



Crosscut

Literary Magazine

With an introduction by Husson President William Beardsley

Crosscut

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“Winter Daffodils” by Matt Pifer in the private collection of Stefanie Hodgson

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Crosscut
Literary Magazine

Bangor, Maine
One College Circle

Preface

In his touching introduction, Bill Beardsley notes that *Crosscut* is “ours,” crafted from moments folded and stuffed into our pockets, logged carefully into journals, or lost in letters we were too cowardly too nervous to send. Those moments are as bitter as lost love or as sweet as a cold river, as heartfelt as a walk across rotting leaves or as wrenching as the tattered photograph of a dead grandfather. Some might ask why dredge up such hurt, why pick lint from a navel, why say anything real at all, doing so just makes everybody unhappy. But happiness is that tickle of knowing you have lived as others have lived, that you can hold a shoulder, a hand, cradle a tired head and whisper, “just a little further.” These works give us a chance to see beyond ourselves and know more and feel something, maybe only one thing, more deeply. For this reason, if for no other, these works should be read twice, mulled over, and by all means discussed. Nothing will ever be more important than writing, than communicating the “dark places behind the eyes.” Everything, I mean everything, comes to this one laborious and distressing act.

--*The Editors*

Introduction

Sugar maples are uncommon yet grace the narrow geographic zone that Husson claims its own. The maple is cherished as its falling leaves cross an artist's lens, it warms the kitchen stove in a grandmother's home, its ephemeral sugars flow when frigid nights meet spring filled days, its canopy protects, its logs yield to flooring, cabinetry and homes. Yet, the woodsman keeps a sharpened eye lest he misses the deformity that creates a bird's-eye found at random among one in thousands of trees, bird's-eye that rivals Brazilian rosewood in the creation of the world renowned classical guitar. And, is there not an elemental loss if that rare deformity is simply allowed to age, fail, fall and simply rot away.

So it is with Husson's *Crosscut*, founded to sweep among the community of thousands to find the bird's-eye. Over the years *Crosscut*'s worldly prose is penned by the student who has never been far from home, the custodian whose anguished poetry has viscerally touched our hearts, and the scientist sharing the artistry of the digital eye. As with the sugar maples, this is "our" special zone.

Once again *Crosscut*'s editors have used the woodsman's eye, the elemental Husson loss denied. This is our institutional strength personified. This is what we are and who we prize.

William Beardsley
Husson University President

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Matt Pifer

Crossing the Hindu Kush

We see ourselves sitting alone,
watching the grainy lights flare across the city,
or walking in a valley washed wet with stone;
it is late; we are tired and leaning close.

Between our hands—
fallen like jobs
one resting near the other—
little of the rusted railing is visible,
but it's enough
still enough to
make mountains.

■

Greg Winston

In the Crib

Works best to point your kayak up and
Over the curling marker wave,
Then shoulder through the one that crouches behind it
Like a stunting, white-shirted linebacker
Who looks to dampen forward progress.

From there keep a slight left diagonal
Through the turbulent entrance called Turkey Chute.
You're trying to make the eddy just below Pillow Rock:
It's a roomy Jacuzzi if you hold the angle,
A bounded, oaken washtub when you don't.

Carving hard across boiling eddy-lines,
You break the barrier and
Glide to a stop,
Gazing back up at a thousand rivulets that
Pulse in regular time over ancient weathered granite:
You've never seen Italy but somehow recall
A tranquil, sunlit *piazza* and the
Well crafted jets of a Florentine fountain.

At play amid nature's work--
It wasn't always this way here.
What would Koluskap say to find you testing
This most dynamic bend on his most mythic river,
Formed when he felled a great yellow birch
To kill that greedy toad and quench a people's thirst?
Or what might be the words of those late river drivers
Who anchored booms to nearby ledges?
They worked these northern woods,
Poling bateaux and fashioning the titanic cribs
That lent this place its name,
This region a life-way, through seven generations.
Could your presence belittle or belabor

Any who ever saw this river,
Or gave it rapid consideration
In such a different light?

These unspoken past and current questions
Spin in, around and out of the eddy
As the mad-dash ferry to the island begins:
Paddle-blades whir, slice, and scythe,
Cutting uphill across the whitewater grain,
Where forces contend, merge,
Then transform into lateral motion.
Their vectored compromise brings you
To the top eddy,
Beside the island's narrow tip, where
You bob like a downy merganser,
Floating free and relaxed for
Just a few moments
Before glancing downriver to what comes next.

Guardian Rock looms on river left.
At right and center are the boiling hydraulics and
Beckoning typewriter waves.
All of these will help you
Find the line.

Spiraling
Down the double-helix
Of Final Chute,
You brace for a finish
In its lager-like outflow:
Intoxication increases
Down to the
Last
Drop.

So goes a good clean run
Down a river and through a rapid
That can set boaters' thoughts upright and soaring,
Other times leave them flustered, anxious,
Pensive or prone
Like a baby
In the Crib.



Kayla Cobb
Bitter Sweet

A single tear drop
That slowly forms
Swimming with the
Past and life
Once lived
Starts in the corner
Of the I
Curl into a ball
Naked the truth held
In the I
Cold and dark
In the room
Which it began
Tiny it does not fall
Growing with time
Now big enough
Falling from the
I can not believe
So bitter sweet
With the salt
The drop holds
Taste of revenge
Sits on the tongue
And dissolves
Bubbles the acid
Revealing the past
The tongue speaks
Of the pain in
The I so clearly
Could never see
Pain which drains
Tough throughout
Sits in the stomach
Then turns around
Making the I's sick

To see what
Was right in front
Of the truth
Slowly coming back
The feeling that
Makes you sick
Wipe the mouth
That held the tear
That the I
Cried so many times
On the fingertips
Of the life and
Present being lived
Grasp the sheet
That lays over
The past
And now comes clean
Soap and water
Wash away
The dirt and
Makeup which
Puddles in the
I smear it
Across the mirror
Which is broken
With the reflection
Of the ugly life
Which is possessed
Falls to the ground
Cutting into every
Step, hundreds of
I's are shown
Through the pieces
Of the life lived
From the I
Looking down at

The hundreds pictured
Back. The tear
Drop falls
Bleeding on the glass
A ripple of life
Red with fire
As from hell
Which the I's
Have lived and seen
Take the glass
Dyed red, dripping
Of the tears
Cuts into the
Heart which
Was already broken
Kills the spirit
Already gone
Naked truth
The I can
Now see images
Clearly cut in
Thousands of lines
Couldn't read between
The I's become
Blurry and
Flooded with
Drops, swimming
With the past
And life once lived.
Drops form with

Blood to kill that
Memory you forced
Upon the I's
Closed they are
Only from you
They can only see
The future not
Lived by your demands
The I's see
What clearly is
Not so clear
The hell that
Bled on the
Mirror, now reflects
The picture of you.
Countless pieces
That stand for
The times you
Made the I's cry
And when they
Couldn't remember
The I's have
Seen enough
Goodbye as they
Shut to never
Have to open
To you ever
Again.

■

Megan London

legacy

at times
between sheets
in white wing
of sleep I breathe
remnant of scent &
reach

for you
across
an ocean,

eternal pinning of
the gulf, our skins
our memory, as if

this close
I taste you
waking

to the cool teeth
of dawn &
fall into
the valley where
your body
used to lay.

■

Ashlee Husson

A Crush

In a burst of gusto,
Without hesitation
She jumps into the combination
Of hydrogen and oxygen
Attempting successfully
To stay afloat

He sees her,
From across the tiled pathway
Each stroke her arm makes
In the water,
Matches his heart beat

She teases from afar
Without eye contact
Her hips convey her messages
No words,
Just motions

Her lips,
A boat
He wishes would grace
The oceans
Mapped from his Arctic lips

To his gold; below the equator

She ,knowing he’s watching,
Makes it harder to ignore her,
He walks closer
Step by step
She knows she “sealed the deal”
The vultures may now prey
On his individuality

He opens his mouth to speak
... nothing

She turns around,
Smiles;
Then releases the snakes
And opens her eyes

Frozen still he watches her leave
The triumphant war
Or her yin and his yang continues
on

She may of won this battle
He vows, but never the war,
She will be his

■

**Clinton Spaulding
Dying a Lone**

Over 700 people died
in Chicago during
a heat wave in 95

Hundreds of them
died alone
at home

LA county employs
over 100 people,
an entire department

to manage the bodies
and belongings
of the deceased

MaryAnn
79
years old

Its been two weeks
and her body is still
here

2 dogs chained in the yard

a 30 year old Christmas card

3,000 cases each year

Assets of over 6000 dollars
which afford her
to be buried in a local cemetery

per orders of
the public
administrator

On this day

the cremated remains
of 1,918 brothers and sisters

buried together
in a mass grave
4 years after ____

in the presence
of 10 county employees
and a chaplain

Their remains fill a hole
10 feet long, 8 feet wide,
8 feet deep

Half covered in dirt
and sand
you have 1984 and

3 feet away
you have 1969
and there's 1966

And if we walk up this road
the numbers
are going to keep

dropping off
and off
and off

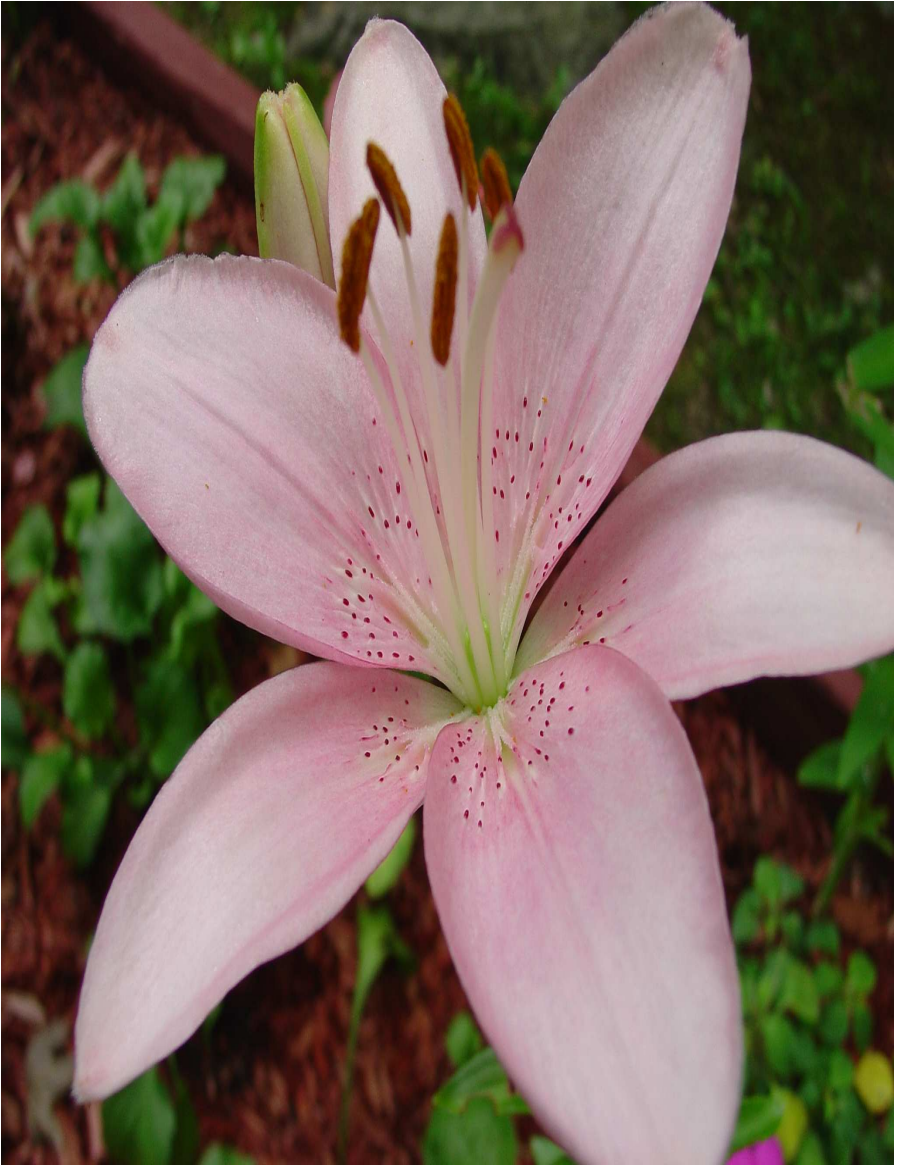
In the span of 3 feet
are the remains of
thousands of people

and from 10 feet away
you would never
know

■



Barry Kitchen



Barry Kitchen

Terri Baker

VNTY PL8TS

BNGR ME

LUV 2GO
LUVBUGG
ILV-FMLY
10 JONES
HMNBRO

CRZY I
EMYSMOM
GDS OILS
YOWZZA
GATO

PATTY K
BEGONE
ROCNOUT
A IS FOR
JS RIDE

MRS RDV
DOGMA
SRSLY
SILVER
MACHINE

IB1RU2
YELEES
CARROTS
DA UP EH
WENDI

MANDI-Z
BEALS
CMPASSN
PAMALA
CHEF KNG



GRANDFATHER

I take out the memories of you,
Old,
Grainy,
Dog-eared with touch.

Your face has nearly faded with
Light,
Years.
This crease is the month
Never remembered,
The day never forgotten.
This fold is the time lost,
Was I seven or eight
The year you died?
The rip on the side,
The day you staggered
Ill,
Dying.
I can't remember if you
Came home.

I put your memory away,
Old,
Grainy,
More faded and dog-eared,
Another crease added
To my loss.

■

KNITTING FREE WILL

I was created without free will, we all were. So when God assigned to me the task of assisting in the building of a world, I didn't have any say in the matter.

We stood at the foot of God's Throne; a Host of beings wholly spirit, without clay or ash clinging to us. Each of us was given a task, many we had no understanding of. Multitudes were given the job of whispering to a blade of grass instruction on how to grow, only none had the slightest idea what "grass might be. Some would deliver messages to men and protect nations, never mind that it wasn't clear just what a man or a nation was.

When my turn came, God gestured with a hand that I should sit. "You will help Me turn this into something very different, something good." He pointed as he said this to a mass that had no form, just...was. "I don't understand. Why do you need my help? You, the Creator?" "I have something special I'll be working on. You will take these and do as you are assigned." He placed a set of crystal needles and a basket of string made from the purest of energy at my side. Picking up the needles, I suddenly knew the task I had been made for. With a deft motion, I cast the string into stitches and began to knit the world.

During the next days, the needles flashed and the unending strand of energy seemed to almost work itself into the very thinnest of fabrics. Knits and purls fell into waves to form islands and oceans. The color of the string changed and blended throughout the piece, I cabled forests of trees; chevrons of mountains, valleys and gorges flowed through the material. A garden of lace grew in the very center.

Once a day, God would take the work from my hand. Spreading wide the folds, He shook it out and laid it over the formless mass. With the Divine Breath blown over the stitches, they melted and became.

The Serpent did not bring
Apples, figs or the
Dusky purple of the Vine
To tempt Eve's hunger.
He walked upright
As any man,
Offering the firm fruits
Of his fingertips on her skin
And the bite of bark
Along her back.

Heaven was buzzing with whispers and news. I continued always with the mad pace of my work, the needles never stopping. I sat amid the standing Host, our heads bent toward one another. We speculated over the newly astounding duties of one of our number. Hasatan had been given the job of tempting the favored creations of God out of Gana Eden.

How could this be, we wondered. God had liked these humans so much He had gifted them with free will, something we couldn't have. And here He was, giving one of us the job to push them out of Paradise.

The whispers continued. More members of the Host were placed forever at the entrance gates with terror inducing swords to keep the humans from returning. Exile was total, complete, permanent. Many hoped it would be the end of God's fascination while some even dared to suggest it might gain us favor. We rejoiced in the fact that *we* had never defied God, conveniently forgetting it was only because we weren't capable of doing so.

It was at the very height of the discussion I was called back to the Throne. God gestured to the foot again and handed me a different set of needles, infinitely smaller than my usual ones. In His hand was a new ball of string.

Dry, barren land stretched in every direction. I recognized each stone and grain of sand as all had sprung from my needles. Before me stood one of the humans, big with flesh and bone. Behind him, God faced away, looking toward the place He had once walked with Adam. I spoke His words to Cain.

“Where is your brother Able?”

“How should I know? Am I to be his keeper?”

“Oh Cain...” I whispered, “What have you done? You were always to be his keeper and now God can hear your brother’s blood! It cries out from the earth...” I stopped talking as God turned and stared at me, a clear indication that I was close to overstepping, taking a little too much on to myself. Compassion for the criminal was His right and not part of my job. The message received, God turned back. Clearly I was to continue my task.

“Cain, God has decreed that you will be cursed, cursed even more than the ground under your feet. You can only wander the land now, not gain from it.”

“Why not just kill me now? You do it now or someone else does it later. What does it matter who or when? A man who wanders cursed is dead anyway.”

“No Cain. Anyone who kills you curses his own generations.” I held up a thin veil of material, a pattern of purlled stitches forming a single letter worked into the fabric. “God has heard your cry. He sends this mark to protect you.” I laid the cloth over his head.

A breath of wind passed around us to press against the veil. The thread began to glow as the evening darkened. A curl of smoke trailed from Cain’s skin. He began to scream in pain and fear. The mark burned into his flesh until there were not threads left, only a branded forehead.

I turned away, his yells battering against my ears, and walked toward Heaven.

When the Angels found
They could climb
No higher than God's feet
They calculated the
Perfect step.
Over the edge
They tumbled-
Falling into the arms
Of the Daughters.
They whispered to their
Children curled in wombs,
Cursing God
And the sameness of Heaven.

Time passing had little meaning for us in Heaven. From the moment I returned to my labors of knitting, every bit was a shade of water. The colors were the variable greens and blues of oceans, rivers and lakes; they were the changeable silvers and grays of rain and dew. God did not come to take the work from me and soon the pile of finished knitting was taller than I could see over.

None of the other angels were able to talk with me and far back in my mind I couldn't help but wonder if it was a punishment for the compassion I had felt for Cain. The low rumble of gossip had begun almost the instant God had returned from the meeting with Cain. The only words I could hear about man's deeds were faint through my fence. Word had passed like strange fire from angel to angel of a new scandal involving the human women and defiant heavenly creations. They had joined in an unholy union and created a race of giants across the earth.

After the last of the gossip had faded from my hearing, God came to take flowing cloth from around me. I was released from my prison-like silence when He tore open the skies below our feet. The sound of His breath hitting the waves of the cloth as they fell from the earth's ceiling and bubbled from under

its land was deafening. It was the sound of rain pelting oceans and the scream of the wind caring the liquid flow of every drop of water.

All of Heaven watched as the earth filled and flooded. Bodies of men and animals alike bobbed swirled and caught in dead vegetation. For forty days and nights, even the gossip of the angels was stilled.

“It’s said there’s a new building in one of the human cities. I hear it grows taller every day.”

“How tall?” I asked, looking up for the slightest moment from my work. I was designing Noah’s family tree and while Shem’s branch was nearly finished, it had become a bit tricky.

“From the bottom, the crown is lost in the clouds and from the top, the ground cannot be seen.”

I closed my eyes to imagine such a thing. What purpose would it serve to build this? “Have any of the messengers come back from their duties? Have they been to see God?”

“Certainly. They have brought the words of man to His ear.”

“What are those words?” I asked, already knowing with a corner of my heart that the humans had stumbled yet again.

“They build not to reach God, they build to pass God.”

It didn’t matter what they were trying to do. I knew that God held the creatures in special regard. They had been spared from Eden to the Flood and beyond, even if in small numbers. I felt this would be little different.

There was a sudden quiet that spread from just behind us, outward to the very edges of Heaven. My companion seemed to melt away as I turned to face God.

“Come,” He said, “We’re going down to Babylon.”

God and I stood at the foot of the tower that seemed to have grown from the very sand itself. “If they could do this as one people with a single language, nothing can be out of their abilities.”

I stared at Him. Had he not known this would happen? Was this Creator without total knowledge? If He hadn’t known about this possibility, what else was beyond His ken?

My amazement fled when God held His hand out to me. I had expected to see another ball of yarn. Instead, there was a long fold of knitted fabric. Looking at it I realized no recognition of the stitches that had been worked into a brick pattern. It wasn’t of my crafting and never had it occurred to me that there might be another angel with the task of knitting God’s will.

He indicated I should take the piece. I did and found the stitches unraveling themselves. Pulling out more of the string, the bricks of the tower began to fall around us. With the tangling of the yarn, the people’s shouts became confused and jumbled. The final stitched drawn, I dropped the tangle. I left and did not wait for God.

I guess I should have known sooner how to do it, to gain my free will. But I didn’t realize until centuries later what road my rising compassion for Cain had led me down. Time began to change for me after the incident at Babylon’s tower. While I continued my eternal knitting of God’s desires, I watched the lives of the men below, especially those chosen as most treasured by God. Hard lives of pain and sorrow with only few moments of joy were the lot they were given. I wondered at their fortitude.

To be fair to myself, I didn’t know that I wanted the freedom to leave Heaven and my task, until the Great Escape of the Israelites from Egypt. Now there was a dozen of my kind knitting out the fate of the world. God conducted our efforts sometimes, like with the plagues that preceded the leaving of Egypt. Our needles nearly invisible as He commanded one to make more frogs, another

more boils and yet another to make the ticks and fleas itch more. With only ten plagues, one of us was left to construct a column of fire and one of smoke to lead the Israelites in the desert. I was set to work on more water, this time a murky brown and bits of green.

It was only as I sat by the Sea of Reeds, watching as my handiwork drowned Pharaoh's army, that I understood. I understood that my work and I had been used to destroy humans since my heart had opened to their plight. Moreover, I understood that I didn't want it to be used like that, not anymore. I sat there with the new work I had been given and thought about all the wars I would have to design, the deaths of people and ideas. I knew I had to find a way to break out of Heaven.

With timbrels bright
We dance in flame and river.
Our voices rise
In ironic joy.
Watch how we suffer,
Watch how we sing
Through the torture.

It was a very long time before I realized that God's breath that would set me free. From the start, when He blew His Divine spirit over my toiling it had come into being. I decided to try hiding the terms of my liberation in my next project. I was taking the chance that He wouldn't look for it and thereby not see it. The risk was that I'd be caught and sent...I don't know where. Some said there were exiled angels in a place all their own. I was willing to gamble with the consequences.

My last task was not water, it was fire. I spent more than ten years knitting the reds, oranges and yellows provided to me into flames. Massive infernos and columns, whirling flames and storms of fire. Finally, very deep in

the center of a single flame, I knit the angelic symbol for free will. It was the very last flame I would knit.

I remember that day, years later. How God took me with Him as He delivered my work to Hasatan. He had the free will to use them or not, and use them he did. God did not blow on these flames after Hasatan filled the ovens of Belzec, Treblinka and Auschwitz-Birkenau with them. My work caught on fire without His spirit. So no, He did not bring them into existence, but neither did He extinguish them. As my hidden symbol burned, I felt the chain of free will slip around my heart.

These days I still knit, although it's without anyone's fate or life or destiny resting in my work and it's on the bus going or coming from work. Even the lightest of the yarns is heavy in my hands and I feel every splinter in my wood needles. But its work I'm used to, work I like. I give away most of the socks, hats and scarves. There are times when I wonder about the big question: Why does He do it, let people suffer and deliver them at the same time, or just suffer? Why make people the way they are, so full of mistakes? There are a lot of opinions. I'm sure I'll ask when I see Him again. Things are getting bad in some places here on earth and I have a feeling I'll be asked back, to help with the cleaning up. But I don't know how I will answer.

■

Ashley Lowe

Untitled

It was a night of perfection. The thunder was rolling across the hills in the distance and the sweet smell of rain danced through the air. Nate sat dangerously close to the end of the ledge and breathed in deep. He exhaled, closing his eyes to hold onto the moment. This ledge overlooked the whole city. Nate watched from above as God looking over all of his small creatures below. The warm wind blew the storm nearer to the city, evident by the light that crashed down closer and closer with each strike. Even a night this perfect

couldn't be immune to danger. Nate could feel it lurking, creeping in with the storm.

Somewhere amidst the fast pace of the city below, Elle peaked through the curtains of her bedroom window to glimpse at the approaching storm. She opened the window just enough as to let the scent of the rain envelope her home. Elle curled up in her chair ready to enjoy the storm and finish her latest sketch. She dreamt of the two phoenixes encircling the cross and while knowing she couldn't capture their beauty from her mind to put on paper, she had to try. The pitter-patter of the first raindrops fell from the sky onto the windowsill. The storm had arrived.

Back upon the overlooking ledge, Nate stood as the rain began to fall. It was his time. Wherever the danger was going to strike, Nate would be there. The markings he bore on his arms proved it. He was the last of the true born ready to fight. Nate always had the ability to sense danger. It's always been a gift, but at the same time a curse. He is obligated to protect, even at the cost of putting his own life in danger. Tonight, would be no exception. While Nate was very familiar with his senses, this time something felt different.

Elle continued to sketch, enjoying the sounds of the storm outside. Little did she know, something else was lurking outside of her window. Covered by the sounds of thunder, a hand crept through the crack in the window and pushed it upward. Feeling the draft, Elle wrapped herself tighter in her blanket and continued to work. The hand grabbed the windowsill and pulled its body in through the opening.

Nate sprinted through the streets, cutting down alleyways. He was getting closer, but still wasn't sure what he was getting himself into. As he sprinted by a fire escape, he heard a terrible scream from above. Nate froze. Listened closely, and then began scaling up the fire escape. He came to an open window and climbed through it as he could sense the scent of the unknown danger pouring through the opening and washing away with the rain. Nate was standing in Elle's bedroom. He could hear a woman's cry for help coming from the room just beyond a half-closed door. He stormed into the room and Elle gasped, begging him to help her. The man dressed completely in black was pinning her against the wall, threatening her with a knife. Before the man had time to react, Nate lunged at him, knocking Elle free.

The man swung his knife at Nate's chest, ripping through his shirt and skimming the skin underneath. Blood began to trickle down Nate's chest but he kept going. He dodged the attacker's continued swings and right as the man raised his arm, Nate tackled him to the ground. Elle stood in the corner, dialing

9-1-1 with her shaky fingertip. Nate continued to struggle with the attacker. He finally got the knife out of the man's strong grasp and threw it. The knife skidded across the wooden floor to the other side of the room. Nate pinned the man to the ground as police officers burst through the front door. Nate stood and approached Elle, still shaking from fear in the corner.

The police escorted the man out of Elle's apartment, taking him away in the back of their car. Nate sat Elle down and asked if she had been hurt. "No. I'll be fine. I, I just can't even think of what he would have done if you hadn't saved me. How, How'd you- I mean, you just appeared."

Nate explained that he had heard her screams from the alley below. Elle left the room and returned with a handful of bandages. She stood behind Nate and removed his tattered shirt. She gasped as she skimmed her fingertips across the black phoenixes stained on Nate's skin. "What's the matter?" Nate asked as he turned to face her. Elle pushed her sketchbook towards him. The images of Elle's recurring dreams were tattooed on Nate's back.

Nate didn't know how to react. What could this possibly mean? Before Nate's brother had left to fight in another country, he had told Nate that the phoenixes had guided their people for thousands of years and would lead him somewhere very important one day. Was this, that somewhere? Nate wasn't sure, but he planned on staying long enough to find out.

■

Marlon Weaver

From Cover to Cover

From being forced to cross the Atlantic Ocean under the cover of stars
to volunteering for a mission above every ocean to the stars.

From being stared at on an auction block and having the family sold and separated
to ten years running, in the most watched block, as a priceless model of the family unit.

From working for peanuts and fertilizing somebody's land with the blood that runs off of the back
to owning the land, working the peanut, and transfusing the blood back.

From being robbed of a spoken language, losing a religion, a culture, a god
to influencing: the language spoken in cultures, songs in religion, and the pathway to God.

From losing a hand and a foot or a leg for not being fast enough to get far enough away from “the man”
to using the hands, legs and the feet in running farther and faster than the average man.

From the king, of a nation, beaten into a personal slave and called names like coon, spook, and “Boy”
to a boy named King who would grow up to “win over” a nation for the equal freedoms of every person.

From generations that had to take the last names of past presidents
to being the name that can give a future generation its first president.

■

Brenda Oldfield

Tippy

Friend
Happy Joy
Run Jump Chasing
Love Happiness Glee Sadness
Puppy Dog

April 14, 1984 Colorado



Danielle Laliberte

Séduction Canadienne

A hint of an accent, the barely perceived mispronunciation
or occasional non-idiomatic phrasing.

Dark lined eyes and club attire disclose more than skin,
désire cachée, or passion half revealed,
concealed wish for whispering of foreign sweet nothings
not comprehended, the magnetism of mystery.



Laurie Easton

My Diet

I nosh on your brittle neglect.
Nibbling around the edges of your hard crust.
Being careful not to bite too confidently,
not risking the crack of your delicate temperament.

I eat your meaty animosity.
Chewing the sinew
and grinding the gristle.
Breathlessly choking down bloody chunks of your anger.

I devour your barbed disdain.
Shoving the sharp bits down,
Ingesting each slice of jagged scorn.
Enduring the bitter copper flavor of your ridicule.

I gorge on your steaming contempt.
Scooping sizzling spoonfuls.
Stomaching the throb of your burning judgment
with every scalding swallow.

Stuffed to bloated,
yet unsatisfied still.
Even now, striving to fill the starving space
Hollowed-out and emptied by your verdict.

■

Library Labyrinth

** In response to Allen Ginsburg's poem "A Supermarket In California"*

I climbed the marble steps of the monolith,

with thoughts of you bombing my brain.

In my thirst for knowledge I drank you up. Gulping the air you
changed

with your stench breath. Every page, every paragraph. . . Smelling like
copper and coke and cock.

Old tomes and volumes of Whitman, and Blake -- Tennessee Williams
and

Kerouac call me.

And then I peek a boo at you.

Slinging your wrinkled droopy skin down over your NAMBLA
registration, with the bill of rights in your right hand and your private parts in
your left. I ensnared a flash of you, running up a Non-fiction aisle, in the way
out back stack, chasing Walt Whitman and little boys. Beatnik boys . .

Resolutely hiding behind your excuses with the communist manifesto,
calling all "Negroes"

to fight your war against Capitalism -

with neon signs, riding in blue cars.

Internally fighting the schizophrenic, gay man.

You wanted a better world,

You should have know that

You can go

Too far

and become cynical, and ironic. . . make the perverse seem justified.

Tucking figs in your armpits and

not being satisfied unless it is a dirty climax - creepy with
hostility and

the defeat of innocence.

You jaded me, Allen.

Baptized me with your bullshit until I saw

you are naught but what you sought to crush
and crumble.

Lying all the way and hiding behind your words and blaming your mother.

Whitman was a miracle. Whitman was courageous. Your verdict is still out.

■

J.T. Kenny

Oye cómo va mi ritmo

I think of it now as a sort of hinge, not like on a door, but on my personal narrative, a time of “epic life change?” Oh no, I don’t think so, but the whole thing does stick with me, holds the qualities of something long ago and remembered. At the time, I was twelve years old and living in Queens, New York. I hung with, teamed-up with, was often seen with, a nuisance brat named Al--Alexandro Rosas. We were best friends. Al’s family had a TV and a telephone, things we didn’t have at our place. Also, the Rosas’s had a much bigger apartment than the “rent controlled” box my immigrant family called home. Oh, and another thing, Al’s mom, Carmen, was for sure one of my favorite people.

La morena, this magnetic Latina, this beatific contradiction, was a hard working housewife, and so maybe it’s not too surprising that I remember her ironing, standing over a creaky wooden board brown hand holding a steamy, gurgling icon of an appliance. There were lots of bodies in her house so she was always pressing something, naturally--very naturally. In warm weather, she did her chores unencumbered by blouse or bra. She loved her personal freedom. Carmen had an ability and willingness to express herself which showed that in all that she cheerfully did. She had mestizo skin and raven hair that always seemed to be drifting into her face. You might think her Indian, those opaque eyes but her face revealed delicately chiseled Iberian features. Often while she talked or softly sang, a wide and warm smile broke through, flashing, lingering--an ember. Hers was a low, mellow voice expressing itself rhythmically in soothing Caribbean argot. Warm spring and summer afternoons at the Rosas’s were the best. Ostensibly glued to the screen, I listened and, of course, I glanced a lot in her direction, charmed by her *platicando* and innocent undulations. I felt, dared not think. Perhaps I knew in my young, but already darkly stained soul,

that words were not my friends in this situation, symbols, thoughts would surely evaporate in the clouds of her ingenuous being; her blameless sensuality. I was just a boy, a boy from a culture where no one looked like her; a place where strawberry blond people ironed quickly and stiffly. Still, this was a great way to learn Spanish--pedagogically sound, I think—a shared experience? No, not shared. When I looked too long in Carmen's direction, Al glared at me, redirected me to the TV. He and I never talked about his mom, not like I am doing now.

So Carmen ironed. She was kept busy with three children, a husband, and she had a mom to take care of. I don't remember much about Al's brother and sister. They were younger and whiney. I do remember his grandmother, *Abuelita*. The latter was diminutive and seemed infirm. She never helped with the household stuff, spoke no English, and spent all of her time reclined on the sofa. When we watched TV, she watched. She prattled, laughing a lot, not at the gags, which she didn't get, but at the visuals, which she thought were funny. It was like we lived in different worlds, making our way through life using different senses. I felt sorry for *Abuelita*. Al hated her. He was a concrete guy and to him she was a lunatic nuisance mystery. Al liked what he could see and control (like the TV) and was not inclined to celebrate diversity, even within his own family.

Television was the thing though. It came on strong in the late forties and early fifties. Weekdays, in the afternoons, when there was nothing better to do, and there usually wasn't, Al and I sat on his living room floor where we first watched vintage *Farmer Gray* cartoons. Our entertainment center was a big box 12 inch, round screen Dumont. TV was fun, though nothing much ever changed in *Farmer Gray's* war with his farm mice. They always bested him, out-smarted him, whatever. It was terrible, but we watched it. Maybe it just felt good being in front of the visual certitude of pixel imaging. I somehow remember that it seemed good just being in front of a screen. We watched. Carmen ironed. When we got rowdy she would call one or the other of us *pendejo!* She was calling us jerks, but until I learned better, I thought it something cute, or endearing. She was just that loving. When Carmen berated us, *Abuelita* laughed in high, knowing pitches—even though she didn't know.

The cartoons were uniformly substandard celluloids--made on the cheap. Still, you had to love those crazy little black mice running everywhere. The cartoonists seemed to have hundreds of episodes though the story lines almost never drifted far from the bearded farmer's cunning and cruel attempts to

deal with his rodent infestation problem. Mice smarter than the people, I don't know why we thought that was so damn funny.

Finally, Farmer Gray got angrier and angrier and smaller and smaller chasing his last mischievous mouse into a shrinking black hole in the center of the screen. When that happened, Al, with the rocket speed of an Oldsmobile 98, switched from Channel 11 to Channel 4-WNBT New York. He moved in high velocity so we wouldn't have to miss any small part of our favorite, the *Rootie Tootie Show*. Rootie was a puppet character. Back then, TV had its share of puppet ensembles. There were *Kookla, Fran, and Ollie, Snarky Parker*, and that loveable *Beanie* with his seasick sea serpent sidekick, *Cecil*. But for whatever reason, the cloth-covered urchin, Rootie, along with his dog, Little Nipper, felt right to us. The duo had class. They did what they wanted, went where they chose, and walked the dangerous edge. Rootie resonated, touched that common denominator of boyhood's belligerent independence. What he put out was real, transcended differences. It's also true that when Carmen ironed, Rootie was one of the few things that could draw my attention back to the ovalish, tinny sounding Dumont.

I don't remember much about Rootie and Nipper's many formulaic adventures, though Al and I obviously enjoyed them. I do remember the song. It went like this:

*Who is the boy who fills your heart with joy?
He's Rootie Tootie!
Who is the lad who makes you feel so glad?
He's Rootie Tootie.*

*He's the leader of the Rootie Tootie Club
And with him there is (woof-woof) Little Nipper the pup
So let's all hear a rootin-tootin cheer for Rootie Tootie!*

I don't really remember much more about Rootie--except how he died.

Our hero was here and he was gone, pushing through like a summer storm. One Monday afternoon, regular time, we tuned in to Channel 4 and there was no Rootie Tootie, no Nipper. For Al and me that was like a double body blow. Kneeling in front of the box, he turned the dial, ran through the channels and then ran through them again. We were in near shock and so we did what stressed friends do-- fell into falling out: "Stupid TV" said I. Al, angry, at the small screen dilemma, turned to me, mayhem in his face, "Least I have a set",

then asked, “When’s you trash Irish gettin’ your own TV?” “Fuck you,” I reasoned. “*Mierda*” he swore at me. “*Feo madecon*”, I hissed back. The *chingada* was moving straight down the ugly path. Carmen sensed that, blew a few strands of black hair out of her face, shouted, “*pendejos!*” *Abuelita* laughed. Al kicked me. I punched him in the mouth. He bled. I got sent home-- no big deal, Carmen was fully dressed that day. Still, parts of what had happened were strange.

A week later, the following Monday, something even stranger happened. Al and I were there. We both saw it. Rootie, or his ghost, came back! Our guy returned to the airwaves, Channel 4, like some *Lazarus*, only different. He wasn’t his old Rootie Tootie self. They had overhauled and sanitized his character. He was nicer, cleaner. Gone was the disheveled but loveable troublemaker. They had scrubbed him up. He even did good deeds. It just didn’t make sense. Years later, in some college course, I would read George Orwell, but by then I already knew about “newthink” and “newspeak,” familiar concepts to folks like Al and me. We had learned all about it on Channel 4.

That day, the day they premiered the new show, Al got real nasty with me and swore at his grandmother for running her mouth. *Abuelita*, well, she didn’t understand, so just chuckled in that save-face knowing Hispanic way. My friend, Al, had what we would label today anger management issues. That was how he was. Carmen, ironing, just shook her head when they started calling RT by his new name--*Rootie Kazzotti*. They even renamed Nipper to *Gallipoochie*. Ugh! It went from bad to worse as Carmen gently hummed, fixed on her ironing, never offering an opinion. She wasn’t going to lose any sleep over this one.

Bruised buddy and I felt rock bottom betrayed. These TV people, not the ones we could see on the small screen, but the ones who hid way back in the box, the ones you never saw; they had just changed the whole *enchilada*, whatever. Worse, through their palpable silence on the subject, they were trying to convince little viewers like us that nothing important had happened--wow, incredible! They even took our guy’s name-- his name, a soul’s link with the flesh...pixels, you know? And, of course, if they could do this to Rootie Tootie...hey, then nobody, but nobody, was safe. So, the bottom sort of fell out that day. I hurt, eventually adapted to a new way of seeing things; taking on a shade of adult jade. For me, for the both of us kids maybe, it was like the beginning of some long and indeterminate internship.

Still, when I think back on those days, it's not always about Alexandro, Rootie, or life's hard lessons. I think mostly of Carmen, lovely Carmen, iron in hand, chatting-- half Spanish, half English, body and mind at home, relaxed and flowing spirit, proof of God's ability to gently touch and animate the living. So, *gracias por la vida*, and maybe that's what this is really all about, you think?



Peggy F. Brown

NOT JUST CLOWNING AROUND

Shriners offer up a way
For school kids to enjoy a free stay
At the circus for the day

This generation may not know
The good deeds all Shriners bestow
At their hospitals where children go

Free help for which is given
To families who are driven
By the tragedy they're livin'

A child with burns can be healed
A healthier life can be sealed
At this hospital; no bills revealed

These days for many are full of greed
But these doctors and nurses follow heart's heed
And selflessly help children in need

22 hospitals around this land, we
Visit a circus full of variety
To help cure pains of society

Trapeze, elephants, trampoline
Enjoy the clown acts in between
Have cotton candy and ice cream

Enjoy the show and the antics
Of performers, at times frantic
A fundraiser that's gigantic

For as you watch elephants and poodles in pairs
Money raised helps peers in wheelchairs
To someday climb the stairs

Funds raised by circus tricks
Pays for grafts and orthopedics
Burned skin is healed, limbs are fixed

May the children at the circus today
Grow up and help in their own way
To make others have a brighter day

Enriched are those who volunteer
Put good motions into gear
When their mission is true and clear

A moment of good, let's not forget
Done by the soul, not for a debt
Can last a lifetime to those who fret



Sheila Buck and Katherine Hamilton

A Troll Tale: A Story From the World of Carthage

She had finally received her retirement. Her Master had just informed her that she would be leaving in the morning for her trip to Troll City. *'I am so happy,'* she thought; she rushed straight home to pack the few belongings that she planned to take with her on her journey. As she entered the big rust-colored barn and climbed the ladder to the hayloft, her two grandbabies stopped playing in the lower level to watch.

She didn't own much, but over her years of service, she collected a few small things that sparked her interest. She was odd in that. Most trolls didn't have anything but the ragged clothes on their backs. She picked up the mirror that her Mistress had thrown away. It had a crack down the center, but other than that it was fine. She glanced at herself as she was getting ready to wrap it up in an old dress.

Her brown eyes stared back at her. Her face had many wrinkles and her hair had gone completely white. *'I got old,'* she thought as she looked at her face. She sighed and finished wrapping the mirror in one of her dresses. She set out her best dress for the morning, and packed her one other dress with her mirror in the sack. The dresses all had holes in them, but they were the best she had.

She looked around the small room to see if there was anything else to pack. Her eyes wandered across the bare wooden walls and over the small pile of hay that was her bed. Her ratty old blanket lay in a heap on the hay. It had many holes, and smelled of mold, but it was hers. She thought about packing it, but decided it was better to leave it to her grandbabies. It wasn't much, but it would help them stay warmer in the winter.

When she had finished packing and turned to leave the room, she noticed her two grandbabies standing in the doorway. They each had tears in their eyes. Their round faces, dirt and all, looked up at her with questions in their eyes. Mud Pie, her granddaughter, said to her, "Why are you putting all your stuff in that sack, Grandma?" Her grandson, Swamp, did not say anything because he was unable to talk.

She was starting to feel very sad. "I am going to Troll City," she told them. "I hate to leave you, but I have worked so long and so hard. It's time for me to go. Your Momma will take good care of you after I'm gone. I promise." She wanted to make sure they knew that they wouldn't be alone, and that they might see each other again someday.

She sat them down with her on her pile of hay. One little troll on each side. She put a small arm around each of them and said, "I am 35 years old. That makes me a very old troll. Since I could walk, I have worked very hard for our Master and our Mistress. I have cleaned and even done a bit of cooking. I have worked hard in the fields. Now I am done with all of the hard work. I am ready to leave this place and live the rest of my life in Troll City."

She moved her hands down to each of the children's backs and started to rub each. "You have heard the wonderful stories spoken of Troll City. Do you not want to go there someday?" Both of the children shook their heads yes. "Would you like it if I told you a tale about the city?" They nodded. She hoped that her tale of Troll City would make her leaving easier for them.

"Many years ago, long before I was born, there wasn't any place for old trolls to go. Instead, we worked for our Masters until we fell over dead, or until one of the Mukesh raids on the town took us away, never to be seen again. This

was a sad thing for the trolls because we didn't get to have any fun before we died. It was just work, work, work, and more work."

She glanced down at her two grandbabies, looking up at her with wonder in their eyes. They couldn't remember the time of the raids. She knew that this all must seem so strange to them, to think that their cozy barn, so close to the main house of their Master and his Mistress, could be anything but the safest place in the world. She remembered thinking the same things when her mother and grandmother had told her these same tales.

"The Mukesh were big and mean and hairy, and they took little trolls, and even little Masters and Mistresses, out into the woods. My grandmother told me that her grandmother said you could hear them screaming as the ogres dragged them up the mountains and down into the caves where they live. All the Masters had been trying to find a way to stop the ogres from coming into the village and taking their babies."

"Tell us about Sludge, Grandma, please?" asked Mud Pie. Swamp nodded vigorously on her other side. She smiled at them, exposing the few brown teeth she had left. Sludge was a tale they had grown up with.

"Sludge was one of the first trolls to go to troll city. He was not a big troll, or a very small troll, either, but just an average troll," she continued. "His mother and father raised him to be a hard worker, but he made a lot of mistakes. He always tried his hardest. He worked for the same Master that his parents had worked for, and he was a kind Master. When trolls got old, he would send them out to a corner of the far field, where there was a hut for them, and they were allowed to rest there until they died. Sludge saw his parents grow old, and then said goodbye to them when it was time for them to move out to the hut in the field. Sludge decided one day that if he could do all the tasks that his Master could set for him, without being asked, maybe his Master would let him go and visit his parents. He hadn't seen them in a long time, and he missed them. The raids from the ogres had been bad that year, and he was worried about them. He wanted to make sure they were okay. So for a long time, Sludge worked as hard as he could, doing every chore he could think of. Then Sludge went to his Master and knelt before him and asked to go see his mother and father."

"Sludge was very nervous, because he didn't think anyone had ever asked this of his Master before. He was not surprised when his Master replied with, 'No, Sludge. You may not go visit your parents in the outer field.' This made Sludge very sad, and he began to get up and leave when his Master told him, 'I know you have worked your very hardest for me Sludge. I would allow

you to visit your parents, but they are not there. They didn't survive the winter.' Sludge began to cry."

"The Master rubbed his back. 'However,' he said, 'the other Masters and I have devised a way to stop the Mukesh raids, and have created a new place outside the town.' Sludge did not know what to think about this turn of events, but knew it wasn't his place to question his Master. 'Sludge,' said his Master, 'You have worked very hard for your whole life. We have created a city for trolls to go when they retire. A place where all trolls who work hard all of their lives can go, and live out the rest of their days in peace. A place where we Masters do not go.' Sludge was very excited. After all, his Master had seen how hard he worked and now his Master was going to reward his hours of struggle. A whole city of just trolls! Troll City sounded like a wonderful place to Sludge."

"Soon after, Sludge and a few other trolls whose Masters felt had worked very hard for their whole lives, climbed into the wagon that the Masters had made just for the trip. One of the Masters climbed into the seat to drive them, and they rode out of town."

"Troll city is such a wonderful place, with games and mud pits, and lots of trolls to play with. There are no Masters to yell at them, and no extra chores to be done. It is so wonderful there, that once we get there, we never want to leave. And that, my little ones, is why trolls don't come back from Troll City. We just wait there, knowing that we have taught all of you young ones well, and that you will work hard. That way, one day, you can come join us there, and we will all be together again. You will work hard, right? So you can come be with me again?"

Mud Pie and Swamp both nodded. "We will, Grandma, we promise. Don't we Swamp?" said Mud Pie to her brother, who nodded even harder and fell right off the side of the hay pile. He looked sheepishly up at them, and they both chuckled at him.

"Okay then, little ones, scat with you so I can finish packing and get some sleep. It is a long journey to Troll City, and I want to be awake to see the whole thing." She swatted them on the butts and sent them out the door.

The next day dawned bright. The sky was blue and the birds were chirping. She had gotten a wonderful night's sleep and was looking forward to the trip. She gathered up her ratty old sack from the corner of the small room, thinking to herself, '*Goodbye, room, you have served me well,*' and she turned and left her little space for the last time.

Mud Pie and Swamp were already at the table when she went out to the little open area they used as a kitchen. "Good morning," she said to her youngest

family members. "Are you up to see me off?" They nodded, and Mud Pie's eyes started to get damp. "No tears, now," she told them. "This is a happy day for me, and I won't have you making it all mushy."

"Yes, Grandma, we'll be good, we promise. We'll miss you, though." Mud Pie and Swamp came around their little table and hugged her as tight as they could. She rubbed each on the back and held them tight for a moment.

"Okay, you two, help an old troll carry her things outside." She gave each a pat on the head as they went to get her bag from the doorway where she had left it. They each picked up one end and started toward the big front door. She followed them outside, into the bright light of day. It was a big difference from the darkness inside. She hoped that the barn would be a good home for her babies, and her baby's babies, and their babies after them. There would be more room now, and Swamp and Mud Pie could stop sleeping in the kitchen corner and move into her old room. Even if the walls were just old boards with knotholes in them, her old hay pile, with her old blanket, was better than the floor.

She stood by the road with her bag at her side, waiting for the wagon that would come to pick her up. It wasn't long before she saw it coming down the street, pulled by an old mule wearing a straw hat. Its big ears poked out of holes on each side. The cover over the wagon was painted with pictures in bright red, showing trolls playing games and having fun. '*It looks very grand,*' she thought. Trolls only got to ride in a wagon once in their whole lives, and she was looking forward to it like she had never looked forward to anything before.

The Master driving the wagon stopped it in front of her, and the shorter Master riding with him got down to help her up into the back of the wagon. She sat next to another troll on one of the long benches that ran the length of the wagon, and the short Master slid her bag to her, which she tucked under her seat. She waved to her grandbabies through the doorway in the back until she could no longer see them.

She looked at the troll next to her. He was one of the trolls who worked for the Master just down the road. She had seen him before. He was even older than she was. Her brow furrowed in thought. 'Stump, that's his name,' she finally remembered. She had walked with him once or twice to the market that had been in the center of town. Her Master's house had been just on the edge of town, and Stump's place had been just a bit closer. He had been nice enough and sharing the walk had made it go by faster.

As the wagon rolled out of town, she and the other trolls began to talk about what they wanted to do first when they got to the city. They were all

happy to finally be on their way, and there was a lot of smiling and laughing. They watched out the back of the wagon as trees and the road fell behind them. They talked and played hand games for what seemed like hours. Some of the trolls started singing and soon they had all joined in. They sang songs they had grown up with and some news ones they had learned or made up as they got older.

After a while, they ran out of stuff to say and, even though she tried not to, she dozed off. When the wagon started the climb into the mountains, a bump woke her up. As the road climbed, it got rougher. There were trenches in the road from where water had run down it. All the trolls had to hold on tight, so they wouldn't slide out the back.

Afternoon turned into evening as the wagon neared the end of the trees. The driver pulled off the road and into a cleared space. She got very excited, because she knew they were there. The trolls all climbed out of the wagon, feeling very young and full of energy. They began talking excitedly all over again, and the air was full of anticipation.

To one side of the flattened place there was a wooden fence, set in a circle. The fence was made of rough-hewn boards with posts set into the ground. Spaces between the boards showed there was nothing inside. There was a gate facing the road made of the same boards, with leather hinges. The latch was nothing more than a leather strip, with a big metal ball hanging on the end that went into a wooden catch on the fence post.

In the ground near the fence, was a big wooden post with a cross bar on the top. It had a big circle of flat metal hanging from it. The gong looked to be made of brass. A strip of leather with a metal rod attached to the end was nailed to the post. The Master who had driven the wagon went to stand by the pole, and the short Master told the trolls they needed to wait in the fence until the other trolls were signaled to come for them. She was a bit confused. She had expected to see other trolls when she got off the wagon, but there was no one to be seen.

The short Master herded the trolls into the fence and shut the gate. *'Why does the gate need to be shut,'* she wondered. The thought passed as the other Master lifted the metal rod and used it to hit the gong. The sound was very loud in such an empty place. As soon as he finished, the Master dropped the rod and walked back to the wagon. The short Master had already climbed back up and they turned the wagon and headed back down the road.

She shoved her way to the gate and pressed her face against the wooden slats. The encroaching darkness made it harder to see. As the wagon rolled out of sight, she saw something moving up the hill from them. *'That doesn't look*

like a troll,' she thought. As it got closer, other trolls noticed it, too. Then one of the other trolls screamed.

She stood frozen, unable to make a sound, as the ogre came up to the gate.

Behind him several others were coming. He was so big. He had animal fur all over his legs and bones tied around his waist. The others were dressed very much the same. They all had holes in their trousers, and they were all very ugly and mean looking. As the ogre reached for the latch on the gate, she glanced at the gong. *'The Masters called them,'* she finally reasoned to herself. *'They lied to me, to us. Why would they do this?'*

The ogre opened the gate, grabbed the nearest troll, and tucked her up under his arm. The poor girl was terrified, and kicked and screamed and bit and pulled at the bulging, hairy arm that held her, but it did no good. One by one, they were all scooped up by the ogres and carried off to the caves.

Inside, they put all but three of the trolls into a small dent in the wall, and a rock was rolled in front of it. She looked at the other two, trying to figure out what would happen next. The cave was dark, and smelled of rotten meat and excrement. One of the ogres held up a smoking torch and motioned to the others to follow.

The ogres carried them deeper into the cave. At the back of the cave a large ogre woman was waiting. She had big, pointed sticks, and a fire burning. Tears rolled down the little trolls' faces as two of them watched the ogress put one of the sticks into the mouth of the first troll and push it all the way through his little body. She lifted him up on the stick and set him over the fire to roast.

A horrible taste rose up into her mouth from her stomach. The ogre arm holding her had begun to loosen and she had the sinking feeling she would be next. Warmth spread between her legs, and the pee dripped from her feet. She tried to fight the big arm that held her as the ogress came toward her with another of the sticks, but it was useless.

The ogre set her on her feet, his grip nearly crushing the bones in her arms, and another one pried her mouth open. She tried to scream, but the awkward angle they were holding her head at made it impossible. The ogress came closer with her big pointed stick. All she could think about was her grandbabies; how everything they had ever known was a lie. Blood poured into her mouth as the point of the stick went through the back of her throat. She had never known that blood tasted like copper coins. She could feel the stick as it went down through her throat and into her belly, then the pain drove all thought from her head.

■

R. James Sands

Rejection

They take my country roads
my landscapes my works
regarding the nature of life
in prose and verse
and paw over them
with crumbs falling from flat lips
that make smacking noises
and the beauty is devoured
like morning fresh scones
lost in a belly full of toast, eggs and bacon
seasoned with cronyism or worse, and
washed down with a bitter black
that rises faintly in the gorge
and mumbles back
something unintelligible about the pain
of being digested, mixed in rejected
corrupted and forgotten

■

Sestina: The Bullet Sons

The bullet sons violently rend the facade
comprising our dreams our serenity
forever lost by that violent cascade
of actions that echo eternity
off splattered, cracked walls of silent red ruin
painted red-rage by corrupted red vision

The children who crossed their empty red vision
cursed into dark by unnatural facade
surrounded with rage silhouetted in ruin
paths pointed and grim, disbarred from serenity
nocturnal black streets etched in eternity
forever entombed in the brutal cascade

The people are crushed by the brutal cascade
search in vain for the source of the vision
And give the bullet sons their share of eternity
coverage for life in a twisted facade
new religion, no hope, false serenity
transcribed in our news of self-serving ruin

The bullet sons blasted, the walls ran ruin
in random red-rage by rifle cascade
Their vengeance their song of serenity
in secrecy alone with their vision
fantasy for truth that built their facade
self-martyring death their eternity

The survivors live guilt for eternity
remember the walls and pay for the ruin
with knowledge they never saw through the facade
and wonder could they have stopped the cascade
if only they'd seen with clear vision
the sons' dead stare of serenity

Dark demons don no serenity
in dreams ride through hell for eternity
wrapped in red-rage destruction of vision
surrounding dead walls running red ruin
blasting dread echoes of sonic cascade
cursed by the truth gunned through the facade

No serenity for eternity
survivors' visual cascade plays ruin
bullet sons' fatal facade their vision



Sarra Kane

Safe Haven

It cracks like a whip against a back; the sound pierces the ears, the butterflies turn into moths and explode in the stomach. The cringe in the shoulders move up and forward, goose bumps trickle down the arms, and the eyes shut tightly. One moment, just two complete seconds and the orbit of the house is broken, for all creatures, enemies, and crying voices to run in and create their damage. That one can of wasted water can ruin an entire night, it can make connections of loved ones broken, memories spoiled, and innocent children have a burden on their chest until it is *all* over. One innocent child (the age of 13) is sitting on his big comfortable bed writing in his journal, filled with words of his thoughts, how he has felt, and the events of his days. With hazel eyes and brown hair, a pale, clear complexion, he stood tall against his other classmates. His name is Ryne, a name his mother, Emily, gave him, and a name his father yells at him.

“Ryne! Where the hell are my glasses? I need my fucking glasses,” the father shouted up the stairs.

Ryne looked up, the words running through his mind over and over again. Ryne didn't know where the glasses were. They weren't his glasses but his emotional state depended on their residence.

“Ryne, answer me!” He shouted again.

“Uh!” Ryne replied, jumping back from being startled, “I don't know!”

“What do you mean you don't know? Where the hell are my glasses?”

“Why would I know where your glasses are? I don’t touch your glasses.”

“Help me look for my God damn glasses!”

Ryne rolled his eyes, and laid down his composition journal. He scooted of his bed, stood up, and adjusted his pajamas (his normal choice of clothing the minute he got home from school). His feet cracked, and he walked around his bed to get to the doorway and made his way down the stairs. He started looking in the hallway table, inside and out... but there was nothing.

“What does a drunken man need his glasses for anyway?” Ryne asked himself out loud. He continued to walk down the hall, ruffling from the kitchen made him quick on his feet.

“Whenever I need the things they are never around, but when I don’t need them they are always in the way,” the dad mumbled to himself. There is never any stumbling, there is never any physical abuse, and there is never any vomit the next morning. The verbal thing always seemed to add up to it though. Ryne appreciated that all he had was the verbal part, those poor kids getting the shit beat out of them just because of a simple can holding a complicated beverage...but when the father was yelling at him for all the small reasons, as well as the big ones, he forgot about those poor kids. “Some people get it worse,” he would always have to remind himself after it was all over, “a lot of people get worse.”

“I can’t find them dad,” Ryne said, with a tone that was meant to be softer.

“Don’t give me any of that attitude, I don’t deserve any of it!”

“I wasn’t giving you any attitude, I was just saying.” Mumbling continued to come from the kitchen. Ryne’s dad always seemed to be talking to himself; it wasn’t uncommon to walk by him while he was having a conversation cutting up some vegetables for dinner or something. They never had a good relationship, talk was usually short, and problems were never shared or solved. Emily was always the one keeping an eye on Ryne. Now, she was gone. She never can come back, and Ryne will never forgive her for leaving him with his father. His heart swelled, fighting back tears, his face began to burn from redness. Every thought, mention in small talk, or even funny stories of her embarrassing moments about his mother made him feel like this. It was so painful, and becoming quiet ridiculous, it had been 4 years, her face still won’t leave his mind, her voice won’t leave his ears, and he still doesn’t know how to get rid of it all. He didn’t want to get rid of his mothers’ memory, but he wanted to get over the pain and missing aspect.

“Get upstairs, go back to your room!” Ryne’s father fought.

“Dad, I’ll help you find them, it’s okay!”

“No! You’re useless! Get back upstairs, I’ll find them by myself!” He waved his hand in a quick motion, pointing his fingers upstairs. Ryne didn’t mind being dismissed, it only meant that he could go back upstairs, lay around, and write in his journal some more. His bed was the safe haven, and for the rest of his teenage life it always would be. A slam from the bathroom door downstairs jumped Ryne. “Dammit! I can’t find anything in this house! Whenever I need things, they are never where they should be, and when I don’t need them they are always in the fuckin’ way!” He repeated. The television’s volume rose. That always bothered Ryne; the volume of the television was so loud the show could be understood from the upstairs, even after numerous times of asking his father to turn down the T.V. it still made its way to its highest point it could possibly go.

A shudder quickly made it up Ryne’s spine as he made himself comfortable on his bed again. The bedspread is a light blue, the kind of blue you see early in the morning before the sun rises, and it is just about to flood the rooms with light. The comforter was filled with goose feathers, and made him perfectly warm in the winter times, as there was only a simple electrical heater for the house which was located downstairs. He had many pillows, making it easy to rest his back without it becoming tired. He cried himself to sleep on those pillows many times, and as he is getting older and entering high school next year, he always hopes the next cry is the last one. Sooner or later the excuse of hurt feelings was not going to be a good one anymore.

Ryne picked up his journal. He continued writing about his day; it wasn’t very eventful, just normal classes, normal people, and normal high school drama. He wrote about a girl named Caitlyn he has begun to grow a crush on, her pretty gold eyes and chestnut colored hair was all he could think about. It seemed like he would go for it, but he was fighting with himself in the journal whether or not to make a move. For someone who just realized his social problems, it was hard to make the first moves for anything, he always hoped that they would make the move themselves so he wouldn’t have to. It was hard to make the change from being interpersonal to intrapersonal, making friends was a challenge period, but knowing that you used to be able to make friends is even harder.

“Dammit! Ryne! How the hell do...” the father yelled, but Ryne just ignored him. It was easy to ignore the yelling demands of a drunken man who he

barely even knew. But ignoring him usually didn't work. An acknowledgment had to be made most of the time. "Ryne!?"

"What dad?"

"Show me how to work this piece of crap," he said, more than likely talking about an electrical device, and it was probably the television.

"Kay." Ryne took himself away from his composition journal yet again, I'm never going to finish this, he thought.

"Ryne!?"

"Yes dad! I'm going." He trudged his way back down the stairs. He made his way into the living room, the air felt sticky, like a muggy summer day; it was stuffy with the smell of sweat and beer.

"Figure this out for me, I can't work this thing," his father pushed the remote into his chest. It was the T.V. that was bothering him, just like he thought. It was always giving him problems, and Ryne had no idea what would happen when he went to college and had to leave his father alone with the T.V. that he still has no idea how to operate.

"What do you need?"

"I can't watch a fuckin' movie," he answered, pointing his finger at the T.V. and rising to show the control of the room. *He* was in control (always, no questioning about it).

"Oh..." He fiddled around with some buttons, and turned down the volume while he had the remote in his hands. "There." His father sat back down on the sofa, all was good again. He grabbed his can of angry awfulness, and hooked his eyes to the television waiting for the movie to appear. He knew it would be a mistake, but he had to say it, "you're welcome..." Ryne mumbled.

"You poor forsaken ass, I give you so much, and you want me to thank you for fixing a T.V.? I don't think so...I give you so much in this God damn world, and I never get a thank you. I deserve the thank yous, not you!" Ryne knew it, he knew he shouldn't have said anything. His father's lips pursed and it seemed like he didn't have any lips at all.

Ryne did say thank you. He said thank you for being a wretched father, for teaching him what he doesn't want to be, and what he knows he should stay away from when he is older, but thank you for giving him a bigger risk of becoming an alcoholic too. He said thank you for showing him what he has to look forward to in life. He said thank you for making him feel guilty, and for confusing him. Ryne thanked his father for making him embarrassed of his home, and thanked him for making it hard to establish relationships and trust people again. Ryne lastly thanked his mother for leaving him with this person

that he felt like he hardly knew, but lived with for his whole entire life. The list goes on and on, only children with an alcoholic parent understand.

“Be a man and grow the hell up,” his father continued, as tears swelled in Ryne’s eyes for the second time tonight. He couldn’t help it; the heavy words rang in his head over and over again.

“I’m trying, you just won’t let me!” He walked away swiftly, hoping to leave a mark on his father. He climbed up the stairs, counting every step, trying to keep his mind off the words. He couldn’t, they took over, and by the time he entered his room and he slammed his door he jumped onto his bed and stuffed his face into the pillows. His tears were telling them stories again, being a guy didn’t matter at this moment, the tears just flowed. He put himself under the sheets, and under the comforter, and he was safe, in his safe haven. Before he knew it, his eyes were closed for the night, he dozed off into a land that he didn’t remember when he woke up the next morning.

“Hey kiddo,” A knock woke Ryne up, “ready for chocolate chip pancakes? Your favorite!”

Ryne suddenly felt bad for not himself, but his father. He may not remember everything, but what he does remember must be eating him alive. “Sure, that sounds good, thanks!”

■

Ily Darrow

Imprisoned

I jump from the metallic thud of the knife colliding with hard wood. I look down at my hands, numbly following the trail of blood run from my forearms to my fingertips dripping onto the floor. My eyes meet my own in the mirror. I pant with adrenaline, and fog up the glass. I do not recognize myself. Her eyes are stormy, sunken, revealing many more years than her age. Her young vibrant flesh is paled, poisoned with a shadow of sheer anger and resentment. Her blonde curls are dirtied with lifeless blood accumulated at the roots along her forehead. Her quivering lips contradict the dark expression of her face. I can feel what she feels. Think what she thinks. Ache where she aches., but she is not me. No, that face is not my own.

I shake the thoughts away, and grab my mothers rose and chamomile soap she forbade me to use. It is still wrapped in plastic, a pale pink ribbon so softly unties from the belly of the bar. The girl smiles a wicked smile at me. My mother will never tell me not to again. Slowly and meticulously, I wash my hands. The blood looks like thin oil hovering above the water. Binding freely. I marvel at how, though dead, blood overcomes both the pressure of the water and the friction of the lather. It floats above, as if breathing, conquering the force, fighting it's way down as it slips through the drain. I begin to grow impatient, for washing is becoming tedious and time consuming. I want the blood off and feel sick as I watch it absorb, tattooing my flesh. Blood is everywhere I look; my clothes, my arms, neck, face, my hair. How will I ever get it off? I decide to strip down and shower. I stand, bare feet atop porcelain until the water grows cold. I try to force myself to cry. Why do I feel no remorse? Why am I not ashamed? I should be mad with guilt and sadness-- my parents are dead. Dead. Not a tear falls. My parents are dead. Gone. Dead. *I killed my parents. I killed my parents. I am a murderer. Oh my God, I KILLED MY PARENTS!!* What am I going to do? I have to run and hide! Where will I go? My parents are dead!

Panicking, I towel off and quickly run into my room to find new clothes. While I fumble around, tripping over pant legs, I scan around and contemplate on what things I could quickly pack. I have no idea where I am going or how I will get there. I try not to think. To just do. I don't have time to think. I decide that all I need is my notebook. I am leaving this life behind and can get the necessities of my new identity later. I run into the dinning room to retrieve it and spot it on the window seat- my favorite spot to write. As I bend down to pick it up, I hear a strange noise. At first it was a slow and rhythmic drip, not like water from a leaky faucet, or light rain on a roof, but like a steady drum.

I turn toward the noise and squint, trying to figure out what room it is coming from. The drip begins to speed up and sound thicker, fuller: *drum drop drum drop drum drop drum drop...* and I hear a chair in the living room creak loudly, as if someone sitting upon it shifted his/her weight. *Drum drop drum drop...* I start walking cautiously toward the living room growing more curious. I stop in the arched doorway linking the foyer and the living room and freeze. I smell a horrifying smell that takes the breath right out of me. It is a combination of raw hamburger being left out in the sun and my mothers overpowering perfume. The room is too warm, but sends a quick chill up my spine. I take it in-

my father's precious reference books and reports are quietly napping on his mahogany desk. His bifocals waiting to assist with his latest case. His red hanky is folded neatly in a square on his desk as it has been for years. My mother's hand painted tea cup and saucer is daintily sitting atop her end table. Her knitting draped along the ottoman accompanying her favorite down chair. Although the tea by now has grown old, you can see that she has just recently sipped from it, for a faint trace of her champagne lipstick lingers along the lip. The setting sun spills through the olive drapes and brings a sense of peace in the house. It clings to the antique hand carved table holding a collection of framed photographs of the family. The sun brings light to some of the faces in them- not one picture of me. Not one picture of me my whole life.

I look over to the other side of the room, in darkness, as though the room is divided in half; evil and goodness. There is a tremendous amount of blood saturating the beautiful Persian rugs placed along pumpkin pine floors. What have I done? I walk closer, caught between the desire to run and the desire for confirmation. Something is pulling me in, drawing me to them, as if forcing me to face the scene of my crime. Both of my parents are facing away from me, arms bound to the chair backs with silver duct tape. Their heads are bowed unnaturally forward, hanging from their bodies like overly bloomed lilies. The steady dripping is coming from their bodies, echoing each other, simultaneously collecting in the puddles beneath them, and beginning to join in the middle as if sharing each other's pain. I walk around to face them, studying their heads, unable to see anything clearly but the profile of my mother's face. Her eyes are open, and I immediately look away. I am close enough to my mother to make out another noise- it is like gurgling underwater, followed by air slowly escaping a clamped balloon. I move closer, her smell unbearable, and watch for any movement in her chest. I realize that she is still breathing.. *Still breathing! My mother is alive!* I am still a moment, petrified to move. What do I do? I bend down close to her face to make sure that I am not imagining it and her eyes meet my eyes. I will never forget the look in her eyes.- pleading with me- my mother, my wicked, torturous mother- my raging, cruel, unforgiving, relentless mother- begging *me* for answers. To save her. To spare her. How dare she. Did she really think she was going to get away with this forever? Why does she look so surprised? "Oh mother, you had it coming..."

I ignore the hesitation. I ignore the desire. I ignore the word "please" escaping her cooling bloody lips smeared with icy tears. I turn to walk away and

can hear the desperate shifts and squeaks of her chair legs against the pine, as she scrabbles for one shred of my humanity.

I reach in between my mattress and box spring and retrieve the precious document. It smells musty and damp, like the isle holding the rare book collection in my father's library. It is always a novelty to have the chance to pick books down there. I leisurely browse the lovely bindings and breathe in the smell of my father's Old Spice and French vanilla cappuccinos. I slowly and carefully trace the letters in ink along the thick line with my index finger. I linger over the last name, memorizing the letters. I say the full name aloud. "Leah Marie Orsteck". The names were foreign, yet somehow familiar. Would my life be different now had I lived with this identity? Would I have been the same person, felt the same feelings and made the same decisions, had I lived under this name? Who am I now? I close my eyes and try to recall a memory, a moment, anything buried deep within my mind. Why don't I remember? How could I not remember my own name? I open my eyes again and read the names below it, "Marianna Olive Orsteck and Regenal David Orsteck". Why can't I see their faces? Hear their voices? How could I not have any memory of my parents? Taped along the back was the article headlined, "Toddler Kidnapped From Visiting Circus". It was perfectly cut out of the newspaper, creased permanently from being folded and re-folded a thousand times. How could they have done this to me? How could anyone do such a thing? I look at my innocent face in the picture, a wide grin, open with the goodness of childhood, where the dangers in life were nonexistent. Where they were impossible. This is who I was. This is who I was meant to be all along. The rage inside my heart starts to boil and circulates through my veins again. My whole childhood was lived in a prison of lies.

I bring the paper up to my nose a last time and I close my eyes briefly as my lips meet my touchstone. I place the birth certificate carefully between pages in my notebook, and tuck it in the waistband of the back of my jeans. I walk out into the hall and make my way toward the foyer to climb the stairs to my parents room. The bed is freshly made with my mother's favorite flannel rose sheets with pansies embroidered along the scalloped edges. The pillowcases and down comforter cover are perfectly pressed and creased, tucked hospital style along the corners of the mattress. Her reading glasses and book light are positioned "just so", next to her quilting book on her bedside table. By the window, an elegant vanity is flowing with expensive bottles of ritzy perfumes

collected from all over the world. They are organized by size on a cast iron tray, protecting the surface of the wood from potential leaks. Hours she sits here, slowly brushing her once beautiful hair, humming melodies with glazed eyes lost in faraway enchantment with her younger self. Forty- three strokes she would count while brushing, followed by a religious ritual of smelling the bottles before selecting her “mood for the day”. She then would brush imaginary dust from the wood, and push in her cushioned stool upon standing, giving a self-indulging smile of satisfaction. This is my cue to begin the cleaning rounds. I have much work to do, and have little time to do it in.

Everything must be sanitized and organized. Everything must be collected and confirmed. If I ever question her orders, she will respond, “We are nothing without routine, my darling. We are all either puppets or things . You are my pet, and I own you to do my bidding. Your life’s purpose is to please me.” I shudder as I picture her accentuate the word “me”. Her injected lips pucker with power peeking her ten thousand dollar pearly whites. Her eyebrows arched with disdain for me. Interrupted and annoyed, she would fluff her hair with the palm of her hand and whisk herself away with her pompous skirts following. I can hear her heels clicking, calling to me midway down the stairs, echoing in the foyer, “Time’s ‘a ticking, Pet.”

Suddenly, I get an urge to do something drastic. Something insane. I sprint down to the kitchen and whip open the garage door, eyes skittering my father’s tool benches. Along the backboard, there are hundreds of tools hanging store-like, organized by type and duty. I nervously search for something damaging, but easily handled. What is it I am looking for? My eyes stop at a heavy-duty hammer, and I, in one motion, release it from the hook and start swinging. I swing, ripping hooks from the board, freeing tools to the cement floor, breaking boards, carving projects, ships in bottles, madly laughing as the debris covers every corner. I move from room to room, smashing dishes, frames, bottles, potpourri displays, antique figurines, vases, paintings. I throw priceless books onto the floors, at walls, breaking windows, satisfied and elated with the cacophony of shattering glass. I bound up the stairs and smash my mother’s perfumes, unstring pearls, destroy majestic jewelries she has hanging in her forbidden cabinet. I venture into her doll room and maniacally dismember every doll, smashing the painted-on smiles of every serene face. All along I am laughing, hysterically out of my mind, tearing through halls, rabidly seeking my next target.

In seeking finality, I return to the garage, and set the hammer down on the tool bench. I grab a can of gasoline waiting in the corner. I know there will be matches above the wood stove in the living room. I snatch up the matches from the mantle, and move along, room to room pouring gasoline. I waltz with the can, humming the tune of my mother's mirror song, dousing every corner and item in sight. I head back down to the garage, tossing the can in the corner and stand in the kitchen doorway, as if saying good bye to myself. With a breath, I strike the match and bring it down to the trail of heavenly liquid along the stone floor. The beauty of flames lighting up ahead of me was mesmerizing, sending a rush of relief over my entire body. I watch, hypnotized as my prison becomes engulfed. I head down the drive and turn around when I reach the sidewalk. I stare at the gorgeous Victorian home, swallowed by the fire serpent, leaping from room to room, and smile a wicked smile. I am free- free. I flip the bird, while beginning to walk and mutter, "May you burn in my hell."

I finish reading my notebook and stare at the page, slowly becoming reacquainted with my surroundings. The lawyer looks at a spot on the wall somewhere behind me. "And what happened then? Where did you go when you left the house"? He is clearly annoyed and unconvinced. I uneasily readjust in the hard chair. His lips are pursed in impatience and his eyes are bland with malevolence. I fidget in my seat, my legs are beginning to go numb, and I wonder when it will be time for a recess. I swallow dryly, desperate to soothe my parched throat. I can feel the jury's shocked eyes lock onto me.

"Well, I walked until I arrived downtown. I asked someone passing by for directions to the nearest bus station. I knew that I wanted to find my biological parents. My birth place on the certificate said Des Moines, Iowa, so when I found the station, I purchased a one-way ticket there. It took me three days in all, and when I got there, I took a cab and checked into the first cheap hotel I found."

"And how exactly did you pay for this hotel? How long did you stay there?"

"I used my mother's credit card and father's wallet cash for everything I needed at first. Look, I wasn't trying to be a crook. I didn't know what else to do, never being in the outside world and all. I got a job and started working as

soon as I was able. I just needed some help to get by until then. Harley helped me the rest of the way, and I paid rent regularly to the manager like a tenant would since then.”

“Tell me about this, “Harley” character. How exactly did you meet her? And didn’t you tell her your story? Why was she so willing to help you along?”

“I met her on the bus while traveling to Des Moines. She was in her mid-thirties- thirty-six, I think. We became friends right away, and she made me feel safe and understood. I looked up to her in many ways. I told her that I had run away from home and wanted to hold my own. I didn’t tell her why, and she never asked. She probably figured I would talk about it when I was ready. She knew I was in a tough spot, so she got me a job in the circus with her. She worked the lions and tight-rope. She got me a job with cleaning cages and grooming the animals. I was amazed with what was out in the world. It was a beautiful. I was mighty thankful for everything she did for me.”

“And, Harley helped you find your parents? They worked in this circus too? How did you know that they were your parents?”

“Well, I didn’t at first. No, it took awhile for it all to piece together. I just remember how majestic and fascinating they were doing their acts and all. I was instantly interested in them, and couldn’t get enough. They did the flame-throwing and all the gypsy-type acts with music that sounded surreal, like in dreams and horror flicks. The kind of things people go to circus’ to see and never forget. I remember the way my father spoke, his bottom lip kinda hung between sentences, and his shoulders would grow heavy when he was deep in thought. My mother had a walk like a temptress, kinda sashayed seductively from place to place. She also had a nervous energy about her, and you could always tell when she had a lot on her mind, ‘cause she would start picking her face. I noticed all of these things, ‘cause they were part of me. I did these things too.” As I describe my parents, my heart fills with sorrow, and I have to try, with everything I have in me, to not cry. My eyes meet them across the courtroom, behind the defense table. I can see how tired they are. I can see how much pain they are going through, again, but they still hold it together and seem so strong.

“Now, when exactly did you tell your parents about the murder? Why did you tell them?”

“Well, one night when we were done with a good show, and we were sittin’ around the fire playing games and telling stories, we all started to get a little sentimental and silly from exhaustion. We all took turns telling a broken story of our past, and when my parents started talking, they told the story about losing their baby girl fifteen years ago. It was while she was sleeping. They were preparing for an act, when someone came into the tent and took her. They looked everywhere, questioned everyone, even filed a missing report and searched state to state for all of these years, and no one ever had any answers. The case was eventually dropped and filed away unsolved. Even my parents gave up and moved on the best they could. That night, I crept into their tent and showed them my birth certificate I had found in my mother’s closet. We wept and held onto each other until the sun came up. I told them everything I did, and everything I went through, and how happy to finally be where I belonged.”

“What did your first parents do to you? What drove you to commit such an unspeakable crime?”

“My mother owned me. I was there to do what she wished. I would clean all day, and was forced to be schooled all night. The only time I was able to sleep was when I was chained to my bed when she napped or when dad was home on the weekends. I was allowed solitude for an hour a day to shower, and most of the time I would just sit in the tub or on my favorite window seat and write. There were bars over the windows and locks outside all of the doors, and I never went outside. My mother believed that the world was evil, and that it would poison me. She believed that I had all I ever needed right in our house. We had no phone, no television or radio, and hardly any contact with the world. Occasionally there would be men that came over with my father when he would return from work that would be sent to my room during the night. I would be blindfolded and chained to my bed while they touched and kissed my skin and found pleasure inside my body. I could hear my mother somewhere in the corner of my room chanting low orders between their hot breaths and moans. She would later say, “Pet, men keep your body soft and supple. We are nothing unless we are needed and desired.” I was only allowed a meal a day, and it was almost always a salad with some sort of shredded meat. It was to keep me hungry for fulfillment and my figure divine. I remember being caught once sneaking a slice of swiss cheese while she was napping, and I was shackled in the basement for a week without food. My mother would come down daily to

share tea and bathe me. She would fix my hair and paint my face and nails while telling me what an awful creature I was to deceive her. There were times I would disobey her wishes. Longing to retreat with my notebook, I would sneak off and leave my chores behind, and shortly after, hear her calling sharply through the halls. I would always quickly hide my notebook, terrified she would destroy it. My books were all I had. Because I had defied her, she whipped me every 15 minutes as I scrubbed floors on my knees for a week. When I began to bleed from my back and knees, my mother would stop to clean and dress my wounds, panicked they would show through my dresses. “

I stop talking, lost in thought. I realize that I am beginning to tremble, squeamish with the things I was revealing about my parents. I have to remind myself that they are gone. I will never be punished again. It was over. I was safe now.

“What about your father? Did your father do anything to hurt you?”

“My father was a coward. He enabled her and did as she commanded. He watched her torture me and gave her the tools to do so. He hurt me more than she ever did.”

“How did you actually kill them? You said you had a knife?”

“Well, yes, it was a knife. The night before, I had taken some of my mother’s sleeping pills from her night table and crushed them during my shower time. So, it was a Saturday, my father was home for the day. While I was preparing our salads for lunch, I slipped three doses each of the medications in their drinks and brought them out. Our lunch was usually about an hour, because my mother liked to take her time and work on her puzzles, and my dad would read the paper. I knew there was plenty of time for the drugs to kick in. When they did, they both fell in a deep sleep and I quickly went to work. I used duct tape to bind them in place to their chairs, and quickly stabbed them twice in the chest with a stainless steel chef’s knife. I wanted to make it as painless as possible. I just wanted it to be over. I just wanted to be free. I realized that my mother lived through the stabs, and when I looked into her eyes, it reminded me of all she put me through and I got angry. Real angry. Anyone would be! I could have put her out of her misery, but I wanted her to need me. I wanted her to be helpless and at my mercy. I wanted her to be powerless, and her life and

precious things out of place and destroyed. I longed to let the poison in. I wanted her to feel pain. So I left her there, alive, to burn with the house. “

“No further questions, your honor.” With that, he slides his feet around across the tiled floor, and heads back towards the table. The room is silent. Some mouths are quivering, many tears are slipping from eyes of disbelief, some have their heads low, and some people have disgusted expressions upon their faces. I realize that I am crying, and the bones in my hands are rattling. Embarrassed, I quickly shove them in my lap. I look over at the judge, and he has his face fixed upon some paperwork, as if trying to sort the information, finding a place for it all.

He suddenly looks up and announces a recess, and dismisses me from the stand. I am escorted to a back room of glass and given a grape soft drink. Are they all going to believe me? What is going to happen now? They must realize that I am telling the truth and that I should be allowed to be with my parents. Surely they should understand that I had to do what I did. What other choice did I have? I pictured my parents’ faces in the courtroom, and how drained they looked, imagining what they must be feeling now. I wanted to understand why they did this. How could they have turned me in? Yet, at the same time, somehow I understood. They were good, honest, and decent people. It was the right thing to do. Maybe they were confident with me getting out of this, sure that the law would understand. If I win, will they take me home and hold me? Love me like a daughter ought to be loved? The desire to be with them grew deeper every minute I waited to be taken back in. I was ready now, imagining what my new home would look like, what kind of dinners I would eat, what it was like to be free. Make friends. Be loved. Feel sun on my face, wind in my hair, water around my skin, taste of rain on my lips. I wondered if they had pets. What kind of windows we would have. What places we would go. Who I really was.

The bailiff summons me over to the doorway and tells me it is time. As we walk through the doors, I can feel the anticipation, thick and sticky like humid summer air. I meet eyes with my father and he offers me a smile of reassurance. My mother is picking at her chin and leaning against his arm with tears in her eyes. I am gestured to take my seat at the table next to my lawyer. He whispers something in my ear that I can’t make out. The buzz of the silence

is too loud. The judge is shuffling papers again. Everyone is perplexed, waiting for the verdict. My pounding heart is sending blood screaming to my ears.

He clears his throat. “The ladies and gentlemen of the jury have reached a verdict. In regards to Leah Marie Orsteck, on this 5th day of August 1997, the jury has found her GUILTY of first degree murder of both Louise and Frederick Palmer.” There is a unanimous gasp from the stands behind me and my mother begins to openly wail. My father kisses her forehead repeatedly in between his own sobs. I am numb. The guards are taking me away now--away. I feel I am in a dream. Just one more look at my parents, please, I ask him. One more look. He continues to pull me along, and over my shoulder I catch a glimpse of an open window letting the sun and air in, birds chirping, happiness and freedom bloom. I think to myself, I am destined to be in a prison after all.

■

Crows

We sit, yards between us, offering bread to birds
You're head bowed with weight of remembrance
My chin upwards warm with dreams of morning sun

Strangers sharing a mutual understanding
transforming question into solidarity
We are lead here to release our burdens

I am compelled to be beside you, share your silence
So I gather my things and draw near your bench
Your posture remains unstirred in my presence

Initially, no words are spoken between us
Just two resting souls catching their breaths
Hungry to soothe our pain and embrace acceptance

Your tranquility invites me to gaze in wonder
Fascinated by the mystery within you
Sensing my awe, your smoky blue eyes unite with mine

A faint smile curls your lips in welcome
A twinkle of amusement in your expression
And as though I imagined it, you return to the birds

I find it impossible to pull myself away from you
I study your movements as you peel the crust from the bread
Meticulously portioning the pieces, miles away

A flask is swung back meeting lips, fire popping under stars
There is conversation of two men proudly skinning hides
Whiskey induced laughter echoes through the thick pine

Somewhere in the distance there are screams of terror
Bullets sear through the smoky horizon, burning flesh
A brother with throat full of blood, chokes out his goodbye

I hear a child giggling and carefree, bouncing ringlets
Preparing biscuits and orange spice tea into plastic china
Her daddy, in lavender ribbons, happily obliges

A woman, daintily props her legs upon boat rails
Golden hair waving to the sea, sun kissing her creamy skin
The boat skips the surface, spraying the air with sea and salt

A man clutches cool stone, his knees meet the earth
Tears of unbearable anguish stream down his defeated face
Banished to continue alone without explanation

I take his mighty hand graciously into my own
Joining lives of simple strangers, sharing journeys
Two souls resting upon a park bench, birds among us catching crumbs

Though the crows have traipsed across your face
The world has carried on leaving your stories behind
Hero, I know what lives miles away in your eyes

And never will you be forgotten.

■

Daniel Libby

Mayonnaise

Fire burns the real
Currently wood
With no means to heal
Roots deep
Trunk thin
Few rings of age
Look high
Where rainbows collide
Like seasons disguise

A matchstick mind
Thoughts spark bright
But burn center hollow
Ash dance in the night

Self forgotten
Ground soaks up sorrow,
Crust left brittle
Like fair skin of old

Wavering in wind
Beauty turns dust, untold
From the depths of earth
Spawn weed like rage

Uplifted from grave
Spread through dirt like decay,
The world left cold
I remember the day my friend lost her soul.

■

Jonathan Racine

Distance

I left her last night pouring tears
It was the worst fight we'd had in years
I don't know why after a few beers
I talk about all those past years
About the way it used to be
About the way you felt for me
I don't know why it still can't be
How its was before

I packed my bags and I'm heading north
The pedals down and I'm moving forth
I guess that's the way that it should be
If only you were here with me
The drive up
I'm all alone
My head is spinning and my mind is thrown
I can't believe I left you there
But how can you think I don't care

I loved you since we first met
I don't know why but I won't forget
The way that you smiled at me
I knew right then that it was to be

How we'd run miles together
How we should be forever
I wished that nothing had to change
But distance is hard and I'm headed to Maine

I packed my bags and I'm heading north
The pedals down and I'm moving forth
I guess that's the way that it should be
If only you were here with me

The drive up
I'm all alone
My head is spinning and my mind is thrown
I can't believe I left you there
But how can you think I don't care
That I don't care.....
That I don't care



Jenan Jondy

Broken

*Why is it they say winds will bring
change?*

*Great apparent change
One oppressor and the next
The talk, the arrogant walk*

*Moans and cries whistle pass me
With ease, so many they all change
Different voices, different people,
different places
Dissonant, free to reach out to
whomever*

*Assuaged by great speeches, given
by great men
Rocks that keep us safe*

*Not even cowards we dare not peek
Or even dare to speak
Feed the hungry while they are all
well fed*

*Personal gain, others pain
Draw the lines, see it through
No time to stop*

*Hold down the fort, build the fires
Keep them roaring, raging
Build some more*

*That familiar smell of nothingness
keeps me company
Out alone in the cold
I feel the despair move my soul*

*Bringing forth storms and
pounding waves
Time will prove these stones to fade
Wearing down, broken to pieces
By the winds of change*

*Carried out to sea – to open
nothingness
To their dwellings in the depths
below
Obliged to darkness, they build
their fires no more*

■

Jenn Nute

The Decision

The wilderness surrounds me now
The leaves glide from the trees
I see the covered pathway turn
Into the depths beyond
A question now presents itself
The curving trail or straight
The sun conceals behind a cloud
The leaves fall down around

■

Ashley B. Migliore

A Robin Dwelling in a Spruce

A robin dwelling in a spruce
Has built a lovely nest.
Among the boughs, her song let loose
To join with all the rest.
But this dear birdie's gay estate
Will shortly pass away.
For, though she's found the perfect mate,
He's likely not to stay. ■

Raise your glass

A glass is raised, an eyebrow, kiss
me quick
The day is never ending, night is
not
All green and red, the boy soon
dies asleep
And tears, they cease to fall for
those who fight
Now quick and quiet, whisper once
or twice
Let's wander through the fields of
living mines
And laugh and laugh at things that
do not matter

■

Scott Matteson

Have it your way

I walked to Burger King to receive my last paycheck. A short woman with a fox-like face, wearing the usual brown uniform with two white stripes down the side, and a tie dangling from her neck glared at me slyly. She had fired me a week ago. I had all but forgotten as I approached the counter. My nostrils filled with the broiled meat scent. I looked down to sign for my check only to read: “Scott Matteson, TERMINATED!” I read it as though her voice was yelling in my head. Even more cynical was the smiley face she drew next to it; this was her bite, and it stung. The mockery was intolerable. Soon a plan gathered itself in my head. I drew a tongue sticking out of the smiley face and signed my name while contemplating revenge.

Stacy, a friendly, long faced blonde girl with glasses, was working the drive-through. I shared my plan with her; she reacted with an uncertain grin, and commented, “You’re crazy.” They were short on help. Because of the numerous call-ins, Terry, my former boss, was making the burgers. I opened the restaurant door to a sunny fall day. The smell of singeing meat in the air was still noticeable. Beside the door was my answer: a large tarp banner was dancing in the light breeze. Highlighted on this banner in all their glory were three burgers: a single, a double, and a triple, each accented by the same flaming background. They beamed down upon me. The prices were also highlighted. They started at \$.49 for a single and increased by \$.50 for each step up. I pulled out my wallet to count my last twenty dollars; I felt a crazed look graze my face as I walked to my car.

I slowly drove down the narrow winding path that was the drive through. Stacy was on the other end; “May I take your order?”

I started modestly by ordering a cheeseburger with light mustard, heavy mayonnaise on two bottom buns cut in half and double wrapped. Stacy repeated

the order back to me and asked, "Will this complete your order?" I continued by ordering another burger, this one was with heavy onion, heavy lettuce, light tomato, extra ketchup, extra mustard, extra mayonnaise, light barbeque sauce, light pickle on two bottom buns cut into quadrants and double wrapped.

There are thousands of ways to make a Burger King cheeseburger and I was determined to try as many as my budget would allow. After each burger Stacy repeated my order back to me and asked, "Is this it?" After trying to repeat my first five absurd requests Stacy became too tongue-tied to repeat the entire order.

The air began to shake with the blowing of horns. The line of cars behind me had overflowed into the Wal-Mart parking lot, and unfortunately for those patrons, I was only half way through my order. An older man in a beat up rusty blue boat of a car wailed on his horn angrily and made at least two inappropriate hand gestures before peeling out of the parking lot, leaving a cloud of smoke. The others soon followed, venting their rage in the form of hand motions, yelling and honking, but they all eventually succumbed to my stubbornness and left.

Upon ordering a total of thirty cheeseburgers, I pulled up to the window to pay. Mike, a nerdy manager who resembled an awkwardly overgrown hobbit, met me at the window. After paying he asked, "Please drive around to the front." I refused to until I got my food, then he threatened, "Before I call the cops." My objective was to make Burger King pay without doing anything illegal, much like a Dr. King protest.

I parked in front of the store, my heart racing as my hand clenched the steering wheel. I could not believe what I had just done, a proud, foolish sense of guts and triumph overcame me only to be immediately stopped by a dose of reality; "WHAT THE HELL AM I GOING TO DO WITH THIRTY CHEESEBURGERS?" I exclaimed. Again my foolish plan had to evolve. I thought about taking them to a homeless shelter, but I knew of none in the area.

Then I remembered the high school soccer team had a game, but, eventually one thought prevailed. I entered the store to collect my burgers and started offering them to customers, providing they agreed to not to order anything else. Free cheeseburgers were an easy sale and customers quickly took them. A large, raspy man even helped himself to ten for his family, and suspiciously, the neighborhood kids.

After being fired, ridiculed, and mocked, I had avenged my wrongful termination. In the course of forty five minutes, during rush hour: I had made countless customers go elsewhere, I had displace my anger upon this careless corporate conglomerate, I had rendered a total of 60 buns useless by ordering only bottoms, and I had spread joy to strangers with my generosity. Terry looked at me as though wounded by a hunter, her eyes swelling with fatigue. Defeated, she quietly said, "Please leave." I followed her request with a smirk as I exited the Farmington Burger King for the last time, and drove away, jobless and broke. My mouth expanded to a large grin. I had made Terry's life a grueling nightmare for forty five minutes. My career was over, but for a short time I had it my way.

■