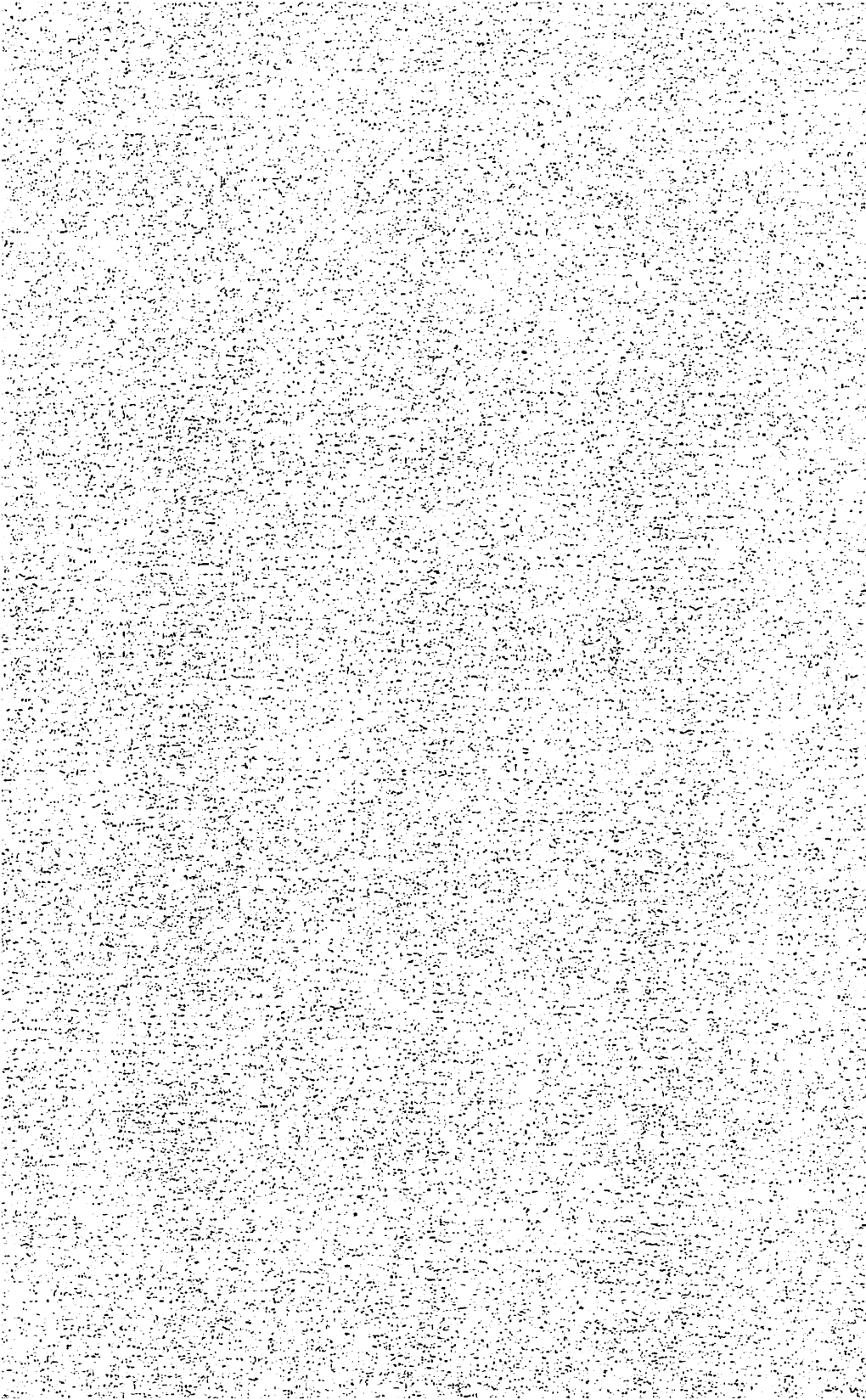


WATERSHED

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A Literary Magazine



# WATERSHED

A Literary Magazine

VOLUME 7

NUMBER 2

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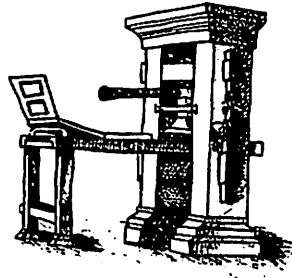
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Dr. George Huang

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*Watershed* solicited for its Spring 1984 issue poetry and short fiction dealing with “a sense of place.” Overwhelming response produced 277 submissions. A great deal more fiction, which was of superior quality, was submitted to this issue than to previous issues. Unfortunately, a few of these pieces were simply too long for publication in *Watershed*.

This issue includes the poem “The Spirits Wait and Sing Beneath the Land” written by Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Gary Snyder. This poem has been specially hand-set and letter-pressed by local printer Pamela Giuliano as a tip-in broadside.

The cover, also letter-pressed by Ms. Giuliano, comprises the Chinese pictographs *man alone*, drawn by Dr. George Huang. In our individuality lies a common sense of place. We feel that this concept of self is appropriate to the theme of *Watershed*.

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*Darren Marshall*

## **How Quickly Things Unbloom**

In the early 1920's  
Karlo was a watering stop  
for the Western Pacific.  
The water tower still stands  
though the railroad moved on.  
After each spring thaw  
the high desert  
is like an abandoned painting,  
somehow more complete  
left unfinished.  
Before bloom  
the sage, broom, and lupine  
reflect the weathered color  
of these cedar planked shacks.  
Behind them  
hunch the rust loved fenders  
and cab  
of a '27 Buick sedan,  
like so many miles  
of imaginary steel track,  
or the sound of the wind  
like a distant steam engine:  
things that a man  
can believe in.



*Kenneth A. Lammi*

## **Feather Falls**

The river narrows at a point,  
falls to the bottom of the gorge,  
the water spreading fan-like,  
three times its width or more;  
billions of droplets, feather-like,  
glisten like gold dust as they fall  
in a white mist, to the rocks below;  
the hollow space resounds with a roar  
of weight and motion, plummeting.

I am the river from nowhere.  
Through the fields of force  
I find the least resistance to flow  
between the spaces of the stars.  
Into sentient beings I separate  
on the world favored by light,  
becoming a dark river once again  
in the infinite vacuum, invisibly moving  
to the level of my existence,  
a certain balance of light and dark.

*Chris Bristow*

## **Susanville**

They thought this town could hold them  
with its gentle woman's name,  
until she climbed out  
that same frozen grade  
they came in on.

Where semis lose brakes,  
clutch, and heart, at once  
to buck and burn  
all the way to the mill  
without stopping.

They thought they could love here,  
wintered in, and growing solemn  
believing a ten month wind  
could carve them clean again.

Now, in a bar on Main Street  
an out-of-work logger  
drinks thin whiskey on thin credit  
and curses, in turn, this town's name  
and the name of his woman,  
which are one more winter, the same.

*S. L. Pritchard*

## **Exercise In Gray**

a mist  
seawater mixed  
with that of all the world  
swaying sea  
in a cushion of rocks  
swells caressing the land  
breeding more life forever

disbursing mist  
leaving the day behind  
to return later  
for  
the faults of the earth's visage  
look perfect  
in the fog's coverage

—Fort Ross, California—  
—1977—

*Kate Hulbert*

## **Patrick's Point**

The trail turned down at least a hundred  
hand built steps to beach. Travelers passed  
silently on their misty way carrying  
icons of driftwood and nodding  
their hooded ascent. By the storming  
ocean we vowed silence—monks winding our solitary  
pilgrimage to the ancient sea mouth  
of redwoods. The endless water pulse confirmed,  
confirmed. There on the grey sand a profusion  
of tormented wood, calm now, worn  
and tangled—lifeless yet calling  
two-footed seekers of truth  
and four-footed dogs of chase to holy communion.

Twelve scarred and sculptured pieces line  
my painted terrace wall as sweet rain washes  
away the murky sea.

I should take them back  
to Patrick's Point.  
Their magic shrinks  
from this heathen place.

*Craig Philbrook*

## **Understanding Tide**

Discount all magic,  
for it will not aid you in this brief  
and various country;  
the silhouette of a cat  
does not always present an arch, just as the moon  
is no perpetual crescent. Notice  
that cats rarely drown in the sea. They too  
understand tide, moderate  
their behavior to conform  
with the standards of waves. Do not attempt  
to establish causal proofs here: the cat and moon  
do not control the tide anymore  
than the way in which  
a young mother chooses to style her hair  
or the varying lengths  
of a lover's pauses between words.  
These are  
coincidental connections: the braids,  
the stuttering  
the waning and the fear; the ocean  
is its own creature, as we are, ourselves, standing  
in doorways  
as summer stands in trees  
and water stands  
in the depressions of this variegated earth  
all the while seeking  
some pattern  
of escape  
from the superstition of place.

*Lorene Praisewater*

## **Silver Creek Harvest**

Snake-cracks mark the soil  
at harvest. They run beneath the crates  
of sun-drying apricots,  
as if the earth can't wait to swallow them.  
Men, on three-legged ladders,  
pull fruit from the trees,  
feeding the metal buckets.  
In the shed, related women stand  
with paring knives,  
tracing the circular indentations,  
dividing the halves and discarding the seeds  
in the pail, like beetles.  
A small girl is removed,  
in the webs of the old oak.  
She's too young to hold the knife,  
to separate the fruit from itself,  
from the tree,  
from this portion of earth, dividing.

*Candice Favilla*

## **The French Eat Snails**

A pearly, plump woman opens her eyes  
on the university lawn.  
The day is well into the grass  
and God knows where she came from.  
She lies in a patchwork of maple sun  
and digger pine. She curls  
pinkly (you slug-a-bed), sits up,  
stretches, yawns. How disarming.  
I am tempted to take her to tea.  
Yellow primroses, fine china,  
Irish linen and Sundays.  
The syrupy afternoon.  
If she had red hair I would fall in love  
immediately. She looks around.  
*Caught me napping*, she says  
to no one in particular.

Kenneth A. Lammi

## **A Visitation**

The cemetery was blanketed  
with heavy snow, the nameplates  
hidden, and for hours I searched  
for the *reminder*, until the groundskeeper  
led me to the burial site.

Finding the bronze plaque,  
I brushed away the snow and leaves;  
feeling for the letters with my fingers,  
I discovered my name on the surface.

Beneath the snow I saw a portrait  
like a living photograph  
of my deceased grandparents;  
my grandfather lay on his side  
grey as the steel he produced for fifty years;  
summer bloom was upon grandma's cheeks.

I returned, putting in the urn  
freshly-cut pine-boughs,  
which endure the extreme of cold,  
an old custom from an old country.

And the gold pocket-watch Weirton Steel  
presented grandfather when he retired,  
gives one an idea of the sense of value,  
the time it takes to build a steel bridge.



*Matthew Mitchell*

## **God Died (for Ivan)**

God died.  
Leaves colored the church walk  
Red and green.  
Women took their children's hands  
Men pulled their collars against the cold  
As they walked away.

"I want to go to hell.  
All the musicians are there."

Churchbells gathered dust.  
Strangers took a long way round.  
Rats bathed in Holy water  
Where tears dried into dust.

"People who advocate suicide  
Destroy their own philosophy."

Old people remembered when they used to stop there.  
Children grew up not knowing.  
Bricks and colored glass were swept away  
By the sea.

Children  
Alone in a field  
Laid a flower on a stone  
And kissed it.

*Lorene Praisewater*

## **An American in Dachau**

Wild daisies rise in patches  
from the unmarked graves of crowded Jews.  
Some revenge.  
The camp is a museum of life-size photographs,  
preventing any vertical aisles.  
I open a pamphlet and begin singing  
"Onward Christian Soldiers";  
I cannot read German.  
I am ushered to the restroom lounge  
by two cardboard militants.  
Inside, in the mirror,  
I confront my shame,  
The Word that had never meant anything  
before this. I see myself slumping,  
tying a black scarf over my blonde hair,  
and lowering my grey eyes. If asked,  
I would lie about my ancestry,  
notwithstanding the American warblood.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Jewish-Canadian boys I travelled with,  
danced with last night in the Hofbräuhaus,  
have disappeared. In the faces of the photographs,  
I search for them,  
but even their pain is unfamiliar. Conspicuous,  
I enter the documentary, filtered by the celluloid,  
until nausea drives me outside myself,  
my sandals, crunching grey gravel eyes,  
all the way to the wild daisies.  
Breathless, I apologize to them,  
fingering their white petals.  
They have to listen. Even now,  
they are captives, grown tall in their faith  
that a seed would catch the wind, and escape.  
I pluck one to drop into the Rhine,  
thinking I understand, finally,  
but the Jewish-Canadian boys find me,  
and slap it onto the gravel.

*Kate Hulbert*

## **I Dreamed I Awoke at Cab Calloway's House**

I dreamed I awoke at Cab Calloway's house  
where the windows are butterfly wings  
reflections of new greens and blues.

Where luminous downbeats glow  
in basement hollows  
and high tone solos reverberate  
from attic beams.

I dreamed I awoke at Cab Calloway's house  
to sweet pancakes  
dripping  
with the laughter of children,  
and to fresh orange juice  
warmed by the rising sun.

Michael Bertsch

## Berkeley Satori for Walrus

I was on my way home  
from work where chocolate chip cookies, melty sweet  
lured the public's money  
into a theatre of the absurd manned by my almost  
obnoxious and firedbycappuccino fasttalkin' persona  
pushing cookies and wiseacre dialogue  
at rushing-through-the-night Cal Berkeley book myth drinkers  
dressed in disguises of careful selection,  
costumes of experimental personality:  
all excitable and green, still,  
to the cold cruel world of real life, therefore,  
still fresh and curious,  
sitting duckly across the counter.

-2-

Midnight:  
store-closing, still speed-rushing  
in the briskly coolish night of late spring/  
early Berkeley fog summer truckin'  
south to home.  
Bent-head path to pass through needle eye:  
post-midnight electric collage of college-town main street—  
Telegraph Avenue,  
strewn with collected Intergalactic trash and items of dubious  
origin:  
(some of which become bohemian *objets d'art*) this  
crumpled paper Chinese lamp globe of orange and white  
flowered by hand design;  
a now funnel shaped umbrella skeleton;  
empty cans-a-bag beers with paper edges like lilies;  
a half-pair of high top sneakers revealing owner's entire  
history to trained eye  
(emphasizing here importance of wisk-broom shoelace ends);  
various editions of various newspapers lying askew and

wind-hered into corners  
and gutters with cigarette stubs and waffle balls of hair  
and dust; a bent bicycle rim, spokeless;  
a deflated Jiffy-Pop dome jaggedly torn one side open and  
all this  
amid bits of colored cloth and bobby pins upon the gum  
and spit splotted general greybrown-ness and wine of the  
sidewalk  
and an ice cream cone, melted.  
Stride past bookstore dimlit windows of college-town Berkeley—  
mute novels scream titles behind plateglass.

-3-

Step across the street upon  
The Triangle—center of  
three-way intersection of Main Drags,  
craftily formed by engineer of yesteryear  
into micro-park of city busy always  
and continually surrounded cacophony of horns and auto-  
flatulence.  
Through all the audio and visual din,  
simultaneously enveloped by the closeness of dampair  
between shirt and skin—  
beneath sodium-yellow fog-enshrouded street lamps,  
encircled by a motley contingency of hangers out  
and nightabouts, among these the trio of beat police,  
all hands-a-pockets, some shuffling—  
view this:  
sprawled on its back like the long, oily hair of some passed-  
out drunken-ness,  
a thin, barefoot figure  
clad in equally thin, beaten denim.  
The overhead signal hangs on middle lamp.  
(My insides remember: eight years old, in Idaho, standing  
too close, watching, fresh and curious, this day's deer  
gut-slit upside-down.  
Inedibles pour out in a shlupp around my ankles.)  
In this yellow instant, I know  
in what dark-red fluid this figure lies and why.

-4-

This knowledge becomes my own Alice's eat-me-cake.

-5-

I am the middle signal lamp.  
I am warm deer-slime around my ankles.  
I lie sprawled-a-back, watching from outside.  
I am the engineer of yesteryear  
from behind plateglass, I scream at myself, muted like a rag-  
time coronet.  
I am the ice cream cone, melted upon the wine-dark sidewalk  
spot.  
I am of dubious origin; I float among the stars like a fart,  
I sell cookies to myself in disguise of poet.  
Hello, I must be going, the walrus  
and I bid you goodnight.

*Lee Funk*

## **Notes From the Commune**

### **Prologue**

There are two types of camps  
so claimed the husky sure-footed firetop who promised us  
galaxies breathed in his ear  
the gringo builds one large and fast  
that gets so hot he must move back  
his face flushes, his ass freezes  
and I believed until I saw him pull a knife on the Sitter when  
returning from the ice spring just before sunset  
the Indian tends a slow flame  
huddles close  
of course it doesn't mean he lied, it just proves truth if it  
exists at all  
like the past unraveling, like an unfinished love ballad, like  
steelhead moving upstream, is snatched only suddenly.

### **I**

Buster had a miscarriage  
on the foot of the bed that first spring at the ranch  
what awoke us was the soft rhythmic moan  
as she methodically ate each fetus.

Driving into town the next afternoon  
I told the Skinny Exile all about it  
she was visiting us between stays at Napa,  
had thrown her lithium in the compost at Breakfast,  
and now reached across the seat as I talked  
to slice half-moons into my forearms and then  
as if in exchange  
told me how her father seduced her for her very first  
time.

At the post office was a letter from my younger brother  
"Remember Mrs. O'Reilly? They've put her in a  
home,

can't you see her  
asking the orderlies to either visit her room  
or show her out?"

The Exile envisioned it as well  
"I've seen organic brain disease on parade  
that's one reason I threw the medication out  
I don't need that shit anyway."

But I was distracted  
maybe I had kicked that cat in my sleep  
the same way my brother must have forgotten  
how we threw rocks at the old woman's poodle.

## II

Since our stay in the Cedar Room I no longer fall in  
love  
with putty complexions and float figures  
I don't know what excites me any longer  
the woman at the drug shop who squints her eyes  
and always looks worried  
the dark skin of a girl in blue silk who tosses her head  
and always seems annoyed  
the librarian with stiff hair who never takes off his coat  
bears perfect posture but grins like a goat  
I can't say what I find interesting anymore  
at this place nothing is more constant than the smells  
and their memories.

## III

The newsman and joint noisily consumed each other  
and he continued his exaggerated pantomime of the ongoing  
household power struggle  
his first goal quickly accomplished  
the Cautious Mystic left the table and began the dishes  
in silence  
the remaining guests and residents  
utilized the cynicism to excuse or exercise personal neurosis  
the Hefty Romantic giggled only a little  
she was plainly confused, but the Skinny Exile unfurled her  
bitterness,



a wrinkled flag in desperate need of an airing.

I lit the lamp above the stove  
just as Simple Simon came through the door, hefting a pony  
keg, even he,  
who worked and slept with the wood, was drunk  
I walked outside to sit on the step—scent of skunk, fir,  
turpentine  
late summer in the high passes  
Jake the Hick was playing the Dulcimer, the Hitchhiker held  
a Recorder,  
“Okay,” I whispered to the evening, “I’ve come back  
for you,”  
such moments are divine whether or not there is a God,  
“Right on,” said the hitchhiker  
and began to play harmony.

### Interlude

Nineteen years old, Mark with his banjo, Nancy  
plump and sweet as maple sugar candy  
crashed onto the ranch with the end of spring rains,  
then Mark cut his foot on a broken lantern chimney  
and the bed collapsed as they giggled that first night  
just one week before their wedding.

Still unpacking, still sealing with wax  
handwritten invitations until the day before  
“What’s the difference?” Nancy laughed,  
“the ones who care will be here and these people  
could never make it this far anyway,”  
the next morning anybody that could sew  
feverishly helped to finish her dress,  
then she made pancakes for the entire household including  
all guests  
who poked their heads from sleeping bags like trolls sniffing  
goats  
while Mark searched for his muslin wedding shirt.

They whispered Gibran at Hog Flats  
as a prelude to tapping the keg  
and the pine and froth was in our throats all day

until we drove home at sundown through a Sierra thunder  
shower  
with no windshield wipers,  
Nancy asleep at Mark's shoulder exhausted from the entire  
to-do  
besides staying up the whole previous night baking bread for  
the feast  
then they were off to Montana to work on a ranch owned by  
Mark's uncle  
to skin rabbits and follow the cattle only to return busted  
and weary the following fall.  
Mark played his banjo yet the gigs didn't come through  
while Nancy played house until finally  
they broke up for a month  
though he moved back in for Christmas and no doubt about  
it  
they were honeys once again  
for he, after all, kept her from the dark  
and she, after all, had such a cute butt  
and the snow was about two feet deep  
but running off fast under a hard winter rain  
when she started loading the truck  
as he went across the creek to fetch the chickens  
and the bridge washed out so he came back across the cable  
hand over hand in the dark, the bannys in a wire cage  
strapped to his belt loops  
then they drove off in the face of a Northern squall, the  
canvas lashed with an old electric cord  
Nancy at the wheel singing about the cat that came back,  
Mark plucking, hens squawking,  
windshield wipers, bless them both, still broken.

#### IV

When you finally knocked Autumn reached out for  
you  
your smile still hid your mischief  
and your eyes were the same, set back like shade on a  
summer afternoon.

It had been twenty years since the tree house  
the most lasting home either of us managed to build

you paused for long spaces between simple phrases, boards  
and branches, settling with the wind.

We dropped our tools in the middle of the washout  
and talked of the neighbor that committed suicide,  
Nixon, the Deluge, our unverified faith in soil, and gangs in  
the suburbs.

Finally we talked about each other  
and the sound my wife thought a coyote or perhaps  
a cat  
was only the creek winding through the rocks with the call of  
far-off voices.

## V

The Savior came back right after the first snow, purple  
eyelashes and all  
and each woman in the community shed her composure like  
tired dry skin  
even the Cautious Mystic, who prior was talking of a vow of  
silence, hiked seven miles  
for a permanent and the Tough Mother and Skinny Exile  
both began wearing dresses again

by this time of year it was impossible to go outside for any  
space  
longer than the few minutes it would take the kettle to boil  
the chatter about the Astral plane mingled indistinguishable  
with the shriek of steam  
a full moon to welcome him, this time there really were  
coyotes.

## VI

"I can't legally stop you but I think you're crazy,"  
the officer said this matter of factly  
the winter had been so mild  
when the snow did fall it was with the fury of a long-delayed,  
long-threatened thrashing.

And when the car spun out of control on the first downward  
curve  
it occurred to me for the first time since  
I was six or seven  
that death sat beside me, close, like the breath of a friend  
asleep on my shoulder.

The weather contained no recognition for us, cared less  
than even the highway bulls  
we were just lucky  
just as the storm harbored no personality there was no  
possible merit in our escape.

After dinner the Wild Irishwoman from upstairs talked with  
me  
until almost dawn, on the second bottle  
I asked her, "Why did I risk it?"  
and she replied by describing a river in Poland and other  
places she regretted never visiting when she had the chance.

The next day was much warmer but what I remember best  
is the snowman leaning in the sleet  
an eye had fallen from his face  
which was bent over, as though burnt wood might become  
precious stone if only a trance remained unbroken.

### Epilogue

Before I came to the Cascades  
where legs turn to logs after walking only a mile  
and leaves freeze like pocket mirrors on the bough  
I lost three wishes  
one was a cat's-eye marble  
another a red flyer  
and the last a tune for whistling  
I don't think of them much anymore  
except when I'm gathering kindling by myself  
or walking out to shut up the chickens for the night  
or maybe drinking coffee before anyone else is up  
I don't think of them much anymore  
and I never mention them to anyone here  
but that doesn't mean I gave up on wishing  
or looking for misplaced toys.

*Zu Vincent*

## **Landscapes**

Your directions were easy, follow the highway north and right on the first gravel road past the fire station—the road splits twice stay right. I really don't know how you managed that place, but I'm beginning to see you are good at that sort of thing. No one has ever offered me a week in a cabin with a creek behind it, free.

I went through a lot just to get there. In the first place Kezzie's regular sitter was sick and there were all the calls around to find a substitute. And then worrying if she would be all right with a stranger, even a certified day care, mother-of-three stranger. Wearing my "isn't this a fun adventure" fake smile and chattering all the way over about the numbers of toys and different children to play with. We both knew I was asking her permission.

Granted. She like the idea of the wading pool under the bay tree that the kids were tripping in and out of. She didn't even mind the wasps, which seemed to me to be hovering too close, diving every now and then for a drink.

This is how I did it. I gave myself three hours. Twenty minutes driving time each way and two hours and twenty minutes with you, which by maternal clock meant Kezzie had enough time to get pink shoulders but not too lonely, taking care to not look back at the boys batting a drowned little nugget of a wasp with a stick.

It seems funny that locally the area is called the woods, since there's too much manzanita and scrub oak for it to be authentic. Some of the manzanita were blooming their tiny pale flowers though, and it was cooler than the valley. Once I got on the spine of the ridge I could look down at the smog, gummy with heat, or way across to the Butte Mountain range rising from this mess like Atlantis from the sea.

Landscapes are important to me. I never feel better than when I'm looking into a great long distance, as over that canyon or into the stars at night. It picked me up, made me stop worrying about Kezzie and gave me the luxury of thinking about you. I began to feel a sort of suspension,

driving along, as if the road were stretching and stretching like the loop of a sagged rubber band, and that I never should get there. The car was full of awkward sun and I could smell the sort of happily baked smell these "woods" take on. There were no dead squirrels on the road or charred places for firebreaks, nothing unpleasant. When the cabin came up it was almost too abrupt.

It worried me when I didn't see you at first, because I thought maybe Sarah had joined you after all or that I had the wrong place, but then I decided that you didn't want to seem too anxious by watching me park and get out. And I tried not to seem too anxious, too, walking toward you as if I weren't being watched, keeping my eyes averted to pretend awareness didn't show in every muscle.

Oh hello, hello/is it really you?/not too hard to find—and I think a breeze caught the digger pines and sent me your warm tones and bristle.

Still we were odd together—war-time lovers or the children of feuding families—with nothing between us but absence and what I'd come to do.

The cabin with its door ajar like an unhinged jaw and the wood floors cool when I took off my shoes. The first thing I noticed was the sink, metal like a washtub, and the sun tea on the sill above it. Two little sieved tea balls like swimming turtles and the light in the amber liquid. I thought Sarah must have taught you that. It was cozy and neat, and something else, *diminutive*. "Look how the mirrors," you said, "only come to my waist. Abby is four foot eleven."

*Oh Allen be quick, surprise me welcome me urge me yield. Fold me in that time where we are alone and two alone, your scratch of beard and tongue and teeth those bones that introduce your skull—*

"Were you working?"

"Some."

The paper in the typewriter felt coarse, like the kind they used to hand out in grade school with the wood chips frozen inside. I wanted to read what you'd written. I only had two hours and fifteen minutes left. Pity the person who tries to do it all.

"And this sketch at the bottom, is that yours too? I like it . . . Boater?"

"My old nickname."

"But you sign your sketches with it?"

"Some people still call me that."

It seemed an unfair advantage, this nickname I'd never heard of, the connotations of which I couldn't even imagine.

"Will you tell me about it?"

"Not now."

How to explain the paths of love, this biological, this chemical force which drives us together and together and together? The bed was soft, with real old handmade quilts. When I lay on my back the sun came down. You were greedier than me, did you have a time limit, too? Too late to ask for oblivion, the physical you all pulse and sweat having nothing to do with desire.

"God how I've missed you."

"This is what it's always going to be like."

Suddenly the impulse to hear you laugh, your ribs your neck the feel of your belly furred and flat, only small little ridges where age had begun. I got it, loud and merry.

"Who is Abby?"

"Who?"

"Abby, four foot eleven, the owner of this gingerbread cottage."

"Just some old bent-over hag with crab apple cheeks."

"But a good witch to let us be here."

"Actually, she's Sarah's friend."

"This is your wife's friend's cabin?"

"I know—don't frown."

"What time is it?"

"It's early . . . and no one is going to show up."

"You have an endearing smile Mr. Allen Boater Fallows. Does Sarah call you by your nickname?"

"I won't let her."

"How long has she known Abby?"

"Why?"

"Just curious."

"They met in college, I think."

"What was her major?"

"Abby's?"

"Sarah's."

"Anthropology."

"You're kidding, what made her study that?"

"Probably it was what all the women were taking that year."

"That's mean."

"No, honest. Why all the questions?"

"I'm trying to picture what she's like inside, an Anthropology major with a four-foot-eleven-inch friend."

"And me for a husband."

"That does give me a clue. She's really in love with you?"

"In her way."

"But you're wasted on her—"

"That would be a snobbish thing to admit to."

"It's only me."

"Only you . . . I try . . ."

"What?"

"Sorry, I can't think. I keep watching where the sun hits you—here and here—"

"Michael majored in Anthropology too." (This while you were kissing the sunned places.)

"They might have a lot in common."

"Just us, they have us in common . . . Allen?" But you were into it then, your legs and arms and over and over. I admit I was already planning my exit, folding the papers from your typewriter and sticking them in my jeans, making the twenty-minute drive in fifteen. So what made it feel like you gave up too soon, freed me too soon, rolling away and that sudden burst of air and empty?

A landscape, Allen, is a portion of land that the eye can comprehend in a single view. Some views are better than others. When I really was driving back down the ridge, I didn't look, the road going lower and lower and flattening too fast. All I could remember was how you got up when I left to search for your pole, saying something about fishing the creek.

I knew you would stand for hours watching the water's mottled skin, its thin rushing, without me.



Zu Vincent

## **Portrait of a Father**

He died of a heart attack sitting in his stilled car, right foot flooring the gas pedal, as if he were trying to get somewhere in a hurry or there was something he wanted to outrun. Who knows?

It's desert where he lived, the Mohave. Picture it as nothing but stark ground and mean cactus. And hot. The sun one incredible un-blinking eye. Under its broil his car would have been luminous, heat seething up off the hood and fiery on the door handles. This bothers me, too much like a funeral pyre; the little green Dodge Dart with its houndstooth-patterned seats and him hurtling forward over the steering wheel. My father.

"Well, at least he didn't suffer," the voice on the telephone says. It is the sort of voice that makes hammocks of words like blue and school, southern. It belongs to my Uncle Noah, who has given me all the details, and whom I've never met.

"Do you all want to come down here, Hon'?" (He calls me Hon') "You know Jack wanted to be cre-amated. He loved you very much."

This last is said in a mournful, unconvincing way. I'm not sure which statement I'm supposed to respond to.

"I have another baby now. She's three months old."

"Well there's no need, Hon'. I can take care of things. Jack didn't leave much money . . . ."

I can't believe I have gotten out of it this easily, that I will hang up the phone and it will all be finished. I have never understood those adopted children who go searching for their natural parents, as if even bad roots are better than none at all. I have spent thirty years trying to extract Jack from my life, my unwanted skeleton in the closet. Who wants the roots if they only stuck around long enough to plant the seed?

He was born in Louisiana, the seventh of ten children. His father drank and his mother, it seems, just had babies. There

was a house of sorts but Jack and his brothers slept outside beneath a wagon in all weather.

Having babies wore his mother out, right there in bed giving birth to a baby girl, Tamsin, the only one who was adopted and didn't have to go to the orphans' home. I'm her namesake.

At the home they beat Jack a lot. He kept running away to be with his father and his father would beat him then, too, and send him back. He was a quick little boy, he shined shoes and sold papers on street corners, and he ran errands for free. Quite a few of the people in downtown Shreveport asked after him when he had the accident.

A moving truck going too fast down an alley put him in traction for ten months. Gave him his life-long limp, his "broken spoke," that he sometimes exaggerated to make noticeable. One good thing about breaking his hip though, his father let him come home again. He got to drive the Model T through the back roads when he delivered bootleg.

Jack and his brothers got separated after the orphans' home. He spent several years tracking them all down. He was a handsome young man, black curly hair and blue eyes that looked at you direct. He told everyone his story, spreading himself around, leaving his name on the backs of napkins and inside matchbooks like messages in a bottle. Even after he'd collected his brothers again he couldn't get out of the habit, and began on cousins, second cousins, great aunts. It was amazing the tangle of humanity that bound him.

"You all didn't tell me Jack left a will."

On my second phone call from Noah I realize nothing is ever that easy.

"Does it change anything?"

"Yes it does. The decisions are yours now, your being what they call the Executrix. Nobody can spend Jack's money but you."

"I thought you said there wasn't any money."

A sigh. I picture him on the other end, an aging Beauford Pussard. "'Peers there is some."

"So we'll spend it for the—the arrangements. Can you still look after things?"

"Be glad to. Say, Hon', was Jack a religious man?"

Religious? Was he kidding? I imagine the scene the day

Jack rediscovered him after the home, Noah in a big white starched apron at the five and ten, where he worked as a soda jerk, Jack spilling tears and throwing his arms around him with the counter still between them, "Noah? Noah? It's me, your brother Jack!" After that he could always get free sodas.

Jack didn't come to see me all that often, maybe with the regularity accorded one of the second cousins. He liked to accuse my mother of turning me against him. "Why should I do that? Give him enough rope and he'll hang himself," she always said.

They met in Reno, Jack having drifted west through a series of bartender and salesman jobs. I remember her telling me how the famous Wagon Wheel was only a wooden building then, and that he bought her her first champagne there. They'd only known each other two weeks before they got married. She must have been in a gambling mood.

It didn't last. She was eighteen and too young to have formed any bad habits yet. Jack had formed too many. Sometimes his drinking binges lasted so long that he forgot her name, and she would wake up in bed in the mornings beside a stranger.

Jack was selling kitchen aids then, the new garbage disposer was the hottest item. Amazing how you could feed in these perfectly good slices of carrots or cucumbers and shred them to bits. The one in our sink was activated by a button in its throat. "Don't stick your hands in there," my mother would warn, "or you'll lose your fingers." Was my father trying to disfigure the women of America?

After he left I used to get these phone calls from a woman with a gasping voice. It sounded like she had been tied up and was struggling to get free. "You not his daughter, he don't have children," she would say through the gag in her mouth. My mother told me it was the crazy lady he'd moved in with, and that I should hang up as soon as I heard her voice. But I never did, there was something too compelling in her muffled ranting. It felt good to know someone was on my side.

For the truth was Jack disgusted me, his grossly exaggerated stories and his politician's smile. The cozy way he had of settling an arm around me for a kiss. He

always projected a dark picture to me, a foreboding, like the creatures in my dreams. The seedy underbelly of life.

Or was he just ahead of his time? He could say words that closed my mother's throat down, like intercourse or Kotex, without so much as flinching. He was the one who showed up on my twelfth birthday to warn me about pimples, and again on my seventeenth espousing knowledge of birthcontrol.

How did he do it? Where did he gain that uncanny knowledge that brought him home the day before my first period, the day after my first sexual experience? It got so I could feel it, too, could predict his coming by some trick of inverted vision or telepathy. It didn't matter that for years I'd told everyone he was dead, we both knew he wasn't.

"What do you want, anything at all." I was five. Jack had hold of my hand and we were in the toy store. A child's dream come true, a slightly drunk father offering her the moon.

I felt I had to be conservative. I would only pick one thing, only one thing. My heart raced—but oh, what should it be? That magical moment when the toy homes in on you, drives its absolute perfection home. If only one thing then this, this big giant Raggedy Ann with dangle legs and a sunflower face. Why, she's taller than me!

Jack leaned towards the saleslady, his forehead nearly touching her shoulder, from beneath the black hair one blue winking eye.

The doll she brought forward had shrunk to fit in the crook of my arm. "You can hold her better," Jack said.

Who wants reality at age five, or even twenty-five, when you could have had the moon? My pretend father was very tall and silent. He looked like Errol Flynn and sailed pirate ships around the world. He was somewhat prim in a dashing way, and he knew how to waltz. Later he became a regular ship's captain, in the Merchant Marine perhaps. He wrote me long loving letters and sent me plane tickets from Calcutta and Amsterdam. All we ever really wanted was to be together.

"Tamsin? This is your Uncle Noah. I'm here at the funeral parlor, Hon', and I need to get your o.k. on things. You there—?"

"Yes."

"Well here's what we got. They can do it for two thousand

or fourteen hundred, depending on which casket you all want. Both are real pretty." He pronounced it "purty."

"Why does he, it—" what did you call a body anyway?—"need a casket to be cremated?"

"As I understand they got to have something to burn him in, Hon'. But don't you worry, I been going through Jack's bank accounts and I find over two thousand dollars."

Two thousand dollars is almost to the nickel the hospital bill we still owe on the baby. "But what if there's a mistake? Then I'll have to pay for everything, won't I?"

"Well, yes, but there's no mistake, Hon'."

I feel defeated, bullied somehow, and a bit like one of those women who haggle over nickels at the flea market. "Does that price take care of *everything*?"

"It does. The cre-amation, the casket, the minister and the service—"

"What service?"

"Just a few words over the casket. Now if you want something more—"

I thought we agreed that Jack wasn't a religious man."

"But this is for the living, Hon'. And I've been looking at a nice headstone that we can maybe get for a few hundred."

"My God, Noah, let me talk to the mortician, will you?"

I can hear a shuffling of hands. I picture white gloves, a tight pink carnation. This man I am fierce with. This man I tell I cannot possibly pay two thousand dollars to burn Jack. I hang up with the guilty knowledge that his body waits unattended in some dank refrigerator, kept like a fading document in a safety deposit box, because I'm too cheap to dispose of him.

This time he is really dead but I keep seeing him. Some old man drives his compact car down the road and there he is, shoulders and grey hair visible, possibly wearing a small brimmed hat. His arms are locked on the wheel as if it were hard to hold.

I did not inherit the car. Jack had it registered in his sister's name, the first Tamsin, because his own driving record was too poor to buy insurance. In the last few years he had been very careful to cover himself with insurance and disability. He said he wanted to be taken care of. Tamsin says the car belongs to her.

Noah has sent me the deed to Jack's few parched acres of desert land, with a note claiming he "wrangled" them from Noah at a ridiculously low price after he'd been lucky at the horse races. This surprises me, Jack was rarely lucky at the races. When he was he usually gambled the money away on the spot or spent it giving some stranger a good time. Noah says he bought the land as an investment, for me.

I try to see myself tanning there in the blistering sun, not too far from the space shuttle launchings and the old atomic bomb test sites. Maybe I inherited the moon after all. Part of me wants to sign the burden of it back over to Noah. Part of me wants all she can get.

I call the mortician and unsentimentally order a cheap cremation. It costs me and Jack three hundred and fifty dollars. Remembering the rag doll, small enough to hold, there seems to be a certain amount of justice in this.

He made his last visit only three days before he died, driving the Dodge Dart out of the desert and five hundred miles across the Central Valley to reach the cool green hills where I live.

I thought he looked surprisingly satisfied, just any old man with a too-big gut and fading blue eyes. He laughed a lot, the old trademark, picking up the baby and holding my son on his knee. Neither of them seemed to mind the big mooshy kisses I detested as a child. Jason called him Grandpa at his urging and played with his cigarette lighter. Yet when I relive that day it's the same old scenario, the same old wedges and blanks separating us . . . .

"I've been doing real good staying away from fats," Jack says, salting the french fries he's brought us from MacDonald's, "but today I'm on vacation."

I offer him squash from the garden, my homemade bread, but he won't take any. When he tilts his head to finish his strawberry shake I notice a slight resemblance to the baby which startles me. Jack and I have never looked much alike.

"I can remember when your mother was potty trained," he tells Jason. "We had a little ducky toilet that fit right over the big one. 'I have to go ducky' she would say." Jason already calls it going to the toilet but Jack is laughing too hard to notice his bewilderment.

"And how are you?" he asks me quickly, as if I were the

same little girl he once knew, as if by helping me master my bowels he'd done all the work. I wonder how many people he's told this to.

"I'm fine. I'm writing a book." I expose this bravely, for the first time.

"A book?" He folds the shiny foil from his Big Mac into a small square, frowning. I can tell he hadn't expected it. If I still believed in pretend fathers mine would ask to see it at this point. We'd argue over technique and punctuation.

Jack is already relating it to someone he knows.

"—This Peg-Leg was always digging into stuff about the Mafia in Tucson, see. He was Peg-Leg because he'd lost his leg in one of them saw mills in Oregon. And anyhow he wanted to write it all up for some big magazine and be famous. You ain't gonna watch yourself get well from that one, I told him, but he went on ahead and wrote it anyway. He just sat and cried when they wouldn't put it in the magazine. That Peg-Leg was a good writer, though. So what kind of book is it?"

"It's—fiction."

"What's that?"

"What's what?"

"Fiction, What's it mean?"

"Stories, you know, made up things, not real."

"Oh, stories, sure. I got a few of them." This one is about "that dam dago woman" his friend married. In two hours I've heard more nicknames for people than I have in a lifetime. The Damn Dago Woman, Charlotte the Harlot, Furd the Turd. What did he do, spend his life in the circus?

A sing-song begins in my head—Jack the Rat, Jack Rat, Jack Rat, so that I feel guilty when he rises to go.

"Gonna swing by and visit your cousin Georgia in Sacramento, you remember her?"

I shake my head.

"Well, actually she'd be your second cousin. Her daddy was old Judge Thimble. Big old fat Baptist preacher used to go 'round on Sundays from one house to the other, eatin' lunch at every one. More than a thimble full of him, wasn't there?" He laughs until he coughs up phlegm.

On one of his visits I asked Jack to spend the night. He refused and I've never asked him again. He is swinging Jason up for a kiss, putting his cheek against the baby's.

“You have a wonderful family, Dear,” he says grandly. “Your marriage is going good now, isn’t it? Divorce is a terrible thing, you know, terrible.”

I hope this isn’t said with his usual timing. What might life have been like had I ever been able to answer honestly to this intuition of his, had he ever been able to listen?

When he hugs me goodbye I’m caught with the distinct feeling that I’ll never see him again. It’s as clear and predictable as my old warnings of his visits. For a small, terrifying moment I cannot let go, and then I release him and he is going out the door, grinning, as if everything has always been right between us.



Phil Hemenway

## A Runner's Body

Ever since he had declared war on his heavily lagered waistline, O'Rourke had found his eyelids fluttering life back to his face at increasingly vulgar hours of the morning. What bothered him was that he had begun to enjoy his early risings. Leah called him smug. Or elitist. This morning it was the mutterings of garbage men and the gonging of airborne trash cans that roused him. Then, the growls of Hillside Scavengers' decrepit trucks gnashing down the trash reached his diaphragm. "Gobble, gobble," he wheezed. Footsteps clacked down the drive. The man above turned over in bed. O'Rourke heard a cough, then a second and decidedly feminine one. He smiled as he lay there. "Neighbor, 1, Moi, 0," he whispered. The smile slipped away with a whimper.

The half-light of dawn made the drawn blinds of the room glow a pale gold. His bed was a futon on the floor. Looking up from his spot equidistant from the west and south windows, he appeared to be lying under two intersecting bars of feeble light, diffuse because of the sun's slow easterly rise. No color reached him where he lay, but by reaching up from the floor's shadow, he could illuminate a hand or foot. Across the room his sweatpants, shirt, and jockstrap hung like a stringer of fish from the closet doorknob. He smelled salt as they mocked him, his fingers locked carelessly behind his head on the pillow. "O'Rourke says *sleep*," he chanted, the sound resonant with morning until the walls pumped quiet back to the room. He smelled the running shoes in the open door of the closet, a vaguely clean odor of toes and mud. The path through the park had hazards now, puddles unavoidable for the poison oak bushes on either side of the trail. "O'Rourke admits to no obstacles," he grunted, sitting up. It would be light enough soon.

His bare chest itched as he dug fingers through the mat of tangled hair. The bed's blue plumeau bisected two white thighs. "Moron," he muttered. The right hand dropped to the ring of spare flesh at his waist. His yawn acquired purpose.

He shifted to a kneeling position on the bed.

His left hand began a crawl through the red cowlicks atop his head. As he knelt there, his own nudity recalled an April afternoon's track practice in high school. He and Basil Kimble stole a freshman runner's clothes and ran them up the flagpole. The boy's slender body had looked so white and ridiculous that day, running naked down the infield of the track at incredible speed, to hide in the sawdust of the pole vault pit. He stayed there, until laughing classmates untied the knots in the flagpole rope and lowered the sweatsuit flag. They returned the clothes to the boy, and he pulled them on quickly, embarrassed and trailing flecks of sawdust as he sprinted back to the gym. The young girls who had dropped their books to run see something remarkable, a boy running naked in high school, untangled fingers from the wire fence around the track and continued on their way home.

"O'Rourke requires orange juice." He stood up and grabbed a salty shirt. The dried sweat was foul and its abrasion offended his neck as he pulled it on. "L.A. in '84 is out, but better thighs," he remarked, snapping on the jock strap. He pulled on sweatpants, then slipped running shorts over the pants. A stop at the john, an emptying, then cold water in the face. "Essential routine," he mouthed at the mirror. Shoes and socks in hand, he made for the refrigerator.

He sat down at the dining room table, placing a full pilsner of orange juice in front of himself. The room's windows faced the street. He had not drawn the curtains the night before, and light crept in from the budding sun and the still burning streetlamps. As he looked out the window, he had to acknowledge the tight strain lingering in the elastic pouch between his legs. "Should have asked her to stay last night," he muttered between sips of orange juice. Sleep flickered once again as an alternative. He pulled on one shoe but did not tie it. The outline of her body shaped itself in the room's muslin light, forcing him to make adjustments in the supporter. "Should have begged her maybe . . ."

It was a runner's body he saw, the body of Leah Heywood. She ran nearly every day, seven miles or more, as if distances existed simply to be galloped through. She would rise early from his bed and pull on shorts, a tank shirt and shoes. He liked to watch her as she balanced on one foot, then the other, pulling on striped shorts to cover a black tangle of hair

clinging to a sculpted pubis. She was beyond mere beauty this way, nearly naked in the dawn-light, her brown nipples like two perfect clichés as they slipped beneath the cotton cloth of her shirt. He admitted quite openly to his ogling. Her standard admonition became "You're a peeping pig, O'Rourke." He would reply, "Mistress Heywood, number 69, now deigns to perform the compulsories," or some variation that earned him a flung book, pillow or hairbrush, depending upon her mood.

Of course, there was nothing compulsory about it. Often, he did not watch. He would sleep through her quiet contortions and awaken later with the sun an hour old in the room and her skin a hot red along the edges of the wet shirt. Several things might happen then. He had confided to her once that he, Patrick John "Oh Marcello, I am so bored" Jack O'Rourke, preferred to run before making love. He explained how the run, the punishment his body took when he first began, then the smoothing out process as he hit his stride, breath coming more easily, burning in the lungs subsiding, miles passing, how all this became a preliminary, a strenuous build-up to whatever resolution they might find together afterwards. "Unless I run to exhaustion, which I wouldn't do, heh, heh," he added. Leah raised herself up on one elbow to look down at him, nestled in sheets. "It's all glandular I suppose," he said, his attempt at the clinical sending them both into a naked fit of laughter. "Prostate *subito*, ejaculatio toto," he droned in mock benediction. "The intensity of the crisis is enhanced by the degree of muscular tension," he babbled as she led him by some handy appendage to a shower or breakfast.

"It's all true," he said. He reached down to tie the shoe and felt a smaller wad of stomach bunch in his lap. Progress, but he was unable to face the sensation again. He pulled on the other shoe and tied it, sat up and drank the orange juice down.

He stood up, opened the window and stared out into the street. He could see her bending at acute and obtuse angles as she limbered up. She had a routine, one stage of which his imagination invariably locked on. It was a classic exercise: her legs straight, she crossed one over the other and bent down to touch both hands flat to the floor. He loved to watch this one, for the thigh of the supporting leg bulged to a supple

smoothness as the strain increased, the calf below pulling to a narrow but equally attractive tension. His response was usually tactile, but once she had begun the exercise, he did not bother her. She approached this time with a singularity of purpose that excluded all; the giving of free rein to her body was linked to a privacy she insisted upon from the day he had first met her at the University track. It had required her to sleep at her place this last night, the first time in two weeks. O'Rourke closed his eyes and watched her limber up, admiring the shapes she assumed as she readied her body for its test, uphill, around trees, over the bridges in the park. He had forced himself to be dispassionate, to withdraw his hand because she was not sculpture. But the ritual she observed each morning had produced for him its own type of classicism. "She who is about to fly salutes you" became her parting announcement.

He stepped over to open the door to the street, perhaps three seconds before the line of streetlamps snapped off. A strange excitement infused into his body. He began his own loosening turns in the cool air crossing the threshold. Stretch, stretch, snap, snap, the machine came to life. He lay on his back with legs rigid and elevated four or five inches from the floor, and looked down over the tension in his abdomen to the ludicrous billow of cotton sweatpants. "Green ones," he grunted. There was a hole below the left knee where he'd snagged them vaulting a fence. "Harem pants . . . a down and out Scheherazade, trading gossamer silk pantaloons for sweats." He grinned, breathless, as he dropped his legs to the comfort of the floor.

An unseasonal dawn warmth pushed through the door as he stood up. It was sudden. "Overdressed," he muttered. He pulled off the shirt, glad to be rid of the clawing just below his beard. Then, stepping through the door and onto the porch, he realized that the pants were the offenders. "Surely, we must uncover the legs," he said, mocking himself. "O'Rourke retreats and divests himself of an offending garment."

He returned to the porch with only the yellow running shorts on. The air was cool again against his bare thighs. His skin contracted, making his body feel more compact and useful. An unencumbered feeling gave way to an unreasonable sensation of purity that lurked just below skin level. He thought suddenly of men from tribes with names like Somali, Bantu, Igbo; men whose economy of motion spoke of

constant touch with reality; black men who rose quite early to leave their huts and run fifty miles, all day along trails through brush or across veldts where waist-high grass oceans before them; men who run to stop by twilight before a startled white woman, their black skins seamed by sweat trickling through a patina of dust, and a string of bloody hares or snared birds dangling from a shoulder.

"This be insanity," he said to his yellow running shorts. The morning light flushed the ambiguous penumbra from the edges of things. "I could stick to residential streets, cut dead center through the park. Who'd see at this hour?" A Serengeti calm elevated his sight, and he dropped the shorts to his ankles and stepped out of them.

A practical consideration dawned then: Support. "With or without?" Already his excitement over the sudden variation in the morning habit had prompted his body to take its own measures. "The men of Greece ran naked. The men of Africa run naked. A wrapper of soft hide maybe?" A possibility, but he pulled the elastic strap down to his ankles and stepped out of it. He dropped it back inside the door, made sure that door was very unlocked, then closed it. He faced the empty street quite naked, except for shoes. "Civilization stares up from the feet of O'Rourke," he giggled. Tender feet, without the genetic callous of centuries. He set out at a good pace down the street, running shoes slapping the sidewalk cracks, a whisper from ancient Greece or modern Africa only half mocking him.

Two miles to the park entrance. He made it with only one minor incident. A newspaper truck was parked outside an all-night market, its driver on his rounds filling the vending machines with the early edition. He made it past the store without incident, but as he glanced back over his shoulder, he saw the store clerk's head peering through the little market's open door. The news vendor stood pointing in amazement with a look of *there goes a naked man* etched on his face and a bundle of newspaper in his other arm. Momentary panic, more speed, until he cleared the lion-guarded gates of the park and entered a cop-less haven.

He found a quick stride and flew down the jogging trail, through the lush growth of dogwood and wisteria, oaks and spring grass, toward the park's west entrance. Two miles through the park, then less than a mile from where he would emerge to Leah's house. He wanted to run to her house, try

to borrow some shorts and run home. "Or maybe she'll drive me," he panted. But he did not want to intrude. He recalled the twelve hours of absence that had passed between them, and he seemed fresh even to himself. "She will 'receive' me, be 'at home'," he gasped, then laughed hoarsely as he crossed the footbridge spanning the swollen creek.

He galloped through the park with remarkable ease, feeling for the first time in many years what *getting in shape* means. The usual heaviness in his legs did not exist. His muscles seemed governed by an external source of energy that shot a constant *fiat* to the machine. He basked in strength, felt he could run forever if he did not have to dress again. A conspiracy of odor and color drew him on through the clouds of his own breath. He began to chant, "Run, run, run" until he left the park and turned into the long street of a recently completed housing tract.

Leah kept an older cottage on the outer edge of the development. As he pictured it, his destination, something quite near to hysteria suddenly seized him. "What have I done?" he moaned. Houses that had been dark were now ablaze with lights. Shadows moved regularly in kitchens, spreading waves of morning coffee and bacon to the middle of the street. O'Rourke sped up. "I flew through the park," he muttered, "I flew. Five minutes, I need five minutes more, or I'll ride out of here in a squad car."

Flight, more speed essential. He picked up the pace, willing the street to remain empty. But two blocks from his destination, the only truly extraordinary event of the whole morning occurred. He had begun the run with a sense of purity, or history. He had made a contest between his legs and the air. There had been no bragadoccio. He had hoped for privacy, relying only on the possibility of its violation as an occasional source of energy. Now he had a good lather going, and it made him feel as though he had accomplished something very nearly perfect.

Half-way through the block, he looked down the street and saw, only two doors away, a woman reaching out to pull several quarts of milk and a newspaper through her door.

"I will not be taken easily," he hissed. "Run up a one-way, climb a wall." He held stride, feet rhythmically slapping the street.

When she finally saw him, he looked directly into her face

still heavy with sleep. Her mouth fell open as he crossed the concrete drive of her neighbor's house. She stared at him for a full ten paces before her face slipped into a broad smile. He returned it, raising his arms and turning his palms up to shrug a greeting. Then, just as he pulled even with her lot, she quickly put down the milk and paper, pulled the door to her house almost shut, and stepped out of the doorway. She glanced quickly up and down before she opened her robe and bared her naked body to him and the morning air. He slowed by instinct, but kept on. She disappeared quickly into her house, taking the milk, the paper and a wonderful pelvis with her.

He broke his stride as soon as he saw Leah's gate and trotted through it. He thought briefly of the conventions as the real sweat began to pearl on his chest. Oblivious, he walked through the yard. "Should I return?" His own voice startled him, and he made for the shrubs outside the window of her bedroom. He slipped through the leaves and branches and peered in. The familiar outline of a body beneath a sheet presented itself backside first to him. The smooth curves, the soft point of shoulder, the black hair flowing out over the pillow. He hesitated, secure in the bushes, thinking again of "That woman. She wasn't begging or even advertising. Maybe she knew I was panicky. Women can sense that." But as he stared through the window, it seemed that her brief splash of nudity had been only a non-mathematical equation. "I could go see her later, with a bottle of milk and some flowers, and say, 'Remember me?'" He laughed aloud, very secure in his anonymity, content to stay that way.

He tapped on the glass to rouse Leah, but his laughter had already stirred her. She turned toward the window. "I must be quite a remarkable sight, time-and-space-wise," he said through the glass. "You will notice I am quite naked," he added as she began to smile. She got out of bed, wearing one of his old t-shirts, and walked to the window. As she opened, she began to laugh, a deep, shaking gale. When she could speak, she said, "You jerk. How did you get here? Where are your clothes?" He saw then that he did not appear to be unwelcome.

His breath came easier now, and he said, "I ran over. Cut through the park and the development. Just kind of a kink, you know?" And he laughed, throwing back his head in relief

and gratitude. "No one saw me," he sang. "And you see this?" He spun around in a bizarre pirhouette, a naked dervish in running shoes. "See this?" A dew of clean moisture nestled in the hair of his body and his skin burned red. "*This* is a runner's body."

They laughed together while she eyed him, still with considerable disbelief. Then she reached out and spread the fingers of her left hand on the back of his neck.

"Yes," she said, "I can see that," and she pulled him sweating through the open window.



# Contributors' Notes

**Kenneth A. Lammi** has attended CSU, Chico five semesters and just last December completed work on the Master of Arts degree in English. Before enrollment at Chico State University he attended San Jose State College where he studied psychology and English.

**Kate Hulbert**, an instructor at CSUC, is currently writing lyrics for a comic opera to be presented at the University of Florida this fall.

**Candice Favilla** is still a senior, but persistent.

**Lorene Praisewater** is a graduate student at Chico State. "I have finally accepted orange; I will never accept chartreuse; and, I accept credit for purple. I submitted my poems so I could publish these fascinating facts about my person."

**S.L. Pritchard** "Ahem . . . I would really love to thank anyone whose name starts with a 'C', a 'D', and 'G' through 'Y' with special emphasis on 'S' and 'W'. I mean, *really*, I would *love* to thank them.

**Craig Philbrook** is a twenty-two year old member of the debating team at CSUC. He was in Fresno at a tournament once and saw the return of the swallows to Capistrano on the TV at the Motel Six. It was very early in the morning.

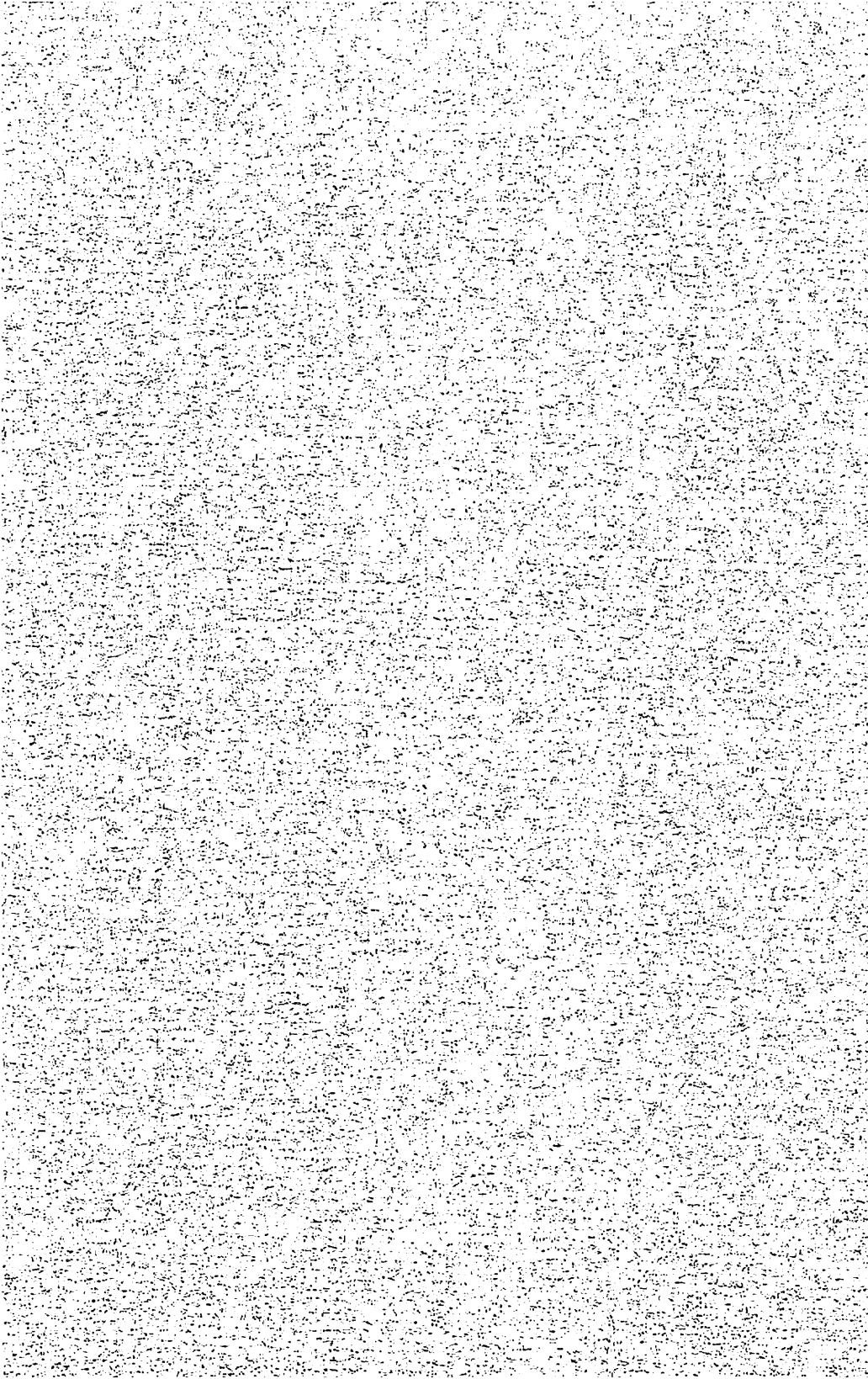
**Matthew Mitchell** is an English student at Chico State who hails originally from Southern California. He writes poetry and prose for his sanity. His main interests involve jazz guitars, old and new books, and avoidance of reality at all cost. His future plans are to continue along this vein.

**Chris Bristow** lives and works in Chico.

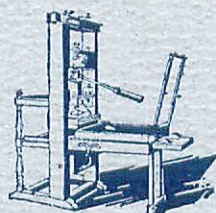
**Michael Bertsch**, father, husband, fool who, in spite of an ancient Royal and a fondness for the ridiculous, has managed all these years to seek and seek, staring intently into the fog of curiosity, realizing that the ever-so-dim outline ahead is the back of my own skull.

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