

BADLANDS

Badlands
Issue One
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Poetry

Pablo Neruda translated by William O'Daly	Eight Poems	6
Félix Lope de Vega translated by Boyd Nielson	Two Poems	38
Jan Neruda translated by A. K. Adams	Jak lvové bijem o mříže	42
Jay Lewenstein	La Casa de Mae Rim	44
Maria Elena B. Mahler	Two poems	46
Elsa Frausto	Two poems	49
Orlando Ramirez	Arizona	51
Lois P. Jones	Beyond Words	53
Derek Henderson	Two poems	54
Jeff Poggi	Three poems	58
Katherine Factor	Three poems	61
Monte Landis	The Big Still	64
Nicole Comstock	Two poems	68
Paula Stinson	No Funeral for a Fire	71
Günther Bedson	East Berlin	73
A. N. Teibe	Three poems	76
Wendy Silva	Two poems	80
Nikia Chaney	<i>from</i> she speaks about what she sees in the man	82
Ash Russell	Two poems	86

Susan Rogers	This Lotus	88
Russell Hoberg	Yeats Limerick	89
Patricia D'Alessandro	The Mind is Electric Waiting for Wet Fingers	90
Ruth Nolan	Tag Cloud	92
Isabel Quintero-Flores	Dia de Campo	93
Kath Abela Wilson	Three Poems	95

Fiction

1968	Eileen Chavez	99
An Ordinary Stone	G. Gordon Davis	108
Instead of Space Ninjas	David Camberos	117
Expectations	Mariano Zaro	125
Celia	Renate Mörder	127
The Novelist	Demi Anter	130
The Present	Bruce Chronister	133
Plan B	Tony O'Doherty	137

Nonfiction

Drinking Tea with My Omi	Diana Holdsworth	146
My Father's Willow	Linda Marie Prejean	152

Es Demasiado

PABLO NERUDA

Hoy me parece que sostengo
todo el cielo con mis anteojos
y que la tierra no se mueve
debajo de mis pies pesados.
Sucede al hombre y a su estirpe
sentirse crecer falsamente
y falsamente destinarse
una falsa soberanía!

Así se levanta a sí mismo
una cabeza colosal
y se siente grande por dentro,
por la izquierda y por la derecha,
a la distancia y de perfil,
y por delante y por detrás.

Se busca el escritor creciente,
un crítico color de mosca
que le dore cada domingo
su pildorita de moda.
Pero no menos le sucede
al militar inoportuno
que comanda y comanda números
y regimientos de papel:
caballeros, caballerizas,
tanques grandes como volcanes,
proyectiles ferruginosos.

(continued on page 8)

It Is Too Much

TRANSLATED BY WILLIAM O'DALY

Today it seems I am holding up
the whole sky with my eyeglasses
and the earth does not shift
under my heavy feet.

It dogs a man and his ancestry,
what it is to grow falsely
and falsely intend to assume
a false sovereignty!

So, it rises to itself
a colossal head,
it feels huge inside,
on the left and on the right
at a distance and from the side,
and in the front and in the back.

We are looking for a growing writer,
a critic the color of a fly
who every Sunday gilds
his little pill of fashion.
But nothing less happens
to the untimely military man
who commands and commands numbers,
regiments of paper:
gentlemen, grooms,
tanks big as volcanoes,
iron projectiles.

(continued on page 9)

Algo así le pasa también
al hipotético político
que conduce sin conducir
a multitudes invisibles.

Entonces cuando se me sube
la cabeza al humo, o más bien
el humo al pelo, el pelo al humo,
o me siento mayor que ayer,
la experiencia, con su tristeza,
me da un golpe de sopetón,
un torpe tirón de chaqueta,
y me derrumbo en mi verdad,
en mi verdad sin desmesura,
en mi pequeña y pasajera
verdad de ayer y todavía.

—from DE FIN DEL MUNDO by *Pablo Neruda*

Something like that also happens
to the hypothetical politician
who leads without leading
the invisible multitudes.

Then when my head rises
to the smoke, or better yet
the smoke to the hair, the hair to the smoke,
or I feel older than yesterday,
experience, with its sadness,
delivers a sudden blow,
a clumsy tug on my jacket,
and I collapse into my truth,
into my truth, without excess,
into my small and fleeting
truth of yesterday and now.

—from *WORLD'S END*, a translation of Pablo Neruda's *DE FIN DEL MUNDO* by William O'Daly

Proverbios

PABLO NERUDA

EL ESTÍMULO DE LA SOMBRA
hizo brillar rastros oscuros,
huesos que el aire derribó
detrás de los ferrocarriles,
o simplemente estrellas negras
que nadie quiere ni conoce.
ÉSA FUE MI ESTACIÓN PRIMERA.

Tuve que hacer y adivinar
para vivir y subsistir,
tuve que trenzar el dolor
hasta sacar fuerza de donde
nadie podía sacar nada,
especialicé mi tristeza
y trabajando a la intemperie
endurecí mi viejo traje.
Ésa fue la estación segunda.

La tercera es ésta que vivo
contando y recontando mi alma,
seguro de tantos errores,
satisfecho de mis desvíos.

Si sirve o no mi corazón
que otros saquen la consecuencia.

—*from* DE FIN DEL MUNDO *by* Pablo Neruda

It Is Too Much

TRANSLATED BY WILLIAM O'DALY

The stimulus of the shadow
made dark trails shine,
bones the air demolished
beyond the railways,
or simply black stars
that no one wants or knows.
That was my first season.

I had to make and prophesy
to live and survive,
I had to braid the pain
until finding strength where
no one was able to find anything,
I specialized my sadness,
and working in the open
I toughened my old suit.
That was the second season.

The third is this that I live
telling and retelling my soul,
sure of so many mistakes,
at peace with my deviations.

Whether or not my heart helps
let others take on the consequences.

—from *WORLD'S END*, a translation of Pablo Neruda's *DE FIN DEL MUNDO* by William O'Daly

Libro

PABLO NERUDA

Mi cuaderno de un año a un año
se ha llenado de viento y hojas,
caligrafía, cal, cebollas,
raíces y mujeres muertas.

Por qué tantas cosas pasaron
y por qué no pasaron otras?

Extraño incidente de amor,
del corazón embelesado
que no vino a inscribir su beso,
o bien el tren que se movió
a un planeta deshabitado
con tres fumadores adentro
capaces de ir y de volver
sin ventaja para ninguno,
sin desventaja para nadie.

Y así se prueba que después
aprenderemos a volver
en forma desinteresada,
sin hacer nada aquí ni allí,
puesto que resulta muy caro

en los finales de este siglo
residir en cualquier planeta,
de tal manera que, ni modo:

(continued on page 14)

Book

TRANSLATED BY WILLIAM O'DALY

From year to year my journal
has filled with wind and leaves,
calligraphy, lime, onions,
roots, and dead women.

Why have so many things happened
and why have others not happened?

Strange episode of love,
of the captivated heart
that never got to inscribe its kiss,
or else the train that traveled
with three smokers inside
to an uninhabited planet,
able to leave and to return
without benefiting anyone,
without harming anyone.

Thus it is proved, only afterward
do we learn to come back
in a disinterested form,
doing nothing here or there,
for it turns out to be so costly

in the final trials of this century
to live on any planet,
so much so that, what can be done:

(continued on page 15)

no hay sitio aquí para los pobres,
ni menos aún en el cielo.

Así las bodas espaciales
de nuestros insectos terrestres
rompieron la razón al tiempo
que rompían la sinrazón:
como una cáscara de huevo
se quebró la tapa del mundo
y otra vez fuimos provincianos:
entre nosotros se sabía
cómo hacer calles en la tierra
y cómo amar y perseguir
y crucificar a tu hermano.
Ahora el interrogatorio
de la luz con la oscuridad
toma una nueva proporción:
la del miedo con esperanza
y la de la sabiduría
que tiene que cambiar de tiesto.

Yo me perdono de saber
lo poco que supe en mi vida,
pero no me lo perdonaron
los avestruces de mi edad.
Ellos siempre sabían más
porque metían la cabeza
en los diarios de los Domingos.

(continued on page 16)

there is no place here for the poor,
and even less in the sky.

So the weddings in space
of our earthly insects
broke with justice as
they were breaking with the lack of justice:
the hard cover of the world cracked
like an eggshell
and again we inhabited the provinces:
together we knew
how to build streets on the earth
and how to love and to pursue
and to crucify your brother.
Now the interrogation
of the light by the darkness
takes on a new proportion:
the light of fear, with hope,
and of wisdom
that must change flowerpots.

I forgive myself for knowing
how little I knew in my life,
but the ostriches of my age
never forgave me for it.
They always knew more
because they buried their heads
in the Sunday papers.

(continued on page 17)

Pero mi error más decidido
fue que entrara el agua en el rostro
de mis intensas letanís:
por las ventanas se divisa
mi corazón lleno de lluvia.

Porque nacer es una cosa
y otra cosa es el fin del mundo
con sus volcanes encendidos
que se propusieron parirte:
así pasó con mis destinos
desde las uvas de Parral
(donde nací sin ir más lejos),
has las montañas mojadas
con indios cargados de humo
y fuego verde en la cintura.

—from DE FIN DEL MUNDO by *Pablo Neruda*

But my most resolute mistake
was the water running down the face
of my passionate litanies:
through the windows it saw itself,
my heart full of rain.

Because being born is one thing,
and a whole other thing is the end of the world
with its fiery volcanoes
that proposed giving birth to you:
so it was with my destinies
from the grapes of Parral
(where I was born, going no farther)
to the damp mountains
with indians heavy with smoke
and green fire around the waist.

—from *WORLD'S END*, a translation of Pablo Neruda's *DE FIN DEL MUNDO* by William O'Daly

Vivir Cien Años

PABLO NERUDA

Estos cien años los viví
transmigrando de guerra en guerra,
bebiendo la sangre en los libros,
en los periódicos, en la
televisión, en la casa,
en el tren, en la primavera,
en España de mis dolores.

Europa se olvidó de todo,
de la pintura y de los quesos,
de Rotterdam y de Rimbaud
para derramar sus racimos
y salpicarnos a nosotros,
americanos inocentes,
con la sangre de todo el mundo.

Oh, Europa negra, codiciosa
como las serpientes hambrientas,
hasta se te ven las costillas
en tu moderna geografía
y entregas tu luz insensata
a otros soldados sempiternos
que se empeñan en enseñar
sin haber aprendido nunca:
sólo saben ensangrentar
la historia norteamericana.

(continued on page 20)

To Live One Hundred Years

TRANSLATED BY WILLIAM O'DALY

Those one hundred years I lived
one body to the next, from war to war,
drinking the blood of the books,
of the newspapers, of the
television, of the house,
of the train, of the spring,
of the Spain of my sorrows.

Europe forsook everything,
the painter and the cheeses,
Rotterdam and Rimbaud,
so as to pour its clusters
and spatter us,
innocent Americans,
with the blood of the whole world.

Oh, black Europe, greedy
like hungry serpents,
we see even your ribs
in your modern geography,
and you deliver your foolish light
to other perpetual warriors
who persist in teaching
without learning anything:
they only know how to steep in blood
the history of North America.

(continued on page 21)

Pero no se trata de tanto,
sino de mucho más aún,
no sólo de lo que vivimos
o de lo que viviremos
sino de cuál es la razón
de reventar lo que tuvimos,
de quebrar lo que sostenía
la copa de lo cristalino
y hundir el hocico en la sangre
insultándonos mutuamente.

Yo tantas preguntas me hice
que me fui a vivir a la orilla
del mar heroico y simultáneo
y tiré al agua las respuestas
para no pelearme con nadie,
hasta que ya no pregunté
y de todo un siglo de muerte
me pongo a escuchar lo que dice
el mar que no me dice nada.

—*from DE FIN DEL MUNDO by Pablo Neruda*

But it is not really about much
but much more yet,
not only about what we lived
or what we will live
but rather, what the reason is
for blowing up what we had,
for shattering what sustained
the glass of the crystalline lens
and sinking the snout in blood,
insulting us all, mutually.

I asked myself so many questions
that I went to live at the shore
of the heroic and simultaneous sea,
and I threw the answers into the water
to avoid fighting with anyone,
until I asked no more
and out of an entire century of death
I set myself the task of listening to what it says,
the sea, which says nothing to me.

—from *WORLD'S END*, a translation of Pablo Neruda's *DE FIN DEL MUNDO* by William O'Daly

Astro en el Día

PABLO NERUDA

Oh sol lleno de uñas,
animal de oro, abeja,
perro pastor del mundo,
perdona
el extravío,
ya llegamos, volvimos,
todos juntos
ya estamos esperando
en el corral del día.

Si desobedecemos esa noche,
si nos fuimos al sueño de la luna
a resolver el luto y los planetas,
si nos reconcentramos
en nuestra propia piel
hambrienta
de amor y de comida,
aquí estamos
de nuevo
en el redil,
obedeciendo
a tus largas espátulas de luz,
a tus dedos que se meten en todo,
a tu concubinato de semillas.
Ya se pusieron todos a moverse,
a correr. Ciudadano,

(continued on page 24)

Star in Daylight

TRANSLATED BY WILLIAM O'DALY

O sun full of fingernails,
animal of gold, bumblebee,
sheepdog of the world,
forgive
our going astray,
we have arrived, we return,
we are already waiting
all together
in the corral of day.

Say we disobeyed that night,
say we left it to the sleep of the moon
to solve the mourning and the planets,
say we withdraw into ourselves,
into our own skin hungry
for love and a meal,
we again are
here
in the sheepfold,
obeying
your long spatulas of light,
your fingers that reach into everything,
your cohabitation of seeds.

Soon everyone set about moving,
hurrying. Citizen,

(continued on page 25)

el día es corto y ahí está el sol como un toro
pataleando en la arena:
corra a buscar su pala,
su palanca,
su artesa,
su termómetro,
su pito, su pincel o sus tijeras,

su esparadrapo,
su montacargas, su buró político,
sus papas en el mercado:
corra, señora, corra
caballero,
por aquí, por acá, mueva las manos,
se nos acaba la luz.

El sol llenó de estacas la alegría,
la esperanza, el padecimiento
se fue de un lado a otro con sus rayos
delimitando, atribuyendo tierras,
y cada uno tiene que sudar,
antes de que se vaya
con su luz a otra parte
a comenzar y comenzar de nuevo
mientras los de este lado se quedaron
inmóviles, dormidos,
hasta mañana lunes.

—from *LAS MANOS DEL DÍA* by Pablo Neruda

the day is short and there the sun is like a bull
kicking in the sand:
hurry in search of your shovel,
your lever,
your kneading trough,
your thermometer,
your whistle, your paintbrush or your scissors,

your plaster,
your freight elevator, your political bureau,
your potatoes at the market:
hurry, Ma'am, hurry
Mister,
over here, this way, put your hands to good use,
we are running out of daylight.

The sun, with stakes, pierced joy,
hope, suffering,
it traveled from one side to the other with its rays
parceling out, attributing lands,
and everyone has to sweat
before it leaves
with its light for somewhere else
to begin and begin again,
while those on this side remained
motionless, sleeping
until Monday morning.

—from *HANDS OF THE DAY*, a translation of Pablo Neruda's *LAS MANOS DEL DÍA* by William O'Daly

La Ceremonia

PABLO NERUDA

Qué hiciste de tus manos,
árbol muerto?
Las dejaste
colgando
del otoño?
Las arrastraste
por la carretera
de la muerte amarilla?

Oh lento nido
de la hojarasca, el viento
llegó con su violín
y luego el fuego.

Yo vi la ceremonia:
dura una vida
entera:
eres tierra, eres semilla,
eres tacto,
eres tronco,
eres hojas,
eres trino,
eres oro,
estás desnudo, encima
del invierno,
no tienes manos,
eres
de nuevo

(continued on page 28)

The Ceremony

TRANSLATED BY WILLIAM O'DALY

With your hands, dead tree,
what did you make?
Did you abandon them
dangling
from autumn?
Did you drag them
along the road
of yellow death?

Oh slow nest
of fallen leaves, the wind
arrived with its violin
and then the fire.

I attended the ceremony:
it lasts
a whole lifetime:
you are earth, you are seed,
you are touch,
you are trunk,
you are leaves,
you are warbling,
you are gold,
you are naked, above
the winter,
you have no hands,
you are
mud

(continued on page 29)

barro,
silencio negro,
sombra.

—*from LAS MANOS DEL DÍA by Pablo Neruda*

again,
black silence,
shadow.

—from HANDS OF THE DAY, a translation of Pablo Neruda's LAS MANOS DEL DÍA by William O'Daly

El Campanero

PABLO NERUDA

Aun aquel que volvió
del monte, de la arena,
del mar, del mineral, del agua
con las manos vacías,
con el domador
que volvió del caballo
en un cajón, quebrado
y fallecido,
o la mujer de siete manos
que en el telar
perdió de pronto el hilo
y regresó al ovario
a no ser más que harapo,
o aun el campanero
que al mover
en la cuerda
el firmamento
cayó de las iglesias
hacia la oscuridad
y el cementerio:
aun todos ellos
se fueron
con las manos gastadas
no por la suavidad sino por algo:
el tiempo corrosivo,
la substancia
enemiga

(continued on page 32)

The Bell Ringer

TRANSLATED BY WILLIAM O'DALY

Even the one who returned
from the mountain, from the sand,
from the sea, from the mineral, from the water
with empty hands,
even the trainer
who returned from the horse
in his coffin, broken
and deceased,
or the woman of seven hands
who on her loom
soon lost the thread
and returned to the ovary,
to nothing more than a tatter,
or even the bell ringer
who pulled
on the rope
so the firmament
fell from the churches
toward the darkness
and the cemetery:
even they all
departed
with hands exhausted,
not by smoothness but by something else:
corrosive time,
the inimical
essence

(continued on page 33)

del carbón, de la ola,
del algodón, del viento,
porque sólo el dolor enseñó a ser:
porque hacer fue el destino de las manos
y en cada cicatriz cabe la vida.

—from *LAS MANOS DEL DÍA* by *Pablo Neruda*

of the coal, of the wave,
of the cotton, of the wind,
because sadness alone taught us to be:
because to build was the destiny of hands
and every scar holds life within it.

—from *HANDS OF THE DAY*, a translation of Pablo Neruda's *LAS MANOS DEL DÍA* by William O'Daly

Un Escarabajo

PABLO NERUDA

También llegué al escarabajo
y le pregunté por la vida:
por sus costumbres en otoño,
por su armadura lineal.

Lo busqué en los lagos perdidos
en el Sur negro de mi patria,
lo encontré entre la ceniza
de los volcanes rencorosos
o subiendo de las raíces
hacia su propia oscuridad.

Cómo hiciste tu traje duro?
Tus ojos de cinc, tu corbata?
Tus pantalones de metal?
Tus contradictorias tijeras?
Tu sierra de oro, tus tenazas?
Con qué resina maduró
la incandescencia de tu especie?

(Yo hubiera querido tener
un corazón de escarabajo
para perforar la espesura
y dejar mi firma escondida
en la muerte de la madera.
Y así mi nombre alguna vez
de nuevo irá tal vez naciendo

(continued on page 36)

A Beetle

TRANSLATED BY WILLIAM O'DALY

I also went to the beetle
and asked him about life:
about his customs in autumn,
about his linear armor.

I searched for him in the lost lakes
in the dark South of my motherland,
I found him among the ash
of the rancorous volcanoes
or climbing from the roots
toward his own darkness.

How did you make your tough suit?
Your eyes of zinc, your necktie?
Your metallic pants?
Your contradictory scissors?
Your saw of gold, your pliers?
With what resin did the radiance
of your species ripen?

(I had wanted to possess
the heart of a beetle
to pierce the thickness
and leave my signature hidden
in the death of the wood.
And so, my name will come to pass
again someday, perhaps being born

(continued on page 37)

por nuevos canales nocturnos
hasta salir por fin del túnel
con otras alas venideras.)

<< Nada más hermoso que tú,
mudo, insondable escarabajo,
sacerdote de las raíces,
rinoceronte del rocío >>,
le dije, pero no me dijo.

Le pregunté y no contestó.

Así son los escarabajos.

—from *LAS MANOS DEL DÍA* by Pablo Neruda

through new channels of the night
until finally leaving the tunnel
with other wings to come.)

“Nothing is more handsome than you
mute, inscrutable beetle,
priest of the roots,
rhinoceros of the dew,”
I said to him, but he said nothing to me.

I asked him and he did not answer.

So it goes with beetles.

—*from HANDS OF THE DAY, a translation of Pablo Neruda's LAS MANOS DEL DÍA by William O'Daly*

Soneto 70

FÉLIX LOPE DE VEGA

Quiero escribir, y el llanto no me deja,
pruebo a llorar, y no descanso tanto,
vuelvo a tomar la pluma, y vuelve el llanto,
todo me impide el bien, todo me aqueja.

Si el llanto dura, el alma se me queja,
si el escribir, mis ojos, y si en tanto
por muerte o por consuelo me levanto,
de entrambos la esperanza se me aleja.

Ve blanco al fin papel, y a quien penetra
el centro deste pecho que enciende
le di, si en tanto bien pudieres verte:

que haga de mis lágrimas la letra,
pues ya que no lo siente, bien entiende,
que cuanto escribo y lloro, todo es muerte.

Sonnet 70

TRANSLATED BY BOYD NIELSON

I want to write, and the weeping won't let me,
I try to cry, and I find no rest,
I come back to the pen, and the weeping comes back,
everything hinders love, everything afflicts me.

If the weeping goes on, my soul cries out,
if the writing, my eyes, and if in the meantime
through death and consolation I am lifted
both take hope away from me.

Go blank to the end, paper, and to whoever penetrates
the center of this chest that burns,
say, if in the meantime you could see yourself:

what does the letter do with my tears,
as soon as it is no longer felt, it is certainly understood
as much as I write and weep, everything is dead.

Soneto 126

FÉLIX LOPE DE VEGA

Desmayarse, atreverse, estar furioso,
áspero, tierno, liberal, esquivo,
alentado, mortal, difunto, vivo,
leal, traidor, cobarde y animoso:

No hallar fuera del bien centro y reposo,
mostrarse alegre, triste, humilde, altivo,
enojado, valiente, fugitivo,
satisfecho, ofendido, receloso:

Huir el rostro al claro desengaño,
beber veneno por licor suave,
olvidar el provecho, amar el daño:

Crear que un cielo en un infierno cabe,
dar la vida y el alma a un desengaño;
esto es amor, quien lo probó lo sabe.

Sonnet 126

TRANSLATED BY BOYD NIELSON

To faint, to dare, to rage
be brutal, tender, generous, equivocal
buoyant, mortal, defunct, alive
faithful, traitorous, cowardly and brave:

To find outside of goodness no peace or respite,
appear ecstatic, melancholy, modest, haughty
irate, courageous, on the run,
satisfied, offended, suspicious:

To turn your face away from plain disillusion,
drink poison that is smooth liquor,
overlook profit, love pain:

believe that heaven is inside hell,
give life and soul for disillusion,
this is love, whoever has tasted knows.

Jak lvové bijem o mříže

JAN NERUDA

Jak lvové bijem o mříže,
jak lvové v kleci jatí,
my bychom vzhůru k nebesům
a jsme zde Zemí spjatí.
Nám zdá se, z hvězd že vane hlas:
“Nuž pojd’te, páni, blíže,
jen trochu blíže, hrdobci,
jimž hrouda nohy víže!”
My přijdem! Odpust’, matičko,
již jsi nám, Země, malá,
my blesk k myšlenkám spřaháme
a noha parou cválá.
My přijdem! Duch náš roste v výš
a tepny touhou bijí,
zimniční touhou po světech
div srdce nerozbijí!
My přijdem blíž, my přijdem blíž,
my světů dožijeme,
my bijem o mříž, ducha lvi,
a my ji rozbijeme!

—from *PÍSNĚ KOSMICKÉ* by Jan Neruda

Like Lions Beating Against Bars

TRANSLATED BY A. K. ADAMS

Like lions beating against bars,
like lions captured in a cage,
we yearn to fly up to the heavens
yet we are earthbound.

We seem to hear a voice from stars:
“Come, you men, closer,
Just a bit closer, you pompous men,
Whose feet are stone-bound!”

We come! Our spirits higher rise,
and arteries with feverish desires
beat for other worlds
almost rupturing the heart!

We come closer, closer we come,
Other worlds we’ll live to see,
Lion spirited, we beat against these bars,
And we will break free!

—from *COSMIC SONGS*, a translation of Jan Neruda’s *PÍSNĚ KOSMICKÉ* by A. K. Adams

La casa de Mae Rim (poema número 24)

JAY LEWENSTEIN

Camino por los pasillos del hospital.
No debería mirar
dentro de las habitaciones
pero veo a un anciano que llora
junto a su mujer.
No sé si es su mujer,
lo supongo.
La puerta está abierta de par en par.
La mujer todavía respira
hundida en la cama
con dos almohadas
bajo la cabeza.
Me acerco.
Está dormida,
está más que dormida.

Él le quita las gafas,
los pendientes de oro
con forma de trébol,
la dentadura postiza
que se despegaba
con ruido de ventosa
y tiene garfios de plata en los extremos.
También intenta quitarle
el anillo de bodas
pero ella tiene las manos hinchadas.
Él entonces se inclina
y le chupa el dedo

varias veces
como perro torpe y obsesivo.
El hombre se saca el anillo de la boca
y lo guarda en la palma de la mano
con las demás cosas:
reliquias,
huesos de pájaros
metálicos manchados por la vida.

Ella desploma la cabeza a la derecha.
Tiene el cuello hecho de nubes.
Su cara es la cara de todos los muertos.

El hombre no la besa,

ni siquiera le toca la frente
cuando los camilleros se la llevan
hacia el frío
donde ella extenderá manteles nuevos
y pondrá la mesa
con copas altas
y guirnaldas
hasta que lleguemos.

Grillos

MARIA ELENA B. MAHLER

Escuché que lo grillos grillan
en cámara lenta, una melodía
a las estrellas, un canto a Diana
compuesto por una sola cuerda.
Enséñenme—le digo al
coro y ellos se ríen
de mi oído sordo.

Espero—espero y
no escucho nada.

Espero y me pregunto sobre
el sueño que dejé en mi
almohada, el significado
del sol que asciende, porqué
el cielo de Venus es tan tentador
y porqué los seres humanos
giran retrógrados.

Espero y me pregunto sobre
los niños vestidos de huesos,
los colores de las fronteras y los mares.

Espero—espero y
no escucho nada.

Ya no me pregunto más
y una cuerda me tira por dentro
a toda velocidad con el viento
viajo sin ruedas

una carretera más oscura que el negro
me lleva hacia lo desconocido de
ese lugar que temo.

Mis ojos abiertos de nuevo.

Espero—espero y
escucho los grillos que ya
se han dormido.

Circo

MARIA ELENA B. MAHLER

Amanece otra vez y
como camello de circo
vago por un desierto
que despide un olor verdoso—
atrae al viajero
y fastidia al iluso.

Sólo espejos brotan
con el sol perpendicular
de una flor que intoxica—
acelera el paso del creyente,
olvida la tinta que se agota,
perpetuando la trampa
del incansable fin.

Desfilan uno tras otro
y me pregunto—hasta cuándo?
anochese y nadie duerme
el espectáculo no espera
sonríen una vez más
al público canoso olvidándose
que nos vimos el día anterior.

Ventosas* en la Memoria

ELSA FRAUSTO

Noche tan oscura
que se traga a si misma.
Desde adentro llama mi abuela,
me pide encender
y poner la vela
en pequeños cilindros de vidrio
mojados en alcohol.

Hasta que el calor y un vacío de aire
succionan su carne,
sostienen las ventosas
mientras la trémula llama
sube y baja.
Los montes y valles de su espalda
como un altar iluminados.

* una técnica médico/popular no invasora que alivia dolores musculares

El Beso de Elvis

ELSA FRAUSTO

En este trío
los dos en una escalera,
el tercer ojo espía.
Ella de espaldas, no importa,
no tiene nombre.
El la mira, le saca la lengua,
se contaminan con la mirada
y el imán de su deseo.
Ella le dice que no con el cuerpo
que se acerca y ya es tarde
para el sí. Sucedió antes de que
los dos se dieran cuenta.
El no importa pero tiene nombre.
Ella lo repite y le propone un beso.
-¿A qué no?
El accede.
La cámara hace click.

Arizona

ORLANDO RAMIREZ

Una mirada a mis zapatos debería haberlos persuadido
Que yo no soy como los demás,
Que tengo una licenciatura de Yale,
Que mi dominio de la lengua
Está en un nivel superior a los agentes
Quién me detuvieron.

Estos otros son brutos,
Con la piel oscura y los acentos tan agudo
Como el olor de su sudor.
Yo compro jabones perfumados en el mercado del aire.
No cocino con ajo o chile
Para evitar la posibilidad
Que un huelle de los olores
Podría filtrarse de mis poros.

He votado en contra de la medida,
¿Pero que esperaban?
Entendi la política
Pero nunca se me ocurrió
Que un día me llevará a cabo aquí.

Estos hombres, estas mujeres, todos me piden ayuda.
Dicen que soy educado,
Que hablo el idioma,
Que necesito explicar
Que nadie sabe que están aquí.
¿Quién le dirá a su jefe?
Sus hijos esperan solo en las casas vacías.
¿Quién cuidará los niños?

Yo sólo les ignoran,
Me envuelvo en el calor de mi chaqueta,
Esperando cuando la agencia se da cuenta
Que hubo un error,
Y yo soy libre
Para volver a casa
A mis sábanas de 300 hilos, mi agua purificada.
Y cuando descanso un poco,
Voy a volver a la oficina,
Y les digo los que preguntan
Que yo estaba de vacaciones.

Beyond Words*

LOIS P. JONES

If you could see me. If you could reach beyond
this wall of words, press your palms through window
into white, into the disappearance of flesh and fire
to the afterburn of dreams. If you could touch me.
If you could feel my throat with your hands,
its warmth, my pulse on your palm,
the way colors seek texture, your eyes now
deep sockets of the earth, you would know
I am water in those pools. Words erase me.
They replace the silvery scales with wood,
the dark moss between stones with gravel.
They unmake the bed of me and you lie in it
imagining. But there are no sheets,
there is only wine soaked petals left in the rain.

I say words were built for a deaf God.
Let's be silent, blind and fingerless the way love is.
Knowing what goes beyond the visible, the tangible.
It says *I am real*, it says *don't think*. The more we speak,
the more our dialect changes until we barely understand.
We never had to learn a language in the dark.

* after Stephen Linstead's painting (the cover image) of the same title

Architecture of Time

DEREK HENDERSON

For us
light through the skyscrapers
sieves through the trees
more than geometry
a coin below the trees
tempered with sidewalk
a thing devoured by sun its light hanging in the air
it hangs in the air as an *as if*

its mission is to rise, to be tossed back to your fingers,
a mission too much for you
to say about it

tossed at your feet for you to carry

heedless, too hot to touch.

Take it, Take it

unprecious metal, precious disk of fire

rain will douse the three of us one day.

So humid I can see the oil I'm rubbing off my arm—

Itching in the middle of the garden

holding her hands

(her hands are hot)

so hard

so easy to hold the cherry stone so easy to hold

A great pain rises
from the toes of my feet to the head a knowledge lost
of itself

I prepare to rest between the angles of the eaves

The rubbing begins

to ease the temples to cause the air I walk out in
to shift around my head
as men work through
humidity

shabby trees

shot through with magpies—images of magpies

Or else the rule

of earth
heats you & I up
shiny like money

Beyond Civilization

DEREK HENDERSON

Make a little hilltop totter, abyss me on, I've been so far above

I poke about.

Abutting the tan ribbon of river

Shuddering below

Snail in the heat, too close to the sun

A minor approaching major

Safer in the dim light

Barely caught

In the door swung

to rest,

to rest you

A palace in time

We step from the coin to the bus stop

leave the nickel's thickness to make its own way

!

Milky coffee in my hand totters,

so far I

go the wrong way

my kilter

rattles

otherwise the earth quakes and calls out.

My feet too quick *tan-tam* of my feet my anxiety an optimum
pounding & circular—

such a noise

the tone so far

from the day

—

in the middle of my scratching I can

tell

as she spills water from the bowl across the hall

in what manner she hums a minor hymn

for May

Green

JEFF POGGI

In March, a distant memory of green
Awakens in the desert, and shows us
New ways to see and new things to be seen
Even as the memory of the cold
Wet winds that froze us of late has taken
Flight in light of the always hot and dry
Desert we know and have always known. Thus
We sleep through our lives lest the alarm
Of days brings to light the old buried
Ways of life. I see warm, wet ground, a lake.
Pleistocene camels walk in mud and leave
Footprints and vertebrae for us to find
In this real desert and the one in mind.

On Darwin's 200th

JEFF POGGI

Charles much under winter gray knew life
Would be back, be full, be gullible, need
Life. If inches crept by like miles rife
With their own history, then just a seed
Or stone therein would tell the story of
All this earth—all. He can't let it be, sees
The earth make new earth, sees new stars above
Reflected, fits royal needs while he flees
Into his life in these new waters, lands.
Home in his garden he takes walks and writes,
Suffers loss most dear and is forced to hand
To them who will not hear what sorely smites
Their hallowed place, their no less hallowed birth—
From such simple forms we populate the earth.

Love Poem

JEFF POGGI

They took the mannered poets of our youth,
Relegated them to unimportance;
In their elder wisdom dared us refute
The superior pose, th'ironic stance.
Bewildered, by them bewildered we shrank
In stature and spoke in voices not ours,
Nor yet theirs, lost powers, and in the blank
Hours our loves, lust, force, faded as we cowered.
Coward. I learned to love too easily,
Yes, but dare not say thus I learned to love
(And worship still) music, shock; on my knees
I suppliant praise in silence my love.
This voice compels its form as one you know
That without voice itself speaks on its own.

Para Sol

KATHERINE FACTOR

we have gone
to the gods

requesting rain

we have surpassed
the quandary
the quatrains

the guardians

from them
we have heard

the time of the flood
was called innudation

how as always
there is a Hero

with a compass that functions
doubly as protection

there we were inured

Ombros

KATHERINE FACTOR

All week I have spent
more time
on the moon

than in your light
shade or shadow

there has been not enough
walking in your streams
testing the screen

the edges between the domes
there I go into falling panels of snow

comparing ions, maneuvering horns.

Joan D'Arc

KATHERINE FACTOR

Once, a prediction of fire.

Before that, the undying presence of flames.

Keepers. Flare.

Look footward, there

The unseen thatching itself.

Will will open open up

Self direct one way

Seal over knit gather repair

Pearl in the phosphorous.

Made to turn to the other

wrangle in the slashed reeds

What a heart we have here:

The Big Still

MONTE LANDIS

O my liver O my spleen,
And all you traffic in between;
O you kidneys O you lung,
O you nostrils O you tongue;
O sweet stomach, O dear heart,
For whom I seldom give a fart,

To all the organs I forgot
Forgive me now what I have wrought,
Teach me how to darn the hole,
Rent within the mind and soul.

No deeper hurt, no greater pain
Than that which festers in the brain;
No anguish ever takes its toll,
Like that which feeds within the soul.
For naught can devastate the heart,
Like that which lies so far apart
From everything we touch and hold,
From everything that's bought and sold.

No torment looms more terrible,
Than the unobservable.
No behemoth beneath the seas,
No hanging Sword of Damocles,
No drug can e'er so paralyze,
No opiate immobilize
My purpose and my goal on earth,
Identity and sense of worth,

Like that cataclysmic yield;
The terror of the unrevealed.
Attempting to conceal the fear,
With porcelain smiles that mask the tear
Of having to confront the lie
Of whether one must live or die.

Can this be an alternative?
To want to die, or want to live,
To long to set this body free
From all that's overwhelming me?

Within this woeful paradox
Whose sole effect is that it locks
Me tightly up within a hole,
Deprived of light, devoid of goal.
The promise that to let me go,
Is empty now, for now I know.

How sorrowfully plain it is to see
This poison that's destroying me,
Flows from some sequestered place,
Far beyond the human face.

A STILL ROUTINELY LETTING LOOSE
ITS DAILY DOSE OF LETHAL JUICE;
A PLANT FERMENTING ON DEMAND
ITS INTELLECTUAL CONTRABAND.

A brew extolling perfect peace
Turns out to be The Thought Police.
Interrogating mind and thought
Until within the net I'm caught,
Caught within the joy and grief,
With nowhere left to find relief.
Frenetic wild intoxicant,
That makes me want to rave and rant,
That makes me want to shake and shout
Until I blow the candles out,
Until I blow the world away,
Until there's nothing more to say.

When all I want to do is scream
Away this dark relentless stream,
Gushing so implacably
From out my own identity,
No deeper wound no greater pain
Can make this life so all in vain.

THIS STILL ROUTINELY LETTING LOOSE
ITS DAILY DOSE OF LETHAL JUICE;
THIS PLANT FERMENTING ON DEMAND
ITS INTELLECTUAL CONTRABAND.

Yet stay ferocious third degree,
A path yet opens up to me,
For now as I record my grief,
A blessed balm suggests relief,
And pledges to my tortured mind,
As to illuminate the blind.

For deep within this dark despair
I hear a voice though know not where

From whence it come, above, beneath,
I only know it brings relief.
Surely such a wave of love
Could only come from up above.

And as it grows within my heart
It soon becomes a vital part
Of that which is the all of me,

For suddenly my mind can see
Things to which I once was numb,
To which I never could succumb,
Things to which I once was blind,
Now taking shape within my mind.

The peace that moves upon me now,
Comes not from contemplating how
To free myself from all this ill
Which hindered me from holding still.

Different far that other still,
Whose dark malignant deadly swill.
Held me fast in such a bind
As ceased the workings of my mind.

I never dreamt that I could will
My body's mind to being still,
To focus on the here and now,
Forget the when, ignore the how.

Eventually detach the heart
From all that wants to jump and start,
Surrender the unyielding will
By willing my existence still.

Surmounting all impediments
That apprehend the movements.

Ah! Drink no bottle, down no pill.
Its faith in God that keeps you still.
Instigating movement from
The outer drive to inner drum.

Know that in that blissful state
You feel your soul exhilarate
When both the body and the mind
Leave their fantasies behind.

This magic stillness does instill
A feeling of complete fulfillment,
likes of which you've never known
Restoring what is yours alone.

A bounty of inheritance
From which there is no severance.
The gifts of an eternity
Surviving mere mortality.

No anthropomorphic dream
Depicts the great celestial scheme
No vision of the absolute
Can calculate its altitude.

No mechanism of the mind
Can plumb its depths or ever find
Its ultimate totality
Miraculous divinity.

No imagery can gratify
Nor idol ever satisfy
The beauty of the contemplation
Of absolute capitulation
Of body, spirit, soul and mind
To purges life's ever crushing grind.

No reasonable explanation
Provides precise signification,
For words cannot convey the sense
Of what emerges out from whence
Those things of which there is no knowledge
Nor taught in schools or learned in college

No instrument of sight or sound
Has ever been explored or found
In all the tongues of humankind
Like stillness held within the mind

No silver-worded eloquence
Outshines the gold of silence.
Language made to sell and buy
Is frequently a tool to lie
And rarely most lamentably,
Is it a fount of honesty.

Speaking words which imitate,
Or phrases that enunciate
Things which flow from other worlds
Is like comparing bricks to pearls.

No bricks assembled in a day
Can be compared in any way
To treasures whose unique creation
Require a lifetime of formation.
For words alone will never reach
Beyond the shibboleths of speech
Nor guide us to those realms above
Which bring us to this house of Love.

O house of everlasting bliss
Beloved transcendental kiss,
No fabricated aureole
Can match this heaven in my soul.

For now this state of endless rapture
Reaches to forever capture
The resolute perpetuation
Of God's miraculous creation.

O let me share this mind and heart
And earn the privilege to impart
The fleeting moment of conception's
Joy of the divine perception.

And may it here forever be
The age of infinite Agape,
Of everything beneath the Sun
Uniting with the all in One.
The All in One, The One, The One
The ONE in ONE, THE ALL IS ONE

The Formal Room

NICOLE COMSTOCK

Long after all had been accounted for
The man and the woman—much older now
Acquired a certain nonchalance of domestic order
That permitted them to lie about
Parallel slung, reclining
In bolstered chairs gifted to them winter's prior
Listen to the wind lift exterior vanes
On their crumbed Victorian
Loosen and release them carelessly
Until day bent into night
Driving their pile to shift

In near dark the man would lie
Sideways behind the woman breathing
Uncareful down her hooked collar
Ducking his nose into the
Wooly length of neck
Syrupy damp balm of her
Where recoiled breaths
Swept the soot of taste
From the corners of his appetite

Imagine! The suffer of years
Postured upright on
Drastic occasional chairs
Welcoming long forgotten guests
In proper fashion
Legs crossed and perfectly useless
Under lace edged slippers
Now creased in a cedar chest

Knowing this is how the man must imagine her
To run a hand now, over the hunch of her back

Her vein knotted body
Trapped within their idle gather

Passion, Exhausted

NICOLE COMSTOCK

Its sentiment ground to bone
By constant prospect
Hobbies little inhabit it
Bloat to fill the word
As if in the acquiring
Lesser tastes refine

The idea—Passion
Nests in a sag of mind
With feet up-crossed
Twisting ends off pencils
Blunting leaden tips with capitals
Writing on undersides of counters

All the while, the host—misguided
Chases frayed little birds from
Electric wires, scheming to
Cup hands against thrashing wings
Measure ease of beats
Finally, feeling known

It cannot escape
Passion, rendered lame
Reckless and inexact
What is not rightfully ours
Shivers under makeshift rooftops

It aches to be given back

No Funeral for a Fire

PAULA STINSON

there was no funeral for you.
we had you cremated
and that was that.
they kept you on ice
for nine long days.
i went mad in my little white room
thinking about you—
wondering how you looked
frozen stiff.

i didn't smear makeup
in your hollow grooves;
no sapphire powder...
a frame vacant eyes.
no hot pink rouge
dusted along sunken cheeks.
no more of that.

i didn't dress you
in your thrift store gown
or spray your hair stiff.
we didn't decorate
a box with you,
or prop you up
with yellow roses.

there was no one there
to fill the seats
of your bon voyage.
you did more damage

than one fire should
in a single life.

there was only diana and i
and you in your teflon box—
that held my rueful reflection,
among other tragic things.
both of us, at once,
contained there in my hands
right before you converged
with the wind
and the sea.

did death welcome you, my dear?
did it make you feel at home?
did it cradle you in eternity—
vast fields in which to roam?

East Berlin

GÜNTHER BEDSON

It was different then
But the same everywhere:
Grey houses, grainy and dull

Children were happy
With barbed-wire braces
Over yellow teeth

Uniformed blocks of flats
Were endless warrens, tattooed
With smudges of nothing

Large, juicy chickens
Were fatty delicacies
Tasting of fish-meal

Patient queues for restaurant tables,
Bread, bananas,
But never for booze

Cheap beer in slender glasses
Flowed with the vodka
Or peppermint liqueur for the ladies

But only one kind of flour, milk, sugar
Rice, noodles—all the same,
But two kinds of bread: brown and white

The stench of low-octane petrol
Fuelling pressed cardboard cars
That took 15 years to arrive

The foul reek of natural tobacco
Caro, Club– all unperfumed
Weeds in pavement cracks

Slender purple and green bank notes
And tinkling aluminium coins
As light and worthless as decaying feathers

Girls like Birgit and Stephanie
Inquisitive, pretty, naïve, hungry
But lost sleeping beauties

Charlie's midnight curfew
Pulling those back west
Who didn't belong

Groomed and elegant soldiers
Goose-stepping proudly or jumping the wire
In silly, round tin hats

And then the wall:
Strong, long, impenetrable, boring
Consciously invisible

There, but not there,
Just a line, just a wall
Almost irrelevant

And now the wall:
Broken to pieces, transparent, fascinating,
Constantly visible

Here, but no longer here,
Not just a line, not just a wall
Monumentally important

Blotting memories of the good,
The harmony, the peace, the safety,
The innocence, the love

Young neighbours greeting old
In endless concrete corridors
Stretched to the city-limits

Parents freed of concern
For their teething children
In guaranteed Kindergartens

Modest, sufficient nutrition,
Slow-food restaurants
And the overwhelming joy of an orange

Leisurely traffic meandering
Along spacious boulevards
In enthusiastic slow-motion

And girls! Girls like Birgit and Stephanie
Inquisitive, pretty, naïve, hungry
Sleeping beauties waiting to be kissed!

East is no longer bad or better,
No longer a compass point
Or a four-letter word

It is the same now
But different everywhere:
Colourful houses, smooth and welcoming

Or just a memory
Lost in history books
To the law of averages

Upon Waking

A.N. TEIBE

I'm wonder whether I'm heading
toward home or another place
I may have been—dreaming
maybe—if that's the case
all bets are off. For now
I'll focus—mindful, present
in the moment, how
the radio Jain monk admitted
he spends his everyday time:
I live slowly. It'd be calming,
approaching sublime,
to spend every *now* living
—rather than obsessing, unsure—
without worry, open to wonder.

At last

A.N. TEIBE

Afternoon dreams of rhythm and words
I wake to the window
sweaty-under-sheet.

Not yet past the middle
of June, but I early regret
the longest, latest day's set of sun.

Beyond backyard fence
lies reluctant flood wash—dry despite rain
then the hills, covered
in brittle and gold,
cast-cloud shadows' drape.

My hand at warm belly, pelvic bowl
where womb and bladder coincide, sitting
sisters of function—everything practical
but each has its small whoosh of pleased release.

What anything is ever original?
No one discovers. Everything here
already has been theirs, becomes ours.
Neither creation
not as if conduit.

And I, when I am not vessel
for song, thought, but
this?

Another's words rhythm, rhymes
will later make my bedtime benediction
long past this hanging, (as if staying,
soon gone) eight-o'clock twilight,
drop of sun, late.

After Expansion Collapse

A.N. TEIBE

The brewing time of
of facts and fictions
has come and gone, eclipsed
eternity a poof
not space nor sense nor sun

No wave of time remains
to parcel pardons
dispute dissertations

Reassuring theory sounds
are gone the way of the search—
gentle suckle, ascension
not a noise, not anything
not even nothing

No ear to hear the vacuum
swoosh, to measure it, report
proclaim the truth

Long argument of maths
and myths at last
has ceased, not truced

An absence
with no end
or start

Stillness now

Losing To My Grandfather

WENDY SILVA

I sat down next to my grandfather at the kitchen table, with a bowl of mole and a rolled up *tortilla* in hand, ready for dipping. He did not look up when I sat down but continued pushing dominoes across the table with his index finger, putting together what looked like a maze. *Puedo... jugar con usted?* I asked him brokenly when my mother motioned for me to talk to him from the kitchen. He flipped the dominoes upside down, clinking them around to shuffle, then told me to grab five pieces. As he reached for his I noticed how worn his hands were. Blotches of darker skin resembling the cancer spot on his foot splattered his hand and up his arm from too much sun exposure as a young man. Thick purple veins struggled to break through the wrinkles of his skin, like the fin of a dolphin gliding just below the ocean's surface.

I didn't know if my grandfather liked the ocean, or had ever been to a beach, or if he ever stopped working long enough to even look at the sea and breathe in the mist of the waves as they sprayed salt and sand into the air. I wanted to ask him. I wanted to ask him about being a *bracero* and having to stand on twenty-foot ladders picking cherries at five in the morning, and walnuts and peaches before the frost came. But I could not. My tongue folded on itself in shame, knowing that it had forgotten its first language. He placed the domino with one dot next to another, like two solid pupils, unblinking, waiting for me to speak. I was a foreigner to the *mole* in my mouth, to my grandfather's his crisp *guayabera*, cut and embroidered by my grandmother's hand. I was only a visitor in his home, a tourist of his culture. So I watched him place down his final domino and smile crookedly at his victory, knowing that we both understood who had won and who had lost.

The Heart of Santa Maria, California

WENDY SILVA

Riding home on the school bus I saw a boy drop his bike on the side of the road and duck into the ditch that circled the strawberry fields. On the far side of the endless leafy rows were the pickers, sweaty and hunched over the dimply fruit. The boy crawled out to the nearest row of heart shaped bulbs and began plucking them, not yet ripe, stuffing them in his pockets. He pulled the dusty hearts from their veins, stopping the juice from flowing into their pale cheeks, like the unripe hearts of the workers, tied to the chains of the dirt, the weight of the sun on their backs bending them as if carrying a fifty pound red sacrifice. They pretend not to notice the yellow bus that passes them every day, the rim of their caps shading their eyes from the looks of children who are still on their route to ripening.

A young man in crusted jeans sees the boy and staggers over, but stops at the edge of the ditch, back aching for relief, muddy shackles around his boots. He watches the boy ride back into the suburbs with crisp school books in his bag and he closes his eyes. I imagine him thinking of bleeding juice from his ankles if he could only grow his life among heaps of books instead of empty black crates. I want to throw my backpack out the window and let him read Ellison's *Invisible Man* or Hansberry's *Raisin in the Sun*, but the bus pushes forward and the only thing behind me is the back of a man whose heart will always be bound to the needs of the strawberries.

from she speaks about what she sees in the man

NIKIA CHANEY

I.

Questions just remake beams, fold
over known things and cause our bellies to simmer, old,

new compositions of what the this odd creature really is.
How do I win, when the method of redemption is

not of the moment, when he has gorged himself on
my breast, when even now my hand is drawing

circles, hot, cold, careful circles that turn
twist, lay, on the limp pieces of his skin. I burn

wet with his sweat and semen, his black oil
on the ocean, his cold metal

hands. He can not feel my touch. He is sleeping
sated now, spent, his eyes lost in the blackscreens,

their lacerations, the wizardry, no longer my child, or
my man. crouched, scratching meaning on the cave floor.

III

you like	I have I hear run
	you want
open window hurt	too small slit
please you keep	wrist slip in need
	me you loose
hair lay	touch fold sheet drawn
feet hard heel	touch palm, touch hair
more	more beam
you give you do	stare glass ruffle add
push past	I close door
haunt come floor	you small, four say peak
you speak	woman you weak
like salt	time in hand
	I fall
I fear	here
I see I try	I give
I want	I will
paper bottle brace	mirror your face
pain	do things
dance wait shave	watch
mountain don't wait	sky don't want
you take I give	I take you give
I hope though you hurt	I have though I
I will	want
I	do

Untitled

ASH RUSSELL

clear plastic, green glass, white plastic, amber glass (vessels)

breast milk,
red wine,

make the same sound

prenatal vitamins,
percodan, seconal

inside their bottle

Oratorio Memoriam

ASH RUSSELL

Vertebrae piano keys
G sharp C sharp E
Tickling the ivory of exposed skin
Marred, marked, stained,
 Red, green, blue,
 Freckles, scars.
Snapping, crackling,
 Under hands
 So skilled
 At making,
 At rebuilding
 Me.

Ribs an Aeolian harp
B flat E flat F
Played by a ghost's breath,
 Mistaken for wind.

Heartbeat, a bass line, a drum beat
Thump thump thump
Metronome to a dancer-less dance.

Your love was a cymbal crash,
 Raining down like thunder.

I'm tears falling on dead leaves,
 Just a drum brush on snare.

This Lotus

SUSAN ROGERS

To awake,
to dream
to open again
into first light
awash with gold
each and every petal
kissed with the sun's love
kissed with the memory of mud
blessed with the touch of water.
Opening and opening
again and again
lifetime after lifetime
pond after pond
poem after poem
until it is beyond
dream, water, mud,
beyond the innocence
of first light, beyond
even the kiss of sun—
there, where it is all
written.

Yeats Limerick

RUSSELL HOBURG

A profound Irish poet named Yeats
Had a hotline direct to the Fates.
He achieved early promise
As a Celt Nostradamus.
But, now, seems somewhat confused on his dates.

The Mind Is Electric Waiting for Wet Fingers

PATRICIA D'ALESSANDRO

Houses wait for morning in the silence of the dawn, having slept through the night snoring, and dogs are barking at the woman in the moon.

A lone walker carries the head of a cow, bloodied by a blow to the skull, and no one even notices. Not even the dogs. Or the moon.

The sun is trying to ignore this *tableau doloroso*, but it has no choice, shining brilliant light on this scene.

The lone walker leaves the head of the cow at the well. The dogs have stopped barking at the moon, and the sun still shines its light on another scene.

My astonishment is real. I am reduced to nothing one can see. I have the station of a bug, waiting to be crushed.

My sense of feeling has been removed. I no longer know the meaning of contentment.

I repeat, I am a bug, waiting to be crushed.
My only worry now, is when?

The world is whirling off its axis, and the seas are covered in oil from the ocean's silent floor, volcanoes spewing everywhere, its heavy ashes.

This is the time for remembering the movie "On the Beach" when its theme seemed so preposterous at the time.

There are no panaceas to correct these major blunders. We wait in silence for a catastrophic end, smiling all the way to Disneyland.

The earth may stop its spinning and there will be no place to run, no place to hide, and buildings will be gone to dust, and we will disappear as yes, we must.

Yet, Hot Air Balloons are leaving in the morning for the woman in the moon, still shining light on every scene, and the sun will rise again to light the way.

Tag Cloud

RUTH NOLAN

The pool is warm, the sun is kind,
it's mid November, the god Tahquitz,
20 miles away, 10,000 feet high,
squats on his red-tinged peak
from where summer thunder rolls down
Chino Canyon, sometimes it wants
to rain but can't, we are the last
stop against the tall mountains
that separate us from the coast
where the ocean resides, a shadow
pain of some kind, you can save
yourself from drowning in sand dunes
by throwing a coat on your head
you left a paint-splattered shirt
with me, the clouds have disappeared
and left us far behind, the long
humid stares have evaporated, it's
winter, time to open the fat blinds

Dia de Campo

ISABEL QUINTERO-FLORES

Rows of maiz caress the sides of
the narrow roads winding through the outsides of Mexico City
the green and yellow smell penetrating through
the windows of the cars that drive by. The passengers in the cars
on the road look out the window as the cool breeze
goes through their hand and jumps through the corn, slightly
moving it side to side.

On the other side of the field a family sets up for a
picnic, un dia de campo; carne asada, some stolen corn,
ready to be roasted over an open flame, and
pulque. There are at least fifteen people gathered, including
several children. Mother begins to cook the meal while children play
soccer or run through the field.

The day is bright, but cool. On the tattered blue blankets
the older children play with the younger, and Mother begins to
set plates on the picnic tables. The salsa, she got up early to make
along with the rice and beans, tortillas still warm,
all go on the table before the meat.

Father who had been sitting talking to his son-in-laws
smiles and looks at Mother. He remembers how she looked
when they first met. He smiles at her and makes a motion with
his hand, she follows.

From a distance childrens voices are heard calling for
Mother, the older ones know and try to keep them busy.
Fifteen minutes later Mother returns, tears and torn dress, to
serve the meal.

On the road cars zoom by smiling at the lustrous maiz,
moving side to side in the wind,
the base of the Mexican household.

Closing Time

KATH ABELA WILSON

the last half-hour of everything
is the most important.

in the gulp
of now

the rattle of tomorrow
slows and stops

and I am finally
here.

on the way to it
the fallen

blood-red the camellias lush
line the meandering stream

I set out two cups for us
set them sail.

one this poem
and the other

our best
red wine

as yet
undrunk

House Full

KATH ABELA WILSON

my house is built
on an underground spring

*the sun is warm on my closed eyes while I still
know a familiar surface while I sense
full breath new depth more treasure*

I run from one end of my village to your other
on second floor bridges roof to roof

*turning more gracefully I tread
deep or shallow not knowing the difference
if I accidentally bump a sidewall push off without looking*

my plants are in pots
amidst clustered houses and rough terrain

*I swim in the same pool I used to swim laps
now I swim in circles with eyes closed
never touching any end or edge*

four trees before my door
grow together form an archway

*there was a catch I knew was there
but not where now I know
I wasn't finished*

now I build rockeries
topiary in shape of you

*I always felt I'd learn someday
I am always practicing but see
I forgot to concentrate on the ending*

beautiful houses and covered beds
made from trading salt over the hills

*yesterday I learned about breathing
I always knew how to breathe in
but I never knew I didn't know about breathing out*

I build my house from tea grown in
your high mountains

*I swim through this day
familiar paths familiar home has new rooms
treasure rooms made of my dream*

Time Begin Again

KATH ABELA WILSON

Time, begin again
when the poet,
out of time,
becomes the tree
full of song of unseen birds,
and is beneath besides,
pen poised
so as to never end this line

1968

EILEEN CHAVEZ

Saturday morning. Eight-year old Loretta and her gang, the Saints, played soldiers and “Viet Congs” based on the few letters home from drafted brothers, who had been called up and taken away to fight Charlie. The Saints were a ragtag group of children who lived north of the tracks, in Indio. They lived in an ex-Army neighborhood of ten houses, built during World War Two, for General Patton and his officers. The California sun shone faithfully in the Coachella Valley some 356 days of the year. Screen-doors opened, and the Saints were sent from their homes, by adults not caring to see them again before nightfall, 365 days of the year. The enormous desert was their playground with games as rich and unlimited as their imaginations.

They were in constant motion. Stopping only to eat, get water or spy on the Vandals’ club house. Not so much a club house as an elongated trench, dug three feet into the sand and covered with a piece of cardboard refrigerator crate. The Vandals were seventh grade boys who had water canteens, worn sofa cushions, comics and nasty magazines in their lair. The Saints, undetected, spied on them hungrily for clues regarding gang deportment.

They were fashioning their own hideout to have a special place like the Vandals. They

filled beach pails and sneakers with sand, slowly excavated their hiding place. No one else knew it existed. It was known only to the eight of them, all sworn to secrecy with the ardor and gravity of every first promise one makes in life.

Pug nosed Michael pointed to the tamarisk trees off in the distance. “To the hideout, men,” he ordered and marched his men, consisting of five little girls and two little boys, across the desert floor. The ten year old Pied Piper led them. Provi-

sions were carried in three filthy pillowcases by the first graders, Warren, Ricky and Tina. The big girls, Loretta, Cathy and Debbie had furnished jelly sandwiches, fresh lemons and a salt-shaker. Water, in three screw top wine bottles, had been prepared by Michael. Only four year old, Arlette didn't have a job but sometimes brought candy or gum.

By mid morning they were at the tree-line and sitting in their private dug-out. Its' depression measured only one foot but to them it signified a safe territory where they were protected against everything. They hungrily ate their sandwiches and shared a bottle of water. Passing it from one to another pretending to be cow-boys in a sandy saloon.

"Let's explore the tracks. Maybe we'll find money today," said Michael. Never mind that only freight trains ran on these rails and the likelihood of an engineer's wallet dropping out of his pocket and onto the ground they were scanning, did not play into their hope-filled search. They scattered in pursuit of treasure.

Before long, Warren hollered, "Hey, guys! Come quick, I found something. Here by the trees!"

The gang flew to the prize. It wasn't a wallet at all. It was a man. A man lying flat on his back. A man lying flat on his back wearing jeans and a fuzzy brown coat and strange tennis shoes. No, the tennis shoes weren't strange. They only looked strange because the right foot looked turned around. The man was very still but they could see he was breathing. The fuzzy brown coat rose and fell in shallow breaths. His brown face had a tortured grimace on it. His black mustache and hair looked sleek from sweat. His hands looked strong but cut and crusted with blood.

The gang was silent.

The gang was stunned.

The gang was impressed by Warren's treasure.

"Hey, that's a Mexican," Michael pronounced breathily.

"Hey that's a Mexican," Arlette mimicked in her screechy little mouse voice.

"How'd he get here?" Loretta questioned.

"Mexico," Michael said condescendingly and looked around for a long stick.

"Poke him, Michael," Warren encouraged.

Michael tapped the man's right shoulder with a branch but there was no response. Meanwhile, the conversation swirled behind him. "Is he our Mexican?" "Sure. We found him." "What are we gonna do with him?"

"Keep him."

"Don't be dumb. You can't keep people."

“Why not? Warren found him. He’s Warren’s.”

“No, people are people, you big ignormus.”

“You’re the igormoris.”

“Hey, quiet,” Michael shouted and prodded the man more forcibly. The children focused on the branch. He heard Cathy starting to cry.

“Don’t hurt him,” she blubbered.

“Don’t cry unless there’s something to cry about,” said Michael who felt like crying himself but wouldn’t show it. Instead he prodded the man more intensely. Working his way down to the twisted foot.

Finally, there was a reaction. The man’s facial expression exploded and a sound so primal and frightening lurched from his throat and clutched the hearts of the children. They all jumped as if shocked by high voltage. His anguished screams cascaded over their heads and pushed through their veins, turning their blood cold, in a blinding instant. They ran as a panicked herd. Even little Arlette vaulted like a deft footed fawn seeking safety. They imagined his bloody hands and mangled foot chasing them. A mad monster. On their heels intent on murdering them with his strong fingers. They ran from their prized treasure, their Mexican, with the speed of frightened lizards. They did not stop until they had piled into the dugout with young hearts pounding against their breastbones aching to escape the confines of their limited chests. One by one, they peered over the sand, and saw he was not in pursuit. Then, as the clamor of their hearts in their ears quelled, they shivered while listening to the man’s high-pitched screams.

Jose Montes Montoya heard someone screaming in agony and before realizing he was the source, fainted.

The silence was as shocking to the children as his screaming. They waited like trusting calves expecting to be safe within the herd. Time passed slowly until they agreed he must have died. They did not have the nerve to check but started to dig him a grave next to a cheese bush, some five feet away. When they were red faced and sweaty they returned to the dugout to eat some lemons. They salted their tongues and ate the juicy lemon wedges like an orange. The flavor glistened in their mouths and caused their teeth to squeak and their ears to tingle. The familiar feeling comforted them more than a hug could have. They finally felt at ease, as if the world was spinning right again.

Jose Montes Montoya looked through the dark hair that had fallen across his forehead at the blue pristine sky. Disoriented. Wondering for an instant, “Where is Ramon?”, before falling back into a black emptiness.

Forty minutes later, the Saints gathered around the man on the ground to start the funeral. Loretta began singing *Michael Row The Boat Ashore* and the rest joined in.

Jose Montes Montoya was aware of singing in the distance. And pain. Excruciating pain, shot from his ankle through his leg and to the top of his head. His eyes popped open as a scream burst from his parched lips passed his swollen tongue. He saw the children in a blur. “Gringitos,” he thought, trying to clear his head by shaking it. He swallowed his screams and looked around in desperation for Ramon. The gringitos were looking at him with shocked expressions. Jose remembered in a flash of color: being inside a box-car; a man attacking him with a pipe; being thrown from the train; and Ramon’s voice, “¡PaPá, PaPá! ¡No me dejes!” Jose struggled to prop himself up but fell hard against the sand, back into the darkness.

“Get water but first help me pull him over to the shade,” Michael said.

They tugged him by his clothes and dragged him under the tamarisks. His foot rocked back and forth like a bobble head-doll.

“We can fix his foot like on Gunsmoke,” Ricky offered.

Twenty minutes later, their Mexican was wearing a crude splint of tamarisks sticks, tied tightly with dirty pillowcase strips. His toes pointed toward the sky.

Jose Montes Montoya felt the soft ground under his back. It was cooler. He couldn’t feel pain in his foot. There was no sensation in his leg. He opened his eyes to puzzled faces of the gringitos again.

“Ayudame,” he whispered.

“Water coming up,” said Ricky like a jovial bartender and tipped the bottle carefully to the man’s mouth. Feeling the lip of the bottle against his own, he tasted the water and drank without hesitation.

Jose thought of Ramon inside the boxcar heading for Los Angeles, without him. His son. His eight-year old son, Ramon. Alone and unprotected. He felt his son’s fear like an angry wolf in the pit of his stomach, and blacked out.

“What makes him do that?” Barbara asked.

“I don’t know.”, said Michael, looking at the man like a broken toy. “One thing for sure everybody, is we can’t tell any one about him. Understand?”

The children nodded exaggeratedly even though they did not completely understand why.

Cathy spoke on behalf of the group, “How come?”

“They’ll try to steal him,” Michael reasoned.

“And they can’t have him. He’s ours,” Warren declared. “He’s my Mexican.”

The children somberly agreed and made plans to bring food and blankets and pillows for him, in the morning. Tina and Arlette earned the admiration of the gang by promising to bring Pop-Tarts and Tootsie Rolls. Access to junk food was seen as a character strength.

“We better cover him up so no coyotes find him,” Michael advised,

“Break-off some branches to pile on him.”

They pulled and tore at the smallest tamarisk branches. Although young and springy, with enough pressure, they tore away.

Jose Montes Montoya came to, looking through needles of the tamarisks. Soft and green against the powder blue sky. He heard the children’s voices. Again the image of his son flashed before him. Next, the image of his wife Maria. Maria, clutching baby Teresa, as they left for Los Angeles, three years ago. Leaving in the shiny station wagon belonging to Tia Veronica and her gringo husband, Gary. Veronica cleaned houses in Hollywood and convinced the young couple that work was plentiful across the border. Maria was light skinned enough to blend in with their own kids, in the car. With American cloths and la niña Luzita’s birth certificate, the border would be easy to cross. Pobrecita, la Luzita, if she had lived past two she would be close to Maria’s age. Now, her legacy rested in the American birth certificate that helped many cousins get into that rich country.

Jose’s mind was tormented as he thought of Maria’s anxiety waiting for him and Ramon to arrive. The three years of separation. Lives suspended. Pining for the day of reunion. Sleepwalking. Love unfaded. Maria’s precious face, -first hopeful and eager. Then, impatient and anxious. Finally, disappointed and worried. Despairing. He could not get to her. They would never be together again. Had he come to American to die? Behind closed lids, Jose wept the tears of a man bereft of hope and full of shame. What kind of man could not protect or provide for his family? He lost consciousness.

As the Saints haphazardly covered the man, Michael’s attention was caught by the silent tears that had slipped from the corner of the man’s eye, streaming toward his ear. Until then, he had not realized that the man was suffering and it frightened him.

“Hurry, we’ve gotta get out of here,” he ordered gruffly to the chattering children.

Walking back to their houses was not as fun as leaving them. The children were tired and hungry. Loretta left the last of their water with the man in case he woke up and was thirsty. Ricky and Warren carried the other bottles for Michael to refill them. Halfway back, Arlette was falling behind and Michael stopped to pick up her up. He carried her piggyback while thinking of a plan.

“We don’t have a Mexican,” Arlette sang absentmindedly in his ear. “We don’t have a Mexican. Warren doesn’t have a Mexican.”

“Stop that,” Michael said, and pinched her foot.

By nightfall they had reached their neighborhood and said goodbye. Each carried their secret, into their houses for the night.

Michael was the only Saint weighted down by knowledge. Hungrily, he ate from the cooling pan of Hamburger Helper, which had been left on the stove. He watched Loretta and Cathy loading up on butter and sugar sandwiches. They had no awareness of the inner struggle raging within him. It was Michael’s time to learn that leaders make the most important decisions, alone. He knew his sisters would never reveal their secret and he knew he must betray their faith.

In the darkness, Michael crept toward the Vandals clubhouse. He was careful to stay in the shadows made dark by the full moon. He saw light. Flashlights. Lights, boy’s voices and laughter spilled over the edges. He took a quick step and crunched a piece of dry mesquite, beneath his tennis shoes. The voices stopped. Listening. They suddenly shut off their lights. A voice said, “Someone’s out there!”

From inside the dugout, Simon, the brashest of the Vandals, shouted forcefully with a voice that sounded its last soprano note and squeaked into an awkward bass, “Who (squeak) goes there?” The other seven Vandals gaped at his voice.

Michael mustered his courage, “It’s me, Michael.”

Simon ordered, “Shine your lights over there, guys.” He sounded so much like a grown-up that they immediately obeyed.

“What do you want?” Jeremy asked quickly. He was the leader, after all, and didn’t want his position usurped. “Did you come to spy?”

“Hey, I know that kid,” Whit reassured the boys, “he’s from the grey looking house.”

“Yeah,” said Michael, frozen in space as their flashlights illumined him.

“He’s all right,” Whit continued. “He’s the one the little kids hang out with. You’ve see them around.”

“We’re the Saints,” Michael parried, “we found something today. I came to tell you about it.”

“What’s it to us?” Paul asked rudely.

“Shut up, Paul.” Jeremy said, “Stay right there. We’re coming out.”

Michael was glad they were coming out because he felt riveted to the spot. Once they surrounded him with their haughty budding-man presence, he felt like running. They seemed so much bigger and wilder, up close. He steadied his nerves and explained what happened that day. He finished with, “He’s a Mexican. We tried to help him but I think he’s hurt too bad.”

Jeremy thought quickly. The man could be dying out there. If the Vandals could get him to Father Damian, he would know what to do.

“Randy,” he called to his best friend, “ride your bike over to Mr. Henderson’s and call Father Damian. Tell him what’s going on and ask him to bring a doctor.” He turned to Michael, “Can you take us to him?”

“Yeah,” Michael said, somewhat unnerved by the ghostly look of the desert at night.

“Good,” said Jeremy, “Get going, Randy. The rest of us will go with this guy.”

Randy made a beeline for his bike.

Simon, wanting to test if his new voice still worked, asked, “Do we take out flashlights?”

“Sure, dummy.”, answered Jeremy.

“How about the canteens?” Simon continued, thrilled by the novelty of his sound.

“Of course,” Jeremy said impatiently. He wished his own voice would change soon.

The Vandals headed in the direction of the tamarisks. The sky was clear and fit over the desert like a glimmering skullcap, studded on the inside with the moon and stars. Each shrub and bush glowed supernaturally. In the distance ahead they could hear the howl of coyotes. The plaintive sound was frightening and alluring. Any call to danger emboldens juvenile hearts. Secure as they were in their own power, the boys trekked behind Michael. All were surprised to learn Michael’s little gang carried on adventures underfoot and undetected.

Michael was careful to veer away from the Saints’ dugout. He thought if he could keep its existence from these guys, his betrayal wouldn’t be so terrible. They walked, at a clip, for forty minutes. From time to time they would shine their flashlights to check for sidewinders and noisy kangaroo rats hurrying past. Reaching the tamarisks, they thirstily drank from their canteens and looked around. They could not see a man’s body anywhere.

“He’s down this way,” Michael pointed, “under the branches.” He was afraid of what they might find.

“What in the hell did you kids do?” demanded Tommy, a mean and impatient boy, “Why did you put branches on him?”

“To protect him from the coyotes,” Michael said hurriedly, “I thought...”

“...You thought? Well, that was your first mistake,” scoffed Abel, pleased to unload the insult his older brother always told to him. “How about scorpions and snakes? Besides, coyotes can dig through branches, you twerp.”

The words hung in the air and Michael tasted tin in his mouth. What if the man had been torn apart by the coyotes they heard roaming around the desert floor? It was too much to bear and he started pulling the branches away, with his head down, so the big boys could not see his tears.

They uncovered the man and checked for a pulse. It was weak but his breathing was strong and even. Jeremy inspected the splint that the children had fashioned. He looked up at Michael’s worried face. “Not bad,” he said, “for little kids,” he smiled.

The burden inside of Michael began to lift but he did not yet trust his voice. “Maybe you’ll be a doctor someday,” he added.

“How we gonna get him out of here?”, Whit wanted to know. “We can’t drag him.”

“We’ll have to make a stretcher to carry him,” Jeremy said decisively, “we’ll use branches for the poles and our jeans for the canvas part.”

Rex asked, “How?”

“We’ll have to slit the front of our jeans across here, without cutting off the legs,” Jeremy motioned with his hand across the thigh. “Then we’ll put the jeans through the poles and use the legs to tie him in.”

“I get you,” said Rex, “but my mom is gonna kill me.”

“Mine too,” said Paul remembering their terrible shopping trips for husky pants.

“Guys, we’re talking about a man’s life,” Simon said with such convincing drama that no one spoke another dissenting thought.

Michael’s pants were spared. They were too narrow to be of use. The Vandals worked diligently using Able’s Swiss Army knife to sacrifice their jeans and slip them onto the branch poles. The hair on their young legs, unaccustomed to the cool night air, prickled. The boys felt brave and important to be outside in their underwear. This was an emergency!

Jose Montes Montoya opened his eyes and saw white jockey clad bottoms. “¡Que. nalgedo!” he thought, wondering where he was.

Rex saw him and crouched on the ground and shined the light in his face. “¡Hola, Señor, como estas?” He proudly used his classroom Spanish.

The man shook his head slightly. “Malo,” he whispered in brittle voice.

“He needs water,” Jeremy said and helped him drink from the canteen. “Tell him we’re going to move him.”

Rex nodded, “¿Como te llamas?”

“Jose Montes Montoya.”

“Me llamo, Rex,” He offered looking at the man’s confused eyes.

“Did you tell him?”, Jeremy asked, “Does he understand”

“Hang on, I’m getting there,” the memorized dialogue of his ALM Spanish course fluttered through Rex’s head. There was nothing to fit this occasion so he improvised, “Vamos audar tu. Vamos audarte. Vamonos audar tu.”

Jose Montes Montoya heard ayudar and whispered, “¿Me ayudan?”

“Si, si,” Rex said, “ayudante.” He didn’t care that the language wasn’t perfect. He had been understood. “He’s ready, guys,” he said beaming.

Jose closed his eyes there was a spark of life returning to his heart. There was a chance he would live. A chance that he would find his son. A chance to see Maria and Teresita again. He silently blessed these American boys and passed out as they hoisted him onto the stretcher.

“What’s gonna happen?” Michael asked as he shouldered the Vandals’ canteens.

Jeremy handed him the flashlights and said, “Don’t worry, Michael, Father Damian will bring a doctor to help him.”

The boys proudly carried their unusual passenger. They were intensely conscious of their role in an important drama, ordinarily reserved for adults.

In the moonlight, the six stretcher-bearers, in T-shirts, jockey shorts and high-top sneakers crossed the desert floor in solemn silence. Michael followed behind deep in thought. The canteens he carried, bumped against each other with a pulsating rhythm that heralded their approach to the waiting priest.

An Ordinary Stone

G. GORDON DAVIS

He said his name was Finch, and he appeared to be a fixture in the nondescript Chicago hotel bar I found myself in. Finch could have been his first name or last. He never said, and I didn't ask. I'd simply come in to get out of the rain after failing to flag down a cab.

The only other patrons besides Finch and me were a young couple seated at a table next to the rain-lashed front window. They were drinking Heinekens from the bottle and eating bar food—burgers and onion rings served on waxed paper in red plastic baskets. They seemed to be totally engrossed in each other and as oblivious to us as to their gloomy oak-paneled surroundings.

I was in town to attend a nephrology seminar, having gotten into O'Hare late on account of the weather. It had been clear when we left Detroit Metro, but the weather in the Midwest is always unpredictable, especially this time of year. Finch could have been a tenured professor at Northwestern, but that would have been judging a book by its cover. He looked to be in his mid-seventies and wore a brown cable-knit vest sweater over a denim shirt and pleated woolen trousers in spite of the fact it was late July. His papery-thin skin was mottled and jaundiced; a sure sign of liver cirrhosis, and he smoked an unfiltered cigarette. Since the overflowing ashtray at his elbow held six crushed butts and three cherry stems, I guessed the Manhattan he was working on wasn't his first.

I typically avoid strangers who foist themselves on others, so I warily accepted his beckoned invitation to join him. Maybe it was because of the watery-blue eyes that seemed to be pleading for company, for someone willing to listen, someone like me, who should have known better. I placed the briefcase carrying my research notes on the stool between Finch and myself as a barrier to discourage

further encroachment and ordered a Coke from the bartender. If he had a twin, it would have been the actor George Raft.

“Hell’uva storm, huh mister?” Finch said after introducing himself. He didn’t offer a hand, yet his tone was warm.

I took off my wet herringbone blazer with its leather-patched elbows and looped it over the back of the bar stool between us. “Yeah, and just my luck to get caught in it,” I replied.

“First time in town?” he asked.

“No. I’ve been to Chicago dozens of times.”

“Salesman?”

“Nephrologist.”

Finch chuckled. I’m a retired sanitation specialist. I’d say that puts us at opposite ends of the same business.”

“I suppose you could at that. However, my interests lay in the development of portable low cost dialysis machines.”

His sallow expression darkened. “Such a machine might have saved my mother. She died during a blizzard. Couldn’t get out for days, and missed her twice-weekly dialysis procedure.”

I reached for my Coke and took a sip while trying to wish away the storm. I didn’t want to hear what I guessed was coming next—a lengthy story of how the medical profession failed to save the life of someone whose time had finally come.

Finch took a last drag off his cigarette before tamping it out among the others in the overflowing ashtray. “Your coming here today was no accident, doctor. In fact, you might say I expected you.”

“Really? How so?”

Finch reached into a pants pocket and pulled out a stone no bigger than a child’s fist. It was deep brown in color, almost black, and encircled with a thin tracery of ochre, such as one might tie around an irregularly shaped package. He nudged it towards me with a hopeful smile.

“What’s this?” I asked.

Finch took a long swallow of his Manhattan and cleared his throat before speaking. “Look’s like an ordinary stone, doesn’t it?”

I shrugged and turned to glance expectantly towards the young couple sitting beneath the windows fronting Michigan Avenue. Beyond them the storm raged with renewed intensity. There would be no getting away from Finch now.

He reached for the open pack of unfiltered Camels at his elbow and shook one out. "Mind?" he asked, and held it aloft as if seeking my approval.

"Actually yes, I do."

He wordlessly returned the cigarette to the pack and set it aside before picking up the stone. He held it in his open palm for several long seconds before beginning. "My late wife Elaine and I were living in Ann Arbor at the time. This would have been nineteen eighty-seven, the year my mother passed during that blizzard I mentioned. She lived to be ninety-five, which is more than I can say for my chances." Finch patted his diseased liver before going on. "She was a heavy smoker for most of her life. Late-stage lung cancer was diagnosed only months before her death, but by then her bladder and kidneys had been compromised. Unable to rid the blood of excess potassium...well, you know the outcome."

I had seen many such cases. "All too well," I replied with a sideways glance at the stone cradled in Finch's palm.

"My father died ten years earlier," he said as an afterthought. "A stroke. Thankfully he was spared from witnessing Mother's painful death."

"You say you're from Ann Arbor," I said without thinking of the consequences. "What brings you to Chicago?"

Finch lowered the stone to the bar's slick mahogany surface and flexed his knobbed fingers as if to suggest the stone had become an unbearable burden. "After Elaine died from ovarian cancer I sold our place in Ann Arbor. Previously, an older widowed sister had taken an apartment not far from here. She invited me to move in, and I did. Now she's gone too."

I shifted uncomfortably on the bar stool. Finch's nearness was almost suffocating. "No living relatives, I take it?"

"None, save for a distant cousin somewhere in Topeka."

"And where does the stone come in?"

"The story begins ten years ago when Elaine and our son Adrian and I traveled cross-state to Ludington. My parents had a home there, and that's where Mother wanted to be buried, next to my father, his parents, and my father's youngest brother."

"I know Ludington. Lovely place. We vacationed there once."

"You're from Michigan too?"

"Born and raised in Traverse City. My wife and I live in Birmingham now. That's north of Detroit."

Finch closed his watery eyes and smiled. "It's small world after all. I was born and raised in Ludington."

"Ludington on the lake," I said. "Air-conditioned by nature and known for its beautiful and unspoiled sugar-sand beaches."

"Also true of many communities along Michigan's western coastline. Elaine and I were joined there by my sister Freda, her husband Jerry, and my older half-brother Donald from our father's first marriage. He and his wife Etta drove in from Escondido, California."

"They didn't fly?"

Finch shook his head. "Etta feared heights and wouldn't travel long distances unless it was in the backseat of Donald's Mercedes with a bottle of red wine for company and an empty Hill's Brothers coffee can for relief."

"She must have been a real treat to have known."

Finch gave me an understanding nod before draining the last of his Manhattan. "She made Donald's life a living hell for fifty-two years."

"So, it was just the seven of you attending your mother's funeral?"

"As a family, yes. A Presbyterian minister unknown to any of us but recommended by the funeral director had come to read her eulogy." Finch waved a hand to attract the bartender. "Can I buy you a drink?" he asked. "Something stronger than a Coke?"

"Thank you, but no."

Finch took my refusal with a shrug and went on. "Mother had many friends. Of course everyone said how natural she looked. But after what she went through? Hardly."

"This has all been very interesting," I began, "but I really need to find a cab."

"Please, wait," he said. "I won't take up much more of your time."

"Fifteen more minutes," I said, "And then I have to be getting on."

Finch sat back with a satisfied smile as the bartender placed another Manhattan in front of him. After taking a sip to lubricate his tonsils, he began to relate his story. "During the services we were told of the remarkable appearance, the day before, of countless stones that had washed up on the beach north of town. None had ever been seen there before."

"Never?"

"No, at least not in recent memory. Seeking a diversion the next day, we changed into the swimsuits we'd purposely brought for the occasion, gathered up enough towels for everyone and bed sheet we could stretch out on. Elaine insisted

upon preparing a picnic lunch, but since the weather threatened, I told her it was a poor idea. Anyway, we took my Buick and Donald's Mercedes for the short drive out. The sun was well up and hot as we walked down the sloping bluff to the water's edge. From there we made our way south until finding them."

"The stones?"

"Yes. Thousands upon thousands of them glisteningly wetly under the sun and none bigger than the one you see here."

"It must have been quite a sight," I said after taking a sip of Coke.

"Like a cobblestone road after a night's rain. We started gathering up as many as we could carry. More, as it turned out. We began selecting and then discarding one for another, prettier one, until our towels were piled high with them. Like kids, we started laughing at the sheer silliness of what we were doing, until realizing it was at least a mile back to where we'd parked. Now we had to choose only the very best stones to take home with us. My son Adrian picked this one. He said it was lucky, except it turned out to be anything but."

Curious, I picked it up and rubbed my thumb over its smoothly-irregular surface, as if summoning a genie. "It looks perfectly ordinary to me."

Finch gently pried the stone from my fingers and dipped it into his Manhattan like a strawberry into hot chocolate. "Look at it now," he said, and held it up. Under the indirect bar lighting, the stone glowed with hidden color. Flecks of red and orange appeared where there'd previously been none. Its dull black surface had taken on depth, with a color like warm molasses. I was looking at a jewel.

Finch gave me a knowing smile. "We had just dumped the stones onto the bed sheet when a sudden flash of lightning stopped us dead in our tracks. Then the thunder came, louder than anything I'd ever heard." Finch paused to let the imagery sink in before going on. "Just like I told Elaine, a dark and fast-moving storm was boiling up to the northwest and coming our way."

"I've seen those storms," I said. "They can and do breed tornados."

"That's what we were afraid of," Finch replied, "Within minutes we couldn't see more than a hundred yards in any direction."

"Did you have to leave the stones behind?"

Finch chuckled. "We had come too far for that. Instead we began pulling the sheet still heaped with stones back up the beach. Of course it was in shreds before we had taken a dozen steps. Being too stubborn to quit, we pilled as many as we could onto the towels and lugged them back to where we'd parked. Say, are you sure I can't offer you a drink?"

At this point I was not only craving a drink, I was hungry too. "Considering the weather, a gin martini sounds appropriate."

Finch waved the bartender over. "A Beefeater martini for my friend here," he said, "And make it a double."

"Make it a Beefeater with a twist. Oh, and would it be possible to get a double cheeseburger with deli mustard and horseradish, no onions?"

"Comin' right up," the bartender growled, and turned to fill my order while I finished what remained of the Coke.

"So, where was I?" Finch asked.

"You were lugging the stones..."

"Right you are. After unloading them into the trunks of our cars, I led the way back towards town. When we passed the cemetery where my mother had just been laid to rest, I slowed for no particular reason and turned in. Of course poor Donald had no choice but to follow. We parked opposite the family gravesite and waited for the fast-moving storm to pass."

I held up a hand as a signal for Finch to hold his narrative when the bartender returned with my double martini.

"Cheeseburger will be ready in a few," he said, and turned to deliver two cold Heinekens to the hand-holding couple at the table in front.

"The minute the storm had roared inland," Finch began, "we left our cars and headed straight for Mother's unmarked grave. Of course there wouldn't be a proper headstone for another several weeks, and it would match the others. The flowers we'd so carefully set out the day before had been shattered by the storm. Downed tree branches were everywhere, like broken bones. Anyone who'd seen us in our swimsuits and bare feet would've thought we were crazy. Hell, maybe we were. Anyway, we had just started clearing away the debris when Elaine suggested we use some of the stones to mark the family graves. We all agreed it was a great idea, and after decorating the others I arranged eight in the shape of a heart where I guessed my mother's heart would be."

"That was a very thoughtful thing for you to have done," I said, and sat back when the bartender reappeared with my double martini and the basketed cheeseburger and fries.

Finch wiped away a tear and nodded. "We decided to return to the beach the next day, but this time with pails borrowed from the neighbors."

"So you were able to add more to your collection?"

Finch vigorously shook his head, as if denying a memory. “No sir. The stones were gone by then. That second storm I’m telling you about took ’em back, every damned one of them. We waded out as far as we could, crotch deep in water and hoping the stones might be waiting within an arms reach. There was nothing there but clear water and a pure sand bottom. It was like it never happened.”

I took a bite from my cheeseburger and chewed it thoroughly while trying to picture Finch’s improbable-sounding story in my mind. “You must have been terribly disappointed.”

“Disappointing hardly describes it. When we got home the next day we put our few remaining stones in flowerpots and along windowsills where the sun would catch them. The day after that Adrian left for Camp Pendleton. From there he shipped out for the Gulf. He made captain while he was in Kuwait, but he never came home. His commanding officer wrote to tell me that my son was killed by what they called “friendly fire.” He was only twenty-three. Among Adrian’s personal effects were a pair of silver captain’s bars, his dog tags, and this stone.”

“Look, Finch, maybe I misjudged you. If so, please accept my apologies.”

Without asking if it was okay to smoke he shook a cigarette from the pack at his elbow and lit it off a chrome-plated Zippo with the iconic Marine Globe and Anchor engraved into it. “It rained last night,” he said. “Nothing like this of course, but enough to wake me from a recurring dream in which Adrian keeps getting blown up over and over again. Knowing from experience that sleep would never come, I got out of bed and stumbled down the hallway to my sister’s old bedroom. I use it as a hobby room now. Stamps. I collect stamps. I was guided by a nightlight that had been Adrian’s. Funny that he should have been afraid of the dark but he was.”

I sensed what was coming and fortified myself with another swallow of my martini. “Look, sir. If you don’t want to go on...”

Finch waved me away. “I ran my fingers over the brittle spines of so many books, non-fiction mostly, and stacks of those National Geographic magazines that seem to multiply when your back is turned. Nestled between two of Adrian’s favorite nursery rhyme books was a scale model of the Porsche sports car he always wanted but will never own. I discovered the twenty-year perpetual calendar my father gave to me on my twelfth birthday. Its perpetuity ran out in nineteen seventy-one, yet it seems I cannot live without it. Next to it was the grim reminder of another time and place; a brass toe tag that carries a stamped legend in black enamel. Bureau of Indian Affairs. Wyoming Territory Corpse No. 132. Donald

gave it to me. It's heartbreaking to think that some long-dead Shoshone or Arapahoe warrior went to his grave with that horrible thing on his foot."

No longer hungry, I pushed my unfinished cheeseburger aside and waited for the old man to finish.

"I finally located the stone where I'd left it in a clay ashtray Adrian made for me in grade school. Also in it were his captain's bars and dog tags. When I picked up the stone, a subtle shift of cool air seemed to move through the room. I swear to you doctor, I could not release it; this thing that had once scoured a glacial lake bottom now seemed to radiate with a heat of its own. I'm no deep thinker, but to have let this stone go would have sent me spinning through time and space to the beginning; back to that sliver of time when I was the youngest human on the planet. I carried it back to bed with me, and there, in that silent lonely room, with the stone held against the liver that's killing me, it seemed as if every atom in the cosmos was pressing down on me."

Finch's remarkable story left me drained. I scarcely noticed that the storm had moved off. I reached for my briefcase and still-damp jacket and stood to leave. "Thank you," I said, and added, "For everything."

He reached for the stone and thrust it towards me. "Please," he said, "do an old man a favor, and take this with you."

"I couldn't. Not now."

"I insist."

"If you must," I said, "give it to that couple in front."

Fresh tears flooded his eyes. "No. They are too young for an old man's memories, especially now, when they are creating their own. In time, the boy will remember drinking too many Heinekens, and the girl will remember it rained."

"And if I don't?" I asked.

Finch placed the stone that remained slick with whiskey and sweet-vermouth into my hand and smiled. "In that case there'll be no one to remember, and it will become nothing more than an ordinary stone."

It has been fifteen years since my wife and I moved to California from Michigan, but I still have the stone. It remains on my writing desk as a reminder of Finch and his dead Marine. But time is getting away from me too. A recent winter thunderstorm woke me from a fitful and dream-filled sleep that seemed to carry with it some unfinished portent. Next to me my wife shifted and turned in her sleep, her

breathing soft and regular. Unable to sleep, I threw off the bedcovers and groped my way down the darkened hallway to my office. I flicked on the desktop reading lamp to see arrayed family photographs that seemed to question my naked presence in the half-light. I picked up the stone where I keep it next to my computer and held it tight, as if to protect it from a sudden chill that seemed to come from everywhere and nowhere.

Was it the rain I heard pattering on the Spanish tile roof overhead, or was it the gentle wash of Lake Michigan surf? It didn't matter. What did matter was that the stone had to go back to where Adrian found it. Sometime this summer I will wade out into that crystal clear water and throw the stone as far as my arthritic shoulder will allow. Naturally, I expect to be drunk.

Someday another storm will heave up those same stones onto that remote crescent of beach. Somewhere among them will be an extraordinary one. This.

Instead of Space Ninjas

DAVID CAMBEROS

At the age of twelve, the thought of passing summer days visiting my grandparents in Mexico did feel a lot like leaving behind a whole life in Arizona. It meant leaving behind the mountains from Mars that screamed red, the browned leaves beneath the tiny yellow flowers of rabbitbush, and everywhere along the Verde River the chirping of flycatchers and yellow-rumped warblers. It meant leaving behind the scooter races I had with Cindy down the street.

Yeah, I'd miss those things. But having a stay in the town my parents grew up in also meant seeing my cousin Adrian again. Adrian's only a year older than me and used to live in Arizona too. We'd spend our days setting traps for lazy gila monsters and hairy tarantulas, digging entire cities in my backyard, or just playing space ninjas with the other neighborhood kids. Now, our thrills together were limited to three weeks each summer that we spent roaming the streets—well, the cobblestone paths—of the town. We took advantage of this time by enjoying grandmother's cooking, listening to some of grandfather's stories, earning a weekly allowance of ten pesos and eating the occasional *mazapán*. It was tradition for my dad and me. Just pack up and get away from the "it all" that he's always talking about.

One thing that I really loved about coming back to my grandparents' was that time never seemed to change. The big wooden door still stood in faded green paint, the pink shrimp flowers in front still poured through the mossy bricks that were supposed to contain them, bits and pieces of the stucco walls were broken off in all the same places, and Adrian and I could always pick up right where we left off the previous summer. As our car pulled up in front of the house, my dad looked

at it and I knew he noticed all the same things I did because you could see it all in the reflection of his glasses.

The first person to come out from that door was my grandfather. He wasn't expecting us really. It just happened to be that he was about to take a watering hose sprinkled with holes tiny as freckles to his field at the top of the hill. When I saw him I threw my bag and ran to hug him.

He hardly had time enough to put down the hose before I threw my arms around him and yelled, Gapa! And he hugged me back and told me, Raulito! How you have grown! Now we have to call you *Re-alto!*

My dad set his luggage down and walked over to us. My grandfather set me down and hugged my dad. They patted each other on the back twice: the sign of a mature male in our family. My dad joked around about looking for a place to stay and my grandfather laughed.

"Sure, but you'll have to work the fields with me first." He put his hand on my head and smiled.

He told us we must be hungry from so much driving and we were just in time for lunch. Only I was too excited to be hungry. I was trying not to look like I was searching for signs of Adrian but my eyes kept looking towards the door, as if he was going to come running out any second.

We walked over to the kitchen and as soon as my grandmother saw us she started serving us plates. She placed one fork on the table, gave me a hug, served some *agua dulce*, and then squeezed some time in to hug my dad. She never wasted time when it came to feeding us.

Did I mention my grandmother's cooking? She apologized for not having the *chiles rellenos* ready for us. We were, after all, four hours early, so we just had to make due with leftover *tacos de lengua*. That's right, her idea of a last minute meal for us was a plate of tongue tacos served with fresh salsa so red, you would've thought it was ground up in a bowl made from the mountains back home. It was a good start to summer already.

When we finished eating, my dad started catching up with my grandmother over dishes and my grandfather was getting ready to go back to the field. I knew that if I wanted to hear news about my cousin, I had to ask right then and there. I didn't want to be too forward about it though. No, I had to use just the right amount of subtlety. The last thing I wanted was for my grandparents to think—no, to *know* how much I missed him.

“Hey, Gapa, maybe when Adrian gets here, we can all go down to the river or something?”

That’s how I should’ve asked.

Instead, “Gapa! Is Adrian here yet? Where is he? You think he’ll get here soon?”

So much for smooth.

My grandfather laughed and pointed at the table. I looked in the direction he pointed but all I could see were the glossy place mats on the table. They were arrayed with sunflowers bright enough to keep your plate warm. I told him I didn’t see anything but he told me to keep looking and that it’s so obvious, it would bite me in the face if it were a snake.

“There are only four of us and five place mats on the table. Who do you think the fifth one belongs to? He has been here all week, he just missed lunch again,” he said. Then, as if by cue, the slow chirr of the wooden door. I looked on in anticipation, as the familiar sound of rubber sneakers against concrete seemed to jibe with my breaths.

When he first showed up at the door, I wasn’t surprised to see that he looked the same: his hair all dark and untamed, above his brown eyes a thick unibrow that was the direct result of him testing out his father’s razor on his face when he was six, and his round chin still poked out from his face like one of those tips at the bottom of a soda pop bottle. His socks were eaten at the heel and his shirt boasted all the wrinkles, dirt, and sweat stains as evidence that he knew what this trip was all about. He stood there for a moment with a half grin and his head at a dog-like slant. I don’t know how long the silence would’ve lasted if my grandfather hadn’t chimed in and told him, aren’t you going to say hi?

He walked over to where my dad was standing and gave him a hug. My dad said he didn’t recognize him and then told him that pretty soon he would be taller than him.

“Yeah right, Tio Alex.” He walked over to me. “Hey, primo, how have you been?” I went in for a hug and received a handshake.

“Eh, I’ve been alright. Hey, remember when we used to play space ninjas at the soccer field?”

“Yeah, that was pretty stupid, huh?”

“Yeah, pretty stupid.” Only I didn’t think it was stupid at all.

“We’re too old for that. Do you want to go down to the river and practice our breast stroke?”

Yeah, I wanted to go down to the river, but I sure as hell didn't want to practice no stroke. I wanted to make walls out of the mud by the water and see which one of us could skip rocks farther.

"Today isn't a good day to go to the river," my grandfather said, "it's too dangerous. By the time you get there it's going to be raining pretty hard." My grandfather knew these kinds of things. He knew that if you stood with your back to the wind and the clouds moved from left to right, chances are it would rain within the next three days; he knew that if the moon had a bright circle around it, it meant it was going to be a cold night; he knew that horses always got up with their front ends first, that cows always got up with their rear ends first, and he knew damn well if it was going to rain.

"I guess we can just go to the soccer field," said Adrian. Of course, my grandmother wasn't going to let him go that easily.

"Your plate is almost ready. Have a seat."

"No thanks, Gama, I already ate. I'm just going to grab my soccer bag and go."

My grandmother turned from the stove in mid taco. With the furry looking tongue meat still crumpled in her fingers, she looked at him in the same way a bird would look at its hatchling if it refused to eat. Her nose crinkled up and her eyes narrowed.

"What?" she asked.

"I'm just not hungry."

"What do you mean you're not hungry?"

"I'm just going to get going. I want to get there before Rafa walks his cows over there and hogs up the field." My grandmother looked down at the half assembled taco. The way she looked at it, you would've thought that nobody had ever refused her food before.

"Well, okay."

"Come on, Raul. Let's go." He picked up his soccer bag, which I soon found out didn't even have a soccer ball in it, and swung it over his shoulder.

"Can I go, Dad?"

"Sure, *mijo*."

And just like that, our first day together began. The soccer field was just beyond my grandfather's land and when we got there, we just kept on walking.

"Hey, where are we going?"

“To the river.” He looked up at the sun, which, save for a few black-collared hawks flying in circles, was the only thing in the sky. “Judging by the placement of the sun, it must be around noon. If we hurry, we can get to the river by two.”

“I saw you.”

“Saw me what?”

“Saw you look at your watch before you looked up.” He gave me a playful shrug.

“Still, I already knew it was noon, anyway.”

“What about the rain that Gapa was talking about?”

“Look up at the sky. There isn’t a single cloud in sight. Not even one.” Like I said earlier, if it was going to rain one day, my grandfather would know. I went along anyways, afraid to seem skittish.

“If you say so. Say, if you knew we weren’t going to go to the river, what did you bring your soccer bag for?”

“Check it out. I bought everything you see here from my buddy, Antonio. He lives by the *panadería*.” He tossed the bag over to me and told me to search its contents. The first thing I noticed was the smell. It was earthy and reminded me of a burnt maple leaf. I took out a lighter, a jar full of sticky green leaves, and a funny looking glass pipe out. It was blue and yellow and purple. It was the color of a bruise.

“What’s this for?”

“Careful, let’s save that until we pass Don Feliz’s *huerta*. We’re going to need some mangos.” Doña Ana sold goat cheese, Señor Fausto sold homemade pop-sicles, and Don Feliz was known around town for his saffron colored mangos. People sometimes asked why his mango garden was located all the way by the river, which is a whole two-hour walk from the town, but I knew it was the river that filled the mangos with the saffron sweetness.

“What does this even have to do with mangos, anyway?”

“Are you kidding me? What do you do for fun over in Arizona? Don’t tell me you and Cindy still chase lizards around.”

“No.”

“Good. That would be pretty funny.” He laughed. It was a joke I could not understand. “Don’t worry, I’ll teach you all the basics when we get to the river.”

When we got to Don Feliz’s *huerta*, we didn’t even have to break in. You see the problem with Don Feliz’s garden was that it spit out more mangos than he could sell. Doña Ana bought a crate of mangos once a week to feed to her goats,

Señor Fausto used them to make his popsicles, every store in town bought their mangos from Don Feliz and he *still* couldn't sell them all. So, instead of locking up the gate to the *huerta*, he just put a sign up at the door inviting tired travelers to help themselves to a mango or two. Underneath the sign was a bucket for donations that read, *Dame pan, queso, hasta un pedazo de pescuezo, pero por favor no me des tus cinco pesos*. In other words, he wanted people to donate anything but money. One summer when I asked what kinds of things he found in the bucket, he said he usually found beers, matches, or boxes of pencils. One time, he told me, he found half a jar of powdered chili with a note attached to it apologizing for the jar being only half full. They had used the rest on the mangos.

There were mangos everywhere. We couldn't even walk without stepping on a few that had already begun to turn brown. With each step we took, a swarm of fruit flies flew up from the mango-ground we walked on. Above us, hanging from the long vines of the wrinkly-leaved trees, were mangos. Occasionally, much to the delight of the swarms of fruit flies, one of them would grow too plump for its vine and fell to the ground, making a soft, squishy sound.

Adrian and I lifted the bottoms of our shirts up to form makeshift bowls for our fruits. I suggested that we use his soccer bag, but Adrian said he didn't want to risk ruining "the goods" that he had in there.

"What?" he asked me when we got back to the entrance.

"Well, what are we going to put in the bucket?"

"Nothing. It isn't serious. These mangos would've ended up going bad anyways. Besides, we have *nothing*."

It was true. In all my excitement to go to what I thought was going to be the soccer field, I didn't even have the sense to pack any water. I had nothing but the clothes on my back and the mangos in my bowl-shirt. I lifted my shirt higher so that I could keep the mangos secure with just my left hand, and with my right, I unlatched my belt and threw it in the bucket.

"Suit yourself, Raul."

"We're already practically at the river anyways."

Within seconds we reached our destination.

"It's one fifty-six. Am I good or what?" We found a spot under the shade of a tall rosewood tree, and put our mangos together in one pile on the ground. I was about to sink my teeth into the thin flesh of my first one when Adrian stopped me.

"What are you doing? You can't eat that yet."

"Why not?"

“Trust me, that thing is going to taste a lot better if you wait a little. Besides, you’ll get my zoom-tube sticky if you start eating them now.”

He emptied the jar’s contents into the pipe, raised the other end to his mouth, lit the plant on fire, and held in the smoke to get its full effect. When he coughed out the last of the smoke from his lungs, he passed the pipe over to me.

“Your turn. Don’t worry, I’ll show you what to do.”

And he did.

We ate more mangos than we should have, giggled a little bit, and nothing else really happened. There were no breaststrokes or mud walls or even stone skipping.

We stayed asleep until the rain found us. Adrian couldn’t pretend to tell time in the sun because it was somewhere under the clouds. He looked at his watch and announced that it was almost seven. Although it only took us two hours to get to the river, the way back was almost all uphill. It only took about ten minutes to realize that leaving my belt in Don Feliz’s bucket was a mistake. Sure, we were only seconds from the river when I decided I didn’t need it anymore, but I didn’t take into account that I was miles away from my grandparents’ house. My fingers had indents in them from hooking them to my belt loops. I felt really down. I think Adrian explained to me that I was “burnt out from his bud,” or something like that.

“We’re not going to do this again tomorrow, are we?”

“Well I don’t know what you’re doing tomorrow but I’m going back home.”

“What do you mean?”

“I’m only staying a week this summer and today was my last day.”

“How come?”

“Girls won’t remember you after three summer weeks, right?”

“Yeah.” I thought about Cindy, and if it was normal that I didn’t think of her this way. I thought about the rain poking our faces and how thankful my grandfather was for it. I thought about how, just last summer, Adrian and I were playing in my grandfather’s field when a different rain began to drop on us. We all ran around laughing. Mud began to build up under our shoes and we pretended that we had grown three inches taller, a year older. I thought about how, instead of running for cover, my grandfather stood up from his rows of corn, took his hat off and yelled, *Bendito sea Dios*.

“By the way, do you think you can take my soccer bag back to Antonio sometime?”

“I guess.” I wanted nothing to do with that soccer bag.

“Anyways,” he said, “this place is pretty boring.”

With nothing left to say, the long walk home wasn’t punctuated by periods or commas, but by gasps for breath and awkward eye contact—the rain heavy on us the whole time.

Niñamiel (Honeygirl)

MARIANO ZARO

We discovered that Niñamiel had hair in her armpits. That day the wasps didn't show up. It happened by the river.

We always went to the river on summer afternoons. All the boys and one girl, Niñamiel, with Doña Julia, her mother. She was the only mother there. Niñamiel was never alone. She wore a swim suit with a big white long-sleeved shirt over it. She was plump, bigger than all of us. She couldn't swim but with her fat arms she splashed more water than anybody. That made her laugh. Her laughter was loud and abundant. *Esta niña, se ríe de nada.* This girl, her mother said, *she laughs at anything.*

Niñamiel got tired very quickly, she couldn't breathe well and her mother had to clean her nose all the time. *Sopla, sopla, no sé qué te crece en esas narices.* Blow, blow, I don't know what you grow inside your nose. She came out of the water and rested under the poplar trees. She leaned her back and head against a trunk, let her arms drop and fell asleep. She slept with her mouth wide open. After a while she started drooling. That's when the wasps came.

The wasps came every afternoon, three, four, five sometimes. They waited until she was asleep, landed on her lips and started sucking her saliva. They buzzed their wings and walked around the mouth with their thin, delicate legs but never stung her. Doña Julia didn't try to scare the wasps away. *Mira, mi niña tiene miel en la boca.* Look, my girl has honey in her mouth. She explained to us. That's why we called her Niñamiel. Then she added, *Mi hija nunca le hará mal a nadie.* My daughter will never hurt anybody.

The wasps always came to eat from the mouth of Niñamiel until that afternoon at the end of the summer. She didn't get into the river that day. *Hoy está mala mi niña. My child is sick today.* Niñamiel waited by the river bank, lifted her arms and waived her hands in the air. She didn't wear her white shirt. We all saw that she had grown hair in her armpits. She got tired soon as usual and went to rest under the poplar-trees. She fell asleep with her mouth opened but that day the wasps didn't come. We all knew that something was wrong with her. Niñamiel never came back to the river.

Niñamiel died that December. We all went to the funeral, all the boys that used to spend the summers together by the river. Her coffin was not white, it was made of dark wood, and that surprised me. I knew that all children were buried in white coffins. *Madre, ¿por qué no la entierran en una caja blanca? Why don't they bury her in a white coffin? Sabes, ya no era una niña. You know, she was not a child anymore.* My mother answered.

Five wasps entered the church and flew over the open coffin exposed at the altar. They stayed suspended in the air like a miniature crown. Niñamiel's lips were sealed with wax. The wasps dropped dead on the marble floor. When the porters lifted the coffin their black shiny shoes crushed the wasps, they crackled like dry, tired tissue paper. The shoes left nothing behind, not even dust.

Celia

RENATE MÖRDER

Celia abrió el paquete de pasteles, lo apoyo sobre sus rodillas, miró las confituras, se relamió. Una expresión de placer casi perverso se reflejó en su obeso rostro.

Contó los pequeños pasteles, eran quince: cuatro de crema, tres de chocolate, uno de frutilla, dos de almendras y cinco de coco; todos eran distintos entre sí.

—Me los mandaron tal cual los pedí -dijo sonriendo satisfecha mientras repasaba mentalmente el orden en que tenía que comerlos. El primero debía ser de crema, miró los cuatro y eligió el mejor. Sí, el mejor, porque éste representaba a Bernie; y Bernie, con su cabello rubio y su piel blanca, había sido el que le había dado más satisfacciones. Con mirada soñadora evocó su pareja de tantos años. Comió lentamente el pastel, lo saboreó, tragó el último bocado, suspiró.

El segundo pastel representaba a Benjamin, y también debía ser de crema, ya que Benjamin había sido casi albino, pero este debía ser un pastel sin demasiadas pretensiones, lo mismo que el que representaba a Tomás que era el que debía comer en quinto lugar y el que le recordaría a David que era el número diez. Buscó el menos atractivo y lo comió de un solo bocado.

Miró la hora y pensó con tristeza “Se está haciendo tarde”.

El tercer y cuarto pastel debían ser de chocolate como Ricky y Jesús, esos dos maravillosos mulatos centroamericanos que habían ido cierto día a hacer unos arreglos en su casa y se habían incorporado a su vida para siempre.

“Todos conviven dentro de mí, todos son parte mía y todo valió la pena” pensó.

El quinto era Tomás y lo deglutió rápidamente.

El sexto era Robert y era de almendras, tan sabroso y dorado como él, que era dorado de pies a cabeza, “Una maravilla”.

El séptimo, octavo y noveno pasaron sin pena ni gloria, tal como pasaron Willy, un pelirrojo intrascendente representado por el único pastel de frutillas y los canosos George y Joe, dos insípidos pasteles de coco.

El décimo era David, el peor de los de crema.

El número once, Alfred “Una delicia de chocolate”.

Volvió a mirar la hora nerviosa y se sirvió una copa de licor mientras pensaba en las inyecciones que le iban a aplicar en un rato y en lo mucho que odiaba las inyecciones.

Miró la bandeja, aún quedaban cuatro pasteles.

El número doce era de almendras, el más delicioso de los de almendras porque era Paulo, un adorable brasileño que le había encargado unas traducciones. Sonrió, “El placer no tiene límites” se dijo.

Miró los tres que quedaban, eran exquisitos, los mejores de coco. Pensó con pena que no iba a poder comerlos enteros. Pero bueno, la vida era así, los vecinos entrometidos eran así. “La gente es mala” dijo en voz alta. Comió despacio tres cuartas partes de dos de los pasteles y la mitad del último.

Se sirvió la última copa de licor, la bebió despacio.

Luego se puso de pie, miró hacia la puerta y dijo en perfecto inglés “Ya terminé”. La puerta se abrió e ingresó un sacerdote. El religioso avanzó despacio, y se sentó temeroso a casi un metro del lugar en el que estaba ella. Comenzó a hablarle en inglés, pero ella no lo escuchaba. Ella, seguía pensando en sus pasteles y en sus hombres.

“Todos forman parte de mi, todos son parte mía” se decía a si misma mientras sonreía con satisfacción.

—Hija -exclamó de pronto el sacerdote. El sonido de la palabra en español la sobresaltó.

—Sí padre.

—¿No te arrepientes de tus pecados? ¿No te arrepientes de tus crímenes?

Ella lo miró y observó la bandeja con los restos de los tres últimos pasteles de coco, y recordó con pena lo que había quedado en el refrigerador del sótano de su casa. El obeso rostro de la mujer se ensombreció.

—Una pena -susurró- una pena.

El sacerdote suspiró aliviado y dijo:

—Entonces ¿Te arrepientes?

Ella lo miró burlona y con expresión satisfecha le contestó:

—No padre. Si pudiera, volvería a comérmelos a todos.

El sacerdote se persignó y ella lanzó una carcajada.

Entraron los guardias tomaron a Celia de un brazo, la sacaron de su celda y la escoltaron por el viejo y frío pasillo de la cárcel.

Celia, avanzando con desgano, dijo en voz alta: “Odio las inyecciones”, pero nadie la escuchó, pues el grito del guardia que había quedado en la celda ahogó su última queja:

—Dead woman walking

—Mujer muerta caminando -susurró Celia con su vieja costumbre de traducirlo todo.

The Novelist

DEMI ANTER

Winner of the 2010 Desert Literary Society Award

My wife is a writer. She wrote for *Rolling Stone* for twenty-plus years, and for some other magazines before that. My career has allowed us to maintain a certain lifestyle, but her gift of understanding is the vessel through which we survive. My wife can, from the curvature of a person's eyes, craft the content of his character and, with a pen and a few well-chosen words, relay the longing in his soul. Her skills in observation come from a rich history of empathy, a trait that made the early years more difficult to navigate. As the familiar reader knows, once we had married and she finished school, my wife moved on to her next dream, taking on the profession of a novelist.

Each day was spent ranting and raving, she sorrowfully complaining of the desire she had to create. Her need was voluminous, large enough to suck away the space of the rented Victorian on Ashbury, so large as to draw from the other dimensions as well until the fourth, Time, fluttered against us like a wayward clock, hands spinning. In the dark, my bird seemed to settle. The energy of her thrashing heart became solidified so that she would sink in her chair, too heavy to do anything but sing.

The songs were beautiful. Lyrical poetry always managed to catch me. I often say that I would love her for the poems alone. But her verses changed, as art does, as love does; both are made of the same—creativity and character—after all. Her stories began, at first quiet and distant, and unobtrusive. She explored different lands and separate characters. Her thoughts traveled quite far from herself, while

her feelings stayed tucked deep within, and I was somewhere between the two, watching transformations.

The muttering was the first sign. Hunched over a newspaper, she would recite words into empty space, and her eyes became dark in imagining. She rented movies set in third-world countries, places she referred to as *the Exotics*, and so became fascinated with Jamaica, and so with Mozambique, so with Palestine, so with Laos.

She began to frequent bars. The City offered much to her by way of experience. Her journalistic skills and ease in conversation opened the doors and bought the drinks. *Taj, Uce, Rami*... To her credit, she did not bring the men home, but did bring their histories. These tales pervaded her until their influence was well known. To immerse herself, *to feel*, she donned silks instead of flannel, scrubbed her face clean until no modern masks could obscure the lines that life had chosen to reflect in it, and, occasionally, she hid her hair.

When I pointed out the changes, she stopped speaking to me entirely. For almost a week, she remained locked in her office; at the end of the time she emerged holding a manuscript and presented it to me. As I began reading at the kitchen table, I saw her slip back past the doors of the sacred study. An unraveled *hijab* draped over her desk. In a box at the foot of her chair lay several more, strewn haphazardly, finished with.

As one critic put it, *her characters breathed*. For some time, I was happy for her. We reaped the rewards of her success and forgot the oddities associated with preliminary drafts.

Unfortunately, these oddities eventually escaped the study, the pages, and the confines of her mind. Like a noxious gas, they swept over us until we were pervaded with an overwhelming sense of unease. She began to elaborate on plans, on the many courses that our lives may eventually take. She imagined our futures. Suddenly the bars were not fodder enough for her creativity, nor did past experiences provide material to develop on romantic idealism. Her pragmatism was overrun by her imagination. Musings became actions and mutterings, matches.

She cooked breakfast occasionally, playing the role of the tame housewife whom we scoffed at in the society of our cultured friends. Over my papers I would notice her ringing her hands, eyes vacant or cast downward. Her lips twitched and her jaw quivered as if she were chewing. She told me later that she was having conversations with herself, playing out scenarios. They often involved me, hence the curt manner in which she handed over the milk, and the bitter taste left in my

mouth by omelets on more than one occasion; when she imagined us fighting, she said, she *didn't feel so guilty if the soap wasn't washed off of the pan all the way*.

She imagined me capable of things I was not—am not—capable of. I could be a liar, a thief, an adulterer, a victim, all at once if not all in one day. No matter what role she played, she did so with ferocity, slamming doors on her way out, sleeping on the couch, upsetting herself at my lack of words or excess. All I wondered at the end of each night, eyes glimmering with the light under the doors of her office, was what had become of my wife.

I thought her a victim. I wanted to cradle her, to place my hand on her forehead and draw away pain, Christ-like, with my fingertips. But nothing worked. I was rejected, and welcomed, and rejected. Sickly cyclical. Two years thick. I thought about leaving. I thought things that no people should ever think.

The last novel was published on the 6th of October, our wedding anniversary—four years. This one made it into more than just *the Chronicle*, but of course that is history, and well documented already. The reader knows that, as he or she knows me. The reader reads now to know of the insanity.

Writing seems safe, familiar. Plenty of us are writers, with or without creativity. Most take English degrees and go teach, and we have all been students, so we think we know, and when a woman tells you—with blinking, bright irises—that she wants to be a novelist—with long, rolling thighs—you nod and accept it, and beg her to let you sleep in her pen ink and eyelashes.

We knew not the consequences of our dreams. We knew not the lengths of evil that must be exchanged for one, boundless masterpiece. It was only then, too—at the publishing—that we knew sacrifice.

I stayed with her, the novelist. She stayed with it, the manuscript, though the duality of her dreams nearly tore her in two. She had success, establishment, and I am sure that she loved each page of the freshly bound copy with a strength and a fascination that I held no candle to.

But time diminishes the romance of most achievements in a way that it does not diminish romance itself. With the same hands that began it, my wife closed the book. With an understanding of self and selflessness, she carried its weight to her shelf. She put it away, her tongue clicking against her teeth, I know, considering the enormity of her sacrifice, and, palms open to the ceiling, she stepped back, turned, to consider me.

The Present

BRUCE CHRONISTER

The snow had fallen during the night. In darkness it sailed from the sky, a soft patter against the limbs of every bare tree in the woods, a resounding silence as it dusted the open fields of northeastern Kentucky. This is what they once called a primitive land, where, from the ancient hills could be wrested the grimy, dusty-black sustenance of hungry, distant industrial furnaces. And this is cave country, too—where rain seeps relentlessly into the earth to fashion magical, fantastical hideaways within the broken strata of the massive limestone plates. . . caverns so numerous they say even the caves have caves. So, too, it is the land of the Little Smokey, where, in the elusive mists hide stories a-plenty awaiting travelers whose eyes and ears are open and ready to see and hear them. It is a place where the truth lies glimmering along the tops of the hills where God has set the sky to rest. It is a country where time often stands still—for a moment or for a millennium.

Unlike the fragile flakes, broad and flat and forged in extreme cold, these had fallen fat and fluffy, born of temperatures just cold enough to give them form and personalities. They were the stick-to-the-eyelashes, pants cuff ice ball, snow angel nest, sphere-scrunched duck-or-be-branded projectile material. They marched along branches, then waited for a gust of chill breeze to play rat-a-tat with a cluster of stubborn-dead leaves before leaping in chunks to the ground. Some now crowded together and peered over the edges of the peeling balcony-plates of hickory bark. This is what they saw:

The footprints in the snow seemed to suddenly begin at the road's edge where the school bus had recently made its crunching stop. They continued up the lane, veering widely toward a vacant bluebird box that was tilted atop a locust post and

wore a fuzzy, white bonnet. They entered the woods where the biting chimney smoke of bituminous coal threaded its way through the trees as if piecing together an heirloom quilt. They approached the weathered gray cabin and ended at the stoop, a freshly swept slab of sandstone. Beside it, in a just-cleared spot, sparrows, juncos and a brilliant red cardinal sought millet and sunflower seeds. The breath of the trees and of the earth whispered a promise of a distant awakening.

From a woven willow basket just inside the door, the aroma of apples leaped up invitingly, and that of this morning's bacon and chicory lingered at the corners of the ceiling. The scent of Fell's Naptha Soap still hovered near the patterned linoleum floor, now so bare near the sink.

In the next room the old blue tick hound slept on the floor next to a far older Franklin stove. His upper lip flapped as burbles of bark escaped. They were doubtless, between his ears, thunderous wails of glee as he chased the granddaddy of all rabbits through a young spring day. Startling himself awake, he raised his head, peered observantly over his shoulder through half-lidded eyes, then, satisfied, slowly returned his head to the floor and with a gratifying stretch and deep sigh, melted again into his dreams.

On the other side of the stove an old lady sat in her rocking chair, her head bent in concentration. Her fingers caressed the brightly wrapped package on her lap, working unsteadily on a piece of tape that secured a corner. The paper seemed to have been used once before, maybe twice, its colors only slightly more festive than those of the flower-print dress she wore under her gray, home-knit sweater. She smiled as she gingerly freed the edge and slowly unfolded the paper, then turned the box over and started on the other end.

"Goodness, Granny, you take forever!" cried the little girl kneeling beside the chair. Her hair was black, and a scattering of freckles over her nose highlighted her porcelain doll face. Her blue eyes had grown increasingly wider and she squirmed impatiently.

"Now, Kurysa," responded the lady, who was really the child's great-grandmother. "There's three things that are important concernin' presents."

"Three things! But it's only one itty-bitty present and it's just from me!"

"The first thing, Kurysa, is to enjoy the openin' of it. Once it's open, it's open for good. So I just take my time." She studied the paper, tracing her finger over it. "Just look at the pleasin' pattern here—the pretty doll baby and the rocking horse—it reminds me of one my daddy gave me when I was about your age, Kurysa. He made it hisself and kept it hid from me for the longest time—now *that*

was a trouble!” Her soft gray eyes were focused on a faraway place and she sighed. “And green is my favorite color. Did you know that?”

“No! I mean,” behind her back Kurysa crossed her fingers, “I think so. . .” She smiled emphatically.

“And besides,” said Granny, “I just want to guess what might be the surprise in here a-waitin’ for me to find it.”

“Oh, Granny, it’s only just something I made. It’s a pic. . .” Kurysa abruptly clapped her hand over her mouth.

Granny didn’t seem to notice. She peeked cautiously through the now-open end. “The second thing,” she continued, “is the fact that you picked *me* out to give this one special thing to.” She unfolded the paper, smoothing it out gently to uncover the somewhat worn shoebox. “There!” she exclaimed. Granny poised to lift off the lid.

“But Granny, I wanted you to have it. I made it special just for you. But it’s only a. . .”

“That’s just what I mean,” Granny interrupted.

The little girl stood now, a slight jumping motion revealing her anticipation of Granny’s reaction. Granny raised the lid, reached carefully into the box, and tenderly withdrew the picture Kurysa had drawn with bright crayons. “Why, this is wonderful! You’re such a good draw-er, Kurysa! Just look at those colors,” she marveled.

“Do you like it?” Kurysa squealed, clapping her hands.

“It’s just what I wanted! It’s so special. You come right here and give me a hug!” As they embraced Granny whispered, “I’m gonna always remember this very moment!”

“Me too, Granny! And . . .” the girl reflected, “and. . . I ain’t never gonna forget the three important things ’bout presents, neither!” Kurysa suddenly blinked. “Hey! You only told me *two* ’portant things ’bout presents, Granny! What’s the third thing?” she asked, pulling the old lady’s sleeve, not taking her eyes from her weathered face.

“Why, Kurysa, *this* is the third thing—this very minute. It’s the part you keep in your heart. Now, you’ve got room for this one, and lots more of ’em, too! You keep it safe in your heart and you can go back an’ open it, just like your wonderful present here, any time you want—even when you get as old as me! Maybe even forever! You’ll see. Now, what do you say we go an’ make us some molasses cookies? Just give me a hand up here, honey.”

Outside the snow had begun to fall again across the fields and into the trees of northeastern Kentucky, into the valley of the Little Smokey, where Truth glimmers at the point where the hills meet the sky and where time, sometimes, stands still.

Plan B

TONY O'DOHERTY

I saw the walker as soon as I crested the hill.

“Darn fool. Don’t he know he should be on the other side?”

I was already riled up and ready to argue with a fencepost. I’d been to town, dropped off the loaner at Rick’s auto shop and picked up my truck. Already sore at the two weeks it took to get the parts, I really blew my stack when I saw his bill. Rick just stood by twisting a dirty rag in his big oily hands till I ran out of cuss words. Then he showed me his invoices, knocked fifty bucks off and said “pay me whatever you can now and the rest later.”

“What’s he doing out here anyway?”

He looked kind of familiar but I couldn’t be sure. Might be his auto broke down, but the last turnoff was five miles back and I’d not passed any parked vehicle, so that wasn’t likely. I was considering driving real close to him—just as a warning, you understand—when he turned around and stuck out his thumb.

The windscreen was streaked and dusty but I could just make out his face. The feeling that I knew him from some place got even stronger. I slowed right down to a crawl for a better look. Without asking, he hopped on the running board, opened the door, slid onto the passenger seat and extended his hand. My first thought was to cuss him and tell him to get out, but I thought “heck, he waved me down and I pulled over. What was I expecting?”

I clasped his hand briefly. It was warm but dry and his grip was firm.

“I appreciate you stopping for me.”

“Yeah, well... Put on the belt there. Where you heading?”

“Oh, I’ll be fine with wherever you’re heading.”

I figured he must be some kind of drifter; but then, where was his gear?

"I'm turning off in a few miles on County Line Road."

"Much obliged."

"You're welcome."

Neither of us spoke for the next mile or so. Suited me fine; I was in no mood for chit-chat. The hitchhiker kept his face to the side window, turning his head every few seconds like a tourist, with a big grin on his face. It's not like we get many—or even any—tourists in this neck of the woods unless they're heading someplace else but he was acting like it was the finest sight he ever seen. Flat farmland stretched out on both sides of the road all the way to the horizon, where, if you weren't a local, you wouldn't know whether you are looking at clouds or hills. Here and there lines of wind-raked trees, clusters of farm buildings and the occasional house broke the monotony.

"Isn't that where the Thompson's horse farm was?"

I turned sharply, but he was still looking out the side window. I reckoned he couldn't be more than early twenties, if that.

"Thompson's place, you say? Must be thirty years or more since that was sold up and tore down."

Matt Thompson and me had been close, real close. He took it hard when the bank foreclosed on his farm. He moved to Kansas City, then to somewhere out West. I'd lost touch with him years ago.

"How'd you hear about it?" I added when I got no response. I glanced at him again. He turned from the window with a faint smile. I didn't see anything funny about my question.

"Luke Thompson was a good friend of mine, and of yours too as I recall."

I sure wasn't expecting an answer like that. Luke Thompson was Matt's father. He had a bad stroke about five years after he handed the farm over to Matt and died a few years later. Matt borrowed against the farm to pay his father's medical bills, and that was the main reason he lost it. Only way this youngster could know about me and the Thompson's was if his family was from around here. No wonder he looked familiar.

"You're right there," I replied, casual like, thinking hard. I glanced at him again trying to put a name to his face. Being farming country, neighbors here are miles apart. But in the sixty-four years I've been around I reckoned I knew everyone there was to know. Most likely he was the son of a neighbor back from college or the Army or the likes.

"Son, your name is on the tip of my tongue, but I can't recall it. I'm guessing it's quite a while since the last time we met up, most likely when you were just a youngster."

There was that smile again.

"It's been a while, alright. Thirty-five years, believe it or not, and I was much older then, not younger. Just a few years younger than you are now, in fact."

I stared straight ahead, not being able to make head or tail of what he said, and not wanting to catch his eye again. I reckoned he was not right in the head and felt the hairs on my neck rising. I knew they let people from the local correctional facility out to work on projects. Joe Gaskins, one of the guards, told me he reckoned half the inmates were insane but there was nowhere else to put them. They were supposed to watch them real close, but this guy might have managed to slip away from a work gang. The truck picked up speed as I stepped on the gas. The sooner I reached the turn-off and got rid of this guy the better. I made a mental note to call Dan Tracy, the sheriff, as soon as I got home.

I pulled off the pavement just before the turn. Pebbles rattled on the underside and dust drifted lazily across the fields as the truck slid to a stop on the shoulder.

"All right son, this is as far as I'm going. I'll have to drop you here."

He made no move to get out but instead leaned across and rested his hand on my knee. I stiffened and drew away instinctively.

"Take me home, Cory. Take me home."

Hearing my first name startled me. But then I figured if his family was local, it wasn't too surprising. Maybe taking him to his home wasn't such a bad idea. His folks would know what to do. That is, if they still lived around here.

"I need to know where you live. If it's far away, you understand, the days getting on and I still have a lot to do."

He pointed down the dirt road.

"About a mile from here."

This approach was not working out. I tried to sound kindly, but I'm sure there was an edge to my voice.

"I'm afraid you've got the wrong road, son. My place is the only one a mile that way, and the Martin's spread is next, but its two miles or more beyond. What's your name? If your folks are from around here I'd know them for sure."

"Anderson. My name is Anderson."

That did it. I switched off the engine and, taking the keys, got out and walked around to his side of the truck, keeping an eye on him all the time. I jerked the door open.

“Okay, get out. This is as far as I’m taking you. I don’t know what your game is, saying you live in my house and we have the same name. Maybe you know stuff about me, but so do lots of folks from around here. No hard feelings, but I don’t appreciate that kind of stupid talk and I sure as hell don’t want to see you again. Your ride stops here. Got it?”

He held up his hands, palms outward, in a gesture of appeasement and climbed out. His eyes followed me as I started the truck and turned onto County Line Road, but he did not move. I stopped about halfway to the house at a high point where I could see the turn off. There was no sign of him.

“Good riddance. I hope he keeps moving.” I slid the truck into gear and pulled away.

Pluto came running from the back of the house and circled the truck, barking a welcome, as I bumped across the yard and parked in front of the door. He danced around my feet, ears pinned back and tail wagging furiously. I dropped the tailgate and slid out the box of supplies I’d bought in town. Inside I stored them away and was flicking the TV remote when I remembered that I’d forgotten to call the sheriff.

“Dan’s out in the car. Can I help?”

I sighed. It was Wayne Gentry, Dan’s Deputy. He is a willing kid, but even his Ma would admit he was no genius and has a lot to learn. I’d probably be wasting my time talking to him, but went ahead anyhow in case he knew something.

“You hear of any trouble with drifters around about or, say, escaped convicts on the loose...”

“Escaped convicts?” Suddenly excited, he cut in before I could finish. “Hey, Cory is this for real or are you kidding me? Wouldn’t that be something? Nothing ever happens around here. The last time I remember...”

“Okay, okay. Never mind.” Now it was my turn to interrupt. “Have Dan call when he gets back, you hear?”

“Sure thing Cory, sure thing.” He sounded disappointed. I hung up quickly.

I was dozing in front of the TV when I heard Pluto barking again. Shaking off sleep, I strode to the door and pushed it open, then stiffened. I recognized the figure hunkered down at the gate rubbing Pluto’s ears immediately. I ran to the corner of the room, pushing chairs aside, and grabbed the shotgun. Without wait-

ing to find shells, I pushed through the door again and stood, feet wide apart, on the stoop.

"You there. Stay right where you are, son. Get away from the dog and get off my property."

I moved the gun so he could get a better view of it.

"The sheriff's on his way here right now," I lied, "so, unless you want to spend the night in the lockup. You'd better get going."

The hitchhiker stood up but made no move to leave, Pluto settled at his feet, his jaw resting on his paws. I could see the whites of his eyes as his glance flicked from me to the man beside him and back again.

"Hi, Cory. I see you've still got the Winchester 42. You know, that gun's older than you. Ain't that something? Do you know your grandfather bought it for your Pa on his twenty-first birthday?"

The setting sun threw long shadows across the yard towards the figure at the gate. He was beginning to make me uneasy. Very uneasy. There seemed to be no end to what he knew about me and my folks. If I'd had more confidence in young Gentry, Dan might truly be on his way now. I hefted the gun again as the hitchhiker started to walk towards me.

"You've no reason to be afraid of me, Cory. I've something very important to tell you. Can we go inside?"

He stopped right in front of me in the shadow of the house. Our eyes flashed as we examined each other. If I was looking at him cold and suspicious, even fearful, his look was the opposite. His question hung in the air between us.

"Until I know what this is all about we'll stay right here," I said as firmly as I could.

I raised the gun higher, but he reached out and gently but firmly pushed it aside. With his hands still resting on the barrel he looked deep into my eyes.

"This is the gun that put poor old Hopalong out of his misery, isn't it? Do you remember that?"

As an infant and small child, Hopalong had been my constant companion. Our neighbors, the Thompson's, bred hunting dogs. Shortly after I was born, a pup in one of the litters had been stomped by a horse and could not be sold. My mother took it in and looked after it. My father called it "Hopalong" because its leg never mended properly. I was ten or so when Hopalong's age caught up with him and the vet that looked after Thompson's horses told us he wouldn't get better. My father had used the gun I was now holding, and which the stranger was

gripping lightly, to stop Hopalong's pain. The pressure on the barrel increased and I did not resist. He took the gun away from me and went behind me to prop it against a post. I turned slowly to face him.

"Who are you? Who the hell are you?"

Instead of answering me directly, he waved towards the door.

"Can we go inside now?"

I continued to stare so he added, "please?"

Taking my silence for agreement, he went inside and I followed after a moment's hesitation.

He moved around the room, letting his hand trail across the backs of the chairs and looking at everything as if he wanted to buy the place. I had to cough to get his attention.

"You said wanted to tell me something important?"

"I'm sorry. I got distracted. Yes. And you asked who I am. Let's go in the back bedroom? I want to show you something that will help me answer."

By now I wasn't even surprised to find he knew the layout of my house. He went straight to a credenza in the corner that held family mementos and, dropping on one knee, carefully opened the doors. That old and worn piece of furniture had been in this room all my life and I reckoned I didn't really see it anymore. I couldn't remember the last time I searched inside. He worked slowly through the contents, setting framed photographs, tarnished sporting trophies and bundles of papers aside on the floor. Finally, with a grunt of satisfaction, he retrieved what I recognized as an album of early family photographs. Flicking through the pages he stopped at one, turned the album around and handed it to me. I looked at the photograph, and then back at him. My heart raced and I stumbled backwards until the edge of the bed caught my knees and forced me to sit. The springs creaked under my weight. It had been my parent's bed until they divorced, then my father's until he died. I had never used the bed or this bedroom.

"How... how can this be?"

The photograph was of my father as a young man—the same young man that stood before me now. Earlier I had doubted his sanity; now I doubted mine. Scenes from "Back to the Future" flashed in my mind. My wide open eyes pleaded for an explanation. The bed creaked again as he sat beside me and gently took the album from my trembling hands.

* * *

The pastor's wife, Betty, said he was over at the church. She sounded irritated.

"He's been there nearly all day. Told me not to come looking for him. Didn't mention anyone else, so I reckon there's no reason you can't go on over. You tell him his supper is spoiling."

As I swung through the gateway my headlights picked him out sitting on the church steps. He jumped up and came forward as the sound of the engine died. When I stepped out of the truck, he blocked my way, looking around anxiously.

"Cory, what are you doing out here this time of night?"

His greeting was cordial, but he looked troubled and he knew it. If he was hoping I'd ask him the same question, he was out of luck. I had my own troubles to talk about and got straight to the point.

"Joe, something happened to me today that has me really scared. You ain't going to believe this, and I don't blame you if you don't, but, well, the thing is, a young feller showed up today claiming to be my father."

I hesitated. I'm not sure what reaction I was expecting, but it certainly was not the look of relief that crossed Joe's face followed by a slow, knowing nod. Taking a deep breath I continued, speaking quickly, sure that what I said next would get a rise out of him.

"He says it's the End of Days and he's come back. Now, I know what you're thinking, that I been drinking or gone mad, but..."

Joe grabbed both my shoulders and gave me a brief hug, slapping my back, and then stood back.

"Praise the Lord,"

"You... You believe me?"

Instead of replying he put a finger to his lips and let me towards the church door. Inside one overhead light struggled to push back the shadows. Despite his caution, the young woman in the front pew looked up as soon as the door eased open. With a resigned smile the pastor pushed me forward and beckoned the woman forward.

"Marilee, you remember Corey Anderson?"

"Of course I do. Great to see you again Cory."

She extended her hand. I looked from one to the other, the color draining from my face. Marilee was Joe's girlfriend at high school. She was killed in an auto

wreck a few months after we all graduated. Joe had been inconsolable for almost a year.

“Marilee’s come back as well.”

My mouth moved but no words came out. Joe took my arm and turned me back towards the door, asking Marilee to excuse us for a little while. We crossed the parking lot and climbed into my truck. I was still speechless, but not Joe.

“Cory, what am I going to do? Marilee says she wants to move in with me. Says I’m still her sweetheart. I told her I’m a married man now and the pastor, for God’s sake. What would folks think? Besides, I never told Betty about Marilee. What’s she going to say?”

I’d come looking for help with my own problem. Now I was being asked to solve his. I finally found my voice.

“Joe, I hear what you’re saying but isn’t there supposed to be, I don’t know, trumpets, and, and angels and the Lord coming down...”

He grabbed my arm.

“I know, I know. You’re right. Thessalonians 4:13–18 and all that other good stuff. But Marilee said there’s been a change of plan.”

“Change of plan? What are you talking about? What does she mean, change of plan?”

“She said when they all got together up there and started figuring the details they decided it would be better to come back in ones and twos instead of altogether. They felt if they all came in a bunch it would be too confusing for everyone. She says it’s called plan B.”

“Plan B? Plan B! But what about us? Don’t we have a say? And they’re both so young. The man who says... Okay then, My Pa, he’s younger than me now. Darn it, he’s younger than when he married my mother. How can I treat him as my Pa?”

Joe looked at me as if I was dumb.

“Be reasonable. Would you want to come back as an old man if you had a choice?”

We sat staring through the windshield for a good five minutes at the darkened fields and star filled sky. The chirping of crickets mingled with the small sounds of the engine cooling. I broke the silence.

“Do you think there are others?”

“Others who came back, you mean? Oh, I’d say you can bet on it.”

“What should we do?”

After almost a minute, Joe replied.

“We should pray.”

That tended to be his stock answer to most problems, but I had no better ideas. We climbed from the truck and knelt behind the tailgate in case someone saw us from the road. I had expected him to lead, but I could see his lips moving and so I reckoned I was on my own. My mind was blank. I nudged him with my elbow and whispered.

“What exactly are we paying for?”

He gave me that “are you dumb” look again.

“Heck, Cory, pray that He goes back to plan A again of course.”

Drinking Tea with My Omi

DIANA HOLDSWORTH

My Omi lies in our back bedroom on the little bed that her son, my grandfather Franz, bought for her. She likes to sip tea from a china cup, the pink one with the painted-on yellow flowers and the gold on the rim. The one she saved from the fires of Europe during The Big War, when she was living in someone's attic.

Every afternoon, Mother opens my Omi's bedroom door for me and I bring her the teacup in its gold-gilt saucer with careful five-year-old hands. I enter bearing the cup. I set it down on the little writing desk under the window near her bed.

My Omi is lying on her bed in her black dress with its skirt down to her ankles. My Omi is not much taller than me. She is round and soft. I look at her face on the piles of white pillows. Her shining dark eyes, slanted and crinkly. Her face. Her round face is bright with light. She is smiling at me.

She says, "Oh, hallo, dearly." Slowly, with a lot of trying, pushes herself into a sitting position. Pulls her feet around so they hang over the side of the bed. Rests a moment. Her wooden cane, the one with the knob on the end rounded soft and smooth by her smooth, soft hands, leans against the wall, but she does not need it today as she stands and takes a few steps to the little grey armchair. The chair that used to be our living room, but Daddy moved it into her bedroom so she could have a place to sit without being in anyone's way.

My Omi stands with her back to the armchair, carefully places a hand on each of its soft grey arms. All at a go, she drops herself into its embrace, making a soft cry of "ha!" She catches her breath. She tells me, "*das ist wie alte Leute es tun.*" I smile and nod. Omi thinks a moment, laughs and says, "but, dearly, you don't understand German. You never remind me und I always forget." She shakes

her head. “Vat I meant to say vas, “dat’s how olt people do it. ... Ve yust drop into chairs. *Hopla!*” She raises her arms and drops them into her lap.

I like it when she talks to me in her old language, her soft voice, her lips forming carefully around the words.

Settled, Omi reaches for the teacup, taking it carefully in her milk-white hands. It rattles pleasantly in its saucer. Mother, Omi’s granddaughter, comes with the little white pitcher of milk and the cup of white sugar in the matching white bowl so my Omi can add just what she likes. Mother is wearing her apron and I know she is starting to prepare dinner.

I watch as Omi pours the milk into the teacup. Just like me, she does it slowly, careful not to spill. I see her add one, two, three teaspoons of white sugar grains and slowly stir, the tiny enameled spoon making soft clinking noises against the sides of the teacup. Mother does not believe in sugar and I don’t know what Daddy thinks, he’s too busy to say, but Omi loves sugar just like I do.

My Omi takes a sip from the teacup and leans back in the armchair. “Dat’s ze vay I like it.” She lets out breath. Her face looks dreamy, her eyes look at the ceiling and I don’t know what she’s seeing, but it’s somewhere far away. Then she looks at me, standing at her side with my fingers on the grey tweed of the armchair. She smiles and her lips move in something like a kiss and then she asks me, as she always does, “Vud you like a sip?”

I say, “yes, please,” and take the cup from her hands with both of mine. I don’t like the bitter taste of tea. But I do like warm milk a lot and sweet warm milk is even better. But the best part is to come.

I give the cup back to Omi and she takes a few more sips to finish. This time she does what Mother calls “slurping” her tea. My Omi says slurping means that you really like what you are drinking, whether it’s tea or soup. My grandfather Franz always slurps his soup and his coffee. But Mother says slurping is something I must never do. Only adults from a far-away place called Vienna, where Mother says she grew up, are allowed, because they are older and from a foreign country and they are somehow better in every way except they slurp. I don’t know why this is so, but I can’t ask Mother to tell me again or she might get angry.

When my Omi has finished her tea, she looks over and says, “Now, vat do you suppose is in ze bottom of ze cup?” I smile and wait. “Vud you like to see?” She asks this every time.

“Yes, please,” I say, and take the cup in eager hands. I look into the bottom. The sugar is sliding warm and brown with tea. She has left it for me. For me. I

put the cup to my mouth and reach for the sugar with the tip of my tongue. The sweetness stirs me to my toes. I lick it up in three goes. I put the cup down in its saucer and look at Omi. Her face is bright. She whispers, "Don't tell Mama." I never do. Sugar is one of our secret things.

One day, very soon, I will hear Daddy tell Mother, "The old lady has to go. She might drop the baby. She's too old." And I will watch them bundle my Omi into a car and drive her away and I will only ever see her once again. My grandfather will drive me to a place far away where I will cry in her arms in a cold quiet room with no armchair and no tea where she lies lonely and alone. I will return home very quiet knowing that useless people can be thrown away no matter how much people say they respect them because they are so wise.

But for now, she is still my Omi and we will have tea together, every afternoon.

The little girl, the little stranger with the cropped brown hair, sits on the bed with her leg stretched out in front of her. She's wearing a light green dress with white flower prints and food stains on the smocking. Her outstretched leg is bound up in iron, like some medieval contraption they once used to torture people, only the history books lie (as of course they are written by men) because instruments of torture are not medieval, they are still with us. They are still with the little girl with her right leg in a brace and her left leg in a half brace that, like dresses in fashion at the time, comes up to just below the knee.

The right leg, with the full brace, has a brown leather pad across the knee with leather straps that have to be strapped in place to hold her leg inside. When the little girl wants to bend her leg at the knee, so she can be like other children and sit Indian Style, she has to pull at the metal latch at the side of the brace and the iron contraption releases. If she wants to walk, and be like other children, she has to push the latch back down 'til it catches with a click, so the brace will hold her up, keep her from falling on her face.

When I was little, a little older than the little girl, I used to watch her. I used to sit on the edge of her narrow bed, the one with the chenille Davy Crocket bedspread all in brown and beige. Davy would look up at us in a coonskin cap with a jaunty smile. I'd watch the little girl, the little stranger, and wonder why my prayers had not been answered.

How I'd prayed to God in my seven-year-old wisdom for a sister, a blonde-haired, blue-eyed beauty, perhaps more mother than sister. A girl who looked like my doll, Cinderella, gorgeous in her pink gown for the Prince's ball, glass slippers on her feet and not a brace in sight. She'd be like me, only younger, sweeter, always ready to play the games I wanted to play. I'd be the leader, of course, because I was the eldest, and in the world of my European family, age carried some weight. We'd play make-believe and in our world we'd both be the Princess. I'd inherit the throne, of course, but we'd always be best friends. With her, I'd never be lonely. I'd watch her smiling face, and at night feel her light kiss on my cheek as she, teeth brushed, in a floaty blue nightgown with lace trim at cuff and ankle, would hurry off to bed at just the right time so mother wouldn't yell, disappearing in a haze of golden angel hair and fairy dust.

But instead I'm sitting on the brown Davy Crocket bed, staring at the little stranger with the dull-brown hair cropped short by mother's shaky kitchen scissors. In those days, money went for doctors and braces, not beauty parlors or fairy dust. I'd say to the little stranger, "Do you want to play dolls?" She would not answer but stare out the window and start to hum some tune that mother crooned to her when getting her dressed each morning.

The little stranger had perfect pitch and my parents made a fuss about this. "It's the only perfect thing about her," Daddy would say in a low voice at night when he thought I was asleep, but the house was very small in those days and I heard all their talk. "She's very bright," mother would say in the little girl's defense. "Much brighter than her sister, if you only understood."

Back in our room, I'd try to start the play with the little stranger, getting out the pick-up sticks and tossing them on the gaily-speckled linoleum floor of our shared bedroom. "Do you want to play?" I'd prompt. "Here, you start, you go first."

This was very generous of me because the first person to go always got a lot of sticks free and, more to the point, as the eldest, I should have gone first.

"No," said the little girl, glaring at the pile on the floor and back out the window. "You pick them up. I'm sitting here."

I protest.

Her face grows mean with anger. She shouts: "You threw the sticks on the floor. You pick them up! Or I'm telling!"

"I'm telling" meant mother racing to our bedroom, flinging open the door, grabbing me by the wrist, hauling me to my feet. Her arm would swing as my bottom grew warm and warmer. This was the game we played.

Now, many years later, the little stranger lies in a nursing home somewhere in Florida where it is warm and they have hurricanes. And the games she plays are with the nurses.

They tell me, in so many words, that she is dying. As the eldest, that should have been my right. The right to go first.

If only I'd had the courage to be there when I was there, when I was living with them all in the big white house under the hemlocks and the oaks. I was myself when I climbed the ancient maple to sit in the lap of its branches and read my books. I was at home when I dreamed of boys and fame among the rhododendrons nestled beneath the windows of the grand world we lived in, a place that might have seemed safe to some.

Father would come home at night during the weekdays when he went to work, but sometimes the train from the city was late. Mother, aproned into her kitchen, always had the radio turned on so she could listen for news of him, of his train, to see if it was late, if she would have to take the well-prepared dishes, select a careful portion both for him and for her, and place them in the oven to keep warm until his arrival. ... Until he arrived.

There were three of us children then, and the youngest sister, D., was my hope come true, the warm-heart in the golden fairy-dust hair. We three would have our dinners carefully served at the appointed family dinner hour of six o'clock when, stomachs rumbling, we would hurry to the great table under the chandelier, B. coming last, leg braces lumbering, to eat the sprouts from Brussels and the slender slivers of roast beef, or the twirl of spaghetti and its meatballs served on great black platters showing off the lightness of spaghetti, the blood red of home-made sauce, the three allotted meatballs hand-rolled and made rich with herbs and flour and the sprinkle of parmesan cheese. And the salad with its lettuce made from icebergs, and tomatoes with a tender taste back then, in those years when we lived carefully under hemlocks.

And while we ate, Mother, with her dark hair coiffed, in a fitted skirt of plaid wool, a maroon sweater from England, sat at the table end, the one nearest the butler's pantry that led to her kitchen, and observed if we three sat up straight, kept our backs away from chairs and our elbows off the table.

When not observing us, Mother stared out of the windows at the far end of the room, at the maple in whose arms I nestled when I could, and I would wonder if she thought of me, or any of we three within those wandering window moments

or if her thoughts were a thousand kilometers away in the country left behind in haste during the war.

Was she thinking of the table in her father's apartment house that oversaw the streets within the center of Vienna, its great high ceilings and its window eyes that saw the Emperor in his golden coach ride by and doff his great hat to my mother. Then a princess, now a wife.

After eating, we would ask to be excused and Mother, making sure that every bit of food was gone from black plates or white porcelain depending on the food she'd served, would consider if dessert had been deserved and on occasion we would have the joy of home-baked *apfelstrudel* or the heavy sweetness of Bavarian layer cake confectioned by the men in smiles and great white hats at the Swiss-German bakery.

I always heard our father arrive before he arrived. The slamming door of his station car. The heavy careful steps along the macadam of the driveway made a certain sound—heel to toe—as if he wished to grind whatever wasn't the macadam that he'd paid to have laid down, crushed and rolled that it might learn its proper place. The door to the house flung open perhaps before his well-gloved fingers touched the knob, and in he strode, heel to toe, a cold winter air around him, great coat with its fabric of a softer hand than the coats of we three standing to attention.

Only B., the one with polio, “the little crippled girl” as he described her, had permission to run up and, after mother had exchanged that proper kiss of greeting, call him Daddy.

My Father's Willow

LINDA MARIE PREJEAN

During the night before my Father's funeral, while I slept in the upstairs bedroom of my childhood home, my Father took the giant old Willow Tree from the backyard.

Dad took the old Willow in the early morning hours before he was to be buried at the family plot he and Mother had purchased many years earlier when the man came around selling grave sites. "Here is where we will be buried," Mother's letter had stated when she sent me a colored photo of the stone which lay on the resting place they would one day share. Large shady Oaks dotted the local cemetery of my hometown in Wisconsin.

As a child, I often noticed an eerie silence in the upstairs bedrooms which were unusually cool in all seasons. In those moments, I would race down the stairs, heart pounding, relieved to enter the cheerful, sunlit rooms of the kitchen, parlour and expansive dining room, filled with windows and lacy curtains. The stillness of the second story had its own kind of noise—a silent noise, unlike anything I ever experienced. I have since returned many times from California, and I learned to welcome the peacefulness of my childhood home. No longer threatening, the upstairs still seemed to hold secrets in its total absence of sound.

In the early hours of the morning on the day of the funeral, I was asleep in the simplicity of my childhood room. The only decoration was the heavy comforter handmade by my grandmother, covering me with a familiar, cozy warmth as winter welcomed the arrival of spring in early April. Not even the hint of a sliver of moon interrupted the darkness outside my window although soon the sleeping songbirds would begin to stir and leaves would rustle on the branches of the old Willow. Before daybreak, when the air would be filled with the shrill and energetic

chorus of migrant Orioles and Warblers, I snuggled more deeply under the weight of the comforter and slumbered peacefully.

Suddenly, I was thrust to a sitting position as if propelled by two invisible hands. My legs were outstretched in front of me, my back ramrod straight. I was aware of glancing at the digital clock on the nightstand next to the bed. Its oversized red letters read 6:00 a.m. The house had that eerie silence even though the upstairs rooms were filled with my siblings—home for the funeral.

Then I heard the noise. It confused me, alone in my room; my body felt tight, like a string on a violin as I sat listening, my eyes wide. The sound was a deep roar, and seemed to be gathering itself in volume. I didn't move, I couldn't move, although I had no desire to try. I needed to be still and listen. It sounded like a freight train approaching outside the house, but that was impossible. My mind gathered its bearings: The South Branch Library was across the street, the bus stop one block away. The nearest train tracks were more than eight miles away on the edge of town. I didn't know how else to identify the sound as it grew louder, low and persistent. I was aware of holding my breath. I felt the warmth of the comforter on my legs but the air was cold on my face.

The noise built in volume, unrestrained as if on an urgent mission. It built to an explosive fury, then a creaking, a groaning, and soon the roar took on an accompanying rumble. I struggled to make sense of the sound, my throat constricting as my imagination began to race.

Suddenly, as swiftly as it began, the noise was gone. My body fell backward again, as if pushed by those same hands and I smacked against the mattress, the box springs quivering from the impact. The roar was replaced by silence, filling my room with a deep stillness and calm. I felt a fatigue as great as if I had personally performed some fantastic physical feat. All I wanted was to allow the leaden feel of my body to rest, to sleep deeply. I lay in a prone position, too tired to roll over, powerless to fight the exhaustion.

Then I realized this massive drain of energy was coming from some sort of primal remembrance as it began to unfold in my memory. In an instant, while my mind struggled to stay awake as if to force me to remember, I mumbled aloud to myself: "Oh! It's just the tree."

It was a declaration of certainty, like something I knew that was beyond my conscious awareness. Instantly I was released from the grip of consciousness and I sank gratefully back to sleep with a peaceful acceptance that I had been the one to bear witness to the strange falling of the Old Willow Tree.

I might have forgotten the incident if I hadn't been awakened one hour later to the sound of Mother shrieking. I flew out of bed, raced down the stairs two at a time, the heavy wooden door smacking against the wall at the bottom of the steps. I entered the kitchen and skated on stocking feet across the tile floor where Mother stood at the kitchen window, having raised the blinds as she always did each morning for the past fifty years.

And there on the grass of the tiny yard lay the Willow like a giant in silent repose. Mother's hands covered her eyes with her apron, her chest heaving, as she peered at the sight. The tree didn't simply fall over. It had elevated itself with a mighty roar from the bowels of the earth and split in two, before it lay itself down in separate lengths of trunk, each side reaching outward, one split side extending itself toward the metal fence separating our house from Old Man Sauer's house, and the other split side reaching toward the slender path of sidewalk leading from the house to the detached garage. Its roots were exposed, rotted and old, no longer able to support the heavy trunk and huge limbs of the tree.

The tree fell without touching anything that might be damaged including the fence and the clothesline. It fell without disturbing the areas where anyone might have walked or stood. The Old Willow simply rose skyward, then fell within its space, like a ballerina collapsing on the stage at the end of a grand performance.

Mother and I looked at each other. Dad had died of old age, in his sleep. It was the third day after his death and, in the Christian tradition, the day he would be buried. Silently we recalled the ongoing argument my parents had throughout my adolescence when it was just the three of us, after my older siblings had left for college or marriage. My Mother and Dad would sip coffee each morning and gaze out the kitchen window at the tree, home to chattering squirrels and the migrant songbirds. For Dad, the tree functioned as an umbrella for reunions and birthdays, and as a backdrop for taking family photos with his camera on a tripod. When I returned from California for visits with my children, Dad would haul out the lawn chairs from the garage, set them under the shade of the Willow, and in the autumn the squeals of grandchildren could be heard as they leaped and played after the Willow's branches had shed its multi-colored leaves and these were raked into piles, mounded like small hills.

"That old tree is going to fall on Linda's room," Mother would remark, casually at first.

That's the way the disagreement began. Mother wanted the tree cut down, and could usually wear Dad down to seeing her way of things, he being the gentler nature, quick to prevent even a pebble from rippling the peaceful waters in his home. But with the Willow, Dad stood stiffly, his jaw set, his mind made up, and he would respond with exactly the same remark, the one that would never fail to bring Mother to silence. She grew frustrated, beginning each morning this way, imagining the Willow's roots rotting close to the surface. She said the tree would fall on the upstairs of the house, on the roof over the kitchen, its thick heavy branches extending like fingers dangerously close to my bedroom window, as if foretelling its fate. I believed she was afraid one of the limbs would smash through my window, crushing me in my bed. Some mornings I would watch them. It was like a ping pong game, Mother first making her statement, then Dad, always with his same response, the response that would always leave her standing there gazing at the tree, without an answer.

“That old tree is going to fall on Linda's room,” Mom would say.

Dad would pause, sip his coffee, gaze at the tree. “That tree goes when I go,” he would say.

DEMI ANTER is currently a senior at La Quinta High School. In the fall, she will attend UC Santa Barbara to pursue a degree in Literature/Creative Writing at the College of Creative Studies. At the moment, Demi plans to pursue graduate education in print media. Ideally, she will become a “novelist,” but she would be content working at a publication as well.

A. K. ADAMS grew up at the heart of Europe, the Czech Republic, where she earned a degree in Gastronomy. In 1998, she moved to California with one suitcase and a great love for the English language and literature. Currently, she is a senior at CSUSB Palm Desert, majoring in English. Her poems have been published in *Mused*.

NEFTALÍ RICARDO REYES BASOALTO (1904-1973), the poet, writer, political leader, and Nobel laureate, chose the pen name Pablo Neruda in honor of Jan Neruda (1834-1891), a prominent Czech poet, satirist, and journalist.

GÜNTHER BEDSON is half English, half German. He grew up in England and moved to West Berlin in 1984, five years before the fall of the Berlin Wall. He studied English literature and politics at the Free University, Berlin and is currently the head of the Berlitz English Camp program for children in Germany. He is married to Tatiana, from Russia, and their 12-year-old son, Jimmy is trilingual. For Günther, poetry is a hobby. East Berlin is his first poem to be published.

DAVID CAMBEROS is an undergraduate at CSUSB, and hopes to someday write a short story worthy of a brief bio.

NIKIA CHANEY is an Inland Empire poet with an M.F.A. in poetry from Antioch University, L.A. She is currently continuing to study at CSUSB. She has been published in several literary journals, including *Pacific Review* and *Poindexter*, as well as the *NAMI Journal of Mental Health*. Nikia is dedicated to working in the community, as she teaches a children’s poetry and performance class for the Top Flight Afterschool program, and spends her free time volunteering in literary outreach programs for low-income families and the mentally ill.

EILEEN CHAVEZ is a Spanish-American Southwestern writer, with roots in New Mexico and Colorado extending back 18 generations. She moved with her family to Palm Springs, California at the age of 11, and developed a love for the Coachella Valley

and its people. She earned degrees from CSUN, in Radio/Television/Film and CSUSB in Education. Her work includes plays, scripts, short stories, poems, songs, and articles. Currently, she is working on a novel based in Palm Springs and a collection of short stories.

BRUCE CHRONISTER lives in the “goodlands” of the high desert, and is, among other ventures, a freelance feature writer for High Desert Publishing and writes and produces a weekly radio spot for the Morongo Basin Cultural Arts Council. His alter ego is “BC,” and, FYI, he earned his B.A. from CSUSB-PDC.

NICOLE COMSTOCK is currently working on a short story collection for the M.F.A. program at CSUSB, although she suspects she may be a poet at heart. She started writing to emulate her older brother, Travis, who is a far better writer than she is. This is her first publication.

G. GORDON DAVIS is a retired executive recruiter and a Michigan native. He and his wife have four children, grown and gone, and live in Rancho Mirage, CA. He has written five as yet unpublished novels (to include a free-standing trilogy), and he is looking for an agent.

ISABEL QUINTERO-FLORES is a graduate student at CSUSB in the M.A. in English program and has been accepted to the M.F.A. program in poetry there as well. She currently works as an elementary library technician in Rialto, and hopes to be able to dedicate her life to writing someday.

ELISA FRAUSTO is a teacher/translator and poetry co-editor of *la-luciérnaga.com*. Born in Argentina, she’s lived in Mexico and in Oregon, and now in the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains where every morning she opens the curtains to the street.

DEREK HENDERSON is alive and well in Salt Lake City. He is co-author, with Derek Pollard, of *Inconsequentia* (BlazeVox, 2010). *Thus &*, his erasure of Ted Berrigan’s Sonnets, is forthcoming from If P Then Q. At present, he is very happy with the following assertion of Oppen: “Yet I am one of those who from nothing but man’s way of thought and one of his dialects and what has happened to me / Have made poetry.”

DIANA HOLDSWORTH is a published author, at present working on a spiritual fantasy novel in a magical Renaissance setting. She won a Hopwood at the U of Michigan where she got her BA. She lives in Amherst, Massachusetts with her husband and cat.

LOIS P. JONES has been published in widely in the U.S. and abroad. She is co-founder of Word Walker Press and a documentarist of Argentina's wine industry. She has featured in London, Prague, Los Angeles, Seattle as well as Tacoma Washington's Distinguished Writers Series. You can find her as co-producer of Moonday's monthly poetry reading in Pacific Palisades, California and hear her as host on 90.7 KPFK's Poet's Cafe (Pacifica Radio). She is the Associate Poetry Editor of *Kyoto Journal*, a 2009 Pushcart Nominee, and a 2010 nominee for *Best New Poets*. In 2010, she took second place honors under judge Fiona Sampson and first place in 2008 under Fleda Brown in the Inter Board Poetry Competition.

JAY LEWENSTEIN is a gringo English teacher living in Mexicali, Mexico and writing about border life.

STEPHEN LINSTEADT is an artist, writer, and poet. His creative work is an ongoing exploration into the study of Cosmology, Alchemy and the archetypal symbolism of Carl Jung. Stephen's paintings may be found online at www.stephenlinsteadt.com

MARIA ELENA B. MAHLER is a nomadic poet and writer from South America who now rides her camel exploring the curious lives around the California desert.

RENATE MÖRDER escritora argentina, nacida en Rosario, Santa Fe, Argentina. Vivió en Freiburg (Alemania) y actualmente vive en Buenos Aires. Es abogada y publicó artículos en revistas de divulgación científica. En 2001 recibió una mención especial en el Concurso organizado por la Biblioteca Nacional de la República Argentina "Cuentos para leer en el subte" y formó parte de la Antología del mismo nombre. Ha asistido a cursos y talleres terarios, entre ellos los dictados por Alberto Laiseca y Juan Martini. En 2010, Renate editó el libro "Celia, el afortunado y otros relatos" y publicó varios de sus cuentos en la web. Actualmente escribe en su blog Renate Welt.

RUTH NOLAN, poet and writer, is Associate Professor of English at College of the Desert, where she teaches creative writing and advises the literary magazine *Solstice*. A former Bureau of Land Management/California Desert District hotshot firefighter and

inner-city high school teacher, she is the editor of *No Place for a Puritan: the Literature of California's Deserts* (Heyday Books, 2009). Her writing has been published widely, and she is editor of the desert literary magazine *Phantom Seed*.

TONY O'DOHERTY was born in Ireland and spent most of his life there before moving to the USA in 1989. He became a US citizen on St. Patrick's Day, 2000. He uses his spare time to find out if a lifelong ambition to write fiction has any basis in ability. He is married to Brenda and has four grown children. He is a member of the Palm Springs Writer's guild and contributes cartoons to their monthly online newsletter—*The Guild Gram*.

LINDA PREJEAN, in addition to reinventing herself after the age of forty, won, with her daughter, Danielle, the California Mother USA Pageant and appeared on a television show in Tokyo, Japan. Linda also trains in horse jumping four hours a day with an Olympic Coach, another of her lifelong dreams. Linda and Jim, her husband of more than thirty years, live in Palm Desert.

ORLANDO RAMIREZ is currently studying for his M.F.A. in Poetry from the Creative Writing program at CSUSB.

ASH RUSSELL is an M.F.A. student at CSUSB. She has been telling stories since she learned how to speak and writing since she learned to string the alphabet together. She has a hard time thinking of dinosaurs as animals.

SUSAN ROGERS considers poetry a vehicle for light and a tool for the exchange of positive energy. She is a practitioner of Sukyo Mahikari—a spiritual practice that promotes positive thoughts, words and action. www.sukyomahikari.org. Her work can be found in the *Chopin and Cherries*, *Poetry and Cookies*, *Ribbons*, 2009 *Haiku Anthology*, *Shell Gathering*, numerous chapbooks from Poets on Site and can be heard online or in person as part of the audio tour for the Pacific Asia Museum in Pasadena, California.

WENDY L. SILVA is a poet from Santa Maria, California and an undergraduate student of Creative Writing at UC Riverside where she serves on the editorial staff for *Mosaic Art and Literary Journal*, and recently became a co-founder for the Living Poets Society on campus. She enjoys writing, painting, volleyball, and board games. Her most recent work can be found in *Spectrum* and *Audeamus*.

PAULA STINSON is a 30-something, unwed, childless English major at CSUSB. By some unfortunate twist of fate, she still lives at home with her ornery eighty-five-year-old father and has failed to do much with her life. However, her three pugs: Bird, Big Mama, and Shorty cushion the blow. When time permits, she writes an irreverent little blog aptly called The Bitch Bites Back: www.myspace.com/insanepugsfromhell.

A.N. TEIBE is a graduate student at UC Riverside. She lives in Inland Southern California, her adopted home of thirteen years. She writes poetry and short fiction.