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ON THE COVER

S. Tucker Cooke's *Icarian Image II* is a 1974 lithograph. Tucker Cooke received his B.F.A. from Stetson University and his M.F.A. from the University of Georgia. Since 1967 he has been on the faculty at the University of North Carolina at Asheville teaching classes in life painting, life drawing, and watercolors, among others. In his own drawing and painting, Tucker Cooke focuses primarily on figurative work, and his art can be found in numerous permanent and public collections across the United States. He has also exhibited in museums such as the Mint Museum in Charlotte, NC, the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art in Winston Salem, NC, and the Asheville Art Museum, NC.

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KATHLEEN SPIVACK

In the Palazzo Altemps: The Bull

Can you feel it already in the entry,
the headless Romans shuttered there
in the gloomy old "palazzo" courtyard,
silent, unpeopled, filled with fetid air?

We've read about the things to see:
perhaps we are tired, cold, or is it
something numbing in the stones themselves
that makes us hurry through this visit

this rainy, dark and "why-not?" day,
dropping in on this after-thought museum, rooms
crammed with huge brooding statuary
pillaged as usual from Roman tombs

and labeled with the names of gods?
They hunker here while we look on:
too huge, too out of place. Rome's full
of so much heavy stone: move on, move on.

Here's headless Hermes, helmet tucked
beneath his arm. And Aphrodite half undressed.
They seem to swivel in the hall
as we walk round so impressed

and squint at little notes on walls
which tell us why this place was built—
the vanity of popes of course—
so many frescoed rooms, and so much gilt—

Which could be spelled another way,
of course. But did these popes know guilt,
or only decorated secrecy? Their brazen robbery
ensured these rooms be filled

and now bronze popes' heads on skirted necks,
look on, impressive and oversized
importantly. Eternal. We, lackluster, trail
beyond their greedy flat dead eyes

to that one almost empty corner hall,
forgotten, plain. Here an Egyptian statue stands,
impassively and inward, closed
with something hidden in his hands.

And in the center of the space
a carefully carved bull, full of the weight
of worship, —(when we worshiped bulls)—
regards the gallery, impassive, isolate:

animus; curve of black-flecked belly-breath.
Totemic Bull, elusive, searched for in the dark days'
vacancy of spirit, if we had only known *where*:
your eyes canny with knowledge; **life**, its obsidian flare!

Glory

All glory gone—
the old tree exposes
its branches shamelessly:
lie down lie down—
our great oak groans
in the wind, not
yet surrendering.
Last night I dreamt
of my father
but the canopy
of leaves was greenly
gone. The ribs of
his old black umbrella
from London
poked out, bare,
where the wind blew it
wrong side out. It was
a flapping inside-out
bat-thing, stripped by the
turn-around wind.
The leaves blow down
too fast and raggedy:
unwrapping.

MARK PHILLIPS

At Last—A Fighter's Peace

In 1930, when a job was hard to find, Emanuel Fried, honored with an award as "the best all-around student and athlete," graduated from Hutchinson Central High School in Buffalo—still a fine enough city for the rich, though never again would it feel so safe to them as before the 1901 shooting of corpulent President William McKinley at the Pan-American Exposition—and one of Fried's teachers found him employment at the DuPont Cellophane and Rayon factory, north of Buffalo in a hazy string of manufacturing plants, refineries, and toxic dumps on the banks of the Niagara as it roiled wide and blue and sparkling and polluted toward Niagara Falls. Local alumni of the University of Michigan awarded a scholarship to one graduate of Hutchinson each year, but with a factory job waiting, Fried was little bothered that as a Jew he was unofficially ineligible for the scholarship. At least he would not hunger in breadlines, shiver in a Hooverville, or become a hobo.

Until you fall, a blue-collar job can be heaven.

In his 2010 memoir, *Most Dangerous Man*—written when he was 95 and published when he was 97 years old—we see Fried dancing in the clouds at the DuPont factory before he became an actor and labor organizer and playwright and Communist target of the FBI. He was only beginning to become dangerous, reconnoitering with brio the precarious places of rebellion: "I would occasionally, while holding the handle of the wooden case with its bottles of samples of different chemical solutions I'd taken from the tanks, cockily leap back and forth from the catwalk on one machine to the catwalk on the next machine, though that was forbidden by management as being too dangerous."

He was trying to "ape the bravado" of the machine operators. Apparently the proud operators, including the females who whistled at the young and handsome Fried as he walked through the factory for the first time, either did not know or care that Marx had pronounced each worker "an appendage of the machine."

On River Road, not far from the DuPont plant where Fried had toiled cockily, my grandfather and father and an uncle and I labored at various times in the coal-fired Niagara-Mohawk plant that produced electricity for western New York. Out in the coal yard, where several hundred thousand tons were kept in constant reserve, the fuel was gradually pushed to and fro to prevent it from erupting into flame under the pressure and heat of its own immense weight. The shifting, black mountain dwarfed the growling bulldozers as if they were Chihuahuas nipping at the heels of a sluggish giant. The men on the dozers coughed. Inside the plant, where we Phillipses worked, darkened and deafened, there was more coughing. If you had a particularly dirty job, such as cleaning dark clouds of fly ash and coal dust from the tops of boilers, you made periodic visits to the nurse to have your eyes swabbed with cotton that became black; and the gritty air was so hot and dry on the upper floors of the plant that if you didn't drink a large volume of water during a strenuous shift, you might not shit for a week.

After he healed from breaking two ribs and bruising a lung in a construction accident, my grandfather quit ironwork and found a new job at the power plant. His Ulster immigrant father had been killed on a construction job when a swinging beam had knocked him from a horse-drawn supply wagon. And two of my grandfather's brothers, in separate accidents, had fallen to their deaths, or as their fellow high-act ironworkers would have put it, "took the dive." Pietro di Donato's 1939 novel about construction workers and their families, *Christ in Concrete*, has been largely forgotten, but elegiac and minatory truth abides in its rhythmic evocation of immigrants broken by industry in the first half of the American 20th century.

In the second half of the century, all but a few of the many ironworkers in the Phillips family had to retire early with damaged backs. After yet another took the dive, the crippled retirees considered themselves lucky, just as my grandfather considered himself lucky to have found a job in a choking and cooking power plant.

In the second half of the 20th century, one of my aunts became a drug addict after her back blew out in a Buffalo furniture factory. Another kin left three of his fingers in a machine shop. Another broke his leg on a road construction job. Another nearly died after a tree dropped on him in a logging accident. A friend of mine in western New York went on permanent disability because three discs in his back had crumbled as if jackhammered while he was doing concrete work. Another had to go on disability because a fringe benefit of his factory job was asbestosis. Another was crushed in a factory accident but is now back at work, hurting and limping, supporting his family, after a year of surgeries and rehabilitation. In

the 21st century, some members of Congress would like to raise the national retirement age to 70. In the 21st century, many Americans believe that unions have outlived their purpose. In the 21st century, you might have heard about the men who died in a mine explosion in West Virginia. You might have heard about the oil company workers who died on a burning drilling platform in the Gulf of Mexico.

On a sidewalk in town, my father and I once passed a stranger in a grandiose suit, glittering watch, gleaming shoes; my father spit on the concrete and muttered, "You son of a bitch."

I worked for the sons-of-bitches during my summer breaks from college. Given the choice of painting power-line towers or shoveling, sweeping, and vacuuming coal and fly ash in the dungeon-like power plant, and recalling family stories about the Phillipses who fell, I decided to work with my feet planted on dirty concrete.

All summer, I blew black snot from my nose.

By then, my father was gravely ill.

Men seldom develop prostate cancer until at least age 50, but some studies have reported that welders have an earlier and higher incidence, and my father often welded without adequate ventilation in the bellies of boilers and other plant machinery. He had been diagnosed with prostate cancer at age 40, and because it had spread into his bones where it was inoperable, his testicles were surgically removed to deprive the tumors of some of their hormonal fuel; he continued to support his family, limping into the plant. He was reduced to small welding jobs at a table in the maintenance department, or, if he was in much pain that day, hidden by his kind foreman and fellow welders in a storeroom where the men in white shirts wouldn't notice that he was slumped in a metal chair, popping yellow pills, moaning, doing no work, dying on company time while long dump trucks halted beneath the scrubbers of the smokestacks to fill up with fly ash.

I think of Fried leaping from catwalk to catwalk, cockily, absorbing the bravado that rose like cool mist from the machine operators below. I think of my father flipping down his welding helmet, snappily, the other workers averting their eyes as he plied his blinding trade; I think of him flipping open his lunchbox when the union was planning a strike, grinning, revealing a small part of some essential plant machinery that he had sabotaged. I think of the time I asked whether he would change anything if he could live his life over, and recall well that he replied immediately and firmly: "No."

I then asked another question—a young man's ignorant and malicious jab. Suppose the plant had caused his cancer, wouldn't he, if he had it to do over, go to college and try for a better job?

"No," he said. "My best friends work at the plant."

At age 95, distrusting himself, Emanuel Fried is, in *Most Dangerous Man*, unsure why he became a labor organizer. He wonders whether he was driven by ego, by an urge to stand above rather than with anyone; whether his lifelong rebelliousness was hostility or righteousness; whether his marriage to a Buffalo artist whose family was wealthy rendered him a gigolo; whether his failure to volunteer on behalf of the loyalist cause in the Spanish Civil War was cowardly. Even when the House Un-American Activities Committee targeted him, when the labor movement expelled him as too dangerous, when the FBI harassed him and pressured employers to fire him, and when no mainstream theater in Buffalo would stage his plays that had been well-received in New York City and Toronto, Fried still believed in his peaceful fight and his art. Though gradually, when the Buffalo newspapers were treating him as a Marxist public enemy and some in the community were ostracizing his wife and children, he began to wonder whether he was a selfish husband and father who had flattered himself into believing he was Prometheus. And he went on wondering for decades. Early in *Most Dangerous Man*, he explains, "I'd like to dig out, relentlessly and honestly—no matter what the cost to my ego—what were my true motivations beneath the surface of what I'd done with my life. It must seem silly, even stupid, to younger people, but at my advanced age I need to find out why I have become who I am—and who am I now?—in order to decide what to try to do with the rest of my life."

I dare say, the near-centenarian posed good questions for the American nation in this new century. How did we become who we are? Who are we now? What should we do? Who, here on the surface, still cares about those men burned and buried in that mine? What did we have to do with it, anyhow, that time or the next? What might we dig up if we care? Not that Fried particularly expects us to ask. His 2010 memoir reminds me, more than anything, of Montaigne's telling us—in "Why I Paint My Own Portrait"—that "What I offer here is not my teaching, but my study; not a lesson for others, but for myself."

Since Fried has no compulsion to describe what he remembers—only to understand it—a reader encounters, in *Most Dangerous Man*, merely a few jump-off-the-page evocations of particular labor struggles or factory workers or even of his gifted, beautiful, and disenchanted wife Rhoda. To experience any of those, you will need to read his powerful plays *Drop Hammer* and especially *The Dodo Bird*; or his autobiographical novel, the *Un-American*; or his collection, *Meshugah and Other Stories*; or watch a

recording of his one-man play about his marriage, *Boilermakers and Martinis*. In *Most Dangerous Man*, the light is inward.

Nor will you find much of a solid narrative thread. It's as if Fried and his reader are sitting at a kitchen table—after all, working-class people sit at kitchen tables when they discuss anything really serious—or you are together at that watering hole a little south of Buffalo near Bethlehem Steel before the mill shut down and the entire plant was sold for scrap and you each take a fresh egg from the bowl on the bar or table and crack the shell on the lip of your beer mug and plop the innards into the dark foam before you drink and reminisce and wonder about your lives. One of you might begin to talk about your childhood when your immigrant father was a hardscrabble traveling salesman and be reminded to tell a story about your own children and then you might talk about their mother and a long labor strike that put a bad strain on your marriage and about a play in which you wrote about some of these things you are yakking and wondering about and exploring yet again over beer and eggs at the scrubbed kitchen table or polished bar. If the two of you are old friends and already know the outline of each other's life, this is good conversation.

Somewhere in all of this meandering talk and wonderment, you recall when movie producer Elia Kazan asked you to play a role in *Boomerang*. One of your union pals was in a Buffalo hospital recovering from the amputation of a leg and you visited him to say good-bye and to explain that what you really are is an actor rather than a union organizer, and your friend reached up from the bed to seize your arm, his grip surprisingly strong, and said, "Don't you abandon us, you redheaded son-of-a-bitch! Don't you abandon us!"

And so you didn't. And a different obscure actor, by the name of Karl Malden, was given the role.

On February 25, 2011, Emanuel Fried died at age 97. A number of articles and reviews full of admiration of his heroism and plays appeared in the *Buffalo News* in the decade before his death; he was referred to as Manny Fried in the newspaper pieces, though on the covers and title pages of his books he is Emanuel Fried. By then, he was no longer quite so dangerous. I believe the writers of the articles and reviews were sincere, but since the paper had been running editorials attacking public employee unions for costing the city and state too much money in salaries and benefits, I wonder what the editorialists would have said about him if he had been yet active in the labor movement as, say, the president of a teachers' or police union.

News outlets in Buffalo paid tribute to Fried's art, courage and purpose on the Friday of his death, and coincidentally, the next day a rally

was held in downtown Niagara Square in support of Wisconsin workers whose governor was attempting to outlaw collective bargaining for public employees. Among the signs and banners in Niagara Square in support of public employees, several were hung in memory of beloved Manny Fried.

The rally was sparsely attended.

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GRANT TRACEY

"Carl D'Amato"

The news was heavy with the story from CNN to Johnny Tenatas's local affiliate back in Northfield, Minnesota: Carl D'Amato, 47, a janitor at Peet Junior High in Cedar Falls, Iowa, had rescued two students whom a gunman, troubled fifteen-year-old Jimmy Destri, had taken into custody. Destri, according to reports, was a loner, had few friends, and often walked the halls with a fierce scowl on his face. He forced twelve-year old Danica and thirteen-year old Sydnee into a cramped AV closet in the back of the media section to the library. Destri said that he was annoyed that none of the girls danced with him last week at the annual winter dance. While Destri sulked and challenged the girls in the shadows of the closet, staff and students scrambled outside and waited for the police. D'Amato stayed in the school, knocked on the AV door, and according to Destri's sworn statement, told the kid he was loved, that he didn't have to do this. Five minutes passed and D'Amato's voice was "real relaxed like," said Destri. Eventually, the gunman came out. Gunman? It was an air gun. The girls were all right.

Reporters snapped Carl's picture. He had a heavy face, the upper lip too small for the lower one's angry generosity. And his eyes were gray with dark troughs under them, making it look like he wore a mask. Johnny, who had been sitting at a Cedar Falls coffee shop for close to an hour, reading a Philip Roth novel and sipping Italian sodas, recognized the face in the newspaper sprawled on the table next to him. It was especially noticeable in the high cheekbones. After all, the face should look familiar. D'Amato was Johnny's father.

Johnny hadn't seen him in nine years. He sipped more soda and tapped the packet of Camels resting next to his book. He wanted a smoke but it was too cold outside. Just what did D'Amato say for five minutes to Destri to gain access to him in the AV closet? And when did Johnny's father, Sol Tenatas, change his name? The street was gray with sky and snow flickered like caught lightning bugs.

For Johnny, memories of Dad were vague shimmers: lime-scented after shave; two layers of flannel shirts billowing as he planted barb-wire along the house's fencing to keep the deer out; buzzed hair and a dark river line at the back of his neck. Other memories weren't shimmers but hard flashes: the haze of alcohol that hovered in Dad's glassy eyes; the sandy stains on his T-shirts; crumpled radios, TVs, edges of coffee tables—items Dad had kicked or tossed in an effort to deflect anger away from wife and son. After school young Johnny gauged Dad's face to know what kind of a day it was going to be. If Dad wore sunglasses all was good—he was happy with drink. If his lower lip jutted above his thin upper one then anything could happen.

Three days ago when Mom first saw Dad on TV she gasped, "It's him. It's, my God, it's—" She had slipped out of her office secretary clothes—pantsuit and flats—and wore bleach-stained sweats that bunched at her elbows and knees. Her forearms, dotted with odd, lake-like liver spots, were folded tight. Johnny couldn't believe it either. Dad's eyes weren't creased with fatigue as they were nine-ten years ago, but the lines under them were deeper. They looked like charcoal stripes.

Compared to his father, Johnny had never done anything heroic. Only eighteen, he was just readying to start college and, except for his father's abandonment, life had been uneventful. Johnny volunteered at the Western home twice a week, attending to the needs of the elderly; earned okay grades at school, Bs mainly; and played varsity soccer. Dad rescued two kids from a gunman.

"It was an air gun," Mom corrected, her eyes darkening.

"Mom—it looked like a real gun. Besides—he—I wonder what he told him?"

"Huh?"

"Destri. The kid with the gun, *air* gun. The news reports said that Dad told him he was loved. Loved, you know? They talked for five minutes—"

Mom bit at her lower lip. "'Loved'? Where was all that wonderful love for us, huh?" Just then the smoke alarm screamed and Mom rushed to the kitchen and switched the fan on above the range. She said something about the pizza being a little tanned.

The news story was full of absurd details and complexities. Above and below the commentator's analysis and the noisy wash of the fan Johnny heard the sharp, blunted tones of his mother, saying how they hadn't seen him in nine years, no child support in six of them, and now he was even living in a different state. Damn dead beat. "Some hero."

Mom continued rallying Johnny to her anger, but the fan above the range had progressed from a noisy wash to a metallic rattle and he could no longer hear her. Maybe, we redefine ourselves every moment in the choices we make, Johnny figured. The dad of his past had become in one

moment a better man than he had ever been. The dampened faces of the two rescued girls, Danica and Sydnee, told Johnny how much his father was appreciated. According to newspaper reports, both families thanked Mr. D'Amato and invited him over for dinner. Danica's parents were expecting a fifth child and they had asked Mr. D'Amato to be the child's godfather.

Now, as the last of Johnny's soda glasses were empty, he crunched on a small pebble of ice, tapped his cigarettes, and glanced at his watch. Three o'clock. Peet Junior High was just around the corner from the coffee shop, about a ten-minute walk, and classes were dismissed at 3:03. D'Amato? Where did Dad come up with that one? There are no D'Amatos in any limbs to the Tenatas family tree. Outside, the gray had now darkened; the sky asphalt.

He wasn't sure of what he was going to do. He had taken the four-hour bus ride from Minnesota to Iowa, hopped in a cab to Cedar Falls, and desired a meeting with his father to learn what Dad had said to another kid that he should have been saying to his own son.

The very journey was sort of sentimental, melodramatic even, but Johnny felt compelled to take it, to hear his father's story, and maybe make him listen to the son's story.

He wanted to diminish his father, the "hero." He wanted to press Dad on his past behaviors, scold him for leaving. The word love was never spoken in the Tenatas home. Johnny couldn't remember being kissed or hugged by Mom or Dad. One Christmas, Dad got Johnny a pedal car to ride around the block but couldn't figure out how to put the damn thing together so it sat in the garage for six weeks until Uncle Sid, a fellow drinking buddy in dark sunglasses, brought over a bigger toolbox. Sid often smelled of stale socks and beer. He never wore deodorant. Didn't believe in it. Causes cancer, he once said. Six weeks. Car parts—sprockets, chains, and steering wheel—were scattered in the garage's sawdust. What if Dad had waited six weeks before talking to Destri?

Johnny picked up his pack of smokes, the Roth book, and tapered his knit cap over forehead and eyebrows. He thanked the girl behind the counter for the sodas and rubbed an eyebrow's edge and sighed deeply. Earlier in the week he had tried to contact his father but the number was unlisted. Johnny left messages at the school for D'Amato the janitor, but his calls were never returned.

Johnny cupped his hands into the crevices of his jacket—he'd forgotten to bring gloves—and stumbled into the cold. He immediately lit a cigarette while his shoes nubbed at salt and ice on the sidewalk. He had left a Post-it on the kitchen fridge for Mom, telling her he was skipping school and heading to Cedar Falls despite the fact that she didn't want him to have any contact with Dad. Last night she talked about suing "Dad's ass"

and getting a lawyer all over him like rabbis at Mel Gibson's house. Mom's quirky sense of humor bubbled out like atomic lava whenever she got mad. What pithy punch line might she toss his way once he returned home? He didn't own a credit card; he didn't even have a toothbrush, a backpack, or a change of clothes—he'd forgotten all that. All he had was a return bus ticket and after a fifteen-dollar cab ride and six dollars of sodas, forty-five dollars—enough for a motel, maybe. Maybe he was walking too light.

When Johnny arrived at the school, the sky's color had changed from asphalt gray to blacktop. Cars whooshed by, the streets thudding with heavy tires, and students, glittering in their ribbony scarves and bright winter coats, boarded busses and waited to be picked up by parents. The school itself was a low rectangle, probably built in the 60s, Johnny reasoned, when architectural design was very functional. On a niche in the school's brick was a crisp blue-ribbon placard celebrating Peet's recent academic achievements. Johnny threw away his cigarette and entered the building.

He hoped to discover Dad working in a hall or room and catch a genuine response. But upon taking three, maybe four steps, a man and a woman from behind the series of glass panels to the main office gathered around him, their brittle ID tags flashing. He should have figured on that, what with the recent air gun/hostage incident. The woman was small with padded shoulders, an upturned nose, and eyes that were like hardened coins. The man had a heavy face, there were dent marks on his lower lip, and his chunky tie was tucked into the folds of his buttoned shirt. Both were pleasant. The man was younger than the secretary and he asked Johnny what he wanted.

Johnny didn't look like a Junior High student. He couldn't just slide by and meld into the muted blues and neutral grays of the school's walls and lockers. "I'm here to see my dad," he blurted, looking at his shoes and losing the battle to make eye contact. His jacket was unzipped. They could see he was unarmed. "Carl D'Amato."

Several minutes passed and Johnny didn't care much for the hard chair so he sat on its edge, trying to get comfortable, trying to keep his legs from falling asleep. He was tired of waiting. He had to see his father and give him hell for leaving years ago. A hero? Please.

The office was brightly lit, but the floor needed to be mopped—it was spackled with gray snow, and the clock to the right would occasionally tap loudly as the needle seemed to stick before moving to the next minute. The secretary smiled in Johnny's direction and asked if he had read the story about Carl. He had.

More minutes passed and then his father arrived. He wore green dickies and a crisp shirt with little puffed tents on the shoulders. His shoes looked old, too old for the shirt. Dad nodded to the Vice Principal who in turn nodded back before retreating into his office. The secretary returned to sorting papers and filing notes. "Hey, Johnny." There was a catch to Dad's voice.

"Hey." Johnny didn't look up. His hands rested on his knees. "I heard about you on the news."

"Yeah. That's something, huh?"

"It's something."

His father suggested they talk in his office and motioned Johnny to follow. The blue halls were warm yet track lights glared violently off the floor's tile. They passed a large green trash bin on wheels with a towel on one of its handles. "I was in the middle of something," Carl said. Mice or squirrels, most probably, had sifted in between the drop ceiling and the ceiling and chewed wires. Dad had spliced the broken ends of bare wires back together.

"Cool," Johnny said, absently.

"You need to brush your teeth," his father said. "Your breath stinks."

The edges of Johnny's face burned. "Well—"

"Smells like you were in a barn."

"I brought deodorant—" He wanted to kick himself. Why did Dad always have this hold over him, this ability to make him feel small?

His father opened his office door. It was really a converted closet with cinder walls, a small desk, and rolls of cleanser under a rust-stained sink. Johnny was directed to sit down. A furnace duct to his left chugged as they sat across from each other.

"How you doing in school?"

Johnny could hardly make out his father's words. The furnace's chug seemed to drag the words out of the room.

"Okay." He was getting Bs; a C in Economics.

"In what?"

"Economics."

"Oh." His father shrugged. Maths and Sciences were what mattered—that's where the jobs were.

"I prefer English and History."

"What?"

"English—"

"Oh. Arty stuff." He smirked. "Like I said. Maths and Sciences."

"What?" Johnny heard him. He was just getting even for Dad diminishing his son's choices. Johnny shifted and knocked up against the desk's edge. "You remember the car with the pedals?"

"What?"

"The one with the pedals that you didn't build for six weeks? The one you got me for Christmas. It was Christmas, Dad. Six weeks."

"Oh, for Crissakes, Johnny. Is that what *this* is about? Where were you going to drive it—there was snow on the fucking ground—Mom wanted to get you the car, not me."

"What did you say to that kid, the shooter?"

His father leaned back and waited for a break in the chug of the furnace. "I told him there would be better days, I told him it's going to get better."

Johnny nodded, smiling slightly. "But you talked for five minutes—"

"What?"

"You talked for five minutes—"

"Well that's between me and him. It's private."

Johnny didn't know what to say, and both listened to the furnace.

And then his father spoke. At first he said, he felt he was acting, trying to say the right things to save the girls, but as he listened to Destri he was no longer acting. It wasn't so much the words themselves that mattered, but the emotion behind the words, the sincerity, that's what Destri was responding to from Carl. "Frankly, I can't remember what all I said. Something about logarithms and not having any girlfriends. I told him I don't have any either." His father apologetically shrugged and opened a desk drawer. He offered Johnny a leftover sub sandwich. "You hungry?"

Johnny was. "No, I'm good."

"I got that ceiling still to do—" He opened a prescription bottle and swallowed a white pill. Blood pressure. No big deal.

"That furnace is loud—"

"I'm sorry I messed up your life. Is that what you want from me?"

"No. I—I—"

"I'm not that person any more—"

"I know."

"I really got to get back to that ceiling—the squirrels?"

"Okay, sure."

"Look, I—I—damn, this furnace is loud." He laughed and Johnny joined in. "Let's do lunch tomorrow. We can talk longer. I'm a little off guard, here."

"Sounds good."

Carl rummaged through the desk drawer. "And even if you aren't hungry, at least take a few breath mints, huh?" He tossed Johnny the packet.

Afterward, Johnny wandered the streets of Cedar Falls for two hours. He bought a Whopper for dinner, drank water to save money, and slouched aimlessly under shadows of an overpass. What was it he wanted? His father apologized, hadn't he, albeit half-heartedly but he had apologized.

Johnny was dissatisfied with everything and wasn't even sure he wanted to meet for lunch tomorrow.

His feet felt heavy as if they were caked with hardened mud. The back of his knees, the corners in his arms, and the round fleshy part of his shoulders hurt with every step. Once he emerged from the overpass, he saw the red slash of a church.

The church doors were unlocked. Johnny's eyes adjusted to the darkness. He smelled candles and old sweaters and then slowly climbed carpeted steps to a balcony to lie down. It was cold in the balcony, probably because the heat in the church was set to a lower temperature to save money. As dry mud cracked from his upper back and arms, Johnny lay in the pew and studied the ceiling. It was darker than the backs of the pews and he thought maybe he saw chains. With dry, heavy eyelids, Johnny prayed for twenty minutes, then stared upward and found himself slipping, falling into a black lake.

"Hey, you can't sleep here."

He blinked his eyes, momentarily thinking he was back in his bedroom, but when he didn't sense a pillow under him, he was confused, and the voice wasn't Mom's. The church. The darkness was lighter now and he could make out the stained-glass windows: fountains with jets of water. Over his head dangled a light fixture that resembled a giant goblet suspended with heavy chains. Mud fell from his eyes and eyebrows.

"You okay?" Parachuted by black hair, hovered the face of a girl. It was a pretty face: thin eyebrows, dark eyes, a high forehead. Her name was Claire.

"I'm sorry, Claire? Claire. I, what time is it?"

She was a big girl. Wide in the hips and chest and her upper arms were sturdy, strong, like maybe she lifted hay or something. He smiled. The edges of his lips still hurt.

It was after 9:30.

Claire handed him a cup of hot chocolate. "I thought you might like this."

"Thanks." He sipped it. It was rich and burned going down, which felt great. "I'm sorry. I just planned to close my eyes for a minute."

"That's okay." She picked at the book that crested from the lip of his unzipped jacket. "Philip Roth, huh?" She liked some of his writing, but not that novel. "Terrible. Sexist. A woman freezes to death—"

"Well thanks for giving away the plot."

"Oh, God." She covered her mouth. Her teeth were very bright. "I'm terrible at that. 'Spoiler Alert.' Someone should tattoo that on my forehead. Too-much-information Claire. That's me."

He laughed and between sips of hot chocolate they made quick introductions: she was twenty-five, a grad student at the University of

Northern Iowa, had taken a Roth seminar with Professor Julie Husband, and worked late afternoons and evenings at the church, caring for the parking lot, making sure the snow was blown clear. She also cleaned up the pews and polished floors too.

He told her he was just visiting and felt the urge to pray. "It happens."

"Yeah, it does." She smiled, her upper lip a chocolate mustache. "Why don't you come downstairs? It's cold up here."

"I thought I could be anonymous. That's why I came up here. I must have known all along that I was going to take a power nap." He chuckled. Power nap. He had been out for three hours.

Downstairs, the fellowship hall was a small meeting room with a quilt on a far wall, hard metal chairs by a fireplace, and three rectangular tables pushed against a kitchen nook. The room's walls were cinder blocks and it was very warm. The furnace was next door, she said. Outside the fellowship windows, streetlights gleamed and the parking lot was a pond that Johnny could skate on.

"So, you go to UNI?"

No. He told her he was from Minnesota, just visiting. "My dad's that guy that rescued those kids from the shooter—" Unlike his mother he didn't make a point of mentioning that the weapon was a lowly air gun.

"The newspapers didn't say anything about him having a family."

"No—no. I haven't seen him in nine years." He shrugged and suddenly found himself with a mouthful of tears.

Claire said it was okay and directed him to one of the long tables. Her hand on his shoulder was warm and full of kindness. He sat back, his head resting against cinder blocks. The furnace hushed. "I'm all on edge." He leaned forward and told her about the meeting with his father, how he wanted to punish him but felt belittled instead. He even mentioned the breath mints.

"I'm sorry," she said.

"I don't know what I wanted. Maybe I wanted him to hit me. Like it would feel good, like it was an affirmation that I existed for him, you know?"

She nodded.

"I don't know how to relate to him."

She looked at her fingers. "The hot chocolate's cold. You want another?"

"I'm kind of hungry. You got an egg you can fry up or something?"

"Yeah. In the kitchen."

"I'm sorry to ask. I haven't much money." He paused.

"You don't even have a suitcase or a backpack—and—"

"—or a toothbrush." He shook his head. "Boy, it sure is nice and warm in here."

"The furnace." She touched the wall behind him. "Come on, let's get something to eat."

The next day at Claire's urging Johnny called the school and confirmed his lunchtime appointment with his father. The night before, Claire let Johnny sleep over at the church—there was a mattress and old sleeping bags in the furnace room.

Now she was saying goodbye as Johnny's father stood waiting in front of the school, hands crammed in his pockets. Instead of dickies he wore a double set of cornflower flannels. The collars were faded, and the fabric looked warm, relaxed. As Johnny left the car, he wanted to linger with Claire. But her head was slightly bent, her eyes elsewhere.

"You need to shower," Dad said, looking over his son who wore yesterday's clothes: blue jeans, a Rancid sweatshirt, and an unzipped jacket.

"Yeah, I know. I couldn't exactly afford a hotel, Dad."

"How about some deodorant?"

"I have deodorant, Dad. I told you that."

His dad shook his head. "Well, I have a toothbrush you can have."

They walked down the hall to the utility closet.

Dad handed Johnny a sub. "I didn't know what you liked—I hope you like Italian."

Johnny said that would be just fine, and then Dad ambled like an actor in a Western to the filing cabinet. The door opened with a creased yawn, and Dad tossed Johnny an unopened toothbrush.

As they sat down, chairs scraped the floor. They ate for several minutes before speaking. The conversation contoured down many different topics—who's that girl who dropped you off?—she's cute—how's your mother?—does she still not know how to make Jell-O?—hers always had a rubbery texture; she got bored stirring it—anyway, I don't blame her if she wants to sue me, I guess—and then Dad talked just a little bit about Jimmy Destri. The kid's father was an alcoholic. His mother a waitress at a low-fi bar in Waterloo. She often turned tricks in the parking lot for extra coin. "Seriously." Dad shrugged. Jimmy was undergoing psychological evaluation and had asked to see Carl. He was thinking of visiting the kid. "Can you imagine that?"

"That's pretty cool."

He nodded. They finished their sandwiches and tossed wax paper into a wastebasket. Johnny needed two tosses and his father reminded him of this fact by morphing into John Wayne of *Rio Bravo*.

"Took ya two," he said as Sheriff John T. Chance.

It wasn't like they were trying to shoot flying dynamite or anything. Well, maybe Carl was, with words. No matter.

The past never came up, at least not directly. Dad offered no explanations. He did say that he had been sober for seven years and since the doctor had found a small spot on a lung, three years ago, had quit smoking.

Johnny slightly smiled. He enjoyed their conversation, but halfway into it he knew he wouldn't find closure, an answer for why his father abandoned him. Rationally, Johnny didn't really think closure could be achieved in one short conversation, but emotionally he wanted it nonetheless.

"You need any money for the trip home?"

"No, no. I've got enough."

Dad placed tired hands on his knees. Some of his fingernails were hard and yellow with age. He seemed relieved about the money thing.

"Dad, why did you choose the name D'Amato?"

"Carl D'Amato. Not just the last name." He laughed. "Boy, that's a story."

Before Johnny was born, Sol Tenatas worked construction, helping maintain weather-beaten highways and bridges in southern Iowa. Carl D'Amato was the foreman of their crew, a nice guy who died too young, anyway, he was real nice, knew everyone's names, likes, and dislikes. He wasn't a big guy—soft spoken, really—but he never said a bad word about nobody and when he spoke it was like parables. "Mysteries, you know? He used to tell this one story about squirrels. 'You see squirrels,' he'd say, 'aren't very smart. No sir. They're digging up, uncovering, and burying acorns all day because they can't remember where they put them. Short attention span or no attention span or something, so they bury way more acorns than they need, but no squirrel ever went hungry because they're always finding some other poor schmuck's acorns.' Then he'd smile, this big cat-like smile. 'There, boys,' he'd say, 'therein lies the secret to life.' He never did tell us what the secret was but it was somewhere in that story." Dad wiped the corners of his mouth. He had wanted to name Johnny after the foreman but Mom vetoed it. Johnny was named after an uncle. "Well, actually, your uncle's name was Sean. But you know your mother—that's more of her quirky sense of humor."

"I never see many squirrels in the winter," Johnny said.

"They hibernate. Short term, I think. But they're around."

"Yeah."

Later that night as Johnny waited for a Greyhound out of downtown Waterloo, he thought he saw a squirrel skittering along the lower casement windows of the library across the street. Its tail was puffed like a raccoon, but it wasn't a squirrel. It was a small cat. The cat moved closer to the warmth of the window's glass and apparently was staring out into the street's dull glimmer. Above the bus station's neon glow, a street lamp flickered intermittently. White, then nothing. White—

Johnny wasn't sure for how long that light could hold a charge.

CHAD HANSON

The Last Flight of the Yellowstone Cutthroat

The state of Wyoming is a square. Other states have borders that follow the contours of rivers or mountains. Ours shoot straight over the landscape. Then they connect at four corners. We are a box. No bumps or ripples. While preparing for a trip, I stare at a map of the Rockies and think of John Wesley Powell. He ran the Colorado River in a wooden boat before we could even dream about the Grand Canyon. After the mission, Powell returned to the nation's capital to report on the prospects waiting out to the left of the Mississippi. His assessment included warnings of drought and intermittent streams. He urged lawmakers to mark territories to match reliable watersheds—the keys to life in the dry West.

For his trouble, Congress drew straight lines across a rendering of North America, routing new states onto the map in the process. Of them, Wyoming and Colorado are perfectly unmoored from reality: two man-made squares set side-by-side on a rumpled assortment of plains, forests, deserts, canyons, and glaciers. Early Americans had a knack for reshaping the world to suit their interests, but today we see the price we paid for our attempt to define geography on our own terms, as opposed to those of the region.

I am headed north to spend time on a stream that is home to an endangered type of cutthroat trout. Cutthroats made their first appearance on the west coast of the continent. Their ancestors were salmon that swam up from the ocean into freshwater. Some of them liked the setting so they chose to stay. Then tectonic plates started to buckle. Earthquakes shifted riverbeds. Whole schools of trout became landlocked, and once they became isolated, the fish developed unique characteristics. In the case of cutthroat trout, at the height of their distribution, fourteen variations swam the waters of the West. Two of them are now extinct.

The Yellow Fin cutthroat vanished from an area of peaks and forests near the town of Leadville, Colorado. Regional mining expanded in the early part of the twentieth century. Hungry crews of miners took too many

fish from local streams. The trout were too easy to catch, and the toll was too great to sustain. In *Cutthroat*, the definitive book on the subject, Patrick Trotter suggests that Yellow Fins disappeared fifteen years after they were discovered.

The Alvord cutthroat shared their fate. The Alvord Basin of northern Nevada became home to a handsome mauve and tan species, back in the Pleistocene Era. The fish grew accustomed to changes in water temperature, so they flourished in their native valley for millennia, right up to the point where settlers began stocking rainbows from the state of Washington. Rainbows and cutthroats spawn in April. When they swim the same waters, inbreeding occurs and pure strains of cutthroat are displaced by a genetic hybrid: cutt-bow trout.

At the same time, cutthroats also begin to lose the race to catch and eat aquatic bugs. Despite their name, cutthroats are the least assertive trout in North America. In streams where non-native fish are stocked or introduced, cutthroat populations shrink because they're less aggressive than browns, rainbows, or brook trout, and on that score I am sympathetic. I find the fish's pacifism endearing.

As a young man I participated as a member of my hometown wrestling team for less than ten minutes. On the first day of the season the coach spent time going over the training and event schedule for the year to come. He took a moment to pair us with partners. Then he placed us on a rubber-coated mat. In my case, he paired me with a wiry kid, four inches shorter than myself. Due to my size advantage, the coach put me in a position on my hands and knees. My partner knelt and wrapped his arms across my back and under my stomach. Other pairs assumed the same position all around the gym. Then the shrill sound of a whistle filled the room. The wiry kid slammed me to the mat so hard my brain bounced off the inside of my skull. His fingers grabbed me with intensity. They sunk into my arms and back. After eight seconds worth of grappling, the kid felt satisfied that I was pinned, so he let me go and I stood up.

I said, "God damn it! What the hell!"

That ended my wrestling career. Some members of our species excel in physical battles. After eight seconds, I learned that I am no good in combat. Cutthroat and I have mellow temperaments. I eventually came to terms with my own personality, but cutthroat trout need food, and when we force them to compete they either get eaten when they're young or they go hungry by midlife.

A line on my map of the Big Horn Range offers a path to the location of a far-flung, remnant school of Yellowstone cutthroat. As the name implies, their genetic roots lead to the Yellowstone River. Their descendants climbed up the west slope of the Rockies. They evolved into their current

state and swam across the great divide. Then they drifted down the Yellowstone, pausing to explore the tributaries. At one point, they entered the Tongue River of Montana. Years ago, cutthroats gained access to the Big Horn Mountains through the waters of the Tongue, but as they made their way into the region, forces inside the planet pushed the range up from the surrounding terrain. Creek beds fell away and the heaving Earth left waterfalls, trapping cutthroats in the high country.

The process that stranded the fish also protected them. When Europeans began to settle the region they stocked the Tongue and its watershed with their favorite fish: rainbows, browns, and brook trout. The foreigners displaced cutthroat except in areas where the interlopers couldn't make it up the waterfalls. In creeks at high elevation, there are still cutthroats swimming without competition.

The road through central Wyoming to the top of Big Horns is familiar, but not boring. The prairies of my home state differ from those of the Midwest or the coasts. Rock outcroppings interrupt hills of sage and dehydrated grass. The plains of Wyoming are broken by reminders that the roadside scenery is some of the oldest anywhere. Seventy-five million years ago a shallow sea covered the state. As time wore on, the sea dried up, and the state adopted a climate similar to Florida's—perfect weather and habitat for dinosaurs.

Then for reasons not agreed upon, the region roiled through an era of turbulent mountain building. Sheets of rock pressed up through the soil to form ridges. In the case of the Big Horns and Beartooths, gray walls of granite were vaulted into the air. In the more frequent examples, however, layers of stone were simply upended and shoved up through the dirt—where they stand today—jutting from the prairie at unusual angles.

In the winter, I spend weekday nights with my collection of topographic maps. Four seasons ago I noticed a creek that parallels a trail running up to a chain of lakes at the top of the Big Horns. The topo lines suggested a waterfall large enough to have protected cutthroat trout from non-native insurgents.

Four months later, I took a trip to the north of the trail over a hill and down into the canyon carved by Archer Creek. My route began at seven thousand feet of altitude. Evergreens stood fifteen yards apart and the forest floor rolled like a carpet of pine needles, broken on occasion by bunches of long-stemmed grass. The creek came into view after a twenty-minute hike. I made camp on the shore of a pool above the waterfall, and I've been back every year since.

This time I start my journey on a path that points toward the top of the mountains. Backpackers use the trail to access the lakes above tree line. The scenery consists of rock, ice, water, and sparse alpine vegetation. The trip is worth the hike. The fishing is extraordinary. The state of Wyoming stocked the high lakes in the range more than fifty years ago, and the progeny of the early fish have multiplied. They grow big in the still water, and during the short summers above ten thousand feet, they'll eat anything that happens to fall onto the surface.

I come upon a party of backpackers in the meadow where I venture off the path. I slip into the trees behind them. As far as they know, I disappear. Soon I hear the sound of Archer Creek bumping and grinding over the east slope of the Big Horn Range. Below the cascade, rainbows occupy all of the eddies and pockets, but above the waterfall, there are only cutthroat trout.

Over the years, elk and deer wore a trail upstream beside the falls. It's a steep path, but I make it to the top without resorting to climbing. I've camped here three years in a row, and there is no trace of my presence or that of anybody else. Even the sandy bank where I pitch my tent is overgrown. Life is incorrigible. I think, "What a planet." Foliage springs up in tufts and patches. I press my ear to the sand and stare at the shoots and leaves that pushed through the soil along the shore. Each blade of grass strikes me as a feat of biology.

My tent goes up in a hurry. I pound stakes into the dirt to keep my temporary home safe in the wind. I rest my backpack against a tree trunk, take a seat on a boulder, and press the sections of my fly rod together. While I work I watch the current pour over a row of rocks. The sight of cold water flowing through a riverbed reminds me that the United Nations predicts that two-thirds of humanity will live in water-stressed nations by the year 2030. In countries all over the world, people see freshwater as a priceless gift and a precious source of life. By contrast, when we wake up in the morning our first order of business is to poop into roughly two gallons of clean water. I think, tomorrow, I'll just find a spot in the woods where I can squat.

I hike upstream to find a series of fishing holes. The first one comes up fifty yards from my campsite. It's a bend where the creek smashes into the left side of the canyon. On the outside of the curve the water rushes past the rock, but on the inside the creek slows to a more restful pace. Fish are fond of the layout. They float in the calm water on the inside of the curve, but their eyes never leave the swift current along the wall, which serves as a conveyor belt for groceries. I loft an imitation grasshopper onto the top of the bend and the current carries the fake bug.

As I watch the fly shimmy with the ripples of the creek, a cutthroat leaves his position. He disappers into the bend. Then he emerges from the flow to strike the grasshopper. I raise the rod. The line jumps off the water and then it stops. The hook is set.

The trout races downstream but I follow him along the bank. He swims back and forth from one side of the creek to the other, but I manage to close the distance between us. When he is within arm's reach, I step knee-deep into the stream. I dip my hand into the water to keep the fish from feeling my skin on his body. Then I shake the hook from his jawbone. For a moment, I admire the elegant work of natural selection. During the past two million years, the spots on Yellowstone cutthroats migrated south and parked down next to their tails. That left their sides free to shine like fields of ochre wheat on the prairie. The trout's black eye looks toward the water, and I know our time is through. I ease him back below the surface of the creek.

Upstream, all of my favorite bends and pools fish well. Two miles from camp I take a trout from a run lined by a row of boulders. I release the fish, and while I stand in the water I find something about the moment that forces me to pause. I climb onto a rock beside a deep stretch in the middle of the creek. I lie on my back and look up at the sky. High cirrus clouds adorn the horizon like malleable veils.

My taste in clouds changed as I entered middle age. As a young man, banks of cumulus clouds captured all of my attention—thunderous plumes of moisture represent power and turmoil. I thought the clouds' potential for weather connected them to life here on the ground. When I was young, I used to sit in the grass outside of my house watching storms roll in to shake up summer afternoons. I still appreciate puffy, gray clouds stocked with water molecules and charged with electricity, but these days I prefer light wisps of haze, holding to the top of the atmosphere.

A honey bee buzzing through a stand of lupines interrupts my cloud watching. The German biologist Karl von Frisch won a 1973 Nobel Prize for his work on the habits and vision of honey bees. It turns out that bees possess a set of eyes that contain tiny light receptors, each one covered by a lens with polarizing capabilities. Their eyes see beams of light as they strike and bounce off objects.

Our eyes do not work like that. For example, when we look at the sky we see a uniform palette of blue. But the sky appears blue to us because the sun's light scatters over dust when it comes into the atmosphere. All our eyes can do is feed us a rough image—an illusion of monotone. By contrast, when bees look at the sky they see sheets of light cascading from the heavens in a myriad of directions.

A flock of four white pelicans appears over the tree line to the north, and I wonder about the process Earth's creatures went through as they evolved. It strikes me that we received more than our share of cognitive capacity, but I try to imagine what the world would look like if pelicans had our ability to think and speak.

If pelicans possessed our talents, when they talked their voices would sound like Garrison Keillor's. Their conversations would be thoughtful and their stories would end in taut, sophisticated punch lines. When they spoke they would take long pauses between sentences. They would breathe through their noses and think about what they were going to say before they spoke again. Their language would not include words for war or pollution, because they would not be necessary. Their cities would tower along the shores of our waterways, and every one would be refined and delicate, like bird feathers.

I decide to wander back downstream toward my camp. The shadows on the ground are growing as the sun descends. I make it back before dark, but I notice the bottle of gas I use to run my stove weighs less than usual. I forgot to fill it up before the trip. I try to boil a pot of water, but the fuel runs out.

There is a plastic holster on the outside of my pack, meant to hold a water container. I discovered years ago that the diameter of the holster is actually just right for a wine bottle. I pour a glass into my metal coffee mug. Now it is dusk. I listen as the wind slows down and whispers to a stop. Then the ripples in the pond above the waterfall dissolve. The moment seems like the most peaceful in the history of Earth. I soak in the solace while I sip my cabernet. It isn't until the mug is near empty that it occurs to me that the planet is hurtling through space, whirling in circles on its axis.

I realize that my only shot at a hot meal is a campfire. Dry twigs litter the ground between the trees along the shore. A chunk of pine bark lights quickly, and the flame spreads over the sticks I piled together. When the coals are hot I set my pot onto the charred remains of pine cones and branches. For early people, fire represented high technology. When they learned to build and maintain fires, it must have felt like the universe was on their side. It seems that way to me this night. My cup of split-pea soup tastes better than it should.

As the evening slips away, the wine bottle drops below the half-full mark, and the word "beautiful" makes it into every one of my ruminations. "I can't believe how *beautiful* the pine trees look along the shore. The stripes of rock on this canyon wall are so *beautiful*!" Etcetera.

I notice my first star of the evening. Then others reveal themselves as the sun's light escapes behind the peaks off to the west. At high elevation in the Big Horns, new stars never stop appearing in the darkened sky. There are so many, and they are so close, if you walk with your head tilted upward it feels like you are stepping into outer space. It's too easy to forget that there are stars in the sky when you sleep beneath a roof in the city.

When we look up, we see the same picture that creatures saw during the Jurassic. Over the course of history, the seas and continents shifted. Every manner of life has been transformed. Entire species or classes of animals came and went. But the stars remain the same. I see the same set of constellations that Neandrathals looked at from the openings of caves. My view is the same as that of Galileo or Leonardo DaVinci. The constancy of the stars somehow makes me feel at ease, so I pull the zipper on the tent's screen door and fall asleep.

In the morning, I wake to find a ridge of gray storm clouds stacked over the peaks to the west of my site. It's a common scene. The Big Horns are well-known for producing intense and unpredictable weather. I decide that I have time to eat a handful of granola, pack my things, and hike back to the car before the lightning starts.

The camp packs up quickly, but I am hesitant to leave. I rest my backpack on a log and take a seat beside the pool. It is still calm, despite the impending bout of wind and rain. While I watch the surface of the water, a bee flies out of a willow bush along the shore. He flies over the creek. His trajectory is haphazard. First it is high, and then it's low. He sputters in circles back and forth. Then he sets out toward the bottom of the pool, bouncing across the surface, alternating between bursts of flight and wet landings. His eyes allow him to see through the glare on the water. He is looking for pollen, but he is confused by the layer of liquid rolling over the plants on the streambed.

The bee is not the only one looking for food. I watch him touch down on the pool and bounce up again with a fifteen inch cutthroat in aerial pursuit. The trout jets out of the water underneath the bug, but the leap doesn't carry him high enough. The unwitting bee sticks to his path and the fish falls back into the pool, sending ripples through a reflection of the blue sky and gray clouds on the surface. The same events repeat themselves. It happens again and again. The bee keeps flying toward the far end of the pond. The trout keeps leaping after him, and I keep watching them with my mouth hanging open. I realize, if I had a camera, I could stop the fish's motion while he arches in the air, and it would look as if he's soaring through a battalion of clouds.

The bee finally reaches the end of the pool. The trout lunges, and his jump takes him over the edge of the waterfall. I scramble to a point where I can see the current clobbering the stones below, but I cannot see the fish. It's hard to imagine that he could have survived the rocks and the force of the creek crashing down onto his body. I lift my pack and tug its straps. Then I start the hike back toward home. While I walk, it occurs to me that the trout chose a perfect way to end it all—flying into nothingness—chasing a thing he could not reach—driven by the pure impulse of appetite.

JACQUELINE MARCUS

Hayden Carruth

The nights are long and the days are left undone
with no particular message, no story to make things right again.
Either way, it begs the question that no one can truly answer.

This morning the sun filled the clouds after a brief storm
like an old promise from an old friend
inviting you to wine and sourdough bread,

a talk about things to come,
perhaps a classical guitarist will remind you of Bach,
or the poet who can no longer lie to himself,

who prefers to watch the orchestra of leaves ripple in the wind
where a string of colored lights around the harbor
brightens his thoughts

which are otherwise lost to the trigger. You can imagine
Hemingway, for instance, alone in this café,
a clean, well-lighted place,

but in the end, the only thing left was the sonnet of Nada.
Either way, it begs the question late into the day
where the sun exaggerates the water.

Amnesia

I watched you from the other side of the shore
as the fog blew a ring around the harbor,

a gold band in shallow light,

a few blue jays came down from the pines
to drink from the dog's water—

the leaves striking the sky like question marks
as if a story had to be told and retold

because it's hard for us to remember
the tales that end on a moral point.

Go ahead and walk away if you must.
Today, it doesn't matter.

The sirens will come and go,

the fires will eventually consume entire forests
like the metaphor of our time,

and the geese will soar to the astral world
if Plato was not dreaming

in the quiet moments of evening
when he wrote down his thoughts in the afterlight.

The Red-Winged Blackbirds

have returned again,
which is to say that spring has summarized the outcome

of rain, the long winter months against the sea-cliffs,
like the summer you bowed your head

in the pretense of work,
marking the charts carefully, testing the wind,

raising your eyes
like an oath, where I, too, presumed

to be the one who saved you.

The leaves are so real you can nearly hear them
apart from the corresponding sun.

The fields grow smaller and darker each year.

As for the birds—
they're still here, in their loud, wild rancor,

unimpeachable, making a menace like the wind.

Global Summer

Summer again with its handful of rain and chilled wine.
The sun sadly turns the leaves chestnut brown
and the fog rolls its dark pearls around the slender shoreline.
What large opportunities for the soul's descent.
What a death-trap for the sea-owl and the bitter oaks.
Nothing exists without consummation, light, spilling through the pines.
What fills the land or the lake's enormous promise
more than this evening's grass, fire and grass,
the fields neatly ploughed, the crows, rowing their boats
to the sound of lost details.
These questions are settled from where they stand,
a handful of rain, a sip of wine.
They want you to believe it's all fiction:
nature's story—defiled.

This Too Is Happiness

There are days when the fog huddles in the corner of the harbor
like a soft gray cat, the quiet purring of waves,

the summer I watched it stretch its paws,
patting the shimmer of the sea like a wool ball

unraveling. All day, I carved and worked the image,
bright chimes in the cypress light,

gulls dangled above the water like puppet strings gone slack.

Someone sits down to read the paper,
somebody else takes notes.

Surely, this too is happiness—
things left as they are.

November Again

when evening begins to hold the shore
with intensity,

when seabirds stir the wind,
and the pelican-colored leaves betray no sound,

how simple it all is—
unlike false words that close the heart.

A dark sun hides the visible trees,
crows return by nightfall,

more beautiful than the things men seek
and foolishly die for.

The moon plays its love of regret.
A few birds churn the sky.

Winter Geese

So here I am with my two Labs
in the early morning light,
a slice of moon still hanging against
the child's crayon-blue sky,
clouds gathering in the distance,
two crows shouting *hello-hello* with no answer
to the drenched fields and candling pines,
to the splashes of mud that my dogs
love with such enthusiasm and determination.

I like it out here
where the absurd events of the world
no longer touch me,
where the horses stand quietly
in the cold grass.

I can remember
a sort of lonely happiness
when the sky opens to the first rains,
when the geese fly high above our cruel example.

Yes, I'd like to go with them.
Of course I would,
of course . . .

Foghorn

Watching the sky appear slowly through the fog,
the hushed pines framing the fields

where crows break silence over a grove of eucalyptus,

watching the days end like somebody's fortune,
less than a chance of rain,

and yet, rain is sure to follow, and soon enough, the tides
will run amuck, as they rise higher against the stone beach,

as ten-thousand-year-old glaciers collapse into the ocean,
a metaphor for human greed—

pockets stuffed to the brim with smoldering ashes.

But I don't want to think about the heart-breaking story,
not now, anyway. I just want to watch the sun

widen across the waves, a weathered boat,

seagulls chasing the ferry past the solemn oaks,
guardians of the shore, soldiers in their own right,

I just want to close my eyes, for now,
to the sea light and the foghorn.

NATON LESLIE

All Around the World

Jesse MacIntosh sat on the front porch of the old house transformed into a duplex in Trenton, Ohio. He lived upstairs and kept a folding, nylon-webbed lawn chair in the downstairs foyer. Every morning when the weather was warm enough, I would find him occupying it on the front porch, doing nothing more than watching traffic and chewing tobacco, spitting juice into a cottage cheese container he kept on the floor by his feet. He was strangely immobile and immutable, and I had no idea how old he was. I would greet him every day when I checked my mailbox; I lived downstairs. His son Dallas owned the building.

Within weeks the old man and I developed a relationship of sorts. He seemed eager to have someone to talk to, though he was far from gregarious. When collecting my mail I'd sit on the porch steps for a minute and sift through the envelopes. At first our conversations concerned little more than the weather, but eventually we asked each other questions about our lives, as neighbors will. That was how I learned he had retired from a local mill and that he was illiterate.

Trenton, Ohio, is a bedroom community near Cincinnati, a working-class town on a crossroads linking some of the surrounding small cities such as Fairfield, Hamilton, and Middletown. These contained remnants of Ohio's heavy industries—car manufacturing and steel mills—and farm towns like Trenton suited up with duplexes and modest homes to accommodate the workers. The towns offered very few amenities beyond what these workers would need after a day's work: bars, banks, barbers, and groceries, having given up any sense of themselves to the day-to-day rhythm of shifts at the mills.

This was an unlikely place to discover the rhythm and blues singer Little Willie John, and Jesse MacIntosh was an unlikely person to introduce him to me. The old man was as consistent as the mail itself, and from what I could tell his life did not contain much more than eating and sleeping. Each morning he got dressed in a neat set of work clothes,

brown cotton shirt and pants he probably bought at Sears or JCPenney, and took his position on the porch.

Jesse was one of the many Scotch-Irish hill folk who migrated from Kentucky and West Virginia in the 1940s and 1950s to work in the factories of the Ohio Valley. He told me his story in bits and pieces. He'd been born in a one-room, dirt-floored log cabin with no electricity or running water. He'd not gone to school beyond first or second grade. Occasionally he told me even more remarkable things.

He always asked me what time it was, for instance, I supposed so he knew when to take his noonday meal.

"Why don't you wear a watch?" I asked. I wondered if his illiteracy was so profound that he couldn't read one.

"They stop. If I put a watch on, it stops right on my arm. Someone said it had something to do with electric in my body, or magnets or something."

I had no reason not to believe him, but I found myself taking off my wristwatch and handing it to him. It ran on a battery, and it occurred to me he might have tried on only mechanical ones.

"It'll stop," he drawled. "And you might not get 'er going again."

"Go ahead," I said. "Try it."

He strapped it onto his wrist, and I stood beside him as we watched the second hand make its arc. It continued for 45 seconds, then hesitated. It moved for a few more seconds, then stopped altogether.

"There she goes," he said, with a hint of sadness. He took off the watch and handed it back to me. I tapped it on the face, and the second hand still didn't move. I put it back on and it restarted.

I didn't learn that he was illiterate right away; those who can't read or write become very adept at hiding it. Once I sat down on the steps after receiving the mail. Jesse was idly watching a construction crew carve a hole in the street with a backhoe. "Tearing up the street?" I asked by way of small talk.

"Yeah, looks like they're working on a water line," he said, pointing to a truck with a single drop of liquid painted on the side, the insignia of the Columbus and Southern Gas and Electric Company. The name of the company was also on the truck. "Isn't that the gas company?" I asked.

"Oh, yeah, guess it is," he answered casually.

I didn't think any more about it. Then one day he told me. I had turned the two-car garage on the alley behind the house into a makeshift woodshop and was busy making simple pine bookcases. One evening I was startled to see him at the door of the garage, as I had never seen him anywhere but on the porch. I just turned around and there he was, a silent, hunched figure framed by the fading light as I drilled holes for wooden dowels.

"What are you making back here?" he asked.

"Bookcases," I said.

"I guess you got a lot of books."

I nodded.

"Never learned to read, myself," he said flatly. "Can't so much as write my name."

I didn't know what to say. I just kept on working and he eventually slipped back into the house as silently as he had appeared. As I finished my work that evening I thought about the old man and his vigil on the porch, and a bit about the narrowness of his life became clear to me. Alone and retired, he had very little to occupy his days but television and the comings-and-goings of the street. Books, even magazines and newspapers, were a sealed world to him. They contained an alien pattern of figures which could do nothing to explain whatever pictures might be found there. He lived an existence which must be present in front of his eyes.

He had always seemed like a lonely man to me when we first met, a widower without many friends; in the several months I had been his neighbor I had never seen or heard a visitor except his son. Now I realized how important our daily chats were to him, the brief time I would take to sit on the porch stoop, exchanging a few words about the rain or the traffic. Even that much broke the silence. It was a visit with words, spoken words, but words.

Later that week, I asked him a little about it. How did he sign checks? He had his mark, he said. How did he order at the Big Boy Restaurant where he went for lunch each day? He listened to the waitress read off the daily specials and ordered one of those. "Or I'll point to one of the pictures, if I want a hamburger or something," he said.

I hoped he didn't find these questions embarrassing, but I figured, since he had brought it up, he was somewhat comfortable exploring the topic with me. I was curious, sure, wondering how someone got by without reading, but I also wanted to know if he could read anything at all. Starting with his name, I thought I would teach him to read. Maybe I'd not give him books or even newspapers as company, but I could teach him to read a menu and road signs. Maybe I could make his life a little easier.

"So I hear you got yourself a record player down there," he said then, abruptly changing the subject.

"Yeah," I said. "Why, have I been playing it too loud?"

"No, nothing like that. I just wondered if you wanted some records."

He took me up to his sparse, one-bedroom apartment, and in the living room were two, narrow four-foot long cardboard boxes. Each contained dozens of record albums and were heavy enough that it took both of us to carry them down.

Someone Jesse had worked with had known a disc jockey at a radio station in Cincinnati, a station which had closed in the early 1970s when new FM radio stations began competing for ears, putting old AM mega-stations off the air. His friend had inherited the station's record library, and after picking through them for his own collection, had passed them on. The original mass of recordings must have been immense, as this was the tail end, the records several gleaners had passed by, and yet a huge number remained.

"I don't even have a record player," the old man said. "If I want to hear music I just watch The Nashville Channel."

As I rummaged through the boxes I found lots of bad recordings, and could usually figure out why an LP had been passed by. For instance, *Hank Williams with Strings* first attracted my eye until I realized Hank's plaintive voice was nearly buried by the overlay of an orchestra. Other records were full-blown collections of one-hit wonders from the golden age of rock-'n'-roll, like Blue Cheer, Iron Butterfly, or Golden Earring, famous for the hit song "Radar Love." There were plenty of reasons not to listen to many of these albums.

But there was a good quantity of early country music. A half dozen Chet Atkins records from across his early career surfaced in the boxes, while Hank Snow, George Jones, Tammy Wynette, and Eddie Arnold were represented, as well as early rockabilly stars like Jerry Lee Lewis stomping out "Great Balls of Fire." I was particularly drawn to the early Johnny Cash albums, 1960s recordings when he was still trying to decide if he was a country or folk singer. On the cover of the 1965 *Orange Blossom Special*, "a monaural" recording, Cash is sitting on top of a freight car wearing a torn pork-pie hat, ankle high boots, jeans, denim jacket, and red handkerchief, smoking a cigarette and looking backward, as though someone might be chasing him. He's Woody Guthrie on the lam, a man with a real hobo past, playing pretty sloppy harmonica on the title tune, but gamely switching from one key to another to keep up. On the same album he covers Bob Dylan's "It Ain't Me Babe" and "Don't Think Twice, It's All Right" and croaks out a disturbing version of "Danny Boy." Nothing on this album was destined to define Cash, as did his classics "I Walk the Line" or "Folsom Prison Blues," but in 1965 it was clear he was trying for some definition or another. Both music and the world were changing, and everyone thought the former had something to do with the latter.

And there was Motown, lots of Motown and soul in the pile. I was thrilled to get my hands on some of it, early Ray Charles and James

Brown, as well as popular groups like The Four Tops, The Supremes or Booker T and the MGs. In the back of one box was a stack of 45s, those two song recordings that were once the staple of pop music marketing. To have a hit 45 was to have *made it*, and these hits then anchored the sales of the LP or album. This was the chief mass-marketing device for most of the rock-'n'-roll era, the way fans could sample the latest work by their favorite musicians. New 45s were sold as widely as magazines and could be purchased in any store with room for a display rack.

These thrilled me as much as objects as for their content. The little records, some with no more than an inch of recording on their dark faces, had held such excitement for me when I was young and first experiencing music; this was music I could afford to buy, a little chunk of identity, right there wrapped in a paper sleeve, a part of the culture around me that I could seize and experience again and again, until the monophonic record player I owned trenched the record with its dull needle and reduced the song to scratchy echoes of itself. I'd been able to own very few of these, records by the Beatles, Byrds or Rolling Stones, and I became so accustomed to their one-dimensional sounds, I was startled by the depth of the recordings when I heard them on new stereo records. I had not known the full songs, only a cardboard cut-out version of them, but even these were exhilarating and heart-grabbing, sound-tracks for a time when all my energy was being expended on becoming someone, and these songs sang me part of the way there.

I found familiar labels on many of them, Atlantic and Decca, but there were others I did not know as well, such as King Records, an old country and blues label from Cincinnati specializing in what used to be known as "race records" featuring black artists. If they were lucky, a "cross-over" hit found its way onto the mainstream pop chart. All of its artists would go on to bigger labels, but King was the incubator, one of those rare places where business intersected with art without diminishing the latter.

I sat in my living room, surrounded by piles of records, halfway through sorting the box. What had the old man made of all these records? Had he flipped through them, looking for good old-timey favorites, like Red Smiley and The Tennessee Cut-ups? Had he found these other recordings, less familiar but compelling music out of Detroit? Did he enjoy these rhythms as well, realizing that blue-grass music, that signature sound from his home state, came from a collision of traditional mountain music and African-American blues? Here in these boxes was a slice of American pop culture, preserved in its multiplication of styles and hybrids. I planned to ask Jesse MacIntosh if he liked Motown too.

Then I realized he wouldn't be able to answer me. Even if he had listened to the other recordings in the boxes, he wouldn't be able to tell me much about the musicians. My neighbor might be able to hear these old records, but he wouldn't be able to read the labels. Unless someone told him, or he recognized a song from the radio, he wouldn't be able to tell who he was listening to. For him, these records were as deep a mystery as the morning paper.

That's when I discovered my own mystery in the boxes, an enigma who has surfaced again and again to confound as thoroughly as he delights. Little Willie John was a King Record discovery, and two of his 45s were in a box. I dusted off one of the blue labeled records, found the fat core which allowed me to center it on my turntable, turned up the speed control, and lowered the arm. I hadn't played a 45 in more than twenty years.

"Inside Information" begins without prelude, just a half dozen warm-up notes on the horns, and then Little Willie begins. He sings with the intensity of James Brown, but less rhythmic and more melodic, and the lyrics, dripping with double entendre, are a kind of R and B version of Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress." At the time the recording was a hybrid of swing and blues, and the result was something new. This 1963 recording was one of Little Willie's many precursors to soul.

A blue inked stamp on the label preserves the fact that this record cost 22 cents—obviously this was not from the radio station's archives, most of which were provided to disc jockeys free in the hope that they'd get some air play. Whoever had been the R and B fan had owned at least two Little Willie records, or two records had survived in this hand-me-down stack. The other was "All Around the World."

It was a stunning find. I had long been a fan of soul music. Having grown up in Ohio, I had listened to a Detroit station late at night when AM stations were permitted to turn up their power, other stations having gone off the air and emptied band-width. A transistor radio angled so as to minimize the static brought me these seductive backbeats and harmonies, secret strains of music with serpentine melodies, punctuated by rhythms which were both driving and syncopated. Crowning this music, though, was the vocalist. A soul singer is as close to the heart as you can get, as close to pure lament and yearning without simply breaking down into a bald expression of those emotions. Aretha Franklin or Ray Charles could not only sing expressively, they could get inside and underneath a lyric and then come swelling up, threatening to break the song in two with their phrasings, pushing repeatedly at the boundaries of a tune until it was bulging with pressure and ragged with wear. A great vocalist can take a song to near destruction and back again, wringing it dry in the process. Once a soul singer has taken on a song, it will likely never to be sung the same way again.

Little Willie John was that sort of singer. He took possession of a song with clear authority, carried it over the driving rhythms, past the sax solos, flipping it over and finding a softer, vulnerable side—then stopping—talking his way into a bridge—and picking it up as though the song was an afterthought all along, as though the song was simply an accessory to what *he* had to say. When Little Willie sang the last line of "Inside Information," pulling the "going" in "What's going on in your heart" for a full four beat count, I was sitting straight up in my chair. This was the real deal. This guy could really sing.

Little Willie was born William John in Camden, Arkansas, in 1937 and moved with his family to Detroit in the 1940s, with the second great northern migration of southern blacks to fill factories there. In Detroit those factories made cars and brought migrants and immigrants from everywhere, such as Kentuckians like Jesse MacIntosh. Plenty of collisions followed as blacks moved into urban neighborhoods, but syntheses occurred as well. In Chicago the delta blues met the electric guitar, and a rollicking, steam-engine kind of blues resulted, and on the Southside, clubs howled with this new music. Record labels like Chess and Okeo formed to promote these energetic new artists, and soon the world was introduced to the likes of Muddy Waters and Howling Wolf.

In Motor City, this synthesis had its own, more suave and sultry outcome. Here blues and gospel found the braided strains of jazz, big band, and swing, and the result was softer and more romantic, trafficking in nuance instead of head-over-heels energy. In Chicago, the blues was a reason to jump up and down and clap your hands. Motor City music had another intention. It was seduction and a wink and a nod. It was a softer sadness fed by the loneliness African-Americans must have felt in leaving family for the assembly lines and cold winters of urban Michigan. Chicago music was all muscle and lightning, but Detroit owned the sultry smoke of longing, the gospel of late nights trysts. This was the music to which Little Willie applied his clarion voice, and the music which would deny him the recognition his talent deserved.

The 20th century has a plethora of great black musicians, artists, and writers who have eluded the notice of historians, critics, and audiences. While legions of scholars have attempted to illuminate this shadowy second tier, this segregated, undervalued place where much of what is original in America began, remains largely undocumented. What struck me as I listened to Little Willie John was just how lost he had become. Sure, great figures in pop music have pointed to him as a major influence. James Brown, who once performed as a warm-up act for Little Willie, set aside his legendary ego long enough to acknowledge this five-foot, four-inch powerhouse as an originator of soul, and rock musicians from John

Lennon to Bruce Springsteen have listed him as one of their favorites. Yet Little Willie John died in prison, barely 40 years old, all but forgotten by the public at-large.

Likewise, much about his life is undocumented, irretrievable. The other King recording in the box underscores this. "All Around the World" was Little Willie's first big hit. In 1955 it rose to number six on the R and B charts and a rare number five on the pop ratings. The song was written by Titus Turner, a black song writer who had his own up, and mostly down, recording career, and the lyrics are pure blues: "If I don't love you baby / Grits ain't groceries / Eggs ain't poultries / And Mona Lisa was a man." The song goes on to describe an impossible list of labors the singer will endure for his love ("With a toothpick in my hands / I'll dig a ten foot ditch / running through the jungle / fighting lions with a switch"), but the intensity of the song comes from Little Willie himself. The singer takes these comic lyrics and makes a real lament out of them—with a sly wink, of course. This is a lover with commitment, to be sure, but he has no real intention of doing the things he declares, nor does he believe the verities of the world would be turned on their heads if his love does not prove to be true. It is all persuasive hyperbole, and Little Willie makes it clear, a smile almost evident in his tenor, that he'd make any claim, promise any feat, if only the woman would make love to him.

As if the lyrics weren't enough, the instrumentation fortifies the essential, bawdy nature of "All Around the World." Little Willie is accompanied on this wild ride by a vigorous brass and woodwind section, the blaring engine of the song. It is such an equally powerful performance that when Little Willie takes a break from singing during the bridge, that center of the song where blues singers often talk and musicians typically solo, a saxophone breaks out of the pack and takes the floor. It is an unmistakably roadhouse sax which comes rushing in, sexy and coarse, both picking up the beat and denying it. In a remixed version I've since heard, an album of reissued King Recordings, the sax is level, unimposing, but on the original analogue recording it comes right over the top, playing first behind, then ahead of the beat, building to ragged crescendos until, seemingly exhausted, it goes out honking the same corrugated note. Then, like a preacher who is bringing the congregation back to level ground, Little Willie steps in and calls the hymn again.

It is a masterful performance, but the name of the sax soloist is lost, as are the names of all the musicians who play on the song besides Little Willie. Probably a session player with years of experience in the jazz and blues clubs in Cincinnati, the sax player will remain nameless unless somehow resurrected from the King archives—musicians for recordings were tossed together in those days, practically pulled off the street, and seldom acknowledged by the performer whose name appeared on the

record label. Yet, for a few beats, no more than fifteen seconds on the just under three minute recording, he had been the center of attention. Still, all we're told is that on that day, for that recording, he was part of the "Orchestra" at King Records.

Little Willie John was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1997, almost 30 years after his death. According to his official biography, the singer had been involved in a fight during an after-hours party in a bar. A man took a chair which had been occupied by the woman companion of Little Willie; when the singer complained, the man knocked him down. Little Willie picked himself up, pulled a knife, and killed him. He was already out on bail after being arrested for assaulting another man with a broken bottle. Foul play may have also had something to do with his death in prison after two years of an eight-to-twenty year sentence.

While astonishingly talented, it was clear that Little Willie was troubled by many demons and plagued by an explosive, even deadly temper. Still, I can't help wondering what would have happened had he found some measure of the success others had with his music. His hit song "Fever" was covered by the white singer Peggy Lee immediately after Little Willie's release on King. She turned it into a steamy pop standard, and the black singer never made a recording which garnered that kind of attention again. Instead of dying a venerated "Godfather of Soul," like King Records colleague James Brown, Little Willie's career and life were over almost before they had truly begun.

Jesse MacIntosh died not long after he gave me his cache of records. One morning I noticed that his folded lawn chair was still leaning against the side of the staircase at mid-morning, and, suspecting trouble, I climbed the stairs. Looking in the diamond-shaped window of his apartment door I saw him, fully dressed, lying face down on his bed.

I called an ambulance, and while he was still alive when they arrived, he didn't survive for long—a diabetic, Jesse had died in an insulin coma. I doubt he even knew he had this medical condition. He certainly never told me about it, though I'm sure there's much about his life I never learned.

Jesse MacIntosh and Little Willie John share this measure of anonymity. Part of the same wave of migration to the industrial north, Jesse and Little Willie were people in a time and place for which they had never been prepared or was unprepared for them. Both only had their voices to represent them, and while Jesse never cut a hit song, he called out to me just as clearly as Little Willie had on those decades-old recordings. I never got to teach him how to read, but we shared something on the porch through that summer and fall. Jesse MacIntosh has remained with me, the image of a quiet, stoic man limited by circumstance. Perhaps he knew he was doomed, running out of time in the same way that watches failed on his arm, as surely Little Willie must have felt doomed, shaking himself

apart with the blues in the recording studio, and so he sought me out, wanting someone to notice him, to hear something of his life. Little Willie John and Jesse MacIntosh might have never quite found their places, but even with the social forces of poverty and race arrayed against them, at the end, they both managed to make their marks.

BECKY KENNEDY

When You Came In

When you came in,
a rusting sun behind you,
the trees bearing their loads
of rusting leaves,
starlings giving up
a black branch so
it shifted as one breath,
light deepened, flocking

through the trees.
And your face filled
with the growing evening,
the trees breathing into
the sky and the raft
of birds rising,
as might clouds, or dead leaves
at the ends of roads

choose their paths together.
And the roses, even,
their fallen heads
gathered, construed: the starlings
rose across the overwritten
light; at times things
that will never be
unfold themselves.

Talking About It

Sometimes I hear myself
talking to myself
or to one not present,
as this day, driving,
your hand on mine,
the sun glittering to itself
on the hills and light
coming down, the way

light wanders,
voluminous, bathing
stone, eddying
across roads,
making light of all
that falls to it
while, restless
as new grief, roadside

water runs,
shaking with the light,
blistering
like hard, cold thoughts
that surface as we drive,
each in our valley:
Is this the absence of
mind that is death

or the presence of mind
that is death, or do we
talk to ourselves
too much or not
at all? I was doing
a thing and thinking
of another while the sun
paused at its lit, yellow door.

How Much Sky

Those leaves, why are they all
in the water, leaves fishing around,
riding in on the light;

what are they doing in the water
like stars; the autumn crickets
haven't given up their chanting

yet, but the leaf-hands of the red
maples are shrunk and done
and the black handles of the locust pods

are dried and cracked and all
the leaves like yellow words
have been said and are gone;

there are words or the colors of words
in the water; is something to be learned
from the rugate water, leaves and moths

floating on the water, or from leaves
rippling not of their own election,
or from the leafless sky: how much sky there is.

PETER GORDON

Alivia

The first time I noticed Alivia, really noticed her, she was trembling in the presence of a vacu-packed grass frog, attempting to pry apart its crooked, diaphanous legs with silver tweezers. Her slender hands were wrapped in mint-green rubber gloves while a paper smock, loosely draped over her shoulders, bunched up at her throat like a giant white peony. It was the third week of high school, the first week of biology laboratory for the ninth graders. I walked between the aisles of the tall tables in my long white lab coat, observing the intense dissection work happening on either side of me. I told the class to be on the lookout for ovaries in the females which looked like whorls of spaghetti or clumps of impossibly tiny eggs. I paused at Alivia's station and bowed my head to listen; the girl struggled to catch her breath and gasped in short little bursts as she worked over the specimen. I turned to say something but kept going. I'd only been teaching for two years but I'd learned enough to know that some girls just crack up in biology and there's not much you can do about it. For the remainder of the class she lazily poked and prodded, a pantomime of purposeful hand and eye movements. Her lab report, left in the middle of a crooked pile on my desk as students made their exits, turned out to be completely blank.

The second class, she sat immobilized on her tall stool, staring at a blue and gold butterfly spread across a glass slide. The students around her peeled back membranes and stared through the microscope at magnified wing scales that looked, as many would predictably write, like the ocean waves of their favorite beach. They observed what they saw, recorded their observations in their black rulebooks, and then observed some more. I always reminded them that the greatest instrument they had was their eyes which would invariably inspire someone to look at me cross-eyed in mocking response. Everyone was busy except Alivia. Her arms hung limply by her sides. Her shoulders slumped. I told her, as casually as I could, in as low a voice as I could register, to meet me out in the hallway. She flinched; she seemed surprised that I would even talk to her. She followed me out the door.

"You're Alivia Kelly."

"Yes."

"Well, Alivia," I said, offering a small smile, "perhaps you would do better in another class."

"But I need to be in this class."

"This is a biology laboratory. You barely touch the specimens."

"I touch them as much as I have to. I try to be gentle. I don't want to be sadistic about it." She put her hand on her hip and jutted out her elbow. She tried to look tough. But her lower lip was quivering.

"You didn't even put the butterfly specimen under the microscope. You weren't taking notes."

"I was thinking about what to write."

"Maybe you should take another science course. Like astronomy. The objects are much farther away and you don't have to touch them."

She compressed her lips to the point where she almost made them disappear completely. Her green eyes glittered with moisture. "I need to take this, Miss Cain. I'm going to be a doctor." She looked around. "Look, I know you have to touch things. I know that. I mean, it's biology. And I will touch everything. I promise. I'm just having an off day." She seemed impatient now, almost angry. And on the verge of hyperventilating. "Can I go back inside now?"

She stepped closer to me. She was close enough for me to smell the orange-scented, sickly sweet body wash with which she and just about every other girl in the high school seemed to douse themselves. Her wrists were ringed with the thin, brightly colored plastic bracelets everyone was wearing. Her clothes were redundant too—faded jeans, a loose button-down blue-striped man's dress shirt worn untucked, earthy brown clogs of some kind. It was only her hair that was singular: long strands of thick, slightly curled red hair that fell past her shoulders in an explosion of color and kinetic energy.

"Can I? Please?" Her right foot was tapping up and down.

"Look, Alivia, if you want to continue in my class you have to dissect the specimens. You have to do the work. Pass in your laboratory reports. Do what everyone else does."

"I will. I swear I will."

I took a deep breath. I wanted to show her that I was agonizing over what to do. I let a few seconds tick off. "All right. Fine. Go finish your lab. You can turn in the report tomorrow."

She practically ran into the room. For the rest of the class, her hand never stopped moving. It looked like she was trying to keep pace with ideas that were coming at her so fast she could barely react to them. She smiled brightly at me as she walked out. But when I got home and spread out the reports on my kitchen table, I found that her second paper was

another void, except for the bottom of the page where I found an illustration of a butterfly with tears falling from its multi-faceted compound eyes. It applied the fanciful notion that Lepidoptera insects secrete tears, but at least she took the eyes from firsthand observation proving that she engaged with the specimen on that primary level. The butterfly's eyes were precisely rendered and she had them at full frontal perspective so they stared unmercifully at the viewer.

Jason Swanson was an English teacher, two corridors down, one wing over, room D-27, the classroom every other teacher coveted with the three tall windows overlooking the athletic practice fields and beyond that an uneven line of fir trees and pale brown hills in the distance. Jason was 42. His friends and those who presumed to be his friends called him Jay. He had a wife and two teenaged children who existed, in perfect symmetry, on a picture on his desk. He had brittle blond hair that fell to his shoulders and thin wrinkles emanating like heat waves from the corners of his eyes. He graduated from college the year I entered second grade. He taught AP literature and every spring gave a special course on creative writing that required a 10-page writing sample to apply, and if there was a celebrity teacher at that school, he was the one. He wore black T-shirts with slightly subversive literary sayings, like "In Heaven All the Interesting People are Missing."

He had a pied piper effect—in the hallways, in the courtyard, in the parking lot, he'd always be surrounded by a pack of acolytes and admirers. I thought about him constantly. I wondered what he smelled like, felt like, and tasted like. Then one day, out of the blue, as we stood in the faculty line of the cafeteria, he spoke his first words to me: he said that I looked like a young Laura Linney. Not the dark, dour Laura Linney of *Mystic River* but the one in *You Can Count on Me* where her hopeful outlook and sensuality were still intact. Had anyone ever told me that? The line kept moving before I could turn back and say something, not that I knew what that might be, and by then he was at the coffee station, ripping and dumping packet after packet of sugar into his small Styrofoam cup. From that day forward his interest in me took hold. He began passing by the door to the laboratory multiple times a day, always glancing up at the exact moment of opportunity to gauge my position and see if he could catch my eye. We seemed to have unexpectedly chance encounters in the hallway or the parking lot or the faculty lounge. It was as though he had this ability to manufacture moments so our paths crossed.

One late Friday afternoon in early November, he came by my classroom as I was cleaning up and readying the lab for a new week. I was rinsing out beakers, polishing eyepieces, folding rubber aprons into neat piles. He told me that I had it rough. "In English the only thing we have to

clean up is the kids' grammar." He came across the room and sat on one of the work-table stools. He was wearing thin round wire-frame glasses which he didn't usually wear, and his shiny yellow hair was pushed behind his ears as though he'd just walked out of a pool. He asked me if I wanted to see a film they were showing at a theater about ten miles away. It was a documentary about twin sisters, one of whom had early stage Alzheimer's. He'd heard good things about it. You had the healthy sister remembering for the other one and filling in all the blanks and being not just a twin but really a surrogate form of memory for her sister. It was supposed to be very moving.

I didn't say anything at first. I was too stunned to speak.

"Unless you want a see a film that isn't about a horrible disease ravaging a poor woman's brain and spirit. There's probably one of those playing somewhere too."

"It's okay. I'd like to see that. I just need to get my coat."

"Excellent. We can take my car." He leaned a bit in my direction, like he was trying to get a closer look at something written on my face, and then straightened up. We walked out to the parking lot. Ours were among the only vehicles left in the lot. There was a slight breeze, just enough to lift the edges of his hair and blow them sideways like flames. I knew that he was married, and I knew that if I took one more step in his direction, I would stop being one kind of person and start being someone else. He saw my hesitation and smiled so sweetly and with such understanding I felt that he saw straight to my hidden center. And that pushed me over the edge.

Alivia was a loner. I recognized that; I related to that. She reminded me of me at that age and at that stage, except I was good in science. I'd see her coming down the hallway alone, head down, pressed forward under the weight of her black backpack, arms folded across her chest in self-protection. White iPod wires hung down like loose threads spilling out of her brain. If she saw me in passing, her eyes might widen slightly in recognition or they might dart away in a desperate attempt to avoid me. If I saw her with another kid, invariably it would be the other kid talking and Alivia staring straight ahead glumly as if she were just waiting for a chance to get away. Whenever I saw her in the lunchroom she was sitting at a random table, with different kids every time, and usually had some kind of reading material spread across her lap. I was sure it wasn't her biology book.

The next time in the lab, as the kids were about to peer into the dark insides of a rat and chart its muscular and digestive systems, she came up to me and said that she had a migraine headache—she explained that she got migraines with her period, and she was having her period right now

and could prove it if she needed to prove it—and it would be so good if she could just lie down on the couch in the office of the school nurse.

I looked at her. "Okay."

"You don't believe me, do you?"

"I said okay."

"Periods are normal. Even rats menstruate. I read about it last night."

Afterwards, she wrote me a note which I found in my faculty mailbox. It was slipped into the midst of the quotidian notices, memorandums, and schedule changes that proliferated like baby rabbits just so you could know, even if it had no applicability to your particular duties, that band practice would now take place in the cafeteria instead of the music room due to the linoleum in the music room's being waxed that day. Her note was easy to spot; the envelope was bright orange. It basically said that the frogs and the rats and whatever other living creatures I planned to give the class wanted me to know that they did not blame me for their torture, death, dismemberment, disembowelment, and destruction. I was only doing my job; they understood that. They really did. They knew how the game was played. She didn't write it from the frogs' or rats' point of view but from her own and made it clear that she was just reporting to me what they secretly communicated to her.

We moved on to the fruit fly—the group more specifically known as *drosophila melanogaster*. I explained to the class how, upon close examination and inspection, the fruit fly will yield important information about sexual characteristics and other natural features in diploid organisms. I held up a large sealed jar inside of which was a gang of flies. They flew around frantically, crashing against the sides. I brought out a large white plastic bucket filled with ice and asked the students to gather around. While the others closed ranks around me, Alivia hung back, on the periphery. Then I took the jar of flies and submerged it nearly completely under the ice, leaving one edge exposed so the students could look into it. The flies slowed down, gradually anesthetized by the freezing temperature in the box of ice. They settled in stunned clusters at the bottom of the jar, some face down, some on their backs and others in various sideways poses. They looked like an army platoon that had been ambushed, caught by surprise and massacred. I asked the students to hold out their petri dishes and then I pulled the jar out and unscrewed the cap and with a pair of long tapered tweezers removed the flies one by one and placed them on the students' dishes. Alivia came up last, her dish sitting in the palm of her hand like a broken piece of glass she had picked up off the ground. She averted her eyes as I dropped the fly onto the surface of her dish.

She looked at me. Her eyes were wet, about to boil over, but not technically crying.

"They're broken," she said.

"What are broken?"

"The wings."

"Alivia, the wings are fine. The fly can't feel anything."

She waited while another student came up, asked a question, and went back to his station. "You didn't give them a chance to escape. How would you like to be dipped in ice and then have someone pull you apart?"

"This is a biology laboratory."

"This is a torture chamber." She closed her eyes for the briefest of moments, a millisecond, and when she opened them she looked at me with such desperation I thought she was going to scream. "I can't stand it anymore," she said so only I could hear.

"What can't you stand anymore?"

"Everything." She gripped the table. "I can't breathe."

"I'm going to get Mrs. Hutchison."

"No! I don't need a nurse!"

"Alivia, calm down."

By now most of the students were watching us so I took her by the elbow and we walked out of the classroom and around the corner until we were partially hidden by a bank of lockers. She was breathing fast and her face was tinged pink, like the inside of a sea shell. Someone passing by would have thought I was yelling at her, or even physically abusing her. "What's going on?"

"I think the smell of the ice made me sick."

"Ice doesn't smell."

"This ice did."

She slid down to the floor and sat cross-legged against a row of lockers and I had no choice but to get down and sit next to her. I had my legs extended straight out and I thought about how many students would trip over me if the bell suddenly went off and kids poured out into the hallway. A minute went by with nothing more said.

"Miss Cain?"

"Yes, Alivia."

"Are you going to remember me? I mean, when you're old and maybe you're not even a teacher anymore, are you going to remember me?"

"Sure."

"No, I'm being serious."

"Yes," I said.

"Yes what?"

"Yes, I'll remember you."

As though those were the words she was waiting to hear, she got up and went back in the classroom.

Jay Swanson was married and he was sixteen years older than I was. But I didn't care. I didn't tell anyone what I was doing, not my mother or my sister or my roommate or my friends. I knew a thing or two about how things worked in the real world. And I knew how it felt to carry around a secret so big it was impossible for anyone else to see it.

I saw Jay during the school day and during school functions but we maintained our pretense of not really knowing each other or caring that the other one was in the same room, whatever kind of room it happened to be—meeting room, lunchroom, auditorium, gymnasium for the Friday afternoon volleyball games. We might exchange a word or a pleasantry in the faculty lounge but it was brief and abrupt and usually left me feeling empty, like the role of making me seem insignificant came a little too naturally to him. He appeared to me most fully and indelibly when I caught him reflected in mirrors—lying in bed flipping through a magazine while I dressed first, or his back to me but his face visible and exposed as he stood at the bureau dressing first. He liked mirrors and they liked him. That's probably when I looked at him most clearly, in the motel room where we used to meet once a week, every Wednesday after school and before dinner, and I never asked why it was Wednesdays and not some other random day. The sex was sweet—he was the first guy I'd ever been with who knew exactly what he was doing—but for an English teacher he was surprisingly non-verbal afterwards. He'd lie there, usually with his hands behind his head, and slowly sink inside some private dream.

He gave me little gifts, all dropped off anonymously. A funky pen he'd leave on my desk. A thin volume of poetry or essays he'd put at the top of a pile of thick science textbooks. A blank postcard showing a far off place we'd talked about in the dark and knew we'd never get to, at least not together, that he'd slip under my windshield wiper like a solicitation flyer. Never jewelry or an article of clothing or something that would call attention to itself or its origin. Nothing I could wear or hang. Nothing with a scent. Nothing that would cling to me.

I finally decided to see the grade vice principal about Alivia. Mrs. Langford was in her late thirties, young by administrator standards, but there was something matronly about her heavy, blocky body, her soft falsetto voice, and her raised, teased hairdo. She was like your aunt but with the face of your sister. On her office wall was a framed poster of the famous kiss between the sailor and the girl in Times Square at the end of World War II.

She clasped her hands. "So this is about Alivia Kelly? A ninth grader?"

"I think something's wrong with her. She sobs when she's sitting there."

"Sobs?"

"When she's working on the specimens in the lab. She loses it. It's pretty terrible."

"Lots of kids must have trouble handling work in the lab."

"She's different."

"Why?"

"It's like she feels their pain. Or what she imagines their pain to be since of course they're not feeling anything. The specimens, I mean."

Her phone started ringing but she never took her eyes off me. "I'm not sure what you think we should do."

"It might be nothing but I think she stole one of the eyebrow knives from my lab," I said.

Mrs. Langford frowned. "A knife?"

"They're small knives. The blade is only this big." I showed her by creating a sliver of space between my thumb and forefinger. "They're used for cutting skin, or tissue."

"You think she might hurt herself?"

"I don't know."

"So you think this girl who doesn't have the heart to cut a frog might cut herself. Is that what you're getting at?"

"I'm worried about her. That's all I'm saying."

"I'll call Evelyn." Evelyn Powers was the school psychologist. "One of us will call the parents now. We'll meet tomorrow. Thank you for bringing this to my attention."

I stood up to leave. She surprised me by standing up too.

"You look tired, Paula. I don't mean that in a bad way—it's just an observation."

"I'm fine."

"I've actually been meaning to talk with you. Or to be truthful I've been debating about whether or not I should. It seems one of your colleagues says she saw you crying in your car in the parking lot the other day. She says you were just sitting there crying. It was before school I think."

I smiled but her expression of pained concern didn't change. "Who was it? Who says she saw me?"

"That's not important."

"She's sure it was me?"

"Quite sure."

"I don't know. I don't remember something specific like that. I guess it could have been me. I'm not a morning person."

"Can I ask you something?"

"Sure."

"I know I have no right to ask. I could probably be reprimanded for asking. Tell me it's none of my damn business. But are you pregnant?"

"No. That's—no. I'm not." I tried not to cry. I tried not to do one of those things where your whole body shakes.

She parted her lips. She looked like she was going to say something else. But she ended up just looking at me—not without a trace of pity and certainly not without a trace of doubt. An announcement came over the PA: no soccer practice due to wet field. Another announcement quickly followed: correction: soccer practice was now relocated to the gym. A car alarm, undoubtedly one of the student's, sounded.

"Paula."

"Yes?"

"Just one second—before you go—let me just fix this for you." She leaned across and daubed at my face with a piece of tissue. "Your makeup ran a bit, that's all. There. That's better."

In late November, those mornings when frost first appears on your windshield like a fogged bathroom mirror, I started feeling lightheaded as soon as I got up. If I ate something for breakfast I felt uneasy and if I didn't eat anything I felt worse. Nausea hit me at unexpected moments, suddenly, like a hot wind blowing through my body. My roommate Patty knew it first. She's the one who handed me a pregnancy test kit one morning and wrapped me in her arms. "Don't worry, honey. Whatever it is, it is. Everything will be okay."

Alivia's parents were sitting at the conference table. They had their backs to me when I got there. They were huddled close together, heads down, holding hands, as though they were praying in an empty chapel. He was wearing jeans and a blue and white floral print shirt, she was in a navy blue dress with gold buttons and thin gold piping running down her arms and legs. You see that a lot—the mother gets dressed up but can't convince the father to do the same. Evelyn Powers was already there too, smiling widely at them, talking about the balky radiators in the room and how every time they had a meeting here the room was either too hot or too cold. Evelyn had short, closely cropped white hair and large loop-within-loops earrings. She smoked; you could smell it on her.

"I'm Paula Cain," I said a little too loudly. I think I startled them. Mr. Kelly flinched. Mrs. Kelly's back suddenly straightened as though she'd been poked in the shoulder blades.

"Miss Cain, yes, of course," Mr. Kelly said, standing up, turning and shaking my hand fervently. He was heavy, perspiring, and seemed a little unsteady on his feet.

"Alivia speaks so highly of you," Mrs. Kelly said. She had a slight, nearly extinguished Southern accent.

"The students all love Paula," Evelyn confirmed. "Paula's very hip."

"I'm not sure all the students would say that," I said.

The parents looked at each of us in turn as though not sure which version to believe.

Mrs. Langford came in a couple of minutes later, introduced herself to the Kellys, and sat at the head of the conference table. Her face was tight, her expression somber. "Miss Cain, perhaps you can give Mr. and Mrs. Kelly an overview of some of your concerns."

I had some notes written down. I'd also brought Alivia's reports and her illustrations, and despite the fact that I was very organized, I suddenly felt totally unprepared for whatever was going to transpire. "First let me say, Alivia is a lovely girl. Really. Very polite. Very quiet. Always considerate. She just seems, in my opinion, vulnerable right now. I think that's probably the best way to describe it."

The parents watched me quizzically.

"Vulnerable?" Mrs. Kelly asked.

"She cries a lot in class."

I showed them her notebooks. I spread them out on the conference table. They stood up and huddled around the drawings. In addition to the crying butterfly, there were screaming frogs and fish, a giant mouse with its head in a guillotine, and a grasshopper with its legs on fire and a knife sticking out of its back. Neither Mr. Kelly nor Mrs. Kelly said a word.

"I think she's in a very fragile state," I said.

"Is she exhibiting signs of unusual behavior at home?" Mrs. Langford asked, turning to the parents. They just looked at each other.

"I think she needs someone to talk to," I said. "Not a friend, or a parent, or a teacher. Someone who can help with some of the issues she might be struggling with."

"Miss Cain?" Mrs. Kelly said quietly.

"If you could just let me finish there are just a couple other things—"

"Miss Cain, please, there's something you need to know about Alivia."

I was busy bringing my next few sentences into focus and it took me a second to realize that the direction had suddenly shifted. "Excuse me?"

Mrs. Kelly slid down in her chair and I really thought she was going to slide all the way to the floor. "Out of nowhere Alivia started seeing this boy over the summer. We never even met him. He'd pull up to the house, she'd walk out and get in his car. She said he was a junior. She didn't even tell us his name. One day he just stopped coming. We never said anything. Then one morning I heard her throwing up in the bathroom and I knew. I called Robert at work and he came home and we sat her down and she admitted that she was pregnant. She wanted to have the baby and of course we didn't want her to have it, we told her it would ruin her life,

it would cut off her opportunities to be whoever she wanted to be. She said we were more worried about it ruining our lives than hers, but we finally convinced her. We talked her into it. We had the pregnancy terminated."

"She got an abortion," Mr. Kelly said, relieving his wife of the burden of saying the word. "At the end of August right before school started. She made us promise not to tell anyone."

"She's only fifteen," Mrs. Kelly said quietly.

Evelyn reached across and squeezed her hand. Mrs. Langford stayed frozen with her hands clasped and her chin resting on top, but her eyes watered.

"No one can ever know about this," Mrs. Kelly said, looking at each one of us in turn and finally at her husband who had by now put his arm around her and all but engulfed her.

"Nothing leaves this room," Alivia's father said quietly.

The next afternoon, late, after the school day was officially over and only the indoor track team was moving through the halls like clomping ghosts, Alivia casually strode into the lab as though class were about to begin. Her hair was different, done up in one of those random vertical towers girls usually concoct when they haven't shampooed that day. She was smiling. I could have sworn she was high. Her eyes had this glassy, glossy finish. I walked straight up to her and patted her on the shoulder, fighting off the urge to give her a hug or some other gesture I wouldn't have been able to explain. "Hey."

She shrugged. "Hey."

"How's it going?"

She nodded as though that answered the question, looking at the ground all the while. "Miss Cain, guess what? I had a dream about you."

I had to laugh. "Okay." I started gathering up the papers from my desk, slid a couple of pens into a drawer, zipped open my nylon briefcase to deposit my night's take-home work.

"The school was filling up with water and you were helping to get all these kids out the door before they drowned. At the end you were the only person left in the school. I woke up before the dream ended. I'm not sure if you made it out."

She shifted her body weight and stood, or tried to stand, taller than she actually was.

"I'm here, aren't I?" I did a little exaggerated curtsy.

She crossed her arms like she was cold. "My parents liked you. But they thought you were too young and inexperienced to be shaping teenage minds."

"They're probably right about that."

"Yeah. I think it's too late by the time kids reach high school. It would have worked out better if you'd been my kindergarten teacher or something. Like if we had met a lot sooner."

"I wish we had."

"Me too."

She plucked a few gummy bears from the dish I kept on my desk, popped in the ear buds of her iPod, and walked away.

I told Jay to meet me at a truck stop about twenty miles south on the Interstate. It was called the RoadHouse, and it was a long silver cylindrical tube like the kind you crawl into so they can take cat scans of your arterial and intestinal pathways. I got there first. It was four o'clock in the afternoon and it looked like midnight. It was raining. You could hear the rain hitting the roof like pins falling from the sky. He arrived about ten minutes later, which was actually about ten minutes early, standing for a moment in the doorway shaking the moisture off his maroon slicker, first one heavy plastic sleeve then the other, and I could tell, just watching him, that he knew what I was going to tell him and he had already mapped out what he would tell me back. When he sat down opposite me in the booth and took off his coat, he revealed a T-shirt that said, "If I am out of my mind, it's all right with me." He saw me staring at it.

"Bellow," he said softly, almost apologetically. "Herzog." He smelled like the rain. His hair was flattened and thin trickles of water creased his face. He picked up a menu and flipped through a couple of pages.

"Did you order something?" he said in his ordinary voice.

"No. I'm not hungry."

My hands shook a little. I slid the glass sugar dispenser back and forth over the stained, bumpy Formica surface of the tabletop. I thought he might reach across and put his hand on top of mine, which he sometimes did in a joking way to suppress what he liked to call my twitchy rabbit energy, but he didn't budge.

The waitress came by. Jay told her we needed a few more minutes.

"So," he said. "Are you okay?"

"I'm pregnant. I used one of those home tests. But I'm sure it's right."

Maybe his lips pursed, maybe his shoulders tensed, but that's all. He listened just the way I thought he would, calmly and steadfastly, never letting his gaze leave what must have been my face arranged in a way he'd never seen before.

"I'm going to have it taken care of," I said. "Just so you know."

"I'll go with you," he said right on top of what I said.

"No. Thanks. That's all right."

"Someone has to take you."

"My sister's coming up," I lied. "She'll drive me."

"I didn't know you had a sister." He rubbed his right wrist with his left

hand, then switched. "How come I didn't know that?"

I smiled for the first time. "You never asked."

"I have two brothers. Did I ever mention that?"

"No."

"They're both in California. They're both assholes. Maybe that's why I never mentioned them." He drew a long tight breath. "I'm sorry you have to go through this."

"Me too."

Our coffees were refilled. He told the waitress that we wouldn't be ordering anything else, just the check, and she gave us a hard pissy look. He looked at me and nodded, a nod that was supposed to mean that he was a good guy, that he'd do the right thing, whatever the right thing happened to be. I suddenly felt worse for him than I did for myself. All he did was fool around with a young biology teacher. She should have known better than to get pregnant. She should have known how to use a damn contraceptive. She should have understood how the stupid human body works.

I had it done the next day.

A week later, I was in my classroom, standing in front of my class. We were focused on the endocrine and reproductive system of a cow. Or at least I was. What I felt first, the first sign, the first harbinger, was a strange fluttering in my chest like a small butterfly was loose in my diaphragm, banging softly into my ribs as it tried to find a way out. It seemed freakishly hot in the room. I opened the window nearest my desk, and then I opened all four windows along the far wall to a chorus of chortles and giggles. I went back to the blackboard and resumed drawing the outline of a cow's ovaries when I suddenly felt myself spinning—I imagined myself at the center of a revolving plate. The spinning stopped suddenly and I turned slowly, opened my mouth to say something and dropped. One student said later my eyes rolled back in my head like one of those people in the throes of religious ecstasy.

I was only out for a second or two. I tried to stand up and my knees instantly caved. Two of the kids grabbed me by the elbows and lifted me—I think my feet either lifted off the ground entirely or my toes just barely grazed the floor—over to a chair in the corner of the room.

"I just need a minute," I said to the class, as though I was still in a position to give out orders. One student, Georgia, handed me the bottled water out of her backpack. Another, Chege, a boy from Kenya, poured water on my wrists which in his deep bass voice he announced to everyone would cool my system and slow down my heartbeat, a theory which, if I had had the strength, I would have vigorously contradicted. Most of the kids had their cells phones out. "There's no need to call anyone. Really. I'm fine," I said, trying to raise my hand and apply some sem-

blance of authority.

"Miss Cain, I think your head is bleeding."

"It is," someone else said.

"Definitely."

"Holy shit."

"I'm okay," I said.

A little blood trickled into my mouth. Someone passed me some construction paper to daub my wound. I might have guessed who would be so totally oblivious to the nature of materials to do that. I tried to stand up again but fell back against the chair.

I remember thinking of the sirens as something whirring inside my head that only I could hear. There was scuttling in the hallways. My classroom door burst open. I think a couple of other teachers came in. I could hear other footsteps, other people rushing in.

They lifted me onto a gurney. They moved me out into the brightly lit hallway lined on both sides with sand-colored lockers. Some of the students tried to follow and someone, it must have been one of the EMTs, barked at them to stop, to fall back, to let the experts handle it. I heard one girl let out a piercing wail—I think it was Sarah Wheeling, an excellent student who knew all the answers and always spoke them in such a soft voice you had to lean forward and concentrate to hear her. But when you listened hard to what she had to say, she was always right.

They wheeled me past the bulletin board advertising the fall play put on by the senior class—Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, one of those productions where there is no possible way for the teenage performers to begin to understand the words they've memorized—and below the illuminated window cases displaying the sports trophies and debating medals and student-citizen awards. I was watching the ceiling and realized I'd never really looked at the school from this vantage point before, never really looked up at all. There were gobs of gum stuck to the perforated tiles, an upside down dart, and a few choice squibs of graffiti. Someone had managed to paint a big round smiley face. And someone else had scrawled a message in bright red letters across five tiles so there was one word on each tile: I'll Love You Forever Frankie.

Two doors swung open. I was rolled out into the pale, chilled sunshine. I could hear the whining of the wheels and beyond that the buzzing of voices. I turned my head to the side and saw a slowly forming necklace of students and teachers gathered on the steps, on the walkways, with those still inside pressed against the windows. The kids from the vocational wing had come out to watch, flamboyant in their orange overalls, wrenches and rags in their hands. The custodians formed a semi-circle in their gray coveralls, using the surprise break time to smoke. I spotted Judy McKay, who taught in the classroom across the hallway from mine, stand-

ing about ten feet away from me, holding something that looked familiar. It was my L. L. Bean white barn coat. The gurney didn't stop until we reached the back of the ambulance, and the ambulance didn't stop until we reached the front of the hospital.

I returned to school a week later. I walked through the hallways and could hear the low hiss of kids' voices as I went by. The janitors looked up from their mops and buffers, and the secretaries smiled at me as I passed by. A few of my fellow teachers stuck their heads in my doorway to say hello, to tell me how good I looked. In my top desk drawer I found a small glass rose, a miniature replica of the real roses that had been sent, anonymously, while I was in the hospital.

When it came time to stand in front of my classes, I saw how my students suddenly zeroed in on me with an intensity I would have cherished before and which now almost frightened me. They watched me the way I used to watch them, hungrily assessing my acclimation, grading my progress.

In the laboratory, Alivia was back in her usual spot, sitting at the work table, her stool twisted to its highest point. But she was different. She'd cut and gelled up her hair so now it was this short, spiky red flame. It was probably a good thing that she didn't have long hair hanging down because she had also adopted a new posture, her face hovering just a couple of inches above the work surface. She had an ethanol-soaked field mouse pinned on its back, stuck in place with the tiny lab pins I'd passed out earlier, and was pulling it apart with maniacal concentration and purpose. She'd done slits on either side—straight, clean cuts done with a steady hand—and was ready to extract the first visible organs. When I walked over to her station for a closer look, she lifted her head for only the briefest instant, then bent back to her work. I'm not sure she even saw me. I'm not sure she even knew I was there.

JIM LAUGHLIN

Memorial Day, 2011

A lashing in the buttonbush I cannot
see through scrub oak, dusk
splashing on the Musketahquid's surface,
a muskrat battling fish or frog below
ripples? Still now where 4,000
years earlier the Nipmuc weirs trapped
eels, shad, alewives headed seaward.
We poisoned the river. Bet frog.
I wind up Weir Hill, debris a retreating
ice sheet left 15,000 years ago. Two
deer chew forbs in abandoned
pasture land pearled by sunken stone,
like the slates I stroll among ten minutes
later in Subdury, flag-inspecting. All
revolutionary sons, including John
Goodnow who poured molten
musket balls for militia at 13,
helped Washington on the Hudson
at 16, and lived long enough to wind
yarn for Union soldiers. Dead at 101.
The Concord Road is closed. I walk
beside a heavy couple with two kids
waving mini-flags to Memorial Park.
Our State Rep reminds us that the poppies
blow between the crosses, row on row,
recalls the old vet who sold them outside
A&P in the late sixties. I do too. Paper
flowers. Twenty-one guns and taps,
three men in brown and gold
caps get lifted into the DAV van, three
more walk alongside. Troop withdrawal begins
in five weeks in Afghanistan.

No Relief *

At the age of ten I was damn good,
agile, and sure-handed in my league.
But even with my dirtbrown, sun-baked
pancake mitt I couldn't handle
my father's puzzling knuckleballs.
Back from jungle duty in the Philippines
he'd hurled Class B ball at Evansville.
He threw the toughest kind, sharp,
nasty breaks, unpredictable, even to him—
the sign of a true knuckler.
My round mitt zigzagged through the air
like a hummingbird. His hands by then
were monsters, buckled by arthritis,
knots and knuckles bulging everywhere.
He launched his offerings from a natural motion,
fingernails dug in and pushing off,
real foolers that exploded at the last
moment, the batter viciously committing himself
to air. For a flash you saw the stitched red seams
raised on a luminous body without rotation
like the man shot out of the cannon
I saw at the circus once. He laughed
and I laughed, hobbling, rubbing down
my shin, his ball delivering the bruises
confusion brings. The arthritis worsened,
other pains increased. Play ceased,
though his knarled hands wouldn't rest.
In his last days, they twitched
and squeezed when little else moved.
Fluid filled his frail arms and bony fingers,
the old terrain pale, puffy, infant-like.
I talked on gamely, held his big hands in mine,
and watched my old man knuckling under,
wondering how I'd handle this last break.

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KARL S MONROE

Migratory Patterns

Friday, October 26, 10:30 a.m. Practicing tai chi with my friend Barbara behind the Redmond Senior Center, a few yards from the Sammamish River.[1] I've been sick and have scarcely practiced during the past three weeks, so I am surprised at the easy flow of the form, except for unusually shaky balance and a creeping weariness. But I feel focused, until . . .

A pair of Canada geese hurries up the river, flying about twenty feet above the water, and punctuating their progress with loud honks. I pause for a moment, feeling a deep, sweet ache that almost causes me to forget where I am. Continuing the tai chi form becomes a struggle, relegated to the background as I attend to this ache, at once familiar and novel, and attempt to trace its origins.

Naturally, I tie this feeling to my intention to write about the geese and mallards of the nearby wildlife preserve at Juanita Bay and their apparent abandonment of migratory habits. Both species live on the lake year-round, sponging off and interbreeding with other species, too besotted with the good life to be troubled with heading south for the winter. I had frequently framed this subject in my mind, but it kept slipping away until gradually it seemed I had written enough. Now I have told several people that all these essays are written. Does my word mean nothing?

Over the next couple of days, I sense that this ache lies far deeper, almost beyond memory. But I must rely on memory, so I picture myself—I'm certain it's a memory, despite its gauzy, epic texture—growing up nearly sixty years ago, not far from here, in a small town, in a rural river valley. So here I am, a little boy, standing outdoors in a field beneath the lowering October skies, watching and listening as a flock of Canada geese materializes in a great, elaborate V, filling my world with their melancholy honking.[2] An understanding takes root, lying beyond words, at least beyond the rudimentary vocabulary at my command then—an understanding that *ducks and geese fly south for the winter*. And this idea rode on the wings of a corollary, that even now I strain to articulate, let alone understand: Living on this Earth is conditional, demanding that each living being pay obeisance both to the rhythms of the orb and to the network of instincts and cultural patterns that govern one's particular species.

And here are two Canada geese flying *north* above the river in late October. This aberrant behavior is not isolated. Most years in the fall, I see small Vs of geese raggedly organized in the dark skies, heading in every direction but south. I impute a plaintive quality to their honking. They're like a tribal people pledged to revive the old ways—they have the pronunciation guide, but the lexicon has vanished.

This skein of thought eventually takes me back to my practice of tai chi, which for the moment has become muddled; I don't know whether I'm headed south or north. Somehow this confusion seems related to my heart's ache at the sight of these geese. That comes second to asking how such an ache could be *sweet*. But first, the birds.

The Canada goose is so regal: tall and stately, its dignity underscored by its muted coloration—black head, crown, and neck; white cheeks, throat, and undertails, and dark brown back and upper wings, fading almost to white on the breast and belly. People have stopped speaking of these animals with the reverence we reserve for other species. They are, in some way, de-Natured. I admit I do feel a catch in my throat at seeing a half-dozen geese wheel in from high over the bay, then skim swiftly over the water before splashing down at the edge of the marsh. I never hurry home to tell my wife about them. Other people may share this pleasure, but we keep it to ourselves. And it's not just that geese have come to seem domesticated and have lost their "wildness." Public policy treats Canada geese as vermin. We loathe them for their enormous numbers, for their droppings that festoon park lawns and walkways, and for the truculent hissing that frightens small children and timorous adults. Park managers hire handlers with specially trained dogs to frighten geese away from their favorite haunts. They resorted to this after failing in a more drastic relocation measure. The geese were tranquilized, then bagged and shipped across the mountains to a rural area. Still, they returned; they didn't migrate anymore, but they knew where "home" was. People here don't have the stomach for the ultimate solution, hiring hitmen to take them out, but that's been tried elsewhere.

And mallards. They're synonymous with the word *duck* in Washington, both because they're the most populous and because the iridescent green head feathers of the drake catch the attention of even the most oblivious visitor to the lakeshore. That's a duck, a mallard—we know it in our bones. Mallards aren't seen as a pest on par with Canada geese, but they don't cause the heart to leap as other waterfowl do. In most parks they are beggars and aggressors.[3] Our soft spot for both these species is reserved for the mother, trailed by her goslings or ducklings. We breathe in sharply at the threat posed by nearby predators, unable to acknowledge that our

favorable feeling for the park depends on early (though not untimely) death, raking through these new generations.

But an adult mallard paddling alone in the shadow of marsh grass? It's just a mallard—*only* a mallard.

Now that I've seen my October geese northbound on the Sammamish, I understand why I so easily set aside my plans to write about these birds that have abandoned their migratory ways. I sit in judgment on them, and I condemn myself as well. I see their opting for permanent residence as a moral flaw, akin to a man becoming a couch potato. Early in my life I lost touch with the rhythms of the Earth. I don't want to think about the parallel. I ache with sorrow for a world out of touch with its roots.

But this ache also carries such sweetness. It's poignant to discover that my own sense of Nature's rhythms lies so deep within, prior to language—even perhaps before the unearthing of the self. And it's so moving to have this vision appear as I practice tai chi outdoors. I have been engaged by tai chi for nearly a quarter-century, counting the seven years I felt estranged by its apparent demand of bilateral symmetry. Tai chi is not part of my native cultural path, but it is essential to my finding my way back to the Earth. In the mystical way of the Tao, tai chi cultivates the flow of Earth's energy coursing up through one's feet and throughout the body where it can meet, mingle, and combine with the energy of Heaven reaching earthward for this very reunion.[4]

I haven't found much literature exploring why ducks and geese take up permanent residence in some areas, just enough references to confirm that it has happened. But even then, this effect appears limited to birds living in cities and suburbs, while their country cousins still migrate. What does it mean? One writer casually blames the phenomenon on humans and their unlimited food supply. Naturally, he blames *other* humans, so it doesn't involve him. I question whether the answer is that easy.

I think that turning so quickly to blame could cause us to miss the main point. It seems just as feasible that we are witnessing evolution at work, and that these strains of geese and ducks have released a portion of their tiny brains to develop a way of life that drafts on the human juggernaut, just as geese in a V draft on the energy of their leaders. This makes me think of ravens and crows, so renowned for their cunning and cleverness. Were they always like this, or did they cultivate this capacity in order to coexist with other species?

Mallards and Canada geese seem cognitively primitive in comparison to corvids, but their capacities may be evolving in ways we don't fully appreciate. Maybe their behavior reflects an unutterable understanding of

global climate change, the total dominance of humans, and the fate of migratory habitat. It's just possible that these sedentary birds have not turned up their tails to millennia of cooperation and collective decision-making. Maybe they have made a decision consistent with the maxim *survival of the fittest*. They not only appreciate Juanita Bay; they know how to make it their home—a skill some of us have yet to master.

Notes

[1]This location is about four miles from Juanita Bay, maybe four times that far if you trace the Sammamish to its entry into Lake Washington and then follow the shoreline to the south.

[2]My aunt, who lived in the same town, says that in those days migrating waterfowl filled the skies of our river valley. Just to think of it makes my heart ache with yearning.

[3]I have never seen birds begging at Juanita Bay Park, though they will beg just a quarter-mile away at Juanita *Beach* Park, which is oriented toward casual recreation. Are these two separate populations, or can birds attach different rules for comportment to specific locales? And speaking of aggression, it's not uncommon to see mixed-breed geese or ducks that have evident traits of the wild goose or duck as well as the white-feathered domestic fowl. Two or three times over the course of a month last spring, I spotted what appeared to be a Mallard Drake with the headdress of a Hooded Merganser. Is this possible, or was I hallucinating?

[4]I've attempted to practice tai chi only once at Juanita Bay Park. I found a place isolated enough—stepping between the molehills on what used to be the green of the sixth hole. But I still felt as if I was on display, even more than in other parks. And worse, there were too many distractions. I could hardly string together two moves without watching my mind slip away in pursuit of a new idea for a problematic essay.

KAREN STEVENSON

All Things Named

"Each planet, each plant, each butterfly, each moth, each beetle, becomes doubly real to you when you know its name. Lucky, indeed, are those who from their earliest childhood have heard all these things named." —John Cowper Powys, *The Meaning of Culture*

Mayriah Far Away stood at my desk waiting for the other students to arrive as I worked on the day's lesson plans. She asked if I would like to hear the names of her relatives. I smiled and nodded at this shy fourth-grade student, her black hair falling loosely on her shoulders, her soft voice a notch above a whisper. It was the first week of my first year of teaching in this one-room country school, and I was working hard at learning my students' names and establishing a relationship with them. Mayriah began reciting the litany of names. Genealogy in the Crow Indian culture is matrilineal and may or may not be based on biological relationship. Aunts can be mothers and nieces might be daughters and vice versa. There are clan mothers and fathers, adopted parents and children. "Belva is my aunt and Norma is my mother but I live with my other mother, Josie. Warlene is my cousin and she's my sister, too. Ruby Turnsback is my grandmother. . . ." I put my pen down and listened to the names that seemed to weave a tapestry of belonging through this young girl's life.

When I was in the fourth grade I wrote the names of my ancestors on the branches of a tree outlined in blue on a worksheet that had been spewed out by a ditto machine. I discovered connections to people with odd names—Ragnvald, Grete—whom I had never known. Likewise, my mother taught my brothers and me the connections of people in our small farming community like a dot to dot game. "That's Mrs. Anderson, she's Hilda's sister, Grandma's friend, and Joyce is her daughter. They live at the old Knudsen Place."

Our parents referred to the landscape in which we lived in much the same way, tagging coulees, pastures, even wheat fields with names. You were "from these parts" if you recognized the Mae West Wiggle was the

twisty dirt road that took you the back way into town. Even the islands of trees on the Northern High Plains of Montana, planted by homesteaders and nurtured through droughts, earned the distinction of being called by their proper names.

"We're going to play at the Willows," we would tell our parents. "Get some water from the rain barrel and water Grandma's Mountain Ash," my father would instruct. We still reminisce about the tree near the reservoir on our grandfather's farm, a willow tree with a large trunk and horizontal thick branches that sheltered us grandchildren with its heavy drape of leaves. Dappled yellows, greens, and grays. A magical spell of light and shadow. A refuge. Grandpa's Tree.

Our mother called the native prairie plants that grew in the coulees and in the ditches alongside roads by names she thought she knew. The plant my mother called a bitterroot, Montana's state flower, grew close to the ground and blossomed bright orange flowers during the heat of the summer. Years later, I discovered the name of that orange prairie wild flower was scarlet globe mallow, a common prairie herb and not the bitterroot she thought it was. Mom and I laughed at her mistake.

"Growing up in wheat country it was one of the only wild flowers I knew and it was everywhere," she said. "I just *assumed* it was the state flower!" I recently transplanted three bitterroot plants into my wild flower garden in Eastern Montana. Although it typically grows only in the mountainous western part of the state, I was surprised to see the plants bloom briefly, then wither back into the soil. As the ground warmed, another plant with orange blossoms grew over the top of the bitterroot, and I had to smile. Scarlet globe mallow, known for its hardiness and drought-resistant qualities, has earned the distinction of state flower in my mind, much more so than the delicate and short-lived bitterroot.

My mother also directed our attention to the sky and pointed out the clouds and their shadows that skimmed along the ground. We named them according to shape—horse's tail and cauliflower clouds—until we discovered their proper names in our elementary school science books. Cirrus, cumulo-nimbus, stratus clouds, we learned, predicted fair weather or storms. Sailor takes warning. Now that I know their names I can learn their linguistic origination, like tracing one's genealogy, which leads to all sorts of delightful connections. For instance, according to myth and folklore, a nimbus is a bright cloud that surrounds the gods or goddesses when they appear on earth. Likewise, a nimbus is the halo that surrounds the heads of the saints. When I see thunderclouds and the nimbus of light outlining their shape, I feel the electric presence of the goddess of rain.

Perhaps it was this particular nimbus that set our summer family vacations into motion. When thunderclouds mushroomed from the horizon and

promised rain, it meant the ground would turn to gumbo mud and it would be days before my father could get a tractor into the fields. By the time the first raindrops fell, Mom and Dad had the car packed.

Off we drove, heading west on U.S. Highway 2, a road that paralleled the train tracks laid across the northern tier of the state, dubbed the Hi-Line of Montana. The small towns ticked by—Rudyard, Inverness, Joplin, Chester, Galata, Shelby—like the steady rhythm of the passenger train, the Empire Builder. The towns were named at the turn of the 20th century for the railroad moguls' European connections and were marked by the grain elevators that rose like sentinels from the prairie peneplain, promising to mark our return with their vigilance.

A campground in Glacier National Park was our destination. As we approached the Rocky Mountain Front Range, Dad would point out a particular mountain peak or waterfall and wonder about its name. If Mom couldn't find the name on a map, our father would make one up. "Look, kids," he would point and nod, "Rolling Thunder Peak!" We drove over a bridge and through our vantage point of the car window saw far below us water crashing around boulders and downed fir trees. "Growling Grizzly Gorge!" Dad announced.

As we entered the park and the high mountain meadows came into view, our mother greeted the plants by their common names like long lost friends. "Oh, look, the Bear Grass is blooming! Look at the Shooting Stars! The Paintbrush is so red this year!" Every time I say the names of those mountain flowers I can still hear the delight in my mother's voice.

Another family vacation taken many years later when I had three children of my own brings back memories of driving on back roads of Montana in the dark of night. At that time we lived in southeastern Montana and it was a long road trip across the state to visit family.

My husband had other commitments so the children and I made the trip without him. After a week of relatives, we were aiming for home. We had driven six hours and had another three to go when I made one more stop at a small-town gas station. Ann, a toddler, and Vince, the baby, strapped in their car seats in the back seat, were sleeping soundly. Greta, five years old, her head nestled on a pillow pushed against the front seat window, was snoring. I had to make a decision whether to press on or find a motel room. Despite the fact that darkness was closing in, I opted not to wake sleeping children and wrangle them and our luggage one more night away from home. A full tank of gas, a thermos of coffee, a bag of M&Ms, and I pulled the car onto the highway. I felt like a horse hell-bent for the barn.

We were on a secondary highway in Eastern Montana, a lonely stretch of road where, after an hour of driving, I had yet to meet another vehicle coming or going. Not even a flicker from a yard light at a distant ranch

was visible. The headlights carved a path through the black void of this moonless night. I let the M&Ms dissolve slowly in my mouth and felt the caffeine do its work while the twilight sky dissolved into the black of night.

The highway unfolded in front of me, a repetitive flow of white dashes and yellow center lines, and it felt like I was going nowhere. I looked down at my odometer to make sure the miles were adding up. I imagined movement on the shoulder of the road, my foot ready to brake at the sudden bolt of a deer onto the highway. I had a growing sense of trepidation that maybe I should have gotten a motel room. What was I thinking driving by myself this late at night with three young children? What if I had a flat tire on this narrow isolated highway? What if I hit a deer? My mind raced. I felt like I was in Rod Serling's *Twilight Zone*, stuck in this car, driving in this black. Forever. No end in sight.

I glanced out the side window at the night sky in an attempt to break the hypnotic hold of the flow of line and asphalt. The glitter of stars twinkled with reassurance. They gave dimension to my one-dimensional thoughts. *All is calm. All is bright.*

Seeing the stars set in motion some thoughts of the first day of summer vacation when I was a child. My cousin and I would celebrate by sleeping outside. We vowed to stay awake all night and devised ways to stick with that promise. The night sky drew us in. We traced the Big Dipper with our fingers. Then we searched for the Little Dipper and the North Star. Finally we would fall asleep but not before we tried to count the stars, every single one.

I leaned over the steering wheel again to catch sight of the night sky. "My Very Educated Mother Just Served Us Nine Pizzas." I whispered the ditty I had taught my students, a way to remember the names and order of the planets. Mecury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, Pluto. I tried to remember the mythology of Mars and Venus, of Neptune and the more obscure Pluto. Catching a glimpse of Orion's belt in front of the car I welcomed this warrior and his sword. I wondered where Leo the Lion was, Scorpio, and Draco the Dragon. Perhaps they were drinking from the Milky Way before taking their places in the night sky. Knowing the names made me feel less alone.

My mind slowed its frantic worry and wandered through time and space as the night sky shimmered above and in front of me. The headlights shone brighter as I followed the thread of highway and the trail of stars where gods and goddesses, lions, dragons, and warriors were leading the way home.

The bookshelves at our home were well stocked with identification books—plants, insects, butterflies, birds. In the fall I would lug them to school with me and then return them to our house for the summer.

"Look, Mom, a caterpillar with stripes!" The two-inch long caterpillar stretched fat in my daughter's hand, a juicy specimen. It was white with black and yellow stripes and had a pair of black antennas on both ends of its body. I grabbed the bug book while Ann and big sister Greta filled a large mayonnaise jar with milkweed leaves and eased the caterpillar into his new home.

We discovered our striped friend was from the family of milkweed butterflies, *Danaidae*, specifically a monarch butterfly, *Danaus plexippus*. An unabridged dictionary revealed that, according to Greek legend, Danaus was the king of an ancient land of Argos. Danae, the Argos princess and mother of Perseus, was visited by Zeus in the form of a shower of gold.

Our newly installed king seemed comfortable in his jar-castle as his royal highness nibbled milkweed leaves for breakfast, lunch, and supper. Scrawled on a piece of freezer tape and stuck to the jar were the words MONARCH BUTTERFLY INSIDE.

The royal centerpiece had been on our dining room table nearly a week when things began to change. The caterpillar had attached itself to a stick and hung stiff as a frozen sock on a clothesline.

We watched as it started undulating back and forth. Still anchored to the horizontal stick, the upside-down caterpillar started swinging faster and faster as if strong winds were whipping him to and fro. Just as suddenly the gyration stopped and the caterpillar became motionless. Less than a minute later an invisible hand unzipped its skin from top to bottom.

Our faces were inches from the jar as we stared wide-eyed. The caterpillar wriggled wildly as its skin, stripes and all, peeled off and dropped like a wadded up sock to the bottom of the jar. "Wow!" and "Yikes!" and "Is he going to die?"

Within an hour, the caterpillar had turned milky gray and, still attached to the stick, it shrank to less than an inch. The bug book told us this de-striped caterpillar was turning into a chrysalis. The chrysalis was jade colored and oblong and by the next morning, glistening gold dots circled the top, forming a cap or lid. The metallic dots were evenly spaced at the bottom of the chrysalis as well. A book described this wonder as "the greenhouse with the golden nails." Chrysalis—*Chrysos*, from the Greek word gold.

Two weeks passed. His highness still held court on the dining-room table and his greenhouse changed to a dull black. Molded imprints of a wing became evident through the walls. As we loaded luggage into our

car for a trip to visit family, there was discussion about the mayonnaise jar and the fate of its occupant. Should we bring the jar or would it wait until we got home?

At that moment Ann ran outside with the jar. The golden nails had loosed. The lid had opened and the butterfly, wings folded close to its side, clung to the top of the empty chrysalis. The metamorphosis was complete.

Our entire family gathered around the jar. We knew from the butterfly book that fluids were pumping through hollow shafts in the butterfly's wings. Within minutes the fluid would solidify to give the wings form, much as a kite takes shape when the rigid crossbars are attached. Ann carefully reached in the jar and held the stick with the newly hatched butterfly in her hand. Finally, the monarch spread wide its red-orange wings, black veins outlining the edges in perfect symmetry. White dots punctuated the border of its royal cloak. The wings moved up and down. Like the flutter of a dry leaf on a breezy day, it lifted from the chrysalis. We watched the monarch flit and float until it disappeared in the blue summer sky.

My children have metamorphosed into adults and we no longer live on the ranch. Yet, whenever I see a monarch butterfly, I'm taken back to that "land of Argos," a golden place we called home.

The country of pine-covered hills, rugged draws, and open meadows where my husband and I raised our children contrasted sharply with the landscape of my youth. Moving to this ranch country was like walking into a crowded room and not knowing a soul. Getting to know the people was easy; learning the names of the landscape took time.

My friend Teckla and I rode our horses on her forest lease to check her cows. She fingered the reins in her hand. "There's a lot of grass this year. The country's in good shape." I followed her gaze over the hillside peppered with yucca plants, burnt red scoria rock outcroppings, and dotted with ponderosa pine trees. She pointed to the stalks of bunch grass that stood yellow and tall and short grass showing a hint of green, and she referred to them all by name.

Growing up in farm country, the only grass I knew was the weedy kind like the cheat grass my uncle hired my cousin and me to pick out of his winter wheat fields. I knew the difference between barley and spring wheat; grass, to a wheat farmer, was just grass. Teckla saw individuals—grama, timothy, bluestem. She named low-lying plants, all relative to the health of the range and to her cows. I pointed to a purple flower and commented on its pretty splash of color. "Locoweed. It's toxic to livestock if they eat enough of it," she replied matter-of-factly. I decided it was time for me to get to know the countryside better since Teckla wouldn't always be there for the introductions. So I bought a range identification book.

I took to the meadows and hills with my book and discovered relation-

ships, not unlike studying a family tree and finding the names and history of distant cousins twice removed. I learned the specific names and shared traits of *Poaceae*—the family of grasses—like little bluestem, big bluestem, buffalo grass, and wooly plantain which grew vigorously in warm weather and was drought resistant. I picked a short-stem blade of grass, turned it around on the palm of my hand, and noted the way its small seed head curled slightly into a comma. The range book unlocked the mystery of the name blue grama (*Bouteloua gracilis*). *Gracilis*. Gracefully small. And grama means grass, from the Latin word, *gramen*. *Bouteloua*, named for Claude Bouteloua, a Spanish botanist. This gracefully small grass that I held in my hand fed millions of bison on the Great Plains for hundreds of years. Like most native grasses, blue grama is a nurturer and a hardy survivor.

The range book listed the grasses' forage value—which plants contain the most nourishment for livestock. Most ranchers planned for their cows to calve in late winter or the chill of early spring, but Teckla's cows calved in late May and early June when the air had warmed and the grass was plentiful, providing hearty nourishment for the mother cows. Spread out across a hillside, grazing or lying down, chewing their cud, the ungulates were at home in this meadow of *Poaceae*. "There," she swept her hand in front of her. "Those are happy cows."

I identified snakeweed, rabbitbrush, and winterfat—plants that provided food and shelter for the mule deer, elk, and wild turkey. The book also listed the historic and medicinal uses of plants. The Northern Cheyenne knew that yarrow, *Achillea millefolium L.*, contains a chemical that stops bleeding in a superficial wound. Ancient European herbalists called it knight's milfoil or soldiers' woundwort. According to legend, Achilles, the plant's namesake, used yarrow to doctor the soldiers' wounds at the battle of Troy. Teckla and most ranchers in the area knew to pack a bleeding barbwire cut on either an animal or themselves with yarrow leaves if they were a long way from the nearest first-aid kit.

Teckla, and the plains Indians before her, knew another plant with an interesting, practical use.

I was hanging clothes outside on the line one summer day when I heard giggles and odd guttural sounds coming from the horse pasture nearby. I walked over to get a better look and there were my three children foaming at the mouth and engaged in a spitting contest. Their slimy ammunition was aimed at grasshoppers on a cedar fencepost.

Vince, my young son, launched a particularly large glob of spittle towards the intended hopper target as Greta waved a plant root the size of a carrot at me and explained. "Here, Mom, chew a little bit of this. It makes your mouth water. It's what the Indians used on a long ride when they didn't have anything to drink."

"Who told you this?"

Greta answered, "Rachel. She showed me when we were helping her mom check cows yesterday." Rachel was Greta's friend and Teckla's daughter.

I took the root and chewed on a small piece. My tongue instantly tingled, and my mouth felt like it had been numbed with Novocain. I spit not once but over and over. My own children laughed at me as my mouth turned into a leaky spigot. Ann stepped on the dry cow pie—the designated launching pad in front of the fencepost—and gargled her spittle before lofting the wad towards an unsuspecting grasshopper.

The range book stated that Cheyenne Indians boiled Echinacea stems and leaves to treat a bad case of poison ivy. Another identification book, *Montana Native Plants and Early Peoples* by Jeff Hart, described what Teckla already knew. The Northern Cheyenne sun dancers, exhausted after several days without food or water, chewed on the root of this plant, *Echinacea pallida*, to relieve their parched mouths.

While walking the hills around my home I learned to identify more obscure plants in the shadows of the pines, plants that bloom and go to seed quickly, their life cycles short but productive. *Geum triflorum*, also known by its common name, prairie smoke or old man's whiskers, blossoms dusty pink flowers in late spring. Its fernlike leaves lie close to the ground. Prairie smoke, from the *Roace* or rose family, is a wild country cousin to its refined city relatives with prestigious names and pedigrees. The mystery of this native rose's common name is revealed when the flower goes to seed. Hairy whitish strands feather out from the fading flower like a wisp of smoke or an old man's long silver whiskers.

I shared my findings with Teckla. That was one plant she didn't know and she delighted in discovering its name's origin. Our plant talk sounded like gossip. "That one's getting to be noxious and needs to be controlled!" or "That one smells sooo good!" or "Mess with that one and you'll break out in a nasty rash!"

One day Teckla and I stopped at a stock tank to water the horses and I wondered about the name of the bush that was growing beside the tank. Teckla knew it as skunkbrush but I wanted to know its botanical name and its relationship to other plants. I looked it up in my book when I got home and learned it was sumac and I found out why it was called skunkbrush. Just to make sure I tore a leaf from the sumac growing on the hillside behind our house and held it to my nose. The smell was pungent enough to be repulsive. When I told Teckla she laughed and laughed. "Why do you think it's called skunkbrush?"

Some plant names, like some people, simply delight. One day in late spring while my students puzzled through a math assignment, a tap on the door signaled the presence of a tall man. He tipped his weatherworn cow-

boy hat in my direction and entered the room; his spurs clinked with every step. His daughter lifted her head and gave him a quick smile. He placed a Styrofoam cup on her desk, patted her on the back and without saying a word, turned and walked out of the schoolhouse. The cup dripped reddish soil that held a singular, yellow, waxy blossom. The young teen looked around the classroom and then offered up an explanation. "We have a race every year to find the first one. I guess Dad won this year." The buttercup, *Ranunculaceae*, a harbinger of early spring whose flower can be found hunkered on the ground in lingering cold winter air, is a bright promise that change is coming.

Another spring flower, a cousin to the buttercup, bursts from the ground sometime in April as if to say, "Here I am! Remember me?" Its purple trumpetlike blossom with long yellow stamens seems like an accidental, if not "ranunculous" phenomenon of late winter, since insistent fuzzy stems can poke through the spring snow and bloom despite the cold.

One Saturday in late March Teckla pulled her outfit into my yard and let the truck idle while she met me coming out the door. "What's up?" I asked. She had moved some young bulls to our place and had spent the morning riding the fence line making sure it was intact. "Here," she said as she dropped a purple flower into my outstretched hand. "It's *really* spring now." Then she hopped back in the truck and rattled across the cattle guard and continued down the red shale road, still damp from the last wet snow. I watched her until she disappeared from sight around the last bend, then looked down and smiled at the flower in my hand. Crocus, *Anemone occidentalis*, commonly known as pasque flower.

Pascha . . . to pass over, from winter to spring.

Teckla, delightfully named for her Sioux and Norwegian ancestors, at home in her environment of native grasses and shrubs, a nurturer of three children, and a hardy survivor of breast cancer, until recently. Pasch.

I can stand underneath a star-studded sky and feel the power of the gods and goddesses. I find the first crocus of spring and feel the spirit of friendship. When I see scarlet globe mallow I remember my mother and smile. When I hear my grown children reminisce about special places they named in their childhood—Sunshine Hill, Castle Rock, and Trinket's Place—I know my father is winking with approval.

Stories unfold and life becomes "doubly real" when we know the names. We become connected not only to our place on earth, but to those things beyond time and space. "Lucky, indeed, are those who from their earliest childhood have heard all these things named."

ERIC FREEZE

Pictogram

A woman is crying. It's about ten in the morning and Carl sits at his desk, checking a list of standardized test questions for bias and sensitivity. The questions can't appeal to upper-middle-class whites from the suburbs, the ethnic makeup of just about everyone Carl works with. One of the questions is about a girl at a birthday party. She splits open a piñata and then starts to cry because now the beautiful piñata with its colorful ribbons and papier-mâché dangles from a tree in the middle of their yard and all her friends scramble for the piñata's innards like scavenging beasts. Carl wonders if it is too ethnic, too heavily Latino or Spanish American because he has to send it to the VP for a last look before he enters it permanently into the database. But there is this crying. He mistakes it for a cold at first; it is Iowa and it is winter, and sometimes colds latch on and don't let go, but then he hears a staccato breathing, almost like a laugh, in between the sniffles.

Carl wonders how he could have missed it. Now nose-blowing punctuates her cries. He can't really see Marje, but there is a slit in the side of his cubicle about the width of a quarter where the two pieces of Carl's melamine cubitat meet his desk. Through the slit he sees her hand on her mouse and a box of Kleenex and two or three perched Popples next to her computer. Marje collects Popples even though no one makes them anymore and the only places she finds them usually are online or at garage sales (the ones at garage sales aren't worth collecting, she told him once). She drives a station wagon filled with old Subway boxes, piles of newspaper, empty water bottles, dismembered doggie toys and now, he imagines, lots and lots of tissue paper, for the crying.

Carl feels bad for Marje, wants to talk with Marje, wants to go over and give her a hug but he is worried about her calling him on sexual harassment. Marje once complained about a conversation he'd been having with a group of guys on the way to the cafeteria. She was walking the same direction, parallel, but distant, with her sack lunch and a book, and she complained to the VP that their conversation made her uncomfortable. After that, they had a long month of seminars and emails about sexual

harassment, about what was appropriate and not appropriate to say and how everyone had to be sensitive to others. Carl can't, for example, say the "b" word, even when talking about his ex-wife, the "b" who has been "b"-ing at him about spoiling their son Taylor because he bought him an iPod touch even though Carl thinks it's more that she just can't afford an iPod touch and he can which is what's really at the heart of most of her hang-ups. And that she didn't get custody because she is an alcoholic and a real "b" every day of the week.

Marje is still crying. Maybe it is her dogs. Most people have pictures of children in their cubitat. She has pictures of dogs. Seven of them. At one time he thought there was a succession. He made the mistake of asking her once. "They're my babies," she said. Walked them twice a day, all seven. She talked for almost an hour, Carl hanging on by thinking about a party that weekend or a baseball game or a movie he saw lately. Maybe she is crying because one of her dogs died? He could ask her. Just peep around the corner and knock on her desk and say, "Hello. Did your dog die?" But to ask would mean a conversation, a long conversation, one that would most likely make him feel worse than if he had just left her alone. He could get a box of Kleenexes. Another box, from the supply room, compliments of the house. She'd thank him, resume crying, or stop. He really wants her to stop. Like there isn't enough pain already at this job for him to have to sit through two hours listening to a grown woman cry. How old is she? Thirty? Forty? Fifty? Difficult to tell. She is on the heavy side and has little to measure her by: no kids, no spouse, and no one he knows talks to her for more than a couple of minutes at a time.

Marje is going on a half hour now of this intermittent crying and no one is even acknowledging it, not even the women in the department who may have less to fear about sexual harassment than he does. He wonders if they're allowed to use the "b" word. Like an insider thing? But no one is stopping by. No one is consoling. He thinks that there must be a reason for this. No one wants to be sad by association. Like she has a virus, an unhappy virus, a pathetic virus, a how-does-a-human-being-end-up-like-this virus. A woman in her 30s or 40s or 50s who eschews relationships, who prefers the company of dogs, who has missed out on the double dates, the dreams of partnered bliss, an agoraphobe who gets Chinese take-out instead of eating at the restaurant just to avoid having to be in a room with other people.

At ten-thirty Carl gets Barry for a smoke break even though he doesn't smoke anymore. They're supposed to have these breaks every day, two of them, fifteen minutes each, even though he knows only about five people who actually take them. They had a meeting about it once. VP Charlie Shugh gave a very passionate speech about how breaks should be

de rigeur—he said that more than once, *de rigeur*—and for about a month people were taking breaks every time you turned around. Breaks improved efficiency and employee satisfaction and retention, they were the panacea for boredom and cynicism and about fifty other corporate ails. He remembers VP Charlie Shugh had a graph.

So they're on this break and Carl takes a drag from one of the smokes that Barry begrudgingly supplies him and says, "Marje has been crying in her cubicle for the past hour and a half."

"Wow," Barry says.

But Carl can tell Barry has something else on his mind. Barry says that he and Beth are thinking of buying an acreage out of town, Beth's idea. Beth wants a garden and right now they live downtown near a fraternity. Every year kids puke on their lawn. She has been going to the farmers' market and talking to one of the Amish farmers there who doesn't use pesticides on his tomatoes but some weird pepper spray that keeps the bugs off. "If she wasn't addicted to *Idol* I'm sure she'd be Amish," Barry says. Carl gets a kick out of that, thinking of Beth in a plain dress with her hair done up in a kerchief and saddled with a gazillion kids. Beth who wears flip-flops even in winter and almost never a bra and who does her hair in tiny braids with little multicolored ties at the end. Carl can tell Barry doesn't want to make the move. Something about being away from downtown, the bars maybe. But then Barry says, "The country does have a certain pastoral appeal," and Carl knows he's a goner. Pastoral. Even as sarcasm, as he ashes his cigarette for punctuation, he implies a world other than the one Carl has known him in. This strikes Carl as funny. "Are you guys going to raise goats? Start a vineyard? I know, you guys could build a kiln and make your own pottery."

"Always the jokes," Barry says.

"You could garden in the nude."

Barry changes the subject to ACT's new lawns, the humps of earth covered with new sod like Native American burial mounds. They speculate on the money ACT's poured into the place: the slate terraces, the koi pond, the automated underground sprinkler system. Word is the company's plunged itself into debt just as states were cutting back funding for the new K-12 tests they've been working on. The recession affecting their bottom line. There will be cuts. On the way back inside, Barry says, "You know, you really need to get a life."

Not fair. "You are such a 'b,'" Carl says and they laugh.

Carl is working on a test item when Marje starts crying again. It's almost noon and he tries to shut it out. The item is about the myth of Arachne and he's trying to tweak it so that it comes out at grade level. He gets rid of

the word "tortuous" because it's too many syllables and the state of Maine puts great stock in the Flesch Kincaid test that says big words are out until high school. He writes a few sample items, reading comprehension questions mostly, when he hears Marje softly sobbing. Item 1, he writes, "Why is Marje crying?" A. Like me, she despises her job. B. She's not crying, she has a head cold. C. Her dog died. D. D. D. He can't think of a D and it's time for lunch so he erases the whole batch of items in case someone glances at his screen. He turns off the screen too, just in case.

Maybe it's the depressing morning he's had or the item not working itself out or the mind-numbing monotony of his job, but at lunch Carl decides to be antisocial and go for a walk. He stops by the vending machine and tries to force a couple of dollars into the bill feed and pick out a sandwich. There's a warning on the machine in red and black: "Never rock or tilt: machine can fall over causing serious injury or death. Thank you!" And a nice pictogram of a stick figure leaning on the machine that makes him stop and size it up. The vending machine is one of those biggies with little sliding doors for donuts or sandwiches. It's refrigerated. He grabs the top of the machine and tries in vain to get it to fall on top of him. Too heavy. He rips his egg salad sandwich out of its cellophane.

Outside there is absolutely no wind. It's like the calm before a squall. In the corner of the parking lot is a pile of mulch that's dimpled in the middle like a miniature volcano. There's a copse of trees with a footpath and benches for sitting not too far away near the old building but Carl is wary of making the trek and he knows people sometimes eat there at lunch. This side of the building, there isn't much—just the parking lot and saplings the company has brought in to line the boulevard that's supposed to be ACT's new grand entrance. It's a remarkable vision, really, but not one that Carl finds realistic. Seems mired in false optimism and courage, the kind of thing that used to be the norm. He gnaws on his sandwich and skirts the parking lot. People walk to their cars, pull in and out. On the other side of the lot is a cultivated wood that is dense with foliage. Pastoral. Barry and his fucking woods. He's halfway through his sandwich and gnats are assailing his eyes and the humidity has dampened his pits and midsection where his gut strains against his blue button-up. Nothing annoys him more than the damp dot on his shirt, like a wet bullseye.

He decides to head back along the long line of cars when he sees Marje, still crying, walking out of the building. She's carrying a corrugated box filled with junk. That's when it dawns on him. D. D is she lost her job. Couldn't think of it at the time, didn't even occur to him. Marje seems such a permanent fixture at ACT. Like she belongs in a desk, needs the feeling of paper between her fingers, her hands on a mouse. Last year,

two people from his department left to pursue other jobs, better jobs, with bigger pensions, 401Ks. In one of the conference rooms they had a party with petit fours and a bowl of punch. A party, like all the other parties at ACT. Someone finally had the courage to leave this place. He passes Marje wordlessly, his every attempt at conversation squelched by her weeping. The Popples and framed pictures and silk tulips from her desk, all her personal effects, in one sordid box. He lets himself look at her, the mole on her cheek, her hair stiff and coarse as duck feathers, her lips puffy and wrinkled like overripe fruit. She doesn't look back. He stares at her lumpy buttocks as she trundles to her station wagon. All that crying, he thinks. All that crying and she's getting away.

ERIN ELIZABETH SMITH

The Song of Fontina

The poets have been mysteriously
silent on the subject of cheese.
—G. K. Chesterton

It is true. I have sung of April blackberries,
toothy shallots, young romas on the vine.
I have praised the thump-round crisp
of peppers and the bushy basil
of the Mississippi.

I have troubadoured the wood ear
mushroom, lemon zest in the winey
risotto. Praised the practical meanness
of artichokes and shucked shimmer
of Gulf oysters.

And of wine and beer and the icy
caramel lick of good bourbon,
I have volumes. Such love
for the delicate hold of stems,
malbec tails in the glassware,
decanters, pint glasses, the perfect
ice crystals of well-shaken martinis.

But cheese—
the grocery store islands of cheese,
the art party tables of cheese,
the lickable glass of French fromageries.
The camemberts, parmesans, bries.

O I want to sing you cheese.
The smoked gouda
wonder of pasta. Goat cheese purpled
with merlot. Or imported feta,
that sheen of new cheese
from its brine.

Want to sing the blue cheese potatoes,
the fist-round mozzarella.
Sing the wholly Swiss triangle,
the muenster with portobello.

And all the times in the party-dark,
whiskey-blinded, when I grated pepperjack
into that drunk béchamel, while the poets
lumbered in from front porch cigarettes,

scooped the corn-blue chips into the rich,
white sauce. Silenced, for a second,
we sang and we sang
with our mouths closed.

Secret Bodies

I wear my bathing suit all summer
in the sycamore-white skin
between the tan. I wear it
like an innocence. The sun-touched flesh,
freckled copper, laid across
a bare, pale stomach—
the raw lie of nudity.

We don't always mean to hide
the memoirs of our bodies
but we do—the flattened mole
on the sole of a heel, the Christmas-
shaped birthmark, the tiny
white hair that grows out like a horn.

On my wedding
ring finger runs a thin white river
of a scar from a night of drinking
and parking lot disasters. I touch it
sometimes when I slide on the band,
this skin-sucked memory of blood
and love and the some other life
each body has.

The People-Movers

I spent all afternoon
looking for the ticket stub
that had that line I wrote
about people-movers,
their poetic relevance to age,
to memory, to the way things move
snake-quick through the gates
of airports.
But we all know how that ends—
the lost lines, the quick comments
that mean so much in the awkwardly-
backed chairs,
the cigar-thin planes waiting for us
on their tarmac.
That window with its elegant display
of Dutch jets and Seattle's finest
guzzied up with foreign names.
We barely even remember the A-gate
malls, the Chili's express
where we ate the too-warm salad
that we were hungry enough for
to suppose it was God's own sous-chef
that prepped those seeping tomatoes.
The dampness in our clothing,
the cheek scruff of my husband
who doesn't believe in shaving
for flight, who is still railing
on the TSA agent who made him chuck
his pocket knife.
And home now, with my codependent
pets who knead into my legs like bakers
too excited about their dough,
I keep thinking about that line,
that is always better in my mind than what it was,
not the one about the CNN screens
of waiting areas, or the bustle of gray
outside those rare smoking lounges in Atlanta.
But instead, I think it was about
the way a city can disappear,

how the automatronic woman keeps asking us
to watch our step, and we slow
finally
to the steady earth,
that is nothing at all like time
or poetry
but rather the way sand feels
in an undertow
or how we see ourselves reflected in restaurant
windows, so much older
than mirrors or a new lover's crooning,
in them so much more
and less ourselves
especially with speed
with the way we glance
and move,
so quickly,
on.

The Goaltender's Wife

When the season starts, the city has already begun to freeze.
The river hardens like the annealing of glass,
while the wood ducks and geese take to the sea.

They say you don't need money for a good life here.
There's the Gallery, Sparks Street. And across the river, Gateneau,
where mothers smile at my stiff French and kids lace up their skates.

Last summer, two games from winning the Cup,
we drove to Montreal, spent a day in the gardens,
you regaling me about wooly bears, their ability to predict the cold.

How moths see only yellow, green, and red, and in some breeds,
the females are want of wing, left only to crawl,
while others have no mouths, living on what they've stored in youth.

**

This October, the water has not yet made its pilgrimage to ice.
The slow roll of autumn has left the city chocked with butterflies
and restless for the new season,

for the forward from last year's draft, the new goaltender,
who made the team out of camp. He gives you migraines,
the way he laughs at everything on the ice,

how he never endured the years of uneasy phone calls,
of frigid bus trips through New England Decembers.
He leaves tickets for his wife that are always next to mine.

She is tall and blonde and has never put on skates.
She is from Radium Hot Springs, where she tells me
the steak is much thicker and the winters aren't so bad.

**

Only Mongolia is colder, they say, breath white on the city.
I unglove my hands to feel the fruit at the ByWard Market,
canvass the season's apples for sickness and decay.

I covet the butterhead lettuce brought up from the States,
and remember myself, six years younger, teaching you
in our Rosemont kitchen, how to break the core from a head,

the night spent banging the seventy-cent Iceberg against our countertops,
then guiding your hand through the leaves to cull the heart.
There, we'd spend our mornings watching the squirrels

knit nests in our neighbor's maple. There, the winter came slower,
and the thrashers would wail in the thinned trees.
There, snow could be an uncomplicated thing.

Cammi Granato as Mike Eruzione

As children, we all want to be Eruzione,
Boston kid who put that puck

above the Russian's right shoulder.
To pucker that net, the crowd

like a pulse in the wrist. Each night
blades clattered under the kitchen table,

while mom ladled casserole onto white dishes.
After, I practiced throwing my fists

into the air, my skates lifting
below me like winged sandals,

while Tony pretended to be Jim Craig,
blanket curtaining his teenage shoulders.

Now twenty years later, I'm on
that same ice, summer turning the glass

opaque, the rink flooded in steam.
It's not like TV. Here, you feel

your breath in the cage, target
the sinkhole of the goaltender's pads

and forget each golden miracle,
the ice cube quickness of a life.

KIP ZEGERS

Letter from Tom McGrath

Going through old papers, part of the summer break clean up, I found the enclosed letter from Tom McGrath which I received in 1976 on publication of my first chapbook, an issue of West End *magazine. Mr. McGrath was very generous and much more serious about this very slender first book than it deserved, but what he said about poetry influenced my practice then and it does now. I thought the letter might be of interest to readers of* NDQ*, unless many such letters exist. However, he makes it clear that he rarely wrote at such length on the practice of poetry. You can imagine what this letter meant to a young poet.*

Postmarked 30 Sept. 1976. Letter undated

Dear Kip,

You've probably forgotten that you ever sent me a copy of your book *Backyard* last March 29. I was teaching and writing a thing against a deadline until well on in summer, then illness and then an operation from which I'm still recuperating—not much strength yet.

I like your book. And it's probably true, as you say, that "we're both wondering how a life story grows," though I guess my wondering has been mostly unconscious. As far as *Letter* [*To An Imaginary Friend*] goes, anyway, the story was simply *there* as I began to write. As far as selecting the part of the life that went into the poem and *structuring* the poem itself—even a lot of that was unconscious, or uncalculated. Maybe that's why I have written some things that I was sure were parts of the long poem *Letter* but which remained autonomous "lyrics" and never (or never yet) entered the poem. (And have written some short poems that seemed "entelechies," purely autonomous and complete, which turned out to be integral passages of the long poem.

But then, unless we lived sometime in the past when there was a "tradition," and when the subject matter of poetry was either *given* (and therefore impersonal) or where the personal experience was shaped by traditional *forms* as to become impersonal except in the style and attitude (as

in the lute songs and madrigals of the 16th and 17th Centuries)—unless we had such conditions what have we except our lives to make poems from? *Themes?* Seem too abstract for most of us, generally. So—since Whitman, poetry seems to move strongly toward the autobiographical—or autobiographical-mystical—or whatever. And while most poets turn their lives into short—or shortish—lyrics, there's certainly been a big push in recent times toward the long semi or pseudo autobiographical poem, toward use of narrative, etc.

I didn't expect to be embarked on such a project when I began. And at the time—1954 or 55—I didn't know anyone who had done or was doing what (as it turned out) I was trying to do. Still doing, I guess, since the poem seems not to be finished yet. And perhaps it won't be—but that will only happen if I die before completing it—I don't believe in *that* part of the theory of "open for"—and little if anything else for that matter.

Your book seems to come from somewhere between the kind of long poem I'm working at and a book of autonomous short poems. But there is a solid spine of autobiography (or semi or pseudo autobiography) in it. In this it is much more secure than most of what some people are now calling the "serial long poem"—a thing like Berryman's *Dream Songs*, for example, which some locos call a long poem, though it is no more a single work than the ordinary sonnet sequence from the days when there were such things as sonnet sequences. I write this, I guess about the first part of your book.

I guess some of the problems about writing a poem that uses one's life as a kind of spine has to do with selection and amplification. Any life, *properly written* is valuable and interesting. *But for a long poem* we must find those parts of our lives (though they may not interest us as much as certain other parts) which are symptomatic or emblematic of a whole *set* of lives. We really live two lives—a unique life and a representative one —which is *also* unique first of all. I think it is the representative part (*uniquely expressed* and *uniquely made into a poem*) which we ought to try to see (and you seem to be doing this—perhaps you've luckily had a "symbolic" life). A life wholly unique (not just subjectively, as all our lives really are) but *in the world* would be impossible to communicate. In fact, of course it is not possible since even to the solipsist or artist the world is here nonetheless.

This goes on a lot more than I'd expected, but anyway. . .

A life interests us if it shows us a lot of quite new—or rare or exotic—experience—it would be interesting even if written in the worst prose or verse, or without any insight at all, as mere reportage.

The representative life by definition is what a whole class of people have had some experience of, even if they were only half alive or awake at the time, or failed to respond or understand fully what was happening

to them. (Most workers, for example, are so full of false consciousness that they don't much experience their exploitation except factually and physically). It follows that our representative experience, where it is *most* quotidian or banal must be seen (expressed sung or said) in the poem most uniquely.

And that brings us to language in all its visionary, magical and "poetic" aspects. And here I guess I'll stop for now. We are of opposite schools (which doesn't stop me from liking your work—my taste—my practice too, I suppose—is pretty catholic). In terms of a kind of short-hand: you are of the school that runs from Wordsworth through W. C. Williams and his epigones (I'm not putting you with the latter!)—the "real language men" school as Wordsworth has it. The school I belong to doesn't have a name, but if I say that Hart Crane is one of its masters you'll know what I mean —that I'm more given to metaphor and image, which you may be opposed to in theory as well as practice. (I'm not given much to theory myself, and this is probably the longest note I've ever *voluntarily* written on it). If you have taken George Oppen as one of your masters, you have found the very best of the school. A very good man. I like both him and his poetry very much, though I haven't seen George since the so-called March on the Pentagon in October 1967. I can still some times smell the tear gas up in the parking lot.

Is this any help? And by the way, is *West End* still going? I promised them a letter.

All best,
[s] Tom McGrath

(The following poem is from Zegers' *Backyard*. Bronx, NY: *West End magazine*, Vol. 3, No. 3. 1975.)

Herman Calls the Numbers

Frank the dock foreman says you go
with Herman tonight, and he does not even
look, he's walking out to wipe his headlights,
sweep out the cab, cursing the day driver
as I climb on and Herman jockeys it out
to Division Street. A stocky man in cap,
thick glasses, he tilts his head to see across
the steering wheel, slow and steady, making
every light to Tribune Tower, down South State,
along Vincennes, stop to stop in streets of bars

and all night barbecue, deserted rotting store fronts,
pitch black muddy alleys, Herman going steady,
telling of a driver shot at. I jump up and down,
dump the bundles as Herman calls the numbers,
giving free papers where he has to, then
it's back downtown. Second run is way southside,
Oaklawn, Evergreen Park, grass and dew and lights
turn green, Herman driving slow and steady.
Morgan Park is the young widow's luncheonnette,
Herman eating like he drives through oatmeal
coffee eggs ham hash browns. Milk-men, cops
are up and Herman talks to the milk-man,
and I eat well by custom. Herman palms the check,
and moving slowly, he walks out.

BARBARA FRYREAR

Austin

Gray fingers thrum deep and limbic
on the flat black roof of my old home.
From the wide shoulders of the eaves
drips a beaded curtain while I sit
curled up dry, reading in a corner
of the screened porch. All around me
the world's a jeweled pavilion, with tall
green lace of bamboo and black
branches of oaks angling across
the sky's wet tent. Inside, the smell
of old wood, old books, old pipe tobacco,
outside, magnolias and rain.

After the Storm

The air, fresh-laundered, hangs out in the sun to dry.
Warm damp smells rise from the earth where grubs doze.
A council of toadstools, gray and orange,
has sprung up from the rubble
of the fallen blackjack oak beyond the thicket.

My toes stretch. My soles can feel
leaf mold from last fall making rich soil,
St. Augustine greening up, soft and cool,
and sharp twigs knocked down by the storm.

Synergy in Blue

He played blues to the cat on a twelve-string guitar
His skin all icy with sweat
Old Sinner sprang up and made for the car
Let out a howl that carried afar
Arousing a yellow muskrat
Who blew on his oboe eight to the bar
As he played his blues to the cat

The music they made grew wild and free
So staining the air with blue ecstasy
That an owl in the crotch of a bur oak tree
Took the bass on his own with eclat

A passerby said it was all quite bizarre
To hear blues played at night on a twelve-string guitar
To a cat

ANGIE MACRI

Swallows

Johnnys jump up as we go down.
The dust on earth is rising
in spirit tails and dust devils.
We roll and push again.

Love is purple as those flowers,
eyes open to oak undersides.
Love is dark as Lake Sylvia
and crows walking on its edges.

Sliding fingers, palms in pressure,
we come along the cedars now
in the charcoal of a controlled burn.
It's cold for April, lead, and bitter.

I know the swallows are coming
from the Southern Hemisphere
with swans in stars and sweet
alyssum and sweet birch beer.

They call. They swing up
under bridges, barn lofts, interstates,
where most people don't go.
They build their homes

from mud mouthfuls, and their chicks
hatch and grow. They all fly south
past Mexico, lavender and eager.
Sometime, lover, we'll move so.

What Passion Dictates

We keep our facts
in sight: the dog days
are rising; ozone
strings a silver haze
over the southern streets;
the dogwoods are dying.

I am the bezel
to your stone. That
is wise, dear July.
There is nothing else
metal could ask for.

Passion dictates
in the face
of boiled morning.
We fly as grain cradles,
fingers sliding
against the wheat.

We ret the flax,
the skin of the stem
becoming cloth and lace.
Stubborn as dawn
and in concert

with it, we mark
time before noon.
Our room holds
angles, vowels,
bold opposition of skin
without ruin.

Telling Beads

Burn the poor and keep the corn,
and your bones will be bare
in bed. Beads and teeth tell.

Their first time: aluminum
lips, closed eyes, button fly.
Just get it in. He laughs like hell.

Like a knock-knock joke,
who's there, who knows?
The sun chokes into morning.

Palms never touch. Bells
pound, violin hounds, but never
aloud. Go. She hopes still.

He's up again, and she lets
herself be glad. Once, twice—
isn't it best to stop counting?

Love is patient, forgiving, kind,
so it must keep on one side
of the bed for twelve years

until the morning she throws
the prayer past his head.
They come—mice, millions—

and she goes down
from that tower, down the Rhine,
away, as if he is dead.

Velvet

In the velvet chokers
of sugar, bakers bend
dough in the dark.
Their neon up the street
glows before any other.

In such early hours,
in the weeks before
my confirmation, I worried
about the unforgivable sin
against the spirit.

Love of my own,
even then I couldn't
believe it so. But my prayers
still are a baker's dozen.
So much can go wrong.

Our son sleeps, legs
thrown as if caught
running. Our other
children seem
to jump or fly.

Prelude to dawn,
the oil of my skin
is slung to your pores,
breathing, sure,
an underscore.

We tune, tune, out
of catechism, away
from alarm. You rock me
back to velvet
in our sleeping room.

MATTHEW BAUMAN

Seeing the Sound

The *thump-thumping* thumped deep as a buffalo stamping the ground. An elk, at least. The other researchers—a team mostly of biologists from the University of South Dakota—had wandered in their own directions looking for three-toed woodpeckers. Although I froze mid-stride—a brief flash of fear—I knew better that a ruffed grouse was nearby. The soft blue of daybreak had just rolled across the sky, and veils of morning mist hovered in the forest canopy. My feet were cold and wet, dew now soaking up my pant legs past my ankles. Even though the conditions were a nuisance, I was enlivened to be out in the Black Hills, breathing the chill air and observing the first minutes of a new day. Faster than sunlight overtaking darkness, though, the grouse displaced the stillness of the woods. I imagine the frozen look on my face, when I heard the drumming, as that of a toddler's when dumbstruck, surprised, curious, slowly comprehending a new and strange experience. Twenty-nine years old and discovering the breadth of a world full of noises, I was learning to hear again, building, like a child, an episteme of sound.

Standing still in front of a downed tree trunk, I heard crackles of aspen leaves waking to new light, grass flicking straight in the footprints behind me, the morning peeps of a few birds near and far. I knew I'd recognize a woodpecker jack-hammering its beak if I heard it, but I don't think I had ever stopped to listen for it before. This early in the season I was also listening for the quiet peck and woody pull of the bird burrowing a nest into an aspen or flaking bark off trees to eat the insects beneath. All were noises I didn't know how to pay attention to or listen for. So all I really knew—this being my first week and because birds had always been just birds—is that I was listening for something other than the morning quiet. When the thumping began again, I just had to find it.

Although I was a novice in the birding world, I was home in the Black Hills in western South Dakota where we conducted our study of the three-toed woodpecker. In addition to being born and raised there, I had worked for the Forest Service during summers in college. Part of me believed that

these woods held no more surprises than I had already witnessed. However, I had never thought to see the forest with my ears.

Most of my work with the Forest Service had been thinning overgrown pine stands. I operated a chainsaw and wore earplugs; I concerned myself with fourteen-foot spacing and saving the straightest, healthiest tree. Then they trained me to study forest regrowth, and I learned to measure trees with a clinometer and take bore samples to assess the tree's age. Included with these vegetation surveys, I learned to identify plants and shrubs—Oregon grape, chokecherry, kinnikinnick, scores of others. Plopping in the middle of the designated radius, I'd flip through page after page of the plant guidebook, identifying as many species as inhabited the area. While I enjoyed the expansion of my knowledge of the forest, the work became monotonous and eventually less than satisfying. Before long, I was plodding through the woods, toting a Blackberry computer for data input.

Emasculating isn't the right word, but operating a sleek, hand-held, touch-screen computer in the woods simply didn't fit the work I had grown to associate with forestry. Tapping the screen with the little plastic pen thing—whatever it's called—drew my attention away from orange tiger lilies and purple lady-slipper orchids, long-horned beetles and dew-dropped spider webs. I had begun to spend more time looking at a palm-sized screen than observing activity in the natural world. Learning to listen for birds, however, reawakened my perception of the forest and gave me renewed interest in knowing and understanding the wildlands of my home. Sound, as it was, gave me a new lens to see through.

The sonorous thumping won over my curiosity, and I stalked after it through the wet undergrowth, stepping over woody debris that, if snapped underfoot, might betray my proximity to the sound's source. Each time the drumming began, I slowed and stopped, redirecting my focus to locate the grouse's position. Not that I understood at the time, but I was navigating by sound—a skill we all have but rarely have use for. I pursued the drumming until I dared not get any closer for fear I'd spook the bird away. Dave, the sponsoring professor who I had just met on the car ride that morning, had camouflaged himself behind a tree and pointed at a decaying stump thirty feet away where I saw the ruffed grouse staging its courting ritual. Raising the binoculars to my eyes, I watched its wings womp back and forth against its puffed breast producing each rapid-fire thump so deep one wouldn't believe it came from such a small bird.

I could see it and I could hear it, and I knew it was real.

Dave was a slender, outdoorsy-looking man with eager eyes. His cheeks and chin were a deep blue this particular morning, and I assumed that his normal look was clean-shaved. Seeing him at the site of the grouse's drumming should have alerted me to more than the fact we both were merely following our curiosity. Perhaps he had heard it long before I

had. It didn't occur to me that, more than just studying three-toed woodpeckers and teaching biology classes for the University of South Dakota, Dave was passionate about birds in general. I saw only the outer plumage of a middle-aged biology professor, but underneath, I would come to realize, he was a full-fledged birder.

Eric, another member of the team and closer in age to me than to Dave, taught at a different university in South Dakota. His stringy dark hair, bushy beard, and grunge-rock appearance completely deceived my notion of an ornithologist. He seemed more like the kind of guy I'd see at a mountain-town tavern drinking brown ales and throwing darts. I would find out later that Dave and Eric are two of the most prominent birders in the state. South Dakota Ornithological Union records show Dave's and Eric's life lists as third and fifth, respectively—a mere seven birds apart. Also, six of the top ten "South Dakota Big Day Records" are held by Dave and Eric cooperatively. The difference between my birding expertise and theirs couldn't have been less wide than horizon to horizon.

Their ears were as honed as a trained musician's to every instrument's flat, whole, and sharp notes. They could distinguish a *pwik* from a *pip*, a pinched *tweep* from a nasal *squeet*. And they knew one species of brown bird the size of a golf ball from another species of brown bird the size of a golf ball by the subtle difference in shading around the ear, not to mention tiny color inflections due to the season, maturity, and gender of the bird that play a role in their identification. The encyclopedic knowledge they had of birds—a lifetime of careful study and rote memorization, the idea of which years ago dissuaded me from science in favor of language arts—astonished me. I wanted to be like them. I wanted what I thought at the time was their superhuman skills of listening, and I envied the knowledge one could possess simply by cultivating an awareness of sound.

We arrived in the woods every morning between five-thirty and six, driving the gravel forest roads until we'd find a suitable mixed-woods habitat—aspens for the woodpeckers to burrow nests into and coniferous trees for them to feed off the insects within. With a black battery-powered blow horn blasting a pre-recorded drumming pattern, we stood off the gravel road and listened through the silence for a reply. The woodpeckers would defend their territory by drumming back at us. At first, I hardly ever heard what gave the others raised eyebrows and knowing grins, so I listened harder, trying to direct my focus on sound. I felt silly doing the equivalent of squinting my ears. I don't know a better expression for it. For how do you listen harder? How can one describe the effort of paying closer attention with a sensory perception that's always active? But it *is* possible, I would learn. I began to wonder that if we can train our ears to hear previously unheard sounds, what other noises in this vast world could we hear if we knew what to listen for and how to listen to it?

The three-toed's drum pattern starts slow, relatively speaking, and speeds up, whereas the more common hairy woodpecker's drum begins fast and tapers to a halt. To untrained ears, as mine were, I couldn't tell a difference. Even at the end of the summer, I could only make educated guesses on which was which, correct only slightly more often than I was wrong. Nevertheless, Amanda, the doctoral student leading the research, her husband Chris, Eric, and Dave when he wasn't busy at the university, helped me over and over to hear the distinction. Instead of marching straightaway into the woods in pursuit of the sound, they'd wait and allow me to hear the drumming a few more times.

"See?" one of them would say. "See how it picks up pace at the end?"

See? An odd expression when you're listening.

At the end of the first week, Eric located a live cavity at the edge of a wooded hillside deep up a grassy draw. Eighteen feet up a pine snag, a woodpecker burrowed a round hole and built a nest. We could drive a mile up the draw and then hike along a ready-made game trail to the site, packed with a home-fashioned net and armloads of examination supplies. Chris, standing all of five-foot-six, extended the net and reached it up to cover the hole. With a small branch, he tapped the tree, scaring the three-toed woodpecker into the confines of the filament net—a female, I was told, because she didn't have the bright yellow crown males have.

My stomach churned as I listened to the bird shriek and flail in the net tangling itself worse and worse. It looked helpless and sounded terrified. Once Chris got a handle on it, he carefully unwrapped her bill, toes, and primary wing feathers from the net. And as he nearly freed her from the strands, she kicked violently and re-ensnared both legs, screaming all the while.

While Chris untangled the woodpecker completely, lingering a few steps away in a grassy patch of the forest, Amanda told me, "It's important we don't take too long. They'll abandon their cavity if overly distressed." Her Tennessee accent was still new to my ears.

So much for this one, I thought, as it shrieked and shook in Chris's palm, until finally it settled into obeisance. With the quiet came a calm. I saw a subtle thrill in Chris's eyes as he held the bird in his palm, its black head protruding like a cigar stub from between his fingers.

Amanda and Eric laid preparations for the woodpecker's examination: a white drop cloth; calipers to measure the bill, wing, tarsus, and tail; a spiral notebook and a pencil snapped in half; a small scale; a green cloth bag to calm the bird while we weighed it; and a medical kit with peroxide, cottonballs, short pricking needles, capillary tubes, and yellow microtubes with anticoagulant. I stood behind them, the morning sun just now warming the air. I was eager to witness and be a part of the procedure.

Chris, an English professor I had worked with, decided better to let the scientists take over, and handed the woodpecker to Eric, who had been

on the crew the entire four years of compiling data. Eric appeared excited to hold the woodpecker again, as if remembering the sensation from the summers prior. He turned his wrist forward and backward, looking closely at the head and bill. His visual examination appeared both scientific and filled with child-like curiosity, even letting the woodpecker drum its beak on his finger.

"Doesn't that hurt?" I asked.

"Yeah, a little bit." And he smiled.

With the bird in one hand and calipers in the other, Eric rolled the jaws to the appropriate measure of each part. I recorded the numbers he called out while Amanda looked on to make sure I was logging the data in the correct spaces of the notebook. When Eric finished, he asked Amanda if she wanted to draw the blood sample. My work for the moment was finished.

Eric, Amanda, and Chris knelt on their knees in a circle on the white drop cloth. Supplies were arranged everywhere. I felt like a kid on a playground joining a new group and trying to be if not an active participant then a visible presence. What's the plan, I wondered, dodging between shoulders so I could get the best view. I examined a capillary tube for the first time—it's narrowness and fragility, about the size of the lead in the broken pencil and four inches long. Eric held the woodpecker belly-up and pulled its wing out. Chris leaned in at the ready with the tubes. Amanda, wasting no time, swabbed the bird's elbow clean with a peroxide-soaked cotton ball, parting the feathers and revealing the pink skin beneath, the purple vein. She held her breath and stabbed the needle into the delicate flesh where appeared a bright red bead of blood.

The frail capillary tubes pulled the blood with a force of suction my awareness of physics was unprepared for. One, two, they both filled from the single drop. It was over in seconds and Amanda covered the wound with another cotton ball.

"What's the blood for?" I asked, as Amanda blew the blood into the plastic microtubes, the viscous red cloud settling to the bottom of the anticoagulant. So far, I had only learned that we were locating the woodpeckers, counting the population, and monitoring their fledging rate.

She told me about the isolated pocket of the species located in the Black Hills and that her dissertation sought to determine if enough genetic variation warranted a Black Hills subspecies distinct from the Rocky Mountain population of three-toed woodpeckers hundreds of miles to the west. When she finished explaining, I asked with a tentative level of sarcasm, "So if you got your own species, that'd be a pretty big deal, huh?"

Eric looked up with a smile that denoted I was more right than I knew.

"Yeah," Amanda answered, distracted while she packed away supplies.

After the exam, Eric passed the woodpecker to me—its warm body cradled in my palm, its nape nestled gently on the webbing between my

knuckles. In the transition, the small bird had tucked up its legs, and while I gave it a moment to settle, it wrapped its toes around my pinky finger, its grip firm and tenuous at once. Turning my wrist back and forth to examine it as Eric had done, I looked carefully at the female woodpecker's white throat and white speckles on its black crown, its black beak and small skull that endures such violent blows. Yet the bird felt delicate in my grasp, warm and trembling. I want to believe that I felt its tiny heart beating, a rhythmic texture I could hear through the nerve endings in my hand.

Amanda shot me a look to release the woodpecker, though I could've admired it for several more minutes—so small and wild, so feathered and marvelous. In one continuous movement, I opened my hand and raised my arm to the sky, the small female woodpecker taking flight from my palm, squawking for her mate or perhaps screaming at us for her inconvenience.

I let go of the bird, but birding was sinking its claws into me. As we traveled from habitat to habitat, I studied *The Sibley Guide to Birds*, working out the differences between species of woodpeckers. Amanda told me in her Southern drawl that three-toeds can be confused with hairy woodpeckers but distinguished by the black bars on their backs and bellies. When I dropped *The Sibley Guide* frustrated by the number of black and white woodpeckers, Amanda said, "Don't worry about the black-backed or the downy. We're not likely to see them out here." A 2002 book on South Dakota birds, which Dave co-authored, doesn't even describe the black-backed; it simply says "See Three-toed Woodpecker comments for identification."

My apprenticeship into the birding world took weeks. I'd hear a woodpecker from the road responding to our blow horn. "Oh! There's one," I'd say.

"Nope. Hairy," someone would reply.

Each day, it seemed, I learned a new sound, and the forest, as I knew it through listening, began to divide into parts, thus becoming larger in my awareness of it. *This* was the sound of robins, *this* of chickadees, *this* of woodpeckers, and so forth. I was like a child graduating from the eight-color box of crayons to sixteen and eventually to the stupefying box of sixty-four. New birds, new sounds, new knowledge.

Eventually, I could distinguish the flat *pwik* of the three-toed woodpecker from the sharp *peek* of the hairy as well as the three-toed's drum that moves slow to fast compared to the hairy's fast to slow. All of these black and white birds became individuated.

From my days with the Forest Service, when I'd look at pine trees—their spacing and crown density and the bark's shade of orange—to now, captivated by birds, bird calls, and bird ecology, I witnessed the forest anew, its overflowing with specific species rather than LBJs (little brown jobs), resplendent with noises I never heard before because I simply wasn't paying close enough attention but now can recognize. Learning to

listen to birds changed the composition of the forest altogether: the underbrush *weefed* and the tree trunks *pwiked* and the canopy *cooed*. The more I could hear, the deeper I'd look. Curiosity of sound became an addiction.

I learned to listen and catalogue and consider, often keeping my guess to myself so as not to form errant knowledge and also not to reveal my mistakes, even though the number of them was diminishing. When one of the others confirmed the three-toed's drum, we'd set off into the woods, wherein I confronted new puzzles: cavity and bird identification. Three-toed woodpeckers don't typically burrow nests over eighteen feet above ground, while red-naped sapsuckers do. Their nests are virtually indistinguishable to the novice eye. And then I had to know the difference between a fresh three-toed cavity and an older one—they make a new nest every year and sometimes more than one if the need arises.

We scouted for cavities individually, which provided me with hours of hiking and listening and looking. As much as listening and identifying, I was able to practice the skill of sound localization—the ability to follow a sound by its direction and distance from me. Because I was so reliant on my ears to guide me, I hardly recall the distance I covered walking, the number of logs I must've stepped over, the valleys I labored up and down. I scoured dense hillsides over and over searching for a little hole in an aspen or dead pine. Between Amanda, Eric, Chris, and me, we'd scramble across opposite ridges, divergent draws, and high country woodlands looking for a singular cavity hidden under a branch, otherwise veiled, or, if we were lucky, carved conspicuously along the tree's stem. Just as my ears adapted to filtering recognizable sounds, so too my eyes singled out every aspen and dead pine or spruce that might conceal a cavity.

I learned about other tree-dwelling birds such as northern flickers, which make a more oval nest, and their repetitive *wik-a-wik-a-wik-a* call easily demarcates it from other woodpeckers. Nuthatches make significantly smaller cavities that are usually closer to the ground, but their nests always required a second glance. And once, a pair of mountain bluebirds nested in a long-ago abandoned flicker cavity—the tree was gray, barkless, and oozed wood dust out its exposed roots from ants eating out the center.

Although we only talked about it in jest, we competed to find cavities. Apparently, the year before, the team had only located about four active ones, so I was initiated with the understanding that every cavity was cause for celebration. Plus, whoever found it got to name it. Most times we named the cavity after the nearest road or landmark: Cavity 641, Long Draw, 201. The first one I found was self-indulgently named the Bauman Cavity since the road's name was already being used. A week later, however, Chris discovered that the woodpecker pair actually inhabited a discreet cavity ten yards away, so it was renamed the Bauman-Ervin Cavity. Although he could've taken it for himself, Chris reluctantly shared credit with me.

Sometimes it took days and weeks to find the cavity that belonged to the woodpeckers we knew inhabited the area. Even then, the success of the research was tenuous. In one habitat, a chorus of frogs in two adjacent stock ponds sung out their position as I wandered the woods near and far always knowing my relative location by the frogs' croaking. While searching for cavities, I followed a trail of bones to a mostly intact bull elk skull. Critters had significantly chewed the antlers, though, and it was crawling with ants burrowing into the bone marrow. After hours and days of searching, Eric found a fresh cavity, which I wanted to call Elk Skull. The next morning, full of newfound excitement, we hiked in all our supplies, including the "peeper"—an extendable camera. When we peeped the hole at seven in the morning, we saw a flying squirrel cuddled up inside, fat and tired from the eggs it had eaten. We hung our heads in disappointment. Under any name, Elk Skull would never be.

Nevertheless, as far as I was concerned, the listening and the searching, the confirming and disconfirming, the excitement and let down were all part of the thrill, part of my rejuvenated curiosity. I started researching online during the evenings wherein I learned that the American three-toed woodpecker has only been classified since 2003 when scientists agreed that the species was genetically different enough to distinguish it from the Eurasian species. Although I never said as much, in light of this new information, I figured Amanda's research might have been overly ambitious to earn her a subspecies so soon after the species had been named. But if I was new to birding and woodpeckers, I was wholly ignorant about such taxonomical matters in the science community. So I kept my mouth shut.

Instead, I asked other questions: Why three toes? What makes that so special? Amanda explained that only two species of woodpeckers in the world have three toes, the usually arctic-dwelling black-backed being the other. Like the three-toed, the black-backed woodpecker maintains an isolated population in the Black Hills, and the male also has a yellow crown. The most notable difference is simply the solid black back. Amanda and Eric told me that having three toes allows these woodpeckers to deliver stronger blows as they peck and pull through tree bark. But what they gain in power they sacrifice in climbing ability. The three-toed especially is known for clinging motionlessly to a tree for extended lengths of time.

About midsummer, we were returning from checking on the female three-toed we first caught and examined when I heard over NPR's morning news a woodpecker's drum out the window. We had driven this road dozens of times tracking the three-toed's range and checking on the cavity, so to hear it drumming this far down the draw was entirely unexpected.

"Hold on a sec," I told Amanda. She stopped the truck and turned down the radio. I stepped out the passenger door at the cutbank, below a

stunted pine. In a matter of just two inches of height change, a perfect woodpecker cavity gaped open and obvious. An overhanging limb just barely obscured the cavity from the road. I considered its shape and size, the soft curve on the lower lip, and the bright yellow color of freshly exposed pine. Before I could announce my discovery of a new three-toed cavity, the woodpecker drummed again—more like a three-toed than a hairy—at which Eric, Chris, and Amanda jumped out of the SUV. Such commotion near its nest excited the bird to a frantic harangue of our proximity. It *peeked* at us incessantly—a behavior I had yet to witness from three-toeds or hairys. I followed the bird with my ears.

"There," I said, pointing up a pine tree to our left.

"Oh, my God," Amanda said, looking through her binoculars, hyphenating *God* with her Tennessee accent. "Matt, that's a black-backed."

I glassed the woodpecker through my own binoculars—white breast, barred sides, black back, yellow crown. "I thought you said they inhabit burn areas," I asked Amanda. The nearest such habitat was fifteen miles away near Deadwood—the Grizzly Gulch fire of 2002 which burned nearly 12,000 acres.

Amanda's voice heightened. "I can't believe this. This is just crazy."

I didn't know what a big deal it was until Amanda and Eric's reactions filled me with gratification. I had found something rare, perhaps an "accidental." Dave's book indicates that the last confirmed sighting in the county was 1989, eighteen years earlier. I felt lucky most of all, but I also felt proud that I had perhaps earned some individual recognition among this group of birders.

Near the end of field research in mid-July, Dave and I were chasing a three-toed up, down, across, and every which way on a pine-covered hillside. From the road across a clearing, we had both heard its sharp *pwik* followed by a signature in-flight call. By this point in the summer, my ears were honed, and I was all-out birding. With just the faint call to guide us, we entered the woods a hundred yards apart. I strolled into the forest, not thinking that I needed to find the bird or that I needed to find it before Dave, but rather reflecting on the course of the summer, knowing that any day might be our last, that I'd have to give up the *Sibley* guidebook and the expensive binoculars I had been using. We had doubled the data collected from the previous two years combined, and Amanda said as much that she was ready for the lab work. Besides, it was our regular quitting time this early in the afternoon, and we would've driven home, except that Dave—the grant procuring sponsor—wanted to keep birding.

I stopped to take a picture of a tall, twisting, barkless tree when I heard the woodpecker's in-flight call again far in the distance. I had enough confidence—and arrogance—to think I might be able to track

down this bird before Dave, one of the leading ornithologists in the state. We each traced its hollow *pwik* from here to there and back and forth, sometimes bumping into each other to report which direction we heard it last; then we tramped on different routes, individual directions.

Considering we'd been out since 5:30 that morning, the afternoon was drawing late at two o'clock. But I was enjoying myself and the friendly competition when suddenly I heard the scratching and peeling of a bird foraging in bark. I crept closer, taking slow silent steps, scanning a spruce tree ahead, trying to locate the woodpecker through the dense lateral branches. The spruce was skinny but thirty-some feet tall and packed in a cluster of others like it. Looking for the black and white bird was all but futile. So I listened, and not daring to move any closer, I estimated it halfway up the tree. It foraged for a few minutes, and then I heard a rustling below me. Dave was leaning against a tree. So intently was I listening for the bird, I never noticed he was there.

He whispered, "Do you see it?" Had he not noticed me either? Had I beat him to the tree?

I whispered back, "No. You?"

He shook his head.

Between us, our field of view covered over halfway around the spruce, and we listened to the woodpecker jump up the tree and slide back down, tip-toe around, yet we never saw it until it flew away, noticing immediately the yellow crown indicative of a male three-toed woodpecker. Simply spotting it—confirming sight and sound—was satisfaction enough to call the day over.

We never returned in search for that woodpecker, the fledging season mostly over. In late July, persistent rains forced us to call the research complete; we had gathered enough information anyway. I was sorry to give up the binoculars and *Sibley Guide* provided for me and sad that I wouldn't have more time with two of South Dakota's preeminent birders.

Years later, camping with a high school friend and his wife and two kids in northern Idaho, I bartered a meal in exchange for babysitting while they cooked. The newborn Ellianna lay quietly in an oversized campchair, buried in a pink fleece blanket. But two year-old Dakota was hungry, impatient, and needed attention. I had the binoculars out from the beginning—though he liked to use them backwards—but I hadn't shown him my book yet. Dakota and I walked to my car, his tentative bare feet withstanding the dirt and rocks. He was still in his blue swimsuit shorts and shirt from earlier that day.

"Map?" That's his name for me because apparently it's easier than Matt. I like that I might be an exploratory guide as he discovers the world for himself. "This's your car," he identified.

"Yep. This one's mine. Which one's yours?"

He pointed to their blue Ford sedan.

I grabbed the *Sibley Guide* out of the back seat and explained to him as we walked back that we were going to look at birds.

At my campchair, I lifted him into my lap, opened the book to a random page, and he slammed his crusty finger down and screamed, "Birds!"

Proud that he knew what a bird was, he craned his neck up at me with bright eyes and a smile only a child can smile. We flipped through pages, ten at a time, until we reached the waterfowl section. Dakota pulled his hand out of his mouth, smacking a wet finger on an image.

"Duck," he pointed.

"Yep."

Next page.

"Duck?"

"Yep, that's a duck too."

Next page.

"Duck?"

He hadn't any idea so many different kinds of ducks existed, probably hadn't noticed the four different kinds of ducks on the facing pages, either. But we all start somewhere, noticing the different colors, then shapes, until finally we can distinguish a shallow *pwik* from a sharp *peek*.

A shadow passed across our campsite, and Dakota looked up. I had been watching and listening to the ospreys all day, though saying nothing.

"That's an osprey," I told him, flipped to the page, and read from the guidebook: "This unique species, sometimes placed in its own family, feeds on fish it captures by hovering, then plunging feet-first into water." Dakota sat silent and rather confused. "It eats fish," I simplified.

"Fish?"

Reading from the book, I had lost my audience. Dakota didn't care much for a bird he could hardly see soaring well above the fir treetops. But in the distance, I could still hear them.

"Dakota, can you hear that bird over there?" I pointed to an invisible source. "That's an osprey and it goes—" forcing my voice falsetto—"*tewp*, *tewp*, *teelee*, *teelee*, *tewp*."

His eyes lit up again, the excited white smile, gaps in his baby teeth. He mimicked me: "*Toop*, *teee*, *teee*."

NORMAN NATHAN

Absent

You said you missed my lecture;
one day I'll miss my own,
and not because I want to stay away;
even if my words were halting,
losing the point I was making,
still I'd be breathing, seeing, hearing
and feeling the floor beneath my feet;

so miss no more;
the flower, large or small,
blossoms for us;
I wish you had been there;
I felt you were.

C. RONALD EDWARDS

Eighteen Months:
One Profile of My Father

The Utah County Jail was 30 minutes from Grandma's house. She couldn't drive, so I drove her, every Thursday, for eighteen months to visit her son—my father. The first time we visited, Grandma didn't ask that I turn on my blinker, or slow down, or not drive so damn close to the curb. She didn't speak, her eyes fixed on the highway leading us from Dad's childhood home to the cell he now lived in. Grandma was seventy-eight. She stood five two with straight brown hair and a short round nose, traits she passed down to my father and then to me. Raised in Charleston, a farming community in central Utah, Grandma often spoke of the Great Depression, saying that she survived on SPAM, water, and the will of the Lord. In the evenings, she sat in the living room with Cheetos, and a Sprite, and listened to the Book of Mormon on audio. After my parents' divorce, I moved in under two conditions: I would attend church, and I would keep my hair short.

This was the summer of '98. Each cellblock of the Utah County Jail is named after a ski resort—Alta, Solitude, Snowbird, and Sundance. We met Dad in the Solitude corridor; it was stagnant and dry and not what I'd expected. I was 16 and Mormon and didn't understand the distinction between prison and jail. I assumed sweat and sin, anger and remorse, would weight the air, but the corridor was clean and church quiet. Dad sat behind Plexiglass, arms crossed reverently, wearing a white crew collared T-shirt that was visible through the v-neck of an orange jump suit. Boyish heart-breaking freckles spackled his cheekbones and contrasted his small-pitted eyes and dark eyebrows. His lips were puckered—monkey-like—because he had no teeth.

Dad communicated through a blue telephone with a heavy metal cable. The receiver crackled, flattening his usual chirp to the husky baritone of a long time smoker. Two weeks in jail, and his face already showed a mix of fear and boredom, eyes glossy and cold, and at times I couldn't tell if he was looking at us or a reflection in the glass. Gray

streaked his black hair, and as we spoke, he licked his palm and dragged it across his scalp. Dad was given an eighteen-month sentence for driving under the influence with a revoked license, forging prescriptions, and insubordination towards a police officer. Later, he missed court dates. These offenses were misdemeanors, but once placed together before a judge, they became felonies.

There was one phone, so Grandma and I took turns.

"I'm happy you stopped by," Dad said. He asked how I was doing, and said he needed a drink. "Not a lot happens in here, and I can't sleep."

Grandma and I swapped places, and as she and Dad spoke, I wondered what Dad thought about when he was awake, at night, in his bunk. Did he think about me? Or his mother? Did he retrace his steps, wondering how he found himself in an 8 by 15 cell with three other men, or was his mind as blank as the white cinderblock walls that surrounded him? I don't know, but what I do know is that each time we visited Dad all I could think about was how badly I never wanted to become him. And as Grandma gazed at Dad, saying little, her small hand holding a handkerchief, she must have wondered where she went wrong raising her son.

In the fall of '97, Dad's teeth blackened and died. He never told me why, and I assume it had something to do with his Vicodin addiction. Before they could fester, his teeth were pulled. His mouth became a soft meaty cavity with a lonely tongue. Grandma gave him money for dentures, but Dad spent it on alcohol and Vicodin. Without the reinforcement of teeth, his flesh caved in on the jawbone. Scrambled eggs, Jell-O, oatmeal, and other soft entrees were his diet. He slurred. His gums bled. Fluid the color of weak strawberry milk drained from the corners of his lips. He caught it with his left cuff.

Dad was 46. Hunching made him appear shorter than five seven. He was a laboring man with flat feet and slender hips, traits he passed to me. He walked with a feeble barrel-legged strut, his eyes fogged and distant. He wore weighty leather boots and thick jeans. Monday through Saturday Dad installed heating and air-conditioning ducts. Sundays were spent alone in a one-bedroom apartment high and drunk and watching the Playboy Channel. Once, when dad was visiting us, Grandma asked why Randy was printed on the back of his belt. "So when I pull my head out of my ass, I'll know my name," he said. She told him he had a foul mouth, and sent him to his apartment.

During my junior year, about six months before Dad's incarceration, he installed my high school library ventilation system. Once, I watched him from a library alcove. I didn't tell him I was there; I just wanted to watch him.

Dad lugged a seven-foot aluminum ladder in his right hand with a sloppy right leaning stride, his weary boot heels scraping the carpet. In his

left hand was a small plastic cooler. He leaned the ladder against the wall and sat on the floor. From the cooler he pulled a flat aluminum can of herring and a Budweiser tucked in a thin blue insulated can liner. He hunched, his sloping shoulders bent forward, a beer between his legs, and gripped chunks of fish with his fingers and chomped them with hard calloused gums. I remember a weight in my gut—heavy and unyielding. I was 16 years old. Dad wore a size nine shoe, 32-inch waist jeans, and a medium shirt. So did I. His handwriting was sloppy and scrunched, lost somewhere between cursive and standard. So was mine. In so many ways the two of us were similar: hair and eye color, love for sweets and hatred for spicy food, irritable stomachs, poor spelling, and so on. As I gazed at this toothless, hunched over man drinking beer in my high school library, I longed to be nothing like him. But he was my father, and I feared how much he was a part of me. Were my genetics aligned like a compass, forced to point at the same future? Would his Budweiser eventually slide into my palm as easily as his Wranglers and boots slid over my legs?

Dad claimed to have slept with his high school math teacher. He also said he could read minds. When he started smoking at 43, he told Grandma that the doctor advised it, and when he met his fourth wife, he claimed to have once been a professional bronco rider. These were lies, I know that now, but he was my father, and in my early teens, I took what he said seriously. There was also evidence to back up his claims. He started conversations with, "I know what you're thinking," and usually he was right. In old photos he looked like a bronco rider in western-style shirts and tight fitting jeans, slender and muscular as a greyhound with narrow hips and broad shoulders. A doctor could have told him to start smoking. As a youth, I didn't know enough about doctors to say what they would and would not advise a patient to do. And a romantic relationship with his high school math teacher would explain his ability to compute complicated math problems in his head, like how much heating duct a 16,000-square-foot building required.

He read like an unreliable narrator, his dialogue hugging the margins between fact and fiction. I wonder if he liked being more than what he was, and I question if this was something he'd begun doing at a young age, or something that started later in life. Perhaps he had a moment of clarity, and realized that his life was not what he'd hoped it would be, so he began crafting his own past, hopeful that it would influence the future. Or maybe he told lies for attention. Or girls. I don't know what his motivations were but I know that I had, on occasion, claimed I could play the guitar solo from Van Halen's Eruption, had sex with a lonely 25-year-old cowgirl, and once rode a bull. And sometimes I claimed that Dad lived in Wyoming. I compared my lies with his and wondered if this was something I was predetermined to do.

A few months before Dad went to jail, he started asking Grandma for money. He'd been fired from Jameson Heating and Air Conditioning for selling prescription pills to coworkers. But he told Grandma he was innocent, just like he claimed to have never cheated on my mother, taken pills to get high, or driven while intoxicated. There was always a shitty cop with a chip on his shoulder, or an accusation-making son of a bitch who Dad pissed off in high school, or a flirtatious waitress who needed a ride and Dad's good intentions created a misunderstanding. Grandma believed him because she had to. No one felt more obligated to grant Dad the benefit of the doubt. Dad said he needed money for rent or gas or groceries, but his eyes were always glossy and his breath was always sweet, and the rent was always over-due, and his Ford pickup was always a notch above empty, and his fridge and cupboards were always spare. Grandma must have known that her money would go to some other purpose, something she didn't agree with, but she always gave it to him because I think she liked believing that he *could* spend it on gas.

Like Grandma, I also clung to his lies. Between his release from jail and his death two years later, he started asking me for money and I always gave it to him for the same reasons Grandma did. Even now at 28, nine years after his death, I still cling to his lies, awake at night imagining him throwing his high school math teacher a charming grin, or riding a bronco in a dusty arena, boots caked in manure, rather than him shoeless sitting in some white-walled jail cell, or eyes closed and coffin stiff.

A month before Dad's incarceration, Grandma and I were driving from the grocery store. Across from Provo Power was Dad's gray Ford pickup. The flashers were on, and the hood was up. Dad's right hand held a beer, his left held himself as he urinated on the sidewalk. It was midday. If he saw us, he didn't show it. Grandma gripped my forearm, "Keep driving," she said. There was force behind her grip, a hurt I didn't understand, and probably never will. Her eyes were rich with fatigue, her right hand trembling. All I can find are names for her emotions—embarrassment, shame, regret—but those words are inadequate, incapable of describing the depth of her heartache.

I'd seen Dad urinate in shopping center parking lots, job sites, and potted plants at garden centers. Utah County was his urinal. I never figured out if it was his lowered inhibitions, a lack of shame, or laziness. Perhaps it was all three. I'd seen Dad pee in public enough times to assume Grandma had also seen it, or at least heard others in town talk about it. But this was the first time we'd seen it together.

We drove for 10 minutes before Grandma spoke into the maroon dashboard of her Buick Park Avenue. "I don't know what your Dad was doing back there, and frankly I don't want to know. But what I want you to

understand is that it was wrong. And you don't have to do things that are wrong." Sometimes I wonder if Grandma knew about my fear of becoming Dad. Or maybe she feared that whatever was making Dad drink and drive and urinate on the side of a busy road was also inside of me.

I don't know when Dad started drinking, or why. Mom said it was after he left, but I don't know if I believe that. I think he'd been drinking in secret for years. When I was seven, two years before my parents' separation, my brother and I found a bottle of whisky hidden in Dad's desk. Mormons don't drink, and at the time, Dad was an elder in our local congregation. Ryan and I had never seen alcohol. We assumed the amber liquid in a rectangular glass bottle was fancy apple juice. After we sipped a little, we assumed it was rotten apple juice. And his Vicodin addiction. I suspect that started after his ulcer surgery. I was 8, and that was the first time I can recall him taking pills.

Mom and Grandma never spoke of Dad's past. I have always been left with questions. Did it start after his surgery? Was he a victim of circumstance? Or did he get the pills illegally? Did he start drinking at a young age and never had the will to quit? Or did he start sometime after he married Mom? Was he born, as some say, with a bottle in his mouth? I don't know. But what I do know is that these questions were a big part of my fear. How could I avoid becoming Dad if I didn't know his past?

The day Dad was sentenced, Grandma went through her pink and turquoise address book and called family. Then she called friends. This was strange behavior. Mornings she made her bed, afternoons she vacuumed the carpet, and evenings she hand washed dishes. She silently baked bread and pulled weeds. She was a reserved and domestic Mormon widow who watched the *Lawrence Welk Show*, *Matlock*, and *Diagnosis Murder* rather than new shows, with new actors that might offend. Not a gossip. But most of that day, she sat at her yellow rotary phone, the same phone Bell began renting to her in 1962 when they installed the line, telling the same story. "Randy's got himself locked up . . . for drinking while driving. . . . I don't know what I'm gonna do." Once the phone calls were exhausted, Grandma sat in her white vinyl rocker, swaying back and forth, the ball bearing hinges rolling and popping.

She never told me Dad was a dumb ass and a fool, with no direction and little common sense. And she never asked me what she could have done differently or how she should feel, if it was her fault or his. But I overheard all of these questions with each phone call. Because of Grandma's Mormonism, Dad's addictions were particularly painful. Dad

never served a two-year Mormon mission, so it was important to her that I went. She brought it up often, comparing it to the Mormon tithe of 10%. "Two years is less than 10% of a person's life," she said, "a small offering when you think about all the blessings you'll get." Sometimes, during her phone calls to family and friends, she said, "If he'd only served a mission," as if Dad's choice not to proselytize—give the Lord his tithe—had brought divine wrath.

For several days she called friends and family and then sat in her rocker, hands across her lap. She never discovered something new, but I think it felt good to have someone other than me to talk to. Someone to say, "I understand," even though they probably didn't.

I watched from the hallway as Grandma sat in her rocker, her anxious toes moving inside small white shoes as she held the phone to her ear. Perhaps what she was waiting to hear was, "It's not your fault." I don't know if anyone told her that.

Throughout my teens, Dad and I communicated intermittently. Once we went a year without seeing each other. His incarceration included the most consistent communication of our relationship. His life was regulated. He was granted one visit and two phone calls a week. Sometimes he called Ryan, who was then nineteen and living in Salt Lake City. And sometimes he called his fourth wife. But most of the time, he called Grandma and me. I wonder if he called us so often because we always answered the phone.

The first time he called his voice was hollow, and deep, and lonely. He could only talk for 15 minutes, and every five minutes an electronic voice interrupted with the remaining time and a reminder of my right to end the conversation. Dad couldn't hear this recording, and he asked me to remind him how much time we had left. Near the end, all that crossed the line were his heavy sloppy breaths. His silence spoke of regret and remorse, faith and forgiveness, while mine spoke of fear that one day I would be on his end of the line. Our phone call ended with an abrupt click, neither of us saying goodbye. A few moments later the phone rang again. Grandma picked up. She and Dad shared a different silence, one of memories and past mistakes.

Grandma and I thought about Dad a lot during this time. One night after we visited him, Grandma stirred warming milk with a wooden spoon at 2 AM. She wore a pink nightgown with matching slippers, hair in a faded green headscarf protecting her perm. I sat at the bar and she said, "I wish there was something I could do." And what I think she wanted to say was, *I wish there was something I could have done*.

I drank my warm milk and thought about Dad's infidelity and divorces, his drug addiction and loneliness. I wondered why he had to be this way. Was it nature and not nurture? Was his life predetermined?

Neither of us realized it, but we longed for different explanations. I longed to discover that Dad's missing teeth, drug abuse, and lies were a product of his environment. I hoped that in his youth he fell in with the wrong crowd, or the wrong girl, or received some poor advice that led him to make poor decisions. That way the blame was his alone and not something attributed to heredity.

Grandma must have wanted the opposite. On our coffee table was a large leather three-ring binder of genealogy that she personally researched. It followed her and Grandpa's family lines back to the seventeen hundreds. Many of the branches contained small narratives below the names. She knew of the misfits, the drunks, and the criminals. While she didn't understand genetics, she must have noticed consistencies in behavior. I think she wanted the explanation to be heredity, a bad gene, because then the blame would be on God's hands and not hers.

We visited Dad the week before his release. Beneath his chin were heavy rolls of flesh, and thin scraps of beard populated his neck and jaw line in splotches, the skin like oceans between continents. I watched Grandma as she spoke with Dad. Struggling to make out Dad's words, she pushed the phone hard against her ear. I could see Dad's face and shoulders. Grandma replied in curt yes's and no's, sometimes silently nodding; Dad spoke while moving his hands, and between words the muscles of his jaw flexed. Both stopped for a moment, and Dad mouthed, I'm sorry. Dad didn't apologize after he cheated on my mother, or after he showed up to my parent-teacher conference unannounced and drunk, or after Grandma confronted him about leaving his faith. But on the other side of the glass, across from Grandma, he apologized again, and again. After the third time, both stopped and in their silence I assumed this was the first time Grandma had heard him apologize. She cried in somber, simple tears that suggested reconciliation and relief.

Dad and I spoke next. He rubbed the phone with his palm, hand thin and spider-like, jaw moving from side to side, tongue mindlessly searching for teeth like the mussel of a clam searching for a lost pearl. Everything about him suggested fatigue. His eyes were moist with longing, knuckles white and cracking, shoulders slumped and weary. He didn't tell me what he thought about while alone, or about past mistakes, or bad friends, or poor relationships, or botched surgeries. And I didn't ask. A guard tapped his shoulder and held up two fingers, a reminder that we had two minutes.

Dad dragged a dry tongue across his lips and said, "I don't want to see you in here. Ever. You don't have to. . . You know that. You're the good one. Better than me." The guard gripped him by the bicep and led him through a door behind the glass.

Two years after that last visit Dad died of a stroke, alone, in his apartment. By then Grandma was being cared for by my aunt, my brother and I were in college, and my mother had remarried. Life had continued despite Dad's addictions. He must have known that it would. But maybe, subconsciously, he also knew that his time was running short, and that this was his last opportunity to make an impact on our lives. I don't know what his intentions were, but what I do know is that after I spoke with Dad, I wanted to run away from him, to be in motion. I wanted to move swiftly toward some other place. And as I drove Grandma home from the Utah County Jail, she cried most of the way, her head leaning against the car door, moisturizer fogging the glass. I asked what was wrong, and she responded with a wave that said keep driving. I drove north on I-15 and exited at Center Street, the road taking us from the cell Dad lived in back to his childhood home.

ROBERT LACY

What Makes Scary Movies Scary?

I am seven years old. The year is 1943 or 1944 and I'm in the Paramount Theater in Marshall, Texas, seated alongside my mother, an avid moviegoer who often takes me with her. The movie we're watching is called *I Walked With a Zombie*. It's a puzzling affair whose storyline is somewhat beyond my seven-year-old intelligence. All I know is that it seems to be taking place on an island somewhere and everybody in it is unhappy. At one point in the film a woman is hurrying through a darkened canebrake—in my memory the whole movie takes place at night—when suddenly her way is blocked. The music rises, the camera pans slowly upward, and we see standing there in her path a huge black man with an eerily vacant look on his face. I, on the seat beside my mother, let out a scream and wet my pants. This movie has literally scared the pee out of me.

Movies can do that. Alone among the arts they have the power to frighten us in a visceral, elemental way. Music can't do it. Painting can't. Theater can't. Not even television, coming at us as it does from a smaller screen and in friendly, familiar surroundings, can. But movies are larger than life. They take place (or used to) in huge, darkened cathedrals where we sit among strangers and gaze up at actors whose images have been inflated to several times our own, merely human, size. And something about that collective, anonymous darkness, those looming figures up there on the screen, the carefully orchestrated soundtrack, makes us vulnerable, passive, an easy prey to what's going on.

It must have been one of the first things early filmmakers noticed—this power of their new creation to grab the viewer by the throat and shake him. *Nosferatu* and *The Phantom of the Opera* and other early silents quickly seized on the opportunity. When the phantom rips off his mask to reveal the horror of his true face the screams must have reverberated for blocks. And when word got back to the neighborhoods of what had just been witnessed, turnstiles must have spun like tilt-a-whirls.

I don't remember them myself, but my late mother told me I had bad dreams for weeks after seeing *I Walked With a Zombie*. I'll take her word

for it. If I close my eyes right now I can still see that huge man standing in the woman's path, still see the empty look on his face. And that was merely the *first* time a movie ever scared me. It was nowhere near the worst time. That would come some years later, in high school.

The movie on this occasion was called *The Thing*. And due to a perfect storm of circumstances surrounding its showing, this little low-budget shocker succeeded in terrorizing just about the entire town.

In Marshall, Texas, in those years there had grown up a Saturday movie-going tradition known as "the midnight show." After the last showing of the regular feature at the Paramount each Saturday evening a decent interval would occur and then the doors would be thrown open again for a bonus, midnight, offering. It was a must-see for the town's youth, a social event of the highest order. On this particular occasion the anticipation had been heightened by a clever ad campaign consisting of a number of billboards, posted days beforehand outside the theater and elsewhere around town, announcing simply, "'The Thing' Is Coming." No still photos, no listing of actors and other credits, just "'The Thing' Is Coming." So that when we settled, somewhat uneasily, into our seats that midnight we really didn't know what to expect.

The movie turned out to be a space-alien thriller set on an isolated military outpost up in the Arctic, on what used to be called the DEW (for "distant early warning") Line. The howling wind, the drifting snow, the utter desolation of the place all added to the atmosphere of impending terror. Further adding to it was the fact that the year of showing was 1952, a high point in the nation's Cold War and A-bomb anxiety, when everyone was already a bit jittery anyway. The film's director—the legendary Howard Hawks, as it turned out—built suspense by withholding from view the captured, but now suddenly escaped, space creature until about halfway through the film. All we saw was the carnage he was creating: the dead sled dogs, the power generator gone silent, those odd little pods growing (and throbbing, throbbing) out in the greenhouse. When from behind a final door the monster did at last make himself plain, the screams in that theater could have been heard all the way to Dallas. To this day I've never witnessed anything quite like it. It would help me appreciate, when I read about it later in college, the impact Orson Wells' infamous 1938 "War of the Worlds" broadcast had had on his radio listeners, the kind of mass hysteria that can take hold. Because that's what happened in the Paramount that night. We had people throwing up out in the lobby, big burly football players refusing to drive home alone, teenage girls fainting. For weeks afterward all you had to say was "'The Thing' Is Coming" to send a shudder through anyone within earshot.

Interestingly, the character of the *Thing* was played by a young James Arness who would go on to star as the marshal in TV's *Gunsmoke*. Arness was a large man, at least six-feet-six. He loomed up before the movie audience when that door was flung back to reveal him much as the big black man had when suddenly stumbled upon in *I Walked With a Zombie*. In both cases the mere *size* of the creature supplied a major part of the impact. A Woody Allen- or Dustin Hoffman-sized zombie or space alien wouldn't have done the trick. So: when it comes to fright objects, size matters.

Which brings us to *Jaws*. I was nearly forty years old when I saw *Jaws* and it too scared the wits out of me. Actually, I only saw about half of *Jaws*: the on-land half. After the first attack scene, every time the story ventured out onto the water I closed my eyes. There was just something about that menace from the deep that activated a primal response in me. And, again, size was part of it. It wasn't just a shark, it was a godawful *humongous* shark. My wife and I live on a lake west of downtown Minneapolis. Occasionally we swim in it. And every time we do I find myself wondering what might be lurking down there beneath us. No huge sharks, certainly, but maybe a snapping turtle or two, or a toothy northern pike. And I have *Jaws* to thank for that.

In *I Walked With a Zombie* part of the fright came from the fact that the zombie in the path was so out of place, so unexpected. We weren't prepared for it. On the other hand, though, in *The Thing* we were *carefully prepared* for the appearance of the space alien. Hawks went to great lengths to build up our expectations regarding him. There's an opening scene where the creature is discovered frozen in the ice near where his spacecraft has crashed. The men from the military outpost chop him out of the ice and carry him back to base in one huge block. They can see him in there but we, the audience, can't. They tell us that he's "big" and "ugly." So ugly, in fact, that the soldier assigned to guard him throws a blanket over the block of ice so he won't have to look at him. But—wouldn't you know it?—the blanket happens to be an electric one and it happens to be "on." The ice melts, the creature escapes (off camera) and begins to wreak his havoc. By the time we finally get to see him our own imaginations have so enhanced his menace that we're putty in Hawks' hands. This is good moviemaking. Hawks' reputation as one of the great ones seems well-deserved.

I'm from the generation, speaking of great directors, that still thinks twice before stepping into a shower stall—*any* shower stall—thanks to Mr. Alfred Hitchcock. His shower scene in *Psycho* continues to be one of the all-time movie shockers. By combining sex—those teasing glimpses of a nude Janet Leigh—with horror—the fright-wigged Tony Perkins and his foot-long butcher knife—Hitchcock manages to set up a clash of impulses that leaves us emotionally wiped out. We go from titillation to

teror in an eye blink, and the scene ends, appropriately enough, with a tight close-up of Miss Leigh's own unblinking eye as she lies at the bottom of the shower stall, her lifeblood draining away beside her.

It's a justly famous scene, vivid—remember the screeching, pulsing music when Perkins pulls back the shower curtain?—and unforgettable. But it's only an element in a larger framework of directorial cleverness in this movie. Recall that up to the moment of her demise in the shower Miss Leigh had been the point-of-view character. The events of the story had been seen through her eyes. But now she's gone. What's this? Is the movie over? Should we get up and walk out? Well, no. The movie is less than half over, so we the audience are going to have to readjust ourselves, aren't we? We're going to have to rein in our emotions (those of us who have survived the shower scene, that is) and try to get ready for whatever comes next. But we know we're on shaky ground, don't we? Hitchcock now has us where he wants us.

Lesson: if you're going to make a horror movie, it helps to have a director who knows what he's doing. Properly packaged terror requires a sure touch. *I Walked With a Zombie* director Jacques Tourneur, born in France, was a veteran Hollywood filmmaker by the time he turned his hand to *Zombie*. Other of his credits include the film noir classic *Out of the Past*, starring Robert Mitchum and Jane Greer, and such well-received mainstream films as *Canyon Passage* and *Stars in My Crown*. Hawks and Hitchcock need no further praising and *Jaws* was directed by the estimable Steven Spielberg. Stanley Kubrick, considered by many the best director of the second half of the twentieth century, gave us *The Shining* featuring a maniacal Jack Nicholson ("He-e-e-re's Johnny!") and Roman Polanski, possibly the second best, gave us that devil's brew, *Rosemary's Baby*. It is not a game for hacks and amateurs, this fashioning of successful spine-tinglers. Novices needn't apply.

He doesn't have to be world-class, maybe, but only a really sure-handed director is capable of generating the proper atmospherics for a good horror film. It requires more than a simple shooting of the script. Attention must be paid to detail. I don't remember a whole lot about *I Walked With a Zombie* but I do recall the brooding sense of something bad about to happen imparted by Tourneur's continual use of darkness and shadow. As I say, everything in the film seemed to take place at night. Hawks, on the other hand, used a wide-eyed documentary approach in *The Thing*. In the opening scenes it's almost like an army training film as he painstakingly establishes the verisimilitude of his isolated military outpost. Only gradually does the terror creep in. Also, Hawks—he who presumably could have had just about any actors he wanted—employs a cast of complete unknowns so that his audience won't be distracted by recognizable faces. The closing scene of the film, with a frantic soldier on his

shortwave radio warning America, and us the audience, to "Look to the skies!" is almost like a newsreel, or a home movie, in its directness.

Hitchcock, of course, was the master of movie atmospherics. Shut your eyes and picture that Edward Hopper-like house up there on the hill overlooking the Bates Motel in *Psycho*. And who else but Hitchcock would have thought (dared?) to use, as he did in *North by Northwest*, the faces on iconic Mount Rushmore for the climactic closing scene of a movie?

So the beginnings of a checklist for a successful scary movie. Good acting (or at least not bad acting), good directing (yes, definitely), and a good script (probably, unless the director is an improvisational genius). No slackness, no ineptitude, no false moves. Horror is like comedy. The timing has to be right and it needs to be exact: half a second off won't do. Close attention to atmospherics and detail. If you're going to use a creature, make him a big one. And, finally and possibly most importantly, find a way to take the viewer out of his comfort zone early and keep him there: a haunted castle somewhere in Transylvania; an isolated outpost up on the DEW Line, the wind howling, no relief in sight; the violent premature death of a main character, especially a pretty one; deep water with a big fish circling and your boat's got a hole in it.

The above represents a (mildly facetious) attempt to comprehend and interpret what goes into the making of successful horror movies. But note that it avoids a central question. And that's the obvious one of *why*? Two of the top ten all-time movie moneymakers, once the numbers have been adjusted for inflation, are horror films: *Jaws* and *The Exorcist*. And movies like *Psycho* and *The Shining* and *Alien* make many well-educated people's lists of personal all-time favorites. Why should this be? For going on a hundred years now we humans (*homo sapiens*) have been paying good money to leave our warm, safe, comfortable homes, often braving sleet and snow and God knows what in the process, to go sit somewhere and watch scary movies. What is it about them that we find so appealing? What continues to draw us to them in such great numbers? Is it the simple *frisson* we get from having the be-jesus scared out of us? Something on the level of that pit-of-the-stomach thrill we got from our first roller-coaster ride? Or is there something deeper, more fundamental at work?

As might be imagined, a considerable literature on the impact and appeal of scary movies has grown up over the years. Psychologists and academics of many stripes have taken their shot at explaining the phenomenon. "Catharsis," "Excitation Transfer," "Dispositional Alignment," "Gender Role Socialization": the list of catchwords and psycho jargon employed in attempting to explain the attraction runs long. But nobody seems terribly satisfied with his or her answer. The unspoken consensus seems to be, We Just Don't Know.

One of the more imaginative theories put forward is that of a Purdue University professor named Glenn Sparks, as detailed on the Internet site, WebMD. Call it his "old brain" theory. Sparks maintains that our central cortexes still haven't adapted to the relatively new technology represented by the movies. "We can tell ourselves the images on the screen aren't real, but emotionally our brain reacts as if they were," he says, citing his figures on increased heartbeat rate and blood pressure among test subjects. "Our old brain still governs our reactions."

Sparks studied the affects of scary movies on young men and found that the more fear they felt, the more they claimed to enjoy the movie. Mastering the fear becomes in this context a male tribal thing, a rite of passage, a manhood exercise. And that's where "Gender Role Socialization" comes in. You take a date along to show her how manly you are in mastering your fear, and she rewards you by cuddling up to you, her protector against the menace up there on the screen. Something like that.

Novelist Stephen King, on the other hand, says scary movies of the gory, chainsaw-massacre type act as a societal safety valve. Watching violence forestalls the need to act it out in this view, which would seem to be contradicted, however, by the contents of the nightly local news.

The philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, who never saw a movie in his life, scary or otherwise, said that man should "rise above life; he should realize that no happenings or incidents, joys or sorrows touch upon his better and inner self, that it is all a game."

And maybe that's it. Maybe we rush to scary movies because we need to have ourselves reminded that "it is all a game." Maybe at some sub—or supra—conscious level we seek out a little manufactured terror from time to time as a way to kick start our lives, to relieve ourselves of the boredom of daily existence, the tedium of one damn thing after another. Maybe we do it to remind us we're alive.

I shudder, therefore I am.

CHRISTINE STEWART-NUÑEZ

Writer of Calendars

"Please, Grandma, record your stories." I placed a plain-lined notebook in her hands. She looked as if ready to speak but put the notebook on the table. In three days I would leave to work in Turkey, and I sensed the opportunity to clarify how I—the poet and adventurer—fit into my family was slipping away. The oldest in her family married to the oldest in my grandfather's, Grandma was the brightest star in the Lenan/Grafton constellation. And somehow I knew she would die before I completed my two-year teaching contract. Lunch-time naps, a clutch of pill bottles, and doctor appointments inked onto her calendar spoke over her silence.

She was barely five feet tall. Once, weight had gathered at her waist. Now cancer loosened her blue-knit pants and muddled the tenderness in her hazel eyes. I picture her leaning against the kitchen counter, beige twin-set fancied up with a beaded necklace and rhinestone clip-ons. She wears her black hair, heavily streaked with silver, short and permed. Tapping a pen in a calendar's margin, she checks on the week's events and considers yesterday's weather. In these grids she connects clusters of light—family in California, Missouri, Arkansas, and Colorado—by birth, anniversary, and death dates. She pockets the pen, and she heads out for church. A faint blend of Aqua Net and scented talcum powder hangs in the air.

Without me to coax the sentences onto the page, Grandma never filled the notebook. Between treatments she pressed sentences in correspondence and squeezed words into her daily calendar. While she was dying on another continent, I composed alliterative phrases about the Turkish landscape and pieced together images from our lives.

June 2008

With the afternoon sun to her back, my mother walked into my house in South Dakota with an overnight bag in one hand and a Wal-Mart sack stuffed to a breaking point in the other.

"I'd thrown these into the trash," Mom said, setting the sack near me with a soft thud. "Then I took them out in case you wanted them." She

wrapped her arm around the base and pushed it to me. Through the transparent film I saw faint, compressed cursive: round Os, Ds, and Bs slimmed to ovals; lowercase Ls thinned to uncrossed Ts.

"I'd forgotten about these," I said, running my finger along a calendar's spiraled edge. For more than two decades, minus an occasional week, Grandma wrote about each day's events in a two-by-two inch box. "Why do you think she wrote in calendars?"

"Perhaps she was a writer like you," Mom replied. A subtle, intangible connection. I noticed our similar script, messy and cramped within lines as if written between tree rings. I sensed her hand gravitating to paper as mine does, the urgent note scrawled next to a full moon symbol as if written to unveil words. I felt the pressure of a pen, the hardened callous bump under the tissue of skin.

"Why didn't she keep a diary—something more expansive?"

Mom looked up from the sink where she was washing her hands. "Maybe this was the best she could do."

September 1996

I traveled to Mount Nemrut in the Adiyaman province on Grandma's birthday, September 22, to see the tomb of Antiochus I. As I loaded my backpack into a minivan at dusk and sandwiched myself between colleagues for an eight-hour ride east from Tarsus, Grandma was probably enjoying a lunch of egg salad with Grandpa. We traveled along pistachio groves—a long stretch of landscape without street lights or towns. The air cooled and became drier. Grandma's calendar doesn't reveal details, but I imagine she celebrated her birthday at the Golden Corral Buffet. That night as I slept, swaying with the moving minivan, she sliced through spice cake and sipped a mug of decaf.

We arrived at Mount Nemrut, the resting place of the king who had ruled Commagene from 70 B.C.E. to 38 B.C.E., at dawn. Stiff and groggy, we stumbled out of the van and gathered outside a tea shack. A man placed warm glasses in our hands, and we waited for the sky to turn gray on the eastern horizon. I seemed to shrink under the star-studded sky. I pulled the sleeve of my wool sweater over my hand against the cold still air, wishing I had brought my journal. Moonlight illuminated the gravel-topped tomb. Here, Antiochus may have celebrated Pompey's confirmation of him as king; here, he may have scoffed at Mark Antony's attempt to fine him for neglecting to aid a Roman ally. Here, he existed beyond the fragments of Roman record keeping at the center of his own royal cult. Future generations would hike to this mountain with offerings.

In the zone between sleep and wakefulness, I gazed at the multitude of stars. Had I ever seen a night so thick with light? My mind swung from

stars to memories of stars: sitting on porch steps one August midnight and penciling in my diary; walking through an autumn field of papery cornstalks, the moon heavy overhead. Wrapped in the humidity of a Midwest summer and cooled by the arid mountain air, the scent of tea brought me firmly into the present. The mountain stretched up ahead, the tea warm in my hands.

July 2008

I didn't look at the calendars carefully until two weeks later. Alone in my kitchen, laptop screen glowing and tea steeping, I paused. What would I find in these windows to the past? My hands peeled back the plastic as if the contents, exposed to direct light, could evaporate. I stuck my nose in the sack. Mildew. One calendar was bolted to cardboard, gray spores on one side, faded gold writing on the other: "Modern Optical. 206 Euclid, Des Moines, Iowa." Underneath, in red: "March 1974. The sure sign of the little man is the big head."

I held the calendar in my hand; Grandma must have touched the calendar like this when she moved it from underneath the green rotary telephone. This month Grandma recorded birthdays in her typical shorthand: On Tuesday, March 12: "Thomas Wayne (Tony) G. 22," indicating that Grandpa's brother, Tony Grafton, was born in 1922. I lifted the damp page. March 21: "Bake pie for dinner at church." April 5: "Theresa and Sharon, 1:30." This was somewhat unusual because my mother and sister's visit was recorded in my mother's handwriting. I imagine Grandma standing back from a month to connect all the visits, birthdays, and bake sales, the line-shaping story.

I flipped through other calendars. What did she want to remember when she wrote "Chris back from Europe" on June 28, 1993? Did these fragments help her access memories as they did for me? Recording names and bits of detail—the quality of sunshine, the kind of baked deliciousness she made for church—became evidence of important events. And she also created opportunities to make memories. Perhaps writing down the day I was due back from Europe reminded her to keep the afternoon free to accompany my parents to the airport.

I recall the two of us pouring over photos of Belgium, ticket stubs from Paris museums, a map of my favorite Vienna neighborhood, and an unsent postcard of Florence. She had always wished to go to Italy where my grandfather spent time in World War II, but family responsibilities kept her home. I read bits from my journal aloud: "Tried to find the Piazza de Michelangelo. Ate pasta with pesto at a café with flower-stenciled mirrors, peeling white paint, exposed red bricks." I omitted a kiss and the description of Rosario, the uniform-clad Sicilian stubborn enough

to pursue a three-hour conversation by working through an English-Italian phrasebook. Toward the end of my photograph pile, Grandma brought out a few photos of Grandpa in Italy and a gift box. Out of the wrinkled "Made in Italy" cardboard, she lifted a shell ring: Grandma's image in a tiny cameo on its face.

September 1996

With more light, we hiked the short but steep path. Pulverized rock crunched under our boots. On the east-facing terrace we watched the sun paint a gold veneer on miles and miles of pocked earth. Antiochus must have seen a lush landscape where the blue sky poured itself into the Upper Euphrates, a shimmering thread of prosperity. The breadbasket of the ancient world. I thought of Grandma in the new breadbasket, the American Midwest. That month, when I opened her letter—three pages of thin, almost translucent paper—I expected the script stretched across the guiding lines to dissolve before I read it: "Hi honey! I haven't forgotten you, but, so many things happened. We went to Branson for a week—didn't see any shows, but did a *little* shopping. Your grandpa caught lots of fish. We will be eating fish all winter."

Her letters dulled my home sickness yet disappointed me. I wanted engaging remembrances of her family's life on the farm; I longed for details of my grandfather's latest carpentry project, probably a stepstool crafted to look like a turtle. Still, hand-written in blue ink, the same color as my teapot and the salt shaker on my kitchen counter, her letters felt intimate. In slices of the quotidian she gave me the events that inspired concern or joy. I looked at the moonscape, the ashen crust of earth, and gathered the images to describe in a letter. So much was unspoken between us—her dreams for me, my desire to see more clearly the silences implied in the bits of anecdotes she shared.

July 2008

I skimmed over a few calendars before I realized I was looking for a specific date: 1984. Snippets filled that fall: "Went to Penney [JCPenney] & R.G. [Richman Gordman] with Ruth." "Theresa here between classes" on two Wednesdays in September, the start of her third year of college. In October, my uncle ate breakfast with them almost every day. November eighth: "Theresa here." I realized, with tenderness, how often my sister visited them. The following weekend, Grandma shopped both days. And the twelfth, the day before Theresa dies: "20° 6 a.m." My eyes began to sting. When I saw what she wrote on November 13, a "T" followed by a line through every day until the twenty-second of November, I broke into tears.

During one of those silent days, I tiptoed to Theresa's casket. I tucked letters between her suede skirt and the satin coffin lining. The funeral home was cold, so cold. With each breath, the scent of chrysanthemums, lilies, and roses nauseated me. A rosary draped across Theresa's hands. Her opal ring, catching the light from the dimmed spotlights above her, sparkled. I caressed the mini carnations on a satin heart-shaped pillow, and I smoothed out the ribbon inscribed with "Beloved Sister."

During one of those silent days, I wrote a poem about a dying rose. A clichéd metaphor of life cut down. In my poem, I planted the rose's seeds. Somehow, at eleven years old, I believed I'd find meaning in her death. From this point, I'd write to record and to think through emotions with metaphors and images. Words comforted me. They connected ideas, created space and light to walk by.

Grandma drew a line through nine days. A flat-line of death, a slice through our lives. A crack creating fragments. Did she see her line as a metaphor? Or was she drawn to the calendar, pen in hand, only to find she couldn't write the words? Why, even after the week of guests and the Friday funeral, did Grandma not write? Perhaps grief disrupted her routines; perhaps, suddenly, the temperature seemed inconsequential; perhaps she didn't want to remember these days of unyielding sorrow. She tended to her daughter and grandchildren. Eventually, life resumed. And she continued her calendars.

Maybe Mom was right. Calendars were Grandma's form, her genre, because that was all she knew. She was a keeper of stories who never had the opportunity to learn the nuances of telling them. Her father forbid her to go to nursing school because he believed education wasn't appropriate for women; she married at an age much later than her peers and soon birthed two children. When my mom and uncle became school-aged, Grandma worked to earn money to send them to Catholic school, which she deemed the better educational choice. As writers both of us compressed stories into phrases, but as I practiced, I added to my repertoire: scene, reflection, figurative language. Proud of my accomplishments, she posted my poems on her refrigerator but complicating that pride was another emotion. Was it wistfulness? Frustrated desire transformed, over several decades, to acceptance?

September 1996

I wandered alone amid the larger-than-life stone sculptures on the terraces of Mount Nemrut. Once these statues flanked the tumulus standing nearly ten meters high, but earthquakes toppled them. More light revealed details of Antiochus's religious lineage: his own statue, clean-shaved and crowned with a royal headdress; Zeus with a massive curly beard and a

warrior's helmet; Mithraic Apollo, the god of light and darkness and the most important to Antiochus.

One stone block depicted an astrological calendar, a lion with a crescent over his mane, the stars on his body representing Mars, Venus, and Jupiter. It bears Antiochus's coronation date: 62 B.C.E. Antiochus commissioned calendars depicting constellations—his own esoteric astrology—because he envisioned a religious legacy for his kingdom, slivers of which survive. One scholar argues that Christians refined the Mithraic initiation ceremony—practiced by Antiochus—as baptism. I imagine the cosmic nod to Antiochus that occurred when the priest sprinkled Grandma, Theresa, and me with water to mark the moments we were cleansed, linked by religion and blood.

Walking amid the colossal heads, I maneuvered over the fragments of stones, the pedestals of crumbled sculptures. I stroked the broad-nosed lions meant to protect the gods and give them strength. Like the other tourists, I turned to the sun when the pinkening sky changed the eagle's curved beak from gray to gold.

October 2008

I sat at my kitchen table describing the "shimmering surface" of Antiochus's calendars and studying a torn piece of paper—a poem I wrote for Grandma about Mount Nemrut. Shifting my chair to the proper angle, I gazed out at the green-turning-yellow leaves of a birch and into the beige buildings of Tarsus crowding out a wider view of the town: the bazaar next to an excavated Roman road, the two-thousand-year-old public baths, cement houses connected by trellises of jasmine and vines of morning glory. Phrases for a new poem flowed between the remembered shouts of students as they poured out of the campus gates. As I held the fragments of Grandma's days and the images of Antiochus's tomb up to the light, studying their textures, edges, and compressions of time, I saw how necessary it feels to find meaning in the events of our lives and record this for the future. By the time I had finished the poem, the buses in my memory started up and sputtered away, and the wind began to shake a few leaves off the trees. Soon it would be November.

Reviews

William deBuys, *A Great Aridness: Climate Change and the Future of the American Southwest*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. Pp. xii + 369, $27.95 hb.

As the subtitle indicates, this book focuses on the American Southwest. Why this region in particular? While the American Southwest is by no means alone in its potentially disastrous situation—the signs of climate change are evident all over the globe—this region has the dubious distinction of being on the leading edge of the devastation that climate change will cause in America and throughout the world.

A Great Aridness is thoroughly researched and well documented (twenty-two pages of notes and another twelve pages of bibliography). The author has visited locations of most concern and has conducted extensive interviews. He describes with compelling interest individual situations, and he explains with appealing clarity complex issues and histories. Early in the book deBuys cites the three themes that will be present in the pages to follow. The first is that "*no big thing happens for just one reason*"—that is, in a complex world such as the one we inhabit, there are going to be multiple contributory causes for major events such as the eventual failures of the civilizations at Chaco Canyon in New Mexico and Mesa Verde in Colorado.

The second major theme is this: "*the human contribution to change in the natural world more often catalyzes than dictates the outcome.*" Humans may contribute to forces already at work, increasing their speed and force, but humans alone are not a complete explanation. And third: the "*enormity of human capacity for adaptation.*" Humans in the American Southwest have in fact adapted reasonably well to a difficult environment, largely because of technological advances (among them, air conditioning) and massive construction projects, including pipelines to transport water over long distances, the Hoover Dam, which created Lake Mead, the nation's largest reservoir, and the Glen Canyon Dam, which created Lake Powell, the nation's second largest. Whether the future will follow the successes of the past is, however, by no means assured. Lake Mead may be depleted within ten years, and Lake Powell is similarly threatened. DeBuys cautions that "strong social will and collective commitment" will be required if the strength of the Southwest is not to be diminished by its vulnerability.

It is important to distinguish between "climate change" and "global warming." The latter term sounds almost benign: the planet warms a bit;

so what? People in colder climes might welcome the change as an improvement. They would be sadly mistaken. The fact is that global warming is a *cause* and climate change a *result* of which the effects are various and widespread. These effects include, for example, increasing periods of drought, more and more severe disruptions caused by violent weather patterns (including flooding, tornados, and hurricanes), increased tree mortality, with a consequent increase in the size and number of forest fires, necessary abandonment of areas made unfit for human habitation, and profound changes in vegetation, including agricultural crops.

An essential step in measuring climate change began in 1958 when David Keeling, a postdoctoral fellow at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography, began measuring levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. He soon made two discoveries of great significance. He found, first, that these levels decreased in the Northern Hemisphere during the summer and increased during the winter. The finding was surprising, but the explanation proved to be simple: increased vegetation during the warmer months made possible increased absorption of CO_2. Keeling's second and more significant discovery was that atmospheric levels of carbon dioxide were increasing annually. Five years after Keeling began his work, the National Science Foundation issued its first admonition regarding global warming. The NSF noted that increased carbon dioxide in the atmosphere reduced the amount of solar energy that Earth could radiate back into space: therefore, global warming resulting in climate change.

Keeling's measurements have been plotted on a graph known as the "Keeling Curve." They show an astonishing rise in carbon emissions: twenty-four percent over fifty-two years. The rise continues: the latest report (in December of 2011) from the Global Carbon Project, an international group of scientists, showed an unexpected and alarming rise in carbon emissions of 5.9 percent in 2010. "The increase," *The New York Times* reported, "was almost certainly the largest absolute jump in any year since the Industrial Revolution, and the largest percentage increase since 2003."

One major effect of climate change is "global weirding": massive and erratic changes in weather patterns that significantly alter conditions on Earth. The year 2011 has seen a record-setting number of catastrophic disasters, including fires, floods, hurricanes, and tornados; and the future is likely to be worse. In December 2011, Jane Lubcheco, Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, warned that "what we're seeing this year is not just an anomalous year, but a harbinger of things to come." Evidence indicates that the crisis is not in the future but is here now. Models of prediction have been remarkably accurate with one exception: the speed of the crisis has been moving faster than models have indicated, and it is accelerating. So what is to be done?

The author writes that "There are two broad avenues for addressing the problem of climate change: mitigation and adaptation." Mitigation involves the global reduction of carbon pollution in the atmosphere. The United States, deBuys argues, would have to take the lead in the hopes of involving developing nations like China and India as well as the major industrialized nations. The possibility of this happening, given the present state of American politics and the widespread indifference toward the dangers posed by climate change, is quickly dismissed. Gloomily, but realistically, the author recognizes that "Perhaps only catastrophe will change the current intransigence." His book makes clear, however, that the need for reversing current trends is immediate. The time may be already too late.

Mitigation is most unlikely. The second possible solution is *adaptation*. What are the odds? Adaptation would require, to mention only the most urgent needs, "the achievement of water security, the rehabilitation of forests, and the task of devising a responsible program for dealing with displaced and work-starved populations." And that's just the beginning. Achieving these goals in the United States alone would require a national commitment not seen since the Second World War. And the prospects of *that* are dismal at best.

And what about *conservation*? A major concern is of course water conservation, given the prospects of rising temperatures and prolonged droughts. The author explains that water conservation is, perhaps surprisingly, not a solution. "The problem," he writes, "is that water conservation doesn't do what people think it does. As currently practiced, it doesn't relieve long-term shortage; it can actually make things worse." Why? Given the certainty of population growth and consequent economic expansion, any water conserved "now becomes available for consumption by the next strip mall or housing development down the road. It fuels growth."

And if the situation weren't bad enough, there's the problem when water use "hardens." Suppose a population were to cut back to a minimum: short showers, low-flow appliances, xeric gardening, and all the other steps that a responsible person might take, what *then* if there's a drought, as there is certain to be. When you're already at minimum usage, what can be cut? "Conservation enables a community with fixed water resources to continue growing," deBuys comments, "but the more it grows on the strength of conservation, the more demand hardens and the more vulnerable the community becomes to drought. When dry times inevitably come, its system has less flex than ever, less room for adaptation."

Some water strategists have suggested *augmentation* as a solution. The process would involve finding new sources by various means, including the desalinization of ocean resources and the transportation of water

from one place to another, even over long distances and challenging terrain. In every case the difficulties would be immense and the costs prohibitive. And any relief could be only temporary as climate change continues to build force and momentum. "No such strategy," deBuys pointedly notes, "will stop scarcity from arising out of abundance."

As *A Great Aridness* nears conclusion, the author summarizes three factors that portend an unhappy ending. The first is the failure of governments to take significant actions toward reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Second is the certainty that the global demand for energy will increase. And third is "the probability that continued perturbation of world climate will eventually produce nonlinear shifts in key processes—ocean currents, monsoon systems, and the like—generating dire consequences for vulnerable populations and the global community at large." Strange times are already here, and more are on their way. Even as the governor of Texas, former Republican presidential candidate Rick Perry, was denying climate change, his home state was experiencing the hottest summer ever recorded for any state in the United States, with an *average* temperature of 86.8 degrees. Texas consequently endured its worst recorded droughts, and wildfires burned an area the size of Connecticut.

The paramount issue for the American Southwest, given the region's aridity and scant precipitation, is of course water supply. Resources have somehow had to support the region's increasing population; in 1950, for example, the combined population of Phoenix and Tucson was about 150,000. In 2010 it was some 5,000,000 and growing. Increased population of course means increased household use of water, but it also creates an increased demand for energy. As deBuys points out, "A typical 1,000-megawatt coal-fired plant evaporates about 10,000 gallons of water *per minute*." And he adds that almost half of the water taken from rivers and lakes in this country is expended in thermo-electric power generation (including the generation needed to provide the Southwest with the air conditioning that has done much to promote the astonishing population growth in the region).

While *A Great Aridness* focuses on the American Southwest, in the background hovers the ominous prospect of global population growth and the consequent enormous demands for water and energy as well as the massive contributions to global warming and climate change. According to the Population Council, in 1952, the year the Council was founded, world population stood at some 2.6 billion people. In the year 2011, world population reached more than than 7 billion, a rise of close to 300 percent in sixty years. By the year 2050, the Population Reference Bureau projects that Earth's population will reach about 9 billion, almost all the growth in the less developed countries. What are the limits, when death by starvation and drought already trouble this small besieged planet? The potential consequences are nightmarish almost beyond imagination.

While the prognosis is discouraging, deBuys cannot end his book without a measure of hope. His final statement is positive, although with reservations:

> No silver bullet will make the coming decades of the Anthropocene epoch more tolerable. There is only the age-old duty to extend kindness to other beings, to work together and with discipline on common challenges, and to learn to live in the marvelous aridlands without further spoiling them. It is an old calling and a great one. We have already had a lot of practice. We should be better at it. We can be.

Perhaps. But the evidence presented in this book and elsewhere is far from encouraging.

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John Haines, *Descent.* Fort Lee, NJ: CavenKerry Press, Ltd., 2010. Pp. 209, $24 pb.

John Haines, *Living Off the Country: Essays on Poetry and Place.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1982. Pp. 200, $18.95 pb.

I think few would disagree that John Haines was one of our nation's major voices. His poetry is often regarded for its focus on nature, which he does not romanticize but respects. Having spent several decades surviving in relative solitude by hunting and trapping in Alaska, he knew his subject, a necessary prerequisite to authenticity and an essential reason for a reader to be attracted to a poet. To raise the question of authenticity, however, is also to say there exists poetry that lacks it. Logic therefore suggests that we might also wonder about the process by which readers are willing to accept poetry that imitates rather than reveals "beauty" and "truth," to use Keats' vocabulary. One suggestion in Haines' criticism is that such readers are not really seeking genuine poetry so much as the fame of the writer.

There are enormous implications to such questions, but Haines never shied away from asking them. In a review first published in 1969 (*kayak* 20) Haines raised doubts about the newer generation of poets:

> There seems to be a willingness in young people today to settle for a certain notoriety. Apparently we no longer believe in posterity— . . . So we have this poet-person, the companion of instant fame, the poet as personality and performer. And this figure is rewarded among us. The idea of the poet as a solitary individual engaged in some inner work that may not ever be rewarded by the society in which he lives seems not to be common today and may be disappearing entirely. (*Living Off the Country* 79)

Later, in the same review, Haines remarked:

> Too many of the poems written by young people these days suffer from unripeness, from the hastiness that rushing into print encourages. What we want in a poem is not some half-baked comment that any momentarily inspired ass might make, but a piece of work—let's call it art—which embodies in a memorable way, through its sound, the images it presents, its rhythmical solidity and intensity, a part of our lives, recognizable and hidden; and which at the same time offers us in its contained beauty, its grace of structure and expression, an alternative to the ugliness and stupidity, the emptiness and triviality of which our life is too often made. (*Living Off the Country* 81)

Here we have two fairly extensive quotes. The second is particularly useful, as good a definition of genuine poetry as any, but there are more such critical comments in this book published nearly three decades ago.

"There is about contemporary poems generally a lack of resonance beyond the page and beyond the self that speaks the poem" (*Living* 70).

We can compare these claims to what we now know. And it seems to me that to a good extent Haines saw what was coming. We now have this strange and egotistically indulgent event called a poetry slam, as if a poetry reading were attending some wrestling match in which an audience votes to elect the best performer/poet. We now have poets accompanied by their own bands, a continuation, one could suppose, of the poetry and jazz phenomenon which the poet Thomas McGrath, living in the fifties in L.A., found of little value. And of course, we have any number of poets who devote huge amounts of time to promoting their work, or themselves (it is sometimes difficult to distinguish), by courting the circuit and connecting to the "network," which has become also a verb, a phenomenon that began to become increasingly destructive in the seventies. To a good extent poetry has become more about "notoriety," as Haines claimed, and less about the value of the work. Any honest appraisal of the current reliance on "networking" will acknowledge this truth.

Haines continued with his criticism of mediocre writing over the years, pointing to its various faults. In his latest prose work, *Descent* (2010), he commented on "the colloquial sameness of tone, and the strained effort to appear to be original" (132) or Helen Vendler's "failure of critical judgment" (150). In his exasperation, he contrasted poor work to poetry that excels. He was clearly insisting upon mastery. We also find the following observation regarding audience:

> Earlier generations of poets could still assume, and as a matter of cultural inheritance, that they spoke, if only potentially, to an audience in society at large. Indeed, one can hardly imagine a poet like Robinson Jeffers writing under any other condition; and Yeats, as we know, claimed that as a poet he could not write without his audience. In contrast, poets now seem to be speaking mainly to themselves in a world where few others are listening. (49)

So, curiously, we have two trends that Haines identified, the desire for an audience of personal following, but a poetry focused inordinately on personal content. Finally, one more quote from *Descent*, in a review of Postmodern American Poetry:

> Poetry like this arises from a fundamental immaturity in the culture. Games, wordplay, snickers, nose-thumbing—a tabloid equivalent of the art; the equal in verse of a Warhol in painting, closer to a media event than an artistic one. (42)

These are hardly assessments held singularly by Haines. In the late eighties I remarked in *American Poetry Review* on a trend toward solip-

sism in the prevailing poetry, in contrast to Thomas McGrath's social/political poetry, whose book I was reviewing. Similar evaluations have been expressed by various writers but few actually risk saying so (if allowed) in print, or if so, only in a fairly mild way, which makes reading Haines so refreshing.

I appreciate Haines' prose because it holds the same authenticity as his poetry. In reading him, we know we are reading someone who was guided by thoughtful consideration. He was not only unafraid to ask irreverent questions and identify questionable work, but did so with a consistent integrity. Beneath these criticisms is a serious concern for the political condition of the world and poetry's role in it. At one point in *Descent* Haines reflected on the devastation he recalled from a newspaper photograph from a street in Grozny, Chechnya, "buildings shattered and gaping, trolley lines torn up, streets clogged with debris, a few trees still standing in leaf. . . . And one thinks: Might this one day be Peoria, Trenton, or Denver? In our shifting and volatile world it seems a not unlikely possibility. And where then will our poets be?" (152).

His critique of poetry is only one theme in *Descent*, and perhaps I have dwelt upon it more than I should. *Descent* is a collection that touches on a variety of subjects, including a wonderful interpretation of Gilgamesh, personal memoirs from his youth, praises for poets he admired, an interesting report on a visit to his isolated cabin by Yevtushenko during a time when the university poets of Fairbanks ignored him, a brief but clear analysis of how the past is not a separate place from our present but a necessary part of our residence, which reminded me of Blake's notion that the past is the bread of the present. I don't believe it is wrong to think of Haines' prose in the tradition of Matthew Arnold who elevated criticism to a fundamental purpose of creating a desirable society. John Haines demands integrity and it is a mistake to think of him as simply a "nature" poet. He had an absolute unwillingness to compromise about poetry's obligation to social commitment. One cannot be dishonest with nature, which seems to me a kind of touchstone for him. Our relationship with nature was, for him, an indication of our social bearings. At the very least, his prose challenges many easy assumptions that break apart in the light of honesty. At its best it provides insight capable of startling us into recognition of who we are and, perhaps, should be. His commentary on poetry, as so much else in this book, is born out of this commitment. His passing marks a great loss to our culture.

Dale Jacobson
University of North Dakota

Gibbons Ruark, *Staying Blue*. Duluth, Minnesota: Lost Hill Books, 2008. Pp. 30, $11.75 pb.

Gibbons Ruark is a remarkable poet, and his thin volume, *Staying Blue*, is pure blue gold. Each of the twenty-five poems weighs in with the classy well-toned musculature, to use a prize fighter's metaphor for deft style and power, of Sugar Ray Robinson.

The opening poem, "Words to Accompany a Bunch of Cornflowers," is a classic tour de force of color, sound, and ideas accumulating as soft, poignant bursts of layered meanings precisely unfolding into the fifteenth line: "Nothing else that dies is exactly so blue." All the s, n, and m sounds of the first stanza deepen the words "lapis," "classical," and "illumines," juxtaposed against the simplicities of phrasing ("this bunch of cornflowers" and "color in the room").

> Those beads of lapis, even the classical
> Blues of dawn, are dimmed by comparison.
> When I hand you this bunch of cornflowers
> The only other color in the room
> Illumines your eyes as you arrange them.
>
> They are the blue reflection of whatever
> Moves in you, serene as cool water tipped
> Into crystal, oddly enough the willing bride
> To a cloudy head of melancholy
> So deeply blue it could prove musical.
>
> This is the blue John Lee Hooker's gravelly
> Voice in the sundown field was looking for.
> This is the unrequited dream of an iris.
> Ice blue, spruce blue, little periwinkle blue—
> Nothing else that dies is exactly so blue. (1)

Here is the poetry of conversational speech that raises itself to the level of high rhetoric by its easy confluence of soft, seeming inevitabilities of meaning. Take the lines in the second stanza beginning with "serene. . ." and continuing through "musical." Such seemingly easy accuracy is what we might call bull's-eye language, and it keeps providing openings for the remarkable, as in the final stanza: "This is the unrequited dream of an iris," and then the next to final line, "Ice blue, spruce blue, little periwinkle blue—."

In "Quarantine," the iambic narrative lilts its way with the ease and resignation of "childhood's / innocent clarity": the polio epidemic of the late forties and fifties in mid-century America when tone tells everything.

Some things happened every year no matter what:
The air cooled down a little after a storm,
The fireflies rose and fell in total silence. . . . (3)

Here resides the stuff of resilient meditation where the wise poet pens back into remembered long ago undertones in pentameter lines that contain both childhood's perceptions and memory's personal poignancies. All the understatement and low key rhetoric that re-open those wise glances of yore, now accumulated into lines, give us, if not our own aunts, certainly and inevitably the author's, arrived in his home to spell his polio-stricken mother:

Spelling each other, stern and sweet by turns,
One not caring if we saw her naked,
. . .
Beautiful and young, an Army nurse in the war,
Milk-pale except for the dark touch here and there,
Did I dream she made us buttered toast and eggs?

And then his mother's return from the hospital, but

Not mama's legs, not anything like them.
. . . and she slept
As we all did, swimmers floating in a salt pond.
In those hours nobody needed to walk,
Unless you had to pee or the house caught fire.

Once again we remember that Pound got it right when he said that a real poet need only write six good lines. In this his eighth collection, Ruark gives us twenty-five poems in this blue book, more than half of them singular quartrains that exude keen-eared intelligence and poetic wit. Ruark once again gives us, not only his intelligence (once praised by James Wright in writing about Ruark's *Keeping Company*: "Gibbons Ruark . . . has discovered that his intelligence, so far from inhibiting his verse, has freed it"[1]) but also his inside view of those compelling passions, both sensuous and cerebral, that define and enlarge the world of poetry.

Possibly only Ruark in this contemporary age of populist poetry, aside from X. J. Kennedy, combines intelligence and sheer wit in the wide embrace of his remarkably far-reaching poetic perceptions.

"James Merrill Remembers Elizabeth Bishop"

Her house guest was brought up short in the doorway.
She'd come to quick tears over a glass of Irish.

"Don't worry Juan," (she'd switched to Portuguese)
"It's all right, I'm only crying in English." (20)

"Deep Image Correspondence School"

James Wright sent his free verse clear to Minnesota,
Then took its advice, as was his habit.
But as for his late exquisite sonnets,
He croaked through his throat hole, "Don't show them to Robert." (23)

A few words about the villanelle, "Little Porch at Night": the quietly invitational opening line not only beckons the reader further into the poem's setting, but also beckons the writer himself, as all formal beginnings do, into repetitions that transcend language in discovered meanings. In the first line, "Pull up a porch chair next to this chaise longue," because the nature of literary form centralizes the language itself, and because all formulaic measures must be transcended by content, the writer must discover the way within the poem that leads to the poem's discovery of itself. By the end of lines two and three—"Tell me the empty dark will fill with voices / And talk to me before I end my song"—the reader can easily see in a glance the progressive form of the poem, the five following three-line stanzas and the concluding four-line stanza, so as the reader proceeds down the poem with the double awareness of form-content plus Ruark's tone silently underplaying the recalled endearments and the conjured presences of his now dead parents. "Something has gone wrong" (4) inside the action itself, but by this fourth line, Ruark has made a formal commitment in composition by rhyming three of the first four lines, a rhetorical move that will become almost as demanding as the one that Frost makes in the fourth line of the opening stanza of "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening." "Almost," because a villanelle insists on the doubling of the final line rhyme, whereas Frost had to invent it in "Stopping. . . ."

Consider Ruark's tonal journey into the deepening engagement of the sensibility at work in the poem and how Ruark's resolution in the refrain line rewards the reader in both formal and ideational ways. The repeated third line of the opening stanza is fixed into place to emerge as the final insight of the poem—silent memories that both speak and cannot speak, the empty dark of summer nights where there was once a hammock strung under a whole moon, and fireflies, "matches struck and gone," "the Morse code of the stars who've lost their places," while "down there in the shallows" . . . is "a taut line from a father to the sea he fishes."

"Little Porch at Night"

Pull up a porch chair next to this chaise longue.
Tell me the empty dark will fill with voices
And talk to me before I end my song.

A summer night, and something has gone wrong
To rob the mild air of familiar faces.
Pull up a porch chair. Next to this chaise longue

A mother should be standing with her long
Hair tucked into a bun. Unwind those tresses
And talk to me before I end my song.

That vacant angle where a hammock hung
Adopts the whole moon in its loneliness.
Pull up a porch chair. Next to this chaise longue.

Summon the fireflies, matches struck and gone,
The Morse code of the stars who've lost their places,
And talk to me before I end my song,

For down there in the shallows should be strung
A taut line from a father to the sea he fishes.
Pull up a porch chair next to this chaise longue
And talk to me before I end my song.

Ruark talks to us. Nothing can move between us. "Little Porch at Night" has all the passion, skill, and pathos of a Thomas Hardy poem. Think of Hardy's "During Wind and Rain," where the formal refrain, "Ah no, the years O!" becomes "Ah no, the years, the years!" just before the final line: "Down their carved names the rain-drop ploughs."[2]

Ruark's poems are in the finest company.

Notes

[1]Back cover, *Staying Blue.*

[2]*The Poems of Thomas Hardy*, ed. John Crowe Ransom, New York: Macmillan, 1961, p.68.

Donald Junkins
University of Massachusetts Amherst

Timothy J. Kloberdanz and Troyd Geist, Compliers and Editors, *Sundogs and Sunflowers: Folklore and Folk Art of the Northern Great Plains*, Bismarck, ND: North Dakota Council on the Arts, 2010. Pp. 340, $34.95 hb.

Do you want to know what a Stone Johnnie is? Or why you should kiss the first fish you ever catch? Or how to make a geranium cake? *Sundogs and Sunflowers* can tell you all that and so much more.

Sundogs and Sunflowers is one of the best of those big coffee-table books: beautiful to look at, entertaining to read, *and* educational. The collection of folklore and folk art contains hundreds of illustrations—scenic photographs, and documentary-style photographs, for example— to give a real sense of the region for those unfamiliar with the Northern Great Plains, but the book also offers new perspectives for long-time residents. Blizzard stories and discussions of weather, for example, often dominate conversations in the Northern Great Plains, and most residents probably have heard versions of the girl who died but saved her siblings, the man found dead next to his barn, the cows that suffocated from ice built up on their noses. The older generation is known for telling stories about how cold it was but they still walked to school. But who knew that in the 1980s the heavyweight boxing champion Muhammed Ali's wife was stuck in the ditch during a blizzard near Kindred, ND? A family who lived near the highway pulled out the car, housed her overnight, and fixed the car the next day. About a month later, they discovered who she was when they received a big TV as a thank you (83). A trucker who helped another family was similarly rewarded:

> I met a trucker who had stopped and picked up a family from the East Coast who was stranded in a ditch during the February 1984 blizzard. There was a father, mother, and twin babies in the car. The couple got the trucker's name and address before they parted ways. A few weeks later, the trucker received a letter in the mail with a check for ten thousand dollars!
>
> Being from the East, the couple must have assumed people expect to be paid for helping someone. But the trucker didn't keep the check. Instead, he made a photocopy and then sent the check back. (83)

Beyond the blizzard stories (Chapter 3, "The Storm Hit Suddenly"), the range of material in the rest of this compilation is impressive and includes folk beliefs (Chapter 6 "Everything Happens in Groups of Three"), common sayings (Chapter 5, "Knee-High to a Prairie Dog"), and holiday traditions (Chapter 8, "Hot Dogs and Lutefisk on Christmas Eve"). The folk remedies in Chapter 7 ("If You Tell Anyone, It Won't Work") tell how to prevent or cure a number of ailments, among them colds, headaches, ringworm, and warts. A story from Ashley, ND, tells about one father's cure for sickness:

> Dad used to have these "green drops." I think it was pure peppermint syrup. Whenever one of us girls were [sic] sick, he'd always tell Mom to give us the green drops. Then Mom would take a teaspoon of sugar and put a drop of the green stuff on top and give it to us. Then we'd throw up and be all better! I don't know where he got that stuff. (166)

A resident of Fargo remembers how one aunt cured warts: "Somebody would have warts and she would say, 'I'll buy them from you.' Then she gave the person some money, rubbed a penny or whatever on the warts, and the warts would disappear" (190).

Sundogs and Sunflowers also includes ghost stories (Chapter 1, "The Boy Who Fell into a Grave"), games, and jokes (golf in the snow, Ole and Lena), as well as depictions of the cultural traditions of more recent immigrants such as a storytelling dance called *kathak* from India (39). Titles of other chapters hint further at the range: "The Powerful Lake" (Chapter 2), "If the Northern Lights Shine Brightly" (Chapter 4), "The Big One That Got Away" (Chapter 9), and "A Little Bit of This, a Little Bit of That" (Chapter 10).

The folklore in *Sundogs and Sunflowers* is predominately from North Dakota but it also was collected in nearby areas of the Northern Great Plains: South Dakota, eastern Montana, western Minnesota, northeastern Wyoming, and portions of the Canadian provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. The artwork comes from a number of Native American and immigrant cultural backgrounds and includes scrimshawed elk antlers, fraktur, hardanger needlework, Ukrainian Easter eggs, Armenian/Russian beadwork, and woodcarvings.

Many of us may know that there is a Hutterite community near Fordville, North Dakota, but how many know that members of that community practice the art of fraktur, a lettering method that dates back to the 16th century, or even what fraktur is? The last entry in *Sundogs and Sunflowers* is "The Art of Fraktur" by Timothy Kloberdanz which is accompanied by colorful illustrations of twenty letters, each a tiny work of art. And we learn:

> . . . in the world of the German-speaking folk, Fraktur is synonymous with the decorative art most commonly found in illuminated manuscripts. Usually associated with medieval times and European monasteries, this type of styled writing and elaborate border design is a living folk tradition that has been preserved outside of Europe for centuries.
>
> . . . Germans who settled in southeastern Pennsylvania (the so-called "Pennsylvania Dutch") brought this form of calligraphy to North America as early as the Seventeeth Century. (338)

Timothy Kloberdanz was a professor at North Dakota State University for more than thirty years, and Troyd Geist is the folklorist for the North Dakota Council on the Arts. As Kloberdanz and Geist say in their epilogue, "While this compilation includes folklore from dozens of ethnic and occupational groups, it still represents the tip of the proverbial iceberg" (298). Just so, this review represents only a smattering of all that is contained in *Sundogs and Sunflowers*.

Or, as my mother might have said, you could do worse for entertainment in a month of Sundays than to pick up a copy. You might learn something too.

Kate Sweney
University of North Dakota

Editor's Notes

Thanks

Our thanks to Otis Haschemeyer who served as our fiction editor while Elizabeth Harris was on sabbatical. He selected a number of stories that will appear in forthcoming issues of *North Dakota Quarterly*.

Call for Papers: Note Extended Deadline

Proposal for a special issue of *North Dakota Quarterly:* "Going Global: Contemporary International Voices and Visions"

Increasingly, international interests and concerns shape our choices, our practices, even our identities. We all carry marks of our heritage, and much has been made of how our ancestry may have shaped who we are. But what contemporary interactions with the world beyond our country's boundaries have recently impacted the way we work, play, or think? How have international partnerships or experiences yielded significant insights into who we are becoming? This question is relevant on the personal, academic, community, and national levels.

We call for essays and creative works from anyone who has been involved in international experiences from study abroad, to travel, to business practices and who can explain and examine these experiences in order to shed light on how "going global" affects the individual, the society, the academy, or the country in negative or positive ways and how these international experiences are reshaping how we make choices and even, perhaps, how we define ourselves.

Submission deadline: December 31, 2012. Send submissions to The Editor, *North Dakota Quarterly,* Merrifield Hall Room 110, 276 Centennial Drive Stop 7209, Grand Forks, ND 58202-7209.

Bulletin of the McGrath Regiment

In the Spirit of the Marsh Street Irregulars, Documenting and Celebrating the Life and Work of Tom McGrath and His Circle, Broadly Conceived, and Dedicated to Acts of Armed Revolutionary Memory to Draw the American Working Class Out of Its Persistent Vegetative State and to Resume Its Historic Mission.

We welcome short articles, reviews, documents, photographs, notes and queries, news and announcements, reports on meetings, conferences, centers and archives, letters, arguments, controversies, harmonies. . . .

This is a print publication, generally four pages per issue, distributed gratis by postal mail to any address in the world, though modest cash donations are always welcome.

First issue: January 2012.
Editor: Fred Whitehead, P. O. Box 5224, Kansas City, KS 66119 USA. Telephone: (913) 342-6379. E-mail: fredwh@swbell.net.

Please Note: New Reading Period For Fiction and Poetry

In order to better manage the flow of submissions, we now have a reading period for fiction and poetry from September through May. Fiction and poetry received between those dates will be returned unread.

Please also note that we do not accept nor read simultaneous submissions of poetry. We are quite diligent about judging poems quickly.

Sea Changes: Books That Mattered

Just as they provide pleasure and prompt criticism, books have a role in the developmental history of their readers. For the impact of a book depends not only on *how* it is read but *when*. Many books fortify or deepen the beliefs of readers; others prompt adaptive responses—that is, the newly read text is fitted to its reader's fund of knowledge and experience. Encounters with some texts, however, amount to a sea change in the lives of their readers. They produce fundamental reorientations of belief, understanding, and purpose. *North Dakota Quarterly* publishes occasional

accounts of books that mattered, books that produced a sea change in their readers. These personal essays have been about well-known books like Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* and lesser known ones such as George Morgan's *The Human Predicament*. As one contributor has proposed, books that matter "liberate the reader from a parochial view of experience . . . and usher their readers into a fuller understanding of self, society, and culture." **NDQ** continues to invite contributions of personal essays on a book or books that mattered.

Yes, our calendars, probably like yours, read 2012, and this issue of *NDQ* is the second and third of four in Volume 77, of 2010. All subscribers receive four issues per year, and eventually we hope that those years will be the same as on your calendars and date-obsessed magazines and newspapers.

Explore . . . Endure . . . Evolve . . .

Contributors

Matthew Bauman received his MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Idaho in 2010 and an MA in English from the University of South Dakota in 2007. He currently teaches at Black Hills State University in Spearfish, SD, where he still enjoys birding in the local hills, canyons, and forests.

C. Ronald Edwards is the former co-host of the Weekly Reader on KMSU. He is also an MFA candidate at Minnesota State University, Mankato. His writing has appeared in *The Baltimore Review*, *Post Road*, *Yemassee*, and elsewhere.

Eric Freeze is an Assistant Professor of Creative Writing at Wabash College. He has published short stories and essays in various literary journals including most recently *Boston Review*, *Tampa Review*, and *The Normal School*.

Barbara Bailey Fryrear has been published in *New Texas*, *Windhover*, *Duck Soup*, *The Irving News*, and *Dallas Times Herald*. She has a novel in the hands of an agent. Her backyard in Irving, Texas, is a wildlife sanctuary. She feeds the feral cats enough so that they have no appetite for the birds and squirrels.

Peter Gordon's fiction has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Ploughshares*, *The Yale Review*, *The Southern Review*, *The Antioch Review*, and elsewhere. He has been awarded a Pushcart Prize and cited numerous times on the Distinguished Stories list that is part of the annual *Best American Short Stories* series. He has a collection of stories titled *Man Receives a Letter*. He lives and works in Massachusetts.

Chad Hanson teaches sociology at Casper College in Casper, Wyoming, and contributes to a wide range of scientific and literary publications. In 2007, the University of New Mexico Press published a collection of his stories and essays, *Swimming with Trout*.

Becky Kennedy is a linguist and college professor whose poetry has appeared in many journals. She has a chapbook forthcoming from

Finishing Line Press. Her work has also been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and has appeared on *Verse Daily*.

Robert Lacy is the author of a collection of short stories, *The Natural Father* (New Rivers Press). His short fiction and essays have appeared in *The Best American Short Stories*, the *Sewanee Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Antioch Review*, *Gettysburg Review*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *Oxford American*, *Minnesota Monthly*, and elsewhere. He lives with his wife Susan on Medicine Lake in the western suburbs of Minneapolis.

Jim Laughlin is Director of Communications for the Life Is Good Kids Foundation, in Boston, MA. He received his MFA in poetry from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst where he won the Joseph Langland Poetry Award. His poems have been published in the *Florida Review*, *Galley Sail Review*, and *Aethlon: The Journal of Sport Literature*, among others.

Naton Leslie's essays have appeared in *The Missouri Review*, *North American Review*, and many other magazines. His last contribution to *North Dakota Quarterly*, "A Compendium of Fact," was cited as a "Notable" essay in *Best American Essays*. He teaches writing and literature at Siena College near Albany, New York.

Angie Macri's recent work appears in *Cave Wall*, *Redivider*, and *RHINO*, among other journals, and is included in *Best New Poets 2010*. A recipient of an individual artist fellowship from the Arkansas Arts Council, she teaches in Little Rock.

Jacqueline Marcus' poems have appeared in *The Kenyon Review*, *The Ohio Review*, *The Antioch Review*, *The Journal*, *The Wallace Stevens Journal*, *The Literary Review*, *Mid-American Review*, *Poetry International*, *Hotel Amerika*, *The Delta Review*, *The American Poetry Journal*, and *The North American Review*. Her book of poems *Close to the Shore*, was published by Michigan State University Press. She taught philosophy at Cuesta College, San Luis Obispo, California, and is the editor of http://www.ForPoetry.com.

Karl S Monroe really did spend his earliest years in a small western Washington valley town, beneath the great migratory routes. His parents took him into exile, where he was raised in the San Francisco area. After graduating in English literature from the University of California in Berkeley, he returned to the Puget Sound lowlands where he worked as a journalist for 26 years. His biggest thrill these days at Juanita Bay is see-

ing the snow geese or tundra swans that occasionally stray south from their usual wintering grounds in the Skagit Valley. "Migratory Patterns" is part of a collection of 35 essays, "The Last of the Ice Ages: A Life Filtered Through the Marsh at Juanita Bay." He is at work on "A Yinward Way," a novel about intrapersonal relations.

Norman Nathan is a professor emeritus at Florida Atlantic University, where he taught courses in Shakespeare, poetry, and the Bible as literature. He has published six books, sixty scholarly articles/notes, thirty-five short stories as well as more than 600 poems. Among the magazines in which he has appeared: *The Saturday Review*, *The Sunday Evening Post*, *College English*, *Tribeca Poetry Review*, and *Confrontation*. He now resides in Arlington, Virginia.

Mark Phillips is the author of the 2001 memoir *My Father's Cabin*. His stories and essays have appeared in *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Notre Dame Magazine*, *Saturday Review*, *The Phoenix*, *New York Times Magazine*, *The Sun*, *Salon*, *Wind*, and in other magazines and anthologies.

Erin Elizabeth Smith is the author of *The Fear of Being Found* (Three Candles Press, 2008) and *The Naming of Strays* (Gold Wake Press, 2011). Her poems have appeared in numerous journals, including *32 Poems*, *New Delta Review*, *Yalobusha Review*, *Water~Stone*, *Cimarron Review*, and *Crab Orchard Review*. She teaches creative writing and literature in the English Department at the University of Tennessee and serves as the managing editor of *Stirring: A Literary Collection* and *Best of the Net Anthology*.

Kathleen Spivack's memoir *With Robert Lowell and His Circle: Plath, Sexton, Bishop, Rich, Kunitz* will be published in 2012 by University Press of New England. A student and friend of poet Robert Lowell, Spivack has written about the poets of his time, notably Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, Elizabeth Bishop, Stanley Kunitz, and others who took her under their wing, with a focus on how they approached their work. She is the author of seven previous books of prose and poetry (Doubleday, Graywolf, etc.), has published widely, and received numerous awards. She teaches in Paris and Boston.

Karen Stevenson taught eight grades in a one-room school in isolated ranch country in eastern Montana where she and her husband also raised their three children. She is the author of the book *Elsie Fox: Portrait of an Activist* which was awarded Editor's Choice from the publisher iUniverse (2008). Reflections West (www.reflectionswest.org), a radio program on MT public radio, aired an essay by Stevenson in 2011. She has logged

thousands of miles traveling Montana performing her one woman show *Evelyn Cameron: An Eastern Montana Story* for which she wrote the script. She was the silhouette actress in the award winning documentary by Montana PBS, *Evelyn Cameron: Pictures from a Worthy Life*. She lives near Miles City, Montana, with her husband.

Christine Stewart-Nuñez is the author of *Snow, Salt, Honey* (Red Dragonfly Press 2012), *Keeping Them Alive* (WordTech 2011), *Postcard on Parchment* (ABZ Press 2008), *Unbound & Branded* (Finishing Line Press 2006), and *The Love of Unreal Things* (Finishing Line Press 2005). Her creative nonfiction has appeared or is forthcoming in such journals as *North American Review*, *Shenandoah*, *Briar Cliff Review*, and *The Pinch*. She teaches creative writing at South Dakota State University.

Grant Tracey edits *North American Review* and teaches Creative Writing and Film at the University of Northern Iowa. He's published three collections of stories, loves punk rock, and has recent work in *Ascent*, *Fiction Fix*, and *Passages North*.

Kip Zegers is in his 28th year at Hunter College High School in New York City. He continues to try writing about his "representative life" as a teacher and worker, most recently in *Reading Whitman in Manhattan*, Foothills Publishing (Kanona, New York), 2010.