



CUTTHROAT,  
A JOURNAL OF THE ARTS  
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**2009 JOY HARJO POETRY PRIZE**  
and  
**RICK DEMARINIS SHORT STORY PRIZE**

**\$1250 1<sup>st</sup> & \$250 2<sup>nd</sup> plus publication**

**JUDGES**

**Dorianne Laux, Poetry**  
**Alan Cheuse, 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 author's name, address, phone & email, title(s) of submission, SASE for announcement of winners (all mss. recycled) and a \$15 nonrefundable entry fee per submission made to CUTTHROAT, A JOURNAL OF THE ARTS postmarked by **October 10, 2009**. UNPUBLISHED WORK ONLY! No work that has already won a prize is eligible. No author name may appear on the ms. If a SASE is not included, the entry will be disqualified. Enter as often as you wish. Multiple submissions okay, but we must be informed immediately of acceptances elsewhere. Finalists considered for publication. Winners published in CUTTHROAT and announced on our website, in POETS & WRITERS and AWP CHRONICLE. No relative of or staff member of CUTTHROAT is eligible to enter our contests.



*CUTTHROAT,  
A JOURNAL OF  
THE ARTS*

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“Almighty” (etching)

RON FUNDINGSLAND

**Marvin Bell**

## **THE BOOK OF THE DEAD MAN (FOUNDRY)**

Live as if you were already dead.

Zen admonition

### *1. About the Dead Man and the Foundry*

The dead man hath founded the dead man's foundry.  
He acted in the past perfect, he funded it with clean dirt, pure water and the  
spotless air.  
Then he was melted, he was molded, he was poured and shook out.  
He was ground and sanded, he was machined to a sweet tolerance.  
The dead man took pains to stay alive, this was how.  
It was the undersong of the self, the subtext, the no-man's-land's calling.  
For the dead man was subterranean to start.  
He was the tuber in the sun, the worm warming, the root that stays put.  
The dead man became again what he was, he germinated.  
It was the foundry of the sun, the foundry of the earth's core, the foundry of  
the electric light and the dry cell.  
It was the retrofit energy that did it, the assemblage after dispersion, the kick  
in the pants we call chaos.  
We are the children of a hothouse, among orchids that grow in lava.

### *2. More About the Dead Man and the Foundry*

The foundry of the dead man pops and smolders with re-creation.  
It is recreated in the titanic and the miniature, every detail.  
Within the dead man, the same fire burns.  
The same furnace, the same raw materials that made flesh.  
The same red water, the same liquid sinew cooling.  
The dead man's foundry has made weapons and ploughshares, and those  
who use them.  
The foundry and the forge, the shapes imprisoned in the molten streams of  
rough matter, these are precursors of the human, too.  
The steam escaping from a wounded body is the foundry.  
The heat of exhalation, the blush of desire, the red sun under the skin—they  
are the foundry.  
And the high temperature of the ill, and the heat of the first foundry  
reassembling at its source.  
If you believe in the reformation of energy, then you believe as well in the  
dead man.  
He is heating up, and what is emotion?

## Jennifer Givhan

### INSEMINATION

These are not the grape flannel sheets stained familiar  
With our sleep and lovemaking, the ones we picked  
For their vibrancy and laid across our bed-universe  
With the joyous expectancy of experienced gardeners  
Tilling the soil, preparing the earth for its season of  
Growth. Years of fruitlessness have produced paper,  
Thin, white and sanitary, spread protectively beneath  
My weary body. Where I was once explored adoringly  
By soft, warm hands that melted like cocoa butter upon  
My clay-baked curves and rejoiced in the wide open  
Spaces of my earthen pots, I am now a specimen jar  
Cloaked only by a sheer, papery gown with all the  
Tenderness of a public restroom toilet seat cover, and  
Though my legs are sprawled methodically, inside  
I am sealed tight with the glue of sadness and too often  
Disappointment. My womb, a catacomb of gourd—  
Honeydew, delicata squash, chayote—all pickled and  
Preserved in cold, sterile tubes and placed among those  
Who have failed to flower. And you, my love, reduced  
To your most virile punch, washed clean of masculinity,  
Passion, privacy: Disillusionment of the plastic cup.  
Once I carried the whole world in my mind, where my  
Imagination spilled forth motherlove like thick molasses.  
Now, fractured and borderless, I cling to the hope that  
A pair of latex gloves and a long, thin catheter—filled  
With my dreams, my love, myself—will raise from the  
Dead what nature has buried in the blood-soaked vines  
Of our bed sheets. Here, doctors are gods and I pray  
On my fettered knees to Science. The glow emanating  
From my belly button has been replaced by a broad  
Strip of fluorescent lighting—but oh, thank God for  
That bulb. The pressure on my pelvis will never efface  
The pressure on my heart, where I will lie with you, love,  
In creation's still sweet embrace—amidst our field of grapes.

**ALFRED CORN**  
**WHAT THE THUNDER SAYS**

A crack a second and a third splinter as the dam breaks  
Soundbolts spiking down through granite a dynamite  
That means concussive rage battering-rams pulverizing  
Skull ribcage spine an earthquake high in the ramparts  
Stone ramparts blocking a sun no one believes ever shone

The houses collapse roof skews off to one side a broken  
Beam crushes doors windows in its crazed veer a drill  
Screams into rooms to shiver walls timbers floor ratcheting  
Through the garden spewing hoses of dirt spinning flagstones  
Into the air while a train that dives from a cloud flattens on impact

Whole quarries of rock shear off tumble smash shock their way  
Off the mountain megatons of shattered booms packed stacked  
On the air collapsing around your ears and what the din sounds  
Out is the last thought which already owns you you and yours  
Nothing holds off the thunderstone it says I am your death.

# ***CUTTHROAT* CONGRATULATES DISCOVERY POET, Emilia Phillips**

## **OUR PROGENY**

I've never done anything I couldn't apologize for,  
and even after Eden, my shoes carry the mud of paradise.  
In my pockets are the seeds of the lonely  
tree. In Cambridge, the fellows of Trinity College grow  
saplings, the posterity of Newton's apple.

When the tree on the lawn dies, the fellows chip  
the wood for mulch, and replace it. They mourn  
nothing, except eternity. They sit in its shade,  
they sit and are drawn to the ground, ears to earth,  
mistaking their footsteps on the lawn for the echoes of our own.

## FLOODING

“Closer, everything stinks  
of the speed it's being ruined”  
-- William Matthews

A dozen houses cling to a railroad bridge and it's as if they were supposed to float for miles and land here, line up neatly against the bridge like a subdivision near Des Moines. The river beats across their beams and backs and soon, the current will take

away their frames. Everything will float downstream, but we'll be left at the shore, our pants wet up to the knees, and we'll watch and we'll wait to see if one shoe or picture frame or spoon floats our way. We build our lives on destruction: the home on the flood plain, the love on human nature, the life

on loan. At the shore, what footprints we leave, the water will be sure to take away, filling and rebuilding its bank, but still, we'll come to the shore, still we'll try to leave our tracks, still we'll cup our hands and drink.

## WE HIDE FROM RAIN

Today, I wanted to write about the birds, how they descended  
onto the city like a black morning  
fog, how they hid the sunrise in the habit of their wings.

But, I couldn't care for these starlings.  
I couldn't care for the metaphors  
that rode on their wings like a plague.

Instead, I thought of yesterday's rain and how  
all rains are the same, really. Just water and maybe  
an umbrella shared between two

as they cross a field, pass battered rhododendron  
and step on black leaves. And the birds,  
they hide in the trees. I've forgotten

to believe in anything that claims to conquer the sky.  
For who or what can kiss a face shrouded  
in a black veil, who can feel the pulse

of the heartless expanse, or gather clouds  
in their holey hands? We hide from the rain beneath  
black limbs. We hide and clutch the guilt that we wear around

our necks. And when the rain lets up and the starlings remember  
their wings, we release each other like doves,  
even though we know we're never coming back.

## NIGHTBIRDS

Sometimes I let the vultures have everything.  
They scoop out the air with their wings, landing  
on the lamp your mother made, the bed post,  
the fire proof box, on your chest, then ride  
the gentle rise and fall of your dreams, or  
they wait, they are my friends. Their eyes  
swallow darkness, their beaks click  
trying to say, "please." And then,  
I surrender, giving them everything:  
the headless opossum from the four way  
stop, the squirrel seeped into the double yellow,  
a ground hog caught searching for its shadow, a beaver  
along the creek road, its tail flatter than  
before, the bobcat that denned in you,  
the hoot owl crying from the window, the wide, fat moon  
with its embarrassed, red face and the scattered,  
bread-crumbs stars that I placed there for you to find me,  
to follow me, but you are just sleeping. The room is empty.  
There is nothing between us, but your breathing.

## Andrea Khan

### TICK, TICK

Twelve years old, going on five, Grace has been raging at air all afternoon. “Sit,” Nadine orders. Miraculously, the child sits. Sets her pink Ballet Barbie tote bag in her lap and smiles at some private joke. They are on the verge of being late for Special Ed Ballet and if Nadine takes time to navigate Gracie indoors again, they will certainly miss the warm up exercises. Nadine hesitates, then decides to dash back into the house for her stash of contraband cigarettes. She’s tried gum, patches and prayer but every now and then still sneaks herself a quick sanity smoke.

Charging up the stairs, she glances back over her shoulder. Sees through the screened front door Grace bundled into her toggle-tie coat, blond bangs peeking out from her hood, rocking back and forth on the rusty old glider. *Come spring we’ll get rid of that decrepit thing*, Nadine thinks. Their little scrap of front lawn is dead with winter. Across the street two uniformed girls from Saint Mary’s Middle School are walking home. One wears knee socks instead of tights and her bare legs are red with the cold.

The plan is to shoot over to the dance school, then the post office, then hit the grocery on the way back for dinner fixings and those greasy canned potato chips Gracie likes so much. The way Nadine’s family operates is

lickety-split, like a row of cascading dominos. Everything comes to a flat stop if her pieces aren't lined up perfectly. No easy task with four kids (one whose needs are unpredictably, impossibly *special*) and a husband who is hardly ever home.

At the top of the stairs Nadine realizes that all along the cigarettes were crammed into the pocket of her jacket. Does an abrupt about-face. As she sails through the hallway, the grandfather clock warns softly, *Tick, Tick*.

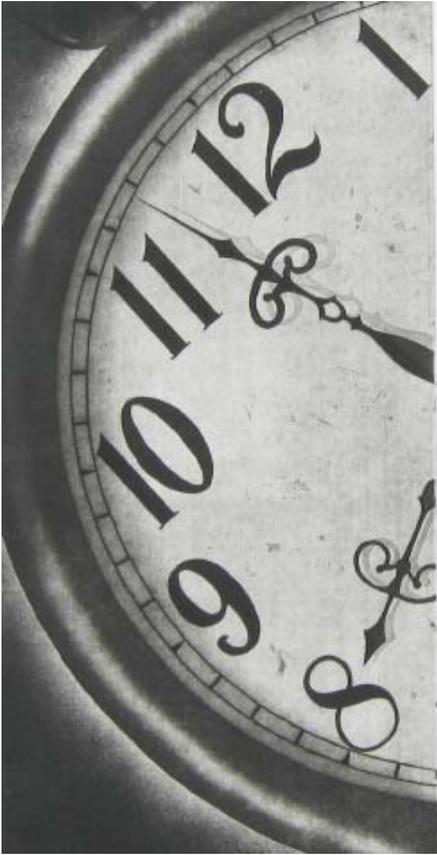
Nadine's gloves are there on the glider, next to her car keys and purse.

Everything is right where she left it.

Except Grace.

Then Nadine sees Ballet Barbie gazing up at her from a corner of the bare, brown lawn, her unflinching smile framed by a whorish halo of platinum.

At the police station Nadine repeats this litany of unremarkable events, over and again. Her thoughts are stuck in these moments. Her voice is stuck too, in a piercing octave that causes a secretary passing by with an armload of file folders to avert her eyes. The police officers listen patiently, faces set in non-committal concern. Nadine implores them to concur with her hysterical hypothesis. Nothing of any real consequence could possibly occur in such a brief and very regrettable span of time.



“Memory’s End” (etching)



RON FUNDINGSLAND

## Christopher Citro

### THE FORLORN SOUND OF REVEILLE

He sits down next to me on the park bench and says, "Excuse me. Are you going to eat that?" I look up from my paper and see him smiling at me, waiting for a response, his head inclined towards the sunrise. I look at the man and cannot think of a word to say. He nods a couple times, waits, then adds, "May I?" Being essentially a polite person, I answer, "No. Sure. Sorry. Go ahead." Hearing this, the man smiles. He reaches out, picks the sun from the sky like a grape and pops it into his mouth. Suddenly everything goes dark.

Holly St. John Bergon  
THE LANGUAGE OF PLANTS

What is the nature of sight  
that I can't see before speech,  
the forest floor an inarticulate green sea  
I must translate into words?

Before I knew their names,  
plants leafed and died and leafed again.

Snowberry bushes did not wait for my words  
to bloom first in snowmelt,  
white berries linking winter to spring.

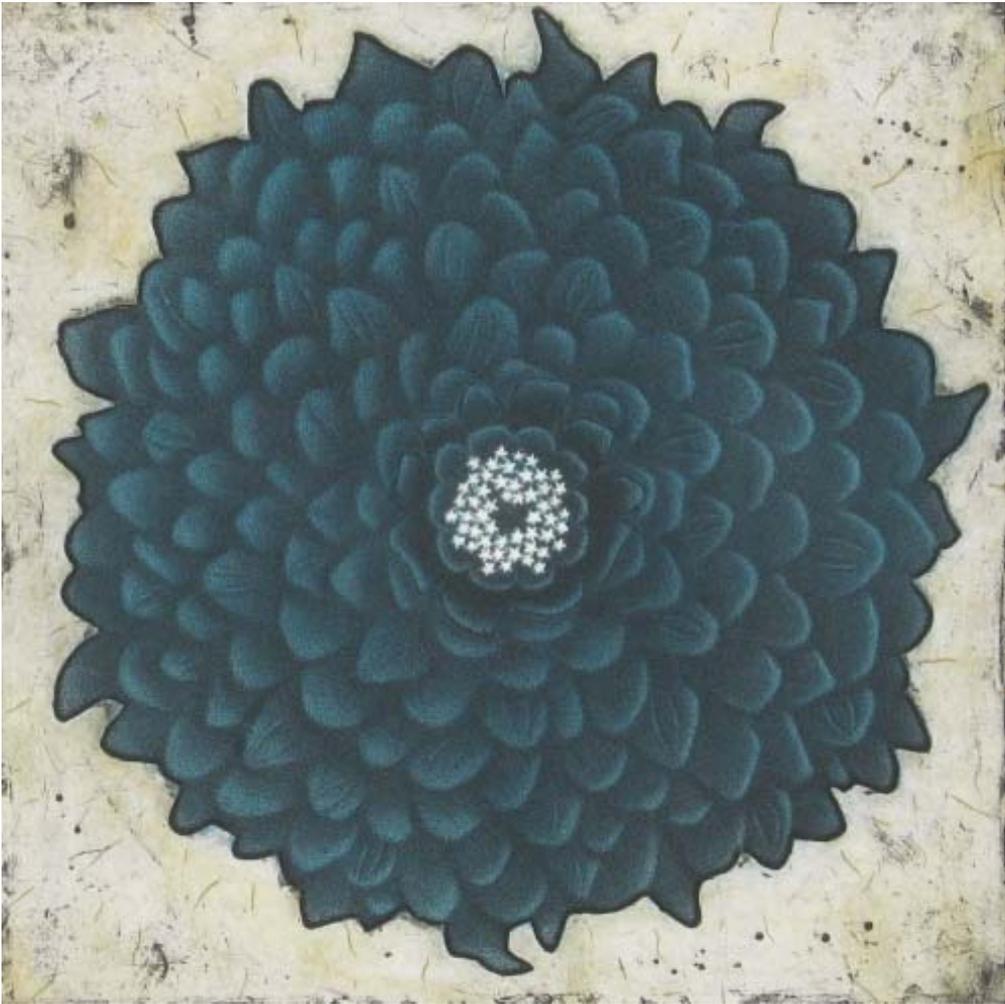
Now I enter these woods,  
chanting the litany of names:  
larkspur and loosestrife,  
meadow rue and sage.

I return the gentian's straight-armed salute,  
spike salads with shallots, wild parsley,  
a heartleaf bittercress.

I peer into the violet folds  
of the poisonous monkshood,  
searching for signs of its perfidious heart.

Yet, even as I name and know,  
I lose sight, not seeing  
through tendril, root, or leaf.

My human eyes see human acts:  
flowers of evil, metaphors of welcome.  
I wander through the woods  
as what I see slips from sight.



**"Blue Zinnia" (Etching)**

**RON FUNINGSLAND**

**Dennis Sampson**  
**SWIMMER IN THE DAWN**

Out of the darkness, plunging with slow strokes,  
the swimmer comes. The lake is composed.  
Mist keeps the swimmer hidden for a moment.

Then the shocked mouth rolls upward  
and away from the depths—grotesquely—  
as if in horror of this horror where nothing roams.

The wake is formal, swaying long green reeds  
on the other shore. He slows to a glide before the wooden platform,  
projects a frantic hand, shoves off with his sole.

Plunges on. Elbow cocked. Gone underwater now, his torso  
writhing over this stillness beginning to take on morning  
that tricks the vision with clouds as clear as clouds

and the image of a swallow crossing another swallow  
ascending as it falls. Nothing is distorted. The sky  
is purified and close, death nothing to be feared

Within this blue mirrored afterlife that's born. Doubles up,  
shoulder's yellower the farther down he goes, arms opening,  
closing. Then the gasp, approaching the ladder probing

the dark remote, his face flung up. Sees nothing. No one.  
Gets out. Wipes off. The ripples  
are absorbed. And the lake begins its furious composure.

## Emilie George

### SPRING IN THE SONORAN DESERT

“With my harvesting stick I will hook the clouds.” Ofelia Zepeda

Occasionally, the gods deign to release the rains  
on the parched elongated tongue of the Sonoran Desert;

Then burgeoning is not just  
a survival instinct, but a florescence:

confetti-blossoms from *cascarónes* of acacias,  
creosote bushes, palo verdes floating a golden haze,

red and pink penstemons’ frizzle or beard-tongues,  
brittle bushes’ wide-eyed daisy-stares,

Mexican poppies singing a Hallelujah  
chorus of yellow and orange refrains,

sunflowers, pink asters wearing floppy hats –  
all swaying in wind-driven choreography.

We exult in the rebirth that cracks through  
the dinosaur eggshell of desert caliche.

Even spine-studded leather-rinded chollas,  
saguaros, barrel cactus, prickly pears

yield to upspearing flowers that emerge easily  
as if from water, then become bulbous fruits.

Javelinas, coyotes, foxes, squirrels, butterflies,  
birds, bees, and humans feed on this bounty.

The Tohono O’odham people have  
eaten the fruits of the desert for centuries.

They know it is time to harvest saguaros,  
to make syrup, jam and wine,  
time for ritual oratory, dancing and drinking,  
time for “pulling down the clouds.”



“Myth and Wisdom” (etching)

RON FUNDINGSLAND

## J. Boyer EMBEDDED

It was a tiny hole. The size of a grape. Maybe smaller than that once we wiped away the blood. An apple seed maybe. But it was big enough to fall through, and never touch bottom.

I'd been in-country less than forty-eight hours. I'd landed in Iraq at Fallujah where I'd been met by my old friend Rollie. He was assigned there to an armored division, filing his stories via BlackBerry. He showed me jpegs of his wife and two kids. This was something new, for Rollie was the lowest tech person I'd ever worked with. When we first met he kept all of his papers in an old gunmetal-gray filing cabinet, and his files were labeled in a way no one would ever make sense of but Rollie himself. Open a drawer and you'd find recycled folder after worn, recycled folder, each one freshly labeled, its contents spelled out in caps: FREE ME!, SIMPLE, TENSION, DRAWING UP SHORT, COCKSUCKER, BARELY LEGAL, and NOW THIS IS BEER. What had changed his mind about the Internet was easy access to Internet porn.

Rollie had been assigned a Farsi translator he called “Jeep.” This, in Rollie-speak, meant “wannabe” or “newbie” I suppose. Rollie said, “I'd like you to meet my schizophrenic translator Jeep. Jeep, introduce yourselves.”

There was a problem with my press credentials and we had to drive to Baghdad to fix it. Though Jeep claimed to be in his twenties, he had the goofy expression of a twelve-year-old, so I wasn't certain I could believe him when he told me everything about Operation Iraqi Freedom was Top Secret. Even army chow, the daily menus, or things that were public knowledge like weather reports. He was giving me fair warning: there'd been some hold-up on my security clearance. Until we got this resolved, I'd be barred from all but the lowest-level briefings.

Rollie drove. Jeep was in the right seat. I was just behind Rollie, still trying to recover from the long flight and taking in the sights. It was a perfectly pleasant day, a nice breeze. Fallujah reminded me a little of South Beach, believe it or not. The breadth of the sky and the changes it went through in any given hour, the trees that looked like date palms of some kind. Rollie was saying that I would like the food, there was always pasta and ice cream, as much as I could eat. I should enjoy it while I could. No reason to unpack. We'd all be home before we knew it.

Something exploded in the distance. I thought it might have come from behind us, and turned around to look. I felt myself having a bodily reaction to the small concussion, so complete that my toes hurt, my ears burned, though I still wasn't sure what had happened. Rollie made a joke about Welcome to Babylon and Jeep slumped down like it was the thousandth time he'd had reason to be scared since the Americans took his country, but he was past all that. He was responding with a snooze this time, which made Rollie laugh. Then Rollie caught on.

Shrapnel. Rollie knew before I did. He 'd been embedded in Afghanistan for Knight-Rider. He sped ahead until it was safe, well as safe as it was going to get, then pulled over into the sand with a seriousness I'd never seen from him, and we sunk, literally *sunk* in the sand to the radiator. Two months earlier, May Day of 2003, Bush had landed on the aircraft carrier U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln in a Lockheed S-3 Viking and said Mission Accomplished. Well there was Jeep, bleeding a tiny red grape from his temple. And we were stuck.

It was as if the war had just been declassified.

## OUT OF INNOCENCE

*For Holly*

Shouldering her .410 bolt-action shotgun  
under a winter sky shot with light,

a 12-year-old girl takes the trail  
to a small cove at the reservoir.

Today she will have her first lesson.  
She will begin with clay pigeons,

sight down the barrel, follow the flight  
over water, squeeze off her first shot

under the careful tutelage of her father.  
He was an expert marksman in the army.

He demonstrates the proper stance  
with his Remington .12 gauge, shouts, "pull,"

shatters one disc after another  
from the automatic thrower. In turn,

she takes each kick without complaint,  
though she is bruised by the gun butt.

She keeps missing, doesn't care.  
She has aimed at something.

She is happy to be here. It is hard-  
biting happiness, cold and clear as the day.

*(for Holly)*

**Muriel Zeller**

**MERCY**

*for Aaron*

He put his dying dog into the blue  
wheelbarrow with his rifle and a shovel  
and headed toward the river. His mother  
watched from the deck 'til they were out of sight,  
waited, heard the shot, only one, reverberate.  
She imagined how he placed the dog gently  
on the ground beside the water, looked love in the eye  
and pulled the trigger.



©Stephen Romaniello Why? Meranner 2007 48"x49" Oil on Canvas

**Muriel Zeller**  
**BAREBACK**

She turns away from watching  
the horse run: she can still feel  
sweated flanks, a spotted pony  
between bare legs, ache of her beginning  
breasts, clean sun burning, eyes  
wet from wind. She reins the pony in  
near the burned-out stone foundation  
of the ranch house. Foothills browned  
into familiar indifference, she belongs  
to this cow-path-latticed land.  
She sees the fig tree that offered  
its shadow--the beginning  
of shadows. She eats warm fig meat,  
feeds the pony from the palm of her hand,  
wants nothing more, nothing less  
than to ride a running horse.

## Leesteffy Jenkins

### LUCKY LITTLE WHITE GIRL

At seven, I knew so many words, I was reading at a college level. When my mother needed things like *marmalade*, *mayonnaise* and *horseradish* that first summer we went to Louisiana, she sent me to the store with Uncle Ham. Uncle Ham couldn't read. That's how it was if you were a *Negro* and lived in rural Louisiana. He was my step-father's brother, the third oldest in a family of twelve boys.

Uncle Ham taught me how to play poker and blackjack and how to shuffle the pack. He gave me money to bet in the back-room gambling parlor which was also a part-time honky tonk my stepfather's family owned. He called me Lucky. Being a white child, I stood out. Soon the men who came to gamble began to pay to rub the top of my white blond head. They'd rub and spit before betting. When Uncle Ham played, I'd count the cards and give him winks, whistles and twitches so one of the two of us would win. We developed our own language that summer.

One day Uncle Ham and I had to go into the white part of town to buy food for my mother. He held my hand like he usually did on our outings. I could tell Uncle Ham was a little afraid. Those white people were mean, not like my mother and me. In the store, we searched the aisles, while out of the corner of our eyes, we watched the other shoppers watch us. They think we are going to steal, I whispered. Uncle Ham nodded tightening his grip on my hand. In the jam and jelly aisle, a white boy with acne snickered and pointed while his mother turned away. Another woman walked backwards down the aisle, shooing twin girls behind her. Never mind them, I said. Knowing they were afraid of us made me feel strange—like my skin was too thick for my body—like I wasn't me.

We were at the cash register and I was counting out the money in Uncle Ham's hand, when two old women with blue-dyed hair grabbed my arm.

“Little girl, what are you doing with that *nigger*? Has he stolen you from your mother? Call the police, this *nigger* has stolen a white child!”

Uncle Ham froze. Then his face started twitching and I wondered if he was going to wet his pants.

I wrested free from their frail spotted hands and stomped on one woman's foot. “You will be sent to the penitentiary if you touch me again,” I said, wagging my finger as my mother did. “You are pure evil— e-v-i-l-n-e-s-s—like the devil. He's my Uncle Ham and my best friend!”

I turned my back on those white women, ignored the stares of the other customers and the *nigger lover* comment of the check-out clerk, and with Uncle Ham's hand shaking in mine, we walked from the store with our groceries.

**Maria Mazziotti Gillan**

**BLONDE CURLS; THE PATERSON OF MEMORY**

In the photo I am on the back steps of the six-family tenement on 5th Avenue in Paterson, where I was born.

I am squinting into the sun, my nose wrinkled, my eyes closed against the glare. I am two years old. My hair

is a curly cap on my head. It looks blonde though I know it couldn't have been, and wonder if my memory is confused. Am I remembering my daughter at two, sitting in the little rocking chair on the front porch on Oak street

in Kansas City? Her hair was all blonde ringlets. Strange how memory is like the fragments of a puzzle: Remember the green blackout shades in our apartment in Paterson in 1944. Remember my father dressed as a devil for a costume party at the Societa Cilentana on Butler Street;

Remember the silver ball Zio Guillermo made from the foil inside the camels he smoked that stained his fingers yellow, so many memories swirl like colored paper in a

kaleidoscope, and so impossible to explain. 17th Street with Mrs. Gianelli who always fainted when she got upset and the old man who ran the candy store that was so filthy no one bought anything there and the big garage in the Gianelli's backyard where we put on plays until something

happened. I don't know what, something to do with playing doctor behind our improvised curtains and then we weren't allowed to play there anymore, and Zio Guillermo's garden

with tomatoes and zucchini and corn and the vacant lot next door that seemed so huge, you'd think we had all

of Kansas to play in, until I see it years later, covered with asphalt and garages and I realize that the entire block, my world until I was eleven, wasn't that big and certainly the field small and now so ugly. Remember Paterson when the stars were still visible in the sky and I didn't know 17th Street was in a city? Remember the sweet smell

of corn growing, the marigolds and daisies in the vacant lot, and our house full of food and laughter, our family together under the kitchen light, the company of honorary aunts and uncles.

Outside our friends gathered to play stickball in the street, hours to fill with games and books and dreaming, how lucky I was, how lucky, Paterson glowing and sparkling like a silver ball in my hands.

David Salner  
**MAGNESIUM FURNACES**

*for Willie and others*

From the Great Salt Lake, a reckoning  
of ancient salts, whose sea is now.

Each furnace gleams at 1300 f, a blood-red pool,  
but when the temp goes up just ten degrees,  
the red salt burns, scabs over like a child's skin.

Change out a pump, the mag ignites  
into a star-size sparkler for one heart-stopping,  
incandescent moment in the barn-dark night.

Gag on the beautiful fumes of sulfur and chlorine  
for a 12-hour shift, drown in gems of your own  
precious sweat, as you stack ingots, 30-lbs each.

A casting machine shrieks and you shriek back—  
*flexeril, skellaxen, bachoffen,*  
*naproxen, neuroten, oxychontyl.*



**“Cross Bearings” (etching) RON FUNDINGSLAND**

## Earl S. Braggs

### THE CHEROKEE IN ME

Between the chapters of slavery,  
seventeen birthdays have counted  
the seventeen pages. I remember  
the sad shape of ships and storefront  
signs swinging  
in the noon day of a horrible sun. Time  
and heritage stands  
still for the people who are darker than  
dark blue. You would not believe  
the sound or the smell of cotton  
seed dust. Back we go when we step back  
into a history that's not history at all.  
Fall feels like spring  
when trees forget to change  
the color of this world. Everything, they say,  
connects now to seasons of no rain. My life  
is made of cityscape snow  
and I promise you absolutely nothing  
but reasons that refuse to explain  
the things I do not know.  
In the sacred hills above my head  
a red Cherokee  
rides into a red night on a red pony.  
Grandmama said the people called  
her father Indian nigger and she  
said they called her, behind her back, half  
Indian nigger. The bones  
of my cheeks rise to meet  
the war paint my father  
painted everyday he scaled fish,  
every night he drove fish trucks and every  
time he danced  
to the call of his own name  
calling him to load more fish boxes  
boxing him into believing  
what he could not believe. My mother  
believed him for as long as she could.

But fish truck patience has a way  
of running out and running into  
the strides of wild horses  
captured  
on reservations of the mind.  
The people walked all the way  
to Oklahoma. Red people tracking  
red Georgia clay as they marched  
and  
the cotton seed dust danced  
the cotton seed dance and chance  
to become  
became the valley of my ship wrecked  
heritage tracked in snow.

## Earl S. Braggs

### JOE BILL

(When we were still young enough to wonder)

When we were ten, eleven or maybe we  
were twelve, Mr. Joe Bill was still walking  
the grassy side of everyday roads,  
picking up everyday soda pop bottles  
with the everyday ease of an any day  
trashman. Ambling up and down  
a two mile stretch of highway 17,  
he celebrated the last highway to be  
celebrated on the coastline of North Carolina.  
Mr. Joe bill was a white man, ugly face  
with a beard, ugly tobacco smoke brown  
and diluted whiskey grey, that scared,  
still, all of us ugly young black and white  
boys into believing he was already dead.  
Ugly brown dirt cowboy boots,  
sideways, always forgiving ways  
matched his little sideways spotted dog.  
Somebody must have made up the story:  
He shot his wife and killed, without regards,  
his own day- to- day magic. Us ugly boys  
wondered briefly then believed that  
Venus flytraps really did chew up  
and spit out Venus flytrapped flies.  
His burlap sack was always heavy  
with mosquitoes of reasons never  
quite understood. To us,  
even the ugliest of us did not understand  
the Sundrop bottles, Pepsi bottles,  
Dr. Pepper moon pie bottles,  
Mountain Dew bottles, Joe Bill bottles  
and his Coca Cola bottled sideways  
spotted dog. To us all, all bottles  
were just piles of white trash piled  
up too high into the multi colored glass  
of everyday black and white small town  
poverty and roadside trash sociology.

Grandmother was the only one  
any of us ever saw talk to him  
and she never mentioned a single word  
ole Joe bill said. We thought  
he was already dead. June, July,  
January or March he marched.  
It never mattered,  
he wore the same khaki strained pants  
rolled up high as high tide, loose  
as breeze blowing into the holes  
in the bottom of his sad boat  
and the soles of his sad boots.  
His sad dog walking sideways, always  
with him and away from him  
and his strange colored green World  
War I war ridden, army jacket  
held shut, barely, by buttons too small  
for the bullet holes that partway held  
together the sliding carefully apart life  
of a dangling man.  
He must've worn a ball cap of some kind  
or a felt tip hat of some denomination.  
I just don't remember ever seeing  
even a summer straw on his head. We  
thought he was already dead.

**Kathie Giorgio**

**SCALD MY EYES WITH THE HEAT OF MY WORDS**

I stop him in the middle of the act, just as he rises above me and moves between my thighs, his hips firmly pressed against mine. Cupping his face in my hands, I look at him and ask, “Greg. Greg, what does it mean to you when I say, ‘Fuck me please?’”

He hesitates for a moment, looking at me as if trying to figure out what I mean by asking him what I mean, and then he smiles and lowers himself into me. He moves fast and pushes into me as far as he can go, his skin smacking smartly against mine, his breath quick and jagged against my neck. I know this is what he thinks I mean, this is his definition of fuck me please. I listen to his sounds, mounting toward orgasm, toward release, and I let my sighs match his. When he cries out, I do too and arch against him, hips to hips, legs to legs, and wrap my arms as tightly around him as I can. I crave skin to skin contact, I need him everywhere at once. I need it, that warmth and the feel of his life directly connected to mine. But I don’t come.

I never do. Not with him, this lover who isn’t my husband. Not with anyone.

This isn’t what I mean when I tell him to fuck me, this isn’t what I mean when I tell anyone to fuck me, whether I ask or plead or demand. But I can’t make the correction. To do so would mean to lose that contact. To do so would mean I’d disappear. I wouldn’t know I’m alive.

After he leaves, after his lover’s cornucopia of soft kisses and murmurings and gentle lingering touches, after one more round of lovemaking, I reach into my dresser drawer. Rummaging my hand around like a child in a grab bag, I surprise myself with the sex toy of the day, of the moment. It is the

purple penis-shaped vibrator, made of soft and flexible sparkling rubber. I run my hand over it repeatedly, to warm it, as if I am making it hard, and then I slide into the soft memory of the afternoon. Pressing the vibrator against me, I remember the skin, the sighs, the touches of fingers and tongue and lips. I feel it all again, his weight full upon me, and I make time hesitate and flow into tremendous slow motion, and when I come, it is at my pace, with my heartbeat, and I cry out, alone in the bedroom, yet fully alive with his memory and his scent still upon me.

I am alive and I am here, in this body, and I am awake and aware. No thoughts exist but for the pleasure of each throb, for the tender glisten of sweat on my skin, the inhale and exhale of every breath into my lungs. I am out of my head and into the world, a world of touch and sensation and texture.

But as my heart slows, I am dragged back into the confines of my skull. A place where there is only instruction. Do this. Do that. Follow my feet and just keep in motion, keep jolting forward like rush hour traffic, start the day and end the night, until the time comes to live again. Or until there is the release of death.

Somewhere I read that each orgasm is a little death.

I glance at the clock. There is no time to call anyone else and no time to reach into the drawer again. Soon the kids will be home, followed swiftly by their father. My husband, who is also my night-time lover, transforming when the kids are asleep. There is just time for a shower, to turn my skin again into white bread, to dress again in the clothes of a mother, a wife, a torn-apart and stretched-out working woman with not enough hours in the day to meet everyone's needs. Time to cover her up, this beast that needs to breathe, that needs release from the inside of my head, from the prison of my skin.

I stand up, make the bed, move toward the shower. One foot follows

the other.

\*\*\*\*

The next day, it is Lynne who presses her body against mine, who covers me with her rolling fingertips, her slippery tongue. We move gently together, a graceful twist of woman curves and dips, and our voices and touches are soft. When she parts from me after a delicious kiss, when I feel her body shift in preparation for the journey downward, I catch her face in my hands, just as I caught Greg's the day before. "Lynne," I say. "Lynne, what does it mean to you when I tell you to 'fuck me please?'"

She smiles and kisses me again, her lips warm, her tongue tickling the roof of my mouth, making me catch my breath. And then she traces her tongue all the way down, stopping to engulf each breast, envelop each nipple, and then further in a damp trail that leaves me trembling with heat and cold. When she nudges me, my thighs part willingly and I

feel her tongue enter me, follow Greg's path from the day before, and then expertly, lovingly focus on my clitoris. But this also isn't what I mean when I say, "Fuck me please." She isn't aware and it doesn't matter. Every nerve ending wakes, yet still I don't come and I cry out as if I did, and then I pull her up and we stay face to face as she rubs against me and I rise to meet her. When she collapses, I take possession of her vibrations, her shivers and her shudders, I inhale the depths of her moans. I wrap myself around her and feel her body and her heartbeat and her breath and I am here again. Alive.

After she leaves, her sung-out goodbye cheery and sated, I take out the g-spot vibrator and insert it and allow the sensations to continue, to build and wallow over my body. When the release comes, I contort, bend double, and I am aware of every inch of skin, every bit of hair and pore and moisture that is me. I am here. I am in the room. I am alive. And through orgasm, I am dead. All at the same time.

\*\*\*\*

There was a time when I was dead. When everything was dark. When the pain of the belt dropped me into a blackness that was at once a comfort and terrifying. Because the pain was gone, there was only sound, the swish of metal and leather through the air, the smack as it tore into my skin. I remember the sound as red and each strike was a number. Red numbers, forming a ladder in the air, escalating to figures I didn't recognize, I couldn't count that high, the red became strange like Chinese. Until the numbers faded to a gentle pink and then to black, thick and soft. A sinking. And a silence. Then came a wave of bone-crushing pleasure, surging from my middle, spreading out in ribbons of purple and green and blue. It woke me up, it brought me back and it made me want to open my eyes, to breathe again, just to keep feeling it. It made the pain fall away. And it made the pain worth it.

But when I opened my eyes, there was always only my father. Only my father.

\*\*\*\*

At night, my husband is exhausted, he pleads for sleep, but I come at him again and again with my fingers and my mouth until he is all over me. He does what Lynne and Greg do, with his tongue, with his cock, he is willing to jump into both worlds, and when I cup his face in my hands, when I say to him, "David. David, what does it mean to you when I say, 'fuck me please?'" he rolls me over and enters me from behind. He grips my breasts like handles and drives hard into me and I don't like this because the connection is not complete, we actually only touch in a few places. There is a gap between us. But I let him continue, because otherwise, he might stop completely and this, this is better than nothing. This is better than being alone in the dark. Alone, even when someone else is there.

When he pulls away and I let him sleep, I lay beside him on my back and I use my hand, my own fingers. I need to be silent as I build on what he started

and I bring myself into that room. I feel the colors again and my breath is sweet

and the pounding of my heart a music that is lovely to hear. And I am back.

For a few minutes, at least. Until the darkness comes again and there is only the next thing to do. Sleep. Sleep until it is time to get up and start the motion all over again.

The red follows me wherever I go. The darkness is right behind.

Oh, fuck me. Fuck me please.



©Stephen Romaniello    Despair of Gorillas 2007 48"x48"    Oil on Canvas

## **AT IT**

Always and never  
anchor our arguments,  
and always there is never  
any absolution from  
the use of absolutes.

We steal and horde  
from each other and what  
we take hangs over us,  
like a piñata of blame,  
so we bang away at it.

And when it bursts,  
and its regrettable gifts  
of always and never spill  
out, we drown and accuse,  
moored to some forensic proof

that it was the other who failed  
to make the bed we made together.

## Diego, Myself and Señor Xólotl

*after Frida Kahlo*

When you came back to me –

I painted a green day-hand and a brown night-hand  
holding up Mexico, her canyons and deserts,  
her candelabra cacti.

And we were there, embraced by our land.  
You were my naked baby  
who is reborn every minute with your third eye open.

Even our dog Señor Xólotl was curled  
on the wrist of evening,  
ready to bear our souls to the underworld if he had to.

Together, we stared out beyond the picture, saw  
in the dark window a small woman in a wheelchair  
cast out in a workshop far beyond the moon,

desperately mixing the colours of love  
until they vibrated –  
watermelon greens, chilli reds, pumpkin orange.

She hurriedly painted the shattered arms  
of the universe –

holding us all up

as if we were a mountain dripping roots and stones.

Who would suppose that when I find you again  
in the distance of our separate worlds,  
your words will buzz suddenly all around me,  
pollinating golden arrows in deep ground.

Or suppose that when my eyes follow you  
across these pages, drenched in the narrative  
of your birth and death, and in between,  
the seasoning nights in which you carried a broken compass,

a quest slipped into your sleeve, faded yet never fading --  
that I would chance upon you in my dream  
and call out, "There you are!" A child in your school uniform,  
your gold-rimmed glasses, ill at ease upon your melancholy eyes.

Who do you wait for, great man? You  
who do not yet know the steepness of your disgrace  
as your triumphs. You who will be much alone,  
and awake restless at dawn, the sea alone speaking to you.

They cannot contain the hidden order of your music,  
the improvisations of the truth that enlarges in you  
that turns into stone these exquisite, obstinately  
coiffured heads, like English little cups that hold so much

and no more. Who would suppose that I, a dreaming  
messenger from another place, your oracle of hope,  
would find you sitting here on this stoop. To suppose  
that we are engaged in some talk, watching you for signs

of your coming brilliance, the seed of your star's disintegration.  
As though elder-wise, I tell you we're too feeble a star to magnetize  
all in a burst, but quickly, I plant the secret in your ear:  
that your life has increased by that which seemed your death.



©Stephen Romaniello. Picture of the Prophet 2007 40"x30" Oil on Canvas.

## LJUBLJANA IS ASLEEP

In red chaos a new humanity  
is coming. Ljubljana is asleep.  
Europe's dying in a red light.  
All the phone lines have been cut.  
O, but this one is wireless.  
A blind horse.  
(Your eyes as if from  
Italian paintings.)  
White towers rise  
from the brown walls.  
A deluge.  
Europe has one foot in the grave.  
We come with a hurricane.  
With poison gasses.  
(Your lips are like berries.)  
Ljubljana is asleep.  
The tram conductor is asleep.  
In the Europa café  
they're reading *Slovenski narod*.  
The clicking of billiard balls.

Translated by Barbara Siegel Carlson and Ana Jelnikar

*Slovenski narod* (*The Slovene Nation*) was the name of a Ljubljana newspaper.

*Europa café* was a popular coffee house in Ljubljana.

## RED ROCKET

I'm a red rocket, I flare up,  
burn and fade out.

Oh, I in a red suit!

Oh, I with a red heart!

Oh, I with red blood!

Tirelessly, I flee as if

I alone must bring fulfillment.

And the more I flee, the more I burn.

And the more I burn, the more I suffer.

And the more I suffer, the faster I fade.

O, I who want to live forever. And

I go, a man, red across a green field,

with iron clouds overhead,

across the blue lake's silence,

o, I go, I go, a red man!

Silence everywhere: in the fields, the sky,

the clouds, only I flee and burn

with my own painful fire and

I can't reach the silence.

Translated by Barbara Siegel Carlson and Ana Jelnikar

## CATHERINE'S STORY

Storms follow a pattern once they start,  
but Katrina moved west, not north.  
Friday, I was at Sally's house watching CNN,  
and we said, *That storm moved.*  
On the way home, I bought all the water left  
at Save-a-Center, seven gallons, and when  
I saw the display of batteries at the front,  
I thought, I ought to get a pack.  
That small decision saved my life.  
By Saturday, everyone I knew left.  
I had \$18, 4 cats, and 2 carriers.  
Where could I go? Sunday  
the sky turned an awful orange.  
The whole house shook back and forth.

Monday there were 4' of water  
along Gentilly Ridge where I lived,  
which is high ground. Live oak leaves  
shredded, stuck all over like green confetti.  
I swept the porch, looking for things to do.  
The cats came out with me—they're all feral—  
and I heard a tiny splash behind me.  
Lily, short for Lilliputian,  
the runt of a litter I rescued,  
was gone. No sign of her.  
Every day I checked to see  
if she'd risen up from the water  
somehow, a God-awful ritual.  
I had the radio for news,

broadcast by daytime disk jockeys—  
maniacal fanatics—who put anyone on air.  
People stuck in attics,  
people who were dying:  
“I'm a diabetic with one bottle of water left.  
Can anyone help me?”  
This terrible information  
was all we had. At first,

the water was clear. Then it turned  
the tea color that swamp water gets

from tannins in bark. Raw sewage floated up, and benzene. I did not know about the violence with which water moved through some neighborhoods.

I had fish in the yard.  
The first living thing I saw  
was a Lakeview parrot—a sign  
of great good luck. Then hummingbirds,  
dragonflies, a hawk blown way off track.  
There was a super silence we don't have  
in America—no hum of appliances,  
no traffic—until the helicopters came.  
I made a big *I'm all right* sign,  
which I taped to my balcony  
in case they were flying by, or,  
someone saw me on a satellite photo.  
I sat each day in Susan's white rocker  
so if someone came by in a boat,

I'd make a good picture for TV.  
My neighbor, Tim the Looter,  
called, "I'm going out!  
Need anything?" Thursday I saw  
my only National Guardsmen, who said:  
"They're coming for you tonight.  
First they'll rape you.  
Then they'll kill you.  
You need  
to come  
with us."

*I can't get in that water. Immune-  
compromised. Cancer patient.*  
Nope. Off they went.  
Katrina arrived  
on the first anniversary  
of my second diagnosis.

I had Vicodin from the mastectomy,  
which I left on the kitchen table for looters,  
so they wouldn't take anything else.

One night there was an explosion,  
fires breaking out in Bywater.

It looked like all downtown was burning.  
The horrible disk jockeys said,  
*It's Armageddon. Race war.*  
They made perceptions,  
if not problems themselves,  
so much worse. Mr. Benny, the firefighter,  
and his wife Miss Suzy across the street  
had a huge freezer of food

which they had to throw away  
using special firefighters' trash bags  
that looked very official,  
yellow with black writing.  
The floodwaters were flowing.  
Mr. Benny let the bags float off, and—  
I know this sounds like movie timing—  
just as he releases the last bag,  
a helicopter drops water and MREs,  
and out of nowhere comes a stream of people  
for the food. A man grabs one of the trash bags  
and opens it. "This ain't nothing  
but meat too rotten to eat! How dare  
the government do this to us!"

By Saturday, Mr. Benny and Miss Suzy  
brought me shrimpers' boots. "Tomorrow,"  
they said, "you follow us out."  
I packed a suitcase and went to bed.  
At 9:30, I heard three shots on my street.  
There was a pause. Then three more,  
closer, then a pause, then three more, closer.  
*If they found people alive,  
were they killing them  
with a sawed off shot gun?*  
People outside of New Orleans  
ask how I knew what gun was firing.  
I lived in Bywater.  
We heard guns all the time.

I'd write in the margin of my Riverside  
Shakespeare the number of shots

and the time, and next day look in the paper.

I learned to identify different caliber weapons.  
A sawed-off shotgun has a distinctive sound.  
I know things I shouldn't know.  
At that moment, I knew:  
*This is what it feels like to wait to die.*  
I took my flashlight, stood at a window,  
and SOSed with it.  
Three dots,  
    three dashes,  
        three dots.

To this day I can't believe  
that a coast guard patrol saw that light  
and Dave Foreman from Apex,

North Carolina in his big, goofy helmet  
jumped out of a helicopter,  
landed on the balcony and said:  
"Everything's going to be ok now."  
And then we flew through the air  
like an apotheosis. "Gosh," I said,  
"I'm really glad you guys still use  
Morse code." This is my full  
disclosure part. They don't use Morse Code;  
they look for blinking lights.  
Having batteries for my flashlight  
was the key to my rescue.  
We're so lucky in this country  
not to have these images in our heads:

the airport taken over by an army,  
weapons everywhere. You never  
want to see that in a civilian space  
with which you associate happy things.  
When we evacuated, we were lined up,  
and they screamed, "Go! Go! Go!"  
like it was a military operation.  
We had to run onto the plane.  
It was ATA Airlines, which the government used  
to transport prisoners, so all flight attendants  
were armed. I was one of 3 people  
who had not been at the Superdome.

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I sat beside a very chatty Uptown looter  
who gave me the straight talk:

how they stole mail trucks  
because they're easy to hotwire  
and never stopped. How they took  
truckloads to Houston and Atlanta.  
All I could contribute to the conversation  
was that I put Vicodin on my kitchen counter.  
"Oh, baby, you so stupid!" he said.  
They're going to say 'What's she hiding?'  
and tear your place apart!"  
We arrived at a Red Cross shelter  
in Charlotte, and I sobbed—I had not cried—  
until this woman came walking herself by  
in a wheelchair, and said, "You ain't got *nothing*  
to cry about!" And she was right.

I had a cot for the night, nobody around,  
and I thought, Oh, thank God, it's quiet.  
But I woke up thinking,  
What is wrong with this picture?  
Where had they put everyone,  
all the sick people, the children?  
I had no idea that  
Charlotte's shelters were segregated!  
Outside, though, there's a *stream* of people  
with bags of clothes, toys,  
envelopes full of money.  
*Everyone* came to help.  
That fall we had to teach classes electronically.  
We're scattered everywhere, students and faculty.

Every email was heartbreak or gloom.  
*I'm in Memphis but my family's in Utah.*  
*I'm taking class from a tent in the backyard.*  
Try to teach a play with characters lost  
in a storm, *King Lear*, to hurricane evacuees.  
Tell this story in blank verse sonnets or rhyme.  
Like Lear, I thought to control the winds of time  
by making them metric. Try teaching this play  
on dial-up. Expect of your students the most.  
Miss Suzy and Mr. Benny went right back.

Sally returned early, too, and cleaned  
my whole apartment. 4 months later,

I walked in and there's Lily sitting  
on the bedroom window sill. Lily,

who drowned. Lily  
who taught herself to swim. Lily  
who fed herself somehow all that time.  
New Orleans asked urban planners  
to look at maps and tell us where  
we should and shouldn't rebuild.  
"Let people live here,"  
they said, and: "Don't let them  
live there." If you overlay  
a racial map of the city,  
so many houses owned by blacks  
are where no one should ever  
have built neighborhoods. So now  
we have exactly what we feared.

## LUST SERIES

### #37

Dawn breaks on Lake Street, the suicide of moon on the block of wrecked Minneapolis mansions. Ice congeals the cast iron of street. Fifty miles south, trapped into five-month winter, her hometown Redwing grovels under snow, barns and farmhouses stagger, mastodons, streaming filthy fleece. Enough for a week's rent; the chasm in their ceiling makes space for another room to fit between her and the chandelier of flame-shaped blackened bulbs. He grips his red wine. His breath is sticky-sweet--blood from a sucked cut. "*It's finished, I tell you,*" he bites a thread on the sleeve of his tuxedo. The eye of his navel gapes. "*I want to practice the silence.*" Black hair hangs to his waist. Impure, but she can't deny his allure. Different from the sons of Swedes she grew up with, their blond hair the color of desks. She loves him. His scorching yeastiness. His hands encircle her burgundy sheath, hem of boa feathers. Her eyes are chunks of blue ice. Her mouth a smear. A Chinese princess brought to the Forbidden City with a half-eaten kiss on her lips. "*Get out of here,*" he whispers in her ear, "*unless you're coming with me.*" His ancient Underwood shudders—its ribbon pulled from the spool, keys gummed together. He's burned almost everything. His unfinished manuscripts, *Mon Hysterie, Chorale*, – the reams of famished weeds and belly dancers.

*Wading through the soft sea with an eye of iron.*

One fragment. Like reading Revelation on the first day of a decade. He's a genius, she thinks. The next Rimbaud. His excess fills her larynx, loosens her heartbeat. If he wants her bones, she'll gladly give him those.

*"Art for art's sake.*

## #40

Inside a Japanese music box she scented clay odor, then tasted the night's sleep in your mouth as you mounted her. "Maintenance," you grunted. She laughed and closed her eyes, seeing the red-eyed Kabuki actors applying wax to their eyebrows and white face cream on their cheeks, princess and commoner practicing samurai sex. You in goldenrod panties. You singing the muffled traffic of the streets below. You saying, "Hey," into her ear, "I'm going to taste you." You, between her legs, your breath tickling the inside of her thighs, your blond hair meeting her darker hair. You trying hard to please her, and her shame of where your tongue was/is, her quivers growing stems, musky and filled with French sauce, you gripping her knees, ordering her to become a puddle of muddiness an orchid shudders from. But she wouldn't let it out, would go only so far toward the edge even with you, she couldn't dissolve. In the heaven of predators, she never let her guard down, and practiced leaving her body, swimming with the flatfish, the skates and ray swordfish, the triggers and puffers, all prey.

Stephanie Dickinson  
LUST SERIES  
#41

I keep running the hurt in my side running too until the ground pulls me down and I taste the bitter twigs. The shatter of his laughter. *Your deer is dead.* He cuts me around each knee. My leaping, hoof stampedes. He tugs my skin and flesh. Slashes my windpipe. I make no more groan or sing. From my belly no more fawn. My guts try to get away. Behind me the trees stand beginning to vanish. I call for the sky to come back. He wipes his knife on the same grass he found poking in my stomach. Bitter dandelion and shad grass. He unfleshes my bones and says he is dressing me.

**Kathy Conde**

**JANUARY THAW**

This kind of cold brought the focus close to the body. If Audrey touched exposed metal with bare fingers, her skin would stick. If she breathed too deeply, her lungs would burn. If she didn't keep moving, her toes would throb. She was alive, and it hurt.

The sky stretched out over Missoula like a sheet of blue ice. Audrey stepped through the door of the Bitterroot Café and was hit by a current of warm air and the smells of brewed coffee and cinnamon. A group of men and women from the morning meeting were seated around a large circular table in a corner booth. Bart, a young man in a studded leather jacket, was talking. They slid over in the booth to make room for Audrey. Bart continued his story.

"I heard old White Feather forked over his brand new Jeep. Gave it to a guy he didn't even know." Bart took a sip of his coffee. His Adam's apple bobbed up out of sight for a moment when he swallowed.

"What do you mean? Why would he give his Jeep to a guy he didn't know?" Sonia said. She flung her hair back over her shoulder and squinted her green eyes at Bart as if she might punch him in the face if he didn't clarify things fast. Audrey turned a coffee cup upright in its saucer. She understood Sonia, less than two weeks sober and still edgy.

"It's a custom," said Bart. "He's from one of the plains tribes. When they

lose someone they love, they give something away. His son was killed in a hunting accident."

"White Feather had his last dime in that Jeep," said a man with a handlebar mustache, as he leaned back, eyeing Bart. "It was worth more than the shack he lives in." He was ten years sober and still skeptical as a newcomer.

"Yeah, but according to the custom, the thing they give away has to be something they really care about, something they love," said Bart. "And they have to give it to the one they see who needs it most."

"Well, it's too bad I wasn't in his line of sight that day," said an old man in a torn gray coat. He alternated between drinking and sobriety every few weeks. Every time he returned to the meetings, people just told him to keep coming back.

"I heard White Feather saw a guy walking down the street in a hunting jacket all patched up with duct-tape, and he pulled over to the curb, stopped the guy, and asked him if he had any use for a Jeep," said Bart, holding his hands up in the air. "Took the title out of the glove box and signed it over to him right there on the spot. Then walked back to the res."

"That's over six miles," said Handlebar.

Audrey liked to be with people from the meetings, drinking coffee with them, listening to their talk. They spent hours hanging on to coffee cups. Audrey got up to leave before the others. Sonia slid out of the booth and said it was time

for her to go, too. Sonia was tall, with long brown hair, and she might have been beautiful when she wasn't racked with DTs. She walked out behind Audrey.

"How you doing?" Audrey turned and tried to sound casual, confident. "You okay?"

"Fine." Sonia wasn't there to make friends.

Audrey wanted to tell her something wise, something useful she could remember in the worst moments, but nothing came. Sonia's glaring knocked her off balance.

Sonia hurried across the street, and Audrey got into her car. To start it in freezing temperatures, she had to work the choke. The engine finally turned over. Her breath was a white cloud inside the car. The weather reporter on the radio said, "...a break from the freezing temperatures of the last few weeks. A change in the jet stream this afternoon is bringing us a January thaw."

Audrey dragged herself from bed. Mornings were the worst part of getting sober—sludge in her veins. Her sleep had been full of nightmares about body parts falling off onto the sidewalk, or about accidentally downing a bottle of scotch and suffering instant remorse instead of a high. The people at the meetings kept telling her she was going through a grieving time and it was perfectly normal; she was losing her best friend.

She stood up and the sludge went pouring down into her feet. She

thumped her way into the kitchen and went straight for the coffee machine, her new best friend. She sat down with a cup of coffee at the kitchen table to read from the inspirational book someone had given her at the last meeting. The reading for Sunday was about letting go. It talked about how once she made the decision to let go of alcohol, she had to let go of other things too, or she'd end up going back to the drinking.

The phone rang, and she picked it up on the first ring. "Charlie?"

"Irma?" The thin voice of an old woman. "Irma? Is that you?"

It took Audrey a second. "No, wrong number." She hung up the phone. She walked to the window and leaned on the sill.

Charlie was her husband. He was about her height and had auburn hair like hers, but in every other way he was her opposite. He was prudent, planned ahead. He owned a small company that built kitchens. He knew how things fit into a house. He was financially secure, had relatives all over town. He must have seen her as a woman in need of him, her life a flooded kitchen that needed rebuilding, her relatives scattered from California to Wisconsin, no foundation. But five years and numerous drinking binges later, he stopped wanting to be needed. She wasn't cooperating.

The last time she saw him she was hung over. The night before, she had blacked out drinking Wild Turkey and beer at their friend's wedding reception. Open bars and dance floors were always her downfall.

"Audrey, you need to quit. Last night was out of control," said Charlie.

“Shh. Could you aim that over that way? My head!” said Audrey, steadying herself at the kitchen counter.

“You can’t handle it. You can’t stop.

“I hardly ever drink. Ouch.”

“But when you do, it’s like you check out. Like you’re gone, and you just keep pouring it down.”

“I gotta make some coffee.”

“This isn’t working for me, Audrey. You could at least listen to me. After all I’ve done for you.”

“What?” It would have been good to shout a few things that might have come to mind if she wasn’t so busy with the throbbing at her temples. Instead, she put her hand up and turned away. Charlie left, slamming the door. She couldn’t quite get her priorities straight; there was emotion somewhere, but the pain in her head came first. Later in the morning, it subsided enough for her to pack a bag.

That was four months ago. Audrey moved into a trailer in town and stocked the cupboards with crackers, Johnny Walker Red, and cigarettes. She filled the fridge with salami and cheese, eggs and beer. She locked the door and settled in for some serious alone time. Within a few weeks, she lost her job and a baby she didn’t know she was carrying.

The cramping and bleeding didn’t surprise her at first. She had always had irregular periods, sometimes months between them. But the cramps got worse and

then something plopped into the toilet. Through the haze of hangover, she stood and looked into the bloody water. She thought she detected the shape of a tiny red creature floating there. She didn't know what to do. She reached to flush, pulled her hand back, then reached out again, shut her eyes, and flushed the toilet. She closed the lid and sat down, her knees too weak to hold her up. That afternoon she dragged herself out of the trailer and into her first AA meeting.

Audrey had another cup of coffee and decided to take a shower and go to the morning newcomer meeting. In the regular meetings, people who'd been sober for years told their drinking stories as if they were showing off trophies they'd won. But at the newcomer meetings, the hell of blackouts and hangovers and desperate early morning gin was described in raw detail, and when she looked around the room at the puffy faces with red-rimmed eyes, she knew she wasn't the only one going through this insanity.

Slogans were taped along the tops of the walls in the clubhouse. The meetings were filled with them. *One Day at a Time. Easy Does It. Live and Let Live.* They took on mystical powers in the context of the meetings, slogans that were small, bearable slaps in the face. Audrey taped them on her fridge and bathroom mirror, wherever they would stick.

She squeezed toothpaste onto a toothbrush and felt the sharp bite of mint before it touched her tongue. Her senses had taken on an acuteness

recently that called for a lighter body, a body that could jerk itself to attention instead of slogging through a two-second delay. She touched the toothbrush to her teeth. In the mirror was a stranger, someone she was uncomfortable standing in front of naked.

She stepped out the front door of the trailer onto a sheet of ice that covered the front steps. Yesterday's sun had melted the snow to slush that froze again during the night. She skated on her rubber-soled boots out to the street where her car was parked. The right front tire of the car was frozen into a solid lake of ice at the curb that almost reached the hubcap. She kept a crowbar behind the seat for times like this. She went around to the driver's side and pulled hard at the door, expecting it to be frozen shut, but it opened easily. She never locked doors in winter. Locks froze in below-zero nights. She leaned into the car to get the crowbar and saw a hole where the stereo had been.

She looked in the glove box and found it empty. She tried to remember what had been there. A tire guage, tissue paper, an old watch. Junk. Then she remembered she left her journal there yesterday. Adrenaline pooled in her body as if she'd been caught in the act of doing the things she wrote about in the journal. She looked up at the rearview mirror. The ivory pendant still hung there.

The pendant was her mother's. It was large and round, with a running mustang etched into the ivory, its wild hair flying. It was part of Audrey's story

that she was making up as she went—of her life with a mother as free as the mustang. She had taken it from her mother's drawer cluttered with jewelry, makeup, pins, underwear, letter openers that looked like knives.

Audrey had put the pendant on her rearview mirror when she left her home town and crossed the country with the stereo blaring. Now she grabbed the silver chain, unwrapped it from the rearview mirror, and clutched the pendant, squeezing it in her fist as if she were being dragged along behind the kid that had taken the things from her car.

Audrey sat in the back corner of the room at the newcomer meeting. The ivory pendant hung from the chain fastened around her neck under her shirt. After she couldn't get her tire unstuck from the ice at the curb, she had the familiar impulse to duck into a nearby bar and have a few drinks. Instead, she walked the mile and a half to the meeting. She sat in the corner cradling a steaming cup of coffee in her hands. She didn't want to talk or be noticed. The topic of the meeting was letting go. She listened to people talking in turns about how hard it was for them to let go of grudges, of betrayals and abuses, of the drinking.

Audrey looked around the room. There were a few new faces, and these people studied their coffee cups or the slogans on the walls, avoiding looking into anyone's eyes. Sonia was sitting near the window, looking as if she might jump out of

it. The first weeks sober were hard for everybody, but Sonia was in worse shape than most. She refused to check into a treatment center. She'd already been that route several years earlier, and this time she was going to do it on her own.

Bart had the floor and was telling the story about White Feather again. When he finished, he said, "You know, that guy knew how to let go. I've got grudges against my ex, my folks, the cops. The old-timers keep telling me I have to let go of it all if I want to stay sober. Okay. But how?"

Audrey refused a ride from Bart, saying she wanted to walk home, get some exercise. Bart would want to talk. When she went out the door of the clubhouse, Charlie was standing on the front sidewalk stamping his boots on the ice and slapping his gloved hands together. He had parked his pickup at the curb, ready to slide into the driver's seat at any moment. He waved her over. She went toward him, looking down at the ground and concentrating on sliding her rubber boots over the ice on the front walkway.

"Hi Audrey," he said. He crossed his arms in front of his chest.

"What is it, Charlie?" She'd been aching to see him, to hear his voice, but now his smile was forced.

"Is that all you have to say to me?"

"Charlie, it's been four months," she said. Heavy clouds of breath fell from her mouth and sank toward the ground when she spoke. "You haven't returned

any of my calls in four months."

"I don't want a scene," he said. He looked down at his feet and stamped them, punctuating his sentence. "Look, I've heard about what you're doing, staying sober and all."

"Three months tomorrow," she said. The others in AA shared her enthusiasm for the monthly sobriety birthdays, but Charlie didn't seem to. He shook his head slightly and dug his hands into his coat pockets. "Hey," she said and reached to touch his arm. "Everything will be okay. You'll see."

He took half a step away from her. "Audrey...I don't..." He looked up at the sky. "I want a divorce," he said, like he was ordering pizza.

The sun gleamed off an icicle with wicked precision. "Oh," she said.

He stamped his feet again.

She stood still for a minute. The rusty smell of blood came into her nose from somewhere in the center of her head.

"Look, I gotta go," she said. The words fell out of her mouth with clouds of breath. She pulled her coat tighter around her neck and turned to go, picking her way along the icy sidewalk.

Images of things she'd lost went running through her mind. The more she heard about letting go the more she hung on, and the more she hung on the faster things kept getting jerked from her grip.

And then there were the things that wouldn't budge. Like the image of her mother stretched out on the road beside a mangled car.

Audrey was in the car before the wreck, and they were arguing.

"I'm eighteen, dammit. You can't ground me when I'm already eighteen," Audrey said, anger displacing fear.

"I can't take this any more," said her mother in a scream. She had already made the change, the one that came over her in a rage.

"Okay, okay," said Audrey, the fear back. "Come on, Mom. Come on. Hey."

Her mother swerved into the lane of oncoming traffic. She was screaming, "I can't take it anymore. I'm going to kill us both."

This is where Audrey blacks out. No memory until the image of her mother on the road. Stretched out with her limbs at awkward angles. Blood pooling around her. This is where she's stuck, no chance, ever.

She never told anyone the things that happened inside her during the following months. The anger that took her over. She felt robbed, not of something she had, but of the possibility for something she wanted more than anything else.

With every step on the sidewalk, Audrey picked up her pace, sliding her feet and breathing out white puffs that made a fading trail behind her. The icicles on the spruce trees were dripping in the sun.

As she neared the Bitterroot Cafe, Sonia came out the door and

walked in her direction.

"Hey," Audrey said when they neared each other.

"What the..." Sonia jumped, startled, and glared at her.

"Sorry." Audrey held her hands up, palms out. "I thought you saw me."

"Shit." Sonia trembled and her eyes were red.

Audrey's hands had clenched into fists at her sides. She willed them to relax. She took the silver chain from her neck and held it out to Sonia. The mustang was caught in a pendulum swing between them. Vertical lines dug into the space between Sonia's eyebrows.

"I wanted to give this to you," Audrey said.

Sonia took the pendant and mumbled something. She looked down at the etched mustang for a minute, then, shaking her head, she held the necklace out to Audrey.

"Please keep it," Audrey said. "Come on."

Sonia's green eyes were hard and shiny like the thawing ice on the sidewalk. She dropped the necklace into the storm drain at the side of the street, stepped around Audrey, and walked away.

Audrey looked into the black cave of the storm drain and heard run-off from the thaw cascading down to a deep whirlpool, water crashing and swirling like vengeance.

She was nauseated, she didn't understand anything, it all hurt. She walked the mile and a half toward home, then passed her street, kept walking.

Barry Kitterman

## IT'S SATURDAY NIGHT WHEN GERALD GETS RELIGION

What if I promise, if the truck will start,  
to go with you to church? You'd say yes then?  
*The Baptist church?* If they can match my style.  
*You have a style?* My people do. My kin.

My mama was a Nazarene. My daddy  
Holiness. *Your father was a drunkard*  
*til he died.* Some Holiness will drink.  
*That truck won't start, or you won't find your shoes.*

I think I will. *And what am I to wear?*  
I like you dressed the way you are tonight.  
*Whoever ever went to church half naked?*  
It starts my truck, Elaine. You do know how.

Turn out the light. Come kiss me on my head.  
I feel the spirit moving. I hear the hymns.

Susan Lewis  
THE BIG QUESTION

I'm thinking of a number  
between one and one.

I'm thinking of a problem  
with big dreams and big teeth.

You won't show me your home  
between a rock and a hard place.

You're thinking of something  
between one increment and another.

I want to say *epicycles*,  
but I guessed that last time.

Back then you looked  
as blank as a mountain.

Now your pupils  
pulsate puzzles,

which makes me want to blurt  
*dark energy*,

but I know you'd never  
let me in on such a hot secret.

## **Karen Brennan**

### **WRONG BODY TYPE**

She said she was the wrong body type for this outfit, whereas the other one was the right body type. She herself was short-waisted and long-legged and the other was short-legged and long-waisted. Therefore, she herself could wear a jacket below the hips but the other had to beware of such jackets. In this particular case, she herself was unable to wear a blouse with a shirred bodice because the flouncing below breast-line gave her a dwarfed look which was unattractive and misleading. Because, on the whole, she was not unattractive. The other was more attractive, true, but she herself was attractive enough, especially if she wore clothes that suited her body type. Oh pass me the salt, she herself said to another person not involved, not at all involved, in this story.

## Karen Brennan

### THE COUPLE

At first Martin was with Erin, then he was with Carol, but before that he was with Melanie. After he left Carol, he went back to Erin but then he met Joan and decided to be with her instead of Erin, only he didn't tell Erin and when she found out she blamed Joan. At the time, Melanie was with Gaylord, but then Gaylord died, so she began to be with Martin since Joan was away most of the time, though she and Martin both denied they were with each other to Joan. Dana wasn't with anyone, but Martin secretly longed to be with Dana, but he wouldn't admit this to Joan. Melanie meanwhile met Luke and told Joan she would be with him for a long, long time and finally Dana met someone who kept changing his name but she seemed to be happy with him for at least a week and a half. Martin re-committed to Joan since the others were taken but Joan wasn't sure she wanted to be with anyone. Erin really wanted to be with Martin and hated Joan and Joan was tired of all the drama. She told Martin he should be with Erin and that she, Joan, would be with no one since being with no one is what she most desired since it entailed no drama. The older she got, the less tolerant she was of drama, said Joan. But Martin enjoyed drama and refused to give her up.



©Stephen Romaniello San Miguel Dream 2007 32"x40" Oil on Canvas

## Leesteffy Jenkins

### WHAT KIDS WILL SAY

I was only six when I had sex. We were in the back of a station wagon driving home from the circus. There were too many of us kids, and the car was cramped. The neighbor's eight year old son had just rolled off me. We were pretending to be a sandwich. I was the bottom slice, he was the meat in-between and his sister was the top. My step-siblings told me that was sex. "Weber's white bread sex", my oldest step brother said sneeringly. My step-siblings were from Watts and hated me. I was a white girl. I fit into the neighborhood where we now lived—while they were taunted, their books taken or torn, and they were called *niggers*. The four of them had moved with us, their mother having lost custody for reasons the adults never said. When the boy rolled off of me, they sneered and snickered and said in a knowing way that I was no longer a virgin. I didn't know what a virgin was but I could tell it was something I wanted to be. Sex was something *the bad* kids did. When we lived in Watts, I once caught a boy pressing his penis into the girl next door, right outside our dining room window. When I told my mother, she got quiet. "Was she crying?" she asked. I shook my head. "Poor thing", my mother said. That girl wasn't crying, but she didn't look happy either. Her head was all scrunched under the white Hydrangea bush, her blue silken panties down around her ankles, her pink puckered elasticized shirt clinging to her flat ebony chest. Natty black braids stuck out of the bush like a star-burst or some kind of crazy, exotic weed.

I'd been *happy* playing sandwich with that boy, and that's what worried me. Apparently, I was a girl who liked sex. I imagined that everyone knew. The shame stung. My step-siblings were no help. They never let up, making me believe I'd had sex, telling me other boys were waiting their turn.

I was well into my twenties when I finally rid myself of the *feeling* that I'd had sex when I was six, even though I had known for a long while I'd only been playing sandwich.

## Brooke Roberts

### PAIR

His wife slid from the wheelchair into their Mercedes, a breath of perfume, soured by the acid stench of hospital, her head bent, paired engagement and wedding rings rocking on the chain around her neck, the new stump of her left wrist held in the air in front of her, carefully, to protect the prickle of fresh stitches that closed severed flesh over bone. It had not been an accident. No. It was no accident that had taken his wife's hand. Nothing even approaching one.

He did not want the other man's hand in return, he wanted death. He wanted humiliation. He wanted back what his wife had felt when they put the rings she could no longer wear on the chain. The rings he had given her, first when he asked her to be his wife, and the day they were married. He vowed those things. He called them "honor."

He shut the door too hard and she jumped. He walked around and slid into the driver's seat, turning the ignition hard, feeling, in the twist of his own wrist, the capability to twist a knife, to pull a trigger. As if, by his wife losing her hand, his was becoming more deft.

"Is there anything you'd like?" he asked.

"For you to ask me if I want anything," she said softly.

"Fine. Do you want anything?" he said.

She turned and looked at him, her arm still in the air, truncated. She was

bewildered. He could see it in the still fading black eyes and the puckered slash in her cheek that matched stitches with her wrist. He had never seen this woman bewildered.

“Yogurt,” he suggested.

She let out a breath he hadn't known she was holding. “Yogurt.” She nodded her head. “Yes.”

He wondered if when the machete bit in and through the heel of his wife's hand, if what had drained, no, it must have spurted -- terrible -- was more than blood. He wanted death. Oh, god, he wanted death. This woman, his woman, what that man violated, what he had tried to kill, it was his, his, his.

His wife waited in the car while he entered the frozen yogurt shop, ordered for the both of them. At the counter, he watched the nozzle dump its contents, and could not shake the sense that it was a defecation. It pinched off to a point. He brought the cups back to his wife, handed one to her, regretted it when she awkwardly tried to settle it between her legs so she could then take the pink plastic spoon from his fist with her now one hand.

“Do you want me to hold it for you?” he asked.

She shook her head, sloughing off more of that acid hospital smell. He would wash her hair when they got home.

“Sometimes, when people have a near death experience, they don't know

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if they're alive or not. They think they might be ghosts,” his wife said, sliding the pile's peak onto her spoon. “Natalie told me that.”

“Why?”

“Because I --” she slid the spoon between her lips. He watched her move her mouth, a tentative motion her eyes closing to absorb mild pain. “I wasn’t sure.”

“You didn’t tell me.”

“I think I said it when I was on the morphine.” A thought passed over her face and she fished out another spoonful of her pile. “Did I say a lot on the morphine?”

“Yes,” he answered. He looked down at his own frozen yogurt. He could not eat it and suddenly he could not stand to watch his wife eat hers. “This was a mistake. It hurts you.” He reached for her cup.

“If I can’t eat frozen yogurt,” there was a slight smile in her voice, “what can I eat?”

He put his hand on his wife’s shoulder, leaned into her. “He pissed on you,” he said. “When he was done, he fucking pissed on you.”

His wife stared at him. There was a long silence in the car. She bent her head and stuck the spoon deep into her yogurt.

“I know,” she said. “It smelled like he’d been drinking coffee.”

He wanted death. He wanted to kill. He wanted to maim and cause pain. He wanted to snatch and smother life.

“Even if I was already dead,” she said finally. “How would I know?”

“Would you imagine this?” he asked. “This?” He took her frozen yogurt cup.

She looked at it, thoughtful. “Maybe.” She took the cup back from him, continued to eat it. He looked away.

This was a woman who made brunches for their friends. Who served pomegranate bellinis, the seeds inside the champagne, jumping with the bubbles, a celebration in a glass. Poached eggs in ham cups, diamond tennis bracelet knocking against the edge of a plate, casually placed in the middle of a cloth covered table. Polished, more gorgeous than any of their friends. A woman who gloried in their sex, yet was so elegant no one could have guessed but her husband just how she was. Just for him. She brought home paychecks between her perfectly manicured fingers with a preternatural ease, as if it were nothing. Added up the zeros, and planned their future. Was careful, careful to make everything secure and right, and yet never once made it seem as if she did any more than him, anything without him. She was perfectly imperturbable. She was not a woman who was ever, ever bewildered.

This did not happen, could not have happened. He trusted this woman, his woman, and her confidence. He had built his world on it and her. It had been sliced. It had been raped.

“I think about my hand,” she told him. “All the time.”

“Yes,” he said.

“No, about how it is now. How it’s decomposing. How it’s died before me. It was part of me... Or maybe they burned it. I think I’m more comfortable thinking they burned it.” She paused a moment. “I want to know where it is. What is happening to it. My flesh.”

I can’t take this, he thought. He didn’t say it. He thought about his wife’s flesh decaying. He thought about the horrific mortality that had come between them. He thought about the dead. How the paychecks and the zeros didn’t mean anything. How the bellinis were drunk and the champagne flutes empty and dirty from lips pressed against the rims. Lips that were not his. Pissed on by a penis that was not his.

“I want to take you home now,” he said. “I want to wash your hair.”

“Why?” she asked. “Does it smell bad?”

“Yes.”

She looked hurt. “I can try to take a shower. I have to learn.”

“No,” he told her. “I want to bathe you. I want to touch your body.”

He pulled the car out and was on the road before he realized that her shoulders were shuddering, that she was trying to contain her sobs. He plucked the yogurt from between her legs. He threw it out the window.

Inside their bedroom, his wife said she liked the new bed, the new carpet. She opened the windows and stood in front of them. She did not mention the

new bars he had installed.

“I can’t live here anymore,” she said.

“I know,” he said. “Let’s get undressed.”

He closed the windows, brought the drapes together. There was a shadowy stillness to the room. He undid the buttons of his shirt as his wife stepped out of her slippers. She shrugged her stump into the sleeve of her sweatshirt and took it off. She was braless under her t-shirt and her breasts hung heavily. He stepped out of his jeans. She fumbled with the tie at the waist of her sweatpants. He got down on his knees and did it for her. He pulled them down. Her thighs were purple and blue and green and yellow. He reached up and slipped his hand between her legs, cupped her mound lightly in his hand, he felt the stitches there pricking through the light fabric of her panties.

“Katherine,” he sighed. “Katherine.”

“I don’t think,” she said, “if I were dead, I would imagine this.”

While the bath was filling up, he got her a glass of water and shook some of her pills out into his hand. He watched her swallow them. She handed him back her empty glass. He turned it over in his hand, found what he was looking for.

“What?” she asked.

He brought the glass up to his lips and put them against where her lips had been, smudging the mark with his own.

“I’m getting cold,” she told him.

He stopped the water and he got in first, sitting with his back against the tub. It lapped against his torso. She climbed in and settled between his legs, then scooted forward and leaned back to dip her hair into the bath. He felt the whisper of the strands floating against his genitals. She tipped her head back and forth, and was just about to come up when he caught her hand.

“What?” she asked, just her face above water.

He bent over her, their faces upside down and opposite to each other.

“What?” she asked again.

He held on tight to her one hand and with his other he covered her eyes.

He pushed.

She kicked, she bucked. Small roses bloomed in the water around her. Elegant. Her stump flailed, tried to hit at him, tried, with no hand and no fingers, to grab at his and dislodge his hand. It lasted much longer than he would have thought. It lasted long enough for him to think that he was, maybe, making a mistake. That, maybe, she could have come back. He didn't see how it was possible, but he had been surprised before.

## SNOW

Today the snow reminds me of my wedding  
dress and its stars of lace embroidery.  
How I bled on the bedding—  
like the white seals bludgeoned near the sea.

Red blood on white linen like a rare striped  
orchid with a deep throat curved to sip.  
In the heat and flies I was too ripe  
not to fall into migrant hands. Suddenly the sheet was ripped

and the bloody banner hung from a window:  
there were tears and laughter, and in the sigh of one widow  
the confusion of love and death. Today there is snow  
and I think of all the torn buttons, row on row

of my wedding dress that he could not stop to undo.  
The dress is pressed and mended, readied for my daughter who is twenty-two.

## Janet Butler DESPAIR

It raises a reptilian head and feeds.  
Then sated, glides on slippery slopes  
indifferent to where they lead.

At home in angles of the soul, it breeds  
easily. And easy it glides and gropes  
then raises its head, and feeds.

Nestled in corners, it drops its seeds  
of doubt. A tickle as well to hope  
then down those slippery slopes! indifferent to where they lead.

Haunting the troubled heart, it seeks to please  
and tender sly advice,  
then slowly raises its head, and feeds.

A glance about the blasted wasteland, it sees  
decay and rot, it pokes  
at closed doors, indifferent to where they lead.

It sniffs the putrid breeze,  
settles in rancidness,  
raises a reptilian heads and feeds  
then down those slippery slopes, indifferent to where they lead.

## Barbara Siegel Carlson

### MEETING

He said he ate a porcupine raw.  
She said she heard the clouds speak her name.  
He said there were winters the roads  
were never touched. She said if you spoke back  
the sun would slit open your skin.  
He said bones have a secret meat. She said here,  
take this white pear and green pear  
that I cradle in my red coat, I have many  
that look like stones, like eggs, like eyes.  
He said the word marrow rhymes  
with arrow. She said I ate my own sorrow,  
my own ambrosia I licked from the bark  
of a tree-- my blood knows your speech.  
He said there are worms in every square inch  
we can't see. She said then how can you know  
what you hold, who you are, where you burn  
in your quiver of souls, your urn of children,  
your oven of honeysuckle.

Shawn Yazzie  
ACOUSTIC

My grandfather,  
Led me to the fire that crackled like fireworks in the air  
I arranged myself on the cold, hard, ground  
He took in a deep breath  
That sounded like the wind blowing snow off a mountain  
And spoke a whisper into the wind  
His words flowed through me  
I was light as a feather floating in an endless sea  
He spoke of the creation of the world  
How the eagle watched over me like an angel floating above my head  
With a wave of his hand in the air like a goodbye sign  
He spoke of the trees mountains water wind the sky  
*All having eyes watching and listening*  
*Like a ghosts tracing your footsteps*  
He reached out  
His hands old hard as sincere as mountains squeezed my shoulder  
Looking at the black and quiet space  
As a falling star fell like a razor cutting across the sky  
to the unknown world below  
He grasped his cane as it wobbled like a book balancing on its spine  
We walked to the edge of the world and looked down the valley  
*Always remember those who have filled the voids in your heart*  
He became a part of the acoustics of the sky the eagle the earth

## Margaret Karmazin

### CONFESSION

The church opened for confession 12:30 till 1:00, which certainly did not give a guilty person much time to unload.

Annette Finn sat on the edge of a bench in a small park across the street, staring at the ground. She had dressed up slightly, though why she didn't know. It would be her black, filthy soul the priest would be seeing, not anything she had on.

It took every bit of courage she had to come. Three years she'd been carrying this with her, and now that she was in this strange city she might as well do it. Better here than home where everyone was a gossip, including the priests.

She glanced at the watch Norm gave her for their anniversary and saw it was only 11:10. More than an hour to go. She had a new magazine in her purse, but doubted she could focus on it. No, she'd just sit there and stew in her own juices, as her mother would have said if she'd still been alive.

Could her mother see what Annette was up to from "over there?" God forbid. If so, the woman would be extremely disappointed.

A man approached on the asphalt path. Annette squinted to see. He was heading directly toward the bench. Company was the last thing she desired.

"Hello," he said in a hyper, cultivated voice. He sat down at the other end of the bench. "I hope you don't mind if I sit here. I really just want to make confession at the church over there, but they told me it doesn't start till 12:30."

Annette sighed. This was like being on a plane or bus, trapped with a gabber. She could tell immediately the guy was one.

“All right,” she mumbled.

He crossed his legs in a feminine manner. Obviously gay, she decided, possibly flaming. She remained resolutely facing forward, waiting for the conversational onslaught.

Instead, greeted with silence, she couldn't resist turning to look at him.

He was staring into the distance, right past her as if she weren't there. He was youngish, in his early to mid thirties, well cared for and dressed in what she imagined was stylish, urban gay. He wore tight, distressed jeans, a white cotton shirt that fit like a blouse she wore in high school and he'd tied a yellow sweater around his shoulders. Across his torso was a shoulder bag of brown leather. His shoes were pointed and European, and he bounced one of his feet as if suffering from the jitters.

Though disapproving of his look, Annette felt herself dowdy in comparison. She imagined that he was thinking this about her - judging her brown tweed blazer and flannel slacks, her weathered bag and comfortable shoes. Then she straightened herself. She was fifty-one, for crying out loud, she could wear whatever she wanted. What business was it of some big city smart ass how she dressed?

He startled her when he said, “I like your hair. Did you have it streaked or does it just grow like that?”

She looked into his eyes and make a slight readjustment to her view of him. They were big, rather innocent eyes and struck a bit at her mother chords. “Um, I had it done. Really, I just have plain old brown hair. You know, the kind they call mousy?”

He laughed. “Well, they did a great job. I think the color makes you look glowy.”

“Humph,” she said. “Glowy is not how I feel.”

Why had she said that? She certainly did not want to tell him anything, not this total stranger and one so different from herself.

He slid slightly closer on the bench. “You’re feeling bad about something?” he prompted. “Because if you’d like to talk about it, I’m all ears. Anything to distract me from my own issues would be more than welcome.”

“I’m just waiting like you are to make confession over there. I’m really early.”

“I’m super early too, “ he admitted. “Pretty freaked out, I guess. Hey, my name’s Ronald Shuman.” He stuck out a large, well formed hand.

“Annette Finn,” she said, giving the hand a quick shake.

He sighed. “I don’t even know if I can go through with this. I just don’t know.” He shook his head.

His face, though large, was boyish. Though she’d always somewhat disapproved of the homosexual thing, she was beginning to feel uncharacteristically warm toward him.

“You don’t go to confession on a regular basis?” she said.

“I don’t think I’ve done it for years, honey. I no longer even totally believe in it. I wouldn’t be thinking of it now if I hadn’t-” He stopped abruptly.

She waited a few seconds, but he did not continue. “I see,” she said.

“You?” he said, brightening his voice. “Do you go every week?”

“No. I haven’t been in a long time.”

He bit his lip and nodded. She noticed that he wore a sapphire ring on his right hand. The stone was possibly three carats and the metal looked to be platinum. From there, her eyes traveled over him and she noted that the sweater was cashmere and the shoes had that unmistakable handmade look. Rich, she thought. Or very very comfortable.

“We’re really early,” said Ronald.

He seemed embarrassed about that. She was a little discomfited about being there herself. Anyone with a regular problem would just show up at twelve-thirty. But then how was she, a stranger to Chicago, to know what the times were?

“This isn’t your regular church?” she asked, just to be polite.

He looked startled. “Oh, God no. I don’t live here; I’m visiting with my partner. Derrick’s a set designer. He’s working on a new police drama pilot that takes

place in Chicago. Normally, I'd be home in Los Angeles writing - I'm a freelance writer, mostly articles about home improvement - but we just decided to turn it into a little vacation. We're going back tomorrow." His expression was one of wistful sadness. "How about you? Do you live in town?"

"No," she said. "My husband's giving a paper at a medical seminar. He's a cardiologist."

"A cardiologist, huh?" he said. "Good profession. Where are you from?"

She didn't reply. What reason to say that she and Norm were from a small town outside Pittsburgh?

"I'm sorry, I know I'm a busybody," said Ronald. "Always have been."

He was suddenly silent, both of them staring across the street at the church, which looked, at the moment, very deserted. She suddenly had an urge to bolt and must have made a small movement because Ronald noticed.

"Thinking of forgetting the whole thing?" he asked, uncannily.

"I don't know," she said. "Maybe."

He shifted his legs, fiddled with his hair, then said, "Well, I feel the same, but I really need to get this off my chest. I mean it's not good for my health for one thing. I haven't even told Derrick and we tell each other everything."

She was afraid to open her mouth.

“It wasn’t something I did recently. Nothing like cheating on Derrick or anything. It was like six years ago and I can’t seem to get over it. Well, why should I? It was huge.”

Okay, what was she supposed to say? Did she really want to hear this? No? Yes? It was clear, however, that he expected her to be interested, so for the sake of politeness, and not looking directly at him, she said, “Do you want to talk about it?”

He sighed theatrically. “You’re going to be the first and only person I’ve told this to. No one else who knows me - none of my friends, family or acquaintances know anything about it. I’ve always led them to believe that I just invested well. That’s what they think, that I had a lucky run on the stock market. If they only knew.”

Oh no, thought Annette, here we go. If he tells me whatever it is he’s obviously dying to tell, will he then have to kill me? She knew he was hanging by a thread, waiting for her signal to spill. Well, there was still an hour to go, so why not?

“So... how did you really get the money?”

He shut his eyes and rubbed the side of his cheek. She saw that he had a ring on that hand too, this one heavy gold, set with a large diamond. “I used to be a hospice nurse. That’s what I did - take care of dying people, counsel the families and hook up the morphine. It could have been a grim business, but actually I enjoyed it.” He paused. “Well, most of the time.

“One of my patients was a rich old lady. She lived in a fancy penthouse

apartment with a view to die for, and had round-the-clock nurses, three who took different shifts. When I came, she'd send whichever nurse was on duty out of the room because she liked the two of us to be alone.

“She talked about her two daughters, both of whom had disappointed her. She still loved them, she said, but they were both selfish egomaniacs. She felt they were only interested in her money, waiting for her to kick, as she put it. I never met them; had never seen either of them visit. I just listened. It wasn't my job to try and change her mind.

“One day, she told me to look under the bed. There was one of those plastic cases like people keep shoes or blankets in. ‘Pull it out and open it,’ she said. So I did. ‘There's a velvet case in there, can you find it?’ I felt around until I did. ‘Take it out and look inside,’ she said.

“When I unzipped it, I almost passed out. It was filled with sensational jewelry - diamond encrusted necklaces and bracelets, ruby earrings, emerald, sapphire and topaz rings, diamond and emerald brooches, you name it. An absolute fortune, all in one little bag!

“She said, ‘I want you to have that. Don't take it now. You don't have your briefcase today, do you? Next time, be sure to bring it and first chance you get, slip that jewelry case into it. I want that stuff out of here, I don't want them to have it. I like you, Ronald, you've been kind to me. You get it out of here next time you come.’”

Annette was now listening full throttle.

“The next morning early, a little after six, I got the call that Mrs. Claridge had died. I needed to get over there to tie things up. I’d been thinking off and on all night about what she’d said - kept tossing and turning, no sleep at all. Did I have a right to that jewelry? Sure, she told me she wanted me to have it, but was she in her right mind? There were moments when she’d lose it and talk to me like I was her brother who died in 1978. How did I know her daughters didn’t know full well about that loot and even where she kept it? If I were to take it, they’d drag me and the other three nurses through the wringer, and I could end up in prison.

“I’d been thinking that I’d make her put it in writing before I accepted the stuff, but there was no chance for that now. I didn’t see much in the future for me. I knew that after a while, I’d burn out. Hospice nurses often do. If I wanted to do anything else and actually support myself, I’d need to go back to school and pay for it, but with what? What I really wanted was to write, but everyone knows you’d starve doing that. So let’s just say the temptation to take the old lady up on her offer was intense.”

“I can see how,” said Annette.

“I took my briefcase, had to anyway as it contained the forms I needed. When I got to the apartment, the private night nurse was there and one of the daughters I’d never met. Her sister, this one told me, was flying in. There was a moment when the two women were out of the room and I did it. I had that jewelry in my briefcase in one swift move, then click and lock. I looked at Mrs. Claridge, who was wearing a Buddha-like expression, and whispered a thank you. When the women returned, I was innocently unhooking the medical equipment.

“I seemed to be in a trance as I left the place, but once in the car, honey, I thought

my heart was going to jump out of my chest. I had to pop a Valium, but even that didn't calm me down. If a police car happened to pass by, I'd almost faint. I went straight home and called in to the office, said that I'd been particularly close to Mrs. Claridge and was really upset. The boss didn't like it, but I took the rest of the day off.

"Trust me, it was hell going about my work after that, which I had to do so everything appeared normal. Every time the phone rang, I jumped. When anyone came to the door, home or at work, I thought this is it, they're coming for me. But they never did."

"They never found out?" said Annette.

"Nope. After six months, I flew to New York where my sister lives and had the stuff appraised. I told them I'd inherited it from my mother. My return on the jewelry came to one million, nine hundred thousand dollars. Some I kept in safety deposit boxes and slowly invested the rest."

"What happened to the daughters? Did you ever find out?"

"I waited about a year and started some inquiries. By then I'd quit my job. It took me a while to locate them. One is in her forties and has an apartment a few miles from our house. There doesn't appear to be a husband or boyfriend. I followed her one morning and found that she works for an insurance agency. Her car is a Ford Focus. There was no sign of wealth anywhere. She lives like any single woman in a low level, white collar job. My next task was to find her sister. For that I had to hire someone. That one lives in Oregon and is married with two kids. Also, no sign of money."

“I don’t get it,” said Annette.

“Apparently, Mrs. Claridge had a major grudge against her offspring. To punish them from the grave, she must have cashed in all her stocks, bonds and CDs and bought the jewelry, which she then planned to get rid of when the end was near. I happened to be in the right place at the right time. Together with her, I cheated her heirs out of their rightful inheritance.”

“I don’t know if I’d call it cheating,” said Annette. “And ‘rightful’ is a matter of opinion.”

“But who knows if her antipathy towards her kids was merited? Maybe Mrs. Claridge was nuts. Maybe she was a controlling bitch. My taking that jewelry would have affected a lot of people, not just her daughters, but her grandkids. What I have could have sent them to college, majorly changed their lives.”

Annette leaned forward. “How do you know they even knew she had any big money? Maybe they didn’t.”

Ronald shook his head. “That apartment she lived in was deluxe. Anyone could see that.”

“Was she still managing her own money?”

“Up to the last. She’d get out her books and pay bills. I think she used direct deposit for some.”

Annette was silent for several moments.

Ronald said, "You think I'm a terrible person, don't you?"

"This is what you were planning to confess to the priest?"

"Yes," he said.

She nodded. "The only thing is, he'd give you penance, but even if you're truly sorry, does that absolve you of everything? Though frankly, I don't know that I believe what you did was wrong. You don't know, and probably never will, the woman's motives for giving you the jewelry. Unless she was insane, she had a right to give her stuff to whomever she chose."

"Then why do I feel this guilt?" he asked.

His face was completely open, as if his entire psyche was visible for her to see. She had the momentary, odd sensation that this was the only person she'd ever really seen into in her life.

He was still regarding her as if she could save him.

"What would assuage your guilt?" she asked.

"Maybe to know the answer to the mystery of why Mrs. Claridge did that," he replied.

"Could you visit the daughter who lives near you? On some pretext? Say you're writing an article about people you dealt with in hospice? Try to find out what you can about her story?"

His face lit up. "I could do that, yes!"

"And then," continued Annette, "if it turns out the daughter was indeed wronged, you might somehow secretly send money to her. On the other hand, if she wasn't aware that her mother was that well off or if she had hated her mother, you could let your guilt go. Or, you might send money to charities. But Ronald, I do not advise you to confess to the daughter. You're too nice a person to go to prison."

His eyes filled with tears. "I'm so glad I met you," he said. "I don't think I need that priest now. You're wonderful."

"No," she said firmly. "I am very far from wonderful. If you only knew."

Ronald recrossed his legs. "What did you do?"

"My transgression makes yours look like first grade stuff."

"Why? Did you commit murder?"

His merry expression switched to serious when she didn't answer. "Oh my God,," he said.

She waited a while before speaking. "Almost," she said. "It was three years ago. Norm and I had, or so I thought, enjoyed a long, happy marriage. Did you ever live under a complete delusion? Can you imagine how it feels when that delusion is suddenly brought to light?"

“Understand that I had reason to believe our relationship was healthy. He was home more than most cardiologists and in frequent touch when he wasn’t. We spoke on the phone several times a day; mostly him calling me. We discussed his work problems, he listened to my ideas and opinions, was attentive in general like a loving, model husband. We took vacations twice a year, exploring interesting places together, relaxing in the Caribbean. He bought me gifts and built a studio onto the house when I took up painting as a hobby. He was kind and sexy and a good father. Of course the kids are out of the house now, one in New York and the other in Spain. You see, I had no reason to think there was anything going on. Nothing had changed in his demeanor or attitude. I had no cause to suspect anything.

“It was late April, I remember - a Sunday afternoon. I was in the studio working on a collage, but mostly looking out the window at the azaleas which were magnificent. The phone rang and I picked it up at the exact moment Norm did. He never knew I was on the line. He said hello and then my sister spoke. I almost burst into the conversation, but something held me back.

“Your guardian angel, maybe,” suggested Ronald.

“I don’t know,” said Annette. “Anyway, it became evident from the things she was saying that they were having an affair. She’s married herself, you understand, to a very nice man who runs a small chain of body shops. I’ve always liked Joe. He’s easygoing and kind, maybe too easygoing. Whatever the case, she was cheating on him, too.

“You can’t imagine my shock. I had considered her my best friend. Not to mention my utter surprise that Norm was doing this. It was as appalling as if, say, a tree, suddenly reached out a branch and hit you hard upside the head. For several

moments I couldn't breathe and almost dropped the phone, then something inside of me hardened, turned to wood, to steel and finally to stone.

"I stayed on until they were finished, then hung up after they did. She'd even mentioned something about their possibly getting divorced."

"What did Norm say to that?" asked Ronald. "What was his input during the conversation?"

"He didn't say all that much, but agreed to meet at her house the following day at two in the afternoon! How was that possible, I wondered, when he had office hours? At first, I planned to suddenly show up at his office, then changed my mind. No, I'd need to remain cool, to make my moves slow and careful. I would contact a lawyer first and see where I stood financially, then I'd do something and that something was going to surprise and hurt them both. Whatever it was, it was going to be hard-ass and scary. I was one very hurt and angry woman."

"Well, I can imagine!" said Ronald, his eyes wide.

"How long had it been going on, I wondered. Months, even years? All the while she'd been acting like we were soul twins, you know what I mean?"

"Yeah, I do," said Ronald. "I've met some of those in my time."

"Well, Lauren - that's my sister's name - was an herbologist. She grew her own herbs, dried them and made concoctions in little bottles - tinctures, they're called. She also filled her own capsules with the dried, whole herbs and took a zillion of

them herself. I don't know how many pills a day she swallowed. I started thinking: how hard would it be to substitute something into those pills she took? And how much would a person need of whatever it was?

"I became a secret student of herbology myself. Now that I knew Norm was a cheating piece of shit, I felt no compunction about being out all hours without explaining my whereabouts. I visited herb shops, spent hours in the library and used the library computers to find information. I didn't want any history of that on my own computer.

"Finally, I found what I needed. The wilted leaves, twigs and seeds of a wild cherry tree. Highly toxic, according to what I read. Fatal if eaten. Imagine that and we had wild cherry trees in the woods right behind our house.

"Norm, in the meantime, began to wonder what I was up to. He started calling me more than usual. I suspected that the reason he'd called so much before was to make sure where I was while he was seeing Lauren. But now he seemed to call for another reason. It dawned on me that maybe he suspected I was having an affair. So I let him wonder, made things appear a little suspicious. I lost a few pounds, bought sexy clothes and had my hair cut. I mentioned running into male friends and having coffee; I let him sweat.

"I stalked Lauren. When she was home working, grinding up her herbs or out doing whatever. Everyone knew she kept a big basket on her fridge in which she stored her personal bottles of dried herbs. The extracts lived inside the fridge. After I got her schedule down, I let myself into her house and substituted my own capsules for some of hers. Herbal capsules come in different colors - some ground up herbs are tan or brown, some different shades of green. I put mine in the

bottle with the closest match.”

“My God,” said Ronald. He was leaning so close to Annette, they were almost touching. “What happened next?”

She shook her head, then looked up at the sky. “She found a lump in her breast and within two weeks, knew it was cancer. It came to light later that she had inherited that breast cancer gene, while I did not. For the next several months, she underwent radiation. She gained weight, which was weird, but that’s what happened. The last thing she was interested in was sex or how she looked. She and Joe got really close again. I never knew when exactly she or Norm ended things, but I could feel it was over. And I was left with a husband I no longer respected or trusted.

“Wait a minute,” said Ronald. “What about the poisonous herb? She never took it?”

“The doctors told her to stop taking supplements before and during the treatments. I guess because supplements can raise the immune system and they were knocking it down to kill the cancer. So she stopped. It suddenly hit me - did Joe take the herbs too? Whatever the case, I got over there ASAP. Went over anyway to help Joe out. I flushed the stuff down the toilet and trashed the bottle. It was like someone, something saved us all.”

“How did you feel about your sister after that?” asked Ronald.

“How do you think I feel? I don’t like her, I don’t trust her. All that is gone, cancer or not. Do I love her? I don’t feel anything much. She’s a human being

who has suffered, but there's a nasty little part of me that says she deserved it."

"She survived then?"

"Yes, she survived. And I do my best to interact with her as normally as possible. There is no need for me to do anything; she has suffered enough. Sometimes I see a look in her eye that is questioning. She can sense a lack of the old feeling between us, but doesn't know why and does not dare ask."

Ronald leaned back and looked to be deep in thought. "What about your husband? Did he ever confess?"

"No and I could never bring it up myself. I was terrified to get near the subject after what I'd done."

"And you stayed with him."

"Yes," she said, her voice flat. "Something seemed to have broken in me. I thought about leaving and starting a different life, but I realized that I still loved him, though it was no longer in the same way. There was pity in it now, where there used to be admiration."

"I'm so sorry," said Ronald.

When Annette looked at Ronald now, she saw everything about him in a favorable light - his shining health, his childlike expressions, his beautiful grooming. If only she were like him, if only she were not living in this darkness.

He leaned forward and put a hand on her arm. “Why not do something similar to what you advised me? You can’t cancel what you did, but you can do something good in its place. Just go out and do something good. And be thankful you were spared all that horrible stuff if she had taken the pills.”

She sighed, then took his hand. “Maybe I will. Maybe I’ll do exactly as you say.”

She looked at her watch. “Twelve-thirty. I’m going in.”

He smiled. “I don’t blame you, honey. But in my case, I think not. I think I know what to do now.”

He stood up, took out his wallet and handed her a card. “Call me sometime, dear. I think you and I have a connection.”

She took the card, but knew she would never call.

## Reviewer: Al Dixon

### *Best of the Web 2008.*

Guest Editor Steve Almond. Series Editor Nathan Leslie.

Westland, MI: Dzanc Books, 2008.

339 pp. \$18.00, paper.

Last year a friend of mine, a poet named Chad, decided to start an online literary magazine. But, after a few months of researching, he came to the conclusion that what the world *doesn't* need is another online literary magazine. There are hundreds out there, maybe thousands if you count the random ones that are probably just guises for people to publish themselves and their friends. Some of what they publish is great, but, let's face it, a lot of it is pretty terrible. A great deal of it is so-so, entertaining but forgettable. That's what happens when you take away the economic impediment of printing a magazine and anybody who wants to can start one up.

But Chad's magazine idea did not die. Instead, it evolved. What the world *does* need (at least the online part of it), and what Chad decided to turn his magazine into, is a filter for all that's already out there. The most well-known filter right now is the Million Writers Award, created by the online journal *storySouth*. For the past couple years, the good people at *storySouth* have been soliciting input from far-flung editors and readers to produce a list of Notable Stories. From those, Jason Sanford, founding editor of *storySouth*, chooses the top ten; then readers vote on which one will be the winner. (2007's winner, "Alex Trebek Never Eats Fried Chicken" by Matt Bell, is available at [www.storyglossia.com/23/mb\\_alex.html](http://www.storyglossia.com/23/mb_alex.html).) The Million Writers Award lists as its *raison d'être* the failure of print anthologies to recognize the wealth of literature available online. Perhaps that's changing, though. You might be surprised to learn (I know I was) that, starting in 2009, Best American Short Stories will begin considering stories published online. Pushcart has been doing so for a little while now. *Failbetter.com* has already placed three pieces in that anthology. I think it's fair to say that the legitimacy of online literature is growing.

This brings us to the subject at hand: Dzanc Books's *Best of the Web 2008*. What differentiates this book from the Million Writers award and other such entities is that it is, to my knowledge, the first time a print anthology has been devoted entirely to literature previously published online. It might seem counterintuitive, but it's a great idea, and I suspect there will be many more such anthologies to come.

Dzanc books is the creation of Steve Gillis and Dan Wickett, whose Emerging Writers Network blog is well known to many in the literary world. Nathan Leslie created the series and serves as series editor. For this year's guest editor he chose the prolific and odd Steve Almond.

This, the inaugural edition of Best of the Web, has loads of potential mixed with a good deal of awkwardness. Across the board, the quality of the entries is quite good—much more even than, say, your average print literary magazines. The poetry is especially strong, although its narrative bent may make it more palatable to fiction readers than to the hardcore poetry readers out there. Ann Dyer Stuart’s “[envy is a nude door]” (from *2River View*) makes you hear the language in a way you’ve never heard it before, and Christina Kallery’s “Swan Falls in Love with Swan-Shaped Boat” (*Failbetter.com*) is an instant classic. The fiction is also solid, and reflects the online trend toward short work. Shout-out to Ron Tanner’s “My Small Murders” (from *Wheelhouse Magazine*), Juan José Millás’s “To See them Again” (*Mad Hatter’s Review*) and its killer last line, and Kim Whitehead’s “The Split” (*Terrain.org*). The creative nonfiction is a little more spotty. One potential problem is that nonfiction isn’t differentiated from fiction, so it sometimes catches you off guard. There are also a few too many copyediting errors for my taste and some design kinks that still need to be worked out. And a few of the shorter pieces left me scratching my head. But that’s the way it goes when you cast such a wide net. Maybe it’s even part of the charm. A couple nice extras include interviews with authors of a few of the stand-out pieces and especially the *exhaustive* list of internet literary magazines in the back (over three hundred of them).

Those of us who love good literature but are too lazy to sift through the mass of online literary outlets owe a huge debt of gratitude to Nathan Leslie for putting this thing together. I expect it will be around for a long time. Order one from Dzanc Books ([www.dzancbooks.org/store/](http://www.dzancbooks.org/store/)). Better yet, order two: one to read and one to sell on eBay years from now when Best of the Web is a fixture in the literary landscape.

## BOOKS RECEIVED

- Anticipate The Coming Reservoir*, poems, John Hoppenthaler, Carnegie Mellon, 2008
- A Moon Over Wings*, poems, Thomas Aslin, Clark City Press, Livingston, Montana, 2008
- The Life Plan*, a novel by Sybil Baker, Casperian Books, 2009
- Sonata Mulattica*, poems, Rita Dove, Norton, New York City, 2009
- Fuchsia In Cambodia*, poems, Roy Jacobstein, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, 2008
- A Form Of Optimism* [winner: 2006 Morse Poetry Prize], Roy Jacobstein, Northeastern University Press, Boston
- The Baseball Field At Night: Last Poems*, Patricia Goedicke, Lost Horse Press, Sand Point, Idaho, 2008
- The Heart Of The Mare*, a novel, Chuck Rosenthal, Hollyridge Press, Venice, California, 2007
- Snapshots Of The Perishing World*, poems, Chad Prevost, Cherry Grove Collections, Cincinnati, Ohio, 2006
- The Home Atlas*, poems, David Feela, WordTech Editions, Cincinnati, Ohio, 2009
- Jeremy Ingalls Selected Poems*, Jeremy Ingalls, Kore Press, 2007
- Key Bridge*, poems, Ken Rumble, Carolina Wren Press, Durham, North Carolina, 2007
- The Martini Diet* [winner: 2006 Orphic Prize], Gaylord Brewer, Dream Horse Press, Aptos, California
- The Miniature Room* [winner: 2006 T.S. Eliot Prize], Rebecca Dunham, Truman State University Press, Kirksville, Missouri
- A Garden Of Aloes*, a novel, G. Davies Jandrey, The Permanent Press, Sag Harbor, New York, 2008
- Sentimental Blue*, poems, Jefferson Carter, Chax Press, Tucson, 2006
- Book Of Beasts*, Kerry Shawn Keys, Presa Press, Rockford Michigan, 2009
- Arranging The Blaze*, Chad Sweeney, Anhinga Press, Tallahassee, Florida, 2009
- A Story Also Grows*, poems, Charlotte Muse, Main Street Rag, Charlotte, N.C., 2009
- Land of Amnesia*, poems, Joseph Bathanti, Press 53, Winston-Salem, N.C., 2009
- Hyacinth for the Soul*, poems, Joan I. Siegel, Deerbrook Editions, Cumberland, Maine, 2009
- The Space Between Our Danger and Delight*, Dan Vera, Beothuk Books, Washington, D.C., 2009
- Naked Souls/ Desnudos del Alma*, Marisa Estelrich, transl. By Graciela Lucero-Hammer, Press 53, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, 2009
- Bestiary*, Elise Paschen, Red Hen Press, Granada Hills, California, 2009

## CONTRIBUTOR'S NOTES

**Marvin Bell's** nineteenth book was the wartime collection, *Mars Being Red* (2007). His most recent book is a collaboration titled, *7 Poets, 4 Days, 1 Book*, co-authored with poets from Hungary, Malta, Russia and Slovenia, as well as the U.S., published by Trinity University Press in 2009. He serves on the faculty of a brief-residency MFA program based in Oregon at Pacific University.

**Earl Braggs**, MFA, Vermont College, is a UC Foundation Professor, and teaches creative writing, poetry, African-American literature, and Russian literature at UTC. He is the author of five collections of poetry, including *Hat Dancer Blue* (winner of the 1992 Anhinga Prize), *Walking Back From Woodstock*, *Crossing Tecumseh Street*, and *In Which Language Do I Keep Silent: New and Selected Poems*. His latest book, *Younger Than Neil*, is forthcoming from Anhinga Press. He has received numerous prizes for his writing and teaching.

**Karen Brennan** is the author of five books, including a poetry collection, *The Real Enough World* (Wesleyan University Press, 2006) and stories, *The Garden in Which I Walk* (FC2, 2004). Her memoir *Being With Rachel* (WW Norton, 2002) was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. Her work has appeared in anthologies from Norton, Michigan, University of Georgia Press, Graywolf, and Longman. Professor of English at University of Utah, she teaches in the graduate creative writing program and at the Warren Wilson MFA Program for Writers.

**Janet Bultler** teaches TESL and Italian in San Francisco, where she balances my passion for watercolors and poetry with walks with Fulmi, an abandoned Springer Spaniel/English Setter mix she brought back from Italy. Her chapbook, *Eden Fables* was published online by Language & Culture, 2007. *Ekphrastic Poems* by Robert Schuler and Janet Butler was published by Canvas Press Collection Series, 2007, and *Shadowline* by Gatto Publishing, Scotland (2007) as an eBook.

**Christopher Citro's** poetry, forthcoming in *Poet Lore*, *Faultline: Journal of Art and Literature*, and *Arsenic Lobster*, has appeared recently in *The Cincinnati Review*, *Permafrost*, *Juked*, and elsewhere. He won the 2006 Langston Hughes Creative Writing Award for Poetry, and has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. Christopher is a student in the MFA program at Indiana University where he also co-hosts *The Poets Weave* on the NPR station WFIU.

**Kathy Conde** won the 2008 Hemingway Festival Short Story Contest 2008 and was a finalist in *Glimmer Train's* 2008 Short Story Award for New Writers and *Cutthroat's* 2008 Rick De Marinis Short Fiction Competitions. Her short story collection, *Close to the Bone*, was a semifinalist for the 2008 Iowa Short

Fiction Award. Her work has appeared in *CutThroat*, *Orbis*, *Pearl*, *South Dakota Review*, and others. She is past fiction editor for *Bombay Gin*, Naropa University's literary magazine. She lives in Colorado with her husband and son.

**Alfred Corn's** most recent collection of poems is *Contradictions*, published by Copper Canyon Press. Last November the University of Michigan Press brought out a collection of his essays titled *Atlas: Selected Essays, 1989-2007*. This summer he is in Newcastle Upon Tyne in England.

**Stephanie Dickinson** lives in New York. Her work appears in *Green Mountains Review*, *Dirty Goat*, *African-American Review*, *Short Story*, *Glimmer Train*, and *Fourteen Hills*, among others. Her novel *Half Girl*, winner of the Hackney Award (Birmingham-Southern) is published by Spuyten Duyvil. "Dalloway and Lucky Seven," was reprinted in *New Stories from the South 2008*, and "Love City" is forthcoming in *New Stories from the South 2009*. Along with Rob Cook, she edits *Skidrow Penthouse*.

A resident of Bayfield, Colorado, **Ron Fundingsland** has exhibited work in Taiwan, Korea, Norway, Poland, Czech Republic and Brazil. He has participated in numerous national print exhibitions in the US where he has received a number of awards. His work is included in several major art museum collections including the Denver Art Museum, Seattle Art Museum, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Museum of Fine Arts in Santa Fe and the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, Missouri.

**Emilie George** is an Albanian-American, retired French teacher, a singer/songwriter who performs international folk songs. Three albums recorded for Folkways are now available in the Smithsonian Catalog. Recent CD with Stefan George, "My Father's Mansion: Hands Around the World with International Songs." Poetry published in: *The Sow's Ear*, *Lifeboat: A Journal of Memoir*, *American Recorder*, *Meridian Anthology of Contemporary Poetry*, *Wising Up Press*.

**Kathie Giorgio's** work has appeared in *Fiction International*, *Dos Passos Review*, *Thema*, *Pedestal*, *Bayou*, *Potomac Review*, *Arabesques Review*, *Jabberwock Review* and others. She is Director and Founder of All Writers' Workplace & Workshop, a creative writing studio, and is the editor/owner/publisher of *Quality Fiction* magazine. She also teaches for *Writers' Digest* and serves on their advisory board.

**Jennifer Givhan** is a Mexican-American poet, graduated with her Master's in Literature with an emphasis on Latina women's poetry and motherhood at CSU

Fullerton. She teaches at Fullerton and Cerritos Colleges. She has a beautiful baby son and is married to a man who helps keep her grounded (and does the dishes) so she can concentrate on writing. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Verdad*, *Caesura*, *Mom Writer's Literary Magazine*, and *Pinyon*.

**Ana Jelnikar**, a Slovene translator currently completing her PhD at the University of London, translated the first Slovenian edition of C. G. Jung's *Man and His Symbols*, as well as several collections of contemporary Slovenian poetry. Selected Poems by Sre\_ko Kosovel (co-translated with Barbara Siegel Carlson) is due out in 2009 from Ugly Duckling Presse.

**Leesteffy Jenkins** holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Spalding University. She has stories published in the *The Louisville Review*, *Eclectica*, and *Marginalia*. In 2007, she won first place in the ABROAD writer's contest. Recently, she completed her first novel *7 Generations*, and is working on a Memoir-in-story-and-flash. She is the founder and owner of artSynergie.com, a fledgling fair trade fine arts company. She currently lives in both southern France and New Hampshire.

**ANDREA KAHN** has published fiction in *Prairie Schooner*, *The Santa Clara Review*, *REAL/re: Arts & Letters*, *The Malahat Review*, and *New York Press*. She is the grateful recipient of the *Thomas Wolfe International Fiction Prize*, *Bananafish Short Fiction Contest Award*, *New Letters Literary Award for Fiction*, and *2006 E.M. Koeppel Award for Literary Fiction*. Recently Andrea completed her first novel and is thinking hard about what comes next....

**Margaret Karmazin's** stories have been published in scores of magazines, including *Rosebud*, *North Atlantic Review*, *Potomac Review*, *Confrontation*, and *The MacGuffin*. Several have been nominated for Pushcart Prizes. Piper's Ash, Ltd. published her chapbook of sci-fi, *COSMIC WOMEN*. Karmazin helped write the introduction for and has a story included in *STILL GOING STRONG* as well as a novel, *REPLACING FIONA*, published by [etreasurespublishing.com](http://etreasurespublishing.com).

**Barry Kitterman** grew up in California's San Joaquin Valley. He received an MFA from the University of Montana, and has taught writing and literature at American and Chinese universities. He teaches at Austin Peay State University, where he has served as coordinator of the creative writing program and the visiting writers series. His novel *The Baker's Boy* (SMU Press) was published in 2008.

**Richard Levine** is the author of *A Language Full of Wars* and *Songs and*

*Snapshots from a Battle.* Levine asks: *In a time of tyranny, how can our writing best express opposition? In time of war, do we describe the horror or write peace?*

**Susan Lewis** is the author of “Commodity Fetishism,” winner of the Cervena Barva Press Chapbook Award (forthcoming, 2009) and “Animal Husbandry” (Finishing Line Press, 2008). Her poetry and fiction have been published widely in *Raritan*, *The New Orleans Review*, *Seneca Review*, *The Journal*, *The Berkeley Poetry Review*, *Cimarron Review*, and *Phoebe*.

**Maria Mazziotti Gillan** is Director of the Poetry Center at Passaic County Community College and Professor of Poetry at Binghamton University-SUNY. Her latest book, *All That Lies Between Us*, was awarded the 2008 American Book Award.

**Petite Pascale** lives in London. Her poem is from her forthcoming collection, *What The Water Gave Me, poems after Frida Kahlo*, due out 2010 from Seren Press, (England).

For **Rhodora V. Penaranda**, sitting down to write a poem is like tracking faint pulses in the body one beat at a time. “Tracking breath is hard. Breathing is hard,” she says. “You exhale a riddle then inhale a divine whiff of an answer. In between observing, we forget what we’ve asked, or that we’ve been answered.” She lives in the Hudson Valley in New York.

**Brooke Roberts** has worked in television writers rooms since 2001. She wrote the episode “Tea & Sympathy” for *Boston Legal*, she was a semi-finalist for the Warner Bros. Workshop, and she is also a feature film writer, represented by Anonymous Content. She lives in Los Angeles and is currently applying to the LAPD.

**Stephen Romaniello** has worked as an exhibit designer for the Arizona Sonora Desert Museum as a set designer/scenic artist for the Arizona Opera Company. He is a painter, graphic designer and writer who teaches at Pima College in Tucson, Arizona.. Romaniello is coauthor of *Mastering Adobe GoLive 4* and the author of *Mastering Photoshop 6*, *Photoshop 7*, *CS and CS2 Savvy*, (Sybex), *The Perfect Digital Portfolio*, (Sterling), and the *Photoshop CS2 Encyclopedia*, and the *Photoshop CS3 Channels and Masks Bible* (Wiley). His column, “The Digital Eye,” appears monthly in *Digital Graphics Magazine*. He has had numerous exhibitions of his drawings, paintings and sculpture and is represented in several private, public and corporate collections.

**David Salner** worked at manual labor for twenty-five years, as an iron ore miner, steelworker, furnace tender, and machinist. His writing is deeply influenced by the people he worked with, including those he encountered during six years at

the notorious magnesium plant in Utah, described in the poem in this issue. His fourth collection of poetry, **John Henry's Partner Speaks**, appeared last spring from WordTech. His poems appear in recent or forthcoming issues of **The Iowa Review**, **Atlanta Review**, **Boxcar**, and **Southern Humanities Review**.

While **Dennis Sampson's** roots are in South Dakota, he's been poet-in-residence at Sweet Briar and UT-Knoxville and has taught at Wake Forest University as well. His books, all from Carnegie-Mellon, include *Needlegrass*, *Constant Longing*, and *Asleep At St. Mary's Hospital*, a fine long poem about his father.

**Barbara Siegel Carlson** is the author of a chapbook *Between this Quivering*. She has recent work in *NOR*, *Mid-American Review*, *Poetry Miscellany*, and *Metamorphosis*. Selected Poems of the Slovene Sre\_ko Kosovel (co-translated with Ana Jelnikar) is due out in 2009 from Ugly Duckling Presse. She lives in Carver, MA near a cranberry bog.

**Valerie Wohlfeld's** collection, *Thinking the World Visible*, won the Yale Younger Poets Prize. She wrote the book while living in a 300-year old house in New England. She received an MFA from Vermont College and has published in *Antioch Review*, *Ploughshares*, *New England Review*, and elsewhere.

**Shawn Yazzie** is a member of the Navajo Nation and is an undergraduate studying poetry and theatre at Fort Lewis College in Durango, Colorado. This is his first national publication. He writes: *Maybe dying isn't so hard or dreaming worlds apart. Poetry is like creating a picture between the stars and the world of people. I listen to the trickle of icy, sharp rain drops against my window. The thunderous rush of a mountain river and the gentle, grey fall of snow. I want my words to paint red, black, and shapshift down the page. I want my stories of the moon and suns in my life to burn and glow in people.*

**Muriel Zeller's** work has appeared in *Free Lunch*, *Perihelion*, *Camas: The Nature of the West*, *Slipstream*, and *Rattlesnake Review*. One of her poems was featured on *Verse Daily*, and another received a A8 Seconds Award from *comboypoetry.com*. Her chapbook, *Red Harvest*, was published by Poet's Corner Press in 2002. A community activist working for the preservation of the rural environment in the Sierra Nevada foothills, Zeller is concerned with the preservation of agricultural land and species habitat and how the two may coincide.



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