# CUTTHROAT, A JOURNAL OF THE ARTS



Fox Joy clay 7 1/2h X 9 1/2 wX10 "Bahia Villa"

VOLUME 5, NUMBER 1, SUMMER 2008



# CUTTHROAT, A JOURNAL OF THE ARTS

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## CUTTHROAT,

#### A JOURNAL OF THE ARTS

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# 2008 JOY HARJO POETRY PRIZE and RICK DEMARINIS SHORT STORY PRIZES \$1250 1st and \$250 2nd plus publication

JUDGES RICHARD JACKSON/POETRY LINDA HOGAN/Short Fiction

GUIDELINES: SASE REQUIRED! Send up to 3 poems (100 line limit/one poem per page) or one short story (5000 word limit/double spaced) in 12 point font, a cover sheet with name, address, phone & email, title(s) of submission, SASE for announcement of winners (we recycle all mss.) and a \$15 entry fee per submission made to CUTTHROAT, A JOURNAL OF THE ARTS postmarked by October 10, 2008. UNPUBLISHED WORK ONLY! No work that has already won a prize but has not been published. No author name may appear on the ms. Enter as often as you wish. Multiple submissions okay, but we must be informed immediately of acceptances elsewhere. All finalists considered for publication. All winners published in CUTTHROAT and announced on our website, in POETS & WRITERS and AWP CHRONICLE. No relative, student or staff member of CUTTHROAT is eligible to enter our contests.

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#### AGNES THERESA K E Duffin

Waters close over us. A name lasts but an instant.

—Czeslaw Milosz, "Winter"

Twice I glided by Pier 64, your deathhouse, welcomer to your last days on earth, its rusting balcony unsupported, spouse of the river with tiny lapping waves, berth

of the great steamships, conduit to graves, the broken teeth of its windows silvered with sky, weeds sprouting from its roof, caves within, a profane cathedral on stilts that shivered

with the tide, the boarded-up door a cry, a sagging sorry thing that spilled its splintered steps to the water. Pencilled shadows plied its flanks, condemned when I saw it. A roost for birds.

You were tiny, four foot ten and pale, with dark hair and blue eyes—or so the crude manifest says, but surely it tells a tale in cruelly summing up your health as "good."

Fair and cold, a west wind blowing as the big ship maneuvered in, the shed an echoing refuge from all that bright billowing. Rouged with fever, eyes sunk in your head, anyone who knew you well would have seen the ominous change. Hustled off by shaken kin, you watched your city spinning away. The doctor was called the very next day.

That I know these things, your final address too, even the doctor's name, seems incredible. So much helpless detail, and nothing I can do. I didn't even know you existed until

weeks ago, when I found your name on a list, and images began to awaken in me. I guessed your story: the voyage was your last, you were dying at twenty-nine of TB,

months before the most beautiful summer, before the Great War. And you were my great-aunt. Then facts confirmed all my hunches. You were. Imagination leads where reason can't.

Sometimes the dead come to us this way, bringing us their names so we might rescue them from oblivion. Maybe you wish to say, "I was a dressmaker who stared at the sea's unraveling hem,

a fine musician from the provinces consigned to stitching as sea swallows, like tiny priests, led my deathship west." Were you resigned to the dwindling of your days, the fading east?

As you watched the shrike-sheen of grays fluently quick march to the horizon in all directions, were you still cutting new patterns and basting?

Did you drum your abandoned scales on the spine of the sea?

Was your demise quiet as a chapel or obscene as a slaughter? The women ringing their hands, their red-faced cries. You lived for thirty days after you arrived, someone's beloved, someone's eldest daughter.

To die on Good Friday and be buried on Easter Sunday, not resurrected!

The mourners in black among the pastel crowds with their new hats and finery instead

of tears. A cold, fair day, with breezes out of the northwest. It's hard to believe we'll never meet in this world—the past teases us with hope that we'll gossip and laugh, grieve

for the dead, and become fast friends. But no, you've gone long ago to your Mozart grave, petrels instead of notes on all the staves, our centuries kept apart by a blinding glow.

In the fashionable clothes of your era you appear, silently ushering me into your sewing room, where needles gleam like the bills of hummingbirds, and I begin where you left off, stitching, but with words.

#### THREE WISE MEN K.E. Duffin

So much for the three wise men.
I asked them for advice, and the first one said
"You must go far away, and never return.
Save yourself from evil." And the second said
"You must sacrifice everything and return
though clearly your life is in danger." And the third said
"You must devote the rest of your days to helping them, but from a safe distance." Who was right?
So much for the three wise men. They played their part.
I paid them, went out into the sunlight, and devoted myself to art.

# BRIEF MEMOIR K E Duffin

I glimpse a tiny star-encrusted glove dropped beneath bars and fear I'm sized too small from the wreckage years, the iridium wrecking ball smashing diaphanous trees, snorting a puff

of dust into my sky. To be stunted, then wither! Raking across that coarse xylophone of iron fence, I mark time as I dither in longing and looking back. But I am alone.

In the subway, the behemoth's rhythmic wheezing as silver doors stand open for a while grapples my throat with a death rattle's unreason. (Her foul-mouthed rage still staring in, her smile.

"You trusted me. Give up. You lost. I won.")
Battered by underground darkness I crave the sun.

#### RANGE Willie James King

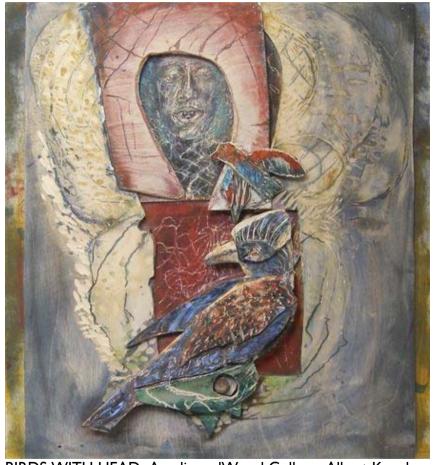
That eagle, soaring above steep cliffs and glaciers could be my brother.

It finds its pleasures there, in self-simplicities, not seeking favor

from others in flight, nor that man with his rifle raised, setting his sight.

### I TELL YOU Willie James King

Make a vase of your urn, I tell you. I don't want to be burned and then thrown as ashes carried by a wind. I am a Black man, live in Alabama. I am not indifferent to the Diaspora. My ancestors were sent in separate directions, routed without roots, a care for how they were pried from their children. Place my nude body in a box, whole, so that even while I am stilled by death, I want to be so ready! in case there's still a soul rambunctious amidst the rot, mold, in order that I may be one of the first to rise, first to have my story told, as I gaze into my maker's mocking eyes who'll not be startled, nor surprised.



BIRDS WITH HEAD Acrylic and Wood Collage Albert Kogel

# 4 POEMS AND 1 DITTY Wendell Berry

Wendell Berry-- farmer, poet, essayist, novelist—is an American citizen in the original mode: radical. Returning to the roots of the land through farming, to the roots of the heart through family, and to the roots of community through culture and agriculture, he reminds us, without jargon or bias, that the roots of our humanized environment are grounded in the greater nature surrounding us. His topics and tones range from "A Citizen's Response to the [2002] National Security Strategy of the United States of American" (reprinted by the New York Times as an entire page, this Tom Paine-like alarum still stands as a high-water mark of sanity) to the delightfully crazed/wise fox observations of the Mad Farmer or SAYINGS AND DOINGS. The following derive mostly from that vein of antic delight.

William Pitt Root

#### A LETTER

(to Hayden Carruth)

Dear Hayden,

How Good—how liberating!—to read

of your hatred of Alice in Wonderland.

I used to hear my mother reading it

to my sisters, and I hated it too, but have always been embarrassed to say so, believing that everybody else loved it. But who the hell wants to go down a rabbit hole? I like my feet best when they're walking on top of the ground. If I could burrow like a mole, I would, and I would like that. I would like to fly like a bird, if I could. Otherwise, my stratum of choice is the surface. I prefer skin to anatomy, green grass to buried rocks, terra firma to the view from anywhere higher than a tree. ""Long live superficiality!" say I, as one foot fares waywardly graveward.

### A GHOST, ALMOST Wendell Berry

Is it that I am a spirit

who returns from time

to time to be embodied

by you? Gimme a hug!

# FOOL YOURSELF AND LOVE ME ONE MORE TIME

Wendell Berry

Time was you couldn't see

You fooled yourself by fooling me.

I ain't yours and you ain't mine,

But you took me off the shelf.

Darlin, you fooled yourself

And loved me that one time.

When we were young and pretty

I sang you this little ditty—

I ain't yours and you ain't mine,

But you took me off the shelf.

Darlin, you fooled yourself

And loved me one more time.

Too many tales to tell,

For you have read my mind too well.

I ain't yours and you ain't mine,

But I'm back on the shelf.

Darlin, fool yourself

And love me one more time.

## TO WORDSWORTH Wendell Berry

Nature never did betray
the heart that loved her,
because nature never did
promise not to betray
the heart that loved her.

### TU FU Wendell Berry

As I sit here

in my little boat

tied to the shore

of the passing river

in a time of ruin,

I think of you,

old ancestor,

and wish you well.

### HUNTING Peggy Sarjeant

It's Saturday and my father has gone to town. It's a thing that began after my brother's death, this going to town and drinking on weekends. My father didn't drink, and my parents didn't fight, when Rodney was here.

Usually, my father leaves after lunch—a quick kiss for my mother, a nod to me as I talk on the phone—and doesn't come home until late. But today he comes back when it's still light outside. The sky is white, the air is white, the ground is white. A thick screen of flat white flakes blocks my view across the valley as I stand at the front window, fogging the glass with my breath. Thanksgiving is still a week away but an early snow started last night and it hasn't let up. I wonder if he's home because the plows haven't cleared the road. I hear the truck door slam, then slam again as my father kicks it shut. Sometimes he has to tie the door handle to the headrest because it doesn't latch tight. It's a hazard, my father says. But he doesn't fix it.

Through the kitchen, I can see into the mudroom. The door opens and my father's presence fills the house. He has a thick neck, and shoulders that bulge under his t-shirts. "Amy!" he shouts, stamping his boots on the mat. "Amy, you here?"

I wipe the window with the sleeve of my sweatshirt, erasing the words written in breath. It drives my mother crazy, those mist-scrawlings, smearing her clean glass.

"Amy, come here," he calls into the kitchen. "Come on, girl! I have something to show you!"

My mother turns from the stove. She is at the back door in a flash. "Ted?" she says. "What are you up to?"

"It's not your concern." My father doesn't look at her. He looks at me, standing in the kitchen doorjamb.

"But you've been out," my mother says.

"Lay off, Ellen."

"Have you been drinking?"

"I've had a few. But, no, I'm not drunk." He drags the word out.

The day after Rodney's funeral, my father drove to Wenatchee and didn't come home for three days. When he finally showed up on our porch, a State Patrol officer stood with him. My father had been found asleep in his truck on the shoulder of State Route 97A. Asleep, two hundred feet above the Columbia River. An empty Jack Daniel's bottle beside him; the parking brake disengaged.

My mother steps into the mudroom. The scene is familiar: my father's face gray; my mother's hair loose and a little bit greasy, the skin across her sharp cheekbones stretched tight and red. They argue a minute, but their voices are muffled. Then my father sticks his head into the kitchen and calls me again. My mother leans against the fridge, her arms crossed over her chest.

My father waits, his boots dropping waffle-stamped snow on the mat. I pull on my own boots and take my down jacket from the hook on the wall. My wool cap is jammed in the pocket, still damp from the morning. "You'll need something more substantial than those," my father says, tipping his head toward my mittens. I grab my brother's sheepskin gloves, stuffed down in a bucket, and follow my father out the back door.

It's getting darker by the minute as we drive toward town. The hills roll away from us, white and smooth; boulders are capped with round mounds of snow and I think of our church and the painting behind the carved wooden pulpit, of cherubs' curved hips and their pink dimpled flesh.

Before Rodney died, flesh was a word I wouldn't have used; now, I can't get it out of my mind. The snow has stopped. The overcast sky hangs full and heavy over the valley. By the time we get to the river, we need headlights. My father pulls the switch.

"Where are we going?" I ask.

"You'll see." He turns off the highway and heads up the hill.

The road is slick and the back end of the truck fish-tails as we turn the corner. I press my nose against the window, hoping the plow mounds are high enough to keep us out of the ditch.

"Have I ever taken you hunting?" my father says.

"No."

"Want to go with me sometime?"

"Not really."

"Why not?"

I shrug. "Just don't," I say. I'm sixteen and sometimes I lie.

The last time my father took Rodney hunting, my brother was home on leave, just before his deployment. It was the time of year when frost droops the sage, when the clear sky is so pale the horizon looks like bleached denim. My father hadn't bagged a buck in years and he was anxious to get out the next morning.

"Go on without me," Rodney had said. "Really. It's okay. I'll stay here with Amy."

"The boys want to give you a proper send-off, Rod. Don't disappoint them."

"I'll be shooting plenty enough over there in Iraq," Rodney said. "I'll meet the guys at the Red Dog when you come in."

My father stood there, his big hands shoved deep in his pockets. "A man's job deserves a man's ceremony," he said.

"Don't begrudge us that." My father looked to my mother. She turned back toward the sink full of dishes.

Rodney lifted his jacket from the wall hook.

"Son?"

"Me and Amy are going out," Rodney said. He tossed me my sweatshirt, then caught the screen door so it didn't bang behind me.

We walked up the drive past the barn and through our gate, almost hidden by shoulder-high clumps of dead rye grass. The hills were brown but the mountains beyond were white with the first snow. My brother's breath swirled in the air.

"I don't want you to worry," Rodney stopped and scuffed the toe of his sneaker in the dirt.

"I'll go instead," I said.

"Oh, right."

"With dad, I mean."

Rodney smiled, but he didn't look at me. He didn't look at me in the same way my father doesn't look at my mother, that just off the edge of my head sort of way. "Now that wouldn't work, would it?" Rodney said.

I felt all the heat from my stomach flood up to my face and in that moment, I hated Rodney. Six mule deer moved across the hill, their huge ears swiveled toward us. I turned back toward the house.

Rodney caught my shoulder. "I just want to get this over and come back in one piece," he said.

I stood there and looked at him. He hadn't shaved for two days and beard stubble grew right up next to his armysheared sideburns. I nodded. "Just don't be a hero," I said.

That night, through the thin wall that separated my bedroom from Rodney's, I heard the low rumble of my father's voice. The next morning he and Rodney were gone, the mudroom emptied of camo and boots; amo and guns.

When they came in for lunch, my father was mad. He sat down at the table and speared a deviled egg with his fork.

He pointed it at Rodney. "And this boy thinks he's a soldier?" my father said. "He had a goddamn buck in his sights and he didn't fire. Waved the thing off so no one else got a chance either." We ate in silence. Three days later my brother landed in Baghdad.

My father pulls into the cemetery and the headlights sweep tree trunks and the tops of gravestones. He turns off the ignition. He rummages in the glove box and finds a flashlight. I step out; it is so cold my boots squeak in the snow. The wind hisses through the spruce trees lined up along the fence and a spray of loose snow hits my face.

"What are we doing here?" I ask, pulling my hood up over my cap.

My father reaches into the truck bed and lifts out a bow saw and an old canvas tarp. "I told you," he says, "we're hunting."

He never told me any such thing but I keep quiet. He takes off through the snow, the light zigzagging in front of him. He walks fast and night slams down in front of me. I try to walk faster. I try to keep up. I stretch, but I can't reach into his wide-spaced boot prints. It's cold, and it's dark, and my father is way out in front. I can't breathe. Every time I take a step, half-buried headstones jump up through the snow. Darkness folds in behind me and I get the feeling something is following. I try to run. The light bobs further and further away. My heart pounds in my ears.

"Dad, wait!" I call. "Wait!" I can't help hollering.

My father stops. He points the beam at my feet. I'm shivering now and my fingers are numb. I want to go home; I want my father to build a fire in the fireplace just like he used to. I want to sip a mug of hot cocoa. Not the powdered stuff, but the real thing. Rodney's recipe.

Rodney emailed almost daily and twice a month he called home. He never talked about combat but instead described the desert at sunset, the palm trees along the Tigris; broken blue tiles inside crumbled buildings. He loved the spices, and the incense. He told my mother he was going to be a journalist, travel all over the world and write about people.

That November, Rodney's twelve-month deployment was extended and he spent his second Christmas in Iraq. In March, it was extended again. By that time, Rodney had stopped emailing. When he called home on Easter, his voice sounded flat and farther away than he was. He told us he had found an Iraqi boy—a kid he'd given chocolate bars to—in the street. The boy was dead, a wet pillowcase stuffed down his throat.

Rodney asked for a transfer, but was told no. He asked for emergency leave, but was denied that, too. Not long after, my brother clamped his service revolver between his teeth and blew a hole through the back of his head.

My father steps toward me and offers the flashlight. "Here," he says. "You take it. I know where I'm going well enough." Rodney's grave is in the last row, backed up against the poplars. My father heads in that direction.

"It's going to be covered, you know." My fingers are so cold I feel sick to my stomach.

"I dug it out earlier today. He's deep enough as it is without three feet of snow on him."

I shove one gloved hand into my armpit and waddle behind him. We intersect a line of half-buried tracks and I shine the light in their direction. I can just make out a heap of shoveled snow beside Rodney's gray granite headstone.

"Hey!" I call. "You passed it."

"That's not where we're going."

"Where, then?"

"Not far."

A few seconds later, my father stops. He reaches for the light and I give it to him. He shines the beam at an old oak tree, still holding its dead leaves. "There," he says. "See it?"

I see nothing but snow and the tips of one sagebrush poking through the chain link of the back fence.

My father presses the back of my neck. We move forward a few steps. "Now?" he says.

Just past Rodney's grave lies the half-eaten carcass of a six-point buck. Brought down by a coyote, or a pack of wild dogs, its stomach—a bloated ball trailing a coiled piece of black gut—has been dragged away from it over the snow. Its ribs dangle strips of furred flesh and one foreleg is missing.

"Oh," I say, "Gross."

"Gross? Look at the rack on that baby!" My father pushes me forward. "This is a beautiful animal," he says.

The buck's eyes are pecked out and the gray sockets are puckered like fish mouths. I turn away.

"What?" my father says. He looks at me a moment, then kneels in the snow and takes hold of the antlers. He tries to twist the head around but the deer is frozen and stiff.

"Give me a hand with this, will you?" he says. "Pull up on the antlers. I'm going to straighten his head."

I grab both antlers and pull. My father wraps his hands around the lower jaw and twists until the deer's neck is extended and its throat lies flat on the snow.

"Perfect," he says.

"What are you going to do?"

"We're going to take his head."

"Do what?"

"Take his head. Cut it off," my father makes a sawing motion across his own neck.

Rodney wouldn't have done it. He would have gone back to the truck and left my father crouching there in the snow. "Okay," I say.

My father's head snaps around. "You sure?" he says. "I'm sure."

"It might be gruesome."

"It's frozen," I say. "It won't bleed."

Our eyes lock and my father nods. "Okay, then." He stands up; his face is inches from mine and I smell his Saturday breath. He taps the butt end of the flashlight against my chest, "You hold the light."

The angled beam shadows my father's face and the lines along his mouth are deep, his eyes sunken. He looks old, and tired. I take the flashlight.

"Shine it here," my father says. He holds my wrist and directs the cone of light at the base of the deer's neck. "And hold it steady. I don't want to screw up."

Last spring, when Rodney came home, the whole town turned out to welcome his flag-draped casket. Mayor O'Rourke gave a speech, Reverend Stevens said a prayer; Mark Barlow, Rodney's best friend, spoke of how proud he was to have known someone who died for his country. At the graveside service, my father told Mr. Barlow that Rodney had received a Silver Star for gallantry on the battlefield. My mother tried to say something, but I distracted her.

I went back to school two days later. The Principal called an assembly to honor its first graduate killed in action since the Viet Nam War. I was the guest of honor. I sat on the bottom bleacher in the high school gym, surrounded by teachers and School Board members, and picked at the edge of my thumb until it was bleeding and raw. I answered all of their questions with lies.

When school let out, Rodney's reputation landed me one of the few summer jobs in the valley. For two and a half months I bagged groceries at the local market. Everyone knew it was against store policy for baggers to accept tips, but

they offered them anyway. By September, I had a cigar box in my dresser drawer packed with cash.

My father, one knee against the dead animal's shoulder, presses the blade to the deer's hide. He saws fast, every breath a grunt; tufts of brown hair clump up along the edge of the steel and roll away into the snow. The sound changes as the jagged blade rips through frozen skin, muscle, bone, windpipe. Scratch, squeal, scrape, sigh. I think I might vomit, but I don't.

When the neck is cut through my father pushes his cap up off his forehead, wipes his nose on the back of his glove. I was right, the deer didn't bleed. The snow is littered with bone fragments and shredded hide but there is no gore. It's too clean. Without blood it doesn't seem true. I think about Rodney—how he pressed the cold gun metal against his own tongue. Blood should be everywhere, soaking all the way through to the ground.

"Hand me the tarp," my father says.

I drag it to him and together we shake it. We settle it smooth on the snow. He lifts the head and swings it into the middle of the canvas. The deer's lips have pulled back and it looks like its laughing.

"Mom's going to freak when she sees this thing."

"We're going to take it to the taxidermy." My father folds the tarp over the antlers, twists the ends together and hoists the bundle over his shoulder. "She won't see it until later."

"You're going to have it stuffed?"

"Mounted."

"You didn't even shoot it."

"Do you have a better idea?"

I don't say anything.

When we reach the truck, my father slings the heavy tarp over the tailgate. "Don't tell her where we've been," he says.

"She's going to ask."

"Tell her a story. Make something up."

The cab smells of cigar smoke and mildew, and in the cold the vinyl seats crackle as if they might shatter. My father turns the heater to high and as he pulls onto the road I hear the antlers clatter against the truck bed. I think of my mother that day at the grave, her eyes empty, her shoulders slumped; her whole body slanted away from us like a cottonwood blown by the wind.

My father leans across me and pulls a cigar from the glove box. He bites the end off and spits it on the floor. We pass the Shell station, the grocery; turn left at the hardware store. The truck whines and clanks. It backfires as we climb a hill. I know my mother is in the kitchen now, making supper. She'll set three plates, not four, and she'll cook just enough. No leftovers.

"What are you going to do?" my voice sounds a long way off, like the last ricochet of an echo. "Are you going to hang it in his room? Or are you just going to hide it in the barn until it rots?"

My father stares at the road. The unlit cigar dangles from the corner of his mouth and his stubbled face is green in the glow of the dash lights. He reaches for the book of matches stuck in the cracked plastic below the radio. His coat sleeve is stained and I see a dribble of blood. My father sets the cigar on the seat and he pushes his sleeve up. "Shit," he says, "That's deeper than I thought." He holds his wrist to his mouth. He sucks off the blood.

"What happened?"

"The saw blade."

"Does it hurt?"

He sucks again and presses his arm against his jeans. The truck swerves and I'm sure we're going to slide into the ditch, but he steadies us. "Like a fucker," he says.

The headlights of an oncoming car trace the cracks in our windshield. The road curls along the river and my father drives with both hands on the wheel. It is snowing again and the flakes slant and swirl in the twin beams of the truck lights, settle in tiny drifts along the straight edge of the wiper blades.

"Do your friends ever ask about Rodney?" my father asks.

"Not anymore, but they did," I fog the side window with my warm breath. I rub a clear hole with the heel of my hand.

"What did you tell them?"

"Same thing you did. That he was a hero."

"But he wasn't," my father says.

Rodney's gloves lay in my lap, and I see now why my hands are so cold. They are way too big, and the seams are unraveling at the tip of each finger.

"Yeah, well. He wasn't a hunter either," I say.

We turn onto our freshly plowed two-track. It's like a tunnel, the dark, snow-speckled sky domed over the white banks on either side. We pass the barn and the gears grind as my father downshifts toward the house. He turns off the ignition and we sit there, the wind whistling through the loose driver's side door. The kitchen light is on and I see my mother at the window, a dishrag thrown over one shoulder.

My father drums his fingers against the steering wheel. "Well, hell," he says. He squints through the windshield. "Tomorrow's Sunday, isn't it?"

"So?"

"So, the taxidermy won't be open again until Monday."

I poke my finger through a hole in the vinyl, feel the old foam like sand against my skin. No matter how hard I try,

I can't remember Rodney's face. All I can see is his back, and the swimming hole, rippled, as he skips smooth stones over its surface. "Will you take me?" I say.

"You have school."

"I mean tomorrow. It's the last day of the season."

The front door is open now and my mother stands there. My father stares straight at her. "You'll have to get up before dawn," he says.

"I can do that."

He nods then, once, and steps out of the truck. My mother flicks on the porch light and the snow—curling from the eaves, piled up beside the walk—glistens like a billion tiny mirrors. I elbow my door open; my father kicks his shut. The front steps have been swept, all the way down to bare wood.

## **CUTTHROAT DISCOVERY POET**



STEPHANIE DUGGER

#### **AFTER CHEMO**

My father made a turtle from clay, painted it with white spots and kept it on a shelf by the kitchen window until I dropped it in hot water, watched it dissolve into brown sediment at the bottom of the sink.

He never noticed it missing
or never said
and I could not have told him
how I pulled it out of the water,
held it in my hands
how it was headless and without marks
before I put it back in.

This is what it will be like to not have you.

#### STRETCHES OF SKIN

Stephanie Dugger

The marks—faintly blue under swirls of pink and pearl—run down your stomach.

You say

I did this to you,

these thin stretches of

skin,

and if I touch them,

they will tear. Blue is almost honest.

Blue

is the place where I moved through sulfurwater and the sound of mice

scattering from underneath

my bed

as my feet hit the floor.

\*

The apple scent of shampoo

before I fall asleep—

this is when I think

I know you.

Almost as gently,

the run of water pressed from a tea bag
tells me there is something more definite
in the way flowers you planted

when I was born

open only at night.

In Russia,

mothers swim with their babies

in frigid water.

They bounce them

in and out of the cold and the babies laugh until their lips turn blue and their hands curl into fists.

\*

#### Women are known for

but I can never tell you

about the stretch of blue cedars behind our house

and how

they look like you,

over

and over,

until you become small and shapeless, or how the clothesline strung between the first two is just loose enough

to quiver.

# OPERATIONS AND ADVANCES IN OCCUPATION Stephanie Dugger

I knew part of him—
the man that used hay string to hang
hollowed gourds from apple trees so that he
could watch cardinals and blue birds from
his porch. He calmed a birthing cow with soft
words in her ear and smooth strokes of his hand
down her side. He walked through fields of rye grass

and could tell by taste whether the crop was ready to cut or if he should wait another day. He was older and more focused, but it was not unusual to hear him yell at his son, the only one left who would listen. I could tell you that in an album, between pictures of his daughter wearing a graduation cap and his grandson at two, naked in a tub, he kept a photo of a man, chest up

and sepia colored. The man's eyes were closed and he was lying on a downed barbwire fence, a bullet hole through his forehead. Written underneath the picture, the word Jap. He never spoke about it or about being there, except to say the moon on the water made him homesick, despite the fact his wife had packed the car with everything they owned before his feet touched the sand. If you had asked him, perhaps he could have found his way to tell you what he missed back there.

### WRECKS Alison Carb Sussman

Probably his mother once polished his tooshie gleaming and bare with baby powder but now he lay in the doorway of the church a big hulking Goth of a man wearing huge leather buckled boots and a tattered sheepskin coat stinking of urine.

As I passed he called out "Hey, can you help me get something to eat?"

And I mumbled "Sorry."

But later in the day I came back

And he was still there, reigning over those steps, calling out to passersby below and I stopped to look at his wild bushy black hair and crazily crossed brows, eyes spinning like discs in their sockets and the chest hair bursting from under his coat.

My brother-in-law Benny—he was always the wild one, the one his mother worried about most. She showed us photographs

of a dark little slick haired boy running into the ocean in 20 degrees. Told us about his bloody sword fights with kids in school,

how he slid down a rope out a 5<sup>th</sup> floor window at night. Five divorces and a tangle of kids. And painting, always painting. My husband Mel, her other gentle son, dressed himself, let himself in the house, made his own dinner.

passed in and out of her vision and never quite touched her,

in and out and over and up in a swing far away

while Benny climbed in front of her over the monkey bars.

Benny's face is a slash of brown, his beard, an ooze of gray, his eyes black water.

We sit in the visiting room with blue plastic chairs and tables, all rectangular.

Patterns, Benny says, to make you go crazy by.

Sunlight slants through the ward, lingering in lonely pools on the floors.

"Can you get me some cigarettes?" Benny says to my husband. "No."

A man comes to take roll call. "My name is cigarettes," Benny says.

"My name is matches," the man says.

We all laugh.

Benny reminds me of a dusty broken old hunting rifle, of a cracked wine goblet left out in the rain.

He took a bottle of Valium. It wasn't the first time. His wife was at work. He wasn't painting.

I am struck dumb by the light. I feel like an ice crystal.

"Can't you get me some cigarettes?" Benny says to my husband.
"I'll wash your car for a week."

"No."

Mel, eight years younger, told me how the teenaged Benny tied him to a chair,

put him under the shower with a bag over his head, shouted, "Escape like Houdini. Go on. Do it!"

Now Benny's eyes follow Mel as he scratches his ear, adjusts his shirt. Like a hawk

watching a mouse.

A woman gropes Benny's shoulder asks if her hospital gown is her party dress or his "Yours," he says, winking, "and you look like the cat's meow."

Mel holds my shoulder, protectively.

### HIGBEE BEACH, CAPE MAY, NJ

Alison Carb Sussman

Dark fields, rippling leaves, 5:30 a.m.
A fish carcass cracks under my shoe. Bird songs burst from behind my half-closed lids.
Mist surrounds shiny trunks, rain droplets shower down.
Branches brush my face, grass grips my ankles. I trip on tussocks, slip in mud.

Colors blaze like gods on fire. Golden, indigo, emerald, ivory, ink, scarlet, russet—
Motionless, a female bird listens to a male's song.
I want you to love me again, your boyish effervescent body twisting around me, while dawn shivers through the trees.

# MUSIC FOR THE THIRD EAR B.J. Buckley

Chromatic or twelve tone, thrum of living field against

unclothed skin --- flesh, living, still knows the small vibrations --- worm, grub, sow bug --makes room.

Bats and swallows bows for wind-strung air

breath's slip jig

last night a scream from the slough, this morning fox scat rich with meat

moon's long arpeggio across the day, the dark

and fog over the river, wet-fingered melodious mute counterpoint

### heart-drum's skipped

beat

one hand on the instrument, one turning

the page

# ALONG THE BITTERROOT, LATE OCTOBER B.J. Buckley

Heron, perusing the river's slow pages for quicksilver fish script ---

great blue wader through water's texts, critic of cold currents.

In the lily-choked shallows, yellow lotus light --- a brace of mallards

at mooring, side by side, their heads soft emerald candles.

And what trout there are lie low and deep, in holes scooped by higher water,

or under cutbanks, disguised as fallen cottonwood leaves.

Woodpecker's martial rat-a-tat-tat --- beetle killed pine snag, rust needled,

lightning-struck, leaning out at a precarious angle.

Hush and hush, ripple and ripple, single osprey

floating like a cloud

upstream, rowing the wind: no one knows what it's thinking.

## WINTER SOLSTICE, MITCHELL SLOUGH B.J. Buckley

for Simon Ortiz

In the longest, darkest, dark, no darkness: Light --- the moon's skull, white and polished, star-spark

points of phosphor fire; and the wings of wild geese reeling in to the river, manganese and silver, gleaming, the taut wire

of their voices a plucked bright string, midnight's violin --voice calling voice calling voice in to the purling currents from flight

behind banks of clouds from far to far, from moon to the moon afloat in the frigid water, while trout in silent constellations fin gravel bar

and eddy. Tonight, splintered radiant bone against the lee shore --- ice shelves thin and breaking; and three geese rocking at the wet breast of winter.

#### ADVICE TO A BETTER POET

Timothy Green for Erik

Think buckshot: Not the rifle, but the musket.

Ear-horn of powder, armdeep in black

soot. Think flint lock and flash pan.

Muzzle blast. Hollow point. Don't paint

the rounds, don't ready the bayonet.

No aim is necessary; nothing is true.

Think percussion cap. Any metal as shrapnel.

Any spark as lightning; be bottled, bottler.

#### POEM FROM THE HOMELAND

Timothy Green *Rose Bowl, 2006* 

As she trills the last note, there's smoke.

Each song now taken literally.

When the firecrackers burst, we leap to our

relief. We clap, put our fingers

in our teeth. Then the B-I Lancer in the twilight.

Drum-roll of the turbofans.

their heat.



Thoughts Aloft Clay 36hX18wX15d Fox Joy

### ALL'S FAIR Amy Letter

Like silk in a blender, Rebecca's voice caught in her throat and ground to a halt. She'd spent the day listing her wants. "All's I want," she said, again and again, until, just as the fat orange sun went down beyond the Ferris wheel, she gave up.

She followed Luke through the fairgrounds and talked, but he only heard Harmony, his daughter, who spoke from beside his hip. He'd dyed Harmony's hair bright blue to match his own, after they took her from her mother's house in Homestead.

Luke left the gun in the car, parked near the fairgrounds' entrance. He'd promised Rebecca and Harmony a good fun stop—no guns, no cops—after four hard days on the road. The boy at the entrance gate told them the fair was closing down, but Luke just patted the kid's shoulder. "It won't take me long to win them some prizes," he said.

"My daddy wins everything," Harmony told Rebecca. "He won me a green teddy bear, once, and it had an apron on it that said LOVE. It had hearts with an arrow going through." She drew an arrow across her chest with her finger. "Maybe he'll win you something too."

Rebecca bit her lip and petted the girl's blue hair.

Luke looked just like his little girl, thin and blue-haired, but he was covered in tattoos. Rebecca had no tattoos; her brown hair fell in a shelf against her soft, round body. The polish on her long nails descended into shade, like the setting sun. She didn't look like anyone.

"Who's next? Only a dollar! Step up to the plate and hit a home run! Your choice of prizes!" called a carnie in a grease-stained purple shirt. He stood outside a batting cage, beside a booth stacked high and hung with dolls.

"Daddy, look! An alien!" The alien doll stood nearly as tall as Harmony, anti-freeze-green with bright yellow eyes. "Oh, Daddy, Daddy, Daddy!"

"You want the alien, baby?"

"There's no way you can get that. It's the top prize." Rebecca began grinding out words again. "See if you can get that little turtle doll for me." The turtle doll was a first tier prize. Its peculiar shade of orange reminded Rebecca of the muddy warning signs their headlights flashed across at night, caution, men working, speeding fines doubled next 6,000 feet, signs that flew by almost before she could read them. She wanted to hold that color in her hand, keep it with her.

"I'm gonna try for that alien. If I can't get it, we'll try for the turtle. Okay, girls?"

"We've got a new batter! This way, sir! Hit the back wall hard enough to light the light. Three times wins the top prize, twice gets you something nice, once gets you a baby-prize. Three strikes and you're out. Batter's up!" He handed Luke a shiny black bat and showed him the way inside. Luke hesitated. Something in him rebelled at the sight of a cage, but he looked at his girls, gave them a smile, and shook it off. The carnie closed the gate and started the machine, which clicked loudly as its pitching arm wound up.

"Yay, Daddy!"

"Come on, Luke!"

An old police light hung outside the cage, ready to flash and spin if Luke hit the carpet hanging on the back wall. "Cop light," Luke told his audience, grinning. "If that don't strike fear!" They heard the pitching machine catch, and it flung a ball towards Luke, hard. He swung. The ball popped off the bat, hit the top of the cage, bounced back down and rolled along the ground towards the machine.

"Steee-rike one!"

The machine was still clicking. It caught the second ball and hurled it towards Luke. He held the bat tight and smacked

the ball. It popped up again, this time hitting the top of the cage right over the machine. Everyone watching looked at the light, but there was no change to it. "It must be a di-rect hit to the back of the cage to light the light," the carnie said. "Steeerike two!"

The machine clicked around for the third pitch. Luke clenched his teeth. When the machine sent the ball towards him with a heavy *sproing*, he leaned forward over his bat. The ball smacked Luke on the face, just below the eye, and knocked him down.

"Luke!"

"Daddy!"

The carnie just looked at the man lying on the ground inside his cage and spit. He turned off the pitching machine, then came through the cage door, closing it behind himself. He crouched beside Luke.

Outside the chain-link, a few people had gathered: "Is he alright?" "Is he okay?" "Oh my God! Did you see him drop?"

But the carnie just said, quietly, "Now why'd you go do that, Mister?"

"Do what? I didn't mean for the ball to hit me."

"Uh-huh. You ac-si-dentally bent your face into a ball."

"Look," Luke said, "You just give me that alien doll for my little girl, and I won't tell everyone my face is covered in grease right now."

"Machine gets greasy."

"Ain't grease. It's Vaseline. I tell people, they won't want to play your game much, will they?"

"Uh-huh." The carnie stood up and opened the gate, spit again, and called out, "Yeah, he's alright." Harmony and Rebecca pushed past him, Harmony collapsing at her father's

side as Rebecca slowly knelt. The carnie came back with the alien doll and handed it to Luke.

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Harmony's face lit up. "Oh thank you, Daddy! Thank you, thank you!"

"How about giving us one of those cute little orange turtles, too," Rebecca said. "Seeing as how you nearly brained my boyfriend."

"Seems to me he nearly brained himself."

Rebecca stood up, dusted her knees, and made herself tall. "My boyfriend's laying there, probably concussed, and all's I want's that little orange turtle. Well, if you won't give it up nice, I'll just go back there and take it myself."

She stomped over to the prizes, reaching right for the turtle. As she touched it, a small, thin-fingered hand grabbed her wrist. She turned to strike, but stopped short. "What are you?"

The small, dark boy hiding under the counter yelled "Thief!" until the carnie told him to stop.

"Just let her take it, Kev. Get out of here, the three of you. Go on where you came from."

They strolled back through the darkened fairgrounds, towards the Ferris wheel and the main gate. Rebecca put her turtle in the lapel pocket of her shirt, and Harmony hugged the alien like it were a little brother. "That was easier than I thought it'd be," Luke said as he poked at his bruise. "That guy hardly fought at all."

"Maybe he got a sniff of who he was dealing with."

"Heh. Maybe." Luke looked around. Night had taken hold, and the fairgrounds were clearing out. "Come on, if you girls want a Ferris wheel ride, we'd better go now."

"Oh, Daddy! Look!" They were standing in front of a horse-racing game. People shot targets with a steady stream from a water gun. The best shots moved their little plastic horses from left to right the fastest. "I bet you could win that one, Daddy!"

"I bet I could."

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"Place your bets and take your places! One dollar to play. Fire your guns directly at the hole in the center of the target. A winner every time!" This carnie was older. He used a chewed-up ball bat as a cane.

"I'll play," Luke said, picking up a water gun. He eyed his competition. They looked like boy scouts out of costume, kids who had learned to shoot hunting squirrels with their dads. Luke handed the old man a dollar and huffed, "I been shooting longer than these boys been alive," just as a recorded trumpeting began to blow.

"And they're off!" the old man called. The line to the water gun tensed. Luke sprayed the water right into the hole, remembering the grocery clerk he'd shot, the guy with the red mole growing out of his blond moustache. He remembered aiming for the guy's shoulder because he couldn't stand to look at his face, and taking the plea offer so he wouldn't have to see it again in court. Barely a drop from Luke's gun missed the target. While the other plastic horses moved along the track in awkward jerks, his progressed smoothly to the finish line. His horse, the red horse, came in first.

"And the winner is the blue horse! Here you go, kid." The old man handed a black and yellow rubber snake to the boy beside Luke.

"Hey, I won that. The red horse, see?"

"Don't try any funny stuff on my ground, Mister. I keep more than water guns back here, you know." The old man spoke to Luke softly, then called out, his eyes still fixed on Luke's face, "Next race in sixty seconds! One dollar! Place your bets and take your places!"

"Why didn't you win, Daddy?"

"What did he say, Luke?"

Luke looked around and spotted the little boy from the batting cage, watching them. "You!" he said. "What kind of game you playing?" The boy ran away. Luke sucked in his breath. "Alright. Let's take our ride on that Ferris wheel and

go. Can't waste much more time on this place. I want to make Alligator Point by morning."

The line for the Ferris wheel was right at the entrance to the park. Only a few people waited in front of them, and only two people got in line behind them. "I'll bet you can see miles up there," Rebecca said. "Get you some perspective."

Luke smiled a curt smile. That old paranoia was coming on again, that feeling that kept him glancing in his rear-view mirror for days. He saw the boy from the batting cage reappear from behind a pretzel stand, then disappear again. He saw that most of the booths were shutting down. He put his hand on his belt where he gun should be. "Maybe we should just go, girls. We've been here long enough."

"You put me in a car and drive me back and forth up the whole state, sleeping in a back seat, eating out of gas stations, and all's I want's one stupid ride on a Ferris wheel. Is that too much to ask?"

"Pleeeease, Daddy."

Luke paid the teenager who was running the wheel. The boy didn't seem to take any note of them: they got in the basket, and he closed the door. The wheel went up a quarter of the way around, then stopped so the last two people in line could get on.

Rebecca reclined as they rose into the air. "See, he didn't even notice us. Rides are different from games. You can't take nothing from a ride. There's nothing to win or lose."

"Maybe that's why I don't like them so much," Luke said. As they went up a little more, they could see beyond the fairgrounds to the open fields, where it was dark, and beyond that, the lights from the city.

"This is nice. The air is better up here. It's cooling," Rebecca said. She folded her hands behind her head and smiled like a queen.

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Harmony looked over the edge. "We're up high now, aren't we, Daddy?"

"Pretty high."

"And then we go down the other side?"

"Always."

When they got back down to the bottom, Luke called out to the teen: "Can you let us out, now, son? We've got to get going," but the wheel didn't stop.

"She goes once more around before she stops, Mister."

"Come on, Luke, enjoy the ride. Look this time. Look how far you can see."

"There's the man who gave me my alien, Daddy."

Luke looked over the side of the basket and saw the man from the batting cage below, talking to the teenager. He looked up and smiled at Luke. The thin little boy stood beside him. The old man from the races sat on a crate nearby, hunched forward, with his head cocked to one side. "They're going to try and start something," Luke said.

They stopped the wheel and let off the couple who had gotten on behind them. Now Luke and Harmony and Rebecca were the only people left on the ride. Rebecca looked down too. "What do you think they're up to?"

"They fixed it so we're getting off last. They're going to start something, alright." His hand clutched his waist, the soft flesh where the steel of a gun should be. "And I left my gun in the car. This whole stop just went to hell."

"But they're just a bunch of hicks. They don't know who they're dealing with."

"I'm just one guy with no gun."

Rebecca gaped at him.

"Daddy?"

"What is it, baby?"

"I want to go home, now."

"I know, baby."

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She hugged her alien again. Luke closed his eyes. "We got to try and jump off whether they stop the wheel or not. You carry Harmony and go off first. If they start something, head straight for the car—my gun's in the glovebox—l'Il be right behind you."

By the time the wheel turned again, everyone had left the fairgrounds. The last few car taillights drew off into the distance. As they got closer to the ground they could see that all the men held baseball bats. The batting cage boy jumped up and down with his fists balled up. "Jesus. They even got the kid into it." Luke said.

When they got to the bottom, the wheel stopped. Rebecca stepped out with Harmony in her arms, and walked past the men as quick as she could. The teenager tried to grab her by the shoulder, but she spun around. "Keep your hands off me," she said. Harmony lost her grip on the alien, and it fell to the ground.

"Where's the hurry, Lady?"

"She said keep your hands off her." Luke pushed towards the teenager, but the man from the batting cage caught him and held him.

"Calm down, son," the old man said. "We're all reasonable here."

"Go, Rebecca," Luke said, and she turned away and started walking. She didn't turn around to see, but Harmony, who was hanging over her shoulder, said, "They're hitting him! They're hitting Daddy!"

"Is he hitting them back?"

"I don't know!"

She found the car right away, since all the others were gone. They'd stolen and ditched so many cars in the past few

days, she couldn't remember what any of them looked like anymore. Rebecca put Harmony on the ground and turned to see behind her. Luke was nowhere in sight. "He's got the keys."

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Harmony opened one of the rear doors and climbed in. "It's open."

"But I still need the keys to start it."

"We can't leave without Daddy."

"I think he's in trouble over there."

"Yeah." Harmony sighed. "No one's hit him before."

"No one's caught him without his gun before." Rebecca climbed into the driver's seat. She pulled the little orange turtle out of her pocket and perched it on the dashboard so it faced her. The eyes weren't quite aligned, she noticed, making it look like an imbecile. "Stupid thing. And I even had to get it myself." They heard voices and what sounded like laughter. The lights of the Ferris wheel danced in circles over their heads. "I just want to go home."

Harmony rested her chin on the door as she watched the emptied fairgrounds for a sign of her father. Her blue hair lifted in the wind. "Daddy will take us home."

Rebecca choked out a laugh. "Who told you he's taking you home? If Luke has anything to do with it, Harmony, you're never going home."

"Daddy said we're going to our new home."

"All's I wanted this whole time was to go home, but did it matter?"

Harmony looked through this woman, this girlfriend to her father, this nothing to her. After a moment, she turned back towards the window. "Maybe you can go get my daddy, and he'll have the keys, and we can all go. . . home."

Rebecca opened the glovebox and pulled out the gun. "Stupid thing," she said. It was Luke's father's gun: an old black revolver with a wooden handle. "All's I want's for things to be normal. Maybe I want some kids that are mine."

"You're going to get my daddy?"

"Stay here."

Rebecca tried to walk back to the Ferris wheel steadily, but her head felt full of churning water, like a washing

machine. When she got near enough, she saw Luke was down on the ground, bleeding. The carnies stood around him, laughing, taking turns kicking him, telling him he should've known better. They even let the little boy kick him. Rebecca stood where Harmony's alien lay in the dirt. The men stopped when they saw her there, the gun hanging from her hand.

"Now Lady, it's not as bad as all that," said the old diplomat from the horse race. "Here, you can have him back, still in one piece. It don't have to get out of hand."

She held the gun out in front of her, pointed it towards the men. "Why can't you just let us be, huh? We just wanted everything peaceful. It's nothing but driving and driving, for days now, and we stop for one nice night. Why you got to go and ruin that for us?"

"We didn't ruin anything, Lady, it was him who..."

"I'm talking to him!"

"What?" Luke lifted his head. His mouth dripped blood and saliva.

"You, Luke. You ruined everything. Why's it so important you have Harmony you want to mess up our whole lives for it? That's not love. That's mean, and you've tried to justify every mean thing you've done by saying it's for love, but it's all meanness. Give me the car keys. I'm taking Harmony back to her mother."

"You can't do that! Jesus, Rebecca, what happened? We were going to be a family, the three of us! A fresh start! We all agreed!"

"I don't remember agreeing to driving up and down the whole state of Florida, living like a filthy gypsy. The keys, Luke. Hand them over."

"You got no right to take my daughter!"

"One of you get the car keys. They're in his front pocket."

The carnies looked at one another for a moment, and then the old man said, "I don't think so." The man from the

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batting cage stepped forward and spit.

"What?"

"A man's got rights over his own kids, Lady. I don't think we can rightfully an' in good conscience stand here doing nothing while some woman, no relation of any kind, runs off with this man's flesh and blood."

"He's a felon. He shot a man for no good reason in the middle of robbing a grocery store. He's done nothing but steal and rob and cheat his whole life."

The man threw his shiny black bat over his shoulder. "That's no way to talk about a man you call your boyfriend, Lady. But you never meant it, did you? No, not if you want to leave him here all beat up, and take off with his kid on top of it. That's no way you treat someone you love." The carnie patted his son on the head. "Go take that gun away from her, Kev."

The boy stepped past the alien and held his hands out. "My daddy says give me the gun, Lady."

"I swear, I'll shoot."

The boy reached up and put his hand on Luke's gun. He pulled a little, and it slid out of her fingers. Her arms hovered for a moment in front of her, like hands caught in prayer or pleading, and then dropped to her sides as she fell on her knees. The boy walked back to his father and handed him the gun.

"I just want to go home," Rebecca whimpered from the ground, her adrenaline fading, her head entering the spin cycle.

The men helped Luke to his feet. He spat blood at Rebecca. "I didn't force you to come."

"I thought I loved you. I thought I'd follow you anywhere." She scrunched her face like a lost toddler.

"Well, I'm sorry you were confused—because when I said I loved you, that was real." Luke plucked his gun from the carnie's hands like a snake plucks a mouse from a low branch.

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He took a step closer, raised his arm in front of him, and, squinting his eyes like he feared he might cry, shot Rebecca in the gut.

The carnie looked at his hands, marveling at the space where the gun had been. "Now why'd you go and do that, Mister?"

Rebecca gasped and gagged. She held her belly, now leaking blood onto her clothes. "You son. . . of. . ." she wheezed, her breath gone, a searing heat building in her abdomen. "I hate. . ."

The old man said, "I think it's time you people got on your way."

Luke pushed his gun back where it belonged, in his belt. "We're going," he said. He picked up Harmony's alien and pulled Rebecca to her feet. They leaned on one another until they got to the car. Blood poured from her belly; blood and bruises marked his whole body, filling the spaces between his tattoos. Luke put his daughter in the front seat beside her bloodstained alien doll, and laid Rebecca out in the back. He sat in the driver's seat and started the car, tossing the imbecile turtle over his shoulder as he revved the engine. "Put on your seatbelt, Harmony," he said. "We gotta make good time if we want to see Alligator Point by morning."

### A MARRIAGE Gail Wronsky

It was so calm hardly a leaf moved or swayed in air the day Marta's letter came to Antonio's house in California a letter written from prison in Paraguay an old letter unearthed in some ruined jail anonymously here. The and sent handwriting was without a doubt Marta's. She'd been his lover before both of them were kidnapped tortured and she murdered thirty years ago. In the letter to one of her captors she requests

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She doesn't kind treatment. grovel or complain won't deny her actions or betray the group she Antonio had served. and It's clearly the effort of someone utterly weary. She was only twenty in the end it did no good. (The and key turned—the door upon its hinges groaned.) Antonio almost weeps telling us it has come in the mail. Alicia Antonio's wife is herself a desaparecido. She's long imagined Marta seen her in dreams escaping over rooftops or embracing Antonio on some back-street waiting at checkthe two of them her thin points hand gripping his. She's imagined her scent in Antonio's long hair

(now white the emblem refusal to comply). She of an old knows her husband sits up some nights with a bottle nursing his memory his Tristessa. Yet Alicia of this girl is moved by the letter discovered buried in a prison archive and now lying between them bristling-a scorpion's nest of memory-- perhaps even more deeply than he is. To my mind nothing could be more threatening to a marriage or more delicate to maneuver around than a remembrancer like this dropt into this life the calm aftermath of great hope and of wild and fervent provocations. But there's something swift and deep between them which

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accommodates intrusion which moves the two of them after a while into their kitchen where each with the other they find again their familiarity of meat and I don't believe that we will wine. (for if thou diest my love meet again I know not where to go) within the minds of those who remember us or that our beliefs will survive their light retained by the dreamers who walk across our bones scrape us from their bootsoles. I note where the pistol has fallen and will neither forgive nor forget.

### ANEURYSM AFTERSHOCKS I Stahl

A thin woman sitting on the beach becomes enveloped in a low bank of thick fog.

The shiny red ballon turns blue two minutes after it is pierced by a sharp needle.

Plath taped window and doorsill gaps before she turned on the gas.

My vision rolls left to right.
What do I see in the corner?
Dissect the pain; exorcise the defective.

If I were you, my love, I'd revise ten times, paring to the perfect word. How do I pare my thoughts?

This morning's neologism is polyglotis! Spanish, German, French. If only the brain went on and off like a baseball cap.



SMOTHER Acrylic and Wood Collage Albert Kogel

# THAT WHICH MAKES US PERFECT Zachary Kluckman

You bottleneck into your blouse,

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looking like nothing so much as a shoe-tree,

and I laugh at the weak analogy. Your raised eyebrow shoots a question

that seems to carry a warning. I shrug and suggest a quick ghosting.

Married this long, you know what I mean; a moaning and movement beneath sheets.

I'd like to consider you tempted, but you remind me we're already late.

I wonder if it's kinder to suggest a different shirt, or less dangerous earrings.

Honestly, you only change clothes when I say that what you're wearing "looks fine" anyway,

and I'm armed with a knowledge of your molting. A simple changing of clothes becoming a rite

of passage, like skin piercings or tattoos. You'll forgive me if we're late,

hate me briefly if someone comments on the nearly indiscernible sweat stain I failed to mention near the small of your back,

even though I find it more feminine, more real than all the adornment and jewels.

In the end, I don't tell you. You might see it as a crack in your perfect appearance, but I cover this small apprehension with my hand. Find that it makes me feel closer to your naked skin,

as if the once-was sweat made the fabric thin.

All night I laugh at the ways we cover our perfection.

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HISATSINOM MIGRATION Nancy Jacques

She collected rice grass by looking for golden stalks

bowing their heads in giving as she passed. Seed kernels, no bigger than smallest grains of sand, required separation from their mother nests. They dropped one-by-one on to the rock, until she collected just enough, like stars sinking to Earth from sky in which no moon danced.

Bent before this nourishment meant for husband, sons, and then herself, her knees upon a woven yucca mat draped in stems of sage to scent red walls that smell of sleep and fires, she takes the rolling stone into her hands, bowing into grinding movements. Back and forth, this rocking motion of creation seems also one of comfort, at times of death. Both are meant for hearths.

They will be leaving soon. This batch of bread will be the last made where her man's fingerprints are pressed in mud, the earth dried between stones set up against the cold. His fingers, once, pressed against the curves of her. His seeds, too, had dropped. She had nourished them.

They will be leaving soon, this place where sun found them even in mid-winter, this place where once the water ran, quenching thirst of people, deer, coyote, mouse, and her favorite wild onions—this place hidden high beneath the rim of many cliffs, beneath her father's fathers, as if she and her son were the Ancient Ones over which the new ones walk.

She will assemble little, leaving things arranged to care for those they love, who must not follow. She will assemble meals, leave seeds inside a bowl turned upside down and placed within the niche. He will know the meaning. He had watched her over many years,

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and watched his mother. She will unwrap their bed and leave it open, for he must be very tired.

She will unwrap one son's cradle and the smaller mat, so each will have their place. She will leave two necklaces of shell that he had brought her, so they might remember. She will leave her two sons' bighorn split-twig blessings for their hunts, and she will leave her favorite sewing needle by the fire, her ladle, other bowls, and cherished belt.

She will leave the snake to tell them of the times. She will stretch its skeleton unnaturally straight upon the floor, so they might see on entering. She will break its back three times, remove its head, and point it to the west. Her family will understand, will enter in; no one else must.

The flour ground, she adds water and the last fat left from old bear's life. She rolls the mix into tiny balls stone size, like those her sons once skipped across the river. Pressing each one flat upon her favorite cooking rocks, the flour cooks golden, like shafts from which the seeds had come.

She binds up two deer hides, inserting in her carrier two bowls, dried berries, meat—and last, the bread. As her last son waits, facing

the east, she kneels and sweeps her hands across the earth where she has slept, drawing a spiral within the space. And rising one last time, she turns and leaves what must be left behind.

"...That man used to turn into a cat, a coyote, a fox, and a great horned owl." — Ascencion Solorsano

Sooner or later, most men turn into cats. Their legs get springy and ready to pounce. They'll stay out late and come home singing.

Some become coyotes, high legged and loose walking. You wouldn't trust them, nor the foxes you don't let near the henhouse.

But this wizard could leap into a great horned owl before anyone saw what happened, and put on its far-seeing night eyes and the owl's way of swiveling its head to catch anything in back watching.

He would fly in and out of branches and the moon, fierce with night power, his claws ready for any smaller live thing. He'd take what he wanted whole.

They killed him when they saw how he went after women and took them, willing or not.

They burned his body afterward.

What if some part of him grew of itself, or nourished another creature on mercilessness?

Better that he disappear into the air.

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## EYE

Rachel Toliver

Once, there was a girl who found herself on the surface of an eye. The eye bent with the endless bend of the

earth, and the girl bent with the eye. You'd think an eye would be a sort of funhouse mirror, wouldn't you? That it'd reflect a freakish figure—her legs curving like tusks, her torso a long smear. But this girl liked herself there, in that eye. She felt more like the self that walked and spoke was the mutant, teetering on thumbtack legs and cleaving crowds with her scythe of a nose. Actually, she was a mutant on a good day. On a bad day, she just wasn't there at all—or, at least, no-one saw her, which amounts to mostly the same thing. But in the eye she was crystalline and lean; in the eye, her profile followed the line of beauty. And it goes without saying that she was visible. I mean, having an entire eye all to yourself is a pretty good way to get yourself seen, isn't it?

Whose eye? you might ask. Sometimes the eye settled into a particular socket like a bird in a nest. For an early instance, when she was in eleventh grade and liked Bruce K., the eye nestled in Bruce K.'s face. The optic nerves clamped down into his brain, pincering themselves in. As she was getting dressed in the morning, the eye that was Bruce K.'s eye already saw how good she looked in her favorite corduroys and her fitted 70s shirt, the one with the neon flowers. That eye noticed how its polyester sat, trampoline-flat, on her taut tummy. She knew that pimples dilated all over her face, but in Bruce K.'s eye, they shrunk, like the zits in a time-elapsed Clearasil commercial. Bruce K.'s eye even followed her, a private investigator, when Bruce K. wasn't around. As she crested from the subway on a rainy day, it

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lingered behind reflective windows in a café across the street. That eye noticed her gracefully burgeoning umbrella; it saw how the neat a-line of her skirt and her nice heels lent her the look of a 50s movie star. How Hepburned she is, Bruce K.'s eye would think, as her image burned into its retina. One day, however, the girl found out that Bruce K. was going out with

Linda S. The eye immediately ripped itself from him, its optic nerves trailing like streamers in the wind.

The eye wasn't just reserved for boys she liked, though. In her second year of college, her friend told her that James had a crush on her. James' face was sandpapery with acne; he had long hair and a mold-like beard that attempted to cover up the acne. He had a girlish laugh that she wasn't fond of, and in fact, she wasn't attracted to him at all. Still, because she knew that James liked her, the eye came to roost in him. Whenever she was around James, she saw him seeing her through the eye, and the optic nerves pulsed like live wires. When the eye was in James, she was a statue of Venus, but with all the parts—and, of course, decently clothed, in a splashy strapless dress and knee-high boots. No nudist amputee was she! The eye, in James, watched her as she sipped from a mug or lit a cigarette, and the eye marveled.

Sometimes—mostly when she didn't like anybody, and wasn't aware that anybody liked her—the eye floated, and could belong to anybody. In these situations, the eye also divided like an amoeba, becoming six, ten or a hundred eyes. As she prepared herself to go out, the girl prepared herself for the eye, because she knew it could be anywhere. She applied mascara, its brush licking her lustrous lashes, like in the Lancome ad. She knew, as she got ready, that the eye would be peeping at the mothwing dusting of her light-blue eye shadow. For the eye's sake, she blow dried her hair straight, so that it fell dark and full as a pelt around her shoulders.

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Once she was at the bar, she'd amuse herself by playing find the eye. Was it in the man with the filigree of tattoos on his forearms? Or, maybe, the serious, dark-browed one? What about the guy whose smile made neat parentheses? When she located the sockets that could house the eye, she located herself. There she was—sundress cradling breasts, neat in-

clipping waist. She laughed with her friends and cracked jokes, and the eye was impressed by her warmth and wit. She almost never left the bar with any of those guys—but, then again, she had the company of the eye. The eye followed her on her sassy, independent walk home, documenting what the guys had missed out on.

Sometimes a different sort of eye followed the girl. You should picture the eye I've been describing thus far as an eye that glints with an obsidian keenness—a canny and voracious eye. Now, imagine another eye, one that's rheumy or bubbling with sties, its iris drifting like a fish. Every so often, the girl found herself in this kind of a pariah-eye. Though she wouldn't like to admit it, most of the time this sick eye showed up in other women. For instance, it would find its way into the girl who picked nervously at zits, or the one whose stomach slung out like a mule-sack. Looking through this eye, other women compared her butterfly lips with their paperclip lips; they compared their lackluster befores to her shimmery after. This other eye was a sideline-eye, the eye of the cornercringers. Of course, this eye didn't necessarily preclude dudes, so long as they were hunch-snuffers or spray-stutterers—ones with no chance, ever. There was one man, an acquaintance of a friend, whose walk resembled that of a flat-foot circus bear. He always tried to talk to the girl and her friends when he saw them at the bar, rambling on and on about the quixoticies of local politics. The crip-eye had permanent residence in that guy. And what was the use of this other eye? you ask. This other

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eye, of course, was an eye of contrast, an eye of envy. An eye of *I-am*, an eye of *you-aren't*.

The girl was well-acquainted with this sort of eye, more so than she'd like to admit, actually. As a kid—and off and on after that, even when Bruce K. saw her, even when

lames saw her—this was the eye that had resided in her, the eye that she'd resided in. Whenever she was out with a group of friends, that nasty eye closed itself around her. From the dark, seething cave of that eye, she'd watch the other girls. These other girls had lips like halved strawberries and wore big, silver hoop earrings. They knew all about things that she didn't know about, like the Beastie Boys and the guys' beloved stand-up comedians. Their teeth shone porcelain and their legs looked like legs that Gillette razors coasted across. The girl watched eyes gliding over those other girls, watched the irises rising toward their faces, irrevocable as a tide. She knew why the eye of desire wasn't for her, why even her first boyfriend pointed out other girls, saying, I think she's really hot. First, the girl's posture curled shrimpishly; second, her stomach parachuted out from her body. Third, she wore too many layers of too-big clothing, and looked somewhat like the Michelin Man. Fourth, her glasses bulged over her face like the headlights of a cartoon car.

But time passes, and thighs deflate, and contact lenses turn losers into prom queens. And so, one day, the girl recognized herself in a different eye. This eye arched her into the mien of an African queen and anointed her brow with aloofness. Guys that she'd met before—in the Bruce K. years, the James years—didn't recognize her, but said, I'd definitely remember it if I met you before.

By the time she was in her mid-twenties, after a few boyfriends and a few pounds lost, the girl had pretty much gotten used to herself in the new, shiny eye. It was around this 71

time that she sort of went out with a handsome philosophy grad student, David H., who lived in another city. During that time, the eye was his eye, and it plastered everything around her, everywhere she went. The eye that was David H.'s eye lurked in the jungular graffiti when she walked through bad parts of town; it stretched out, like cellophane, over the sky.

In his coy, blue eye, she lived and moved and had her being. As she wrote e-mails to him, David H.'s eye was the cursor winking at her, the period at the end of every sentence. She re-read the annals of those e-mails, knowing that the self she wrote would be encoded into David H.'s eye, tunneling through his optic nerve and into his brain. Each missive inscribed her body, conjured the ivory handle of her hip and her slatted ribs, which he'd so admired. She wrote about going out to a club, and David H.'s eye was the disco ball above her when she danced, scattering its leopard-print light over her halter top and size 4 jeans. Once, in a phone conversation, David H. told her that he found her house on Google world, and that he was sure it was hers because of the little rectangular roof out back (they'd kissed sitting on it once) and the magnolia trees next to it (the magnolia trees had looked on). She was delighted, and from then on, she knew that the internet was a giant, pulsing eye, that its cables and invisible signals were all buzzing and humming in service to the eye.

When she and David H. sort of broke up, she missed his eye more than she missed him. To tell the truth, David M.'s eye still sometimes bounced along next to her shoulder, like Snow White's twittering bird-buddies. Even her quiet, routine moments—coming home and inserting the key into her mailbox, putting a can of beer down in its ring of water—imprinted themselves on David H.'s eye. But that eye was mostly just an eye of habit. After all, she and David H. were still friends. The girl still wrote to him about her exploits, not as much as before, but at least four or five times a week. She

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hosted a dinner party—arranging brie and grapes just so on a plate, arranging herself just so in sheer black, with an onyx choker at her throat. She went to hear her favorite blues band play, and knew all the words, and knew that her cowboy boots were the perfect contrast with her shimmery skirt. In these moments, David H.'s eye was an orphan-on-a-rainy-night

eye, the eye of a wayward Dickens character down on his luck. That disinherited, cast-off eye looked into her happy parlor, where she laughed and danced and entertained. How could I have been such a fool? the eye of David H. would ask itself. His eye was sad and isolated, and it cried itself to sleep. Poor eye, out in the dark, on the other side of the bright that buttered her window! When she thought of that outside eye, the girl placed herself, thinking: here you are here, and she exhaled a perfect purl of smoke, and she settled just right in her face.

A little while after that, the girl was drinking her morning coffee at work and browsing through the Craigslist Missed Connections. She and her friends often e-mailed each other funny links from the page, ones that were especially desperate or creepy—"Yo nice nipples at Exit on Sunday," and such. Though she'd never ally herself with the peerers and leerers posting on the site, the girl was drawn to those missed connections. The postings made the girl feel like the city was teeming with eyes—eyes scoping out from the shrinkwrapped meat at Trader Joe's, eyes oogling through movie theater semi-dark. Since she fancied herself an on and off writer, she told herself that she was just conducting research, finding inspiration for her stories. But you can imagine how her heart skittered when she read, "Long brown hair, 13 trolley line to UPenn-m4w-29." And there it was, with an attached disclaimer that it was not OK to contact this eye with services or other commercial interests:

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Long brown hair, 13 trolley to Penn, around 9 this morning. You had your headphones on, so I didn't want to disturb you, but I thought that you were beautiful. We made eye contact. I was wearing grey jeans and a blue Fred Perry t-shit; you were wearing a jean skirt and very flattering blazer. You walked down

37<sup>th</sup> Street when you got off the trolley. I wish I had talked to you.

The girl was very happy. She went into the bathroom, washed her hands, and checked herself in the mirror—yes, that was her. There she was, with her hair epauletting the shoulders of her blazer. There were her black-lacquered eyes, yes, and the neat wingspread of her collar bones, which he was sure to have seen. Everything was in its right place, pallor where pallor should be and color where color should be. She was a totality—a jean skirt, sleek and unbulged, a nice pair of silver hoops in her ears—and this wearer of Fred Perry had seen this totality, and had called it *beautiful*. True, she hadn't actually made eye contact with him—but all the better, for the eye had taken it upon itself to contact *her*.

The girl began composing her commuter self for this new eye, making sure that she was made up every morning and that her coat adequately matched her outfit. When her alarm clock rang, eagerness for the eye tore her from sleep's maw immediately. No longer the grapple for the snooze button, no longer the eeking-out of a few more minutes' sleep. On the trolley, she used to sag, morning-lagged, in her plastic seat. But now she wrenched the bent coat hanger of her posture into a straight and proper shape. At each stop along the route, she plumbed the eyes of men that stepped aboard—eyes sheathed in clunky glasses, eyes ruffled by nice lashes, eyes green and lively, eyes brown and pensive. Eyes opened and opened and opened all the way to work. She

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trembled with anticipation, waiting for the eye to finally find her, but also hoping that it didn't, for she loved this eye as it was, fluid and ubiquitous.

One night, she was at home drinking beer with her roommates, girl-gabby and happy. She told her confidants

about the Craigslister, all the while thinking of a camera-blink-and-cut-to the eye guy, sitting in a nearby bar, telling his best buddy all about her. In terse buddy-terms, he'd say, Man, ever since I saw her, I cannot get her out of my mind. Then a nodding buddy-silence, and the swigging down of a synchronized, meditative swig. Her roommates said the things that the girlfriends say—Oh my gosh, you totally have to e-mail him and Just go out on one date, it would help you get over David. So, the girl, in the flush of the moment, wrote an e-mail to pers-6273762@craigslist.org. Hey, Fred Perry, it read, I'm the girl from the trolley. Just wanted to volley back that serve. Oh, and I've been keeping my headphones off these days. The e-mail was so witty, so savvy, the eye watered with laughter.

The day the girl met the eye-holder at a coffee shop, she wore a modest white blouse and jeans that just cusped the dual crests of her hips, a look sure to imprint itself immediately upon the eye. A tall man wearing a black Fred Perry walked in, and his vision swung, like a North-jerked compass needle, immediately to the girl. It is you! he said. The details of the date needn't be related. I'll just say that the man had perfectly angled cheekbones and that his hair was dark and mussed just enough. That he was a young geology professor at the university where the girl worked and that it was easy to imagine him in front of a classroom, chalk paused in a moment of discombobulated, Hugh Grantish charm. That his name was Daniel and that his frame was taut and trim. That his blue eyes kept darting to her and scooting away, like

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a wild animal being tamed. The girl buzzed from the coffee and from him. She told him a funny story about one of her boss' many faux-pas, and he leaned toward her. The eye inflated, expanding up and out into space, and her image expanded with it, till it really did feel like there was nothing in the world

but the seeing of her, the being of her—the snake-curl of her slender wrist, the lilt of her laugh.

Coffee that day lead to a walk in the park a few days later, lead to dinner, lead to a play, lead to sun-slathered mornings in bed. He took her sailing on his boat; their white smiles matched the white sails, and his blue eyes matched the water skimming in furrows beneath them. Daniel wrapped his arms around her and her skirt fanned in the wind, and the scene was a Yahoo! personals ad, with a caption reading Lost and Found or First date to first dance. Everything was perfect—but something was wrong. As the girl and Daniel cooked dinner in his chrome-sleek kitchen, the girl felt like she was blinked-out, blocked-out—in other words, not really there. The girl was nymph-thin in a light green sheath, and Daniel danced with her while the pasta boiled, his hand resting on her hip. He caressed the contours of her face, reading them like Braille. All of these things were things that happened in the eye, sure—but they weren't things that happened in real life. The hand passing over the face, and the face it passed over, belonged to the realm of the eye, not the realm of air and tasteful track lighting. The girl tried and tried to establish herself there, in the shelter of Daniel's hands. She repeated her old mantra of: here you are here you are here, but it reversed itself to: are you here are you here are you? In stepping out from the eye and into completeness, the girl lost herself completely.

But how can that be, you ask, when she'd finally become all that she was in the eye? But who can diagram the strange

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properties of an eye such as this? Who can explain the mechanisms by which its vision worked? Who can so easily divide the seeing from the being-seen—and who can say which one is better? Perhaps—if one were to be fanciful—one could say that the eye became jealous of Daniel seeing the girl.

Perhaps the eye was lonely and wanted the girl back. Maybe it resented the fact that she had peeled her beauty right off its surface, when it was the one that made her beautiful in the first place. The eye had done so much for her, and this was how she treated it? I mean, who had given Bruce K. that admiring eye, when he clearly never was interested in the girl? Who'd filled David's eye with so much regret, when he was the one who'd broken up with her in the first place?

Daniel took the girl to meet his parents, genteel folks with starched tablecloths. They found her charming, but the her they found charming didn't seem to be her. She and Daniel sat, cozied up in front of his parents' fireplace, flames reflecting amber light on their attractive faces. She was curled, tiny and lovely, her hair ermine, swept around on one shoulder. When he murmured *I love you*, the girl tried to locate that loved girl, but found nothing, no-one. She knew then what she had to do. As they were driving home, she told Daniel that she couldn't see him anymore. The highway headlights coasted over his shocked face. She couldn't give any reason, other than *I just can't really* see us together.

The next morning, the girl woke up, had a cry, and fixed herself a cup of tea. She sat at the wooden table in her kitchen, lean and salted and solitary. Her bathrobe cinched in neatly, and her mascara left coal-colored tracks on her cheeks. She sat there for a long time, putting herself together. Daniel's eye came to see her—how wan and tragic she was, how the grey ashes of her endless cigarettes matched the grey of the rain-silvered day matched the grey of the Eliot Smith CD she

listened to over and over. Daniel's eye observed how she pooled in singularity, saw how the she that she was, was. And there she was again, bending with the bend of the eye, all the more lovely for her pale, thin sorrow. Slowly, she began to recognize herself once more, re-applying herself to the eye

like a contact lens. Her cigarette-puckered lips were the lips of one who had loved and lost, and her profile gelled into her—tragic without, but whole within. Like someone walking down a hall of their childhood house in the dark half-asleep, she traced all that she was—here the mole just below the nose, here the comma-like dips at her shoulder blades. In the inventory of her parts, she was checked and checked.

The girl sipped her tea. The eye that was Daniel's eye longed to see her once again, and saw her, and missed her. And just like that, she found herself back again, at home on the eye once more. She settled in, her body bending with the endless bend of the earth. Each part of her plastered to the eye in perfect proportion, as she blew a thread of smoke. And it goes without saying that she stayed in the eye, wherever she went, that day and the next day and the day after. And, in fact, the girl kept herself there—right there on that beautiful eye—for all the rest of her known days. And she and the eye lived happily ever after—just the two of them, singular and settled, confirmed and firm as the firmament itself.



TWO HEADS Wood and Acrylic Collage Albert Kogel

LAZARA M.E. Wakamatsu

I. She was barely six weeks along when she told him and he chased her

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out the trailer into the swamp where she sloshed through greenish-black muck the color of alligators she'd seen come right up to the trailer and snap up small dogs, so she ran and ran picking up her feet as soon as they lighted wishing she could fly instead, she stumbled over fallen branches through velvet curtains of brown leaves through sea of darkness and air too thick to breathe. Wide-mouthed, she gasped and wetness dripped down temples down chicken neck down hair stuck in long strands that flapped against her back plastered with mustard and memories of asthma and other vises like his knee on her cracking sternum, like his fingers around her scrawny neck, like blood bubbling in her stomach, crawling up her throat and gurgling in her ears where Atlas stirs and boyish shoulders broaden and internal bleeding becomes the body and blood of Christ amen.

2. They were barely six weeks out of the hospital when the baby got sick and he threw her out the red-floored bedroom and she landed arms here

legs there in the tiny bathroom.

"Levantate hija de la chingada," boomed the Redwing boot as it rolled her onto the linoleum-floored kitchen where she finally got to her feet and ran through the living room.

You should go to the U; maybe they can teach you to be a mother.

Cucarachas y culebras he spat at the back of her head now whizzing out the Arizona Room just beyond his mother's hand around his head pounding, pounding the floor of his adobe childhood home.

3.
He didn't want to move to the house on Lee no matter how nice it was.
He was the man and she'd found it—she'd rented it, y el era el macho, que no?
Pues tendrás que empacar tu porque yo me voy camping.
She should've left his ass then llevarse a su hijo y dejarlo, pero no, a'i va con todas sus garras hasta que cayo rendida en su nueva casa donde la pintura de la Sevillana

que en realidad es una gitana disfrazada de Española, lo observa todo. Mientras duermen, lo desviste con los ojos y bajo el traje descubre llagas supurientas que le arden con el aire, con la luz.
Las gitanas curan con las manos
y con el alma cauterizan lo malo
y lo feo también.
A los seis meses, la arranco de la pared
y con la rodilla la hizo ciscos
lanzándolos a la chimenea hasta verla achicharrar
como a tantas mujeres se les quema por sábelo-todo.
Andi, cabrona.
Lo que no sabia es que
there's more where she came from.

#### 4.

It was six weeks after they moved in to Sixth Street that he came home smelling of the ocean and threw the glass of Merlot against the wall because her cousin was just too hard to resist and it was her fault for moving them there anyway, so that settled it—she was stupid y re-fea la hija de la chingada so he threw her into the shower a'i como caiga. Contra la tina elbows and knees retumban so he turned on the hot water to drown it out y pa' que se le quite lo negra a la cabrona. Maybe a scalding shower will do her good, make her güera, like her cousin, si no, a la otra, le echo cal.

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5.
Six weeks after they moved to Encanto she left.
The ribs healed, the bruises faded the swelling down.

Gone were the thuds against porcelain tub the crash of glass against wall the blow of fist into belly boot against ribs palm smacking cheekbone fist against eye socket knuckles against lip. Gone was the wild smell of blood the salt of tears and mocos. Gone were memories of fideo first grade Arnold... so she took to the sea like a lemming, pero la revolución requiere destrozar lo malo y conservar lo bueno probado - Lenin

6.

She had such silky skin. He could pretend he was in Persia inside a tent of yeils

where Sheherezade told her thousand and one tales, but unlike the Sultan he forced the issue and she thrashed like a shark and that brought him back to the Brown Foothills where the clay is black and good for sculpting,

back to the leather couch where she lay pinned inside, back to the passion or rage he felt for her and that last bastion of resistance, the one that dared him, mocked him in his sleep, awoke him in the middle of the night. He was being nice. He wanted her to stay, but there she went thrashing about, until he couldn't stand it anymore, so he flung the whiskey in her face and her corneas sizzled and she smiled. The cleansing she needed burned through layer upon layer of inertia of paralysis burned. On the sixth day, God said, let us make man in our image and likeness... and when she rose. He saw that she was good.

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# THE UNIVERSAL POET Kenneth Pobo

At 16, I wanted to be immortal:

Sappho, Shakespeare,

Dickinson, Pobo. Writing teachers said to live forever,

a poet must be universal. They meant heterosexual, I learned

later. When I fell in love, I got tired of addressing my lover as "you"

to keep universal. Once I quit trying to be eternal and universal, I found many

heterosexuals could be small and selective, their universe closed. My universe

had stars, super novas, lovers moving over me like storms, petals.

### DINNER Susan H. Maurer

I see thru yr eyes& nose he says staring at me strangely. What are you talking about, I ask. I'm thinking about sculpting you.

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He's thinking about murdering me in marble killing me in stone or having the d.t.s, I think.

Watching his fine hands splay on the table top almost not breathing when he leans slightly forward and I can almost hear his long muscles move

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### **DOWNTOWN**

Raymond Cavanaugh

I used to hang out at the monument. I have no idea what the thing commemorated, but to me it represented countless wasted hours. It was the popular spot for a ramshackle collection of disaffected small-town youths, who were referred to as "monumites" and who'd sit around antagonizing one another while they waited for a connection to bring in some contraband from the city. The monument was across from the shopping plaza and downtown bus stop, and so it was a prime location for observing the routines of various people, three of whom stood out in my mind.

There was Miss Allen, who lived in a loft above the long-since-closed Warwick Theatre. About every other day, she'd venture from her bachelorette pad and trek to the bus stop. By this bus stop was a mailbox - a short, squat, nondescript-looking piece of government property. But Miss Allen saw something different; she blamed the mailbox for ruining her life. She'd spit at it, kick it, and scream obscenities so shrill they seemed to spurt from the very depths of her psychotic hell. Such behavior would last a quarter-hour or so, before the outbound bus would come, at which point Miss Allen would stop her antics, and board the bus as tamely as a nun. Though it made for an interesting fifteen minutes the first time I saw it, Miss Allen's carrying-on soon lost its mystique. Nobody else seemed to pay her much notice; yuppies, cops, even postal workers would walk right past her as if she were an off-key street musician. And so the performances went on, until one day she stopped screaming at the mailbox, ignored the bus, and just sat on the sidewalk like a child; she was soon shipped off to a group home on the outskirts of town, where, under supervision, she'd stand straight as a lighthouse in the

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communal front yard garden, perhaps waiting for just one more outbound bus.

There was Officer Cheswick, the stray cat detective, whose exploits were immortalized every week in the town paper's police log. He'd often swing by to curse monumites and other pubescent stragglers for "not doing anything" with their lives. Then he'd park his siren-topped Ford Explorer in the downtown plaza and strut into Starbucks for another

cappuccino. This blue-collar yuppie never forgot his gritty patrolman's roots, and from time to time would remind us that if we ever caused him to drop his cappuccino, he'd pick up his baton. Cheswick was stubborn in his concept of a small town and was the community's most vocal anti-immigration crusader. When the minority population skyrocketed to a half-dozen, he went around saying that the place was doomed, and soon transferred to some "unspoiled" Vermont logging village.

The third downtown character was by far my favorite to observe. His name was Mr. P, and that single initial was, to the best of my knowledge, all that anyone knew. He'd say that we needn't trouble him about his name, and, in return, he wouldn't trouble us about ours. He was somewhat tall and stout and appeared to be a bit past middle age, though no one knew for sure. What remained of his stringy light-colored hair was always combed back, and he was always clean-shaven; in fact, the man's appearance was impeccably clean, and his formality of dress bordered on the absurd – his clothes looked straight out of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. He would've made a splendid Ben Franklin.

But Mr. P was not a diplomat or a scientist; he was an avid photographer and patron of the arts, more specifically, adolescent artwork...any adolescent artwork. My partner in cannabis, Jamie, scored fifty bucks from him in exchange for a pair of hastily drawn cartoons. For some time I'd been wondering how Jamie, a product of public housing, was able to

afford his weed. Brooding over the prospect of my parents' tax-dollars financing this free high school lunch recipient's pot habit (especially since he insisted on taking the first hit off any joints we shared), I finally asked Jamie how the hell he was able to raise the funds for all this herb, seeing as how he was legally impoverished and had never worked a day in his life. And so he told me about the cartoons.

The money was tempting. I'd never considered myself much of an artist, but for fifty bucks, I was thinking, I could find enough inspiration to crank out a few dinky cartoons. I took a newspaper, copied some work from the funny pages, and the next time Mr. P came downtown, I approached him. He held my shamelessly plagiarized artwork in his hands and looked at it like a true connoisseur before telling me that I was quite talented and that he'd be interested in purchasing my art, as long as I'd be willing to "do some photos."

Some photos? I didn't see the connection at first, so I asked him again, and he repeated his offer, only this time he said the word "photos" with a strange touch of sentiment and opened his eyes wide, like he was begging me to understand how much it'd mean to him. There was something peculiar about those eyes. I didn't know exactly what. But whatever it was, I wasn't sure it was worth fifty bucks.

Annoyed that my artistic endeavor yielded no profit, I confronted Jamie with this business about "doing some photos." Jamie shrugged and mumbled something about it being good money. Into our second joint, we were feeling relaxed and were chuckling over some sweet nonsense, when Jamie pulled this wad of cash from a pants pocket. He shuffled the bills like a professional gambler and gave me a weird look. Upon exhaling another cloud of smoke, I asked Jamie what the hell he had to do to get *that* much money. He made this kinky gesture. Then he shrugged. Then he began laughing. The laughter grew more and more intense. I'd never seen

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someone laugh so hard. It seemed like there'd be no end to his laughter.



Pierus

**Raymond Cavanaugh** graduated from Boston College in 2006. He now works for an ethnic newspaper. His work has been published in 96Inc, Adbusters, and Journal of the American Medical Association.

Of **Wendell Berry's** 40+ books, for poetry try Farming: A Handbook or The Country Of Marriage then The Selected Poems; for fiction, The Memory Of Old Jack then Jayber Crow; for essays, The Unsettling Of America then The Way Of Ignorance. Of the finer qualities a writer may exhibit as a man or a man as a writer, Wendell Berry is a humble compendium of living proof.

**B.J. Buckley** is a Wyoming/Montana poet and writer who has worked in Arts in Schools programs throughout the west for over 30 years. Her most recent book, with co-author Dawn Senior-Trask, is *Moon Horses and the Red Bull*, from Pronghorn Press in Greybull, Wyoming. She has poems in *Epiphany*, *Pilgimage*, and the online magazine, *HoboEye*.

**K.E. Duffin's** book of poems, *King Vulture*, was published by University of Arkansas Press in 2005. Her work has appeared in *Agni*, *Harvard Review*, *Hunger Mountain*, *Ploughshares*, *Poetry*, *Rattapallax*, and *Sewanee Review*. *Poetry Daily* and *Verse Daily* have featured her poems. Duffin lives at Inkspot, an artists' cooperative in Somerville, Mass. She was awarded a Massachusetts Cultural Council Artist Grant and a Berkshire Taconic A.R.T. grant for cliché-verre, a medium that combines painting, photography, and printmaking.

Born in Florence, Alabama, **Stephanie Dugger** is a graduate student at Austin Peay State University in Clarksville,

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Joy Fox studied ceramics at UCLA with Laura Anderson, independently with Paul Soldner at Claremont College and sculpture at the University of Arizona with Don Haskins. She has lived, worked and studied the birds at Rancho Linda Vista, a community of the Arts in Oracle, Arizona, since 1968. A constant source of inspiration has been the surrounding desert: the geology, plant and animal forms and the art of its early peoples.

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Nancy Jacques is a writer and artist living in Durango, Colorado. Her work has appeared in New West, E: The Environmental Magazine, Arts Perspective Magazine, San Juan Mountain Journal, Telluride Watch. Her political columns appear regularly in the Durango Herald. She is author of The Heartcore Alternative: Reinterpreting Our Relationships to Each Other and Earth in a Global Age, published in 2001.

**Zachary Kluckman** lives in a state of animated suspension in Albuquerque, where he publishes and produces poetry for television, page and stage. Recently, his poetry has found its way to radio and film as well. Founder of the world's premier poetry advocacy agency, NM Poetry Tangents, Kluckman has

published and performed broadly. Recent publications include *Plain Spoke*, The Dos Passos Review and Looking Back to Place. His new manuscript is The Bone-Fly Files.

Willie James King resides in Montgomery, Alabama. He holds an MFA from Queens University, Charlotte, NC. He has published widely, been nominated for four Pushcarts, and his latest book, *The House in the Heart*, was released by Tebot Bach, with a foreword by Cathy Smith-Bowers. Those wishing to can contact the poet may do so at <a href="mailto:will3ki@aol.com">will3ki@aol.com</a> King teaches at Notasulga High School, Tuskegee Public Schools.

Albert Kogel makes art in Tucson, Arizona, attended by his Corgi, Sabe, who appears in many of his works. In the permanent collections of such places as the Tucson Museum of Art and the Museum of Texas Tech University, his work has won several awards, including a fellowship to the Vermont Studio Center. Educated in Germany and at the University of Arizona, Kogel is a Professor of Art at Cochise College in Sierra Vista, Arizona.

Amy Letter is a writer and artist living in South Florida whose work has appeared or is forthcoming in Louisiana Literature, storySouth, Fringe Magazine, Relief, Aced Magazine, Specs, Perigee, and others. She holds an MFA from the University of Arkansas and currently teaches creative writing and literature to undergraduates at Florida Atlantic University. More at http://amyletter.com

**Susan Maurer's** latest collection of poems, *Maerchen*, about the Celts and Druids, is just out from Maverick Duck Press. Her other collection, *Raptor Rhapsody*, was released by Poets Wear Prada. Over 400 of Maurer's poems appeared in fourteen countries. You can hear her read her work on Hypster.

**Charlotte Muse** is working on a collection of poems based on the words of Ascencion Solorsano, a famous healer and the last native speaker of the Mutsun tribe of California, who built the Mission San Juan Bautista. Before she died in 1930, Dona Ascencion, told John Harrington, the Smithsonian's leading ethnologist, all that she could of her language, her life, and the stories of her people. Muse won a prize in the 2006 Joy Harjo Poetry Competition, published in *CUTTHROAT* 2.

**Kenneth Pobo** has a new book of poems, *Glass Garden*, just out from WordTech Press. His online chapbook, Crazy Cakes, can be accessed at http://scars.tv. He teaches Creative Writing and English at Widener University in Pennsylvania. Catch his "Obscure Oldies" radio show on Saturdays from 6-8pm EST at WDNR.com.

**Peggy Sarjeant** lives in Seattle, Washington, with her husband, two teenagers, two 110- pound Bernese Mountain Dogs and a cat that rules the world. She writes best in the hills above the Chewuch River on the dry side of the Cascades. One of her stories was awarded the Albert and Elaine Borchard Fellowship for Fiction at the Tomales Bay Writers' Workshops; a second story is forthcoming in *The Portland Review*. Peggy has practiced general Pediatrics for eighteen years.

**J. Stahl** lives in Tucson, Arizona with her husband and 16 year old son, two dogs and a cat named Tiger. She is a Registered Nurse, who also has a Masters in English Literature from the University of Arizona. Her book reviews and feature articles have appeared in *The Tucson Weekly*. This is her first poetry publication.

**Alison Carb Sussman** lives in New York City with her husband and anarchistic cat. By day she minds pets and by

night she reads the poetry she didn't read in college and graduate school. Her poems have appeared in such publications as Anthology of Magazine Verse & Yearbook of American Poetry, California Quarterly, Earth's Daughters, Iconoclast, Jewish Currents, and Slipstream. Her online publications include Poets Against War, and The Rogue Gallery. Alison won Amelia Magazine Awards for two poems.

**Rachel Toliver** has work published or forthcoming in *Philly Fiction II*, *Alligator Juniper* and *Geez*. Toliver works as the Managing Editor of the Journal of Modern Literature, and moonlights as an adjunct professor in Temple University's English department. She lives in bucolic West Philadelphia, and disagrees with all the nasty things people say about Philly.

M.E. Wakamatsu was born in the border town of San Luis R.C. Sonora, Mexico, the daughter of a Mexican mother and Japanese father. Her work appears in Southwestern Women New Voices and Cantos al Sexto Sol. She produced From the Lair, A Spoken Word Poetry CD and Speakwater: Regando La Frontera--A Multimaterial Visual Poetry Installation. She teaches High School English and Creative Writing in Tucson, Arizona. Her awards include the 2008 Mary Ann Campau Memorial Fellowship.

**Gail Wronsky** is the author or coauthor of seven books, including *Dying for Beauty* (Copper Canyon Press, 2000), *The Love-talkers* (Hollyridge Press, 2001), *Poems for Infidels* (Red Hen Press, 2005), and *Volando Bajito*, translator (Red Hen Press, 2005). Her poems, essays, and reviews have appeared in many journals and anthologies, including *Poets Against The War*.. She is Director of Creative Writing and Syntext (Sythesizing Textualities) at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, and a frequent instructor in the Prague Summer Program.