

WATERSHED



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WATERSHED

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New House

It took a long time to find the new house with the long, skinny, sloping yard. The real estate woman nodded at your husband, and then you, and declared the yard had potential.

Your husband assures you the new garden will be better than the old one. This seems like a betrayal. You know nothing will ever touch the perfection of that garden: tomato plants crammed in near the rosebush and fennel—basil and columbine in the corner with strawberry plants and lettuce. The small crop of first wheat, then sorghum, then flax. The rhubarb, the wildflowers, the corn and sunflowers—everything crazy and brilliant coexisting beyond all the skeptics.

And the new yard: it's grass. Even though all your nice, new, quiet neighbors assure you that the old woman you bought the house from once had a huge garden. All you see is grass with one scraggly oak tree to the side.

It's exhausting thinking about turning it into something else. You stare at the slope of the yard, at the neighbor's dog—Dude. Dude barks at you every time you shove the manual push-mower by him.

As soon as it turns warm, you drag a metal lawn chair under the tree with all its missing limbs and cracked bark. Now you huddle there in its shade. You're unsure if you're looking to get or give comfort.

The leaves above you quake in the breeze as your husband jabs the shovel deep into the ground and wedges free a patch of lawn. He turns it over in one swift movement and, earth-up, puts it back down, burying the grass with a few more quick short pokes. He steps to the side. Begins again.



SEAN MELODY

Moon Saga

The moon, flirtatious hussy,
rises early,
smooths dusting powder
on her pock-marked face,
and pretties up her eyes
with deepest shadow.
High in the honey sky,
an afternoon in August,
she presents her classic profile
to the sun, boldly reveals
the outline
of fullness yet to come.

Dazzled, inflamed,
the sun lingers, huge
on the horizon, then sizzles
in an ocean trough. He tosses back
his royal bounty:
gold, crimson, hyacinth,
certain that cool beauty will slide
into his hot embrace.

But the inconstant moon
now owns the heavens
and casually bestows
her favors
on that cloddish jester, Earth.
When the blinding sun
is just a memory,
she changes yet again,
outshines every star,
and offers her silver cheek
to the dark kiss of night.

Front Door

There was this guy who came into my life. He knocked on my door one day asking if I knew where somebody or another lived. He wound up in my bed the next afternoon. Soon thereafter he's telling me he loves me. He's telling me the kinds of things most girls wait whole lifetimes to hear. But I'm not most girls. I'm Susan.

So Bob comes into my life—like I said, Susan's life—and he just plants himself like he has been meaning to come for a long time but just misplaced his shiny black appointment book somewhere. Bob comes like he was *expected*. This is really good because surprises don't thrill me, and except for those flowers he brought on that Tuesday, everything went right as planned.

I have this tendency to date assholes. It's something of a refined skill of mine. I can pick one out of a crowd at twenty feet. One of my second skills is making these assholes sound like wonderful men. And, believe me, there has been a long, wonderful line. This is why I'm about to make Bob sound great. But don't ask me—ask my friends if you want the real scoop.

Bob comes to my door. Like I said, knocks. I answer. I'm in a hurry, because I've got some shows I like to watch and they're about to come on. The set is warming up, I've got coffee brewing, and there's a bowl of bran flakes on my coffee table threatening to go at any moment. He knocks. I open, and I'm wanting him to talk a little faster; I'm wanting him to get to his point, then I'm noticing his teeth. They're striking me as the kind of teeth I like—straight and skinny and going around his mouth in a nice even line. I miss part of what he's saying because I'm finding the tongue a little intriguing too.

Next we're kissing on my couch. I'm missing first one show, then another, and I don't care one bit. I also don't care about the next two days of work I miss or the fact that on the third day when I make it in my boss threatens to fire me when I fall asleep waiting for Mr. Riley's light rye toast to pop up from the toaster. Along those same lines, I don't care the day after that when I let Riley's eggs go clammy cold before I serve them or that I brew regular into the decaf pot more than once.

This is love to me. I stop my life like it's some kind of spinning LP, and I'm suddenly the sharp pointy needle that hovers above it but just doesn't come down for awhile.

With Bob, things were good. He didn't hog the bed and he rubbed my back when I asked him to.

I'm easy to please. Most men overlook this fact.

One morning, in a long string of mornings, I'm hugging Bob at my door as he's on his way out. He's mumbling something into my shoulder and at first I think he's complaining, and from what I can tell, I think it's about the cap on the toothpaste.

Quietly into his newly-slicked hair, I say, "I like it off."

He stops, lifts his sweet head from my shoulder, and says, "What?"

"The toothpaste," I say, "the cap."

He says, "Love," then he shrugs and leaves, scratching his head and searching in his pockets for his keys. I suddenly realize he has actually said the words. The 'I love you' words. The words a person says to her mom and her boyfriend in ninth grade—but positively absolutely no one else until she gets old and mature. Old and mature, up until this point, were two things I didn't want to think I was.

Wham. Love, right there mumbling into my shoulder. Love, right there declaring itself by my own front door. I ran to my window and watched Bob get into his Honda. The door creaked as he shut it. The engine started and I couldn't see his face anymore or those teeth, just a big bright reflection of sun and day and trees.

I knew then he might come back, but I sure as hell didn't expect the flowers. That was Tuesday—the one surprise.

The next thing I know it's months later and I still don't remember sleeping eight hours in a night. What I'm saying is I was still happy—and satisfied—if you know what I mean. Bob was meeting me at the laundry mat for some reason or another. In the meantime, I'm drying my clothes in the way that I've learned is the most efficient: I spread my damp things out in tiny little loads that fill as many dryers as possible. That day, it's all the dryers because I'm the only one in the place.

Like I said, I'm feeling satisfied with Bob and I'm also pretty happy about the free cable they've installed at the folding area. Life is good. The fluorescent lights are humming. I'm humming as I put my one quarter into each machine, turn the metal knob to get things started. I don't believe the cardboard signs they've tacked neatly above each dryer that tell me it's okay to stockpile my quarters inside. They tell me if I do this the dryers will somehow understand and work harder and longer.

As I said, I'm alone—until Bob shows. He's late which is nothing new—but he's soon rushing through the door apologizing—which is—and looking, I realize in retrospect, distinctly sheepish. But right then I don't notice the sheep-like quality, just those teeth—that tongue.

And almost immediately I'm smiling like I think love looks. And he's smiling, but now, I just don't know what that meant.

Soon Bob's hugging me in front of all my spinning, tumbling, coming close to dry clothes, and he's mumbling something into my shoulder and rubbing his head that's holding those gorgeous teeth together back and forth in this way I find—at the time—endearing. I can't quite make out the thing he's mumbling.

So I say, "I love you too."

He looks at me then like I'm a bright spotlight and he's the raccoon that has been digging through my garbage cans for weeks.

He says, "Veronica and I. We're getting back together."

My clothes are tumbling then slowly stopping short and falling gracefully in rounds behind us. I'm standing there watching Bob break my heart. There's heat and moisture and the smell of soapy clean all around us. He's putting his hands in his pockets and talking with those teeth and that tongue. They're working together perfectly to create words and sentences that make a lot of sense at the time. They're coming at me at a nice even pace, and it isn't until months later that I see all the bullshit involved. Right then all I know is that I want that tongue and those teeth to be mine. All mine. I also realize they aren't. They're his, and Bob takes them away soon after that. One by one those molars, incisors, and eyeteeth disappear.

I start getting some sleep. Stop answering my door.

It's what it's like. And no one can tell anyone a thing about it. They come, and then suddenly some time later I find I have a few new favorite TV shows, a new kind of cereal to keep crisp. There's a full pot of coffee sputtering on my stove and a lot of new ideas to keep organized—ideas about how to stop this kind of thing next time.

After Bob, it has something to do with more quarters, fewer dryers. I can't really explain the logistics of it all.



Vacancy

RENÉE SUZANNE MUIR

Heading North

I saw Jesus Christ
crucified
to a telephone pole
beside a Union 76 sign
glaring its orange brightness
into the late April day
in an awakening springtime
as I cruised up I-5
heading north
to the far corners
of the California outback
where landlords can't make
aching demands
and the fan clubs
of money mongers
are annihilated by thick spreads
of poppies.
I drove the flaming jalopy
of elf kings,
arrayed in the gleaming gown of Kwan Yin,
flittering over fields
of melodrama and ennui,
fleeing the harsh fumes of toxic valleys,
seeking the sheltering heights
of light-filled mountains
where earth-dwellers
do karaoke
twenty-four hours a day
and friends play flutes and ukuleles
while trees sing familiar melodies
and the sky nestles down
against a soft earth
who feathers out
upon her nest
of stars and galaxies.

Broken Plates

1906.

Startled eyes jerk open, 5:15 a.m.
Stampeding rumble deafens a young boy's ears.
Somewhere deep beneath his bed
God-like geological plates quarrel.
Earth trembles.

Window glass, Grandma's china tea set,
Tinkling shards in a razor-sharp mosaic.
Brick fireplace rips loose revealing
San Francisco burning.
Façades fall, stunned shock-frozen
Faces like broken buildings stare.
Telegraph messages falsely report
San Francisco sinking into the Pacific.

Chinaman searches for his family,
Never found, never counted.
Van Ness Avenue weeps like
Rachel for her children.

1989.

5:04 p.m., rush-hour drivers fight lurching
Asphalt, rising and swaying.
Seismograph needles scribble violently
Recording the 7.1 magnitude temblor.
Santa Cruz crumbles.

Hollister homes march off foundations,
Mama's best plates fly from the cupboards,
Lee's Gym slides onto San Juan Road.
Oakland's Bay Bridge entombs drivers
Laid to rest in concrete blankets.
Cameramen capture blank-eyed visages,
Refugees wandering debris-strewn streets
Searching for family, for untainted water.

Pregnant woman near her time,
Crawls on bloodied knees,
Digs alone through lath and plaster
For her buried children and weeps.

Ruins

Not this temple
but another I thought. Remember
the yellow grass
at impossible angles,
the ground growing harder, the ground
muscled up? At the top:
small boulders, wind-shaken bush,
bright bird song
and the charred grove
of five trees. Black trees
standing, their tense branches.
Still it was a circle,
and in the center another
had fallen, and its branches lay
around it, had yet
to scatter into sticks.
When you hear music,
what do you hear?
I heard that day a bird's trill
slow into a heartbeat,
then into other forces:
the sun's mensural movement
out of the sky, its fragile grumble of pink,
and I had a sense of my body
and of yours, the wind then quiet,
moving between us.



UTE LARSON

Under the Green Ash

1.

Dark here,
but elsewhere the sun shot right through.
And grass, bright, but also fresh heaps
of sweating, heavy green. Just above:
flowers grow already bundled,
little white flowers, red soaking out
from little centers. And there: statues
of women, their heavy arms raised,
always embracing East. The real ones walk
in short ruffled skirts. Their legs, and
this distance here. Under the green ash
half the beetle's dried body
is smashed into glassy flakes.

2.

Day after day I've watched
the pool evaporate. Its fleshy water
the color of copper, the sheet of gnats
swirling above the surface. This
convection, also, alchemy. Day
after day though, drying.
Now there's no season, now no thin
division, the leaf-matter beginning
to glisten. When dry I'm sure
it will be brown. When dry I'm sure
I will be deep in my relief.

3.

There the duck waddling
over leaves. There the single,
dark eye. All day as such,
hanging, beaming, as if
not part of the duck: his glaring
green head, his flared feathers.
I have bad dreams, oh yes,
I could tell you. Eerie eye,
indifferent duck, picking among
the dead blossoms.

4.

Now the day seems longer,
dragging heat, a trawl of light, air
a heavy bag of loose dirt. Once
it blew across the grasses.
Yes, the wind-matted fur,
the broken sky huge over Wyoming.
Now, mouths gulp through it
as the cool smell of lilacs happens
then goes.

5.

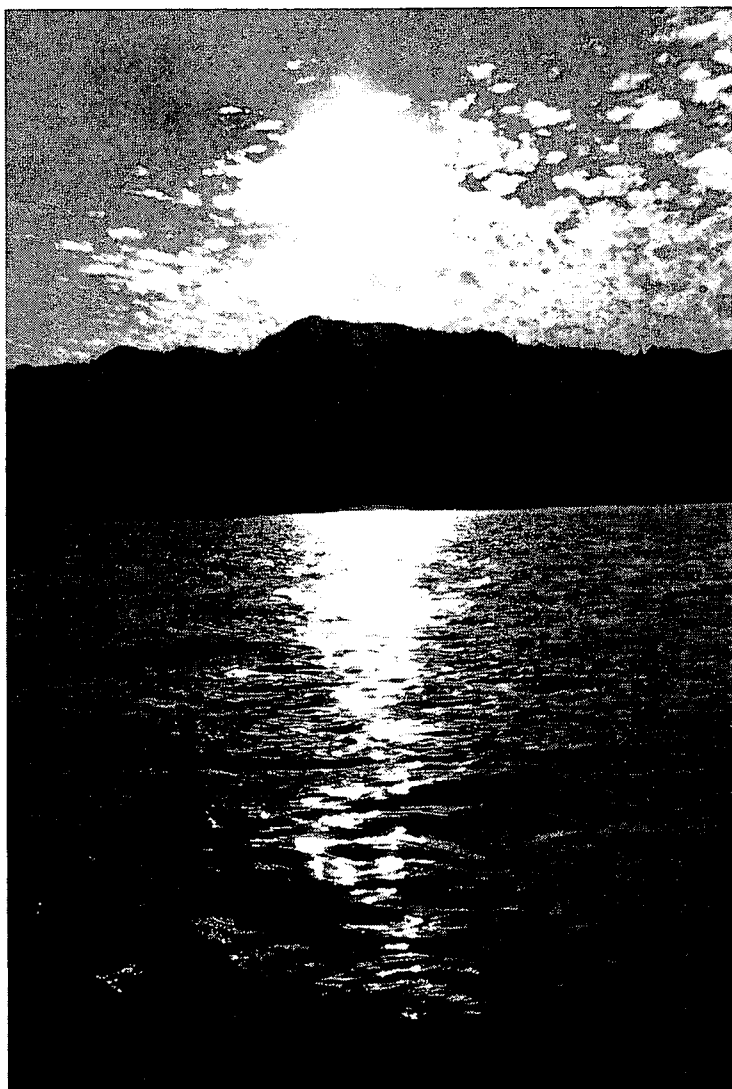
So far things have been
pretty fair. Days upon days
the body moving well, heat
washed by iced teas. Surely,
invisible things heavy on
the face, but still the wind blows
smells into the street, and still a
deep breath for the mornings.

Anorexia

My stark-eyed fledgling
balanced
on a wire,
you watch me
from your bedroom door.
I see the heartbeat
in the hollow
of your throat.

Come into
the kitchen.
Let me be
your cornucopia,
fill you
with my bounty,
red and gold
and green.
Dance to the sizzle
of garlic cloves
in olive oil.
Open wide
for pasta
that rollicks
in a shiny pot.

Wheat stalk,
harp string,
thread of glass.
Daughter, daughter,
I reach
to hold you,
and you slip
from my cupped hands
like water.



ERIKA MONTGOMERY



Protect Your Future

MANUEL ZERMEÑO

Verse Ladies of the Night

The poetry sluts
strut their stuff
metaphors popping
all over the place,
and graceless dangling participles
adding attitude
to swaggering syllables.

The haiku hos
show their toes
and wiggle bright images
like ruby red nails,
flashing flamboyance
and causing annoyance
among those who demand
rhyming stanzas.

The wallowing women of ill repute
shoot their boots
with shotgun verbs
and curb audacious adjectives
with sonorous sonnets
and rangy triolets.

The homonym whores
floor the poor
with wanton verbiage
and takeout images,
their line breaks all anomaly.
Their rhythms? Improbability!
They aren't "fit"
for a poem—
they are poetry
embodied.



SPENCER CROOKS

void

there's a crooked picture of venice on the wall, two oranges and a
lemon in a bowl.
something in the silence speaks but you can't hear the words, only
the placid sound
of footsteps resonating strangely in the empty space
a blue bottle and a red box balance on a shelf, in this room where
you search
for sleep but find only the absent colors of a dream that burnt out.
insomnia floats like a violet star above your head
in the drawer there's a letter, on the desk a silver jar of unused
pencils,
the mind struggles for metaphor but reality clings like static energy.
a dusty philodendron droops and withers in the darkness
the splintering bookshelf offers a singular shadow of absence
but sketching only the bones you discover the pulse
and heat of what bleeds from these gashes
a man with sad, sea-green eyes stands on a dock and waits
on the other side of the journey the water looks the same
but is filled with the emptiness of having left
after the wine is finished, feeling escapes through a crack
and all things are filled with the diminishment
of bitter intensity.

Midnight at the Sit 'n Eat

She walked by me as I sat nursing a cup of coffee alone at a table at the Sit 'n Eat. Her black hair was swaying down her back, her glorious eyes large and enticing, her smile wide and courteous, as she spoke delicately, "Could I borrow this chair?" And I guess I said yes, because she thanked me, and then slid the chair over to her table where another man was seated.

That other man must be her brother, or a close friend. He must be consoling her over a messy breakup. That's why this beautiful woman is here. She most surely is single, and interested in a mildly overweight man sitting alone in a restaurant in the middle of the night on his thirtieth birthday. That has to be why she asked me for my chair. She is probably telling her brother that a cute guy sits behind her, how hopeful she is that he might be single and interested in her, this lonely, beautiful woman that radiates such loveliness in my world.

I'll walk up to her and ask her her name, and she'll tell me it's, oh, Marian, and she'll ask me to sit down, and then laugh embarrassedly because there are no other chairs in the restaurant, and then I'll laugh and say it's all right, that standing in her presence is better than sitting alone. She'll smile, her eyes moist, and her brother, sensing the connection, will stand, offer me his chair and welcome me in. He'll leave smiling, knowing his sister is in good hands. Marian and I will then share a wonderful evening talking, talking, really communicating on a deeper level, I getting to know her, she me, and the two of us will leave the restaurant arm-in-arm gazing into each other's eyes. She'll step into my Pinto and I'll drive her to her place, and she'll invite me in using the old "Care for a nightcap?" line, and I'll take her hand, and I'll follow her in. She'll pour the wine, I'll take a sip, we'll share a kiss.

And then we would hear the bedroom window smash, and we'd recoil in alarm, and ducking behind the counter I would hold her back with my arm across her saying, "Stay back, Marian! I'll handle this!" And deftly crawling across the floor on my knees and elbows, I would peek through the bedroom door to see the two masked criminals with guns ransacking her room. I would rise up, find a weapon—a baseball bat, because Marian also likes to play—

and, kicking the door open, I would rush the first criminal. With a death-thud, the first would be on the floor. The second, seeing his partner on the ground, would feel the mortal danger. He would see the vengeance in my blood-thirsty eyes, so he would fire off a round at me as I'd slowly, menacingly approach. There would be no stopping me, despite the bullet in my shoulder, so his desperation would reach its peak and he'd back into a corner. I'd reach down to grasp the first criminal's revolver, and then I'd check it and curse finding the gun not loaded. Glancing back at the criminal, I would half-smile and reach into the gaping wound of my left shoulder and painlessly pull the bullet from the wound. Blood oozing down my finger, I would insert the bullet into the gun, cock it, and point it directly at the criminal's face and, in a menacing growl, say, "Drop your gun." The criminal would faint before my feet.

And as I'd stumble back into the living room, I would hear the sound of sirens in the distance before collapsing at Marian's feet. She would appear above me, tears would stream down her face as she would see that my end was so near, and I would place one hand on her cheek. And as I'd slip from this world she would know, she would truly know that I loved her, and there would be someone on this planet whose life had been changed because of me, because I had been there, because my presence on this planet had been taking up space for thirty years, and she would never be the same from then on out; she would carry my memory in her bosom and tell my story to her children and their children, and they would ask about me for years to come. I would live on in their memories, and she would thank her lucky stars she had had the fortune of meeting me.

Whoever she is.

Visiting “The Forest”

A gentle swaying makes me dizzy.
The massive Sequoia takes hold of my senses.
Grandeur on a scale unheard of in a valley of Giants
Keeps me entranced.
A peaceful whip of breeze clears the mind
And leaves a fresh green scent
Of the giant's odor deep within me.

Some shit falls in my hair.
Tree sap.

Resolute for my annual spiritual quota,
I am brought back to the Divines.
The breeze blows stronger now;
A cracking and popping emit from
The trunk. His underground muscles
Flex with the load. My lungs stop moving.
I simply exist with the Forest.

A giant thorned pine cone hits the ground
Next to me. I glance up and get
Plowed on the forehead by a second.
Blood flows forth in waves filling
The depression for my eye and down to both ears
As I writhe on the hot, dusty, filthy, littered ground.
“Fuck you,” He says.

Nepenthe Records

I. Memory

She stopped taking baths
at night after wading too far
into the lake. She said mud
abandoned her toes. She must
compose herself when filling
a glass, she pours rain gauges
out compulsively. Her breath assures
her of an inability to swim.

II. Post-Sensation Memory Disorder

She lies on a couch, imagines water
tickling her nostrils, filling her lungs.
Moonlight floats like a net above her,
she swipes at it. An arm wraps around
her chest. She slaps, gouges. Fluorescent
rectangles hang above her bed. Her pulse
mutes her mind and she opens her eyes. Once,
she was a submarine, sealed and resistant to fishes.

III. Post-Memory Sensation Disorder

She's submerged, she says, but can't recall
anything: it's like peering into a stranger's head
at the movies, flickers without pictures. Other
days, it's waking, not knowing why she's clutching
the window sill. She keeps her back to the wall
all morning, doesn't trust ceilings or floors, rails,
or elevators. She suddenly wants to stand
in a river and turn against its current, wants
to be carried under a bridge.

IV. The Principle of Experience

Her shirt is dry now. Warnings
don't matter: words require sensations
the way ventilators require electricity.



J.O. CARR

On a Saturday Night

Just don't let it cry because they'll hear it and come upstairs and then you're in trouble and if he knew what happened he'd freak out and that's the last thing you want because you've tried so hard to keep it a secret and everybody believed your story about the tumor and it wasn't as hard as you thought it was going to be and what would your parents do if they knew and—HEY BABY YOU JUST PUKED ON MY SHOE—omigod this is the worst time for it to come and you wished you didn't live here and that night would have never happened because this hurts so much more than you thought it would and you need more towels for the blood and it just keeps coming like waves lapping at the carpet and the music's getting louder and it's drowning out the voices and it pumps through you like the blood that doesn't seem to stop and—GET OFF THE COUCH AND GET A ROOM YOU TWO—you can't let them come up here because it's coming and it's killing you and it's going to breathe and that means it'll cry but you can't let it cry and you're going to die and you need to stop the bleeding and you feel it down there and the mouth and the nose and the eyes are open and you need to cover them up and you've got to stop the bleeding and then you won't die and—COME UP HERE BABY THERE'S A BED IN HERE—now they're on the stairs and you can't lose your control and you have to stop them from coming because you're not alone up here and someone's pounding on the door and then it's moving on the floor and you find a towel to cover it up and stop the breathing because then she won't cry.

Elegy, Muse

As she fell, gently,
as a tree falls,
the wise and their advices
became the words
of earthworms
speaking of space's
void and vacuum.

Moments under her musing diffused
into vapor and rode the last passing
breeze of her breath.
The pale wind of final life.

Felt the fall six feet beneath
the rich, writhing soil
where my heart's last beats
hammered like coffin nails
then stopped,
without.

Her body rotted
in a moist, decadent
buried box.
Her cold tombstone
alone to hold.

Wavered towards going
where she went,
merely a few miles,
but that option long
lingered and now lays lost.

Sicknesses clouded
and fevers burnt
the dearth of memory.

Forgetting her effect
like atrophy,
like desert sand,
I hoped for the grace
of her haunting.

But inside my eyes
her quintessence
sat outside nightly windows,
and space between stars,
bringing back buried clarity.

I found new comfort
waiting for the promise
of old pictures
held against mirrors.

The heartbeats returned
to repeat and repeat.
The elegy, Muse.



UTE LARSON

A Duck's Quack Doesn't Echo

Each fair dawn a star fished from horizon,
 behind bare limbs blowing in a winter.
To be cycled and spun through seasons of rising, and
 half-halcyon days proceeding unhindered
After empty cold alleys where a fisherman's mirth
 Will be filled when clothes worn for one season
Mark flights of mad flocks making route to half-Earth
 Until a warm star renders return and reason.
Where good weather for warriors crawls from the clouds
 Fostered and fought as if chivalry games,
All shallow and short and surely rematch allowed
 As sixteen replaced on clean squares without names;
Watching lines cast to seas of sequence deep.
Where the piece is thrown back because it is too short to keep.



SHARON DEMEYER

—take a train to the end of the line
journal entry 2.28.99

it's a journal i kept in florence.
tuscan days pressed like wildflowers
on the lines. it tracks "love,"
amore, is a fast train of desire and despair
each page a *carrozza*
moving me toward the inevitable
end of the line. *destino*.
destinazione . . .

i've called love many things.
in florence—*leonardo*.
eyes like crushed velvet.
"smile of a god" my journal reminds.
bel ragazzo . . .

spring. we take the train to pisa.
lounge in its crooked shadow.
torre he repeats, till i say it right . . .
days, pages later . . . *il mare*.
we count unbroken shells. scatter
thoughts in broken phrases. every night
i glue them together—these words
on these lines . . .

mi innamorato. the train rolls on.
words filling pages, *le parole*,
beautiful, insignificant, lamenting
brokenness and space,
senza fine . . .

end of the line—
il treno. early dawn.
i remember color like crimson.
clouds like *ciao* and pulling away.

Lupe and the Boy of Her Dreams

Lupe was a big girl.

Big-boned, her mother said, although girls
At Pinewood Elementary just called her fat.

With tree-trunk-thick legs, she was strong,
Not fast. Her arms were bow-legged
And didn't touch her sides.

She could spit too.
And whistle-call a dog
Without sticking her fingers in her mouth.

At recess, Lupe played with boys:
Tag, king-of-the-hill, dodge ball.
She was a boy in a dress,

Brown hair, cropped short
Around her ears. My mother
Said it was a shame. I remember

Her birthday party:
We were seven years old.
The speckled linoleum tiles in her living room

Made everything louder,
And harder,
And brighter than the dull carpeting at my house.

Lupe bat-slammed the piñata,
Exploding hard candy out on us like pellets
While her big-boned mother whooped *¡mi hijo!*

We played drop-the-clothespins-in-a-Mason-jar,
And after I clinked in fifteen wooden pins,
Lupe called me her best friend.

Three years before I learned to ride a two-wheeler,
Lupe popped a wheelie on her blue sting-ray
From Second Street all the way down to Third.

Still, it was okay that I didn't ride a bike:
Lupe spun black rubber brodies on the sidewalk,
Watching me watch her from the curb.

In high school, Lupe quit riding her bike,
And hid her breasts
Behind a big, blue jacket: the kind mechanics wear.

She wore Levis then too.
Nylon-tipped drumsticks stuck in each back pocket,
She looked like a turkey in strut.

Sometimes, she spent the night at my house.
And once—sleeping next to me—
She dreamt she got a boyfriend:

We woke up with her bare arm around my waist.
This was a dream-trick, Lupe said. A dream-trick
Brought on by my miniscule size 26, double A, pre-breasts.

During our sophomore year,
When Lupe's were growing to the size of basketballs,
And mine remained barely visible pink goose bumps,

Lupe said it was God's trick:
A cruel and constant reminder
Of the boy of her dreams.



SHARON DEMEYER

The Artist

I weave between the headstones like Van Gogh's brush.
One stroke of the rake here. One stroke of the rake there. I create
my work with various tools. Mower. Clippers. Broom. Passion.
Precision. This cemetery is my canvas. My inspirations are few, yet
satisfying. Each plot is paint on my palette and displays only the
perfect shade of green for your Devoted Husband, Loving Father.

I call myself a Graveyard Artist.

Do you notice I water the flowers you bring on Sundays? Or
that the little American flag never fades from the sun? I anticipate
your arrival and watch from behind the mausoleum on those
Sundays. The tired minivan with half an inch of dust from the ride
over here. The duct-taped mirror that must've been bashed by the
hoodlum kids that live half a mile down the road from you. That
broken HAPPINESS IS AN EMPTY CANVAS license plate frame
is tossed on the dash because you're too tired, or too sad, to throw it
away. And that left headlight probably still hasn't shed a single beam
on your few ventures out into the real world. My graveyard must be
the only world for you.

And here you come dressed in your best clothes. Best
meaning clean. Because you probably only do the wash on Saturday
night before you come here. It's the same every time: golden curls
draped over the fabric-softened, low-cut black dress. Barefoot and
beautiful. The sun is sinking behind the trees. Crows have started
caw-caw-cawing overhead. Do you see my perfectly-timed sprinklers
have stopped just for you? This is your time. Your kids are probably
taking care of themselves. The boy you've left in charge gets teased
in school because his daddy was an artist and only fairies are artists.
And the younger one, the girl, isn't old enough to understand what a
fairy is. Do your crying kids keep you up at night?

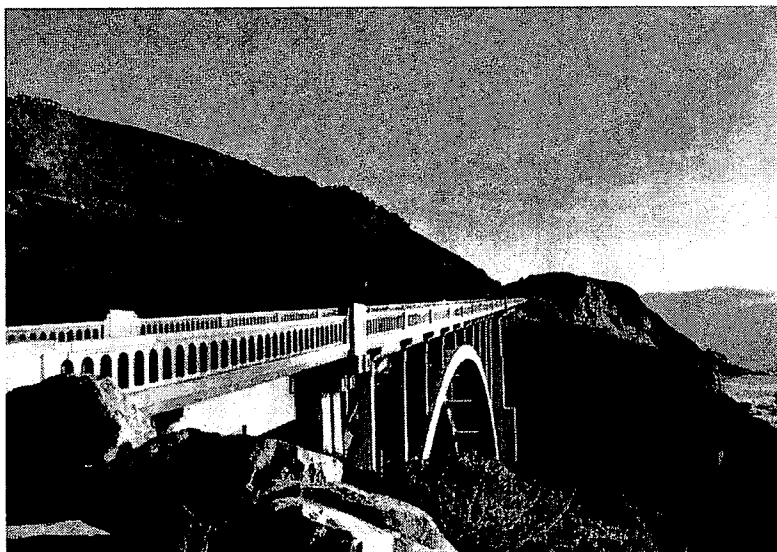
When I go home at night I think about you getting ready
for bed. Your crimson satin nightie from the night before has been
tossed aside at the foot of the rocking chair. You bend over to pick
it up and rub its smoothness against your cheek because it was a gift
from him and you've worn it every night since he's been gone. You
slip it over your naked breasts and look at those thin, bony shoulders
holding it up in the mirror. Depressing. What a voluptuous body

you once had. It was his inspiration on several occasions. But now the sunken brown eyes and the hollow white cheeks are merely accented by the golden curls that can't die because they don't live. A waif of a woman can be an inspiration for an artist.

When the rooster crows in the morning on Sunday you're already awake. You make the trek in that minivan and you lay your head on the stone and cry almost every time. I wonder if you sometimes might fall asleep when you do this. But you must stay awake because your mascara runs down your face and I wipe away the damp black blotches after you leave. This ritual is interrupted sometimes on the occasions when you bring his brushes and a canvas with you. On these days you talk to him. You tell him that the boy has lots of friends and the girl is growing up so fast. And you wish he were here to paint you pictures of where he is now. You aren't an artist and so you don't know how to paint a picture of your new life for him. You're afraid someone will steal the brushes. The canvas. You take them home with you. Don't you know that I have my own tools? My own canvas?

Some day I will comfort you. I will leap out when the minivan comes down the newly paved road. Grab the license plate frame and put it where it's supposed to go. Wouldn't you like me to put a hand on your shoulder? Wipe the tears and the sorrow from your face? Or should I use the brush and the canvas that you bring and create for you your own little vision of heaven? There is a plot for you in this masterpiece. I have a palette of the perfect green for the Devoted Wife, Loving Mother. Don't you see that I will comfort you when you have reached

The End?



BECKI CLIFFORD

The Tree of Life

The closer I get
The further I fall
Into the headlong abyss
Of knowledge of oneself

The roots of my tree
Littered with the huesos
Of martyrs for libertad
Reaching down into that abyss

The branches of my tree
Spread wide and strong
Littered with the huesos de libertad
Placing sombra over todo conocido

The higher I climb
The faster I fall
Headlong into the abyss
Of the knowledge of my tree

The trunk of my tree
Pitted and filled
With the huesos de libertad
Lleno de la culpa de horror
Standing ancho y fuerte entre todo

El cielo sobre mi arbol
Sprinkled con estrellas
Hecho por los huesos de libertad
Sospecho que puedo verlas
And make right the wrongs I see

Y lo mas cerca, lo mas cae
En la profundidad de saber

Cell IV

(wood, marble, steel 82x84x84 in)

Father

your cell is large, but you are small, it is yellowed, there is much
light, and shadows cut into the wooden planking of floorboards.

Father

your floor is sturdy, but the walls of doors may fall, stay calm.
Carved of rose marble, your ear is too large, but you do not hear,
hear my crying.

Father

your gong, pounded of raw steel, rings too loud, methodically of
determination,
your own personal success defined as work and not happiness.
There is a reason for your madness, and it is this:

Art is the guarantee of sanity.

Father

your eyes are pained and you are beginning to look old, worn from
ambition,
your hair grayed too early, because of me you said, but I was no
worry.

Father

can you hear me praising you? I'd call you genius, to your face, if
you'd listen.
Can you see me? I am looking at you through the hole in the door,
where a latch used to be,
you could have escaped back to reality from wherever you have been.
Home is here. Daddy?

Cell V

(painted wood, metal 92x72x72 in)

Mother, are you there?

It is dark, the doors are all closed and I cannot see you
through the cracks between the walls, evergreen, your color. I can
smell you,

wisp of lavender and patchouli, and trees of forest

Are you among them now?

Hiding behind the great wooden spheres carved of fir?

This is where you go to dream,
there along the floorboards.

I imagine you lying motionless,
your small body tired of screaming, wrecked and damaged.

You lie still, so that I won't disturb you,
you lie like the fallen trees around our home.

Silence. After all your naked screaming at dawn,
the pain of the tree spirits vocalized through your delicate frame.
You invited the spirits here; as they fell their branches waved goodbye,
and they wept sap that you collected—their death tears.

A work of art does not need an explanation.

You have created this room for your pain, hexagon of facing walls.
Surrounded by latchless doors, so that you might not escape,
you delve into their pain, and it becomes your own, because you feel.
But Mother, it is dinnertime, and there is no food,
only uncooked brown rice, and I am hungry.
Mother? Are you there?

Cell I

(glass, fabric, wood, metal 83x96x108 in)

I am drawn by the blue of the walls, turquoise almost, but more
blue,
cornflower I think. Weathered doors separated from their hinges,
placed in line
contain me in this room. Pain transcribed into sculpture.
An iron bedframe covered in burlap sacks, inscribed jaggedly in red
ink,

Pain is the ransom of formalism.

The glass vials on the low side table hold something from me,
perhaps happiness
encapsulated. This is the most beautiful thing.

I need my memories. They are my documents.

I pour my heart into the bedpan to be emptied nightly. Louise, take
this pain
from my heart, take away my ability to see sadness,
and let me only suffer from beauty. Let my head circle in the black
spiral drawn harshly on the pillowcase. Let me access this rope
if I desire. Let me drown in this blue, cornflower, and wake each
morning
to the yellowing light gentle through the door.



SPENCER CROOKS

when we are fortunate

as a child, john tells me, he was wary.
affections, to him, seemed a call to arms,
one of his many reasons
relating death to be of consequence—

they tell him that for twenty-two seconds he may survive,
in battle I tell him, no matter the weather, it isn't likely;
that heaven is found on the straight path,
walking a tightrope of red and white.

he tells me that I am fortunate,
to live in a place with revision,
where there are more than two colors to see.

I say it isn't likely that the consequence of his freedom
could lie in tones so simple as to create no gray
how the tide turns just the same as yesterday,
but still he dreams and lives for the moment when

he can fire blindly for seventeen seconds and lie thinking for five
of the pale beach stained red against the water, and his fortune
to be buried with grains of sand stuck to his face.

Cilantro

With red wine-stained lips I desire you
in some phallic association, some oral fixation,
I swirl the liquid over my tongue
to taste every flavor like I can taste you on my lips,
I savor, recalling how we once touched
under the covers in the pre-dawn of morning,
how I once seemingly mattered to you
for a brief moment or instant
I am unclear how I must seem to you, like cilantro,
sometimes bitter, but always flavorful,
always deep green and beautifully cut
like a snowflake perfectly frozen in time
and either you hate me or crave me,
and I am left wondering
if you feel anything about cilantro at all.

**sunset:
for sappho**

red and orange, the west catches and smolders,
gold dust flickers like smoke. violet and umbra
spangle the distance, composing drama
like mozarts of light.

second movement. the shimmer sings descent,
drifts to shadowed hush, and a pulsing dusky
rhythm invades the tranquil, moonless sky as
stars are metered out.

now is the good time. the song for sappho. twilight.
now is the perfect. the inspired and sinking
moment rescued from dusk, captured like seashine
on darkening sands.



UTE LARSON

Last of Her Line

She follows ghost ruts of extinct wagon roads,
finds her husband, her mother, her baby.
They make their way single file
along the night trails of her memory.

Bent to the ground with age,
with the death of everyone she knows,
she walks slowly over the pasture.
Near a stand of oaks
through vein work of branches,
the sky sends signals to her eyes.

In a field wrapped by drooping barbed wire
where death perches on fence posts
she goes down on her knees,
with the wild mustard and gopher holes.

The snake tenses its muscles
as she waits,
on the other side of cold grass.

Why Death Stopped Being Dissatisfied with His Junior Apprentice

The girl has no sense of direction or distance. Worse, she miscounts. "Ten thousand," he tells her, crunching his whole-wheat toast at their daily planning session. "I give you a round number, a simple number. So, remember it."

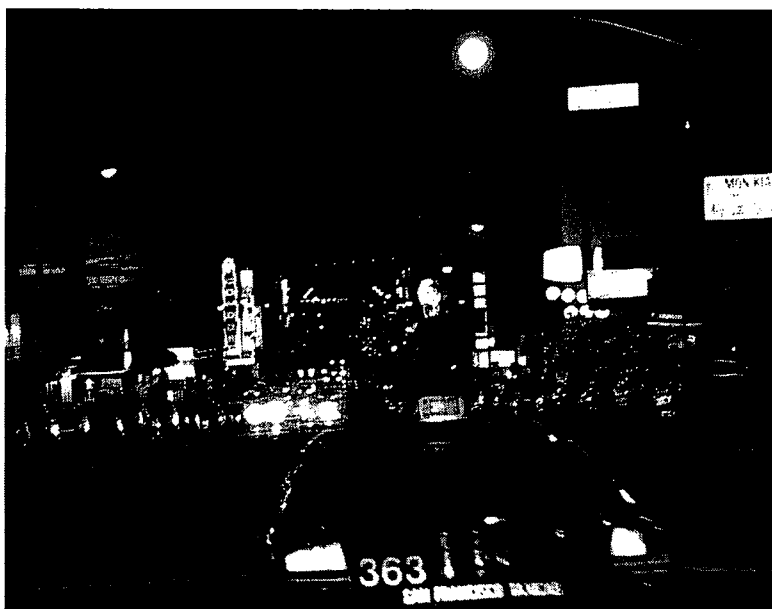
One morning she brings him many more, another morning many less, than the quota he sets. He says, "The next soul I want is north-north-east for 200 lengths." Each length is a human soul laid flat. She asks whether bald souls are longer or shorter than those of redheads, and if his measure allows for the pointed toes of ballerinas and foot painters.

She picks the wrong soul most times—the mother instead of the drug-dealing child, the grandfather instead of the gambling uncle, the twin brothers instead of the bartending sister. Often the soul is from a different family—the client crossing the street instead of his lawyer, the Soo Line engineer instead of the bums drinking Ripple by the track.

"Do you forget what I say when you fly out of here," he asks her, "or before you leave?" She smiles and shrugs. Centuries of her gestures have worn down his irritation the way time tilts the land, turns a north-flowing river south. She flies away through windows and water, not in the slingshot line he prescribes, but in her erratic wobble, snagged in the texture of things.

She hovers above a cradle, above
a car crash, twists in the air like a conductor,
a dust devil, a brindled cat. He wonders
what she looks for, what gesture or fragrance
makes her gather that life instead of this.
He suspects her of heresy, that she lifts up
the ones that want to be chosen, instead
of the ones he plans for and demands.

So that nobody meet Death alone, she
brings these souls to him in small clusters,
presents each group like a unique bouquet.
Here are bold-faced African daisies, elder
flowers, Australian eucalyptus branches,
carnations spiked with nutmeg, sky-bright
forget-me-nots, and poppies, perfectly
open and full. Most are more curious
about one another than about him.



SPENCER CROOKS

Smalls, Manhattan

You, trumpet man, sit calmly before me,
without a smile on your face,
but happiness gleaming in your eyes,
and a rhythm pulsing in your toes.
Your cheeks billow,
as my ears swallow
the nature of the melody,
smooth and metrical sounds dance
through my body to my foot
gently tapping.

Butterfly wings echo
strings in lovely patterns, quickly.
Wings cut from a woman's curves,
glisten through the smoke-filled room,
under the glare of a carefully aimed bulb.
Blinding light shimmers
off sweating performers strumming.

Chairs and small round tables
littered with emptied bottles
fill the basement room.
The 2 o'clock subway jars the floor,
reminiscent of the earthquakes of home.
The subtle vibration adds to the tapping of high hats,
the plucking of jazz guitars,
light piano keys, and a stand-up bass booming steadily.
Camera flash of estranged light exposes
my face drawn to the music of the room.

A snug crowded brick room,
pictures of the men who came before you
hang on the walls like trophies.
Smoke swirls in tendrils
from thick Cuban cigars,
clouding the room with a haze of sinister sweet.

I the nonsmoker,
light another
because it is Manhattan, 3:30 a.m.

CONTRIBUTORS

HARRY BEARD

Harry Beard enjoys watching people laugh, playing music outdoors, and reading with a cocktail. He is most interested in history-based fiction and satirical pieces. His favorite authors are George Orwell and Thomas Pynchon. He thinks he has an unhealthy infatuation with blues music.

J.O. CARR

J.O. Carr is currently involved in a rigorous program of lying on the couch and eating bonbons.

BECKI CLIFFORD

Becki Clifford is a junior re-entry student and former video marketing editorial coordinator working toward an Editing/Publishing Certificate at CSU, Chico. She enjoys reading literature, gossip magazines, and Shakespeare, and taking photographs.

SPENCER CROOKS

Spencer Crooks is an aspiring photographer. He is currently a photographer for the *Orion*, but began by taking an art photography class in the fall of 2002. The pictures he submitted were taken while he was enrolled.

SHARON DEMEYER

Sharon DeMeyer graduated from CSU, Chico in 1996 with a B.A. in English. She currently works in the payroll office here at Chico State. She was born at Enloe Hospital and has lived in Chico all her life. She enjoys photography as an expensive hobby.

SHERRIE FLICK

Sherrie Flick has published short fiction in numerous literary journals, including *North American Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Quick Fiction*, and *Quarterly West*. Her work is included in *Sudden Fiction: The Mammoth Anthology of Minuscule Fiction*. She has been awarded artist residencies from the Ucross Foundation and Atlantic Center for the Arts and was a Tennessee Williams scholar at Sewanee Writers' Conference. Co-founder and Director of the Gist Street Reading Series, she lives in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, with her husband, the playwright Rick Schweikert. Her fiction chapbook, *I Call this Flirting*, was published by Flume Press in 2004.

CARRIE FRITSCH

Carrie Fritsch is a woman possessed by design and is currently wrapping up a degree in communication design and a minor in creative writing. She writes because her mind tells her to. Most often this occurs while driving—so watch out.

LARA GULARTE

Lara Gularte is the editor of *convergence.journal.com*, a poetry and art e-zine. Her poetry has appeared in such journals as the *Santa Clara Review*, the *Montserrat Review*, and *Haight-Ashbury Literary Journal*. Her chapbook, *Days Between Dancing*, was published by Poet's Corner Press in 2002, and her poems have been translated into Portuguese.

SUZAN JANTZ

Suzan Jantz will graduate from CSU, Chico in May with a B.A. in English and a minor in creative writing. She is currently working on an honor's thesis with Professor Jeanne E. Clark, a poet whose wisdom allows writing to examine itself, and Erik Armstrong, a poet whose lyrical lines are to cry for. Suzan's writing has appeared in *Watershed* and *Sinister Wisdom*.

ANITA L. JOULE

Anita L. Joule lives and writes in Chico where she has watched her children and grandchildren grow. As they have sought to find their identity and place in the community, she has sought to find her identity as a writer. Through her writing she explores what it is to be a writer, mother, wife, and woman.

UTE LARSON

Ute Larson is a painter and photographer currently in her senior year at CSU, Chico. She is in the Bachelor of Fine Arts program and will graduate in the spring of 2005 with Honors in the Major, and her emphasis is Studio Art/Painting. She lives and works in Grass Valley where she has a large studio where she paints. Her photography has recently shifted to digital output.

PATRICK MELLO

Patrick Mello writes: Posing revisionist of California, / engaged to a member of the Old World. / a writer with hopes to name his / scrawlings poetry the / highest art of pure atheisticism- / to see sun spots of eternity and / be conscious as they fade. / in the progenies of the Great Dissenters, / Herbert, Vaughan, Eliot / one of the least in a genus / a flea upon Saint Peter's Basilica.

SEAN MELODY

Sean Melody is originally from Santa Rosa and is in his second year at CSU, Chico. He has a passion for photography, music, and concerts.

JESS MILLS

Jess Mills grew up in North Carolina and received a B.A. in English from UNC-CHG and a M.A. in Librarianship from the University of Washington. One of Jess' poems was selected by the Washington Poetry Association as a William Stafford Award winner. Recently retired, with camper, skis, boat, and boots, Jess is enjoying exploration of the wide world.

ERIKA MONTGOMERY

Erika Montgomery is a new mother to a sweet baby girl named Kira, through whom she has found a new inspiration for her writing and creative abilities. She is looking forward to graduating in spring 2005 and continuing to seek new opportunities to write.

RENÉE SUZANNE MUIR

Renée Suzanne Muir has lived in Chico since February, 2000, taking numerous photographs with a Nikon N-70 camera. Digital photography continues to be a futuristic idea.

ELLIOTT PARK

Elliott Park shares his middle name, Warner, with his maternal grandfather, Colonel Warner Frank, who died before Elliott was born. Warner was a lawyer for Northwestern Railroad. He had four daughters. By all accounts Warner was a considerate, intelligent, and reasonable man. Apparently, Elliott looks like his grandfather.

MIM. ROEDER

Mim. Roeder first showed creative expression through poetry. In Mim.'s academic career, poetry writing has become an outlet for those thoughts, emotions, and observations of daily life which clutter one's mind while one is trying to be a successful visual artist and cultural anthropologist. Written during fieldwork in Antigua, Guatemala, these poems serve as reflections of those experiences.

SHANNON ROONEY

Shannon Rooney agrees that "Life is a mystery to be lived, not a puzzle to be solved."

JORDAN SANDERSON

Jordan Sanderson is a first-year Ph.D. student at the University of Southern Mississippi in the creative writing program with an emphasis in poetry. He has poems forthcoming from *Wavelength: Poems in Prose and Verse* and *Hazmat Review*.

AARON R. STEINMETZ

Aaron R. Steinmetz is a prose writer who shares his bed with poetry, a literary begetter whose children keep him up at night, a finger-dancer on the keyboard of literature, and a lover of all things English who's well on his way to becoming a tortured genius.

HEIDI WALLIS

Heidi Wallis is currently working on an M.A. in English Literature at Chico State. This semester is her final semester of coursework towards her degree. Next semester she will be writing a creative thesis in poetry focusing on forms—sonnets in particular. After that: Hopefully a normal life with occasional "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings."

RYO YAMAGUCHI

Ryo Yamaguchi has a B.A. in Creative Writing from the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana. He works and lives in Denver.

MANUEL ZERMEÑO

Manuel Zermeño was born and raised in Santa Monica, and grew up with his mom and two sisters. He will be graduating in May with a degree in Media Arts and a minor in creative writing. His art, whether it be writing, photography, or film making, is his outlet and allows him to express what current events are affecting/surrounding his life.

J. ZIMMERMAN

J. Zimmerman has worked as a surveyor at archaeological digs in Britain and Greece, a solid-state physicist, a limnologist, a teacher, a software quality assessor, a radio host and engineer, a falconry apprentice, a web designer, a software designer, and a university advisor to ESL students.

DANIEL ZWACK

Daniel Zwack grew up in Encinitas. Chico has been a wonderful experience for him and will culminate in a semester abroad in London for spring of 2005. Sitting on the verge of completing his formal education, he realizes for the first time that he has just begun to learn about his relation to others, himself, and his planet.

