

WATERSHED



Watershed

Volume 22, Number 1

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Trevor Calvert

Epiphany at 3 a.m.

Last night my girlfriend gave birth
to fish. Out they fell,
without warning: gleaming
drops of mercury,
rainbows and oil slicks.
Like Cronos,
I ate them all.
Today I see rainbows
in every puddle.

Trevor Calvert

Secrets

Silently they grope, long fingers with
cracked nails and tongues like spades
pushing and tasting the damp earth
O so quiet, watching, waiting
they know they are the end
the true children of this earth, there down
below, with their cities and hoary culture
that is old and patient and hungry

Anne Barrington

Freight

On executioner's feet
sleek head, belly, haunches
unblinked
slink by

and a train disappearing
flicks its tail into the night

Roxanna Glang

Twelfth Summer

I miss you
like I missed my twelfth summer.
That was when they told me
in the burgundy station wagon.
A vortex pulled me through the Naugahyde
into the spiral of metal springs,
minus the filling.

A child
with Irish Setter eyes, and
a sea anemone heart,
lodged in Buddha's bellybutton,
rolling with laughter, then
retching for God.

I wonder how long my favorite veins, those
highways on the back of your hands,
strutted
like peacocks
before the gate-keepers.
Did they flutter
feathery blue,
impressing the biting red lines that
queue like musical notes suspended in a
conductor's wrist-
dancing across digital pages.

Each year I climb further out from
the hole in that backseat,
where the seasons stopped, and
into a creosote galaxy,
spinning toward its middle,
a push-me, pull-you
looking toward its navel.

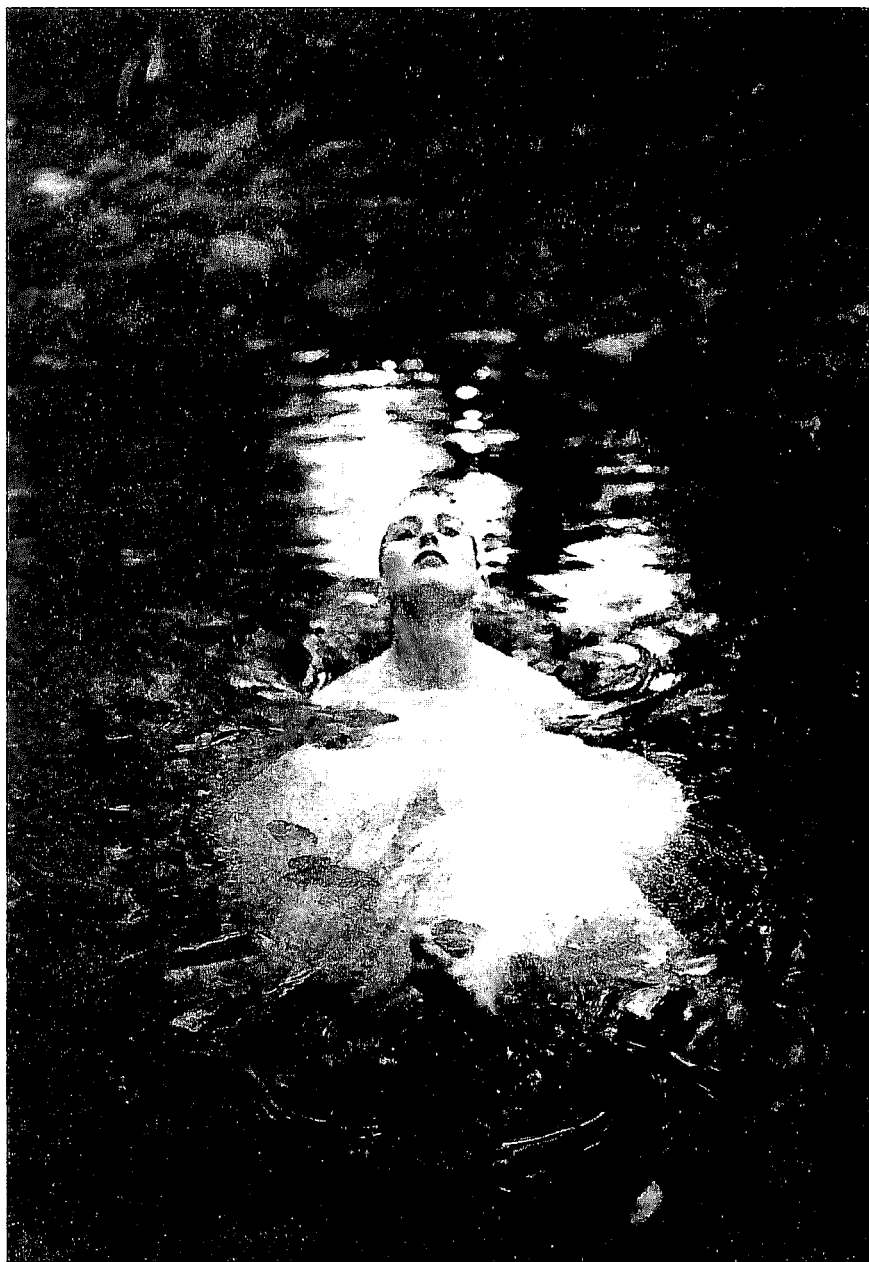
I'm still your *pip-squeak* cowboy,
a sea urchin in your saddle, riding

just for the thrill
of touching you.
Sometimes my half-life voice
seeps through my lips,
pleading
"Daddy, I want down now."

The years have crumpled
the envelope containing
memories of you.
Sometimes the wind
blows just right, and
I smell bucking bronco rides on
the front lawn.
Other times, the wind
doesn't blow at all, and
the air is as still as the inside of
your coffin.

No more creosote fumes, no
more calloused palm on my face, no
more broken furniture.

Did you know it was your last one?
your last day
your last drink
your last breath



Melanee Grondahl

Resurrection

I Am

Standing in the cemetery with the wind
blowing out her candles on her 18th birthday
party all through high school
dropout of time spent
dreaming drugs while drinking
coffee at a café
when they met
he was thinking love she was thinking like
a teenager not a wife
after the wedding
he kissed her
in the corner
she cowered in her dress as he was yelling
"he wore the pants"
she would iron
his wrinkles
were reminders of
the young bride
no longer the little woman
above his grave
six feet under
him no more
abuse was over now
she knew who she was

Samsonite Soliloquy

Paris is over in the left corner behind the ten dollar garage sale chair. The Seine flows over the cheap upholstery and forms dirty puddles that tourists carrying hard baguettes step in and swear in English as a passing Parisian tilts his head and mutters, "small wee wee Monsieur."

Behind my bed a lush forest throbs with sputtering insects, dark caves echo the dreams of hibernating beasts, and trees fall without making a sound.

Several countries hang precariously next to the ceramic cherub on my wall. Arabs in sandal feet and Eskimos in fur-lined boots trek over its outstretched wing, sliding over desert dunes, jumping onto moving glaciers, and landing in exhausted heaps with damp feet and sand in their teeth.

Hollywood sits inside my oak display case. The muffled sounds of superhighways and sighing waiters with stars in their eyes seep out, erasing the silence of my broken radio. The "D" in the Hollywood sign fell the other day when I tried to tap on the glass pane and get Robert Deniro's autograph.

Late at night when I lay on top of South Dakota with my pillow propped on top of the Black Hills, I can hear the ungreased, rotating pedestals squeaking as they turn plastic starlets and sculpted movie hunks with painted-on smiles. The island of Nantucket is perched on top of the coffee table. My blue shag carpet does a swell job of doubling for the Atlantic Ocean. Pristine white cottages bric-a-brac the shoreline surrounded by miles of stain proof wall-to-wall. Children race across the sand dodging piles of old magazines and my #1 Dad mug full of salt water from a recent storm.

Patches of white heather are scattered and waiting for the memorial service among the sparse foliage of my suffering fern. Clumps of potting soil grow into the rolling hills of Scotland. I pour seven drops of plant food into a cup made in Japan and mimic the sounds of a freak thunderstorm as I pour it over bearded clansmen playing Amazing Grace on their bagpipes.

My imagination speeds on like an Amtrak train meandering over states, countries, continents, and Barstow, California. I drink the complimentary beverage.

Melanee Grondahl

Bailar

triple time the pasillo with me baby dancin' man
you make me hot in black shoes
with your funky ass moves
slamming on the horizontal click clack floor
hold me hard ripping rhythm
snap my heels between your legs
bite the bass, swing me cool
let me hang on your shivers
fall freaky notes between banging bones
leave panting vibrations in my mouth

Donald Beaman

Fractured

fractured
eyelids

photos
bridges

faces landscapes
cracked with commas

A Lingering Season

I swallowed the rush of cold air after I opened the bathroom door. As the heated moisture disappeared, I fumbled with the buttons on my blouse hoping I wouldn't be late for work. Yet my hands paused at the bottom and my eyes pursued a thread that was threatening to slow me down. I discovered that my skirt's hem had come loose. The crease clung to my calves where my pantyhose was creating a ladder down my leg.

"That's the fourth pair this week I've run," I said out loud.

Sharon, my seventeen-year-old daughter, did not respond. She continued to crawl down the hallway, scrambling by with a pack of cigarettes sticking out of her pocket. She scooted forward on her knees, dragging her feet.

"You don't need to sneak cigarettes anymore," I said as I plucked my hose. "I know you smoke, have for a long time."

But she never glanced my way; she only gazed ahead, her expression flat.

Another time, Sharon would have flounced to her room with a soda and a half-eaten candy bar, and I would have told her to eat a normal breakfast.

Although she would have said, "Come on mom, what's the difference between a chocolate donut, coffee with tons of sugar, and this?" Then she would have kissed me, leaving chocolate lip prints on my cheek.

Forgetting my hose, I glanced at my reflection in the mirror and noticed the dark rings under my eyes. Thinking I would blend in more make-up before I left, I followed Sharon down the hall to our rooms staring at the dirty bottoms of her feet, letting them lead me to her room.

Her top dresser drawer, pulled opened, contained her faded bikini. The pant was a little brighter, since she always wore a pair of cut-offs over it. I grabbed the suit and placed it in a box that held the things that defined my daughter: a beaded necklace, a fringed vest, and her favorite book, *All Creatures Great and Small*. She dreamed of becoming a veterinarian, wearing a white coat and playing with puppies all day. I shoved the box back into a corner on her closet shelf.

"You need the morning sun in here," I said as I pulled back her curtains and snapped open her shade.

I expected her to protest, "Mom! Just leave my curtains alone! I like them closed in the morning; it's easier to put on my mascara because my eyes aren't all squinty."

Yet, there in silence, I stared at the lock, remembering how I had welded it shut the last time her father had visited.

During that visit, only the third since the divorce, he stood in the backyard watching Sharon smoke. "What have you done to make her so distant?" he accused more than asked. "And when did you start giving her cigarettes?"

I snapped back, my usual reaction to his father act, "She found your last hidden pack somewhere in our room, two years ago, just one day after you..." I couldn't finish. Instead of arguing further, I hurried to Sharon's room where I heated the soldering iron.

Fingering the lock I welded that day, I shook my head, wishing I could forget him, forget the last couple of years. But especially I wanted to forget the reason why I needed to make my daughter's room a mausoleum. I picked up a barrette. I looked in the mirror over her vanity table past my hair to hers. Her hair, dull and matted, needed to be washed.

"Maybe you should shower today, Sharon," I told her.

Sharon sat on her bed with her legs crossed and rolled a cigarette between her palms. My mind swung back. I remembered a different set of hands a few months ago right before her father's visit. Sharon's boyfriend sat in my living room rolling his keys back and forth, his elbows resting on the tops of his spread out knees. His jeans were faded, and black grease outlined his fingernails.

His cigarette burned in the ashtray as he spoke, "Jane, it was like this..."

"Don't call me Jane."

Sharon paced the living room and held out her hand for his cigarette. He gave it to her.

He shrugged, "She would fall asleep in a noisy theater, Mrs. Anderson."

"Sharon could never sleep when there was noise."

I covered my face with my palms as he explained that Sharon always climbed out of her bedroom window.

"She could be quieter than a butterfly," he had to say.

As Sharon pounded the cigarette in the ashtray until it stopped burning, she did not glance at either of us. And he continued to explain about the parties and the secret that had eroded my daughter's mind.

"It affects some people outright, doesn't bother some and others it works slowly." He folded his arms in front of him. "Anyway, at the last party, she curled up in a corner, bouncing and humming."

"She reached out her hand and you gave it to her?" I paused, staring at my own hand, the one I held out like she must have, like the one she just held out when he handed her the cigarette. "What kind of person..." I couldn't find any reason to continue.

"Mrs. Anderson?"

"What more could there be, Raymond?"

"She had wet herself." He had to have the last word.

I turned away from the vanity mirror and faced Sharon. She had quit rolling the cigarette and I wondered if she remembered that final conversation between Raymond and me, or if that memory too, was as tangled as her hair. She hopped off her bed and pulled open her bedroom door to invite in a few invisible friends. I stroked the orange and blue barrette, watching the soundless scene. Yet hearing the tingle of her laugh and the singsong pitches of her friends' voices, I spun around, folded a clean diaper, and put it on the stack with the others realizing for the first time that I wasn't going in to work.

"You need a bath today, Sharon," I said as I smoothed out another diaper.

I then hurried to her and pressed her head against my chest. I put my cheek on her hair, encircled her in my arms, and rocked my daughter.

Bob Garner

silly old pablo

silly old pablo
sat down with favorite
pen and began to write
about the ocean and the sky
and salt and beans
and love

about the wild and tender
sting of adoration,
the purple roses
on the broken
gramophone,
the ashtray
with the lipstained
cigarette

Amy Antongiovanni

Platonic Moment

You imitate day like a field flushed yellow,
long for definition—
indigo hills against a fallen sky.

But the daffodils drying release
their wrinkled faces to the dark earth.

When you come inside and dial the phone,
you ask his name just to hear it,
and his voice echoes over the line
like a Pink Floyd ballad, like truck tires
screech in the teacher's parking lot—

It's that kind of forever you forget about for years,
until a voice sends you
back into the abyss of wanting
such drunken nights
you thought you didn't deserve; the yes
that erased all no's; the first time
is what this feels like
and the ache of your body reminds you
how fast forever can end.

But the shivers of memory,
a kiss that might have changed you,
that changed you like the moon
becoming full
which later shrinks back,
a toenail clipping on an oak floor.

from the windy noon for hot chocolate, a biscuit, her mother's
kind words.

If I were her, maybe I could go home and change these
clothes—

but I'm stuck on the lily's callous face
that reminds me of him, a uniform pale, the yellow tick
at the center like his sex that protects him
from his true emotions, prevents me from knowing
what the chairs say in their plastic conversation.

I push the image from my mind,
wild flutter kisses leading everywhere—

Riding his bike last Sunday, I saw
yellow curls escape his cap, and on his face, the subtle determi-
nation
of a hawk waiting patiently
on a fence post at the edge
of a field.

This afternoon in Albion you collect a fishing license,
abalone shell souvenirs to checker
in your garden of hope,
like rainbow pressed colored plates
to mark time among herbs and plants without names
like the cowboy cookie on a brown paper napkin,
lanky wallflowers in their purple verdure, scentless
and stiff;
your spine wants to flex and you simply don't know
how to let it breathe

in and out, though the waves know that dance,
can make meaning
of haphazard movements—

And I remain
the lightening stripped wood, scrapped on the shore
to be found by some kid who'll paste
eyeballs on my back, attach beads
to my middle and put me
in the windowsill
for her mother to praise.

Gifts

We bought your wedding gift today,
a pair of salad servers, their silver
handles curved in my hand like
a Waterford goblet, just heavy enough
to know it's real, and the handles end
in a whirlpool
carved casually in the metal
because their artist knew
how bright and twisted marriage can get.

Though you planned this day for months
you'll try to get your arms around
it a year or two from now, only to remember faint scents,
the color of the sky, and what the fabric felt like
against your skin.

I hear your Pop-pop fell—
Laying in a white sterile room
with an oxygen mask cupped
over his lips, he wonders what
your eyes will say
when she whispers her promises,
his own eyes dulled to a wintry blue.
They flutter, hope to see Tess
on your arm
wearing white satin, a fine
woven veil to mask her desire—

and though his world dissolves quickly,
falters between meaning and hope,
at the altar you smell the faint
citrus of your bride's perfume,
the glittery antique stone reflects
in her eyes like the white sun that filters
through mini-blinds next to his bed,
shimmers off a thermometer
in a stainless steel carafe.

From the stained glass Mary,
blue gold crystals
splinter against wooden pews in diamonds,
on a cold surface, the scalpel punctures
cotton balls, the bitter wine
bites your tongue, her teeth etch
the brass goblet, and we all respond:

Thanks be to God

Although I never believed in
original sin, I'll catch my
breath, clench my husband's hand,
our gold bands will scratch
making room for our fingers—

Later, you'll open our gift.
Her face reflects in the slight curve
of the spoon, the whorl of celebration
around you might stop
for a moment
while you lean forward to
kiss her over boxes and tissue.

You'll take her hand
as Pop-pop takes his last quick
breath, whisper *I love you, mine*
while he's falling in circles
to wherever we go next—

Mark Stilwell

Through the Meadow

Like wildflowers
that brushed against me as I passed,
They stand.
The essence
of them clings to me
like pollen
stowed away on my clothes
and waits.
Awaits
the right moment
to mate with the seed of another.

Pop Star

Champion bones own shackles—
Pull, man, pull: birth of a horse.

Aztec births, assisted by shaman—
Patients waited on primitive toilets.

Guppies like a pimple pinch juicy—
One-by-one come out, swimming.

Stars, I hear, we create formally—
Not gravity; rather, crests of energy.

Thirty minutes from sperm to egg,
I deny his, tempt a genetic recipe.

To be water, ice cream and candy!
Maybe give me a star—still not easy.

Only birds, their birth, all species' envy!
Jellybean kids, then send them flying.

splendid, above the rafters

a cup of tea
with the mothers
while the fathers
mock the history
of chess, pistachios
& foreign politics
letting timothy's
room hound you
with straight-edge
tunes, issued:
you still have my
nancy sinatra cd,
you do, so soon
talk secret cocktail
after steph's parrot
gnaws a hole
in the collar
of your Van Heusen
& no way, dear
to repair it.

Roxanne Brooks

Preheat 350°

Eva? Was it love?
The aureole of an artist—
His, you shared?

Rudy snapped you
Frame by frame,
Courting the Black Forest

Of toothpicks & toad-
Stools. You kissed
His palm, nail to lipstick

And smiled: for Rudy,
Love and foreign dignitaries,
Marzipan on trellis balcony

With turkish tea, chocolate
And dollop of whiskey
Earlobe whispering

Of mother's grey cardigan:
If he made you bleed,
Daughter, how gently?

How, your fetus, future boiling?
Paying that Frau to strip:
You: one of many

Yet true, most faithful
Bird of fantasy!
Denial, dear

Ghastly nightmares
Goat's milk comforting
His sweat, cursing

The pink-singing
Crust of morning:
His eyes, first thing

And your love, mother:
Mustache, enamouring?
Your hour-glass figure

His accidentally?
Infidel fire, spark
To his religion

Like Zoroastrianism—
Bones: Charbroiled
Vermillion, to mother's

Simple autopsy question
Scarf to frame, polka-dot
Dress: *Sex preceding?*

Or, your volcano
Hour engagement,
Poison cooperating

Slowly, sulfur-pits
In fetus, vein, run purple,
And boil, alternating

With the cobalt spider
Of his mouth-hand-nazi:
Like lava along your lovely body.

R. Eirik Ott

rage

as
the sun
lurches
from behind
the steeple-stabbed town

violets
shake
sun-splattered dewdrops
from dark petals
that quiver
in the prowling miasmic haze

a stoop-shouldered worker bee
grumbles
criss-crossing the field
collecting tithes

a stigmata-skinned lizard
partakes
of a praying mantis' twitching body
its ridged underbelly
folded
and wrinkled into a frown

then

white-hot light
bursts
through stained glass
rains
multicolored shards
upon a braying crowd

the grimacing preacherman
scarlet robes ablaze
lashes his flock
into the apocryphal agony
His love invokes

sunday mourning
in a prairie town

Chris Baldwin

Self Defense

You jumped away from the firecracks
but the silence was so loud
that the girl stopped her screams,
you turned and stood like a boy, tiptoe
and watched his pirouette

across the backyard mossy light,
a Noh dancer stricken face-white
drunk on the stain that would not stop
and then the low moaning began,
trapped in a cloud damp well

rasping slow and hoarse like
the runover lab you could never forget,
choking on blood and pissing herself empty.
Soon their guns were leveled on you-
the concrete cold as a doctor's table.

When the cops had taken Aaron away,
their silent blue lights faded like an old movie.
With nothing this time to bury, you left
his glass of water like a chalice on your floor,
afraid to touch it.



Melanee Grondahl

Coffee Shop at Sunrise

Shannon Rooney

Awake

You eat
greasy French fries
at 5 a.m.,
swill dishwater coffee as you hunch over
at the tacky orange counter
of Denny's restaurant,
read the Tao te Ching
while dishes clink,
utensils rattle,
chatty, black-skirted waitresses
with tired faces rumble by,
stopping to ask, "More coffee, hon?"

Miles away
I sleep beneath flannel sheets,
immune to your early morning insomnia,
your fever of wakefulness. Coiled in warmth
you left behind, I dream
of a naked lunch
next to the serpentine creek
when the hills grow green again,
and splashing water
paints our awakening
as boldly as diamonds
on the backs of snakes.

Catherine Huff Clayton

Fishing and Father

Turn,
the warm bread earth
out of the shovel loaf pan
to gather crumbwrigglers
that dangle (little girl giggles)
on your teaching knee
as you break
the sweet communion bread earth.

Dragonfly sandwiches,
wasp warm root beer,
poppyred sequined ladies
lounging on a rotting log couch
gathered for a feast.
"Dragonflies sew up the mouths
of little girls who talk too much."

We straddled oily slimestones
under wrinkled water
that rushes onward
impatient as I
to wander the world.

August 1983

Here I am, sucked into the notes that have the most familiar rhythm I've ever known and mi abuelita is thrusting her worn hips from left to right, biting her lower lip and just dancing with the ghosts of those boys from years ago. She has a spatula in one hand, half a radish in the other, and is wearing an apron that makes her look older than her 70 years. The movement! The rhythm has hypnotized her and presently she is in a hazed bar-b-que trance. A whirlwind of strong woman because there's no taxman today, no bills today, no INS man today. It's Sunday and she makes me dance too. I'm still dripping from the kiddie pool, the one with duct-tape scars. I'm too big for that pool but so are my cousins and the stray dog abuelita found but we flood the water with our innocent flesh and splash into the twilight and abuelita is eating and dancing more than cooking and suddenly an uncle yells "git mea beer!" and I relish the responsibility and pit-patter my feet over cement till I get to the Coleman and pop it—a sea of ice and Budweiser. I reach for one and fall in. I froze there, but I can still feel the rhythm, sometimes.

the shark

god damn you!
cursed be your kin
you son of a sheepherder
who grew up on sheepherder's bread
good to go from
earth-oven
to satchel to stomach for days

you who rolled your blind grandfather's
cigarettes with tobacco leaves

you whose left handed uncle played
violin and had no fingers on that hand
just grooves between the supposed knuckles

you new mexican
with your castillean stubbornness
with your new world savage perception of
the pueblo, the hacienda, los indios,
los anglos

why
did you stoke that
hideous fire with the phrase
"los indios"

because *you* were los indios
because *you* were los anglos tambien

you were walking a thin line
where there should be no lines,
no boundaries
no looted burial grounds
no seas of cortes

just ocean
blue and salty
deep, deep ocean
alive
with all of her goodness

Just like Grandma

In the old days Grandma moved quickly, buzzing efficiently from place to place like a hummingbird. I felt clunky in her presence, dull-witted and oversized. I watched her with admiration from the sidelines as she worked her garden or whipped out one handmade quilt after another. I knew that if I tried to enter the circle of her busyness I would only slow her down, or undo with my clumsy hands what her deft ones had put together.

I think about this now in the grocery store as I turn down the cereal aisle and find her there, a diminutive woman in fuzzy pink sweatpants. Her sweatshirt hangs loosely from stooped shoulders; tiny feet are encased in a pair of child size sneakers. She is staring in bewilderment at the brightly colored cereal boxes, struggling to understand what the smiling cartoon animals are trying to tell her. For one instant I have the ridiculous notion of scooping her up and setting her in the shopping cart, and cruising the aisles with her as she once did with me.

"Gran?" I move beside her and put my hand over hers. Her skin is warm and dry, and her hand feels curiously doughy as if it is constructed entirely of flesh. It is a fact that her bones are shrinking. I imagine one day they will evaporate altogether leaving only a worn out pink sweatsuit in a puddle on the floor. "Are you o.k.?"

She starts and then her faded blue eyes spark with recognition. "Hi there! Good to see you!" she exclaims and hugs me tight, as if she hadn't seen me in a very long time—as if I hadn't driven her here, as if this hasn't been our weekly routine for the last year and a half.

"Did you find your cereal?" I shout this, but she gives me a vacant nod. It is her patented, I-couldn't-hear-a-thing-you-just-said-but-I'm-sure-not-going-to-tell-you-that look.

"CEREAL!" Other shoppers glance at us surreptitiously and hurry about their business.

Grandma shakes her head defiantly. "Where are those Nutty Bars? Your Dad is mean, he says I can't have them." It is my turn to shake my head, this time in exasperation. Nutty Bars—

sugar wafers dipped in chocolate and nuts, the only thing she will eat willingly.

"We already got your Nutty Bars Grandma, remember?" I motion to the cart. She sees the familiar white and red box and seems satisfied.

"Don't tell your dad though, he'll take them away."

"I promise Grandma. It's our secret."

She smiles, then veers away from me and shuffles toward frozen foods.

"Gran. Grandma. GRANDMA!"

She turns and smiles at me sweetly.

"We've already done this aisle."

"We have? Oh." She looks terribly disappointed.

"Listen, we need to speed this up. I have to get to work."

This is a flat out lie, but I've told it so often now that I don't even feel shame anymore. She loves our outings; she can make a trip to the pharmacy last two hours. Lately it seems as though her senility were contagious. I imagine confusion and disorder curling out of her in long, smoky tendrils. They enter me through my nose and ears and mouth; they begin to squeeze my brain.

"You take after your old Grandma. I worked in department stores for years." She steps back to 1953 for a moment of lucidity, while I think about that phrase 'Just like your grandmother.' When I was a girl I heard it all the time. "Bookish, like her grandma. Creative, like Grandma. Looks just like her grandmother when she was young." It used to make me proud. Now it makes me scared.

In the checkout line we are behind a middle-aged woman in an expensive looking pant suit. In the front of her cart sits a small boy in striped overalls. His face is covered with sticky green goo and an empty lollipop stick is clutched in his tiny white fist.

"Ohhh!" says Gran as she elbows past the woman and gives the child's foot a squeeze. "What's your name?"

"This is Matthew," the woman answers proudly, beaming down at the boy.

"Michelle?" asks Grandma.

I lean close to her ear. "Matthew!"

She gives me the nod.

"MATTHEW! HIS NAME IS MATTHEW! HE IS A BOY!"

Matthew's grandmother eyes me nervously and cranes her

neck to see if there is another checkstand available. It's no use, she is trapped.

"A boy? Well, he sure does have a lot of hair. What is he, Mexican?"

I was afraid of something like this. These days the phrase "think before you speak" means nothing to my grandmother.

"He does have beautiful hair," I say hopefully to the grandmother, silently begging her not to take offense.

"This is my grand baby," says Grandma proudly, patting me on the back. "It wasn't too long ago that she was that size."

The woman smiles politely at me and brushes the boy's hair out of his eyes with her fingers.

In the parking lot I load the groceries into the trunk of the car while Grandma watches. Then I lift her into the passenger seat and buckle the seat belt across her chest. Her hands automatically go to the release, but I am too fast for her and grab both of her hands in one of mine.

"Leave it!" I snap. She sticks out her bottom lip and turns her face away from me, but I am prepared for this.

"Here's a treat for the ride home." I slip the Nutty Bar into her lap. She grins and pats me lovingly on the cheek.

"You are a good girl," she whispers.

John Gurnee

saturday's heroes

straying rice creeps
over silent roads
near the edge of silo towns.
the arctic wind's return
blankets fields with white snows
ross and blues.
men come from miles around
driving muddy pick-ups
full of decoys,
excited dogs.
arriving before dawn
they struggle to fit into neoprenes
holding coffee
maybe a cigarette
or two.
brownings and berettas are shouldered tight
as they take their first step
into murky lagoons,
mowed rice
dreaming more than stories
to take home to the wife.

Who Gonna

Boom box babies bouncin' in
a break-dance frenzy on gangbang boulevard.

The night sang BANG! and blood muffled
speakers silenced as break-dance broke.

A girl vision: a four-year-old black beauty
fell by the fallen all the time a callin'

Bobby, my bro oh Bobby my bro
What I gonna tell mama this time this time?

Who gonna clean my room n' sing me the blues?
Who gonna make me cereal n' tie my shoes?

Who gonna hug me n' make me feel good?
who gonna splain things when I ain't understood?

where you gone to bro? what I gonna do?
who gonna love me bro if it ain't you?

Red Light District

I see you
stagger up the stairs,
smeared and papered with cherries.
Your drink
rattles your fingers
as you hold the ice cubes
between your teeth.
Please don't make my mother
replace the candles
aligning the hall.
They are there for
a reason.

They are there to light the way home,
the way out the door where darkness is black, not red,
and grins are no longer cheap.
Out there is like a tree house
and the rope ladder is my coat.

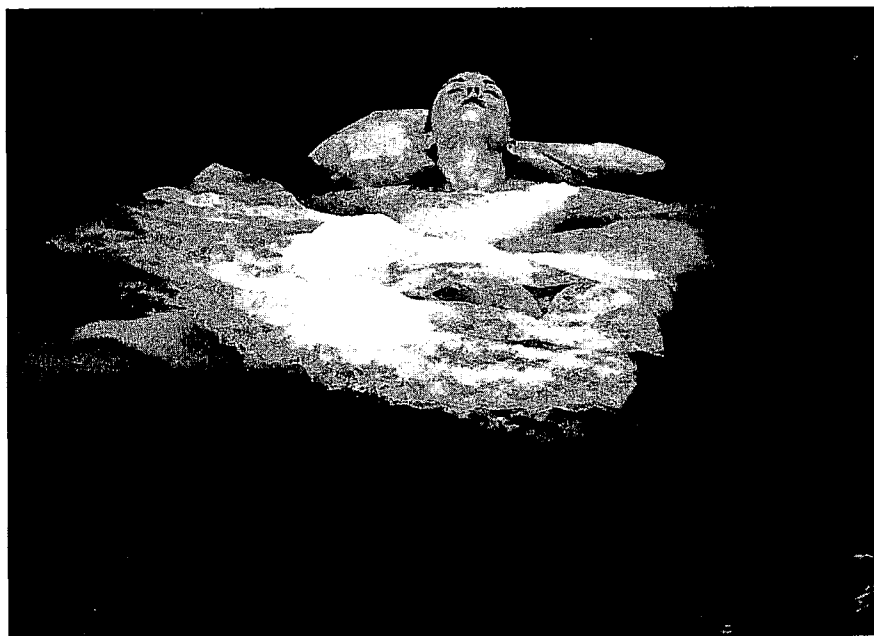
Why don't you go home to your wife
and your two small babies?
As you tell me you love me,
they are playing with the dolls
you bought from the lady outside.
She sells them for money, like me,
like us.
Yet, those dolls only make five,
and we make ten.

Barbara L. Caneer

Spring, You Jade

Like a gypsy maid she dances
with gold coins dangling from her brow,
jingling from her ears.
Luminous eyes sparkle
behind a shelter of disheveled hair.
Taut rosy skin sheaths her exquisitely.
She is draped in an artless rainbow of scarves
that sway to the harmony of undulating hips,
unraveling limbs, the tattoo beat of narrow heels,
the staccato snap of fingertips.
Promise she is, and it is me she beckons,
and I reach, I reach...

She laughs and flees
behind a screen of burnished beads
from which the older, coarser sister
steps with heaving breasts,
hot eyes, fervid breath.
The full-bodied, over-ripe necessity
presses against me,
the cyclical body responds.
I yearn to the glittering curtain
where one slim hand grasps a shimmering strand
and one dark eye looks out,
indifferent to all
but the lascivious process
she has begun.



Melanee Grondahl

Ophelia #2

Barbara L. Caneer

Lot's Daughters

*And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou
also destroy the righteous with the wicked?*

Genesis 18:23 (King James Version)

Mother died the night the angels came
with their obsidian eyes and cutglass faces.
Sister and I hid from them,
peering out from the pantry.
They were appallingly beautiful, cold

as ice sculptures, distant as the stars, awful
in their indifferent arrogance.
Even father feared them more than the drunken men
who came rowdy to our door,
demanding the elegant strangers for sport.
But mother was not afraid,
not until father begged the mob to take us
to rape instead of his honored guests.
Then she clutched us tight in bony hands,
wailed and moaned, sobbed so hard
we thought we would drown in her salty tears.
She had been growing thick
with crusted brine for years to no purpose
and it served no purpose then.
When at last the angels intervened
it was for father's sake,
not for mother's tears, not for our fear.

Later, when we fled,
she never looked back at our former home.
But she heard—we all heard—the screams, the shrieks,
the great outpouring of pain from thousands of voices.
And somewhere in that mass of suffering were
the women she gossiped with
at the well when she went for water,
the potter who mended for free the jar she broke
so father need not know and punish her,

the butcher who teased her
 because he wanted to see her smile,
the hungry children she fed scraps to behind the house
 when father was busy elsewhere.

For mother, this was, finally, too much sorrow.
She wept herself to death,
solidified into a pillar of salt,
leaving sister and me alone with that old lecher
who drinks and fornicates with us
and swears we make him do it.
The Lord loves this man.
What can we do?

Stalked

There was a riot of wild flowers
on my way to work today.
They crowded the banks of the roads,
brandishing their multi-colored flags,
threatening change.
Even in the concrete city I was not safe.
Fearless, kamikaze sunflowers
attacked the pavement,
cracking it with wanton abandon.
Roses and carnations
Mata Hari-ed their way
into shop windows and buttonholes,
and the dwarf cherry tree in my office
sat sullen and broody through the day,
straining at its ceramic container
like a P.O.W.
On my return home,
I plunged from garage to house
through pouncing tiger lilies
and swooping snapdragons,
infiltrators from my neighbor's yard.
An infantry of daisies,
led by daring dandelions,
nipped at my feet,
while a reserve of dogwood blossoms
cheered them on.
Inside, my tamed african violet,
having lost its usual compliance,
was loudly demanding
an afternoon airing on the porch,
unmindful of my jeopardy
in taking it there.
No, too many forces are at work outside
that would endanger
a mind set on winter
with a heart meant for spring.

Barbara L. Caneer

La Mujer Muda

En otro tiempo, había una niña
Once there was a girl
que amaba a las libéulas
Who loved the dragonflies
que destallaban en la luz del sol.
that glittered in the sun.
Trataba de capturarlas
She tried and tried to catch them
porque le encantaban a ella
las alas de telaraña fina,
because she was enchanted
by their gossamer wings,
los ojos irisados,
their iridescent eyes,
los cuerpos como agujas brillantes.
their bodies like bright needles.
Las perseguía, suplicando,
"Ven a cá, ven a cá. No me huyan.
Solamente deseo quererlas."
She would chase them, begging,
"Come to me, come to me. Don't fly away.
I only want to cherish you."
Pero los ojos siempre la divisaban
But the eyes always spied her,
y las alas eran veloces.
and the wings were swift.
Finalmente las libéulas llegaron a ser fatigadas
de sus súplicas
Finally, the dragonflies grew weary
of her pleas
y le concidieron su deseo.
and granted her wish.
Con las agujas cosieron juntos sus labios
With their needles they sewed her lips shut
y hicieron una madriguera en su pecho.
and burrowed into her breast.

Hoy ella es muda,
Today she is mute,
pero lleva libéulas en su corazón
but she carries dragonflies in her heart
eternamente.
Forever.

Contributors' Notes

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Chris Baldwin received his B.A. in English Literature from James Madison University in Harrisonburg, VA, home of the world's largest freestanding concrete mold. He is the calendar editor for the *Chico News & Review* and a part-time music store employee (as long as he still gets discounts).

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