

Aquila Review

**Volume 2
Spring 2009**

Texas A&M University-Texarkana

2009 *Aquila Review*

Editors

Brian C. Billings (Editor)
Colleen Narens (Student Editor)

Cover Art

Krystyl Wimberly (*Cold Roses*)

Aquila Review is a nonprofit arts journal published twice each year by Texas A&M University-Texarkana. Funding for this publication is provided by Texas A&M University-Texarkana's English Club and subscriptions to the journal.

Communicate with the staff of *Aquila Review* using the following contact information:

Aquila Review
Texas A&M University-Texarkana
Department of English
P. O. Box 5518
2600 N. Robison Rd.
Texarkana, TX 75505-5518
(903) 223-3022
www.tamut.edu/aquila

© 2009

Submissions

Aquila Review publishes original art, creative nonfiction, drama, fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. Unsolicited interviews and reviews will not be considered. Manuscripts are not read during the summer months.

Submissions may be sent as hard copies, or submissions may be sent in the body of an e-mail to brian.billings@tamut.edu. Simultaneous submissions are encouraged. When mailing hard copies, please include a self-addressed stamped envelope. Submissions without a self-addressed stamped envelope will not be returned. *Aquila Review* cannot accept responsibility for the loss or damage of any materials sent by mail. Sample copies of *Aquila Review* are available upon request for \$8.00 apiece.

Contents

Art

<i>Tongue Piercing</i>	JENNIFER BEATY	07
<i>Jane Eyre Arriving at Thornfield</i>	LAUREN HEHMEYER	70
<i>Ms. Havisham's Gate</i>	LAUREN HEHMEYER	65
<i>Quixote</i>	LAUREN HEHMEYER	61
<i>Sincerely, John Adams</i>	LAUREN HEHMEYER	84
<i>The View to Hemingway's Study</i> <i>from His Key West Home</i>	LAUREN HEHMEYER	87
<i>Atomic Blast Eyewear</i>	RICHARD KARNATZ	80
<i>Burned Out Light Bulb</i>	RICHARD KARNATZ	13
<i>TurnPike</i>	RICHARD KARNATZ	78
<i>Gnome</i>	GERGELY KOVACS	75
<i>Mommy</i>	COLLEEN NARENS	48
<i>New Dreams</i>	AGNES TIRRITO	45
<i>Searching</i>	AGNES TIRRITO	67

Creative Nonfiction

Stop Ignoring the Holiday Season	JAMES CHITTY	71
Why? Oh, Why?	LORI PARAULT	05

Drama

<i>Vow of Silence</i>	DEBRA KAUFMAN	16
<i>I'm a Woman Now</i> <i>(from Hattitude)</i>	LINDA KAUFMAN RACHELLE NEUMAN	50

Fiction

Gigantic	RON BURCH	24
Crazy Cat	JULIE DANIEL	40

Poetry

Mother	LINDA BENNINGHOFF	43
Songs about Boxes	JESSE CAPPS	11
The Couple	GRETCHEN COBB	09
Dark Trenches	GRETCHEN COBB	66
Journey of the Sun	GRETCHEN COBB	14
69	PHILIP DACEY	12
Mary Had a Little Love	DORIS DAVIS	76
Puss in Boots's Complaint	DORIS DAVIS	88
Trees	DORIS DAVIS	60
Beauty and the Fish	R. S. DUNN	77
Gnomeland Security	R. S. DUNN	73
A Reflection on Life Gone	SARAH E. ELLIOTT	68
Old Dog	LAUREN HEHMEYER	42
After Losing My Eyeglasses	H. K. HUMMEL	82
The Day Lily Farmer	ALISHA JAEI	15
An Exhibition of Progression	ALISHA JAEI	41
The New Script	CAROL LEVIN	85
The Day of the Band	KAREN SUE LINSTRUM	62
Snail Trails	SUSAN H. MAURER	08
Where Were You, Wall Street?	MALCOLM MCCALLUM	91
A Complicated Love Story	COLLEEN NARENS	46
In That Cemetery	ANN A. NICHOLAS	64
Boy and Jar	LORI PARAULT	49
Hand-Me-Downs	LORI PARAULT	81
Lime Green	LORI PARAULT	90
Nightfall	LORI PARAULT	49
What's in the Meadow?	LORI PARAULT	86
Mom	TAMARA RICHERT	44
Season/al Master/ed	ELIZABETH KATE SWITAJ	63
Clean Sweep	DIANA LEE VELIE	79
Twin Sorrows:		
November 22, 1963;		
September 11, 2001	DIANA LEE VELIE	59

<u>About the Contributors</u>	93
--------------------------------------	----

Why? Oh, Why?

Lori Parault

Well, it's official. Yesterday, I became old. I never even saw it coming. It happened at 6:53 p.m. at register number seven of the local Wal-Mart. I was putting my grocery sacks in the buggy, and I happened to catch a glimpse of the young . . . ahem . . . lady (okay, she *was* a lady) in the line behind me. Dangling from her nose was a small ring. So help me, it was all I could do not to hand her a tissue and say, "You have a little something . . ." My next thought? "*Do you own a mirror?*"

I understand that at some point in the life of a collective generation, we begin to believe the next generation is going to Hell in a hand basket. I think this belief starts when our firstborn children begin to speak. Looking back, I can't think of one good example of anything my generation has done that even comes close to this body piercing craze. Seriously, the worst we ever did was convince ourselves we were the first ones to wear torn Levi's. (We really believed it, too.) The only people who had tattoos were our crazy uncles who had been in the war. For everyone else, getting a tattoo was tantamount to branding yourself a lowlife wannabe inmate. Getting two piercings in an earlobe (where they belong) was questionable in some circles.

I come from a home where the need for flea collars on the ankles wasn't a valid argument for shaving legs prior to the age of sixteen. I was never as inflexible as that (something to which my children will attest), but I have to say I just don't understand the appeal of piercing.

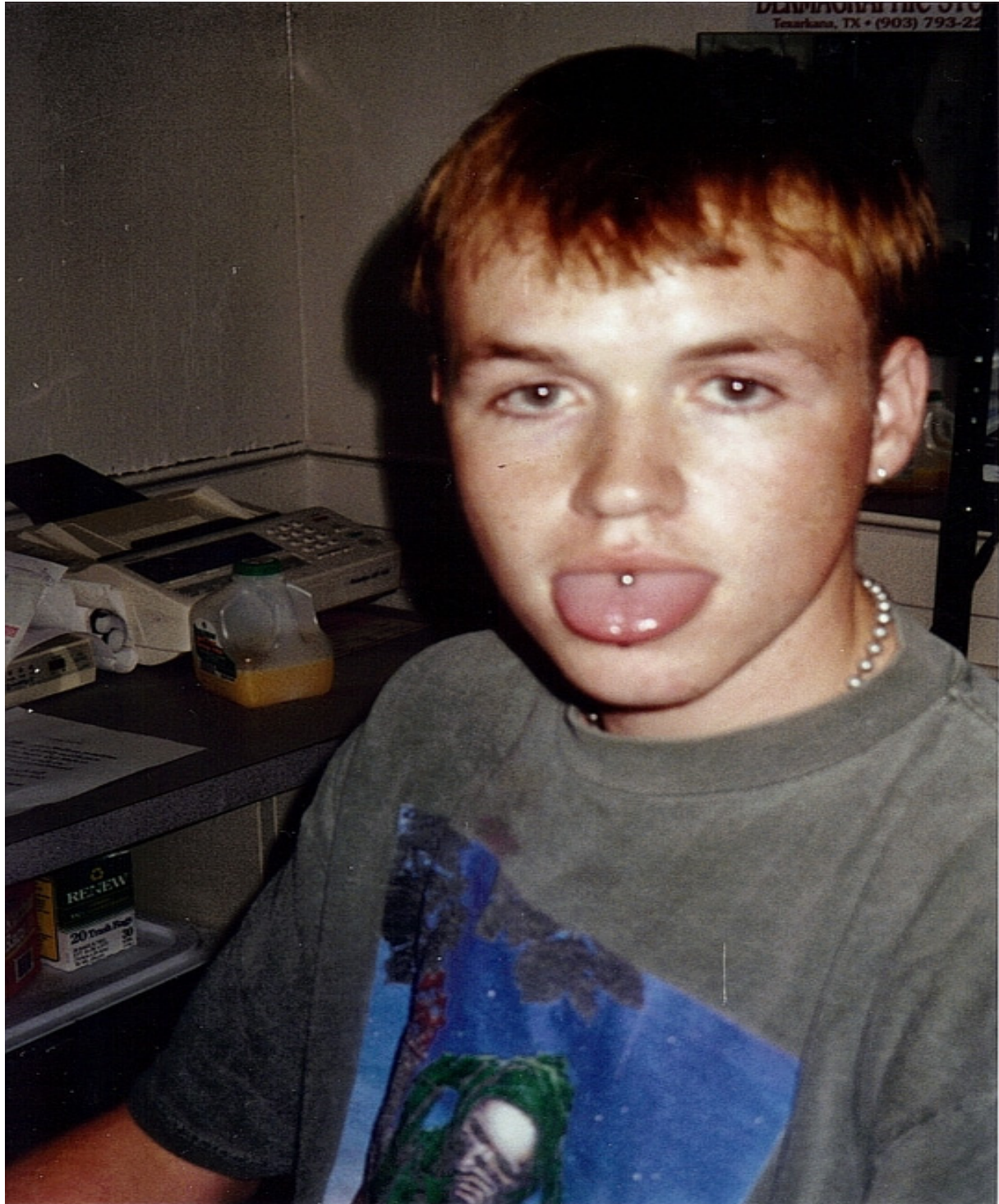
Why in the name of *Vogue* would anyone deliberately put something through the nose that makes it look like the proverbial bat is exiting its cave? (I won't even go into the fact that a ring through the nose symbolically sets the women's movement back to some time before the most recent Ice Age.) Honestly, if someone took a survey, wouldn't fear of having a booger dangling in public rank in the top five of human adult fears? The entire concept is so incomprehensible to me that I'm left wondering if I dreamed the entire Wal-Mart episode.

I understand that the need to adorn the body dates back to the Garden of Eden, but, in all honesty, a fig-leaf bikini wouldn't have caught my attention half so effectively. We humans have an innate desire to make ourselves more attractive. Some ancient instinct driven by the need to procreate keeps us ever vigilant in the upkeep of our appearances. Makeup, hair coloring, lap bands, and Botox—we all want to look our best . . . and I guess this desire is where the mystery lies for me. Do you nose ring wearers not realize that the things are damn ugly? Repulsive,

even? The sight of those rings makes most people recoil in horror. Is this really the reaction you want?

What's next? The deliberate tucking of the skirt into one's hose before going out? Of course, that question brings me around to the whole thong issue . . . but that's another topic.

Tongue Piercing
Jennifer Beaty



Snail Trails

Susan H. Maurer

Salt melts the snail upon the path
How slow the snail trails of the heart
That tears can't wash away
Simon says
Do that
And one does

I've no energy, I say
And my friend, preoccupied,
Remembers she needs to buy batteries

I see why men
Look for life on other planets
Perhaps there someone will understand them

I know that if I scream and no one hears
I'm still screaming
In apartment 2C or outer space
I only suffer from the less fortunate confusions
Not the least
And in the morning
There's another day, Simon says

The Couple

Gretchen Cobb

The beginning is precariously sown into the earth.
Roots begin to anchor and embed, becoming life:
Seedling of Apollo, standing, admired by Bird.
Flowing, cascading, twisting tunnels of water—
Petals (addictive to the eye, the radiant color of blood)
Intertwine into a stem, straight and erect . . . a rose.

Perfumed petals, thick thorns, she remains a rose.
Barring destruction by man, she clings to Earth.
Storms, uprootings, transplantings of blood—
Could this be destiny, to weather this life?
A symbol of beauty generated with water,
With growth, desire comes from the longing bird.

Perfect petals summon the hovering bird.
The bride is adorned with the petals of a rose.
Stones of genesis cycle around in the water.
Creation harbors in the bowels of Earth.
Over and over, she brings forth light and life.
Change comes only with a ribbon of blood.

Transformed by the sun, turned dark as blood—
What sweet aroma is this to entice Bird?
Sailing swiftly along the river of life,
He stops and collects a nectar-drop from Rose.
Their tendrils are sown throughout the earth
Only to become a dark drop on the glistening water.

Stillness and turbulence unite in the water
To grasp the meaning of splattered blood.
Can he prevail upon himself to lift off the Earth?
Through splashing rain and pelting ice, on goes Bird.
Bruised and bent, she always returns, his Rose.
Sorrow abates in the roots of her love; he sees new life.

Memories of sound and sight remain in this life.
Dormant souls linger, sadness washed by water.
He says, "Awake or asleep, I am always with you, Rose."
When he has departed, there is no more blood.
Singing stops, chatter ceases . . . the flight of the bird.
The ground opens. He becomes one with the earth.

With sun and water, love ignites in the chest of Bird.
"My flesh and blood to sprout again on higher ground," prays Rose.
Feathers of a child spread out all over the Earth to renew life.

Songs about Boxes

Jesse Capps

The alarm clock tried to warn me
that something was wrong.
The bed was too roomy,
and poorly used time was resting
on my hands.

It's hard to be greater
than the sum of your parts
when some of your parts are gone.

Someone is holding half of me hostage.
He keeps promising to give it back,
but I continue to open up superficial crates
filled with packing materials
that only want to be friends.

Hm. I know this culprit!
I scream at Him when traffic is slow
and money is tight.

A jealous and broken ninja,
I hide my name in my pocket
because it's my name . . .
and I don't want to wear it out.

With one arm,
I'll hold the blade to His throat
and yell, "Time's up!
Where is my better half?"

Philip Dacey

In this upside-down world,
we're a breathing
yin and yang.
Am I six or nine?
Someday, she'll wear

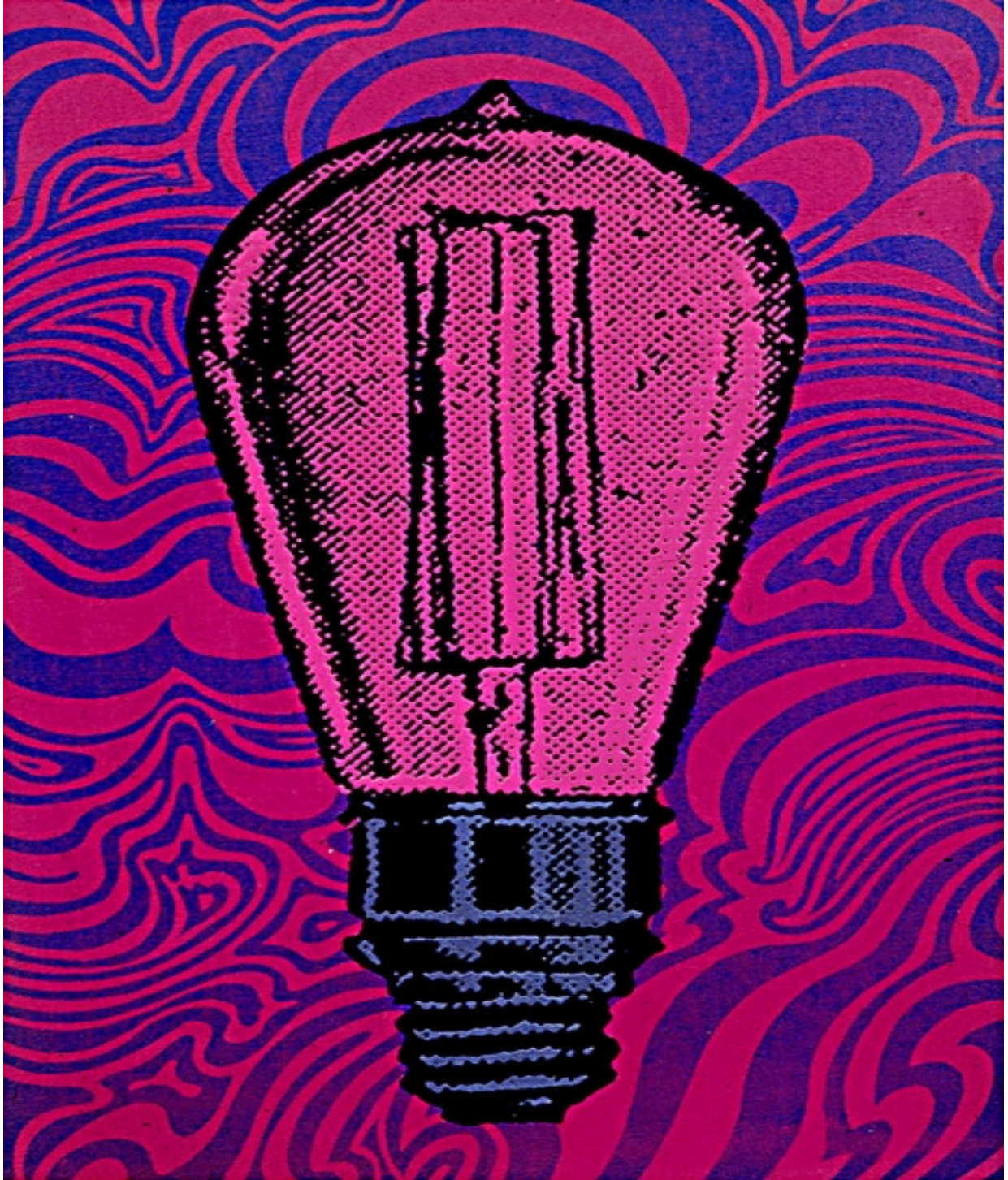
my ears away
like the toes of Italy's
kissed stone saints.
Headgear?
Polar mouths, north and south,

fat life between.
To lunch is to investigate
primordial sources
who tell of Jaw,
usurper of the throne,

tyrant of pleasure.
Two sets of four cheeks each,
homage to Dizzy,
and the feet, lonely sentries
at the limits of empire,

forgotten by the court.
This is love
as comedians know it.
We tighten into a ball
and roll forever.

Burned Out Light Bulb
Richard Karnatz



Journey of the Sun¹

Gretchen Cobb

Faint traces of the morning air waft up into the noonday sun.
Clouds billow and plummet on taut strings of a violin.
Fields rise up to meet me; evening shadows cast out to greet me.
Our life is half over, my dear, though it's really just beginning.
Let us pause to think of all we've had and lost . . .
And of what we shall find and share.
It's time. It's time, love, to move on into the evening.
Retire your basket and cart; I'll put away my pitchfork and spade.
Let no more seeds fall from your apron. Our planting will soon be finished.
Sowing and plowing behind us; a new harvest beyond us.
Unwanted weeds grabbed and tossed to shrivel and die . . .
In the nursery, the sprouts are protected from destruction and pain.
Left behind are the seedlings reminding us of toils and tribulations.
We will begin our twilight's journey as one,
Listening to the songbird's sweet melody.

¹ This poem was inspired by Jean-François Millet's *The Angelus*.

The Day Lily Farmer
Alisha Jael

Led not by genius but by passion,
he toils night and day,
holding fast to his beloved dream,

seeing not mere seed and soil
but the beauty of future,
the blossoming of possibility,

Sacrificing . . . time, work, love . . .
Sowing pieces of himself
within the beds of promise.

Patiently, he waits
to reap of his devotion:
The blooming of selfless affection.

In a glorious moment appears
the realization of his labor,
the flowering of hope.

Then, as quickly as it flourishes,
brandishing its magnificence,
it withers into eternity,

and so the cycle will begin anew,
a worthy sacrifice
for one day of ecstasy.

Vow of Silence
Debra Kaufman

Characters

FRANK, 50s, KATHLEEN's husband

KATHLEEN, 50s, FRANK's wife

STAR, 20s, TREE's wife

TREE, 20s, STAR's husband

Time and Place

The action takes place in the outdoor seating area of a health food café during a hot day in May. The time is the present.

(Flute and guitar music wafts across the lawn. STAR and TREE sit at a table and drink bottled water. STAR holds a baby in a sling. She looks overheated, but TREE is cool and calm. Though silent, he is very present. KATHLEEN and FRANK enter, each carrying a tray of food and drinks.)

FRANK: See a table anywhere?

KATHLEEN: I'm looking. God, it's hot for May. How about over there?

FRANK: In the sun?

KATHLEEN: I don't see another. It's always so crowded on Saturdays.

STAR: Kathleen!

KATHLEEN: Hey, Star, it's great to see you. So this is your little one.

STAR: Yes. This is Willow.

KATHLEEN: A girl? She's beautiful. Hello, Willow.

STAR: Have you met Tree? Tree, Kathleen.

KATHLEEN: Nice to meet you finally. This is my husband, Frank.

FRANK: Star, is it? Hi. *(To TREE.)* And you are—?

STAR: Tree.

FRANK: Tree. And . . . Willow. I had a friend in college named Branch.

(Only KATHLEEN laughs.)

And then there's Twiggy.

KATHLEEN: Was.

FRANK: What? Twiggy died?

KATHLEEN: *(To STAR.)* Twiggy was a model in the sixties. *Our* generation. She was the first famous anorexic. But we didn't call it that then. Just skinny.

STAR: Want to sit down?

KATHLEEN: That'd be great. Thanks. I'm starving.

(FRANK and KATHLEEN sit and begin eating.)

FRANK: This place kills me. The food's good, but it took us—what?—fifteen to twenty minutes to get through the line. At least.

KATHLEEN: Frank's an architect. He can't stand badly designed workflows.

FRANK: It drives me nuts. It's bad enough there's only one line for everyone to get through. It's totally disorganized. The coffee's on one side, the cream and sugar on the other, the napkins somewhere else. Then you get people with shopping carts going through the same line as the lunch line . . .

KATHLEEN: *(Prompting.)* And there's only one exit.

FRANK: One exit! So you have to wind your way through people coming in while you're trying to go out. And everybody's in their own world—lah-dee-dah—just drifting through the day. All the time in the world.

KATHLEEN: (*Overlapping.*) Don't get him started.

FRANK: (*Overlapping.*) Don't get me started. (*To TREE.*) You don't work here, do you?

(*TREE shakes his head.*)

KATHLEEN: Star, I've missed you in class. You've been busy, I see. (*To FRANK.*) Star's in my art class. She's so talented. I'm always amazed at what you do with watercolors. Really, Star—

FRANK: (*To TREE.*) So how old's your baby?

STAR: Sixteen weeks.

FRANK: (*Endearingly.*) Still counting in weeks, huh?

KATHLEEN: Oh, the time goes so fast.

STAR: I guess. In some ways. The days can seem really long, though.

KATHLEEN: I remember.

FRANK: Before you know it, she'll be walking and talking. Help yourselves. We have plenty.

STAR: Thanks. I'll have some goat cheese and a cracker. Yum. And a few olives. Oh, and— (*TREE gives STAR a look.*) I'm hungry. Tree thinks I'm too fat.

KATHLEEN: A nursing mother's supposed to have some extra weight on her. My grandma told me to drink Guinness. "It's good for the milk," she said. (*Beat.*) Nice music, huh? (*To TREE.*) What a beautiful scarf. Did you make it, Star?

STAR: Yeah. It was my birthday present to him.

KATHLEEN: I've never tried batik—

FRANK: Tree, dig in. Help yourself.

KATHLEEN: It's hot for May first, isn't it? May Day.

FRANK: Nobody celebrates May Day anymore. When we were kids, we danced around the Maypole—actually, the tetherball pole. We hung crepe-paper streamers from the top, and everyone grabbed a streamer and we wove in and out, dancing like maniacs.

KATHLEEN: We gave our friends May baskets. Ever hear of that? You'd make up a basket of little things—little people made out of pipe cleaners, penny candies . . . or did our moms bake something? Anyway, then you'd ring your friend's doorbell and run away. If they caught you, they got to kiss you. God, we sound ancient—like we lived in another century.

FRANK: We did. The nineteenth.

KATHLEEN: Uh, twentieth.

FRANK: Dancing and kissing. That's a holiday.

KATHLEEN: Yeah. That's pagans for you.

FRANK: *(To TREE.)* So, how do you like being a father?

(TREE smiles, nods. Pause.)

FRANK: *(Overlapping.)* What—are you a mime?

KATHLEEN: *(Overlapping.)* You have laryngitis, or—?

STAR: Oh, Tree's being silent today. He takes a vow of silence sometimes. This time, it's—he's on day two. You're doing three days, right?

(TREE nods.)

KATHLEEN: Wow. That must be strange. I've been on retreats where I've been silent for a day, but everyone is—you know, communally silent—and we're all in sacred space, so it's not that hard. I've never seen anyone be silent out in public.

FRANK: (*To TREE.*) What's the reasoning behind it?

STAR: It's something he does. (*To KATHLEEN.*) So, what have you been working on?

KATHLEEN: Pencil sketches lately. Back to basics. That's what van Gogh did when he got frustrated with his paintings or didn't have money to buy paints. He'd go back to drawing. It's—

FRANK: (*To TREE.*) Sure you don't want anything to eat?

STAR: He's fasting. Also for three days.

KATHLEEN: Wow. I could never do that. I like food too much.

FRANK: (*To STAR.*) So. What do you do?

STAR: You mean like for a job?

FRANK: Y-e-s. I used that line, too. In my twenties.

(*STAR rubs the baby's head.*)

KATHLEEN: Her job is raising her baby. (*To STAR.*) I wish I could have stayed home when our kids were little. I feel like I missed so much—all those little daily details the day care workers would tell me about.

FRANK: You didn't want to stay home.

KATHLEEN: I know . . . at the time. I just mean looking back. I was afraid I'd lose my edge. Become a boring housewife. You know, after reading *The Feminine Mystique*. Yikes. Oh, well. You do what you do, and things work themselves out. Or not. What was it Édith Piaf sang? "*Je ne regrette rien.*" No regrets.

FRANK: *(To TREE.)* What do you—? What does Tree do? For a living.

STAR: He's a beekeeper.

FRANK: Of course! A Tree would keep bees. You named yourself, right? I assume that's not what your parents named you.

KATHLEEN: Yum. That was a good, healthy lunch. Just the right amount. Oh, it's so beautiful the way the sun's slanting down through the leaves, making these lacy patterns on you and Willow. Mind if I sketch you?

STAR: Not at all.

(KATHLEEN takes out her sketchpad and pencils and begins sketching.)

KATHLEEN: Madonna and child.

(FRANK addresses STAR but looks at TREE.)

FRANK: I've heard of the silent treatment, but this is a new twist. Doesn't it bug you to have to answer for him?

STAR: Oh, well. I don't mind.

FRANK: But does he always like what you say on his behalf? Don't you ever want to say things about him he might not like? Make up lies. Tell people he's an accountant.

STAR: *(Laughing.)* Tree?

FRANK: Or he has the heart of an accountant. Or he secretly eats bacon. Or he ratted out his brother to get a lighter sentence.

KATHLEEN: Frank, aren't those the musicians who played at Sam's wedding?

FRANK: What?

KATHLEEN: Yeah. They played at Sam and Jean's wedding. It's so lilting.

FRANK: Or worse—you could tell the truth. Things only you know. His dark secrets. Like he doesn't help out with the baby all that much. He holds in his anger and broods. He feels trapped by all the responsibility—too rooted in home life. He wants to change his name to . . . to Cloud. And just float away—free.

KATHLEEN: Frank—

FRANK: Do you like being married to a mime?

STAR: It's only like a few days. And we're not—I mean, we don't think of it in those terms. Marriage. Ownership terms.

FRANK: Hey, I grew up in the sixties. I studied Marx and Engels before you were born. We were protesting in the streets to end the war, end capitalism—which is a lot more than most of your generation is doing.

KATHLEEN: Let's not talk about the war. It's too hot.

(As FRANK grows more agitated, TREE loses his beatific glow and tries to stay calm.)

FRANK: Kathleen hates mimes, don't you?

KATHLEEN: No.

FRANK: Yes, you do.

KATHLEEN: I never said I hated them. Just—they're not my favorite entertainment is all.

FRANK: Like puppets. I hate puppets. Kathleen and I both do. And clowns. And masks. What is the point of masks?

KATHLEEN: Depends on the play, Frank.

FRANK: And what's the point of being silent? In real life. I'm not talking about the theater. Is it a purification rite like fasting? Are you doing penance? Have you ever heard of penance?

(KATHLEEN's on alert.)

FRANK (CONT.): You want to feel superior to the rest of us yammering away here? We're just trying to communicate one human being to another, poor fools that we are. Just trying to get through the day. *(Trying to enlist KATHLEEN.)* He's trying to— "Look at me. I'm so cool, I don't have to actually make small talk." Great way to call attention to yourself. Like giving yourself a new name. A cool name. "Tree" instead of "Bob." Or is it "Mike"?

(TREE and STAR exchange looks.)

The point of silence is to *retreat*. You don't do it in a social situation. What you're doing is really selfish. Childish. Here you've got this beautiful wife, a beautiful new baby, and you're out here on the public green on May Day in the twenty-first century. And music's playing. And you're young! Jesus, in your twenties! And you're wasting it. Making your wife answer for you. You should be laughing out loud! Singing to your baby! Telling them you love them! Don't you know that it's over—? Like that! *(He snaps his fingers.)* Youth.

(TREE signals STAR. They gather their things to leave. FRANK squares his shoulders.)

What? You can't take the truth?

(TREE smiles pityingly. FRANK throws ice from his drink into TREE's face. TREE gasps. STAR wipes his face with the scarf. TREE tries to breathe deeply to compose himself. He and STAR leave. KATHLEEN runs after them to apologize. KATHLEEN returns.)

KATHLEEN: Jesus, Frank, what's the matter with you? So he's a little flaky. He's probably a nice guy. And I like her. She's really sweet. Now she's going to think I'm married to a grumpy old man. *(Softer.)* Frank, really, what got into you? I can't believe you—you threw your drink at him. *(She laughs.)* Like Bette Davis. Drama queen! *(FRANK fumes.)* So, no, really, what's this about? *(No reply.)* Come on. I want to know. Something's going on. Frank?

(No reply. Lights slowly fade.)

Gigantic

Ron Burch

This all started when Old Man Hawkins—that pinched-nosed, furrowed-browed, drainage-ditch-skinned old bastard from over on Blue Church Road—hired me and Skeet for a job. Skeet, my best friend—being born William Charles Crawford but never liking the sound of Bill or William or Willie, Chuck, Char, or just plain Crawford—was called Skeet because he was kind of bony, had thinning mousey brown hair and a face scarred by acne, and was generally not good-looking. It might have been someone else one night at the High Star who came up with it since Skeet wasn't the largest man in Delaware County—him barely five-five and kind of stoop-shouldered—or maybe it was because he had this way of buzzing around you, sometimes annoying like . . . not that it bothered me since Skeet and me are friends.

But anything was better than being at home watching TV, watching my life go nowhere and not seeming to have anything to do with it one way or the other for better or worse, for good or bad. That's why I don't stay in my shithole apartment that sits right next to Highway 3C just half a mile out of Sunbury, Ohio. Sheryl, my ex—having already walked out on me because she said I had no chance in Hell of ever becoming anything—once said, “When you start that low, a life's worth of climbing still won't get you out.”

I miss her sometimes, especially when I'm really drunk.

Old Man Hawkins somberly stepped into the High Star wearing an honest-to-God string tie and mourning coat, dressed up as if there were a burial to be done or some special occasion since he'd never been in there as long as Tommy Dang, the owner, can remember (and he's had that place now almost twelve years, taking over after Mr. Christopher, who while banging Cheryl Miller against the wall one night fell backwards down the basement steps and couldn't get up again). Never before had Hawkins stuck his gaunt face through that doorway, him coming in that same night that me and Skeet were celebrating the joy of being alive—which we do quite often—throwing around loose memories and hard shots of Maker's Mark.

No one paid much attention to Hawkins at first, him taking up residence somewhere in the middle of the bar, just standing there, ignoring an open bar stool right in front, ignoring Tommy who leaned big-bellied on the bar, waiting patiently across from Hawkins for the miracle order from a man who was never seen to drink once. Hawkins was just looking up and down the bar itself and over to a few of the tables, just standing there despite Tommy's forced cheerful, “What can I get you?” Hawkins wasn't moving, his arms crossed against his wiry old man frame,

being at least sixty by guess but more likely towards seventy or maybe even eighty (no one really knowing since he outlived most of his peers, his wife, and even his three children—one dead when his powder blue Ford truck ran headfirst into the oak over at Sunbury and Mill roads and the other from a self-inflicted gunshot wound or, as we call it around here, natural causes). Hawkins was just standing there giving us the eye, and some of us (or maybe it was just me) thought we were going to get a God lecture, seeing him bundled in the string tie and mourning coat. He had the reputation for quoting the Book instead of saying, “Hello.”

“I need to hire two men,” Hawkins said.

Despite momentary attention by the bar before the customers returned to their prior conversations, this pronouncement by Hawkins seemed ineffective, and even Tommy, unexcited by this not-very-grave pronouncement, took a few draft orders, turning his back on Hawkins, knowing that he wouldn’t order a thing.

“I said I need to hire two men,” Hawkins said again, but this time in a louder voice, trying to talk above the noise of the bar. “A day job. One day.”

No one replied because getting involved in anything with Old Man Hawkins was bound to cause trouble and not even be worth the trouble it caused.

“A day’s work,” he said. “Couple hours.”

Two men at the far end of the bar laughed to themselves, bent their heads, and started low-whispering to each other.

Hawkins’s head was bobbing left to right as he scanned the bar for takers; the veins were sticking out in that gullet neck of his as if they’d been glued onto his brown-spotted skin, and the broad white nails of his hand flashed when he passed it over his face.

Finally, he said, “I’ll pay one hundred per man in advance. Then the same after the job.”

He looked around. No one was responding. Most were just looking down at their drinks waiting for him to give them back their peace.

Hawkins sucked up himself, his pride, whatever you call it. He had made his offer, he had made it clean and easy, and there was nothing else he could do. As he turned in his boots to head to the neon-arrayed door, I decided to say something, ’cause I (I finally decided) have no sense whatsoever (as my mother repeatedly has lectured me over the years).

“We’ll do it,” I said.

Skeet choked on the bourbon he was pouring down his throat.

Hawkins swiveled his head around to locate who had said it.

I pointed over to Skeet and said, “We’ll do it.”

“Are you out of your frigging mind?” Skeet sputtered, staring incredulously at me, his eyes beading down like “Shit, Bond! What’re you doing to us? Is this a joke, I hope?”

But that’s what I did. Skeet and all. Maybe I did this, just joking, to get a laugh with Tommy and some of the guys and maybe bum a few free drinks later on in the week (maybe on Friday, which was always the saddest day for me because I had the whole weekend ahead of me). For a second, I thought Hawkins would cast it off, throw it back in the pond ’cause Hawkins had no respect for me—having told me this the last three times he’d run into me around town—so then we’d be in the clear, and I would’ve made the attempt to save myself and be straight refuted, but Hawkins set square his head and appraised me as you’d do an animal at the stockyard, sizing me up and all, and I was sure he was going to walk out, thinking that my offer was not at all serious, the jest of some drunk, and that after gauging me and me not being much of a sight, he would storm out, stiff-stepped, doing the old man shuffle, cursing us vehemently under his breath with that sometimes mumbling speech of his (some said he’d had a minor stroke a couple years ago while he was working the cornfield, but he was being too stubborn to let it slow him down and take him away from his field, so he tried to shake it off like it was a big-winged fly).

He walked down toward us.

Skeet was staring at me still, the joke now not becoming a joke, and Skeet started to look worried, and he put down his head when Hawkins came up, turned around to the rest of the bar, and said, “Anyone else?”

I was a little insulted, to be honest. I know I don’t have an MBA and a nice suit, but I did volunteer (even if I was hoping for a rejection).

“Anybody?” he asked the bar again.

Finally, seemingly disgusted, Hawkins turned back to us and asked, “Got a truck?”

I nodded.

“Good,” he said. “Be at my place tomorrow at nine. Don’t be late.”

He slipped a hand underneath his coat and brought out a red rubber-banded pack of twenties. He threw it on the bar between me and Skeet and said, “An advance.”

Without even a nod to Tommy as a cursory thank-you for the podium or an agreement from us or an acknowledgement from anyone else, he walked out. He didn’t even wait for a response from us, no, he just shifted that white head with those blue eyes, jerked that slightly twisted mouth that only slightly moved at one end when he spoke, turned, and walked out leaving this pack of twenties sitting between us.

“You fucking idiot,” Skeet said. “Of all the dumb possible things you had to do in this world, why in God’s name did you pick that one and then include me?”

“Cause we need the money,” I said. “Neither of us has a job.”

“So what?” he replied. “If I wanted to change my life drastically, I’d go to college. Or prison.”

He looked at the money and picked it up but, despite what he said, he didn’t put it back down.

“I got bills to pay,” I said. “If you don’t want to do it, I’ll do it myself.”

“Do what?”

“Work for Hawkins.”

“Doing what?!” he said, alarmed.

I had to admit that I had no idea what exactly we were doing.

“You don’t even know what you’ve gotten us into!” Skeet said, somewhat nervously ’cause Skeet tended to worry about those things that no one else really worried about. But we needed the work, me and Skeet, both of us, yes, both being unemployed and him with a kid and all (his wife worked for the phone company, and her mother took care of Josie). Skeet had to do something to raise a few bucks and gather some coin to pay fucking Tommy before he bounced us out of there on our heads and so Skeet’s wife wouldn’t hate me so much and blame me for the troubles of her marriage.

My throat felt dry . . . so dry I was afraid I’d lose my voice.

At home that night with the TV replaying some baseball game from earlier, I realized I hadn’t drunk enough to stop me from thinking. I eventually went to sleep wondering if Sheryl still had the pink negligee.

Lucky for me, the next day after we pulled up at Hawkins’ in my black three-quarter ton with the V-8, Skeet was sitting there stock still on the leatherette seat resting his forehead in his right hand.

“Throbbing,” he kept saying. Skeet was either too hung or too worried about the oncoming (or maybe both seeing how Skeet can be a bit strung sometimes). We were bummed having to face Hawkins at nine in the morning with the sunlight topping the hill and biting into our eyes and the soft summer morning wind making me want to loll back and drift down into sleep again.

Hawkins was stone-eyed awake and standing on his porch. He was probably up before Skeet and I even bedded down. Even Tommy last night was begging us two-handed to go home, but me and Skeet were still celebrating life even more joyously with the two hundred Hawkins had handed over, the two of us sorting through the various farm chores that Hawkins might delegate (our joint celebratory knowledge of farm chores being scant due to the fact that neither me or Skeet knew anything about farming except that there were several of them left in Delaware

County and that Hawkins owned one of them). Me and Skeet figured that Hawkins would have us painting one of his scabbish-looking barns with the old white paint peeling off and hanging there since probably the late 1800s . . . or maybe he'd want to extend his pastureland, and we'd have to spend the day bareback sweating in the sun digging postholes for a fence extension . . . or maybe he'd want something as simple as weeding his garden since he was getting old and slowing down.

"Throbbing," Skeet said. "My head's just throbbing."

Which was a good thing for me because I was able to coerce Skeet without too much effort on my part.

"Can't we just go back home?" Skeet asked. "This is a dreadful mistake. Tomorrow I'll change my ways, give up the drink, go over to Delaware, and find a proper job."

"Uh-huh," I said.

"I'll find a proper job for both of us. A cushy job for you, one with a desk so you could put your feet up and look out the window, and you'd only have to work a few hours a day without sweating."

He was getting desperate.

"So," he continued, "can you just turn the truck around and get us the Hell out of here?"

"We need the cash flow," I responded. "Ever since we got laid off from the Nestlé factory, we've been short."

Hawkins had come out to the foot of his driveway. He was motioning for us to park and waving us out of the truck and saying something like, "Come on, Pilgrim."

I got out and had to open Skeet's door and pull him bodily from the truck. He was pleading and hanging onto the seat belt, but I eventually got him out.

Hawkins, without a word, turned and walked away from us. We followed, Skeet shaking his head, to one of Hawkins' back buildings—a long, dingy, rough-gapped thing made of wood timbers that didn't fit flush together. It was propped together as if it would collapse if the wind blew too hard. Skeet looked at me, and I was thinking the same thing (that maybe we'd have to shore up this dilapidated tinderbox, this lean-to of firewood), but then Hawkins walked us inside to the dirt. The building had no proper floor, only black dirt, rocks and pebbles, and animal dung.

We followed him in.

It was dark inside this barn. The walls narrowed down, becoming so slim that we couldn't walk abreast but only single file in the silence. In the darkening corridor—briefly lit by small square windows that barely let in any light—the animal smell got stronger, making me wince, and I could hear Skeet behind me

mumbling, or, more assuredly, cursing me something awful. That smell was so strong, so concentrated and contained trapped within that den, it was beginning to make my head hurt. The walls were so tight, I thought we might be descending into the ground.

Hawkins walked us for what seemed to be at least a mile when the corridor opened up into a large room—a pen.

Light faintly shined through three rough holes punctured in the back wooden wall of the pen.

Inside was a night-black-colored bull about eight, maybe nine, hundred pounds, if not more. It was standing at least five-ten, taller than Skeet with horns and drool dripping from its mouth.

Hawkins turned to us and pointed at it.

“This is what I need you to do,” he said.

“Oh, God,” I could hear Skeet whisper behind me.

“And what is that?” I asked.

“You know Johnstown at all?” he asked.

I shook my head.

“Not really,” I replied.

“You take this over to 3736 Grant Road,” he said. “Get it there by two thirty.”

“Yeah, right,” Skeet said. He turned around and started walking back the way we just came.

“I already paid you part,” Hawkins said. “You owe me an obligation.”

“So what?” Skeet said, disappearing into the darkness.

“I will contact the law,” he said.

Skeet stopped and turned back to us.

“There was a meeting of minds, even given the state yours were in, and substantial cash was exchanged,” Hawkins said. “As well as spent, from what I hear. So you owe me an obligation.”

Skeet looked at me.

“And it’s right there,” Hawkins continued, pointing at the bull. Which stood there. Gigantic. Looking at us.

“You can use those gates to block up your truck,” Hawkins said, pointing at a stack of wood gates that were resting against the wall. “I don’t have a carrier.”

Skeet was steaming at me.

Hawkins turned and walked away.

“You get it there early,” he said from the darkness. “I’ll meet you there, and then you’ll get the rest of your cash.”

“You idiot,” Skeet said. He slapped me on the head and then several more times on the shoulders until I pushed him away.

“Stop fucking around,” I said.

He pushed me again. I pushed him back.

He swung at me, and I popped him a light one on the chest, causing him to lose his balance and fall to the ground.

He sat cross-legged in the dirt. I didn’t say anything. The smell of dung was so strong back there it made my stomach jump.

No wonder Hawkins hired us. There’s no way he could’ve done it ’cause of his age. No matter how mean he was, no matter if he’s too mean to even die, there’s no way he could’ve moved that bull by himself. It’d be like trying to lead a bulldozer with a leash.

“What’s he doing with this, anyway?” Skeet asked.

I shrugged.

“No idea,” I said.

“You think he’d really call the cops?” Skeet asked.

“I think he’d have no problem putting you in jail,” I said. “In fact, I think he would look forward to it.”

I helped Skeet up, and we walked over to the gates to drag them out to the truck. It took both of us just to move one, and we needed four gates to surround the bed of the truck. We attached them to the inside of the truck’s frame and tied them down with old rope we borrowed from Hawkins, who was sitting on his back porch watching us. He just sat there, not moving, watching us lift the gates one at a time, bring them into place, and then lash them down. The gates fell over a couple of times, and Skeet started swearing despite Hawkins’ attention. He didn’t offer any words or gestures of help.

Skeet took off his shirt and threw it on the ground, revealing his girl-thin body and farmer-tan arms.

“That guy’s getting on my nerves,” he said.

His breathing was ragged and quick, and his chest was heaving up and down as we lifted the gate into place. Skeet’s face was the red of a flag. His cheeks were wobbling from the effort. I wiped thick sweat from my face. Sweat was running down my neck and through the few hairs cluttered and matted on my chest onto the flatness (despite the serious hobby of drinking) of my stomach, discoloring the front of my red T-shirt. Skeet bent towards me and motioned to Hawkins, who was sitting in a stiff-backed wooden chair on his porch.

“Probably sleeps with his eyes open,” Skeet said. “Like a lizard.”

Someone once told me, maybe while I was drunk most likely, that Hawkins and his other son were once both randy, and that his wife—a woman who only left the house to be driven to the IGA in town on Wednesday and to the Methodist church in town on Sunday—she never approved. She was a God-fearer and a spouter,

worse than Hawkins now, and one day while Hawkins and this son were working one of his back fields on their twenty-two acres of corn, lightning shot down out of the sky and struck his son. Just like that. His son was momentarily dancing tunelessly around the field, and then he buckled face down. No storm. No thunder. Not even a cloud. The sun was still hanging up there in the blue sky. Apparently, Hawkins saw this meeting of man and nature as a warning shot. Then his wife passed, and no one even knew it until they spotted her small cement stick in the cemetery. Hawkins turned to the Book. Maybe he's been looking for an explanation . . . or at least a finger pointed.

But I'm no better. I'd do the work. I needed the money, I did. Truth was, after the layoff, I had nothing. Nothing at all. Skeet borrowed money from his wife. I borrowed it from him. Maybe this job would get me back on track. Maybe I wouldn't be tossed out of my single apartment next to the highway and lose my truck in the process.

Once the gates were set—once me and Skeet were already worn down, gasping and sweat-covered, lying slack in the dark back barn, spread out across the dirt and shit, trying to catch our breaths and slow down our runaway hearts—we looked over at the bull that hunkered all thick-set and spread firm-legged with his head like a large drop of metal down in the water bowl.

"You got to be fucking kidding me," Skeet said, looking over at the bull.

"Ready?" I asked.

"I ought to kill you right now," he replied.

We got up. I walked over to the pen and threw open the gate. The bull just stood there, not moving.

"Hey!" I yelled at it, flailing my arms.

It didn't move. It didn't even blink.

"How do you operate one of these things?" I asked.

"Beats me," Skeet replied. "Maybe you should get out and push."

I faced something alive that was threatening and unpredictable. It scared the living shit out of me by merely lifting its head and staring incomprehensibly at me with big black eyes. I didn't know what it would do next . . . but I needed to finish the job so we would get our money (and maybe another job).

Yet this thing . . . it moved, it breathed, and it stepped tentatively toward me.

I was not a farmer. I was just a drunkard who needed an odd job.

"This thing scares the shit out of me," Skeet said, putting his shirt back on.

I concurred. This thing, this beast (as we started to call it) was so gigantic in this place, and we were so small.

We roped the head and pulled. At first, it refused to move. Skeet was holding onto the rope and leaning back the other way, his hands sliding and burning along

the rope as the bull—the beast—refused to move. It locked its back feet and wouldn't be moved.

"Okay, let's go home," Skeet said, dropping the rope.

I grabbed a handful of food mixture from a grain sack outside its pen and threw the handful a few feet in front of the animal. It moved toward the food, eating it from the ground.

"Hey, not bad," Skeet said.

"It's how I get you to do things," I replied, throwing another handful down as the beast ambled forward.

This method worked down the corridor until we reached the tailgate of the truck. The beast stood there.

"I think we need a board or something to get it up there," Skeet said.

"We're not just going to pick it up and throw it in?" I asked.

Skeet looked at me as if I'd lost my mind.

"Help me find a board," he said.

We hauled an old wooden door that we found behind the chicken coop over to the truck and let it fall on the opened truck gate. The bottom of the door hit the muddy ground. I looked at Skeet, he looked at me, and the beast looked at both of us. It started backing up, walking backwards toward the barn. Skeet jumped for the rope and caught the end of it. The beast kept backing up and started dragging Skeet with it.

"Well, help me!" he screamed.

I grabbed him by the arm and then got hold of the rope. Over my shoulder, I caught a glimpse of Hawkins, who (I swear to fucking God!) was laughing at us, but I couldn't be sure because the beast gave a big head-yank on the rope.

Skeet fell down, and I almost stepped on his head. I tried to catch my balance but ended up next to him.

"The feed!" I yelled . . . and let go of the rope.

"Don't let go of the rope!" Skeet screamed.

I grabbed a handful of the feed out of my pocket and threw it somewhere toward the truck. The grain hit Skeet in the face.

"You got it in my eyes," he said, rubbing them.

The beast shuffled forward toward Skeet—its massive hooves inches from Skeet's head—and began to eat the grain off Skeet's back.

"Okay, don't make any sudden moves," Skeet said, staring at the hooves.

I threw another handful of feed and Skeet quickly backed away and jumped up.

"I'm going home," he said.

"No," I replied.

"Fuck you," he said. "I'm going home."

“Grab the rope,” I said. “We’re almost done.”

“I’d rather not,” he replied. “I’d really rather not.”

He sat down in the mud. He rested his head on his arms.

“You okay, Skeet?”

“Yeah,” he replied, burping, “just a reminder of last night.”

He stood up and grabbed the rope and, from the look of it, gave it a half-hearted pull. I got behind the beast and started pushing. Skeet walked backwards up the gate, pulling on the rope. I screamed cowboyish noises like yip-yip-yiee or something I saw in a John Wayne movie once.

Skeet stopped.

“What’re you doing?” he asked.

“Just pull,” I said.

We got the beast up there. Just like that, it was standing in the truck. Skeet was right in front of it, pinned against the back of the cab.

“Hey, it worked,” he said. “How do I get out?”

“Move around it,” I said, slamming the tailgate closed.

I ran over and grabbed the last gate, the one to place on the inside of the tailgate. Skeet jumped up on one of the side gates in the truck, climbed up the side, and flung himself to the ground.

Together, we got the last gate onto the truck.

The bull was in.

The truck was sunk low towards the ground. Way low.

“I wouldn’t go too fast,” Skeet said, looking at the tires.

“Think we can make it?” I asked. I just wanted to get this job over with, get the rest of my cash, and head to the High Star. I was tired of Hawkins watching me as if he knew something I didn’t. I was even getting tired of Skeet. I wanted this to be over.

“I think so,” he said.

“It’s a straight shot anyway,” I replied. “Right down Route 36.”

The beast, standing still in the truck with the white rope still around its thick neck, made an awful sound. It bellowed. Loud. Mournful. It was downright depressing.

“Jesus,” I said.

“I need a drink,” Skeet said.

He got in the truck. I followed. The bull bellowed mournfully again.

“Just start the truck,” Skeet said.

I started the truck, and when I stepped on the gas, the beast in the back lost its balance and fell against the back gate. The truck rocked. I checked the rear-view and slowed. The bull stood back up without any problem.

I slowly moved the truck down the driveway towards Blue Church Road.

“Why do they call this Blue Church Road?” Skeet asked.

“Don’t know,” I said.

“Is there a blue church on the road?”

“Not that I know of.”

“Was there ever a blue church on the road?”

“Not that I know of.”

“So why—?”

“Skeet,” I said. He shrugged and turned away.

We only had to go a ways up Blue Church Road until we hit State Route 36. As we slowly drove down the driveway, we passed Hawkins, who was still sitting on his porch.

He waved as we passed.

“Fuck you,” Skeet said against his closed window, and then he waved to Hawkins and said several times, while smiling, “Fuck you, fuck you.” Hawkins waved back, happy that his job was getting done.

We turned from Blue Church onto State Route 36. We weren’t going over twenty-five miles per hour, and we had about twelve miles to go before we hit Johnstown.

“Put your flashers on,” Skeet said. I put them on, and we eased onto State Route 36. I pressed on the gas but didn’t push the truck past thirty miles per hour even though the speed limit was fifty-five. A black Suburban zoomed around us, horn blaring. In the back, the beast lost its footing and crashed into one of the gates. Skeet looked back at the beast, which seemed to be okay. Another car was now riding the bumper.

“Maybe you should go faster,” Skeet said.

“No,” I replied. “Not if you want to get there in one piece and get my truck there in one piece. That animal takes a header off the truck, we could have major problems.”

“What does it matter?” he asked.

“It matters,” I replied, “because we need to show these people that we can get one job done.”

“What ‘people’?”

“The people around here in town,” I said. “No one takes us seriously.”

“They do so,” he replied.

“Really?” I asked.

“Yeah.”

“Then why’s there a frigging bull sliding around the back of my truck?” I asked. “If everyone takes us so damn seriously, why does it look like we’re presenting ‘Cows on Ice’?”

He turned his head away.

“Look,” I said, “we’re almost done with this. This can get us more work, something else. I mean, I’m almost broke here. No one’s knocking on my door. No one takes us seriously. We’re a joke. Okay? A joke.”

“Okay,” he replied. “Okay.”

A steady line of cars was now passing us. People stared as they drove around us in the opposite lane. A convertible with two cute women passed us. They were laughing. With a forced smile, Skeet waved at them.

“Kiss my ass,” he said.

I didn’t even look at them.

Skeet played with the radio but couldn’t find anything he liked.

“I sort of feel bad about this,” he said.

“Then turn off the country radio station,” I said.

“No,” he said. “About that.”

He pointed at the bed of the truck toward the beast, which did its best to remain standing and tried not to fall when I shifted or stepped on the brake. It also did its best not to crash into one of the gates when I rounded the curve near Route 3.

“What about it?” I asked.

“The place we’re taking it,” he said.

“What’re you talking about?”

“The address he gave us,” Skeet said. “It’s a slaughterhouse.”

“It is?”

“Yeah. My uncle buys meat from there. I thought you knew.”

“No.”

“Just don’t think about it,” he said. “In the old days, they never thought about it.”

“Yeah.”

“Fuck the old days,” he said, and he laughed.

Behind us in the rear-view mirror, the red and blue flashers of a following police cruiser came on.

“Shit,” I said.

“Oh, man,” Skeet said, looking back.

“I can’t afford a ticket.”

I pulled over onto the shoulder and killed the engine.

The police car pulled up behind me and Len, the local cop, got out of his car.

"It's just Len," Skeet said. "Remember when he gave me that wedgie in high school? He's such a dick."

"Don't say anything," I said to him.

Len walked up to my window, which I rolled down.

"Hey, Len," I said. "What's up?"

"Heard you got this job," he replied, and he started laughing.

"Yeah. It sure is a sight, isn't it?"

"Well at least you're not warming a barstool," he said. "Shame I'll have to give you a ticket."

"For what?" I asked.

"Cause this is illegal, Bond," he said.

"Oh, come on, Len," Skeet said. "Give us a fucking break."

"Shut your mouth, Crawford," Len said.

Skeet leaned back against the seat.

"Where you going? Johnstown?" Len asked me.

I nodded.

"Well, hurry up and get there," he said. "I'll give you pathetic bastards a break this time."

"Thanks, Len," I said. "You know, this is a job for us."

Len laughed again as if he didn't really believe it. I didn't like that.

He went back to the cruiser and turned off his lights. I saw him talking sideways into his handset, and he was still laughing. Then he pulled around us and was gone.

I sat there for a couple of seconds.

"What?" Skeet asked.

"Nothing," I replied, but it was bothering me. It was bothering me real bad. What did I have to do to turn things around here?

"Well, let's go then," Skeet said. "Let's get this whole thing over with. Then we'll go to the High Star, put this behind us, and have a good time, right?"

He looked at me hopefully.

"Right?" he said again.

"Right," I said, and I started the truck.

As we entered Johnstown, Skeet asked if I could pull into Molly's restaurant so he could run into the bathroom.

"We're almost there," I said.

"I really got to go."

"Skeet," I said, "there're going to be all those people there."

"You wanted to do this."

I pulled into Molly's. The gravel-topped parking lot was filled with cars, truckers, and campers. There was a line of waiting people trailing out the door, and they watched us as we pulled in, thinking that the beast in the back might be their entrée.

I pulled around to the side, but there was still a row of windows with customers looking out of them.

Skeet jumped out of the truck and ran around the corner of the building.

I noticed that people were looking out the windows and pointing at the truck. I checked the rear-view mirror and saw that the wooden gate against the tailgate had fallen. It was leaning precariously forward on the edge of the gate on my side, leaving a huge gap that the beast was sticking its head through.

I got out of the truck.

The people in the windows were watching me. Some of them I knew, but I didn't look their way.

Len's police cruiser pulled by even though we were in Johnstown now, well outside his jurisdiction.

I tried to get the back gate back into place, but the bull wouldn't move its head.

I smacked it on the nose.

"Move your head."

I smacked it again, becoming frustrated.

Through the windows of Molly's, I saw Skeet talking to Annie, the cashier. He was pointing in my direction, and Annie's head turned my way. A couple of customers—a gray-haired man with a huge belly and his bland-looking wife—at the counter also looked out the windows.

In the parking lot, Len was sitting there watching me. As if I didn't know any better.

The bull bellowed again. I don't know anything about cows, but it wasn't a happy sound. It was the kind of sound I've made late at night falling down drunk alone and thinking there was no hope in sight.

I could've just gotten into the truck, started it, and gone to the High Star with it.

The bull just wanted a chance.

I looked around the restaurant. Everybody was watching the drunk.

I dropped the tailgate of the truck and let the wooden gate drop to the ground, kicking up dust and displacing the gravel.

The beast turned its head and looked at me. I slid the door into position, stomping on the bottom of it to anchor it into the ground.

"Go," I said.

The bull just stood there.

"Go on," I said.

Skeet rounded the corner of the restaurant and saw me.

The bull wasn't moving. I backed away.

"Hey!" Skeet yelled and ran toward me.

Len had opened his door. He was talking into his handset.

"Go on," I said to it.

The bull cautiously stepped forward onto the door, which sagged. The beast steadied itself and allowed me to remove the white rope from around its neck.

"Bond!" That was Len, moving toward me.

The bull walked down the door and, on seeing Skeet running toward it, quickly lumbered across the parking lot and down the sidewalk of Penn Street in Johnstown.

Skeet grabbed me by the arm. He was out of breath. He tried to say something, but he couldn't get the words out. I started laughing.

Finally, he exploded, "What the fuck're you doing? Have you lost your mind?"

"What're you talking about?" I asked.

He pointed at the bull, which was quickly clearing the sidewalk.

"What is that?!" Skeet said.

"That's a very large animal," I replied.

A car screeched to a stop. I turned. Inside a small red economy car, a white-haired woman's mouth was hanging open. In front of her was the bull standing in the middle of the street.

"I'm gonna bust your ass, Bond," Len said as he came up. "What happened?"

"It got loose," I said.

He took out his .38.

"You're going to shoot it?" asked Skeet. "In front of them people?"

"You're in serious shit for this," Len said to me, holstering his .38.

"Oh, fuck you, Len," I replied. "It got loose. It's an animal. It's uncontrollable."

Len ran back to his car and called in for backup.

I saw Hawkins pull up in his truck. He watched the bull lumber down the street. He looked at me as if he had something to say, but then he shook his head and pulled out of there.

Len was still talking frantically. Skeet and me just stood there.

People were coming out of their houses and businesses to watch the bull as it passed. The customers had cleared out of Molly's to watch this beautiful sight.

I got in my truck. Skeet leaned in the window.

"You want to go to the High Star?" he asked.

"No," I said. "I got other things to do."

“Okay,” he replied, and then he nodded toward the bull. “Do you think we should go get it?”

“No,” I replied. “No, I don’t.”

I started my truck. Skeet waved at me, and I waved back. I drove down the street with the people standing there watching me pass by. I caught up with the bull. It was cutting between two houses.

It moved past the houses, past the clutter of children’s toys, plastic ladders, discarded bikes, and old lawn furniture. It moved toward an open field, where it broke into a hard run.

Crazy Cat

Julie Daniel

“Dinah, stop already.”

On and off all morning, she’s been listening to the kitten’s attempts to destroy the curtain’s pull-string. She blinks groggily at the sunrise sliding through the slits in the blinds. A feline silhouette absorbs some of the light, but then the rays bleed through the cat’s stripes and shine right in her eyes, reminding her how much she partied the night before. She squeezes her eyelids shut and tries to pull herself awake before opening them again.

She sits up and groans at the clock blinking next to her bed. Dropping her head in her hands, she futilely wills away her hangover. Her memories from last evening are scattered and blurry; she wonders if she even wants to remember.

“Long night?” asks the cat.

She doesn’t have to look. She knows this dream. The cat smiles at her through jigsaw teeth littered with flesh and rot. His monthly visits are like clockwork in her subconscious.

“You’re late,” she snarls.

“You’re early,” he replies.

Their dialogues are always the same. Seesaw logic with a breath of insanity . . . or is it just politics?

“You know, puss, it wouldn’t kill you to lighten up on me a bit.”

“Take one from nine, and you still have eight. Even crazy goes mad under such a weight.”

Rolling her eyes, she’s reminded how much the puns and rhymes lost their charm on her years ago.

“I don’t suppose I could just pinch myself and wake up?”

“Supposing you could fall asleep?”

“I’m dreaming, cat. I’m already asleep.”

“One must awake already be to dream of dreaming sleeping dreams.”

The realization shoots through her veins like a drug. She spins back around at the clock just in time for it to melt off the side of the table like a painting. She pushes her eyes shut and desperately tries to recall what happened the night before or the night before that. The visions are colorless and distant.

She brings her gaze back to the fading grin of the cat as the floor falls away from under her and the ceiling tears itself back into the spiraling sky of her consciousness.

She’s already awake.

An Exhibition of Progression
Alisha Jael

Years of people
passing through,
creating collages
of memories:
pieces of passion,
portions of potential,
particles of purpose,
tattered and torn tidbits
broken and left behind
in the wake of escape.
Marred by attempts
to shade fate.
Fused together with
tears shed for faded
dreams and promises
unremembered.

Old Dog

Lauren Hehmeyer

Her cloudy lenses hide the hope
that I am eating something dog-worthy
which I will graciously bestow.
And she is right.
For between us there are seventeen years.
Her lifetime; my parent-years.

I trusted her to watch my children, knowing
they would run from the yellow bus straight
to the house, empty save for her.
She was big and black; she terrified the delivery men.

Now, she lifts the food from my fingers, knowing
that although she can barely see it or smell it
I have given her the choice bit.

When Owen was busy being nine, careless as he swung,
he hit her with a baseball bat.
We all thought—"Dead, for sure"—but *no*.
She shook her head solemnly and went on.

She goes on . . . but not for long.
I have cared for the aged, both human and canine, and I know.
She rises slowly if at all, but sometimes
she comes to rest her head
for just a moment
on my knee.

Mother

Linda Benninghoff

My mother lifts her hand to her chin:
“If you have nothing
To do, you can always clean
Out the basement or your books in the study.”
I tell her I need to relax.
I want to bake cookies or photograph
The jeweled birds on the lawn
Who rest and sing in ease.

I imagine her getting a house together
When she bore me—
Everything straightaway neat
As though the baby’s coming was expected,
Prayed for.
I never asked if my room had pink
Wallpaper with bears in blue pajamas floating in it
(If she got it ready before I was born).

When I was born, I think
I cried to be alive
Just as the dogwood in our yard
Seems to me to weep white petals
When spring comes and everything shouts new.

The dogs napped.
My mother lifted a sprig of lilac to her nose.
There was an incoherence to my life
From the start
When my mother first held me
Nonchalantly
Beside the toy piano I would learn to play
Cradling my head
In her long-fingered hands.

Mom

Tamara Richert

You were his mother.
You held him when he cried.
You loved him when no one else did.
You were his rock.

Later—
You blamed yourself when
He fell apart.
Regrets filled you. You wondered
Where you went wrong.

That love that held him
Pulled you under.
You cracked. Your bones
Were visible through
Your weak flesh.

You reached out for those little hands
That used to hold you.
You longed for those tiny arms
That wrapped around you.

He still needs you
To be a rock for all those
He left behind,
To give the strength and security
You gave him . . .

He is gone now,
But you are still his mother.

New Dreams
Agnes Tirrito



A Complicated Love Story

Colleen Narens

I met a man, and we fell in love.
Our love blossomed, and we had a child.
My daughter became the light in my life.
So tiny, so pink, so perfect—Evie.
The day she was born, I was born a mother.
Our love faded, and we fell apart.

I wanted something to be a part
Of: a family, a marriage, a love
So strong, unbreakable for a mother.
All my love poured upon my child.
She was my world, my everything. Evie.
The day I had to leave, I lost my life.

My heart shuddered, struggling for life,
Trying desperately to tear apart
The love from the loss of love—Evie.
I've never known overwhelming love
Like the first time you look at your child.
I never wanted to be a mother,

But I was born for this role of mother.
I can't imagine another life.
I embraced the new title like a child
And made promises that soon fell apart.
I told her she was my love,
That I never knew love until Evie.

The day solemnly came to leave Evie.
I called and cried to my mother.
I asked God, "Why?" Did I not love
Enough? Slowly draining out, my life
Felt empty now; my world fell apart.
A mother should not have to leave her child.

Walking away, I became a child
Again. I lost my baby that day—Evie.
Going in public, I felt set apart.
I saw a girl play with her mother,
And my soul sank. I felt it was over—life.
My daughter was gone; my heart felt no love.

I fell apart. I needed my mother.
I needed my child. I needed Evie.
My life had purpose. She taught me how to love.

Mommy
Colleen Narens



Boy and Jar

Lori Parault

Boy with a small jar
Chasing the fireflies again.
Night's dew wets his feet.

Nightfall

Lori Parault

Darkness creeps. Silence.
Cricket on a blade of grass.
Moon rising. Goodnight.

I'm a Woman Now (from *Hattitude*)

Linda Kaufman

Rachelle Neuman

Characters

FLORINE, 50s, MAMA's daughter

MAMA, 70s, FLORINE's mother

Time and Place

The action takes place in a car and a cafeteria during the afternoon. The time is the present.

(Lights rise DSL to reveal FLORINE, dressed in a pea-green pantsuit, seated in her car. Two chairs can serve as the car. It is early afternoon. SHE checks her watch and confirms that MAMA is tardy. She honks the horn. MAMA calls from offstage.)

MAMA: Just a minute, Florine! Hold your horses!

(She enters wearing a large hat.)

Florine won't like this hat, but . . . Oh, what the Hell!

(She crosses DSL in a rush and jerks open the passenger door of the car. She seats herself, buckles up, and pulls the door shut. FLORINE starts the engine. Throughout the scene, FLORINE and MAMA bump in time to the motion of the car.)

You could have come inside, you know. Oh, well. I'm already here. How are you today?

FLORINE: I'm fine. Just fine. Thanks, Mama.

MAMA: I don't recall that outfit. Is it new? Looks expensive. Huh. I've always said we all spend our money in different ways.

FLORINE: I guess we all do.

MAMA: If there's one thing I've learned, it's to keep my mouth shut.

FLORINE: Yes, ma'am.

MAMA: How can you keep this car so messy? Just look at all the garbage. You should clean your car. It only takes a few minutes.

FLORINE: I've been busy, Mama. I see you're wearing that hat again.

MAMA: Yep.

FLORINE: You must really like it.

MAMA: I do. What's the matter? You don't like it?

FLORINE: It's nice. It just might look better with something else another time.

MAMA: Really! You think I'm a silly old lady, don't you?

FLORINE: Mama! How you do go on sometimes.

MAMA: You think I'm showing off—a little eccentric, maybe?

FLORINE: Let's just enjoy our little outing.

MAMA: I know you're busy, Florine, with your husband and the boys. I know that this is—

FLORINE: It's okay.

MAMA: If it's a problem . . .

FLORINE: Mama.

MAMA: You don't have to take me. I can always stay at home . . . alone. I don't mind. You're always going here or there. Aerobics, cooking classes, the Temple sisterhood, PTA, the Lively Oaks Garden Club . . . You're on every board in town.

MAMA (CONT.): I never wanted to be a bother . . .

FLORINE: You know, we have an appointment with Doctor Applebaum next Thursday.

MAMA: *We? We* have an appointment?

FLORINE: *You! You* have an appointment.

MAMA: That's better. Believe you me, I wish I still had my big red Cadillac. Just because I had a few little fender-benders, everyone thinks I can't drive. I taught all you kids to drive. I'm a good driver.

FLORINE: As soon as the car is—

MAMA: I think you and your brother must be paying that mechanic to take as long as possible. Every week, he orders something else. Believe you me, there are plenty of excuses. *Everything* is on backorder.

FLORINE: Why don't we go to the cafeteria? It's 11:30. We can beat the rush, and then we can go to the beauty shop and get all fixed up. How does that sound? What time was your appointment?

MAMA: We need to be there at 2:30. *(Car breaks squeal.) Watch out! Oh, my God!*

(She jerks the steering wheel and stomps down on the brake over FLORINE's foot as FLORINE is braking. There is a moment of panic, but FLORINE soon has the car rolling forward in good order.)

FLORINE: Mama, do you have to press down on the brake when I do? I'm perfectly capable of driving a car.

MAMA: You don't say.

FLORINE: I heard that.

MAMA: Well, I just hate the way you drive.

FLORINE: Let me remind you that you're the one who taught me.

(MAMA rummages below the steering column and produces a cigarette butt.)

MAMA: Aha! What's this?

FLORINE: It's a cigarette butt, Mama.

MAMA: Is this yours?

FLORINE: You sound like a detective.

MAMA: Is that so?

FLORINE: *I am a grown woman.*

MAMA: I thought you quit.

FLORINE: I did. I just get a little nervous, sometimes.

MAMA: I could say something, but I won't.

FLORINE: Thank you.

MAMA: You'd better slow down. The cafeteria's over there. You're going to miss it. Slow down, for God's sake! You drive like you're going to a fire!

(She closes her eyes, grabs her seat tightly, and screams.)

Watch out!

FLORINE: We're here.

(Crossfade to DSR, a cafeteria at lunchtime. MAMA enters and begins proceeding down the line without claiming a tray. FLORINE rushes over to the head of the line; she grabs for a tray and a napkin-wrapped silverware set. All physical manipulations in the line are implied through pantomime, and all business is directed toward the audience.)

MAMA: Looks like a full house today. *(To an already-seated friend.)* Hello.

FLORINE: Here, Mama. Take a tray and some silverware.

(She hands the items to MAMA, and then she selects a tray and silverware set for herself.)

MAMA: Thanks, Florine. I *never* would have thought of that. Coleslaw. Thank you.

FLORINE: Cucumbers and carrots, please. The potato salad looks nice. I'll have some. Thanks.

MAMA: Liver and onions. I want extra onions, please.

FLORINE: Fried chicken. *(MAMA gives her a look.)* Never mind. Baked. Two pieces.

MAMA: I thought you were on a diet.

FLORINE: I am.

MAMA: Okra and sweet potatoes.

FLORINE: I'll just take the okra.

MAMA: Was the cornbread made today?

FLORINE: You ask that every time.

MAMA: Sh! It looks good. *(She points.)* I think I'll take that piece. Not that one, dear. It's burnt. *(She points more firmly.)* *This* one.

FLORINE: I'll take a piece, too. That apple pie looks awfully good, Mama.

MAMA: Not today. I think I'll just have some Jell-O. Don't give me the blue. Whoever heard of blue food? I'll take the red, please. Thank you.

(They reach the end of the line. While FLORINE pays for the meals, MAMA, smiling happily at everyone, looks around the seating area for a table. She makes quite a deal out of being seen as she searches. Finally, she points at a nearby location.)

MAMA (CONT.): We'll just sit over there.

(MAMA moves to the table. FLORINE is left to catch up as best she can. FLORINE and MAMA remove their food from their trays, place their napkins in their laps, and begin to eat. MAMA sips her coffee.)

Oh, dear. My coffee's gone cold. I *hate* cold coffee. Here.

(MAMA says this in a very demanding way. She then slides the cup over to FLORINE.)

Get me another cup.

FLORINE: I don't think so.

MAMA: What?

FLORINE: You forgot the magic words.

MAMA: What do you mean?

FLORINE: "Please" and "thank you." The magic words you use for everyone but me.

MAMA: I've never heard you talk like that.

FLORINE: You're polite to everyone else but me. I don't want to get you another cup of coffee! Get it yourself!

MAMA: What?!

FLORINE: You heard me.

MAMA: Sh! You're making a scene. Everybody's looking at us.

FLORINE: Then let *them* get you a cup!

MAMA: You're embarrassing me.

(MAMA is shocked.)

FLORINE: *I'm* embarrassing *you*? How do you think I feel every time you wear that *stupid hat*?

MAMA: Well, I never! What a mean and evil thing to say. You know I love this hat. *(She removes the hat stiffly and slams it on the table.)* I'll just drink my coffee cold.

SONG: I'M A WOMAN NOW

FLORINE: STOP IT, MAMA!

CAN'T YOU HEAR YOURSELF?
I'M NOT A DOORMAT. I'M YOUR DAUGHTER.
I'M NO LITTLE GIRL YOU CAN BOSS AROUND.
ALL I EVER HEAR FROM YOU
IS THE IRRITATING SOUND
OF ALL YOUR CHATTER.
WHY CAN'T WE TALK
ABOUT THE THINGS THAT MATTER?

I know what you really mean. You're angry. You're afraid of slowing down, of losing your pizzazz.

BUT DON'T HIT ME WITH YOUR FEAR.
DON'T WHIP ME WITH YOUR WORDS.
DON'T SCAR ME WITH YOUR SCORN.
THAT'S NOT WHY I WAS BORN.

I'M A LOVELY GIRL.
I CAN DO SO MANY THINGS:
PLANT A GARDEN, COOK A MEAL,
VOLUNTEER FOR PTA, AND FEEL.
I FEEL SO MUCH.

FLORINE (CONT.): ANYONE WOULD LIKE
TO KNOW A GIRL LIKE ME.

I'M NICE. DON'T YOU THINK I'M NICE,
ATTRACTIVE, AND DELIGHTFUL?
DARE I SAY IMPRESSIVE?
CAN'T YOU SEE THE BEST IN ME?

YOU USED TO WATCH ME RUN AND PLAY.
YOU ALWAYS SEEMED TO BE SO PROUD.
WHY CAN'T YOU BE THAT WAY TODAY
AND SAY "I LOVE YOU" OUT LOUD?

MAMA, DON'T YOU SEE I'M JUST LIKE YOU?
I'M DEALING WITH A DAUGHTER, TOO.
IT'S HARD TO SAY WHAT'S IN MY HEART
WHEN NONSENSE MAKES US GO ASTRAY,
BUT HERE WE ARE. DON'T DISAGREE.
TAKE A CHANCE AND LOOK AT ME.
I'M A WOMAN NOW.

Listen to me talking. Listen, Mama. Listen.

I'M A WOMAN NOW.
I'M A WOMAN NOW.

MAMA: You must hate me.

FLORINE: I don't hate you. I'm sorry, Mama. I didn't mean it. Let's just start
the day over.

MAMA: It's twelve noon.

FLORINE: That's not what I meant! Mama, I need to know why you're so sweet
to everyone but me.

MAMA: I don't know what you mean.

FLORINE: Mama, you heard what I said.

MAMA: Eat your food, Florine. You never did eat enough vegetables.

FLORINE: I need you to answer me. Mama, I want to know why!

MAMA: I'm nice. I'm *nice*! Don't you think I'm nice?

FLORINE: To everyone but me!

MAMA: You don't understand.

FLORINE: Then tell me.

MAMA: I'm not just dirty bathwater to be thrown out!

FLORINE: And I'm not some old rug to be walked on, either. Mama, please. We need to talk.

MAMA: *I'm* supposed to be the mama! Not you! You're my baby.

FLORINE: A baby that's grown up.

MAMA: I'm supposed to take care of everyone.

FLORINE: Let me do for you. Please.

MAMA: A mama should watch after—

FLORINE: I know, Mama. After all, I'm a mama, too.

MAMA: That's right. You are.

(She looks at FLORINE. It's the first time she's seen FLORINE as a daughter, a mother, and a woman to be respected. This is moment of deep understanding.)

You certainly are!

FLORINE: Mama? *(Beat.)* Will you please get *me* some coffee?

(FLORINE puts on MAMA's hat. MAMA takes FLORINE's hand. Blackout.)

Twin Sorrows:
November 22, 1963;
September 11, 2001
Dianalee Velie

The Vermont sky, cerulean with promise,
wept today, a duplicate sorrow, mimicking

the New Jersey shore where I wept that winter,
waves of tears washing away a brilliant fall.

A seventeen-year-old mother, isolated and alone,
weeping over the death of a young president,

weeping for a nation and for dreams deferred,
crying for what we all had lost. Placing all my hope

in the pink bundle on my lap, and the blue one
soon to follow, I faithfully shadowed the young man

I loved who would also have to die before
I felt free to fly, fleeing the shadows of my

sorrow and loneliness to write and remember.
Now, in shock and anguish once again,

under a sapphire sky of collective grief,
I compartmentalize and file thirty-eight years

of my life, bookending them forever
between the memory of twin sorrows.

Trees

Doris Davis

It was the trees my father loved
that brought him back to Arkansas,
back to the trees on whose tops
pressed great chunks of billowy sky—
like so much spider web
weighing its whiteness in the air.

Such trees . . .
the oak with its thick thumb of a leaf matting the sky,
cottonwoods shedding pale hair
in long downward drifts,
willows trailing sheaths of leaves
like giant feathery boas.

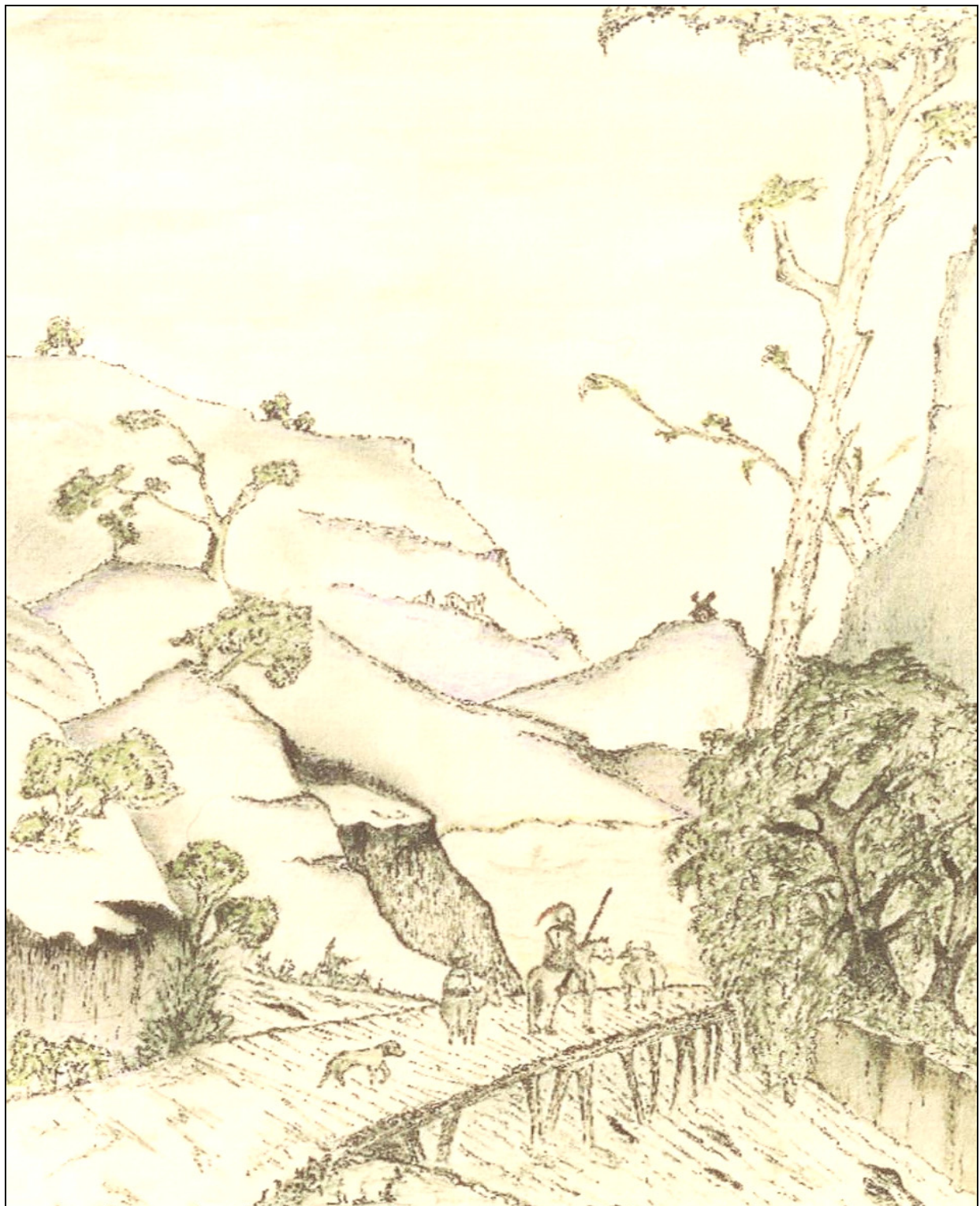
But mostly the black gum.
That was the tree he loved
the fall he left. Outside his window,
tree leaves burst into flame,
their sequins of copper light
gleaming like an enameled Monet.
His heart longed for its beauty.

That fall he waved to a boy
climbing trunks of sloping trees,
to a mother clearing land of stubborn spruce.

I thought of their lucky return to arms
that have held them,
to trees whose roots are their own,

that death is perhaps not blackness after all
but the great light of towering pines turning in the wind,
the broad brightness of the chinquapin
mounting the sky.

Quixote
Lauren Hehmeyer



The Day of the Band¹

Karen Sue Linstrum

The Day of the Band began early
the year after he left for Heaven.
(I pray not Hell.)
The two loves of his life arose
and marched on and on
through the halftime rain:
a downpour of memories, music, and tears.

His name remains everywhere:
on paper, in bronze, embossed
on both our hearts.
As the Day comes and goes,
my memories may fade,
and my tears may dry,
but my heart . . .
my heart will always beat
with the Band.

¹ This poem is dedicated to the poet's brother, Todd.

Season\al\ Master\ed\

Elizabeth Kate Switaj

I have no paintings of my old face
before the turn to beautiful death
 when all that could fall
turned steadier [yellow] [red] than fire
preparing to tumble
 my arteries into crystal
 shattering frost

oils with cadmium, cochineal, cobalt
could have brushed my face between
long summer shadows
 stiff starchless folds

add water for dull spring blooms

this woodblock has no time
this lithograph too many
this photograph
 too wintry & surreal blue

In That Cemetery

Ann Atchison Nicholas

Just this morning, racing down the street
to the job I both love and despise,
I saw them—old woman, aging son—in that cemetery
collecting memories after a funeral.

Husband, father—now gone forever,
leaving them grasping at concepts:
a new me, a new us, a new existence
never to be the same.

My car sped forward, but my mind,
my heart, my soul screeched
to a halt, and I joined them
in their pain in that cemetery.

My sweet parents, both spring-dead,
lie in that cemetery, too, buried
in warm days, cool breezes,
and daffodils laughing at my sorrow.

And this I know: Of all things lost—
home, marriage, children, self—
the death of parents, the death of family,
is the cruelest death.

I cried again.
I cry still
in that cemetery.

*Ms. Havisham's Gate*¹
Lauren Hehmeyer



¹ This drawing was adapted from a picture by Richard Taylor.

Dark Trenches

Gretchen Cobb

Through the deep, dark trenches at night,
He comes riding his cart when the day is small.
In his ghastly disguise, he rides in the moonlight.

In the recesses of my mind, he is but a dim light.
He knows me well, so he will come again to call
Through the deep, dark trenches at night.

Through walls he runs, his cloak trailing in flight.
He crouches so low to the floor to crawl.
In his ghastly disguise, he rides in the moonlight.

He runs on the ceiling, going the speed of light.
I struggle but cannot catch a glimpse of him at all
Through the deep, dark trenches at night.

Is this the apothecary who knows my plight?
Into the secrets of my mind, he travels like rainfall
In his ghastly disguise; he rides in the moonlight

Out into the world with his silver tips alight.
I accept his agonizing drugs to heal all.
Through the deep, dark trenches at night,
In his ghastly disguise, he rides in the moonlight.

Searching
Agnes Tirrito



A Reflection on Life Gone¹

Sarah E. Elliott

Used, worn, broken, abandoned,
Dissolving in a forest of both
The dead and the living.

Buried by dark leaves—dead.
Melting amongst the bright ones—living.
Years of service—wasted?

Once they carried so much inside—
Precious cargo.
Now they are left with emptiness, filth.

They were once filled with color, too.
Now not even the brilliant rays
Of the sun can reach the forgotten ones.

Enslaved by the vines,
Their tormentors.
They mock.

Subjects to the towering trees
Whose merciless leaves block
Their only rays of hope.

Five , ten, fifteen, even more
Drift lonesome in
A quicksand of green.

How many have perished?
Do we know?
Will we remember?

¹ This poem was inspired by David Burt's *The Gathering II*.

Automobile victim:
Man, woman, and beast
Are left to perish as well.

Pull me in; pull me out,
But don't leave me
Like this.

Jane Eyre Arriving at Thornfield
Lauren Hehmeyer



Stop Ignoring the Holiday Season

James Chitty

My friends and I were sharing our favorite holiday stories recently, and the recollection of the better moments of my childhood sent warm fuzzies up my spine like a double shot of Jameson Irish Whiskey. I remember clearly jumping out of bed in the wee hours of the afternoon and racing downstairs with my brother. Rounding the corner into the living room, the first sight to greet us was my old man already passed out in his recliner with a half-empty glass of Guinness dangling from his quasi-conscious fingers. We hurdled his propped-up feet and landed on the floor loud enough for him to cry out something like “Goosenbug!” There before us stood the beautiful monument to the hour, the holiday icon all children dream of: the Guinness Tree.

According to tradition, the Guinness Tree goes up on the first of March. Traveling to the liquor store to pick up a keg of the brown stuff is a family affair. I remember standing back with my mother and my brother while Pop lugged the keg inside the house while muttering like Ozzy Osbourne with an elephant tranquilizer stuck in his neck. My brother and I would take to the front yard after that sacred moment to pick clovers for the Guinness Tree.

By the time we were ready to come back inside, Pop would be tearing down the house to find where Mom had hidden the tap. Sometimes, she’d be clever and place a bottle of Jameson where he could find it so she could stop the rampage ahead of time. Once, being new to the whole Irish thing, she bought a bottle of Bushmills for Pop. He screamed, “We don’t keep this stinking North Irish Protestant crap in this house! We drink proper Catholic whiskey!” She did not repeat her mistake.

Around the Guinness Tree on that magical morn of the seventeenth of March (that’s Saint Paddy’s Day for all of you people who’ve been living under the Blarney Stone) are presents wrapped in Erin green paper. Gifts range from curse clusters to punch bowls, but there’s only one gift a boy worth his green wants. Year after year, I felt like poor Ralphie (you know, that kid in the movie TBS shoves down our throats on that other holiday) when I ripped the paper off the rectangular box in my hands. The anticipation was a killer. Would I get it this year? No, not a pellet gun. (What kind of jackass wants a pellet gun?) My tastes were much more advanced.

I was twelve when my moment finally arrived. I peeled back the wrapping paper. There before my eyes was my very own tap! My heart raced, and my left arm went numb as I lifted the brown-and-white Guinness tap over my head. Now I

was a man. My mother stood up to find the ceremonial tap so we could begin the festivities, but Pop let me use my new one on the Guinness Tree. (He still got the first glass, though.) We sat around the keg and did our best to make it float while Pop told us the story of Saint Patrick. My favorite part is when Patrick fights the Devil and chases him to England (where he's been ever since). After the story, we sat down to a dinner of bacon and cabbage and took bids on when Pop would start screaming obscenities at the invisible Queen of England in our dining room.

Every year during this joyous time of celebration, I feel sorry for the poor children in places like Budapest who know little or nothing about Saint Patrick. (Do leprechauns ever visit Budapest?) When I tell my holiday tales and notice the wide eyes of my friends, I can't help but feel that they haven't shared similar experiences. I ask them about the Guinness Tree, and they shake their heads. Leprechauns? Saint Paddy's Day presents? A month of nothing but potato dinners? They respond with "No, no, and potatoes? We don't need no stinking potatoes!" I'm horrified to learn that they don't even roast marshmallows over the Union Jack.

This holiday season, do your family a favor and don't forget to honor Saint Patrick and his contribution to the world. Don't let his bringing Christianity to Ireland go uncelebrated. Bring on the cabbage, binge drinking, and friendly fights. You'll be glad you did . . . at least until the morning after.

Gnomeland Security

R. S. Dunn

So now the gnomes are advocating
Building a 700-mile border fence
To keep the elves out of Gnomeland,
Insisting that elves pop up too often
(Without official papers, of course)
And steal cookie-baking, shoemaking,
And insurance jobs (at Mutual
Of Gnomaha) from proper God-
Fearing native-born gnomes.

Elfish pride, naturally, is stung
By all this. “We only get the jobs
The gnomes don’t want to do.
They don’t bake; they don’t cobble;
They won’t calculate actuarial tables—
They say that’s all beneath them.
So who are we hurting? Tell us that!
All *they* want to do is stand
On their lawns holding iron talismans
And communing all the live-long day
With their magic mushrooms—
Which, we might add, are likewise
Undocumented. They don’t crack down
On the mushrooms, so why shouldn’t
We elves have the same opportunities?”

The gnomes, in turn, deride what they call
The elves’ “pointy-eared intellectualism”
And pointedly demand that the elves
Click their heels together three times
And go back to “Elf Salvador,
Or wherever it is they came from.”

A good and lovely Good Fairy
Once appeared and offered to resolve

The crisis with a wave of her magic wand,
But the gnomes sent up a banshee wailing,
“We don’t accept waivers, and we hate fairies!”
In calmer moments, the gnomes tend to snicker,
“Wall’s well that ends well.”
But they really aren’t fooling anybody.

Gnome
Gergely Kovacs



Mary Had a Little Love

Doris Davis

What I know about that woman
and man is only hearsay about how
their engines ran so fast, even in neutral,
they hopped right out of their cars
to feel each other's hot flesh on the field
just beyond the school. They didn't know the bell
had rung, didn't know the children—who lingered
for rides—saw more than Mary's lamb at school.

As drunk as Bacchus and his nymphs
on the sweet high of love, they seesawed,
a levitation that lifted them right off the ground . . .
landed them in the lap of Miss Fleece, the principal,
who, when the police arrived, could only say,
Why, I never . . .

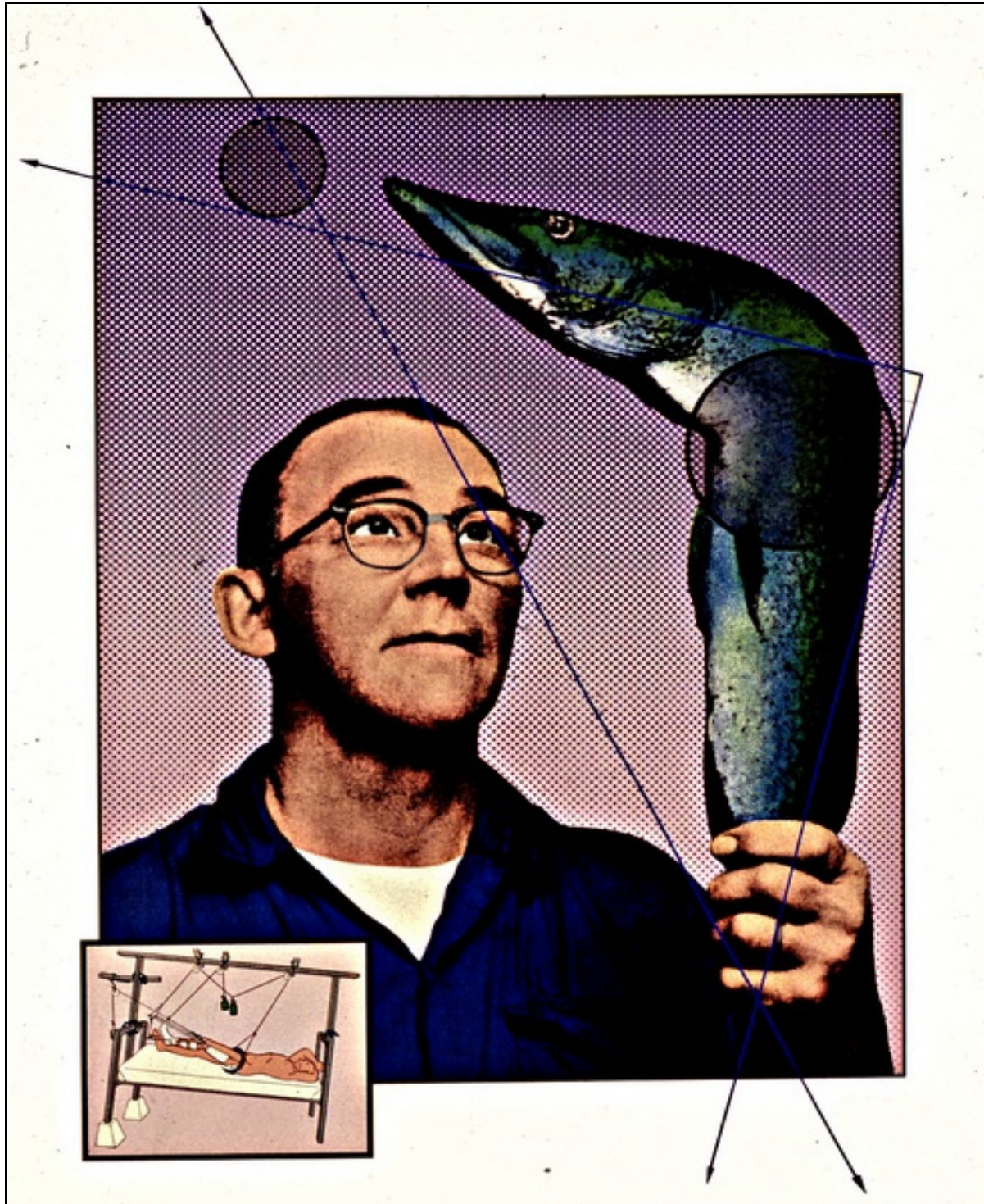
and then again, *I never!*

Beauty and the Fish

R. S. Dunn

Bobbing in a gentle swell off Aruba,
Staring into my Martha's eyes,
I was granted a sudden insight
Into the true secret meaning of beauty.
It was the gleam of tropical fish
Nosing along the coral reefs
Combined with the words of an Aruban
Fishing smack captain of ancient lineage
That made it all clear to me:
The brighter the colors,
The more beautiful the fish,
The more poisonous it was
For human consumption.
And after another moment's gazing
At each other over our mahi-mahi,
I jumped over the rail
And found comparative satisfaction
Nuzzling the Yellow Tangs.
Their flavor was, of course, *excruciating* . . .
But, man! What piscine bling!

TurnPike
Richard Karnatz



Clean Sweep
Dianalee Velie

Romance swept past
us the day you gifted me
a vacuum cleaner
for my birthday.
I grant you,
the old one
tired easily
and was lately
prone to violent outbursts
of dirt and dander—
the vacuum, that is,
not you, darling—
but the new one
came on bold and bright,
anxious to sweep up
anything in its path,
which is where
I placed myself,
unknowingly anxious
to once again
be swept away.

Atomic Blast Eyewear
Richard Karnatz



Hand-Me-Downs¹

Lori Parault

I'm not the oldest.
I'm not so tall,
So I am the one
That the burden befalls.

They get new clothes
As we make the rounds.
But, no, not me . . .
I get the hand-me-downs.

I'm not too sad.
I'm a good brother.
The clothes aren't too shabby,
And I have no others.

The shoes fit nicely
And don't make blisters.
I only wish
They didn't come from my sisters.

¹ The words in this poem should be pronounced as if sniffled.

After Losing My Eyeglasses

H. K. Hummel

I.

Suddenly, I understand Mary Cassatt.
The diffusion of winter light
is emphasized as everything fuzzes just so—
smudged edges of hemlocks
with coins of rain glancing off the blacktop.

The world beyond arm's reach
goes muddy, unfocused, off-center.
For the near-sighted, we must
hold close both fiend and friend
to recognize them.

II.

See the way focused light begins
to burn through one spot in the cloud,
one aperture intensifying to the size of a dinner platter,
creating another illumined circlet
exactly equally on the sea below?
In a second, the cloud can re-cover, and all is gone.

That coloring, that quality
is what we feel and
want to name
for knowing.

III.

She recreated the greats—
Correggio, El Greco, Vermeer—
and then, from those foci, moved
out. Clouds, fog, mist, a flurry of fresh snow
weathered her vision.

Cassatt let the paint dry on her palette:
the black smear of World War I
rumbled across the continents. Modernity
came with the fullness of nothing.
She couldn't see well enough
to capture the luminous
ruddy knuckles or that sensuous fullness
of crinoline or muslin. So she sat down.

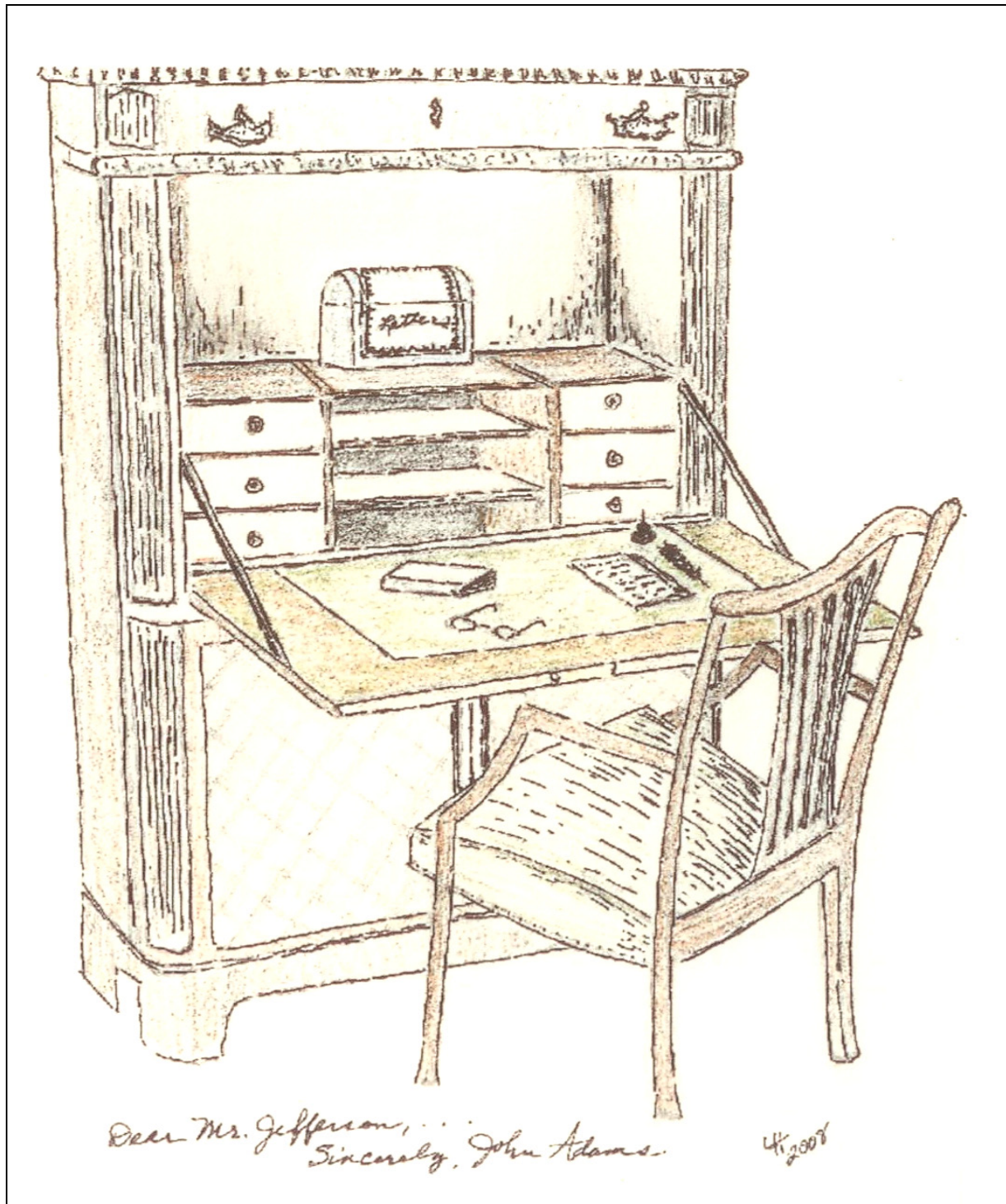
IV.

The world isn't a place for keeping time;
we move full-tilt, a whirling globe,
a shoal of desperate anchovies.

How many layers of motion
can a canvas hold?

Peering into
a courtyard filling with snow,
I continue trying to grasp, as she did,
depth circumscribed with precise effusion.

Sincerely, John Adams
Lauren Hehmeyer



The New Script¹

Carol Levin

We labored to fit Russian
into English like concentrating
a fat man into his skinny
cousin's clothes, popping
seams.

We mended nouns
to baste a play
syntactically verbed,
coerced time to cram hours
into minutes, tailored
foreign idioms, pinned

syllable to syllable,
fitting *nyet* into *no*,
ripping out, rewording,
tucking Chekhov's nuance

into English sensibility.
We opened each other's hearts,
needled each other's nerves,
slid night and day
like silk thread through

the chasm that separates
Russian from American
like the chasm
that separates the moon
from the sun.

The actors wear *The Seagull's* words
as skin, say the new translation
is as easy to slip into as slippers.
Chekhov, leaning out
of Heaven, is applauding.

¹ This poem is dedicated to Laura Akmylavskaya and Leonid Ansimov.

What's in the Meadow?

Lori Parault

One black cat hiding in the grass,
Watching as the hound dog runs right past.

Two green frogs splashing in the water,
Jumping on a rotten log, hiding from the otter.

Three brown bears basking in the sun,
Romping in the meadow, having lots of fun.

Four fledgling red birds learning how to fly
Try their tiny wings alone . . . but Mother is nearby.

Five blue dragonflies arriving with the wind.
Oh, the things that they have seen—the places they have been!

Six yellow bees near an old hollow tree.
Many more are in the wood where we can't see.

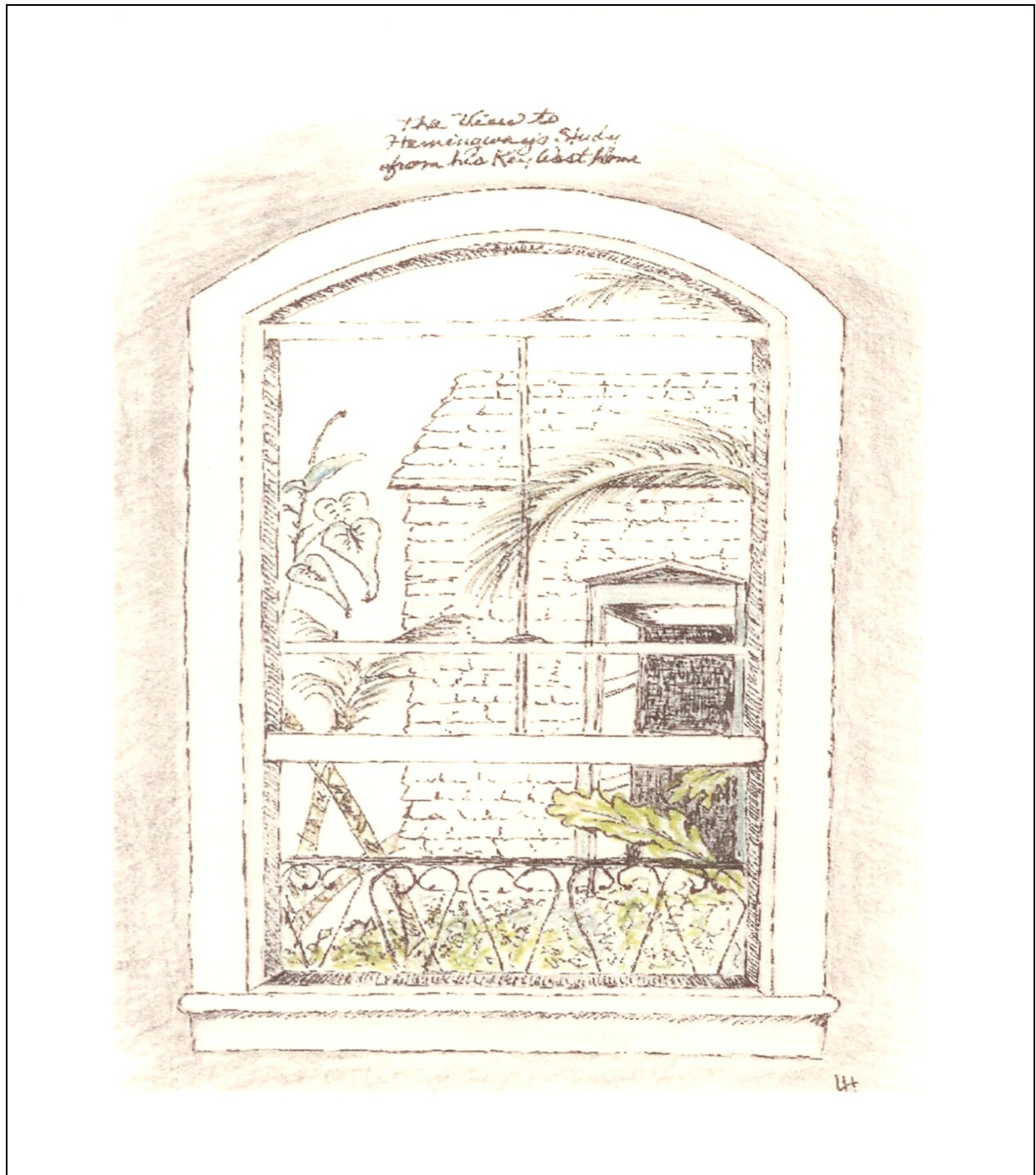
Seven purple flowers standing by the lane,
Waiting patiently to wash their faces in the rain.

Eight white bunnies hopping in a row,
Looking for a place to stay. Where will they all go?

Nine bugs a shade of lavender climbing up a tree.
I've never seen their like before. Whatever could they be?

Ten orange butterflies high among the trees,
Floating on the silky air and soaring on the breeze.

*The View to Hemingway's Study
from His Key West Home*
Lauren Hehmeyer



Puss in Boots's Complaint

Doris Davis

Chicanery is inevitable
when one becomes the inheritance
of a third-son numbskull!

Life was better with witches!
Double, double, toil and trouble
never bothered me—they smelled
of severed thumbs and swine-breath,
mouthed their scrumptious concoctions
in my ears, taught equivocation,

even a trick of prophecy.
I come, Graymalkin . . .
Such fond memories.

Their tutelage benefitted
my fourth life with D. Whittington,
nice lad, but down on his luck.
I *volunteered* to go on a hunch he'd be Lord Mayor,
do his duty toward my kind.

Then I tumbled forth as Tom Tildrum,
summoned at ol' Toldrum's demise
to become King O' the Cats, per-
fect distinction, stupidly proclaimed
by that sexton chap—none too bright.

But this dullard of a third son
makes Lazy Jack seem sharp.
His doltish questions stagger:

Who is the Marquis of Carabas?
Why must I hide my clothes?
Must you bother the ogre?
And so forth.

Yes, I am now Lord Puss
(royalty becomes me),
but my “master”?
Still a whey-faced sap of an ignoramus!

Lime Green

Lori Parault

The best flavored popsicle inside the box.
Jammies to wear while in bed with the pox.

A soft, squishy purse from big New York City.
A collar to put on the neck of my kitty.

Fun, fuzzy flip-flops to wear on my feet.
The craziest house on the neighborhood street.

Lollies and earrings and Mother's best dress.
Lime green is the color my mother likes best.

Where Were You, Wall Street?
Malcolm L. McCallum

Where were you, Wall Street,
on the day you let me go—
that day you left me stranded with
no benefits to show?

Where were you, Wall Street,
when my phone bill was so late?
Where were you when I noticed
days had passed since I last ate?

Where were you, Wall Street,
when I needed you to loan?
Why was it you decided then
to leave me all alone?

Where were you, Wall Street,
when they dumped waste on my house
and left me with a sickly child
and thoughts so full of doubt?

Where were you, Wall Street,
when I needed someone's hand?
When I asked you to stay and help,
you simply turned and ran.

And now that you're so desperate,
you're asking me for cash.
You want the money that I have;
you'd spend it in a flash.

You could have shown me pity
and given me a break.
You could have granted me some time
and let my payments wait.

Instead, you just attacked me
with phone calls late at night
and said that all the thoughts I had
were wrong in any light.

You plastered your expensive ads
on TV spots to show
how pollution doesn't hurt us
and how you love us so.

How vital and important
your friendship may yet be,
but now I really could care less.
You didn't care for me.

About the Contributors

Jennifer Beaty is a student at Texas A&M University-Texarkana pursuing a bachelor's degree in business administration. She attended the university's Young Writers' Program each summer from 1995 to 1997. She enjoys writing, amateur photography, knitting, and spending time with her daughter (Emily).

Ron Burch has published short stories (in print and online) in *Mississippi Review*, *Pindeldyboz*, *PRISM International*, *The Saint Ann's Review*, *Small Spiral Notebook*, and other journals.

Jesse Capps is a writer and stand-up comedian who has performed with the Black Justice League Comedy Team in Texarkana, Arkansas, and Shreveport, Louisiana. He performs karaoke every week. In his spare time, he likes to grow beards and shave them without warning.

James Chitty is an English education major at Texas A&M University-Texarkana who currently serves as the secretary for the English Club. After graduation, he plans to teach high school English in Arkansas. One of his favorite pastimes is reading Lovecraft to his baby daughter.

Gretchen Cobb was born in Washington, DC, and she has lived in Texarkana for fifteen years. She received her BS degree in deaf education from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. She is currently pursuing a master's degree in English from Texas A&M University-Texarkana. She has been teaching English and other high school subjects for sixteen years. Her hobbies include reading, interpreting for the deaf, and coaching gymnastics. However, her number-one hobby is writing (she started keeping a journal at the age of fifteen).

Philip Dacey has published ten books. His latest book—*Vertebrae Rosaries: Fifty Sonnets*—will be available from Red Dragonfly Press in 2009. His awards include three Pushcart Prizes, a Fulbright fellowship to Yugoslavia, and two National Endowment for the Arts creative writing fellowships. More about him appears at www.philipdacey.com.

Julie Daniel is a graduate student at Texas A&M University-Texarkana. She is also a member of the Texarkana Poet Society.

Dr. 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.

R. S. Dunn is the editor of the poetry journal *Asbestos*, the former editor of *Medicinal Purposes Literary Review*, and the erstwhile host of the *Poet to Poet* cable television show. His work has appeared in such publications as *Krax*, *Imago*, *Mobius*, *Art Times*, *Rattapallax*, *Nomad's Choir*, *Critical Perspectives in Accounting*, and *Pegasus*. His full-length collections of poetry include *Zen Yentas in Bondage*, *Playing in Traffic*, *Horse Latitudes*, and *Baffled in Baloneyville*. Additionally, he has released a CD of his performed work (*Sickly Minutes*).

Sarah E. Elliott is completing her undergraduate degree in English at Texas A&M University-Texarkana.

Lauren Hehmeyer is a professor of history and English at Texarkana College in Texarkana, Texas. Before becoming a teacher, she was a reference librarian. Her hobbies are drawing, painting, reading, and gardening. She also enjoys travel, especially to places of historic or literary note.

H. K. Hummel has published her work in *Babel*, *Calyx*, and *Quay*. She is the recipient of Western Australia's 2009 Katherine Susannah Prichard Emerging Writer in Residence Award. She is co-editor of *Blood Orange Review* (www.bloodorangereview.com), and she lives in Berkeley, California.

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 three-year-old daughter (Zoe).

Richard Karnatz was born in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, in 1961. After working as an apprentice for five female artisans at Calabash Pottery and Clayworks and sculptor Frank Williams in Fayetteville, Arkansas, he began his college career at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville. He completed his schooling at the University of South Florida, earning a BFA with honors in photography. He has worked in New York and New Orleans as a studio manager. He currently lives in Texarkana, Texas.

Debra Kaufman is a poet and playwright who lives in Mebane, North Carolina. She is the author of two poetry chapbooks—*Family of Strangers* and *Still Life*

Burning—and a full-length collection (*A Certain Light*). Her chapbook *Moon Mirror Whiskey Wind* is forthcoming from Pudding House Press.

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.

Gergely (Greg) Kovacs is a graduate student from Hungary. Art is his hobby and his means of expressing himself. He does not have a preferred medium, but he favors working with digital design. Other than art, he loves foreign cultures. In his free time, he tries to learn new languages.

Carol Levin has recently published a chapbook (*Sea Lions Sing Scat*) with Finishing Line Press (2007), and *Red Rooms and Others* is pending from Pecan Grove Press. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The New York Quarterly*, *Gander Press Review*, *Late Blooms* (a postcard series), *The Massachusetts Review*, *Third Coast*, *The Seattle Review*, and *The Pedestal Magazine*. Her poems have been set to music and performed by several choirs. She has also collaborated with two Russians to translate Chekhov's four major plays and write a dictionary of Stanislavski terms for theater artists. Ms. Levin is an editorial assistant for the *Crab Creek Review*, and she teaches the Alexander Technique in Seattle.

Dr. Karen Sue Linstrum was transformed after reading Kenneth Koch's *Wishes, Lies, and Dreams*, a 1970 book about teaching poetry to children. Dr. Linstrum enjoys poetry therapy and other forms of bibliotherapy. She worked primarily with children, adolescents, and families in the psychiatric field as a Licensed Professional Counselor for over twenty years before returning to college to earn a PhD in counseling in 2004. Dr. Linstrum is interested in the correlation between a child's reading ability and a child's self-confidence.

Susan H. Maurer has published several little books including *By the Blue Light of the Morning Glory*, in2 (with Mark Sonnenfeld), and *Raptor Rhapsody*. She has received three Pushcart Prize nominations, and she has appeared in over 400 magazines and anthologies.

Dr. Malcolm McCallum is an associate professor of biology at Texas A&M University-Texarkana. He also serves as the editor for *Herpetological Conservation and Biology* (www.herpconbio.org).

Colleen Narens has been writing since a young age. She attended Texas A&M University-Texarkana's Young Writers' Program each summer from 1994 to 1997, allowing her the chance to experiment with writing prose, poetry, and short stories. She is a recent graduate of Texas A&M University-Texarkana with a bachelor's degree in English, and she is currently pursuing the master's degree in English offered by the university.

Rachelle Neuman graduated from the University of the Incarnate Word with a bachelor's degree in drama. Some of her scripts include *Brown Pigs and Burgers*, *The Three Faces of Yitzhak* (performed in Akko, Israel), *Hattitude*, and the timely *Darfur Calls*. Several of Rachelle's original short plays have been performed in San Antonio, Texas, by the Renaissance Theater Guild and Steven Stoli's Theater. She has also directed original folk plays at San Antonio's Temple Beth-El for children of all ages. She enjoys working with her friend and musical partner, Linda Kaufman, who has a million tunes bubbling in her head. She thanks her husband, Sterling, who always encourages her to challenge herself.

Ann Atchison Nicholas lives in Texarkana, Texas, where she works as a ballet instructor, a county clerk, and a voter registrar. She volunteers for community service regularly and serves on the board of directors for TexRep, Texarkana's regional theatre organization. She has three children (Martha Grace, Rebecca, and Hamilton) and three grandchildren (Anna Elizabeth, Ethan, and Lauren).

Lori Parault was born in New Orleans in 1964, but she grew up all around the southern United States. She attended the University of New Orleans in the early 1980s, but she left school to become a wife and a mother. After working in a variety of positions, Lori returned to college in 2006. Lori is currently attending Texas A&M University-Texarkana, and she plans to attend law school after receiving her bachelor's degree. She is a former student editor for *Aquila Review*. She currently resides with her husband and children in Ashdown, Arkansas.

Tamara Richert is a college student from Texarkana, Texas; she writes for fun and as a release from daily chaos. Her poems are dedicated to her brother (Randolph Michael Jones), who died on September 27, 2007.

Elizabeth Kate Switaj (www.elizabethkateswitaj.net) has two full-length collections of poetry forthcoming: *Magdalene & the Mermaids* from Paper Kite Press and *How to Drink a Floral Moon* from Blue Lion Books. Her chapbook, *The Broken Sanctuary: Nature Poems*, is currently available from Ypolita Press, and her e-chap, *Shanghai*, is available from Gold Wake Press. She edits *Crossing Rivers into Twilight* (www.critjournal.com) and serves as assistant editor for *Inertia Magazine*. Her professional experience includes teaching in cities throughout Japan, China, and the United States as well as writing online copy for a kimono import company and conducting media research.

Agnes Tirrito is employed by Texarkana Independent School District. She is a lead 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. Mrs. Tirrito is a co-director for the East Texas Writing Project, a National Writing Project site.

Dianalee Velie is a graduate of Sarah Lawrence College, and she holds a Master of Arts in Writing from Manhattanville College. Rock Village Publishing has published three books of her poetry (*Glass House, First Edition*, and *The Many Roads to Paradise*). She has served as a faculty advisor to *Inkwell Magazine* (the literary journal for Manhattanville College's MAW program), and she has taught writing at Norwalk Community College, the State University of New York in Purchase, the University of Connecticut at Stamford, and many other colleges and universities.

Krystyl Wimberly has taught fourth grade at Westlawn Elementary in Texarkana, Texas, for the past two years. In her spare time, she loves to take art classes.