



WATERSHED

WATERSHED

A Literary Magazine

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Five Limericks

Ernst Shoen-Rene

Sans Merci

Some blame her for witchcraft and whoring
That *Belle Dame* who would leave her knight snoring—
But my God! his appeals
And his dreamy ideals
Were so terribly, terribly boring.

Sneak Attack

I look in the mirror and find
That my forelock's still there (I'm not blind),
But in back there's a place
That's as bare as my face—
Just old age sneaking up from behind.

O.D.

Some get high on pot or on whiskey,
Some coffee alone will make frisky,
Still others, I guess
Do it on righteousness,
Which they somehow believe is less risky.

Men!

A man scorns his mother-in-law,
In his daughter finds hardly a flaw:
The former gives life
To what he fears in his wife,
And the latter to what he once saw.

After Céline

The road with its murk and its haze
That we tread to the end of our days
Is a long one-way street
Whose length cries, "Stop and eat!"
But it's Death who owns all the cafés.

Street Reflections

John W. Young

The hot rains of August come. In the glistening streets, a skeleton horse weeps for the fallen feathers of its wings; rusty metal swans with black fishnets scrape the gutters clean; Marionette, that sad-eyed comedienne of mystery, dances while her fading puppeteer father dreams; two blonde children of identical looks grow into a single scarlet bird and soar up through the cloudy stalactites; a golden calliope band produces glass images of fine purple flowers and lost blue virgins in the steamy air above their instruments; black priestesses strike steady waves of chimes on their gray ankle bells, signifying the end of rhythm; a very small girl with violet eyes speaks in magnificent riddles that madden the impatient, predict future boredom in even the great crystal orbs beyond the sun, and explain all ancient babblings on a simple color wheel; And so is crowned the Sibyl of the Morning.

And when the sky's vibraphone is at last stilled, all these shades and shadows will flee away. Down into the womb of the Earth. Down through an iron-fisted stormdrain.

Casting Call (A Feminist Poem)

Tacianna Aguiar

Well fuck you, too.
Director of the Production.
None of us chooses our parts—
and surely not those of us relegated
to the chorus line,
obliged to be made up and to obediently
lift our legs high and wide and on cue
to the music of some conductor's stiff wand.

How I hate those adjectives,
Scriptwriter the Almighty.
Please reword my part—
the throat constricts around your phrases,
my lines do not ring true;
under glaring and brutal stagelights,
I fear I'll be typecast and pigeonholed,
but at least I'm front row, center.

I yearn to assume another role:
Hero of the Story.
I know how to play the part—
his soliloquy tumbles from my heart,
I've memorized the lines.
But wardrobe made some mistakes;
it's difficult to bow to thundering applause
wearing an ill-fitting costume.

and they called him 'girl'

Eric Nilsson

they sat
smugly
on the benches
in between

the safe walls
of their lockers
the smell
of their white

sweat smothered
the room
a young
native american man

with long black
hair braided
delicately, resting
on his back

walked past them
his costume
made of beads
not batting helmuts

shades of
green & brown & gold
& bright orange
not loud red or icy white

gentle folds of
soft cotton—not
bright stiff numbers
on synthetic jerseys

he walked past them
reddish brown skin
proud calm face
ready for

ceremony—ready for
dance &
they called him
'girl'

Tribe follows tribe, and nation follows nation, like the waves of the sea. It is the order of nature and regret is useless.

Chief Seattle

Seattle

Geri Mahood

Could the cold be inviting
an international scene?
Art flourishes
and ferries float true to Whidbey
their wide guts filled
with treasures of the Orient.
Seagulls scream
but the city is secure.
The Duwamish chief's portrait
presides above snapshots
of Hollywood stars
in a bar.
Looking like a weary old woman,
a chaperone
for crowds consuming fire water,
suicide
for savages
destroyed
by gun power
gun powder
power powder
blown now up the nose
as crazed street lights
flash green
yellow and red warnings
and salmon slip silent through the sound.

Rosa

Suzanne Lucas Meyer

"Mom?"

"Ya, what" always distracted, hoeing and sweating, but we're under the prickly white oak alone and

"I dreamed, ah, I dreamed . . ." she's watching me, pushing her glasses up her dirt streaked nose, settling the back of her gloved hand on one slim hip. The hoe's handle is in the other hand, she'll hit me if I say

"I dreamed I kissed Rosa on the mouth" shit, as if seeing your sixteen-year old in the hospital for a week detoxing isn't enough for one year. Jesus, Maddy, she's gonna put you in a foster home for sure.

"Rosa, Rosa, Mario and Wendy's girl? Fatima's adopted granddaughter?" Mmm, hmm, Rosa, with the pale, pale almost-not-blue eyes, long fingers and nervous smile when she flips her light brown hair out of her pale, pale "Rosa Gouvea. What about her?" Locked in. Jigsawed into the little town dirt.

"Dreamed, dreamed, I kissed her" on the mouth. Look down, the oak roots are trembling, crawling. Up, Mom's got that black eyebrow lifted up, black as my eyes and long ponytail. Sweat trickles down my thin ribcage, past my nipples, navel.

"Ha!" Mom snorts, invites me with a smack on my bare brown arm "Ha! Ah, don't worry! I kiss my friends all the time!" too loud, her white teeth flashing hard into my squinting eyes, too loud. Up inside the smooth bark a flicker bangs, bangs,

"Tell her, tell her again, the mouth, the mouth, tell her, tell"

"I, ah, kissed her, ah, on the mouth. The dream, Rosa . . ." fucking flickers, anyway. The heat settles, setting the tree on fire. One-one-thousand, two-one-thousand, three-one-thousand, tapping the hoe, the hoe, turning

"Oh, ya! On the mouth, sure, sure! You've seen me do that with Magdalena! Yes? Fine. Okay, ya, ya" waving away in mock pursuit of "Ice tea? Sure, come on. Too hot. Buy you a drink. Ha! Dad and Joey are probably done too."

But, Magdalena's an eighty-year-old Portuguese lady, Christ, Christ have mercy, Christ on a "uh, ya, sure, in a minute, in a minute."

"Good. Fine, fine," go ahead breathe.

The hoed ground is clay-soft under my feet. My toes sketch Rosa's mouth, hitting a joint. Rosa's crossed leg, smooth, bouncing out the rhythm of my pulse. Across the yard the cat named Lucky sticks her arm in and out of an old gopher hole. Sticks it in up to her shoulder, playing, reaching for the disappearing legs of a brown tarantula.

Honolulu, Hawaii August, 1989

Nancy Boyles

A woman sits daily
on the Ala Wai Canal
drinking wine from a sack, smoking
in and out of Hawaii's rich and colorful past.

The neighbor yells obscenities
at children eating breakfast—
the kids are screaming now
at each other, at themselves.

Oahu, the island of white sand beaches
the playground of a nation—
where are your dark-skinned people now?
mopping floors,
making beds?

The ancient ones
are gone
vanished in the mountain clouds—
they see no reason to return.

Road Kill

Cinnamon Kern

I am
as a
woman
hypnotized—
I am
powerless -
to resist,
I am dazzled by your eyes,
and I
step,
unaware,
directly into your path.

Tribute to a Sax

Rose Calvano

A saxophone
is a velvet man
whose husky voice
can touch a place in me
reserved for none

A saxophone
is a silky hand
that softly runs
the length of me
kisses me in private places
then bellows out his pleasure

A saxophone
is dusky eyes
with a look of hot desire
Those eyes can have their way with me
take my love, all my money
then blow a note
that comforts me

A saxophone
is easy feet
that guide me through a number
an arm that reaches for my waist
lips that brush against my face
embarrassed, I regain composure
then beg to go again

Some Men

Jim Hochtritt

He don't like long hairs
Or men with earrings in their ears.
He prefers his therapy from the bottle
And his women are to be seen and not heard.
He don't like cops
And he don't trust teachers either.
He only reads the paper
During football season
And in order to keep peace around his house
He threatens with a backhand
Across the chops
Or a bootheel in the ass,
His kind of justice, frontier like,
Swift and exact;
The kind that hurts.
Church disturbs him because he'll tell ya'
That he don't need that kinda' crap.
He expects dinner at six o'clock
Army-like and prompt, no excuse.
Plays cards with the boys
Every Tuesday night after work
And he like to brag about
The buck he brought down last November
With his American rifle
With the high powered German scope.
Really put a hurt on that sucker, he laughs,
And points to the head above his mantel.
He likes to get it up and over with, that is,
He likes to fuck, hard and fast,
He likes to fart,
And he likes to intimidate with his fists
Anybody he thinks is a bureaucrat,
And after a slow pull from a long neck of Bud
He likes to burp.

Proud of the men's den only
He built by himself on the back of his house,
Proud of his souped up speed boat
And his big wheeled pick-up truck,
He demands from his wife and his kids
Well rehearsed answers
To any necessities his kingdom demands.
From eight to five, Monday through Friday,
Down at the plant
They call him "Willy boy" short for William;
On Saturday afternoons in June
Down at the Little League stadium,
Molding the fragile characters of young men,
They call him coach.

Light Beer and Bourbon

Will House

Shakespeare said it best
When he didn't say anything
Like the speechless moments we have
Between light beer and bourbon

There's an urge to express myself
With words
But words would only dull the feeling

I search your eyes for an understanding
A glimpse that the unspoken experience
Is shared between us
Between your light beer
My bourbon

Creating Chihuahuas

Calhoun Smith

I guess I have to say it all began somewhere, and who's to say my choice for a beginning is any less appropriate than someone else's. After all, it was my story that was involved, and my house.

But it was someone else's cat.

I'd been trying to end a story of mine for about three days, staying up each night until I was practically asleep at the typewriter, but nothing seemed to be working. I finally had her (the heroine some might say) on the subway, the right train even, but I couldn't decide where she was going. I could see her staring out the window like the rest of the passengers, but they had no faces and no names. She, at least, had a face; but no expression. I remember rubbing my forehead, almost as if I were trying to massage an ending from inside, but it was no use. Like her, I knew I was going to have to be content to do nothing for awhile.

I remember looking at the clock above my desk (it was just after midnight), and then almost as a reflex I looked out my bedroom window and could see the old man and his chihuahua walking by. I watched the chihuahua stop and sniff the curb. I saw the old man walk onward and then stop and tug on the dog's leash when his pace was lacking. I heard the old man cough. I heard the chihuahua sneeze. Then I heard a knock at my front door.

I made it to the front door through the darkness of the house and when I opened it, no one was there. I moved forward into the doorway, my hand still on the knob, and looked out into the parking lot. I saw a man walking away. He turned around.

"Oh, hello," he said. "I was beginning to think I'd have to look elsewhere." I wasn't sure what he meant, and as I thought, he came back towards the door but stopped just short of it. He was holding a white tipped cane and he tapped the asphalt a couple of times before speaking again. He was wearing a top hat, which appeared to be about half the size of others I'd seen, and running down the sides of his face, looking almost like extensions of his hat, were two thick, dark sideburns.

"I'm sorry to be disturbing you at this time, but you see, I've lost my cat," he said.

"Your cat?"

"Yes." The man switched his cane to his other hand. "You see, I walk with my cat every night about this time, you've probably noticed us before, that is if you make it a habit of staying up late." I crossed my arms against the cool night air. The man continued talking. "I don't use a leash, of course, and—"

"A leash?" I'd forgotten for a minute what he was talking about and by the time I'd remembered, he was explaining it anyway.

"Well, yes," he said. "I mean, it is silly to leash a cat. That's precisely why I don't do it. But unfortunately, that's also why my cat has wandered off."

I suddenly felt like I'd been thrown into someone else's dream. I looked away down the railroad tracks and could see that a dangerous moon was resting on the horizon. The man looked behind him to see what had caught my attention, and then he looked back. He removed his hat and approached the doorstep with his hand out.

"My name is Warren," he said. I let one arm free of its crossed position to accept his hand and then recrossed them without offering my name.

"Well," he said, "I'm wondering if perhaps you've left any windows open that my cat could've crawled through?" I started to answer but he continued talking. "You see, just a block or two back that way," he pointed with his cane beyond the parking lot, "my cat—Thorn is his name—and I were walking. I stopped to pick a flower out of Old Lady Sand's garden, God rest her soul, when I looked up and found Thorn missing. He normally stays close by unless there's mischief to be had—sleeping dogs, flower pots, even open windows." He tapped his cane on the ground again. "Anyway, like I said, I looked up and Thorn was gone. I think he might be inside your house. I must admit that I noticed your kitchen window around back was open. I could see the curtains blowing in the breeze."

"Yes," I said. "I leave that open to get a draft." I shivered at the talk of cool air and the feeling that I might have given something away. "But I don't think your cat came inside," I said. "I've been up all night and haven't heard anything except my typewriter," and even that, I thought to myself, has been quiet.

"Oh! Are you a writer?"

"Of sorts." I still had a hold of the doorknob and was turning it slowly back and forth.

"Writers do tend to stay up late it seems. I used to write for the moon myself. But that was years ago."

"For the moon?" I asked.

"Yes. 'For the moon.' You know, writing at night. I used to say that when I wrote at night I was writing for the moon."

"Oh, I get it."

"Well, anyway," Warren put his hat back on his head, "I don't want to keep you from your work any longer. Would it be possible to check and make sure that Thom hasn't stolen away inside your house?" Warren pointed with his cane to the living room behind me. "Thom is awfully quiet if he means to be."

"Well ... I don't see why not."

"Good. Good."

I stepped back from the doorway and let Warren enter ahead of me. He took off his hat again and placed it in the same hand with his cane. He hesitated once inside. "Uh, is the kitchen that way?" He pointed with his cane again.

"Yes."

He walked across the living room and stopped outside the doorway to the kitchen. He felt along the inside.

"Here. Let me." I moved around Warren and entered the kitchen as I turned on the light. The window was open and the curtains were still waving in the breeze. We looked across the counter space and then Warren bent down and looked under the table, but neither of us saw Thom. I looked inside an open floor cupboard but found nothing. Warren stood. "Well, he's not here," he said.

"I can check the rest of the house," I said. "He may be hiding somewhere else."

I walked out of the kitchen and Warren followed, turning out the light behind him.

At the back of the house I checked the bathroom while Warren stood in the doorway watching. I slid back the shower door and looked in the tub. Nothing.

"You don't write anymore, then?" I asked.

"No, I don't."

"Would I be familiar with any of your work?" I turned to face Warren. "I mean, did you publish?"

"Once," he said. "It was a sad book of poetry that sold well for awhile. That's all. You wouldn't have seen the book around here."

"Oh." I walked past Warren and out into the hallway. "Well, there's one more place we can check."

As expected, the small barman's lamp on my desk was still on. Thom was on top of the desk sniffing the typewriter the way a mechanic might feel the hood of a warm car, and he didn't seem to notice when Warren and I entered the room. "Well, look who's here," I said.

Thom began moving around to the other side of the desk, and after stepping carefully over the pages of my story, he sat down on the edge. The cat looked at me and then at Warren who leaned his cane and hat against the bedroom door and went over to the desk. Warren picked up Thom and draped him over his shoulder.

"He's a funny cat," Warren said. But Thom didn't look very funny to me. I could see that Warren was looking over the pages on my desk. Thom was staring at me.

"I don't mean to pry, but I would really like to read some of your work," Warren said. Even Thom waited for me to answer.

"Well, I really don't have much with me, but you can read what's there on the desk. It's not finished, though."

"Not finished?"

"I've been trying to do something with it for days, but—"

"Ah! One of those stories." Warren scratched Thom's head and the cat finally closed his eyes.

"Like I said, you're welcome to read what's there. It's not much." I went over to the desk and gathered the pages. "This stack here is ready." I got a chair from the closet and Warren sat down with Thom in his lap. I handed Warren the pages. "It starts here." Warren started reading without another word, still petting Thom with one hand.

"You want some coffee?" I asked.

"No."

Warren read and I went out to the kitchen.

I stalled every way I knew how out in the kitchen. I even watered the plants on my windowsill who by now had come to accept the fact that they were living in Death Valley and the water faucet below them was nothing but a cruel mirage. Mine were the only plants I knew of that licked their own leaves.

When I went back to my bedroom Warren was still reading. Thom was asleep in his lap. I sat down on the corner of my bed with my cup.

"Yes," Warren said. "I am impressed. Entertained. Although, the story does require that ending you're looking for. Leaving a subway train halfway between points A and B is no way to leave the reader. Incredibly involving, though. I wonder if the lady will end up travelling the entire distance?"

"Yeah." I smiled. "I don't know. It's amazing that I've been able to write anything at all considering the trouble I'm getting from this one. It's a tiger to be finished."

Warren flipped through the story again. "Well," he said. "You're left with nothing but possibilities. Much can happen on a subway at midnight, especially to a female travelling alone. Perhaps that man from the newsstand could be used again, you know, as a catalyst for an ending. He's a very well written character. Very visual, if you catch my meaning." I nodded whether I'd caught it or not. "It seems though that this newspaper man has a lot more to say and do before this story is over."

Yes! You're right, I thought. And he was.

"You see," Warren continued. "A newsman on a subway platform, especially one with all his connections, you know, the ones you set out ... "

As Warren talked, I started thinking almost involuntarily, and the ideas started rising from that grave at the base of my skull. I felt an ending somewhere inside me do a jumping jack. I felt on the edge of something great, something very high up.

The ending came to me just after midnight. I remember the time because it was right when the old man and his chihuahua passed in front of my window on the broken sidewalk. They were like clockwork, passing by at the same time in the same clothing every night. Even the sky looked the same, as if it were holding onto its rain until these late night walkers took their shelter once again. But these weren't things I had to notice then to tell about them now. As I've said, these things were constant. For me, that night, I was too caught up in my writing to notice that the chihuahua wasn't a chihuahua at all, but a cat instead. A cat on a goddamn leash.

Anniversary

Julie Mason

We don't like
each other anymore.

You've turned
into the woman-despising,
foul-mouthed, careless,
fat-bellied creep
you always were
in the deep recesses
of your gene pool.

I've become
the man-despising,
foul-mouthed, careless,
shrivelled-up bitch
I've always been
in the dark closets
of my family history.

We never talk anymore.
We just watch
each other
decompose into hatred.

The Shape of Things

Emily West

When the phone call comes
you think it is someone
trying to sell you something
until the room tilts
to match the hollow voice
and you nod your head at no one.

It is June,
a bright morning like glass.
The house is shrinking.
Outside, the street
hums as usual.
High school kids
lean into each other, laughing.
A woman walks her dog.

At the hospital,
a priest shyly holds out a bag,
a plastic bag
with your brother's life in it.
Running shoes,
sweatshirt,
shattered wristwatch.
You forget
what language you speak.

Inside the bag
is a whirling world,
a boy who flew
up the trunks of trees,
a boy made of blackberries.
And you wonder
as he fell
did he wish for wings?

The shape of everything changes.
Your mother sits crumpled
like a child.
Her eyes are endless.
You and your father
walk like orphans
through a day of strangers.

People begin bringing food.
The house is full of food and flowers.
No one is eating
but the people who bring the food
and the flowers die quickly.

A Familiar Walk

Scott Walker Paulin

Two young men sat lazily on the edge of the porch as the early morning sun crept up the sky. They were wiggling their toes and drawing with them in the warm dust. One man was taller than the other and had dark curly hair. The shorter man was stockier, but neither of the men looked well fed.

"I think I'm going leave here and move to the city," said the tall man with the dark curly hair. "My cousin, he tell me there is much work in the city for a man who wants it. He work in a market and never come home all dirty and smelling of the fields. I think I am going leave here soon."

"My sister's husband, José Louis, used to live in the city," remarked the short stocky man. "He din' like it."

"José Louis is not a man who is happy no where, amigo. If he had a job good as my cousin he would like it, I think. I know if I had a job good as my cousin I wouldn't never complain or be late or nothin'. The city would be a good place for me."

"I hear people are not so nice in the city," countered the short stocky man. "I hear once of a man an' his family who were made to sleep out in the rain because they had no money for rent. People, they say to him you no pay rent an' you can no stay here tonight! Now, my friend, I ask you, is that the way nice people would be to a man an' his family?"

"Where do you hear this? From someone who does not know the city as my cousin does, no? Maybe from someone who is scared of the city an' wants to make others scared as well. The teller of this story does not know the real city."

"But you have never been to the city."

"My cousin, he work in the city! He tell me how it is. I think I leave here soon and go to the city. You see, it will be good."

"How you goin' get there?" asked the short man.

"I have save up money enough to take the bus. Three weeks now I save a little each day."

"Where will you stay in the city, amigo? You will have money enough for rent also? And if you do not find a job as your cousin has—what then? You may not find a place to stay as nice as this in the city."

"This? We are given a garage to sleep in because we bring home food from the field for Ricardo. We sleep on the floor of his garage."

"Aye, but you may not find a garage as nice as this one here."

"You don' know nothin'," burst the taller man, suddenly annoyed. "You who sits here on this stinking porch every Sunday—who sleeps on the floor—who never been nowhere else. What do you know? Every Sunday you tell me how bad the city is an' you never even been there at all!"

"An' you," said the stocky little man, rising, "You sit on this same stinking porch every Sunday and dream of the city. If you know so much about the city, then go. Tomorrow I will take you down to the bus station and you will go, okay?"

"Perdon, mi amigo. I am too easily angered with you. You are a good friend. Let us get some wine and celebrate this move to the city at last."

"I would, amigo, but I have no money for wine. I have not saved as you have."

"We will use some of mine then."

"But you have only enough for the bus, no? You will need that tomorrow."

"Tomorrow? What need is there to rush? I can save a day or two more and then take the bus to the city."

The stocky little man smiled as his tall friend rose and they walked side by side down the narrow dirt road to the store to buy wine. It was a familiar walk.

Walking the Road to Tijuana

Janet M. Schmidt

Balancing along cracks
tufted yellow beards
poke through
in thirsty revenge

A highway taunts
each step
hissing sighs
Spanish blossoms

sweet to despair
cover me
Slow breathing
my thoughts turn

to you ahead
in a wavering city
looking north
for rain

Kathleen Belden

It's just an adventure for them

Packing toys for Daddy's home
Socks, shirts, and dinosaurs

So exciting
New mommies and new daddys

Already a writer's cramp
an ache that won't go away
How can they be so eager
when I want them here

"I need those dinosaurs
They're mine," I said
in reference to my toys

Genevieve Peabody

Shawna Quinn Murphy

Genevieve Peabody smacked her new white mary janes against the playground pavement and began to run. She swung a Snoopy lunch pail high above her head, the bright red handle clutched tightly by small pristine fingers. A blue and white checked pinafore snapped briskly against her legs; she turned her head and gave a gleeful smirk.

A crown of angel blond hair caught her watchful eye. It was Teddy Simpson. He sat in a corner surrounded by curly-haired girls with twinkling eyes; his nose ran. Genevieve curled her lip and proceeded forward with a manly swagger.

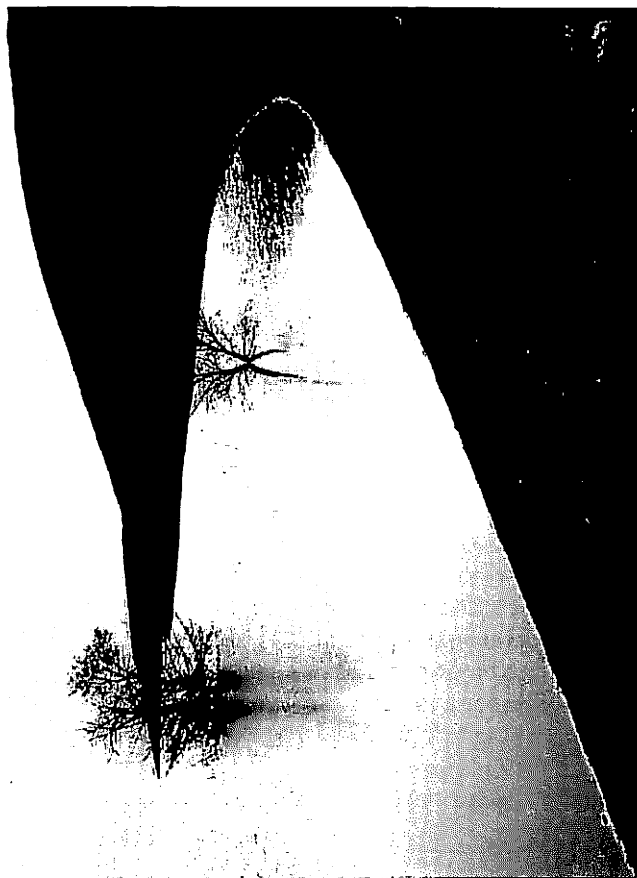
"Hellooooo Theodore." She tried to bat her eyes but only succeeded in making a pained gesture. She began to turn in front of him, faster and faster until she achieved a constant spinning motion. She raised her arms, lunch pail in hand and flashed Teddy her freshly starched petticoat.

Genevieve became a blur as Teddy took to his feet in an attempt to relieve himself of her. She only edged closer, spinning.

S M A C K !!

Teddy Simpson hit pavement with a sickening thud. Genevieve Peabody was awestruck—she had never seen anyone go down quite so quickly before. The little girls nearest to Teddy began to scream and cry. Genevieve examined her lunch pail and the blood splat which streaked across its corner.

She was in for it now. Damn Teddy Simpson, she thought. Her mother was going to kill her now she would probably have to carry a sack lunch for the rest of the year. She looked at the red stickiness oozing from Teddy's head and hoped that he would need at least five stitches.



William Sharpe

Spirit

Jean Schlais

September 25, 1979

Dear Julie,

It's raining again, raining hard. God I hate it all! I hate Spirit. I know I've told you this too many times already, but I can't let go of the feeling. Every day it seems to get worse; the way the streets close in and bleed together until there isn't any room for me anywhere. Nothing ever changes here. Death? Yes, maybe, but it could be that the stagnation is just too hard boiled. You see, I know every brick on every wall of each and every building in this little townling. You think I'm exaggerating and blowing things out of proportion "as always," but I'm not. Like yesterday, I went to Larry's Deli and grocery with Mom, and while she was buying Cheeto Cheese Balls for Grace I waited outside against the wall. I was feeling the rusty bricks with my fingers and I knew that when I turned around I would see "Josh Kroker loves Samantha Wellington" scratched there. I did. What struck me, even more than my knowing those darn bricks so well, was that I knew both of them (Samantha was the witch who used to make fun of my ugly green boots, remember?) and they're married now and living on Mill Road just across from the cemetery in some one-story, gruesome, green house (fitting). Did you know that they're only nineteen? That's just a year and a half older than me. What a waste! She's pregnant and they fight all the time. In fact I saw her in Rib Lake a couple of weeks ago and she had a big purple, cloudy bruise on her cheek. She was buying a pack of Camel cigarettes. I don't know if they were for her or for her romantic sidekick or for the baby.

I hate people who smoke, it reminds me of cancer and that always brings the memory of Nana's shrunken face back to me. I always picture her in the icy, white hospital bed Gramp put in their living room. It was so different from anything else there; the ugly green carpet, the orange, red, and yellow zigzag afghan Nana had crotcheted, the sea shell pictures she had glued together, and Gramp's bottles of homemade wine. It was a piece of snowy glass that wouldn't melt even under the Florida sun.

I walked into the living room early one morning while Nana was raising up the bed. The motor was drumming and the bed was clicking and she looked up at me with a hollow face that peeled the ice right off the bed and punched it into me. She had her teeth out in a glass of water on the bed stand so that her mouth caved in. That inward mouth brought all the other realities of her into a sharp focus. Every wrinkle was sucked in deep and her skin was dry and ashy. Her hair hadn't been combed so that it showed patches of white skin on her head too. "My God," I had thought. "This isn't my grandmother." I don't know why I hadn't realized how old and sick she had become until that moment. I think it was the missing white teeth sitting on her bed stand. If I ever get old like that I just want to go. Why not?

Shoot, got to go. Grace is screaming for me. Probably wants those cheese balls. God she's getting huge.

Love always,

Brette

October 12, 1979

Dear Julie,

Dinner was funny today. We ate downstairs like always, since Grace and Gramp moved in. Grace clicked and rattled the whole time Dad and I were setting the table, telling us, "Oh honey, it smells so lovely upstairs. Cathy must be cooking up something delicious. Every time I think about that warm dinner being made upstairs I say, 'Thank you dear God for giving Hank such a generous son as Denny, because we all have to pay the reaper and if it weren't for you all I'd have handed over the whole lot already.' Isn't that right Hank?" I don't know why she always asks Gramp what he thinks because he never really follows all her stupid prattle; so he just looks perplexed and grunts, "Huh?." Then Grace has to explain the whole thing in a loud voice to which Gramp always replies with a smile and a laugh, both of which mean absolutely nothing. But it gets Grace going anyway and she chortles and crosses her arms under her huge, lowly breasts as best she can. Then she looks at Dad, and sometimes at me, all pleased and smug.

Anyway, we brought dinner down and Dad was on the phone so I got Gramp's plate ready for him. You have to put little bits of everything there and cut it up so he can eat it; only, I forgot to peel his baked potato. So he gets his plate and butters his bread and then he looks up and demands, "Where's my potato?" Grace looks embarrassed and she leans over and whispers, "It's in the skin honey." Only she makes the "Honey" sound more like it should have been, "You son of a bitch." I don't know why she whispers either because it's loud all the same. Even Dad heard it on the phone and started laughing. We were all laughing 'cause Gramp got such a wondering look and said, "Well I'll be damned," with such revelation and awe. You just had to laugh. Grace looked uncertain for a split second but then she started her chortling and tried to cross her arms up under her chest and sent her plate somersaulting over the broccoli.

I think maybe laughing at Gramp like that was cruel, but he didn't seem to mind. He was laughing too. I don't think people should make fun of old age, though. I don't know.

Your loving sister,

Brette

November 5, 1979

Dear Julie,

Gramp had an "accident" today and no one was home except Grace so I had to clean up. It was awful. It isn't like changing diapers either, you said that once in a letter (not that you've ever had to do it). With diapers it's OK because babies are supposed to do it, but there is something really creepy when it's someone old. Maybe it's 'cause no one wants to admit what it means, what it really means. That people get old and senile and become dependent on people. It's almost like being born again only in the opposite direction.

Love always,

Brette

December 2, 1979

Dear Julie,

Gramp had a stroke last night and I had to skip school to sit with him because both Mom and Dad had to work. He made me bring him his accordion. It hasn't been out of that scraped up brown box since he first came here. Do you remember? It was the Christmas of your senior year, 1976. He and Grace were unpacking all the boxes shipped up from Florida and he saw that brown leather and his face lit up and he said, "Denny get me a beer. I'm going to play a 'moving in' song." And he did "Irish eyes are smiling." He was whistling and tapping his foot and his face was red. Dad brought him a beer and he let out a really long belch and Grace said, "Henry! Don't embarrass me like that." Gramp just looked at her and nodded and kept playing.

Anyway, the day after his stroke he told me to get out his accordion so I did but it scared me and his eyes were so clear. His fingers shook when he forced the air in and out of that wrinkled instrument and he started singing, only it was in Bohemian and I couldn't understand any of it. I asked him what it was and he looked at me like he didn't know who I was. "Hey you," he said. "Get me a beer." So I did, but he didn't notice me when I came back into the room. He was playing too hard. He was trying to whistle but it was just wheezy air. I watched him rocking forward in his bloated flowered chair; pinched face, his tremendous piece of nose, and thick bloated lips with spit coming off them. Grace came into the room and screamed, "Henry!" She screeched it at him and then she saw me and she said, "Henry, honey," only it was softer. Gramp looked up at her and he didn't recognize her even though his look was so clear. He just kept punching the white keys and forcing the air in and out of the leather skin.

I talked to Dad about it when he came home and he said Gramp's mom used to sing to him in Bohemian. Isn't that strange. He never spoke Bohemian.

Are you coming home for Christmas? I need you.

Love,

Brette

June 18, 1980

Dear Julie,

Gramp's sick again and Grace is going back to Florida to visit some friends, so Mom and Dad said they need me around the house for awhile. Maybe a year, if things are too bad. It's OK though, I have a job at Larry's that starts next week. I'll be able to save up money so I can go wherever I want. I got a letter of acceptance from Wisconsin State University of Stevens Point so I guess I might go there. It's probably nothing like Smith and it certainly isn't Massachusetts, but it is a change. Besides, I can always come visit you out there when I have money. It all depends on Gramp.

Love,

Brette

November 15, 1980

Dear Julie,

I met a guy today in Larry's. His name's Tom. He was buying a six-pack of Hamms and Big Red gum and while I was slipping it into a brown paper bag he says, "Hun, you have the most beautiful, mysterious eyes I've ever seen." I must have been blushing pretty hard because then he said, "And the reddest face, too." That made me laugh hard. It's been so long since I've laughed! I felt weak when I stopped and I almost cried but I didn't want to make a fool out of myself.

He asked me to go out this Saturday. We're going to a movie. I'm so nervous. Can you believe it all? He's from Rib Lake (that's only twenty miles from Spirit), so he practically lives around the corner. His uncle lives here, Robert Zimke. Do you remember him? I used to pull weeds for him. He's fat and talks real slow and tells God awful long stories about hunting.

So I'm going out. My first real date. I wish you were here to help me figure out what to wear. You're so good at knowing what looks right. I think I'm in love!

Loads of love,

Brette

November 16, 1980

Julie,

Gramp died last night. No one heard him go. He died in his sleep. I was out on my date with Tom. He took me to a movie in Rib Lake and then we had ice cream and talked about everything you could think of because he's so easy to talk to and he really cares about things. He told me I had melancholy eyes and asked me why I was so twisted up like that. I asked him, like what, but he said if I didn't know, never mind. I was so happy until about nine this morning when Dad came up and told Mom and me that Gramp had died. He was sad in an awful way, Julie. He was so heavy. You could feel him the moment he walked into the room. Mom and I both looked up at the same time.

Mom's calling relatives so I know they'll call you but I need to write to make sure you'll come home. I know you didn't come home for Christmas, but this is different. I really need you! She called Grace already and Grace made a big bawling fuss. Do you think she really loved him? Sometimes I think she just wanted to use Mom and Dad for a place to stay. Gramp didn't love her. Not the way he loved Nan. He just needed her that's all.

I've never been to a funeral before. Not even Nana's.

Love,

Brette

November 20, 1980

Julie,

I knew you weren't coming home. Isn't that funny that I knew even before you said you weren't. It still made me sad though and at first I thought I was surprised, but I'm not. Because you're never there when things get tough are you? You always get everything, all the breaks. "We'll send Julie to Smith." "We want Julie to be happy because she's so energetic and good and alive." Not me I'm dead. I'm dead like Gramp because I'm cramped up in this little town. I hate life! I hate Spirit! I hate you!

Brette

January 25, 1981

Dear Julie,

Don't keep apologizing, I'm not mad anymore. How could I be? It really isn't your fault. Mom found out somehow and she talked to me. She's the one who made me see that it's not your fault. She said you're like a movie, "... that's really enjoyable to be around and watch but you can't make it go the way you want."

Gramp's funeral was both beautiful and horrible. I actually looked at him. All through the service I was pretty sure that I wouldn't be able to, but I did. There were flowers everywhere. I think they do that to hide the death. No one wants to just look straight at it, but you have to. I did. Straight at it. It was ashy with blue lips. It was cold and something else; it wasn't really there. Not on Gramps face because he wasn't really dead except that we all thought he was and we had the body to prove it. You see? He didn't care. He didn't know he was dead because he wasn't there any longer to think about it. We mind, everyone who gets left behind. We're the ones who die. A little piece of us, because we know we can't have that person anymore. It's easy to think about death and to be scared like it's a monster coming after us but the truth is that there's just life. Before and after there's nothing but in between there's life and that's what we're doing here. We're moving through that middle. I'm not dead at all. I'm very very alive. I love you.

Love,

Brette

March 1, 1982

Dear Julie,

Tom and I went to Steven's Point to look at the campus and I got really lonely just looking at all those overgrown buildings. I've decided not to go to school for sure, now. You know what else? It was you who hated Spirit, not me. Oh, I guess I did for awhile, when I didn't want to really see what was happening; when I wanted to hide. But I don't want to hide anymore. It doesn't really matter, anyway, where you live as long as you're living wherever you are.

Tom and I are probably going to take over his father's dairy farm instead, once we're married. I milked one of the cows last week. Their udders are so warm and soft, kind of like a baby.

Love,

Brette

Dissociation

Calhoun Smith

There was something going on last night.
For what other reason would I have left the house
with no destination in mind
in the rain?

The neighborhood was in its place
Outlined in lightning from the coming storm
and clouded by what lay beyond the Sierras.
Quiet like the heartbeat of a cat

And there were cats.
Out in prime numbers
Looking for something, too
in the rain.
Shaking wet paws, howling at strangers
following at my feet then disappearing into the shadows.
Slipping from between cars then back again.

Under an awning I heard a cat complaining.
And next to him, a smaller one was looking up into the sky
with not a word on her sandpaper tongue.
While out in the parking lot a defiant one crushed rain drops
under his feet.
Running back and forth like those clowns that spin plates
up in the air ...

In the air.
I remember looking up
And I remember wondering
Who'd left us out in the rain?

July 29, 1986

Calie Jo Varnell

really

it doesn't bother me

at all anymore

after

the initial hysteria

i learned to be numb

promised

myself i'd forget

don't worry—I have

except

sometimes if it's late

and i'm tired

Andrea Ross

me and robin
we're just trying to catch
water skeeters
and some guy walks upstream
in brown socks
burrs stuck on em
pulls out a knife and
makes me listen to stories about
fondling each others private parts
(thats what i dont
tell the police because
im dirty its my fault)

that yellow knife

i take rocks and squish
those dead fish
you find under river rocks
watch their dull eyes
but i gotta listen
to this guy
dont make im mad
you dont know what
hes gonna do

Sugar Water

Roxanne R. English

I'd never seen such white. It was diamond white. Real pure and sparkly. I didn't want to touch it. I mean I did but it was so pretty I thought I oughtn't. But Mrs. Langley said it was okay long as my hands were clean. I showed 'em to her and she said she'd never seen such clean hands.

She said it was a sugar egg but it weren't for eatin'. I said she didn't have to worry 'cause I'd never eat somethin' so pretty. Mrs. Langley says I'm a fine boy.

The egg was white but on its sides was two curling purple lines made of icing. On top of the egg was four little flowers. They wasn't real flowers just sugar ones like the egg, but they was yellow. Four little yellow flowers with purple centers. I like flowers.

But that wasn't all. On the end of the egg was an opening and you could look inside. And there was things inside. Beautiful, beautiful things! The inside of the sugar egg was a bunny house! There was green coconut grass and three speckled jelly beans: a red one with pink spots, a blue one with purple spots, and a yellow one with red spots. But that's not all! In the center of the grass with the jelly beans by their feet, was three white sugar bunnies. They was a family. A mama, a papa, and a baby. All white, pure, and sweet. The papa was on the one side of the baby and the mama was on the other. They would have held that baby tight if they could've. That baby, she was so pretty! Little blue eyes and a sweet pink frosting smile. I never seen anything so beautiful and I began to cry. They was just so beautiful!

Mrs. Langley asked what was the matter with me. "A fine boy cryin' over a sugar egg. Never seen somethin' so silly!" She said I'd melt the sugar and spoil its sweetness with such big salty teardrops.

They're just like big sugar eggs, don't ya know? But they're bigger and got more openings. It's like a Easter holiday, everyday, when you're lookin' in. Judge Anderson had the best egg in town. It was big and white with tall white pillars in front. He had those white, sweet smellin' flowers in his yard too and when I'd squat down in 'em, it was like smellin' the sweet vanilla of a sugar egg.

There was lots of big windows in his egg. Always clean. Don't touch! Don't leave no fingerprints! Clean hands. Fine boys have clean hands.

Warm light. Shinin' like a diamond in the music room. Shinin' like a black pearl off the grand piana where she'd play. Long white fingers slippin' across them creamy keys. You can't tell the music from her voice, song's so sweet. Cool. Like sleepin' in whippin' cream. Her skin was soft and white like the bunny's. The bunny everybody loves. Her eyes was blue too. Two little blue robin eggs, peerin' over that black piana, lost in song. Sometimes she'd sway like a willow. Soft yella hair ticklin' the tops of her shoulders and she'd close her eyes. Her cool, misty eyes. And I'd close mine too and rock in the circle of the frostin' flowers. And she'd play and play, her voice risin' like soda water, makin' the chandelier quiver. Little shootin' stars in the black pearl piana. The notes would rise in her shoulders, dance up her long neck, and slip through her velvet lips like shiny gumdrops. Pink frosting. Like the bunny. Soft sugar lips. My soft white bunny. And then she'd stop and I'd cry cause I'd never heard nothin' so beautiful. And I'd cry big salty tears in the vanilla flowers. I know it was foolish! I felt so ashamed. I'd run down to the river and I'd jump in the water and scrub myself clean 'til my fingernails were ghostlike, and my skin looked like flour in the moonlight.

Didn't want to go that night. I tried not ta. I really did. I lay in my bed 'til fever took hold and the sheets was soaked through. I needed the cool of the vanilla flowers. I needed air. I couldn't get my breath. I ran to the egg and layed on the cool ground under the music room winda, lettin' her cream soda song wash over me. My fever was almost gone and I was slippin' into sleep when the music stopped. The heat came rushin' back and my head, my head was meltin' and my bones felt like they's gonna split wide open! I pulled myself up, grippin' the winda to look in. Look into the diamond room.

He was gonna kill her. I saw. He had a shiny, silver sword on his hip and he was plannin' to slit her silky throat. The piana begin to shriek but no one was playin' it! His fingers reached out and took a hold of her shoulders. They was dark like swamp water.

Plang! Plang! The piana was shakin' and it got real dull lookin'. My head was splittin' open and I wiped the sweat out of my eyes. My lips was salt. Heavy rock salt.

He pulled her tight. Gonna squeeze her, gonna squeeze her to death! I heard the folds of her dress cracklin' like glass as he pulled her against him.

The chandelier. Look how it's spinnin'! Screamin' like an animal! I covered my ears, holdin' out the sound.

He moved in closer and smashed his filthy mouth against her little sugar lips. My throat was burnin'! The egg began to crack! Frostin' was flyin' every which way and the pillars were bucklin'. And she closed her robin egg eyes.

Crack! My head burst open and I was standin' in the room. Red, red was everywhere. On the walls, spillin' on the green coconut. My bones were poppin' and my tears were thick on my face. She screamed as I shoved him down. His sword was so bright it stung my eyes and I had to shut 'em real tight as I grabbed for it.

"Only fine boys with clean hands! Only fine boys with clean hands!" I shouted at him and I dug the blade deep into his soft belly. And then the shriekin' stopped and the chandelier froze, and I could hear the music again. I looked and saw my bunny quiverin' in the corner. Fur wet with tears, chest all speckled with red cinnamon.

"Only fine boys with clean hands," I told her smilin' and I held up my hands to show her.

But they was coated, slippery with black blood. My nails were purple and I tried to hide 'em from her soft, misty eyes.

"Oh, I'm sorry! I'm sorry!" I said and I ran down to the icy river to wash. But they wouldn't come clean. They wouldn't come clean. I scrubbed and I scrubbed and I scrubbed and I scrubbed. I scrubbed 'til some men came and pulled me from the river. And I cried like a fool.

They wouldn't come clean so I don't eat on Tuesdays. Cause we have eggs on Tuesdays.

A Foot In California

M.E. Parker

The names since yours have been few
And yet—
They seem to drape
The miles of years
As a canopy of your absence.

It is not longing that brings
You to me.
I am given to that less and less.
I hang curtains upon my soul
And decorate my own heart.
I am home.

Tonight the stars were a
Drunken audience for the moon.
You would have known
Them each by name.
I was always so amused.

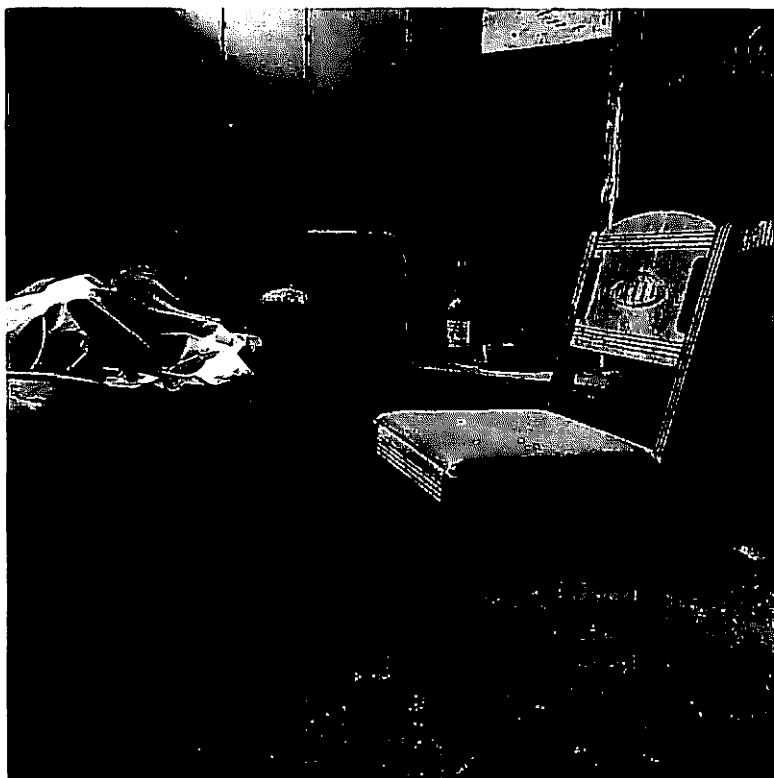
See, down here they only glow.
Not that child's work of
Glitter and glue
Tied up in a ribbon of
Northern lights
That balanced so near above us.

I remember all that.
Your name, the moon,
And why I hung these curtains.
I wish upon your star.
I dream into your nights,
To find you home.

desert sketch

Monica Reller

The ambiguous breeze of the desert
carries the vagabond sand,
and hangs in rhythm precarious
over dancing bones and saguaro
watching the cactus dramaticus
overgesturing his role.



William Sharpe

The Story

Denise Parkin

The slap of leather echoed through the still house. Shrieks of pain, high and shrill, could be heard. Andrea cowered in her closet, hands over her ears. It must go away, she thought to herself. I can't listen. I don't want to hear. Slap! Slap! Andrea retreated into her mind. From a distance she could hear children calling. Eyes clenched, she conjured up the images she had seen so many times before. It was the only thing that kept her from the fear she was feeling.

She was almost there. She was White Shell Girl and she could see the other children. "White Shell Girl, come play with us." They were calling her. Slap! Slap! White Shell Girl looked back at the darkness she had left. The noise receded and then was gone. She turned and ran, smiling, to play with her friends.

The grass was green and smelled sweet. In her hand was a small pointed digging stick. Elder Cousin was showing her where to dig. "Not there, silly girl, over here where the roots are younger, sweeter," she directed her younger cousin.

"Yes, Elder Cousin, I'm coming."

There was crying, no, sobbing. Great wracking sobs that shook the body. White Shell Girl felt the darkness overcome her again and suddenly she was in the closet, hands over her ears. The crying came from the other side of the wall. It was Joey, and she knew from experience that he would continue crying into the night unless she comforted him.

Although she knew it was risky to leave the relative safety of her room, Andrea crept silently down the hall to Joey's room. She eased open the door and tiptoed past the sleeping form of her older brother, Jack. Joey lay in his bed, scrunched down under his quilt. Thumb in mouth, his shoulders were heaving convulsively as he sobbed.

"Don't cry, Joey," she whispered. His shoulders grew still and he turned to look up at Andrea. She saw his tear-stained face and red-rimmed eyes. She lightly caressed his cheek. "Hush now and I'll tell you the story." Joey's eyes brightened. He knew her story. It would, as always, take away the pain and fear. Far away, on the other side of the house, there was the sound of furniture falling as Father stumbled drunkenly from one room to another in search of the bottle of Scotch the children had hidden from him. They knew he would rant, stumble, and finally pass out. It was only then that their fear passed.

"The story," Joey pleaded around his thumb, "Please, Andrea, the story." Andrea snuggled down next to her brother and, stroking his flushed face, began.

"Look, now, Joey. Close your eyes and see. We are far, far away, up in the hills. See the scrub oak, the manzanita? Feel the soft clover under your feet. They're bare, remember? The People don't imprison their feet in hard leather the way They do. Smell the flowers. Feel the soft breeze of spring as it lifts your hair away from your face. Are you there yet?"

"Yes," Joey whispered, thumb out of his mouth, tears and pain forgotten. He was there.

"Look now, Little Brother. There is the creek where we swim. You can take off your clothes, and join the others if you want." Joey's eyes closed and Andrea continued to stroke his cheek.

"We are The People," she said. "We have lived here since time began. They are not here. There is no place for Them in our world." And, then, Andrea was there, too. She took Little Brother's hand and they ran off to join the other children.

Some of the older boys were showing off their first bows and arrows. They were hunting Squirrel, Rabbit, and Chipmunk. Squirrel and Chipmunk chattered and scolded as they teased the boys from their high perches. Whoosh. One arrow flew by. Whoosh. Another arrow went by. Both missed their mark and White Shell Girl laughed behind her hands. With great dignity, Tupi retrieved his arrows from the brush below the tree where Squirrel taunted him. Tupi fitted his arrow into his bow once again and, this time, his aim was true. Rabbit, who had peeked through the brush with curiosity, fell to the ground, dead. Tupi carefully withdrew his arrow and held his catch aloft. Shouting triumphantly, he ran to the firepit of his mother. It was his first kill. Not enough to make him a man, but enough to be cause for celebration.

The children followed him, cheering loudly. White Shell Girl and Little Brother ran with the others. Their bare feet flew over the clover, their long, black hair streamed out behind them. At the firepit, the children gathered, quiet now. Tupi presented his kill to his mother. She looked up from her basket and gravely regarded the dead animal. Tupi waited impatiently, shifting from one foot to the other, but remaining silent. At last his mother said, "It is good!" The children cheered.

Tupi quickly skinned and cleaned his catch. His mother added it to the boiling stewpot and, before long, bowls of mouth-watering stew were passed out to the group of admiring children. Tupi took nothing,

but stood proudly by. He had provided his mother with meat. Soon he would go off with the men to learn the ways of The People and he would no longer play with the younger children. But for now, he basked in his glory.

The children ate their fill and, one by one, drifted away to nap in the shade of the huge oak trees that stood guard over the village. White Shell Girl settled herself under one of the trees and pillowed Little Brother's head in her lap. His breathing became more and more regular and, at last, he was asleep.

Andrea gently disengaged herself from Joey and moved quietly down the dark hall to her own room. Father lay on the floor, half in and half out of the master bedroom. He was snoring softly. Andrea could see the bottle of Scotch, now nearly empty, propped against the wall.

Once in bed, covers pulled up to her chin, Andrea began to cry. It wasn't fair, she sobbed into her pillow. Mother should never have left them, not Joey, especially. Too young at age six to understand desertion, he grieved as though she were dead. In his innocence, he would question Father about her and soon the belt would fly.

Jack, at age 12 and a year older than Andrea, said nothing, asked nothing. He ate, went to school and slept. It was as though he were a robot. If questioned, he would reply in monosyllables or say nothing at all. Often the target of Father's belt when he was younger, Jack had learned to make himself invisible.

Andrea had invented her make-believe world long before Mother had left. It was a place to be safe, warm and happy. Here there were no belts, no Scotch, no angry parents. Here there was a loving and caring mother. If she could have done so, Andrea would have taken Joey into her make-believe world with more than just stories. If she could make the story real . . .

Next morning, as the sun began to peek up over the mountains on the horizon, Andrea arose. She washed her face with cold water, hoping to shock herself wide awake. It would not do to be sluggish the morning after one of Father's drunks. She dressed for school and made her way to the kitchen to start breakfast and, more importantly, a pot of strong, black coffee. Oatmeal started, juice made and the table set, Andrea walked down the long hall to awaken her brothers and Father.

Jack was already up and Joey, though reluctant, got up and dressed. That done, she moved fearfully toward her sleeping father. It varied from day to day. Sometimes he awoke smiling as though nothing had or would happen; other times, somewhat groggy. Worst of all, and especially after a drunk, he would awaken with a roar. It was

this mood she feared and anticipated as she timidly approached him.

"Father," she whispered as she tapped his shoulder. Nothing. "Father," she said a bit louder. Still nothing. Heart in her mouth, she gently shook him. "Father, it's time to get up."

"What is it?" he shouted, sitting up and banging his head on the wall. Andrea cringed back as he swung blindly in her direction. "Leave me alone! I know when it's time to get up!" He stumbled into the master bathroom and Andrea could hear him start the shower. She relaxed a little. That was good. It meant she would not have to reawaken him before she and her brothers left for school.

The boys and Andrea were nearly done with their breakfast when Father came into the kitchen. By the time he had sat down and finished his coffee it was time for the children to leave for school. Quietly they gathered books and lunches. "Goodbye, Father," Joey said, looking expectant, yet fearful. Father grumbled his goodbye and the relieved children filed out the front door.

Once free of the oppressive atmosphere of home, Joey began to run and laugh, like all his friends at school. Andrea, looking on maternally, smiled to herself. She looked at Jack. He ignored her and studied the tops of his shoes all the way to school.

Halfway through math, the school nurse came and took Andrea out of her classroom. In the nurse's office, waiting, were her two brothers. Joey sat hunched over with his thumb in his mouth. Big tears were rolling down his cheeks. Jack stood at the window and stared at some unseen object. The nurse took her into the back office and asked her to take off her dress and slip. Andrea was very frightened. When the nurse asked her if her father had ever hit or hurt her in any way, she shook her head in an emphatic no. After she dressed, the nurse took Andrea to where her brothers were and left. From the back office she could hear the words "Father", "bruises" and "scared". Andrea was now terrified. She knew Father would blame them or Joey for all this and there would be another belting. An oppressive silence hung over the three children.

"What happened?" Andrea asked. She looked directly at her brother Jack who had turned away from the window when the nurse left the room.

"I fell down at recess," Joey said softly. "My pants was torn and I was bleeding and everthing. The nurse told me to take down my pants and she saw. She kept asking me how I got 'em." Andrea knew he had to be referring to the bruises on his thighs. Father's belt usually landed there rather than his bottom.

"I'm glad," she said firmly. "Now they have to put us somewhere away from Father."

Joey started crying again. Jack glared at Andrea. "You're glad? You're glad?" he spat out bitterly. "We'll have to go to foster homes, separate ones. Who wants three kids, huh? No one! We're better off with Father. At least we can protect each other and we'll be together."

"They can't separate us! What about Joey? He's so little. He needs us. He needs us to protect him." Andrea clutched the sobbing Joey to her.

"They don't care about that. We can't tell," Jack said. "If we don't tell, we will just go home."

"But how do we explain the bruises?" Andrea asked.

"I don't know. We'll just have to think of something."

"You can tell them I fell down. I always fall down, don't I, Andrea?" Joey searched his sister's face for confirmation.

"O.K.," she said. "But Father. Who will protect Joey from Father? Who will keep him from hitting Joey again?"

"I will," Jack said, bravely. "I'm getting bigger all the time. You just help Joey to remember to not ask about Mother."

"Why can't Mommy take us to her house?" Joey asked.

"She doesn't want us," Jack said, cruelly. "She left us with him and she knew what he'd do to us."

Joey was crying again. Andrea rocked him back and forth on the cot where they sat. "How about the story, little guy? My special one?" Joey stopped crying and nodded eagerly. Jack turned back to the window, shoulders slumped as if he were exhausted by his outburst. Stiffening his back, he resumed staring out the window.

"Close your eyes now, Joey. See it? It's up there, in the hills. Look at the trees. See those big oaks we sat under before? Feel the sun. It's so warm now. We are safe." Out of the corner of her eye, Andrea saw Jack edge closer to the cot. He sat down quietly, leaned against the wall and closed his eyes. "Are you there yet? Can you feel the clover under your feet?" Joey nodded. Andrea thought she saw Jack's head incline ever so slightly. The nurse's office slipped away.

White Shell Girl stood next to Little Brother. The other children were laughing, running and playing. Little Brother ran to join them.

"Come, Little One," the one who was her mother said. "We go now to gather what we need to make your basket."

"My first basket?" White Shell Girl was very excited. Today would be a turning point in her life. It was time to begin her initiation into the mysterious ways of the women. They walked along the creek gathering reeds, rushes and the long grasses needed for her basket.

White Shell Girl already had a picture in her head of what the basket would look like. She kept her eyes open, alert to those materials that were the colors she needed.

Under Mother's patient guidance, it would be a beautiful basket, perfect. White Shell Girl followed Mother's movements closely. Soon she was weaving the bottom of her basket. It was hard work and the result was less than pleasing to her. More often than not, her result was irregularly woven and looked sloppy, even to her unpracticed eye. Mother was very patient. She helped White Shell Girl rework the reeds and soon she began to weave tightly, evenly, beautifully. Mother stopped her. "It is enough," she said. "Go play now. I will call you when we eat."

White Shell Girl ran to where Little Brother was playing. To her surprise, Elder Brother was there, also. She was confused at first. He had been gone for so long. Then happiness flooded through her. He had found his way back to them at last.

Off in the distance there was thunder. White Shell Girl took Little Brother's hand and started back to Mother. Elder Brother followed behind them. If it was going to rain, they wanted to be safe and warm with her. The thunder was louder now. To White Shell Girl's dismay, she heard that it was voices. She heard a name called and was afraid. "Not now," she pleaded. "Let us stay a little longer. Please!"

"Andrea!" The nurse's voice was stern and loud. Andrea looked up and saw that two uniformed policemen were standing behind the nurse. "These men need to talk with you children. Please cooperate with them."

"The nurse, here, has some concern for you," one said, his voice soft and kind. "She thinks your father may be hurting you."

"What do you mean?" Jack asked. Andrea was surprised. She usually spoke up for the children. She had not expected Jack to take over, but she was glad.

"There are bruises on Joey. They could have been made with a belt. Where the bruises are, it is suspicious," the nurse told him. She indicated the backs of Joey's thighs.

"I fell," Joey said in a small voice. "I just fell down. I always fall down, don't I Andrea?" She nodded.

"It happened last night," Jack continued. "We were playing. I guess we were just a little too rough. We were just playing cowboys and Indians. That's all."

"Our father would never hurt us. Our mother left us and now he takes care of us. He loves us," Andrea said emphatically.

Further questions were met with stony silence. The kind policeman said, "We just want to help you. If your father is hurting you, any of you, it's better to tell. We won't let him hurt you anymore. But you have to tell us." The children said nothing. They were adamant in their defense of their father. The policemen told the nurse that there was nothing more they could do. "Keep us posted. If you see anything, anything at all, let us know." The nurse nodded and walked them to the door.

"I had to call your father from work," the nurse told the children. "We thought you would be going away with the policemen and he needed to be here to answer questions." The children looked at one another. Father would be very angry now. He hated to be called from work for any reason. He said that his boss was looking for a reason to fire him. Then they'd all be out on the streets. But there was nothing they could do now, but wait. When he arrived they filed silently out of the office and left with their father.

There was a terrible thunderstorm after they got home. Father, strangely quiet, had locked himself in his bedroom with a bottle of Scotch. When the lights went out, Andrea went from room to room and lit the emergency candles. She avoided Father's room completely. He didn't need light to drink. Then she returned to her brothers' room and there they waited, fearing what would happen, knowing they could not stop it.

"Maybe he'll pass out early this time," Jack said hopefully.

"I hope so," Andrea said in a low voice. Joey sat close to her. His face was white and pinched with fear. He was so frightened he had even forgotten about his thumb. He sat numbly next to Andrea, waiting.

There was a crash from the master bedroom. The children heard muffled words that seemed to be coming nearer. Jack and Andrea jumped up and began pushing furniture in front of the bedroom door. Satisfied, they sat back down on Jack's bed to wait. Then they eyed the barricade. Now there were doubts. Would it be enough? Father seemed possessed of super-human strength when he was in a drunken rage. The sound of their lurching father moved away from the bedroom to the front of the house. There was another loud crash and they heard incoherent shouts. Father tried to open the door to the boys' room. When it wouldn't move, he bellowed in rage and rammed against it over and over. The children moved away from the bed to the far wall of the room. Andrea smelled smoke and noticed the intensity of Father's shouts was increasing. She thought he called out, "Fire!" but she wasn't sure.

"The story," Jack begged. "Tell us the story." Joey nodded eagerly. They retreated to the corner farthest from the door and huddled down on the floor together.

"Close your eyes now," she began her voice shaking a little with fear. There were crackling noises in the distance. "See it? It's up there in the hills. See the trees? Remember the trees where Tupi got his rabbit?" Both boys nodded. The crackling, shouting and crashes began to fade. "Feel the sun, the clover under your feet. Are you there yet?" The boys nodded again. It was harder this time for Andrea. She was so much more afraid. There was something terrible happening and she was having trouble remembering the story. "We are The People," she started again. She couldn't go on.

"We have lived here since time began," Jack picked up the story. His voice was strong and sure. "They are not here. There is no place for Them in our world." Then, suddenly, Andrea was there. She was no longer afraid.

The children stood on a grassy hill. They were holding hands and smiling. The breeze lifted their long, dark hair away from their faces. They looked back and saw a house totally engulfed in flames. "Come, children," said the woman who was their mother. "Come now with me. I will not let anyone hurt you." The children looked at her and then back at the house. The image was dimmer, more distant. "It is time to eat now," Mother said as she encircled them protectively in her arms. "Don't look back." The children looked away from the house. "Elder Brother has provided well for our stewpot, children," she said with pride. "Come, let's eat." The children looked one more time at the house. The image faded and then was gone. White Shell Girl took Little Brother's hand and they raced Elder Brother home.

Perfect Family

Denise Parkin

The perfect family

we were told.

Our father worked

and made good money.

Our mother didn't, so she could

Stay Home With The Children.

Houses in good neighborhoods,

Yards to play in,

New clothes and oxfords every year,

The four of us decorations on my father's

Chest of manhood.

The perfect family.

Mother

Lay around in nightclothes,

Read romance novels all day while

Her daughters

cleaned the house, cooked the meals,

washed the clothes.

Father

Watched ball games, played golf,

Read the paper, never had time to take

His sons

fishing, hiking, camping.

The perfect family.

Father, mother, four children who grew into

Sad, frightened adults who wondered why

Being part of a perfect family

Hurt so damned much.

This dilemma

William Sharpe

It is hard
to live
more than
a day

and love
her,
not want
to control

her. It
comes when I
least
expect it,

slips out
of my mouth
like hands
and rings

her neck
like a leash
and collar.
She fights,

thank god,
she fights.

liberation #2

Monica Reller

the militant
black widow
spider
sees her husband
useless
beside her—
one of six suitors
all having wooed her
and won her
today.
routine mastication
follows copulation.
and yet she is proof
abundant
of gossamer
homespun.

Kathleen Belden

I want to peel away all the layers of adulthood
with you
I want to laugh and giggle, and
roll on the grass
blow with all my breath on a dandelion
to make a child's dream come true

Toes pointing to the sky
talk of the future
spread our arms flat against the earth
at peace with the world
our eyes part of the universe

Dreaming of the future
Drifting into the warmth of the sun
tickling you with a blade of grass
laughing about silly things

Children's dreams

Down to the core of who we were when we
thought we would meet
the person we would love the rest of our lives

Children's dreams

When any future was a possibility
We knew no limitations
not so many fears
No constraints

We carried unbridled hopes
and sacks of
Children's dreams

Are there no places for us to run
No fairyland where we could begin again
Lie on the grass and have
endlessly possible dreams

Children's dreams

House on Tracy

Janet M. Schmidt

Winter was long that year, roof leaking
horse buckets of rain poured
out to midnight while
he slept, face to the quiet
walls.

She walked
wheezy floors where
waterbugs scattered
in fright at the sound
her gown dripping
muddy, sullen tears.

Shell-game Man

Stuart Koster

"Wanna play the shell-game, man? I'm the best."

"Nah. I've got better things to do. I'm leaving."

"You just scared. I can see it in your eyes. You scared."

"I don't know how to play."

"Man, you can't lose at this. Shell-game—hey! Everybody knows how. First time's free!"

"Maybe I'll just watch and see how you do it."

"You know best, man."

The shells were just lying there. The hand picked up the shells and showed the quarter. The shell went back down and then all of the shells shuffled around. I knew it. It's the middle one. My hand pointed.

"Let's see where she at. You're just being bad. And you telling me you didn't know how to play. I'm going to do it again and see if I can get it right."

The shells began to move again. It was like they were running in little circles. He stopped.

"It's that one." I almost touched it.

His hand sat just above the shells. "You wanna play, you gotta pay. You know that. What you take me for?"

My hands paused. My hand went to my pocket and stole out a bill. I put it down. His finger moved it. My dollar lay next to his dollar next to the shells. My finger aimed at the middle shell again. The hand paused over that shell and moved to the shell on the right.

"No, no, the first one. That one."

He moved it back and rolled the shell over. Nothing. Nothing. Then he rolled over the shell on the right.

"There she is." He smiled and my dollar disappeared. "You wanna go again? Let's go again. Me, I'm gonna go again."

He turned the shells over and then they began to dance.

"Man, you really got 'em moving this time."

"C'mon, man. One outa two—nothing to it. You bound to score this time. You just bound to."

He stopped the shells.

"Check it out. All three there. She hidin' in there somewhere. I know you know where she at."

Another bill came out and there was my finger pointing at the middle one. He touched my shell and his hand moved to the left. He looked at me.

"No, no. Back there. That other one."

"You just can't help some people."

I wish I never saw that light-fingered, honey-talking lying shell-game man.

Sex

William Sharpe

Sex isn't what they said it was.
No soft focus, no violins.
More grunts and silly faces.
We were expecting more.

What we got was too real.
A real mess. Ever try
to put one of those on,
or take it off and look suave?

Worst of all, it's only love
when you mean what you say.
And that's not sex. No,
that's not sex at all.

Grace

Janet M. Schmidt

Straddling arms of the live oak
I ride behind Paul
galloping on the patient limb
ahead, jeans covered with dust
dry moss, bits of bay leaf fallen
pungent eucalyptus and slivers
of pine rising into Saturday.

How come you're always the hero?

I push the question hard
against the arched dignity
of the old tree, lose
balance and fall
to the ground, a crackling
carpet below. Paul swings down
to pull me up
his hands warm, dry with play
fragrant as the air.

God's Town

Julie Valin

"This is God's town!" she randomly yelled out. "Yep, God's town. That's what He told me . . ." Her audience was not so attentive, but she didn't care. She laughed, "I remember when He told me that this was His town." Her voice was softer as she remembered when He told her.

Her eyes were looking out the window, but not really seeing the passing street corners and littered sidewalks. The bus then became uncomfortably quiet except for the rumbling of the motor and the knocking of the wheels. The brakes squeaked when the bus came to a stop. Two or three people got up out of their seats a little too fast. She smiled at them as she watched their backs. "God bless," she said out loud. They got off the bus. She sat there in her seat with the same pleasant smile on her face, looking out the window.

She liked riding the bus. She liked riding on the bus and watching the people get on and off the bus. She liked people. She liked looking out the window at the people walking down the streets. She loved this town. This was her town, where she was born and raised.

"Yep, I love this town," she began again. The people on the bus started shifting in their seats and sighing.

"Look at it!" she shouted, her eyes gleaming. "It's beautiful!"

The boy in front of her became irritated. He turned around and looked at her, his eyes glaring, but she didn't notice. He turned to his friend, "Godammed ol' lady. Won't ever shut up about it. Something's missing." He tapped at his head, explaining, "Something's really godammed missing, godammed ol' lady." His friend sat there, looking down at the floor.

"God's town! He told me that it was, you know. I believe Him. I talked to Him once and He said . . ."

"Lady!" The boy leaned over the seat, "Only you can understand what the hell you're talkin' about, so why don't you just give it a rest, huh?"

He didn't turn back around in his seat. He watched her watching the gray streets go by. He saw how her eyes were glassy and how her lips were shaky, but still formed in a faint smile. He looked in the direction she was looking, out the window. He tried to understand where the admiration in her eyes was coming from.

"This is my town . . . and God's," she said almost under her breath. She never looked at the boy, who she knew still remained looking at her.

His friend tapped him. "Telegraph's coming up soon." The boy turned back around.

"She must be about 70," he said to his friend.

"So."

The old lady was talking about donuts and coffee and about how God didn't like cream or sugar in His. She remembered how that was, when they sat in a café talking once, when He told her that this was her town, too, if she wanted it to be. She was talking about how pleasant a guy He was, but that He had a horrible habit of playing with His mustache

The talking on the bus was little, if any. People spoke in low tones to each other. Some read newspapers or books. They figured they'd just let the old lady talk. Some didn't even notice her sitting alone toward the back of the bus, talking and looking out the window. Most did notice, though. They saw her there in the seat with two brown Safeway bags filled with clothes and Tupperware. They noticed how her socks didn't match, and how her yellow plaid pants didn't go with her pink silky shirt. Her shoes had holes in them. Yeah, they noticed all right. But they thought it would be best not to stare at her, because one never knows how an old lady like that would take to people starin' at her. They didn't want to cause a scene or anything. So they would just look out the window and pretend that there was no such thing as a weird old lady on the bus. They thought this would be the best thing to do under the circumstances.

"...and then He leaned over the table," she continued, "and said, 'you know Ev, the bottom line is that I just want you to be happy. Make this town work to your advantage. You'll be rewarded someday. Just be happy...'" The old lady laughed as she recalled it. "And I am," she said assuredly. "I'm happy in my town. It is my town because I need it to be and I'm happy in it."

The boy overheard her because he was silent the whole time, listening to her behind him. He suddenly turned around. "Where do you live?" he demanded outraged. He wasn't going to stand for her ignoring him like she did before. His lips were tight, waiting.

She looked away from the window slowly. She looked into his eyes for the first time. "I live here, in my town, in my wonderful town." She lifted her hand with her palm up, showing the boy her town out the window.

"Where? What street? What house?"

"Any street, all streets, it doesn't matter. It's all my town."

The boy wasn't satisfied with her indirect answers.

"This is not a wonderful town, ol' lady, and it ain't your town either. I mean, look at it! Are ya blind or something? This is a shitty place and I bet you don't even have a home. I bet you live in alleys and dig through fast food bins for food. I've seen 'em doin' it, people like you. I bet you do it. I bet you're just like 'em. I see 'em everyday doin' it. I just bet."

His friend tapped him again, but he stayed turned around looking at her. She wasn't looking out the window anymore. She was looking down at her hands crossed in her lap. Her lips were quivering with only a trace of that same faint smile. Her eyes were focused on her hands; intent, as if they were searching for sentences on them that would explain things better to the boy. The boy saw this and so remained there, waiting.

"To survive," the old lady began, "I've had to make this town mine, because God told me I had to. He said that this was His town too, and that sometimes He could come visit me, but that He lives in a much better town far away. He wasn't bragging or anything, He was just telling me how things are. He owns them all, I guess."

The boy sighed deeply and looked out the window. The old lady kept on, "... and besides, this town ain't done nothin' to me yet. It knows it's my town and it's darn good to me. It's a beautiful town and I lloooove it."

She never looked up from her hands. She began to hum "God Bless America," and the boy shook his head and turned back around in his seat. "Screw you ol' lady. Won't listen to a goddamned word I say."

His friend was looking ahead to their stop. He and his friend soon began to notice people on the bus turning and looking at the old lady. Then everybody was turned around looking at her. The boy noticed this and immediately turned around too. The old lady's head was leaning against the window of the bus and only the whites of her eyes were showing. Her hands were clutched at her chest and she was making choking noises. Everybody stayed in their seats watching.

"Somebody help her!" a lady with big-rimmed glasses shrieked.

Everything became frantic. The bus slammed on its brakes, and about four people got up out of their seats and crowded around the old lady. The boy couldn't see what was happening, or maybe he just

couldn't remember. All he could remember, though, was that she kept mumbling, "He said I could come now . . . to visit . . . His town . . . He said . . . I could . . . it's a better town . . . a bet . . . ter town . . ."

Over and over she kept mumbling. Then the paramedics came onto the bus and put a blanket over her body and carried her off the bus. This was after she stopped mumbling. This was all the boy could remember about it.

The bus was uncomfortably quiet as it started off again. The boy's stop was just ahead a couple of blocks. His friend was rubbing his hands together as he looked ahead at the road.

As the boy and his friend got off the bus, the boy repeated the words "screwy ol' lady" out loud and then said to his friend, "Did you see how her eyes were all rolling back and stuff? Man! That was wicked!"

His friend kicked an empty beer bottle as hard as he could, aiming it at a dumpster and watching it crash into many pieces as it hit. "I'm hungry, let's go to Burger king," he said with his head up and his eyes looking ahead down the alley. He noticed how ugly the alley was. he shoved his hands in his pockets with his eyes still looking on down the alley. He decided he hated the alley.

Dip-Shit

Laura Lukes

"Don't worry honey. I can do it myself." I waved my hand, palm facing out, through the air between us. John shrugged and I trotted out to rescue a three-day-old calf: another victim of this winter's dip.

Dip is a nasty mixture of cow manure, cow piss, and freezing mud. Freezing, not frozen. That slight tense distinction marks the difference between walking on top of it and being buried beneath it. In its liquid state, dip can kill. Newborn calves following their mothers get stuck in it—the four spindly legs sink deep into the icy slime while their soft bellies ride the surface. Once stuck, their spastic kicking burns precious calories while the cold dip consumes their body heat.

On this ranch, dip rescues were routine. One squatted next to a trembling calf, gathered both pairs of legs between the arms, heaved one's self up, and carried the exhausted animal to a dry spot. I had made a couple of dip rescues already this winter, so I dashed out with confidence to help this latest casualty.

Ten feet from the bawling baby, I knew I was in trouble. With each step I sank deeper into the dip. The freezing slime rose above my knee-high rubber irrigation boots and seeped through my mechanics coveralls into my thermals. It took enormous effort to make sure that my boots came back out of the mud with my legs and feet.

Bye the time I reached the calf, I was coated inside my thermals with the sweat of over-exertion and savage frustration. I stood over the trapped animal, my thigh muscles quivering, willing my heart to beat slowly. I took a deep breath, then I squatted. I gathered. When I rose, I was standing crotch-deep in the stinking sludge. Now we were both stuck.

How was I going to get us out of this? With the extra weight of the animal in my arms, I couldn't move my legs through the mire. Suddenly, I had it. I threw the 35-lb. calf out in front of me, where he stuck fast in the dip maybe two feet away. I slogged through those two feet, gathered, rose, and threw again. During this second round, I both lost a boot and pitched headlong into the slime between me and the calf. I wiped tears and dip from my face for the third try. It was on the fourth, as I lost my other boot, that I looked back. The calf and I had gained about six feet.

How much had John seen before he came out to finish the job? "Aren't you supposed to wait tables for Eric tonight?" he asked, taking the burden from me. I watched him sort of skim over the top of the dip with the calf in his arms before I trudged back to the house to shower and change. I was angry. I was frustrated. I was exhausted. I was literally dipped in shit. And I was going to be late for work.

Reflection

Emily West

Angela is alone again,
red lips reflected
in a store window.
in the parking lot
behind her,
those boys with the nicotine mouths,
quick and mean.
Their shoulders a circle
in the darkness
and then a girl's laugh
like a wild bird
rises up, hovers in the air.

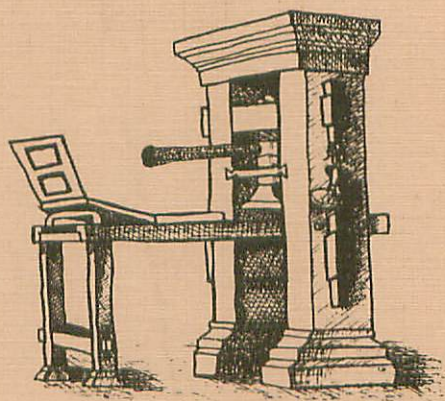
Angela is alone again,
this time in thick September,
one eye eggplant purple.
When she talks,
her hands flutter
in front of her face,
the bruise flashing
between her fingers.
At night
she darts from doorways,
her body as light as paper,
her heart full of water.

Contributors' Notes

Taciana da Aguiar graduated in Journalism from San Diego State. A freelance researcher, writer and editor, she plans to attend CSUC for an M.A. in Psychology. **Kathleen Belden** is a 1988 graduate of CSUC in Instructional Technology. She is currently working as an instructional designer with Arthur Anderson and Co. in St. Charles, Illinois. **Nancy Boyles** lives and plays music in Chico. **Rose Calvano** is a writer who has been previously published in *Watershed*. **Roxanne R. English** likes writing that is "raw, born of feeling." "The birthplace of my pieces comes from an endless place within myself. I don't profess to always understand this source, but I do tap into it quite often." **Jim Hochtritt** used to write poetry but doesn't anymore. His favorite authors are John Steinbeck, John Berryman, Adrienne Rich, and Leon Stokesbury. **Will House** likes clean granite, smooth bourbon, spirited horses, and women. He wants to make the most out of life, whether it be "holding on to a crazed bronc, the edge of a cliff, or a glass of Wild Turkey..." **Cinnamon Kern** is a third year English major, and this is her first semester at Chico. She transferred from Shasta College in Redding, where she lives with her husband and her 70-pound German shepherd puppy. **Stuart Koster** is a graduate student in the English Department. His interests include contemporary critical theory, writing theory, and, not coincidentally, games of chance. **Geri Mahood** teaches composition part-time at CSUC and wonders how long the "civilized world will be able to ignore the wisdom of native peoples." ("P.S. I submitted this poem to 3 or 4 different issues of *Watershed* before it was selected. Don't give up!") **Laura Lukes** states, "The short amount of time I spent on 'The Ranch,' where this episode takes place, has given me a lifetime's worth of experiences to write about." **Julie Mason** enjoys writing, photography, travel, and music. A senior Journalism major, she has just come to CSUC after living in Southeast Missouri for five years—still in culture shock, but very glad to be back in California. **Suzanne Lucas Meyer** writes to live and lives to write. "These writings are pieces of my experience as a woman, a lesbian, a feminist, and a poet living and growing up in Northern California." **Shawna Quinn Murphy** is a twenty-one-year-old English major with a minor in Theater Art. This is her third year at Chico State. **Eric Nilsson** is a student at Chico State. He and his wife, Julie, are expecting their first baby sometime around Thanksgiving. **M.E. Parker** is currently in the Nursing Program at Chico State, having relocated from a small village in Alaska. Writing is something she had

plenty of time for in the quiet of Alaska, but finds is a luxury in busy Chico. **Denise Parkin** is a senior English major at CSUC. She is a single parent to Eric, 14, and Shellie, 8. She writes stories with her daughter, and reads Native American history and anything else she can get her hands on. **Scott Walker Paulin** grew up in rural Mendocino county, California. He spent a childhood around dusty, red dirt, tractors, blue skies, and the smell of fresh-cut hay. After some running around he landed in Chico, where he's studying to be a dreamer. **Monica Reller** has a B.A. in Liberal Arts and teaches music, foreign languages, foot reflexology, and vision training. **Andrea Ross** has lived in Chico for seventeen years and finds that some of her most visceral poetry comes from her experiences there. **Janet M. Schmidt** is an English major. She has been taking classes at CSUC for two and one half years, and plans to graduate next spring. She then hopes to move on toward an MFA in Creative Writing. **Jean Schlais** spent her "first five happy years playing nude in irrigation ditches." Several years later, she is an English major at CSUC. The town in her story, "Spirit," truly does exist. **Ernst Shoen-Rene** teaches in the English Department, writes music reviews for the *News and Review*, and occasional children's musical plays. **William Sharpe** is a Liberal Studies major working on an English minor, but used to be a Fine Arts major working himself into a frenzy. "I love it all. The more I try, the more I see that I'm only just beginning to change." **Calhoun Smith** is currently a junior at Chico State majoring in Art and Illustration, and would one day like to write a movie script that would star Jimmy Swaggart as a reluctant messiah. **Nancy Talley** says that she is an "aging broad, wife, mother, child, homemaker, counselor, and poet." She has written for years, and has recently acquired the courage to submit her work for publication. **Julie Valin** is a sophomore English major at CSUC and has been writing creatively since 1982. The story published here is her first short story. **Calie Jo Varnell** is in her fourth year at Chico State and says that she is "finally an English student." She would like someday to teach college students, but for now she wants to read and write as much as possible. **Emily West** is an English major from Santa Cruz. She has six nieces and one nephew, all of whom she is very proud of. **John W. Young** poses as a poet, and also presumes to be an actor, artist, musician, philosopher, music critic, and the worst swordman not-in-France. He likes mythology and archetypes, and lists among his influences: Ovid, Shakespeare, Blake, Eliot, Baudelaire, and other French Symbolists (some of whom are Latin American).

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