



CUTTHROAT,  
A JOURNAL OF THE  
ARTS

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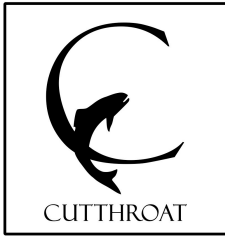
**2010 JOY HARJO POETRY PRIZE**  
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**RICK DEMARINIS SHORT STORY PRIZE**

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*CUTTHROAT,  
A JOURNAL  
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**Glacial Remains on the Sturgeon River    Jerry Gates  
(Oil Pastel)**

Alfred Corn  
VINES

7

Leanings, lavings, lashings that in cool  
weather shoot forward fast as the short  
clock hand and, in hot, as the long.

Rockface daredevils, adjectives, rapunzels,  
strategists, they reel out  
a flexible antenna to get a purchase  
on any scaffold or trellis in reach, a grab-on,  
a braiding, that sun, rain, and years will strengthen  
as the minute  
digital pads  
adhere to whatever handhold stays.

Without support, disabled, they'd flail  
and collapse but, supplied by their IV's,  
have the strength to dangle out clusters of flowers  
or fruit, spiced wines to inhale or drink down.  
Morning glory's deep Marian blue,  
the dull gold stalactites of muscadet  
suspended in a fume of honey,  
and the climbing roses, the roses!

Against brick or stone an exact progress  
is recorded, the pattern's asymmetrical  
perfection tendril  
by rambler inscribed and revealed  
when leaves drop away:  
an organic etching, grillwork balustrade,  
knotted tapestry of appositives,  
the saga of a dependence that kept its freedom  
to be what they becomingly are.

And yet a few, like kudzu  
or strangler fig, have unrestraint  
twined into their very nature, they annex  
all they can, imperial as wildfire,  
climbers that invade, engulf, choke, ravage,

siphoning up water and blocking light  
until the naïve host's swathed in deadly feathery  
boas of foliage. Not satisfied, the vines tighten  
to constrict the trapped trunk and branches,  
and, woe, tighter still, winding, screwing, wrenching,  
as the rack grows tougher,  
teak or oak at last throttled sapless, foreclosed.

Yet when support though dead remains intact,  
they enjoy a long-term lease of aftermath,  
in preening leisure on their lofty hat-rack, king  
of the mountain, rolling in the clover of themselves.  
That no triumph endures they forget, we all do.  
But then, at length, the work of woodworm, beetle, and dry rot  
done, down tips the ghost-tree, along with its thick  
invader cables, dragged to the floundering earth, snapped  
off at the root, prone on the ground,  
their highflown sunlit terrace forfeit.  
Twilight in Valhalla. The hanging gardens have fallen,  
fallen, seeds scattered to the eight winds....

These were (and will be) the Vines.

Mihaela Moscaliuc  
SUMMERTIME

9

“But 'till that mornin' there's a nothin' can harm you,  
with Daddy and Mammy standin' by . . .”  
— Ira Gershwin & DuBose Heyward

When Mr. Robu bleached our pet sanctuary,  
killing two kittens, we poured cabbage brine on his doormat  
& sent dung rockets through both kitchen windows,  
charged Mrs. Robu with silent complicity,

buried our babies in burst ballet slippers,  
then sauntered to St. Nicolae  
for Saturday's funeral: trombones and five criers,  
fir-trees sagging with goodies.

Coins and bon-bons sequined the air  
—to distract devils while the soul crossed bridge no. 7.  
I trapped a dozen or so in my hiked skirt,  
then cut back through the food bazaar, through “Ayaya,

heard about the new cut in the sugar ration?” &  
“Celery root, celery root: a boost to your manhood.”  
I spent my spoil on a last piece of dried gizzard—  
“fastest anti-diarrheic,” explained my hairy-moled *matu*□*a*.

After dinner, we bunched below the sputtering post light  
to select our dream item from a smuggled Nekermann.  
I had just chosen mine—a bowl of perfectly smooth rubies  
dubbed “jelly beans”—when an ambulance pulled up.

As the stretcher emerged from our apartment building,  
the nurse's voice soared into summer dark—  
“We'll fix you up, Mrs. Robu, don't worry,  
we're all good people here—good as candy.”

**Mihaela Moscaliuc**  
**GENTIAN I**

10

*Gentiana Acaulis*  
“Used in all female weaknesses”

You nursed my childhood with tinctures  
bled from soft plicae—cured colic, cauterized  
cankers, restored appetite and laughter.

Still, I never would have remembered you,  
gentian blue, if on the fourth day my nipples hadn't  
given in, one crack at a time, if by the sixth night

I hadn't lain there creviced, undone.  
The silver-haired pharmacist opened his fist  
into my palm. “I knew someone would come for it.

It's been discontinued for years.”  
To you I owe the first drop of milk,  
my son's unparching lips, so this is for you,

Dear Unprescribéd.

Mihaela Moscaliuc  
THE OWL CALLS FOR GRANDMOTHER

11

*Remember, grandmother says, far-off cry  
for near death, near cry for death far off.  
At the kitchen table, we scan owl echoes,  
winnow rice, pencil crosses on rationed eggs.*

*At midnight we mount the rooftop  
to spot the owl's yellow globes.  
When I was young, grandmother laughs,  
I twirled naked in our drying yard*

*and he remained silent for weeks,  
calling forth rain, forgetting death.  
Above the warm tar we find only stars  
—wise sage turned God*

*of the underworld, corpse bird, ungrateful  
offspring, stolen bride, sorcerer:  
you let the dark prince step out  
from behind the third eyelid, and give us no cry.*

**Luis Urrea**  
**ARIZONA LAMENTATION**

12

We were happy here before they came.

This was always Odin's garden,  
a pure white place.  
Cradle of Saxons,  
birthplace of Norsemen.

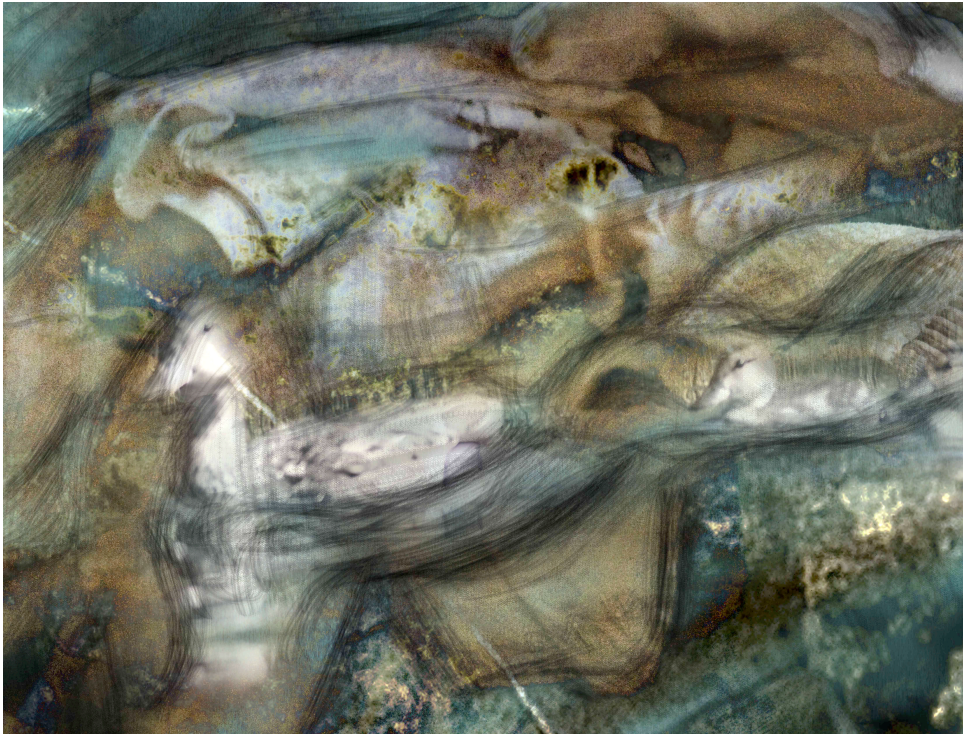
No Mexican was ever born here  
until their racial hatred and envy  
forced us to build a border fence.  
But they kept coming.

There were never Apache Villages here--  
we never saw these Navajos, Papagos,  
Yaquis. It's a lie. Until their wagons  
kept coming and coming. And their soldiers.

We worshipped at the great god's tree.  
We had something good here.  
We had family values and clean sidewalks.  
Until those savages kept coming, took our dream

and colored it.

AZ SB1070



**Preliminary Best-interest Findings**  
(Photo)

**David Cheezem**

Mary Larkin

14

## IF THE DAYS ARE GETTING SHORTER, WHY DO THEY FEEL SO MUCH LONGER?

### EARLY SPRING

You tell your best girlfriend about your boyfriend.

“MMMmmn,” she’ll say.

You tell her more, you tell her *everything*. You tell her how, after seven weeks of wild, frolicking passion, the two of you are in bed and all he is wearing is a puzzled look on his face when he says, “I didn’t expect to be so involved so soon.” You know exactly what he means by “so soon”—he means seven weeks. But what does he mean by “so involved,” and just how involved is he? You cannot ask him yet.

“Men!” your girlfriend says. “You know what his problem is?”

“No,” you tell her, hoping she has an answer.

“He’s a man!” Her answer is fast and sure.

She’s quick to rally round you, wave the flag of sisterhood. You trust her completely; she’s your best friend.

After seeing him three months, you tell her he still hasn’t said he loves you. But you know, you sense that he is a Good Man. When he sleeps over, your cat sleeps next to him. Your cat is very intuitive.

“Men are funny about sex and love, like they’re two different things,” is what you say to your girlfriend. “It’s like they don’t know a woman’s nookie leads straight to her heart.”

“It’s probably just too soon for him. You know how men are.”

“Right,” you agree.

### SUMMER

During the fourth month, he steals a photograph of you, one where

you are younger, leaner, living out West. You are standing in New Mexico sunlight, wearing a straw hat you still have and a smile he has never seen. You discover the photograph framed, set on his mantel, right next to his beloved baseball trophy from childhood. Across the front of the trophy is the word "Winner." Maybe he feels he has won your heart. Maybe he loves you after all. You are flattered and do not demand your photograph back. His new home is so sparse already. His soon to be ex-wife has kept practically everything, including the decades old Christmas ornaments his mother gave them, hand-blown Santas and Snowmen with some glitter still stuck on, but mostly gone. He has told you about them with a wistfulness you cannot describe to your girlfriend. His mentioning Christmas to you is a good sign.

"Do you think he loves you but just can't say it?" she asks.

"Maybe. He says that when we are making love he is *showing* me how he feels. So I said, 'Why can't you say what you feel?'"

"Maybe he's just afraid of commitment."

"Who isn't? It doesn't have to be commitment-commitment. You know what I want? I want more intimacy."

"But you know how men are. They're so afraid of being trapped."

"I still want to hear the words."

She's very understanding, always willing to listen, which is part of why she is your best girlfriend. You listen to her complaints, too. She's dating someone totally inappropriate and far too young. You encourage her, again, to find somebody better, more her equal. She must not want to talk about the man she's been seeing because she steers back to your relationship.

"How's his divorce coming along?"

“He says it’s just a matter of time.”

“How much time does he mean?” she asks. You admire the way she cuts right to the chase.

“I don’t know, he doesn’t know. First his wife kicked him out, now she’s stalling on signing the papers.” You explain to your girlfriend what your boyfriend explained to you, that their marriage was doomed from the start, that he never should have married her, that it’s been hell, and that they haven’t been intimate in *three* years.

“No wonder he’s so horny,” she says. You ignore the uncompliment.

You tell her how understanding of him you were the first time he left early on a Sunday morning. How, when he said he is not “religious *per se*,” but he still believes spiritual values are important, you said you think so, too. When he said he felt his son who will be in second grade needs to be taught spiritual values, you agreed. Who wouldn’t? You tell her how you did not say one word when he said Sundays were for church with his son. And wife. You tell your girlfriend that you couldn’t be disapproving without seeming like one of Satan’s minions. You don’t want to seem possessive. You have your own spiritual leanings, so how can you deny his? You hope he appreciates these qualities in you. You try not to be jealous of the wife. You try not to think about people seeing him sitting next to her on a pew in church when he is dating you. You hope people know your boyfriend and his wife have a Legal Separation and that you are not a Hussy or a Homewrecker.

“I simply smiled at him and said, ‘I’m glad you are such a good father.’”

“You played that one right!” your girlfriend says.

She asks, so you tell her more about the love-making. You tell her how he teased and thrilled you like no other man has. You tell her how *good* it was, making love with him, how he said, “You satisfy *all* my needs,” and pulled you closer. There’s no need for you to be jealous of anyone.

“What’s this?” you ask when he hands you a small box. This is the first gift he’s given you. “I saw it at the Food Co-op and thought of you. It’s plant-based estrogen.” You are not sure how to respond, but take it and say, “Thank you. I’ll take it if I ever need it.” Later, when you see male potency supplements, you pick them up for him. You’re not the only one who’s getting older.

More weeks go by and your boyfriend still won’t say he loves you. He will go as far as “You know how I feel about you,” but no further. It’s driving you crazy. Maybe you shouldn’t have given him the whole cow. And then there are his little habits and ways. He refuses to shop at normal grocery stores, insisting on organic produce from the Food Co-Op. He’s adamantly against anything made in China or Taiwan, (“It’s so *cheap*,” he says) preferring exorbitantly-priced French cookware, which he displays atop his stove. His kitchen sports the Le Creuset sauté pan, a sauce pan, a covered casserole as well as the *cassolette*—all in a blue that Parisians probably shun. You know because you’ve lived there. Parisians would think the blue *provençal*, and would go for the white—just look what they did to the museum they set up in *Les Halles*. Before him, you had never met a man who bragged about his pots and pans, but you don’t say anything because you realize he must feel insecure about his childhood or something.

Then there is salt.

He never uses any salt. You learn this about him when he cooks a special dinner for you. The table salt is nowhere in sight. You politely taste the food he's prepared prior to asking for the salt, then you gently say, "Just a smidgen of salt is all I need, it's so delicious." You are careful not to say to him that it is all the entire dish needs, or that it is all the world needs. Still, he screws up his face and so you say, "What?" to him, innocently. That's when he tells you how bad salt is for you, that it will raise your blood pressure. He cites studies, throws out a few figures, a few *statistics*. He pauses (you hate this part) to make sure you're taking in his understanding of salt and nutrition, which is to him a better understanding than your own.

"You know it makes you retain water." He looks at you as if you were puffy.

"I like salt," you tell him. "I'm so thin that a little water weight is flattering. Besides, they've shown in recent studies that contradict the studies you're alluding to that people have taken too much salt out of their diets and that we actually *need* salt. People are suffering from salt deprivation." This is not completely true, but you do not care. He should not be using such a patronizing tone. "A dash of salt brings out the flavors of foods, adds a little zest, a little life."

He is not listening because as soon as you begin your explanation, your defense of why it is okay to sprinkle your food *lightly* with salt, not that it would have been enough for you to simply state your saline preferences, a non-political matter of taste and pleasure of flavors to *your* taste buds, not an indictment against his cooking or his taste buds, as soon as you begin, he rises from the table, goes to the kitchen, and makes a loud commotion so you will know just how far back in the cabinet his salt is

because it is so rarely required. He is demonstrating how much trouble he will go through because of your idiosyncrasies, your neuroses, your *dependencies*.

“Your palate has been desensitized by high salt intake.”

You use very little salt, the least amount of anybody you know, and you do not wish to have to fight for the pinch you get. He says his palate is more sensitive, more developed, more—you can’t believe he’s using the word—evolved. Then he says yours can be, too. Like his. You know him well enough by now to know what he is thinking. He thinks your spirit is not as evolved as his spirit, or even as his taste buds. You decide to use the salt a little more lavishly.

He hands over a baggie with a twisty tie, the label pasted on it says FARMERS’ HARVEST FOOD CO-OP. Beneath, in ink, he has written the words “*Dead Sea Salt*.” They are written with authority, as though they are Scripture. You are afraid his explanation will have religious overtones, but you ask anyway, “Dead Sea Salt?”

“That’s the only kind I’ll buy,” he tells you. “It’s from the Co-Op. Do you know how many chemicals are used to process common table salt?”

You tell him you don’t.

The next day, your best girlfriend calls to find out how the dinner went, how the night went. You tell her all of the above, of his fear of salt. You tell her the sex was a little bland.

“Men!” she says. Then she asks you for more details about what he cooked. And more details about what you did in bed. You tell her some, maybe most.

You ask your girlfriend how her last date with Mr. Wrong went.

“‘Last date’ is exactly what it was! I need a real man in my life,” she tells you. “I’m so horny . . . I have got to get laid.” You know exactly what she’s talking about.

The next week, when you have a tiff with your girlfriend, you confide in your boyfriend, thinking that by sharing something intimate, the two of you will become closer. He needs to learn to talk about feelings; you will show him how. You tell him how your girlfriend hurt your feelings. You want him to be supportive and sympathetic towards you. Instead, he defends your girlfriend. You can’t confide in her and now it looks as though you should not have confided in him. You need a hug, but he’s too busy rationalizing for you. He thinks he’s being fair and wise by not siding with you, by presenting her viewpoint to you. She’s your friend, not his, so naturally you know your girlfriend’s viewpoint and feelings better than he does. He tells you that she had reasons for not being available as a friend—she had her life, her love affair, whatever. Then he makes it worse.

“Men don’t have fights with their buddies because they don’t over-analyze every little thing. They just accept each other for who they are. You women are overly emotional, but I realize it’s hormonal.”

“Men don’t even have friends. Just what buddies are you talking about?”

Later you make up with your girlfriend (you knew you would) and your boyfriend, too (you weren’t too sure you would). Sex is always good after you’ve fought. It is so good that you want to live, you want to die, you want to live. You tell your girlfriend.

There are time-together issues, too. Little calendar and scheduling problems emerge like mushrooms after a soggy rain. You have not been demanding of his time, or nosy about where he's been because you appreciate your own privacy—not that you would use it for anything he couldn't know about. You would tell him what you did with your days and your time, that you thought about him, that you made up love songs about him if he asked you, but he hasn't. You have been understanding, and even patient when he has had to cancel dinner with you to attend a Parent-Teacher Conference, or on Thursday evenings when he sits on the board meetings for the Boy Scouts because his son is a Cub Scout, and he wants to be supportive of the Boy Scouts of America. You have admired his sense of community. He is also a board member at the food Co-Op where he volunteers every other Wednesday afternoon. You are dating a Good Man. You have been so understanding of the demands his almost-ex-wife makes on him, so sympathetic, that he *thanks* you. “No one else would understand,” he tells you. You smile a Mona Lisa smile because you know he is right. You do not complain when she makes him stain their deck or paint the dormers on the weekend he was going to spend with you. You radiate patience.

“We'll get to spend more time together soon,” he says. “I promise.” You count on him because you can. He is a good citizen, a good father, a good man.

Then, in an off-hand way he confesses to having volunteered to coach his son's soccer team. You are struck silent. He takes your silence as some sort of concordance or acquiescence and spills the rest of the news. “After school practices will be Tuesdays and the games will be on Saturdays from 9:00 until 1:00. Just from July until November.”

There are no more days of the week to be had. You ask, “Do I get a day?”

“Of course!” he tells you “You know how I feel about you. You are number three on my list.”

“I feel like Number Two,” you say, but it goes right over his just beginning to bald head. You do not like being listed after his almost ex-wife, and feel you should come in second, after his son, or, if he really loved you, even first.

For a week you avoid having sex with him, you will not even see him, not for a movie, not for anything. It is hard when he tempts you with an invitation to your favorite restaurant but you say in the most mysterious voice you can muster, “I think we should think about things.” Your girlfriend has advised you to Withhold. That night all you can think about is how you wish you were eating tapas and drinking the dark velvety Spanish wine with him. You call your girlfriend but she is out.

## FALL

When your boyfriend says he likes the way your girlfriend wears her hair (it’s dark and lush and tends to cascade down the nape of her neck onto her shoulders) and he glances briefly, surreptitiously at yours, and when your girlfriend comments that when she saw the two of you at the neighborhood pub you looked great together and that, really, your boyfriend would look good with a stump he’s so gorgeous (she’s wrong), then you don’t need your newly-acquired leopard-framed reading glasses to see what’s scrawled across the wall in *her* handwriting

“You sound interested in him,” you tell her.

“You’re being paranoid.”

You're beginning to feel especially so around her. You tell yourself that she is ten years younger than you, has been married twice, and is probably not interested in your boyfriend who is older than you, too old for her. If she saw his scrawny body without the clothes, she would lose any desire she might have imagined she had for him. Of course, you yourself didn't lose all your desire when you saw his body, but you are older. You have learned to close your eyes occasionally, or to gaze into his, or to stare at the ceiling, or the sheets, depending on which way you are facing. Besides, at first, you thought you were in love. You were in love.

The problem is that he is a charmer, a seducer of women. When you are standing by his side as one half of a *couple*, he will chat up another woman with pre-orgasmic intensity. He's looking at this woman with x-ray eyes, seeing right through her snug summer Tee shirt with a V so deep there is not much left for him to figure out. If he can flirt with another woman while you are privy to every word and inflection, he is perfectly capable of flirting with your best girlfriend behind your back. And she is young (foolish) enough to think he's attractive simply because he is so much older. You make a mental note to yourself to describe what age has done to his body and to somehow slip it into your next conversation that she is so lucky, so fortunate to be able to date *young* men—men with good, hard bodies. Maybe that will do the trick.

You invite him for dinner and dress in something ravishingly beautiful in case you gather the gall to tell him you no longer want to be with him or in case he says something similar to you. You will be ready for either event, poised and stunning.

You prepare an unprecedented dinner for him—farelle pasta in a

lemon vodka cream sauce with leeks and shrimp and sugar snap peas. He's never had anything like it. You serve a \$27 bottle of pinot grigio. For dessert, you scoop out lemon sorbet, toss a few fresh raspberries over it, and splash it with iced vodka. You have wowed him. He stays and you make love. You should be happy. But you aren't. While he's making his little piglet sleeping noises, you lie awake sprawled out and restless in your unhappiness. The next morning when he kisses you good bye, his breath is fresher than usual.

“Yummy—is that your all-natural toothpaste that tastes so good?”

“No, it's your toothpaste.”

After he leaves, you straighten the guest bathroom. He has opened and used the guest toothbrush you had just bought to replace the previous one he opened and used. This is the third one. What's he doing with them? You had assumed the small bag he brought inside held his toothbrush and clean underwear, but it obviously did not. Something dawns on you. He had not intended to spend the night—he didn't even bring his toothbrush or the hippy toothpaste that doesn't freshen his breath at all, but you haven't told him, because you are kind and don't want to hurt his feelings. Your cat is sleeping on your side of the bed again. Your cat knows something you don't.

You call your best girlfriend.

“All I do is fantasize about breaking up with him,” you tell her. “But I don't have the guts. Some part of me still cares about him.”

“When *are* you going to break up with him? Just make sure you dump him before he dumps you,” she warns. “Women have to keep the upper hand.”

You tell her that sort of thing doesn't matter to you, you're not into games. After hanging up, you realize she's playing at a different level—she's so young. There's no use trying to explain yourself to her. Someday when she is older and wiser like yourself, she will see that love is not a game that you try to win at all costs, beating out the competitors and even defeating the beloved, but winning. You don't want a man you've outsmarted or beaten down.

### *THE HOLIDAYS*

It is the beginning of November, and everybody has asked you to have Thanksgiving with them—your mother, your sister, your best girlfriend—everybody but him. You don't want to be pushy; you wait for him to bring it up. The second week of November he begins telling you what a family tradition Thanksgiving is for him, his son, and his wife. He forgets to say “ex”. You are hurt. It is obvious he plans on spending the day giving thanks with and for his precious family. You plan to do no such thing. You turn down all invitations. You decide to stay home by yourself and fast. You tell your mother, your sister, and your best girlfriend that this is what you are going to do, that it is a Spiritual Thing.

Then, the day before Thanksgiving, he invites you. His ex-wife has changed her mind and has uninvited him. She will be celebrating with their across-the-street neighbor who is also getting divorced and who has a boy their son's age. Your boyfriend tempts you with descriptions of the butternut squash and ginger soup he will make using a recipe that was posted at the Food Co-Op. You stick to your guns, regardless of squash soup.

“If you had invited me at the beginning of the month when

everybody normally makes plans for the holidays, then I would have said yes. If you had even invited me last week, I might have considered saying yes.”

“I’m inviting you now.”

“Now is too late. You’ve waited until *the day before* Thanksgiving.” You try to lower your voice because it has risen in volume. Very quietly you say, “I have made my plans.”

“But you’re not *doing* anything.”

“I am,” you tell him. “I am Spending Time Alone, with myself, fasting, meditating.” You hope he will feel guilty. And lonely. Now he can see how it feels. You hope this will help him schedule his holidays more efficiently. Christmas is just around the corner.

You hang up. You are starving. You raid the near-empty fridge. Your eyes light on the fat-free Swiss Miss Chocolate Pudding that you had hidden from your boyfriend’s all-natural, organic gaze, and you grab it. Peeling back the tin foil seal, you give thanks for it. *Thank you, Swiss Miss.* The Pilgrims should have been so lucky.

Two days later, you and your boyfriend have made up and made love at your house. His fingers are in your hair. He says he likes your hair, and you wait for more compliments, but he digresses into a description of his wife’s hair. “It’s paler than yours,” he tells you. “Like the sun setting on wheat.” You pull your head away to look at him, which hurts because his fingers have found a tangle in your hair. “Yours is pretty, too,” he adds. “It just needs to be longer.” His wife’s was long, but then she cut it all off right before she gave him the boot. He thinks she’s a lesbian. You tell him you think he’s right, that she *is* cheating on him, but not with a woman. With a man. Maybe you will try to grow your hair out.

You prepare a wonderful breakfast for him. He reaches over and rests his hand on your knee. The out-of-bed tenderness causes you to drop a spoon. For some reason, your boyfriend believes this is the time to tell you that his ex-wife keeps the floors so clean you could eat off them. “She has a maid,” you say. You want to invite him to eat off your floors, but you don’t.

You move your hand up to brush the corner of his mouth where a droplet of the pancake syrup, the syrup you brought with you from Vermont, clings to his mustache where it joins his beard. The syrup was made from the trees on your property by the man across the road, an ex-lover who boiled the sap down to its sweetest, purest essence.

“Homemade pancakes?”

You confess to having used a mix. “But they’re buckwheat—aren’t they good?”

“I hope you at least used an organic mix.”

“Naturally,” you lie. He doesn’t need to know that Aunt Jemimah helped. He does not comment on the syrup that took hours and days of non-stop stirring as it boiled down. Nothing could be better and he does not even realize this. He does not know what treasure, what nectar is poured over those buckwheat cakes. The early Sunday morning light illuminates the two of you, the table and the pancakes. You feel as if you are on a small stage with no audience. The syrup glows from the inside out like million-year-old amber with a bug caught in it.

When he leaves and you are putting things away, you notice the light and love coming from the eyes of Aunt Jemimah, who is smiling beneficently at you from her place on the box in the cabinet. Why can’t he look at you like that?

### WINTER BEGINS

If the days are getting shorter, why do they feel so much longer? When you think about him, you are sad. You tell your girlfriend, “I gave him all my love, my attention and time. I made incredible dinners for him. And I can’t believe the things I did with him in bed! Now here it is Christmas, I have a boyfriend or at least he says he’s my boyfriend, but I’m spending the holidays alone again another year!”

“You’ve seen it coming.” She pauses, making her pointy point. Then, sounding so innocent that she sounds guilty, she says, “Do you think he’s seeing someone else?”

You want to say, *You tell me*, but you just say, “Could be.”

“Why can’t I quit him? Why is it so hard?” you ask her.

“Make a list of pros and cons,” she says. She can be so clear-headed, despite, or perhaps because of her youth. She can be quite brilliant. Thank God you have her to complain to, to confide in. It beats therapy.

Here is what you do. You decide to be like him, to be analytical, logical. You make a list of all the reasons you don’t like him, all the reasons you should break up with him. You tear off a piece of paper from a small notebook, then wad it up and reach for a larger notebook with bigger paper and more lines. You are not going to bother with a pros list. You will just concentrate on the cons. You begin your list. It says:

He is not young or handsome (this is a 2-for-1)

He has a beard (I have never liked beards)

Doesn’t salt his food / thinks he’s superior (2-for-1)

Says he *cares a lot* about me, but refuses to or is unable to use the

word *love*

He is still married \*

You put a star by the last item. This list is convincing enough, but you want to really cure yourself of him—you do not want a relapse. You continue.

He talks incessantly during sex, but it's an unchanging (boring) monologue, not a dialogue.

He does not love me, or, if he does, it is not enough

He does not deserve to have sex with me if he does not love me

He comes, I don't

Not getting what I need: no love, no time together, not even orgasms

Stands me up to do manual labor for wife who still is not ex

He called out his wife's name during orgasm—*note to self: move farther up the list*

Lectures me on the evils of using tap water & shopping at corporate-owned grocery chains

My eggs are not free range

You put the list in the drawer of your bedside table to read when you feel weak, or to add to if necessary.

Lately you have noticed that neither of you looks in the other's eyes much anymore. You used to be glued to one another's eyeballs. But you don't look, you don't want to, because the truth may be in there, deep in his eyes the way it is in yours. You close your eyes or look away so he won't see how much you don't love him anymore. Still, you feel hurt. He should *want* to look into your eyes. You think that if he can't look in your

eyes, he is being dishonest. Maybe he is cheating on you after all. Maybe he's just there for sex, and there's no longer any possibility of a real relationship. Your romance has gone ragged at the edges.

After dinner, he wants to watch TV, something you never do—an obvious red flag. When the show is over you say, “Were you thinking of staying or leaving?” He looks over at you.

“I was thinking of leaving so you can get your rest.”

“Don't say you're doing it for me—just say you want to go if you want to go.” This time, for the first time, he doesn't stay and you don't ask him to.

Your cat waits until your boyfriend's truck has crunched down the gravel driveway before jumping onto the bed. You want to meet someone who loves you more than this man does. It seems anyone would.

You spend the week between Christmas and New Year's at your parents'. When you return, you do not hear from your best girlfriend and you do not hear from your boyfriend. You wonder if your answering machine is working. You leave messages for her, she is your best friend. Your messages for her say how you don't have any messages from him or from her. She does not return your calls. You wait for the phone to ring, and decide it is not ringing because a watched phone never rings. You curse your answering machine—surely it is losing messages. You pray to the phone, *Please ring. Please ring.* When it does ring, you think *Let it be him! Let it be her!* Finally, after *eight days*—God created the world in fewer—you break down and call him. You tell him you have not heard from your girlfriend. He quickly says he saw her downtown, that they danced one dance and had a beer, but that is all. “She had wine,” he corrects himself. The next day, she calls you out of the blue. You ask her

why you haven't heard from her, but she asks her own question.

"Are you going to keep seeing him?"

"No—I don't know." You think it's strange that she hasn't talked to you in two weeks and instead of asking how *you* are, she asks about *him*. You feel hurt. You ask her point blank, "Have you seen him?"

"I ran into him downtown. We had a glass of wine, and one dance. That was all. Actually, he had a beer."

At least the two of them have their stories straight, you think to yourself.

You do not hear back from either of them. You hurt some more.

#### *DEAD OF WINTER*

You do not care how long it takes for him to realize that he's been trapped. By one of the best. You know your girlfriend already knows all of your boyfriend's faults because you have delineated each one for her. You hope these faults will drive her crazy the way they did you. Let her sit next to him, or better yet, wait at home for him while he is in the bleachers, cheering on the seven-to-eight year olds kicking soccer balls and each other. Let her slave over boring, unsalted, organic root vegetables. Let her lug twenty-pound bottles of mountain spring water that feel as if they still have the mountain in them. She can accommodate the whiney kid—she's younger than you. Let her become jealous of the outrageously fit, practically-ex wife with sun-setting-on-wheat hair who gets the big house, the Christmas ornaments and the SUV. Your girlfriend already knows how good your now-ex-boyfriend is in bed, because unfortunately, you told her every detail. Now she is finding out for herself. Some of those orgasms were meant for you. You hate her for getting the results

you earned. You hope he occasionally imagines and *really misses* you when he's doing her. Perhaps he will call out your name. He is bound to learn that her hair is dyed—the color will rub off on his 100% organic cotton sheets. You know how deceiving appearances can be. After all, you thought he was a Good Man. You thought he loved you. You thought you loved him. It looked that way at first, it felt that way.

You do not care if he finally divorces his wife and then marries your best girlfriend. They deserve one another, you tell yourself. You do not care. You do not care at all. All you really want is something salty from the pantry, like the bag of thick-cut potato chips, the expensive blue ones. You sprinkle salt on them, but still, they are not salty enough. All the salt in the Dead Sea would not bring out their flavor.



**Between The Red Sky and The Blue Sea**  
(Photo)

**Joy Harjo**

Martín Espada  
ISABEL'S CORRIDO

34

*Para Isabel*

Francisca said: *Marry my sister so she can stay in the country.*

I had nothing else to do. I was twenty-three and always cold, skidding in cigarette-coupon boots from lamppost to lamppost through January in Wisconsin. Francisca and Isabel washed bed sheets at the hotel, sweating in the humidity of the laundry room, conspiring in Spanish.

I met her the next day. Isabel was nineteen, from a village where the elders spoke the language of the Aztecs. She would smile whenever the ice pellets of English clattered around her head. When the justice of the peace said *You may kiss the bride*, our lips brushed for the first and only time.

The borrowed ring was too small, jammed into my knuckle.

There were snapshots of the wedding and champagne in plastic cups.

Francisca said: *The snapshots will be proof for Immigration.*

We heard rumors of the interview: they would ask me the color of her underwear. They would ask her who rode on top.

We invented answers and rehearsed our lines. We flipped through immigration forms at the kitchen table the way other couples shuffled cards for gin rummy. After every hand, I'd deal again.

Isabel would say: *Quiero ver las fotos.* She wanted to see the pictures of a wedding that happened but did not happen, her face inexplicably happy, me hoisting a green bottle, dizzy after half a cup of champagne.

Francisca said: *She can sing corridos*, songs of love and revolution from the land of Zapata. All night Isabel sang corridos in a barroom where no one understood a word. I was the bouncer and her husband, so I hushed the squabbling drunks, who blinked like tortoises in the sun.

Her boyfriend and his beer cans never understood why she married me. Once he kicked the front door down, and the blast shook the house as if a hand grenade detonated in the hallway. When the cops arrived, I was the translator, watching the sergeant watching her, the inscrutable squaw from every Western he had ever seen, bare feet and long black hair.

We lived behind a broken door. We lived in a city hidden from the city. When her headaches began, no one called a doctor. When she disappeared

for days, no one called the police. When we rehearsed the questions for Immigration, Isabel would squint and smile. *Quiero ver las fotos*, she would say. The interview was canceled, like a play on opening night shut down when the actors are too drunk to take the stage. After she left, I found her crayon drawing of a bluebird tacked to the bedroom wall.

I left too, and did not think of Isabel again until the night Francisca called to say: *Your wife is dead. Something was growing in her brain.* I imagined my wife who was not my wife, who never slept beside me, sleeping in the ground, wondered if my name was carved into the cross above her head, no epitaph and no corrido, another ghost in a riot of ghosts evaporating from the skin of dead Mexicans who staggered for days without water through the desert.

Thirty years ago, a girl from the land of Zapata kissed me once on the lips and died with my name nailed to hers like a broken door. I kept a snapshot of the wedding; yesterday it washed ashore on my desk.

There was a conspiracy to commit a crime. This is my confession: I'd do it again.



**Blue Star**  
(Photo)

**Joy Harjo**

Lillian-Yvonne Bertram  
SATORI

37

What the body does not know  
it just invents: a girl bucking herself to sleep  
on the back of her hand.

Or the sound of a chair creaking  
is the sound of a man  
having a heart attack

in the lobby. The theater packed  
with strangers  
and on some airplane

an ink pen leaks on pants  
pressed in a suitcase. A woman  
shifts her leaky blood

into the twice circulated air.  
In the poorest county  
behind a house on palettes

our piebald dog streaked with exhaust  
wails at the line of junipers  
rushing at him, and the valley

pulls its long arm down  
on the prickle of starlight.  
The man and his architecture grasp

for semblance of rhythm:  
a lover pendulumed  
from a balcony, the sweeping

triple-eight knots of a torn bedsheet.  
Someone should call his wife  
made a pale deer

by the downshift of night.  
Made a pale window facing the pond,  
rain choking on glass.

# CUTTROAT DISCOVERY POET

38

**Jeffrey Alfier**



(Photo credit: Tobi Cogswell: At Bukowski's grave in Green Hills Cemetery)

## THE FREIGHTYARD PROPHET

Mojave's desert hills surge before him  
as if storm-beaten seas froze to granite.  
Shadows wilt like men in funhouse mirrors.  
The white lines of back roads burn through his sleep.

Haunting shit-kicker bars in flyspeck towns,  
yellow skin means his liver's losing ground.  
Snorting hits of speed off a whore's switchblade,  
he pontificates to fellow wastrels:

'Drive with expired tags but stay off the grid.'  
'Find weed so righteous that God would smoke it.'  
'Pray gas pumps out here ain't dry as tombstones.'  
'Hide out in a mirage if you have to.'

Life reaches an impasse that wears his name.  
He hops a Union Pacific grainer  
trundling through open plateaus of sandstone  
where brakemen glare, latch trains to hard silence.

Jeff Alfier

39

## WHERE SHE BUYS A TRANSFER TICKET TO THE MIDNIGHT SHIFT

Collars are turned up against wind that owns us.  
Headlong down the boulevard the northerly  
bends pedestrians over like a hail of bullets.

In its icy gusts everything on the street  
goes cold as the dark side of the moon.  
Snow gives vacant lots a reason to be empty.

In the corner of a bus stop, backed out of wind,  
a woman lights a cigarette with a cupped hand,  
its wind-sucked ember a tracer in the dark.

Save for a quickly fading halo of breath,  
factory men who share the bus stop  
could be stone owls in a cemetery.

One man sighs that she's farm-girl pretty,  
while another murmurs that she is all but  
one of those blonds faded beyond repair.

But even in frigid air the men's eyes glitter  
to make that one contact. When they do,  
her smile just flickers like a votive candle.

She knows after years with the boy next door,  
the heart's a wilted corsage, blown down streets  
where you can't even stop whispered words.

THE WOMAN WHO APPROACHED US FROM THE SEA

She'd jaywalked across the Esplanade to curl up  
in the dingiest booth of *Il Sestante Café*.

She was clothed in a winter heavier than the one  
outside, where Pacific gales whipped without letup.

In the room's opposite corner, we local dockhands  
and merchantmen swore we'd never seen her.

But this was a woman only men from the furthest  
ports had luxury to deny they'd ever known.

As she hunched over the table, her red-tinged  
face was a galleon figurehead stung by sleet,

gravity an accomplice to imprecise age,  
her eyes peering oddly at us over sunglasses

as useless in this dimly-lit sailor's refuge  
as slits in a door slammed on strangers.

Jeff Alfier

41

**LATE WORDS TO JACOB ON THE COAST**

*Better the man you were...*

Richard Hugo, *The Art of Poetry*

You swore with this new lover you wouldn't  
replay the old games—no second guesses  
that turn words opaque, no pleading undertones  
burned between lines you barely suspect  
as guarded, and no dim distrust till some clock  
buried inside you said *find a way out*.

On the stroll you take mid-morning along  
the debris-rifled shore, derelicts sleep  
under the beams of a pier as if the sea  
has screened their retreat from life. Even  
at this early hour the beach is women reborn  
in the sidelong glances of those broken men –  
each more intimate with loss than empty rooms.

In a city up the coast this same wind smells like snow.  
Here, it cools the bed's imprint where your new love  
rises to wave warmly from an upstairs window.  
She too was once your first road home, your eyes  
glittering like a sidewalk's shattered glass.

Jeff Alfier  
JUVENILE COURT

42

In her chambers on the second floor –  
leather sofa, fishbowl, a jar of candy  
from three Christmases ago –  
she watches the Shopping Channel  
on a small TV, buying nothing,  
mesmerized by the distractive drone  
that releases her mind from truants  
delinquents and shoplifters.

The unwieldy tomes of her trade  
crowd bookshelves. In a corner closet  
are clues to the part of life she deems  
real: leather chaps and biker's helmet;  
the hemp necklace her daughter made.  
Each day beneath her robes she wears  
an orange dress to remind her  
that real life lies beyond dull dockets  
of lawyers pleading with all the rote  
mechanics of mumbled liturgies.

At home and off the Harley, other  
reality hits her: a bed-ridden mother  
shouting her name, a husband in a stained  
shirt banging pots on the stove,  
the clack of an aluminum beer can tab  
slapping her eardrums. From a recliner  
she will fill him in on the histrionics  
of the law's best backsliders, sobbing  
parents, and lawyers who tempt her wrath.

Her husband will say, 'time to quit honey,'  
but she'll only proffer a rueful smile;  
each day passing one more verdict  
on the future of petty thieves, weighing  
each shiny alibi that leaps from their mouths.



**Canfield Spring Evening**  
(Oil Pastel)

**Jerry Gates**

For Emily Woodberry the world seemed to have changed. She stood in the rain, her blue eyes wide open and sparkling, unaware of the drops collecting in her light brown hair and of the stares from passersby hurrying for cover from the sudden, late afternoon shower. Everything on that dingy Manhattan street all at once seemed wonderfully alive. Everything, street lamps, parking meters, the gleamingly wet cars, the front stoops of the old Chelsea brownstones, seemed to be speaking to her. Everything was saying “pick it up.”

Or was it? More likely it was some aural trick, the effect of the sounds of the rain and the traffic. Yes, that must be it, thought Emily, who was an assistant professor of linguistics and not at all accustomed to being spoken to by inanimate objects other than tape recorders in the language laboratory. But Emily bent over anyway, to have a closer look, and found herself staring into two very round, very beautiful eyes, bluer than her own, bluer even, it seemed, than the sky in Iowa on those dazzling cloudless June days of her childhood. “Pick it up,” Emily heard in the rain that splashed gently on her face. She hesitated, however, thinking that she might catch a disease and that this marvelous, startling mood that had taken her by surprise was very peculiar. After all, Emily had always been too concerned with what she liked to call, in her soft, almost lisping voice, “the difficulties of human affairs” to care very much for animals. Being thirty and not married -- a combination she had never dreamed could really occur in her life -- was the chief one of those difficulties lately preoccupying her. The last thing she needed was some helpless creature, probably on its last legs anyway.

The kitten did not meow. It opened its mouth to do so, but no

sounds came out. When Emily saw that, her heart seemed to contract in pity. She snapped open her pocketbook, removed a napkin in which she had wrapped an apple and then, against every hygienic impulse of her upbringing, reached into the refuse that had been dumped alongside a broken-down stoop and pulled the little black and white animal out. It did not resist. It was about four weeks old and starving. It just looked at Emily, and Emily looked at it. "Now what do I do?" She asked aloud. The bark on the few leafless trees looked black in the rain. There was no one else left on the dark gray sidewalks. The sky looked like damp earth. The rain was getting stronger, and it was becoming a cold October evening. Emily considered just putting the kitten back down and hurrying away.

"Got yourself a little kitty cat," Emily heard, turned and saw a short, rotund, elderly man approaching her, evidently from the bar two doors down the block. Emily had lived in the neighborhood for almost ten years, but had never had an occasion to go into that bar. "Felix domesticus," the man went on. "That's Latin." He stared at the bedraggled creature, then extended an index finger, rubbed its nose and cooed at it in what Emily immediately classified as baby talk. Emily asked if he wanted the kitten.

"Couldn't do that," he merrily replied. "It belongs to you. See how it's looking at you? It picked you. You have to protect it." With that he resumed the baby talk, bringing his face very close to the kitten's, which produced a look of what Emily could only think must be feline amazement. After a few moments and more than a few words of advice on what to feed the animal, the man invited Emily into the bar, which, he explained, he owned. He directed her to the kitchen, took the cat, cleaned it with paper towels and fed it some tiny scraps of meat. To Emily's surprise, there were many large cats lounging around the room. She asked if that wasn't a health

code violation. “It is,” he smiled, looking at the hungry kitten, “but what do they know? They’re only people.” At this point, Emily began to think that the bar owner might be just a little crazy. She thanked him and prepared to leave. But first he gave her a small box, the bottom of which he padded with dish towels, in which to transport the kitten. Even then he would not let Emily depart without her accepting what he called “a care package.” Later, after arriving home and thoroughly scouring her hands and arms -- the kitten had fleas -- Emily found that the care package contained a hot roast beef sandwich, a side order of French fries and two beers.

While Emily ate this serendipitous dinner in her bright, one-bedroom apartment, the kitten remained in the box. It could not even whimper. Its round blue eyes just stared at her, its round head, with one black and one white ear, wobbling on its frail neck. Emily, who had not owned an animal for well over a decade, did not know of any veterinarians. And most of her friends did not have pets. But at last she recalled that an acquaintance from the university, a mild and likeable eccentric named Cecil Barnes, had several cats. She had not seen him in a while; his career as an academic had been only a brief interlude in his life as a manager of local political campaigns. Cecil was loquacious on every subject except his cats. Emily had a dim memory of Cecil’s periodic disappearances from his Democratic political club and of his vague, reported explanations, “Oh, I went to see my cats.”

Cecil was very excited when Emily explained why she needed the name of a veterinarian. The best in the city would, he said, be able to see the kitten that night -- but Cecil would first have to arrange it, by telephoning a friend who was a government official, a “real” cat lover and a longtime client of this particular vet. “When you say real cat lover...” Emily

began.

“I mean fanatical. He has almost thirty cats. He keeps ten in his apartment on Central Park West and then he rents another, on the Upper East Side, just for the other cats. There’s a person he pays to live there and take care of them. He’s been saving cats for twenty years. We were instrumental -- it was really him more than me -- in getting that piece of anti-laboratory experimentation law passed. You know, the labs used to get cats from the ASPCA. They can’t do that anymore...” Cecil went on for another quarter of an hour on the depredations of the “mindless morons,” as he called them, who experimented on animals, on the legislative battles in which he had participated to stop these “acts of torture,” and on the abysmal plight in general of animals in the city of New York. Cecil himself, in the fifteen years since his divorce, had been taking in cats from the street. He concluded the discussion by decrying the insensitivity of his children who, now grown up, often stayed at his apartment but were “evidently not mature enough” to tend his five cats as they ought. A few moments after this conversation, the phone rang. It was Cecil’s friend, the government official, who exclaimed to Emily in a fit of enthusiasm that she considered a bit excessive for someone he had never met, that she must indeed be an immensely kind-hearted person. His veterinarian, Dr. Stein, saw clients in his Murray Hill office until nine p.m. and was expecting her. Once Emily hung up the phone, she realized that the mood that had come over her late that afternoon when she first saw the kitten, the sense that she had entered a secret and magical world, had grown stronger.

Cats and dogs of every description had the run of the veterinarian’s office. They strolled around the waiting room and lolled in the halls and rooms where other animals were examined. While Emily waited on a

leather couch, noting from the dampness of her skin that her stylish new raincoat was not all it should be, and with the kitten wobbling around in the box beside her, four enormous cats, one after the other, approached, looked into the box, sniffed the kitten and walked away. One of the cats had something very wrong with its eyes. "That's Timmy," explained the attractive young woman who apparently took care of the animals that lived in the office. "I found him in my neighborhood, in Queens. He had belonged to an old man for years and years, and when the old man died, Timmy became a stray. Then a gang of teenagers caught him -- he was so friendly, just loved everybody, it must have been easy -- and bashed his head in, you know, battered him and then strangled him, hung him from a branch. That's why he's blind. But we found him in time to save his life. He thinks he died and woke up in cat heaven. Don't you, Timmy?" Timmy, sniffing at Emily's kitten, began to purr. Emily, who had been horrified by this story, remarked that she could not imagine how anyone could hurt an animal. "When you've been in this job and you see what people do to animals," the young woman went on, "it's really no surprise what people do to each other. They're capable of anything."

"They?" Emily thought and then said, with a sad yet slightly defiant sigh: "Yes, I guess we are."

In the next few days Emily was preoccupied with her cat. Her article for a scholarly journal on syntax in the earlier Finno-Hungaric languages progressed very slowly. Cecil telephoned frequently and then began to visit. The vet had sprayed Emily's cat with a medicine which had killed the fleas but left the animal quite uncomfortable. So one evening Cecil, his graying hair damp from the rain and a sodden sheaf of campaign literature under his arm, arrived to wash the kitten in the bathroom sink. It

was remarkable, Emily thought, how calm the cat was throughout this bath, which really must have been an ordeal for it. But then, the kitten seemed to trust Cecil, as it had the bar owner, and everyone in the veterinarian's office. As soon as it was healthy enough, it ran and hid from all of Emily's other friends. At first this was a little awkward. People would visit and want to see Emily's beautiful little cat -- and after the bath the tiny creature was even more beautiful, since it then kept itself spotlessly clean -- and Emily would have to explain, "Oh, it's so shy. It's behind the bookcase," or "it really doesn't trust strangers, so it's hiding under the couch. " After a while, however, Emily began to prefer the people her cat preferred, namely Cecil and his cat-owning friends.

In the last few weeks of autumn, the kitten began to be able to make a soft, peeping sound. Sometimes it really did seem, Emily thought, as if it were trying to talk to her. Soon Emily was dreaming about cats. Once, when she was out of town for an entire night after giving a lecture in Boston, she dreamt the kitten was gazing at her as she slept through a supernatural well that enabled it to talk to her. After that, Emily became interested in all things pertaining to cats. Fortunately, so were her new acquaintances, who seemed to spend a lot of time talking to cats, dreaming about cats and speculating on what the cats were thinking about. "Musical notation," said one man one December afternoon in the cat food section of the supermarket. He had seen Emily loading her cart with a kind of cat food, which, he hastened to tell her, was too high in ash-content to be healthy. He recommended another kind, and the conversation proceeded, as all of Emily's conversations in the cat food section of the supermarket had, to extolling the virtues of cats in general and of the ones the two people owned in particular. In this instance the cat owner, who attributed

unique mental powers to the feline species, informed Emily that while he was uncertain whether cats passed their time pondering musical notation or higher mathematics, he was quite sure it was one or the other.

“How’s the little furry creature, with the pointed ears, one black, one white, and the whiskers, and the tail, that runs around on four furry paws?” Emily heard one cold December evening a few days before Christmas. She had been walking home, her thoughts absorbed in the question of how the animals communicated with each other -- which was not wise, she realized all at once, since the stoops, sidewalks and curbs were covered with bright, fresh and very slippery snow -- and she had not even seen the bar owner as she passed him, standing in the kitchen doorway of his establishment. Emily smiled and then answered half-jokingly that the cat was fine, though she was not so sure about herself. She had become obsessed with cats, she said. It was bad enough that she thought about them all the time and dreamt about them. But when she found herself seriously contemplating writing a research paper on cat languages, then she began to think it was time to see a psychiatrist.

“And what’s wrong with cat languages?” inquired the stout little man.

“They can say a lot of things you never dreamed of. Things no psychiatrist would know what to do with. What should you be obsessed with, if not cats? People? Well, do people have whiskers from the moment they’re born? Do they have pointed ears? Tails? Do they prance on four paws? Are they covered with fur? No. You know what a psychiatrist will say? I’ve looked into these things. He’ll say you’re anthropomorphizing. As if there’s something wrong with that. Frankly I’d say the opposite. I’d say you can measure your humanity by how much you can anthropomorphize.

People who don't are lesser beings. I've looked into it. Do you know that before an earthquake, days and days before, every animal that can, will abandon the area where the disaster is going to occur? Scientists just don't know what to make of it. And do you know that for people with high blood pressure and heart problems, petting a cat helps them? It actually lowers their blood pressure. Now they're even using cats with autistic kids. They don't know how it works, but petting animals breaks the barrier around an autistic child."

The bar owner, who seemed to have just begun to warm to his theme, paused to catch his breath. Emily took this opportunity to indicate that she had better be moving along. "Well, you go home to your cat," he said and then, all at once, rushed on: "There's a lot animals could do for us, if we'd let them. There's a lot they do we don't acknowledge. We eat 'em. The world's awash in the blood of animals, and never so much as a thank you. On the contrary, a lot of fancy talk about how superior we are. Well, I'm just not convinced. Animals don't murder. They don't cheat you. They don't betray you. Sometimes I think not until we make peace with the animals, will people be able to act like human beings. Read "The Ancient Mariner." The poets knew about this. They knew that the more we see animals as human, the more human we are. And you want to see a psychiatrist? Just because you're being a human being."

When Emily arrived home, she found Cecil standing on her stoop under an umbrella. This was a bit surprising, since she had thought he had an important meeting at his political club that night, and that his absence would be noted. "I just told them I went to see my cats," Cecil said. He had, he explained, brought some Kittyvite for her cat and some Nutravite for her. Cecil was a great believer in vitamins and thought Emily looked a

little run-down. Later that evening, as they sat in the living room drinking coffee, Cecil checked over a pollster's district by district analysis of voting patterns in New York City ("it'll only take a minute," he had apologized), and Emily's blue eyes gazed dreamily out the window. Her cat had curled up on her lap, and Emily was watching the snow turn to sleet. The pitter pat, pitter pat began to sound like rain. "Like little cat feet?" She wondered. "No," she thought, and listened harder.

And in the rain she heard sounds, a soft rustling from the secret world, the presence of which she was now always thrillingly aware; it was a confluence of numerous voices, all different, speaking different languages, but at that moment clamoring gently together to form one long diphthong - - "meow." Emily looked down at the kitten. One ear was cocked toward the window: it was listening, too.



**Making Poetry With The Assistance of Morning Glory Spirits**  
**Joy Harjo**  
(Photo)

**T.R. Hummer**  
**EPHEMERA**

54

The old woman sat naked in a wicker chair under a jacaranda tree at midnight, sprinkled with purple petals, dreaming of a handful of dust.

\*

Everything in the house had to be put in boxes, even the tiniest object--because that is all death means--handled, wrapped, listed, stored.

\*

It was gathering food among rocks in the arroyo, grasshopper mouse, no bigger than a thumb--then shadow, wings, owl, a silent puff of fur.

\*

After the performance, she removed the sweat-stained costume and her makeup; then, because of the mirror, her face, which was now complete.

\*

Days later, Monday, work, it was already forgotten, that moment in the dark when by synchronicity they climaxed together and were destroyed.

\*

Hot wind, sand blown against plate glass, centuries now, and a fine-etched image

emerges, a city, maybe, if anyone were there to see.

\*

That metaphor is dead that says he plows a field and under the sweat of his plowing something writes itself in compost: dead metaphor it says.

\*

Carrying grocery bags, he walks as far as he can through the scorched land without stopping to eat, or think, or pull out his rusted pistol.

\*

They had wandered years through wilderness, looking, not noticing until the land cooled and greened around them that the children were gone.

\*

I told you, he said to the gravestone, someone will always be here, someone will remember the story--as they lowered him, he said I told you.

**T.R. Hummer**  
**THE LOVER**

56

Across the room a woman is talking to someone.  
Her focus on the other is complete; her eyes  
Are fixed on the eyes of the one to whom she speaks  
almost prayerfully, as though with her words  
She washes the feet of the Beloved, as if her speech  
is the long hair with which she wipes them dry.  
The intensity of her gaze, the eloquence of her gestures,  
make it unimportant that no one stands facing her,  
That she talks into empty air, that she stares into a wall  
like someone insane. The tiny cell phone  
Attached to her ear excuses her, but fails to explain  
how the greatness of her passion creates a form  
In the nothingness before her, and how everyone envies  
the one to whom she is speaking, how all of us  
Desire to be the one thus re-created.

I

in the roar of this december morning  
who flicks so much light from his fingers, so much light?  
who causes these convulsive discharges, the flicker of bedside lamps, the  
automatic shutter-release of cameras in shop windows  
in quest of chance, a specter, blood, tires?  
who feels woozy with vertigo, seeing and touching with neither sight nor  
touch?  
who attracts into the window of the musica shop so many clouds of  
dissolved purple?  
who splashes a huge glass of soda water on the exhaust-marble of the  
telephone palace?  
who enters frozen, transparent bucharest wearing lipstick of flame?  
who trails her dress across the electrical network causing the simultaneous  
lighting of branches in ci□migiu park, the transfiguration of  
green fence railings, a tabor light?  
who brushes with hip and purse the façade of the universitas club, the  
*amphitheater* review, purifying, exciting, polarizing the green halls  
where congresses of smoke are convened?  
who brings sweet negligence to the lascivious eye of our contemplation  
which, in winter now, feels its lid more panoramic than da vinci's  
last supper and heavier than nazareth?  
who casts the shadow of her little cutie-pie pout over auto bodies dinged  
everywhere with wounds, filled with terror and discontent,  
peeling away seven layers and crushing their engine?  
who lets her tear fall on the velvet of my jacket, who was once livelier than  
the lipscani bazaar, more brilliant than the boulevard movie  
theater, more tender than the garden of the icons park, sulkier  
than the yellow sea when the weather clears and sharks can be  
seen circling in the water?  
who scratches cassette tapes and assures the failure of weekend parties  
and name-day parties and causes them to end in boozing,  
gobbling fish sandwiches and just about no dancing while on the  
balcony january witches revel in their sabbath reeking of  
diamonds, moldering in jasper and coral?  
who casts knife-edge shadows in the snow alongside the massive press  
building and the promenade by the highway?  
who has plump cheeks shiny and dimpled but terrible as the cheeks

of paranoia, death, decay?  
 who glitters, who dazzles, who moves dainty shoe after dainty shoe, her  
 flowing hair changing color with hundreds of billions of seasons?  
 who floats, neck veins throbbing, immense as a statue of liberty and slow as  
 in reverie, over the midwinter night's dream of the city, with  
 her many-branched nails prying into every drawer and removing  
 pantyhose with runs, mildewed lingerie, moldy lipstick, scarlet-  
 singed mirrors, dried orange peel, crumpled bank notes and  
 elytra fallen from insectaria?  
 who exposed to our folly her naked vomer and bared her breast with its  
 scorpion's barb?  
 who stuffed with lavender, sulfur, asparagus, flame, love, biscuits and  
 carbide the trolley-bus I was waiting for at the arsenal stop?  
 who laughed lubriciously like a lush caressing the columns of the north  
 station, making the taxi-vans blush?  
 who walked by, oh dear, who walked by on glowing hearth street her arms  
 full of chrysanthemums, leaving a trail of grapes among blind  
 men squealing with delight?  
 who was called the dragon and the swan and the lyre and the pleiades and  
 millions of other constellations, worlds of stars, stelliferous  
 tempests raining over lakes, transparent stars flickering their  
 laser light on the faces of those looking up at the skies, from  
 park to park, from arm to arm, listening to a voice exterior and  
 cold, laving the spirit in sexuality?  
     who is the champagne of freighters, who slices districts like  
 sperm whales under the deck of fishing trawlers?  
 who is in gemini?  
 who is a mignon? who trembles and gathers the sheets under her heels  
 then calms again, the room flashing violet, then orange, pale  
 blue, garnet, and out of her panting a planet with only fourteen  
 inhabitants is born?  
 who suddenly starts to snow over the carpenters' workshops, over the  
 grade schools, the kindergartens and finally over the synagogue  
 perched on a havana-club sephiroth?  
 who remembers my baby pictures with atropine-dilated eyes that tell us  
 only: I know. I was aware. I learned?  
 who drives down the boulevard of victory in a limousine of guts, cartilage,  
 ears and vertebrae, a fine smile drawn across her lips, but hiding  
 a body as lustrous as a bomb, a tube of poison candy-drops?  
 who has the ring? who is proprietress of scorn? who is sold simultaneously  
 in all stalls in the union square market for a handful of sequins?

who secretes a bioelectric field that can bend the crosses at the  
 resurrection church, tie knots in the lights of the republic  
 stadium? who with only a systolic murmur knocks down the  
 acetone snail of dalles hall replacing it with a jet of water  
 droplets heavy with  
 rainbows and shiny candy wrappers and lemons?

who is my beauty?

who else can it be, my pretty one, my darling?

who are you, my love, darling, dearest?

## 2

under the firmament you're like a baby with a handkerchief shading its face,  
 asleep in the tram,

oh lord, you tormented me, I tormented myself for you

I threw up, cried hysterically, dug my nails in my palm clenching my fist for  
 you

wrapped myself in the curtain, tore it off, fell to the parquet for you

gnawed the pillow with my teeth only for you

chewed my obsession until my brain got periodontosis, letting its  
 constructs wiggle loose and the idea of the infinite spiral  
 upwards like a turbine of pink dough, like a rosette of little  
 bones, like a morning star of toothache for you

and I dreamed that I was dragged from under my blanket with my head  
 conic and bleeding and I crawled to the middle of the room and  
 that my mother fractured my pelvis with her half-yard-long  
 shoe-sole only for you

I ripped my cousin's pinky with my teeth when he was one and I was three,  
 then laughed like a madman, like one possessed by the devil, for  
 you

I went to college in your desk, lived in your city, witnessed my human  
 condition fixing my eyes upon your belly, for you

I celebrated New Year's Eve hugging an enormous cigarette lighter, rose  
 with it into the air, flew out the window and soared over the  
 city clinging to the cold nickel-plate until the stars knocked us  
 back down to the tram rails and a water-sprinkler truck dragged  
 us to the sewer for you

I was witty for you, I wrote books for you, I bought myself corduroy slacks  
 and a digital watch and chain for you

I was predestined for you, they vaccinated you against me and still I  
 populated you like a spirochete, like a tape worm, multiplying

myself extravagantly for you, devouring your blood, your glycerin, your sap, your food, your fat, and I left you surreal and lean and nostalgic for you

I had intense ultramarine eyes for you

I died for you and entered your belly and my teeth alone gleamed through the night of red I split open an adder and then glass doors swung wide and above them in neon it said ELVIS I emerged under a sparkling blue sky full of dirigibles, beneath which there stretched a city with subways and monorails and shop windows crammed with musical

instruments painted sweetly in mahogany, in orange, there were gigantic brass instruments, green drums, saxophones, transistor radios, turntables, and in the center of your canvas among dewdrops you were radiating like the mystic rose, so that citrus flames licked my face until I went away disfigured, cut to the bone, and your smile had bars, bars like in the zoo

I was lonely among steam locomotives, and suddenly I wished myself more human for you

I wished myself more masculine for you

all this year, the miserable year of 1980, my mind was one step away from abortion and I no longer believed in anything, especially life's capacity to produce pleasure and joy, and I developed canker sores biting myself for you

and I shredded my heart, diaphragm, lungs walking hour after hour along the drive to the circus delirious and gesticulating to the lawn, the magnolia, the pekinese, the lake with its filth, waiting for a connector cable to be plugged between my eyes to the stellar cassette recorder

I sighed like petrarch in the collar of my sheepskin coat coming back at six in the morning from some crummy party, where all the glasses had stickers with your face, and I wiped the whitewash from the walls walking against garages, warehouses, railway stations for you

I had an operation for you, I got drunk for you

I alienated myself for you

I cultivated myself for you

I adolescentized myself for you

I bogomilized myself for you

I became the workshop where you ordered your gloves and the crosswalk on which you crossed to the romarta department store and the arab in his car who picked you up in front of the continental

hotel

I was your grandmother's nervous breakdown the first time you stayed out  
all night

and I was happy even ultra-happy a whole rosy, radiant evening, reading  
alternately valentin rasputin, nichita stănescu and the dairy of  
virginia woolf, and with the intensity of an epileptic aura thinking  
only of you

I was strong and cheerful and peevish and gossipy and tender and  
masochistic and conceited and green and blue and untamed and  
above all else handsome, handsome as the grin of agony, as the  
hubbub of the apartment complex, as a love dream of every nail  
in the hardware store

I meditated on the transmigration of souls and I lived under the earth of  
your tits blind as a mole lit up only for you

I was yours alone, all you had to do was yawn the antipa natural history  
museum

wide open to swallow me with a muzzle, trunk, snout, stinger,  
beak, jaws, molars, incisors and maxillae, rake me with your  
pincers and your chalicers and your tongue and your claw and  
the venom of your tail, electrocute me with your elastic cyanide  
skin

with your bouquet of chrysanthemums in your arms

with golden braids wrapped around the back of your head

and tied with a ribbon.

### 3

. . . there was so much light in the foundation on your cheekbones

so much fear in the hollows of your collarbones

so much modernity and nonchalance in your gait

so much *je m'en fichism*, such misfortune . . .

do you still remember me? who was mircea?

what years was he your friend?

do you still remember any of it? the way we used to walk past the  
armenian church

your hand in mine in the pocket of my overcoat

through the snow of murky streetlights

or when we climbed to the roof of my building among hundreds of  
antennas and linens

and down below we could see only miniature houses and trams that glided  
along stephan the great boulevard and high above were only the  
stars shining through the battlements of the general

headquarters of the police, and every now and then an airplane  
 blinking red on and off in silence in isolation in fear, and oh, I  
 want . . . I want . . .  
 who are you now? what's become of your nostalgia, your helplessness,  
 your selfishness?  
 disburdened of you, my life rushed high above  
 and I can't breathe  
 I really can't understand anything  
 oh, woman, woman, woman  
 woman, woman, woman, woman . . .  
 now all I can do is wait for your phone call,  
 listen to music, hang out with friends,  
 read some more, wander into a movie,  
 but I bury myself in an unbreathable h□nay□na  
 I don't want you back  
 rather, I wish you never left . . .  
 dearest, you were so sweet when you wanted to be witty, and when you  
 needed love  
 who unbuttoned her own buffalo-plaid shirt?  
 who studied pedagogy with her glasses perched on the tip of her nose until  
 she made herself feel sick?  
 who gave me rhymes to write sonnets to her?  
 . . . now you belong to the physiological  
 now you're only a contortion in my fingers, a rupturing of tendons  
 now you're only a pool of blood where someone was slaughtered  
 on the divine snow in bucharest,  
 now you're only a former fellow student  
 a sweet former fellow student from my college years, from my youth . . .

## 4

now you're a superstition, a hyperreality with tens of billions of faces.

translated by Adam J. Sorkin and Bogdan □tef□nescu

My father  
sleeping, choking  
On a dream—or My  
brother's fist-White rock,  
burrowing Into his throat, Palm  
bleeding, Skin shedding, Defenseless  
boy slammed into a wall Nose bloody,  
eye blackened Hollow body hitting the  
linoleum, Shredding neon aquarium  
shirt, Hanging off the frail, pasty  
frame of the, "Little military  
faggot!" Not crawling,  
running Into the  
air force  
voice  
dropping,  
eyes decomposing,  
fingers stiffening, jaw  
clenching, brother becoming  
my father sleeping,  
choking dreams,  
guilt or fist.



**Flower  
(Photo)**

**Joy Harjo**

## Khadijah Queen YES

65

*I know, now, how to be angry outside of parentheses.*

I am not who I was at eighteen. But that night, my voice did what he told it to. He asked me:

*Should I put on a condom?*

(Quick: a slow word.)

Yes.

~

*December 19, 1993*

Somewhere on Fairfax, just north of Pico, parched light blue roof peeling, façade in need of paint, the apartment building loomed. The parched lawn where police laid tenants' looted TVs and mattresses during the riots still patchy and lined with weeds. Crooked white shades and flowered sheets at windows, electric fans – tucked in every other sill on hot days – visible from the busy street. The skinny parking lot behind it looking like an alley, dark with buckling asphalt and sagging carports. Tonight my boyfriend's tan, rust-laced '75 Toyota Corona nestled against that concrete two-story crumbler where I lived, my body trapped beneath his like earth, tread upon, roughly.

~

*(I was fresh then. Rich. Free of tears.)*

We came to the alley from El Chorito's in the marina, where he bought me enchiladas verdes and fried ice cream, his sport-scarred hand on my blue-jeaned thigh, his light brown eyes hardly ever leaving mine, my dark eyes hardly ever meeting his. Many kisses before, we lay half naked in his pull-down bed in his

grandmother's house near the borders of Compton, an abandoned littered field visible from his tiny window – hundreds of kisses. My upper body a sticky-slick map of saliva and sweat and semen he didn't always bother to wipe clean, sometimes only in the mood to hand me a wrinkled paper towel or a swiped napkin from a fast food restaurant –

*(But his face there that night behind the building)*

His mouth down there, drawing out sounds and movement I hadn't known I could create, that I wanted to keep feeling—keep feeling what my body could do. How it could tremble my mind, a pleasure mingled with uncertainty, urgency and the body's innumerable lies.

In the alley parking lot kissing goodnight (kisses traveling wildly through my bloodstream) I hear him whisper:

*Why do you taste so sweet?*

~

*(If I played sports I might have traded sex stories in the locker room like designer cigarettes—)*

Large calloused hands used to digging into turf, tucking and throwing footballs, gripping metal bars with powdered palms, heavy bars stacked with steel circles of weight, traced lightly the hem of my gray sweatshirt, the soft brown of my flat belly, the white elastic of my only clean bra. I had pulled my clothes back on, readied myself to go home to my apartment. He wanted to go into the laundry room, but I told him it was better if we didn't. He started to kiss me again, and I swirled in a state of contradiction. He said:

*I want to be inside you.*

~

*(In this same alley parking lot, a cobwebbed laundry room fit like an afterthought on the side of the building.)*

A low-watt light bulb dangled from the ceiling on a chain. A warped pine door, chipped once-white paint stained gray and black with grit, so weak one fist could crush it. My mother would heft plastic trash bags full of our dirty clothes and put quarters into the rickety washing machines that leaned against the back wall. Once, she walked in with two loads in her arms and a roll of quarters in her back pocket. A man waited in the corner, tall and red-eyed, head full of black tumbleweeds. He asked her about the drying time of our bras and panties. Luckily, she knew to say she had forgotten something upstairs; luckily, he did not follow her. But the thought of him took night washing from her, shook her striding step.

~

As he pressed his body onto mine, letting the seat down further at the same time so that we went together closer to the floor of his battered Toyota, I felt like I was riding an elevator to the basement of a deserted building, dank with the smell of pooled gasoline and fear and the sound of faraway traffic wrapping around me in a thick, heaving cloud. I kept wanting to say, *wait*—

~

His rasp grazed my ear, then the snap of the top button of my jeans echoed. The sound jarred me out of the world of touch. He started to move faster, almost ripping my clothes. I had not planned to have my zipper fingered in the alley parking lot, my jeans pulled and tucked under

my knees, waistband catching on the worn gearshift so he really had to work them down, my thigh burning as the fabric chafed it, making my skin there look like ash. I had not planned to have my old white cotton underwear seen. I did not feel cute, did not feel like the cannonball-breasted girls giving up their virginity in horror movies before a masked figure emerged from the dark forest to slice them into tiny pieces—

~

*(The streetlight snaked in and blinded me if I moved my head too far to the right)*

If I kept still, the light was just enough to gild his face, looking up at me from between my thighs, where he had made me swell and gush. But I was not thinking of me. I was thinking of how he had fit his six foot frame into the bowl of space between the cracked dashboard and tattered passenger seat and my legs, and how I had let him in, my jeans wrapped around his muscled shoulders like a yoke—

*My body did not belong to itself.*

My calves, resting lightly on his back, started to sweat. My ass, punctured by a collage of ripped leather and dirty seat foam. He asked:

*Should I put on a condom?*

I nodded, but I wanted to cry. I was afraid he would do it anyway, with or without a condom. I believed that was the only choice I'd be given. I felt somehow outside of myself. Like this was happening in some other body, some other place, and I was floating above, watching helplessly. I stared at

the dark hole where the doorknob to the laundry room should be, counted the jagged splinters pointing toward the center: *one, two, three, four*

—  
~

As he pressed into me, gentle like a finger pressing a button, like dialing a new love, then like a child ringing a doorbell over and over, I moved my free hand. The other was trapped under his arm, gripping his back. I placed my free hand against his chest and pushed. I wanted him off. I wanted him to stop. When it seemed I should surrender, I wanted to fight. This was not the right place, not the right time. Disbelief transformed into uncertainty, uncertainty into panic. Still silent, I managed to push. He asked:

*What are you doing?*

I could not speak.

*I want to make you feel good.*

I pushed.

~

*(The competing virtuosities of hands and other imperfect appendages)*

He lifted himself off of me, smiling at the *suck* our wet skins made at the sudden separation. He took my hands, held them over my head, his long fingers lacing my wrists like ropes. Tears fell and I couldn't stop them, but he wasn't looking at me. His cheek pressed into the headrest, his chin dug into my left shoulder. The sound of traffic amplified; the occasional pedestrian laugh. He kept going. When my legs tightened he told me to relax. Panic set in, I couldn't blink, and a scream formed in my head that I could not release, heating my blood until I thought I would burst.

~

*Are you all right?*

I managed a nod. He brushed long black strands of my hair away from my face, rearranged my disheveled clothing, tucked intimate body parts slowly away.

I didn't speak.

He stepped out of the car and opened my door, gave me his hand and I took it. I finally got out of the car, trembling. His arm around my waist, he walked me up the stone stairs. The rickety metal railing rattled with the weight of our steps. He asked if he could use my phone.

~

I unlocked the front door, and found my mother sitting on the couch in the dark, smoke curling around the shadow of her head as if she were the Cheshire Cat from *Alice in Wonderland*. I left him in the living room with her, went straight into the bathroom and did not turn on the light. The nightlight and the streetlight were enough. I drew a bath, as hot as I could stand it, and sat on the side of the tub in a kind of daze, even though the metal threads of the sliding shower door dug into the backs of my thighs. I did not yet take off my clothes, though the fabric itched and burned against my skin. I let discomfort become my tether, keep me from floating away. I let the sound of water lull me. I breathed in steam and darkness.



**Blue Reaching**  
(Photo)

**Joy Harjo**

**Andrea England**  
**MY FATHER'S BREATH**

72

Is now my grandfather's and his  
and his before him, the expenditure  
of one things as it closes in on another,  
point at which a strike, just far enough  
from the cradle of the pitcher's glove  
hesitates toward the plate.

Not only the breath but our excretions,  
what the body cannot keep secret—  
various mints and sprays neutralizing  
temporarily: A woman menstruating,  
the odiferous body hung over from drink  
or birth. The breathing I suppose

because of its repetition, its association  
with the every day task of leaving and  
coming back to, trained or informed by,  
like the dogs doctor's claim can identify cancer

in one quickened sniff. All of our caverns  
bubbling up this strange soup, time passed,  
passing or not yet begun and my father leaning  
in for a kiss goodbye, unaware of his own.

**Jim Sullivan**  
**RED MOUNTAIN**

73

That is one sensual mountain, the painter said  
curves you just want to fall into.  
And it's no lie.  
Your sandstone colored flank that names you  
now covered with deep green fur of native grasses  
after our monsoon bonanza.  
Shadows suggesting depth as afternoon lengthens,  
jags of trail lines here and there, some ending  
at black abandoned mine holes.  
But mostly it's your soothing curves  
wrapping the schoolhouse on the hill  
letting us know that however carved  
shafted and dynamited we've gotten  
digging at our veins of pain  
we can heal over  
we can cover ourselves in beauty  
we can make onlookers want to fall into us.

John Williams  
A SIGN ON THE ROAD

74

We've grown taller than our parents,  
taller still than the shadows

our dreams cast  
across the upturned soil,

shoveled to surface, inside out,  
and guilty as the plowshare.

The sun in its endurance is a step.  
Time a weather-bowed door frame.

Death in its tiresome lisp  
is a cripple groveling at our storefronts.

Soon I will need a lantern  
to decipher figures in the morning

and when it hisses out  
by too much song and love

an ocean of darkness  
to quiet my nights' thoughts.

The abundance of this place.  
Be it more than our renderings,

charcoal more than its rubbings,  
this *Dead End* sign a transition

from pavement to forested path.  
Let me sever myself from the instruments

behind my song and let speech  
drive me further into silence,

down into the surrounding furrows  
where sunlight must raise its voice to be heard,

where the questions still unanswered  
that we leave behind in sleep

are somehow before us again  
when we wake.



**Trout Cathedral**  
(Oil Pastel)

**Jerry Gates**

**Yu-Han Chao**  
**MR. WONG'S DUCK**

77

Mr. Wong woke up and found a duck next to him in bed. It was bright yellow with a few white spots on its feathers. Mr. Wong pulled down the covers and saw that the duck had flat, webbed feet. Then he noticed that he and the duck were attached. The tip of his right index finger was glued to the tip of the duck's left wing. They seemed to blend together, flesh into feathers, yellow-gold fluff into human skin. The duck had a pointy yellow beak.

"Quack," it said.

"Why are you glued to me?" Mr. Wong asked, and tried to push the duck away.

"Quack," the duck struggled, flapping its wings and kicking its feet.

When Mr. Wong got out of bed, the duck was pulled along with him, left wing extended upwards because it was much shorter than Mr. Wong. It waddled alongside Mr. Wong.

"This is ridiculous," Mr. Wong said to himself, but he decided to deal with it; he had to go to work.

Mr. Wong brushed his teeth clumsily with his left hand, splashed his face with water, rubbed soap over his face with his left hand, then splashed some more water on his face and rubbed his face dry with a towel.

Shaving was trickier. Mr. Wong nicked himself a few times with his blade, luckily not too badly. Nobody would notice. Nobody looked at him up close, anyway. He blotted the tiny bleeding cuts with tissue until they stopped bleeding. Mr. Wong changed out of his pajama with one hand, made toast and ate it with one hand. When the duck quacked for some bread crumbs from Mr. Wong's plate, Mr. Wong put the plate in front of the duck and let it eat the crumbs while he drank his sweet soy milk.

Mr. Wong was a tax specialist at an accounting firm in Taipei. He had a corner cubicle, and often went for days without talking to anyone. His job included punching a calculator, checking and double checking his results, entering numbers into a computer, and putting his files into filing cabinets after he was done.

After Mr. Wong dressed himself in a plain white buttoned shirt and dark blue suit pants with one hand, he rushed to the MRT subway station five minutes from his apartment, duck in tow. He carried the duck for a distance and then let it walk beside him, dragging it a little because he wanted it to walk faster. When Mr. Wong put his ticket in the slot at the MRT station and walked past the metal bars with the duck hugged against his chest, the MRT officer walked out of his glass booth and blocked him.

“No birds,” the policeman said.

“I’m sorry, I have to bring it, it’s only for today until I give it away,” Mr. Wong said, and he fully intended to get rid of the duck any way he could after work.

The duck fluttered its wings and quacked unhappily.

“No birds,” the policeman repeated. “It’s because of the bird flu. You can’t take a bird on any kind of public transportation, not on a bus, not on the MRT, not on a train. No exceptions.”

Mr. Wong sighed and dragged the duck out of the MRT station. He waved for a taxi. A few Taipei City taxi drivers, upon stopping and seeing he had a duck, drove away again. Finally, a female taxi driver accepted him and his extra passenger.

“What are you going to do with that duck, mister?” the driver asked.

“I don’t know, I haven’t figured it out yet,” Mr. Wong said.

The woman nodded and glanced a few more times at Mr. Wong and his duck in the rear view mirror, but said nothing. Mr. Wong looked out the window and tried to forget he was glued to a duck. He was beginning to develop an inferiority complex around it.

“This building, sir?” the driver asked.

“Yes, thank you.”

Mr. Wong paid the driver 100 NT and got out of the taxi. He took the back entrance so that the front entrance guards would not have a chance to give him trouble over his duck. He ducked into the elevator and pressed the “close” button immediately so nobody could see him. The elevator beeped to a halt at the 11<sup>th</sup> floor and Mr. Wong stepped into the office of Easy Tax Accounting Firm. Usually there was a receptionist, but the receptionist wasn't at her desk, so not a soul saw Mr. Wong walk to his little cubicle with his duck.

Once at his seat, Mr. Wong logged on to his computer, made the duck some space next to his keyboard, and began doing taxes with his left hand. Mr. Wong went to the bathroom a few times and even let the duck rest in the sink once so that it could go to the bathroom, too. When Mr. Wong ate lunch, which was a cup of instant noodles from the vending machine in the lobby, he set aside some noodle pieces for the duck to eat. For the most part the duck was very quiet and obedient, and this comforted Mr. Wong.

But as the day progressed, Mr. Wong noticed something wrong. The duck seemed to be expanding. It was growing bigger by the hour. And it was eating up more of his body. There was now less of his hands and more of the duck's wing. The duck was taking over his body, like a Siamese twin in the process of “absorbing” the other twin in the womb. Mr. Wong used his office phone to call the Taida Hospital to make an

appointment, but it was too late for today, so he made an appointment for tomorrow morning at 8:00 A.M.

At the hospital the next morning, the doctor shook her head.

“I’m sorry, Mr. Wong, I’m afraid I can’t do anything for you. We looked at the X-rays and we can run some more tests to make sure that your health is normal, but we can’t remove the duck from you. It will kill you, I’m afraid. You’ll have to live with the duck.”

Mr. Wong could not believe this was happening to him. He didn’t know how he felt about spending the rest of his life with a duck attached to his arm. Plus the duck was growing. It was now about twice as large as it was yesterday morning. Yesterday, it was at best a medium to medium-large sized duck, whereas today it was definitely a large duck.

Over the next week Mr. Wong struggled with his new pet/appendage. The duck continued to grow, becoming more a cream color than yellow, shedding its old yellow baby fuzz feathers. Mr. Wong was relieved when the weekend came because he no longer had to lug his duck around in public. He ate instant noodles at home, watched Chinese and Japanese variety shows on television and read in the bathroom with his arm/duck in the bathtub beside him.

Monday Mr. Wong did not go to work. The duck was too large and he did not want to carry it. Something had to be done about the duck, to sever it from his body before it ate him alive. The doctor was no good, so he obviously had to take matters into his own hands. Mr. Wong ordered an axe from an online hardware store in Taipei, specified expedited same-day delivery, then rummaged through his cabinet and found a large bottle of super-strength aspirin.

When the axe arrived Mr. Wong took 4 super-strength aspirin, prepared a bucket of ice, and plenty of paper towels. He dissolved 2

super-strength aspirins in a bowl of water and set it before the duck so it would drink it. He then hoisted the duck into the kitchen sink, and poised the axe between the duck wing and his left arm. His left arm was clumsy since he was righthanded, but he tried his best to poise the blade edge of the axe on the duck's wing. He figured if he lopped off more duck than arm, he would be fine, at most still have bits of duck wing on him, and the duck would take most of the damage. If it survived he would take care of it. If not, too bad—he never really wanted a duck anyway, especially not this gargantuan one. The duck was now 600% its original size.

Mr. Wong raised the axe and brought it down with a weak blow, weakened because he was a little shocked by the lack of resistance in the wing. It was like cutting into butter. The duck flapped its wings but did not struggle much. Then, quite suddenly, it spoke.

“Why are you doing this to me?” the duck asked.

“I’m sorry, but I can’t live like this. I can’t have a duck attached to my arm,” was all Mr. Wong could say.

“But I am your soul. I am here because you have ignored me. If you kill me, you will be without a soul. You will not only live a soulless life like you have up until now, but you will not have a soul at all,” the duck said.

“I’m sorry,” Mr. Wong said, and raised the axe again.

The duck closed its eyes. It was bleeding. As Mr. Wong maneuvered the axe with a second blow, he saw that he was getting his elbow back, then his forearm, and now his fingers. It was working—the duck was separating from him in a very clean way. Its wing tore away from Mr. Wong after the third blow and the bird lay limp, filling the kitchen sink with its body and blood. Life seemed to be draining from it as well as air. Mr. Wong used some paper towels to wipe his right arm, which surprisingly was completely intact, without so much as a nick or scratch.

The duck in the kitchen sink began to shrink from extra large to large to medium large, medium, until the corpse was no larger than a smallish Cornish hen one might find in the supermarket.

Mr. Wong wrapped the poor bird in newspaper and put it in a trash bag. He threw it out when the trash truck came by his alley at night, tinkling the theme to “For Alice,” inviting denizens of Taipei City to come forth with their household garbage.

Mr. Wong’s life went back to normal after that. He took the MRT to work, never spoke to anyone, did Taipei residents’ and business’ taxes and when his calculator broke he had it replaced, and when his computer became outdated that was replaced, too, at his company’s expense. Mr. Wong remained single and worked as a tax specialist for 35 more years until he retired at 65. Sometimes he lay awake at night thinking about the duck. Was it really his soul? Why was his soul a duck? Where was it now? Probably in a landfill. What did it mean when it said he led a soulless life, and if the duck had been telling the truth and it really was his soul, what did it mean now that he had no soul?

One afternoon when Mr. Wong was 67 and had just stepped off a Taipei City bus from a trip to Da An Park for his morning tai chi class, he was hit by a motorcycle and died on the spot. The motorcycle driver had tried to squeeze between the bus and the sidewalk because it wasn’t prepared for the bus to stop in front of him and didn’t have time or the willingness to slow down.

As Mr. Wong lay dying between a parked motorcycle and a stopped bus, he thought he heard a duck quacking.



**Evening River Shadows**  
(Oil Pastel)

**Jerry Gates**

Gail Fishman Gerwin  
HOSPITALITY

84

When I was six Michael S. asked me to play at his house after school. No discussion between parents, just a simple

arrangement between boy and girl. After the bell rang at three, we walked seven blocks from School Thirteen to his place near

the corner of Eleventh and Twenty-seventh, a two-story box with giant white shingles surrounding upstairs and downstairs

porches where chair swings offered squeaking accompaniment to shared popsicles, traded secrets. As I climbed the flight to

Michael's second-floor flat, I could inhale traces of the five-thirty supper Mildred S. was heating for her moustached husband and sons.

Entering the living room through the unlocked door, I saw this scowling mother, head wrapped in a kerchief, escaping henna hair

tendrils soaked in sweat. *What is she doing here*, Mildred asked her son, *you know I wash the floors on Wednesday. She can't stay.*

Chastised, flushed, his glasses askew, Michael told me I'd have to leave, *go home*, he said. I started to cry but he'd already

slammed the door, leaving me in the hall. I ran downstairs to the street where I stood, stony statue not remembering which way

to turn, how to find home. Cars passed, the afternoon darkened, Paterson's five o'clock whistle pierced my fear. By then I was hunched

on the sidewalk, cross-legged, bawling, needing to pee, knowing my parents couldn't find me, I couldn't find them, thinking this

might be the time that gypsies my mother pointed out in downtown storefronts would take me because I didn't listen. Crying out—

*Mommy Daddy Mommy Daddy*—I alerted a man walking by, a father from Twenty-seventh? A gypsy? A stranger. He asked

where I lived (I told him five-seven-one Madison), took my hand, walked me down Eleventh, and I knew when we passed

the candy store on the corner, home was near, my mother and father would be waiting on the porch, supper waiting on the table, and

I'd never be allowed to play with Michael S. again.

**Caleb Tankersley**  
**FLATTERY**

86

This is my adaptation of Li-Young Lee  
who adapts the style of Li Po  
so it's okay.

Poems, like faces, are copied through ages.  
Ancestors build on ancestors  
and I claim my father's grave my own.

As a winged seed, I've traveled the Earth  
searching for a child's longing  
in trees and birds and clouds,  
but find it here, in my family's dirt.

A father's integrity is a promise.  
The son remembers, and softly to the wind  
he commemorates the dead with the living.

A son gathers what is left of his father  
carries it to his children  
and disappears.

Life is a pebble flushed down a stream,  
or is it smoke, rising, as my ancestors  
spread and cover the sky,  
or is it a drunken man drowning  
for the moon in a river?

Ding-a-goddamned-ling. Everybody has to be someplace and I'm right here, in my office on a someday morning, earning my daily as a paralegal assigned to a class-action on behalf of the losing class, the inmates at the local county jail. Losing, hell, they're lost, gone without redemption, the living dead giving the lie to any hallucinations regarding the reformative properties of incarceration. The only thing these losers, these chronic criminals petty and grand, these burglars and dealers and gangsters, killers and rapists and drunks and junkies, check kitters and embezzlers, crack-whores and Wal-Mart shoplifters, beaters of wives and children but never of the ultimate rap haven't lost is my telephone number. Lucky me, the only number they can call for free is the number that rings through to the telephone on my old, beat-up desk.

There it goes. Multiple ringy-dingies, and I pick up. Is it my mom? Is it my girlfriend? Is it the President of the United States? No, it's who it always is, the names and voices changing but it's pretty much all the same person, all the same meta-individual, an inmate wanting to tell me about the conditions in the jail, tell me how jail sucks. I know how jail sucks, and I didn't have to be stupid enough to get arrested to figure it out. To begin with, it's jail. The very idea sucks. That's all I've ever needed to know. But these days, these long days that pay for my economy car and the rent on my one-bedroom and provide me with the health insurance that changes plans and doctors every six months, these endless days it's my job to hear the details, to take the notes and make the calls and see if I can fix the problems that are every bit as perennially irreparable as are the inmates themselves.

For instance, the food. Sometimes there's not enough. This is usually because there are too many inmates, so the food runs out before all the inmates get fed. When this happens, moldy baloney sandwiches and soft brown apples are brought in from the slag heaps behind some supermarket somewhere to feed the extra inmates. And no matter how much food there is or isn't, and whatever degrees of edibility the portions may possess, usually the trays are maybe not completely clean. Hot water and soap cost money, you know.

It's jail. It sucks.

Other things about the jail. The inmates get locked down. They get locked down because they're overgrown unruly children, undisciplined sociopaths or murderous psychopaths, or simply because there are never enough COs—"Corrections Officers," the nicest way the bureaucrats have come up with for saying "Jail Guards"—and there are never enough of them, no matter what you call them, because who wants to work in a fucking jail? So there will be like one CO for seventy-five inmates, so the COs just lock 'em down, all the inmates locked into their cells, no access to the common areas with the televisions and the pay phones. And much better to do that, my friend, to lock them securely away, than to be trapped in a pod with seventy-five instances of the dregs who just might decide to gather themselves all together in one massive instance of a murderous *lèse-majesté*.

The locked-down inmates get let out for one hour or less out of every twenty-four, and not all at the same time. The ones who get let out for their one hour or less outside of regular business hours, Monday through Friday excepting holidays, can't call me. I'm not there. I'm driving my economy car to the bargain store, or tending the withery garden in the

tiny yard out front of my one-bedroom, or fucking my girlfriend, or blowing my brains out with dope and wine and television.

In the daytime, the ones who can call me do. They call me to tell me about the lockdowns.

“Man,” they say, “we been locked down in here for twenty-seven days, man. The COs won’t tell us why. Somebody said it was because of that guy that got murdered.”

“That’s probably it,” I say. There are well over two thousand inmates in this jail built for half that number, and it seems not a month goes by that some poor fool doesn’t get murdered in there. The COs can’t be everywhere, you know, and even when they’re there, they’re not always watching real close.

The inmates call me and want me to call their girlfriends, their moms, their people. They haven’t heard from their people.

“Hey, man,” they say, “Acan you call my people? I don’t got no money on my books, so all I can make is collect calls except when I call you. But I can’t call my people, they got blocks on their lines.”

I never ask them, And why do you think this is?

“No, man, I can’t call your people,” I tell them. “I’m sorry, I’m not allowed to do that. All I can do is take down what you’re telling me. So tell me—what’s up?”

They tell me.

“Man, last night?” they say, always with that question mark. “Last night the sewers backed up and all this raw sewage starts coming up out of the floor, out of the floor drains, you know? And the COs won’t do nothing about it. They got us on lockdown and here we are in our cells and all this sewage, it’s got like, you know, human waste”—the inmates are

always more polite than they really are—“it’s got human waste floating in it and it’s coming into our cells and the COs won’t let us clean it up until day shift and so we’re locked in here with all this stuff—raw sewage, man—and it’s floating around and they bring us breakfast and we’re supposed to eat with all this stuff on the floor, and some of the guys, their mattresses are on the floor, you know? Cuz they ain’t got enough bunks so they got to sleep on the floor. So this stuff, it’s getting, it’s like, it’s soaking into the mattresses and we got to sleep in this stuff. And man—it stinks in here! *There ain’t no amount of deodorant can make it smell good!* Not even if we stuck it up our noses, man.”

“Okay, I’ll write it up, see what I can do,” I tell them. I don’t tell them, There’s not a goddamn thing I can do—you’re in jail.

Some of these guys, they’ll tell me something that starts with, “Last time I was in jail....”

“You were in jail before?” I say, like I never heard of anyone going to jail more than once and I can’t believe anyone would end up there even just twice. And I can’t, but the truth is, some of these guys, it’s all they can do to stay *out* of jail. On their own, they’re their own worst enemies. There’s no place in the world that will take better care of them than the stinking, over-crowded, under-staffed county jail with its raw sewage, its thin mattresses on cold concrete floors, and its rotten food. No place.

Most of the calls I get are from men, since most inmates are men, but I do hear from the women, too. Most of them are whores and/or addicts, in for hooking, simple possession, or misdemeanor shoplifting. Maybe sometimes disturbing the peace or conspiracy. I see them when I visit the jail—it’s not enough I get paid to take the calls, I also am desired by the higher-ups to make what for my part are far too many visits to the place, given that once is way more than enough—I see the women inmates

and they all have a look, a hard, lean look with extra lines etched into their faces, even when they're young, which most of them are, and even if they're fat, which most of them are not. Female or male, very few inmates are truly fat. Takes a certain minimal level of stability and accomplishment to pack on the poundage. And very few of them are old. By the time they get into their forties, they've either wised up or grown up or settled down and cut the crap and they don't go to jail anymore, or they've graduated to the state or federal prison system and don't come around to the county jail so often, or they didn't get into their forties and they're buried someplace.

The women—possessors, petty thieves, crack-whores, speed freaks, snowballs and junkies—they call me when they're coming down, when they're pissing out of themselves the bio-processed remnants of their coke or their crystal, or when their methadone has been cut off, or their Valium or their Percocet or God only knows what they've been on, sometimes even they don't, and they always refer to whatever it may be as their "meds." They tell me about it with voices strained to taut breaking, voices that have been stretched that way sometimes for so many years filled with infinite moments of pain and fear and longing that they no longer have any other way of making speech. They need their meds, they tell me, they'll do anything, *anything*. Once they get out, they'll make it up to me. I could have every wasted trick in the city falling down on my lap. Every day could be my lucky day.

"Please, you got to help us," they say. "People are going crazy in here. We're not getting our meds. And we can't get a hold of our PDs. The PDs won't take our calls."

"I'll see what I can do," I tell them, but it's easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than it is for me or anyone else below the rank of district court judge to get a hold of anyone at the Public Defender's

office. A PD's caseload averages out so that each indigent inmate gets about one one-hundredth of an attorney. This is supposed to be better than no attorney at all.

But even when the inmates can't get a hold of their people or their meds or their PDs, they still have me, their last and very slender hope. More slender than they realize, and more slender than I want them to know.

"I'm not supposed to be in here, man," they tell me. "There's been a mistake."

Got that right.

"Tell me about it," I say. Story is there's been a screwup, paperwork got lost, someone was supposed to be released already, time served. I make some calls. Who knows what went wrong? No one, nowhere.

Or maybe there's a problem with the bond.

"I got money on the outside, man," they tell me. "If I could just get to it, I could make my bail."

But you can't get to it, I don't tell them. It's out here, with the cars and the stash and the girls and the movies and the hot juicy burgers and Saturday nights and Sunday games,

and the children and the dogs and the cats and the trees and the grass and the sky and the clouds and the sun and me. And you're in *there*.

It's noisy in there. I get the calls, and I can hear the noise, the great, empty, clanging cold echo. No carpeting in jail. No wood to speak of. It's all concrete, steel, and heavy-duty plastic. It's all one-piece jumpsuits and bad BO. It's all Shut your motherfucking face, and, Your ass is mine. It's mace and pepper-spray and five-point restraints, truncheons and boots and shackles. It's the cold day in hell that changes nothing.

It's the call from the guy who was fine on the outside until his medication ran out and then he just sort of lost it a little, he's not sure what he did but they've told him about it. It's the call from the woman who swears she was only going to turn that one trick to get the money to get her car out of the shop and she's never done this kind of thing before and how was she supposed to know the john was an undercover working a sting? It's the call from the guy who was running his nice little organization on the outside though he's sure as hell not going to be telling me that over a jail telephone, but he's the sort of fellow who's used to being able to get other people to do things for him and now they won't. It's the call from the guy who was shot four times shortly before incarceration and now the county won't give him the medical attention he tells me he needs, the multiple surgeries so that he can walk again, so that his hand can be fixed so that maybe he can get a decent job once he gets out, but him and me both know there is neither scalpel nor bullet that will ever land him in whatever it is he may imagine a decent job to be. It's the call from the guy who has the worst stutter ever inflicted on a human, I can't believe it when I first hear it. At first I want to laugh but after a minute or two of being very patient while he tells me his story, I find that I'm in danger of losing it the other way.

"Ah-ah-ah-ah-l," he's telling me, "wuh-wuh-wuh-was j-j-j-j-jumped by-ah-ah-ah, ah-ah ph-ph-ph-four guh-guh-guh-guys. They-they-they-the-the-the they buh-buh-broke muh-muh-muh-muh-my j-j-j-j, j-j-j, j-j-jaw ih-ih-ih-ih-ih-in thuh-thuh-three puh-puh-p-p-puh-puh-places. N-n-n-n-now-now-ow-ow muh-muh-muh-my t-t-t-t-teeth ah-ah-are-are ph-ph-ph-falling ah-ah-ah-out. Ah-ah-ah-ah-l'm s-s-suh-suh-sorry, ah-ah-ah-l d-d-d-donnn't, t-t-t-t-talk t-t-too g-g-g-g-g-good."

“It’s okay,” I say. “Take your time. Did you fill out any med slips or grievance forms?”

“N-n-nuh-nuh-nuh-nuh-n-no,” he says. “Ah-ah-ah-ah-ah, ah-ah-ah-l  
c-c-c-c-cannnn’t ruh-r-r-rruh-r-read oh-oh-oh-or ruh-ruh-ruh-ruh-ruh-ruh-  
write.”

I tell him I’ll see what I can do. I will see and I will see and I will see, and I will go blind from looking so hard into the muddy haze of incompetence and carelessness and the infinite darkness of the nothing that can be done.

Good days will come. Or different days, a change of pace. I’ll be in my office and the telephone on my beat-up old desk will not ring with calls from the inmates. Every pod will be locked down, a jailbreak was attempted or drugs or another body were found. The drugs may have been found in the possession of a CO, or the body may bear upon its bloody bruises the battery of marks from official batons, fists and feet. Whatever the case may be, the telephone will be silent for a while and the higher-ups will assign me to work on something else in the interim. Maybe I’ll draft a graphic presentation, a series of trial exhibits that attempt to demonstrate that the accused could not possibly have pulled the trigger if the gun was over here and he was over there. Or a real challenge will be thrown my way: I’ll get to review the videotapes that our latest client, the sexual predator, made while he had his way with his victims, my task being to help try to find a way to deflect the damage this damning evidence does to the client’s defense, doing my para-professional duty as best I always do, even though the heart of my soul desires nothing more out of this case than the privilege of cutting off the client’s balls and stuffing them down his throat. Justice for a change.

But I will return to my regular duties after not too long, taking calls, and even making the visits to the jail where I will interview as many inmates as I can as quickly as I can, trying to make some small slice of time for each of them. There are so many and they cannot heal themselves. And I cannot heal them. Most of them I will speak with at tables in the common areas. Most of the time the COs will stand back so the inmates can speak frankly and confidentially while I listen and take notes, and I will remember that my instructions are that in a hostage situation I am to attempt no heroics. When I interview the schizophrenic inmate who tells me he doesn't want to take his meds because he doesn't like the way they make him feel, but when he's off them he hears the voices and he doesn't like them, either, a CO will stand close enough to intervene if the voices instruct sudden mayhem. I will gently attempt to coax the inmate to take the meds, thinking all the while as to how I have an undergraduate liberal arts degree and no training in what to do here, and this is the best, the very best that can be done for this man.

When I interview the psychopaths, and there are a few, and they are the genuine article, I speak to them through the narrow food slots in their locked cell doors. They always smile, just like psychopaths do in the movies, only this isn't a movie, and the smiles aren't actors' smiles, and the COs stand right behind me so they can grab me quick and pull me away if the psychopaths try to get their hands or even their fingers through the food slots and grab my neck to choke me, or try to break my nose or tear my ears off or poke my eyes out.

And I meet the stuttering man. In a general population pod while I'm making a routine inspection of conditions, I meet him. I recognize him instantly, the moment he begins to speak. I even remember his name.

“Ah-ah-ah-ah-ah-I c-c-c-c-called y-y-y-y-you ah-ah-ah-about m-m-muh-muh-my t-t-t-teeth,” he says.

“Yes,” I say, “Randy Smithers, I remember. How are you doing now?”

“B-b-buh-buh-buh-better,” he says.

“Did Medical come see you?” I say.

“N-n-n-no,” he says. “B-b-buh-buh-buh-but, l-l-l-look,” he says, and he holds up a plastic sandwich bag. “Ah-ah-ah-I s-s-s-saved th-th-the-them. Ah-ah-ah-all, uh-uh-of the-the-them.”

The bag holds at least a dozen yellow and grey teeth, mostly molars.

“D-d-d-d-do y-y-y-yo-you th-th-th-thuh-think they-they-they-they c-c-c-c-c-c-can p-p-p-p-p-puh-puh-put the-the-the-them ba-ba-ba-ba-ba-back ih-ih-ih-ih-ih-ih-in?”

“I don’t know, Randy,” I say. “I’ll look into it, see what I can do.”

“Th-th-th-th-thank y-y-y-y-y-you,” he says. “Th-th-tha-tha-th-thank y-y-y-y-you.”

“It’s okay, don’t mention it,” I say, looking around, wanting, like anybody would, to be almost anywhere else. And lucky me, once my duties are done for the day, almost anywhere else is where I’ll get to be. I’ll go home and work in my garden before supper, then call my mom after I eat, chat with her a bit, see how she’s doing. A little while later, my girlfriend will come over. She and I will maybe watch some television, share a couple glasses of wine, maybe a joint, then go to bed. She’ll tell me about her day and I’ll tell her about mine, then we’ll slip into sleep, our arms around each other, rocking, gently rocking.

Amanda Cobb  
MOTORCYCLE POEM

97

He had a motorcycle, the boy I liked for two weeks—  
I wrote a poem about a ride.

A few years after that, I got married to someone else.  
He hated the poem—  
made me throw it away.

He didn't understand that wrapping  
my arms around the boy's waist,  
that tucking  
my fingers between buttons four  
and five of his flannel shirt,  
weren't really true.

He didn't understand the wind making marbles in my mouth.

---

After the divorce, I tried to recover broken lines.

Then a new man said *let me*:

We walked where the motorcycle went,  
cleared gravel from roads,  
sat in front of box fans with our mouths open,  
leaned in, tight, when we imagined curves—

*Are you sure we have to give so much to a turn?  
It feels like falling over.*

Once, when we stopped for half & half,  
there was a bike in the lot outside the store.

*Touch it*, he said.

*You might remember what you need.*

I put my fingers inside the exhaust pipe, the only part that gets hot.



**If I Let You See Me**  
(Photo)

**Joy Harjo**



**Sky Over The North**  
(Photo)

**Joy Harjo**

A Review by William Pitt Root of *ROUNDING THE HUMAN CORNERS*, Poems by Linda Hogan. Introduction by William Kittredge. COFFEE HOUSE PRESS (Minneapolis, Minn., 2008). 96 pages. \$16.

By the time Linda Hogan ends her poem “The Hidden,” quietly declaring “Paradise has always been just out of sight,” we understand that this is not your standard book of poems. It has slowly revealed itself to be a blessing process that works through a retelling of everything we know: she gives us a startlingly visceral sense of what life is, a fresh sense of how it forms, dissipates, transforms, persists ; a radical refiguring of what part consciousness does and does not play in the process, and a keener awareness of how a revisited sense of scale can open a floodgate of revelations.

Keenly aware of current science and technology, she deliberately, effortlessly translates her experience through “words directly revealed/ from before instruments and the lens.” “Looking through sound at my grandson/before he is born” is her way of decanting “prenatal sonic imaging.” And dark matter is “where the space/between stars,/the space between bodies, is not there.” She consistently removes the antiseptic coating from what is scientific to rescue wisdom from the compounds of specialization and restore it to the company of elements : “When I saw the war, the burning children,/I wanted to hurt the killers. It is the way one metal/in the presence of a magnet becomes magnetic.”

Her “paradise” is not that Old Testament radical , the “walled garden” in the midst of the desert. For Linda Hogan, whose name means home of the beautiful, the desert itself is paradise. As is the sea, the sky, “the far universes, the undiscovered/ocean depths, the hidden magna.../the first fronds of green beginnings,/the shine of moonlight behind a cloud,/or the pearl in an ordinary shell.” It is not a shut-in place but an all encompassing sensibility.

Her exuberance resonates closely with that of Neruda in his *odas elementales*, her authority in the realms of the liminal is as assured and as quiet as Merwin’s, and her descriptions of spirit are as unforced and indelible as those of the flesh, where the eyes of a fish “never close,” and where

The night, too, is a place of marvels,  
the creature light,  
the eyes of the skunk and rats,

not great, but all the beginning of the great,  
dark to the mind, light to the heart.

The dozen best poems in this collection remind me of Galway Kinnell's *BOOK OF NIGHTMARES*, Rilke's *DUINO ELEGIES*, Roethke's "North American Sequence," not by way of style or voice but by the permeating awareness of an authorizing eloquence that arises out of such dogged pursuit of ultimate human experiences as birth, death, love, that mortal grasping at immortal concerns which we dare not imagine we have solved and yet dare not ignore. This book by a poet who has reached ancient ways of "rounding the human corners" is veined with a quiet magnificence. Linda Hogan is definitely a contender.

**REVERBERATIONS, A REVIEW by Pamela Uschuk OF RICHARD JACKSON'S *RESONANCE*, Ashland Poetry Press, 2010, 94 pages, \$15.95.**

Ever since I read the first poem in Richard Jackson's *HEARTWALL*, I've been hooked. So, this year, I am delighted at the publication of Jackson's fine new collection, *Resonance*. These poems haunt me with their intricate imagistic weavings, wakening me to possibilities of language, profound questioning and feeling that never are satisfied to float in warm shallows. They dive, layer by layer, to the deep and sometimes painful end of the pool, challenging the reader to follow. In this way, they remind me of Roethke's meditations. In another way, Jackson's fine crafting of sound reminds me of what Auden said, that a poet, must, "above all, be in love with the sound of language." Listen to the alliteration, the assonance and sibilance in "Night Sky," amplifying the poet's passion and soaring off the page like schools of silver flying fish.

"Can you believe what the eloquence of these asteroids tells us? That we are thrown through space from one explosion to another? How amazing any love has endured! In spite of the fact that so many tendrils of hope wither in the sun, in spite of the way the flower now seems to feed on the bees, that the lake seems to shackle to the sky, that the roots pull down the tree, in spite of the fact that the clouds drag the earth toward some new final solution."

Never pretentious, never facile, Jackson's metaphors sizzle between dualities, leaping from quantum physics, to the cruelty of war, to the sorrow of losing a friend, to an opossum rattling in the leaves below his porch, to his love

for his wife, to the sex lives of Groupers. A postmodernist, Jackson stitches quilts of information that overlay the wisdom, the longing, the seeking and philosophical questioning at the vortex of his work. His range is astonishing. He is a jujuman, a shaman creating resonances in the reader's heart, asking again and again how does love survive in this contemporary world when we are overloaded with information, when destruction and greed and indifference are rife? Look at the title poem, "Resonance,"

The hieroglyphics of sunset written on the bay's water:  
Your sad eyes the moon has lit its little fires inside of.  
The wind untangling itself from streetlights and trees:  
Your voice hollowed out by a loneliness I can't name...  
More and more these things shimmer on the spider's web  
of despair...

...I heard once  
of fishermen who could hear the low rumbling sounds  
from the hollowed heads of Croaker, Hardhead, fish you have  
to answer to just to relieve your own loneliness. It's the same  
way with seers who talk to stones. Because every word  
we say means how alone we are. Maybe our memories are  
useless, maybe our words won't save us. In Baghdad, Shiite  
militia drill holes in the heads of sunnis to make them talk.  
I didn't want to have to say that but it's a matter of resonance.

What I admire about Jackson's poems are their richness, their full-blown imagery, their unabashed intellect and willingness to risk sentimentality without being sentimental. Richard Hugo said that if a poet isn't willing to risk sentimentality, he is never really a poet. Jackson risks vulnerability in every poem. Taking that risk, he wins our hearts.

**THE PROMISE DELIVERED**, A review by Pamela Uschuk of Marilyn Krysl's *Swear the Burning Vow: Selected and New Poems*, Ghost Roads Press, 2009, 135 pages, \$13.95.

If you are looking for a poet who can hammer lively imagery into formal verse that sears with passion, look to Marilyn Krysl. Each time I open this collection which consists of a smattering of poems taken from six previous collections as well as a good sampling of new work, I am awed by Krysl's poetic prowess. The wonderful thing about a selected poems is that the reader can watch the growth process of a poet over a span of decades. Krysl is a lyricist of high order, but her syntax is often also muscular and craggy as

the rugged landscape that surrounds her. For me, Krysl's poetry has always been tough, political, courageous, outspoken and innovative. It is high time she received the accolades she deserves.

Although I admire sestinas, there are only a handful I love as I do Krysl's "Sestina for Bright Cloud Singing (But Not the Blues)," a satirical look at male/female equality in Communist China. She establishes the power and authority of her voice immediately. At the same time, the subtlety and playfulness of Krysl's internal and end rhymes as well as her deceptively simple syntax underscore the poem's irony.

"In China  
women hold up  
half the sky. Guess who  
holds up the other half.  
those men are planting  
rice, and manufacturing tractors

and washing machines and more tractors,  
so it can't be the men."

There are so many poems I admire in the plush collection, but some of my favorites are her new political poems. Some dramatic monologues, such as "Unarmed Bodyguard: You will Hear the Lutes," flame with white magnesium lines:

"And I heard and took her hand, a thing we didn't do—  
our hands might make them mad, anger's a drug  
and a turn-on—and I said I'm scared. The world

can tear. Our hands, the glare, that street so hot  
and white, the light a blare—and here a man  
with just one hand thrust out his begging bowl."

In the the heart-wrenching sestina, "Bahgdad: the Disappeared Girls," Krysl hits all the high notes, giving voice to the countless civilian losses behind Iraq War statistics and indicting all of us:

"A girl outside the primary schoolyard gate  
has disappeared. Another—no one sees—  
doesn't come home. A black car eats a broken  
girl child's scream. Her father: *she was my jewel!....*

I who buy Uzies, mortars. (War  
is terrorism: Howard Zinn.) Our broken  
treaties fan my shame: hurt girls, dead seas,  
the poor polishing our luxuries..."

Marilyn Krysl is a master craftswoman with a profound and mature vision who writes with great passion and clarity about complex issues.

"Learning the Tao of T'ang Poetry," ***The Collected Songs of Cold Mountain***, Red Pine, Copper Canyon, Port Townsend, 2000, and ***In Such Hard Times: The Poetry of Wei Ying-wu***, Red Pine, Copper Canyon, Port Townsend, 2009, reviewed by Art Goodtimes.

Most of us Pacific Rim poets learned of Han Shan back in the Sixties through the small covey of translations that Gary Snyder did at the back of his ground-breaking poetry volume by New Directions, "*Rip Rap*." A brilliant poet, Snyder's Han Shan was irreverent and reverent at the same time. A Taoist (aka Daoist) and a Buddhist, Han Shan was a mystical old goat with a wonderful sense of humor and insight, who lived away from the red dust of the world in a cave in the Tientai Mountains of Western China and wrote piercing, zen-like poems. Red Pine's bilingual *The Collected Songs of Cold Mountain* has given us the first full collection of Han Shan's work, poems written some twelve-hundred years ago on rocks, trees and temple walls and then collected and saved by admiring disciples. Red Pine (aka Bill Porter) is a masterful translator, and his authoritative preface gives wonderful context to the lyric offerings. His interpretation is clear and graceful. But he is not a poet of Snyder's caliber, and the English text – while scrupulously accurate – lacks a certain flair and joie de vivre that seems elemental to Han Shan's legacy. Nevertheless, the book is a whole college course in Chinese thought and T'ang custom, with extensive footnotes and a dazzling introduction by China scholar John Blofeld. And there's even translations of two of Han Shan's lyric sidekicks, Feng-kan ["Big Stick"] and Shih-te ["Pickup"].

Red Pine's uncolored almost prosaic style works better for me with *In Such Hard Times: The Poetry of Wei Ying-wu*. Born into an aristocratic family whose fortunes were on the decline, Wei Ying-wu bounced from one minor government post to another, sometimes resigning, sometimes forced to move. He lived in the turbulence of the T'ang dynasty, and as a young man had to escape with imperial forces from the An Lu-shan rebellion that turned his world topsy-turvy. Later in life, his patron in the court, Li Huan, who'd secured various appointments for his friend was accused of treason and executed. And

his wife died at about the same time. All these setbacks seasoned the poet's sense of loss. His poems linger on the past, on friendship and those who have passed on (his 17 elegies to his wife are among his best work). His poems were not popular in his own day – but became known as Chinese classics in the Sung dynasty. And they are filled with wisdom, and lovely language: “When other plants bow to the frost / chrysanthemums alone show their beauty / this is the nature of things ... life is about more than plenty.”

The book sports a fine preface and incredibly informative footnotes (although occasionally the same point is raised that appeared earlier, as though one gained no cumulative sense of things – a slightly annoying shortcoming). Still, in all, a very powerful immersion in Chinese thought and custom.

**Jeffrey Alfier** is a 2009 Pushcart prize nominee. His poems have appeared in *Crab Orchard Review*, *Kestrel*, and *The Saint Ann's Review*, with work forthcoming in *Chiron Review* and *Post Road*. His chapbooks are *Strangers Within the Gate* (2005) and *Offloading the Wounded* (2010). He serves as co-editor of *San Pedro River Review* [www.sprreview.com](http://www.sprreview.com)

**Lillian-Yvonne Bertram** lives with a pesky but adorable cat, Hipólito, and a loving partner. Her poems appear or are forthcoming in *Alligator Juniper*, *Cream City Review*, *Indiana Review*, *Harvard Review*, *Mid-American Review*, and *Narrative Magazine*. Her book-length manuscripts have been finalists for numerous contests. A Cave Canem Fellow, she is the 2009-2011 Gaius Charles Bolin Fellow in the English Department at Williams College. She'd be nowhere without Mom and Pops.

**Bogdan Țefănescu** is an Associate Professor of English at University of Bucharest who teaches courses in British literature and critical theory. A journalist, editor and professional translator, he taught as a senior Fulbright Lecturer at Penn State University and has received research grants from the British Council, the University of London, the University of Stuttgart, and the New Europe College.

The stories and poems of **Tetman Callis** have appeared in various publications, most recently *Caketrain*, *J Journal*, and *580 Split*. He holds a bachelor's degree in philosophy from the University of Texas at El Paso, lives in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and makes his living as a legal assistant.

**Mircea Cărtărescu** (born 1956 in Bucharest) is Romania's most celebrated writer of the highly accomplished group of self-consciously postmodernist writers who began to publish in the 1980s—the “blue-jeans generation.” As a poet, he published seven books plus collected editions, all written in the 80s; after the fall of communism, he turned exclusively to fiction and essays. Although he has only one book in the U.S., the novel *Nostalgia*, and one chapbook of poems, Sorkin's *Bebop Baby*, he has been published and honored widely in Europe and his native country. He has recently been Romania's prime Nobel Prize for Literature candidate. This poem was from a book never published book in Romanian until this year, *Nimic* (“Nothing”).

**Yu-Han (Eugenia) Chao** was born and grew up in Taipei, Taiwan. She received her BA from National Taiwan University and MFA from Penn State. The Backwaters Press published her poetry book, *We Grow Old: Fifty-Three*

*Chinese Love Poems*, in 2008. To see more writing and artwork, feel free to visit [www.yuhanchao.com](http://www.yuhanchao.com)

**David Cheezem** is a poet, digital artist and bookstore owner. He lives in Palmer, Alaska.

**Amanda Cobb's** recent or forthcoming publications include the journals: *Arts & Letters*, *Pebble Lake Review*, *Connotation Press* and others. She is currently a lecturer at West Virginia University in Morgantown, WV where she lives with her family.

**Andrea England** resides in Kalamazoo Michigan with her daughter and two dogs, where she is a doctoral candidate in English/Poetry at Western Michigan University. Her most recent publications include *Rhino* and *The DMQ Review*.

**Martín Espada** was born in Brooklyn in 1957. He has published seventeen books as a poet, editor and translator. His poetry collection, *The Republic of Poetry* (Norton, 2006) received a Paterson Award for Sustained Literary Achievement and was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. A collection of essays, *The Lover of a Subversive is Also a Subversive*, is forthcoming from Michigan; his next poetry collection, *The Trouble Ball*, is forthcoming from Norton in 2011. Fellowships and awards include a Guggenheim Fellowship and the National Hispanic Cultural Center Literary Award. Espada is a professor at UMass-Amherst, where he teaches creative writing and the work of Pablo Neruda.

Life-long Michigan painter, **Jerry Gates**, has shown his work or been featured in one man shows in many galleries in the midwest. He holds an MFA in Painting from Central Michigan University, and he taught art courses for a number of years at Northwestern Michigan College. Jerry lives and paints in Williamsburg, near Traverse City, and he is also an avid fly fisherman and conservationist.

**Gail Fishman Gerwin's** poetry has appeared in *Lips*; *Paterson Literary Review*; *Calyx*; *The American Voice in Poetry: the Legacy of Whitman, Williams, and Ginsberg*; and *yourdailypoem.com*. The Paterson, New Jersey, native was honorable mention in the 2008, 2009, and 2010 Allen Ginsberg Poetry Awards. Her memoir *Sugar and Sand* was a finalist for the 2010 Paterson Poetry Prize. She and her husband Dr. Kenneth S. Gerwin are parents of two daughters and grandparents of three boys and a girl. She currently is at work on her second volume of poetry.

A member of San Francisco's Union of Street Poets in the Sixties & Seventies,

**Art Goodtimes** was the founding poetry editor of *Earth First! Journal* (1981-1991) and poetry co-editor of *Wild Earth* (1991-2000). His first book was *Embracing the Earth* (Homeward Press, Berkeley, 1984) and his most recent *As If the World Really Mattered* (La Alameda Press, Albuquerque, 2007). He's founder/director of the Talking Gourd poetry gatherings in Colorado, New Mexico and Mexico (since 1989) and poet-in-residence of the Telluride Mushroom Festival (since 1980).

**Joy Harjo** is a poet, musician, performer, playwright and sometimes a photographer. Her art is featured on her newest CD of music, *Red Dreams, A Trail Beyond Tears*, and her photographs will be featured in her forthcoming book of interviews, columns and essays *Soul Talk, Soul Language*, from Wesleyan University Press next year. She lives in Albuquerque, New Mexico where she is finishing up a "memoir" and is beginning work on her second play: *I Think I Love You, An All Night Round Dance*.

**T.R. Hummer's** 12th book--10th book of poetry--, *Ephemeron*, will be published by LSU Press in Fall 2011. Hummer teaches at ASU amid cacti and heat waves. He practices philanthropy, tries at sainthood, and is adept with a cat o'nine tails, not to mention the saxophone.

**Marie Kelly** thanks Rick Pearse, Brooklyn College, for inspiring the writing of this poem! Other poems were published in *Borderlands: Texas Poetry Review*, *Compass Rose*, *Forge*, *Portland Review* and *Words of Wisdom*, won the Bernard Grebanier for Best Sonnet Award and honorable mention for the Beatrice Dubin Rose Award.

**Mary Larkin's** developed software for the U.S. Embassies, and brought educational technology to 19 Native American tribes. Her award-winning fiction appears in numerous literary journals. A Fellow of the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, she's taught at UNH, FSU, and St. Mary's in Maryland. Before her academic career Mary was an international model and appeared in *Vogue*, *Bazaar*, *Mademoiselle*, *Marie Claire*, and other fashion magazines. She a member of the Luffing Lassies, Sarasota Sailing Squadron, and the Florida Women's Sailing Association. Last season she won 3rd in her first Championship Regatta with FWSA in St. Pete.

**Eve Ottenberg's** novel, *Dead in Iraq*, was recently published by the Plain View Press. She wrote a weekly column for *The Village Voice*, book reviews for *The New York Times*, *Vanity Fair*, *The Baltimore Sun*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *USA Today*, *The Nation*, *The New Yorker's* "In Brief" section, *The Washington Post*, *The Washington City Paper*, and articles in *The New York Times Magazine & Vogue*.

**Khadijah Queen** is the author of a poetry collection, *Conduit* (Black Goat/Akashic 2008), and a chapbook, *No Isla Encanta* (dancing girl press 2007). Her work has been widely published and anthologized, with recent work forthcoming in *jubilat* and *Best American Nonrequired Reading* (Houghton Mifflin 2010). Her second collection of poems, *Black Peculiar*, was just completed. Current projects include a third book of poems, a graphic novel and a memoir about her service in the US Navy.

**Adam J. Sorkin** recently published *Memory Glyphs: Three Prose Poets from Romania* (Twisted Spoon, 2009, Mircea Ivănescu's *lines poems poetry* (University of Plymouth Press, UK, translated with Lidia Vianu), and *Rock and Dew*, poems by Carmen Firan (Sheep Meadow, 2010, translated mostly with Firan). Marin Sorescu's *The Bridge* (Bloodaxe Books, 2004), translated with Vianu, won The Poetry Society's [U.K.] Poetry Translation Prize.

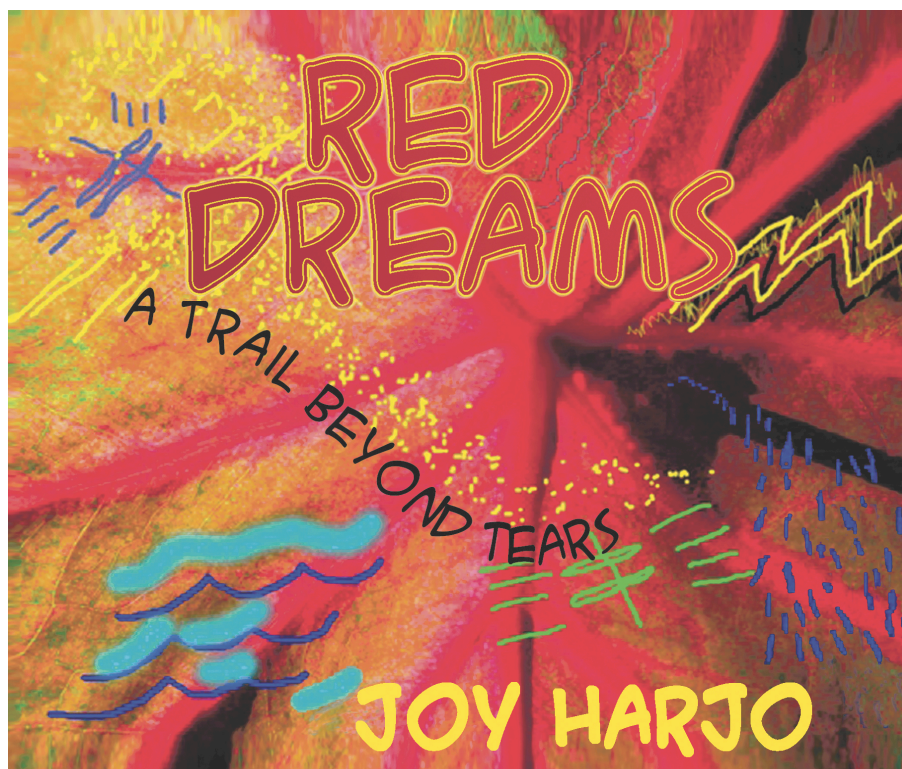
**Jim Sullivan** lives with his wife, Ros, in Patagonia, Arizona, near the Mexican border. A landscaper, he gets dirty for money and writes dirty for fun.

**Caleb Tankersley** lives in Cape Girardeau, Missouri. His work has been published in *Cutthroat*, *Journey* and *Big Muddy*. Caleb is applying for MFA Programs across the country.

Prize-winning poet, novelist and memoirist, **Luis Alberto Urrea** is completing the sequel to *The Hummingbird's Daughter* (shortlisted for a Pulitzer Prize). He is also putting the finishing touches on *The Tijuana Book of the Dead*, his first book of poetry in ten years. "Arizona Lamentation" is included in his new collection.

**John Sibley Williams** has an MA in Writing and resides in Portland, OR, where he frequently performs his poetry, works with *Ooligan Press* and *HoboEye*, and studies Book Publishing at Portland State University. His poetry was nominated for the 2009 Pushcart Prize. Some of his over ninety previous or upcoming publications include: *The Evansville Review*, *Ellipsis*, *Flint Hills Review*, *Juked*, *The Journal*, *Hawaii Review*, *Red Wheelbarrow*, and *The Alembic*.

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