

# THE ALEMBIC

## 2006



THE ALEMBIC  
2006



**PROVIDENCE COLLEGE**  
**THE ALEMBIC**  
**2006**

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## EDITORS' NOTE

Not shockingly enough, the most popular concern circulating amongst readers and non-readers is that nobody actually knows what an alembic is. Let us ignore the first, rather non-helpful, definition of an alembic – ‘an apparatus consisting of two vessels connected by a tube’ – and move on to the second, more metaphor friendly version – ‘A device that purifies or alters by a process comparable to distillation.’ Ah, says the reader. I get it.

Once understood, the word can offer the reader a beautiful lens to color the works inside *The Alembic*. As T.S. Eliot wrote:

You cannot say, or guess, for you know only  
a heap of broken images, where the sun beats.

So here are our broken images, broken moments, and broken truths that together present a cohesive reality in its most pure form. Each individual poem and story captures a glimpse into a moment's honesty that could not otherwise exist unless expressed by the language of these artists. And for us, that is writing in its finest form: a voice for the unspeakable.

We would like to dedicate this issue of *The Alembic* to Jason Stumpf. It was his first year as *Alembic* advisor, so we had a lot of fun figuring things out together. Jason's hard work, sense of humor and encouragement of our creativity helped us to put together a journal that makes us all happy. Jason, thanks for everything!

– Alison Espach, Ashley Laferriere,  
Caitlin Murphy & Emily Reynolds





Nick Admussen

*Her Shift*

If she had clothing her father  
had never seen she would wear it  
in her own place like a film of water  
over her breasts, the nipples outlined  
proudly outside his imagination.  
It would make her body an image  
with the smooth lines of fiction,  
one set on a train with strangers

and the train never stops and the destinations  
and origins are irrelevant.  
She is not moving away from or toward  
her father or the world. A stranger  
like nightfall eases toward her. He kisses  
the hem of the film of her garment.

Taylor Altman

*Cityscapes*

I. After Sunset

Across Industrial Way the moon breaks through its aureole of frost.

He sits at his desk, watching light after light go out in the next building. Before long, it loses its separateness and dissolves into night.

II. Dawn

The trucks come before the people, a whisper of wheels catching on smog. Artists open their shops, arrange their canvases in still-blue windows.

Then, a clangor of fire alarms in Topanga Canyon. Nothing is safe.

On her way to the job center she pawns her grandmother's ring. The money is enough to run the air conditioner for two more months.

III. Midday

Silence in the central tumulus of the hotel. Ten minutes before checkout, he leans over the indoor pool, troubling it with his touch. Surface tension holds his fingertips to the luminous skin of the water.

At rest on the drain, the ring he dropped this morning. If he goes after it now, he will miss his flight home. He imagines how the next swimmer will find it, slip it on, leave for some other city.

## Taylor Altman

*When Death Comes to Tampa*

People die. This is what happens everyday  
 behind the silkscreen of the ordinary,  
 in quiet, residential neighborhoods  
 where cars pull in and out of driveways  
 on quiet engines, and little girls dance  
 barefoot in the St. Augustine grass,  
 still in their leotards after their mothers

have picked them up from ballet class.  
 Death comes to the little boys on their  
 bicycles, the ones who ride down to  
 the culvert and poke the dead man, face-  
 down in the water, with a stripped branch.  
 Death whispers to these boys, comes  
 close, closer, a voice like an exhalation

from the two dead lips they cannot see.  
*There is a tribe in East Africa that believes  
 in several stages of death: dead, very dead,  
 completely dead. I am the latter.* This is  
 what the dead man says to them. But it is  
 Death speaking now, not the man. He is  
 no longer a man but a mouthpiece of

a sentence misplaced. There are some places,  
 though, where death is pleasant, even fragrant,  
 in the lost islands where the mild-eyed  
 Virgin leans in on the dying as they lay  
 on their white-sheeted cots in the heat of  
 the day—rows of cots in a palm wood hospital,  
 where, through the slats of the shutters, they

watch the lantern moon rise from the drench  
 of the bay. The bell tower rings once, calling  
 back lost souls. The Virgin, mistress of the  
 afternoon, shares one face with Night's queen  
 and leans in on the dying to whisper:  
*No word that I use is not also yours.*  
 The far-off gas lamps sputter out.

Rebecca Aronson

*West*

Across the road a yellow Bobcat  
    chews a ragged border of mud along the field.  
    My boot treads slick against asphalt,  
    I slide too near a speeding hotrod—farm boys  
in a patch-job coupe shaking off a day of steering slow tractors  
    in straight lines, reddened arms loose in the windows, a beer  
    already cradled between stiff-jeaned knees.  
I only imagine these boys.

Is Spring this symphony of mowers  
    roaring in overlap, overriding the robins  
    perched everywhere in the damp grass  
    masticating like tiny cows?

After rain there are earthworms  
    wriggling on the sunroom floor. They must tunnel in  
    at the borders. My husband warns me, *we've got worms, honey*,  
    and I laugh until I see them, maybe thirty,  
wet bodies glistening as they shimmy  
    from the corners. Even the cat, momentarily fascinated,  
    soon puts her ears back and tiptoes away.

Outside, the bell-tower unspools its carnival rendition  
    of *Frère Jacques*, so I know it's either Sunday or noon.  
    Grasshoppers fly up at every step  
    like popping corn.  
Everything is just a guess.

Look, the mounds of shiny mud have already paled:  
    dirt giving itself to the prairie  
then riding west on the backs of whatever moves.

## Barry Ballard

*Filament*

The crows above the forest call,  
 To-morrow they may form and go.  
 O hushed October morning mild,  
 Begin the hours of this day slow.

Robert Frost, "October"

You stand there watching a single tree limb  
 etching across the pale sky like a wired  
 filament inside the bulb of heaven. Slim  
 chance that it will wash over everything, the tired  
 retreating shadows holding too much fear. Let  
 the wind of chance alter it, and what will  
 that prove? Both the appeal of its greening scent  
 and the barren stone-like moan echo like the shrill

of the Eternal inside us, one octave  
 above our narrow written lines. And though  
 we stammer like crows among the diseased  
 trees (destined to be diseased), we forgive  
 the failure in the mirror facing us, glow with  
 hope from nothing else, but songs among the leaves.

Jackie Bartley

*Sirocco*

Last night, the almond outside our window  
shed its fruit, the pods like furry cloaks  
unfastening to reveal the hard shells below,

pale and stippled. Stubborn now as we coax  
the soft nutmeat from each tiny cell.  
How their dense armor mesh pokes

and numbs the skin under our fingernails.  
Yet we welcome the work for its promise, sweet  
taste of almonds fresh from the tree that quells

the hunger for something besides bread or meat.  
This craving strong as winds that rise from the desert  
and tumble through the whole of Italy,

signaling summer's end. Winds that kept us alert  
all night in our bed, that wrapped at windows, doors,  
counterpoint to the beat of our own moist hearts.

Jackie Bartley

*Rome in Rain*

The marble stairs glisten in quicksilver light  
as we enter Santa Maria della Vittoria  
where, Cupid's golden arrow aimed at her heart,  
Bernini's Teresa writhes in ecstasy,  
her white robes the only light in apse or nave,  
the whole church dark as a catacomb.

Back outside, in a dimly-lighted doorway,  
a fair-skinned, red-haired girl in a gypsy skirt  
crouches, nursing an infant. Her face glows,  
a rosy, translucent marble. Down the street,  
a carabinieri, young as the girl madonna,  
cradles a submachine gun in his arms.  
All flesh numinous, each face lighted  
from within, compass of the divine.



Claire Becker

*Boar's Ears*

Your t-shirt is paint-  
splattered & holey.  
Somewhere beside my thigh.  
Middle of the lunch  
rush. I fill your glass.  
You (by my thigh) are  
thinking waitresses  
are nincompoops or poets.

\*

I write myself  
a postcard-sized poem.  
On the back it says *Goodbye!*  
*You have left the poem.*  
I lie. I am in it,  
escaping the restaurant  
pictured (est. 1949).

\*

Imagine I'm imagining  
something like whatever  
is thought untimely—  
the walls are melting;  
wool is felting; boar's ears—  
& there you are (you with  
the arm) with your arm waving.

\*

A t-shirt smells like  
a girl looking like  
a waitress thinking  
my plant grows  
too fast when I water it.  
Have you decided,  
you by my thigh?  
Have you decided?

Claire Becker

*Untoward*

On the bus to the ferry to the clambake,  
a woman has a purse full

of cinnamon balls, and I don't  
know what they taste like.

I see a sugar truck parked outside  
a cookie factory. I should copyright

that fact, sell it to make kids happy.  
A boy is saying, "¿Hablas español?!"

That's quite a discovery!" Ugly  
ceiling sections are *insoportable*.

A long, boring story in the boring,  
long tradition of notebooks and stone walls

and spoiled dogs barking on the boat.  
It's their vacation. Quiet down

for the tight bay air. Sootier people  
here. Three young people are a family.

They don't need the story  
I'm writing them. They may enjoy

ambition, failure. If a minute  
can remember an hour,

we have more time. A stoner story  
might be kind of a list story.

Powder; short senator;  
squash rotting to scary. I want

to trick you about the ferry.  
The journey's plastic, hot vapor

turns to vapid in your blood.  
Untoward is a word. I never use it.

I lay my head back on the chair  
and close my eyes during the hot part

of the day. In here, jittery  
and real empathy for falseness.

I suggest it thought by thought,  
my own emotional register:

alive with responsibility  
to stability, able to bury ships.

Doug Bolling

*Questions*

In night on the plains  
or ocean

time no longer shrinks  
to the size  
of a clock.

Gulls and owls watch from  
their chocolate silence  
saying little.

What is the point of words  
here where the boulders  
of your past refuse  
to surrender.

How high can you climb  
on the ladder of  
desire.

It was supposed to be different,  
the clouds spilling their  
secret wisdoms  
to the cupped  
hands,

the stalks of memory  
weaving a satisfactory  
temple for all  
those years  
ahead.

## Lindsay Burton

*My Mother's Story*

Her face was black when I found her.

I called 911 and then I smoked cigarettes on her front porch, counting the wrinkles in the faux-grass carpet as if they were beads on an abacus, shifting colored wooden spheres of perilous gloom from the foreground to the background of my head. People in heavy uniforms rushed in and out, banging against me like pin balls as they darted through the front door. I told them, "She is my mother."

She was face-down when I walked in, in front of her faded-blue recliner. Her arms were by her side. It was as if she were a tree that had been cut down. Flat. Solid. No sign of trying to catch herself.

A policeman startled me, tapping my shoulder from behind. I jumped like a dog awakened from a dream. He said, "See, she was dead before she hit the ground." I sucked on a cigarette, compulsively flicking the ash with a vibrating rhythm that knocked the cherry onto the porch's carpeting. He said slowly, as if timing each word to the dull metronome of empty condolences, "She never knew what hit her."

A yellow paramedic approached. He looked to the policeman and said, "Heart attack, most likely."

The paramedic then turned to me, taking off his hat and repeating his diagnosis. He asked if I was okay. He put his arm around my back. I shrugged it off. Examining the chipping nail polish on my fingers, I answered, "Of course I'm not." My voice carried the quality of an echo in a metal pot.

I had told her I would write her story, just weeks before, after Jeff left. I had told her that this would be the story that made it into one of those magazines. Now, with not even a line begun, she lay as dead as the piles of crumpled manuscripts in the corner of my bedroom.

Looking at my stomach as if it were a piece of fruit in the produce aisle, the paramedic asked, "So, when are you due?"

I flicked my cigarette into the street, watching its comet-like arch toward explosion on the asphalt. As the last live ember hit the ground, I tried to pre-compose the opening lines to my mother's story.

I asked the paramedic, "But why is her face so *black*?"

He explained to me that she had probably been lying on her stomach all night. He said all the still blood had pooled under the weight of gravity, gathering, grouping into a dark internal bruise mask.

He said, "She didn't feel a thing."

I rubbed my stretched belly, counting the petals on a flower on the print of my maternity dress. The paramedic said, "So you never told me..."

"In two months," I answered.

"Oh, and have you thought of a name?"

I sniffed back the snot that was tickling, creeping down the inside of my nose

like a snake slithering toward his bite. I felt the baby move inside of me, a hopeful, tiny piece of new existence.

I smiled weakly and said, "Conner."

\*

I hear their screams but I ignore them. I shove cheerios into a zip-lock bag. The phone rings. When I reach across the counter to answer it, I knock the cereal box on its side and tiny hollow circles spill over the edge of the counter, slowly, like grains in an hourglass. It's Jeff. He says he can't take the boys to the circus today. Something's come up at work, he explains—for the third weekend in a row. When I say, "Goddamn, don't do this to me," he tells me to get off it.

"Jeff," I say, his name like a fist pounded on a table, "You know I was going to try to do some writing today." He shoots me a "sorry" that is as apologetic as a serial killer and hangs up the phone.

He was the one who wanted the kids in the first place.

He said I'd always have time for college and all those bull-shit rock-star writer dreams. He said it'd be easy because he'd be there; I wouldn't be doing it alone. I was nineteen and suddenly, accidentally pregnant with my first child, and so I believed him. What else was there to believe?

I hear their screams as I walk the hallway, mentally chanting the rhythmic one-two of my steps while pushing diapers into my pocketbook. When I enter the den, Mikey is on Conner again. I drop the bag and jerk him up by the arm. Conner lays on the floor on his back, immediately motionless, staring wide-eyed at the two of us. His arms and legs suspend in the air like the legs on a caged dead bird. I put Mikey on the couch hard and hold his shoulders.

I say, "Conner is too little to wrestle you," my words forming a stiff beat. He looks at his hands, pushing with one finger the dimpled knuckles of the other. "Look at me," I demand.

He raises his eyes as slowly as an anchor dragged from the floor of the sea. They are blue and blameless, half-obsured by a fringe of blonde hair. He smiles, saying, "Okay, Mommy." I pull his red tee-shirt over his huge round belly. I tell him, "A four-year-old is too big to tackle a two-year-old. Do you understand?" He promises me he does.

I pick Conner up, cradling him as if I were a child with goody-bag, unknowing of the secret prizes inside. I tickle his feet. He squirms and smiles.

I look at Mikey, who is struggling against his weight to climb off the couch. I don't have the heart to help him. Instead, I pour a whispering song about a fuzzy-wuzzy bear into Conner's ear. His mind, untarnished by any real memories or misfortunes, shines through his bare eyes like a newly found gem among an unending bed of dirty coal.

Mikey pulls on my pant leg and I feel guilty. He asks, "When is Daddy coming?"

I sit down at the computer, trying to read the few pages of my mother's story that I have managed to create. With two kids, there is never time. Mikey leans on

the desk, knocking into an old college application I had been recently admiring. It floats slowly, reluctantly, to the floor. He says, "Hey, Mommy, when is Daddy going to be here?"

I scroll down the page in an attempt to focus, for a few moments, on my work. I say, "He's not coming. I'll be taking you to the circus today, honey."

Mikey sits on the floor, the boards moaning like a student with a too-heavy backpack. Tears jump to his eyes. He pets Conner's head.

Silent Conner. Before he was born, on the day after Jeff left us, my mother had told me that this new baby meant a new beginning. I believed in his freshness, his ignorance to the hateful, thwarting circumstances of existing. I look at his face, searching for inspiration for a new line in the story. Already two, but he still can't speak. Despite this, somehow I still expect an answer.

I send the boys to their room, telling them that Mommy needs time to write and that we will go to the circus in a little while. Conner runs down the hallway laughing. Mikey follows, his sausage-like legs kicking a measured march toward the bedroom. He looks over his shoulder and tells me, "Hurry up, please, I want to go real bad."

I stare at the computer screen. I try to recall the tales my mother told me of her first marriage, and the beatings, and the boyfriends, and the dances at the Pepsi building, try to manipulate the concrete facts into lovely metaphors of birds and the sky. Yet all of these wide-open possibilities for a publishable story filter like formula through a funnel and all I can remember is her dead black face. Her life seems no more than a dream and all that is left, all that is *real* is the image of her, face down and lifeless. This could take hours.

And with two children and no husband, there is never time.

My thoughts wander to Mikey's doctor's appointment. No one can tell me why he is so heavy but they think it might be his thyroid. I remember that it is my turn to carpool to daycare this week. I think about how I need to call some of the other mothers and schedule for the next month's carpool, but with those stiff-smile-women, I feel like a Jew at communion. I hear the boys running around upstairs in their bedroom. I hear the plastic, hollow sounds of toys hitting the ground. I hear Mikey sing, "Spiderman, Spiderman, spins a web as fast as he can." I cover my ears.

Focus! There is no such thing. I type a few words and erase them. "If only Jeff would have taken the kids today," I think, "maybe I could've gotten some work done." The sentences, those striking, thoughtful sentences that enter my head so easily as I lay silent and alone in bed each night, seem to blow away from me now like smoke from the top of a tee-pee. There are too many practicalities, like grocery shopping and birthday parties, for invention these days. 'That motherfucker Jeff,' I think, 'free-wheeling it while I am stuck like a world traveler in some dingy country with no airport.'

The night he told me he was leaving, I clutched the bed sheets as he spoke his exit, arming himself in proclamations of this life not being enough. I twisted the sheets in my hands, feeling the tactile textile, unbelieving of the presence of such permanent physicality in the face of this hovering uncertainty. Throughout my life I was never able to understand how the objective world continued to exist, solid and

whole, despite the deterioration of one's personal universe. Things like bed sheets, or tables, or jobs, or other people, continuously endured, no-matter-what, like a wooden frame around a fading, ripping photograph of one's self.

I had asked Jeff then, after hours of banging his body with my fists and pleading for myself and my children while he tried to sleep on the couch, "What about college?" I had already applied and I certainly couldn't go without him here to help. He told me he had to worry about his own wants and needs now. He added as an afterthought, "And of course I'll still be there for the kids."

One of which he was leaving before it had even taken a breath.

Three months later I got my acceptance letter. I held on to it like an urn of a beloved's ashes. When Mikey accidentally threw it away one cleaning day, I think I felt a little relieved.

That night, the night Jeff left, I knew this unborn baby would be my salvation. I promised he would be the first sun to rise on the horizon where I'd fight for myself and my mother's story and all the unborn stories and I'd just throw the children under my arms and run. Poor Mikey, so big, so hard to carry, and at no fault of his own loaded down with indecipherable hieroglyphics spelling "What You Can't Have."

When I had Mikey, I guess I knew the truth even then. I guess I knew that was it. For me, at least.

I shake my head and hit the space bar. I type, "When my mother was married she was very young and did not know what she was getting into."

The boys come running down the stairs, their footfalls like claps of thunder. There is no point in trying to concentrate.

I shut the computer down and grab my purse. I ask, "Who's ready for the circus?"

Mikey jumps, landing hard, fists clutched and shaking by either side of his smile. If anyone is ready, surely, it is him.

\*

I get a popcorn for the boys to share. Mikey says, "Daddy said I shouldn't eat junk food *any-more*."

A silver-costumed elephant begins a parade inside of the dusty ring. I tap Conner's arm and point to it, smiling at his curl-framed face. Mikey pulls my sleeve, saying, "But Daddy says I'm a bad boy if—"

I place my index finger against Mikey's jaw, turning his face toward the circus. I say, "Look at the shiny elephant," and give him a handful of popcorn. He becomes silent, only chewing, and asking no questions.

The scene darkens. A single spotlight appears. The crowd sounds fall to the floor, the quick quiet sounding an invisible thud. A thin clown emerges, balancing on a unicycle. He dismounts, gazing upward into the spotlight with his made-up smile, leaning against the unicycle as if it were a neighbor's wooden fence. Red dust swirls around his feet and settles.

A voice is heard over the loud speaker: "What lucky boy or girl will get a unicycle trip around the ring?" Children all around gasp, grabbing each other and glee-



fully squealing like monkeys. Mikey pokes Conner on his diapered bottom. He says, “Hey, there, baby brother, want to go on the ride,” and jiggles Conner’s little fingers. Conner blinks slowly, staring ahead. Mikey pats my thigh, asking, “Mommy, why won’t Conner ever talk yet?”

I say, “I don’t know, Mikey. Hush.”

A second spotlight cuts through the black air like white scissors through velvet and starts a wild figure-eight over the face of the crowd. The thin clown drops his head, turning round and round in place in that small bright circle in a ring of dark. The voice sounds again, asking, “Who will it be,” engulfing the audience in a quicksand of expectance. The spotlight circles again, and lands. It lands on Mikey.

He squints immediately, shielding his eyes from the beam with the palm of his hand. With the other hand he nervously shovels a fistful of popcorn into his mouth. He looks up at me. Half-chewed junk food spills out of his mouth when he says, “I’m scared.”

A lady attendant approaches our seats, taking Mikey’s hand and leading him down the stairs. I whisper in his ear, “You’ll be okay,” but honestly I’m not sure. He is brave but looks back to me as he descends. The silence slowly cracks as if it were an old painting. It breaks in tiny places, in almost unnoticeable seams of miniature laughter at the little fat boy.

Once Mikey enters the ring, the thin clown shakes his small hand in a flinging, exaggerated way. Mikey shuffles his feet, reclaiming his hand and clasping it into the other behind his back. He stares at the red dust twirling in a dry eddy around his Velcro shoes. The thin clown hops on his unicycle and grabs Mikey, holding him under one long, polka-dotted arm.

The spotlight follows them around the ring, orbiting the circus like a bright moon in the vast black of space. The thin clown sways uneasily with the weight of this unexpectedly heavy child. He hobbles to the left and to the right, Mikey under his arm, a round, red-tee’d package. The image of a painting I saw once on the side of a bar-be-que restaurant enters my head—an insultingly comical black man running with a hatchet in his hand and a pig under his arm. I feel ashamed. Yet I know Mikey is a heavy load.

The seam of sound in the sea of silence explodes and laughter tumbles through the crowd. I think the thin clown has about as much chance of making the whole round as I do in finishing a whole story. Absolutely—he cannot do it. He stops halfway, setting Mikey on the dirty ground and squirting him with a fake flower. I pet Conner’s head and guard his ears against the mocking laughter.

When the attendant returns Mikey to his seat, he is grinning. He says he wishes Daddy was here to see how he made everybody laugh so big.

I am looking past him when I say, “You did good, son.”

\*

After the circus, I make dinner. Mikey rolls a toy car across the kitchen floor. Conner plays with a puzzle silently and alone in the den.

I ask Mikey, “Will you hand me a bag of carrots?”

He reaches in the refrigerator then gives me the old bag. I tell him, “No, not these. Throw these away. I want the other bag, the new one.”

Mikey asks, “Mommy, why do you like new things,” his question a true one of honest ignorance, the kind of question borne only of a child or an adult defect.

I answer, “Because, Mikey, the old carrots are slimy and rotting. They have lots of bad things stuck to them. The new ones haven’t even been opened, so who knows what yummy things we can make with them?” I rub a smear of butter from my brow with the back of my hand and contemplate whether to begin my mother’s story with an adult scene or one from her childhood. I wish I’d paid more attention when she was alive.

Mikey hands me the bag, redirecting my thoughts from literature back to dinner. He asks, “Mommy, do you love Conner better than me?”

I turn to face him, but his back is already toward me as he crawls with his car in circles on the floor. I slap the counter and say, “Mikey! I love you both *too much*,” holding my hands wide apart as if “too much” were an amount one could measure. He looks back, smiles sweetly, and slides like a slick old vegetable on the linoleum toward the den.

Moments later, I hear their screams. But I ignore them.

Yet it is the silence, suddenly crashing, that I *can’t* ignore.

The screams stop abruptly, tearing from the air like a bird dead mid-flight. I run through the hallway, straining to hear any solid sound. Nothing answers. When I enter the den, Mikey is on Conner again.

Conner is still.

Mikey is still.

I rip Mikey off of him, tossing his profound weight as easily as a dirty bra to the clothes hamper.

Conner is still.

I grab him, shaking him gently as if he were a Magic Eight Ball holding some mysterious truth. His head lolls backwards, rolling from shoulder to shoulder like a doll-baby. I shake him harder and his arms and legs swing.

I call 911 and scream into the phone, “My baby! My baby! He’s suffocated!”

I lay Conner down and try everything. I repeatedly push his tiny chest with my fist as if I were drumming on a desk mid-exam, trying to squeeze out an answer. I breathe in and out into his mouth. Yet I know my spoiled breath is something that can help no one.

My hands rub his head, feeling for one of the very last times the fine chicken-feather texture of his still-new hair. Bed sheets, tables, jobs, people, little curly heads—a wooden frame, enduring. I rip at my own hair, pulling out clutches of tangled black strands, and shriek Conner’s name into the congested, still air of the den.

I jerk Mikey from his frightened corner. He begins, “Mommy?” but barely has time to get the word out before I slap the shit out of him. He falls to the floor, screaming a hoarse cry like a deer shot by a hunter. He curls his body into a tight bulb as if he were a tulip un-growing. I jump on him, hitting his back two times with my open hand.

Finally, I retreat. Mikey snuffles, his legs painfully drawn to his round belly.

I hold Conner in my lap. His face is pink, his lips glistening like a cherry fresh-picked. Mikey says, from the shadow behind the couch, "I didn't mean it."

I can't hear him.

\*

I sit on the stairs outside of the house. Men in heavy uniforms rush in and out, banging into me like the rounded stab of an alarm clock to the ears of one who has been sleeping too deep. I light a cigarette off the flame of a candle, smearing my hand with soot. I run my fingers down my face like a rake through sand and choke the smoke down my lungs in an attempt to kill the sobs. I say, "I am his mother."

Mikey sits a bit behind me, leaning against the house. He shivers in a blanket and waits, always waits, for his father to show up. We answer a lot of questions.

I guess the shock leaves you lucid.

The paramedic says, "It's the body's gift to the mind."

I rock myself forward, hugging my knees. I tell him, "All I cared about was writing stories."

The paramedic leans in close, confused, and examines my face in the flickering light of the candle. He asks, "Why is your face black?" He runs his hand across my cheek. His palm comes back covered in soot. But I know that's not it.

Soon, they'll take me to the police station. I, of course, am a suspect.

I had tried to write my mother's story, half-fabricating tales of her history as if they were breathing and living. I thought if I could resurrect her in a poetic, publishable way, then I could resurrect myself—the writer, the would-be college student, the nineteen-year-old girl who believed because what else was there to believe? I typed on a computer and sent my children to their room.

When Mikey sang, I covered my ears.

When Conner stared, I searched for answers from a boy who couldn't yet talk.

I had two boys, just hours ago, running loudly, dropping toys, asking questions that interrupted my thoughts. But I hadn't heard them, not really. I called Mikey to my side and dropped my arm around his shoulder—Mikey, who at no fault of his own had worn a knotted ribbon of my quixotic dreams. He whispered, "I didn't mean it," and I knew it was true. There was no way for me to apologize.

This is my mother's story.

Not the boyfriends, or the beatings, or the dances at the Pepsi building. None of those things that once existed but now did not. Not the acceptance letter or the bull-shit-rock-star writer dreams or the husband who wanted more. This is my mother's story—the fall, not feeling a thing, the heart that stops beating without you noticing it. The children who play loudly upstairs while you write, write, write, as if that's going to save you.

I'd been dead before I hit the ground.

## Matthew Campion

*Wonder at the Green Light*

The green light was not at the end of your dock but was your dock. It was in Newport, running through the tall Goat Island grass, freshly muddied from the misty rain of the day – wearing a suit, you in a dress – like some kind of hip commercial about people who don't care. It was catch with your brother and getting lattes while walking your dog.

There was dinner by the riverfront and then gin and tonics without parents. Then the goodnight kiss, afterwards blowing out candles and driving through the fog – the music sounding better with the windows up.

That was summer and now it's fall. Friendship was a word left behind in June. Outdoor concerts at sunset made bridges that build up and up in the background. Music crescendos and finds us in dark dens where the rain pours down. Leave the lights off, for I have grasped the dream.

## Neil Carpathios

*Moving On*

We buried a small porcelain Christ  
in the yard under the elm  
and read from a slip of paper  
a prayer for selling a house.  
We found it on the internet,  
along with comments  
of others who did the ritual  
and within twenty-four hours  
had buyers in bidding wars  
at their doors. Why not,  
my wife said. So we sent  
the twenty bucks, dug a hole  
a foot deep in dirt  
and lowered the little man,  
respectfully wrapped in a white  
cotton hanky. Meant for  
St. Joseph, saint  
of homes and families,  
we thought we'd use a Christ  
instead who surely  
would speed things up  
even more. We placed him  
near the *For Sale* sign,  
his eyes peering away from  
the house signifying a new  
beginning. Then we sat  
on chairs on the patio,  
sipped martinis with olives  
as the sun slowly dropped  
behind trees  
at the edge of a field  
making branches pulse like  
fingers the way it does  
nowhere else we agreed.  
Oh how we'll miss it,  
but sometimes change is good  
we concurred, like our lives  
before each other—  
wrong partners, divorces,  
messes we'd made and learned from—

the way children break toys  
playing, too reckless,  
then have to live with the pieces  
or find new toys. We sat  
until the trees, and everything,  
disappeared. We listened  
in dark cool air  
wondering if that Christ  
down there was sweating,  
wrestling worms, rewriting history  
for us, maybe holding his breath.

Neil Carpathios

*The Country of Marriage*

After too much vodka we start hurting  
each other with talk of old lovers.  
Like wild animals, questions from behind  
the ribs slip out and rise to our heads.  
“What made her so beautiful you lost  
fifteen pounds when she left?”  
“Was he large? Did he ever use his tongue  
the way I do?” Minutes ago we were holding,  
kissing, laughing at the cat curled  
in a question mark on the floor.  
You leave the room. I finish my drink.  
Those beasts run amok,  
and it won't be till morning or after  
that they find their way back to the cages  
we built just for them to stay, quiet, sleeping,  
almost, sometimes we think, finally tamed.

Nina Corwin

*What Can Happen to Seagulls*

I returned the note you never wrote  
because everything was all wrong.  
At least I wrote a response but never  
sent it because the price of stamps  
was high and I ran out last week  
so it sits collecting bits of sunset,  
coffee cup rings and bitter inflections  
that rise up in the air owing to a lack  
of substance or dignity.

We can't return if we don't ever leave.  
It's as simple as that you say  
and sometimes slipping out the back  
door is the best one can do. I say nothing  
is simple and besides, fire is transient. You say  
water leaves us swamped in the mud  
of our grudges. We are an oil spill  
on these waters and we have watched  
the seagulls die in us.

I call your name but all you hear is blurred  
because the leaves are falling and you  
are deafened by their autumn scent.  
The songs are simpler than you think  
I say, but I need a translation you say  
and the point is our languages never shared  
a common root – we both agree. The rush  
of highway sounds drowning everything  
and yes, there is no returning.



Corrine De Winter

*St. Cecilia*

Now East, those angels of sobriety,  
Of drunkenness, of children  
Unwhole and waiting to be saved.  
In the dream I am forever walking  
through the East Village  
with a black-haired unkempt boy.  
There are mosaic faces of saints  
in the corridor of the mausoleum  
where a group of black marble children solemnly play.  
I suddenly know the songs  
that rise out of St. Cecilia's organ  
in the stained glass window.  
Patron Saint of music,  
what have you done to the  
boys in my life?  
They walk like zombies  
toward rhinemaidens dressed in river weeds.  
They understand the language of ravens.  
They denounce all angels  
and hide when the daylight comes.

They yield like Paul on the road to Damascus,  
dropping to their knees  
for the conversion.

Corrine De Winter

*Danaid*

Cottonwood pollen shifts like snow around us,

Caught in my hair, clinging to my lips,

Moving through my bare toes.

White stars in the air

As though Cocteau had directed it.

We stand like hands

Pressed together in prayer.

Later, I dream there are bees

Building hives to yield honey.

The culmination of past sorrow

Bringing sweetness to the present.

The night roses and lavender,

Far from scenes of the apocalypse.

Lamb, everything is about light.

In your hands I am like Danaid,

Uncarved, half submerged in marble

As if trying to emerge from a cocoon.

Now your fingers find the hands, the thighs

That so long have been obscured.

It is about light and becoming whole,

This soft rescue, this work in progress.

Your body speaks in absence

After you have gone.

Desire leaves a patina on everything

In the eyes of the beloved.

Alison Espach

*On Plants*

I promised her I'd never write about plants, "there's nothing good to say" I said, and I sipped the wine before bellying over –

It was only a plant for Christ's sakes, just green, vibrant, plant-like, and me, aware.

So I start cracking jokes, thought we could all use a laugh, but it wouldn't, and she wouldn't. "How bout a movie?" No, she preferred to watch the plant, wanted to make sure it didn't grow without her consent – things kept growing without her consent, she kept saying. I never knew how to respond to that, so I suggested getting rid of it. Maybe it would be better? But she wouldn't, it reminded her of things-

"What things?" I ask.

"Any old thing."

I could have sworn that yesterday, her blonde hairs falling to the floor, she would have forgotten them all.

## Alison Espach

*Dimension*

If you touch it you'll gain dimension. That's what they said at least. That they found Jesus there. That if he had a scent, he probably smelt like my hair.

And then you go and tell me that I'm too beautiful to be sleeping around? To have my hips is an art. You'd never drape them over just anybody. Instead you'd smile and make it hard for them, then walk away, incarnating the myth that there *are* people in this world too beautiful to leave. "You ruin it," you say, "God, I could do it so much better than you at being beautiful." You slam down your glass. It shatters. You remind me how lucky I am. "You don't even have to pretend you know about all the other things." You list off things like Kashmir and Nietzsche. You hesitate and say it would be good to at least become acquainted with one of them though, to try Jesus Christ, you hear he's a pretty nice guy, a real safe bet - not like any of the other ones. Did you hear he can turn water into wine?

Imagine the money we could save, you said.

Lucía Estrada

*[The bone mask]*

The bone mask  
doesn't show

whether it hides  
the features of god

or beast

or both who, after death,  
will go on battling  
for the same crown.

*translated by Jason Stumpf*

## Gary Fincke

*Childish*

The summer before I started first grade, three men with rifles robbed the savings and loan three blocks from my parents' house just outside of Pittsburgh. A minute later, because the police were alerted by a clerk watching from the bakery across the road, a shootout began along the main street of the business district.

My mother followed the action from the upstairs window in the office where she took dictation from a hardware merchant, and for months she told the story of what she saw, including how our fat police chief, Frank Muschak, stood sideways to hide behind a telephone pole. "His big beer belly hung out in plain sight," she said. "He was a hundred pounds past being protected by anything as thin as that pole. The other policemen and the robbers exchanged gunfire for five minutes and not once did fat Frank Muschak do anything but try to suck that gut in. He was like a baby who covers his eyes and believes the world is gone."

Each afternoon, once first grade began, Chief Muschak, the policeman with the huge belly, stopped traffic so students could cross the highway two blocks from our school. Three or four times that fall he said, "You've got a first class cowlick there, little fella," and I looked down at my shoes, pretending he wasn't talking to me. I wanted to ask him how it felt holding his gun at his side without shooting it and hiding behind that telephone pole. I wanted to yell "fatso" and "lard ass" at him.

In October, on a Saturday, everybody I was playing with went in to lunch at twelve o'clock except Margaret Truman, who had the same name as the President's daughter. She wanted to be called Meg so nobody noticed, and after six weeks of first grade, I wanted her to think I had better things to do than head straight home to cheese sandwiches and milk because the town's noon siren had sounded.

"Let's go to the railroad tracks," I said, picking a forbidden place, and she didn't hesitate. "Where's fat Muschak?" I said after we crossed the one street with traffic, and Meg laughed. She walked beside me down Angle Alley, and I imagined we looked, from behind, like the painting my doctor had on his wall.

Two sets of railroad tracks ran to and from Pittsburgh, and walking along one of them were three older boys we didn't know because they weren't the brothers of anybody from our neighborhood. They had BB guns, and they pointed them at us as if we were tellers at a bank.

Those leveled guns backed us against a door, and Meg grabbed my hand. *Somebody lives behind this door*, I thought. Since it was Saturday, he would be home, hear us, and open that door to say, "What's going on here?"

Nobody said a word until one of the boys lifted his gun to his shoulder and chanted, "First grade babies, stick them in the grave." The other two laughed. They fired their pellets at our feet and yelled, "Dance!"

I danced like all of the cowards in cowboy movies. Meg cried like all of the women who listened to gunfire from behind drawn curtains. Finally, all three of them took a stance like a firing squad, shouting, "Five, four, three, two, one" in uni-



son before they shot BBs into the door six inches above our heads.

That house belonged to somebody who must have noticed, coming home, that his door had three sets of pock marks. He would have said "Goddamned kids" and been surprised those marks formed a nearly straight line. Ten or eleven years-old, all three of those boys were so accurate they might have been training for combat in fifth grade.

I didn't tell anyone. What would I have said? They fired a volley so close to all at once I wouldn't have known which one shot my eye out. Or Meg's eye. I wouldn't have known which one fired because he thought he had to. Or which one wanted to point his gun directly at my face.

Besides, there was other news that night. My father didn't ask me how my day went or what I'd been doing with myself that made me come home for lunch so late. Instead, he spoke quietly to my mother about Chief Muschak, the fat policeman, because he'd been hit by a train and killed at the crossing by the grade school. Directing traffic, he'd stepped back into the path of a northbound freight approaching a couple of seconds after a southbound one had passed. "Something a child would do," my mother said.

Gary Fincke

*WOOM! BALL*

At four a.m., just before the two-mile run, fifteen pledges circled up for half an hour of woom! ball. Woom! I said, and slammed a football into my neighbor's guts. Woom! he said in return, passing it on or returning it with force so none of the active brothers would think we were slacking off.

We cupped our hands like running backs to keep ourselves from harm. Woom! We made sure we laid that ball in the belly hard and true, but there were pledges who always moaned. Pledges who doubled up because they were soft in the middle.

Woom! After a few minutes, some of the active brothers joined, the biggest picking spots beside the pledges who thought they were tough, Jim Ulsh and Dave Mazur and Cecil Mroz, the ones who never showed fear or pain, the ones the rest of us tried not to stand beside.

Woom! We fired back, driving that ball into the stomachs of seniors just returned drunk from bars, happy to see the ones who were wobbly and bloated become quick to leave the circle. Woom! Until Dave Mazur said his rib had cracked where one brother slapped that ball in wide. Woom! Until Jim Ulsh took that ball point first and said he'd come apart inside.

The drunk brothers went to bed. We were five days into the week of no sleep. We were nearly finished with woom! ball, one more night, and the rest of the pledges, one by one, stopped touching that ball because I was exchanging slams with Cecil Mroz, my right hand and his left, back and forth, both of us screaming woom! as if the sound could take the wind out of somebody, neither of us knowing he would die in a war that was as small, that night in 1964, as our fraternity house base-meat skirmish.

Woom! I shouted, and nobody stepped between us until we'd hit each other twelve times, and then, because it was 4:30, all of the pledges but Dave Mazur and Jim Ulsh headed out the door in single file behind me and Cecil Mroz as we started our run into the town that was sleeping, watching for lights in windows at 4:35, guessing whoever moved there was coming home from trouble or waking into a day that, starting this early, was pain.

Graham Foust

*Just Two of My Many Concerns about Bone*

In the dark, the tooth-  
like light-switch. And where's  
the chunk of skull  
while the surgeon's inside?

Graham Foust

*Academy Fight Song*

Wilted to official, I might keep  
here like a leaf. Might eat  
my prayers. Might say  
to force astonishment  
and where. You absolutes  
bleed between your places,  
half inflated. What is  
is gained space, a ream of paper.

Graham Foust

*The Moviest Thing*

is when the bomb comes  
together. Let us play

the imaginary  
stabbing game.

We get our tongues  
pierced just

for the lisps,  
the faint clucks.

Sparks  
are going in in there.

Let us  
eat cartoons.

## John Gallaher

*Measure Twice, Cut Once*

Afternoon's drone, and first sleeveless day,  
 the yards are yards again, all at once.  
 And we're stumbling from our houses. Redbuds waving,  
 we're stumbling into the light.

If it holds meaning, it's holding it awfully close.  
 That's one thought. And if this is all,  
 then there's not much to study for  
 or tally. That's another, I suppose.

Behind every afternoon  
 is further mountains. All shimmery.

I'd like to start again. Here, or  
 somewhere back there, anything  
 I know I can't have. Where the redbuds started  
 swaying slightly, seemingly  
 like some reward.

But they're taking apart this town you just left.  
 Where you looked so pretty.

*The afternoon dances forth—*  
*The afternoon rummages forth—*

## Chris Gordon

*Named After Titans*

After the causeway a fortune of magnolia petals crushed to a fine paste and smeared upon your breasts. Something will come of this. The discovery of two small moons in the orbit of Saturn. A slowing in the process of calcification. The last drips from the tea bag swirl darkly into the rest of the tea. If you could speak this language you would be handsomely rewarded. But as your thumbs have been split at the tips by those tiny knives that are used to break the seal on a bottle we will be sending you into the fields to choke the barley until it gives up its secrets. In various separatist strongholds there are pockets of resistance. In the lake district in autumn the edges of the gravel path are littered with bottle caps. The ones eaten through with rust will provide the fuel to reach those new moons, which we assume will be named after Titans. Perhaps we should break with tradition and call them after regional outbreaks of rare primate viruses fatal to the rest of us. We are always looking for new methods of farming. Ways of making tomatoes that never end. Some beachfront property on the limits of technological expansion. Which brings me back to your breasts. If you could get those huge heron like petals to turn into a kind of apple I'd have to say our work here is done. A Causeway made of baboon skulls you can dance upon with your red umbrella. Just hold out for an updraft and we'll soon be on our way to Saturn.

**Chris Gordon***This Is My Wilderness*

This is my wilderness. Something in the sink drips slowly into the drain. A strong wind in the August night rubs the oak tree against the eaves. The wax that has spilled on the table has dried. I forget what it means when two bodies find a way of speaking without words. A car passes on the road up the hill. Someone is driving that car. This seems impossible. When you take the cap off the acorn it starts to brown and shrivel. My children asleep somewhere else. My cameras all have four pictures left but the batteries are dead. When I get tired of sitting I get up and walk around a little. There are things on the walls. Some of them I've never noticed before.



Andrew Grace

*Vantage*

Backyard in its usual post-moon fade, loll of drugged hostas, same old piles of detritus held up to the light, spent choke and St. Augustinegrass. A slow wind endlessly scans the asters as if for its lost map, white forefinger of the unknown AWOL, carbon copy salvia shimmer, unoriginal air, yet also Issa's warning: *the world of dew is the world of dew, and yet, and yet...*

So, from the window I watch for a different light to fall and prove things otherwise: the curtains shawls of flame, the candle a sibyl, these boxwoods thousand mile horses. I wait because of the redress in silence, daring me to open a small tapestry bag of knowledge and read from the slips of paper what I think I know:

1) Our blood scrolls down the sugar maple 2) Its bark sutures us, our split skins 3) By fine roots, we are bound home.

Kevin Griffith

*Paranoia, My Sweet*

I looked under my bed,  
hoping to find a monster.  
Instead, I found an empty mousetrap,  
unsprung, the bait  
carefully nibbled away.

And behind the wall,  
the world's tiniest laugh,  
more quiet than silence itself.

Kevin Griffith

*The Severed Hand*

At night, it crawls  
through the lonely town.

It doesn't have a prayer.

It can't hear the sound  
of itself clapping.

It has heard all the jokes.

Not horrifying to anyone,  
just unemployed.

Without a brain  
to boss it around anymore,  
it sleeps during the day.

Sometimes it wakes to find  
a few coins in its palm.

Kevin Griffith

*The First Sentence of the Story*

Waking up one morning, I found  
myself in my own bed, a child  
jumping on my stomach, my wife  
sleeping beside me,

and I began to realize  
that I had faked my own death.

Kevin Griffith

*Old Man Swimming Laps at the Y*

Sunlight flashes through the windows  
and sinks to the blue bottom.

Here's what one notices:  
The hair growing on his back,  
black as a burnt forest,  
sewn lips of cancer scars,

and the flat piece of Styrofoam  
shaped like a tombstone  
he holds at the end of his outstretched arms,

as if he has just been given a trophy  
in a race no one would want to win.

## Jacqueline Guidry

*What Corinna Heard*

After her father left, Corinna heard things. Her sister turned the disposal on a bug, cockroach maybe, though Mother denied that, and Corinna heard screams, little tiny bug screams. People said Corinna was crazy. She said, "Wouldn't you scream, if you got caught in a disposal?"

She'd moved to the city after high school as had Eva. There were too many people in the city for anybody to bother over Corinna being crazy. Only her mother and sister still cared and sometimes, even they didn't.

Now, her mother threw a log on the fire. Wood screeched, bemoaned the final loss of life, remembered it had housed nest after nest, had been a place birds taught their fledglings to wing. Corinna started. Her mother and sister said nothing, just looked at each other, sighed their Corinna sighs.

"It's just an old birch log, dear. You know that," her mother said. She wiped her hands on the towel hanging on the edge of the mantle for just that purpose.

"I don't want to hear. I don't even try. I just do," Corinna explained for the hundredth, maybe the millionth time.

"You do it all on purpose," Eva said.

"You don't know a thing about it."

"Girls, girls. A tea. A pleasant tea among three adult women. A lovely fall afternoon. Please remember."

"Father would understand," Corinna said.

"Leave him out of it. Father is not here any more. You're not Daddy's Darling any more," Eva said. "Why can't you remember that?"

"More tea, anyone?" Mother smiled, bent to the silver tray on the inlaid coffee table to refill the china cup from her best set, the one used only for important company or important occasions. Corinna wasn't sure yet which this was.

"So I took off early from work. So I drove forty-five minutes to get here. So I've drunk your tea. So what is it?" Eva never heard a thing unless everyone else heard it too. "What's it about?" Eva pressed.

"No need to rush now you're both here." Mother smiled her lady-of-the-house smile. "Cookie, Eva? Real butter in these cookies." She balanced the silver tray on one hand to let Eva choose.

"Never mind, Mother." Eva folded her arms against her chest, stretched her legs and crossed them at the ankles, then closed her eyes. "Traffic was horrific," she mumbled. "Call me when something happens."

Mother stared at Eva, but only for a moment. Then she turned her smile on Corinna who flinched as the grate of metal in Mother's partial scraped the tooth next to it. "Now, Corinna. Things are well with you?"

"Well." Corinna answered quickly, hoping Mother would relax the smile so her partial would quieten.

"Still at that bookstore, are you?"

“Still there.”

“That’s fine. Good to see at least one member of the family knows how to keep a steady job.”

“I’ve never been without work more than three weeks at a time,” Eva said, her eyes still closed.

“Yes, dear. But how many three weeks are we talking about? No need to discuss that now. Not proper conversation for our afternoon tea, is it?”

Eva grunted, shifted her crossed arms slightly.

“Now, what have you been doing lately?” Mother turned again to Corinna, but didn’t bother with a smile.

“Work,” Corinna said.

“Yes, dear. We’ve established that, haven’t we. What about work? Is that the proper question?” She sipped tea, looking at Corinna over the rim of her cup like a coquette. “Yes, of course. Anything special at work?”

“A lady, well dressed, string of pearls.”

“Real or fake? Could you tell?”

“Real.” Corinna didn’t bother explaining she’d heard ocean waves as the lady swished past the counter. “Guess what she bought?”

“I’m too old for guessing. You know that.”

“Seventeen of the most pornographic books in the store.”

“How do you know they were porno?” Eva asked, eyes closed, corners of her mouth hinting at a grin.

“Seventeen?” Mother asked as if the number were more shocking than anything else.

“Seventeen,” Corinna confirmed, ignoring Eva. She held the word on the edge of her tongue before letting it out, but couldn’t taste anything different from a three or a five or even an eleven.

“What did the manager say?”

“She was at lunch. I was the only one working the counter.”

“Didn’t you tell her?”

Corinna shook her head.

“Don’t be so secretive. You must tell your employer these things. She’d want to know.”

“Really?”

“Certainly. Aren’t I right, Eva?”

Eva yawned loudly, shivering with the force of so much exhaustion, but didn’t answer.

Mother sighed. “Anything else, dear? Any other items to share?”

Corinna bit her lower lip, trying to remember something else newsworthy.

“Don’t do that.” Mother tapped her own lower lip with a slender, polished nail. “You’re not a child any more.”

Corinna smiled, not showing her teeth, an adult smile.

“Better,” Mother said. “Much, much better.” She sipped her tea. “Perhaps something will come to you before your sister decides to join us.” She nibbled the corner of a cucumber sandwich and smiled, teeth not showing, while she chewed.

"There is the poetry man, the one with a pointed chin and wide nostrils," Corinna said.

"Pointed chin is quite acceptable. Sign of royalty, isn't it. The nostrils are bad, of course."

"Sign of a pig," Eva said, her eyes still closed.

Mother ignored the comment. "Anyway, what about him?"

"He comes in every day, noon to one. Must be his lunch hour."

"Evidently."

"Obviously," Eva added.

"Eva, dear, if you wish to join the conversation, please sit properly and open your eyes. It's quite disconcerting to get comments from a person who looks as if she's passed out."

"On a drunk, Mother? Is that what I look like?" Eva lolled her tongue out the corner of her mouth. "Have you seen someone on a drunk to know for sure that's what I look like?"

"Don't be vulgar. That's not how you were raised." She turned back to Corinna. "Finish the story, why don't you."

"He's reading the poetry section. Book by book."

Eva opened one eye. "Poetry? That's all?"

"He never goes to any other section."

"Strange. Never buys one?"

"Never."

"Cheap." Eva closed her eye again.

"A sign of refinement. You might strike up a conversation with him. Nothing too bold, of course. The weather, perhaps. A coming sale." Mother paused, smiled. Her partial grated, louder than before. "Robert Frost. You should mention Robert Frost next time. There's a collection in your father's study. Take it when you leave."

"What about those nostrils?" Eva asked.

"Not an appropriate topic for afternoon tea." Mother rose to poke the fire. Moans from the birch crescendoed to a high-pitched squeal.

"Any other news, Corinna?" She sat in the arm chair which sighed softly, wishing Mother hadn't reached for that second cucumber sandwich.

"I think that must be it." She started to bite her lower lip, then remembered she was grown.

"Eva? News?"

Eva's eyes opened slightly, slits and no more. "I'm dating an African, Italian, Hispanic, Irish atheistic Catholic Jew."

"Rather a confusing conglomerate, isn't he?"

"He's a cab driver or maybe construction worker or garbage collector. I can't remember for sure. Anyway, I'll probably marry him and have a dozen little African, Italian, Hispanic, Irish atheistic Catholic Jewish babies."

Mother leaned forward. Her face tightened until everything pointed towards her pursed lips. "Not one piece of silver, Eva. Not even a salt shaker. Remember that."

"He's a great kisser." Eva closed her eyes again, puckered her lips and made kiss-



ing, sucking noises.

Mother leaned back. "Vulgarity has no place at an afternoon social." She refilled her cup, added cream and one cube of sugar which she stirred with a silver demitasse spoon.

"May I bring my fiancé to our next social?"

Eva's heart beat like a bongo, though Corinna didn't cover her ears.

"Your friends are always welcome." She sipped. "Just be sure you get his genealogy and his job straight before then."

The heartbeat quieted until Corinna couldn't hear it any more.

Mother cleared her throat. "I have decided your father is never returning."

"Well, thank God and Halleluiah." Eva opened her eyes and straightened, crossed her legs at the knees. "He's only been gone seven years."

"Seven years, seven months, seven days."

"You've been counting," Eva said, grinning an accusation.

"He might come back. You can't tell for sure," Corinna said.

"Don't be vulgar." Eva turned her grin on Corinna.

Corinna smiled back, hoping to appease the snarls and growls leaking from between Eva's lips. But her smile didn't change the truth which only Corinna believed because only Corinna had been blessed with a good-bye kiss by Father when he left.

There had been no moon that night and clouds hid the stars, so she hadn't been able to see his face clearly, the one thing she'd always regretted. He'd been a shadow whispering in her ear. A magic man.

"I'm leaving now," he said. "Time for me to go."

She listened and understood.

"I'll be back, though. Don't forget to listen for me because I'll be back."

"I won't," she whispered back.

He had closed the door behind him, softly, oh so softly so as not to wake Eva or Mother, before Corinna thought to ask, "Why?" She strained for an answer. If there'd been one, surely she would've heard. But all she heard were the soft snores of dolls lined on the shelves above her bed. Though she had never heard that sound before, it did not surprise or frighten her now and, instead, lulled her to sleep.

"He is dead. Officially dead," Mother said. "Seven years, seven months, seven days. That's what the authorities tell me."

"What authorities?" Eva snorted disgust at such authority. "How do you get to be an authority on dead people?"

"He is officially dead. I am his official widow. I will receive my first official widow's check next month." She smiled into the fire. "The government says he is dead. I am a widow. I thought you girls should know."

"So, we're orphans," Eva said.

"I'm still alive."

"Of course. I nearly forgot."

"He said he'd be back." Corinna knew her voice was probably too loud, but she couldn't control that. As it was, she could barely hear herself over the roar in the room. Mother's partial was still grinding and now a hissing came from her nose,

maybe her mouth, as if all her air were escaping. Eva's growls and snarls seemed a pack of wolves brawling over a deer's carcass. The firewood, which had quieted for awhile, joined with moans and squawks. The tea service cried, though more docilely as was befit its station in life, knowing it had been a wedding gift.

"Remember, Corinna, remember how Father held you on his lap here," said the sofa.

"And here," said the Queen Anne chair.

"Me. Don't forget me. The light. Nothing could happen without the light," cried the lamp, screaming to be heard above the rest of the clamor.

Through it all, Corinna managed to keep her hands on her lap and off her ears. "He said he'd be back," she said, even louder than before.

"We're in the same room, dear. No need to raise your voice. It's so..."

"Vulgar," Eva finished.

"Vulgar," Mother repeated.

"What about what he said?" Corinna concentrated on keeping her voice subdued. She couldn't hear the words herself, but what did that matter as long as Eva and Mother understood.

"Your father said many things. When he was alive, of course."

"Dead men tell no tales," Eva said.

"Of course not," Mother said without looking at Eva. "This room couldn't hold all the promises your father made, but didn't keep. Not that he didn't intend to keep them or try to keep them, at least most of them." The hissing stopped. The partial could not be heard.

"Never speak badly of a dead person," Eva said.

"Never," Mother said.

"It can only bring bad luck," Eva said. No more growls or snarls.

"Terrible luck," Mother said. She reached across her chair to squeeze Corinna's hand. "The government wouldn't say he was dead, if it weren't true. Why should they?" The tea service and lamp and sofa and chairs went silent.

"No reason," Eva said.

"None at all," Mother said.

"I'm glad that's settled." Eva stood. "I'm taking off. I have to be back by seven."

"Big date, dear?"

"A date," Eva said.

"A man of substance, quality, I hope."

"Always, Mother. Always." The fire let out a final moan.

Mother offered Eva a cheek for a farewell peck. Corinna raised her own hand in a weak wave, but didn't go to the door. She watched Mother watching Eva turn her car in the circular drive and head towards the street.

Mother closed the door, then turned back with a smile. Corinna strained to hear the partial. But she heard nothing. Nothing at all. And she covered her ears to drown out so much silence.

Daniel Gutstein

*What We Had Seen*

Arms and legs tipping lamps  
the girl one breast out of a ripped shirt  
the girl who wore food stains  
counted her change out loud at the bus stop  
her brother in his undershirt yelling whaddya  
whaddya whaddya whaddya  
his grip on a bloody wrist  
his knee on her bare stomach and then  
we ran from the side window  
clouds throbbing in wet mirrors beneath us  
we ran through the empty lot  
where it was flies like jailbreak from dogshit  
that's what we were my friend and I  
so low the red balloon.

## Lois Marie Harrod

*At the Writer's Conference*

When I return to my room mid-morning, a young woman, is wiping and closing the drawer of the dresser, having looked perhaps at what I had tossed there, but not in the way, I think, of work or theft. She will be finished soon, she says, wiping the face of the television as if it were a child's, slowly and gently, as if I am not there. She seems to be giving me time to tell you that her body has something of a ballerina's coil and lightness, that her long hair has been pulled into a neat bun, and that she seems too elegant to be here cleaning rooms, and I remember other beautiful women doing what was needed, the woman I saw in a gold and turquoise sari cleaning the Venetian blinds in Heathrow Airport, the Finnish immigrant in raw hands and tights pumping gas in Califon, grace subservient to labor, unconscious, the daily silver. How long does such grace last? My own body has always grumbled gracelessly through its chores, doing what it has to do so that external neatness keeps chaos within. She makes me wonder if how we lick honey from a stainless spoon, if how we place one foot in front of the other at the sink, if how we brush our teeth matters as much as art. Maybe more. While I watch her, I do not want to be Mary, the sister Christ preferred, the one that sat and listened to his tales. Let me be Martha in the kitchen delicately washing the dark eggplants Lazarus brought from the garden, let me be Martha ready to complain that if there is to be dinner, she needs her sister's help.

Michael Hogan

*Drought in Jalisco*

In the windless afternoon  
when hard mangoes rest in a mantle of dry leaves  
and desiccated corn stalks wonder  
where God has gone  
we return to a house of dust and stillness  
wander through rooms  
to the quiet accompaniment  
of the invisible current of our lives.

We are waiting for the sun to pass behind the mountains  
for its light to fade in the reflection  
of what has been diminished.  
We have passed beyond language  
and in the grim silences of dusty rooms  
a vast wordlessness  
echoes the thinness of our souls.

Somewhere beyond the moil of the city  
grapes hang heavy, mangoes softly bulge  
like ripe words  
fabricating themselves in the sudden puff of curtains.  
Sea breezes rise and  
there is a compendium of excesses.  
But that is as far as memory allows  
or the atrophied imagination reaches.

In the garden the last hummingbird  
flashes its demented greenness and is gone.  
The dog clicks her way  
over the parquet floor and collapses in a corner.

**Peter Johnson***American Male, Acting Up*

They say your whole life flashes before you when you die, but I'm sure I'll witness the lives of others. And if I'm right, please spare me the lives of this bearded oaf in a black wife beater, mid-calf jeans, and orange work boots. We're at the zoo, more precisely the habitat of the arctic fox whom we've never seen awake, terminally depressed to find himself in a moderately-sized ethnically-mixed city surrounded by creatures who hurl animal crackers, caw like crows, or scream, "Wake up, stupid," which is what this man's two boys are yelling. When I tell my two-year-old to ignore them, he asks, "Why?" and I say, "Because anyone with half a brain wouldn't scare a little fox." The man glares at me, and I glimpse the chaos of his past lives. It is the feast of Saturnalia. He smells of grapes and cheese, the blood of his favorite Thracian slave hardened on his left thigh. He's swigging diluted wine, exchanging arm punches with friends. He's the hirsute sweat bag movies portray with thumb downturned, the one who two thousand years later chugs four beers, then goes to the zoo to torment the animals. Laugh if you must, but I would gladly take this bully down. So when he stares, I stare back, and when he says, "Boys, we paid our money, so scream whatever you want," I brace myself, prepare to take a beating.

Jeff P. Jones

*It Shouldn't Be*

a crime to pull  
into a parking lot,  
bass kicking,  
treble blaring,

but that scowl  
should be.  
Is the music too loud?  
It's my favorite song, spans

decades to that winter  
night rolling down  
a snow-packed hill,  
best friend

beside me, our voices  
declaring the universe  
too big not to let go  
every once in a while.

## Matthew Kern

*Old Time Religion*

We walked down Beale Street with  
 Green blotter going long since gone to the man upstairs and Telling him to lean  
 back and lay off the job 'cause the Subconscious  
 Wants  
 Out.  
 And out it will come.  
 The first hour is high on the cliché of who cares no  
 Introspection just a nice gust of  
 Coasting cavalier on a pockmarked chewing gum sidewalk  
 With the booze and blues of Memphis, Tennessee  
 At the edge of spring.  
 The nightclubs line up,  
 Street corner vendors  
 Hawking a million different rhythms, rhymes, melodies.  
 We think it's the world and thank God we're  
 Young Enough.  
 A gospel choir  
 Sways back and forth,  
 Tall grass in a watch chain breeze next to a statue  
 Of a Confederate General,  
 Spackled with medals of birdshit and sashes of rust,  
 Next to that  
 A bar.  
 We sidestep in with  
 Thoughts of silk garter sliding up a sweat-jeweled leg  
 Saxophone insanity to  
 Fire us up good and slow like  
 Gas flares under a brass pot of water then  
 On to the blues to land us soft on a runway of a river.  
 But we walked into the wrong place.  
 There was this  
 Industrial band on stage,  
 Lean and angry  
 Boiling a bad attitude through the pot-lid roof,  
 Treating their guitars like their  
 Daddies who thought they were queer  
 Treated them.  
 The crowd was all tactile noise:  
 Arms flailing, bodies crashing,  
 A hundred plus personalities merged into the



Great big amoeba with a temper problem known as  
The Mosh.

Didn't feel young anymore

More like

Fifty years old and scared and

Just barely

Escaped.

We walk outside,

Snatch back our sanity at the entrance and I

See an old woman holding cross with a

Digital ticker tied to the horizontal bar it says,

BUY SOME STOCK IN JESUS.

She's looking at where we just were and I'm

Daring her to go in, yeah

Go in,

Spread your gospel to the Goths, Vandals and Huns

Hammering their brains against the walls of their skulls

Before they sack the seven hills of Rome when the

Bar locks up the beer.

I dare you.

And she does.



no matter that a head  
with audioreMOTE

gets in the way  
the way an upraised

finger from a driver  
ahead or behind or on

the passing side  
tells us where to go,

or the quick dart of a cab  
makes us pause

before we cross the street  
to meet what next

we might at L'Hermitage  
or what poised fruit they've spread –

what we can park ourselves  
upon a ramp or in parallel

to hold in view,  
to see the what of how

for an unclogged minute  
or so,

which then we take away  
and place, like fork and knife,

next to the plate  
of dreams and colors

we taste and eat  
and taste again.

John Lacey

*Powerball*

This poem should make me rich.  
It should be so moving that it causes worldwide hysteria.  
It should be made into a novel or a movie.  
The original manuscript should be purchased from me  
by a Turkish sheik for millions of dollars.  
It should save me from working, from the job search;  
From the gentle rebukes of those busy businessmen  
who just can't take on another employee.

This poem should be exalted, regardless of whether  
it is deserving or not. It should be heralded.  
Great and powerful world leaders should read  
excerpts from it as they console their people  
after a natural disaster. English teachers should  
repeat this poem even though they don't find it  
particularly talented, simply because it is  
ingrained in our literary fabric.

Someone with the means should pay me for this.

Ashley Laferriere

*Coins*

I am selfish with the people I love.  
I hoard them like silver dollars.  
Fitting them into secret  
Hiding places  
Away from the world.

I want

An island of solitude  
And dark cornered drawers  
Overflowing with shiny coins.

I want people to be trees for me.

Sturdy and layered and reliable.  
An Oak with roots that run deep  
Or a Maple that shades.

I want these trees to grow forever.  
Just here.  
In.  
This.  
Spot.

But especially,  
Can you teach me how to love the rain?  
I am terrified  
By how the water rushes  
By so fast.

Ashley Laferriere

*Foreign Thing*

Yesterday began the rise of a foreign thing.  
The green arm moving through soil  
And emerging into a butterfly.  
Papered, like the delicate words  
Now living on the edge of the tongue.

I have cast this down a dozen times.  
Remembering the open ache of disappointment,  
Like a hole torn from the sky –

We sat by the river.  
Moving our feet through dark waters.  
Your voice matching the rush and tumble,  
Our hands circling the surface.  
Inventing new patterns, undiscovered.

Then you rose from beside me  
To walk into the tide.  
Unable to ignore  
The pull of the wind.  
Unable to invent  
An anchor.

Brian Lewis

*Shades of Almighty Despair Dispelled*

The dog sheds light from the corner, she sheds light  
as any other dog would shed water, but I guess  
bathing in pools of light as large as lakes

will make dogs shed light as dogs sometimes shed hair,  
leaving translucent wisps on the carpet for us to  
come upon in May and marvel at.

She is enjoying her silvery self in the corner,  
and scratching at fleas no longer there, brighter  
than last Thursday's smirking comet

and your newest winter coat. The stars shine,  
and the moon too, but your dog sparkles beyond  
the celestial, panting with delight

and wagging her radiant tail to a rhythm  
infinite. I know it is the one to which the constellations  
pulsate while Venus twirls and Mars simply laughs.

She rolls over in an extravagant display of  
pristine sheen, and she comes to the couch,  
and she gently licks my limp left hand

(the left hand of the once luminous boy with the  
intricate adjectives), and she makes the depressed  
me smile for the first time this season.

Maura MacNeil

*The Harbor House*

Upstairs in my room I stood at the window  
and watched my father cross the lawn and walk  
to the end of the pier and become completely still,  
his face sliced by harbor lights. Sometimes

he stripped off his clothes, his body so blue,  
so frail the moment he dove into water  
I thought of him falling to the ocean floor,  
that he might forget his way back. I was

breathless in my wait for him to surface.  
When he chose to return he rose with  
a body I might be uncertain was his own  
and lay on the pier until morning. I'd watch

fog cover him, settle on the lawn, creep over  
drying shells and boat cushions tossed aside  
like salt stained carcasses. Then, always, my  
mother split open the morning as she came

from the house and gathered him up as a child  
and took him back through the doors below.  
Their muffled song of despair leading them  
back to their room. My curtains, yellowed

from salt air, thinned by age, whispered  
across the walls, settled against my back,  
shrouding me. When I finally slept they clung  
to the bed, offering up scents of salt and rain.



Maura MacNeil

*Invention of Longing*

I.

I am fourteen, kissed for the first time.  
It is summer. Always summer, and when the boy

presses his lips against mine I laugh. His lips  
so close remind me of curved mountains.

I can not believe his mouth resting so simply  
against mine will not drift into a cloudless sky.

Later that year, the ground frost burnt and hard,  
there will be a night when I can't sleep and I

conjure a lover who waits for me on the lawn.  
I invent his lips, his whispers running circles

in my ear, his wish for me to follow  
into the cold twilight, his mouth forever

tattooing small hearts on my skin.

II.

Even then I knew longing. That night my head  
spun so quickly I held it within my own hands

not knowing it would be a pose I'd return to  
again and again. And last night,

like so many others when I can't sleep,  
as I drove past shuttered farmhouses, darkened

windows, I remembered how at fourteen I thought  
there would never be another time like that first time,

how there was not always supposed to be something more.  
*I think of what it would be like to live forever.*

## Timothy Martin

*The Untruth*

First one, then another of us, said it.  
Words we assumed were to soothe...  
talk of therapy and melioration, the too-bright  
tablecloth you spread sometimes when mortality  
throws an awkward come-as-you-are party.

She watched from under hospital white,  
eyes extra-quick, as if the body had  
donated to them the surplus movement  
it wouldn't get around to using now. They were  
sharpshooters, double agents that swiftly  
exposed the bullshit we were saying,  
as nurses and IVs threaded each other around the bed.

We made a pact of the untruth.  
It was the bread we baked  
because *we* were hungry. A bedtime story  
to send the teller to sleep, getaway car  
speeding from the vault still brimming with gold.  
We could have at least chosen silence,  
chose to help each other rise and walk instead.

Sandy McCord

*Circus*

In summer, the season of unexpected  
guests, an elephant came to Grand  
Marais, the biggest thing to hit  
our Superior shore town since the storm  
that sunk the Edmund Fitzgerald,  
but that was a November when huge things  
are expected. Even so, she didn't draw  
much of a crowd, not like the week before  
when she was the star of Marquette  
where people were used to looking  
at elephants. But here,  
where we've been taught not to stare  
at tourists, the street was empty  
as that great, gray beast trundled  
past Ace hardware and turned  
at the Sportsman's Bar, sequins swaying,  
her behind sagging, skin ancient  
and mysterious as a fossil.  
We just couldn't watch.

Charles P. Meehan

*Your Father's Den*

Count backwards to one summer night. You and I reclined on lawn chairs in your father's yard, listening to the whir of the pool filter and shining flashlights at the stars. You told me that the stars were actually beams from flashlights of other kids in far away galaxies. I said that you had gone to see *Star Wars* one too many times. When the mosquitoes became annoying, we followed the sounds of jazz coming from the wood-paneled den in the house. With the door cracked opened and light oozing across the floor, we spied your father hugging his upright bass. We sat cross-legged in the hallway and listened to the smooth timbre of wound steel slapping against acoustic mahogany. Your father's fingers looked like a hairy, drunk tarantula as they walked up and down the fret board. You whispered that he often cradled the bass in his arms at night, holding it like he held your mother before she died. You never talked much about your mother dying and I never saw your father cry. Later, as I walked the maple-lined street toward home, I still heard the faint sound of your father's playing echoing in each step I took. When I got home, I wrapped my arms around my mother's waist and cried the tears I heard in your father's den.

Ashley Millerd

*Crowded City*

And then there I was  
Fading into the blurred scene.  
A spark among ashes.  
Unable to be smothered  
By the city's quick pace.

## Caleb Morgan

*Why Not*

Because I have two and a half baths  
with just as many children  
and I complain about oil spots  
on the driveway and buy the good fertilizer  
laughing because my idiot neighbor  
will never figure out how to kill crabgrass

and I quote comedians like I'm funny  
chain smoking alone on the porch at midnight  
almost calling my bastard broker  
but he's probably happy or drunk  
or thinking of another way to screw me over  
and I don't need to hear that again

and I collect business cards in my trunk  
with hundreds of crumpled lottery tickets  
and rear end some expensive looking car  
because I'm belting out Sinatra  
as if some blond stunner in the front row  
is eyeing me greedily

and because I go out of my way for coffee  
just to tip some girl too much every morning  
make a useless comment about the same tomorrow  
and leave hoping a cop might chase me to work  
so I can swerve through stoplights at eighty  
and give him the finger without spilling.

Wilda Morris

*warning*

if a phoenix gives you  
a melon seed    plant it  
and you    like Xiao Da  
may someday climb  
the vine through clouds

plop onto the bank  
of the Milky Way  
saunter across a bridge  
of living magpies  
with fluttering wings

behold sea serpents  
with fiery eyes  
carved on pillars  
of the Heavenly  
Imperial Palace

beware    the paint  
may yet be wet

your red-tipped finger  
may give you away

## Elisabeth Murawski

*Rome, Starry Night*

It's late. Tomorrow,  
Vatican City, the tomb  
of St. Peter

crucified upside down.  
Windows without screens  
let in mosquitoes,

the horns of Fiats.  
Sipping bottled water,  
I trust one special photo

will turn out – the ceiling  
Keats died under  
even as he got his wish

to be among the English  
poets, daisy after daisy  
ornately carved

and gilded, each flower  
framed on a field of blue  
by strips of white.

At dinner tonight, my son  
asked for a sign,  
a proof when I die

there is an afterlife.  
*Just tap me here.* He grabbed  
his shoulder. My airy

*sure* was writ in water.  
What ceiling will be mine?  
I close the shutters

on this city of last things,  
undress in the dark.  
I think of the trout circling



in the window tank. A waiter  
snatched it with a net.  
Solemn in its turning

overhead, the ancient fan  
clicks and spins,  
a wheel of fortune.

## Caitlin Murphy

*Ego Is A Cologne*

ego is a cologne called bipolarity:  
 a self-absorbed fashion focused  
 upon knee-bends, a bottom-lip, buckles  
 and a soft-shoe tap dance  
 having its highs where you tell me:

'baby!! wit is a honey-sap  
 I press my cheek to on my shoulder.  
 I am the sound of cracking ice in warm bourbon,  
 you are beautiful and EVERYTHING I EVER WANTED.'

and you throw out a leg-kick, you spin circles on the carpet until  
 you stir up enough static, the bourbon splashes  
 onto my taffeta, and I laugh.  
 I tell you, STOP, LOVE! I tell you, I AM beautiful, aren't I?  
 and you grin, sloppy,

sloppy, sloopy come on, sloopy, come on!

and in mid-blink and mid-grin and mid-sip you are back at your computer.  
 hi. what's up? nm. u. you okay? yea.  
 but what about your bourbon and my taffeta?  
 shrug. shrug.  
 shrug

and how stupid I look, standing there on the  
 wet carpet, drenched. limp.  
 I am still licking around your edges, buzzed and haunted, idiotic.

silence must prevail to save my own ego. but what I am thinking is:  
 IDIOT. IDIOT. IDIOT. crack your knuckles, and run.

scrub the scent off,  
 it is so intoxicating, chemical-sweet and lasting  
 like pink-rubber-ball smell on my hands.

just as childhood is remembered for sweet lovely warm fresh things  
 so I keep remembering you, mistakenly.

## Caitlin Murphy

*Applesauce Adaptation*

I am sitting in Rita's Diner in New York City when I hear the sound of applesauce outside. Through the window, I see dollops of applesauce fall heavily, splattering quietly on the pavement. It makes a pretty rhythm, but not pretty enough to make the waitress stop to watch. Down the street, a few orthodox Jews in deep discussion absently shake their heads, picking out bits of the sauce from their tight curls. A few feet away, a young mother in yoga clothing pauses to bend over and pop open the cover on her baby's carriage. She turns to her friend and asks, "Do you suppose it's organic?" The stroller streaks by a quartet of hip-hop dancers in the middle of their routine. They continue to squish-squash, slip-slide over the thin film of applesauce coating the ground. The homeless man on their corner turns over his empty coffee cup, dumping the extraneous applesauce into his palm. He cleans off the nickel and two dimes into his mouth, pockets them, and calls it a day. The jazz musicians in front of Rita's are having difficulty playing, scooping handfuls of sauce out of the crevices of their instruments every few notes. One wipes off his glasses and steps under the over-hang of the diner, continuing to play. The rest follow. We all silently agree that the applesauce is a vast improvement over the pork chops that fell last week and are still rotting on various street corners across the city.

Kerrin Nagle

*The Daily Commute*

Kerrin Nagle leaves Chinese characters in diluted mascara on her lover's cheek.  
 Her lashes frame her one, good eye  
 And curl off into the celestial abyss like the DOW and NASDAQ reports below  
     the CNN correspondent on the screen  
 And the napkin that scuffs the sidewalk winds  
 And lodges itself between the zigzag prongs of stilettos crossed  
     – daintily –  
 at the ankles,  
 But any superior absorbent properties are at a loss to sop up the city bile.  
 Kerrin's *delgada* calves kiss and part but leave their brushstrokes in puddle juice,  
     instead.  
 She plays Russian Roulette with the trigger of her umbrella handle  
     – desperate for the bullet to fire –  
 Only it doesn't.  
 So she draws an Iron Curtain trench around her Berlin bones  
 And glides on the corporate-people-mover past the ramshackle 'ma and pa' deli  
     and soul quenching tarot parlor  
 And her lashes sift through the wafts of laundry detergent breath that emerge from  
     clenched-jaw vents  
 While a ring of phallic keys gang rapes the doorknob  
 Which patiently endures the barrage until reunited with her true and proper love  
 But they don't kiss and they don't leave brushstrokes of anything.

Sudie Nostrand

*[So intense is the tenderness]*

So intense is the tenderness  
in your voice

you teach my ear  
how to hear.

Now I catch snatches  
of it everywhere.

**Sudie Nostrand**

*[A moment ago]*

A moment ago  
this was a simple conversation.

At the window  
you lean your forehead

against the cold glass.  
O you spin around

coming to me  
quickly.

Lee Passarella

*Relativity Theory*

*In the wake of Hurricane Katrina  
August 30, 2005*

Green on green. Redbuds and maples  
against the darker pines—  
in this high wind and half-light,  
a place briefly lovely as a coral reef,  
the underwater currents'  
many fingers combing the rich  
growth west to east, west to east.  
To the north, the storm clouds  
mate, knotting one another in slick, fat coils,  
showing here and there  
their near-white underbellies.

That's how it appears  
where I sit thinking, at a red light in Atlanta,  
on the pinwheeling verges  
of the storm. Here, it is an endless,  
gorgeous yin and yang.  
But along the Gulf, from New Orleans  
crabwise to Mobile, it has been  
this vastly hungry thing,  
self-interested, indifferent  
as a boa trussing up a mouse.

For me, it all comes down to this:  
Last night, I learned the surgeons ferreted  
out the tangled monster that has bred  
among the imagined channels  
of your fine brain,  
making its foul snakes' wedding  
in the places I have loved  
but never seen. And suddenly, *this*  
has become the all of human unhappiness—  
this unseen beauty I imagine,  
where the blackness bred,  
and still breeds, its mandrake-  
rooted you-and-not-you.

## Hadley Pennington

*How I wrote a girl*

These are not the makings of a person,  
 as the ingredients to the recipe  
 are not the cake.

When questioned about herself,  
 about her life,  
 these are her answers,  
 in poetic form.

A cat named Jinx that I can't picture  
 may have often sat on a windowsill,  
 I'd like to think he was fat.

“Three brothers and I,”  
 (one older, two younger)  
 “I prefer a cloud to a tree.”  
 Here I insert poetic assumption –  
 and place a little girl in  
     a backyard  
     with a swing set  
     staring at the sky.

I wonder about her being the only girl,  
 like a rose in the midst of dandelions,  
 I'm sure she was often casting her shadow –  
 I wonder if she was ever burned in the light.

And then  
     there it was,  
     her older brother's cancer,  
     her “meaningful experience,”  
 which changed this whole poem.

It's as if this disease  
 were a guest that I hadn't accounted for,  
 and here I am setting the table  
     and there he is,  
 and wouldn't you know it,  
     he is horrid.



But as these sorts of guests often do,  
    he united them,  
    This she told me.  
Her mother gathered them together,  
    and showed them all  
    how to make it known  
that this visitor was not going to  
    overstay his non-welcome.

(And isn't it nice here,  
    to imagine  
a family not only fighting for a common cause  
    but doing so in their party clothes.  
    This, I find to be  
    entirely lovely.)

I'm sure it is symbolic of  
    another kind of beauty,  
a deeper kind of strength.

When she was a senior in high school –  
she performed in her final dance recital  
  
her brother was there.

I say we picture her as sparkling on stage,  
    though I'm not sure  
as to the nature of her costume.

I picture him clapping

And this I am sure of:  
    he is handsome  
    with wisdom.

    This girl,  
all laughter and legs –  
    she is full of life  
and knows something  
    of its recreation.  
    And at her end,  
she clearly stated,  
    that she'd like  
    to hear  
    “it was all worth it.”

and here is the most important  
use of my poetic license –

Id like to insert,  
assume,  
and believe

that it was.

Hadley Pennington

*The Idle Dance*

There is no story here.  
Pulling back  
and pushing forward  
your hands are remembering me.

And the last of the sun  
has become a sort of  
magenta tongue,  
it's licking at the lip of the window,  
the leg of the nightstand.

I wait until it calms,  
until your skin warms with sleep,  
and then I crawl out of bed  
and shock the room with lamplight.

I can't ever seem to sleep here.

I look at your books,  
and your notes.  
I sit down on top of your desk  
and watch the trees  
mourning  
yesterday.  
Green veils,  
indigo shifts,  
rushing  
with sadness.

I'm trying to gather you up  
in my lap –  
your opinions on Kerouac  
and Ginsberg,  
your thoughts on meter,  
the definitions of  
garrulous and viviparous,  
the menu from your favorite Chinese restaurant –  
dirtied with ink  
and *duck sauce*.

Your papers whisper against my skin.  
I can smell you dreaming, even from this far away.  
The distant rumble of a plane wakes you –  
shattering my silence with your movement.

I return to bed now –  
empty handed  
and  
you,  
you are simple in your sheets –  
patting the spot next to you.

I crawl into the space  
you have left for me  
and realize

there is no story here,  
nothing to collect,  
just the echo of  
your scattered thoughts,  
and my restless mind.

just the  
idle dance  
of midnight's  
affection.

## Jane Lunin Perel

*Louie Loves Kids*

When Louie was seventy the neighborhood boy still knocked at the door. “Can Woowie come out and play?” He went out and played catch with the five year old. He sprung the yellow foam football right into those small hands each time. While pink and blue streamers scrambled the sky in a late august sunset. Carnelia and her mother Mara stared through the kitchen window. “He’s so good with kids. It’s adults he can’t take,” Mara said. Scrubbing the roasting pan harder. Her knuckles scalding under hot water. Mostly he told his bosses off. “Go Screw yourself,” he’d say. That way he went from selling mutual funds to insurance to used cars. Carnelia remembered the used car lot with the plastic flags jerking in the wind. Louie standing there like a King reduced to jesterhood. He graduated from law school. But he never practiced law. When he came home Mara was right on him. “Did you sell any cars today?” Clamming him up. Shrinking his balls. Further.

To Carnelia he was a god whose worshippers had turned away. Except for his three daughters. How those flags bothered her. As if George Washington’s birthday were a wild party. And the couple from Puerto Rico were living high off the hog. Buying a ’58 Rambler from Louie for \$300.00. That would give out a week later. In the parking lot of their apartment house. All the families cursing Louie en Español. That is what made Carnelia get that waitressing job. So there would be carfare in her draw for her parents. A few extra dollars for dry cleaning and chocolate. Louie was the one who told her when she asked him if he thought she could be a poet, “Somebody has to write the poems; why shouldn’t it be you?”

He’s dead ten years now. Carnelia keeps dreaming of those red and blue flags. Their riotous, ragged, sweeps against the throbbing sky. Louie’s dingy desk in the corner of the car lot. Inside a tent set up for the G.W. sale. His freezing hands gripping a dirty pencil over the sales contract. The hand shakes. Louie’s gin settling in the freezer. The ghost of him now still sick of adults. Playing catch with the young ones. Who have just made it to the other side.

## Caitlin Read

*Chiloé*

I came of age under a dictatorship  
Now I know how to look unflinchingly at death.  
I am the only one who lives at my address, but strangers pass  
Through my house.  
Each one leaving something  
Behind:  
A coin, a book, a copper plaque, a scarf...  
I have seen the desert in the north, but I didn't go inside the mines  
I have only heard of their darkness.  
And I have seen the forests in the south  
Produce timber from which my house is built.  
I once traveled to Chiloé where a ferry separated me from you,  
The icy pacific,  
And fourteen long hours on a bus at night.  
I grew up in a smoggy city, yet  
It did not stifle my growth.  
I pour two cups of coffee  
But there is only one set of sleepy eyes.  
I have a constant view of a couple mountain peaks, and  
A washing machine by the window,  
That never hums so I do so for both of us.

Emily Reynolds

*The Orange*

Your brown hands peel away  
grainy layers of outer skin.  
Orange leathered covering is  
stripped by workworn palms  
and half moon fingernails  
rimmed with dirt.  
The curls drop to the unfinished floor lightly,  
and lay, covering themselves with sawdust and buttons,  
torn newspaper ads and crushed Pepsi cans,  
the bits of people's lives.  
The section that you offer me is sweet.  
It smells like the warmth of summer,  
or when we fall asleep to the sounds of the breeze,  
swinging in a hammock.  
Twists of peel fall onto my lap where  
you brush them off, roughly, smiling.  
This orange, a sacrifice,  
wordless words of love.

## Emily Reynolds

*Visiting Hours*

When we went to see you in that room, you didn't say a word. Pretty rude, I thought, but shut my mouth, sat stiff, fake-smiling, pretty glad I tanked six beers on the train ride down. As we stared at the bright TV, I thought about tubes and wires, tugging them as you softly spiked and flatlined. I didn't come too close, praying that no one would mention the booze on my breath, hoping even harder that you'd forget my awkwardness if I fed you soggy spinach or half-melted jello with a thin plastic spoon. I left the smell of flowers and not enough air, covering your skinny ankles with a blanket because I was sorry.



Susan Roney-O'Brien

*The day you died*

my next-door neighbor chain-sawed  
lozenges of ice from his driveway  
and stood them in his front yard.  
My husband and I gutted  
the old living room of paper,  
horse hair plaster, laths  
and rats' nests, leaving  
only exterior walls and floorboards.

This morning in the walk-the-dog cold,  
I catch my breath. Chickadees  
cry from branchtips and I stand before  
the slabs of light-refracting ice,  
listening. The silence your voice once filled,  
wells up.  
You always said you would die  
in your forties, and here you've  
done it, gone beyond the amputated leg,  
the excised lung, to complete yourself.  
And cancer didn't get you,  
your heart gave out.

But the gravestone ice can't hold you.  
You've opened the bone cage  
and flown. Last night I saw your  
silhouette against the snow moon.  
The dog yanks me down the road.  
My husband and I will begin  
to rebuild the walls of our home today,  
to ready it for spring. You and I  
both knew it would come to this.

## Leone Scanlon

*Picking Blueberries*

To pick them wild,  
tasting of sweet fern and pine,  
we used to row along the pond's rocky banks,  
filling our buckets with the steady rain  
of blue and bits of twig and leaf.  
The bushes hung thickly over the dark water  
and I secretly feared the eels and snapping turtles  
you said you caught in childhood.  
On the water you talked to me as you  
never did inside  
emotions bursting like the berries  
blue-red on the tongue.

## David Schuman

*Indian Casino*

My son wakes me in the middle of the night. This is unusual because he is a heavy sleeper—he once slept through a hailstorm that left pockmarks on the hood of the car and two crushed robins in the backyard.

“We need to go to the casino,” he says. “I had a dream.”

I mumble something about it being two-thirty in the morning but he is unimpressed.

“Mom was in the dream,” he says, and hands me my pants.

His mother, my wife, has been dead for a year and three months.

The river takes an hour to get to, and there’s the casino, garish against a dingy dawn sky. Beyond the flashing lights, a barge glides past on the river. I have read about pleasure boats that get too close to the barges, underestimating their speed. It is all over for them.

“She said you had to play the slots. She was sort of singing it,” he says, pressing silver dollars into my hand, one by one, until there’s a little column of them in my palm.

“This isn’t tooth fairy money?” I ask. The look that he gives me could remove paint from a wall.

“Say her name when you pull the lever,” he says.

I leave him three stories up in the garage, parked behind a pillar of concrete as thick as a redwood. I tell him to keep the doors locked, against who I’m not sure, but a casino parking lot is no place for a boy. A few days before she died, I saw my wife push my son’s hair out of his eyes as he lay with her in the hospital bed. “Be good, little onion,” she said. I order his favorite pepperoni pizzas instead of making meatloaf and vegetables, I take him to science fiction movies that his friends’ parents won’t let them see, and I bought him a parakeet who shits on my shoulders, but “little onion” is the thing he is going to remember as long as he lives.

There are more people in the casino than I thought would be here this early. The carpet has a pattern of tomahawks, but I don’t think Indians have anything to do with this place. The gamblers carry jumbo plastic soda cups with tokens inside.

You expect me to say that I came out of there with nothing, but that is not what happened. When I open the car door, my son is roused from sleep. The pattern from the upholstery is impressed on his cheek.

“Did we get lucky?” he says.

For the first time I have something to tell him.

Vera Schwarcz

*Dark Woods Blew*

into my bathroom last night, a gypsy  
moth carried mosses, miterwort,  
solomon's seal, cotton grass, tussock  
sedge on its wings, banged itself  
noisily against the neon light. Tired  
of dying sounds,  
I drowned it.

Steven Ray Smith

*Forty Hours*

Popping up at the faintest hallway cheer,  
The slightest chance of drama, of difference—  
I'm always restless to be there, not here—  
To sign my name in blue and take the severance.  
To spend my forty hours driving coast  
To coast, or riding half a Tour de France;  
A day and night in bed in Ocho Rios;  
A semester of college classics class.  
I'd settle for some thwack to hit the floor  
That calms the room and lets me hear each chain  
That rattles, each fan that squeaks before it  
Hums, each nose holding whispers in refrain—  
Enough to know the thwack was falling toys,  
Before they pack and go—my once small boys.

Sarah Stickney

*The Leaf Pile*

John finally agreed to rake the leaves after three hours of nagging. I mean I would have done it *myself* if I wasn't so busy making pie-crusts from scratch, leafing through *Better Homes and Gardens* for a potatoes au gratin recipe but landing on photo after glossy photo of landscapes ten thousand times more perfect than our ramshackle backyard – these look like *golf courses* for Christ's sake. And so John raked up a huge pile of red and yellow leaves, and the kids leaped in butt first in an explosion of giggles, except for little Jamie who stutter-stepped in, a sea of red and yellow flying everywhere. I should have been mad but I envied how they threw themselves in, never mind all the spiders and garden snakes that might be there. I would never step foot into anything like that, not even the ocean unless it was clean enough to see the bottom. So the kids crawled around throwing fistfuls of leaves that went nowhere, crunching dried leaf-crumbs in their hair, and maybe I did that too, once, but I can't remember ever feeling safe *like that*, not in my kitchen or with the girls in the neighborhood or even in John's arms and it stings, knowing that I can't just let go anymore. I'd tell them to stay that way forever, to play in the leaf pile forever, but children won't be told what to do. So I sit by, idly watching them – my little ones throwing fistfuls of leaves that go nowhere – thinking “the places these kids feel safe in, these kids amaze me.” Because really, they do.

Michael Paul Thomas

*Brooklyn, Late Morning*

Levine's voices, two in number, are on these streets, somewhere around the four-stories. They began in a magazine four years ago, taken from the pile of mail she gathered on my desk, out of fear of the other letters I might receive. We read together; one of those few times the lines brought our eyes in time, the one pacing we shared.

Two women paint a brick wall sky blue with rollers and cloth. On my wall, Dylan grimaces, holding a guitar, and I feel as though I've never worked. Mockery is the secret motivation. Our light is dark gray. Splitting asphalt comes up through the house in tremors. I cannot take what is given. We could smell the rain between the houses before it hit our screens.

## Ron Thomas

*Angiogram*

A large needle pierces an artery at the groin. A tube feeds upward through the body. Spits dye into the tunnels and roadways that lead to the heart. The same heart where you live. Where you live when I watch you and you don't know I'm watching. Like the ride home from your mother's house at night on the Fourth of July. You spot the fireworks around the bay. There's Vallejo, or is it Benicia? There's Marine World. Marine World's the best. You're turned toward the passenger window. I glance at brown curls on the back of your head. Far across the water, green, red, and orange bursts rocket and flare up from Sonoma County. You try to locate them all. You have this fascination for geography. Once in a plane high above the earth you pointed down to the checkerboard farms, to the tree-lined rivers that pass through hamlets. There are so many places. Mountains and cities and farms. How do you know where you want to live? I'm on my back on a table. A treadmill test reveals an abnormality, my heart an image which now thumps on a screen. Curly blood vessels rise and fall with the tide of every release and contraction. The vessels look tiny. Thinner than hair. I'm screened off from a full view of the cardiologist, but peeking under the screen I see her wiping blood off her green gloves. She is East Indian, her voice crisp and precise. The curls represent damage from long-term high blood pressure. You have a genetic abnormality. A myocardial bridge, but your coronary arteries are clean. It is not life threatening. I'm giddy on the gurney ride back to recovery where you sit and wait. Everything looks good. I'm okay. You put your clenched fist to your lips. Tears dampen the isles of your eyes. I touch your curls, your face smooth like cool porcelain against the back of my hand. Home. The pillow cradles my head like a cupped palm, the monocle of the moon peers in our window, searches the bedroom, finds your closed eyes. You breathe softly, your long slender fingers rest lightly on the pulse beat of my arm. The world is huge. How do you know where you want to live?



Kyle Vealey

[(upon waking with;]

(upon waking with;  
the gorgeous mass  
of morning you

the finer finger clenched  
of moving open and closed

airy on sure designed regale.

the in and out the we  
spend time with;

ferrying to us and  
back again with

arms wrapped flimsy

the quietness, and  
air on the way night left

you—restful and wholly free,

a one of one's reciprocal.

## Shanti Weiland

*Mormon Boys*

I hide from  
them behind dusty blinds,  
peering through the crack.  
It begins with  
dress shirts, caking to  
their chests.  
The humidity turning  
their sweat sweet.

I imagine them at lunch.  
They smile silently,  
unwrap their sandwiches.  
One wipes the other's chin  
of mustard.  
They want to love God.

After prayers that night, I think  
they shift in bunk beds.  
Their voices are hoarse  
now, a haggard sweet whisper.  
The top lets his toes dangle  
and sleeps to the bottom's  
breath.

But the next day they have  
work to do,  
and they knock  
door to door, knuckles,  
four pink buds per hand.  
I envy their hope, as they pull  
at their dress socks and bump  
elbows down my street.

Shanti Weiland

*God Poem, Part V: Getting His Attention*

Do something silly  
    like reincarnate  
        for cake.

Send Him letters addressed  
“Hey You, it’s me.”

Dream-kiss Him open-  
    mouthed. His skin blue, yours,  
mirror.

Light your bones on fire and shine  
    more than stars.

## Contributors' Notes

**Nick Admussen** teaches English at the Dongbei Caijing University in Dalian, China. His work has appeared in *DIAGRAM*, *Seneca Review*, and is forthcoming in the *Boston Review*.

**Taylor Altman** is a senior at Stanford University majoring in English. Originally from Baldwin, New York, she now lives in Las Vegas.

**Rebecca Aronson** teaches writing at Northwest Missouri State University, in Maryville, Missouri, where she also serves as co-editor for *The Laurel Review* and *Green Tower Press*. Recent and forthcoming publications include poems in *Tin House*, *Cimarron Review*, *Phoebe*, *The Cream City Review*, and others. Her first book of poems, *Spectacle*, is forthcoming from Main-Traveled Roads Press.

**Barry Ballard's** poetry has most recently appeared in *Prairie Schooner*, *The Connecticut Review*, *The Apalachee Review*, and *Puerto del Sol*. His most recent collection, *Plowing to the End of the Road* (Finishing Line Press), was nominated for the Pushcart Prize. He writes from Burleson, Texas.

**Jackie Bartley's** poems have appeared in a number of journals including *Crab Orchard Review*, *Gulf Coast*, and *Image*. Her most recent chapbook, *Women Fresh from Water*, was published by Finishing Line Press.

**Claire Becker** lives in Oakland, California. She is pursuing her MFA at Saint Mary's College. Some of her poems can be found in *The Tiny* and *580 Split*.

**Doug Bolling's** poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Mid-America Poetry Review*, *Poem*, *Poesia*, *Blueline* and elsewhere.

**Lindsay Burton** grew up in Virginia and received her bachelor's degree in English from Virginia Commonwealth University. She is currently working on her master's degree in literature at University of Louisiana at Lafayette.

**Matthew Champion** is a junior studying English and American Studies at Providence College. This is his first publication.

**Neil Carpathios** teaches creative writing at Walsh University in Canton, Ohio. He also is an associate poetry editor of *Artful Dodge* magazine. His poems have recently appeared or are forthcoming in *Rosebud*, *Talking River Review*, *Lake Effect*, *Birmingham Poetry Review*, and other journals.

**Nina Corwin** is a social worker and the author of one collection of poetry, *Conversations With Friendly Demons and Tainted Saints* (Puddin'head Press, 1999). Her work has appeared, or is forthcoming, in a number of anthologies and journals including *Nimrod*, *Poetry East*, *Evansville*, and *Spoon River*.

**Corrine De Winter** is the author of seven collections of poetry and prose including *Like Eve*, *The Half Moon Hotel*, *Touching the Wound* and, most recently, *The Women at The Funeral*. She lives in Western Massachusetts.

**Alison Espach** is a junior English major at Providence College.

**Lucía Estrada** lives in Colombia and is the author of three books of poetry: *Fuegos nocturnos*, *Noche líquida*, and *Maiastra*. The poem translated here is from her most recent manuscript *Grimorio*. **Jason Stumpf** teaches literature and creative writing at Providence College. His poems and translations have recently appeared in *Post Road*, *Circumference*, and elsewhere.

**Gary Fincke's** fourth collection of stories *Sorry I Worried You* won the Flannery O'Connor Award for Short Fiction and was published by Georgia in 2004. Other recent books are *Standing around the Heart* (Arkansas, 2005), a collection of poems and *Amp'd: A Father's Backstage Pass* (Michigan State, 2004), a nonfiction account of his son's life as a guitarist in two signed rock bands.

**Graham Foust** was born in Knoxville, Tennessee and raised in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. He teaches in the graduate and undergraduate writing programs at Saint Mary's College of California. His third book of poems, *Necessary Stranger*, will be published in the fall of 2006.

**John Gallaher** is the author of *Gentlemen in Turbans*, *Ladies in Cauls*, and *The Little Book of Guesses*, which won the Levis Poetry Prize from Four Way Books and will be published in 2007. He works as co-editor of *The Laurel Review* and has poems forthcoming in *Verse*, *The Iowa Review*, and *Crazyhorse*, among others.

**Chris Gordon's** poems have appeared in a number of anthologies and journals, including *The Antioch Review*, *Fence*, and *Northwest Review*, and have been translated into Japanese on two occasions by PEN-Award recipient Hiroaki Sato.

**Andrew Grace** received his MFA from Washington University in Saint Louis. His first book *A Belonging Field* was published by Salt Publishing. His poems have recently appeared in *The Denver Quarterly*, *The Crab Orchard Review*, and the *Boston Review*. He currently lives in Tucson, Arizona.

**Kevin Griffith** teaches at Capital University in Columbus, Ohio. His latest book is *Paradise Refunded* (Backwaters Press, 1999), and one of his poems appeared recently in U.S. Poet Laureate Ted Kooser's column "An American Life in Poetry."

**Jacqueline Guidry's** novel, *The Year the Colored Sisters Came to Town*, received the Thorpe Menn Award and was selected for the Pen/Faulkner Writers in Schools program. Her shorter work has appeared in a variety of publications including *Crab Orchard Review*, *Rosebud*, *Yemassee*, and the *Chattahoochee Review*. She recently completed her second novel, *Blue Candle Blessings*.

**Daniel Gutstein** lives in Washington, D.C., where he is visiting assistant professor of creative writing at George Washington University. His first book, *Counting Station*, is forthcoming from Edge Books in 2006. Poems and stories have appeared or are forthcoming in *TriQuarterly*, *Ploughshares*, *Barrow Street*, *StoryQuarterly*, *Best American Poetry*, and elsewhere.

**Lois Marie Harrod's** chapbook *Put Your Sorry Side Out* was published by Concrete Wolf this spring. Her other books of poetry include *Spelling the World Backward* (Palanquin Press, 2000) and *Part of the Deeper Sea* (Palanquin Press, 1997). Her poems have appeared in many journals including *American Poetry Review*, *The Carolina Quarterly*, *Southern Poetry Review*, and *Prairie Schooner*. A Geraldine R. Dodge poet, she currently lives in New Jersey and teaches English at Voorhees High School.

**Michael Hogan** is the author of fourteen books including *The Irish Soldiers of Mexico* which formed the basis for the MGM film *One Man's Hero* starring Tom Berenger. He lives and works in Guadalajara, Mexico.

**Peter Johnson's** new book of prose poems is *Eduardo & "I"* (White Pine Press) and he has a novel, *What Happened*, forthcoming in the fall of 2006 from Front Street Books.

**Jeff P. Jones's** writing has won several awards, including the Lamar York Prize for Nonfiction and the Hackney Literary Award for the Short Story. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in the *Mississippi Review*, *Puerto del Sol*, *Passages North*, and elsewhere. A contributing editor for *The Chattahoochee Review* and *Fugue*, he teaches writing at the University of Idaho.

**Matthew Kern** is the author of numerous poems, short stories, stage plays, screenplays and stories for children. His stage play *One for Another* was performed at the Alan Carr Theater in Lake Forest, Illinois. He also works as a toy developer and assists environmental attorneys in clean-up projects. He lives in Hainesville, Illinois with his wife and three children.

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**Elisabeth Murawski** is the author of *Moon and Mercury* and *Troubled by an Angel*. Her writing has also appeared in *The New Republic*, *Antioch Review*, *Ontario Review*, *The Yale Review*, and other journals.

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**Lee Passarella's** poems have appeared, or are forthcoming, in *Chelsea*, *Cream City Review*, *The Louisville Review*, *The Cortland Review*, and many other periodicals. His long narrative poem based on the American Civil War, *Swallowed up in Victory* (White Mane Books), was published in 2002. *The Geometry of Loneliness* will be published this year by David Robert Books. Passarella teaches English at Georgia Perimeter College and is Senior Literary Editor of *Atlanta Review* magazine.

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Retired from teaching, **Leone Scanlon** lives in Worcester, Massachusetts where she paints as well as writes. Her poems have appeared in publications including *Common Ground Review*, *The Maxis Review*, *The Teacher's Voice*, *The Worcester Review*, and *For All That Is Our Life* (Skinner House, 2005).

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**Steven Ray Smith's** work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Raintown Review*, *Orbis* (UK), *Aura Literary Arts Review*, *Story South*, *Parnassus*, the *Austin Chronicle*, and other publications. He is the editor of *Texas Poetry Journal*.

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**Ron Thomas** is a landscape contractor living in northern California. His poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in the *Montserrat Review*, *Texas Review*, *Wisconsin Review*, *Sanskrit*, and elsewhere.

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