



**WATERSHED**

# **WATERSHED**

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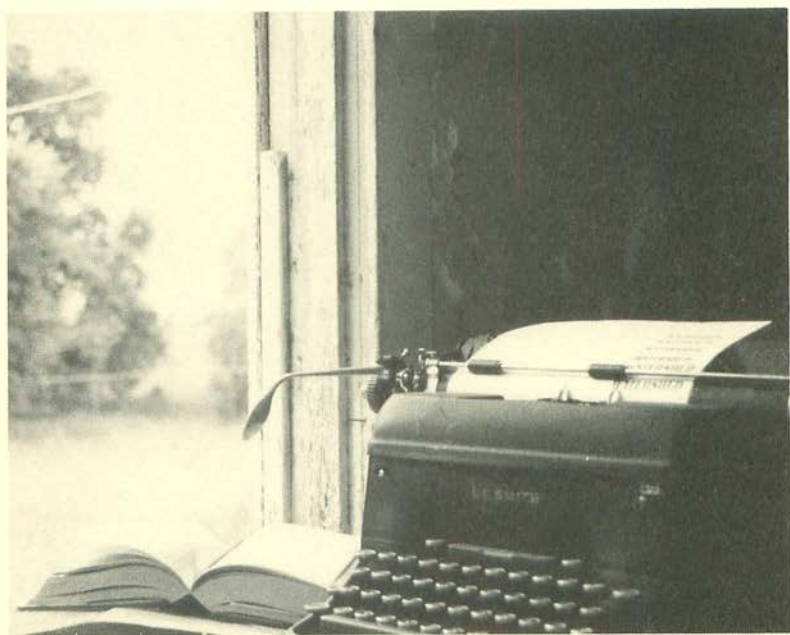
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*Karen Joplin*

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## **Pantoum with Bats**

The dry sandstone cavern  
above the field of poppies:  
home of the velvet winged bats,  
they flit, invisible in the purple night.

Above the field of poppies  
in darkness dripping with orange stars,  
they flit invisible in the purple night.  
Wing beats pulse, or is it your own heart throbbing?

In darkness dripping with orange stars,  
enter the cavern, breath held.  
Wing beats pulse, or is it your own heart throbbing,  
as furtive fingers feel the way?

Enter the cavern breath held.  
Find its fullest depth,  
with furtive fingers feel the way,  
then strike the torch, reveal the gallery:

Ancient paintings of beast and bird,  
home of the velvet winged bats,  
hand prints the size of your own, on the walls of  
the dry sandstone cavern.

*Mark H. Clarke*

She takes a few deep breaths and settles on the floor  
To stretch her tightened body.  
Not unhappy,  
Yet not the slightest smile to prove this.  
Unmotivated.  
It must be Sunday.  
She's noticed this pattern.  
Not quite here,  
Yet not quite there.  
This is how she feels.  
She slowly rolls her head to the beat of the song  
She recognizes so clearly.  
Memories emerge during this slow, perpetual motion.  
Where is she now?  
Driving through the desert,  
Just about dusk.  
Heat and sweat thicken her brow.  
Windows are down,  
To blow the beads of sweat from her dampened face.  
Her hair is loosely tied at the low of her neck,  
And the warm wind whips tiny wisps upon her cheeks.  
She loves this song.  
She loves the desert.  
She puffs on a cigarette,  
And lets the smoke dance with her thoughts.  
Driving.  
No place in particular.  
Driving.  
It's Sunday.

*Sydney Rogers*



## Split Custody

Your eyes flaunt themselves,  
your posters wink,  
your Legos build themselves  
into startling contraptions.  
Your bear growls, your dog barks,  
even though their glass eyes  
continue to stare.  
Your quilt wriggles and wrinkles  
wanting you beneath it.  
Your games throw dice around  
all day and all night,  
bored to tears  
without you.  
Your room misses you,  
and calls for you,  
while you're gone.

Fifty percent of the time  
is not nearly enough.

*Shannon Rooney*

## Snow Drift

I am ready, now,  
for you to step softly  
through the snow drift  
of my spirit.  
I am ready, now,  
for the trail of paw prints  
you'll leave  
across my soul.

I have resisted  
for so long,  
afraid of demons  
that don't even lurk  
in this forest.  
Ours is an ancient  
stand of trees  
where we've never been  
before.

So enter, now, into the gentle darkness  
of tall pines, fragrant cedars,  
and step, step softly,  
sink down  
into my readiness,  
leave your paw prints here,  
here in this drift  
of snow.

*Shannon Rooney*

## Bad Dog

*Shame is born of betrayal. It matters little whether one is victim or perpetrator, for shame adheres in the event itself, and all who participate are tainted by its presence.*

I am eight years old, my brother Rowland, ten. We follow our father up the steep, wooden stairs to the second story bedroom. He does not talk. Our steps echo in the hollow of the stairway enclosure. Father holds the lath stick by its end. It's stiff and splintery, and it hangs from Father's hand almost to the floor. I am sick with dread. I am swallowing the words that would beg Father, once more, not to do this.

In the upstairs bedroom, Father shuts the door behind us. A ceiling light hangs from a cord. It lights the surface of the bed, leaving the corners of the room in shadows. Father stands by the bed. He turns to face us. Rowland and I stand together, backed up against the door. We do not move. Outside in the hall, Laddie our farm dog scratches at the bedroom door. Father looks sad and serious as if he wishes we didn't have to do this. He points toward us with the lath stick, and I hear him ask, "Which of you goes first?"

Rowland goes to the bed. He wants to get it over with. It's worse to go last, but I can never bring myself to go first. Rowland unbuttons his jeans and pulls them down to his knees. He does this without being told. He knows he has to pull his jeans and underwear down, then lay himself, naked, face down on the bed. He pulls his underwear down at the very last because he doesn't like to show himself and waits for the first blow. I look away. My body shivers as though it were cold. I hear Laddie snuffling and scratching at the door, and then I hear the crack of the lath stick. Rowland doesn't cry out. He holds his breath. He has told me this is the way to do it.

I hear the lath again, and then again. Still Rowland doesn't cry out. Laddie scratches at the door. I don't know why we are being whipped. Rowland teased me and punched me behind the barn, and I called him bad names. Did Mother hear us? I had some bad thoughts. Did Mother know this? Mother was angry, and then she was sick and lay on her bed with a wet cloth over her eyes and told us that we would be whipped when Father got home. I got scared and tried to talk to her and make it okay again, but the cloth was over her eyes and she wouldn't talk to me.

Rowland's whipping is done. I pull my shirt up and tuck the end of it under my chin to keep it from falling. I pull my pants and underwear down. My penis feels rubbery where I try to hide it under my hands, and Rowland is watching me. I'm holding my breath. The first blow comes. It hurts more than I can stand. My hands are stretching back to cover my buttocks, and I hear myself whimpering, "Please, Father. Please."

"If you do that, you'll only make it worse," my father warns.

When it's over, Father goes out. Rowland is in the dark near the wall. I'm under the ceiling light. Rowland can see me wiping at my runny nose with my shirt, but he looks away. We have something wrong with us. We both have it. We do not like to look at one another. It makes us too sorry.

In a moment or two, Rowland goes out. The door shuts behind him, and I hear him going down the stairs.

Later, when I go out, Laddie is waiting. He's glad to see me and wags his tail, pushing himself against me. "Go away, Laddie," I say. Later, in the dark of a sleepless night, I slip from my bed and open the door onto the hall where Laddie waits and, clutching him to me, I tell him how sorry I am.

*Shame is felt as a failure of love. Its peculiar anguish lies in this perception.*

I am eleven years old. Laddie has done something bad, and Father has seen him do it. I don't know what is going to happen. Rowland says that Laddie killed a turkey. When the neighbor's dog killed a turkey, Father shot it. I saw him do it. The neighbor's dog whined and went round and round in circles until it fell down. Blood came out of its nose when it breathed, and pretty soon it died.

In the barn, Father has a rope around Laddie's neck. When Laddie tries to pull away, Father jerks the rope. It chokes Laddie and makes him cough. Laddie's fur is tangled and dirty as if he's been dragged on the ground. A young turkey, about the size of a chicken, is dead on the barn floor. It's torn and bloody, and its feathers are wet. "Oh Laddie," I cry out, "what have you done?" I squat and put out my hand. Laddie wags his tail and starts toward me. Father jerks him away with the rope. "Don't be good to him, Linley," Father says. "He's tasted blood. It's not likely he'll ever quit."



"He doesn't know, Father." I try to keep from crying, but I can feel my face screwing up and my voice going high. "Please, Father, please."

Father hands me the rope that's tied to Laddie's neck. "If he kills again, he goes. Do now exactly what I say."

Laddie is tied by the rope to a post in the barn. I have gathered the baling wire, wire cutters, and the roofing tar that Father told me to get. I have to wire the turkey around Laddie's neck and paint it with tar so Laddie can't chew it off. He has to carry it until it rots away. Father says we have to do this because we only have one chance. I'm not supposed to be good to Laddie. He must learn not to kill.

The dead turkey is covered with flies. Tiny yellow eggs are already stuck to the places where the blood has dried. I take a stick and dab tar on the turkey until its feathers are all plastered down, the torn places are filled, and its eyes are stuck shut. I punch the baling wire through its body and around both legs.

I take the rope off Laddie. He's glad and wags his tail and tries to lick my face. "Bad dog," I tell him. "Bad dog." I tie the turkey around his neck. The tar sticks to his fur. "Bad dog," I repeat.

After three days, Mother won't let Laddie near the house anymore. We are told to keep the yard gates shut. "It's intolerable," she tells Father. "I can smell him even here in the house."

I am watching Father. He doesn't look up, and he doesn't say anything.

"It's not just the smell, you know," she says. "I can't bear the thought of it."

"That doesn't help any," is all Father says.

At the end of a week, Laddie quits coming for the food I've been carrying out to him. I find him where he has crawled back into a space under the floor of the storage shed. I call to him, but he won't come. I push the food under to him. I bring a basin of water and push it under too. I do this for two more weeks. Sometimes a little of the food is eaten and some water taken, but often both are untouched.

Once during this time, I see from a distance that he has come out from under the shed. The turkey sags from his neck and drags on the ground when he walks. Even from far away, I can see that the turkey is slimy and bloated from rot. "Laddie," I call. I run to him, but before I can get to him, he crawls back under

the storage shed. I see him there in the darkness. "Laddie, I'm sorry." I try to crawl in, but it's too tight. I can't reach him. The smell of him gags me. "Laddie," I say again.

And then one day, he's out. I find him in the barnyard, the baling wire still wound around his neck where the turkey has rotted off. I remove the wire, but he doesn't wag his tail or try to lick me. He doesn't do anything at all. I take him to the washroom and fill the washtub with warm water. I lift him into the tub and wash him with soap. I scrub him and rinse him and draw more water and wash him again. I dry him with a towel and brush him. I keep telling him that it's okay now, that it's all over. I let him out on the lawn by the house where the sun shines through the elm tree and go back to clean up the washroom.

When I come for him, he is gone. I find him under the storage shed.

*Shame bears within it the source of its own healing, for it grieves the loss of love. Shame is the grief whose tears flow from the eyes of compassion.*

I am sixty years old. Father is ninety-three, and he is in the hospital with pneumonia. It is not at all certain that he will survive this illness. My brother, Rowland, and I take turns watching him through the night. Rowland has gone to get rest. It is nearly two in the morning. Father is fitful. He's suffering from diarrhea, and it awakens him frequently in such a state of urgency that I do not dare to doze off myself. Father is embarrassed to use a bedpan, and he is too weak to reach the toilet by himself. He needs me to get him there in time.

I watch him there on the hospital bed where he labors in his sleep to breathe, his thin chest struggling with the effort. Father is much softened with age, with grandchildren, and with great grandchildren whose innocent love has reached beyond his fears. It has coaxed him out of his darkness.

A quarter past three. Father calls to me. "Linley, I need to go." He is trying to sit up and get his feet to the floor even before I can get to him. I help him up. He has so little strength, yet he uses every bit he has to walk himself to the bathroom. I support him and we walk around the foot of the bed and through the bathroom door before I realize we are too late. His hospital gown is open in the back. Diarrhea is running down his legs



and onto the linoleum where he tracks it with his bare feet.

He looks at me with the most urgent appeal. He is humiliated by what he has done, and his eyes ask of me that it might never have happened. I back him up to the toilet and sit him down. A neon ceiling light glares down on us. In the hallway beyond these walls I can hear the voices of the night nurses on their rounds. I close the bathroom door. When the latch clicks shut on the two of us, the sound of it sends a shiver through me and I wait, once again, for the crack of the lath stick. This old man, sitting soiled in his own filth, disgusts me. I cannot move myself to help him. The sight of him blurs beyond the sudden tears that sting my eyes, and Laddie whines somewhere in the dark. And from that darkness there rises in me an unutterable tenderness.

"It's okay, Father," I tell him. "It's okay." I find clean towels, a washcloth, and soap. I run water in the basin until it is warm. I take off his soiled hospital gown, mop the floor under his feet with it, and discard it in a plastic bag I find beneath the sink. I wash Father with soap and warm water. I wash him carefully, removing all the diarrhea from around his anus, from the hair on his testicles, down the inside of his legs, and between his toes. I wash him as though I were washing my own flesh, until all the awful, rotten things are cleansed away.

I have written of these things out of gratitude. I have come to know that pain summons its own healer. If shame is all you have, embrace it, honor it, and care for it with all your attention and kindness. In your own grief you will find the power to convert shame to compassion.

*Lin Jensen*

## I

## Clouds

Cumulus dancer,  
you pound your heels  
into the summits of the mountains,  
the wind  
is your solemn flute  
the lightning stinging the ground  
decorates your ankles.

## II

## Shadows

They walk  
across the land,  
patches of darkness  
bump into each other,  
some dragging the rain  
like a veil  
behind them.

*Bonnie Cox*

## **The Sculptor II: A Narrative in Four Parts**

—for F.H.

I  
Southern sculptor,  
I knew you for twenty-four hours  
in Iowa City in 1981.  
You told the woman gathering  
voter signatures that  
I was your wife.  
(Strange in Iowa City,  
because you were black  
and I was not.)  
You told me  
about the catfish  
you liked to catch,  
about your studio  
where you slept,  
about your son  
who reminded you  
of a beautiful flower.  
You told me  
about your wife  
who had tried  
to poison you,  
about the last time  
you awoke to the embrace  
of your father,  
and more and more and more.

You said very little  
about your work.  
That did not come  
until later, and later  
you entered my room,  
plucked one hair  
from your beard,  
and placed it on my pillow.  
I said my heart  
belonged to someone else  
and you left.

I felt as if  
I had known you forever.  
The next morning  
you were gone.  
I did not see you again.  
A few days later  
you sent a letter.

I wrote a poem,  
"The Sculptor,"  
and sent it to you.  
Several weeks after  
I had returned  
to California, a giant box  
appeared on my doorstep.  
In it was the poem  
which you had printed  
in beautiful calligraphy.  
Buried deeper  
in the white air balls  
were the hands—  
a sculpture  
on two small cement blocks—  
mahogany-colored, graceful,  
exquisite hands.  
You had overwhelmed me.

## II

Later, you sent pictures.  
Well-known in the South,  
you often made enormous  
bronze castings.  
There were projects  
in New Orleans and throughout  
your hometown of Baton Rouge.  
I liked your wood pieces the best.  
I had never seen sleek, smooth wood  
turned into such unusually shaped forms.  
You had a show in Chicago.  
You sent me the program  
you said you had placed  
on the seat you had  
saved for me.

I sent cards,  
a few pictures, letters.  
You sent clippings,  
articles, hasty notes  
about your depression  
and your compulsion to work.  
I found out later  
that you were commissioned  
to sculpt a bronze figure  
of St. Martin de Porres  
to present to Pope John Paul II  
when he visited New Orleans.  
You had worked day  
and night to finish it.

III

Several years passed,  
and I had not heard from you.  
I sent an occasional card,  
but there had been no answer.  
I sent one more note.  
A week later  
a pink envelope arrived  
with a Baton Rouge address.  
The one line letter  
from your daughter was simple:  
"My father died in January of 1988."  
I remember my face flushing  
as the blood drained out of my body.  
I remember sitting down,  
disbelieving,  
and thinking immediately  
that you had killed yourself.

But no, that  
would have been too simple.  
Your death was much  
more horrible than that.  
*The Baton Rouge State Times* told the story.  
You had been sleeping  
on the couch at 3:30 a.m.  
in the family den

near your studio.  
Your 21 year old son,  
your namesake, shot  
you twice in the head  
and killed you  
while you slept.  
"It appears the shooting  
was the result of some  
problem between father and son."  
The paper said  
that your last work  
had been a sculpture  
in white alabaster  
called "The Prodigal Son"...

## IV

Frank, only twenty-four hours  
in Iowa City, and yet a lifetime.  
When I oil and clean  
the sculpture you sent me,  
I imagine your hands  
making my hands  
as I touch the fine  
grain of wood and trace  
the curve of those  
delicate cupped fingers.  
Know that on the pieces  
of wood I search out for you,  
that I am looking  
for an indentation, perhaps  
the slope of a limb,  
a shade or blend of colors,  
the best direction  
of the grain,  
smoothness—a place  
where you might  
begin again.



## Women Who Sleep in the Afternoon

In the womb of the day they tire,  
 sleeping instead of peeling, sewing, watching T.V.  
 Let their children cry for milk,  
 their lovers' hands fold into the envelopes of another.  
 They care only for sheets  
 like cool palms on their faces and back of their necks  
 and beds without the worn-out-from-work bodies of companions.  
 They are children alone for the first time in water.  
 Balls of their ankles like stones anchoring them in place,  
 they wake to the curtains stiff as the skirts of grandmothers  
 standing above them, lampshades dusty as back steps,  
 and corners that box them like jewels in their beds.  
 Rising, they welcome evening:  
 children's hands glowing like stars,  
 lovers' teeth that peek from red lips like square eyes.  
 Women who sleep in the afternoon  
 trace the outlines of their dreams on dinner tables,  
 the curve of their children's backs,  
 pillows that the hips of their lovers settle into.

*Heather Brittain Bergstrom*

## On Our Seventh Anniversary

Go back to August, the patio lounge chairs, my arm  
like a thick stem in yours. Go back to when you were twenty,  
before whiskey slowed the stories about your brothers  
dragging the heavy bodies of deer through soil darkened  
by the shade of old trees.

Go back, your eastern mouth still marinated in wild blackberry,  
to the years in California. The sun, how we couldn't  
get enough,  
as if somehow we knew we'd spend the next four in Seattle  
unable to dry.

Go back to the small airman's house, the tile floors.  
Your body, even in uniform, smelled of maple.  
And the gray of your eyes like the Atlantic you should  
have stayed beside.

Go back to the geraniums we planted in pots because  
we had no garden.

There, beside them, in your hand, the glass cup, the warm air  
making your palm slippery. Now watch your fingers  
how one by one, like small children, they pass over the rim.

*Heather Brittain Bergstrom*

## Forget-Me-Not: A True Story

The thick, mouthwatering scent of beef broth and the sting of the smoke from the stove of oak branches mixed to close a long day of rafting down the Sacramento River. I squatted at Grandpa's side and stirred the bubbling stew in the big black pot. I was his little helper that week, a scrawny eight-year-old sidekick, along on one of the camps for boys Grandpa led that summer. He'd secretly brag to me that they came as boys and left as men, and I still believe it was true. He'd load a dozen boys from well-to-do neighborhoods into an old brown van, all of them complaining of their radios (which Grandpa had confiscated, calling them "distractions of modern society"), their accommodations (Grandpa's musty old tents), and the food (all prepared by Grandpa and me). By the end of the week they were tan and healthy, laughing about riverboat races and seeing who could pitch a tent the fastest.

It was Grandpa's gift, I think. He lived the first twelve years of his life in a one-room concrete house in the hills of Hollywood. He later joined the Navy, and then became the champion lightweight boxer in the United States vs. Canada match in 1942. He lived his family life as a carpenter, and when he retired he ran this camp for boys. He never asked for anything, and nothing was ever given to him but a blessing. He showed me and the boys this new way to live.

That evening Grandpa and I were making Forget-Me-Not Stew, one of his ingenious inventions, named appropriately because it consisted of all the foods the boys had failed to eat earlier in the week: bacon from breakfast, carrot and celery sticks from lunch, hamburger bits from the day before, tomatoes from untouched sandwich toppings. We stirred those (and many other unmentionable items) all together and boiled them in beef broth over an open flame. To everyone's surprise, including our own, it was delicious.

The boys all played at the water's edge, some skipping rocks, some trying to light a fire by rubbing two sticks together as they had seen Grandpa do. He sat next to me, humming and whittling a bit of leftover wood into a small, ridged doll. I squatted next to the pot, my blonde, tangled, unwashed hair scattered about my wonderfully dirty face, my older sister's cut-off Wranglers held up by Grandpa's belt wrapped twice around



me to keep them from dropping, and one of the boys' old tee shirts I had found at the bottom of a boat that read "I Believe in Music" covered my sunburned little body.

The sun was low in the sky, clouds of mosquitos hovered around the bushes planning their attack. The water was low, and the river was so shallow in one area that we had to pick up the boats and carry them a quarter-mile downstream until we came to a good camping spot. Just behind us was an enormous steel bridge, looking very out of place among the eucalyptus trees and endless river. Once every half-hour or so a rusty Ford would lumber over the bridge, heading to the small town I imagined to be a few miles down the road.

Grandpa came over, took the ladle from me, and said to start rounding up the boys for supper. As I stood and stretched, I looked up at the bridge. There was a man climbing out over the side rail, leaning out to watch the water flow over the stones fifty feet below him. He was an older man, wearing a disheveled gray suit and looking as if he had been walking aimlessly for days.

"Grandpa, look!" I pointed up to the man. Grandpa quietly set down the ladle.

The man saw us staring up at him and began to shake his head furiously side to side until his face was a blur. After a few seconds he shouted down to us, his voice echoing along the entire stretch of river bank. "NOBODY LOVES ME!" he sobbed.

The boys were silent, looking back and forth from Grandpa to the man. As for me, I couldn't take my eyes off my grandfather. There was a soft clink as one of the boys dropped his flat stone onto the rocky bed he stood on. Grandfather, looking straight into the eyes of the man, stood up slowly and deliberately as if the man was a deer that he didn't want to frighten away. When he was fully erect, I noticed his eyes were shining and his face was glowing. His voice was commanding, strong, and honest when he called up to the man, "I love you!"

The man was silent, but after a moment we could hear him choking back the sorrow that poured from his lungs. I wondered if Grandpa knew this man. How else could he love him unless.... My thoughts were interrupted when the man cried out again, "NO ONE CARES ABOUT ME!"

"I care about you!" Grandpa told him.

Before the sun had set the man came down. Grandpa walked down to the foot of the bridge and met him there. I saw them

shake hands and heard Grandpa's firm voice say, "Vic Jansen," in formal introduction. I realized he hadn't ever met this man before, but he had saved his life. I had only begun to understand the enormity of the situation.

The two of them sat and talked there under the bridge for a while, and I served up the stew to the boys. After they had gotten their portions and were busy eating, I carefully filled two bowls to their very tops and walked cautiously down the bank to Grandpa. The men were sitting in silence, but there was no longer any desperation on the man's face.

"Here is some stew." I curtsied to the man, being as proper as I could. "My grandpa invented it himself," I bragged. The man thanked me kindly, and Grandpa smiled up at me. "Be a good girl and watch over the boys while I take Mr. Mann back to his house." Then he winked, and I knew he was proud of me. I blinked back, and he knew I was proud of him.

They were gone for over an hour while the rest of us sat dazed around the fire. Occasionally one of the boys would look up at the bridge for a moment, then stare back into the fire. Once I saw a tear running down his nose. When Grandpa finally came back, he sent us to our tents without a word.

Since Grandpa and I shared a tent, I knew he didn't go to sleep for hours after that. I heard him outside, pacing along the bank. I think he was walking with God.

*Amy Jansen*

## Leave Hello to the Doors

I remembered you left my bra on the studio floor  
 when I boarded the BART in such a late-show fashion.  
 Sax 5th Avenue bag in one hand, a Sinatra CD in the other;  
 I scored a vinyl Paul Simon earlier with Art, on acoustics.  
 No, combing the floor the other night, I found no bra  
 so I just wore your baseball cap from 1974. Today  
 the station features Jack London's half-brother, folk singer.  
 Hittin on his guitar, Spiderman, he sang & then looking  
 at my arm, *Cecelia, you're breaking my heart*  
 So I leave him a nickel by the railing only to find  
 myself reciting the Gettysburg, addressing  
 a businessman from Union tempting to square me  
 with emerald earrings. I only wear sapphire,  
 I laugh; he answered: next Thursday. Diamond  
 Theatre on Lombard for a drink & maybe an Andy Warhol movie.  
 Although I'm the kind that must sit alone during movies  
 4 rows up center with a brown bag, pen & receipts of  
 paper, I'm hungry again, carving the Golden Arches  
 with a Swiss Army Knife on the pale cheddar  
 seat in front of me. Stepping off the platform  
 I greet the Embarcadero yawning;  
 I am tired of thinking our names in graffiti  
 A quad of espresso from Billetti's, true:  
 The Grateful Dead needs enlightening—no offense  
 to Jerry—and Paul (I think you call him Frankie.)  
 Overdue now, the wind solicits the pier and  
 pantomimes my lips thick with China Town  
 karma. Nose runny, I find some sailors gambling  
 with a bottle of Everclear, in some waterfront  
 alley. It used to be illegal, I tell them.  
 Everclear. Go easy. They reply: I own a walk  
 like Janis Joplin & after a couple swigs, Bye Bye Baby.  
 And Goodbye's, like BART, always seem to start  
 easy & hardly Six (or still 4:30) when I told your machine  
 that Spiderman was caught cooking LSD in an alley.  
 I'll be coming home now so make me something silly.  
 (You always worried how Breakfast becomes me.)



## Mea Culpa

I smell the blood of a menstruating Catholic  
is it shameful—do you think?  
what isn't with us?

Eve damned us All anyway  
so let womyn suffer—  
they seem to enjoy it...  
beat me...

...again...  
...i'll leave  
next time  
hurt me...

...again...  
...i'll leave  
next time  
i caught you...

...again...  
didn't i?  
no?  
...i'll leave...  
...next time

*rdp*

## Postmortem Care

Usually  
 the window is already open,  
 so, if they've been pronounced,  
 and if they're not a "Coroner's case,"  
 that is, if their death is not too unexpected,  
 I start right in removing tubes and tape,  
 cleaning, changing linens,  
 wiping away the final defecation,  
 the famous last words,  
 make them as nice as I can.  
 We do not put pennies on the eyes,  
 we use the eyelashes to pull the eyes closed,  
 they look peaceful then, but not quite right:  
 the color all wrong,  
 and the utter stillness all wrong.

Of course none of that is begun  
 until after I have marked off the territory,  
 the rectangle of hospital room, as sacred ground;  
 until after I have imagined  
 my own other lighted half  
 rising out of the top of my head  
 like a candle, a torch,  
 flaring for the dead to navigate by,  
 for the living to be shielded by.  
 While I work, I speak to the body,  
 softly, with respect, treat them  
 with the same gentleness, kindness  
 as I do the living;  
 the flesh is still warm,  
 and all the rest not too far gone.

Then I wait with them,  
 (torch still flaring,)  
 finishing my notes, arranging the paperwork.  
 I raise the head of the bed a little  
 and place a pillow carefully  
 so the mouth won't gape,  
 and so the stomach contents won't emerge,

in their quest for lower ground.  
 I watch for the family,  
 the spouse, the children, sister, brother,  
 or just the one remaining friend to arrive.  
 I greet them outside the sacred space,  
 fill them in if they had hoped to arrive "in time."  
 Some I have to caution if an accident has left a mangled horror  
 instead of peace and rest inside.  
 I provide them an opportunity to set aside their flurry,  
 for they are entering a special moment,  
 separate from regular time and space,  
 where everything, everything matters.

No one knows exactly what to do in the face of death.  
 Some find their own way,  
 we will all have to find our own way one day,  
 most will need some help getting started.  
 With my hand on the body,  
 to show them touching is safe and is acceptable,  
 I tell them what I know of this particular death:  
 how hard they tried to hold on, if that is true,  
 or how willingly they let go, if that is true,  
 how they had told me earlier, when they still had the power,  
 that it might nearly be time to let go, if that is true.  
 If their death was a horror  
 of pounding on their chest,  
 of forcing tubes into them,  
 of pink foam pouring from their mouth and nose,  
 of blood and spit, urine and feces,  
 of me and my colleagues urgently working, cold and callous,  
 pretending not to be intimidated on the edge of the abyss,  
 I leave out those details, even if those details are true.  
 I substitute what I knew of the person,  
 what I saw to appreciate,  
 what they had said about those now present,  
 or I simply ask what the living can tell me of the one gone.  
 If I sense regret at arriving too late,  
 I ask if their loved one was inclined "not to be a bother,"  
 and explain how often I have seen the dying sneak away  
 when no one they cared about was around to be worried,  
 for that is true.  
 Sometimes, all I have to offer is the plain fact

that they were not alone when death came,  
when that is true.

Sometimes...nothing.  
Sometimes...no one comes.

If it wasn't an easy death,  
don't worry, many do not make it look easy,  
and if the family made it "in time"—  
had the misfortune to witness  
the pounding, the frenzy, the foam,  
the leaking away of life,  
I am able to assure them  
that everything was done that could be done,  
and answer questions—provide the rationale  
behind the apparent brutality they saw.

At this point, Kleenex becomes useful, a whole box,  
some for everyone, sometimes even the nurse.  
When I see the mourning begin,  
when I see their own lighted bodies  
like torches, like candle flames,  
emerge from the tops of their heads  
and begin to swirl, and sway, and meld into each other  
flaring for the dead to navigate by,  
for the living to be shielded by,  
I retreat with mine, use my light to guard the door.  
Then I give them time, all they want  
there is no need to hurry now.  
They will let me know when they are done.

When they do, I offer coffee, cold water, answers...  
to their last questions, the ones I can answer.  
I have a few questions for them:  
which funeral home? tissue donation?  
belongings to sign for.

When they are gone,  
I retrieve the cart from the Anatomy room.  
It has a special drape so that no one will have to see  
the unsettling specter of a human form gliding by in the night,  
familiar, but covered face and all;



hidden for fear the sight might suck away every hope in its wake.  
 It comes with a packet containing  
 a cloth strip, some string, two paper tags,  
 and a waterproof plastic shroud.  
 After unclothing the body, the cloth strip ties the jaws closed,  
 strings tie the hands over the abdomen, the feet together,  
 preserving against the stiffening to come, that human form:  
 broadening to the shoulder, narrowing again toward the feet.  
 One tag is filled out, name and number,  
 and tied to the right, great toe.  
 At least three people are needed  
 to roll the body with any respect,  
 side to side as the shroud is wrapped,  
 then taped, covering all, everything.  
 The second tag is taped outside,  
 the body shifted to the cart,  
 the drape put in place.  
 Then the slow trip back to the Anatomy room  
 where a small hoist allows the body to be lifted from the cart  
 and placed gently on a shelf that rolls out from a refrigerated  
 cabinet.  
 As I slide the drawer back in, I address them by name, tell them:  
 "Everything is all right, everything taken care of, you can rest now."  
 Then I close the cabinet and leave them  
 to their first practice at being alone in cold darkness.

In most cases, everything does seem right then,  
 but I worry about those for whom no one came.  
 By whose light will they navigate?  
 Who will intervene in their behalf?  
 Is there anyone on the other side to show the way?  
 We don't put pennies on people's eyes anymore, the policy states:  
 "grasping the eyelashes to pull the eyelids down is sufficient  
 to close them without bruising."  
 Without those pennies, how will they pay Charon's toll at the  
 river crossing?  
 Sometimes, when the funeral home comes to collect someone,  
 they are found on their private shelf in the chilled cabinet  
 with a shining nickel right beside them.

## **I Don't Need You**

I don't need chocolates or flowers or lace.  
The ladies at perfume counters are liars.

I just want a bowl  
shaped like your ear  
to pour my heart into  
with no splashing back.

I just want a wall  
with you painted on it  
to crash into sometimes  
with no deductible.

I don't need sweet songs of sentiment  
that remind me of peeling onions.  
Words can be salt to the wounded.

I just want a mirror  
with your eyes in it  
to see myself the way you do.

I just want a tape deck  
with your voice in it  
to stop when I need to  
and start again when I'm ready.

I don't need shining armor and flashing swords.  
No passionate knight has ever delivered me.

I want  
Sincerity,  
Philosophy,  
Autonomy.

No production,  
No protection,  
No salvation.



## **To the Feeling**

Hey, check out my new wheels  
as I roll by you, huffing up the sidewalk,  
my lungs at ease to fill. I sit, smiling,  
vain in the polished gleam of my chrome rims.

Now that I have wheels  
I think of old minds seeing futility in the square.  
Won't they all appreciate its ease,  
admire this father of modern-day motion?

Now that I have wheels  
the liquor store on fourth, a comfortable coast.  
Ivory stones and spite fill my wastebasket  
ending years of dead skin scraped, bottoms of feet.

Now that I have wheels  
I envy children perching at pool's edge—  
that undeveloped joy for a simple thrust  
into cold water—cold water that cuts me in two  
and shapes languid 'round these numb legs  
now that I have wheels.

*Troy Johnson*

**Ocean**

We are a deep ocean.

We hug  
the continents,  
caress their shores with dark waters.

Our tides  
ebb and flow beneath the midnight moon.

Our stillness  
reflects the shapes of geese  
migrating overhead.

We hear them  
call to us, and know  
we are not alone,  
as we sit, here, in my living room,  
waves crashing.

*Shannon Rooney*

## Cookie

Edwin and Laura-Ann Mulhaney lived in Grover's Creek all their lives. Like most married couples there, they knew each other all through their school years and became man and wife directly after graduating from Alfred Grover High School. But, unlike most people, they were unable to have children until twenty years of marriage had passed. They were then suddenly and copiously blessed with three children in three years, long after they had given up on the idea. People said it was not exactly natural for Laura-Ann to be so fertile so late in life and that bad luck might follow, but Mr. and Mrs. Mulhaney looked on the occurrence as just one of the ironies of life.

The first child was Horace, a gangly and serious boy. Second was Joseph, small and red. Then came Margaret, a pretty, chatty little girl who refused to answer to any name but "Cookie," because her father liked to call her that. The children were the apples of their parents' eyes for ten happy years, and the Mulhaney's were one of the best-loved families in Grover's Creek. Then another irony of life struck them.

Horace and Joseph were both taken by God in the older son's tenth year. Horace was helping his father repair the roof of the rickety barn one crimson-skied evening, when the skinny boy slipped soundlessly through a space between two boards without so much as a peep to alert his father, who was busy hammering at a hopeless piece of dry rot. The fall was not what actually killed him; the pile of hay he impacted upon was stiff and poked at him like needles, but was soft enough to limit his injuries to a busted jaw and broken legs. Horace was too shocked to cry out, and when Lila the blind old mare came in to rest on her bed of hay, he really didn't notice until she heaved the whole of her weight on top of him. He struggled for a bit, but Lila was too worn out after a long day on her sore legs and stubbornly refused to get up. The hay in his mouth prevented Horace from calling for help before he was smothered.

Joseph, who was loud, anxious, and full of expendable energy all his short life, died while in a fit of rage. He got into a shouting match with his group of friends during a Sunday afternoon of frog hunting a few months after his brother's funeral. Joseph was boasting about his expertise in finding the most and the biggest croakers in that county or any other when

his companions, a little sick of his bossiness and arrogance, ganged up on him all at once and scoffed at his claim. Joseph's complexion, which was naturally an unusually vivid pink, turned a hot, glowing red in outrage at this insolence from those he considered to be his underlings. He stared at them silently with eyes burning hotly for a while, then he declared in a booming voice that he would prove himself by delivering to them no less than a hundred of the fattest frogs in the creek within a half-hour. He threw himself into the water, cursing and radiating with anger. Joseph was indeed a fine frog catcher, but his rage made him careless, and every living creature swam away from his splashing. His friends guffawed at his frustration and clumsy pursuit of the slippery amphibians. Joseph finally dove in after a particularly impressive specimen and stayed under for a long time, determined not to emerge without it. His friends' laughter continued then waned, for Joseph's red face was visible through the murky water, and it changed colors over a period of minutes. They saw his glow change from red to magenta to purple to blue, and then he stopped darting around under the water and floated face down on the surface. Later, those boys were known to say that Joseph killed himself because he couldn't stand to be wrong.

Life changed dramatically for the Mulhaney family after that year, but not as much as it did when Cookie turned twelve. This was when the more superstitious members of the Grover's Creek community said that the Mulhaney family experienced the full curse of whatever force was against them. Cookie, like her mother and father, suffered from a profound depression after the loss of her brothers, and that great sadness grew and grew within her until she could take it no more. She read in a novel how a woman had hanged herself with a silk scarf due to her grief over a lost lover, and in a moment of desperation Cookie decided to hang herself. There were no scarves of any kind in the house, so she rifled through the shed until she found some cord. She sneaked away into the barn one night after supper, made a primitive noose, threw the other end over a beam and secured it, stood on the edge of a horse's stall, and jumped. The cord cut into her throat, creating a gash as she flew forward and the noose tightened. Her neck stretched and she started to convulse. However, to her surprise, and later to everyone else's, she didn't die.



When she leapt off her perch, her body performed something that seemed impossible for anyone except a cartoon character. Her neck stretched out to an unbelievable length as she was propelled forward, and then she snapped back like a rubber band. The wood of the beam was in such bad condition that it split, dropping her to the ground. (The structure of the barn fortunately remained sound and only minor damage was incurred.) Cookie was unconscious for a while. When she awoke to the cries of her mother calling her for supper, she found that her neck was a good eight inches longer than it should be, and she had a bloody, wide hole in her throat that made it hard to breathe. She was found by her father who was just coming in from the fields. He reacted with initial horror, threateningly holding up his hoe at the bizarre creature, then even deeper horror as recognition hit him. Cookie was rushed to the only doctor in town, Louis Farnsby, who nervously poked and patted at her with life-saving instruments, all the while wearing a bewildered expression that puzzled, "Isn't she dead yet?" After a time, Doc Farnsby approached Cookie's parents, who had been waiting breathlessly in his reception room. He declared that their daughter was alive and in what seemed an impossibly stable condition, despite the fact that her neck had been stretched like a piece of chewing gum and she had a whopping great hole in her throat. He said it was impossible to repair the neck and hole, although the truth of it was he had no idea what to do with her, and he felt skittish about even touching someone who, by all the laws of nature, should be dead. After Cookie's bleeding and gurgling had stopped and she seemed to be breathing normally, the Doc took a guess that she was recovered and eagerly released her to her parents.

The Mulhaney's were forever transformed by Cookie's disability. There was not a soul in Grover's Creek that didn't stare aghast at her when she walked by, or secretly fear her hideous presence. Cookie looked like a stupefied ostrich with throat cancer. Her giraffe-like neck made her seem a lot taller than she was, and even though it was logical that it must be broken, she was able to move the neck perfectly well, although it did wobble and sway a bit in a snakish fashion. It seemed thinner than a neck should be, and her head looked like a scrunched-up pea balanced on top of it. The hole was even more horrible to look at; it seemed to be a gaping, toothless second mouth, forever yawning at the world. This "mouth"

replaced her original, because the injury caused undetermined brain damage that changed Cookie from the quick, talkative girl she was into an incomprehensible zombie with dark-rimmed eyes and a shuffling, slow step. She said nothing to anyone that they could understand, because she spent most of the time lost in a world of her own, and when she did "talk" it was made up of unintelligible noises emanating from the hole, sounding like the moans of a man with no tongue inside a well.

Cookie, of course, became an object of ridicule to everyone in town, most of all to the children in school. Having nowhere else to put her, the Mulhaney's sent Cookie to the local school. Miss Hodges sat her in the back and let her vegetate all day, since Cookie seemed entirely unaware of anything, only raising her hand when she was having her occasional, unexplained fits and flailing at some unseen horror. The boys were especially cruel, playing vicious tricks on her as if she were an insect trapped under a jar. They altered the double-o sound in her name, branding her with the nickname "Kooky," which everyone in town began to call her, except in the presence of her parents. The boys would search her out while she rested under a tree and stared oddly into the sky, as she was wont to do. Then they would take turns trying to toss crab apples into her neck hole, never fearing of getting into trouble because she could pop them out with a quick gust of breath if they blocked her airway. She seemed to take no notice of them, but she did shuffle by a bit faster if they were around.

Cookie seemed to be completely without intelligence for a long time. She would plod along to school and back by herself, or with her stony, silent parents to church, completely oblivious of others in either case. Father Samson, the minister, often scolded children when they teased Cookie, or adults when they grumbled about "those Mulhaney folks," saying that all children are beautiful in the eyes of the Lord, yet he too was seen to cringe and sneer in disgust when Cookie tried to walk through him in pursuit of some butterfly or bird.

Mrs. Mulhaney had grown more and more careless about looking after Cookie, often letting her go to school with uncombed hair or unclean clothes, and on the weekends she would let Cookie out of her sight more and more, in the secret hope that something would end her existence. One day Cookie wandered off by herself into the wooded area around the creek. On this day, a Saturday, Cookie got on the road and kept



following it until it came to a dirt trail, which she followed until she found a tree with a knothole containing a squirrel who was filling his home with a hoard of acorns for the winter. Cookie's distant eyes stopped staring vacantly and focused sharply on this image. She stood transfixed by this vision for a long time, and then suddenly gave a loud whoop of excited glee and began jumping up and down, gesturing wildly. Then she went searching for acorns on the forest floor, her head bobbing and jerking as she tramped around. Having collected a large number of acorns in her apron, Cookie started to shove handfuls down her hole. She began to choke. It seemed to puzzle her that this was happening; she tried and tried to pop the acorns out, but it didn't work. David Konroy (a boy from school who liked to ask Cookie if she was one of those African women who stretch out their necks, and if so, where were all her brass rings) happened to be hunting for slimy creatures that day. He came upon her as she ran along, flailing and lurching. He thought this looked like a good deal of fun and approached her with a branch in hand, ready to smack her with it. But when he came up to her, asking what kind of hallucination was she having today, she grabbed onto his arm in panic. He started to swear at her and tried to pull away, then he looked at her face and realized she was looking directly at him with something between terror and rage, instead of her usual dreamy vacuousness. This scared him more than he thought was possible, and he started to wail and lash out at her with the branch. He left welts on her legs but she wouldn't let go. He left bruises on her side but she wouldn't let go. He left cuts on her face but she wouldn't let go. Finally he ripped his arm away from her, which tore his shirt nearly clean off and left deep wounds in his skin where her fingernails dug at him. Her face was somewhere between green and purple, and she was wheezing monstrously. He snarled nauseously at the grotesque creature and, on an impulse such as a person has when he sees a twitching bug, he lunged like a fencer and lanced Cookie in the throat. The branch was sharp enough to pierce the back of her throat and fill up her artificial mouth, which grinned at David in a way he would never forget. Cookie died instantly. She did not lie on the ground, but sat propped up with one arm sinking into the mud.

David told no one. No one really cared what happened. They were just glad Cookie was gone. When her absence was noticed, a rescue team was quickly put together and quickly disbanded

after a short, half-hearted search. David would not go to the woods for a long time, because he hadn't had the stomach to hide her body, leaving her alone for the animals to find. He was surprised no one found her in the ten years he avoided the place. When as a braver, older man he ventured forth to the place, he soon regretted it when he found a tree in that spot resembling a figure sitting with its arm in the mud and a branch sprouting from a gaping knothole.

*Beth Swanson*



## Confession, for my Daughter

Because His words said from a wooden pulpit  
gather people like circus elephants,  
and fill trays  
with dollar bills like dead butterflies,  
because they cause the starched hands of a minister  
to conduct,

I whisper them only when you sleep.

Because I fear an obsession like mine  
for the man with hair like spilling honey  
who will knock on your heart,  
bringing punctured hands like lilies  
and the smell of blood from under his robe,  
because the Mary whose body He could not know  
loved his,

I will not tell their story.

Because I want you to dress up  
and visit me on Sundays,  
remembering always the water of my womb  
that darkened your lips to wine,  
body that tore like bread when you pushed out,  
heavy breasts that never ran dry,  
because I want you still calling for me  
evenings after I am gone,

I will not say His name aloud.

*Heather Brittain Bergstrom*

Thousands of fireflies,  
     Christmas-lighting on  
     Nature's doorstep,  
 infinite pulsating scattered random—  
     which words can't sweep into pan  
 in the middle of summer midnight hush hush silence  
 & waves of cars pushing back/forth  
 over tar-covered stones,  
 the house shifting from one leg to another  
 then back again till dawn,  
 the porch swing breathing sighs with every shudder and creak—  
     my arm itches in freshly washed sweater,  
     the odor of my months gone to start anew  
 & this is the last night in Michigan,  
 birthplace of me  
 and the Republican party,  
     downtown now run-down  
 with the front steps of my parents' first apartment,  
 crumbling roof wasn't theirs,  
 once 19 like me now  
 & singing blues with Ed on stairs  
     both combing long hair on 2nd floor  
 till a job came around  
 then chop to feed and go to college next to the capitol,  
 turning left at the light dad tipped imaginary hat  
 to marble columns and domed white roof aged

& I saw it out of my eye's corner,  
 the way I saw Detroit suburbs with Kate,  
 on our way to Dr. Rosco in Taylor  
 for painless  
 tongue pierce—  
 under massive arms tattooed unbudging,  
 her face passive to the clamping tongs  
 but her eyes gleamed  
 pulsating random infinite excitement

& I saw the fireflies everywhere thereafter,  
 changing hair colors monthly to match latest tattoo,

lunch-box cigarettes bowling shoes  
dragging on dirty carpets,  
slouch playing pool  
at flop-houses from east to west  
with dope-squint'd eyes  
at the cue,  
racked up some slam colored balls twirl  
& eight balls fly in pockets  
over downtown run-down midnight howling blues,  
  
sleepless from the long dull drum eighties of do-nothings,  
for west to go east or to drunken Mexico,  
for east to go west or to drunken Canada,  
all with the same hot ember intentions showing,  
in newspaper slums & suburban basements musky below  
the downtown couches on drooping porches shifting  
  
the chain-raised swing is breathing,  
the fireflies are glowing

*Khutch Stanaway*

## And I Said

...and she said to me  
"I think we should hold back"  
And my heart said no  
And my soul said no  
My mouth said "Yes, I agree"  
Then she whispered "It's for the best"  
By saying so I knew she was  
Right  
And I cursed her for being  
Right  
...and I said "Yes, I agree"  
Then she placed a  
Consoling kiss on my cheek  
A farewell gesture  
"Another place, another time"  
She intoned while addressing her hair  
"We'll just be great friends"  
And my heart said no  
And my mind raced  
To find words that might sway her  
But my mouth said...  
"Yes, let's be friends"  
And as she moved away  
I tugged at my lips  
And said...  
"How could you betray me?"

*Jaxson Riedel*



Excerpt from **Getting to the Real River**

The boy Jude woke up afraid. He was six years old and he was afraid most of his days and nights. It wasn't the corkscrew howl of the coyotes that scared him when they surrounded the cabin at night. Neither did the bear tracks in the patch of frost by the outhouse door. Nor even the cold, deep pockets of the South Fork that he had to ford each day to get to school. What struck his heart with terror was his stepfather, Russ Skidmore.

Russ Skidmore was a barrel-chested man of about thirty with a hawk nose, leathery skin the texture of smoked deer jerky, and pale blue eyes as startlingly empty as a fish bowl after a cat had snuck furtively by. Most sinister was his long, coarse hair, straight as an Indian's, but white as moonlight. All Jude's life he would think that certain platinum hair—the likes of which he never saw again except in nightmares—was the devil's own.

Tonight Russ had gone down to the Valley, yet still Jude awakened with fear. Was it the moon coming in through the wide pine slats of the sleeping loft? Or was it the surcease of the coyotes' incessant yelping? He could hear his mother muttering in her sleep and the soft breathing of his baby sister, Pearl, in her crib in the corner. Outside he could hear the mournful sway of the wind in the tops of the pines, a sign that fall was ending and the short days of winter lay ahead. Jude dreaded winter the most, locked in the cabin with no place to hide while Russ sharpened his tools and oiled his guns with a smelly oil. Russ distilled popskull corn likker late at night, and the entire cabin was heaped with five gallon buckets of fermenting corn that looked and reeked like piles of vomit. When Russ wasn't applying his hands to some task, he would wave them in the air like a fisherman describing the fish that got away, droning late into the night about killing slopes, niggers, cattle, and snoops from the Bureau of Land Management. Tonight Jude prayed his usual fervent prayer that Russ would be so drunk when he came careening back up the mountain that he and his old Jimmy would fly over the rim of the road into the Beegum Gorge or Noble Ridge Canyon and hence into eternity.

Yesterday had been particularly cruel in a life of days where the shape of each held a faceless dread. Russ had shaken Jude awake at first light, then woke Bob Baney, his partner and right-hand man who had been with his platoon in Vietnam before

Russ had gotten his dishonorable discharge and spent two years in Vacaville State Prison. They were getting up early to go on a wood-chopping and game-poaching expedition to Harrison Gulch. They had also gotten up hungry. For several weeks now they'd been subsisting on squirrel stew and his mother's dough-gods. Today they would be heading below the timberline to bag some beef because after three drought years the deer had all gone to a higher elevation. His mother had gotten up too. While Russ was siphoning gas into the slat-sided flatbed and Bob was gathering the guns and chainsaws, she had handed Jude a plastic bag containing three dough-gods. "Share these with Russ and Bob when you-all get hungry," she had told him.

"Okay," he said and cached them into a hidden pocket his grandma had sewn into his hooded jacket.

"A little pocket that no one knows about but you," his grandma had told him, "where you can put your own very special, private things." So far the pocket held two items. One was a year-old letter from his real dad who lived in Berkeley and whom he hadn't seen since the fourth of July when his dad had walked up their private road and then ran for his life when Russ, sitting on the cabin porch, blasted bullets at him from Bob's M-16. The other was a small, round tin that had once held jelly beans his grandmother had given him for Christmas a few years back and now entombed the tiny shattered carcass of his pet wood mouse, Ratso, that Russ had crushed with his boot during a drunken rage.

At that moment Russ came roaring and stamping into the cabin. "Goddamn it, Jude! Where'n hell's the come-along, and where did you leave the goddamn splittin' maul?"

"I didn't use 'em. I didn't have—"

"Goddamn it, the maul's not in my toolbox. When were you fuckin' with my tools?"

"I *wasn't*, sir!"

Russ raised his voice as if Jude had remained silent.

"You answer when I talk to you, boy! Now where'n hell is the fuckin' maul?"

"I'll go look for it!"

"You'll do more'n look for it, boy. You'll find it in about five minutes, or you won't be sleepin' in the cabin tonight."

Jude ran out the door and around the house, knowing from experience that this was not just a threat. He'd been left outside many a night for less.



"Get crackin'!" Russ roared after him, but Jude was already halfway down the path to the pit, a dugout about four hundred yards below the cabin. It was here Russ kept the trucks and the old school bus they lived in before Russ had gone down to Weaverville and claimed this land as a bona fide mining claim. The claim, christened *High Llama*, was a long, narrow twenty-acre piece that ran the length of Wilson creek.

As Jude ran he wondered, as he never stopped wondering, why his mother and Bob Baney never defended him. Bob looked like a wild man with his long matted hair and shaggy beard, but he had gentle eyes. However, his gentle eyes looked away, and so did his ma's, when Russ beat Jude with a belt, kicked him into a corner, or snatched a chair out from under him. Sometimes Jude thought his ma would believe Russ's old black hound dog, Hawkeye, was an Alaskan Husky if Russ told her it was so.

Jude found the maul and come-along in the ditch by the trucks where Russ usually flung his tools. Toting the massive maul and the heavy come-along, he ran, panting, back up to the cabin.

Russ and Bob were standing, backs to the wood stove, finishing up their coffee. "Coffee tastes more like piss every day with these ol' grounds we been usin'." Russ was commenting peaceably enough when Jude came puffing into the cabin.

"You find 'em, boy?"

"Yessir!"

"Good enough, now let's git goin'." He threw the dregs of his coffee cup at the wood pile next to the stove and went out, Bob, Jude, and Hawkeye at his heels.

Although early November, it was hot once they got below the timberline into the scrub oak, manzanita, and buck brush of Harrison Gulch. There were two chainsaws: Russ bucked the logs, Bob cut what was bucked into firewood lengths, and Jude ran back and forth to the truck, stacking the wood. Although only six, he worked like a boy of ten or twelve. The sun pounded down on their heads and backs, and the two men took their shirts off, sweating while they worked. Jude tried, but he couldn't get his mind off the dough-gods in his pouch.

After what seemed like forever, he asked Russ if he could stop a few minutes and find a place to poop. "Sure, boy, but hustle back. It gits dark early an' we still gotta rustle up some hoofs before nightfall."

Jude jogged down the slanted rock plateau to a small, dry gulch where papery brown skunk cabbage marked what once had been a spring. He was as tired, hungry, and thirsty as he imagined a boy could possibly be. He was about four hundred yards away from where the chainsaws snarled into the immense silence of the late afternoon. Far away to the east, the heat shimmered above the great Sacramento River Valley, and Jude thought longingly of his grandparents' farm down there on the river. In his mind's eye he saw his grandma humming as she walked up the path from the hen house, his grandpa on his rusty old tractor way off in the lower field, and the sheets on the clothesline billowing and snapping in the north wind.

After he wiped his butt with a dead skunk cabbage leaf, he looked back at the men's shiny sinewy backs, at Bob's dark matted hair and Russ's white hair, both held back by bandannas. Black specks formed in the air above him, and it took him a minute to realize that the specks were not bugs in the air, but something at the back of his eyes. The dough-gods loomed in his mind. Both Bob and Russ had been outside when his ma had given the dough-gods to him, and he'd been thinking all day that they could not know he had them. He brought them furtively out of his jacket pouch. Three dough-gods, each one about as big as his fist. His parched mouth watered.

He took one out of the bag, looked at it, looked right and left like Moses before smiting the Egyptians, then shut his eyes and took a bite. Before he took a second bite he shook the other two out of the bag and buried the empty plastic wrap as deep in the rocky, barren soil as he could scratch. Within two minutes the dough-gods were gone. He wiped the crumbs off his mouth and jacket and ran back to the truck.

Presently Russ stopped his chainsaw, dropped it, lowered his butt, rocked back on his heels, looked up at the sky, then pulled a leather flask out of his hip pocket and took a huge swig of popskull. Bob, too, cut off his saw. The last echoes died away except for the buzzing of a lone fly. The late mountain afternoon was very still.

"Say, men," Russ said pleasantly. "What say we stop for a minute and eat them dough-gods that Rochelle packed up for us."

Bob put down his chainsaw, mopped the sweat off his face with his bare arm, and reached for the flask that Russ absently handed him. Jude didn't speak.



"What say, Jude?" said Russ, still amiable.

Nothing.

"Say, boy, do the cat got 'cher tongue? Fetch out them dough-gods. I'm hungry."

Again, nothing.

"Say, boy! Do I have to spell it out? Recoup them biscuits!" He got up, stepping menacingly forward.

"Ilosttheminthewoods," said Jude, looking groundward in front of him.

"Hear, what?"

"I-lost-them-in-the-woods," said Jude again in a muffled voice.

"Lost them in the woods?"

"Yessir," said Jude, still looking down.

Russ cocked his ear. "Say *what*? Can't hear you, boy."

"I lost 'em in the woods," said Jude, heart thumping in his chest. "*Up* in the woods." He pointed vaguely east toward the timberline ten miles or so behind them.

"You tell me straight, boy. Where'r them dough-gods your ma gave you?"

"I *lost* 'em in the woods."

"Well, boy," Russ said, stepping backward and sitting on the back of the truck as if getting ready to enjoy an intellectual discourse. While he smiled obligingly, listening to what was said next, his hands were slowly unhitching his leather belt. "I guess you better find them in the woods."

For a split second Jude seemed to want to run in all directions at once, like an animal caught in a vehicle's high beams, then he froze, shut his eyes, and bowed his slight neck forward.

"Come on over here, boy," said Russ gently, coaxingly. It was the same voice in which he talked to Jude's mom in their bed in the loft across from Jude's late at night before they both would twist into a panting, slobbering ball, making vile noises more animal than human. Bob, standing in the shade of the truck, took out a packet of chew, slung a wad in his mouth and he, too, looked at the ground in front of him. Jude walked slowly toward Russ and the back of the truck, arms straight and stiff to his sides, fists clenched, head bowed, eyes screwed tightly shut.

"Speak up, asshole!" said Russ in a startling tone, as if he were confronting someone in a prison yard, not a terrified kid of six. "Who do you think you are, you little son of a bitch, *numero uno*?"

Jude didn't speak.

"ANSWER ME, YOU LITTLE CUNTFUCK! YOU LITTLE SELFISH FUCK! WE'RE ALL STARVING TO DEATH OUT HERE, THE WHOLE FUCKIN' COMPANY, AND ONE STUPID CUNTFUCK EATS ALL THE RATIONS! I SHOULD KILL YOU, BOY! IN FACT, I THINK I WILL!"

Still Jude didn't—couldn't—speak.

"This is some bad shit. Very bad shit." Then Russ said quietly, "Fess up little man and say what happened." Sweat was pouring out of his hair and face.

"Can't let this go by, man, no fuckin' way." His voice again got tender, "Come here, little Jude. Little dude, muchachos." He was up now, walking closer to the boy.

He cracked the belt in the air and came so close that Jude could smell his rank breath. The first lash hit Jude across the ear, causing a deafening, cackling roar like a landslide of boulders and earth shifting a mountain into a different position.

It had been dark for several hours when the truck whined up the road to the cabin. Jude and Hawkeye lay curled together on the tarp high above the cumbersome load: a cord of scrub oak and the carcass of a great steer. Jude could hardly move. In the cabin window he saw the kerosene light sputter and stay on. His ma was getting up to greet them.

Russ got out of the truck and headed up the path to the cabin. Bob came around and lifted Jude gingerly off the load. "You all right little man?"

"Yeah," Jude whispered, but he could barely walk. Bob half carried and half walked him up the path.

His mother, who had come out on the cabin porch with a lantern to help light the dark path, saw Bob and Jude limping their way up and yelled out with terror, "What's the matter with Jude?"

Russ, the first to gain the porch, said, "Oh, he's all right! Got to playin' aroun' when he shoul'da been workin' and poked hisself full into a hive a yella' jackets."

"Oh, my poor baby," wailed Jude's ma. "Let me see my poor baby!" She ran down the stairs and scooped Jude out of Bob's arms and into her own. "My poor baby! You're covered with welts! Let's get you inside!"

**Ashiya\***

—for M.K.B.

a continent lies between us  
you write life is hard these days  
sitting patient with the dying and those who grieve  
holding back, holding it gets hard

you could cry, you write, in my arms  
that crying which before it begins has no end  
here, near my heart, might start  
were I holding you, might surface  
well up flowing, drawn from that same deep source  
as my comfort

a continent between us  
you, there, hold the trembling bird of sorrow  
while weeping alone so far away,  
I hug myself  
hold only the absence of you  
stirring here like  
intimations of flight

*Miftah Hartwell MacNeil*

\* A west African expression of sympathy and connection

## Rendezvous at Balboa

"Where was I when Dick Dale blew  
 for sunburned surfers at the Rendezvous?"  
 I've asked that. When the dance floor ashed,  
 I was two,  
 and fifteen years from sun when  
 my freckled mom  
 served shrimp-in-a-cup  
 to Lou Costello in the Fun Zone.  
 I never saw Weissmuller waxing his fleet,  
         or John Wayne setting glass to bar  
         to crush a hand at Dillman's.  
 "Why couldn't I pop Hamm's in the sandy lot  
 as the Beach Boys opened  
 for the Belairs?" "Why must the Chantays play  
 and the Mar-ketts stomp  
 only in black and white,  
 and I,  
 never in the crewcut crowd,  
 always holding the frame?"

I stand on this loud corner at twenty-nine  
 and hear, in a Miata sliding past,  
 the primal thump of my successors' youth.  
 Now even the girls in lime mohawks  
 and eye-lined rockabillics  
 wheel their Vespas in ghostly turns  
 around flappers, dorymen and WACs, as

pierside, Stan Kenton looks down from the gazebo  
 over a plaid-blanket sea,  
 snaps thrice,  
 and ignites his Fabulous Horns.  
 Crackling strains billow into  
 the fog-bleached night and  
 damn!

I sit at seventeen with Stacey White  
 —since Berryed, divorced, Wilsoned, with kids—  
 beside an orange fire, puckering black.



Where does he look? Mistward, for worthier dates.  
Why blind to her own thrown shadow,  
a black tombstone angel  
twitching on footpocked sand?  
Stace White, retainer in hand,  
of a hundred pages in a journal long-boxed,  
as gravity-fettered,  
as suitable for framing,  
as queer-lipped Miss Balboa, 1910.

Again,

twenty,  
he walks the pier  
with, but not of,  
gawky Cress Delahanty  
wedged beneath his arm,  
ignoring the Hmong fishermen  
for the straw hats cast  
in his mind;

I try to look away

at twenty-five,  
three drinks deep, trying to glare  
a black-marker obscenity from the wall  
of the Balboa Inn,  
imagining a time before graffiti,

and blink as Kenton's fog  
rounds a corner and rolls  
down Balboa Boulevard at me,  
bleaching every step  
I've taken but

a moment back,  
on this corner,  
a Miata pounding past

this,  
rearing only at the curb,  
at my toes, at the edge

of my last breath,  
held back only as long  
as I keep breathing.

The horns stop, have stopped. Now,  
now,  
I hear every exhalation as  
an interlude  
a low-pitched, tremulous run  
stalling those Fabulous Horns,  
in time to the pale parade  
I must review: sweater girls,  
punks, and doggers,  
Stacey White, Tarzan, The Duke,  
Miss Balboa 1910, '11, '12,  
my mother and Lou Costello,  
stalk in the gutters, blades drawn  
to usher  
each ashen-faced fool I was  
to the Rendezvous.

*Michael Sigalas*

## **Village Main in Dane County**

Wooden bench of old men;  
Twigs on a thin dead limb.

*John Miles Coverdale*

## 7th & Chestnut

Two years since I packed  
boxes of us  
into the Volkswagen  
and traveled alone  
to the other side of town.

Tonight I read our number  
on a thin slip of dirty paper  
still taped to my phone.

In that blue Victorian  
we held the windows open  
with our shoes,  
and tied the curtains back  
with worn yarn.

In the yellow kitchen  
we baked oatmeal cookies  
to bits of charcoal  
puffing the house with their smoke,  
while we chased each other in circles,  
palms full of flour.

Late in summer  
we sat on the hard wood floor  
whistling into beer bottles,  
while the cats stole chicken  
from the back porch barbeque.

We would lie in bed  
until late afternoon  
with my hair wound through your fingers.

I don't remember when we began  
trying to muffle the sounds  
of our shouts, so hard  
I couldn't lift my head for the noise,

sounds of scratching fingernails  
against porcelain  
when you dragged me from the bathroom



## Midnight Lover

I am never sure if I should tell these stories. The principals are dead. That's the truth.

When Marsha was divorced by Dr. "AL," she lost house and prestige. This little death was followed by a new apartment furnished in bright pink velvet. Her good hair-style and smart simple LA clothes charmed her grandchildren.

There were volunteer hours, concerts, drinks with friends, nice car. And before long, Richard, her midnight lover. He never actually lived with her. Their long, slim bodies shared the sweet, fresh bed linens and hushed nights.

White wine, music, scented flowers. For nearly nine months they created slippery, rosy pleasure.

Just a firm little lump, eventually explored by her physician. It became an anticipation, like waiting for a seasonal holiday. She decided to celebrate early.

Marsha planned it with special snacks, candlelight and intimate gifts. Wearing a creamy satin nightgown, she slipped into the cozy bed, blew out the candle and nestled against her lover. She sighed, passing into the deep, secret, dreamless place of too many sleeping pills. With Richard's arm wrapped gently around her, she gave him one last surprise.

*W. Baker*

**To Cuba,  
from Hurricane Roxanne**

Did I rough you up  
a little too badly?  
I was swimming in the Atlantic, you see,  
when I remembered your eyes.  
Blue skies appalling,  
you were calling my name—falling.  
I did not mean  
to hurt you, my darling  
but Santiago saw me coming;  
whispers blistered  
*nada, nothing*  
except phone lines fell—  
I'm terribly sorry.  
Hitting Havana all around,  
maybe your refuge is Matthew Town  
on the island of Great Inagua.  
You not found, I heard that sound—  
*Roxanne, mi amor, por favor*  
On the whole, although  
you are sweeter  
than the canes in Casilda,  
I had to cough them out, I fear—  
granulated sugar.  
But I only kissed  
the lids of the orchids  
amid the parts of stars and  
I knew you weren't far  
when I heard your guitar  
chords—B flat and F minor.  
*Dolor por mi corazon*  
Orchid tears, drops of rain.  
Leaving, I hate  
to see you  
again.

## For Leigha

### I

You stole penny candy faster than the rest of us.  
 Jean pockets like bags of marbles,  
 we walked home on streets named after World War I generals.  
 Watermelon and sour apple breath not stirring the late summer air  
 that stuck like glue our cotton shirts to sunburned backs  
 and made our sandals slippery to walk in.

In the front yard we acted out the old movies  
 Aunt Lil watched on a t.v. turned so loud  
 you could hear it from the sidewalk.  
 We saved money in a box beneath your bed  
 for the Greyhound trip to California and Marilyn's Pacific.

### II

For three years of high school  
 we waited tables until eleven at Milly's Grill.  
 Missing more days than we went to school,  
 we drove the back roads  
 rehearsing scenes from Tennessee Williams plays:  
*So what are we going to do the rest of our lives?*  
*Stay home and watch the parades go by?*  
*Amuse ourselves with the glass menagerie, darling?*

### III

Still waitressing, your arms and legs remain  
 strong as unworked clay before a potter's hands.  
 But your blue eyes have darkened to the gray rock color  
 we broke bottles against years ago,  
 thirsting on the banks of the Snake River  
 for the salty water of the sea.

You dip your hands in the bucket of suds  
 washing first the tops then the legs of wooden tables.  
 You fill long-necked bottles with thick steak sauce and ketchup.  
 But the salt you pour into silver-capped shakers  
 no longer makes you thirst.

## IV

Cousin, I've washed my arms in the blue of the Pacific.  
I've felt the warmth of a California evening on my neck  
and the backs of my knees.

I've tasted San Joaquin cherries—dark and sweet  
as Marilyn's lips.

But the Greyhound I board every day goes back to you.

*Heather Brittain Bergstrom*



**Grandpa's Pocket**

Looking for keys  
16 hours after your death  
I search the polyester blue  
Sportabout slacks  
you wore the last day  
you dressed yourself  
In the left hand  
front pocket a large  
nail clipper a pocket knife  
inscribed Old Timer  
a silver dollar 1922  
the year grandma was born  
It is heavy real as old things are  
3 quarters 1965 88 89  
and an 88 penny  
In the back right pocket  
a black comb  
white hairs left behind  
I shove it all  
into the plastic Kaiser bag  
with your shirt and underwear  
And remember how the pens  
Kleenex hard mint candies  
you used to quit smoking  
always hurt my chest when you  
hugged hello and squeezed my hand  
I don't remember you smoking  
but I looked through the black holes  
in your lungs  
listened to your morning cough  
And I watched your body  
spiritless beneath the morphine  
life leaving with the slow flow  
of an August river  
And I think of  
arriving and departing  
through a hospital  
returning to the newborns first inhale upstairs  
as you exhale one last time

## Contributors' Notes

**W.Baker** is a contemporary California art worker living in Chico and Palm Springs.

**Heather Brittain Bergstrom** says that imagination never came easily for her. The reason, as Mailer once said, is that "[imagination] is buried in the pain of one's forgotten experience, and so one must work to find it, one must occasionally exhaust oneself by digging into the self in order to perceive the outside."

**Roxanne Brooks** agrees with George Orwell: "All art is to some extent propaganda." As a journalist, she advertises for the liberation of Cuba, Ireland, and Persia.

**Patricia Caspers** is still here.

**Mark H. Clarke** is a writer, father, husband, and registered nurse who lives and works in Chico, California. He writes because he doesn't sleep well anymore.

**John Miles Coverdale** grew up in Milwaukee and Appleton, Wisconsin where he graduated with a B.A. in English and a minor in Latin from Lawrence College. He is a disabled senior citizen, twice widowed, with three grandchildren. He has lived in Chico for about six years and didn't discover his writing talent until he was sixty years old.

**Bonnie Cox** and her husband, Jeff, are both seniors at CSU, Chico. They are both from Watsonville, California. Her life's ambition is to write children's books.

**Jenna Current** is a graduating senior at CSU, Chico, studying to be a teacher. Once she was a bolted door. Now she is an open window.

**Amy Jansen** is a graduate student and a composition instructor at CSU, Chico. She dedicates "Forget-Me-Not" to the memory of Grandpa Jansen, 1918-1983. Ciao, Ciao, Ciao, Ciao, Ciao! XOXOX.

**Lin Jensen** is a Soto Zen Buddhist who writes of the connections we have with ourselves and our earth. He seeks to uncover the harm and the good we humans do to bring to light

the sources of our suffering and our peace. His book, *Bowing to Receive the Mountain*, written with co-author Elliot Roberts is soon to be published.

**Troy Johnson** likes the anthill we call a world and the quirks that abound. He believes that the only ugly aspect of any human being is the ego, that Corporate America will one day pay off the national debt and, consequently, that CNN correspondents will report from outside the Pepsi Cola White House.

**Karen Joplin** is a graphic design student. This semester she is interning with Joe Dimaggio, HFA publicist, designing posters for CSU, Chico arts events. She also works in the religious studies department as a student assistant.

**Miftah Hartwell MacNeil** was born in California and has lived in Virginia and Hawaii, yet Chico has been home for the past eleven years. A frequent contributor of Watershed, this writer believes in public poetry.

**Debbie McCallum** is a senior English major with minors in creative writing and women's studies. She loves language and reading and plans to teach writing and literature someday, hopefully somewhere less landlocked than Chico.

**Erica McLane** is an older student at CSU, Chico. She is an English major in Clark Brown's advanced fiction writing class, and submitted her story upon his suggestion. "Getting to the Real River" is an excerpt from a novella length (hopefully) work-in-progress.

**rdp** isn't pretentious enough to claim to be a poet but likes to write anyway.

**Jaxson Riedel** has lived in Chico, off and on, since 1980, taking great delight in the diverse art forms expressed in and about town. He works at a local hospital and seldom finds time to write. He loves KCHO, the blues, and this year he finds himself on the men's pool team at the Towne Lounge.

**Sydney Rogers** uses creativity to develop individuality and to become the woman who makes her happy. Ambitious and motivated, her experiences have been plentiful and thoroughly enjoyable. Learning today, tomorrow, and each to follow, is her fulfillment and satisfaction. Chico State is her newest endeavor,



one which she anticipates will offer all she needs in a single experience: the possibilities of many to follow.

**Shannon Rooney** celebrates life. She is a freelance writer living in Chico with her ten year old son, Austin John.

**Michael Sigalas** was raised in Orange, California and graduated from CSU, Chico in 1988. He received his Master's in American Literature in 1994 from the University of South Carolina. An editor at Moon Travel Books, he also teaches English at Butte College.

**Klutch Stanaway** is a sophomore at Chico State. He is presently an Art major without any set plans for post-graduation. Born in Michigan (where the poem took place during a visit last summer), he escaped the drudgery of the Mid-west with his parents to come to California. He has stayed the past seventeen years, appreciating and contributing to the arts.

**Beth Swanson** is a senior at CSU, Chico majoring in English with a minor in creative writing. She has lived in California for over ten years now, mostly in the East Bay in Danville. Her interests include the theater, playwriting, movies (good and bad), animation (all kinds), and science fiction. She hopes to become a writer of bizarre novels and plays which will gather a fanatic cult following someday. Then she plans to sell out and go commercial, eventually becoming a burnt-out has-been.

**Marianne Werner** works full-time in the English Department at Butte College. She has a B.A. in English from San Diego State University, a M.A. from Syracuse University, a J.D. from the University of San Diego. She has poems published in *Intro II*, *Bachy*, "Womansoul," and "Mademoiselle".



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