The Alembic is published each spring by Providence College in Providence, R.I. The subscription rate in the United States is $15 for two years.

Please address all correspondence, business, and editorials to: Editors, The Alembic, English Department, Providence, R.I., 02918. Submissions are read from August 1st through December 18th only. Please include a brief biographical note with all submissions. No manuscripts can be returned, nor any query answered, unless accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope with the appropriate amount of postage. Manuscripts known to be under consideration elsewhere will be returned to the authors unread. The Alembic accepts no responsibility for unsolicited submissions and will not enter into correspondence about their loss or delay.

Copyright © 2009 by The Alembic

Thanks to the Providence College administration for all its support.
POETRY
Alex BetGeorge
Matthew Miller
Dan Newman
Kelly Smith
Patricia Slonina Vieira
Kim Chinquee
Ryan Kennedy
Jesse Mack
Carol Frith
Rabiul Hasan
James Engel
Andrei Guruianu
Jules Gibbs
R.T. Castleberry
R.T. Castleberry
Kevin Leonard
Peter Johnson
Irene O’Garden
Ryan Kennedy
Julian Fenn
Kenneth Pobo
Jules Gibbs
Lowell Jaeger
Irene O’Garden
Chard deNiord
Kim Chinquee
Aaron Fagan
Biman Roy
Aaron Fagan
Biman Roy
Jane Lunin Perel
Francine Witte
Bobby Bretz
Bobby Bretz
Chard deNiord
The Affair..................................................10
Twenty Years Have Passed.................................12
Keep This Thing Alive..................................13
We Should Have Stayed Married When We Were Seven......14
Nesting..........................................................15
They Folded The Flag..................................16
Exilic Stigmata...........................................17
On Standish Road, After Pulling Up The Driveway........18
Eve..................................................................19
Night-Fay....................................................20
For You..........................................................21
The Street Where I Lived Once.........................22
Point of Departure........................................23
Coupled..........................................................24
Uncoupled....................................................25
A Rose Is Still A Rose..................................26
Friends..........................................................27
Slave Trade..................................................28
Ezekiel..........................................................29
Chasing Hours.............................................30
What If The Serial Killer.................................31
Science..........................................................40
Late Sunday Afternoon..................................41
Dirty Bomb..................................................42
Virgil’s Bees................................................43
We Wanted The Universe.................................44
Traffic..........................................................45
Night of a New Yorker..................................46
Moonlore.......................................................47
Bystander’s Query........................................48
Pastrami.........................................................49
The Baby in You...........................................50
This Patrol Base Sucks.................................51
City in the Sky.............................................52
What Doll Am I...........................................53
FICTION
Celina Martinez  Mexican Sadness ........................................ 56
Leeyanne Moore  Mr. Fix-It. ............................................ 57
Dwight Hilson  No Problema ........................................ 59
Bryan Tarpley  One New Story Every Generation .......... 68
Katie Caliva  No Puedo Bailar. .................................... 72
Ashwin Parulkar  Two on the Floor .................................. 75
Samantha McVay  As I Lay Me Down To Sleep. .................. 77
Giselle Youssef  Teta .................................................... 82
Vivian Chen  Allegory of Love ........................................ 84
Tom McFadden  Surviving the Storm ................................. 86

PHOTOGRAPHY
Mary Pelletier  Ebony & Avery ........................................ 33
Matthew Longobardi  Risk ............................................... 34
Eric Sung  Chairs, Amsterdam ....................................... 35
Elizabeth Reilly  Bicycle in Ice, Copenhagen ..................... 36

CONTRIBUTORS’ NOTES.................................................. 97
Editors’ Note

Writers take words seriously—perhaps the last professional class that does—and they struggle to steer their own through the crosswinds of meddaling editors and careless typesetters and obtuse and malevolent reviewers into the lap of the ideal reader.

—John Updike

Whether the shutter of a camera captures four solitary chairs, empty but bearing the potential for fulfillment, or the scrape of a pen embodies opportunity lost, like the fantasy of childhood love, this issue of The Alembic brings together written and visual works that encapsulate the highs and lows of our existence. Never has the written word been so accessible, and like the butterfly perched upon a screen, writers and photographers evolve and possess materialistic evidence of that from which they came. But regardless of the stage in which our contributors linger, our aim is that their work falls “into the lap of their ideal reader.”

—Brett Corrigan, Annmarie Granstrand, & Richard Kurker
POETRY
The Affair

Alex BetGeorge

Premature ice etchings
Flower over
The window panes.
Obscuring their view
With a sheet of crisped gauze.
Through it, she can see
The black mass below,
Frothing at the shore.

Outside,
Dune-grass blades slide
Over her calves,
Leaving ribbons of cold
As she runs down.

From the base of the dunes,
She searches the sand’s surface
Finding only her own footprints.
Moisture curls from her lips in exasperation
Suspended by the cold.

So she meets the lake instead;
As it churns in limpid swirls
About her ankles.
She shivers.

The wind catches the ends of her
Hairs; each crinkled
Like the veins
Of an inkblot.

Her vision is lost
Beyond the last
Spires of light
dimpled in the
water from houses above.
Past them,
The night’s hemisphere
Lies, devoid
Of horizon.
The waves shrink from her skin
As the tide retreats,
Leaving her to venture
Back up the beach.

As she slips
Through the door
His fingertips
Brush her arm.
A broken dream, that’s all you were,
a Freudian lullaby
saturated with ambitious feeling
giving us each small
victories, stolen, embattled
ghosts of an elusive smile.
They say we were young
and we were
young enough to understand
that love swirls
in
an ephemeral dance founded
on principles of
shadowy caverns.
Bring it back, my sweetest heart,
bring back that tender,
kiss, bring back that
acid remnant
of another
era’s twilight.
Those bleary nights we
brought about, the romance
more entwined with
absence than matter.
We sought the edges and flirted like doom,
made our way slowly, under the moon.
Keep This Thing Alive

Dan Newman

A little germ of hope
In a sterilizing sea
A little seed of truth
Obstructed by debris

A little stroke of change
in the endless teduim
A little chance of life
In the harshest medium

When all the rest have lost the drive
When nothing else can survive
If the angels don't arrive
And if the world cannot revive

I will keep this thing alive

A little bit of innocence
suppressed by tainted hands
a little flash of radiance
drowned by the desert sands

A wisp of a dream
Caught in a frozen gail
A little touch of love
That is trying to prevail

When all the rest have lost the drive
When nothing else can survive
If the angels don't arrive
And if the world cannot revive

I will keep this thing alive

Keep this thing alive
We Should Have Stayed Married When We Were Seven

Kelly Smith

We should have stayed married when we were seven, you and me
With the dandelion ring you tied messily around my finger
And my fingers laced in your muddy hands
We skipped through the woods behind our houses
Dodging enemy trees, laughing, and yelling, and being happily married.
We should have stayed married when we were seven, you and me
Then my heart wouldn’t have had to have been broken
Over and over by boys who didn’t make me birthday sandcastles
Or catch me a rainbow in a pale yellow bucket
Or leave me love notes carved into the oak of our tree house hideaway.
We would have eventually figured out
How to hold hands and swing at the same time
That grown-up kissing wasn’t that bad
That the world wasn’t just kings and dragons and ice cream
But we could have done all that together
And taken on the world and all its troubles
If we had just stayed married when we were seven, you and me.
Nesting

Patricia Slonina Vieira

The beauty of winter in morning:
bits of leaves, twine, and cloth
gathered by instinct
assembled with hope
ragged but sturdy
nestled into naked trees
high above the hard earth
solitary sentinels abandoned until
branches bud, explode to leaf and
whispering hide each unseen
habitat.

The beauty of winter in evening:
rows of silent houses
lamplight spilling its golden
invitation into the moonless night
onto frozen ground hinting
behind shuttered windows of
waiting and the simplest of joys
random stacks of books, a table
set for supper, a kettle
whistling welcome
home.
They Folded the Flag

Kim Chinquee

It was a spring of meteors and suicides and love, stones rolling off the mountains, and they stood there in uniform. There were boots, their heels hitting pavement, the whole squadron sounding like drums. Another graduating class, and this was basic training, and they would have been in blue dress, but the country was at war and this was only practice. The music played and the instructor commanded them to face, respecting their commander and salute and they all looked to the right and she saluted for them. There were women in one flight, men the next, in most, and they did everything together, all alike and straight, tensing up their bodies, stiffing their joints and moving ahead again when the instructor told them forward.
Exilic Stigmata

Ryan Kennedy

Exilic stigmata and the sound of autumn rains which bleed from it
Fill the cathedral of changing leaves.
I gather my hymnal and leave,
Disappointed with the sermon of a hollow priest,
Who clasps his hands and pretends to know the world by a book which has not seen it.
In the evening, when the sky displays many of its polluted hues like the plumage of a dying peacock,
I wander city streets with no coat to protect me.
The seppuku breeze cuts into me and surely must come from the breath of angels.
The confused wings of piteous pigeons buffet into the illuminated skyline of a gothic nocturne and
Urban gargoyles watch as the crowds move in and out like the tides of the mighty pacific.
I listen to the chatter as people pass me.
They speak of their weekend in Vermont or their weak and crumbling love,
And when they speak I cannot shake the thought of palmate antlers or the golden locks of Absalom tangled in the boughs of Ephraim.
As I watch the couples gaily erupting in one another’s arm
I feel envious that it is not me who resides within the tabernacle of love.
That no girl hangs from my shoulder like a chandelier.
Instead I walk without stately step cursing the watchmen inhaling fumes on rooftops.
On the fire escape a goblin writhes in invisible and endless agony.
Then when my eyes fix themselves upon the addicts,
I can see a fragment of my being in these discharged creatures
And think myself glad for being too frail for love.
The organ pipes echo through the fissures of the night sky
And somewhere within those holy cracks there lies the love I cannot see.
And rejoicing inside the stars, the man I failed to be.
On Standish Road, After Pulling Up The Driveway

Jesse Mack

Who knows what rain means
when it passes, returns, and passes
over a house’s hard shell?
Tires skid on wet leaves:
I still can’t answer
the question I haven’t been able to ask
or the door on Sunday morning.
There’s no one I’m expecting.
November with its yearly parousia
steps suddenly over the landscape.
Neighbors pull down their shades.
Light pierces my spirit
from a street lamp.
A clear pool’s built up in the basin
where swallows gather to drink.
Is the soul some street where a child goes
to play, and comes back puddle-drenched?
Eve
(after an unsigned print)

Carol Frith

There is nothing to contest here: she is most skillfully naked and standing beside a pale tree, her huge breasts bruised and scratched. The maker lays his palm against the flesh of her abdomen. Do you suppose she will not tremble?

He remembers every element of her flesh, her seamless breasts in the ripening dark. She will lean toward him, this woman, her vague skin sipping the maker’s breath, her color on his tongue.

She is a strange totem that the air desires. His breath opens her — a made thing moving beyond her maker. In her careful eyes, nothing has happened. The maker carries himself beyond his sight of her

and into evening: he has forgotten much of this — the green glow from the trees — but she will remember how he rises quite separate from the air and from himself, rises from her bruised flesh on his bright, uncertain wings.
Night-Fay

Rabiul Hasan

All night the east wind came howling in my room. Airborne on a chariot, you followed quickly; I could not be happier. The Danes are at your heels, their ships fast approaching the Isle of Skye. You are the star that guides me along day in and day out. I become embolden like an albatross. I will ruin them if you break out in lake-water.
James Engel • 21

For You

James Engel

As the Sun sees the flower, and knows it must end, I look at the hour, and pray God to bend.

To allow you to stay, let time simply stand, to keep us this way, my heart in your hand.

But life must go on, and you must away, let not one tear fall, remember this day.

for though all the oceans, move back from the sand, they always return, by God's gracious hand.
The Street Where I Lived Once

Andrei Guruianu

A long, low row of houses,
hunchbacked and tired like old men,
half lived in, half endured.
Snow still on the walk,
turning to a crust of ice.
There is suffering behind closed doors
to explain much of this—
people who rest their heads
on the nation’s anguish for a pillow
while below the ground is
one dark, bleeding wound,
still shedding black tears.
From the crease of covered doorsteps,
one can almost believe
in the swagger of bare trees,
their evening shadows growing longer,
thicker through another bitter winter.
A long, low row of houses,
hunchbacked and tired like old men,
half lived in, half endured.
Snow still on the walk,
turning to a crust of ice.
There is suffering behind closed doors
to explain much of this—
people who rest their heads
on the nation’s anguish for a pillow
while below the ground is
one dark, bleeding wound,
still shedding black tears.
From the crease of covered doorsteps,
one can almost believe
in the swagger of bare trees,
their evening shadows growing longer,
thicker through another bitter winter.
It comes in the form of a confirmation
and then a cancellation —
we give our belongings, we get them back
with a note from gloved hands,
the trace of latex on lace like
a lover’s subterfuge.
A panicked woman has staved off
death behind the Iron Curtain, waved
the orange flag of the Ukraine,
but she can’t make the agent understand
what it means to get to Detroit today.
It’s all beyond him, he explains —
engine trouble, a missing crew,
hard air, a jealous god. We shrug off
our urgency, nod off, dream of the parody
of takeoff, a speed and lift sufficient
to overcome our burdens, ascend
six miles above the national identity
where we are regional in the morning,
economy in class, none in meal. We believe
our winged man will deliver us
through zip codes and altitudes
to a current weather and time. His gifts
are intermittent, costly: we pay for the enterprise
of duration over distance,
the short supply and tall demand
of must and love.
Our status arrives through static,
a broken message we can’t comprehend —
we turn to our agent who says it’s all made plain
in the fine print, where we will find
a print finer still:

Regardless of your standing we guarantee
absolutely nothing, which includes the following:
a place to sit, a place to kneel, angel
sightings, pleasantries, recourse, refills,
heavenly choirs, comfort, refunds, reward
miles, the disembodiment
and indecency of descent, power
or any other means of getting you there.
There is a Sunday wistfulness to late summer sunlight, the rising rustle of a breeze.
I don’t often see it.
I’m folded into my house early, after work.
Dulled by ceaseless disaffection,
I’ve become an instrument of routine, of resignation—
wrists bound by PC and cell phone,
constrained by family rant, familiar rage.
There is an order to this,
a symmetry to images of outburst:
I ask you three questions for the day.
Your answers wither through the seasons.
Settled, in a cycle
I chase the cigars-and-martini circuit,
you change your music with the moon.
It’s the risk, the rhythm in our relationship:
we see advantage as a pair,
unkindness as an art.
I spend my time among the married:
the wives cutting, cunning,
mad with imprecision,
with migraines or money.
Husbands nearly as bad—
an endless emotional cheat
of computer games and office girlfriends.
And always, the imposition of a child—
whether imagined, postponed or present.

I take my leisure among them.
Successes and a single life
only slightly held against me.
Despite the prickly dramas
of discourse and dinner fare,
"I would like to marry," I tell my friends.
And yet I haven’t.
In loving, I know my limitations.
Conscious of their conceits, these wives
have ruined me for other women.
A Rose Is Still A Rose

Kevin Leonard

Know, as the last petal hits the floor;
A rose is still a rose, even if it bears no clothes.
Delicately held, in awe of its heart,
Bare and naked, it's soul an art.

Set ablaze, heat surrounds the core.
Creeping down the stem, burning up the hem
Fire to fingers, passion is slow
As it smolders, admire the glow.
I like my friends best when they’re extremely depressed, when they’re house-bound and terrified of their own reflections. They’re easy to be with when the gun is cocked, loaded, and sleeping under a pillow, when something as trivial as a bad dream might send them packing to the Great Beyond where most Americans believe there’s a 77% chance of meeting God. “It’s the 23% that keeps us alive,” I tell them, as we sip weak tea, pretending to be children with a great capacity for love. I like my friends best when they’re trembling, when their sense of self-worth hangs by the thread of a thread, when even the mention of a broken baby monitor hooked up to an empty nursery can bring them to tears.

When they’re at their lowest, that’s when I like my friends, that’s when I know they’ll need me.
Slave Trade

Irene O’Garden

(Note: I call the words and phrases in superscript “fulcrums.”
They serve the teeter and the totter of lines in which they are found.
When the poem is read aloud, the fulcrums are read twice.)

chocolate coffee diamonds rubber gold
slave trade limbs for
luxuries enslave trade lungs
for luxuries enslave trade life for
chocolate coffee diamonds rubber gold

slave trade time
24/7
splits
time like atoms

8 secs 2 crss the st.
10 min lunch
grid enslaves
the animal in us
work buy work by slaves to trade,
luxuries to prove
we are not slaves:
earth’s rich veins drained of blood
stained luxury
chocolate coffee diamonds rubber gold
Ezekiel

Ryan Kennedy

I. Withdrawal
The backstreet black wing of a flightless angel stretches across miles of the divided highway,
Over the vast schism between what is and what was promised.
Within the valley, a man Franciscan robed prays through the floorboards in his room.
He can see the whole of the darkness through a tiny light fashioned through a mouse hole.
It does not worry him.
His worn and withered missal is like a solemn crystal ball, illuminating the vicissitudes of the apocalypse among us,
Or is it coming into being beneath the shadows of a broken twilight?

II. Methadone/Memory
I skim through the scrapbook you made of me.
The whole essence of my childhood is captured in a photograph:
The daylight sustains me as I ride the red bicycle.
We both smile crooked like the folds of alligator scales.
While a leather woven baseball mitt and a can of oil keep alive the Chanukah flame.
In the backyard, I bury my holy relics next to the Labrador.
A beaten black car sleeps behind me.
A trembling mandolin announces my departure.
I trek the highway alone, racked and prideful.
In each picture, you are behind the camera smiling.
Not aware of the blotted moon and starless destiny of the forsaken firmament
Crouching beneath the weeds and cracks of our beloved sidewalk.
Chasing Hours

Julian Fenn

The leaves on the maple
blush and fall.
A gentle reminder of Autumn’s
ephemeral call.

Seems it’s time to shed lusty
summer’s dark tan.
Time to pick up the pieces
and start again.
What If The Serial Killer

Kenneth Pobo

doesn’t come? You wait your whole life
to be part of a great story, maybe even a headline,
but he overlooks you. You’ve been
overlooked before. You didn’t invite anyone
to the prom figuring who’d want

a limousine ride with the likes of you? Even
in church, while other kids won Bibles
for memorizing verses, when it was your turn
you froze. All you had to say

was John 3:16, an easy one. Instead
you gave the chorus to “Hanky Panky.”
It wasn’t appreciated. The serial killer
isn’t even in your state. He was a few months ago.
You took hope. Authorities say

he’s probably in Connecticut. Still,
you sleep with the door unlocked
despite hearing your dad’s voice,
“Always, always keep it locked.”
You’ve done well keeping it locked. In fact,

you’re a padlocked gym locker
and the dripping patron has forgotten
the combination. Who does he wait for?
Probably just someone with tin snips.
While he waits, so do you.
Ebony & Avery

Mary Pelletier
Risk

Mary Pelletier
Chairs, Amsterdam

Matthew Longobardi
Bicycles in Ice, Copenhagen

Matthew Longobardi
Sentosa Island

Eric Sung
Ridgers

Elizabeth Reilly
As it turned out, we were no more than the idea of ourselves, God’s spittle blown to raspberry bubbles on His lips, bacterium of a deity swollen to the size and shape of a forest floating on a bed of peat. None of it meant anything — It was the sort of news that brought everyone out onto the streets.

For thousands of years, we thought we owed everything to The Flood: alluvial fans, dendritic drainage patterns, animals of field, birds of sky, coal, permafrost, chakras, trigonometry, every variation on desire: shopping malls, frozen yogurt, you name it — only to discover it was all coded in a single protein, a strand inside some impossibly long-lettered and numbered supercoiled subsystem — that was as much as we needed to know to be sufficiently startled out of our collective experience. Or into it.

We were our own negative feedback loop. On Neptune and Mars, entire civilizations of sinners and saviors had come and gone. Suns lost. Earths lost. A trillion times over. A googleplex. Suddenly, all of our thoughts embarrassed us. The smell of a neighbor’s dinner — meat and carrots stewing — wafted into the street. That, too, embarrassed us. Even with Heaven gone, some dropped to their knees. None of us knew where to look.

It was Jonnie Bulger who spoke first: I am, I am, I am, he shouted into the street. Everyone swears he was sober. That’s all it took to turn us loose again. The adults shrugged and went back inside. Us kids followed. It was past seven. We were famished.
Late Sunday Afternoon

Lowell Jaeger

A good day but not at all
as I’d planned. Left a week’s load
of garbage in the dumpster
down the road. Drove home slow,
glad a hint of gold sunlight
broke the grey sky and dashed
bits of dazzle over dirty snow.

On the radio, market crowds
--car bombed--limp and wail, mop
their gashed foreheads with rags.
I watch a red-tail hawk dive
into scant cover of tall grass
and rise with wriggling prey.
Officials count the dead. Align
them along the sidewalks and gutters.

Reporters intone the score. A semi
blasts by in the opposite lane
with huff and puff enough to broadside
my pick-up and blow it a little
ditchwise. Minus a couple arm’s
reach between us and I’d be a hash.
A simple errand, no grand design:
just hauling trash. Or standing in line
with an armload of produce and lamb.
Dirty Bomb

Irene O'Garden

The bomber’s the driver who’s just plowed
the bus into the trusting wide plaza
of civilization. A quark of a spark of fear
tickles the fuse. Greedfueled hatred explodes,
ejaculates terror all over the airwaves.
It sticks to us, sickens us, pours into pores,
radiates into our limbs and our lungs.
Glowing green particles breed
in our bread. Duck under newsdesks.

Whirling threats, smoke-obscured figures
on horseback, gasmasked in flags
as they brandish our children.
Stripes on a flogged back, fouled
white field, star-pierced bruiseblue patch.

Terror’s plutonium glows in the plaza.
And then what and then what and then what?
We wail. Yet who spreads the terror? We do
and we do, thoughts quick and tiny as ants,
who can, one by one, on this spattered terrain,
in crystal intention from clarified brain
extinguish it, an atom at a time.

Extinguish it an atom at a time.
Extinguish it an atom at a time.
Virgil’s Bees

Chard deNiord

Virgil made up almost all of what he wrote about the bees: how the queen is a king in fact, How moisture in the softened bones of a slaughtered heifer spawns a new hive in the season when the zephyrs first ruffle the waves. If we’re always wrong about something in the age in which we live, then how is something we believe today about ourselves any less foolish than what Virgil believed about the bees? and why do we need to believe them still—those Latin lines—when we know they are not true?
We Wanted the Universe

*Kim Chinquee*

I took the tray to ER, trudging down to wait there for the copter. This one was a guy, the nurse said, on a bike, and there was that constellation.

It was three a.m., and we were all waiting for the man, for the bluesuits to bring him on a gurney. The nurse ate a sandwich, said there were cupcakes if I wanted, and I stood by the door, feeling the thick air, and then a drunk came, and a baby—they would wait, and then there came a theme song on the TV—the orderly in waiting, changing the remote—and then we felt the big wind, heard that common slap, and the rush. They wheeled in the body, man, this skin, and we all stood breathing.
Traffic

Aaron Fagan

Keep your distance.  
If you love me, keep  
Your distance when  
I die—give me room,  
But not so much we  
Lose sight of the fact  
Of our eyes unseeing  
Each other vanishing.  
Love will be the trust  
We were here entirely  
And part of this world.  
If you put two parallel  
Lines down on a page,  
Read them carefully.  
Look at them sideways,  
Draw the meaning into  
The distance, and make  
A point of departure.
Night of a New Yorker

Biman Roy

At White Horse Tavern
I face the refracted city light
through amber of Guinness
with a well-toned crowd of young bodies,
like in the days of Normal Mailer pounding
his conviction about “White Negro,”
way after Dylan Thomas settled the score
with the world; his shadow still hovers
near his portrait in the back room
and on Saturday nights Delmore Schwartz
would recite a few pages from *Finnegans Wake*.

As night deepened, four firemen sauntered in
with ash-caked boots and smoky helmets,
a sudden fire of defiance rolled over sawdust,
waitresses danced with firemen on tabletops
crowd kissed strangers and wept—

I am a New Yorker; I refuse to surrender.
Moonlore

Aaron Fagan

Knowing what I know now
I don't want to know anymore:
There's a man on Earth selling
Realty on the moon. Legally.
It was bad enough knowing
There are footprints, a flag
And other crap up there just
Waiting for the day to come
Down here when we can go up
To collect and expand, Luna.
You have offered me more
Madness than I can stand,
But bless you for no binding
Contracts or agreements for
There's no reward as great as
Letting go of what I love,
And nothing worse than
Letting go of what I love.
Bystander’s Query

Biman Roy

At the corner of Bleecker and Broadway,
he always waits on the sidewalk,
keeps the paper on the wooden bench,
as if for a friend, and smokes maduro cigars,
like a samurai in the royal garden.

A little jazz, flavored with lamb soup,
wafts up in the gardenia bush facing the lions
of public library and a few pigeons, stubborn as mules,
peck at the letters on pages of Post.

“New York is in its menopause now,”
someone said in the R train to someone,
while the girl sitting beside me like Buddha
Plucked her eyebrows clean as a ball field.

I know exactly what he is going to do now.
he will look at his watch, fold the paper,
take out a tissue, blow his nose,
amble the door of “Guys and Gals,”
and walk away with the same woman.
Carnelia loves buying food. She strides out of the deli with two bags. Moves on to the bakery. She has never felt so alive. Although she’s just come from her Uncle’s funeral. She wept with her sisters Opal and Jade over their parents’ graves, the Uncles’ and Aunt’s. Then they hit the deli. Where Romanian pastrami struck like gypsies’ tambourines over Carnelia’s tongue. Opal ate French toast. Soft against her tongue. Sore from that surgery that removed the lesion. Jade had lean corned beef on rye. Their father Louie’s favorite. When they said the prayers for Uncle Harry they were standing on burlap that covered their parents’ graves. The cemetery has horizontal plaques not tomb stones. That was a first. They had always been careful not to step on those markers. Sweeping the leaves off. Placing flowers around the names.

It was a dream sequence. The wind. The canopy. Throwing earth on the casket. The burlap. Underneath it their parents’ names. Underneath. The femurs. That had run with them. The ulnas. That held them. The skulls singing the white song of the grave that has no sound. But never ceases. The ocean sound without sound.

When they drive to the cousin’s house Carnelia estranged for so long isn’t sure how they will take her. But they are welcoming as if they are all at a party that will never end. She sits there realizing that although she shared her father’s and mother’s disdain for this branch of the family, these cousins are real. They know grief. She keeps drinking scotch with them. Studying their children. Seeing the flint of their great grand parents’ skipping through each eye. Next the long drive home with Opal. The endless old stories. Remembered so differently by each sister. Now the exhaustion. As if Carnelia has been pounded and roasted in a slow oven over night. Carnelia with her high cholesterol. A giant walking mound of Romanian pastrami. Cured tender. The old toughness gone.
Strangers stare at pregnant me like it’s something they’ve never seen. They would sooner believe that it’s a watermelon under my shirt.

A cashier at the Walmart rings up my bag of M&M’s. “Does the baby in you allow these?” I look at her, question mark on my face. “I mean,” she continues, “you gonna keep these down?”

My mother, who is standing next to me, explains. “She means that the baby in you is the boss now. If she likes it, you can eat it.” I wonder if I was ever allowed such luxury when I was in my mother’s stomach. My mother never asked if we should leave my father behind, middle of the night like we did when I was five. I would have puked that up bigtime.

The cashier wraps my M&M’s and wishes me luck. My mother and I walk outside to the parking lot. Cars like schools of parked fish.

“If you had been smart,” my mother points to my stomach, “you wouldn’t have strangers telling you what to do.”

We find her car, which is a rental, just like everything else in her life. “If you had been smart,” she continues as I slide into the passenger seat, “none of this would have happened.”

Now, I am used to being spoken to like this, but the baby in me isn’t and hurls it back up.

“And how smart were you?” the baby in me is making me say “to have a baby you didn’t want with a man you didn’t love?”

My mother looks dead ahead and grips the steering wheel. “Why don’t you have some M&M’s” is all she finally says.

I open the bag and pop a handful into my mouth. Then my mother and I wait for a moment to see what will happen next.
This Patrol Base Sucks

_Bobby Bretz_

a thousand points of light
(a great deal fewer actually)
i saw em in the woods one night
like sylvan spirits only they
made a hell of a lot more noise

but a thousand steps away
an i done broke a thousand leaves
i wish i said to number one
(he had a bigger light)
this aint no base its shite

cause there you sit all pissed and thinkin
bout all your friends (and what theyre drinkin)
its friggin cold your neighbor gripes
and not to be out-griped you gripe
this aint no base
its shite
City in the Sky

Bobby Bretz

Child is born by angels’ feet
A mile in the sky
Above our vice and our deceit
Who knew we’d get so high

Once I stood in the highest breeze
The clouds all drifting by
And searched from the spire a love for me
A love with my love for the sky

The empty spaces in between
The ancient sea and our steel-clad sky
We filled them in as she stood by me
And the world below passed by

We knew our fate and didn’t say
But lived with the happier lie
Loved like in old sunlit gossamer days
Despaired not with more than a sigh

And that day came when we didn’t smile
But neither did we cry
And our brothers below put their tempers to trial
Till our faith in fits did fly

I pull myself in from the rain
And the wrath of an angry sky
And look back down at the ground again
And it’s a long, long way to die

Child is born by the rubble and grief
Of the city in the sky
But he knows why our stay was brief
When we finally got so high.
What Doll Am I

Chard deNiord

I arise naked each morning from my antique bed
and stand at the window with arms outstretched
and feet apart like Divinci’s man in the circle
and wait for the day’s attendants to dress me
in the garments they choose for that morning-
a shroud one day, a coat of lead the next-
until after a hundred years I have worn so many
outfits I’m mystified by the day’s imagination.
What a doll am I to those attendants whose only
task is to dress me as they please, so that when
I disrobe at night in the vacant dark, I remember
the clothes that lay beneath. How easy to forget
them as soon as I emerge from the closet
in a new disguise—mere subterfuge to them
but fashion to me, if also laundry. I tell them
in vain how hidden they are, the articles
they choose, but insist I wear until I’m dressed
as the soul they say I am, although it takes
the whole day sometimes for me to see
myself as I am, and often not even then.
Do I wake or sleep in their invisible hands?
Wake, wake, I think, but only to fall
asleep again in the course of the day, no matter
the hair that lines the shirt they first put on.
Fiction
Mexican Sadness

Celina Martinez

In Spanish the word is triste for the way my aunt looks walking through the party while the mariachi bounces its song above the murmurs, yells, hugs, and glances of the people around her. She sets up tables in her front yard with the cement floor and iron gates that keeps her dogs from biting people passing by on the street. Today they’re tied up. Her sweater exclaims: it’s Christmas! in loud colors.

Her husband is at the cantina on the corner. She’s spent years waiting for him to stumble home drunk like a wolf, groping the walls as they hold their breath.

Cold settles over the night. The mariachis and relatives move into the house. She reigns over the party, waving her arms to El Jarabe Tapatio.

My mother said my tia used to be the prettiest of her sisters. She showed me a picture of a teenager in Mexico, with long, shiny black hair piled beautifully on her head and eyes that looked happy and skin as smooth as a freshly ironed shirt. She didn’t have the short, feathered hair or the breasts and stomach that droop, and a nose that hooks like a beak. It’s understood that the man who claimed her used up her youth and beauty. He slung insults and children at her until all traces of that girl disappeared. She has no need of that girl in the picture now.

Her sisters stamp their feet and grab the sides of their pants to mimic skirts when they dance. She dances in the middle of the circle. I could see the varicos veins bulging out around her knees when she picks up her skirt, plants her feet and makes lewd, ugly circles with her hips. I turn away, but her sisters and the other women cheer at the fleeting suggestion that one of them is free to act like a man.

It’s not true. She cooks for him; wipes him when he shits himself; fills the space under the bed with boxes of new pots and pans; waits for him every night; fills the silence in the corners of the house with plastic saints her kids don’t break anymore.

In the cage, her parrot watches; she trains him to say things she can’t. ¡Chinga tu madre cabrón! it repeats like a song. I imagine my tio crouching in the cage.

She loves him.

My aunt is starting to look like a parrot with silky black hair and worry lines carved into her face. She laughs and it sounds like a cackle. But the blue eyeliner smearing from the bottom of her eyes and the false jewels on her sweater don’t change her sadness. Instead, it looks like my aunt is crying blue tears.
Mr. Fix-It

Leeyanne Moore

Sherman looked at the glass of scotch resting on his knee, while beneath the two-foot silver tree with dangling glassine ornaments, a Mr. Fix-it marathon played on the cable channel. The show ended with credits racing over a list of repairs, a work-gloved hand putting a white line through each completed project. He turned his head to where his son, Scotty, was looking at him while cramming a toy robot's head into its blue torso and then pulling it out again, over and over. Scotty now lived with his grandmother during the week while Sherman traveled for his job. Sherman noted the new habit Scotty had of letting his eyes walk objectively all over Sherman's face. Sherman passed a hairy hand over his own razor-scraped chin. He turned his head to look through the dining room. His mom had put up a dutch door to separate the kitchen off from the dining room. Through the open top half he saw her standing at the sink. She was peeling a sweet potato briskly into the sink, the deep lines on either side of her mouth un-softened by the short strip of metallic orange lipstick she wore on holidays.

Sherman got up, a little buzzed from the scotch, and sauntered through the dining room, gesturing with his drink for Scotty to follow. Sherman's job involved assessing shifting business trends for a consulting company. They sent him all over the country to meet with clients. Lately, he had anxiety dreams in which training concepts slid off the powerpoint presentation screen. The concepts then transformed themselves into little salamanders which ran through his spread fingers as he chased after them. When he tried to grab onto them they squished, rubbery and slippery at the same time.

He leaned into the left side of the kitchen doorframe. There was a wide ledge to the bottom half of the door, which made a convenient place to rest his elbow. He watched his mother move down the galley kitchen and then back to the sink. She had the flat-footed competence of the retired, robotically taking care of the house, yard, and boy. He looked down and around him. Scotty was there to his right, standing just behind him in his blind spot. He put his hand on the thin, rubbery shoulder and drew the boy forward, bumping his son's chin accidentally on the top of the ledge. They both pretended not to notice, though Scotty's face stiffened as his eyes got glassy and he sucked in his lower lip.

"When's dinner?"
"Dinner'll be ready at three," his mother said without looking around.
"Gonna teach Scott here how to do the oil on the car."

His mother was not happy.
"Needs an oil change," she said, "not more oil."

He waved this objection away. He grabbed his thin-shouldered son and took him outside. After pulling the lever to release the hood, he walked around to the front of the car and pulled. The hood hadn't quite released, and
his fingers searching in the crevice for the tab that released the hood manually. It was there, he could feel it with his fingers, but how did it work again?

After twenty minutes he had the hood propped up, a little rag in his hand, and a plastic container of oil precariously balanced on the battery. Attempting in his best Mr. Fix-it manner to look at Scotty while providing a smooth murmuring commentary, Sherman checked the oil level and displayed to his son the dipstick, noting it was low. He then added oil, only realizing as he was shutting the hood that he had just put it in the radiator, not the engine. This caused him to pause for a long time, his fingertips still resting on the hood, while he looked off at the kitchen window.

Finally, however, without further comment, he walked back into the house, trailed by Scotty. Another scotch before dinner and Sherman was ready to try again, nodding to Scotty to follow him into the kitchen, where he took the electric carving knife from his mother's grasp and with a hand out to keep Scotty at a safe distance, launched into an explanation of the mysteries of turkey carving. Holding the knife in his right hand, and the end of the turkey leg in his left, his head was turned over his shoulder toward Scotty as he sawed through the electric cord. At the same time the carver stopped working a fireworks display of blue and yellow sparks showered out from the cut cord. A small cloud of smoke rose up and then flattened out, continuing to hover over Sherman's head near the kitchen light while Scotty's grandmother attempted over and over to explain to a thoroughly befuddled Sherman what he'd done. When he tried to unplug the carving knife, he got a jolt which caused his fingers to accidentally slip so that he plugged the cord in again. This blew the fuse on the right side of the house, and all three were plunged into a premature twilight, listening to the sudden quiet from the refrigerator. While his mother dug around in a kitchen drawer for a fuse, Sherman could see through the kitchen half door the warm glow off in the living room, the television rattling with cheer just out of sight, the tip of a silver branch sticking out and glittering, beckoning him back to a place of comfort.

Sherman never knew that Scotty retained a strong image of that holiday moment for the rest of his life. That moment—the smoke circle about his father's head—always had a pinnacle place in the hierarchy of tender memories of his father's brief presence. Sherman did not even make it to the next Mr. Fix-it holiday marathon, a blood clot taking him out of Scotty's life when he flew to Deluth. They did not have enough time together, not enough time for Sherman to ever tell Scotty about his dreams, and how after that weekend they changed. The thin, pale, rubbery salamanders Sherman smooshed between his fingers at night began to look up at him before dying, each one with blank eyes that walked over his face, each amphibious underlip drawn up in pain.
As if a reflex he’d trained for years, Andy started to run. He offered no good-byes and bolted in full stride, south on the gravel road, the same direction they’d been traveling. He splashed through a small arroyo but maintained pace, following the road along a gentle, rising grade. Andy ran to the crest and stopped, bent over, panting. It wasn’t totally dark, yet when he looked back, no light or reflection betrayed where Keith lay. He sucked in air and looked ahead. The road melted into waves of treeless Patagonian mesas, rolling off between rising bluffs and valley streams toward a fading, orange horizon: a seamless expanse defined only by brightening stars and the numberless haystack shapes of the neneo bushes lining the road, their thorns hidden in the dusk.

How far to the estancia? Ten kilometers? Twenty?

Don’t think—just run.

Andy picked up speed on the downslope. A steady, throbbing ache grew on his shoulder, the shirt torn. Adrenaline must’ve masked the injury. He had hit the gravel hard, one twisted spin away from breaking his neck, but somehow stood up focused, knowing what to do. Wade had landed nearby, covered in crates and boxes from the back of the pickup. Amazing he wasn’t hurt; maybe being a hockey player helped him absorb the impact. Andy started to get his second wind and remembered he hadn’t asked Wade if he was all right—there hadn’t been time.

His sliding footsteps settled into rhythm, their scuffing projected only a few strides ahead. Andy maintained pace, running in a cocoon of his own sound, ignoring the vast surrounding silence. He was frightened, not least because of the instinctive clarity he had never felt before. That they needed help was obvious, less so was that Andy would need to find it: no one else could go.

Certainly not Orlando, the lodge foreman, who should have been driving; he wandered through the debris, dazed, mumbling, and lost, his indigestion a minor annoyance now. Wade needed to stay and take charge, keep his wits, and calm Andy’s mom, who trembled at Keith’s side, holding his hand. She wheezed in gasping breaths. Keith’s lanky writhing had eased, but the moaning deepened and his long, straight hair—normally tucked easily behind his ears—matted around his face in twisted, bloody clumps. A steady red stream seeped across his cheek. Andy’s mom tried to wipe his face, but the flow overwhelmed her bandanna. Droplets pooled and soon a rivulet of gas, leaking from the upturned pickup, merged with the blood and continued its darkened progress down the gravel roadbed. Even the dust smelled of gas.

Andy’s little sister staggered and vomited into a coiron bush.

He knew he had to run—toward the cattle ranch they would’ve passed on the way back to the fishing lodge. They’d noticed the entrance earlier that morning on the way to San Martin. He couldn’t be certain of the distance, a long way for
for sure: it had passed in a blur. Still, it had to be a shorter distance to find help than the empty miles they had driven before the accident.

Twilight dimmed. Soon stars would be the only light glowing over the empty mesas spilling off the Andean foothills.

Andy had gathered a few Spanish words and shouted at Orlando, “Donde esta la Estancia Quemquemtreo? Donde?”

The foreman looked back, answering with a low wail filled with failure, “Tranquera blanca. Tranquera blanca.”

Something white, something white. God, Andy wished he’d paid more attention in Spanish. His mom coughed words as if hearing his confusion. “White gate. It’s the white gate.”

Keith lay motionless in her arms.

Andy rushed further into the cooling twilight. His lungs no longer short-winded and for a few strides, his fear fell behind in the dust. He strained to see the road and wondered if he was running for help, or simply running away.

Don’t think, you idiot; just run.

***

Keith wasn’t even supposed to be on this trip. He invited himself after Andy made the offer down by the river after check-in: any friend could come to Argentina if they paid their own way (which wasn’t cheap; not that Andy had a clue). Thing was, Andy meant close friends and Keith didn’t qualify.

Keith was rich, however, and that was part of his problem. Midwest rich. Chicago rich to be exact, always trying to overcompensate for that “Second City” insecurity. His dad ran some huge advertising agency, and Keith acted like his town invented cool, an obvious façade to stay on par with the NYC kids who dominated school—one of those exaggerated boarding schools sending flocks of graduates to Harvard or Yale or Princeton, if they don’t get thrown out along the way.

Keith amused Andy with his rangy frame, ever-present Coke can, and Marlboro dangling as he talked; plus, his voice projected a deep resonance which grew in intensity as BS spewed forth faster than he could exhale. But Andy was one of those NYC kids and couldn’t understand why Keith felt so compelled to impress—he would’ve been accepted simply by having good weed.

Keith did have one special talent that no one else matched: he could fly single-engine planes—he got his pilot’s license at 15 (and no one could imagine sitting in the copilot’s seat with Keith at the controls). His special move was to rent a plane and buzz campus during big home games. He sure captured everyone’s attention with that maneuver.

Still, Keith wasn’t a consideration when Andy made his offer about Argentina. In retrospect, it probably wasn’t such a great idea to extend a blanket invitation to a bunch of guys passing around a bong.

***

Over another rise and Andy felt the first blisters on his heels and outside toes—Wallabees were just too soft for running.

But don’t slow down, forget the pain.

All that blood gushing from Keith’s mouth couldn’t have been a good sign;
All that blood gushing from Keith’s mouth couldn’t have been a good sign; he showed no obvious cuts or gashes—it was all from inside.

The three of them had been riding in the back of the pickup, sitting on the spare tires, surrounded by boxes of supplies. And when Andy scraped himself off the gravel, all of it was spread across the road, Keith’s head wedged under the side of the upturned truck. He and Wade—somehow—pulled Keith out; relieved they saw no wounds. But as Keith groaned and curled, a trickle widened across his cheek and leaked onto the ground.

Andy’s dad had probably returned to the lodge after a hard day’s fishing, expecting to find everyone lounging fireside. He’d scoffed at the notion of giving up a day on the river to waste time haggling over unneeded wool rugs, guanaco ponchos, or maté cups; his annual obsession with trout clearly a higher priority. And anyway, Andy remembered his dad’s confession, how he felt cornered, only able to stare blankly ahead whenever riding in the same vehicle with his mom. He was sure she had her own side to the story and had come on this trip for appearance sake, not yet prepared to explain failure to a daughter too young to understand. Still, Andy accepted that his parents were more pleasant when apart and saw his mom brighten at the suggestion Orlando drive everyone into San Martin.

Wade had become familiar with the tension on numerous visits to Andy’s apartment, and together, they’d become practiced at avoiding either source. Riding in the back of the lodge pickup, alone and open to the breeze, felt like an antidote for any friction they’d ever known. Wade sat in the middle, almost as a buffer.

And when Andy started to run toward the dim horizon, he just said, “Hurry, man, hurry.”

***

They’d first met when Andy heard guys jamming from the rafters of the main school building, their freeform rendition of “Whipping Post” echoing across the quad. Wade was the drummer and switched tempo from the Allman Brothers to The Who effortlessly, his shoulder-length hair flying in rhythm (during weekend dances Wade was always one of the first to sneak out of the gym with nubile accompaniment). But they became friends over a favorite Todd Rundgren album (few others owned, let alone cranked up, A Wizard a True Star), and on his next visit home Andy discovered his dad actually managed Wade’s father’s money: strange how friendships transferred like contracts between generations.

They met in NYC on vacations and practiced bar hopping, not so much to get drunk or pick up girls—they were, after all, only 16—but rather to stay up all night and feel the exhilaration of watching dawn lighten city streets. Andy’s parents couldn’t have cared less; he avoided them as effectively as they avoided each other. His dad liked to complain about his mom’s allergies and mood swings and psychotic redecorating and how she blamed him for asthma attacks that started whenever he looked at her even slightly askew. Andy was pretty sure his mom wasn’t crazy, but sometimes wondered just what his father believed. They carried a lot of baggage: the only thing worse than their strained conversation was when they pretended nothing was wrong.
conversation was when they pretended nothing was wrong.

Of course, their medicine cabinets were always fully and conveniently stocked with Valiums and Libriums—in family-size bottles—and once in a while a vial of little, orange Seconals (even a gallon of coffee was no match for those bad boys).

Two weeks before their trip to Argentina, Andy and Wade shared a handful of pilfered extra-strength Valiums with Keith and together snuck out to the woods for a moonlit hike. Only Keith remembered how the evening ended, on hands and knees, crawling, out of sight, back to the dorms. But considering all the foliage brushed out of hair and dirt caked on blue jeans, Andy and Wade figured his recollection to be accurate.

***

The road made a sharp switchback on the hillside below, a shortcut to save time. Anything to save time.

Andy darted downhill, trying to maintain speed around the neneo bushes, massed like giant pincushions. The hillside was steep, and he lurched past the hazy mounds, each step a guess in the darkness. His legs raced with momentum and brushed against thorns, sending needle jolts through his jeans. He jerked his body from side to side, feet barely missing ancient roots waiting to tumble intruders headfirst into the tortuous plants. Andy leaned forward and tripped, his feet churning the air. He tensed for an onslaught of spines and raised hands toward his eyes before rolling, once again, onto the open road.

He wasn’t sure how long he lay there, but the sky focused overhead and the Milky Way’s cloud of stars never looked clearer. Andy staggered upright. Dizzy and shaking, he resumed a jogging pace. So hard to see, but for some reason he felt reassured that the neneo bushes would keep him on the road; no more cutting corners, just find the white gate.

***

Andy started to hate coming home from school when his dad needed to vent. Those were vacation days, and he wanted to vegetate in front of the tube or hit the town, not listen to rationalizations for why 15 happy years turned into 7 of mistrust. Unfortunately, Andy was usually home when his dad trudged in from another day of shuffling people’s money at his desk in the Pan Am Building, and he’d start in right away with why it was his mom’s hormones that changed (not his, of course), or why Andy better to be careful when he wanted to get married. Hell, Andy had a few steps on the adolescent ladder to climb before writing that check: talking with girls was hard enough — sure, they wanted to get high, but afterward he could never come up with the right thing to say.

His dad seemed to need playing the trusted advisor, as if Andy couldn’t see through the manipulation. Andy imagined him sitting outside the lodge with a goblet of red wine, smoking a cigar (Cuban, no doubt), and annoyed that dinner would be late. His dad was alone too, and Andy pictured his inconvenience soon changing to concern. But even if he suspected trouble, there wasn’t a phone to alert the cavalry.

At the summit of every rise, Andy’s heart rate rose in anticipation of finding the white gate, tranquera blanca. He imagined the pale, ghostly structure would
absorb the starlight and project its location, much as a beacon. But he saw nothing but hazy undulations and an infinite sweep of stars, all of little use.

He lost track of how long he’d been running. Longer than he ever ran before, certainly, and the moonless night played tricks, or was he going into shock? His feet throbbed, but Andy thought his wounds petty compared to Keith’s.

Concentrate. Keep the pace.

***

Three days into the trip, Andy had suggested a rafting trip. Simple concept: take an inflatable raft five miles upstream to the lodge’s property boundary; bring fruit, bread, dulce de leche, and a thermos of rum, then float all day, bouncing off river rocks, lazing in the sun until Orlando reeled them in downstream.

Keith joked that some of those colorful little pills might enhance the excursion, but when only a handful—to too few to swipe undetected—were found in Andy’s parents’ toiletry bags, Keith offered an audacious solution: he would feign epilepsy, his medication misplaced before departure. Keith knew everything about the ailment and embellished his pitch with an impassioned story about flying over the late semester field games, knowing he would be grounded after reporting his illness.

Phenobarbitals would do the trick, 3% his regular prescription.

Andy’s mom bought the whole deal and dispatched Orlando in a panic to hunt down the drugs.

Keith said that two pills gave a buzz, but six might do the trick, so they guzzled them out of sight before jumping in the truck bed to ride upriver.

Andy unfolded the raft and began rhythmic steps on the foot pump. The effects began in waves—like sheer curtains unfolding in slow motion. Each step sent new pulses, melting along shoulders, rolling down arms; his skin tingled, and he swayed with every movement. They watched, mesmerized, the raft growing and firming, the sunshine raising unfelt sweat beads, the river’s cascade rushing through their ears, pulling senses into the surging foam—no way to stop.

A jolting report ripped through their trance, the raft collapsing in a hissing rush.

They stood paralyzed, speechless, unable to disguise slurred words and creased eyelids, and Andy wished—more than anything in his life—to reverse time. He looked down and saw his foot, a foot he couldn’t feel, continuing to pump air into the limp, useless raft.

***

The road descended into a narrow, hollow valley, twisted around three curves, and crossed a small stream. Andy stopped. A slender gap appeared on his right in the darkness; he felt wheel ruts indented in the gravel. Neneo bushes towered on either side, appearing as a rounded, shadowy gateway, and past them, almost hidden from the road, Andy realized a geometric consistency. He tried to focus through the dimness and wandered toward the object: a gate, perhaps white but weathered and near camouflaged from sight.

He reached out, feeling the peeled wood, and hesitated. Was this the white gate? The night hid any color. Andy fought for memories of other gates that
gate? The night hid any color. Andy fought for memories of other gates that might have sped by in a blur earlier in the morning.

He had run for so long. His sweat started to cool. Keith could be—he had to decide.

A fist-sized padlock secured the rusted chain linking through the gate. Andy climbed the wrinkled slats, his blisters exploding with every step. His legs cramped as he swung them over the topmost board and crumbled on the other side. The path ahead was half as wide as the main road and wrinkled from wheels sinking into the mud left over from afternoon showers. Andy stumbled over the furrows, concentrating to remain upright.

How long could someone live with internal wounds anyway? It must’ve been the tires. They sat on the tires. All the supplies were at their feet. Only the spares tires could’ve crushed Keith’s skinny chest.

Stop thinking, please. Just move.

***

They had argued two days earlier. More precisely, Andy and Keith had argued—about girls, no less—on their return from another failed adventure. With shouldered backpacks they hiked up a narrow canyon to a confluence of small streams, intent to camp overnight, and then continue up to the snow-capped summit anchoring the property’s western reach, where views of the high Andes would stretch north and south, as far as they could see. Descent would follow the southern flank, camping one more night in a broad-leaf forest, visible as a lonesome green patch from the lodge’s front porch.

Wade and Keith erected a tent streamside, near a haggard sheep-herding corral, bantering nonstop over their quixotic romances. Andy sat apart, boiling water over an open fire for a dinner of noodles and canned cheese. If half of their stories were true, they’d qualify for the nooky hall of fame. Still, they were amusing, and Andy wished he had real stories to contribute. He chuckled, distracted from straining the pot over the stream, and too late adjusted his grip: Andy watched, helpless, as the limp noodles followed the pot into the rushing water.

Wade was incredulous. “You’ve got to be kidding me.”

And Keith erupted, “Christ, man. You weren’t even wasted this time.”

There was nothing to say. Leading adventures on the opposite side of the Earth was supposed to be his domain, and certainly more tangible than his compatriots’ bluster, but the criticism stung. Andy would’ve run back to the lodge for more supplies, if viable, and for the first time considered that this vacation was all a mistake. Worse still, the stories of his incompetence would be repeated to howls back at school. Maybe the trip would’ve gone smoother with just Wade.

Andy cooked the freeze-dried stew originally carried for the following night and ate in silence, separated from Wade and Keith’s easy joking.

Even in March, the end of the Andean summer, weather was hard to predict. The lodge awoke to cool, royal-blue skies, but up canyon near six inches of snow blanketed Andy’s tent. As they withdrew down the trail, their waterlogged packs soaked shirts and dripped on their legs—it seemed to Andy his friends
friends blamed him for the weather too. Keith couldn’t resist chipping away at Andy’s sensitivity. “Man, I hope you’re better with chicks than leading expeditions.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Hey, you’ll never get laid when these stories reach Miss Porter’s.”

“Who says I’ve never gotten laid?”

“Shit, I heard how Daphne stood you up for Casino Night. Christ, I would’ve asked her myself if I knew you’d chicken out.”

Andy was incensed, and Wade offered no assistance; he drifted back, perhaps recognizing that taking sides was a no-win proposition. “That’s bullshit. I did call, and her roommate said she was coming.”

“Yeah, that’s why you were left standing holding your dick when she wasn’t on the bus.”

“Since when are you such an expert on girls?”

“Well, I know you gotta talk to them if you want a date.”

Andy’s legs weakened on another long incline, no longer able to maintain a steady jog. With each step his feet rebelled; where was the damn estancia? He never felt more alone and wondered if the vast stillness harbored a drug-induced nightmare, one entwined with sensations of pain and truth. But Andy remembered waking before dawn, remembered climbing into the truck bed, and remembered Wade sitting in the middle.

The ride into San Martin passed bumpy and uneventful. They explored the imitation Bavarian town, often mocking the heavy German accents spoken by what had to be one-time Nazi sympathizers. After he loaded the truck bed with cartons and crates of supplies for the return trip, Orlando looked gray, sweat ringing his armpits.

Andy’s mom offered to drive.

At least this day had unfolded as planned, and as they bounced on their spare-tire seats, Andy pulled a bottle of vodka from the lodge supplies. Maybe a good buzz would reinforce his position after all. They took turns downing shots, careful to shield their motions from the front cab window. The sky slid toward evening magenta as the alcohol softened bumps and memories of insults evaporated.

Keith volunteered to lead an expedition to Miss Porter’s when they returned to school and they toasted the prospect. Wade vowed he’d get everyone laid—whether virgins or not—and Andy let his initial pang of resentment drift away in the swirling backwash behind the truck cab.

They hit a sudden, sharp bump, the truck skidded sideways, and the hurrying landscape distorted skyward. Andy’s back slammed into the back of the cab and his arms flailed out of control. His body twirled, weightless in a blurred cyclone. Pain slammed through his shoulder and when Andy could breathe again, he only tasted dust.

At the top of the ridge, Andy was too tired to notice a broad valley floor with clusters of poplar trees just darker than the surrounding bushy range. He picked
picked up his pace on the downgrade and saw sparkles within the valley, like stars overlapping the horizon. Andy stumbled sidewards and scraped against naneo thorns. The pain cleared double vision. They were lights, unmistakable clusters of lights, flickering through the leaves of tall poplar trees.

Adrenaline rushed Andy forward, shouting as he ran. The lights were distant, but he kept yelling, unconcerned that the light breeze absorbed any sound. His ears pounded with each step, and he imagined he was crying but felt no tears. On the valley bottom, his voice echoed around him, and he ran faster still.

The estancia was large, but there was no movement. The workers had to be asleep; what time was it anyway? And he needed to remember more Spanish. Andy rehearsed an explanation, “Nuestro coche esta en un accidente. Por favor, vamanos a—” Damn, he needed to slow down, clear his thoughts; there was no time.

Andy reached the corrals first, empty and blocking his route toward a string of low-slung buildings, each with lights casting shadows onto their green metal roofs. The odor of large animals and manure seemed oddly comforting. He scrambled through fence rails and stumbled over clumps of dried mud and dung before reaching the first row of towering poplar trees protecting the main buildings; their red brick walls glowed orange in the floodlights.

Andy banged on doors and windows, yelling his rehearsed line, “Socorro! Socorro! Es una emergencia!”

No response. He screamed at three buildings, fearing the workers all out with their herds, then saw a lone window, illuminated from within. Andy pounded on the door and yelled again, “Socorro!”

The door creaked open and a gray, crevassed face peered out from the crack. Andy struggled with his prepared plea when the man interrupted, “Whoa, pardner. Calm down, calm down.”

He spoke English (later telling Andy he was a Texan, retired way south to help breed ponies), and within minutes bodies and vehicles erupted throughout the estancia. Andy slumped in the front seat of another truck, hurtling back down the road where his footprints would be filled behind this caravan of tires and headlights projecting through the bushes.

Rise after rise passed by in the coal-black night, until Andy saw a distant orange fire and shadows waving near the pickup, still balanced on its side. The debris was stacked neatly by the roadside and nearby lay a tarp-wrapped form, flat beside the truck.

Wade ran up, bursting with relief. “I knew you’d do it.” But Andy stared at the motionless form, too tired to feel anything.

Wade touched his arm and said, “He didn’t make it, man.” And from the corner of his eye, Andy saw Wade hurry to the side of the road and throw up in the bushes.

Andy’s mom embraced him, so tight he never forgot the touch of her curves, nor her trembling, even worse than hours before. She stammered, trying to explain, “The brakes just locked. We hit a small bump, and when I touched the brakes, I don’t know what happened—they just locked.”

She let go of Andy and looked toward Keith’s body, her voice breaking. “We
held him over an hour. He stopped bleeding and didn’t move, but he felt warm and we couldn’t let him go. We just couldn’t let him go.”

***

Andy’s father met them in San Martin the next day. The medical examiner ruled an accident, but a judge declared fees must be paid before a foreigner could leave after a fatal accident; no telling all the pockets awaiting that bounty.

A mechanic crawled under the pickup, towed into San Martin the morning after the accident. He tested all the operating functions and told Orlando the brakes worked perfectly, “No problema.” Other than a few scratches on the driver’s side, the truck appeared as before, and sat, gassed and ready to ferry everyone to the small airport outside town. Vacation over.

They waited in a hotel lounge as arrangements were finalized. A phone rang at the front desk, and the manager waved and pointed to an extension on a nearby table. Andy’s dad glanced toward the phone, his expression hardened. “Can you all leave me alone? That’s Keith’s parents.” Andy’s mom grasped his sister’s hand and retreated to the front lobby.

Andy and Wade poured drinks in the empty bar. The next week would bring a meeting with Keith’s family and their lawyers, then a memorial in Chicago, and another back in school, and they lost count how many times the story would be repeated. But as they nursed drinks, trying cognac for the first time, Andy remembered something that he would never tell his mom, even after she remarried and moved to a different time zone, or his dad, even when he worked on his third marriage and would tell the story how his first wife “killed that boy in Argentina.”

The two boys stared at their reflection in the bar mirror behind a row of colored bottles. “Wade, do you remember when we got in the truck yesterday to head back to the ranch? I don’t know why I blocked it out, but I changed seats with Keith. No real reason. I just said, ‘Let’s change places.’ He didn’t argue at all.”

THE END
Some gringos came yesterday. Javier saw the dust from their tour bus as it neared the cliff’s edge, and shook his head as it negotiated the narrow switchbacks into the canyon. He watched as gringos filed out wearing khakis and sandals, their feet soon covered by the fine rock powder which hung as a mist over the quarry. Their Peruvian driver approached him with a nervous smile and introduced himself as Miguel.

“We’re here on what we’re calling a Reality Tour.” He put a hand on Javier’s shoulder. “Would you mind if they took some pictures?” Javier shrugged. Cameras flashed. Miguel asked him to hold up his chisel, then spoke to the gringos in English. Javier couldn’t understand. He assumed Miguel would be telling them how the chisel was once a car axel now sharpened at both ends. Javier couldn’t use explosives to quarry the fragile stone. He must climb the cliff face and pound the chisel into the wall with a hardened steel mallet, carving out great bodies of stone which fell and shattered into manageable pieces on the canyon floor.

Miguel pointed to a stack of finished blocks, calling them sillar. He’d be telling them how Arequipa, the city beyond the canyon, got its nickname “The White City” because it was once built entirely from the chalky stone in this canyon. Due to frequent earthquakes, those who could afford it now built their homes with concrete and rebar. Only the poor built with sillar. This is why the ten blocks Javier finished in one day sold for merely thirty cents apiece.

When Miguel finished, one of the gringos approached and offered Javier his hand. Javier looked down at his own bony hook of a hand and extended it awkwardly toward the fleshy gringo. A camera flashed. The gringos drove away. Javier lifted his hand to wave, and noticed the gringo had slipped twenty American dollars into his palm.

Ten years ago, Javier might’ve taken the money straight home to Soledad and told her to buy a new dress. Might’ve told her to save the rest for the second floor of their sillar-walled, tin-roofed home. Ten years ago, there was hope that children would fill the second floor. Instead, Javier hid his chisel, hammer, and block pattern beneath a pile of rubble.

He walked out of the canyon and a kilometer down the road until he caught a faded yellow minibus filled to capacity. Always room for one more. He crammed beside an old woman with thick thighs who eyed him menacingly. Acrid exhaust mingled with the smell of sweat and market fruit as they rumbled down pockmarked roads.

A gap-toothed man in the front passenger seat spoke with a failing voice. “It cost me a week’s wages for water this month. They wouldn’t have to bring it in by truck if they’d just lay the pipes. Bastards. With Fujimori, at least we had
water for coffee.”

“Fujimori was a thief!” said the woman next to Javier. The bus erupted in debate. Javier kept quiet.

He passed the driver a coin and squeezed out a block away from the nearest Picanteria. He walked with a limp down a sun bleached road lined with two- or three-story houses. This neighborhood is older than his: one new story every generation. He wondered how tall the houses are in the oldest neighborhood in the world.

Inside the Picanteria, full-figured women in miniskirts danced a Cumbia on the television mounted behind the cracked Formica counter. In her day, Soledad could wipe the floor with those girls. People from other neighborhoods came to her Quinceanera just to watch her dance. The pleats of her white dress barely kept up with the whirling of her body.

Alfredo wiped the counter with a soiled rag. He wore an immaculately white shirt tucked into brown polyester pants.

“Fredo!” said Javier. “Does your chicha have any kick today?”

“More than you can handle old man!”

Javier chuckled and slapped his twenty on the wet counter. “Think you can handle this?”

A low whistle. “Only if you buy a round for the house.”

Javier glanced behind him. He was the only customer. “Make it two rounds Fredo. I’m feeling generous.”

After counting out change for the twenty, Alfredo took a two liter Sprite bottle filled with fresh corn beer from the buzzing fridge behind him. He topped off two glasses and clinked them together. “Salud.” The two of them smiled.

The Cumbia came to a halt and five-o-clock news took its place. Nancy Alvaro spoke in a rapid, newscaster Spanish: The Archbishop addressed a crowd gathered to celebrate the opening of the Immaculate Virgin Jesuit Retreat Center. The camera cut to a regal faced man in gold, white, and deep red robes. Upon his head sat a hat like the tip of a fountain pen. He spoke slow words, deep and sonorous. From the Vatican comes a bold challenge to the faithful of Arequipa. His Holiness would see God’s light shine from this city on a hill so that the eyes of Christ’s Church on this continent might be turned toward Arequipa as an example, a focal point, a Rome for Latin America!” The camera panned a frenzied crowd, arms upraised—

Signal lost. Static.

“This thing’s a relic. It’s a miracle I have any recep—

Javier’s barstool flew out from under him and his chin hit the counter and the glasses on the counter rose and fell and crashed and the air filled with dull thunder and the plates fell out of the cabinet and Alfredo shouted something and Javier crawled and rolled across the cracking floor to the doorframe and he made the sidewalk when a power line whipped snakelike and sparking on the street so he rode the earth scraping and bumping—

And it stopped.

Car alarms and wailing women. The air hung thick with dust, the ground strewn with debris. Javier scurried into Alfredo’s and shouted his name. No an-

The aftershock was bad. Javier threw himself on top of Alfredo and they rode it out together while chips of concrete broke from the wall above.


Alfredo put weight on legs and stood, coughing. “I think I’ll be okay.” He felt his chest. “They’re not deep. I’ll be fine.”

“I’ve got to find Soledad.”

“Run. I’ll pray for you.”

Javier cursed his limp and the seven kilometers between himself and his wife. He picked his way past stranded cars, fallen poles, shards of buildings collapsed and spilt onto the street. Water from broken lines made flowing rivulets of mud which cut through the buckled pavement.

Muffled screams from a taxi up ahead. Javier rounded it, saw a concrete electric pole had fallen across the hood, the driver crushed and dead. The doors were buckled and shut. Inside a woman with her baby, beating against the back windshield. He found a large chunk of concrete, told the woman to duck behind her seat. He swung hard and made a hole, the glass spidered out around it. He busted away the shards and reached in to take the baby. It was a girl. She stopped crying in his gnarled hands. The woman crawled out, legs scraped against glass and bled. He handed back her baby. “I’ve got to find my wife.” She nodded in teary thanks.

Javier’s swollen knee trembled with each step. Three years ago he had finished carving a good week’s worth of rock from the cliff face. He began to lower himself when his rope frayed and snapped. He fell wrong on one of his legs, and walked wrong ever since. He had four kilometers to go, and another hour the sun would dip behind mount Chachani.

It didn’t take long for the looters to arrive. They roamed in groups of three or four, pushing wheelbarrows or carrying canvas sacks. Javier watched three men push past a plump woman who was the proprietor of a cybercafé. She tried to stop one of them. The looter whirled around and brought the handle of a machete crashing into her temple. She collapsed and rolled into the gutter. It wasn’t his fight.

He stepped with his good leg onto a pile of rubble. The rubble shifted. He came down hard on the bad leg. It went out. He fell, hands and face and ribs striking jagged concrete. Tried to stand. Managed a few steps. Had to stop. He pictured Soledad at home, stirring a pot of beans the way she does, her whole body swaying with the spoon. Maybe she heard it coming. Maybe enough time to put the spoon down, look out the window. He built the house himself. He knew the wall in front of her would come down first, pinning her under immovable stone. She would probably be still, stay quiet, the way she did when she gave birth to their dead son. She wouldn’t make a sound as the other walls pounded down.
Across the street Javier saw a boy standing among silver chalices, brass candelabras, wooden statues, gilded metal plates depicting scenes of saints. Behind him men grunted under the weight of a crucifix, trying to maneuver it out of the splintered wooden doors of their church.

“What are you doing?” Javier shouted, wet faced.

“Standing guard.” The boy said, straight backed.

“Not you. The men behind you.”

“They’re saving these things. In case the building falls.”

“But there are people trapped in all these buildings.”

“These things are sacred.”

The high-pitched whine of a scooter. Javier stood, tottered out into the center of the road. Held out a fistful of cash. The rider wrestled his scooter over the pile of rubble, and came to a halt in front of Javier.

“I will pay you five American dollars for a ride to my house, just up that way.”

The driver laughed. Tried to steer around Javier.

Javier hooked his arm around the driver’s elbow and clamped down. “My wife is trapped. Maybe dead. Either I give you five dollars and you drive with me on the back, or I dislocate your shoulder and I drive with you on the street.”

The driver mumbled obscenities. The boy looked down at his feet. Javier climbed onto the back of the scooter.

Orange light from the setting sun filtered through settling dust, turned it murky brown. Javier cried out her name, hurled the chalky bricks of their ruined home. He remembered six years ago, holding her hand in front of the church. They purchased a candle, walked inside. Up front, the altar was crowned with plumes of golden light, each a candle lit in prayer. They lit theirs and placed it together, her other hand resting on the bulge of her belly. May it be a boy. May he go to school and never have to lift a chisel. May he marry a dancer.

Through the debris he saw the fabric of her dress. His voice was a ghostly rasp. “Soledad?”

No reply. No movement. It would take another hour to clear enough to reach her.

Javier stretched his legs out and laid on his belly. His forehead rested on siltar and he looked straight down at her dress. It was white. He did not cry. He did not move. He just breathed the air around the stone. Cool air. It smelled like her.
It was very late but there were still many people in the smoke filled room. More technically it was a veranda, but the smoke was so dense that it obscured the openness, and so it may as well have been a room. Small men puffed on their big cigars and blew the fragrant smoke into the faces of painted women in low cut dresses. The band in the corner was releasing three salsas, three tangos, three salsas; an SOS that was never noticed. And even if it had been heard, who would have come to the rescue? Waiters milled around serving cerveza and tequila. Couples held hands across small tables. Dancers moved in the center, creating a whirlpool of cigar smoke around them.

She was there in the center of it all, dancing as though the beat of the bombo and the beat of her heart were the same. She was one with the smoke, the hypothetical room, and the music. To remove her would create a void so tremendous that everything else would stop. The waiters would drop their trays; the band would break their instruments. Even the smoke would dissipate, exposing everyone present to the great black emptiness of the heavens. She was beautiful in her green dress with the ragged hem; olive skin stretched tightly over bones and toned muscle, glowing with the suggestion of sweat. She was beautiful yet she danced alone. Whether or not this was a conscious choice was unclear. Perhaps she had scorned all partners, preferring her solitary worship of Apollo manifested in the form of an Argentinean band. Or perhaps she was too lovely, too graceful. All men wanted her but few were brave enough to approach her lest they disturb the rhythm of the universe. She danced like one possessed by the spirits of the ancient world, like a medium in a trance.

He was removed from it all, sipping some non-alcoholic drink at a table alone, watching all the patrons, but especially watching her. He was wishing that he had not worn a suit in the tropics, wishing that he had ordered a stronger drink, wishing that he too was polluting his body and his air with a cigar, wishing that he had not come. Yet above all these things, he was wishing that it was his arms in which she moved so sensuously. He watched her and she made him long to be everything that he was not. No, it was more than that. By watching her he became profoundly aware that he was already unhappy, that he had been so for a long while and more disturbingly aware that he did not see change as a viable option.

And then the song ended and the band leader signaled that he and his men needed libations. Most dancers rested at tables, leaned up against the bar, but she lingered for a moment on the deserted dance floor. She tossed her hair back so that it fell in soft curls on her bare shoulders and every man present moved over just a little bit so that there would be room for her to sit at his table. But she already knew where she was going to spend this intermission because she had felt his eyes upon her body as she was dancing and knew that he meant her
no harm. It was as though she could sense that he was a sweetly bumbling fool. She had enjoyed their symbiotic relationship; her dancing, him watching. Perhaps she had even sensed that he needed her, needed to come into contact with the energetic spirits moving within her Latin body.

Without hesitation she walked past the other men and their dates, wives, and mistresses and went up to his table. Somehow she was still moving in beat with the bombo even though it had stopped playing. She sat, lit a cigarette, did not speak. He was a mass of tremors because he had wished for her and there she was and he had never thought of his own desires as powerful enough to come to pass. He stared at her profile, too scared to speak, move, or ask for a light. She tapped her foot to a beat that she felt somewhere in her body and as if in response to the sound of her delicate shoe hitting the ground the band returned to its post. The music started up again, returning to its previous sequence of three short, three long, three short. She rose and stood there in front of him, smiling more with her eyes than her lips, stretching out her hand, still not speaking, and yet most clearly asking him to dance.

“No puedo bailar.” He mumbled in his God-awful accent the only phrase of Spanish that he knew, the phrase that he had learned especially for this night. He would go to a club prepared to turn down an offer to dance. Not because he was sure that he would get an offer, but because that was his way, to always avoid an uncomfortable situation. It may or may not be surprising that he usually was uncomfortable despite his best precautions. And indeed his not-so-well-laid plan did go awry that night. She did not accept his refusal; instead she looked incredulous and said, “No es la verdad. Puedes bailar.”

Perhaps if he had known more Spanish he would have been curious about her use of the familiar tu instead of the formal usted. But he did not know more Spanish and so he let her lead him out on to the dance floor because he had no idea what she had just said to him and because he was a doormat and that is what doormats do. And sometimes doormats are lucky like he was lucky that night. She was the best thing that had ever walked all over him.

This isn’t about sex. This is about a 34-year-old American accountant faced with a beautiful Hispanic girl asking him to step out of his box. He was every inch the stereotypical accountant, every stigma attached to the job was true in him. Shy to his own detriment, never standing up for his wants among friends, at work, or with strangers. His self-esteem was once recorded by the company psychologist as having a negative numerical value. The last woman he could remember dancing with was an awkward girl he took to his senior prom. He repeatedly stepped on her toes and she promptly dumped him.

On the dance floor she led, but never let him know it. They moved together awkwardly at first. He was cumbersome and weighed down by self doubt but like air mixed into a heavy batter, she lightened him. He closed his eyes, feeling the music: feeling her heart beat against his chest, and thus feeling the bombo. He shed his history, his reputation. For the first time he pretended to be different, stronger, better. He focused on the music, the girl, and most especially that drum.

The other men at the bar watched with envy and lust. Everyone knew that the
man who danced the last song with a woman was supposed to bring her home. For them, it was all about sex. Because they were successful businessmen who hired bicho raros like him to do their books, and they could not understand why she would possibly choose him over them. They were the same type of men who, back in America, had roared with laughter when he had requested a week off to travel to Argentina. Their world was one of straight lines and fixed stereotypes. They made no allowances for a man being more than his job. And for far too long they had convinced him that they were right.

The song ended, the bar closed. He drove her home. She kissed his cheek, and then he drove back to his hotel. In his journal he wrote “Went to club, spent 40 USD.” No comments about a night of almost-passion, because this was never about sex. It was about something greater, so monolithic that it almost suffocated him as he tried to put it into words, and so he only wrote “spent 40 USD.”

The next day he boarded a plane and returned to his home and to his job. His boss asked how his vacation was and he mumbled something about customs. The boss smirked and headed to find some of the other high powered players in the office. They no doubt had a pool going about whether or not he would get laid or do anything interesting at all while abroad. They loved thinking themselves to be right about everything. He, always a compassionate man, decided to not jostle their world. So he went back to his daily routine of crunching numbers and swallowed his secret. But, as soon as his boss rounded the corner, he touched his cheek, smiled, and wondered where he could buy a bombo.
We had a balcony once that overlooked the city and a cook who lived in the building. Or just outside it, in a little room inside the gate. She came to wake us each morning for breakfast and had a nine year old son that looked just like her, who ran to get us vegetables. Otherwise, he sat with us and played the ukelele we had there sitting on a couch pillow on a chair next to the screen door. We were five men and she was a small woman. She had a good heart, and that's what her name meant too. She named each of us because she didn't like our names and the names she gave us stuck.

One day her boy came knocking at the screen door while we ate. He said "Our whole family's here." She didn't hear him over the frying pan so we told him "Come in, come in." He didn't go for the ukulele like usual but instead into the kitchen to tell his mother that their entire family had come from the village. They were downstairs, in front of the room they lived in, just inside the gate. "My mother, my father," she said coming out the kitchen.

"Someone's dead," she said. She tried to explain, but we just told her "Go, go."

Later that day, we saw her downstairs, wringing a handkerchief out into a wash bucket. We planned out what we were going to say to her but when it came time to jump we froze. She laughed. "It was all a misunderstanding," she said. She said her entire family was on their way to Ajmer, and they decided to stop here, to see her, and her kids.

"No one died. My mother, my father, everyone's all right, but God I was scared," she said, showing us with her hands what her heart felt like that morning.

Then we laughed.

That whole day, before that, we'd been having terrible thoughts, and didn't know what to say. Or how to say what we wanted to say.

"Same time for dinner," she asked.

"Same time," we said.

Her son was sitting on a box crate, under the clothesline, chewing a pen, and he got up smiling to come with us upstairs. She didn't come to cook us dinner. So we made it ourselves while her son went looking for her. Then she came in dragging her feet, while we were eating.

"You know what happened," she said. "You know that girl next door who's always yelling for me, the girl in the next building."

There was a young woman, maybe about our age, or a little younger, who was always yelling for our cook, from the small room on the roof of the next building where she lived. She would yell for our cook to come to the balcony. She was always cracking jokes. They were always cracking jokes. Mainly, about us, making fun of us, because we walked around the house with our
shirts off.

"That woman, that girl," we asked.

"Her husband died today," she said. "Someone slipped a pill in his whisky, his whole body turned red, she found him on the roof next to the bird cage, not breathing. You can't trust anyone."

"How old was her husband," we asked.

"Young," she said.

All we could say was man. Then she picked up our plates and took them into the kitchen. "Breakfast same time tomorrow," she said over the sink.

"Same time," we said.

I slept on the couch that night. I slept well for sometime but it was that time of year when that's all you can ask for, when you wake up during the night, panting, blinking. I went out to the balcony with my jug of water and drank from it, poured the excess on my chest and my neck and looked out over the railing and except for that same light in the old fort on the hill everything was dark and her wailing covered up the barking dogs that started up that time of night then because her door must have been open and I laid down on the balcony floor pouring water over my chest and eyes, into my mouth, listening to her until she fell asleep.
As I Lay Me Down To Sleep

Samantha McVay

The lights were intimately low. Small tables perfect for two were covered with white tablecloths and lit with white candles. Place settings and silverware sparkled in the candlelight.

She was guided by a waitress to her usual table, in front of the window overlooking the water. She had been self-conscious the first time she had gone there, alone and certain that everyone was watching her. Now she didn’t mind going alone and often stayed long after she had finished her meal, drinking Chardonnay and watching the couples eating around her. She had seen a few engagements take place and felt her heart lift with the excitement of the beautiful young couples. But she particularly loved to watch the older couples, who looked like they had been together forever. She imagined that they knew everything about each other and liked to picture them at home, in the routines it had taken whole lives to develop. How beautiful, she sighed.

Her waitress came back to the table. “The usual?”

“Yes, thank you.” Holly was what is known as a regular customer. She came in faithfully around 7:00 pm every Tuesday and Thursday. She almost always ordered a garden salad, the shrimp and scallop scampi, and a glass of Chardonnay. Once in a while, she treated herself to a dessert. She knew all of the waitstaff, though only by face. Holly knew tonight’s waitress to be pleasant and efficient. She was young, probably in her early twenties and had long, dark hair she always wore in a pony tail. Holly was old enough to be her mother and imagined that if she had had a daughter, she might have been like this young woman.

All of the waitstaff liked Holly; she always left a big tip. They speculated about her amongst themselves: rich and lonely, they said. She had a couple of dogs, one thought (she had mentioned once that she took her leftovers home for the dogs). They all knew her order but not her name and if one day she were to stop coming, she would have passed from their memory with hardly a thought.

An older couple came in and sat down. Holly recognized them. Although they did not come in as often as Holly, this was one of their favorite restaurants and she had seen them there a few times before. They were dressed up tonight. The woman was wearing a light blue dress and matching jacket that looked beautiful with her still reddish hair, and a pair of silver heels. Tonight she looked like a young girl; her cheeks were flushed pink and she was glowing as she smiled at her husband. He was beautiful. He was wearing a suit and held her hand across the table. They sat leaning towards each other; she was speaking animatedly and gestured with her free hand.

Outside, it was dark. The water moved in slow, languorous black waves that picked up a silver sheen in the moonlight. The lights that glittered like diamonds from across the bay usually made Holly feel like child looking at a carnival, but tonight she did not see the view. She stared out the window blindly, not tasting
nival, but tonight she did not see the view. She stared out the window blindly, not tasting the food she chewed mechanically as she thought of her parents.

They too had always been affectionate, still in love after more than 40 years of marriage. Her parents had been each other’s best friend. The three of them had always been close, but it seemed to Holly that her parents were the only two members of a secret club to which not even she could gain access. Growing up, Holly had known she would find that kind of love someday.

Her parents had died several years ago; first her mother, of breast cancer, followed in a few short months by her father. He had seemed to age suddenly after his wife’s death and they said he died of a broken heart. Holly had no other family.

Now Holly lived in her parents house, the house they had built when they were first married. Her parents had wanted their home to be a private retreat sheltered from the intrusion of the outside world and so it was forty minutes outside of the city, where Holly worked. About ten minutes from Holly’s house, the pavement disappeared and the roads became dirt. The house was pushed back from the road, behind a long driveway. Holly had moved in with her father after her mother died, leasing out her apartment in the city. When her father died a few months later, leaving her the house, Holly sold her apartment and settled in permanently.

The couple to her right caught Holly’s attention again and she paused chewing, fork in mid-air, as she watched the husband pull a jewelry box out of his pocket and present it proudly to his wife. It must be their anniversary, Holly realized. The woman looked at her husband for a long moment before opening the box and Holly wondered what she was thinking. Looking around, she realized she was not the only witness to this beautiful moment. It seemed all of the diners had stopped eating to watch the exchange. The woman opened the box and her surprised laughter rang out.

Holly smiled. The woman stood up and walked around the table to kiss her husband. One person started clapping and then others and for a brief moment, the whole restaurant was giving the couple an ovation. The couple looked around, acknowledging the salute with beaming smiles.

Holly turned back to her dinner, wondering what the husband had given his wife on their anniversary. Surely a piece of jewelry would not have elicited such a response? When the waitress appeared to take Holly’s empty plate, she was surprised to realize she had finished eating. She ordered another glass of wine. The couple to her right had finished eating as well. They ordered two glasses of champagne.

“We’re celebrating tonight,” the husband explained to their waiter. When Holly’s waitress returned with her wine, Holly asked her if they had whole cakes. “I’d like to send one to that table there,” she said. That was fine, her waitress told her. What kind of cake? Holly wasn’t sure. The waitress suggested her favorite, a white cake with vanilla frosting and strawberry cream inside. It sounded fine to Holly.

“But we can’t eat all this!” protested the woman, with pleased surprise when their waiter delivered the cake. The waiter shrugged.
"We'll box whatever you don't eat for you to take home."

"But who sent it?" Holly stared into her wine glass, embarrassed, as the waiter pointed to her table. She did not hear the woman request another plate. Holly was still concentrating on her glass when the woman walked up to her table and she started at the sound of her voice.

"Thank you for the cake. Won't you come eat it with us?" Holly was caught off guard and hesitated before answering. "Please do, we'd love the company." Holly surprised herself by accepting the invitation. An extra place setting was set and a chair pulled up for Holly at the couple's table. The husband thanked her again for the cake as she sat down.

"You're welcome," said Holly, still slightly embarrassed. The woman reached over and put her hand on Holly's.

"It was very sweet of you. My name is Eleanor, and this is my husband, Arthur."

"My name is Holly. Nice to meet you." Eleanor leaned towards Holly confidentially.

"How old do you think I am?" she asked. "Oh, I don't know!" protested Holly.

"Oh, no, please guess," begged Eleanor. "You won't insult me." Holly thought for a moment.

"65?" Eleanor laughed.

"I'm 77!" she proudly announced. Holly was shocked. Eleanor seemed much younger.

"Today is our 58th anniversary," Arthur told her.

"We were married when we were 19," Eleanor added. "Wow. Congratulations."

"Thank you. Would you like to see what my husband gave me for our anniversary?" Holly nodded—yes, she would! Eleanor handed her the jewelry box, which was still sitting on the table. Holly held her breath as she opened it. Inside was a plastic ring. Holly had found one like it once in a cracker jack box when she was younger. Eleanor laughed again. "It's my engagement ring!" Holly was puzzled. What was Eleanor talking about? There was a diamond ring above the wedding band on her finger.

"It's her engagement ring," Arthur confirmed.

"When we were 19, Arthur refused to ask me to marry him until he could afford to buy me a ring." She smiled tenderly at the memory. "I told him I didn't care about a ring but if he didn't hurry up and ask me, I was going to run off with Glen Davis."

"He was always in love with her," Arthur whispered to Holly.

"But he was set on giving me a ring. He ate five boxes—"

"Six," Arthur corrected her.

"—six boxes of cracker jacks to find me that ring. Later, when he could afford it, he bought me this one." Eleanor showed Heidi the ring she was wearing.

"But I was so upset when I realized I had misplaced that one! I can't believe Arthur found it for me."

"She said it was the best gift she had ever received!" he explained.
“It still is.” She squeezed his hand.

“Do you have any children?” Holly asked.

“No,” Eleanor answered, with a wistful look. “We were hoping, when we first got married. We wanted a big family.”

“But we always had each other,” Arthur said, squeezing his wife’s hand. Holly thought of her ex-husband. He hadn’t wanted children. When Holly had married him she had hoped he would change his mind. She had always wanted children. They had divorced ten years ago. Now he was remarried. She had gotten drunk when his first child was born.

Holly finished her wine. “Well, I should get going. Thank you very much.”

“Oh, no, thank you, dear,” Eleanor said, squeezing her hand. Arthur stood up with her and shook her hand as he thanked her again.

Holly left Arthur and Eleanor with a great feeling of heaviness. She felt exhausted walking to her car and she sat behind the wheel for a moment before starting it. She had been 35 when Eric asked her to marry him. She had been so happy! So grateful, she thought now. She had been flattered when he asked her out. She had not expected to attract the attention of someone like Eric and she had often congratulated herself on her good fortune while they were dating. She was a secretary when he was first hired at the firm. Eric was a marketing genius. His ads won the firm new corporate clients and he moved up quickly. He had been made a partner shortly after they were married. She was swept up into his life as into an exciting new world. She became friends with Eric’s friends. Through him, she got to know the bosses on a personal basis. The other women at work began to include her in their gossip circles. Her whole life had changed! But after the divorce, Eric’s friends were still Eric’s friends. Holly got a new job. Now she was a receptionist in a medical office.

Eric had told her he didn’t want to be married anymore. She hadn’t protested. She accepted his departure unquestioningly, as she had once accepted his entrance into her life. Her parents comforted her when he left. It was better after all she had not had children with him. She was still young. She would marry again. But when, hardly a year later, Eric remarried, Holly gave up. She knew then that it wasn’t that he didn’t want to be married—he didn’t want to be married to her.

Holly’s parents encouraged her to go out more, meet people. When her mother suggested she should get a little more dressed up, try a new look, Holly heard her say: you look awful. No one will want you looking like that. Holly did not get dressed up. She was starting to realize she would always be alone. She settled into a new routine and her days began to blend together, stretching before her as one long, eternal day.

Now Holly was pulling into her driveway. Usually, she stopped to get out and collect the mail but tonight she decided not to bother. It was always junk mail.

Silence greeted her when she opened the door. (The waiter who remembered that she brought her leftovers home to the dogs must have confused her with another customer; Holly had no pet.) She hung her coat by the door and walked into the kitchen, where she opened a bottle of wine. She carried her glass into
glass into the living room and she switched on the television. She flipped through the channels. Nothing really appealed to her and she finally settled on the news. But she did not hear what was happening in Iraq, or that Fidel Castro was stepping down as president. She sipped her Chardonnay, lost in thoughts she later would not even remember.

Finishing her wine, she left the empty glass in the kitchen sink and retired to her room. When Holly first moved in, she had slept in her childhood bedroom. But it had seemed silly to leave the large master bedroom empty and now she slept in the bedroom—and in the bed—her parents had shared for all of their married life.

In the bathroom, she brushed her teeth, washed her face and put on cold cream. She didn’t pay attention to her reflection in the mirror anymore, didn’t notice the permanent flush that bloomed across her cheeks and nose or the red that rimmed her eyes. In the bedroom, she left her clothes folded on a chair and slipped on a long cotton nightgown. She pulled back the sheets and climbed into bed. She switched on a lamp and opened a book to read, Oprah’s recent favorite, but tonight it did not hold her attention. She closed it after rereading the same page three times. Turning off the light, she rolled over to go to sleep. She was tired but sleep eluded her. Restless, she switched sides, laying on her stomach, then her right side again. Finally, she lay on her back and stared at the ceiling. She started to cry.

She thought of Eleanor and Arthur. She thought about the cracker jack ring and the way they had looked at each other. She thought of her parents. She thought of her ex-husband and his new family. She thought of herself. She rolled over onto her side, curling into the fetal position. She lay in the dark, praying for sleep. A thought she had been fighting to ignore—for how long?—now forced itself on her: if she didn’t wake up, no one would ever know.
Teta

Giselle Youssef

There's something about an old woman's smile that elicits mixed reaction. The muscles in her face form, pull, ever so slowly, but ever so quickly, to create an upward-shaping mouth. In a room of hospital beds and rubber gloves, wheelchairs and tubes, medications and cotton swabs, you wonder if the "smile" is just that—an upward-shaping mouth.

You walk the borderline, trying to discern whether you are being cynical, or if, in fact, there lies no emotion behind her cheek muscles. Hospital air conditioning. It numbs. It is a weird thing, air conditioning. Though the glory of an air conditioner on a day consisting of humidity and only humidity cannot be denied, in a hospital, its glory is defeated, beat by the unlikely champion of real summer heat. The cool air that usually creates a sanctuary has a competitor. Numbness versus sweat. Just a drop of it is enough to give the air conditioning a run for its money. Just a drop of reality, of actuality, of what those in the pictures hung on her wall probably have on their foreheads at this very instant. Just a drop of what her life was a few long months ago.

Suddenly, you wonder if air conditioning was created specifically for hospital rooms. It is a compliment to the ice white sheets which rest frigidly on her knee. A knee that also once knew warmth, once knew sweat, but has now betrayed her for a sanctuary of nurses. Then, you wonder: was "conditioning" the only word the clever inventor could think of to put behind the word "air"? Why air conditioning? In eyes that are now resting, you see conditioning; the same numbness that your toes now feel due to the air. She has been conditioned to the bed, as if it is the one calling her name, as if it is the one that college students long for on their sleepless nights of homesickness. Conditioned to her table, holding her food. Conditioned to the phone, not a chordless one, as a way of hearing the voices of her children. Conditioned to the pictures on her wall, as a way of seeing the faces of her grandchildren. Conditioned to the eerie baby blue curtain that divides the room.

There is a painting hanging on her right wall, right above the air conditioner, of some one taking a dive into water on a hot day. You know it is a hot day in the painting, for there is a palm tree in the background and a cactus in the foreground. You can almost see the sweat on the figure's forehead. Right above the air conditioner. What a tease. But not too much of a tease, for the colors in the painting are the companions of the rest of the almost color-less room, perhaps painted using the same palette of the curtain hanging to the left, dividing the room, dividing her life. You start to wonder, where is the red in hospital rooms?

It's temporarily reassuring, that flash of a smile she gives you as she looks up from her sleep every once in a while. But you are still walking the borderline. Did her cheek muscles just move because of something in her
dream, of her memory, of her world of sweat? Or did they move because she is, in fact, happy to see you at the foot of her bed, within these walls, bringing in a bit of body heat? Or did they move because she knows it is what you want to see? Because she wants to give you a bit of red, for she knows you are searching for it as your eyes pick the room apart? Because she knows that you do not want to see any more of her tears? She already gave you her share of those this morning.

No, my dear, I do not want to see any more tears. Thank you for your courtesy. But, in truth, the tears are nice. Tears do not leave me walking the borderline. They do not take muscle movement, they flow by themselves, like sweat. You can not fake tears. You can fake smiles. Just like when you’re in the midst of an argument with some one, and some one suddenly says “say cheese!” and your muscles flex and you give your best smile so that you look pleasant in that picture, because you know that one day it may end up somewhere important, maybe in an online photo album, or on a hospital wall. You never take a picture of some one crying; smiles are fake, tears are not. And in those seconds of uneasiness, where I’m not sure anything I say can comfort her, her tears show me that she is not as conditioned as the cold air might suggest.

And after rain, there comes a rainbow. Another borderline to walk: an illusion to some, and a reality to others. A symbol of happiness to some—a path to a pot of gold, but a mere scientific happening to others. And just like that, you notice the color of her smile, and you appreciate it. You put away the cynic in you, for you know that she is cynical enough for the both of you. Fake or not, Josephine’s smile has existed beyond the baby blue curtain; her cheek muscles have been flexed in photos from before, in days when you did not have to doubt their motives. So, let them flex. The lips are those lines of the border which you walk, that which makes you question whether such muscle movement is illusion or reality. But only reality could melt such icebergs and break such a palette, so that is what you must let it be.
Allegory of Love

Vivian Chen

Dust is in love with me. And I feel the exact same way about you. Dust doesn’t mind and still replicates every part of itself onto me. The affection would be endearing had I not already lost all sentiments from my last devotion. And we all know the first one sets the shelf by which others will fail to reach.

I look around at my well-adapted setting and think back to my first home. I invited judgmental eyes to steal my dignity without looking beyond the cover. And then you came. I thought you were different. You sighed with sheer contentment as your hand moved down my spine... your eyes tenderly touching my opened texture. You had the weight of glory under your arms that day you checked me out.

Have I done you any wrong? Was I not made to entertain you? Imagination costs more than the price you slipped into the pants pockets of a father who sold me out like the other sisters of my genre. Now, only dust seems to give me the time of life.

This cushion sits between my poor back and the hard wooden chair. But I bet it’ll wear out in three month. No big deal. I’ll just purchase another one. Kind of like relationships, except you gotta say pursue instead of purchase. Truth is... them women don’t know the difference.

From this here angle...I can see the book on that brand new bookcase. Don’t know why it sticks out so much. Maybe because it’s taking up too much room. Shoulda left it on the display table where I first found it.

Ah...but I must admit it was a sheer beauty. Only cause others wanted it of course...but I guess that’s why it felt special at the time. Once I picked it up, I knew I had to have it. I paid a grand $7 for that thing. That, along with some other book. I left with two spankin’ new books!

Oh, won’t you turn me onto my back again and skim the summary of birth marks that code my value? Am I really doomed to sleep with the problem of pain and a grief observed by my own tear-stained eyes?

I’m not in love with Dust. But he’s good to me. He compliments my age and even protects me from looking too polished per chance you or another incompetent lover will break my child-like expectations again; it’s like way you are freed from the discarded images that haunts your first love.

And in the back of my mind I’m glad to be hidden behind the abolition of man, for if you only knew.... how much I’ve started to fall apart... since I started collecting dust on your shelf of unopened options.

Don’t read much...but I’ve heard that this guy...C.S. Lewis or something... was a real good writer. So I gave it a try. Managed to get through the first paragraph...and then had to put the God-awful thing down. No clue what the man was getting at...but I doubt he’d really care if I read or not. He got his money, didn’t he?
Haven’t touched it since. That was ‘bout three months ago I guess. Funny thing is...the ex noticed I had three of those books from that guy...and bought me three more! Crazy gal. She was definitely less than three months.

She was nothing like this gal I knew once. She... ah, nevermind, that’s long and over. No need to raise the dead. Getting too old for this stuff anyway. Gray and old.
Surviving the Storm

Tom McFadden

The long form of street poet Cruise O’Kelly tensed on the newspaper-bed beneath a tree in the city park as a sensation of disturbance entered his nocturnal suspension. Despite the brain’s slight, sudden awakening into night, the eyes on the wind-tanned, twenty five-year-old face remained closed, as though the street poet chose to pursue the avenue of feel as his important tool. Traveling the sentient way, he focused his essence more and more into alertness until, abruptly, the eyes flew open.

Circling his existence loomed a predatory configuration, the entities of its design bent low and tightening the circle with each slow, deliberate step. Quick looks from the wind-tanned face discerned lethal coldness in their eyes and saw the shoulder muscles rise and fall in thick danger as each stepped so slowly, so rhythmically, toward his assumed demise that their collective approach seemed almost a hypnotic, nocturnal ballet of death.

With a sweeping glance, he looked at both their variety and their similarity: abandoned street dogs of many colors and shapes, now joined into a pack, running wild. As a hard look entered his own, staring eyes, a deep voice whispered conclusion into the solitude of the park: “Well, well. The would-be wolves of the city.”

They saw that he was awake, and watched his eyes as they approached, unaltered from their rhythm, even when their prey slowly, carefully began to rise, there within his trapped site. Each animal’s body seemed to grow more armored by its muscles and gathering fur as the ears lowered and the tail tightened; and, low grunts commenced a choral prelude, as if from long before civilization.

Yet, a moment’s confusion briefly entered their predatory glares, as if they had turned out to be not the only atavistic figures in the park, when a tone not of capitulation, but of disconcerting savagery, illogically reached them, riding the voice of their prey: “You bastards don’t own the night!”

As big, unsurrendering hands slowly wrapped around the lip of a dented, metal trash can, extracting both the lid and a discarded umbrella as shield and pike, the voice of the prey reached them again, growled in strange manner to their experience: “Do you know what Kelly means in Gaelic? Warrior. It means warrior. And I am Cruise O’Kelly! So, I say to you all: Céad mile fáilte!”—the ancient voice of Ireland welcoming them to that battlefield in the night.

It was then they discovered a prey could be wilder than they, for it was then they experienced what to them had been the unimaginable: somewhere beneath the civilization of the city, war that seemed swirl through time. In a modern park in a modern time, two ancient strengths compared their savageries: four mouths of bared, lunging teeth against the wild strikes of a trash can shield and
the untamed rammings of a trash can pike. In the end, the circle was broken, the four entities of its former design slinking away, leaving the park reclaimed by the solitary figure.

The tall, powerful form stood still—catching his breath, contemplative. Gradually, the tension of savagery subsided, that taut face transforming into a gentler, softer profile, finally tilting back far—to stare at the vast sky over the park while stellar light subtly reflected off scars in the eyebrows. After a long while, the deep voice whispered upward: “The night is not to be impropriely defined.”

Then, after a great exhale to punctuate and finalize the now-voiced thought, a wide smile of new notion sculpted into position, released words ultimately traveling through the smile toward the sky, high above: “The night is for reveries!”

The figure stood marveling upward, smiling in the finale of the moment, fully transformed from warrior into the artist of the night, glad the stars still twinkled so magically.

Finally, the large, lone figure, appearing tired yet content, exited the starlight oasis...drifting slowly back into that great, deep black of night, the solitary form gradually disappearing in the direction of his newspaper-bed beneath a tree in the city park. Soon, the mind and form of a street poet redrifted into nocturnal suspension.

Hours later, in first stirring of auroral day, eyes still closed in the unfocused cerebral mist, an olfactory adventure seemed to begin. A wonderful aroma—paradoxically familiar, yet distant—had formed and risen into the abstract darkness of his mind’s premier instant of new day: an elusive mystery. Then, abruptly, he knew: he could smell the world rerising! A smile formed in the mental mist: it was spring!

The day-eyes of the street poet opened slowly where he lay, on his newspaper-bed in Alamo Plaza, the central park of San Antonio, Texas. In eerie time journey, his gaze perceived the historic Alamo in the background—like a looming, visual ghost—while discerning, excitedly, the utterly contemporary event in the foreground and beyond: premier verdancy in the park! The eyes of Cruise O’Kelly swept the ground of the park, then quickly raised vision into the trees. A great, glittering smile greeted discovery. “Verde”—he uttered in Texas-learned Spanish, for, indeed, the plaza had once again turned incipient green. “Glas!”—he grinningly repeated, this time in the Irish tongue of his youth. Then, the Irish-immigrant street poet sat up, adjusting his tall frame into stability...to merely stare, exhilaratedly, at the scene of the realized moment: renaissance earth—San Antonio once again efflorescing.

Well, Cruise O’Kelly, a figure free and unconstrained by orthodox ways, could also start a season—a personal season. Cruise O’Kelly, himself, was a little dot of life, and this could be his first day, too! He would voyage upward aesthetically on the power of new poems, rising into the San Antonio air. Then, later, that very special day, he would recite his new treasures aloud on a sidewalk among the downtown hotels. Enough passing tourists might smile and countenance his verse—with coin flips toward his upside-down, Irish cap on the sidewalk—to, for another fine day, his own first day of spring, sustain him.
Cruise O'Kelly raised his tough face into that new season's sun with eyes still closed, leaving the face tilted, questing upward, into the vernal miracle. Slowly, the mouth opened beneath the closed eyes...for manifested thought to ride. From that dreaming face, tilted toward the new rays of the spring sun, a second soft laugh grew audible. Yes, on Cruise O'Kelly's first day of spring, the heavens would open in inspiration, and fine words would flow from his poetic soul!

Just then, the heavens did open, slightly. But it was not inspiration which fell from the blueness: it was an irritating, splattering arrival of surprise, spring raindrops, shocking his jerking face from ecstasy into chagrin!

His eyes squinted open, Cruise glancing at the descending wetness through a tightening, defensive posture, slightly ducking at the irony of the realized scenario: slight rain falling out of a blue sky! His life never seemed to escape irony, he thought. Quickly, the propitious feel of spring's first day began to slip away, and with it an easy flow of inspired new verse began to elude him. Cruise fought hard to hold the creative, nascent feeling, but irritating, continuous drops kept landing onto his face and head to ultimately break the spring spell. Then, the remaining romance on the countenance of Cruise O'Kelly totally dissolved in a suddenly harder descent of drops, the poet feeling his hair turn wet. The street poet glared at the rain as best he could through his squinting eyes. Overwhelmed not by opportunity, but by the day's irony, the tall, lanky figure stood up, into the rain...then angled, in his defensively bent posture, across the park toward a metal trashcan beneath a tree. Cruise stumbled awkwardly through the rain to finally reach the tree, quickly inverting the empty trashcan—with an amazingly fast, strong flip from one big hand and wrist—into a piece of furniture, the long form lowering onto the makeshift chair with a deep grunt, then slowly sinking into a posture of suspension.

Cruise sat in that development of the misadventure until gradually allowing himself a private pleasure: falling into the drama of the day and its provided contemplations, now enjoying a brief conjuring of such matters as the quality of unorthodox, irony and poetic elusiveness. As much as he loved writing, lapsing into pensive reverie was surely his second-favorite activity—moments like this. Cruise O'Kelly could dream, or even grow moody, with the best of them! Yes, even while rained upon, Cruise O'Kelly would embrace the fine arts of life!

The solitary figure pulled his jacket over his head, converting it into a rain tent, as he watched some discarded paper wrappers and less romantic debris drift in the nascent, vernal streams. Quickly obeying instinct, he let his foot toe-flip a few little rocks into two elevated piles, one for each bróg, laughing to himself that the Irish word for shoe had leaped out first in his partially rained-on mind. It made him feel good—he, the lover of culture, ethnicity, and language. Cruise O'Kelly—surveyor of the world!

And there he sat, a lanky form inside a rain tent, beneath a partial umbrella tree in the city park, empty with new rain, a lanky form on an inverted trashcan, alone with his reveries. He knew he looked wild, sitting in the rain; but, he didn't care about that, he thought. He could sit anywhere---as long as he were allowed the freedom to think, and feel, and search for poetic theme, for, even through such wet, falling misadventure...he was the street poet.
The day devolved into pure misadventure: harder and harder rain; no forthcoming theme; no cloud-penetrating ray of miraculously clarifying light in a sky that had at least grown appropriately ominous. The portrait of the day remained intransigent: just a wild-looking anti-statue, humped beneath the protection of his over-the-head jacket forming a rain tent atop an inverted trashcan in the empty park.

Little laughs of ironic humor floated, several times, through the cloth and half-openings of the rain tent...the cloth finally bulging and slowly jerking, as though someone inside were working on a poem, which, in truth, turned out to be the scenario.

The rains worsened, forcing a first, mild nervousness into the alert cognizance of the street dweller; then, the skies could nearly be felt turning darker. Tough eyes peeked purposefully from the rain tent, measuring the ominous development. Darkness deepened with a dramatic rush, as the concerned figure inside the rain tent seemed stiffen in a new wave of instincts’ preoccupation. With the eruption of the first, mighty notes of thunder and the awesome, premier brilliance of violent lightning, the street poet chose retreat form the park, hurrying with a bent race across that new grass, awkwardly striving to maintain the jacket protectively overhead. The large, wild figure leaped with a long, splashing stride from the park into the city street, then, with its bent, hunched posture, scurried in awkward struggle across the street to the far side, racing ultimately into the modern cave of a shelter-offering dumpster not far down the alley, behind some department stores.

Cruise landed awkwardly inside the dumpster, concluding in an uncomplimentary, legs-spread sitting posture upon enough smelly refuse to make him wince with a brief moment of pain and a massive dose of repulsion! Seeking shelter in a dumpster was definitely one of his last choices in the street survival scene, yet, to be sure, covering oneself with garbage inside a dumpster on a frigid winter night could actually save a guy! Conversely, it was one hell of a way to celebrate the advent of spring.

“Spring,” the voice uttered aloud with cynicism, glancing at the garbage. “The season of efflorescing!” The street poet made an appropriately bitter face to match his uttered cynicism.

Oh, well. He supposed this was better than being outside, although he wasn’t quite sure. But he could hear ... and the sounds convinced him. Breezes had grown into winds, then winds into ominous gusts. Tension and worry settled onto his face as he tried to adjust his big body into a more comfortable posture in the garbage. Yet, the sound of the winds grew so strong that they pounded the exposed side of the dumpster, and the structure soon began to vibrate each time a massive gust struck. The winds grew so loud that they at last sounded even stronger than the might of Cruise’s big body. One of the worst things, for him, thus began: his feeling unsure. Yet, he knew, in the end, that feeling unsure was part of the human condition.

Suddenly, an utterly massive gust rushed against the side of the dumpster, jolting it sonically and physically. At the exact same time, it seemed, the sheets of rain poured down onto the world outside with an accelerated might almost
unknown to the street poet.

“What the hell is this—a hurricane?”—Cruise muttered out loud, imagining the dumpster flipping over to spill its entire load of garbage onto his essence.

Just then, with secondary sight and instincts, Cruise O’Kelly thought he saw some odd movement along one inside wall—a little, quick rise of debris which should not have risen. His head, which had quickly pivoted in that direction, now remained congealed there, the wild wind and rain outside devolved to the secondary drama, suddenly, while this new drama rose into prominence. Another sound along the wall, but closer to him this time, brought a sweep of pure concentration over his face. He turned totally still, almost as though he were voluntarily paralyzed in concentration; and, when the sound of a yet nearer movement of garbage reached his cognizance, the muscles of the street poet seemed hurry into full alertness. Even greater strikes against the dumpster from rising, incredible winds and incredibly descending rain could not detour his defensive staring, as the figure of Cruise O’Kelly hardened into a street survivor’s first-things-first status.

Suddenly, a hideous head popped ever so briefly into view, then lowered quickly back down into the debris, completely disappearing: the head of a gigantic rat! Sweat broke onto the forehead of Cruise O’Kelly as his memory returned to him the sight of that hideous face and especially those horrible teeth inside its briefly opened mouth!

Just as the largest gust of that wild storm struck the side of the dumpster, the full form of a giant rat suddenly blurred out of the garbage into full, hideous view, blur-rushing directly toward Cruise with its horrible mouth open! Almost as though he were watching himself while an incredible feeling of fear and repulsion swept through his entire being, Cruise O’Kelly watched his own great fist seem to fly out of that distant, Gaelic past, as if from the revisited mist of the great, O’Kelly clan days, an epoch when O’Kelly was O Cellaigh and the name meant warrior! Out of the mist flew his own Irish fist; and Cruise O’Kelly punched to death—in a smashing blow which caught the target against the hard dumpster side wall—the ugliest foe in all his days!

The street poet stared briefly at the hideous corpse; then, with a violent, cupped scoop of the other big hand, the street survivor toss-flipped that ugly body through their shared dumpster. It had been hurled so hard that the body dully sounded off the far dumpster wall, then lifelessly arced downward, into the garbage, its body disappearing fully into the refuse.

Cruise leaned, exhausted from the shock, against his own wall. He listened intently, occasionally wiping some sweat off his face, then ultimately concluded that the rat was truly dead.

Noticing the burial ground of his foe, Cruise felt a cynical calm possess him in the aftermath. Slowly his mouth opened for a brief funeral, looking toward the spot where the corpse had disappeared: “Garbage to garbage. Amen.”

Instincts now returned with priority to the powerful strikes from the wind and rain, the street survivor inside the dumpster beginning to sense a growing amazement at the endurance of such strength. A moment’s wild strength was one thing; a continuum of it was something else!
Suddenly, the dumpster seemed to move! Alarm returned to Cruise's face. Had he imagined it? Once more the street survivor congealed into a form locked into full instincts, this time trying not to hear or see the truth, but to feel it!

In fact, what he felt... was the entrance of water into the dumpster! With his on-going traumas, he had not been cognizant of it previously, yet there definitely was water now entering the dumpster, somehow. There was already enough for some incipient swishing noise, with accompanying, brief movements of the garbage. Surely that rat wouldn't pop up to float toward him! Despite the thud of gusts and rain sonically symbolizing an uninviting scenario outside the dumpster, Cruise rose with difficulty in the garbage, placed his hands on the inside of the heavy lid, then thrust upward to partly open the lid.

As soon as the lid opened, Cruise's concentration spontaneously returned from feel to the faculty of sound, for the surge of water shocked him in its audibility. Pulling his head back inside the dumpster to avoid the stinging rain, he consciously listened for confirmation, soon convinced of the surging's presence. Squinting, he forced his head closer to the opening. The drops fell with such power that he placed a stretched, protective hand above his eyes, then glanced from beneath the trembling hand as that hand absorbed and endured the storm-driven pain.

Although he had heard it, the visualization shocked him: outside, an incredible rise of rainwater had transformed into an urban stream! He knew then that all the streets around there had turned into street-streams.

With an abruptness too furied to allow Cruise’s adjustment, a surge of the rainwater struck the dumpster hard, the surge’s power briefly moving the street survivor’s shelter. His own big body lost its equilibrium, toppling helplessly backward as the dumpster lid clanged loudly shut. Cruise landed in the dampening refuse, briefly chagrinned. Angry at the feel of wetness in parts of his clothing, the dumpster’s lone, living being reerose quickly when the dumpster stopped moving, to remuscle the dumpster lid open. After repositioning his protective hand over the eyes, he both stared at and listened to the wildness outside, wondering if he would be safer inside or out. He damned sure didn’t want to float out to sea in a garbage boathouse!

Suddenly, some aural strangeness turned his head slightly—a possible sound coming from around the alley corner. Perhaps he had not really heard something, but his instincts were so very good that they were, unlike life itself, almost never wrong. He hated just standing there for fear of another movement of the dumpster and another, consequent topple into the garbage; yet, against those fears, Cruise O'Kelly once more congealed into a concentration of his instincts, this time closing his eyes to focus his might on the faculty of hearing.

Soon, despite the gusts and loud downpour of rain, indeed came a special sound—the sound of small voices crying, desperate words in Spanish voiced between the sobs.

Another movement—this one of alarm in duration, with Cruise refalling—defined and emphasized the dumpster’s precarious state; however, the mind of Cruise O’Kelly had now focused completely onto that desperation of small voices, which he had surely heard. With a hurried rise and mighty push against
the lid, the form of a street survivor flipped with a leap through the opening of an alley dumpster...landing with a great splash in the surge of the street-stream outside. As Cruise rose in the alley tributary, he found himself shocked at the depth of the water. It had risen so fast! But another call from those small voices quickly provided Cruise direction; and, although soaked, the street poet powerfully forced his feet and ankles and calves through that urban waterway toward the mouth of the alley.

The street poet felt a mixture of emotions as he fought with his own great strength to outpower the surge of the street-stream. The might of Mother Nature found itself clearly rising, while his own might could ascend little more, and, in fact, would ultimately decline in exhaustion. Meanwhile, the rain continued to slant-burst down in sheets—wild rain that hurt as it pounded against the poet’s surprised face, causing Cruise to attempt to run, as well as he could in the water, with one arm folded across that face’s side, like a fighter blocking punches. Yet, those fragile voices drove him on, through it all, his fears for them greater than his fears for himself.

Suddenly, a powerful gust caught Cruise by surprise, knocking him violently sideways. Off balance, he attempted to shuffle his legs and feet in recovery, yet the surge of the water exacerbated his dilemma. Despite a final, frantic effort, the street poet fell sideways into the rising urban waterway. The strength of the surge surprised him even more. Although he had quickly righted himself onto hands and knees, holding his head up, the surge rushed at him from behind, actually pushing him forward against his will. As his face tilted, again, near the rainwater, Cruise wildly focused all his strength, muscling his way out of that posture to awkwardly thrust his form once more upward, into a hunched, yet upright, position, the rain-blocking arm once more folded across the side of his face. With all his energy, Cruise O’Kelly fought the surge, this time reaching the mouth of the alley tributary.

To his great chagrin, a glance informed Cruise that the street-stream beyond the alley, the larger urban waterway that rushed beside the edge of the park, looked even worse! However, while he stared in awe, his ears recaptured small voices, this time with surprising clarity, turning his head through the driving rain and wind to spot their heads inside a parked car! Alarm jolted Cruise O’Kelly as he watched their car slightly move in the rising water, the movement accompanied by a fresh release of screams.

Rage at their imposed solitude and vulnerability focused all power. Suddenly, the street poet did not care how hard the gusts might blow, or how forcefully the sheets of rain might descend, or how mighty the rainwater’s surge might prove: he was Cruise O’Kelly…and those little, tender beings would have a rescuer! And with that resolve, he stepped into the main street-stream.

A battle of ragings transpired in the flood: the wildness of Mother Nature against the wildness of Cruise O’Kelly! Knocked down, seemingly endlessly, by wind and water, the street warrior rose again and again until he at last reached the car, which had continued to occasionally and ominously budge in the rising water within the glances of Cruise’s approach.

As he finally felt his own big hand grab the outside door handle, Cruise
continually heard the word socorro—the plea for help. Trying, with a tug, to comply, Cruise discovered the door locked. He shouted in Spanish for them to unlock it from the inside, but they were too young...and too deep in their panic.

An alarming movement of the car—clearly floating for an instant—engendered a loud rise of screams and sobs from the pair of little girls and the one little boy...just as Cruise took another topple into the surge. His wet hand refound the door handle, pulling in assistance as the legs drove the soaked body once more erect.

Cruise put his face near the window to—as gently as possible, against the wind and the rain—apprise them that he would return. Then, he muscled his way with all his power into the park, bending and searching blindly with his groping hands deep in the liquid until they emerged from the torrent with a true treasure: a nice, big rock.

Awkwardly twisting his body back and forth through the surge, Cruise returned to the vehicle, vocally moved them all away from his target, instructing them to raise and huddle behind some held, old newspapers, then pulled the rock back to cock it for the end of this long misadventure.

After listening to Cruise’s warnings about the shards of glass, out the window they came—the boy quickly sitting on the poet’s shoulders, a little girl crawling into each of his big arms. Just as they started to walk away, the car transformed into a vessel, floating off, into uncharted San Antonio. To the little trio’s last, yet greatest, scream—seeing their car depart in the flood—the street poet fought what felt like the universe of physical elements to stay on his feet, and, with his tender cargo, literally walked out of the flood.

Across the main street-stream they awkwardly journeyed together, then up and onto the water-disappeared sidewalk, and finally into the poolhall toward which the little, vulnerable hands had fervently pointed.

A shout of protest rose from inside the music-filled poolroom as some water splashed in with the opening of the door, but all inside quickly grew quiet at the entering sight of the big rescuer bearing that fragile trio of clinging, little beings. For some reason, the big figure halted at the doorway, he, himself, not entering; but, he gently lowered the three little ones to safety, glad to see numerous women and some sensitive men, among the many Mexican pool players and observers, rush forward to take charge of that little trio, completing the rescue. After a quick explanation of events—while noticing their disgusted glances toward a slumbering, drunken figure curled onto a small sofa against a far wall, obviously the negligent father, who clearly had not even mentioned the children’s presence in the car outside—the street poet, with a tired smile, politely refused their offer of safe haven beneath that roof. However, as he turned in the doorway to leave, they shouted for him to wait, several of them rushing off, to quickly return with the best rewards their good hearts could give him: some dry pretzels, peanuts, and two opened bottles of imported Mexican beer!

With a happy, yet tired, smile, Cruise O’Kelly thanked them. Then, without ever having fully entered the building, that large, strange, rain-soaked figure disappeared...away from that well lighted, dry shelter, back into the wild, yet
unique, world he knew—back into the ambience of streets and shadows, back into the alleyrealm of San Antonio, Texas.

The street poet survived the vernal storm, nestled among the structural braces beneath an insignificant traffic bridge within the city. Beneath his bridge, he mostly listened to the storm, enjoying the entertainment, now, from Mother Nature. From his recess away from that rained-on world atop and beyond the bridge, Cruise O’Kelly carefully listened to the winds, marveling at their sonic might. Each gust seemed to compliment the total drama, their raging combinations now a pleasure for him to listen to from his bridge-bottom netherworld.

A deep, melodic voice floated from an urban haven beneath the city above: “One really does come to appreciate... life’s little pleasures.” A gentle laugh floated from the bridge’s understructure, floating, unharmed, into the storm: “For instance...survival ...is a nice little pleasure.”

Cruise repositioned his legs and back in the structuring, then leisurely opened the bag of pretzels. Extracting it slowly with felt appreciation, he stared at the treasured first pretzel a long time, then sent munching sounds slowly, yet happily, into the storm. A long gulp of imported Mexican beer seemed to join the munching sounds as an excellent, metaphoric echo.

What a strange, yet wonderful, formula his life possessed! At the core loomed a survivor’s toughness, seemingly always able to grow deeper as travail deepened, inevitably matching any adversity! Yet, the poet’s face softened as he contemplated the other half of his life’s formula: poetic sensitivity—enabling his perception of life’s fragile essence. What strange philosophical partners! The toughness did not preclude, but protectively enabled, the survival of the poet’s gentle side.

Cruise O’Kelly turned his head to directly face the rage of the elements beyond his netherworld haven. A great smile of relief and happy perception spread slowly and fully across his tough face. Yes, he would make it. Cruise O’Kelly...would always survive the storm.
Contributors

Alex BetGeorge is currently a sophomore at Providence College who writes in her spare time, and for The Cowl newspaper. Everyone thinks she is an English major, but in fact, she is a Global Studies major. But if she had her way, she would probably stay in college forever and major in everything.

Bobby Bretz is a freshman at Providence College. His subject matter generally reflects the life experiences and influences that have managed to hold his interest; specifically, military training, physics, classic literature, and crappy poetry.

Katie Caliva is a junior at Providence College studying classics and writing. In addition to her academic work, she is an editor for The Cowl, Providence College’s student newspaper, and contributes to the paper’s creative writing section.

Vivian Chen is a senior studying psychology at Providence College. She additionally minors in writing because her heart is wired for and inspired by words. She is interested in the art of healing and hopes to pursue a future in serving God’s children.

R.T. Castleberry is a widely published poet and social critic. An active participant in Houston poetry since the mid-70’s, he was a co-founder of the Flying Dutchman Writers Troupe and co-editor/publisher of the monthly magazine Curbside Review. His work has appeared most recently in Comstock Review, The Alembic, Paterson Literary Review, Caveat Lector, Silk Road and Argestes. He was a finalist for the 2008 Arts & Letters/Rumi Prize for Poetry. His chapbook, Arriving At The Riverside, is forthcoming from Finishing Line Press.

Kim Chinquee is the author of Oh Baby (Ravenna Press), the forthcoming collection Pretty (White Pine Press), and is co-editor of the forthcoming Online Writing: Best of the First Ten Years. She is the recipient of a Pushcart Prize and lives in Buffalo, New York.

Chard deNiord is the author of two books of poetry, Asleep in the Fire and Sharp Golden Thorn from Marsh Hawk Press.

James Engel is a freshman biology major at Providence College. He is originally from Waterford, Connecticut, and is the oldest of four. Go Friars!


Julian Fenn is currently a senior at SUNY Geneso in New York, majoring in Sociology and International Relations. He grew up in Wilson, NY—a small farm community on the edge of Lake Ontario where he is an avid bird watcher and enjoys reading.
Carol Frith, co-editor of *Ekphrasis*, has been published in various journals, including *Cutbank, Willow, Seattle Review, Measure, MacGuffin & Main Street Rag*. Her chapbooks are from Palanquin Press, Bacchae Press, Medicinal Purposes, and Finishing Line, with a full-length collection due out in 2010 from David Robert Books. She received a Special Mention listing in the 2003 *Pushcart* anthology.

Jules Gibbs earned her MFA in Poetry from New England College. She’s been a writing fellow at the Ucross Foundation, and is a two-time recipient of the Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Foundation Prize for Poetry. Current work is published or forthcoming in *Spoon River Poetry Review, Salt Hill Journal, Pearl Magazine, The Broken Plate, Stone Canoe*, and other journals. She teaches poetry at the Downtown Writers Center in Syracuse, and to children in Syracuse city schools.

Andrei Guruianu is a Romanian-born writer currently living in Vestal, New York. He is the author of three previous collections: *Front Porch World View* (Main Street Rag, 2009), *Days When I Saw the Horizon Bleed* (FootHills Publishing, 2006), and *It Was Like That Once* (Pudding House, 2008). He teaches at Ithaca College and Binghamton University where he is also pursuing a Ph.D. in English with a focus in creative writing. Guruianu is the founder and editor of the literary journal *The Broome* and currently serves as the Broome County, NY Poet Laureate 2009-2011.

Rabiul Hasan's work has appeared in more than forty journals and anthologies published in the United States, Canada, and Malaysia. He is the author of one full-length collection of poetry entitled *Madonna of the Rain* and he is also the author of three collections of short stories and two collections of poetry in Bengali. Currently, he is working on two new collections of poetry entitled *Miriam* and *Stars in the Darkness*. Hasan, who earned a Ph.D. in English (American Literature) at Texas Tech University, is assistant professor of English at Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, USA.

Dwight R. Hilson is a recovering businessperson, earning a Master of Arts degree in Writing from Manhattanville College after 25 years managing: a short-line railroad, a restaurant, deals in real estate, grain transportation and direct marketing and, finally, a video and DVD publishing and distribution company. Born in New York City, he has lived in Boston, New Hampshire, Chicago, St. Louis and Los Angeles, and now lives with his wife, Mindy and soon-to-enter-college daughter, Samantha in Greenwich, Connecticut. He holds a B.S. in public communications from Boston University and an MBA from Northwestern University and is at work on a novel set around a small town New England railroad.
Contributors

Lowell Jaeger has worked as editor of Many Voices Press. He edited an anthology of Montana poets, *Poems Across the Big Sky*, and is currently gathering submissions to publish *Poets of the American West*, an anthology of poets from western states.

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 and Mortifications,* and *Eduardo & I.*

Ryan Kennedy is a senior at Providence College with a concentration in English. Joseph Conrad, *The Faust Legend* and novels about espionage are among his literary favorite interests.

Kevin Leonard, a senior English Major at Providence College grew up in Hampton Bays, New York as a part of large family. The oldest of five children, Kevin spends most of his time acting as a role model for his younger siblings, but still finds time for his other interests: writing and passionately cheering for the Providence Friars basketball teams.

Jesse Mack is a junior at Providence College who divides his time between his studies, poetry, and songwriting.

Celina Martinez received an MFA in Creative Writing from Syracuse University and a B.A. from Stanford University. Originally from Los Angeles, California, her short stories, non-fiction, and poetry have been published in the United States and Mexico. She is currently living in Brooklyn, New York. “Mexican Sadness” is part of an upcoming short story collection titled, “Four Corners.”

Tom McFadden’s writing has appeared in ten countries in such publications as *Journal of the American Medical Association, Poetry Ireland Review* (Dublin), *Voices Israel, Storie* (Rome), *The Plaza* (Tokyo), *The Poet’s Voice* (University of Salzburg-AUSTRIA), *Seattle Review, South Carolina Review, California Quarterly, Portland Review* and *Hawaii Pacific Review.* He has published one poetry book entitled *Twilight of Dreams* (Plain View Press). Tom lives with his wife Loretta in Austin, Texas. They have three daughters and three grandsons.

Samantha McVay is a senior at Providence College. She is majoring in American studies with a minor in writing.

Matthew Miller was raised in the woodlands of New Hampshire. He is currently a student at Providence College, studying English and History. Next year, he plans to travel throughout North America.
Leeyanne Moore’s short story was based upon a short story idea by Dan Torday, a fellow classmate in Syracuse University’s MFA program. She has been published in McSweeney’s Internet Tendencies, and is a regular contributor to the zine Mildred Pierce. She is a Rhetoric lecturer at Hampden-Sydney College in Virginia.

Daniel Newman is currently a senior at PC. He is finishing up a B.S. in Biology with a minor in Digital Imaging. “Keep This Thing Alive” is poem about clinging onto hope in a seemingly hopeless world.

Irene O’Garden’s poetry has found its way to the Off-Broadway stage (Women On Fire), into hardcover (Fat Girl) into children’s books, and into many literary journals and anthologies. She has received awards, fellowships and residencies for her writing, as well as an annual listing in Who’s Who in America and Who’s Who of American Women.

Ashwin Parulkar completed his MFA in fiction at Syracuse University. He currently lives in Syracuse, New York.

Jane Lunin Perel is is professor of English and Women’s Studies at Providence College. She has published 4 volumes of verse poetry and is now completing her first collection of prose poetry.

Kenneth Pobo had a new book of poems published in 2008 from WordTech Press called Glass Garden. In addition, Pobo has an online chapbook called Crazy Cakes. He teaches Creative Writing and English at Widener University in Pennsylvania.

Biman Roy is a research psychiatrist at the Nathan Kline Institute in Orangeburg, New York. His work has appeared in various literary magazines in the United States, United Kingdom, Canada and India. He is currently working on his first book-length manuscript, Moon’s Other Half.

Kelly Smith is a Providence College freshman Theater major originally from Foxboro, Massachusetts. She aspires to eventually pursue a career in the theater or in writing.

Bryan Tarpley lives in Texas with his wife and son. After earning a degree in Computer Science and working for years in the computer industry, he changed tack and received his MA in English from Stephen F. Austin State University. He now teaches English while writing novels, short stories, and poetry.
Patricia Slonina Vieira is a 1975 graduate of Providence College. A former student editor of *The Alembic*, she cites Department of English faculty members Jane Lunin Perel, Roger L. Pearson, and John Hendedy as having the greatest influence on her literary education and writing. She directed the Pawtucket (RI) Arts Council’s Galway Kinnell Poetry Prize competition from 1984-1993, managing the production of the five-year anniversary volume in 1988, and coordinating readings by Kinnell in his hometown in 1986 and 1991. She is currently the associate vice president for College Relations and Planning at Providence College.

Francine Witte is a poet, playwright, and fiction writer in New York City. Her poetry chapbook, “The Wind Magic in the Streets,” was published by Owl Creek Press. Her flash fiction chapbook, “The Wind Twirls Everything,” was published by MuscleHead Press. She is a high school English teacher.

Giselle Youssef is a sophomore at Providence College from Somerset, Massachusetts. She is an English major whose favorite author is John Steinbeck.
POETRY
Alex BetGeorge
Bobby Bretz
R. T. Castleberry
Kim Chinquee
Chard deNiord
James Engel
Aaron Fagan
Julian Fenn
Carol Frith
Jules Gibbs
Andrei Guruianu
Rabiul Hasan
Lowell Jaeger
Peter Johnson
Ryan Kennedy
Kevin Leonard
Jesse Mack
Matthew Miller
Daniel Newman
Irene O’Garden
Jane Lunin Perel
Kenneth Pobo
Biman Roy
Kelly Smith
Patricia Slonina Vieira
Francine Witte

FICTION
Katie Caliva
Vivian Chen
Dwight R. Hilson
Celina Martinez
Tom McFadden
Samantha McVay
Leeyanne Moore
Ashwin Parulkar
Bryan Tarpley
Giselle Youssef

PHOTOGRAPHY
Matthew Longobardi
Mary Pelletier
Elizabeth Reilly
Eric Sung