

# WATERSHED



# **WATERSHED**

Volume 25, Number 1

## **WATERSHED**

Volume 25, Number 1

Fall 2001

### **Editors**

Stephanie Boram

Jason Cowley

Darcy Gilman

Anna Harris

Kelly Horne

Aubrie Koenig

Patricia Madrigal

Meghan Park

Mario Perez

Jillanne Tuttle

### **Faculty Adviser**

Casey Huff

### **Cover Design**

Davin Schreindl

The editors would like to thank Gregg Berryman and Alan Rellaford and the students in CDES 23, fall 2001, for excellent cover design proposals.

©2001 Department of English, California State University, Chico  
*Watershed* is supported by Instructionally Related Activities Funds awarded by the College of Humanities and Fine Arts, Sarah Blackstone, Acting Dean.

*Watershed* was designed and typeset in Goudy Old Style 10/12 by the editors. Computer assisted layout and design by Rick Bates. Printed on 70# Sundance White, on a Docutech at University Printing Services, CSU, Chico.

## Contents

---

Bonnie Roy	
<i>Palm Stories</i>	1
<i>Warrack</i>	2
Reneé Suzanne Muir	
<i>Native American</i>	3
Kylee Hayden	
<i>The Beginning of Silence</i>	4
Bridget Crenshaw	
<i>Would You Object If I...?</i>	5
Laney Eroken	
<i>High Heels</i>	6
Bob Garner	
<i>love poem</i>	14
Jeremy Terhune	
<i>Warmth of a Learner</i>	15
Samuel Provenzano	
<i>Numbers</i>	16
Kitty Nard	
<i>End of the Day</i>	23
Reneé Suzanne Muir	
<i>Flower Box Under Shed Window</i>	24
Heidi Wallis	
<i>Snap-shot: Bosnian Breakfast</i>	25
Scott Lawrence Pabst	
<i>The Porcelain Doll</i>	26
Erica Traverso	
<i>The Anatomy of a Gang Rape</i>	28
Rachel Krampfner	
<i>Immigrant mother</i>	37

Ryan Patrick Yurcich	
<i>The Punta Cabras Burning Man</i>	38
<i>In the Mandarin World</i>	40
Jacalyn Pauer	
<i>New Physics; Love Poems</i>	41
Dave Peterson	
<i>Feast of You</i>	42
Reneé Suzanne Muir	
<i>Cupola Bells</i>	43
Dave Peterson	
<i>Looking Back I See You in Technicolor</i>	44
Kiara Koenig	
<i>Aubade for a Roommate</i>	45
Ricardo Ramirez	
<i>Untitled Photo</i>	46
Kiara Koenig	
<i>January at the Edge of the Sacramento Valley</i>	47
Gary Prows	
<i>A Blues Poem</i>	48
Zu Vincent	
<i>The Divide</i>	49
Contributors' Notes	59

Growing up,  
Love,  
I imagined you  
As a kind of suited  
Deliverance.  
A crane to pluck  
Me and hold me up  
At eye level. A kind  
Of badge  
To slip on my finger,  
To wear in my  
hips.

Love,  
You are no magic  
Hat. I am no  
White rabbit, no  
Dove, no dissectible  
Belle. We scrape  
Our knees on  
Skyscapes. On able  
Capers, when  
We find out we  
Are not. Not mysteries, not  
Spoons.

Growing up,  
Love,  
I imagine us as beggars  
In funny caps.  
Wearing your socks on  
our ears,  
And my bra,  
A funky pair of  
Cuffs, holding us  
Together. Perking us  
Up.

Ten minutes ago it was eleven.  
Now it's eleven oh two.  
The sly walls of your hospital cubby

Are draping down on me,  
Heavy yellow veil to smudge  
My gluestick smile.

Silent, I stand like another  
Dead lamp. You sit sagging,  
An unsnapped shirt, unstuffing,

We cannot talk here.  
The IV won't let us alone; it  
Drips a flag to the nurse after every word.

Your morphine slurs  
My punctuation. Flesh-tinted, your blanket  
Spreads too thin over the skeletal metal,

The infirm love boat that rocks you  
To sleep. You are almost sleeping now.  
Like a hiccup, the wall clock jumps

Finally forward. I cut a hole  
In your sick-box and climb out of the cardboard.  
The stink of gauze and old skin won't scrub

Off. If only I could peel  
Back my memory, put you back  
In the garden. Pull the curtain up again.



NATIVE AMERICAN

Reneé Suzanne Muir



## The Beginning of Silence

Kylee Hayden

Living with you  
Was like paying a hit man  
To shoot me in my sleep.  
Though I knew the end would come,  
I had the comfort  
Of thinking it would catch me  
With my eyes shut tight.

But things went wrong.  
The hit man tripped over the rug,  
And as he crashed to the floor  
The gun went off  
And my eyes opened  
Too soon.

I watched you  
Pack up your clothes and books,  
I helped you  
Clean out our cluttered bedroom.  
And when you finally walked away,  
My words went with you  
Like the last scream  
Before a fatal gunshot.

## Would You Object if I?

---

Bridget Crenshaw

Would You Object if I...?

Come on baby,  
STRIP!

off the makeup hair dye fake lashes implants CK jeans high  
heels fake nails

Strip off the objects  
that OBJECTIFY  
that take away from

YOU  
your soul  
your heart  
your love  
your fear  
your personality  
your  
ESSENCE

Take back the you.  
Inner beauty strength light happiness

When stripped these splendors will resonate.

At first, I hated him. He was beautiful, could have been chiseled by Michelangelo from the finest Italian marble. He was loud, he reveled in the attention he earned, he was obnoxious. Then there was the warmth in his voice and the charm with his smile, the way he walked into a room like he was waltzing. Maybe I didn't like him because he made me uncomfortable. Or maybe, somehow I knew deep down the consequence he would have on my seemingly stable and secure existence.

We met at summer camp where we were both counselors. We had to at least pretend we were friends so we could work together, but eventually his magnetism and charisma wore my walls and dislike down and I was addicted. The purest smile was enough for me to reveal things to him that I never would tell a soul. His energy seldom waned, his mouth seldom closed. There was always a song, joke or story echoing around him.

Most girls immediately fell into some sort of love with him — boys too. His love wasn't biased. He wanted to share his happiness with everyone he encountered. His name was Andrew and the summer I turned 17 all his attention was on me.

At that age you are desperately trying to figure out who you are — your relationships define you — speak for you. You're on the brink of adulthood where college, career, love and fear all lie on the horizon. And anyone who has had a friend like Andrew knows that just being near him can confuse the heart, but also let you know that with him on your side, you can do it all.

Later, he told me he wanted to be friends with me as a challenge — because I so obviously didn't like him. His stories enthralled me, his humor matched mine and his desire to be my friend made me feel safe. We started telling each other everything about each other whenever possible. We'd sit together at meals and spend our free time together. But it was after the campers were put to bed that we'd sit up around the smoldering campfire and talk — full of confidence and grace, we taught each other who we were.

His father was a minister for the Episcopal Church, his mother was a singer. They both died in a car accident when he was seven. He has four older siblings who were all out of the house at the time. Aunts and uncles passed him around before putting him in a prestigious boarding school at 14. During this time of transition and upheaval he discovered a love of theater. This was how he hid his fear, loneliness and sadness, he once told me over the red, glowing burn of the campfire.

He had tons of girlfriends, and although I didn't know if I wanted to be one of them — I was certainly envious of them. He wanted to be a Broadway star, or a minister like his dad, and there didn't seem to be anything stopping him from either of them. All I knew was the more time I spent with him, the happier I was.

Our friendship continued through my first two years of college. Routine and intriguing phone calls lasted hours between San Francisco and the coastal town I lived in. I was trying to figure him out. I wanted to know what he was composed of, how he handled life's joys and sorrows. How last night's show was and what he thought of just about everything. And for some reason, which I never really understood, he wanted to know all that about me, too. It was a mutual interest and we tried as hard as two friends could to get inside each other's heads.

Andrew transferred to an art school in Scotland after I moved to England for a year abroad in a London university. Our paths crossed frequently, either it was him visiting my flat with his newest girlfriend for a West End audition, or it might have been me and my flatmates wanting to tour the Scottish countryside. During that year, I was filled with a new self — one living in a foreign country, learning what I could handle, or couldn't — but I knew there was someone eight hours away on the train and knowing that Andrew would be there reassured my nervous spirit.

Around the same time we both moved home, he broke up with Leah, the girlfriend he was living with and I had to come home to start school that year. We tried to keep in touch, but for some reason the love and connection we had with each other was lost. We never really confronted the issue, there would be a message on my phone every once and a while, or an email in my inbox. Eventually, we stopped talking. He came to my birthday party when I turned 21 and I was happy to see him, but something was different, with us and, more importantly, with him. He seemed withdrawn and tired. There was something on his chest that he couldn't get off...not even to me.

I was walking home from work and my cell phone started ringing. I looked at the number on the screen and didn't recognize it. I answered cautiously and heard a familiar voice say, "It's an old friend..."

"Andrew!" I screamed.

"I have something to tell you," he said.

I could hear the smile on his voice as I waited to hear his news. Soon as he said he had news for me, I figured he was going to tell me he was gay. It was something that I had always half way expected from him...

"I think I know, Andrew," I said with trepidation.

"No you don't, you'd never guess this. I've changed my name," he said.

"What are you talking about? Did you have to change it for acting? Is this an Equity thing?" I retorted.

"I had to get a whole new driver's license. Everything is different, even my picture," he said.

I was speechless.

"Laney, my name is Mary. I had an operation," he spat out urgently. "What speech do you want? The short or the long?" he quietly said.

"I want to know everything," I paused. "Everything that you're comfortable telling me." I added.

He began the tale of his life — it seemed like a made-up story to me, this isn't the Andrew that I knew. The four years of friendship seemed to be false — I thought I knew

him, but I knew the adjusted life...the one the doctors gave him when he was a few hours old. Now he was ready to tell me the real story. The silence from my side of the phone hummed and my mind began spinning as he wove the tale to me of what he'd been doing the past two years. Andrew was now a woman. His new name, Mary.

As I drove, lost and confused, through the Presidio, I stumbled through the woodsy, dank, dark area of San Francisco, harbored in the hills above the city. Illegal u-turns and dome light on, I reread the directions to Andrew's, Mary's house that I couldn't seem to find. I really didn't mind getting lost, because that was all the more time I had to myself before I had to see him, her. Trying to gather my thoughts, I navigated my way through the old military base—where every house looked like the one before. As I looked out my window, I looked down the hill and saw the small, matchbox-sized cars driving effortlessly through the city. I wished I was there, going to a movie or concert, or even home, so I wouldn't have to go out to dinner with Andrew, Mary. What was I supposed to call him? I wanted nothing more to leave and never, ever return to the Presidio.

Finally, without thinking, I found my way to the house and pulled up, not sure what to think. "Do I hug him? Will I recognize him? Do I call him Andrew or Mary? Do I pretend that nothing has changed? What if he is ugly or looks botched...then I can't say how good he looks — different. That's it! Say different. That's what he wants to hear." So I put all the ideas out of my head and tried to get excited for my old friend Andrew. It really had been years since I'd seen him last, since my 21st birthday and now it was almost my 23rd.

I gingerly walked to the door, breathed in deeply, and knocked. The heavy brown door, rough from the salt air, was immediately answered. I stood there hands clenched and twisted, breath bated, anxious about everything and a blank stare, I'm sure, on my face as I waited to see who was behind the door. Those five seconds lasted a year as I waited to see the new Andrew. Obviously he was now a she, but that transition wasn't very easy to make. Andrew or

Mary? Him or her? The distinction was known, but changing the gender and identity of a friend in one night was more detached than I could be.

The door swung all the way open and the strong smell of Chinese food and vanilla scented candles blew in my face, a strange combination that will always remind me of this night. A young woman with long reddish-brown hair, small wire-rimmed glasses, a long black skirt and a tight, white sweater opened the door and stood smiling in front of me.

"Laney!" A voice screamed and it took a minute until I realized it was from this woman in front of me. The voice was vaguely familiar as was the look on her face. Then I felt my face flush and my hands were clammy and shaking. That young woman was Andrew. Mary. No — Andrew. I looked down. My friend was wearing high heels.

"God," I thought to myself, "I've been a girl my whole life and I can't even wear those." I don't think I had ever thought so much in one moment, or so fast.

As I looked up, Andrew lunged at me and gave me a hug. I let out the breath that I'd been holding. It's a strange thing, but amongst our friends Andrew's hugs were infamous. He put everything into it: arms grasping, hands holding — he could make you forget anything for about 30 seconds with one of those hugs. Then I tensed...this hug was different. He had breasts. Anyone will tell you hugging a girl is much different than hugging a boy and Andrew's hug was different — when I hugged him I felt his bra strap on his back, I smelled the strong, floral scent of his perfume — not what I was used to. Where we used to be exactly the same height, tonight he was taller than me in heels, he felt delicate, not like the strong, lean dancer I'd seen two years ago. He was a she.

Andrew asked if I wouldn't mind waiting a minute and went to the mirror over the fireplace. I looked around and noticed three girls in the kitchen leaning over steaming boxes of Chinese food. They looked at me inquisitively and I managed a smile to them. I felt like they could read the panic

and anxiety I was feeling. I redirected my attention to Andrew, he was putting his hair elaborately up in a clip, it was an act that girls are born knowing and he was doing it without struggle. I noticed his hands — that once seemed strong and manly, now were hairless with long, sculpted violet fingernails. He reached in his purse, a dainty cloth black one and pulled out a tube of lipstick. I watched him as if I was in another place, maybe watching him prepare backstage for a role in a play, but this was real life. I was watching in the mirror as my friend Andrew became Mary.

As I was watching him perfect and beautify himself, I started to miss him. My emotional state was weakening on the inside, as I stood strong in this hot, smelly, little house in San Francisco. I was watching a woman prepare herself to go out just as I would, concentrating on details and nuances that Andrew would never have thought of. I began recalling nights that we had gone out before, he always looked good—it was the actor in him. But he was gone. A young woman stood in front of me as I searched for my friend.

We drove downtown, the whole time Andrew asking me what was new in my life. “New in my life? Come on Andrew, you don’t want to hear about this...” I said, cringing because what could I say about myself when I’m sitting next to a friend who just finished a sex change? We walked to the busy restaurant and waited for a while for our table. “Andrew, remember that time in London...” I started.

“Laney, you can’t call me Andrew anymore,” he said bluntly as I looked at him. “I know it’s hard, but when you call me Andrew and people hear...”

“I know. I’m sorry, it’s just hard,” I apologized.

“It’s okay, just try to call me Mary,” he said quietly. I looked around and was glad no one heard me and to break the awkwardness, I started chatting about common friends, he hadn’t talked to any of them, and I watched people. I watched men looking at the young woman next to me. I watched women look at Andrew. I was desperately trying to find someone who could talk to me, explain that I wasn’t mean or weird for what I was feeling — someone who could tell me I could handle this change, that I was strong



enough, but no one was there to talk to but Andrew.

I was lost and I had to be steady for Andrew, for Mary. I had to be strong for this meal we would share and the conversation we would have, changing Andrew forever in my mind. And I was worried about myself. I felt like a coward, that I couldn't acknowledge the change that had taken place since the last time I saw him and now that something had changed, happened to him and I couldn't deal.

I wanted it to be last week, where I missed Andrew because I hadn't talked to him for a few months, not because he no longer existed. And when I missed him, I wanted to open this photo album of our trip to Wales and remember times gone by, not think of him and cry because I would never talk to Andrew again. He even had a new email address, one omitting the name Andrew. I just wanted him.

We used to go dancing at the studio where Andrew taught at out in the Mission. We couldn't really do that anymore — how funny would it look for two girls to go swing dancing together. "Oh Andrew," I thought. "Where did you go?"

In the busy din of the restaurant I forgot about everything else. I kept catching myself staring at him and when he'd look at me, I'd quickly look away. I was trying to memorize his face, at the same time I was trying to find traces of Andrew in Mary's face.

I listened, at first uncomfortably, then like a student to Andrew. He went through the facts: he was born a hermaphrodite. His parents and the doctors decided it would be easier on the baby, physically and later emotionally, to grow up as a male. No one would have ever known, but Andrew's parents told him when he was five. He said when they told him it made sense why he loved to dress up in his sister's clothes. His siblings knew from the time he was born. When his parents died when he was seven, he was stranded, he said. No one ever talked about the change that was made to his body when he was a few days old. He harbored the facts and didn't tell anyone his secret. It was also this decision, made without him, that drew him to acting. When he

was on stage or rehearsing his lines, he didn't have to be himself, he told me over our dinner. He liked putting make-up on and playing a part.

When he was in college he started deliberating and thinking about this and what he could do. He realized he had always had more interest in feminine ways, he wanted to be a girl. That is when he started the intensive counseling the state requires for an extreme surgery like this. That is when he stopped talking to me.

"I haven't changed, I have the same heart and the same mind, just a different package. I'm still the same person," he told me over dessert, looking down through his mascaraed lashes.

We finished dinner and walked around San Francisco talking — about makeup, about the fact that sexually he still liked women, about the change from being a straight man to a lesbian, about the reaction from his friends and family and how he'd never felt so happy. And I felt scared for him and for me.

I dropped him off at his house and we hugged. That time I knew what to expect from the hug. I wasn't hugging Andrew, I was hugging a new friend Mary and no matter how many times he tried to tell me he was the same person on the inside, I knew he wasn't. How could he be? We promised to talk more often, "Once a week at least," I said. I told him he looked beautiful and I was happy for him and I drove home.

When I got home, I parked the car and when I was reaching on the floor for my purse, I found the clip Andrew used to put his hair up. He had stepped on it when he got out of the car and it was broken in four big pieces. As I held the clip I started to cry. I was crying for everything I learned that night, what both of us were afraid to say and I cried for Andrew, who I would never see again and cried for Mary who I didn't even know. I got out and flung the clip into the street.

love  
turns me into an idiot:  
one thin strand  
of golden hair  
or the light through the side  
of an emerald eye  
and i  
am mad with love  
or the idea  
of it

the backward sweep  
of thick black hair  
streaked with silver  
and the wild grey eye  
and i  
am nuts with love

and a beautiful river of words  
gets stuck in my throat  
and to snake it out  
i talk too much  
a whole big bunch of nothing  
til i spit through my teeth  
and a bit of me  
ends up on the nose of love

love  
the desire for the touch  
makes me shake  
makes me feel the chill  
and still

i leave the warmth  
of a perfect evening  
exchanging smiles and glances  
with attractively framed pictures  
to search the crimelit streets  
for you  
my little red-faced monkey

Little Miss Freudian slips  
stands before class,  
bouncing brown hair, fiery eyes,  
mind unlocking the masses.

Always seeing  
    smelling  
    tasting  
    fearing  
    sharing  
    youthful days.

Chanting naked in Walden Pond  
tossing twenty dollar bills  
to pallid starved students.  
Aura of an orange orb,  
pushing the grayness back back  
from her steps, she smokes a cigarette,  
wafting puffs of dream stuff  
into blankets that warm  
souls of stricken scholars  
chilled by an icy grip.  
Come  
floating on philanthropic  
heat waves,  
cozy just long enough  
in her electric presence,  
to dream a little.

"Vinny," his mother's voice called, invading a dream the boy was having about his father. The boy, tall for his twelve years, stirred in his bed and covered his face with a pillow.

"Vinny," the voice came again but louder. He got up and went and stood at the top of the stairway where his mother could see him. "Good morning," she said. He nodded in reply. "I'm leaving," she said. "Will you say goodbye?" He looked at her, but said nothing. He felt a pang of guilt at the hurt he detected in her face as they stood, staring at each other.

"I left fifty cents on the table by your cereal," she said. "Buy milk at school with it." He nodded as she turned her back to him and left.

"27 times 50 equals 1350," he muttered as he heard her car start and then leave the driveway. "57 times 75 equals 4275," he continued as he went to the bathroom and brushed his teeth. The phone began to ring and he went and picked it up.

"Hello?" the voice at the other end said.

"93 times 57 equals 5301," he said. There was a long silence at the other end and Vinny returned the phone to its cradle.

On his way to school, Vinny felt a hard push from behind and he fell to the ground.

"How much is one times zero?" Mac, an eighth grader said, as he stood over him with his arms crossed.

Vinny looked up at him and sat with his knees bent in his arms. "72 times 80 equals 5760," Vinny shouted.

"Your Mama!" Mac shouted back, kicking Vinny in the shoulder.

More kids arrived and gathered in a circle around him while he hugged his knees tighter and pressed the side of his face to his legs.

"Stand up puss!" Mac shouted.

"78 times 95 equals 7410."

As Vinny sat, contemplating the answer to the next problem he was formulating, he felt a sharp pain from a rock that hit him in the back of the head. He sat in the same

position, though he could feel the blood trickling down the back of his neck. The crowd of children grew as Vinny heard the school bell in the distance.

Vinny watched Mac come toward him and then felt the pain as Mac kicked him in the ribs. He lost his breath but forgot the pain when he watched a tall, slim girl step out of the crowd and punch Mac in the nose. He watched the blood running from Mac's nose, down his chin, and onto his shirt. He looked at the girl's face and it looked red with rage. Her long blonde hair flew behind her in the gentle afternoon breeze and Vinny was certain that she was poised to hit Mac again if he should move.

"What the...", Mac hollered as he took a step back holding his bleeding nose. "What was that for?" She said nothing but looked him in the eye until he turned away.

A middle aged woman who had been sweeping her sidewalk across the street from the group, came to them with the broom in her hand.

"Get out of here you kids. Go on all of you or I'll call the cops. Go on, get." She swung the broom at them as they dispersed.

The girl knelt by Vinny's side and put her arm around him.

"Are you okay?" she asked.

"27 times 40 equals 1080."

"What are you, a computer?" She asked, putting her hand under his head and withdrawing it quickly, staring at the blood on her hand.

"Oohh, can you sit up? I want to see the back of your head."

Vinny stood up and felt a little dizzy. He thought the girl looked surprised to see that he was taller than she was. He leaned on her, with his hand on her shoulder.

"Are you alright?" He nodded yes and they walked toward the school together.

"What was that all about?" She was still watching him.

He shrugged his shoulders and she glanced sideways at him.

When they arrived at school she told him to go to the boy's room, wet a paper towel, and wash the blood off of the back of his head. He nodded and walked away.

After school that day, Vinny found the girl sitting on the front steps.

"Howdy," she said. "How you feelin'?" she said, as she stood up. He nodded. "Don't you ever talk?"

He nodded again.

"58 times 60 equals 3480."

"Numbers only huh? How about 75 times 250?"

"18,750," he answered within the second she asked.

"No way," she laughed as she sat on the step again, took a notebook and pencil from her backpack, and did the problem on paper. "How...?"

He looked down at the ground and shuffled from one foot to the other.

"What's your name?" She was still sitting on the step and she looked up at him as she asked.

He continued to stare at the ground and made no reply. "My name is Rosemary, what's yours?" She waited but there was no reply. "Hmmm... Are you ignoring me?"

He shook his head no slowly. "You only like to speak numbers and math problems, is that it?"

He nodded his head yes.

"Com'on, I'll walk you home," she said as she stood and put her hand out to him. He took her hand and they walked to his house without speaking.

As the weeks and months passed and their friendship grew, Rosemary stopped pressuring Vinny to speak, and he began to trust her more and more, until one morning, while they walked to school, he told her his name.

"Vinny," he said.

"What?" she asked.

"Vinny," he repeated. She began to laugh and he couldn't understand why, but then she was suddenly standing next to him and she hugged him and he no longer wondered.

The first day of summer vacation, in the cool, early morning light, while his mother slept, Vinny made two ham sandwiches, put them in his backpack, and rode his bicycle to Rosemary's house. He sat under a huge oak tree in her front yard and stared up at a second floor window which he was sure was her room. He imagined her sleeping there with her beautiful long hair covering the pillow. He sat for a long time. His legs grew numb and he became restless. He stood and walked around the tree and studied the huge limbs coming from the trunk at various angles. He stood very close to the trunk and looked directly up and he could not see any sky at all through all of the foliage.

Vinny began imagining himself talking real words to Rosemary, but the thought soon frightened him. For Vinny, words were scary. Unlike numbers, which were always constant and dependable, words were like the people who used them, unreliable and filled with hurt.

"Vinny?"

He stepped around the tree to where he could see her window again. She was leaning out her window, in her pajamas, smiling at him. She held up her index finger and left the window. A moment later, barefoot, in blue jeans and a red tank top, she came running across the lawn to where he stood. He looked down at the ground and shuffled from one foot to the other and she laughed gently.

"Wanna ride our bikes down to Seeley's pond and catch frogs?"

He nodded yes.

And then, she added quickly:

"Let's play a game of not saying any numbers all day, okay?"

His ears felt hot as he looked from the tree to the ground and shuffled faster. And then he nodded yes.

"I'm going to go and put my shoes on. Want me to bring you some toast?" He shook his head no.

"Okay then, wait right here, okay?" He nodded yes and she ran inside.

A moment later she stood at his side, holding out a slice of buttered toast to him. He took it and smiled. They sat



under the tree as he ate his toast and, when he was done, she went to the garage and took out her bicycle while he watched. She rode to where he stood, motioned to him and he straddled his bike and they were off. The morning was still cool and the air felt like water as they cut through it.

She took the lead as they rode and occasionally she looked back at him. Each time she did, he smiled at her.

When they arrived at Seeley's Pond, she chained her bike to a small tree. He stood and watched her.

"Aren't you gonna lock your bike?"

He turned red and shuffled from foot to foot as numbers began to form in his head.

"My chain is long enough. You want me to lock yours with mine?" He nodded.

"Here. Bring it here." As she began to lock their bikes together, he stood so close to her he could smell her hair.

She stood up, grabbed his hand, and pulled him toward the pond. There was a huge pine tree that had fallen recently headlong into the pond. The trunk was on shore but the tree extended out into the pond by forty feet. They walked out on the tree for twenty-five feet and sat down. She took her shoes off and dangled her feet in the water. He hesitated a moment and then he followed her lead. They were hot and sticky from the ride and the rising sun. She stood up suddenly, took off her blue jeans and jumped into the water. She laughed as he stood and almost fell in as he lost his balance while he removed his pants. He laughed too as he dove in. She splashed him in the face when he surfaced next to her and he splashed her back. Before long, they were having a water battle and their laughter echoed in the surrounding woods.

When they settled down, Rosemary called out: "What's your favorite color?" Vinny felt his stomach muscles tighten. "Mine is red — what's yours?" she asked again.

He looked at her for a moment and then he pointed at her hair. She smiled at him as she looked into his eyes, and then she brought a handful of her hair around to her face to see the color.

"Hmmm, kinda golden, huh?"  
He nodded and backstroked around her.  
"Say it," she said. "Say golden...Please?"  
He looked into her face and half smiled.  
"Golden," he said.  
"Thank you," she said. "What's your favorite food?"  
He looked at her but didn't say anything.  
"If I guess correctly, will you tell me?"  
He nodded reluctantly.  
"Hamburger?"  
He shook his head no.  
"Fish?"  
He shook his head no again, but less reluctantly.  
"Pizza?"  
He began to laugh as he shook his head no again.  
"Please tell me," she said it lightly as she laughed with him.

"Spaghetti," he said.  
"No...really? But spaghetti looks like worms!" Vinny splashed her.  
She took off swimming away from him and called over her shoulder: "See if you can catch me."  
Vinny's father taught him to swim when Vinny was three years old.

He caught up to Rosemary and passed her with his easy powerful stroke. He sat on the shore and waited for her.  
"Whew, you Tarzan; me Jane." She sat next to him on the muddy grass bordering the pond. They baked in the sun by the pond's edge until almost noon and occasionally dipped into the water.

"I'm getting hungry, are you?" she asked. They were both lying on their backs. He nodded and held up his index finger as he stood up.

"Where are you going?" She was still lying on her back, cupping her hands over her eyes against the sun.

Vinny pointed at their bikes. He walked back a couple of moments later with the bag slung over one shoulder. He sat next to her, took two sandwiches from the bag, and handed her one.

"You're a genius!"

He smiled with pride.

"Do you mind if I ask you a question?"

He looked down at the ground and didn't answer.

"Well, I'm going to anyway. I've seen your mother but not your father...is he...?"

"Dead," Vinny finished without lifting his eyes from the ground.

She made a move to touch him, and he stood up and jumped into the water. He went underwater for a long time. He surfaced briefly and was gone again. Each time he came up, he saw her watching him.

They hardly spoke again that day. Vinny rode home with Rosemary and, when they arrived at her home, she got off of her bike, went to him, and kissed him on his cheek as she thanked him. Vinny felt the coolness of the kiss all the way home. Again and again he pictured her face and all its various expressions. He remembered her question about his father, and he hoped she didn't know that he was crying under the water all that time.

He parked his bike in the driveway and headed for the house. Noticing a flower growing near the front door, he bent and picked it. His mother stood by the stove, cooking dinner. He went to her and hugged her. He felt her body shake in his arms, as he handed her the flower.

"Thanks," she said.

"One plus one equals three, Ma," he said.

Daughters in bed,  
I reflect,  
can I find peace?

“Mom...

You don’t understand.

I need crayons, shoes, jeans, a car, a bigger bra, to pluck  
my eyebrows.

I love you.

I got an A.

I scored a goal.

Do I have to go to church?

She called me a bitch, ate the last cookie, hit me, won’t  
drive me to the store.

Can I sleep in your bed?

Does this look okay?

I don’t feel good.

Guess what? I love you.

Can I have a dollar?

Why can’t I turn left on a red light?

I really like boys.

When was the first time you had sex? Did drugs? Lied to  
your mother? Loved someone?

I have a headache.

Why do you have all those lines on your face?

I think I’m pregnant.

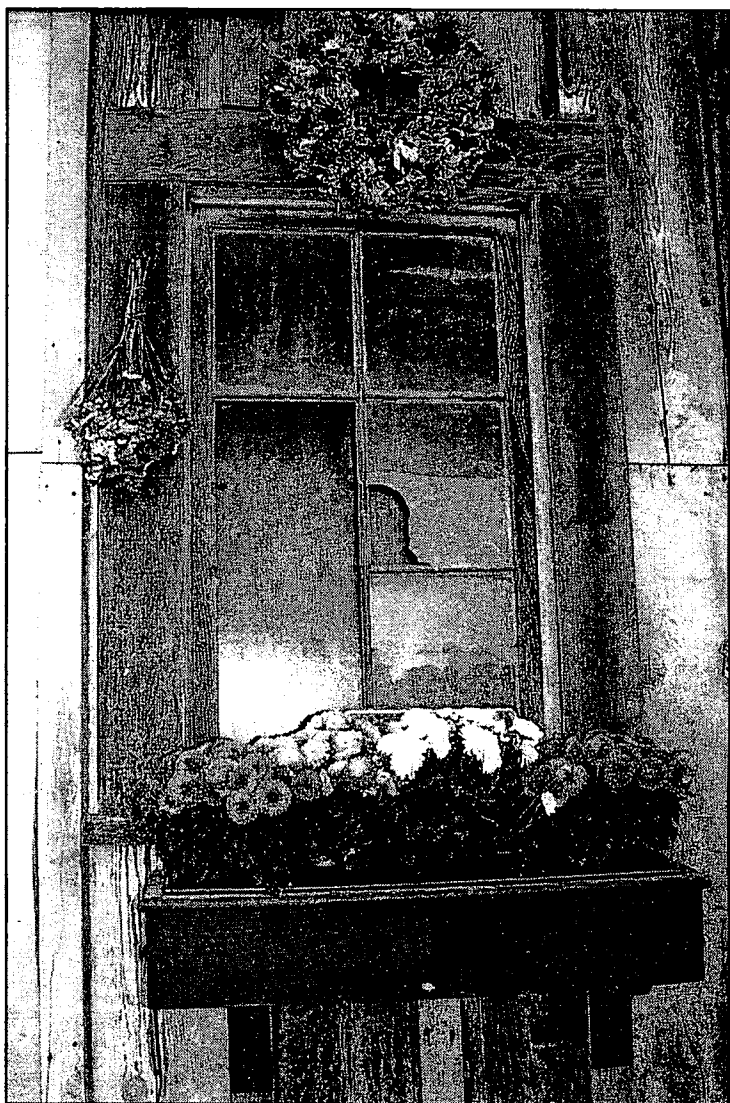
Can you fix my hair?

I didn’t know men could be doctors, too.

Why are you crying?

When I close my eyes, is it dark for you, too?”

Yes.



*Flower Box Under Shed Window*      Reneé Suzanne Muir

Sidewalk cafe.

Rusted white table beneath  
the faded chipped red letters,

Coca-Cola.

Small blue flowers

groping dismal air,

begging escape from crumbling sidewalks.

A girl

sits at the street-side table.

Barely old enough to vote,

but proudly displaying the red, white and blue,  
the stars and stripes on her right shoulder.

Small brown-skinned children

crowd her as she sips bitter coffee  
from an old ceramic mug,

tattered red peace sign  
on its side.

She smiles faintly at the children,

their sticky fingers,  
shyly exploring the barrel of the gun  
that rests indifferently across her lap.

Forgotten, as much a part of her now  
as the rag doll that used to be.

Innocence—  
gone before it ever makes a sound.

Her polished boots shine,  
laced, in solid lines, up to shins,  
camouflage ballooning out the tops.

## The Porcelain Doll

---

Scott Lawrence Pabst

I found her broken in pieces

Tossed shamelessly  
between a one-eared velveteen rabbit and a faded yellow wedding dress  
Thrown away, like refuse, by the one's she loved the most

As I looked into her glazed green eyes  
I saw the pain  
hidden deep behind her gentle stare

Those lonely cold nights  
shivering silently in a dark corner waiting for the sun to rise  
waiting for love, for tenderness, a caring soul

Those dark abusive nights  
laying on a soiled sheet less mattress  
eyes closed, hands pressed, praying

Praying that her ears would fall deaf  
upon the groaning of the old oak door  
and the squeaking of its rusted hinges

She laid there...like her clothes...torn and ragged...breathing heavy

I opened her eyes

Showed her the beauty within her cracked surface  
beauty that she couldn't see, that no one could  
I showed her the cruel years had not broken her but made her

I gathered her shattered pieces

Gently, slowly, I put them together  
watching her broken shell heal and blossom  
from a naive girl into a strong young woman

I showed her love  
how it was supposed to feel  
(warm to the touch, burning when it's true), be

Slowly...we grew apart  
my adhesive heart which held her together  
was no longer my own

What I helped mend would destroy me  
What I helped save would sacrifice me  
What I helped love would hate me

I lay broken...

Tossed shamelessly  
between a one-eared velveteen rabbit and a torn tuxedo  
Thrown away, like refuse, by the one I loved the most



Jenny (age 20):

I got a call from someone at home. She wanted to ask me if I had heard. Heard what? I wanted to know. I'm living in Santa Barbara full time. I don't know anything that's going on back home. Not sure I want to know. But of course I asked her. And she was more than willing to tell me all about it.

Kevin (age 21):

Did we invite any other women? Well, no, it was a bachelor's party, you know. Quien es muy machismo and all that. I don't know whose idea it was to invite her. No, I don't think she knew she'd be the only girl there. I don't know if she would've cared, as long as we gave her free booze. Rum and Coke, that was her favorite. And beer. But, it wasn't my idea to invite her, I know that much.

Joey (age 20):

No, not me. I didn't think of it. It was Lee. He called her up around four in the afternoon. Yeah, well, it was my place for the summer, but I wasn't the one who called her. See, John was getting married and Warren and I were throwin' him a party.. .a luau. All the guys were there. Hell, John didn't even show up until later and he left early, I think. Becca wanted him home. She was already his boss, man. He's whipped. So he really only came to his own bachelor party for a couple of hours.

John (age 22):

No, I didn't see her at all. I mean, I guess I saw her there and wondered why she was the only girl, but she was just talking to Lee and Joey and I didn't think anything of it. I was gone by 10 p.m. They were just too drunk for me and I didn't want to be all hung over. There was a lot of planning still to do for the wedding. Yeah, she was still there when I left. Pretty drunk herself by then. But she was drunk a lot and I never thought anything about it. Someone'd take her home. Or she could crash at Joey and Kevin's. We all did that. I didn't think anyone'd give her a

bad time. I mean, we'd known her for years. She was a friend of ours. I had invited her to the wedding. We'd all gone to high school together. We used to sit on the bus coming home from basketball games, she and Jenny took stats, you know, she was the head stats girl. And we'd ride home in the dark and I remember singing the Eagles with them, "There's gonna be a heart ache tonight, heart ache tonight I know..." Jenny was my escort that year at the rally, because it had to be someone from the cheerleaders or stats girls. They were our friends. I don't know where Jenny was that night. I hadn't seen her much since graduation. They were two years younger than me and all. Oh, yeah, she was in Santa Barbara.

J.T. (age 21):

Don't ask me. I didn't have anything to do with it. It was Scott and Lee. I don't know who called her up and told her about the party, but it was Lee who started the whole thing. I was all the way across the room. It must've been midnight. Everyone was fried by then. She was sitting at the table in the center of the room and Lee just walked up to her and whispered in her ear. She was sloppy, man. Wasted. He got her up on the table without her even realizing what was going on. Yeah, I watched. But it wasn't my idea.

*(Author's note: Subjects seem to be determined to repeat that they didn't "think of it" themselves – a distancing technique?)*

Kurt (age 21):

Who the fuck cared if she knew what was going on? She had huge tits. I mean, I'd seen them before, but it's always good to see them again, right? Yeah, I was her first. Back when she was a senior in high school. No, I know I was her first 'cause she'd only started partying with us a little before that night. At the Mellini's Party House. Six built-in bunks ready for action right there in the living room. Anyhow, you can tell when you're the first. I mean, I wasn't that drunk. Oh, the night of the bachelor party? I think Lee was the first. Or maybe J.T. That little weasel probably got in there pretty quick, anyhow.

John:

No, I was gone by then. It was too rowdy for my taste. I know it was supposed to be my party and all, but really, I just wanted to be home with Becca. She's the only girl I want. No, I can't say that I did think about leaving her alone at the party. Would I have left Becca? Becca wouldn't have been there in the first place. But no, I guess I never would have left her with those guys. No way. Shit, I should've taken her home with me...

Warren (age 22):

I never laid a hand on her. Not once the whole night. Sure, I saw what they were doing and it made me pretty sick. I didn't want to be any part of it. I mean, who wants to fuck some comatose girl in front of 20 other guys? Especially after everyone else.

Jenny:

The whole thing was too much for me to take in. I mean, just the thought of it all — all those guys and everyone watching. It made me sick. But of course, I defended her to anyone who mentioned it. Like my — when he called with the news a few days later. "They're the assholes," I told him. Why was everyone crowing about her behavior as if the guys hadn't done anything? But inside, I was kind of going, yuck. She's so gross. How could she let this happen?

Scott (age 24):

I don't remember anything from that night. Shit, I woke up in the morning with her dress on and nothing else! Sure, she and I slept together. I mean, we must've for me to get her dress on, right? (laughs uncomfortably) I don't know what else happened. I was wasted.

Warren:

She was lying on the table and they were pulling her dress off over her head. Lee and Joey. Maybe Kevin. A couple of them were holding her arms while Lee pulled the dress off. She was kind of mumbling to herself. I think she was shak-

ing her head. She tried not to let them take it off, but once it was off, she just laid there naked. No, they'd taken her underwear off first, I guess. It was a pretty big wooden dining table. Oh, Lee was kissing on her tits and rubbing himself all over her in front of everyone and it made me sick. I think I went outside for awhile. When I came back, someone else was having a turn. I don't know who. I didn't want to know. I never touched her.

*(Author's note: Something about this guy seems like I should be touched by his denials. Especially compared to some of the others. But, still, I'm not seeing much of a difference in how he speaks about her. I mean, it's all the same – woman = slab of meat, right?)*

Lee (age 21):

Fuck, she wanted it. I mean, sure, I called her up and asked if she wanted to come out to the party. I knew her and she loved to drink. She had to know there wouldn't be any other girls there. It was a bachelor party, wasn't it? Well, I don't know if she knew that. But she could've left anytime she wanted to. She had her own car. No one tied her up or anything. She was just like that. She liked to party hard. And when she drank, man, she fucked anyone. Even Scott! (laughs)

Kevin:

It was hilarious to see little Lee, that red-headed fucker, straddle her and take hold of her boobs. Man, we were all laughing so hard. No, I don't think she was protesting. I don't remember that. I just remember his little butt pumping away – he's so short and she's a big girl, you know?

Warren:

She was saying "no, no, no" the whole time Lee was on her. I saw her shaking her head and trying to get up, but she was too drunk. She just kept falling back flat against the table. Her head kind of moved from side to side. I don't know. I left. Then, when I came back, she was just lying there, letting them do what ever they wanted with her.

Lee:

It's not like we'd never done it before. She and I were regulars. It was a real rush to be doing her right there in front of all the guys. I mean, we all talked about her tits. All the time. And to be the one with his dick right between them and all the guys, they were cheering me on. Sure they were. I didn't hear a single word of protest from any of them. Course, I was so fucking wasted I wouldn't remember that anyhow, would I? So, I was the first? So what? They all took a turn. Some of us more than once.

Jenny:

I didn't want her in my wedding. That was one of my first responses. Like, she'll ruin it because people will be talking about what she did instead of thinking about me. I still don't know what to do about it. I mean, she's been my best friend for five years. I have to have her in the wedding, right? But...

*(Author's note: Expected sympathy from female subject absent. Narcissistic replies about her own wedding and herself.)*

Warren:

No, I never touched her. I already said that.

J.T.:

By the time Lee was done, I was so horny I thought I'd die. I mean, I was right there, next to the table, watching those big tits bounce and getting a good view of her crotch. I mean, she was naked. I don't know if I went next or Joey. No, not Warren. It was Joey. Then me, then, Kevin. I think. I'm not really sure. I mean, we were all drunk, right? It wasn't like any of us were sober and thinking straight. I don't want to talk about it anymore. Ashamed? No, why should I be? No one else is, are they? So, why should I be? I didn't do anything that the others didn't do.

Joey:

Ashamed? I don't know. I mean, sometimes, I think, "she's

my friend,” but then I think she didn’t have to be there. She could’ve left any time. And she’d been with us all before, anyway. Well, not all at once like that, but... Shit. You’re just trying to confuse me now. Fuck you.

Kurt:

What the fuck do I care if she let herself be fucked by all those guys? I mean, once I’d sobered up, I was kind of grossed out. There were quite a few of us. I remember telling Roy about it and he was like, “Damn I missed it!” and I said, “Yeah, but at least your dick doesn’t smell like Lee’s cum.”

Kevin:

What do you mean, do I feel bad? About what? It was just a party. We all had a good time. She did, too. I mean, she stuck around the next day and got drunk with us again, didn’t she? Big deal? No, I didn’t see her saying no. Or saying yes. She just laid there. To tell you the truth, it was kind of like fucking a stuffed animal or something. But all the guys were hooting and hollering and kind of chanting. How many? I’d say there were probably 12 or 15 of us left at the party at that point. No, I don’t think everyone had sex with her. Warren keeps whining that he never touched her. He was probably whacking off in the corner watching everyone else.

Jenny:

Do I blame her? I don’t know. I blame them all. The guys for being such assholes and her for just being there. I guess Warren is the least to blame, but really I think I just hate them all. Yeah, her, too, sometimes. She didn’t have to go to the party. She could’ve left.

She stayed there all night *and* the next day? No, I didn’t know that. I don’t know why. She obviously can’t see what assholes those guys are. Maybe she just convinced herself it was all fun and games. Shit, the truth is that I’ve known and she’s known for about three years what jerks those guys are and she just keeps saying that they’re her buddies and

they didn't mean anything by what they did when they used her. Like she's afraid no one else but those assholes will ever like her. Well, that was before this. I don't know how she's going to explain this one away and the truth is, I don't want to hear about it. I don't want to be a part of any of it. I'm going to get married and move on with my life and I don't want anything to do with any of them.

Warren:

Stop them? How could I have stopped them? There wasn't anything I could've done. Did I think about it? I don't know. I really can't say. I remember being shocked and then leaving the room. I remember coming back in and getting another drink and kind of looking over at them. I couldn't see much with the crowd around the table, really. But she wasn't crying or anything. She was just lying there, kind of glassy-eyed. I think I ended up going home. What could I have done? There was no way I could fight off 15 guys. There wasn't anyway I could carry her out of there. No, I don't know what finally happened. Like I said, I left.

*(Author's note: I can't believe how much this guy is whining.)*

Lee:

What happened was that after we'd all had a go at her, she had to pee. She stumbled off to the bathroom and must've found her way to Joey's room. I found her in there and had a little private party with her. Fiddler came in at some point — he was wearing her dress and dancing around. It was hilarious. I left them alone. Don't know what they did then. Yeah, I went back out and had another drink. The night was young, man.

Jenny:

God, she's so oblivious! She has no idea that the whole damn town knows. The whole county. Yuck. It makes me feel sick just to think about it. I don't even know how to look at her. She doesn't even know I know about it. We'll never talk about it. God, how could we? What would I say?

Sometimes I want to ask her what she was doing at a bachelor party. But I don't even know how to. I mean, she's still my roommate for a few more weeks. I see her sitting alone in that old chair in front of the t.v. and I know she's sad, but she won't say she is. She's so damn stubborn. Not scared when she should be scared. I want to cry with her and tell her what assholes they all are and beg her not to ruin her life but she sits there without an opening. All locked down. *Now* she's locked down.

Sometimes I hate her. I mean, I really do. Not just mad at her, like I've been, for being so stupid. And not even just disgusted, like every time I think of her there with those guys, but just hate. I get so pissed off when I think, what the hell was she thinking? How could she allow this to happen to her? To us? Because we've been in this together for a long time. Damn it. How could she have let this happen? It's so gross. Those guys are pigs. Gross, sloppy, rutting sick pigs. Just sitting at the bar with Joey and Kevin the other night made me want to grab their faces and smash them into the hard wood of the bar. I asked them, "How can you treat her like this? You're supposed to be her friends?"

Joey just gave his stupid shrug. Kevin was all, "You weren't there that night, you don't know what happened." No one even had to say which night he was talking about.

"You're such assholes." I said. They always have been.

So, what will happen now? She's moving back home. I'll go on and finish school and plan my wedding and neither one of us will ever mention that night. Why would I bring it up? She just lies and says nothing happened whenever I try to talk to her about her "flings." Like the time I asked her to go to Planned Parenthood and get some birth control and she flat out refused and said that would mean she was "condoning" her own behavior and "acknowledging" that she was going to have sex and she wasn't about to do that. That was wrong.



*(Author's note: Nostrils flare, eyes roll – disdain or is there something else? What? It looks like fear.)*

Jenny:

She doesn't even remember half of what happens to her, she's such a drunk. I mean, I have seen the shutters go down over her eyes when the booze hits her. She goes blank. Usually doesn't remember anything after that point. Like the time she stole the pot from my room and smoked it, then denied it. We found the roaches in her room and had a laugh over her blacking it out because she was embarrassed to get stoned.

*(Author's note: Did she really know all that time, but somehow, not "remembering" took away some of her shame? Jenny won't speculate. Female solidarity? Or some kind of repayment to her friend for her betrayal?)*

Jenny:

I love her, you know. You don't have to look at me like that. I do love her. She's just, it's just so gross and, whatever. I don't know how to say this. I don't want to talk about it anymore. I don't want to *think* about it anymore. How will I forget? (pause) What do you mean? *(Author's note: Are those tears in her eyes?)* You know, she's not the only who got hurt by those assholes. She's not the only one they hurt.

## Immigrant mother

Rachel Krampfner

I scrub the white, porcelain bowl  
using the bristly brush to erase a dingy yellow ring.  
Flush the toilet and sapphire water spins in rage  
and then finally stops,  
like a calmed storm.

Mama once told me about a storm, when I was a baby,  
that almost blew our entire village away.  
Papa was at work and my sisters cried,  
afraid he would never return from the wharf.  
The sun almost setting  
cast shadows on the adobe houses lining our unpaved street  
when finally Papa walked through the swaying palms.  
He was soaked and his shirt was ripped,  
but he kissed his family and made a joke  
about how in Estados Unidos it did not ever rain.  
Papa's only request was for his daughters to move north  
and lead a life without struggle or poverty.

I hang oriental rugs over the balcony and beat the dust out of them  
just as Grandmother did on Saturdays, wheezing in the red dust cloud.  
We'd eat soft corn tortillas  
that she tossed back and forth in her brown, wrinkled hands  
before frying the dough on the black grill.

Now I roll out the same dough  
and serve tortillas to my niñas.  
My hands don't move gracefully like grandmother's,  
they are rough and callused, like my life in this country.

At night I stare up at the ceiling from my small bed  
and count the weeks and months left  
'til Manuel joins my daughters and me in America.  
I miss the way he'd sometimes comb out the knots  
in my long, black hair before we went to sleep.  
But soon we will have dreams for our daughters  
and will lie together on the blue woven blanket  
Grandmother stitched for our wedding.

*I. The Invocation*

I have a journey ahead from nature and earth to  
sand and sea,  
from wind to clouds and rain to me.

Waves and wind  
Touch my back and rub my soul.  
Hiding in the deep sand sky,  
I let go—after you.

Chasing you—  
Reveling in you—  
Touching you away from me—  
Far into the sea.

In the night carry me away,  
let it go in the Baja sky.  
Follow the sunset,  
surf the bellowing monster—  
Crashing roar and low rumble—  
the mass of water forming ahead.  
Waves go silent, everything stops and I feel alone.  
At peace on the beach, no knowing what I have ahead.

*II. The Journey*

We were four sailors on a red bronco ship.  
At night a drive delirious, dreaming horror  
headlights heckling heinous fear,  
Towering trucks, twirling corners,  
critical moments caught roaring as road lines turn.  
This ghostly glitch electric trip  
chaotic slip into Mexico.

III.     *Finding a Friend*

The dunes of sand, tainted by the ocean wind—  
howling in the night sky.

A man came to life,  
driftwood tossed by the sea  
—tied in dusk.

We doused in fuel and paper skin,  
gave him a mouth and hair, he smiled at us.  
Then in a simple flick of light he lit up the night.  
Fell to the ground like a carcass bleeding fire,  
he was us, where we all go,  
the *Punta Cabras* Burning Man  
And the March beach clad night.

## In the Mandarin World

---

Ryan Patrick Yurcich

Mandarin is a group name for a class of oranges with thin, loose peel, which have been dubbed “kid-glove” oranges.

– Morton, J. 1987. *Mandarin Orange*

To hear your subtle voice  
whispering the skin tearing  
subtle peel and you enter me.  
You the color of warmth,  
gently sweeping nightly breezes,  
Caressing so wildly.

The mist dancing through air  
gentle across my nose  
Oh how beautifully mild,  
Aphrodisiac backyard fun.

With chloroplasts loving you, moving you  
Being you and then being me.  
Mandarin day hiding in this world-go-bye  
I see you for all that you are worth  
In your purpose of being alive to hang  
For many nights and touch the bite of light  
Kisses in the morning.

### I. Particle/Wave

Two waves meeting at trough  
cancel each other out. Two  
waves that meet at peak  
enhance one another. Meeting  
at sea, we crest and fall  
sweetly, the particle of you  
dissolves into me, the part  
that was me, sinking.

### II. Parallel Universe

I curl my leg around  
the crater of night  
as if night were the only  
world, but in another realm  
you open your eyes  
and your breath blows  
warm rain across the white  
plane of my wrist.

### III. Bell's Theorem

At a certain depth there is  
nothing to know.  
There is no known path  
from point *a* to point  
*b*, only what might be,  
and what will, probably,  
and, deeper than deep,  
the salt house where you live.

I'm going to undress you,  
Surrender up your mysteries—  
Soft pliable flesh  
Sliding beneath stroking fingers—

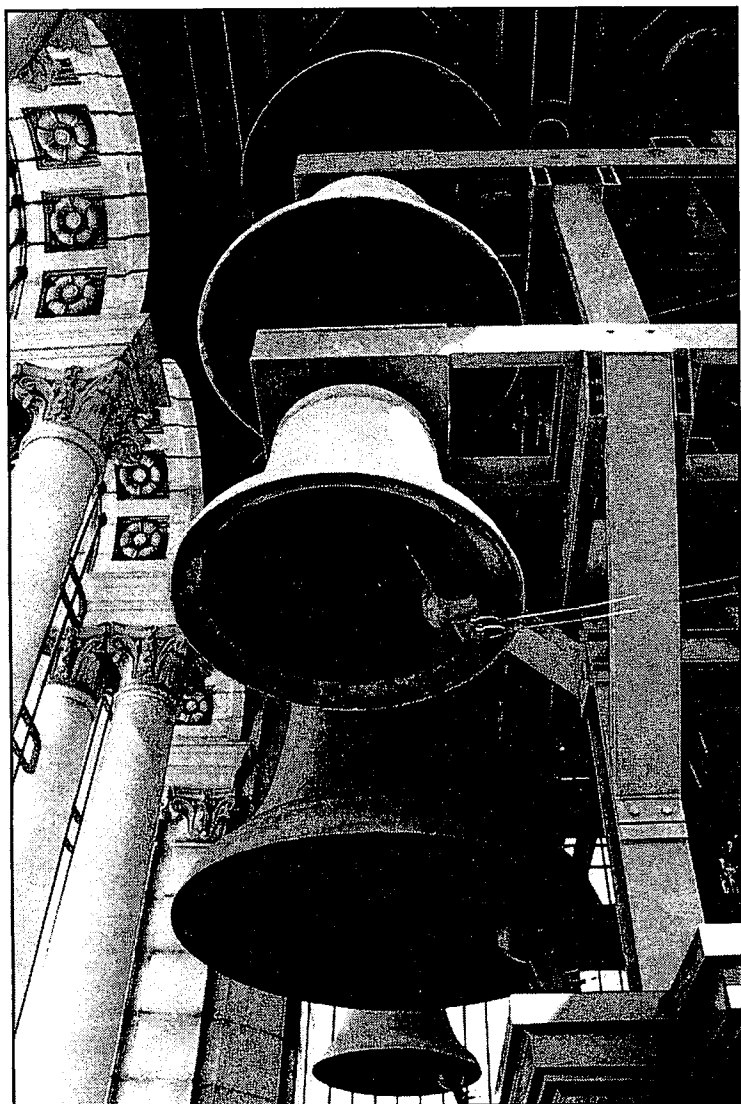
Skin spotted with  
Hills and valleys  
Of gooseflesh—

Peel away a layer  
With delicate violence,  
Pry you open,  
Thumb caressing the soft  
Moist bulb beneath—

Your juices invite mouth—  
Tongue lapping nectar  
Tart and sweet—  
Dripping down chin in a small  
Sticky mess—

Nibbling engorged flesh,  
I part your inner treasure  
With my mouth—

Relishing,  
Until your juice is spent  
And I am sated



Cupola Bells

Reneé Suzanne Muir



## Looking Back I See You in Technicolor

---

Dave Peterson

Your face framed by sky  
an unbelievable blue,  
your hair a shade of red  
not existing in nature.

What I don't see  
is the whole world stopping  
except for you.  
When it swerves and  
blurs into a halt  
and you fly forward  
your soft face breaking against,  
breaking through,  
windshield;  
the shards of glass shining  
like diamonds  
like a mirror foretelling  
seven years bad luck.  
And when you finally halt too,  
your flesh grated  
bones smashed  
one jagged femur piercing out  
bright and white as divinity;  
the drops of blood  
spackling your face  
a red like melted candle wax  
or raspberry syrup  
mingling with your freckles.  
I just can't see it.

Eurydice,  
I look back for you  
every day  
but all I see  
is a wisp of smoke  
trailing into a sky  
of bright unbelievable  
blue.

## Aubade for a Roommate

Kiara Koenig

New morning,  
someone's cologne  
rises from her pores.

She never lingers  
overnight.

One hand  
loosely fisted  
the other splayed  
into carpet.

All six-feet  
of her curled  
into the love-seat.

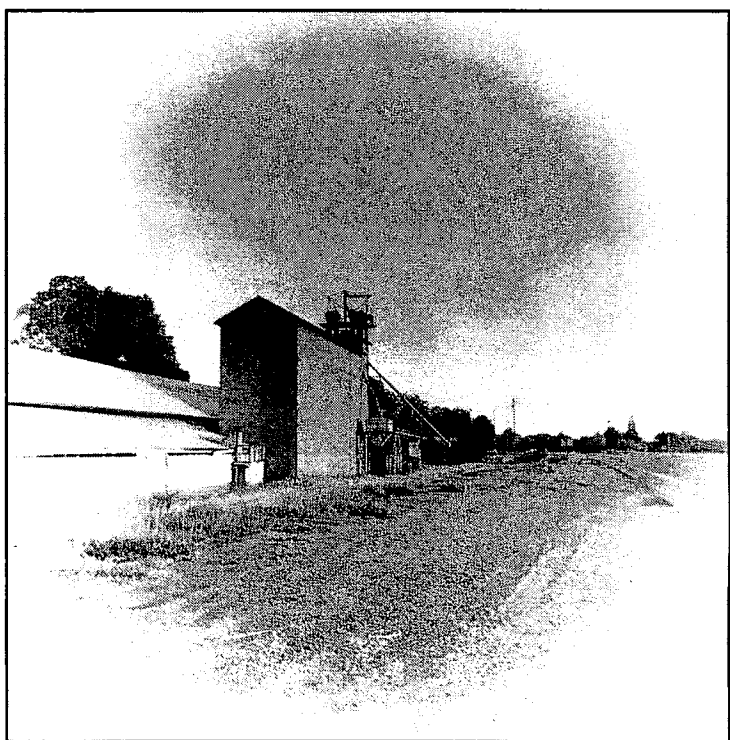
Her pillow—  
long, ink-black hair.

She wakes slow;  
hands first,  
then feet.

A long yawn  
relaxes into a smile  
scenting coffee.

Two cups  
into the morning  
I will listen  
to last night's drama.

Until then  
we share silence.



*Untitled*

Ricardo Ramirez

## January at the Edge of the Sacramento Valley

Kiara Koenig

Driving north between fallow rice fields—  
Hwy 99 eighteen-wheeler deep in tule fog  
and the tidal flow of station reception:

Lizst's vehemence underscores a guard's  
stutterstep, elevation and sweet stroke;  
Berlioz orates the long jump style stride  
and launch of a 360° tomahawk jam.

Driving home by memory—  
last traces of caffeine in full retreat,  
tires shushing me towards sleep.

Game over, locker-room clichés merge  
and re-emerge through midnight  
harangues both biblical and political,  
condense into fog and these familiar foothills.

## A Blues Poem

---

Gary Prows

Playing blues guitar is heaven now.  
You stand up with a Fender Telecaster  
and play that one note from God.  
You feel the hard maple lacquered neck under your fingers,  
the nickel-silver frets, the slinky strings,  
and you rip.  
Its slicing through the smoke in a nightclub,  
going for the jugular, ruling the room.  
Black women, black oily hair meeting brown skin, sweat,  
and a strong glow in my loins is how I do it.  
I reach down inside of myself to my feet,  
rip a guitar string with my bare fingers,  
and pull out a sound as big as the whole world.

I once promised Arden that on our son's sixteenth birthday, Casey and I would do something great together, something to remember him by. Really celebrate. Jump out of an airplane or off a bridge. I did this without stopping to think how soon his sixteenth birthday would actually arrive. Or that it would be a beautiful, clear, windless day thick with the promise of spring.

"Way cool," my wild-haired, silver-eyed son assures me about his choice, which is similar to jumping off a bridge except we're going to leap from a tower built for this purpose, fly through the air for two hundred feet, and be collected at the last moment by a long bungee cord tied to our ankles.

Casey, who loves thrills, has told all his friends about it. One of them, Simon, is standing nearby with a video camera in order to capture the entire event, before and after. Casey's girlfriend, Lorrie, whose mother would never in a million years jump off a tower for her daughter's sixteenth birthday, memory or no, is standing beside Simon giving me a thumbs up because I've won her admiration.

She has no idea.

Casey doesn't remember what his father looked like, and I have no pictures. So that despite the same silver eyes and wild hair facing him in the mirror each morning, he has often doubted Arden's very existence. I don't have this problem. To me Arden is still a vivid motion picture, and it's often the rest of the world that's drained to black and white.

When I met him I was married to an enlisted man, and living on base with him in San Francisco, California. Will and I had a house in the Presidio, before it closed down. The house was built in the thirties, on a grassy knoll, and the whole time I lived there I kept up an unending battle with ants. We had married in Indiana, just out of high school, and I'd moved across the country with him. I didn't know a soul. I'd send home charming pictures of our cream colored house by the bay, where dozens of sailboats looked

permanently anchored, but were actually crisscrossing all the time.

I was the only thing that never seemed to move.

On the day my life changed forever, I'd said goodbye to my mother-in-law, who was visiting, and gone to the Laundromat alone. It was heaven just to have a break like that. I was only twenty, but usually I felt a hundred years old. Will had recently surprised me by becoming a Born Again Christian, and turning his holy light on me. As soon as he had all my dark corners illuminated, he was going to have me baptized, but I had to clear up a zillion sins first.

I could no longer wear my necklace and earrings, or go out dancing or to pool halls, the few pleasures we'd had together until then. I wasn't allowed to drink beer or go anywhere without him at night or even meet with the wives group, the only place I had to make new friends, because Will said most of them fornicated out of wedlock (he'd actually begun to talk like that) and called them heathens.

I didn't disagree. It sounds crazy now, but in those days a lot of women just went along with what their husbands thought.

At the Laundromat, Arden talked to me while we were washing our clothes. I was struck by his amazing long hair, grown down to his shoulders, and the fact that he kept his worldly possessions in a knapsack, and had been to Vietnam.

It was hot. There was a little fountain out in the square before the building and he surprised me by stripping off his shirt and splashing himself in the water. He had a strong, suffering torso like Jesus painted on the cross, a long, high ribcage and wide shoulder blades.

Several matronly women from a nearby cleaners, out for their lunch on the benches, frowned and moved away from him. He dunked in the fountain and came up with water fingering across his bare chest and shoulders. He didn't seem to mind the commotion he was causing. He shrugged and did a little jig. Then he threw back his head and belted out a song. It was in Spanish, so I didn't recognize the words, but the tone was unmistakable. He sang in a rich, deep voice that rang across the little square like a lovely poem.

When he stopped singing he looked at me, and I didn't look away. He grinned and held out his hand, and I startled myself by taking it. He jerked me and I fell into the water with him, laughing.

I had suddenly become a heathen myself.

There are five of us jumping at once, which is supposed to provide moral support. We're about to step into a caged elevator where several cords are coiled on the floor like dozing snakes. From this elevator we'll be hoisted to the tower and flung into space. My guide for the jump, Mickey, a thick-necked sergeant type whose blond hair is buzzed to a flattop, checks equipment and talks over his shoulder to another, veteran, jumper. Half of what Mickey says is shouted.

Despite his loudness, Mickey's voice sounds far away, which confirms my suspicions. I've suddenly gone from collected to hysterical. Isn't he supposed to be paying attention to me? How nonchalant he is, going on about a backpacking trip he took to a lake in the Trinity Alps, where he caught native browns that measured from his wrist to his elbow.

"I worked this one torpedo for twenty minutes," he boasts, "what a fighter, and then, just as I got him to the bank, *phew* — off he went." He skates his left hand across his right and the sudden motion unnerves me.

I feel like I might be falling on solid ground. Who cares about the damn fish? Concentrate, this is dangerous business.

But Mickey, his two assistants, and the other jumpers, who all happen to be men, are oblivious. Even Casey is more interested in the lake's location and how long it takes to hike in. He'd like to go after the one that got away. He makes a face for Simon and the video camera, grins at Lorrie and throws her a kiss, and then I watch Mickey align him in the elevator cage.

"The lake's a good day's hike in," Mickey half shouts to my son, bending to strap his ankles together, and attach the bungee cord to the ankle strap. "But once you're there it's incredible, a different world." Sun glistens on his shorn hair which is dark at the roots, oiled cellophane bright at the



tips. "Over here, Alice," he orders me, pointing to my spot in the cage. I try to obey but find I'm slogging through water waist deep, against the current.

The trouble is, despite his bossy voice, Mickey looks incredibly young and foolish, nattering on about trout, and I'm wondering what his qualifications really are for bungee jumping, other than the fact that he seems to have such a cavalier attitude about risking my life by leaping off a tower aimed at the ground.

I'm no longer in control of my fear. It's imploded into my stomach and fizzes my blood at manic speed. I wonder why I didn't think of offering Casey an incredible backpacking trip for his sixteenth birthday. All the fish he could fight. Who would expect me to keep some promise I made his father years ago, anyway? I feel Sergeant Mickey's hands press my arms as he positions me, but it's as if he were touching someone far removed from where I stand.

He bends down and straps my ankles just like he did Casey's, and I throw my eyes at my son. My heart sinks. He really does think this is way cool. He wants to go through with it. He wants his mother to toss her life away for one dance with fate. Doesn't he care more about me than this? And what could I have been thinking? He's my little boy, my baby. What am I doing letting him bungee jump? We've both gone mad.

"Wait!" I croak, trembling like a trapped bird. I'm going to faint.

"Yeah?" Mickey stops his incessant talking and squints at me, perhaps seeing me for the first time. His breezy manner disappears and he seems to grow older and taller in front of my eyes. "Scared?" he asks.

Scared? I'm a quaking two-year-old.

"I can't — I can't —" I'm panting and the words get stuck.

"Yes, you can." He grips my shoulders and his square face looms in front of my eyes. His blond eyebrows above hazel eyes look cellophane, too. "Because I can," he corrects himself. "I can get you through it." He doesn't seem to think much of the other option, and shame fills me. The relief of

getting out of the cage seems as illusive as that trout that got away. Dimly I remember that I do have a choice, and make a stab at asserting myself. But what comes out is, "You sure?" in a stunted whisper.

He grins sturdily and cinches the cord tight around my ankles. Then he puts his nose even closer to mine. "Here's the drill." He pokes the air in front of his eyes with his fingers, in his best military gesture. "You watch right here unless I tell you otherwise." The sergeant taking me into combat.

"Good, now look up there. See that mountain? Go ahead, look." He points to the horizon in front of us, where a jagged blue peak rises up distinctive from the coastal range behind. "That's The Divide. Once we're up there, and you step to the edge, you won't have my eyes anymore. But you're going to have The Divide. You keep fixed on it no matter what, and do exactly as I tell you. Don't look down, don't look up. Just look at The Divide. Nothing to it, okay?"

Arden was nothing like Will. He was nothing like anybody. You read about people like him, they are always characters in a book. Bigger than life, bold, magical. He didn't believe in material possessions or working nine to five for a living, and instead got by on his disability check (he'd been wounded in Vietnam) and what he could earn doing odd jobs.

He looked like the gypsy he was, a true hippie several years after the fakes had vanished. His father had actually grown up traveling the back roads of Europe and his mother, a circus performer, still did accounts for a traveling show. Arden had helped tame lions as a boy. He could walk a tight wire with perfect balance. He loved doing back flips and round-overs and was fearless when it came to getting what he wanted. He plucked me from my life and took me on the road with him and I was gone almost three years.

I was madly in love, a thing which had never happened to me before. And up until that moment I'd spent an eter-

nity taking care, first, of my little brothers and sisters, and then my husband, without any real thought to what I wanted out of my own life.

Arden and I were the strangest sight you've ever seen. We were those people you look at by the side of the road and wonder what ever got into them, and what their life is like, thinking how you'd never in a million years be able to strip yourself of all you knew and be them.

We traveled around in a little wagon pulled by a pony, a miniature Conestoga he'd designed from a picture his grandfather had, and built from balsam and covered with a ship's sail. In the Conestoga we inched up and down the back highways of the country like people from another century or an alien planet. I wore loose fitting gauzy dresses and tons of silver jewelry, and Arden's hair grew ever more long and tangled. I used to love to tug a comb through that hair, while he sat grateful, his head gentled against my chest. We were living high on passion.

We traveled from spring to fall, and then in winter, we settled on a place Arden knew, a quarter section in the Rockies. As caretakers we lived free, in a cabin with no lights or power, and we took our job seriously, watching the movements of birds, deer and coyote as if their lives depended on us. As if we'd landed in a snow-filled Garden of Eden. I look back on myself then like some exotic plant, blooming and blooming miraculously.

There are those things in life you do without fear, and those things you do full of fear. How fearlessly I changed everything about me during that time. Later, everyone said wasn't I ashamed for leaving my husband and running off with a lunatic, but the truth is, Arden made me shameless. More shameless than I ever managed to be again.

"Here we go," I hear my son shout. There's a clank of gears and a shift in the cage and we're moving up. My stomach roils and jumps with the mechanics. For a moment I look away but Mickey pokes me and points at himself and I think, there are so many colors in hazel eyes. But I'm also thinking, I feel like a penguin with my ankles tied. I wish

I'd chosen the harness jump, where you're strapped like a rescue victim and fall backwards, not looking at the ground. I remember that the woman on the phone said it minimizes the rush.

Rush. That sticks in my head. Too fast, too deadly, the ground slamming up. Mickey pokes me again. He will not be making the jump with us so has not strapped himself in, but stands wobbling in the center of the cage. His face fills my vision. I'm inches from his thin ski patrol nose and ruddy tan. His wide, strong cheeks and forehead. The cellophane hair.

"You can do this. I said I'd get you through. You're going to be fine," he yells. A thinning wind in my ears. I'm worried that the tower doesn't feel stable as we rise, but sways maniacally.

"Casey?" I screech.

"I'm here, Mom!" He gives an Indian war cry that lingers and moves out, and I know I've lost him. But his cry rouses me, gives me the slight hope that Mickey's right, that he can get me through this, that I won't be one of the losers who asks to be let down. I realize I'm more afraid of this failure than jumping. Please, I plead silently with Mickey, make me do it. Make me do what I can't do on my own.

"The Divide," he says, grinning.

I can't shut my eyes but for a moment I pretend I'm feeling it again, the motion of clopping along in that pony cart with Arden. How the sky was always luscious hued, the wildflowers brilliant, the hills green, and time stretched like a hammock, lazy and full. The nights we made campfires by lakes and streams, and danced like dervishes around the flames. The days we made love on the hot river rocks flamed by sun, or rode toward the ocean so slowly it seeped into us fervent as the tide.

Real life? That felt the most real, most cherished. And I couldn't bear what I've lived since if it weren't for Casey, grown to be sixteen, much less flamboyant than his father, but gypsy enough, in the shadow of his legend.

The cage moves too fast. I was hoping it would stay slow and ponderous. But within moments, we're higher in the air than I thought possible. This part is slightly familiar, like taking a roller coaster and moving up the arc before you fall into space in that long, heart-stopping drop. Sparks are jiggling across my vision and a knot has formed in my forehead, between my eyes. I think I'm airsick.

"Look," Mickey shouts, "when we get to the top, you're going to step out onto the platform. You're going to look from me to that mountain. And we'll count down from five together. All of us. Five, four, three, two, one. Like that. And then you're going to head right into The Divide. You heard me, right for the mountain. Not down at all, get it? That's all you have to do. That and shout your favorite four letter word a couple hundred times."

Only a couple hundred times? A strange, strangulated giggle escapes me. But I see he's serious, and I fall silent.

The elevator cage clanks again, like a restless monster. Me caught in its zipper teeth. The air is definitely thinner up here, and whistles past my ears, hardly breathable. A pale day moon sits sadly in the west, last night's memory. I might as well have been shot into space.

"Is Casey okay?"

"I'm here, Mom." His voice is edgy with excitement. Uncontrollable tears track my cheeks. I'm doing this for you. Because I promised. "Happy birthday!" I hear a giddy voice call, not realizing it's me. "Happy Birthday! Happy Birthday!" Every time I say it, it seems to have an exclamation point.

"Isn't this great!" Casey sings, perhaps not catching the blind panic in my words.

I wonder if the horrible maw in my stomach could be intuition. A sign that one of us will be the statistic, the thousandth person whose cord doesn't hold, who plummets to his or her death. I open my mouth to voice this new worry, but Mickey shouts, "We're here," and the cage halts.

We're dangling two hundred feet up, a leaf twig in the wind. The tower dipping like a hula dancer. Nothing substantial beneath us. It looks two hundred feet too high.

"I don't feel so good," I tell Mickey's eyes.

He winks. "You've got it made in the shade, Alice. Now I'm just going to release this latch here, and you can step out. Ah, ah, ah!" he warns, catching my gaze traveling down. "From me to The Divide. Remember?"

What can I do? I snap to.

The Divide. A big blue cutout, rising stark and sheer and razor-backed as if to split the sky. Mist roostertails from it like a shrug.

"Step on out, Alice," Mickey repeats, not seeming to notice that I hardly have control of my muscles. But I step out onto the platform. I want a last look at Casey, my lovely boy with silver eyes and that crazy mass of hair, only I'm afraid to avert my gaze.

The wind is tinkling my ears now like glass about to shatter. My throat aches. I can't believe I've gotten this far. I can't believe I'm letting Casey do this. This is the sort of thing his father would do, not me. So how come I'm here, high on a tower, willing to jump?

It happened like this. Arden on a railroad bridge high above a rocky gorge. The Snake River tumbling far below. He's climbed to the topmost gothic spire, a thin band of iron from this angle, a wire across the sky. He means to walk it, not the first time he's taken such a risk.

Below him, my heart whumps in my chest. What does he think he's doing? The baby, Casey, is crying. He's teething and his little face is scrunched in misery.

I watch Arden take his first light step.

Despite my picking him up, Casey begins to wail.

Arden takes another step and I feel Casey's small heart beating avidly against my own. I pat his back, rocking us both while in the air, Arden teeters recklessly.

Casey shudders. His toothless mouth widens and his reddened gums stretch until the sound splits my ears. I hold him tight, not taking my eyes from Arden, as if my gaze alone were holding him there.

From a tree behind me there's a flutter of birds wings not unlike a rustle of petticoats. They startle Casey and halt

his crying and he looks up, listening.

I want to call him back but Arden has made his way into the center of the void, much too far away to hear. I cradle Casey, whose shudder is more lonely than his wail, and that's when my eyes lose track of Arden. I simply can't watch them both, and it's breaking my heart.

The irony is that now, Arden's son, the boy who brought me back to earth, tethered me, is about to leap into the air with me. Even though I couldn't keep up with his father, even though the responsibility crept back, the worry, the needs, until one day I had to walk away from him, back into mundane life where Arden couldn't follow, I still miss him. I still weep for my carefree self.

And I weep because Arden performed without a net, and in the end I wasn't able to. I weep to give Casey a glimpse of him, some greater understanding, and perhaps myself, too.

I don't need to jump, I realize, but as Mickey has instructed, I look at nothing save The Divide. And the surprise is, I'm good at it, watching this one single thing. I look and look until it fills me, and I become the big blue razor-backed cutout splitting the sky.

What the hell, I think, I'm here. And I spread my arms, lean out, and leap into the blue.

On the way down, I don't scream my favorite four letter word a couple hundred times. Instead I shout his name, Arden, Arden, Arden! so that it's over quicker than longing. Only that one stark instant of staring into his soul — a wide, vast canvas as big as the mountain I'm falling from, separate, charmed, until the cord tied to my ankles pulls me back.

## Contributors' Notes

---

**Bridget Crenshaw** is a student at CSU, Chico.

**Laney Erokan** is a graduating senior this semester. She started out in college in San Luis Obispo, then studied at University of London for a year, and then transferred to Chico State, where she is a journalism major and a creative writing minor. She worked for the *Orion* and currently is an associate editor at the *Synthesis*. She grew up in the Bay Area and upon graduation, will move to San Francisco and give freelance writing a shot.

**Bob Garner** has had his prose and poetry published in a variety of journals, including *The Painted Hills Review*, *The California Quarterly*, *Contraposto*, and *Watershed*.

**Kylee Hayden**, originally from Clovis, CA, moved to Chico right after high school to attend California State University, Chico. Kylee, now 20, is an English major with a certificate in technical writing and a minor in creative writing. Her interests include literature, music, hiking, rock climbing and, like most writers she knows, excessive coffee intake.

**Kiara Koenig** teaches creative writing at CSU, Chico and is completing her MFA with the MFA Consortium in Creative Writing. The genesis for "January at the Edge of the Sacramento Valley" was a midnight drive up Highway 99 from Sacramento to Chico after a Kings game. The post-game show kept blending into classical music and various call-shows and the road kept getting lost in the tule-fog. "Aubade for a Roommate" is a modern take on an old form.

**Rachel Krampfner** is a media arts major with a minor in creative writing. She likes long walks on the beach, Jell-O pudding snacks, and *When Animals Attack* specials on TV. This is her last year at Chico State, and she hopes to go into radio and eventually make, or write, films. Although many people influenced her in her writing, she'd like to thank Mr. Belvedere and Brenda from *Beverly Hills 90210* for their subtle moral support, and the faith they had in this young, aspiring author.



**Renee Suzanne Muir** is a professional photographer with a studio in Chico.

**Kitty Nard** lives in the High Desert region of Southern California with three of her four daughters. She holds an MA in creative writing and is currently completing an MFA through the CSU Consortium Program based in Chico, CA. She is presently teaching in the English department at CSU, Northridge. Her creative work has appeared in *The Northridge Review*, *51%*, *Eclipse Magazine*, and *Roar*.

**Dave Peterson** is an English MA student at CSU, Chico where he lives communally with his wife, two children and the Taylors. He'd like to say something witty here, but those sort of things always come back to haunt him years later.

**Jacalyn Pauer** is a student at CSU, Chico.

**Samuel Provenzano** is scheduled to receive his MA in English this spring. When he's not writing, he's usually riding: Horses, Harleys...He plans to teach comp or creative writing at a two-year college in the fall. The End.

**Gary Prows** is an English major at Chico State. He is taking English 120A, a poetry class with Jeanne Clark, who encouraged him to submit his work to *Watershed*.

**Ricardo Ramirez** is a photography student at Butte College.

**Bonnie Roy** is a junior transfer to Chico State from Dominican University of California. She plans to study political communication at Chico, while continuing to pursue her interest in creative writing. She is an Aquarius, cat person, and middle child.

**Jeremy Terhune** says, "Through her support...a CSU, Chico faculty member inspired this poem, which is simply the fruit of a student's creativity when kindled by warming kindness and sincerity."

Meredith Timpson is an artist and writer from Michigan, currently living in Paradise, CA.

Erica Traverso is a graduate student in Creative Writing at CSU, Chico.

Zu Vincent is a frequent contributor to *Watershed*, and her work was included in the spring '97 "best of twenty years" issue. A novelist, short-story and feature writer, her Christmas fiction is an annual tradition in the *Chico News & Review*, and her most recent non-fiction sales include *Yoga Journal*, *Artweek* and *Chico Statements* magazines.

Heidi Wallis was born in British Columbia, Canada. She is currently working towards an English BA, with plans to eventually hold an MFA in creative writing. This is her second semester at Chico State. After college she plans to travel and write.

Ryan Patrick Yurcich challenges you to let it flow, taking it deep into the soul, to always remember that there are friends in poems, and words hold true — the mysterious exchange, gifts inside of you.

