

Aquila Review

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Submissions

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Poets Have
Glenn L. Wiley

Poets have
internal conversations;
unobstructed investigations;
unique perceptions;
enlightened observations;
loving kindness;
proper stewardships;
absolute convictions;
proper diction,
enunciation, and inflection;
various inconsistencies;
and the need
to speak freely!

Waiting for Tomorrow
Agnes Tirrito



Seussian Sestina
Corinne Patterson

Way up in the attic behind some old packs,
I found some old books piled up in large stacks.
I opened the first one and saw the two Zax
and laughed as I read about north-going tracks.
The next book I read told about the Lorax,
and, finally, I read of the Grinch's dog Max.

I always felt sorry for poor, sweet old Max.
The Grinch made him carry too many old packs,
and who would not pity the furry Lorax,
who had to watch trees become Thneeds in tall stacks?
And even those fellows who made all those tracks
I could come to pity. He called them both Zax!

You can't feel too sorry for the stubborn old Zax.
They weren't near as patient as the Grinch's dog Max.
Who cares what direction they use to make tracks?
At least they don't have to lug 'round all those packs
and watch those poor Whos lose their tall present stacks!
That has to be worse than the fate of Lorax!

And yet I read more of the suffering Lorax
than I read about both of those stubborn two Zax
or all those Whos' presents all piled up in stacks
that went up Mt. Crumpit by aid of old Max,
who had to endure dragging all of those packs
and pulling that sleigh, leaving long white snow tracks.

That trip took much longer than those footprint tracks
or yanking the seat of your pants like Lorax.
At least the old Grinch took back all of the packs.
He didn't just stand there like those stubborn Zax.
That sure must have comforted poor, tired Max,
who dined on roast beef sliced in thin little stacks.

But, really, both Zax and the Grinch's dog Max
and the wise little Lorax who didn't make tracks
are those in the stacks that I want in my packs.

Family Portrait
Melanie Gloster



Life

Tamara Richert

Writing on walls aligns us,
keeping us together,
guiding us nowhere,
turning truth,
twisting tales,
pushing focus into freefall . . .
and we chase onward
without choice.

If You Write It, Will They Come?— The Ravings of an Emerging Playwright in Crisis *Frumi Cohen*

After nine months of solitary confinement, I had completed the first draft of my latest musical. I was in that bipolar combination of an ecstatic “I can do anything” mood tempered with that “what if no one likes this show or ever wants to produce it?” state of mind. This gleeful paranoia is not unlike the mixture of the joy and guilt found when indulging in a gooey, sticky, triple-scoop hot fudge sundae. It’s that chronic, uncomfortable condition that many writers develop and tell me they learn to live with. No big deal. It’s part of the creative process, they say. Stop *kvetching*. Just write it, and they will come. But will they? Maybe they’ll just go to the movies instead.

I have been a so-called emerging playwright for young adults for over ten years now. After I complete each new musical, I find myself struggling for a way to classify my work. My identity crisis is not unlike the audience for whom I create: that volatile group caught somewhere between *bar mitzvahs* and senior proms. If being a playwright is an adventure in bipolar mood swings, then creating theater (especially musical theater) for this elusive age group qualifies as a manic odyssey. I question what I do often. At times, I fear I am pursuing a goal that doesn’t exist. I am definitely writing in a form for which there are very few prototypes.

There is the phenomenon of *Rent*, of course. What is it about this piece that hooks teens by the thousands? The story? The setting? The characters? Rock-hero worship? What kinds of stories prompt teenagers to buy theater tickets? What makes them choose live theater over movies? What are theaters doing to attract that group that includes thirteen-year-olds to seventeen-year-olds? These questions prompted me to investigate the current relationship shared between teens and theater. I interviewed several members of my targeted demographic and called a sampling of theaters and publishers across the country specializing in TYA. That brought up another loaded question: “What is TYA?”

The abbreviation TYA has been used widely to denote Theater for Young Audiences, but I found that publishers defined young audiences differently. How old are young audiences? Some publishers said three-year-olds to eight-year-olds. (Isn’t that children’s theater?) Others said seven-year-olds to twelve-year-olds. Still others felt that TYA included everyone under the age of eighteen. In the publishing realm, though some material has been classified according to age (lower, middle, and high school), many editors clump plays and musicals for the

upper end of the adolescent continuum into the TYA classification in catalogues. That would place them alongside such adaptations as *The Emperor's New Clothes* and *Bambi*.

To cloud the issue even further, some plays or musicals are written specifically for teen actors to perform for their peers (or younger audiences). In that case, TYA could mean Theater for Young *Actors*. Sometimes, works meant for teens to attend are classified as Theater for *Family* Audiences. (Though no self-respecting teen I know would be caught dead attending a family show.) To add insult to injury, there's a new catch phrase afoot: ageless theater. Over the years, I have also heard the abbreviation TYA described as Theater for *Youth* Audiences. The word *youth*, as defined by Webster, is "the period between childhood and maturity." This definition covers quite a lot of developmental ground, not to mention a wide scope of levels for a writer to accommodate. If you are becoming confused, you are not alone. Think of what a playwright for this audience must do to classify what he or she writes in order to target and correctly channel work to the proper venues. Such playwrights are constantly inventing dramatic and musical material for an audience that may be getting lost somewhere between three-year-olds and adults. No wonder I feel as though I am still emerging after more than ten years. Am I wasting my time? Is there such a thing as Theater for *Young Adults*?

I thought I was certain to find some answers for my questions when I attended the Dramatists Guild special-events session entitled "Writing for a Young Audience." I did discover answers that evening, but they were not the ones I wanted to hear. According to the extremely qualified and well-spoken panel (with representatives from respected venues, including The 52nd Street Project, TADA!, Theaterworks/USA, and The New Victory), I learned that the majority of the soon-to-be adults of America generally are not spending their money on tickets to Broadway shows—or any other live theater performances—unless their parents drag them into seats or they know people in the cast. (These young adults *are* buying tickets, though. Many of my own students from third grade and up went to see *Titanic*—the movie—an average of four times.)

The news is not all bad, however. Many young adults who spoke to me said they did like musicals. Some of these up-and-comers owned the soundtracks of *Grease*, *Rent*, and *Bring in 'Da Noise, Bring in 'Da Funk*. They knew the music even if they hadn't seen the shows. Some of them were lucky enough to attend one of the 210 high schools in Theater Development Fund's Audience Development Initiative in New York City, and these young adults were receiving *Play by Play* (a performing-arts newsletter for students). This innovative publication includes reviews of shows and interviews with popular stage stars . . . all written by high-

school students. The last page includes a comprehensive listing of all the shows that students can attend, each for under twenty dollars. Let's do the math. Four *Titanic* movie tickets at seven dollars a ticket yield twenty-eight dollars. According to my calculations, if young adults choose *Titanic* (the musical), over *Titanic* (the movie), they will have eight dollars left over for a couple of Kit-Kats and a soda.

What else is being done to help start a theater-going habit? Quite a bit, I discovered. Seattle Children's Theater has recently instituted Teen Night, during which young people can see a play and have pizza among an audience entirely made up of their peers. The material ranges from Shakespeare to originals and adaptations. The People's Light and Theater Company in Malvern, Pennsylvania, has Project Discovery, an outreach program in which students in the ninth through twelfth grades from eighteen districts attend two performances each year. The dramatic fare primarily consists of classics (no musicals), and the program serves as an introduction to theater. Many theaters also have acting programs for adolescents. The idea is to help young adults develop a love of theater through performing. This is the philosophy at TADA! where young people ages seven to eighteen are at the core of every one of the productions. This approach seems to have merit. The enthusiastic and eloquent eighteen-year-old woman with whom I spoke at TADA! was a graduate of that organization's acting program, and now she works in TADA!'s office.

There are also organizations such as IUPUI (Indiana University and Purdue University at Indiana), AATE (American Alliance for Theater in Education) and ASSITEJ (International Association of Theater for Children and Young People) whose sole commitment is to advance the field of theater for young audiences. As a two-time semi-finalist of the Bonderman IUPUI National Playwriting Competition for Young Audiences, I have benefited greatly from exposure to a supportive network of committed producers, directors, and publishers of new work for the younger generation.

Linda Habjan at Dramatic Publishing assured me that more material for young adults is being published every year, from adaptations of *Jane Eyre* to issue-driven plays about homelessness and suicide. Nancy Vorhis at Eldridge Publishing confirmed that there is a definite demand for quality-assured, age-appropriate material (especially musicals) for high schools.

So why all the *kvetching*? Maybe the people *will* come. I should just accept my identity crisis and get back to work. My audience is waiting . . . but before I sit down, I think I'll fix myself a hot fudge sundae.

Dragon McFlaggen

Corinne Patterson

I ride on a dragon way up in the sky.
His name is McFlaggen, and, boy, can he fly!

One day, poor McFlaggen, he rushed in the house
And cried, "My dear master, I stepped on a mouse!"

I tried so to comfort him, said, "It's all right,"
But dragon McFlaggen got no rest that night.

I tried to distract him with burning a house,
But every last subject led back to that mouse!

I said, "It's so little. Who cares about mice?"
But dragon McFlaggen, he said, "That's not nice!"

A life that is small still has value," said he.
"You love the sweet honey that comes from the bee.

The ugly black cormorant catches your fish.
You would not want him to be served on your dish!

Or maybe you'd like me to smash a poor bug
That ate all the aphids for Farmer McClug?

You mourn a lost gerbil, and how 'bout your cat?
I'll bet you'd be angry if they were smashed flat."

Then dragon McFlaggen, he raised his great claw,
And said, "And to me, you are really quite small."

I fell on the ground, and I cowered in fear.
I yelled to McFlaggen, "Your point is quite clear!"

A life is a life whether large or minute,
And I should take care where I place my big boot."

Another Love
Chic Walcoff

Another love could never really
Take your place,
For when I dream,
I seem to see your lovely face.

No other love could offer
All the thrilling charms
That I possessed each time
I pressed you in my arms.

I try to realize
That true love never dies,
But one can't love enough for two.
I always knew.

Another love could never live
Within my heart,
And so I pray that you'll come back
Someday, sweetheart.

Another Love

Lyrics and Music
by Chic Walcoff

Moderately

An - oth - er love could nev - er real - ly take your place, for when I

mp

This system contains the first two lines of music. The vocal line is in 3/4 time, key of B-flat major, and features a repeat sign after the first measure. The piano accompaniment is in the same key and time, with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic marking. The lyrics are written below the vocal staff.

dream, I seem to see your love - ly face. No oth - er

This system contains the next two lines of music. The vocal line continues with the same melodic pattern. The piano accompaniment provides harmonic support with chords and single notes. The lyrics are written below the vocal staff.

love could of - fer all the thrill - ing charms that I pos -

This system contains the final two lines of music on this page. The vocal line concludes with a long note. The piano accompaniment continues with the same harmonic structure. The lyrics are written below the vocal staff.

sessed each time I pressed you in my arms. I

try to re - a - lize that true love nev - er dies, but

one can't love e - nough for two. I al - ways knew. An - oth - er

love could nev - er live with - in my heart, and so I

The first system of the musical score consists of a vocal melody and a piano accompaniment. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats). The vocal line is written in a single treble clef. The piano accompaniment is written in grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The lyrics are: "love could nev - er live with - in my heart, and so I".

1. pray that you'll come back some-day, sweet- heart. An - oth - er

The second system continues the musical score. It includes a first ending bracket labeled "1." above the vocal line. The lyrics are: "pray that you'll come back some-day, sweet- heart. An - oth - er".

2. heart.

The third system continues the musical score. It includes a second ending bracket labeled "2." above the vocal line. The lyrics are: "heart.". The system concludes with a double bar line.

A Biography of Charles H. (Chic) Walcoff *Linda Kaufman*

Though his full name sounds rather formal, Chic Walcoff was a relaxed, fun-loving guy who grew up in New York City in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Born to a Jewish couple who were third-generation Americans, he was the only boy in his secular Jewish family. His three sisters were the main focus of his parents' attention.

Leaving home in the early 1930s, Chic went to California to be a part of the fledgling movie business, but a trip back to New York ended that part of his life. He met and married Lillian Alperin and never returned to California.

In 1933, he and his bride moved to New Jersey to be part of a family business that manufactured boys' clothing, but that business relationship didn't last. Chic opened his own men's sportswear shop in Trenton, New Jersey, and aptly called it The Dude Shop. He designed everything from the oversized black-and-white photographs of cowboys (hung like wallpaper above his custom wood-and-glass shirt cabinets) to the award-winning windows that were once featured in *Esquire*.

A heart attack in his late forties made keeping the store open an impossible task. Chic eventually became a sewing instructor at a local industrial-arts high school, spending the last six years of his life paying back every vendor to whom he owed money.

The few rich and famous people who lived in Trenton, including the Roebing Steel magnates and comedian and early talk show host Ernie Kovacs, patronized Chic's shop. Chic was a man with a great personality who gathered friends like the beach in summer.

When his only child, Linda, was eight years old, they began taking piano lessons together from Eddie Hatrack, the music director of *The Ernie Kovacs Show*. Like his father (Nate) and his sister (Anita), Chic found he had a knack for music.

His daughter found "Another Love" among her mother's possessions when Lillian died at age ninety-three.

The Erotes, or I Ought to Snap Your Little Winged Neck¹

Amber Harris

Pothos, wield my lips
that I may have the aptitude
to speak plainly
of longing.

You—with all of your
experience in the blood-
rushing sensation of
chasing after something
you love—
impart your wisdom
or be gone.

Oh, but you and Himeros
have had words,
become a pair,
walked hand in hand,
destroyed all the sentimentality
Eros invested.

Now Hedylogus whispers
into the sweetest ears,
uses the sweetest words,
and leaves me craving
for a touch
that does not sugarcoat
my love's absent-minded lust.

But Anteros has a plan
to avenge the broken heart
sheltered beneath his
outspread wings.

¹ The Erotes are the gods of love: Anteros (god of mutual love and the avenger of unrequited love), Eros (god of pure love), Hedylogus (god of flattery), Himeros (god of lust), Hermaphroditos (god of hermaphrodites), Hymenaios (god of weddings), and Pothos (god of passionate longing).

He will not rest
(and nor will I)
till that which has been left
unrequited
is paid back
in full doses of fury
and stolid loneliness.

Belly-Gods
Alisha Jael

Humanoid beasts
clothed in typical
id fashions hibernate
invisibly beneath
epidermal superegos,
passively drifting through
colorless hues of apathy,
carefully concealing
meat-hungry souls
as they consume
what once was life,
smiling while they
dress their sin in
flavors of hate,
savoring
innocent tastes
on double-edged tongues.

Athena's Night

Amber Harris

Athena moves through my veins tonight,
jumping straight from Zeus's head
into my eyes.
Oil seeps down
upon my sleeping form
beneath the olive tree,
and doves pick leaves from my locks.
I dream of battle.
The burning stars of glory and honor
blind me from eventide to sunrise.
This daughter of the gods
possesses my nights.
She overthrows kings, courtiers,
and the not-so-occasional bludgeoning madman.
Athena snarls my dream-lips
and helps me spit
in my persecutors' faces.
As Nyx¹ gives way to Hemera,²
I wake with the battle-lust gone,
but my eyes shine bright
with Athena's fire.

¹ The Greek goddess of the night.

² The Greek deity of the day along with her brother-consort Aether.

The Sword
Randy Jones



In Style

Doris Davis

“Miss” Olivia collected them, wore them—
only the best from Neiman’s. The delivery boy
gladly drove the two hundred miles from Dallas

with the latest Italian—regal black, alligator brown,
navies with tiny bows—rows of boxes stacked
to the ceiling, half a century of Ferragamos and Guccis.

A tiny foot and narrow, the docent said.
Look at those pumps for weddings,
the round-toed grays for scurrying down those stairs!

“Simplicity” entered the world of patterns, but not here—
with “day help” to manage and parties to attend—
even little Katherine’s fifty-two curls to comb before morning coffee.

Then forty years of widowhood and finally *alone*,
alone with all those shoes,
each in its proper box.

In the bedroom portrait, she stares toward the windows
where light flickers and wanes, enveloping the shoes
in mottled dust, as in the tale where

the maiden waits a hundred years
for the fated lips, so the room strains for her return,
as strangers consider the clip-on rosettes and bow-front flats,

how the light circles the blue satin slippers
to the right of the porcelain lamp,
shoes worn only once—the morning *after* Pearl Harbor.

Fate

Mellissa Marlowe

Characters

MADELINE, 27, a middle-school science teacher; PHYLLIS's only daughter

MARGARET, early 50s, a widow

PAUL, 29, a perennial student; MARGARET's only son

PHYLLIS, late 40s, an empty-nester

Setting

The action takes place late in the morning in a hair salon in San Antonio, Texas. The time is the present.

Scene 1

(PHYLLIS enters the salon to find MARGARET already sitting and waiting while reading a magazine.)

PHYLLIS: Good morning.

MARGARET: Good morning to you.

PHYLLIS: *(Looking around.)* Have you seen Jerrilyn this morning?

MARGARET: She just went to the back with a customer.

PHYLLIS: She did? Just now? I have an appointment at 11:30, and she just started someone else?

MARGARET: Yes, and more bad news: I'm her eleven o'clock.

PHYLLIS: You are *kidding* me. What has gotten into her?

MARGARET: I think she's having a bad day. She seems a little upset about something, poor thing.

PHYLLIS: Oh, no. I hope she's okay. I didn't mean to get ugly. Now I feel bad for saying anything!

MARGARET: Oh, don't feel bad. You weren't being ugly.

PHYLLIS: I feel like I was.

MARGARET: Oh, come on. No one likes to wait in the salon all day. It's not like you uttered Lamar Smith's eight banned words and phrases.

PHYLLIS: Uttered what?!

MARGARET: (*Showing PHYLLIS the magazine she has been reading.*) Oh, I've been reading this article about Lamar Smith introducing a bill to ban eight dirty words and phrases from radio. It's funny.

PHYLLIS: Eight? I thought there were seven?

MARGARET: There were, but he wants to make sure that no one uses the "a word" as either one word or as a two-word phrase, so he included it in the bill both ways. (*They laugh.*) Have you been coming to Jerrilyn for long?

PHYLLIS: Yes, I have. Let's see . . . it's been ten years! Oh, my gosh! I hadn't even realized it's been that long, but it has. My daughter was still in high school when we both started coming to Jerrilyn. How about you?

MARGARET: Oh, not that long. Maybe two years now. I found her just after I moved here.

PHYLLIS: You've only been in town for two years? Where are you from?

MARGARET: I moved here from Arizona after my husband passed away.

PHYLLIS: Oh, I'm sorry.

MARGARET: Thank you. I was married for thirty years, and after Tom passed, I just didn't want to live there all alone. My son is going to school here, and my brother and his family live here, so what else could I do?

PHYLLIS: So, how do you like it here?

MARGARET: It's a lot like Arizona—hot as heck year round.

PHYLLIS: Well, it certainly has been this year! You said your son goes to school here?

MARGARET: Yes. He's working on his PhD. Of course, he has been for a long time already. I think he just likes going to school for a living.

PHYLLIS: Oh, but that's wonderful. A PhD. Does he have a family of his own yet?

MARGARET: Oh, heavens, no! Not Paul. I'm afraid he's a hardcore bachelor.

PHYLLIS: That sounds like my daughter. Madeline is a devout spinster. In fact, it's starting to be a family joke since she started teaching school. She's our old-maid schoolmarm. I'm happy that she's found what she loves to do, but I wish she'd settle down and have some grandbabies for me already!

MARGARET: Oh, I would sure love a grandbaby! But right now, I just can't even imagine that. Paul is so involved in school, I don't know if he even dates.

PHYLLIS: Wait. How old is Paul?

MARGARET: He's twenty-nine . . . and going on "old man."

PHYLLIS: Madeline is twenty-seven. What does Paul study?

MARGARET: He's a biology major.

PHYLLIS: Madeline is a middle-school science teacher!

MARGARET: You're kidding! Are you thinking what I'm thinking?

PHYLLIS: I think I am!

MARGARET: Oh, no. Paul will never let me fix him up with anybody. I can just hear him now: "I don't think I have reached the point in life where I need my mother to fix me up on dates!"

PHYLLIS: What if he just happened to meet Madeline by chance?

MARGARET: How would that work?

PHYLLIS: Can you get that boy on the phone and get him down here?

MARGARET: Well, I guess I could make some excuse. Can you get your Madeline here?

PHYLLIS: She's coming here already. She's meeting me here so we can go shopping and have lunch after I get my hair done. She should be here in half an hour.

MARGARET: Okay. What excuse do I give Paul?

PHYLLIS: Just tell him your car won't start and you need a ride.

MARGARET: No. He'll try to fix my car, not give me a ride. I'll just tell him to come meet me for lunch. He'll never turn down a potentially free meal.

PHYLLIS: Now we have to make sure they end up in this waiting room alone together for a good long while.

MARGARET: We'll just fill Jerrilyn in on our little plan, and she'll take us both back at the same time.

(She takes out her cell phone and dials.)

PHYLLIS: Oh, this is fun!

(Lights fade on the ladies.)

Scene 2

(MADELINE enters the salon, looks around, grabs a magazine, and sits. She is carrying a purse and a small shopping bag. Shortly afterward, PAUL enters the salon, looks around, and takes a seat. After a moment, MADELINE and PAUL smile at each other.)

PAUL: Hello.

MADELINE: Hello.

(*Beat.*)

PAUL: Nice day out.

MADELINE: Yes. It *is* very nice today.

(*Beat.*)

PAUL: What are you reading?

MADELINE: “Eight Words and Phrases You Can’t Say on the Radio.”

PAUL: Pardon me?

MADELINE: It’s an article about how Lamar Smith penned a bill to ban eight dirty words and phrases from use on radio.

PAUL: Eight? I thought there were seven.

MADELINE: There are. Old Lamar just dislikes the word *asshole* so much he included it twice.

PAUL: I see.

MADELINE: Are you here to see Jerrilyn?

PAUL: Who? Uh, no. I’m here to pick up my mom for lunch.

MADELINE: Me, too . . . and shopping. I thought she’d be ready by now, but I guess not.

PAUL: Looks like you’ve already been shopping.

MADELINE: Oh, yeah. I just picked up a little trinket for my classroom.

PAUL: Your classroom?

MADELINE: Yes. I’m a teacher.

PAUL: What do you teach?

MADELINE: Middle-school science.

PAUL: Ah, a science teacher. What's the trinket?

MADELINE: (*Taking a nautilus fossil out of the bag.*) It's a cephalopod fossil for my desk. We're covering sea life right now.

PAUL: Nice. Kids ought to like that.

MADELINE: (*Holding out her hand.*) I'm Madeline.

PAUL: (*Taking her hand.*) Madeline, I'm Paul.

(*They drop their hands.*)

MADELINE: So, Paul, what do you do?

PAUL: Well, I'm a grad student at the moment.

MADELINE: Oh? What's your subject?

PAUL: That would be biology.

MADELINE: Really? You're a science guy, too? (*He nods.*) Well, well. It's a small world, isn't it?

PAUL: Yes, it is.

MADELINE: So, what do you want to do when you grow up, Paul?

PAUL: I figure I'll stay in school as a student just as long as I can, and then I'll stay in school as a teacher for the rest of my life.

MADELINE: Really? No research institute for you?

PAUL: Well, I'd like to teach at a university with a decent research program so I can do a little of this and a little of that.

MADELINE: Ah, then you must be working on a PhD.

PAUL: Yes, I am . . . and I have been for quite a while. At this point, my student loans are so great, I need to stay in school forever just to avoid paying them back.

MADELINE: How close are you?

PAUL: To finishing? Oh, about six months or so if all goes well with my research and my committee.

MADELINE: You must stay very busy.

PAUL: Yeah, but never too busy for dear old mom.

MADELINE: That's sweet. Are you the only kid?

PAUL: Yeah, I am. And my dad died a couple of years ago, so it's just the two of us now.

MADELINE: I'm the only kid, too. I love my parents, but they do drive me a little crazy.

PAUL: Now, what are the odds that I would walk into a hair salon to meet my mother and instead meet a pretty middle-school science teacher who is also an only child?

MADELINE: Today, the odds were pretty good.

PAUL: I guess so. (*Beat.*) Listen, I don't mean to be too forward, but if you're taking your mom to lunch, and I'm taking my mom to lunch . . . maybe we can all go together.

MADELINE: Well, I bet they know each other. I mean, they're both Jerrilyn's customers, and they're probably back there together talking up a storm right now.

(*MARGARET and PHYLLIS enter, chatting.*)

PHYLLIS: Well, there's my Madeline!

(*She hugs MADELINE.*)

MADELINE: Hi, Mom!

MARGARET: Hello, Paul.

(She kisses his cheek.)

PHYLLIS: This is your son?

MARGARET: Oh, yes, this is Paul. Paul, this is my new friend Phyllis.

PAUL: *(Holding out a hand to PHYLLIS.)* It's very nice to meet you, Phyllis.

PHYLLIS: So nice to meet you, Paul. This is my daughter Madeline.

MARGARET: What a lovely girl! Good to meet you, Madeline. Paul, this is Madeline.

PAUL: We just met while we were waiting for you.

PHYLLIS: Oh, you kept each other company? Isn't that nice?

MADELINE: Mom, Paul invited us to join him and Margaret for lunch. Would that be okay with you?

PHYLLIS: Well, as long as you'll still take me shopping afterward.

MADELINE: Of course I will. Margaret, do you mind if we join you, or would you like some time to have Paul all to yourself?

MARGARET: I've had Paul all to myself all his life. I think I could stand a little company for lunch.

PAUL: Where shall we go?

MADELINE: Oh, how about the Calico Cat? I love their seafood bisque.

MARGARET: That sounds great. I haven't ever been there. Paul, do you know the place?

PAUL: It's one of my favorite places in this city.

MADELINE: Really? Mine, too. I must go there at least twice a week.

PAUL: I can't believe I've never seen you there.

MADELINE: Yeah. Funny, isn't it?

PAUL: Well, shall we go? I guess we'll meet you there . . . ?

MADELINE: Sure. That sounds great. We'll see you there.

MARGARET: See you in a few minutes.

(MARGARET and PAUL exit.)

PHYLLIS: Oh, honey, he's so handsome!

MADELINE: Yeah. He is. And he's a scientist. Weird that we would meet at your hair salon.

PHYLLIS: Oh, Madeline, this is fate.

MADELINE: Mom, I'm a scientist, too. I don't believe in fate.

PHYLLIS: Of course not, darling . . . but it is weird.

(They exit. Lights fade out.)

Roulette World

Alisha Jael

With a God-hand spin,
once again I circle
round and round
this roulette world,
whirling apathetically
through red and black redundancy,
stopping for entertainment
purposes only.

Spying a tiny glimpse
of hope-colored green,
I find myself praying
that today I will somehow
break the hand of fate
disguised in probability.
Zeroing in on my goal,
I zealously overcompensate,
rolling slowly to rest
just past possibility,
where all I can do is wait
and plan to win the next round.

The Special Request

Melba Peña

It was Saturday morning in early summer—a most exciting day. I was excited because I was going fishing. Dad would try his new fishing pole (hoping to catch large speckled trout or bass), and Papa Chano was coming with us, hoping to catch large crabs that lurked near the shallow waters. I had never seen how crabs were caught, but I was told today was the day I would learn. We had gotten up before daylight, hoping to catch bigger fish and beat the bad weather that might come our way. (The cool morning breeze and rapidly moving clouds hinted at a hurricane.)

Dad liked to fish at Port Isabel when the weather was questionable. I liked it, too. I knew all the boats and ships would be tied securely, awaiting the storm. Dad hoped we'd have enough time to fish before we were forced to leave. Papa Chano hurried, but he was still taking too long to get ready. My grandpa was never one to move quickly. He brought out a star-shaped cage covered in chains that made the cage open and close. He tested the cage, opening and closing it a few times.

My father was impatient: "Hurry up, Dad. We're losing the early edge."

The sun was beginning to show on the horizon, but Grandpa wasn't worried.

"There will be plenty of fish and crabs in the channel no matter what time it is," he said.

"Yes, I know, Dad, but they'll all be fed by the time we get there if we don't hurry."

We loaded the car, and Grandma stood on the porch as we waved goodbye. She shouted to Grandpa, "Bring some of your catch home for me."

Grandpa liked to catch, clean, and eat his catch right there and then. Food was sometimes scarce because Grandma and Grandpa fed the local congregation if its members needed food. Grandma was a good Christian, and Grandpa was usually obedient; but crabs were his favorite food—a rare delicacy he couldn't resist.

We finally arrived at our destination . . . not as early as Dad would have liked, but we were there. The men hurried to unload the car and prepare their fishing gear. Papa Chano sang while he worked.

Dad grumbled, "You're going to scare the fish."

"I'm hypnotizing them to come to the cage," Grandpa replied.

"We'll see who's right," said Dad.

I watched Papa Chano lower the cage down the nearby embankment. He had placed small bits of fish in the cage as bait. When he got the cage leveled on a flat shallow, he opened it with the chains. Immediately, the crabs scuttled into the cage to eat the bait.

While the crabs crowded into the cage, my grandfather filled a large pot of water. He pulled some wood from the trunk and began building a fire for cooking. He hung a large black pot over the fire; then he went to check his cage. He had to return quickly when the wind began to blow hard. Grandpa had to restart the fire four times, but he finally had it going strong.

"Well," he said, looking at me and shaking his head. "Have you been taking care of my cage?"

"No," I said. "I didn't know what to do."

"Well, is the cage full?"

"Yes."

"You think no more crabs can get in the cage?"

"No, Papa Chano."

"Then go pull the chain up"

"Me? By myself?"

"¿*Por qué no?* Hurry up. It's time to eat."

I grabbed the chain and pulled, but the weight of the cage with its contents was too much for me.

"¡*Ándale!*" said my grandfather. "You need some help, *mija*?"

"Yes, Papa Chano. It's too heavy." The wind whipped harder. "Help me, Papa Chano. I can't do it."

"You can do it. Atta girl. ¡*Más fuerza!*"

Papa Chano grabbed hold of the chain and helped me pull the cage up. The fire under the pot blazed wildly, shifting with the wind. Dad was still fishing with his new fishing pole, and Mom was by his side wearing her soft cotton dress. The clouds grew darker, and the smell of rain was in the sky.

I remember Mom's dress wrapping tightly around her legs. It reminded me of that moment in *The Wizard of Oz* when Dorothy is caught in the winds before the tornado touches down. I didn't think the wind would blow us to Oz, but I knew it could blow me into the water. I couldn't swim, so I moved farther away from the edge.

"Atta girl!" Papa Chano yelled. "You're a great fisherman."

"What are we going to do now?" I asked.

He held the cage over the fire and snapped it open. The crabs fell into the boiling water, and I heard horrible, high-pitched screams.

"Oh, Papa Chano! They're still alive!"

“That’s how you cook them.”

I looked away. “But they’re crying.”

He saw I was worried. He thought about what he could say to make it easier.

“No. Their shells are making the screeching because the water is hot. God gives us food to eat. They wouldn’t be good to eat uncooked.”

Dad and Mom watched the crabs cook.

“That’s a great catch,” Mom said. “I hope we can eat before the rain starts.”

“Did you catch any fish?” Papa Chano asked Dad.

“Just a few fish,” Dad said. “All trout.”

“Big enough to eat?”

Dad laughed. “*¡Cómo no!*”

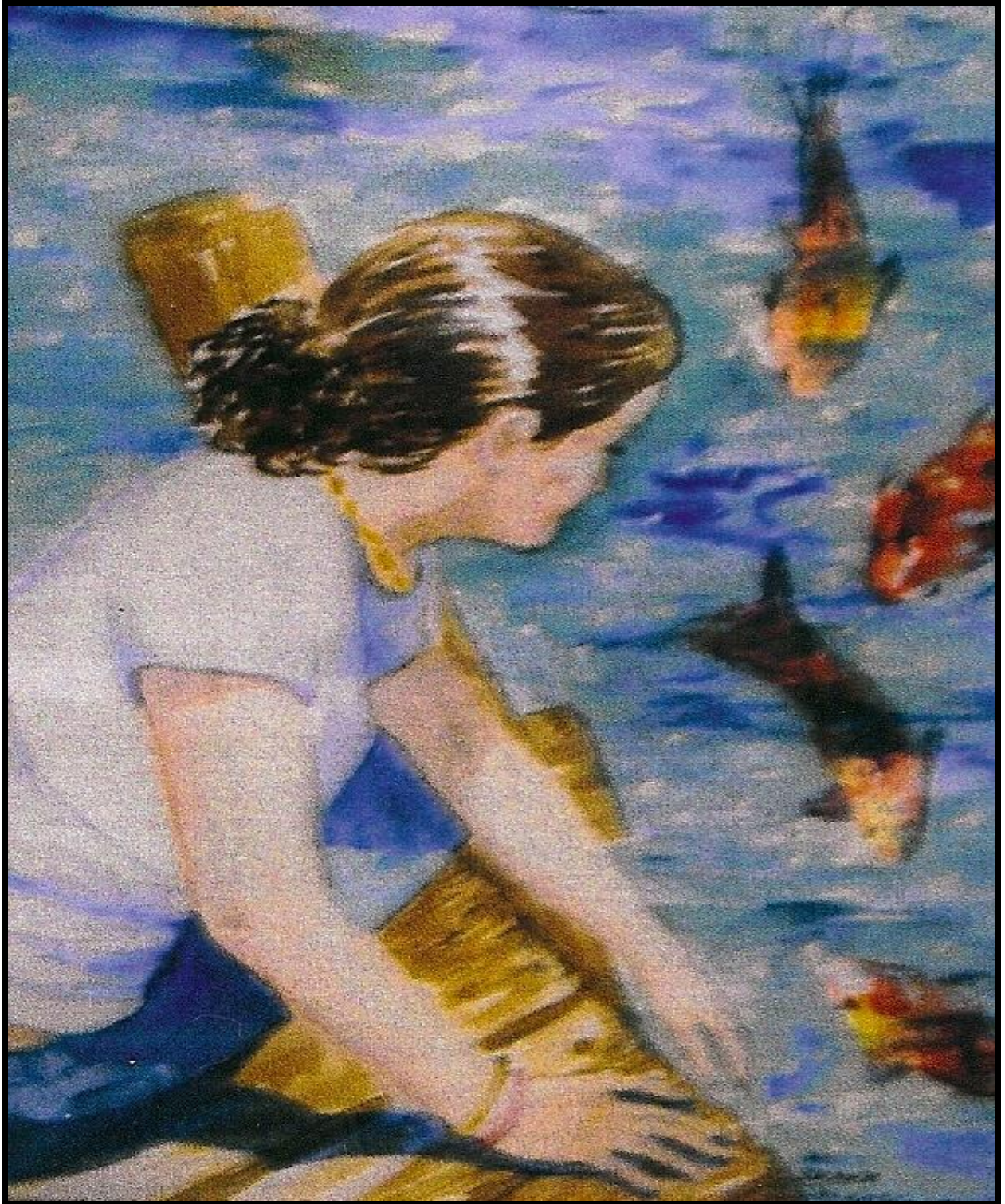
We sat down on some mats to eat our catch of the day. We watched the clouds grow darker and swirl in the sky. Suddenly, rain drops shot down from the sky, stinging our bare skin. We hurried to put our meal in containers so we could eat it later. We extinguished the fire just as the rain began falling in earnest.

Papa Chano sang a song while he worked. Then he said, “Your grandmother will be very happy. We have lots of crabs left over.”

I thought for a minute, and I came to a conclusion: “I think God must have heard her request and made sure we saved her some.”

“Ah, yes,” said my grandfather. “God has always been on her side, and that is a very good thing . . . for the both of us.”

Japanese Gardens
Pat Swartz



Humorous Epitaphs

Tom

Cynthia Crouch

Here lies Tom.
His wife was Beth.
She told a joke,
And he laughed to death.

Bob

Cynthia Crouch

Here lies Bob,
A big old buck.
He crossed a hunter
And didn't duck.

Unraveled
Randall Cobb

I see you unraveling, feeling you at home as I am traveling—
the fracturing components of this life reflected
in a broken mirror-mosaic,
every shine and shadow symptomatic of the battle
two hundred miles away.
I can feel you unravel.

You have the gift of casually embracing drastic changes,
saying, “God closes one door . . . then he opens another.”
Now I feel the same after witnessing the faith,
but I am not so accepting of the change.
I cautiously venture into darkness with a flame
that flickers as I seek illumination in the strange
rooms of the uncertainty where pleasures kill the pain.

I have known you long and deeply.
I have watched you innocently sleeping
and raging in anger against hypocrisy
and warped philosophy and all the rules on the page.

We are both Caucasian, but our eyes are dark
and ethnic . . . like the color of earth
or the color of the timbers—deep brown that
speaks of sensitivities, of passions from ancestors’ histories
and insights into spiritualities.
Our eyes are the same.

Two hundred miles away, even as I travel,
I can hear you, see you, touch you.
I can feel you unravel.

Broken Things

Linda Kaufman

Anyone who knows me is well aware that I am a first-class “thrower-outer,” not a “saver” by any standard. My idea of a fun afternoon is going through closets and cabinets and discarding any and all items I don’t need or want anymore. I am not sentimental about most possessions I have, and if they haven’t been used in a reasonable amount of time, out they go with nary a second glance.

But yesterday, a glass tile—part of a set I bought when I furnished my first apartment after the death of my husband—dropped to the floor and split in half. The day before, one of the candlesticks that a loved friend gave me hit the tile floor in the kitchen and disintegrated into glass slivers. Three of my favorite wine glasses didn’t survive cleanup at a recent dinner party. Did I mention that my mother’s glass cigarette box with the sterling silver lid now has a crack on the edge of it . . . or that someone dropped the lid to the coral glass jewelry box that belonged to my Great-Aunt Fan, one of my favorite family members long since gone?

For some reason, I have been breaking things that matter to me . . . and maybe the biggest surprise is that some “things” do matter to me. Maybe I’ve been too callous in my rush to throw out all “unnecessary” possessions. Maybe I care more than I realize for the small treasures that connect me to certain people or events in my life.

If breaking things isn’t bad enough, I decided to join the gold-selling craze that is upon us; and I sold off the gold watch my father gave me for graduating college and the charm bracelet I wore during high school. I guess what I am realizing is that these items—links to my past—are not relevant to my children or grandchildren even though they do matter to me.

Even items around the house that I bought are part of this breakdown. I noticed a chip on the granite countertop in my kitchen this morning as well as a piece missing from the ceramic hat of the Poupée doll that sits on my coffee table. There’s no question I’m having an epidemic of breakage and loss.

Interestingly enough, in this same time period, I have attended two Jewish weddings and a Jewish funeral; and I have read *Have a Little Faith*, Mitch Albom’s new book. At the wedding, the groom gleefully stomped on the glass that was placed beneath his feet, evoking the familiar “Mazel Tov!” from the congregation. In this case, breaking something meant the marriage was consummated; and a joyous response followed. No one was upset that the glass could not be repaired. It served its purpose and then was thrown away.

At the funeral, I didn't hear anyone mention the "things" this beloved member of our community was leaving behind. The legacy he left encompassed the many lives he had touched as a doctor, a husband, a father, and a grandfather. What he had collected in his lifetime was a host of family and friends who loved him. His sense of humor, his intellectual curiosity, his readiness to help his patients and family no matter what the personal cost—these were the aspects of his life and character that were extolled.

What is worth preserving? For one thing, a good name is meant to be one of our most cherished possessions. Proverbs calls it "more precious than diamonds." I haven't read anywhere that my Aunt Fan's chipped jewelry box was anything to get upset about or that a broken candlestick should affect me for more than a moment. Mitch Albom's portrait of Rabbi Albert Lewis in *Have a Little Faith* reveals a man whose life was lived with others in mind. His life was not about acquiring anything but Godly wisdom, and he put that wisdom into practice in his own life while inspiring others to do the same.

In *Faith*, Albom examines two clergymen, one Jewish and the other Christian; and he shows that these men's riches were all intangible. They spent a significant part of their lives praying and pursuing loving deeds. I'm sure Rabbi Lewis wouldn't be upset if someone accidentally broke any of his possessions. He probably wouldn't even notice.

With my perspective adjusted, I feel more at peace about the various items that have deconstructed lately. The memory of the people they represented will always be unbroken in my mind, and I can always buy a new figurine for my living room's table. I am also relieved that I never chose archaeology as a career. I don't think I could become excited about finding broken pieces of dishes. I'd rather learn about the love they poured into their families and the world in which they lived.

Frothing at the Pier
Melanie Gloster



Butterflies

Jonathan Elder

At ended lives, the butterflies
Live on in us; when we long
For a life so sweet,
To grow from crawling creature
To winged angel,
They're born again—
Beautiful, never judged,
Fluttering happiness
That all may know.

Blue Butterfly
Patricia Moore



Heatwave: Can You Say, “Hell’s Kitchen”?
Sheila Rinear

Characters

LAURA, 20, RICH and TRINA’s sister and a college sophomore

RICH, 40s, LAURA and TRINA’s brother

TRINA, 30, LAURA and RICH’s sister

Setting

The action takes place in San Antonio, Texas, in the kitchen that belongs to Laura, Rich, and Trina’s mother. The time is the second week of September in 2009.

(Lights rise on TRINA, who sits at a kitchen table drinking coffee and reading her Bible. She pauses and lifts her eyes heavenward.)

TRINA: Lord God, fifty-nine days of one hundred-degree heat? Come on, Lord. Please do not let us go to sixty days. Amen.

(Offstage, LAURA calls.)

LAURA: Trina. Where are you? Trina?

TRINA: In the kitchen.

(LAURA enters, huffing in anger. She carries a snow shovel, which she uses like a fan throughout the next beat.)

LAURA: Oops. Sorry. I didn’t mean to interrupt you reading your—

TRINA: My Bible? I’m mostly checking to see how the folks in the Old Testament prayed to be rid of their droughts.

LAURA: Really? Oh . . . you mean like us? Pray for rain, too? Oh, duh. I get it. Can you do that?

TRINA: Now, Laura, stop and think about what you just said, okay?

LAURA: I don't have time. But, listen, I'm glad you have time to do all that kinda stuff.

TRINA: Yeah. I've got more time on my hands now and less money thanks to "corporate restructuring."

LAURA: I thought it was 'cause you got fired.

(TRINA gazes in amazement at her little sister and shakes her head.)

TRINA: Good thing you're cute.

LAURA: Thanks.

TRINA: Don't you have classes to attend this morning, sweetie? Something that'll help you sound a tad more intelligent? *(She notes LAURA's confused look.)* Never mind. What's with the shovel?

LAURA: Richie's here. He says he's taking it.

TRINA: Where?

LAURA: To his apartment. Then to Minnesota. He said he's packing and moving back.

TRINA: What?

LAURA: *(Beginning all over again.)* To his apart— *(TRINA signals her to stop.)* He says he's moving. Isn't that awful?

TRINA: And isn't Mom gonna just be thrilled with that news?

LAURA: No. I don't think she will. Really. It's a really good thing Mom's at yoga class. She's gonna need all that . . . *(She demonstrates a yoga breath.)* breath.

(As they speak, RICH enters. He is soaked with sweat and starved for energy. The sisters do not see him.)

TRINA: Laura. Set the shovel down before you break something.

RICH: I'll take it.

TRINA: I didn't even hear you come in.

RICH: 'Cause when I opened the door, you didn't hear them. They're all dead.

LAURA AND TRINA: Who?

RICH: Birds, crickets, cicadas, animals moving through the brush, camels grunting, galloping castanets. All the creatures that used to chirp in the summer sun? They've been fried.

TRINA: You know, you do that a lot. You rattle off long strange lists of . . . things.

RICH: I've got a knack for humorous elaboration.

TRINA: No. Actually, you don't.

RICH: Really. You really think that I don't? And now you're wondering if that's why Jen divorced me, aren't you? Fine. Let's play "Pick on Richie" again and list all the reasons you think Jen divorced me.

LAURA: You do sound like a computer sometimes.

RICH: I work for Dell. What do you want?

LAURA: I want you to not move. I like having my big brother in town.

RICH: Sweetie, we've had fifty-nine one hundred-degree days. I gotta get outta this kiln.

LAURA: So you can shovel snow and have a heart attack and die just like Dad?

(LAURA and RICH proceed to play tug of war with the shovel. RICH wins.)

Just remember: no one ever died from shoveling heat.

RICH: No, but people do die from heat stroke. Look on the bright side. Next summer when you're melting again, you can come visit me.

TRINA: Wow! Minnesota. Such a lot of . . . of . . . ground to see. Oh, but I'm forgetting to mention the main attractions: you and the Mall of America.

RICH: They've got great theatre in Minneapolis.

LAURA: Is that near Minnesota?

TRINA: Yes, dear. One's a city, and one's a state.

LAURA: I get that stuff confused a lot. What else is up there? States? Cities?

RICH: Lakes. Fresh air. Sweaters. Jackets. Flannel shirts.

LAURA: Flannel . . . ? What?

RICH: I rest my case. (*To TRINA.*) She's been here so long, she doesn't even know what flannel is.

TRINA: Think of all the things you'll miss down here.

LAURA: Fiesta!

TRINA: The Alamo!

LAURA: Dave and Buster's.

TRINA: The River Walk!

LAURA: Fatso's!

TRINA: The Hill Country.

LAURA: Good Time Charlie's.

TRINA: The Majestic.

LAURA: Durty Nelly's. Ripley's Haunted—

RICH: Fine. I'll miss the Spurs, but I already miss Mom's lawn.

LAURA: Why?

RICH: It's gone. Like fifty percent of the lawns in this city. Have you really looked at it? It looks like the moon out there.

TRINA: It'll come back.

RICH: Right . . . and Bernie Madoff's getting out of jail.

LAURA: He is? (*Beat.*) Who's that?

RICH: Neither of you realizes another dust bowl, worse than the first one, is in the making.

LAURA: Another? Really? I must have missed the other one.

(*RICH nods.*)

RICH: I kid you not. This is the hottest summer since 1885.

LAURA: (*She giggles.*) Well, yeah. Pfft! 1885! That was the Ice Age. Am I right? And as for your silly dust ball, I take it you mean something along the lines of little Grenadine's hairballs. Well, people *love* Swiffers, so there you go. No worries about dust.

(*RICH and TRINA both sigh.*)

TRINA: Laura, honey, could you go see if I left the Swiffer utensils in the garage? Thanks for reminding me about them. (*LAURA shrugs and leaves.*) She's got two more years of college, thank God.

RICH: If she doesn't fail out.

TRINA: Oh, no. She's on the Dean's List.

RICH: What? How is that even possible?

TRINA: Oh, settle down and tell me what facts you're putting together to justify moving away.

RICH: Treen, temperature records are not being broken. They're being shattered. The only worse record is thirty-six days of one hundred-degree heat in 1998. It's draining people's energy and leaving record highs of people depressed. And the high heat with no rain? You've seen the wildfires? Crop failures?

TRINA: And this really makes you want to leave Texas? Wait a minute. You want to try to get Jen back.

RICH: Nah. She told me if I ever tried to talk to her again, she'd commit suicide. I take that woman at her word. She would do it, too. To spite me.

TRINA: So, Richie, okay. Try this: water Mom's lawn. Run your feet through the grass, ya know? Relax about all this stuff.

RICH: I can't.

TRINA: Why?

RICH: 'Cause I feel guilty about it being so bad. I'd have watered it more if I hadn't been so worried about losing my job. I missed the water restriction times. When it was Wednesday, I'd think, "Tomorrow, I'll water." Then I'd forget, and by then it was Friday; and I'd hear the guy on TV: "You know you must conserve." But I kept thinking . . . hoping the rain would come. A gentle, nourishing, soaking rain kissing the ground with Mother Nature's love. It gets me—now I'm not kidding, so please don't laugh—it gets me really upset to see the earth look so Godforsaken. When San Antonio was green and beautiful and alive, I felt alive, too. It's like I didn't do anything to help this land, and I don't feel worthy of living on it. (*He looks at the shovel.*) I was over here last week . . . and just picking up the shovel, a cool breath ran through me, calling me back to life. I can't explain it. I love the snow and the lakes up north, and I know when the land feels cursed like it does here. I do.

(*TRINA opens her Bible.*)

TRINA: Richie, you've done nothing wrong. I think, because of this heat and drought, we've all learned a big lesson in conservation and such. Listen. (*She reads.*) "Like a fluttering sparrow or a darting swallow, an undeserved curse does not come to rest." Proverbs.

(*LAURA enters empty-handed.*)

RICH: (*Grinning.*) "Like a thornbush in a drunkard's hand is a proverb in the mouth of a fool."

TRINA: Ouch!

RICH: I'm playing.

LAURA: I want to play. (*She looks through the proverbs.*) Here. "As a dog returns to its vomit, so a fool repeats his folly." What the heck does that mean?

RICH: It means I'm not going to miss my sisters' advice and their turning up the heat on trying to talk me out of leaving hell's kitchen.

TRINA: Maybe we're hoping you'll notice how much we care about you and want to nurture and nourish you. Like rain?

(*Beat.*)

RICH: I've got to pack. I've got to get out of this tinderbox.

(*RICH has almost exited when TRINA calls to him.*)

TRINA: Richie, could you try leaving this "tinderbox" with some love? Wouldn't you rather embrace the wonderful memories about San Antonio that have brought your life meaning and happiness? You've loved it here. You've done good living here. (*He turns to her.*) Can't you walk away from it with appreciation the way you'll walk away from those of us who will love you no matter what you decide to do?

(*Beat. Loud claps of thunder sound. Steady rainfall begins. They listen, stunned.*)

Is that . . . rain?

LAURA: It's raining. It's raining.

(RICH hollers and runs outside. LAURA and TRINA hug each other and run to the window to watch the rain. RICH comes back in all wet and laughing.)

RICH: It's raining like there's no end to it.

(He picks up the shovel.)

LAURA: What're you doing with that shovel?

RICH: Putting it back up so I can use it in one of the Fiesta parades next year.

(The siblings joyfully group hug and look outside as the sound of the falling rain grows louder and louder. Lights fade out.)

A Dunloe Dandelion
Melanie Gloster



Tree Query
Corinne Patterson

A balding tree
Once questioned me
About the wistful breeze:

“Why does she sigh
When passing by
The leaves high in the trees?”

I asked the grass
As I walked past,
But it hadn’t a clue.

The twisted vine
Twined ’round the pine?
He claimed nobody knew.

I searched all night
For plants that might
Explain for that poor fir.

No cypress fair
Nor budding pear
Could say what troubled her.

The corn in rows
Could not disclose
An answer for that tree.

At last the oak
Said with a choke,
“Breeze lost her heart to me.”

Sharon's Tree
Melanie Gloster



Bath Ballad

Corinne Patterson

When Mama makes me take a bath,
I always want to cry.
I hate the way the blue shampoo
Runs down into my eye,

But once my hair is squeaky clean,
Then I can have some fun.
I splash and play with all my toys
Until my bath is done.

Amanda
Pat Swartz



Dog-Eating Homework

Corinne Patterson

My homework ate my dog.
That Math sure is a hog!
It divided Spot right up—
Subtracted that poor pup.

Now I can't leave it near
My tank of fish for fear
That Math will multiply
By zero . . . then goodbye!

Poor puss can't frisk about
'Cause Math cancelled her out.
Of four birds, two are mute
'Cause Math took the square root.

I had to turn Math in
To Mrs. Finnigan.
I know what grade I'll get,
For Math is teacher's pet.

Trio
Melanie Gloster



Supper

Cynthia Crouch

After Jim Bob was
Bitten by a
Crawfish, his
Daddy
Exclaimed,
“For
Goodness sakes, you
Humongous
Idiot,
Just
Kill the
Little thing, and
Mom can cook it for supper!” Jim Bob said,
“Nothing is better
Over rice! A
Plate of that, and I’ll be
Quite full. Then I’ll get a
Restful night’s sleep, and
Tomorrow
Uncle Bubba can eat the leftover
Vittles
With me after he plays me a song on his
Xylophone, and
You, Dad, will get
Zero because you called me an idiot.”

Adapting “Jack and the Beanstalk” for Children

Whitney Ryan Garrity

While adapting the fairy tale “Jack and the Beanstalk” into a musical for children’s theatre, I was faced with many challenges.

The first consideration was the character of Jack himself. In many of the versions of the story that I encountered, Jack came off as lazy, dim-witted, and somewhat unscrupulous. (After all, stealing from a giant is still stealing, isn’t it?) These were not qualities I wanted for my young protagonist.

In my version of this story, Jack is not dim-witted; he is cheerful and optimistic. However, Jack’s mother is cynical and pessimistic—hardened by her penniless widowhood. She perceives her son’s happiness as stupidity. She wonders how he can be happy in his poverty.

This dysfunctional parent-child relationship is apparent right from the opening number (“That Boy Don’t Know Beans!”). During the song, the audience realizes that Jack’s mother is more concerned about *her* lot in life than about Jack’s well-being; the audience also learns that her neighbors do not share her opinion of her son.

A backstory reveals that Jack’s father was killed fighting the giant during one of the ogre’s raids on the village. While Jack sees his father’s actions as heroic, Jack’s mother sees them as folly; her husband’s bravery cost him his life and landed her in her penniless situation. Jack’s desire to become a hero is revealed in his first song (“Something Bigger”).

On his way to sell his cow at the market, Jack encounters a Gypsy named Maurio. For me, the creation of this character (and his wife, Maria) pulled the story together. As a child, I remember being perplexed with the whole cow-bean trade. I mean, if this man had *magic* beans, why would he trade them for Jack’s ordinary cow?

As a playwright, the motivations of all the characters have to make sense to me. I decided that Maurio made the trade because he did not believe that the beans were magical. I created a wife for Maurio so someone could question his reasons for the trade.

This culminated in a quartet number for Jack, Jack’s mother, Maurio, and Maria (“Where Was Your Head?”). While Jack’s mother and Maria berate Jack and Maurio, respectively, Jack defends his trade and his belief in the magic beans.

Later, Jack’s discovery of the beanstalk vindicates his belief, and he climbs the beanstalk in triumph. His intentions are pure rather than unscrupulous: he

plans to slay the giant, thereby avenging his father's death and reclaiming the villagers' stolen treasures ("Something Bigger [Reprise]").

Once atop the beanstalk, Jack faces new challenges . . . and so did I. First, there is the character of the giant to consider. My experience in performing and directing has taught me that one can never cast *the* perfect actor in a role. Some sort of compromise is always made (actors who sort of sing, singers who kind of dance, and more of the same). I decided the most important requirement for the giant should be that he *appears* to be a giant. Therefore, I made a conscious effort to stress that the chosen actor be physically large; I kept his other requirements minimal. He only has one major song ("Just Because I Can"), which he can speak-sing if necessary; the song is also backed by actual singers. In addition, the giant has the fewest lines.

Another challenge I faced was the depiction of the harp and the hen as characters. I wrote them as young girls transformed accordingly by the giant's spellcraft. Melody seemed a natural choice for the name of the harp, and the hen became her sister, Hannah.

I had decided even as early as the original outline that the sisters would have a duet. I focused on what the girls had in common. The harp is made of *gold*, and the hen lays *golden* eggs, so I came up with the title "Good as Gold." The lyric evolved from a comedy novelty number into a serious ballad depicting the plight of two girls who were living (like Jack) in a dysfunctional home (they are victims of the giant's abuse). True happiness for Melody and Hannah is a distant memory, so they settle for being good to avoid riling the Giant.

Rather than give the giant a wife, I created the character of Lettie, who is Melody and Hannah's mother. Through Lettie's relationship with her daughters, Jack is able to see how a truly loving family interacts. Lettie, representing many women in an abusive situation, is fearful of rocking the boat, and she expresses this fear to Jack in her song ("Up Here").

Meeting Lettie, Melody, and Hannah strengthens Jack's resolve to slay the giant. The first act closes with a song like "One Day More" (*Les Misérables*) in which the major characters sing together (but introspectively) about their hopes for the future.

The second act opens with Jack's mother, who is convinced that her missing son is dead. She leads the neighbors in mourning ("Kingdom in the Sky"). Jack appears, ruining his mother's chance to grieve for him. Jack's story about the giant, the harp, and the hen fall on deaf ears as far as his mother is concerned. However, Maurio and Maria (determined to recover the magic beans) find their way to Jack's cottage. They hear Jack's story and become convinced that there is much gold to be had by "Stalkin'" the boy when he climbs back into the sky.

Jack heads back up the beanstalk with his mother in pursuit. She realizes that her son has been putting himself in harm's way in order to prove to her that he is truthful. She knows she has wronged her son, and she seeks to make amends lest he suffer the same fate as his father.

Originally, I intended for Jack's mother to have her epiphany offstage. That decision came across as false and forced. I realized that the audience needed to *see* Jack's mother comprehend the error of her ways, so I added the song "Lament" to the score. This song is simply a reprise of Jack's part in "Where Was Your Head?"

In most versions of "Jack and the Beanstalk," Jack is usually a lad of about nine or ten. I decided to make him a teen (fourteen or fifteen) so I could include a romantic subplot for him. This subplot is realized in the duet "I Don't Know the Words," which he sings with Melody. During "The Chase (Instrumental)," Jack bests the giant . . . and Maurio and Maria as well.

After the giant is slain, Melody and Hannah are restored to their original forms; and Hannah gifts Jack with a golden egg that will make him and his mother rich. Jack returns the villagers' treasures, singing that he knew all along that he could be a hero ("Up Here [Reprise]").

Jack is joined by his mother, who is more interested in Jack's safe return than in the golden egg he proffers. Jack's mother joins Lettie in singing the moral of the story: children, like beanstalks, need love to grow ("Finale").

Ocean Moon
Kaytlen Smith



These Last Words

Gabriel Ruiz

Primary Characters

DEREK, early to mid-20s, a new college graduate
FREA, early 20s, the object of DEREK's affection
KATRINA, mid-20s, DEREK's ex-girlfriend
NATHAN, early to mid-20s, DEREK's best friend
RUDY, mid-20s, a drunk party guest

Secondary Characters

EXTRAS, party guests

Setting

The action takes place after college graduation at a house party. The time is the present.

Scene 1

(DEREK and NATHAN enter through the center of the audience. DEREK is mumbling to himself. The curtain is closed during this scene.)

NATHAN: Here we are. You ready?

DEREK: *(To himself.)* I've known you for a few years. I've always seen you as a good friend, but I have a confession to make. *(Beat.)* No, that's not going to work.

NATHAN: What the hell are you doing?

DEREK: I'm still thinking about what I'm going to say to Frea.

NATHAN: You're still thinking about that? You've been saying the same things over and over again on a loop the whole ride up here. Stop thinking. It's not going to help you.

DEREK: Well, it's making me nervous.

NATHAN: Listen to me, Mister BA in BS. This is what you do, and you better pay attention to this: when you see her, just say whatever comes out of your mouth and let the words flow.

DEREK: I know that, Nathan, but I just have to do this tonight. I'm leaving town tomorrow, and I know if I don't tell her, I'll end up regretting it.

NATHAN: So tell me again. Why are you doing this? Of all the years you've known her—all those times you were alone, snuggled up on a cold, wet winter's night when all you had to do was rub noses—you choose now as the time to profess your love to her.

DEREK: Have you ever loved somebody so much it makes you cry? Have you ever needed someone so bad you can't sleep at night? Have you? Have you?

NATHAN: You're so madly in love that you've resorted to quoting nineties love songs?

DEREK: What do you want me to say? That I fell for her the first time I met her? That if I don't tell her how I feel, I'll be asking myself "If only . . . ?" for the rest of my life and long after I'm dead?

NATHAN: Okay, then. I guess we're not just here to party.

DEREK: I can tell you are. This is my first, last, and only chance. How would I ever know if I—?

NATHAN: Okay. Enough. Who do you think you are? Some lovesick puppy quote machine? Derek, look at me. You can do this. You just need to have the confidence.

DEREK: What do you mean by that?

NATHAN: You know. The confidence.

(He begins to perform a dance that hints at a pelvic thrust.)

DEREK: You're right. I can do this. I'm confident. I'm confident.

(He mimics NATHAN's dance while repeating "I'm confident.")

NATHAN: You're scared, aren't you?

(DEREK stops his dance.)

DEREK: Like a little child.

NATHAN: Good! Let's get in there.

DEREK: *(Taking a deep breath.)* Here goes nothing.

(As NATHAN starts to move towards the closed curtain, DEREK freezes while taking deep breaths. NATHAN grabs him.)

NATHAN: Will you just get in there?

(NATHAN pushes him towards the curtain, and it opens.)

Scene 2

(The set is decorated in the style of a regular college graduation party. There are some guests on one end of the stage playing some type of drinking game, and more guests are gathered around a couch. DEREK starts to look around the room for FREA while NATHAN starts looking for a drink.)

DEREK: Do you think she's here?

NATHAN: Well, I don't know. Seeing that this is her house, I'm guessing . . . maybe she's somewhere in the general vicinity.

(DEREK gives him a look.)

NATHAN: Just a guess.

DEREK: I don't see her anywhere.

NATHAN: Derek, for the love of God! Frea is not going to walk right up to you and leap into your arms.

DEREK: (*Looking USL.*) I think I see her.

NATHAN: Yeah. Trust me, that's her. *Go!*

(*NATHAN hastily pushes him USL while FREA enters from SR. NATHAN looks USL, trying to call DEREK.*)

NATHAN: Der— (*He notices FREA behind him.*) Hey, Frea.

FREA: Nathan. What's up? Glad you could make it. (*They hug.*) Is Derek with you? I thought I heard you say his name.

NATHAN: Oh, I was looking for this guy. (*He grabs a random EXTRA.*) Yeah. This guy. Derek is around here somewhere. I believe he was looking for you.

FREA: Do you know where he went?

NATHAN: I think he went (*He looks USL and then USR.*) that way.

(*FREA looks back SR confused; then she turns back to NATHAN.*)

FREA: Are you sure?

NATHAN: Yes. I'm very sure he did. Besides, if he's not there, he'll find you eventually.

FREA: Cool. Thanks.

(*FREA exits USR.*)

NATHAN: (*To the EXTRA.*) So how are you?

(*They engage in a brief conversation. DEREK enters from USL looking a bit annoyed.*)

DEREK: Nathan. (*No answer.*) Nathan. (*Still no answer.*) Nathan!

NATHAN: What?

DEREK: Dude, she wasn't there.

NATHAN: Well, that's because I saw her—

DEREK: You saw her? Where did she go?

NATHAN: Look at you. I've never seen anyone so nervous before. Remind me never to set you up on any blind dates.

DEREK: All right. Just stop it.

NATHAN: Derek, it's not brain surgery. All you have to do is look her in the eye and speak.

DEREK: I'm just so nervous.

NATHAN: Damn it, Derek! Focus! I've known you for . . . how long? Four-and-a-half years now? I don't think waiting here will hurt you. You have plenty more friends than me and Frea. You're also saying goodbye to this guy here and her and those two dudes over there. Besides, you know she's around here somewhere. It's not like she's going to leave the party and not come back. Here's an idea. (*He finds a drink and hands it to DEREK.*) Drink this. (*DEREK does so.*) Still feel nervous?

(*FREA enters SR and crosses towards the couch.*)

DEREK: Yes.

NATHAN: Well, you better snap out of it fast because there she is.

DEREK: Who? Frea?

NATHAN: No, the Dalai Lama, you idiot. (*He turns DEREK around.*) Here. Do I need to make it more obvious for you?

DEREK: There she is. (*Beat.*) I can't move my legs. What was I thinking?

NATHAN: *(He lightly slaps DEREK across the face.)* Snap out of it.

DEREK: What was that for? What did I ever do to you?

NATHAN: Do you know what your problem is? You think too much. Stop it. You don't want the last words you might ever say to her to come out as gibberish. Are you finally getting at what I'm saying here?

DEREK: Loud and clear.

NATHAN: Well, go and remember. *(He does his dance from earlier.)* Be confident.

DEREK: *(He takes a deep breath.)* Here I go.

NATHAN: Will you just move your ass?

(NATHAN pushes DEREK towards FREA. DEREK freezes and turns back towards NATHAN, who threatens to slap him again. DEREK then turns back . . . only to be tackled by RUDY, who is obviously drunk. NATHAN shrugs and begins talking to an EXTRA.)

RUDY: Woo-hoo! Goodbye, college life! I'm finally out of here! Graduation!

(RUDY picks up DEREK and gives him a bear hug.)

Dude, I never would've gotten out of algebra class without you.

DEREK: That wasn't me. It was—

RUDY: Never thought I'd graduate. Sure, it took me eight years, but I did it. I shut 'em up . . . bastards. *(He notices DEREK gasping for air.)* What was that?

DEREK: Can't breathe. Need air.

RUDY: My bad. *(He loosens his grip.)* I got carried away.

DEREK: *(Smelling RUDY's breath.)* That's not all you got carried away with.

(As RUDY tries to help DEREK, FREA crosses in front of them. RUDY drops DEREK and crosses to her. DEREK stands up, seeing that RUDY has blocked his path to FREA. DEREK runs to NATHAN, and they try to formulate a plan to get RUDY away from FREA.)

RUDY: Hey, Frea, this is one kick . . . hell . . . ass . . . ass kick . . . yeah. The kegs in the back are awesome.

FREA: What kegs? I don't know what you're talking about.

RUDY: Yeah. Those are mine. *(He laughs at himself.)* Man, I'm so wasted. *(He looks at FREA in a seductive manner.)* Damn! Look at you in them jeans. So hot! So . . . can I see you in those jeans?

FREA: What?

RUDY: What I meant was "Can I be your jeans?"

FREA: What are you talking about?

RUDY: I want to cover you in feathers and make you my own personal chicken.

FREA: You're not making any sense.

RUDY: I love you.

FREA: Now you're scaring me.

(As FREA tries to escape from RUDY, DEREK casts about for any nearby bottle or cup. He finds a bottle.)

DEREK: Here, Rudy. Have another beer.

RUDY: Beer. My favorite science experiment.

(RUDY chugs down his drink as DEREK guides him to the couch.)

DEREK: All right then. Now let's just remember: thinking and speaking are two different things.

(RUDY falls on the couch hugging his bottle.)

FREA: Now that was awkward.

DEREK: From him, I've seen worse

(They laugh. Then they share a moment of uncomfortable silence. RUDY rises from the couch and stumbles offstage.)

FREA: So . . . you're leaving town tomorrow?

DEREK: Yeah. I'm heading out to Houston.

FREA: Are you excited?

DEREK: Very. Going out there, molding young children's minds I just don't know what to expect.

FREA: I know you, Derek. You'll do fine.

DEREK: You think so?

FREA: Trust me. *(She puts her hand on his shoulder.)* You will.

(Beat.)

DEREK: Frea?

FREA: Yes?

DEREK: I've got something I need to tell you.

FREA: Well, what is it?

(As DEREK tries to find the words, KATRINA enters from DSR.)

DEREK: Well, I've known you for about three years, and, uh, I have a bit of a confession to make. I . . . I . . .

(KATRINA screams as she finally spots DEREK.)

KATRINA: Derek? Is that you?

(DEREK turns around and sees KATRINA. Looking scared, he turns back around. KATRINA pulls out a bottle of hairspray from her purse and makes herself ready to confront DEREK.)

DEREK: Please tell me there's someone else here named Derek.

FREA: I doubt it.

(KATRINA puts away her hairspray. Then she runs across the room and jumps on DEREK.)

KATRINA: Oh, my God! I can't believe it. I never thought I'd see you again.

DEREK: Uh, yeah. Well, here I am.

KATRINA: I knew you wouldn't leave without me. I mean, I knew you wouldn't leave without saying goodbye to me.

DEREK: Yeah. How could I not?

NATHAN: *(Looking offstage.)* Hey, Rudy. What are you doing talking to the stove?

(NATHAN exits.)

RUDY: *(From offstage.)* Yo, Nathan. Meet my new drinking buddy. His name's Steve.

NATHAN: *(From offstage.)* Dude. Seriously. There's nobody here, and you have a six pack in the oven.

RUDY: *(From offstage.)* Yeah, but he listens to me.

FREA: I've got to stop that before it gets weird. *(Hesitantly.)* I guess I'll just give you two some time alone.

(She exits.)

DEREK: Frea, wait. Don't leave me here with Kat—

(He starts to follow FREA, but KATRINA blocks his path. She puts her arms around him.)

So, uh, how are you?

(KATRINA's hands are all over him as she seats him on the couch.)

KATRINA: Oh, don't worry about her. She's always butting into other people's business. Is it true that you're moving to Boston?

DEREK: Well, actually I'm moving to Houston, but you're kinda close.

KATRINA: You're still going to be a preacher?

DEREK: No. I'm going to be a teacher.

KATRINA: *(She giggles.)* Silly me . . . but listen, Derek. I want to talk to you about something.

DEREK: About what?

KATRINA: About us, silly! Where we stand. Our . . . future!

DEREK: Future?

(KATRINA giggles as she plays with her hair. She notices that something is wrong.)

KATRINA: Hold that thought. *(She straddles him.)* I need to go freshen up. *(She places her knee on his crotch.)* I'll be back.

(She jumps off of DEREK, kneeling him cruelly, and she exits SR. DEREK, writhing in pain, falls off the couch.)

DEREK: I've got to get out of here.

(NATHAN enters holding a six pack of beer. He notices DEREK.)

NATHAN: I know that love hurts, but . . . damn!

DEREK: Dude, you need to help me.

NATHAN: What do you need my help for?

DEREK: Dude! Kat—

RUDY: *(From offstage.)* Nate! It's your turn for the beer bong.

NATHAN: Gotta go.

(NATHAN turns to exit.)

DEREK: Wait. Katrina is here!

NATHAN: Who shot a deer?

DEREK: No! I mean—

(DEREK tries to reclaim NATHAN's attention, but NATHAN exits. Chants of "Chug! Chug!" are heard from offstage. DEREK looks SR, trying to spot KATRINA. FREA enters from SL and crosses behind DEREK.)

FREA: Do you have to go that badly?

(DEREK screams and hides behind the couch. He jostles a cup perched on the back of the couch, and the cup's contents spill down his back.)

DEREK: Stay away, you Jezebel! *(He notices FREA.)* Oh. It's you.

FREA: Are you alright?

DEREK: *(Climbing out from behind the couch.)* Suddenly, I feel a cold breeze down my back.

FREA: That's because your back is all wet.

(She takes off his shirt, leaving him wearing only an undershirt. They sit down on the couch.)

DEREK: Yeah, and it's my good shirt, too.

FREA: I always thought you looked kinda dorky in that shirt.

DEREK: Dorky? Just dorky? I thought you said I looked good . . . almost good enough for the cover of *GQ*.

FREA: Maybe I did, but I take it back.

DEREK: Ouch.

(They laugh. NATHAN enters and playfully sneaks behind DEREK.)

What I was trying to say earlier . . . There's something I need to say. I . . . I . . . I'm . . .

NATHAN: I'm so in need of a hug.

(He hugs DEREK from behind.)

DEREK: *(Jumping.)* Stay away! *(He notices NATHAN.)* Damn it! Again?

(DEREK sits down. NATHAN positions himself between DEREK and FREA.)

NATHAN: Now these are good times. The three of us out on the high seas, causing trouble.

FREA: We're nowhere near the ocean.

DEREK: Let him figure it out.

NATHAN: What I mean is this is the last time the three of us will be together being young and carefree before going off to that place called *(Beat.)* . . . called *(Beat.)* . . . what is it called again? The place with the thing and the short people?

FREA: How much have you had to drink?

DEREK: I'm guessing one or one and a half.

NATHAN: But seriously, I would like to propose a toast. Raise a glass.

DEREK: I don't have a drink.

NATHAN: Well, get one then. *(Beat.)* I'll get you one.

(NATHAN grabs a shot glass and hands it to DEREK.)

NATHAN: A toast to best friends on the last night we'll be together as college students.

DEREK: Uh, actually, I'm the only one who graduated.

FREA: And I still have another year to go.

NATHAN: I'm trying to be sentimental here. Can't you just let me have this moment, please? Now where was I? I remember. To friends, love, and whiskey, the fuel of life. May our glasses never be empty.

(They raise their glasses and drink. Both FREA and DEREK give NATHAN a look, which creates an awkward moment. NATHAN takes the hint and exits.)

FREA: So, Derek, what are you going to miss the most about college?

DEREK: So many things. I don't know what to choose from.

(Beat. He looks into FREA's eyes. KATRINA enters, and looks around the room.)

Of all the things I'll miss, what I'll miss the most is—

(KATRINA finally spots DEREK and runs to him.)

KATRINA: There you are!

DEREK: Not her.

KATRINA: For a second, I thought I lost you.

DEREK: Why? Did you leave?

(KATRINA gives a loud and annoying laugh.)

KATRINA: Oh, Derek, you're funny. You're just the funniest guy I know.

DEREK: And you . . . are you. Oh, you.

(KATRINA laughs again, this time in FREA's face. FREA stands and covers her nose. KATRINA moves onto the couch seductively.)

KATRINA: So where were we?

DEREK: *(Covering his nose.)* Maybe getting a mint?

KATRINA: Now I know where we were. So, Derek, considering our past, I know the last few months were kind of uncomfortable between you and me.

DEREK: What are you getting at here?

RUDY: *(From offstage.)* Condom fight!

(Several EXTRAS run offstage.)

KATRINA: I know our relationship didn't exactly work out the way we wanted it to be.

DEREK: It depends on your definition of *exactly*.

KATRINA: What I exactly mean is that I know I never was the best meaning of the word *girlfriend*.

DEREK: What in the hell are you talking about?

KATRINA: I was wondering, do you think that maybe, just maybe in some other time, another place, or perhaps *(She points to her ring finger.)* in the near future, there could be another chance?

DEREK: (*Jumping up.*) Hold up, Katrina. Another chance? Listen to yourself. Our past? What past is there?

KATRINA: It's what wakes me up in the morning.

DEREK: That past you keep talking about consists of going on three dates two years ago. That barely constitutes a relationship.

KATRINA: It still feels like it was yesterday.

(*RUDY enters and stumbles through the room.*)

DEREK: That's what I mean. You're making a huge deal out of a distorted thought in your head.

KATRINA: You *do* care about what I think!

DEREK: You're not listening. I told you a long time ago, and I'll tell you again: there was no connection at all; it would never ever *ever* work.

KATRINA: You're being modest.

(*RUDY stumbles between them and falls to the floor.*)

DEREK: There is no modesty. I'm just telling you the truth.

KATRINA: Don't lie to yourself, Derek. I know you still want me.

DEREK: What is it going to take for you to realize that I'm not into you? And another thing, I—

(*KATRINA grabs and kisses him. FREA enters and notices them. She gags and runs offstage. DEREK pushes KATRINA away.*)

DEREK: Why did you do that?

KATRINA: Why shouldn't I?

DEREK: You . . . I . . .

KATRINA: I *do* love me! I mean, you *do* love me!

DEREK: No! No! No! A million times no! (*Beat.*) Oh, crap!

(*DEREK exits in a hurry, and KATRINA runs after him.*)

KATRINA: Derek, wait! Don't leave me!

(*NATHAN enters and spots a couple of attractive female EXTRAS who are talking about what just happened. He sneaks up behind them and joins their conversation. They both give him a look.*)

NATHAN: I've been waiting all night to find someone like you. Beautiful, charming . . . how your blue dress shines in this dim lighting. (*One of the EXTRAS giggles.*) I've got a secret that I haven't told anyone. I only have twenty-four hours to live. The doctor told me this morning. I came here to party and celebrate life, but the moment I walked into the room, I knew I would want nothing more than to spend my final moments on this earth with you.

(*FREA enters and crosses to NATHAN.*)

FREA: Nathan, I need to talk to you.

NATHAN: Excuse me. (*To FREA.*) Not now. I'm busy. (*He turns back to the EXTRA.*) So . . . where were we? If you can grant me this wish, I can try to pull some strings to put you on the fast track to heaven.

(*FREA interrupts him.*)

FREA: Are you doing that twenty-four-hours-to-live line again?

NATHAN: Excuse me. (*Whispering to FREA.*) Don't ruin this for me. I've got a shot. (*He turns back to the EXTRA.*) Pay no attention to her. As I was saying—

FREA: (*To the EXTRA.*) He does this bit a lot. That's how I met him. If I were you, I would just run.

(*Laughing, the EXTRA leaves with her friend.*)

NATHAN: Uncool. That is so uncool.

FREA: Nathan, I really need to talk to you.

NATHAN: Well, you couldn't have done this about five minutes ago?

FREA: Relax. You weren't going to get any.

NATHAN: You don't know that, do you?

FREA: Maybe not, but I guess you'll never know.

NATHAN: Besides, I think she could go for me. *(Beat.)* Well, at least for one night.

FREA: *(Frustrated.)* Oh, forget it!

NATHAN: Frea, is something wrong?

FREA: Everything is fine. Everything is just fine.

(She turns away from him. Then she sniffs around the general area of the couch.)

I can still smell the sardines and glitter hairspray.

NATHAN: What are you talking about?

FREA: How could someone with that . . . *(She can't find the word.)* Do that to . . . *(Beat.)* Ew!

NATHAN: Do what to who in where?

FREA: Have you seen Derek?

NATHAN: Not for a while. What does he have to do with this?

FREA: You don't know? *(NATHAN shakes his head.)* Katrina was here, and—

NATHAN: Katrina? (*He sniffs.*) I thought I detected a hint of Aqua Net in the air. So what's the problem?

FREA: The problem is they were here, and then I left them alone because Rudy was too drunk to tell the difference between an appliance and a woman. Was he about to hump the toaster?

NATHAN: Never mind about that. Let me get this straight: you left them alone, so the problem is . . . wait. Is there even a problem at all here?

FREA: The problem is that when I walked in here, I saw Katrina making out with Derek.

NATHAN: You're joking, aren't you?

FREA: I'm totally serious.

NATHAN: So Katrina appears from out of nowhere to give a proper sendoff—in her own mind—to someone who . . . uh . . . well, I can't think of anything else.

FREA: She still thinks they're dating.

NATHAN: That still doesn't get to the point about why you're angry.

FREA: I think I'm going to be sick.

NATHAN: Frea, am I detecting a hint of jealousy here?

FREA: What?

NATHAN: You're jealous!

FREA: You're crazy.

NATHAN: There's no use hiding it, Frea. I can tell.

FREA: You're wrong.

NATHAN: Whatever.

FREA: For the last time, I'm not jealous.

NATHAN: You're turning red in the face.

FREA: No! I'm not! I . . . Oh, hell! I don't want to see him leave.

NATHAN: *(With a silly smirk.)* Now this explains something.

FREA: What's so funny?

NATHAN: Man, I'm good at reading people.

FREA: Do you know something I should know?

(NATHAN doesn't answer her.)

FREA: You do. You know something. *(No answer.)* It's about Derek, isn't it?

NATHAN: You know what, Frea? I feel like getting some fresh air. You should join me.

(They exit. DEREK enters. He is trying to hide from KATRINA. He discovers that the coast is clear, and he collapses on the couch. KATRINA enters and playfully hides behind the couch. She comes out from behind the couch and covers DEREK's eyes.)

KATRINA: You can't hide from me now. *(DEREK jumps off the couch.)* Why are you hiding from me?

DEREK: Why are you still here?

KATRINA: Because I can't stand to see you go.

(She gives him a hug. He pulls away.)

DEREK: Listen, Katrina. For the last time: any highly glorified image you have about me is just plain wrong. Get that through your head. There isn't any type of relationship, connection, or link between us at all.

(KATRINA stands speechless while EXTRAS gather around to watch the spectacle.)

DEREK: You've been eyeing me like a vulture. Let me ask you something. What are you trying to get out of me?

(Beat. KATRINA doesn't answer.)

Nothing. Just like I thought. I don't mean to come off like the bad guy here, but you need to move on and realize I never want to see you again.

(Silence. KATRINA looks like she is about to have a nervous breakdown. She clenches her fists and is about to take a swing at DEREK . . . but she stops herself.)

KATRINA: Okay. I guess that since you won't be here, you don't want to see me anymore. Okay . . . but before I go, I just want you to know in front of everyone else here exactly what you're walking out on. I gave you the best four weeks of my life. Take one last good look because when you're all alone at night, and you realize that you want me back, don't expect to pick up the phone and have me run to you. Have a good life, Derek.

(She reaches for a drink to throw at DEREK, but she grabs an empty glass. She throws the glass aside. She grabs a male EXTRA and begins making out with him. They slowly exit.)

DEREK: Uh, okay then, I guess.

(NATHAN enters from SL.)

NATHAN: Wow! I never thought she'd be here.

RUDY: *(From offstage.)* Everybody, stay away from the microwave. It bites back.

DEREK: I think I let her down gently.

NATHAN: Dude, not even a shrink could fix her.

DEREK: I know. I know. I was there. (*Beat.*) I had Frea right here, and then that hurricane blew in. (*He looks around for FREA.*) I don't even know where Frea went.

NATHAN: I know where she went . . . but before I tell you where she is and you try to play out that romantic scene you've been dreaming about, hear me out. I just talked to Frea outside, and we spoke about a few things: the weather, the economy, that lip-lock Katrina gave you—

DEREK: The what?

NATHAN: The economy?

DEREK: No. The other thing.

NATHAN: I'm getting to that.

DEREK: (*He grabs NATHAN by the shirt.*) What did she say?

NATHAN: Dude, let go of me and I'll tell you. (*DEREK lets go.*) Whatever Katrina did to you almost made Frea throw up on my shoes, but mostly she talked about how much she'll really be missing you.

DEREK: Are you serious?

NATHAN: Maybe.

(*RUDY runs in scared and leans on DEREK.*)

RUDY: Help me! The Ewoks are humping my legs.

(*DEREK panics, and RUDY falls to the floor.*)

NATHAN: Wow! That guy is wasted. Anyway, Frea is right outside waiting for you to talk to her. Why don't you be a good little boy and talk to her like you intended to?

DEREK: What did you tell her?

(NATHAN gestures for DEREK to leave. DEREK does so, but he quickly runs back to NATHAN.)

DEREK: I don't think I can do this.

NATHAN: Go out there and do it!

(DEREK looks around the room. He takes a deep breath and exits DS as the curtain closes behind him.)

Scene 3

(FREA enters and sits on the apron, looking out in the distance. DEREK takes a deep breath and walks up to her.)

DEREK: Hell of a night, huh?

(FREA looks at him; then she turns away.)

FREA: I guess you could say that.

DEREK: What are you doing out here?

FREA: I just need some air after all that craziness in there.

DEREK: I see.

FREA: I've also had a lot on my mind lately.

DEREK: Like what?

(DEREK sits next to her.)

FREA: I've been thinking about . . . you leaving. I mean, you're a great . . .
(Beat.) I don't know what I'm trying to say here.

DEREK: I think I know what you mean. I've been wondering what life will be like without all of this. I don't know what exactly I'm getting into, but I can't wait to find out.

(They share a brief moment of silence.)

FREA: I usually feel comfortable telling everything to you. I don't know if I'll ever have that type of friendship with anyone again.

DEREK: Frea, look. I have to say something in case I never see you again. *(Beat.)* I think I'm in love with you.

FREA: You think you're in love with me?

DEREK: No. *I know* I'm in love with you. To be honest, I had a bit of a crush on you when we first met. *(He stands up and starts to pace.)* I wanted to tell you a long time ago, but I was scared. I tried to block out any kind of romantic feelings I had for you, and it actually worked. As time went on, I saw you more and more as a friend, and I didn't want to screw that up. But lately, I've been thinking about those times when you needed someone to talk to. Both of us would complain about the people we dated, but when you'd talk about looking for that special someone to make you happy . . . I wished that someone was me.

FREA: Well, I wished that—

DEREK: You might think that I'm some guy with bad timing, but everything I just said is coming from the deepest trenches of my heart. I don't know if or when I'll ever see you again, but if I'd never told you this, I know I would have regretted it. No matter what happens, I will always care for you and love you.

(Beat. FREA stands up)

FREA: Wow! I mean . . . wow. I never knew how much you really felt about me.

DEREK: Yeah. I don't know if there's anything else I can say.

FREA: Don't. *(She crosses to him.)* Just being out here alone with you says enough. I only wish you could've told me how you felt a long time ago.

DEREK: I know. I don't know what—

(She puts her hand on his mouth.)

FREA: That doesn't matter now. *(She leans in to kiss him. Beat.)* I can't. I can't do this.

DEREK: Yes, you can. You just put your lips on mine and—

FREA: *(Pulling away.)* No, Derek. I can't.

DEREK: What just happened?

FREA: Did it ever occur to you that whenever I had those talks with you that I was dropping hints that I maybe I wanted to be with you?

DEREK: Hints?

FREA: Remember how I said I wanted to find a guy just like you? That was a hint.

DEREK: I didn't read that.

FREA: I guess you were too afraid to do anything. I practically laid it out for you a long time ago, but you weren't thinking.

DEREK: I don't believe this.

FREA: I remember when you chased after anyone in a skirt who smiled at you, hoping that she was the one. After all those romances failed, you came running to me. You didn't see what that meant?

DEREK: You did the same thing.

FREA: That was different. I knew I wanted to be with you back then. It took almost four years for you to open up . . . or was it because someone as easy as Katrina wasn't giving you enough goodnight kisses?

DEREK: She has nothing to do with this.

FREA: Right. I saw it right from the moment she wrapped her arms around you.

DEREK: Frea, listen to me.

FREA: No, Derek. You listen to *me*. All those things you said to me . . . did you really feel that way, or were you saying that just to get laid? Tell me.

DEREK: It's nothing like that. I—

FREA: Enough already! I gave you a window a long time ago. I don't know how it would've been if we'd gotten together, but I guess you'll never know. I'm sorry, but it's too late. I have to go.

(She starts to exit.)

DEREK: But Frea—

FREA: Derek, I just don't feel that way about you anymore.

DEREK: Frea!

FREA: Leave me alone, Derek. *(Crying.)* I hate to see it end like this, but—

(She exits.)

DEREK: Frea, wait! Frea! Damn it!

(Frustrated, DEREK sits down. NATHAN enters.)

NATHAN: Hey, Romeo. How did it go?

(DEREK doesn't answer.)

NATHAN: Derek, are you still alive? Is everything okay?

DEREK: I told her.

NATHAN: You did?

DEREK: Yeah.

NATHAN: So what happened?

DEREK: I told her everything, and she just threw it in my face. She gave me some crap about how I wasted some window of opportunity she gave me a long time ago.

NATHAN: Seriously?

DEREK: Yeah. She could've been mine a long time ago, but I didn't do anything.

NATHAN: Dude, that really sucks. What else happened?

DEREK: Nothing. She ran away crying.

NATHAN: That's it?

DEREK: That's it.

NATHAN: Derek, I don't know what exactly you said to her or what she told you, but what were you expecting? Did you actually think she was going to fall in love with you like that (*He snaps his fingers.*), and ride off into the sunset with you on some galloping horse?

DEREK: I don't know.

NATHAN: You kind of knew what was going to happen. Nothing good was going to come out of this.

DEREK: But I didn't think being told to practically get out of her life was an option.

NATHAN: I don't know what else to say . . . but you did what you set out to do. You spilled your heart out to Frea, and now you have no regrets.

DEREK: You know what? You're right.

NATHAN: I'm always right. Look. You're going to be a teacher. Learn from what just happened. *(He looks at his watch.)* Look at that. It's getting kinda late. Don't you have to leave early in the morning?

DEREK: Yeah. It's late. Let's go. I'll drive.

NATHAN: Not with your broken heart.

DEREK: How much did you have to drink?

NATHAN: Just enough to let you drive.

(As they exit, DEREK's cell phone goes off as he receives a text message. He reads the message while NATHAN tries to look over his shoulder.)

NATHAN: What's up? *(DEREK shows him the message)* Who sent that? *(DEREK points at the phone.)* So what are you going to do?

(DEREK looks at his phone. Then he looks back and forth between the curtain, and the phone a few times. Beat.)

DEREK: Goodbye.

(He puts his phone in his pocket. He and NATHAN exit through the audience. The lights fade to black.)

About the Contributors

Randall Cobb is a lifelong poet, an A&M graduate, a native of Texarkana, Texas, and a member of the Texarkana Poet Society. He won his first competition slam against the Hot Springs Poet's Loft team in 2001.

Frumi Cohen is a playwright, a lyricist, a composer, and a teacher. She lives and works in Pennsylvania.

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Doris Davis is an English professor at Texas A&M University-Texarkana and the director of the East Texas Writing Project. She enjoys playing the piano and spending time with her grandchildren.

Jonathan Elder is a native of Texarkana, Texas. He is an English major at Texas A&M University-Texarkana, and he enjoys writing music. When he is not at school, he works at Christus St. Michael Hospital as a certified aerobics instructor and personal trainer.

Whitney Ryan Garrity wrote and directed his first musical at the age of twenty-one. He has created dozens of plays, revues, and musicals. He has worked with various drama-oriented organizations in both New Jersey and Texas as a performer, a director, and an artistic director. He has also founded several youth drama programs. He currently resides in Texas, where he continues to write.

Melanie Gloster secretly wishes to work as a photographer for *National Geographic*. In the real world, she has recently completed a degree in English from Texas A&M University-Texarkana. Prior to returning to college, she worked as a fundraising and public relations professional for Opportunities, Inc., a local non-profit organization. Melanie's hobbies include spending time with her husband and children, lugging a camera to parts unknown, cooking, and studying Tudor history and culture.

Amber Harris lives in Texarkana, Texas. She fills her time with hot baths and wonderful literature. She is a member of the Texarkana Poet Society and an employee of Starbucks Coffee Company.

Alisha Jael was born in Texarkana, Texas. She is a student at Texarkana College, the co-founder of the Texarkana Poet Society, and the mother of a beautiful daughter (Zoe).

Randy Jones is a self-taught artist who has drawn since he was a child. Later in life, tattoo art became his main influence. (He has many tattoos.) Drawing continues to be his passion; it helps him symbolize his ideas about life and life's struggles.

Linda Kaufman has been a co-director of the Beth-El Players in San Antonio, Texas, since the group's debut in 1994. She has written scores for ten musicals, and she has been awarded two San Antonio Globe Awards for Best Musical Score. She writes a monthly column for the *San Antonio Jewish Journal* ("Mishugas"), and she has released a CD featuring selections from her columns and her compositions.

Mellissa Marlowe is a director, a playwright, and an actor in San Antonio, Texas. She is an assistant professor of drama at Northwest Vista College, and she directs shows for the Witte Museum and San Antonio's Shakespeare in the Park.

Patricia Moore traveled around the United States and the Middle East before moving to New York in 1994. While in Greenwich Village, she lived in a senior center and participated in art classes. Her wonderful teacher always motivated and encouraged her talent. Although a late bloomer as an artist, she has always found creating art both relaxing and challenging. She currently lives in Texarkana, Texas.

Corinne Patterson aspires to become a published writer of novels for young adults. Currently, she studies English and history at Texas A&M University-Texarkana. She resides in the small town of Redwater, Texas, with her husband and her five children. Corinne's hobbies include attempting to learn to play any musical instrument she can get her hands on, dabbling with a room full of arts and crafts, and reading until she cannot see the print any longer.

Melba Peña was born in Brownsville, Texas, on January 17, 1949. She began writing poetry to help relieve the stress she felt while enduring difficult times. She also began painting with acrylics after she turned fifty. She made a late start with her creative endeavors, but she is passionate about her writing and painting. If she can reach one person, her efforts will have been worthwhile.

Tamara Richert believes her strongest creative influences are the trials and tribulations of life. She loves literature and writing, which continues to be a mode of self-expression that grants her release from her daily chaos.

Sheila Rinear is an award-winning, published playwright and screenwriter. Over two dozen of her plays have been produced. She earned her bachelor's degree in English from St. Joseph's University in Philadelphia, and she earned her master's degree in drama from the University of Oklahoma. Formerly a theatre-arts teacher at the public-school level, she currently teaches playwriting at Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas.

Gabriel Ruiz is an actor, a poet, and a writer. He is a graduate of Texas A&M University-Kingsville with a bachelor's degree in theatre arts. He currently resides in San Antonio, Texas.

Kaytlon Smith is an English major at Texas A&M University-Texarkana. For her, writing and other creative projects are means for both self-expression and self-discovery. She enjoys reading, painting, and organic cooking. In addition to spending time with family members and close friends, Kaytlon loves spending time in nature, especially while indulging in activities such as hiking, camping, and canoeing.

Pat Swartz has practiced art since grade school. She continued her art studies in high school, and she took one college art course. She originally preferred working in oil, but using watercolor became (and remains) her passion.

Agnes Tirrito is employed by Texarkana Independent School District as a master teacher at Westlawn Elementary's Professional Development School, where she mentors teachers in training and teaches fourth grade. She is an adjunct faculty member at Texas A&M University-Texarkana, and she is a co-director for the East Texas Writing Project (a National Writing Project site). Her interests include cooking, photography, fishing, and the arts.

Charles H. (Chic) Walcoff was a clothier and entrepreneur in Trenton, New Jersey. Well loved by his customers, his friends, and his family, he died in 1962.

Glenn L. Wiley is a native of Ecorse, Michigan, a suburb of Detroit. He retired from the United States Navy in 1993 after twenty-one years of service. He has studied martial arts for thirty years, and he received the rank of third-degree black belt from Master Spydr Akau. Glenn thanks God for his health, his children (Jonay, John, and Joni), and his extended family in Detroit. Currently, Glenn lives in (and writes poetry about) Texarkana, Texas.