

WATERSHED



poetry, language, style

WATERSHED

Volume 25, Number 2

Twenty-fifth Anniversary Issue

WATERSHED

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Spring 2002

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The editors would like to thank Gregg Berryman and the students in CDES 23, spring 2002, for excellent cover design proposals.

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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 Garamond 10/12 by the editors. Computer assisted layout and design by Rick Bates. Printed on 70# Sundance Natural, on a Docutech at University Printing Services, CSU, Chico.

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Dedication

This 25th anniversary issue is dedicated to Ellen L. Walker, professor emerita of English, founder of the Literary Editing and Publishing Certificate Program at California State University, Chico, and inspiration to hundreds of students interested in the process of bringing literature alive in the form of books and magazines.

In spring of 1977, Professor Walker launched the first literary editing course at California State University, Chico. One of the projects that resulted from that class was a small, fairly crude literary magazine called *Trial Impression*. There was no university funding for this magazine, but Walker was determined to make the student project a reality. She knew that when students take responsibility for a publication, their learning is intensified. She and the students found the money to produce the first issue, and that effort helped Walker secure stable funding through Instructionally Related Activities and the College of Humanities and Fine Arts.

In spring of 1981, student editors changed the magazine's name to *Watershed*, to signify its emergence as an established campus and community magazine. Now in its 25th year, *Watershed* is one of the oldest student-edited literary magazines in the country—and Walker's energy and spirit has been behind each of the 50 issues published.

Casey Huff, Coordinator
Literary Editing and Publishing Program



Joyful Koi

Reneé Suzanne Muir

Kanemoto: a tale of entreaty for this, a Surname

Elizabyth Hiscox

i. How you found your name:

Tracing the subtle, staccato sound
gorgeous, jagged,
to sumi-ink dreamed peaks of Japan.
Slopes that scraped to heights. Climbing past
pinking blossoms,
haiku-filled forests of thin-lined pines.

ii. How I found your name:

Tracing the gorgeous, supple lines of you,
fingering the delves:
our American sonnet. Rolling in the
watercolored swath grassland:
fertile and low,
spreading fresh in the shade of lone black oaks.

iii. How I've lost your name:

Thick sweat of syllables
in my mouth.
Unable to splay the rich vowels, catch
consonants quick and salty on my tongue.
I cannot climb past.
Having breathed too deep of lows and highs,
vibratoed hills, silent trees I cannot find the air.

meloned nomadic me mother

Elizabyth Hiscox

regarding the Venus of Willendorf

slow round you
named for a goddess you aren't

that frail one too young one
born of cold clamed shell

one sprung, unclasped from salted Roman seas
not sound round woman

breasts swelled sore
your milk more than yours more than sore a million mothers'

your belly hips thick lick of fruitful.
lush with stretching life thrust

yet

arms wrist-thinned small
can't cradle more than round sore self

weight of what you birth
more than you can hold

more than you can stand
found in situ situated perching only on prayers,

a dangerous dependence:
female sans footing

faceless your lips eyes nose silent
under limestone curve of profile

mute call for more recognition
than gentle roundness prominent navel

dear faceless ill-named Venus heavy
down turned to shared burden sacred hope

Ginkgo, Maidenhair Tree

Elizabyth Hiscox

*Ginkgo biloba was once believed extinct and is not found in the wild.
Preserved within the monastic temple gardens of China, she is found today
only as a result of that confinement.*

blessed with two gentle lobes loba
supple shape calls
for fingering,
lascivious frondling fondling
indulgent smooth.
my seeds are naked to this world.

yet touched only by the untouched:
Buddhist belly round,
Dao with homely bellied vowel.
celibate index and fore finger skin
comes
close and firm, feeling up my thin fragrance.

delicate sway of me deceives,
they mistake maidenhood.
virgin male palms, meditative smooth, don't know this wild strength.
I have thrown countless children to the wind
and swallow the sun.
unapologetic.

taken fresh, spilling
within walls of release,
flowing with the stream while mountain still.
cloistered away
I, perverse, defy this ebb of propagation,
spread wide my bare seeds.
Sink them deep,
sprout wet this sacred soil.

I defy despair.
circular spin of time will find me
fallen fresh
beside the path, this sacrilege seclusion in future pasts.

contemplating the aesthetics of skeeball ineptitude

Elizabyth Hiscox

ricocheting casts toward carnival constellation
that bumps my stars back at me.
borderline Ptolemaic beauty
the ellipse is accuracy but this...spherical indulgence
round bounce
centrifugal force of concentric circles building to
building around
thirty the forty the fifty the score
a game
that will take on slant whatever I throw at it.
will slant it back
will take whatever I give it divvy it into
fifty the forty the thirty the numbers
dirty values that only flirt with what this entails
can't value up
can't rack this out in points:
thump of the arcade strong in my commotion of slipping
 spheres hard in my din of this
loud in my

a miss is still a shot taken
arc of it pleasurably registered;
Ptolemaic,
its ambitious thrust a beautiful, bouncing miscalculation.

"And you threw her a script?"

"Yeah, I threw her a script."

"Over dinner?"

"Yeah, over dinner I threw her a script."

"Why?"

"I wanted to keep the conversation going."

"Wasn't it going already?"

"Yeah, it was going just fine, but I didn't want any lags in the dinner conversation. I figure I'm paying for dinner, so the conversation should be good."

"What happens if she decides to pay for the dinner?"

"Doesn't matter, I'll still throw her a script."

"So, it doesn't matter who pays, you're still going to throw the person you're out on a date with a script?"

"Yeah, I mean there's no use in wasting the precious time two people have together, and if I can make the night a momentous occasion, so be it."

"You consider handing a girl a script of conversation a momentous occasion?"

"Sure do."

"Is it just over dinner?"

"Depends on what we decide to do for the night. I have many scripts ready at a moment's notice."

"What do you mean a moment's notice? Do you carry all the scripts around with you?"

"The basic ones I carry with me."

"What do you consider the basic scripts?"

"Well, I have the drinks script, the dinner script, the before and after the movies script, the after the movies, coffee, or drinks script, and then it boils down to the choose your own adventure script."

"What's the choose your own adventure script?"

"Well, you remember those paperback books like *The Mysterious Cave* and crap like that, don't you? Well, this is basically the same thing. When I come to the end of the night, I have the woman choose which ending she thinks it should be. If she thinks we should end the date with just a hug, then she turns to page 55 or something like that, and that basically tells her what to do for the end of the date."

"So, do most of the women you go out with object to this sort of bizarre dating ritual?"

"It's not bizarre. And some of the woman like the unpredictability of the first date."

"Do you just use this on first dates, or does it go on for longer than that?"

"Well, it depends what happens. But I basically run all my dates this way."

"So, you can actually end the date with you two having sex?"

"If at the end of the date the woman chooses that option, then it is her choice."

"What happens in the morning?"

"If she opts for the sex night, she has to choose another option as well. This could be the 'she leaves after we have sex' option, the 'I'll cook you breakfast in the morning' option, or the 'sex, breakfast, and more sex' option."

"So, basically it always works out for you if they choose the 'sex' option?"

"No. I don't really like to cook."

"Could this ever lead to marriage?"

"It has, but the woman chose the 'divorce and alimony with no kids' option at the end of the 'ten years of marriage' option."

"You were married for ten years? Did you write a script for each and every day of your ten years?"

"Yeah, every morning before she woke up I would have a script ready for her. She would run errands, pick up the dry cleaning, make the bed, cook my favorite meals, and have a dirty martini when I arrived at home."

"What would people think when you went to parties and other places with her? Would you always have a script with you?"

"Better than that. I would write scripts for everyone at the party, or if we just went for drinks, I would have a script there."

"What happened if you ran into someone you weren't expecting?"

"I have an option for unexpected visitors and/or ex's. It's perfect. Sometimes I have an impromptu option that allows the person I'm with to choose their own decision without the script."

“But isn’t that against the ‘script’ rules? If they don’t read the script how will they know how to react?”

“If the impromptu is in the script, then it’s a part of the script.”

“Do you mind if I ask you more questions?”

“No, not at all. It’s all there in black and white.”

Upon Hearing that Scientists Mixed Spider DNA with that of a Goat, Allowing it to Spin Silk from its Nipples

Ryan Grow

Just imagine the delicate dance of genetics.
Guanine waltzing with cytosine,
the subtle foxtrot of thiamine and adenine;
the splicing as partners are switched,
switched again.

Imagine the inspiration.
A scientist with a few empty glasses before him,
contemplating, in muted anger,
the rising prices of shirts, pajamas, and ties.

Imagine the pitch.
“Ladies and gentlemen, do I have an idea for you.”
The board of investors, mouths agape in astonishment,
hands unconsciously fingering lapels of rock-gray suits.

Imagine the research.
The jug jug juggling of the DNA milkshake,
the delicate coil of plastic tubes
running between Pyrex glass bottles,
the serum glistening beneath incandescent overhead lights.

Imagine the success.
The men and women in white overcoats handing out high fives
like pink slips in a Chinese textile factory,
the milk in champagne flutes that gets a laugh from everybody,
the collective gaze into the future.

Imagine the goat.
The bare white walls of its bedroom,
the project code number it responds to like a given name,
the bleat of surprise as a plastic-gloved hand pinches its nipple,
drawing forth yard after yard of raw fiber.

Imagine the possibilities.

Imagine the boundless horizon.

A Subjugated Voice

Michael Gordon

I removed a rusty iron spike
from the gravel and glass shards.
It was filthy and useless
having served its purpose,
anchoring the steel rails
to their splintering wooden foundations
under the clumsy, moaning cars
of the trains passing lethargically through town,
like stray ghost ships through a narrow canal.

I clutched the stake like a formidable weapon,
bloody, bent and spent,
now nothing more than an artifact,
an indication of its own replacement.
The redness of the long years of oxidation
staining the moist palm of my hand,
settling into a fortune teller's script
I never knew I'd held before.

This dagger is a crude being
writhing, and drinking my sweat
like an iron seahorse;
the battered, puckering snout
craning over the long curling body
of a petrified serpent.
A single, dense, worm-like muscle
paralyzed by a crippling struggle
to free itself from the echoing sentence
of John Henry's vicious gavel.

I wondered how the antique filth would taste,
the tangy flakes of dirt and aged metal
fastening my jaw at its hinge
as it had fastened the rails to the earth
under the sustained, violent vibrations
I still hear
when I hold the rusty railroad spike to my ear
and listen for its raspy whisper.

Pa pointed his finger at me as though he were telling God where to strike.

I was fourteen, and starting high school in a week. I didn't particularly like being told what to do, but I did it anyway, though not always in a way that Pa found completely satisfying.

"Football?" I said, without much enthusiasm.

Pa slapped me to get my attention. He spoke with a hoarse, scratchy whisper.

"You better think," he stabbed his finger at me, "before you answer."

I touched my burning face,

"When does it start?" I asked.

Pa smiled. "That's a good boy." He reached over and knuckled my skull.

"You're gunna make me proud, son."

I didn't see how knocking people down could be anything to brag about. Pa pulled out a tin of Copenhagen and put a dip of tobacco in his lower lip. He turned away like he was done talking for the day.

Pa owned 200 acres on the coast that had belonged to his father, and his grandfather before that. I went past the barn on the way to the cliffs, and stopped at the kennel where the dogs were yapping. Pa made a living at breeding and training guard dogs that many folks thought were some of the best in the country. At the south end of the kennel, there were eight puppies about four weeks old. The pups were yelping and wagging when I crouched down by the fence.

Frodo and Bart were teamed against Goofy, and Goofy was beating up on both of them. Waldo was lying back in the corner, almost invisible because of his brindle coat. Waldo grinned and stood up. I looked around, then went in and got down among them.

After playing for a while, I sat in the corner, rocking back and forth while holding Waldo in my lap. I could usually tell which pups weren't going to pass the test. Pa liked his dogs mean and obedient.

I wished Ma was still alive. I held Waldo tight, and there were tears itching my cheeks. Waldo licked them away.

I was making things worse.

* * * * *

I didn't think it would feel good to hit people, but Pa was right about football. I wasn't the biggest or the strongest or the fastest,

but something happened when I put on a helmet and nobody could see me. I was told to hurt them, and it turned out I was good at it. People at school started looking at me differently, and sometimes it felt creepy. I made a lot of friends that I didn't like much.

I was the team captain. Before every game, I stood at mid-field with my cleats pawing the turf like a bull getting ready to charge. The official held up a coin between his thumb and finger and asked— "Heads or Tails?" I could barely hear him because of the storm roaring in my blood. It wasn't until after the game was over that I could remember who I was.

In our second game, I blindsided the quarterback with his arm back to pass. I felt his arm snap at the shoulder, then dove on the fumble. After that, I walked with a warrior's strut. Girls with flashing eyes were giggling and talking in whispers. One day, I caught sight of myself in a reflection while I was bragging. I shut up after that.

I was hanging out with the team, and we started stealing stuff, like road signs and other junk. I thought it was stupid, but I went along. Once, after a game, I got caught by the coach passing Cokes out a little snack bar window. I'm not sure who came up with the idea, or how I ended up inside, but there I was. Coach never told Pa, which was good, because Pa was feeling poorly lately, and he was already in a bad enough mood. I quit stealing after that.

The team finished in last place that season, which seemed to bother Pa even more than it did me. We lost our last game the weekend before Thanksgiving. Pa made a list of all the things I did wrong that cost us the game, then backed up to cover the whole season. I was tired of hearing it, and said so. Pa slapped me.

I was tired of that, as well.

* * * * *

"He always was a mean son-bitch."

Pa spat a stream of tobacco juice at Jeckle. The angry turkey was spreading his wings and preparing to defend himself.

"Git behind him, boy. I'll keep his eyes while you grab him."

I hesitated. "Pa?"

"Git!"

I circled to the left while Jeckle kept a wary eye, dividing his attention between us. Pa waved his hands in the air and shouted to

distract him. I tackled him like covering a fumble, and Jeckle clawed at me until Pa rushed up and grabbed him by the neck. With the quick slash of a carpet knife, he snapped off Jeckle's head, and then leapt backwards to avoid the blood spewing from the neck.

"Let him go, boy!"

I let go, and Pa began laughing while a headless Jeckle ran helter-skelter, crashing into the sides of the pen. The laughing turned to choking, and then Pa bent over and spit up blood.

Jeckle's head was lying in the dirt at my feet. The beak was opening and closing as though he were gasping for air.

I bent over and threw up.

* * * * *

It was just the two of us for Thanksgiving dinner. Guess I was more grateful for what hadn't happened that year than what had. Ma died of cancer two years back, and it looked like Pa was going to follow soon. Neither one of us wanted to talk about it. Pa wasn't much of a cook, but he tried. We sat at the table looking at Jeckle belly-up between us. I wasn't hungry, and Pa had trouble swallowing solid food.

We were silent, pretending to eat, both of us probably thinking about Ma, and wishing she were here. Pa put his head down in his hands. It made me shiver, like a ghost was breathing on the back of my neck.

* * * * *

Pa was testing the loyalty of the pups to the pack leader. He was taking them one at a time out to the south pasture. He would lay down flat on his back, then turn the pup loose. A guard dog will sit next to Pa with his head on a swivel, watching out while the leader is down. Some pups try to get their heads lower, pushing it under Pa's so that they don't have the job. Some pups take off a-running...

I'm sitting on the edge of the world, with legs dangling over two hundred feet of space. The waves are crashing into the base of the cliff with a crack of thunder that snakes up my spine. I'm in the updraft, and salty spray carries a gull straight up past my nose on invisible currents. The gull spirals skyward. For a second I think of following her, of spreading my wings and soaring lazily upward. My entire body is trembling.

Waldo walks up and looks down over the edge, then sits. He smiles at me. We sit there like that for a while, side by side, tears tumbling through empty space.

* * * * *

I was holding Waldo, afraid that if I set him down, Pa would kill him. Pa was staring at me like maybe he might kill me as well.

"You forget how things work around here, boy? I tell you what to do, and you do what I say."

"It's not his fault, Pa. I've been playing with him."

Pa took a quick step forward and slapped me hard enough to loosen a tooth.

"He ain't your damn friend, boy. He has a job to do, and if he can't get it done, then I got no use for him. You need to pay attention to business, son."

"I'll take care of him, Pa. I'll make sure he ain't no trouble."

Pa shook his head like he couldn't believe what he had just heard.

I stared at him, clutching Waldo, tears blurring my eyes. Pa waited, then slapped me again.

I slowly extended Waldo, eyes closed so I couldn't see Waldo looking back.

* * * * *

Bart, Goofy, and Waldo were trapped in a chicken wire pen out behind the barn. Pa was next to the pen where the pups were yapping and wrestling. I was standing on the other side of the water trough, watching three puppies floating. Pa reached into the pen and grabbed Bart by the scruff.

Pa knelt down and pinned Bart on his back in the red dirt, then held him tight while the pup kicked. It took about thirty seconds before Bart gave up. Pa held him up and stared into his eyes.

Pa put him in the cage with Frodo, and I drew a breath, feeling a little light-headed. The next pup was Goofy. Goofy wouldn't surrender, a future pack leader for certain. Pa reached over and pushed him down into the water. Goofy died fighting. He bobbed to the surface, and then there were four puppies floating.

Pa had the last pup on his back. Waldo just lay there enjoying the belly rub. Pa looked up at me, and then tossed Waldo in my direction. I caught him.

“Kill it,” Pa said.

And everything got quiet around me. I blinked a couple of times in the weird light, feeling dizzy, like I was standing at the edge of a cliff staring down into a storm.

“Gunna start crying, sissy boy?”

I set Waldo down in the dirt next to me, then turned in a crouch and stared across the water trough at Pa like it was a scrimmage line. God’s fire had burned away all of my doubts.

Pa came at me.

He never made it past the trough. I held Pa underwater while he thrashed, until his churning knocked Goofy’s body over the edge and into the dirt. Suddenly I had a vision, Pa holding Goofy under, just like I was holding Pa. I pulled Pa up out of the water, and he took a ragged breath.

I couldn’t stop shaking.

orange crumbs—
the cheesy dust
of Chester the Cheetah
mingles with powdery talc
leavings from white chalk—
staining tiny blue-dyed
cotton fibers
woven into wee mittens
he wears even when warm,
plopped on couch,
sheltered from nature

Batman and Aurora
lie frozen
limbs askew
as the cherry-red
sportscar
cast in non-toxic plastics
plows into them
pressing them into carpet
stained by milk and Kool Aid

yesterday he told me a story
(at 3 he has all the necessary parts)
standing in the halls of my school
beneath neon flyers he can't read
face aglow and bursting to share

he began:
once upon time:
big red chicken—
does chicken dance...
for mommy and daddy,
the end

Joaquin Phoenix, Remembering the Life of a Brother Named River Now Nine Years Dead by Overdose

Dave Peterson

1.

My video library catalogues tumult;
the life you lived on screen
paved the way for me.

I remember you best in *Running On Empty*.
The anguish in your eyes simmering
as you played air guitar for Martha.

I followed your light—
a beacon out from the street-corner songs and dances
that supported us as children
into *Space Camp & Russkies*—
close enough to bask in your light
& not be burned by the flames.

2.

Viper Room.
Samantha.
Sirens.
Martha.
Red and blue Red and blue.
Johnny.
Counting compressions.
Cops.
Cameras flashing.
Martha crying.
Martha crying.
Martha crying...
Rivers

3.

Ridley cut my scene from *Gladiator*:
Commodus, impotent to move on Maximus,
begins to hack and hack and hack
upon the stone bust of his father

(a bust I see wearing your face)
slashing with impotent rage
I can only express to stone.

I fall into tears
like your light fading—
grasp at all that remains:
a chipped & cracked visage
of a dead Roman king;
haunted by a brother
who will not rise from ashes.

Watching the Kenton band
on a Happy Birthday video
my daughter gave me
today, I come to a place
where the camera holds tight
on the trumpet section, and I
can see the second hand
on Buddy Childer's wristwatch
tick along the metal arc
of its curving sky
like a sleek cat checking
the cul de sac action
on a slow hot summer day
where everything in the world
crawls, except this music which pours
& roars & takes ahold of you.

Engineer in English class

Alex C. Brown

*It is difficult to get the news from poems, but men die miserably
every day for the lack of what is found there.*

—William Carlos Williams

Circled learning,
I cringe,
what next?

Hazy manure fog, settling
thick and particulate,
group-share?

Where is arctangent,
curl vector,
theta,
my infinite Riemann sums?

Autumn birthday song,
waves the arrogance away,
brings clarity to
Williams Carlos Williams.

I now hear,
cascading neutrinos and positrons,
at the photocopier when someone relives
the previous night's events.

Dear sisters,

I went to the lake today
it sat lotus position,
broken teacup background,
familiar jagged smile.

Wipe those creeks from your eyes,
swimming in the river
strengthens your heart.
I know, it seems easier
to turn into the current,
but that only leads to ponds.

When you reach the lake
Eagles will be proud
of how well you swim,
and the fish ladders you climbed.
I will be there, tent and lantern,
Angie will pour you soup,
and we will pencil you
on our camping pass.

They were afraid of the deserted anthill, the way it
sat there, twelve-hands-high, the ghost of so much
busyness, afraid of the shadow it cast.

But they couldn't level it. That would be hubris. So
they left it in the middle of the world and planted grass
around it, a sea of dichondra—little tight dark green
cloverlike leaves, growing slowly,
close to the ground.

Looking godward, I only
See my eyes get
Wide, and my neck, sore.

Maybe I have read the map
Wrong
Maybe godward is the other way.

They say if you fold
Your hands just so,
You will fly that way.

Like a pigeon with some
Dirty scrap of news.
They say.

When I was fifteen,
I would have gone non-stop,
No peanuts.

When I was nineteen,
I would not have gone at all.
At all.

At the dwindling of twenty,
I am catty and curious,
Delicate sniffs at

Hereafter. And here. I
Wonder if I need to balance
Again: tree pose. Or

Just give in: mudhasana,
Child. Of?
Someone strapped me on

Skates. I have gone too
Fast, have missed the god turn,
Have gotten dizzy

As a fugue. And I only
Halfway
Want to find my way again.

And only one eye
Can dare to look for it,
To open.

Only my third.
And when I see the world,
I see the third.

And when I look for the face
Of god,
I only see the word.

Namaste.

I cannot mark the path
for you to follow. I can only whisper
and gesticulate and sing and cry the path
I have followed the quiet beauty
I have seen the maddening confusion
I have stood in the mute strength
of the mountains within me.

I can sit with you in the light
under a round summer moon
and let flow on my breath
the amazing powerful heart
rending tale of my life
while a soft warm midnight wind wraps us
in the scent of sweet dry grasses. There
I can tell you of where
I have been: in
cold wet caverns,
chill and full of echoes on
dry hot stretches of sand,
sharp and burning under the sun in
quiet dew heavy forests,
soft with fallen needles and verdant ferns.
I can tell of how my thirst to
live, to
drink and bathe in life, drove me
to set my bare feet onto
this spiraling path, to walk
into the unknown
with only a faint view
of a shining mountain top
in the faraway distance.
And of how joy flows
through me in
the soft mountain meadows
I wander through along my way.

I can share
all of this with you—but,

I cannot say where the spiraling path lies.
I cannot say where
it will take you
I cannot tell of adventures
you will live
before you reach your heart.

Her Hands Touch Me Like Water

Douglas S. Jones

It is the inevitability of time
that turns from a tree its leaves;
the perfection of seasons that move,
with the slowness of the cycle of water,
heavy, overripe fruit
from its soft, bruising skin.

I know a woman whose palms—printless skin—
resist the withering of time
like pieces of wax fruit.
Her fingers spread like leaves
in a small wind and touch me like water
with one slow, smooth movement,

as a willow in a storm moves.
The slow twisting of life beneath skin
that, without the taste of water,
will dry like charisma in time,
leaves
only hope for the seasons when fruit

bends branches down to our hands; fruit
that drips juice from our chins, moving
like the thin veins of a leaf
down our skin,
because time
is slow and silent when she touches me like water.

I watch her hands under running water,
cleaning fruit
that, after giving it time
to dry, we will move
to out mouths. From its skin
she washes the dirt and leaves.

As I leave,
she pressed my hands, like water,
to the simple skin
of her soft cheek and the taste of fruit
rolls from her mouth in movements
that separate space and time.

And when the wind blows against my skin like leaves
moving on slow water,
I recall how her hands, unlike fruit, refuse to wither in time.

Spring-Teased Celebration

Ryan Patrick Yurcich

*So, I'd give this world
just to dream a dream with you
On a bed of California stars.*

—Woody Guthrie

To catch the wind and hold the sky—
to dream a world buzzing
blackberries into big-creek corners—
jump—skip contorted boulders over down
into waters February fervor—

naked plunge pulsing hair
with winds individual caress
then bask on black rock
sun's oven on noon's tune—

hold tadpoles in your fingers,
and watch woodpecker's way of hawk:
chirp err-errr-er and freeze into shadow.

To bark at squirrels
as they bark at squirrels—

to oak silhouette,
the overlapping awning
branched sky below sky.

To join the kids
playing circles around day
in the grassy patch the tumble downs
into poppies orange sea

and you find your friend
a hand taking you into something new
as this moment stops wind
and pauses everything,
out-pacing time.

Till moon rises sky
and stars turn
And it comes time to go,
but you don't.

We drove down snow-quiet streets
past Ky's apartment to the East Ridge
where we hiked the snowy hill.
You stretched your arms wide at the lookout—
I took your picture
All this could be yours someday.

You meant the world,
but I saw an impossible future unfold
and drop toward the dark push
of mud-swift current,
where the Long Island Sound disappears
into smoke, snow, clouds.

Later, on the phone I hesitate to ask
how you remember that night,
how the blinds in your room
shut out the world

To be sleeveless singing in the cold night,
To be East of my knowing—

It's easier to look back
when time fell inward like snow
on the hill we climbed,
easier to remember the next day's sun-slicked sidewalks,

how we clutched each other
hooking elbows to stave off the chill.

I remember you on the East Ridge
the war memorial, a tower.
Past. Present. Past.
Names of soldiers, dates of the war;
Those who survived.
those who did not.

Isn't memory survival?
A crossing between time and the event—

From safety, I traveled to what—
To the way we touched each other.

I watch and wait
for the dogwood to ignite pink day-lit stars.

How much of this can a person bear?

Improbable sweetness,
so much waiting—

It took us out of our skins.

To reach out and discover every area
has the same information,
not large, but sensitive, every part of the body
disguises our longing.

We were young, something other than
god carried us through on waves
of positive form.

What remains
when you've taken away the rest?
Organic negative shapes, backlit by
pop-orange light. *Perde ti amo.*

Sometimes the finish leads to failure,
so deKooning erased it all each night,
scraped paint from the canvas to start again.

To leave things alone demands sensitivity,
patience. You weren't there yet,
and I was far from never,
pools of blue on blue, a woman
drawn from just one line.
We dream the right dreams
at the wrong times.

See the thick application— like he scraped
paint off his shoes
onto the canvas. You were impulsive that way,

how you held your hand to the piece—
the elegance of the stroke, *La Zingarella, Aida Tosca.*

Querencia denies the distance between us,
but not the white space. Always
the memory pushes back.

You said we should occupy the problem
for a while.

Now I can't forget it.

For some years you borrowed space
from my horizon—
aftershock barlight, *Aida Tosca*.
The blue period was your best.

You invented that dream
where fragments of forgotten people live.

Note:

*Last line is Tennyson; all other lines lifted language from
Sal Casa's lectures on painting.*

Circa 1965

"Jayne Mansfield was beheaded in a convertible like this one," my brother Jamie says. He's in the front seat with the window down and his pointy elbow sticking out. "Let's put the top down now." His smirk is stationary against the blur of other cars, distant hills, the sky.

"Shut up." I kick the back of the seat, hard. I don't care if Jayne Mansfield was his favorite actress, he knows if he talks about somebody— anybody—dying now, after Dad, he'll only set Mom off. I look at her but she keeps driving with her eyes fixed on the road, and Jamie throws me his "I'm the oldest" look, swipes carefully but oh-so-casually at his black curly hair and warns, "Quit kicking. You'll make a mark."

Mom reaches in her purse without looking and pulls out a dollar, folds the bill around her middle finger and leaves the ends sticking up like wings. She always does this a long time before she gets to the toll booth, the same way she'll check for her purse three times before starting the car, even though it's sitting right beside her. I decide she wasn't listening to us.

In another hour, Santa Cruz. Without my little brothers along, I've got the back seat all to myself, and can stretch my bare legs across the cool black upholstery until the tips of my shoes just hit the arm rest.

"Can I have a cigarette?" Jamie asks, and I'd like to kick his seat again. Who does he think he is? He's only fifteen. Mom gives him her sideways look and moves the flying dollar bill along the steering wheel.

"Come on," Jamie begs.

"Just one," she relents. She always relents.

Jamie pushes the lighter in on the dash and takes a Salem from her purse and lights up.

"Convertibles aren't any more dangerous than normal cars," Mom says and glances at me in the rearview, so I know she was listening. "It's all in the way you drive them." She tries to catch my eye and shakes her head back quickly, like she wants to flick her hair, but the cut is too stiffly done. It's a new gesture.

"Where're we going to stay?" Jamie blows out smoke and uses the ash tray. "Someplace nice I hope. Someplace where you can get

room service and they have a TV.”

“A TV when there’s a beach?”

“And a vibrator bed and a swimming pool.”

“God, my first class son. What about you, Cassie?”

“I don’t care.” A semi comes alongside us showing the tops of its wheels and the mud flaps behind them swaying like clothes in a wind. Mom rolls her window down and the plastic cleaner’s bag guarding her good pink dress starts to slither. A little white jacket hugs the dress in case it gets too cool. Jamie ticks off the titles to all Jayne Mansfield’s old movies.

I squint my eyes and look down at my legs. All of a sudden they’re so long and thin they don’t seem to belong to me. I wish my Dad was alive to see that I’m not going to be a fat person after all.

It’s not true that I don’t care. What I want is a really nice hotel like Jamie described it, where they have small packages of soap with roses on them and the strip of paper around the toilet lid to let you know it’s sterile. My best friend, Danny, stayed in a nice motel here last year, and before we left she gave me some advice; “Just walk down the boardwalk and the boys will be looking you over. I mean they’re everywhere. They come here to find girls. That’s how I met Ray.”

Ray is someone she claims to have slept with, which I doubt, since she’s only thirteen, like me, and I’ve never even had a real boyfriend yet.

Mom slows for the toll booth and a skinny woman in a green uniform jacket leans toward her with the exact change, even before she hands her the dollar. I take the cleaner’s bag from its hook and she pushes a button to let the top down just as we leave the toll plaza. The black canvas flaps straight up like a jack-in-the-box lid and then crinkles accordion-like, with a neat little whine, and the car speeds up and I can tell the difference in the air. It’s wetter and cooler and smells like salt.

* * * * *

Jamie is stuck on Jayne Mansfield because her death was so tragic. Some people say she was going to be another Marilyn Monroe. It’s hard to believe she’s really dead when you see her on TV pouting and slitting her eyes like that. When he first told me about her accident, I thought he was making up the beheaded part. It didn’t seem

possible that something like that really happened to people anymore. She wouldn't have had a car just like this one, of course, but a Cadillac or a sports coupe, and her hair would've been tucked under a pale chiffon scarf with the ends of the scarf trailing. Jamie compares the way she died to how they used to guillotine people in the French Revolution. He says their decapitated bodies would run around the streets, as if they were still alive, as if they couldn't really believe what had happened to them, either.

Mom has her hair fixed like Jayne Mansfield's used to be. She's bleached it and cut it into a bubble, which looks exactly like it sounds. The first time she tried peroxide she stood outside with the hose over her head screaming that it was burning her, that she was going to go blind. I thought she'd never try it again but as soon as the roots came out dark she had a rinse put on the color of cotton candy. Then she bought the sleeveless pink mohair dress to match her hair, and a friend of hers who works in a studio took her picture. In the picture she looks as perfect as a Barbie doll, although you wouldn't think anybody could look like that. Even her shoes are pink.

Beside me in the plastic cleaner's bag the mohair dress looks stiff and straight even when the wind billows the plastic and makes my eyes tear. Up front Mom is twisting the radio dial looking for another station and I can hear the Beatles in snatches, sounding so happy singing, "I wanna hold your ha-ha-hand." Jamie puts out his cigarette butt like he's been doing it for years and says, "Yeah."

On the hem of the mohair dress, real pale, is a stain the cleaners couldn't get out. I don't think Mom knows it's there. She got sick in the dress a few weeks ago, coming home late too wobbly to stand. She was so out of it Jamie had to carry her to bed like a baby, and she kept pretending it was something she ate, when Jamie and I both knew different.

* * * * *

Mom says, "Just one drink, my throat's so dry. You kids can shop for your brothers' souvenirs now." The place she's picked is called the Back Door, I guess because you only see a door, black with silver studs, and no windows. Maybe there are windows on the other side, facing the water. We've driven out along the wharf. A dozen gulls are pecking the sticky sidewalk near our tires.

Jamie starts carrying on about being left right away. His voice attracts an older couple on the sidewalk, who look over at us, annoyed. The woman is wearing a green pants suit and the man's got a camera around his neck.

"People are staring," I say, trying to shut him up.

"What's the big deal about one little drink?" Mom half turns in the seat to look at me. "Will you ask him that? Jesus, there's all kinds of things to do here."

"Maybe because we're supposed to be on a vacation together?" Unlike them, I'm trying to keep my voice down.

"We are. We're going to be. But isn't it my vacation, too?" I know why Jamie is sulking, but I also know she has to have her way or the rest of our time will be spoiled. "I'd take you in there with me if I could," she goes on. "Both of you. Here." She rummages in her purse and brings out a five. "Fifteen minutes. I promise."

Jamie gets out and slams his door.

"Don't spoil our day, please, Honey?" she begs him. She holds the money out, and Jamie crosses his arms, but I take it. When Mom goes inside, I follow Jamie down the wharf, and stop in front of a window display. Sand buckets and sea shells in wads of fishing net.

"Want to go in? We can find them something in here," I say. Jamie just looks at me. I open the door and a bell tinkles. The dim light makes me blink. I start down the rows of souvenirs. Painted rocks, fish ashtrays, sea shell statues. It's hard to concentrate on just what my little brothers might like. I waste several minutes looking, and when I get back outside, Jamie's gone. I find him standing in an open spot, where for a nickel you can stare through magnifying lenses, out to sea. They're shaped like a face on one side, with big goggle eyes. The ocean is perfectly blue, with whitecaps. A dingy bobs like a happy porpoise a few yards out.

"Go away," Jamie snaps, "I don't want to be seen with my sister." He's watching some boys and girls hang over another lens.

"How're they going to know we're related?"

Jamie glares at me.

"I saw a boat about to dock. We could watch it."

"No." He bends and looks through the telescope. The boat is a commercial fishing boat. *Stagnero's*, the name says. It bangs the wharf when it pulls in, and the asphalt and boards under us shake.

I miss the way it used to be between Jamie and me. When we were little, our favorite pastime was to act out movies together. We'd wrap up in Mom's sheer curtains, her skirts for capes, and run around the yard or sweep over the fence, sometimes the story so elaborate it went on for days. In the sharp smell of Bermuda grass, the mint plants edging up the stucco wall, the peach trees with their fuzzy, wormed fruit, Jamie and I stole jewels, clashed swords, watched the world go up in flames. He'd move toward me with his pink mouth parted because playing the damsel in distress I'd said "Kiss me," and he had, his face quick at mine, the short lashes closed down soft, so close that when they flew open I could feel them brush my skin.

* * * * *

While I wait for the passengers to get off the fishing boat, I look across the water to the boardwalk. From where I am, at the far end of the wharf, I can see the entire curve of land with the rides, low shop buildings, and penny arcades, their walls and rooftops gleaming. The rides are toy-sized going back and forth. The roller coaster's red tracks a bright painted sash against the sky. I can hear its roar above the surf, and the people's screams. But the screams seem lighthearted, they come easy, floating across the water like shouts of welcome.

I turn back to the boat and some sunburned passengers are getting off, while a boy in a green plastic apron unloads their fish and starts gutting them at an outside table. He chops fast, the knife blurring and flashing, like my Dad used to do when he made his famous spaghetti sauce. The boy is bare to the waist except for the apron, his arms muscled and brown. The fish smell comes up, and every so often he takes a hose and washes the blood and guts off. When he's finished he rinses his cleaver and knives and disappears into one of the fish stalls.

Jamie is on the other side of the wharf. He's leaning over the rail. It's a long, long drop.

"We could ride some rides," I call across to him.

He keeps his back to me, like he hasn't heard.

"I should have brought Danny. She'd go with me."

Jamie turns. "That dyke."

"She is not. She's my best friend." I don't add that she already

claims to have done it with Ray, so how could she be a dyke.

"She's a dyke." A car drives between us and the planks under the asphalt thunk-thunk.

He looks back at the water. I go down the wharf again and into the stores. I decide on painted rocks and squirt guns for my little brothers. I wish now we hadn't left them with our neighbor. I'd get stuck with them but at least they'd be somebody to do things with.

When I come back out Jamie is balanced on top of the thin wharf rail, his hands out in a T, the breeze pressing his shirt back. He raises his knees like a marionette, controlled by strings, takes a few steps, tilts his head up at the sky, then down at the water, and executes a turn.

"Don't look down! I'm going to get her. I'm going!" I run up to him just as he lifts his right foot behind him and dips forward. Jamie has taken dance and gymnastics for years, he has good balance, but still. Some tourists stop to watch in disbelief. I recognize the woman in the pants suit, and the man with the camera. Her eyes bug.

Jamie looks around at the crowd and smiles like he's on stage. Still on one leg, he tips forward more and more, showing off. When he straightens, he starts to teeter. A couple of women gasp. He waves his arms wildly and I see him floating out against the rocking blue water, vivid and doomed. I shut my eyes.

A horn honks. When I open my eyes Jamie is beside me, solid on the wharf, and Mom is waving cheerfully from the car.

"You thought I'd fall, didn't you," Jamie says.

"No."

He grins and threads through the little knot of people. He vaults in the car and lands in the passenger seat, breathing hard.

"Come on, Cass?" Mom calls. "Hurry up. What are you waiting for?"

When I get in she says, "Well, what'd I tell you? Fifteen minutes. No big deal." Neither of us dispute this. She steps on the gas and the Pontiac picks up speed.

"Poor Jayne." Jamie throws his head back against the seat and opens his mouth in the wind. "They say she didn't have time to feel anything, but I bet she did. I bet her body ran around *knowing* it had no head."

"I was thinking of finding a spot on the beach," Mom interrupts. "What about it, Cass. I feel like getting a tan."

"You don't tan," I remind her.

"Yes I do, in the right place like this." She's happy now, less tired. A couple of drinks can do that for her. "That summer I spent in Tahoe I got so brown. And when I got sick and went for that operation, even the nurse said what a pretty tan I had against the white sheets."

I've heard this before. It was a million years ago, and the operation was sudden and she was almost ruined for having kids, but then Jamie came along, her first miracle baby. Oh boy.

In the back seat, the wind wraps softly around my hair like ghost hands moving a few inches from my head, and I remember being alone on the wharf, how that boy looked, chopping the fish.

* * * * *

"I used to know a boy from around here," Mom says. "Clayton. He played in a jazz band. I wonder whatever happened to him." She sits up on the beach towel and slaps lotion on her arms. She's a fanatic about lotion. The sun is warm, and I'm hot until the breeze comes up, when I get goose bumps. I shade my eyes and listen to the waves mumble behind the sound of her voice. "To tell you the truth, we almost got married. Here, get my back, will you?" She pokes me with the Sea and Ski. She's still in her good mood.

I sit up. "Why didn't you?" Her back is white and freckled, with a long hollow between the shoulder blades. Her shoulders are rounded. I can feel tiny bumps on her skin.

"Mother didn't like him. I was waiting to hear from him before he left for the navy, but she burned his letters. I never even knew he wrote me until years later. He must have thought, when I didn't answer, that I didn't love him anymore." She sighs and stretches out on the blanket with one leg crossed over the other. She has thin, graceful legs for a mother, and the skin bumps aren't that bad, just a rash from being sensitive to soap and things.

"Imagine," she breathes, "Clayton going to war thinking that. Not knowing the truth. Isn't that sad?" But you can tell she likes thinking of it this way, that he missed her forever.

"I can't believe Grandma did that," I say, trying to picture the rickety old lady I remember doing something like burning letters.

"She thought it was for my own good." Mom waves this away. "She didn't think I knew him well enough, that he was a bum who

would never amount to anything.”

“But she let you marry Jack, and you’d only known him two weeks,” Jamie reminds her. He’s lying on his back with a towel over his face. Jack was her first husband, Jamie’s father and perhaps mine (I’ve never been able to really pin her down on that) before she met my dad, who we all know was her One True Love.

“She liked Jack. How could you not like Jack?”

“Anyway, I thought you were going to marry some other guy. What’s his name—Mark?” Jamie says into the towel.

“Oh, *Markie*.” Mom picks at the specks of mica stuck to her thighs. The way she says his name sounds silly, and I look away from her across the waves. A fat girl with a t-shirt over her swimsuit is rolling in the surf, flailing and screaming, pretending she can’t get up. Her arms and face are covered with wet sand.

“As it turns out, Markie was already married,” Mom half whispers. “But I didn’t find out about that until later, of course.”

“And that cadet from Florida?” Jamie lifts the towel, turns on his stomach and watches her. He’s not mad at her anymore, he adores her.

“Well,” Mom laughs, “did I tell you about that? What was his name—Phillip, I think. He wired me to come and get married at his graduation ceremony. He thought it’d be neat under the crossed swords. I kind of thought so, too, the way he described it.”

Jamie makes circles in the sand by his chin. “You could have had anybody you wanted. You could have been a movie star. In those old pictures you look just like Natalie Wood.” At least he didn’t say Jayne Mansfield.

“It was the war, silly,” Mom says, but she looks pleased. “There were men everywhere, and not so many women. Everybody proposed. I felt I had to hurry up and choose. When I was with Markie, and we’d walk down the street, he’d say, ‘Honey, hold on tight, so nobody steals you.’ It was fun.”

In the surf the fat girl rolls over on her back and the waves lap at her ankles. She’s laughing so crazily I think maybe she really can’t get up. I look at Mom and her face is happy, remembering. I’m sorry her life isn’t fun anymore.

Jamie says, “But you chose Jack.”

She lays back and stares at the sky behind her sunglasses. “We had the world by the tail.”

Jamie snorts. "Then it bit back."

"Ha, ha," Mom says. She's quiet a minute. Then she looks right at me and says, "Don't misunderstand me. It was different in those days. Not like this free love bit. More innocent. More like in the movies," glancing around as if someone might be listening, being Mom again. "No, you can't trust boys now days." She forgets to say, *present company excepted*.

* * * * *

Jamie makes her stop at the most expensive hotels first. We wait in the car while she goes in to ask about prices. "I'm sorry," she says, coming back out with a long face. "We just can't afford that one," and turns the engine over and backs out of the parking space. The ride is smooth. The steering wheel turns in her hand with the slightest touch. Before she wrecked it and got the insurance money, Mom drove a plain white station wagon. It was nothing like this. So what about the room? I think. Who else owns a maroon Pontiac convertible.

The motel we can afford is called the Flying Carpet. It has a turret on top painted in orange and black stripes. A dark skinned man wearing a head turban takes Mom's money. "Tacky," Jamie says, but there's nothing he can do about it.

* * * * *

Mom shimmies into her pink mohair dress and goes back for a cocktail after we get settled, because cocktails give her an appetite. She promises to come and get us for dinner. She says for me and Jamie to go to the boardwalk and ride the rides, only Jamie won't. He just sits in front of the TV watching *I Love Lucy* reruns.

"Come on, Jamie, we're in Santa Cruz," I beg, but he stays planted on the bed. "Well, I'm going. I'm going without you."

Jamie looks at me. "Bye-bye."

I put my swimming suit on under my shorts and walk outside. The Flying Carpet Motel doesn't have a pool, but this town is full of motels. I walk right up to the one down the block, where some kids a little older than me are sitting on the edge listening to rock and roll on the radio. I try to act like I belong here. One of the girls looks me over when I put my foot in the water, but no one says anything. She's got bouncy, soft blonde hair. I pull out of my shorts

and jump in. The water is cool and the chlorine stings my eyes.

I dive under and swim to the opposite side. I imagine the manager waiting for me when I surface, and my heart starts beating hard. I imagine these kids staring at me, laughing. But when I come up it's all the same as before, except that the song on the radio has changed.

I lie on the hot cement and watch the others. The blonde has long legs and a small swim suit, hair she won't get wet. Instead she walks down the pool steps holding it carefully on her head, and dips in until the water barely touches her shoulders. Then she walks out again. I put my head down on my arms and all the drops of water from my hair hold tiny rainbows on the concrete. I picture the boy on the wharf again, chopping fish. I can hear my own loud breathing.

Someone kicks my leg and I look up. It's the blonde-haired girl, jumping over me to get away from two of the boys. She giggles and shrieks, collapsing when they catch her. They pick her up by her arms and legs, and rock her like a cradle suspended from limbs, shouting, "One...two...three...!" and down her suit front, underneath the small bright triangles of fabric, I see her breasts, the dark brown nipples and white, untanned flesh, just before they throw her in.

* * * * *

Mom isn't back when I'm finished swimming, and Jamie's still lying on the bed. I want him to come with me to find her, but he won't. "Forget it," he says. "She won't come back now anyway. She's boozing it up. I knew this would happen."

"Maybe she's not bad yet. We could stop her." I can't see how he can just give up like this. I want to shake him, to pull him from the bed and make him come with me. But it's no use when he gets in one of his moods. I use the phone on the nightstand and call the Back Door, ask the bartender to page her. I wait while he sets the phone down. I can hear country music and the tinkle of glasses. A woman's laugh which sounds like Mom's. The phone lifts again.

"Guess she's not here," the bartender says.

"Are you sure? She's wearing a pink dress, she's sort of short..." (Mom calls it petite.) "She's got these turquoise blue sunglasses..."

"Hey, kid, nobody answers to that name, okay?"

"Just try once more. Please."

He sighs heavy, leaves the phone again. I hear him saying, "Hey, you sure you're not this kid's mom?" and her light laugh.

The bartender comes back. "She says she'll be back in a little while. Not to worry."

"Why won't she talk to me?"

"Look—I only work here, okay?"

"Okay, sorry. But will you tell her we'll be here waiting? Will you tell her we're hungry?"

"Sure, kid, I'll tell her."

I hold the phone after he hangs up. I think maybe she'll call us back.

"I told you." Jamie stretches out a leg and pushes me with his toe.

"She's there. We could go get her."

"You go right ahead."

I grab his foot and twist it. "Why do you just give up? Why don't you help me with her?"

"She's a big girl. Let her do what she wants. I don't give a shit."

"Yeah, not now that you've got this motel room and a TV. Well, I'm not going to just sit in here, that's for sure. I came to see the beach."

"So go."

"And the boardwalk. You did, too."

"I've seen it," Jamie says, "all I want to see."

* * * * *

I walk down to the boardwalk and stand on the sidewalk outside the entrance. The sun is low over the water, spreading. Its light flows up golden across the sand and into my face. Cars rush along the street behind me. The boardwalk is jammed. I wish Jamie had come with me. I can't make out the cars on the wharf from here, to tell if our Pontiac is still parked by the Back Door.

Next to me the carousel goes around in a glass-walled room. Over the music there's a loud clacking noise when the riders grab at metal rings to throw in the clown's mouth.

"Hey, Sweetie!" someone shouts from the street, and I turn and see a man on a motorcycle, waving. I point to my chest and he nods. "Wanna come on over here?" he pats the seat behind him.

I shake my head. He's on a big Harley-Davidson. There are snake

tattoos on both his bare arms. "Come on, be my mama. We'll go down to Mexico together, waddya say? I been lookin' for someone sweet like you."

I shake my head again. I look around to see if anyone's watching. The light turns and he guns his Harley. "Last chance!" he calls.

"Maybe next time!" I shout, reckless, and he nods and raises his hand, like we have an agreement. When he roars off I feel giddy, as if I just escaped something, that moment when I almost stepped toward him, when I could have disappeared.

* * * * *

On the boardwalk there's the hot smell of mustard and corn dogs, fried fish and chips. I hear balloons being darted, bazookas, bells, and a different music from the open door of each shop. I walk up and down, without my sandals, feeling the grit of sand and peanut shells and old sticky splotches of taffy. Once something stings my foot and I pull back to find the still burning butt of a cigarette.

I sit on a bench and watch the sun hover over the water, a melty orange ball. I wonder if Mom's back yet. I'd like for her to be back first. I imagine her asking Jamie what has happened to me, I'm not usually the one who wanders off. She'd worry, of course, and feel guilty, and when I got back she wouldn't know whether to yell at me or hug me. She'd rattle off the cautions she used to when I was little, about steering clear of creeps and weirdos. She wouldn't understand the surprise I've found. The wonderful thing here, calling me. A sort of humming from all these people, and the lights and the rides. An electric city. And I want to crawl inside it.

The roller coaster is loudest after dark, flashing green neon across cheeks and chins. The crowd changes, there's not so many little kids. I pass stray dogs, and people in leather coats, shorts, and sandals. The ones on the roller coaster and Zipper scream like mad. Near the penny arcade gangs of teenagers hover in a busy way, pretending. I watch them and pick one out who, from Danny's description, could be her boyfriend, Ray. I imagine telling him I know Danny, and how he'd introduce me to his friends. We'd ride some rides.

My legs feel tired. I'm hungry. I check what change I have from buying those souvenirs. I don't have enough for a Coke and a hot

dog both. I decide to call Jamie instead.

He answers after the third ring. The TV is loud in the background. "Guess who?" he says, "Jayne Mansfield."

"Big deal. You should be outside. There's lots of kids down here. You could meet someone."

"What for?"

"Is she back yet?"

"Are you kidding?"

"Then I'm going to get her."

Jamie doesn't say not to when I hang up.

It feels as if people are drawn up onto the boardwalk like into a white hot core, and when I leave I'm like a random atom, a stray, on the sidewalk that melts into the beach. Their screeches and shouts get less, mingled with the soft waves. I stop and lean against a car meter. A boy is watching me. The car meter flicks to red and I reach out and put another nickel in. "Is that your car?" he says.

"No, it's just something I do. So they won't get a ticket."

"You do?" He comes closer. Light green eyes and thick blond hair trained to the side so it just grazes a long fringe of yellow lashes. Possibly older than me. "What's your name?"

"Cassie."

"Mine's Evan." He looks over his shoulder at another boy, nods. "That's my brother." He waves and the other boy shrugs. Evan turns back to me. "You live here?" I shake my head. "Me either. Where're you going?"

"Out on the wharf. I need to find my Mom. Your brother's leaving."

"Oh, that's okay." He studies me. He looks down at his feet.

"What if I come along?"

"Sure. I don't care. Come on."

We start walking.

"Where are you from?" Evan asks.

When I tell him, he says he's from Bakersfield. The way he says *Bakersfield* causes little sparks to jump between us. I look out across the velvety water.

"Do you know why none of the streets here are dark after dark?" I say.

"Why?"

"It's the boardwalk. It sends this giant charge through hundreds

of buried conduits and cables, to make Santa Cruz glow until dawn."

"You're strange," Evan says. Listening to myself, I think this must be true. That I'm strange. I didn't know how I would be with boys, but maybe this is it. We take some steps down onto the beach, where it's cool. The wharf lights cut the water. We look back at the rides, the roller coaster's neon stitched against the sky. Evan takes my hand. I guess he likes strange girls.

"Why are you looking for your mom?"

"She's drinking. I'm worried about her."

Evan stares at me. I don't know why I should tell him the truth, except that he's a stranger and it makes me feel interesting, saying it like this.

"My dad died last year," I explain. "She's lonely."

"Oh." Evan's fingers are bony, clutching mine.

"What about you? Are you here with your parents?"

"My dad. They're divorced."

We get to the wharf steps and climb them side by side. We go along by the rail until we reach the shops and restaurants. The Pontiac is no longer parked by the Back Door.

"A Pontiac convertible?" Evan says when I tell him what kind of car. "Cool."

"I've driven it. It's so smooth it's like driving on glass."

Evan looks appreciative. "Where now?" he wants to know.

"I don't know, but I'm thirsty."

"Over there." He points to a café and with our hands laced we take turns dragging at each other and swinging forward, laughing, until we're inside, where we find a booth in back. A waitress comes over for our orders: two Cokes. We look at each other across the table, look away. She serves our Cokes and starts filling glasses of ice on a tray.

"I guess you're kind of like my girlfriend," Evan says.

"We just met."

"Don't you want to be?"

"Okay."

He grins, and I imagine telling my friend Danny about him. He pokes his straw at the ice in his Coke, holds it aside and raises his glass and takes a gulp. I start talking. I tell him how much I miss my dad. I tell him about Danny, and how I've been looking for her

boyfriend, Ray. I joke that maybe we could get Evan's dad and my mom together. When I stop I feel breathless, and the trays of water glasses the waitress filled with ice are slowly melting.

"You have big sad eyes," Evan says. He sucks on an ice cube, watching me. I watch him back. He has the kind of skin which tans easily, and his face is golden in the dim light. Except that across his nose an old sunburn is pink and peeling, outlining itself in the vague shape of a tiny lake.

His fingers snake toward mine. I can smell the sea from here, through the walls, the closed windows of the café. The wharf makes an island, and we're surrounded. When his fingers reach my hand, he stands up and comes over to my side of the booth. He sits down and puts his arm around my shoulder. He draws a breath and kisses me. It's not like I thought it would be, with his closed lips pressing against mine. I feel a little disappointed.

"Wow," Evan says, "I never thought this would happen to me."

"What time do you think it is?"

"I don't know." He looks around for a clock. "God. We've been talking forever. It's almost ten. I've got to go back or my dad will kill me. What about you?"

"It doesn't matter." This may or may not be true, depending on the shape Mom's in. But I can see he's impressed about no curfew, and I feel older than him when I say it. "I'd better see if she's back, though," I add.

Evan sighs. He doesn't want to leave. "I'll walk you to your motel first," he says. I get a little thrill because, despite the kiss, he has manners to go with his looks. He puts his mouth against mine once more. And this time it feels different, better, and I think of a thread, like when we were kids and used to sew our fingers together, catching the needle through the top layer of skin. It didn't hurt, but something had been done to you that was so unusual, you could still feel it, more than memory, even when you pulled the thread out.

* * * * *

Evan walks me right up to the Flying Carpet Motel. Our Pontiac is not in the parking lot. Suddenly I feel like I can't stand to leave him.

"I'll see you tomorrow," he says.

I shake my head. "We're leaving tomorrow. We could only afford

one night.”

“Damn.” He takes hold of my shoulders. We’re standing against the motel wall.

“Can’t you go in and sneak back out?” I say. I imagine telling Danny this part later, telling her how bold I was. I imagine how I’ll be able to write his name, Evan, over and over in the back of my school books.

He leans his forehead into mine. He’s thinking. My heart is ramming into my chest. Our noses touch.

“Oh, God,” he moans.

* * * * *

Jamie is shaking on the vibrator bed. The firm lines of his arms and face jiggle, make him not quite clear.

I take my long pants and a shirt in the bathroom and change into them. There’s an empty plastic baggie on the counter, and I pick it up. It smells of glue. When I go back out I notice the TV’s on, flashing pictures without sound. I watch for a minute, another old black and white movie.

“Tell me what you think.” I step between Jamie and the TV, turning and turning. The pants and shirt are new, from what was left of the insurance money after the Pontiac.

“Do you think I should put a knot in the shirt?” I draw the end up and try it.

Jamie scowls. “Get out of the way.”

“Do you think I got a tan today? Look.” I pull the shirt up to show my stomach a little. I wish he’d ask me where I’ve been, but he doesn’t.

“Move,” Jamie orders. “I mean it.”

He throws the pillow hard, and I dodge it. I hear a car outside, and someone gets out and walks toward our room. I hope it’s Mom, that she’s back safe, and I’m already starting to get mad at her for ruining my plans with Evan, but the footsteps don’t stop, they pass our door and keep going.

“I know what you’ve been doing.” I hold up the empty baggie and Jamie grabs for it but I snatch it away. He throws another pillow. It hits the TV antenna and the picture fuzzes.

“I’ll kill you,” he screams and the bed stops bouncing. When he lunges for me I dance away from his swinging fist.

"Do you know what happens to glue sniffers?" I shout. "They end up vegetables in a psycho ward, that's what. Is that what you want to be?"

"You're not going out again," he yells, because now I'm at the door.

"Lunatics. Like in the *Snake Pit*. Think about it."

"It's eleven o'clock at night."

"As if you're so perfect."

Jamie's face is grey from the TV screen. "I'll tell."

I hold up the baggie. "Then so will I."

He scowls. "Just get out of here, then. I don't give a damn what you do. What either one of you do. Go ahead and turn out like her if you want."

I go outside and stand there, waiting. I don't know what for. Maybe for him to come outside and find me.

Nothing happens. I go back in the room. Jamie is in the bathroom again, with the door locked. I put my head against it. "Jamie," I say. "I've been to the Back Door. I didn't see the car."

Jamie doesn't answer.

"I'll stay if you want. We could play cards or something. We could go to a coffee shop and eat. Or just take a walk."

Jamie still doesn't answer. I can hear him wheezing in suffocating breaths from the plastic bag. I can't imagine what it's like, sniffing that junk. It makes me sick to think about it. "Jamie, please. Just tell me you're all right. Are you all right?"

I feel the pressure as he leans against the door. "I'm all right," he says. His voice is high, happy. "I'm just dandy. Now buzz off, will you?"

* * * * *

Evan and I meet under the boardwalk. The air is even cooler but under the top layer, the sand still warm. Boat lights move like detached lanterns past the waves. There's a bonfire down the beach, some kids are grouped around it, laughing and talking. A drum starts up, like it's coming out of the surf, and a couple of the kids get up and dance in front of the flames.

"We could go over," Evan says about the fire.

"Okay," I say. But we don't move. He's sitting close to me. We start to kiss. Evan kisses shy. The first time he keeps his lips togeth-

er, like in the café, but I open mine, and put my tongue out. He grabs my shoulders hard when I do this, and parts his mouth with a little cry. We lay down together in the sand, and I feel the current, like I myself am full of electricity, enough power to light the town. I let him touch my breasts, first on top of my bra and then up under, his fingers on my skin.

Contributors' Notes

Amy Antongiovanni began her experience as a poet in 1990 as a student of Brenda Hillman at Saint Mary's College in Moraga. She completed her B.A. in English and returned to study there for her M.F.A. in creative writing, poetry. She has been published previously in *Watershed* and other literary journals. She is currently working on a poetry manuscript and is teaching in the English department at Butte Community College.

R. Brooding is a retired consultant for isometric typing techniques. He has contributed to *Watershed* in the past.

Alex C. Brown is originally from beautiful Oroville, Calif. and currently resides in Chico. He is a civil engineering major. He served his country from 1989 to 1996 in the army as a medic. During his stay in the army, he worked in a pediatric ward, a newborn nursery, an emergency room, and spent a year in Korea. His wife is named Angela, and they are expecting their first-born this summer.

Bob Garner has been a regular contributor to *Watershed* since 1991. He still lives in what used to be Chico.

Michael Gordon is a product of the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco where he attended Raoul Wallenberg Traditional High School before going on to earn a B.A. in anthropology at Sonoma State University. Michael is presently enrolled in Jeanne E. Clark's introductory poetry writing course at California State University, Chico.

Ryan Grow was born in Albania, the son of an illegal arms dealer. He fled to America in the hold of a tuna boat and lived for awhile in San Francisco, where he made money by sketching humorous caricatures of politicians on Fisherman's Wharf. He came to Chico to avoid answering questions about his legitimate right to live in the United States. He is the only person on the Internet to run a site devoted to Albania's King Zog.

Elizabyth Hiscox is a crisp candy made of pecan, almond, etc., and browned in boiling sugar. . .oh wait, that's praline. Shoot.

Douglas S. Jones enjoys fish tacos, getting naked in orchards, midnight runs to the coast, and is a firm believer in two things: rock 'n' roll and hoochie koo.

Reneé Suzanne Muir is a self-taught photographer living in Chico.

Dave Peterson is a frequent contributor to *Watershed* and has served as part of the editorial staff. A Master of Arts student in English and bachelor's student in Asian Studies, he lives, works, and writes in Chico with his wife, two children, and life partners. He feels this might be his last hurrah.

John Pierce wrote his first novel sitting on the backseat of a '72 Chrysler Newport parked beside Highway 101 in the Redwood National Forest, while living on peanut butter and jelly sandwiches spread with the handle of his toothbrush. He is currently a graduate student at Chico State, studying literature and creative writing. Someday he hopes to teach in Costa Rica.

Bonnie Roy is a junior at Chico State University. She is majoring in political communications while continuing to pursue a lifelong interest in creative writing.

Max Staub writes:

Man Seeking Woman

Attractive SWM, 32, 5'10"/175, Red/Blue

Me: Enjoys music, reading, writing, and long drives in the country.

You: Just have a heartbeat, oh, and be attractive.

Rachel Styer has wanted to be a writer most of her life. Only recently has she begun to seek the writer within herself. She is pleased to say that she has found *her*, and the adventures that lie ahead promise to be exciting.

Ryan Patrick Yurcich is currently taking a graduate writing workshop at CSU, Chico. He is in a community of poets that has been known to climb trees and pocket sunsets. Ryan has lived in Chico for five years and is finishing his undergrad in business administration with an emphasis in management information systems.

Zu Vincent is a freelance and creative writer whose short stories and articles have appeared in regional and national magazines, as well as on the Internet. "Under the Boardwalk" is based on the characters from her new novel, *Blue Corners*, now in the hands of her agent.

