So I sat between the word obscure
And the word gallows
Took out my small cauldron
And ladle

Whistled to the word fire
And she answered me
From her sleep

*Charles Simic*, from “Pastoral”
CAULDRON STAFF

Leanne Anderson
Marcus Britton
Christopher Gale
Claire Grover
Kevin Houldsworth
Heidi Kopacek
George Kourous
Katie Lowrie
Roxanne Prillwitz
Deidra K. Razzaque
Josephine Rood
Andrew Sherrod
Jennifer Wapinski

With special thanks to Leah Berger

A note about the editing process:

A disinterested person (someone not on the Cauldron staff) removes the names from all submissions before the staff considers them for publication.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Photograph .............................................................. .............................................................. 4
  Patty Mayle
Barely Spring at the Joneses' .......................................................... ........................................... 5
  Linda Chalk
Justine .................................................................................. ......................................................... 6
  Andrew Sherrod
Photograph .......................................................... .......................................................... 9
  Blair Beitner
Afterbirth .................................................................................. ................................................... 10
  Jennifer Caldwell
Womanhood .................................................................................. ................................................ 11
  Claire Grover
Oreos and the Secret to Life .................................................................. ..................................... 12
  Claire Grover
Self Portrait .................................................................................. .................................................. 13
  Blair Beitner
l'ennui existentialiste de la reveille .......................................................... ...................................... 14
  Erick Trickey
confession #88 .................................................................................. ..................................... 14
  Dan Klyn
Walking Home, Clermont Ferrand 1989 .......................................................... .................................. 15
  Claire Grover
Once .................................................................................. ......................................................... 16
  George Kourous
Twinkle .................................................................................. ......................................................... 17
  George Kourous
Photograph .................................................................................. ................................................ 18
  Rob Grathwohl
Stories my Mother Told Me .......................................................... ........................................... 19
  Josephine Rood
Photograph .................................................................................. ................................................ 22
  Leah Berger
Patio .................................................................................. ......................................................... 23
  Kerry Gottfied
Geraldine .................................................................................. .................................................. 24
  Michelle Murray
Born .................................................................................. ......................................................... 25
  Theresa Braunschneider
Twins .................................................................................. ......................................................... 26
  Roxanne Prillwitz
Cain and Abel .................................................................................. ......................................... 27
  Leah Berger
Untitled .................................................................................. ....................................................... 28
  Chris Matthews
Autumn .................................................................................. ....................................................... 29
  Chris Newman
The Whispering Summer .................................................................. ........................................... 30
  George Kourous
Photograph .................................................................................. ................................................ 32
  Rob Grathwohl
Barely Spring at the Joneses'

They do most of the talking, raw young men with earnest beards, mingling, mixing, moving in and out of groups in baby sunshine. The women hug in clusters, elbows out to poke intruders, breasts pressed together, murmuring low. Children connect the dots, play Ping Pong from parent to parent, world to world.

She arrives, wondering already, standing uncertainly. The ring is complete, but roaming the circumference is one small child. She catches it fleetingly to ask: will that be me? Then leaping free of her it dives into the picture and it's gone, it could be anyone.

She makes her face a blank, not knowing, clutching five daisies under April's hasty clouds.

_Linda Chalk_
Justine

I was right out of college and my mother wrote to tell me that Justine Fisher had died, in childbirth. She enclosed a slip of obituary, as well as several comics cut from the same paper. I was surprised that my mother thought to mention it at all. I couldn't remember seeing Justine for years, not since the tenth grade or earlier, when she went away to school. I had never been close to her in the way that I remembered the other friends from grade school and junior high, and I had no idea what might have happened to her. The obituary was brief, stating only that she was survived by her loving husband, a Mr. Robert Baley, and the infant son.

Bits of Justine came back to me. I remembered her at first as the only black girl in the neighborhood, although she might have had an older sister. She lived two blocks over from my parents, and I met her on the first day of first grade at Oakwood Elementary. She was the only black in the class, and I was the only boy with glasses, and we sat next to each other at the front by the teacher's desk.

She invited me to her first grade party at the very last minute, on the bus on the way home. The party started at four o'clock; I went without a present. I sat in the corner drinking glasses of punch, because I didn't know anyone but Justine, and I was the only white. Mr. Fisher led games of Pin the Tail on the Donkey and Musical Chairs, while I watched. I remember wanting to climb up onto his shoulders and push my hands down in his Afro. My own father set his straight grey hair on a wooden head in the bathroom before getting into bed. Mr. Fisher seemed so much more inviting. I left without saying goodbye to Justine, just ran home before the ice cream. She didn't mention anything about it the next day in school.

We rarely played together: she was with the girls and I was with the boys or in my room. One summer, though, before fourth grade, she rode her bike by my house. She circled around in the street, slowly, so that the green and white tassels from her handle bars brushed against her thighs when she turned sharply. I was alone on the front steps--my friends that summer, Dameon and Kelly Brown, were away at camp--shouting things at the cars that passed and she stopped to help. I lived on a busy street, so no one ever stopped to get mad at us or even notice, so we eventually wandered around into the back yard to play on my swingset.

We pulled the plastic swings down from their hooks and refastened them, so that the seats were no more than eight inches from the bare, rusty cross-bar that flaked green chips onto our hands. Then we climbed up onto our little seats, squeezing in, so that there was barely enough room, so that our thighs were pushing against the flaking paint of the bar. We rested our arms on the bar, and our faces on our crossed arms, and looked over the hedge that separated my yard from that of my next-door neighbor, Miss Mary Piper.
She talked about "Grease", with Olivia Newton-John and John Travolta. I hadn't seen it, my mother had said no, it was PG. I turned around every once in a while to see if my mother was home from the mall, listening carefully for her tires scraping in the driveway. Justine wore a white T-shirt, I remember, and her hair was twisted back into tiny knots and braids that ran from her forehead to the back of her neck. I took off my glasses and rubbed them into my shirt.

It was hot, and Justine took off her shirt.

Her skin was a rich brown, and it shone in some places where she was sweating, under her arms and down her stomach. Her chest was like mine, skinny, smooth, but dark, thick black. Her nipples were sweaty, shady splotches the same color as the hair that moved down in wisps off her neck.

She leaned back in the swing, arching her tiny grade-school back, kicking her tennis shoes up above her, and turning her face to look at my house, upside-down. She said nothing, just hung, and her T-shirt glared in the sun by the leg of the swingset where it had dropped.

My eyes were wide behind my glasses, and I was looking away, at the garage, at the hedge, remembering seeing my own mother naked in a motel room in Virginia the time we had gone to Williamsburg. I remembered my sister, running naked as a little girl into the bathroom to take her bath. I thought of Dameon and Kelly's magazines, hidden under a rock in the woods behind the private school down the street.

Justine's body was dark in the sunlight, it absorbed the light, pulling my eyes to her as she twisted back in the swing, singing "Hopelessly Devoted To You" in a tuneless, upside-down voice. My mother's car pulled onto the gravel at the end of the driveway.

We were down from the top of the swings in an instant, snatching up her shirt and racing towards the hedge, towards the back of the yard. The sound of my mother's car door slamming, the sound of the gate opening, chased us away from our perches down into the dark place under the branches of the hedge. We pulled through and out and continued to run, across Miss Mary Piper's yard into the woods, where my sister had buried the rabbit.

We tore into the woods and out of the sun and hid behind a tree, a dying one, with limbs that hung down over the dirt, and we rested and caught our breath. Justine had caught her skin on the prickers in our hedge, and spots of red covered her chest and back. We listened for my mother, for sounds of her following us to dress Justine, to grab our hands, to take us back into the house and send Justine home and me to my room. There must have been some reason why she would follow us: the car had been menacing and parental as it pulled into the garage. We both recognized the sound of authority.

I sat down on a root, my feet hunched under me, and wiped my glasses again on my shirt. Justine looked down at me, one hand wiping at the blood that ran down her front, and she threw her head back and laughed at me, a woman's laugh, a mother's cackle. Then she
bent down over my face, blocking whatever sunlight managed to break into the trees and pushed her lips onto my mouth. It was a full, heavy kiss; when she pulled back, my face was wet and cold in the light breeze. Then she turned and walked away, out of the woods, slipping her shirt on over her bloody arms, and moved out to the street in front of my house to get her bike and ride home. I sat under the tree, my legs and feet cramping from my own weight, and waited until she had disappeared around the front of Miss Mary Piper's house before wiping away the wetness that she had left.

My mother knew, and she said nothing. She was unloading groceries when I stepped into the kitchen, and she asked me what I had been doing, but she didn't seem to notice the answer. She said that it was nice of me to play with Justine, that it was hard for a little black girl to live in a white neighborhood.

And later, when I was a freshman in high school, she never asked me what had become of little Justine. She asked me who my girlfriends were, why I didn't go on dates, if there was anything the matter. But she never asked about Justine's T-shirt or the woods behind Miss Mary Piper's house. She worried about me, she cried when I told her that I thought I might never find a girl or a woman, but she never suggested Justine to me, never hinted at the sexuality of the swingset, never made any attempt to remind me of a little black girl in the sun.

She wrote me years later and told me that Justine had died giving birth to a baby boy, James William Baley. She told me that her husband had been very wealthy, from a good Eastern family--"Like the Kennedys"-- which meant white. She told me that she was sorry, that she thought that I might want to know, but she never hinted that she might have seen us, seen her little boy run off into the bushes with a black girl, a shirtless girl, who bled climbing through the hedges. She wrote that she hoped I was fine, she reluctantly gave her love to Peter, and she signed her name.

I fell asleep, setting the letter down on Peter's nightstand. I remembered Justine again. I imagined her lying back on a table, her tiny body twisted in a new position, giving birth and losing her life. I dreamed that the tiny brown baby came forward in blood and sweat, and Justine arched her grown-up back the way she had from my green, flaking swingset.

Andy Sherrod
Afterbirth

Womantongue, I'll crawl
at your side, trailing the worm moon to keep
you company. Many times I've fallen, spirit-locked. Of a kind,
the blood-bone we grind is our own. I know what stopped you,
perched
naked in the corner of your eye. Your wail,
crushing the suspicious sun from my sky, is a memory
that swallows all.

Deliver yourself unto life or death;
unlock the tar hands that mangle each thorny
breath. Your song is beautiful, stopping me dead
again and again. Having been dipped in many things, I crack
a smile for you risking a warmth in the holding-pen of souls.
My love, I hold you more jealously
than all my heartbeats.

Jennifer Caldwell
Womanhood

i
It amazes me that women can be afraid of blood
after watching so much of ourselves slide down the drain
bleached out in the laundry, rumpled with shame
in a wad of tissue and stuffed deep down in the trashcan.
On the other hand, maybe that explains a lot of things.

ii
It all goes back to a late night candid conversation
in a deserted train station
He wants to know what this womanhood is all about:
how long? how much? how does it feel?
We move beyond girl-talk, punctuated with nods and I-knows
and you-know-what-i-mean-so-don’t-make-me-say-it looks.
It’s hard to keep the explanation simple

iii
We talk to our friend
who is trying to understand
who is trying to be open-minded
who is trying to figure out how he will survive the next week.
We tell him,
this is what you need to know about the great mystery
of womanhood:
it can be damn irritating
(but a source of comfort and constancy),
you don’t stand up too fast, you don’t laugh too hard
and when you say you need to use the bathroom, then
dammit, you need to use the bathroom.

iv
Most of all it’s a private thing
a slow leaking of the self
a ticking of clocks, a turning of wheels--
potential: washing out and starting over.
Measured out, it would not be much.

Claire Grover
Oreos and the secret to life

Anna has come to the shattering
(realization that)
she is now an
Adult...
herself sentence is all verbs
Go! Work! Buy! Act! Eat!
We commiserate over coffee and writing tables
2000 miles apart.

Anna, before you mistake your own identity
let me tell you the Big Secret--
for when I was a child I made up rules
as only children can
I said to my 8-year-old self, I
said, 'when I am a grown up
I will have black pumps and car keys
checkbook and credit cards
Excedrin headaches and Calgon days.
I will eat Oreos head on.'

Little Me thought the advantages of Adult-hood
looked slimmer than a dab of white frosting.
(I watched Peter Pan and nodded... you too?)

Because
a trip to the moon in a cardboard box
was more exciting than drafting a grant proposal
and a cookout in a secret fort
with flaming black marshmallows and the smell
of goats and sassafrass
was better than a banquet with too many forks.

So Anna, look at me today
black pumps hurt my feet
gas pumps hurt my checkbook
I crunch two Excedrins before falling into morning
But there is one thing
that I never did get right.
I still twist my Oreos in two
and scrape the icing off with my teeth.
I have been known to blow soap bubbles and
watch cartoons with the sound
turned way down low.

Claire Grover
Self-Portrait  Blair Beitner
l'ennui existentialiste de la reveille

when you wake up
turn off your alarm
sit on the floor in the dark
getting ready to take a shower

it seems like
your whole life
is waking up
turning off your alarm
sitting on the floor in the dark
going ready to take a shower

Erick Trickey

confession #88

one time i got drunk
and stumbled from
bed to wall to floor
looking for something i would
recognize
and
your picture
didn't work

Dan Klyn
When the man in the sodden trenchcoat
shambles across your path, coat collar and palm upturned
you give him what he asks for:
5F for the phone, the bus, a brioche,
2F for the sterile jukebox of a pay toilet.
You give it to him because tea is waiting for you
safe in a cupboard,
because you will pass yourself on Rue Blatin sleeping in a
doorway,
because the wind bites the corners of your eyelids, making you
cry,
because the church is watching with one round eye from her dark
eyrie.
Inside, the vicar is collecting 5F for every candle.
Once
(For Steve Eller)

Once, cicadas cracked their skins and moved higher up the trees.
We picked the dried shells from bark and pinned them to our shirts.
Later, we stuck them on girls’ sweatered backs and then later we did other things with girls.
We drank together and smoked cigarettes and we listened to music and we dreamed.
Once, you fell asleep in the passenger seat of your best friend’s van, and woke to find yourself flying, truly flying.
soaring along the highway,
and the first time I met you I remember noticing how your hands, in disuse, had grown stiff and claw-like. I remember you scared me, in the way cicada skins scared my boyself.
Once, we became friends and talked of ourselves, we played music and I danced as your head bobbed to the invisible drumming of your arms.
You taught me to play chess well, even when drunk
And I saw the clean power of your mind, and I combed your hair and pumped the fluid from your lungs
and you entered my life in a cicada-cycle
at a time when I thought I could have no father.
You watched me come and go and grow while the cicadas droned a dream
for the summer night outside your window.

George Kourous
Twinkle
(for Steve Eller)

When first we were friends
& I tentatively gifted my hands
for your occasional use,
the thing that I most feared
was my hard fist buried in your flesh.
Each clenching finger felt the
movements of your bowels.
And I never pushed enough,
never got used to the noise from your nose
after every thrust,
the fear that I was inadequate
& that you would die, drown
in your own fluids, your life passing
through my hands.
I never got used to wiping clean your moustache
& the slow slide of frothy spit
down the inside of the mug I held to your mouth.
I left, and now in my
dreams I dream myself into your room
& I dream a fist for my fingers
& a mug
& a slow sliding of spit;
each tiny bubble a crystal tracery
of your shiny, translucent, twinkling life.

George Kourous
In October, it rained nearly every day. The sky, perfectly clear in the mornings, turned dark and heavy in the afternoons, and the rain came down in torrents, blotting out the world beyond our windows. I rushed to put buckets under the leaks in the roof, which seemed to multiply with every storm. When the rain stopped, light cascaded through the rents in the clouds, and soon they were driven away, unravelling into long grey mares' tails before the wind, and the sun came out to dry the grass and the steaming wet backs of the animals.

One morning, after a night rain, Daniel came to tell me that Rachel had had her baby.

"Where?" I asked, and he pointed silently to her small house at the foot of the garden, his expressionless old face telling me nothing. I walked across, nervous, afraid of what I would find, the wet grass soaking my legs and the hem of my skirt. I put my head around the open door and saw Rachel lying in her bed in her best green and yellow basuti, a small bundle wrapped in a clean white cloth beside her. A woman was bent over scrubbing the floor, and two others stood by the spirit stove, brewing tea. Their chatter stopped the moment I looked in, and three pairs of curious eyes scrutinized me in silence.

"Hello, Rachel," I said.

She turned her head on the pillow to look at me.

"Hello, Mrs. Guardy," she said.

I stepped hesitantly forward to look at the baby. Its eyes were squeezed shut, its skin crinkled as if it had been soaking overnight in a washtub. Rachel watched my face with amusement, and I knew she had meant all along for it to happen like this.

"Have you thought of a name?" I asked softly.

"I call her Night, because she was born then," said Rachel.

Gently, I touched one tiny hand, marvelling at the fingers and the soft curled palm, as pink and pale as the inside of a cowrie shell.

"You were all alone?" I had to ask.

"Yes, quite alone," she said, smiling now. "The pains started late in the night. When all had passed and I had cut the cord, it was growing light outside, and so I called Daniel to get a woman from the village. These three came, to wash and dress us, and to make the house clean." She looked down at the baby, smiling her knowing smile. "It was all so easy, you see."

I nodded, watching the tiny brown fingers curling so easily around my own.
Driving south, I watched the landscape change from flat savannah dotted with dark green thickets to fields of brilliant green maize and clumps of banana trees, their leaves drooping like tattered feathers over pendulous bunches of fruit. It was December, and sunlight glistened on the brown puddles in the road and on the dripping leaves of plants which the rain had washed clean of dust. Instead of buffalo and kob, pie-bald cattle and goats grazed beside the road and ambled slowly across in front of the car. People walked along the road, dozens of them; there were straight-backed young women in red and green dresses carrying buckets or parcels on their heads, old, old, wrinkled women creeping with rounded backs beneath great bundles of firewood, young men strutting in polyester shirts and flare-bottomed trousers, old men shuffling in rubber sandals and tattered black raincoats. Everywhere children scampered and shouted, their shrill voices cutting across the sound of the motor like the sharp cries of birds as we passed them.

I changed down gear after gear as the car chugged up a steep hill, crawling hardly faster than the plodding cattle. Still-eyed and slow, patient and inevitable as stones, they shambled unhurriedly out of our way. We passed a big white Catholic mission church, shining among cedar trees. Sebastian told me to turn left, and we drove into a dirt compound. I stopped the car and switched off the engine, and as it coughed into silence I heard muffled voices and the clucking of chickens. A girl peeped shyly out of a doorway, gave a shriek of delight, and disappeared.

"This is my home," said Sebastian.

It seemed dark inside the house after the outdoor brightness. There were only two small windows cut into the mud brick walls. We sat cross-legged on the hard-packed red clay floor, Sebastian and I, surrounded by women--his mother, his father's two junior wives, and several of his sisters and half-sisters. Mattresses lay on the floor at the other end of the room, and cooking pots were stacked against one wall. Sebastian's mother served me a huge bowl of spinach and banana stew, which I attacked with as much relish as I could muster. I had brought a roasted leg of lamb as a gift, but this had been carried off to an unknown destination as soon as I had presented it.

Sebastian's father, a wrinkled man with coffee-colored corneas and a jacket several sizes too big for him, sat on an up-turned crate chewing on a piece of sugar-cane while everyone else ate. He eyed me curiously for a long time before asking,

"You are married, Mama Guardy?"
"Yes," I said.
"Too bad," said the old man. "Sebastian, he looking for wife."

He chuckled throatily and spat out a piece of chaff, watching me as if to see if I would be shocked.
"Yes, he's told me that," I said.
“Eh, white woman cost too much anyway,” he continued, “Sebastian has not enough money. But, for me, I give twenty cows for you, mama!”

“Thanks,” I said, “That’s very generous of you.”

He laughed and slapped his knee and then lapsed abruptly into silence, chewing on his sugar-cane. The room filled with munching sounds. I tried not to notice that everyone’s eyes were fixed on me as I spooned up mouthful after mouthful of bitter, brownish spinach.

“Amin says too much white people in the world,” the old man announced suddenly. “Black people must have much children.”

I looked at the room full of women and girls, and at Sebastian’s mother, nearly forty and big with child.

“How many children do you have?” I asked.

“Eh, so many,” he replied, spreading his arms wide. “And three wife. This first wife, Sebastian mother. This middle wife, this youngest.” He poked the young woman sitting nearest him.

I looked at Sebastian, trying to catch his eye, but his gaze was fixed on the food in front of him. He remained completely silent throughout the meal.

Finally, the old man left, and Sebastian went with him. Almost at once, everyone else started to talk, chattering and poking each other, staring at me and giggling shyly when they met my eyes. The younger children crowded around to touch my hair and clothes. I asked Sebastian’s mother with a combination of hand gestures and Swahili how many children she had already. She held up ten fingers, and then three.

“Kumi na tatu,” she said.

“Thirteen,” I said. “So many children.”

She smiled a little and gave me a steady look that said this was a woman’s lot and she would not complain.

In the car going home, Sebastian was quiet. I asked him why his father didn’t eat with the rest of the family.

“The man of the house eats separately,” he replied. “The best food is reserved for him.”

“What will happen to my leg of lamb?” I asked.

“Probably he will eat it all.”

“Oh,” I said, “That wasn’t what I intended.”

“My people are very old-fashioned,” said Sebastian.

“But aren’t these customs changing a bit now?” I asked.

“In my country, madam, nothing changes,” he replied, and he turned to look out the window.

Josephine Rood
Patio

Bike sheltered in damp rug.
Unraveled porch chair that has
never seen better days--
Empty beer bottles that have.
The phone rings.
The tea cooks.
The cigarette burns and a
funnel of smoke swirls
over my head.
Sunday evening for listening:
listening to wind chimes,
air conditioners, and
voo-doo jive.
Dead leaves and dying
cigarettes and a very dead
Poinsettia.
A clothesline, naked.
A hose, green and coiled.
Two shovels, loitering.
Red tennis shoes, wet and too
small.
Sitting on the steps, glad for
no trains.
Mellow, tired, and waiting...

Kerry Gottfried
Geraldine

She sang her way from a clapboard church in Georgia all the way up north where the white lights shone on her bell of a body, casting shadows on the keyboard player who was no good anyway (diddling fool she called him) She was sure something though pouring the blues like a pitcher from her lips spitting the saucy soul on the rows of blind bland winterized women and men wasting nothing on the stage but winks and smiles Then she'd wind it all up for the audience shifting her weight til the table tilted sending her thunderthroated "Lord have mercy!" straight through the bones of the building setting its teeth on edge the crowd lathered up in a frenzy mouthing "let it roll, let it roll!" all the way home

Michelle Murray
"If a woman can do this
Five times,
Then I sure as hell can do it once."
So he went and had himself a baby.
And she grew up singing
About her daddy
Who cut himself wide open
To let her out.

Theresa Braunschneider
Twins

They both have doughy noses,  
a scar from the left ear of one 
to the right of the other  
connects them like the punk-rock lovers  
at the end of the bar are connected with a visible chain  
from the pierced cheek of the boy  
to the pierced ear of the girl.

Each wears a gravy stained t-shirt  
and holds his beer with the pinky  
finger under the can for better balance.  
The same plastic rimmed glasses,  
the same bald spot and pregnant paunch  
betray these two as brothers;  
even they can see it

and their bellies tremble with recognition  
as something contracts and turns over  
inside like a chevy as it warms up coughing and shaking  
after one hell of a long winter,  
and Leo says, after forty years,  
“Jimmy, meet your twin brother Ed.”

They laugh and point  
and touch each other's bald spots with a tenderness  
that surprises and embarrasses, so their hands jerk back to beer mugs,  
and later, to car engines and TV dinner boxes and things they are  
used to, and finally the smooth jagged line of the scar  
on their own faces late at night in the mirror;  
but for now they hold on to the bar,  
red faces curling inward to pull out more laughter,  
and they begin to discuss toothpaste brands and bowling techniques,  
resisting the urge to count fingers and toes,  
call relatives,  
or reach out and touch the brother before him,  
the beginning and end of his scar.

Roxanne Prillwitz
Untitled

Mom said the lonely know how to treasure. And putting things away mom would hold them against her self, as if touching their coldness could return something to her. She held them so close sometimes they would fall. She said porcelain was beautiful when it dropped and all the pieces danced away from the impact the way mom and dad used to break from a party and sit in the garden just to watch each other, just to hold each other as if they could each return something the other had lost.

Chris Matthews
Autumn

Cornstalks after the harvest.
Razor stubble
   on the face of our beloved mother.

Isn't it strange
That she shaves
   before the shaving cream is applied.

Chris Newman
The Whispering Summer

It is a whispering summer. There is no more water and the grass waits for the inevitable combustion beneath our leaping frisbee catching rolling to the ground feet. In Mike's front lawn the bushes have stopped growing and wait for night, for the cool night at which time I imagine them tingling, unfolding, opening, a nighttime lover, to kiss the dew.

There is dust in the air, on the stairs, in the dorm, down south, in the middle of Ohio. There is dust in the glowing air and it is dust and the light of youth--playing in the dining room under the table, the glass sliding door wide and open. Mike gives the acid to me and I ask man what do I do with it eat it right and he grins and does a little dance right there on the tile landing yeah man yeah man on your tongue leave it on your tongue for a while then swallow. I take it, plunk it down on my tongue-- it's like the first kiss, the first time you touched a girl's tongue with your own. Mike hands me a green can of pop and I swish it all down.

Running from the cops over the worn-smooth unsureness of the railroad ties is a sticky business. It's not the ties I watch--they roll quickly past--it's the water between them, far away and deep down below the ties, unveiled by the cruel moon. And I think I'm getting the hang of this as my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth and the sound of my pulse in my ear is the sound of every scared stride I take. The radio in the police car is still loud across the wide river Maumee when we hit the end of the bridge and fling ourselves over the clinking metal fence into the stygian blackness and cool greenery of the woods beyond and fall wildly down the bank thick with thorns and thistles down to rocks lapping water, silence, and the river. We can't find Mike. We think maybe he's dead.

I watch the thin legs of Mike's young brother scrabbling down the bulging stone side of the quarry--no purchase possible he's going to hit it's an unwanted prophecy as I see him plummet along the rocks his foot hits a boulder and bends but still he pushes off in one long mad last chance leap. My eye follows the invisible trajectory of his tennis shoes to the rocks and the water and I know he's going to hit.

I swim in to him and I'm there when it happens. I sit next to him in the shallows and put my arms around his shaking shoulders. He's calm and I think he's going to be OK. His hands are over his eyes and his breath makes a long hollow sound in the space between them. He's just scared I think and then I see his foot. The bone is sticking out of his soft flesh right above the ankle like a turkey drumstick only half-heartedly sucked on. I tell him--he won't look--I shout call an ambulance throw down a bag of ice I know there's plenty in the coolers with the beer. Then I hear Mike scream My brother! and I look back and straight up.
He's arcing over me like a bird of prey. His body intersects with the sun and it's like an Indian vision of my spirit animal. He's a hero in cutoff jeans, every muscle an exercise in adrenaline, his arms outspread, his head bowed as he drops in a perfect wild dive down down down to flash between the rocks, a glimpse of fighting trout and blue jeans.

I stand on the sandy steps of my dead father's church. At this moment in time no sight is more welcome than the sight of Mike, standing flatfooted on the pavement, a bit away from the clumps of sobbing Greeks, nervously smoking a cigarette, an Irishman lost in the wave of a Mediterranean requiem ritual. His arms are around me and we hug each other, crushing our neat silk ties. The orthodox Greeks look at us, the half-breed with long hair, son of an American woman, and the strange golden promise clad in baggy tan pants locked together understanding friendship really for the first time. We take a slow walk around the block, cigarettes dancing in our cold fingers.

There could have been no more fitting or useless way for Mike to die than the sharpness of LSD in his mouth, standing amazed in the center of the highway, his eyes filled with vision of star-stretched automobiles, facing down the inexorable tide of headlights sliding strangely at him. I'm not surprised that that's the way it was, for it was I who, that first time, got lost and stood scared, fingers gripping the dried pulp of a telephone pole, and stared at the infinity of taillights slinking redly, so redly and so safely away from me, slipping down the long perilous channel of that busy campus boulevard so long, god, so damn long ago.

George Kourous