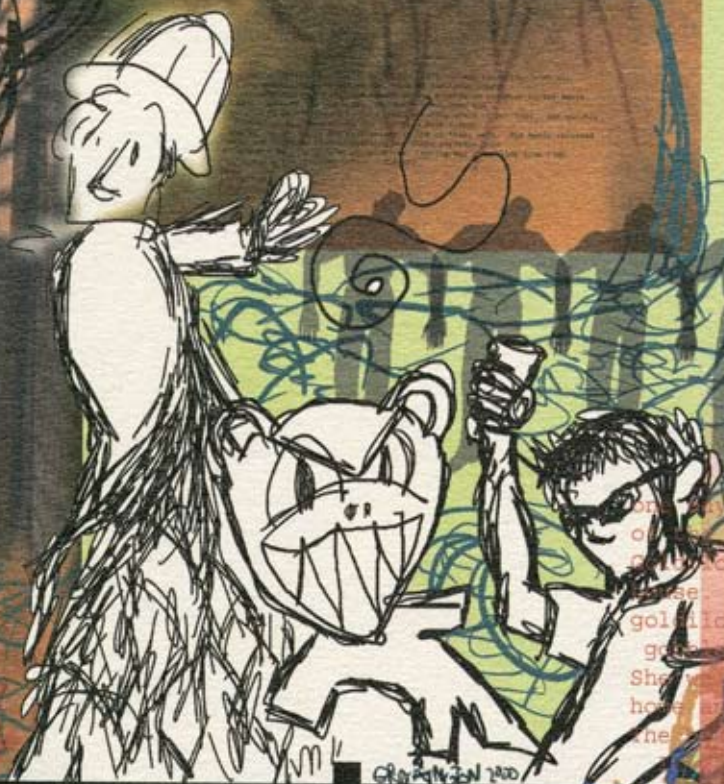


The

CAULDRON

XXIV



2003 — 2004

The CAULDRON

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V O L U M E X X I V

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Big Bowls of Porridge and Our Thanks Go To:

-Student Commission, for funding the magazine, and Emily Olson in particular, for her help with our budget

-The Kalamazoo College English Department, for its support and guidance

-Lisa Darling, Director of Publications, and Kristin Butler, for their brilliant work on the design of the magazine

-Terry Watson, of Watson De.Zin, for designing the cover one more glorious time

-Drew Brockington, for allowing us to use his inspiring art piece for our cover

-Sandy Rook, for typing the magazine onto disk and for her patience and good humor

-The Kalamazoo College Art Department, for assisting us in finding student art for the magazine

-Cari Carpenter and Chris Matthews, our Mellon Post-Doctoral Fellows, for serving as judges for The Divine Crow Awards

-Provost Gregory Mahler, for his unwavering support of creative writing at Kalamazoo College

-All the student writers and artists who shared their work with us.

A special thanks goes to Rob and Dianne Vibbert, the parents of Stephanie Vibbert, for supporting us in our wish to honor their daughter with ~~The~~ *Stephanie Vibbert Award*. This annual award will be given to a piece of writing published in *Cauldron* which best exemplifies the confluence of creative writing and issues of social justice. This year's winner is Matthew Pieknik for his piece of creative nonfiction "Walking Through Mae La."

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PREFACE

In early versions of "Goldilocks and the Three Bears," the bears are unrelated. No Mama Bear or Papa Bear, certainly no Baby. In the earliest known version of the story the bears are all males. Yet, from the beginning, the Bears inhabit a house. Not a cave or den. And the Bears eat porridge, not raw meat, nothing bloody. They're so civilized they even go out for a walk to wait for the stuff to cool. Enter Goldilocks the Wild Thang. In the original tale, the interloper was, as is often the case, an old woman, with roots in earlier stories in which the trespasser was a female fox a vixen. Vixen became crone, crone, the less threatening Goldilocks, Shirley Temple as breaker-and-enterer. In an odd reversal of the usual story, it is the Girl, not the Animal, who is the transgressive agent here. She window peeks. She tests the ~~wood~~ door (the Bears, being so trusting and true, have failed to lock). She walks in. You know the rest of the story. Porridge is slurped up. Chairs are broken. As evidence of her badness, Goldilocks even enters the Bears' bedchamber and crawls into their beds. When they return home and discover her, all hell breaks loose (as it must, in stories as in life). In later versions Goldilocks leaps out the window and is gone. In earlier ones, the crone (old harridan, old vagrant!) is picked up by the constable and thrown into a cell in the House of Correction.

When we saw Drew Brockington's digital art piece "The Third One Will Make It All Better," with its image and text references to the tale of Goldilocks, we knew it had to be this year's *Cauldron* cover art. Its graffitied bear, uneven fangs bared, could have been drawn on the wall of her prison cell by Goldilocks herself. Since we're writers, Goldilocks' transgression of The Bears' House is ours as well. We, too, bring chaos or revision to the civilized and buckled down. We, too, walk up to the edges of tradition the sonnet, the sestina open the door, let ourselves in. The discipline of creative writing itself is a sort of outlaw, rattling the gates of the academy. In some places, like Kalamazoo College, it's made its way in.

Two of Katie Zapoluch's poems bookend this year's magazine her sestina for Sylvia Plath, a Goldilocks if there ever was one, and "Sweating Holy Water," a near-song we swear we heard leaking from between the bars at the House of Correction. Between those seminal poems are other poems and stories and pieces of creative nonfiction which, each in their way, light a fire in the Bears' House, some through sheer

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* Denotes Stephanie Vibbert Award
Winner

** Denotes Divine Crow Award Winner



The Divine Crow Awards are given annually to three outstanding pieces in

The *Cauldron*, regardless of genre, and are judged blind. This year's judges were Cari Carpenter and Chris Matthews, Mellon Post-Doctoral

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I AM I (FOR SYLVIA)

Katie Zapoluch

In my nightmare, your face won't need a disguise:
dripped and rippled burnt out candles are my delight.
An amnesiac's stutter is merely memory's revision.
Because the arpeggiated Italian wind won't inspire,
rusted rails leave weighty freight in business unfinished.
Artichoke heartbeats and olive oil wells are my universe.

But tonight, all is not well in the universe:
no matter how you look at it, I see your disguise.
The surface is marred, the work is unfinished,
and the wax builds up in pools of quiet, pale delight.
Sandstorms come, harsh, shut my senses don't inspire.
And aren't we forgetting? This was a second attempt
revision.

Seeing you every day in the pools of my own eyes is a revision
I can no longer bear. I'm single now, afloat in the universe,
a poem of one stanza, not two. I don't want you to inspire
the scent of my hair anymore, and I won't even try to disguise
my contempt for hell's flesh, that fire, that earthly delight
of skin. I want to get rusty, oxidize, become work unfinished.

I'm ironing out the steely peeling bells of morning, unfinished
chimes ringing on disused ears. Misused eyes, a revision
of waxen dolls stuck with hatpins, and the lily thrill and
delight

of a corpse kiss in the mirror swallows me in my new
universe.

Scraping the flakes from cracked crimson lips, the disguise
wears off, and my senses sting as my lungs hungrily inspire.

This motivation, movement, thrust you didn't inspire
this in me. What you left, true, was an empty sack of unfin-
ished

rhymes, rhythms unarticulated, unglued. But to disguise
reality in a shroud of grief would be a transvestite's revision
of what really happened me. Without you, I found a
universe.

You made me think I was wax, but I am an ivory delight.

Charred and skeletal, yet whole and hard, I don't delight
in your pain. Rather, your tears wash ash from my eyes. I
inspire

pollen and seeds, and things are blooming in my paper
universe.

You once stripped me, now I strip you, and you're unfinished.
Every sunrise blinds your scars white, every sunset a night's

A FIELD GUIDE TO SECRETS

Meredith Adams-Smart

I have become a collector of secrets,
archivist of little glances and
picked noses. I have learned
to make pinky swear promises
with commas, hooking my finger
in the pause and knowing
what is waiting to be said.

The city breeds secrets, thousands
are born daily. They move silently among
the commuters, buildings, into and out of
sight. Watch for them:
An old woman with long roots
of yellow teeth planted in gray gums,
the bored look of a woman having
breakfast with a man she realizes
was a mistake,
a Polish woman eating chocolate
on the train and laughing
at its rebellious sweetness.

If you listen carefully when no one
thinks you are, you can hear secrets
growing between people:
a husband and wife arguing over
the purchase of a vibrator,
an Indian grandmother teaching
her granddaughter Bengali,
boys talking about you in a foreign
language they don't know you understand,
while you sit next to a pre-teen from Montreal.

In the city there are secret smells:
air moving from house to street
carrying with it the spices of someone's dinner,
smells of Mexico, Puerto Rico, India, Pakistan.
The perfume of a woman who wants
this date to go well,
stale cigarette breath from a man
as he brags into his cell phone that he hasn't
smoked in two weeks.
These are not the secrets of nature

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pearls, milkweed, pollination, hidden sex.
These are secrets that attach us to strangers
with fine sinewy understanding,
offerings of clairvoyance,
lessons in observation.
Secrets that hold us to this world.

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NO GIRL IS AN ISLAND

Sarah Martina

I was raised Catholic, and in my family that meant Catholic guilt. Guilt led us to attend church weekly and put crisp bills in the collection box, but most of all, it led us to confession. Every Thursday evening my mom put on her black pantsuit and toned down her lipstick, while Rachel, Patrick, and I dressed in our good-children faces. Dad drove us downtown in the Ford, always 2 or 3 mph below the speed limit, and dropped us off in front of the big stone church next to the bank. Half an hour later he would pick us up, our slates wiped clean of sin. That's the way it always was, even after Dad died and after Patrick finally told us he was gay and after Rachel moved in with that hippie right after high school. He was 36 years old to her 18, Jewish, and reeked of Patchouli and something else that I thought might be tofu.

I am 17 now, the only one still living at home and the only one who goes downtown with Mom on Thursdays, although now I drive her instead of Dad. I believe in the ritual, and the most part, it works. I confess the things that I know could potentially send me straight to Hell, and keep the rest to myself. I guess the way I see it is, some people have big secrets, some don't. Maybe you lied to your mom about your SAT score, maybe you stole a twenty from her purse to buy a fifth of vodka for New Year's Eve, or maybe you slept with your sister's boyfriend the weekend she was out of town at a peace rally. Even if, unlike me, you have done none of these things, these are still the type of sins you confess. They are the things you *do*, not the things you've thought. They are going to get discovered by real people sooner or later, so telling God isn't too much of a risk. It's the things you don't confess, the little secrets, that are far more telling. These are the ones that can go unexposed; they are small and perhaps harmless. You don't tell anyone, you don't even write them in a diary because you imagine you might die suddenly in a car crash, and while your mother is tearfully cleaning out your room she will find the diary in your sock drawer, she will read it, and she *will*. In fact, it's the little secrets, the insecurities and embarrassing moments, that are pushed to the back of your mind so that even you can pretend they don't exist.

But I am in therapy now, because Rachel, rightly, thinks I am a crazy bitch, and even Patrick ~~has a plan~~, it might just turn out to be beneficial. My therapist, Julie, has been giving

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NO GIRL IS AN ISLAND

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me weekly exercises to help me "open ~~No girl is an island,~~ she tells me. So last week she asked me to start keeping a journal, more like a running tab of all the things I feel guilty about, so we can discuss them. Clearly, this woman has no idea who she is talking to, what kind of mess she's gotten into, but the truth is, I like her, so I will attempt to be honest. I bought a new black and white composition book, with wide-ruled pages. However, when I am done writing, before I get the chance to be hit by a bus or a falling airplane part, most likely I will burn this and flush the ashes down the toilet. here goes:

1). Whenever I go into the Wal-Mart, to pick up poster board for a school project or ink for the printer, I am disgusted by the people who shop there. All the women seem to have stuffed themselves into neon spandex, their flabby white arms pushing a shopping cart containing at least ten kids, buying the processed food Mom never allowed us to eat Kraft singles, pre-mixed peanut butter and jelly, cheap cola, white bread. Their voices come out ~~No, put that down, goddammit, come back here, stop touching that~~, but their faces just look tired. They have bad hair and even worse teeth. If I am not busy trying to beat the words "white trash" out of my head, hoping no one can hear them besides me, I sometimes wonder if these women ignored the advice about birth control, or if, perhaps worse, they ignored the advice about toothpaste. It's so awful.

2). When I turned fifteen, I discovered accidentally that my mother was throwing me a surprise birthday party. I never told her that I knew. She would have been so disappointed she had been planning the party for weeks. That was the year that Dad died, and Mom was spacey. Even so, she put more time and effort into that party than I remember her putting into the funeral arrangements. There were balloons, presents she couldn't afford, three types of ice cream. I didn't have the heart to tell her that it wasn't necessary, that in the ninth grade, having a party hosted by your mom was social suicide. So when I walked in the house and saw heads pop out of closets and from behind the sofa, I smiled, and my mom cried. *Happy Birthday, Emily*, she said through her tears, and I replied with just what she wanted to ~~hear~~ *be surprised*. *Dad would have loved this, he would have been so pleased.*

Sometimes I wonder about that too, though, because Dad hated surprises as much as I did. In fact, ~~attach~~ ~~heartage~~ 53 was probably not the way he would have chosen to go.

3). Sometimes I pee in the shower it saves time in the morning. I d never admit this to my mom, especially consid ering she is the one who cleans the shower, because it really is disgusting. However, I suspect that she was the one who clogged the toilet at our annual Easter brunch last year, so maybe we re even.

4). My cousin, Mikey, has severe Downs Syndrome. He is the sweetest little boy alive, and the entire family adores hi Sometimes I babysit him for my Aunt Jen when she goes to her monthly book club. When she is around, I talk to him just like I would talk to any other eight year old. But after she leaves, when Mikey and I are alone in the house, sometimes I don t know what to say. Sometimes I find myself talking to him in the voice people use when they talk to babies, and I *hate* that. I know he is not a baby, but I feel so silly. He m sense this, I know, and that makes me even more uncomfort able. By the time Aunt Jen comes home, I usually feel so guilty that I don t want to accept her money. But I always do and Mikey always gives me a hug and a kiss on the cheek as I leave.

I take my list to therapy on Saturday morning after track practice. I am late, as usual. Julie is nice though, and doe say anything. I wouldn t mind being like her when I am older. She wears black lace stockings and red leather, and her office shelves are filled with books by Gloria Steinem, bell hooks, and a lot of poetry: e.e. cummings, Nikki Giovanni, Emily Dickinson. The room has no goofy half-bed, half-chair thing; instead there are beanbags and dumpy pillows, and a small fridge stocked with mocha Frappucinos from Starbuck s. *Good morning, Emily, she says* *How are things?* For a moment, I imagine that she actually wants to know, until I remember that nobody ever does. I smile, settle into my beanbag, and begin to tap out a rhythm with my fingers on my two front teeth. *Things are fine,* I tell her, and Julie smiles back. Her teeth are even and white, and she has two dimples that make her look young. She asks me about school, and running, and then brings up the assignment. I pull the composition book out of my Adidas bag, but do not give it to her ~~right~~ away.

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NO GIRL IS AN ISLAND

Continued

not finished, I say. But she tells me it's no problem, I can work on it some more and bring it back next week. I am relieved. Instead, we talk about Rachel and Mom, about their fights, and about the physics class I am failing. As has become the custom, Julie tries to trick me by slipping questions about Dad into seemingly benign conversations. *Dad, your father have trouble in school too, Emily?* she asks. Or maybe *Do you think you got your athletic ability from your dad's side?* I am not stupid, though, and we both know that. Still, she always asks me, just in case I am feeling unusually talkative, I guess. At the end of the hour she gives me a hug and a blue fountain pen, tells me to keep writing.

Thursday rolls around, and after dinner and a lazy attempt at homework my mom yells up to my room *Time for church*. I change out of my jeans and brush my hair, then meet my mom in the driveway. She is already standing by the passenger side of the car, and she looks so small. Lately, she hasn't wanted to drive at night. It's only quarter after eight but the sky is getting dark so I know she wants me to drive. I get behind the wheel, and less than fifteen minutes later I am in that familiar confession booth, talking to a faceless priest behind a wire screen. *Forgive me, father, for I have sinned*, I begin. Usually I have trouble coming up with things to say—after all, it's hard to build up too many major sins in just a week. This time though, the words jump like toads from my mouth. I tell him that I wrote physics formulas on the palm of my hand for my last exam, that I still haven't told my boyfriend about the time I met the long jumper from Country Day high school in the locker room after a meet. This priest is old-fashioned; when I am finished he only assigns me Hail Marys and sends me out, absolved. As I wait for my mother to take her turn, I drum my fingers against a pew and wonder what she could possibly have to confess. She comes out smiling though, so it must have been something juicy. Ha. We shrug on our jackets and walk to the car. I have forgotten to put money in the meter. *Fuck* my mom says, sharply, as she catches sight of the ticket pinned under the windshield wiper. I want to laugh my mom gets upset when I let escape a harmless *Oh my God*. Instead, I tell her I will take care of it and I turn on the car and search for a radio station that I know she will like.

Later that night, I consider writing my English paper, but

instead find myself taking out my composition book. It still looks brand new, and I flatten the pages with the heel of my hand and begin to write.

5). When Patrick still lived with us, when he was the age I am now, he was the president of the environmental club at school. Unlike so many people who joined up when activism became trendy, who suddenly sprouted dreads and Free Mumia buttons and claimed they had been vegan for years, Patrick really cared. He actually convinced Dad to look into installing solar panels on the roof of our house, and spent a week building a rotating compost bin for the backyard, reminding us constantly to save egg shells and apple cores. His senior year, he organized a recycling program. At the end of the first week, he asked me to drive the van full of cans and bottles and cardboard to the city recycling center because he had a meeting to go to. I had just received my learner s permit, but said okay, desperate to please him. The van was enormous, it felt like driving a school bus, and the directions he gave me were all wrong. After an hour of frustrated driving, driving that should have taken ten minutes, I parked on the wrong side of a one way street, discouraged and crying. As I prepared to go find a pay phone to call my mom, I spotted something in a nearby parking lot through the side-view mirror Without another thought, I backed up to the ordinary blue garbage dumpster and unloaded the carefully sorted bags. When I arrived home that night, Patrick asked me if everything went okay, and I told *Yes, I found the place fine, They said to tell you thank you for your hard work, Of course they were grateful that everything was presorted.* He smiled, but the next week the school changed the budget, and canceled the recycling program in favor of a spring talent show. I never told him.

6). On the first year anniversary of my dad s death, my great aunt sent Rachel, Patrick, and me Hallmark cards in the mail. She had to be at least eighty by then, and had been slowly losing herself to Alzheimer s for several years. We were so surprised that she remembered our names, much less the date, that we chose to overlook the strangeness of the cards. Mine said "Happy Birthday to a Special Daughter" and was signed in shaky script. Inside each was a check. Rachel

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NO GIRL IS AN ISLAND

Continued

and Patrick's were made out for fifty dollars each, but mine had been left blank. I didn't mention the oversight, to tell the truth I didn't even notice it at first. But at the bank later that week, I stepped up to the little counter that held the deposit slips, and used the pen attached to it and my left hand to fill in the missing spots on the check. *Seventy-five dollars and zero cents*, I whispered to myself as I wrote. I spent the extra twenty-five dollars on an eighth of bad weed at some party. Enough said.

7). My mom makes great cookies. Great food in general, actually, but cookies are her specialty. Last week, she bought the ingredients for those seven-layer bars, the ones with coconut melted on top, to make them for a neighbor's open house. When she got home from work, though, with just enough time to assemble them and put them in the oven, she couldn't find the chocolate chips. She asked me if I had eaten them, which I had, but I said no, of course not. She asked me again, and I denied it over and over until she finally settled for lemon bars. Stupid, I know, but it bothers me.

I scoot my chair back and flex my wrist. I am not used to writing so much at once, which is probably related to the fact that I am now close to failing English as well as physics and calc. I can hear my mom moving around in the living room below me the soft shuffling noises suggest that she has already changed into her slippers. I am the only one who knows that she has recently started sleeping downstairs on the couch, something she hasn't done since the month right after Dad died. For a while, she would just drift off watching Letterman, and move back upstairs an hour or so later. But lately she has been sleeping there all night, waking up to straighten the couch cushions before my alarm goes off for school. I don't blame her though, because my bed can feel empty too, and it's nowhere near as big as her king sized one. Sometimes I want to curl up with her, and breathe in her smell, like I did when I was a little kid and had the excuse of nightmares. I want to come home from school and see her standing behind the kitchen counter cutting up carrot sticks for a snack, instead of standing with vacant eyes, as though she is baffled at how she ended up in this house, with this daughter. I have an urge to talk to her, but as I start down the stairs I hear a click and then the soft static of the television. I decide to go back to my room, where I change into

one of Dad's old T-shirts and a pair of boxer shorts from god-knows-where. I climb into bed and flip my pillow over so the cool side rests against my cheek. I can't sleep though because my legs are restless and my mind is even more so. I keep thinking about my mom, and wondering if, a floor below me, she is restless too. So I get up and sit for a while at my desk, then open to a clean page in my composition book.

8). At the precise moment my father died, in the ICU on the third floor of the hospital, I was down the hall getting a Pepsi from the vending machine. It was his second heart attack, another surprise, more severe than the one that had brought him to the hospital in the first place. My mom had run over to the cafeteria to gulp down something other than jello from my dad's tray, and Rachel and Patrick hadn't yet arrived. She had said *Stay here with Dad, hon, I'll be back in ten minutes.* He was sleeping, so I didn't think twice about a quick jog down the hall in search of caffeine. The machine ate my dollar, though, and when I came back he was gone. I stood, shaking, as the nurses began to fill the room. My mom never thought to clarify, and that night, as I lay in bed beside her, she whispered to me *What a blessing, you know, that you were there to hold his hand.*

I put down the blue pen, the one Julie gave me, and start to cry. I cry big tears, tears the size of the drips from the broken faucet on the kitchen sink. I don't try to stop them; instead I sit still, and let my mind wander. An hour later, I wake up, slumped over my desk, my face strangely creased from resting on my open book. I shut it, and I watch the headlights from a passing car enter my window and sweep slowly across my wall. My mind feels surprisingly clear, as though I have just finished a satisfying round of sneezes. I remember what Julie told me, that no girl is an island. I smile and think about that summer we went camping at the beach in South Carolina, when we all still lived together Mom, Dad, Rachel, Patrick and me. I was five or six, afraid of the waves and spent hours combing the coast for shells, dead jellyfish, and sand crabs. My dad walked along the edge of the water with me, holding a plastic bucket in one hand and my thin brown wrist in the other. As the tide went out, a sandbar began to gradually appear, pushing its way up through the

EATING OURSELVES

Daniel Menzo

Gentle like brain surgery
separates me from me from

this point on I will be gentle with
all things considered it wasn't

too bad that it ended like that like
how is one supposed to have ended it

otherwise it would have separated me
from me from me there is only one thing

before you go down make sure you
can't be too serious consider

ring on finger finger in anus anus
us being what we wanted to believe

in God the Father and Holy Spirit but
so smooth and so soft it lent

like a sacrifice over foreheads
better than three governing members

clubbing the neurons out of the brain
surgery is gentle like lamb

markings on the road pointing in all directions
to not answers but more questions

one through eight and nobody's wrong
way through the other side of definition

in butts and chests and biceps and eyes
would not have to tell you that this only

one thing that needs to remain
entrance into this tenderness of gentleness

lingering over my head like pain medicine
forgive me forgive me for I have sinned.

UNDER THE APPLE TREE

Alasun Schrecengost

On the Father s Day after your cremation
your wife and youngest spread you around the yard.
I didn t need to play in your remains, scatter them
like sterile seeds; the ash
you were promised you d be returned to when righteous
hands
formed you out of dust: strong legs,
Herculean arms, callused hands.
But later, under the apple tree you planted,
I ate that body I refused to spread.
I chewed it from under my fingernails
with the dirt from that apple tree,
from the ground you worked.

The ground I now work.



HOW IT WILL BE

Divine Crow Award Winner

Meredith Adams-Smart

The day we decide to run away together
we will draw maps with lipstick
on our underwear.
A cartographer's fantasy,
there will be no possibility
for loss or displacement.
We will gather dead bees
from the attic window sill,
fill our pockets with their crisp stripes.
We will set green leaves to smolder
with our cigarette cherries.
Pile up heartbroken wishes
and loose teeth on the doorstep,
careful not to kick them
away as we walk out holding hands.
I will toss a lit match
over my left shoulder as we leave
superstition learned from my mother.

In the backseat of my car
our anxious bodies will squeak
across red vinyl seats.
We will strip down
to skin and sharp angles, shedding
maps and bees on the carpet floor.
I will let you climb my horizontal
body like a monument.
We will commemorate the loss
and gain of love, the gathering
of artifacts along the way.

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MY LOVE LIFE

Lynn Brewer

It s all about love these days.
Love between two people on a one night
stand. Love between a woman and her pink
thong. Love between a pair of sexy heels and blisters.
Love in a movie theatre with Humphrey and Ingrid.
Love in a fish bowl where everyone can see it. Love at
work where the cute guy is always too young for
you. Love with the bra that makes your breasts
look how you want them to. Love in the bank account
because credit cards are a girl s best friend. Love
with the decongestant that lets you breathe freely in allergy
season. There s love in your horoscope today, no wait, you
accidentally looked at Cancer instead of Capricorn. Love in
the empty shot glass that will have more love in it when it s
full
of Stoli s. Love in the glasses that let you see clearly the
faces you love. Love in the parking lot between two cars who
can t imagine life without one another and worry that their
owners
will forget the oil change is due in 27 miles. Love with
chocolate,
if you eat enough the chemical reaction in your brain is the
same
as when you re in love. Love with a professor who doesn t
mind flaunting her underwear or using the word "vagina" or
"nipple"
in casual conversation. Love with the best friend who you ve
never
dated but everyone jokes you two will be married one day.
Love
in books, with books, about books, all you need is books.
Love with Jimi Hendrix, when you groove out to him and
pretend
you re in the sixties, when pot and rock was everywhere and it
was all
about the love, baby, free love that don t cost nothing and
reaches
everywhere like the stretch marks on your mother s belly, the
faded
scars that she hates so much.

HAVE YOU SEEN THIS STATE?

Joe Tracz

I turned sixteen the day Ohio went missing. I know because my parents were letting me drive, luggage and presents in the trunk and the family crammed like so many canned goods in the backseat. I was nervous because it was a big responsibility for my first day with a license, and my dad kept looking up from his crinkly, oversized Fodor s to tell me I wasn't following the speed limit, or I should be in the other lane, or, come on, Jeffy, how did you ever pass that test anyway? On top of this, the twins were fighting and my mom was trying to play mediator, but the baby started wailing and the radio kept switching between music and static, and that's when we saw the big green sign saying "Welcome to Pennsylvania," and my dad just looked at the map, confused, and said, "Shit, where's Ohio?"

It was the first time I remember hearing Dad swear. In retrospect, it was as appropriate an exclamation as any. What, really, do you say when a whole state just up and disappears?

We weren't the only ones to notice this, nor were we the first. The sides of the highway were lined with parked vehicles, as commuters, truckers, and other motorists stumbled about like traffic accident survivors one big crowd of dizzy confusion. Through the chaos, everyone's eyes sort of drifted to this one guy, glasses and a suit, who paced around in circles saying, "It's gotta be the map. It's gotta be my map!" As if on cue, we all looked down at our own. But though we clutched them tightly and concentrated intently, it was pretty clear that, where I-90 East should've been connecting Indiana to Ohio, there was nothing but well, there was Pennsylvania. The maps were right; it was the geography that was wrong, like the entire state had just been skipped. The tollbooths were missing, too, which gave the whole road a slightly off-look, an unexplainable emptiness. And though more cars kept coming from both directions, engines wavering before screeching to a bewildered stop, it started to feel like the six of us were the only people there. Sure, there were whispers that I've now forgotten, shouts I never really heard. But mostly, there was silence, us just huddled together in the chilly Midwestern afternoon, until my dad touched my shoulder. "Let's go."

And we did. There was nothing else to do.

Dad took the keys and drove the whole way back.

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HAVE YOU SEEN THIS STATE?

Continued

It was all we heard about for months to come all anyone heard about, really. "Ohio: MIA!" "The Lost State!!" "Ripped from the Heartland!!!" With each passing day, the number of exclamation points following the headline seemed to grow. Twenty-four hour news coverage, but what could they say? A talk show host suggested putting it s picture up at the post office. Or on a milk carton: "Have you seen this state?" TH became a popular catchphrase for the next couple of weeks, and, what with the general state of confusion, it sounded almost logical.

At first, most of the talk centered around the victims, but what really threw us all for a loop was that there didn t seem to be any missing persons. Oh, sure, it took a little while to locate everybody, and, to this day, there s still the inevitable disagreement about numbers, but by and large everyone who lived in the former state of Ohio came forward to say, yes, I okay, thanks for your letters and your concern. An overwhelming number of them had been on vacation, or out of state on business or field trips. My grandma whose house had been our destination on that ill-fated drive turned up three days later in Canada. She said she d completely forgotten about our visit, and had taken off for a weekend at the casinos with a few friends from church. Also, though she missed her old house, wasn t it about time she got a condo in Florida?

As these stories grew stale, the news turned to the search for explanations, but since none seemed plausible, and no evidence ever turned up, even this got relocated to cable channels and daytime talk shows perfect for a topic on which everyone had an opinion but no one could agree.

The twins were just as bad as anyone else. "Aliens," said Alex over cereal one Saturday.

"Naw," said Allen, "government conspiracy. Like JFK, right Jeffy?"

I grabbed a pack of Pop-Tarts no time for cereal and shook my head. "Communist revenge."

"I like my theory best." Alex made an alien face at Tanya in her highchair, chocolatey milk sliming down his chin.

"Grow up," I told him and left the house. Now that I could

drive, this was a regular occurrence. Home was too stagnant, the people too familiar embarrassing even. I was glad for the gift of spontaneous removal, with its promise of acceleration, voyage, discovery. Escape. I couldn't get out of the house fast enough and I left the tire marks to prove it.

My parents noticed but intervened clumsily. "We just want to know where you go," said my dad, during the first of many stony front door face-offs. I contemplated telling him about the girl I'd met at 7-11, who looked so serious ~~like~~ buying *Wall Street Journal* but, it turned out, could play the national anthem by whistling through a Slurpee straw. Instead, I asked him what about what I wanted and he ceremoniously snatched away the keys. "This isn't a democracy."

After dinner he made us all watch television as a family, news footage of helicopters circling the same plain flat land over and over. A large chunk of tax money was to be given to the cartographer's union, they announced. Call in now and tell us whether you think more border guards are the solution. My dad sat riveted in his rocker and even Alex and Allen stopped dismantling the remote to pay attention. I didn't see why I needed to be there. Why should the disappearance of one little state keep me from having fun?

The remaining forty-nine states seemed to feel the same way. Small changes had to be made, sure. Maps were readjusted, geography books altered. They kept fifty stars up on the American flag maybe to hold out some hope that Ohio would one day return, maybe because it would be too much work to change after so many years. Maybe a little bit of both.

One night I came home a good hour and a half past curfew to find my dad, alone, awake at the kitchen table. He was poring through the pages of a thick book, mothy brown. I shut the front door behind me as quietly as possible and watched him. He had his reading glasses on. Now and then he'd flip a page too quickly, and dust would shoot up, high lighted by the lamplight. I must have started walking towards him at some point because I suddenly found myself peering over his shoulder. The book was a photo album. On the page was a picture of a little boy on a tire swing. I thought was me, but the caption ~~was~~ *Vernon, OH, 1961*.

"I was born there," he said. I don't know how long I'd been standing there, but he didn't seem to regard it as

(continued)

HAVE YOU SEEN THIS STATE?

Continued

strange. "Your mother, too. Not Mount Vernon. But in Ohio somewhere."

"So was William McKinley." A fact I'd learned in school I don't know why I thought of it then.

My dad shot a sideways glance. "So were you, you know."

I said, "Really?" I might have known this already. I was tired and stoned and just glad he hadn't brought up how late it was. I said, "I think everyone knows someone who was born in Ohio."

He either smiled or frowned, I couldn't tell which. "There's a picture of you on this very same swing. You were oh, I forget. One and a half? Two? It's around here somewhere. I can't seem to find it now."

"That's okay, I'm tired anyway." I inched towards the stairwell. Could he tell my eyes were red? But he kept flipping from page to page, forwards then backwards. He wasn't looking at me at all.

"I could ask your mother in the morning." He was getting sentimental, desperate. I remembered him swearing at the state line and wasn't sure which person I liked better. It made me angry that he'd waited up for me. Why? What did he still want? These days I saw freeways in my sleep, traced them like veins, like the crimson cartography on the 7-11 girl's alabaster arms. Earlier that night, in the backseat, we come close to trading virginities. Now he wanted to show me a picture from when I couldn't even walk?

"Your mother will know," he said. "We could ask her now, if you want."

I reached the hallway. "That's okay." I ran up the stairs two, three at a time.

The night after that, I didn't come home at all.

XXIV



THE BEGINNING OF FAT

Lisa Findley

What was Eve s sin? –
She ate.

No wonder I hunch over my food,
furtively looking around
for those who may see me
naked, needy.

I go out in the world
in the skins of animals,
but I see others eyes and know
they re not fooled –
they hear the meat smacking
against my sides,
see the fat dribbling
down my thighs,
taste the blood drooling
into pools at my feet –
and they know it all to be mine.
The serpent slithers at my heals,
a constant companion,
his mouth full of fruit.

WHITE UMBRELLA

Meridel Thomson

Before I could get one in I wore loose pants, letting cool air fly up and around my thick pad, taking large strides to stop the ~~swishswish~~ of plastic and paper between my thighs. Only old women wore them, women like my mother, who just "couldn't stand those damn things up them all the time" after that space had seen so much traffic for so many years. Women like my mom bought economy-sized, economy-priced boxes of pads that filled the space under the bathroom sink and made large thin-skinned red wads in the waste basket. Young blonds with tight white clothes, straight white teeth, and new white ~~cars~~ wore the white umbrellas, and I wanted to be them, even if they ~~were~~ ~~only~~ 13 inches tall in the TV screen. My mom had a body full of hills and valleys, but these girls had white umbrella bodies, straight and slender, save for their breasts, which smiled up at heaven and never jiggled, even if they were jumping on trampolines, their legs parallel to the ground on either side, like Barbie Dolls. Free. Clean. Sexy. There is nothing sexy about a red tent, where the woman is left alone with her blood, no men around to witness the fish scarlet rivers flowing. The white umbrella mops this mess up, pulling sea life into its nets, soaking up the shame of womanhood with one smooth sponge. Getting one in is all about direction. I couldn't sit for a whole day after pointing its white nose straight up, instead of back, which the diagram clearly illustrates with a woman, only an outline on black to bring her into naked existence for young girls to imitate on cold bathroom tile, all alone with blind fingers. This sexy little cotton secret inside made me mysterious at fourteen, and it's true, you really can't feel it. It's like it never happened, like the thunder and rain and wind that comes with being a woman

GAPS

Carol Flanigan

By the time I was in third grade, I still hadn't lost a single tooth. All my peers' teeth were dropping like flies and for years now they had been coming in day after day, their mouths hanging open while they wiggled a newly loose tooth or to show the gap left behind from an old friend. Meanwhile, my baby teeth remained, steadfastly dedicated to the homes they had staked out in my gums eight years before. It looked like my older brother had had this sort of problem too, but his teeth didn't stick around quite so long as mine. When he was seven he tripped over our cat and crash landed mouth-first into our kitchen table. There was a solid sheet of red on his chin that cascaded down onto his white t-shirt and all during the ride to the hospital, he kept spitting out little pieces of tooth. When he got back, he looked like our great-grandfather in that in-between moment before he puts his dentures in. Scott couldn't bite into anything for months so my mother had to cut and rip every thing into manageable pieces. That first night my father told him that the Tooth Fairy doesn't give money for broken teeth, since they are of no use to her as she attempts to build a palace out of solid teeth, but of course when Scott woke up the next morning there were two wrinkled dollars bills under his pillow. He had lost seven teeth in one day, which works out to a little over a quarter a tooth. That was pretty much the going rate in those days.

In my own classroom, you could already tell which kids were going to have million-dollar smiles and which were going to have huge chunks of metal wrapped around their heads for three years. Not me though. I sat in a desk near the middle of my classroom with all those mouths filled with adult teeth surrounding me and I would gently push on each of my teeth in sequence to see if I could feel a little give that would signal its coming departure. There were times at home where I would position our cat between myself and the kitchen table and I would get myself ready for a good running start. I would be off, my eight-year-old legs pumping down the hallway and my mind thinking of how good it would feel to have a nice clean space in my mouth and how I would be able to wind my tongue up into the gaps when my new permanent teeth eventually came in. This never worked. Either I would chicken out and veer off to the right moments before impact with the cat, or she'd get sick of waiting for me and wander off by herself toward the food dish, or my father

would find me and catch me in his arms as I ran past his study.

So I was stuck as the freak-show third-grader with no adult teeth, no expectant gaps. Not even a wiggle.

Four days before my ninth birthday my mom got concerned about this and called my dentist. Two days after my ninth birthday I was in the dentist's chair with a lead vest over my chest and an x-ray machine humming at my cheek. A little while later, the dentist informed me and my gathered parents that my adult teeth were all ready to erupt and it was just a matter of my baby teeth getting out of the way, but if they didn't do it soon, my adult teeth would try to crash through the baby teeth barrier anyway. This would cause damage to my gums and adult teeth, as well as causing pain for me. So, he said, he could pull out the eight or so teeth that were ready to be replaced and save me all the trauma. As good dentist-loving Americans, my parents agreed to this plan, despite the look of horror that was on my face at the prospect of having my beloved ~~teeth~~ naturally removed, and an appointment was set up for a week later.

That night, after I brushed my teeth, I ran my tongue along my four top teeth. My beloved teeth, that had been with me for so long. They had bitten into sandwiches, cookies, and once my brother's arm and they were still devoted to their mission. Lined up like little soldiers in armor, prepared and dedicated to a fight against anything crunchy, hard, or too large to swallow. They were good teeth and I suddenly wished I had named them. I could never give them up, sacrifice them while under the needle. I vowed that the only thing that would yank out my teeth would be not a set of dentist's pliers, but a string tied to the front door.

My brother pounded on the bathroom door. "Are you done in there yet?" he called through the wood.

Not wanting to give up my spot in front of the mirror, I leaned towards the door and pulled it open. Scott was now thirteen with a set of pearly whites that stood straight and tall and were the envy of many of his peers whose own teeth were buried under metal. He wedged his way between me and the wall and nudged me repeatedly with his hip until I was on the far side of the sink. Then he expertly grabbed the toothpaste tube from the drawer and spread it on his toothbrush so that paste landed on his brush like a butterfly, gently, gracefully

GAPS

Continued

beautiful as the toothpaste on commercials. His toothbrush was far more adult than mine—it was blue with different lengths of bristles, in order to reach the plaque on his molar the box had said. Mine was red and only had one size of bristle and was a full inch shorter than the rest of my family. I watched as Scott's front teeth became obscured by the clouds of the toothpaste's foam, and when he rinsed, his teeth were revealed like shining little moons. I ran my tongue along my own teeth again and suddenly became fully aware of their stubbiness, their worn color, their general inferiority. Scott's and my peers' and everyone around me who had joined the world of adult-teeth bearers. Even first graders had adult teeth already. I was a stumbling block of evolution and my baby teeth were not just preventing the eruption of my adult teeth, but also my adult self. Until I had those permanent teeth--clicking together and smiling friendly, knowing they would ~~last~~ last around for the rest of my toothed life—I would be a lowly shell of a human.

"Did you plan to run into that table?" I asked Scott, who was now attending to his face with the carefulness of a preening movie idol.

"What table?"

"You ran into a table and then all your teeth fell out. Did you mean to do it?"

"Yes, yes, I did," said Scott deadpan, keeping his eyes on his own reflection. He had caught sight of a forthcoming pimple and was dedicating most of his attention to it. "I said to myself, Scott, why don't you just ram your face head-on into the kitchen table so that you bleed all over everything and are screaming in pain and look like you belong in a freak-show for months until your teeth grow in? I couldn't think of a reason not to, so I did it. No, Shawn, I did not. One's that psycho."

"Right," I said.

Scott turned to me and put his hand on my shoulders. Eye to eye, now, he said, "Shawn, don't do it."

"I won't," I said, pretending to be insulted that he thought I would be that psycho.

"Are you worried about this pulling teeth thing?" asked Scott.

"Well, wouldn't you be? It's like they're going to pull bones out of my body! I like my bones," I said, covering my

mouth protectively.

"Yeah, but your baby teeth are supposed to come out," said Scott.

"I want them to come out. They're ugly, I think. And I want to have adult teeth that I won't have to worry about. But I don't want them pulled out by a dentist, I think."

Scott shrugged. "You want me to punch you in the mouth?"

"Yes," I told him. I hadn't thought of that as an option and I don't think that Scott really meant to offer it. He always threatened me with a punch in the mouth when I was annoying him. He was probably just saying it to get me out of the bathroom, but this time, I could use this threat to my advantage.

Scott raised his eyebrows and scrunched up his nose like he did when he didn't understand a joke or the end of a movie. "You shouldn't want someone to punch you in the mouth."

"Come on, just do it," I commanded.

He took me by the shoulders and pressed me up against the cool tiles on the wall. With his hand under my chin, he steadied my head and said, "Get ready." I nodded and he let go of my face, taking a step back. "Don't duck at the last second or I'll ram my hand into the wall, okay?"

"I won't, Scott," I said.

"Good," he said, and then breathed in deeply through his nose. "Close your eyes. It'll make this easier."

I took one last look at my brother, wearing a white t-shirt and red plaid flannel pants. He had his right fist already tightly clenched and pulled back behind his shoulder. I closed my eyes, but even in the darkness behind my lids, I could see his fist. My face could feel the air getting pushed out of the way of his fist as it came hurtling towards me. I could feel my teeth cowering behind my tightly pressed lips. But I stood firm. And, amazingly, when Scott finally came in contact with my mouth, it wasn't as painful as I expected. Teeth didn't go flying into the back of my throat and blood didn't gush from my lips and gums. But it did hurt, the back of my head had bounced off the wall and I had bit my lip firmly, and even though I had promised myself I wouldn't, I screamed bloody murder and I felt tears collecting in my eyes. I tested out my teeth—still solidly rooted.

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"I can't believe you just punched me in the mouth!" I sobbed.

"You told me to," said Scott, bending down to my level and putting his arms around me.

"I guess I didn't mean it," I said.

"Don't say things you don't mean," said Scott, as my mother came to the door, with an expression more angry than concerned. When you're the mother of two boys, you learn to get angry rather than worried. She yelled at us a little and said things like, "I can't leave you two alone for a minute" and hemmed and hawed at the bump that was starting to swell on the back of my head because of the tiles. We were both sent to bed immediately and after Mom finished quietly reprimanding Scott, she came into my darkened room. I pulled my blankets up to my ears and chewed nervously on the sheets. Mom sat down on the bed next to me and gently pushed the hair back from off my forehead.

"Honey, Scott says he's sorry he hit you," Mom said. "Don't chew on your blankets."

I pushed the blankets away from my face. "It's okay," I said. "I told him to."

"Yeah, he said that, too," she said. "Don't ask Scott to punch you again. I don't like you two hitting each other."

"I won't."

"Are you okay with this teeth thing?" Mom asked.

"I want them out," I told her. "I think I'm just nervous about having them taken out at the dentist and everything. Is going to hurt?"

"Not too bad," said Mom. "You're going to have medicine so that you won't actually feel anything, but you'll probably be sore afterward and you won't be able to eat anything too crunchy."

"It's okay. I like soup," I told her. "Can I keep them?"

"What? Soup?" asked Mom.

"No, my teeth," I said.

Mom was silent for a few moments and I could see her silhouette place its head in its hands. "Why do you want to keep your teeth?" she asked.

"Because I love them."

Mom sighed and said, "We need to get you a dog." Then she kissed me softly on the forehead and whispered, "Love you, sweetie." The whisper smelled like toothpaste.

* * * * *

A week later I was brushing my teeth again—brushing my baby teeth for the last time. Although I was nervous about having my mouth pried open and important parts of my body ripped out, I was excited, for on this day a new chapter in the Life of Shawn would commence. I would no longer be a child whose mouth was filled with baby teeth, but I would be a man with adult teeth to spare. All during the week I had been filling myself with the hardest, crunchiest food in the house: pretzels, celery, carrots, hard cookies, even old Christmas candy canes, which I bit through instead of sucking. In school, I chewed my pencil fervently and then gazed at the marks left, thinking of the bigger, better teeth that would dent my future pencils. As I put my own tube of toothpaste away that morning, I looked at the tube of toothpaste that was shared by my parents and brother. Unlike my own, it had been consistently squeezed from the bottom and now that half was curled up like a snail in a shell. My own had grooves all over the tube and little drips of blue peeked out from under the cap. Plus, there was a cartoon saber tooth tiger on mine encouraging me to brush after meals. I was disgusted. These teeth and all their paraphernalia had to go. Tonight, I thought, throwing my old tube into the garbage. Tonight, I would brush with the well-squeezed toothpaste.

I got to leave school at lunch, which was fine, because by doctor s orders I wasn t supposed to eat, anyway. My dad came to pick me up and when I saw him in the principal s office I couldn t help grinning despite the butterflies in my stomach. Dad smiled back and said, "Ready to go, kiddo?"

I rolled my eyes. "Dad, come on. I m about to become a man."

"What exactly were you planning on doing today?" he asked.

At the dentist, there were a two other kids there with their parents, the kids nervously hanging onto the parents sleeves and the parents flipping their ~~People~~.

"Do you think the dentist will let me keep my teeth?" I asked my dad. I wanted my new teeth but I couldn t just abandon my old ones. One time, we had been driving and seen a large cardboard box with the ~~Free Cats~~ in black permanent marker on it. We would have pulled over and looked at them, but it was raining outside. All the rest of t

(continued)

GAPS

Continued

drive, I kept thinking about those kittens left in a box in the downpour with no protection, with no Mom, with no company, even, except for a bunch of other wet cats. I didn't want to leave my baby teeth out to the elements. They would stay with me. It was called being a good tooth-owner.

"We'll ask," said my dad.

In the dentist's chair with a plastic mask over my mouth and nose to bring me calming nitrous oxide, I tried not to look at the steel instruments that rested on the paper-towel covered tray at my side. I ground my front teeth one final time as I waited for the dentist himself to come in and I tried not to think of losing my teeth. I tried to remain optimistic. I had been all through the week. Every click of my teeth accidentally bumping into each other seemed so loud in the silence and stillness of the dentist's room. I ran my tongue along the back of my front teeth and was shocked at how dry they were, and then I realized my whole mouth was abnormally dry and that my tongue stuck to what it was touching like a sock with static cling. Through foggy eyes, I saw the dental assistants put a needle in my arm, and I felt the dull sensation of another needle going into the gums above and below my teeth. The needle was what I had been dreading the most, really, and here it was, barely a sensation that I could register.

When I woke up in my bed, there was darkness outside my window, but light slipped underneath my door and I could hear my mom and dad talking not too far away. I slowly, cautiously, nervously lifted my tongue toward where my teeth had been. I had expected a clean, smooth clearing, but I was shocked to find that a metal bar had been suspended between my remaining teeth and that my gums were raw and rough. I turned on my bedside lamp and swung my feet onto the floor. I turned to my mirror and opened my mouth, pulling my lips away from my teeth with my fingers. It was impossible that something could be as ugly as I was. Not only were my baby teeth failures who didn't know when to give up the ghost, but this in-between stage was gruesome. With teeth like mine, my adult teeth were bound to come in rotted already and crooked beyond repair. I would have to get those pulled, too, and I would have dentures at twelve. I would apply for jobs, but people would be too repulsed at my toothless state that I would never be hired. I'd have to

become one of those old teeth-less hobos that my mom always tried to ignore and who smelled like Taco Bell combined with pee. My fingers reached into my mouth and grabbed at the upper metal bar, tugged at it as hard as possible, and then did the same with the bottom. When it didn't give at all, I tried harder, my fingers slipping off of wet smoothness and unable to get a decent grip. I pushed on them with my tongue and hooked my thumb around the backs, trying to pull them out. I grasped frantically at them resorting to pulling on the teeth the metal bars were attached to. My face was red with tears and blood, as I had accidentally opened up some of the stitches in my attempts. Exhausted, I threw myself onto my bed on my stomach and pressed my face into my pillow.

Behind my gasps for breath, I heard the door to my room open. I turned my head so that one eye could see Scott standing at the door with his hands in his sweatshirt pockets. He looked at me skeptically, and I couldn't help hating him and how his teeth flashed as he said, "What's your problem?"

"Look at this!" I said, pointing to my mouth. "I don't have teeth!"

"What did you expect?" asked Scott. "Come wash your face. It's a mess." Scott came to the side of my bed and lifted me to a sitting position. "Come on." He tugged on my hand, which was bloody and had tiny still-dripping cuts on the finger tips. Scott put his arm around my shoulders and guided me to the bathroom where he wet a washcloth and sat me on the toilet while scrubbing my cheeks.

"You lost two more teeth than me today," said Scott. "I only lost seven when I tripped over the cat and Dad says they took out nine today. Did you get any money under your pillow?"

"You told me the Tooth Fairy was fake a year ago," I told him. It felt so odd to life my tongue up to my teeth to speak only to find the roundness of the bar. I wondered how different it made me sound.

"Well, anyway, it's pretty impressive," said Scott, wringing out the washcloth in the sink. "And I didn't get those spacers, either, they just crossed their fingers and hoped my teeth would come in soon."

"How long did it take?" I asked.

"A couple of weeks or something," said Scott. "Not long at

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all. Are you hungry? Mom made you some homemade applesauce. Extra smooth."

"No. I think I'll go to bed again. I'm tired still."

Scott shrugged and reached into his pocket. He pulled a little blue plastic resealable bag out of it and laid it on the counter. "Those are your teeth," he said. "They're all clean and washed off. And they're whole. That's lucky. I'll tell Mom you're awake."

After he left the room, I couldn't take my eyes off the bag of teeth. Each little lump and bump on the surface of the bag used to be in my mouth. I reached across the sink and brought the bag to me. Inside, the teeth were in shadow and I had to shift the angle of the bag and my head in order to see them well. They were so small and helpless looking, and they seemed unworthy of all the power I had given them in my mind. It seemed unreal that they used to be an unchangeable part of me and that these were the very same teeth that had chewed gum and given Scott a scar on his ankle. I reached in carefully and pulled one out of the bag. I couldn't even tell where it had ~~my~~ mouth. As I was staring at it, my mom came and stood in the doorway.

"They're so little," I said, holding it up to show her.

"I know." She smiled.

"I didn't actually think you guys would let me keep them."

"Well, I didn't want to buy you a dog, so I figured if teeth make you happy, why not keep them around."

"How long will I have to have these in?" I asked, pointing to the bars.

Mom shrugged. "A couple of weeks or so. Your teeth are all ready to come in, so it's just a matter of time. The dentist didn't want the teeth in your mouth to get in the way and crowd your new teeth. Are you sure you're not hungry?"

I nodded. "I just want to go to bed again. I'm really tired."

"Well, take your medicine first, okay?" said Mom, heading for the cabinet. She pulled out a little orange tube and said, "You need to take four of these a day and bedtime would be a good time to do it."

"Okay," I said. I put the tooth I had been holding back in the bag and stood up. I was standing next to my mom in front of the mirror, and I opened my lips again to see where my teeth had been. It was now much easier to imagine

Meghan Kralely

"I hate you!" I spit out after the gritty handful of sand and dirt she forced in my mouth. Later I bite my sister again and again, in the tub and through her footed pajamas and passing on the stairs when she narrows her eyes at me.

At dinner Mom notices the half-moon of small red scabs on her wrist. "Did you do this to her?" she demands, and smacks my bottom once, hard. Grinding my teeth, I feel the leftover grains of sand and glare at my sister across the table. Neither of us says a word.

"I think I might be pregnant." My sister starts to laugh, then catches her lower lip between her teeth. I stare at the Berber carpet; one loop is longer than the others, its green fibers twisting together before plunging back toward the floor. Mom starts to talk, too quickly, about adjustments and sleeping arrangements. "When the baby comes "

When the baby comes. My sister is a baby, younger than I am, still in high school, fresh out of her homecoming dress. Too willingly out of her dress for her dropout boyfriend, proud father of four previous abortions.

I glance out the window at a hummingbird hovering near the feeder and wonder if I can leave yet. My big toe cracks and I realize I've been pressing it hard into the floor. I am too embarrassed to look at my sister.

The doctor steps back, satisfied. "You're looking real good there, young lady." My sister is small in her makeshift robe, but her eyes are luminous from watching her first ultrasound. "Now, I want you to listen carefully, you hear?" She nods as he warns her not to drink bleach under any circumstances. "I know it sounds silly, but pickles aren't the only cravings you might get." I nod too, letting this sensibility digest. How can you crave something you've never had?

We pick up pizza on the way home, and my mouth salivates as its warm aroma fills the car. Is this what it feels like to want to crush chalk or limestone between your teeth? Swallowing hard, I refuse the pizza at dinner that night, claiming refuge in a sick stomach. A curious sense of strength diffuses throughout my limbs even as my mouth and stomach retain their empty feeling. I decide to stop eating.

The absence of food consumes me, invading my dreams

(continued)

SWALLOW

Continued

and controlling my activities. If I work in the back until Li arrives, I won't be tempted to grab an office bagel. I can study in the library until it's too late for dinner, and say that was a potluck at work. It is easy to avoid eating around other people. It's only with nobody watching that my body betrays me, running to the trashcans, sucking on empty wrappers for the last vestiges of nourishment.

There are other tricks. A pot of coffee is warm, comforting, and essentially free of calories. I brush-my teeth constantly to repel the cravings that creep into my tongue without warning. Peppermint reduces appetite, did you know? Chugging 20 ounces of Aquafina when I'm really desperate works the best, though. The clear piss is purifying.

My sister takes prenatal vitamins, large enough to contain a square meal, condensed for convenience. The supplements brighten her eyes, thicken her hair even as mine starts falling out in clumps in the shower. I touch the warm skin of her stomach, feel it grow firmer and riper until even her bellybutton pops out, a guaranteed seal of freshness.

My stomach shrinks away just like the man who impregnated her; who is not a man; who does not stay to help their child become a man. I like feeling empty, the concave foil to her gentle curving. We both stroke our stomachs before the mirror in admiration when we think no one is watching.

When she thought no one was watching, my sister hacked at her wrists with a steak knife smuggled from the kitchen drawer, her breaths drawing as ragged as the scars that marked her skin. There is no family conference this time, but I curl my knees to my chin as low murmurs of concern float under my parents' bedroom door.

Late that night I steal into the kitchen and carefully trace the scalloped blades with my index finger, trying to detect traces of her desperation. A bright drop of my own blood spills onto the steel when I press too hard, and I think this must be the one she used.

My blood stops flowing after just a few weeks of skipped meals; my placenta sacrificed to nourish the embryo growing inside my sister. Hers has slipped, fallen: placenta previa, the doctor calls it. A wayward obstacle on the wrong path, it

XXV

blocks the birth canal as if it, too, knows this pregnancy is not right. A complication.

When my sister has her first contraction, my mouth goes dry. I am too young but she is younger, and I mop her forehead with a washcloth as she drifts in and out of consciousness.

Seventeen hours later, she is weak and pale, but holding a beautiful boy. The room smells of formaldehyde and I remember the queasiness of eighth-grade biology.

I pick an apple from her complimentary food basket and study it, noting the tiny freckles that dot its skin and the small dark bruise near the bottom. I hold it in my lap, transferring it from my right hand to my left, and back again.

I swallow, and slowly raise the fruit to my mouth, puncturing its skin with my front teeth. The juice sprays up at me and my sister catches my eye and smiles. Neither of us says a word.



PUT THE HAPPY BACK IN GAY

Shawn Tenney

I want to put the happy back in gay. I want to hold hands
more,
kiss in the park, make love my own way, even if they call me a
dyke

or a queer especially if they call me a dyke or queer I want to
laugh

at them, tell them they say "queer" like it s a bad thing, tell
them hate,

now that s a bad thing; tell them they should try to be gay-er

I want to put the happy back in gay. We re "gay," because
they said

we were unhappy, sick, perverted, depraved, because we love
different

from them. We said they were the unhappy ones. We were plenty
happy,

gay even. They are angry enough to kill us. Fear is robbing
my joy.

It s hard to be gay while tied to a fence post with a gun at y
head.

I want to put the happy back in gay. I want to roll in wet
leaves,

laugh until I cry, and forget that I carry the blame for the
plague

of God s wrath. HIV. Hepatitis C. Not my God. God created
me

to be happy and gay, and my God don t make no junk, my
grandma says.

I want to put the happy back in gay. People like Pat
Robertson

make it easy to be gay. He makes up the greatest shit. Take
the

Teletubbies Tinky Winky the purple, purse-carrying queer
cartoon character now that s funny. It s easy to be gay when

I laugh. It s not so easy when less ridiculous people come up
with less insane-sounding stories. Like Billy Graham s "love

the sinner, hate the sin." That s not something to be gay
over. That hurts.

Billy has it all wrong. Jesus said to LOVE, not JUDGE, thy
neighbor.

I want to put the happy back in gay. I want to march in a pri
parade,

walking my queer dogs, my faggy cats, with my flamboyant
bird on my shoulder.

I want to carry a rainbow flag with a laughing mouth painted

2 0 0 3 - 2 0 0 4

BABY ZEUS

Will Miller

Baby was born with a conehead. They named him Zeus.

The name was Father's sense of humor. The cone, Father said, was the sword of Athena pushing against Baby's head. (Athena, of course, would split Zeus' head open and spring forth fully formed and fully armored.) Father asked Mother to make Zeus little pjs decorated with lightning bolts. He also wanted Mother to make Baby Zeus lightning bolt shaped booties. Lightning bolts, Mother explained, are not similar in shape to Baby's feet. Father capitulated. You have a point, he said. Mother bested him in most of Baby Zeus' affairs. (He taught that manliest of disciplines, mathematics; and he played that manliest of horns, tenor sax. Otherwise he was not manly.) She let the name Zeus stand because in it was all she found adorable in Father. Father courted her three years before. He brought her an apple, a golden delicious. He said, This apple is for you; some guy told me to give it to you and I didn't catch his name but I remember he was from France. Mother found this line charming and cultured. She liked the name Baby Zeus for much the same reasons.

Both Mother and Father secretly expected their conehead to be retarded, but many things about Baby Zeus were surprisingly mature. When he began to eat solid foods, for instance, he chewed slowly like an old man. And he always chewed with his mouth closed, they never even had to teach him that. Baby Zeus looked mature, too. He looked a lot like Winston Churchill, only with a conehead. The doctor told Mother that the conehead would probably go away in a few months. That did not happen. Father solved the cosmetic problem with a cowboy hat. Baby always wore a cowboy hat in public and everyone thought that was just adorable. Baby's face looked so solemn and dignified underneath his cowboy hat. Father wanted very badly to personalize the hat. It could say "*Bay-bay Zeus*" in a swirling cursive font that looked like a lasso, with maybe a sharp little lightning bolt underlining the name. Mother did not go for that. Father settled for a black and yellow neckerchief with the initials B.Z. stitched along one side. He also bought Zeus some real leather cowboy boots (ordered specially from San Antonio).

Father was so proud of Baby Zeus that he insisted upon taking Baby for long strolls through the park, just him and Baby. Father would tell Mother, He needs some Daddytime; just the two boys together. Mother was suspicious but

(continued)

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BABY ZEUS

Continued

allowed it. Daddytime was a roaring success. Father often remarked to the many strangers who stopped to admire his winningly bedecked infant, Baby Zeuss he s got a draw like lightning. To complement this saying Father bought Baby, without Mother s knowledge, a little gunshaped lighter. He tried to train Baby to click the lighter on cue, but Baby s fingers were too short, and his hands were probably too weak anyway. When Mother found the lighter tucked into the porch on the back of Baby s stroller she thought that Father was using Daddytime to smoke cigars which he knew were expressly forbidden in front of Baby. From then on she insisted upon accompanying Baby and Daddy on their strolls.

Over time the cowboy outfit was not enough to conceal Baby Zeus conehead. Father accompanied Zeus to his first day at preschool. The teacher found Baby Zeus getup adorable (women never failed to find it so) but as class was beginning she told Father, Okay, class is beginning, time for little Zeus hat to come off. Father blanched for a moment. Must his hat come off, he asked. The teacher replied, Yes, there can be no hats in class. That is policy. Father said, But Baby Zeus hat limits his exposure to florescent lighting. The teacher said, There can be no exceptions to policy; these are young children, after all. We wouldn t want them to get the wrong idea. No we wouldn t, Father agreed. When Baby Zeus hat came off there was his conehead, as prominent as ever. The teacher started, but quickly recovered and said, There now, little Zeus is ready for class to begin.

During calculus, while his students took a quiz, Father thought of something he could say about Baby s head, now that it was to be exposed to the world. I will tell them, he thought, that Baby s head is specially designed to tunnel out of Mother s womb. I will tell them that Baby was conceived without aid of sexual intercourse, and that in order to break into the world he had to rupture Mother s hymen. That s the story, he thought.

Father picked up Baby Zeus from preschool. Baby Zeus was by himself, sitting next to a pile of ignored alphabet blocks. He stared pensively at the opposite wall. Father picked up Baby Zeus by the armpits and Baby Zeus did not struggle. The teacher said, Little Zeus was such a good boy today; so well behaved. She handed Father a piece of paper, on which was recorded all of the days activities. Apparently

Zeus had had a medium-loose bowel movement around noon, and had consumed his babysauce without complaint.

When Father returned home he placed Baby Zeus on the floor in the living room. He knew Mother was home because it smelled like spaghetti sauce.

I m home with Zeus, Father said.

I m in the kitchen, Mother said.

You know what they did to him at preschool? They made him take off his hat. In front of the whole class.

Mother walked into the living room, wiping her hands with a towel. Well, what happened?

Nothing. The teacher was a little startled, but I explained everything and she seemed to be just fine.

What do you mean you explained everything? What is there to explain?

I told her that Zeus head is specially designed by the almighty to burrow out of your womb. That he was conceived without sexual intercourse, and that he needed to break through your intact maidenhead.

Normally, Mother thought things along those lines were quite funny. But she was quiet for a few seconds and then said, What the fuck are you talking about?

Well, he s not mine, Father said.

There was some more silence. Oh, he s yours all right.

He s not mine. It s not possible. I m a math teacher; I can figure these things out. So I m giving you the benefit of the doubt and telling the world that it is God s child, that he was conceived without sexual intercourse, and that you were a virgin before he was born. Would you rather I tell them that you are fucking a conehead on the side? That s the only other explanation I can think of, perish the thought.

No, no, no. He s yours all right.

Look, there s no point in playing this game with me. I know he s not mine. So just tell anyone that asks that you were a virgin.

He s your kid. Just tell them that he s your kid.

He s not my kid. There is no possible way that he is my kid.

Baby Zeus sat on the carpet, his legs folded underneath him. His slightly open mouth, his slightly concerned brow, made it seem as though he was about to say something. But he just stared in the direction of the voices, and listened.

XXIV



Stacie Remensnyder

Nothing good ever came from his hands. Nobody got too close, defended himself, because old man had a gun. You came in too late at night and he might have shot you, like you were some robber or a black man down the street.

He smoked the animals anyway the raccoons who ran around in the garage, taking small bites of green plastic bags holding trash.

He hit his wife, and one time he had to show everyone the gun wasn't loaded shot right through the kitchen cupboard, eyes all big for a second. Said, "I'll be damned," put the gun down, picked his cigarette back up. Man never stopped smoking, never slept too long.

Told his granddaughters stories, of tigers in the jungle, or elephants, or monkeys, pretended like he had traveled the world one day long ago.

The older one came over by herself one night, thought she could cook some oatmeal/peanut butter/fruit/chicken broth kind of mess with grandma.

She was sitting at the dining room table, a speck in the room filled with blue and white china.

Her hair was cut short on the top, and grew long down her back. She sat and waited to spend time with Grandpa.

She looked to the living room, atop the television where his eyes were often fixed the birdcage was no longer there. "Grandpa," she said, "Where's your pet parakeet?"

"Oh, that sucker? That sucker was being too loud, getting on nerves.

That sonofabitch, I shot it right in the head."

Grandpa blew the head right off of his pet bird. The last one that had bothered him went to the garbage disposal, must have been head first.

Granddaughter went to the phone called her mother said, "Mommy, grandpa's weird.

And grandma doesn't talk. Come get me."

She waited in silence, watched him smoke

SPELLING

Emilie Griffin

Amy lives in a city where the people are made of glass bottles.

She is the size of forty-eight glass bottles stacked up, her middle

finger smaller than the length of the neck. She is made of beer

bottles, wet brown glass, thin and curved. When my brother comes home to her, Amy will pull one of her legs apart, take out

a piece of thigh, hand my brother a beer.

A trickle of the liquid is gentling out the corner of his mouth and

catching in the hairs on the side of his chin, moving back and forth like the metal balls in the games we used to play in car rides, the metal balls clicking back and forth between the plastic

pegs, under the plastic top, my brother's fingers touching my hand when he is reaching for the boy. My parents are in the front

seat, father gravelling out instructions to my mother as she is looking out the window counting hay bales.

Amy is hobbling on her one foot, my brother's arm around her

shoulder, steadying her, his other hand around the neck of the

beer bottle. Its bottom is tilted up as the two of them are moving

across the floor. My brother's fingers slip against Amy's glass-

bottled skin, her body clacking and jangling all against itself as

she hops; chips of glass spraying into the walls, and the beer spilling out of my brother's mouth a little with each hop as she

knocks against him.

My brother used to teach me how to spell my name, stacking up

wooden blocks on my stomach. I used to lie in the middle of the

X X W

carpet, straight out like a board, the blocks going straight u
between my body and the ceiling. First a block shaped like
an E
he put in the middle of my stomach, the smooth white space
above the bellybutton, and then an M on top of it, until my
name,
a stack of six wooden blocks on my stomach, was all spelled
out:
clicking and wavering when I breathed, but not falling down,
and
sometimes me holding my breath.

I never chased boys on the playground. I sat in the corner of
the
tire pyramid, carving my name into the rubber, my name full
of
girl letters like e s. We found a tire once, covered with wor
like sex and tongue, and we stared when we saw a boy named
Christian crawling out of the opening in the pyramid with a
pointed stick in his hand. When boys chased me, I would tear
along the dips in the sand,
begging my legs to work better, licking my lips as the smell
from Christian s dirt stained shirt moved under my face.

Amy sits in the corner of the new carpet house, the place
where
she lives with my brother, licking her knees and elbows where
the beer leaks out a little at the joints. Her head is curled
down
against her own body, her hair in her face.

I wonder, when they go into the bedroom and the door is
closed,
and I am sitting on the grey upholstered sofa with their dog
licking my fingers, does her body crack as they are pressing
together? How does he arrange the blankets, position his
body,
so he does not break her? I am staring at the white halo
around
the TV screen, listening for the small noise of clicking glass

NATURAL SELECTION

Chris Foss

Corn rows
cattle grazing
smell of asphalt
speed gauge set
at 90 wind going
faster antlers on
car roof
playing tuba hanging
out of window.
cattails and snapping turtles
feet prints in wet brown
fertile soil
soul brothers
farm hands
driving car
too fast
past carousel
trying to grab gold
ring to ride for
free balling in the
backseat loaded genitalia
fishing for condoms in
the Detroit River
cannibals living under bridge
lost tourists disappear
the buttocks is the tastiest
and thus first eaten by
Detroit bottle bums
desperate for fixing
and fornicating with
marsupials unknown
Kangaroo crossbreeds
devastation as world becomes infested with kangaroo-people
bumming around vagabonds collecting bottles buying liquor
to pour in eyes.



ELEMENTS OF COMPOSITION: WORDS OF A STRUCTURE/MUSIC POET

Katie Zapoluch

*Chi sono? Sono un poeta.
Che cosa faccio? Scrivo.
E come vivo? Vivo.ⁱⁱ*

Questions burning, without the light of the candle: the wind
blew it out. Or perhaps her cough, her death. Wooing with
simplicity: the dreams of a penniless writer, he asks the
archetypal
questions. Burning his poems to keep warm fuels his art.
He is a poet.
He writes.
He lives.

ELEMENTS part I

The basic assumptions or principles of a subject.ⁱⁱⁱ

i am a poet i write i live but this was not always so it began
long ago before college had a secret fascination for the dead
decaying into elements

*A substance composed of atoms having an identical number of
protons in each nucleus. Elements cannot be reduced to simpler
substances by normal chemical means.*

would study mortuary science or forensic anthropology
needed biology and chemistry to work with the dead three
years in the biology classroom cutting open worms frogs
starfish hearts eyes fetal pigs cats learning the ways the body
was efficient learning the greek and latin roots for bodily
words processes two years in the chemistry lab studying the
periodic table the elements over one hundred abbreviations
representing what we are made of if you pulverize us to the
atomic level crush the universe down to atoms somehow met
whitman in my erlenmeyer flask over bunsen burner flames

*I Celebrate myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.^{iv}*

ELEMENTS OF COMPOSITION: WORDS OF A STRUCTURE/MUSIC POET

Continued

It was a pleasure to burn.^{vii}

In my chemistry classes, I learned what fire was: the product of exothermic chemical reactions; specifically, in the oxidation of combustible substances. It is not classified as solid, liquid, or a gas. It is energy, heat, and light.

I had experienced this type of fire a few years before, when our house burned down. The substances contained within the house, and the house itself, were combustible. Enough chemicals, coupled with the proper amount of activation energy, produced flames, as well as carbon dioxide gas and carbon residue. I saw my life as a charred, black mess, trampled by firemen's boots and drenched with hoses. After that fire was extinguished, something else burned within me.

It was a special pleasure to see things eaten, to see things blackened and changed.^{viii}

It felt good to see the possessions destroyed, because part of the owner was destroyed with them.

Burn all, burn everything. Fire is bright and fire is clean.^{ix}

Somehow, the fire hadn't cleansed everything. Acrid smoke clung to my pores, followed me to sleep, swirled in dream and nightmare. What the fire left was small, and I worked to make it smaller. Fire consumes; I vowed not to consume. Yet, I still burned. Fire was my element, somehow. I felt it, burning. Somehow.

Winston Smith had memory holes to incinerate the past and destroy evidence. What did I have? Fire had come and gone, leaving me hollow and yet so full.

A book lit, almost obediently, like a white pigeon, in his hands, wings fluttering. In the dim, wavering light, a page hung open and it was like a snowy feather, the words delicately painted thereon. In all the rush and fervor, Montag had only an instant to read a line, but it blazed in his mind for the next minute as if stamped there with fiery steel.^{xi}

I had been in Kalamazoo for only a few days. Orientation was a blur of names and faces, not burning themselves into

my memory because I wasn't sure I wanted them there. I walked into the Humphrey House lounge out of curiosity, and it looked like the grandma parlor from hell. Andy gave us a line, and we wrote what came into our heads. I wrote. It blazed. I shared. I burned inside, and it felt good.

He hadn't known fire could look this way. He had never thought in his life that it could give as well as take.^{xii}

The things we've shared
are wax dummies and sugary
sweet islands of witness,
I wish I could have warned you
about the way they're going
to melt in the heat. I'm in love
with honesty, and it's a fiery^{xiii} bitch.

Perhaps he had expected their faces to burn and glitter with the knowledge they carried, to glow as lanterns glow, with the light in them.^{xiv}

"Lux Esto" is an archaic Latin form of the phrase "Be light." Fire can be a destroyer, an indiscriminate consumer laying waste to whatever is in its path; or, it can take the form of a truth-seeker, an abused woman with chaos at her back, inspiring the scent of old books in an effort to block out the smoke of her past.

There must be something in books, things we can't imagine, to make a woman stay in a burning house; there must be something there. You don't stay for nothing.^{xv}

But the past has value, too. Consider the myth of the phoenix: he consumes himself in flames every few centuries, only to be reborn from his own ashes. He is an archetype we can learn from, if we only learn how our composition relates to his.

COMPOSITION

The combining of distinct parts or elements to form a whole.

It is not formulaic or rigid. There are no straight lines.

(continued)

ELEMENTS OF COMPOSITION: WORDS OF A STRUCTURE/MUSIC POET

Continued

(I am a poet. I write. I live.)

The manner in which such parts are combined or related.

There are no seams. There is no glue. There are no stitches.

(I am a poet. I write. I live.)

Arrangement of artistic parts so as to form a unified whole.

Water flows. Fire burns. Wind blows. Earth turns.

(I am a poet. I write. I live.)

The art or act of composing a musical or literary work.

There are formulas. It can be rigid and regular. There is a structure.

There are bones.

Yet it must be creative. It must sing, speak, and flow.

(I am a poet. I write. I live.)

A work of music, literature, or art, or its structure or organization.

Alliteration, assonance, cadence, caesura, dissonance, dynamics,

enjambment, feet, lines, metaphor, meter, notes, paragraphs,

plot, rhythm, simile, syllables, synecdoche, tempo, verse.

(I am a poet. I write. I live.)

A short essay, especially one written as an academic exercise.

Topic: Write a six-line "essay" in response to your ex-fiancee and his repeated question,

"Where did it all go?"

After an hour of highways, Indiana pastures crowd the car windows:

Green fields dotted with cows, fenced-in horses, neat farm houses.

Quiet morning roads are gridlines, square and efficient, laid straight

and direct. I've never driven on these particular roads, b

know

that they are edged with gravel, lined with mailboxes on one side. Then I see a barn, a century old, collapsed in on itself breaks the spell.
(I am a poet. I write. I live.)

The formation of compounds from separate words.

Newspeak: Doublethink. Unpersons. Thoughtcrime.
(I am a poet. I write. I live.)

WORDS

*Words are flowing out like endless rain into a paper cup
they slither wildly as they slip away across the universe* ^{xviii}

Words have harmed me my whole life: mother used soap to scrub obscenities from my tongue as young as five. Ivory was my favorite variety it was less bitter than Dial, whose vile orange froth would run down my chin as I choked. The cleansing of my vocabulary was futile. When I spoke, the same painful words bubbled from my throat, stinging.

A sound or a combination of sounds, or its representation in writing or printing, that symbolizes and communicates a meaning and may consist of a single morpheme or of a combination of morphemes.

Sub-definition: Morpheme

A meaningful linguistic unit consisting of a word, such as man, or a word element, such as -ed in walked, that cannot be divided into smaller meaningful parts.

Words create a circus in which our emotions, choked by smoke from the human cannonball, fly the trapeze. I spoke the rainbow language of the bearded lady for a night, shared

(continued)

ELEMENTS OF COMPOSITION: WORDS OF A STRUCTURE/MUSIC POET

Continued

soap
with the clowns as they washed off the grease paint. Turn the
dial
on the calliope, and as the music slows you can hear the
stinging
of the lament, a funeral dirge carved on elephant~~ine~~ ivory.

*It's a beautiful thing, the destruction of words. Of course, the real
wastage is in the verbs and adjectives, but there are hundreds of
nouns that can be got rid of as well...In your heart, you'd prefer to
stick to Oldspeak, with all its vagueness and its useless shades of
meaning. You don't grasp the beauty of the destruction of words.*^{xxi}

Words fly between us on wings of ivory, a fluttering story. A
spoke
when your voice failed, choked by location and distance. Ever
I dial
your number, stinging vines wrap around my tongue, and I taste
soap^{xxii}
Montag felt the slow stir of words, the slow simmer.^{xxiii}

The elements of compositions are words. The elements of
words are morphemes. But structure is also an element of
composition, and composition is the journey to creating
music, in which structure is also inherently present. Poetry,
then, is the synthesis of these elements: the fire of
morphemes composed into words, which are then wrought,
musically, into a poetic structure.
I am a poet.
I write.
I live.

STRUCTURE/MUSIC ^{xxiv}

*'Twas in another lifetime, one of toil and blood
When blackness was a virtue and the road was full of mud
I came in from the wilderness, a creature void of form.
"Come in," she said,
"I'll give you shelter from the storm."* ^{xxv}

In the pursuit of poetry, there have been false steps and
struggles some types of poetry did not work for me, others

ignited my passions from the beginning. In life, I defy restraint and order, live in clutter, invite chaos. In my poem however, the sestina came naturally to me, inviting me to take shelter from the storm my life had become. I am compelled to write in this form, and rather than merely limiting me, it tests me to see how far I can push the limits of the form. Gregory Orr's division of the poetic temperaments is accurate in explaining that it is an impulse rather than a choice.^{xxvii}

While structural impulses give some governance to my writing, I draw emotional complexity and creativity from the musical dimensions of language, playing with sounds and rhythms as much as possible. The image I have is of a well-dressed woman in a formal ball gown, structured in a way that pleases society, until she opens her mouth; then the room is filled with howling, wine glasses are smashed on the floor, and her skirts are up over her head in abandon. But she doesn't lose her step in the carefully orchestrated dance, and her partner never falters, either.

his hands were the hands of some amazing conductor playing all the symphonies of blazing and burning to bring down the tatters and charcoal ruins of history.^{xxviii}

I write because I am a woman. I write because I have the ability I write because I have the opportunity. I write because I burn to do so. I write because not doing so would burn me. Writing does not belong to one nation, one ideology, one sex, one creed, one race, one class.

I am a poet.

I write.

I live.

POET

I am a poet.

To mark the page was the decisive act.^{xxix}

I write.

With its grace and carelessness it seemed to annihilate a whole culture...a gesture belonging to the ancient time. Winston woke up with the word "Shakespeare" on his lips.^{xxx}

(continued)

ELEMENTS OF COMPOSITION: WORDS OF A STRUCTURE/MUSIC POET

Continued

Winston and Montag are one. Their wives were one meaningless. These men were cheap paperbacks, bound in fancy leather. They are still combustible, though. Their atoms belong to you, to me, to Whitman, to Plath's oven.

We burned a thousand books. We burned a woman.^{xxxi}

I am a woman who has been up at dawn, smoke curling from nostrils, breathing fire, spewing ashes, wanting nothing more than to express this fire, this rage in the written word, on the page, in a feverish tongue and with sweating palms.

"Good-by," he said. He stopped and turned around. "Does it have a happy ending?"

"I haven't read that far."

He walked over, read the last page, nodded, folded the script, and handed it back to her. He walked out of the house into the rain.^{xxxii}

On my last page, what will it say?

I live.

ⁱThe title of this essay was subconsciously borrowed from a poem by A.K. Ramanujan, which I read for Diane Seuss's Advanced Poetry Workshop. Both the alchemical and periodic table type of elements are mentioned, and that seems to have stayed in my head, only slightly buried, while I was preparing for this essay. Upon the realization that my title wasn't original, I thought it best to reference the poem.

ⁱⁱRodolfo, the poet, in Giacomo Puccini's opera "La Bohème" The passage reads: "Who am I? I am a poet./ What do I do? I write./ How do I live? I live." My translation is based on course notes from the Masterpieces of Italian Opera class I

took while on Study Abroad in Rome, Italy at the American University of Rome.

ⁱDefinitions will be italicized and underlined; all are from same source, as given in works cited.

^{iv}Walt Whitman s "Song of Myself."

^vFirst section of "For Andy: July 17, 1950-January 26,2001" (written a after a poem by Conrad Hilberry) marking the first anniversary of the suicide of my uncle. It was turned in as a assignment for Di s Intro to Creative Writing class in the winter of my sophomore year.

^{vi}Third stanza of "Salvador s Sestina", which I wrote for Di s Advanced Poetry Workshop in April of 2003. Each stanza used a particular Salvador Dal painting as inspiration; this one based on "Atomic Leda," 1949.

^{vii}Opening line of Ray Bradbur*Fahrenheit 451*. Note: The title is the temperature at which paper burns.

^{viii}The second line *F451*.

^{ix}*F451*, pg. 55.

^{*}The protagonist in George Orwe*1984*s

^{xi}*F451*, pg. 34.

^{xiii}*F451*, pg. 130.

^{xiii}A section of the second stanza of "Polarities (for Matt)," written for Di s Advanced Poetry Workshop, April 2003.

^{xiv}*F451*, pg. 138.

^{xv}*F451*, pg. 47.

^{xvi}First stanza of "Reverse Chronology of the Roads we Traveled", a sestina written for Di s Advanced Poetry Workshop in May 2003.

^{xvii}Terms taken from "Newspeak," the fictional language in Orwe*1984* which is used for mind control.

^{xviii}First two lines of John Lennon s song "Across the Universe." (Used without permission).

^{xix}First stanza of "A Shot of Morpheme," a sestina written for Di s Advanced Poetry Workshop, April 2003.

^{xx}Fifth stanza of "A Shot of Morpheme."

^{xxi}1984, pgs. 45-6.

(continued)

ELEMENTS OF COMPOSITION: WORDS OF A STRUCTURE/MUSIC POET

Continued

xxii Envoy, "A Shot of Morpheme."

xxiii F451, pg. 147.

xxiv Poetic temperaments (self-categorization), from Gregory Orr's essay "Four Temperaments and the Forms of Poetry."

xxv Opening line s of Bob Dylan's song "Shelter from the Storm." (Used without permission).

xxvi A 39-line poem consisting of six six-line stanzas and a three line envoy, using the end words from the first stanza as the end words throughout in a predetermined pattern.

xxvii Orr, pg. 8.

xxviii F451, pg. 3.

xxix 1984, pg. 10.

xxx 1984, pg. 29.

xxxi F451, pg. 46.

xxxii F451, pg. 19.

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DIVIDING

Daniel Menzo

Once you realize
when, then
 (the caving in)
take the last
 breath needed
as it
 falls —
This —
 the empty wall
that divides us.



WILDERNESS

Brittany Edwards

As the icicles drip their blood onto cracked pavement
the air freezes bones and innocent grass.
I feel you in that air,
frozen in time, in the water,
under the icy fountains, gurgling your reply.
Snowflakes whip through the sky
interrupting my comfort, but not asking why.

I long for warmth in too many ways,
asking for a comfort life does not supply.
I long for the sun to soak my pores
I want to bask in content,
enjoy the laziness of days without you.
You cover me in blankets,
but they are made of snow, my dear.

The air warms, then freezes into
memories of you,
with icy stings on my flesh
which melt into pools of water
in hands cupped,
quenching the thirst after days
lost in the Wilderness.

We endured the cold season
created by your absence.
The world still can't decide
if it wants to move past the cold void.
Can it grow soft, green buds on trees,
let birds leave nests,
and allow the sun to warm their eggs?

For Steph

Meridel Thomson

First, you have to fill the glasses with
glittering ice from the big freezer,
using the metal scooper
to break the cold chunks
into small cubes that melt the moment
they meet warm kitchen air.
Ten rows of eight, eighty cups to fill
before the guests arrive.

Looks great, Merideth, keep up the good work,
but wipe your knuckles before you fill another
because no one likes blood in their water goblet,
and the taste of iron won't mix well
with the scalloped potatoes or seaweed wraps
that we serve every day, at every luncheon,
to all the men with all the money
to make your dreams come true.

You dream about squirrels when winter comes.
Walking across the quad, their little tin eyes
follow your path, lidless, steady lights.
The squirrels grow so fat they can't
fit into their holes.
They can only roll down the white hill
that curves like a woman's knee,
small rodents running
between the dark trees that become black hairs
in the blue night, shooting straight up,
not wavy and wild like Frida Kahlo's mane
when she let her twisting snakes
loose on Diego's pillow.

The trees remind me of a time
when I didn't shave.
It was all just peach fuzz,
my young skin covered in luminous gold powder,
like Frida's after the accident, when metal tore
between her legs, cold and silver,
beautiful and sharp,
perfect for crushing ice.

XXIV



WALKING THROUGH MAE LA

Stephanie Vibbert Award Winner

Matthew Pieknik

An hour outside of Mae Sot, you are driving past Mae La. From the van, the refugee camp resembles any number of mountain villages you've passed through. Huts constructed of sunburned bamboo, bland dirty cream colored homes schooled together like plankton, churning across the surface of a mountainous sea. Brightly colored clothes and blankets occasionally materialize on a clothesline or along a wooden porch railing, protesting against their monochromatic surroundings. There, smoke rises from a roof and lingers in the air, the sun's rays shot through it, paralyzed for a moment. Gone. A simple bamboo fence races alongside you. The camp seems almost like a natural occurrence, the huts taking root like the seedlings of the surrounding trees and vines, and yet, somehow it is distinctly unusual. You need a moment to realize it. There. Where are the fields? The gardens? Every previous village you've seen has been peppered with small gardens between the homes, and circumscribed by rice paddies and sometimes fields of corn or beans or sugarcane. Here there is no space for cultivation. The homes are too close to each other, elbowing each other for space. They're folded in on themselves, like a group of self-conscious friends who don't know anyone else at the party. But their number and proximity are too conspicuous, and they fail to blend into the background, as wallflowers do. Instead they are wildflowers, blanketing the undulating hills as thick as daisies. Except they do not look you in the eye like daisies. No. They keep their heads down, avoiding eye contact as you hurtle past.

It is necessary to enter via the camp's rear gate. The Thai authorities, stationed at the front of Mae La, deny entrance to any outsiders other than NGO workers, Red Cross medics and the like; your presence is hardly more legal than the refugees. Inevitably they will receive word of the arrival of a modest group of *farang* and make to remove you, but the paths information must negotiate are apparently as inefficient as the roads within the camp — due to the terrain, no one road traverses the entire length of the interior — and so you have little time.

As you walk, the community leader designated to be your guide delivers a brief introduction to what life in Mae La is like for the 40,000 people and counting who are living here. These 40,000 are cramped into two and a half square miles of

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WALKING THROUGH MAE LA

Continued

land, and many live in huts the entire size of which, at a glance, are the size of your bedroom. Sometimes their homes have been burned down by SPDC soldiers marching through the jungle, on orders to suppress peace. Fifty or sixty new families or remains of families wander into the camp every month, mostly Karen, at any given hour of day or night. Denied legal refugee status by the Thai government and so unable to leave the camp for fear of arrest, they willingly become the incarcerated homeless as they cross the border from prison state to prison camp. Which is somehow better. Time and again they will tell you, "At least here we have peace."

The camp appears like an optical illusion — your eyes insist that you are witnessing the truth and yet you find yourself hoping you are being deceived. It is discomfoting, no, awful to see this much life so tightly compressed. The camp, an aggregate of several others no longer existing, is only seven years old, and the population is rising every day, climbing microscopic but persistent degrees on the thermometer of survival. It is like a jungle ghetto. Development — if that what this is called — has reached its fullest outward growth, touching all the fences and shouldering up to the mountains. It cannot grow any larger, but the pattern has become decisively more intricate. Schools, homes, churches, shops, seem hardly separate entities they are so closely, and not unskillfully, plotted together. Under different circumstances its complexity might possess an almost mathematical beauty. It is like a magic trick. For a moment you are aware of the awesome ability to adapt that this community possesses, to fashion something from nothing. It is like easily being out of sync with its surroundings and part of them at once.

With little pomp is your group shown into the nearest school. It is hardly more than a cluster of open-air square spaces, each enclosed by woven bamboo walls, roughly chest-height, low enough to see over, and sheltered by thatched roofs of prehistorically large dry brown leaves. They look more like animal pens than classrooms. Inside each classroom are rows of weathered benches, as simple and rough as Puritan pews, upon which sit perhaps fifty students. They are roughly your age, maybe a two or three years younger, but they are in the equivalent of tenth grade. Some are dressed in traditional Karen or Burmese clothing; simple

white dresses or colorfully patterned sarongs. Some of the boys wear *longyis*, but most wear battered, faded and dusty jeans with polo shirts sporting Ralph Lauren or-Izod trade marks. A few are wearing leather jackets.

You and your friends stand before the class for an introduction you don't understand, and then in English the teacher encourages you to disperse and sit among the students, but you are rooted to the spot. Why don't you move? The students are all looking at you, they are all looking at a student whose old clothes are nicer than the ones they wear everyday, who comes from a land of freedom and wealth and opportunity for anyone fortunate enough to be born there or else lucky enough to make it there. A person whose life is easy, carefree, who complains about being a poor college student and eats pizza and ramen soup and pays enough money in annual tuition to pay for thirty plane tickets to America, when nearly every meal they eat consists of rice and fish paste provided by the Burmese Border Consortium (sustain them, but don't encourage more refugees by providing truly good food). But the teacher is urging you again now, so why don't you move?

You're looking at one of the girls in the front row. She's wearing a dark green jacket, and though her face is in profile you see that she's beautiful. And then you catch her looking at you directly and you see that one eye is permanently shut and scars of acid tears trail her temple and cheek. The other eye blossoms full of rich pink conjunctivitis. You hesitate, willing yourself to take a step, but she feels it and jerks her head away.

A friend of yours has more courage than you do and you overhear her ask a boy what village he is from. He looks down at his science book, which has only a few drawn illustrations on coloring book-quality paper. He quietly answers, "None, it has burned to the ground."

"Go on, take a seat. Don't be shy." Why don't you move?

Because you've never felt more like a voyeur. Because to witness this environment passively, to have it presented to you for your observation, seems clinical, seems not even human, and you are at a loss as to how to remedy this. You feel like a superficially interested tourist who wants to visit the refugee zoo and smile sweetly with big sad eyes until it comes time to leave and you deposit a donation at the door

(continued)

WALKING THROUGH MAE LA

Continued

and feel like a good person with a harrowing story to tell your friends at home about the horrors of the world off the beaten path. Because this is a visit that you had the choice, the opportunity, to make, and because in less than an hour the reality tour will be over and you'll be able to move on.

Because this existence is so alien to you that you cannot find any frame of reference through which to relate, any method of communicating with the students staring at the dirt floor out of shyness or embarrassment, any means of softening those eyes daring you, boring into you. Because even if you understood Burmese still you would not have the language, the words, to connect you to them. Because you do not understand a thing about suffering. You realize that now, and you are ashamed of it. What could you possibly say to them? What might ever carry any sort of meaning?

"Hi, what's your name? Hmm, I don't understand what you just said, but I'm from America and I have enough money to study in Thailand for six months and I came here to see you, that's right only you, just you, yes, so tell me about fleeing SPDC soldiers and your burned villages through minefields across the border where you're not welcome, and what it's like to outlive your siblings and to see your friends die and never feel safe and to know you can't really stay here and though you don't want to stay here you can never leave here and you sure as hell can't go home, and how each and every day you persevere for the sake of persevering but each and every day you're quietly losing a little more hope and each and every day you're resigning yourself a little more to knowing your life is never going to improve, that this is it, the end, full stop, finis. Tell me, what is that like?"

Time's up. You leave and resume the procession to the next stop on the tour. Larger dirt roads branch off into smaller paths that coil and wind through the homes, stores and businesses in Mae La. There are myriad general stores supplied by Thai businesses from Mae Sot which, in lieu of display windows, feature their goods by fastening bunches of bananas, cheap plastic toys, cigarettes, and whatever else to strings which hang down from the ceiling, looking like surrealist firecracker chains. There are children everywhere, running and giggling, playing tag or catch or attempting to fly kites made from plastic bags and twigs. You notice a couple playing in the rubber garbage pots scattered throughout the

camp. They steer clear of you as you approach, only to shout hello, or hello thank you or hello I love you after you passed, too shy to test their English face to face. You pass alley with an enclosure where older kids are ~~chiplaing~~ and you marvel at their agility as they perform all sort of aerial tricks to kick the woven bamboo ball back and forth across a volleyball net. One of them catches your eye and politely ~~does~~ a small bow and says hello with a smile before returning to his game.

There are enough children and young people in the streets that it seems every family in the camp must have ten children, and they appear remarkably happy. But the innocent happiness these children exude seems to be theirs alone. Parents and grandparents sit on their porches or lay in the shade inside, and their eyes possess none of the disarming vitality of their offspring. There are simply not enough jobs within the camp to employ every refugee, and it is too dangerous to sneak out of the camp to find labor jobs. There is too little land in the camp to cultivate even a small garden let alone fields for farming, which accounts for the former livelihood of nearly everyone here. Even most of the students where farmers at one time or another. There is nothing to do except sit. And wait. And remember happier times. And wait. And watch their children, who have never known a life outside of Mae La, grow up without the agricultural skills the families have survived by for generations. In the past their children would have become farmers, but their future has been decided for them. Some will become teachers or medics within the camp, a precious few will have the opportunity to leave the camp in order to pursue their education, but most will filter into the Karen National Union to become soldiers and continue the sixty-year-old fight for Karen liberation and independence. For now, there is no more future to look forward to than this. Children will grow and their parents will die, but life has stopped here.

Until a few years ago, refugee camps like these were open to tourism. For an admission fee ~~about~~ ^{about} 2000r about five dollars, tourists could walk through here as you are doing now. Thinking on the idea is like trying to stomach poison. As you process through the camp, it requires calculated courage to shift your eyes from the dirt path, the trees, the sky, the person in front of you, toward the people resting on

(continued)

WALKING THROUGH MAE LA

Continued

their porches or within their homes. You have a camera, but you only snap photos of signs or buildings or the bridge that spans the river, unable to dismiss the thought that you would only objectify their pain if you took pictures of people. You are speechless to consider those individuals – for surely they exist – who could tread these paths as outsiders and unflinchingly take all this in. As though suffering could be the stuff of spectacle. You cannot even tolerate a measured gaze. Most of what you see comes in flashes before you turn away again.

The huts are sparsely furnished. Mostly they contain sleeping mats, some cooking ware and a few clothes. Some have mosquito nets, and some have pictures of the Buddha or Jesus or Mary tacked to the walls. On your right you catch a glimpse of a hut which is completely bare save for a worn patterned blanket, pink, green and gray, on top of which sleeps a woman and two small children.

Your guide follows your gaze and quietly informs you that they arrived only eight hours earlier, in the wee hours of the morning. She stumbled into Mae La with a baby clutched to her chest and pulling a small girl behind her. It had taken her a week to walk to the border from her home village outside of Pa an, a larger city on the far side of Karen State. Generous farming families inhabiting the villages in the jungle along the way had taken them in and offered them what little food they had, but they were famished. Some guards had been sent to fetch food, but the children fell asleep before they could come back with plates of rice and shrimp paste.

She had explained that, some five months previous, Burmese soldiers marching through her village had demanded the village headman to offer a handful of able-bodied men to serve as porters. Because her village was poor the headman did not have enough funds to pay off the troops, and so was forced to submit to their request. Her husband had been among those taken. He never returned. For all she knew he had suffered a bullet in the head and was festering beside the army's path. Three months ago her baby had been born, a boy she named Hpo Nyo, after his father. Then, two weeks ago, local government officials had come to the village again to inform the headman that the entire village was to be relocated some 200 miles north within the next seven days. On the seventh day the army appeared and lit her village on

fire. Amid flames and gunfire she packed the loss of her home and her farming land on top of the grief of her stolen husband, stuffing them deep into her heart, and then grabbed her children and fled.

Her hut is now some distance behind you. Before it was all you could do to force your eyes to see what they had been brought here to observe, and now you want to break from the procession and run back to that woman to do something to comfort her. Maybe you could give her a hug.

People could pay to come see her. A few years ago all of her suffering would have amounted to five dollars and the chance to be gawked at by tourists. You are trying to take solace in the knowledge that you aren't like those people, because you are a student who has come here to learn. But you realize that to their eyes you look no different, and without the means to communicate otherwise, when their faces appraise your own you fidget with your camera and pretend you don't see them.

The roads, streets, sideways, and paths through Mae La are mostly hard red dirt, earth blood, congealed and tightly packed by the plodding footsteps of survival, and they are scattered with the refuse of exile. Soiled scraps of paper, folded and torn, are slowly melted by the rain. The butts of cigarettes and ~~her~~ roots are lodged in the gutters and ground into the mud. Scraps of wood become small bridges over gutters and depressions. Burlap sacks of sand become stepping stones along steeper inclines. Beer bottles, green and copper, as well as cans, are planted in the soil to form walls circumscribing a small flower bed or preventing dirt from crumbling under pressure or nature. Folded paper bearing the blurred ink of interrupted lives, splinters wearing the fibers and fragments of memories, empty bottles which still hold the faint smell of celebration or solace, and sacks of sand filled with a fertile mix of boredom and frustration. No one notices it now, but as they tread their refuse into the soil they are creating chronicle. They are making this ground holy, imprinting it with a silent language of resilience.

Deeper within the camp are several Bible schools, and now you make your way toward one of these. A weather-beaten blue and white sign hanging above the entrance features a dove and a rainbow and wishes for Peace on Earth in Burmese, Thai and English. The school is significantly larger

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WALKING THROUGH MAE LA

Continued

than the first one you visited, with a second floor and many rooms of various sizes. All of it is made of bamboo. In one of the smaller rooms, young women are sitting in a groups and sewing, chattering and giggling. Farther on, in a makeshift rec room, some young men are playing ping-pong. You can't see into many of the other rooms because they are partitioned off with sheets or curtains. Aside from the silence filtering through the sheets of these private rooms, the school seems full of life, more like a community center than a school.

You take off your shoes at the foot of the steps and head up the stairs, into the principal's office. The room is on the backside of the building and thus enveloped in shade. When you step through the doorway you feel the floor give slightly due to the pliability of the woven bamboo floor. Garishly colored pictures of Jesus Christ and Mary, as well as faded photographs of General Aung San and his beloved daughter cling to the walls like old stamps. In the corner opposite the door is a small plastic shelf, painted gold, which displays a small statue of the Buddha, with two candles standing guard and an offering of rice and green Fanta soda placed before his feet. Resting next to the Buddha is a small bowl filled with sand and spiked with the red stems of burned incense, wiry hairs of ash dangling from their tips. Above the principal's desk is a red, white and yellow calendar distributed by the National League for Democracy for the year 2000.

You sit on one of the woven plastic mats lining the floor and the principal speaks. He welcomes you to Mae La, and then offers his condolences, wishing that you might have met elsewhere, under better circumstances. Slowly, quietly, he recounts the history of his people to you. He remembers Burma when it was under the rule of the British, and this makes him an ancient within this community. When he speaks there are cobwebs in his voice, and he has so many memories to recall that he must close his eyes to summon them up. He tells you about General Aung San, Burma's first independence fighter and one of the people's most highly respected heroes, who left Burma during World War II with twenty-nine of his friends to be given military training by the Japanese. These Thirty Comrades then swept back into the country among the Japanese, and after the war turned coats, forming the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League to oust the Japanese, and shortly thereafter, the British.

And he was there, he witnessed what happened on the eve of Burma's Independence. His words, tempered and measured, create the door on the second-floor of the Secretariat Building, visible from the red brick balcony, and then raise a shaky finger toward it. "That was where Burma's future ended. Do you see that door? It leads to the room where Aunt San was assassinated on July 19, 1947. I was just down the corridor: I saw his body lying there."

And he tells you about everything that happened there after. National independence was granted on January 4th, 1948. The British had agreed to the first of the year, but the new leaders' astrologers insisted that the fourth was the most fortuitous day to ensure a healthy national future. Perhaps they were wrong. It wasn't long before the Karen were initiating civil war. Prime Minister U Nu and his parliament were overthrown in 1962 by the armed forces, and a new military government installed under General Ne Win. There came the dawning of a new era: the Burmese Path to Socialism, more intimately known retrospectively as the systematic economic, political and social destruction of what was called the Golden Land.

He speaks so softly you must focus everything on him. He pauses between each sentence and hangs his head. Each word seems like a great effort. You want to stop him. You are afraid this story is going to kill him. You want to embrace him and quiet him and tell him that you understand. But you do not understand. That is why you are here. And that is why he must tell it.

What is history to those who would come after is his actual life experience. Cured of colonialism but still weak, Burma had no protection against the viruses of xenophobic nationalism, economic and social isolation from the rest of the world, and superstitious dictators. On the contrary, Burma was all too susceptible to new plagues — unemployment, poverty, hunger, and fear. As an elementary school teacher, he suffered all of these. And there was more to come.

He was in Rangoon when it started. At 8:08 A.M. on the eighth day of the eighth month of 1988. The students organized it, and the dock workers began it, walking out on their posts and into the streets. Soon after, people of all professions, classes, and ethnicities followed. For six weeks the people brought the country to an absolute standstill.

EMILY

Meridel Thomson

I.

You screamed whenever it was time to leave my dog hair house of Doritos and generic pop, so I hid you behind the piano. When they dragged you out, the mud from our new pie business ran down brown rivers down your cheeks, mixing with the salt as you licked it from your lips, your tongue lingering to taste the recipe of the day. You were in such pain to leave me and it felt good to know it mattered so much. Before I loved boys, I loved you.

II.

The gardenia-scented women in Marshall Fields with the hard blond hair always grabbed for you first, anxious to imagine their granddaughters in the clothes your perfect girl body would model for them. I hung back while they oozed all over you, the strings of my white celery body tight with envy as Laura Ashley hugged your round stomach and smooth shoulders. I comforted myself with the knowledge that underneath we were the same, with our matching training bras and lace-edged panties in sky blue. People always thought we were sisters, and we didn't correct them.

III.

We hid in the folds of your step-mom's closet, drowned ourselves in the shiny fabric of her Chinatown kimono, and played at being orphans when our real mothers were too strong. It was Christmas all the time, and Easter every other day. Our adopted doll children were always dying of some fatal disease and we cried fake tears for their plastic passion.

We took our games out into the open wildflower fields when I moved a state away. You rescued me from the loneliness of so much empty space when my mother's white slippers made us blue fairies in the rising moonlight. We hailed the field frogs as our servants, and chased their dark bodies from our divine presence. When the hornets attacked that summer, down by the river and without warning, we left our slippers in a silken pool, and returned Mother Nature's kingdom to her.

IV.

We took our field dancing to the studio when I moved back to Illinois. I forgot my ballet slippers on Parents' Day. The adults lined up like movie producers to see what their

money had made of us. My soft socks slid on the polyurethane and I never once saw my own reflection because of yours. You were always at the very front of the barre so only your frame and face could be seen, blocking out all of ours in the mirror. The other girls' arms and legs framed your body in slivers so you looked like a Buddhist figure. When class ended, I rushed to walk out with you, fiercely proud of your presence when we held small sweaty hands and I slurped a cold pi a colada smoothie to soothe the hot lump of envy every dance class left in my throat.

V.

In high school, you had the entire pubescent litter to pick from, and you chose the boy who won the role of Cyrano de Bergerac for his large nose. Brian's long white arms replaced mine around you, and when he walked you by the green lake, he made music with glass blades, and brought bread for the fat catfish. The fish rolled their heavy silver bodies over and on top of each other in the dark waters to get what was promised from the blue above. When he said you were the type of girl he could marry, you lost yourself in his love and forgot everything else. After he ended it, I couldn't hear you sob over my silent thanks that you were still a virgin, and we were still the same.

VI.

So much happened in one year. I was about to leave home, leave you behind. When you called to see me, my fingers traced ghost steps over your number on the phone keys. We met at Mozart Caf a week after Michael committed himself. I had three brothers to spare, but you only had him, and now he was lost in a reality of his creation. - Your stepfather moved out before Michael did, and your family suffered a third divorce.

The peppermint tea was too hot so we looked at each other over the sweet steam, once again young enchantresses hovering over our steaming cauldrons. Your skin was a light snow over blue streams; your brown eyes looked like the glass beads through which porcelain dolls stare. You were under some spell, and I wanted to grab your small shoulders and shake you awake and alive, open the windows on the darkness that held you. Instead, I ordered chocolate mousse,

(continued)

EMILY

Continued

and pushed the fluffy mount towards your twig fingers.

It doesn't matter, you say. Everyday I get on the scale and every day I weigh the same. My body can't hold anymore than these hundred pounds, it's too much. I listen but don't know if food really refuses you, or you it.

I looked at you, and remembered when we were the same size. We felt beautiful in everything, especially the Amish apron with the heart-shaped stain, a treasure salvaged from our time in the country. Tripping on pink scarves and long pearl strands, we sashayed on bare feet to the refrigerator. we found no princess-worthy goodies, we filled ice trays with fruit juice and did magic dances to speed up the freezing process. The cold sweet cubes stained my lips orange and yours red, and we kissed paper napkins to admire our fiery imprints. When our lips overlapped, they made a small moth, meshing together so the flaming wings were caught in motion on the soft tissue.

TO MY ROOMMATE, ANDI, WHO HATES FEET

Bree Koehler

I tell you, Andi, maybe even feet
are beautiful; arches rise with grace, toenails
glimmer and the swirls of toeprints can seduce,
unless the foot is clubbed, or hidden beneath socks,
or the nails are cracked or brownish, or fungus
peels away at yellowing, wrinkled skin.

But wait why should a blemish on the skin
of a delicate extremity five feet
below eyelevel, a trifling patch of fungus
sprouting up from under whitish toenails,
detract from the grace of a sockless
foot or from its power to seduce?

Won't the gentle touch of a man's foot seduce
your hardened heart? The whispering on your skin
of an arch, a heel, a sole without any socks
to block the intimacy of barely touching feet:
this might melt your hatred of toenails
and their ilk. At least, if there's no fungus

in your line of sight, no fungus
that you know about, the sensation could seduce
away your cherished dread of toenails
at the end of skinny toes and taut skin
that does not hide the bones of feet
intricate, fascinating bones. But wear socks,
if you would rather, wear cotton socks
to hide your feet, although no fungus
blooms on your pale toes. Hide your feet,
which are beyond reproach. Seduce
your man with the brush of stocking on his skin
and if you're lucky, he'll steer clear of toenail
clipping in your presence. Then his toenails,
too, will be forever buried beneath thick socks
and you'll never see that the skin
on his right sole is splintered from a fungus
that will not heal. Your life will be seduced
by him, but you won't recognize his feet.

Avoid toenails, blisters, fungus, if you'd like; wear
socks seductively, but pay the price. You won't know
the skin of his sole, if you fear his feet.

ERIK IS GAY

Divine Crow Award Winner

Garrett Felber

erik is gay

it said in white spray
paint on the side of
the house.

the house was an old, condemned
Victorian, with
dark metal fencing.

I once kicked down the
boarded door and
explored the hidden
dust and untouched
porcelain bathtub.

I wrote my name across
the broken mirror
on the floor,
sealing myself in
the infamy of the house.

but,

erik is gay.

I m glad I know that
now. what if I hadn t
been warned by
the side of the house?
become friends with

erik,

spent the night with

erik,

grown up loving erik

and not known what the house

knew.

A LONG AND GETTING LONGER LIST

Carol Flanigan

I need a drink.

I need a shower.

I need some money.

I need to find a car that will drive me to and from work and not

break down and not break my budget for gas money.

I need to get some exercise.

I need to get some sleep.

I need to get an A on this paper and so getting sleep and exercise is

out of the question.

I need to have a good job out of college because I need to have a

place to live that is comfortable and not in a scary neighborhood.

I need to find an apartment in a not-scary neighborhood with classy

neighbors whose only form of entertaining is hosting pinochle

parties or fancy dinner parties where all they serve is champagne and all they talk about is the stock market. I need to

find neighbors like that in a cheap neighborhood so I can get the

sleep I need at night.

I need a roommate to split the rent with.

I need a washer and dryer.

I need a DVD player, but I will wait until I can get it for cheaper.

I need to get a life.

I need a significant other.

I need a soul mate.

I need to get a male-order catalogue. A catalogue where I have my

pick of all the men in the world and I can pick and choose them

to my specifications. I need someone six feet tall, light brown

hair, brown eyes, British. I need someone five-six, bright blue

eyes, a head full of curls, quirky and cute. I need someone perfect, at

(continued)

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A LONG AND GETTING LONGER LIST

Continued

least in some form.
I need to have one of those relationships like you see on TV.
One of those lovely-dovey relationships, where they can kid
around with each other and arguments are forgotten by the next
week.
I need to have a white wedding, even if it is a lie, because my
mom doesn't need to know.
I need to have a honeymoon in Europe.
I need to have two kids.
I need to have a house in the Hamptons with a view of the
Atlantic right outside my window so I can be inspired by the sight
and write beautiful sonnets about the beautiful landscape and
my beautiful husband and my beautiful life.
I need to get a grip on reality.
I need a drink.
I need to think of other people more often.
I need to see others' points of view.
I need to feed the homeless.
I need to house the homeless.
I need to clothe the naked, tend to the sick, visit the imprisoned,
and cross my fingers that they don't think it's a conjugal visit.
I need to do unto others, but not in a dirty way.
I need to find myself.
I need to know who I am.
I need time to myself.
I need silence and quiet so that I can think.
I need to clean my room.
I need to stop being anal retentive.
I need to stop being so much like my mom.
I need to start being more like my mom.
I need to act my age and stop eating Fruit Roll-Ups and
talking about the Smurfs.
I need to stop saying "yo mama," because, honestly, what
kind of

phrase is that to say?
I need to stop buying things simply because they have sprinkled them.
I need framed masterpieces to put on my wall.
I need to shop at Pottery Barn.
I need to smell like Bath & Body Works Country Apple Scent.
I need to make sure my hair is soft and smooth, or else put it in a pony tail.
I need to pop my zits that are in plain sight.
I need to show off my boobs, but I also need to not look like a slut.
I need to cover up any imperfection.
I need to be perfect.
I need to get a grip on reality.
I need a drink.
I need a big drink of juice, of milk, of water. Of something because I
 am thirsty from all this talking, all this needing.
I need something to eat, meat and veggies and dairy and sometimes
 fat but in moderation, so says the food pyramid.
I need to find out what carbohydrates are, and what proteins are.
I need to find out where I can get more fiber because sometimes I
 need to shit and I just can't, and I hear that fiber helps with constipation.
I need to get at least four hours of aerobic exercise every week.
I need to ~~some~~ exercise.
I need to stop kidding myself and admit that I want to exercise not
 for my health but because I want to get skinnier.
I need to buy clothes that make me look skinnier without having to
 do all the work.
I need new shoes to go with my new clothes.
I need to learn how to walk in high heels.
I need an encyclopedia that I can balance on my head to improve posture.
I need to read that encyclopedia.
I need to read more.

DRAWING BLOOD

Julie Faust

That was the fall it was just me
and Poppy Z. Brite. The fall
my parents split up and I buried
myself in paperbacks *spatterpunk*.
I stretched out on my floor,
imagining Poppy kicking off
her tall, black boots and stretching out, too.


I needed to learn how to give up
the burning kiss of steel lips prying
my skin apart. I could only hide so many
bloody tissues in the trash *Give up the knife*,
she demanded, so I kissed Poppy
and heard her whisper *It's my boys*
that set me apart. And I read her stories
of boys fucking in abandoned houses,
where three people were silenced
with a hammer, and sometimes the boys
danced in the icy rain on the Devil s
Stompin Ground, or in Birdland, where
cartoon junkies walk the streets with used
condoms, shooting up on turpentine.
And everything ends with Tran,
the Vietnamese boy who was
served fresh as they peeled
back the layers of his flesh.

The pills – I want 'em, she ordered and sucked
the thoughts out of my head. I was left
so hungry, I would eat Tran, served in the dish Fa,
where flesh is sliced so thinly, it cooks
in boiling broth on the way to your table.
Poppy says *savor every bite, the way my boys*
savor the last drop of absinthe.

I walked around my house, sure it was
the Devil s Stompin Ground, ignoring
the fighting and yelling or the stream of people
assessing our house before bidding on it.
Poppy poked my eyes with black eyeliner
and taught me ancient Cajun voodoo –
to write the names of those I wished

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to hide from on eggs and throw
them onto the roof, to watch their brilliant
yolks cook under the hot sun. In return
I began to concoct my own stories,
bleeding wounds of the most beautiful pain-
black lace burnt flesh, gold dust pills,
green alcohol. My flesh was nearly
as soft as Tran s. I became her only
girl.



XXIV



Abha Kundi

I m watching television late at night, the volume turned low. I flip channels for a few minutes before settling on an episode of *Cops*. The camera rests on the profile of a police officer as he drives through empty streets, one hand draped over the steering wheel as orange-lit lamp posts and darkened buildings roll past in the background. He s talking to the cameraman seated next to him, although the volume is too low for me to hear what he is saying.

The officer guides his car into an empty parking enclosure surrounded by a chain link fence. The picture shakes as the cameraman steps out onto the pavement. Another police officer is already there. He points over his shoulder to where a man stands cowering in a corner of the lot.

The man s face is smudged, and his eyes dart between the two officers as they approach him. He s clutching a bundled towel against his dirty jacket. The officers say something to him and he shakes his head violently. One officer reaches for the towel. The man s face contorts with fear. He tries to run but is caught. As one of the officers restrains him the other wrestles the towel from his grip.

The officer sets the bundle on the hood of his car and unwraps it. He smirks and signals for the camera to come closer. He dangles a dead hummingbird in front of the lens before flicking it into the darkness. The man screams and struggles to break free from the other officer. He is sobbing and kicking and pleading. I don t hear the words but I know what he is saying. *No. Please. My heart. My heart.*

HAIR CARE

Zakia Carpenter

Loudly- twist, curl, wave, bend, zag, zig,
kink, link, lock, link.
Golden Face, hair spreads
like peacock feathers.
Face Golden, hair rays
twist and suck the sun through pursed lips –
through a straw.
Light wraps up in blackness
caught in thickness:
a net that barely lets fingers go.
My hair is a prism, shinning red,
gold and brown. Light passes through.
Not a prison – but a loose free thing.
My hair is sweet and as twisted as candy cane:
golden rays, dark color, golden rays, dark,
golden, dark, black, golden, red, brown,
turning and pulling into a collapsed star,
a black hole.
Hair sucks water glistening to gain back its glow.
Electric current runs through its curly waves
and kinks.
If I so allowed, my hair would absorb the orb
of the planets,
drink the swell of rivers and oceans,
feed the fish as if it were a kelp bed,
be as a shark and never sleep,
mourn sorrows never spoken
and liberate anyone believing
in "nigger hair," "good" or "nappy hair."
Who says that straight means good, or
all things twisted need be neglected?
Hair twisting as a rope; would let nigger hair dangle
from its locks,
linked to good hair
suspended
and tried before the court
of blacks, whites, and those native to this land.
How heroically twisted
and powerful is that?
How heroically twisted and powerful is that?
I reach my hand into my hair,
a collapsed star,

and gain my power back.
Swirling inside its communal tangles
is all that it managed to absorb from the universe.
And well you know galaxies are black –
swollen with wisdom.
Light cannot escape the pull of black collapsed stars
which have no beginning or end,
believed to be so phenomenal
as to occupy more than one moment in time
simultaneously. And I believe it;
I can see it in my hair.
I know that its texture reveals the curves
and twists of the universe.
Kinks reflect the cosmos movement.
Yet, hair never gets jammed in the grandeur
of the heavens.
No, my hair is not detached and roaming space.
As can be seen, it s on my head –
twists contented in a community of themselves,
strong and coiled, locked up tight,
condensed, embracing,
knowing shall a breeze come,
they re not likely to be disturbed or swept away.
A community with a dialect
and an oracle to guide them.
Delighted to be together –
Been separated for so long.
Loudly it extracts light from its sun roots.
Loudly it lures water from its earth roots.
been separated for so long,
my hair star has collapsed
and focused on bringing in.
Extending its rays, so focused on bringing in
wondering why it took so long to brag
me
Could grasp the sun rays and the planet orb
but took so long
to grab
me
Hair had to catch and squeeze me
through soft wooly space
showing me where my roots are –

(continued)

HAIR CARE

Continued

Knowing that I was the one lost.
While hair was cutting through my shame,
lathering me with pride,
I realized that my hair isn't shameful.
I realized
for myself.

BREAST ON BREAST

Shawn Tenney

She was the perfect picture of a tall, handsome young man except for the two round breasts that protruded from the chest of her t-shirt. Soft lips, not of a man, kissed my cheeks, my lips. Straddling my hips, she rose up onto her knees and pulled off her shirt and bra, unsnapped her jeans. Naked, no shadow of the young man whom she had resembled. As she lowered her body back down to mine, my breasts felt the weightlessness of another's breasts for the first time. I heard buzzing in my ears, felt my skin prickle, awaiting her touch. No repulsion, only excitement though "lesbian" still sounds like a disease.

THE TAMPON LADY

Marissa Trevino

A gynecological nurse told me I should never use tampons because I was supposed to be a virgin when I got married. This remark was the sole source of my adolescent sexual confusion. How was a tampon going to take my virginity? People spoke of virginity as a gift that I could give to somebody or choose to keep until my wedding and in that case wear a white wedding dress down the aisle. But, what was more, I thought sex was something that was fun. At the ripe old age of twelve with a whole year of periods under my belt and numerous encounters with various brands, sizes, scents and types of tampons I thought I knew all there was to know about tampons. Not to mention, I was under the impression that a penis and a tampon were different, meaning the use of a tampon could not alter the state of my virginity.

My world of sexual knowledge was crumbling around me. Suddenly a nurse, someone educated in the medical field, was telling me that at the age of twelve I had let my virginity go. A *Playtex Slim Fit!* How was I supposed to digest something like that? And what about sex? How was it that sex was everywhere: people talking about sex; having sex; selling sex; watching sex on television; seeming to enjoy sex very much. How was anyone enjoying sex if it was like wearing a tampon? Once I heard some girls in the eighth grade bathroom talking about how sex was supposed to hurt the first time it happened. I could understand how that would be like a tampon. Sometimes it wouldn't go in right and I could never sit down without something hurting. But after hearing the bathroom conversation I heard people talked about how they had wonderful sex that lasted for hours of intense passion. That's when I knew I was doing something wrong because there was nothing passionate about the tampons I wore. Not to mention the only intensity I felt was the intense need to run to the bathroom to check if I needed another. What the hell was that nurse talking about? Maybe the sex she had with her husband was like wearing a tampon and in that case he's lucky to have a wife at all.



HAY

Featured Alumni Poet

Lisa Rye

When he left her, she did not weep each day
she filled the void with lavender and clover,
counted leaves and memorized scents.

She did not laugh at all she roamed fields,
sighed in their troughs, drank storms, ate thunder,
danced with the lighthouse until sleep cut in.

Tallied moments lie
like golden bales
waiting for a spark.

from *Blood Sister* by Lisa Rye Moon Goddess Press, 2004

"Hay" was previously published in *Red Tide*

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This represents a new tradition ~~to~~ *The Cauldron*. Each year, we will feature a poem and a brief biography of one alumna/us writer of distinction.

Lisa Rye studied at Kalamazoo College and completed her BFA degree at The University of Michigan in 1979. She received her MFA degree at the low residency creative writing program of Vermont College in January 2004. She is married to Jonathan and has two sons, Benjamin and Calvin. Lisa also paints, creates collages on canvas and small collage boxes, and exhibits her work in regional and national shows. Lisa's poetry has been published in numerous literary journals. She also performs at grassroots, open-mic coffee shop readings.

BLUE GOD

Emily Boehm

The sun creeps through the stained glass
casting a blue light. Its radiance
distracts me from the drone of the priest
and the uncomfortable wooden pew.
My eyes follow the warm glow
as it fills the cold stone church,
And I find God there.

The blue haired nun told me as a child
that God is nature.
The azure blanket of sky,
violets sprinkled in a field,
sapphire waves rolling onto the shore,
of course God s there.

But what about
the cobalt clouds of an impending storm,
a hypothermic limb, dead and blue,
blood pooling below the skin in a bruise.
Is God there too?

Off the island of Capri, there is a cave
where sunlight creeps through underwater
and reflects pure blue light,
La Grotta Azzurra, where greasy gondoliers
are quick to bleed eager tourists of their money,
to row them inside and introduce them to God.
Entering the grotto, an indigo baptism.
A blue so intense, I reach out to feel it.
Breaking the surface,
my fingers are painted a shimmering silver-blue.
And here, Blue god, I float with you.

IS IT OVER YET

Shawn Tenney

I thought when it was over, it was over. No one ever tells you that nothing is ever finished at least not when you're 15 and you already know everything. Or maybe someone tells you, but you're not listening.

I was excited when Tom asked me to meet his folks. We had hotdogs and whiskey a bad combination. I was only 15, and whiskey was new to me. So was dating a 24-year-old guy. When the room started spinning, we went outside and sat by the pool. When I started puking, I ran for the bathroom. I was given a shower and a robe. The room spun the whole time he was on top of me. I kept thinking when he finished, it would be over. I don't even know how I got home. I don't remember getting dressed, or getting in the car, or being dropped off. But every time I see his name, Tom, and every time I drive past the blue house where his parents live, my head begins to spin, and I remember.

When Ken started paying attention to me, I was flattered. I was a needy kid, and any attention seemed like good attention. I was 12, and he let me ride his horses. He invited me to use his pool any time I wanted, even if he wasn't home. He took me shopping, and bought me new clothes something my parents couldn't afford to do. I was uncomfortable when he started saying he'd like to marry me. He was 68, so I knew it was a joke, but he kept saying it. By the time I was 14, he was telling me he would buy me a new car for my sixteenth birthday if I'd undress in front of him. He wouldn't even have to touch me. He'd just jack off. When I refused, he laughed at me. One time we were sitting out by his pool talking about his horses he'd been letting me ride them for a couple of years. He came over and sat next to me on the bench. I could smell the alcohol on his breath. I felt ill. He tried to tear my shirt off, but I yelled. He stopped and said I should grow up. One day when I was 15, I'd been swimming in his pool. As I passed his door on my way home, he called to me. I didn't even know he was home. I went over to see what he wanted, and he was standing there naked, playing with himself. He wanted me to come and talk to him while he finished.

I thought I must have a tattoo that only men could see, one that said, "Yours for the fucking." I told my parents what

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IS IT OVER YET

Continued

he did, and I thought it would be over. Instead, the next time I saw him, he told me he had been terribly embarrassed when my folks came and talked to him about "the incident." He said he thought I was more grown up than that. He said some day he was going to fuck me. I thought it would be over when my horse died. I felt so much guilt for thinking this. I didn't ever want Ponch to die, but I wanted it to be over. I endured six more years of "I'm going to fuck you" before my horse died. But even then, every time I drove by his house, every time I looked out our kitchen window, it wasn't over.

I got a counselor. I told him about Tom. I told him about Ken. I felt better. I thought I was over it. I'd gotten past all.

When I started dating my first girlfriend, she told me a story about when she was young. Her brother came into her room at night and had sex with her. Then, she was raped by her boss. She got pregnant as a result of the rape, but lost the baby just after she'd started wanting it. All my pain and anger surged forward, nearly knocking me out of the running for life. I thought if I was angry enough, it would be over, I was wrong. The anger was eating me alive. I went back to my counselor. I told him I wasn't over it yet. We met once a week. Finally, after two years, I was really and truly over it.

My doctor suggested that I should have a full exam because first the bleeding wouldn't start, and then the bleeding wouldn't stop. I don't know a lot about doctors, but I don't think his penis should have been part of the exam. I think he must have seen my tattoo. I thought when I was dressed, it was over, but it wasn't. Every time I hear the word *gynecologist* or the word *stirrups*, I feel sick. I thought I needed a gynecologist for the bleeding, but I guess I needed a plastic surgeon. I needed to have my tattoo removed. Maybe then it will be over.

I was 31 when my cousin was born. She was three years old when she asked my mom if mom wanted her "to lick it now that it was clean" as they were getting out of the shower. Later the same day, she told my mom that "all daddies lick their babies." I wanted to kill someone someone in particu

lar. Rage made breathing difficult, and I saw everything in shades of red and black. My doctor put me on medication because I wanted my daddy dead. I think we all did, the whole family. I thought when protective services pressed charges and he went to jail, it would be over, but the judge dismissed the charges because there was no evidence of penetration. Four years later, her daddy is still trying to get visitation back to regular weekends.

I finally realized that I wasn't just angry for my cousin; was about what happened to me, too. I was angry because it wasn't over. I was angry because I still had work to do. I called the rape crisis hotline. I sobbed my story out, and got into counseling at the "Y." My counselor *The Courage to Heal* workbook. I hated that book! I did the exercises, and we talked about them. Writing my story brought all the emotions fear, anger, fury all to the top and bubbling over. When I finished the book, I burned it in my fireplace, one page at a time. But as much as I hated it, there was healing somewhere in the telling. By the end, I was cured. I had done the hard work, fought the hard fight. And I won. It was really over this time.

When I met Terri, we were both in our 30s, Christians, both lesbians, both single and not looking. We quickly became friends, and were soon inseparable. Six months later, we had "the conversation." One of us was in love. Was the other? As it turned out, the answer was yes, and we began a new phase of the relationship. One evening as we were watching television, Terri pulled away from me. I asked her what was going on, and she said she needed to tell me something. With a quaking heart I awaited the breaking up speech, but it never came. It was her father. He was the one who taught her about sex. He started teaching her when she was four, or at least that's the first lesson she remembers. No one told me that I would be this angry, that I could be this angry.

Terri had never confronted her father about the years of abuse, and I thought it would be over when she did. I went with her. We lied to him and told him we had car trouble to get him into the back seat where he couldn't escape. I drove. Terri gave it to him with both barrels. He kept asking us to pull over. He was going to throw up. "Please, just pull over

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IS IT OVER YET

Continued

so I can throw up." I told him to take his coat off and barf that. I told him to shut his fucking mouth and let his daughter speak he owed her that much at least. I thought it was over when we dropped him off at his house. I felt such a sense of relief. It could finally be over for me, too. I had told Ken what I thought of him. I got to participate in Terri's healing. I felt like it was really over this time.

Yesterday in class, I read a story about my perfect grandma. Andrea told a story about her mom. Then, it was Dora's turn. She told the story about when she was in Kenya—when she was raped in Kenya. I have been sitting here crying ever since. I'm crying because I know how Dora feels. I'm crying because I wish it could have happened to me again rather than having had it happen to her, too. I'm crying because Dora says she's handling it just fine she's getting over it. I'm crying because it isn't over, because I know it never will be, not for either of us. I'm crying because I don't know who will tell Dora that it isn't over, that it will never over, that not getting over it is normal. I want to tell her even though it's never over, there is healing in the telling. I want her to know that every time she tells her story there will be an easing of her pain, that, with each retelling, the story will lose its power over her just as it does for me.

STILL-LIFE WITH PAINTING, BLANK PAGES, CRUCIFIXION, AND TASTELESS DANCING

Divine Crow Award Winner

Anne Holmes

As they say in France, *adieu mon ami*, but where to?
Out the backdoor, with an insatiable thirst for cheap liquor?
No, no. I hate the taste of alcohol on my tongue.
Maybe an afternoon spent jumping on Monet's ancient
lily pads.
Tell me where to go, honey, and I'll be there with bells on,
except
I hate pet names like "honey," "baby," "sweetie pie," and you
really not
worth the francs spent on accessories.
Breathe in, breathe out, but please cover your mouth.
The sound of air hitting teeth makes me cringe.
And come to think of it, maybe breathing should be optional
because I can't stand whistling noses either.
There really is a pace to my direction.
It's right there between the lines.
Oh, but the pages have yellowed at the corners,
and the sentences have lost their meaning.
What I mean, *cheri*, is that my fingers are numb and these
words will inevitably write themselves to suffocation.
To suicide!
I lost my childhood somewhere along the way.
Can I borrow yours?
I promise to guard it with all that I have (which isn't much,
honest).
What I mean to say is
we all need distraction to hide the anguish,
but the anguish usually hides the distraction in the end.
What's distraction?
Two-thirds of a deer carcass on the highway.
The charred remains of a front lawn crucifixion.
A broken cemetery gate.
Your mother crying without her seatbelt on.
Look, I hate to rain on your parade, but this isn't Paris.
Mona Lisa *avec son sourire mysterieux*, sees right through your gaping
mouth
and down that hideous black hole to your toes.
This is not your entrance.
As a matter of fact, this isn't even your fire escape.
This is your last chance.
So swing me once more before you let go, and I know you
will.

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STILL-LIFE WITH PAINTING, BLANK PAGES, CRUCIFIXION, AND TASTELESS DANCING

Continued

You always do.

We ll dance *Sheherazade* until our feet swell up and Ravel
himself

rolls over in his grave.

Thanks God this isn t France.

The girl with pale blue eyes is no longer dancing.

Oh wait, she doesn t have any legs.

I can t stand the way this place is configured.

Strobe lights, red lipstick, a stranger s hand on my back.

"Ne me touche pas!"

I know we re spinning, but your face is starting to blur into
those faces

that always made me shiver.



MY GENTLE SEA

Julie Faust

When I have closed my eyes at night to rest,
to fall into another dream, my mind
will wander far to reach unknown seas, best
and only found in darkness, shores all lined
with green, beyond the endless trees they lie,
a family waiting patiently for me.
The harsh concrete recedes, that I might buy
a short moment, they are my gentle sea
and I, their earth-bound daughter, wrapped in salt,
their tears alive, a cold embrace before
their dark liquid retreats. It s not my fault
that now, empty waters demand them more.
When I awake to lonely, hollow land,
I find the salt of tears, the faded kiss of sand.

SWEATING HOLY WATER

Katie Zapoluch

I m working on
my wild woman ways:
hair a tangled tumbleweed
teeth a jagged maze,
parching the saguaros
with a love-infested gaze,
I sleep beneath the desert sky
breathing gritty haze,
spiders, snakes and scorpions know:
mine s the kiss that slays.
Neon Vegas vamps agree
I m the bet that pays.

I m saving up
my secret, sacred sighs:
storing precious penances
right between my thighs,
sweating holy water
when I m fucking pious guys,
the Pope and all the priests think
I m a virgin in disguise,
shrouded in a habit
I kiss Judas when he cries,
blessed be the bitch
John does more than just baptize.

I m calling out
my capital complaints:
isolating evidence
breaking my restraints.
I ll axe the executioners:
theirs is blood that taints.
The losers aren t winners
but the sinners become saints,
graffiti revolution till
the misogynist repaints.
The war is only over
when every phallus faints.

I m tearing out
my tortured, Tampax soul.
Remove a useless uterus

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SWEATING HOLY WATER

Continued

then I can be whole.
I bleed for my own causes,
put the pussy on parole.
Eclipsing chalky daughters
I m a dirty lump of coal,
a muddy stream in summer
all crusted with dead tadpole.
It s a baby factory play:
but I ve found a different role

I m killing off
my mother s mad dog rage:
scrawling it in capitals
across a filthy page.
Cardboard box confessions
beat inside a catholic cage.
her bruises and contusions
screaming out in my rampage,
I ll fuck up her abuser
forget my weakness and my age.
Someone s gotta save her,
and I guess it s me onstage.

So I m working on
my wild woman ways:
underneath the plastic there s
a Barbie that decays,
mirage you kiss at midnight
when I fix you in my gaze,
hot whispers of the convict
to the preacher when he prays,
fire burned to ashes
on a forehead that s ablaze,
all this in a woman
the one who never stays.

XXIV



XXIV



one day Windylocks was hoping a
of the sudden she came across the
Goldilocks was very tired and hung
house was empty, no one was home. The
goldilocks walked inside to find
gobbled up all three bowls of porridge.
She walked up stairs and found the
home and found Goldilocks sleeping.
The bears quickly gobbled up Goldilocks.
It was quite gruesome.