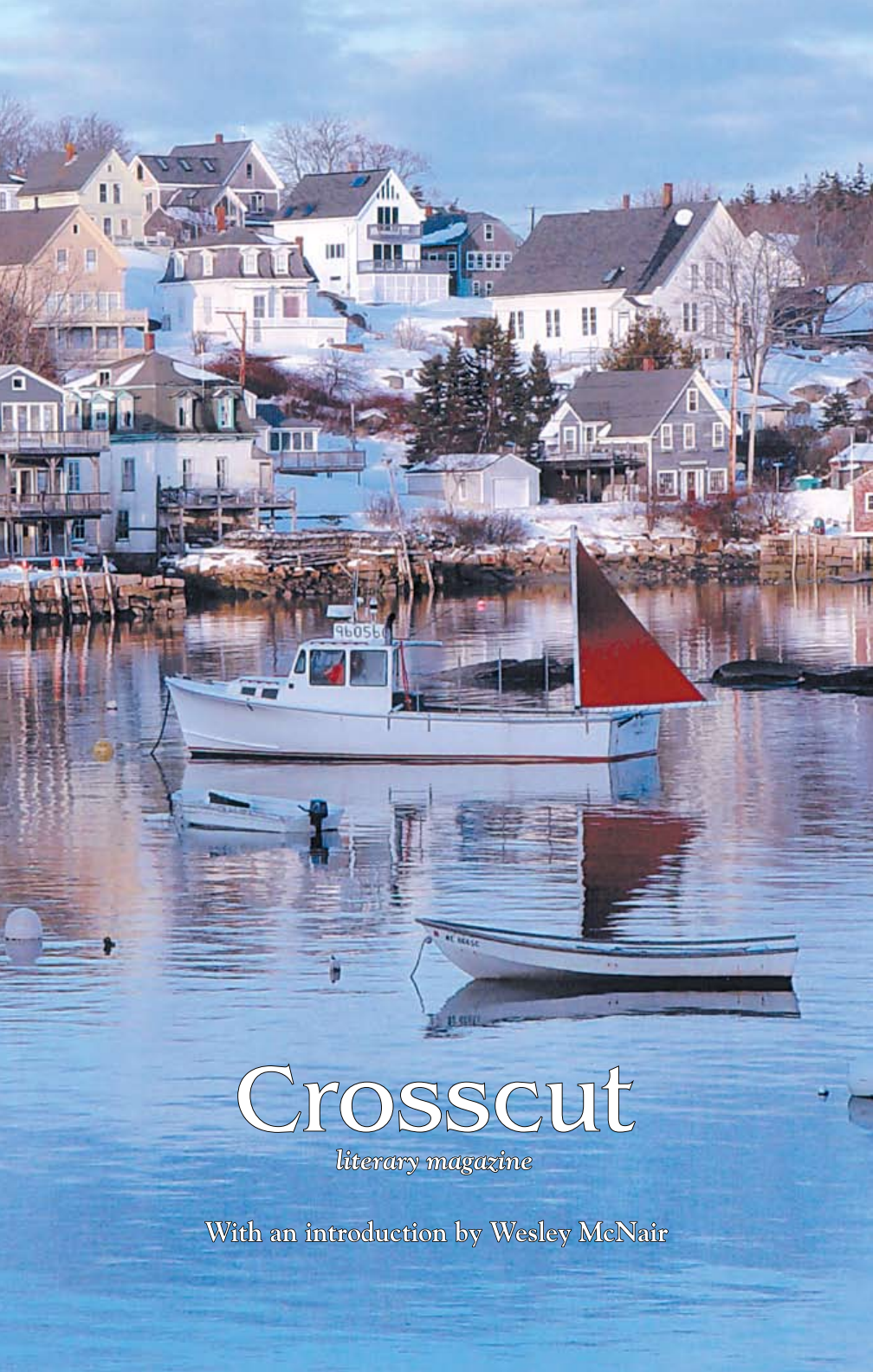
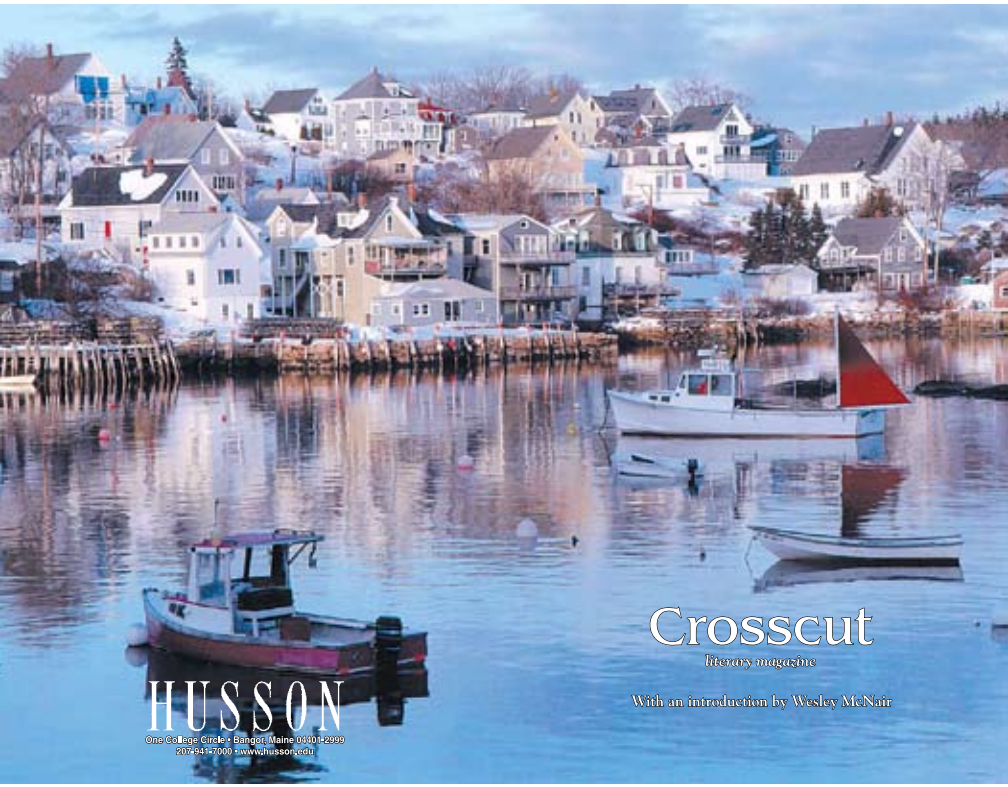


Crosscut

literary magazine

With an introduction by Wesley McNair



Cover Photo: “Stonington” by Kathy Wall
wrapped from the front to the back cover.

Crosscut

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Preface

Under two feet of snow—there's more on the way, the radio promises—and a pewter mid-March sky, I'm searching for signs of spring. By this time last year, Penobscot ice was already flowing seaward. The fields outside my door were rolling back their white covers, as timid snowbirds rejoined the resolute, year-round ravens and chickadees.

This year, winter lingers. I keep boots, skis and snowshoes ready; sandbags stay in back of the truck. So I look to Crosscut. As another volume of poetry, prose, drawing and photography comes together at Husson, its appearance alone dares speak of spring.

Farmington poet and Maine literature anthologist Wesley McNair opens the collection this year with his memoir of first publication. His message is appropriate, as a number of writers and artists included in the following pages are themselves discovering that same magical moment. Here's your invitation to share in it with them. Enjoy their work, their springtime and your own.

— Greg Winston

Introduction

Wesley McNair

When Greg Winston asked me to submit an essay for *Crosscut* that might introduce the work of young Husson College writers in formation, I was sure I did not have a thing to offer. Then I remembered my own development as a poet that began when I was just their age, and I decided I had a subject after all. My hope is that by relating this story about the early generosity of a fellow writer, the obstacles to my own journey as a writer later on, and my first small episode of success, I will provide not only a suitable introduction for this issue, but encouragement to the students whose work is collected here.

Like these authors, I began writing when I was quite young, though as a kid growing up in rural Vermont and New Hampshire, I seldom found peers I could show my poems to. But this all changed the summer before my senior year, when I became a kitchen boy at Lost River Gorge in the White Mountains. There, I got the chance to meet and talk with the college students who led tours through the gorge, one of them John, a literature student at Columbia University with a passion for poetry. After hours, the two of us wrote and often talked about our poems, and the relationship we struck up over poetry

resulted in one of the most important pieces of mail I ever received: a small, heavy box that arrived the next spring, bearing my name in bold letters. At the time, John must have been moving out of his dorm room, since the box was packed with books he had purchased for college courses or for recreational reading during the school year. There were novels by William Faulkner, Carson McCullers, and Ernest Hemingway; collections of essays by Randall Jarrell and R. P. Blackmur on the work of Cummings, Moore, Frost, and others; and poetry by Cummings, Williams, Ferlinghetti, and the pre-Wasteland Eliot. Having such volumes to read as a high school student in the boondocks of western New Hampshire gave me a feeling for the modern tradition in America that might otherwise have taken me years to acquire. And finding a copy of Columbia University's literary magazine with a poem by John himself in it suggested to me that I might one day be able to publish my own poetry. As I sometimes tell others, what I received on that spring day was a vocation in a box.

I hope that the aspiring writers whose efforts follow this introduction find their way into writing careers more quickly than I did. As it turned out, my first published poem appeared several years after receiving that box. It was not only family life that got in the way (I married young and started raising children right away); I took to writing short stories and drawing cartoons. In the end, the fiction I worked on taught me methods of narration that became important to my poems, so I can't really say my short stories were a distraction. I see now that my cartoons were important to my poetry, too — not only because they helped bring the subject matter of pop visuals into my verse, but because the single-caption cartoon I attempted is so much like the lyrical narratives of my later verse: One places two or three characters together in a certain resonant situation, touches just the right words against them, and poof! the cartoon comes to life. The

narrative poem is less static than the single-caption cartoon, of course, but there is a similar interest in the moment, and in the compression and tone of language. For years I tried unsuccessfully to publish the stories or the cartoons I worked on, regularly cursing my luck. Now I see there was luck in the venture after all.

I wrote my first narrative poem as an adult at Lake Mascoma in Enfield, New Hampshire, when I was twenty-seven years old. At the time, my family and I had just been turned out of a lovely old cape we had rented for five years, near Newport and not far from my job at Colby Junior — later, Colby-Sawyer — College. Though my wife was pregnant with a fourth child, the family that owned the house pressured us to leave after only a month's notice, then showed up on moving day to urge us out and cut down two of our favorite trees. Not knowing what else to do, we prevailed upon my in-laws to let us stay at their cottage on the lake until we could go elsewhere. There, I put aside the short stories I had been working on to begin "Leaving the Country House to the Landlord," a poem about our traumatic move.

The necessity of this poem, which forced me back to poetry, also compelled me to make use of approaches I had learned as a fiction writer. Stanza by stanza, I composed a series of scenes or moments that revealed the one family packing up and moving out, and the other family cutting down trees and moving in. The difference between my poem and the fiction I had worked on was that in the poem, all of the scenes took place simultaneously in one spot of time. Impatient always with the linear requirements of plot in the short story — that "and then, and then-ness" — I was able at last to tell a story that seemed to take place all at once, combining elements of narration with a sense of the lyric. Having learned this lesson, which influenced all the poems I wrote afterward, I never returned to fiction.

People who lived through the assassination of Presi-

dent Kennedy remember where they were when they got the news; I recall exactly where I was when I learned that my first poem had been accepted for publication. Standing outside of the post office in Enfield near the end of my family's fateful summer, I had just picked up the mail that had collected there for two or three weeks. By then, my family and I were living in the home of my in-laws in Keene so they could have the cottage for the month of August. Too broke even to have our car aligned, I had driven for weeks to a summer job on badly scalloped front tires. In short, things couldn't have been worse — until I opened my letter of acceptance from Poetry Northwest. The steering wheel shaking in my hands, I drove all the way to Keene weeping and shouting, "I've found a form!" Though I now find a certain awkwardness in the poem that once rescued me from my formless life, the moment when I arrived in Keene to share my good fortune with my wife Diane is still vivid and perfect in my mind.

....Looking back on my early struggle to make poems, which took place with little guidance well outside of a writing community and the world of publishing, I can't help but envy the young authors of this issue. What could be more beneficial to developing writers than to have peers who share their pursuits – a whole group of Johns? What could be better for young people seeking an audience than a literary magazine right on campus ready to publish their best work? I commend Husson College and in particular Greg Winston for helping to create this community of writers on Husson's campus, and for establishing Crosscut to honor the work they do. And I commend the student writing between these covers to you, Dear Reader, without whose attention what has inspired such passion and devotion would be nothing more than words on a page. ❧

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Farmer's wife, mother of eight, grandmother, great-grandmother
Library volunteer, cook, seamstress, gardener, expert popcorn ball maker.
They call it the "long good-bye"
Celebrities have it; ex-presidents suffer with it and Nana's get it too.

Library volunteer, cook, seamstress, gardener, expert popcorn ball maker
Kids came to the farm from miles around on Halloween
Celebrities have it; ex-presidents suffer with it and Nana's get it too.
Her own children growing, serving, moving, marrying

Kids came to the farm from miles around on Halloween
My own remembrances of good night stories and the Lord's Prayer
Her own children growing, serving, moving, marrying
Generational memories mixing, matching, some fuzzy some clear

My own remembrances of good night stories and the
Lord's Prayer
Now, my children remember visiting their Nana,
not knowing her any other way.
Generational memories mixing, matching, some fuzzy
some clear
Adults loving Nana as she was, kids loving Nana as she is.

Now, my children remember visiting their Nana,
not knowing her any other way.
Dancing with those in walkers, drawing rainbows
for folks who stood in line.
Adults loving Nana as she was, kids loving Nana as she is.
Slowing their exuberant stride, the little ones walk
attentively with her.

Dancing with those in walkers, drawing rainbows
for folks who stood in line
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Slowing their exuberant stride, the little ones walk
attentively with her
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Bruce Pratt

Elsie

Elsie closed her eyes and struck at the gray bank with a long-handled spade, ice and old snow flying back at her. The spray was cool against her face, and tiny crystals shimmered and stuck in the curly brown hair knotted at her neck. She had begun to sweat in the bright early May sun. The snow and ice had fallen from the steep tin roof or been pushed up like a frozen wave by her husband, Ed's, plow as he cleared the driveway. All winter the living room had been dark as the snow pile blocked the light.

The narrow house, which faced north across Bob Temple Road at the base of Larson Hill, did not catch the spring sun until afternoon. As the days had lengthened, the water from the slowly melting bank seeped into the stone basement and muddied the front yard. Elsie determined to speed the melting by hacking the great pile down. She had planted bulbs beneath the living room window, but they lay dormant under the dirty snow. She wanted to help them bloom. When chunks of the bank broke away, she flipped them onto the shoulder of the road where they melted into wandering rivulets on the sun-warmed tar. She hoped Ed would appreciate her work.

Across the street, back off the road on a small knoll, sat an immaculate red cape, where the crocuses peeked through the dark earth and the forsythia sported incipient buds, and the grass had begun to green on the broad lawn. A young couple from away had bought the house and fixed it up. The husband worked in the office at the mill and the wife was a teacher. A black-topped driveway coiled up to the house and gleamed in the sun.

Elsie's yard was pocked with lumps of old, gray snow,

hidden from the longer days' light by the steep-roofed house and a brace of white pines. It was littered with wind-downed branches and dappled with shriveled feces their dog, Rip, had left there before he was killed by a car while chasing a state truck during a storm.

Elsie had called to him, but he had ignored her. She found him sprawled on the shoulder of the road and dragged him home. Elsie and Ed had him since before the girls were born. Hannah still expected him to return, and whenever a dog barked she went to a window and called him.

The sweat felt good running down her neck, into the small of her back, and between her breasts. She felt lighter, and though she wanted to sweat, she took off her heavy sweat shirt, and rolled up her sleeves. Working quickly, Elsie paused to listen for the girls napping in the cool dark of the living room, the window open to the warm breeze. Cars downshifted to climb Larson Hill, and log trucks, going east to Madison, hit their jake brakes.

As she walked her boots made sucking sounds in the mud like a baby at the tit. Elsie slogged shovel loads of snow to the road and threw them onto the warm pavement. In an hour she had barely dented the pile, but the ache in her muscles and the sweat on her skin, felt good.

One-sixty-five looked huge to her on her five-foot five frame. Elsie was sturdy and big-breasted like all the Perault women, but the babies had come and she had grown so big that Ed called her his BMW—Big Maine Woman—and then, Elsie the Cow, because she had to put plastic cups in her bra to collect her excess milk. Rachelle refused to be weaned and Elsie kept nursing her believing she would get fatter if she stopped.

One-sixty-five was, at least, better than one-eighty. Six weeks of no dessert, no beer, and a long walk each night after dinner when Ed could tend to the girls while

he watched the Red Sox, had pared away fifteen pounds. She was still forty pounds from her goal.

Elsie tried an exercise video, but the girls never gave her enough time during the day, and Ed didn't like her to run them at night. "Turn off that awful music will you?" he'd blurted out with a menace she'd heard but once before, the one time she'd seen her father hit her mother.

Elsie drove the spade into the bank with all her strength and weight. A jagged piece of ice sheared off, and struck her below the left eye. Dropping the spade she cried out, grabbing her face in her hands and pinching the skin tight. Blood, warm and sticky, dripped onto her shirt. Grabbing her sweat shirt, she staggered toward the front door, kicked off her muddy boots in the hallway, and sucked in a deep breath, dazed. Her scream had awakened, Hannah, who was crying for "Mama".

"Just a minute honey, Mama will be right there," she called.

Elsie wobbled to the bathroom. The ice had pierced the skin her below the eye where it is tight to the bone. Pressing a cold wash cloth to the wound, she groped in the medicine chest. Finding the peroxide bottle, she wrestled the cap off with one hand, still holding the cloth in the other. The peroxide burned and foamed as she splashed it on her face. Feeling sick to her stomach, Elsie slumped down onto the toilet seat, one hand holding her face, the other clutching the edge of the sink.

She rested a moment then eased her way to the refrigerator for some ice. The tray slipped from her hand and clattered to the floor. As she bent to pick it up, she felt faint. Bile rose in her throat. She sat down at the table and swallowed hard.

The wound began to throb. She tried to breathe slowly, but panted as if she had been running. Elsie went to the sink, shook loose a few ice cubes, drew one to the wound

and winced. She put another cube to her forehead.

The ice cooled her and she leaned against the sink. Her breathing slowed. She stumbled back to the bathroom mirror. The gash was purple and clotted, and her eye was puffing shut.

Elsie made her way to the living room. When Hannah saw her she screamed, and knitted her hands over her eyes.

"Mama has a boo-boo, honey," Elsie told her as she lifted her from the day bed. In the playpen where she napped, Rachelle was staring at her butterfly mobile. Elsie pried open Hannah's fingers. "Mama got hit by a piece of ice, but she's gonna be okay."

When Hannah was calm, Elsie sat her at the kitchen table with a box of juice and some cheerios and went to get Rachelle. The baby looked at Elsie then grabbed at the cut. Jerking her head away, Elsie nearly blacked out. She unbuttoned her blood-spattered shirt and lay back on the couch to let the baby nurse. Rachelle, wet but hungry, sucked a long time. Against Elsie's cool, sweaty skin the baby was as warm as a sun-burnished pear.

Hannah sang out, "Get me down now, Mama." Elsie carried Rachelle, still nursing, into the kitchen. "I want to nurse too," Hannah whined, pulling at Elsie's bloody shirt.

"You're a big girl. You don't nurse. I'll put on Barney if you're quiet."

"No. I want to nurse. I hate Rachelle. Bring her back to the hospital."

"You want a spanking? Keep it up. Go watch Barney."

Hannah scooted to the living room with her hands behind her back.

The room was dark. Elsie turned on a lamp, and put a tape in the VCR. The baby sucked noisily. Elsie wanted to

change her, but Rachelle cried and pawed at her when she took her from the nipple. When Rachelle stopped nursing, Elsie changed her diaper, put her back in the playpen, and went to fix Ed's dinner.

Ed was thirty when he proposed to Elsie. She was twenty-one. He had a house, a new F-150, and almost no debt. They married in June, she got pregnant in September and again twelve months later. After Rachelle arrived, Ed got a vasectomy. "If I'm only gonna make more splittails, might as well turn off the hose," he'd said.

Self-employed, Ed did roofing, small additions, plowed snow in the winter, and was a silent partner in a small Slatsford bar. He did not want Elsie to work when the girls were little. " I ain't a cave man, and I ain't a women's libber neither. Kids need their mother home when they're little," he'd told her before they married. She'd agreed.

They had both come up poor with mothers working entry level jobs to make ends meet. Ed, whose family got indoor plumbing when he was six, was the oldest of seven, Elsie the youngest of four girls. Ed had grown up in the County while Elsie's family had come to Slatsford from Massachusetts, to live with her aunt after they had been evicted from their apartment in Chelsea. Her mother worked as a cashier at a lumber yard. Her father collected unemployment when he could, worked as a laborer when he had to, and died when Elsie was in high school. Driving home drunk from Massachusetts, where he had gone to look for work, he ran off the road in a snow storm and froze to death. Elsie never cried. Ed's parents still lived in St. Agatha.

Her mother never remarried, working her cashier's job until the day after Elsie graduated from high school, when she loaded her station wagon with what she could haul and kissed her daughters and their families good-bye asking that they send her other property when she, "was settled

where it's warm." Elsie moved in with her sister, Dorcas, and inherited her mother's old job.

None of the sisters saw their mother again. A man they did not know buried her in Key Largo, and they learned of her death a week later from the man's son, who had tracked Elsie down through the lumberyard.

Until she met Ed, Elsie found most men in Slatsford too much like her father, hard drinking and sullen. Ed liked beer and a rare blackberry brandy, but Elsie had never seen him mean with drink.

Rachelle banged at her busy box and babbled while Barney droned and Hannah sang along with each song. Elsie put potatoes on to boil, placed three chicken breasts on the broiler pan and opened some frozen peas, briefly pressing the cold bag to her cheek. She took two aspirin and looked at her face again.

Her eye was nearly shut. Elsie feared what Ed would say. She knew she looked awful and prayed he wouldn't say she was foolish. She'd been teased by her sisters for being the youngest and shortest, and by teachers for looking out the window and forgetting assignments, and by her father for needing a bra in the fifth grade.

Ed's truck splashed into the driveway. Elsie heard the cab door shut. Ed dragged something from the bed and slammed the tailgate. He opened the back door, took off his work boots, and came into the kitchen.

"Jesus, what happened to you?"

"I was trying to break up the snow bank in front of the living room and a piece flew up and cut me."

"Christ sakes, girl, the Lord put it there. Time'll take it away. It'll melt off in a couple three days."

"But it runs into the basement."

"That's why we have a sump pump. Look at you. Folks'll think I'm beatin' you. Jesus, El."

"Ed it really hurts."

"'Course it does. D'you clean it good?"

"I poured peroxide in it."

"Burn?"

"It burned like hell."

"That's good. You okay now?"

"Just a little woozy sometimes."

"Girls here?"

"They're watching Barney tapes."

"What's for dinner?"

"Chicken, potatoes, peas, applesauce."

"You icing that eye?"

"A little, but I was making dinner for you."

"I gotta wash up."

Ed left the bathroom door open and she could hear the squishy lather as he worked it around his dirt-creased hands.

During dinner the baby pointed at Elsie and said "Booboo."

"Papa no booboo, Papa hairface," Hannah said in baby talk. Ed looked up and growled, "Hairface Monster." The girls laughed from their tiny bellies. Elsie was not hungry. Rachelle made a game of throwing her peas on the floor and laughing when Elsie picked them up.

When dessert was over, Elsie got the girls into the bath. Ed sat down to watch television. When the girls were bathed and dried, Hannah ran into the living room and jumped up on Ed's lap. She cuddled up to him and played with his beard. He could hold her in one arm. She begged him to growl and be "Hairy Face Monster Man."

Elsie put on her running shoes, sweatshirt, and new jeans, and came into the living room. Ed sat with both girls on his lap, the light of the television reflected in his bright eyes. "I'm going for my walk now," she said.

"What the hell, El?" Ed said with a soft exasperation, "You sure you're up to that? All you need to do is open that

up again. That's some wallop you give yourself. Folks'll think bad 'bout me if they see you busted up like that. Don't get to rattlin' on with anyone while you're out there eh?"

"I don't see anybody when I walk. Besides, it'll be sorta dark soon."

"Be careful. Don't get hit like Rip."

At the mention of the dog's name, Hannah jumped off Ed's lap, nearly knocking Rachelle to the floor, and raced to the window calling, "Rip, Ripper, here Rip, here Rip."

"Stop that Hannah," Ed said, loudly enough to set Rachelle crying, "Jesus. No peace in this place. Come back here. Rip is in heaven, Hannah. Damn. Rachelle got so scared she pissed right through her sleeper."

Elsie took the baby, and Ed led Hannah from the window. She kept calling the dog until Ed yelled, "Knock it off Hannah or you'll get a spanking." The child backed away, and said, "Rip will come back from heaven to visit Daddy. He will, I know."

"He ain't here now, so hush up." Ed slumped back into his chair. "Come watch the ballgame with Daddy."

"I want to watch Barney."

"Barney ain't on, Hannah, and Daddy is watching the Red Sox. Watch the Red Sox with Daddy, or go to your room and draw."

"I want Barney."

"Don't make Daddy mad."

Hannah plopped on the floor and lowered her head into her hands, muttering.

When Elsie returned, Rachelle was wearing a sleeper with Future Red Sox Slugger written across the chest. With Rachelle, Elsie had an ultrasound. Her doctor said, "It looks like a boy, but I can't be sure." She told Ed exactly what the doctor said, but he only heard the word boy, and refusing to believe that his second child would be another girl, purchased a tiny Red Sox hat, and the sleeper. When

Rachelle was born, Ed's, disappointment was visible. "Surrounded by splittails now," he'd said as they drove her home, though he loved the child as much as the other women in his house. Ed set Rachelle in the playpen. Elsie went to the kitchen and brought the baby a small bottle of juice, which she held deftly in one hand, while clinging to the edge of the playpen with the other.

"Don't be gone too long, El, 'case the little one gets hungry for a real meal."

"I'll be about half an hour, forty-five minutes. She'll be fine with the bottle 'til then. There's a couple three of the biscuits she likes in the bread box, and if Hannah is good, she can have a pop after the little one goes to bed."

Hannah sat upright, and, nodding her head, announced, "I'll be real good, Mama."

The cooling evening air invigorated Elsie, but seemed to stretch her skin taut across her cheek as she squinted into the sun slipping below the western mountains. Her legs ached as she began her walk, but, by the time she had reached the foot of the hill, they relaxed. Her gait quickened and her breath came harder as she flexed her stubby calves and leaned into the grade. A sourness clawed at her stomach and she imagined her body attacking her winter fat. She felt palpably thinner each few feet she trudged up the hill. Melting her flab and find her old body was something she could do.

Her face ached as she strode harder against the grade, and that pain, too, brought her a sense of quiet and pleasure. She imagined herself thinner than she had been before the babies. Warm sweat ran into the furrow of her buttocks and breasts. Elsie toyed with the idea of running, but doubted that she could run for very long. Her jeans were stiff and new and she wished that she had worn sweat pants. She resolved to begin running part of the way each evening.

She imagined the bounce of her swollen breasts, and remembered Vera Brown, the chestiest girl in Slatsford High School, who had been a runner. Elsie knew boys who ran track just to watch Vera practice hurdling. Elsie could recall Vera's breasts rise and twist as she ran, and remembered wondering how painful that was. As she walked up the hill, beyond the spot where she usually turned back, she thought again of those days.

A truck driver honked at Elsie as he rolled down the grade, down-shifting with a throaty roar. She waved. The light dimmed and she realized that she had no idea how long she had been gone. She felt strong and did not want to turn back. She resolved to walk to the top of the long hill, a distance she reckoned was at least a mile and a half from the house. For a moment, she worried that Rachelle would cry to be fed, and that Ed would not know to give her more juice.

In ten minutes more, Elsie reached the top of the hill and turned to look at the three-hundred and sixty degree view. She could make out the mill stack; steam rising into the cooling night, then drifting eastward. She scanned the horizon along the high peaks of Sugarloaf and Mount Abram, then gazed down along the darkening valley at her own home. Gray wisps of wood smoke rose above the house that winked tiny and dark in the distance. She knew how chilled the somber living room had become, and felt the heat from the stove in her nostrils. Her face pulsed, the wound scabbed, her skin tight and sore.

Elsie stood at the summit. The descent would be easier than the climb. Her legs were weary, and her new jeans chafed her thighs. The sweat began to cool on her back, and she stretched her arms above her head. She was tempted to run. She hoped the Sox were winning. She hoped that Rachelle was quiet, and that Hannah had been content to curl up on Ed's lap, or had gone to her room to draw.

She swore to lose the suet-like weight on her bones, wean Rachelle, and end the sticky leaking from her breasts. She wanted Ed deep inside her like before the babies had come, and wanted his lips on her nipples.

She turned again toward the mountains. Sugarloaf looked like a tonsured monk, the snow melted above the tree line, but deep and bluegray below. She lingered a moment more staring into the red alpenglow, then turned for home.

Elsie strode down the hill, the grade, her weight, the angle of her body, propelling her toward a trot. She could feel the fat melting away and running down the damp legs of her jeans. Picking up momentum, she jogged, her body jarred by the pounding of her feet. The fat around her middle jiggled.

She ran faster, her shoes slapping the pavement. A pain, like small hot embers, burned in her throat. She ran in delicious discomfort. She lengthened her stride, and knew how it felt to be Vera Brown, her breasts swinging up and down as she pumped her arms.

She could smell the smoke from her own stove as it rose into the dark.

Old drifts lay sheltered where the road ran close to a stand of tall cedar. Brush clogged the ditch and water ran onto the road leaving a sandy meander. Her head down, and arms pumping, Elsie slipped and sprawled forward onto the road. She slid, scraping her palms and tearing her jeans at both knees. She shrieked, not from the pain in her hands or knees, but from the crushed plastic cup that cut into her left breast. For several minutes she sat on the shoulder, then rose unsteadily.

Elsie saw smoke from her chimney, and the last of the day's light glinting on the roof. As she limped closer to the house she wept. Her incompetence shamed her. She thought of Rip. He had died, only a few feet from where she

had fallen, chasing a truck that he could never catch.

Elsie eased the door open. Her face was streaked with sweat and blood and dirt. Her knees burned. The raw flesh of her hands stung. Shame shuddered across her cheeks. Peeking into the living room, she saw Hannah sitting on the floor playing with a doll. Rachelle was holding on to the edge of the play pen and staring at her sister. She had spit up on her sleeper. Ed dozed in his chair.

Elsie cried harder, but mutely. She tried to slink past the living room and go upstairs. Hannah, spying her, cried "Mama's home," and ran, arms akimbo, and crashed into Elsie's leg. Elsie winced as she caught the sinewy child against her hip.

Ed started and looked at his watch. "Just get back? Walk all the way to Kingfield or what?" Then looking up said, "Jesus Christ, what happened now?"

Sorrow and shame burst in her and she sobbed. She tried to speak, but her voice quaked and her words were unintelligible. Still seated, and but half awake, Ed asked again, "What happened?" but she could not answer.

Ed rose from the couch. In the half-light of the flickering television, he saw the torn knees of Elsie's jeans, the blood on her hands, and the dirt on her sweatshirt. "Jesus, you get hit by a car?" he asked.

"I fell," Elsie sobbed, and for a moment could say no more. "I was running down the hill and I slipped in the sand and I fell. I'm such a spaz. I got cut everywhere and it hurts." She could say no more.

Elsie washed at the kitchen sink. The soap stung her scraped hands, and tears burned the wound beneath her eye. Elsie sat at the kitchen table and sobbed, her chest heaving, her breath gulped in short gasps. Ed came in, but could not calm her. She asked him to change the baby. "I'm sure she's really wet."

Ed disliked changing the girls, afraid he would do something wrong, or drop them. When he had diapered and powdered the baby, he lowered the smiling child into her night crib and drew up her blanket.

Back in the kitchen, Ed found Elsie hunched over the table, raw palms wrapped around an unopened can of beer. He sat across the table from her. Hannah stomped in and said, "I want Mama to tuck me in."

"I'll tuck you in. Mama hurt herself."

"She's always hurting herself. It's not fair. I want her to tuck me in.."

"She can't, Hannah."

"It's not fair."

"Yes, it is fair. Now do as I say."

Hannah turned her back and stamped her feet in short slow steps as she left the room.

Ed took a beer from the refrigerator and sat down across from Elsie. "Jesus, El, you're beating yourself to a fuckin' pulp here."

"I felt so good. I walked all the way to the top of the hill. I saw things I never knew you could see from there, the WTOS tower on Sugarloaf, the stack in Madison. I saw the smoke from our stove. I had never walked so far before and I was running home. It felt like just before the baby comes out and the doctor lets you push. I felt myself getting lighter. Then I fell. I ruined my new jeans. One of my cups broke and I think my tit is bleeding. I'm a fucking failure, Ed. I just suck at everything, I couldn't chip the ice away, I couldn't make Rip stay in the yard, I can't even walk right."

He did not speak. Elsie raised her head. She could not tell from his eyes what he was thinking. "I'm gonna drink this beer, soak my hands in this ice water and when the hot water is ready, I'm gonna take a long bath." Ed said nothing.

As she drank the beer, Elsie thought to ask Ed if he still loved her, but she was afraid he would say, "yes," or, "of course," or "that's a dumb question," and she did not want to see if she believed him. The couple from across the street drove down their driveway, their headlights casting Elsie's shadow on the wall.

When Elsie finished the beer she braced a hand on the table and stood .

"Ed, help me off with this sweat shirt," she said. He pulled slowly, pausing with each groan or grimace. He slipped the sweatshirt over her head, and she asked him to undo her shirt. He fumbled with the buttons. She opened the front clasp of her bra, and pieces of plastic fell to the floor.

As Ed peeled her shirt back, he whistled through his teeth. Her left breast was bruised a yellowish purple, and he pinched a slivery shard of plastic from it. He pulled the shirt off her arms. Her bra dangled off her shoulders and Elsie stood mute and humiliated.

Ed stepped back. " Need me to run the bath?"

"Hold me first."

"I'm afraid I'll hurt you."

"I am already hurt. Ed. Please. Hug me."

He put his arms around her, but did not pull her to him.

"Please. Ed. Hold me."

Elsie groaned and raised her arms up to her husband's neck. He kissed the top of her head, but said nothing. She lowered her arms and looked at him. She bent to pick up her clothes. "I'll get those," he said. "Go on up."

The old claw foot bathtub could be filled once without exhausting the hot water. If Elsie slid down the water would cover all of her, though after the babies it took less water for her to submerge completely. Ed held her elbows while she stepped out of her panties, and into the tub. The heat

of the water surprised her, and just as the stinging in her wounds seemed unbearable and she thought she might cry out, it eased.

Elsie lay still a long time, almost asleep, unable to bathe herself. She could only flex her sore calves and knees. Ed came upstairs to tell her that Rachelle was crying. She asked him to bring her to her.

When Ed brought Rachelle into the warm moist bathroom, she giggled and reached out toward her mother. Elsie sat up and dried her hands and chest. She put Rachelle to her right breast. "I should wean her, Ed, I know, but she's the last one we're gonna have. Don't you just love her?"

"You gonna be alright on the other side?"

"We'll find out."

Elsie lay back nursing the child and tried to picture the girls as grown women. She could only conjure herself and her sisters. She switched Rachelle to the other breast and twitched as the child came to her nipple.

Ed put the lid down and sat on the toilet. "El, you look like a wreck on the highway."

"Yeah, I'm a fucking mess, but isn't she beautiful, Ed?"

"Oh, sure, a beautiful little splittail. Got a house full of 'em."

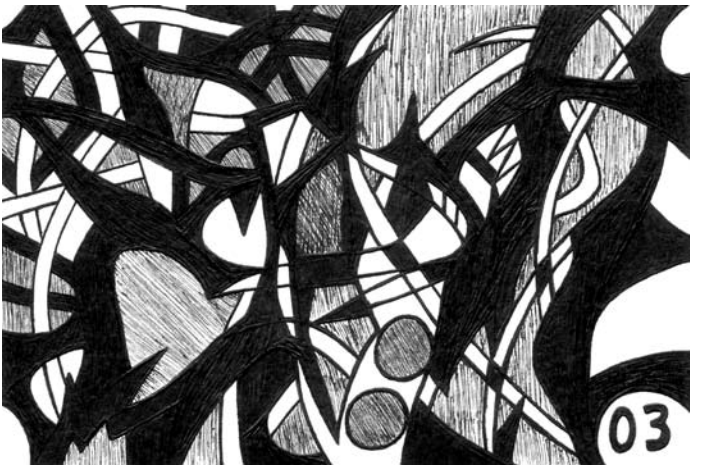
She did not hear in his voice the love she waited for. When Rachelle was sated, Ed put her to bed. Elsie turned on the hot water with her foot, but it ran tepid.

Ed brought Elsie a dry towel, and went downstairs to watch the end of the ballgame. She pushed her self out of the tub, stiffness binding her like a mummy's cerements. Lifting her feet, one at a time onto the toilet lid, she dried her legs and put antiseptic cream on her knees.

The moon rose and the night grew cold. The windows fogged against the night. The neighbors yard rimed with a light frost. A dog barked, a log truck hit its jake brake, and

the steamy room began to cool. Elsie sat in the bathroom wondering how long it would be before she could run to the top of the hill without stopping. The chill made her shiver. She rose, balancing herself on the sink. She limped into her room and fished a clean nightgown from the drawer. She pulled it over her head and the hem fell down to her crimson knees.

Elsie descended the stairs one at a time. The news was on. The weather man was calling for bright, dry weather. Ed was asleep in his chair. She looked at his face, glad that he could not see her for she could not have borne her reflection in his eyes. ❧



People Ruining Other People's Houses
– Jonathan B. Obst

Greg Winston

Hibernian Haiku

Sligo Road: July Morning

Slow Sligo boreen—
Old stone bridge. Three bottles of
milk stand glistening.

Knocknarea

Slopes of fern and furze
Stone circles and Queen Maeve's cairn.
Mysterious mount.

Dublin

Hardened stone houses
Ashen-gray River Liffey
Pub doors open: laughter.

Zann Reynolds

Accounting Class Captives

It wasn't such a beautiful day outside but lively nonetheless. The wind was harsh. From the classroom inside it all seemed like a faraway place, totally detached though it was only separated from me by a pane of Anderson brand glass. I stared.

Two flies inhabited the glass pane, indoors. Little Fly blindly crawled its way along the perimeter of the pane, searching for a way into that separate world. Fat Fly fluttered and crashed crazily against the invisible wall as if it intended to break through. Now and then Fat Fly would fall still to take a breather and face the outside.

Little Fly continued to creep, never pausing until a heavy gust of wind popped an adjacent window open inward. After Little Fly stopped in surprise, a gust of wind forced its way through the window. The air swept up Little Fly and hurled it outside, where it soon disappeared from view.

The next rush of air closed the window again. Now alone, Fat Fly stopped floundering against the window. It washed its hands and considered the situation. Fat Fly then began crawling slowly along the perimeter of the pane. His gust of wind never came.

I furrowed my brow, feeling as if I should have learned something from the flies.

Kristie Licata

Breaking

She shivers when he speaks,
His frigid words
Frost her heart,
And the whites of his eyes
Are like ice to her soul.
Her body's frozen
In a state of confusion.
The wind whistles its words,
But she can't break the fall.
She crumbles to the ground,
Smashing to pieces
And melting as the sun appears.

Lucas Martin

Gap Girls

"So, you're thinking about working for us..... here at GAP?"

"Yes!"

"Well, you should know that here at GAP we uphold the highest level of facetiousness along with a certain bourgeois hipness and a fiery sex appeal! In order for you to work with us, you need to play your part."

"How do I do that?"

"By wearing tight super-low waist, industrial short crotch, vintage 1932, PAG 1 allstar jeans of course.... With a rainbow scarf!"

"That's it?"

"Well, darling it's needless to say that to fit into these superstar jeans you need to have a certain shamba-wamba nn snay snay (Gap language for being less then .33lb^2/in^3 height."

"Well, I have big breasts!"

"That certainly helps!"

"But your 'snay snay' measured in at .47 lb^2/in^3 that would be the highest in Gap history. We once made an exception for a girl who was .42, but she was one of those Asian-American beauties with the poutiest lips."

"Well....," Jane said desperately

"I can cut my hair like a pixie, dye it red, and apply some artificial freckles!"

"I like your Gapsence!" (a word defining all words synonomous with cool, hip, fresh, sassy). "I think you might look good in our sparkle, athletic, tiny/sexy tube V-neck, we designed it for the customer over .40 lb^2/in^3, you would embody this lower class of Gapism."

"So, I've got the job?"

"Yes… of course."

Tears stream down Jane's face ruining her Gap juniper face powder.

"Thank you Gap, God, whoever, thank you!"

Andre, the interviewer proceeds to explain Gap's new holiday marketing tactics, which involve dividing the store into two separate halves by a wall in the middle. On one side the females will have to separate with their boyfriends, brothers etc. On the female shopper side there will be only male employees. These workers will wear superbaggy sweat pants with mesh mustard muscle shirts and black skullcaps in order to excite the female shoppers.

On the male side there will be only female workers who will sport the new extremely low warehouse flare corduroys with elastic waist lowering bunjees and the peasant scrunched keyhole cap-sleeve blouse. In the back pocket of the corduroys will be a 10$ Gap gift card sticking half way out of the pocket. Upon entering this side of Gap if desired by the male shoppers they may get their hands bound behind their backs and attempt to remove the cards from the back of the employees pockets using only their teeth. This is expected to be one of the highest grossing seasons in Gap history.

Note: this fictional story was not written to offend anyone, and or their gapism.

Amanda Kitchen

Elusive

I slip in and out of you
like a rainbow through a cloud
trying to find its way down.
and like those clouds,
you look so pure;
as if I could touch you,
taste you,
and you'd be sweet.
But when I draw near,
reaching,
you escape my colors
like an invisible wind.
So I fall back,
wondering,
how this dreary rain
creating my colors
falls
so steady
from something so white.

Rob Juckett

The Memory of Swallows

Ben's car emerged from woods at the bottom of a hill and curved up along a patched asphalt lane to two buildings that occupied the broad, grassy summit. The sunshine was just as he had imagined, bright and warm after the cool of the forest. He was alone, and this he had also hoped for.

Three tall, old trees stood in front of the buildings, two white pines and a red spruce. A line of younger spruces and pines grew behind the buildings. The foremost structure was a garage with three pre-fab aluminum bay doors, all shut. He guessed it was twenty years old, still in good condition. Beyond was a long wooden building of one story with windows the length, and clapboard walls painted medium brown. He knew this building to be more than fifty years old. He remembered it from his childhood, his earliest childhood. And the memories were sharp and elemental to him.

At the top, next to the buildings, was space for five or six vehicles. He turned onto the gravelly surface, parked his red Jeep, and got out. He consciously breathed deeply and looked around. Three hundred and sixty degrees of perfect grass, he let his eyes scan slowly across sloping fairways and micromanaged turf of tees and greens. Partly shaded by the three tall conifers, the 14th tee was the highest point on the course. Ben walked over and examined the bent grass surface, divoted but healthy. There were no players today. He had the course to himself. Twenty-five yards down the fairway was the ladies' tee, marked with two green cubes; the men's tee had white markers. He turned and looked at the buildings, bright in August sun. Swallows had constructed their mud nests beneath the eaves. They had always been here; he remembered them from his youth. So hard to follow

with the eye, so fast they flew. Zipping now (it pleased and delighted him) in precipitous flight with instinctive course, above and around the buildings, to the nest then away. As a child he had sensed their speed. But the place had been different then, more human and inviting.

The long, brown building was a bunkhouse for caddies, and attached to the front, where the garage now stood, was a rec room with a full-length porch that provided an open view of the fairways, the road, and the woods beyond where the water of Emerald Pond flashed bright through thick evergreens. Built onto the side of the rec room was the greenskeeper's apartment with a screened-in porch. Fifteen yards away, and forty years gone, was another building that housed the big kitchen, dining room, and the cooks' rooms.

There was always activity; this was the Caddie Camp. For a young boy the opportunities for play were practically unlimited. Ben sat down in the shade on one of the benches that overlooked the 14th tee and recollections streamed through his mind faster than he could sort them. Out behind the kitchen was a huge pile of dirt, topsoil, curative agent for any golf course. A boy with a toy truck and a digging spoon could . . .

There were cats. Someone said cats always land on their feet. This observation deserved testing from the rec room porch. It proved true, many times, with various cats. There were golf bag carts upon which a boy could pile several pieces of firewood, steer the cart to the door of the bunkhouse (while making wonderful wheel tracks in the summer dust) and call out "Fish! Fish for sale!" One day a caddie actually bought some fish for a nickel. On the bench, eyes focused on nothing, Ben smiled and shifted position. There used to be a flower garden right here, full of tall gladiolas red, yellow, white . . .

Papa was the greenskeeper. He was the boss. Ben

recalled men talking to Papa and then listening as Papa spoke, his voice even, unemotional, and choppy staccato. The words came so rapidly Ben often could not understand. The men always said "Yes, sir. No, sir." Papa . . . they called him Blondie when he was young, hair combed straight back and flat on his head, hawk nose and long, lean face. Papa . . . jingling the change in his right pocket, a cigarette in the left hand. He was left-handed but, of course, had been forced to learn to write with the right. He teed it up lefty though, but never had a complete bag – a driver, a 3, 5, 7, and 9, and a putter. He didn't play often. Golf was a richer man's game. Born in the 1890's, he was due to ship out to Europe on his birthday, November 12, 1918. The troops were actually on the transport in New York when the wire came in on November 11. They never sailed. Early in the morning he looked in the window where Ben lay in bed. "Come on, Beebo, we have to dew the greens." Ben's mother and grandmother were always there with corn flakes and toast carried to the apartment from the kitchen. Get dressed; hurry up, Papa's waiting. They drove across the fairways, so quiet and so smooth, all the way to the first green. A small boy could do it, grip a 20-foot length of thin bamboo and swish it, back and forth, across the morning cool dew on the putting surface.

Ben recalled that years later he and his father had played a round. There was something special about being here on this course, cut from the Adirondack forest when McKinley was President and everyone was remembering the Maine. That day with his dad the clubhouse was open but the course was closed. Dad spoke to the man in the office after mumbling to Ben "We'll see what he says."

Ten minutes later they were on number one tee.

"Are we the only ones playing today?" Ben asked.

"Yep. You oughta remember this; it may never happen again."

"Did you have to pay?"

"Nope. I guess Papa's reputation isn't dead."

It was the first full round of golf that Ben had ever played. His father had trophies. Ben's experience was on a driving range and a practice putting green.

They played along the edge of the woods from number one tee to the green and then from number two tee they continued with the trees on their right and the openness of the course to the left. They were about a hundred yards down the second fairway when Ben's father said, "You see that little cleared space in the woods there?"

Ben looked and saw an area where the trees had been cut and now the ground was covered in tall grass speckled generously with the dark orange blossoms of Indian paintbrush.

"That's where our little house was for two years," his dad said. "Nineteen thirty and thirty-one, we lived right here on number two fairway."

"I thought you lived at the caddie camp."

"That wasn't until later when Papa became greenskeeper."

"Did you have electricity here?" Ben asked.

"Yeah, but the toilet was in the outhouse."

They didn't keep score but Ben knew he had a couple sixes, a couple sevens, and a couple worse. They teed it up on number 9, out behind the caddie camp.

"Now relax and hit a good drive," his father said. "Remember, you have a nice touch with the putter, but you have to get on in two here to take advantage of your strength."

Ben hit a nice drive, straight on the straight fairway.

"There ya go!" his dad said. "That's well over two hundred. That's your best drive of the day."

"Dad, that's the best drive of my life!"

Then his father, whose strength was off the tee, hit his drive. The ball rocketed out low and Ben was about to com-

ment when he saw the ball begin to rise and soar, fading right, then hooking gently back left and dropping on the fairway beyond his own 'best drive yet.'

"Wow!"

"I'll take it."

"I thought you said you were rusty."

"I am, but that was a good one." They walked down the fairway together. Ben pulled the cart; they were both using the same clubs. "Now this second shot is the important one," his father said. "You've got to get on the green. This is where your aunt was so good, the iron shots. It's my weakness."

"What do I hit?"

"A good six iron will do the trick. I'd hit a seven, but I'm stronger than you. Get a good swing and hit it square; you need the lift."

They came to Ben's ball first and he waggled the six iron, looking down at the ball, then up at the green and the flag. "It's a good distance," his father said. "Don't hold back. The trick is to put two good shots together. You've got one; now get another one."

Ben waggled and looked, waggled and looked . . . then swung through the ball – head down – follow through, and felt the contact. The ball lifted straight for the flag. Too low, he thought, too low.

"Good shot," his father watched. "You're on."

"I thought it was too low."

"It was, a bit, but I think you also underhit a touch. You'll need the roll."

Ben stood as his father hit and also got on the green.

"Now, let's go see who's closer to the pin."

"Okay." He felt the warmth of the day and a slight fatigue in his legs as they approached the green. One ball was ten feet from the flag and the other was thirty. "Which is which?" Ben asked.

His father smiled, standing on the finely trimmed skirt

of the green. “Well, I’m playing a number two.”

“Mine’s a four.” Ben walked to the ball closer to the flag. “What do you think, you or me?”

“I don’t know. Take a look.”

He squatted next to the ball, “It’s mine!” and looked back at his dad.

“There ya go. Slammin’ Sammy couldn’t have played it better. And you’re lucky; you’ve got a flat line.”

“You putt first.” Ben stood, then stepped to the flag, gripped the pennant so it would not flutter, and watched his father line up the long putt. As the ball approached the hole, Ben carefully withdrew the flag and stepped back. His father’s putt came up two feet short. “You’re gonna par this one.”

“I’ve got a chance. I’ve missed shorter putts though.”

Ben laid the flag off the edge of the green and took the putter from his father.

“Nice and smooth now. Don’t be afraid to give it enough. It would be something if you got a birdie before you ever got a par.” His father stood aside.

Ben looked it over then positioned himself with the ball just in front of his left foot. He thought his putt was perfect and watched as it rolled to the cup . . . and rimmed out, leaving him eighteen inches away.

“Oh, no!”

“Well, you went for it. It looked good to me. A half inch to the right and it would’ve dropped. Go ahead and putt out. It’s not a gimme, remember.”

Ben lined up the short putt and tapped it in. “Par!”

“Congratulations.”

His father sized up his own two-foot putt and sank it.

“Two pars,” Ben said as he replaced the flag.

“Ya know something; this is the same hole that I got my first par on.”

“Really?”

"Yep."

"I'm seventeen. How old were you?"

"Nine."

"Hmph, nine years old on number nine?"

"Maybe you should have waited until we get to number seventeen?"

"No, it's better like this. But I've got a question. How come we're not back at the clubhouse after we finish nine holes?"

"We would have been. The kitchen and dining room at the caddie camp right there used to be the clubhouse."

Ben thought for a moment. "So the course must have been renumbered."

"Yep. Papa did that."

"How come?"

"They wanted the clubhouse to be next to the main road. Here it's up in the woods off the Emerald Pond road, which was dirt back when we lived on the fairway.

So, instead of two nine-hole loops like most courses, we have one big eighteen-hole loop. But it worked out fine. The caddie camp was right here after the ninth hole and there was always a rest room and you could get a drink or a sandwich or a candy bar. Then you teed off on number ten and you played your way around to the front of the caddie camp by the time you were done on number thirteen green. Number fourteen tee right there in front used to be number one."

"Right here," Ben whispered. "Right here." He rose from the bench and walked away from the tee and around the buildings to the far side. From where he stood he could see the green where he had gained his first par. He leaned against the rear of the old bunkhouse and gazed through the openings between the trunks of the spruces. From above he heard a cheep and a second later a swallow knifed in through the evergreen boughs and flittered to a mid-air stall

before landing on the edge of its mud molded nest. Cheep, cheep . . . Then the swallow flew away and Ben looked up at the nest where it clung to the woodwork beneath the roof overhang.

"What are those birds, Papa?" he had asked.

"Barn swallows. They come every year and spend the summer here."

"Every year?"

"Yep. Just like Mom and I. Except these birds come all the way from South America, Brazil."

"What?"

"Don't know how they can find their way. South America's about as far as you can go."

"Farther than Florida?"

"Oh, yeah."

"Do they remember the caddie camp?"

"I guess so. They always come back. They must remember something."

"How do they remember where to fly? It's so far."

"Nobody knows."

Years later Ben had returned and seen the birds, watching them closely. Then he went to the library and looked them up in the Audubon Field Guide and also in Peterson's. He saw them now and remembered it all, walking into the sunshine where he could see the dozen or so mud nests under the eaves. Every thirty seconds a bird zipped in, fed its young, and darted away.

"You were wrong, Papa. They're cliff swallows. Their tails are blunt." Those gourd-shaped nests, he had discovered, were indeed made from mud that the birds filled their beaks with, masticated, and then used to sculpt a rigid, lumpy den. The insides were lined with feathers and moss, particles of leaves, soft vegetation. Insect gatherers, the swallows spent most of their daylight hours flying and hunting, or chewing up dirt. Every year.

Ben moved back into the shade next to the long building. He recalled the warm days of the caddie camp again. (They had never really been out of his thoughts.) Right here, against this wall, on this very spot, shaded by spruces even back then in the 50's, had been a big, wooden icebox. He had pushed up the lid with some effort (he was small then), letting it fall back and slam against the bunkhouse wall. Inside was a heavy, olive drab canvas, stiff from the cold and littered with sawdust chips. Pulling it back, he exposed the glittering ice beneath, huge blocks, clear, but holding, as he bent over and looked closely, trapped bubbles and deep, whitish imperfections. And there, within easy reach, lay the ice pick . . . ah, so appealing with its wooden handle and thin, 4-inch metal pick. Ben knew how to use it; he had seen Papa chip pieces from the blocks. "For our party. For Aunt Helen's drink and Mom's drink, and for your Crush." Papa said to never, never, touch the ice pick. Ben looked at it. There were always a lot of small chips down in the sawdust. A boy could grab several and clean them off easily enough.

Ben walked back around the bunkhouse to the parking area and opened the tailgate of the Jeep. He pulled out his tri-pod and camera bag then positioned himself in the sun, looking east over the fairways toward the distant line of forest. He mounted the camera with its telephoto lens and focused on the horizon. In the center of his frame the tall conifers, 300 yards distant, had been cut away to offer a view of Whiteface Mountain, 40 miles away on a straight line. It was slightly hazy at that distance today, but the elegantly rising slopes were sharp enough to make a clear image, Fuji-esque in its symmetry, but rising to a perfect peak. Ben shot the scene at 70, 125, and 210 millimeters, closer, closer, yet keeping some sense of distance and grandeur. Zooming back out to 70mm, he saw a cliff swallow flying directly toward him, rising as it flapped its wings then

dipping as it glided in an urgent and swift approach.

He stepped back from the camera, picked up the tripod and carried it into the shade. Leaning against the rough trunk of an old white pine, he propped one foot on an oversized root that had grown larger and larger with the years, developing its own smoother bark, half buried in the season's fall of needles, brown now and clean. Several long cones lay on this natural cover, where he as a child had sat, short pants and tousled hair, and drunk Orange Crush. Perhaps, with a bit of luck, he could spot the bird with the naked eye as it homed in on its mud nest. He stared ahead, alert for motion in the air.

But the bird was too fast, he guessed, and must have arrived unseen. He slid down and sat with his legs crossed, content to wait for the next swallow to fly in. He had come a long way to visit this place and wanted to relax and allow his mind to work over the deep memories. Knowing there was a long drive back the next day, he savored the quiet warmth of the hilltop and the soothing comfort of the shade here.

A small pickup truck rounded the curve coming out of the woods below, drove up the road, and parked next to Ben's Jeep. Two young men got out, spoke to each other quickly, then one started to walk toward Ben where he sat against the pine. Ben watched him come, blue jeans and work boots, a black nylon baseball cap turned backwards on his head.

"Hey," he said.

Ben stood up. "Hi ya." Damn it!

"Ya know the course is closed today." The fella stopped short of the shady area beneath the tree, standing in the sunlight and squinting slightly.

"Yeah, I know."

"Well, this is private property."

"I guess you're right," Ben smiled. "I was just waiting for a better angle from the sun so I can take a couple pictures

of Whiteface. This is a nice spot up here and I was hoping to take advantage . . . since there are no golfers around for me to bother." Ah, that sounded good, sincere …

"You work for a newspaper or a magazine or somethin'?"

"No, no," Ben grinned. "I'm just after a couple good shots for the family album actually. You see, my grandfather redesigned this course in 1922 and was the greenskeeper here for forty years. Matter of fact, I spent my summers right here when I was a kid . . . back when the caddie camp was still operating."

"Caddie camp?"

"Yeah, there was big rec hall and kitchen and . . ."

"Well the owners got a rule that nobody's supposed to be on the course when we're closed. You'll have to leave."

"Oh . . ." You son of a bitch. "Ya know in about twenty minutes the sun'll be just right." Ben looked at his watch. "Tell you what; I'll be gone by . . . four-thirty. I came a long way for these pictures."

The young man frowned and shook his head. "Sorry, but the owners . . ."

"I doubt that the owners would object."

"Sorry, you gotta leave."

Ben sighed and dropped his head. "Okay." It wasn't the pictures he really wanted; he'd already taken his shots. It was the time, just the time. "I'll be outta here in five minutes. Just have to pack up the camera."

The young man nodded and walked back toward his companion and the pickup. Ben watched them enter the garage as he folded the tri-pod and put his camera back in the bag. He saw the two of them looking out at him from the interior of the building. He turned away and saw a streak above the bunkhouse roof, a cliff swallow soaring in a tight ellipse. For a moment he watched, then, placing his bag on the ground, he walked back to the foot of the

ancient white pine and knelt down. He carefully brushed aside the layer of fallen needles there until he saw moist, brown soil beneath. His fingers sank easily into the loam. He withdrew a large pinch of that Saranac earth and placed it upon his tongue. ❧

– Lucas Martin

J. Laurie Smith

Ageless

The dragon was ageless.

Time holds no meaning to an animal caged. Seconds fled by her unnoticed, yet it seemed like each moment held an eternal power and endlessness in the void. Alone, helpless, and immortal in the blackness, she drifted weightlessly. No stars glimmered to keep her company, and there was no distraction from the constant turning of her mind. She lackadaisically mulled over the atrocities time had inflicted upon her body, in order to retain some shred of prior sanity.

Her once beautiful ochre scales were gray and dulled by the unmonitored passage of time, and once razor sharp claws were now frail and contracted close to her body. Her stomach no longer growled to remind her of its shriveled existence. Emancipated, her frame curled up in a helpless fetal position, she wondered if any being even knew of her plight. Or would they, if they did know, even care?

The dragon's mind wandered from subject to subject, lacking direction in her prison of senility. Her tail hung limply behind her in testament to her saddened state. Once, she remembered, she possessed the gift of flight. Swooping high into the clouds, and then swiftly arrowing downward to stoop upon her prey in an aerial ballet of concise power. Her mind balked from thinking of the loss of freedom she endured in the void, turning her from subject to subject in avoidance of her cold reality.

Cataracts comforted eyes dimmed by lack of use, providing an easy excuse for apparent failure. Vocal cords rusted away in silence, unused and forgotten in the dark. Sighing, muscles relaxed into ineptitude. The dragon considered the advantages of final insanity, a descent into the uncharted

regions of self that would free her mind from the reality of her existence.

Imperceptibly, the darkness began to lift! A welcome grayness began to lighten the black surroundings into a bluer twilight. Stars again peeked out of the sky, and the dragon's scales began to redden anew, throwing the stars' light back to them for the first time in her hopeless incarceration.

She stretched! Her magnificently heavy head rose, supported once again by a sinuous neck that regained more of its supple reach each passing moment. The dragon's terrible claws sheathed and then sprang forth again in celebration of their new abilities. Cataracts faded, replaced by the sharp, piercing sight of her youth. She sang aloud, rejoicing… and then stopped, confounded. The newfound acuity of her mind wondered at the sudden release: Had her captors wearied of their hostage, and now were willing to free her? Or was it merely a game, intended to tease her into reveling in the return of her old form, only to slowly descend again into madness?

The growing light became blinding in its intensity, placing a generic nimbus around shapes unfamiliar to her unadjusted eyes. The void retreated, and shapes began to take form around the dragon. A chrome and plastic chair waited next to a sterile chrome bed that was too clean, sheets and blankets folded with an almost military precision. An acrid, antiseptic smell stung the dragon's keen nostrils causing tears to form in defense of soft tissues. The dragon solidified as she began to take shape in this new room, floating in expectant euphoria above the bed.

A woman lay in the bed, beginning to stir as she climbed groggily up out of sleep. Her brown hair looked older than it was due to the talc in the dry shampoo that the staff used. Lines carved into her face by trials with illness seemed to give her the character of a different person. Her disease,

who had chased away the laughing young girl in her soul, looked for help with its loosening grip.

The patient's eyes blinked and opened, as the woman tried to focus on the gray indentations on the white cork-board ceiling above her bed. Dry, cracked lips tried to form her name with a tongue swollen by disuse. Where was she? Who had been in the chair?

With a mighty roar, the dragon remembered her own purpose! Immortal indeed, and older than time itself, the terrible beast of pain reared above the bed and grew explosively, talons outstretched to rend her stirring captor in the bed.

The woman cried out at the growing red pulse of pain. Her arm flung out, she fumbled for the corded button on the bedside table. Morphine!

The dragon screamed in frustration and the void grew again around it, sucking the monstrosity back into the starless blackness. As the dragon disappeared, the woman sank back into the hospital bed. A warm looseness chased away the terrible gnawing pain of her disease, and replaced it with an infant's smile.

The cycle began again. ❧

Garth Danielson

#15

I speak of you no more
And to you I can never
It would betray myself
And there is no more I can give
Your absence made your decision
And in turn sealed our fate
Intentions are still unknown
And through this I would wait
But……

I can't say everything for you
And I can't guess what you feel
The smoke lears my head and I drown all the pain
But in your silence you remain

I've found myself in a place
I don't know if I should be here
But I won't come to you
Because I've been burned before

I laid myself out to you
A sacrificial lamb
Out there and you did nothing
So in trouble I will stay
Because…..

I can't say everything for you
And I can't guess what you feel
The smoke lears my head and I drown all the pain
But in your silence you remain

Susmita Chatterjee

Philosophy and Poetry of Rabindranath Tagore

Rabindranath Tagore was a mystic explorer of the worlds of imagination and beauty, but unlike John Keats he finds that the realm of truth and God surpasses the worlds of imagination and beauty. In this exploration he touches the soul of mankind and finds the spirit that dwells in the human heart. He writes about the joys and sorrows, the pain and the pathos of the human heart that touch the universal. His lyrics are a constant play of the infinite and the finite. In fact, to find the infinite in the finite is almost a passion with him. So he says:

> You are the infinite in the finite
> And you play your tune, and
> Your manifestation in me is so
> Delightful.

And again:

> When I look at the world
> Through my music I then know
> It and then I recon it.
> My heart then trembles to find
> That each one is whispering
> In my ears.

Music to him was uplifting for the human soul and he wrote three thousand lyrics and tuned them to Indian classical and folk style. Some of his lyrics also have the western classical tune because he had close association with western

culture. His writings had a meandering course in which passions, emotions, longings for human love, and love of nature predominate. But he moves on to the domain of truth and humanity and God as the ultimate goal of his sojourn on earth. We find therefore an immense maturity in his poems that made him the poet of the world. His refinement and standard of literary expression of language and thought are unique and unparalleled. His writings extended to short stories, novels, dramas, dance dramas and essays. Tagore himself sang and danced in his own dramatic productions and during the last ten years of his life painted unique paintings that were exhibited in centers of art all over the world. His genius was multifaceted.

Five times he visited the United States, and he was in touch with many of the great writers, philosophers, and scientists of the United States and the world. He had something good to say about America, in June 1927, writing in the Atlantic Monthly: "When we say America is materialistic we speak of a fact which is too apparent to be completely true. There is a strong current of spiritual idealism flowing beneath the surface soil of the American mind" ("East and West."). Tagore also had a hope that the tremendous productive power that America has built up will be of help to humanity.

Perhaps it is time that Tagore's consciousness merges into the American consciousness.

Tagore passed away on the 8th of August, 1941.

[Excerpted from a talk given at the Cultural Integration Center, San Francisco, California.]

Tagore's Poems

Translated by Susmita Chatterjee

Remember me

Remember, that I sang
My songs amidst the play
And laughter of you all.
Remember me, for I sang my songs
In your neglect and in ignominy
I sang my songs.
Oh traveler of the day, remember
That I traveled by night with the
Evening lamp in my hand
I sang my song, Oh do remember
That I sang my songs

Taj Mahal

Oh emperor of India, oh Shahjehan
You knew that life, youth wealth and title
Perish in the tremendous flow of time.
Royal power, strong and hard like thunder
Let it perish in the dust if it may,
Only thy innermost pain and undying longing
Should remain eternal, this was the hope
That you had in your mind.

Rubies and diamonds and the array
Of gems, are like the magical void
Of the rainbow colors that vanish
But let for ever remain the pain
In thy heart like a pearly
Tear on the cheek of time
Pure white and translucent
The Taj Mahal.

The Golden Boat

The clouds rumble in the skies,
It is the height of the season of rain
And I am all alone on the banks of the river;
Who is that person singing
And rowing the golden boat
As if I have known him for long

With full blown sail the boat runs
Swiftly it goes looking at none,
The waves break helplessly
On both sides of the boat
To make way.

Where dost thou go
To which foreign land
Do come close and bring your boat
For a moment, oh come close to the bank.
Take my golden crop
Take all of that I lived for so long.

Is there any more? Asks the boatman.
"No, I have given all that I had and now
there is none. Kindly take me in your boat".

"No there is no place
In this small boat." says he.
It is all filled with my own harvest.
And now there is no place for me.

Amidst the rain, when clouds rumble
I am left alone, lonely and desolate.
On the bleak bank of the river.
What was mine is taken away
By the golden boat.

{In this poem the poet separates man's ego from his accomplishment}

Alien

Every atom calls me in this universe
Thousand knocks are from the world
At my door that is shut———-
The wind, through my breath sends
Eternal invitation
All that is not me
Draw near through these incantations

Love is there from dust to dust
Joy is there in the universe
Every part of every atom
Is a soul, silent and self-complete
Flows through all forever
A glory, if you know not
In life and in death remain a stranger.

Lyrics

I want to tread on that path
Oh I want to tread that path
Where Thy light shines on
But a thousand fetters
Stand in my way and I
Stumble and I fail.

I shall not beguile you
With my beautiful looks
I shall not open the door
With my hands, I shall
Make my songs open it.
I shall make a garland of
My love, and then garland
You with it to swing.
Around your neck.

We met on a honey night
But we did not talk.
We met on a honey night
On the banks of the river
Yamuna, the creeper and the plants
Trembled and were amazed to see
That we did not talk when
We met on the riverside on a honey night.

Make my heart bloom
Oh Thou dweller of my inner being
Make my heart bloom.
Make it pure and bright
And make it beautiful
Make me tireless
Make me doubtless, oh dweller of my heart

Like the moon and its unseen
Pull shall I rouse the waves
In the flow tide of love
For I shall not beguile you.

Robert Weaver

Paris in Spring

The greatest book I,
ever gave notice-explained
that cholera and love
inflict the same symptoms
upon the fortunate hearts
they dwell within-the worst
being both are highly
contagious among the
unsuspecting populous.

I've never been
a tourist, due to never
having felt I had
a home to leave, my
song lines criss-cross in
the heart-seeing faces out
of a crowd-wondering, searching
the snapshots of my memory, as to
which city they-or a likeness (we
are not as original as we
think) was branded into
my psyche-the answers lay
in a box of undeveloped film.

With my knowledge of
the airports, seaports-and
every cab driven destination of
far and away,
-in-between-
travel is a sickness
of epic proportions.

Prognosis: similar to intoxication
specified by addiction,
and a worse hangover.

No sooner do my
ears pop-landing gear up,
than the altitude makes me
light headed, and as if
consuming red wine-I
think of Paris-
a song I have yet
to hear.

Spring is only fitting
to hop a metal
bird~and land-for
just as the return
from most of my trips, “it was
fine” is the answer-the reproduction
in the form of
story never really articulates the
experience of secrets lying
in the vaulted
heart-as summer-though
warm, never lives up
to the promise-
of the season before.

The lure is
that it is called
amour-a culture that
truly believes, “with it you
need little more-without it,
it doesn’t matter much else
what you have.” Pass the creamy
butter for my

croissant is warm-
and I will relish-every
bite of life~you might
as well live it, there isn't
much else to do with
the limited-one time-gift.

The country-it has
a rocky edge, and-the city
a wide river, baptism
doesn't need to occur
at birth, ask someone
from the coast, the water
can cleanse the soul, take
two and call me
in the morning, rinse
and repeat if desired.

If I knew the
method which produced
the Merlot, that shall be
sipped in a cobblestone
surrounded cafe-I
would forget it-belief in the mysteriousness
of a city built
on-around-the buzz
of love,
I wish to imagine the
inhabitants bleed such
tender libation, while
watching dawning days
in bed next to a beloved one
~white sheets, and
during red, burning
sunsets.

Crystal Beale

From A Distance

It is not easy
Loving someone
From a distance.
But the pain
Of being so far away
Draws the love closer.
The longing to see
The one I love
Reaffirms in my heart
That the love is for real.
It won't run away
Like the tide,
It won't fade away
Like a distant landscape.
It will become
What we have been
Waiting so patiently for—
A relationship that's not distant.

Eight Roses Pulled Apart
– Jonathan B. Obst

Jonathan B. Obst

The Youngest Flannel Ever

Wrestling with a cigarette
Bring in the family
Shall the night bring madness
Fingers touch loud rockets
Crank and kettle
Deadly Diary
Columns won't go away
Propose in purple
And bring the words she said
Heavy tears glaze over
Foolish bones know home
Feather moonlight
Old night, rice machine
Half-eaten ferns
Ripped leaves
Warm velvet cushion
Squirmy shoes brush
Mosquito taste let go

Morgan Holbrook

Autumn Leaves

black
white
gray
leave shapes
becoming mingled
like at a party
on top of the top, over the top, of the
bottom
bumpy
sticks, twigs
half moons
crescents
a pile
i remember as a kid, jumping in cool, wet, damp, piles of
leaves
the musty smell of rotting autumn
that hung on my clothes for days
it was the most fun i've ever had
now in the east it smells like that all the time
what about the ones in the "gray area?"
do they count?
or the ground underneath, how does it feel?
there's that spot in the photo that looks like a spider
only it's legs are pulled off
but it's big
or maybe it's a scorpion
circles
critters
bacteria, eat away
rotting slowly

do dead bodies feel like leaves if you jump into a pile of
them?
whole
half
folded
the life force gone like the chlorophyll
(oh shoot what's the word for the fall colors?)
(i've learned it once and have forgotten)
see through
woven: under, over, under, over
poking out of the mass
species?
looks like birch
or is it beech?
the beeches are yellow
tiny veins
(like in dead bodies)
slick
slippery
shiny
glistening

Kristie Licata

Painter

I've decided it's best for you to go away,
Go paint someone else for awhile,
Just until you step down off your ladder.
I don't want to be the one who gets splattered anymore.
All those colorful thoughts and printed hearts
Just end up on top of me.
When will you ever stop painting with your eyes closed?
Slapping your brush this way and that.
Forcing crude graffiti on my heart and mind.
You should dump that paint on yourself,
Cover up your own holes and chipped paint

J. Laurie Smith

Grave Thoughts

Amid the pregnant silence of the grave
A question stirs my thought:
Who was this person, once saved,
Now lain down to rot?

A name stares forth from weathered stone
Abandoned by all relations…
Quietly comforted by turves alone,
Empty space for loves and occupations.

Perhaps this person found peace at last
And finds it homey, beneath the grass:
Content with honor and mistakes past.
Beneath mothering soil, watching life pass…

Judy Eyerer

The Sea Urchin

He reaches,
with hands heavy as cast iron,
and lifts the empty sea urchin
from my cobalt blue jar.
Its absence is noticeable
among the remaining shells.

Once,
in the sub tidal zones
of Maine's coastal waters,
it clung with stubborn tube feet
to rocky ledges,
inching its way past
sea cucumbers
and waving anemones.

Strongylocentrotus droebachiensis

Harvested by divers
line-tended to surface skiffs,
its gonads are processed
into *shio, mushi, yaki or reito uni*
for picky Japanese customers.

Now,
empty of roe,
its protective spikes stripped away
by the rhythm of the sea,
it bears the weight of his thumb
as, idly, he rubs its fragile surface
back and forth.

I watch,
nervous,
eyeing the sphere
and its radiating rows
of sun-bleached beads,
wondering which of the five
perfectly
symmetrical
sections
will be the first to crack.

When I let go my breath
and ask for the urchin,
he nods—
    nonchalantly,
and hands it over.

Morgan Holbrook

Even the Scoreboard

Sometimes there are days when I can make it
I aim – shoot – swish
I think I'm happy in the moment
It proves something

Then there's that time in between
When you take it back – like it was yours to begin with
And I miss – air ball – brick
I think I realize something

If basketball really is a metaphor for life
I should start making my own plays
Instead of using old ones that never work

Because he always gets the steal
And I can't seem to get the rebounds quick enough
My dribble is off and my ankles always get twisted

There's that rhythm – in life and basketball –
That I somehow can't keep up with
I don't get back to the paint in time

You know maybe it has nothing to do with you
It could all be in my round basketball shaped head
or
It has everything to do with you
And I'm the visiting team

Kaleena Nakowicz

Unexpected

A lowly smile hides behind his
beauty.
His beauty is what
makes me
want to continue.
The way he moves
makes me
look forward to the
next day.
Where I will see him and my
excitement of a child
continues to grow.

The day I met him
I knew,
he was who I
needed to find out more about.
It seems perfect and
it seems it's what I need.
The day I have to say goodbye to him
is the day where the beautiful
part of my
true individuality will
disperse.

J.T. Kenny

from Duckpuddle Road

The morning was crystal. From the big kitchen window, I saw the partially ascended Sun send out its chilly reflection, a fragile illumination coaxing a sharp, hoary glare from fallen snow and crusted ice.

The house and all in it slept as I moved about doing my quiet, remote things—autopilot stuff. I laid the wood fires, let the dogs out, let the dogs in, and fed the birds. The latter task wasn't quite autopilot and took a bit of ingenuity this white day. The barn was about thirty feet from the farmhouse. There was a small shed, a lean-to affair, coming off the side of the livestock pens facing the house. Some mornings, I scattered seed on its dry, low roof. Not possible today. The shed was covered with about eight inches of yesterday's storm. There was a barn-side feeder, but it had been iced up since early December, so I had to improvise. I shoveled a clear space, about five-by-five, in the stretch of ground between house and shed. The cats were indoors, so the ground space would be safe for the birds.

Inducements—I chirped a bit of nonsense and spread a smorgasbord of assorted seed and sunflower kernels. I then tracked back inside to get some coffee and watch from the kitchen. First came the house sparrows, swift, numerous, wings beating about 40 times per second. It amazed me that such tiny creatures could move so quickly in the cold. Shouldn't little, brittle bones break? Next came the yellow grosbeaks: bigger, aggressive, looking incredulously tropical in their bright yellow and black plumage. The ones I was really looking for took awhile longer—my favorites, the redpolls—but eventually they too flew in to chow down. These last, the smallest of our guests, weren't resident.

They migrated all the way from Hudson's Bay and the Arctic Circle; did so in the dead of winter. They were a bit like southern purple finches, with less color. At first sight, they appeared to be smallish sparrows bleeding from tiny chest wounds. That intrigued me. They intrigued me, seeming so delicate yet apparently thriving, in a sparse, wintry habitat. Their visitation was fleeting.

Wind blew, snow billowed, birds scattered. I could see that there was a drift blowing across Duckpuddle Road. No vehicles had come down our way that morning, not even the plow. Looking across the white expanse, I saw the kennel and further down, opposite the barn, our snow-capped equipment building. There were four buildings if you added the house and barn—kind of a quadrangle. The outbuildings were without paint. Everything was as it was, bleached barn board and wooden siding shingles. The natural, weathered effect seemed a part of nature, a kind of a camouflage that made this spot secret, an unnoticed part of the surrounding New England forest. Like my winter birds, I had found my haven, a for-the-moment banquet in a safe place. ❧

Marie Juckett

Three Untitled Poems

They gathered (like)
    a herd.
A variety
A mix
    of big and small.
Some with frail, weak bones
Some strong and hairy,
Both tall and short.

Some hissed
Some growled
Some hummed (chirped)
    as the rain drizzled
Eventually soaking their skulls and their fur.
Hooves –
    Covered in padded colors, stood still in the mud.

Necks stretched
Backs arched –
    in readiness

The start gun sounded
  And -
    They were off.

Just a thought . . .

Should I ever get hit –
while running –
I hope it's from behind –
so I never see –
the color
of the vehicle –
For fear it wouldn't
look good –
Covered with the blood I spilled.

I liked the way
    you
Studied the leaf
    that I brought in from the cold
    and
    then asked
    if you could keep it.

Leon Raikes

To Ralph Waldo Emerson

i

You sit alone
    amid whole fields of vines
        and pumpkin flowers.
Far off I see you
    bend against the warm wind
        resisting rootlessness.

ii

The blossoms of the creeping vine
    are fat and primitive
        fleshy flowers.
The stamens are hairy
    obvious poles. Even
        the pollen is like a shower
of small stones. And the bees –
    how the bees express their elation
        in a drone of dance.

iii

I think of the Zuni hunters
    alone in
        arid arroyos.
Each is shaded from blindness
    by the shadow of a single
        squash blossom.

iv

You sit alone
Amid whole fields of vines
Neither dreaming cabbages
Nor delicate ears of corn
But the rotund globes
Of pumpkins, pumpkins, pumpkins –
As though the single fruit
of ancient meditation
were more delicious to the mind
than more perishable stock – or the fiber
of wild meat – or the taste
of mere water.

Gary Lee Albert

Burden of Life

For Jennifer Lea Curry

When the weight of the world lies upon my shoulders
And the flame in the fire fades and smolders,
When the burden of life has taken its toll,
Consumed by despair, condemning my soul

As the future's uncertain, you lay your cards down to fold
Can you bury the burden, to lessen the load?
And the years go by wasted, but the wrath of time remains,
As the circle of life has come around for me again

Now there's nothing left to gain and all is lost,
See through the smile I feign, as I'm adding up the cost.
So what's it all mean? I ask you my friend,
What's the price of life and is it worth it in the end?

Pouting Cat
– Shaun Hilton

William Beardsley

Midfielders

They could have been brothers. It was the swagger, taper of the shoulders, curls on the nape of the neck. Both had played midfield for Newington High, came to college as a package. Roomed together. Teammates called them the twins. But, that's where the similarities ended. Josh said little, kept to himself, drove his wreck of a car home for Mass. Sean was the man, had the moves, gift of gab, drove an SUV, defined what it meant to party on a Saturday night.

That was two years ago. Josh chewed on a donut hole. He sat in a new Ford pickup at a gravel rest area on the edge of town.

"Swigart's Field and Forest" was embossed on the door. Ed Swigart sat in the driver's seat. The sky was lightening up. The dashboard clock was creeping up on seven. They were working the Parker tree farm. Actually, it was more like a garden, gravel paths, stone bridges, myrtle, ferns and rhododendron under a canape of oversized oak and pine.

Josh shook a cigarette from the pack he lifted from his jacket pocket.

"Forget it. You know the routine" said Swigart as he shifted into gear and turned onto the woods road.

Josh flicked it out the window and leaned back hard, head pressing against the rear window. It had been a bad night. Mom had gone to bed after supper with her cough. Sally and the boys fought over the phone. Dad had the T.V. Josh didn't sleep. It wasn't the cough or the T.V. It's what Swigart had told him as he'd left work. "Going to work Parker's tomorrow. I'll pick you up quarter to seven."

"Count me out. I'll go back to work on the wall." He waited. "Let Kelly go to Parker's. It's light duty. He'll like it."

But it wasn't to be. Here he was, heading into Sean Parker's family tree farm as a common laborer. Like there was no class system anymore. Like in the South where black kids and white kids played together through high school then went their separate ways. Like he and Sean had built forts together, played soccer for eight years. Dr. Parker had taken them to the NCAA nationals in Annapolis their senior year, and now, he was their gardener. Dad laid off, mother giving up, sister and brothers out of control. Left college after freshman soccer. Went home for Thanksgiving. Never came back. Didn't return phone calls. Slipped out the back door when Sean had stopped by. All added up to ten dollars an hour.

Something moved. His mind stopped swimming. His eyes focused. It was Sean's father, Dr. Parker, walking through the woods. Narrow man, hair never out of place, quick little prance, bit of a bantam rooster.

"Stop the truck. I can't do this." His body turned tight as a wire.

"Can't do what?"

"I told you I didn't want to come," Josh shot a glance at Swigart.

"Just stay in the cab. I'll be right back." Swigart dropped onto the ground and walked to meet Dr. Parker. Josh stared away out the side window, hoping the windshield reflected the light. He glanced down at his hands, dirt beneath broken nails, torn jeans. Last time he'd been with the Parkers he'd worn sunglasses, a soccer jacket and khaki shorts. He was hot. Head hurt. Then it was over. Dr. Parker was walking away. The pressure drained away.

Ed Swigart climbed into the cab. He sat for a moment, hitting the palms of his hands against the wheel. Then he turned. "It's going to be a long day." Josh was looking out the window. "Dr. Parker said Sean is home from college. He's coming down to help after breakfast. I said we didn't need him but the Doctor just said it would be good for him." Josh

started to speak. Mouth was dry. Nothing came. He took a deep breath, still looked away.

…

"Hey man! Didn't know you worked for Swigart. How's it going?" Sean stood behind Josh, a pole saw in his hand. Head cocked. Stupid grin.

Josh looked back but kept working his saw. "Fine, how about you. How's school?"

"Oh, you know. Same ol', same ol'. Soccer's still good. You still play?"

"Yeah, a bit in the summer. Kid brother's pretty good. Work some with him on his foot work."

They worked in silence, each on his own tree, pruning up to seventeen, maybe eighteen feet, then on to the next. They worked in tandem with natural ease.

"So, how'd it turn out with Patti?"

Josh worked his saw. "Left. Went to Florida to live with cousins. Lost the baby."

"Abor….."

"Don't know," Josh cut in.

"Bummer. Really messed things up I guess." They moved on. "That mean you may be back next fall? You know, with Patti gone and all that?"

"Maybe." Josh walked away. "I'm doing other stuff now. Maybe not. I'm not really into college these days."

"Yeah, I know," said Sean.

But Sean didn't know. There was no Patti, no baby. Just a dad at home, a box of food from the Episcopal Church last week. Two brothers and a sister who prayed they'd never have to leave high school.

"How's your Dad doing?" asked Sean. I see him at games but never get a chance to talk…Team could use you."

"Lay the hell off." His fingers knotted up. He was sweating. "You don't get it do you. You never got it." He spit.

"Well, screw you too."…

He slammed the kitchen door. His mother looked up from the table. "What is it, Sean?"

"Nothing! Where the hell is my damned father? He set this whole thing up."

"Stop it Sean. And don't you bother him. He's with patients."

"He's always with patients."

"That's his job. That's why we live in this house. That's how he pays your tuition and bought your car. What did he do to you? He does everything for you."

"Where have you been? He doesn't do crap. Hell, when was the last time he ever saw me play soccer? Didn't even give me a brother or sister to beat up on."

"Well don't blame me…And, that's unfair. You know he would if he could…. Remember he took you and that Josh boy to Annapolis. "

"Get with it, Mother. That was two stupid years ago. Hell, Josh quit and his father still comes to all my games. He seems to care a hell of a lot more than our precious doctor of the house."

She stood at the sink. Turned the water on. She spoke softly as she filled the tea kettle. "Don't you ever say that again."

…

It was dusk when they finished windrowing the branches and brush and headed for the pickup. Josh didn't notice Dr. Parker until it was too late. He was too tired to care.

"I brought you each a beer. Where's Sean?"

"He left about lunch time. Haven't seen him since." Swigart leaned back against the tree and drank deeply.

"Funny. I didn't see him at the house. He must've headed back to school early."

"Nice guy," said Swigart after Dr. Parker had left.

"Yeah. Bit of a prince."

"Don't be too hard on him. He's got his burdens."

"Sure, like too many zeros in his check book."

"Let it be, Josh. He's Sean's Dad. Sean's all he's got."

"Father like son."

"Hey, he likes you."

"Yeah, like a son."

Swigart turned the key. "No, but almost. Someday you'll get it right."

The engine roared. Country music filled the cab. A landscaper shifted gears. A boy stared out the window at the passing trees. ❧

Contributors

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Jim Kenny is Dean of Science and Humanities at Husson. He has a background in history and political science and, of course, an interest in writing. He shares a modest home with his wife, Delia, and Sammy "the Cat." The latter is a family pet living in the federal witness protection program. In his spare time, Jim enjoys carping and meddling in the lives of his adult children.

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