



CUTTHROAT,  
A JOURNAL OF THE ARTS  
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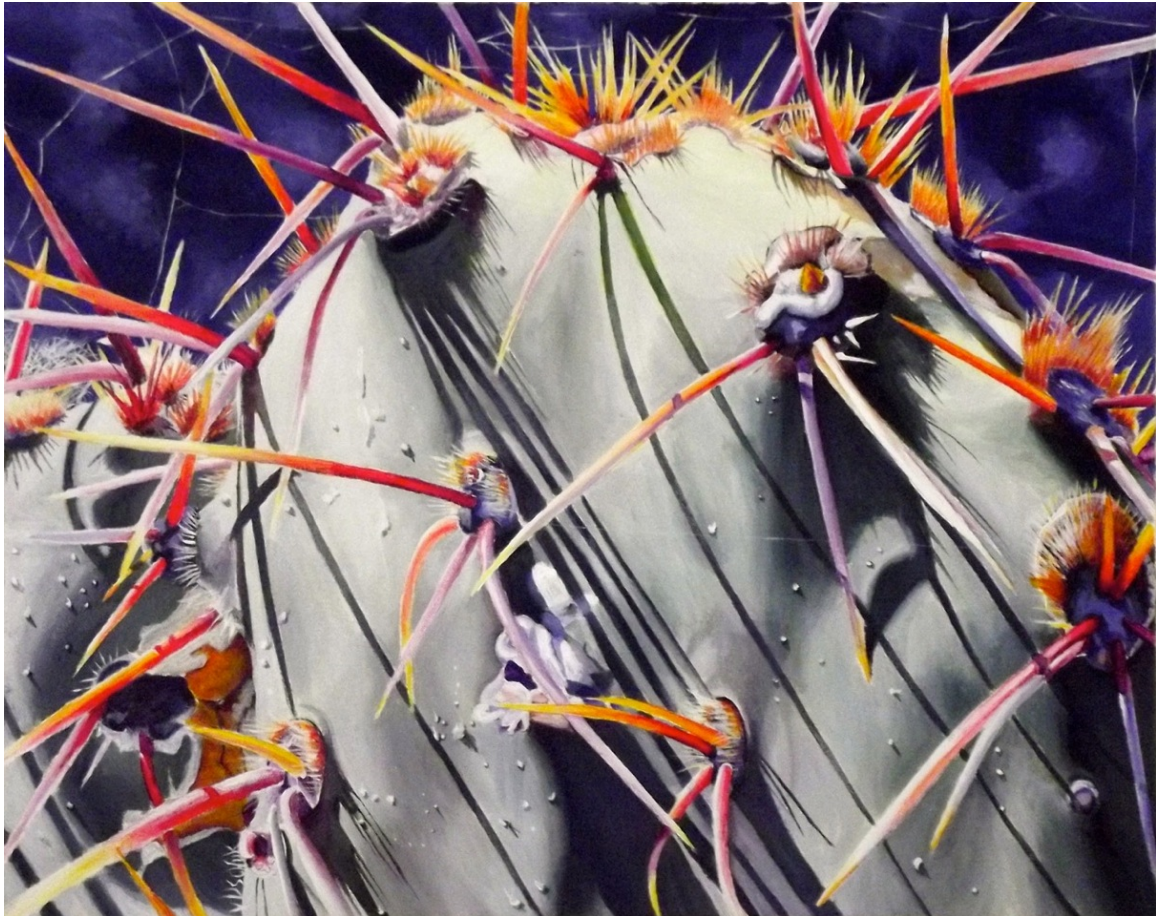
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**Party Cactus**

**Val Uschuk, acrylic on canvas**

## CADENCE OF BREATH

*Nancy Naomi Carlson*

I listen for voices my student hears. They threaten his life. He checks my lips to see if what he hears is real. He's helpless in the dark.

\*

In the bar, the deaf woman's hands weave a basket mid-air. Trapped light gathers and grows, whispers through willow.

\*

A thin *goodbye* descends with snow from a doomed mountain climb, frozen and framed on his wife's mobile phone. She'll play and replay his final words, try to preserve their cadence and breath.

\*

Before they could talk, all of my babies could sing. In the crib's down they practiced trills and roulades, flowered like calla lilies prized for their milk-white spathes. Even the one who barely outlasted his birth. I tasted his voice—insistent as rain on grass—heard it bleat in our blood.

## PHLOX ON THE NIGHT STAND

**Nancy Naomi Carlson**

—School counselor's log

*For Adina's mother*

I thought she'd be gone in the night,  
scrolled into herself to escape the clutch  
of mutant stomach cells,

but no—just a drawing in of what was left  
to mother morphine-induced dreams.  
She raised herself from the pillow mound

into which she'd sunk, and thanked me—  
my bouquet of birthday cards spread  
at the foot of the bed, picked to greet

her school-aged girls for the next ten years.  
She touched the phlox in the vase,  
blooms rescued from April's late frost.

*Am I...?* her question drifted between us  
hours through hours, glittered,  
hovered, until hospice came to my aid.

*None of us knows when.*  
She slipped in and out of herself,  
beyond the range of a single thing

I could give, but took the marker's length  
and signed and signed, letters like promises  
unfurled into months more distant than names.



## **DEEP SEA DRIFTER**

***E.M. Schorb***

Before my body began to swallow my soul, before it began to *try* to swallow my soul, I was like you. I pushed myself up from all fours and took my first infantile steps. I could see my feet. Soon I could run and play. I was like any little boy. But then a rare glandular condition began to act upon me—a genetic condition, the doctors told my mother—and I began to become what I am: a man who weighs over a thousand pounds, over half a ton.

We lived in Brooklyn until my father died. Fortunately, he left us a lot of money, mother and I, and, after his death, mother moved us to Saga Bay, Florida, to an isolated beach house. It's a good thing we had money, because she had to hire a number of professionals who possessed the knowledge and equipment to transport a six-hundred pound twelve-year-old from Brooklyn to Florida.

The house in Florida had to be rebuilt for me—doors and halls made wider and special lifting and turning equipment installed. Two vans, with equipment for lifting, were kept on the property—two, in case one failed in an emergency. I already suffered from high blood pressure, sleep apnea, respiratory problems, and incipient diabetes. I was of course threatened with stroke, blood clots, heart disease, and, later, the likelihood of cancer.

There was a hospital within reach; but, as I have said, the house was isolated, and, at that, its private beach touching the Straits of Florida, it was a likely target for hurricanes.

Why had my mother picked such a place to move us? Because I had already become a curiosity. People liked to come and look at me, perhaps to guess what I was. In

a few years I had completely lost the shape of a human being. It wasn't long before I had reached my present weight of over a thousand pounds. I couldn't keep track of myself. Large parts of me, as big as you, sprawled this way and that. The little skeleton inside of all this adipose tissue could not lift it. My body was utterly useless to me; I was its prisoner. Speak of being buried alive!

It has been decades since I could move as I do now. I fly with my cape rippling behind me. You who are of average size cannot begin to imagine how wonderful I feel. I feel the ecstasy of a superhero. This miracle has occurred because I tried to save my mother's life.

But my body had also tried to kill her, just as it was trying to kill me. At first and for some time she had summoned medical people to help her with me, and we were known at the hospital and to others; but, as I reached new proportions of sprawl, mother took to drink and with alcoholism came increasing eccentricity, sometimes bordering on madness. Mother was—perhaps is—an ectomorphic type, thin and nervous, always highstrung. In time, she would sit by my bed, drinking her cold gin and tonics, and talk, and the more she drank the stranger her talk became.

My air passages closed by degrees and I found it increasingly difficult to answer. But I began to understand that her grief over my condition had turned to guilt, to deep shame. Some time ago, I can't say exactly when, people stopped coming to the house, and we were left to our own devices. She continued to wash me, rub oil and antibiotic lotions into my creases, but less and less often, until, finally, she just sat by me and drank.

Eventually, it seemed, everyone forgot us. Mother said that people were too busy with their own problems. Perhaps somewhere in her mind, unrecognized by herself, was a

desire that I should die. Perhaps there was a desire to be rid of such a literal weight. She was only middle-aged and still attractive in her way. She told me so. I impute no evil intentions to her. She loved me and I broke her heart.

Then one day I did break her heart. She dropped her drink and gasped. *What's wrong?* I said inside myself. She fell out of her chair and lay beside my bed. Pushing hard, I pivoted on my stomach until I could see her. My eyes are mere slits. I can scarcely see out of them. But I saw that she was blue and surmised that she was having a heart attack. It was useless for me to try to find a phone of any kind or any alarm system that she may have had installed, utterly useless. There was only one way for me to draw attention to our plight.

I had heard of wonderful things being done by people in desperation—mothers lifting cars away from children, mountain climbers cutting off their own limbs to free themselves from rocks—and now I know these stories to be true; for desperation allowed me to do the impossible, though it took an unspeakable amount of time and Herculean effort. It took hours—I could tell by the changing light—but I crawled down an unremembered hall and out an unremembered door and heaved myself down unremembered steps and onto an unremembered beach. There I became lodged in the sand. Someone must see me, I thought, a creature so huge. At last I had found an advantage in being myself. And someone did.

The effort had rendered me unconscious. When I woke, I could hear that a crowd had gathered. Immediately, I tried to tell the many-voiced crowd that mother lay dying inside the house, but, of course, nothing would come. Then I realized that the crowd was asking itself what I was. I posed the question—*Are you people crazy?* It was almost impossible for me to realize that these people could not recognize in me a human being.

Then I heard the voice of authority. “It’s a leatherback. You can tell by the leathery cape down the back, instead of the usual carapace. As to its color, I’d say it’s an albino. Yes, the more I look, the more certain I am. It is *Dermochelys coriacea*, largest of all living turtles. They grow to 800 pounds as an average adult, maybe 2,000 pounds as a record-setting lunker.

“It’s also the fastest-growing and heaviest reptile in nature, the fastest-swimming turtle, the most widely distributed, and highly migratory reptile, and the only one that can be called warm blooded. In this and other respects they seem halfway to mammals.”

*You idiot! You madman! My mother is dying! Inside! Inside!*

“Being an albino, this is a very rare find, and it’s very likely that the Marine Institute, if they are summoned, will take it away for study. As a member of the Green Party, I think that would be wrong. Born free, it should go free.”

“What should we do?”

“Push the poor creature back into the sea,” commanded the expert.

And so it was that the well-meaning but misled crowd pushed me down to the sea. It was terribly painful, being dragged and shoved on the hot sand that felt like ground glass until my underside was raw and bleeding. I screamed from deep inside—*I am not a turtle, you fools! I am a human being! Mother is dying inside. Please save her. Help! Help me! You’ll drown me! I don’t know how to swim. You’ll kill me! What are you doing? Are you people mad?*

Can you even begin to imagine my terror?

It must have taken an hour to get me into the surf, an hour in which I realized the full horror of being myself. Why my heart didn’t stop, I can’t imagine. But then something wonderful happened.

The sand grew smooth, soft, and slippery. It grew cool and wet. Water splashed my face, as it might another's upon awakening, as others splash their faces in the morning, but, of course, much to my relief, the sun was going down, down and setting in full red splendor. I felt small before the hugeness of the sea and sky.

Then, suddenly, I was adrift. I floated. The crowd cheered. I moved my arms and legs freely for the first time in years, and I knew the Zen of swimming, the healing salt of the sea filling my every cracked crevice, cleansing my every abrasion. I guess I doggy paddled—or turtle paddled—and soon I lost my fear of the water, of drowning. I washed this way and that, exulting in my new freedom. I was caught in the current. I realized that I was probably in the Gulf Stream, being propelled north. The water whirled me about, and on shore I saw an ambulance drive to the front of our house. I realized that someone had discovered my mother. At last there was help. At last something was going to be done for her. Across the susurrus of the sea I could hear the siren and knew they were rushing her off to the hospital, perhaps to be saved and, I hoped and prayed, to go on to live a normal life without me. Perhaps I had saved her by bringing so much attention to the house. For once in my life, perhaps, I had achieved something, and now, as I whirled and whirled, slowly learning to direct myself, I was free of my imprisonment—an imprisonment which you of normal proportions will never know—and could look at the beautiful, splendid horizon, a spangle of stars appearing overhead.

Come thirst, come hunger, come starvation to make me nothing but bones, a tiny skeleton, come sharks with death in their teeth, come what may, I tell myself, for when I speak I speak only to myself and to Mother, who can no longer hear me for the sounds of the sea.

## **BY AIR TO URUGUAY**

***Jesse Lee Kercheval***

Good-bye America which I have left again and again  
I came to you late and always I am leaving

I am no longer interested in being a good girl,  
in earning my citizenship. Was I ever?

Me, the girl who cried when the bureaucrat  
took my picture, stamped my papers

Now I don't want to remember that other language  
time and history stole from me

I don't want to speak English either  
I want to forget everything

I want to learn a new tongue  
Be a child again

Eat new fruits whose names I do not know  
Segment myself like a clementine  
each section of my life  
with its own seeds

I am peeling back my own skin  
I am opening up my own eyes

The sky is cloudless  
The beach below the wrinkled brown of old sweaters

The air is blue  
My skin the wrinkled brown of old sweaters

When the plane lands  
I will be called by a new name

## SIREN

*Jesse Lee Kercheval*

It is a song  
It is static  
Tour Eiffel as radio tower  
television tower  
cell tower

In René Clair's film  
Paris Qui Dort the city is frozen  
by a mad scientist's invisible ray--  
every human paused, midstep,  
like a stopped watch

Only the watchman at the top  
of the Eiffel Tower  
& the passengers on an aeroplane  
just making a grassy landing  
move in the morning sun

The silence total  
except for the phonograph they steal  
& take to the top of the tower  
to dance in their equally stolen fur & pearls

The film moves  
but the world below is  
still  
as a B & W photograph

A soundless world

Not like now--when the Spanish King  
snaps at the President of Venezuela,  
"Por qué no te callas?" Why don't you shut up?  
& it echoes on Youtube  
as downloaded ringtones  
Shut up Shut up Shut up

Weatherunderground promises  
"A fair day for Paris"  
but in this new century  
I smell hellfire  
I smell war

There is no future but the past  
No, no scratch that

I am going to send this stripped chassis  
of a poem on a long trip  
by snail mail, by sea  
to you in Uruguay

Let it be the future

Let it arrive--  
infant Moses in papyrus basket--  
on the doorstep

of a new world



CUTTHROAT DISCOVERY POET  
**DIANE K. MARTIN**



**Diane Kirsten Martin's work has appeared in or is forthcoming in *Field*, *New England Review*, *Poetry Daily*, *ZYZZYVA*, *Harvard Review*, *Narrative* and many other journals and anthologies. She was included in *Best New Poets 2005*, received a *Pushcart* Special Mention, and won the Erskine J. Poetry Prize from *Smartish Pace*. Her first collection, *Conjugated Visits*, was published in May 2010 by Dream Horse Press. Her newest manuscript, *Hue and Cry*, is seeking a publisher. She lives in West County, Sonoma, California with her husband and dog.**

## NIGHT MIND

*Diane Kirsten Martin*

The night mind looks for someplace to land — suspended,  
less the bloodthirsty mosquito or hummingbird  
that hovers, wings beating eighty times per second,

than ghost, score unsettled, restless, volatile, afloat.  
Perhaps, purblind and shackled, stumbling  
over pea gravel and millennial tree stump, it seeks

the phantom limb, lost twin, coin in the snowdrift,  
or attempts to recall words of a prayer in the unwritten  
tongue uttered by the last of a tribe now gone.

For a while, it settles in the palimpsest of past, scrubbing  
out and rewriting old memories. When at last it looks forward,  
it finds a wall of glass — no aerie for nesting, no toehold.

## RIFF ON HEADLINES IN VENICE

*Diane Kirsten Martin*

“A car bomb. Government denials that influenza is rising. Three new saints.”  
from a Donna Leon mystery

Chord played forte.  
Then an arpeggio.  
Brisk pizzicato  
pluck for each saint.

Foot follows foot  
round the corner.  
Safety there. Are you  
feverish? Are you

faint? Part of the problem  
or part of a plan? Is  
this the chance  
you take? You fake

and flaunt, tackle fate,  
you bait and lure.  
Three lights flare  
from the shore.

You fish in shallows  
for a bite, for romance.  
for more. All right, all  
wrong — for a song.

## RED HERRING

*Diane Kirsten Martin*

Motives: everyone's got one — a bully boss, the sibling rival,  
business partner absconding with the funds,  
the trespass, the treason, spousal in flagrante.  
But do you think you could swing the lead pipe  
in the library? wield the candlestick in the study?  
Stab, stab, stab, stab, stab, with the dagger in the hall?  
It takes a special talent to murder. Consider,  
Wiley Coyote aside, there's no backsies,  
and there's all that mess of a corpse. Yes, perhaps,  
you've got a problem with the property line  
and the pissant neighbor who's had one too many  
one too many times. But even the hypothetically culpable  
usually aren't capable. We're merely over-brined kippers  
designed to throw off scent for the hounds.

## **RADIO FREQUENCY**

***Diane Kirsten Martin***

Oyster white and loaf shaped, the radio,  
was thought to hold miniature boys singing  
around a tiny mike, though how transported

from station to station, didn't figure into her  
equation. Their voices broke through ads,  
and taunts: My Bonnie lies on top of my mommy,

and that's what happened to me, mewled Butch,  
in row three, and threw acorns and called  
her witch. Years passed and the meaning

of words carved in bathroom stalls  
became evident, but O say those harmonies  
she'd heard were in a different key.

Then a salty magazine piece revealed  
that boys were men, and so, at twilight's  
last gleaming, she sobbed,

but dawn's early light gave proof  
of those chords still streaming; so, proudly  
she hailed, gallantly they waved.

## COLD MUSIC

***Diane Kirsten Martin***

*“...in my mind it’s been down there dreaming of being a violin”*  
— Peter Van Arsdale, violin maker

1650: European winters are long and cold,  
summers short and cool, and a woman  
mumbles to herself, wool-clad mornings  
in the kitchen garden — would there be enough  
beetroot and barley to get them through?  
Perhaps next year would be warmer.  
The Alpine spruce she gathers from forest floor  
burns with blue-white heat. But when chartered  
woodsmen send the hard, dense lumber  
down the Po to brine in the Adriatic,  
Antonio Stradivari finds it prime to craft  
an instrument whose vibrato shimmers  
with a blue-white heat. Did this soak allow  
the wood to absorb apothecary herbs  
the luthier used to ward off worms and rot?  
Was the glue that holds the instrument together  
the key to its flawless tone, or the tender way  
he sculpted belly to the back? Was it the metric  
Stradivari used to indicate where to carve  
f-hole eyes according to the Golden Ratio?  
Or was it his practice of crushing gems and glass  
to coat the instruments with a brittle lacquer?  
Bows made from tail hairs of a Mongolian stallion?  
Or mere serendipity, accident of coldest weather,  
something like love they can’t duplicate or measure,  
that Antonio Stradivari could feel about the violin  
when he tucked the instrument under his chin?

**“Careful Bear Raids Colorado Candy Shop”**  
***Ace Boggess***

[AP Aug. 9, 2012]

*“He was clean and very careful. He ate a lot of candy.”*

he much prefers the ones with guts of oats  
what he knows as porridge neither hot nor cold

his turn to be the burglar the breaker & enterer  
stealing delight from its dainty ridged plastic trays

soft *Ghirardelli* squares orange-centered *Cadburys*  
painted pretzels & all things honey-glazed

what does he care that Quetzalcoatl brought  
the first cacao on a beam from the morning star?

or French nuns stirred in streaming milk  
to make the sinful blissful & much harder to repent?

carefully he stretches his black-brown bib  
laps at his prim manicured claws to clear the stain

goodbye to the bonbon goodbye the slice of cake &  
though man's laws name this sweet feast *Death*

by *Chocolate* he waives the blindfold puffs the cigarette  
howling orgasmic transcendent *God this is the life*

***“Suppose He Wants to Rob—Who Can Prevent Him?”***  
**Ace Boggess**

[H.G. Wells, *The Invisible Man*]

From the moment he pulls into the driveway,  
he studies the symmetrical box of the residence:  
two stories of rusty brick & weak gutters,  
rolling windows storm-sealed, door  
strictly double-locked, on the lawn a lady  
crabapple, its short, pink arms not catching the level above.  
He makes himself a burglar in his own bungalow then,  
frustrated, reaches for his key or garage-door remote.  
Earlier, a big cat hidden by heightened panic grass,  
he lurked in a lot at the mini-mall,  
observing the zip-in & shuffle-out of patrons at the tobacconist,  
the pharmacy, the tanning bed & adult bookstore:  
he could take them—one motion, a swift thwack, &  
it's off with a wallet or package containing...  
what? *Society doesn't want a grocer who dreams,*  
*said Sartre, for to the extent he's a dreamer,*  
*he's that much less a grocer.* How easily the meek become monsters,  
lacking only the boiling blood of action.  
Such a man might make murder  
in one transcendent vision of himself.  
What keeps him contained behind the old woman  
who lingers too long at the ATM?  
Why does his hand tremble before the carver's fang,  
revolver's booming brimstone voice, the quiet rod or ball bat?  
When night comes, he disrobes with the ease  
of a ritual prayer, creeps into bed & holds his lover—  
sleeping—to his chest as though he's innocent  
beside her. But his head is full of wonder,  
a field of plowed soil sewn with possibilities.  
Only once he stirs from rest, gets up &  
goes to check the deadbolt on the door.



## All That Is Sacred, All That Is Profane

### Micah Ruelle

Outside Harrod's,  
a woman in a tangerine scarf  
leans against the wall,  
smoking a cigarette,  
watching Arab women  
dressed from head to toe  
in brilliant blues, yellows, blacks,  
shuffle in and out of limousines.

Her lips smile in awe,  
her brows point, then uncurl.  
She says to her friend  
who has just walked out,  
"Let's get tea."

—

A little girl is sitting at a piano,  
her fingers are leaves  
in a violent wind.  
"She's the next Mozart,"  
an observer exclaims.

But his tone is indulgent, sweetened,  
sending tremors through her bones.

—

Right now, a rich businessman is  
packing his old suitcase: he is leaving  
his family everything, for everything.

Never so much joy,  
never so much promise for life.

—

The scent of her is on his shirt again.  
The wife runs upstairs to the bath,  
a wine bottle in hand  
to empty the contents and her tears.

Our houses have ears and eyes.  
They vow to keep the secrets  
that simmer and whistle beneath steeples.

—

“He is a God-send—this  
doctor, he’s amazing—  
he can work long hours  
and always does a great job,”  
the old man nudges the other.

The young doctor chuckles  
and shakes his head  
while the God within him  
basks.

—

The church is full of virgins:  
blonds, brunettes, and redheads.  
The church is rich with them—  
even while the whole world  
has gone sex-mad, drooling  
and bleary eyed. They carry  
the mighty V like martyrs.  
The brunette carries It in the lip  
of her pants like a gun.  
The red head throws It over  
a shoulder like a tomahawk.  
Don’t be fooled—that blond  
slides It down one pant leg:  
a rusty pipe.

Smile, girls, they’re all watching.

—

Yesterday,  
the tides brought offerings  
from the Pacific to a Californian beach.  
They rolled in, arms overflowing  
with silt, greenery, glass bottle bits,  
some shells and stones.

A vain offering: stolen  
second-hand gifts.

—

At night, she lies down in her bed,

looking at glow-in-the-dark stars,  
praying, "Dear Lord, would ya  
please send a new man into my  
life. I need a date to the dace.  
Don't let it be Johnny."  
Switch out Johnny for Tommy.  
They're light bulbs, car parts.

But God isn't a mercenary.  
We have nothing to pay him.

—

It is the winter of 1952.  
A young man in Minnesota is  
humming to himself, while carving  
a set of wooden snow shoes.  
He does not know yet, but he will  
tread through cold and wind and ice  
to visit her everyday  
till she becomes  
his wife.

—

"Martyrdom used to be an art form.  
Now it's a part-time job,"  
says the priest to a young man after church,  
"It's getting too easy to die for things.  
It's so much harder to live."

—

In Las Vegas, a couple stands  
across from one another, dumb-faced,  
quaking, holding hands, blubbering  
something about forever.

Lord, let their rings never part.

—

Even though they've been told not to,  
they decide, after some deliberation,  
they are going to do it.  
This is a scientific experiment.  
Neither comes. The backseat is cold.

We are each other's guinea pigs.

—

In Lucerne, Switzerland  
an old woman is sitting  
looking at a sculpture of  
the lion crying on a shield.  
The well within her, for the first  
time, is stirred.

She retreats, and feeds her  
bread to the swans.

—

A woman is about to be told  
she'll be shut down if she interferes  
with the State's affairs regarding  
the children of alcoholic parents.

Let no one show unofficial mercy,  
get it all down in writing.

—

I watched the news four nights ago,  
the police dragged the lake that  
late June night. When they  
found her, she was bloated and blued,  
still pregnant.

I think of you.  
When they find you, I hope  
you have just left.  
I hope your skin is still warm,  
still bloated, and you are still pregnant  
with desire, the embers burning within you.



**Blind Man's Bluff**

**Turner G. Davis, print**

## **PLAYING WITH FIRE**

***Hannah Johnson***

I blow onto my frozen fingers, trying to get feeling back into my thumb so I can flick the flint wheel of the lighter. I try again, holding the lighter in both hands this time to keep them steady.

*Cchh.*

The flame comes alive and dances before me. I wave my fingers over it several times; they're too cold to feel anything. I love playing with the lighter. I feel like I can lose myself by staring into the glow. My fingers continue to move as I close my eyes, imagining what it would be like if I lost myself. I imagine it would be beautiful. It would relieve all of the pain in every aspect of my life. Maybe if I ran away and got lost literally, I could start completely over. No one would know me as that dead fireman's fifteen year-old daughter.

I run my fingers too close and I feel the heat singe the side of my pinky. I reflexively jam it into my mouth, trying to cool it down by sucking the heat out of it.

The Zippo lighter belonged to my father. He gave it to me before he left to go be a hero one last time. I wonder if he knew it would be his last. My real father, not the man who sleeps with my mom every night and sucks on his secretary's neck during the day. My mom met Jack in the alcohol section of the grocery store, and they were married several months after that. If dad were still alive, mom never would acknowledge another man's existence. I guess she's desperate to create a family. My mom is completely naïve, or maybe she just acts that way. Perhaps she wants to believe he is extremely dedicated to his job. Maybe she feels suspicious but rewards him with her body several nights a week to make sure he stays with her.

I wonder if she knows where her two daughters spend most nights —on the corner of First and Elm, my sister's corner. Angelina was my age when she first started waiting at this

corner. It was three years ago, right after Jack abused her for the first time. Mom didn't believe Angelina; she told Angelina she was just looking for attention. I was young and didn't understand why my sister would get into different cars with strange men and would be gone for an hour if not more. When I was little, she used to take me out for pizza and ice cream after each ride. I asked her once what she did with all of the men. She had this lonely look in her eyes and told me that when I was older I would understand why she did what she did. She doesn't take me out for ice cream anymore.

"Zoë," my sister hisses, starting to open up her coat. "Hide your face." With a quick, flawlessly fluid motion, her outfit becomes fully exposed. It shouldn't be considered an outfit. Her black fishnet V-neck tank top stops above her pierced navel that is home to a dangling sterling silver halo with angel's wings. Her bright pink leopard-print bra is so obvious, I don't understand why she bothers to wear a tank top over it. Her black leather skirt barely goes past her cheeks; if she bends over, anyone can easily see what color v-string she's wearing, if she's wearing any at all. Her six-inch stilettos look incredibly uncomfortable, but my sister glides around in them as if she were barefoot. Her hair is in messy curls, as if it was neatly done and then someone had run their slimy fingers through it, grabbing at it in masses.

Whoever this person is that is flashing his lights at my sister is her first customer of the night.

I flip my hood over my head, knowing the shadows will cover the rest. I close Dad's lighter and hold it firmly in my hand. I shiver a little, wanting what little warmth the lighter gave back. I never understand why I have to hide. My sister always tells me to do so, and I trust her; I never question her.

I watch my sister glide seductively and carelessly over to this man's car. She bends over, resting her elbows on the passenger-side door, giving the man a perfect look at her cleavage.

My sister is definitely a professional. I admire her for that. She takes what she does very seriously. She's good at it, too.

Her customer obviously does not have as much experience as Angelina, if he has any at all. I can't see his face, and I know I don't ever want to see it. He's unusual compared to the other creeps that pick up my sister. He keeps turning his head from side to side nervously and tapping his fingers on the steering wheel. My sister works her magic, calming him down. I watch her open the door and slide inside. I know her hand will immediately rest on his inner thigh to excite him. I watch them drive away. I refuse to think about them anymore.

I flip my bangs out of my eyes, adjusting my hood back onto the ridge of my head so it won't hide my face. After stretching my legs out slowly, I stand and head for the park. It's only a few blocks away, but I know I have plenty of time to myself regardless.

I whistle a soft tune as I walk, picking up my feet so my Chuck-Ts won't scuff the sidewalk. My footsteps hardly make a sound, and I know my solid black outfit will make me invisible, especially at this time of night. I blend in with my surroundings.

It's quiet. Any other night it probably would've been busier, but most of the town is in their beds, resting before they begin another day of dead-end jobs and mundane activities. It's a Tuesday, or at least it will be for one more hour. Angelina hadn't planned on working tonight, but she doesn't have homework and needs some cash for some boots she saw and really liked. I don't mind going with her. In fact, I kind of like it. It gets me out of the house. That's all that matters.

I am getting closer to the park. The trees are starting to get taller and the area is starting to grow denser with more trees. I climb over an old wooden fence that needs repairing, preferring my shortcut through the woods rather than going through the front that's



crowded with way too many brightly-colored playgrounds. I move quickly. My steps are noisy over the fallen pine needles and fall leaves.

I let my fingers scrape across the rough bark of each passing tree. If my sister feels most at home under different sheets every night, then these trees are my sheets. I know every tree in these woods. I can probably run through them barefoot and blindfolded and not step on a single thorn or crash into a single branch.

I don't want to waste time.

I reach my destination: a large cement tube that was once a sewage system underneath a large hill for bikers and joggers. I call it my cave. It's mostly hidden from the rest of the woods, and the trees do a swell job of shielding it, too.

I climb through the tunnel expertly; only my first few steps echo. Once I reach the darkest part of the tunnel, more towards the middle, I sit down and rest my head against the cool cement.

I pull Dad's lighter out again, fingering the flames that are engraved on one side. I imagine the blaze comes to life in my hands but doesn't burn me. I become one with the fire, dancing in its pure energy. I grab a few straggling leaves and twigs that have been carried into my cave by the wind, and I make a pile. Smiling, I flick at the flint wheel. The wick lights up quickly, and I hold a mass of dead leaves over the flame, watching them be eaten away by the fire. It's as if the fire is hungry, the way it licks at the edge of the leaf. Once it's fully caught, I place the ignited leaves on top of the pile, and let the rest of the group catch.

I feel as if I'm witnessing a miracle. I feel as if I'm exploring a foreign thing that's taboo. The fire snaps and crackles, devouring the bits of leaves and twigs. It seems desperate for change. I can't help but smile; for once, I don't feel like I'm the only one.

I sigh and close my eyes.

Today has had a slow start. Angelina hasn't said much; she got ready to go to school, as usual. She's wearing a white button-up shirt with a collar on it – to hide whatever marks she received last night, I'm assuming. Her brown hair is down and wavy, practically flowing. Her makeup is simple and elegant; I can hardly tell she's wearing any at all. She looks so different from last night. She's gorgeous.

She catches me staring at her. Smiling softly, she runs her fingers through my hair.

"You're pretty," I whisper, not looking away from her.

A sudden pang of sorrow spreads across her face but she doesn't move her hand away from my head.

I swallow and shift nervously on my feet. "I wish I looked just like you."

Her other hand makes its way to my hair as she remains silent. She begins to French braid my hair, trying to hide the emotions racing across her face.

"Sometimes, I wish we were twins."

I think I see her bright green eyes start to water but she hides it well. Finally, she sighs.

"No, sweetie," she doesn't look at me yet; my hair fascinates her. "Trust me: You don't want to be anything like me."

I know the conversation is over.

We walk downstairs to make breakfast. Angelina goes straight to the cupboard to find a bowl for her oatmeal, as I go to the fridge for the carton of orange juice. There's a slam down the hall and we freeze. We know what's coming. I want to tell her to be strong, to fight back. My mouth refuses to move.

My mother's husband Jack stumbles into our kitchen, pushing me over as he makes his way over to Angelina. He hardly ever pays any attention to me, probably because I'm not as

pretty or as built as my sister. He never cares if I'm in the room; he tortures me by making me watch. He stands behind her and slowly licks his slimy, greasy fingertips before smacking Angelina right on her butt. She doesn't even flinch.

I hate that she doesn't react. I hate that she's so used to this, that she's numb.

Jack puts his hands on her waist and begins kissing her shoulder and her neck. I hear him breathe slowly on her bare skin, and chills run down my spine. I feel as if I am going to throw up as my anger starts to boil. I want to kill him. He reaches up to move her hair out of the way to bite her neck.

"What the hell are those?" he snarls, grabbing her hair and pulling her head to the side to get a better look at her neck. "You little whore. Who did this to you? Who put his lips on you?" He twists her hair. Angelina winces but she knows better than to scream. Mom will take Jack's side regardless. She closes her eyes and I know in her mind she is somewhere else. I don't want her to go away. I want her to stay with me in the kitchen. I want her to fight back.

Jack slaps her across her face, and my knuckles start turning white.

I hear Mom's heels click towards us and in my head I beg for her to hurry. Jack hears her, too. He leans over and kisses Angelina roughly on the neck before releasing his death grip on her hair. When mom comes in, she makes some comment on how pretty Angelina and I look. She blushes whenever Jack sticks his tongue down her throat and squeals whenever he slaps her butt. She says he makes her feel seventeen again.

"Zoë," Angelina whispers, squeezing my hand. I blink several times as if my eyes are adjusting to the light. Her face is composed, staring at my hands as if nothing happened. The red mark on her cheek says otherwise. "Let go." I look down. The orange juice carton is seconds away from exploding all over me. It's bent and crushed into itself. I release it and watch as the blood slowly returns to my hands. Angelina kisses the top of my head; it calms me a little.

Mom tells us she will be gone for the rest of the week on a business trip and we have to mind Jack. I hear Angelina hold her breath behind me. She squeezes my shoulder. I don't know if she's trying to comfort me or herself. Jack looks at us with the most horrifying grin I've ever seen. I wonder where Angelina goes when she escapes in her mind. Wherever it is, I need to go there with her.

On our way to school, Angelina and I cut through the forest, like we always do.

"Last night was unusual," she says. It catches me off guard; she never brings up her customers. She ignores my reaction and stares ahead. "He was young, like my age young. It was obvious he had never done anything like that before. He even offered to buy me dinner instead of the usual wadded-up cash." Angelina shakes her head. "He kept stroking my face and telling me how beautiful I was. I've never seen anything like it," she chuckles slightly. "Afterwards, he invited me to spend the night with him. He didn't ask for another round, he just wanted me to be with him. I mean, it's not like he was bad in bed or anything." She blushes a little, brushing her hair behind her ear. "He was actually pretty good. I could do without the hickeys, though."

I remain silent, kicking at a rock.

"It was almost as if he wanted me to be his girlfriend, not just a *thing* he could stick his thing into." Her comment surprises me as much as it surprises her, I think. We walk the rest of the way silently until we are about to walk into the school. Angelina grabs my wrist, turning me to her and staring me directly in the eyes. "You are absolutely beautiful, Zoë. Don't ever settle for less than what you deserve, and that's the best. Above all, don't do anything with a boy until you're married," She looks down at our feet. "Like what Dad wanted us to do."

The first bell rings and Angelina squeezes my wrist before walking inside, leaving me. I don't understand how she thinks I'm beautiful. I stare at my reflection in the glass double doors. My outfit is not as put-together as hers, not even close. My hand-me-down jeans don't quite fit

me, and neither does my t-shirt, hidden beneath my favorite black hoodie. What stands out the most is my hair. It's only slightly shorter than Angelina's, but it is bright blonde; Mom says it's practically gold. Everyone thinks I dye it for attention, but it's all natural. I flip my bangs away from my eyes and go inside for another day of fake smiles. Heaven forbid anyone ever ask us what's wrong.

When Angelina and I get home from school, we're surprised to find Jack nowhere in sight. We don't look for him; we'd rather imagine him gone. Angelina offers to play with my hair, and I play with my lighter while she does. We don't say much; we never have to. Angelina understands me better than anyone. I know that she loves me more than anything; I can feel it through her fingers.

I don't remember falling asleep. I blink, trying to remember what happened. I'm still in my shared room with Angelina, but she's not. I sit up slowly and my hands immediately go to the back of my scalp. My hair is halfway braided, as if something has interrupted Angelina's process. My head's pounding. I feel something wet. Curious, I bring my fingers in front of me, and the tips are covered in blood. Keeping one hand on the oozing wound at the back of my head, I look around the room. The first thing I notice is pieces of glass. I lift the comforter that had been dragged away from the mattress and discover the remains of Angelina's favorite snow-globe; her gift from dad.

"Angelina," I whisper, terrified.

I carefully step around the glass and slowly make my way downstairs. As I get closer to the living room, I hear the sounds of distress grow intensely louder. I peak my head around the corner, terrified of what I'll find. I see Angelina lying on the couch, flailing around like a freshly caught fish on a boat. Jack is on top of her, laughing. He only needs one hand to hold her hands

down, and the weight of him on top of her waist leaves her defenseless. He slaps her with his free hand, telling her to shut up.

I spot a full bottle of vodka on the coffee table and I grab it. Using both hands, I raise it like a baseball bat and close my eyes. I swing as hard as I can, and I feel the bottle shatter as it impacts against his skull. It vibrates through my arms and suddenly I feel very tired. I don't open my eyes until I hear his body hit the ground.

I'm seeing red again.

I go over to Jack, kicking at his limp body to see if he's unconscious. He doesn't move. I jump over him to Angelina, wrapping my arms around her. I carefully pull her face towards mine to see if her eyes can focus on me, but they're full of fear.

I feel sweaty arms wrap around my legs, and before I can scream, I'm knocked to the ground, my head inches away from the corner of the coffee table. Jack doesn't waste time beating me. He gets back over to Angelina, grabbing both of her arms.

I crawl away from him and towards the corner of the living room. My hands find a bookshelf and I use it to pull myself up. Once I am standing, I realize what shelf I am leaning against. I move over to the other side and push as hard as I can, moving the shelf away from the wall. Gravity takes pity on me and the shelf falls forward, the contents rolling and spilling all over the carpet. I wince as I hear all of Jack's alcohol supply shatter into thousands of pieces.

Only then does Jack look away from Angelina.

I stand on top of the fallen shelf, Dad's lighter open in my hand. Jack is confused at first, until he sees my thumb stroking the flint wheel. His face goes red with rage as he gets up to attack me.

*Cchh.*

The lighter ignites with the first strike and I drop it into the pool of rum, tequila, and vodka. There is the crackle of hungry fire.

When I wake up, all I can see is white. At first, I think I am in Heaven. Then I remember my passion for fire and assume there must be a mistake. Everything is white: the ceiling, the walls, the clothing, and the machines. I lift my hands to rub my aching eyes and discover they are wrapped in white bandages. I blink, looking down at myself.

Wires are everywhere, and there are even more bindings. I shake my head, trying to wake up, hoping it's all a bad dream. I notice my hair doesn't smack my face or tickle my neck as I move my head, like it usually does. I try to feel my head, but I realize I won't be able to feel anything in my bandages.

I hear Mom's voice.

She keeps calling me sweetheart and darling and tells me how grateful she is I'm awake. She sounds hysterical, which makes me wonder why she isn't hugging me. Instead, she rubs my bandaged hand gingerly. It's as if she thinks that if she rubs me too fast, the friction will cause me to combust. There are tears in her eyes. I only stare at her, waiting for an explanation.

She tells me there was a fire at the house. They don't know the cause of the fire yet, only that Angelina and I are badly burned. Jack made it out with a few scratches, bruises, and minor burns. She makes some comment about how brave Jack was for getting us out alive, and I close my eyes before I start getting angry enough to see red.

Then, I hear the sweetest sound I've ever heard.

"Zoë, is that you?" I can hear Angelina's voice but I don't know where it's coming from. Mom smiles and pats my hand before standing up. She grabs ahold of the curtain and draws it all the way back. At first, I think it's a giant mirror they had covered up so I wouldn't see how terrible I look, but then I blink again. It's Angelina.

Her arms are covered in dressings, her face is covered in bruises, and her lip is busted. The only thing that stands out to me is she is completely bald, and one side of her skull is protected by a bandage.

She holds a weak arm out to me, a mirror in her hand.

“Look, Zoë,” she says softly. “We’re twins.”

I reach out for my sister as far as my bandages and wires will allow.





**Bright Cactus**

**Val Uschuk, Acrylic on canvas**

## **MY STARLING**

***David Chorlton***

One Sunday afternoon he fell from the sky  
(or maybe a stunted palm)  
as a couple walking past  
stopped to look at the handful of feathers  
and twisted neck

the way we watch the Syrian war on television  
without knowing how to help.  
After they moved along

I went outside to bring the bird  
in from the hot asphalt  
and place him in a carrier,  
thinking he would quietly expire  
even though we fed him  
through a tube, and later with tweezers  
as a parent.

Within days he stood up straight  
and the elegance emerged  
of the long beak extending  
from the skull. Starlings  
come in hundreds, thousands

in the winter when they line  
the telegraph wires for miles, but one alone  
seemed worthy of a name  
and of a home. So he stayed  
and began to sing.

We heard this week  
ninety-three thousand have been killed  
in Syria. No names for them  
as they rise in a black murmuration of souls.

## CHORUS

*Joe Bocchicchio*

There is a poetry to atrocity:  
St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre  
Kristal Nacht  
9 - 11  
Someone is always available to shoot  
Garcia Lorca

There is a poetry to atrocity:  
The Reign of Terror  
Black September  
Abu Graib  
Someone is always available to shoot  
Yitzhak Rabin

There is a poetry to atrocity:  
The Trail of Tears  
Deep Water Horizon  
Hiroshima  
Someone is always available to shoot  
Anna Politkovskaya

Voltaire declared that only those  
Who believe in absurdities can commit  
Atrocities. Adorno tells us that to write  
Lyric poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.

There is atrocity, then, to poetry:  
The semiotics of catastrophe  
The hermeneutics of suffering  
The aesthetics of hell  
Someone is always available to  
Write poetry.

There is a poetry to atrocity  
If it preserves the horror  
If it preserves the horror  
If it preserves the horror  
Someone is always available ...



**If He Can't Have You**

**Ron Fundingsland, Aquatint/etching**

## EDITOR'S CHOICE, POETRY

### TUBE AMP

*Andrew Phipps*

You're looking at necessity,  
age-old, wrapped in vinyl.  
An orange box that sounds

blue. We pick strings,  
scrape frets, slide, scream.  
Goddamn, it's come

a long way. And it  
comes a long way  
through each of us,

this power   anthracite  
right out of the ground  
to give blues the juice

to make noise   essential  
and sometimes music.  
It's of the earth

but so are we,  
from pits black in us  
since the dawn, civilized

across time and still  
we split skulls.

Just listen to the riff.

## **Morning Creatures**

***John Victor Anderson***

Chickens, they are creatures of morning  
habit: they peck the bugs, dew, air,  
each other once noon strikes heat  
and boredom into those glassy eyes  
never halfway closed. They learn  
early on that brood of philosophers.  
It was their kin who first taught Echo  
with their howdy-howdy-dooos  
that all things put forth come back  
diminished, but useful still  
like tears, or unanswered letters  
from those hands left back home.

Two chickens: a rooster and his hen,  
or, if you've another view of such country  
relations: a hen and her rooster—  
Eve and Adam—discovering that sweet scratch  
of earth and wood shavings, how to take baths  
together inside dustbowls, and how each step counts  
backwards, an old tax-man's trick. Even in sleep,  
their feet constantly reach for dirt and straw—  
such kept comforts are always held close  
as fears or children through breaking nights.  
Even in dreams, they plant one foot down  
slowly, then tilt over to the other  
like a drop stretching out into a drip,  
cock their heads this way, an eye that way  
watching out for the brittle bones of eggs  
that lay buried lost in this barnyard.

It was some man—not a farmer  
else he would have known—  
bought 'em both as Easter Chicks,  
gifts for his two grandchildren,  
tied in purple ribbons with white bows.  
But the man forgot the first principle:  
what eats grows, then must leave  
home, to come back some day, perhaps

after you, yourself, have gone  
on that final walk so tender among the eggs.

But for now, outside this post office state,  
that man and those two chickens  
walk through the morning dew:  
the man tossing down corn crumbs,  
the shadows of chickens bobbing  
their heads, jacking down the ripened teeth,  
a trail that snakes back and loose  
as they, themselves are swallowed  
by slips of light that wriggle across the highway  
between his front porch and yours.

## **DA NANG GOSPEL**

### ***William George Meffert***

They sat on a hallway bench, waiting while the operating rooms were cleaned. Both surgeons had been operating the entire night in hospital tents pitched between Vietnamese fishing villages on a beach of the South China Sea.

Orderlies scooped blood from the floors with snow shovels, pushing the jiggling clots into large plastic bags for incineration. Craig walked over to the scrub sink to wash sweat and sand off his face, his arm brushing against streaks of blood on his shirt. He looked at Graham, the wet blood on his tank top and shorts, dried clots on his feet and sandals. Craig spit sand from his mouth into the sink and breathed the air, smelling of humid decay and antiseptics.

“I never imagined it would be like this,” he said.

Craig recalled how it had been those first days when he came to Vietnam, well-trained, eager, inexperienced. How he had dressed in fatigues and boots instead of scrubs and sandals. How he had saluted and carefully followed protocol, even gone to church every Sunday, with the comforting belief that God’s providence would give him guidance.

A few minutes later, two large Chinook helicopters landed on the helipad and the surgeons covered their eyes as chunks of dirt and dust blew through the flimsy hospital tents. Twenty casualties were unloaded and carried on stretchers into Admissions, a drab, open-ended tent, painted with red crosses. Craig ground his cigarette into the sand; they both stood up to make room as patients were rushed along the narrow corridor into the operating rooms. A curly haired kid from Iowa, with a belly wound, went into Operating Room #1 and was quickly anesthetized. Craig began the surgery; blood spilled out of the abdomen through the incision, splashing everyone before pooling on the floor. Somehow



the bullet had missed the aorta and the vena cava by millimeters. Talk about luck, he thought.

When the bleeding was controlled, Craig went into Operating Room #2. Another near miss. A piece of shrapnel skimmed past the heart of this soldier and tore into his lung. A few sutures stopped the bleeding. A bullet had just missed the largest artery in his leg. Neurosurgeons operated on the soldier's head, while orthopedic surgeons stabilized his fractured leg. Crowded between the other surgeons, arms pushed against his sides, Craig looked up.

"You guys have to move the hell over so I can get this chest closed." He managed to finish the surgery, stripped off his gloves and gown and left the operating room. Craig leaned over the sink just outside Surgery. He looked at his face in the mirror above the sink: unshaven, sand streaked, baggy-eyed, a few grays in his matted hair. He washed off his glasses and pulled off the soaked gauze taped to his face, an ineffective effort to prevent sweat from dripping into wounds. Months ago, he had worried about the contamination, but he hadn't seen any complications. It would have been a major breach of sterility at home, but here it was routine.

He changed into dry scrubs and walked over to Admissions where Graham was examining a soldier sitting on the edge of a stretcher, some scalp was missing, some just hung loosely from the back of his head. A strip of white skull shone from the depths of the wound. While someone cleaned off caked blood from his face and hair, the soldier talked about an ambush and thanked God for his life.

"Frenchie and I were sitting in a small jungle clearing, opening rations for dinner. I bent forward to open one of the cans on the ground just as the bullet grazed the back of my head and then hit poor Frenchie in the chest. I know he's dead. I saw you guys cover

him up after we got out of the medivac. He was bad in the air, could hardly talk, but kept asking if I was OK.” He leaned forward, holding his head with bloody hands. “I tried to stop the bleeding. I held my hands against his chest, stuffed some of his shirt into where he was shot. But the blood kept running along the helicopter deck and out the open door.” He paused. “Oh my God. What will I tell his parents? ”

Graham looked carefully at the skull which was fortunately still intact, but there wasn’t enough scalp to cover the bone. “Son,” he said, gently grasping the soldier’s arm, “we’ll have to move the scalp over and use skin grafts behind your ears.” Perhaps confused, the soldier silently looked up at Graham. But there was no time to explain the procedure in more detail.

“Let’s take him to surgery next.”

Father Perez, the Catholic priest, knelt briefly beside the wounded man, holding his hand, offering prayers before the soldier was carried into surgery. Perez followed for a short distance, still talking with the soldier, “I’ll help you with the letter,” he said. “We’ll write it together.” Then Father resumed giving last rights to dying soldiers, and blessing the dead. Supplies of fluids, and bandages were replenished in Admissions and medivac helicopters were informed by radio that the hospital was ready for more casualties.

Late in the afternoon, on the way back to the room they shared, the two surgeons walked past the morgue. Frenchie was lying there with all the other bodies. A moment too soon or too late, an inch this way or that, it seemed only chance to the surgeons whether you did or didn’t end up toe tagged staring at the ceiling like Frenchie. Months before, Craig had thought God was watching over them and was protecting the *Just* side, but now he realized there wasn’t any *Just* side.

“Jesus, Graham, all of them probably thought they would survive the fighting with God’s help.”

“Only fucking chance determines survival,” Graham answered. He tried to remember some of the names or the injuries of the soldiers he had operated on in the past 24 hours, but it was just a bloody haze, a tragic game of hit or miss. But the Chaplain went from soldier to wounded soldier, comforting, taking down names, giving rites. Perez was playing an illusionary game, he thought. It was almost witchcraft, a laying on of hands.

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That evening, a monsoon swept over Da Nang, white crested waves crashed onto the beach sending blasts of water and sand into the surgeons’ sleeping quarters; three sides of plywood, the fourth, canvas, flapping in the wind. They both lay on their cots and tried to rest. The most intense fighting and serious wounding occurred in darkness. Graham stood up and tilted his narrow canvas cot, showering the floor with sand before flicking the ash tipped cigarette away to the dirt floor and lying down again on his side of the room.

“Maybe the rain will keep everyone under cover and tonight we’ll be able to get up a game of poker,” he said. Dried blood clots clung to the bottom of his sandals.

“We’ve got to get Perez in the game with us,” Craig said. “That stone face of his. He hides his weak cards. Hell, I’m down a month’s pay to him. I try to bluff the bastard, try to look uncertain and fidget when I’ve got a strong hand, sit still with a weak one, mix up the signals, but that guy can somehow read me. Must be something they learn in seminary.”

“Well, he’s got God on his side,” Graham smirked.

Craig had tried to push thoughts about the dead and wounded out of his mind. Repair what you can and go on to the next patient, he thought. When he was a resident in

cardiac surgery the surgical team had operated on high-risk infants. His professor had visited the families only briefly the night before the surgery. If one of the kids died during the operation, the professor would have someone else talk to the family. He'd lock himself in his office until the next morning. Now Craig could understand why he did it.

He thought again about Father Perez , always there in the hospital, round faced, sweaty like everyone else, the usual fatigues, a bottle of Irish Mist in one pocket and Holy Water in another. His only vestment, a long, narrow silk stole around his neck and draped over his wet shirt, doubled back over his shoulder when he knelt at a patient's side. Perez, who seemed to have concerns other than just life. Perhaps he actually believed in the spirit, life after death. Well, goddamn it, he can have that belief, Craig thought. The dead look dead to me.

Graham sat up, again flicked ash from his cigarette, and brushed sand off his cot. He had to shout above the wind and the crashing waves. "I dream of silence, fucking silence. The rockets, shrapnel flying through the hospital, sappers cutting through our concertina wire— the wind the— ocean make so much noise I never realize we're in danger." Craig remembered running to their hutch when he finally heard the gunfire during the sapper attack a few weeks ago. He had raced for the .45 under his cot, stuffed in the clip and waited, safety off, hammer cocked. I may end up dead, he had thought, but I'll take some Viet Cong with me, the sons of bitches.

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A helicopter flew low over the ocean from Monkey Mountain toward the hospital, its turbine blades whomping at full throttle, the landing light reflecting off the water. The surgeons finally heard the noise and ran through the rain, across the sand to the Admission Ward. Father Perez was already there, sitting beside an unconscious Vietnamese boy with

a deep head wound, holding the mother's hand. Colonel Thompson, the hospital chief, was standing by the communications radio.

He looked at Craig. "A medivac helicopter radioed they just picked up a soldier with an unexploded rocket grenade in his chest. They're bringing him here in about five minutes.

"We can't put him into the operating rooms," the Colonel added. "If the grenade blows, the whole damn surgical unit will go up in smoke. Put the soldier in the morgue. You two can operate on him in the morgue. We'll surround you both with sandbags so that only your arms and head will be exposed."

"Great, Colonel. " Graham frowned. "Thanks for thinking of our safety. Maybe we should operate on the beach with flash lights."

"Well hell, Major, what else can we do? And don't bring him into the goddamn x-ray department. Take the x ray with the portable machine out on the helicopter pad. I've called an ordinance expert who's supposed to show up soon. Good luck." The Colonel returned to his air-conditioned trailer.

All the bodies had been moved to the hallway, but the morgue's humid air still held a nauseating odor of decay. A cot, closely rimmed with sandbags, had been placed under a dim ceiling lamp. A nurse quietly sorted surgical instruments on the metal autopsy table and then left the room. The helicopter approached the hospital, slowed, turned into the wind, and lowered gradually into the blowing sheets of sand for a gentle landing. The wounded soldier was the only passenger, buried under flack vests except for his wide-eyed face. After the vests were removed, he was carefully placed on a stretcher, floodlights revealing a deep, bloody chest wound which bubbled when the soldier tried to speak. The helicopter quickly took off, leaving just an orderly, Craig, and the patient on a stretcher

outside the hospital. Two nurses, standing at the entrance of Admissions, wearing helmets and flack vests, shielded their eyes from the wind and stared at the helicopter disappearing into the night.

A jeep with *Ordinance* painted on its bumper, drove rapidly up to the hospital. The driver, armor and helmet clad, ambled like a heavy weight wrestler into Admissions, pulling a large metal box on wheels. Stopping and dropping the cart handle, he said “Who’s the cutter?” Craig shook his huge hand.

Both surgeons watched the ordinance officer closely as he drew a large egg with a rear propeller. “Now this thing in his chest is about this shape,” he said, “and this propeller is how the grenade is armed, the propeller turns and arms the rocket as it flies through the air. This one didn’t explode—maybe it hit the marine before the propeller had time to turn enough. Maybe it has to turn just a little more before it explodes. Or maybe it’s just a dud.”

“Have you handled one of these before or are you just talking from some fucking army ordinance book?” Graham asked, staring at the sandy floor.

Looking up from the drawing: “Major, I want you to be very careful when you remove this. Don’t turn the propeller, even slightly. Don’t pull or push the grenade and you sure as hell don’t want to drop it. Just gently remove it and hand it to me. I’ll be right behind you in this armor suit, and I’ll put the grenade in the box and take it away. Got it?”

The x-ray showed the grenade.

Craig looked at the morgue, the sandbags arranged so the surgeons could look over the top and put their arms through small openings to operate on the soldier. How could that work? he thought. How can we operate so far from the patient ? If it blows up we’ll be dead like the soldier, anyway.

“It’s a coin flip again,” Graham added, “heads or tails,” as he thought about their chances of success.

“Move the sandbags away from the autopsy table so they will be behind us instead of in front of us,” Craig said, thinking the hospital would still be protected and he could operate with greater precision. Someone brought flack vests and helmets for the surgical team. He thought about what he and Graham had been saying about chance and whether God was watching over them. As his vest was zipped closed, he thought about his wife and kids—what would they do if he didn’t come home? He couldn’t remember their voices or even what they looked like—it had been so long. But for a moment, he saw his own coffin in the Methodist sanctuary, Reverend Coleman in the pulpit, arms and scarlet shawl reaching out in intercession above the flag –draped box. His favorite hymns echoed from the sanctuary’s stained glass. He silently spoke remembered parts of the Apostles’ Creed :

*I believe in God, the Father Almighty,  
Creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,  
On the third day he rose again and ascended into Heaven and life  
everlasting.*

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Just as the surgery was about to begin, Father Perez appeared and gave Graham and Craig bottle caps full of Irish Mist. “Have a sip of this,” he said, looking at them solemnly, like a communion offering. “We’ll have a little more when you’re finished.” Then that damn smile of his. “And maybe even some poker.”

The surgical team was ready. Craig picked up the scalpel and cut into the soldier’s chest. He didn’t see or feel the grenade. Cutting deeper, he entered the chest cavity and pushed the lung gently aside. There was a soft, metallic scrape when a retractor was repositioned. The fins and propeller were resting against the lung, the egg-shaped

grenade lay on the diaphragm. He turned around to the ordinance expert who was standing outside the ring of sandbags, his face covered with a Plexiglas mask.

“It’s right against the diaphragm,” Craig said.

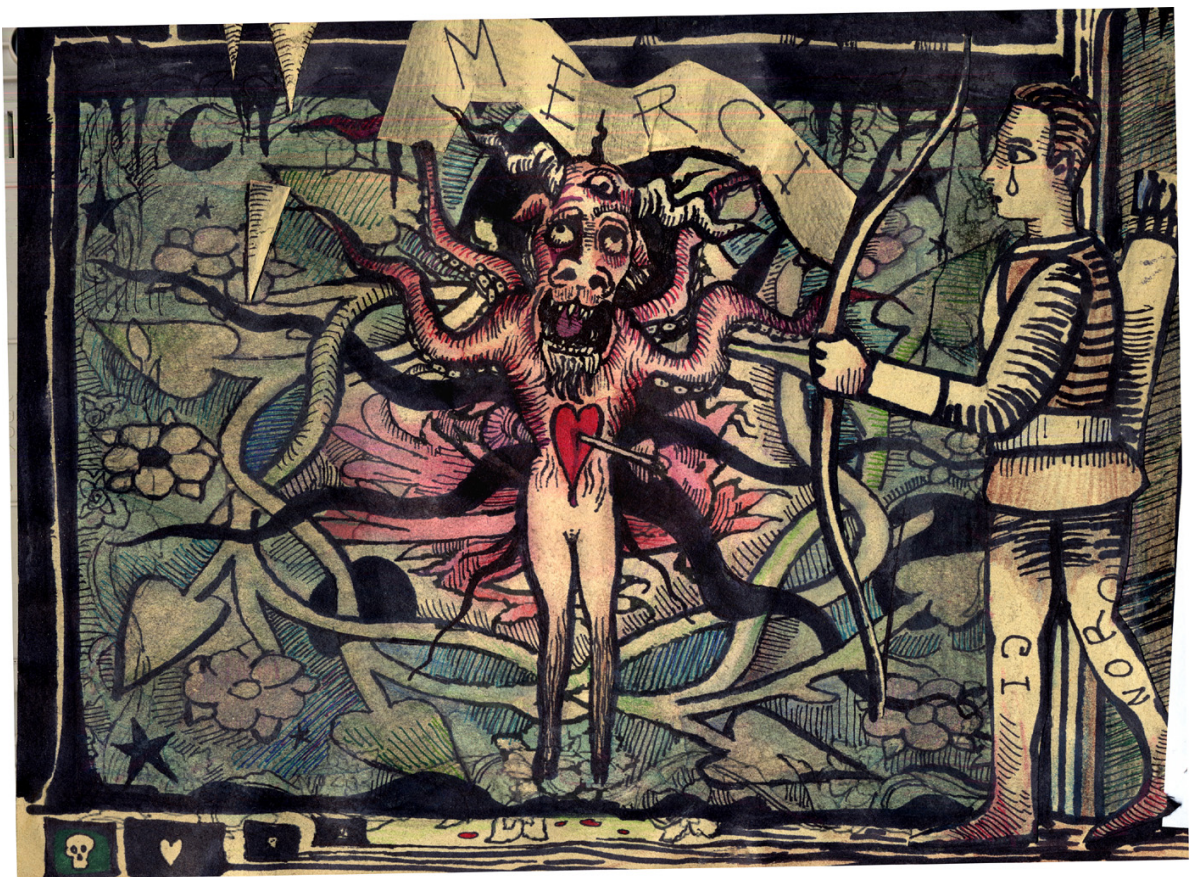
“Go get it,” the ordinance expert answered. As Craig turned back to the patient, he saw Father Perez standing on the other side of the table behind Graham, inside the sandbag ring, hands together, no flack vest or helmet, his fatigues soaked with sweat. Their eyes met. Father nodded. Craig cut away the bleeding, red muscle with tremulous hands until the grenade could be brought out of the soldier’s chest as easily as taking an egg from a carton. Sweat dripped into the wound, and onto the bomb’s dull casing. Protecting the propeller with one gloved, bloody hand, Craig handed it over the sandbags to the ordinance expert who placed the grenade carefully into the armored box, closed the heavy lid, and wheeled it away. Someone mopped Craig’s face and cleaned his glasses. During those few seconds, he recalled Hemingway’s story about a terrified soldier huddled in a trench, continuously praying to Jesus as bombs exploded, saying he loves Him and will forever be a disciple if God spares his life. The next night he is with a girl at the Villa Rossa and does not tell her or anyone else about Jesus.

Craig looked around the morgue as orderlies brought back the bodybags from the hallway. He looked over at Graham standing at the other side of the cot. The surgeons grasped hands in sweaty relief.

They looked for Father who, a few moments ago, had given a thumbs up and pointed to the Irish whiskey in one of his pockets.

But he had returned to the Vietnamese mother with the brain– injured child.





Merci

Turner G. Davis, print

## **A PORTFOLIO OF POEMS**

*Richard Katrovas*

### **A VALENTINE FOR KRISTA**

February 14, 2010

We are the stuff of stars exploding still  
From that event horizon of no time.  
When we embrace all empty spaces fill  
With light, and silence spews a holy chime.  
The sky extends forever, and yet must end  
When everything collapses on itself,  
At which moment even our dust will rend  
From dust to settle upon the temporal shelf  
Of nothingness, or all that God will be  
When nothing carries being in its heart.  
I found you as one foundering at sea  
Beholds an island, feels despair depart.  
As true love is timeless, I will love you past  
All endings and beginnings, where all will last.

### **A TOPICAL BESTIARY OF 2010**

*Glenn Beck*

The next-door neighbors' yapping beast  
Was unrelenting as the tide.  
We celebrated when it died.  
We didn't mourn it in the least,  
Until the quiet was a hymn  
To all the nonsense of the world,  
The dangerous lies that get unfurled  
Before our senses rendered dim  
By ambient noise of idiots,  
And dogs and cars and dripping spigots.

*Michelle Bachmann*

A tiny lizard scared my girl,  
As it darted from a heating vent.

Not four, she screeched and stamped and sent  
The poor thing up a wall to hurl  
Itself against the windowpane.  
The sun was bright, the breezes thin,  
My drama princess calm within  
Her wonderment at how I strained  
To trap the culprit of her fear.  
I hauled it by its tail with care.

### *Carl Rove*

A polar bear will eat her cub  
When seals and walruses are scarce.  
Such brutal logic makes for fierce  
Assessments of the human club:  
The body politic we feed  
Such lies as roil all hateful hearts.  
Defilement ends as passion starts  
Its trek across the wastes of need.  
A bloody snout and mother's eyes  
Are antidote to bloody lies.

### *George W. Bush*

In road-kill cookbooks freshness counts  
Much more than butchering technique.  
All flesh in desert heat will stink  
Within an hour of its bounce  
Across the acrid burning tar.  
Behold the ruptured armadillo  
Decaying in its shell of woe!  
The sides of roads its corpses mar  
Each desolate, monotonous mile  
Of our nation's vacuous smile.

### *Donald Rumsfeld*

To this day my wife is traumatized  
By having squashed a running bird.  
Her ex, a magnificent turd,  
Had bullied her, had fantasized  
The car would miss the thousands flocked

Upon the road to Kennesaw.  
One runner fell into doom's maw.  
She drove for hours, mildly shocked,  
The shit beside her holding forth  
On wildlife's gross extrinsic worth.

### *Rush Limbaugh*

Youngest brother hosted tapeworm  
That kept him sick for weeks on end.  
We called the thing his "special friend";  
We heckled anyone infirm.  
They killed the beast with Praziquantel.  
We fished it from the toilet bowl  
And kept it in a jar we stole  
From neighbor's mother's windowsill.  
My kid brother would proudly show  
that intimacy few can know.

### *Sarah Palin*

I had regular sex with one  
Whose Rhesus Monkey hated me.  
Chained to its fake Joshua tree  
It screeched and back-flipped at our fun.  
The little bastard bit me twice  
And strained to rip my flesh each night  
Mama and I took carnal flight.  
I taunted it, and was not nice.  
But when the little pisser died,  
I took a lonely, mournful ride.

### *Rand Paul*

My ex-wife's mother's quiet man  
Each birthday roasted full-grown pig.  
We turned it in a makeshift rig  
He'd fashioned from an old oilcan.  
A Czech dude through and through,  
He drank Slivovitz for breakfast  
And was a connoisseur of rest.

Prince of Leisure: each breath he drew  
Was testament to *laissez-faire*.  
His pig, our joy, was free of care.

*Dick Cheney*

Those summers driving, windows down,  
A dead skunk every hundred miles  
Would leave us gasping in kid piles  
On Chrysler backseats; our dad's frown  
Would turn to threats of violence.  
"It's only death!" he'd shout, then swig  
His whisky, fire up a cig.  
Our mother straddled every fence  
Within the sickness that was we,  
The deadened longings that was she.

*Roger Ailes*

Some punk spray-painted Swastika—  
That symbol of a strutting doom  
Against the grain of chanted *om*—  
On east wall of Sunrise Yoga.  
My yogini wife was saddened,  
but changed it to a yellow lotus:  
Ganesha will unburden us  
When ugly ones their vile thoughts send  
(Such chains of sorrow's bleak decree)  
To those blessed ones whose hearts are free.





**More Aloe**

**Val Ushuk, acrylic on canvas**

## ENGLISH 301

*J. Scott Brownlee*

I can't tell nobody how we is, babe, but want to shout it.  
School ain't the right place for me. I just sit here and stare  
at the whiteboard or whittle some wood out in shop,  
where I get A-pluses. I can't write you're pregnant  
in my English journal because our teacher Miss K's a Baptist—

so she wouldn't like that. I came inside you when you asked,  
used protection each time before that when I could—  
when we had it around. Even though you said, "Christ,"  
then—and, "Christ," afterward—it was me you prayed to.  
I understand the word desire, now, I think—mostly

because of you. It's not something a book could teach me,  
or a show on TV, or a good teacher—even Miss K—  
who has helped me read some and explained Romeo  
when I asked her to: why he and Juliet killed themselves  
for no reason. "But the reason was love," she said.

"That's a reason." While I didn't get what she meant, then,  
I do now. Like that gravedigger dude in the last play we read—  
what was it called? Hamlet—I just keep burying what I don't want  
to reach. It's a goddamn feeling—desire, I believe—one  
that's so powerful I just couldn't help it when you said,

"Come inside, come inside, come inside. Make a baby  
in me." Jane, now I don't know what to do, though  
Shakespeare makes more sense to me—the scene  
where everyone dies at the end, what Miss K called  
"the tragedy, Joe, the sad part"—next to your seat, empty.

## **GATOR BAIT**

***Kyler Campbell***

The smell of rotten fish crept outside of the shed, but Elwood Moreau sorted the pieces into a ten gallon bucket without regard to the stench. His hands sloshed between three-day-old fish innards searching for the most intact pieces. The summer heat was settling into the air and began to fill up the small 10' by 10' aluminum shed. Elwood knew that in ten minutes or so the air inside the shed would become too hot to breathe.

Inside, the sunlight shone in a tight cone that sent dust flying about Elwood's unused workbench. An assortment of scattered tools, most pre-1970s when everything was made in America and fashioned out of steel, littered across the old pine surface. Elwood regarded his tools. He still had receipts for each one. He shouldn't even have them here. They were supposed to go to his son, Emile. For now, he thought, they'll stay right there.

Elwood carried his bucket of fish parts to his dock overlooking the bayou and set it down beside a lawn chair and a .22 rifle. He tossed a few pieces into the leather colored water. Across the water, a tricolored heron stepped methodically along the bank, craning its copper neck in search of movement beneath the water's surface.

A vehicle crunched into Elwood's gravel drive, and he walked to the front of his trailer. His gut clenched at the St. Landry Parish Sheriff's cruiser that stopped behind his truck. His hand clenched when he saw Phillip Jenkins exit the car.

He had never gotten along with Phillip. A few years ago, Elwood had been hunting in the dusk when Phillip's son Job had entered a clearing with a young woman in tow. Job had tried to force himself on the girl when Elwood, against his better judgment perhaps, had fired a shot just past the boy. Job screamed and called out, asking who was there. "It's



God,” Elwood had said and told him to run on home before the second coming of judgment. Elwood had brought the girl to the sheriff’s station to press charges, but Phillip had talked her out of it, citing that no incident had actually occurred.

“What you know, Elwood?” Phillip said as he exited the car.

Elwood could see the sweat stains on his khaki uniform underneath his arms and around his neck. He didn’t respond to Phillip’s greeting.

The sheriff stepped to Elwood, seemingly unsurprised at not receiving a greeting. “Man lives out here all alone I suppose he loses that friendly touch. Though I suppose some men never had it to start.”

“Need something, Sheriff?” Elwood put a certain emphasis on the title.

“Heard talk of you selling your garage down on Cedar Street.”

“We all got things need doing,” Elwood said.

Phillip laughed. He cleaned his sunglasses on his shirt. “I suppose it makes the doing easier if you get rewarded for it, too. Heard through the grapevine that some dollar store mogul in Opelousas offered you a pretty penny for that land.”

Elwood sighed in exasperation. “You got something to say, say it.”

Phillip smiled. “Always on to business I see. Got a call from a fellow yesterday. Said he saw you sitting on your dock just talking out to the bayou. I come here now to check up, and I can smell what I believe to be gator bait. And I don’t believe you to be having any tags for hunting. And if you are hunting gators out here with no tags, well Christmas might come a little early for me.”

Elwood looked past Phillip and at his neighbor’s house. A woman peered through the blinds, watching the two men with a steady stare. “You got a charge to bring, Phillip?”

“I don’t believe so, just catching up with you,” he said in friendly tone.

“I believe we’re caught up now. If you’ll excuse me, I’ve got an appointment with Willie Nelson and a lawn chair.”

Elwood, not wanting to lead Phillip to the dock that was rank of ripened fish parts, stepped onto his porch and reached for the door. Behind him, Phillip walked toward him, the gravel crunching under his boots. When Elwood turned around, the sheriff stood with one foot on the bottom step of the porch. A swirl of dust spread across the wood.

“Ain’t often you see a porch on a trailer,” Phillip said. He rubbed the pine railing, admiring the finish. “Sam told me you built it for Midge before she passed. Did it all yourself. Mighty fine, Elwood.”

Elwood steadied his hand and tried not to think about his late wife Midge. “Say what you’re gonna say then leave,” he said.

Phillip sucked at his teeth. “You best be careful about what you’re doing back there on the water or won’t nobody be around to watch after this beautiful porch. Not least that son of yours.”

He bid Elwood farewell, and climbed into his car. Elwood watched him drive off, and he realized his hand was shaking from hearing Midge’s name come out of Phillip’s mouth. He felt his skin flush from the rising Louisiana sun and his own anger. Elwood went inside his trailer and grabbed a radio from the kitchen. He passed Midge’s hutch in the dining room, stocked with pictures of him, her, and their son Emile.

Out on the dock Elwood sat, rifle in his lap and radio at his side, staring out into the muddy mirrored water. Waylon Jennings sang out over the cicadas about being lonesome, ornery and mean. The heron from earlier had left and moved farther up the bank. Elwood tossed a piece of fish into the water, and after a few seconds, a pair of eyes glided from the center of the water towards the fish. A black snout, scaled by pre-history,

splashed out of the water and seized the piece of fish from the surface then sank so only two eyes remained, staring at the dock. Elwood smiled and pitched another rotting fish part into the water.

“Hello, Willie Nelson.”

“The one thing I wanted out of retirement was for people to leave me alone,” Elwood said. “Just to sit on this dock and watch that sun come up.” He reached into the bucket and cast another piece of fish into the water. Willie Nelson snatched the meat and settled back underneath the surface. The two had had this arrangement for almost four weeks. Elwood fed the gator and Willie Nelson listened to all of Elwood’s grievances about life and family and growing old. Elwood found himself talking about his son more often than he would normally be comfortable. The two hadn’t had a face to face conversation in months.

Elwood cast another fish piece into the water and watched Willie Nelson snatch it. “Emile hadn’t made bad choices. He’s got a good business selling foreign cars and all. Just up and left and cut ties.” Willie Nelson didn’t move. The alligator watched him with an intensity that made Elwood shift in his seat and look away from the water. He swatted at a mosquito the size of a quarter and wiped the remains from his arm. He sat back and, without meaning to, replayed his and Emile’s last phone call in his head.

He remembered just a few minutes of small talk. How’s work, how’s the kids, the wife and such. But then Emile had asked about Willie Nelson, claiming that Sam had told him.

“Fat man can’t keep his mouth shut,” Elwood had said.

“You’re not feeding it, are you dad?” Emile asked.

“How else am I supposed to get him to stay?”

“Christ, dad. That thing’s gonna start coming after other people now. You’ve got to stop.”

Elwood cut off his son. “You haven’t been down this way in months and I reckon you’re not the foremost expert of bayou animals.”

The conversation had ended with Elwood calling his son a “deserter” and hanging up the receiver. Although he didn’t mean it, Elwood remembered there being such a finality in the insult, something that rang through the walls of the trailer and in the reverberating bell inside the phone. Elwood had regretted it, but he would never say so.

On the dock, he snapped back to the sound of the water displacing near the dock. Willie Nelson was gone and the brown surface settled back as if nothing had ever broken through in the first place. Elwood sat a few more moments, polishing up the sight on his rifle. He nicked his thumb, but didn’t think much of it.

He carried his bucket and rifle across the scattered patches of grass and back into his small shed. Somewhere near Baton Rouge, he knew his grandchildren were playing with each other. He imagined them pushing steel trucks along the floor or braiding a doll’s hair. As he set his things down, his heart jumped when he couldn’t remember their names. Elwood sat down on a bench and after a minute of not remembering their names, he began to go through the alphabet. “Aaron, Adam, Anne,” he muttered. His words bounced off the shed and came back to him, still empty and devoid of memory.

“Rodney and Lisa,” he said, snapping his fingers. That was it, he was sure. Or were Rodney and Lisa someone else? He seemed to remember a Rodney from school, maybe not. Rodney Naples used to run the shop on Timber road, and there was a Rod Furland who worked for Longman’s Timber back in ‘78. No, he thought, Rodney and Lisa are my grandchildren. It was coming back to him. The air inside the shed was beginning to become

unbreathable. As Elwood got up, he saw a blood trail leading down his thumb and forearm. He followed the dots along the dirt floor of the shed to the end: a series of streaks and dots on and inside his bait bucket. The red of the blood spread through the grey and pink fish mass until the two were barely distinguishable.

Elwood spent the next two days in Opelousas, finalizing the sale of his garage to the dollar store mogul, as Phillip had described him. The paperwork was considerable, more than Elwood had ever encountered at one time. The man kept using Elwood's name in conversation in ways that normal people don't. Elwood thought he seemed too excited about the land. After everything was finished, he'd considered calling Emile and scheduling a visit. But the thought of his son made him want to go home.

At his trailer, Elwood waited for Willie Nelson, but he never showed. The next morning, he got up earlier than usual, just before the sun, and waited for nearly three hours for the alligator. When Willie Nelson didn't show, Elwood went inside and made a pot of coffee and started tossing raw chicken into the bayou, hoping the smell would bring his old friend back. He waited another hour, twitching and scanning the horizon. There was no wildlife, no passing boaters, no sleepy fishermen, and no Willie Nelson.

He drove to the Corner Cafe. In his mind he hadn't wanted to talk to his friend Sam, but something inside had pushed him into the truck and down highway 290. Sam had owned the cafe since Reagan was president. He had bought the run down gas station from a man who had lost most of his money gambling on a timber company that went bankrupt during that time. Sam had gutted the inside himself and spent so much money on the interior that there was nothing left to make a parking lot or remove the gas pumps or change the sign. He'd taken down the Gulf Oil sign but had never put up his own. Driving by, the gas station sat unmarked but always busy. Elwood remembered how badly Sam had

burned his first batch of boudin balls and it made him laugh. He remembered sitting in the corner booth with Midge and Emile when he was just a boy. He would hum a song, but Elwood couldn't remember the song now. He thought about the tune while he drove, trying to pick out the notes. Nothing came to him, only a memory of Emile's mouth moving in silence now. He took a breath. "Allman Brothers, ABBA, Beach Boys, BB King, Buddy Guy, Creedance--"

"With a Little Help from My Friends," he said, and he snapped his fingers. "The Joe Cocker version, that was it." He whistled the tune, trying not to let it slip away again.

Elwood watched his overweight friend Sam slide into a seat. Since Elwood had seen him last, he'd gotten bigger, somehow. He hadn't thought Sam could get much bigger, but Sam did like to surprise people. He set a cup of coffee in front of Elwood and another for himself.

"What's good with it, Elwood?" Sam asked, a grin stitched to his face. It made Elwood uncomfortable.

"This and that, I suppose," Elwood said.

"I seen Emile the other day. Me and Connie was up in Baton Rouge going to see the doctor. We stopped for a milkshake and seen him and Sharon and the little ones."

"You sick or something?" Elwood asked.

Sam laughed. "Damn CPAP machine keeps clogging. Wake up and feel like I can't breathe. Doctor said it looked like the dogs been chewing on the cords again."

Elwood tried not to laugh.

"Your boy's done well up there."

Elwood sipped his coffee. It was bitter and singed the roof of his mouth. "It would seem," he said. He pretended his mouth wasn't burned.

Sam drummed his fingers on the Formica table top. He sipped on the coffee.

“Something on your mind, Sam?” Elwood asked.

Sam shook his head. He drummed a bit more, then asked, “How long since you seen him? Emile that is.”

“You charging me for this?” Elwood pointed at the coffee.

“Just hadn’t seen him down here in a while.”

“Cause if you’re not charging me for it, I’m leaving. The boy made his choices and there’s nothing can be done by you or me to change that.”

Sam sighed and leaned back as far as he could. He looked down at the table. “There’s no charge, friend.”

Elwood couldn’t think of what to say. There was a pleading in Sam’s voice that irritated him, like shaving against the grain. Elwood even thought for a moment how things with Emile would have turned out had he tried harder with his son. What if he had been more understanding or more approachable? All this gave him a headache. He tapped his thumb on the table. “Well,” he said after some time, “that’s it then. I’ll be off.”

Elwood said goodbye to Sam who still sat in the booth, visibly weighed down by more than his enormous size. He stepped into the afternoon light and made note of every sound he heard. The bell against the dusty glass door. The cars occasionally rolling down the highway. The crunch of gravel beneath his feet. The voices from inside the diner. He climbed into his truck and put the key in the ignition, but he did not start it. Too many memories flooded his mind, and Elwood lost focus of where he was and what his aim had been to begin with. All he remembered was Midge and the porch, how she had died everyday sitting in her chair and watching the sun go up and down.

It had been her last request, to live in a house with a wrap-around front porch like in the old movies. Elwood had built it in less than two months, by himself. Midge had pushed him to involve Emile in the project, but with his mother fading every day, he had withdrawn himself from them. Elwood had never gone out of his way to bring him back.

“I don’t blame you for Emile,” Midge had said. “But a father can’t be without his son.”

Elwood had always responded with “I suppose” and pushed the conversation further along, away from their son or his wife’s impending absence. He’d tried to remember her before the sickness, when her skin glowed and her step bounced. But the farther he moved in time from her death, he only remembered her yellow skin and cracked lips. Out of all the things he was beginning to forget, he hated himself the most for forgetting her. The only other thing he remembered about those days was the dust settling as Emile drove off during the early morning, almost six months after Midge died.

Lost in his memories, Elwood didn’t hear the knocking on the truck window. He opened his eyes and panicked. He jumped at the sight of a man in a sheriff’s uniform standing outside his door. He looked at the face with vague recollection, trying to force the name it carried into his mind. Elwood rolled down the window and remembered Job, Phillip’s son. He thought about that girl he’d tried to rape in the woods and his stomach turned.

“Morning, Elwood.” Job said with a smile.

Elwood didn’t respond.

“Something the matter this morning?” His uniform was neatly pressed and unusually clean for a parish sheriff. The khaki cloth had no signs of being sun bleached or sweat



stained. Likewise, his smooth and stubbled face showed the signs of inexperience. But Job still carried an undeserved assurance in his eyes, a look of entitlement.

“Got things to do, Job,” Elwood said.

Job smiled, revealing all too-white teeth. “I think you need to stay around and listen to what I got to say. I came to find you, ‘specially.” He ran his fingers through his pompadour hair, then checked it in the truck’s side view mirror. “Seems they picked up that gator of yours today, down at the Cooley place.” He looked directly at Elwood, and when he didn’t respond, Job continued. “C’mon, old man. Ever body knows about you and that gator,” he said with a smile.

“Sheriff ain’t got nothing better to do than hunt gators,” Elwood said with a scoff.

Job took out a pack of cigarettes and packed them in his palm. “Gators taking down little girls right next to a dock would be worth catching now wouldn’t they? Only one that’s been fed by a person would behave like that. I tell you though...” Job turned and looked toward the highway. “Shoulda seen it. Goddamn mess. Gator caught her at the end of the snout so she slipped loose. But that son of a bitch took a chunk of her leg with him. She survived, but I don’t expect her to be walking no time soon.”

Elwood tried his best not to flinch or give any movement, but he could feel his temperature rising. “Where’d they get it at?”

“It’s in a cage down at the Cooley place. Said they’re gonna put it down,” Job said.

Elwood stared straight ahead at the highway. The Cooley’s was three minutes away, two if he left now. For a brief second, he tried to think through what he was planning on doing, to see all the outcomes. It didn’t matter to him.

He cranked the truck, and without giving warning, took off toward the highway while Job fell into the dust behind him. Elwood looked into the rearview mirror. Job was

shouting something into the police radio in his car. As he drove on, Elwood reached behind the seat and pulled out his .30-06 hunting rifle and placed it on the seat next to him.

The sun was at its peak by the time Elwood arrived at the Cooley place, just four miles from his own house. He parked his truck behind the Sheriff's car and pulled the bolt on the gun and checked the chamber to make sure it wasn't loaded.

There were shells in the glove box.

Elwood paused in his truck and listened to his own breath, steady and sure. There was no plan, no direction he had plotted for what he would do next. He hadn't considered what he would say or if he would even do anything. He only knew that Phillip had taken upon himself to ruin everything. The blame for the Cooley girl rested on Elwood, and he knew it. Phillip was shifting everything to Merle Haggard--Elwood stopped. That wasn't the gator's name, but he couldn't remember what was its name. "Damn," he muttered. He took a breath, then started: "Bob Wills, Buck Owens, Charlie Daniels, Dwight Yoakam, Hank Williams." He snapped his fingers loudly. "Willie Nelson!"

Elwood jumped out of his truck and walked across the road, down the short drive, and around the side of the house to the backyard. Phillip and a few sheriff deputies were roaming the scene. Elwood imagined they were buffalo grazing across some small plain as he raised his rifle, pointed directly at Phillip.

The sheriff saw Elwood coming around the yard and hollered. "Stop right there, Elwood." Everyone on the scene stopped, and two deputies on either side of Elwood drew their pistols, ready to fire. "Job said you might be coming down here," Phillip said.

Elwood spat. In a cage not ten yards away he saw what he guessed was Willie Nelson. The ridges along the alligator's back were dark and scarred, like a timeworn

mountain range the animal carried everywhere it went. This was the closest he'd ever been to Willie Nelson. "What's gonna happen to him?"

"You know what's gotta be done. He's been domesticated and he's too dangerous to be left out here." Phillip lowered his gun. "Now if you drop that weapon we can have a conversation about all this."

Elwood tightened his fingers around the fore-stock of the gun. "You just can't let me have nothing, can you?"

Phillip removed his sunglasses and looked right at Elwood. "This animal attacked a little girl. We have to take action."

Elwood thought about that little girl being rolled through the water while screaming for help. He remembered meeting the little Cooley girl some time ago, when her dad brought their car into his shop. She was three feet tall and looking every bit like a Cajun girl. She was lying in a hospital bed now, no doubt, in Opelousas with her daddy by her side. Willie Nelson still had pieces of her inside him. Elwood's stomach wrenched and he thought for a brief moment that he *might have* been responsible for this. He wondered what Emile would make of this scene.

All of that disappeared in an instant when he saw Phillip approaching him, hand out in front as if Elwood were some dangerous animal. Before he could tell his hand to let go of the gun, he pulled the trigger.

The gun gave a small click.

It seemed as if in the flash of a few seconds he had been wrestled to the ground and stuffed into the back of a cruiser. For the first time in his life, he was in handcuffs. He found himself shifting his wrists every time they went numb. Outside the window, Phillip looked equally distressed. He rubbed the bridge of his nose, massaging out his "near-death"

experience, Elwood thought. He watched as the sheriff picked up a .22 rifle and made his way toward Willie Nelson. Willie Nelson began to thrash his head and spread his jaws wide, giving a resonant hiss. The animal seemed to know what was coming. Elwood closed his eyes and let his head fall onto the plexiglass divider in the cruiser.

The rifle shot cracked through the summer air and Elwood flinched, not from the noise but from the stillness that followed.

He sat handcuffed to a table directly across from his son, Emile, who had brought two cups of police station coffee. He was being detained on aggravated assault charges. Elwood had reluctantly called his son for help. The two Styrofoam cups sat steaming in front of them. Neither had touched the coffee. Emile took a heavy breath.

“I keep trying to be surprised, Pop.” He spoke with the tone of a disappointed parent.

Elwood rattled his cuffs against the metal table. He noticed the wear that Baton Rouge had taken on his son. The elasticity of his skin was fading, creating small canyons along the sides of his mouth and eyes. His shirt was unbuttoned at the top and his tie hung low, as if weighed down by the pressures of the city. Sleeves rolled up and hair unkempt.

“I talked to Sheriff Jenkins,” Emile said. “He said he’d reduce the charges if you plead guilty.”

“Last thing I need is sympathy from that son of a bitch,” Elwood said.

“Dad, you tried to shoot him. It’s a miracle he’s not keeping you in here for longer.”

“The damn gun wasn’t even loaded. He can’t charge me for trying to click him to death.” Elwood stopped and looked down at the steel table. “Anyway, it’s done now. That gator’s gone the way of the flesh.”

Emile sipped his coffee. His face twisted and he looked at the cup in mild disdain. "They said the Cooley girl is out of surgery. Doctors had to reconstruct part of her calf. She lost a fair amount of blood but she's gonna be fine."

Elwood scratched his fingertips back and forth on the metal table. "Glad she's all right. Might want to go visit her after I get out of here, see for myself."

"No," Emile said. "You're not going to see that girl."

Elwood sat up straight. "Son, you will not tell me what I will and won't be doing."

"Yes, I will." Emile raised his voice. "Sharon and I are posting your bail, so if we can avoid you getting into another altercation, then we will." He watched his father slowly deflate, then added, "Sorry, Pop."

The familiar silence between them gradually filled the holding area. Emile leaned back in the metal chair and crossed his legs. "What did you name the alligator?"

Elwood straightened up. "Willie Nelson. Seemed only fitting."

"Jesus, dad. That's the craziest thing I've heard in a long while." He shook his head and sipped the coffee in front of him.

Elwood straightened up and wrapped his hands around the cup in front of him. It left a warm imprint in his palms, melting away the coolness of the metal table. He tried not to smile. He thought about his grandkids and about showing them the quickest way to navigate the backwoods channels and twists and turns of the bayou, showing them the best way to get back home after they'd ventured far enough.



**Coronary**

**Ron Fundingsland, aquatint/etching**

## **The Horror of a Bookstore Owner** ***Zhu Jian***

It suddenly snows.  
Shortly after 4 p.m.,  
it's getting dark.  
There are few people on the streets,  
and in this bookstore, even fewer.  
Me alone, to be exact.  
Oh no, not so,  
There are still many people here  
who never speak a word,  
lying in exquisite –  
yes, exquisite coffins,  
not making a sound.  
Isn't that a morgue?  
It's completely dark now.

### 店老板的恐惧 朱

突然飘起了雪  
才下午四点多  
天就快黑了  
街上行人很少  
书店里人更少  
就我一个  
不对，不对  
其实还是很多人  
不过他们老不说话  
他们躺在精美的  
对，精美的棺材里  
一点声响都没有  
这不就是太平间么  
天已经全黑了

Translated from the Chinese by Liang Yujing

## **Anna Akhmatova (1889-1966)**

**1925**

As a shade not properly mourned  
I will ramble here every night  
When the flowering lilac is groomed  
By the playful hands of starlight.

1926 Sheremetyev Garden

### **In Memoriam**

And you, my close friends till Judgment Day!  
I have been saved as though to mourn you,  
To not be stilled as a weeping willow above  
your graves but to cry aloud your names  
For the whole world to hear. Enter the Saints;  
All fall to your knees! – the light breaks in,  
In smooth rows stream the citizens of Leningrad,  
Living with the dead. For God there are no dead.

August 1942 Dyrmen'

**27 January 1944**

On starless January nights,  
By its unfulfilled fate amazed,  
Returning from death's abyss,  
Leningrad salutes itself.

2 March 1944

**May 24**

They were the blackest tulips.  
They were terrifying flowers.

24 May 1959

Translated from the Russian by Alex Cigale



**not a medal, but a poem**  
***Richard Vargas***

brown desert children  
dressed in their best clothes  
chasing each other around  
tables and chairs where the  
wedding party sits surrounded  
by family and friends  
this day to celebrate and remember  
turned to grief and shock with  
a flash a boom a puff of smoke  
a small shoe flying through the air

sitting in rooms on the other side of the globe  
in the middle of another desert  
uniformed video game junkies  
finger their keyboards and  
hi-tech joy sticks as words like  
“alleged” and “probable” increase  
the pressure of a thumb on a trigger button  
until an innocent child obliterated  
is written up as the equivalent  
of a dead goat

for actions degrading our humanity  
and our standing in the global community

uncle sam  
i pin this poem on your chest  
sorry for the prick  
it will only bleed  
a little bit

## NOT DROWNING

*Stan Sanvel Rubin*

They say you will remember nothing  
but I remember how our house  
filled with water the way a field fills  
with sunlight, a crack, then the slow  
onslaught that will not be stopped,  
the way memory circles and swirls  
under every present tense  
until it bursts forth everywhere,  
the way the birth of any animal—  
oozing, luxurious—cannot be denied,  
life held steady in the soft hands of water,  
the fluid lasso of water , the threatening bell  
of water ringing inside the mind, the cold  
intentions of water, the abrupt dismissal.

**MAN, FLOATING**  
***Stan Sanvel Rubin***

The scalpel of cold  
etches him lying  
on his back like an otter  
visibly going  
nowhere.

Ice crusts  
his body,  
a second skin  
he must wear and  
he wants to.

When nobody's  
watching, this  
feels less like  
freezing, more  
like flying.

**EDITOR'S CHOICE, NONFICTION**  
**BIG TWO-HEARTED ME**  
*Steve Ramirez*

The morning was cool, damp and not yet fully awake as I stepped up to the river. A slight fog held just above the water. The grass bent soft and wet beneath my footsteps and the gray-skinned, ancient Cypress trees stood there watching, waiting for something to happen. I stood there too, my fly rod in hand, watching, waiting for something to happen—and it did.

I don't know why it is that some of my best days on the river have begun with waking alone in the darkness, truly alone, with that deep empty feeling—that hollow aloneness that you cannot shake free of. It had been some time since my service in the Marines, but years later the ghosts came to call and I found myself afraid to sleep, knowing they would come back. A doctor helped me to chase away the ghosts, but the feeling of emptiness remained. I guess sometimes surviving is your punishment. So you stand in the river, facing upstream with the water rushing down upon you as if it could somehow fill the hollow emptiness—and somehow, it always does. So it was one morning. I stood there, without even casting and with no trout rising, and as the water rushed passed me I knew it was washing my burdens behind me, swirling them downstream like the autumn leaves.

There is a great deal about living that trout can teach us. They teach us how to keep swimming even in a steady current. Trout know that if they stop swimming they cease to be trout and begin to become debris, floating without purpose wherever the current may take them. Trout know that if they keep swimming, facing into the current, perhaps

in the eddy of a rock, all that they need to truly live will eventually come to them. I learn a great deal from trout.

The river sparkled. Shafts of morning sunlight came through the tree limbs, fog returned home, and it was then that I saw the first rings appear upon the water, like inverted raindrops, the trout rose. A hitchhiker rests upon my hand, tiny mayflies looking for love. Aren't we all? How perfect they are, each one born of the river and then bursting into the air. Living, loving and dying, only to return to the river—going home, just like me.

My line slid back and forth through the air. I looked back over my shoulder and saw the loop hanging, too perfect to be my fault, and then it straightened and I sent it forward toward the rainbow I can see waiting behind the rock. He rises to the naturals, sipping them from the surface. My imitation which is made of bits of feather, fur, and thread drifts toward him. He turns, considers and rejects it. I cast again.

For me, fly fishing for trout is more about the fishing than the catching. If I was worried about catching trout I would use bait or spinners or dynamite. But, bait seems like cheating, and spinners seem like hardware and dynamite makes a mess of the river and scares away the birds. So I tie flies that cause me to be close to the river, and thereby learn how the trout live and what they like to eat. Fly fishing makes you live through the trout's eyes. Like the trout, you live in the water and learn of the currents. You reach up into the air to grasp that which sustains you. Fly fishing connects you to the trout's world, and in doing so, your own.

Trout are not native to my beloved Texas Hill Country, but like the Apache, the Comanche, the Conquistadors and me, we have all called it home. Here in the Texas hills, Texas Parks and Wildlife stock rainbow trout into the Frio, South Llano Blanco,

and Guadalupe rivers each year during the colder months of December and January. In the Texas summer the water gets too hot for most trout to live and propagate, although it's rumored that a sustainable population lives in the cold waters below the Canyon Lake Dam. But the truth is the trout think it's home and so do I.

Not all of my best trout fishing days have been in the Texas hills, and that's okay too. There was a time when I was visiting my mother when she lived along the edge of the Alleghany Mountains in south central Pennsylvania. It was Thanksgiving morning and freezing cold and dark outside as I slipped out of the house while everyone slept. As I drove through the twisting snow dusted roads and the sun began to rise, I couldn't help but smile as I turned off the pavement along the shores of the famed Yellow Breeches River. On any other day, the river would be full of fly fishermen politely jockeying for position. But it was Thanksgiving, and all of the "sane" people were either at home asleep or sitting under a warm blanket watching the parade on television. I, on the other hand, found myself standing in a freezing cold river, snow falling, ice forming in the guides of my rod and rainbow trout that seemed to like what was on the end of my line. It was a perfect day.

And, this brings me back to Texas. The home I share with the trout is a land of subtle beauty. Our rivers sometimes live just above the stone—skinny water where dinosaurs once roamed. Other times, our rivers seem to be made of stone, shyly waiting for the rain. When the rains come our rivers demand respect. They are the kind of rivers that put cows in the trees and roll Buicks like cord wood. That is the magic of a Texas Hill Country river. Like life, it is ever changing, always creating a new self, always connected to the past. And each winter the trout rise like shadows mixed with

memories. They wait, patient and understanding that what will be will be, and that all that is true is this moment—everything else is an illusion.

And, so I stand in the river casting back and forth trying to lose that feeling of being alone. It is then that the rainbow rises and takes my offering. I raise my rod and all at once I am no longer alone. I am connected to his powerful runs, facing into the current. Silver line connects us, both fighting to live—two beating hearts. He comes to my net. I hold him gently, rocking him back and forth in the cold rushing water. “Gain your strength dear warrior,” I say. Am I speaking to him, or to me? With a kick of his tail he returns to the river—and I go with him.



**Valentine**

**Ron Fundingsland, Aquatint/etching**



A Review by Doug Anderson

***Psalms of the Dining Room***, by Lauren Schmidt,  
WIPF & STOCK, Eugene, OR, 2012.

Lauren Schmidt's new poems remind me of Diane Arbus's photographs. They show us the things we turn our eyes from daily. Like Arbus, she treats her subjects with love, no matter how dark or strange. She slips into the skin of a serial killer with the same compassion as she treats the society woman whose principal horror of the day is having a basil leaf stuck in her veneers at a house party. Schmidt is fiercely intelligent but at home in the working class vernacular she grew up in. She never takes cheap shots but tries to find the soft core underneath the pretension, the mutable substance in all of us that carries empathy for the limited beings we are. She is tough and tender at once, and has given us, with *Psalms of the Dining Room*, a rich and disarming book.

In the opening lines of the first poem she declares her position: *When graffiti becomes gospel, ask me/ if I've ever believed in anything*. She follows through with a belief in *what* is not what should or should not be. The poems speak without preaching more effectively than all the rhetoric that typically floodlights the same subjects: poverty, addiction, crime, despair. The young girl crossing the street in a city, dressed to be noticed, and yet withering into fragility, losing one high heel and carrying it as she limps the rest of the way through the intersection. The girl is all of us. We are off balance. We are staggered by the realities of our lives, whether we push them away, medicate them, or rage at them. At the end of the first poem she declares to us: *What this city says, that is what I will say*. Look at what is, she says, it's all there. She is giving us a luminous urban vision as poignant as Nelson Algren's *Chicago: City on the Make*.

There are many rooms in the house of poetry, but the room Schmidt inhabits avoids the careful MFA poem, or the conventional postmodern moves like ironic distance or self-referential language unhooked from its referents. The people, places and things she writes about intrude up on us so emphatically it is impossible to remain detached or playful. Which isn't to say that she doesn't illumine her subjects with such love as to make us work up hope, somehow, some way, that all our love and rage indeed add up to something. There is the sense in her poems that she is unable *not* to do so: it is her nature, and not the effusions of the privileged guilty.

Her Billy Holiday grit and honey voice punches us in the heart but caresses us also.  
*She opens her shirt the way women do/to have rock stars sign their breasts./But this is no concert and  
the cop/on the sidewalk strains to pin her/arms behind her back for a check./Tremors scatter from  
her chest,/screams, like locusts, color the sky.*

This book will stand by itself among the best poetry published this year.

A Review by Mary Makofske  
***Light at Point Reyes*** by Joan I. Siegel  
Shabda Press, 2012

Like the “fog-washed” light at Point Reyes which “blurs boundaries,” Joan I. Siegel’s book is awash with memories that blur past and present, human experience and the natural world. The poems can be private as family or public as the fall of Baghdad, which is itself replete with personal stories.

Siegel knows how to let a flat statement speak for itself, as in “Nesreen in Baghdad”: “The car pulling up / beside me is only a car stalled / in traffic: I do not explode.” But her language can be highly charged, as when she speaks in the voice of a 13<sup>th</sup> century Chinese mother binding her daughter’s feet:

*I will beat you...stand...walk  
back and forth a hundred times...do not cry...I curse  
you...women suffer for beauty...your feet will be  
your face...walk...daughter...walk...*

Music echoing through the poems—from “First Song” in an ancient cave, to the memory of her mother playing piano, to the poet falling asleep to Bach’s Partitas—offers transcendence, comfort, a link to history and her own past.

Often human experience meshes with the natural world, as in “Last Morning of My Mother” when the day itself begins with “One eye / half closed, unfinished / with memory and light,” or when the author drops her daughter at “Wilderness Camp” where she will learn to build a fire and a lean-to as well as “find yourself / whenever you are lost.”

The poet is adept with the telling detail. In “Au Pair” the young woman, “only / the sub-plot” in her employers’ lives, waits for her own story to develop. Strolling the child through the gardens of Rome, she passes

*a stone Madonna drape[d] in moss. Jasmine  
blooms. She wonders  
how it is to be a nun.*

*Late above the shining city, night  
of lilac and cedar, he kisses all the words  
from her mouth.*

The stone Madonna covered in moss set against lilac and cedar (that ambiguous cedar, fragrant, long-lived, but often found in cemeteries) strikes just the right note here.

This volume moves from narrative to lyric, from free verse to pantoum, from classical myth to an art gallery to the room of a modern hospital. Like the pines at Point Reyes, the poet is shaped by the powerful winds of time and loss—is moved, but remains rooted and becomes stronger.

WHAT REFLECTS, a review by Pamela Uschuk  
***Shimmer, Poems by Judy Kronenfeld***  
Word Tech Editions, Cincinnati, OH, 2012

In this wide-ranging third collection, Judy Kronenberg's precision of language and her keen observation of detail lead the reader from New York City to Damascus, from her father's death bed to her own marriage bed, from Southern California clipped lawn to Bucharest gypsies and polluted Athens, from her husband's cluttered study to the spot under the end table where her dead dog last laid. Kronenberg's poems braid loss and love as do many contemporary poems. What sets them apart are her musical lines, her precise detailing of the natural as well as the everyday human world, and the way that each poem detonates a surprise that makes the reader see the world, with its griefs and joys, in a new way. Passion shimmers, shakes the poignant core of many poems in this collection.

Kronenberg is a fine technician. Her poems sing. In her rhythms, especially in poems like "Ex-New Yorker Remembers Her Natural Landscapes," are reverberations of Langston Hughes, Carl Sandberg and even, at times, Walt Whitman. Her verse is muscular, her rhythms powerful, and yet they vibrate with longing:

Fortress city--  
houses cresting ridges  
like battalions of horses,  
battlements of near tenements--...

Tree-house city--how shocking my first sight  
of Western towns, like knots in the ribbon  
of the road, sediment in the cup  
of sky...

O my city of sorrows.

In other poems, such as the fine "What We Do For Each Other" and "Individual Animals" set in the domestic everyday, are echoes of Maxine Kumin. Of her dead dog she writes,

Could we have not erased  
His signature?  
Suddenly  
I'm low to the ground  
To know, taking in pheromones

Cross-species, nose like a mourner's  
In a sleeve--

*Shimmer* is an intelligent collection of poems that hold out to the reader a large and generous heart.

INITIATIONS, a review of *Crazy Brave* by Pam Uschuk  
**CRAZY BRAVE**, a memoir by Joy Harjo  
W.W. Norton, New York, 2012

I read memoirs written by writers the way some people sneak chocolate, savoring juicy gossip, the shadow story behind the pens, computers and public faces of my fellow writers. What I most enjoy and am moved by are the rare memoirs that rise above a chronicling of life experiences to risk breaking the rules and explore. Because it diverges from traditional autobiography and because her prose is often pure poetry, one of my favorite memoirs of last year is Elizabeth Alvarado's *Anthropologies*. The other is Joy Harjo's *Crazy Brave*, a book that defies linear time while blending poetry, prose and myth to leap to the realm of the visionary. *Crazy Brave* is one of most inventive memoirs I've ever read. It is as intensely engrossing as it is poignant. It also has a sense of humor. Since Harjo is a poet and musician, her prose reverberates with rhythm as well as with metaphor, story and wisdom. Harjo's imagery is expansive and tinged with the gravitas of knowing on the intuitive as well as the intellectual plane.

A member of the Mvskoke Creek Nation, Harjo was born and raised and, after a long hiatus, now lives in Oklahoma. Her Indigenous heritage, a deep spirituality, and the storytelling tradition inform her work. Her difficult childhood and adolescence forged in her a burning need to know, to find words for healing, words to create herself whole from the ashes. Harjo plays alto saxophone and has recorded some three albums, nearly all are arrangements of her own poetry. In 2010, she was awarded Best Female Vocalist by the Native American Music Awards. So, it is appropriate that music creates part of the weft of this memoir, which takes us through her early childhood, subject to the alcoholic temper and infidelities of a charismatic father, then, through her adolescence, marred by an abusive, sadistic step-father. We follow her to Indian boarding school, and we suffer with her through two heartbreaking early marriages and motherhood, transcending all of it, as she evolves into a poet and a musician in her own right.

As Pam Houston said, Harjo invites us into a whole new way of seeing.” So, the narrative begins:

"Once I was so small I could barely see over the top of the back seat of the black Cadillac my father bought with his Indian oil money....This was the time that I acquired language, when something happened that changed my relationship to the spin of the world. It changed even the way I looked at the sun...We were driving somewhere in Tulsa, the northern border of the Creek Nation...The radio was on...I became acutely aware of the line the jazz trumpeter was playing...I didn't know the words *jazz* or *trumpet*. I don't know how to say it, with sounds or words, but in that confluence of hot southern afternoon, in the breeze of aftershave and humidity, I followed that sound to the beginning, to the birth of sound. I was suspended in whirling stars. I grieved my parents' failings, my own life, which I saw stretching the length of that rhapsody."

The entire memoir is a feast seasoned with magic. As Harjo has said about poetry, "We must turn slaughter into food." This narrative is the shaman's journey of initiations through the folds of time and memory ultimately for healing, for Harjo, for Indigenous women whose rights Harjo has for decades fought for, and for all who read it. Harjo is as adept at rendering verisimilitude as she is at creating the poetry she is renown for.

"The Saturday after moving to her step-father's house, Harjo recalls that she "followed my five year old sister's cries to the kitchen and found her being held aloft by one leg by my stepfather. I froze in terror...

this will happen to you if you misbehave." He swung my sister around.

He unbuckled and pulled off his belt in one slick motion. i still see the sweat crescents under the arms of his work shirt. i hear him grunt with the effort as he whips her...

When he was done he put her down, then slid the belt carefully around his girth."

Holding the narrative together is Harjo's understanding of and journeys into the spirit world, a world as palpable as the physical world as it is in all of her writings. Despite violence and despair, Harjo's generous spirit triumphs with crazy courage and compassion.

Like an ocean, *Crazy Brave* refracts light through many levels. Through vignettes, memorable characters and interlocking stories, this memoir invites us on a trail of tears of a sort, the journey of a young Native woman exiled from her family and from herself, of a young woman bearing the heartbreak of a dispossessed people, of incredible longing, a way to walk through all of it with grace. Here is a journey marked by violence and beauty, by fear and love, by betrayal and courage. There is a good reason it has won this year's American Book Award and the PEN Center USA's Award for Creative Nonfiction. In



writing that is spell-binding and visionary, Harjo takes our hands and leads us to transcend the terrible fire of loss to find compassion and love.



The Hunchback

Turner G. Davis, print

## CONTRIBUTERS NOTES

**John Victor Anderson's** work has appeared in the *Southern Review*, *The Southern Poetry Anthology*, *Volume IV: Louisiana*, 21<sup>st</sup> Editions' *Jack Spencer—Prism Book Number 3*, *Naugatuck River Review*, and other journals. Between learning to play fiddle and a continual search for the best Boudin, he teaches at the University of Louisiana in Lafayette where he is soon to complete a PhD in English.

**Joe Bocchicchio**, who reads regularly in Kent, Ohio, was born in New York City and has been writing for about three years. Joe practices martial arts, yoga, and Zen. He runs, rides bike, and lifts weights. Joe also is active in health care reform and poverty issues. He lives with his wife, Vicki, in Kent, Ohio. She is a painter and a yoga teacher. Joe and Vicki enjoy gardening and travel. They have two children and two grand children. He describes himself as fortunate.

**Ace Boggess** is author of two books of poetry: *The Prisoners* (forthcoming from Brick Road Poetry Press) and *The Beautiful Girl Whose Wish Was Not Fulfilled* (Highwire Press, 2003). His writing has appeared in *Harvard Review*, *Mid-American Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *RATTLE*, *River Styx*, *Southern Humanities Review* and many other journals. He currently resides in Charleston, West Virginia.

**J. Scott Brownlee** is a founding member of The Localists, a new literary movement that emphasizes place-based writing of personal witness, cultural memory, and the aesthetically marginalized working class, both here and abroad. His poems appear in *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *The Greensboro Review*, *Rattle*, *Boxcar Poetry Review*, *Nashville Review*, and *Devil's Lake*. His ms. *Disappearing Town* was a semifinalist for the 2012 Brittingham Prize, as well as for Crab Orchard's First Book Award. He currently teaches at NYU, where he is a Writers in the Public Schools Fellow.

**Nancy Naomi Carlson**, winner of grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Maryland Arts Council, and the Arts & Humanities Council of Montgomery County is the author of three poetry collections, as well as the critically acclaimed *Stone Lyre: Poems of René Char*. She is an associate editor for Tupelo Press, translation editor for *Blue Lyra Review*, and teaches at The Writer's Center in Bethesda.

**Kyler Campbell** would not have put a pen to paper if his wife (and eternal muse) hadn't tricked him into it. He now holds an MFA in fiction from Converse College and is hard at work on his first collection of short stories. He currently lives and teaches in Charleston, South Carolina.

**Alex Cigale** was born in Chernovtsy, Ukraine and lived in St. Petersburg, Russia from 1966 through 1972. He completed an MFA in Poetry at the University of Michigan. Since 1990 he has lived in New York City. Cigale's poems have appeared recently in *The Cafe*, *Colorado*, *Global City*, *Green Mountains* and *North American reviews*, *Gargoyle*, *Hanging Loose*, *Tar River Poetry*, *Many Mountains Moving* and *St. Petersburg Review*.

**David Chorlton** was born in Austria, grew up in England, and spent several years in Vienna before moving to Phoenix in 1978. He pursued his visual art and had several shows as well as writing and publishing his poetry in magazines and collections, the latest of which is *The Devil's Sonata* from FutureCycle Press. Although he became ever more interested in the desert and its wildlife, the shadow side of Vienna emerges in his fiction and *The Taste of Fog*, which was published by Rain Mountain Press.

**Turner G. Davis** is Director of the Riva Yares Gallery in Scottsdale, Arizona. His solo exhibits include shows at University of Arizona Museum of Art, Rancho Linda Vista Gallery, Maryland Institute College of Art, the Yuma Arts Center and Studio 21 in Halifax, Nova Scotia. He teaches at the Drawing Studio in Scottsdale.

**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. He lives and makes art in Bayfield, Colorado.

**Zhu Jian** is a Chinese poet born in 1975 in Yiyang and now based in Xi'an, particularly known for his vivid short poems. He joined *xiabanshen* (the lower body) poetry group in 2000 and became a member of *Kui* (sunflower) poetry society in 2005. With some fellow poets, he launched Chang'an Poetry Festival in 2010. His first poetry collection *Tuoluo* (The Spinning Top) was published in Hong Kong by *yinghe chubanshe* (Milky Way Press) in 2011.

**Hannah Johnson** is an undergraduate student in the Creative Writing program at Stephen F. Austin State University. Her work has appeared in the SFA Gratitude Chapbook. She is a native Texan and has been writing for many years.

**Richard Katrovas** is the author of thirteen books of poetry, fiction and nonfiction. He taught for twenty years at the University of New Orleans, and the past eleven at Western Michigan University. Katrovas is the founding director of the Prague Summer Program for Writers. The work herein will appear in his forthcoming *Swastika into Lotus* (Carnegie Mellon University Press, 2015).

**Jesse Lee Kercheval** is the author of 13 books of poetry, fiction and memoir including the poetry collections *Cinema Muto* (SIU Press, 2009), winner of the Crab Orchard Award, and the novel, *My Life as a Silent Movie* (Indiana University Press, 2013). She is also the editor of *América invertida*: an anthology of younger Uruguayan poets which is forthcoming from the University of New Mexico Press.

**Diane Kirsten Martin's** work appears in many journals and anthologies, including *Field*, *New England Review*, *Poetry Daily*, *ZYZZYVA*, *Harvard Review*, *Narrative*. She was included in *Best New Poets 2005*, received a *Pushcart* Special Mention, and won the Erskine J. Poetry Prize from *Smartish Pace*. Her first collection, *Conjugated Visits*, was published in May 2010 by Dream Horse Press. Her newest manuscript, *Hue and Cry*, is seeking a publisher. She lives in West County, Sonoma, California with her husband and dog.

**William G. Meffert** obtained an M.D. from Yale Medical School, he became a Winchester Scholar in cardiothoracic surgical research, Yale University. He was an army combat surgeon in Vietnam; then performed cardiovascular surgery for 30 years in Iowa. Retired, he has volunteered as a surgeon in Haiti, Russia, and China. His interests include serving as a Consulting Professor for Stanford University, Department of Surgery, becoming a certified flight instructor, and working as a carpenter for Habitat for Humanity. His stories have appeared in such journals as *AOPA Pilot Magazine*, *The Vietnam Archive*, *The MacGuffin*, *Ars Medica* and *Crack the Spine*.

**Andrew Phipps** has lived in West Virginia all his life except for a brief stint in Prague. He is finishing his undergrad writing degree at West Virginia Wesleyan College before he does more ramblin'. This is the first time his work has appeared in a literary journal he doesn't edit.

**Steve Ramirez** lives and writes in the Texas Hill Country. His work has appeared in *The Houston Literary Review*, *Pecan Grove Review*, and *Explore*. He is currently working on his first book of essays entitled: *Big Two Hearted Me: Fly Fishing Through Uncertainty in the Texas Hill Country*. This essay provided inspiration for the current project.

**Stan Sanvel Rubin** lives on the Olympic Peninsula of Washington state. His third full length collection, *Hidden Sequel*, won the Barrow Street Book Prize. A fourth, *There. Here.*, will be published in Fall, 2013 by Lost Horse Press. His work has appeared recently in *Carolina Quarterly* and *Pacific Review* and is forthcoming in *The Florida Review*, *Cimarron Review*, *The National Poetry Review*, *Great River Review* and *Talking River*.

**Micah Ruelle** is a midwestern poet residing in Austin, Texas, where she edits for *Newfound Journal*. This is her first time appearing in a journal.

**E.M. Schorb's** stories have appeared in *The Carolina Quarterly*, *Roanoke Review*, *Quick Fiction*, *The Chattahoochee Review*, *The Willow Review*, *Gulf Coast*, *OffCourse: A Literary Journal*, *Haight Ashbury Literary Journal*, *Writers' Forum*, *The University of Windsor Review* (Canada), *The Wascana Review* (Canada), *Gargoyle*, and *Camera Obscura*, among others. His latest collection is *Manhattan Spleen* slated for publication by year's end.

**Valerie Uschuk** is a prizewinning and lifelong painter, who now paints in Ajo, Arizona in the winter and in Bayfield, Colorado in the summer. She likes to expand on the already beautiful sights in nature. Her most recent exhibit was at Rancho Linda Vista Gallery in Oracle, Arizona. You can see more of her paintings on Face Book.

**Richard Vargas** edited/published five issues of *The Tequila Review*, 1978-1980. His first book, *McLife*, 2005, was featured twice on Garrison Keillor's *Writers Almanac*, in February, 2006. A second book, *American Jesus*, was published by Tia Chucha Press, 2007. A third collection, *Guernica, revisited* is forthcoming from Press 53. Vargas received his MFA from the University of New Mexico, 2010. He was recipient of the 2011 Taos Summer Writers' Conference's Hispanic Writer Award, and was on the faculty of the 2012 10th



National Latino Writers Conference. He resides in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where he edits/publishes the biannual poetry journal, *The Más Tequila Review*. His collection of poems, *Guernica Revisited* will soon be released by Press 53.

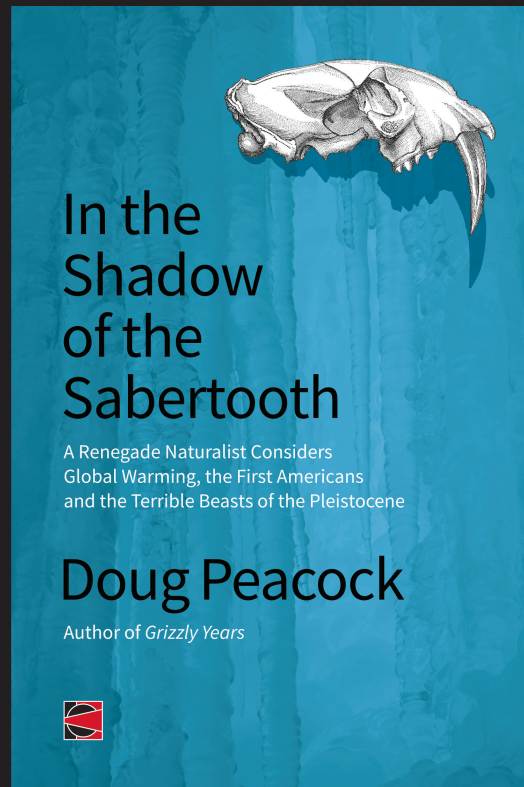
**Liang Yujing** writes in both English and Chinese, now a lecturer, in China, at Hunan University of Commerce. His poems and translations in English have appeared in the UK, the US, Australia, Canada and India, in magazines like *Wasafiri*, *Acumen*, *Westerly*, *Epiphany*, *Willow Springs*, *Los Angeles Review* and *Boston Review*.



**Close-up of Cactus**

**Val Uschuk acrylic on canvas**

"Peacock makes his case for preserving the land that reminds humans of our insignificance in the face of nature."—*Publishers Weekly*



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