



THE ALEMBIC
2008

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The Alembic

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EDITORS' NOTE

...In order to make you understand, to give you my life, I must tell you a story—and there are so many, and so many—stories of childhood, stories of school, of love, marriage, death, and so on... I begin to long for some little language such as lovers use, broken words, inarticulate words, like the shuffling of feet on the pavement...

—Virginia Woolf

The image of shuffling feet on the pavement and the idea of telling a story come to fruition in the writing chosen for this year's *Alembic*. This collection tells many stories, all of which evoke some part of the longing to which Virginia Woolf refers. We felt it our responsibility to share these writers' experiences with you. When put together, they begin to tell one version of the story of human experience—a difficult task. We hope these poems, stories, and pieces of art help you make sense of the broken and inarticulate words we all encounter.

—Lia Armatas, Rob D'Alfonso,
Kristina H. Reardon, Carrie Terbush

This issue of The Alembic is dedicated in fond memory to Dr. Rodney K. Delasanta, who provided support and encouragement to so many students during his more than 40 years teaching in the English department at Providence College.

POETRY

Bread

Bruce Alford

money
I ask for it
and my father points
at his pocket.

He is not Christ.
He is Simon from Cyrene
a man picked out of the crowd
compelled to bear the cross after Jesus.

After a few dollars
I say, that's all I need
nodding, not thinking
of a boy, his five loaves
the woman with two fish
how fragile the crowd hummed

A little music, a little folding
of the hands, and eyes
turned away from Jesus
toward the overflowing baskets.

I think like the disciples who said
"It's already late, and this is a lonely place."

Dining at 5

Lia Armatas

Dora chats with the milkman who stares at a strategically positioned broach on her bosom most of the morning, until she begins humming and pushing a Hoover around a waxed floor and a roped-off rug. She stirs noodles into a casserole dish as the clock strikes 5:00 p.m. His boots stay outside and the baby wakes from his nap, just in time for a lesson in table manners and fear and the “bolts and screws of America.” Once the mush of green and weathered limp noodles are gone, one more slam of his glass and a “goddamn communists.” Milk drips down the leg of the perfectly polished table.

Keep your charm, America.

The Cubans
for Virgil Suarez

Rane Arroyo

A boat can be anything that floats:
theology, driftwood, the ghosts of
sailors rowing to paradise, tire tubes,

water wings, prayers, rafts sewn from
fallen palm trees. Sí, stolen yachts.
To drown in the sea is to return to

human pasts as fish, to a cruel womb.
Desperation is unseemly for our
televisions. Humans without gills

shiver alone in the freezing tropics.
Between the two blues, they weep,
deepening the dangers around them.

Reading in the Yellow House

Robin Behn

Sometimes for two weeks at a time
she and the boy would be alone
with the yellow and the house.

And by the seventh day
they would turn, both of them,
the color of privacy, and stay that way,

even or especially
when they walked down the hill
together as if under one yellow umbrella

to go to the children's library
whose yellowing volumes had once, in an hour,
by the frantic and heroic and thoroughly acclaimed

actions of five passing adolescents
been rescued by a kind of book-brigade
from the flash flood.

Did we know about the yellow river, its fevers?
Did we know about the noble youth
the boy could, here, become?

The yellow house, above it all, would wait
for their return with the five unread volumes
and give them the yellow chair to read in,

and listen hard, itself, because stories never last
half as long as they should.
This is how the yellow house came to decide

it would be a place they could actually live in
and let their stories story it
so they would never die.

Dinner Out

Gaylord Brewer

No crème brûlé these days, be serious.
So once your places are cleared
it's just the matter of payment—
too damn much—splitting what's due,
negotiating a margin of service:
stick it to the girl or pile it on,
or division that cuts where it should.

Some small change finally arrives
and the rest's a figurative cakewalk:
the wave to the owners—good-bye,
good-bye, thanks ever so much—
out with a flourish or stumble.
Couples preened for the night two-step
toward bars, intersect your course.

“Too old for that,” she concludes,
thus knotting a bow around evening's
conversation, a Gordian noose,
a what-the-hell-ever: just shut up.
The top down exposes skulls to heaven,
rebuke of wind you vowed was fun.
Then it's eyes on the road, knuckles on

the wheel, the yellow line home
with no flashing lights or ironic gods,
only a shameful, searing déjà vu
and a hundred silent conceits
bubbling the swamp of your brain
that it will never, ever happen again,
whatever it is, or was, or shall be.

Srebrenica
A Sestina

Erica Carroll

The girl walks outside alone at night.
 She is but a young daughter,
 the silhouette of her long shadow
 leaving a dark stain on the earth.
 Even the approaching rain
 won't remove the stench of blood.

It must be an innocent's blood,
 a sacrifice to the endless night.
 A peace offering from the gods, the rain
 will wash over the daughter
 until she yields to the earth,
 and what remains is only a shadow.

She already feels like a shadow
 of herself. Drained of her virgin blood,
 she kneels on a mound of earth,
 pleading with God this night
 that she never bear a daughter
 whose only consolation is the rain.

She doesn't remember feeling the rain
 as she stood, hidden in the shadow
 of a willow, the lone daughter
 to watch her father's blood
 spilled wastefully as the night
 came on, and the black earth

shrieks with delight as he returns to the earth.
 These few drops of rain
 will make his spirit grow. The night
 surrounds her like a shadow
 with a taste for blood
 and is not satisfied with the father or daughter.

She is a poor man's daughter,
 tied to the land, but this earth
 has consumed the blood
 of thousands. No amount of rain

will leach it out. She watches her shadow
grow with the rise of the night.

Tonight, even the moon is blood red.
A shadow of a rain cloud passes by the lonely satellite,
reminding her that she is an orphan daughter of Earth.

A Photo of Bathing in Shadow

Lisa Fay Coutley

My friend's lover, who is older than her
father, emails a photo he took in Spain

on vacation with his wife. The scene is sliced
in threes to draw the eye from cat

to cage to woman. We joke about
the cat, outside the cage, thin enough

to maneuver the bars, the woman
far out a second-story window to see

the cat, seeing the cage. We joke about
obituaries, how my friend reads them

if her lover hasn't called in a day. I explain
binary black holes, how one star isn't

visible without the other. She knows
that a man who dresses himself in shadows

draws light like hers. She's eager to link
herself to such a metaphor, words

like *tidal force & naked singularity*. He tells her
he is the cage in the photo. *I agree,*

I say, with the words *stellar remains* still
fresh from lunch. It may be the smartest

thing he's ever uttered. It may be
his most lovely gesture yet.

Sonny

V. M. Fry

He was a full-fledged hero
With a love of fast cars. He was catnip
To women, especially those who craved
Rescue, of any sort at any hour.

He loved the grittiness of the urban world,
Fights in the ring, and a damn good cigar.
He had a washboard stomach and a Hollywood
Grin. He won at pool and was forgiving of cheaters.

His hair escaped from his hat, and he wore
Alligator boots and carried a Swiss Army knife
On weekends to impress “the girls.”
He was a graceful dancer and liked holding

His partners close and humming when the lights
Went blue. He loved his job jumping
Down that pole, the bell clanging wildly, then
Leaping that throbbing firetruck to Hell.

Visitor's Lounge

Bill Garvey

David lifts a cigarette to his lips, inquisitively,
as if he wonders how it got between
his yellowed fingers, or admires its simplicity,
smoke curling like the question he ponders
the way Bogart would, his pasty face
reflecting in the lounge's one window,
as if he had options, royalties to calculate
before granting consent to film his insider's view
to this insidious disease, its noisy industry
which merely hushes the murmur of voices
at moments like these when he needs clarity
to make what he thinks are his own choices.
His nephew blushes for having made
this personal request for something
as meaningless as a senior project.
David leans forward, blows smoke
through a corner of his mouth like steam
wheezing from a furnace, then answers.

(Who) Art in Heaven

Meredith Davies Hadaway

The projectionist who starts the movie, then reads the paper
in his booth, doesn't care who gets the girl

in the end. He lingers over a late supper.
Chases peas around his plate

with stained utensils. Because
time has someplace to go

the final reel, untended, ticks away
in blind orbit. To father children,

you must be willing to be forgotten.

Lone one (two)

Jessica L. Kowal

Just beyond the foot of my bed
sits a gentle man
who does not speak unless spoken to
 (and he is never spoken to).
As the footsteps of company approach
The air is oppressively thick
And he does not know where to look
 (but to the floor).
I want to tell him everything's okay.
(Nothing's okay.)

He studies their shoes with furrowed brows
as if this trifling material
will appear on a quiz
 (unannounced, of course).
My parents
Suddenly somehow older
Wrap me in hugs that hurt
 (in a good way).
They pay him no attention.
(He already gets paid for this.)

When they leave
He and I are alone
Together
 (more alone than together).
I pretend to sleep but can't
Because I'm too focused
On making my eyelids not flutter
 (still – pretending is easier).

City Kids

Joseph Kramp

On the fourth of July they line the bridge.
The sparkles lead their eyes to the mirror windows of a sky rise,
The animals under the terrace pissing and howling,
And the small park nearby that gives each of them
A kind of warmth never spoken of publicly.
True to the days of freedom, gunshots explode
Forcing them to cross the bridge while blood trickles
And follows them down the cracks of the aging sidewalk.
Looking behind them, their faces are lonely as gods
And white as winter moons.

Fallen Idols, Revisited

Norm Levine

Human sacrifice, perhaps, is what it is.
 They give us their livers, their lives
 and with them, we soar
 higher than Icarus.
 They put us in a sweat like his wax
 and we give the sun our finger
 for a measureless moment, extending us,
 before the fall.

Were those home runs or asterisks they hit?
 And what of the record-breaking sprints
 and spokes zooming up that hill in France
 passing Sisyphus with his rock?

Was it Coleridge's pen or opium,
 we might ask, that gave us Xanadu?
 How many poems did absinthe write?
 Can we turn away from Van Gogh's
 astigmatic sky?
 For some, sobriety couldn't tame
 their anguished soul.

In chorus we clamor to raid Olympus,
 defy the gods and re-write the record book.
 Now those melted wings are a cupful of pee.
 We take our hero off the pedestal
 and put him under it
 screaming "hubris" as we stone him
 for daring to leap beyond mere men.

Lamb's Head

Jane Lunin Perel

Carnelia has to stop watching these cooking shows. Especially the ones about exotic cuisines. She can not stop thinking about the special on Lebanese food. Spinal chord, boiled. Then simmered in a sauce and served in a sandwich. She watches the man in the yellow T.-shirt with the hairy arms bring the pita to his lips. When he bites into the chord pieces, his eyes roll like a lover's. His jaw works furiously. The juice slides from his mouth like afterbirth. Then the camera close-ups the lamb's head. Its eyes are staring out from the sides. Doll's eyes caught in the inferno. The chef is saying that his customers, who all appear to be men, come once or twice a week for chord and head. "It's very labor intensive," he says. First, you have to boil them and throw out the clotted water. Spice the next water bath with cardamom and bay leaf. Then you have to dip them in egg, flour. Then bread them. Next you roast them for three to four hours. Finally, the head sits on the platter like a cartoon of John the Baptist's. Or your pet dog's head. But with an elongated jaw.

Another man sits waiting, sweating. His eyes glaring. His red shirt clings to his round belly. Sausage casing. He plunges his fork into the lamb head's left temple and lifts his knife, Carnelia feels her colon rise in her and convulse. He chews and wags his head. Now he goes for an eyeball. Plucking it from its socket with his fingers. When he put it into his mouth, the music swells. The picture zig-zags. The camera tech is reacting like Carnelia. The poor breaded head sits on that serving dish like her worst regret. She can not bring herself to look up again. Finally, the music stops.

Several days later, Carnelia's student, Nadine, stays after class with questions. All Carnelia can see when Nadine speaks of phallogocentrism and women's silence is a lamb's head on Nadine's shoulders. The bold black eyes. The flat nose and long jaw. Carnelia will never watch another cooking show. She lacks the courage to ask Nadine if in Lebanon, as a child, her grandmother prepared these foods. Carnelia sways, sweats. "Professor, you look faint." Nadine gets a chair for her and a bottle of water. Nadine who is pre-med thinks it's hypoglycemia. Carnelia nods. Her head bobbing as if it's boiling.

An Office

Jesse Mack

1: Midnight

Night lifts from the cold stillness.
Day-old snowfall thin among grass-blades.
Fog sleeps in enormous sheets along the quiet street.
A yellow-orange haze glows from the lampposts.

2: Morning

Light, white with snowfall, streaks into the room,
strikes the corners with a yellow glow.
The leaves of late fall linger on the trees.
Snow hangs and drips from heavy boughs.

3: Midday

Sheets of orange wave upon tree branches.
Sky in streaks of blue, white, grey.
A single brown leaf tumbles to the ground
just outside the window.

4: Evening

Sounds of melting snow open in the late November air.
Suddenly in the stillness
rise notes of wordless liturgy.
The wind's cold rhythms move in glorias
that call upon my voice to join with them.

The Kiss

Kevin H. MacLean

A pair of lungs breathes in deep so blood cells
Can complete their race around the intricate sapphire and ruby circuitry
Before they grow tired and die,
They give life and color to the smooth skin of two legs
That will never look quite that shade of beautiful ever again
In that moment, full of originality and sureness, muscles
Contract and twist, and tighten in all the right places while two hands
Move separately, one raising slightly in anticipation and the other
Clutching a distant cousin, tendons
Pull an ankle and connective tissue slightly off the solid ground. Lips
Glide back and forth then purse and hold before being slowly pushed and
pulled apart by an eager jaw, the neck snakes, curls forward, then back

Eyelids open, the windpipe closes
Your pupils focus downward toward metatarsals that fidget over each other,
Warm saliva glides down an esophagus past the heart that gives you the rhythm
and
The feeling (you called “butterflies”) you have right now all through your
glowing red body
You are on fire yet you tremble
Lungs exhale slowly and controlled
A set of beautifully crimson vocal chords
Vibrate and create the sound carved by your tongue into words that mean
everything to me.

Tin Can Phone

Joe McCormack

I have one of those tin-can-string phones coming in my window. One night I put my ear to it, and Satan told me I'm a swell guy, but I can't rely on myself for happiness. His voice sounded tinny in the metal cup. He went on to talk about how bad the young stars of Hollywood were being, with their drinking and making sex tapes. He said it with a wink and a nudge.

One day in the clear quiet of my room God told me I can't rely on myself for happiness. It was confusing that He said that, and then didn't tell me what it meant. So I put the can back to my ear and fell asleep listening to the jangle.

Corpse

John McKernan

Stick of shadow
With a pinch of yesterday

Three screams
Filtered through
A rusted screen door

A nail
The size of a doll's tooth
Pounded Into dry sand
That's how I wanted to explain it

When my daughter asked
Will you be a corpse too Dad?
Of course Of course Of course
In the interest of silence I gave her
Three large licorice gum drops

Chiaroscuro

Elizabeth Mosier

I

Looking down I have coerced the reluctant ground
Into silent conversation it is stained like the veiled
Eyes of every face here unfamiliar awkward
An artless pause and the room is obscured
By reddened cheeks in the dark
My eyes flash upward momentarily
I am blinded by those irises

II

I would like to seize her eyes
And imprison them in the sky
She does not know
They are small stars
And when she blinks it is like lightening

On the Radio

Kristina H. Reardon

He preferred the radio, he said. The television was too loud. *Bastante algo* but he didn't know what. His granddaughter would come in after school, when it got too hot outside, when it was ninety something degrees, and she would say, "¿qué pasa, 'buelito?" as if it mattered. As if she had learned his Spanish, his accents, his words. "¿Quieres zumo?" she'd say, pouring herself a cup of bitter grapefruit concentrate, making that z sound like a th, and he'd cringe and tell her, it's *jugo*, not thumo. And that he didn't drive a *coche* but a *carro* and all he really wanted to do was listen to the Jankees on the radio because even though they were playing on TV, it was just... *bastante algo*, too much something, but he couldn't say what. He didn't know what.

After Reading Gerald Stern's "Straus Park"

Benjamin Russell

Don't go to Denver.
Come with me. Spend your life
walking cobblestone streets.
Don't go to Denver
with its rotten air and winter months.
I'll give you Neruda, then Rimbaud,
then Robert Desnos. I'll give you their words
so you may recall this reborn city,
in different languages. I'll give you
the ocean it lies upon, this old bed,
the blue house where I wrote my first real poem.
I want you to have the waterfall,
the altar of prayer that lies behind it,
the bell that starts the service.
I'll give you the best local cuisine:
the Cuban and Italian dishes, Portuguese
bakeries, Armenian delis, the cheap beer,
then a smile that makes you blush.
I'll get the ghosts out of their graves for you,
the old men singing barbershop.
I will give you some earth
to carry back with you in your shoes,
I will give you a sweet fruit.
Just remember to swallow the seeds.

Kidding Myself

Benjamin Russell

*It had amused him to make
a kind of living mirror; a little homunculus
that could learn a few of his lesser tricks.*

-Stephen Dobyns

I spilled some water and joked
I had made an ocean. There was nothing
better to do. I thought I'd make an island
next, then some plants and animals.
I went to the cupboard looking for help.
The cereal and tomato sauce told me to stop.
This was a bad idea. I was playing with something
too delicate. I thought of the little man
I would make out of spit and couscous
and how sad he might be. It would not be fair
to the little guy. He would barely be able
to stand up straight. He would know nothing
beyond the oven and the coffee pot.
The rats would begin to nibble on him.
He would dry out, crumble, and fall to pieces.
I'd have to wash him down the drain.

Royal Flush

Anthony Sanders

No aces now, just three face cards in play.
The kind of hearts, one-eyed king, crowned cowboy,
Commander of K company, the king
Of suicide depending on the game;
The queen of spades, the lady the hen or bitch,
Often called Black Mary or slippery Anne,
Often called mop=squeezer and whore,
Depending on the game; and then the jack,
The lowliest coat card, known as a knave,
J-boy, j-bird, fish hook, and sometimes john,
Though it's not spoken how he serves the court
After servicing the queen, maybe bowing
To the boss just back from his own fox-hunt,
While praising cuckoldom under his breath.

Mother and Sister

David Sapp

On warm summer mornings,
our mother lay sleeping
down an ill-used lane,
away from some distant dirt road,
as an abandoned house
we'd pass in the Ford,
its siding, gray and rotting
and plaster walls,
shingles and rafters
slowly falling in upon itself.
In the night,
thunderstorm winds ripped
through black, empty windows
and tossed and tangled,
into a violent frenzy,
the bare raspberry briars
growing in the kitchen.

On warm summer mornings,
when my sister was three,
as soon as she could,
on tiptoes,
reach and turn the knob,
she was out the door,
running with the dogs,
with the tall Irish setter,
the leader of the pack
of burr and tie encrusted mutts,
hunting, scaring up rabbits,
plunging through the field's high grass;
and when she would fall,
tumbling headlong and far behind,
her pals sat and waited for
her to get up and her small limbs
to spring again.

Begging for More

Kevin Shea

It comes from the shivering shadows,
betrayed by four-step drums and a chilling cello/
violin combination, playing a dirge,
an earthy hum of hastened pace and intent

and purpose. Is this the right song, the one where the trees
are chipped away by rickety hatchets and bone saws
fit to sliver a barge in cool, clean water? The one
where street sign silhouettes bark at passing dogs

to the tune of a dying quail? My radio is out of batteries
and I can't tell if this is just fuzz or if I am
fading as I watch the last gleam
of screaming headlights melt

through the broken banister
and bleed onto my feet. I will wash them
with my dirty hair and I will wake up tomorrow
and sit outside and listen. The song will no longer sound

like low-flying jets, like the chopping helicopter
swiveled about my head, like the fallout shelter
siren and the whining of bats, like the sound of bones
crunching in the silver graveyard. It will be

of even pace, back and forth, two notes,
in perfect harmony, like swaying boats,
the telephone wires will nod, will breathe,
will play a gentle tune, will sheathe

the weapons of the night, will leave
the neighborhood begging for more.
The skylark will sing, the pigeon will soar,
and all the while we'll beg for more.

Bargain

Philip St. Clair

Reckless guilt, careless regret: these are the forces that keep us awake
 when we are thirty.
 We leave our tangled beds for the living-room couch, watch CNN
 scroll from right to left.
 until we are put to sleep. When we are out in the daytime, among
 billboards and sparrows
 and people like us, we are overcome by all those broken narratives
 that rush at us
 in fragments we can't piece together, We go to the self-help section
 in mall bookstores
 and look at photos of the authors, read about them on the dust jacket,
 try to determine
 which one would be the best to meet for cappuccino at a Starbucks,
 the one most likely
 to ask us to a Holiday Inn right off the Interstate. When we reach fifty,
 we begin to notice
 that the many-petaled chronicle we've carried about begins to smell
 like the family dog
 when he slinks in from the rain and shakes himself: a circumstance
 we grouse about
 but quietly enjoy. Friends will tell us we've made adjustments;
 critics think we're
 sadly in denial. But whatever they say, we might not care: we begin
 to dwell upon last things—
 the light we aim for, the spirit in the alabaster robe, the golden scales
 we tap with a silver coin.
 What was the deal we made so long ago? We can't remember.
 We hope we've kept our end.

Poetry is...

Merrill Sunderland

When you eat a large buff chick pizza with extra bleu cheese by yourself and you drop a piece of chicken that reminds you of that girl in your civ class with the perfect skin tone who is not really attractive but kind of attractive who loves to work out and reminds you of that trainer guy who “appreciates the enthusiasm” of non varsity players as he yells at you for climbing the pegboard until you leave and change out of your gym clothes and switch into the new shoes you bought that really don’t fit but look cool (you buy more practical shoes later) because you want to be different but then you see someone else with the same shoes with that girl from your civ class on their way to the pizza place with the buff chick pizza you like and then you realize that the confident dude with the skin tone girl can be you if you want it bad enough.

Midnight Blue

Carrie Terbush

I've started seeing in midnight blue.
A kind of tribute to
your favorite Converse sneakers,
the ones you kept until
the imprints of your feet were permanent.

A measure of authenticity,
you said.

You were right—
the world looks most real
between the lines of color and black.
Never mind meaning.

So I'm loyal to
the beautiful ambiguity of existence,
where not knowing everything
has to be everything
because this life is all we've got.

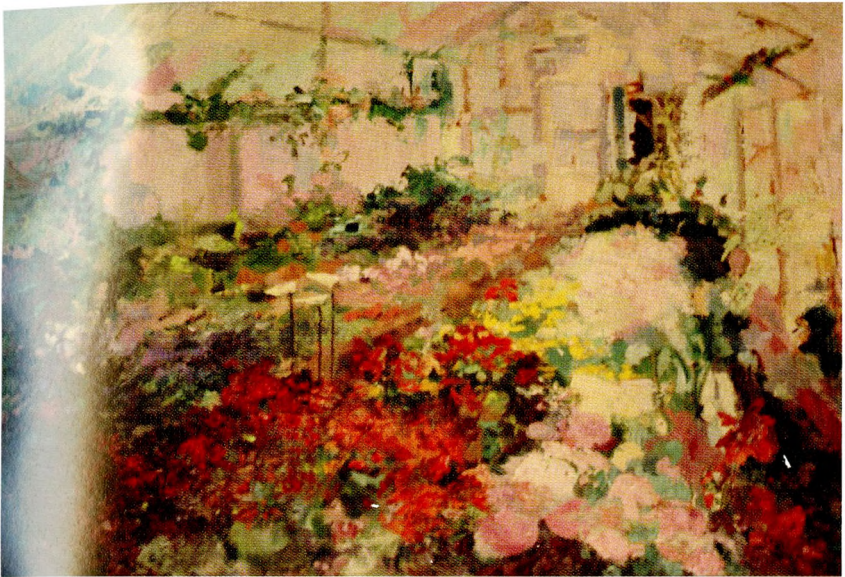
You'd be proud to see me wearing it out.

Samuel Beckett Fills Out His Census Form

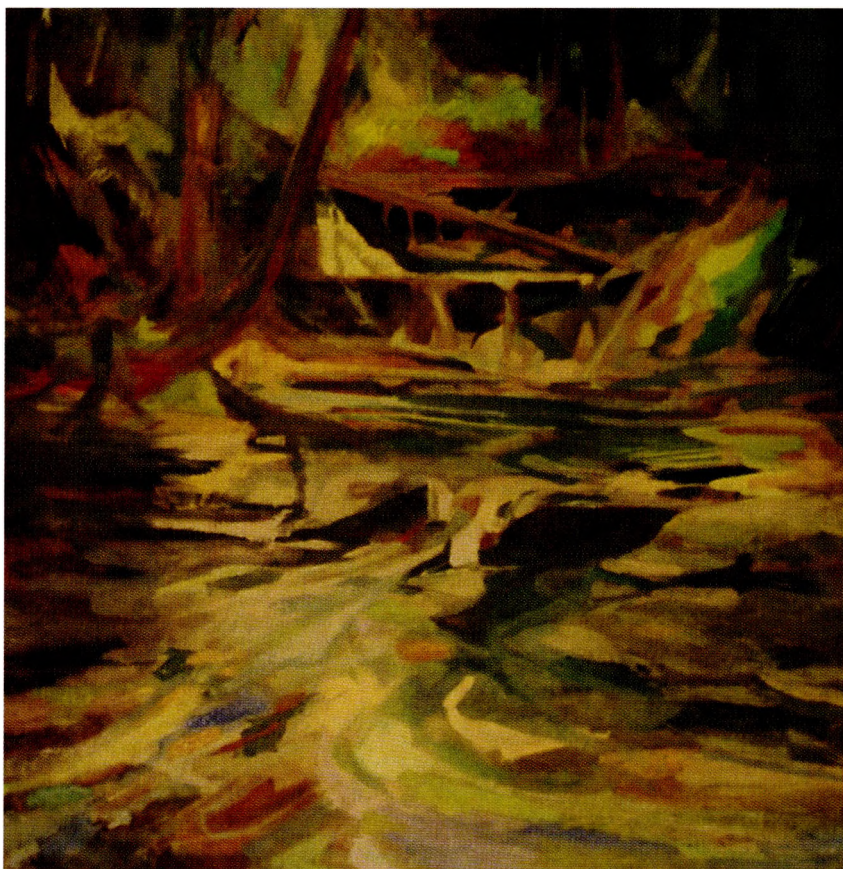
Sheila Tombe

The problem lies in labels we assign
to disparate, unnamable designs.
Each noun is thus a filthy circumstance
and not the thing itself; so what we strive
to reify in space becomes a false
deification of the wrong address—
an incorrect presumption on our parts
to name the void. No wonder mail gets lost,
and prayers fail; they cannot say the whole
of our intent. His “faith” is not my “love”—
yet that is what we both mean when we mouth
those sounds. Her “God” is insufficient means
to illustrate my “aching-reach-of-vast-
compelling-sky-that-arcs-above-the-swelling-
of-dolphins-belted-heartsongs-into-blood-
pulsed-sighs-across-the-grand-design-of-time.”
But both are trite. Both mirror nothing more
than fog that hides the lighthouse on the shore.

ART



Greenhouse
Katherine Burke



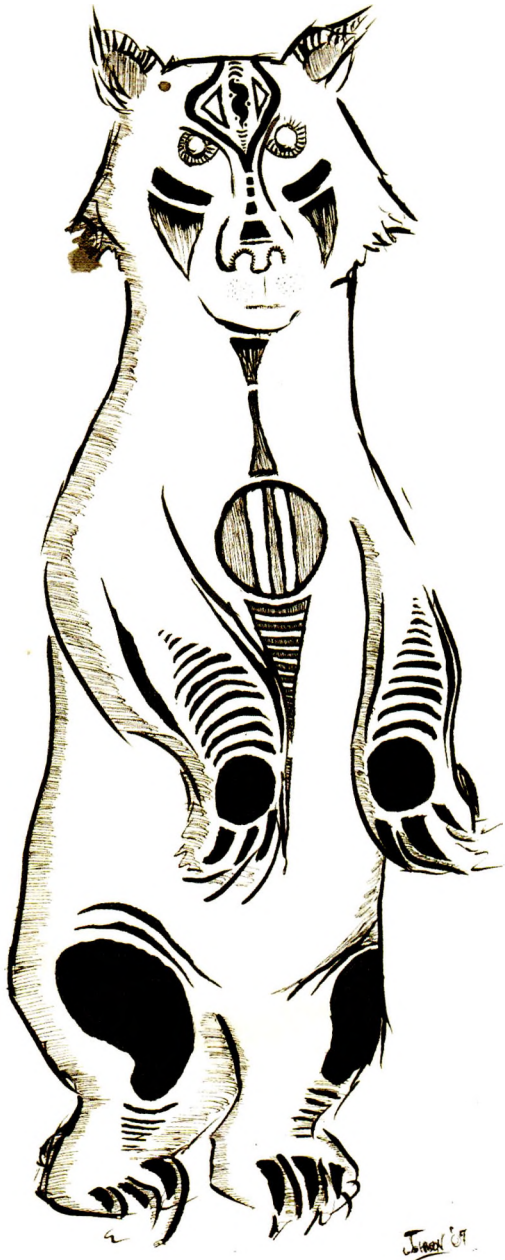
Waterfall
Katherine Burke



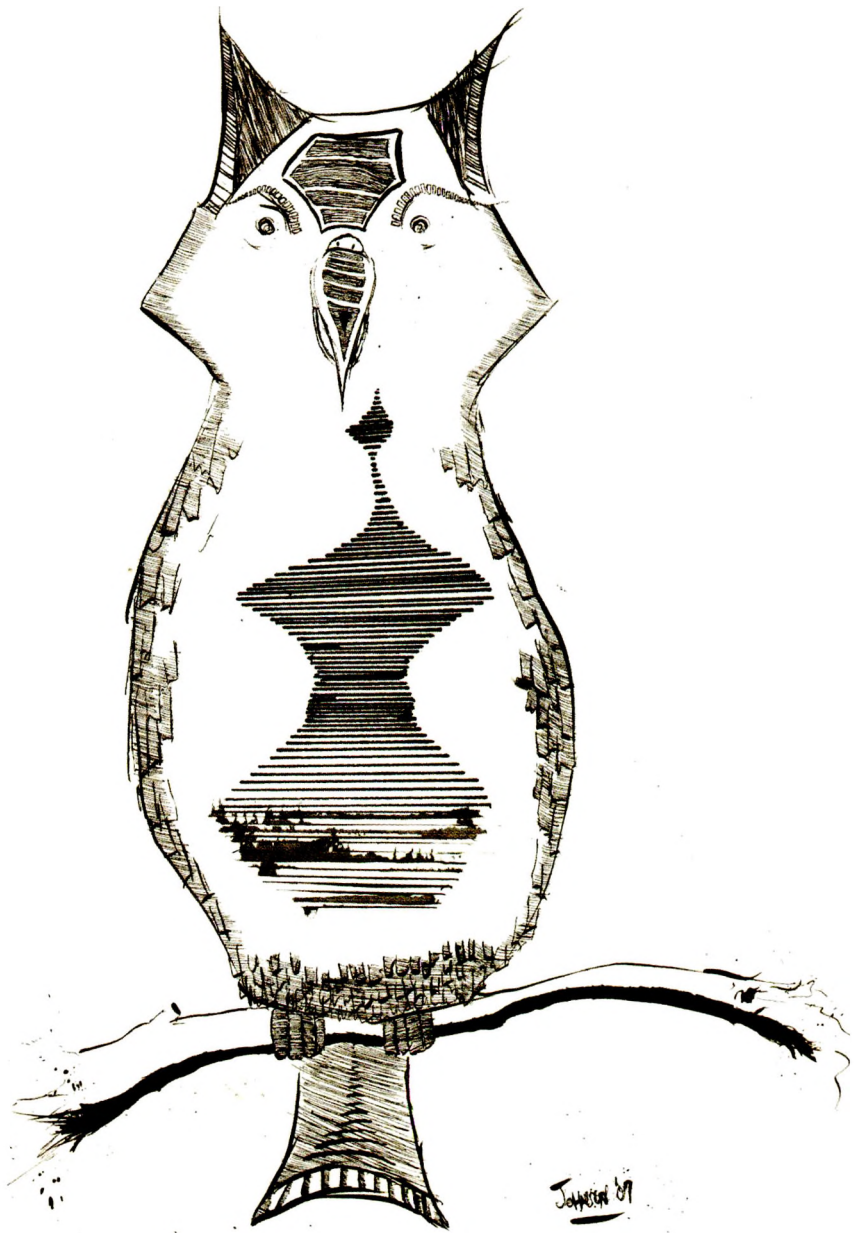
Vase
Katherine Burke



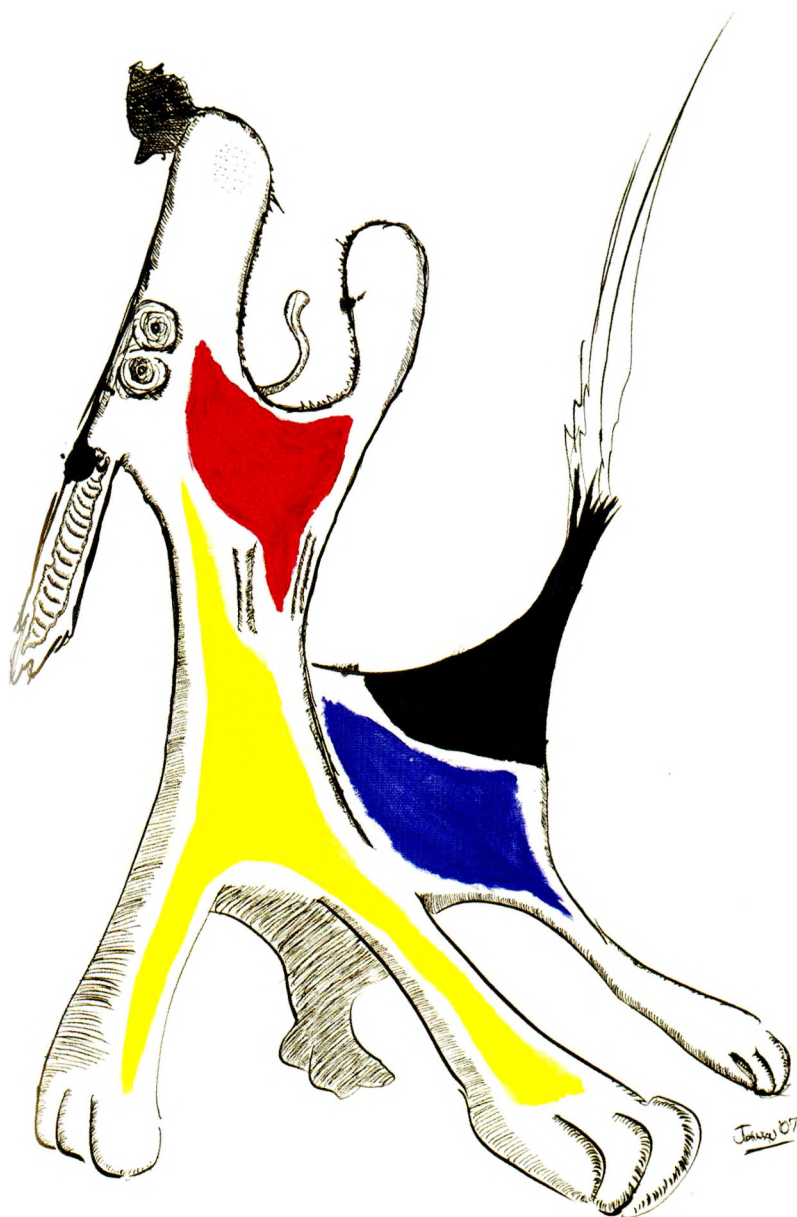
Untitled
Maggie Ciarcia



Bear
Alex Johnson



Owl
Alex Johnson

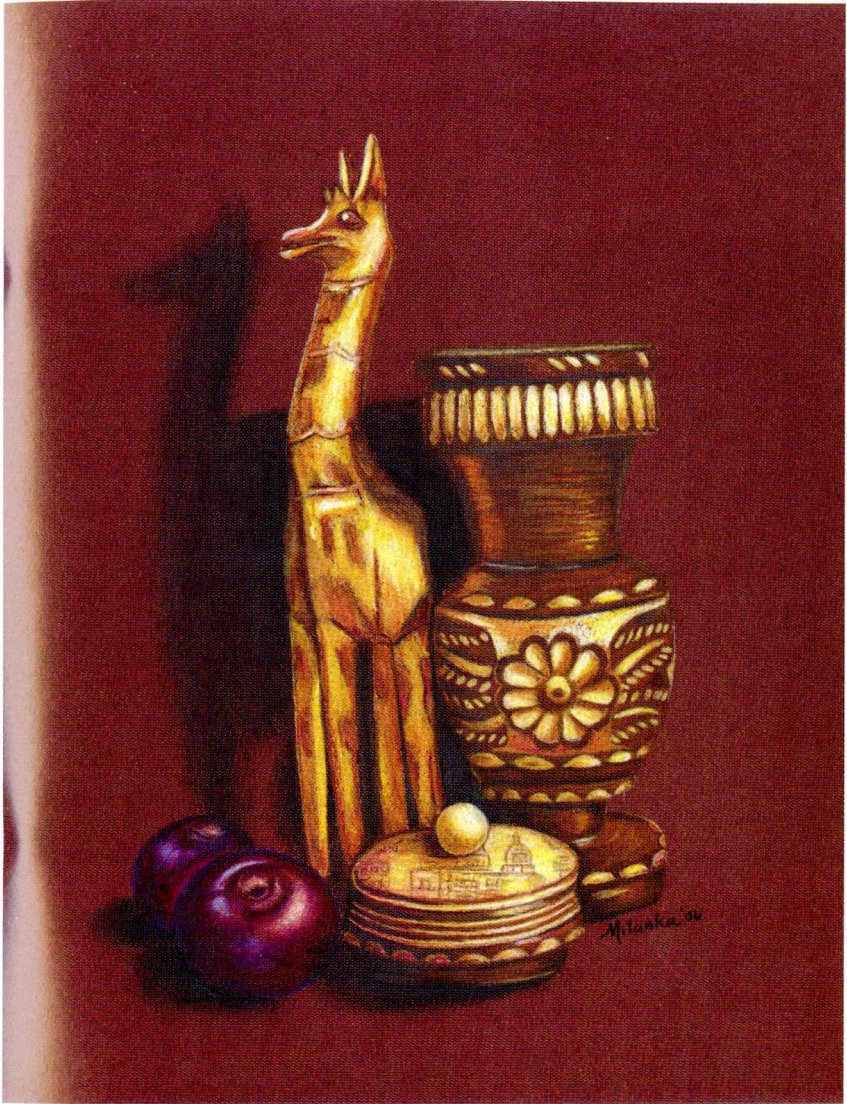


Un Chien Andalusia

Alex Johnson



Gecco
Milanka Reardon



Slovenija
Milanka Reardon



Lady on the Rocks
Milanka Reardon

FICTION

Cracker Jacks

Rob D'Alfonso

Stevie's grandmother sits in a hospital bed, propped up by a pair of off-white pillows between her back and the headboard. From the opposite side of the door the boy's mother urges him, "Go in, Stevie...only for a minute...no, I don't think she'll have Cracker Jacks, but if you're good maybe we'll buy some on the way home...I know Grandma always has Cracker Jacks to share with you, but not today..."

The door creaks open. The boy walks in slowly, playing with the button of his overalls and watching the lights in his sneakers flash each time he steps. He looks back at the doorway. From behind the half-open door his mother waves him on. He stops a few feet from his grandmother's bed and with his eyes towards the floor he mumbles, "Hi, Gran'ma."

"Hi, Stevie," she whispers.

"Momma told me I gotta say bye 'cause you're goin' away. She says you're goin' to see Gran'pa."

The boy's grandmother smiles, the dimples lost in her wrinkled skin. "If I'm lucky," she says, "I'm going to see your grandfather."

"I don't remember Gran'pa," the boy says flatly.

"Well, I'll tell him you said hi."

"Do you have any Cracker Jacks, Gran'ma?"

"Sorry, Stevie." She pauses. "Come here."

The boy takes short steps until he reaches his grandmother's bed. His grandmother kisses the palm of her hand and extends her arm, pressing her trembling hand to his forehead.

"Bye, Stevie. I love you."

"I love you too, Gran'ma," Stevie says, already walking towards the door, his sneakers blinking in time with the faint beeping of the heart monitor.

As he walks through the door, his mother places her arm around his shoulder, her hand revealing a box of Cracker Jacks. "That was very nice, Stevie," she says. "Are you hungry?"

He grabs the box and stuffs it into the pocket of his overalls. "I'm gonna save them," he says, "to share with Gran'ma next time."

An Excerpt from *The Amazing Adventures of Houdini Weenie*
Or How I Saved the President's Life

Peter Johnson

I Saved the President's Life

Peter Johnson

On the warmest day in November, two weeks before Thanksgiving, I saved the President's life, but no one will ever know.

Except for Franklin and Lucky.

And Jorge.

And my parents.

And you.

No Swearing or Sex

Peter Johnson

I decided to write this book because I want to make money.

Last week a writer came to class and talked about his novel, which probably only three of us had read. Writers are always coming to my school. Our teachers write them, explaining how poor we are but, “If you can find it in your heart to visit, we know you will motivate so many of our students.” The writer, Mr. Peterson, a tall, skinny guy with a receding hairline, actually read this letter out loud, expecting us to lift him onto our shoulders and dance him through the halls. I wanted to tell him to get lost.

We don’t need his charity.

We don’t want to be MOTIVATED.

We are sick of the word MOTIVATED or any word related to it, like MOTIVATION or in Jorge’s case, UNMOTIVATED.

But we all want to make money, and Mr. Peterson showed me the way, not meaning to of course.

He said anyone can write a young adult novel if they work hard enough.

He said we all have “authentic” voices but he had to invent them.

“What’s authentic mean?” Jorge whispered to me, until Mrs. Guido came over and rapped him alongside his head.

What Mr. Peterson meant was that we don’t have to pretend to be fifteen. We are fifteen. And I knew what he meant. When I read his book, I thought the kid telling the story sounded like me, but not *really* like me. I knew it was Mr. Peterson pretending to be fifteen. It’s like when you eat Kraft’s Macaroni and Cheese and you like it but know it’s not as good as your grandma’s recipe. Now you’re grandma, there’s someone who makes “authentic” macaroni and cheese.

And that’s when I realized my life was more interesting than the dweeb Mr. Peterson wrote about.

For one thing, the fifteen-year-old in Mr. Peterson’s book never swears, and just

about every fifteen-year-old I know swears. We can't do it in front of our parents or we'll get grounded, even though our fathers swear all the time. My father says one particular word over and over, but Mr. Peterson said if I use that word, no one will publish my book. He said publishers want to make money and kid's books with swear words "won't sell in the South or Midwest."

The South or Midwest might as well be Mars or Jupiter to me, since I'll probably never live more than five miles from home, but I think Mr. Peterson knows his stuff so there will be no swear words in my book.

But, as I said, just about every guy I know swears, especially Jorge. I even associate certain words with certain people. "I guess you'll have to sacrifice character for money," my friend Lucky said. But I don't want to, so below is a list of words I plan to use, and when you see those words, you'll know that the person is really saying the word next to it.

Goofball = A _ _ h _ _ . This is my father's favorite word.

Up yours = F _ _ _ y _ u . Lucky says this one this one a lot.

Freaking = F _ _ _ _ _ g Jorge absolutely wears this word out when, saying it as often as most people say, "You know."

Jackass = F _ _ _ head, though Mr. Peterson said "ass" might be "acceptable."

Tick me off = P _ _ _ me off.

Damn = Sh _ t.

Privates = B _ _ _ s

No kidding = No sh _ t. This is my favorite expression.

I realize that calling someone a freaking goofball isn't the same as calling them a you-know-what, but at least the sound of you-know-what will be ringing in your ears, and, hopefully, my own personal cash register will be ringing when the kids in the South and Midwest buy this book.

Mr. Peterson also said a kid's book can't have "explicit sex." No problem there. None of us has had explicit sex.

None of us has had any sex.

Most of us feel weird just talking about sex.

My Neighborhood.

Peter Johnson

I live on the East Side of Providence, but not where the rich people live. My neighborhood lies between theirs and the one people won't walk through unless they're carrying an Uzi.

Obviously, the kids in the rich neighborhood don't go to my school. They get shipped halfway off across the city to a magnet school called Classical or they go to private schools. Mrs. Guido says I should have taken the test for Classical or one of the Catholic high schools that sometimes offer scholarships, but why should I get B's at those schools when I can glide by and get A's at mine. I also wanted to stay with Lucky and Jorge, who have a better chance of being astronauts than going to the fancy schools.

Not because they're dumb.

Lucky is even smarter than me, smart enough to know he can't work for anyone. He plans to open his own landscaping business when he graduates, so why bother doing any school work. "I'll study just enough to get a high school diploma," he says. "People think you're a jackass if you don't have that, my friends." Lucky says "my friends" a lot, like he's a politician addressing the voters.

"The hell with freaking people," Jorge said, "the freaking goofballs tick me off," and then he went on a torrent of obscenities. That's just the way Jorge is. If Jorge were rich he'd be seeing a shrink and on some kind of meds, but instead people just say he's "wired" or "freaking crazy," depending on how they feel about him. You never know from day to day how Jorge will respond to something. Sometimes he's very mellow, soft-spoken and would gladly volunteer to clean toilets at the old folks' home. Other days you'd think he had about fourteen cups of coffee. On those days his left leg has a mind of its own, jiggling up and down, and he clings to his desk, like he's afraid he might fly out the window if he lets go. That's when I wish his ear was an on-and-off switch, so I could lean over and shut him down.

But it's hard to blame him because there's always something nutty going on at his house. Like many kids living on the wrong side of the East Side, he doesn't have a father, and his mother has had more boyfriends than Lindsey Lohan. Some of them have lived there off-and-on, others pop in and out. Jorge is short and thin and always wears a New York Yankees cap sideways. He doesn't own the best clothes, and one time I noticed the waistline of his jeans was held together by a big safety pin. If you were to see him on the street, you'd label him a punk because he walks with an attitude, but he's really a good guy and a great friend. He thinks he's part Latino and part black, though his mother, who's Latino, doesn't really know who his father was. My theory is that on the days Jorge's head is in fifth gear, he hasn't slept much. That's when his eyes are like slits, his eyelids puffy, like he got freaked out by

whatever demons visited him that night. But he doesn't say much about his mother. No one really talks about problems they have at home.

My Name

Peter Johnson

My name is John Smith, Jr. but everyone calls me Houdini. If you can be patient, I'll explain the Houdini part, but first you should know what it's like to be named John Smith, Jr.

It sucks.

It's like calling your dog Fido, or your cat Mittens, like plain white bread and a glass of milk, pasta without tomato sauce, or a Ford Focus with roll-down windows and no CD player.

My father's name is John Smith, too. Well, really, it's John Smith, Sr. I guess we've had hundreds of years of this John Smith nonsense in our family, which would be fine if we were related to the guy who knew Pocahontas, but we're not. In the future if some other John Smith decides to trace our family tree, he'll find a few other John Smiths hanging from one of its branches or stealing silverware from some rich person's house.

But we *are* English. By that I mean the first couple John Smiths actually came from England and my father is proud of that, and has our coat of arms hanging in the living room next to a very ugly painting of an October sunset. What I'd like to know is why my parents didn't call my brother John Smith, Jr. because he was born ten years before me. His name is Franklin, and if you call him Frank or Frankie, he won't even respond to you. He was the best quarterback to ever play at my high school. He even played in college before he joined the Marines. He's stationed in Iraq now in a war my father says is the "stupid nightmare of the most colossal goofball" of all time, meaning the President. When he says this, my mother responds, "John, I've asked you not to use that word in front of John Jr.," but the "goofballs" keep flowing like smoke rings, which is a good simile because my father is a chain-smoker, and Mr. Peterson said you should never use a simile unless it has "thematic value." "What's 'thematic value'?" Jorge said and Mrs. Guido came down the aisle, taking another swipe at him. But it *is* odd that my father hates a war my brother is fighting in. He's proud Franklin is a Marine but says every time he gasses up the car he wants to strangle someone. By that he means that Franklin is risking his life to make the President and his rich friends richer. I don't know if my father is right because I'm happy just to get through the day. But it is ironic and a bit sad that I ended up saving the life of one the most "colossal goofballs" of all time. But before I tell that story I promised to explain why they call me Houdini.

Laika

Joe McCormack

Star sailor, he said the words to himself—as he did every time he felt the small plane ride the wind like a surfboard. It’s what “astronaut” means, from the Greek, according to NASA’s website. It also told him that anyone looking to pilot a space shuttle needed at least a thousand hours of flight experience. That’s forty-one full days of being in the air. He had been taking trips like this every time he had enough money, thirty-seven flights over the last two and a half years. He got a hundred and twenty-four hours in, prior to today. Laika always had a print-out from the site with him and the bold title at the top of the page, “So You Want to be An Astronaut,” stuck out of the folded copy of *The New York Post* that sat on the empty seat next to him.

The landing went smooth. He wished he could take off and land the plane every day just so he could do it perfect every time. The cab was waiting for him. It was on time, for once. The cabbie’s name had too many consonants, and he talked into his cell phone the entire trip in some foreign language. Laika cringed when he handed the man seventeen-fifty for the fare, but there was no other way to get back to his little apartment in Elizabeth. If he didn’t have to spend almost forty dollars every time he went flying just to get to the airfield and back, he could probably save enough to go once a month, or more.

When he got home he opened his window. On August days like today, the single room apartment was so hot that he wouldn’t dream of using the little electric stove on the wall opposite of his bed. He looked in the dirty mirror over his sink, which was next to the stove. He was twenty-eight years old with a hook nose and clear blue eyes. He was graying in specks around the edges of his hair, but his body was still in the prime of its power. After working out on the hardwood floor, careful not to get splinters, he took a shower and dressed for work, then walked to the Martin Luther King Public Elementary School down the road.

—Hey Lichen, make sure you wax the floor real good tonight, Tony yelled to him as he walked away down the hallway.

Laika hated his dirty red Phillies hat and the smirk on his scruffy face.

Laika was on with the new guy Santiago that night, so he could play his Russian conversation tapes and Santiago would just have to deal. Laika wondered if Santiago even knew enough English to realize that the tapes weren’t in English. They never said more than a few sentences to each other, except the first day when Santiago tried to tell him something about his son, but Laika couldn’t figure out what he was saying.

He always told himself it was his knowledge of Russian that gave him the edge in the astronaut application. When he handed in US Government Application Form 171, he would get to check off the box that said he was fluent in Russian. Of course, he wasn’t quite fluent, but his grandmother had

taught him a lot when he was little. She liked him because he was named after her husband, who died fighting Hitler. He felt like the name gave him powers, gave him that courage that she always talked about his grandfather having. *The German rifles couldn't kill his courage*, she always said. Laika imagined being able to see his grandfather's courage from space, still living there in the old country.

That courage was supposed to help him in the Air Force, but he didn't score high enough on the IQ test to be a pilot. He started out cleaning the barracks, and eventually they gave him the job of teaching emergency survival training to the real pilots, but he never really went up in rank. He took an honorable discharge as soon as his commitment was over. At least with the GI grant he didn't have to pay for the degree he was working on at the Elizabeth City College—although Laika wondered how good a Physics degree is if the school had no labs.

Laika started waxing the floors at dawn, and was finishing as the teachers started coming in at six, shuffling with their eyes not focusing on anything in particular and their hands clutching coffee cups. He loved it when the entire floor shone after waxing, even in the corners where no one could see it. *Star sailor*, he said to himself.

He heard a shriek behind him and a body slip on a section of the faux marble floor that he just waxed. He whipped around and saw one of the teachers in her late twenties wincing in pain, sitting on the floor in a short brown skirt with her legs spread open facing him. He put his eyes to the ceiling real quick and felt his face heat up a little as he walked over to her and helped her up from behind, more lifting her than helping her get up on her own. She was blushing.

It was that one blond teacher that always said hi to him in the morning, the one with the tattoo on her ankle. She didn't have the prettiest face, but he always checked out the curving slope of her hips as she walked past. He watched her walk into her room, though he laughed that those inner city Elizabeth black kids must eat her up in there, judging from all the garbage and gum all over the room every night. He noticed that she had a bit of dirt on her jacket right where he helped her up.

—Oh, Miss, I—I'm sorry—I think I got some dirt on you... Laika said, stuttering and pointing.

—Oh don't worry about it, she said real quick. And my name is Jessica, not Miss—you can call me Jess.

—Oh well hello Miss Jess. It's nice to finally meet you person to person. He looked at the wall to his left. There was a slight pause.

—My name is Laika, he stuttered.

—Oh, nice name. Are you Russian?

—Yes I am. My grandfather fought Hitler in the old country. My mother named me after him.

There was a pause.

—I always see you, she said, here in the morning when I come in but I'm always so out of it in the morning, you know? So I never introduced myself.

She started to blush lightly around the top of her cheeks.

—Well, she said, I better get going to ready my classroom for the first bell.

—Yeah, yeah. I'll see you around.

She turned around and started to walk off. Laika watched the curves of her waist.

—Wait, he called out. Since I, you know, made you fall and everything, cause I waxed the floor too much, I was wondering if you wanted me to get you some dinner to make up for it?

She looked around as if to check if anyone was listening in.

—Yeah, sure, she answered.

Laika suddenly realized he had no money. The room grew hazy in his sight, like his eyes forgot how to focus, and he looked down.

—Wait, you know what, nevermind, he stuttered. I'm real busy for the next couple of weeks. Maybe some other time.

—Oh. Okay, she replied.

She turned and walked away, with a surprised look on her face.

—Sorry about the wax, he called to her.

After she was out of sight he got all his equipment together and threw it into the closet.

—You're gonna start spending money on dinners? he yelled at himself. How are you gonna be able to afford to get those miles in? Is she gonna come back to your shoebox apartment? Are you gonna fly off into the sunset? What do you want?

He looked up and saw Santiago looking at him funny. He threw his mop against the wall of the closet and walked out to let Santiago put his equipment away and didn't stop till he was out the door and back at his apartment.

He made himself a peanut butter sandwich and looked out the window. His window looked out to a brick wall, but if moved his chair right up to it and looked through the side he could see the sky past the edge of the building. The sun had pushed all the colors of dawn out of the sky, but he could still make out the moon and its horns, light blue on a deep blue sky. He turned to the *Post* to check the lotto against the tickets he bought yesterday. None of them hit.

Bombs

Kristina H. Reardon

What Mama didn't understand was that we didn't have to leave Titograd. That's what I told my cousin Marko right after we came to the U.S.A., when I was five.

But now, the black mountain was crumbling to dust, and there was no more Titograd.

That's what the television told me now, thirty years later, as it blared in the background, blackness overtaking the screen where the on-the-scene reporter was bringing me the news.

"Explosions rock the capital of Montenegro today, as Podgorica sees its first round of American bombs dropped off the aircraft carrier the Theodore Roosevelt," a female voice said forcefully, as the screen filled with images of dust clouds and smoke. It could have been anywhere. It could have been any dust, anywhere in the world. But it wasn't. It was Crna Gora, the Black Mountain, Montenegro. It was my dust.

And as I looked at it swirl around, brown, black and gray pieces of nothing going nowhere, I could think only: Mama just didn't understand. What she didn't understand was that I liked living near a castle and giant seashells and a man named Josip Broz Tito, a Mr. President Tito, Sir, and I liked how the soldiers would pick me up and say, "You are the prettiest little girl I have ever seen! When I get married, I want to have a hundred little girls just like you!"

"Nuh-uh," Marko had said when I was five. "No way José, Irena, they did not say they wanted to have a hundred little girls just like you."

"Yeah they did."

"Irena, please be quiet!" Mama yelled from the kitchen of my memory, where she was taking flour and throwing it into the air, and stamping her hands down onto the table so hard that the house shook.

"It's like a *bomba*," I said to Marko, using my *Srpski*, my Serbian, for the words I couldn't remember. "It sounds like a bomb going off."

"Guns at least," he said. "And it's bomb, Irena. Bomb in English. But *bomba* in Slovenian, also."

"Stop it!" Mama yelled in English.

"Bzzzz!" Marko made noises like an airplane, and I laughed. I thought about how at school, the teachers said, "English, Irena, English!" and how at home, Marko and Mama said, "Slovenski, Irena, Slovenski And how when I tried to make my letters big and pretty on the chalkboard at school and on the little slate in my room, I couldn't because I had to write I-R-E-N-A in big letters with straight lines and no squiggles and no pretty curves. I thought about how I wished I could write Russian letters instead just because I thought they were pretty. And how I could say to Marko and to the teachers and to Mama, "You should all write your names on the chalkboard using my letters because

they are much better than yours.” And then Marko would try and I would have to say, “I’m sorry, Marko, but you have done it all wrong.” And then the teacher would try and I would have to say, “I’m sorry, silly lady, but you have just gone about this all wrong.” And then Mama would say, “Irena, these are not your letters. And they don’t even spell anything, not in English, not in *Slovenski*, and not even in *Srpski*.”

And I would say, “I am very sorry, Mama, but when you crossed onto my side of the room, you moved into a whole new country, and you are just going to have to learn the new language.”

“Bzzzz!” I said back to Marko, and I even tried to make my face look happy, like the little girls in the picture books Marko had, the little girls that ate the porridge that belonged to the bears. We started running around the room with our arms out, and I thought we were kind of like the birds back in Titograd, flying over the city, back in Yugoslavia, and then I thought, no. We are not like birds because we are buzzing and birds tweet instead, and I thought, we are like airplanes. I stopped smiling. Airplanes were things that took you away from Yugoslavia, things that brought you to a new country where you had to learn two languages because your *teta*, your auntie, and your whole family spoke Slovenian and everybody else in the whole country spoke English. And nobody knew Serbian. And ‘airplane’ was spelled with the letter A, and there was no room for squiggles when you had to write the letter A.

“Bzzz!”

“Irena, stop!” Mama said, pounding the dough into the flour instead of mashing it with potatoes like she used to. She picked it up like it was a ball she wanted to play catch with, but she threw it down on the table so hard that it just made a blob, and then she took that blob and put it into the oven, and when it finished cooking it was a blob of bread, with no plum inside and no honey on top, and it didn’t even look pretty, and when I took a bite of it at the supper table, I spit it back onto my plate.

“*Ni dobro*,” I said. “This is disgusting. *Slabo*.”

Mama didn’t understand.

Listening to the broadcast, I thought there were a lot of things Bill Clinton didn’t understand, either. For one, I told my daughter, you really shouldn’t bomb things. It’s not a very nice thing to do, to annihilate a city nobody’s ever heard of, to just bomb it out of existence.

But she wasn’t really paying attention. She was coloring, pictures of Mulan and her little dragon friend, humming the “Reflection” theme song as she worked.

“Targets have been hit in Serbia and Kosovo as well, as part of Clinton’s ‘moral imperative’ to eradicate genocide in the former Republic of Yugoslavia,” the female voice said severely. “Podgorica, of course, was formerly known as Titograd when it served as Yugoslavia’s capital under Tito’s communist regime.”

A close-up of Clinton’s face came on the screen, his eyes squinting in a forced attempt to appear as if he really felt for the people he was killing, and he

said in his Arkansas drawl: “Our mission is clear: To demonstrate the seriousness of NATO’s purpose.” The young woman appeared back on the screen.

“Clinton and his supporters say that if Slabah, I mean Slobak—I’m sorry, Slobodan Milosevic—”

I hit the power button on the T.V. as fast as I could. We were bombing the country of a man whose name we couldn’t even pronounce. Well, they can’t pronounce it, I thought. I can.

What were the letters? I thought. How would I have spelled Milosevic’s name, using the Russian alphabet? Is his photograph in the cover of every child’s textbook, like Tito’s was? Did he live in the castle? Well, it wasn’t a castle really. It was a building. A skyscraper. A skyscraper with a nice outdoor theater, two seashell domes that housed the likes of Frank Sinatra and the King of Egypt. I tried to remember what it looked like. All I could picture in my head was the word castle.

“Mariana?” I said. “Mariana, you just stay right here while I go upstairs.”

“Okay, Mommy,” she said, not even looking up from her Mulan masterpiece. She was picking up crayons and breaking them in half, the snapping noises like the far-off bombs sounding faintly in the distance on the television just a few moments ago. I watched the pieces of her black crayon crumble, two halves that could never be put back together again, two halves with little splinters of crayon missing from the center, fallen on the counter.

“Please, Mariana, don’t break those new crayons!” I said.

“Okay, Mommy,” she said, and snapped a red one.

“Please!”

“Sorry, Mommy,” she said, and jumped off her stool to run for the Scotch tape, hidden in one of the junk drawers in the kitchen. She was going to try to fix them, I thought. I turned and left the room.

Upstairs, in the attic, there was a suitcase. It was only twelve inches long and four or five inches deep, but I needed to find it. It had to be there somewhere, maybe underneath the pile of college biology books, or the boxes of clothes Mariana had outgrown. I could see it in my mind, that little box: There were the brass corners, with the cream colored canvas, covering the box. No, wait, it wasn’t cream colored. It was blue and yellow. Blue and yellow plaid...

Lines running up and down, up and down, side to side, I remembered thinking, once we had landed at JFK. *Like the way an airplane flies: First up, then to the side, then down. First up from Titograd, then over to Austria, then down to Vienna. Then up from Vienna, then over to the United States, then down in New York City.*

Just like that, I had thought. *That’s what plaid is. Too many colors.*

I needed to find that box, that pitiful excuse for a suitcase, that twelve-by-six-by-four box, that box which had carried everything I could bring with me: One *ruta*, one kerchief to cover my head in case the wind blew. One set of plastic teacups. Or had I brought those? No, I hadn’t. I had left them behind, out on the floor of the kitchen, white with blue flowers, water inside the cups, teddy bear waiting for someone to feed him. No, there had been no teddy bear.

I had remembered the teddy bear. But did he come to America? No, no he didn't. He went to my cousin so she could have a nice teddy bear to play with since when I got to America, Mama said, I could have a hundred teddy bears. Only I never got a hundred teddy bears. I got a stuffed puppy instead for Christmas. Nobody ever remembered that America was supposed to give me exactly one hundred teddy bears, not even Mama.

What did I bring in that suitcase? A pair of underwear, probably, thrown out thirty years ago. A ribbon, maybe. If I didn't find the suitcase, I wouldn't know what was still left in it, and I wanted, needed to know...

Then, there it was, its rusted brass corner, sticking out beneath a blanket, inside Mariana's white, lacy bassinet. When I was a baby, I thought, I slept with my mama. In a bed. In an apartment with no bathroom, in the *barakas*, near the castle that wasn't a castle...

I gently placed the suitcase on my lap. I lifted the cover and peered inside. All that was there was a patent leather purse, shiny red and black glaring out at me, a last gift from Titograd, from my Slovenian *teta*, my Slovenian auntie, the one who lived in Ljubljana.

Inside the purse was the *ruta*, with polka dots, just like I remembered. I smiled thinking about Mariana wearing a *ruta* while coloring her Disney characters downstairs. Maybe I would give it to her, to play with. It wasn't doing any good sitting up in the attic anyways.

I lifted the purse out of the suitcase. There was nothing more. Just a patterned cloth, covering the inside of the box. I shook it. A thin paper fell to the ground, cracking in half as it landed, yellowed and brittle. A forgotten, uncared for piece of paper.

It was blank on one side, so I turned it over.

No way José, Irena, they did not say they wanted to have a hundred little girls just like you. Marko's voice echoed through my mind.

Explosions rock the capital of Montenegro today

Explosions rock the capital of Montenegro today

Slabah... Slobak... I'm sorry, Slobodan—

Explosions rock the capital of Montenegro today, as Podgorica sees its first round of American bombs

"Titograd," I said aloud. "Explosions rock the capital of Yugoslavia today, as Titograd sees its first round of American bombs."

I picked up the two pieces of the paper. I wanted to tape them back together, to make them whole again. I wanted to frame them. I wanted to know why I had forgotten.

It was a photograph. Just a black and white faded photograph, and I was smiling, *ruta* tied snugly behind my ears, arms around the neck of a soldier. In the background were two seashell domes.

I wondered what seashells looked like when they turned to dust.

Free Lunch at *Il Paradiso*

Valerie Stauffer

Barbara can't believe she's going on a date—her first in 48 years. She's given away almost all her clothes, deciding she'll age gracefully in a single turquoise, polyester pantsuit for drinks with “the girls” or wear her basic black shift for the relentless parade of funerals. And then this new friend found her in the Lucky's Supermarket express lane. At least she still has one go-out-to-lunch dress.

A last look in the hall mirror. She dabs another layer of rouge to perk up her pale cheeks, considers and rejects mascara for the third time, and gazes at herself in the lavender silk she's kept around, just in case. Just in case something came up. Not bad at all for 76.

The buzzer shrills. She drops her best blue leather purse, spilling keys and a monogrammed linen handkerchief. She stuffs it all back in and opens the door to her gentleman caller.

George Wilson looks even better than he did that day at Lucky's. He's in a snappy gray suit and a satin, pink flowered tie. Perhaps a bit overdone for lunch, but he's certainly handsome. Not a single gray hair among the black.

“Great little place you have.” George glances around the room, focusing on the New England antique lowboy with Barbara's collection of figurines.

“I like these statues,” George says and picks one off the shelf. “I bet they're real valuable.”

“Oh, I guess so. My husband Dan brought the *netsukes* back from Japan. They're ivory, you know. Lots of memories.” Barbara hopes he won't drop the little snake he's holding. That was from the Chinese Year of the Snake, the year she and Dan celebrated their fortieth anniversary with a party for more than a hundred friends. Less than five years later, Dan was dead of a stroke. After that she couldn't bear to live in their rambling Connecticut farmhouse.

She flew to California to visit her friend who lived in a retirement community. Within two days, Barbara had put down a deposit on a tiny cottage in Edmont Manor. California had seemed like a good idea. She'd make new friends and start a new life. And so she moved into this squat Spanish cottage in a village of old people. Her best friend is now in a nursing home, her mind a fog of confusion. Good friends are hard to find. Conversations are all about arthritis, knee replacements and heart problems.

“Now, tell me where we're going. I love going out for lunch.”

George laughs. “I've got a real nice place for us — *Il Paradiso* down on the San Diego harbor. Great views. Great eats.”

“I've heard it's rather expensive.”

“I'm set on *Il Paradiso*. Never been there,” George says.

Barbara can hardly believe she accepted an invitation with practically a total stranger. *But why shouldn't she go out to lunch?* It isn't as if she has any-

thing else to do all day.

Barbara carefully locks her front door, and they step into the brilliant California sunshine.

"I came for this perfect weather," she says. "Crayola-colored blue skies and green grass."

"You don't miss family back East?"

"Dan and I never had kids. Just one of those things."

He leads her to his gray Toyota. This battered one has seen better days. Her second ride with him. He'd been so charming that first time when he offered to drive her home from Lucky's.

"I was rude the other day," Barbara apologizes. "I guess you didn't know the express lane is for customers with less than ten items. You were cheating, you know. Oh, but I told you that, didn't I."

"Sure did, Barbara. Loud and clear. But no punishment. My reward was getting to drive you and your bag of groceries home. And take you out today."

"I miss my car so much," she says. "I was going to buy a brand new Mercedes, an adorable little white sedan. Then California took my license away. I didn't really hit anything, just touched someone's fender."

"You walk everywhere? You must not get out much."

"The Manor runs bus trips to stores and theaters. But you know, these other people are rather dreary."

They drive along the Manor roads, past identical little white stucco boxes. Ghostlike video friends flicker through the picture windows.

"Barbara's such a formal name. You must have a nickname. Babs? Barbie? Barb?"

"In college, I was Barbie, but then that doll arrived. I went back to Barbara. Dad was the only person who ever called me Babs."

"You'll be my Babs. Let's be young and foolish!"

Outside the Edmont Manor gates, Barbara sees joggers and small children. Everyone looks young and happy. George cruises down the San Diego Freeway, asking about her, discovering she loves Danielle Steel romances and gets up early to walk around Edmont Pond. She tells him she wishes all the other residents at the Manor wouldn't plan their days around the TV soaps.

At the *Il Paradiso* gates, a red-vested valet opens their car doors, and a beaming maitre d' leads them to a terrace above rolling surf and a sandy beach. Overhead, white seagulls fly.

"It's a paradise all right," George says and turns to a waiter. "Two margaritas, lots of salt."

"I never have a margarita before evening. But I *would* love one." She isn't driving. There's no reason not to enjoy herself with George.

Barbara reads the over-sized menu from right to left, just as her mother instructed her years ago. "Nice girls don't order the most expensive foods," Mom always said before Barbara's dates."

"Two *Paradiso* Lobster Supreme," George tells the waiter.

"I'd be happy with a salad," Barbara says.

"No salads. We'll have the special lobster."

While they sip margaritas, George says he builds office buildings, rents them, sells them, manages them. He has deals all over San Diego, up the Coast, even in L.A.

She finally dares to ask, "Did you ever marry?"

"I was sort of married, but it didn't quite work. You know how it is."

Barbara doesn't know how it is. Her marriage was forever. But people in California are different, and men are shy about explaining their personal lives.

She wonders if George is younger than she. He looks fine and fit, no wrinkles, and that black hair...

He rambles on about his daily jogs and then mentions he hasn't yet reached the Medicare Milestone. That means he's more than ten years younger than her 76.

Barbara concentrates on picking out the lobster meat from the claws, hoping he won't ask her age.

And he doesn't. George is polite. And delightful.

"Another drink? Or a cappuccino?"

"Perfect. There's not a food or drink here that I ever have at the Manor."

With the cappuccinos comes the check. She hopes the lunch wasn't terribly expensive. Of course, George knew all about this place.

He studies the check and searches his pockets.

"Hey, Babs, I have a small problem. Must have left my wallet at the office."

"It's probably in the car. You wouldn't leave your driver's license at the office," Barbara says.

"I keep my license in the glove compartment. I'm sorry. I'll need to use your credit card."

George isn't asking; he's demanding.

"I never carry a credit card," she explains.

"All women have credit cards. You know—AmEx, Visa. We've had a great day. Just help me out."

George eyes her blue pocketbook on the table.

"I'm really sorry, Babs. Be a sport. You must have cash on you."

Barbara reaches for her purse, glad that she went to the bank last Wednesday before Lucky's. She pulls out some tens and then realizes that she needs all her twenties and the fifty. "Lunch is a hundred-and-twenty-three dollars? That's a lot of money."

"And a tip, Babs. Twenty percent would be right." He searches through her purse for the last few dollars.

"Please, give me my bag." Barbara takes her pocketbook and snaps it shut.

Barbara can't decide if she's silly. Of course, she can afford the lunch, and George will pay her back. Still, he should have remembered his wallet.

Then, as they turn the corner of the hall out of the restaurant, George kisses her lightly on the cheek. He's all musky aftershave and smooth sandpaper.

"M-m-m, so lovely," he whispers.

In the car, he stretches his arm over the seat and around her shoulders.

Is she being prissy? Tears well up in her eyes. She reaches into her purse

for her handkerchief. Not there. It must have dropped out when George took her money. A tissue box could be in the glove compartment. She opens the little door and sees it— not a hankie box but a worn leather wallet.

“Oh, good news, George. I’ve found your wallet.”

“Give it here.” George grabs it, stuffs it into a pocket. The Toyota swerves, nearly crossing into the far lane of the Freeway.

“Aren’t you glad? You’ll pay me back, and the day will be perfect,” Barbara says.

“Sure, but not while I’m at the wheel.” George smiles and gently squeezes her shoulder.

“Let’s talk about another time, Babs. Today’s been great. Right-o?”

Today *has* been fun. If George hadn’t invited her out, she’d have eaten her usual sardine sandwich on whole grain, satisfying her calcium and nutritional needs.

They pull up in front of her cottage, and George starts to get out of his seat.

“Now that you have your wallet, we should get things settled,” she says. She’s embarrassed, acting like a bill collector, but of course he means to pay her back.

“Oh, Babs, you understand. I can’t afford an expensive lunch. My business isn’t going too well this year.”

“But you invited me there.” Barbara knows she’s right. Why should she feel guilty?

“What’s the problem? You’ve got money. It’s not every day that you go out on a fun date, Babs.”

“Don’t call me Babs.”

George is charming again, jumping out of his seat to open her door, reaching for her arm to escort her into her house.

“We’ll do this again, Babs. It’s been a fabulous day.”

Another time? How can he dare to suggest it? She puts her key in the lock and opens the front door just enough for her to squeeze through.

Barbara takes off the lavender silk dress and tosses it onto a chair. She wraps a pink paisley robe around her and settles into the comfy wing chair in front of the TV. *One Life to Live* isn’t a bad show. She tries to follow the romantic entanglements on the screen. Then, with sudden determination, she turns off the foolish video romance.

She’s had her own romance today—well, definitely not a romance, but maybe a romantic adventure. In a way, it was exciting.

The ringing phone startles her. Probably a neighbor calling to check up on her fiasco of a date.

“Hey, Babs, it’s your buddy, George. Great lunch today.”

“You owe me an apology.”

“Of course I’m sorry. You know I’d pay if I could, but I told you I’m just a little short of cash right now.”

“Why are you calling, George?”

“I’ve got a fun plan for us, Babs. Dinner and a show. *Midsummer Night’s Dream* is playing at Balboa Park Theater.”

The *Dream* is one of her favorites.

“You’ll like the show, Babs. “I’ll pick you up at five-thirty tomorrow. Right-o?”

“No, George.”

“I thought you’d like an evening with Shakespeare, but I can come up with something else. No problem. How going to the Embarcadero to hear the San Diego Pops?”

For a minute, Barbara can’t make her tongue say the words. A Pops concert has been on her wish list since she moved to California. She takes a deep breath. “No, George. I won’t be going out with you.”

“Don’t be foolish, Babs.”

“Never, George.” She bites her lip. “Never. Ever,” she says and pushes her thumb down hard onto the disconnect button.

Barbara takes two steps across the room to consider her dress lying on the chair. She might take it to Diego Cleaners. Instead she smooths out the wrinkles, folds it into a rectangle of shimmering lavender silk and puts it in a brown paper bag that she’ll donate to Goodwill. She should go this afternoon, before she changes her mind.

Death Walks Into a Bar

Francine Witte

He, of course, has to wait. Seems the kangaroo and the duck are out of control. Duck drank too much tequila, and now he's not fit to drive. Kangaroo stuck the car keys deep into his pouch and when the duck tried to get them back, the kangaroo cried *sex harass*.

Death yawns and zaps them flat. Then he orders a beer. The bartender rubs the same circle into the wood a hundred times. *No eye contact*, he is thinking. *I'm three payments short of a mortgage, and I ain't in no mood for irony*.

Death turns instead to a couple cooing in the back. Death remembers the girl from last summer. Leukemia scare before the chemo kicked in. He's sure like to squash her now, but he's not in the mood for a struggle.

The bartender is busy dragging the duck and the kangaroo out to the street. Sticks a sign on them — *Free and tasty with barbecue sauce*. Death is down-right pissy now. The bartender sees this and scurries back inside. He has seen Death level cities when he gets like this. He shakes him up a Marguerita, frothy and blue. Death smiles for a change. He likes the bartender's fear. He likes the Marguerita. He decides to have some fun. "Here's the guy I'm looking for," Death says, sliding a compact across the bar. The Bartender stares into the tiny mirror.

"Ever seen him?" Death leans in and smirks.

"I don't get it." The bartender says, clutching his heart, falling to the floor.

"If you have to explain it," Death says, licking the salt from his glass. "It just isn't funny."

Penguin Business

Francine Witte

Harv and I sit down to dinner at the elegant *Chez Romeo*. Crystal and silver, and that's when Harv tells me he's in the penguin business. Supplies their tuxedos and such. Most of Harv's clients are in the restaurant game. Harv leans in, maybe a bit too close, "it's not just that the waiters *look* like penguins."

According to Harv, this is one of those facts the public isn't ready to deal with. Except for women like Celia, a lonely widow, who Harv met at a *Love Anonymous* meeting. It seems that poor Celia had been dining nightly at *Marco's* over on 57th and had fallen for Tony, the slippery (literally) maitre D'. Celia needed to know why Tony had never sent a bottle of complimentary champagne to her table.

After the meeting, Harv had given Celia his card and told her that he was only the tuxedo guy, but he would let her know if he came upon a phone number in a pocket or a lipstick tissue.

When Harv tells me this, I start to have my own questions. 1) Why did I agree to a blind date when I *know* better? And also) Is *our* waiter a penguin, too?

We order dinner and that's when Harv leans in again. "I could tell you stories about Tony," he says. It seems Tony lives in a famously hated igloo in a faux colonial subdivision. He insists on keeping the block at subzero all year long, and it's killing

everyone's petunias. "And let me tell you," Harv nods, "angry flowerparents *love* to talk."

I swallow the obvious, why hasn't Harv dated Celia himself, partly because our appetizer has come, but mostly because I just don't care.

But then our waiter comes back, and why haven't I noticed him before? The gentle way he sets my plate of salmon in front of me, eyeing it with a lust and desire that unsettles me at first, but really, when was the last time I saw that look in *anyone's* eyes?

This time it's me leaning into Harv, who must have seen that bolt of electricity between me and the waiter. "Tell me, are they *all* penguins?"

He must have seen it, because he pulls out his wallet and slams a crumpled hundred on the table. "Not you, too," he says.

I tell him I'm sorry, and really, I am. "It's just that his emotions are so pure." I watch as our waiter waddles back towards our table and hopefully into my life.

"Pure," Harv smirks as he moves to slip out the back door. "I tell you what," the very last thing I hear him say, "this penguin business is going to be the death of me."

ESSAY

Buggy

Carol J. Morrison

A song keeps wafting through my head, a one-hit wonder from the sixties by Sopwith Camel. “Hello, hello,” the song says. “I like your smile. Hello, hello. Shall we talk awhile? Would you like some of my tangerine? I know I’ll never treat you mean.” It’s a sweet song, a bubble gum song, and if it dates me, well—it should. My fortieth high school reunion will be held down south this summer, 1,700 miles away from my Northwest home. When I checked the Web site for the event, scrolling down and remembering or not remembering the half-grown boys and the girls with the helmet hair, I came to the “Deceased” list, and I stopped breathing. Buggy is on that list. Buggy. I don’t know how she died. I want to know. I don’t want to know. I imagine a car wreck, a terminal disease, a shooting by a jealous lover. I prefer these horrors to the image of her killing herself, and the possibility that she did haunts me.

Buggy’s given name was Melissa, but no one called her that except her mother. Buggy drove a dark-green VW Bug, thus the nickname, and that car became her playmate and her trademark. When I picture her in the car, I think of “Buddenbuddenbudden” that sound children make when they play at driving. Buggy drove fast and wild, veering in jerks when the spirit moved her, as it often did, especially if she was in the throes of one of her tumultuous love affairs. Tumult was one of Buggy’s specialties, as was high drama. And she sang “Hello, Hello!” with drama, then got all giddy as she came to the line, “Would you like some of my tangeri-i-ine?” kicking up her leg and pointing her foot, wiggling her long, curved, little toe, which she swore was shaped exactly like a tangerine section. She always finished the verse with a mock-sincere shake of her head and an equally sincere belting out of, “I know I’ll never treat you me-eeean!”

Buggy and I swapped clothes and secrets and spent weekends at each other’s houses. We colored our hair together, turning it putrid green or purple-silver instead of “chestnut brown” or “white minx” like the labels said. Often, after we slathered our hair with some potion, we’d ride around town in Buggy’s Bug with plastic caps on our heads, forming pretend goggles with our fingers and shrilling, “Up in the Air, Junior Birdmen. Up in the air, Bird Girls too! Up in the air, Junior Birdmen. With your colors of red and blue!” We made a point of singing it when we knew folks were watching. The stranger people thought we were, the better.

When one of us got bored, she’d shout, “Shoobie time!” and then we’d pull our shirts up and our bras down and shoot full frontals of our not-so-full breasts to some unsuspecting driver or pedestrian. “Shoobies,” as we called them, were our version of “shooting moons,” which we considered more of a guy thing. Our favorite recipients of shoobies were old men. We liked how shock would freeze them for a second, and then how they’d glare and some-

times shake a finger.

As I remember Buggy, I see her face, flat, except for her sculpted cheekbones, and her hair, short and usually blond, with wispy bangs. Her eyes were almond-shaped and looked Asian, even though they were blue. She loved bubble baths and boys and staying up all night recounting, in her droll, dramatic voice, her latest encounter with a male, be it a fight or a sexual adventure. She loved new powder puffs. She loved me.

Buggy hated high school. She hated college, too, when we roomed together our freshman year, and she soon dropped out and hit the road, searching, I think, for something to make her stop running, stop the high drama, stop the tumult. I took off on my own pursuit of relief, and we connected only three times after that, on the phone.

The first time, calling me from California, Buggy rattled on and on about the hunk of a guy she was living with. She still called me “Tayluh,” like always, making a Southern swoon out of “Taylor,” my maiden name. “He’s beautiful, Tayluh,” she gushed, “and fabulous in the rack.” She was as animated as ever. I felt tired when we hung up, and somehow irritated.

Fifteen years later, still in California but in a different town, divorced, with a daughter, and we’d barely said hello when, in typical Buggy Birdgirl style, she burst out, “Oh, Tayluh! I came home from a business trip the other night—and there was Lisa, my baby, asleep on the couch, and she looked so grown-up, she’s thirteen now, and I just broke down and cried, Tayluh, because I didn’t recognize my own daughter!” She was quitting the corporate world, she told me, to spend more time with Lisa. I was married and working as a therapist by then, and her high drama wore on me. *This woman is work*, I thought. *I don’t have the energy for this.*

A year later, 1988, a phone call from Colorado. Buggy and Lisa had moved there, just the two of them. “Listen,” she gushed, “I have tons of ideas. T-shirts, for one thing, with sayings on them, ones I make up. I know about sales. I can sell those suckers.” She rambled on, and I felt dizzy, a little off-kilter, like I feel with clients who are very disconnected from themselves. She mailed me a note after that, saying she hoped I’d stay in touch and that she hadn’t made one red cent yet, but she hadn’t panicked, not once. I didn’t write her back. I didn’t call.

And now she is dead. And my guilt weighs heavy. Arrogant in its self-importance, guilt nags for days that maybe Buggy got lonely and scared, so lonely and scared she couldn’t stand it anymore, and maybe she needed people to be with her, and maybe those people left her and let her down, and maybe I was one of those people. I think of her singing, “I know I’ll never treat you me-eeean,” and I adopt a fresh definition of “mean.” Mean is leaving someone who might need you. Mean is small, restricted, narrow, and leaves no room for old friendships in the face of new awarenesses. Mean is saying no when a fellow shoobie-shooting, Junior Birdgirl offers you a little tangerine.

I can’t do it over. I can’t. But I remember that the architect van der Rohe said, “God is in the details,” and I pray that I can bring God to this sad, human drama by remembering the details about Buggy as she Budden-budded down

the street, and as she applied bleach to a strand of my hair, and as she teetered on one foot, brandishing her pale, silly toe. I can hold on to the details of the pennies in her burgundy Weejuns, and of the way she drawled “Tayluh,” and to the smell of the hair concoctions we thought would glamorize us. I can picture her, cross-legged on a chair in front of her dresser, dabbing her face with powder, and I can sing to her. “Hello, hello. I like your smile. Hello.”

It’s not enough, though. I can’t let go of needing other, not-so-sentimental details. I need to know how she died, and maybe why. And so I search the ‘Net for names and whereabouts of people who might have some information, and after a few false leads, I locate her brother in a small town outside the one where we grew up. He doesn’t remember me, he was only seven or so when I knew him, and he coughs and chokes when I tell him that I learned of Buggy’s death from the reunion Web site.

“What?” he says. “Buggy? Why—no. She’s fine. She had a little surgery recently, but she’s fine.” He pauses, then, “What are you telling me? What are you saying?”

“Check out the site,” I tell him, and he does, while we’re on the phone, and he sees his sister Buggy’s senior picture, pouffy, frosted hair and all, with “Deceased” by her name. It’s not just a typo, he sees, when I direct him to the “Friends Gone By” list, and the same picture is there.

“Well, I’m glad you called me,” he says. “She’s fine, really. She’s in Florida.” Another pause. “I’ll call her,” he says. “I’ll let her know.”

It’s less than an hour before my phone rings. No hello when I answer it. Only a Southern twang, low-pitched and drenched with drama. “Tayluh. What the hell are you doin’, thinkin’ I’m dead?”

“Because it’s on our class Web site!” I tell her. “I’ve been freaking out. I’ve been grieving, for God’s sakes.” A terrible thought hits me, and I hit Buggy with it. “You didn’t report yourself dead, did you?”

“Nooooo,” she says. “Must have been somebody else’s joke. I wouldn’t mind not being alive sometimes, though. Such as now. Such as my husband—the third one—just told me he’s divorcing me. The asshole.”

“He did?” I say, and then she talks my ear off. Buggy’s an earth mother now, she tells me, complete with Birkenstocks, tie-dyed pants (“I have twenty pair,” she says), and hair that is, as she puts it “au naturell.” Her recent surgery was for cataracts, and, after she recovers, she’s going to have eyeliner tattooed on her eyelids.

“Earth mothers don’t do that,” I say.

“Earth mothers can do any damn thing they want to,” she says. And then she raves about her exotic parrots, six of them, that she loves and is obsessed with, and about her garden, that she loves and is obsessed with, and about Lisa, her daughter, who wants to get pregnant, and how Lisa has this “fabulous tattoo on her stomach, it’s just stunning,” and how giving birth is gonna play hell with that tattoo, so Buggy is trying to talk Lisa into letting her female partner have the baby instead. “I’m having some success,” she says. “I do what I can.”

Buggy does not know why her “totally cut-off, morphine-addicted” husband is divorcing her. It took her by surprise. And what’s really awful, she

says, is that she's not exactly rolling in the money, and she's started viewing these parrots she adores as "assets, Tayluh, assets." "But maybe," she says, "I won't have to sell 'em because my mother (she pronounces it "mutha") lives near me, and we're organizing a Texas Hold 'Em Poker Game in the backyard as a benefit to raise money to get me an attorney!"

"That's creative," I say, truly impressed.

"It's survival," she says. "Pure survival."

Buggy is happy for me that I'm a happy therapist, writer, and wife. We talk, or Buggy talks, for about 30 minutes. When I get off the phone, after promising that we'll hook up sometime, somewhere, I sag in my chair. I'm exhausted.

We won't hook up at the reunion. Neither of us is going, it's too damn hot down there in the summertime for me, and Buggy says that too many ugly memories there would make her ill. I won't go to Florida. Too hot there too, and I'm wary of disconnected, morphine-addicted husbands. That leaves meeting her somewhere or inviting her to come see me.

I pace around the house for the next few days, much like I did when I first saw Buggy listed as "Deceased." Guilt follows me again, a different guilt though, a more present guilt, playing tug-of-war with a boatload of resistance to spending time with Buggy. I remember zipping around town with her, and this time, our shoobie shooting seems stupid and sick. Were we really having fun? Was her laugh as deep as I recall it? Did she tan or blister in the Southern summertime? Buggy is not dead, but she is fading. And whatever made me think that her white little toe looked at all like a wedge of tangerine?

CONTRIBUTORS

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Robin Behn's most recent book is *Horizon Note*, winner of the Brittingham Prize from University of Wisconsin Press. A chapbook, *Naked Writing*, is forthcoming from DoubleCross Press. She teaches at the University of Alabama and The Vermont College of Fine Arts. Other recent poems are forthcoming in *Poetry* and *Kenyon Review*.

Gaylord Brewer is a professor at Middle Tennessee State University, where he edits *Poems & Plays*. His seventh and most recent book of poetry is *The Martini Diet* (Dream Horse, 2008). His novella *Octavius the 1st* is forthcoming from Red Hen.

Katherine Burke is a native of New York State's Finger Lakes region and has admired its natural beauty from an early age. She is a graduate of Syracuse University and received her B.F.A. in 1977 and later completed her M.S. and M.A. degrees. She has continued painting for 30 years after having four children and running a bed and breakfast out of her historical home. She reinforces her personal belief that history is not the sole component of art but continues to feel that the true value in art is the making of art; the process and the “object” are at the root of this basic pleasure.

Erica Carroll is a senior Spanish and History double major at Providence College. Her favorite historical topics include World War II, the modern Middle East and 20th century Eastern Europe. She originally hails from Long Island, N.Y.

Maggie Ciarcia is a junior English major at Providence College. She is a member of the Providence College Varsity Field Hockey team along with the all-female a capella group “Anaclastic.” She doesn’t know what she will do with her life; however, if all else fails there is always professional field hockey or American Idol.

Lisa Fay Coutley holds an M.A. in creative nonfiction and is currently pursuing an MFA in poetry at Northern Michigan University where she also teaches writing. Her work has appeared most recently in *Glass, nimble, Eclipse*, *Terminus*, *Tar Wolf Review*, *Ibbetson Street* and others.

Rob D’Alfonso firmly believes that the Constitution does not imply a “right to privacy” as currently defined by the United States’ court system. He plans to develop the nuances of that belief in law school, while also testing his theory that ‘if you can understand Faulkner, you can understand anything’ by comparing *The Sound and the Fury* to written legal code.

V.M. Fry is a poet and painter, who exhibits her poetry in tandem with her large oil paintings. She studied with the Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Professor Henry Taylor at American University in Washington, D.C. and with the renowned Czech novelist Professor Arnost Lustig. Professor Charles Larson supervised the development of her novella. Though she was born and raised in Minnesota, she now writes in the Washington, D.C. area and has a studio on the Chesapeake Bay. She is the author and illustrator of the poetry art book *Things Done Alone*. Other recent poems are forthcoming in *The Podium*, *Slipstream*, *The Distillery*, and *Thema*.

Bill Garvey lives in New Hampshire. His poetry has been published or is forthcoming in several journals including *Margie*, *The Worcester Review*, *5AM*, *Slant*, *Diner*, *Concho River Review*, *New York Quarterly*, and others. Finishing Line Press published his chapbook, *The Burden of Angels*, in 2007. Bill received his MFA from New England College.

Meredith Davies Hadaway is the author of *Fishing Secrets of the Dead* (Word Press, 2005). Her poems also appear in numerous journals and in the anthology *Here on the Chester* (Literary House Press, 2006). Her poem “Yahrzeit” received a Pushcart nomination in 2007.

Alex Johnson is an illustrator and cartoonist who dreams that someday somebody will pay him to draw pictures. His online portfolio can be found at <http://jojajamo.deviantart.com/>. He can be contacted at alex85j@gmail.com for contract, in-house, or syndicated illustration work, editorial cartooning, and landscaping/manual labor. He’s also a former *Alembic* editor.

Peter Johnson is a professor of English at Providence College. He is the author of the young adult novel *What Happened* and three books of prose poetry, including *Pretty Happy*, *Miracles & Mortifications*, and *Eduardo & I*.

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Jess Kowal is currently a junior and studying biology at Providence College. She aspires to become a Doctor Without Borders, a profession encompassing her two passions of travel and healing.

Joe Kramp is a Chicago native with a B.A. from Millikin University (2003) and an M.Div. from Princeton Theological Seminary (2006). He worked for a year as a hospital chaplain in San Francisco and now works for Millikin University.

Norm Levine is a retired pharmacist who worked for 53 years to make a living while writing poetry. His wife, Peggy Aylsworth, was a 2007 contributor to *The Alembic*. Together, Peggy and Norm have 160 years between them and have co-authored two books.

Jane Lunin Perel is a professor of English and the director of the Women's Studies Program at Providence College.

Jesse Mack is an undergraduate at Providence College in the class of 2010 and a native of Ellington, Conn.

Kevin H. MacLean is a simple man of simple pleasures. He was born the fourth of six children in the Connecticut village of Vernon. He does not know how to sail, but believes he would enjoy it if he did. He enjoys listening to people speak in Japanese and French and hopes to one day become extremely wealthy doing what he loves: writing and playing recreational sports.

Joe McCormack is a 2007 graduate of Providence College. He is currently teaching high school at Vincent Gray Alternative High School in East St. Louis during his year of service with the Jesuit Volunteer Corps. He is also currently writing an epic poem, but he knows that—if he ever finishes it—none of you will care.

John McKernan teaches at Marshall University in West Virginia. His most recent book is *Resurrection of the Dust*. He edits the poetry magazine *ABZ*.

Carol J. Morrison is a psychotherapist in private practice in Bellevue, Wash.. She is the author of *Catching On: Love with an Avid Fly Fisher*, winner of the 2003 Jim Angell Award and is currently working on *Grace for our Common Disgraces*, a memoir emphasizing her beliefs as a non-exclusive Christian. She lives on the Snoqualmie River in North Bend, Wash., with her husband, Ed, and can be reached at emiloooh@comcast.net.

Elizabeth Mosier is a young poet from Minnesota just entering the publishing world. She is currently working on a collection of poetry for publication and hopes to be more widely read and recognized in the near future.

Kristina Reardon is a senior English and Spanish double major at Providence College. She also has a minor in women's studies, was the Associate Editor-in-Chief of *The Cowl* during her junior year, and served as a fiction editor of this year's *Alembic*. Having worked as a news correspondent since 2003, she writes a weekly column entitled "Kristal Klear" for the Stonebridge Press and Villager Newspapers across Massachusetts and Connecticut. She will attend the University of New Hampshire's M.F.A. program in the fall of 2008, where she will continue to re-imagine stories her mother and grandmother tell about their immigration experiences from the former Republic of Yugoslavia.

Milanka Reardon an alumnus of Providence College. Her artwork has won awards for still life, portraits, and landscape painting at the New England Traditions Art Show. She primarily works with oils but also enjoys experimenting with colored pencils, pen and ink, and watercolors. The colored pencil drawings featured in this journal were inspired by her travels to Oguniquit, Maine, to Florida, and by wood carvings native to Slovenija and Croatia, the area in which she was born.

Benjamin Russell, a former *Alembic* editor (2002-04), is a graduate of the M.F.A. Program at New England College. His poetry has appeared in *5 AM*, *Mid-American Review*, *RE:AL*, and others. He was co-director of the award-winning Mad Poets' Cafe program at the Warwick Museum of Art before its closure. He is currently a high school English teacher in Providence, R.I. where he also lives with his dog, Ramses.

Anthony Sanders is the author of two books of poetry, *Partial Eclipse* and *Warning Track*. He lives in New York City.

David Sapp is an artist and writer living near Lake Erie. He teaches studio art and art history at Firelands College, Bowling Green State University, in Huron, Ohio. He creates graphite drawings and writes poetry. His poems have appeared in *The Chattahoochee Review*, *The Cape Rock*, *The Licking River Review*, *The Hurricane Review*, *Sidewalks*, *The Bad Henry Review*, *Meat Whistle Quarterly*, *Limestone*, *Red Cedar Review*, and elsewhere. His articles have appeared in the *Journal of Creative Behavior*. His chapbook, *Close to Home*, and his novel, *Flying Over Erie*, have been published.

Kevin Shea has found life as a full-time, professional poet to be difficult. To pass the time, he slaves away in a massive gray imprisonment of an office building. He toils, thanklessly, day by day, proofreading books about infectious diseases and tummy tucks. Thankfully, his boss just moved him to a new cubicle, one that's next to two windows, so he can stare outside all day at two overflowing dumpsters and an empty parking lot.

Valerie Stauffer, a resident of Greenwich, Conn., is a graduate of Wellesley College and the M.A.W. program of Manhattanville College. She recently pub-

lished a short story in *Inkwell* literary magazine, a non-fiction piece in *Rhode Island Monthly* and received a 2007 Tassy Walden Award from the Connecticut Shoreline Arts Alliance for her young adult novel. She is now writing an adult mystery novel. Valerie is a member of the Board of the Historical Society of Greenwich and is District Chair of the Greenwich Representative Town Meeting. She previously served on the Board of Trustees of Greenwich Library. She works with her husband at his consulting company, Stauffer Technology.

Philip St. Clair is the author of four books of poetry, most recently *Little-Dog-Of-Iron* (Ahsahta Press, 1985), and *Acid Creek* (Bottom Dog Press, 1997). His chapbooks include #176 in the *Greatest Hits series* (Pudding Press, 2003) and *Divided House* (Finishing Line Press, 2005). His poems have appeared in *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Black Warrior Review*, *Chattahoochee Review*, *Chiron Review*, *Cortland Review*, *Gettysburg Review*, *Harper's*, *Ploughshares*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Poetry Review*, *Shenandoah*, and elsewhere. He has received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts (1994) and the Kentucky Arts Council (1999 and 2007); he was awarded the Helen Bullis Prize from *Poetry Northwest* in 1986. He lives with his wife Christina in the Appalachian mountains of Carter County, Ky.

Merrill Sunderland has completed his freshman year at Providence College and he has currently taken some time off from school. He intends to pursue some form of expressive writing in the future. He owes much of his inspiration to his friends, family, and poetry classes.

Sheila Tombe, born in Belfast, N.I., has studied in Scotland, Spain, and the U.S., receiving her Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from the University of South Carolina in 1993. She has taught English in Spain and Spanish in Japan but now is an associate professor of English at USC Beaufort, where she specializes in Shakespeare. She is editor of *Apostrophe: USCB Journal of the Arts*, and actor for Lowcountry Shakespeare, Rogues and Vagaboundes, The Rafael Sabatini Players, and Beaufort Repertory Company (roles include Shirley Valentine, Queen Gertrude, and Lady Macbeth). Her poetry (in English) has been published in *Eclipse*, *Rosebud*, *Yemassee*, *Fortnight* (N.I.), *Mindful Living*, *A Millennial Sampler of SC Poetry*, and *Essence of Beaufort*; she is also recipient of the first Gival Press Prize for Poetry in Spanish published in *Poetry Without Borders*.

Carrie Terbush is a senior English major at Providence College with a minor in writing. In addition to working on the *Alembic* staff, she is a part of *The Cowl* staff and hopes to do editorial work after graduation. This is her first publication.

Francine Witte is a poet, playwright and fiction writer. Her poetry chapbook *The Magic in the Streets* was published by Owl Creek Press. Her chapbook of

flash fiction stories has just been published by Musclehead Press. She is a high school English teacher. Please visit her Web site at www.franigirl.com.

