The Alembic 2001
The Alembic is published in April by Providence College in Providence, Rhode Island. The subscription rate in the United States is $15 for two years.

Please address all correspondence, business and editorial, to Editors, The Alembic, English Department, Providence College, Providence, RI, 02918-0001. Submissions are read from August 1st through December 18th only. Please include a sentence or two for "Contributor's Notes." No manuscripts or artwork can be returned, nor any query answered, unless accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Manuscripts known to be under consideration elsewhere will be returned to the authors unread. The Alembic accepts no responsibility for unsolicited submissions and will not enter into correspondence about their loss or delay. Materials published in The Alembic may not be reprinted, in whole or in part, without written permission from the editors.

Copyright 2001 by The Alembic

Thanks to Rev. Stuart McPhail for his support.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

JAMIE ANSELMO  Attacker ........................................ 1
JOANNE ARGENTO  First Harvest  .................. 3
                  The Bellfounder .................. 4
R.J.G. BAKEWELL  Justice .................................. 13
KRISTIN BERKEY-ABBOTT  At the Museum of American Folklife  14
GAYLORD BREWER  Myth & Miracle ............ 16
                  Provisions ................... 18
GWENDOLYN BRASSARD  Anne Carson’s Glass, Irony and God  19
CHARLES EDWARD BROOKS  The Shop Window .... 23
JOCelyn COALTER  Freedom .................................. 35
LEONARD COCHRAN  On the Occasion of my 100th Birthday Party  36
                  Wings .................................. 37
BRIAN J. CUSHING  Pig ....................................... 38
BRIAN DALEY  Moments of Pure Religion ........... 39
TALIA DANESI  Bedtime Stories .................... 40
                  everything permissible .......... 41
                  Haggis ................................ 43
                  Turkeys ................................ 44
JENNIFER DAVIS  What’s Real, What’s Not ............. 45
GARY DUEHR  Eartha Kitt at the White House .... 68
                  Object Lesson .................. 69
NEAL FERREIRA  I Hear You Langston Hughes .... 70
PAT FERRUCCI  A Christmas Carol .................... 73
CAROLINE FINKELSTEIN  There was no Umberto Eco in my Life  74
TODD GERNES  Nothing to Celebrate: A Prose Collage  76
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Poem Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amanda Glenn</td>
<td>Horse Barn</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Orkney</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JoLee Gibbons</td>
<td>Cutting Hair</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Grey</td>
<td>An Effort to Remember</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter Johnson</td>
<td>Cannibals</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Love Poem</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike Kane</td>
<td>Your Hometown</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas David Lisk</td>
<td>In a Bedouin Bed</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morton Marcus</td>
<td>Words Before Sleep</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie McAllister</td>
<td>Cyclic Assurance</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ted McCrorie</td>
<td>Cascade</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T.J. Moretti</td>
<td>Magic Box</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elisabeth Murawski</td>
<td>Two Geese in a Man-Made Lake, mid-March</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miho Nonaka</td>
<td>The Market Place, Patzcuaro</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What I Wish</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan Noonan</td>
<td>Love is a Cigarette</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danielle Pedi</td>
<td>Fall</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane Lunin Perel</td>
<td>Buna</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No Less Rose</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric Rawson</td>
<td>As If Music</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expression of the Parts at the Griffith Observatory, Los Angeles</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Los Angeles Morning</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Still Life</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bruce Smith</td>
<td>Chaste</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lustral</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Push</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judy Spock</td>
<td>Keys</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Litchfield</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Title and Details</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virgil Suarez</td>
<td>Borroto, Singer of <em>Decimas Guarias</em></td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>For Chato Who <em>Dreams of Chevy Impalas</em></td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I-5 Freeway</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jess Tabak</td>
<td>A matter of time, a matter of place</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ralph Tavarez, Jr.</td>
<td>A-3949, Franz Steiner</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim Baker</td>
<td>The Vision of St. Hubert</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaitlyn Longmire</td>
<td>Untitled</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynn Curtis</td>
<td>Flatsands</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Babar</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicole Bourgea</td>
<td>Untitled</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laurie Driscoll</td>
<td>Untitled</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molly Narloch</td>
<td>Untitled</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrick Landry</td>
<td>Untitled</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheree Thornton</td>
<td>Dream</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributors</td>
<td></td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Attacker

JAMIE ANSELMO

You were in my dream last night—
My nightmare.
I scratched and clawed to make you go away—
Attacked in a fitful rage
Like so many times before—
Only to open my eyes and find you gone.
This time, I had won.

I awoke this morning
Soaking wet from the effort
But proud of my victory

And looked in the mirror to find
That it was I I was attacking,
In all the places I remember you hurting—
Face, chest, back—
The sting of sweat in every one.

So now, I stand in front of the mirror,
Trying to cover up my battle scars—
Swollen cuts that could never be explained—

And crying because,
Without even being there,
You got me.
Strawberries. June. The field of shade
a rectangle cast by the blue foothills,
and the plants, not white now but choruses of green.

I bend down. I see the red under the leaves,
berries—some so heavy they've sunk to the ground.
Others, burst open from sheer juice, or birds,
left ravaged to the air and sun, and my hands,
stained sweet, my fingernails lined with this, the first
harvest. I kneel on the moist ground and pluck
the fruit, one after another, and eat them
as though I haven't eaten before. In the field
fed by the sun, I look to where the land inclines.
I am where spring ends and summer begins,
where the earth lifts up, past the horizon to the sky.
"...the tintinnabulation..."

I.
After the Tartars, the house ablaze,
the Master slain, the flame-
dissolved house cinders,
his wife dead, children and chickens,
the garden torn. And me,
taken for dead until they kicked
me - my body - and a groan escaped
and they plucked me from the mud
like a raw onion bulb. After
the Tarters, the Cossacks would've killed
me when I told them the Master
was dead, that he couldn't make
the monastery bell. But then I
told them I knew how to do it,
that I was a bellfounder, too.

II.
Forlorn plains, gestures of hills,
from your center curved roofs rise.
Inside, the stories of saints cover whitewashed walls. The apse glimmers gold leaf, but the tower, stark, waits for the music-makers to descend the hill it faces, the hill where I stand, wrapping the core, clothing it in clay two fingers thick, knuckles relaxed, the hand is mine. The bell thickens by those hands and they — they turn from clay to tallow to clay. Yellow, waxen, the core uncloses like a tulip. Murmurs arise. A crowd watches while I cover the tallow in final layers of clay wet and earthen, to an outline, a shadow, the structure, of a bell.

The Cossacks dig a firing pit from beneath the stand of the mold, digging the black earth on one side till it tilts, then shoveling out the other side, descending into earth as fingers down a scale, and until today, I've never made a bell,
but I feel the Master behind me.
I place charcoal below the platform
and kindle the coal, and his voice
changes to my voice while the tallow
melts in scents of spring mutton and swine.

We build the furnace of stone and clay,
placing bellows beneath the bell,
at its center, at its top.

The furnace
burns, the Cossacks, unhorsed, pry open
the bellows, push them closed. Whoosh!
air sucked into sacks. Thwack!
They're filled. Flames roar
as the bellows collapse, twirl and whirl
and leap, a howling, hypnotic
dervish bending with each exhalation
of the bellows. I am seated,
my knees drawn to my chest, transfixed
by the motion of the men, the gasping bellows,
the outline of flames inside the oven. Then —
hissing . . . I turn my head . . . dreams.

We are seated at the Master's table.
A bowl steams before me. Red beets boiled soft— but to eat hurts. The chewing forces blood through my pores as though I were a hemophiliac who can't stop bleeding, can't stop eating. The Master watches me, unable to help. My gums can't stop gnashing. He says to me, "Deep, deep below the surface of the earth, far farther than graves, sheathes of rock seethe to granite and shale and gold and silver. Copper and tin lie together in the layers of the earth, as though meant for discovery, to be mixed, altered."

The blood eases, slows its seep from my skin. He wipes my faces, saying, "To change because we want them changed," and I awake.

III.
A green flame ascended— copper. Mist on the ground. Damp clothes and a chill. The watery steppes glistened before me. Bone cold, I crawled toward the metal's heat. Then toward the hole and the mold
where the clay flared. We put out the fire. We filled the pit and stirred the copper. I added tin and took a stick scorched as the beams of my Master's house. The metals as though magnets revolving against each other, melting separately, resisting each other, refusing to blend. The stick left spinning a charcoal wake. Churning and churning, I erased the trail of soot. Always, at my side, the Cossacks, standing as though I would run away. I wanted to, wanted to sprint past the oak bristling at last in spring, wanted to surpass the crowd, the men heaving the bellows, helping me, wanted to flee — to where?

The Master, dead, could neither house me, nor train me. I wanted to go back but when I stepped toward that path I fell near the edge of the pit.
The ground was cooling over the mold. My cheek turned cold against the mud, my hands blanched against the earth. Behind me the metal melded in amber and emerald and pomegranate flames.

We dug a canal between the cauldron and mold and poured the bronze in smoking metallic streams that seemed to flee from the sight as cataracts from cliffs, water meeting air in perpendicular explosions falling, falling till space ended in earth and rocks and spurning water. Like thunder bawling forth from mud and bubbling metal, the bell, liquid in its mold, grumbled, groaned in sighs that faded below the ground.

IV.

A pale light. Quiet. The sun's white glimmer against the hills. The monastery
tinged blue. Monks at matins.

Here, men sleeping everywhere. Cossacks circled the empty cauldron, the cold fire. I traced my hands' blue veins, placed my palms on the dirt-bound mold and thought I saw an opening in the unpeopled plains.

A pool of bronze gleamed hard above the bell. The opening was in the earth, between layers of clay. I turned to wake the others.

V.

I cupped my ear and leaned against the mold. I did what the Master did — I knocked — rap, rap, rap — and heard nothing but knuckles hitting clay.

I circled the bell, slamming the clay as though it would fall away. I was running then, one revolution for each year, nineteen years.

And I wanted to say I didn't care but couldn't, it had to emerge, fully formed and whole and not because
of the others, the crowd and the Cossacks
and the Master lying dead — but because I
wanted it, wanted to hear
the resonance of the clapper
meeting the bell and the bell peeling
across the steppes, from the tower
above from where the prayers had ended
to where they had not yet begun.

Bronze emerged waffled like the clay,
the matter of my fingers
stippled through metal in tactile
voices. I pressed my cheek
against the bell. It was as tall
as I and far, far greater.

A line of monks filed toward
us. I took the mallet
and struck the bell, and the bell vibrated.
An utterance. The clearing
of a throat before a note, raw
harsh, an uneven
reverberation out from the hill
to the men pausing below,
galled from their silent march. They fell
out of line, gathering, pointing,
moving on again to greet us.

And then you were there, high above,
resonating in the sound of metals
binding and unbinding, in copper
and tin and bronze, bronze and
copper and tin, collecting, un-
collecting, the clapper
crashing back and forth, flinging
music like water from a bucket,
silvery sounds spilling spreading everywhere.
This is she,
Quivering uncontrollably
With no one to turn to
Terrified to shut her eyes
Tears streaming down cherry-less cheeks
Unable to erase her memory
Blaming herself
Serving life behind invisible bars.

This is he,
Bragging to his buddies
Life bubbling to the brim
Not one scar to show
Full of swagger
Lust still unsatisfied
Sentencing again.

This is justice?
The gift shop is bigger than the museum—
one has to search to find the actual artifacts.
But these tourists aren't interested in anything they can't buy.
They rifle through the racks of quilts,
looking for the perfectly matched
colors that will pull their living room together.
They talk of the best ways to showcase them.
They look at butter churns as things to be displayed;
they have no idea how to use them.
They listen to Benedictine monks chant and forget
that they're hearing powerful prayers.

I think of my grandmother's hands,
gnarled from doing years of sewing.
The quilts she kept from the Home Place—things of rare beauty,
but she can't stand to look at them.
They remind her of days spent stitching
together scraps of old clothing;
they remind her of the drudge
she used to be, the poverty
that threatened to erase her whole family.
She knows the true uses of these museum pieces, now turned into gift shop offerings for wealthy suburbanites to purchase.

She knows that the handmade quilts kept the family from freezing to death at night.
She remembers axes like these, her father and brothers chopping wood because that was the only way to heat the house.
She remembers praying for winter to end.
She remembers countless hours at the butter churn wondering if she really wanted something to spread on the rolls that rose on the windowsill.

She still cooks with a cast iron, makes her own bread, but she buys her blankets at Wal-Mart and pays for extra heat in the winter.
She appreciates the luxuries of the modern grocery store in a way that my generation can't.
1. The Myth of Quiet Houses

No foot hammers floor, no cabinet quakes, no obscenity follows exploding glass.
For one moment, spring buds mutter in a dumb ocean, even those damned chimes on the porch titter like somebody's peace of mind. We could sit so, you and I, windows and walls recklessly askew, basking in the bliss of no talk, fingers, foreheads, livers and spleens—but not the leathered balls of hearts—inarticulate on cool-lit evenings.

Almost, we could live the desperate ease of seconds, ignore the slow approach of wheels, rabbits bolting. But in reality, we can only wait—an arc widening, a boot on gravel, then truth's whole dark body about to emerge.
2. The Miracle of a Lonely Hour

Let minutes tickle and smooth you,
buttery anemones of peace.
Don't count to sixty or strain yourself
with thinking. There's profundity
in the lawn's scraggy blooms.

Be lulled. Let the dog's ears flick to points
as a coyote coughs beyond the hill.
Cross palms over the hot cage of your chest
and accept this gift. What you wanted
but were afraid to ask for.
Scattered cherries in a bowl,
not those one might pull from a limb
while lost on the road from Crestet
after walking ten miles
through vineyards and forest.

Nor cherries, although similar,
one would dip in chocolate
— a fine dinner—
on a terrace in the Bishop’s quarters
overlooking Vaison-la-Romaine.

Just a few simple cherries
in a bowl on a table by a window,
beside a pink rose dying
in a bottle from Chateauneuf du Pape,
beautiful as it dies.
Anne Carson has been called the "philosopher of heartbreak." She describes and illuminates the most complicated of feelings in the simplest of terms. Her collection of poems and essays, Glass, Irony and God, is dedicated to answering some of life's most troublesome questions: "What is love?", "Why so much pain?," and "Who is God and where is He in our lives?". In dealing with such intense issues, Carson draws from various sources to aid in her contemplation. In Glass, Irony and God, she cleverly intertwines elements of religious scripture, historical context, and the work of poets such as Emily Brontë in her verse. Her use of a "free-flowing" style of writing in this collection ("The Glass Essay," "The Truth About God," "TV Men," "The Fall of Rome," and "The Gender of Sound") makes the mundane and ordinary seem interesting and extraordinary. She has an obsession for the transparent, intrigued by the nakedness of the human condition. Carson shows us her soul as "nudes," images that flash up before her eyes when she is meditating:

Nude #1. Woman alone on a hill.  
She stands into the wind.  
It is a hard wind slanting from the north.  
Long flaps and shreds of flesh rip off the woman's body and lift  
and blow away on the wind, leaving  
an exposed column if nerve and blood and muscle  
calling mutely through a lipless mouth.

Like peering into her mind and soul through a glass windowpane, we
are allowed to catch a glimpse of her innermost feelings in random sensation al spurts that have so much personal meaning.

Anne Carson establishes herself as a true poet, using a unique style and structure as well as vivid physical description to shape her work. In "The Fall of Rome" she uses Roman numerals to separate sections and in "The Glass Essay" she places headings such as Liberty and Hero to strategically break up her verse. Her awareness of her subject topic and also with her surroundings allow her to describe even the minutest details with extreme clarity and meaning. She uses colors and feelings to portray a very intense picture, very much like that painted by Emily Brontë in her works. In "The Glass Essay," Carson shows her shared preoccupation with the physically beautiful by writing of the moors and the winds. Like Brontë, she uses both the descriptive form and content of her work to get the intense meaning across to her readers. In "The Glass Essay" she comments on Brontë’s being a natural "whacher" (or watcher) like herself:

Whacher is what she was.
She whached God and humans and moor wind and open night.
She whached eyes, stars, inside, outside, actual weather.

Carson is very "Brontëian" in her approach, using physical elements as representations of the feelings that stir within. Not only the vivid physical descriptions, but also the manner in which she writes is very comparable to that of Brontë. The tone of Anne Carson's "Glass Essay" is one of bitterness and heartache upon the breakup of her five-year love affair with a man named Law. She uses the themes and characters of the work of Emily Brontë to illustrate these feelings. The sexual despair felt by Brontë and by her characters is comparable to that felt by
Carson, though for reasons quite different from her own. The strained relationship between Law and herself is comparable to the sexual despair felt by Brontë’s characters, Catherine and Heathcliff, in *Wuthering Heights* and also by Brontë herself. The similarity of Catherine and Heathcliff’s despair to Carson’s is shown in this verse:

To see the love between Law and me
turn into two animals gnawing and craving through one another
towards some other hunger was terrible.

Also, like Emily Brontë, Carson seems to have a preoccupation with imprisonment and liberty. She says of Brontë’s work:

Yet her poetry from beginning to end is concerned with prisons, vaults, cages, bars, curbs, bits, bolts, fetters, locked windows, narrow frames, aching walls.

Glass is used symbolically throughout Carson’s work, much like Brontë’s use of such things as windows and other physical barriers to paint containment and division. Carson views life as an observer, as if through glass:

It is as if we have all been lowered into an atmosphere of glass. Now and then a remark trails through the glass.

Carson writes to our souls, appealing to our humanity. She relates to us in a way that draws us into her pain or confusion. She is able to make connections, incorporating the work of other poets with which we are familiar, that allow us to relate to her personal trials as if they are our
own. A perfect example of how Carson gives her language meaning lies in her struggle with the idea of God and the soul in "The Glass Essay" and "Book of Isaiah." She forms connections and makes relations for us by again turning to Brontë and her symbolic Thou, which represents the higher power, to show a poet's creation and entrapment of her own soul in glass:

For the most awful loneliness of the poet's hour.
She has reversed the roles of thou and Thou
not as a display of power

but to force out of herself some pity
of this soul trapped in glass,
which is her true creation

In Glass, Irony and God, Anne Carson is rhythmic and expressive, emotionally and visually complex, but at the same time, simple to understand. She strikes a personal chord with a descriptive language that speaks of tender human feelings and qualities that are common to us all.
The Shop Window
Charles Edward Brooks

Which window onto which of God's secrets have I unwittingly approached?

(Fernando Pessoa: The Book of Disquiet)

5 December 199X. The patient's breathing rattled like a primitive percussion instrument. She tried to speak, but only indistinctness blubbered from her lips.

The fiftyish, well-groomed woman beside the bed held a lined tablet in her hands. From time to time she added a few words to the page, in her neat librarian's script: Sustained by her unwavering Christian faith, Suzanne Sinder-Salzberger, 4.IV.191X__XII.199X, has left the Earth for Eternity. It's odd, she reflected I don't know anyone else's birthday by heart but my own.

The voice from the bed was little more than a gasp: "Rosy, I'm afraid."

"Afraid of what, Mother?"

"I don't know. But I'm so afraid."

The younger woman pushed the call button.

"I've rung for the nurse, Mother. Let's see if she can help."

The nurse who answered was a he.

"What is it, Mrs. Binder? What can I do for you? He lisped.

"My mother's afraid," Rosy Binder replied in the patient's stead.

"The doctor's down the hall. I'll ask him to order something. Be right back."
A few minutes later the young man came back and administered an injection. "At least she's not in pain Miss Binder," he whispered. "That's one good thing about cancer of the pancreas. You can be grateful for that."

"I am, of course."

As the rattle of her mother's breathing subsided, rosy resumed her writing: The funeral services will take place at the Hauptmunster on __. Instead of flowers, it is requested that the charitable works of the Reformed Church be remembered.

Well, she thought, this is ready: Only the two dates are missing. And packing away the tablet, she got up and tiptoed out of the room.

*  

Colored lights adorned the buildings along the Preisweg. Brilliantly illuminated merchandise filled the shop windows, for Christmas was drawing near.

Snow and slush covered the monochrome street and pavements. Reality is gray, Rosy Binder mused as she trudged past the shops toward the train station. The color is just an illusion. We've piled it up on the sides, like a protective embankment, so that we don't see the grayness stretching to infinity. We couldn't stand it.

I've always supposed Mother to be a deeply religious woman, but now I wonder. Could she know the secret, too? Her belief seems to be helping her less and less as she gets closer to the end. Chemicals do, though. They're replacing her faith a little more each day.

The woman shuddered in the cold wind and turned up the volume on her Walkman.

*
11 August 199X  In the aseptic cafeteria across from the university grounds, Rosy Binder consumed her lunch with deliberation. The cheese-and-pickle sandwich was tasty, the coffee execrable.

The luncher wore the expression that she stuck on each morning before catching the train for the city and peeled off each night when she climbed into bed: a faint but determined smile. It rather became her straightforward face—clean features, blue eyes, and lovely skin—with its frame of iron-gray hair.

Branka, appeared, as usual, with the big plastic container resting on one hip. With spare, efficient movements, she collected abandoned dishes and wiped off tables. But today, her cheeks were stained with tears.

"Branka," cried the librarian, "what on earth's the matter?"

"My people, Miss Binder. They've had to flee from home. They've crossed the Una River into Bosnia, but I don't exactly know where they are. Or in what condition." The robust open-faced woman, a good fifteen years younger than Rosy Binder, blew her nose loudly.

"I want to help, Branka. Tell me what I can do."

"Thanks Miss Binder. You're a wonderful person. But right now there's nothing we can do from here. They're heading for Serbia, and they'll call as soon as they get there. Till then, all we can do is pray."

"Count on my prayers, too, Branka. And once you know where you're family are, let me know right away. There'll surely be something I can do to help them."

I can send money, some clothes, too, continued Rosy Binder to herself. But the prayers. The poor girl doesn't realize that there's no one to hear them.
20 September 199X  The white-coated physician looked uncertainly at the patient opposite her and spoke in a tentative manner: "Miss Binder, this makes the fifth year that you've complained at your check-up about lack of energy. You say you're downright exhausted at times."

"I hadn't kept track of the years, but that sounds about right."

"By now, we've cleared up every potential cause for such symptoms. Every physical cause."

"Yes?"

"Definitely. You've spent a fortune on blood chemistry in the process, but at least we know that physical causes can be excluded."

"The causes, then, are mental. Is that what you are saying, Doctor?"

The physician seemed relieved: "Miss Binder, I think you're suffering from a fairly mild but chronic depression. That's what makes you so tired all the time."

"Assuming you're right, what shall I do about it? Go into psychiatric treatment, or what?"

"I shouldn't say this about my own medical colleagues, but I've never seen much improvement in the patients I've referred to psychiatrists."

"What, then?"

"There's a new drug available now. From America. It's called Galaxyn, and it relieves the symptoms of depression in something like eighty-five percent of the cases. The side-effects are minimal. Mostly a little loss of libido, that's all."

The patient's smile almost slipped off her face.

The doctor glanced surreptitiously at her watch: "I'll give you a prescription and ask my nurse to make an appointment for about two months hence. I'm sure this is going to bring about a big change for the better, Miss Binder."
A few minutes later, while the pharmacist was fetching the medication, Rosy Binder felt the way she had as a little girl when she took a shortcut across a forbidden field.

*  

24 September 199X. The pastor at Hauptmünster soke earnestly, with gestures just short of theatrical. When listening to his sermons, Rosy Binder often thought that he would be able to declaim a washing powder advertisement in the same way as Holy Scripture, and with the same conviction.

Rosy skimmed through the church bulletin in her gloved hand. The back page contained the passage of scripture on which today's scripture was based:

Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this description, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him I declare unto you.

If God were only unknown, instead of being non-existent! Rosy cried inside herself.

She remembered the vertigo, the horror of peering through her late father's telescope and seeing . . . not stars, but vast reaches of empty space, of nothingness. Even as a child she had not been able to bear emptiness, absence, stillness. Her parents had eventually acquiesced in her leaving the little radio on her bedside table on all through the night, just loud enough to banish the terrifying silence.

As the girl grew older, she realized that it was no only the universe at intergalactic distances, not only absolute quiet that harbored the grayness of nothing. Everything and everyone harbored it.

All of us piece together curtains, with whatever materials we can find,
to block out the sight of it, she thought. The Apostle Paul did, and the
good pastor is doing his best right this minute. Far be it from me to crit-
icize any of them for it.

During the signing of the last hymn she joined in with vigor, raising a
joyful noise unto the Lord with her pleasant contralto. For music, too,
was a veil over the face of the void.

* *

19 November 199X. Rosy's bedroom in the solid half-timbered house
at Todikon looked out on the back garden and the frosted fields of cab-
bages and turnips beyond it. Between the two windows stood a pear-
wood commode crafted by Pastor Binder for one of his daughter's
birthdays.

For years, she had kept her bible on this piece of furniture; two old
religious prints and a likeness of Ulrich Zwingli had hung on the wall
above it. But Bible and pictures were now laid away, carefully wrapped,
in one of the drawers.

A single picture had replaced the others: a disquieting gouache
acquired at a sale of drug addicts' paintings. How well Rosy understood
what these people were trying to blot out with their cocaine and heroin!
On top of the commode stood potted plants, two tortured ceramics—
also created by addicts— and, in the midst of these items, a bottle of
Galaxyn.

The Alter of the Unknown God, she smiled to herself sardonically.
The drug has really worked wonders for me. I feel benevolent toward
other people. More indifferent than ever, too, but never mind. It's at
least a benign indifference.

More important: The Angst can't get at me now. I'm free of it. I don't
care a rap about the emptiness any more. Theology, philosophy, . . . all
those desperate attempts to weave curtains over the nothingness. The poor young people in the faculty: They're all trying, too, with a woof of revealed religion and a warp of far-fetched reasoning. But their handiwork will never be thick enough. It will never be anything but a net, and the void will show through, no matter what.

What was the asceticism of a St. John of the Cross, of the two Teresas, really? Did all that self-torture do anything other than create chemical changes in their bodies? Reactions that produced religious visions? Isn't Galaxyn preferable in every way? A simple, painless method of persuading the body to produce serotonin? Serotonin: the elixir of life, the philosopher's stone.

But try as she might, Rosy Binder would not make herself feel comfortable with these ruminations. Something about them was wrong: Something hovered darkly in the background, unthought and unspoken.

Outside, just above her line of vision, she heard a flap of a great wing. And by a curious intuition, she knew that the wing was black.

* 

18 December 199X. "Where's Branka today?" Rosy asked the younger woman's colleague Nevenka.

"Oh, Branka's in the hospital."

"What? Since when? She was all right on Friday."

"It happened on Saturday, Miss Binder. Bleeding ulcer. She threw up blood and collapsed on the street. They brought her up here in the ambulance."

Rosy gulped down the rest of the sandwich and the terrible coffee and almost ran across the street to the university hospital. I forgot to take the Galaxyn after lunch, she recalled suddenly. But I just don't have time to bother with it now.
Unlike Mrs. Binder, Branka lay in an eight-bed ward. At the sight of the patient, ashen, with dark circles under her eyes, Rosy was shaken by tenderness and pity. Not since she had begun the treatment with her new medication had she felt anything remotely as poignant, and seldom before it. Her own mother's long struggle with cancer had aroused a firm sense of duty, but no strong emotion at all.

As the sick woman related her illness, Rosy began to weep. The faint fixed smile disappeared entirely: "Oh, Branka, you've been through so much these past few months, and now this. It's just no fair!"

"I'll be all right, Miss Binder. Sure I will."

"But your family's still not settled for good, and you won't be able to go back to work for a while."

"I'll be all right, all the same. . . . You know, there's a giant hand holding me."

"A giant hand? You mean—"

I guess it's what my grandmother used to call God, Miss Binder."

Rosy Binder trembled. She considered taking a Galaxyn tablet from her purse and swallowing it right before the other woman, but decided against it.

"You know a lot more about that than I do, Miss Binder. Working in the faculty of theology and all. I'm just a simple country woman."

"Don't overestimate my knowledge, Branka. . . . You grew up in the Orthodox Church, didn't you?"

"No, we didn't have a church in our village when I was a girl. They told us at school that there was no place for God in Scientific Socialism."

The sick woman's life-affirming smile broke out all over the pallid face as she continued: "An since then, well, I never seem to find the
time to study these deep things. It takes so much just to get through the
days,"

"And you've felt this . . . band before, have you, Branka?"

"Oh yes. Many times."

"In what sort of situations?"

"When I need it. When I'm all silence inside. Haven't you ever felt
anything like that Miss Binder?"

"Not . . . not quite like that."

"You're such a good person, Miss Binder. Why wouldn't God want to
touch you?"

*

21 December 199X. Rosy Binder turned wearily into the Preisweg. She
had enough time to reach the last train for Todikon without rushing.
Bruckner's Ninth boomed in her Walkman.

Winter solstice: the shortest day of the year, she thought. For me it's
been the longest. But Mother's out of it now. The obituary is ordered,
the pastor and Father's old friends in the church notified, the telegrams
sent. I'll go by the burial office and the bank in the morning. Everything
else is ready.

I haven't taken a Galaxyn tablet all day. I just had to be on my toes. I
couldn't tune out. Of course, I could take one now. She fumbled listless-
ly at the catch of her shoulder bag but did not open it.

The street was deserted, the shops since long closed. But the
windows were still lighted, as were the Christmas decorations on the
fronts of the buildings. Involuntaryy, something on the other side of
the street caught her attention. She crossed over to it.

An elaborate creche filled a whole shop window. Rough plank
walls formed the backdrop; fine hay covered the floor. At the center of the scene, Mary and Joseph knelt at the ends of the manger in which the child Jesus lay. The three kings, also on their knees, faced the viewer from behind the manger. Shepherds, intermingled with the townspeople, spread out in a fan from the central group to the backdrop, all their various postures expressing reverence. Sheep and cattle, donkeys and horses formed the periphery of the assembly.

The figures were delicately constructed dolls, the most exquisite that Rosy had ever seen. There were hundreds of them. Who on earth has made them, and why are they displayed in this window shop? she wondered. In any shop window? There are no price tags on them. Indeed, how could they be for sale? They belong in a museum.

Nor could she determine what the dolls were made of; the skin was amazingly lifelike, the hair and the animals' coats exactly befitting creatures of these lilliputian dimensions. The garments were perfect down to the tiniest details. Many of the figures—the kings abundant measure—wore jewels that sparkled in an opalescent shower of colors.

Most startling of all were the expressions on the little faces, human and animal like: deep earnestness, love, adoration, and awe. All eyes outside the manger focused on the child Jesus. The child himself looked straight upward. From a source no visible to the beholder, a jewelled light shone down on the infant, reflecting from him onto the rest of the assemblage.

Rosy gaped at the scene and lost all track of time. But suddenly, she sensed that the music of her Walkman was masking something. Something absolutely essential for her to hear was being concealed by Anton Bruckner. She tore the earphones from her ears and looked about her.

The street was empty, as before. Not a pedestrian, not a vehicle squished through the slush on street and pavements. All was completely still. Almost palpable waves of silence rolled over the solitary woman;
for the first time in her life, they worked on her like a healing balm.
Once again, time was forgotten.

The train! Departure in six minutes!

With remarkable speed for a sedentary fifty-year-old, Rosy trotted
down the Preisweg into the Bahnofstrasse and along it to the main sta­
tion. Seconds before the automatic doors clanged shut, she rushed onto
the train and fell panting into a seat

*  

22 December 199X. "In our window? A crèche?" The woman, of Rosy's
own build and vintage, fairly cringed as she spoke. "I . . . the owner's out
right now . . . I don't . . ."

She opened the doors behind the show window timidly, as if fearful
of what might be revealed. With tangible relief, she turned to Rosy
Binder and pointed: Medical and sickroom supplies filled the long win­
dow. In the center of the display stood not a manger, but a dismal
clump of urinals and bedpans.

"But I'm positive it was on this side of the street," Rosy protested, "at
about this spot. And your window is the only one in the block large
enough to hold it all."

A tic jerked on the other woman's livid face: "I . . . really . . . if you'll
wait till the owner gets back . . . he may know—"

"But surely you would have known about this yourself if you were at
work yesterday."

"No, I didn't. Not anything." The anemic lower lip quivered. "Maybe
you could ask the health food shop on that side . . . or the bakery on the
other," the woman added hopefully.

"I have asked them. They know nothing about it. And anyway, their
shop windows are too small. It must have been here."

"I just don't know. I . . . I never saw anything like that. The owner won't be long now." The words died away pathetically.

Rosy Binder and the shop assistant stared at each other without speaking. Each of them wondered whether it was the other woman or she herself who was going mad.
The world in a tilt
silhouetted by a molten sun
lines and shadows
chaotic and flowing.
Your amorphous essence changes all.
clocks chime
chime
chime again and crack open,
spilling the yolk of time over the ground;
a cosmic tyrant rendered still.
The leaden circles freeze, crumble apart in the air.
After one last pitiful gasp my watch
melts,
slowly slides off my wrist
freeing me.
Of course, I'll be sagelike in appearance,
Wear a scholar's beard and a sober skullcap
(To guard against the chills of old age).
The media will ask me how I did it,
And I'll answer – much as expected –
That it was the result of clean living,
No smoking, no drinking, no late nights.

Or maybe I'll just tell them the truth:
That I don't know, that it wasn't my idea
To begin with, that I just bumbled along
Surviving wars, plagues, natural hurts,
And the normal foolishness of the human race.
Perhaps, too, I'll ask them a question:
Where were you at my ninety-ninth?
Otherwise unskilled at age ten,
I'd help my mother hang out laundry.

Shirts, their sleeves like puppet arms,
played "catch me if you can,"

socks were dancing, disembodied feet,
sheets aiming to fly off the line

mimicked the Canada geese my heart
longed to join high above our home,

heading I cared not where,
only that it was elsewhere.

Time-tied, earthknit, I wished for winds,
was given words.
I squealed like a pig as they punched me. No weapons, not even feet. They weren't bad guys as far as muggers go. They promised me as I rolled around on the muddy ground that they would not let me wake up in a coma. A kind gesture. So I stopped rolling and relaxed. Giggling I fell asleep. When I woke up in a coma, I was sad they had lied. It must have been something I had done. I ought to start behaving.
Moments of Pure Religion

BRIAN DALEY

He had always been depressed only now he really didn't care ...

and that was the answer really, leaving him in a constant state of calm and other worldliness. Like when a sonata pauses before the concerto of violins to be followed by the thunder of the remaining orchestra you stand there erect yet on the verge of the cliff looking down at the crashing waters the motion of the rolling waves creating an hypnotic rhythm till you feel you stomach calling out as you wait for the moist juices to flood your tastebuds the subtle whimper harkening the oncoming rush of adrenaline as you sink your claws into the back of your prey only to know that the day will come when just one of the thousands of inhalations you take from the cloudy pipe throwing your mind into a whirl so excited that only numbness and delight can arise from the soft glow in the distant hills while you wait in deathening anticipation – clutching the moist grass in your hands before the cry of the new voice pierces the air combined with the sensation of how small you feel when looking at the night sky...

-PEACE-
A new tale of the artist’s deranged melancholy?

Imagine Poe, and the children he never had except on late nights at his desk with tincture of Belladonna. They, like all good children, resisted bedtime. Tapping on walls and making crow noises until the angry father threatened, No More! And still the cheeky laughter merely dilates, refuses to be tucked in like proper children. Poe tried to remember what it was like to work uninterrupted, or where his slippers had gone to.

The lover of the dark worries about the flashlight under his bed, and the way the shadows disappear when his eyelids drop their guard. So he spends his night trying to remove the beak from his heart, and thinks of sheep instead. Fat black ones, with chiseled teeth, chasing Welsh shepherds over fences until sleep comes.
poor Ivan in Siberia
has been waiting for a postcard
from his good friend God
vacationing somewhere tropical
where fruit doesn't just taste
it comes
alive.

here God is not here,
and everything is permissible.

the brochure mentioned ice fishing,
fleece blankets and complementary drinks
under a red umbrella with a beautiful
woman named Ana.

but poor Ivan drinks his vodka from
the bottle to keep warm
remembering the glossy photographs:
him and God,
Summer in Vostok.

He promised to write
but didn't.

(here, that is permissible)
Haggis
TALIA DANESI

The Scottish enjoy an occasional
Sheep's stomach.
Heart, liver, lungs
simmered and seasoned within the gut
like ancient quarrels
buried in onions and oatmeal.

Insipid creature,
wool over your eyes and made
to swallow your greatness,
Is it enough
to love the plate?

The sheep dreams of Bannockburn,
to fill itself purple
with thistle
and song.
Cold November, the bird ran circles round the garden, so Fiona made lasagna instead. The table cleared, we sat with our Luna di Luna, mesmerized as children before the television as the sumo wrestlers entered the ring. Huge men, porcelain white, ambling across a mat with the grace of dancing bears. Swaddled in finest linen, they swipe and heave and lumber and strain until one knocks the other out of the circle. You thought only of turkeys.
Elizabeth is counting again. A hundred forwards then backwards. Without the Mississippis. She's pressed for time. She goes to the bus stop at 7:30, not 7:25 or 7:35, but exactly 7:30. Although the bus usually arrives ten minutes or so later, she does not like to be late to her stop. She thinks she has enough time for one more count to a hundred, maybe halfway to fifty, and then must go.

Her mother does not have the same paralyzed urgency about her. Instead, Margaret flutters in a disorganized haze, wrapping a tape measure around her daughter's slight extremities, writing measurements in a little notebook, sipping coffee from her #1 MOM mug, which she bought herself.

Elizabeth wants to scream at Margaret to hurry, wants to take her stubby Ked-covered feet and light a match to them, wants to explain that she can't be late to the bus stop. But if she had to explain why she can't be late she couldn't, as there isn't a specific reason, just a very specific feeling that sticks in the back of her throat when her schedule is thrown off. And if she could explain she would lose count; if she loses count she has to start over, and there just isn't time to start over. So instead she stands quietly while Margaret drapes a pink satin dress over Elizabeth's sheer frame, a body so narrow it seems to be apologizing for taking up space, and tries not to visibly shake from the numbers as her mother pins the hem, steps back to study it, pauses to take a sip of coffee, then unpins it and starts over again.

"Bet you didn't know your old mother could sew, eh?" Margaret giggles at least five times. Elizabeth's never known her mother to sew, but in some burst of domesticity, Margaret insisted on putting the finishing touches on her bridesmaid's dress. This is Margaret's fourth wedding. Elizabeth could probably wear the dress from the last one. He owned a
Her odd appearance earns her the occasional pretty friend, the kind of girl who doesn't want competitors, but rather scenery to showcase her own looks. Her best friend is Angie Jenkins. They ride on the same bus and take Ms. Robert's second period French class together. She isn't sure if she likes Angie, but she the likes the way Angie knows how to sponge electric blue liner into smoky streaks, how to buy a bra an inch or two too small to squeeze her breasts together, how to moisturize her hair with mayonnaise and beer, how to be girl. So Angie spends the night with Elizabeth at least once a month, and they do and undo each other's hair, go to the mall on weekends, crank call boys, sneak liquor out of Margaret's bar and fill the bottles up with water, and watch X-rated movies on cable after Margaret passes out. Although Angie usually ends up drinking all the liquor because it hurts Elizabeth's throat, and they've never made it through an entire dirty move. It's the attempts that amount to normalcy.

Margaret adores Angie, or rather adores Angie's family name, and constantly reminds her daughter of how lucky she is to know such a popular young girl. She's fond of telling the women at her luncheons such things as "Angie and Elizabeth are like two peas in a pod. You should've seen their matching dresses for the Christmas dance," or "Angie's helping Elizabeth practice her cheerleading skills so she'll make the team next year. Now that's a devoted friend." Then she claps her puffy hands in glee, and the others compliantly sip their cocktails in approval, a synchronized dance of delicately thin, cream-colored wrists. It doesn't take a genius to see that two girls couldn't be more different. It doesn't take a genius to realize that Margaret couldn't be any more different from these women she tries to win over with such raw want. They tolerate her because that's what is done, because Elizabeth's grandmother contributes generously to most of their pet charities, because Margaret gives them reason to raise their razor-winged eyebrows in camaraderie, with much more being said than if their comments were actually verbalized, the crudeness much grander when not confined to
words. This is a talent among the women Elizabeth knows – to say things without putting them into words, so the ugliness never actually touches them, but rather floats above them in the silence of its implication.

Elizabeth's presence is sometimes required at these luncheons – when the numbers are down and an extra body is needed. She quit protesting some time ago because complaining led to wearing a pink or blue concoction her mother picked out. Sometimes ruffled, or with lace. If she keeps her mouth shut she wears what she wants.

Which does not include underwear. At first it was just a joke, a way to entertain herself at the boring luncheons, a way to tell her mother to screw off without having to face her histrionics. But then Elizabeth got use to the feel of air against her, the cold press of a chair against her bare buttocks, the idea that someone might notice her vagina as exposed and bright as her violently colored hair and be just too damned polite to mention it.

She wonders if this is normal, if she's inherited some of her mother's whorish tendencies, if she'll marry four men before she hits fifty. She would like to ask someone, maybe Angie, but knows better. Angie abhors ugliness. She lives in a world where T-shirts and jeans magically appear in your closet ironed and smelling of sunshine. Angie is a cheerleader. Her mother was a Kappa Kappa Gamma. She debates over where she'll do her bridal registry and the pros and cons of yellow versus white gold. She doesn't talk about getting a thrill from a flash of wind up your skirt.

Besides, when Elizabeth slides next to Angie on the bus school mornings it gives her a strange pleasure to feel the cracked vinyl of the seat against her bare backside, great pleasure to be sitting there, invisible even in all her orange blister, practically naked, watching everyone watch her friend. And she watches Angie too, the way her squeezed together breasts rise when she gets excited, the way the tips of her hair smell like
lemon from sunbathing, even in the winter when Elizabeth has to imagine it. Watches Angie roll lip gloss over her puckered mouth for the sake of all the boys pretending not to notice. And Elizabeth's so close she can smell Angie's toothpaste breath, can feel the side of her naked buttocks pressed against the fabric of her short skirt, pressed into her friend's hip.

And when Angie starts babbling her inane insights about life, Elizabeth won't allow herself to question her motives for their friendship, won't admit to herself that each word out of Angie's glossed mouth bores her into numbness. She can only see the flash of Angie's light, a beauty so close to her she can almost touch it and make it her own. And Angie with her chanting about sororities and boys and rush parties and who's wearing what and who's supposedly screwing who and which boy called her the night before, all of this fades into her smell of sunshine and the parade of numbers that inevitably marches through the fog. Angie has twenty-two freckles on her cheeks, fifteen on her left forearm, eleven on her right, six fillings, seventy-two daisies on her favorite shirt.

By the time Angie finishes her litany, she is clutching Elizabeth's hand. Elizabeth finds herself squealing with her friend, hopping in the bus seat, her bare butt cheeks slapping enthusiastically, without really knowing why. And what Elizabeth wants to study doesn't seem that important—they're going to be sorority sisters. And they will go to swaps and wear slinky black formal dresses and date rich boys with longish hair and soft, khaki pants—a different one every night. And maybe she'll try out for cheerleader next year for real instead of just using practice as an excuse to be near Angie, and then her résumé will reflect the life of a normal girl, a popular girl. And they're going to be sisters.

Then the bus pulls into the school and Angie leaves for homeroom, her Calvin Kleined legs slinking toward the school entrance, the excitement seeping to Elizabeth's toes and becoming the old familiar weight.
She vaguely remembers that Angie annoys her.

At school she's on her own except for the one class she has with Angie. Elizabeth is what some would term studious. It's not that she studies, it's just that she likes to read because if you have a book in your hand you can always appear busy, even frantic, as if you are so rushed for time that you must read and eat, read and attend assemblies, read and walk simultaneously. So busy that it is impossible to devote an entire hour to just one single activity. So busy that you must be important.

Margaret noticed Elizabeth's affinity for reading and took it upon herself to make her daughter's literary well being her new project. Margaret was dating a literature professor at the time, a man of flowery quotes, his sunken literary cheeks the color and texture of the yellowed books he always carried with him. Margaret, who graduated from high school with a vo-tech track, was trying to live an intellectual lifestyle at the time. She bought glasses with fake lenses and tweed skirts of varying shades of brown or green, colors the sales ladies referred to as jodhpur or hunter.

After Margaret had been seeing the professor for a few weeks, Elizabeth came home to a stack of Jane Austen books, a copy of Gone with the Wind, and her mother sitting on her bed. All of the Austen books were deemed appropriate for a girl her age by the professor, and her mother threw in Gone with the Wind because she'd always wanted to read it and had never gotten around to it.

Margaret insisted on monitoring Elizabeth's literary progress. This developed into an after school ritual where Elizabeth would curl up on the living room couch with her book while her mother lunged around the den to the Christian television station's Glorify Your Temple aerobics hour, hosted by a woman wearing tortured bleached hair, bright red lips, and latex tights with bulging polka dots that varied in color depending on the day. Elizabeth nicknamed her Whore for Jesus, which her
mother found less than amusing. "Jesus loved the whores the most," Margaret reprimanded. Elizabeth suspects this is why her mother calls herself a born again Christian, that she somehow secretly feels like one of the chosen ones.

"How's that book coming along?" Margaret would wheeze out, lying on her side doing leg lifts, her thick thighs dropping like a wet sponge as they parted, suctioning with a loud smack as they came together, the television wailing Amazing Grace or Just as I Am or Precious Memories.

And Elizabeth would ask for the umpteenth time, "Don't you think that's kind of blasphemous Mom, exercising to gospel music?"

"But your body's your temple. That's what the show's called."

"Yes, I know they call it that, but just because they say it doesn't mean it's so. I mean, don't you think that's taking it a bit far?"

But Margaret has no concept of too far, and so Elizabeth would give up and lay down on the couch, eyes closed so at least she didn't have to see her mother's exposed flesh, and begin telling her about the latest book she'd read. Margaret had never actually read any of the books. And some of her comments were so asinine they physically hurt Elizabeth — especially if she varied from the Austen novels and tried to discuss a more contemporary book with her mother. When she tried to explain that the little girl's desire in the *The Bluest Eye* for blue eyes symbolized the inferiority she felt about being a black girl in a society where white is synonymous with pretty, Margaret, her fat rolling under her leotard, sweat bleeding down her face, shrugged her wide shoulders, her own blue eyes squinting with confusion and asked for the fifth time, "I still don't get it. If the girl wants blue eyes, why doesn't she just go get herself some contacts? Somebody should have been kind enough to get that girl some contacts."

For the most part Elizabeth didn't mind this time with her mother; she liked repeating the stories of refined and dignified love. There were
mysterious mansions and intelligent, virtuous women and flawed, charismatic men and their lives seemed clean. But she suspected that her mother's concern was not with her or the books, but rather with the literature professor, especially after Elizabeth came home one day to find her new books strategically strewn around the house and her mother suggesting that maybe it would look nice to have a body, preferably Elizabeth's, reading one of these books when he came for dinner that night.

Margaret no longer monitors her daughter's literary development. Around the same time the literature professor quit coming over for dinner, Elizabeth came home one day after school, prepared to discuss Emma, to find a bulldozer in the garden and Margaret barking out orders and sipping tea that smelled suspiciously of whiskey. Margaret announced with a loopy grin that she was building a topiary with an African safari theme to enhance luncheons. But the landscaper must have misunderstood, because her intended centerpiece, a lovely elephant poised near the edge of the fountain as if about to take an afternoon swim to escape the heat of the grasslands, presented itself as a whale. So now they have a giant, landed bush/whale in the garden. This is where the wedding is going to be.

Margaret is going to Italy on her honeymoon. Elizabeth isn't invited. Instead her grandmother, her father's mother, is coming to stay with her for a few weeks. Her father had the good luck and fortune to escape the household. He died.

Elizabeth remembers watching a documentary on Antarctica last year about penguins, one of the few animals equipped to survive in such a frigid, seemingly lifeless climate. The narrator explained that when the ocean warmed the penguins would flock to a nesting ground near the ocean's edge, often returning to the same nests they left before, even the same mate, and then would proceed to breed in an elaborate ritual surely ingrained in their genetic make-up.
Elizabeth watched, mesmerized by the intricacies of nature, when a slow groaning began building near the penguins nesting ground. The groaning grew, reverberating, until it peaked into a sound like a field of dying soldiers, bodies torn apart limb by limb, bones pulled from their proper encasement of flesh, everyone exposed, vulnerable and dying. This is the sound the frozen surface of the ocean makes when cracked by the sun, split and melted by its heat, and eased apart to free the warmer waters beneath the surface.

This painful, eerie cracking is what Elizabeth imagines when she sees the cold, rigid planes of her grandmother's face slice into a smile.

*****

Her grandmother's money is as old as it comes. You know this by the number of times her last name appears on signs around the state. She suspects that her grandmother keeps count. Grandmother Bounds has been married three times, but retains the name of the first husband, Elizabeth's grandfather, because it is a fine name and not easily topped. Her grandmother's time think it better to keep your statistics to yourself. Elizabeth couldn't recall her grandmother's first name if pressed, not that anyone concerns themselves with first names in her circle, and she doesn't think that her last step-grandfather cared much about the age of his bride, or her first name either if the truth were told. It sufficed that she was old, terribly old, nearly as old as God permitted, and terribly, terribly rich. Of course she must provide carefully for the young husband who eased her through her final years.

He died years ago of a heart attack. Grandmother Bounds found him floating in the pool in his Styrofoam chair. "That's just like a man for you," she says after a few drinks. "You can't count on them for anything."

*****

The day her grandmother is supposed to arrive for the wedding
the following weekend, Elizabeth has her first period, bled straight through her jeans at school, especially fast sans panties, and had to come home after lunch. At first Margaret seemed irritated, as if Elizabeth was trying to upstage her. And then she grew inconsolable, crying deep bel­lied on the front porch, wrapping her lumpy body in an old quilt made by her own mother, who she never mentions, cuddling to her misery she couldn't or was unwilling to explain.

"Ah, baby," she cried when Elizabeth asked her if there was anything she could do, "I just hate for it all to start for you now, you know?" And then she pressed her hand against her daughter's cheek in a moment of kindness and intimacy that rarely occurs in their household. Her hand burned Elizabeth's face long after it went back to the cup of tea she was drinking. By early afternoon Margaret's breath was sour from whiskey and she was as plastered as the smile on her face. Suddenly she had a turn of emotions, had a burning need to celebrate what she called Elizabeth's descent into womanhood.

Now Elizabeth finds herself in Margaret's whale of a Cadillac on the way to her first manicure, Margaret looping in and out of traffic, her breath swelling in the car until Elizabeth's throat burns as if she were drinking herself. For Elizabeth a manicure is little consolation, the production of the thick, brownish blood between her legs terrifying, the pitying look her teacher gave her earlier in the day when she explained her circumstances blooming in her memory until she can see nothing but numbers surge through her head fat and stretched long, unmanageable and teetering like the lifeless things come to life-tables or spoons or umbrellas-in the cartons she watched as a child. They march in an endless parade no matter how hard she tries to think of something, anything else. But the only something is her embarrassment at school, her drunk, crazed mother, or the old-fashioned panties holding up the old-fash­ioned sanitary napkin bulking painfully between her legs. And so the numbers flow thick and black and unstoppable.
She can barely see when they arrive at the tiny nail salon in a part of town Elizabeth is not familiar with, has to put her head between her legs and breath deeply for several moments before going in to allow the numbers to fade enough for her to function. Her mother barely notices, rattles on and on about what price the salon is. Margaret goes to this particular salon because they are exceptionally cheap. This is a favorite challenge of Margaret and her friends: to find a bargain. Not because money is tight, but so they can outdo each other with their cunning shopping savvy.

Margaret tells Elizabeth that she can pick out any color of nail polish that she wants. Elizabeth's first choice is clear because it's the closest and the quietest one to look at.

"Well if that's what you want..." her mother's voice trails off in order to assure Elizabeth that it's not what she wants at all, "but if you wear clear, well, you might as well not even get your nails painted."

Translation: you never appreciate the kind things I do for you.

When Elizabeth chooses red her mother says that she would look like a prostitute. The tulip, well tulip would clash with her coppery hair and pale skin. She ends up letting her mother choose. Margaret picks hot pink, deciding it will look nice against the bridesmaid's dress and is bright enough that Grandmother Bounds will notice what a lovely young woman she's becoming. Margaret worries that Grandmother Bounds lacks interest in Elizabeth. When it comes time to divvy up the spoils of her death, this lack of interest could potentially cause a problem.

All of the stylists are Vietnamese, or Elizabeth thinks they are, but doesn't want to ask in case they are Korean or Japanese. It isn't polite to confuse Asian heritage. She hopes her manicurist will be able to speak English, but thinks that the receptionist is the only one who knows how. Besides, they really don't seem to want to converse.
Elizabeth thinks they get paid for the number of nails they do a day. No one's wasted time on ambiance. The only things on the wall are a cheap imitation oriental tapestry and a poster of Farrah Fawcett.

Elizabeth's name is called first and she gets a man. He grunts at her, his dark eyes annoyed with the sluggishness caused by her uncertainty. She hands him the polish. He grabs her hands and puts a thin yellow lotion on her, roughly rubbing her wrists and chopping up her arms. Her mother sits in the booth next to her.

"They're not gently, Lizzy, but they're cheap and good." She beams at finding such a gem of a place.

Elizabeth hates her manicurist. Then she feels guilty for hating him. His teeth are a crusty, mustard color at the gums, his fingernails exceptionally long and pointy. She wonders how he couldn't cut his nails when he works as a manicurist all day and decides that he doesn't want to waste any time.

He pulls her hand closer to him and begins buffing a board across her nails haphazardly. She is embarrassed that he holds her hand so tightly. She is embarrassed to be her. He finishes one hand and slams it into some type of solution, then begins buffing the other. He finishes quickly, fumbles for a silver utensil on a tray next to him, and then begins clipping her cuticles. Elizabeth thinks that this utensil should be soaking in antiseptic to avoid disease, but is too scared to say so. He clips her cuticles dangerously close. She reflexively pulls her hand away. He yanks it back. She notices a fat drop of bright red blood on her thumbnail. To her horror, the manicurist pushes it aside like with his taloned index finger and mutters what she thinks is a sorry. Visions of a slow death by AIDS or syphilis or that flesh-eating disease she hears about on TV begin congesting her mind. She thinks she might throw up, but is too terrified to complain. The blood begins coagulating on her nail. The numbers ink black. There are ten utensils on the manicurist's tray, three bottles of nail polish, two empty coke cans.
this time giving in to the steadiness of it, the calming India ink dark moving through her mind, always knowing what number follows what comes next.

Grandmother Bounds arrives later that day at exactly five o'clock, gliding up the azalea-surrounded driveway, her posture so straight and rigid her tiny soldiers threaten to meet behind her. Margaret greets her with a pursed kiss neatly executed in the air next to her shriveled cheek, then motions for the maid to fetch the afternoon martinis. Her grandmother's hair is blonde now and shellacked into a curled hood around her face. Elizabeth vaguely remembers her grandmother saying that women past sixty who dyed their hair were wrinkled old tarts, stupid enough to think that everyone else was stupid enough to believe their hair wasn't gray. She must have a new boyfriend.

They sit down immediately to a semi-formal dinner, some type of obscene period party for Elizabeth. Her hot pink nails glare angrily against her pale skin.

"Her nails are too bright." It's the first thing out of her grandmother's mouth at dinner. "She looks like a slut." And then Grandmother Bounds picks up a spoon to eat her soup, her old melting mouth drooping toward the spoon in such a way Elizabeth has to push her own bowl away from her in disgust. Elizabeth slumps a little lower into her chair. Her sanitary napkin crinkles like a diaper.

"You know how young girls are," Margaret smiles desperate, "always trying to grow up just a little too fast," Margaret stretches her thin lips wider-the only thin part of her body-her stumpy gold-wrapped fingers smoothing the linen napkin in her lap. She won't look at her daughter. The hot pink color is now Elizabeth's idea. She's glad her grandmother hates it. She'll get to take it off.

Elizabeth thinks of Angie and her lemon smell and sunshine hair, her talk of shopping and boys and parties, wonders what she's eat-
ing for dinner tonight, imagines her mother asking how her day went, what she studied, which boy flirted with her, what she'll wear to the homecoming dance. Imagines Angie's father, a kind, quiet man who sucks on toothpicks and winks for no reason, sees him palm his daughter's golden head, mussing her hair playfully, warning her to stay away from those dirty boys. Then maybe they all watch TV after they clean up the dinner dishes together, maybe the make popcorn or eat ice cream. Maybe.

********

Elizabeth doesn't know her step-father-to-be very well, but he's taking her to lunch anyway. The wedding is tomorrow, and he says that it's high time that they get to know each other. She doesn't really want to get to know Martin, doesn't think he will have much staying power.

Her grandmother likes Martin. Elizabeth knows this by the way she looked at him each time he dropped by during the last week to finish the details of the wedding. Eyes wide with knowing, flaccid lips parted into an almost smile, and I bet you could make me smile smile. This is Grandmother Bound's favorite pastime when visiting, attempting to sleep with Margaret's husbands. Margaret ignored this, focusing on her martinis instead, often chastising the maid for their dryness, or wetness, or saltiness, or lack of the three. Elizabeth had never seen her mother so drunk, or maybe she'd never seen her this sober.

Under the pretense of sharing sweet anecdotes about the young Margaret, Grandmother Bounds told the story of how Elizabeth's father met her mother. Margaret, her body wrapped in a black silk suit so tight it looked as if she'd ejected right out of it, hid in the shadows of the room, excused herself as often as possible, looked as if she hoped the darkness of her suit would absorb her, allow her to somehow float above her embarrassment. And isn't it hilarious, Grandmother Bounds giggled, how Margaret met Elizabeth's father while she was a cashier at the 7-11, right over the slurpy machine, and how much in love they were,
"Pay me now," he says. The sudden appearance of the manicurist's voice startles Elizabeth, then insults her. Were you supposed to pay before their nails were painted? Did he think she was poor? That she wouldn't pay? Her head spirals in a tornado of images: blood and IV's and raw flesh and crawling viruses and yellow crusty teeth and knife-like fingernails that are weapons, not fingernails, and numbers, always the numbers.

Elizabeth cannot speak to the man, so she allows her eyes to speak for her, flashing the Vietnamese/Japanese/Korean man a nasty look. She turns to her mother for the five dollars. "He thinks I won't pay. I have to prepay before he paints my nails."

Margaret is smiling, then laughing. Elizabeth can see her mother's tonsils jiggling. She looks ridiculous with her mouth opened so wide, grotesque. "Lizzy," her mother giggles, Elizabeth can smell the liquor from three feet away, "don't be silly. You're showing yourself. He's asking you to pay before he paints your nails so you don't ruin them by getting money out of your wallet. Quit being so paranoid." Her mother turns back to her own manicurist, a tiny, delicate, smiling woman.

Elizabeth doesn't look at her manicurist for the rest of the time he paints her nails, a difficult feat when someone is pulling you toward them. She is past mortification. Not because of what she said—the manicurist probably couldn't even understand—but because the words coming out of her mouth were so like something her mother would have said, and this is her worse fear realized, to be like her mother.

On the way home her mother babbles about how lovely their nails look. Elizabeth ignores her. She knows she's acquired HIV in the pursuit of vanity, can feel the virus crawling in the blood seeping from between her legs, its diseased wet warmth pressed against her flesh. It's probably her punishment for making exploited people paint her nails for next to nothing. She promises if God won't punish her this one time, she'll never be so vain and selfish again. Then she focuses on counting,
how passionate it all was, a wink of Grandmother Bound’s floppy eye, with Elizabeth born just a bit too soon after the marriage.

This was all a familiar scene to Elizabeth, one she’d witnessed once too often. She cupped her jaw in the palm of her hand and splayed her fingers to the left of her face so all of Margaret’s misery was blocked from her view except a patch of black. That left Grandmother Bounds, who had wedged herself so close to Martin she might as well be in his lap, her head tuned away from Elizabeth in order to give Martin her full attention.

Elizabeth focused on a large, furry growth – a mole maybe – riding the soft waves of her grandmother’s neck, bobbing up and down with her raspy breathing. She studied it for a moment, circling its uneven edges, imagining its spongy texture. Melanoma maybe? Disgusting. She was in the middle of a fantasy about a long, drawn-out death for her grandmother, complete with bed-wetting and nurses, half of her grandmother’s neck and face eaten by the cancer surely feasting on her at this very moment, before she realized her grandmother was asking her a question. Then she was staring directly into Grandmother Bound’s runny eyes, so similar in color to her own eyes, and an embarrassed, sinful feeling crept over her, as if she’d spit on someone’s grave. She smiled almost a full smile, an inappropriate smile, and forgot about answering the question, just cupped her jaw with both hands in an attempt to block the entire room and all of its inhabitants from her.

"She's fourteen," Martin patted Grandmother Bound’s leg and twisted his lips into a smile of camaraderie for Elizabeth. "We probably bore the girl to death, eh?" Martin’s upper lip lifted from the left when he smiled.

Martin has the same I’m-a-pretty-cool-guy-if-me-a-chance grin when he picks Elizabeth up from school after fourth period, signing his name next to hers in the principal’s office so the school will know she has check out. Margaret called ahead of time and said that it was OK.
Elizabeth feels important when he checks her out. He has slicked his hair back like Robert DiNiro movie and worn a pinstriped suit for the occasion. His French cologne fills the room the way Margaret's alcoholic breath usually does. Martin's the kind of man who expects everyone to notice him walk into the room, and the office of secretaries do notice, their sunshine painted lips and eyes spread wide in approval, their broad haunches poised and ready to spring if he gave the invitation. Elizabeth begins to suspect that he gives the invitation often. For a moment she forgets why he is marrying her mother — then she remembers the money.

He takes her to the Capitol City Club in his older modes Mercedes, which smells of cigars and leather and cologne. She has never been to the Capitol City Club before. Real silver on the table, twelve cubes of ice in her lemon water, ten in Martin's.

"Have the lobster. Have anything that you want. Even two desserts. This is our day and we're going to enjoy it." Martin pats her knee and squeezes it tightly. He has a large class ring on the middle finger of his right hand with an eye-like ruby staring for its center. "I've never had a daughter before. Or a son. I just kept putting it off, and putting it off, and putting off, and then I was old before I knew it." He smiles to show that he really finds himself in his prime, but values his own modesty. "But you've never had a dad either. Your mother tells me that your father died before you could remember." He stops her to rub her knee again, this time squeezing a bit harder. "can I call you Lizzy? Your mom calls you Lizzy and I think I like it better. It's warmer." A strand of his hair has come unglued and it hovers in mid-air over his forehead. Elizabeth's head is pounding, and his hand burns through the thin skin of her thigh. Isn't this what stepfathers do? Molest new daughters? Don't they show this on after school specials? Can Martin tell? Can he tell she's just like her mother and assumes this is what she wants? She thinks of slapping him or doing something equally dramatic, seat, one buttock off the edge.
"I'd like chocolate mousse and the cherry pie, please." Her voice is shrill, almost a scream, and people begin trying not to stare. They haven't even ordered entrees yet. Martin yanks his hand off her leg and asks the waiter for the dessert menu. He looks at Elizabeth as if she's lost her mind, and she wonders if he's right, if she imagined the whole thing, if his hand had lingered on her thigh in a brief moment of warmth and sincerity. Elizabeth orders the mousse and the pie, making sure that each lasts fifty bites apiece, allowing the numbers to take over. They don't talk to each other the rest of the meal. Both tell Margaret the lunch was lovely.

*****

Elizabeth's not wearing panties, but the pantyhose she's supposed to wear with her bridesmaid's dress have built-in underwear, which seems like she's cheating. When she slides them up her lanky, red splattered legs she feels as if they're going to cut her in half, squeeze right through her, so she takes them off, deciding that she'll slip them on at the last minute. Lately Elizabeth is vulnerable when separated for her rituals.

Her bright hair is pulled into a bun and infused with baby's breath, and she can't seem to find a comfortable way to rest on her bed without ripping out any of the dry, scratchy flowers sprouting form her head. Her hair matches her mother's. They both went to the salon early this morning where Elizabeth sat stranded in a pool of aluminum foil and curlers while her mother and the hair stylist discussed the all-important details of the wedding.

She tries to read, which usually takes her mind off things, but her head hurts too much, the words jumping out of order, so she peers out at the wedding guests instead. Her father's sister, pink Aunt Mary, round and soft, unmarried and defeated, is wandering from guest to gust, apparently littering little anecdotes to shorten the wait, lingering a bit longer around the single men. She looks like a demented forty year-old
at her long awaited coming out party. Elizabeth doesn't feel sorry for her - she's run out of sympathy.

Angie will arrive within the next few minutes or so. Margaret asked her to serve cake. After all, she is Elizabeth's best friend. Angie says yes to anything that will permit her to stand and be examined by an audience.

Elizabeth wants to leave her room, its floral walls and peach carpet too sweet, too clean, too much like a normal girl's room, but can't think of anywhere to go. So she starts counting again. She can't seem to quit lately. She's trying to calm herself by using the Mississippis, but the numbers tumble together in her head and her eyes begin to hurt and she feels too much energy. She picks up a pencil and presses its point against her book until it snaps and then she does it again. She's about to break a third one when her door flies open and Angie, saffron curls and pink satin streaming, throw herself into the room.

Elizabeth wants to ask her friend if she's every bled through her pants at school or sometimes goes without underwear or enjoys the odor of sweat from her own armpits, or if she has to count, has to count to a certain number before reaching the top of a flight of stairs or finishing a coke. She wants to ask her is it ever like she's screaming, screaming, hearing the sound of her own voice, and no one notices. She wants to ask her friend to step back because the urge to jump — not for the purpose of hurting herself but just for the joy of jumping — becomes so strong she thinks she might not be able to stop herself.

And she's going to ask, the words are coming, but then Angie's hand is against her hair, and Angie has to have her hair in a bun as well, and then Angie is squeezed between Elizabeth's legs, her own hair thrown back in offering.

"Whatchya reading?" Angie asks as Elizabeth pulls a brush through her curls.
"Hmm?" Angie's sunshine smell is everywhere. Clean.

"The book," Angie says, pointing a pink-tipped finger at the opened book on the bed. Angie's bright, polished nails don't look angry against her tan skin. They look warm and inviting, her fingers wands of color.

"Oh that. Crime and Punishment." If she wraps one of Angie's curls around her finger it slides off in a perfect coil, keeps the shape of Elizabeth.

"You're so smart, Lizzy," Angie sighs. "That fat thing would take me a year to read."

This is the first time Elizabeth remembers Angie ever complimenting her intelligence, and she seems so sincere she doesn't know how to respond to the kindness in her voice.

"It's nothing."

"Well men love smart girls."

"They do?" Elizabeth has yet to meet any.

"Sure, Look at Jake Andrews, He's reading all the time."

Now it begins to make sense. Angie's had a crush on Jake for a month now.

"Maybe you could tell me about some of those books so I can talk with him about them."

"You could just read them yourself," Elizabeth says.

"I already told you," Angie snaps as if her friend hasn't been paying attention, "it would take me a year to read a book like that. The homecoming dance is only two weeks away."

After this comment, Elizabeth quits paying attention as Angie lapses into a detailed account of each time Jake Andrews has spoken to her in the last week. Instead, she focuses on counting brushstrokes, and
touches, is as white as Elizabeth's own blue-veined breasts, with tiny hints of curls following the edges of the wave of her neck. And there's nothing Elizabeth wants more than to press her lips against the indentation at the base of that skull, to suck some of that sunshine into herself to see if Angie tastes of lemon and soap. To see what clean tastes like. But she has no idea she's actually done it until her friend screams as if she'd been bitten, shoving herself from the bed with such strength that Elizabeth's knock onto her back, legs sprawled, her skirt riding up over her hips, her vagina, the hot pink color of the nail polish her grandmother had condemned a week ago, open and exposed.

"Are you a freak?" Angie's full throat screaming. "I knew I should have listened to what all the other girls said about you." Angie's trying not to stare at Elizabeth's nakedness. Her face is screwed up into a fist. She's shaking, her lovely hair hanging from one side of her head like a whip. For a moment the room is leerily still, and Elizabeth realizes that the look on her friend's face is fear. Real fear. She knows this look. This is her own face. And although the words are mean, Elizabeth wants to pull Angie back into her lap and explain away that fear, tell her she didn't mean it that way. But in order to do so, she would have to explain what she did mean, and she can't because she has no idea. And so when Angie runs outside, Elizabeth doesn't try to stop her, just rolls her pantyhose up her leg, which takes 67 counts, a horribly uneven number, then slips on her satin-covered shoes and heads to the ceremony.

Everyone's waiting for her when she reaches the garden, and she has little time to think about Angie, the taste of her neck, the fear in her face. When the bridal music begins, Margaret starts her march through the standing congregation. Her dress is old-fashioned, belled-out at the bottom, and white — very, very white. Elizabeth notices that her mother is walking rather strangely, wobbling uncertainly towards her, wobbling towards the silly grinning Aunt Mary who's also a bridesmaid, wobbling towards the giant pink ribbon bedecked whale where the preacher waits
with an unruffled smile draped on his face. Margaret would bump into the guests’ chairs if she weren’t being practically carried by Martin’s father. He is giving the bride away, or at least attempting to, and finally succeeds in depositing Margaret by his son’s side.

But Margaret doesn’t stop, and Elizabeth notices that her mother isn’t looking very well, that maybe her veil isn’t on quite right, that maybe there’s mascara under her eyes. Then her mother’s face is next to hers and she’s whispering that she loves her, doesn’t Elizabeth realize this?, is pressing her lips against Elizabeth’s cheek, the smell of liquor curdling Margaret’s breath. Martin gently unfurls Margaret from her with great gentleness, a gesture that makes Elizabeth question again if she imagined his hand up her thigh, makes her wonder what else she imagines, what’s real, what’s not. He collects Margaret without ever looking at Elizabeth, and she wonders if he ever will again. This is the drunkest she’s ever seen her mother.

Elizabeth’s stomach hurts from the elastic on the pantyhose. She can’t focus on the preacher’s words, who barrels right on through the wedding as if drunk brides fell down the aisle everyday. Her mother seems to have retrieved herself nicely and occasionally looks Elizabeth’s way and winks, the cosmetic tape attached to her temples to alleviate wrinkles prohibiting her from closing her eyelids entirely, giving her a crazed appearance like the boys at school who flip their eyelids inside out. Elizabeth tries to pretend that she doesn’t see her, looking at the guests instead. But then she sees her grandmother, creased and scowling for the first row, and then Angie, near the back row, scared and skittish, already so far away from her, already refusing to look Elizabeth in the eye, already gone. Elizabeth’s eyes have nowhere safe to rest.

She tries not to count but can’t help it. There are twenty five roses in the vase on the altar, fifteen in her bouquet, fifteen in her aunt’s, seventy-five chairs, all full of people she hates, twelve women in hats, ten bows lining the walkway to the altar, five on each side. Then there’s
nothing left to count and all she can focus on is the giant bush/whale-a
living whale in their garden. If she closes one eyes and squints, she can
almost imagine it moving toward her. Yes, it is moving toward her, hov­
ering over her drunk mother and oily Martin, its pink ribbons sailing
beside it like a cape. And for a second Elizabeth thinks, she hopes, that
it's going to sweep down on them, its leafy tail flashing, and somehow
swallow them all.
There are pages in which
everything transpires.
A flame uncurls its fingers
from a college kid's, then spirals up into
a smoky patch

on Main Street. It's not safe anywhere.
The focused stare
of intellects, on trial in Moscow,
meets the gaze of Eartha Kitt who has grasped
Lady Bird's left elbow

to make her understand the country is on fire.
She can't. in the turning pages
there are linked arms & streaked faces.
Then bayonets appear, & bullhorns, till a smear
of specks, like a storm of bees, obliterates

the darkening sky. What's written there? You must grind
the particles to ash, smear them on your forehead to understand.
And there's the wall
against which motherfuckers
cast themselves. Beneath the fizzy pall.
down barren avenues still strewn
w/ leaflets, everyone struck

their own deal. As had we: we shall
not be moved, till eyebrows
split, & heads, & sights of rifle barrels
line up like a glinting fence
w/ whites of eyes—in a kind of awe

that's post-despair, post anything. Here a rock
& there a kick, an arc
of fire hose in response to shouted taunt:
the chaos of ballet that's played out
on its knees. Then the long hot summer

fell apart in widening sirens, while the Pigs
waded waist-deep into random slaughter. Finis.
I Hear You Speak Langston Hughes.
I Feel you so close so clear.
You speak in my ear.
You sing, you breathe, you mutter, you whisper. You scream,
YOU CAN'T SLEEP ON DAYS LIKE THIS.

Live this world. Open up and see.
I can feel myself fly today.
To create, to be free, to be awake and aware.
I RUN! Spin, move, flow, flitter, sing, yell, fall, stumble, stand and sound.
Groove, ramble, rant, rave, fuck, slap, drive, lust, follow, sit, try, and always grow.

I hear you Langston.
You can't sleep.
This day is for us.
Speak to me Langston Hughes, Speak to me!
I hear it so faint, so slow, so eloquent, come forth through the darkness.
Muse, inspire, set aflame!
You can't SLEEP on days like this.
I feel it coming, I'm almost there.
I'm on the brink,
Only on the brink and its so HUGE.
SO wonderful and clear— almost more that I could ever hear in this drum.

But I cannot rest yet.
I can't put the feeling down.
Still so much to learn.
Far, Far to go, But I can.

Only, again I start to say
You can't Sleep on days like this.
Repeat, over and over and upside down in this mind.
Langston, I can HEAR .

I can hear you speak Langston Hughes.
I listen to your voice, your energy, your heart fill my net.
Finding
Finding art
Finding an open space
I'm traveling onward to the night— to go.
Clutch and don't let go ... yet.

You can't sleep on days like this.
Langston Sleeps, and dreams and rings loud and boisterous to me.
To each and every one of us—alone.
Still got to be alone, Not ready yet.
Be on.

HERE NOW.

Say it, Langston, Say it
Breathe, YAWP and Proclaim.
I hear it.
I hear your voice.
I hear it speak Langston Hughes.
You.
You all.

You can't SLEEP on days like this.
My mother believed in Santa Claus until she was thirty-seven. The good old days, waiting for the cherubic geezer to bring you gifts. I had to break the news to her. Devastated, she cried then she took to rum and cokes. "Nothing can kill the pain like a little alcohol," she always said. "Make her believe again," the doctors told us. Outside the house was a scene passing for a winter wonderland. Mistletoe, holly, and jingles festered inside the house. Mom began to believe again. That year, my sister fell twenty feet down a chimney and died.
there was, however, Leo
and it astonished me
being solidly alive,
bread on the table, dreams.
Understand that Leo wasn't Perseus.

I saw American movies,
then I whistled, *Baby Leo.*

*Atta baby, Leo.*
Understand that I was worshipful.
At a window, even at a window.

Leo sighed.
Leo bought a car.
Then he bought a dog.

*Leo, call the dog, Umberto Eco.*

My head was full of forms:
lilac, swan, milk
of the body, kingdom of
avocado, worthy pilgrims,
for example: my ten toes.

It was Good Friday.
It was the Resurrection.
It was the Medicis
eating every bit of Florence.
Little children, tether your velvet horses!

Hello, disappearing Leo,
Only slowly, slowly.
Rising from a restless sleep, it dawned on him. A crocodile had crawled into his belly and taken up residence there. It was nothing to celebrate. As the morning light filtered into the bedroom through the wooden venetian blinds, he discovered that his body was changing: eyes swollen and half-closed, taking in the horizon through a greenish haze, rusty joints, like so much ancient armor. The beast’s tail thrashed inside him. Its cold snout nuzzled his heart. The pieces began to fall into place. A fatherly kiss on Corey’s head had produced a chipped and jagged tooth. He snapped at Linda without provocation. As she stirred on the pillow beside him, a static charge prickled across his body, morphing the very chemistry and texture of his skin. Dry scales and imbrications displaced the soft patches that had served, in moments of intimacy, as a remembrance of youth. His pulse quickened but his blood grew colder. He was the Crocodile-god, his father’s first and only son, dwelling amidst the terrors of the night. He was the Crocodile-god, ravenously seizing his prey.

It was nothing to celebrate.

Corey was still sleeping, cocooned against the morning air in folds of cotton, wool, and flannel. With all of the textiles and assorted stuffed animals, the child’s bed resembled an archaeological site, Corey a well-preserved bog-child. Gazing on the boy, his abdomen rippled, hot with pain. He steadied himself against the dizziness and cold sweats that followed.
As the crocodile writhed inside him, he searched his own childhood for a story that would shed light on his condition. Cambridgeport, Massachusetts, 1967. His father, who had honed a folk singing voice on the local coffeehouse circuit, would read him *Aesop's Fables* or Kipling's *Just So Stories* at bedtime. With boyish dimples and melodious intonation, he recast the tales for the boy tucked inside beside him. "Do you know how the rhinoceros got his skin?" David asked.

"How Daddy?"

"It wasn't always wrinkly and dry, you know. Once upon a time, the rhino's skin was smooth and fit him tightly. There were no wrinkles in it anywhere. He looked exactly like a Noah's Ark Rhinoceros, but of course much bigger. One day, the rhino ate a Parsee's cake without saying 'thank you,' which was very bad manners. The Parsee took his revenge by putting cake crumbs in the rhino's skin while the beast was bathing in the Red Sea."

"What happened then, Daddy?" the boy asked.

"When the rhinoceros put his skin back on, it tickled like cake crumbs in bed. He lay on the ground, rolled in the sand, and rubbed up against a palm tree, but this only made things worse. He rubbed so much and so hard that he rubbed his skin into great folds all over his body. He became scratchy and irritable, and from that day to this, every rhinoceros has great folds in his skin and a very bad temper, all on account of the cake-crumbs inside."

"Is that a true story, Daddy?"

"Just so," his father said with a smile.

A few years later, Kipling's story proved to be prophetic. David's skin became red and blotchy at the knees and elbows, with wrinkly folds and flakes that betrayed his presence long after he had left a room. The diagnosis was psoriasis, a chronic skin condition with no known cure. His son noticed and worried unnerved by the rapid change in his
appearance. His father was disintegrating! Soon he would become a small pile of white flakes in the living room rug, food for his mother's new Hoover. David downplayed the problem, trying to smooth his son's concern: "Just a little irritation from working under the sink on my hands and knees. It'll go away, eventually." As time went on and his condition worsened, David sought medical help and even tried a solar remedy believed to have originated with the ancient Egyptians.

III

"Mercy, Oh Lawd! Mercy! Mercy on dis po' sinner," cries Eugene O'Neill's Emperor Jones in the concluding moments of the play. Jones, the self-appointed Emperor of an unnamed West Indian Island, has run out of luck and time. Sitting in Normand Berlin's O'Neill seminar at the University of Massachusetts, the student pondered the primordial and the Jungian and the Emperor's haunting refrain, "Seems like I ben heah befo'." At the end of the play, Jones, prompted by a savage Witch Doctor, must offer himself for sacrifice, because the forces of evil must be appeased.

[The Witch-Doctor springs to the riverbank. He stretches out his arms and calls to some god within its depths. Then he starts backward slowly, his arms remaining out. A huge head of a crocodile appears over the bank and its eyes, glittering greenly, fasten upon Jones. He stares into them fascinatedly. The Witch-Doctor prances up to him, touches him with his wand, motions with hideous command toward the waiting monster. Jones squirms on his belly nearer and nearer, moaning continually.]

Mercy, Lawd! Mercy!

[The crocodile heaves more of his enormous bulk onto the land. Jones squirms toward him. The Witch-Doctor's voice shrills out in furious exultation, the tom-tom beats madly. Jones cries out in a fierce, exhausted spasm of anguished pleading.]
Lawd, save me! Lawd Jesus, heah my prayer!

[Immediately, in answer to his prayer, comes the thought of the one bullet left him. He snatch at his hip, shouting defiantly.]

De silver bullet! You din't get me yit!

[He fires at the green eyes in front of him. The head of the crocodile sinks back behind the river bank, the Witch-Doctor springs back behind the sacred tree and disappears. Jones lies with his face to the ground, his arms outstretched, whimpering with fear as the throb of the tom-tom fills the silence about him with a somber pulsation, a baffled but vengeful power.]

IV

His silver bullets were prednisone, a powerful steroid pumped directly into his veins through an IV push, a continuous saline drip, and plenty of sulfur-based antibiotics. The sulfur drugs had the advantage of making the crocodile feel at home in its new environment. Surrounded by the bedlaminate sounds of a working-class hospital in Framingham, Massachusetts, he settled warily into the cramped quarters he shared with an elderly cancer patient. Albert had a tumor in his tongue and was fed vitamin milkshakes through a tube in his stomach. All things considered, he was an excellent roommate, quiet and easygoing, despite his fondness for smutty talk shows and torrid melodrama. Albert's television droned through the curtain partitions like an ill wind, unsettling his puritanical sensibility.

"And during this three-hourd sexual marathon," the prosecutor intoned dramatically, "did you notice any distinguishing marks?"

"I'm sure I don't know what you're talking about," the languid blonde on the stand replied coyly.

The prosecutor shot back, "You've been polishing his knob every day for six months and you expect us to believe you didn't notice any distinguishing markings?" Come, come, Miss Simmons!"
When Linda and Corey come to visit, they approximate domestic life by staking out territory in the more spacious family area down the hall from his assigned room. He dresses in street clothes for these occasions so as not to alarm Corey. They spread out newspapers, puzzles, and home-cooked food. Linda stitches Corey's Halloween costume, the Pokemon character Golbat, while the boy watches "Rugrats" on TV and Dad reads the New York Times.

"Daddy why can't you take your medicine at home?" Corey asks, looking up from "Rugrats."

"Let's all play a game," his father says, strategically changing the subject.

"As a family!" Corey exclaims.

Dad sets a Tupperware bowl in the center of the floor and fills it with Crazybones, colorful plastic game pieces in the shape of grotesque comic heads. Taking turns, they gently toss playing cards toward the translucent bowl, trying to coax them inside in order to capture Crazybones, one by one. Landing on top of another card earns you the right to pick up the cards previously thrown by others. The person with the most Crazybones at the end of the game wins, unless someone else first collects all of the cards on the floor, thus trumping the other players. It is their own game, improvised on the spot. As the cards flutter to the polished floor, hospital time, factory time, stands still.

They reached the Forge Park Station in Franklin with one minute to spare. His heart raced from the steroids in his system, but he kept his voice calm for Corey and cousin Eliza, leading them up the steps to the top of the double-decker train to Boston, piling everyone into a seat, and attempting to catch his fleeting breath. He felt thirty years older
and imagined he was their grandfather, taking them on a little journey, for a little culture. Maybe some blueberry muffins from Jordan Marsh, he thought, suddenly conjuring from distant memory the bakery boxes tied with red and white striped string that his Nana Pauline always brought home from her shift as clerk there. The muffins were as big as grapefruits and sparkled with granulated sugar.

"We're gonna see lots of pictures," he told the children, adding a touch of urgency to his voice. "From all around the world."

"And fountains," Eliza chimed.

"And 'gyptian mummies!" Corey shouted triumphantly. The children munched their snacks contentedly, as New England whirled by the windows like an autumnal kaleidoscope.

"Tell us a story, uncle Todd!" Eliza pleaded.

"Yes, Daddy, tell us a spooky one," added Corey.

"Not too spooky," cautioned Eliza.

"Let me tell you the story of Charlie and the haunted train," he said, lowering his voice to a Gothic whisper. "I think you'll like it." With the newly discovered authority of old age, uncle Todd assumed grandfatherly demeanor and spun out a tale based loosely on "Charlie on the MTA," an urban folk song familiar to most Bostonians. Charlie boarded a subway one fateful day and never returned, destined to ride phantomlike beneath the streets of Boston for eternity. Uncle Todd's version of the story included bloody handprints on a broken train window, luggage-rack goblins, and a ghostly bride and bridegroom waltzing down the aisle at midnight. Corey and Eliza were entranced.

As he approached the white marble steps of the Museum of Fine Arts, a child in each hand, he had a profound sense of returning.
rious hour before work and school, they undertook the "Cross
Continental Challenge," a game featuring bold graphics and a high-tech
electronic module in place of dice. The race led the fearless drivers
through metropolis and mountain range, through piney wood and arid
desert. Avalanche— Go back to Start. Sandstorm— miss a turn. Oasis! Play
again. It was a long journey.

"Corey, try to count the spaces with your finger, and then move your
car," he gently admonished. "You've got to follow the rules or else it
won't be fun."

"Okay, Dad," Corey sighed.

"Ooops! Caught trespassing on tribal land. Miss a turn. Sorry Corey, its
the luck of the draw." He checked his watch and pressed the center of
the electronic module one more time. Beads of red light flashed around
the perimeter, and the unit chirped like a tree frog.

"You move five, Daddy," said Corey gleefully, counting the spaces
with his finger. He nudged his father's car forward into the awaiting
hazard.

"You've been bitten by a crocodile. Go to the hospital."

It was nothing to celebrate.

End.

Reference Note: The author has consulted books and internet websites to refresh the memory,
interpolating and paraphrasing brief quotes and passages with artistic license. Books quoted and
paraphrased: Rudyard Kipling, Just So Stories (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Page & Company, 1912);
Websites quoted and paraphrased: E.A. Wallis Budge, trans. The Egyptian Book of the Dead. 1240 BC
(Lysator Academic Computer Society, Linkoping University in Linkoping, Sweden),
http://www.lysator.liu.se/~drokk/BoD/toc.html, visited 10 November 2000; the Cairo Museum's
Adopt a Mummy Project, http://www.animalmummies.com/project.html, visited 10 November
2000; the Herman Miller Company Eames management Chair,
That winter the snow was to my waist,
and I lost one boot down a blue crag in the ice.
Water was the gritty part. Then everything was water,
turning its loyalties with the air's bolstering breath.
It cut and steamed and would not thaw.

Clinging to the purple bucket, it had to be hammered
clean with a stake or a rock or a bigger piece of ice.
The chipping rang in circles through the startled pines,
across the swipe of field. Crows complained.
I joined them in breathless profanity.

The horse stopped me each night to rub her scars
on my sweater, along my hipbone, while I unraveled
the straw from her mane, and murmured choir songs
in broken Latin. Her mammoth body made contented gurgles
as our breath steamed silver in the stained evening light.
February was a long month. Then came March, and the time for the sweet scent wheelbarrows hauled in. After time, peepers by the pond sang evening feedings. The ice waned with the old moon. It ran from the spring in rivers, and the rivers roared.
I.
In the beginning there were a man and woman, and they stood on the beach at Skaill.
In the day they collected round stones and found faces in the sea. At night they breathed one warm breath through black air that slapped at them like a wet bedsheets hung to the wind.

This is a true story. The man still returns, Octobers, and watches the waters spit greenly the semen of the isles. He remembers a time the woman put ice to his body, and he was as the brewing sea. They are unchanged.

From here to Stronsay she sings his name in one beat of raven wings.

With the sob of birth she returns with rare snow. She carries stones in her hands, and stars fill the music of space and sea.
Blessing for my daughter:

*No one may touch her unless she says so. Then they may take all she has in a mist down the vinyl cape.*

I'm about to cut her bangs,

so I tell another story about Nan Walsh,

my Irish grandmother from County Louth.

How she saved her egg money to buy a velvet hat, and her brother stomped it, fed it to the goat.

How then she packed the rose tea set in pages torn from her brother's books and left Dundalk for Alabama.

How a leprechaun came with her in her brown leather bag, his feet stretching the sides. She could feel his heels like a baby inside, but when she undid the clasp, there was nothing there.
To my daughter, it was all fairy stories.
This is what I want: for her not to be afraid.

So I can cut a straight, smooth line of bangs across her forehead, shaping it 'round the ears, never a nip, never the struggle. Not like my father's chair, sheet spread over the floor, his hands on my arms. His pleading: Be still, she's almost done. And my mother, snipping the ragged ends, her scissors so close to my eyes, their shadow was the only shadow I could see — I've stopped talking, and my daughter Looks up. Mama? Then what, Mama? I'm back in the old country and I'm telling how the roof was thatched, how the straw strands wove a roof so tight that no rain, not a drop, came in.
The past is like a sky
with slowly breaking clouds.
Occasionally, light shafts through.
Illumination is breaches,
random spotlights on odd things
that amaze me when they show up next.
What is that piece of plastic?
Where is that narrow road?
What does a tin soldier, paint peeling,
one arm missing, have to do
with the comings and goings of people?
What is that rolling in the waves...
shell or wood or beer can...
and which shore does it spill onto
and who's been walking on that shore?
Everything disappears quickly
without revealing more of itself.
The plastic's kicked by a shoe.
The road is swallowed by
the heavy wheels of a truck.
The tin soldier is dropped
into a box of many others.
The waves take back
what they so lately gave.
Everything's like that beach,
constantly wiping clean its footprints
as if that's the best way to preserve them.
Cannibals

PETER JOHNSON

Just try to find an interesting slab of meat. Instead, we make subtle incisions with stone knives of despair — later, recant like bears with mouthfuls of porcupine, whisper in post-prandial conversations.

There's something to be said for the honesty of cannibals, who, with nostrils cupping the wall set snares for thin-skinned neighbors, smack lips loudly instead of spreading nasty rumors. They know hunger hurts, that real game is always close by.
Love Poem

Peter Johnson

Her need to inspire suicide, for one thing. Move here, move there. Her car always breaking down. The day she shattered her hand on the steering wheel. The night she decapitated plastic chessmen, then walked manic at 2 a.m. in a neighborhood of bullets.

She hates men, loves men, "feels nineteen again," non-plused by men who abandon families for her.

Uh-oh, another crisis: trichinosis from the Chinese take-out, or maybe she's "just unlovable."

"Just five more minutes," she sighs. And they love her, want to pay her rent. "Just five more minutes," she sighs. And they love her, take her to the finest restaurants. "Just five more minutes," she sighs, her bed leaping up and down like a born-again Christian.
Not even Warhol, who changed so much,
could change his, and now
there's a museum there, unlike
for the rest of us who maybe
get only the plot of land we pay for,
or the entanglements of our lives
stretching from us like roots that take
an effort of will to kill if that's what we want
or maybe only deep breaths to grow, a mantra
of days flowing with the faces and streets we know,
the way overlays in an encyclopedia
reveal the bones and blood and lungs and finally,
piled one on top of another, the sum
of parts we have no choice but be.
Staple traces break the gate,
pacers whippet-light on
tough, supple legs. Overtures
and India eyes: roses float
in winter pools, and on
a horizon a red-clad rider
rises, a mystical illusion
of heat and desire. A pool
fed by a sub-Saharan stream
shrinks to an effaced nickel
on a shifting, almost golden
plate. Shades of tan: sand
man, land, camel, pommel
rubbed shiny with hand oil
and skin whorls, ridges
of subtle sandpaper. Books
of sand, ropes of paper.
Medjool dates in taut skins
dry a bit to rumpled roaches' wings.
Oh, Red Ryder and Little
Beaver, rescue me from
this empty land of tents,
forbidden cunts and moonlight.
Tonight I have acknowledged once and for all that my bones are nothing more than a roller coaster in a seedy amusement park, and whoever / whatever I am huddles inside its shadow.

The scaffolding creaks around me in the dark, yet even as I watch old newspapers and empty candy wrappers skip by like children on Halloween, I'm stirred by a sense of freedom I've never felt before.

To be imprisoned in the self is to identify all that is not me by all that is, much as a carpenter takes comfort as well as pleasure in seeing the structures he's built, although he doesn't own them.

Dark wind, you are as much my breath as the universe's. Let us hum a duet to celebrate the passing year.
the leaves have started to turn
shades of yellow and deep reds
come forth from the veins of each leaf.
hidden colors dawn
secret splendors emerge.

you are jumping
from one leaf pile
to the next,
scattering the order,
disturbing the groupings,
single leaves containing your whole world
shed for the greater

strewn pieces of the trees
remnants of who they used to be
coating the loam with commotion.
I never knew death
could be so colorful, kaleidoscopic
cyclic assurance.
Ticos killed off shoots on the trail
to keep their smaller Monte
Verde mouths from sampling the bare
legs of Yankees.

You were the green magnificence
a boy dreamed of watching
Sabu movies with licorice kids
in a balcony jungle.

At home I put the cat's omniscience,
hating the moon and padding
the famished house to savage decay—
redolent pillows.

Now the river I slaked my thirst in.
Trees in their hides of moss,
cascade voices, the echoes of Toltecs,
lovers of almond
and fig. Co-atyl had ruled my floor
and Quetz-al the ceiling. Gold
and green, sky in the coils of earth—
gods who have long since

put on scales again or feathers.
As though years of bloody
transcendence were always behind them,
hardly ahead still.
He paced down the boulevard with his head cast down like a keyless Houdini, his trembling right hand gripping a quaint, wooden box. The box had cracks in its lacquer, faded spots from its original burgundy color, and loose hinges for the attached lid, swaying in the wind. One of its legs was missing, and the others delicately trembled with each shake, each gust, each step.

The box creaked as he walked underneath a corroded sign that read Antique Shoppe. He jerked the door open. Dull, rust-infested iron bells tolled above, and he rasped his feet against the stairs that led him into the Shoppe. Upon entering he feebly lifted his head and gazed into the room. Unseen mites ravaged through layers of dust atop chipped chin, lifeless flowerpots, and decrepit sculptures. Cobwebs masked long forgotten copies of literature that clothed a ten-case bookshelf. And pervading all the clutter was a filthy darkness, only penetrated vaguely by old lamps.

And the clocks – they forced his eyes to widen and his hand's grips to intensify. Grandfather clocks towered over him. Some wall clocks hung motionless, while others swung their pendulums in cacophony. The man became dizzy, rotating in the center of the room as if affected by a mysterious force emanating from each clock. Stumbling over a stool, he came face-to-face with one of them. He saw himself in the glass, his eyes as bloodshot as the wine he had sipped earlier that morning. His heart squeezed itself in pain, and he knew...knew that he was on that pendulum, hanging on desperately, with his left hand clutching the shaft, his right hand almost releasing the wooden box with every sway, his feet slipping with every change of momentum. He sensed hell pursuing him from each rise and dip, and he shivered at its tenacity.
They gray-suited man shook out of his trance, approached the clerk standing behind the counter, and lay the box on the counter. He shot his eyes back and forth from the box to the clerk. He saw the clerk's face twitch, and heard him ask, "Is there something that you wanted, sir?"

As the man opened his mouth to answer, he again heard the clanging of the bells. The men's eyes quickly found their way to a young boy with an unshorn head of sand-colored hair and dressed in a green cotton shirt and a pair of blue jeans. The boy's head rose as he smiled, observing all the antiques, all the furniture, the carvings, the bookcase.

The man gave him a cold stare, only to hear a nasal-sounding "Hello" come from the boy.

The clerk quickly growled at the boy. "Enough of you already! Go home where your mom can feed you your daily dose of stupidity!"

"This damned deaf fool comes in every day, wanting books and other valuable antiques," the clerk explained to the man. "He's asked me many a time if he could clean up the place for a few little trinkets. I try to tell him it is fine the way it is and I'd rather not have him, but he obviously can't hear a word I say. The idiot keeps coming back!" He then paused, stared at the boy, and exclaimed, "I just wish he'd disappear."

The boy replied, "I can't disappear. It's not like you're Houdini. Even if you were, you couldn't do it, cuz Houdini can't do magic. When he went in the water locked up in that wooden box, his wife gave him a key. Without the key, he wouldn't be able to get out. He'd be trapped like anyone else. That's not magic ...how stupid." The child rambled on, but the gray-suited man ignored him. He was again in a trance, but now from the bells — they continued to hum, and he could do nothing.

"Sir, what ya doing here?" the boy asked the customer.

Immediately brought out of his daze, he stuttered, "I was just going to ask if this music box could be fixed."
"I'll see what I can do," the clerk replied. "If you could be so kind, could you make sure this kid doesn't break anything? I really don't want to start my day on a bad note." The man reluctantly dropped his hand to his side, leaving the box still on the counter. The clerk quickly seized it, hurried into a room.

The man, gazing at the clocks, returned his face to the child, saying, "I'm glad you can understand."

"I can understand lots of stuff," the child replied, as he let go of the man's hand and reached for a book. "I read this book, and all the others. I'm gonna be ten in two weeks you know. And guess what my mom says. She says that one day when I'm old enough, I'll know how to hear. I always wish I was old enough. Sometimes, when I go to sleep, I dream that I can hear everything, but when I wake up, I still can't hear." He stopped only to blow the dust off the book and place it back on the shelf. "Maybe one day, I'll wake up after dreaming of hearing and won't remember to stop hearing while I'm awake... Where did ya get that box anyways?"

"My mother gave it to me when I was a child," the man mumbled.

A lengthy moment of silence ensued. They both wandered through the dark room. Suddenly the man became aware of a fan above him, clicking with the clocks. Click, click, click... he shuddered. The child, following his eyes to the fan, spoke again.

"Hey mister? Have you heard a soul yet?"

"What?"

"Have you heard a soul?"

"Well, I don't think so."

"Cuz I can't see a soul, and I can't feel one with my hands or none. And I haven't tasted one, or smelt one either. So you have to be able to hear one. I can't wait till I hear, cuz then I'll be able to listen to my soul."
My mom says that I'll be able to hear soon enough. I want to play the flute, cuz my mom says it's so peaceful. She'll stay near the window for years just to hear the stuff outside, like birds and stuff. I see birds all the time, but they don't come near me. I think they want to be near someone who hears, but I can't. I don't mind though, my mom's always there for me anyway, and she loves to be next to me."

The man, trying to ignore the boy, picked up an old music box, opened it, glanced inside, and wound it. Before he could hear the music, he shut the box and placed it back on the shelf.

"Are you deaf or something," the boy asked.

"No, I'm not deaf."

"You are deaf, you can't even hear the music in the box. If you could, then why would you close it and put it away so quick?"

Sunlight broke through the sky, climbing over the town and reflecting against the room's dusty air, as the man sighted with impatience at the boy. The clerk suddenly entered the room and called the man to the counter.

"I'm so sorry, but I couldn't find out what the problem is. Here you go."

The man mournfully took the box with his right hand and thanked the clerk.

The boy then shouted to the clerk, "Ask him what it sounds like! Ask him what it sounds like!"

"That is not going to do anything! Why don't you just leave me alone and go home where your mama can teach you some manners," the clerk screamed, while the man furtively departed. Only the bells were able to notice, and they wished him well.

The door slammed shut, and the man suddenly stopped on the sidewalk. His eyes consumed his face, and he thought, "I don't remember
what it sounds like."

Disheartened, the man continued onward, his shaky hand holding the broken box. Trying to remember the music, he could only focus on the song that he heard earlier that morning. He recalled how the priest only said how she was dedicated to the parish. The man began thinking of what he would have said about his mother. But he hadn't the strength to speak. He remembered sipping the wine from the chalice. The wine had tasted bitter. He still had the taste in his mouth. He thought about how he left her coffin — he had slowly turned his head a few times while he walked out of the cemetery, thinking that a hand would reach over and rub his back, call him back. But no one was there.

The wind pushed against his back as he hiked towards his house. He lifted his head up towards the sun, and it reminded him of the dream he had the previous night... He was sitting underneath a shadeless sky. The sun burned him, somehow magnifying itself. Then he felt hail fall on his head. He ran away in agony only to find himself trapped by glass walls. He looked above him to find a small hole in the firmament from where the hail was falling. The sun continued to scorch his body as the hail began filling the dome. He took a hailstone and threw it at the hole, hoping to clog it. But the hail just kept falling. Shortly, his lower body was completely trapped beneath a mound. Screaming his last breath as the hail filled his mouth, his body awoke breathless, shaking vehemently.

His recollection ended, and he realized he was already at his door. Unlocking it and hurrying into his bedroom, he said aloud, "If I were really trapped, I would have broken the glass. Stupid dream," and shook it off. He felt tired, so he placed the box on his nightstand and lay in his bed. His dry eyes stared and the box, and he began thinking about the child at the store, wondering, "How could he hear in his dreams if he never heard before?" He dozed.

"Can you hear a soul... are you deaf... you are deaf... I can hear... when I sleep..."
His eyes opened to a terribly bright sky, and the sun pierced through his skin. He dropped his head in misery, looking at his tremulous hand as the hail began to fall once again. He feebly threw a hailstone at the glass, but it only bounced off and hit him in his chest. He winced in pain and fell in despair. He began to breathe slowly, his eyes ignoring the repressing havoc outside, focusing only on his shaking hand. "Only a dream," he said. But the hail continued to fall, and finally buried him.

He found himself in complete darkness. He could not feel his body. He could neither taste nor smell the air. But he could hear himself breathing, his heart beating, almost deafening him. He found himself completely senseless, except for his hearing. He heard himself breathing, his heart beating. His heart began pounding louder — it did not speed its pace, but its volume intensified, almost deafening him. He tried to run away, but could not feel his legs. He was his heart, his breathing, his ears. He was nothing else.

He suddenly heard a faint flute accompanying his heart. It caressed his ears for a time only to be joined by a piano, a set of violins, clarinet, and chelos. They all joined in pure harmony with each other. Then, he heard a soft voice singing, felt his body once again, and saw the ceiling open. He lay down, placing his trembling hand on his chest, his heart seeming to grab his hand with each beat, soothing it. And, crying, he closed his eyes.
Two Geese in a Man-Made Lake, mid-March

ELISABETH MURAWSKI

They dip and press
the water, gesture
with wing and neck,
doing this work
that is theirs to do.
Planless sailing,
no goal in sight
but today's
endless grooming,
a bit of green to eat
in a paradise
they never lost.

I am grateful
for the oil that holds
their bodies up.
For the joy
their swimming brings
at the advent

of the season
cruelst for its promise,
my spirits buoyed

by the grace
of these two
in watery pursuit

as if I had touched
the hem
of a healer's garment.
Flies hover around the golden pyramids
Of coconut flakes. Pastries in basketfuls,
Dark and indifferent. Dappled beans,
Sunset-hued mangoes, and whitefish
With dilated, silver-ash pupils. I walk through
Their market, not fathoming a word,
And I think to myself, this is why
I haven't dreamed in days:
The nexus of raw exchanges, the plucked,
The shored, the dried, and the cooked,
Either dead or alive. What have I brought
To trade with these? I am yet to admit
My appetite; I still haven't named my anxiety
To be touched, to melt, and to grow rancid
Mr. Sato slips into conversation with me
the way a petal drops from a cherry tree.
Mt. Yoshino has a fat waist girdled with three thousand cherry trees
according to him.
Am I just in feeling flattered?
It's a rare feeling even in spring,
and his fingers are moving like translucent white bait.
I like repeating his name Sato,
drunk on its unoriginal resonance;
I even like his watercolor face
on the verge of merging with the rest of the scenery.

Mr. Sato shows me how to prepare arrowroot jelly.
There are more Satos than all the blossoms put together
at Mt. Yoshino each spring,
but he is the Sato who makes arrowroot jelly.
I am not learning, not really—
I am busy thinking
I won't see New York again, even in a dream,
and how much sweeter my disposition will be once I become
Mrs. Sato,
how much more civil, my world. For the final touch now, Mr. Sato's hand lets float salted petals on the top of his jelly in the manner nondescript and slightly feminine.
Love is a Cigarette

Dan Noonan

Take it all out.
Anger, Fear, Frustration.
Light her on fire
and watch as she burns.
Kiss her gently,
let her in,
let her go,
repeat.
(She seems to like it)
Put her down.
Let her sit.
Let her think
about what she has done.
Watch as she wastes
away to nothing.

Her mind flakes away
with the games
she once played.
Off with her heart
and the pain it
has caused you.
Take one more taste
before putting her out.
Enjoy the last breath
and remember her essence.

Now, dip
her in water.
Hear the scream
as she gasps for breath.
Then walk away as
she floats,
Alone like you.
Fall

Danielle Pedi

To make words dance on air
In pirouettes of gold and red,
Stirring songs in the graceful glow
Of autumn moonlight overhead,
To be a gust, a breath, a breeze,
Capturing truth as it falls off trees
And carrying it in whispers,
Gusts, and whirls —
Drifts of light that crisply swirl,
Sweep, fly,
Fall and rise, rise and fall,
Burn and glow in fiery flight,
Thoughts in motion, keeping time,
Their music stirs,
Awakens night.

Yet, words fall heavy upon the cold ground,
And make dirty piles of brown.
Collect in sewer drains,
Soggy, sopping,
Making pains at wisdom.
Fall in clumps, dull lifeless words,
Tortured, trifling, half-absurd –
Are trampled below two left feet.
And the low moon shines her yellow teeth,
Casts her shadow on the page beneath,
Smiles her mocking grin
In smug silence.
Laughs at the staccato strain –
The revisions, imprecisions
That capture only the mundane.
So Buna means rubber.
The Nazis intended the prisoners of Buna make rubber, but it never happened. Liberation came too soon. A few chemists survived. A few procurers. Now I hear the word like a truncheon. Its sound a blow across my ear. A strap wrapped around the back of a large hand whacks me. But I am only dreading Buna hearing the blocked shrieks of the dead.
If inside this smell of honey and moss the rose is steeped in, there are tiny horns that blow a zig-zag into your wrist as you bring your hand down around the bloom to cup it up, and winding down the ball and socket of those small bones your own juice-mud slides in a salt stream of velvet laced with ammonia, and the rose is no less the rose, then it must be right for me stare from the window on the coldest night of the year and sound out the syllables of your name; round, lethal, distinguished. All this snow and compost, and the rose is no less the rose.
1.
Then summer was the leafing of the senses.
But we had no thorns flashing in the air,
Only the leafing, the senses.

What we needed were thorns against the skin
And fruit to fill our thoughts, a kind of heaven.
What we needed was summer in our thoughts.

2.
My friend, how did you know to weep
When it was right to weep and to laugh
When it was right to laugh?

How did you know? What did you feel
To find the joy stirring through rage,
Joy and rage, like sap in a wintery branch?

How, when the language means nothing,
Did you write sentences in the air?
How, when your heart, like our hearts,
Is no more than a scrap of blood and hope.
How is the autumn not lost to you,
Which you wear like skin, autumn like skin,

With shape and tint and odor, too, if music
Is like a skin and skin a kind
Of element, as autumn is?

There are days like unlit lamps that stand
Together, unused, never to be used.
To the waking brain come images

Of washrags, soap, and dripping mirrors,
Thin mornings that have no peaches in them,
No jokers in them, no breasts.

You knew what I wish to know:
Out of cold uncertainty came chords of deep consideration
And bacchanals to cheer the wineless heart.

3.
The air still reeked with the oils of summer.
Some would say that summer - vibratory -
Was still with us, our thoughts edged with leaves,

As if we needed thoughts to sound sensation through
And sensation to lessen the divine,
That we felt that summer was still with us,

Whereas in the present we inhale autumn air
And walk on autumn grass and feel the winter
Sliding up our bones. Yet it was what we needed,

To feel that summer was still with us, the desire
To mean – like pleasure in the hibiscus –
Beyond our choosing. Our need

Was for the green fable that is not autumn,
For the lightly clouded afternoons that fleshed
Our feelings in sticky air and the leaves of planted trees.

All day I was troubled by the ficus that fills
With calling birds at night and shapes the dreams that shape
My waking hours, troubled, troubled by beating wings.
Expression of the Parts
at the Griffith Observatory, Los Angeles

ERIC RAWSON

1.
The cable of the pendulum:
A plumb-line dropped into a pit

Around which edge of wooden pins
The orb describes our daily turn.

The thing's all swing, steadily ticking
Off the velocities of hours,

To rise and fall and rise again,
Through the stillness of the middle.

It makes an unmodern motion
Around the mind, this measurement

Of our descending nights and days —
Days and nights not yet as lonely

As they will be nor circumscribed
By summer sky and winter fields
(That is, memory and false hope)
But nonetheless descending, like

A spiral clockwise round a drain,
To the single empty moment.

2.
Christiaan Huygens, ill, bored, observed
The pendulums of two small clocks

Which, set closely on the mantel,
Through the subtle movements in the air,

Imperceptible vibrations
Exchanged along their common ground,

Began to swing symmetrically;
And symmetrically swinging paced

The rhythm of the room, tuning
The watcher's mind to new notions

Of ways to measure out the days
Than sun, moon, and stars had offered
In their complex Ptolemaic
Pinwheeling through remote heavens —

Many measures set together,
Each honoring the others like

The players in an orchestra
Honoring a mutual time.

When the sick man arose and placed
The second clock on a table —

Not far away but separate —
Their timing slowly fell apart.

3.
The principle that beats the heart,
Resolves each breath and stimulates

The tongue to speech is that which makes
Cicadas hum in matched pulses

Of stricken sound, and irritates
The muscles into forming gaits
(The gazelle's pronk, the elephant's
Thumping procedure, and the spring—
Taut leaping of the wallaby).
The fine expression of the parts,
The cooperative nature
Of body-ness, reflects a world
Itself.

The world was not a world
Without two minds to mind to it,
Unseen and unbelieved until
The coals first burned on human tongues;
And though beliefs evolve from grace
To grace through Newton, Babbage, Bohr
And Mandelbrot, whose instruments
Were made to measure music
Of the mathematical sky,
The coupling of the sun and moon

Still breeds a sense of passage, and

In the greyhound's graceful canter

Or the quick flash of pigeon winds

Quick eyes find meaningful movement.

4.

I groped from the cave of my birth,
Seeking the tangibles of sight.

Blind to distance and dimension,
I sought to know my limber bones,

Water's delicate temperament,
The weave of oak leaf and maple,

New physicals of adjectives,
Fat oranges on ice. When vision

Came to me, what sense could it make?
The autumn maple's red floated
From its form and oranges exchanged
Their prime astringency for globes

Of hue: habitues of three
Dimensions will turn sensation

Into memory.

I watched a moth

Maneuver through the rain on steps
Of air, in and out of danger,

Until one wingtip caught a drop
And she plunged to the black cement.

Perhaps you have known the feeling,
As a stranger in town or drunk

And carefully aware of steps,
The feeling of seeing clearly

Not clearly that keeps you moving
Constantly, constantly aware.
What I will see this next moment
Cannot be seen without those things

That I saw a moment ago;
What I will know I will not know

Without the things that I have known.
The pleasure in a woman's breath

Against the neck is the pleasure
Of the orange peel's sting and the green

Light of the palmetto in June.
I know this because I knew those.

5.

Outside the common accident
Of mover-moving, doer-done to

Is a meeting of bodies not
Of the quick-struck tuning-fork which

Touched to goblet makes it ring but
More as if the buzzing metal
Finds a sympathetic tremor
In the glass and both modulate

To mime a one-note melody.
But what is the song?

Our unformed
Selves one struck begin their motion,

Like two waves, out of phase at first,
Not harsh, merely incoherent;

Then discovering each other's
Tempo, might match the flowing self

Reflected in blood-haunted eyes
And the shifting mirrors of flesh,

Until an emerging cadence,
The common rise and fall and rise

Again, in time but beyond all
Consciousness of it, carries out
Its message. The message is: love.

6.
Since Creation the earth has turned
A trillion times; and if one could

Turn those cycling days to sound,
Which note would ring our histories?

Which part of us would harmonize
With that unwinding note of time?

In the Archeozoic seas
Where molecules first joined as genes,

Eurynome out of chaos
Sprang up as naked as a star

To dance the southern waves and coil
The northern wind into herself.

In each act of understanding,
In each act of attentive love,
Deep in our chemical essence,
Her memory comes dancing, forming
Through the love of the dance she is
The tides and time-zones of our lives,
As rhythmic as mimosa tips
Opening to the pull of moon.

How should we know to name the day
Without her ordering presence?

7.
On the riverbanks of Thailand
And Malaysia dense instinctual

Congregations of fireflies swarm
Through branches in the darkening air.

At the sunlight's last moment, one
Begins to blink, then a second;
A third and fourth take up the cues,
The click of little lantern lights
From those a blue distance away,
And match their tilt and timing

To the phosphoring frequency,
Joined now by thousands turning round

The center of gathering light,
Until, as night draws deeper, out

Of the random massive flashing
Comes unison, a sexual

Advertisment like stars against
The screen of night: strange synchrony.

8.
My thoughts are as plain as sparrows
On a thin, plain branch. My feelings

Are plain, plain as the rich red clay.
My life is as plain as an hour.

Propped at the railing of the pit,
My watching makes the world proceed;
And as I count the pendulum
Across, I feel whatever tugs

It tugging me. Swing on! Swing on!
Swing on and rock this world to sleep,

To rise, to sleep again, and pace
The passing years. Join my thoughts

To my tongue, my sight to my heart,
For faith in seen but speechless things,

To meet tomorrow properly.
It's a windy day, but the wind passes
Through the lemon trees without unhooking
A single shadow from its leaf: noonday,
The hummingbird's hour, the hour of cut grass.
A cat must be watching from a window.

On the lawn the sprinklers rise with a sharp
Breath, the water apparently absorbed
Into the light of the never-seen sun
Spilling like chardonnay on the aloe
Veras and the white wall.

The air imparts
To all it touches a frightening brightness:
A sense of joy: There's a striped rebozo
And a pair of sandals on the terrace:
Arranged by a divine hand! Uncertain
Flick-of-the-wrist flashes in the koi pond:
A koan, a psalm! Spine-straight paintbrush palms: Peace.

Everything seems (but nothing is) seamless,
The meeting of water and tile and leaf,
Of window and sky, my hand and your hand -

The dry, dry eucalyptus beckons us
To put down our lives and rest in the dust
Below it: The gray dust is beautiful
If not to be beautiful means not to
Be here. Here you are.
Still Life
ERIC RAWSON

1.
So many atmospheres
Surround the instruments of human life:

A flask, a biscuit tin,
A fluted pitcher or a bowl upon a plank
Can cling together "like frightened children
On a small flat earth," nothing out there

In the brownish, bottomless, monotonous air-fulness.
(Although, in fact, these things are themselves exactly.
If straight lines seem to waver, it is that
Even glass and tin give way to shifting
Vision and the urge to metaphor,
Like light on wind-stirred water.)

2.
The colors of the dusk
Of a shadeless lightbulb formed into a substance,
A solid substance, in the back room
In a city he could feel forming around him.
New habits came of habitat —
Gems inside a geode — bottle, table, window, wall
Repeated until they broke into a revelation
Of umber, white and mussel-blue,
The colors of an approaching dusk.
If it helps to believe it,
There is no light that is not real.
Baby breast fed when I was ten in the back room
I knocked and yes? And entered and saw ob jesus
I saw myself seeing myself, saying to myself as I had one
that was ten years away from my mother and wanted what?
Other or more? It was an unframed consciousness and uncut question
of language ob jesus I said with my teeth hidden before my hand
as the "primitives" do as laugh or curse or embarrassment —
stage fright of the loss of self before the succubus.
Big brother is a camera and little brother is a spectacle,
a held thing dandled. I spied with my little eye
(16 years before 1984) my birthright and what was expected
of me in the way of charity as if I were UNICEF.
Looking (and love) began at home and ended with what?
It felt like loss. It felt hilarious and sex-blessed desolate.
From Tuscaloosa west to Mississippi then north to Memphis through country as unmusical as I was unloved by the decorous ardor of the South and the voice of one whose recitative was evangelistas and tongues fictive, elusive, repulsive.

She didn't love my love like Shiva's everywhere and blue and many-handed, some with knives and some with billet-doux.

She wouldn't sacrifice the better judgement I'd want of her. Like stopped clocks, the geographic cure was true two times a day. All time else I was wrong and blued like the notes of the guitar, drum saxophoned songs I was receiving. I was a magnet wound around a steel coil – a Les Paul – the quavers I converted to an electric boil that simmered into myself, into the sweet, fry-oil air. I can be mortified anywhere, everywhere.
When Lennon and McCartney were thumbing through *The Portable "Nitz Ga"* for something Dionysian, I held the same book stuffed with contrabanded letters from an inmate at Lewisburg Federal to Richard Alpert, now Baba Ram Dass, begging for parole. Of the mind and the tongue, where does the music come from? And what need for music when mind and tongue were an OOOO? I was the youngblood Zarathustra, imperious to the Tommy whose job it was to pat me down, but I had the juju of the Catholic Chaplain's inscription on the book's edge and righteousness and in my head, "A Day in the Life" — the end, which felt like the apocalypse, at least that's what we alleged. And the letters went out and one came back like a confection laced with acid, a Napoleon, to be eaten at the empire's end. We put it on our tongues. It said, "The bars are in your head."
Remember, husband, cruising the old unspoiled
Keys? Water so clear it had no surface.
Wading in, up to our ankles, and pulling rock lobsters
out by their antennae, out of their hiding places, in a smoke of sand.
And gathering coconuts dropped from wild palms on beaches,
for the milk to make lobster chowder with chunks of
fresh coconut in it.

And the bottom fish coming up in a fan of glorious color,
shadowy indigo, lighted forest, points of bright purple and rosy ochre,
and those shifting iridescent patterns reflecting their light,
then dimming as they died, then our tanning them in butter
with white wine in the pan at their end.
Scented with crescents of key limes,
yellow as moons.

All on the deck of a square boat floating above aquariums of fish,
sponges and coral, laid out like gardens under the glass of the salty creek.
Or rushing away from the white roaring plume of ocean
thrown by the extravagant engines.
People tossed and caught their laughing children, on lawns after dark, while good dogs ran among them. The ill or old watched, smiling, from the porches or heard the carrying voices from their beds or chairs, through windows open to the deep air of those evenings.

And the kitchens, lighted and warm, fed us all until we slept and woke again to look from their high windows of old houses onto the tops and sides of elms that had lived always, and would live, always leafing out over the small town, hidden and still, in shade and prints of light from above the tallest branches.

The breath of Litchfield in summer was a mist of sad, slow leaving, when around the white wood houses, down in oceans of trees, there were again the lights of early evening and children on dark lawns, calling out to us like birds.
Borroto, Singer of Decimas Guajiras

Virgil Suarez

He sat on his special stool at Alvaro's garage, drank his beer, always lager, and played his guitar, sang the old Cuban tunes to the men who waited for their cars to get fixed. He sang them all the old standards like "Lagrimas Negras," "Volver," "Pintate los labios Maria," and the tip maker "Cuando Sali de Cuba." Also sones, rimas, and the decimas guajiras. He got drunk by the end of the day. His wife called the garage at 7 p.m. simply to let him know food was ready, but Borroto stayed on, drank and played, year after year. My parents moved from Los Angeles, my father got word about Borroto's illness, his quadruple bypass, the cirrhosis in his liver, but nothing changed, he still talked about his days.
in Cuba to the men at Alvaro's garage, sang them the tunes; then my father heard Borroto had stomach cancer, the feet of the intestines removed, had to be fed through a tube. My father always meant to call and say hello, but my father knew that he'd never catch him at home. My old man died two years ago. And when I ask my mother about their old friends in California, she tells me the same thing: Borroto's still alive, singing at Alvaro's garage, strumming his *decimas guajiras* and drinking lager.
During the day he worked as a sanitation engineer picking up trash in the distant, rich neighborhoods of Wilshire, Beverly Hills, and Westwood. Weekends he worked on his Chevy lowrider, out front where he argued with us because our stickball hit the pre-paint gray of his chassis. We called him "Chato" because of a birth defect which left his nose stuck to his upper lip, flattened, like a flap, and when he called us names, the words flew out of his nose instead of mouth – nasal angry words like "pinches," "pendejos," "putos," and "jotos."

Once he chased us down the street because he heard the Thunk! of the ball on the hood. He ran out of the house barefoot, caught us on the grass and spat on our faces. When we called him "vato loco," which made him proud to hear it before, he said, "you fucking gabachos," and put a fistful of grass in our mouths. "You hurt my carrucha"
again and I will really kick your ass." Then one day Chato got shot in a driveby and never came home.

His car rusted in the sun, out by the curb, where we hit it every time the ball flew. At night we dreamt Chato chased us down the street, driving behind the wheel of his freshly-painted Impala, his golden winged chariot, glowing, Chato smiling all the way.
Each Sunday after my father bought our first car, a 1965 Dodge Dart, in the United States, he took us, my mother and me, out of Los Angeles county.

At first we rode down the long streets like Florence, way East, passed Downey, Cerritos, Lakewood, and made it as far as Pomona and Chino, right to the entrance of the men's prison, which reminded my father of Boniato, El Morro, La Cabaña, Cuban equivalents, but for the dissidents not so much criminals.

All the way in Pomona we marveled at tomato fields, their redness clung to vines like swollen tongues, the bowed vines heavy in the dusty fields. We rode later on the freeway, when my father's driving skills improved, to place like Long Beach, Laguna, La Jolla, and one time all the way to San Diego where a new
zoo would be built. This was 1975, Nixon had resigned.

On the I-5 Freeway we sped north one Sunday
toward San Francisco, my mother's favorite city, she

said, though she'd never been there, but she loves

St. Francis of Assisi. My father wanted to go all the way,

but half-way through we grew hungry and we stopped

by the side of the freeway, under a shady tree, my mother

set up a blanket on the grassy incline and we picnicked

there, relished ham and cheese sandwiches my mother made.

We drank sodas to cool off. People drove by and waved,

my parents waved back. Trucks blew their horns.

We ate until the highway patrol arrived, the officer, red

in the face, approached us and asked us what we thought

we were doing. I translated what little English I knew

then into Spanish for my parents. *Qué hacemos aquí?*

"*Dile que paramos un rato,*" my father told me. "*Descansar.*"

I translated. The officer asked if we were Mexican. My father

Opened the cooler and showed the officer a cold can
of soda. No, not Mexican. Cubans. The officer looked for beer, then shrugged. You can't do this, he said, not here. Freeways are not for stopping to picnic. You have to move on.

My mother, nervous, started to pick up the blanket. My father put the cooler back in the trunk of the car. I watched the light squint off the officer's badge, his sun glasses, the fixed crooked smile on his face-uncomfortable. As we were getting in the car, he walked over to us, on my father's window and he bent over, eyed us one more time, then said in English to get the hell back to where we had come from—my father and mother didn't understand. They simply smiled and we drove off. Since they didn't ask what the officer had said, I didn't translate it, but years later I'm still puzzled by what I think that highway patrol officer really meant.
8:08 a.m. Ante meridian. Six more minutes – units of time measure, 60 seconds long each – before he had to leave. Five more nose hairs to trim, a comb-through of gel, and one last dab of Gucci after-shave. A few cuts, a flicker, a flash of gleaming goop before, with two fresh cotton balls, the final touch of after-shave was placed behind each ear, and Drew was ready to face the world.

He locked the apartment door and headed down the stairs. Fifty-eight stairs from the sixth floor to the lobby. Forty-seven seconds to travel them. Drew didn't look at the people walking past him going upstairs. He had to stay on schedule. Just last week, he stopped to tie his shoes on the stairs after a woman warned him to be careful not to trip. Drew thought he could afford the thirteen seconds – fifteen if he double knotted – but how wrong he was. Those seconds turned to minutes when he missed the "walk" signal on the corner of 8th Street and Avenue A. He had to wait for the signal to come back, and he ended up arriving at his bench in Central Park at 10:04 – two minutes after he was supposed to get there – and the whole venture was for naught.

Regardless of where Drew was going, he walked. It was the most reliable, least variable form of travel available to him. He hated public transportation. Hated it. All of the bodies – some more groomed than others – grazing and skimming, skimming and grazing past and around him, their sweet, sour smells commingling into a cloud of unpredicted virility. He never wanted to sit on the seats, for fear of the sheer multitude of other asses that had touched them. If he knew to whom they each belonged, it may have made a difference. But Drew was sadly aware that those sorts of details were well out of his reach.

Taxicabs were even worse. Of course, the risk of coming into physical proximity with another, most likely undesirable, human body was
greatly diminished, but the ass thing still held true. And with the cab, there was the driver issue. They were almost always members of the city's minority population, and they rarely knew English. But, more importantly, it was impossible to manage your time properly if you were dependent upon cabbies. They picked up whoever was yelling the loudest, had the longest arm, the best legs, whatever. Drew was not one to make a spectacle of himself. When he first moved into the city a few months before, he tried three times to take a taxi from his apartment to the bench. All three times he had resorted to walking in front of the moving taxicabs to get their attention. Still, he was invariably late arriving at his destination. After that, he decided that walking was the best way to go.

The only places Drew ever went were the Laundromat — Tuesdays, 4:17 a.m., before anyone else got there — the post office — Monday through Saturday at 12:35, after the window was closed, to pick up bills, the latest monthly installment of his inheritance, and his catalogues — and, on mornings like this one, his bench in Central Park. The bench rested along the West Side of the park, facing the street. From it, Drew could safely observe the people coming out of the subway at 81st Street. Every weekday, at exactly 10:06 a.m., the beautiful girl with the silky straight hair and big, bored eyes would emerge from the primordial sludge of the New York City subway system to grace the street. She looked just like the girl on the Gucci billboards near Times Square and in his Gucci catalogue, and Drew imagined that she smelled like its perfumed pages. He didn't want to know her, he didn't want to talk to her, and, despite the strange stirrings her image spurred, he didn't want to touch her. Instead, he simply sat and stared as her head appeared from underground and she traveled the sidewalk to her marble office building facing the park. Once she had disappeared into the building, Drew would begin the trip back home.

Today was a bright day. Sunny, a slight crispness to the air, a few clusters of cumulus clouds gliding across the piercing blue sky. Drew
checked his watch as he stepped out of his building and onto the pavement, turning left on 8th Street, going straight past the "walk" signal. He was on schedule. He continued, trekking through seas of people, weaving through crowds of businesspeople, students, and the conspicuously vagrant. Stride, stride, stride, stride, slip past, squeeze by, stride, stride, signal – stop, thirteen seconds – "walk," stride, stride, stride. Drew moved through streets and avenues, checking his watch with each block he passed, running the particulars of his route in his head as he went. Turn on 8th Street, walk through to 5th Avenue, merge onto Broadway at 34th Street, follow Broadway to 40th Street, duck over to 7th Avenue before hitting Times Square, and follow it straight into the park. Once he got to 7th Avenue, he was home free, in the home stretch, almost home – Drew checked his watch, patted his hair, and continued on.

It wasn't until he turned onto Broadway around 34th Street that Drew began to sense something was amiss. He knew the sidewalks always held the unavoidable crowds of people, but this was certainly something different. There were mobs of people, masses of them, in all different sizes, shapes, colors and clothing, clogging the sidewalk with their bodies. None of them were moving, and they were all looking out into the street, where nothing was happening – no cars, no people save numerous police officers with their cruisers nearby. The crowd's anticipation hung sticky sweet in the air, wafting into Drew's nostrils and hitting his head with devastating thickness. He began to become very aware of his pulse points, the blood that ran through each of them rushing in warm spurts underneath his skin. He started to sweat. This was going to be a problem. He still had 32 blocks to go before arriving at the park and he was losing precious time standing here thinking. Already in jeopardy of missing the next "walk" signal, Drew made a quick decision. He needed to press on. He had to press on.

And press on he did, past the seas of sardine-packed construction workers and nursing mothers and runny-nosed children. Cacophonous
music started to dimly filter into Drew's ears, and the mob began to buzz. Fat and spindly limbs, flat and frizzy hair—some smelling of rose shampoo, some of old tobacco, some of stale fish—all came at him with their unwitting claws, pushing him into themselves and each other, swirling him around in a sea of uniform chaos. Drew ran his unsteady fingers through his moist gelled hair, attempting to put the strands back into place. But with each attempt, he was yet again sidled into another fleshy obstacle, sandwiched amidst the swooning sway of skin and smells. And he was losing time. A lot of time. Infinite number of seconds escaping his grasp, floating just past his eyes. He looked off at the Gucci girls perfect skin and jaded gait plastered on her billboard and could almost sense the sign for 40th past the thousands of eyes and hands and breasts that stood between him and it. It was there, dimly inspiring him to continue through the swarms of pheromones and blaring music that he was drowning in. The crowd was getting thicker; the music was getting louder. Two more blocks, and turn—into the empty street, past the policemen, through one more crowded sidewalk, and run. He could make it. He could make it. He could...

As Drew looked off into the distance, something caught his eye. It was floating into view from behind the curve of Broadway, a hint of red and orange. When the crowd spotted it, they went collectively mad, shouting and flashing cameras and clinging to each other in excitement. Drew watched the thing's puckered, blimpish form as it loomed into view, casting shadows over Broadway. Strings attached it to a large cart-type unit that was bringing it down the street. As it moved, another one began to come into view, followed by yet another. Drew stared at the strange nylon monsters, gliding with slow, steady fatness down the street and closer to where Drew was, closer to 40th Street.

He had to act quickly. Faster, faster he walked toward 40th Street. He had to beat the floating monsters at their own game. He had to get there first. Drew attempted to run, but it was an ineffective venture at best. He kept stumbling on stroller wheels and feet and walkers, kept
veering off the straight-line path. The floats were getting closer. Within minutes — no seconds — he would be overcome, trapped like a bird in a cage, a mouse in a trap, a fly underneath a swatter. The faster Drew moved, the more ineffectual his movements became, and the harder it was for him to slice through the collective mass of the crowd. The floats were between 41st and 42nd now, lumbering steadily on, their garish symphonies being injected into the air through big, black speakers, and the crowd was beginning to swell. Drew continued on, sweating through his white T-shirt, blue oxford, blue jacket. All he could see was the advancing red and orange, the street sign, and the empty street.

Drew was almost there when he tripped, fell, and picked himself up in just enough time to see the float reach the intersection. Thirteen steps before reaching the corner of 40th, Drew bolted into the crowd, punching and scraping and screaming to get through. Adults began to gasp. Children began to cry. A few people tried to grab him, ripping his shirt. A man shouted to one of the policemen to arrest the crazy man. Drew was hardly aware of these sounds. His senses were choked with horrorshow music, colors, and the stench of people, grime, and sausage vendors. He needed crisp air and clean beauty, and he was almost there. As he shoved the last old woman out of his way, two policemen grabbed him by the arms. He fought against the pressure they were exerting on his forearms, jerking back and forth, trying to break free. The pressure increased, and Drew kicked one of the policemen in the knees. He cursed, and his partner asked Drew something about that being the way he wanted to play the game. Before Drew could answer, the two policemen had wrestled him to the pavement, slamming his wrists against the ground and putting them in handcuffs.

The policemen whisked him kicking and screaming into one of their cars, driving him back down Broadway. Drew twisted around in his seat until he could see the oranges and reds gliding toward him. He watched as they slowly lost themselves behind the speeding police car and the Times Square billboards came into view. There was his catalogue girl,
gazing through the glass of the windshield and right through Drew, and
he was struck with a wild hope that maybe he could still make it to the
park. Drew twisted his wrist to look at his watch and gasped. Underneath
the chrome of his handcuffs, he could see the shattered
glass of its face, its gold hands hanging limply behind the splintered
shards. As he watched the Gucci girl get smaller and smaller, Drew
ripped the broken watch off his wrist and began to cry.
I don't know why I never said anything. Maybe it was because everything happened so fast and ended even faster than it had started. It was all so quick and so painful and I don't even know if I lived it. Maybe it was all a bad dream. Sometimes I think if it could have been different but I only get lost in my silence. Always silence.

I didn't say anything when the signs were posted on the door of my home, when they followed my wife home just to see where she lived, or when they smashed the windows of my home in the middle of the night. I didn't say anything when we hid next door at our neighbors as they invaded my home, and took all our belongings. Nothing but silence.

I didn't speak up when we were told to pack up one bag of clothing and forced to leave our homes. It was the last time I was to walk with my whole family. I didn't speak up when they told us to walk to the train station and I still said nothing when they grabbed my wife and my daughter. My heart dropped and I held my son tight, but I said nothing. They shoved me in a train with my son filled with hundreds of other men and children. I didn't speak up when they closed the doors shut and the cramped room started to vibrate. The screams of my wife outside roared louder than the engine.

The train ride was cramped and long in duration. I held my son and I could have spoke to him and told him to stay strong. I could have told him I would not leave his side, ever. I was cold and I tried not to shake. I saw a man crying on his son's shoulder. I saw another man defecating in the corner. My legs were cramped and my back was pressed hard against the back of the car. My son was shaking and he had his face in his hands. I could have talked to him and told him that it was going to be alright but they would have told me to "keep it down in there." So, I
remained silent.

I remained silent for the entire train ride. I remained silent when we arrived at Buchenwald, when they gave me my new name, A-3949. I remained silent when they stripped me naked in front of everyone and laughed at me. I didn't say anything when they finished mocking my cold naked body, when they hosed me with disinfectant chemicals, treating me as if I were a disease. I saw my son again, in the same cellblock as me. His new name is G-3298. We both saw each other with our heads shaved and I could only cry. When they weren't looking, I could have whispered then, in his ear, "be strong." But there was no heart behind what I could have said because my heart had gone numb when she was screaming louder than the train engine.

I didn't say anything when we had to work together in the SS housing area at Klein-Obringen, where we were beaten daily, when we had to carry heavy tree trunks in to camp. I didn't look when one of the tree trunks rolled over one of the workers and crushed his spine and rib cage. I couldn't help him, because my heart was still numb. I did not want any more beatings.

I didn't speak up when my son and I had to run in line with our inmates. I didn't speak up when he couldn't keep up with all of the others, when he dropped right next to me and I couldn't pick him up. I could not see them grab his arms and pull him up against a tree, when they whipped him with the butt end of the rifle, and shoved metal in his face. I could not see them bang his bloody face against the tree or the tears coming from his eyes. I could not see his body fall to the ground. He had the silence then.

But I saw it all. I didn't say anything when I kept running and heard the gunshots that ended my son. I remained silent because everything was gone. All of my insides had left me. My insides were gone. They were with my son at the tree, with his silence. I became a walking corpse because I no longer cared, and I no longer had any emotions, or
The Vision of St. Hubert

Jim Baker
Untitled

KAITLIN LONGMIRE
Untitled

NICOLE BOURGEA
Untitled

Laurie Driscoll.
Untitled

PATRICK LANDRY
Babar

LYNN CURTIS
any insides. I was a hollow cavity. I still didn't say anything.

Silence is gray.

I slept in an empty bed that night without my son. I couldn't cry. I didn't have any appetite because my stomach was gone. I didn't see the horrors anymore because my eyes could no longer function. I couldn't talk anymore because I no longer had a voice. A voice I never used, a voice I chose not to use. I remained silent.

I knew it was over, I couldn't stay any longer. I could not endure. I was not among the strong who could stand the suffering. I couldn't stay in the bed, in the cell, in the camp. I couldn't remain silent in my actions. Everything had been robbed of me. I would no longer be silent. I never used my mouth before. Now I would act. I would leave. I had a chance before and I almost broke the silence, but fear had gripped my throat and forced it closed. I no longer had any fear because I no longer had a heart. I knew I had to leave. I got up from my bed, and did not say goodbye to anyone, because there was no one to say goodbye to. No one cared. They were silent too.

I walked out the door and couldn't see the snow on the ground, couldn't feel how cold it was. I couldn't see the cold air come from my mouth because my mouth didn't work and my eyes couldn't see it. I could only see the sky. It was gray like the silence.

I walked on and then started to run. I didn't see the guard dogs chasing me, the soldiers ahead of me with their guns drawn. I had no fear anymore. I didn't feel the guard dogs drag me to the ground because I couldn't feel anything anymore. Everything was numb. I didn't scream. I felt my son's tears falling from my eyes.

I didn't see the SS guards rush onto me with their high black boots with metal tips, and stomp my face in to the cold snow. I couldn't feel the dogs ripping my legs to shreds. I couldn't see the butt of the rifles hit me in the face. I couldn't scream in terror because my mouth didn't
work. But no fear. Just silence.

I couldn't see the bright flashes of the SS machine guns because my eyes still didn't work. My wife screamed louder than the machine guns. I didn't feel the bullets rip through me because I was hollow and I couldn't feel them. They shot through nothing because all my insides had already died and they all went right through me. I didn't feel them drag my battered shell through the snow because I was already out of it. Nothing worked anymore; I was already broken. I had already died when they tossed my body into a mass grave among millions, my son at the bottom somewhere. Somewhere maybe not even this pile, but I couldn't see anything anyways. It didn't matter. Just silence.

When it was over the dirt was thrown over and no one said anything because they had the silence too. Everyone had the silence. They had the silence and no one could talk about it. They all had the awful silence.

The war ended and everyone had the silence. The silence has closed the throats of all the neighboring towns and all the witnesses to the death factories. The silence has shut the eyes of the people who knew about it, but didn't say anything because of the silence.

When it was all over, the guilty had all escaped the punishments of their crimes. They had all escaped the torture that all the victims had gone through. My story has ended. But my silence lives on. My silence tortures them when they cannot sleep at night. My silence is gray in the sky. My silence echoes in their heads when their conscience has overpowered the propaganda. My silence is remembrance, my silence is hell, my silence is revenge. My silence, their silence, our silence. Never-ending, dead silence.
I marveled tears as

a dark image effigies

you in a void room
Jamie Anselmo is a junior at Providence College.

Joanne Argento was born in Worcester, Massachusetts and received a bachelor's degree in journalism from Boston University and a master's from The Writing Seminars at John Hopkins University. She now lives in New York City with her husband, the painter Slobodan Trajkovic.

Jim Baker is a professor in the Art Department at Providence College.

R.J.G. Bakewell is a recent graduate in accounting and finance and has studied abroad. This is his second publication.

Nicole Bourgea is a Studio Art major at Providence College with a Philosophy minor. Her most recent show was at the Yellow Barn Gallery, Washington, D.C.

Gwendolyn Brassard is a senior Psychology major at Providence College with minors in Biology and Writing. She has been accepted for graduate study at Catholic University in Washington, DC. This is her first publication.

Gaylord Brewer is an associate professor at Middle Tennessee State University, where he founded and edits Poems & Plays. His most recent book of poems is Devilfish (Red Hen, 1999).
Charles Edward Brooks was born in North Carolina and took degrees at Guilford College and Duke University. Following his qualification as an actuary, he went on to do a doctorate at the University of Lausanne in Switzerland. In addition to translations, his literary output includes novels, novellas and especially short stories which have appeared (or are scheduled to appear) in magazines such as *Aim Magazine, Distillery, Eureka Literary Magazine, Grasslands Review, Leaf Curve, Lynx Eye, The MacGuffin, Medicinal Purposes, Orange Willow Review, Owen Wister Review, Pacific Review, Pangolin Papers, Parting Gifts, RE:AL, The South Carolina Review, and Wellspring*. He was a finalist in the Writers' Workshop International Fiction Contest (1998). He now divides the year between Zurich and a village in the mountains of northern Portugal.

Jocelyn Coalter is a junior at Providence College.

Leonard Cochrane is an Associate Professor of Humanities at Providence College. His poems have appeared in *America, Atlantic Monthly*, and *The Formalist*. He is also the winner of the 1999 Foley Award for Poetry from America.

Lynn Curtis is a professor of Art at Providence College.

Brian Cushing is a senior English major at Providence College.

Brian Daley is a senior History major at Providence College with a minor in Writing.

Talia Danesi has packed her trunk and said goodbye to the circus.
Laurie Driscoll is a sophomore at Providence College.

Gary Duehr received an NEA Poetry Fellowship in 2001. His previous books of poetry are *Winter Light* from Four Way Books and *Where Everyone is Going To* from St. Andrews College Press. He lives in Boston where he is a photographer, visual arts critic, and co-director of the Invisible Cities Group performance company.

Neal Ferreira is a junior Music major and Black Studies minor at Providence College. His life aspiration is to be a starving artist... really.

Patrick Ferrucci is a senior Sociology major at Providence College. He does a lot of things... writing poetry being one of them. This is his first time published.


Todd S. Gernes is the Director of Writing at Providence College, where he teaches courses on the essay, creative nonfiction, and peer tutoring. His essays and reviews have appeared in *The Winterthur Portfolio, MELUS, New England Quarterly*, and *Black American Literature Forum*. His essay, "Recasting the Culture of Ephemera," is forthcoming (June 2001) in John Trimbur, ed., *Popular Literacy: Studies in Cultural Practices and Poetics* (University of Pittsburg Press). He is presently at work on a cultural biography of visionary artist Charles Walter Stetson and his circle in nineteenth-century Providence.
JoLee Gibbons lives in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, with her daughter Rebecca. She teaches college writing at the University of Alabama where she recently graduated from the M.F.A. program in creative writing. She has poems forthcoming in The Spoon River Poetry Review. Her work has appeared in the Hampden-Sydney Poetry Review.

Amanda Glenn is a senior English major at the University of Maine.

John Grey is an Australian born poet, playwright, and musician. His work has recently appeared in Two Rivers Review, Apostrophe and Potpourri, and is upcoming in Pacific Coast Journal and South Carolina Review.


Mike Kane is an executive director of a community foundation in Pennsylvania. He recently has had poems appear in Phoebe, White Pelican Review, and others. He can be e-mailed at palliser@lenxlink.net

Patrick Landry is a recent graduate of Providence College.

Thomas David Lisk's fiction, poems, and essays have appeared in many little magazines and newspapers. His most recent work has appeared or is forthcoming in Apalachee Review, Arts and Letters, Boston Review, Boulevard, LIT, Spoon River Poetry Review, and Painted Bride Quarterly. A collection of his poems, A Short History of Pens Since the French Revolution, was published by Apalachee Press.
Kaitlin Longmire is a junior Studio Art major and Art History minor at Providence College.


Katie McAllister is a junior at Providence College.

Edward McCrorie has been a professor in the English Department at Providence College since 1964 and now lives in Rhode Island and New York with his wife, the psychoanalyst and infant researcher, Beatrice Beebe. Work in progress includes a translation of Homer's Iliad, a third book of poems called *Love Life*, and a new theory of poetry based on its origins in very early childhood.

T.J. Moretti is a senior English major at Providence College. After graduation, he hopes to pursue a MA in Literature. However, his only true ambition is to write well. He hopes to learn to juggle both while maintaining peace of mind in the midst of it all.

Cuban-American Childhood and Cafe Nostalgia: Writings from the Hyphen, chronicle his life of exile in both Cuba and the United States. He is also the author of four collections of poetry, including Palm Crows, forthcoming this year from the University of Arizona Press in its prestigious "Camino del Sol" Series. Along with editing various poetry anthologies, he wrote the film script The End of the Game for Leon Ichaso, a Cuban-American director, and has adapted several of his novels into scripts. His essays, stories, poems, and translations continue to appear both nationally and internationally in diverse journals and reviews. He divides his time between Miami and Tallahassee where he lives with his family, and is currently at work on his new novel Sonny Manteca's Blues, and a new collection of poems.

Jess Tabak is a senior English/Theater major who likes long walks on the beach, candle lit dinners, and evenings by the fireplace.

Ralph Tavares Jr. is a Senior at Providence College. He is an English major looking to find a career in communications/public relations. He also is a member of Special Guest, the male acapella group on campus, the General Manager of 91.3 WDOM, a third year resident assistant, and a Martin Luther King Jr. Scholarship recipient.

Sheree Thornton is a senior English major at Providence College. She has aspirations of starting her own sports magazine. This is her first publication.
JAMIE ANSELMO
JOANNE ARGENTO
R.J.G. BAKEWELL
KRISTIN BERKEY-ABBOTT
GAYLORD BREWER
GWENDOLYN BRASSARD
CHARLES EDWARD BROOKS
JOCELYN COALTER
LEONARD COCHRAN
BRIAN J. CUSHING
BRIAN DAILY
TALIA DANESI
JENNIFER DAVIS
GARY DUEHR
NEAL FERREIRA
PAT FERRUCCI
CAROLINE FINKELSTEIN
TODD GERNES
AMANDA GLENN
JOLEE GIBBONS
JOHN GREY
PETER JOHNSON
MIKE KANE
THOMAS DAVID LISK
MORTON MARCUS

KATIE MCALLISTER
TED MCCORRIE
T.J. MORETTI
ELISABETH MURAWSKI
MIHO NONAKA
DAN NOONAN
DANIELLE PEDI
JANE LUNIN PEREL
ERIC RAWSON
BRUCE SMITH
JUDY SPOCK
VIRGIL SUAREZ
JESS TABAK
RALPH TAVARES, JR.
SHEREE THORNTON
JIM BAKER
KAITLYN LONGMIRE
LYNN CURTIS
NICOLE BOURGEA
LAURIE DRISCOLL
MOLLY NARLOCH
PATRICK LANDRY