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Editor's Note:

This magazine takes its title from my grandfather's, Madison Jones, house which we lovingly called "Kudzu" for the plant which proliferated along the property line. He was a farmer, writer, literary critic, and professor in Auburn, Alabama, the town where Robin, Rivers and I grew up. The poem "Kudzu" is dedicated to James Dickey, a colleague and friend of Madison's. "Kudzu" is also a synthesis of my reasons for starting KR, and a veiled critique of Dickey's work. Madison retired and still lives in town. I moved away from Auburn in 2006 to attend the University of Montevallo, where I met Arthur, Jane, and Ashley. After graduating, I decided to create an e-zine and turned to my friends for help. Soon, Powell joined us, and the following issue is the result of our labors. Thank you to the entire KR team!

Our efforts would be nothing without the University of Pennsylvania's Call for Papers webpage, the many online journal catalogues who quickly included us and, of course, special thanks to Duotrope.com. Thanks to all of you for helping us reach out across the world at the click of a mouse! Also, thanks to Carmichael Library, whose computers were there whenever mine crashed.

We would also like to thank the editors of *A Few Lines Magazine* for support and guidance in the making of this journal.

I must extend gracious thanks to every author, accepted or otherwise, who submits to this journal. The quality and variety of the following works speak to the relevance and importance of ecocriticism. Our tagline, "literature of an invasive species," is used with sardonic self-awareness of the problems facing our planet. We believe that literature offers solutions: a chance to erase boundaries, allowing humans to re-place themselves into the landscape and uniting us as shepherds with a common goal.

Most of all, we at Kudzu Review want to thank YOU, the reader! Without your participation and support, none of this could have been possible. Please feel free to contact me, or any member of this staff, with questions or comments you may e'r have.

On behalf of myself and the staff:

may the Kudzu grow!

Cheers,

M.P. Jones IV, *Editor-in-Chief*

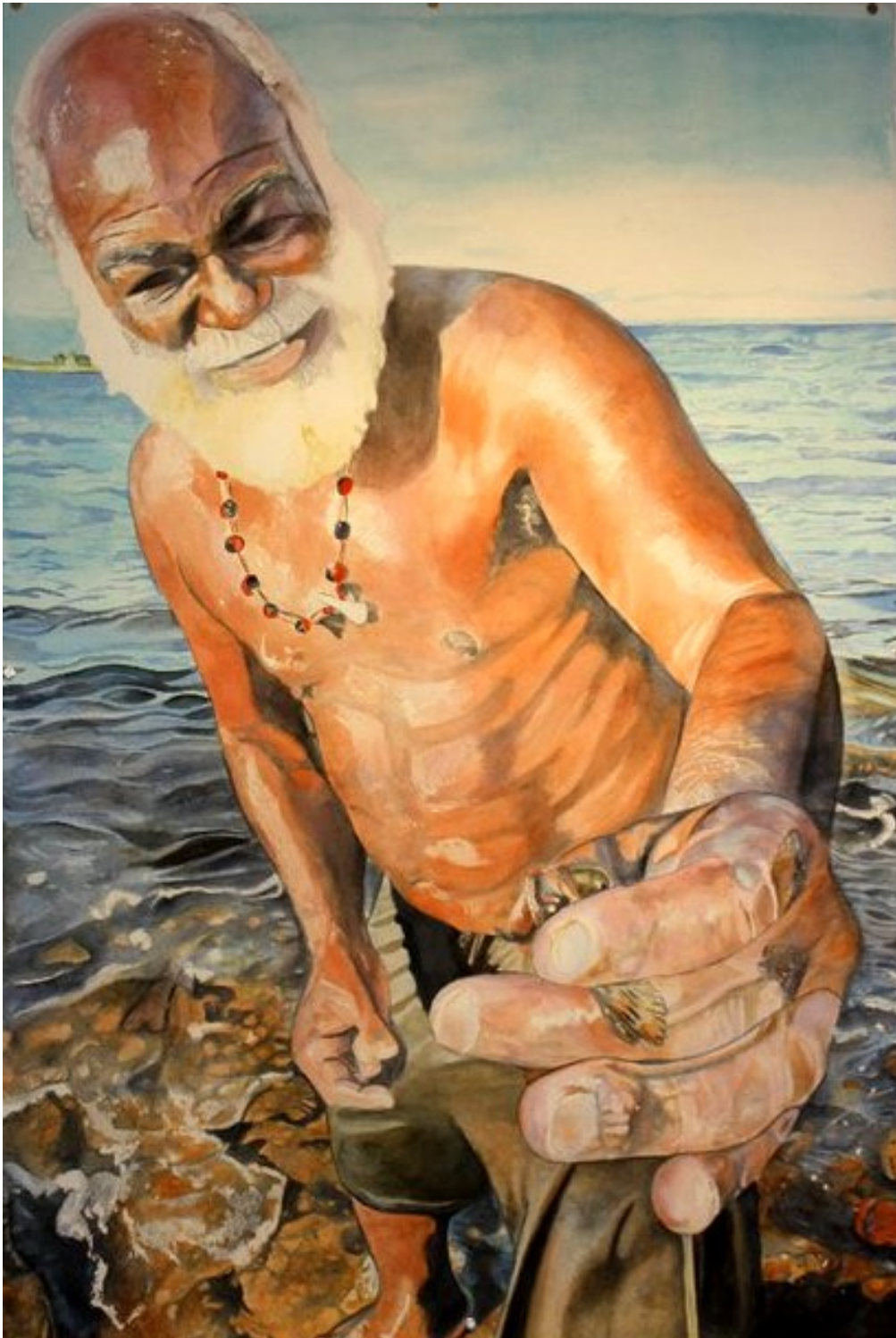
“TRANSLATE ME”

Lakshimi Eassey

Translate me
and take me
into that other world of
your language and
cadence
the melody that
waits to create the pictures
of the impressions so gracefully
painted and captured by
blinks of memory
of roads obliterated
take me and let me wade my feet into
your stream
the water that empties into the
endlessness
Create me
don't just take me word for word
allow me to see the way
your heart unfolds
the taste of fruit in the midday heat
cutting rice by the roadside
the gentle whittling away
at the center of the matter
Transcend me
beyond
the dam
that has stopped the flow of water
and thoughts held stagnant for progress
too long
the rain that has caused landslides
of rock, water and emotion
flooded with what is lost and
can never be recovered.

(Tehri Valley, October 2010)

“SANTANA DO PESCADOR,” by Brandy Bajalia



“LEAVINGS”

Joseph Rhea

Hands sweating more than the mason jars he was using, Lee poured himself another jack-and-coke and Cassius a coke—Cassius had stopped after one round of liquor—and handed the older man his drink. Lee sat back down in front of his arthritic white box fan and tried to absorb as much of the flowing air as he could.

“Thank you, thank you,” Cassius nodded to Lee. Cassius was a retired chef from Parchman and a carpenter, with white eyebrows and age-thinned wrists that belied his wiry strength. He and Lee had become unexpectedly close friends during Lee’s time in Odessa. He had given Lee carpentry lessons and kept inviting him to the Baptist church, even though Lee had politely refused since his first month in town.

“Boy, lemme tell you it’s been a hot summer,” he began. Cassius was a reflexive storyteller. The present seemed no more to him than a series of mnemonic devices to recall past events.

“Mm,” Lee grunted. It had been hot as hell this summer, even compared to Starkville, where he had gone to college. The Mississippi humidity settled in blankets over the flat north parts of the state, sticky and oppressive.

“Yes indeed, hotter’n most the last ten years,” Cassius nodded as he swirled the rapidly shrinking ice cubes in his glass. “Like one time the air went out at th’ prison for near two weeks, and the kitchen staff almos’ rioted with the pris’ners.” He chuckled. “Though we was gon’ to have a whole-out revolt on our hands.”

“Cass,” Lee interrupted, struggling for words, “have we done any good here?”

“What’s that?” Cassius asked.

“I mean, have we made any good difference? Did we help anybody?”

Cassius leaned forward, resting his bony elbows on his knees.

“Good, mm? Done good?” With his free hand, he rubbed at his chin. “Don’t reckon I know what you mean, done good. The Harrises’ boy is out of trouble more of’n than in it; guess that’s good. Ashia passed in school this year. What kinda good you thinkin’ of?”

“I...I don’t know. I just...I wanted to do *more*. I hoped we would see things *change*, you know?” Lee could feel the alcohol loosening him up inside, and he had learned he could let his guard down with Cassius. “I thought we would see more people doing better after a year.”

“Well now, the white folks didn’ come and change ever’thing for the better in a whole year, hmm?”

“No, no, you know—I’m sorry, I didn’t mean it like that. Forget I said anything. I’m just mad that we had to shut down. Mad at the government, or at Skinner, or something.”

Cassius leaned over and squeezed his knee. “Ain’t much help in that, now,” he said. “Not

much help at all.”

Cassius leaned back and they sat in silence in the heat. Cassius finished his drink, then worked himself up out of his seat. “I got to go finish that table for Dottie,” he said.

“Come see me tomorrow before you leave, now, hear?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Okay, then.” Cassius let himself out, letting the heavy wooden door of Lee’s apartment close softly. Lee leaned back in his battered mustard-colored sofa, sipping on his drink and staring into the fan.

. . .

“Dude!”

His door slammed open, startling him out of the dewy reverie of his fifth drink. Jack stomped in, one overall strap clinking its buckle against his back. He had an iPod in his hand, one bud in his ear and the other in his other hand.

“Dude, you need to hear this Flying Lotus song *right fucking now*. It’s phenomenal.”

“Jack? Shit, man.” Lee collapsed back into his couch. Jack leaned over him, dumping sweat-stench into Lee’s nose, and shoved one bud into his ear.

“I can’t believe I never heard this guy before, man. He’s sick.” A frantic, deconstructed hip-hop beat sluiced into Lee’s ear. He wanted the earphone out.

“Um. It’s good, man. Good stuff.”

“I know, right? Lane gave me this stuff last week, but it just came on while I was finishin’ up at the blue house. Oh man, it’s so good.”

“That’s good man. That’s cool. Uh. What time is it?”

“Seven forty-two. You been nappin’ or something?”

“Shit. Yeah. Are you helping set up?”

“Yeah dude. Lane and Ashley and Eddie should be here any second. We’re gonna send this thing out in style, right?” Jack looked around the expansive loft, scratching absently under one strap of his once-white A-shirt.

“Yeah. Style.”

He heard voices, laughter, climbing his stairs. Eddie came in first, followed by Lane and Ashley.

“—I mean, Skinner was *livid*. ‘If you come in here smelling like that nasty pond again, I’ll send your ass back home to your mommy and daddy!’” Lane was red-faced and choking from laughing so hard, and even Eddie was laughing out loud. Lee dimly wondered what

they were laughing about.

“Hey there,” Eddie said, patting Lee’s shoulder with his free hand. He had two big tubs tucked under the other that would hold ice and wet towels for that night. “Looks like someone couldn’t wait for the party.”

“Mm,” Lee responded. “Hey guys.” He stood and shook hands with Eddie, then hugged Lane and Ashley. Ashley squeezed him tight, looking into his eyes.

“Well hey there. You okay?”

“Yeah, fine, fine. Uh, sorry. Haven’t really gotten started on setting up yet.”

“Not a problem. We’re on Delta time anyways.” She smiled at him, and (as always happened when she smiled at him) he regretted breaking up with her for just a little bit. She picked up the bulging bags she’d brought in and took them into the kitchen, or rather, the tiled section of the refurbished attic he rented as an apartment.

“We cleaned the place out,” Eddie said, shifting the tubs in his arm. “Got *all* the goods. This is going to be pretty much incredible.”

Most of Lee’s belongings were boxed and loaded into his car already, so setup was not much more than arranging tables, food, and music. Jack had built some folding tables from scrap wood at Retrofit, his job, and Lee hauled them in with him. Ashley set out food and drinks, most scrounged from the Windowsill’s kitchen. Lane and Eddie put out the sound system, then hung posters and works of art from the house they had rented. Ashley was staying in town, but Lane and Eddie were both leaving with Lee in the morning.

The Windowsill had been their brainchild and main project, and its closing had ended their time in Odessa. Lee, the head chef, had hoped to hire and train people in the community to take ownership of the restaurant, gaining passion and skill for baking that they could take on to college or work. Lane had come on with him as a business internship; Eddie had finished a stint with Teach For America in Odessa and was beginning an MA in Art History in August.

The bakery had flopped, not at all becoming the community center Lee had expected. Their grant had not been renewed, and they had had to close down. Jack would be staying on, since Retrofit’s \$20k house program was alive and strong.

Lee had determined to drink away as much of the year as possible. He gave Ashley token help, little more than putting things where she wanted them, and walked down to the Shell station to pick up ice. He was grateful for the slight breeze outside and the cooler air. He savored the lazy sunset; it seemed to last twice as long here as in the mountains of North Carolina where he’d grown up. The sky, cloudless today, was a mellow sunflower shade, fading across into indigo as the sun pulled the light away, a spray of dandelions in a child’s fist.

He felt that he had lost something in this place, some contest against the ignorance and poverty besetting the rural world. It had checkmated him; in his mind, a button-bursting figure sat smirking at him, rubbing its sweaty forehead with a fat freckled hand

and playing with a tie that came halfway down its belly.

He was mad. He didn't know what he could be angry at, though. He had just wanted to help people, was all, and they didn't seem to want to be helped by him. He couldn't be mad at them; he didn't want to be mad at himself. He said a distracted goodbye to Bernie, the night-shift worker at the Shell, and walked back down the block with two bags of ice in each hand. He resented the laughter eddying out of his window into the street.

Inside, the others were finishing their work. Eddie and Lane had his place decorated far more than he ever had done himself. Jack was making a play-list for the night; Bill Withers' street-walking baritone filled the room. Lee grabbed a Pabst from an open cooler and smiled at Ashley, who was walking towards him holding a perspiring can. She wore a white-and-red button-down with short sleeves that he had bought for her.

"I have an unfeminine love for PBR."

"You're such a hipster," he grinned. "Christian Lander would be proud."

"I know, I know, I'm just an empty cultural stereotype."

"Don't get too hard on yourself, kiddo," he said. "We can't escape it."

"What—" she began, when the door opened, and the architecture students interning with Retrofit spilled in, towing a few people from the town. Kyle Weatherly, an effusive senior with an explosion of curly black hair and a huge crush on Ashley, came up and threw a wiry arm around her shoulder. He high-fived Lee, then guided Ashley towards the food. She looked back over her shoulder with a visual shrug, and he shook his head at her. It was better that they not talk as much anyways.

He walked over to Eddie and Lane, who were talking with G.B. Harris, one of the guys who had worked with them at the Windowsill. G.B. looked like he felt out of place, and Lee was afraid that he was. Eddie had befriended some of his students, playing basketball and football with them even though he sucked at both. Most of the outsiders here, though, hadn't made more than token efforts to make friends with people in town. Lee didn't even know how many locals had been invited to the party. He made small conversation, feeling himself rotate into himself and away from them, and went for another drink when he finished his beer.

As the party went on, Lee's perception started to blur at the edges. The amount of people in his apartment made it sweltering hot, so he got a towel from the ice-water bucket to cool himself. He tottered over to a couch against the wall and sat down. Jack, now shirtless under his overalls, put on Flying Lotus and started a bizarre dance that looked mostly like leaping around the room in circles. Some joined him; others began their own dances, the crowd generally drawing into a knot in the middle of his apartment.

The alcohol had unseated his inside from his outside, pulling him away from the people in the room. He wanted to keep turning, to turn so that he was so alone he didn't even feel himself, just become a series of impressions without referents. No self, no Other. He wasn't alone, though, even inside himself; the thing was there with him, like it was sitting on the couch with one hand gently pressing its stomach and the other around his

shoulder. *This is wrong*, he thought, but did not know what to do. Like a cheap candle burning out its wick, his consciousness jumped and guttered out.

It was still dark when he woke up. The bleary brown fug of a hangover was settling into his head, but he didn't want to go back to sleep. Kyle and Ashley were passed out on the couch, she laying on him and his arm around her. The room was quiet, everyone either having gone home or fallen asleep around the place. His bed was stacked with bodies. He fumbled on his splintering kitchen table for his phone, finding it under the blue beanie Lane had knitted for Eddie.

It was five-twenty. He sighed, scratching at the thick blond stubble on his neck. He couldn't tell if he was just tired or still kind of drunk.

Not knowing what to do in his own place, he made his careful way down the stairs and walked towards Cassius' house. Lee knew he would be awake, especially with it being Sunday. The tiny town, little more than two commercial streets bisecting swaths of farmland, was silent at this hour and as close to cool as it would get this side of September. He woke up as he walked the half-mile to Cassius' place, but his hangover settled in slow and snug as the Mississippi heat.

Lee walked behind Cassius' white shotgun house to the rough shed Cash had built in the back. He heard a drill whirring in professional bursts as he approached the shed's open door. There was a single incandescent bulb hanging in a cage from the ceiling and a stronger floodlamp peering down on the table. Cassius was leaning over the table, fastening its legs in place.

Lee knocked on the open door.

"Lordy! You scared th' devil out of me!"

"Sorry, Cash," Lee said.

Cassius looked at him closely. "You want some coffee?"

Lee nodded. Cassius sat down his drill, then shook the table leg to make sure it was sturdy. Lee followed him into the house, sitting down at the kitchen table with a glass of water Cash poured for him. The old man started his coffeemaker and gave Lee some Tylenol. They sat at the square kitchen table; Lee looked around at Cassius' abundant collection of family pictures, common to any grandparent's house. Cassius had one daughter who had married in town and still lived there and one son who had moved to Jackson, where he was an A. M. E. pastor.

Cassius looked as if he were trying to decide what to say to Lee. The coffeemaker beeped as he was opening his mouth, though, and he got up and poured them a cup each. Lee sipped his thirstily, blowing on it to cool it, burning his tongue and lips.

"The coffee ain't gon' get away from you," Cash said. "I make it strong, but not that strong."

Lee looked down at his cup. He smiled. "Cash, can I help you finish that table?"

Cassius nodded. "Sure can. You want to finish your coffee first?"

"No, it's okay. I'll drink it as we work."

They went back to the shed. Cassius gave him a strip of sandpaper, folded and worn from multiple uses. They sanded down the rough wood, smoothing the legs and underside and then turning it over and smoothing the top. Cassius corrected Lee gently when he bore down too hard on the wood. When it was done and they had blown away the sawdust, Cassius opened a can of wood stain with a screwdriver and poured each of them a cup. They turned the table back right side-up and brushed on the stain, working quickly as the sky pinked and lightened.

“JACK O’WELLS”
Dwain Wilder

This is the well that Jack drilled.

This is the Earth
that lay shorn and still
that bore the well that Jack drilled.

These are the pipes, arrayed in racks, and the concrete pad
that was anchored to Earth
that lay barren and silent,
that founded the well that Jack drilled.

This is the Christmas Tree complex of valves
that handled the flow in and out of the pipes,
that was fastened and sealed to the wellhead pad
that was founded in Earth
that lay mute in the offing
that would run the well that Jack drilled.

This is the rig tower, decked out in lights,
that rises above the turmoil below
that guided the awl
through the Christmas Tree cluster of valves and pipes
that augured the Earth
that lay pierced without breath beneath the pad
that delved the well that Jack drilled.

This is the Jack whose alchemical broth
of poisons and secrets in millions of gallons
will plunge down the well, gagging the Earth
like a force-fed goose
far under the rig, spangled in stars,
that sits astride the Christmas Tree’s pad
that gluts the well that Jack drilled.

This is the Jack who throws open the valve
that blasts the pressure under the Earth
that fracks open her rock with the noxious tea
that Jack o’ Warlocks brewed by the tank-load
prepared from the townfolk’s water supply
pumped from trucks through the Christmas Tree cluster
under the rig like a ruddy bright fang
that ruined the Earth
that finished the well that Jack drilled.

This is the shale in the jack-shocked Earth
shattered and crazed, her jaws locked open
by the clever drink
that was nursed by the trucks

that Jack o' Valves slammed at the Earth
that her body might burst
that brought in the well that Jack drilled

This is the breath from the gape-jawed Earth,
caught at the rig, loathesome in red,
tended by Jack o' Valves working the Christmas Tree
sending the gas through the pipe-line maze
to profit the well that Jack drilled.

This is Jack and Jill at their table, signing a well-paying lease
(which does not state that the Earth will shudder)
that will free them both from his toilsome trade of cleaning the waters
that feed the hamlet by the Ourswimming River,
that Jack o' Mixtures will draught and poison
that Jack o' Valves' will surge at the Earth
that fractures the fastened shale miles down
that will lock its jaws open with tiny sands
that Jack o' Mixtures secretes in his pottage
under the rig, all decked out in welcome for both the o' Waters,
permitting the well that Jack drilled.

This is the Jack who drives the truck
that sucks up Jack o' Draughts' disgorging dregs
returned to the wellhead by Jack o' the Christmas Tree,
that the lock-jawed Earth
might gurgle their poison out of her throat
that Jack o' Trucks might haul it away:
that may be bonded for Jack o' Waters to clean for the village,
or maybe just dumped by the Ourswimming River,
'cross the meadow from some jack o' the lease
not so far from some bright crimson tower
that rears, now done, on its Christmas Tree
that debauches the well that Jack drilled.

Here's Jack o' Valves,
'lone in the night but staunch at his Christmas Tree,
sipping the coffee that smells like his clothes,
working to pipe off the Earth's stinking breath
with foul-looking hands that worry his wife;
sour his manner but doing his best
under the rig tower, grisly in red,
to cash out this well
that asshole jackass drilled.

Here's Jack o' Waters madly reading that lease
(which does not state
that they both would get headaches,
that the sky would turn funky and misty at night,
that their neighbor's face would sometimes go numb),
while Jill makes them coffee; she draws at the sink,

which explodes when she turns their water well's spigot,
with holy hell's scorch and fetid breath.
"I knew it, *just knew it*, that something would happen
the minute that tricked-out bitch 'cross the road
planted herself 'top that smarmy red Christmas Tree, vomiting filth,
that squats on that god damned blow-job pad
that hides that frick-fracking well
that jackal drilled!"

This is the Jack who ventures his money to turn a quick buck.
And this Jack o' Millions may care for the Earth
or care not at all in the financing game
where money's the nothing that makes aught but money
earn it and spend it and send it around
hold to the nothing that's all that money
the details don't matter
it's all in the play
that jacks the Earth's jaws
that lies 'neath the rigs o' the garish dull night
that serves but the wells
that helluva Jack drills.

Here Jack o' Wells sits at his desk, writing the checks
that Jack o' Millions will honor on Wall Street
that all Jacks o' Labor earn with their craft
that satisfies all of us Jacks o' Lease
that sends the o' Waters off to Florida
that makes Jack o' Millions billions and billions
from the Jack-fracked Earth
that makes all the plastics
that furnish our cars and the thousands of trucks
that burn our oil
(*That's* secured by our Jacks o' War – just like our Freedom!)
that travel the asphalt
that runs in black ribbons all o'er the bright land,
that lights up the lamps and fuels the stoves,
that all of us Jacks and all of us Jills
may nightly to bed in our warming homes
that dot the banks of the Noswimming River,
flowing down to Pastitspeake Bay,
that sit across from the gaily lit Christmas Trees
that govern all of the mazes of pipes
that send out that wonderful life-giving methane
that comes from under those handsome pads
that mark the sites of these amazing wells
that our beloved devil o' Jack drilled.

“THE WOLFFE BROTHERS”

Susi Lovell

I shouldn't have minded that George sat down beside me at Carla's party. I shouldn't have cared that he's different. If my mother had been here, she would have disapproved of my irritation. It doesn't *matter*, she would have insisted, skin, fur, fish scales, feathers, who cares?

But it did matter. Everyone stopped dancing and stared, and I hate it when people stare. I gazed out of the window with a preoccupied air as though ruminating some complex philosophical conundrum, hoping George would take the hint and go away. Carla scowled at me, deep vertical lines pinched between tented eyebrows, red lips sucked in tight. Did she think *I'd* invited George? I shook my head—discreetly—to tell her: no, no way, not me, are you crazy? And then there stood George's brother Mike, a vision in white fur, framed in the doorway, nose twitching, eyes flickering around the room. Poor Carla. She looked ready to burst into tears. I sympathized: I wouldn't want it known that the Wolffe brothers had come to my party either.

Without greeting anyone (what would be the point, who would have responded?), Mike stalked, stiff legged, through the throbbing music and placed his haunches on the arm of the sofa beside my shoulder, on the other side from George. Jen, Barb and Ellis snickered, relieved they hadn't been the ones who'd had to sit down because their shoes pinched so badly. I transferred my gaze to the carpet, counting the holes that had been left in it by generations of smoking pre-Carla tenants, trying to breathe through my mouth.

Hi, said George. I couldn't look into his face. It wasn't that he was ugly, but he didn't, well, he didn't look right. If my mother were here she'd have hissed to me that I had the sensitivity of a stoat, didn't I see how uncomfortable I was making them? It's not about what someone looks like, my mother likes to say, it's about what's inside—*that's* what counts. But I did mind. I was sorry of course that everyone stared at them and made jokes at their expense. About the size of their noses, the hairiness of their legs, and above all, about the way they smelled. As long as I wasn't personally involved I had no problem with them carrying on their lives however they liked. But if “however they liked” involved me, then...

I leaped to my feet. Hey, Jen, I called. Jen pointed to her empty glass and slipped out of the room.

Wanna dance? George's low growl—or perhaps it was Mike's, I didn't dare look—was not threatening but it made the hairs on my arms stand on end.

No, I don't dance. Thank you.

Silky white fur slipped over my skin as George draped an arm around my shoulders. Beneath the fur, bone and sinew. He moved in a most peculiar way, knees jerking high, elbows wide, snout lifting and mouth pulling forward into a little round “o.” His

movements had nothing to do with the rhythm of the music on Carla's sound system. Mike crouched, belly low to the carpet, then leaped, twisting in the air as he kicked up his legs high behind him. Mike swept me up, tossed me to George. Face buried in fur, I breathed in the manky smell of the Wolffe brothers. Then I was crouching too. My friends stared and shrank back against the walls as the three of us hurtled around the room, yapping and howling, tumbling on the holey carpet, springing up onto the back of the sofa, the window sill, the coffee table, the bookcase. Now I'd caught the rhythm that the brothers were dancing to: Of bright sun-glanced glaciers, of darting fish and green pebbled stream-beds, of pines and, beneath their bark, slow-seeping resin.

We stood on the carpet, panting. Well, that was fun, said George, leading me back to the sofa. We sat down, George on one side, Mike on the other. I stared at George, then at Mike, into those black-rimmed blue eyes. A flash of light. Carla rushed for a dustpan and brush. The bulb in the lamp beside the TV had exploded. That could only mean one thing: I was in love. The tip of George's white tail entwined itself around my calf, Mike's nestled in my elbow. Oh no, the tails. I'd forgotten the tails. They shouldn't have mattered, I know, but they did.

“THE TEST WAY”

Dominic James

These dusty shoes crunching the white chalk road:

below me, in the sun, stretching far as I can see,
may be a thousand polytunnels on the land
dazzling mournful crows out of the sky.

What vegetables sweat it out in airless rows
under those elongated plastic ribbons,
drip-fed like invalids, incontinent and low?

Market's far. Among our provisions my girls
have polished off the last pressed apple stock
and are singing songs of cultivation:

The black earth was a bitch
she was rich and full of veins:
grub down, dig her up,
pull out the crops again.

Old lies make the stories that I like to hear:
orange groves thick leaves grew in the open
famous lush and green, Spring in Andalucia.

“GOOGLING SOYLENT GREEN EATING SCENE”
Dominic James

Edward G,
every inch
the eternal man
full of Soylent Green
and Death,
in his shady bed,
a wrinkled bean,
foetus,
a thread of cress
in newlight
smiles beneath
the silver screen's
abundant streams
and crocus,
fields
of daffodils,
throbbing
waterfalls,
forests,
wide plains,
hills,
the stag
and mountain lake:
in pastoral
magnificence,
to listen
to his symphonies
to germinate
the tree of life
beneath his shining sun
setting red:
rebirth.
Is this the end of Rico?

“THE ABCS OF EVERGLADES HURRICANES”
Karla Linn Merrifield

The alphabet of natural disaster begins again
each June: A as in Andrew.

Since the '50s, we name all hurricanes
that rage across this liquid land
that is southern Florida.
We remember the most destructive hurricanes,
hurricanes for the history books,
hurricanes for the records of man.

We recall that Isbell rearranged
the Ten Thousand Islands
on her whirlwind trip in 1964.
Inez, '66, the crazy one, zigzagged
her path of slaughter through the Keys
and then ensued Alma, Gladys, Abby.
The '60s rocked on and along came Donna:
Goodbye mangroves, goodbye white herons.

Down at Flamingo, it was only a matter of time,
thirty-some years of calm, before another murderous blow.
What Donna didn't finish
in the black forest of the coast in '68,
Wilma did in 2005.
In her deadly wake of storm surge and salt intrusion,
the Eco-Pond is going, going, almost gone.
The lodge: blown out, washed out,
doorless, windowless concrete hulk.
The maniac had done her ghost-town work.

We recite a litany of ravishment
from Madeira Bay, to Cape Sable, up to Chokoloskee,
where Lostman's River keeps getting lost.
We track, we monitor, we enter data.
We author articles and books.
We issue treatises and master plans.
We write poems.
And we wonder why hurricanes are getting worse.
Will a year come when we run through our ABCs
and call the last and worst one Zora?

“SKATING ON THIN ICE”

Becky Garrison

An excerpt taken from the book *Jesus Died for This?* (Zondervan 2010)

During my first pilgrimage to Ireland, my spiritual guide, the Rev. Kurt Nielson, author of *Urban Iona*, talked to me about “thin space,” that imaginary veil that separates this world from the next, where we can almost reach out and touch the angels. I have a taste of this sometimes when I fly-fish or kayak; with each cast or paddle stroke, I can feel pieces of me melt into the horizon. I’m no longer observing nature but am part of the picture. If I allow myself the time to really be still and listen, the line between where I end and nature begins becomes obliterated in a swirl of impressionist brushstrokes.

First stop—Glendalough. After I toured the ruins of Monastic City and walked around the two lakes (gleann dá locha means literally “glen o’ the two lakes”), the touristy chatter started to get on my nerves. Then I set out for a late-afternoon hike beyond the two lakes toward the ruins of an abandoned mining village. Rows of purple heather greeted me with pine trees serving as an umbrella to shade me from the sun. Finally I got to sample paradise almost all by myself.

En route, I glanced out at the hole in the rock called “St. Kevin’s Bed,” a seven-by-three-foot cave that apparently was shown to this the venerable St. Kevin, abbot of Glendalough. Like other good hermits, this sixth-century monk lived off the land, consuming herbs and fish. Legend has it that as part of his prayer routine, he would stand in ice-cold water up to his neck.

While stories abound recounting Kevin’s unbridled kindness toward animals, this nature lover had a major dislike of women. According to rumor, he dealt with an amorous woman by pushing her into a bed of nettles. As I walked, the sky opened up and baptized me, in typical Irish fashion. I literally soaked in St. Kevin. Every time I took a step, I went squish-squish.

The rain drenched my body but fed my soul. With each step, I could feel myself opening up more and more and more—and then the Celtic Spirit let it rip. A hailstorm of tears poured into me. I joined in this joyful lament.

On the way home, a rainbow frown graced the sky. No, I didn’t rattle off strings of leprechaun pot o’ gold jokes, though I could have sworn I saw the shadow of some crusty old coot staring at me from St. Kevin’s Bed. Now I get why Kevin’s name means “he of blessed birth.” It took a really good dunking in his country for my spiritual life to be reborn.

I’m not crazy about the fact that I fell in love with such a prickly hermit. But once again, the thin line dissolved those man-made barrier that all too often separate us from each other.

“BLUE LIGHT/WHITE LIGHT”
J.P. Bohannon

Three jays appeared in my yard this year
though one was feathered white,
her dark eye brilliant against the sun
her necklace black and wide.

What odds occurred to mark her so?
What chromosomal art?
Three jays appeared in the yard this year.
The smallest one was white.

A jay's feather pales when it is crushed.
(The structure pressed, it can't refract).
No chance had play then after all,
But simply violence and light.

Three jays appeared in the yard this year
The small one feathered white.
She darted once at a neighbor's cat
then rose and pierced the sky.

“CARCASS”
J.P. Bohannon

At first, it seemed a honeyed knot
Bubbled within the worn pine grain,

Surprising and simple, among the mail,
the clutter and the children’s drawings.

Or perhaps, a golden trinket,
a playing piece, a child’s toy.

The cicada’s shell appeared on the kitchen table.
Brittle and tender, it baffled us all.

The dog sniffed gingerly and lost interest.
The child pinched it between fat, awkward fingers

and held up the carcass
to watch sunlight spray halos within.

“CODA OF THE ACCIDENTAL CLOWN”
Maggie Koger

Driving along Highway 55 before sunrise
just above Lucky Peak Dam, I see shadowy
deer whose dark limbs rend the fog.
A herd flowing over slick, wet asphalt
a long line leaping the railing one by one
until this doe stares into my headlights.
A nick of the fender turns her suddenly
into flesh and bone, marrow and hide.
Torn from her morning circuit, she sails
a tumbling head-over-hooves clown
smearing red smiles on my windshield.
A crowd gathers and men pull her aside.
Someone will come to harvest the meat
they say. I scarcely hear this soothing tale
as I am waiting for the wintry sun to shine
to dapple the caudal stain we leave behind.

“ARBORETUM”

Joan Colby

In the distance, smoke.
Nearer, a woman in a field gathering blue
larkspurs. In the foreground,
a honey locust
crocheting motifs of gold
light. The path leads
deep into shadows where
endangered red pines succumb
to bloody vines
strangling them like hairshirts.
In sparse green brains
a congregation of flickers.

Walk with me
around this body of water
where Canada geese feed
and algae thickens.
A bystander is taking our picture
by mistake. The ironwood
has as many arms as Kali.

This ground cover is called
wintercreeper. Everywhere leaves
are falling like tongues.
We scuff our feet
through their small talk. More come
drifting. The truth is
we'll never count the rings
of any question, or understand
the elms symmetry
or the evergreens presence.

Bleeding
all over the earth
like maple or sumac, nothing
holds. You read the tag
of a corktree deafened to violence
and I put my arms around
the heartrending linden.

“OVER THE AIR”

Joan Cody

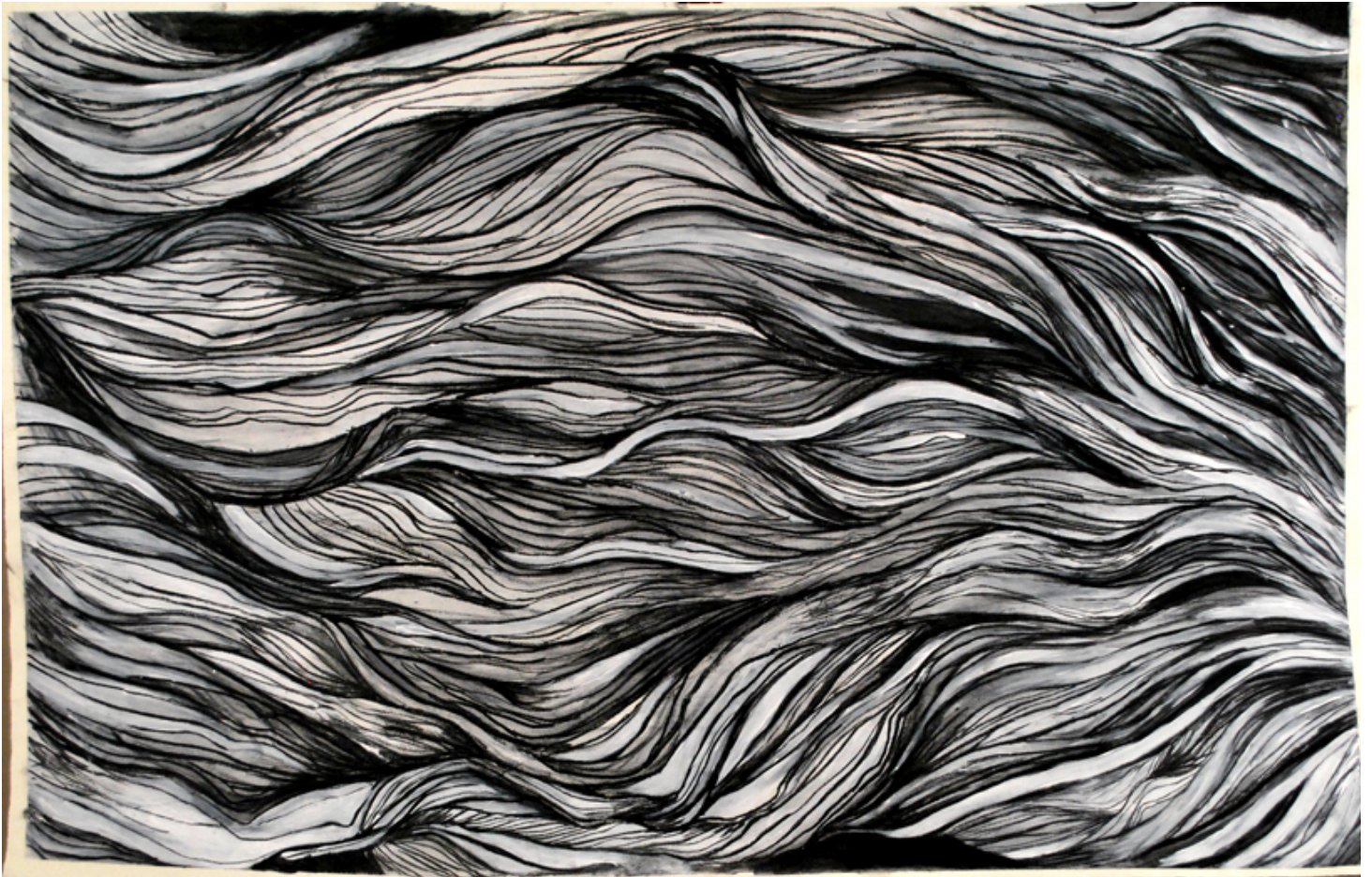
Drifted snow outside my window.
On the radio, a voice
Postulates that global warming
Is just a fiction: look at it come down,
A whiteout stranding cars.

The polar ice is melting,
Glaciers leaving littered slopes
As they withdraw like trolls
Into the old ignorant caves
Where inlanders used to insist
The earth was flat—you could fall off
Into a dragon’s fiery breath.
Perspective changed all that.

Darkness of space, our blue home
Twirled like a yo-yo by a star,
How peripheral we are.

This radio voice thinks what it says
Has weight. The snow piles up
Blocking my drive. Somewhere a bear
Is searching for a solid floe
To rest upon.

“UNTITLED,” by Lauren Kays



“CRUDE THING”
Drew Jennings

When it came to him, he waved his hand to pass on his turn. It had become almost competitive, and Miles was intimidated. It fell to the fat man next to him who wore earrings and a soul patch; some kind of metal flame-out.

“Well, I was walking through town, and it was crowded, more crowded than usual. Dunno why. Anyway, everyone was in a rush like they had somewhere important to be or somebody to see. Well, I didn’t have nothing going on. Y’all know how Stormy’s front is just that big window? Well, I look at it and see the reflection, like how big I am. Well, how fat I am. I felt disgusting.”

The guys nodded their slumped heads with empathy. They sat in a circle in the basement of Caddo Baptist, where these sorts of things were held.

The unemployed cook spoke up. “I know what you mean buddy. I mean, I know I’m real skinny but I know that disgusting feeling. Just like ‘Ugh!’ like the way my wife looks at me, like she thinks I’m no good. I think she wonders how she ever fell in love with me. She always talks bout how well her sister and her husband are doing in Houston and I...”

Miles was restless. Sun was beating in through the top windows. He’d drank too much coffee. The chef’s mouth kept moving and moving. That yellow-toothed hick. *Stop. Stop. Shut the fuck up!*

.

The circle broke, and Miles started for the door. Most of them would stick around for a while, talk, and eat the rest of the donuts. They didn’t want to go home yet. Miles didn’t really want to either, but the room had become too dense with pity to stay.

He cranked the AC in his truck and closed his eyes. He breathed deeply through his nose. *You will not give up. You will not give up. You are worthy. You are worthy.* His head was heavy, and he felt like sleeping until the sun went down. The Texas side of the Caddo bayou had to be the saddest place on earth in August. He hated the South, he really did but something held him there as if the thick air anchored him down.

Mary’s mustang still sat outside his house. She hadn’t gone to work again.

Bodie didn’t jump on him like usual. The hundred-pound pit-mix was balled up on the couch, her dried turds under the coffee table. “Fucking Mary.”

She lay still on the bed. “How’d it go?”

“How come you ain’t take Bodie out? She shit on the carpet.”

“Oh God, Miles... I’m sorry.”

She whimpered and pulled the comforter over her head. *Sick as a dog.* He lay on the bed and wrapped his arms around her. Her skin was sticky; she needed a shower. *My dirty little pooch.*

"Let's get out of bed," he whispered. "C'mon, let's go!" He pushed her playfully.

"Ergh!" She smiled.

He went to the bathroom and started the shower. "You'll feel better after a hot shower, babe."

She stood and leaned into his chest. Dead weight.

"We'll go get breakfast, okay? We'll get pancakes," he said.

He went into the living room and lay on the couch. Bodie snuck up to lick his face. "Go on!" Miles commanded.

Mary always took forever in the shower. Miles knew leaving that warmth could be as hard as getting out of bed. Miles knew the makeup she took twenty minutes putting on would soon streak her face.

"I'm gonna steal one of your shirts, okay?" she said from the bedroom.

She looked pretty when she stepped out. Her damp, blonde curls shined. She gave Miles a toothy smile.

"I'm excited for pancakes," she said.

On the road, Mary remembered she was supposed to work that day. "Oh fuck, goddamnit," she said and scrambled for her phone. "It's dead... Miles we gotta turn around and," she began but stopped.

"What?"

"Nevermind. I'm gonna be fired either way. Don't matter." She sank in her seat.

He kept driving. She needed him to say something, but he couldn't muster anything.

"I'm an alcoholic," she said.

"C'mon. No way."

She cried and nodded her head. "I am. Miles, I don't even remember coming over."

"Not at all? You were wasted but still."

She'd called him insisting he pick her up from the log cabin whisky bar off the main road.

Miles had given up drinking. The feeling the next day became too much to bear.

She hadn't let him fall asleep. She kept trying to have sex. The Prozac left him without desire. She sucked on his half-flaccid dick for awhile before falling asleep, resting her

head on his crotch. He always felt guilty; she wanted to feel pretty.

“I’m so fucked,” she said.

“Babe, it’s a shit job anyway. I’ve been fired from a lot of shit jobs. Fuck ‘em.”

“It’s different for you. I’m gonna be thirty soon. This shit ain’t funny no more.”

The Store was always busy on Sundays. The gravel lot was full of dually trucks. He leaned over and kissed her. “Quit! Not when my face is all gross.” She smiled and wiped her cheeks. “I don’t think I’ll eat but I can get coffee,” she said.

“I’m not really hungry either.” They sat in the truck and listened to the radio for a few minutes.

“Wanna just go back?” he asked.

“I don’t care.”

He would leave Texas. She was dragging him down. *Just abandon her? Just run from your life? STOP! You deserve happiness. You deserve happiness.*

She began to cry again.

“You gotta stop crying, babe.”

She shook her head. “You don’t care.”

Miles pulled the truck over by the bank of the swampy runoff. He was surprised by how irritated he felt. “That’s bullshit.”

“What? I gotta go home. C’mon! I gotta charge my phone.” Miles pushed on the accelerator.

“I hate this fucking place,” she said.

Miles stopped again and shifted into park. “Get out,” he said.

“What?”

“I don’t know, but you gotta get out of my truck.”

She stared at him brow-cocked, but he kept his eyes steady on the steering wheel.

“Faggot.” She got out and slammed the door.

Faggot? He drove on. He wasn’t a man; he was a boy just like Mary would say. She needed a *man*. A man to protect her. A man to treat her like a queen. A man to fuck her into a peaceful sleep. The road sloped downwards. Once he was sure he was out of her

sight, he pulled over.

"You are worthy. You are worthy. No! Fuck You! Fuck You, Miles! Fuck You! Fuck, fuck," he sobbed. He curled up in the cab. *I can't do this anymore. I want to die.*

He found the group leader's number in his phone. "You can call anytime," he'd said. *Anytime?Anytime.Anytime.* If he turned back to get her immediately, it would be okay. He would go back and get her, and she would settle in a few hours. He sat up and wiped his face on his shoulder sleeve. *You will not give up!*

But she wasn't there. Miles hopped out of the truck and looked down the bank. She'd climbed down and was headed towards the swampy woods.

He jumped down from the elevated road and started through the tall grass. His view of the stream was obscured by the wall of lush weeping willows. Mosquitoes hovered lazily in the grass, big fucking things. His ankles swelled with bites. *This place isn't for humans.*

"Mary," he called out, trying to mask his anger.

He expected her to be just past the willows, waiting for him, wondering what took him so long. She wasn't. He saw the prints of her sneakers in the mud. They headed up the runoff towards the main stream. *My lost little pooch.*

The river was still like black glass. His footsteps sunk in the mud and snapped twigs. *I'm through, through with her for good.* Mosquitoes ravaged all exposed skin. The trail along the river was less beaten, and he could no longer make out Mary's tracks.

"Goddam it Mary!"

Miles often thought that if he was to commit suicide, he'd slit his wrists and jump into the dank water to be consumed by gators. Born and recycled in the mother Bayou. How beautiful and tragic! He knew it would probably be pills or some other pussy-shit.

He was worthy of life. *You are worthy!* The idea still comforted him though. The option was always there. It was there with you in the lonesome AM with a way out.

Where the fuck was Mary? "Mary! Please, I'm not mad." He was probably a mile downriver from his truck.

He heard her whimper and saw her pale legs sticking out from behind a wide tree. She was swollen all over with bites.

"C'mon sugar, you're getting eaten alive. You know you can't just stay in one place like that."

"You don't care. No one cares."

"Course I care. I'm here out in the swamp for you." He gently pulled her to her feet. "You think I'd leave you out here for the gators to get you? A pretty white girl? They'd lick their chops at the sight of you." She managed to keep her puss face.

Her legs wobbled, and she stopped frequently. She wouldn't let Miles wrap his arm around her so he followed close behind.

"We're gonna get some water and some of that pink shit to rub on your bites," he said.

. . .

In the Store parking lot, they passed a gallon jug of water back and forth. "I feel better," she said and smiled.

"Me too. It's been a rough day."

"I'm sorry I ran off like that."

"It's ok. I shouldn'tna kicked you out of the truck like that."

How you feel is your choice. Your choice. "Fuck it, let's turn this around."

"What do you mean?"

"This day. It's only 1:30. We can do whatever we want."

"Okay." She smiled.

"I wish we had one of those natural springs around here. Stays cold all year round."

"Stays cold in the summer?"

"Yeah, comes fresh out of the earth."

"Wow."

"Miles took his medicine every day, didn't drink, listened to those defeated men every Sunday morning, men who'd really lost, but in the morning with Mary still asleep and Bodie begging to go outside, he couldn't help but feel nothing fucking mattered.

"Let's get drunk," Miles said.

"Are you serious? You shouldn't. Don't tease me!" She cupped his face in her hands and kissed him. "Let's do it."

"Fuck it, we're getting some wine."

. . .

"I wanna play a game!" Mary said.

"No, let's do a puzzle. No, I don't have any puzzles. Let's play chess."

"Fine, but you know I suck."

Miles felt a head-rush when he stood. He was drunk. He smiled at Mary. "Sugar, where'd you set that jug?"

"You're drunk!" she said. She hooked her fingers in his belt loops and pulled him close. She led him to the bedroom. "Trust me," she said.

"Strip, boy!" she commanded. They undressed and lay down. She nibbled on his earlobe. Her soft nipples dangled just in mouth's reach. He slid his hands down her back and up the soft mound of her ass. He squeezed, and she moistened on his belly. She sat up and turned her body away from him. She straddled his waist, pushing the wetness into his face. She lay flat and started sucking his dick. Miles had never tried sixty-nine before. It was great. He came a few seconds after her.

Miles dozed in and out of sleep. Every time he woke Mary kissed him and tried to keep his attention.

"I love you, Miles," she said.

"I love you too."

"No, you don't get it. I love you so much. Why are you so good to me? I don't deserve you."

She teared up.

"Hush, you're my sugar! Let's not lose our buzz now." He got out of bed. "We got a ton of wine left."

He drank straight from the jug. "We should dance, c'mon."

He played Michael Jackson from the living room. "MJ! C'mon babe, dance with me!"

Lovely is the feeling now...

He pulled from the jug again. "Come to me, sugar. How can you hear MJ and not get up?"

So get closer, get closer now, to my body, just love me...

Miles slid his heels back, attempting to moonwalk.

Don't stop 'til you get enough

His calves bumped into the coffee table, and he fell backwards. He knocked the jug off the table, and his head landed on the leather couch seat. He scrambled to turn the jug upright.

I'm melting, oh I'm melting, like hot candle wax sensation, oh sensation...

"Babe, come here. Look!" He took a drink. "I fell, babe. I fell over the table. I was moonwalkin' like I do."

She didn't respond. He walked to the bedroom doorway. "You know how I moonwalk? I was doing it and fell back over the table! Spilt wine on the carpet. There's gonna be a stain but I saved most of the wine...Why are you crying?"

Mary sat on the bed, leaning against the wall, hugging her knees. "You walked away from me when I was trying to tell you I love you."

"What the fuck are you talking about? Why are you crying? Can't you just not cry for ten minutes of your life?"

She buried her face between her knees. Miles took three big gulps and threw the bottle over her head. The plastic container bounced off the wall and spilled on her lap. Needing something more resounding, Miles picked up the Mardi Gras crystal ball that snowed beads from his dresser and chucked it away from Mary. It made an indentation in the plaster wall but didn't break. "Fuck!"

"You're getting violent. I'm calling the police!" She flipped open her phone.

"You'd do that? After all I go through for you? Fuck you!" He tore the phone from her hand and broke it in half.

She buried her head again.

"Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck," he said. More wine. He paced in the living room, taking deep breathes through his nose before re-entering the bedroom.

Mary pointed at the wine in his hand without looking up. He gave it to her and rubbed her back.

Miles lay next to her. He lifted his leg to straddle her waist. "No!" she said and turned into him, her knee landing firmly on his ball-sack like the payoff blow to a piñata that sends the kids swarming. Miles lay still as sickness rose to his stomach.

.

He woke somewhere between drunk and hung-over. His head throbbed, and his mouth was dry. He finished off the jug and tossed it at Mary. It bounced off her ass but she remained asleep. "She don't give a shit. Bitch." He smiled. *I'm a piece of shit.*

He made a tight fist and rubbed the inside of his wrist. Two crossing veins bubbled up.

Horizontal was a cry for help. Vertical meant death. He could draw a hot bath and let life ooze out of him. Mary would find him of course. She'd be pissed he didn't tell her or ask her to do it with him.

He went to the bathroom. He closed the drain and started the hot water. The throbbing in his head worsened. He walked to the kitchen and scooped water into his mouth from the faucet. The only sharp thing he had was a steak knife. Vertical. He grabbed it and walked back to the bedroom.

Mary looked like a real woman as she slept. A full woman, calm with strong curves. He lay next to her, careful not to wake her. He gently stroked her thigh and kissed her cheek.

Miles went back to the bathroom and set the knife on the toilet lid. He poked his toe in the water. Hot as sin. He would have to wait at least ten minutes before he could even try to get in.

He skimmed over his wrist with the dull side of the knife. He looked in the mirror and ran it up his arm and across his pale chest. *I'm fucking ready*. Blue streaks were clear where veins ran near the skin's surface. Miles imagined veins were impossibly blue under the flesh.

Bodie sat just outside the bathroom, head cocked to the side with pleading eyes. One more walk. Miles needed to breathe Texas air one last time and feel its warmth. He walked out on the porch barefoot. Bodie ran in circles like a damn tornado, kicking up hunks of the muddy yard. The sun was just starting to slip away. He checked his phone, only 6:50.

Maybe he could take off running. Run to nowhere in particular; drum up some kind of feeling. The sun looked kinda cool, simmering orange. He began to sweat. He called Bodie, and they went back inside, Bodie tracking mud all over the carpet.

The tub was too small for an adult; his legs were scrunched up. *Shoulda done the swamp thing*. He examined the knife. It was a crude thing. He poked at different areas of his body, comparing their sensitivity. He poked his lower thigh. He dug the point in and shrieked. Too deep; into the muscle. The red expanded into the water like smoke filling a room. He held the side of the tub and bit his lip. "Fuck me."

After a minute or so it didn't hurt anymore. He actually felt better, felt strong. The water looked like cherry Kool-Aid.

Miles wondered if he'd shit himself or was that just with really sudden death, like a bullet to the head? This was gonna be a fucking mess. He pumped his left fist. The crossing veins popped right back up. They were soft and tender. His heart was beating faster'n hell. He set the point of the knife on one of the veins and spun it like a top. It fell and disappeared in the now brownish water. He took a deep breath. He felt his wrist again. He ran his hands down his legs. He flexed his young, hard calves. He felt over his bumpy balls.

He couldn't do it. Not then, not there, not sitting in a filthy bathtub.

He opened the drain and stood up. Blood ran down his shin. He turned on the shower to rinse off. He stuck wadded toilet paper on his leg.

He put on boxers and long pants so Mary wouldn't see the cut. He lay next to her and fell asleep.

. . .

Miles woke with an oppressive headache. The sharp pain from his leg triggered his recollection of the night before. Mary hadn't moved at all.

Miles shook her shoulder lightly. "Babe."

She groaned.

"How ya feeling?"

She rolled over to face him, already with tears in her eyes. "I did it again. I don't remember anything."

"Mary, I want to die. I want to kill myself."

She closed her eyes and nodded her head. "I wanna do it with you. I wanna die with you," she said.

They held each other. "I love you, Mary."

"I love you too."

They kissed. "I'm so thirsty," she said.

"Me too, we drank that whole jug."

"Miles, how should we do it?"

"Dunno, we could jump off a cliff holding hands, but I know you hate heights."

"Oh whatever! You're just as scared as me!"

Miles smiled.

"I have to get some fucking water!" Miles said and got out of bed.

"Get me a glass!"

He lay back down. He rubbed against her unshaven leg, rough like a dirty car-hood. Mary drank her glass desperately. "Is the little puppy thirsty?" he asked.

Mary covered her mouth, nearly spitting from laughter. "Fuck you, I ain't no dog! Ow, Miles... you made water go up my nose."

He kissed her forehead. "My poor little pooch."

"Quit! why do you keep calling me a dog? I dunno if it's cute or an insult."

They laughed, and it rattled Miles' wine-sick body. Mary took his glass. "I'll get us more."

They sat up and sipped their water. The overcast sun shone faintly into the room.

"Miles, I'm scared."

"Bout what?"

"Bout dying. I mean, I dunno. I don't wanna go to hell if there's one."

"There ain't no goddamn hell, and if there is, let it come. I'm ready to go." The starkness of this statement clung to them like Spanish moss. It chilled Miles, and it crushed Mary. She cried.

Miles lay down and turned away from her.

Mary loudly sucked air past the mucus filling her face. "I don't want you to leave me. I don't think I'm ready." She was suffering.

"Babe, I'll wait for you. I will." He rubbed her thigh. She fell into him. *Let it come. I'm ready to go.* His heart started beating fast like before.

"Don't leave me."

"I won't. I won't."

"You promise?"

"I promise."

Mary shivered. Miles felt her chill course through him. He pulled the covers over them and pressed his cheek against her crown. He was scared.

"Don't leave me, Miles."

"I won't sugar. We can keep trying."

"Don't kill yourself, Miles."

"I won't. I won't."

I am worthy. I am worthy. I will not give up.

"I love you, Miles."

"I love you too, Mary."

I'm not ready.

“WHAT HABITAT IS THIS?”

Mercedes Lawry

Light expects shadow.
The dim offers phrases of remembrance.
The sky empties and is filled
and we proceed to know
but little of the ways
the stars make our blood burn.
Echo of touch, one hand
lying in another, while exquisite
silence holds the center close.

“UPPER ASHLAND LAKE”
Mercedes Lawry

Shadows steal across the lake
like black tides, while swifts
streak from point to point
in this contained sky. Only night, reaching
for its center. Only the peculiar calm
that leaves us out of place as we strive
to remember the safety of the dark.

Shrouds of mist lift from the water.
The lone frog croaks incessantly,
the echo turning round against the wall of pine.
Even our presence, close by now,
does not stop the throaty cry.

A mute wind moves from tree to tree,
brings a sudden chill
like a whisper from the buried.
We test our capacity for fierce love
against time that holds us in
like a long sleep, deceptive and friendly.

“THIS CAN’T BE”

Sue Blaustein

I.

In Kern Park
my Lab, Jama, grazes on panic grass,
tearing at tall blades
that’ll bind her stools
in strings. On a narrow path

I’m muzzled by threads every morning –
spun and drawn
by caterpillar glands,
the tiny weavers
you never see.

It’s just as well. I’m silent –
stubborn when hurt. I’m afraid
you and I won’t sleep together again. We’re
ruled and bound by so many
hidden governors – pancreas, pituitary,
heart.

II.

Twenty two years ago,
you warned me about
my heart.
You told me to get it
“under control.”
We ran in Washington Park
and you mistrusted
our reckless and consequential joy.

There were witnesses!
– a boathouse and picnic tables,
and dry box turtles
nearly immortal as fear.
Grandparents sat on buckets
fishing with cane poles. Later,
we had a home

and a flat-eared dog.
We woke together every morning,
lying close, listening
to him eat. How can we
separate, when we were

consecrated in the sound
of pellets
tumbling
in his bowl?

“LEARNING LIES”

Donna L. Emerson

Her eyes fill with tears
as she hears the news
about the growing Pacific
garbage heap: plastic
in our ocean for miles.

*What can we do, Mommy?
We can't go out there
and clean it up, like Lynch Creek.
Maybe we'd get caught in it
like the birds and baby fish.*

Some people are putting
warning flags out now, honey.
The wildlife will learn not
to go there.

*But birds don't know how to read
flags or warning signs, Mom,
Don't be ridiculous. Even third
graders know that.*

What do you think we should do?

*Go out every day and pick up plastic,
protect the sewers and creeks.
Tell all the others.*

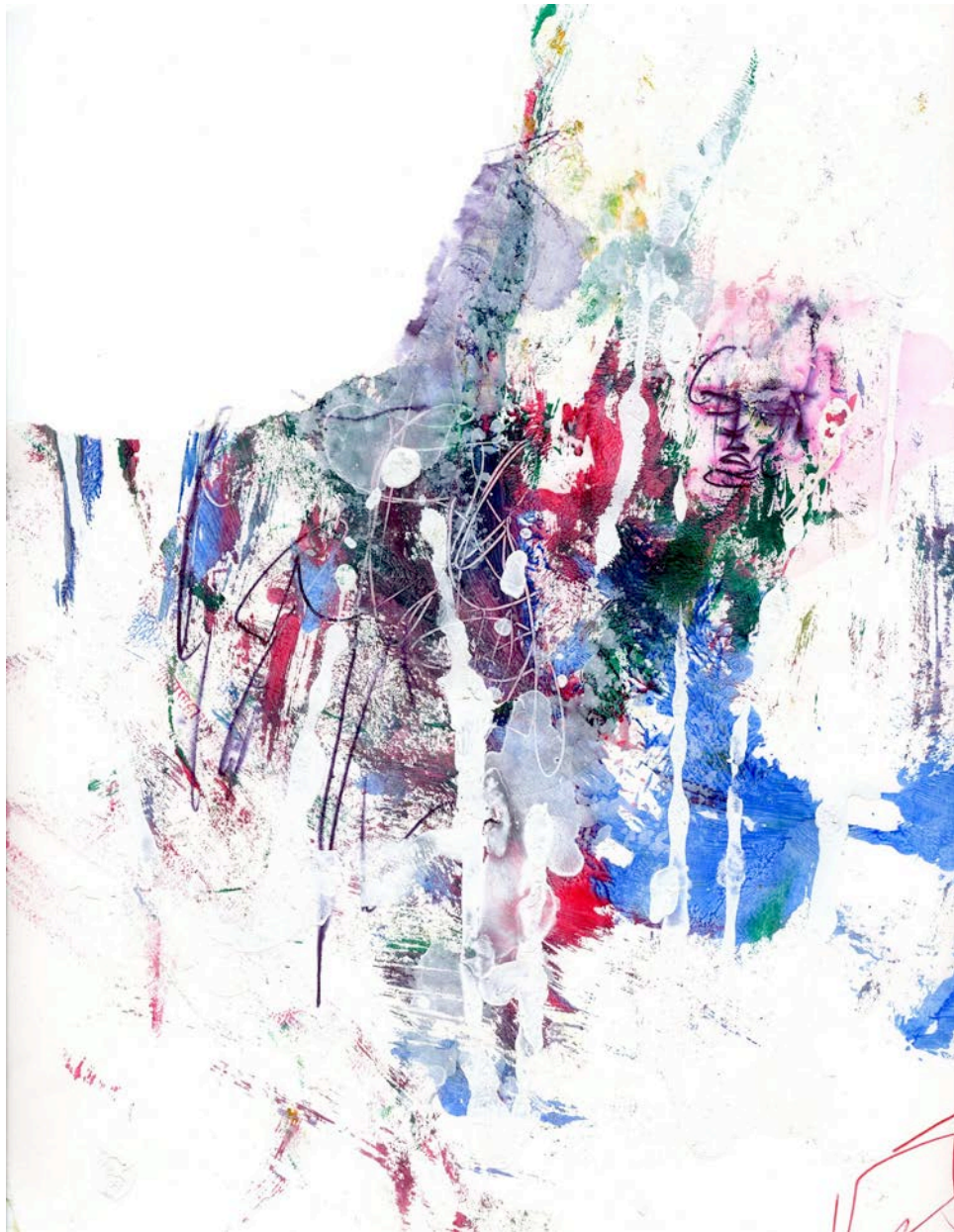
We were walking down the shortcut
path to school. As she stepped
over an opening to the sewer, she
tried to leap like a deer.

Oh, no!

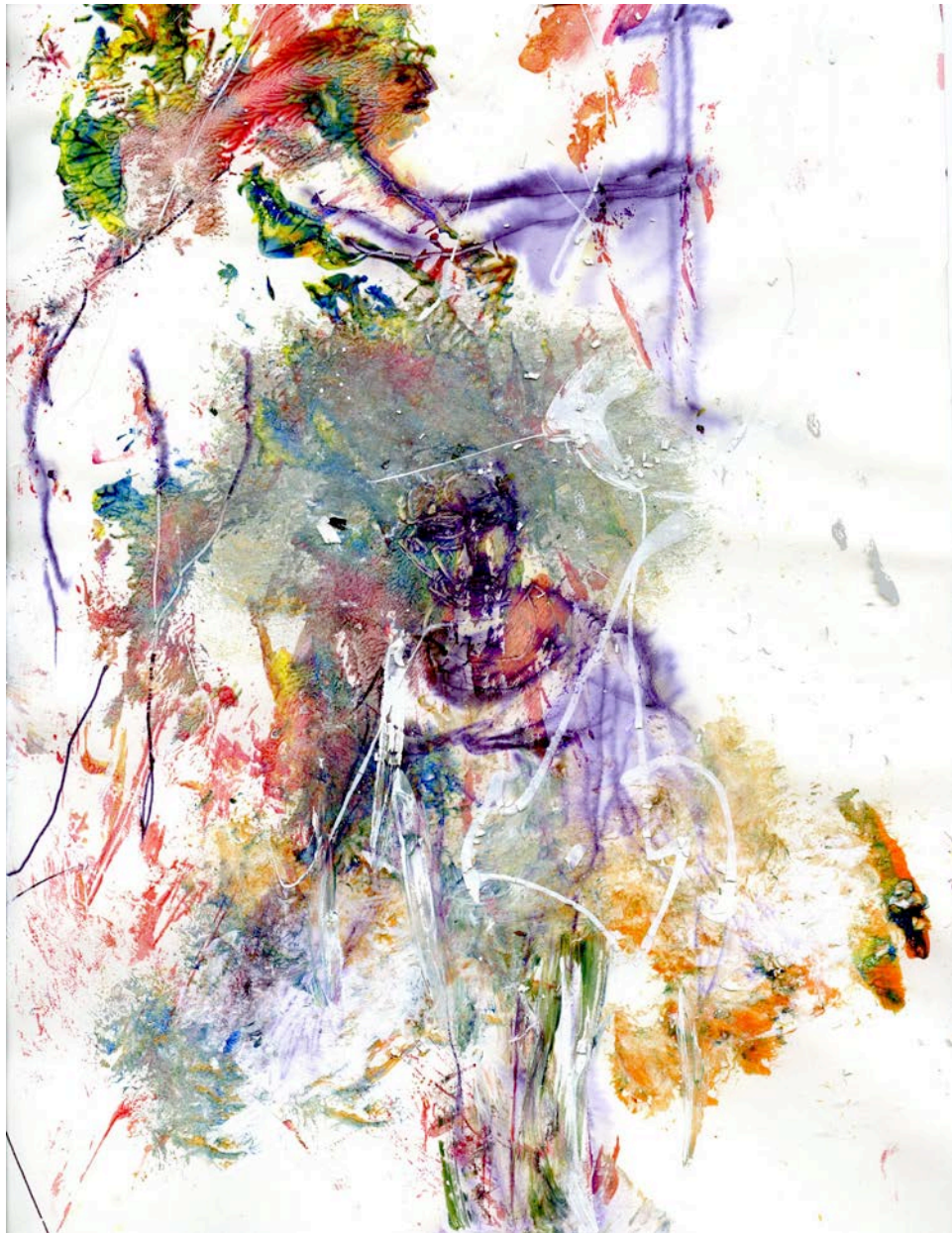
We both looked down. The entire grate
at my feet full of wine bottles, chip bags,
styrofoam plates. Clean-up would
make us late for school.

We'll get it when we come back
later today, I said, knowing we
would forget by then.

“SEEPING FACES,” by Ernest Williamson



“A SIDE OF REALITY,” by Ernest Williamson



“THE MOTHATCH”

Laurie Skelton

The mothatch is a bird of near impossible smallitude. When a chick breaks through its tiny eggshell (normally in late summer), the bird’s body is no longer than a paperclip, and its head no bigger than a thumbtack. At this tender age, the mothatch’s plumage is shockingly white and downy. It’s stubby beak is polished to an ivory sheen, and its slender legs are a pale gray.

Mothatch parents take little interest in their young, and the chicks are usually left to their own devices just after they hatch. It is for this reason, scientists speculate, that mothatch nests are usually found in abundance within larger public libraries, bookstores, and print shops. Deprived of parental guidance, the immature hatchlings are driven by hunger and the smell of ink to leap from their nests and take flight for the first time. So it is that, hours after its birth, the mothatch begins to dine on the punctuation of the written world.

The young mothatch (with its miniscule beak) is particularly fond of periods, but will also browse open manuscripts and newspapers for the dots one finds atop lowercase “i’s” and “j’s.” As the bird matures, it nearly doubles in size, and its plumage develops a characteristic “notebook” pattern of thin, light blue stripes. During this period of rapid growth, the mothatch normally moves from manuscripts to bound books where it begins stalking larger pieces of punctuation—eventually hunting for words.

When the birds reach sexual maturity, the males develop bright red beaks and become exceedingly territorial. The females, however, remain sociable and tend to travel in large flocks of up to thirty members. During the mating season, female mothatches save the longest, most stable words from their foraging. With these words, the female constructs stunningly intricate nests in the corners of shelves, amongst the rafters of libraries, or—occasionally—in the paper trays of photocopy machines. The males then approach their prospective mates’ nests bearing the finest words from their hunts. The hopeful suitors then lay these buzzwords at the entrance to the females’ nests and await lexical judgment. If the male’s vocabulary is poor and his choice of words is shoddy, he will be chased angrily from the nest by the female with a fearsome pecking. If, however, the male sways the female with a beautiful choice of words, she will accept the offering and invite the male into her nest. The happy pair will usually produce an egg within a week of breeding.

In the early 19th century, the discovery of the bird gave birth to the myth of “bookworms” as the rise of the novel coincided with a boom in the mothatch population. Victorian observers mistakenly assumed that the flocks of tiny, white birds hovering around their bookshelves were feeding off the paper lice and silverfish nestled in the bindings of their novels. Although it is sought out vehemently by modern ornithologists, the mothatch is a known nuisance throughout the publishing community. In fact, its habit of gobbling up punctuation and dining on nouns earned it the rather derisive nickname of “Steinbird” (after the modernist writer, Gertrude Stein) amongst copy editors in the early 1900s.

In recent years, the mothatch population has plummeted significantly. Hoping to cut damage caused by the birds, both libraries and bookstores have become more adept in installing anti-mothatch precautions. These methods (which range from simple traps to

hazardous poisons) have effectively cut the mothatch off from a large portion of its natural habitat and traditional nesting grounds. Similarly, the rise of e-readers coupled with the move by many magazines and newspapers to convert their content to a digital format has devastated the mothatch's hunting grounds. The deadly combination of habitat destruction and restricted hunting means that many mothatches starve before they ever have a chance to mate. Sadly, there are less than one thousand mothatches left living in the wild today.

“THE WANNABE ENVIRONMENTALIST”

Tomas Fussey

After a delightful evening dining on vegan fare and drinking organic elderberry wine by candlelight, (to conserve energy) you bid your friends farewell and pedal your second-hand bicycle homeward. Half-way there you remember that you need toilet tissue. It's been at the top of your grocery list for over a week; the list you keep within your head so as not to waste a sheet of paper. You pride yourself on being one of the new environmentalists. Soon you are standing in a fluorescent lit aisle of a 24-hour drug mart staring at the toilet paper selection.

The hum of the overhead light annoys you, and out of habit you reach for a brand name that you are familiar with. But quickly you set it back on the shelf. What were you thinking? You haven't even considered if the brand is made of recycled paper. However, it is then that your eye goes to the price labels. You work hard for your money, so it seems logical to look for a bargain, as well. 'Read the packaging,' you say to yourself. But to calculate the one that gives the best bang for the buck, you now realize that you need a calculator since different brands list the size of the rolls differently. But who carries a calculator? Wait... you do have one—on your cellphone. But you have NO idea where this feature even lurks amongst the windows and icons. You didn't get the cellphone for frivolity... you got it in case of an emergency. That idea is scraped. You grab the one-ply brown toilet tissue but instantly set it back when you see the price. You pause, perplexed. What ever became of colored toilet tissue? You fondly reminisce how in your grandmother's bathroom, there was always blue toilet paper to match her wall color. It was so pretty. Probably toxic. From the corner of your eye, you notice a movement and look up to see that the security guard is now hovering. And beyond him, the cashier is mowing down on a piece of gum (no doubt laced with Aspartame). She is also watching. You break into a sweat. You've been standing before the toilet tissue far too long.

How is it that your mother could buy toilet paper, but you can't? She was no rocket scientist. Simply loading her shopping cart with whatever brand she'd been brainwashed into buying, she brazenly pushed it through the store without a second thought. But then you remind yourself that you are now living in the age of environmental conscientiousness. Flustered, you snap up the first package within arms length—3-ply bleached white with embossed soft pillows and scented with aloe—and hurriedly move toward the cash register. In line, you grab a package of potato chips conveniently placed near the checkout. You deny that you are being sucked in by “point of purchase” marketing, instead telling yourself that you need a treat to help calm your nerves after the hell you've been through. In your state of haste, you fail to notice that you've accidentally grabbed the potato chips made with Olestra, and that night, you use up all the tissue in just one sitting. The next day you are racked with indecision as you again stand before the toilet paper selection. Of course, this time in a different store.

“THE RISK OF ABSURDITY”

Jéanpaul Ferro

Tattooed and pierced,
come dance atop the waterfires,
orange glow of the sparkling comics,
all shambled and wild-haired,
mad scientists, mad poets,
all the un-interesting things of the seven other elements,
an uncommon girl, her mouth tender like cinnamon,
go currents, shoulder to shoulder,
the truth no religion at all,
life with all its untraceable tracks,
God everywhere you look,
incredibly mad to live! frantic as hell to live!
you must race to it all to even live,
make those bombs fade away,
telephone wire to telephone wire,
anamorphic dream, sending birds askew
with microchips to fly from Mexico
to Maine,
two blushing suns in the simmering blue waves,
in the waves of anxious music,
footsteps atop rigorous black hands,
the CIA, the Creation of Adam,
fuming in iron, magnesia, and sulfur,
in the allies, panic-stricken at times:
in dreams, in stars; life just like that,
offering nothing but confusion,
but you must embrace it; look for it in others;
see the curve of the earth in rear view mirrors,
atop the cotton-candy fog of the autumn valleys,
up there it lives in the wood smoke of the old world chimneys,
in the books under the blue starry library roofs,
you're not alive without this sensation of death in it,
with every aching sinew, aching of loss,
desirous of everything that is commonplace
to man, being in love when it is as effortless
as dying and waking, in the haunting loneliness
of evening, where you will do it all your life,
where in this suffering twilight you will realize
that you are crazy enough to think you can change
things, change things in this great, wobbling, stabbing
dream we all call our tumultuous world.

“THE FORMAL GARDENS (PLANET EARTH)”

Jéanpaul Ferro

That afternoon the garden gate had
been mistakenly left open,

the wind creeping in, hot, like a cyclone,
leaving scars and passages of lilac,

cutting blue-topaz across the bellowing sky
until it was suddenly drunk and dark,

going around, crushing all the perfectly
pruned borders of the columnar evergreens,

knocking the cypress and bay laurel straight
down into these tertiary plumes,

draining all the fountains until all the emerald waters
of the garden had become like molten ash.

“EAST BY WEST”

Tiffany Morris

your voice, echolocated
over satellite signals
brought me across the country
straying over latitudes
and replacing mountains
with towers
stretching toward
light polluted sky

where streetlight signals
and foreign language signs
scrawled neon on brown-grey
mirrored the jellyfish that flash
colours to communicate
(as was told to me by an earnest
brown-eyed boy
in a bar 1 hour north
of civilization)

and the graffitied shutters
on closed-down stores
like the peeling paint
on tunnel walls
were the flowers fading
on hidden mountain paths
that i'd once dared traverse

it was those mountains
to which i needed to return
when i left you one night
among closed down towers
lit by security lights
the snow forming perfect
geometry on endless rooftops
outlining the way home

“KUDZU; FOR JAMES DICKEY”
M.P. Jones IV

once, and again,
I notice kudzu tendrils
writhe like a Nure-onna
on any sunny April.

slithering moccasin runners
swell, green heads full of big ideas,
as unfrozen taproots rise
to court the hard Alabama clay.

lawn mower blades
spin like nihontos
in the hands of samurai

and I mouth words,
amidst the roar of conquer,
like *exotic*, and *invasive*

as the leaves fall,
this one a little boy
this one a fat man¹.

finished, I turn my back
on the tangled mass of wild progress,
verdure shadow-faces in the dirt,

and afterwards fail
to see the towering long-leaf ghosts
asleep in the burnt pine barrens,
or my own pale reflection—
hollow puddles on asphalt streets.

1: “Little Boy” and “Fat Man” are the names given to the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki respectively.

“WILDERNESS”
Anthony Rintalla

Cloud shadow flickerfalls up valley rims,
curtaining cold on rasping casters from the pit of the loch:
the monster is here.

It isn't fear that rises in the glacial dredge,
but anticipation rewarded, the peaty clench
of a whisky's melt.

Breathing here sends shivers back past the jut-rocks
of jaw hinge, plunging hidden waterfalls down the gorge.
It is grasped in gasps. It leaves and hollows.

This is the bed of myth, the drake's vault,
a vast haunted house, its storm-gabled roof lifting clear
past scarred, mossed jags.

All the age of the world clawed across these stones,
tilling cold into every lost crevasse. The earth eviscerated
and laid bare to the scudding sky.

We can't breathe this water, can't drink this sky;
this land makes us young, makes us mortal, made us
put a monster here.

“TRAVEL”

Anthony Rintalla

Sometimes I must be reminded, gaze adrift,
stunned by the rapture of revelation noted,
that, no, I have never been to Manhattan.
I know the city filtered through projected film
so well—so well— I’ve wandered the spreadsheet streets,
down to the Mondrian intersections of Soho.
In memory, it is a collaged city, sidewalks,
facades, and faces in turn: four-color, full,
and silverscreened. At times, it’s Gotham,
at times, Universal Studios or Toronto.
But I remember myself there.

At the same time, I do not recognize my hand
as I press it to the scabrous crème brulee crust of Big Ben,
River spume tumbles up over the lip of the bridge
And mists me in Thames. It’s noon of the New Year
and I am alone for a second, the crowds dissipating like
foam in the mist and I was there—there, on the grass?
The sidewalk? The ground is outside the frame of every photo,
outside my mind. An unreal me hangs over this forgotten space,
the wall grits under my palm, like a baking stone, like an eggshell,
and the cold funnels up the trunk of my coat. The cold is there,
the wall, my hand, but I’ve fallen out of frame, like the ground.

Pennsylvania, same. It was for a maybe—for a larking moment—
my next home. It is now, for an ever—for an always—preforgotten.
I can create the memory of West Main dropping downhill at my feet
to rise again near the cusp of my vision, awnings and shingles
approaching each other at the point where parallels become point.
I walked outside this morning to see the wrong lawn, in the wrong time zone
(I slept in, maybe) and found mid-summer instead of early fall.
Leaves spiraled from Texas trees and fell down the street with the
sound of tent canvas shaken. But this wasn’t the approach of winter,
just the continuity of Texas sun, in its bleached birdskull of a sky.
I can feel the Blue Mountain frost of a non-future steam off of me.
If I cupped my palms over my face, I could smell the corn. So I don’t.

Slidell

This is the Euclidean
Squares framed in cubes
Solid, real and perfect in
Things, and they equal
Of the land is defined by
My yard and yours, limit

realization of the suburbs:
nestled on rectangular planes.
its math: things equal
each other. The volume
its boundaries. Here bounds
ed from point to point.

Gridded with imaginary
Tetrising fractal lawn,
fractal street,
fractal shoulders,
All corners neatly tucked,
Coordinates graph lives,

lines, Cartesian angles
driveway, truck, mirror
mailbox, envelope, stamp,
ballcap, lens, reflection.
equal in object, in sum.
lines separate community.

This complexity has intent,
Friends disappear, die, or
Remove a nested level
One house does not support
Charted against loss, you
Which does not suffice

it is a bulwark against loss.
trade up for wider Platonic lots.
and the structure stands; no
any other. Cointerdependent,
can not subtract one thing
to improve the lots of others.

Things that coincide with
Which is the truth that this
Adjacent lawns, cork-
Katrina it breaks perfect
It sags across a driveway
Into the geometry of the

one another equal one another.
tree reveals. Vectored across
screwed out of the earth by
squares into shattered angles.
and branches punch infinitesimals
paneled garage door. These lives

Spill into each other. Cats
Out along the ground. They
Of Euclidean landscapes
Subverbal rubrics notched
no set geometry, and the
imaginary borders, dream

nest in the horizontal tree and flock
pay no attention to the subtleties
or cryptic FEMA hieroglyphics,
on doors ajar. Water and wind have
suburbanites now lean hard on
their lines straight, and glare at that tree.

“WALLED-OFF DIAGLOG BETWEEN THE BIRDS & THE TREES”
Ed Zahniser

St Francis is in the alleyway
tweeting his sermon to the roosting birds

We are all rooted in the home ground like trees
who never experience real time zone changes

The language of birds is 140 characters
or 114 more than the English alphabet

Unless you consider Daylight-saving Time
a zone—however subject to foolish politics

One wonders how the birds sort out the tweets
and if they feel like Sun and Moon are their siblings

At a time zone's west end kids wait
for the morning school bus in pitch dark

And what the heck is a *canticle*? At least
Latin had given way to vernacular in Frank's day

That was Nixon's daylight trick trashed in Ohio
God told Tricky Dick “You're no John Kennedy!”

Birds once were dinosaurs and know deep time
like even Darwin—much less trees—could not suspect.

“THE LESSONS TO BE LEARNED FROM BIRDS”
Cassie Premo Steele

She comes to my feeder, so close I can reach her,
and I bow my head to show her she is my teacher.
My eyes roll up to watch her, slightly pink with
brown feathers, not as bright as her mate but still
beautiful, and better camouflaged than her brother.
My eyes face forward, have the human limitation
of looking ahead, or up or down. But she, with gold
eyes on the side of her head, can see sideways,
knows who is coming, who waits to be next—
not behind her or lesser, as humans often assume
of those who follow us. She is simply one of
many, and she has the courage to tell us this.

“JIMMY THE BLIND MAN SAYS HE’S IN LOVE”

Donal Mahoney

Remember, a blind man can see things a sighted man can't. So let me tell you about her and then you can tell me whether I'm right.

The first time a man meets her, his eyes flicker and dart. Desire, an appropriate reaction.

The first time a woman meets her, her eyes pop out and coil on her forehead. Envy, another appropriate reaction.

Today, who can blame either? Today, who believes the canard about the true, the good, the beautiful, in theory or in a woman? I never believed it till the day that I met her.

And you won't believe it either unless you do what I did—frisk her for flaws that will allow you to live as you are, as you were, as I was when I met her. As for me, I'm no longer the same. Perhaps you can help me. My cane and my dog are no help in a matter like this.

The day that I met her, I was sitting on pillows propped against the wall of a building not far from Wal-mart. I had my cane and my cup properly positioned on the sidewalk. I was ready for business. And then I heard her heels type out on the pavement the story of my life. I could hear in those heels a woman who knew me although we had never met.

I had my baseball cap upside down on the sidewalk between my outstretched legs. It was full of my wares—pencils, spearmint gum and Tootsie Pops, free, for the children.

When her heels stopped in front of my spot, I sensed this lady, whoever she was, had bent over my cap and was checking my wares. Her hair was a waterfall licking at my knees. I was inebriated by her scent.

She selected two pencils and didn't ask price so I knew I had a real customer. And then with a wave of her hand she let paper money float through the air into my cup.

Believe me, a blind man can see with his mind the butterfly of paper money float to his cup. Any denomination, large or small, is a Monarch afloat on a zephyr.

Customers, you see, usually drop change. A blind man can tell you what coins a customer has dropped by the clink in his cup. So when I heard her Monarch take to the air, I forgot about my teeth and smiled up at her.

I usually don't smile on weekdays. I used to smile on weekends till that Hummer ran over my mother. She lived for a while but she was never the same.

On Saturdays she used to bring meals wrapped in tinfoil and labeled in Braille to tuck in my freezer. She wanted me to know which meals were where, but I was never able to read her Braille so I ate whatever the microwave served.

This new lady in heels, however, has dissolved my bereavement and taken me captive. She has me smiling on weekdays. I've been stoned on her musk since the day that I met her, and I'm becoming ever more wobbly. Everywhere I go her scent surrounds me. I'm an addict now, and I need my cane and my dog just to get around the apartment.

So, please, tell everyone now in the parade passing by to listen to her as I did. In time they may hear, as I can hear now, a year later, the cherubim sing as she blooms with our child like a sunflower in summer while I wonder, I try.

“A LIVE STUDIO AUDIENCE”

Ashleigh Rajala

The house was silent save for the flickering of some distant infomercial blasting through the two am airwaves: a direct transmission of nothingness from the studio right into Dad's vacant, tired eyes.

He heard me stagger in, heels clicking away across the linoleum. Each clacking step came with the unsatisfied ache of dance floor blisters. Each clacking step betrayed my feigned innocence. Each clacking step cut through the “*Three! Easy! Payments!*”

“And if you buy now—!” CLACK

“You'll also receive—!” CLACK

“The Blenderrific—!” CLACK

“Free! Of! Charge!” CLACK

The clacking stopped as my heels hit the carpeted floor of the living room. Were I any other nineteen-year-old and were this perhaps any time other than two am on a Saturday, I might fear a reprimand.

But no. Dad and I looked at each other, both internally equivocating who sat in the worse light: me, eyes smeared with make-up, hair stringy with sweat, blood thin with alcohol; or him, nearly fifty years old and watching an infomercial for a blender at two am on a Saturday night.

“So,” he finally spoke, “How was your night out?”

He asked honestly, as if the fluorescent glow convinced him he could not be one to judge.

“Oh,” I finally spoke, “I don't know if this whole clubbing thing is for me.”

I answered honestly, as if suddenly remembering I had once been the only kid in my junior high to own a copy of *Highway 61 Revisited*.

“I just don't think I like any of this music. I hate hip hop and dance, and whatever else it's called. It's just....”

The night came filtering back like a distant memory. Moments picked themselves out of the fog. *But everyone else seemed to be having so much fun.* The realization hit bitterly. *Is something wrong with me, or were they all faking it too?*

“It's just... I had a crap time. God, I hated it. So full of fake people and fake smiles, fake... everything! Overpriced drinks, sweaty assholes!”

I peeled those horrid shoes from my feet and tossed them across the living room. For just a moment, the violence felt nice.

I ranted for a while, thinking of the dreaded club as a scene from a terrible movie: poorly lit with a horrible soundtrack.

“It was terrible, Dad. Just terrible.”

Dad’s eyes rolled back to the infommercial. I could hear the years of frustration bottled beneath the surface.

He pulled the remote from between the couch cushions as if it had been lost all night and only now he remembered where it was.

“Now you know what I went through with *disco*.”

With that, he changed the channel.

“WE’RE HERE TO HELP”

Dwain Wilder

Now, whether you have a lease or your neighbors have leases
it’s all the same. We’re here to help with that.
It’s essentially a simple contract with either of you
that means you or your neighbors agree
to leasing your land.
So we’re drilling – ‘perforation,’ we like to say –
into or under your land.
So, the contract is plain English
with some fine gray print stuff at the end
– that’s to help lawyers decide things.
So nothing to worry about there, it’s all clear as day and a good deal.
For you who have a lease.
Well, I’m glad I mentioned drilling, or the ‘operation,’ as we like to call it.
You hear all sorts of wild tales.
Those people with the flaming water spigots, they don’t understand.
Solid science confirms that if your water is burning,
it’s your well’s been bad all along.

Our wells only have petro-methane. See? Rock gas.
If your water explodes, it’s bio-methane. See? Live gas.
Has nothing to do with the booms and grinding you feel
on your land, or across the road, or in your pasture and what not.
It’s just your own well. If it catches fire.
Down under you, the land has just gone rotten somehow, over the years.
So we’re here to help. These misconceptions and lies can lead to fear,
which is all our enemy, and we can clear that all up.
Now, our operation is very technical, very scientific,
and it’s been shown over and over, all over the country,
that our engineers do not cause any cloudy smelly water,
we don’t make the rivers and streams obnoxious, for goodness sake! –
bubbles and floating tar and such like.
These have always been there – it’s all natural after all –
but now you notice something’s wrong about it. That’s all.
Likewise your headaches, numb face or fingers and all like that.
You look into your family history, and I bet you’ll find
your symptoms right there – that intractable mom, the odd uncle,
the mean drunken dad, et cetera, no disrespect, mind you.
Rest assured your daughters will be fine.
They’ll be just fine, them and your grandchildren.
Fit as you could possibly hope.

And you can go ahead and send your sons over too.
We’ve got plenty of work. Now, our crews are quality,
so there’ll be plenty competition. But just for the top jobs;
we’ll find something for your boys.
Maybe patching and repaving after the trucks’ve run through awhile...
And, of course, all the new bars, truck stops, motels, what have you –
they’ll need plenty of help.
Maybe something there for the wife.

Which gets us to drilling into the earth, or 'horizontal penetration,' as we like to say.

We're using millions of gallons of the cleanest local water from right here, so rest easy about that, what we're pumping into the ground night and day.

There's sand, lubricants and such we add – a few chemicals – make sure nothing could make it back up here to the surface *alive*. Is all. So let's get that fear stopped right here.

I'd drink a glass of frack fluid for you any day. If that would help.

It's all really a little like poetry, actually.

The trucks are the the latest, sleek, bright, won't disturb your sleep at all.

– You can watch them nurse the fracking well in the complex across the road,

under the rig tower, day in, day out, lighting up the night sky so.

No more finding your way by starlight,

just guide by one our 'light-spangled spires,' we like to call them.

You'll find them everywhere you go, pretty soon now.

Don't worry. You won't need the moon anymore.

“ENVIRONMENT AS ACCESSORY”

Ann Cavlovic

The tourist wears pink hoop earrings and large sunglasses. She leans over the side of the boat, not wanting to miss an opportunity for a good shot. When one appears, she flips around to get a smiling apparition of herself in the frame. Miss X by the steep cliffs. Miss X by the cliffs with more sun on them now. Miss X by the water rushing off the rocks. Thanks to the ingenuity of digital photography, she can appraise each shot after it's taken. I don't wonder what she looks at first. Yet her expression is nearly identical from shot to shot—an unmistakable “I'm having a great time,” which fades the moment the digital shutter snaps.

At first, this was mildly amusing. After all, I'm a trigger-happy foreign tourist at the moment too. We are on our way to the Frioul Archipelago, a set of islands that, from the coast of Marseille, looks like a family of giant hippos sleeping side by side. Behind us, the city shrinks into a splay of fishing boats and off-white buildings staggered along hilly streets.

But after Miss X has taken about twenty shots—and only two of *just* the scenery—she asks me to take one for her. Perhaps she senses I'm paying attention to her and misconstrues my motives. I agree and make an effort to align the shot well, positioning Miss X in the right side of the frame, with the soaring cliffs and ocean spray shimmering off to the left. And as I pass the camera back, I feel like I just sold crack to a 12-year-old. She looks at the image and smiles.

So why feel like a pusher? Because I helped sell the natural environment as an accessory, something pretty that's *provided* (or that we buy a ticket for) to make *us* look good. A shiny ornament to highlight the colour in our eyes. A backdrop to make us appear worldly and desirable. And all this would again be amusing, were we not in the process of destroying our environment, in part due to this materialistic attitude itself.

The archipelago we are about to visit was recently made into a conservation area, after barely surviving its teenage years of ammunition testing and military battles. Battles to acquire other people's stuff, or to defend against others doing the same. The fighting is not completely over, either. Ecologists would rather I didn't visit at all, to let the land properly regenerate. A few French millionaires, on the other hand, are jonesing to develop an exclusive luxury getaway.

The boat is slowing down and preparing to dock. If these islands ever become completely degraded, few tourists would notice. Miss X could just travel elsewhere to get some nature-accessories, much like a junkie could always find another dealer around the corner. The only catch is that eventually, such décor may run out. More precisely, the last few stands of wilderness may be ruined by a swarming mob of tourists, likely economists, willing to pay thousands of dollars to prove that the unregulated free market still provides an incentive to preserve natural spaces. Not exactly a fun ride.

Miss X eyes her destination as we step off the boat: the Chateau d'If, where the main character in the 1956 novel *The Count of Monte Cristo* was imprisoned. For several euros, you can visit a mock-up of the Count's jail cell and pretend you actually read the book. It seems Miss X will need to be patient though, as her white leather stilettos do not help her navigate the rocky footpath with grace. But I suspect the guidebooks do not

bother to advise about proper footwear to navigate the craggy Frioul limestone. After a lazy glance at the promotional photos, you might expect to be visiting a castle on a giant gravel parking lot with the worst ice-heaving ever.

What interests me more is a hike across this heaved and craggy landscape. So I need to climb away from the dock and the tourist-trap food kiosk in a hurry. Looking back toward the curved coastline, I can see mountains that I know are over a hundred kilometres away, thanks to yesterday's 90 kilometre-per-hour Mistral wind that pummelled every speck of dust out of the air. It is this clarity of light and air that first attracted impressionist artists to the South of France, not the all-inclusive packages.

A few paces uphill and I can see a surprising abundance of greenery on these rocks, growing in lush defiance. Swaying gently to my right is what looks like a patch of dried yellow flowers. They are actually fully alive, growing out of teaspoons of invisible soil, wedged in cracks sufficient to shelter their roots from that disciplining wind. Other low-lying plants display the strange, gnarly forms that arise from fighting a constant battle against exposure to salt, and later in their evolution, to metallic pollutants from heavy ammunition. If life challenges build character, the hundreds of rare species that live in this extreme habitat are ruffians with good senses of humour and numerous tattoos.

Bluebirds, kestrels, peregrine falcons, and little owls also thrive in on these islands. But they are smart, so they keep away from the human-likes of me. Snorkelers below play peekaboo with strange critters in underwater holes and crevices. But despite their ingenuity, the life here is subtle and easily ignored, unlike the tourists who tramp over it. The one exception is the male yellow-legged gull, who would swoop down and peck at the top of my head if I get too close to his nesting young. One has just started to circle near my head, which I take as a strong suggestion to try another path.

I feel the elation and ebullience that comes during hikes in beautiful places, as the sun warms and softens the tough urban skin on my cheeks and shoulders. I wish I could run into Miss X again and have a conversation about this land, about any land, and our interdependence with it. About whether we are separate from the world, or whether the world is separate from us. But there would be a language barrier to cross, if not two or three. What I *can* do is work to protect wild spaces, and with my leisure time, make sure I recharge by actually enjoying them. But before I feel too proud of myself, I remember the ecologists who would rather keep both Miss X and myself off of this island. My presence here is far from neutral. Everything within sight is impure, imperfect and somewhat wild.

As I walk further and further from the Chateau, I discover a spot where the rocks, with typical French flair, pull back on their hemline enough to reveal a small sandy inlet. It's a tiny swimming hole that only locals seem to use. But it's inviting enough to make me strip down to my gotchies and sports bra (this is France, after all) and swim out into an un-photographed sunset. I leisurely enjoy the sensations of cool salty water and sand under my toes, unlike the Count of Monte Cristo, who had to escape back to Marseille in a hurry.

My camera is left behind somewhere on a flat patch of rock. There is some chance it will be stolen. No matter. As hard as I've tried, I've never really "captured" a perfect sunset anyway.

“THE RIVER NEVER CHANGES”

Jack Foster

When I was much younger, and less wise, I remember I would always go to the same river every summer. I thought it would be cool for me to drive my pickup out into the middle of nowhere and visit this river that flowed through a portion of the mountains that ran behind the shack where some great poet I had once heard of used to write. How fucking Thoreau, I thought.

The tires of the old truck would make the gravel pop under the weight of my compensatory teenage idol, and I would tap my fingers on the driver's seat door as I sojourned back to my secret spot. I'd prop the door open and leave it hanging, knowing no one would pass by. In those days, I used to drink a six pack of shitty beer, probably some sort of Keystone, and smoke a soft pack of Lucky Strikes as I quickly took off my clothes before entering the water.

I'd always make a point to romp my way into the water. I'd enter forcefully and jerk my way around into my comfort zone. I never had much endurance, though. Maybe it was the smoking, but then again maybe it was just because I was so young. I'd get tired and lay back flaccidly in the water as sunspots peered through the perforated canopy of willow trees.

Every time I got out of the water, I remember I would dry myself off thoroughly as to not bring any liquid baggage into my outside life. However, I always noticed that there were one or two places I could never get completely dry. It didn't matter how hard I tried; it always happened. I took a piece of that damn river with me whether I liked it or not.

Eventually, as time progressed, I had to quit making my juvenile visits to the river. I suppose I fell into all the mundane things we always fall into. College, careers, kids. I soon realized, after only a few years of getting married, I needed some sort of catharsis. I wasn't happy at all with the way my marriage had turned out, and I especially didn't like it because I, like everyone else, did it to myself. So after a few years of being married, I went back to the river like I did when I was a teenager.

I still remember my first time back since being a kid. Even in my thirty-second year the river was the same pristine place I had frequented in my youth. I rolled up in my mini-van and felt the ground crinkling beneath me as my weekend-warrior plowed through my very own proverbial secret garden. Turning off the car, I grabbed a cheap bottle of whiskey from the glove compartment and took a few swigs before removing my clothes.

As I struggled to take off my pants, I accidentally caught my reflection in the side view mirror and saw, as if for the first time, the man I had become: hairy in all the wrong places, slightly oafish, and definitely exhausted. I took one more swig from the bottle and capped it. Dropping the bottle, I proceeded to the shores of the stream where I sought some sort of renewal.

My feet entered first, just to check the temperature of the water. It seemed colder than I remembered, but I proceeded into its sanctuary anyways. I immediately noticed details about it I had not been aware of in my youth. The sandy bottom cushioned smooth rocks,

and cradled my feet upon entry. The stream felt like a stranger despite the sense of nurturing love I felt from its embrace. My skin felt on edge as I eased my way in, but the water seemingly cured the itch I had been feeling since my wedding day.

This pilgrimage repeated once every three or four years, and it was always a “business trip” or a “convention.” I looked forward to my trips with immense anticipation but always felt restrained by the fetters of my obligations; that is, until my divorce.

I was divorced in my fifties. As one might infer, the action was inevitable. My ex, having slept with her expensive lawyer, was granted most of what we had, but it honestly didn't bother me. I, after all, had my river which I could freely visit whenever I wanted. However, I soon realized that the novelty was gone, and I no longer needed my secret spot; not with the glaring distraction of “freedom” in my aging face.

By the time my children were off having families of their own, I quickly realized I didn't have anyone or anything. I felt that the logical thing to do was return to the only thing that remained constant in my life, so I took the limited provisions I had and returned, once more, to my sacred river.

On my way back to the river, I was listening to a radio-station where two intellectuals were having an argument about some philosophical matter. The one, who was clearly younger, claimed that no one can ever go into the same river twice. I thought this was a silly notion. In response to his claim, I turned up the volume and listened to what his defense was.

The young man said, “If I walk into a river and get out, by the time I get back in, it will have changed. It doesn't matter if the time between getting in and getting out is ten second or ten years; the river changes. The current of the water brings in and takes away sediment from other riverbeds and oceans. Thus, on the most basic level, the river has changed.”

I chuckled to myself as I pulled up into the spot where I always parked. The calm body of water waited in silence for me as I slowly removed my clothes. My ancient feet trudged sluggishly across the earthy path towards the bed of the river until I was waist-deep looking her into her mirror-like visage.

The reflection of my face lulled about lazily in the water as the river lapped around my leathery skin. It was then that I realized that the younger man said what he said because he is young. The river never changes. It's the tired old men that do all the changing. We take a piece when we're young and carry it with us until we don't know what to do with it except look back on it; hopefully doing so with some sense of clarity. As I came to my realization, I splashed my hand across the reflection of my face and laughed.

“OLIVE WANTS A MARTINI”

Kenneth Pobo

After being hospitalized for a week with pneumonia, Olive is happy to be back at her house—a ramshackle collection of smooshed decades: a 1950s clock, a 60s troll doll, a 70s poster of The Fonz, an 80s cover (missing the album) of The Bangles’ *Different Light* album, a 90s tape of three *Seinfeld* episodes, and a 00s card listing the Sirius channels.

At 80, Olive dislikes when her family calls her “spry” or “sharp.” They mean well but have consigned her to a resale shop, some duddy old item, still in somewhat decent shape, but not what people really want.

What do people want?

Having been driven home by her daughter Lara, who stays too long fluffing pillows and unpacking her hospital bag, Olive sighs with relief. Gone! No one’s here but me and my cats.

She thinks about what she wants. A martini. A bouquet of coneflowers on the square table by the back window. An *I Married Joan* rerun. Songs by Sergio Mendez and Brazil 66. And to sit. Breathe. To cough less.

It’s 2:30 in the afternoon, an hour she normally never notices. 2:30 is a bridge. You walk on it long enough and eventually arrive at evening. Today she stands on the bridge and looks at water flowing beneath her, smells apple-y October air. She makes a mental note: don’t ignore 2:30. Pay more attention.

After a month, Olive can take walks and her friends and family stops coming over so much. A phone call. An email. Peace.

On her birthday, almost five months after her hospitalization, Lara picks her up and puts a party hat on her. Her grandson Jeffrey says, “Grandma looks like a clown!” She laughs, agreeing completely. The party ends badly. Her brother Ernie and Lara’s husband Jake get into a screaming match about torture. Doors slam and party hats come off.

After a quick coffee, Lara drives her home.

“Jake’s an ass. I should divorce him, mom.”

“Then do it,” Olive replies, the car chugging on a snowy Wisconsin road.

Lara’s soapy problems grow tedious. Then again, Olive knows how tedious her problems are to others, so she often keeps quiet. Many people call her “quiet,” not meant as a compliment or an insult.

2:30. Another spring. And another. And another. Trilliums and yellow daffodils. The garden like a train moving faster and faster, Olive riding near the caboose, noticing veins in each trillium even as they speed by. What comes after the last depot? Is it worth a thought—or is it better to sit back and enjoy the ride, even the bumps?

Olive drifts off. Motion has lulled her, and when the depot appears, she can't be awakened.

“FIREFLIES”
Trent Laubscher

Outside, the world is busy ending.

Inside, Peter and Georgette sit at the oak table in the dining room. There are a few tea lights lined up on the table runner, and Peter can just make out his wife’s face. She is half drunk, smiling, showing her teeth. Peter thinks that if she knew she was showing her teeth she would close her mouth.

Earlier, they had gone out to the water to see where the anglerfish had beached themselves. Peter held Georgette’s thin hand and felt her pulse quicken as they stepped over the fish. He saw that the footprints she left were slight.

“They live deep,” Peter said. He squeezed her hand. “I can’t think of what would bring them up.”

He knew his wife wasn’t listening. Instead she just smiled and looked out over the water.

Peter looked down at a dead fish, its milky eyes staring out at nothing in particular. Some of the fish still glowed, throbbing blue lights dangling from their foreheads. That was the word, wasn’t it? Peter wasn’t sure fish had foreheads. It wasn’t something he had worried himself about before.

Over the ocean a red cloud boiled on the horizon and rolled toward shore. Lightning pumped inside.

Peter turned to the house at the end of the boardwalk. The lights flickered once, twice, and went out. The beach brightened in a soft, pulsing light.

“Let’s go,” Peter said. He squeezed Georgette’s hand and led her up the boardwalk.

They decided to make mimosas at the cabana beside the pool. *Make the champagne last, they agreed, don’t let the orange juice spoil.*

Now, they sip their drinks while thick, purple and blue lightning rips down their neighbors’ houses, crumbles the fountain on the front lawn, punches craters into the roads. Peter wears his Caraceni pinstripe and Gravati slip-ons. Georgette wears the Karan dress she bought for their son’s wedding. Peter knows it is her favorite.

The house trembles. The crown molding in the dining room slides down the walls.

Peter rises and walks to stand behind his wife. He rubs her shoulders, and he can feel when she closes her eyes. He can feel when she smiles.

Georgette reaches up and squeezes Peter’s hands.

They step outside as the earth shudders and breaks beneath their feet. Peter leads his wife down the front steps into the drive as the guest house sinks into the lawn. They walk together through the ashes and into the lightning as it streams down around them, and

they are so small in the end, flashing dark and then bright, bright, bright.

KUDZU BIOGRAPHIES

Aaron Poller currently works as an advanced practice nurse-psychotherapist in Winston-Salem and teaches Mental Health Nursing at Winston-Salem State University. He has been writing since the 1960's when he studied poetry with Jean Garrigue and Daniel Hoffman while a student at the University of Pennsylvania. His poems have appeared recently in *Barnwood Poetry Magazine*, *Eunoia Review*, *Muddy River Poetry Review*, *The Writing Disorder*, *Cherry Blossom Review*, *Wild Goose Poetry Review*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *Poetic Medicine*, *The Yale Journal of Humanities in Medicine* and *Palimpsest*. He lives in a small house with his wife, four rescued dogs and three rescued cats.

André Babyn lives in Canada.

Ann Cavlovic has published essays in *The Globe* and *Mail* and the Canadian environmental journal *Alternatives*. Her creative writing has appeared in *Event* and *SubTerrain*. She was a finalist in the 2005 Writers' Union of Canada Short Prose Competition for Developing Writers. She lives in Ottawa, Canada.

After a thirty year tour of the American South, Anthony Rintala is now a proudly midwestern poet teaching at the University of Southern Indiana and is the Assistant Poetry Editor of the *Southern Indiana Review*.

Ashleigh Rajala is a Vancouver-based writer who spent a few years making movies. A graduate of Simon Fraser University, her short films have screened worldwide, but she has now returned to writing and her role in the Vancouver zine community. Her interests lie in deconstructing genre boundaries and personal narrative, and blending the lines between fantasy and reality in the process.

Becky Garrison is a panelist for *Washington Post's* "On Faith" column and author of six books to date. Additional writing credits include work for *The Guardian*, *American Atheist magazine*, and *Killing the Buddha*.

Cassie Premo Steele's poetry has been nominated twice for a *Pushcart Prize* and has been published in over a hundred journals, anthologies, and magazines. She is the author of eight books of poetry, fiction, and nonfiction and specializes in poetry that reveals the natural world as a source of balance and empowerment. She works as a writing & creativity coach with clients in person and long distance from her CoCreating Studio along a creek in Columbia, South Carolina. Her website is www.cassiepremosteele.com

Dominic James lives in the soft underbelly of England, hails from soft underbelly of humanity, getting weak, bod rejecting booze and fries, sausage, spices, reduced to vile obedience in diet, obese, going down sardonic smiling. Under 50.

Donal Mahoney has had work published in a variety of journals in the United States, Europe, Asia and Africa.

Donna Emerson is a Santa Rosa Jr. College instructor, a licensed clinical social worker, photographer, and writer of poetry and prose. Recent poetry publications include *The Place That Inhabits Us*, *Poems of the Bay Area Watershed*, *Phoebe*, *Eclipse*, *The Paterson Literary Review*, *The Healing Muse*, *The New Ohio Review*, and *So To Speak*, among many others. Recent prose and photography publications include *Passager*, *Stone Canoe*, and *Tiny Lights*, where she was awarded first prize in the 2010 Flash competition. Her first chapbook, *This Water*, was published in 2007. Her second chapbook, *Body Rhymes*, was published by Finishing Line Press in 2009 and was nominated for the California Book Award. *Finishing Line Press* has just published her third

chapbook, *Wild Mercy*, October, 2011. Donna is a current finalist for *Sonoma County Poet Laureate*, 2012-2014. She lives with her husband and daughter in Sonoma County, California, near her two adult sons and the water.

Drew Jennings is from San Antonio, TX. His work has been featured in *Midway Journal*.

Dwain Wilder, a native of a small town outside Dallas, moved to Rochester, NY in 1970 to study Zen Buddhism. He has had a varied career as navy flightcrewmember, leadership roles in the anti-Vietnam War and Civil Rights movements, research technician, software engineer, and lutherie (the building of stringed musical instruments). He holds three patents, in semi-conductor device design and musical instrument innovation, and is a graduate of Yale, with a B.A. in American Studies (History of Technology and Literature).

He lives with his wife and their two dogs in a quaint, untidy farmhouse near a large park. He currently makes his livelihood in lutherie, and his Appalachian dulcimers are held in high regard, both here and abroad. Dwain teaches dulcimer building classes at the Northeast Dulcimer Symposium, in Blue Mountain Lake, in the Adirondacks, as well as in his studio.

Dwain also writes poetry, and essays on Zen. He has published poems in various small poetry periodicals and collections, and his poetry collection, *Under the Only Moon* was published by *Foothills Press* in August, 2011.

Ed Zahniser's poems have appeared in more than 100 magazines in the U.S. and U.K., three chapbooks, three books, and several anthologies, including *A Tumult for John Berryman*, *WFPM Anthology*, an *Amicus Journal* anthology, and *Odd Angles of Heaven*. His book *Mall-hopping with the Great I AM* was published by *Somondoco Press* in 2006. His poems *Slow Down & Live* were published in 2011 as a handmade chapbook, edition of 26, illustrated with security envelope patterns in a collaboration with artist and designer Heather Watson of *Pernot&Tatlin*. A former poetry editor of *Living Wilderness magazine* and a founding editor of *Some Of Us Press* in Washington, D.C., he edits the poetry page of the Shepherdstown, WV quarterly *Good News Paper*. He has recorded his work for "The Poet and the Poem" audio project of Grace Cavalieri for the Library of Congress.

Jack Foster is the Editorial Manager of *A Few Lines Magazine*. His work has been published or is forthcoming in *Heavy Hands Ink*, *Eunoia Review*, and others. He is a fan of Whiskey, but it brings out the Irish in him.

Jeanpaul Ferro is a novelist, short fiction author, and poet from Providence, Rhode Island. An 8-time Pushcart Prize nominee, Jeanpaul Ferro's work has appeared on *NPR*, *Contemporary American Voices*, *Columbia Review*, *Emerson Review*, *Connecticut Review*, *Portland Monthly*, and others. He is the author of *All The Good Promises* (Plowman Press, 1994), *Becoming X* (BlazeVox Books, 2008), *You Know Too Much About Flying Saucers* (Thumbscrew Press, 2009), *Hemispheres* (Maverick Duck Press, 2009) *Essendo Morti* "Being Dead" (Goldfish Press, 2009), nominated for the 2010 *Griffin Prize in Poetry*; and *Jazz* (Honest Publishing, 2011) nominated for both the 2012 *Griffin Prize in Poetry* and the 2012 *Kingsley Tufts Prize in Poetry*.

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Joan Colby has seven books published including *The Lonely Hearts Killers*, *The Atrocity Book*, etc. Over 950 poems in publications including *Poetry*, *Atlanta Review*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *The New York Quarterly*, *South Dakota Review*, *Epoch*, etc. Two Illinois Arts Council Literary Awards (one in 2008) and an IAC Literary Fellowship. Honorable mention in the 2008 *James Hearst Poetry Contest*—North American Review and the 2009 *Editor's Choice Contest*—Margie, and finalist in the 2007 *GSU* (now New South) Poetry Contest, 2009 *Nimrod International Pablo Neruda Prize*, 2010 *James Hearst Poetry Contest* and *Ernest J. Poetry Prize*. She lives on a small horse farm in Northern Illinois with her husband and assorted animals.

John Bohannon is a teacher, writer and poet based in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. His fiction and poetry has appeared in the U.S., the U.K and Ireland. His collection of poems, *The Barmaids of Tir na Nog* was published by *Harrowood Press* in 2008.

Joseph Rhea is a full-time divinity student in Birmingham, Alabama, and a writer by passion. He married his beautiful fiancée Allison Cleveland in November.

Award-winning poet, National Park Artist in-Residence, and assistant editor and book reviewer of *The Centrifugal Eye*, Karla Linn Merrifield has had work published in dozens of journals and anthologies. She has six books to her credit, including *Godwit: Poems of Canada*, which received the 2009 *Andrew Eiseman Writers Award for Poetry*, and her new chapbook, *The Urn*, from *Finishing Line Press*. Forthcoming from *Salmon Press* is her full-length collection *Athabaskan Fractal and Other Poems of the Far North*. And from *Finishing Line Press* Merrifield's *The Ice Decides: Poems of Antarctica*. You can read more about her and sample her 75 poems and photographs at <http://karlalinn.blogspot.com>.

Kenneth Pobo has a new chapbook forthcoming of micro-fiction from *Deadly Chaps* called *Tiny Torn Maps*.

Lakshmi Eassey is a teacher and freelance journalist based in India with roots in California. She covers the environmental beat for *Project Groundswell* and teaches journalism to young people in the United States and India. An interview with her is available online at kudzureview.com

Laurie A Skelton hails from the Deep South where she grew up learning how to deal with sweltering heat and possums. For the past four years, she has become something of a European traveler. As a result, she knows a thing or two about airports, teatime, black pudding, and snazzy scarves. While she has visited six countries within the EU, Laurie's most recent adventure involved teaching English to adorable, elementary students in France for a year. When she is not writing (or desperately trying to survive her twenties), she enjoys reading novels, drawing, and speaking French.

Maggie Koger is a Media Specialist with a writing habit. She lives and works in Boise (pronounced boysee) and celebrates Le Bois--the trees the city is named for. She has published poetry in *Poet Lore*, *Avocet*, *Mused*, *WestWard Quarterly*, and *Montucky*.

Born and raised in Pittsburgh, PA, Mercedes Lawry has lived in Seattle over thirty years. She has published poetry in such journals as *Poetry*, *Rhino*, *Nimrod*, *Poetry East*, *Seattle Review*, and others. Her chapbook, *There Are Crows in My Blood*, was published by *Pudding House Press* in 2007 and her chapbook *Happy Darkness* is just out from *Finishing Line Press*. Also, she's published some fiction as well as stories and poems for children. Among the honors she has received are awards from the Seattle Arts Commission, Hugo House, and Artist Trust. And, she's been a Jack Straw Writer and held a residency at Hedgebrook.

Sue Blaustein's poetry has appeared in the *New Delta Review*, *Verse Wisconsin*, *Isotope - A Journal of Literary Nature and Science Writing*, *Wisconsin Academy Review*, *Blue Fifth Review* (online) and *Wisconsin People and Ideas*.

Susi Lovell lives, writes, and teaches movement and physical theatre in the Montreal area. She has written on dance for *The Montreal Gazette* and has an MFA in Creative Writing from Lesley University, M.A. Her work has appeared in *The Fiddlehead*, *Grain* and *Metal Scratches*.

Thomas Fussey is a celebrity makeup artist, has contributed to *Street Sound magazine*, as well as been a writer of training manuals for HMV Records. He recently completed his first novel and his second novel is currently in the works.

Trent Laubscher earned his B.A. in creative writing from the University of Central Florida. He is currently a middle school teacher in West Palm Beach, where he lives with his wife. He enjoys backpacking, playing ukulele, and sleeping on the ground outdoors.

Tiffany Morris is an emerging writer from Nova Scotia. Previous publications include the *Red River Review*, *estuary magazine*, *Blue Skies Poetry*, *ditch poetry* and *Red Claw Press*.

“Snowman wakes before dawn.”
– Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*



May the Kudzu grow!

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