

WATERSHED



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Volume 24, Number 1

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Fall 2000

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Autumn

Two sisters screaming
Phantom cartoon soldier says
Stop-Drop-Roll

Orange flowers racing
Climb the younger sister's
Hair

Rusty yellow Tonka Toys
Pool of mossy water
Weeds

One's hands fly pat-pat-pat pat
One runs for the emerald garden
Hose

Icy water streams
Sparks drown
Silence

Hair matted charcoal
Blisters erupt on a scalded pink
Face

Parents return—whisk her away
Little monkey face wrapped
In bandages

Long hair-sprayed waves lost
Bandages removed
Scar-free

Small slender pink tapers
Flameless on her birthday
Cake

Turn the Flame Low

Back from church,
quarter to eleven,
the farmhouse kitchen bustling
with bouffant women.

Four generations gather.

I, over the stove, frying
ten pounds of sausage.
*Sweetie, turn the flame low
when it pops on you.*
The smell of pork warming
the hazy summer kitchen,
and I know
to save the grease,
know how Auntie will sprinkle
flour into the burning, bubbling fat,
mixing the thick roux,
then adding milk,
letting it simmer and thicken into
creamy gravy.

Grandma covers the counters
with cookie sheets;
her spoon drops dough
that will become biscuits.

Men in the yard,
getting a brisket ready to grill.
Disagreeing, gently,
over how long it takes
to cook all the blood out
of the tender middle,
scorching Missouri sun
driving sweat down temples
into sideburns or peach fuzz.

My Noah shimmies the leaf
into the dining table.
Then Amy, the youngest,
brings out dishes:
blue and white gingham earthenware,
ivory linen,
sturdy iron forks
 that traveled between the teeth
 and over the tongues
 of my ancestors.



michelle m. rader

The Door

Down On Downer

Washed out town,
hydraulic miners stole the nugget,
smothered the living silver in the shallows,
left bedrock, tailings,
the valley forever damned.
Eleven antique stores
sell all that was left behind,
sell mostly to each other.
The old, hard-livers
stumble down to Downer,
ask, "... a little somethin' for the pain?"
Our elixirs—not enough.
Nothing glitters down on Downer,
and the sole traffic light
blinks red in all directions.

Wake to Dream

You sleep to find yourself
in a village, on just the cusp
of the mediterranean. A creeping sun
suspended low on a blood-
letting sea. An unbearable hum
at the bone
propels you.

On the crowded street
a marionette winks at you
through a child's deft fingers
and disappears.

An old fisherman,
a lady-in-waiting,
a cut-rate magician garbed
in the tantric flair—
all are pulled away.

And in the wake of their passing,
in the stir of the air, you can
discern the pattern of thought
their skin deposited, subtle ruminations
on a theme:

all have wanted you once,
witness their stolen glances.

It is only much later
alone, and on the verge of silence
that you feel the press of my lips,
and hear my breath on a whisper
receding.



crystal beck

City/Lover

I am coming to you
San Francisco
My City/Lover.
Your great steel/concrete arms
reach out to bring me to your breast.
You sit Regal upon your throne
Between Bay and Ocean.

Sweet Fog/Breath
Cool upon my cheek
As sun comes up over Berkeley Hills
Glint of Orange Morning light
upon your eastern cheek
And you stir from night dreams.

Awake my City/Lover!
Such Thrill of expectation
In Belly and Balls
Gooseflesh from toes to greedy fingers.
I am coming to you
San Francisco
My City/Lover.

I long to run my hands across your hills.
I ache to plunge my fingers into your gentle valleys.
I taste the salt of your Perfume
Mixed with your sweet Fog/Breath.

You lift your skirts to reveal
your lovely twin thighs of Sunset and Richmond.
You flash your Hot Pink Tenderloin

You grind your NeonHot Broadway SexShow
You flirt Boy/Girl eyes from Polk/Castro hustle
You send out white hot desire from South of Market.

Ocean winds through Treetop Hair
You Laugh with wild Salsa Rhythm
from your Mission.
and Love, Strong and Black
from Fillmore and Hunter's Point.

You turn shy
becoming the face of a young girl
with an ice cream cone on Clement street
who sees too clearly my Naked Love
and you turn your head away.

I touch you in Secret Sacred ways.
My hands travel across your body in beloved familiar strokes.
22 Fillmore, N Judah, 7 Haight, 21 Hayes.

The Sun, high now,
Has rolled back the fog.
Shining brightly are your crown jewels
of Skyscraper Downtown
BofA and TransAmerica
and more subtle older treasures revealed
of Mission Dolores, Octagon House,
Palace of Fine Arts, Emanu-El.

I am wild with the smell of you!
Pouring out from Kitchen Windows and exhaust fans.
Fat Burritos, Dim Sum,
Garlic, Basil, 5 Spice, Feta, Coffee, Cumin, Crab.

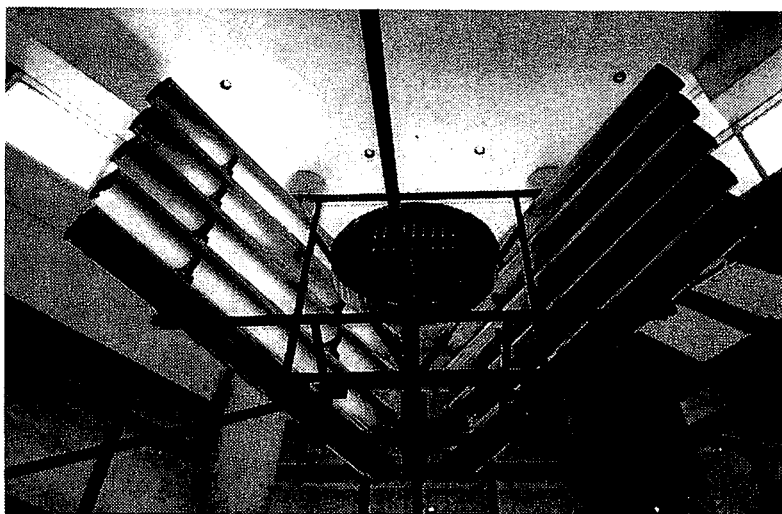
You whisper in my Ear
In a hundred different languages,
"Te Amo."

I run my hands along your Dirty brick walls
I stroke the Cracked paint of your Weathered siding
I take off my shoes and bury my toes
in your Ocean Sands.
Back on with the shoes
And it's Rubber Soles on Concrete Sidewalks
As I continue to search out
the Sweetness of your Hidden Places.

I am falling Ever
Deeper in love with You
My City/Lover

Your Hills gently rise and fall
(I have watched this from afar
and felt this beneath my feet
on Potrero and Sutro)
And at times you Shudder and Quake
And I Shudder and Quake with you.

Are we both going to die in this moment?
I surrender! I surrender totally to this Love
I bear for you,
My City/Lover.
Lying on the green grass
In Golden Gate Park
Between your lovely twin thighs of Sunset and Richmond
On Hippie Hill
I fall Asleep.



renee suzanne muir

Acoustics

This Girl I Know

Crowded chatter can't
penetrate my thoughts through
razor air.

Blocked by the only motion
of this girl I used to know.

On the corner—
she stands in the rain
looking up without caring
which drop will hit her first.

Her portrait on the wall bares—
naked she stares back.
Black surrounded colored eyes—
deep enough to swallow—
stares I hardly recognize
in fever fire delicate,
I wave—to this strange naked girl.

Have you seen her in the coffee house, running gently through
rows of unyielding robots? Business suits and hurricanes always
wanting something new. Have you seen her with her Goodwill
shirt—too tight to be revealing, too dirty to love fully? She
dances in my mind, in her walk, in her style, in the jazz which she
creates. Her steps heavy in thick boots, like pounding headaches
just relieved. Who has seen her living? "Do you want to dance?"
the old man asks her quietly, "or perhaps a gentle screw in the
back of my mini-van?" She smiles in her pleasant way, repeating,
"No thank you sir, not today." In watercolor life she stays the
most beautiful girl alive.

Red Dress

he said the red dress used to fall
away as free as gin and lemonade.
and when he boozed,
sometimes he lost his mind and
cried promenade.
promenade on sugar limbs as
innocent and bare as legs of
barroom stools.
except it was only hope which
dreams entrusted to his care.
hot damn he said,
it seems I just get by you know.
everything has come undone
and left apart while echoes blow
like promenades of the red dress I
have known.

a picture of your—self

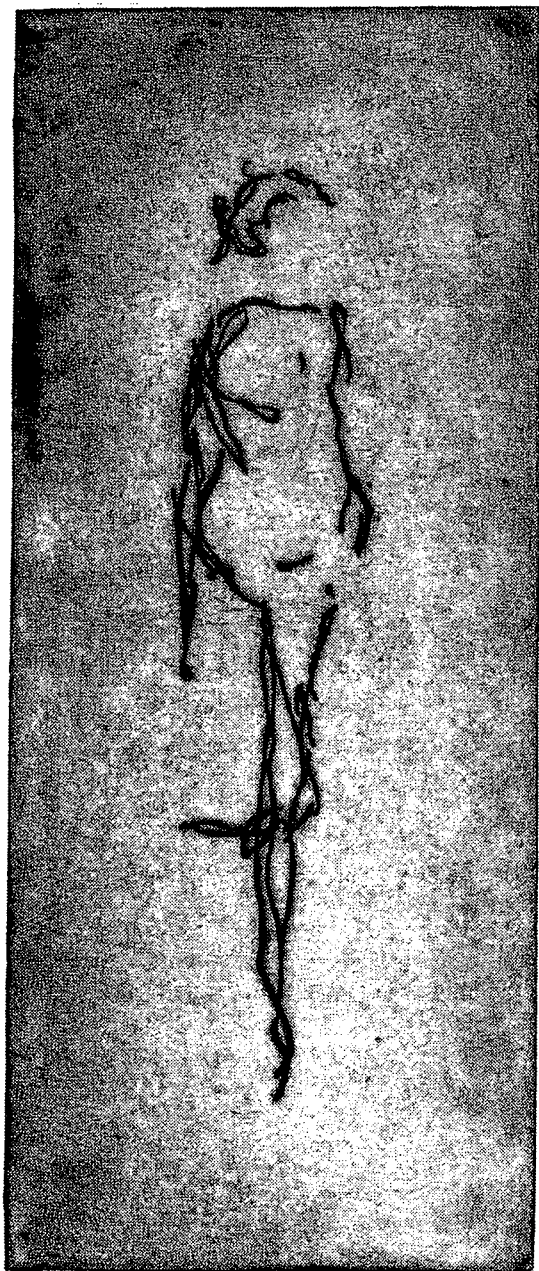
if i were a man
i would like to be him,
then again
if i were
i'm sure i'd want to
be more like me

knowing by the way
he's watching
we have a good bit
in common:
giving passion to
in-house whiskey beggars,
wrinkling our foreheads—
artwork's perplexity,
note-taking the billboard—
names and dates,
jazz bands and poetry jams.

he's drinking cold water,
i'm sipping hot coffee.
like me
he's wishing
he could afford
a warm
beer.

—it's a funny thing
observing a person writing,
the way he breathes,
silence, hardly spoken
whispers,
the rapid rhythm,
searching eyes.

he's writing,
i'm watching,
he's writing about me watching,
at some point
he stops—
to look up
and there i am
looking at him,
him at me.



elizabeth hiscox

Self

Sketch

As I entered the front door to the tiny corner bar, my dog, Harry, by my side, a hand took my elbow.

“Hey Sketch, good to see you,” a woman’s voice said.

“That you Katelin?” She squeezed my elbow in response.

“You want to sit in front?” she asked as she led me past the bar. I nodded. I estimated, from the sound of the voices, that there were about forty people in the bar.

“Johnny Walker Black, straight up?” she asked as Harry and I sat down.

“And a bowl of water for Harry,” I said.

Moments later I heard blues chord progressions being played on a piano. The ice in the glasses around me stopped clinking and everyone in the bar stopped talking at the sound of that first note. A woman’s voice started singing the blues, and, I swear, it sounded as if everyone there stopped breathing.

When the song ended and the applause began, Katelin brought my drink and Harry’s bowl of water. She put my drink in my hand, then she placed Harry’s bowl in front of him. As I reached for my wallet, she put her face close to mine.

“Mick says your money’s no good here,” she almost hollered over the applause.

I always carry a sketch pad; that’s why many of the folks who’ve seen me around the neighborhood call me Sketch. I can’t comment on my work, for obvious reasons.

I drank my drink and raised my arm for another. Katelin came to my table.

“Ready for another?”

“Bring one for the singer too,” I said.

Within ten minutes, this girl was standing next to me. As soon as she was within three feet of me, before she said a word, I knew it was her.

"Hey, Sketch. "

"You know me?" I asked.

"Seen you around the neighborhood, but I just learned your name from a guy at the bar. Thanks for the drink." I nodded.

"Mind if I sit here?"

"Please," I said coolly, but my heart was in overdrive.

She sat down next to me and I could feel her eyes on me.

"How'd you get your name?"

"Guess it's what I do," I said. There was a pause then, and I didn't want her to leave.

"Can I touch your face?" I asked. She pulled her chair very close to mine, took my hands in hers and placed them on her face. It was just as I had envisioned: the length of the forehead, the depression between the eyes, her nose, her lips, her chin, her cheekbones, her hair. I suspected she was African/American from the way she sang and the sound of her voice. When I had finished touching her, I was sure.

"Did you see me now?" she asked.

"Yeah, but everything is like I already knew," I said.

"What's that mean?"

"Beautiful. "

"So you gonna sketch me?" she asked.

"Yeah, but I'll wait till you're up there singing," I said. We had another drink together and then she went back to the stand. Everyone stood up and applauded as she sat at the piano.

Four bars into "Stormy Monday," I took my sketch pad from my pack and began to sketch. I can't go back and fix things; when my pen goes to paper, that's it. I sketched during the whole second set, and, by the end of it, I could tell there were at least three people looking over my shoulder. I closed my pad as she ended the last tune of the set and people stood and applauded while she stepped down and walked to my table.

"Did you sketch me?" she asked as she sat down. I didn't answer, I just opened the sketch pad. "You're even better than I heard," she said.

"You heard I was good?"

"I heard you were somebody who would become famous after you died," she said.

"Fits the pattern," I said. "Isn't the bar scene a step into Hell for you?"

"Hell?"

"Yeah, I mean you're a church singer aren't you?" She laughed then and covered my free hand with hers.

"This ain't Hell man, Hell is four blocks west of here, right where Potomac crosses Main. "

"Well," I said, "you're a slice of Heaven." She laughed again.

"No, Heaven is on Capital Avenue, up past Madison, where everybody's rich and white. "

"So, we're somewhere in the middle?" I said.

"Yeah, it's called the way it's supposed to be," she said.

"Amen," I said.

After her last set, the three of us left the bar together and walked down East Avenue along the river. We stopped at a hot dog cart and she handed me a hot dog; I gave half to Harry.

"You like me cause I'm black?" she said.

"Yeah," I said. "You like me cause I'm white?"

"I'm serious, my color turn you on?"

"I can't see your color, and who says you turn me on?"

"Do I?" she asked.

"I guess it's your voice," I said.

"That enough?" she asked. I didn't know.

"What do you think?" I said.

"I think we must both be crazy for having this conversation."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because you're some blind white guy who bought a drink for a girl in a bar and you can't even look into her eyes," she said.

"Sure I can," I said, "I just can't see them, that's all." She didn't say anything for a while and I felt uncomfortable. "You prejudiced against blind guys?" I asked. I heard a low subdued laugh and I knew that my words were probably causing her to think about prejudice. I think it might have been the first time she ever thought of herself as potentially prejudging anything.

"Naw, if I learned anything in my life, it's that I ain't about to pre-judge any thing or any body," she said. "Anyway, that gives you a good excuse to be with a black woman, doesn't it?"

"What?" I said, "You think I need an excuse to be with somebody?"

"Well, you don't have to look at people's faces judging you, people forgive you because they figure you might not even know I'm black, and even if you did, you're blind so you can't always get what you want. " I felt my face burn and my eyes sting.

"Damn, that's cold," I said. "You think I got low standards because I can't see you? What's that say about how you see yourself? There ain't nothin' low about my standards."

"Sketch, I ain't out to hurt nobody, but I calls 'em like I sees 'em."

"And you're blinder than I am," I said. "I can't see you, but I heard you, I felt your face; you saw my sketch. You think other people, people who ain't blind and people who ain't black, have a better understanding of each other than you and I?"

"I don't know what I think... maybe I'm a little scared," she said.

"Scared of what?" I asked. "Where's a seat? I want to sit down." She took my arm and led me to a bench where we both sat. Harry laid down by my feet with his body against my leg.

"You're the first white guy I ever liked this way and I'm having a rough time relaxing with it." I felt my shoulders relax when she said that.

"Okay, fair enough," I said, "but that's what you got to tell me, not that gobble-de-gook about us being a couple of sorry-ass misfits and that's why we're becoming friends."

"I never said that," she said. "Look, I just got off a long bumpy ride with a guy from Newark and I need a rest." I leaned back against the warm hard backrest and concentrated on the air on my face.

"Yeah girl," I said getting up, "you have yourself a rest. Home Harry." And Harry pulled me toward home.

A week went by before I allowed myself to think about her again. Her face appeared before me suddenly like bread in the

toaster you forget until it pops. Once she appeared, she wouldn't go away. I couldn't understand the longing I began to feel for her company. Maybe she was right, I thought, maybe I'm a desperately lonely blind guy.

It was Saturday morning. I leashed Harry and we went out for a walk. As we passed the corner bar, I heard her voice. Harry and I stood outside until the song ended and then we continued down the block. I heard someone running behind us and getting closer.

"Sketch?" she said.

"Hello," I said, "I don't even know your name."

"Veronica," she said. "I'm all rested."

"Well," I said, "let's finish that walk."

Summerfeet

I have had to grow old.
I can no longer enjoy
running barefoot in ankle high grass
dull blades that nick and scratch
tender skin,
callused heels blackened
from the pavement's hot stove
where I would race the sun.
Now my feet have tender souls
troubled by gravel roads and dirty hills,
delicately slipped into sandals,
adorned with rings,
too old to run
barefoot
like a child.



michelle m. rader

Forging Ahead

517 Bootcut Levis

I wonder
When that lie I told you
Will surface
When I said
I would never need another

Because I can feel the guilt inside
Tumble & turn
Like my Levis in the wash
You say my ass looks great in them
I wear them for you
And for him

He doesn't say a thing
His eyes grow big
His pupils dilate
Huge black buttons

I let him watch me
When I bend over
To pick up forgotten laundry
Socks & underwear
I hope he fantasizes

I hate to admit
That when I think of him
I don't think of you
I am thinking of you less
And less

I wonder
When I'll make the mistake
Of letting him
Have a taste

Forgetting that I promised you
I would never need another

Sand Castle

In my tenth summer,
you were inexhaustible.
Every day, armed with seven
peanut-butter and jelly sandwiches,
you would round us up
and haul us to Coconut Island
where we learned,
barefoot in faded bathing suits,
just who we were.

Those days
you would sit on the sand,
in the shade of your round straw hat,
(a mother turtle with her little ones)
and dig.
You dug tunnels and bridges.
You built entire cities
there on the shore.
For hours
you pushed piles of sand,
like pie crust,
into curves and edges,
forming roads that always led to
secret passages.
You were magic.

Now, in my twenty-sixth year,
I can still feel your essence.
But we are no longer on the sea-side,
it is winter, and you are tired.
You just sit there patiently,

in that washed-out
underwater light
of the hospital waiting room,
heartsick—
no trace of castles in the sand.

Let me build you a city of refuge,
a sanctuary that won't wash away.

Cities and Memory

I.

I waited for you
by the water's edge
and in the café,
my back to an open window.

So much has changed here.
The city is like a giant
turning clock, and every day
something new vanishes.

Old men and their dogs
now occupy the parlor
where you and I held hands.
They spend long days on the broken floor
arguing the politics of a dying nation

each foreign tongue
each forgotten country

~~speaks to the misery~~ of silence.
It will go on as long
as there are words
and breath to form them.

II.

Perhaps you heard,
there is a street carnival
in the alley where the vendors
used to shout.
I go there every day looking for you.
And the things I have seen...

The old, cruel dictator
is now the shoeshine boy's apprentice.
I saw him hurry a budding starlet
behind the illusionist's tent
when no one was looking.

He had the same cruel smile.
She looked spellbound.

You see,
there is much loss here.
I found it on the gypsy's face
as she traced the lines of my palm
with her finger, her dark eyes
closing.

Everything recedes.

III.

There is hope,
some say,
in the tent city being erected
outside of town.

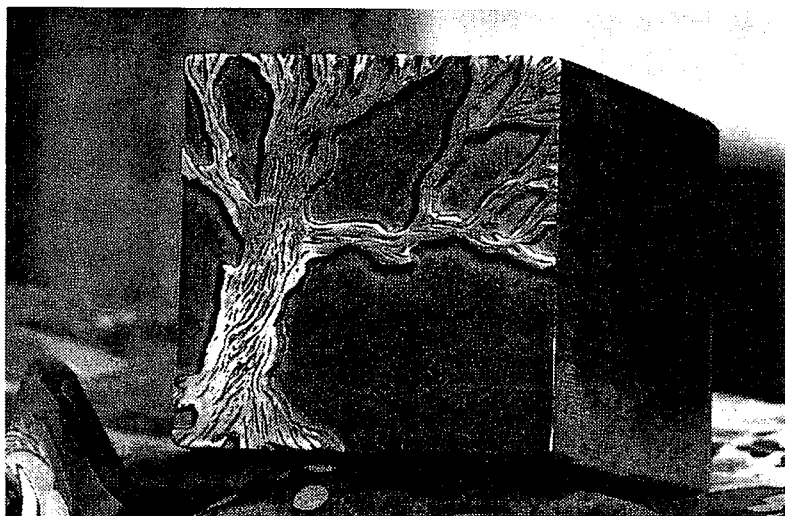
There is a boy there
who reads minds in the mesmerist's show.
They say he speaks
with the Redeemer, and the word is...

something profound is taking place
we must follow the footprints—

down the alleys and narrow streets,
into the closets and attics,
on street comers and in basements.

Somewhere, far beyond the city
a revelation awaits us.

I will look for you there.



renee suzanne muir

Wednesday's Child

surreal from several sources

the green flavor dominates the contented breeze
as light-bodied versions in bowfront windows
turn to elaborate menus
the scholar is wearing a hat
and a portrait of his grandfather
like an everyday hazard
the delicate texture of
a friend who knows everything
a mixture of color and black and white
saturated with character

it's a short chapter of conversation
swimming in a shock of red



renee suzanne muir

Graven Image

Well Traveled

Cracked skin like an elephant
wrinkles scorched
in walks through steaming heat
areas black and smooth like obsidian.

Black laces tattered
from thousands of ties
now lay like dead snakes
through eyelets.

Soles smooth as glass
worn away on Avenue A.
Soles that trampled over bones,
Thomas Beckett, Shakespeare, Marx,
and slipped on cobblestone in Dublin,
now lay lifeless
on my bedroom floor.

Insoles dry and hard
from wading through five inches of water,
Rebecca clutching my back,
to a castle
guarded by a swan
and a storm.

Red dirt caked in stitches
from rocks along cliffs.
Stitches frayed over two years
in deserts, swamps, and cities.

Westfalia '78 \$1800 Good Condition

It's a goddamn good thing
that we never bought
that hippie van together,
brown and orange polyester mesh
curtains like the ones
my mother parted
at my age.

Still, sometimes I miss
that set of fantasies.

And it would've been nice
to crawl onto that narrow bed
beside the travel sink
and make frantic love
out in the forest, side of the freeway,
impatient, like the night
we drank ourselves sober.

Nice, it would've been,
but now there's nothing shared,
not much to share,
between you and me.
So keep those heated polyester visions
with everything else
you hold too tight,
and I'll fly off this time.

Hair Clip

There was a woman's^{1,2} hair clip³ attached to⁴ the television's⁵ power⁶ cable⁸.

-
1. Well, technically it could have been a man's⁹ hair clip—there was nothing inherently special about it that made it so that only women could use it.
 2. It was owned⁷ by a woman named Samantha Peterson.
 3. It was one of those claw-style clips, and black¹¹.
 4. Or hanging from, depending on your semantic point of view.

5. The television was hanging in the upper left corner of a room in the Communications Department building.
6. Or maybe the Cable TV cable, I don't really remember⁸.
7. Well, Samantha's sister bought it and gave it to her as a present, and Samantha obviously wasn't using it much while it was hanging in a classroom in the university, so one could get into a fairly tangled legal argument as to the strict ownership of the hair clip, but suffice it to say that the clip was essentially Samantha's for most of its functional life span.
8. Whichever it was, it was thick and black.
9. In fact, one could say that²¹ a man¹⁰ was the reason it was hanging there in the first place.
10. Ricardo¹² Smith²⁴.
11. Samantha's favorite color.
12. Known to his friends as "Ricky¹³."
13. Some of his friends¹⁴ thought "Ricky Smith" sounded like a Rock²⁰ Star¹⁵.
14. Samantha was¹⁹ his girlfriend, so she definitely fits into this category.
15. Or a porn¹⁶ star.
16. Samantha¹⁴ was more fond¹⁸ of this¹⁵ interpretation.
17. Carl McConnell.

18. Use your imagination.
19. As in past tense. Things changed²⁵ once the semester ended.
20. Actually, Ricardo was a Geology major, so the nickname²² was kind of appropriate.
21. In fact, I¹⁷ just did. And I would know—I knew¹⁹ both parties intimately^{18,23}.
22. Rock Star Rick, among others¹⁸.
23. Not that much imagination.
24. Yeah, his last name was really Smith.
25. Well, to make a long story²⁸ short²⁶, they broke up²⁹.
26. Really short, if you take my meaning¹⁸.
27. Samantha.
28. Samantha and Ricky had been dating for two years³⁰. They had been a pretty happy couple for most³¹ of it, and the rest of us were joking about where³² the wedding would be. They never³³ seemed to have any problems, but things started to go bad. Little things at first, arguments and the like³¹. Things slowly got worse until one day³⁴, Samantha thought³⁷ she found out³⁵ that Ricky had cheated on her.
29. Well, it's more like they failed³⁹ to get back⁴⁰ together.
30. Since they were sophomores.
31. The Noodle Incident¹⁸ was pretty bad.
32. My money was on the rose garden Downtown.

33. What, never? Well, hardly ever.
34. September 14th, last year.
35. One of her²⁷ friends thought³⁷ she³⁶ saw Ricky and another girl at a party making out and then going home together³⁸.
36. This is the friend. I think her name was Kori.
37. One of the morals of this story is not to jump to conclusions.
38. Actually, Ricky did drive her⁴¹ home. She was an old friend of Ricky's and Ricky was giving her a lift. Sadly, Samantha didn't wait around for the explanation and overreacted⁴³.
39. Ricky seemed to think that Samantha was just a little too much work⁴⁴ if she²⁷ was going to flip out about him¹⁰ helping old friends⁴¹, so he didn't take his opening when he got it⁴⁰.
40. After she²⁷ dumped⁴⁵ him¹⁰, Samantha decided to try and give Ricky another chance. She used a hair clip³ to attach a note to the television⁵ in one of Ricky's classrooms. Ricky actually got⁴⁶ the note⁴⁷ and spent a good thirty seconds considering his choices. Then it seemed obvious⁴⁴ what to do⁴⁸.
41. This is Ricky's old friend. I never did catch her name, but she had great legs.
42. Meanwhile, in a lonely corner of the North Atlantic, there were two Buddhist Monks in a rubber raft. They had been floating in silence for several minutes. The second monk watched the first monk with an expectant look on his face. The first monk was staring off over the water, and was fidgeting with something in his lap. The second monk couldn't

tell what it looked like; it was either the sleeves of his robe, or the ends of his scarf⁸. Finally, the first one straightened his robe, turned to the second one and said, "You raise a good question, but I think the Niners are going to go all the way next year."

43. She²⁷ flipped out, started yelling and throwing dishes, ended up throwing Ricky out of her apartment, made her feelings plain⁴⁵, and ignored what he had to say⁴⁹.
44. This seems like an odd opinion after two years of dating, but the evidence³¹ had been piling up that the relationship was over.
45. "Get the hell out of my house, and I never want to see your ugly, impotent⁵⁰ face again you jerk!"
46. This was actually a small miracle. There are a lot of "Ricks" in Geology.
47. "Ricky—I'm sorry about the other night, I think we need to talk. I think we're even now, so if you still want to give us a chance, take this hair clip and attach it to the fence post where we met. I'll call you."
48. Well, in case you couldn't figure it out, I'll give you a hint. The hair clip is still there.
49. "Baby, no! You don't understand..." and a whole lot of stuttering. Ricky isn't the world's most verbose individual.
50. Ricky says that this was just angry hyperbole. I'm not so sure¹⁸.



elizabeth hiscox

Swept

Sometimes Tying Caddis Nymphs

Hare's ear, rooster neck, mallard tail
and gold wire—general love

For rivers and fish,
sharp at the barbs and tips—the fisherman

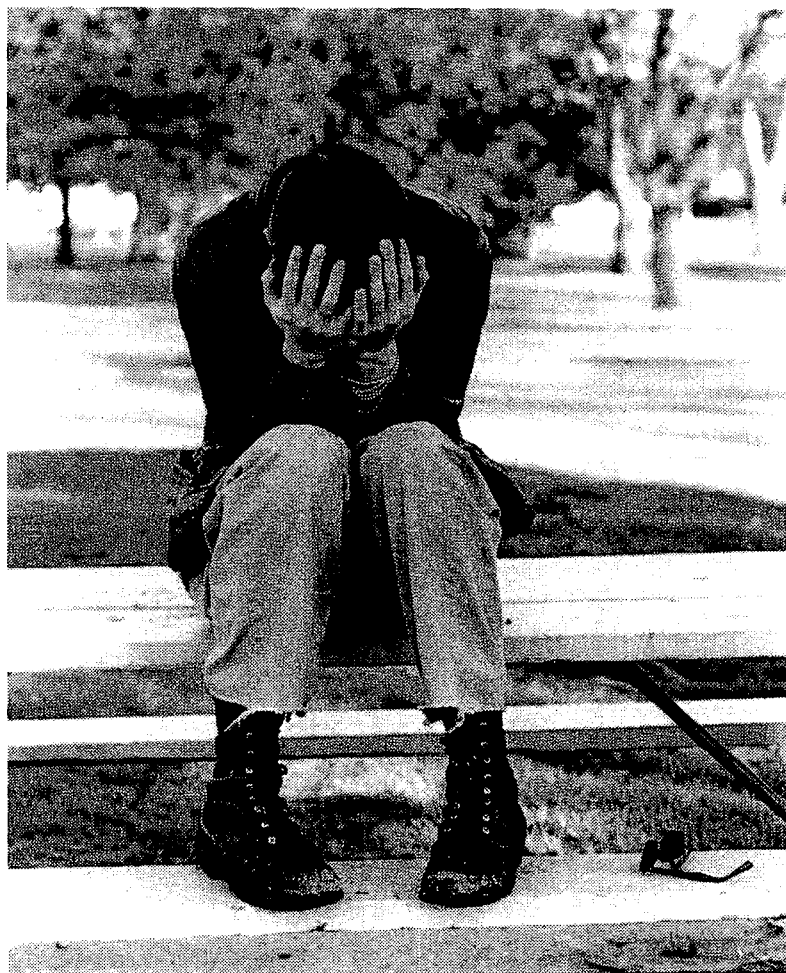
Wraps the mallard tail taut for legs,
waxes the thread and dubs the hare's ear down

For bodies segmented by general love—
the separating gold wire tied off

Before the rooster neck spikes from the shanks
and that tied off even, by the common

Catching brown thread—
two knots tight in front of the eyes

To make sure it all holds



crystal beck

Sam

High Coup

The stars had been raped
When the Sun wasn't looking.
Dawn broke with a scream.

Domestic Violence

My wife's great happiness
these days is chasing crickets
toward our new gecko
and watching him snap them up.
Nocturnal or not,
he comes out standing tall
whenever she whispers to him in her
gecko lover's voice.

Should I be worried?
No, I knew she would love the lizard
when a friend offered and I brought him home.
There isn't much wildness in her life,
not much Life-and-Death struggle.
She needs this adventure: black plaster mountain, blue ceramic lake,
single sprout of plastic jungle on a plain of crumbled red bark;
all contained in a little glass cabinet where
she turns the sun on and off.

Should I be worried?
No, I don't think so,
at least not like the crickets should.

Letting Go

I did not think it would happen so quickly.

During those final days in the ICU
when you decided to reject treatment
and go home,
it seemed like you were getting better.

And in the foolishness of my youth
I talked myself into believing
that this wasn't really the end.

I said that home would be good medicine.
You said:
“don't get your hopes up.”

You did not tell me
that you were gripping-fast to your body
so you could make it home
to die.

You did not confess that it took
the fierceness of all the strength you had
to keep your spirit locked inside
your exhausted, living corpse.

And with that aching father's love
you did not confide
that the moment we landed at the Redding Airport
you would surrender your furious battle—
that the coolness of the April rain patting your dry face and lips
would mark the beginning
of your letting go.



christine lundgren

Path Unknown

Promise

When you return we will pick fresh oranges from the garden,
peel their skins to uncover succulent pips,
push their pulp around in our mouths,
let their juices heal our throats.

When you return we will rock in the chairs by the fireplace,
warm our tired bodies,
learn to talk to each other again.

When you return I will bring you books of poetry,
sit by your bed,
invite rhythm to fall from my lips,
soothe your mind with words.

When you return we will sit, wrapped in blankets by the pond,
watch orange and yellow koi
slip slow through water lilies.
The rushing waterfall will sweeten our silence.

When you return we will watch the sky marble
brilliant fuchsias and golds,
watch the sun set low on crinkled hills.

When you return we will till the earth,
plant new bulbs,
watch the rain pour down
and nourish hungry roots.

contributors notes

Crystal Beck is a junior at CSU Chico, majoring in graphic design. She transferred to Chico from American River College with an Associate of Arts degree.

Brian Brophy is a fifth-year senior at Chico State majoring in journalism with a minor in Creative Writing. He likes to play guitar and take pictures, and hopes to graduate someday.

David Chartlon lives and writes in Chico.

Mark H. Clarke is an amateur myrmecologist and a registered nurse. He is allergic to latex as well as most types of fruit, but still finds ways to be happy.

Bob Garner is a writer and an artist and lives in Chico.

Mark P. Haunschild is a senior English major at Chico State with a minor in creative writing. He started his college career as a marine science major at CSU, Monterey Bay, where he discovered his passion for creative writing. He hopes to obtain a master's degree in creative writing and poetics.

Gabriel L. Helman is a Sacramento native, but has been living in **Chico** since 1996 in an attempt to convince the esteemed faculty at **Chico** State to endow him with a degree in computer science. It appears he may become successful in this endeavor, though he has upped the ante to include a minor in creative writing.

Douglas Hesse is a creative writing graduate student at Chico State.

Elizabyth Hiscox says she is not at liberty to divulge anything about her fascinating existence due to the ongoing investigation.

Buffy Lauer wants to be an ocean in her next life.

Christine Lundgren is a single mom with two children and works with Feather River Hospital as a medical transcriptionist. She has written many short stories and poems, which she continues to work on over and over.

Jim Matthews enjoys writing poetry and says his poems need to be fun for him to read them. He is a self-described “new writer,” though his poem “Homer’s Dream” was published in a local anthology, *This Little Bit of Earth*.

Renee Suzanne Muir is a Seattle native, but relocated to Chico last winter. Photography is her hobby and her passion.

Timothy John Muir was born at the beginning of President Harry Truman’s lame duck year in office. He became an official “man of letters” in 1978, “pushed the envelope” for 19 years, and resigned from the U.S. Postal Service three years ago. “Now I loaf and enjoy my soul,” he says.

Denise Peterson is married to Dave, and they have two kids. She graduated from Chico State in May with a bachelor’s degree in English, and is now pursuing an anthropology degree.

David Philhour is a 1983 graduate of Chico State who majored in “absolutely nothing” until academic advising forced him into a B.A. in psychology. He has committed psychobabble for *Chico News and Review* and written film reviews, personality profiles and social commentary for *Chico Times*.

Samuel Provenzano is a graduate student with the Chico State English department. He considers writing full time to be the agony and the ecstasy. He has returned to university life after many years soaking up the sun as a bricklayer and touring the country with various bands as a jazz drummer.

Michelle M. Rader is an undeclared senior at Chico State working on a proposal for a special major in photojournalism and documentary photography. Her 4-year-old son is her favorite subject matter.

Jennifer Roscher is a graduate student at Chico State, a San Jose native, and an all-around “hilarious person.” She likes her boyfriend, singing karaoke, and American literature. Her best friend is her mom, Wendy, who has been waiting a long time for Jen’s poetry to get published.

Benjamin J. Steele is in Chico on a national student exchange program from Indiana University-Purdue University-Fort Wayne. He is an English major with a focus on literature and creative writing. He thinks creativity must be shared for it to make a difference in this world.

Kelly C Thomas enjoys stealing lines from other people’s conversations and eating sunsets.

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