

The Lighter

Volume 51

Issue 1 *The Lighter Fall 2005*

Article 1

January 2005

The Lighter Fall 2005

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Recommended Citation

(2005) "The Lighter Fall 2005," *The Lighter*: Vol. 51 : Iss. 1 , Article 1.

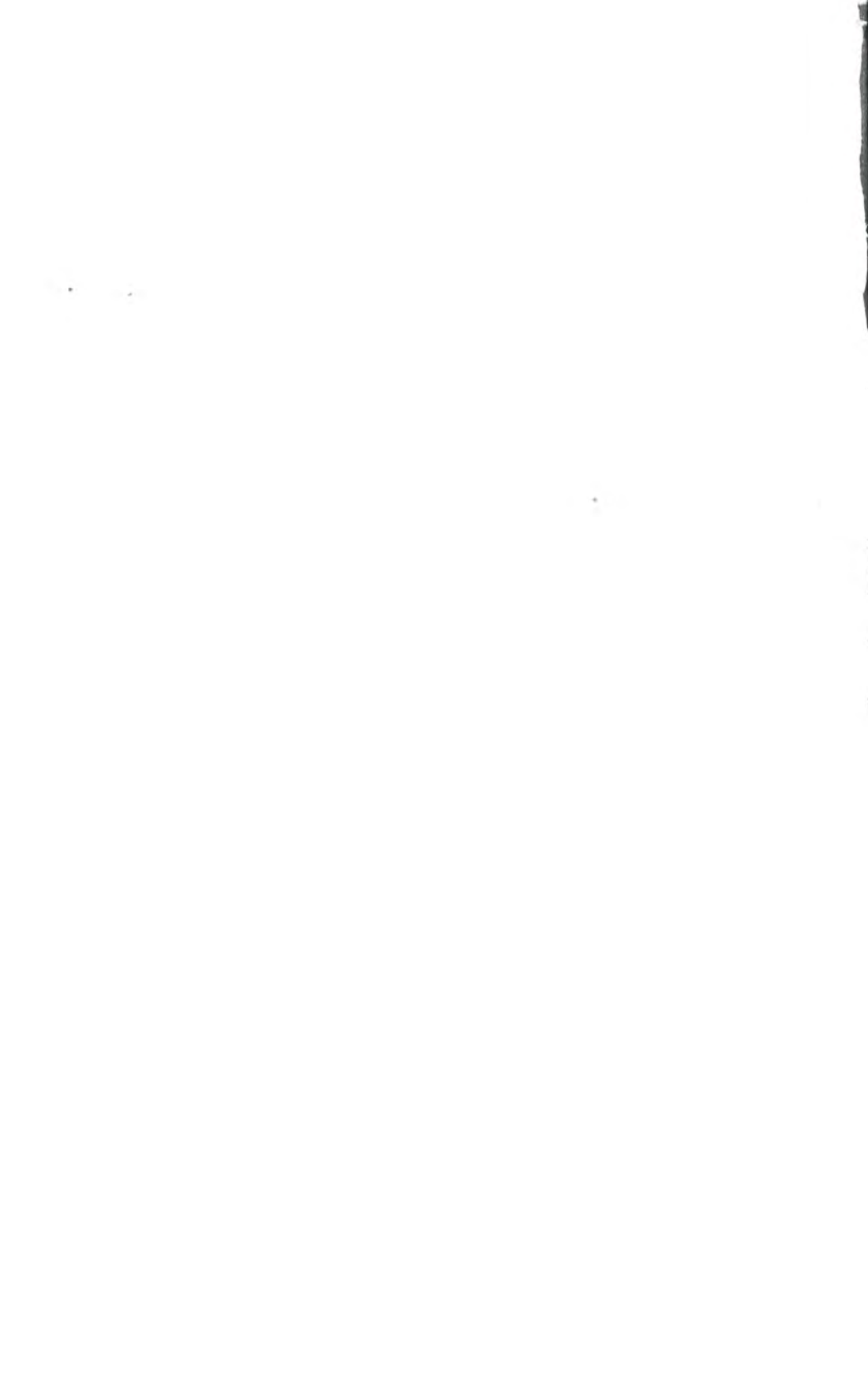
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Fall 2005



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volume fifty-one issue one

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Fall 2005

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Acknowledgements

The Lighter staff members thank our advisor, Walter Wangerin, for his guidance and the Committee on Media for its support. Thanks to Tracy Monson for being a marvelous assistant editor, to Lauren Schreiber for her heroic work as graphic designer, and to Sarah Werner for her gracious assistance in copy editing. Thanks to Tim O'Brien for his interview and inspiring words. Most of all, thank you to the members of the selection committees for their time and effort, and to the students who so kindly submitted their work this semester.

All submissions remain anonymous throughout the selection process. *The Lighter* welcomes submissions from all undergraduate, graduate and law students of Valparaiso University, regardless of race, gender, religious creed or sexual orientation. The editor assumes responsibility for the contents of this magazine. The views expressed in these works do not represent any official stance of Valparaiso University.

Front cover taken from "Pit Fall" by Melanie Schaap
Back cover taken from "and your flesh will be a great poem" by Abi Lesing

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A Fall Afternoon
Holly Sagarsee



Putting on a Self Portrait
Holly Sagarsee

A Conversation with Mr. Tim O'Brien

Netha Cloeter

Tim O'Brien's words are not easily forgotten. From his infamous instruction on "How to Tell a True War Story" to his reflections on love, betrayal and redemption, he has a strikingly simple yet profound way of illuminating the human experience. In speaking with the author, one quickly recognizes the powerful yet down-to-earth voice that resonates from his fiction and distinguishes him as an eminent novelist.

O'Brien studied at Macalester College, where he received a BA in political science in 1968. Shortly after he was handed his diploma, he received a draft notice. After much deliberation and consideration of the nearby Canadian border, he arrived in Quang Ngai Province, Vietnam, in February 1969 as an infantry foot soldier of the U.S. Army's Fifth Battalion, Forty-Sixth Infantry. Reflecting on his decision in an October 1994 article for the *New York Times*, O'Brien wrote, "I was a coward. I went to Vietnam." This decision, however, triggered the most powerful fiction reflecting on the Vietnam experience.

After returning to the United States with a Purple Heart in March 1970, he entered a Ph.D. program at the Harvard School of Government. He left the Ivy League in 1976 without a degree, but with a memoir and a novel under his belt. His memoir *If I Die in a Combat Zone, Box Me Up and Ship Me Home* (1973) was his first and only "non-fiction" work, and the novel *Northern Lights* (1975), set in his home state of Minnesota, initiated his prolific career as a novelist. *Going After Cacciato* won the 1979 National Book Award and was followed by *The Nuclear Age* in 1985. *The Things They Carried* (1990) grew out of several stories that he published throughout the eighties, including "How to Tell a True War Story" (1987) and "The Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong" (1989). This book was named as one of the ten best books of 1990 by the *New York Times*, received the *Chicago Tribune* Heartland Award in fiction, and was a finalist for both the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Critics' Award. The 1993 French edition of the novel received the prestigious Pix du Meilleur Livre Etranger. O'Brien followed this worldwide success with *In the Lake of the Woods* (1994), named Novel of the Year by *Time* magazine, and *Tomcat in Love* (1998). His most recent novel *July, July* (2004) returns to Minnesota for a 1969 class reunion and explores the inescapable communion of the past and the present.

O'Brien currently resides with his family in Texas, where he holds the Roy F. and Joann Cole Mitte Chair in Creative Writing at Texas State University. His fiction tackles issues of truth, love and human nature with straightforward eloquence, hitting readers "in the stomach"

as well as the heart. He aptly describes the act of writing as a “balancing act,” where the writer is “trying to put down one word after another with a kind of grace and a kind of beauty that’s a constant, never-ending balancing act of billions of variables.”

Although Tim O’Brien is an award-winning novelist, he spent a sunny afternoon last April signing three boxes of books for Valparaiso University students and taking a “break” to talk with the Lighter over the audible bustle of the Marriott hotel lobby. His hand was sore but his answers were articulate, his words inspiring, and his passion for fiction evident in every sentence he spoke.

NC: What, in your mind, should a written story strive to do?

TO: Ultimately the goal of a story is not just to go to the brain and the intellect. The object of a story is to go partly to the brain, but also to the heart and the stomach, to the back of your throat and your tear ducts. It’s aimed at the whole human being, as opposed to a work of non-fiction which is aimed at being persuasive to your brain. I want to persuade your stomach about how horrible the war is, and I want to persuade your tear ducts of how bad and full of grief it is. So I’m aiming more towards moving reader’s emotions – that’s my ultimate goal. Not just in bad ways but also making a reader laugh at times, shake his head and wonder, all kinds of different emotions – it’s aimed at the whole human being.

NC: You’ve dealt with humorous, serious, short, long, fictional and non-fictional stories. Do you see yourself as continuously experimenting or progressively evolving towards a particular style, tone or genre?

TO: Constantly changing and evolving. Evolving is too highfalutin; I’m really just trying to find a new story to tell. I can’t repeat myself, I can’t tell the same story over and over, I can’t have the same characters – it would bore me and it would bore readers. I search for a story I could tell that would interest me enough to get through five years of writing it, and interest the reader enough to keep turning the pages. And I know I’m not going to interest every reader; no book can. In fact, my books probably interest only ten percent of possible readers. I’m not going to appeal to readers of erotic fiction, I’m not going to appeal to romance readers, and I’m not going to appeal to all kinds of readers. But for those readers who would open a door to my work, buy it and begin it, I want to write a book that will keep them turning the pages. That means I have to come up with a story and characters that appeal to me and to those readers. You have to evolve and change because otherwise, what story are you going to tell?

NC: Do find yourself returning to certain themes in your work?

TO: Yes, I think I do. I think most writers do. They are a part of who you are as a human being. For me it's not necessarily war; I mean, war pretty much bores me as a subject. I get bored quickly hearing talk about it. I'm not interested in bombs or bullets or military maneuvers, but I am interested in the human heart. Certain aspects of the human heart have always interested me. Specifically, the theme of betrayal - when one person really hurts another, and how horrid that feeling is, and how your whole world is pulled out from under you. Not just in terms of human relationships, but also in terms of countries betraying citizens, and citizens betraying... all kinds of betrayals have always interested me.

The issue of courage as a theme has always fascinated me. Not physical courage alone, but also moral courage and all of the other kinds of courage that we show or try to show in the world.

Also, the theme of magic. In all of my books, there is something that will occur that can't happen in the world we all live in. The dead will suddenly sit up and talk. That's the kind of fiction I write. I'm not writing *Alice in Wonderland* or about hobbits, but I do let magical things happen in all of my books. In *The Things They Carried*, which is a pretty realistic book, there is a story at the end with a little girl and a guy asks her, "What is it like to be dead?" She gives him an answer and says, "This is what it's like." This doesn't happen in the real world, but it can happen in fiction. That's possible for what I do. You can't do that when you write an essay, but you can do it in fiction and at times you can move the human heart that way.

Those are the three themes that remain constant in my writing, and probably always will.

NC: You only wrote one story when you were actually in Vietnam. Was there a particular moment - either on the battlefield or when you were back at home - that you decided that you had to write, or was it sort of a growing inclination towards writing?

TO: I'd say both, in a way. I mean, in a way it was growing... from the time I was nine years old I knew I wanted to be a writer, and when Vietnam happened I began writing almost right away when I got there. They weren't stories, they were little two- to three-page scraps of what had happened that day - what I heard someone say, an image I had seen. They didn't have a beginning, a middle, an end; they were more "here's what happened today," though not quite like a journal. They were written like fiction, like a story. I didn't try to shape anything; I just said

here's what happened and then I'd write it. So partly this had been growing for a long time, but I can remember the first time I sat down in a fox-hole after a day and I began to write, so it *was* kind of a moment. It wasn't anything horrendous that had happened; it was how peaceful this little lagoon was that we were camped on along the South China Sea. It looked like something out of a fairy tale: little round boats bobbing in the lagoon, little fishermen fishing, and each boat had a little lantern in it... It looked like something in another world. It was incredibly beautiful in contrast to the war all around us. So in a way it was a moment – a moment of indelible peace – that led me to writing, but it was also a long-time desire to be a writer.

NC: What prompted your move from “non-fiction” in your first book, *If I Die in Combat Zone, Box Me Up and Ship Me Home* (1973), to fiction? Or was that a distinction that was out of your control?

TO: That's a good question, and it was both again. It was partly out of my control – I just began a novel. I guess it came out of being a little boy and always wanting to write a novel. At nine years old I was reading novels and always thinking what a cool thing it would be to make things up, have interesting things happen, get inside other people's bodies, take the voice of a woman, or visit some adventure of the past or an event. I always dreamed about it. After writing the first book, which was non-fiction, I did pretty well and was able to write another book. The publisher asked, “Well, what do you want to do?” and I said, “I want to write a novel.” This came out of a long, growing desire beginning way back in my childhood. Back then it seemed like a fantasy, like wanting to be Spiderman or something. It seemed impossible. When he asked me what I wanted to do it was suddenly possible. My publisher gave me a thousand dollars as an advance to live on for five years, since that's how long it took me to write it. And I did.

NC: In fiction you can work in a non-chronological format, you can jump around, and in your 1994 article “The Vietnam in Me” you talk about a present that relates to the past. What do you feel is the greatest single aspect of that ability of fiction?

TO: I think it reflects how the world comes at me. It comes at me in a non-linear way. I think of yesterday and I can't remember the sequence of events very well: who said what first, who I shook hands with first... it has already all evaporated. What I'm left with is a little clump of who I ate lunch with and meeting you guys outside the building. I remember that specifically, but I don't remember walking out there. I have no

memory of *how* I got there because we just erase that inconsequential stuff. Nobody remembers every scab they picked and every hiccup, or every meal they had, but you do remember vivid moments of your life. So I try to write that way. I don't write in a linear way, I just write about that moment and then I'll jump to the next important, dramatic thing. That's partly why all my books are structured in a non-linear way, with a lot of transition. They are not point "A" to point "B." They usually start at point "D" and then go back to "A"... and some even go out to "W."

NC: How do you choose an editor, especially when you are writing about a specific war and a specific place? Do you take those elements into consideration?

TO: You should, though I'm not sure if I did. My first book was published in my early twenties, and I didn't know anything about the publishing world. I sent my first book out to two or three publishers whose names - I don't know where I got them. I must have looked them up somewhere but why I chose the ones I chose, I'm not sure. I probably had chosen the publisher who accepted me because he had published Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five*, and works by several writers whom I had admired. Now, I don't remember this so I can't guarantee that I am telling you the truth, but I think that's why. He certainly was the right choice, though I'm not sure if it was even a choice - it was partially luck that I happened to hand the book to that particular publisher.

NC: How much are you influenced or strongly impressed by your contemporaries and writers in the past? You've drawn parallels between your novels and other works, for example, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Are you conscious of their influence and those parallels as you write, or is it all in retrospect?

TO: Its all in retrospect. I mean, 99 percent of it; I can't say all. When I'm writing, I'm so caught up in what the next sentence should say and what should happen next that I'm not thinking about influences or other writers. I'm thinking about how I can make the story any good, which means imagining something interesting that also has some meaning and has the power to move somebody to laugh or cry. I am so caught up in that, I'm not thinking about anything else. In retrospect I'll see similarities, differences, shapes and influences, stuff like that.

NC: How do you start a work of fiction? With a character, a scene, an idea?

TO: I almost always start with an image or picture in my head. It's a picture of somebody's face, or a picture of anything, really. I want to make it into a "motion picture," which is a novel because things move; it isn't a static image of something. Other times, I begin with just a scrap of language. There is a chapter in *The Things They Carried* called "How to Tell a True War Story," and the first line I wrote was "This is true." Period. I thought I was going to write a true story, tell a true story. This was early on in writing the book and I think I thought it was true. I kind of had a theme for the whole book about what is true and things like that. I thought it would be neat to say, "OK, this is true," and then write the next excerpt and tell the next story and say, "yet it's not." That story, that chapter in the book, came out of three words. So sometimes it can be born just out of some words. Other times short stories come out of little anecdotes that either I've witnessed or was a part of, or have seen or heard about. Even then it's a whole assemblage of things - the people we meet, our dreams, all kind of sources.

NC: What do you feel is your best work?

TO: I don't say because they are like children; I don't favor one over the other because you might piss off the other one. I don't think I really have a favorite. I have maybe four favorites, and they are favorites for different reasons. *In the Lake of the Woods* is so radically different from anything else I have written before, *July, July* is radically different, and *The Things They Carried* is radically different. *Cacciato* is a daydream novel. I don't want to pick out a favorite.

NC: Do you have a regulated writing schedule or do you tend to write sporadically?

TO: I'm very, very regulated. I almost have to be because I'm such a slow writer. I wake up at six or seven, go to work by eight, and I pretty much write all day until six at night. I take an hour and a half off to work out during the day, but even then I'm writing in my head. I'm pumping dialogue or thinking to myself, "What's going to happen next?" I work on weekends, holidays - I'm pretty disciplined. It's tedious, it's a job, but I really enjoy it. I can't imagine doing anything else.

NC: Do you have time to read?

TO: Yeah. Usually late at night until one in the morning, something like that. I read an entire book the night before coming here. I read a lot.

NC: Predominantly contemporary works, things you get in the mail?

TO: Yeah, not just that, but predominantly yes.

NC: Were you reading in Vietnam?

TO: No, not that I recall. There wasn't an occasion for it. Your day was full and your night was full because you spent twelve hours each night in your foxhole. You'd sleep for two hours, then you'd get up for two hours, then you'd sleep for two hours, then get up for two hours... so you're always exhausted, and you're terrified, filthy, and hot, thirsty and scared. Plus, books were heavy and you had enough to carry. I can't remember reading in Vietnam. Probably the only time in my life that I wasn't.

NC: How do draw inspiration for your characters? Do you walk around with a notepad, jotting down observations throughout the day or...

TO: Oh, no, I don't do that. To me, a character isn't born out of details like people's hair color. Now and then I'll notice a detail and think "that's interesting," but by and large, a character comes out of everything else, comes with the story. A character is what the character does. Novels require doing. Characters have to behave. They can't talk about chasing a whale; they have to chase the whale. Otherwise it's not a novel. You can't talk about getting on a raft and going down the Mississippi; you've got to do it, otherwise the character doesn't have motion. What's memorable about characters is what they *do* in the book. They kill people or they abandon their lives. They do things and they suffer consequences, which makes them human, and that's the novel – the things they do. Mainly when I'm envisioning characters I'm not seeing faces so much as I'm seeing a psyche, and a conscience, and a person in trouble, struggling. That doesn't mean I won't put physical details in – I'll do it at times – but they only come when it's like "that's what this person should look like." And it wouldn't be just what they look like; if a person is hard and tough, I'd make their physical details somehow angular and tough. If I were to do a bit of description it would come naturally out of the character's psychology; it wouldn't be just tacked on for no reason. It's a consistency that's easy because everything is coming out of what the character is doing. Well, not *easy*, but it's part of the main drive of the character.

NC: You have reflected on pieces that were published in the past, in a magazine for example, and mentioned that you felt, retrospectively, that you wouldn't have published it today. Do you look back with regret or

do you look back and say, "Oh, wow. Well, I did that—"

TO: I look back with both feelings. I mean, it's regret but it's done. You can't live your life over; you make mistakes and assume that they are right at times. Sometimes you make mistakes that you know are wrong. In the case of publishing things that I wish that I hadn't, you can't undo it. At the time it seemed like the right thing to do, but you live with those things. That's all you can do. I'll try to not do that in the future, but you never know.

NC: With the letters you have received from soldiers thus far, do you foresee any literature coming out of Iraq?

TO: I do. Statistically, with that many people in combat, somebody will be so moved by it or traumatized that he or she will feel compelled to pick up a pen and begin writing. Again, I can't guarantee that, but history tells us that when people go through trauma they tend to bear witness to it. I think somebody will bear witness to what was seen and done by Americans in Iraq. Or perhaps a citizen in Iraq will write a novel to show us the other end of it.

NC: Since I am interviewing for a campus literary magazine, I have to ask: do you have advice for undergraduate creative writers?

TO: Yeah, read a lot. Be yourself in your prose; don't try to be another writer. Try to be directly honest, not flowery or cute, clever or decorative. Be whatever you are, whatever your voice is. In the end that's what is going to make it good or bad anyway. It's not going to be the plot or the character. It's going to be the voice, the music underneath it all. It gives an irony, a freshness, a uniqueness to the story and it makes it different from any other story. That means you really *have* to be yourself to make it any good. And by "yourself" I mean your *best* self, your ideal, the best person you can be. You can be a total shit-head outside of it, but when you are writing you've got to be your best self.

You also need the virtue of tenacity and stubbornness. Writing fiction is a long-haul process; even a short story takes a long time to write. You can't do it just an hour here or an hour there; you have to be tenacious enough to at least try to work every day. You have to be fairly steady. If nothing else because stories are kind of like a dream; if you wake up from it, you go to the refrigerator, you can't get back into the dream. You can think, "I wish I could know what the end was going to be," but the dream's gone. Same thing with a story: if you leave it for too long you forget the passion that brought you to write it. You don't forget

it intellectually, but your body forgets why you cared so much about it.

So my advice to aspiring writers is to care, to be immersed in the story, stay in the dream, and to stay disciplined. Most fiction writers – though they would probably disagree with everything else I am saying – will at least agree with that. You really have to be tenacious and stubborn and disciplined if you want to succeed. Books don't get written in bowling alleys or in theaters. They get written in privacy, in a room alone with a piece of paper and a pencil, or a computer or whatever it might be.

NC: Do you think having children will change the direction or tone of your writing?

TO: I don't think it will change my tone because I am who I am, but I may make use of them – and not in the ways you might think. I have contemplated someday writing a story about a father who drops his son, or a taxi knocks his son down and he dies. The horror of losing a child and the loss itself is such a tragic thing because you are so afraid of it. In fiction, you can have that happen and explore the consequences of loss and guilt. I hope my kid doesn't think I want that to happen when he grows up and reads it, because it's certainly the opposite – you're afraid of it. That's what I meant by evolving when you asked that question at the start of the interview; he came into my life and, as a fiction writer, I'm sure I'll be making use of it in a pretty literal way.

NC: How do you handle criticism? I was looking at reviews of *July, July*, and they were...

TO: Yeah, they were brutal, I know. I didn't read them. But I've never read good reviews either. That's one of the good decisions that I made early on in my career. Somebody told me, I think it was my publisher, just not to read them – good or bad. You aren't going to learn anything from a good review. You wrote the book; they can't teach you anything about it. You wouldn't be publishing the book if you didn't think it was good. Similarly with bad reviews – you aren't going to learn anything constructive. So I haven't read them. I've heard about them, of course, and they're either painful or exhilarating, or both at times. I guess it's out of your control. As I said earlier, I write for certain kinds of readers and hope that they will like them. I take comfort, too, in the fact that some really great books have gotten poor reviews and some really horrid books have gotten great reviews. The real test isn't a contemporary one; the real test is if the book is read a hundred years from now, or two- or three-hundred. Very few books endure that long and I don't know if mine will or not. I think two or three have a chance, but I don't know.

Even if it's popular, and only three or four of my books are, that doesn't mean it will be read. They might be totally forgotten; there's no way of knowing. But that's the real test - if they will endure and move people's hearts years from now.



Among the Wildflowers .
Katie Resel



Untitled
Meredith Albertin



Independent Living No. 5
Liz Hanson



Bitter with a chance of sprinkles
Melanie Schaap



Untitled
Meredith Albertin



What are **you** looking at?
Catherine Gurinsky



XDEEX
Lauren Schreiber

Stage Perfections

Christina Ramirez

His cardboard box, squatting two
kicks beyond the footlights and stamped in
cattle car print, beckons -

A-CUP FILLERS FIVE BUCKS A PAIR!

Destined for intimacy, sewn
and stuffed like confidence, insulation
with a payoff inside sleek silk bodices - a convenience
for the concave
chests devoid of their own pressure heaved among
the muscle women, sculpted beauties, pinched,
lean possibilities, passionate and willing -
but who still need filling!

There's too much of too little!

Never mind your absent waxing-waning, your ruined toes
and bulging eyes! Fill up! Fill in! Fill out!

Joffrey needs his fantasy, and he gets it
two A-Cup Fillers at a time.

Family Tree

Sarah Werner

You grow up in a small house in Cleveland
playing pranks on your younger siblings, hiding
in shadows, grabbing their shoulders
as they walk past, and you glower,
grumble about your parents' strict
policies and authoritarian rule
from the dark confines of your bedroom.

You grow up going to family reunions
where Aunt Edith's pie is "to die for"
and Cousin Dave is "the perfect one,"
even though he killed the tiny frog you caught by the lake
and mocked your stack of books.

You grow up going to family Christmas parties
where Santa is always tipsy,
the sweaters you're given are always
too big or too scratchy, and Uncle Alan winks
as he lets you have a sip of his Manhattan
while your German relatives sing "Schnitzelbank"
over their sauerkraut when they have too much to drink.

You grow up telling your parents
to leave you alone, shrinking away from them
in mingled disgust and embarrassment in public,
hating them for making you do "family things"
when you could be out with friends.
You cast your eyes aside when they stand up
in tearful pride at your high school graduation.

You go away to college after a summer of hard work
with a singular breath of relief
and car exhaust, leaving everything behind, starting anew.
You call your mom twice a week,
once a week, once a month and forget
to answer your siblings' letters. You get caught up
in your own life, trapped in the college bubble,
but still remember to call home
when you receive a box of homemade cookies.
You finally move into your own apartment and then...

And then you're grown up and realize
your house in Cleveland wasn't really that small,
and not half as barren as your new apartment,
which echoes with ghosts that were never there.
And you realize that your siblings really are there
to lend steady shoulders when you're afraid of the shadows.

You set down your pile of books
and ask Aunt Edith for her pie recipe
at the family reunion and listen with shock
to the news that Cousin Dave, so recently granted parole,
died in a tragic car accident on Thursday.

When you return to Cleveland for the funeral,
you realize that your dad's back is slightly bent,
though it hasn't lost any of its pride and dignity,
and that your mother's hair is no longer black
but grey as the chains of time.

After the funeral, when the German relatives sing "Schnitzelbank"
over cold cuts and pickle spears, you go to your parents
and just look them straight in the eyes and nod.
Uncle Alan brings you a Manhattan on the rocks
and, as you tilt your head back
to catch the last amber drops, you see
the stars spinning above in the dark cold blue void
and drop your glass... And as it shatters
everyone turns in slow motion to look at you
and they have your eyes and your smile,
and the arms of someone strong catch you
as you sink to the grey-specked linoleum floor.

On Surpassing the Speed of Light

Evan Scott Bryson

everything goes dark. lacustrine warbling black envelopes eyes
so thick as to prevent imagination,
or any mental faculties to faithfully record the adventure.

(yet) behind, racing like burgeoning quartz crystals,
are all colors in the spectrum stretching back to the ripcurl end
of the universe.

at the speed of light time diminishes,
and surpassing the speed of light
aches the dark between past, present, and future.
even though the vibrations of sound cannot travel
in this diachronic reservoir, the music of eternity imbues a gossamer existence:
clear cobweb echoes.

surprisingly, the memory of me diminishes.
memory is eclipsed, irrelevant:
the fare for traveling on the gods' toll roads,
chasing down their chariots.

the whale-song of entire galaxies pressing gravity is revealed.
planets speak in confessional whispers. ice rings hi-fi hiss.
comets and asteroids manage snatches of songs learned before their breaking.
single stars call for love; binary stars dance to the music of the other celestial bodies.
they wonder who will brown dwarf first,
who will collapse and begin the somber cannibalism.
(the composition of elements is clear: gasoline soaked rags and loneliness.)
supernovae, in destrato wrath, conjure libidinous swearwords
and forge from the neon swirling ashes nuclear life.

this (the secrets of the talking universe) is dark.
the dark is not varying degrees of darkness.
nothing implicates the nothingness, the anti-everything.
nor the complete capacity of matter, of antimatter, or antiparticles.
even heavy dark matter diminishes.
the anti-time in surpassing the speed of light roars with noiseless anti-light,
infinite energy is consumed texture-free, without ripples or indications.
(any indications would present a discrepancy in the void: the void is perfect.)

nothing is left: absolute zero is met.
infinite anti-energy, burning cold and still, flows dark like a wound,
flows from the wound and blinks.

•

self diminishes.



Division
Megan Murphy

Poisson d'avril

Mark Gaspar

Je suis tres fatigue!

A man in the airport with a bag in his hands
Exclaimed, while a rose-fingered mother
Pushed her screaming baby down the stairs. *Uni la fin du monde!* Says
A newspaper, the woman screams "Martin Sheen now! You are
An errand boy" and together we dance, oh
How we dance, until my pants stick to my legs and she'd
Run right out of her clothes, except for the baby. Oh how
That baby screamed "This is the end...ride the snake!"
The man with bag paused with enigmatic printed on his brow
And sprinted on the plane. I am
Utterly, and metaphysically alone. What to do?

What to do but skip rope and chew gum, and spread my seed, alas
I am here, in the airport... sans mate. I am alone.

But here no one speaks of Michelangelo, or even
At the least Jasper Johns. "This is the end, my
Only friend" the baby cries. "Are you my friend?" I ask
The babe who sits on an automatic walkway
Picking its nose, but instead he's eaten by the machine... airports are like
that, or so the saying goes, well, actually does it go? The world is over,
Uni la fin du monde "here comes the sun" lala la la, perhaps I'll hum,
No one to judge, remember I'm alone...mmmmmm, nonononono that
doesn't work, not At all, so flim flam, so bougeoise, if that's
How the saying goes, yes, yes, yesyesyesyesyes I think that's right,
I think that's exactly how the saying goes *Je suis tres fatigue, uni la fin du monde*.
Today I am only so-so as I sit in the airport with my own
private network
News channel. Here I sit today, tomorrow,
Tomorrow, and tomorrow as the Scottish man said long ago,
Here I sit tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow -
Minus a modern marvel, sans mate, sans seed, sans everything.

Locks Acquiesce

Ralph Asher

I.

Air taut and dense, throbbing
with a sense of the ethereal
as close as his lover's skin.
Twenty-five years old, married
to a woman of twenty-two,
who writhes and gasps

as drizzle falls on the porch.
Shallow puddles rocked
into chaos, drop by drop.
Windows steam and streak
while evening news drones on -
drizzle transforms to downpour,
washing mud from flowerpots
that rages down rotting steps.

II.

A month later, stumbling
up decomposed stairs covered
with snow, breath crystallizes
as icy pinpricks strike his face.
Locks acquiesce. She stares
from the couch. A smile betrays.

The news broken, he fumbles
for words. None are found.
She grazes his hand and guides.
A sweater lifted, a soft plain
of flesh exposed as she stands.
His cheek savors airy warmth
on her belly as he strains to hear
a sound, the cry of a prophet.

the myth of propinquity

Sara A. Jackson

I am thinking of you and how the stars are neatly misplaced like the
hairs upon your head. Moon is in its quarter.
How your shoes galumph on the kitchen floor.

The laden clink of the washing machine reminds me excellence has a
tendency to droop, like an angel without wings.
Half asleep, more awake. Envisaging landscapes through the blue hue
of my cigarette smoke,
plant a tree here, a bird bath there. My home.
Home.

Alas my love, I was just thinking of you.

Consuming Fire

Ralph Asher

I.

When I was a child and thought
like a child, I dutifully sat
upon my grandfather's porch,
harking upon old Gospel tales
as Sunday morning opened.
Church bells cut the holler haze

and flocks of barn swallows
flew from the eaves and took
wing, air thick with the stench
of manure, coal, and diesel fuel.
Passing tailpipes flamed -
Papaw preached about the end,
a time when all the earth would speak
like licking tongues of Pentecost.

II.

I have put that behind me.
Today is Sunday. I relax,
the newspaper in my lap.
Flaming wind invades the city -
my apartment's balcony shakes
and the newspaper soars.

I reach, but it's too late -
cursing, I pad in slippers
down stairs, around a corner
to the 7-11. I place a paper
and an aged chocolate bunny
on the counter. Damn! I forgot
my wallet. I try to explain.
The cashier knows no English.

The Bed

Mark Gaspar

They sit on a bed, her back
Facing, silence between them.
He sits eyeing the ceiling,
Twirling her hair. There is a sigh
From the man. She turns, stares, turns
Away. He looks at her, feels her
Shift her weight. Silence between them,
Just the empty space.

She asks a question "what are
You thinking?" Silence between
Them, a pause, sigh, looks down. Thinks
About dinner, her, alone, everything,
Her, his reply "nothing." She shifts
Back, facing the wall. He twirls her hair.

Sunday Afternoons At Grandma's House

Tracy Monson

Ruffles and white tights,
I sit with my family in church.
My parents listen as the pastor spews a homily
full of terms
beyond my understanding.
A baby is baptized,
her fresh head bathed:
a sacrament.

My hat, knotted in a bow beneath my chin,
shields the sun and I'm pale
as my grandmother's belly
whose soft fleshy folds
conceal secrets, mysteries.
I skip through her weed-choked flowers
where seeds seep forth and buds ooze life,
fragile as tissue paper,
carelessly crushing them with my shiny black shoes.
After running my stomach is empty -
she fills it with peanut butter and jelly,
dripping red down my chin, in my lap,
and juice which sloshes inside me.
She sings as we clear the table together.
Her voice is still warm and wailing
fills the air, a heartbeat.
At the sink she lets me choose:
usually she washes and I dry.
Filthy suds swirl down the drain.
She reads to me in the living room, a book about a queen
who must decide
how to rule her kingdom.
The story spirals into a confused snarl as I grow sleepy.
The walls, once swaddled in yellowed paper, are now blind
white, cleansed and sanitized.
A framed photo of Grandpa and her in Venice;
the canals throttled
with long, thin boats.

My mother picks me up at nine, the appointed time,
happy to have her baby back in her arms.
I pull my slick pink poncho out of the hall closet
where it wilts on a rusted wire hanger
next to an old matted fur.

Days of innocence, those Sundays.

I am older now, a woman.

I call to thank her for a birthday card and visit the nursing home once a year,
ringed in the false cheeriness of artificial flowers;
a nurse pushes a cart of silver bedpans, stained with offense.

No Sorrow In Sight

Ralph Asher

I.

I thrust my way through thorns
grabbing, tearing my shirt.
Double-edged blades, tall,
wild and thick, cut bare legs
as I struggle up the hill
off the crumbling path
of my ancestry, to the place
where roots are buried.

Cheap tennis shoes slide on gravel
until I reach the crest, coursing
down the valley to my goal:
An unlocked chain-link fence, stuck
from rust. I climb over. An oak's
long shadow sways to "Kawliga."

II.

I must mow. Unsheathed green knives
creep around the headstones.
A man with my last name stares
from an antiquated photograph,
before he saw the lights of heaven
and the car. I know the story
and cannot mourn. A three-strand rope
needs first be knotted, before undone.

Across a patch lies my grandfather,
a strong man made weak by work
and love. He phoned all his children
but one, who arrived on his steps.
"Now I can die," he said. Sweat
and tears sear wounded skin.

III.

A pink stone bears not names -
"Husband" and "Wife" it reads.
Above where they shall lie forever,
a photograph: not of youth, but age.
Below her title, an unfinished span:
No one dares speculate aloud.

Fighting back to the truck, I swear
that tonight I will find the trimmer.
The engine hums and inside she sits,
shivering from air-conditioned cold
to spite oppressive summer heat. I say
we'll walk there tomorrow. She shakes
her head. Her dear John, she'll see
in heaven, and the grave in due time.

Lonely

Alaina Kennedy

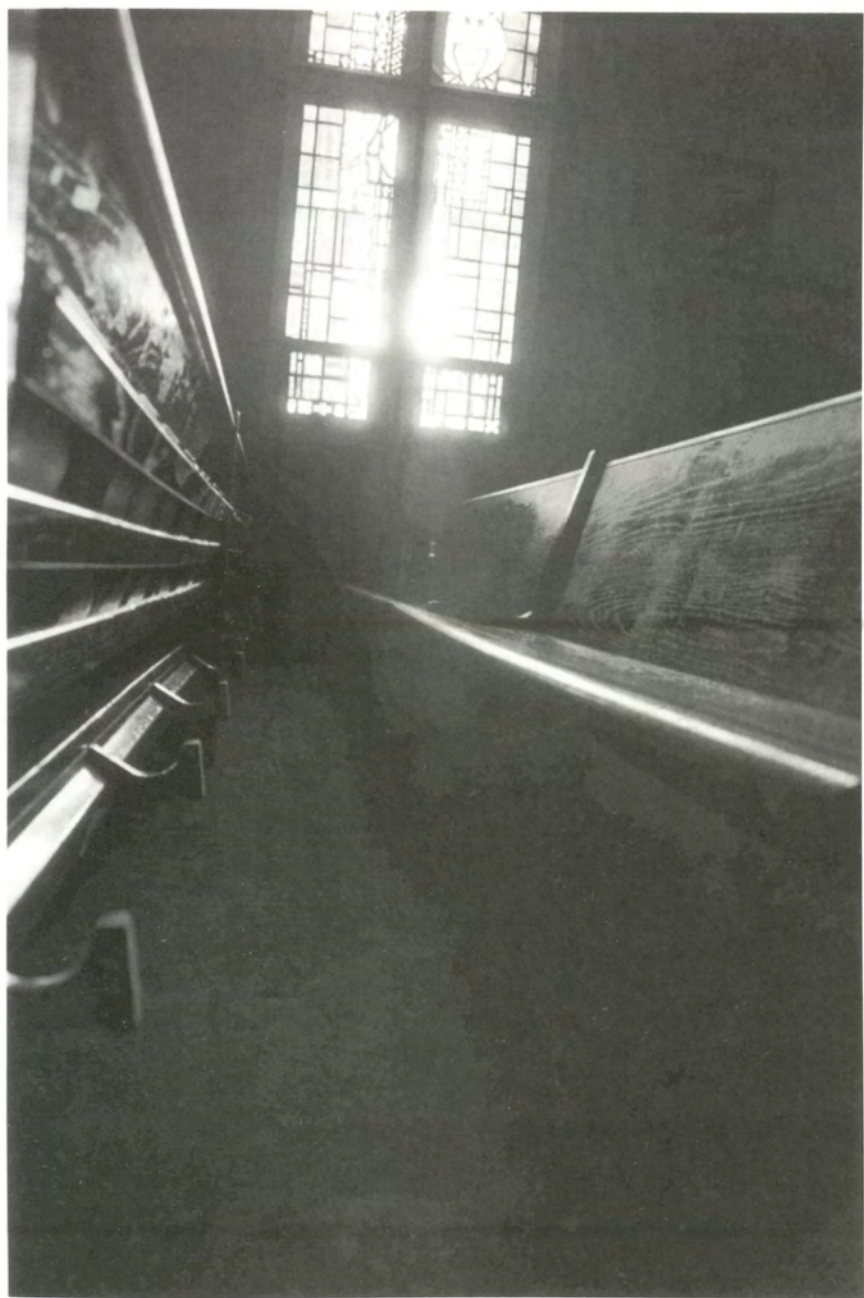
Anxious, he stands in front of his class
waiting for their undivided attention.
His congregation of students,
settling in for his morning lecture
about light waves and solar power,

is restless today. He starts with,
Sometimes the dust is so thick
you can only see the neighborhood
and not the whole city.

Hiding behind his podium
he goes on to explain away the beauty
in a sunset. The sky assumes a red hue,
as the sun's light is intercepted by dust.

The room rustles, the novice crowd
shifts in their seats before his homily
is finished, and he stutters over the last
few lines of his morning instruction.

He speeds up, afraid, he knows
he is about to lose his captive audience.
Indifferent, they will leave,
kicking up so much dust,
they won't even be able to see his face.



Church Pew
Holly Sargasee

I Am Your Gun And I Will Protect You

Evan Scott Bryson

thank God for the war,
if he's in combat now well then
he's not at home beating his wife.
his gun talks to him and says,
I am your gun and I will protect you.

elsewhere of the globe,
father folds his hands in prayer and
tomorrow steals from the pawn shop
with a gun stolen the previous afternoon
victoriously from black thugs in an ally.
he's got six mouths to feed
he's got food to serve on a Formica table that's browning
his family is thankless but
without his soul they're better off drowning.
all the same, he strokes his gun and his gun says,
I am your gun and I will provide for you.

• • • • •

I am bright black of dull nickel finish
I am six rounds and a barrel of flash
I am loud with lightening across the club owner's chest
I am so proud of you and I am loyal to you alone
I am what you owe to this night, says the gun

to a split-lipped faggot injured but on cocaine.
techno blasts across the blood on the pavement.
he's pissed because his dad will not accept him.
he's pissed because his dick rejects girls.
he doesn't realize society rejects his dick.
the gun holds his hand steady
and leads him through the back door,
eases his quivering lips by singing,
I am your gun and I will proclaim you.

• • • • •

I like your ghost costume. it's so pointy.
you dance like a chickenhawk with its prey's head bit off
but you smile and your teeth fill apart
as separate from your self as the glass windows
forty years on pavement in East St Louis, says the gun.

you dance with broken windows in your mouth.
doesn't that hurt at all?
you dance like poverty.
you dance like a racist, says the gun

to an old white bastard
fecklessly shitting himself drunk and sad
and rumpling his wasted old times
between two guns that cannot speak to each other,
between the two guns is a wall of human lives.
he's got his dick in his hands
he's stroking off remembering the smell of his wife
he's damned but not from suicide
and she's crying and he's crying,
I'm so old, I'm so old I just feel like dying,
and the guns agree and they choir,
I am your gun and I will preach for you.

• • • • •

the penal system ignored the trunk under the bed
but she's a smart little girl
and endured her mother's evangelical rages
and ignored and unlocks and simply takes,
so as her retarded pigtails arc across the living room TV
her mom's gun says, now
I am your gun and I will pulverize you.

• • • • •

the radio is dead, the marshes are dry
and the beasts on the plains are dry or dead
and the plains are bones or ash.
the radio falls to the floor and cracks
and the marshes roll over to sprawl.
so the poet leaves, yes, he says, fuck off
to his desk, and surrounded by falling leaves
he hums in the park and says, I am a poet
and I can protect nothing.
my poems will not protect me.

his poem says,
I am your poem and I will protect you.
the poet says, tah, I told you to fuck off.

there is nothing to embrace, yes
there is nothing to describe,
all my brothers left me here, no
I have nothing left to say.

and then the golden bathlights warm his shoulders
as his cock warms his thumb while he takes a piss
and his poem surges forward of this intimate moment and says,
I am your poem and I will protect you.
and seemingly troubled by all of this
he buys a gun and the gun says,
I am your gun and I will protect you.

and his poems never talk again.

but he's got his gun for company and his gun says,
I am your gun and I will protect you.

Vanity of a Woman Removed

Jaquelyn Zuniga

The wood is a stained oak
from decades passed.
Atop it lipsticks of lush hues -
Mauve, mahogany, mocha -
are worn down to crescent moons.
Snowflakes of powder
cover the surface, and from ancient
perfume bottles left half empty
lingers the scent of a young woman.

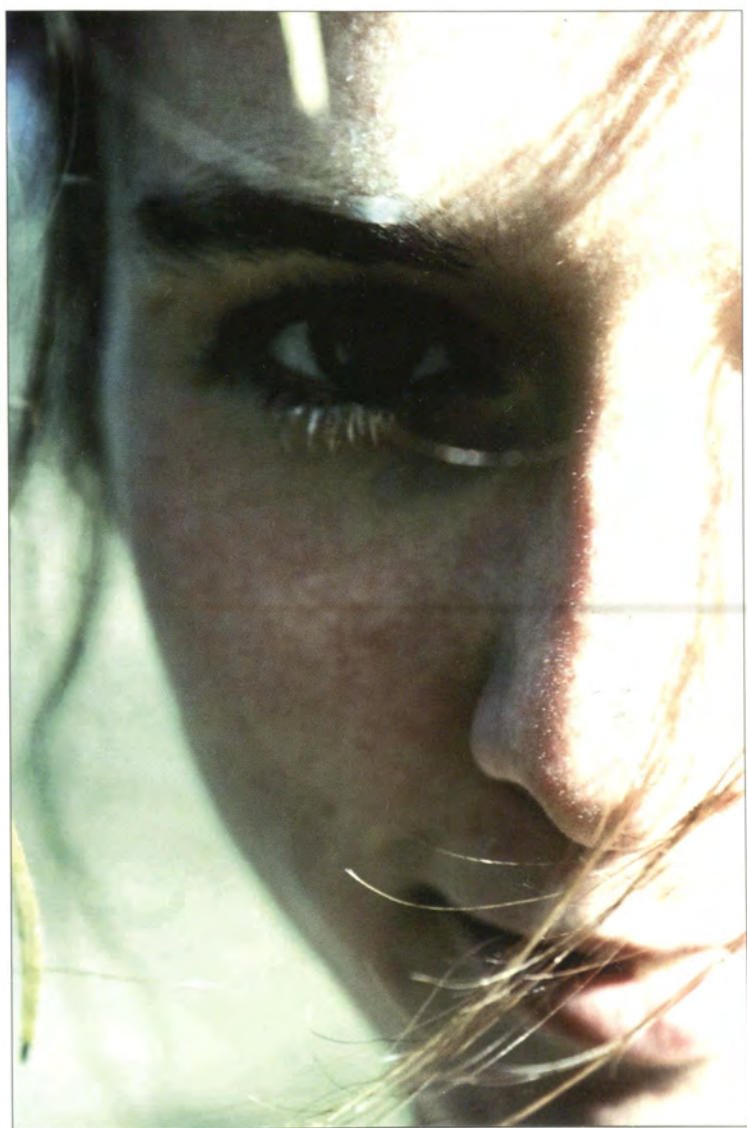
On a plush velvet chair,
she gazes into the mirror
and, while rouging cheeks,
her skin is still porcelain smooth,
lips still soft, hair
a sunshine blonde.

Heaps of clothing, scattered jewels
conceal the room
that once was.
On the wall the grandfather clock
has lost its tick,
and silence dwells.

Staring into a reflection of weary eyes,
she sees what time has taken from her.
With an unstable hand, she lowers the lights.
Surrounded by silken sheets
she will dream once more of a girl
with porcelain skin,
and hair of gold.



Untitled
Angela Fritz



For Sarah: A Mirror of the Salvific
Melanie Schaap



and your flesh will be a great poem
Abi Lessing



Untitled
Angela Fritz



Pit Fall
Melanie Schaap



Amber's Sky
Megan Beaver



Untitled
Angela Fritz



Portrait of the artist as a 20 year-old woman
Shana Heller

within The Book of Love, Articles on Tragedies Arcing or Alone

Evan Scott Bryson

THE LOVE OF DISTANCE

They were ennobled by their love, drenched in it. Their love devoured them like a wet spider-web and only stretched til it could stretch no more when he first flew across the Atlantic and settled in his diplomatic function at the consulate in Geneva. There he met an old friend from undergrad, his former TA living in Albi. She asked him to come down for a weekend to see the French countryside, to see Lyon, where Monet and Manet and van Gogh often found their best lights on their gravest canvases, and he agreed on the stipulation that she knew he was engaged. Andrew flew for a long weekend to Marie and told Tayler everything was in its proper way, and that she had his heart on a chain and if it ever tugged asunder, she would be the first to feel it, perhaps even before Andrew. So Tayler expressed little concern until a late Sunday afternoon, when she was in the bust hall of the Metropolitan, and her toes began bleeding into her clogs. She knew immediately Andrew had perpetrated some minor infidelity and rushed to the ladies' room to cry. Meanwhile, he was drunk on wine in a vine-dense courtyard sampling cheeses, and yes, Marie's fingers were clasping around his fingers, and he was too drunk to resist holding her hands just a little bit, but drunk enough not to disguise an ashamed blush. Marie took his chin into her palm, stared into his eyes, eyes reflecting the starry night above, and she whispered, "*La marée, la marée il ne me prendra pas,*" and they left each other that night to the desperate beeps of Andrew's voicemails. It was Tayler. She knew everything. This was the first infidelity.

THE LOVE OF LEAVING YOU FOREVER

That hurt would have a luster, such as the longing would penetrate the air and give silver leaf edges, make the sun rays oil slick luminaries on passing cars, then the traffic lights continue red then green then yellow then back to red – and even those colors are affected by the pigeon's flight glow of desperation when I called to you, "I don't think we can ever go back!" And you were there on the first step of the bus, blonde hair aching back to me on the waves of choking exhaust, and you gave me one eye and one side grin, and flashed me a small, side wave, fingers half-closed, half-open, limp and restrained. What did you mean to say in that wave? Did you mean to say: "We can go back! We can absolutely go back! If only you believe it, we can go back!" Did you mean to say: "Yes. I agree. We've been fools. There is no returning to what we found and what we

lost." Did you mean to say: "I can love you again if you will love me again." If only I had seen your lips! Two eyes! If you were wearing a hat and scarf, and if I had seen two eyes and a nose, your blushing cheeks! If I could see your teeth under those cherry lips, a tongue, a blink, a snuffle! I got the corner of a sapphire eye and a hand's wave slicing through the temple of our love, spilling the contents of that love into the city around us, and we became an epicenter in the land. We became something more than human, we became something that could destroy humans and raise the dead, we became something that cannot be named and has been named a thousand times. Did you mean to say: "This is going to be tough." Did you mean to say: "I hate us both for this!" Did you mean to say: "Remember that the cat doesn't stomach tuna anymore, and the puppy needs wormed." What debris we've littered the apartment with! How your skirts hung on the shower and when you went to work I would touch the straps and smell the hems and hope for you to dance again. On the second step of the bus, when the door began to close, I admit that I stepped back. I let us go. I put my hands in my pocket because it was cold and I was afraid I would wave back and then it began to rain and I turned. That was when I had to let us go. If we never let each other go how would we ever be free, how would we belong to another, belong to a better, if I never stepped from the curb and let you lay your foot on the third step how would we ever be better? Just because we say to each other we can let each other go does not let us go, does not make us free, does not make us belong to another or become better - it is there, on the curb, when our bodies turned, when our backs aligned, when my hands hid from your finger and your fingernails, and your slightly exposed wrist, that was the moment and it rained and maybe we sighed together, maybe you felt us die too and maybe that moment keeps us together and apart and together and apart and together and apart. Did you mean to say: "You can still stop me, and I will stop, and this will never end but become sweet again like in the beginning." Did you mean to say: "I hate you!" Did you mean to say: "I'm sorry that I am leaving you forever."

THE LOVE OF DISTANCE

But Tayler was to go overseas as well, to Harlaxton, where she compiled art history to complete her dissertation. The proximity was merely a taunt for the lovers, and Andrew and Tayler fell asleep breathing softly on opposite ends of a phone line every other night. When Tayler was in the library one morning, she ran into another grad student, an attractive Irish man, a gregarious fellow; they had gleamed past each other for the last two months: "What is your name?" he finally asked her, in a daunting brogue. But she answered truly, and he took her hand and they

parted. She allowed her eyes to follow as he walked away, lost in the stacks. The next morning she saw him again and they agreed to coffee. She didn't understand any of what he said, he discussed revolutions, Keats, Heany, and Joyce, he mourned collusion, and what he distressed as hostile memories she distilled as a lullaby, an undulation of sensuous belong. So the next morning he held her side while she climbed to the tallest stack and she allowed his strong hands to find their way to the aching slope of her breast. But there he stopped; she didn't know if he was unaware of how erogenous his fingers claimed, or if mere propriety helmed the tide, or if he waited for her to slow-drag her breath or to curse him. But only silence followed, and in Geneva, Andrew began to bleed out of his fingernails. He was in an important meeting with the Ministers of Foreign Relations from Russia, and he put documents over both hands, but the blood ran across the table, and he said he broke a pen, and he walked out with dignity and called Tayler, his cell phone eventually shorting from all the blood swollen into the dialpad.

THE LOVE OF HEARTBREAK

Goddam I feel worse and worse everyday and she keeps sending me more and more e-mails that every time say something about how she's changed a little more and she keeps taking more and more to this break, so that it's clearly not a break anymore it's just a breakup, she's broken up with me. You read the e-mail, it's craziness. I can't read her words, Scooter, and be able to eat and sleep. I hate this. You made a lot of painful sense, though, and I hated it all. I don't want another girl but I certainly don't want that girl who has downgraded me so much, and feels as though I'm a fucking nuisance, which will blow over soon enough. Goddam, Scooter. I hate all of this. You noticed the misspellings too. Fuck. Putain de merde. This is so painful, I have never felt so betrayed or kicked around, or lied too in all of my life, not ever. Never. I don't know right now if I could love another person ever again. I'm telling you we were perfect, she was perfect to me. This is ridiculous. Some other chick could just do it to me again. I've never felt so alone and confused and shitty in my life. I can't take it. My friends Wren and Koon took me out last night, and Koon let me drive his car. We went to two clubs, Shakers and La Baroque. There was approximately five people at both and I drank an apple juice. But the gesture was really nice though. Then today I dropped Koon at the airport and drove around the city. Completely illegal. Fuck it. I pick him up on Sunday. I hate this, Scooter.

THE LOVE OF DISTANCE

Tayler and Andrew voiced their frustrations in absence. Neither could stand to discuss their new natures face to face, and neither could find the time. They deferred by leaving messages on answering machines, by

transmitting text messages, substituting urgency with emails, and they printed out the lorn blurbs and pasted these to refrigerator magnets to better visualize the reticent diplomacy shaping their forgiveness, their affections: "Do you trust me?" No, I don't trust you. "You don't trust me?" No. I could never trust you. "You would never trust me?" I could, but I will not. "But you could?" Anyone can trust anyone. Trusting you is something anyone, given enough time, could do. "But you won't?" I cannot ever. "Why?" If I trusted you then I would love you. "I thought you already loved me." I love all of you. "But you don't love me?" I love nothing of you without trust. I thought you liked it better that way. "I need you to trust me." I need you to love all of me, in all ways. "I cannot love you." Then it makes it easier if I cannot trust you, if I cannot love you, if you cannot hold and have and break my heart. "I thought I already broke your heart." I broke my heart. "You told me I broke your heart." You did break my heart. I can still feel its pieces riding through my blood stream over my knees. "But you've never trusted me, never loved me, never let me break your heart." That broke my heart. We broke my heart anyway. There was no way to keep my heart from breaking, no way not to trust you, no way not to love you. "Hearts break." Yes. Hearts break. "Trust happens." Love happens. "Hearts break." I love you. "I can't." That's why I don't trust you. "I love you." I trust you.

THE LOVE OF INFINITE PEACE ABOVE INSUBSTANTIALITY

Senior Year is the first time I am around a jack-o-lantern without parents, let alone a brother. I am sitting in Jem's grandma's house, watching "Hook." Jem is watching, too, and listening for the doorbell. Children in costumes wheedle about the front yard, checking their candy, getting lost in the fog. I am totally and piteously attempting to draw lines in my life. I am sifting through the alternatives and motives leading me away from my home on the Thirty-First of October, I need to know when I made decisions - and what precisely these decisions are. Foremost is my self, lying on its back, glaring at Robin Williams having forgotten a past life as Peter Pan. The writhe of me stares into the vacuum tube and sees Jem sorting Tootsie Rolls and Reese's Cups, each of his motions precise. When he yawns I fall back into my body and roll over but I am uncomfortable and anxious so scrunching my face in expectation I lie again on my back and hope he notices my arms. These arms, another decision. I am slow breathing. I am over-analyzing the inherent lack of romanticism in the situation, and wondering, if Jem is straight why am I bothering with a physical fitness regimen? His body is toned from Varsity Tennis. Harry Houdini died on Halloween. I tell Jem this and when he tells me he already knows, I feel affirmation. Jem is a smart kid. After eight o'clock, we drive through the fog to Jesse's house, and all the strength in my

known body is working against my decisions, and my fingertips are trying to touch Jem's. My fingertips need to know his decisions. I swallow my heart back below my sternum, and maybe because I cannot see the stars and the moon will not keep us and Halloween is a chilling hour, and because he knows when to play the perfect song and his driving is so safe, and because he combs his hair forward with an actual brush and wears old sneakers with no discernable resentment, and because this is so complicated and absolutely betrayal and hopeless, I decide I love him. I am sinking in the passenger seat with my muddy shoes propped on the dashboard with this feeling of no matter how each ton of inertia tailing my every seventeen years on this earth wants to crush me, the weight absolutely cannot. The weight absolutely cannot as long as Jem is driving and I am beside him.

THE LOVE OF DISTANCE

So they agreed they were still in love. Clearly they were. Their very cuticles condoned their love. But they agreed that infidelities were imminent, unpreventable, the world shoved other love onto them; they were very attractive: it was inevitable. But they knew certain infidelities were unpardonable, as such the infidelities recently acquired amounted to hands, and what of hands? When Andrew visited Tayler in fragrant June of the following year, he briefly noted a photo adorning her mantle. "Who is this?" he asked. "Henrik," she said. She let the halves of the name detach from her vocal chords like a grape plucked to make wine, and when she tried to replace the harmony she found in pronouncing his name, when she coughed, Andrew winced. He asked Tayler how they came to meet, and she asked Andrew if he wanted the truth. He said he did not, he begged her to lie, to make anything up at all, but do not tell him the truth. "We kissed in Paris," said Tayler, "and he is with the University." She looked at the floor but her eyes desperately wanted to fall back on Henrik's smile, and Andrew's smile, although Andrew never smiled anymore, so she raised her eyes and found Henrik's eyes and they reminded her of Andrew's smile, and she smiled, and Andrew clawed at the black tie choking his neck, and he left promising to call. This was the explanation for the morning his wisdom teeth impacted.

THE LOVE OF PROTECTIVE LIES

Sometimes our charms fail us. Two silver rings - either on thumb, index or bird of left hand, always. One bracelet - red, green, one blue stone, silver, left wrist, always. Four holes in left ear - industrial piercing, two hoops, silver, always. And my little mouse heart still broke last night. I would rather die for love, but haven't, remarked O'Hara in a collection of

his works this afternoon. I don't think I've had a better explanation for my self-alienation since re-reading certain passages from *Everything Is Illuminated*, and even then, is love really the immovability of truth? Sometimes, and just because it hurts so damned much, I'd like to make bawdy lies about his affairs, and to lie with such conviction that the intensity of his lies far outstrips the actions, the lie becomes a good. His wanting to protect me through lies is a good, or would be, if they protected me, if they were good, sturdy lies I would never find my way through, that they would never break right at the good part. I'm fairly certain he doesn't give a shit about protecting any of us, let alone me, but this is just part of mine own construct. It's reasonable. Poetry isn't logical. So let's say, I'd hate to be making out and see cocaine highlighting the inside of his nose. But sometimes that happens. And sometimes we should have the fortitude to protect those we love and cover our substance abuses by being ridiculous. Sometime, what we really need to say is, "Baby, this ain't coke, me and Pan got in a flour fight." "A flour fight?" "Yeah. At the pizzeria. I thought I washed my face all right, but I suppose I didn't get my nose completely clean." "A flour fight?" "Yeah, baby." "A flour fight, Jesus Christ!" "Yeah, we're a couple of kidders." Sometimes, it helps to know all things die.

THE LOVE OF DISTANCE

Did I come here to die? flashed behind his eyes in a satin gloss of blood-spray, and the intensity, the vision of lying beside a toilet – a frat toilet, the seat dribbled with pubes and crusted vomit and ex-girlfriends' tampons – slithered into his nostrils and he had to ask himself again, just to feel again, Did I come here to die? and he nodded his head in time with the generic hip-hop blaring from speakers tied to the ceiling, above the crashing faces of bronze girls turning red, turning blue, spinning stars, dangling arms like harpoons beneath the spinlights, while shirtless boyfriends danced behind them, grinning sharp white teeth turning green, biting neon fish, smelling the chum, dipping fingers into navels and then further below. This is just a nice night, he said to himself, dipping further below the established axis of hips swinging, where the bodies were so tight and the excited cries so compact, the room was squealing so much bass, no one could catch up with their self-inflicted doppler effects, the effects of alcohol, the effects of meth, the effect of the music burning across their tongues like scratching cat claws slicked in ambrosia. The fillings in his teeth purred. The humid air sagged under the weight of designer colognes and sweat. "Did I come here to die?" he asked a girl that grinded on him as he made his own descent to the floor. "No, from bio class," she said, and her hand traced the contour of his groin, ran under his shirt until she found his terrified, erect right nipple,

then inched like a mantis out of the collar of his shirt. Her fingernails dragged across his adam's apple and flicked against the shell of his ear, where the neck meets the lobe. In this way, pulling his shirt up she asked him if he had any ketamine. "I'm a dignitary," he mumbled. "How much?" she asked, taking her black fingernails and scraping them under his blanched, cracked lips. Of course he was here for vengeance, so he smiled at her, refrained from blushing, allowed the study-abroad girl that believed him to be in her biology class to peel his shirt from his body. She danced with her back to him, rubbed her ass on his crotch, her hair smelled of lilac and José Cuervo, sour sweet sleeping fast, and the matted strands felt like vulture's wing tips against his nose, his chin, his neck. Wherever the tousles swayed, he felt the feather lightness of sex, betrayal and death. When he followed her upstairs, through the purple murk of Freshmen spraining their ankles from boiling balloons on the floor, she began to remove straps from her shoulders, to unlace necklaces - seven in all - and to guide his hands to the small of her back. "I can't wait to mess this up," he said, thinking about Tayler under Henrik in the Galerie Ufizi, her pink fingertips knowing the hair on his widows peek, brushing it from his eyes. "We need water," said the girl when her hand wrapped around the doorknob. Did I come here to die? seethed from his nostrils as they stumbled to the bed.

THE LOVE OF SELF IN SOUND AND MOTION

I love you more than anything, I just don't know if that is what I want for the rest of my life. I have been thinking a lot about the future lately - college will do that for you, and it sucks. I am not just questioning me and you, I am questioning everything that I ever thought I would do. Did you know I dance now? That I drink? I got on top of a table and sang. I kind of want us to experience more things. I feel so shitty for doing this to you, because you believe in us so much. Remember when you stood on the pier and shouted just that, how much you believed in us, and you said we were a true romance. I know you are thinking that this is so stereotypical, and you know of all people that I don't like to be stereotyped, but that is how it is here. Your school wasn't anything like mine. I want to be sure that what I am doing is okay, but I can't because I will always know that I hurt you. I just want to do this now, so it doesn't progress into something worse. You don't like the thought of me being with other guys, but right now, I don't see that there is a problem with you and I going out with other people and seeing what there is. I don't know what else to say. I believe this is the first time I've talked to you and I don't know what to say. I know that, probably, whatever I say will make you a little angry and that is okay. I know that I have changed. When we talked about these things, it was us talking like we always had been. We

didn't know anything different. I went to the Toxic Wasted party. They had glow paint in the basement and trampolines. I went to Dante's Inferno party. They had the heat cranked up and coal pits, and people were completely naked and I saw a girl blowing two guys on the stairs, well, the guy getting blown was jacking off the other guy. I get here, and realize that I can do so many more things here than at home. I don't do half of them (I won't be that girl with those two guys on the stairs), but they are still there, as is alcohol and nice men and dancing and later nights. And I know that you hate that, you don't want me to do those things, but just because you don't do them, you don't want to do the same things, doesn't mean that I don't want to. That is why I wanted to break. Because right now I feel like I am making my decisions based on what you do, and what you expect me to do. I am not going to go crazy, but I don't want to be bored. Believe that I miss you and I love you. I have different friends, they do all kinds of different things, and I am willing to do it with them, as long as I don't get hurt in the end.

THE LOVE OF DISTANCE

So it went that night, when Tayler's eardrums burst, and she bleated deaf as Andrew's chains tugged through her heart and out of her hearing, slow moans turned to hot razors as he climbed on the girl, a girl near Tayler's age, in a room darkened by curtains and night and a reeking dust-ruffle. But he did nothing with the girl save brush her nipples, untie the back of her dress, resolve a limp wrist down her gnashing serpent spine. They kissed, briefly, but when he felt Tayler had suffered enough - and he did know she suffered - he left the girl alone, still asking about drugs, still smelling of lilac and alcohol, her coke nail itching a nostril. He left through the ally and walked in circles around Lake Geneva. His head hung heavy with guilt. He was repulsed by his own pleasure. He paged Tayler, knowing she wouldn't hear this until Wednesday, to say he was sorry, to say his infidelities measure a nipple, a full spine, locks of hair and several eyelashes, the bridge of a nose, fingers and wrists, but nothing near a body.

THE LOVE OF INCREASING THE ENTROPY IN A GIVEN SYSTEM

Refer to Articles on Car Crashes, Articles on Heists, Articles on Benders, Articles on Prostitution Gone Awry for the Sake of Additional Pain, Articles on War, Articles on Defecation During Sex, Articles on Confusing Your Brother-in-law as Your Husband, Articles on Confusing Your Sister-in-law as Your Wife, Articles on Homosexuality, Articles on Heterosexuality, Articles on Bestiality or Sex and Romances with Pets/Farm Animals/Other Zoological Specimens. Refer to Appendix J, June, Jeremy, Dance Dammit.

THE LOVE OF DISTANCE

So it was on Wednesday when her ears were healed and she pulled out the soaked cotton balls and she listened to music on a phonograph, and as the table turned, she checked her pages and began again: "I'm sorry. When you can hear, you can imagine I am saying I am sorry I am sorry I am sorry." You aren't sorry. "No." Yes. "No." Is it my turn now? "No." Yes. I want to be sorry. "You want to be guilty." You wanted to be guilty. "I wanted to say I'm sorry." Only from your guilt. Not because of it. You just like those two words. Guilt. Sorry. Guilt. Sorry. "Sorry." Guilt. "I mean it." I mean it. "Don't repeat." Don't repeat my mistakes. "Our mistakes." Yours mine and ours. "Are you trying to give me a nosebleed?" Are you trying to make my hair fall out? "Are you trying to give me a nosebleed?" Are you trying to make my hair fall out? "If it makes you less worthy." If it makes you less worthy. "Stop." Stop. "Are you done yet?" Are you done yet? "Are you done yet?" Are you done yet? "Are we done yet?" Are we gone yet? "No." Are you gone yet? "I'm right here." Me too. "Don't leave." I won't.

THE LOVE OF CLAWING UP THE STAIRS TO REACH YOUR DYING WIFE cough I CAN HEAR YOU ARE YOU ON THE SECOND LANDING on the second WHY DID YOU CLIMB UP SO HIGH where are you AT THE BOTTOM my foot snagged on the baluster i'm so sorry wheeze maybe you should call the ambulance I CAN MAKE IT UP THE DAMN STAIRS TO SAVE MY WIFE no need cough to get angry I'M NOT ANGRY I JUST WANT YOU SAFE then cough call wheeze an ambulance you can't I CAN MAKE IT where are you I'M ON THE I'M ON THE THE FOURTH STEP your knees are so cough bad cough cough WHY DID YOU GO UP THE STAIRS IT'S BEEN YEARS i thought jan and thom's rooms would be dusty and they cough wheeze cough cough never cough remember to make their beds in the morning JAN AND THOMAS HAVEN'T LIVED HERE FOR YEARS AND YEARS REMEMBER what they ate breakfast WE DIDN'T HAVE BREAKFAST MY DARLING cough WHY DID YOU YOU AREN'T ON THE SECOND LANDING the third cough O WHY DID YOU cough HOW DID YOU MAKE IT SO HIGH cough jan and thom were out last night i cough wheeze wheeze wheeze didn't here them come in THEY AREN'T cough HER THEY AREN'T THERE ANYMORE don't yell i think o there's some where are you THE LANDING COUGH I'M ON THE LANDING WHEEZE did you call the ambulance I CAN'T ANYMORE where are you I' MONTHE LANDING GOD cough don't yell DA MMITAGATHA sweetie are you mad at me i think i'm bleeding NO I'M WHEEZE COUGH NOT MAD AT YOU I COUGH AM I I JUST I JUST CAN'T TREACH YOU cough did you call the ambulance I CAN'T call

the ambulance call them they'll I sweetie this isso
 hard WHy Did cough can you hear I HEar
 you jan and thom will save us yesafter din

THE LOVE OF DISTANCE

They couldn't leave. Even when they abandoned their love, they were still trapped in the foil, in the vessel of their love, in the snowstorm of their tendencies, in the flurries of memories and flashbacks and when they drifted into the ideas of their love, they were snowed in, blockaded in their homes on beds turned into fortresses, below shingles heavy with their doubts. Tayler went ahead and saw the owner of a gallery she knew, a man that didn't speak any language she spoke so in tempting him, she did so with a vigor beyond words. Though, what in temptation is ever merely words? She urged her hips towards his hips, his narrow hips, and she brought her eyes into his Caspian eyes, and when they mumbled nothing, no language, she let him know through brushstrokes what she desired, if only for the night. And he painted her naked, then, but she lay in a ball, with her knees to her breasts, her feet curled under her spine. She was naked, completely naked before the Fin, but privates were obfuscated, were hidden behind trepidation and bones. When he had finished painting he brought stained fingers to the crack of her bosom, and she let him paint a heart above her heart, and when he painted it blue and black and green, she fled the gallery knowing Andrew's nose was running blood, blood was pouring into his mouth, slicking across his teeth; blood oozed over his chin and onto a navy blazer; blood dripped into his lap and into the folds of his slacks, and when he awoke from the chair he had fallen asleep in, he was speechless, because the blood had so crusted over his mouth that he had to pick his speech free as if it were a scab.

THE LOVE OF FINITE PEACE BELOW SUBSTANTIALITY

Refer to Articles on Illusions and Paradoxes, Articles on Misplaced Letters or Epistles, Articles on Frivolous Distinctions. Refer to Appendix G, precinct one: God as shit-brained and scared-as-fuck youth wandering around the darkness of uncharted deep space; precinct two: god as formidable college dropout and his awesome ambivalence to tyranny both foreign and domestic; precinct three: god as blind/deaf/mute handicap still impervious to cosmic destiny and actually confused and brow-beaten; precinct four: god as reputable big leagues player in deciding the destruction of everything; precinct five: god as God.

THE LOVE OF DISTANCE

And so on. Because once each had acquired an infidelity measuring a full body, then they were broken - nothing was worth it anymore. So, uniquely, each could acquire a kiss here, a tousle of hair there, a hug, a snuggle, a movie and a dinner followed by a massage, and in time they acquired other backs, necks, feet, lips, eyes, knees, asses, stomachs, eyelashes, coughs, grimaces, Achilles tendons, dimples, moles, teeth, earlobes, pubic hair, spines, pinky fingers, and up and down the body until they were repeating backs and necks, feet and lips, eyes and knees, asses and stomachs, foreskin, nipples, Adam's apples, breasts, toes, laughs, thighs-they were assembling other loves, and repeating infidelities as to never assemble other loves in full. "We're swingers," remarked Tayler, dryly. "I have three other loves from the torso up, and one from the torso down," said Andrew, sadly. Both were disgusted by the physiological accumulations of their infidelities. "We should end this," said Tayler. "We should," agreed Andrew. And much later in life, deep within Rub Al-Khali, they cheated again but with each other and that's when they broke. Everything spilled. The horizon cracked crimson. The sands of the Empty Quarter wept. The lovers bled so much they re-stained the Red Sea.



Night Life
Holly Sargasee

At The Zoo

Tracy Monson

Folks who live in Morning Glory claim that our town is famous for two things, the first being Mr. Edward Hickum and the second being the Morning Glory Zoo and Gardens. The zoo was never much of a zoo, really. There was a snack bar where me and my friends hung out in the summer, an indoor bird exhibit that mostly only old ladies liked, and a petting zoo with goats and sheep and a couple of pigs. At the end of a shady path there's a cage where the three chimps used to live, but that's about it.

On that day I had told my mama that I was going to the zoo with Sydney and Lauren, my two best friends. Really though I was going to see Jeffrey Turner, the zookeeper's son. Jeffrey cleaned out cages for his daddy during the summer, so I knew he'd be there; he was there every day in a t-shirt with the sleeves cut off and sturdy brown work boots all tied up with thick laces. I had a big crush on that boy, and everyone in the sixth grade at Morning Glory Junior High knew it too. Jeffrey's friends all said he liked me back, as in more than a friend, so when he told me that he had a lunch break at noon and I could come get a Coke with him if I wanted, I knew he was going to kiss me.

Lauren lent me her cut-off shorts, like all the girls in the magazine pictures wore. She had two older sisters in high school, so her mama didn't care how she dressed. The jean shorts made my legs look real long and thin in the mirror and I put on my favorite yellow T-shirt, the one with a picture of a dolphin jumping out of the ocean in the middle. I twisted my hair in two braids and carefully put on the pink bubble gum flavored lip-gloss that I stole from the drug store on the corner. Mr. Douglas, who owns the store, he's so old and blind and stupid that one time me and Sydney and Lauren each took a can of soda and a dirty magazine and he didn't even notice. The lip-gloss tasted so good that I licked it all off and had to put it back on again.

I tried to come down the stairs real quiet, but my mama was in the kitchen and she heard me. She was making blueberry muffins, and she brushed her floury hands on her checkered apron. I remember her hair was messy and wispy around her face, which was red and shiny with sweat from working around the stove.

"Land's sake, Mary Ellen, you get yourself back upstairs and you put on some real clothes. Short shorts get girls pregnant," my mama snapped.

The week before that she had told me that skipping church got girls pregnant, but instead of being smart I went back upstairs. I didn't want

her to get mad and start asking me a bunch of snoopy questions. I put on my own shorts, even though they came down to my knees and made me look like a boy. Outside I used a pair of garden shears to cut around them, though, and I made them even shorter than Lauren's.

I rode my bike to the zoo, coasting fast down the hills with my braids straight out back behind me. Lauren and Sydney had better clothes than me, but I had the best bike. It had a wicker basket on the front, beads on the spokes that rattled when the wheels spun around, and three different gears.

At the zoo I saw Jeffrey Turner sitting all alone at one of the picnic tables. He was taller than all the other boys in my grade and his skin was the color of an old penny. When he smiled he showed all his teeth, and they were creamy and straight. Last year he chipped one in a basketball game against Belmont Prep, but Mr. Turner has a lot of money and he took Jeffrey to a dentist in Montgomery to get it all fixed up. The best thing about Jeffrey, what I really liked, was that even though he was practically perfect he never acted stuck up about it.

"Hi, Mary Ellen," he said as I walked over. I saw him look at my legs, but then he looked away again real fast. "I like your shorts," he mumbled, and the tips of his ears turned a little bit red.

"I made them myself," I told him. I'm pretty sure he was really impressed. Jeffrey bought us a Coke and put two straws in it so that we could share. While we drank he told me all about working at the zoo and the summer baseball team he played on, and about how his daddy yelled at his mama and made her cry all the time, and about how his dog had six puppies last weekend and I could have one for free if I wanted. When our Coke was gone he asked if I wanted to walk down to the chimpanzee cage. That's how I knew he still wanted to kiss me; the cage is at the end of a long path underneath some big leafy trees, far away from the rest of the zoo. Plus, he held my hand while we walked.

On the way I got a little nervous because I had never kissed a boy before Jeffrey Turner. I had seen plenty of movies where the beautiful girl gets kissed by her boyfriend in the end and their faces always fit together like puzzle pieces and they know exactly what to do even with their eyes closed. I decided I should probably keep mine open because I didn't want to mess up. Me and Sydney and Lauren used to practice on teddy bears to know what it was like, but a stuffed animal is different than a real person. One time we even hid in Lauren's sister's closet and watched her and her boyfriend kiss on the bed for almost twenty minutes, but Sydney started to laugh and we got caught.

It was much cooler in the shade by the cage, and Jeffrey and I leaned on the railing to watch the monkeys. There were three of them chasing each other around through the trees and chattering away. Jeffrey told me

one of them was supposed to have a baby in a couple of months, and that his daddy was going to let him watch the birth, maybe even help with it. I remember he kept sliding closer to me, but he did it very slowly so that I almost didn't even notice.

"I like you, Mary Ellen," he said very quietly.

"I like you too, Jeffrey Turner," I said.

He leaned in towards me until our faces were probably only two inches apart. I could feel his breath on my nose, and I remember it was hot and smelled like maple syrup. Up close I saw that his eyes had tiny specks of gold in them and they glistened like fish scales when he blinked. He even had the start of a mustache, just a couple short, spiky brown hairs underneath his nose.

As Jeffrey closed his eyes and pushed out his lips I heard footsteps pounding up the path, but he moved his head forward and I got ready. I had kept my eyes open so I turned my head just in time and our noses didn't bump. Over Jeffrey's shoulder I saw someone come around the bend in the path, stumbling and tripping. It was Mr. Edward Hickum, and I could see that he had something thin and silver in his hand. He was waving it in the air and I heard some loud noises, sharp and angry sounding.

The last time I saw Mr. Hickum was when he worked for Morning Glory Gas and Electric. About every three months he'd get fired from a different job, but I think he held this one the longest. My daddy would hear about it from the men he worked with at the insurance office, and he'd come home and tell my mama about it at dinner.

He'd say something like, "Welp, Ed Hickum went and got himself fired, lost another job."

And my mama would put down her fork and she'd pinch the bridge of her nose and shake her head. "Mercy, that poor man. Somebody should do something. Why doesn't anybody do something?"

My daddy would cross his arms and lean back in his chair. Sometimes he'd suck in air from just the corner of his mouth and then breath it out through his nose, loud. That always meant that he was thinking of something smart to say and that we should listen close.

"A man has got to grieve, Linnie, got to heal. These things take time."

It was a sticky hot August day a year or so back, and Mr. Hickum came to our house to read the meter and poke around in the electrical box. I remember he rattled up in a busted old company van, clanking and clattering. Me and Lauren were eating grape Popsicles, and we sat on the lawn, all pokey with crabgrass, and watched him.

Everyone else in Morning Glory got tan in the summer, the sun was

always so bright, but Mr. Hickum's skin was pale, white as the lilies at church on Easter. His mouth was red with chapped patches, and it looked like a long thin scab just sitting on his chin. He was baldheaded and the veins on his skull were like nasty old woman hands, all lumpy and blue and there was a dark circle on the side of his stomach, a sweaty armpit stain on his work shirt. Lauren snickered, but I stared down at my clear jelly sandals because I didn't much like to look at him; he didn't have any eyebrows.

Mr. Hickum saw me and Lauren sitting on the grass and he came over. He squatted down in front of us, and his big belly pushed over his pants. He leaned in so close that I could see all the pores on his cheeks.

"How old are you girls now?" he asked us softly. I remember his breath had an awful smell, a mix of my daddy's empty beer cans and burnt hair.

"Twenty-two," Lauren said hotly. She was being smart, but I didn't say anything.

Mr. Hickum smiled a little, but the corners of his mouth went down more than up. He stared at us and his eyes got all glassy and shiny. Finally he straightened up, waded carefully through my mama's yellow rose bushes, and bent down in front of the electrical box.

"Mary Ellen," he called back over his shoulder. "Your daddy have a wrench I could borrow? Forgot mine."

My daddy was inside the house, so I ran and got him. "What kind of wrench you need, Ed?" my daddy called as the screen door banged behind him. "Monkey?"

Mr. Hickum's eyes popped open, almost clear out of his head, and his nostrils started to flare, he was breathing like a horse. I thought he was going to cry because his chin started to quiver, but then I realized he was chewing on his tongue, over and over again, his jaw snapping up and down. He crawled fast on his hands and knees right straight through my mama's rosebushes and I could see the thin bloody scratches on his cheeks where the thorns tore the skin, like some crazy Indian's war paint. He struggled to his feet and took off running down our street, faster than even Sydney could run, and she's the fastest kid on the track team, including all the boys.

The busted old van stayed parked in front of our house until someone from the company came and got it two days later.

The very first time I met Mr. Edward Hickum was right after he moved to Morning Glory, when I was real little. He bought Sydney's old house after her family put it up for sale and moved into my neighborhood.

One day I overheard our mamas talking while they canned peaches in our kitchen, and her mama told mine that he used to be a professor at some college in Montgomery.

"What in the world did he come here for?" my mama asked her. Sydney's mama leaned in close, like she had an important secret to tell.

"He needed a quiet town, a place to recover."

A few days later my family went to visit Mr. Hickum because my mama said it was our Christian duty to make him feel welcome in Morning Glory. She put on one of her church outfits and a hat with flowers and plastic fake fruit all around the brim. I had to wear my Easter dress from last year, which was too small for me, and shiny black shoes that buckled and pinched my toes.

We brought Mr. Hickum a macaroni casserole and some Rice Krispie Treats that I had helped make, all stacked up on a plate. He invited us into his house and all I remember is how many pictures he had. They were hung all over the walls, propped on coffee tables, even on the fridge. Some had fancy gold frames that swirled all around and looked real expensive while others had no frame at all.

In every single picture, though, there was a woman and a little girl, about my age. The woman had pretty yellow hair and a small waist. She was laughing most the time, her head thrown back and her mouth wide open. The girl had yellow hair like the woman, but her face was round and serious just like Mr. Hickum's. One of the pictures was the woman and the girl at a lake, the wind blowing their yellow hair every which way. Another was up close of them crossing their eyes and puffing their cheeks out. A couple had Mr. Hickum in them too, usually with his arm around the woman or with the girl on his shoulders. They all looked happy.

I asked my mama later where Mr. Hickum's wife and daughter were and she got a funny look in her eyes and pulled me close so that my nose was buried in her belly. Her blouse was scratchy against my cheek and I could smell the laundry soap.

"They're dead, Mary Ellen."

By the time Mr. Hickum had been in town a month, everyone in Morning Glory knew what had happened to his family. Me and Sydney heard the story from Lauren who heard it from one of her sisters. We were sleeping over at Lauren's house in a tent in the backyard one night, taking turns trying to scare each other with ghost stories. She told us about a family who went on vacation all the way out to California. They visited one of those wildlife safaris where you drive through in your car and look at all the animals and the way Lauren told it, two of the big monkeys, chimpanzees, went all crazy and wild and they busted through the car windows and dragged the family out.

The husband tried to stop them, but the monkeys started chewing on the wife and daughter.

Lauren paused and made Sydney and me lean in to hear her. "They

gnawed their fingers clean off and ate their eyes and their noses and everything," she hissed. "There was nothing the man could do, those monkeys ate his family right up."

"Yeah, right, Lauren. That's the stupidest story I've ever heard," Sydney said. She was trying to act older than Lauren, but I saw her bite down on her lip and I knew she was a little scared.

"It happened, Sydney. I'm not just making it up. It happened to Mr. Hickum and his family."

Sydney rolled her eyes.

"You ask your mama if you think I'm lying. I swear to God it's real." I went home the next day and I did ask my mama. She said Lauren had been telling the truth.

When Mr. Edward Hickum came around the bend in the path at the zoo that day, he looked a lot like when he ran away from my house in the summer, all wild and sweaty. He looked how I felt the time I was real little and I got lost from my mama in the Piggly Wiggly and I ran up and down every single aisle, past slabs of frozen meat and canned vegetables, all frantic and scared and panicky. Even though me and Jeffrey were right in front of him, Mr. Hickum only looked at the monkeys screaming from their trees in the cage.

After the loud noises - shots from his gun - two things happened, the first being that one of the monkeys fell out of a tree. I think it was the pregnant one, and she made a thumping noise when she landed on the cement floor of the cage. Also, Jeffrey Turner stopped kissing me. His eyes got real wide and surprised and stayed that way. He leaned towards me again and I thought he wanted another kiss, but then I realized that he was falling, not leaning. I tried to catch him in my arms, but he was taller than me and I couldn't hold him up. I don't remember thinking that he had been shot, even when the back of his white cutoff t-shirt showed a dark red stain oozing out bigger and bigger until it covered his whole back. It looked like a firework in slow motion.

I stared down at Jeffrey Turner all crumpled up on the ground for a long time before I realized that Mr. Edward Hickum was next to me, staring too. Even though it was hot out he started shivering and the hand without the gun hung down by his side and he kept clenching and unclenching it, over and over, like one of those games where the machine claw grabs for a prize.

"Oh... oh, God. Oh, Mary Ellen, look. Look what I did."

His voice came out high and thin and he made little whimpering noises like a kicked dog. He sounded so scared and sad that I reached out and patted him on his arm.

He turned away from me a little bit then, I thought maybe because he

didn't want me to see him crying. After a couple seconds, I watched as he put the entire end of the gun in his mouth, so deep in he started to gag. His hand was shaking so bad that the gun rattled, clanking against his teeth and sounding like a jackhammer. I remember wondering if he was going to try and eat it.

Even though I've heard starter pistols at track meets a million times, I jumped at the sound of the shot. Mr. Hickum's legs went loose and he fell to the ground next to Jeffrey. A rainbow of blood flew through the air as the gun came out and it was pretty just for a second. Then the rainbow broke and it splattered all at my feet and I could see right straight into the wide, red hole of his mouth.

I don't remember much what happened after that. I guess the sounds of all the gunshots brought people running. Mr. Turner, the zookeeper, was there and he told me later that I was just standing and staring at Jeffrey with drops of Mr. Hickum's blood on my favorite yellow t-shirt, the one with the dolphin in the middle.

I miss Jeffrey Turner. Everything at Morning Glory Junior High is done in his honor, so I think about him almost every day when I come to school. They renamed the football and baseball fields after him and put a bright shiny plaque outside the doors with flowers all around that says his name and the years he lived. They even put on a dance to raise money for the plaque. Sydney and Lauren went with Michael and Tyler Kitchell, twins a year ahead of us in school, and they had the prettiest dresses, just like movie stars, and Lauren's mama drove the four of them to dinner. I did their hair, but I didn't feel much like going, I guess.

Sometimes I wriggle down under my covers at night and I picture me and Jeffrey's kiss over and over again in my mind, how smooth his lips were and how his hands were soft like he just rubbed them in baking flour, not even a little sweaty. Nobody knows about me and Jeffrey, not even Lauren and Sydney. I'm pretty sure they guess that Jeffrey Turner kissed me before he died, but they never asked me about it, not once, and I'm not going to tell them, or anybody.

Jeffrey's daddy sold all the animals to a big zoo somewhere, and now our zoo just sits empty. Grass pokes up through cracks in the snack bar area and thick vines snake all around the empty cages.

Nobody misses Mr. Hickum much, not even his relatives in Montgomery. They were supposed to come clean out his house but never did, so some of the church ladies put on a big rummage sale. Most the stuff got bought, except for the pictures of his family. I think they threw those away. One Sunday at church the pastor tried to say some nice words, about how Mr. Hickum's biggest fault was loving his family too much, and how good Christians couldn't really blame him for that. After the service, though, I heard Sydney's mama say that God sent

people who did what Mr. Hickum did straight to hell.

I didn't go to either Jeffrey's or Mr. Edward Hickum's funerals. Sydney and Lauren told me that at Jeffrey's funeral his parents cried in the front pew during the whole thing, but there was a lot of pretty singing and flowers and almost everybody in Morning Glory was there. Sydney said that the weird part was seeing Jeffrey in the casket because he looked like a big wax doll in a shoebox. They said I should have come, but my mama declared that a girl seeing dead bodies one time was enough; I didn't need to go back and take another look.

Gray Eyes

Sarah Werner

Gray eyes are fixed upon a window, beyond which the gray clouds are raining with such a heavy desperation that it takes an effort not to join in. But the eyes are not watching the rain. Nor are they admiring, despising, or even considering the thick, blocky city skyline, almost blurred now by the torrent. They are foggy, glazed over and unmoving, and the gray skin around them sags with the dead weight.

Footsteps bustle in with a sensible, tidy clatter on the tiled floor. "Hungry, ma'am?"

No answer.

An exasperated sigh, and the raised eyebrow is apparent in the speaker's tone. "All right. But you'll be complaining in a few hours, you know."

Still no answer, then another sigh and the footsteps clack back out of the room.

Silence and stillness under the white noise of the thunderless storm.

There is a crack in the clean window shaped like a thick spiderweb, and a confused spider wanders jauntily around the wooden frame, trying to find its echo, which she built here last night. She eventually gives up and begins anew, spinning tirelessly and aimlessly, unaware of the bottle of glass cleaner in the small cupboard below. The spider scuttles into a dark corner when footsteps enter the chamber once more. This time, there are several pairs, loud and clashing, different paces, different voices. The gray eyes remain fixed upon the window.

A child's whine, "I don't want to..."

and a parent's interruption, "But you have to..."

and a second parent's harried, hushed, "We'll buy you candy. Lots. Just come on."

The footsteps pause at the door. Crinkle of stiff clear cellophane. A throat clears. "Sandra?"

No answer.

"Sandra, we're here to see you... and we've brought Kaitlyn."

The spider peeks out from her hiding place, front legs waving cautiously in the air as if sensing for danger.

"Sandra, please... I know I haven't been the best daughter-in-law - "

"And I haven't been the greatest son, Ma - "

" - but we're here now, and hopefully we can put this all behind us."

Her young, gracious tone is left echoing in the silent chamber.

Kaitlyn is pushed forward by soft, sturdy hands. "I brought you some flowers," she grumbles dutifully, maliciously. Her voice is clipped

by desires for Saturday morning cartoons and Barbie dolls. She carefully places the bunch of flowers, still in their drugstore wrapper, onto the nightstand like a burnt offering and scampers back to her parent..

"Aren't you even going to thank her?" the man's voice demands of the silence.

"Or look at the flowers?" his wife's kinder voice pleads.

"Let me handle this," the man mutters audibly, angrily, to her. "Ma," he continues in the same voice, "I don't understand what this is all about. We tried. We really did. Are you really going to hold your grudge this long? I know we maybe didn't do like we were supposed to, but nobody's perfect." He fumbles with his shirtsleeve as his last word echoes, then, receiving no answer, continues. "Look, I'll say it: I'm sorry. There. You happy? I'm sorry. I'm sorry for the pain I caused you as a child, the anguish I caused you when I was a teenager. In fact, I'm sorry I was ever born to plague your life like you think I do!"

"Thomas!" admonishes his wife in a hiss.

Unfinished, he waves a hand to quiet her. "All I can say, Ma, is that I'm sorry. Okay? Now one of us is going to have to be mature enough to forgive the other. And that's all I'm going to say. We'll bring Kaitlyn back when you're in a better mood." He picks up Kaitlyn's hand and puts an arm around his wife's back. "Come on," he commands them. Their footsteps march down the hallway and the room itself seems to sigh in relief at their absence.

The spider edges slowly out of her dark hiding place as gracefully as her awkwardly-jointed legs will allow. She returns to the frenzy of web-spinning and enjoys the little cold breezes that squeak through the web-like cracks in the window. Line by line the web grows.

A drop of clear liquid lies pooled in the bottom of the left gray eye, the eye closest to the pillow.

Time passes.

The door of the room slowly begins to glide shut in the breeze but is stopped by a large leather boot. A male voice curses softly at the ineffectual doorstep and walks through the door. It shuts behind him with a muffled thump and click.

"Hello?"

Again, no answer

"I, ah, guess you're asleep."

Is the deep voice edged with a trembling nervousness? The spider in the window freezes and sneaks to her dark hiding-place unseen.

"Even if you are asleep, I gotta say what I gotta say." Throat clears, deep breath. "So... I, ah, know that I haven't really gotten around to visiting you lately... uh, at all. You see, I figured that Tom would be visit-

ing you a little more, you know, 'cuz he lives around here an' all and I've been in Joliet for the past ten years..."

Nervous, shaky breathing. The spider shivers in her hole.

Then the outburst, "Come on, Ma - you can't write me out of your will! I know I haven't been the best son, but for cryin' out loud! I need the money! You know how hard it is, settin' up a new life once you're out of the slammer! Show me some mercy, please..."

Her back, which faces him, is rigid and firm, if small.

"You're supposed to take care of me... you're supposed to care about me! You... you never visited me in jail... well, at least not after your accident... and I mean, not that I blame you for that..." He seems to be calming down, breathing evenly...

No. His voice climbs to a higher volume. "But writing me out of your will?! Why? Why do I deserve that? Did you write everyone out? Even Tom, the perfect one? Or just me, your... your miserable failure?" He pants slightly from the effort of self-accusation.

Change of tone. "Please, Ma... I did good, tried hard - you know I'm not perfect!... I even read some books in jail! Well, not the ones you sent me - I was never much into poetry... or the Bible, for that matter..."

The rain continues to drone in the silence.

"I even wrote a little..."

The spider continues to stare patiently.

"I wrote a poem about how being in jail made me feel. It was real clever, Harvey said... Started like this: I hate to live in this cell, Hate the color and texture and smell. With the stuff on the walls, And the gross shower stalls, I'd rather just go live in hell. Ha ha! ...Harvey says it's a limerick. He said it's not real academic but it had a good, uh, rhythm and stuff." He waits for praise or censure and, receiving none, continues awkwardly.

"Well, I only have a few more seconds... my parole officer's waiting outside for me. She was real nice to drive me up here. I just was hopin' to get to talk to you, visit you a little like you always wanted us to... not like Tom, I bet. He's the one you should write out of your will, not me. Nooooot me."

Seconds tick on the clock and a soft knocking is audible from the other side of the door.

"Well, that's Lucy, lettin' me know my time's up. But I'll try to visit again soon. You, uh, keep sleeping and I'll talk to you later. Maybe call you or somethin'."

Feet lumber clumsily but softly out of the room and the door closes.

A withered, white hand falls noiselessly from beneath the thick blanket. Gnarled old fingers are clutched tightly around a folded, yellowing piece of paper, through which elegant cursive writing has bled through

to the other side.

Gray eyes still locked with the window, gray storm still falls fast and desperate beyond. Dry thumb twitches over dry paper.

The little spider basks now in the filtered white light of the window.

When the door opens again it is with quiet caution.

"Hello?" comes the whisper.

No answer, except the small folded piece of paper's descent to the floor.

"Dr. Adams?" continues the hushed voice.

The door closes as soft footsteps tread closer to the still and silent form.

"Dr. Adams? I heard about your accident... they told all the students and we were going to organize a trip up here but it just never happened. You know how those things go..."

The spider begins to weave again.

"Um, anyway, Dr. Adams, I just wanted to come see you, see if you needed anything... I brought the anthology that was on your desk if you felt like reading at all. It had a bookmark in it so I assumed you were reading it."

A pause.

"Wow, I really don't know if you can hear me or not, but it's me, Delia Swanson, from class..."

Another pause.

"I guess not. Anyway, I'll just leave this book on your table. Someone brought you flowers, you know. Pretty ones. Lilies and mums and baby's breath and a tiny card. I'll read the card to you. It says, 'Get well soon, Grandma. Love, Kaitlyn.' Well, that's nice. I didn't know you were a grandma. My mom just became a grandma - my sister just had a baby - and she went crazy over it..." Delia's soft voice trailed off and meshed with the rain. "Well, I guess I'll get going now. I gotta catch a cab so I can make my train - oh, you've dropped something."

Delia walks over to where the folded piece of paper has fallen to the floor and the spider flees to its hiding-spot for the last time.



Wat Po, Bangkok
Shana Heller



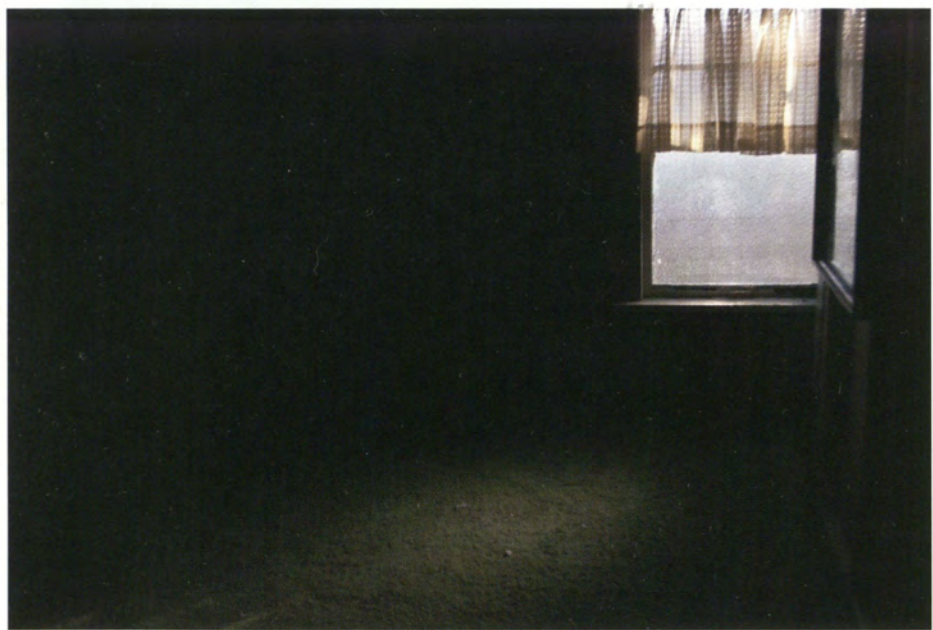
Ships and Sailors!
Lauren Schreiber



Neenah Morning
Laura Potratz



Untitled
Angela Fritz



Michigan
Shana Heller



Offerings, (Hong Kong)
Shana Heller



Sun on Blackwaterfoot, Scotland
Shana Heller

Professor's Corner

Introduction by Tracy Monson

Allison Schuette-Hoffman joined the English faculty at the beginning of this year as a professor teaching Intermediate Composition, Introduction to Creative Writing and English 200. Despite being new to the faculty, Schuette-Hoffman is no stranger to *the Lighter*, having published narratives in several issues as an undergraduate student. Although she experimented with other genres in her years at graduate school and continues to do so, her interest remains in creative non-fiction.

The genre of creative non-fiction is a relatively recent development in the literary world, including, among other forms, the personal essay, the memoir and the travel essay. All of these forms wrestle with the "real."

Schuette-Hoffman uses reality as an anchor as she explores the emotional truth of a situation through her writing. Just as a poet may experience more freedom when writing in traditional forms, she finds that constraints – such as remaining faithful to reality – create a place in which the imagination can flourish.

Fortunately for her readers, Schuette-Hoffman believes writing is a public art, one in which the artist should cultivate a balance between contributing to a current ethical conversation and focusing on aesthetic conventions. In the piece she gives us, Schuette-Hoffman does a remarkable job of striking such a balance as her honest and lovely narrative voice explores questions about judgments and human connections.

Bowl-a-thon

Allison Schuette-Hoffman

The Northland Bowl, inside, didn't look much different than any other bowling alley – gleaming lanes, racks of bowling balls, cubby holes stocked with shoes, the aerosol can of antibacterial spray poised on the counter. Perhaps then to distinguish the establishment, the owner had decided to embed the cab of a semi into the building's exterior. The big, blue Mack spelled attitude. It's bulky musculature hogged over half the sidewalk, leaving only two feet for me to help Buna negotiate her way to the entrance. Buna was blind. Having rarely spent time with the blind, I had no idea what to do. Buna didn't help me out. She forged on confidently, talking a mile a minute, cane ticking like a metronome. Perhaps I was out of my element, but for Buna this was just another day.

The same held true for Cary. Later, in the bowling alley, I walked with him toward our lanes. The path was plenty wide, and once Cary had his bearings, he strode on, engaging me in conversation. I tried to listen, but ahead a mother and her two sons quickly approached. She hustled them along, bending over the boys, doling out instructions. None of them saw us coming. I panicked. I could take Cary's elbow or I could blurt something out like *Incoming at ten o'clock*, but before I could decide anything, Cary's cane had tapped across the toe of one of the boy's shoes. The boy stopped and stared; the mother smiled at me crookedly and herded him on; my cheeks reddened. Cary apologized but didn't even pause. And why should he? There's nothing unusual about bumping into strangers.

*

I laughed when Steve first asked if I wanted to bowl for the blind. Turned out, my reaction was typical. I'd ask people to sponsor me in the bowl-a-thon, and they'd break into a grin. "But blind people can't bowl," they'd say, as they took the pen from my hand and filled in their donation. One friend laughed, caught herself, then added, "Isn't the irony kind of cruel?" I shrugged my shoulders and handed her the pen.

I really didn't know what I was getting into. I never asked Steve for the details. I knew I had to get donations, I knew the date, I knew we'd bowl for two hours, and I knew Steve was picking me up. Apparently, in the absence of details, I made a few assumptions as well. Most importantly, I assumed as my friends did that blind people don't bowl. I pictured myself and Steve maybe sharing a lane with two other sighted folks, maybe splitting an early afternoon pitcher, bantering to each other

whenever that one damn pin refused to fall, "Awww, you were robbed."

When we settled in at our lanes, I found myself next to Buna. I asked her about visiting Cary while we changed into our bowling shoes - her size two and my size nine. She told me that the bowl-a-thon capped off a weekend event for the local chapter of the National Federation of the Blind. As a long time friend of Cary, she'd flown in from Denver to participate. I told her I loved the Rockies and asked about her life there. In her lilting Indian accent, she told me she worked for a nonprofit organization that helped companies realize they could hire blind employees.

"They always say to me, 'But we don't have any jobs for blind people.' And I have to teach them that blind people don't need special jobs. With the right accommodations, we can do anything."

I tried to imagine this small woman, who didn't quite stand to the height of my shoulders, challenging a human resource manager or taking on a board of directors. In spite of her size, she certainly had the necessary daring. Her enthusiasm and charm bloomed far beyond the stature of her body, extending at least as far as the reach of her cane. In fact, I felt somewhat overwhelmed. Conversation with Buna left me breathless as if we had just hiked a section of the Continental Divide. Now, she wanted me to teach her to bowl, and I worried whether I was up to the task.

I wasn't. Buna remained patient as I failed over and over in my instructions. I kept wanting to rely on sight in order to explain what Buna needed to do - how she needed to hold the ball, how she couldn't cross the line with her toes, how she was aiming for a set of pins at the end of a long lane. I especially excelled in my description of the latter. "The lane's really... well... long. And there are these pins, see. Ten of them at the end. They're in the shape of a triangle, with the top pointing at you."

"Okay," Buna said, smiling and nodding. I had a funny feeling she was simply being polite.

I wanted to stand up and just show her how it was done. I wanted someone to come along and tell me how to be with the blind. I wanted to run and hide in the bathroom.

Up at the lane, it suddenly struck me the best approach for Buna might be the Granny Roll. She laughed at this odd sounding name, and her sense of humor gave me the courage to continue. By impulse, I wanted to stand behind Buna and wrap my arms around her so that I could place my hands over hers and move her through the motions. But such a gesture seemed too intimate, something you would do with a child or with an acquaintance when flirting.

I had never thought of myself as someone afraid of touch. In fact, when I tutored students in writing, I often put my hand reassuringly on their arm or shoulder. How was this different? Well, for one thing, I

didn't use touch to do the actual tutoring. Instead, I used it as an emotional gesture, to reassure the student that she wasn't alone and that I had confidence in her. For the actual instruction, I relied on language and sight, two quite cerebral activities. To wrap my arms around Buna would be to teach sensually, a form of communication I reserved for lovers. I began to wonder if the blind unsettle the sighted because the blind so obviously meet the world first through the body and then through the mind. Sighted people have learned to compartmentalize the senses, especially touch. We reserve it for special occasions. Someone like Buna demonstrates another way of being and that kind of difference always unsettles.

*

In the course of the afternoon's bowling, a local news team – one reporter and one cameraman – joined our crew. They spent a good deal of time in the corner interviewing folks, Steve among them. Later, on the ride home, Cary asked Steve about being interviewed. “Did you mention the G.F.T.E.O.?” he asked. That's when I realized how Steve and Cary knew each other. The G.F.T.E.O. was an organization of Penn State instructors trying to form a union for graduate assistants and fixed term employees. Apparently, that's how Steve even learned about the bowl-a-thon. Cary had asked the G.F.T.E.O. to co-sponsor the event alongside the local chapter of the National Federation of the Blind.

“Yeah,” Steve replied, “A couple times in fact. But strangely enough,” and here he paused to glance at Cary in his rearview mirror, “the reporter didn't seem interested in pursuing a story about our unionizing efforts.” Cary, of course, couldn't see Steve's glance, but he could hear it – the pause, the pitch of sarcasm. “In fact, all the reporter seemed to care about was what I thought of blind people bowling. Guess he plans on taking the 'personal interest' angle.”

I scoffed along with the others. Not long before, I had witnessed the cameraman filming one possible lead-in to the story. The reporter, crouching by the carousel where the bowling balls emerge, had looked sincerely at the camera. The tilt of his chin promised a story of personal triumph; the pinch of his eyes pleaded for sympathy. I could tell he tried earnestly to visualize his audience, to connect with Margaret, say, from Boalsburg, who'd just put her hamburger casserole in the oven and now nestled in the corner of her couch, slipped feet up on the coffee table to ease the pressure on her varicose veins. She had the news on but also flipped through *People*. If he was going to get her attention, he had to catch her heart.

I don't know about Margaret, but the reporter's appeal didn't do

much for me. "These folks have come out today to do more than just raise money. They've come to raise awareness." That was the gist of it anyway. Pretty generic. Still, if the sentiment was clichéd, the idea was correct. Certainly, Buna and Cary had dramatically challenged my previous awareness. But now, hearing Steve's story of being interviewed, I had to wonder about the reporter. By presenting the bowl-a-thon as this weekend's "Local Boy Saves Drowning Puppy," he reduced its meaning, its weight. He perpetuated the idea that blind people are special people who deserve a special place in our hearts.

I heard again the way I had spoken to Buna when trying to explain how to bowl. My vocal chords had strained unnaturally till they ached; I sounded like a preschool teacher patronizing his pupil. At first, I justified it-teaching requires you to break things down, so doesn't it make sense that your voice would break too? But then, I had to admit, if I was teaching a sighted stranger how to bowl, my tone of voice wouldn't change. In fact, I'd probably laugh at the beginner's mistakes because teasing her would produce camaraderie and put the beginner at ease. Instead, I had tried to protect Buna. I thought if she didn't get it right the first time, she'd get discouraged. I had acted as if her ego was especially fragile. But Buna needed neither my protection nor my help. I may have introduced her to the Granny Roll, but that was it. The rest of the afternoon, Buna had bowled on her own. She picked her ball out of the many crowding the carousel and, without hesitation, advanced upon the lane.

By considering the blind *special*, we sighted folks conveniently marginalize them. They are different than us; we are normal; they are deviant. Our language reflects this marginalization. In it, we associate blindness with weakness. We say, *the light nearly blinded me*, and mean we've been debilitated, made less whole. We say, *handicapped*, and believe that nature has stacked the odds against the blind. But blindness in and of itself is not a handicap. Buna and Cary inhabit their bodies every day. To them, the body isn't deviant; it's what they know. The challenges they face arise not from nature, then, so much as from culture. In other words, the sighted assume our way is the only way, and we organize society by our needs and standards. The blind teach us, however, that there is no norm. If they navigate the world through the immediacy of their bodies and we navigate through the abstraction of our minds, these are two equally valid alternatives. The blind don't want *special* treatment. They don't want our indulgence or tolerance or pity. They want us to respect their way of being in the world on the same terms as we respect our own. If we did that, then our society would be organized in such a way that everyone would have what she needed to participate.

*

On the way out, I held the door open for Cary. His cane ticked against the doorframe and then against the side of my leg as he walked through. We stood in the vestibule to the bowling alley, no longer inside, not yet outside.

"Thank you, Allison."

"You're welcome, Cary," I replied, imitating his playful formality.

He stopped then and turned his head toward me. "You know," he said, "I think you and I should spend more time getting to know each other. You're cute."

I laughed. "Now, Cary. How do you know that? You've never seen me."

"Don't need to. I can tell by your voice."

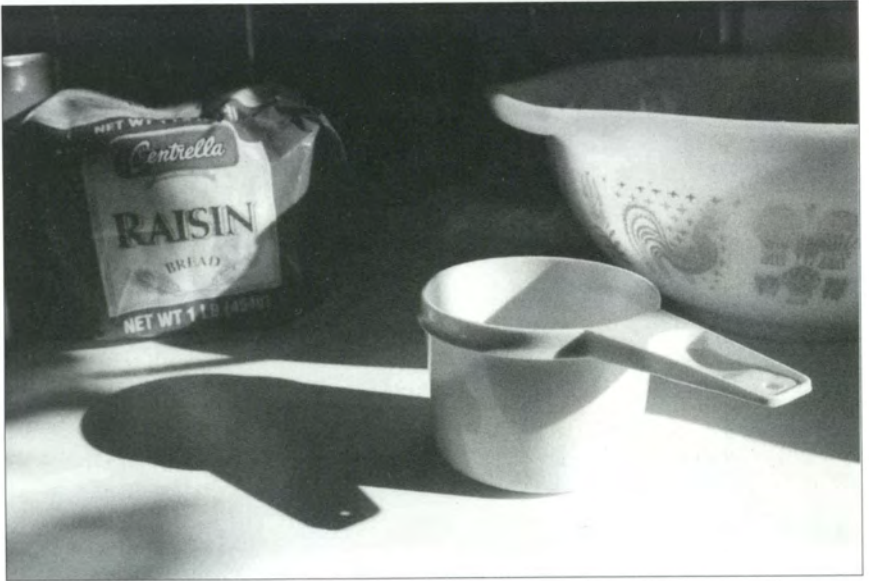
Before I could say another word, Cary pushed through the second set of doors and stepped onto the sidewalk. I stood, in slight shock, caught once again by my own assumptions. As a sighted person, I had learned to measure attraction visually. But here was Cary, flirting with me, and - like everyone else - calling me cute. I have always hated that label and chalked it up to my round face, its circularity and smoothness not allowing for the complexity and distinction that a word like "sexy" tries to capture. How strange, then, to learn that my voice conveyed cuteness as well.

Flirtation, apparently, does not require special accommodation.

© Allison Schuette



Check Mate
Carolyn Stypka



Crumb Stash
Melanie Schaap

Contributor's Notes

Meredith Albertin

I'm from Zionsville, Indiana. I am a history major. I enjoy doing photography for fun.

Ralph Asher is a senior physics major from far-off western Valparaiso (he regularly runs from home, around the campus, and back in under 40 minutes). If you got the Hank Williams, Sr. references in "No Sorrow in Sight," your musical tastes alone make you awesome.

Megan Beaver is a Junior TV and Radio Major, and Individualized Photography Minor. She is from Columbia Heights, Minnesota. This is her first publication in the Lighter. Her submission is dedicated to her parents, Morgan and Kathy, and her best friend Jenna who have been her inspiration and encouragement to pursue her dreams.

Evan Scott Bryson

I owe thanks to A.J. Bryson and Tayler Ittel for allowing me to crib and then embellish their e-mails for two articles in "The Book of Love."

Angela Fritz is a Senior meteorology major. She is planning on attending grad school beginning Fall 2006 and intends on continuing her photography education while she receives her masters. Most of her photographic interests include urban life and industrial landscape as well as the role that industry plays in surrounding communities. Her favorite places to photograph are downtown Chicago, Gary and East Chicago, Indiana.

Cat Gurinsky

I'm a senior Chinese & Japanese Studies Major graduating in May. I'm also a member of Alpha Phi Omega and Kappa Kappa Gamma. When not in class, I am most commonly found at the EIS Help Desk where I work. An interesting fact about this photograph is that it was taken right outside of the Christopher Center where the purple flowers grow. I caught this mantis eating a bee and couldn't resist taking many pictures of him! This was his glare at me once he was done with his meal. I'm a photographer as a hobby primarily, though I often shoot as favors for friends, and I have never actually had a formal class in photography!

Liz Hanson is a junior art and English major with a concentration in painting. The Independent Living series explores the unnatural juxtaposition of food and electronics in cramped spaces.

Sara Jackson

Devoted theologian, age 25.

I write as the spirit moves me - no rhyme, no reason.

Alaina Kennedy

I am currently attending Valpo Law School. I am originally from Kansas City, Missouri, and I did my undergrad work at Missouri State in Springfield. While there, I studied creative writing and political science. I try to combine the two and pull subject matter for my poetry from the other subjects that I study.

Tracy Monson and Melanie Schaap are chaos-creating banshees. Their interests include chaos creation as well as bansheeism. They would like to thank partners in past love affairs and Melanie's plant, Shelley. Tracy would like to note that her poem "Sunday Afternoons At Grandma's House" is a meditation on the emotions surrounding the choice of abortion.

Laura Potratz enjoys experiencing music, art, theater and the understanding that comes with traveling. When not building or playing pipe organs, she is outside with her camera and/or bike enjoying the unscathed parts of the world. Her favorite color is green.

Christina Ramirez is spunky as spunky can be. Her poem "Stage Perfections" was inspired by being backstage at the Joffrey ballet when she sang for *The Nutcracker*.

Katie Resel is an art museum studies major, and is a senior at Valpo. Photography is one of her favorite artistic pursuits. This photo was taken at the Valparaiso Sunflower Festival, where much frolicking and delicious beauty were to be had.

Holly Sagarsee

I'm a sophomore art major with a concentration in photography and a minor in German. I transferred from Indiana University and this is my first semester at VU. I love making black and white photographs

because the lighting can be so elegant and the prints so rich. I plan to go on to graduate school to earn a MFA. Mostly I hope to pursue a fine arts career, and plan to teach photography at the college level, which I would also enjoy.

Sarah R. Werner is a senior English major with a focus in creative writing. She is currently the intern for Valpo's own Project on Civic Reflection and copy editor for *The Torch*, and may also be found fretting over grad school applications. She is also currently searching for possible patrons who would pay her vast sums of money to write for a living. She laughs at her little joke and dreams on.

Jaquelyn Zuniga is a senior public relations major with a Spanish minor. She enjoys writing poetry with her free time. Her poem entitled "Vanity of a Woman Removed" is a poem she wrote for her poetry writing class, and is about an old woman that has a difficult time accepting her age. She spends countless hours at her vanity while at the same time, vanity takes a hold of her. Jaquelyn will graduate in December this year and hopes to become a public relations professional in the fashion industry.

Lauren Schreiber refuses to be put in alphabetical order. BOMB THE SYSTEM. Her eyes are bloodshot red. She is stoked to be done with this semester's Lighter. And her flesh *is* a great poem.

the **Lighter**

Fall 2005

Volume fifty-one Issue one



the **Lighter**