STRAYLIGHT

Literary Arts Magazine

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STRAYLIGHT
Literary Arts Magazine

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Rebecca Shepard

Wyoming

"The good thing about Wyoming is, you can lay down and feel like you might fall into the sky and smack your face on the stars." Her voice was cheerful and nonchalant.

I adjusted the lawn chair so I could lean farther back, deeper into the darkness, parallel to the sky. The clouds shifted between imitating sand banks, melting glaciers, dinosaur skeletons, and Chinese rice farmers. I thought about how between the two of us, we had probably seen all of those things in real life.

Alice and I had been friends since before we were born. Our parents had that connection, that 'let's go traveling together' urge, and as a by-product, we knew each other more as family than anything else, despite the fact that we only saw each other on Christmas Eve and the few occasions in a year that we were all on the same continent. We were family in the way that animals can be—a bonding based around species, around a group of 'your own.' I couldn't tell anyone Alice's favorite color, whether she had had sex, or what she wanted to be; but she was permanent in the way only family could be, as simplistic a bond as flesh to bone.

Together, we enjoyed childhood and a scattered adolescence. We hadn't witnessed each other growing up. In fact, I perpetually imagined her in seventh grade, as if she could only ever suit that age. The image was sharp and clean—a Christmas Eve as we sang around the piano. The lighting was deep golden from candles and fairy lights, and her face was filled with excitement. Like her brother Allen, her hair was white blonde and cut short with bangs right above her eyebrows. Her eyes were speckled blue. Both of our arms were pale, sticking out from our shirts. She had just returned from living in Nepal, a day after I had come back

from England. We were flags of faraway lands, ring bearers to different continents. We knew ourselves well enough to know each other.

"Alice, it's time to go," came Allen's quiet voice out of the darkness. I glanced over at her. Her face was puckered up to the sky, illuminated, almost translucent. Her teeth looked like glow-in-the-dark stars. She directed her grin at me, stood up, and was gone.

I smiled at the sky and considered getting a glass of wine and coming back out again, but somehow stargazing is different by oneself, and I felt in a way that I would be cheating to do it by myself. The seat stuck to me slightly as I got up.

She died that night. Her father driving them home, so full that the alcohol within him really only made him tipsy—a truck lost control around a corner and came spinning into them. Into her. It was a Safeway truck on its way back to its docking bay. The driver, a man named Henry, had grown up in Arkansas in a deeply Christian family. When he had left home, he left both his family and his religion. That night, as he climbed out the smashed window of the truck, he felt Jesus like a splinter in his spine.

Her brother had been dozing against the window, his doll-like skin pale under the clouds his sister and I had outlined an hour before. Her mother had been staring out the windshield, thinking of horses.

The police determined that Henry was not under any influence, that the brakes on the truck had malfunctioned, that Alice, who had been named after her parents' quest for Wonderland, was dead, and that for the moment, her mother, Elizabeth, couldn't speak.

I had slept fitfully that night, dreaming of planes slicing up clouds as if they were at war.

Alice and I in early spring searching for Easter eggs. We were in England, at her grandparents' cottage out in the countryside. Her family was on their way back from Asia, and we took the train from our second home in Sussex to meet them. The landscape was so green it almost felt like the earth was about to explode, about to overspill. We picked the yellow and pink eggs out of the surroundings like they were alive, like we were their mothers. We

sat eating chocolate and she told me to shut my eyes and repeat 'I love you Mother Earth' over and over again in my mind. She said a guru had come to her school in Nepal and said that if you thought that, your toes would grow. I concentrated with all my might. The next day, I was convinced my fourth toe was bigger.

Fifteen years later, after the equation of college plus job plus marriage didn't balance out the other side of the equal sign, I found myself plunking my way through the Midwest in a car that seemed half-human. I had been living in San Francisco, as seduced by the fog and the crimson and dumplings through the gray as I was by my then-husband, Dan.

Often I was electrocuted by touching the railing of cable cars — more shocked by that than by Dan's touch. I had lived in San Francisco for six years, and yet I still rode the cable cars. I was one of the few locals who boarded them alongside the eager tourists dressed in shorts and skirts, shivering and complaining about how California was supposed to be warm. I would smile to myself, gratefully burrowed into my peacoat.

One late November day a year after I got married, the conductor asked me out on a date.

"You look lonely," he said, dancing slightly around the brake at the back of the trolley. His coat was slightly greasy and his pants were so worn down that the navy blue had faded into a gray. But they were ironed and so clean I could almost smell them from where I sat. He had a scar through his right eyebrow, just a small gap in hair above gray-blue eyes that seemed to change, as if they were the tide, in front of me. His smile was large and comforting, the stubble on his face covering his slight double chin. I shook my head cautiously, keeping my eyes lowered.

"Why not?" he asked, still grinning.

At first I couldn't think of a reason, before remembering I was married. I felt frozen with guilt at this, and he must have been able to see a change in my face because he reached a hand out to my shoulder and squeezed it.

"Are you alright, ma'am?" he asked.

I nodded sharply. "I am married," I said.

His hand stopped squeezing me but remained a second longer before he removed it.

Dan had moved out to the Bay Area to be a dancer but had soon learned his real talent was with persuasion. That was how he got me to marry him. After years of telling everyone I didn't believe in marriage, after years of being perfectly content alone, it was not true love that slipped me into life-long commitment, but a man's persuasive skills. In need of money, he had become a cell phone salesman. I was the manager at the Verizon Wireless outlet he applied to. I was working my way up in the loosely framed profession of 'business', a world entirely different for women than for men. I found, however, that convincing someone is a genderless skill, and although I knew myself inside out, I could not understand the parts of Dan that were similar to myself.

He had offered to take me dancing. We had sex in his car that night, looking out towards the Golden Gate Bridge. It was too foggy to see anything else. I wasn't drunk, but I was aware of the warmth of wine inside of me, along with the friction from sex. I wasn't a virgin; I wasn't much of anything that was an anomaly, but for some reason I thought I might be bleeding. I put my purse on my lap and shifted slightly in the passenger seat, slipping my hand down to check in one swift motion. Nothing was there. As he drove me back to my apartment, I thought about how I used to be the different kid, the one who was always traveling, the one who grew up before her time—but how when I was given the time to grow up rather than be grown up, I chose to live the most normal life I could. I didn't want to think about the rest of the world anymore; I didn't want to think about the suffering or all the work that needed to be done. I was happy to be alone in an apartment with a job that paid well, that allowed me safety and security. The sex had unnerved me. Not because it was even that passionate, but because its context implied passion. Steaming up windows in a car after a first date. That was the life I had imagined when I was younger, when I was eating fifth courses in France at a vineyard, when I was taking a midnight ride in a gondola through Venice. After Alice died, things were different. We

didn't travel much anymore. We didn't see the world as our stage. We were humbled.

I didn't have a dancing bone in my body, but Dan continued to try and teach me for six years. When he gave up on that, our marriage ended. It turned out there was a limit to his persuasion. Our last night together we went to a swing dancing class, and when I failed yet again to be lifted up and flipped, I pulled myself up from the ground and slapped Dan. A look of utter shock crossed his face and he blinked. The other couples, who had been attending the class alongside us for the last few weeks and were now fully comfortable with flips, stopped dancing to watch, pretending they weren't paying attention. Dan stood motionless, a single tear dripping down out of his left eye.

"Why won't you just trust me? I won't drop you," he murmured.

"I'm done, Dan," I said, my cheeks still red with fury. I wasn't sure what I was mad at exactly, but I knew I didn't want to be there anymore, didn't want to be with him.

"It's okay," he said. "We don't need to dance."

We stood looking at each other for a long time.

"Do we?" he asked, quietly.

I glanced around the room. The couples awkwardly tripped back into dancing. The music was still playing, a swooning melody about love under the moon.

"What else is there?" I replied.

He shrugged. "We love each other. We can do other things, we can make it work. I promise." He reached out towards me. "Darling, you are just upset right now. Let's go home, let's have some hot chocolate. Tomorrow everything will be okay."

I kept shaking my head. His words were buzzing in my ears, overwhelming, like insects.

"No, Dan," I found myself saying, almost shouting, pushing away his hands. "You … you talk too much. Stop talking. Just stop."

I walked towards the door, grabbing my jacket on the way out.

I went home and packed a box with books and one change of clothes. I took the car I had bought when I first arrived, years before. I had

named it Vivian, after some character in a book I could not remember. It was tan and old, and it reminded me of a silent but loving grandmother. I filled the tank and decided to drive home, back to Michigan. I hardly went home anymore, even for the holidays. Our lives were too spread out, like jam scraped from the bottom of a jar. My family, the last remnants of berry preserve, I thought, chuckling to myself. Family needs all of its pieces, I realized. If one relative couldn't be there for Christmas, the whole thing fell apart. So ever since I got married and my siblings had started their own lives, Dan and I had stayed in San Francisco for the winter holidays. My family had never even met Dan. We hadn't had a celebratory wedding, just a legal one. I told him it was because I was so busy. It wasn't that I was ashamed of him — more that I was ashamed to get married.

Crossing the border into Nevada, I had an overwhelming desire to pull up the driveway to the one-story home of my childhood, the house that looked like a puzzle piece. I wanted to wake up in my childhood bed, to see that my mother was still a mother, rather than just a person. Unfortunately, Vivian's resolve was not as strong as mine, and she sputtered out a hundred miles into Nevada. It was there, on the side of the road, smoke erupting like an ocean liner under Vivian's hood, that I thought of Alice.

After her death, her family could not bear to travel without her, but they couldn't stay either. They moved abroad, and I hadn't heard of them since, except one Christmas Eve when I lay in bed and overheard my parents in the room next to mine, whispering that Elizabeth had never gotten her voice back. I had pulled the blanket up over my head and tried to imagine it was snowing outside. The blanket smelled of grass and iced tea.

I didn't know a thing about cars. I considered calling my father, but it was eleven o'clock my time, later in Michigan, and I didn't want to wake him. Besides, I doubted there was much he could do from where he was. I thought that perhaps I could sleep in the car and wait 'til morning, but besides the fact that it would be incredibly uncomfortable, I didn't

like the idea of being alone out in the middle of nowhere. When I saw headlights far off, my decision was automatic.

"You are being stupid and reckless," I chided myself as I got out of the car and stuck out my thumb. Dan would kill me, I thought. Pleased with this realization, I focused my eyes on the truck, the glowing orbs beginning to drown out the darkness around me. I thought about how humans are always happy to separate, emboldened to go our own ways, admired for our inner strength, but never ready to be alone. Ever.

Alice and I, in the forest outside of Tengbotche, building forts in the mossy hillside that in my memory is as steep as the face of Everest, looming over us. She wandered off to find more sticks and I grew nervous waiting. I added room to my fort—just enough for one more small person to fit in—even though hers was right next to mine.

The truck slowed, and I threw the car keys into the front seat of the car, wrapped my coat tighter around me, and climbed onto the step so I could peer in the window. A middle-aged man with a few days' stubble was sitting at the wheel. His hair was thick and brown, his eyes gray. He smiled and rolled down the window.

"What's the problem, ma'am?" he asked.

I pointed out to the car, still puffing at the side of the road. "My car broke down."

He peered past me into the night. "Would you like me to have a look at it?"

I shook my head. "I would rather leave it behind."

He focused on me, his eyes slightly squinting as he gazed into mine.

"Fresh start," I said, although I knew it probably wouldn't make much sense to him. To my surprise, he turned back to the wheel and started up the engine. I climbed in, closed the door, and buckled my seatbelt. The road was flat and straight, and I kept my eyes on the rearview mirror, watching Vivian fade away. A CD was playing faintly in the background—some sort of country music. It seemed to have a lot to do with farmland and tractors. I liked that because it reminded me of the South. To me, the South seemed simple. I had once had fantasies

of living in the South. I imagined a farmhouse with a big open kitchen. I could almost smell the breakfast, could almost feel the blocks of light falling through the enormous windows on my back.

We must have listened to the entire CD, but I thought I could still see Vivian. At first she had been alive in the night, still puffing like an old locomotive, but as the distance lengthened, she turned into a marker in the night, a purple mountain, an outline of memory, theory.

A summer night in the haze of age between six and nine. Lights were on in the house behind us, but the trampoline was still hidden in darkness, our games still our own. Alice was bouncing after us with her eyes closed and Allen and I were biting back our squeals, diving out of the way just in time. We had no shirts on, and I noticed how Alice's skin was the whitest—almost translucent. We had named ourselves the bare-chested triplets, and I had trampoline burns down my back, itchy patches from the stems of leaves and dirt that covered the netting like icing on a cake.

The CD ended and I looked at the trucker. His thumb was still thumping a beat out on the wheel. I wondered if he even noticed music anymore, if he noticed landscape or cars or anything, really.

"Where are you from?" I asked, although I realized afterwards that perhaps truck drivers weren't *from* anywhere. They were always going. Maybe I should have asked *that*.

He shrugged. He didn't seem unfriendly, just not interested in talking. I turned back to the window. I tried to think of what my parents would say when I arrived. They probably wouldn't ask questions. They hardly ever did anymore. I could see my father squeezing my shoulders briefly in greeting and then returning to the sitting room and burying himself underneath the newspaper. The stacks of untouched *National Geographics* would be by the fireplace. We had always had a subscription to *National Geographic*, but as soon as we stopped traveling, we stopped reading them. The subscription was never cancelled though, so they just built themselves into a dusty tower in the corner. The pictures were so glossy they were almost three-dimensional. The piano by the window had the lid pulled over it, round like a talon. Pianos had always looked

like mouths to me. I didn't understand how a gaping jaw could make such beautiful music, but then again, all music came from some sort of hole.

Christmas Eve and we took a walk burning with alcohol and food and lights. I thought that if I was turned inside out I would be a fireplace, that Alice would be able to roast marshmallows over me, that I would keep her warm as she lay out a plate of food for Santa and his reindeer. Neither of us was religious, but when our families gathered around the piano and plunked our way—slowly and off key—through carols we sang like savages.

I woke up from a slight bump of my forehead against glass. I had dozed off against the window. I couldn't tell what time it was or how long it had been. The night was impossibly dark around us, and all I could make out were rock formations. The truck was stopped.

"What happened?" I murmured, sitting up.

The trucker was frowning and sorting through a metal box.

"We popped a tire," he answered. He found an enormous wrench and opened his door, hopping out. I sat still for a moment, listening. The night was buzzing with silence; the trucker's footsteps and the sliding up of the back door echoed out into the land around us. I opened my door and got out as well, my knees shaking slightly when I first landed on them. I stretched and shook them out, walking around to where he was. Fixing a car was one of those things that I had always had on my list of things to learn, but never got around to. I wondered why men seemed to be born with the knowledge of fixing mechanical things.

"Do you need any help?" I asked.

He shook his head and grunted. "I'll be done in a minute."

Men never accepted help, either, I thought. Not with mechanics, not with anything. Not even on the brink of losing everything. My father had worked at a blue-collar I.T. company for most of his life, but when layoffs came and our family needed to watch our expenses, he couldn't even tell us that. I wasn't sure if it was pride or shame. I could never tell the difference between the two.

I looked out around us. "Where are we?" I asked. My voice seemed to expand in the stillness.

"Wyoming," he replied.

Late spring in Michigan, May tasting like summer. As we sat silently in the field, the sprinklers burst open like geysers, and we tore off our clothes in glee. Alice jumped over the spray like she was a horse in a competition. My chest was starting to change, as if two volcanoes were slowly forming under the surface, waiting to gurgle upwards. Alice didn't say anything about it though. We weren't ready to stop yet.

I walked out onto the rocks around us. I felt like I was on the moon. There was so much dust on them that they almost felt soft beneath me, cushioned. I bent to run my fingers through the dirt. It felt like saw dust. The rock was still warm from the sun that had set long ago. I sat down out of my squat, making the dust poof up slightly around me. The sky was alarmingly bright above me. I lay down, looking up.

We were racing through an airport together, and we couldn't remember if we were in France or Germany. "What difference does it really make anymore?" Alice joked. The rest of our families were on the moving walkway going in the right direction and we were running next to them on the one going back towards the check-in. "The ground underneath us is pulling us back!" Alice exclaimed, feigning worry. I laughed, panting slightly. My backpack was heavy on my ten-year-old shoulders. My two stuffed animals' heads popped out the top of the bag. "We will get there first," I encouraged her, checking to make sure our parents were still behind us. "We have to!" Our feet quickened. When we reached the end, it was like coming out of ocean onto land. We swayed slightly, steadying ourselves. We looked at each other and giggled. Alice peered up at the gate in front of us and down at her ticket, clutched in her small hands. "We never stay," she said, eyes on her seat number. "Nothing ever stays."

I heard the engine start up and saw the headlights blink on, covering everything in light. Slightly blinded, I couldn't see the sky above me. I fumbled my way upwards. The truck was waiting for me.

David Lawrence

Teddy Bear

In the intermission is the show but all the actors are missing.
There is a theatre in my head that doesn't charge admission.
I enter with stubs for arms.
The wrong characters are saying the other one's lines.
Gestures hang in the air like traumatic accidents.
I bring popcorn from the cinema
And get thrown out.
This is all too classy.
The dramatis personae are stage worthy and dignified.
I wrap film around my forehead and pretend I am a samurai
Warrior.
I am not.
I am a toy soldier in a mental ward where the shrinks
Are my targets.
They laugh at me.
The only character that I threaten is myself.
I am sitting on my lap like a stuffed bear applauding.

Clay Carter

Someone Watches Us with a Microscope

You sleep and I dream. Wrinkled white sheets. Lit windows outside
this room. We pretend we live in a tower four floors up where your

mood is light receptive. Arms at rest, panting from sex's motion.
Two strawberries beneath light dew. Your chest rises as a pale billow.

I search skin like Braille for foothills of freckles I know are clustered
at your hip. You evade my cold envoy, proving your storm lingers

over Indiana. Your circadian rhythm rattles the tree outside, shaking
cicadas nervous. Circles fall down your thighs, glowing. Push this

hand and howl to any moon southern. Curl awake on cinder block wall.
Sky, polluted by sodium lamps, now the color of the coal on the trains

that slice through the humid air like the bow of a double bass pulling
the tracks to the point of vibration. I do not sleep well under its steely,

midnight note. I observe your drawing pinned to a fake skyline sunset.
In it you have painted a tree alone on the moon, ignoring the voice that

says there is no tree on the moon, there is hardly water. I think what boy
might find the tree and scale its silent branches while my fingers grow

slow as vines reaching. Breathe light and dream thin. Eyes open like
peeled fruit, then your slices lull back into the lucid rivers I hope to cross.

Sefik Huseyin

The Six-Year-Old Artist

My artwork appeared in a cheap graffiti-littered window shop during Christmastime when I was six. Indeed, I had the gift, no question or debate about that here. I was set to be my mother's star: kisses and hugs, endless praise of my wondrous hand to my aunties—who in turn despised me, and my mother, too—and gifts of paints, thick quality Hallmark paper and expensive Faber-Castell stationary. It's just one of those instances in life: you know you're exceeding in your craft successfully when you're receiving commodities. I walked the corruptly brick-laden streets in bouncing motion, proud of my unique ability with imaginary bodyguards at my side: evil eyes to retract my enemies. Secretly, I never showed my real talent; I just waited 'til I could be established, because I knew my work was a Monet's childish fluent stroke, or, even better, a Picasso's cubed-arithmetic. My work stood unnoticed amongst the others, though, and, for some reason, I never saw it again. But the praises and despises were enough to convince me that I could never paint anything better, and so I never lifted a brush to paint an equation again.

Mark Jackley

Kathleen

I saw a woman walking down the middle of the street,
twirling bags of groceries. End of a summer storm.
I remember when I loved you. It was bountiful, precarious,
a little bit illegal, and the city shone.

Steven McBrearty

Roadside Restroom

To understand my childhood, you should know that my mother looked on the entire world of humanity outside our nuclear family as something akin to a roadside service station restroom — trashed, vile, germ-infested, uncontrolled, and to be avoided except in quick, small doses, fast forays there and back. We operated with cloistered caution, like a convent — or a coven. We prepared for the worst. We expected the worst. We spent more time than anyone I had ever heard of preparing to move to a center room in the event of a tornado. We were masters of the center-room move. Our fire alarm batteries were replenished every two weeks and our burglar alarm system was set to catch the movements of butterflies, I do believe. Chickens — oh, my God. In my mother's cosmology chickens were like a species of especially desperate felon. We washed our chickens so thoroughly to avert any possibility of salmonella poisoning, they could probably have been used in a surgery ward. It goes without saying that inside a car my mother launched into full back-seat driver's mode, pointing out potential obstacles with panicky gusto.

This was just my mother's side. On my father's side, we were cheap. My father's family was supposedly from some old German stock that was inherently thrifty and then having lived through the Depression tightened down the fiscal screws another thread or two. My father was an accountant for an office supply firm and I believe he applied accounting principles to every situation in life — from dating to household management to metaphysics.

Case in point — we owned just a single telephone, located (efficiently, cost-effectively) in a high-traffic area of our living room. I am convinced

that the location of this telephone contributed in no small measure to my lack of development with adolescent girls. I could not imagine calling a girl up for a date, or simply to converse, in our living room with family members eavesdropping while they read or did homework or watched TV. This was before the days of cell phones or portable phones, of course, so I was forced to drive over to out-of-the-way pay phones in shopping malls or convenience stores while making this type of call. These phones never functioned properly, the reception was bad, I was out of my comfort zone, and besides, there was always the squawk of a P.A. system in the background announcing an ongoing sale at Dillard's or a car with its lights on in the parking lot. At the convenience store, the clerk would be speaking loudly in a foreign language.

"Where are you calling from?" a befuddled Girl A (or B or C) would say. Girl A—innocent, unsuspecting, living in a normal home environment with a telephone in her bedroom or a secluded hallway, at least. There was no way that Girl A (or B or C) would be able to understand what life was like in my wacked-out household.

"Oh, just over at North Star Mall," I would say, as if this were the most natural thing in the world. As if, actually, I had just been sort of wandering through the mall and the urge had come over me to give her a call. There was inevitably an eerie silence on the other end as Girl A's adolescent brain tried to process this information reasonably and fairly. She probably already thought I was weird, but now she thought I was over-the-top weird. Most of these conversations never went anywhere, and I never seemed to go anywhere with any of these girls, either.

One phone, one car, also. Yes, we owned just a single car—a tank-sized Pontiac Catalina station wagon with 400-hp and seats in the far back facing the rear. The single car was an economy move, of course, made feasible because my father rode to work with his father, a salesman at the same office supply firm where my father served as head accountant.

The station wagon sat lodged in our commodious two-car garage like a royal coach. Obtaining permission to use the car required a lengthy

series of interviews and a background check. Driving off afterwards, I felt cheapened, violated, beaten down, guilty without reason, a suspect in a police interrogation. No wonder that I wandered a bit in college. It's a wonder I didn't run off to live on roots and berries in the desert.

One summer day, while I eased the station wagon into the garage bay, my mother emerged from the utility room door to intercept me, holding the car door open as I sat trapped inside like a circus clown. (Though compact, my mom could move like a jungle cat when on a mission.) I reviewed my activities for the last few hours, working swiftly to develop an alibi. Sadly, I did not have time to brush my limp, long hair back behind my ears to make it appear shorter—my slicked-back, at home 'do that would allow me to appear like a stalwart citizen in my parents' eyes. In retrospect, I am not certain that this fooled anyone, but it served as a workable illusion for my immature psyche.

"Where have you been?" my mother asked. Her voice had several textured levels of shrill, moving up and down on the shrillness scale, and this one was near the top. I remained sitting in the car, blocked by my mother. This seemed a huge tactical advantage on her part. Her words were like a baseball bat to my solar plexus.

"At the driving range," I lied. Going to the driving range was one of my standard spiels for obtaining permission to drive the car. I slung my golf clubs into the hatchback of the station wagon and tallied ho, veering off course immediately toward whatever activity I had scheduled for the day—phone calls in the mall, smoking dope with friends, sometimes something even more mesmerizing.

This particular trip I had paid an actual in-home visit to a girl I had met one evening at the high school dance—a sexy little raven-haired siren named Holly, I might add. If you want to know about it, it had not gone well. We mostly stood on the flagstone porch of Holly's red-brick suburban home and exchanged what we knew in real time were lame, risqué witticisms because we didn't know each other very well and didn't have very much in common. Even then I understood it was not a good

sign when somebody you are standing with stares abstractly over your shoulder while twirling her heavy black tresses. I was forced to leave abruptly when Holly was called into her house. I feel fairly certain that this occurred on a pre-arranged signal between Holly and her mother that kicked in if things were not going well. I drove away from that encounter with a hard lump in my stomach and the feeling that nothing in my life would ever be successful.

Already depressed, I drove directly into my mother's welcoming arms.

"You've been gone three hours," my mother said.

"I hit three buckets of balls," I said. I glanced at my hands inadvertently, to see if their un-weathered condition would give me away.

"Your father needed the car to run back down to his office," my mother said.

"I didn't know," I said. "Why didn't he call Grandpa?"

My mother persisted. She was one of the great persisters of all time, my mother.

"Grandpa wasn't home," she said. "Tell me where you've really been."

She peered through the open car door and through the windows as if expecting to find contraband, hard evidence of my malfeasance. I half expected to find this evidence myself. Could she tell that my golf clubs had not budged since I had loaded them up when leaving? Could she see through to the hole in my heart?

"I told you—the driving range," I said.

To those of you who may wonder why I would continue in this sad charade, I can say only that this was another piece of my stinted development. For some deep-rooted psychological reasons, no doubt, I did not want my parents to know the simple, un-sinful truth, that I was visiting a girl at her house. I could not tell them this, I was not sure why.

They would misinterpret the situation, no doubt. They would badger me with questions, bombard me with intrusive remarks. I would be stripped of my dignity, reduced metaphorically to a small, sniveling baby boy.

"I know that's not true," my mother said. I felt like a defendant in a trial who is suddenly blindsided by a witness introducing unexpected secret information. I was surprised, confused by this revelation.

"How do you know it's not true?" I asked. My mother's face was like a lemon, scrunched up and tart. Her liver-spotted arm stretched across the gap between the door and car like a "Crime Scene—Do Not Disturb" ribbon.

"Sally Peterson saw you driving the car in the Harmony Hills subdivision," she said. "She saw you turning at the entrance off San Pedro." I nodded, as if regrouping for a powerful rebuttal. Unfortunately, I was running out of defenses here.

"There's a driving range out by San Pedro," I said. Thank God I wasn't hooked up to a lie detector machine. "I was cutting through the neighborhood afterward." My mother stomped her foot on the garage floor. Sometimes when angry, she actually stomped her foot. It would have been comical if my entire future had not been at stake.

"Why don't you just tell me where you went?" she said. It was a cry from the depths, really—a sharp, penetrating wail. The utility room door opened again and my father entered the scene, standing like a bit character in a play, hands on hips, eyes directed toward the main players on center stage. Faux-Rolex watch gleaming on his hairy wrist, he was undoubtedly calculating number of miles driven = gas used = mileage = wear and tear on vehicle. His eyes seemed to pronounce me "guilty" of something.

Outwardly defiant as I took on this double-team, I sat with throat, arms, feet, hips, and internal organs quivering. My soul mirrored my mind. I wanted to cry. I felt as if the center of my being, the core of my persona, was being challenged, ripped apart by my mother's inquisition. All the years, all the days, all the moments leading up to this one felt like they amounted to nothing. I felt that I was staring up at a very steep, very slippery cliff that I must scale to escape from the bonds of parental control. I felt that I would never be able to do it. I shrugged. I slumped

against the steering wheel, burying my head in my hands. I raked my fingers through my hair.

"I'm about ready to give up on you," my mother said. Now this was surely encouraging news. In some ways, I felt that almost everybody else had given up on me already. I was about ready to give up on myself. I picked up my head and sighed.

"I went to see a girl," I admitted.

"Say that again?" my mother said. Her face changed. Her eyes perked up.

Her arm on the car handle relaxed. She no longer looked mad. She looked younger, softer, more girlish herself. For a strange, transcendent moment, I could see the young girl in her—happy, high-spirited, hoping to be asked out herself.

"I said I went to see a girl." She touched me on the wrist, a very unusual thing for her to do, totally out of character. It was almost as though another "regular" human being were touching me, not my mother. This feeling was only temporary.

"What's her name?" my mother said. "What school does she go to? Is she Catholic?" These questions hit me like a nail being knocked home by a hammer.

They made me feel even more humiliated, more demeaned. Finally, I made myself move. I disengaged myself from my mother's hand, slid out the door, and pushed past her and my father ignoring all questions, disregarding the chaos of my younger siblings by the phone in the living room, straight to my bedroom where I closed and locked the door. There I lay on my back in bed, staring at a whirling ceiling fan. I was able to find some solace in that activity. I was able to find some peace.

Eric Huff

armpit

I was either born in a garden or a large serving bowl
back when Ronald Reagan was President of the United States.

All I remember about that day was the conversation my
mother (I assume) was having with a nurse (it must have been

in a garden, with the tomato vines) about the allegory and
how one could go about swallowing enough saliva to extinguish

the fire that still roared in her womb. I sat, watching an aphid
lay down beside the ladybird. I held my thumb over them,

hummed softly, then pressed their bodies into the ground.
that is what we do with our dead. When I grow up, I am going

to be rich and famous and you are going to be my beautiful wife.
When I grow up, I am going to be a mourning dove perched on

a gable of a two-story house, dreaming of my boyhood home,
wishing I didn't make you feel like having to shave your armpit hair.

Jacob Oet

Vertigo Fall

I wonder through leaves.
Truly the autumn's a simmering
Spoonful of chicken broth.

I wonder through the hair of angels
Hanging from the clouds—
The rain on the streets saddens me…

Aged temptress at the soup-bowl:
Are you done making a mess of things?
Oh Fall—your spice spills over the shingles,

Sweet in the sweep of laces, tennis shoes
Persisting in their elegance,
For all their wear.

Aged temptress at the window:
When will you be done straining and grating the Earth?
The wrists are starting to fray

Of the trees,
Like a cloth that's been washed too many times.
Lady of the pine needles,

My great dancing mother:
The world is spinning, over and over itself,
In your great washing machine.

Donna Pucciani

The Present Continuous in Italian

The arc of the present, always overhead:
in English, a word chasing its tail shaped like an *-ing*.
In Italian, *-ando* or *-endo* becomes a sweet shadow
trailing the verb. It means

riding the waves, puddle-jumping,
race-car driving, running for the train,
suddenly sneezing, an accidental twisting
of the foot, a gazing into the mirror of the self.

To embrace participial splendor or
imbibe the elixir of the gerund, one must
shed the infinitive. Lighten the load of life
by spreading honey on bread, filling empty spaces
with spring, pressing winter's griefs into snow.

To listen to a lecture is not the same as
listening—*ascoltando*—to a lover's voice.
To cry over spilt milk is not like weeping—
piangendo—at a funeral. To ring a doorbell
is less than ringing the changes—*suonando*—
in the tower of a country church, or ringing in
the new year with champagne and friends.

I can still hear my mother's voice saying,
A rolling stone gathers no moss. And then
the titles with the ring of *-ing: Being There*,
I Hear America Singing, The Cloud of Unknowing,
Plant Dreaming Deep, and *Wuthering Heights,*
the untranslatable sound of wind on the moors.

It is good to get swept up in the now,
forgetting—*dimenticando*—sickness and bills,
anger and wars, dwelling—*abitando*—in the mythology
of being and doing—*stando e facendo*—in equal measure.
Researchers report that people who spend
money on doing things are happier than those
who merely have them. So I leave behind
the shops, find myself lining up at the airport,
playing the flute with silvery lips,
writing this.

Sarah Lucille Marchant

It's nearly finished brewing

My love, I will put away his skeleton
now. You go ahead and brew your tea—
add an extra scoop of sugar in case I
want to steal a sip. I know a number
of birds who would be delighted to
nibble off any remaining meat on his
bones. They'll dig in deep, slurp up the
marrow and regurgitate memories to feed
to their young. Just think of it—baby birds
belching up corners of his eyes, learning to
fly and dropping amateur poetry with their
feathers. Now sit with me. We can throw
bits of his fingers at the dog, moving our
spoons back and forth in off-white teacups.

Lawrence F. Farrar

Cherry Bombs

In the early 1950s, when we were thirteen or fourteen, we would stand on our bike pedals and pump as fast as we could whenever we passed the little frame house on the corner of Oak and Eighth. Quick sidelong glances alerted us as to whether or not Fred Noonan was out in the yard. Usually he wasn't there, but sometimes his mother lost track of him, and he would be standing by the front step, staring straight at us as we shot by. Once in a while he raised a hand; maybe he was waving. It was hard to tell. Then, looking over our shoulders, we could see his mother shooing him back inside.

One August afternoon, after we'd zipped by the Noonan place, the three of us rode down to the lake. We dropped our bikes in the grass and helped ourselves to the bench on the Wilson's dock. We could see schools of minnows dashing around in the clear, shallow water. Sometimes a bass or a few sunfish cruised by. We threw stones we'd collected to see if we could hit any of them.

"He's crazy as a loon," Billy McMaster said. Everybody thought Billy looked like a young Elvis, except he had a crew cut.

"I'm Fred Noonan," Jack Tschida said and staggered toward us along the dock with his arms out, like Frankenstein's monster—or maybe it was The Mummy.

Jack, a slight, towheaded kid, wore horn-rimmed glasses. Some people said we looked like twins, which neither of us liked. Besides, I didn't wear glasses.

"He doesn't walk that way, you dope. He walks like this." And Billy got up and started down the dock dragging his leg and moaning.

"My mother says he can't help it he's that way, and we shouldn't make fun of him." I knew right away I should have kept my mouth shut.

"Oh, is that what your mama says?" Billy said. "You sound like a mama's boy to me." I had made the mistake of quoting my mother before. "What does she know anyway?"

Billy lived with his father and stood six inches taller than the rest of us. He also had already taken a girl to a movie, which Jack and I wanted to do but had not done yet. Billy liked to ask if he could punch us on the arm, to see if we could take it. (Sometimes he didn't ask and just did it.) I hoped he wasn't going to ask me again. It always hurt.

Instead, Billy plopped down on the bench and said, "Fred's bald as a billiard ball. And did you notice how his ears stick out?" We nodded. He was right on both counts.

"Ever hear him say anything?"

Like a couple of *Howdy Doody* marionettes, we shook our heads. "Maybe he can't talk," Jack said.

"My old man says he ought to be put away somewhere." An opinion on the part of Billy's father obviously trumped one by my mother. "Says it isn't safe to have him loose. You never know what he might do." That warning conjured up undefined, but nevertheless scary, images for us.

"Better look out. Fred's coming to get you." Jack performed his monster moves again.

I continued to pedal as hard as I could whenever I passed the Noonan place. Fred was never out, but I came across his mother two or three times. She was a bent-over little woman. Her white hair stuck out, like when you rub a comb and put it next to a cat's hair. I guess she must have been tending flowers or maybe pulling weeds. She glanced up when I sped by, then went back to whatever it was she was doing.

A few weeks had passed after that day on the dock. One afternoon we shinnied up a maple tree and perched in the branches dropping feathered seeds. Watching them spin to the ground, we pretended they were helicopters.

"What do you think those Noonans eat?" Billy had tired of trying to figure out who'd carved their initials on the branch just above him.

"Regular food, I guess," Jack said. He'd been hanging by two hands and, after two or three tries, he swung his leg over a branch and managed a sitting position. His hands gripping the branch on either side of him, he sat there looking confident. "What's that got to do with the price of tea in China?"

"You got a dog? Or a cat?" Billy said to me. He knew full well I had a terrier mix named Buddy. "You know about any dogs missing around here lately?"

"No. Why?"

"Well, my pa says folks in this neighborhood better keep an eye on their animals, that's all."

"Why's that?" He had me worried.

"You remember that old brown dog those people had that lived by the track? All I can say is the last time anybody saw it Fred's mother was petting it out in their yard."

Suddenly I had visions of Buddy served up in a stew in the Noonans' kitchen.

Later that day we headed up to the schoolyard to play football. Billy had on one of those old leather helmets; Jack carried a beat-up ball that needed air; I didn't have anything and felt kind of left out. As we cruised down the street, the playing cards clothes-pinned to our bike frames whirred across the rotating spokes. The sound effect inspired the three of us, in those days would-be motorcyclists.

"Hey, there he is!" Jack exclaimed as we approached the Noonan corner.

"Let's stop and say hi," Billy said. He slued his bike around, and skidded to a stop, like a motorcycle racer at the county fair. Jack and I followed suit.

"Hey, Fred. Nice shirt you've got on there," Billy called out.

"Looks like a regular shirt to me," I said.

"Can't you tell I'm joking with him," Billy said. He fired a dirty look at me. "You must be as big a dummy as he is."

Fred just stood there, staring at us.

"How old do you think he is?" Jack said.

"Say, Fred, you got a birthday coming up?" Billy edged his bike closer to the Noonans' sidewalk.

Fred didn't say anything.

"He looks pretty old. My mother says he's probably in his fifties," I said.

"You like cake, Fred?" Billy said. His words sounded innocent, almost kind.

A big grin ran across Fred's face. His mouth opened like a half moon. He didn't seem to have any teeth.

"Let's go," I said. "He's not hurting anybody."

"Oh, yeah? Why don't you go up and shake hands? I dare you to."

"What for?" That prospect frightened me more than that of another punch on the arm.

Just then, Fred's mother stepped off their porch. She saved me.

"Come along, Fred," she said. Her voice sounded gentle and kind of sad—not mean and scratchy like I thought it would. "These boys just wanted to say hello. Now we have to go in."

Fred shuffled after her. But when he got to the door, he turned and waved at us.

"Why did she have to come and spoil everything?" Billy asked.

I didn't think she'd spoiled anything.

Billy and Jack couldn't wait to tell the guys at the schoolyard about our encounter with Fred. I sort of wished they'd shut up about it. Right after we started playing football, somebody wonked Billy in the nose with an elbow. I don't know why, but when I saw his nose bleeding, I felt sort of happy, like he deserved it. Fred scared me, but I didn't think we should pick on him.

That night before supper, my dad leaned over the sink washing his hands. He always used Lava soap because working on cars got his hands

really dirty. I thought it was weird for a mechanic like my dad to use pink soap, but I never said so.

"What's wrong with Fred Noonan?" I blurted out.

"I thought we told you before. They say he was gassed and shell-shocked in the war."

"You mean he wasn't born that way?"

"Nope. Graduated right here from the high school. Wanted to be a soldier, I guess."

My father postured in front of the bathroom mirror combing his thinning dark hair across. He pivoted his head from side to side and patted down some resistant hairs with the flat of his hand. My mom claimed he had gypsy eyes—whatever that meant—and was about the handsomest thing she'd ever seen. I guessed that must have been when he was younger.

"Anyway," my dad went on, "he joined up—I think in '17—went back east somewhere for training and, next thing anybody knew, he was over there, in France."

"What does shell-shocked mean?"

"Well, I hear the fighting was pretty awful and seeing all they saw, I guess a lot of the boys just couldn't take it. People say their nerves were shot, and they ended up like Fred. Being hit with that poison gas must just have made it worse."

"Doesn't he have a father somewhere? All we see is the mother."

"Don't you know you shouldn't put your nose in other people's business?" My dad always said that when he didn't want to answer any more of my questions.

I trailed after him to our kitchen table and sat there until he finished mashing his boiled potatoes and submerging them under ladles of white flour gravy. While he was doing that, I dropped a piece of bacon on the floor where Buddy waited for a handout.

"Don't feed the dog at the table," my mother said. She always said that, too. And I fed Buddy anyway on the theory he didn't have much else to look forward to.

My mother was Norwegian on both sides, born in Iowa, and blonde as they come. She didn't smile a lot and looked kind of severe. But, I think most people considered her to be good-hearted. Nobody knew why her folks named her Myrtle.

"Myrtle, your boy here wants to know about Fred Noonan's father."

If anybody had answers, it was her. Dad used to tease her about being nosy and peeking around the curtain to spy on the neighbors. She said she just kept herself informed, that's all.

"Mr. Noonan used to have a dry goods store on Second Street, where Brennan's Bakery is now," my mother said. "Fred was an only child."

"Did his father die or something?"

"No. People say when they brought Fred back from the war and his father saw the way he was, he just couldn't take it. Next thing you know, one day Mr. Noonan closed up the shop and just disappeared."

My dad cleaned up the last of the gravy with a piece of bread and scoffed up the remaining piece of bacon. "You left out the part about young Mary Wilkinson disappearing around the same time." My dad winked at me.

"He can learn about those things later on. Anyway, Mrs. Noonan sold the shop and retreated, you might say, into that house on the corner."

"She never goes out," my father added. "Has groceries delivered from Peterson's Market. Doesn't want to leave him alone."

My father held out his coffee cup and my mother filled it from a pot where it had been brewing all day. Dad called it "Norwegian coffee" and said it tasted like motor oil.

"It's a real pathetic situation, I'll tell you that," my mother said. "And some people around this neighborhood are just nasty when it comes to the Noonans. Not one ounce of pity. Not one."

Wow. I had the whole story. I could hardly wait to tell the guys, especially the part about the woman named Wilkinson. That would get their attention — girls being much on our minds at the time. They'd also have to change their tune about Fred. He was practically a war hero.

But they weren't impressed the way I hoped they'd be. "That's a lot of malarkey," Billy said. "Fred Noonan is as loony as they come. My dad says he ought to be shipped off to the funny farm."

"Yeah," Jack said. "I heard he was over in the neighbor's yard one day taking clothes right off the line before they ran him off."

"Maybe he just thought he was helping." I knew it was a feeble reply.

"What are you? His buddy?"

"Aw, come on," I said. But I have to admit I felt different about Fred after hearing what my folks had to say. And the old lady's voice sounded almost sweet. I didn't know what to think.

A week or so later, we filed into Doerr's Drug Store and reached down in the freezer for some Fudgesicles. Just then we heard Mrs. Gustavson talking in a low voice across the counter to Mrs. Doerr. A skinny, crabby-looking lady, Mrs. Gustavson yelled at us when we came in her yard for plums or apples. My mother described her as nothing but a busybody.

"They'll just have to do something. The other day, the Swenson girl was walking by, and he came right out to the end of the sidewalk. He acted like he was going to follow her."

"Mercy. Then what happened?" Mrs. Doerr leaned forward on the counter to make sure she didn't miss anything.

"Well, she just kept on going. But she was plenty scared, I'm telling you. Plenty scared."

"Maybe she should go up another street," Mrs. Doerr said.

"Well, I never. What's the world coming to when a nice girl can't run an errand for her mother without that," we strained to hear, "without that pervert leering at her."

Mrs. Doerr got so preoccupied yammering about Fred, we just traipsed out the door without paying the fifteen cents for the three

Fudgesicles. We ambled down the sidewalk past the Ben Franklin Store and the Coast-to-Coast Hardware Store licking our Fudgesicles to keep the chocolate from dripping on our hands.

"So, he's a pervert too," Billy said.

I didn't know for sure what a pervert was, but I had a pretty good idea. I also figured Verna Swenson was an out-and-out liar. You couldn't trust her any farther than you could throw her—and she was a big girl. She was boy-crazy and made things up.

Billy did not take Verna's reputation into account. He simply said, "I think we're going to have to pay Fred the Pervert a little visit sometime. Teach him a lesson."

"Yeah. Who does he think he is?" Jack chimed in.

"But, he didn't do anything. He's like a little kid," I said. "Probably she smiled or something. Maybe he was just trying to be friendly."

"Hey, whose side are you on?" Billy delivered his best tough guy look, which to tell the truth, made me nervous.

Still, I said, "I'm not on anybody's side. I just think—"

"Sounds to me like somebody's cruisin' for a bruisin'. Right, Jack?"

At that moment I realized I was on a side—I was on Fred's side.

"We shouldn't put our nose in other people's business," I said—without attribution to my father. "Leave it to the grown-ups."

"Yeah, we'll see about that," Billy said. He didn't say anything else, and I reckoned that was the end of it.

Autumn rolled along, and the smell of burning leaves signaled the start of football season. One afternoon in October, we rode our bikes over to the high school field to watch the team practice. While the players lifted their knees running through parallel rows of tires and sprinted up and down the field, we commented unfavorably on their ability and on the prospects for the rest of the season. But secretly we hankered after their cleated shoes, pads, and helmets.

"Just wait until we get on that field. We'll show 'em a thing or two," Billy said. I wasn't so certain he had it right. After all, Jack and I were

skinny kids. Nonetheless, like budding Crazy Legs Hirschs and Frank Giffords, we spent the next five minutes practicing our stiff arms.

"Let's see what's going on under the stands," Billy said. The year before, we'd caught two of the high school students, Mike Chamberlain and Sally Engstrom, there on a blanket. I didn't get a good look that time because Mike, who was sixteen or seventeen, came after us, and we took off.

Afterward, Billy said, "I hear that Sally's a regular punch board—if you know what I mean." I didn't, but I worked it out.

Anyway, we pedaled around the bleachers and raced along the track to a spot under the announcer's booth.

"Heck, there's nobody here but Howie and Mark," Jack said, after we slued our bikes on the track trying to make the cinders fly. Howie Letourneau and Mark Carlson looked daggers at us from under the stands where they were smoking. We envied their leather jackets with silver studs, especially since none of our parents would let us have a jacket like that except over their dead bodies. We also knew his brother had already let Mark drive the family's old Ford. There was no way riding around on a second-hand Schwinn could compare to that.

"What do you guys want?" Howie said. He inhaled so loudly you could hear him, then blew a big puff of smoke in our direction.

"Nothing. Just riding around."

"Hey, did you hear they took Fred Noonan away?" Mark said.

"How do you know?" I said. "It's news to me. And we live just up the street."

"Believe it or not—I don't care. My brother, Avery, drives cab part time. He picked up Fred and the old lady at their house and hauled them all the way to the V.A. Hospital."

"What else?"

"They didn't say much in the cab. But, Avery suspects Fred must be sick or something."

"Yeah. Sick in the head," Billy said.

"The mother told Avery not to wait when they got there. Gave Avery a fifty cent tip."

"She probably had to have him committed," Jack said.

During the next week or two we checked out the Noonan house whenever we went by. It just stood there looking empty.

When I told my dad it seemed like Fred was gone, he said, "Maybe his mother took him in for a check-up."

"Mrs. Lorentzen, lives right across the street, heard from somebody — I think it was the mailman, or maybe the milkman — anyway, she heard Fred has a bad heart," my mother said. "Poor man — that on top of everything else."

Well, apparently my dad was right. We were wrestling around in piles of leaves in Jack's yard one late afternoon when Mark Carlson came by.

"Avery says he's back. Dropped Fred and his mother off at their house this morning," Mark said.

"Wait 'til I tell my dad," Billy said and buried Jack's head under an armload of leaves.

A few days after that we were hanging around on Billy's front step. It must have been late October. We were wearing jackets, and my legs trembled from the cold when the wind blew against my jeans.

"Want to see something?" Billy said. He fished around in his jacket pocket, pulled out his hand, and displayed the contents.

"Yeah. They're cherry bombs. So what?" I said.

"I've got a bunch of them. Hid a bag of 'em in the shed on the Fourth — forgot they were there."

"So what? Probably won't even work."

"They work. I already tested them. Got matches and punk too."

"So what?"

"Remember you told me Fred was shell-shocked."

Whatever Billy had in mind couldn't be good.

"I saw him out in the yard—just a little while before you got here. Watching his mother raking leaves. I'll bet he's still there."

Jack and I looked at each other. You could have peeled the worry right off our faces.

"How do you suppose he'll act if he hears a couple of these salutes go off?"

"You're not even supposed to have those fireworks. My mother says it's a state law."

"Well, I've got them. Your mother can go jump in the lake."

Billy picked up his bike. "You coming?" he said.

Jack hesitated. Then he stuck out his hand to receive two or three stubby red cherry bombs. Their fuses stood straight out from their cylindrical surfaces. More powerful than regular firecrackers, a cherry bomb detonated with a gratifyingly loud bang and could send a tin can hurtling skyward.

"Here's yours," Billy said and offered me two more cherry bombs. Silver ones.

"I'm not going," I said. "It's mean."

Not exactly a convincing argument since that was exactly why Billy wanted to do it. People who worked with Billy's father at the lumberyard feared him for his mean streak. He must have passed the trait on to his son.

"You're chicken," Billy said. "Let's go."

"You'll get in trouble with the police," I said. Perhaps fear of punishment would inhibit him more than an appeal to conscience.

"Let's go," he said insistently. He kicked the stand on his bike sharply, swung up on the saddle, and pedaled off. Jack showed me a kind of helpless look and followed after him. I watched them ride away and felt myself shiver.

I didn't want any part of it. No way. Yet, curiosity pulled me toward my bike. It was like when you put a magnet under a piece of paper and sprinkle iron shavings on it. The shavings all get sucked right to a spot

over the magnet. I should have gone home, but instead I shadowed Billy and Jack. When they hopped off their bikes and crept toward the side of the Noonans' house, I watched from half a block away. Maybe they spotted me—I don't know.

Just like Billy said, I could see the mother raking leaves. She had on a black and white plaid coat and had a red scarf tied around her head. Fred seemed to be having a good time, kicking his way through piles of leaves she'd raked up.

Pow! When the first cherry bomb went off, both Fred and his mother just sort of froze. Two more followed the first one. Pow! Pow! Fred clamped both hands over his head and stood there, swaying like a flagpole in the wind. Right away his mother started towards him.

"Stop. Stop," I said out loud. But nobody heard me.

The next two sailed into the yard. Pow! Pow! Fred jerked away from his mother and started jumping around like he was on fire or being chased by bees. Even from where I watched, I could see he was frightened. His mother caught up to him and tried to take him by the arm; he shook free, like a scared dog. I thought the bombers had finished, but I guess they just had trouble lighting the fuses. Pow! Pow! Fred started to kind of lope around. I didn't even know he could run.

All of a sudden, he dashed across the sidewalk and out into the street. I couldn't see his face, but from the way he danced back and forth he had to be confused. Fred's mother chased right after him. All of a sudden, out of nowhere, the Carlson's Creamery truck came around the corner. I yelled, but it was too late. The driver, Phil Monroe, swerved as best he could and missed Fred. But the truck's bumper hit Fred's mother straight on. The police said she probably died before she hit the ground.

Billy and Jack high-tailed it down the street. Like a pathetic-looking statue, Fred just stood there, his hands over his head, covering his ears. A little later, some men took him back to the V.A. Hospital in an ambulance. We never saw Fred again.

Soon afterward, before it snowed, workers tore down the house. My father said he heard at the garage that it was the father who had it done, but nobody knew for sure. As far as I know, no one ever built anything on that corner. Anyway, every once in a while, when I'd come home from school my mother would say, "Did you go by the Noonan corner today? We ought to have been nicer. We ought to have done something for them, you know."

She was right. But nobody ever did anything, me included.

Dorine Jennette

In Which the Academic Life Reveals Its Disadvantages

When I made Chair, I rigged myself
from the rafters and finally slept,

head-down like a bat. I awoke with the eyes
of an older politician, all my bags a-lean.

On the ground, going chicken
seemed the obvious solution:

I required a beak to speak sharp words.
Yet in my craving for grain and kindness,

I sought an air where flies
could harmonize in minor thirds.

I rubbed my eyes in their fanfare,
breast called to the scalding pot.

Each feather capered like a fox
dropped in the water's boil,

tunelessly whistling
an egg inspector's song.

Ian Williams

Out of work

Seeing his skin, stretched transparent
like plastic over a Styrofoam meat tray,
and the striation of his muscles, an illustration
from an anatomy textbook,
                Job's wife suggests
he root around a high-end dumpster, then gives him
details as if she had done it before, exactly
which streets and at what time and what to say
should he get caught. He has rights.
                I see his soul
step out of his body. It is white and transparent
and wears the same clothes. Rights, she's right.
She is also edible.

Jason Bogdaneris

Empress

You look like an impatient lioness on the IKEA folding bed
momentarily unsettled as the flat surface becomes a right angle
a sudden positional coup d'etat which you handle
with stoicism and clenched claws

You soften the newly shaped ground beneath you
and with narrowed eyes
re-conquer your domain
ruler of all your marble-green eyes survey

Even when pleading for an open door or tin
you do it with a sense of entitlement
An impatient empress

I read that Haile Selassie had someone in his court whose only job
was to carry around a collection of cushions to be placed under him
wherever in the world he sat
to elevate him sufficiently
Another tiny despot revered

Iris Hann

Summer Morning

when i was a child & the sky swallowed shadows
without yes
fields and fields of green gray marsh
and daddy's rough salty hands holding me up

Jody A. Forrester

Beverly Hills

The sticky lavender buds from the Jacaranda trees littered the parked cars and sidewalks beneath them, but there was only one parking space available for blocks around, and it was right next to my eye doctor's office. I hesitated, then decided since I'd just be a minute, I wouldn't let the flowers worry me. Sirens were shrieking, coming closer, but I paid them no mind. Their mournful wail was as natural as birdsong in the city. I pushed through the heavy glass doors into the marble lobby of the three-story medical building. Screeching tires added to the cacophony on the streets, but then the elevator doors closed and I was insulated from all sound except Simon and Garfunkel on Muzak. I came out five minutes later wearing new bifocals in rimless frames, whistling "Homeward Bound."

"Lady, what part of armed and dangerous do you not understand?"

A policeman just twenty feet away in the middle of the street was chastising a young woman in tears. She wore a tailored gray suit with a pale blue silk blouse, sheer black stockings and four-inch heels, the kind of small-boned woman that my wife Fanny hated on principle. The cop stood at attention, his sturdy legs rooted to the asphalt in a wide stance, fronting a street-wide barrier of yellow caution tape that wasn't there when I went inside. His supplicant begged to enter the street that my car was parked on. I stood by and listened as the policeman broke down the possible scenarios that awaited her if a shoot-out should occur. She talked over him, trying to explain that none of that mattered; she had left her apartment only minutes before to buy milk for her daughter's hot chocolate and needed to get home.

"What's happening?" I asked the cop.

"Armed robbery. They're supposed to still be in the area. All I know is that my shift ended, but here I am. Nobody can get through." He gave me a look that told me not to even think about arguing.

"That's my car right there," I said, pointing less than a half a block away. "Can I give you the key, just to get out my briefcase? It'd sure be helpful if I'm stuck here."

His response was muted by the noisy arrival of three black and white vans pulling up next to us. I jumped back to the curb when LA County's SWAT team spilled out of the vehicles' side-doors and ran past me.

The woman held her position, apparently unwilling to give up her intention to get home. Her hair and makeup looked as though she frequented the local salons. I shrugged and walked away, wondering what I could do to pass the time.

"Sir!" the policeman called me back. "Would you mind accompanying this young lady to the bakery?" He indicated Clara's on the opposite corner. To her he said, "Take a window seat and you'll be the first to know when it's safe to come out."

I looked at her through the top of my glasses, then dipped my head to see the small paper bag that she clutched to her stomach, the damp from the milk carton already seeping through.

"Sure, come on," I said to her, offering my arm. She grasped my elbow with child-sized fingers. Fanny's had heft, made for milking cows on the Idaho commune that I had either rescued or stolen her away from, depending on her audience.

"Do you need to call home? You're welcome to use my phone." I felt like a minor hero conscripted into service by the policeman.

"I've got my own, thanks. I'll wait until we're inside." Her voice was subdued, with a faint accent that I couldn't identify, which puzzled me given that most of my students at Hollywood High spoke English as a second language.

Inside the shop, the wrought-iron bistro chairs were already upended on glass-topped round tables. A girl wearing a blue and gold UCLA sweatshirt and white ear buds hummed while she mopped the floor. In the years that I had been going to the optometrist across the street, the small corner establishment had changed hands many times. In this incarnation, with baby-girl pink walls bordered by hand-painted leafy fronds, it appeared to be designed as a rest stop for the local shoppers.

"Closing, sorry," said the Elvis Costello look-alike at the cash register. He indicated the clock on the wall behind him with a flick of his acne-scarred chin. It was just past 6:00.

"We're stranded — didn't you see what's happening across the street?" I turned and saw that more people had pressed against the yellow tape, gesticulating to the lone policeman.

The coffee shop's employees went to the front windows while I told them about the suspected burglar, said by the policeman to be armed and dangerous. Most of them had also parked on the few non-metered streets in Beverly Hills east of Beverly Drive. An undercurrent of crisis began to swell. They worried aloud about dogs and cats that needed to be fed, and family and friends who were already waiting for them. My companion told them about her child's need for milk. That I was merely inconvenienced in my quest to end the day with my wife, a glass of bourbon, and a pile of essays from the AP English classes I taught hardly seemed worth mentioning.

I thought I should call Fanny, but decided to wait until I knew more. Maybe this would end soon. Since her cancer, I made every effort to be home before dark, before the demons that she had dubbed "Master Fear" and "Mistress Despair" could ambush her.

The staff conferred with the manager at the register and decided they would stay open a while longer. More people were coming in. I helped return the chairs to the floor while my new friend stationed herself at a window seat and took out her cell phone. When she finished, I walked

over to her and perched on a chair. They were not designed for a man my size.

"Everything okay at home?" I asked.

"The nanny put in a movie until I get back. How long can it be, I wonder? She has her bus to catch." She shook her head as though still struggling to comprehend what had happened.

I extended my hand. "Harry Donaldson."

Her eyes narrowed. "Really?"

"All my life." I was perplexed by her question.

"I'm Leila Nathan, so pleased to meet you. What luck! If I'm not safe with Mr. Darcy…" Her fingers added quotation marks. The skin between her eyebrows relaxed a little, but I recoiled.

"Well, of course, I realize that was just a part." Leila's face reddened and I realized that she wasn't kidding, although it was inconceivable that she should think I was the actor, the Harry Donaldson who won an Oscar ten years earlier for his leading role in *Pride and Prejudice*. That Harry Donaldson was six years my senior, easily fifty pounds lighter with a full head of hair. All we really had in common was our Scottish lineage with a smattering of freckles and dimples when we smiled. I had been mistaken for the actor before, but only on the telephone when making a restaurant reservation or ordering food for pick-up. I hadn't corrected them, reasoning that it wasn't my fault if people wanted to give me advantages meant for my namesake. But there in Clara's bakery was the first time that anyone had made the assumption in clear sight of me. I thought it took quite a leap of imagination but decided not to correct her. She was sure to realize her mistake sooner rather than later, but in the meantime, I saw no reason to resist my sudden ascension to Hollywood star. Her heartfelt awe was a boost. I sent a silent apology to the actor whose thick hair I wished was still mine.

"Look!" Leila pointed towards the window. Canine units had pulled up across the street. The black and white sedans parked parallel to the yellow tape, forming a wall to aid the traffic cop besieged by the crowd

that had gathered. German Shepherds, their noses to the ground, pulled their handlers past my car. I sighed when I saw that it had already been festooned with the sticky flower buds.

More people came grumbling in, shaking their heads, cell phones to their ears. Each new customer brought in a piece of the incident that had stranded us, eliciting a high-frequency buzz about a killer on the loose, a woman bound, but able to call for help—nobody knew for certain. Strangers talked to each other in that familiar way that only happened in a state of emergency. It seemed as though every person whose car or house was inaccessible within the police cordon was on the threshold of a life-changing event, of opportunities that would be missed if not immediately attended to.

Leila sat next to me, hand to her mouth, a red gleam of gum flashing while she chewed on a French-tipped pinky. She watched the people filling up the shop, muttering that she only went out for milk and look what happened!

"It's not fair. This has nothing to do with me. We're being held hostage!" she said to me. I dipped my head in sympathy; I felt the same way.

"Can I get you a cup of coffee? A pastry?" I asked. She said yes, requested cream, no sugar, and picked up her cell to make a second call. The grind of steaming milk braided itself into excited conversations as I wedged my way to the line forming at the counter. When my turn came, I purchased two coffees and an assortment of muffins, then pressed myself through the crowd to the milk and sugar bar. It was difficult to narrow my vision to the top half of the glasses and I had to apologize several times for my clumsiness.

A woman with Leila's olive skin and thick black hair had joined her at the table.

I overheard my name. When I saw them squinting at me, I noted the proximity to the exit in the event a quick getaway was needed. Leila's arms shot up, waving me closer with both hands.

"Harry, this is my cousin, isn't it wonderful? She came to keep me company! I called her — she lives just up the street." Leila introduced us, her voice high-pitched with excitement. "Harry Donaldson, my cousin Rachelle Levi."

She continued talking, telling her cousin what happened, ending with how lucky she was to have met me. Leila spoke with her head tilted, as if surprised by what her mouth was saying. Rachelle's eyes were dark like Leila's, but wider, more alert. She scrutinized my body as if measuring me for a suit. A feverish blush rose from my neck, percolated up my scalp and broke into tiny bubbles of sweat on my forehead. I placed the coffees and muffins on the table and sat down, making a failed effort to suck my abdomen up to my chest.

"Pleased to meet you," I said, extending my hand. Two cold and limpid fingers were offered in response.

"I thought you were taller," Rachelle said. She pushed out her lower lip.

"Oh Rachelle! Actors always look taller in movies, don't they?" Leila appealed to me with her pinky caught between improbably white teeth. I nodded and she turned back to her cousin. "Dustin Hoffman is 5-6, Tom Cruise only 5-7, aren't I right, Harry?"

I nodded again and concentrated on cooling my coffee with short puffs of breath.

"I also thought you were thinner." Leila's cousin sounded disappointed.

"Don't be rude, Rachelle. He's probably in character."

"What happened to his hair?"

Both women looked at me. I swallowed, the coffee still too hot, my face cherry-red with heat and embarrassment. Still, I didn't want to give in — not yet. It was time to play the part handed me.

"Lost it, ladies, what can I say? My manager insists on a hairpiece for the camera, but I go au naturel in public. Makes it harder for people to recognize me." I smiled at them, relaxing again. It could be true, I

thought. I pictured myself later with Fanny, drinking bourbon from cut–glass tumblers, recreating the scene. My thoughts turned to Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors*, a play I had taught earlier in the semester. The classroom had been lively then, the subjects of false identity, gullibility, and crowd mentality earnestly discussed.

"Like Ted Danson in *Cheers*! I loved that show, remember? Who knew he wore a hairpiece? The first time we saw a picture of him without it, Leila thought he shaved his head, but no, he's really bald!"

"It is amazing," Leila admitted to her cousin. "How transformational—he looks nothing like himself! But," turning to me, "aren't you afraid you won't lose the weight? I would be scared to do such a thing." She rubbed her flat abdomen like she might a beloved cat nestled on her lap.

"My next director already has a trainer waiting in the wings. They'll starve me, I'm sure." I permitted the thought to surface that that was the man I wanted again to be, not the actor, but myself transformed with muscles nesting now in loose skin becoming hard again, as they were in my college days when I spent a summer building roads in Cuba as a volunteer in the Venceremos Brigade. My body had aged into that of my father's, something I would not have thought possible. I had been telling myself daily that today was the day I would reclaim my body, but the days had turned into years with gravity and donuts in the teacher's lounge gradually winning over.

"What's next?" Leila asked. She leaned in close—patchouli-tinged perfume wafted from her breasts, carrying me back to the summer of 1967, to long-haired girls dancing topless at the Griffith Park love-ins where the smells of patchouli, incense, and marijuana had made me delirious with desire.

"Oh, I know! You're the next Bond! I read it when I was in line at the supermarket!" The tension in my shoulders eased—Rachelle's doubts had apparently been allayed.

"Is that true, Harry?" Leila asked. Her admiration for me shivered in my pelvis and the room felt hot again.

"Who's the next Bond?" A silver-haired man, fit in his custom pinstriped suit and silk tie, sporting a Palm Springs tan, leaned in from the next table. His face was smoothed and stretched by surgery and Botox injections. Probably a producer or agent; I thought, here it comes. I squared my shoulders, stressing the buttonholes on my oxford shirt.

"Should we tell him?" Leila asked quietly. "Maybe you don't want people to know you're here."

But Rachelle had already turned and was explaining me in breathy whispers. I tried to sit taller, but the chairs were so crowded together that the table pressed into my soft belly, making it rest on the glass tabletop like a deflated beach ball.

"You're the next James Bond? What makes you think so?" The man winked at Rachelle.

"He's Harry Donaldson, don't you recognize him?" Leila said. I saw the manager at the register look our way.

"Harry Donaldson? The actor?" A woman likely in her forties, but made-up as younger, was sitting at a nearby table. She exhaled more than spoke my name, clutching the table, then her chest.

"Harry?" she said. "It's me, don't you remember?"

My breath caught in my throat, a familiar feeling that always prefaced panic. I saw the man at the next table inch his chair closer.

"I was the extra in *Pride and Prejudice*, in the first parlor scene, wearing a yellow dress, remember? I stood right next to you, and when you turned to walk out, you winked at me. They didn't cut it—you can see if you watch closely!" My eyes fixed on Leila's lipstick-stained cup and I shook my head, relieved that she hadn't known the actor better.

Leila moved in like a mother cat. "How do you expect he would remember everybody?" she said. I had a momentary spasm of guilt when I looked up to see the woman redden and turn away.

Leila patted my hand. Her slim cigarette-shaped fingers made mine look like liver-spotted cigars. My neck tightened and I rubbed it reflexively. How far could this go? I blamed their eagerness to believe what their eyes should have refuted. It couldn't end well, I already knew that, but I remained quiet, too curious to see what would happen next. If nothing else, this would make for an interesting discussion in tomorrow's classes.

The silver-haired man said, "It's an honor to meet you, Mr. Donaldson. Forgive my skepticism, but you know…" He waved his hand in the direction of my head.

"I'm William DeSimone, owner of the Mercedes Benz showroom up on Rodeo Drive." He stated his name as a question compelling me to nod my head. A business card was palmed into my hand. "Please, come see me anytime. I'd love to put you in one of my 300SLs. That's the car for the next James Bond."

"Oh!" Rachelle looked as though she was going to levitate. "I bought my SL from your shop just two months ago. I love it, such a classic!"

I excused myself to use the men's room. As I stood at the urinal, the toilet flushed and a sunburned man exited the stall, wearing soiled overalls branded with Beverly Hills Sanitation on the bib. Crudely-inked tattoos wrapped around his Popeye-like forearms. While he washed his hands, I whistled an aimless tune, and was shaking the last drops when the man leaned in, his breath warm on my cheek.

"That's some bull you're throwing around, man," he said. "If you're Harry Donaldson, I'm Sly Stallone." I had flinched when the man came near, but then smiled and waved my free hand as he walked out the door.

I was enjoying myself. My own life had been broken down into units of efficiency, responding to whatever fires were burning the hottest at any given moment. To be thought someone else was a lift, especially the actor who had touched so many people with his talent and leading-man looks. I wished Fanny could see what I had not so innocently wrought. She would definitely agree that I was performing a public service, giving the

people who Hollywood called "civilians" a chance to sit with a famous actor.

"What's the movie you're filming now?" Leila asked when I rejoined them. I saw that the muffins had all been eaten and Rachelle had applied fresh lipstick. The car dealer had turned his chair to make a fourth at the table.

"A has-been boxer, like George Clooney in *Syriana*, that role when he had to get fat?" Rachelle asked.

"Something like that," I answered. My cell vibrated in my pants pocket and I saw that it was Fanny. "Excuse me," I said to the others while I flipped open the phone to talk.

"Darling," I said. "You'll never believe it. I'm stuck in Beverly Hills, the car is—"

"What happened to the car? Are you okay? Why didn't you call?" Fanny's voice, compromised from decades of smoking and more recently from radiation, came through the receiver in a scratchy growl.

"No, everything's okay." I saw the question in Leila's expression and mouthed "wife." Her eyes widened. "I've been stuck at Clara's, across the street from the eye doctor. The police roped off the street where I parked; apparently a burglar is in the area."

"How weird. How long do you think you'll be? Should I come get you?" Fanny asked.

"I don't know. You shouldn't have to come. I'll call a cab if this doesn't clear up soon." I plugged my free ear to hear her better.

"The thing is, Petal just called. She thought you could pick her up on the way home. She wants to bring the boys to stay with us while Richard's out of town for a few days."

"That would be tough." Our oldest daughter was difficult for Fanny; their relationship had never been smooth. A groundswell of regret that I was not yet home washed over me. "Don't worry, honey. I'll talk her out of it."

Fanny moaned and Leila must have heard because I could see her forehead pinch.

"I don't know how long we'll be, but I'll call you when I learn more."

"We?" Fanny exhaled with fury. The habit persisted even though she could no longer blow smoke. I winced at my mistake.

"Nobody, just me." I said goodbye and returned the phone to my pocket, forgetting that I wasn't myself when I gave Leila a helpless look.

"Is something wrong?" she asked.

"Was that Maven Grant? Oh, this is so exciting, I hardly believe it!" Rachelle looked to Leila as if for confirmation. I had forgotten about the actor's wife, a Tony-winning stage actress.

"When will you do a picture together?" the car salesman asked. "I probably shouldn't say anything, I mean, you probably get this all the time, but my son is at film school and wrote a script that would be perfect for you and Maven. You don't mind if I call her by her first name? You're both household names, well, in my home, anyways. My son, Jake, wonderful boy, I always knew he would go places."

He reached into the inside pocket of his jacket and pulled out his cell. "I'll call him, he can bring it by, you two can talk." He pressed a key, then shook his head with a grunt of disgust. "Damn kid, probably forgot to charge it—went straight to voice-mail."

"Jake, call me a-sap. I've got Harry Donaldson here, he's interested in your script!"

Leila clapped her hands. "Isn't this exciting?" she said, looking around as if seeking an audience to share her happiness with. Rachelle hugged her, and they kissed flushed cheeks.

"How about I messenger it to you tomorrow?" DeSimone asked.

Rachelle jumped in. "You don't think he reads new scripts, do you? You have to send it to his agent, right, Harry?"

I smiled and let them argue it out while I wondered how I could persuade Petal to remain in her house while her husband was traveling. Fanny had been diagnosed last year with stage two lung cancer after the

routine chest x-ray required of employees in the Los Angeles public school district; she taught middle school algebra. The tumor was removed, there was no evident metastasis, but chemotherapy and radiation were still recommended, one after the other. The cancer didn't make Fanny sick, but the treatment did, and she had only limited tolerance for our toddler grandsons whom she had so cherished as infants. It was hard for her to admit that they fatigued her, but Petal was alert to her mother's eyes rolling and took it personally. I thought I'd wait another few minutes before giving her a call.

"Last call," shouted the cashier. "Folks, we're running low on supplies; we'll be shutting down in ten minutes. Mr. Donaldson," he called out, "can I bring you another cup of coffee?"

Heads turned as one. I heard my name generated in concentric circles, a rock dropped into a pool of water. The rate of the news traveling could be measured by the new heads that swiveled to see me. "No way," I heard, over and over again. I saw heads shaking in vehement denial, those closer scrutinizing me, trying to see the actor in my face.

"Can't be," said a Latino man close to my age. "Impossible."

Rachelle and Leila took up flank positions, explaining how it was true that the thrice-nominated and twice-winner of the Academy Awards was indeed the fat and balding man stranded with them in Clara's coffee shop. Nobody addressed me directly, except the garbage collector who caught my eye and winked.

Several preadolescent girls, wearing short belly-shirts and carrying bags of clothing and shoes from Barney's, approached me for my autograph. Leila boasted to their mothers, telling my rescue of her as something far more dramatic. A line formed and people thrust cups, napkins, and paper receipts for me to sign. Another dozen or so hung back, disbelieving but quiet, doubting their doubt. I wrote slowly, asking

for names to personalize my scrawled signature, amused that celebrity worship was alive and well in Beverly Hills; I would have thought its denizens well-jaded by now. I had seen my first celebrity in Beverly Hills when only six years old, when Gregory Peck got into an elevator with my mother and me holding an ice pack to his swollen jaw after visiting the dentist. My mother gripped my hand so tightly that I pulled away, embarrassing her, she said later, in front of a famous actor. The girls who had been first in line used their cell phones to take pictures of me. They compared photos and autographs. I heard one wonder how much they might get for them on eBay.

"Okay folks, sorry. We're closing down." It was 7:25. Outside the late May sky had darkened. The police cars were still blocking access to the street where my car was parked. Elongated shadows from the palm trees that lined Beverly Drive striped the cars slowing to see what was going on.

"But I still can't get home," said Leila, tears welling up. The girl in the UCLA sweatshirt who made the announcement shrugged her shoulders and continued to wipe down the counter while other employees fanned out to clean up for the second time that day.

Rachelle tapped my arm with a blood-red nail. "Harry, there's a woman out there. I think she's trying to get your attention."

I looked out and saw my wife on the sidewalk, gesturing for me to come. Her twelve-year-old Volvo was double-parked under sodium street lamps that illuminated every scrape and dent. Fanny was wearing a pair of my old jeans with a sun-bleached denim shirt and red gardening clogs. With her hair short and spiky from the last bout of chemotherapy and her body swollen from the steroids she would have to take for another month, I realized that, to my companions, she must look like she sleeps in her car.

"Who is she, Harry?" Leila asked. Her repulsed shudder horrified me. I stood up, not bothering to suck in my stomach—my ninety minutes of fame were over.

"Fanny," I said, "my lovely wife." I walked out the door, looking only straight ahead, and swept Fanny into a hug. She kissed my cheek.

"Sweetie, I had to come get you. Petal's freaking out and I don't want to deal with her alone."

"That's fine," I said. "I'm glad you did."

"Hey, what's going on in there? Are they taking pictures of us?"

I looked over. People were bunched at the picture window, gawking and holding up cell phones. I could see Rachelle and Leila fluttering their fingers, the pock-marked manager standing with hands full and jaw dropped. William DeSimone's mouth and fists were clenched.

"Yeah, they thought I was the actor. I played along." I opened the passenger door for Fanny, went around to the driver's seat and settled myself in the comfortable seat.

"You're kidding, right? Are they blind?"

I shook my head, turned the key, and released the emergency brake. "A comedy of errors, so to speak." I started to tell Fanny the story as it had occurred, from the beginning but her chortling interrupted me.

"Wait! That makes me Maven Grant!" Fanny lowered the window and stuck out her arm, waving with a twist of her wrist just like the Queen of England. An enthusiastic fusillade of flashes responded.

Annie Walaszek

This is How it Was in November

You are eating blueberries
In the brightest morning light
That's making the trees look black.
And I remember when you ate me
In the darkest light of dusk
When shadows are heavy with
Unspoken promises.

It is a sweet death
Sitting here,
Watching you,
Pop blueberries between your lips.
I am okay with losing this oxygen
As you press beads of juice against your teeth
Because in my mind
We are back in bed
Under the curtain of night
And your fingers are rescuing my chaos
Your tongue is healing those prayers I prayed
Your chin on my skin is wiping away the grime of day.

And so my heart is breaking
Because I'm not sure
I'll ever be a blueberry for you
Again.

M.E. Silverman

Why There Is No Fifth Season

i. Leaves

For Mother, the fifth season
has arrived—a *Farmer's Almanac*

of second chances.
Decay everywhere.

Another house to fix,
another town to touch.

Several roses jut
and other petals swell

through the missing wattle board
from the fence he never fixes.

Neighbors notice the weeds
while no one sees

the sun-soaked lace
in the bottom of the shed

on top of a tulle veil
attached to a pearl headpiece,

and hydrangeas she presses
into *Twenty Love Poems*
and a Song of Despair.

ii. Working in Forsyth

After my sun-stained mother
pots her last plant,
she kneels at the yard's edge
with her old trowel,
two acres away
from the half-painted house,
two people removed
from Father, secluded
in his office, pretending
to finish his doctoral work:
the Miltonic apple
and the *felix culpa*.

I read Forster and Eliot.
One says *I quite expect to end*
my life caring most for a place.
The other types lines like
Houses live and die:

I know most writers lie.

iii. Blurs

Caught in a final photograph:
three plastic butterflies

whirlygiging in the alley
between a fence and a shed.

The overhead phone line blurs gray
with shrikes or maybe mockingbirds.

I'm the boy sitting cross-legged.

In my lap, a stuffed dog,
a small blanket, folded neat,

under a bag of travel toys
and a Shel Silverstein book.

Everything is off-centered
around two tickets for a one-way

viewliner roomette to St. Cloud,
already within the taut grip

of Mother's left hand.

Arthur Gottlieb

Farmer Grey's Son

Good deeds filed in the county
courthouse did not bind his only son
to the chain of title.

After the old man's death
he ditched farm for factory,
drifted like a hayseed
thru small towns and cities
sowing wild oats.

Now the abandoned land
is no man's,
collecting dust and taxes.
The wind reaps crops of weed.
Barn roof caved,
the calloused cornfields turn
a deaf ear to the combine
rusting in a shed.

The boy is busy now breaking ground
on a new rockpile in a city prison.
Ghosts rattle his leg irons
as the youth pounds his head
against stone to make sense
of the years slid to seed.

Straylight Staff

Dorine Jennette

Dorine Jennette is the author of *Urchin to Follow* (The National Poetry Review Press, 2010). Her poetry and prose have appeared in journals such as *Verse Daily, The Journal, Puerto del Sol*, *The New Orleans Review, The Los Angeles Review,* and *The Georgia Review*. Originally from Seattle, she earned her MFA at New Mexico State University, her PhD at the University of Georgia, and now lives in Suisun City, California.

In February of 2011, the poetry editors of *Straylight*, along with students studying poetry at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside, held a nearly month-long online conversation with poet Dorine Jennette through the *Straylight* literary arts forum. Interviewers included University of Wisconsin-Parkside students Tricia Boyd, Eric Hinkle, Colin Flanigan, Brit Kopczynski, Chelsey Okerberg, and Dana Roders, and their advisor, Mark Bilbrey. We've printed some highlights of that conversation here, but interested readers can find the entire discussion in its original form here at http://straylightmag.com/boards/index.php.

Mark Bilbrey: One thing about your work, Dorine, that's very clear in *Urchin to Follow* is how varied your poems are—in tone, style, form, subject matter, and everything else. On one hand, there are certainly some threads that unite the book (like, for example, natural imagery, especially of the American southwest, and there are certainly

consistencies in your voice and concerns). But it's hard to find two poems that operate in quite the same way. Other authors never write two poems that operate in different ways, right? That must be part of what drives you, then—to constantly be working in new territory in one way or another?

Dorine Jennette: Mark, I love it that you ask this question in terms of a "drive" for variety, as though my poem variety is shaped by some kind of coherent artistic ambition. Bless you! Honestly, I think the variety in the poems just stems from a low threshold for boredom. Kel Munger wrote a brief, wonderful review of *Urchin to Follow* in the *Sacramento News & Review* in which she accused me of having the attention span of a golden retriever—in a good way. The review is called "But I Digress…" and it was written by someone with whom I have since had several conversations about Chaucer's Wife of Bath and other digressive storytellers in literature—not to mention other digressive storytellers in conversation! Kel and I turn out to have very similar sensibilities, with a shared appreciation for mixing tones and dictions, literary allusions from different eras, images from different zones of the imagination, etc. But I digress…

I don't mean to say that I am lacking artistic ambition. It's just that my artistic ambition seems to function on a microscopic scale. I love chipping away at the one line, the one stanza, the one image, maybe how the one group of images relates to another group of images, how one stress pattern relates to another, or how one group of puns or homonyms relates to another group within the piece. I can think within and about the one poem—but on any scale of construction larger than that, my thinking gets fuzzy and I quickly get frustrated. I'm happiest rooting around in syllable counts, in rearranging the little particles of one line, one poem, until they please me.

Some of the poems I write during any one time period do have shared elements, because I'm puzzling over a constellation of related images or issues, but I'm not consciously working on any pile of poems as a set. And as each poem presents its technical challenges, I take them on individually, as individual puzzle obsessions. Sure, I grow aware over time that one pile of drafts has things in common—at the moment, I'm working on, in addition to a lot of unrelated odds and ends, a stack of long, messy, semi-narrative collages. I see how my brain is working out a related set of challenges—but I still approach the poems as individuals. And those poems, though structurally related, are very different: one is a kind of fugue, and is set in New Mexico, and includes images of Mary, and a painting by da Vinci, and also seafood in a roadhouse, and Patsy Cline. Another includes Shiva, Odin, quantum physics, bicycling, and compost. I look at those lists I just typed and they look crazy to me, but on the page, those things feel so linked—I guess I like a poem better the unlikelier its combinations are, you know? As Hannah Stein said to me once, when I asked her about her wild, beautiful juxtapositions: "Well, things seem to be related." And I thought, exactly! There's always a connection there somewhere. That's what Coleridge spoke of as the "esemplastic power," the poet's power to connect objects previously thought to be unconnectable. That's the fun, for me: trying to find those unlikely connections between images. Not that I have Coleridge's powers, or Hannah Stein's, for that matter. I'm just saying, that's where my fun is—in the attempt, image by image, to make connections. But it's my dream to be able to think on a larger scale.

Mark Bilbrey: Your interest in combination and forming new connections between otherwise unassociated entities shows up in the form of your poems, too, doesn't it? That's perhaps most obvious in a poem like "Reading and Writing on the Bus: How I Quit Missing My Stop and Learned to Love Pastiche."

There's an interesting tension, then, between your "low threshold for boredom"—your head-first, associative romps through a poem—and, on the other hand, your absolutely meticulous attention to detail and form. Tell me more about what this "digressive" approach means to you and how you reconcile that with the more formal elements of your work. Perhaps those two seemingly contradictory impulses feed each other in some way?

Dorine Jennette: First, Mark, I hope you know that your questions are beautifully phrased. "Head-first, associative romp" is great! I'm going to put it on a Post-it and wear it on my forehead as my personal blurb henceforward. Seriously, that's a great question regarding tension between associative romping and a meticulous approach to formal and technical details. My fastest answer to that question is that I don't find associative digression and formal meticulousness to be in tension, if by tension we mean conflict (and tension could mean "resonance" or something else, too). Digression and meticulousness do feed each other, in my brain. My way of being meticulous with structural/formal decisions, and with the details of linebreaks and phrasing, attempts to make those formal elements and details part of the overall scheme of digression and juxtaposition.

For example, there are a number of poems in the book, like "Trial of the Oblique Triangle," that I think of as sonnets, in that they have 14 lines and they follow the rhetorical shape of the sonnet, the thought shape of the sonnet: four lines to articulate a problem, four lines to elaborate/complicate the problem, a hard volta, or turn in the thinking about the problem around line nine, and so on toward something capping-couplet-ish at lines 13 and 14. Yet this way of structuring the thought in a sonnet is already a combination of Petrarchan and Shakespearean sonnet traditions, and then I tend to bury the iambic pentameter (maybe a crucial line or two will be in that traditional meter, but I background it, otherwise), keep the rhymes within the lines, versus at the ends, or make

the lines half-rhymes instead of full, and so on, mixing the "rules" of the form with bending or breaking or moving its rules. And sometimes I'm trying to use this old form to explore rather contemporary puzzles about subjectivity and what we now think of as the fragmented nature of consciousness; maybe I'm using the old form to explore a very small-scale puzzle versus the grander vision of one of those old favorite sonnets like "The World Is Too Much With Us, Late and Soon." So, the attempt is to make something that sounds very contemporary within an old shape. That's a kind of juxtaposition.

A poem like "Marriage Song in the Desert" is another category of juxtaposition via play with structure. That poem started as my attempt to mess with Eliot's "Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." I know there's no way any reader would be expected to notice this, by the way—I'm just laying out how I amuse myself making juxtaposition with technical details. I love Eliot's "Prufrock"—who doesn't?—but by the final third of the poem, don't you just want to take him by the lapels and shake him? Each time I read it, I feel like Cher in *Moonstruck*, slapping the Nicolas Cage character and shouting, "Snap out of it!" So, as a personal amusement, I tried to use some of the same structural ingredients as "Prufrock"—the invitation at the poem's opening, the call-and-response elements, the refrain, etc. etc.—to make a poem in the opposite tone. Instead of isolation, impotence, and despair, I was shooting for ecstatic union and fecundity. Just to see if I could do it. Same ingredients, opposite effect, was my goal. Honestly, I think the end result is a little too over the top! I took that poem out of the book manuscript, then put it back in, like five times. But I keep that poem around because I enjoy messing with T. S. Eliot, if only in my mind.

I am also interested in using the ingredients of argument—those connecting words like "therefore" and "because" and "in that case," and so on—against their usual purposes, so that one arrives at a sort of absurdity.

That's a current project—haven't figured out how to make it work yet. But in *Urchin to Follow* there's a good example of another argument-related strategy I favor, that of beginning a poem with an outrageous claim just to see if I can back it up. "The Facts We Prefer" begins with the idea that "it may be generous / to donate firewood / to a heretic's burning…" and goes on from there. So in that case, the outrageousness of the opening proposition is in tension with the really straight-faced frustration with the beloved who is described and addressed in the piece.

I guess the bottom line for me, regarding my low threshold for boredom, is that rearranging elements of form and structure, syntax and grammar—I'll geek out about syntax later in this interview, I'm sure—is the one thing for which I have an inexhaustible supply of attention. For me, meticulous play with those devilish details isn't boredom, but rather the best escape from boredom, and part of the project of playing with digression and juxtaposition. Does that make sense?

Mark Bilbrey: Dorine, I can't wait to hear you "geek out" about syntax. I'm trying to contrive a question that would push your "syntax" button—perhaps, since you mentioned "The Facts We Prefer," I could simply mention how perfectly convoluted that long sentence is (up until the very end, where it's perfectly concise), but how appropriate it is for its subject matter. I won't try to untangle all that here, but the point is that the tangle of content and syntax is a symbiotic relationship. It's a reminder, I suppose, that a sentence is a form, just as a sonnet is a form.

Chelsey Okerberg: I, too, am looking forward to experiencing a "geek out" about syntax! I have also really enjoyed hearing your inner-workings and thoughts about your poetry.

It seems as though you think in poetry; you even answer Professor Bilbrey's questions poetically. I love the fact that you can digress from

love to self-discipline to oppression to humor all within the same poem, but it is all so cleverly woven together that it makes universal sense. I especially like how you buffer the seriousness of reality/experience and human emotion with humorous tidbits.

Being an infant poet, I am attempting to write poetry for an audience consisting of people outside of my head (including my fellow poets in Professor Bilbrey's class), so it has to make a little more sense than the ramblings of poetic thoughts in my journal. Can you shed light on the progression of your poetry? (I know this is a question with, most likely, a limitless answer; however, any insight or thoughts you can share would be helpful. I have a growing pile of crumpled paper under my desk that is becoming my nemesis.)

I also love the free associative fluidity of your poems. Can you explain a bit about the process of forging the poems that survived to make it into *Urchin to Follow*?

Dorine Jennette: Mark, I like your way of saying "A sentence is a form, just as a sonnet is a form." I hadn't thought of it that way before, but now that I see you put it that way, I realize that I do approach the sentence as a form—and now I can do a better job of it, because you've described the process for me! Along those lines, Lynn Emanuel has a spectacular line in her poem "The Politics of Narrative: Why I Am a Poet": "A sentence, unlike a line, is not a station of the cross." In context, she's half-kidding—but only half-kidding, I think, and so half-serious. I will not attempt to summarize the complexities of this, but I'll just set it out there to resonate and amuse us.

I'll try to summarize what I mean by "syntax-geekery" by describing an essay by Heather McHugh on Emily Dickinson: "What Dickinson Makes a Dash For: Interpretive Insecurity as Poetic Freedom" in *Broken*

English: Poetry and Partiality (Wesleyan, 1993). This essay changed not only the way I read Dickinson and McHugh, but the way I read generally, and the way I attempt to write. McHugh's contention is that Dickinson's (in)famous dashes serve a very specific and very strategic purpose: to hold open as many possible interpretations of any line or any set of lines as possible. Wherever a directive piece of punctuation, such as a colon or a comma, might show us conclusively how two or more clauses relate to each other, Dickinson uses a dash instead, preserving several possibilities for how the clauses might relate. This is effective because Dickinson often strategically shapes her lines so that the word preceding a dash might be acting as a noun or a verb, etc. Thus, Dickinson's poems are a choose-your-own adventure experience, because if you decide to read the crucial word in line 1 as a noun, you read all of line 2 a certain way, which conditions your reading of line 3 as well, and so on. On the other hand, if you read the crucial word in line 1 as a verb, you read line 2 a different way, and then line 3 accordingly, etc. So, Dickinson's refusal to conclusively say how her clauses relate to each other is a refusal to commit to any one possibility, so long as multiple possibilities might be extant also. And if you multiply all those branching possibilities over the course of a whole poem, you end up with a very large number of total possible readings. That's either infuriating or exhilarating, depending on your preferences. Obviously, I am in the exhilarated camp!

I find the same exhilaration reading a writer like Heather McHugh, who plays some of these same tricks herself, and who also chooses her words so carefully that often a homonym or homophone for the word that's actually in the line is half-present also. McHugh is a relentless layerer of puns, so it isn't over-reading her work to listen for the words that are almost in the line, by eye-rhyme or ear-rhyme, in addition to the words that are physically in the line. Her lines are crowded with word-ghosts.

I am also a follower of writers like Carl Phillips, who complicates syntax and meaning in another way. Phillips writes mostly in a very "traditional" syntax, composing his lines in such long, winding sentences that his is almost a Miltonic or Baroque syntax, packed with embedded clauses and circlings back. Phillips isn't fragmenting "traditional" syntax in any now-familiar contemporary way; instead he's almost going back in time for his line/sentence arrangements. (Like Anne Carson, Phillips is a classicist by training, so his backward-looking sense of syntax makes sense that way.) But Phillips layers his clauses so deeply that he accomplishes very contemporary investigations of fragmented or intersubjective consciousness simply by stacking his old-fashioned clausal arrangements into such deep piles.

Overall, I'm only a happy reader when each line is full of toys, little bells and whistles that go off when I come back and read the line another way, find a different connection, notice a new pun, etc. I don't pretend to keep up with the writers I've just mentioned, but I attempt to build as many toys into my own lines as possible, in keeping with their spirit.

I hope I am explaining myself semi-clearly—for me, fine distinctions of word usage and line arrangement are the heart of how a poem does what it does, so the question of syntax relates to, well, everything! And I wanted to give a few examples, instead of going off the deep end and close-reading any one line to death.

Chelsey, as for my process, my experience is similar to yours, I think, in that I find it a long road from notes in my head to communicating with fellow readers. I am a slow writer—like, dead-slow. I started the aforementioned "Marriage Song in the Desert" about eight years before I finished it. Ouch. Not that I was working on the poem for eight years straight—that sounds terrible! It's just that I put things aside for weeks and months at a time, then would come back and chip at them again,

then put them away again, then chip again. I work on a piece until I get sick of it, then move on to something I'm excited about, knowing that the piece I'm sick of will be exciting again if I set it aside for a while. Carolyn Kizer said somewhere that the best tool of revision is a drawer, and that's how I live. After the poem spends enough time in the drawer, I can read it as though it's someone else's draft I'm reading for a workshop, or as though it's a piece I'm evaluating with my editor hat on, considering it for possible publication. There's a marvelous interval where I can see with perfect clarity what to chop and what to rearrange—and then the poem gets familiar again, and then I get attached to it again, and then I have to set it aside again.

Plus, if you are constantly reading, and learning from the writers you are reading, then you are constantly assembling your box of writing tools. Maybe you start a poem in January, but don't have the tools to finish it until a book you read in September gives you the eureka moment. I know that during the course of one class, you may not have enough drawer-time to really finish a piece. So, when I've been in classes, I've just tried to use the production of a "final" portfolio as an impetus to take the poem as far as I can get it, and then I set it aside before I return to it. You'll find your own rhythm.

Also, I should mention that eight years is the slowest I've ever been, so I'm using this as a dramatic example. Be not afraid! But it is often months or years of chipping away at a draft and setting it aside before I am satisfied with a piece. I did write "Interview with the Rescue Crew" in one sitting, plus a couple of line edits two days later, but that's my exception, not my rule. That's the most recent poem in *Urchin to Follow*, completed when the manuscript was mostly done, and a lot of my new work picks up where "Interview with the Rescue Crew" leaves off. Anyway, I think my timeframes are not unusual. I attended a talk by Chad Sweeney recently where he talked about writing almost half of *Parable of Hide*

and Seek (I think it was that collection) in one magical twenty-four-hour stretch—but that was a twenty-four hours that followed something like a decade of reading and writing and revising other things, plus his serious study of Buddhism, including traveling to meditation retreats with monks in—was it Burma? At any rate, he experienced a magic twenty-four hours of cranking out nearly-done poems, but he'd laid the ground for that magic, aesthetically and personally, with a decade of sweat and tears beforehand. So, if you can manage to be faster, I say, more power to you. But if you are slow, don't feel bad, is my point!

As far as my drafting process, I find it very helpful to take notes. I write down bits of overheard conversations, intriguing animal facts from nature shows, and favorite quotes from things I'm reading, or I'll sketch out an interesting image I've encountered during the day. When I write these things down, I don't usually have any plan for what to do with them. With many of them, I do nothing, and that's fine. But sometimes you realize that a note you took this morning is the answer to a poem that's been making you nuts for months. Or you realize that images you've been recording over a series of weeks, through random chance and serendipity, actually resonate with each other and make a poem together. My revision process is similar, in that I take a lot of notes on the page at each stage regarding possible new versions of a stanza or ways to rearrange, and then I come back another day and see which of those versions seems like the best idea. Then I lather, rinse, repeat. I used to long to be faster, more efficient. Now I accept that this is my process. If your process is faster, by all means, celebrate!

Regarding the poems that have survived the revision process, I know I've recycled hundreds and hundreds of pages of drafts by now, and I do it joyfully, without distress—I have no problem giving a poem the axe. I recommend keeping a folder called the "boneyard," containing all those

lines you've salvaged from the drafts that didn't work. Many of those lines will find a home in a new poem someday!

Chelsey Okerberg: You said, " … fine distinctions of word usage and line arrangement are the heart of how a poem does what it does." Does the syntax shape the way in which your poems are written? Or do you build the poem from a pile of loosely-arranged words, and forge the syntax after the poem is basically written? Or do you approach syntax and the poem as one unit from the beginning of the drafting process ("chipping" away at content and syntax at the same time)? Basically, can you elaborate on the forging of syntax and line arrangement within your poems with relation to the content?

Eric Hinkle: While reading *Urchin to Follow*, I noticed a lot of recurring images and words. For instance, you really seem to have fur on the mind, as well as yuccas and bees. Indeed, there is an abundance of natural images, sights and sounds and behaviors of Nature (animal and vegetative, as well as human). Another recurring image/word is "black": not just the noun, but also the verb. Your work contains images of "blackened" and "blacksmithed" items and environments. It seems to me like black is the most oft-used color in your book; and, of course, black isn't technically a color, but the absence of color (or rather, all colors combined into one dreary blotch). This is an interesting contrast to your work in general, which is rather colorful, both in tone and in images, and the direct opposite of a "dreary blotch". Black is often associated with evil, negativity, fear, etc.—elements which are present in *Urchin*, but which are far overpowered by light and color. I wonder if this contrast was anything intentional, or just one of many "happy accidents" that came about?

Dorine Jennette: These are great questions. I'd like to relate the questions to each other in my answer, so I'm just going to jump in.

First, Eric, this is a great sentence: "For instance, you really seem to have fur on the mind, as well as yuccas and bees." You'd better dibs that sentence now, or I or someone else will steal it! I actually hadn't noticed the persistent blackened-ness in *Urchin to Follow*, and I'm not sure what to think of it. I am fascinated with blacksmithing, in particular, and have some new poems in mind based on blacksmithing. Blacksmithing is a kind of magic, in the alchemical sense of taking something solid, making it a liquid, reshaping it, then solidifying it again. I think it's a fair analogue for the poetic process, or for the creative process in any of the arts, actually. I had the opportunity to visit a working forge in Oakland recently, and it was an incredible experience, to hear in the flesh that noise of the hammer striking metal that I have heard so often in my head, thinking about this.

And I'd like to relate smithing to your syntax question, Chelsey. That's a good and complicated question, how syntax and meaning emerge in a draft, and what writing process creates that emergence. For me, a physical process of "chipping" at the poem, or of chiseling the poem, or sculpting the poem — or blacksmith-style, lighting a fire under the draft and beating the crap out of the poem — until it takes the desired shape is the way I think of writing and revising. How does syntax relate to content? Syntax is content. Syntax is the way the words and clauses relate to each other; without it, you've just got a pile of words, a list, right? (A list does put words in a kind of relationship as well, a kind of syntax, but it's not a very directive syntax in terms of showing relationships between the words. A list leaves the task of making relationships entirely up to the mind of the reader. Which can be fun, but many of us do want the writer to have performed some assembly before sending us the rest of the poem's ingredients.) So, yes, I'm tinkering phrase by phrase, line by line, as I go. I know some writers talk about finding the content and then shaping the music to suit it, but I am baffled by that sort of process, because it implies that for that writer, an idea can exist separately from

its music, that meaning can exist outside of how syntax makes meaning by showing relationships between linguistic elements. I don't understand how that works. At all. I'm going to a writing group meeting tonight, in fact, with a friend who talks this way. She writes strong poems, and I have no idea how she does it. To each her own process! My process is to bash out the relationships between the image elements via bashing out the relationships between the line-and-sentence elements.

Writing is often considered a very abstract process, and compared to building a cabinet or shoeing a horse, I see how that's true. But writing feels very physical to me, and I experience revision as a kind of chipping or sculpting or bashing toward a pleasing shape. I get it that the physical arts require actual sweat, which poetry does not, and that I would deserve to be mocked by any physical craftsperson worth his or her salt for claiming that poetry composition is physical. I think Yeats once said that writing poetry was more difficult than bricklaying. I'd like to hear what a bricklayer would have to say to that. (In Yeats's defense, given the volatile politics of his time and place, he had real weight on his shoulders regarding the consequences of his work.) Still, I do think of assembling a line or a sentence in physical terms, which is why I do so much work by hand. I do enter drafts in the computer, but I write rough drafts on paper, and I revise on paper via making notes with a lot of arrows and drawings and possibilities for a line stacked on top of one another. I guess a tablet PC would get the job done, too. Somehow I need to be able to move words around vertically and sideways and diagonally, with drawings to remind me of things as I go, and a pen in my hand is the easiest way.

Colin Flanigan: I generally try to write with a similar strategy to the "head-first, associative romp" previously described, which generally leads me in all sorts of directions—most often to something that I like, and then into a state of deep insecurity where I question over and over whether or not I'm entirely narcissistic or just have bad taste in poetry (my own).

Likely both. Anyhow, I'd like to probe your mind about how you arrive at acceptance with the first draft of a poem—what your "litmus test" is, as it were, for knowing when a poem should be either discarded or set aside to be refined later? And secondly, I see both from this interview and the poetry I've read so far that you have a distinct appreciation for imagery rich with associations. How do you go about deciding what imagery properly serves the purpose of the poem you are working on—that is, what imagery is too obvious or too vague, what imagery is vague/obvious enough?

Dorine Jennette: Hi, Colin. To answer your question about drafting and images: It is definitely helpful to think about litmus tests, and I start applying them many drafts down the line. My litmus test for a first draft is—I don't have one. I count on a first draft to be excruciatingly bad. In *Bird by Bird*, Anne Lamott talks about living in fear of being hit by a bus when she has a new draft in hand, because of paranoid fantasies that the people who come to clean out her place after her death will find the first draft, see how bad it is, and conclude that she threw herself in front of the bus out of despair that she had lost her talent. And that's how bad my first drafts are, too. There are people in the world whose first drafts are good, but let's agree together to despise them, okay?

If you are not yet feeling liberated to write utter dreck, as I do—and many people do feel obligated to write well quickly when they begin, so you are not alone in that at all—then I really recommend the "Shitty First Drafts" chapter of Lamott's *Bird by Bird*. So freeing! Read it once, read it twice—lather, rinse, repeat! I don't apply my should-we-let-it-live test to a piece until I've been working with it for a while, until I've found out what it is. At that point, if it needs to be killed, or cut up for parts, well, I'm not as attached to it as I was at the first draft stage, thus it's easier to just keep what was good from it for the boneyard. Make sense?

My litmus tests for an image, when I do start applying tests, depend on the piece in progress, but speaking generally, my list might include:

> Is this image sufficiently concrete?
>
> Is it fresh? Or have I seen it too many times before?
>
> Is it physically clear?
>
> Is it tonally in keeping with what I want this moment in the poem to do, emotionally?
>
> Is it conceptually in keeping with what I want this moment in the poem to do, philosophically?
>
> Is it musically in keeping with the line?
>
> Is it aesthetically in keeping with what the rest of the poem is doing, or should it find a new home in a new piece somewhere else?

If you're feeling uncertain as to how to answer these questions when you're looking at a draft, the only thing to do is read more. Then write more. Don't worry, you'll develop an ear as you go!

Mark Bilbrey: And one final question:

Does poetry matter or is it just a dead frog for classroom necropsy, or perhaps a fancy crossword game for hobbyists?

Dorine Jennette: This here is one o' them Big Questions, isn't it? That's only fair—I've been doing the same to other people in my wacky online interviews for *The Georgia Review.*

Okay, here I go: Does poetry matter? Yes. Robert Pinsky's Favorite Poem Project (when he was Poet Laureate) showed that poetry matters to our lives as human beings. Pinsky's invitation to share a favorite poem revealed just how many people would pull wrinkled scraps of paper out of wallets, back pockets, dresser drawers, wherever, to tell the story of how a poem had helped them grieve for a loved one or renew their marriage or whatever.

As William Carlos Williams says somewhere in "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower": "It is difficult / to get the news from poems / yet men die miserably every day / for lack / of what is found there." What is found in poetry is beauty, connection to other humans, reminders of interconnectedness, of the numinous, of the Great Cosmic Ya-Ya that is larger than ourselves. So what is found in poems matters and is found also in painting, music, dance, movies, etc. (Here Frank O'Hara hollers at us from the sidelines, "Mothers of America, let your kids go to the movies!") I like to get these beautiful goodies from poems, but if someone else wants to get them from choreography or fiction, that's okay by me. Art matters. Poetry is one of its matterings.

Poetry encourages acts of imagination that allow us to imagine other lives, and therefore poetry encourages compassion, the recognition of the selfhood of the other. Thus poetry is a form of peace activism just by being itself. Lucille Clifton joked somewhere in an interview that if violent folks were poetry readers, they'd be better able to imagine another's experience, and maybe less likely to beat somebody up — or, as she joked, maybe they'd just beat somebody less severely.

So sure, in that art encourages imagination, which is essential to compassion, which is essential to our not blowing ourselves up or destroying the resources of the Earth, then yes, poetry, by being one kind of of art, matters.

But then the equation adds a variable, when we move from poetry on the page to poetry at a public event. Say we gather for a reading to benefit a favorite community organization, and we pass the hat while we're there. The money we raise for the worthy organization matters in that it supports their work. If the reading itself renews our energies for fighting the good fight, that matters, too. It's even better if the audience includes some folks who aren't usually poetry readers, who discover that poetry may have more to offer them than they thought. I encountered this recently when I guest-emceed for a reading to benefit the University of California-Davis Mind Institute, which studies autism, and the Odyssey Learning Center, which works with autistic people. (Let me be clear that I did not organize or publicize, by the way, I just showed up to introduce people, so I was sort of experiencing the event as an outside observer.) Everyone paid a little at the door to get in, and that money went to the two organizations. The key staff of the learning center were in attendance, and heard themselves celebrated by the poets. Some of the poems read were much better than others, in my opinion, but who cares? The event brought together people to materially support good work in the community, to celebrate the people doing the work, to connect to other humans with similar struggles, and to energize themselves for their own ongoing struggles. This event took place at the small, scrappy Sacramento Poetry Center, but for me it had all the elements of poetry mattering.

On the other hand, when poets gather for a theme reading about a social issue, and the audience consists only of others in the organizers' *wee coterie*, and no money is raised, and no volunteering occurs, yet the organizers are congratulating themselves for civic activism, I get upset. This looks to me like grandstanding, not activism. This makes me want to say, "Uh, guys? Next time should we maybe just walk dogs at the Humane Society for the day? Or write letters to the editor? Or something?" A reading that does nothing other than read poems may matter very much in the

sense of raising awareness and firing up the troops and etc. Firing up the troops matters, and forming community matters. I just get upset when people doing work that raises awareness among their friends wish to be congratulated as though they have been enacting substantive material change.

Having said all this, I should own that I have been known to write poems with social goals. A poem like "Notes on Logistics" in *Urchin to Follow* aims to draw attention, in its opening lines, to the rather blasé approach that our culture still sometimes takes to rampant, persistent violence against women. I've even published my token anti-war poem (it's online in Protest Poems somewhere, and I rather like it, I admit). But I try not to delude myself about the impact of such poems. I think my mother has more of an impact in the world than these poems do when she delivers hot coffee and sandwiches to striking union workers who are picketing on a day of forty degrees and rain. Some of you who are participating in your state's politics right now are probably having an impact via mechanisms other than poetry, even if poetry is part of what gives you the brains to operate those mechanisms.

For another scenario, I have more of an impact in the world than my poems do when I'm at a dinner party of all straight couples, and someone says something nasty about gay people, and I say, "Oy! That's my family you're talking about. Those are my friends you're insulting. I suggest you rethink that." I think any man reading this can make more impact on women's safety than my poem is ever going to do by saying, next time you're in a men-only conversation and someone says something horrifying: "Jesus, man, that could be my sister you're talking about. Shut your piehole," or however you prefer to say it. Martin Luther King Jr. said that "Silence is the voice of complicity." And poetry is one way to speak, one way to be other than silent. So poetry matters. But poetry often isn't loud enough. Sometimes simple conversation is louder. Poetry

matters, but it isn't the only thing that matters—art isn't the only thing that matters—and sometimes I think we are trying to accomplish tasks with poems that would be better served by other tools.

I hope this makes some sense, and I thank you for the opportunity to share my rant of the day!

Mark Bilbrey: Brilliantly put. Thanks so much, Dorine—from all of us up here in the cold and politically-tender state of Wisconsin!

Dorine Jennette: Thanks for having me on board, y'all, and keep fighting the good fight!

Eric Hinkle

"Smile. You've Just Been Nick Demsked."

Nick Demske
Nick Demske
Fence Books
88 pages
$16.00

"Can you show me on the puppet where the poetry touched you?" asks the narrator of one of Nick Demske's poems (64). It's a good indication of what to expect from his book: sly humor employed to describe something serious, with at least a hint of something dirty. Demske's debut poetry collection, full of brilliant lines such as the above, advances with an almost manic pace. It sucks the reader in and refuses to behave along the ride. It is a fantastic book and so addicting that most readers may just finish it in one sitting (one of several things it has in common with a bag of Krunchers).

Nick Demske, the self-titled collection from this Racine, WI native, was the 2010 winner of the Fence Books Modern Poet Series, which publishes one book a year from a selection of American poets. With Demske's sheer originality, his book fits in perfectly with the other Fence winners. It could be described as genuinely innovative, endlessly clever, politically incorrect, and preposterously profane, with "humor so dark you mistake it for chocolate" (19), as Demske says. Indeed, his poetry is disguised as candy and will rot your eyes. The book is not recommended for children's hour, the Amish, or even healthy dogs. Rather, it is recommended for anyone who has (at least once) been called weird, awkward, or deranged. For those folks, this book is a sheer joy!

Demske enjoys being audacious and offensive, but above all, he is unpretentious. His poetry isn't difficult to penetrate; in fact, it's incredibly engaging, and the reader will likely find herself shooting through it. The

language is inventive but never fancy or over-the-top. Demske is obsessed with "bad form" and considers his poems "deconstructive sonnets"; through his work, and his "violence" toward poetic form, he deconstructs social conventions in the most intriguing, and often amusing, manner possible. His poems have 14 lines and some kind of rhyme scheme (often slant, but typically a different rhyme pattern each time), though these "sonnets" are generally unrecognizable as such.

Demske slices words with alarming frequency. To make a word rhyme, he will often cut it in half (or in thirds), using the second half as the beginning of the next line. Usually, the rhyme isn't even noticeable. The slicing is rather violent, but he often uses it to force new words: "donate" will become "don" and "ate," for example (19). Thus, he uses the two words, plus the original word itself, essentially using three words when most writers would only use the one. Ergo, there is a limitless amount of imagery and personal interpretation; the meaning of the poem can go in myriad directions. Depending on how you read a certain line, it becomes a sort of "choose-your-own-adventure" form of poetry. Here is an example of Demske's word-splicing:

> I am violently Nick Demske, the pissy,
> Second-hand trench coat of poetry. Behold my clearance discounts.
> I we
> Ar my Nick Demske like a burkha — the lamb's wool codpiece, pessi
>
> Mystic. (28)

Perhaps this unique technique will come to be known as the "nickipoo" (after his blog at nickipoo.wordpress.com).

Nick Demske is the self-proclaimed "poet laureate of your face," and he means business. Like all poet laureates, real or imagined, Demske possesses a real power to "move the crowd," as Rakim would say. This is meant in both ways: he knows how to please his audience (with outrageous one-liners and outlandish offensiveness), yet he also knows how to rub the hairs of our hearts against the grain (and with the grain, when he's in the mood). Demske has a clear desire to make something

good out of something inherently bad, and through doing so, he broaches numerous serious topics. His are poems about death, abortion, suicide, the wretchedness of human nature, the decline of civilization, and other somber subjects. (Of course, to paraphrase James Tate, it is inappropriate to talk of "subject" when discussing poetry.) However, the light always seeps out of Demske's darkness, and we're never wallowing in the muck for too long. His knee-jerk reaction is to laugh in the face of sadness, the tears trickling over his grin—and the reader is beside him all the way.

A thousand adjectives could be used to describe the style of Demske's work, but perhaps the foremost should be unpredictable. I doubt even God could keep up with Demske's thought process, the way it just winds around and around at breakneck speeds. Or perhaps God is scared of Demske and isn't paying attention. I wouldn't blame him, after reading this stanza:

> We maim
> Our temples, kneel on marbles, we drag
> Nails through cheeks, we bum rush body bags,
>
> Caskets . . . to know a veil. I pulverized the cross to kindling. (49)

Demske has a real tool—a scathing tongue that cuts right to the bone—and doesn't care how many times you say "uncle." If he has something to say, it will be said, and nobody can't do nothin' 'bout it. As Demske will say, "If you're going to act like a brat, // I'm going to eat you like one" (19). He appears to be offended by quite a lot of what he sees around him. Throughout his book, he points to all the vulgarities of the world, and all the hypocrisies within it. They piss him off, and he's here to speak up.

There is a definite focus on "Real vs. Fake" in Demske's book: which people are forgeries, which sentiments are genuine, which reactions are feigned, which of Demske's opinions are the "true" ones: the book is a study of which is which. Demske himself is named as the narrator, as well as other Demskes who may or may not actually be "others." "Demske" might also be used as a verb or adjective. The name/word comes up frequently, as Demske likes to speak of himself in the third

person—often in hilarious and/or self-deprecating manners. He calls himself "the lobster bib of poetry" (20), and then conflictingly sighs, "Sadly, I have to remain a god" (75). Is it cocky to describe oneself as a god? Is it wrong to say, "I will make me beautiful if it takes // Uglying everything else" (7)? No. It's hilarious. Pure "chortledom" (3), in Demske's words.

A lot of these poems are dedicated to people, often locals that Demske knows. This adds an element of sincere intimacy; the reader sometimes gets the sense that Demske is just talking to a friend. His poems are not just to the world, but to specific people (many of them poets, as well). Obsessed with poetry and the arts, several years ago Demske co-founded the Bonk! performance series in Racine, which consistently features a slew of great poets, writers, musicians, and more. He is also the editor of *boo: a journal of terrific things*, which can be found online. Demske basically sleeps with poetry.

For those who want grit and grime, for those who want truth and intimacy, for those who want beauty and a whole lot of swear words: Nick Demske is your man—and he'll admit it. He wants to laugh with you. He wants to be on your side. He wants to show you that your voice matters, that you can make yourself heard. He wants to show you that not everyone is a cruel bastard. To end with a line that perfectly sums up this whole "glowing mosaic" of a book (87):

"Alls I'm trying to say is [section omitted]" (62)

Ben Kopczynski

Truth and Terror

Incendiary
Chris Cleave
Simon & Schuster
272 pages
$15.00

In 2011, the events of 9/11, while not yet forgotten, have generally faded from the social consciousness. The award winning novel, *Incendiary*, first published in 2005 and written by Chris Cleave, wouldn't have us forget so quickly. Though the 2001 tragedy is altogether absent from *Incendiary*, its content rings some rather uncomfortable bells for anyone old enough to remember that day (and anyone too young to remember really shouldn't be reading this book: naughty language and sex scenes abound), but it does more than simply dredge up bad memories: *Incendiary* is a prolonged insight into the effects of loss, grief, and pain.

Set in London, *Incendiary* is a compilation of four fictional letters written entirely in the first-person by an unnamed woman to Osama bin Laden. The book opens with an explanation of the speaker's purpose in writing Osama: she is convinced that if Osama only knew the effects of his efforts firsthand, he would get out of the terrorism business entirely. She then gives a heartwarming and frequently humorous description of her family, starting with her hardworking husband. As a member of the police bomb squad (a job which comes with mediocre pay, unforeseeable scheduling, and enough stress to frazzle any housewife), he is frequently distant, but his upcoming resignation has put life back into their marriage. Her four-year-old son, meanwhile, whose antics are only describable as cuteness personified, is her life. Also, she cheats. She is always ashamed of this behavior, and there can be no doubt that she loves her husband dearly. Nevertheless, on those nights when her husband is called into work and she knows that she's one wrong decision, one slippery hand,

or one ill-timed sneeze away from losing him forever, she finds herself in dire need of comfort and finds that comfort in pleasure. She never tries to excuse her actions; however neither could I, as a reader, condemn her for them. It isn't the right choice, but it feels like the human one. She isn't perfect by any stretch of the imagination, but her love for her family is undeniable.

The bulk of *Incendiary* is dedicated to detailing a year in her life (as well as the lives of those around her) after a fictional terror strike by Osama bin Laden turns all of London upside down. The narrator's musings explore the nature of a variety of touchy issues most of us would like to pretend don't exist. A chance encounter brings her into contact with a neighbor and his girlfriend, whose difference in incomes and glamorous fashion force class issues into the limelight. Later, while in the hospital, she comes across a young nurse who does a fantastic job of caring for everyone under her power, but whose religion makes her a target for the post-terror government. While giving the narrator her daily meds, she tells her, "Merciful pills, now we'll forget about it all for another day. The hours will go by like a dream. My god isn't cruel. A cruel god wouldn't help us forget. This is why we say Allah Akbar. God is great" (63). She's fired that day because the government won't let Muslims work in hospitals, or on planes, or in areas privy to certain sensitive information. After the economy, morality, and sanity of London slips still further as the story progresses, the narrator even goes so far as to wonder whether her country could be so corrupted from one moment of terror, or if everyone had always been this scummy, and the terror strike simply forced them to show their true colors. And if that was the case, she muses, was Osama bin Laden really so wrong to try to destroy them?

As mentioned above, *Incendiary* is divided into four chapters of sorts, each detailing a season of the year following the terrorist attack. More notably, Cleave's writing style here is completely devoid of any mid-sentence punctuation: no commas, colons, semi-colons, dashes, parentheses, ellipses, etc. While this stylistic choice is occasionally an impediment to clarity, on the whole it serves to underline the emotional impact. It also gives the narrator an odd, detached, almost wooden tone throughout, making the contrast to the incredibly raw emotion flying

left, right, and center throughout all the more vivid, and consequently making the narrator that much more sympathetic. Take this excerpt for example, from shortly after the attack:

> The BBC never did work out what to call the thing you'd blown up. After days … they gave up and just started calling the whole thing May Day. Everyone did. Like you hadn't just blown up a football ground you'd blown a hole straight through our calendar. I felt like I'd fallen through the hole. Day and night didn't mean anything it was all just buzzing neon. (51)

The depth of her emotion is horrifying at times, liberating at others, always present, and the skill with which Cleave instills these emotions in the reader is staggering. When there was horror, I felt horrified. When there was humor, I laughed aloud. And those few moments when there was real happiness and contentment, I half-wanted to shut the book because I so wanted a happy ending, yet couldn't because of that half which wanted to feel that happiness more thoroughly.

One of the side effects of telling a story wherein the only moralities are gray or grey (and you may rest assured that *Incendiary* fits such a mold), is that it can become difficult to argue any character as being either admirable or despicable. Whether this is a strength or a weakness of the book is largely debatable. Certainly, for colleges or book clubs, there will be no end to potential debate in terms of the relative moral worth of Cleave's characters, the damning power of certain actions, and the justice (or lack thereof) to be found in the post-terror government. For the analytic reader who enjoys trying to puzzle out these sorts of questions, *Incendiary* is a fantastic find. The casual reader, however, simply looking for an interesting plot, a hero to emulate, or a villain to denounce, should pick up a different book. Personally, this sort of ambiguity keeps me up at night, but I'll sacrifice the sleep for such fascinating thoughts.

There can be no doubt that Cleave knows his craft; the book is very structured, well-paced, and engaging. Similarly, he knew precisely what he was trying to achieve with this book, and put no effort into parts of the book which did not further this goal: namely, creating characters and events which have no obvious moral right or wrong, but simply are. Don't

expect to receive answers to all the questions raised in the book; indeed, much of this book's brilliance rises from its ambiguity. The flipside of this, however, is that there is very little in the way of conclusion, no real satisfactory cap to events. Again, this could be argued to be some very rare realism in fiction; in the words of Rich Burlew, "There is no end. There's just a place where the storytellers stop talking." Characters might die, but they usually have family, friends, or even enemies who live on in their stead. Story arcs may end, but only to give way to next. Any real finale is an illusion. If there is one thing that this book got right, it's reality. At no point did I feel the plot was contrived, that characters were acting without motivation, or that these characters were anything more or less than people trying to make the best of a hard time. Have no doubts, there are many themes running throughout the book, and lessons to be taught using the plots and characters as extended, beautiful metaphors, but the degree of subtlety with which it is done is simply marvelous.

Quite simply, Cleave has put together a rather clever book, which, if read by the right people, might easily become staple literature in classes across the world, but more likely will fade into obscurity since it may not appeal to readers who want their stories simple and self-contained.

Tara Gilboy

Chasing Seabiscuit

Unbroken
Laura Hillenbrand
Random House
496 pages
$27.00

Laura Hillenbrand's 2001 book, *Seabiscuit*, a narrative history of the Depression-era racehorse (and the men who trained him), was a hit. A *New York Times* bestseller, the book has over six million copies in print, was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award, and won the Book Sense Book of the Year Award. The film based on the book, nominated for seven Academy Awards, had just as much success. *Unbroken*, Hillenbrand's second book, seven years in the making, was eagerly anticipated by readers and critics alike, predicted to be just as popular as *Seabiscuit*. Hillenbrand had come across *Unbroken*'s subject, the Olympic runner Louis Zamperini, years ago while doing research for her first book. Zamperini and Seabiscuit, both breaking racing records in the 1930s, were often mentioned together in the newspapers Hillenbrand sifted through while compiling her research. In 1938, Louis Zamperini was running the mile in 4:13.7, causing his coach to comment that "the only runner who could beat him . . . was Seabiscuit" (40). Perhaps, publishers hoped, the book based on his life would enjoy similar success in chasing after *Seabiscuit*.

Unfortunately, I'm not really a fan of horse racing, and I was one of the few people not familiar with the story of Seabiscuit. My knowledge of horse racing begins and ends with the famous horse race of *Anna Karenina* when, rather than breaking records, Vronsky shifts awkwardly in his saddle, breaking his horse's back. I have not read *Seabiscuit*, nor

have I viewed the film. And it's not just horse racing that I am a bit biased against. Horse racing, dog racing, NASCAR, people racing (track?) — any racing really. Perhaps it is just jealousy: I am a notoriously slow runner (my mile clocks in somewhere approaching nine minutes, more than double Zamperini's time). Whatever the reason, I wasn't exactly thrilled to find out I'd be reviewing *Unbroken*, a biography of an Olympic runner. I was, however, cheered by Zamperini's take on the subject. "I'll be an easier subject than Seabiscuit," he told Hillenbrand, "because I can talk" (399). Yes, I thought. At least Zamperini can talk.

In *Unbroken*, though, Zamperini does more than just talk. He lives, moves, and breathes. Hillenbrand brings Zamperini to life; the book reads more like a novel than a history. Zamperini swoops about on the page: from a small town in California to the Berlin Olympics of Nazi Germany, from a B–24 bomber high above the Pacific to a Japanese POW camp; *Unbroken* is not just a book about racing, but rather an epic tale of one man's life. And Zamperini's life contains all the plot elements of captivating fiction, not to mention biography: he meets Hitler, is shot down by Japanese fighter pilots, fights off shark attacks, and is subjected to dangerous medical experiments. He drinks, bullies, steals, sacrifices, and saves lives. Hillenbrand, always honest, paints the man in all his complexity, not shrinking from the bad as well as the good. At times, especially early in the book, Zamperini is not even likeable. The effect is an extremely human portrait; Zamperini is not just a static character trapped in pages, a statistic, but a tangible, living, breathing, human being. He is, in many respects, the troublemaking boy-next-door. Hillenbrand mirrors this familiarity in her language; her prose style is accessible and unpretentious. Both Zamperini's character (one cannot help referring to him as a character even while knowing he is indeed a real person) and Hillenbrand's taut, to-the-point prose make the book extremely approachable.

Louis (Louie) Zamperini grew up in Torrance, California. He was a troublesome child, often running away from his mother, making

mischief, and stealing food. Hillenbrand writes that most of the stories Louie tells about his childhood end with the words "and then I ran like mad." The running paid off; Louie became a track star in high school and college. In 1936, Louie competed in the Berlin Olympics, where he met Adolf Hitler, got drunk, and stole a Nazi flag. Later, when World War II began, Louie joined the Army Air Corps. During this time, Louie's plane was shot down over the Pacific Ocean. Louie and two other men, the only survivors, crowded onto two rubber life rafts. One of the men, Phil, was wounded; the other, Mac, as they drifted, began to lose his mind. The men had no food or water and were constantly surrounded by sharks as the rafts slowly turned to jelly from the long exposure to saltwater and sun. The sharks were so aggressive that if the men edged too close to the water, a shark would try to bite them. The men killed birds that landed on the raft for food. After twenty-seven days adrift, the men spotted a plane, but rather than being their salvation, the Japanese pilot began shooting at them. The men were forced to dive into the water with the sharks to avoid being killed by machine-gun fire. After forty-seven days, the men reached land, and surprisingly, this was when the real trial began. The island they reached was occupied by the Japanese, and Louie and Phil (Mac died on the raft) became prisoners of war. They were starved and beaten. When Louie begged for something to drink, he had scalding hot water thrown in his face. Particularly brutal was a guard Louie referred to as "the bird," who, once he discovered Louie's fame as an Olympic athlete, singled him out for exceptionally cruel punishment.

Louie's time in the POW camps turned out to be much more traumatic than his time adrift on the raft. In one of the most poignant passages of the book, Hillenbrand describes the difference, explaining:

> the crash . . . had left Louie and Phil in the most desperate physical extremity, without food, water, or shelter. But [in the camps], the guards sought to deprive them of something that had sustained them even as all else had been lost: dignity. This self-respect and sense of self-worth, the innermost armament

> of the soul, lies at the heart of humanness; to be deprived of it is to be dehumanized, to be cleaved from, and cast below, mankind … hope is almost impossible to retain. (182-183)

The book, at times gripping, does have some major flaws. Some of the information presented as "fact" is difficult to believe. For example, Hillenbrand writes that when Louie was a child, Louie's mother asked a neighbor to "sew Louie's severed toe back on" (6). Hillenbrand makes the statement and immediately moves on without offering further explanation. Sewing on a toe is, after all, not the same as sewing on a button, and the reader here questions the credibility of the narrative.

Also disorienting are the frequent shifts in point of view. The narrative in many of these spots feels awkward, and it would perhaps have been more natural for Hillenbrand to summarize as a historian rather than providing the background information (needed for historical context but not in Louie's realm of experience) by forcing the reader into a new point of view. For example, when Louie leaves the Berlin Olympics to return to America, Hillenbrand wants to inform the reader of what occurred in Berlin after the Olympics were over. Rather than summarizing the information, Hillenbrand forces the narrative into the point of view of the basketball player Frank Lubin, who remained in Berlin for a while longer than Louie. The effect feels clumsy and results in a narrative dotted with so many characters (some that we see only once or twice) that it is at times confusing and difficult to keep all of the names straight.

Because there are so many people mentioned in the book, the majority of them remain simplistic and without depth. This is, of course, necessary in this type of book; not all the people in it can be, or should be, treated at length, but most noticeably, the book is devoid of strong females. This is especially strange given that many of the women in the book are mentioned repeatedly throughout. Despite the frequency with which many of them appear (Louie's mother and sister, Phil's fiancée), they remain mostly shadows, stereotypes of the "ideal feminine" without any real depth or complexity. The women are portrayed only

in their relationship to the men, never in their own right (this would be permissible if this was the case with all the people in the book, but we see many men as stand-alone characters; for example after the war, we are privy to "the bird's" actions, apart from Louie). Louie's sister weeps for her brother, who she calls "darling." When one woman's husband goes missing, she sells all their things and moves in with her parents. Louie's mother's hands break out in a mysterious rash when he goes missing that miraculously disappears when he is found. Even Louie's wife is portrayed as extremely one-dimensional. The reader is told that she is upset about his drinking, but she stays with him, even when he disappears on drinking binges and becomes physically abusive. Hillenbrand does not offer readers Louie's wife's voice or opinion, although she gives this voice to many men in the book. The women of *Unbroken* are depicted as silent martyrs; their characterization brings to mind the "gentle sex" ideal of nineteenth-century literature. They wait patiently, never giving up hope. They are placed on a pedestal, yes, but one cannot do much on a pedestal. On the opposite end of the spectrum, when women are not being portrayed as angels in the book, they are being represented as sex symbols. Nude pictures of them are featured in the soldiers' bathroom, the "pornographic palace." In Japan, the released POWs visit prostitutes. The angel/whore dichotomy that this creates is disturbing. It is surprising to see this in a book released in 2010.

Women are not the only "thing" in the book that is over-simplified. Discussion of the Japanese-American conflict tends to lean toward a "Japan bad: America good" approach. To be fair, Hillenbrand does write of some kind guards and Japanese civilians, but Japanese are mostly portrayed as cruel. Japanese brutality is a well-known fact of WWII, and I by no means wish to undermine the experiences of POWs like Louie Zamperini. But Americans were not all good either, and Hillenbrand tends to overlook this fact. She ignores the internment of Japanese-Americans in the United States, and she does not address the morality or ethics behind the US decision to drop the atomic bomb. The bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki each killed nearly one

hundred thousand Japanese. These figures are not given in *Unbroken*, although many figures are given regarding the number of POWs killed. The atomic bomb is treated as something exciting, the tool for bringing about the end of the war (despite contemporary thought that questions the bomb's necessity as a means to an end and speculates on it as a medium for intimidating the Soviet Union). Hillenbrand even quotes a released POW who, as he passes the destruction of Hiroshima on a train, describes it as "beautiful" (320).

Despite these shortcomings, the book is engaging; at times, I stayed up late reading it, unable to put it down. Hillenbrand combines the meticulous research of a historian with the storytelling ability of a fiction writer. She organizes the events of history and Zamperini's life into a suspenseful narrative. The book more resembles a novel than biography. Plot takes center stage, creating, in effect, the non-fiction equivalent to genre fiction.

Hillenbrand even uses the "Chekhov's gun" technique of fiction writers—elements that appear briefly in the early pages of the book become significant later on. While in training for the army, some of the men get bored and shoot at sharks. They learn the bullets are not deadly once they pass through a certain depth of water. This information becomes important later on when Louie dives deep into the water to escape Japanese bullets from overhead. Hillenbrand also uses "teasers" throughout, especially at the end of chapters, to build suspense and keep the reader engaged.

Unbroken will most likely enjoy the same, if not more, success as its predecessor, *Seabiscuit*. *Unbroken*'s pages contain all the essential elements of a blockbuster film; not surprisingly, Universal has already acquired the film rights. The book has much to recommend it, no matter what one's reading preferences normally are. It is at once a history, biography, and just plain good storytelling. And when the film gets made, I will be standing in line with all the other movie-goers, ten dollars clutched in hand, to see it. Perhaps Leonardo DiCaprio will star.

Alexandria Binanti

The Tale with Two Literary Stylings

Pandora's Succession
Russell Brooks
Amazon Digital Services
352 pages
$2.99

Pandora's Succession, the breakout novel by Russell Brooks, is an international action-packed thriller with political and personal vendettas driving the plot. Using terrorist threats and the sale of biological technological warfare to modernize the Bond-era mystique, Brooks still applies typical spy-genre glamour to the deliberately-explosive narrative. Continual violent altercations pop up from the fast-paced storyline, along with an array of plot and character twists, which keep readers at the edge of their seats. Beyond the basic storyline, Brooks dabbles in constructing a complexity of characters that falls short under critical analysis. He intends on employing an underlying depth of character through internal dialogue that focuses on back stories for motivators of action, and random commentaries on morality. This may be an attempt to appeal to social consciousness, perhaps for the appeasement of a bleeding heart. Unfortunately, the overwhelming amount of details and descriptions is sometimes unnecessary to the evolution of character and plot, therefore inhibiting an organized plot progression. The constantly-changing narrative, revolving characters, and the continuous introduction of new elements to the storyline become a deterrent from the real "meat and potatoes." The plot twists become predictable and the characters and progression over-simplified, thereby losing any chance of believability.

The storyline follows the struggles of our protagonist, Ridley Fox, a military-special-ops-soldier-turned-CIA-agent. Brooks invents Fox to be a killing machine with a conscience. Brought across the world to stop a bio-hazard terrorist threat from getting into the wrong hands (initial suspect: Al-Queda), Fox deals with blown covers by moles and scientific buxom beauties who unsettle his nerves (followed by the story of his dead fiancée), lab explosions, secret meetings and combat with "*Janjaweed*" (literally translated as "the devils"), followed by a minor Pandora outbreak where "it finds its way inside you either through your mouth, ears, or the nose and eats its way inside, ingesting tissue and organs in order to self-replicate … [to the effect that] Huge boils appear all over your body, seconds before they erupt" (46). Oh, and did I mention all of this intense action is in just the first couple chapters? Action drives the narrative early on, and the twists get bigger with competing political villians, attempted brainwashings from a drug ironically named "Clarity," and hidden insurgents masked as allies.

The novel has the feel of a fast-paced action film. One could easily imagine Sylvester Stallone cast as Fox. It hits all the marks of the genre: unbelievable combat scenes, an abundance of weaponry, sexual frustration, and a macho dialogue. Action oozes from every facet of the plot:

> He ran outside and grabbed their assault rifles, removed the ammunition clips, and brought them into the school with him where he tossed them into a classroom. Weaponry made these men fierce and they used this fear against defenseless women, children, and elderly villagers. But these guys were no match for Fox who was not only skilled with a gun, but also with knives and hand-to-hand combat. Their mistake was doing business with Ares because now it put them on Fox's hit list. (29)

If you can picture a muscle-man in the desert with army fatigues fighting off the villains to save innocent villagers from a bio-test, then the shift of narrative focusing in on a teary-eyed child that exclaims "You came

back. You did come to save us" (32), as his mother holds him tighter against the immediate aftermath, you've summed up the whole premise of the story's thematic developments.

The outlandish circumstances that are supposed to make us ask what's next somehow get reduced to clichés. The believability is lost early on by the distracting internal dialouge of lost love, the thematic back story of Cold War influences, and the later-implied sexual tensions between a multitude of characters. By the time we get to the climax after being fed all this hyperbole, the story's mystery is irrelevant. The plot is overwhelmed with stretches of unnecessary background information and details that are supposed to give us a more humanized character portrayal. But the reader does not need to know about Fox's high school football history, for example, since it has no real bearing on the development of the action later in the novel. Then the half-page introductions of characters that usually don't evolve beyond their preliminary description make it hard to follow who is important to the actual outcome of the story, often because Brooks intentionally abandons them by killing them off.

There are moments where the novel shines, though. The premise is ingenious, serving the action that is clearly at the heart of the narrative. Furthermore, Brooks tackles the emotional complexities of war and real-life terrorist threats with internal dialogue. The omniscient narrator is able to extend reasoning behind the extremities of violence and action—all from capturing a multitude of perspectives. The alternating points of view creates necessary tension.

But herein lies the problem: the underlying themes demand a *so what,* and there isn't a great answer. Brooks has Fox tackle well over fifty obstacles, all cool snapshots of an individualized scene, yet the novel brushes over too many issues to ever be complete. I don't want to know only one or two details of a murdered fiancée; if the murder is intended to be a valid component it has to go beyond the preliminary description:

> His fiancée, Jessica, had died at the hands of his captors two years before. Unlike her, he knew they would torture him first.

> She was murdered just a few hours after he proposed to her. He promised her to give up his career in the Joint Task Force (JTF2)—Canada's equivalence to America's SEALs—to settle down with her. (3)

We are also given the occasional reminder that *"Jessica [has] a way of tapping into my soft side"* (8), and that her loss is his internal distraction. But these ideas are never really developed, which would make the novel more interesting.

Ultimately, *Pandora's Succession* succeeds wonderfully as an action novel. Brooks has a vibrant imagination. However, the novel vacillates between the well-wrought espionage plot and personal history that I'd hoped would be developed to some greater purpose. Brooks is already working on a sequel, and perhaps some of the character questions will be resolved in the next of the series.

Christy McCarter

Yes, I Said Thor

The Lost Gate
Orson Scott Card
Tor
378 pages
$24.99

Orson Scott Card (OSC) is the Hugo and Nebula award-winning author of bestsellers such as *Ender's Game* and its sequel, *Speaker for the Dead* (Tor). While his long-lived career mainly consists of sci-fi, he has also produced modern fantasy, poetry, and biblical novels, displaying a versatility that is particularly evident in *The Lost Gate*. The first of a forthcoming *Mithermages* trilogy, *The Lost Gate* ensures the future of this already time-tested author. OSC keeps the prose modern, casual, and interesting, continuing to live up to his critically-acclaimed reputation.

On the surface, *The Lost Gate* may appear to be just another cookie-cutter fantasy/sci-fi novel: there are magical beings, different dimensions, and a complex form of teleportation. A novel dealing with time-weakened, mythological deities may not seem to be up everyone's alley. The fantasy genre isn't one I normally dabble in, but I believe that this book diverges from what we expect from the genre and touches enough bases to have something for everyone. A story based on well-researched historical references, universal human nature, with a strong mythological base, *The Lost Gate* is an extremely flexible novel.

We meet Danny North as a ten-year-old living in the North family compound in western Virginia. He is a loner, ostracized by his peers because he is different—your typical coming-of-age protagonist. However, OSC gives this well-worn plot structure some quirks: his family members are the ancient Norse gods. In fact, Thor is his uncle. Yes, I said Thor. Sounds like Danny should be pretty badass, right? Now

the problem: Danny is picked on because of his lack of god-like powers. Considered a "drekka" because of his inability to manipulate a natural element, he truly is the ultimate disappointment. The gods have been trapped on Earth because the gate to their home world has been closed, leaving them without a way to amplify and maintain their powers. Danny suffers scrutiny from adults and children alike as a representation of the weakening gene pool. Stranded and weakened, all of the ancient deities (Greek, Persian, and Norse alike) settle in family compounds around the world. Their power reduced, the former gods have ostracized themselves from human society, refusing to stoop to the level of the pathetic "drowthers" (a very pleasant-sounding term for humans).

Despite stepping in as the clichéd troubled kid, Danny has a very engaging personality. He yearns for family approval while also having a bit of an ego (the result of his above-average intelligence and maturity level). Somehow OSC creates a character that you want to punch and hug at the same time. Eventually Danny realizes that he has the most feared and revered set of powers: he is a "gatemage," an extinct branch of deity capable of opening portals that allow space travel. This means that Danny can open the portal to the home world, and while this seems like a blessing, Danny finds himself in mortal danger. Although gatemagery has been deemed illegal, Danny's exposure would lead to tribes from all over the world hunting him down in an attempt to keep the benefits of this rare gift for themselves. The tribe with the gatemage has access to supernatural supremacy and the age of the gods will return—and someone will need to be in charge. He quickly comes to terms with his future:

> If I were a good boy, I'd fling myself from this tree and die, saving them the trouble of killing me.
>
> But Danny was not a good boy.
>
> He owed them nothing. He was not one of them. He did not accept their power over him. He would not let them kill him if he could avoid it. (32)

Caught between admiration of his elders and disdain at their treatment of him, Danny's inner struggles are just beginning. He is forced to exile himself from his family, and finds himself among a world that he has been taught to look upon with contempt.

Danny stumbles through his new life, learning to suppress his cheeky attitude and survive in the world we all know and love. He immediately falls in with a sketchy crowd, resorts to burglary, and finds himself living in a not-so-great area of D.C. Eventually he stops being a jerk, and the reader gets to watch his awkward development unfold. The young protagonist and easy prose lean the novel toward a young adult readership; however the sex, drugs, and crime that Danny stumbles through drag it back. His first encounter with a woman (who isn't a member of his family) is so uncomfortable that it is almost embarrassing to watch:

> In a moment she was pinning his shoulders to the floor with her hands, but since his knees were still folded under him, his body arched, with his pelvis at the apex. The pertinent fact, however, was that she was straddling him, and he was feeling things that he'd never felt before… What kind of magic was this, that worked on people instead of animals or plants or the elements? Was this the forbidden "manmagic" that was only whispered about? (139)

Although Danny gets himself into and out of some interesting situations, we're reminded that he is just a boy burdened with some immense responsibilities.

In fact, OSC finds a way to remind us all of some immense responsibilities. Danny, hitchhiking across the country, ponders his experience among the drowthers:

> He had asked them for money and food and rides, and half the time they had shared with him what they had. Why? No one in the Family would do that for anyone who was not one of the Norths… Why should they care whether somebody else's kid was hungry or got home? (101-2)

He goes on to see the "little artifacts" left at the base of the Vietnam Memorial and feel a "twinge" upon seeing people too young to have even known someone in the war. He begins to wonder if this "Lincoln" would have stood up for someone like him, while I started to wonder if I would have helped a kid like him. Sometimes the best way to "twinge" the heartstrings is to show the truth through the eyes of an outsider.

OSC's indirect way of inserting social awareness is clever, emotional, and effective.

The emotional angle should be universal, but if you're looking for an intellectual depth, OSC gives you that as well. Danny debates mythology (his real history) with a historian at the Library of Congress:

> "There is zero chance that the Semitic god Bel or Baal was ever spoken of in any Indo-European language, let alone some ancient form of German."
>
> "You lose the bet," said Danny. "Do you think the Hittites never spoke the name?"
>
> To Danny, the Hittites were just another branch of the Family, albeit an extinct one. (118-9)

I love a nerdy protagonist. OSC shows off his familiarity with the history of language, mythology, and religion through Danny's snarky attitude. Luckily, Danny's wit keeps the history lesson from slowing down the story.

OSC successfully weaves a narrative that keeps you interested and invested. He is amazingly capable of turning a complex history, magic system, and intricate storyline into something relatable, easily understood, and meaningful. He even creates a subplot on Westil (the home world) which makes the reader even more invested in the fate of the exiled deities without confusing the story. I appreciated this extreme attention to detail; OSC's ability to paint a picture and draw you in is impeccable, making this book an entertaining and rewarding read. I particularly suggest *The Lost Gate* for someone who is willing to venture into the sci-fi/fantasy genre for the first time. Even if you don't care much for the subject matter, *The Lost Gate* is a beautifully woven mesh of opposites: it is at once complex and simple, mature yet youthful, and tense while encouraging. The *Mithermages* series has great potential and is sure to add some more positive checks to Orson Scott Card's already impressive body of work.

Spring 2011

Contributors

Karina Aguilera is a University of Wisconsin-Parkside student majoring in studio arts with an emphasis in art education. As a prospective art educator, she makes sure to explore a wide range of media so that in the future she will be able to share a diverse knowledge with her students. Much of her work is inspired by natural forms and compelling color relationships.

Robert W. Andersen is from Racine, Wisconsin. He is a special student at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside working in Relief and Intaglio Printmaking exploring hand-painted color.

Martin John Antaramian is a senior at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside majoring in studio arts with a focus in sculpture and furniture design.

Lisa Bigalke has been teaching art at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside since 2000. Her reduction relief prints and book constructions have been exhibited nationally.

Alexandria Binanti is a student at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside who will be receiving a BA in english with a minor in history. She is currently working on a series of short stories, and freelance political articles, and she aspires to be a novelist.

Jason Bogdaneris is a writer living in Brooklyn, New York, who has written about popular American culture and has contributed travel web blogs for online publications.

Clay Carter is a junior at Ball State University studying creative writing. He currently resides in an apartment in Muncie, Indiana.

Lawrence F. Farrar served as a career Foreign Service officer in Japan (multiple postings), Germany, Norway, and Washington, DC. Short

term assignments took him to nearly 40 countries. A Minnesota resident, he has degrees from Dartmouth and Stanford. His stories have appeared in *The MacGuffin, Red Wheelbarrow, Colere, G.W. Review, Green Hills Literary Lantern, The Worcester Review,* and *Red Cedar Review*. Another story is slated for the spring edition of *New Plains Review*. He has also completed two draft novels, both set in Japan.

Jody A. Forrester is a recent graduate from the Bennington Writing Seminars. Her story "Train" won honorable mention in the 2007 Anderbo Open City Competition, and her story "Watts" was chosen for the 6th Annual Emerging Voices Group Show (2009) at the New Short Fiction series in Los Angeles. A flash piece, "Mrs. Friedman", appeared in the 2010 summer edition (electronic) of the *Citron Review*. She lives in Venice, California, with her husband John Schneider.

Jim Fuess works with liquid acrylic paint on canvas. Most of his paintings are abstract, but there are recognizable forms and faces in a number of the abstract paintings. He is striving for grace and fluidity, movement and balance. He likes color and believes that beauty can be an artistic goal. There is whimsy, fear, energy, movement, fun and dread in his abstract paintings. A lot of his abstract paintings are anthropomorphic. The shapes seem familiar. The faces are real. The gestures and movements are recognizable. More of his abstract paintings, both in color and black and white, may be seen at www.jimfuessart.com.

Tara Gilboy has a BA in english from the University of Wisconsin-Parkside and is working on an MFA in creative writing at the University of British Columbia. Her work has appeared in the *Beloit Fiction Journal* and is forthcoming in *The Best of Everyday Fiction Three*. She lives in Wisconsin, where she works as a substitute teacher.

Dylan Gilje grew up in northern Minnesota. Photography was always a major influence in his life thanks to his grandfather. He has a BS in film from Full Sail University. He has moved back to the Midwest, and works at a concert venue in Milwaukee taking pictures, videoing recording bands and interviews, editing footage, and bartending. Photography will always be a part of his life. With every chance, he'll continue to spread the joy of photography.

Michael Gill is a professional photographer from the Milwaukee area who likes to describe his style as unique, edgy, and modern.

Arthur Gottlieb is an Oregon poet whose work has appeared in most small literary magazines, including *The Ledge, Chiron Review, The Alembic, The Pacific Review, Lullwater Review,* and many others.

Iris Hann is a creative writing student at California State University-Los Angeles. "Summer Morning" is part of a mosaic of poems that juxtapose disparate fragments of memory to create a self-portrait. She lives in Los Angeles with her husband, Josh.

Kevin Heapes is a senior graphic design student at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside. His career goals are to do logo design, layout design, and web design for a well-known company. Photography is a hobby of his and also his stress reliever. Currently Kevin is working at Creative Services, located at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside.

Valerie Hernandez is a senior at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside. She is an art major with a concentration in printmaking. After graduation she plans to get her Masters in Art Therapy, and use art to help and heal people.

Eric Hinkle is a banjo player, poet/fictionist, "smelly beer" lover, and student at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside. He enjoys film, food, and stargazing in different countries. He is a mad, mad man.

Eric Huff lives and works in Kenosha, Wisconsin. He currently serves as the Poet Laureate of Kenosha and is the co-editor of the online literary journal, *The New Gnus*. www.thenewgnus.wordpress.com.

Sefik Huseyin is currently earning his MA in english from Eastern Mediterranean University. His poems have appeared in places such as *Fringe Magazine* and *mediterranean.nu.*

Mark Jackley is the author of four chapbooks and a full-length collection, *There Will be Silence While You Wait*. He lives in Sterling, Virginia.

Dorine Jennette is the author of *Urchin to Follow* (The National Poetry Review Press, 2010). Her poetry and prose have appeared in journals such as *Verse Daily, The Journal, Puerto del Sol, The New Orleans Review*, *The Los Angeles Review*, and *The Georgia Review*. Originally from Seattle, she earned her MFA at New Mexico State University, her PhD at the University of Georgia, and now lives in Suisun City, California.

Spencer Karczewski is a student at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside, studying to be a graphic designer. She also enjoys photography and hopes to combine the two in her future career.

Ben Kopczynski is a student at Ripon College, with a double major in english and math. He's looking for work for the summer so his status won't change come Fall. He enjoys video games, anime, and a reasonable argument.

David Lawrence has published over 600 poems. He used to be the CEO of Allied Programs, is a former professional boxer who fought in Vegas, and is the star of three rap albums and a movie at Sundance Film Festival.

Sarah Lucille Marchant is a Missouri resident and university student, studying literature and journalism. Her work has appeared in publications such as *The Poet Sanctuary, Down in the Dirt Magazine*, and *A Cappella Zoo.*

Steven McBrearty grew up in San Antonio, Texas, in one of those large, loud, rollicking Catholic families typical of the 1960s. On any given day, there might be games of pitch and catch in the hallway or tackle football in the back bedroom. He moved to Austin to attend the University of Texas and remains living in Austin now. He has published more than 25 fiction and non-fiction pieces in a variety of literary journals and served as a ghostwriter for a study skills book published by Simon & Schuster. Recently, his collection of short stories, *Christmas Day on a City Bus,* was accepted for publication as an e-book by McKinney e-Publications. He has two grown children and four lovely grandchildren.

Amanda C. McCann is a former Straylight art and layout director. She is excited to be published once again in this journal. She is graduating from the University of Wisconsin-Parkside with a BA in spanish and digital arts, concentrations in graphic and web design, and a certificate in the world wide web. www.amandacmccann.com.

Christy McCarter is currently an english student at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside and plans on earning her PhD in British literature. She likes castles, dragons, general awesomeness, and her fish, Titus.

Andrea Mercadillo is an art student at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside. Her work is very much influenced by her culture, the natural world, and places she has visited. Her work exudes an intensely personal relationship with these subjects.

Lisa Mowry is a recent graduate from the University of Wisconsin-Parskide with a degree in graphic design. Although she was a digital arts major, she also has a love for the studio arts and especially enjoys printmaking. Nature is her muse and color is her best friend.

Jacob Oet lives in Solon, Ohio. Jacob's poetry and images appear in *Cicada Magazine, The New Verse News, The Jet Fuel Review, Superstition Review, H.O.D.,* and *OVS Magazine.*

Donna Pucciani has published poetry on four continents. Her fourth book of poetry, *To Sip Darjeeling at Dawn*, has just been released by Virtual Artists Collective in Chicago.

Rebecca Shepard is an author and poet from Boulder, Colorado. She recently published a collection of poetry available online. Shepard will be attending Sarah Lawrence College starting in the fall of 2011. Visit her website at www.rebeccashepard.com.

Christine Sikora paints various subjects in acrylic, but is best known for her botanicals. She lives and works in southeastern Wisconsin.

M.E. Silverman moved from New Orleans to Georgia and teaches at Gordon College. He was a finalist for the 2008 New Letters Poetry Award, the 2008 DeNovo Contest, and the 2009 Naugatuck River Review Contest.

Jamie Stoehr is a student at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside. She will be receiving a BA in interdisciplinary art. Her interests include painting, drawing and printing fanciful beasts.

Joseph Szabo is a senior at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside. He is an illustration major. With his degree he plans to illustrate children's books.

Annie Walaszek is a sophomore theatre major at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside, focusing mostly on acting and costume design. "This is How it Was in November" is her third published poem.

Ian Williams is the author of *You Know Who You Are* and *Not Anyone's Anything*. He divides his time between Massachusetts and Ontario.