

Crosscut

literary magazine



With an introduction by Kathleen Ellis

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Husson College
Bangor, Maine
2005
Volume Thirteen

Crosscut

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"Female Pine Grosbeak"
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Crosscut website: <http://english.husson.edu/crosscut/>

First Edition.

Press run of 500 copies; no reprinting is planned.

Printed by Fast Forms Printing & Paper, Bangor, Maine.

Funded by Husson College.

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Address all correspondence and submissions (up to three poems, three drawings or photographs, or prose selections up to 5,000 words) to Editorial Staff, *Crosscut* magazine, Department of English, Husson College, One College Circle, Bangor, ME 04401.

Preface

The thirteenth volume of *Crosscut* contains verses that originate in the deserts of Iraq and the distant cities of India, drawings exported from China (with a stopover in Louisville), stories that grow out of the potato fields of Aroostook County and poetry from the backstreets of Bangor. It's a winged migration to nearly all corners of the globe, and without even leaving your feet.

Not surprisingly, wide-ranging topography begets extensive *topoi*. The visual and literary reflections that span these pages run a gamut of diversity, from encounters with the paranormal and awakenings of the spiritual, to experiences of life, death, devastation, hope, elation. There are no shortcuts, no in-betweens here. There are poems that doubt and exult, stories that ponder and amuse, and visual arts that focus and reflect.

Now a teenager, *Crosscut* remains a steadfast emblem of Husson's fledgling programs in English and liberal arts. Even while attracting more and more submissions from writers and artists beyond campus, the magazine still takes wing each year on steady currents of voluntary editorial and creative support by a dedicated corps of local students and faculty. As Husson's first English majors begin their own high-flying, unprecedented pursuits, *Crosscut* remains a publication of literary opportunity and artistic expression that unites various disciplines, outlooks, and perspectives.

So, like Kathy Wall's pine grosbeak gracing the cover, hang out, rest your wings a bit, and bite into the ripe fruits before you.

– Greg Winston

Introduction

Kathleen Ellis

Along with talent, verbal adroitness, and ambition, a writing community is one of a writer's most valuable assets. Whether it is a community of two or two hundred, the camaraderie and feedback shared with other writers is often the impetus a writer needs to continue plying this solitary craft.

This issue of *Crosscut* represents recent work of an active, loosely knit community in existence since Husson's literary magazine debut in 1993. Some of the writers in this issue are longtime friends of *Crosscut* and have appeared on these pages before (Rob Juckett and Kristie Licata, for example), while others are first-time contributors.

As a child, seeing my first poems and drawings in a local newspaper, I was thrilled beyond words. I still have the pencilbox I won for one of those drawings. Now looking back over decades of writing, I realize the works in print I have valued most are ones that have also included friends and peers. The halcyon moments are not necessarily the prizes and awards, fellowships and grants, or even individual books that represent a collection of work over time, although these are wonderful for kudos, self-confidence, and even money at times.

More importantly, it's the joint efforts — anthologies, literary magazines, and public readings — that offer true fellowship in the writing community. And, the best thing about joining this community is that it is open to anyone willing to share one's work — no entry fees, resumes, standing in line overnight, or being the first caller to

answer a question correctly. Magazines like *Crosscut* are open to all, amateur and professional alike.

The most valuable gift a writer can give is the generosity of self, one's stories and dreams, verbal candor or even outrage, and the far stretches of imagination. But what good is that creativity and skill, if it is not shared with others?

The Bangor area is currently blessed with a plethora of events where writers of every persuasion read their works. For those who want to "test the waters" with their latest poems and stories, *Borders* holds a monthly open mic night. Opportunities abound to publish in many lively literary magazines, including *Hemlock*, *Stolen Island Review*, *Maine Review*, *Puckerbrush Review*, and of course, *Crosscut*. A haiku writing group meets monthly in downtown Bangor, and both the New Writing Series at the University of Maine and the *Borders Books Series* offer readings by local and nationally known writers. Book signings, readings, and workshops are also held at BookMarc's, Lippincott Books, and Bangor Public Library.

And now, *Borders* is working in conjunction with Husson's Department of English to co-sponsor readings by well-known writers in the spring and fall semesters. With the advent at the college of a new English major, other opportunities are likely to enlarge the scope of Husson's writing community.

A serious writer learns soon enough that the publishing world is as competitive as any other professional endeavor. Yet, all writers start somewhere, first sending out their work locally and then gradually submitting further afield. Without community, without literary magazines like *Crosscut* to encourage emerging writers, an important step in this process would be missing,

Now open these pages and join the community. Read Ariel Powell's incisive look at the tyranny of high school gossip in her story, "Rumor." Wave as the President passes by and ponder your reaction to Rob Juckett's "Seeing Presidents." Plunge into the dynamic lines of poets Kristie Licata, Daniel Gallant, and others. And next year, consider submitting a work of your own. ❧

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Susmita Chatterjee

At the Hour of Dawn

As if in
A communion with the sublime exchange
Of light, in the far corners of the skies
Followed my existence
A trail of golden light, a crimson potency
My existence trailed in this communion
“This is it!” exclaimed I. forever longing and ever realizing
The world of light.
That was the communion I reached
And this the world bequeathed you me
In being love of the spirits domain
A story told by a seer of the past
A mind trailing towards the stars
At that moment of time I found
My existence a light, an ineffable purity
Towards a goal of completeness
And through the darkness of the night
Continues the search for the dawn
A day beyond.

Note: The Mind of the Christ is a universal reality. A complete growth and validity of the human mind is in the seeking of it.

Amanda Kitchen

Coming Back

Long ago,
when your touch was
embedded only in my imagination,
unreal to my fingertips and
skin,
I used to watch you
carefully
leave my room.
I studied your
smooth stride, those
anxious eyes
looking forward to
your next move—
And that is where I
lingered,
in the space where you were
here and gone.
I never told you, but
I didn't want you to leave,
even if you
just stood in my doorway,
because coming back
seemed so hard for you to do,
seeing your eyes in mine
seemed so hard for you to do.

But now, oh now,
how things have changed—
its funny what a little mix of
pressed time and
dishonest goodbyes can do.
You're laying
back to
but your eyes are shut,
they aren't anticipating your
next big move.
And I know
coming back
won't be so hard for you to do—
no,
you'll turn your body around,
melt your skin into mine,
and I know
it won't be so hard
for you to do.

Tiffany Hartshorn

The Hidden Daughter

It is five o'clock Saturday morning and the house is still. The curtains are closed, the cats are lying at the end of my bed slowly purring, and the reflection of the fire in the fireplace has slowly faded away. It is so peaceful, at least for fifteen more minutes. I slowly watch the clock, the minutes feel like hours and the hours feel like days. Just as I turn my head to look out the window, I hear him frantically fumbling with his keys. He tries the first key, then the second, and by the third time he has managed to open the door. I hear him carefully step into the house. He watches every step making sure the wooden floors do not creak. My husband stands there for a moment and then sits on the wooden bench, slowly unlacing his boots and neatly placing them under the bench. He then goes to the kitchen with his newspaper in hand and makes a fresh pot of hazelnut coffee. He grabs two coffee cups from the cupboard and fills them just enough so he will not spill any on the way upstairs. The aroma trails behind him and fills the room as he walks in. I quickly close my eyes, so he does not think he woke me up. He sits on the edge of the bed, softly kissing my cheek and whispering, "Good morning."

"Good Morning, Richard! How was New York this week?" He did not say anything, just rolled his eyes and told me to drink my coffee before it got cold. I could tell that work this week was stressful and I better wait till later to talk to him. After five minutes of silence, he started rambling on about how he hated being a stock broker in New York and how he disliked that he could never come home till the weekends. He had been complaining about his job for the past seven years and how he wanted to move. However, this morning

he said, "I want you to come with me this weekend to see the new house I want to buy."

"You want to buy a house? Where? Why?" I could not believe what I just heard, but I gave him a few minutes to explain.

"I have been looking at houses for about a month now because I want to be closer to New York, but I also want a change. I want to be able to come home every night and have dinner with you instead of spending hours on the phone discussing our days."

I was angry at the fact he did not mention this to me earlier, but I wanted to see what the house looked like and where it was. So that Sunday, we left for Rockland County, a little town on the outskirts of New York.

It took us about an hour and a half to get there and when we arrived, the real estate agent was waiting. He was a short, clean-shaven, stocky man dressed in khaki pants and a blue collared shirt.

"Good morning, my name is Morse and I'm going to be giving you a tour. I will answer any questions you may have." My husband and I smiled at each other, hoping that this house would be just what we wanted. The outside of the house was painted white with black shutters. However, the gutters were coming off of the outside and there were spots where the paint began to chip. The windows were dusty and full of debris, the lawn was overgrown with weeds, and the stairs to the porch were broken in. I was not impressed from the outside and wanted to leave at that moment, but I knew we had to see the whole house before we made any decisions. When Morse opened the door, we were bombarded by an old, musty moth ball smell, cob webs filled each corner of the house and white sheets lay on the dusty furniture. It was apparent no one had been living in this house for years, but it gave me that safe, welcoming feeling. There was a lot of work to be done, but it would keep me busy while Richard

was at work. I kept envisioning my little bench by the door and the hazelnut coffee brewing in the morning. We continued on the tour and when we got upstairs we got to this one room at the end of the hall. It was the last room we had to see and I kept trying to open it, but it would not.

"Why's the door not opening?" I asked.

Morse replied, "I don't know what to tell you. That door has never been open during the day. If you want to see that room you have to come back at night." My husband and I looked at each other puzzled and in disbelief.

Richard said, "You've got to be kidding me. Let me try." Sure enough he could not get it either. I could not help but laugh. "Oh well, we'll see it after we buy this house," I replied.

"You want to buy this house?" Morse asked.

"I know I do, but I have to check with Richard, but I'm sure he'll agree to it." I didn't have to say anymore because when I looked at Richard he just smiled and nodded his head.

For the next few days we signed papers and packed all our belongings in boxes. Each day I drove an hour and a half bringing as much as I could because I wanted to be in our house as soon as possible. I worked day and night cleaning and rearranging everything. By Thursday night, I had finished decorating our bedroom and I was too tired to drive back, so I decided to spend the night in our new house. I had just fallen asleep when I was suddenly awoken by a tapping noise. I tried to ignore it but it would not stop, so I slipped on my bathrobe and opened the bedroom door, but then it stopped. Nervously, I looked down the hall and the room that would not open earlier this week was open. My heart was pounding and my hands started to shake. I slowly walked down the hall and peeked my head around the corner of the door. It was a small room with a rocking horse, a little table set up for a tea party, a pile of stuffed animals in the

corner, and a bed against the wall. It reminded me of my room when I was a little girl and how I wanted to decorate my daughter's room, but Richard and I were never blessed with any children.

I just went back to my bedroom and woke up early the next morning only to find the door locked and closed again. It happened to me for the next two nights, first the tapping, then I would crawl out of bed, and as soon as I turned the doorknob it stopped. As soon as Richard came home Saturday morning I told him what kept happening to me, and of course he did not believe me, so I was going to prove it to him that night, but it never happened, nor did it the next night. Richard kept telling me it was a figment of my imagination, but I knew what was happening and what I saw in that room.

Richard left Monday for a business trip and would not be back until Friday. After I dropped him off at the airport, I went to Wal-Mart to pick up a little doll. I found one with blonde hair, blue eyes, and a little pair of overalls on. That night when the door was open I left the little doll on the bed propped up against the pillow. I decided to stay in the room for a while. I sat at the table and put all the stuffed animals around the table. I felt like a little girl again. The next night when I went into the room, the little doll that I had bought was around the table and there was a little note that said "Thank you." I did not know what was going on or even who wrote it. No one was in the room and no one had been in the house since we had moved in. Was this some practical joke? Who could it be? So the next night I left a note on the tea table saying, "I don't know who you are or where you are from, but I want to see you." I waited till the next night for an answer, but all I found was a hand drawn picture of a little girl. At the bottom it read, "My name is Madison and I was sent to you." I could not take anymore and could not wait for Richard to come home; this was proof that there

was someone in our house.

I picked him up early Friday morning and began telling him about my week. All he could say was, "Are you feeling okay?" I knew he was going to say that, so I pulled the drawing out of my purse and told him to look at it, but there was nothing there. I must have grabbed the wrong piece of paper before I left; it must have still been at home. Once we got home I searched everywhere for that picture but it was nowhere to be found. Richard told me to stop thinking about it and to enjoy the time we had together.

For the rest of the weekend, we went to the movies, dinner, and then at night we laid in each others arms. For the entire weekend we never heard the tapping or even saw the door open at the end of the hall. The house was silent for the next month, until Richard had to go away on business. That night after he left, the tapping started again and the door was open at the end of the hall. When I looked into the room there was a little note that said, "I've missed you, I hope everything is going well."

This strange behavior happened for many years and only occurred when Richard went away on business. I gave up trying to explain this bizarre occurrence to my husband because I knew he would never believe me. For many years we wrote notes and I bought her gifts. Then one night it all disappeared. There was no note and everything was in its place, the only thing that was left was the silver locket I had given her. Inside the locket was a picture of myself and a little girl. From that night, I never heard the tapping again and the door at the end of the hall was always open. ❧



– *Lucas Martin*

Thomas McCoy

Potatoes, Paranormal and Hooo-Hooo

In the late sixties, I was teaching at a small college in northern Maine. After a few years of apartment living in town, my wife found a beautiful farm for rent. Our first “official” duty, after moving from town out to the farm and unpacking a small number of items, was to paint the cupboards in the kitchen. Micki, who was pregnant with our first child, had gone to bed early and being in a new place far from town or neighbors, every sound was also new and carried with it a warning. After all, a boy from Atlantic City, New Jersey, and suburban Philadelphia was now in the heart of the wilds of Aroostook County and nouns like bear, moose, and bobcat carried with them grizzly, blood-soaked scenes of limbs ripped from bodies and lurid headlines in the Houlton Pioneer Times, “ Moose Shatters Door, Gores Hannigan Farm Renter to Death as He Paints Kitchen Cupboards.” A city boy’s senses were on high alert.

Around midnight, I heard what I was sure was a small crowd of people out in front of the shed that also served as the garage. This area, I was told, was called a dooryard. I opened the kitchen door and looked out. In daylight, when the shed door was open, you could see almost to the apple orchard about fifty yards away. When it was dark and the outside light over the shed door was on, only a small area, perhaps ten to fifteen yards in circumference, was illuminated. No people were visible. Nothing but the light showing an empty dooryard but beyond that, God knows what, but certainly no people. When I closed the door, the sounds subsided. About an hour later they started again. This time they seemed farther away but there also seemed to be more people.

This time, in an absolutely uncharacteristic but won-

derfully brave act, I threw open the kitchen door, strode out past our light blue VW Beetle and emerged into the pool of light. No one. Nothing. I looked right. I looked left. I narrowed my eyes and tried to peer through the darkness. Nothing. Nothing except a razor-fanged, hot breath beast I couldn't see biding his time. The best killers are the patient ones. But what about the real problem? Who were these people I could hear but not see? What was causing this? Perhaps someone was having a party and the sounds of the well-attended gala were being blown across the wide fields back to.....who was I kidding. In the potato capitol of North America, staying up past ten meant someone was sick. Parties were rare and only held during the safe light of day.

I went back inside, decided painting could certainly wait until tomorrow and with the sounds again no longer audible, went upstairs, having already decided not to mention what I had heard. I could just hear Micki. "I wish you would put your imagination to better use. People in the dooryard. Really, Tom." I stayed up again the next night. The noises came back but I didn't go out to check the source. The wind, probably. No need to fuss. This was the country. This was miles from town where you couldn't even see the nearest neighbor's house. Things were different out here. Get used to it.

The cupboards were finished, we bought some furniture, survived our first winter with a growing appreciation of something called a snow fence, someone called the plowman, and awaited the birth of our first son. He was born in mid April and when we were leaving the hospital in Houlton to drive back to Hodgdon and the farm, we were stopped by one of the nurses. She asked to see the baby. Micki pulled back the blanket. "Oh, my. Ain't he cunnin'," she exclaimed. Then she volunteered the uncomplicated but profound country wisdom regarding child rearing. "Jus' try tah not drop 'em on his head."

The months passed, seasons changed, the plowman

was known by name, and before we knew it, Mark, who we had dutifully managed not to drop on his head, was a few months from being two. He had got to that stage of development where instead of crying when he woke up, we could hear him babbling in long, animated sentences, having conversations composed of gibberish, laughing, having a wonderful time.

A few months after his birthday, his grandmother made the long trip from Philadelphia, brought a number of books for him, and after a few days in the country, the late afternoon shadows of the maples moving like dark liquid on the front lawn, the intense gossiping of the birds, and on one of those afternoons, a doe and her fawn shyly stepping out from behind the raspberry bush only to vault quickly away, my mother, speaking about Mark actually said, "It's a shame he can't read." She left the next day.

That evening, as I always did, I picked a book to read with Mark. It was one she had brought for him; one, of course, the poor blond moron could not read (What COULD she have been thinking?). It was the first time we had looked at the book. The illustrations were lovely and vivid. We had read about five pages when I turned the next one and suddenly, there was a sharp intake of breath and his body stiffened. He sat straight up and with a look of complete astonishment on his face, he pointed to the picture. "Hooo-Hooo," he said. "Dat my Hooo-Hooo!" His small finger was pressed against the picture of a sinister looking figure, dressed in a flowing, long, white gown. The figure, which looked female, also had a black mask on her face, the sort of mask the Lone Ranger wore. For the next few minutes he kept his finger pressed to the page, emphatically repeating again and again that it was his "Hooo-Hooo." Even though my poor retarded son couldn't read, he at least had an active imagination...just like his dad.

Before my mother had confessed her shame and sadness that a two year old had not yet learned to read, we had

committed to making the trip to my parents' summer place so my dad could see his grandson. A few weeks later, after a daily dose of explaining we were taking a trip, that it would be so much fun and finally packing the VW for our journey, we tried to get Mark into the car. He refused to budge. "Mark, PLEASE get in the car." "Ask Hooo-Hooo!" "What?" "Hooo-Hooo go." "What are you saying?" "Hooo-Hooo come." "Mark, get in the car!" "NO! Hooo-Hooo. Hooo-Hooo go!!" A conversation, bizarre by any standard, between a grown woman and a semi-grown man resulted in the semi-grown man going back into the house, walking to the bottom of the staircase and shouting, "Hooo-Hooo, we're going to New Jersey. If you want to come, we'd love to have you, but hurry up because we're leaving right now." I waited a few seconds, heard no response, and went back to the car. I told Mark Hooo-Hooo was free to join us if she wanted to. He got in the car, Micki got in, I got in, put the VW in reverse and with our four cats, one of them pregnant, staring at us like we were the worst humans on the planet, I backed out of the shed, stopped, then pulled the door shut to keep skunks, foxes, raccoons, porcupines and rabbits out of the bowls of cat food and water we had left out. As we passed the orchard, it remained unclear whether Hooo-Hooo had joined us or would meet us there, or was simply not interested in a seventeen-hour drive even though a dip in the Atlantic Ocean was one of the end results. For the parents and the child at least, it proved to be one of the worst trips anyone could ever take.

The highlights, in no order of priority, were each almost equally awful. The first morning as Mark was eating his breakfast with a fork, my mother told him to use a spoon for his soft-boiled egg. Micki and I were delighted that he had decided not to use his fingers or just stick his head into the bowl. My mother told him again, this time in a loud voice, "Mark, use a spoon!" He looked up at her then looked back at his bowl. In went the spoon. Outraged, my mother slapped his hand. As the spoon fell to the floor, he grabbed her hand

and bit it as hard as he could. Score one for the “I can’t read kid and who ain’t got no etiquette, either.”

The second night there, with another uncharacteristic burst of courage, I brought out a “baby banjo,” an authentic American antique, almost a hundred years old, a small beautifully handcrafted five-string instrument. I had learned to play the guitar a bit and the person who taught me, a virtuoso on the six-string and twelve-string guitar, also played the banjo beautifully. When he heard we were going to see my parents, he volunteered the instrument saying that very few people had ever seen anything like it and he knew my parents would be thrilled. We had worked on a tune I could actually play, and with a trembling sense of anticipation, I explained to my parents the history of the instrument, pointed out the unique fret work, the ivory inlays and then began a competent version of “Cripple Creek,” double thumbing my way into what I was sure would be nonstop and lavish praise from my mother and father. Maybe my kid couldn’t read, but damn, I could play. Before I got to the verse that says, “Girls up Cripple Creek are only half grown, jump on a boy like a dog on a bone,” my favorite verse, and, one which I intended to really “sell” vocally, my father got up and went into the kitchen to mix himself another Old Fashioned. From there he asked, in a voice loud enough to be heard over the “hammerin’ on” and “hammerin’ off” I had practiced so long to achieve, “How much did you say that little college pays you? It seems to me you could make twice that around here doing nothing.” I ended the concert more quickly than I had planned and the desire for praise of any kind was frustrated once again. But I had learned the tune, damn it, and somebody was going to hear it...hear it from start to finish. I got the retarded blond boy, went out the kitchen door, down the back stairs and sat in the grass. Mark had always loved music, and many nights, safe and happy in his mother’s lap, while one amazing and one embarrassing guitar player gave it their all, his little feet, covered

in those pajama bottoms, would go up and down, up and down. Maybe he couldn't read, but he had a great sense of time. He sat dutifully next to me as I double thumbed my way to an imaginary first prize at some famous festival in Virginia or North Carolina. Just before the final verse, he jumped up, crying out and hitting and gouging his thighs. He had sat on a small hill of red ants and they had feasted on both upper legs. Welts hardly describe what were already appearing. Agony hardly described what he was feeling. A frantic trip to the sundry store at the corner enabled us to smear some white powder over the bites and ease, if only a bit, his enormous discomfort. I didn't see anything that could ease mine. Letting your own son, mentally challenged as he was, sit in a pile of red ants would surely lead to a call from Social Services. And when I saw the look on his face as he tried not to scratch the bites....how foolish can a baby banjo player be?

The third evening my sister came from Washington, DC, where she was studying nursing. She forgot and left her prescription shampoo on the ledge of the tub. Mark came into the living room with the bottle in his hand, half the contents in his stomach. Among other things, the shampoo contained ether, alcohol and a number of things we couldn't pronounce. We poured two bottles of Epicac into him and waited for him to throw up the poisons. Nothing. So after a frantic call to Poison Control, we raced him across the causeway to the Summer's Point Hospital where an intern who didn't speak English finally gave up trying to understand what we were saying and gave us over to a very large, short haired woman with huge forearms who told us he'd have to have his stomach pumped out. It took two people to hold Mark down while another did the pumping. Midway through our child's agony, the large woman bent down over his wet, terrified face and screamed, "I bet you won't do that again, will ya?" As we carried him to the car, exhausted but flushed, he looked up and softly said, "Lesh go home." And with the

welts going down, the banjo wrapped back up in a blanket, and the possibility of my son having an uncontrollable hatred for large women that would lead to a sensational trial and substantial prison time-or worse- home we went.

I stopped in front of the shed door, opened it, and for some reason the smell of heating oil filled my nose. Perhaps it had something to do with the hundred or so gallons that had leaked out of the 500 gallon tank on the north wall and now covered the floor of the shed.

The cat's bowls still had some food and a bit of water in them, but no cats were in sight. Usually at the sound of the car they would appear from all compass points, knowing they could come in. As I stared at the enclosed pond of oil and wondered what to do, Micki started calling the cats, Mark flew by us, ran up the shed stairs, pushed open the kitchen door and was inside before we could stop him. As I had visions of little oily footprints everywhere, he screamed. I tore up the shed stairs, kicked off my shoes as I flung open the kitchen door, raced through the house, up the stairs, and there, in the middle of the upstairs hallway, he sat crying. I immediately picked him up and tried to comfort him, tried to find out what had happened, why he was crying so hard. After a minute or two, still in my arms and his mother rubbing his back, he sobbed, "Hooo-Hooo gone. My Hooo-Hooo gone."

The oil got cleaned up, the cats showed up, and the first delivery for the coming winter would include an extra hundred gallons. Micki and I were both grateful that whatever caused the tear in the connection from the tank to the furnace had not happened when the tank was full. The only problem was the cat who had been pregnant. She wasn't when we got back and we had no idea where the kittens might be or if they were ok. In a few days we realized they were under the front of the house, behind the tilted concrete stairs that made entering and leaving the front porch a test of balance. I got down on my hands and knees and peered in. I

couldn't see anything or anyone. Mama would flatten herself and slither in a few times a day and stay for what seemed like hours. We hoped that meant all were well, happy and regularly fed. We tried everything we could think of to get them to come out but nothing succeeded. They had been in there for more than a month. We finally decided they'd come out when they wanted and let Mama do what she wanted when she wanted while still marveling at her ability to make herself about three inches high two to three times a day.

In late August, a car came down the road and stopped in front of the porch. For those not familiar with the house, this porch looked like the main entrance. I went out and the fellow said he would clean our chimney if we needed it. "Wintah" would soon arrive and living way out here, "you folks ceahtenlee don' wan no chimneigh fieuh." We had installed a small Franklin Stove and even though we burned pieces of maple, we occasionally would toss a hunk of coal into the small firebox. He said that made a different kind of coating inside the chimney and could prove dangerous. He said it would cost ten dollars. Small price for safety. He'd be back in about a half hour with his equipment and his helper and take care of everything.

It took almost an hour but he returned in a truck with ladders tied on, coils of ropes, all kinds and shapes of black brushes, things that looked like lead buoys, and a number of tarps. His "helper" was very small, a few inches over five feet, hadn't shaved in about a week, and had the beadiest eyes I'd ever seen. They were so bloodshot even his pupils looked red. The plain fact was he scared me and when Mark came around the shed corner to see what was going on, I immediately picked him up. During a break in the activities, the beady-eyed man sat down in the grass next to the porch steps. Mark, whom I had put down some time before, ran into his lap and sat down with him. He almost snuggled. Here he was, completely comfortable in the lap of someone who clearly could be deranged, dangerous or both. Holding

Mark with one arm, he proceeded to role a cigarette with one hand while he talked in the softest voice to my son. Once his cigarette was lighted, he looked up and said, "You folks had any trouble with the ghost?" I'm sure I hadn't heard him correctly. "What?" Again he said, "The ghost. You folks had any trouble with the ghost?" "A ghost? What ghost?"

Sitting with his arm around my son, smoking a cigarette he had rolled, rolled with one hand, and these rat like eyes focused right on me, he told me that when he was a small boy, maybe six or seven, he had come with his dad out to this farm. The farm's owner had reported his wife missing and in those days, everyone joined in the search. Because it was such a long time ago, there were only horses and wagons and carriages, "right there," he pointed. Right there was the foundation of an old barn and in front of it part of the large dooryard. He said there were probably about forty people and they searched for three days and two nights and on the last night, as they all were gathered in the dooryard and getting ready to go back to town or the neighboring farms, the woman floated from the barn into the house. She floated. Those were his very words. "Floated 'bout ten feet off ah the ground. She had this long white gown on. We nevah saw her again." He told me that he remembered his father used to say people believed the man kept her chained in the back upstairs bedroom and that some people thought she eventually died chained up or he murdered her.

I was flabbergasted. Maybe I had heard the people who had come to look for her. Were those the noises I heard when I was painting the cupboards? Could Mark have seen her, spent mornings talking to her, and did she, for whatever reason, get angry and sever the oil tank's connection? Was Hooo-Hooo the woman who might have been murdered less than twenty feet from where he slept? There were so many questions. Did the woman he saw that evening have.....and just as I was about to ask, five very fat kittens emerged from under the house and began rubbing against the man who

years before had been right here, here where a woman in a long white gown had floated from right over there into the house. Kittens who had never seen a human being were rubbing all over this man and my son, sitting in his lap, although unable to fully understand the story he had just told, had evidently met this woman, become her friend and was heartbroken when he realized she had gone.

My son is now in his late thirties, has two beautiful children, and I often wish they too could have a Hooo-Hooo to talk with each morning. Perhaps they do. Perhaps that old farmhouse provided us with much more than shelter, peace, beauty. Perhaps it gave us a connection to profound forces that remain unseen but are deeply felt, lovingly remembered, the Hannigan farm that helped give voice to a major narrative of my life when I was young and asking ghosts to come to New Jersey. ❧

Kristie Licata

Heavens

She sits and waits.
I sit and watch.
She says nothing –
her body speaks loudly.

It shouts confusion
and emptiness.
She reaches for solid ground
but continues to drown in sweet tears.

Her spirit is a black hole.
Eyes explode like supernovas –
salty rain soaks the sky
putting out the Red Giants.

She looks to escape the void
searching for brighter skies.
Orbiting the sun
is where she dreams to be.

Kristie Licata

Replaceable

I'm like the tiny
white elastic band
I keep around my wrist.
I play with it,
I snap it,
I know it will be there
if I need to tie my hair up.
There are days I forget it.
Days I don't use it
And days I can't feel it there.
If it breaks
I'll replace it
with an identical twin.
I too am replaceable.
You've proven that to me today.
I was left behind
with the other elastics
waiting for my turn.
But it's alright – I'll shrug it off,
and you'll act like it's okay
that you didn't put me on
your wrist today.

Rabindranth Tagore
Trans. Susmita Chatterjee

The Maddening Breeze of a Rainy Day

In the maddening breeze of a rainy day
Awakes my maddened mind
To rush about on the untrodden territory pathless
Shall it ever homeward go?
Oh! no, no, no
All the walls have tattered down
And it shall never homeward go
Ah! in this rainy evening
Intoxicating
My dreams are drunken
With longings for the forbidden
Lonings for the unavailable
Lo! I shall never get the impossible
With all my longings.



“There Was Garbage Falling From The Sky”

– Xia Mim

Marlon P. Weaver

I Have Come To Understand

A woman needs love, romance and tenderness. The romance that a woman so desperately needs, one that she has dreamed of for so long is simply just not in some men to give.

Love is not something that blindly affects the innocent. Love is what two people choose to share that can make them guilty of many things.

A woman has that ability to find something in a man that makes him worth having.

The butterflies that you feel should be allowed to fly, to escape through your touch and through your kiss. Though the butterflies don't stay, they never leave you. There are always some more to take their place.

On that moment that I close my eyes for the last time, I want to see you; the reason that they were opened for the first time.

What inspires me the most is my one desire to be completely happy.

Watching her dance, the beauty in the way she moves, reminds me of a good conversation.

What I realize is that she already knows what I will say and she will be happier for me to say it and prove her right.

Love can be one sided, especially if we are on the same side.

Do not settle for that one especially if you know that you will not remain happy.

Do not pursue her especially if you know that she will not stop for you.

When we see each other, I hear our song playing and it hasn't even been written yet.

It is possible for two to be in love with what they can be together, but better to be in love with who they are together. ❧

I am thankful for the opportunity to share these thoughts with the readers of this publication. I have recently returned from the deserts of Kuwait and Iraq, where I spent 14 months contemplating the many things that I used to take for granted. I am presently pursuing a college degree, which will help me to use the gift of writing as a means of inspiring others.

Jim Reed

Polar-Bear Dip

For Warren Greeley

At noon on January 1st,
I jog down Belfast Harbor's boat ramp
and commit when the pavement hits the
 North Atlantic.
As cold water splashes above my thighs,
I chug frosty air, glance over my shoulder
for Warren's image, dive headfirst
into indifferent saltwater.

The quick-freeze is so numbing,
I rebound skyward,
yelping and thrashing,
lungs desperate for familiar air,
eyes for my friend.

Suddenly, frozen-grinned,
I charge up-ramp, plunge into
a smaller silent world.

Rumor

It is the same at all small schools, rumors are told and lies are spread. It never matters what clique you're in or who your friends are. You could be the nicest person in the world and friends with everybody but you still are subject to gossip. Every community thrives on gossip and rumors, nice gossip or lies.

Elizabeth was quiet and kind, a wallflower that nobody really noticed. She kept mostly to herself and had a few close friends. Elizabeth did really well in school and worked hard after school at the Holiday Inn as a maid. Elizabeth's family lived comfortably and she had a new car that she got for her birthday.

Elizabeth was a sophomore in high school. She was at an awkward age but she had a natural beauty that our society rarely appreciates. Bethy was figuring out who she was and coming into her personality.

Second quarter, after homecoming dance, it started. At first it was just a whisper but grew into a scream, like how a ripple becomes a wave. It was an abomination, she was pregnant. We were never sure of how it started, just that it was started. It was the beginning of her undoing.

"She's pregnant," they would whisper as she walked past.

"That one? I'm not surprised, just look at her."

"I wonder if she knows who the father is."

"How stupid can girls get? Getting knocked up now a-days, with all the contraceptives out there?"

"She should get an abortion."

"Maybe she already has."

"SLUT!!!" was yelled and she broke down, they laughed.

"Elizabeth Smith, to the principles office." She walked down the hall to the office in a complete daze, wondering what was going on.

"We heard that you are pregnant. We have informed your parents and they have asked that we talk to you about your options. It's not too late for you to have a life you know." The counselor said, looking very disappointed.

"WHAT! I'm NOT pregnant!"

"Will you agree to a pregnancy test?"

"No! I'm only in the 10th grade, I'm still a virgin!"

"We would like proof. Please calm down."

"No." Bethy walked out. She was falling apart. She had had enough. Bethy wasn't who they all thought she was.

For the next month the rumors swelled and overcame her, it was like a room with the walls closing in around her and there was no way out, she was suffocating and just wanted the silence that comes with freshly fallen snow to clean the words from her virgin ears. The rumors had changed to her having had an abortion. She went to school only half the time and the other half she slept or cried. Her few friends had abandoned her. Then she started her own plans to clear her name and start over.

Bethy came home Friday from school and got in the shower. She scrubbed her skin so hard it turned red; she was trying to get rid of her awful feelings. She felt dirty and horrible. When she got out she knew that it was going to have to happen tonight.

Bethy made herself dinner, since her parents had gone out for the evening. She made a salad for an appetizer, and her entrée was steak with potatoes, carrots, and bread. When she had finished dinner she made herself a banana split. When the meal was finished and the dishes were washed, Bethy watched The Breakfast Club.

Her body was tired and worn out from fighting her battle against the world of gossip; she had had all she could take. She drew herself a bath and put on a white camisole and

white boy-short underwear. Bethy lit some candles and took a note she had written out of her backpack and stuck it to the bathroom door. As she climbed into the tub she realized how nice the water felt. She sat there for a while drinking a glass of red wine staring at her father's straight razor. Bethy picked up the razor and cut deep into her right wrist. It was difficult to do because she was right handed, then she switched hands. This time it was easier to draw the razor across her wrist. She watched the blood pour out into the water. She listened to "The Used" and lay back into the water.

"It won't take long, I cut deep enough." thought Bethy.

As Bethy lay there she felt the life draining from her body. The water was stained red like the glass of wine she had drunk. Bethy closed her eyes and floated there in the bathtub. She felt as though she were spinning around and around, like on a tire swing but she didn't have the strength to make it stop. Death washed over her like a wave on the beach, she dreamed that she was lying on the sand.

Her mom was the first to find her: she said that Bethy looked like a sleeping angel laying there in the water; she was almost afraid to touch her. Her hair was floating around her head and her camisole was drifting in the still water. It was like the scene from Hamlet when Ophelia killed herself.

The coroner's report stated that she never had been pregnant and was, in fact, still a virgin. It also stated that there were no hesitation marks and that the death took less than a minute due to the severity of the cuts.

That's how it is at a small school; rumors spread and then tumble down like an avalanche. Everyone ends up hurt by rumors at least once, it's just some rumors push people over the edge.

Mom and Dad,

I'm so sorry that you two have to find out like this, but there was no other way. No matter how many times I say or scream that I'm not pregnant and never was no one would

ever believe me, not even you. I can't stay in this world if I can't make the rumors stop. I don't know how it started but it did. My life was over even if my heart hadn't stopped, so I ended it completely. What is done is done. I'm so sorry I have to put you two through this but it will never be as bad as being a girl who had lost the battle with a vicious lie. Put my corpse in the ground and let it rot away, like the rumors in the hall of a small high school.

I'm sorry. ❧

Jean Ostrander

Sonnet

I've lived on Mother Earth for decades eight,
Known war and peace, unforeseen boom and bust,
I've climbed some hills benumbed to my fate,
But plodded on aware full well that I must.
Attending classes has been passion dear,
To seek instruction, open worlds of thought.
A book is like unknown paths to clear,
Without a guide, exertion goes for nought.
A story paints some pictures for the mind,
It is joy to grasp the imagery,
My private movie like no other kind,
No peeking, only I can view it clearly.
A year of age does not inhibit learning,
From birth to grave the fire keeps burning.



– *Lucas Martin*

Daniel A. Gallant

To Love And Share

If you love me
Always share,
Do not hesitate
to love me but beware,

I will love you
Always that is for sure,
The best cure of ALL
Is to share your love,

Do not wait
To let someone know,
Love is a gift
So share with all!

Rob Juckett

Seeing Presidents

The President flew into Bangor in September for a campaign rally at the airport and spoke to a couple thousand people about his resolve. All the area Republicans received a postcard telling them they could get two tickets for free. My wife got one; I didn't, not being of the ruling party.

"You gonna go?" I asked her one day at lunch.

"Yeah, I think so. It'll be exciting."

"You takin' the boy with you?"

"Sure, now that he's a registered Republican." Dig.

My son had turned eighteen only two days before. He had picked up a voter registration card at Bangor High, filled it out, and returned it. Good idea, registering at school. Makes it easy for the kids and promotes involvement. Bad idea, telling Dad after the fact. He registered with Selective Service too. On line, for cryin' out loud. Again, it's easier. More convenient, promotes compliance. So, he did what he was supposed to do. Good boy. He's got nothing to worry about; it's an all-volunteer army now.

My dad had World War II to worry about when he was eighteen, so he volunteered. Back then volunteering gave you the opportunity of choosing Army or Navy. He would have chosen the Navy (who wouldn't?) but his infantile paralysis, a form of polio, had left his right foot an inch shorter than his left foot, and he was classified 4-F. So he went to college. His favorite saying about Army versus Navy was one he didn't follow. "When you is in the Army and you gets shot, there you is. But when you is in the Navy and they sinks your boat, where is you?" He was the class of 1943B, one semester early.

By the time I turned eighteen, in 1969, there was the

college deferment. So I didn't really have Viet Nam to worry about as long as I was a full-time student. Plus, the direct draft had been replaced by the lottery. Three hundred and sixty-five dates were put in a drum and drawn, one by one. My birthday came up number two hundred and forty-three. Viet Nam never went higher than about one-fifty. And by the time I graduated in 1973 the war was finishing up. I knew I'd never go. So I joined the Peace Corps – just to go somewhere.

My grandfather was drafted for World War I, the Great War. He didn't get the call until late, but he finally reported and ended up in New York City with his assigned bunk on the troop transport to France. He was scheduled to sail on November 12, 1918, his birthday. The Armistice was signed on November 11. He never sailed.

On a Thursday afternoon the two of them went to see the President. My wife called the high school so my son could get out a bit early. I even made sure they had a new roll of film in the camera. (That's selflessness for you.) I got home from work early and they weren't there, so I flipped on the TV and one of the local stations had the speech live. I listened. The President wore a blue dress shirt, no tie. Kind of walking the narrow line between white collar and blue collar. He spoke longer than I had expected. Maine was a swing state. It was the first time either my wife or my son had seen a President. Even though the airport is less than fifteen minutes from our house, they wouldn't be home for a while. I turned off the television and sat down on the front steps to wait for them.

I had seen a President. A couple weeks before my eleventh birthday the President went to Philadelphia for the Fourth of July, the 186th anniversary of the USA. My father asked me if I wanted to go downtown to Independence Hall to see him and of course I said yes. We were living out in the suburbs of Philly and had to take public transportation in. Dad was a small-town boy at heart and driving into center

city was something he avoided. Plus, it was easy to go on the subway.

It was a hot day. We walked down the hill from our house and caught the Red Arrow bus to 69th Street. Red Arrow was the suburban line and 69th Street was the western-most extent of the PTC lines. We walked through the concourse from the buses to the subway, passing small shops and eateries, news stands and a shoe shine man. "Tell you what," Dad said. "When we're comin' home, we'll stop at Nedick's for an orange drink and a glazed doughnut; whadda ya say?"

"Okay!"

Getting a seat in the el was no problem since we were at the Terminal. Dad gave me the window seat in the silvery aluminum car. The only thing we carried was our 8mm movie camera. We didn't have a decent film camera, just a Kodak box. But I knew this was something special because we'd brought the movie camera. "Now listen, when we get downtown you stay close to me, okay? There's gonna be a big crowd and we don't want to get separated."

"Okay. We'll be able to see him, right?"

"I hope so, but we'll be pretty far away."

I thought about that as the train pulled out of the Terminal. On TV I always saw the President shaking hands with people as he walked through crowds. That was what I had imagined. But now Dad said we'd probably be far away. I didn't like that idea of being lost in the crowd.

The second stop on the el was at 63rd Street, up above the big Sears and Roebuck store where we went occasionally.

"There's Sears," I said.

"Yep. Ya know, Ted Williams is working for them now."

"He is?"

"Yep. He's helping them with sporting goods."

"Baseball?"

"Baseball, yeah, and fishing rods."

"Fishing rods?"

"Oh yeah. Ted Williams is a big fisherman."

Through the numbered streets of West Philly, I looked down on the row homes. Then we went underground. Finally, the big station at 30th Street, then under the Schuylkill to Center City, 15th Street.

“Don’t we get off here?” I asked.

“Not today. We’re going down to 8th Street.”

I remember running up the steps to the street and how the heat of midday was so warm and there were so many people. “Stay close now,” Dad warned.

The front of Independence Hall was already packed with people. We walked into the crowd. “I guess this is as close as we’re gonna get,” Dad said.

I turned and saw, at the end of the mall, the big blue and white helicopter. Within ten minutes we were surrounded by people and I couldn’t see very well. A man stood next to me with a transistor radio in his hand. “...the President and Mayor Tate are coming up onto the stage now ...” The mayor spoke first, but briefly. Then everybody started clapping and cheering as the President stood at the podium. Dad looked at me, then bent down so I could hear what he said. “Can you see him?”

“No.”

“Tell you what; get up on my shoulders.”

“Huh?”

“Get up on my shoulders. You’ll be able to see up there.” He squatted and I put one leg over each of his shoulders and he grabbed my ankles. “Okay?”

“Yeah.”

He stood up and... “Wow! I can see everybody!”

The President had started speaking, about the Founding Fathers and the courage they had. The President was always very concerned with courage.

“You can see him?” Dad asked.

“He’s pretty far away.” We were perhaps halfway back in the crowd, which filled about half of the open, grassy mall.

“Here...Why don’t you take the camera and shoot some

film." Dad held up the movie camera and I took it. "You know how to use it, don't you?"

"Yeah. Just push the little button."

"Right. I already turned it on." He gripped my ankles firmly and I felt comfortable up there. I accidentally bumped his head with the camera. "Ouch!"

"Oops, sorry."

Dad's hair was red, like mine, but mine was brighter. Having red hair was one of the primary ways I identified myself at age ten almost eleven. I'd heard somewhere that the President had auburn hair and I asked my mother what color that was. She told me it was reddish-brown. Reddish...

I could see the President but I could not make out his facial expressions. He was a point in the distance, somehow connected to the amplified voice that blasted over Independence Mall and the tinny, staticky voice from the man's transistor radio.

"He's pretty far away, Dad."

"Go ahead and film a little bit."

"How much?"

"Oh...ten seconds."

I looked through the viewfinder and pushed the button. The camera hummed. "Okay, that's ten seconds." It was getting hot up there on Dad's shoulders in midday July sunlight.

"Why don't you just shoot the rest of it," Dad suggested.

"All of it? To the end?"

"Yeah. There's not much. Go ahead and shoot it."

Maybe ten more seconds of film ran through the camera, then stopped.

"Okay," I said. "That's all."

Everybody clapped at something the President had said. I watched.

"You wanna get down?" my father asked.

"Yeah, okay."

A few minutes later everybody clapped for a long time and people started moving around and walking.

"That's it," Dad said.

"The man with the radio still stood near us and I heard the commentary. "The President and Mayor Tate have walked into Independence Hall...the President is looking at the Liberty Bell and now he's smiling and joking with the Mayor . . . Shortly,

the President will get in the limousine for the short ride to the Presidential helicopter and his return to the Capital..."

"Hey, Dad, did you hear that?"

"Yeah, I did." Dad looked up at Independence Hall, then turned and looked down the mall to where the big helicopter waited. He turned back toward the old, historic building, then glanced at me. "Well, he's got to get to the helicopter, but I don't know which street they'll drive down, the one on the left over there or the one on the right. We might as well walk over here." He nodded toward the right and we walked in that direction. I knew what he was talking about; I could see the problem. Which street would the motorcade take to drive the block and a half from Independence Hall to the helicopter? The one on the right side of the mall or the one on the left?

We stood at the edge of the mall and looked to our left toward Independence Hall.

"Let's move up here," Dad said, and he worked his way to the street. We couldn't get to the curb; a woman stood in front of us, but I had a good look up and down the street, lined with wooden horses all along. The woman in front of us was leaning forward with her hands on the wooden horse and straining to see down to the left. I noticed that she had a long-stemmed red rose in her right hand. Dad stood behind her and said "Uh-oh."

"What?" I reacted.

"Look over there. See the street sign? One way."

I saw it. The black and white arrow pointed left, toward

Independence Hall.

"We should go to the other side," I said.

"No, let's stay here," Dad said. "You never know. They stopped the traffic on this street, so they might come this way."

"Okay." But I figured Dad had chosen the wrong side. This was a one-way street, going the wrong way. Dad was looking to the left. I couldn't see much more now, other than the press of people around us and the signs across the street that said 6th St. and ONE WAY β. I looked around some more. Up near Independence Hall, I saw police lights flashing red and white. Dad was watching, too.

"What do you see?" I asked.

"Just the motorcycles."

"No car?"

"Nope, but I probably can't..."

I heard a cheer and clapping from the place we looked to.

"Whoop! Here they come!" Dad said as I tried to see. People down the street to our left were waving and cheering.

"Is he coming?"

"Yep. Here they come." Dad glanced down at me. "Get up again."

"What?" But I saw him squat as he had before and I climbed onto his shoulders for a second time. He stood up.

"How's that?"

"Great! I can see them coming!"

His hands again gripped my ankles and held me steady. A line of Philadelphia motorcycle police was almost to our position along the curb.

"There're cars behind the motorcycles," I called.

"Yeah, I see them. Stay still up there."

"I will."

The motorcycles started to pass us and I saw the people

reacting as the cars also approached. They were moving pretty slowly. Suddenly the woman in front of Dad started jumping up and down and waving her long rose in the air. I'd never seen an adult behave like that. She was actually jumping into the air. She bumped into Dad once but kept on jumping. The wave of cheering was getting closer.

"I can see him!" I shouted. It was getting noisy around us now. "He's not in the first car."

Dad said something but I couldn't understand him. Then he raised his hand and I saw the movie camera. I took it. The motorcycles had passed and the first of three black, convertible limousines was only a few feet away. Some men in business suits were walking alongside the limousines. That's how slowly they were moving.

"There he is! There he is!"

"I see him," Dad said.

In the second car, sitting in the back seat on the right side, the side near us, was the President. I held up the movie camera, knowing that it was futile. I got a clicking sound. I lowered it.

I was above the crowd. Dad held my ankles. People were cheering and clapping. I watched the car approach. I could see him clearly. The woman in front of us was leaning forward now, waving her rose. I heard her screeching. There he was, just to the left. The car was moving very slowly. He wore a blue suit, a white shirt, and a dark red tie. I raised my hand and waved, but he was looking at other people. As if choreographed specifically for me, the car slowed and stopped directly in front of us. The woman at the barrier screamed and suddenly threw her rose directly at the President. A man beside the car tried to catch the rose but it landed in the back seat at the President's feet. The man stepped forward and spread his arms, pushing right up against the woman. I turned and looked down the street to my right. The motorcycles had stopped and the policemen were moving the barriers along the edge of the mall. I shouted "Hi!" and waved

my arm, but the President was waving at other people. He had red hair, obviously red, and he had a tan. Another man stood in front of us looking at us frantically.

"Hi!" I shouted again, just as the limousine started rolling forward. The President waved at the crowd and then he looked up at me.

"Hi ya!" he smiled, and then he was beyond us.

I watched the car all the way to the end of the mall, where it turned in and I couldn't see it any more. Dad stepped back and I climbed down.

"Wasn't that something?" he said.

"He was right in front of us. He was right there. Did you see? He was right there."

"I saw him alright. We had a good look, huh?"

"Did you see him? He was right in front of us. He looked at me. Did you see him say Hi ya? Did you see? Did you see?"

"Sure I saw. Too bad about the camera, huh?"

"Yeah."

"We sure had a good look, huh?"

"He had red hair. Did you see that? He had red hair."

We watched as the rotors of the helicopter started to turn, and then, in mounting whine and rapid chop, the blue and white rose, moved in air off to the right, sound fading, and disappeared behind the buildings. Suddenly the sun was hot and my shirt was damp.

"He had red hair, Dad."

"That's right."

"He looked right at me."

"That's right. He saw you. Pretty good, huh?" That was Dad's standard comment on anything that went well, expected or not, mildly pleasing or wildly exhilarating.

"Yeah, pretty good."

I sat there, swatting late-season mosquitoes, for a little while longer. The traffic was probably bad getting out of the airport. But shortly they showed up. I watched our red car

pull into the driveway, and stood up.

“Well did you see him?” I asked.

“Yeah,” my wife said. “He was pretty far away, but we saw him.”

“Was it exciting?” I looked at my son.

“Yeah, really exciting. There were a lot of people.”

“I watched on TV,” I said.

“You did? That was nice of you,” my wife commented.

“You’re not a Republican.”

“Well,” I said, “I wanted to see what you saw. After all, it was the President.”

Lucas Martin

Then

Smell strikes the left brain
Memory senses the familiarity
No immediate connection made
Rush of memories and worries un-weighted

Changes of season mostly, old memories found
Dry spring sun thawing snow and softening the matted
ground
Cool fall breeze wafting the smell of bark and piles of Play-
ing beside the house at Grams, getting stung by the
bee's nest up in the eaves

When a trip to the store could make or break the weekend
Five cent pretzels, ten cent Hershey bars
Red wooden clapboard store with a Schlitz sign
Creaky dark stained planks, musky between the cracks

Changes in street character sometimes
Forgotten fences, abandoned house that belonged to the
Jensons
The mossy hammock covered with spiderwebs
Old dusty bottles and rods in the back shed

Twig stream races at the side of the road last for hours
Getting called a mean name, pukas could make you cry
One pair of shoes for everything, unless your folks made
you
Stay for hours at a playground with one swing and a
sticky slide

Seemed we were always staging a large fair or carnival in
the backyard

Demolition obstacle course for bikes in the dirt road
Building incredible snow jumps with only ten feet of hill

Peering into rundown buildings at the bottom of the street
Wondering what went on there, who's in there.

Neighbors' concrete steps imbedded with marbles
engrossed the eyes

Scary old man who gave out the giant Mr. Goodbars on
Halloween

Changes of friends mostly, growing out of fads and out of
our cousins' clothes

Falling in and out of six year old crushes, snapping out of
thirty second grudges

That was one beautiful smell

Windows on the World

Stonington is a quiet little village on the southernmost tip of Deer Isle. It is a village with one main street running parallel to the sea and a few minor roads leading away from the town and docks. The docks are where the fishing boats unload their catches while hundreds of seagulls hover in the air hoping for a handout.

The best place for me in this town was my aunt and uncle's cottage right on the waterfront. This was a small house whose focal point was a glassed-in sunroom. This was situated on the backside of the house overlooking the town docks to the left, the ocean straight ahead, and a very close neighbor on the right. It was from this room that we could watch the comings and goings of things in town as well as the lobster boats and sailboats traversing the thoroughfare. For me residing in Ellsworth, a trip to Stonington and this house was always a welcome excursion.

Looking straight towards the ocean from this room were two interesting landmarks. One was the foundation of a former shack, probably used by a lobsterman, which had long gone before my pilgrimages to this place. At low tide, my sister and I used to climb over the seaweed-covered rocks to this little area. In fact, this was one of our favorite pastimes, seeing how far we could walk out on the rocks before we had to turn around to beat the incoming tide.

The other landmark was much farther out in the bay, Two Bush Island. This island was exactly as its name suggests: an island with two bushes, possibly pine trees, on it. Every other July 4th it was used for shooting off fireworks. On those years, we had front row seats to a wonderfully spectacular event.

Whenever I had the opportunity to stay overnight, I would sleep in the attic room with its slopping ceiling. The only windows were on each end of the room. My sister and I would always sleep by the one overlooking the sea. It was here that I would wake up to the sound of the gently lapping waves, a distant foghorn, seagulls hunting for their breakfast, or the sound of lobster boats leaving the harbor.

This experience has left an indelible mark upon me. Two years ago I visited my sister in Seattle. The first morning there I was just waking up when I heard a seagull cry. My mind immediately flew to mornings waking up in the attic room in Stonington. I did not want to open my eyes and break the spell of that memory. This cottage in Stonington was one place where a person could go, sit back, watch life go by, and not be worried that time or life was passing by because you were in an ideal place, at an ideal time, and there was no hurry to return to the hustle and bustle of the everyday world. ❧

Jim Reed

Waterwalker

She walks across the wind-swept pond,
shuffles over shoreline snow drifts,
heads uphill through beeches
until snowshoe hare tracks cross her path.

Considers following those stepping stones:
Huge rear feet outside and ahead of forefeet.
Instead, envisions those tracks crossing the brook
where, with one foregone leap,

the red fox snuffles a childlike cry,
silences its white prey.
Images of bloody and scattered fur
fracture the miracle of life everlasting.

So she step high over the tracks,
walks on up the path, where a partridge,
buried in its shelter beneath a hemlock,
explodes in a blaze of white promise.



– *Lucas Martin*

Jean Ostrander

The Owl And The Pussycat

(with apologies to Edward Lear)

It was whispered to the high and might King of Wild Animals that there had been a mixed animal marriage.

"Doesn't it say in the Book of Wild Animals that that is an abomination?" he growled. Send out the best intelligence agents to capture those varmints. And I want a detailed report!"

Two seasoned spies set out. In time, they submitted their account.

A horny owl was looking for a mate when he discovered a white fluffy kitten near a lake, gazing at nothing in particular. The owl was impressed by what he saw and asked her to go for a ride in his pea green boat. (He may have been wise but not very imaginative. Pea green? Why didn't he choose tangerine or magenta?) She knew she was afraid of water but sitting in a boat seemed safe, so she consented to get in.

It was a balmy evening, a soft breeze came up, carried the boat away from shore, and it bobbed around gently. Fortunately, the owl had the forethought to bring some food and his guitar. They chatted. They ate a little. They gazed at the stars. Then owl got out his guitar and sang to Miss Kitten, telling her she was beautiful and "my love". Miss Kitchen said that he was an elegant fowl and sang charmingly sweet. After one night of song and laughter, they agreed to marry.

Not so fast. The boat bobbed around for a year and day before they hit land. They still had marriage in mind but they needed a ring. Lucky day. A pig with a ring in his nose greeted them. Owl bought it from him for a

buck. They found a turkey to perform the ceremony and they were about to begin a life of wedded bliss.

First a little celebration. They dined on mince and slices of quince from runcible spoon. Yes, they danced by the light of the moon. Then they disappeared.

The agents searched for⁴ what seemed like a century when they met an old goat from whom they learned that Mrs. Owl longed for a fireside, a basket of yarn, and soft food from a can. Owl was bored. He needed to get out at night.

It was an amicable separation. The animals were spared the humiliation of being chastised or worse.

The agents failed their assignment and were promoted.

King of Wild Animals fumed. He had been deprived of a chance to harangue and publicity spectacle. ❧

Lucas Martin

- 1. To**
- 2. Do**
- 3. List**

There's nothing to do with a Saturday except

Drink tepid tea

Fight with porch squirrels

Stare at birds and pretend to know their genealogical names.

Make lists of things to do

Cross off things done on an old list of things to do

Add up the delicate monies spent: dinner, gas, coffees, books, ice creams

Perform advanced calculus to arrive at a golden I owe you.

Floss even numbered teeth, save odd teeth for Sunday

Put "floss odd teeth" on a list of things to do for Sunday.

Take a mesh onion bag and fill it with ancient dryer lint and cellophane

Then tack this birdy bag up on the porch beam

Sweep the mess of seeds and lint off the astroturf porch

Fight about who made the last "things to do" list.

Look back at receipts to know who bought the note pad that we write our to do lists on

Clean the sheet of random hair which enjoys frolicking in the corners of the bathroom

Sit down on the couch to regain strength

I will need that strength to finish Sundays to do list.

The sound of a high wall furnace vent blowing while doing
push ups, Weoowa weeoowooow weoowaa
Sound of a nail dropping off the countertop

~~4. Must remember to write about great noise of that nail
dropping off the countertop in my new poem.~~

Lucas Martin

Bangor Beer

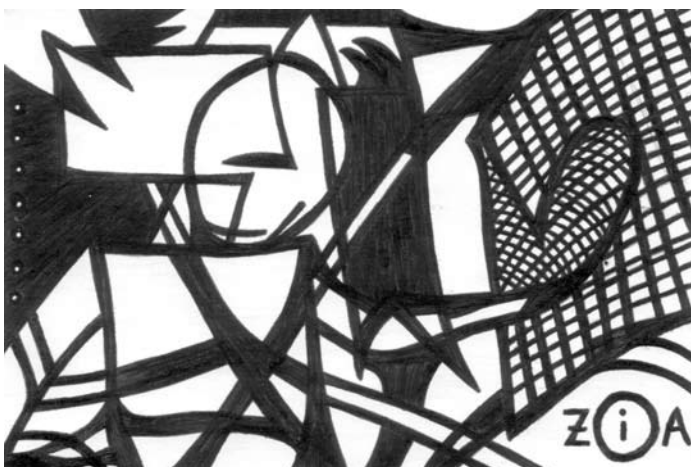
One more traffic light, then I can have my beer
Stop and get twenty, park, yes now I can have the
beer

Listening to Turin Brakes, watching the Penobscot
The first of a few good-bye pats to my old friend.

Trees on the riverbank are cunningly planted
As if they are asking me to play two hand touch.

Joshua Chamberlain Bridge massive and strong
Green guardrails and giant straight lamp posts
Amber light casted through three windows
Weeping through the top of an old Brewer church.

I must drive home to the yellow lights
Before the Fosters and river tuck me in.



“Playing Tennis In The Early 1980s”

– Xia Mim

Bruce Pratt

A Wittol's Wager

Levin lounged in a wing chair in the reading room of the Ivy Club, his back to the massive fieldstone fireplace, and stared at the hillsides beyond the city. Spring rioted. Robins flitted between lilac hedges and the new green shoots beneath the open window. The *Courant* lay on his lap, and he picked at liver spot on his left wrist with the forefinger of his right hand. The tepid remains of his noontime drink sat on a table to his right. A susurrus, lilac-scented breeze stirred the long white tails of the curtains, raising them like the arms of praying Muslims, as a maid, her slippers sliding over on the rich oriental rug, crossed behind him unnoticed.

One of his firm's founding partners, Levin was entitled to an office for life, but as his legal interests waned, and he discovered that he was drifting from his professional friendships without regret, he had resolved to give his up corner office at seventy, and had adopted the practice of leaving each day at noon. After stopping at the men's room, he took the stairs to the lobby, crossed the street to the cab stand where he bought a paper, and was seated in the club's dining room by a quarter past. An hour later Levin was settled into the same quiet chair browsing the *Courant*, relishing local news: the son of an acquaintance nabbed for DWI, a neighbor's daughter on the Dean's List, meetings of the Valley Stargazers Society, programs at the Ecumenical Center. He devoured the monthly divorce notices, noting often names of the firm's junior partners, then crafted a reason to speak with that person and put a face on the misfortune.

Levin folded the paper and dozed. Undisturbed by the insistent tick of the antique Seth Thomas on the mantle behind him, a dream of his first wife, Leah, spread over him like claret across the chest a white dress shirt. When the

clock unleashed twin, deep bongos, Levin started, scattering the Courant. Clearing his mouth with his tongue, he gathered the paper, and, shaking his head like a stunned fighter, pushed on the arms of the chair to rise at the moment he noticed Marshall Sellors hurtling into the room.

Sellors, short of breath as if he'd hurried a long way, said, "Have a moment?"

Levin eased back into his chair, wetting his arid lips with his tongue. "I have many moments," he said, grinning at his meager joke.

Dropping into the chair beside Levin, Sellors said, "It's best we're alone."

"Been served divorce papers?" Levin said. "Rather common in the firm these days."

Sellors leaned toward Levin. "I had lunch with Jeff Mulready at The Shamrock," he said, lowering his voice with each word. "They have those snugs like in Ireland."

"And?" Levin said.

The maid returned. Sellors paused until she passed out of the room. "I saw Kathy, with a man, in the snug adjoining ours. I'm sure I'm not the only one who noticed."

"Six one or two, light brown, almost blond, hair, waxed mustache?"

"That would be a fair description. I didn't stare," Sellors said.

Levin sat forward. "Michael Klaskell. Art professor. Having a show at the Birdsall. Kathy did the posters. Odd choice in some ways," he said.

"You know?" Sellors said.

"I've wondered, but he isn't the first."

"You're bullshitting me," Sellors said. When Levin did not answer he said, "They were being quite affectionate, Alan."

Levin smiled. "Kathy is most affectionate with me as well, though it must be exhausting for her at times," he said.

"You did a prenupt?" Sellors asked.

"No," Levin said. "I find them distasteful."

"As an old friend," Sellors said, "I'd advise you to do something about this."

"As my friend or as my lawyer?" Levin asked. "Besides, then it would be in here," he said slapping the paper.

"It'll be around town soon enough," Sellors said.

"Kathy takes good care of me," Levin said, a smile smoothing the creases in his face. "She's flighty and impulsive. Absent that I've little to complain about."

"I'm not sure I believe you," Sellors said, his voice rising.

"It's not like she's screwing the whole town," Levin said. "These flights are short. When the geese wing south, Klaskell will be gone. He'll want her for himself, and she'll fly home." Levin paused. "She's incapable of meanness."

"Infidelity isn't meanness?" Sellors said.

"We've been together ten years, married eight. She has her studio, I have the office and this club." Levin said, "Besides, I imagine she does not think of these affairs as a crime."

Sellors folded his hands on his stomach. He said, "Making out in a bar may not be a crime, but..."

"Making out?" Levin asked.

"Holding hands," Sellors said.

Levin laughed. "I thought you didn't stare."

"She kissed him goodbye, Alan," Sellors said, "She's being indiscreet, open, it's like a dare."

"I agree she's being indiscreet, and I would prefer that were not so." Levin said rubbing an eye with the back of his fist. "When Leah was dying, I wanted to recall how we first were. We'd been getting along poorly—seventy-five hour weeks, missed dinners, nights alone. If not for her cancer, I'd have lost her to another man." Levin picked again at his wrist. "In twenty-two years, when Kathy is my age, the actuaries say I'll be dead. Death will do us part, not Michael Klaskell."

"I'd think you'd care for appearance's sake," Sellors

said.

Levin laughed. "Appearance? The firm's or mine? Is it scandal that worries you?"

Sellors sighed. "Damned if I know why I told you."

"You're loyal," Levin said. "I turned down the bench, preferring to advocate than preside. I'm pained by my wife's public insensitivity, but loathe to judge her and I'll not risk losing her for a convention of society," he said.

Neither man spoke. Marshall rose. "I have a three o'clock with Mike Laughton, he'll ask after you," he said.

"Give him my best," Levin said.

Sellors set his hand on Levin's shoulder. "I can understand wanting to hold onto Kathy, but I'd wager it's a mistake," he said.

Wager then. A bottle of Midletons," Levin said. When Sellors did not answer, he said. "I insist."

"All right," Sellors said. "Terms?"

"I die married to Kathy, you drink it as you remember me. She leaves me, we kill it together."

"Fair enough," Sellors said, offering his hand.

Dust devils swirled up from the river scattering loose winter sand, commingling bus fumes with the scent of forsythia and dogwood. Levin tipped the attendant, eased into his car and drove west, passing the The Foxx School for Girls, where Kathy once taught art, the glassy Westend Medical Arts Building where he had learned that no protocol could save Leah from her dividing cells, Hillside Cemetery where his father lay buried miles from his wife, Levin's mother, interred in Florida by a second husband, the Birdsall Art Museum, its portico garlanded with banners for Klaskell's show, the glinting spire of the Jesuit Seminary, as the ashy ends of the city disappeared in his rearview.

He stopped at Valley Florist for cut flowers, then turned onto North Farms Road, imagining Klaskell at that moment retrieving his watch from the table on his side of the bed, his manhood slack and wet, his clothes thrown on the chair

where Levin sat to tie his shoes. He saw Kathy reading her own watch, then bursting from the covers in a quick, windy motion, gathering the sheets to bring to the basement to launder, and hurrying Klaskell to dress. He saw them kissing at the door, Klaskell's shirt untucked, Kathy, naked, holding the bedclothes in her arms, shivering.

Levin stole up onto a snaky line of cars trailing a school bus, a stab of brake lights scattering his visions. Such delays were recent, spawned by the labyrinths of subdivisions and cul de sacs that scaled the deciduous hills and deserted orchards like heliotrophic tendrils reaching for the summit of the mountain. Levin considered another route as the bus idled and flashed; children, bent beneath knapsacks and waving bright papers, raced across the street to waiting mothers, but he could think of no other way home.

The line lurched up the hill, stopping for the bus to disgorge more children. Levin punched in a cassette, *Get Your Kicks*, a birthday gift from Kathy, remembering a July afternoon, hand-painted Route 66 signs directing him to the studio, a champagne picnic spilling from a wicker creel, Kathy perched on a stool beside an easel festooned with balloons. As he entered she shed her short sundress, twin red sixes drawn on her stomach. Fanning her fingers, each nail a different color, she'd turned to reveal smaller sixes, one on each buttock, one bisected by the nubby vertebrae of her spine. Downshifting at the foot of Pinnacle Hill, Levin conjured sweating slate beneath his back, Kathy's nipples teasing his nose, post-coital brie and salmon, her fragile fingers coaxing his shriveled root to a second life, the muscle-cramping heave of his body, rhythmic clicking in her throat, summer's salt on her neck.

Levin gunned up his driveway and rolled into his garage. He stared a moment over the valley before lowering the door. The Audi's engine ticked. The scent of tumid earth invaded his nostrils. Dark forest lands, wind-stirred and unleaved, stretched below him, sinking sunlight spread bony shadows

of naked maples on the brown fields, and a kettle of hawks spiraled above the river, riding dying thermals into the western ridges. The hood of Kathy's jeep, cool to his touch, was spattered with bird droppings, gray discs with black bull's-eyes. Levin noticed her purse on the front seat.

In the kitchen, he washed his hands, clapped water onto his face, and dried with a dish towel. A fragrant pot simmered on the stove. Levin scanned the mail on the counter and placed his keys into a hand-thrown bowl that gathered the odds and ends of the room: a paper clip, half a roll of breath mints, and unbroken wishbone, hook-eyes, a capless pen, a roll of clear tape, a battery, matches, lip balm, ticket stubs from The Birdsall Ball, a molly bolt.

Levin crept up the flagstones to Kathy's studio, remembering that before he'd hired Wade Finnegan to add skylights and windows, heat and water, and a woodstove to give his new wife a place to work, that it had been a stable, and he recalled Leah's Arabian, Blaze, and the nights he'd spent after her death in the dark stall feeding it apples and listening to its baleful nickerings, before he had the courage to sell her.

Kathy sat on a stool, hunched over the sink, cleaning brushes, a poster for Klaskell's show rested on her easel, April 15-30, 1998, painted in soaring script. She whistled, more breath than music, nodding her head and fanning her brushes, a clatter of bracelets ringing against the stainless steel like the voices of quarrelsome crows, unruly, auburn tresses fleeing her barrette.

Levin's shoe creaked. Kathy flew off the stool dropping the brushes, cleaving a hand to her chest.

"Jesus," she said.

"I was afraid I'd disturb you," he said, "You looked busy."

"I got back late," she said, looking at her bare wrist, "I had to touch up the poster and make dinner."

"The kitchen smells great," Levin said, loosening his tie,

and tossing his suit coat onto a chair.

"Just some leftovers I heated up as a stew," she said.

Kathy scooped up the brushes. Levin set the flowers by the sink. Pressing her nose to them she said. "These smell nice, too. What's the occasion?"

"Nothing," Levin said, struck by the thinness of her fingers, as she arranged the flowers in a large glass.

"Saw Marshall," he said. "He saw you and Klaskell at The Shamrock."

Kathy hopped backward. Levin surprised by the flare of his voice, copper-fastened his gaze on her eyes. A low chirp escaped her throat. Levin raised his hand as if to fend off a leaping dog. "I don't care about Klaskell anymore than I did about Finnegan," he said. "But damn it, Kathy, I don't deserve humiliation."

"You knew?" she said, pulling moist strands of hair from her face.

Levin cleared his throat. "I would rather live with you knowing of the others, than lose you because I knew," he said.

Kathy removed her barrette, gathered her hair behind her neck and let it fall on her shoulders. Levin eyed her bare feet, marveling that they could support a body, even one as lithe as hers. He watched without speaking as tears spackled her paint-spattered smock. "I won't see him anymore," she said.

Levin stepped toward her. "I did not ask that," he thundered, then, in a hoarse whisper said, "Just do not shame me." Levin mined her eyes, terrified of finding pity.

"Michael has been the only one. I swear to that," she said. "Never with Wade." Levin said nothing. "It would be easier if you screamed," she said.

"I can't make this easier," he said. "I'm better at pleading than judging. I cannot scream or rage, that anger isn't in me."

Levin reached behind her, untied her smock, and it flut-

tered to the floor. Pulling her to him, he felt the wing beats of her heart, as she balled her tiny fists against his shoulders and pecked with her nose at his chest, and he fumbled to pluck off her clothes.

The dark began to settle, the air stripped of the scents and songs it had borne in the light. Trembling, Kathy asked, "Can we go to the bedroom? I'm cold."

Levin closed the window. "I'll start a fire," he said, afraid to discover a trace of Klaskell in his bed.

A patchwork quilt flowing behind her, Kathy darted across the studio to a cabinet, drew down an open bottle of wine, rinsed a mug at the sink, then nestled on the couch, casting all but one of its pillow to the floor. Levin laid a fire, struck a match, and tried to blow the flames to life. The cold chimney was reluctant to draw, and worked the bellows until the dried oak roared and snapped.

As Levin urged the fire, he considered that she might have slept with Klaskell that day. He wondered if he would know, and if that knowing would revolt him. He adjusted the damper and laid the poker on the hearth, the point glowing with a shard of bright charcoal that expired into a wispy, gray curl. Humiliated by his baggy shorts and patchy calves he undressed, comforted that in the half light Kathy could not see the veiny blue tangles on his ankles or the splotchy stains on his hands. She lifted her mouth to his, her lips salty with tears, her tongue warm with wine, then parted the quilt, its colors raging in the flame's fits. Shivering into the couch, she opened to receive him. Committed to probe her soul, Levin prayed she would not divine the griefs in his heart, terrified to leave her unsatisfied. A whistled, trilling, moan of descending notes escaped her throat, and he imagined she saw Klaskell's taut, eager skin.

The room darkened. The stove cooled and clinked. Night invaded the evening.

Draped in the quilt, clothes in hand, they shuffled like shackled prisoners over the bluestones to the house, print-

ing the rime with their naked feet, shadowed by a new-dime moon. Orion had fallen. Stars and satellites twinkled, lights pulsed on the wingtips of flights circling the airport to the east. Headlights toiled along the distant interstate. In the valley, the city glowed like an ember. The radio tower on Storer Mountain winked at the darkness. Their breath ghosted.

Kathy turned off the heat beneath the stew. They shared a shower. He pulled on his Columbia sweatshirt. She wrapped a soft blue towel around her wet hair, fluttered a long flannel nightgown over her head with a violent shiver, turned on the electric blanket and wriggled into the warming bed. They shut their lights. Night deepened and chilled. Curled against his back like nestled spoons, she ached to ask his forgiveness, but he'd insisted she not speak.

A silent spring snow was falling, fat flakes clinging to still-bare branches like clusters of tiny moths. Levin dreamed. In the reading room at the Ivy Club, he saw the pallid curve of his wife's arches annealed to the ripple of Klaskell's ribs, her tresses spilling onto the oriental rug, her neck arched like a desperate wrestler, as Levin, legless and mute, felt his voice clawing to rise beyond his throat. Averting his eyes, he enfiladed the walls recognizing among portraits of the founders his own ashen image.

The passion of the night, the terror of his dream, unabated in his heart, Levin rose in predawn, longing to wake her, take her again, purge her of her sins. Watching her slumberous breathing, he thought of how often after making love she would fly to her studio, return in nascent day's lambent light, arias of birds trailing her, to show him what she had made, and how in those moments he believed that he'd inspired love for him in her heart. Terrified that she'd wake and speak, he stole into the hall.

Levin ate with relish, frying two sausages, poaching an egg, and toasting two slices of bread which he ate with butter. He brewed a pot of coffee for Kathy to find when she awoke.

Levin filled the bird feeders with sunflower and thistle seed. Fresh deer tracks printed the lawn; shards of shrubs strewn where they had eaten. Swollen like rancid raisins, crows strutted and bathed in the snow, gold finches and chickadees swarmed to the swaying tubes, and the steady report of a woodpecker echoed from the woods.

Returning to the breezeway, he kicked off his barn boots and noticed Kathy's muddied shoes by the door, which took to the kitchen, wiped clean, and set by the door.

April sun, melting the night's snow, reflected on the windshield. Levin snapped on his sunglasses and adjusted the visor. As he passed under the dark spruce canopy at the head of the ess curve on Pinnacle Road, a flock of turkeys flapped into his path. When he braked, the Audi spun into the trees.

Levin's nose bled, his forehead burned to the touch, and he could not make a tight fist with either hand. A fireman told him he was fortunate to be driving a good car, and that the town should have sanded the curve. Ravens quarreled over the whine of the wrecker and crackling static of the ambulance radio. An empty school bus toiled up the hill.

At St Francis, a young doctor examined Levin's wounds, read his ex-rays, and insisted he stay overnight. Kathy sat with him until the end of visiting hours, when Levin asked her to bring him clothes for the morning. "You know jeans, a shirt, a sweatshirt if it's cool. I am afraid the pills are knocking me out. You'll come early won't you?" he asked, ashamed of the age in his voice.

Refusing a wheelchair, Levin limped along the hallway to the discharge exit. Kathy helped him ease into the passenger seat. "Damn good I'm in the habit of using these things or I might be dead," he said, buckling his seatbelt.

"You're well-served by habit," Kathy said.

"I'll recover soon enough," he said, "but until then, I'm afraid, I'll be in your way."

"I swear I'll take good care of you," she said, easing her

right hand gently beneath his thigh.

Snow lingered in the sheltered shade of pines; green shoots graced the abandoned orchards. Kathy soared out of the valley and up into the hills, Levin wincing each time the Jeep was jarred by a frost heave, his mind roaring for words he could not conjure. Fighting sleep, Levin spied arks of logs stacked in glistening clearings where the upland earth and ledge, still embraced in winter's frost, awaited spring's dynamite and excavators, and noticed the town crew chipping brush where the Audi had chiseled its swath into the spindly mountain laurel.

Kathy fed him the warmed stew of spiced pork and vegetables he'd smelled on the stove two days before. When he had eaten, he lay in the studio watching her hop from foot to foot and stab the canvas with her brush, as she painted geese gleaned an autumn cornfield beneath blazing hills. At two, she brought him cool water and pills that made him groggy and thick-tongued. He floated to the bedroom, her arm linked in his, and drifted through a nervous slumber, waking, in twilight, alone.

In the evening, the lights on the hills and the lights of the city, and the headlights on the interstate and the taillights of the planes circling the airport, winked and blinked for them. A silver moon rose and paled, its lights dimming the stars. He felt her draw the blankets to his chin, saw her shadow cross the room, heard the click of the door. He dreamed the dreams of the drugged, wandering in places he knew and in places he did not know, always slow of foot, reaching for things he could not touch. He stumbled in a dark forest where woodcocks cooed dirges, Kathy, in a windy, gossamer gown with sleeves like moth's wings, flitting before him. In his sleep, he gasped and died. In the morning she woke to the eulogies of crows. ❧

Jenn Nute

Untitled

Fred drove carefully down the highway. He almost questioned renting the expensive Bentley, but he had wanted to make an impression. The lease he had signed on it made him nervous though; if the car got a scratch he was liable for the repair plus an additional fee. It was going to be worth it, he told himself.

He pulled the car into a deserted parking lot and got out, making sure to lock the door behind him. The cloudy sky matched the color of the vehicle. He hoped that would help camouflage the car from unwanted eyes. He glanced around to see if anyone was watching and ducked into the side door of the whorehouse.

Once inside Fred saw that they had been expecting him. The floors and walls were freshly scrubbed and they had even swept most of the cobwebs from the ceiling. The doors on either side of the hallway, however, still exhibited the names of the girls and a Polaroid that left little to the imagination. He walked past the doors without a glance at the pictures. He wasn't here to shop around; he knew who he had come for.

The last door on the right sported no name, and no picture. He knocked softly and the door opened almost immediately. They had been waiting. Fred stood in the small room, taking everything in: the windowless walls, the worn out bed and the three whores who stood waiting. He crossed the room to the young girl sleeping on the bed and gently picked her up and – with a brief nod to the others – carried her out to the Bentley. Her red hair screamed against the gray sky and silver car. He placed her still sleeping in the backseat and started the car. He

gave a final glance to the run down building, and saw the three women looking out at him. Fred gave a small wave with his hand and they nodded back. One disappeared. Fred pulled out of the parking lot and started back up the highway. The child stirred, but didn't wake. ❧

Contributors

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Bruce Pratt was a 2003 finalist for The Andre Dubus Award from Words and Images, and the annual Fiction Prize from Dogwood. Other short stories have appeared in, The Greensboro Review, WordSmitten Quarterly Journal, Portland Magazine, Puckerbrush Review, Crosscut, and Stolen Island Review. Pratt is an adjunct at The University of Southern Maine, Maine Maritime Academy, and John Bapst Memorial H.S. He holds an MFA in fiction from The Stonecoast MFA, at The University of Southern Maine, an MA in English from The University of Maine and a BA in Religious Studies from Franklin and Marshall College.

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