

Spring 1994

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# *The Lighter*

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*Spring 1994*

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# *The Lighter*

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*VALPARAISO UNIVERSITY*

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**Editors:**

*Carolyn Blair and Lisa M. Montelpasse*

**Faculty Advisor:**

*John Ruff*

**Literary Selection Staff:**

*Tonya Albregts, Cindy Belletini, Matt Christian,  
Jim Ehrenberg, Lynne Flowers, Val Foltz,  
Heather Gorman, Kate Kitzmann, Joe Lehner,  
Christine Mueller, Julie Sievers, Sara Steinbrueck,  
Heather Swanson, Lori Van Every, Kate Weizel,  
and Shannon Welch*

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*If anything is misspelled, it's Sara's fault.*

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# *Rita Signorelli~Pappas*

## *PREFACE*

I used to have a neighbor who insisted on calling me in the morning while I was working in my study. I had asked her not to call then, but she ignored my request, assuming that because I was not working outside the home, I was always free. When she would finally realize that I didn't want to talk, she would say in an irritated tone, "Well. I guess I'll just have to let you go back to whatever it is that you're doing in there."

What I was doing there in my study was writing. Once or twice I had tried explaining this to her, but like so many people, she didn't think of writing as real work. I had been careful not to mention what it was that I was writing—fiction and poetry—because that would have sealed her doubt.

I think of writing as an artisan's work, for a writer gives shape to his or her vision as a potter molds a clay object on the wheel. As the wheel's revolutions gain in speed, the potter watches and guides the emerging artifact through a series of quicksilver changes until it achieves an attractive, satisfying form. And that is very like the work of a writer, whose wheel is not a touchable apparatus but the invisible, swift accelerations of his or her imagination. Writers must have very strong imaginations, powerful enough to find the voice and images that will enable them to craft the contours of their waking dreams.

Unfortunately, there is no course college students can take that will instruct them in the mysterious art of learning how to use their imaginations. The making of literature is an unknown, infinite road, and if we choose to follow it, we will find the trip exciting but bewildering, for vision arrives before language. We then find ourselves living in a strange, haunted state, aroused by a confusion of beats and rhythms for which we have, at first, no words. It is an eerie, unfamiliar sensation—this pulse of wordlessness—yet as we gain ease and practice in living with it, we feel our confidence beginning to expand. We learn to sustain ourselves, for long stretches of time if necessary, on the glimmers of our vision and the queer, insistent beats that accompany it until slowly and fastidiously we discover an arrangement of words to fit the beats and embody the incandescent dream.

Today, more than ever, we need strong imaginations not just to write poetry and fiction but to imagine a way to continue writing. We live in a culture that tends to devalue artistic endeavor, especially when it is not commercially successful. The truth is that although we may come to regard poetry and fiction writing as a vocation, we cannot depend upon it to provide us with a livelihood.

Then why should we keep writing? Because it invigorates the sensibility and heals the soul. Because when lovers disappoint or misfortunes multiply, new visions always await us on the imagination's beguiling road. If we stay on that road and travel it with all our intelligence and all our love, the journey will save us.

I once attended a lecture in which the speaker advised his audience that lit-



erature—specifically, poetry—did not save lives. He was wrong, of course. Writers are nothing if not survivors, and readers turn to works of fiction and poetry in search of the blueprints for their own survival. Every serious writer passionately believes that language is an emancipator, for it contains the secret code that spells salvation. A life spent in the effort to crack this enchanted code will set us free.

*Rita Signorelli-Pappas has had poetry published in a number of journals. She has new fiction forthcoming in Farmer's Market and Voices in Italian Americana.*

## *Lynne Flowers*

---

### *A PICTURE OF MY MOTHER IN THE SEVENTIES*

The divorcée  
with short, tightly permed hair  
leans on angled elbows,  
Hunched  
over the dining room table,  
white bra showing through  
a thread-bare purple sweater.  
Cigarette in hand,  
she is  
poised to drag  
with dark lipsticked mouth.

I suck in her tired face  
along with stale breath  
knowing the whites of my own eyes are  
yellowing  
like my teeth.  
My skin is winter pale,  
the sallow  
of olive-skinned women in January.  
I rub her image with a once  
six-year-old finger,  
one of a set she would have cradled  
with bleach-burnt, food-stained hands,  
and note the similarities.

Same dark circles.  
Same nervousness.  
Same bad habits.  
My mother, myself  
Hard and beautiful  
Like two brown nipples  
shriveled in the cold.

---

## HOLY SATURDAY

Beloved,  
I lie awake tonight  
while you slumber,  
An old woman, an older woman.  
I 'neath down and flannel,  
You 'neath soil and snow.  
And it is my skin that is goose-pimpled.  
Cold enough to bring tears to my eyes.  
Grief tears to wash your hair,  
once long and golden  
which I would brush and plait.  
I will not sink to dreams  
With you sunk in grave.

*Why do you seek the living among the dead?*  
But she is my mother.  
I suckled at those breasts,  
The age-swollen stomach  
was once life-swollen with  
eight children,  
Hands to bake bread, sew quilts  
hold a rosary, paused in prayer,  
waiting.  
The flesh melts away,  
The beads remain.

Mama,  
It is my turn to wait for you  
as you awaited my return  
with husband, children, grandchildren  
for Sundays and chicken dinners.  
It is my turn to care for you,  
Sprinkle the ground with flower petals,  
purple orchids  
feet above a pale pink coffin,  
And keep a vigil  
For new life.

# *Sara Steinbrueck*

---

## *AT THE EDGE*

Mapped mountains exist  
in startling serenity here, my silhouette  
infancy itself against aged  
thrusts of stone. When I top  
the rise and come, greeted  
by stark white windmills,  
to the crest, I see  
such pleasant decadence as the edge  
of the earth can afford. No space  
other than this; no light lingering  
elsewhere beyond this glacial valley, draining  
deep through heather  
to the foot of the mountain.  
I am alone, no companions  
to fill my sight, my eyes brimming  
with distance—the world,  
if flat, would be bowing down, outspread  
from these granite soulless folds,  
ancients silent, offering only rock, only all  
contained here with emptiness.

---

## LANGUAGE OF DEAN

With a start unsatisfactory, you greet  
Val and me. "It's too fucking early."  
Stupid American, we groan, stepping  
out into Innsbruck, looking  
for Salzburg's train, 4:30 a.m.  
Avoid the crass, look  
for the quiet, but you follow us  
into our compartment, discover  
we're the Americans, you a Canadian.  
"What do you know  
of Canadian poets?" you query, prying  
tired eyes open. With politeness  
I avoid sleep and converse, Val dropping  
off quickly in her corner. Not much,  
I admit, and face my first one.

Day rises with your dialogue. Austrian alps slip  
into view under velvet morning, rubbing  
light across cows and dark, wet grass, saturating  
minds with color. A homecoming  
to a place never seen, I wonder  
about my name, my family.

Val stirs from her sleep  
as we talk, stares out  
into deep green of morning, purple  
shadows, orange autumn.  
She is finally at peace  
after Italy, so dry, chaotic, its incessant  
brightness. She leans pale Nordic  
face upon chill of glass and senses  
an approach to home  
akin to mine.

Since that trip you've contacted me  
once, asking "where is your writing?  
send samples to me,"  
recalling the morning, forgetting  
my name is not Val.



---

## *CALLED*

Echoing whistles wail  
throughout this silent  
house tonight, bringing  
memories of Frisco trains running  
by former homes.

The call opens roads  
in my mind, freedom  
along worn paths I've known, down  
the length and back  
to here, Midwest summer  
evening. I am contained  
by this place, by asphalt  
and corn fields, with siren  
calls of locomotives streaking  
through night sounds to my window,

open to their wafting lure. Surrounded  
in my bed, I long to  
join the migration  
across continents, elope.  
The line here arcs  
around this town, its wail sounding  
continually within earshot, stretching  
on to places beyond.



## *Rhett Luedtke*

---

### *A PECULIAR WAY TO HAVE FUN*

Crouching, painted like a tree in waiting,  
my hair strung with twigs like knots  
blending my body into the brush,  
I, nymph-like, slide naked belly  
beneath the old oak root, and pause  
to blink away the leaves.

Mud sucks my body to the ground  
like a mother nursing my spirit  
within ten thousand years of humus,  
and I wait, thirsting in  
the presence of the forest.

My boots, cracked and strong  
with experience tuck my army pants  
within its sleeves, crushing ferns  
beneath limbs, and I pause  
to reveal my demonic companion.  
Waiting in silence,  
a spotted prey comes to drink  
and satisfy the stream. God-like.  
I aim the piece of war opening  
the silence with a roar from beneath  
my hands dropping another  
animal to the ground. Rising,  
slipping, sliding from beneath my tree  
I scream the primal sound, reverberating  
throughout the forest's agony.

# *Ali Mohajer*

---

## *MY INHERITANCE*

A little while ago, I was asked to read a beautiful piece of writing by Scott Russell Sanders on the inheritance of tools. Although much was made of some implements of carpentry, I believe the tools he was speaking of were more ethereal, and the iron hammerhead and well oiled chisel blades were only vessels, anchors, to hold the real tools passed down from his grandfather and used by his father and him. My inheritance will probably be quite different, and the icons for it less tangible. No wonder, because my father never showed me how to build a wall, and when I was a boy, my grandfather and I would take long walks together to see what there was to see in the world.

As I was growing up, I learned that the ring and the watch, along with the walking stick and the burden of completing missed prayers and fasts are passed down to the oldest son. The hammers and chisels stayed in the family tool chest, where they could be gotten to to drive a nail in the wall for a new picture frame. Of course my father's father wasn't an extremely handy man. The most important tool he used was probably his eyeglasses. The same goes for my mother's father. Accountants and judges don't do much carpentry. My mother's mom didn't do much of anything except sit around and act wise. Not too many tools needed for being right all the time, but whatever they were, I'm sure my mother got them. From my father's mother though, I have a little jar that used to hold medicine to keep her blood pressure down. It's faded blue on the outside, with the writing barely visible. Propranolol. Inside, there are a thimble, some buttons, and a pin-cushion made from a few scraps of cloth that still smell like she did. I never really use that thimble, but it's good to know that it's there. A little gadget my grandmother used to use to keep from pricking herself when she sewed buttons for those of us who couldn't do it for ourselves, or those of us who just wanted her to pass her loving hands on our clothes and then our faces.

When I think about my grandmother though, I don't think about the things she did, but the way she touched my life and became a part of me. I think about the way she smiled when she watched me offer a peach from the orchard to a passerby. The crop was magnificent that year, and I was bringing her the roundest, reddest, most magnificent ones I'd found that day, with the finest one on top. She saw the stranger take it and she smiled down at me from her kitchen window. My inheritance from her is that smile I see so often in my mind. The heirloom thimble can stay in a shoe box to surprise me the next time I move.

When I think about my heritage, I think of a small dusty village in Iran, in the mountains to the west of Tehran; where the winters are bitter cold and the summers are pleasant; where my grandmother watched her mother kill a wolf on their porch one lean winter; where my father used to tag along when his older brothers went hunting; and where I know every turn in every little canyon that the moun-



tain streams have carved from the exposed bedrock. This is a place of familiar mystery, where the oddly shaped boulder lying on the side of the road to the next village is supposed to be where my great-great-grandfather used to sit to rest when he was on his way out to check on his fields, and where I've dug up old pottery and glass, mortar and river stones, even a few bones, from a hilltop that commands a view of the surrounding land. The hill is called "ghal'eh", or 'fort', for the structure that my father's aunt claims to have seen when she was a girl. The village folk tell stories of buried gold and messengers from Hassan-i-Sabbah, and whisper that so and so found a cache of old swords and spears that he sold for a tidy sum. The foundations I unearthed seemed to be buried too deep to have been exposed only two generations ago.

There's a story here, and I like to tell it sometimes, not because I'm proud of it, and not because it has a moral, but simply because it's the story of how my family sprang from the dry earth of Taleghan. My father's uncle told me this story, not in a day, but over tea and many long summer afternoons. He didn't tell it to me straight, and I don't think he thought he was telling a single story. He's something of a writer himself, and I saw a copy of a satire on the family that earned him many cold hellos at family affairs. There are lost tombstones that he found on paths I've never walked, forgotten etymologies and stories he was told long ago, all between the lines, and every little tale added new color to the portrait of my history. I can't tell it like he did, but I've done some walking and some digging that my grandchildren will hear about if they want.

Hundreds of years ago, three mutinous generals fled from Nadir Shahe Afshar's army and found a place in the mountains cold and unpleasant enough to feel safe in. Whether this was before or after they plundered India I don't know, but in good military form, they set up camp and named a few villages after themselves and had the people who already lived there build them big houses. Although the folk of Taleghan are known to be gentle and literate, there must have been some who didn't welcome my ancestors as honored guests. I say this because I know a little field not too far from my ancestral home called 'Gardanzanan'. It means 'place of beheading'.

The generals metamorphosed over the generations into powerful Mullahs. Clergymen who could read the Koran as well as any and cite the words of the apostles and sages so that their villeins would know why Mullagha (fathersir) could take three wives but they shouldn't. They struck fear in the hearts of men, and were more powerful than the generals because they ruled with the power of God and not just the sword. I've seen old, old drawings of these turbaned and robed village leaders. Some of them look so much like my own father that I can almost tell how they would have sounded if I had been there to hear them speak.

The mullahs held the land and added to it, and just a few generations ago, they spawned a brood of malcontents. Sons who wanted to go out into the changing world and become generals, playboys, judges, writers and accountants. They never really left the village no matter how far away they moved, but they all managed at least to die outside of it. My grandfather the accountant, though, asked to be taken back to be buried next to his mother on a hill near our home. Its a nice

spot really, under a mulberry tree where birds and children visit. I wouldn't mind being buried there. The epitaph on his mother's grave is a verse he wrote himself, and it could be translated to say this:

*Beneath this earth and stone unmoving lid,  
Lies not a woman, lives an angel hid.*

I wonder what my stone will say.

The next generation, engineers and doctors, scholars and professionals, managed to set down roots outside the village, and spread their seed across Europe and the West, and here I am. Sometimes I miss the tiny village behind the mountains and I wonder if I could go back there to live. I know I've taken most of what I needed to take from that patch of land, but I wonder if my children will ever roam the hills and bathe in the river with their cousins, or if the old graves will be visited and the old houses kept in good repair. There's a power in knowing your roots that can't come from knowing just your neighborhood, and an assurance that can't come from the achievements of just a lifetime.

There are so many little things I could call my inheritance. Trinkets and baubles are lost though, and old stories aren't necessarily true. In the end I'm glad for my name, for my mother tongue, and for the memories of summer walks in the canyons carved by cold mountain streams.



# *Alice Boswell*

---

## *REARVIEWMIRROR*

I'm sick of driving and  
I hate this highway everyone drives  
too fast. And I'm sick of you  
in my rearviewmirror  
your face in my face  
that smug grin  
as you sit on my bumper  
Creep into my back seat.  
I slam foot to pedal and watch  
your eyes  
glow,  
dim,  
disappear.  
And this damn radio throbs loud  
music like screams twists out of speakers  
to my ears, my brain,  
it's in my lungs,  
I can't breathe.  
Just you and me and this stupid  
highway  
and this music that won't shut up  
and I don't need this violence  
and anger and humiliation.  
And I don't need to be  
flat on my back  
on the back seat  
in the back of a car  
in the back of my mind  
Rearviewmirror.

## *Kate Weizel*

---

### *BESIDE A FOUNTAIN IN LAUREL*

She looks so innocent—  
the long curled blonde hair,  
the small frame,  
the small hands  
grasped tight  
around her treasure.

She begins to cry  
as she is fiercely attacked.  
She doesn't understand  
the symbolism;  
she doesn't know  
what she has done.

She is called a thief—  
she has misbehaved—  
she has stolen  
the dreams  
of others.

She sighs,  
and walks to the edge  
of the fountain.  
Slowly, she opens  
her hands  
and releases a handful  
of copper coins  
to their home beneath  
the shallow water.



## Joe Lehner

---

*dear Lighter, I discovered this scribbled in a book from Moellering library, on the blank page in the front that preceeds the title page—*

Please listen—do you know how long i've listened without shouting something, over chips and the straw-stabbed cup, with the plastic lid? I hear and it chills my earrings—it's that static, it's that dead. I look at the air we breathe. It is, exactly, a thing—we can touch it. It's real, it is there—I handle those things, so gently, that I never before knew existed, as things. Just like Christmas break. Like May graduation. Like Friday night. Not like how was break, not like how was graduation, not like how was Friday night. Friday night was not. It faded as quickly as the question, except for a randomly lucky few. they had moments, not events. if you did not discover, it was not a moment. if you were not surprised, it was not a moment. Moments can happen, just like the empty space in the bag between the sun-chips. that significant. did you feel? it was a moment, then... Beer does not count. Nor does hiking. No external things, like a good grilled cheese, can create moments... No matter what the weather is, we wear warm winter coats, Russian parkas from Siberia, to protect us from badness, or a spilled cup of coke. Every so often, there is an opening, a gap between where it buttons, and there a moment sneaks in. Remember Otis Woodard? He had no coat. He had love, and a few buttons to protect him. All those moments... Look around, at all the parkas. It's what we do. What does our own parka look like, on the inside? It is very difficult to tell. We have to open them to look inside. I sure as hell haven't looked in mine. I pull off my earrings, and tear off my bracelets. They fall to the ground, like my thoughts, discarded. Like me. I curl on the floor, next to them, and go back to sleep...

## *Kirsten J. Lee*

---

### *THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY TRAIL OF TEARS*

"Can you help me, please??" she pleaded relentlessly with me to come with her. "My boy has just hung himself, what do I do? Oh my God, help me! He's turned blue, and not breathing. Call the paramedics, they will never get here, last time this happened to my neighbor, they took over an hour to arrive. An hour is too long, he will be dead. Please, Kirsten can you help me, it's my boy, he's dying. Where are the paramedics? They don't care what happens to us!"

I felt her weight as she collapsed in my arms. Numb from this woman's pain, I had no response, I simply held her and waited for what seemed like forever for the paramedics to arrive. Sobbing, without prompting from me, she explained why, oh why, her thirteen year old child would be driven to take his life when it was just beginning.

"My boy did not know how to be a man in a White man's world. He just did not know how to defend his right to be. He could not survive in your world. None of our children can!! Do you see what you have done to us? Oh my God, my son!!"

Still paralyzed with the shock of what I was witnessing, no response came from me. I listened to the voices around me.

"This is the ninth hanging suicide of adolescent boys on our reservation this year." This was not a big reservation—maybe a few hundred people.

"If the alcohol, poverty, or cultural rape does not kill them off, then despair takes their life, and no one, no one can tell them that things are going to get better. To say this would be to say an evil lie." These words came from the only white man on the reservation. He owned the trading post, the only store for miles around.

Voices were whirling around me. I was in such shock that I no longer could distinguish who was owner to each thought. I had met this woman earlier here at the trading post that day. Her kind smile had welcomed me onto the reservation. The trading post is the only type of gathering place on this reservation. Here, the Navahos trade jewelry, or other crafts they make, for food and gasoline. Since the Indians have little to no economic resources, they trade whatever they can to provide for their most basic needs.

This reservation is right outside Chaco Canyon National Park at the top of New Mexico. The Navaho reservation is quite vast, all of the land equaling the size of the state of West Virginia. Unfortunately, their land is checker-boarded due to all the resources that our government will not give up rights to. What this means is that many of the smaller Navaho reservations are virtually cut off from the capital of the Navaho Nation which is found in Window Rock, AZ. The money, health services, decent schools, and other public benefits are not able to be dispersed to many of the Navahos. This particular reservation I was on was strick-



en with poverty and most all the homes had no running water or electricity. These homes were of two types, either rusted beat-up trailers or the primitive traditional home of the Navaho people—the hogan.

The hogan is built not only as a residence, but with many special attributes to make it a religious ceremonial place as well. They are six-sided, built from materials of the earth—wood, dirt, and stones. The doorway faces the east, which is the gateway to illumination and welcomes the sun. The hogans are circular, with a dirt floor, and a fire in the center representing the breath of God. Here, in a hogan, is where my friend Lara and I were invited to spend the night.

The Navaho people are also called the “Dine,” which means “the people.” A cluster of hogans often represents many generations. (On our trip we were also on pueblo reservations where the Indians live in pueblos—adobes with many added on rooms, as families grow more extended.) I learned that in the Navaho language there is no word for religion as they make no distinction between the sacred and the secular. To them holiness is in all things. We found in our travels that there are four things that the Native Americans hold to be true.

1. Humans exist in community with all living things. The most important virtue is to be in good relation with all things.

2. In the eyes of America, we, (Native Americans), like all wildlife, are extinct or soon will be.

3. All American Indians are invisible in the minds of America; women are non-existent.

4. We are ever aware that we are occupied peoples who have no military power on earth ready to liberate us.

(taken from the book SpiderWoman's Granddaughter (9), purchased on my trip at the request of a Navaho elder)

Earlier on I had made friends with a Navaho, named Leroy, working at an Apache casino at a place called “Inn of the Gods.” Leroy had checked me over silently, but carefully, and then said, “You are a good soul, I can trust you, you will not harm our people.” Out of this came a friendship of sorts. He, in the course of the evening, let me in on the customs of his people. To begin with, it is rude to ask questions, one is to avoid questions and rather use all of your senses to obtain information. Hard lesson for me to learn!! Yet, I waited patiently, in silence, allowing Leroy to share what he wanted, not asking for more. He specifically told how much one can learn in silence, acutely using all of your senses to make inferences.

Leroy told me that when I go to his reservation, (which we never got to), I should take a gift to anyone I may visit. He gently informed me that the Dine people are offended if I look them in the eye. This is considered intrusive, and no firm handshakes should be given. That whole evening Leroy shared much, but it was given in spurts, cautiously and with many silences. From childhood on, Navahos are taught not to talk too much, be loud, or share much with strangers. This type of behavior is showing off. No physical contact can be found except with the most intimate of relations. Anywhere in the Navaho nation, you must ask permission to photograph any of the people or even the land.



Leroy's story was one I heard many times on my trip. He was greatly pained to not be on his reservation with his family. However, there is no employment or ways of providing for his family's survival. Leroy works 16 hours a day at minimum wage jobs. The money he makes is then sent back to the reservation to help his mom, his sister, and his wife and child. Victim of our welfare system, Leroy's wife would lose her aid if he were to live at home. So, 14 hours away from his family, without any mode of transportation, he is severed from the ones he loves. As his only connection, he produces the pictures out of his wallet to show us the faces of his loved ones.

He also shares with me that he is deeply concerned with his mother's health. On the reservation they have no heat and the nights get very cold. Somehow, I didn't understand why or what happened, but the people did not have health care, or access to it. Leroy's uncle is a medicine man. Leroy tells me of healings he has seen with the use of crystals, eagle feathers, and herbs. He explains that there are many different types of Indian medicine and that there is a hierarchy of power and greatness to the type of medicine one is blessed with. However, he again tells me that it's not enough. His people need our medicine as well and do not have access to it.

He tells me that his daughter is failing math in the public school that she is sent to far away from her home. Leroy says that many of the Indian children are in the Learning Disability programs and not always able to get the special attention they need. Leroy believes that he is stupid and gave it to his daughter. I was pained that Leroy has internalized what we have told him he is. Never mind that we have indoctrinated the Native Americans into believing that they are child-like, unable to have control over their own lives. It is only because of the benevolent paternal white father that they have any life at all!

"Education has been the most powerful tool of conquest for White America. The intellectual apartheid is the father of political apartheid. What did the educational process look like?" Quote from book recommended to me by the Navaho man mentioned earlier.

"Instruction in literacy was accomplished through humiliation, beatings, and isolation in huts, dark closets, and tiny prisons. When students are force-taught, half-starved, dipped in sheep-dip, shorn, redressed, renamed, forbidden to see their families for years on end, given half-rotted and barely digestible alien food, shamed and humiliated publicly, forbidden to speak their native language, and indoctrinated to believe that their loved ones are naked, murderous, shameful savages, hardly on par with beasts" (18).

What could I say to this gentle soul to ease his shame for not measuring up to some standard of what he had to accomplish to be truly a respectable person? He kept repeating that he works 2 jobs, 16 hours a day, so proud that he works as hard as any white man. Leroy, you do not need my approval. I am so sorry that my people have made it such that you have to prove your right to be. I am sorry that your daughter and wife are denied a father because of government regulations. And I am sorry that you carry such a heavy pain weighing on your soul, as a result of being separated from your relations. Things have not changed



since the time of the Trail of Tears all that much. We still are systematically separating you from your roots. Conquered, you have lost personal and collective control over your lives. The shooting ended over a hundred years ago, but the war continues on as your people fight to endure all genocidal attempts. I shake my head in bewilderment. I thank you Leroy for your friendship. I never did understand why your people treated me with such love, no matter where I was. Why did you not hate me? You should have. Why did you share of yourselves with me? Why did you trust me?

I remember being in Window Rock, AZ. Lara and I stopped at a grocery store/laundromat. We soon discovered that this was the local hangout for all ages. We were approached the minute we walked in. People were anxious to spend time with us. It is here I met some elderly Navaho men. I also met a man my age who attended the University of New Mexico. It is important to note that seldom on any reservation did we come in contact with men between the ages of say 25-50. I assume most of them are in the cities working and sending money back to their families.

These older men talked much to Lara and I about their customs and traditions. They told us of their Sun Dances that they hold each year. This is a ritual where select individuals dance around a sacred tree with skewers attached to their chest. In the ecstasy of the dance their skin is ripped from their body as a sacrifice to the Great Creator. We were told that they have these for the sake of the white man. This elder man, I never learned his name, told me, "We do this hoping that your people will learn of the ignorance and arrogance of your ways before you destroy all of us, including yourselves. Don't you get it, your evil comes from your ignorance". I was so moved to find that these people, who have every reason to hate us, instead offer their skin as sacrifice to the creator on our behalf!!

These same men, in the evening, had Lara and I buying hair spray for them. Later we discovered that they used it to drink to satisfy their desperate alcohol addiction. The despair, community destruction, and the mutilation of their people is what I remember. My heart was heavy seeing how in destroying the Indian culture, we had destroyed the Indian him/herself.

Alcohol is not allowed on the Indian reservations. How do I begin to speak about that which seemed to pervade every aspect of the Indian's life? Fetal alcohol syndrome, alcoholism, and many health problems find no resources on the reservations to deal with their extremities. The only bitterness I heard expressed was by an elderly woman who cursed the white man for bringing alcohol to the Indians. She said, "It would have been easier and less painful if you would have just shot us all."

My story of my encounter with the ravaging effects of alcohol still is at the forefront of my mind. Lara and I were hiking in the only natural park owned by the Native Americans themselves, Canyon de Chelly. In this park were beautiful 1000 ft. deep canyons with 700 prehistoric Indian ruins, ancient cliff dwellings, and monument ranges. Deep within the canyon, hogans can still be seen with families living taking up residence there. Here, we were speechless with the



beauty of the land, imagining what our lives would have been like growing up so close to the earth and so close to the divine.

It is here in this canyon, that we stumbled upon a very drunk woman named Jackie. At first she appeared so happy, very eager to tell us secrets of the canyon, secrets only her people possess. She offered to take us on trails that were off limits to non-Navahos. Her kindness was overwhelming, and her request was only that we be her friend. She was desperate for friends. She has had little to no contact with non-Indians. She rarely leaves the reservation, except for a few day trips to a city a few hours away. Soon her laughter stopped, and a desperate sort of melancholy took over her speech. She was with a woman who held a month-old baby in her arms. These two women had started drinking around supertime the day before and had not stopped till the morning light. Tourists were coming by and giving Lara and I disapproving looks for associating with these drunk women. We did at one point try to move on, but Jackie desperately clung to us, asking us not to go. At this point she passed out.

Emily, with the baby, was frantic. The reason they were out wandering around is their car had run out of gas. Lara and I got them in our car and then Emily told us where to go. We went to Emily's, but we had to drive by her house and another house three times. Finally, she told us that she was making sure her boyfriend/father of her 4 children was not at home, for she feared his violence. The other house was the home of his girlfriend and here is where we found his car. She had much fear of this man. In the next breath she told us that it did not bother her that he slept around with many women. This is normal and to be expected.

We went next to Jackie's house to get a gas can. She's still passed out however. Let me explain these houses they live in. Cement boxes, stuck close together, with no yards, and no garages. I think I would pick living in a jail over the cement cubicles these people were forced to call home. Inside, there was no carpet, tiny bedrooms, very little furniture, and concrete block walls.

We thought we might be able to sober Jackie up by feeding her food and drink. We found no food whatsoever in her cupboards. There was a piece of rancid meat lying on top of the refrigerator. Inside the refrigerator nothing was to be found. Stacks of empty beer cans lined the walls. The place reeked of death and despair to such a great extent that I was desperate to get out of there. It was the type of experience where all you want to do is shower in order to clean yourself of the experience and wash away the filth of death. I think for Jackie, death would be a welcome friend.

By this time, a few hours had passed, and Jackie had sobered up. When she came to all she did for the longest time was sob about what a horrible evil person she was for drinking again. Her kids would be home from school soon and she was ashamed to face them. Jackie's husband works in Phoenix to be able to send them money; she sees him twice a year.

We ended up paying for a tow truck to tow her car back to her house, for in her drunken stupor she had lost the keys. It is important for me to tell you the desperation of this woman when she could not find her keys. When we could not



locate her keys, she went nuts. She tore the whole house apart. In between throwing cushions at the walls, and hearing drawers crash to the floor, I would hear her heavy sobs. At one point, she simply collapsed in my arms. This was the second woman on my trip that I held against the weight of utter despair. I had not before felt this helpless. I could not offer solace of a future time when things would be better. Jackie hated her life and hated herself. Her car was her only feeling of freedom. When the keys were lost, it was as if someone had stolen her soul. I don't know how else to explain it. I feel helpless at trying to convey to you how great this woman's pain was.

We did tow her car back. We took the food we had along and put it in her cupboards. In return she made beautiful necklaces and earrings and blessed them. One such necklace she made for me and had blessed by the medicine man was of an eagle made from turquoise. She told me that the necklace had great power because the eagle is their tribe's sacred animal since the eagle flies closest to the creator. She showed me her most sacred belongings: a kachina doll, a peace pipe, sacred tobacco, a medicine rattle, ghost beads, and many other sacred objects. Her fear was that the medicine man was going to make her take lots of peyote for several days to clean the evil out of her.

Jackie's children came home from school and if my heart was not already broken, their faces tore my heart in two. These were not children standing before me. Jackie had cried herself back to sleep. Her daughter, Randita, immediately went and got blankets to cover her mother, and both of the children spoke in whispers as not to disturb her. Later, this nine-year-old girl was in the kitchen surprised at the new food, asking me if it was OK for her and her brother to eat of the canned soup we had brought. I wanted so badly to offer them a different sort of life. Once again, I was left feeling helpless and impotent in my inability to really offer much. Randita had gotten her report card that day and since her mom was passed out I asked if I could see it. She had all high marks. I said to her, "You should be so proud of yourself," and she replied, "No, today I have made my people proud."

This is a double-edged sword. The Dine people take credit for each of its member's achievements. However, the community bears the shame of each of its people as well. Jackie is victim to a powerful addiction, so powerful that she is helpless to its calling. She, in her poverty, will satisfy its needs, over the feeding of her young children. They don't have a mother. She no longer has a self. The community scorns her and alienates her in her shame. There are no AA groups or other resources available. Jackie now drinks even more, for she is filled with such self-hatred and contempt after the death of her fetal alcohol syndrome son. She told me when I was holding her that I should not touch her for she truly is an evil person. I say to you, what have we done to this woman? We, truly, are the evil ones.

The Navaho people because of their size are a very poor people. We met other tribes that offered us more hope. On a visit to a pueblo reservation, we witnessed a hospital that had both traditional Indian medicine along with Western allopathic medicine. This reservation had their own schools, and there seemed



to be a much better employment rate. I spent time there talking to a Pueblo Indian named Lambert. He is an artist. He told me that whenever he needs to get clay from the earth for his pottery, he must fast for four days before going to get it out of the sacred ground. He explains that being an artist is a heavy responsibility for he must go to great lengths to keep his mind, body, and spirit pure.

The Indian people do not believe, like the white man, that one owns their individual talent. For example we say "He is a great writer, musician, etc." Rather, according to Lambert, the artist is simply the channel for a collective vision to emerge. Anything he creates belongs to all his/her people. He laughed remembering when he went to college how they tried to make him footnote ideas. He found this simply absurd. Everyone's ideas simply arise from a collective conscious. This, to him, is simply a small example of how egocentric and detached White America is from its true source.

Even though this reservation was better off economically then most that I had seen, it is important for you to know that there is a high percentage of cancer due to the U.S. government's mining of uranium on their land. Their water is contaminated and their natural resources are being depleted. Lambert was infuriated when he spoke of the raping of their land. Although they are gaining power among their tribe to stop some of the exploitation, it seems that still no one is able to stop the destruction of their most holy lands.

After we left this reservation we went to go hiking in the White Sands National Park. After arriving there, we had to wait for three hours because the military was testing nuclear missiles that day. This is where the first atomic bomb was dropped. I can't tell you the sorrow both Lara and I felt in seeing this beautiful park of mountains of white sand off limits due to the need for nuclear testing. It was one more paradox that was not making sense.

In ending my account, I must pay homage to my first Indian friend that befriended me. Let us hear the words of the elderly gentlemen, back at the Navaho laundromat, who told me quietly in a scratchy voice, "My friend, will you go back and tell your people what it is really like here, for they will not listen to us. But maybe if you tell them, they will listen to one of their own."

And so I have told you. Much more goes unspoken because words cannot convey what we saw. Still, I ask you at least to remember Jackie, Leroy, Lambert, the woman who lost her son. Let us remember the boy who hung himself in a world hostile to his spirit. Remember their stories of poverty, despair, survival, combat, and of life gone. Somehow, beyond my understanding, these people have endured. Their story has not ended. I just pray that somehow we can rewrite the script to bring an ending of life, of hope. Yet this will not happen until we see that interwoven in their stories, we find our stories. It is in these faces of oppression that we must see that it is the face of you and me. I have to be honest in telling you that most of the trip I was saying, "Let the bombs drop, for nothing short of this will teach us of our arrogant ways." Yet remembering that those I help to persecute, sacrifice their flesh for me, I am obliged to keep on speaking the truth, and hope, as they do, that the day is coming for a better world.

# Heather Gorman

## TREE

I wrap  
My stringy arms  
Around your bulk  
They only come halfway

Green above  
Green below  
Brown between my fingers  
Reaching into my blue eyes  
Cascade of brown  
Texture of smooth paper  
Or stubbly beard  
Lines  
Tunnels  
Grooves  
Run into and out of you  
Canals for dog urine and rain

Green grass fringes your feet  
So deeply planted in moist darkness  
That we find you still  
When digging in the garden

You have seen me  
With baby feet  
And new cars  
You watch beyond  
My sight of years

Earth is the shade of your shell  
The color of your smell  
Honey and water on the inside  
Sweetness sheltered  
From storms

I wish to bury  
My narrow cold hands  
In your living  
Breathing  
Warmth  
Pulsing with birds

I would travel the tubes  
The veins of you  
From fingertip roots  
To tip of newborn leaf  
Soft as mother's milk  
Your branches  
Arms  
Rungs of a celestial ladder  
Cables  
Curved and knotted  
Into a leafy living maze  
Of rich rough browns

What glory to live  
With many breathing hands  
Each lacy with light at dawn  
When sun welcomes day

If I stand long enough  
Holding you close  
As a second  
Woolly skin  
My toes shall grow thin and long  
And reach deep  
In their searching  
My fingers and hair will grow  
Into twigs  
Light and fine as bird bones  
And my eyes will turn brown  
And chlorophyll will run  
Through my veins.



# *Paul Cook*

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## *LEPROSY*

*Her face was white with leprosy,  
The nightmare Life-in-Death was she,  
Who thickens men's blood with cold.*

Samuel Taylor Coleridge,  
The Rime of the Ancient Mariner

We lepers  
Turn up our collars so passerby can't see  
The flecks of skin we shed.  
We die daily,  
    a piece at a time.  
Tiny mites  
    under our beds  
Eat the leavings.

People fear  
    the slow decay  
        of things.  
They banish us from their houses,  
Banish us from their gatherings.  
And so we stand on the edges of things,  
Now grimacing,  
    leering  
For effect,  
Now howling in pain—  
"Unclean, unclean!"

So living is dying,  
Kissing is contagion,  
Touching is murder.

And what if lepers embrace?  
The cold-thick blood of men  
Can never know the warm joy  
Of holding someone  
In arms that fall off,  
And are pasted back on  
By poetry.

## *Kate Kitzmann*

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### *REVISION FOR OFFRED*

Four times mentioned  
in conversation  
was her vision;  
which envisioned  
and enfolded  
the Sacred deep.  
From what fountain  
did this  
Sacrament spring?  
Daily communion?  
we wonder.  
Heresy, we say.  
But holy reach  
prophetic eyes,  
suggesting the unnameable,  
creating woman-space  
with artistic  
attentions.  
The truth outside—  
inside—communing  
herself with the other:  
the seen and believed  
and unnameable.



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**MUKENDA**  
*(BOY'S INITIATION INTO THE NDEMBU TRIBE)*

Mukenda—  
initiate naked  
(Drum, beat, rhythm)  
boys face men  
in sacred fire.  
(rhythm, beat, drum)  
Tribal rite,  
the end is beginning  
at the dying place.  
(rise, hoot, call)  
Baptize man  
alive, potent.  
(dance, dance)

To dance is  
to breathe;  
(call, hoot, call)  
ancestry masked—  
(dance, dance)  
rattles his leg  
bells on his hind.  
(dance, shake, dance)

Come boys, return!  
Clack your sticks  
(clack, rhythm, clack)  
on the backs  
of guardians.  
(whoop, drumbeat)  
Circle round  
mudyi-milk tree;  
(turn, dance, shake)  
take boys to village  
to new fire, rebirth.  
(clack, dance, call)  
Feast till morning—  
unmourning boyhood

with fire.  
(clack, crackle, call)  
Seclusion lodge burns  
in dance and falls  
to the warrior—  
potent rite,  
sacred signs.  
(dance, rhythm, call—  
beat)

# *Ali Mohajer*

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## *SPRINGTIME'S AUTUMN*

This is a story about a boy who lived not too long ago, in a city not so far away as you might imagine. The boy lived with his mother, and occasionally his father, on the second floor of a rather unique two-story building.

Now the outside of the building was nothing to stare at really: grayish white stone and a few windows, a stairway in front with white bars that gave access to alleycats only, and a green ceramic mesh up on the second flight that added a touch of color. The roof of the house (like most of the houses in this city) was flat, even though it snowed several times each winter. This was good for the less fortunate, who would put on their heavy sweaters and warmest boots and scarves (if they had a few to choose from) and walk the narrow alleyways shouting "Shovel your snow! Shovel your snow!" as they hefted their carved wooden shovels from one shoulder to the other.

Inside the house, though, there was a huge palm tree. It was planted on the first floor in a little courtyard that was surrounded by the various rooms of the house. Perhaps it would be better to call it a greenhouse, since it was glassed in on top; but I think the palm would rather it was a courtyard, because even though it had been pruned regularly over the years so that it had a very short squat cone of a trunk, its long fronds with their hundreds of slim sharp fingers were starting to push at the glass above.

The palm could see almost all that happened in the house upstairs, and perhaps it would tell stories to the old lady who lived downstairs in return for taking away the sunlight that the courtyard was meant to provide. It seemed that way to the boy sometimes, because he could see her whispering to the plant every now and again when she rearranged her curtains or watered the smaller potted plants that lived at its feet.

The boy thought nothing of the snow shovelers' shouts. They weren't as loud or clear as the man who traded salt for bread scraps, or the peddler who sharpened knives, or the one that bought old clothes. These people were full time shouters, and they had developed their pitch to a comfortable, piercing, nasal cry, with words more implied than pronounced. None of them, however, could hold a candle to the the voice of Akbar.

Akbar was the neighborhood simpleton, though most people called him the neighborhood madman. He was short, so his dull green overcoat made him look stocky, and no one really knew how many times he had wound his ratty grey scarf around his neck. He wore that scarf year round, and the boy couldn't help but laugh one day when, as he watched from the safety of the streetside window, he imagined Akbar spinning like a top, with his arms spread straight from the shoulder, swerving around on the street and occasionally bouncing off the walls and doorways as his scarf was unraveled by an invisible hand.



"Hassan, come away from the window dear," his mother called, "you know it's not nice to watch."

Akbar had short black hair and thick black eyebrows that ran the length of his forehead. His eyes were sunken but bright, like a pair of onyx, and his brow was furrowed much deeper than could be accounted for by merely intense concentration. When he shaved, the skin on his face, almost up to his eyes, became bright pinkish grey. This happened once every few weeks, which was probably as often as he darkened the door of the local public bath. You didn't have to look out the window, though, to know he was there.

Akbar liked to sing. He would walk the alleyways and sing about some poor merchant's daughter who lived a few streets away. He would sing about his mother, and sometimes he would sing happy popular songs. His deep booming voice almost made the windows shake, and put the cries of "Salt for your bread!" and "Knives and scissors sharpened! Pots and pans mended!" to shame.

Hassan would listen to him at night, when he was supposed to be reading over his lessons for the day, and often he would wonder why no matter how long he stared at the page he would always come back to the sentence he started from. Most of the time he didn't really understand Akbar's songs; sometimes he couldn't make out the words, and sometimes when he could make out the words, he couldn't make any sense of the song. What did it mean when he sang: "Sara has my throat! My throat is tied to Sara's door!" Hassan wasn't sure what the meaning was, but he had an idea, and he didn't think it would be the thing to do to ask his mother. Maybe his father would know and would tell him. He'd have to remember to ask him when he thought the time was right. He was too sleepy to try to wait for him to come home, but Friday was just two days away, and he'd certainly see his father then. His father rarely went to work on Friday.

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The next day at school, he hardly thought about the dreams he had the night before. Classmates and teachers are good for helping you forget images of demons with nooses and chains, and Hassan was good at forgetting his nightmares anyway. He struggled to keep awake in class, and was relieved at the end of each period when he could leave the close and headachey air of the classroom and breathe the fresh air outside. The windows in the classroom would only open a little way, as if to make sure no one could escape when the teacher had his back to the class, and forty boys straining to understand geometry caused the air to smell strange and feel wet and grimy. Hassan would draw faces in the fogged windows and put dots in for the eyes before a difficult class, and sure enough, the faces would be crying by the end of the period. Sometimes they would sweat as if they were having a hard time with geometry too, but most often they would cry for what they were forced to watch the boys go through.

The last bell rang, and the day Hassan thought would never come to an end finally did. He was free! He ran across the schoolyard and out the narrow door,



barely nodding and mumbling "g'bye" to the custodian who sat at the door whenever the boys weren't in class, and made a beeline for Agha Jalal's ice cream shop at the corner. Today was a special day. Aside from being Thursday, which was a good day of the week, it was Thursday afternoon, and he felt the freedom of not having to go to school the next day. But what was really special was that when he opened the door to Jalal's, there was no one else there. Except for Jalal himself, standing behind the big glass refrigerator with his elbow on the counter-top, waiting for the hordes of schoolboys that would rush his place every day at four. He was the first one! This was something that had never happened before; there were always at least three or four people ahead of him and usually there were many more, but today Jalal was there for him alone. This was a special occasion and merited a triple-scoop cone with chocolate, coffee, and caramel flavored ice cream. He would have to eat it fast, though, because he didn't like to walk into the house with half an ice cream cone and none to offer if his mother should want some; and the ice cream would melt and start dripping out of the hole at the bottom of the cone if he took too long. The art of eating an ice cream cone is the art of balancing a headache with sticky fingers.

Hassan made it home with only the bottom part of his cone left. The pointed end was soft, so he knew he'd finished it just in time. He put the cone in his mouth from the narrow end and sucked on it to make the soft part pop out. He considered whether to crunch down on the ring he'd made or to save it for a while, and he decided to use it to make friends with the tiger-striped alleycat that stole away the scraps of food he left out for it. The cat was hiding under one of the cars near his house, so Hassan crouched down and held the ring out toward the cat and whispered, "pshpshpshpshpsh, pshpshpshpshpsh."

The cat looked at him with wide eyes and suddenly crouched, then paused to see if it was actually necessary to flee from under the car. It decided that Hassan was too big to get into that small space, so it stayed put, but it couldn't decide what it was that the boy was holding out. It didn't look like food.

Hassan tried again a few times and then tossed the cone bottom under the car in case the cat should change its mind. The cat was already bored with the whole thing and barely blinked its now squinted eyes. Hassan's mouth was bitter from the sugar cone, but he still craved it; he wished the cat would at least eat it, since he couldn't.

It was time to go upstairs, even though he wanted to just walk the streets. His mother would ask where he was going, and he could see the whole conversation clearly in his mind:

"I don't know; just out for a walk."

"Well, Hassan, I need to know where you are so I can find you if I get worried. Tell me which way you're going."

"I don't know. I just want to walk."

"Hassan, what a strange tone you're taking with your mother."

"I don't want to show a tone, I just don't know where I'm going. I just want to go out for a walk. Why don't you let me go?"

"Well, you sit down and think about where you want to go, and when you



decide we'll talk again."

And that would be the end of it. Even before he entered the house, he was angry with his mother for keeping him in on a Thursday afternoon.

"H'lo."

"Hello Hassan jan. How was your day at school?"

"Fine."

"Are you hungry? Come have some tea and cookies."

"I'll come later; I'll be in my room."

Hassan's mother wasn't surprised with this exchange. Ever since she could remember, Hassan liked to isolate himself. Whenever she or Mostafa tried to draw him out, it felt like holding a bird in your hand. He would quietly come and stay for as short a time as possible, looking for the first opportunity to escape. She didn't understand why he was like this, but she had come to accept it as his way, and tried not to take offense. In fact, she tried not to think about it and preferred to think that he was busy in his room with his books, which was good.

Hassan, meantime, was looking into the courtyard/greenhouse from behind the gauze curtains that hung from the inside windows of the house. The old lady wasn't in sight. If he moved back a little, he would be out of her line of sight. He couldn't imagine what he would do if someday she looked up just as he was looking down, so he was always very careful and never just looked straight down. He'd make sure she wasn't there from the corner of his eye first, then glance down to the potted ferns and other plants he couldn't name, and the base of the palm.

The window started at his waist and went up to the ceiling. The glass top of the courtyard gave him a clear view of the late afternoon sky. The sky was still blue, but there was a gloom inside that came from the sun's being hidden by the surrounding buildings. Hassan sat down and leaned against the inner wall. He could see the sky if he looked up, but no one could see him from his house or downstairs.

Even though he had checked all the angles many times, and knew that there was no vantage point to this spot in his room, he always felt as though someone might be watching him. Nevertheless, he resigned himself to the fact and disregarded his uneasiness and started to stroke himself from over his pants. This was something he was doing more and more in the past few months, and although it made him more tense and unsettled, he found great pleasure in this self absorption. Most of the time he wouldn't take off his pants, but today was Thursday, so he decided to remove all his clothes and lie naked on the floor. He was so lost in himself, in stroking his body and his penis, in kissing his own thighs and arms, that he didn't hear the quiet thump from above, and he almost didn't notice the shadow that darkened the corner of the skylight for a moment. He looked up after a while, but there was nothing there, and he didn't want to get up just yet.

#

"Hassan."



The knock at the door was a little louder this time. "Hassan, are you asleep?"

Hassan tried to rouse himself and put on his clothes as quietly and as quickly as he could. "I'll be right there." He tried to sound detached and calm, but his voice quavered just a little, just enough for his mother to know he wasn't reading. "Just a minute."

"Hassan, your light was off; I thought you were sleeping." She paused for a moment to listen.

"You won't be able to sleep tonight if you nap now. Why is your door locked, aziz?"

"I'm sorry Maman, I must have done it without thinking" he said as he turned on the light and opened his door. His mother stepped in and glanced over to his desk. The reading light was off, but there was a book open. It lay at a little angle and one edge rested on a plate that had dried orange peels on it. Perfect.

"I must have dozed off."

"Come to the kitchen, aziz; there's something I want you to do please."

There was a platter with food on it. The rice was heaped higher than it would be for his father's dinner, and there was chicken curry spread on top. His mother put the platter on a tray with a glass of water and some flat bread and said: "Akbar is at the doorstep. He rang the doorbell and asked for some food. Take this down to him and come back up, aziz; it's for the good."

Hassan had never actually talked to Akbar before. His booming voice seemed to say, "Stay away so I can shout to you." It would be strange to hear him from up close! He wondered how Akbar would sound as he carefully carried the tray down the stairs, walking at an angle so he could see his feet. He wondered what to say to the strange man who waited at the doorstep, sitting with his back to the door and looking away from the opening. It wasn't polite to look into people's homes, even if they did buzz the door open for you.

Hassan made a little noise with the tray as he opened the door wide with his foot. Akbar got up and moved away a little to give him room to set the tray down and said, "God love you Hassan agha; I hope I can serve at your wedding." Hassan didn't know what to be more embarrassed by, the traditional thanks and the reference to marriage, which seemed like something that could never really happen to him, or Akbar's stage whisper that must have carried to the neighbors three houses down either way.

"You're welcome. Good health," he said, and then added, "my mother says."

Akbar sat down and started to eat. Not with the spoon and fork on the tray, but with his hands. He tore off a small rectangle of bread and used it to grasp and compress a morsel of rice and curry from the plate. When he lifted the bread, the rice and chicken stayed inside, like stuffing in an open *dolme*. Hassan thought this was a strange way of eating, but he thought he'd have to try it. He noticed he was staring when Akbar looked up.

"I saw you today," Akbar whispered and smiled. It was a strange smile, with a round mouthful stuffed into his right cheek, but it seemed to fit his exaggerated features well.

Hassan didn't know what to say. He didn't remember seeing Akbar that day,

and he was sure he would have noticed. Akbar was hard to miss.

"I didn't see you, Akbar agha."

"I saw you playing," Akbar said and smiled again. He leaned over and tapped Hassan on the near pantleg. A spot stayed behind where his finger had been.

Hassan was frozen. He thought he would fall down, but it was as if he had turned to wood. His head felt like it was made of wood: dull; light. He wished he had gone right back upstairs like his mother had told him. He wished Akbar could talk in a normal voice.

"I was up there all day," he said as he pointed above to the roofs, "watching."

All the roofs on this side of the street were connected. Even though some were higher than others, if someone wanted to, he could walk the whole length of the alley on the rooftops. All he needed to do was find an open door.

Hassan felt that his life had ended. There was nothing he could think of doing; there was nowhere he could run to, no one who could help him. He had never known such absolute despair before in his life. He stood there watching the caricature of a man eating, chewing, cleaning his plate, licking his fingers, and smiling at him. He knew he would fall down. He knew he had to get away. He turned and crouched and was about to run up the stairs, but the clanking of the tray and Akbar's huge voice stopped him.

"Hassan agha,"

He couldn't turn around.

"Hassan agha,"

Like a sparrow under the spell of a snake he turned his head and looked.

Akbar stood at the doorstep, with the streetlamp casting dark shadows below his brow and nose. He was holding the empty tray out to him and smiling.

"Pshpshpshpshpsh."



# *Donna Kotulock*

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## *LIVING WILL*

I am  
a woman  
whose silky ashes  
dust  
only a bed  
of tulips  
none  
of my powdery  
body left  
irreclaimable  
on an end  
table by oblivious  
mourners  
who uncover  
and peer  
into terra-cotta pottery  
or lattice-stemmed  
silver  
leaving me damp  
with tears  
I rest  
in this garden  
commune  
with the soil  
and in my demise  
beget life

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**SARCOPHAGUS**  
*(FOR ANNIE)*

sad for you  
when he spray  
painted  
*whore*  
over that oil  
painting  
the one  
in which  
you're nude  
but clothed  
by the colors  
of sunlit  
stained glass  
afraid for you  
when the pale  
of your neck  
which he adores  
suffocated  
in his fingers  
hurt for you  
because i feel  
your secrets  
stinging  
i feel  
the cold  
of the cave  
in which  
he has placed you  
and i see  
the carcass  
of your flawless  
bejeweled  
self



# *Anne Shepler*

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## *I KNOW HER*

Fog rising like her hair, smug smog  
like Lutheran dinner plates and ham casseroles.  
She walks slowly and communities  
are given before God in her head  
(tells me where I don't belong) among the smog  
of academic pages and pages and pages papercutting  
the heavenly fog into strands of her heavenly hair.  
Mocking the smirks of babies peering up her skirt,  
nodding that milk should be served with casseroles,  
she can pronounce judgment—she too once wandered  
dry creek beds in the fog and smoked  
pipes to mask her face in the crowd  
and her heavenly lips blow smoke and blow my friends  
(or only in their heads) and I freeze her thoughts  
like papier mâché faces with carrot lips  
and see circus boys vomit in her lap,  
burn and tweek the stereo burn tweeking her brain,  
twist her arms and offer her jackets and roses  
of paper shoved in chicken wire for the float  
(tells me where I don't belong) among the smog—  
the night before the parade  
where she sits slowly rolling  
with her holy hair and her divine head  
atop a gracious red car vowing graciously to take  
the boys in her bosom with coupons of custody  
and clears the road ahead with papers and tissue papers  
loving her and smothering her and cutting her  
in bed instead of a lover with long dense fingers.  
She coughs and covers her head like a Jew  
blowing steam from her dragon nose.  
It separates and clings as fog,  
softening the papier mâché faces  
as soggy tissues are passed under her long dense fingers.  
It envelopes my stringy hair and whispers:  
go back to dry creek bed (where I don't belong),  
smug smog lifting and sifting through my pouting face,  
rising and caressing her golden hair into the image  
of the empty eight-year-old mother I see now.

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## TRUE LOVE

The bed is upside down  
I haven't seen you in months  
And the room hurls our ravenous legs  
Along and among and apart until  
Dog pounds down the stairs  
Sits at the door with prim disapproval  
eyeing him with indifference  
She snorts an impatient "Please MOVE"  
before heaving the length of her black body  
Between us and down the length of my own  
She subtly rebukes me with a whisper:  
"Boys and universities are variations on a theme."  
He pats her head with a mock smile  
While she yawns with annoyance  
That we haven't yet been to the stream  
He finds our conversation simplistic  
And our affection ridiculously refined  
"Tis natural," she sighs knowingly,  
"Jealousy."



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## CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

**Alice Boswell** is a junior Marketing major with a minor in Psychology. She hails from Winamac, IN.

**Paul Cook** is a senior from Rochester, NY. He has a double major in Psychology and French and a double minor in Math and the Humanities. After graduation, he plans to live by a river for a while and never look at a single newspaper.

**Lynne Flowers** is a junior English and Secondary Education major from Lansing, IL. She is a big fan of the women who raised her and she enjoys all things holy and perverse.

**Heather Gorman** is a junior English major from Western Springs, IL. She likes photography, Ireland, singing and making and selling jewelry.

**Kate Kitzmann** is a junior English and Humanities major from New Ulm, MN. H.D. is her hero.

**Donna Kotulock** is a senior Biology major from Portage, IN. She is seeking gainful employment while deciding what degree to pursue in graduate school. She often dances around her room to relieve stress. This is her first publication.

**Kirsten Lee** defies description. She is a senior English and Psychology major from Lapeere, MI who is planning on hiking through Central America upon graduation. Kirsten is a truth-teller.

**Joe Lehner** requested that we not print the usual background stuff. He wants no commitments until he's around thirty at which time he'll become a paid consultant for things like boating and hair weaving. Joe apologizes to anyone whose toes he's stepped on at VU; he's only now learning to dance.



**Rhett Luedtke** is a senior English and Theatre major from Eugene, OR. "Forever is only three months away."

**Ali Mohajer** is a senior Physics and Chemistry major from Tehran, Iran. Upon graduation he probably will not continue in the sciences, but would like to continue writing. At age nineteen he was an anchor for IRIB English news in Tehran.

**Anne Shepler** is a Math major, Humanities/Individualized Science minor from Big Rapids, MI. The dog's name is Pico.

**Sara Steinbrueck** is from Webster Groves, MO. She is a senior Biology and Humanities major. While studying in Cambridge last semester she was bitten by the travelling bug and hopes to go to Japan next Fall; from there only the Shadow knows.

**Kate Weizel** hails from Bowie, MD. She is a junior English major who enjoys writing, reading comic books and men who like to make beautiful music. She is looking forward to going to Cambridge in the Fall.



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