

# ASSISI



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# *ASSISI*

*AN ONLINE JOURNAL OF ARTS & LETTERS*

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**EPIC JOURNEY**

A drab stork clatters its beak in this land  
and narrow streets run crookedly  
where dried dung smokes in courtyards  
Abram, *Friend of God*, was born here

Dust, a brown filter, slays colors  
unchanged for four thousand years  
along the modern Euphrates Road  
Abram's God was personal and generous

The Patriarch led his clan up the valley  
grazing his flocks, seeking a home  
God found him in the wilderness  
and made a covenant with him

between the Tigris and Euphrates  
mute words re-tell ancient history  
and dusty wolves trot the wasteland  
in this place sanctified by blood

left to fade on deserted streets  
the sun rises dull as an old coin  
where roads to the Persian Gulf meet  
requiring only modest burnt offerings

a tolerant and respectful outsider  
in a world trembling before many gods  
in Canaan, millennia before Christ  
changed his name to Abraham

Abram's wife, Sarai, became Sarah  
her womb opened; her mind closed  
Hagar and peace were banished  
sands shifted; the desert  
still swelters

**COME THROUGH**

Sooner or Later  
We all have to take  
the long way home,  
through a dark passage, maybe  
or cross that unknown  
dreaming threshold—

It is not the open doorway  
but the crossing  
that takes a deep breath,  
putting one's foot where  
the steps cannot be  
seen, trusting  
the millennial stone.

Listen! The stone  
whispers God:

Come through, my Beloved, for  
I AM the stone  
and the steps  
and the dark doorway.

Before I thought of the world,  
I thought of you.

Come through, my Beloved, for  
I AM the smooth unyielding stone  
beneath your feet.

MARIAN KAPLUN SHAPIRO

**Breathing,**

say the Buddhists, is a rehearsal for the Great Journey.

We inhale: Life.

We exhale: Death.

As simple as that. Our souls  
travel by air. It takes a lifetime

to learn the way. And so

we practice. In. Out.

In. Out. Our transient breath.

GLORIA VENTURA



**ARC**

*The miracle is not to fly in the air, or to walk on the water, but to walk on the earth.*

--Chinese Proverb

Envisioned distilled:

light,  
ice;  
hawk

flies  
outside my window  
--deer have passed

and stared.

I see  
blue sky and feel

me wander  
under the star  
of our beginning,  
weighted by all lamenting:

for I love this world,  
this life

lived

but I must arc away.

Every page is  
darkened  
with ink  
tears.

**AN OVERSIGHT**

And there, at the edge of the wash, the salt  
spikes of stars spit-  
free, I dissolved,  
seeing God, or what I thought was, past the veil,  
swimmers' limbs cleaving waves, pliant mirrors. What has flown

is beyond me. I should have been born

not a man but a flying fish or a feral gull  
soaring out over the fish.

I'd be on my way to the next world,  
a breath glimpsed  
pumping wings

over beaches, frail rigging, parted deeps, *los diablos rojos*—  
inner pulse of lights,

pulling hard

through the dark into the next day.  
I should have soared.

**THE JANITOR WORKS**

To  
Find  
Happiness

In  
Scrubbing  
The  
Floor

I  
See  
The  
Light  
In  
Each  
Tile

Clean

And  
Unafraid

Quite  
Squarely  
So.

**INDIAN KILL CREEK**

*Glenville, NY*

The water only flows one way,  
but the reeds jut out at angles  
unopposed to chance or risk--  
nuzzling in between the boulders,  
flirting with the shade.

Late evenings, when the creek  
has tired from its daily trek, the  
lightning bugs and toads emerge  
to sing their full congratulations--  
testaments to another day well  
spent--and everywhere the silence  
fills with promises to be made and  
kept, made and broken.

Proof that nothing ever lives  
the way we think it should,  
that death and birth are closer  
than we like to imagine, nurtured  
on all sides by a humble silence  
wanting just for us to recognize it,  
to call it by its rightful name.

**FOR THE CREEK SNAKES OF HINDMAN, KY**

I've read that God's hand  
is in the world.  
And it is,  
as are the works of men.  
For the creek snakes  
of Hindman,  
there's a patch of shade  
beneath  
the footbridge.  
It gives the creek snake  
the coolness  
it needs to thrive.  
Man put the bridge there,  
never giving  
thought to creek snakes.  
But these creek snakes  
of Hindman,  
are far more likely  
to tremble,  
when thinking of their God.

**DOWN**

I don't see it until I rise, a feather  
on the chair across from mine  
as if a tiny ashen bird

landed while I was gone  
to other landscapes in my thoughts  
and stayed just long enough

to leave evidence of his visit,  
a small memento of flight  
before lifting back into sky,

The tiniest quill,  
which might write  
so many notes to you now,

each one fluttering down  
confetti-style, beneath this sturdy  
layer of cloud just to ask you how

you are in such minuscule script  
you might mistakenly think each slip  
of paper is just a blank

prompting you further  
to think of stories unwritten,  
novels unread or the way

even the newest words  
can dissipate  
on the jet streams

of surrounding phrases and refrains  
but maybe, by some fluke  
of free association, you'll think

of the lightness of paper instead,  
how it carries its freight of words  
as medium, impartial

to both statement  
and intent, as if the words,

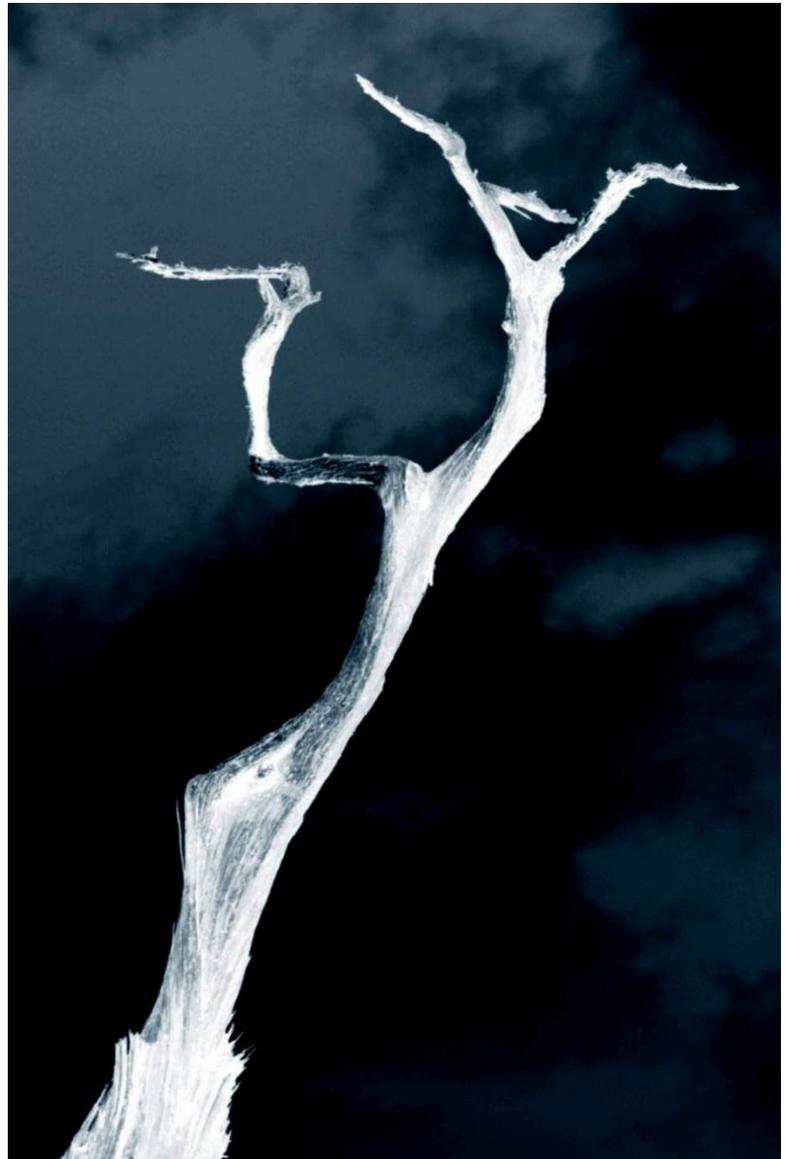
were a mere flock of birds

that caw, crow, peep,  
whistle, chirp, and sing  
but always end the performance

the same way: a ruffle of feathers,  
a preening beak, the whisk of purpose,  
the air of flapping wings.

KATHLEEN GUNTON

**NIGHT BALLET**



**FULLNESS**

Fullness comes over you  
Like a cloud that settles into a valley.  
You must become the valley  
To welcome the cloud,  
Which takes you into itself

When you are ready  
To receive it purely  
Without knowing you are ready,  
When you are empty  
Of all that weighs you down.



## RHAPSODY IN FIVE PARTS

### *A Theory of the Wind*

Today my son has discovered that leaves love him.  
That they will fight to color a theory of the wind  
For him until, bloodless husks,  
They are relieved by reborn snow.

The day had unmasked like any clear sign of November, with its diminished general street traffic and sudden shifts of wind, and the day had opened over a place somewhere, out there remotely, where distant roads run seemingly forever and if and when we see a car, it must certainly purposefully be there.

On this day, the clouds cast shadows over the farm, their roaming trails the very menacing gestures that had blown away the deed and shredded the bank loan and burned the authority over the land that had once called this man a farmer. And if I must explain myself, it comes simply to this, that with the advent of the clouds, there arrived an accountant to the house and farm, and she knocked three times on the front door until the Farmer opened it, met the morning sun, and stood uneasy in the doorway. The Farmer listened to the wind as the Accountant pulled papers from her briefcase with the disconcerting ease of someone whose everyday brimmed with difficult moments. The Farmer listened to the rustling trees while the Accountant prepared to explain why she'd arrived to his farm so early that morning.

She inhaled deeply. She exhaled just the same. She contrived a smile before realizing none was necessary, Sir the bank must appropriate your farm, I've been expecting this, Your debt exceeds the land value, There's nothing I can do, I'm sorry sir, It isn't your fault your business is heartless, Our business enforces the contracts sir, and the Farmer stood in the doorway taking no papers from the Accountant, despite her insistence to hold the appropriation papers before him as she had been instructed to do earlier that day by her bank Executive supervisor, I want you to hold the papers out in front of the Farmer until he takes them, But what if the Farmer doesn't take them sir, You have to be perceived as offering the papers but not forcing them upon the Farmer, That is going to be tricky sir, It most certainly will, Either way the bank will still appropriate the farm isn't that true, Yes but I trust that as a representative of this bank your discretion will be precise.

And so it went, that after a motivational speech, an encouraging nudge, spoken by the bank Executive and told to the Accountant, the Accountant found herself holding the papers to the Farmer. A seasonal breeze streaked across the porch. The grass across the front yard bent east. The clouds in their roaming anxiety contorted everything in skewed directions the Farmer no longer recognized, and directions the Accountant had refused to consider all morning, and then suddenly the Farmer's son came to the front door. And with that, the doorway grew full.

Leaves blew across the doormat. They scuttled onto the porch, whirred around the banister, scurried to the porch steps, scattered after the last step down. They spread across the gravel walkway that led every visitor from the street to the house.

The Boy's hair fell over his brow. His shirt sleeves fluttered loosely in the breeze. A leaf glided past his feet and slapped his toes. The Boy nodded to the Accountant. The Accountant returned the nod. She started smiling but then didn't. The appropriation papers shivered. The breeze spread the crisp papers' sound across the porch. When the Boy let go of his father's shirt and reached for the Accountant's papers, the Farmer took the Boy's hand and held it, softly but firm. The Boy peered up and met his father's somewhat stern look, and then the Boy left back into the house. The Accountant watched the boy disappear and then proceeded with her responsibilities, Sir I'm required by law to show you these papers, I don't want them, Nothing changes at the bank sir, That's fine then, The appropriation will begin, Then it doesn't need me.

The wind rustled the Magnolia in the yard, rooted firmly in the soil by the road.

*What the Father, Filled with Sorrow, Asked the Son*

Just once more whisper with respect to the birth of angels.  
This is my bubble, blown in love, broken over green grass.

Dinosaurs?  
Under the weight of sin they became oil pumps.

How, then, should we pray?

The appropriation continued. The Farmer lost his farm. On their last day packing, after the Farmer had folded his son's last shirt and laid it into a box, he stood up. He swiped his pants, dust falling and lingering on the bare mattress before him. He walked over and shut the window, and then he patted his son's head, Let's go outside, But my work boots are packed away papa, It's okay we're just going to play.

The Boy smiled, faintly, and then he followed his father down the stairs and into the den, where the Farmer grabbed a stick and a ball. Together, they walked through the kitchen, past a counter covered in stacked boxes and scattered kitchen forks, and the Farmer pushed open the backdoor which, on account of the wind, slammed and stamped itself to the exterior wall siding and surprised the Farmer with its bang.

Outside, the Farmer and the Boy played with their stick and ball. In time, though, the winds impeded their play, having forced the ball once too often over the house, once getting lost in a rosebush, the last time swallowed by the chimney, Let's stop playing before the ball goes into the clouds and never comes back, to which the Boy responded by looking up, his right hand shielding his eyes from the sun. Squinting, the Boy seemed to assess the whiteness and width

and fluff of two passing clouds, but the Farmer interrupted the Boy and took him by the shoulders, Let's go, Okay papa.

The father led his son to the farm's perimeter fence. They walked alongside it, following it until it bent near the lake. They walked past the chicken wire portion and then alongside the swinging metal gate, which the Farmer had originally installed to allow his plow a facilitated exit. He had built the gate before the first second and third arid summer, before the bank had ever considered appropriating the Farmer's land, though his was not the first appropriation ever considered, banks surviving by it, debtors owe and then cannot pay and banks exist to collect that which is uncollectable, such things begotten by excruciating effort such as homes and cars and firstborns, which accountants have difficulty collecting, simply ask she who'd visited to the Farmer and left the firstborn out of this mess entirely, precisely because it was her discretion to do so.

The Farmer had no particular walking intention, refusing only to be inside his house. And so he and the Boy strolled to the solitary tree on the farm's far side. The Boy has always enjoyed the tree's singing leaves there. The Farmer has always loved the sun's crowning wall over the hills there. They've especially enjoyed the tree's distance, because from it no one could see the street, and can you imagine the sweetened future without paved roads, if all long avenues just snaked off and vanished, imagine the veiled flowers we'd smell and the new grass we'd tread and how wonderful that bankers and mortgage brokers, with no understanding of the sun's directional principles, would find themselves incapable of commuting to work without the highways' guiding signs.

The Farmer took a deep breath and leaned against the tree, Can I go running papa, It's okay you can go running, and so the Boy left his father by the tree and just started running. At first, it didn't seem the Boy would run any further than some twenty yards, the Boy's feet more wobbly than freely striding, his chin bobbing, his eyes full. But, after some thirty yards from the tree, it became clear the Boy would run the full expanse to the house, which on a clear day, took him approximately five minutes, but which, on that day, consumed slightly less than three minutes, which shouldn't surprise us. Not only had the Farmer and Boy lost the farm and house, but they had also shouldered the day's dead weight of prayers and vacant stares and empty rooms, intricately woven things that yoke and pull and impose their unwanted ruminations, but also the very things a good run could at least make float.

The Boy ran across the field. The house in sight, he ran over everything, over the dried soil that had, on one particularly difficult month, swallowed more corn than it grew. The boy ran over the arid dirt that, after two simmering years, had shed wheat stalks like a buck did its horns, and the boy ran over the corn leaves and kettles, and then he invaded the dead rows that had once sprouted cabbage, and then many long strides later, the Boy crossed over and into the rows that had once grown broccoli and after that had once grown squash and then, when all else failed, the Farmer had turned that plot of land into a graveyard for tools and irreparable machinery, and so the boy had to leap over hand plows and shovels and the rusted moldy engine of a broken backhoe. The boy ran, his legs striding and hopping as best they could over obstructions, and, unless you've forgotten, this is a running boy, and not a man, and so his strides were limber but not long, and if you've never seen a running boy, it would serve you to remember your running

youth, knobby elbows and knees and pale wrists and a chest beaming with the living gestures of budding shoulders, the Boy's grin forced wide by the wind.

### *Typhoon*

As I write this, Noah is chasing a billion-leaf typhoon  
Over the spring and up the short silo,  
Clapping in two bright spades together and screaming,  
In a tongue known only to captains and their fathers,  
“There's no place like earth, there's no place like earth,  
There's no place like earth.”

For months, the Farmer and the Boy lived in a small square home closer to Town Square, near where struggling growers congregated to sell meats or barter ham for eggs. The Farmer's bedroom was also the Boy's bedroom which was also the living room which was also the kitchenette. The only separate room was the bathroom, such that opening its door impeded directly with their eating table, Papa the eating table has a wobbly leg, It's okay I'll fix it tomorrow meanwhile eat everything because we won't be back until later tonight.

The Farmer had managed gardening work that day, not far from Town Square, in a neighborhood with little if any land between neighbors, which the Farmer didn't like, which he simply couldn't understand, How could anyone live like this, Because they do Farmer, I just don't understand doesn't everyone need their space, Some just prefer it like this Farmer, If you ask me it's just too invasive, People will simply do as they do Farmer.

The Farmer labored as a gardener for a day, with the promise of coming days if he successfully planted a small plot and filled it with oregano basil and lemon leaves, squash eggplant and cucumber, and then lined the circular garden with brick stone and wood. And he was also to build a trellis for grapevines, even though he explicitly told the owner, This here is no climate for worthwhile grapes sir, It's the vines that I'm after Farmer, Well if that's all you expect you'll be okay sir, How long should all this take you, It shouldn't take me more than a day sir, How is that, Because I'm starting early enough sir, That's good I'm glad I hired such a professional Farmer, Thank you.

After the gardening work, on their way back to their tin square room, the Farmer and the Boy took the long way home. They drove what seemed to be a circular path, one lined with barns and horse ranches and, after one sharp turn, two short silos with prancing smiling horses painted on their walls, both horses, a stallion and a mare, painted leaping into each other, Papa what are those, Those are milking stations son. Just behind the silos, seven roofed buildings with no walls, just fences, stood in one row, dozens even hundreds of cows beneath the roofs being milked, a handful of ranchers taking turns holding pails and pressing nipples, Didn't we used to have something like that papa, Yes we did, and the Farmer brushed his hair back, We had five or six milking stations before you were born but then we sold the cows.

The Farmer led the car around another bend, and he raised his window when the cattle's smell had grown thick and unbearable, Put yours up too, Yes papa, All the way, Yes papa. The Farmer exhaled across the glass and the driver's side window fogged, and the Boy looked at his father, the Boy's eyes weary and closing but nonetheless fighting the calling sleep. The Boy turned to his window, watched the trees pass and brush the side view mirror. And then the rear glass started fogging, and so certain things had to change, and because they had finally driven past the milking stations, these changes had become acceptable, It's okay to open the windows again, Okay papa.

At their tin square home, the Farmer settled onto the eating table after putting away his pants and changing the Boy into a sweater and oversized shorts. From the table, he watched his son fall asleep. The Farmer's brow, his eyes, his chin, his hands, all sat like empty bowls. The Farmer's lips kept the working day's scowl until long after the sun set and the moon had begun to shed its light. Watching his son, after almost thirty minutes, the Farmer's breathing settled into the cricket's chirping pace.

When the Farmer finally sat up, he stretched some, and then he reached into the bottom drawer, a place more appropriate for knives and spoons, but which in this tin square home, kept everything but utensils, things like an old notebook and even older pens, and so the Farmer took out the notepad and a pen and set each on the table.

### *To Show That They Believe*

Even the wind and the waves obey Him.

The Farmer started to write a list, his list, which he entitled *Groceries*, and to which he added things like milk and eggs, juice and baking soda, dish soap and a scrubbing sponge.

He sighed and reached into his back pants pocket. He leaned forward and then right, his chair creaked, all just so he could grab his wallet set deeply in his back left pocket. Reaching for the rear ends of things just isn't easy, and the Farmer's leaning brought his nose near the window, his chin almost pressed to the glass, his breaths almost fogging the pane. When he finally set the wallet on the table, the Farmer emptied its largest sleeve of receipts and other paper slips. He set immediately to sort them. He spread them out, his arrangements varying either by quantity or price or former grocery lists, because these very receipts remembered everything he could not about the food he had and had not bought, because it's dutiful to recall the things we've paid for, particularly when we cannot afford anything new.

And so an hour or so passed in this same way, the Farmer making new lists. He made one list for the next day's grocery purchases, and it did not have much food, and so he made subsequent lists for each time he expected remitted payment for work he performed, for his gardening work or his door repair work or his plumbing and pipe replacement work. Overall, the Farmer finished seven lists, and he to be meticulously careful with them. He could not buy ham and cereal, for example, before he purchased socks for the Boy, and simply because the Farmer expected a lump

sum payment for two weeks gardening work did not mean that the Farmer could buy a whole week's consumption of dried spaghetti, at least not immediately. Prioritizing meant excluding sliced cheese from the grocery list until both the Farmer and the Boy first purchased thicker blankets to last the winter, and rationing meant they could not eat chicken every week, perhaps not even the next, or even the one thereafter, that is until, first and foremost, the Farmer purchased new screws and repaired the hinges on his own front door.

After an hour's calculation, the Farmer sighed, loudly. He rubbed his eyes. He dipped his forehead into his hands, and then he picked his face up. When he glanced at his son, the Farmer found the Boy staring.

Moonlight illuminated half the Boy's face at a slant. His teeth were darkened in the shadow of his lips. He held the blanket to his chin. The Boy's hair fell over his eyes, Go to sleep boy, and the Boy shook his head, Okay Papa, but remained as wide-eyed as he had been. The Boy adjusted his face on the pillow. The Boy brought the blanket even higher and covered his chin, his thick lips an unnervingly dark shade. It was nearly impossible to differentiate anything beneath the Boy's nose from the shadow that drowned it.

Moonlight lit half the kitchen table, missing the Farmer's pressed fingers on the wood by inches. The Farmer exhaled, he leaned back, What do you need to sleep boy, but the Boy only pursed his lips. The Boy didn't nod, he only kind of shook his head, which may very well have been further comforting adjustments on the pillow, but who's to say. The Farmer saw in the Boy a stillness and hesitation only cold nights can invoke, Do you want to fall asleep together, Okay Papa, Okay then you sleep there, Okay Papa, And I'll sleep here okay, Okay Papa, and after the Farmer swept receipts and paper slips aside, he leaned over the table. He settled his tilted face into his palms. He adjusted his elbows on the wood. His lips went soft and his back ached, but he kept still. He extended his legs because the table wobbled, and so he pressed the soles of his shoes against a table's leg. The Farmer sat there, as still as he could, staring at the wide-eyed Boy on the bed looking back.

### *Prayer*

Thank you Father for my son with whom  
You color yours.

**THE BUTTERFLY EFFECT**

Once you say *I love you*  
it rhymes with everything.

Ripples in the lake  
begin to change your mind.

Of course, the mind  
changes.

You have only to say  
a word like *but*

and everything is up for grabs.

On the contrary,  
the world escapes.

That sudden destructive storm  
stirred by the fluttering of tiny wings

six thousand miles  
to the callous north  
of you

is a lover's song,  
a word left out.

A tin can falls from the sky  
and clangs.

It lands on a beautiful continent  
you have only read about in books.

The world has come to an end.

The best time then  
is when all is at risk.

Then you cast yourself out  
on the sea of cause and effect.

**I HEARD MORNING OPENING**

The minute I heard  
Morning opening  
There were birds

and a fresh crackling  
like new cellophane torn  
from an Eager Present, thrusting  
itself into my hands

The rumbling garbage truck flees  
outdone  
by beeping earthmovers  
belching out a condo development  
down the hill

In some far-futured  
Someday its remnants  
will live

among the tall grasses  
and wildflowers,  
and archaeologists, peering  
beneath the soil  
will see coffee colored rock  
with their lasered glasses

and here and there potsherds  
of broken ipods

and tablet computers,  
a dirty but serviceable yellow rubber duck  
and call it  
The Plasticene Age

But never mind that;  
It's Morning!  
A delicious new

Blue Present of Yes,  
Another Grand Opening  
Another Miracle  
Another Morning

**ITALY**

The quiet of dusk shades silent rooms  
and yesterdays recombine.  
Mediterranean blues float again above a plush earth,  
above hills that coddle slipping hillside towns  
all burnished rock of timed-smoothed grays,  
villages of plump fruits, clear wines  
the abundant vintage of gods  
sitting, careless, on cloudy thrones  
that drift the high Italian skies.

**TUSCAN HOUSES**



**PHOTO**

She is  
covering

eyes he  
has

just now  
confessed

make him  
grateful

for a  
pair

of his  
own.

**POUGHKEEPSIE KEEPSAKE**

The scattering sparrows, the scooters  
scattering, the boss on a business trip,  
the loss of hearing, the lost roots,  
the last episode of Lost, the  
missed opportunity for a thick steak  
or a life on the stage, the death  
of Norma Walker, the washed-out  
bridge, the bridge.

The wind on the bridge, the view  
up the winding Hudson from the bridge,  
the vibrant fall colors, tangerine and  
apricot and blood, our regular booth,  
our regular waiter, oh sacred  
heart, we love you.

Fennel, fennel seed, Manhattan, a  
Manhattan cocktail, everyone ordering the same  
drink, my life with you, your breath  
in mine, back to front, toboggan,  
to begin, to begin from Wednesday,  
to email, text or call,  
to wait like a waiter,  
one tree blooming,  
coming—arrived—or on the horizon.

**THE DISTANCE TO US**

For we could say this  
is the crux, this being the measure:  
how we stumbled  
at the sound, the sight  
of a bird thrown  
(at our sudden voices) from cover.

Yet kept up...pressing  
the attendant ghosts known to this road,  
laughter of men  
confined to work each  
mile, around them  
fields unresponsive to gross fatigue.

And keep on...as each  
image we catch, itinerant, breath-  
less, disappears  
with the trees and towns  
we pass...our thoughts  
bound to the soft beds fitted for us.

Too early—a bird  
at our window renewing its call  
hearing nothing,  
no answer...our turn  
forfeited, this  
sleep that we share (non-exclusively).

Attend our going:  
signs and wires adjusted to this road,  
holding patterns  
narrowing above,  
in the sky where  
we won't look—ready and never more.

**CROSSING CALIFORNIA**

Driving through rain, my wife at the wheel, me in the back with the baby. The baby won't sleep. I hear him hum his *ma-ma-mas*, his *da-da-das*, through his six small teeth. He can't yet speak, yet he understands the rain, knows its wet tap, its alphabet on glass. Driving south from San Francisco, waiting for night to tuck itself in. *Ma-ma-ma*, the baby yawns and rubs an eye. The wipers groan against the glass, my wife *tap-tapping* to the jazz of rain, the *da-da-das*, the subtle scratch of a felt-tip pen. Did I mention the dog up front in her bed, quiet as rain, jazz on glass? Did I mention the baby's sweet subtle wheeze, the rain and the wipers as the day falls asleep?

**COMFORT**

The lighted dark. The heart of palm.

This dome of sky.

Gentle this. To make a way here on such a planet under so many stars

turning us round on it,  
us so round on it,

gravity's sweet spot,  
this solid, this airy too

and all the explained that feels familiar  
even when it's not,

this hand to so much dark,

life's complete, the comfort of a single word,

the wrap of touch, this soothing  
in the end

and going on again with the ease, a rough place, ease.

This ease, this gentle this, gentle us.

**LOST**

He can't  
even  
find the words

for what  
trying and failing  
over

and over

to find the  
words

for what  
her laughter is  
like

is like.

**THE SCARLET TANAGER**

I return from tooling around the park  
and doing miscellaneous errands  
(really this is an errant ride without

destination to speak of), though I may  
have a weak cappuccino with a friend  
before heading back home from Riverside

Park, anything to avoid sitting down  
and writing once again, and again blank  
pages, blank verses, blank walls and blank doors

without door knobs, not to mention door-frames  
without doors, so that to speak of this day  
as miscellaneous is to miscount

the blessings, mistaken facts for a bird.  
Was it really a scarlet tanager?

**PRAISE, PRAISE**

Would it break your heart if you  
stood blind at ocean's edge  
listening to the waves'  
infinite hammering  
on the anvil  
shore  
or  
would  
your hearing  
become so fine that  
your heart bursts into  
praise and you become the  
thunderous, great, sightless sea?

**PIANISSIMO**

Describe her as *pianissimo*,  
tilt of her head, slight bloom of a smile:  
delicacy, a reverent partaking,  
carefully slow like a bowing pony  
grazing tender shoots.



**WHEN SHE BENDS (APOLOGY TO WS)**

My Mistress' neck is something like  
A swan's,  
Soft as fresh-plowed fields of Amish April,  
White as the delicate blossoms of . . .  
No. No, she will not have that.  
More delicate than that.  
White as Easter linen after a long night vigil  
In the dark castle of distant childhood.

Graceful, always, without intention or artifice,  
But gracious too, before and beyond desire,  
Gracious, like a goddess, when she bends,  
More than eager to receive  
The hungry worship in her lover's kiss,  
Parting the golden drapery of her hair,  
And leading him to the spot--  
"There . . . no, not that. Yes . . . that. Yes . . . Yes, just there."  
Trembling she tries to speak her joy,  
But, tongue-tied, language fails--

Again she is nineteen,  
Aflame with hope and purpose,  
Swimming naked, unashamed in the Bavarian summer moonlight,  
Moaning the secrets of her soul,  
Unfurling to the absent friend she fears will someday come.

**HOMECOMING**

Now the sun will soar again,  
now the dark won't drop too deep,  
now I won't mind getting up,  
now I'll finally get some sleep,

now I'll breathe the way I ought,  
now I'll let up on the clutch,  
now I won't gnaw every nail,  
now I won't shake half so much,

now I'll always say it right,  
now I'll take the perfect tone,  
now I won't avert my eyes,  
no, or make you roll your own:

now I'll flip my constant frown,  
now (for now) you're back in town . . .

**SNOW**

Old heart, are you up to it?

Last night snow fell, just as predicted. A soft slow steady white snow that covered the steps and the walk and the passage between the buildings and made a little white mushroom on the plastic table in the center of the yard. Now it waits while he eats breakfast, reads the New York Times, sorts through the morning mail, and feeds the cats. "Would you like to know what the cat weather forecast is?" he asks his wife. She already knows this joke, just as she knows all his jokes. "Warmer by the radiator," he says. "And cooler on the porch."

Together, they laugh.

Old heart, are you up to it?

He pulls on his winter coat, all zippers and velcro and extra pockets, pulls that knit wool cap that makes him look like a street person over his gray head, picks out his new, and now favorite snow shovel, that red one with the metal edge that works so well as a scraper. There are fresh footprints on the porch, his wife's, the mailman's. He can see the spot where the New York Times landed. Because the boards on the porch (which he built himself) are a bit rough and cannot be easily shoveled, he gives them what was once known as "a lick and a promise" and starts out on the main walk where the snow is partially trampled down by the neighborhood kids on their way to school. It's important to get this up before it becomes packed down and freezes. He has exactly twenty-five feet of sidewalk to do and is surprised at how heavy the first full shovel full of snow turns out to be.

Heavy snow, wet snow, heart attack snow, that's what this is. Be careful, he warns himself. Don't be another old fool who shovels himself to death!

One shovelful at a time, each carefully tossed onto the parkway. The red shovel works perfectly, scrapes right down to the wet sidewalk. He appreciates good tools, good objects, things that work as they are meant to work. He tries to remember all the shovels he has known, the heavy coal shovels his father used to fill the hopper, that metal shovel his father-in-law had made himself, the shovel he had used to kill a rat when he was working for Mr. Fisher—his very first job, he smiles now when he remembers how Mr. Fisher closed the storeroom door and held it shut until he was sure the rat was done.

Snow like this, you can see that it wants to pack. Would make good snowballs. Would roll up into snowmen. Could be fashioned into excellent snow forts. After school, what a great race of boys and girls to get out of sight of the nuns and begin throwing. God made the snow. The nuns never seemed to think of that. There were boys who could throw major league fastballs all the way from the other side of the street.

He pauses for breath at the end of the walk, and listens to his heart. It seems good, pumping steadily. Out of the corner of his eye he sees his wife on the porch, cleaning up his "lick and a promise" with a yellow straw broom. There are moments when he loves everything about her, and this is one.

Now he begins to shovel the narrow gangway between the buildings, lifting each heavy wet shovelful chest high and toss it over the fence into his neighbor's front yard. This he does slowly, carefully, thinking of the great blizzard of '67 when his sons, now grandfatherly men themselves, piled the same neighbor yard higher than their own heads with snow. Entire cars

were buried that year, traffic was brought to a halt, silence and beauty returned momentarily to the inner city. What is it, he wonders, that so many people have against snow?

His heart, pumping steadily, has gotten the rhythm of the work, and he feels the warmth rising in his blood, feels his lungs fill with life. The air is crisp, not at all cold, so clean you actually want to breathe more of it. How many breaths has he drawn since he first appeared on this earth. This might be interesting to work out some day.

At the place where the front yard ends, the houses stand so close to one another he can touch either wall without stretching his arms. Now each shovelful of snow must be carried back to where he can toss it over the fence or pushed forward to where the back yard begins. Here, between the houses, is where the gutters drain and the ice forms, some years several inches thick. Yesterday he stood out here chopping merrily away at it until his wife finally cried out, "Stop that, don't go killing yourself!"

Women, even good women, never seem to understand. The snow, the snow, the snow! To sit in a classroom with your corduroy knickers still wet from recess, to watch the great white flakes circling down over the church yard, to hear the nun droning on about the merciful gift of God (His love), to itch for, literally itch for the snow. What is that television man thinking, nattering on about three inches, oh, the horror, oh, the weather charts, oh, the warnings, button up, don't drive, oh! Clearly that television man had never lived on the Western Avenue hill and celebrated each winter snow storm by watching cars turn sideways and go sliding down from the halfway point. Oh, the snow.

And the trees are white with it, and the rooftops are white with it, and the birds line up on the wires with their feathers fluffed up against it, and the frozen dead rat in the alley is completely covered by it and this morning, so calm, so beautiful, so restorative of life, is enough to make a man wonder why he might not live forever after all. Are you up to it, old heart? Of course.

He finishes between the buildings, pleased with himself, and slowly works all the way to the alley. The garbage men have already been through, and the big black plastic containers the city provides have been rolled out of position. He thinks of all the other retired men, in the city, in the suburbs, throughout the country, all shoveling, all admiring the snow, all remembering. He thinks of his schoolmates, the boy who died in Korea, the girl who gave birth to a hermaphrodite son—or was it a daughter, the boy who became a priest, the boy who went to jail for smoking marijuana, all once innocent as snow; he thinks of the nuns sweeping through it in their black robes, he thinks of his father, his mother, his sister, and of the white mounds covering their graves, his first wife, he thinks of her too, and her own white mound, and the two evergreen shrubs she sleeps between that have now grown into tall trees. What a gift this life is, he thinks, what a beautiful beautiful thing while we have it.

Now his wife comes out the back door with her broom and turns her attention to the back steps. Now the dog comes into the yard and romps momentarily in the snow. Only a few short years ago this dog had easily escaped the yard by climbing the snow mounded up next to the fence, and there had been a wonderful chase for him and his wife before they caught her several snow covered blocks away. Everyone had been out shoveling that day, men, women, children, white, black, hispanic. Had they seen a black dog, a perro perhaps? Oh, yes, one went by just a few moments ago.

And now the dog is already growing old and she sits in the snow pretending not to notice that the gate is standing open.

Old heart. Once more you have been up to it. He leans against the fence and allows his blood to calm. Ker thud, ker thud, ker thud. The sun slips out from behind a cloud. The birds on the wire suddenly take flight and are gone. The dog sits attentively in the snow. The wife finishes the steps and closes the door quietly behind her. The red shovel has done its job well.

The end

GLORIA VENTURA



**SCHEHERAZADE**

Naturally, she'll be in blue,  
not the wild bullfight, flame  
color that drives men wild  
as the story goes but calm,  
hypnotic, a frozen lake  
spell that swirls men into  
her words, a tornado  
spinning, about to touch  
down. She knows the ritual.  
Her voice, a lasso, a swirl a  
lariat. Her eyes, words, voice  
hog tie your breath. She is a  
wild magnet everything in  
you is iron filings, unable  
to resist. She will tell you  
the dream where you feel your  
skin pulled past deserts in  
Tripoli, flung into an emerald  
studded tent where whatever  
you lusted for is pulled  
from the lake behind her  
eyes and the new moon of her  
whispers turns darkness wild as  
overflowing rivers in a tsunami.  
It gets late, later and no one  
can sleep. Night's glistening  
onyx. She is cunning, cat  
like. She is the horses running  
until they forget they are  
horses. Just as you think maybe  
you've got her for good, have  
her body where you want  
it, light slices the room in two.  
If you weren't so drunk on  
her, you'd see her slight sneer,  
how she catches her breath:  
*alive for one more day.* How  
she sees your longing, prays you  
will never get used to it

## **SCHEHERAZADE**

She wants you  
to be inconsolable,  
wants you to keep  
wanting more.  
Somewhere, under  
her hair wild plots  
explode like kudzu,  
covering a whole  
house overnight. Her  
stories grow like  
an invasive species  
taking root, taking  
over. She'll reveal  
just enough. Her  
stories could be a  
a dance of veils,  
hypnotic, her words,  
a belly dancer's skin,  
mesmerizing as car  
lights you are the  
frozen deer in  
the trance of until  
it's too late to  
do her in

## UNDER A QUILT OF STARS

like black onyx velvet.  
She pulls, like someone  
spinning straw into gold,  
visions that stun, would  
pull any man close, his  
breath held, frozen. Her  
stories, pungent as a  
mango grove, intoxicating  
as May wine in a night  
garden of jasmine  
and patchouli, lasso  
your blood and  
your dreams. Each plot  
stuns and slithers in  
to a new one like  
jeweled glass, ruby  
emerald and sapphire  
shards in a kaleidoscope.  
She is enchanting,  
gives you what you  
can't let go of. A  
magician, she is not  
like a tree where the roots  
have to end somewhere  
but is daring and  
clever, wily as Coyote,  
definitely not like those  
afflicted at birth  
with some  
presentiment of loss

## SCHEHERAZADE, AS THE SUN GOES DOWN

Maybe she thought of him  
as a child asking to be told  
about a past dream, or some  
familiar story never ending  
as it did. She knows his  
tantrums, the knives in his  
eyes. Others haven't made it,  
escaped, stayed alive. But  
she's got a stone-strong,  
wild, riveting plot. No, plots,  
and images to keep him as  
glued to her as if she was  
stripping, revealing slices  
and flashes of an exotic sexy  
body. She's a quick change  
artist, her stories the cape the  
bull of his appetite tries to  
gore. There are bodies stock-  
piled before her. She is steely,  
fanatically bright. Their  
nights are brilliant blue. Like  
a magical tree's never  
ending explosion of plums,  
she spins stories he can't help  
but lust for more of, each  
one more tantalizing

## **YOU MIGHT WONDER**

even before being captive,  
was she too often living  
on the edge? Addicted  
to danger? Was the  
edge all she ever knew?  
The intensity? Was it a  
high to escape the knife  
one more time? Never  
feeling as alive? Does  
she find him more  
terrifying or more  
seductive? Imagine  
the velvet cushion, her  
pale throat so close  
to his knife and hands.  
Was he so close  
she could smell his  
beard? Was the air too  
still as clouds covered  
covered the moon?

## **SCHEHERAZADE**

How it was late, was  
getting later. She  
was walking a tight  
rope, couldn't know  
if each story could  
be the last. Adrenalin  
pulses through this  
chameleon. She's  
wily as the Lorelei,  
tempting and luring,  
her words a mirage,  
her only ammunition

## HOW COULD HER PALMS NOT BE WET?

Scheherazade, her  
heart wild under silk.  
I think of her when  
the sky gets light  
fighting sleep, driven  
to map out the next  
night's plot. Each tale,  
like the third person  
in this ménage a  
trios where words  
tempt more than bodies,  
hair and skin. She  
knows, like a lover  
who prays to never be  
boring, her stories  
must charm and  
disarm or she won't  
be there to tell them

## **EACH NIGHT SHE IS LIKE A DROWNING NYMPH**

like a woman pulled  
out of the river  
and dressed in warm  
clothes, her lips  
parted. The twist of  
words that will  
keep blood flowing  
thru her body.  
She could be a woman  
close to drowning,  
reeled in with eels and  
sea weed, fins, like  
Rapunzel shimmying to  
freedom, her own  
hair, her words  
a rope to escape

## **SCHEHERAZADE**

if she were to tell  
her own story, if  
she were to spin  
images and verbs  
of her nights, it  
would never be  
boring, would  
never end. Like the  
most skillful lover,  
her nights are  
never dull. Like  
any woman who  
has to do what  
she has to do  
save her own life,  
she had to keep  
doing it, one  
night at a time

## SCHEHERAZADE'S JOURNALS

written in code only  
her sister could read  
if she doesn't make  
it thru another night.

Who knows if his  
body crushing hers  
will be for sex or  
death. She writes a  
note to the ones she  
could be leaving.

One dull story and  
everything ends.

Her beauty, plum  
nipples, her lips  
smelling of roses  
won't be enough if  
the lure of her plots  
and stories can't  
measure up to his  
unearthly intellectual  
and spiritual lust

## **I THINK OF HER IN SOME FILMY SILK**

her skin rubbed  
with jasmine. Before  
the stars are rhinestones  
above the castle where  
he will enter her  
for what she knows  
could be the last time.  
The erotic and the  
life threatening, a sash  
he could at anytime  
undo, wrap too tight  
across her neck.  
Call her wily Coyote.  
Everything is a trick.  
Who can imagine  
The names she  
calls him where he  
can't see shuddering,  
as she lists the names  
of flowers that only  
open once

**PAPRIKA**

My brother is standing in the doorway when I open the door to air out the house, the raised purple scar across his chest tapering at his neck. The kerosene lantern slips from my hand and shatters in my surprise.

“Break the wineglass,  
and fall toward the glassblower’s breath.”

Eight years since I last heard his rusted voice—still he quotes lines from Rumi, covering this darkness between us with the poet’s incandescence.

And I answer in kind:

“A candle is made to become entirely flame  
In that annihilating moment, it has no shadow.”

Shards of glass in my hands, I head down the corridor and hear him come inside behind me, closing the door and going into the front room. The kitchen is full of the heavy smell of last night’s tea. I put the glass into the bin, then dump out the tea leaves and put on the kettle.

In the war, when shells no longer whispered from the ocean but shrieked from the sky, he’d throw off the blanket late and brew his tea in the kettle, slurping it out of the spout as we scuttled through the trench. He handed me the last three-quarters of a cup once we’d reached the guns. Knew I wouldn’t mind the dregs.

The cups, sugar, teapot rattle on the tray as I carry them into the dark front room. I slide the sugar bowl towards him:

“Dissolver of sugar, dissolve me,  
if this is the time.”

In the dark room, the shadow that is his head rises.

“I am a plantation of sugarcane, and at the same time  
I’m eating the sweetness.”

As he speaks, he sifts three spoonfuls into the tea.

*He became an apparition in the months we spent in the trench. Like a spider, he seemed to jump and land and still hang, suspended, and the bullets and mortar couldn’t find him. I ate, shot, and defecated with earth on all sides and thought only of killing and dirt, not minding the many shadows that flitted across that canal of sky, until his feet touched the ground beside me. Then he would whisper what he’d seen near the enemy trench. I’d look up at his tilted head and feel his hand on my helmet. The only other time he became solid was when I awoke at dawn, next to him under grandmother’s blanket, and I had to shake him to get him up so he could come hold the front for another day. But once he’d risen and started the tea, he was our company’s idol, our hero. A strange idol, nearly mechanical, but he led us through that tunnel of days and rain and dirt.*

The tide of light in the room rises imperceptibly while my brother gulps down two cups of tea. I realize he’s cold and toss the blanket in his lap. He unfurls it with his fingers and wraps it around his shoulders, tilting his chin to feel the worn pile, watching the lines of early sun pass through the shutters.

He watches me take him in as he’s revealed. His head shorn but with a bit of stubble coming in, the thin line that looks like a pouting lip above his left ear. Skin stained and marked

like weathered oak. And blending into the ‘v’ of the blanket, his barrel chest, the angle of the poorly set rib. I wonder if he has eaten recently.

“a boiling new life begins,  
and the Friend has something good to eat.”

He knows I’m asking if he’s hungry but doesn’t answer—squinting, instead, at the worn rug. His lips part and some air goes in and they come together again and he looks up at me with unsure eyes. I shake my head and say:

“There is a basket of fresh bread on your head,  
and yet you go door to door asking for crusts.”

I stand and return to the kitchen, where there’s a salted leg of lamb wrapped in cheesecloth in the cupboard. Wrinkled, but still good.

Into the garden for tomatoes, cucumbers, mint. Not yet ten o’clock and the morning sun has already turned the rows of plants into the dull color of heat. Stings. Even the tomatoes look pained under the muslin I’ve stretched above them for shade, stretched as taut as skin. ‘Don’t let your throat tighten with fear. Take sips of breath all day and night, before death closes your mouth.’

Cucumbers, mint, and tomatoes chopped, thrown in a bowl with lemon juice and oil. I open the tin of paprika. Doesn’t smell like it will work, the dry sweet and wet sour.

“Look at the chefs preparing special plates  
for everyone, according to what they need.”

At the sound of his voice, I look up. He leans in the doorway, the blanket still on his shoulders, the brown wool flattened between his skin and the whitewashed stones. The sun comes through the little window, hitting the tin of paprika. It shines in my hand and both of us look at it, at the flakes the color of dried blood pinched between my fingers. My knuckles are pale in the light. When I glance up at his face again, he seems reversed for a moment, like the inside of a mask.

“Be a full bucket pulled up the dark way of a well,” he says, “then lifted out into light.” He picks up the bucket by the back door, and lalts out into the garden. *He tapped my helmet on a charcoal dawn while I lay in the muck of the trench, said it was time. I knew what he meant. I turned but he had already moved on. The rain slackened enough to let the dawn in, and then I heard him at the far end of our line, cawing like a crow, and the rain came harder and I stepped out of my hole, drawn by that lonely sound, hoping the rest were with me as I lurched forward, unsure of even the next three steps, the ground pitted, covered in bits of metal. Then I saw the man I’d tried to kill for so many months, not raising his rifle but still, like death, and I felt sure my brother had come earlier and slain him. But no, he lay asleep. His brown jacket was heavier, newer than mine. I smashed his head with my gun and slid into the trench. No shots, but after a time, that cawing again, soft, between the walls of coarse, wet earth there in the foothills—earth that didn’t smell or feel like our fertile soil by the coast—and I began to caw, too, and soon every one of us were in the enemy trench, first cawing then whooping with the lightening sky.*

The grease on the outside of the lamb has hardened, but when I press the yellow skin, I feel the meat in the center is still soft. The knife is dull. I kneel and glance around the bottom shelf for the sharpening stone.

*Only four of theirs died in our attack, and not a one of ours. I bandaged the man whose head I split, and he lived, though his vision suffered. When the Colonel came, I told him about my brother. The Colonel wanted to give him a medal and hear him tell how he had done such a*

*thing, but I couldn't find my brother. The others nudged and pestered me with their eyes but what was there to say?*

*We got our orders, climbing out of the trenches and into the wind coming down from the mountains. Soon, the coast was only visible when we came to the top of a hill taller than the last. I dropped to the back of the line, staring over the hills. On a day with sandbag clouds, the sun barely slipping through the pinholes, I caught a last glimpse of the sea reflecting a few holes of light.*

The meat slides off the bone. My brother has brought in the well water and now picks up the chair in the corner by the slats in the back. I rush to take the chair—worried he'll fall—but he shoves me easily out of the way.

"The body is merely a device," he says, lurching towards the other room, "to calculate the astronomy of the spirit."

*When I lost sight of the ocean, I focused on my brother's back, his shoulders and spine. They were the gunbarrel straight I imagined a hero's should be. A couple of men had a rope bed made, said it wasn't right having a hero sleep on the ground. So we would unroll and sleep in the rope bed with grandmother's worn blanket on top but truth be told the ground was warmer. I'd catch him from time to time, stepping aside and trying to get me to march in front of him, and I'd grab his sides and push him up the hill.*

*No matter how fast you run  
your shadow more than keeps up.*

*The rain and fog of the foothills turned to drifts of snow when we entered the mountains. We floated through them, and fell to speaking in grunts and gestures, and even in this silent world my brother was somehow more than the rest of us—he learned to sleep in step, and so awoke when we stopped to camp, and took the first watch, every night. Often I'd find the boy who should've taken over halfway through the night still asleep as my brother's silhouette stumbled among us, the scratchy wool blanket on his shoulders.*

I cut the lamb thick and set aside a few leaves of mint to throw in with the tea after our meal. The smell of the leaves opens my sinuses, makes me hunger for the weight of the meat. I bring the plates and utensils into the main room.

*We began to struggle to crest each granite wave of white, our will sinking with us into the valleys as our food ran thin and the sun twisted in eighteen directions over our heads. When at last it chose a mountain wall to drop behind, the blue of the snow and moon would enclose us and pull on all sides of our boots, jackets, blankets. We cleared a space and slept together in a pile on the stiff earth, waking to check the knuckles of our toes and fingers, rubbing the grey blooms of cold that cracked across our skin. Only I and my brother stayed separate, and he would watch over us, though we would have surrendered had the enemy but come, had we seen so much as a child walking through those fields of white.*

He eats slow, turning his fork over for the small bites of lamb he cuts. I push chunks into my mouth to feel the texture on my tongue and what little juice is left. I watch as the pores of lamb open before him, a touch of moist pink amidst the ash grey, and soon I can't stand it and I have to stop eating and simply stare at the dimpled whitewashed wall.

*A blizzard came one night and my brother kicked us awake, got us moving so we wouldn't freeze. We wandered about, dazed, burning the last scraps of food in our stomachs from two days before. We stomped our feet, swirled our arms, and watched as the beautiful, luminescent feathers glided around and down upon us, on our tongues when we chose to open our mouths as we spun and tumbled into that soft, cool down. Then the kick again, from him or*

*another—on your feet—and more stumbling, all night, until the hollow sun cut through the snow at dawn.*

He has finished his lamb, so I reach over and slide the rest of mine onto his plate. I want to feed him full, to cover those ribs. His brown eyes shift from his plate to mine, then move to my face and tighten, weighing something.

“A little curtain-flick, no wider than a slice of roast meat,” he says, “can reveal hundreds of exploding suns.”

*When we awoke from our sleepless night, we were nothing. We turned and faced my brother. He looked us over with his bleary gaze, back, forth—then quickly back again. He cried out. The boy—where was he, the one who used to sleep through his morning watch, the only boy among us? We found him, curled, now content, under the heavy blanket that stretched as far as we could see. He’d fallen and no one had kicked him up.*

*I knew that would soon be me, for I didn’t have the strength to climb the mountain before us, never mind the endless blue and white of the peaks beyond.*

*I lay next to the boy. My brother absently kicked me in the hip, but I couldn’t rise. He stood near my feet, the sun behind his head, and told me to get up. I closed my eyes. The tiny walls of snow on either side of my face echoed my ragged breath. This time he kicked me, hard, in the right leg.*

*When I didn’t respond, he lurched forward and grabbed my jacket with both fists, yanking me to my feet. Then he let go, and I flopped to the earth. He took me again in his hands and shoved me, screaming at me to stand, but my will was crushed, and I fell on top of the boy and this time when he brought his face close, I simply shook my head.*

*He searched the blank field, and lit on one of the others—the uncle of the dead boy. From where I lay, I saw the look of fear under the man’s bushy black eyebrows in the moment before my brother swept his gaze away. But something had taken root between us all, and in an instant, my brother had his knife out and held me by the hair—I thought he meant to kill me—but he brought the blade down on the cadaver’s neck, sliced it open, and shoved my face into the hole and the slow red slush. Drink, he said.*

*I couldn’t bring myself to do it, even as he pressed me deeper and I couldn’t breathe. But he flipped me over onto my back and took a chunk of the boy’s soft flesh and shoved it in my mouth, and forced my jaws around it, and shook me until it slid back and down—I gasped and he shoved in more, and shook, and turned me around and mashed my mouth over the wound, where my own body betrayed me and I swallowed, over and over. I had a dim awareness that the others were eating the boy’s half-frozen flesh as well.*

I stand with the kettle’s cry, and take the tray into the kitchen, unable to watch him eat any longer. Next to the counter, the propane stove blurs before my eyes until I rest my hand lightly on the kettle’s side, the metal searing my palm.

The black scent rises from the tea, as the curled, sun-baked leaves drift into the pot and blend with the jagged mint.

He comes into the kitchen. “Be melting snow,” he says, “wash yourself of yourself.” He starts to rinse the plates, the salad bowl, the utensils. I dry. The walls have begun to radiate the heat of the midday sun. When we’re finished, the humidity rising from the teapot and the water in the bucket before us fills the kitchen, refusing to go out the window.

I open the back door and gesture to the garden beyond.

“Steam spills into the courtyard. No one notices how steam opens the rose of each mind.

Hold out a basket. It fills up so well  
that emptiness becomes what you want.”

Sweating, I put the teapot and cups on the tray. He takes the dishtowel, reaches over and wipes my forehead before I can stop him.

“Then the steam evaporates.  
Figures sink back into the wall, eyes blank  
ears just lines.”

In the garden, the sun plays in the leaves of the olive tree. Soon it will drop behind the whitewashed wall and the olive grove beyond, ushering in a breeze from the sea visible in the distance.

He comes to the garden door and stops, blinded by the sun, his back bent, a bit of sweat running along the distended rib.

*Yes, we were alive. But we were stained, the dark ink swirling and mixing in our blood as we trudged up the mountain pass the rest of the day and through the night. My brother led us, and in my exhaustion, I thought I saw him lit by the thin moon, even as the rest of us blended into the shadows of the rock outcroppings.*

*When the moon set we couldn't trust our feet and so began to crawl over the snow and rock, the wind at us from all sides. Still in front, he would call each of us by name from time to time, to which we answered with a murmur or grunt.*

*At dawn we found ourselves huddled on a shelf of rock that divided the valley we'd just left and the one ahead. Behind us were the first signs of sunrise. Before us, a leaden mix of day and dark.*

*Then we saw it through the haze—a line of smoke, rising from across the valley. A crack in the sky. One of us pointed it out but we had all seen, and we began to shout and hit each other on the back.*

I sit, sweating, drinking my tea, waiting for some relief from the pounding sun. When I look over, he is walking between the rows of cucumbers, squash, and beans, just beyond the herbs and tomatoes sheltered under their muslin tarps. He squats, tastes the earth, spits and calls,

“I feel like the ground, astonished. Rain makes  
every molecule pregnant with a mystery.  
The ground cries out and breaks open.”

What does he mean? The sun hides behind the branches, casting geometric shadows on his face as he comes to the table and drinks straight from the teapot.

He sits, and digs his bare feet into the dirt. The drying sweat on my neck turns to grit with the evening breeze. I start to speak, but he has put down the pot and closed his eyes. ‘This body,’ I think, ‘becomes, eventually, like a vest of chainmail in peaceful years, too hot in summer, too cold in winter.’

*On the edge of that rock shelf I felt myself float outside my body, and then I turned and looked at the others, seeing the dried blood on our clothes, our faces, our mouths. I saw the vague outline of the peaks behind us, hiding the sun, and beneath them, the valley we had climbed out of—a sea of light grey, but for the shadow of what we had done in the center, blooming out.*

*And before us, my brother, the leader, standing apart.*

*The blood heaved in my veins. I threw myself at him. We hit the flat rock then rolled over the edge into space.*

“For years I pulled my own existence out of emptiness.

Then one swoop, one swing of the arm,  
that work is over.  
Free of who I was, free of presence, free of  
dangerous fear, hope,  
free of mountainous wanting.”

I wake at dusk to find no trace of him. I stride through the house and out the front door to catch him, my brother who is and always has been dead, who is more perfect and real in death than we are in life, this half of us that lies formless and flawless next to us, within us, without. I start to run, though I can barely make out the white gravel in the moonless night, and I cry after this lost half of myself:

“Do you think I know what I’m doing?  
That for one breath or half-breath I belong to myself?”

C. MARECIC

## A ROOM WITH A VIEW



ALEX KUSTANOVICH

## NEW THEOLOGY

They say meteorology is the new theology, Temples forming across plains,  
Priests splitting the mysteries of clouds  
With a rainmaker's prayer.

A woman with a sunburned dog, her hands blistered from raising other people's children, puts on  
a hat on and looks up at the sky  
for signs of Armageddon.

The scientist at the algorithm sanctuary still argue about the origins of time.  
Life continues as it began,  
without a hint of destiny.

ELEANOR BENNETT

XMASSHOOT 368



## **BOOLEAN ARRAY**

Persistence of mind, clarity of thought  
this is required and  
logical foresight plus analytical predictions.  
To create and design, and concept  
the logic conduits required to guide:

Numbers flowing and changing.  
Some ending some beginning some,  
not even numbers at all just  
a true or false.

As everything slows down  
starting to condense  
the workflow decreases,  
hitting a final Boolean, or not.

Those remaining race ahead  
catching the floating integers in their wake,  
coming to a stop.

Blasting back into motion  
frantic with logic and equations  
the massive lattice-work searching for the final value,  
seeking with double precision,  
The last solution to all of the problems.

Wrapped up neatly in one cluster and shipped out  
the final solution to the unspoken question  
the one survivor who was just born.  
Born as everything has begun to  
End.

LIFE WITHIN A DIGITALIZED WORLD

birth is a wonder, death is a hunter, nothing is in between except a number after a number

```
      1 000000
      1 0
      1 0
0     1 000000 10101 1
1     1 0      0
      1 0      10 0101
1     1 0      0
010 01 10 01010 1 0 1 01 01 0
```

KATHLEEN GUNTON

**HOW TIME FLIES**



## ENVIRONMENTALISM AT ST. FRANCIS COLLEGE

A student recently filled out an application for a summer forest ecology research program just north of the city. For “outdoor activities” he put “played baseball in a park.” There was no mention of hiking, fishing, or camping that might indicate that the student had ever been exposed to a forest or another more natural ecosystem. This limited knowledge of the environment and its ecosystems is typical of an inner-city Brooklyn student. Even a student who lives in Coney Island close to the beach mentioned that she had never really examined the shoreline for signs of marine life.

Our students are, however, adept at using computers and playing video games. They would rather shop than take a hike. I once took a student to a salt marsh at the Jamaica Wildlife Refuge to collect shrimp for a project with a small net. She screwed up her nose with disgust when she saw...mud! I had told her to wear sneakers---something she could get wet and dirty, and she had little sandals on and refused to step near the beach. Then she whipped out her cell phone and proceeded to chat with her friends while I did the collecting. I snarled at her to put it away and at least dip the net into the water once, which she finally grudgingly did. Not all students are so unappreciative of nature...a student on a recent trip to St John in the Virgin Islands wrote in her journal, “It was on my bucket list to see stars. Since I have lived in Flushing, Queens all my life, this is the first time I have ever had the chance to see them. It is so beautiful and peaceful to see the sky full of stars.” These are the kinds of statements that I thrive on. I know that St. Francis also had this love and expressed a familial feeling for the environment in the “Canticle of the Sun,” in which he referred to Brother Sun and Sister Moon. Over the past fifteen years, there have been attempts to imbue the atmosphere of St. Francis College with a sense of being in harmony with the environment. Efforts have been made to do this through courses, field activities and research.

“Ecology and the Environment,” a course offered by the Biology and Health Promotion Department, introduces non-science majors to the natural world. Projects that students have participated in have included letter writing to local officials about their concerns about problems in a local park, and keeping an energy and resource usage log to create an awareness of how much we consume and yet take for granted. A favored assignment is the ‘niche paper’ in which students write about their interactions with the environment and the various roles they play in their own lives (sister, mother, wife, daughter, brother, father, husband, son, employee, student, or athlete). Hands on demonstrations help them envision environmental concerns: a flask of yeast magically rising simulates population growth. There is a “needs and wants” exercise where a grab bag is filled with sundry items such as a Styrofoam cup, a shoe, a toothbrush, soap dish, book, pen, and Frisbee (the students always laugh when someone pulls a hairdryer out of the “needs and wants” bag). Two columns – Needs and Wants – are written on the board and the name of each item is placed under what the students perceive to be the correct heading. Of course, most items are “wants” but in our culture, they often become “needs.” The students then contemplate the fact that the developed nations have ten percent of the population but use ninety percent of the materials of the earth. And, most of the items listed on the board are not even available to most of the world’s inhabitants.

The Ecology course for Biology majors includes field trips to local parks where trees are identified and water quality is studied. The students learn about biological relationships among

plants, animals, bacteria, and fungi, and also the relationship between organisms and their physical environment.

One Saturday trip included a visit to the Sunken Meadow in Fire Island. The students especially enjoyed the breezy ferry ride to the island. The group was surprised to learn that deer were abundant and was astonished when one came up to us. We had been cautioned not to feed the deer as they could harm us if they wanted more food than what we had available. Holly trees, sassafras trees with their mitten-shaped leaves, and cherry trees containing shiny black bark were pleasing to the eye, and unusual in their short heights, having been “salt-pruned” by the ocean spray. Since it was a warm Indian Summer day in September, we were able to don bathing suits and partake in seining, a type of fishing in which a net (which is suspended between two poles that resemble broomsticks) is dragged on the bottom of the shore side. We were rewarded with a catch of small silversides.

An environmental theme has often been chosen for a one-credit senior seminar for the biology majors. One year the students were asked to work in pairs to pick opposite sides of an environmental issue and stage a debate for the class. Controversial issues included the fishing industry versus overfishing, factories that produced chemical toxins versus the families that lived nearby, and the pesticide industry versus the biotechnology industry (genetically-engineered plants to resist pests without the use of pesticides). The students learned that there were often more than just two sides to a story, with many stakeholders involved. After the students presented their debates, the rest of the class was allowed to “vote” on the winner.

Another senior seminar was titled “The Biology of Poverty.” The students were asked to research diseases that afflicted many members of the developing world. HIV-AIDS, malaria, schistosomiasis, cholera and leprosy were among those the students chose. One connection students were able to draw was between leprosy and St. Francis; he lived among the lepers and may eventually have contracted the disease himself near the time of his death. An attempt was made to teach the students that adverse environmental conditions sometimes lead to disease, as in the case of malaria and cholera, and that eradicating mosquitoes and filtering drinking water could lead to a decrease in infections. A case in point today is the recent cholera epidemic in Haiti.

The seminar theme of “Environmental Health” was popular, because most of our biology students want to embark on health careers. Students wrote about and presented information to the class on diverse topics such as mercury poisoning, Chernobyl, and Love Canal. Again, students learned about the insults our environment has been dealt as a result of industrialization, and how these detrimental effects can be experienced by human beings.

SFC has now offered six marine biology courses in the Caribbean. Students have traveled to Belize, Honduras, or St. John in the U.S. Virgin Islands for a week-long trip to study the ecology of the coral reefs. These fragile ecosystems that make up less than 1 percent of the coastal areas of the world are endangered, and thus invite urgent study. Students spend a few days in book and paper discussion at the campus prior to the trip, and they receive ecology and Caribbean culture lectures from SFC professors and make their own presentations to the class. While in Central America, the students spend their time snorkeling and photographing creatures of the reef, studying and conducting research projects, listening to lectures and keeping journals.

The most recent trip to St. John was most interesting because two-thirds of the island comprises the U.S. Virgin Islands National Park. We stayed at the Virgin Islands Environmental Resource Station (VIERS), which is part of the University of the Virgin Islands. Solar water

heaters and composting are incorporated in the “attempt to be sustainable” daily operations of VIERS. The students were not very happy about the three-minute showers to which they were confined! Hiking was a larger part of the itinerary than previous trips, and we were amazed at the large pipe-organ cacti and sugar plantation ruins that dotted the gently rolling hillsides. We were treated to viewing the same types of tropical fish that we had seen in Central America, with the added pleasure of actually “following” sea turtles while snorkeling.



Photo: Kathleen Nolan  
Kathleen Nolan  
Honduras 2009



Photo: Kathleen Nolan  
St. John 2011



Photo:  
St. John 2011

The first research project that the science majors embarked on over fifteen years ago was a study of the effects of anti-worm drugs on fish that had died in the New York Aquarium. Students learned how to make microscope slides of tissues from these fish. Other projects included partnering with the American Museum of Natural History to study sturgeon, which are endangered fish. This relationship led to a paid internship for one of our students in a summer research program, where he was able to work and socialize with students from many colleges (including Brown and Princeton) throughout the country. This, in turn, led to a collaboration among SFC, Medgar Evers College and the American Museum of Natural History that secured funding for four years from the National Science Foundation for our proposal “Teaching Students Conservation Genetics.” This project exposed mostly minority students to the environment and the issues that affect it. Over twenty-seven students were able to receive funding to partake in research activities related to the environment.

The framework of the program allowed students to participate in major research projects in the summer that were conducted at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH). The projects fulfilled the mission of the AMNH, which is to classify organisms, and discern their role in the natural environment. Students used various body measurements (morphometrics) and DNA to uncover these relationships. They were exposed to a variety of techniques including molecular biology, field technique, using computer software, and freezing specimens in liquid nitrogen (cryopreservation).

A few students had the chance to travel, both locally and abroad, to study specific organisms. Sea turtles in Brazil, mongooses in Jamaica, snakes in Alabama, scorpions in Arizona, and diamond backed terrapins in New York City, were just a few of the organisms the students studied.

This grant laid the foundation for other environmental projects, which have included the study of plants in Trinidad by Dr. Evelyn Wolfe, shrimp populations, and toxins found therein, water quality of the Gowanus Canal and the Hudson River, and a study of plants found in the vicinity of Coney Island. We have even recently ventured into archaeology with the “discovery”

of several oyster shell middens (waste piles left by Native Americans) which have been shown to be 2300 years old through radio-carbon-dating. Our latest projects have involved collaboration with the Brooklyn Bridge Park Conservancy in which students have conducted projects as varied as surveys of park usage to seining under the Manhattan Bridge. This summer we will strap a sonar fish finder under kayaks and “go fish finding” adjacent to the Brooklyn Bridge Park!



Photos: Rene Brown  
Seining under the Manhattan Bridge

The NSF funding and other grants have allowed the students to partake in activities such as field trips and attendance and presentations at conferences. Overnight field trips have included a stay at the Pocono Environmental Education Center (PEEC), Black Rock Forest, and a field station of Fordham University in Armonk, New York. During both the PEEC trip and the Black Rock Forest trip, the students were able to trap and weigh and measure turtles for a population study. These urban students were apprehensive before both of these trips, but once at the destination began to relax and enjoy the activities.



Photo: Black Rock Consortium

Students have presented their research work in the form of PowerPoint presentations and posters at many conferences in the New York City area, and sometimes beyond. These are learning and networking opportunities for the students. They get a chance to see other students’ work from other colleges and glean further research ideas from this work.

The students have started an Environmental Club at St. Francis College. They have invited speakers to discuss the “Power of Green” and “Ecology in Nicaragua” and have gone seining (fishing) in Yonkers. They helped set up for a fund-raising dinner at the Beczak Environmental Education Center in Yonkers, and conducted two beach clean-ups on Canarsie piers. Another activity that has been proposed to the students is to get involved in the Franciscan “Care for Creation” movement.

The Great American Smokeout and the SFC Heath Fair also make connections between the environment and health. Physical activities (such as karaoke, Wii, and belly dancing) are combined with presentations and printed material to try to provide information to the students in a festive way.

Students have attended many environmentally-themed lectures over the years, with topics such as the ecology of coral reefs, agricultural effects on the environment, the Metropolitan Flora project (sponsored by the Brooklyn Botanic Garden), the diamond-backed terrapin of Jamaica Bay and various endangered species such as sturgeon.

The Biology and Education departments sponsored a program called “From Sea to Seining Sea.” Teachers and teachers-in-training were invited to partake in activities that combined hands-on laboratory activities with a trip on the Schooner Pioneer in New York Harbor, and seining in Brooklyn at the Salt Marsh Nature Center. They then competed through essays for schooner trips for their own students. One of the classes who “won” a free trip was a group of second graders. I had the good fortune of being able to go out on the schooner with them, and was delighted to see their astonished faces when they actually raised the sail, and saw a real live starfish.

The experience of seining is a thread that runs throughout our curriculum; in addition to the examples noted throughout this essay, for the past ten years SFC and the NY State Department of Education have sponsored the Summer Science Academy, a program for high school students. Participants in this Academy have opportunities to conduct science experiments such as “What Lives in a Drop of Sea Water?” and participate in field trips such as the ones on the schooner or seining, and to diverse places such as the New York Aquarium and the Prospect Park Zoo. The seining trips expose students to the natural environment, and provide a keen sense of excitement because one never knows what the net will bring up to the surface. There is always something in the net, from masses of silversides that travel in large schools to a single flounder. The students are always astonished by this activity.

The college is now exploring a minor in environmental studies-sustainable development, a course of study that may include Environmental Economics as well as Religion and the Environment. Even though St. Francis could probably not have predicted the current degradation of our environment, he would definitely celebrate the beautiful parts of it that still exist. I feel that he would want us to celebrate the creation and the environment all around us and would want us to impart a value of stewardship of the environment to our students.

## “MEANINGFUL READING, MEANINGFUL WRITING”

“Can I make copies of your lessons on \_\_\_\_\_?” At the high school where I work, as in many others I would imagine, such a question is commonplace. At such a seemingly innocuous question I balk. Often, I acquiesce in the name of collegiality, turning over at least some of my lessons and / or supplementary materials on whatever text / topic needed. I have always considered that my reluctance to do this stems from my identity as a writer. I consider anything that I commit to paper as my intellectual property. I no more wish to see lessons I created housed in someone else’s files than I would wish to see this article, a book review, or the novel I recently completed published under someone else’s name. There is a certain amount of intellectual egoism involved.

As I prepared to write this article addressing the need for teachers to create meaningful assignments, it occurred to me that there is another underlying issue to my reluctance to share. My lessons, assignments and exams are written for each class each semester. Rarely do I re-use lesson plans. I have taught *My Name is Asher Lev* by Chaim Potok (1972) thirteen times and have thirteen folders of lesson plans and materials. Each folder represents one of the times I taught the course. My focus, our discussions, quizzes, tests, and assignments vary from class to class according to ability levels, in-class discussions, and students’ interests. Had I taught (as at least one of my colleagues does) from the same one folder with the same sets of notes and the same homework questions, student interest would not be accounted for in my planning. Certainly, if allowances in instructional planning are not being made for variety in the tastes or interests of whole classes, differentiated instruction cannot possibly take place. Likewise, colleagues who assign vocabulary words found in a text and subsequently test students on the meanings are not creating assignments with any meaning, beyond the short term goal of passing the forthcoming test. Authentic assignments occur when students feel not only involved in whatever is being studied but also when what is being studied is **relevant to the students’ lives**. In literature classes, students must see the themes in texts and be able to connect those themes to their own lives. It is important that teachers of English make sure to keep texts fresh for students. One method of doing this is by re-reading texts alongside students, as if for the first time. Elaine Showalter (2003) also suggests that a teacher might consider actually reading a text *for the first time* along with students, staying just one chapter ahead, so that the teacher experiences the same first-time insights that the students experience. In this way, the teacher does not become so jaded as to discount student responses that might otherwise be considered trite or statements of the obvious. “We’ve known that for years; they’ll have to do better than that in *my* class (McNaron, 2001, p. 230; emphasis in text).

One of the ways to make students more personally involved with texts is to show a direct and personal connection between the text and the students; in other words, a reader-centered approach. Creative lesson planning can often make such an approach possible. For example, when planning for my literature classes, I often leave off deciding the homework. This practice, which I would encourage other teachers to use, makes allowances for the fact that students influence the homework assigned based on their grasp of the material presented, their questions or comments, or the particular direction of the classroom conversation. It is not uncommon for me to have two sections of the same course, and wind up teaching two extremely different

lessons. It is also not uncommon for the lesson recorded on the note pad to be vastly different from the one performed in the classroom.

There can be no denying the power and purpose of a reader-centered approach to literature and the degree to which it has positively informed our practice. It has made the enterprise of literature teaching more relevant, immediate and important. It has forced us to rethink what we do when we teach literature, why we do it, and whom we do it for. There is ample evidence of the soundness of the reader-centered approach.... The value of the lens of reader response to literature study in secondary classrooms simply cannot be denied. And no one would want to (Appleman, 2000, p. 26).

Similar to literature instruction, authentic writing takes place when students have a vested interest in the writing assignment. In order for students to even begin to produce quality writing products, they must first feel connected to the writing which they are to do. Following that reasoning, teachers who assign writing topics in basic composition classes are already placing students at a disadvantage in the course. Often, students are assigned to write a persuasive essay on a controversial topic such as abortion or capital punishment. A descriptive writing assignment might entail writing about a pleasant childhood memory, a favorite holiday, or something along the same line. Students who receive such assignments are often instantly “turned off” by the writing process, feeling “put upon” rather than being an active participant in the creative process of writing.

Having followed the research of many experts in the field of writing, as well as having a personal commitment to promoting writing as a daily part of students’ lives (both in and out of the classroom), I began the Fall 2009 semester pondering two simple questions: 1) How can I get my students to be personally invested in their writing assignments for this course? 2) How can I generate enough interest in writing that students will continue to write, even after my course (or the school year, or their formal education) has ended?

In the quest to answer my own questions, I decided to do some investigating. Approximately two weeks into the semester, I devised a “writing survey” and distributed it to students in the two sections of my basic composition class. I asked six questions:

- 1) When and where do you do the writing assignments for this course?
- 2) What is your ideal writing environment?
- 3) How do you utilize the writing process?
- 4) If you could choose your next writing assignment for this course, what would it be?
- 5) What method (i.e. pen and paper, computer, etc) do you prefer to use when writing? How do you revise and edit your work?
- 6) How often do you write outside of class? How often do you read outside of class?
- 7) What connection, if any, do you see between your life as a reader and a writer outside of a classroom situation?

Several students’ responses surprised me. Patricia, a ninth grader, said that if she were to choose, her next assignment would be a research essay. Additionally, many students responded that they prefer writing the old-fashioned way; pen and paper (perhaps my students are not as heavily invested in technology as I was led to believe). Jacob also surprised me. Quiet and subdued in the class, Jacob did not turn in more than half of my many assignments. He says he writes “when an idea pops into my head.” Yet, he sees “a small connection” between his reading and writing life, claiming to “read 4 days out of the week.” This shocked me because as a proficient reader/writer, I see the two as inextricably linked.

Above all else, the common response that was the greatest revelation to me as a writing teacher as the overwhelming desire to write **at home**. I had always structured so much time into my classes for writing to be done in class, thinking I was doing the students a service. It turned out, they wanted no such service. Another finding that surprised me was that, despite all the professional literature singing the praises of group work and group revision / editing, during follow-up conversations regarding standard practices in English classrooms, the overwhelming majority of my students felt that group work was onerous, unhelpful and inherently unfair. Many students cited the common example of one or two people doing the work and the credit being shared by everyone. Additionally, students felt that peer revision and / or editing was not very helpful since students often do not see what is “wrong” with a piece or may not care enough to give a close read.

As a result of my findings, I re-structured and re-thought my course presentation for the remainder of the semester. Class time, when not needed for direct whole-group instruction, was devoted to self and peer revision as well as teacher-student conferencing rather than draft production (allowances were made, however, for the few students who did indeed prefer to write in class). Additionally, the assignment following this survey was a *free choice* assignment. Students chose their own topic; in conference, we discussed the best method to explore the chosen topic (e.g. short story, poem, essay). One student, Alain, tried writing a short story, realized that he had much more to say than could be contained in those few pages, and decided he needed to write a novel. Even after the course was over Alain still came to see me weekly with ideas, an outline, and the first pages of a first draft. In addition, Patricia, mentioned earlier, and Yesenia, her friend, both submitted articles to *English Journal* for publication. Patricia’s article was accepted almost immediately. She now is seriously considering writing as a career, something she had never thought of before. Yesenia, who has always loved writing, decided that she would take the rejection as a call to improve her skills. I seriously doubt that my colleagues’ grammar worksheets and vocabulary tests would have propelled these young women into action.

Finally, the method which I believe creates the most meaning for my reading / writing assignments is a very simple yet (in my opinion) underused one: *teacher modeling*. As someone who expects students to read and wants them to be excited about reading, I regularly share what I am currently reading and / or what I have read recently, as well as my thoughts on the material. I believe the perception of the teacher as an active reader is essential if the teacher is to “sell” reading as a regular habit. I often say that, if appointed to an Assistant Principal position, my first question to a prospective department member would be, “What are you reading now?” If the teacher of English does not read, how can she or he possibly convince students of the value of reading? If the teacher (regardless of subject area) has not written a word in decades, how does the student see writing across the curriculum as something more than a nice phrase?

In my own classes, I address these issues on a regular basis. I mention in class discussions the names of authors I know personally, state the titles of their books and often show their websites. It is not uncommon for students to come to me before or after class anxious to tell me about a book they are reading. Sometimes, it is one written by someone I know. The student will usually ask me to get it signed for her/him, which I do. Additionally, when I plan to attend book signings, I invite students. The turnout is generally minuscule, but the opportunity is there nonetheless. Thus, students see me as a *practitioner* of reading, not just a spokesperson for it.

As for my writing, I tell students about my writing projects underway, and often share pieces of a work. In some instances, I have read aloud from sections of my novel or distributed copies of one of my short stories. One article, “Tennessee Williams’ Women in a Man’s World”

(DiSchiavi, 2008) has become part of the course materials in my class on Williams. Although the byline clearly displays my name in caps, students are nonetheless surprised after having read the article when I “come out” as the author. I do this to show them that, to paraphrase Elaine Showalter (2003), published materials come from regular people, such as themselves, not from the heads of Zeus or Minerva. In a similar vein, a friend of mine, Susanne Dunlap, author of YA historical fiction, frequently visits schools to discuss writing. She recently brought to a speaking engagement several copies of her latest novel, *In the Shadow of the Lamp* (2011). Although Susanne spoke at length about the process of writing the book, more than half the class had not realized that she was the author.

No one method is right for all; that is the heart and soul of what differentiated instruction teaches us. That said, I do believe it is safe to say that whatever method one uses to teach, or whatever assignments one chooses to give, there must assuredly be perceivable *meaning* and *value* to such work. The meaning and value must be perceived by the *students*; they are the consumers of the assignment, they are the ones who must succeed, and ultimately, they are the reason we are all here.

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**READING JOHN KOETHE ON THE BUS FROM STRATFORD, ONTARIO TO  
MADISON, WISCONSIN,  
A LITERARY PILGRIMAGE**

*Is that your panda bear? Does it have I.D?*

It was suspicious the way she carried  
her bear in a snugli like a baby.  
Who would do that? So they shook poor panda,  
rattled the teeth sewn between her matter-  
of-fact muzzle, her glassy, button eyes.  
If she were human, her brains would rattle, break  
against her skull, but in the end, satisfied  
that she wasn't trying to smuggle knowledge  
across the border, they moved on: to boys  
with suspicious biscuits, rolled British-style

In cylinders, like their sleeping bags, like mats  
tied to their packs below. The guards unrolled  
them: *What do you use these for? Yoga?* They looked  
for anything that smacked of foreign, strange.  
Pulled thick books from the bottom of sacks, shook  
them by the boards, expecting documents,  
drugs, secrets stashed in the empty middle,  
but they kept their mouths clamped tight, marmosets  
wrapped around each ligature's branch, limbs locked,  
their little lips clenched, hanging on every word,  
turned up, twitching with soundless laughter, gaze

fixed on one another. They could hang on  
for any length of time. They were flexible.  
They packed everyone back inside, heads turned wrong,  
a few limbs missing, clutching our searched  
accessories, palpated by lycra-  
gloved hands at the end of the fluorescent  
tunnel. Three hours it took to thumb each life,  
missing connections just blocks, just countries  
away. No one squeaked. Not a word, peep, bleat.

*Just out of curiosity, the border  
guards ask me, why the bus?* The last hour, a tease,

they kept the last sheep in the holding pen  
and everyone on board could see him there,  
too cramped to move. We waited, waited,  
watching for his release. *If my girlfriend*

*was on this bus, she'd drop like a window.*  
Because I don't drive. Because I'm cheap. Because  
connections between rural Ontario and central  
Wisconsin are tied with frayed twine, not high-speed  
trains. Because I lived in Europe where busses  
are a way to get from a to b, not  
the last judgment. Because I took childhood trips

this way with my grandmother, remember  
sunrise on the painted desert, over lake  
pontchartrain, amarillo at midnight.  
Texarkana, little rock, Galveston,  
Albuquerque, Baton Rouge. Because people  
on busses carry packs and pocket shells  
like pilgrims. Because greyhound allows thirty  
minutes to get over this border but waits  
for you in Detroit five hours. Because when  
that brand new bus breaks down and you circle back,  
they unlock the station, have you on the road

again in less than an hour. Because all night  
long drivers tell you things you want to know about  
things you didn't know you'd want to know. *Poor  
planning.* And that they don't know everything.  
Because despite everything you arrive  
at your destination as scheduled. Because  
miracles are more than god waving some  
magic wand, and I am reading *sally's hair*,  
thinking about Prospero and Paulina  
who orchestrate the happy endings of their  
plays assisted by Apollo, assisted

by Ariel, then put aside artifice  
to marry, to pray. Because the book I bought  
used online arrived signed by the author,  
inscribed to Joe and Annie, from 14a,  
and I think: how nice to come by it in such  
a random way, at just the right time, my  
daughter whom I elbow similarly amused.  
Because we expect that life reads like a play,  
with characters, dialog, metaphor, plot.  
Because we could entertain ourselves years  
this way, waiting for each sheep, filling in gaps.

**WHEN SUMMER COMES**

in drops, and the air hangs  
like a too-big t-shirt  
and smells fresh like a child  
who has run through  
fields of honeysuckle,  
and the stars come out  
of winter hibernation  
and shine, glowing  
across Heaven's neck—  
lovebitten in spring's cool  
affair—

When summer  
comes,  
in drips,  
rainlove rushing  
through hot rusted gutters  
on white houses and  
leaking in between boards...

When summer comes  
and droops,  
lazy magnolias laying  
their heads down to rest  
as arrangements on tombstones,  
old, and expanding in wet  
air...

When summer comes,  
it dries like blood  
on a uniform in Georgia.

**AFTERWARD**

I'd like to say my father planted this seed, but in eighteen years I never once saw him  
 clasp a spade,  
 pull up weeds with gloved hands,  
 smooth topsoil over fresh depressions,  
 or brag on his best melon—how it's grown threefold in his absence.

Who would've thought our day would end like this:  
     us face-to-face like two schoolboys at recess arguing over the girl in pigtails  
 who *might've* waved at one of them,  
 the rage ablaze in me from some underbelly caldron, ignited by words and tone  
 misunderstood,  
 the wedding ring flung sidearm and stinging my cheek like an open palm  
 and five firm fingers?

This time I won't unearth the words to say what's needed till hours, maybe days, after  
 the door slams,  
     your fingers turn the lock,  
     your body collapses on the bed in tears cascading down in uncertain streams.  
 I'll return to student papers or poems that search for meaning—  
 with better meaning hidden behind the bedroom door where you've cried yourself to  
 sleep,  
 mascara and blush staining the damp pillowcase you've sunk your face into.

There's nothing to be said for understanding *why* when all you want is *Sorry*,  
 no desperate pleas for acceptance or needs for convincing or persuasion.  
 A bad day, my slow-healing wound—what shall I blame it on this time?  
 Perhaps the fact that I can be a jackass?

Like Lot's wife, you'll turn back,  
 seasoning my bad tastes and bitterness with salty absolution, God's gift to mankind I've  
 yet to find under my tree.  
 You'll stow your sentiments in a fireproof case that I will surely kick ajar again, its contents  
 rising into the air like fog, obscuring the trigger of our next skirmish.

**THE SIREN**

Facing a winter window,  
wearing longjohns in a house  
I keep conservatively cool,  
I shuffle papers at my desk,  
reading, writing, sorting bills.  
Out in the town, the fire siren howls,  
calling volunteers. Once, first ward; twice,  
second ward, and so on, up and down.  
*Thank God it's not me*—a reflex  
for which I shame myself in the next breath.  
Think of the terror, the stupid flames  
that will not stop, the startling smell, the cold outside,  
the kind old dog they find dead in the smoke,  
the ruthless damage done to save the roof,  
the walls, the family photos,  
the next day's work clothes.

The siren stops, but even through the window  
I can feel it humming  
on the stony air.

**VALENTINE IN VERKHOYANSK**

It is cold and all the world is brittle,  
White, stiff and frozen. The grass itself breaks  
From the hoary ground with every little  
Move that nature brings: birds' feet, leaves. It takes  
Just them, no more. Trees hold their silent arms  
Aloft in frozen skies, branches bare and  
Ice chaffed. The sun shows itself, but it warms  
Nothing—a brilliant distant white diamond  
Set inside a band of grayish blue. No snow,  
No rain, no hail comes forth, just this cloudless,  
And this endless, chill above and below.  
Air, thick with bright and frozen luminance,  
Sits, motionless and cold, while all around  
The brittle world grows more and more icebound.

**THE HEISENBERG PRINCIPLE MEETS MR. SOMNUS**

The sky today looks like an upended landfill;  
any sunlight is wrapped in matted  
gray vapors, trouncing any desires  
to sport among the high weeds  
and frightened shrubs of Spring's  
recent arrival. I can always  
watch clouds or drink a cooler  
in stemless crystal, musing.

All the birds on the lawn, hunting seeds,  
their heads darting to find a cat or lesser  
threat of child or machine. But cats lie inert  
in disheveled heaps here and there;  
children can't leave TV; I can't rise  
to push a mower. I can always  
drink a beer or two in large-handled steins  
and listen for frogs, which might be up to it.

Hedges, flowers, errant growths, these weeds  
trying my flannelled shins, all mustered  
for a month's employment, a beckoning  
landscape just too much to consider  
right now before dinner; I can always  
look in the magazines for images  
to fill my head with decent ideas  
for when I could remodel.

Many the days I sit waking and  
watching, gleaning; they tumble  
and fester in heated piles, too many  
to count, too many to appease, or quarry  
for finings or effluent I can use  
in conversation. I can always,  
I could, count cars or drink  
herbal tea, waiting for someone to call me.

**ROAD**

Online photographs of the road  
show it's still dusty,  
lined by saplings and shrubs  
and tired houses.  
The dirt-clod fights, bike crashes,  
snakes striking passing pant legs --  
none of that's visible --  
no ghost of the boy  
whose shepherd lurched at the bully,  
nor the bully's acceptance  
of the dare to gulp  
rancid water from an old tub,  
no cowboys or Indians,  
no colliding heads,  
no bloody brow  
or angry parents,  
or midnight screams  
or curses or static silence,  
no spring night meteors sparking  
wonder and hope in a boy's eyes --  
only those houses, smaller now,  
sagging under the years  
along a road that's far shorter than memory.

## GHOSTS

In the small square outside a courthouse a  
group of strangers hide from the rain, as if  
they've known each other for years,  
ignoring the pigeons huddled between two oaks,  
in silence, burying their dead, whose spirits ascend in  
flocks daily, rain or shine.

In a gauze of lighting, gusts of wind rise  
feathers, trampled and weeks old,  
high above the benches and the fops in suits,  
as the raindrops, melting into sharps and flats,  
tear at the oaks' crowns, in a funeral march  
for the departed, at lunchtime, on a Tuesday.

**THE COMING DARKNESS**

It's difficult to see  
Through the coming darkness,  
The clouds that have settled  
Into the valley after rain,

But you see them,  
Sometimes clearly, other times  
As hazy shadows emerging  
One after another, you count

Sixteen deer over the miles,  
To graze beneath the tree lines  
Mindless of the noise  
Of the passing cars and trucks,

Or what awaits them  
If they wander too far.

## **ON THE EVE OF WAR**

January 2003

Flights of geese, wings curled, descend calmly  
like planes on a harbor long ago, splash among  
flotillas of waterfowls. All talk at once and waken me  
from an old nightmare of martial law, curfew,  
and rationing.

Two geese dip their heads in water, and I wonder,  
then understand a mating ritual in late January. The gander  
takes the goose's neck in its beak, and I laugh, "Is this timely?  
Is this proper?" So it is in any war, however difficult  
to justify or define. The time is now, whether one's for victory  
or peace.

The gander bumps to shore, shaking its tail, and balancing  
on one leg. I sit quietly, settling to the moment, as the goose  
with an entourage of mallards wags ashore. They receive me  
no longer an intruder, but one of them, and I join the myriads  
murmuring, inviting new flights of sojourners to hover briefly  
in light, alight and join this community of everyday hope.

**THE OTHER SIDE OF THE GLASS**

Swallows congregate and perch, fly in and out  
of the wooden beams that jut above

the plate glass windows of our home  
in the converted barn. Sometimes a swallow

will believe the doorway is open, as generations  
of swallows swooped through semidarkness

toward fragrant silage, and is drawn to nest  
beyond the audible thump and the whitest clouds,

past a sky clearer than glass, released from  
this life into whatever it may become in the next.

Face down though there's no room  
– the crowd still on its feet  
as if there were ropes and the bell

could save you, take on the cold  
from under the threadbare news  
and your name nowhere

– this paper not yet marble  
can't warm you  
has no one to lose to

no headliner after headliner  
whose arms hang over  
and all winter

still work the corners  
prop up the dead  
the way this bench

looks you in the eye  
covers you night by night  
and never there enough.

## TALL SHADOWS AND SHORT GLASSES

Hayward, Calif. 1968-69.  
The box labeled 'Winter Quarter'  
is checked; materials plus fees

equaling 68 dollars. The owner  
lived in Walnut Creek and did not draw  
well (chaotic; symmetry intended,

not achieved) but made many double-  
sided arrows connecting line to line  
across boundaries of page and topic.

Bertrand Russell is right, after seven  
semesters I know very well,  
an education in Classics leads

to nothing but despair (arrow crosses  
two margins to point to the word  
philosophy). Loving grimy, used

Brise is more than clean, sexy Helen,  
Mycenae before my eyes for days  
at a time, thudding pieces of wall

and falling bricks shake the ground beneath  
me (calculators and printed theories  
of Galileo and Malthus tumble

into the void): the necessity  
of Necrophilia to literature,  
to self, imbibed by words forced deeply

into veins like tearing spears and, more  
painfully, by mad eyebrows just visible  
over tilted gin tumbler, the tipping

glass distorting eyes flickering,  
explaining, founding.

## USEFUL GUIDANCE

Useful guidance  
was not forthcoming.

“Better we don’t speak,”  
you were told by  
the fisherman who  
had left his catch  
in the net too long.

Did that mean you  
should swim away,  
or take a deep  
breath and go into  
the cold water  
like a stone.

You watched the  
fisherman remove  
from the nets  
the fish which  
had been eaten  
by crustaceans  
from the inside  
out, trying to  
make sense of the  
constant, merciless  
ache in your soul.

“Better you go home,”  
the fisherman said,  
speaking as one who  
spoke to no one  
unless absolutely  
compelled to do so.

So you chose him  
to tell you the  
secrets of the ocean,  
the secrets of the  
ocean that cannot  
be told, but which  
one lives and under-

stands only after  
years away from shore.

JANET BUTLER

**SUNFLOWERS**



## THE PERTINENT QUIRKS

The old blue Civic idled outside of Lily's aunt's house. As usual, Justin was gathering the nerve to face the spinster and her sinister felines—minus Mr. Bananas, he remembered with a smile. To make his anxiety worse, Brother Warren's boat-sized Buick Park Avenue was moored beside him in the driveway. A wooden cross hung from the rearview mirror. He considered his options. Put it in reverse and slowly back away—he was good at that and trusted his ability to follow through. Go inside, face the nutcases on, discover the truth of Angela's complete recovery—that is, most likely, a deluded acceptance of her death as healing. He pictured her in the rocking chair—pale and cold, eyes forever locked on the TV that wasn't there—and shuddered. Or he could just stay in the car, turn on John Cash, and wait for the mother-ship to come take them away, problem solved.

*To hell with it . . .* Justin got out and went in. *And to hell with knocking, too.*

Aunt Jennie and Lily were in the kitchen doing dishes. The older Bramlett washed and the younger one dried. "Come in, young man," Aunt Jennie said without turning around. Lily rushed toward him beaming. The folds of her jersey dress flowed around and within her short strides; she appeared to be floating like one of Ms. Pac Man's ghosts; coupled with her seamless joy, the effect was ethereal. She hugged him and kissed his lips—*her* lips like a softness forgotten. It had been months since Justin had seen her and months more since they'd been so close. Guilt, as it will, accompanied the renewed wave of fondness. Both sensations settled it—he would not mention Elisha. Or any of the other, less serious girls. Did it really matter? Probably. But it was settled—with or without certainty.

"We just ate. Are you hungry?" she asked.

"Honestly . . . yes. But I can wait until later," he said, happy with the built in excuse for splitting.

"Are you sure? We ate dinner early but just put away leftovers."

"I'm sure. You look good . . . like healthy." *Healthy? What a goon.* But it was true. Call it radiant or full of life or glowing, like they say of pregnant women. *Wait.* He thought about it. But there was no way. Or was there? Brother Warren, he thought. Not unprecedented in similar circumstances. Read or watch the news. Cult leader convinces congregation he is Christ on earth—the bridegroom come to claim his collective bride. No way, though. *Right?*

"Thanks, you look like shit," she said, leaning in to cuss.

"I will thank you to use decent language in this house, young woman," said Lily's aunt. Lily cupped her mouth, eyes wide and smiling.

"Sorry. Slipped," she said.

"That man hasn't been here fifteen seconds and already she's a sailor. Angela, your daughter's done backslid a mile already."

Neither Lily's mother, Angela Bramlett, nor Brother Warren were in sight. Justin went to his usual seat on a tweed-ish chair and sat down.

"Angela's in the shower," Aunt Jennie said, presumably to Justin but not specifically. It was as if she preferred to address the four winds over acknowledging his existence directly. If the young man happened to catch one of those winds, then so be it. "Brother Warren's in the backyard blessing the soil for this year's flower garden. We're gonna have morning glories. The trellis is already planted."

“And celosia and zinnia,” Lily added, as if the topic was well rehearsed. “He had to tear up the goldfish pond but it was done for anyway.”

“Sounds nice, Aunt Jennie,” Justin said, knowing such familiarity from the interloper would irritate her. One should get along to go along, which was his goal—to go along, as in, quickly back to middle Alabama. But the get along part was hard. Besides, she started it.

The bathroom door opened and Angela Bramlett emerged from a light fog. The soothing scent of jasmine followed her into the hall. Justin had to owl his head to see her. And when he did, his eyes lied. Had to have lied, because the woman with the towel on her head was not the skeletal, hound-eyed woman he had left here two months ago. This woman, for starters, stood on her own power—back straight and head high. Instead of the pale-blue skin he had expected, her face was blushed. Her cheeks had regained their flesh and no longer clung to her skull like papier-mâché.

“Angela Constance Bramlett! You get straight back and get dressed! This young man doesn’t need your eyeful,” Aunt Jennie exclaimed, shaking a dripping plate at her robed sister. Angela shrugged at Justin and went to the back of the house. “And you’ll catch your death of cold,” Aunt Jennie hollered after her.

Lily joined Justin in the TV room and lowered herself to the ottoman using his knee for support.

“So, what do you think?”

“Think about what? Your mom?”

“No, the weather. Yes, my mom. She looks good, doesn’t she?” She jabbed his rib with a knuckle.

“Amazing, actually. Especially considering.”

“Miraculous, huh?” Again, with the knuckle. This time it tickled and he laughed. He didn’t want to laugh any more than he wanted to admit the miracle. On the other hand, the moment deserved more than incredulity. Sometimes science owes mystery a flash of lightning for all the thunder it’s stolen.

“Seems like it,” he compromised.

As if on cue, Brother Warren came in, his massive hands soiled and bleeding. “Ah, Mr. Latherfeed. You’ll excuse us. We are not in the habit of storing up fruits on earth but, for the time being, a flower or two is permitted us.”

“Sounds like poetry,” Justin said.

“All things considered, poetry fails us in the end, Mr. Laugherdeed . . .”

“Lat-ter-ly,” Lily enunciated.

“That’s fine, Sister Lilith. In the end, Mr. Latterly, words cannot express the manifold graces of our Lord.”

“I suppose that’s true, Mr. Warren.”

“*Brother* Warren,” corrected Aunt Jennie from the kitchen where she was cranking an opener around a can of cat food.

“It’s OK, Sister Jennifer. For the most part, we only expect the respect of brethren. It’s not for us to chide the lost.”

Lily sensed Justin’s patience thinning. She gave his calf a conciliatory rub. Which worked. Her foreign touch against his leg radiated throughout his body—a thrilling chill. Too many emotions to deal with. Spite, awe, humor, and an ill-defined hunger pitting his gut. Never mind the physical hunger. *Better yet, mind it.*

“You know, I think I’ll go get a cheeseburger or something.” He was already on his feet and heading toward the door. He expected opposition, perhaps another offer to heat up some leftovers or to make a quick PB and J. Nothing doing. *Just as well.* “Anybody want anything?” “Going somewhere?” It was Angela. Her hair was black, no longer gray, and lustrous in the dim light; it covered her shoulders in heavy curtains. The swell of her breasts widened the gaps in her loose-knit sweater revealing little squares of blue camisole. No one noticed him noticing, Justin hoped.

“Yeah, I was gonna grab a burger right quick,” he said.

“I’ll go with you,” Angela said.

“OK . . . wait, what?”

“I’m coming. Is that all right? I won’t bite.” For whatever reason, they all were dumbstruck. For Justin’s part, it just seemed weird—hanging out with Mrs. Bramlett, just the two of them. The others were probably shocked at the idea of her going out at all. Maybe she had yet to leave the house; and now, after all this time under their care, she wanted to share the moment with the interloper. Mr. Justin Something-or-other. She looked around the room at their variously puzzled faces. “Is that OK with everybody. Can’t a girl grab a milkshake?”

“Generally speaking, Sister Angela, he thinks . . .”

“Oh, come on Brother Warren, this ain’t generally speaking. It’s clearly a special occasion,” Angela said. No wonder the daughter looked so healthy—the mother had life in surfeit. The real question was . . . how, in the middle of so much *joie de vivre*, did the other two, the spinster and the quack, stay so glum? *What fortitude. Impressive really.*

Lily wanted to come too but her mother suggested she stay behind. Aunt Jennie called for Miss Niffers. A lame tabby sulked into the room from the back of the house. Gone were the air of superiority and the nod of disdain Justin remembered from prior visits. From the looks of things, if not for the promise of food, the cat could’ve have done without the public scrutiny. She looked depleted, done with her little kitty life and biding her time.

“Poor Miss Niffers,” Angela said. “Hasn’t been the same since Mr. Pickles ran away.”

“I thought it was Mr. Bananas that ran away,” Justin said.

“Him too,” Lily said. “Mr. Pickles took off after him about two weeks later. Spent the whole time pacing and looking out the window for his friend, pissed off because he had been left alone with the she-beast.”

“Young lady, I will thank you . . .” Aunt Jennie began.

“Well, we’re off,” Angela said and tugged Justin’s arm like it was now or never. He shrugged at Lily. She shrugged back.

“You must think we’re off our rockers, huh?” Mrs. Bramlett asked once they were in the car. He said that he didn’t think that at all. She doubted that.

When they got to the Hardee’s, he asked if she wanted to drive through or eat in. She wanted to eat in, said she was glad to be out of the house.

“I bet.”

“See, I knew you thought we’re bonkers,” she said.

“Busted.”

The restaurant was busy. The man at the front of the line argued with a teenager over mayonnaise—its presence or absence from his wife’s sandwich. The mousy wife hid by the beverage fountains sending psychic reinforcements to her husband’s aid. The poor kid apologized five or six times but the bastard was on a roll. It’s hard to stop a bastard on a roll.

Then the inevitable domino fell. One by one, people in line started to complain—some volubly, some in Shakespearean asides.

“Should have driven through,” Angela said.

“And miss the show? Nah.” The awkwardness of the mayonnaise fracas helped ease the awkwardness between himself and Mrs. Bramlett. She blurted a laugh and quickly stifled it with her palm. He saw Lily in her mother. The hair-trigger sense of humor and the easy recovery. Also, the deep-green eyes.

At last a boulder-bellied man in a bursting blue-shirt and too-short striped tie joined the fray, throwing his employee under the bus.

“It’s not his fault,” a sympathetic patron explained. “He apologized a zillion times.”

“The customer is always right,” an opponent reminded the crowd.

“That’s a crock of . . . you know what,” Justin said, leaning into Angela’s ear. “The customer is practically never right.”

The mousy wife, erstwhile silent champion of his bravado, tugged at her husband’s shirt and begged him to walk away. Because and only because she insisted, he let it be known, he took the new, properly-condimented burger and strode back to his booth where he took the most masculine sip of a milkshake as the act allowed.

Angela patiently watched Justin eat and daintily enjoyed her own milkshake. Strawberry, because she “likes the little chunks in her straw, its fun to suck ‘em through.”

In the restaurant’s parking lot, she asked if she could drive. He tossed her the keys and they fell to the ground. He picked them up and handed them over securely. She had long, piano-playing fingers that couldn’t help but graze his hand. The coldness of the touch was shocking. For all of her fresh vitality, he had expected warmth.

Angela fiddled with the signal and wiper levers and accustomed herself to the feel of the wheel. When she reached to adjust the rearview, Justin had to tell her it was no use, that it was super-glued from a collision with his hard-head. For a minute, he thought she would change her mind. Maybe it had been so long since she drove a car that she didn’t feel comfortable driving his.

“Trust me, you won’t hurt anything but us,” he said.

“It’s not that. It’s just . . .” She couldn’t say what and he couldn’t guess what so they sat in silence for a while. He felt bad for her.

“You got this,” he said, eventually.

“I got this,” she said. She reached for the gear shift beside the steering wheel and came up empty. The Civic’s was beside her right leg. She laughed at herself and pulled out of the space. She inhaled deeply and exhaled slowly, put the car in drive, and pattered out of the parking lot. Along the way, Justin clued her in to the pertinent quirks of the old car, occasionally apologizing for the more irritating ones. But she mastered things early and told him not to worry about it, she was better now.

“Like riding a bike, right?” she said, risking a glance in his direction.

“So they say.”

“And *they* usually know what *they* are talking about.”

“They usually do.” Justin took several opportunities to study her face in the mirror and from sideways glimpses. To take notes on the miracle, to search for empirical explanations. It was a waste of time. Miracles keep secrets well. Especially from skeptics.

Before long, he realized that she was not going the right way. She was lost or confused, disoriented during internment. But he kept his mouth shut about it because far be it from him to

play the navigator. In fact, he was as lost as anyone. No landmarks looked familiar. The sun was setting and impending dusk made matters worse. She sensed his worry.

“I don’t feel like going back yet. Mind if we stay out for a bit?” she asked.

“Not at all,” he said, unable to blame her. “Do you want to listen to the radio or anything?”

“No, quiet is good. But we can talk if you want to.” She switched on the blinker and abruptly turned right causing him to lurch into her arm. She said, “Oops. Sorry but I almost missed the turn.” So she did know where she was. Comforting or too premeditated? Hard to say which. But after one more right turn, he recognized the area. She was taking them to the beach.

White Keds hooked on two fingers, Angela walked in front of Justin through the high grasses, sinking ankle deep into the sand. She whistled staccato notes that matched the rhythm of her march.

The high tide pushed lathered breakers halfway up the shore, not twenty yards beyond the last dune. Without rolling up her pants or slowing down, Angela headed straight for the surf—arms wide like preparing to embrace the Gulf of Mexico. The night was warm for February, sixty-five degrees or so, but the water would be no such thing. An unexpected wave smashed against her shin. She yelped, stumbled back, then pushed forward again.

Oh shit, he thought, not so much concerned as exasperated. Maybe she wanted to walk clear to the Caribbean, to push with all of her regained strength against the bullying forces of nature, now before it was too late. *Who am I to intervene? If anything, I should join her.*

But she stopped. The waves pushed her back, sucked her forward, but she stood her ground—now knee-deep, now shin-deep, and so forth. Justin took his shoes and socks off, just in case, and watched from the brink of the surf. Angela Bramlett was taller than Lily, more statuesque. Especially as painted against the bruised gulf and sky.

“Are you coming, Justin?” she asked, barely audible over the waves.

“No, I think I’m good. Maybe you should come back though.”

“No . . . not yet.”

She took another step. Or appeared to. The heaves and lulls played tricks on his eyes. The sky itself moved beneath its illusory dome like an eyeball out of sync with its contact lens. Angela turned and it took several seconds to realize she was walking back towards him; but when she pushed through the last suck of undertow, she seemed to be sprinting. Splat, splat, splat—her feet off the packed, wet sand. Wide as the waning crescent moon in the east—her hilarious smile. Safely in the softer sand, she caught her breath with her hands on her knees.

“Not so bad once you get used to it,” she said.

“I’ll take your word for it.”

“Lily never told me you were a wuss.” She fake-punched his arm. He had never thought of his disinclination to confront fear head-on as wussiness, but now that she mentioned it . . .

“No? Well, she should have. It’s the most important thing to know about me.”

She laughed. He didn’t have the heart to tell her he was mostly being serious. Didn’t have the heart. *Bingo.* He headed back to the car and got to the splintered wooden walkway before he realized she wasn’t following him.

“Mrs. Bramlett.” The noisy gulf swallowed Justin’s voice. “Mrs. Bramlett!”

Long, white fingers sprouted from a grassy dune and fluttered. “Right here.”

“You OK?” he asked, approaching slowly as one might sneak up on a wounded badger.

“I’m fine,” she said, “just not ready to go back yet.”

“It’s getting kind of late, don’t you think . . .”

“So, call Lily and tell her what’s up. Tell her we’ll be home soon.”

Dreading the interchange, he called Lily. *Sorry, me and your old lady are kickin’ back at the beach and whatnot. See ya when we see ya. Wouldn’t wanna be ya.*

She didn’t answer. “Phone might be off,” he told Angela.

“Leave a message. Tell her everything’s OK.”

He hates leaving messages—the pressure and the dithering. Never mind the heebie-jeebies encounter with futurity, the cause whose effect dangles in the ether. At any rate, he followed the robot’s commands and left a cryptic message to do with oceans and convalescence. Hopefully, Lily would catch the drift.

Angela patted the sand beside her. Justin sat down. A miniature avalanche of grit poured into the crack of his butt. *What a life.* He brushed his feet with a sock and put on his shoes.

Angela’s feet were still bare. She wiggled her toes and one of them popped. Even her toes were long. Except for the little ones which were half nail, half stub. Lily’s little toes did the same thing.

The tide slowly receded as they looked out on the water. Five minutes passed. Meanwhile, the beach lost its residual warmth and the temperature dropped ten degrees. Angela hugged her knees and gently rocked side to side. Five more minutes passed. Only the thinnest rim of the western horizon still clung to the purpling daylight. The rest of the sky darkened to near-black-gray, occasionally pricked by stars.

“Do you love her?” Angela broke the silence. In a way, he knew the question was coming. Not sure how but when it came it did not take him off guard. Not that he knew how to respond which was a wholly different matter. The easy answer was Yes. But it wouldn’t come out of his mouth. It sat on his tongue like horseradish, bitter and burning.

“Should I take that as a no?” she asked of Justin’s reticence.

“No, no, no . . . not a no . . .” he wasn’t sure what to say and one needed to be sure. Regarding the apprehension of love, inaccuracy is the most certain reality. And the most unforgivable, nonetheless. What was he supposed to say? What was the truth? Yes . . . he loved Lily and every other broad-hipped and mammariated *homo erectus* gracious enough to acknowledge his existence. Or was the answer No, after all. No . . . because love bandies us about willy-nilly, because it’s the heavy-weight champion of the world, because its sucker-punches are second-to-none.

“It doesn’t matter. If you’re supposed to, you will. If not, you won’t.”

“I guess that makes sense but how are you, I mean anyone, supposed to know? Seems to me it’s a dangerous guessing game,” he said.

“That sounds about right.”

“As in unfortunately correct or as in worth the risk?”

“As in how should I know?” She scooped a palmful of sand and dropped it on her right foot.

She scooped another load and dropped it on her left foot. “Help me,” she said, “help me bury my feet.”

Justin turned away from her, in part to pretend he had not heard her, in part to avoid the embarrassment of the moment. He could hear her grunts of effort, stretching further and further for fresh palmfuls, as if some stubborn vestige of disease still clung to her lungs.

*For God’s sake, just help her.* He dug into the sand as far as he could go, until he reached a cold, undiggable earth. The ground held tight to his hands. He panicked, envisioning in a microsecond the remainder of his life stuck, elbow-deep, burning by day, freezing by night,

stomped upon by children, crept upon by crabs. With an unnecessarily mighty pull, his arms erupted and he fell flat on his back.

Angela laughed hysterically. Before long, still lying flat, Justin joined in. They slapped each other, slowed to giggles, then busted out all over again. After several rounds of this, Angela collapsed onto Justin's chest, sucking in air through diminishing chuckles. Justin hesitated and then pulled her in tight to his own gasping body. There was the warmth. There, whether he liked it or not, was the miracle.

Angela pointed out a kite-shaped constellation. Justin tried to remember what it was called. He considered making something up but the notion quickly became absurd. She pointed out another constellation. Then he took a turn. Back and forth they snatched shapes from the sky for the admiration of the other. A lion, a swan, a goddess, a galactic set of breasts, a variety of dippers. Ten minutes had passed when she noticed that the moon had slipped to just above the horizon. "It moves so fast," she said.

Her breath was a milky strawberry infusing the jasmine scent of her skin.

"Very, very fast," he said. *Nice contribution, Justin.* Suddenly, he felt wildly out of his league. Like a child making his first appearance at the grown-up table, bungling topics at hand, slurping loudly from exotic glasses. Who was he to lie here, her once-gray hair across his throat?

Justin sat up slowly, raising Angela with him.

A jogger and her dog splatted in and out of view along the shoreline.

Justin stood, brushed himself off, and held out his hand for Mrs. Bramlett.

"I can't," she said. She pointed to her legs. "You have to help me uncover my feet."

He doubted that she really needed help, they weren't buried so deeply as that; but he knelt anyway and scooped until he reached her wiggling, long toes and then some more until he reached the funny short ones. The ones she shared with Lily—half nail, half stub.

**HAULING HAY**

The summer sun blazed, but farmers think at least two seasons ahead: winter was on your mind, when the cows follow in steam, bellowing, looking to you for forage. The boys had already left home, launching themselves back to Texas from our small farm, to find their own way. Mom and I alone

were left behind to be your helpers; truthfully, though, we weren't much help, and more often you just worked longer, bending your brown back to the extra chores. But it was time to bring in hay bales for winter; strong as you were, you couldn't haul it alone. At fifteen, I was it.

So before sunrise, while it was still cool (but not for long), you drove us to a local hayfield in your embarrassingly orange Dodge, homemade hay rack reaching up from the top of the bed, measuring high the work ahead. Side by side as the sun climbed to the top of the hay rack, then beyond,

we worked and sweated, swinging arms in that ancient rhythm, bringing in the harvest. I did not know I could be so strong; I surprised us both, matching you bale for bale. We did not talk, saving our energy for the endless field before us. Sun and dust,

horseflies and gnats, ice water and sweat, the small relief of sitting while you drove to the next row. That was our world that day. We loaded the rack to the top, then climbed into the truck for the trip home. I think I slept. Too soon, the aching work began in reverse:

to load the hay bales into the barn loft. I almost cried then, but rejected tears as useless, and settled once more into the work that must be done: catch, turn, stack, turn to catch again. No thought of work's ending and rest beyond; only the work itself existed. Staggering home in firefly darkness,

I knew I had visited only for a day the bone-deep work of your life, and felt pride to have shared it. In the moments before exhaustion won, I heard you tell Mom, "She worked like a man," and smiled. You meant it well. And next morning: "I'm proud of you." Into whatever darkness has come,

that day has blazed its light; whenever soul's winter came bellowing hunger, that day has fed me with its truth: be strong, keep your head down, keep working, there is more to be done, do it and be done. The strength that surprised came from you: pride, stubbornness, love. I have done no finer work than that day hauling hay with you.

**LITTLE BORDERS**

I'm trying to pinpoint  
my first memory of you.

You aren't there  
when I'm getting dressed

for school. You aren't  
where I wait for the bus

nor at the Christmas  
pageant. Instead

you are on the couch  
in indeterminate

years, saying too loudly -  
again, again, again -

because you decided  
to quiz me

on my spelling words  
until I had a headache;

until I began spelling  
everything wrong; until

I'm also on the couch  
after crying. I'm

perched on your hip.  
You are laying

on your left side  
and so am I. My

left hip to your  
right. We are

planks of wood  
or countries

with ever changing  
borders because

of little wars, tiny  
battles, moments

of appeasement.  
When you sit up –

I roll off. I  
begin to scratch

your back  
–hard –

just like  
you like.

**COMPROMISING JOY**

My daughter, how alike we are in mind  
And manner, speech and gesture, form and face.  
When God surveyed all time and womankind,  
He measured me in His abounding grace  
And marked my nascent womb, my life, my hopes  
With seven pounds of compromising joy.  
Look at you now! A five-year old who copes  
So well alone, a minx who seems to toy  
With my desires as well as my affection  
And only offers love upon caprice.  
It's true I often make you a projection  
Of my person. Yet when I won't release  
Your self from mine, your protest says it all:  
"But, Mama, you are big, and I am small."

**AFTER MY FATHER GOES UNDER**

*I'm so scared, I'm so scared, I'm so scared:* we shoot the rapids in our stone canoe. My mother closes her eyes and screams. She sits in the front, tries to hang on, grips its side with gnarled hands, contracts, shrinks. She is killing herself shriek by shriek. I hear her pounding over the falls. *Relax.* I breathe. Relax. She twists in her seat, to the right, to the left, making it worse. She squeezes her eyelids shut and screams again. I am breathing in and out through my nose—elongating my spine, aligning its bones—*if you pick a point on the horizon, I say, it helps*—my back, my neck. I empty my mind, open my chest. I am spreading my feet: there's only so long you can lean this way and that. We swing and tip. I am gathering strength: to slip my skin. To let my contents flutter out.

**LATE HARROWING, ILLINOIS**

I saw him from the road  
over on the bottomland  
harrowing the dry ground  
in a big old Allis  
swinging the great flat machine  
around the low spots, getting ready  
to plant. Whatever he was thinking of,  
I doubt it was the music of the curve  
he was making, black ground against  
the furtive sweep of weed-grown swale.  
It was early; let's say he missed breakfast  
and was thinking of bacon and eggs.  
But he did this: called up the earth  
to snare my heart with that shock  
of rough dark color, that easy, flattened  
wave of black carved in dead gray ground,  
around him the ditches growing quackgrass, dock,  
chicory, and blackbirds,  
the trees behind him a blue-dark green,  
the river hidden behind them  
and behind that a lilac sky rising to the heat  
of another week in June.

**COMING DOWN FROM THE HAYLOFT WHEN VERY YOUNG**

His right foot punched through  
the rotted boards  
then chased his curled torso  
as it sailed smoothly thirteen  
feet down  
to the straw-covered concrete floor.

He heard the sound  
of his own astonishment:  
    the gust of breath bolting  
    from his flattened lungs  
    pushing the trailing hay dust  
    into a turbulent plume  
    several feet above him.

He distinctly remembers  
(to this day)  
the face of the cow  
standing over him:

    “Thank you for landing where you did.”

## THE COW OF RECKONING

Five a.m.,  
cow bows to rusty gray poles in half-sleep rapture,  
as my uncle's swift, skilled hands  
squeeze milk into a bucket.  
His head holds steady against the beast's brown hide.  
As his fingers tweak, muscles ride up and down  
his weathered arms like snakes.  
He massages, pulls down on the pink-gray udder.  
Foamy white liquid pours from teats in a gusher.  
Can after silver can is filled with  
heritage, family, land, food on the table.  
The surly banker would have him oversleep.  
The auctioneer prefers his stock be dry.  
The city job hates farmers  
with a cube and work-bench passion.  
The drained cow stumbles from the shed  
into a grassy field.  
Soon enough, it's chewing its way toward  
tomorrow's milking, last month's bills.

**JOSHUA**

I have this vision of us running.  
You trailing behind,  
always behind.  
The sunlight gently touching our skin  
as we run with our strong, feathered wings  
crafted from a love  
that was conditional.

Our laughter is music,  
the perfect symphony together.  
You finally catch up as we  
crash to the emerald earth.

We never knew where we were going,  
perhaps that was the problem.

I have this vision of you  
gazing through the window,  
deceivingly hard blue eyes staring  
at the winter landscape.  
Flakes float like feathers from broken wings  
to serve as a quilt for the chilled earth.

What a deceptive quilt,  
a backstabbing chameleon,  
pretending to be what it is not...  
what it could never be.

As you watch them swirl in the atmosphere,  
I cross your mind.  
You smile.

I have this vision of myself,  
frozen.

**“LATE, AFTERNOON”**

There are times, in the country, panic spews  
Out of stillness (the seed from which chaos grows),  
And she is sudden, when so easily found.  
She is sudden; and so easily missed.

Through summer, insects discreetly swarm  
In circles above the crop’s wavering tassels  
As a thousand tiny comets weave lingering  
Spirals across the broad sunlight.

There is a magnetism that speeds  
New dimensions, spins new universes.  
Conceives endless spheres of her image.  
The dead farmer said, there’s a god in there.

The sky blisters green before your hard rain falls.  
In the barn, the ground is dry. The cellar is wet.

**ROSE STANDING IN SNOW**

See the rose upright, blossoming  
in my garden. Buds are breaking  
out, careless of the weather.

My frozen earth is  
stained with crumpled leaves.  
she should be barren now...

In the sky, beyond the  
birds, gray-haired nature  
defies sun and spreads her

hair. Clouds stretch beyond  
their means. In the family room,  
I hear the news with the an incessant

voice, blaring more war, or rape, or  
graft. Still, I see this rose, yellow  
as gold, gleaming, like light

into soot filled dusk. Some  
say yellow roses are a symbol  
of Love or Jealousy. I choose love.

From here, her thorns are  
invisible, like unseen  
Sorrow. I think all roses

should be female. We feel both  
love and jealousy. We know how  
thorns have failed to keep all bad

things away. We have our winter  
hardships: Hard grounds and chilled  
winds. While roses may sicken and

die, my rose has kept her beauty.  
She stands alone, waits for the  
coming of small shoots of green.

**VISITING HOURS**

He calls to ask if I will come; it is winter and the ground is rock-hard from two months of biting cold. My father doesn't need to say he's been admitted: I can tell from his voice, from the pause as he coughs, phlegmy and loud, and from the nurse in the background, urging him to rest. Of course I will come, I say; but I'm afraid I'm out of practice. It's been twenty years since the girl I was, gangly and dutiful, waited in the lobby of this hospital. Waited for my father, the expert visitor, to come down the elevator with news, waited in line with him for dinner, waited for my mother to look up from her bed and tell me how she loved me, noticing the ribbon in my hair.

The thruway drive is long and grey, and somehow suits me, bare trees and wintered grass. It has been months since I've seen him; I am startled by his gauntness, his color. He'd been telling me he was okay, no need to visit in the cold; but I forget how loose with the truth he's always been. He still lives here, in the town where I grew up, a town with one old grocery store, where the Sunday paper is skimpy and filled with circulars. I will always like it here, he told me when I mentioned how run-down the house is; he likes walking along the main drag, as he calls it, watching women with their strollers and men filling up their tanks with gas. Peaceful, he says, and Friendly's is a few blocks down.

It is clear he doesn't have much time; he likes this hospital, even though it's changed, the foreign doctors, one especially from Pakistan. Even though he cannot understand the accents, or recognize the smells of foods the nurses microwave, it is where he wants to be. He tells me what he wants: no hanging on for weeks, no big to-do's when it is time. He has a plot, one shaded from the sun and leaf-blown in the fall. The colors are beautiful, he says, in fall, maples and oaks and the white barks of birch. One next to your mother, he says, left of hers, closer to the gravel path.

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My mother. I was nine the first time she went away.

It's true that there were times she was wildly happy, sewing curtains early in the morning, rearranging furniture at night, singing with the radio, and that look she had, as if she lived in a place, secret and magnificent; and she would wake me, at four a.m. to take a ride, somewhere, anywhere, stop at diners in little New Jersey towns, make believe were living someone else's life. I was at turns, scared and thrilled and wondered who this was, my mother who seemed incapable of sadness.

And then the times when she was not. Sitting in the green upholstered chair saying nothing, her hair uncombed and her stained blue robe, the one my father bought for her at Sears. The way she looked at me, as if I never belonged to her. And the quietness which came before the sound of dishes breaking; and the words she said which I remember to this day, which I want to forget.

That first time she went away, my father said it would be alright: she needed rest, they were taking care of her. I went to school like always, though some things were different, my hair, for instance, which my father combed for me, which turned out badly, lumpy and flat in spots. I

don't remember my father doing wash, but clean clothes showed up in my dresser drawer, folded, I guess like he folded his own undershirts. And my father gave me thirty five cents each for lunch, for tomato soup and buttered bread, and the smell of wet trays.

As the days went on, we settled in, Huntley and Brinkley on the television as evening fell, my father's voice on the kitchen phone, checking on my mother's day. I never really knew how she was, but believed him when he said things were honky-dory, and that we'd see her at the hospital on Sunday after church. I was to tell the neighbors, in case they asked, that my mother was visiting her sister, an invented sister who lived in a place my mother never went to in her life.

When she was gone, things were different. I stayed over at my friend Camille's. I didn't need to make excuses as I had to do when my mother said no: who knows if Mr. Salvatore would peek through my nightgown, or fall asleep in his easy chair with a burning cigarette; ask questions about my family; God knows what could happen. And while she was gone, my father let me ride my bike as far as Chatham Road, though he didn't change his mind about reading with the light on after nine.

Sunday came, and ladies in church wondered about the handsome father with a daughter whose mother was a question mark. My father guarded my mother's secret, that she was at St. Mary's in the wing where children under twelve could not visit, on the floor they kept patients with bandaged wrists and others who believed that neighbors followed them into the grocery store and watched and whispered as they shopped.

He loved visiting days and the meals they served in the hospital cafeteria, Yankee Pot Roast, and of course meatloaf, especially when Lillian served it with a little extra sauce since she liked him, and he was a regular. I was happy seeing him eat slowly to make it last longer, and hearing him dissect the meal while he ate, and the way he revisited the peas or the cauliflower on the drive home. It was nothing like eating at home where my mother saw food as yet another looming threat. Everything was overcooked; meatballs were blackened and hard, and canned vegetables were boiled for good measure. LeSueure peas were cooked so long, the green skins separated from the peas themselves, and corn niblets ended up mushy and tasteless. All because she feared salmonella, bacteria, toxins and impurities which she knew were lurking. Drinking Pepsi from the bottle caused trench mouth, and the crust around the Gulden's mustard jar could blind me if I wasn't careful.

Eventually I got bored sitting the hospital lobby, reading old issues of *Reader's Digests* and smiling back at the Candy Strippers. I couldn't stand to flip through the pages over and over, and see the articles about Joe's liver and his ventricles, and corny jokes. So I watched people come and go, stopping at the information desk to find room numbers, the nurses with their quiet shoes, orderlies wheeling big green bins through the hallways. I especially liked watching everyone in the cafeteria, other families sitting at tables speaking quietly or staring in silence. I made up stories for each of them, imagining they kept long vigils at the bedsides of those they loved, a husband or wife who would die in the end, revealing a secret while taking a last breath, like the characters on *As the World Turns*.

My father was not like the other visitors. He was lighter, not weighted down. We would sometimes stay a little longer and have dessert, especially when they had tapioca pudding in small glass bowls. Lillian winked at him, sympathetic, and he grinned. We grew accustomed to this routine, and the best thing, he said, was that our meals cost way less than HoJo's, and he didn't have to leave a tip.

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When my mother came home, that first time, we were happy with little things, drives to the park with the duck-filled lake, shopping for poster boards for my school projects, making decorations for the Christmas tree. When things were like that, I put my fear into a box on the top shelf of a dark closet. But then there were other times, and afterwards a feeling that things might not really change : I would never have a mother like the other mothers on the block who drove and planted flowers in the yard, and laughed, and didn't laugh so loud, or cry so hard and noisily, or keep lights on around the house at one a.m. and close drapes to keep the autumn sun out.

The second time, she chose to go. It was the day before Thanksgiving – she could not stand another minute of mothering she told my father loudly; and I heard her, even though I covered my ears with my pillow, hoping I heard wrong. At times like this my father never sat me down and re-assured me that she did not feel that way, really, it was her sickness which made her say these unkind things. Instead, he figured in her absence we could breathe again and that should be enough.

We had turkey and stuffing and mince pie in the St. Mary's cafeteria. I watched doctors and nurses and orderlies as they ate at tables decorated with a paper pilgrim girl or boy, or an Indian bearing a gift of corn. My father told me that my mother had a little bit of the holiday meal they brought to her, though the turkey was hard to cut with the plastic knife. He said he thought the patients' food was not as good as what they served to visitors and staff. My father remarked on the way home how nice it was that there were no pans or dishes waiting for us when we got home, but then again there were no leftovers, no hot turkey sandwiches for dinners that week.

She was discharged on Sunday; they wheeled her down, and she was peeved at the nurses who treated her like an invalid, wheeling her into the lobby for everyone to see.

I'm sure they will talk behind my back, my mother said, as she held my father's arm getting into the car which he parked under the portico. Would she bring home a great silence like she did the time before, silence which was louder than sirens? And my father, his neck already tense, the drive home; would he be on tenterhooks again?

\*\*\*

We got through Christmas and the snow and the long afternoons, and things were good for all of us. In March, it seemed she sensed the coming spring well before the forsythia burst out. She ironed all my summer clothes and smoothed them as she folded them as neat as in department stores; and she flipped through magazines, clipped articles and recipes for summer soups and different kinds of lemonade. I knew it meant another headlong plunge would come, but when? I prayed she would not drag me underwater with her; if she went again, that she would fall quietly, not saying hurtful things about my curly hair, my chubby cheeks, how like my father I was, cold, unfeeling.

And so she fell, in April as the spring kicked in. This time she wanted more than anything to go so far away we could never pull her back; this time my father found her open wrists blooming on the bedroom sheets.

Because I had turned twelve, I could visit for a little while. I wore my glen plaid kilt and blue knee socks, and used my mother's rouge, since she'd never know. And when I saw her in her room on the third floor in the section with locked doors, she was still not well, whispering hello to me and gazing toward the window, her lunch sitting uneaten on a tray. I sat in the chair next to her bed and didn't know what to say; but I thought of some things about school and the flowers in our yard, and she said that's good at the end of each. And I saw the bandaged cuts on her arms and knew how deep they must have been, and wondered where she got the razor blade she used, did she take it from his razor, the one he shaved with every day?

I knew she didn't want me there, but I needed to say something that would make her want to stay with me; I could cook and clean and make her life less difficult when she came home. I kissed her cheek and said goodbye. She never said that I looked pretty and smelled good, Oh de London! dabbed behind my ears. I told my father I wasn't hungry as we took the elevator down. But he was, and I watched him eat potatoes Lyonnais as it began to rain outside. Can't beat the price he said, and we drove home.

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For six straight weeks we went to St. Mary's on Sunday after Mass, after hard rolls and the Sunday Daily News. She grew better slowly, more slowly than the other times. My father said it upset her when I visited, and so I never went back upstairs.

\*\*\*

May, the month of Mary, the smell of lilacs filled the place; I should have been playing outside in the soft spring air, but instead, I was the daughter of the man who visited his sick wife week after week, the daughter of the woman who cut herself, the one who wanted so badly to die. And so, I watched the blue afternoon evaporate, seeing it from inside the bland waiting room, waiting for the ride home with him, its predictability, Sinatra songs and the waves of cigarette smoke filling the front seat.

They let her go again, her tranquilized, dead eyes. She did not want to be with us at home, the summer coming and the long, long days. And so she found another way to go, for good this time, with pills and scotch my father carried home the previous Christmas, an office gift.

She had to know that I would find her when I came home from school; she must have known that I would be the one to touch her face to see if she was warm, that I would be the one to pick the empty bottles off the floor. She must have known that I would be the freshman girl that fall, the one without a mother. She must not have cared; if she did, she would still be here.

\*\*\*

She had asked to be buried far from where we lived. My father picked a place a hundred miles from home, a place where no one would think to look for her, the same place where her imagined sister lived. I guess he knew how many times she practiced death and figured one day she would get it right.

We drove to the cemetery three days later. I sat up front; my father looked straight ahead as he drove home on the back roads. He said these roads reminded him of Vermont, the birches and their shadows. Like a Frost poem he said, looking up at the patterns of light and leaves.

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You might ask why I went along with it, with him. It was simple: it made me glad to see my father eat. It's our little secret, he said, and winked at me as we pushed through the revolving door. Just to be on the safe side, before dinner, he strode through the lobby and went upstairs as if nothing had changed. For seven weeks after my mother died, we came as we had come so many times before, to this place which was comforting, in a way, and familiar, its sounds and smells. I never asked my father what he did when he went upstairs; I didn't really want to know; it would make me see him in a sad way, and I could not take more sadness in. I pretended to read my book; I couldn't bear to let him know the nurses snickered as he waited for the elevator; and how one of them made the crazy sign, small circles with her finger moving by her head. Here I was, the daughter of a woman gone from us because of craziness; and then my father, people thinking he was too. It felt contagious, and I was afraid.

That Sunday, the last time we came here, that Sunday, the chaplain asked my father if he could speak with him, alone; that last Sunday, my father finished his piece of cherry pie, his coffee, pushed his chair away from the Formica table, walked past Lillian behind the counter; and I knew this was it: we were never coming back. I did not ask him anything; I knew him well enough to know he'd never tell me everything; he had become a master of silence, a black bearable silence, not the jagged kind my mother always forced on us.

\*\*\*

But we have come back, he and I, to count the hours down.

In three weeks I will come back to this old hospital, walk through a lobby filled with visitors. I will take the elevator up, carrying some magazines to read while my father sleeps. I will remain with him for eight days, watch vital signs displayed on monitors in icy green. I will wonder how the dying die among the clatter of carts, cackles, talk of schedules and weekend plans, sirens, TV news. I will see his ribs and knees and parts of him I never saw before. I will sleep a little in the chair, walk along the corridors and spy on others tied to their machines. Sometimes I will sip coffee in the cafeteria, watching families and their burdens.

I have small conversations, ask the nurses for whatever my father needs, and I share with him the applesauce they bring at intervals. Tonight, he whispers, it's beef burgundy. I will sit with him and eat whatever's left before I drive in darkness, home.

**THAT I TAKE IN ABSENCE AND WILL NOT MEET**

*after words at the table*

He arranged the dead,  
my father. Sundays,  
too, as winter held.  
Evenings, his hands cold,  
deeply stained, he'd take  
both our hands blessing the bread  
he preferred.

*Where fit the dead, who  
go unfit from here—  
(His burden.) Sometimes  
he invented names  
to mark the flat stones...  
reluctantly, unbidden,  
my father.*

What license applies,  
outlining the dead?  
*Deus vult.* I reach  
for him. Lucky day—  
I come to work, strike  
at the ground and hold off on  
hitting clay.

**THE FINAL AMEN**

He whispered a hundred secrets  
to me while I slept. He sat beside  
my bed and sang songs, his voice rising  
over the sound of traffic in the street  
outside my bedroom window.  
His hands brought joy  
and pain and the inescapable feeling  
that he would hold me against  
the fire of the world. When we sat  
at the kitchen table, he said the prayer  
with such faithful seriousness  
that I believed in God for the moment,  
but only until the end, the final Amen.

## LEAVING THE LILACS

Cool and wet in early spring, the cut grass haunts me.  
It reminds me of her hair,  
of how the funeral director  
cut three small locks for my brother, sister, and me.

Sorrow woven into lilacs, into the green hair of graves,  
worries me like a song.  
How will I, while the sky is weighted  
with the Lenten purple of spring,  
leave the magnolia-like clouds, the irresistible fragrance of rain?

I have seen her in her casket.  
I have gone into the ground to watch her become the earth.  
I have felt the cold drop, ascertained the false stasis.  
Today I will move beyond the graveyard.  
I'll leave the lilacs, take nothing for my table.

Whatever it takes for a body to become a flower,  
that is what I want.

**INSOMNIA SONNET (2)**

The peacock's scream awakened me again  
last night. I didn't mind, I'd figured out  
exactly what it was: part anguished human,  
and, almost equally, feline in heat,

yet something definite of bird as well,  
abrupt at first, then rounding to a peak  
as if of longing cut off in the middle,  
like mourning when the world insists: *Those weeds*

*no longer suit you, dear, move on, break free—*

The peacock cried all night, a dozen times  
at least. It's good to have the company  
to watch the sky go aqua with sunrise,

to overhear the widow, who, upstairs,  
has wakened straight from dreams into her tears.

**WHEATFIELD WITH CROWS**

*The sadness will last forever.* ~Vincent van Gogh

I, too, have known sadness  
like a summer field,

coarse grass knee-high,  
wild carrot, pigweed.

I, too, have known  
*forever's* call, heft

of revolver turned  
in my hands. Polished

wood, metal shine.  
Maybe you didn't want

to die, just feel your chest  
explode with light,

know your blood's  
rich coloring. I, too,

have walked that narrow  
road. Have studied sky,

resplendent, stifling.  
Opened my easel to paint.

the Sunday  
you died  
stood still  
ashy gray  
misting moisture  
from heavens  
no moment  
of serenity  
rushed me  
every prayer  
prayed, ignored  
those lips  
so white  
marble hard  
eyes, all  
blue lost  
soul vanished  
to ether

**IN WHICH THE VAMPIRE IS A CHICK**

I saw you sitting there, Sylvie, with your smudged mascara and your perky red bob and your nervous nails and your birdclaw jewelry and your birdlike ways, your predatory ways. You perched on the edge of your seat and hovered above the burger you ordered. Sylvie, I have never seen a girl with such a vicious appetite. Sylvie, sometimes I think it has been such a long time, since I saw you sitting there ripping into your dinner, there at the bar. Sylvie, sometimes I think I will never see the light of day again, sometimes I think it will always be eclipsed by your red hair, your pecking little hands.

You were carrying your Chanel bag when I first met you, and you set it down with such caution. That was when I thought you were a vision, Sylvie, such a vision of tenderness, before. It is hard to believe now, when I remember. How I could laugh, Sylvie, thinking how helpless and lovely you were. Your skin was blotched and pasty and you had been crying. I saw you roughly wipe your tears away with a little floral handkerchief, and believe me when I say it, Sylvie, you had cut me to the bone. I was undone by your antler jewelry, your taxidermied speech. Your words, coming from your mouth, were like pressed flowers. Victorian, they were, and fussy and dried and preserved, the air coming from your mouth was sweet and preserved with arsenic.

So I sat at the bar with you and I had my light beer, sitting before me like a kind of reproach. You sat beside me and you made demure little movements, light and fluttering like a bird, and I wanted to take your bird-bones into my arms and cherish them for always. You did not believe in diets, you said, and you looked at my steak like so much rubbish. Rubbishy, you said, you're a big guy, you said, stop trying to reduce. Here, and you ordered me a shot of vodka and you began to cram the French fries into your mouth. You were part French, you said, and you said you would not shave. How I wanted to find you out, Sylvie, see if you spoke the truth.

You were studying English, you said, and it was with such a tender humor that you quoted Oscar Wilde, you quoted James Joyce and I wanted to be impaled, bleeding, on the hooked barbs of those witty and beautiful words. I asked you where you bought your dress and you laughed at me, but there was gentleness in that laughter, though perhaps I am recalling it wrongly. You said it was your little secret, and how else were you to charm the men into sleeping with you, and then you laughed so, as if it were a good joke. It was a good joke, Sylvie, and I am afraid I laughed with you even as I was ravening after you. Like a wolf. I thought I was like a wolf, and I was ashamed of myself. You were such a tender, such a florid little lamb. It is funny to think now.

Sylvie, I told you I wanted to take you down to the water with me, and I did not know as I said it what it was that I meant. But I knew that I wanted to feel your presence beside me, your plush and floral presence, your birdlike edge. The moon looked like you did, white as bone on the black black waters. The wine-dark sea, you said, and you looked up at me and looked away again, maiden-like. Ah, but you knew, didn't you, Sylvie. You knew it all the time you were shrinking and shrinking like a violet, when your small pale hand edged into mine.

Sylvie, I wanted to kiss you there, by the water, but you would not let me and I thought I saw the moonlight glinting on your fangs, the sharp incisors so precise and small within your little smile. I thought I saw the wine-dark sea, reflected in the dark pools of your eyes. I had always thought that redheads were light-eyed, Sylvie, I had always thought you would have,

when you came to me, eyes green as the pure new grass. I had never thought it of you, Sylvie, those black and famished eyes. I was afraid for you, Sylvie, that was my folly. It is funny to think now.

I drove you home, Sylvie, that night and I thought about the game I was missing, the football game that I had so wanted to see. It had been diminished, Sylvie. I think that all the world has been diminished since you came, and that the walls are caving in upon me. Sometimes I wake at night and I look at you beside me and I am so terribly frightened. I think you were glad to hear it, when I told you that you had priority, when I joked about the television remote. All that seems so far away, it is hard to believe it, but I assure you it is so. How eager I was in my assurances, and how I tired of the cheerleaders, but you know this. You frowned and you were going to lecture me, I think, you were going to deliver your stock speech about privilege and patriarchy that so amuses you now, but I stopped your mouth with a kiss.

And then my lips were bleeding, Sylvie, and my neck was bleeding and my hands were dripping with scarlet. Sylvie, you threw down your handbag, that Chanel handbag, and there was no tenderness in your going. You went away from me, I think, but then sometimes I wake at night and I see you beside me and I am so terribly frightened of losing you again. I am growing weaker, Sylvie. The doctor says I am anemic and he furrows his brow over my blood reports. I know better than he does, of course. I know I am dying for the love of you. I wish you would come back to me, Sylvie, but I cannot think why I am telling you this as you lie asleep beside me and your hair is so fetching on your black silk pillowcase.

You are weak, Sylvie, and you are so afraid of the world. It hurts me sometimes, when I look at the fear in your eyes. The fear is always growing. The fear is always there, and I am afraid it will consume us both. How you lie and cry in the darkness, how strong you are, how you must be strong for us both. I am so weak, Sylvie, and I know I am always battenning myself upon you. You are vigilant, but then, so am I. I will shield you from the moon, my love, from the terrible clarity and truth of the moonlight. I will keep you safe and hidden in the darkest recesses of my heart. I will line it with plush and velvet and it will be dark, dark as the wine-dark sea, dark as the glance of your loving eyes. Things that bite and claw and scratch will never find you there, Sylvie, and you are in my little hidey-hole, and I will never escape from it.

Sylvie, sometimes I fear you are going to suck me dry, and then how will I ever see to find my way to you? The moonlight will make a path to you, all paths lead to you, Sylvie, and everywhere I go I am always searching, searching, for your presence.

**FINE LINE**

Most days

I

feel all

right

overall but

you

always look

all

right all

over.

1.

I see what comes  
down the pipe

gutter water  
leaves and twigs  
coming out of the downspout  
and into the earth

And I want to be like that

pulverized  
eaten by worms  
in one end  
and out the other

useful finally  
for something  
something that counts  
something that adds up

what everything comes to  
in the end

not counting the birds  
not counting them out either!

eat or be eaten

bon appétit!

**REBOOT**

Unhook me  
from the iPhone  
the iPod  
the iMac  
the I V.

Deliver me  
from the iWork  
the iWeb  
the iWireless  
the ICU.

Free me  
from IT,  
and the me  
myself and I  
the i, i, i.

ROBERT WEST

**DE NADA**

Any day  
I can

save the  
day for

you is  
a day

for me  
to savor.

KATE LADOW

**MOUNT OF OLIVES**



**DONALD GOES TO MARKET**

To shop, or not to shop, that is the question:  
Whether 'tis nobler in mind to suffer  
The shoves and elbows of outrageous women,  
Or to take aim against this sea of harpies  
And by opposing, send them, to buy on the cheap  
No more; and by cheap to say we send  
The heart-ache of none of the thousand coupons  
They've become heir to: t'was their obsession  
Devoutly to be wished for. To buy, so cheap,  
So cheap, perchance to scheme - ay, there's the rub:  
For in that dream of cheap what bargains may come,  
When we shuffle off this cart in need of oil.  
Must give us cause - there's no respect  
That makes calamity of so long a line.  
For who could bear the quips and scorns and obscenities  
The pressing throng, the loud man's contumely,  
The pangs of wrong-priced items, the cashier's delay  
The insolence of debit card users, and the spurns  
Of the impatient who deem waiting akin to death  
When I myself with patience take  
With silent dignity who would these bear  
Their grunts and groans of warlike strife  
But that the dread of a forgotten "something"  
I cannot now fetch does with horror fill me,  
Yet comforts me with what I've found.  
To run through check-out and to get out fast  
Thus convenience does make cowards of us all.  
And thus the hue and cry from cashier errors  
Is sicklied o'er with a gush of foul language  
And the revulsion at the witch of the moment  
From this regard I turn and fly unto my car  
And so preserve the name of - Reason.

**EPIGRAM**

Dabump, dabump, chadumpa pumpa lump;  
Gradumpa bumpa stumpa bumpa grump.  
Achoo, taboo, derwop derwop derwop.  
Sha-dooby shooby, dump kerfloo. Kerflop.



**ALL SOUL'S DAY**

*Exchange forgiveness with me, noble Hamlet.*

The coffee shop writhes  
with talk of the just-gotten  
up: two tables over, herself tells you more than you want  
to know: failing marriage, health crises, work dramas. Hard to concentrate this lack-light  
first of November—dark Monday after the time  
change, less than a week past my last

birthday. I stare out glass,  
try to force the next line, but it's not right,  
and I have to pack up—rush to a meeting—timed  
to interrupt—if she doesn't forget—  
with a make-work list—try to be polite  
to one more old person in charge, wanting

in common sense, who wants  
someone else to do the work, while her control lasts.  
After I shake her, I light  
out for Spin—one hour, at least, of riding  
hard, of racing my heart, and getting  
it to outrun my mind—it's temporary—

the lift—but for almost an hour  
the things I don't want  
to think about get forgot—  
chased off, while my legs pump hard through class,  
and beyond, on the bus ride  
back to the next intrusion and then the light-

weight Shakespeare rap that I like  
the idea of more than the execution—predictably paced  
gangsta slang/graphic novel slide show, written  
by, good God, academics. I want  
to know how animated *Hamlet* rap & animated *Hamlet* opera differ—neither will outlast  
the original—but have to go before getting

to the Q&A, pick a foggy path through fall to mass, where I get  
a candle to light  
for my father who died last  
summer after a life-long  
struggle with himself. I want  
to remember him here, fading ghost, then write

about it the right way—in an epilogue that gets tacked onto the wanting end of a play’s last act: time to close, too late for flight.

AMANDA SULLIVAN

**SCREAM ZONE**



**“THE POETIC LIFE”**

Whole afternoons you could pass with a book are gone. The  
Smell of French toast and moldering leaves.  
Only you can't see or hear them anymore.  
The rain is like a continual death in you and you  
Don't know what can heal you now. You feel along the  
Anointed skin. It's always tearing itself away and the blood you  
Call sacred gapes back at you like a child.  
The wounds are in your gut. The pain doubles you over. It is  
As if you were a stem of sunlight being snapped  
Between the thumb and forefinger of a god.

**THE LESSON**

One time, unsure as always what to say,  
he asked the angel did she know *inspire*  
derived (through French) from Latin for “breathe into,”

and though she later swore she hadn’t meant to,  
she smiled a smile so bright it felt like fire,  
and taught him inspiration  
takes your breath away.

**EMPATHY**

I feel a song

trapped deep within the  
closing of my

mouth. The tight hold  
of my breath. Control

this melody that I  
can't contain. This

spoken gospel  
spilling from my

ballpoint, onto this  
blank sheet. My soul is

the soul of an  
angel that's just begun.

## THE RELIGIOUS VOICE OF POETRY'S QUESTIONS

The first time anyone asked me the difference between poetry and religion I was eighteen years old and one of four guys carrying a steel frame bed up to the third floor of a building in North Carolina. At that point in my life I had not yet written a poem, read poetry outside of a high school class nor thought much about the implications of a life devoted to writing. The top of my left hand was bruised, having been caught between one of the legs of the bed and a door jam. We set the bed down on a landing between two flights of stairs to take a rest. "Hey," one of the guys called out "what's the difference between poetry and religion?" At first I didn't realize the question was directed at me. The next time I was asked this question was fifteen years later, the day of my father's funeral. My eyes were closed for most of the day.

Unanswered questions are beautiful in a way answers could never be.

What would a bible be without language?

Better yet, would a bible be without?

Or, what would a bible be?

And, what would?

Five scientists were burnt at the stake for giving unorthodox answers. Three were burnt for questions, they burnt brighter.

Religion is alchemy, of sorts, a blend of fear and hope. Don't confuse anything I'm saying with faith. But talking about faith brings us back to poetry. Poetry is alchemy, of sorts, a blend of the pedestrian with the magical. No, that's not accurate. Poetry coats the pedestrian in the magical by juxtaposition and figuration. I like the sound of that word, figuration. Metaphor is important, but it's not one of my favorite words, so I'll dismiss it as being too sophomoric for the conversation right now.

The bible was the first instructional manual. Think of yourself as an apostle. Isn't that what you want to do, spread the word? No matter what our poems appear to be about, the subject of poetry is always poetry. This concept is easier to understand if we talk about painting. When you stand in front of a painting, let's say Van Gogh's watercolor painting of The Quarries of Montmartre, Paris 1887; you're not admiring the loosely rendered ditch cut into the ground. You're admiring the technique and the vision. The subject of each Van Gogh painting is the same, Van Gogh's vision of the world. It really doesn't matter what he paints, what matters is how he paints it. What you choose to write a poem about is not nearly as important as the way you choose to write. You can make poetry out of any subject. There is no language that can not be made into poetry. Poetry is a filter. Poetry is a point of view. Think of yourself as an apostle.

I was walking along Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles on a Tuesday afternoon. It was summer. The temperature was a little above 105 degrees. An old woman stopped me. I'm positive she was in her eighties. A wide-brimmed hat kept the sun from her fragile face. A touch too much makeup. Though her gown was sleeveless she wore white gloves that stretched to the elbows. Her cane was as much accessory as necessity. "Excuse me, sir, do you know what time it is?" I looked at my watch, "one fifty." "Three o'clock, thank you," she replied and began to stroll away. She misunderstood. "Ma'am, no, it's one fifty." She walked right up to me and though she attempted to hide her annoyance it showed. "I heard you perfectly, three o'clock, thank you," and walked away with a briskly indignant step. There is poetry everywhere. Think of yourself as an apostle.

**ENTER FAITH**

*For my husband David on our first Passover*

Shredded: Two cups each of  
zucchini, carrot, potato, one of onion.  
One knuckle grazed. I try to staunch  
the bleeding. (It's Good Friday.)

Add: a bit of oil, matzo meal,  
two eggs-- beaten. Season to taste.

The kugel goes into the oven  
on time. I walk the dog in light  
evening rain. Clouds begin to part.

**CHICKENS**

So what is it that depends  
so much on Williams's  
white chickens?  
a student asks.

I tell her about that little  
hill path outside Assisi.  
Not a rusty wheel-  
barrow but a faded  
green gate and beside it  
chickens, red-gold  
and glazed with sunlight.

Something happened there.  
I don't have words to explain.  
Just that I pocketed a flake  
of pink stone from the path  
to help me remember.

**BAPTISM**

my name is not james or jim or jk  
jimmy or jacob or  
mud or hey you or  
jerkoff or jehosephat  
it is water weaving through  
boulders and pebbles  
old tires and leaves  
flashing silver through sunset  
singing to forever

my name is not skin or kidney or femur  
capillary or dendrite  
testicle or tendon  
alveoli or the stark red  
of blood  
it is the smell of the salt sea  
the swell and trough of waves  
the pelagic deep of sleep  
breathing in  
life breathing out  
dying

my name is not yahweh or allah  
jesus or jesu or hey zeus  
gautama or shiva  
talmud or tantra or  
cornflower blue  
it is the resonance of dreams  
the cool dust of distant suns  
the paleolithic residue of birth  
reborn

my name is not quarks or quanta  
muons mesons carbon rings  
or strings of quixotic thought

my name is not my name is/not  
name is not name

### **THE WOLF OF GUBBIO**

When the wolf was too old to wander the streets  
of Gubbio begging for alms to give to the poor  
the way he had seen his Brother Francis do after  
their fateful meeting on the road that morning,  
Brother Ugolino built a cart drawn by two sheep  
for the wolf to ride in while he made his rounds,  
and no matter how hungry they were the people  
saved a little of what they had for the old wolf  
who was not evil, only hungry, when he terrorized  
the town, and he left a little behind for the mice.

### **GRAY WOLF**

To write a poem about a gray wolf  
it's best to have seen one hunting  
beneath a hornet's nest of cloud  
along the edge of a marsh still  
mottled with winter's last snow,  
to remember the angle of its head  
and the long thin length of its body  
like a scimitar as it turned to mist.

### **LUPA**

What was a good wolf mother to do  
with the two legged cubs that floated  
down the river to the place she came  
to drink? She could have pushed them  
back out into the current, but they were  
bawling and trying to reach her nipples  
so she suckled them knowing that nothing  
good would ever come of it, nothing at all.

**SERVICE AT PENIEL**

*“And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.”*

Inside the red brick and white wash,  
a congregation’s melody:  
no risen *in excelsis Deo*  
but “Shepherds, why this jubilee?”

Why? Tired third Sunday of Advent.  
Proceeding, afternoon sun pours  
under the window’s Roman arch.  
December’s luminous Jordan

bathes the prim choir in daylight: *Thee*  
*who wast rich beyond all splendor*  
(I find the season ruins me)  
*for love’s sake becamest poor.*

Desire obliteration then?  
These fancies quickly turn awkward,  
though briefly suicidal joy  
awakens, beckoning me toward

African Noël: collective  
urge and spirit’s polyphony.  
The choir, swelling Nyasa, revives  
a sound beyond the Occident.

“Reminds me,” says my friend, “of Philip  
from the *Acts of the Apostles*.  
You know, the Ethiopian?  
Discussed *Isaiah*, read the scrolls.”

We are strangers, both in our ways.  
My friend’s new too, though still recalls  
the perforated figures that  
adorn the walls of Sunday schools.

O shepherds, why this jubilee?  
The forked road reconvenes, defeat  
appears regardless. We are forced  
toward disaster, with or without

the soul. I fail despite myself  
to bear that weight. *O Come, O Come  
Emmanuel*—when?—and ransom  
*captive Israël*. Purity

of need slightly fed? Mightily  
I desire the resurrection  
of the body. Just to say that,  
to see the envoys passionate:

average women and men recede,  
robes covering their navy suits.  
And their single, radiant voice  
(transfigured?) sings *Rejoice Rejoice . . .*

AMANDA SULLIVAN

**BROKEN SKYLINE**



**AFTER PSALM 23**

In the presence of mine enemies,  
in the presence of mine goggle-eyed doubts,  
mine palpitating, white-knuckled *no*'s –  
by the light of the fuse,  
by the shimmer of deadly fireworks –  
the glint, glare, the grenades  
in the grey shadow of death,  
in the serpentine breath  
where mine snakes circle tight,  
tangled, flapping forks,  
in the mud of mine trenches,  
by the bullet that wrenches  
flesh from skin in the dark,  
in the shade of my looming nightmare  
of the minefields and the blade  
is my lover's table laid.  
We are so jubilant we spill red wine  
over everything – trembly-fingered,  
splash it on the tablecloth, the bread  
and watch the cracks soak red.

## CHRISTMAS CACTUS

You know the light is right  
when in the window facing west  
the Christmas cactus drops a spent bloom  
in wet April at Holy Week's advent.  
Hours shut in darkness, the ancient plant  
flowers twice a year, thriving in dryness  
and morning chill at Christ's birth  
and now at his death. I stoop before  
the profusion of color in our valley window  
for the spent blossom, a lovely promise  
someday we'll find ourselves the right darkness  
and light to thirst, flourish and die  
on a Good Friday in our blue valley home.

we believe  
we can  
know god  
we can  
see god  
we can  
play god  
we can  
love god  
we cannot  
we all  
are god  
each soul  
is god  
every heart  
is god  
we cannot  
know god  
without knowing  
our self

**ME ATTITUDES**

*"When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:*

*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.*

*Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.*

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.*

*Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.*

*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*

*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*

*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." Matthew 5: 1-12*

\*\*\*\*\*

If only when I'm alone in a dark house  
in the still of winter

Still

I can catch my spirit, poor--  
and thinking of my dreams  
unpursued,

I have mourned.

And does it count as meek  
to admit I looked up "righteousness"?

I hunger and thirst for You.

My mercy is as yet untested

I haven't been wronged enough to know.

Pure of heart, I think,

but if You're asking around, talk with my children  
on a good day.

I can't claim to have made peace

But keeping it might suffice.

It's that last one

that stops me in my tracks.

I'd have to go looking for persecution  
in this day and age.

If You don't mind my saying,

I think that mountaintop

got You thinking about martyrs and saints

and not the likes of a girl like me

alone in a dark house

in the still of winter.

**TURNING COMPOST ON GOOD FRIDAY**

A sheaf of last year's lavender  
slimy black

My mother's fragrance  
and my grandmother's

Between them on fervent knees  
I kept vigil

Death and resurrection  
both abstractions

A hawk's cry  
slices the air

encrusted with blossom  
the plum tree hums

After a slow dying  
crumbs of compost

**PEOPLE LIKE US**

Peter and Martha,  
The people like us,  
The real and exact prototype  
Of disordinary clay,  
Like us,

Who don't get it, like us,  
And who, like us,

Represent maybe  
The only type, disordinary clay,  
Who have ever a chance of getting it, some of it,  
Over and over  
Again and again,

Forgetting again,  
    Over and over  
    Again and again,

Touch and taste, touch and taste  
Because we are the unrefined, unkilned,  
Condemned to the grinding joy  
Of feeling  
Over and over  
Again and again

The gift of solid passage  
Beneath our unworthy and sacred feet,  
Graced with nothing more  
Than Earth,  
Mere and mortal

And promised that  
We need be no more.

**ST FRANCIS TELLS BR. LEO ABOUT THE INCIDENT AT GUBBIO**

My heart in my mouth I set off to meet Wolf.  
He filled me with fear. He was Other.  
I walked dark into the forest, so deeply looking  
That at first I failed to see this Brother.

He appeared to be slinking around a tree.  
In shadow, he looked all grey and black.  
His eyes though lighted were lifeless,  
And I froze, my feet bare on the mountain track.

I stared at the terrible empty eyes.  
Brother Wolf still as a stone about to slide.  
My eyes entered his and the space between melted.  
We became one: my eyes and heart in Wolf's inside.

He swallowed me whole. Yet I possessed him too.  
Confused our hunger for love and humanity.  
Crossed our praise of power in life and death.  
Gubbio lay below in its simple vulnerability.

We stayed like that for time and a time,  
Then slowly, gently in two came apart;  
The same, yet different than before.  
I burning with hunger and he humbled in heart.

I led him back like a lamb to the village.  
Aflame, I rebuked him with voice and with prod.  
"Share, show respect, live in harmony."  
The villagers rejoiced. I devoured God.

**CONSIDERATION**

It is true that  
the lilies of the field  
neither toil nor spin.  
They never travel  
any distance to shop.  
They never struggle  
to park at the mall.  
They never max out  
a credit card  
or hide a bundle  
from a husband.  
They never clean out  
a drawer or a closet  
only to fill it up again.  
They never donate  
something to charity  
just to buy something else.  
They never flip through  
a magazine modeling  
haute couture.  
They never finagle  
an invitation to a show  
from a stage or a trunk.  
They never diet to wear  
a size of a single digit.  
They never join a gym  
or hire a personal trainer.  
They never develop  
any addiction or disorder.  
In fact, they are so content  
with seasonable style  
as to be considerably  
unfashionable.

**VILLAGE MARTYR**

1896: Akbés, Syria

In a smoky room, boards on the windows,  
the postmaster's son trembles with fever,  
his legs gone, stumps turning to ooze. His teeth  
clack like spoons as I pray a few simple words.

When Mary held her baby the first time—  
naked, sticky with blood, breathless, and blue—  
she did not know that so He would appear  
the last times she saw Him, standing among  
those who lined the streets, and then cross-shadowed.

I could give to him the sacraments.  
if I were a priest. His sisters pluck a bony stork  
for the stewpot, chop a thumb-sized parsnip.  
His mother wrings a thin rag,  
to moisten the tip of his tongue.

JOANNE POTTER

**VICTOR**

The ancient battleground remembers its glory,  
divine death transacted on unsuspecting wood and iron.  
One blood sacrifice undiluted,  
one final sigh become heaven's breath,  
a serpent the only corpse remaining, head crushed,  
outside an empty tomb.

STEVE PRUSKY

**GHOST RIDER**



## ONE FLOCK

*I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. John 10: 14-16*

\*\*\*\*\*

So even then you knew the work that lay before you  
That even more nations would rise up  
from the need to huddle together  
and even more shepherds would be raised up  
to safeguard their peoples  
and even more hatred would rise up  
from the distrust and fear  
that come from the fences  
between the folds.

When really, all along  
you were silently planning a gathering,  
and all the shepherds, the fences, the folds  
were just the best we could do  
to fill time,  
a moment really,  
the moment before we could hear your voice  
as one flock.

Speak.  
Because it's getting late  
and the wolves are coming.

**DIEU CACHE**

Your absence,

once mistaken  
for nonexistence,

now suffices  
to fill  
the gaps between

the subatomic particles and  
the galaxies,

serving the same function as

Your presence.

## THE PLEASURES OF THE BOOK

A good deal of my personal “for fun” reading (and as much of my teaching as I can manage) is done in what members of the academy have come to call genre literature. By genre they don’t mean the traditional literary genres of novel, poetry or essay. Nope, to the academy the term genre literature applies to works that fall into a number of different categories, none of which is considered *literary*: mystery, horror, thriller and romance, for example. I started out with mysteries (Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes stories and novels, to be precise), moved on to Agatha Christie and Zane Grey and Ray Bradbury and Raymond Chandler, and never looked back.

While one might successfully argue that fiction is, by its very nature, speculative, there is a genre that is itself called Speculative Fiction (SF). SF encompasses much of what could be classified as *unrealistic* by non-SF readers: science fiction (both hard and soft), fantasy, horror, alternate history and magical realism, to name a few. To read an SF story is to walk with dinosaurs, fly to Mars, or peer through the veil between this world and the next. Through Speculative Fiction we can imagine what would have happened if Abraham Lincoln has survived the assassin’s bullet, or if multiple universes were not part of a theory propounded by theoretical physicists but rather actual places existing right alongside our own world. And we can travel through time.

It is this final category of SF, time travel, that led to this column, for through sheer serendipity I recently read two wonderful time-travel novels: *Big Daddy’s Gadgets* by C. S. Fuqua (a contributor to this issue of *Assisi*) and *11/22/63* by Stephen King.

In *Big Daddy’s Gadgets*, time is an arrow, a linear progression that moves only forward; thus, those who wish to travel through time must go forward as well. There is no going back to fix a mistake, no way to get a “do over.” All a time traveler can do is jump forward and hope for the best, and this is just what Josh, the novel’s narrator, does.

Time travel works differently in *11/22/63*. In this story, a traveler can indeed go back in time, but he will always go back to the exact same date, time and place; here, every trip back is an automatic “do over” because each time someone returns events reset to the way things happened originally. For this novel’s narrator, Jake, the past is mutable but a change can be undone if it produces unforeseen consequences.

I will not give you a plot synopsis for either of these works; other reviewers have done so, and done so well. What I want to convey to you is what the act (and the art) of reading is like with these two novels.

There is something inherently wistful about a time-travel tale. We all have regrets. We all have things we wish we had done differently. One of the appeals of time travel is the hope that it would allow us to fix things, make things better. And one of the lessons of time-travel stories (usually, at least) is that changing the past isn’t always that easy, nor is it something that should be attempted – those unforeseen consequences can be a bitch.

These novels are sweetly sentimental, but not in a saccharine or annoying way. They are sentimental amidst devastating tragedy (nuclear holocaust in *Big Daddy's Gadgets*, the Kennedy assassination in *11/22/63*), and this means that the reader shares in those tragedies while coming to identify with each novel's narrator. This identification is possible because both Fuqua and King give us engaging narrators. Neither Josh nor Jake is perfect; each has his flaws, and throughout the course of his novel each makes mistakes (some small, some large). But the reader can understand the motivations behind his actions, and can see that the sad, sweet sentimentality of Josh and Jake comes at a high cost to both the narrators and those they love.

As with good fictional tales in general (not just SF stories), it is the realistic depiction of a world, no matter how *unrealistic* the novel's events may seem, that anchors the reader in the details of the story and draws her into the world the author has created. In both *Big Daddy's Gadgets* and *11/22/63*, the reader enters a world that is fully realized, realistic in the best sense of the word, and the storyline – time travel and all – flows naturally from the events occurring in those worlds. The reader not only understands why Josh leaps forward, and Jake steps back, in time; she finds herself rooting for each hero even as she understands that time travel (most likely) is going to cause as many problems as it tries to solve.

Whatever the outcome of Josh's and Jake's journeys (and you will find no spoilers here), the reader of these two novels enjoys engaging, moving stories told in strong, original voices. Josh and Jake may be flawed characters (aren't we all?), but they are wonderful narrators, and they bring the reader along for the ride as they travel through time. Don't miss the ride.

## INFORMATION ON CONTRIBUTORS

William L. Alton started writing in the Eighties while incarcerated in a psychiatric hospital. Since then his work has appeared in *The Oklahoma Review*, *The Red River Review*, *Poet's Corner* and *Whalelane* among others. In 2010, he was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. He earned both his BA and MFA in Writing from Pacific University in Forest Grove, Oregon where he continues to live.

Danny P. Barbare resides in Greenville, SC. He grew up in a Southern Catholic family and attended Prince of Peace and Saint Mary's church most of his childhood and adult life. He has found great therapy in his poetry that he has been writing for 30 years. His poetry has been published in *Writing Ulster*, *The Santa Barbara Review*, *Christianity and the Arts*, and *Sisters Today*. His poetry has appeared locally, nationally, and abroad.

Patrick Bell Jr. is a resident of the Bay Ridge section of Brooklyn. He is currently an undergraduate at St. Francis College majoring in Psychology. He loves to take photos in Brooklyn Heights and throughout Brooklyn.

Eleanor Leonne Bennett is a 15 year old photographer and artist who has won contests with National Geographic, The Woodland Trust, The World Photography Organisation, Winstons Wish, Papworth Trust, Mencap, Big Issue, Wrexham Science, Fennel and Fern, and Nature's Best Photography. She has had her photographs published in exhibitions and magazines across the world including *The Guardian*, *RSPB Birds*, *RSPB Bird Life*, *Dot Dot Dash*, *Alabama Coast*, *Alabama Seaport* and *NG Kids Magazine* (the most popular kids' magazine in the world). She was also the only person from the UK to have her work displayed in the National Geographic and Airbus run See The Bigger Picture global exhibition tour with the United Nations International Year Of Biodiversity 2010. Only visual artist published in the Taj Mahal Review June 2011. Youngest artist to be displayed in Charnwood Art's Vision 09 Exhibition and New Mill's Artlounge Dark Colours Exhibition.

Kevin Bezner is an instructor in English at Belmont Abbey College. He has published five collections of poetry and edited books on the poets John Haines and Colette Inez. He recently published poems in *Pilgrim: A Journal of Catholic Experience*.

Jane Blanchard divides her time between Augusta and St. Simon's Island, Georgia. Her poetry has appeared in such venues as *Blue Unicorn*, *descant*, *Light*, *LiturgicalCredo*, *Pearl*, *Penwood Review*, *REAL*, *Stone Voices*, *Thema*, *Trigger*, and *Welter*.

Ben Burr lives in Nashville, Tennessee. After relocating from Ohio, he released *The Nashville Poems* in 2011.

Rick Bursky's most recent book, *Death Obscura*, is out from Sarabande Books. His previous book, *The Soup of Something Missing*, was published by Bear Star Press. His poems have appeared in many journals including *American Poetry Review*, *Iowa Review*, *Gettysburg Review*,

*Southern Review*, *Field*, *Harvard Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Black Warrior Review*, *Shenandoah*, and *New Letters*. Bursky teaches poetry at UCLA Extension.

Janet Butler currently teaches TESL Test Preparation in San Francisco, and is a member of both art and poetry groups in Alameda, where she lives with Fulmi, a beautiful Spaniel mix she rescued in Italy and brought back with her. She began both writing and painting while living in Perugia, in central Italy, in the region of Umbria. She spent more than 20 years teaching EFL and translating texts, both literary and scientific while living there. *Under Italian Skies* was published by Flutter Press last year, and *Searching for Eden* is forthcoming from Finishing Line Press. Recent publications include the *Tipton Poetry Journal* and *The North Chicago Review*.

Jeremy Byars's first poetry collection, *Eyes Open to the Flash*, was published in 2008. His poems and reviews have appeared in many journals, most recently or forthcoming in *MOTIF*, *Writer's Bloc*, *Pirene's Fountain*, *Welter*, *Stymie* and *580 Split*. He lives in Murray, KY, where he is an executive at a college textbook rental company.

Jessie Carty is the author of five poetry collections including the upcoming chapbook *An Amateur Marriage* (Finishing Line Press, 2012) which was a finalist for the 2011 Robert Watson Prize. She teaches at RCCC in Concord, NC. You can find her editing *Referential Magazine* or blogging at <http://jessiecarty.com>.

Katharine Diehl is a junior at St. Francis College, pursuing a degree in psychology. Born and raised in Brooklyn, she cherishes fantasies of becoming a hermit poet in Carroll Gardens. This is her first published work.

Michael DiSchiavi, a SFC alumnus, is an English Turn Around Teacher at William E. Grady High School in Brooklyn. He has published several essays and chapters in books, is a peer reviewer for *English Journal* and is a regular contributor to the *Historical Novel Review*. He recently completed a first novel and is working on a second.

Maira Egan's poetry collections are *Cleave*, *Spin*, *Bar Napkin Sonnets*, and *La Seta della Cravatta/The Silk of the Tie*. She lives in Rome.

Gail Eisenhart's poems have been published recently in *CANTOS*, *Generations of Poetry*, *Specter*, *Jet Fuel Review*, *Front Range*, *New Verse News* and *New Mirage Journal* and are included in *Flood Stage: an anthology of St. Louis Poets*. A retired Executive Assistant, she works part time at the Belleville (IL) Public Library. She travels in her spare time, collecting memories that show up in new poems.

Maureen Eppstein has two poetry collection: *Rogue Wave at Glass Beach* (2009) and *Quickening* (2007), both from March Street Press. Her poetry has appeared in numerous journals and anthologies and has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. She is executive director of the Mendocino Coast Writers Conference and has taught poetry workshops at College of the Redwoods Mendocino Campus. Her other interests include gardening and observing the wildlife around her home on the Mendocino Coast.

Patrick Theron Erickson writes: With this submission my avocation goes without saying. As for vocation, I am a parish pastor, a shepherd of sheep, a small flock with no sheep dog and no hang-dog expression. Or I am the sheep dog, a small dog, with the hang-dog expression. Secretariat was my mentor, though I've never been an over-achiever and have never gained on the competition. I resonate to a friend's definition of change: change coming at us a lot faster because you can punch a whole lot more, a whole lot faster down digital broadband "glass" fiber than an old copper co-axial landline cable.

Kenny Fame is an African-American poet who was born in Paterson, New Jersey; but he currently calls the village of Harlem in NYC his home. He was a recent graduate of Cave Canem's 2011 & 2012 Poetry Conversations Workshop classes. He was the winner of "The Tenth National Black Writers Conference Award for Poetry." He has been a featured "Poet of the Week" on the *Poetry Super Highway* during the week of January 2-8, 2012. His work has appeared in numerous journals both nationally & internationally: *Steel Toe Review* # 7& 10, *River Lit* #5, *The Fine Line*, *Emerge Literary Journal* # 1, *Rufous Salon* (Sweden), *Milk Sugar*, *Prompt Literary Magazine*, *De La Mancha*, *Anastomoo*, *ken\*again*, *African-American Review*, *Black Magnolias Literary Journal* # 6.2 & *The New Verse News* on December 18<sup>th</sup> 2011.

Brett Foster's first book of poetry, *The Garbage Eater*, was published in 2011 by Triquarterly Books / Northwestern University Press. His writing has recently appeared or is forthcoming in *Ascent*, *Atlanta Review*, *Books & Culture*, *Christianity & Literature*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *First Things*, *IMAGE*, *Kenyon Review*, *Pleiades*, *Salamander*, and *Shenandoah*. He teaches creative writing and Renaissance literature at Wheaton College.

C.S. Fuqua's books include *Alabama Musicians*, *Big Daddy's Gadgets*, *If I Were...* (children's poems), *Trust Walk*, *The Swing*, and *Notes to My Becca*, among others. His work has appeared in publications as diverse as *The Christian Science Monitor*, *Main Street Rag*, and *Year's Best Horror Stories*. Please visit <http://csfuqua.comxa.com>.

Gerald J. Galgan was born in 1942, baptized at St. Bridget's Church, shortly thereafter took out a library card at Queensborough Public Library, began teaching Philosophy at St. Francis College in 1966, received his Ph.D. in Philosophy at Fordham University in 1971, married Wendy Walter in 1999, and lived happily ever after.

Matthew Gasda is a poet living in Brooklyn, NY. His first book of poetry, *The Humanist*, is available through Amazon and select bookstores.

Trina Gaynon volunteers with WriteGirl, an organization in Los Angeles which provides workshops and mentors for young women in high school who are interested in writing. She also works with an adult literacy program. Recently, her poems have appeared in the anthologies *Bombshells* and *Knocking at the Door*, as well as numerous journals including *Natural Bridge*, *Reed* and the final issue of *Runes*.

Monique Gagnon German earned a B.A. in English Lit. from Northeastern University and a M.A. in English from Northern Arizona University. She has lived all over the US and worked as

a Technical Writer and Tech. Pubs. Manager for a decade, before taking time off to start a family. She is the happily married wife of an active duty Marine, the mother of two youngsters and many poems. Her poetry has appeared in the anthology, *e, the Emily Dickinson Award Anthology Best Poems of 2001*, and journals such as *Ellipsis, California Quarterly, Kalliope, The Pinehurst Review, The Bear Deluxe, High Grade, Borderlands: Texas Poetry Review, Calyx, The Ledge, and Rosebud*. Upcoming, her poetry will appear in *Tampa Review, The Sierra Nevada Review, and Ragazine*. Her poems can also be visited at: [www.moniquegagnongerman.com](http://www.moniquegagnongerman.com).

**Mark Goad** is a poet living in the Boston metro area. His work has been published previously in *Assisi, BAPQ, epiphany*, and other literary journals. His interest in working in poetic form comes after years of writing and publishing short fiction and non-fiction. What can be said in one hundred words, he'd like to say in ten (perfect words of course). Looking for those words has been a joy.

**John Grey** is an Australian born poet who works as financial systems analyst. Recently published in *Poem, Caveat Lector, Prism International* and the horror anthology *What Fears Become*, he has work upcoming in *Potomac Review, Hurricane Review* and *Pinyon*.

**Hardy Griffin** is a contributor to *Writing Fiction* (Bloomsbury, 2003), and has published writing in *The Washington Post, American Letters & Commentary*, and in the anthology *Strange Intimacies*. A 2001 fellow at The Blue Mountain Center, Hardy lives in Istanbul, and has received more honorable mentions for contests and fellowships than it is honorable to mention.

**Kathleen Gunton** believes one art feeds another. She has published over 100 images in literary publications such as *Inkwell, Shenandoah, Arts & Letters, Thema, Off The Coast, and The Healing Muse*, to name a few. She lives in Orange, California and is completing a memoir of her convent days.

**Marcus Hall** is an eleventh grader in Eugene, Oregon. He enjoys programming for his high school robotics team, and plans to study engineering in college.

**Catherine Harnett** writes: I am a poet and fiction writer living in Virginia. The Washington Writers Publishing House (WWPH) has published two of my books, *Still Life* and *Evidence* (which was selected by Henry Taylor). My work has appeared in numerous literary magazines, most recently the *Roanoke Review, Prime Number, Alimentum, Cider Press Review, Danse Macabre* and *Barefoot*. My fiction and poetry have been included in a number of anthologies; one of my short stories, "Her Gorgeous Grief," appears in the Hudson Review's *Writes of Passage*, an anthology of coming-of-age stories. It was also nominated for a Pushcart Prize. The Pen Faulkner organization arranged for high school students in the Washington area to read and discuss the story during the 2010 school year. I have translated native Israeli poetry, and my work appears in several international publications. I received my MA from Georgetown University, and my BA from Marymount College of Fordham University. For over thirty years, I worked for the Federal Government in a variety of positions on Capitol Hill, the Department of State and the Department of Justice. During my public service, I traveled to many developing countries, providing assistance in public education and outreach programs. I retired in 2007, and

am writing fiction and poetry on a regular basis. I live in Fairfax with my high-school aged daughter who is active in sports and photography.

**Matthew Haughton** is the author of the book *Stand in the Stillness of Woods* (forthcoming, WordTech Editions 2013). He has also published one chapbook, *Bee-coursing Box* (Accents Publications). His poetry has appeared in many journals including *Appalachian Journal*, *Now & Then*, *Still*, *Stirring*, and *The Louisville Review*. Haughton lives in Lexington, Kentucky.

**Juleigh Howard-Hobson** has simultaneously written literary fiction, formalist poetry and genre work, along with non-fiction essays and articles, purposely blunting the modern ‘brandable’ concept of artistic obligation to any single form or movement. Her work has appeared in such venues as *The Lyric*, *Mobius*, *qarrtsiluni*, *The Raintown Review*, *The Best of the Barefoot Muse* (Barefoot Pub), and *Caduceus* (Yale University). She is the Assistant Poetry Editor of *Able Muse*.

**Bryana Johnson** is a homeschool graduate with a passion for poetry, political science, and art. Her poems have won prizes in multiple poetry contests and have been published in several literary journals, including the *Boston Literary Magazine*, *Time of Singing*, *The Mayo Review* and *Adroit Journal*. She also writes about literature and current events at [www.theheightide.com](http://www.theheightide.com). While she grew up in Turkey and lived for a time in Ankara and along the coast of the Black Sea, she currently resides in a rural community in Texas. She loves G.K. Chesterton, acrylic paints, guitar and children.

**Kadari Keller** writes: I am a white woman of 60 who is establishing her poetic voice. My work is intended to honor the One who made us and who is all in all. Poetry has been the steel rebar of my life, holding it together, expressing truths as I experience them. I like to comment on the human condition in the context of nature and spirit. I made my career out of healthcare these last 35 years. I developed rheumatoid arthritis in both hands and wrists and lupus, both of which forced me into an early retirement. This has allowed me to concentrate on my creative work. Fortunately, I can write at the computer about 1-2 hrs. per day. My beloved life partner Jescie has supported me all this time. We have two grown children and a grandchild who, at the age of 21 months, already knows how to read simple words, unerringly load the DVD player and make it play.

**Alex Kustanovich**, who was born in a country that no longer exists, is a Reference and Digital Services Librarian at St. Francis College. His interests run from the sex lives of snails to atonal music for the button accordion. You can ask Alex a question at [www.kustanovich.com](http://www.kustanovich.com).

**Kate LaDew** is a graduate of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro with a BA in Studio Art. She resides in Graham, North Carolina with her cat, Charlie Chaplin, and is currently working on her first novel.

**Charlene Langfur** writes: I am an organic gardener, a rescued dog lover, teacher, graduate of the S.U. Graduate Writing Program. My work has appeared in many magazines and journals: *The*

*Adirondack Review*, *Literal Latte*, *Poetry East*, and most recently in *The Stone Canoe*, *The Toronto Quarterly*, and *Poetry 24*.

Dr. Diane Henry Leipzig grew up the seventh of eight children in an Irish Catholic home in Long Island, New York. Like every other good Catholic girl, she rarely touched the Bible. Each Lenten season, she dutifully gave up soda or candy or swear words until one year, striving to deepen her faith, she bought herself a Bible and committed herself to reading some, every night. An elementary school reading teacher, she came to see the Bible as an inspired work of art, and her spiritual life forever changed. The Gospels were like poetry, whispering her an invitation. She accepted, and began to write them back.

Lyn Lifshin's *Another Woman Who Looks Like Me* was published by Black Sparrow at David Godine October, 2006. Also out in 2006 was her prize winning book about the famous, short lived beautiful race horse, Ruffian: *The Licorice Daughter: My Year With Ruffian* from Texas Review Press. Lifshin's other recent books include *Before it's Light* published winter 1999-2000 by Black Sparrow press, following their publication of *Cold Comfort* in 1997 and *92 Rapple* from Coatism: *Lost in the Fog* and *Barbaro: Beyond Brokenness* and *Light at the End, the Jesus Poems, Katrina, Ballet Madonnas*. For other books, bio, photographs see her web site: [www.lynlifshin.com](http://www.lynlifshin.com). *Persephone* was published by Red Hen and Texas Review published *Barbaro: Beyond Brokenness* and *Light at the End: Jesus Poems*. Most recent books: *Ballroom, All the Poets (Mostly) Who Have Touched Me, Living and Dead. All True, Especially the Lies*. In Spring 2012, NYQ books will publish *A Girl Goes into The Woods*. Also coming *For the Roses* poems after Joni Mitchell

C. Marecic writes: Lives, writes, and photographs from the vantage point of Midcoast Maine. A small selection of his photographs can be viewed at <https://picasaweb.google.com/cmarecic>. You can also find him on LinkedIn.

Stephen Massimilla received the Bordighera Poetry Prize for *Forty Floors from Yesterday*, the Grolier Prize for *Later on Aiaia*, a Van Renssalaer Award, an Academy of American Poets Prize, and two Pushcart nominations. He has new work in *AGNI*, *Barrow Street*, *The Colorado Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Verse Daily*, and elsewhere. He teaches at Columbia University. Website: [stephenmassimilla.com](http://stephenmassimilla.com).

Daniel Meltz writes: I've had poetry published in *American Poetry Review*, *upstreet*, *Mudfish*, *The Audio Zine*, *FortyOunceBachelors* and others. I'm a technical writer and taught vocational subjects to disabled adults for many years. I live in New York, near the Chrysler Building.

Laura Merleau lives in Waterloo, Illinois. Her novella *Little Fugue* was published by Woodley Memorial Press in 1993. Her poems have appeared in *Mixed Fruit*, *Inertia*, and *Soundzine*.

Cheri L. Miller writes: Writing poetry is a form of meditation and prayer for me. I consider my desire to write a gift from God, and in developing that gift I am brought closer to my real self and therefore closer to the great spirit of good in our universe. Though I have a long way to go, I strive to be an honest channel and to achieve unity with God and my fellows through writing and

sharing my poetry with others. I work as a writing/reading tutor for the Community College of Baltimore County in Maryland. I earned an MA in Writing with a concentration in poetry from Johns Hopkins University and have had poems published in publications including the *Baltimore City Paper*, *Penn-Union*, *DRADA newsletter*, *Snakeskin*, and most recently in *Rock and Sling: a journal of witness*.

**Donald Minkoff:** Brooklyn born, 1949. Attended the NYC Public School System. Attended NYU, Queens College, and, ultimately, St. Francis College through the Regents External Degree Program. Took the BA degree (Thanks Be To God!) in June 1991. Employed for 29 1/2 years by State of NY Workers' Compensation Board- Board Member's Review Analyst, Claims Unit Supervisor. Retired in November, 2004. Still keeps in touch with SFC professors.

**J.D. Mitchell-Lumsden** co-edits Erg's chapbook series and *Cricket Online Review*. His work has recently appeared, or is forthcoming, in *Rem Magazine*, *Burner Magazine*, *Otoliths*, *Raft*, *Psychic Meatloaf* and the anthology *Conversations at a Wartime Cafe: A Decade of War*. He lives in Iowa City.

**George Moore's** fourth collection of poems, *Children's Drawings of the Universe* (Salmon Poetry Ltd.) is scheduled for publication this year. His earlier collections include *Headhunting* (2002) and *The Petroglyphs at Wedding Rocks* (1997). Moore's poetry has appeared in *The Atlantic*, *Poetry*, *North American Review*, *Colorado Review*, and *Blast*. Nominated in 2011 for Pushcart Prizes, Best of Web and Best of the Net awards, The Rhysling Poetry Award and the Wolfson Poetry Prize, he has been a finalist for The National Poetry Series, The Brittingham Poetry Award, and the Richard Snyder Memorial Prize. On the faculty of the University of Colorado, Boulder, Moore teaches literature and writing.

**Jessy Murphy** is a poetry and fiction writer.

**Dr. Kathleen Nolan** received her undergraduate degree in Biology from Northeastern University, her Masters' in Biology from the City College of New York, and her Ph.D. in Biology from the City University of New York. She has taught Biology at Yeshiva and Columbia Universities, and has been at St. Francis College for eighteen years. She is a professor and Chair of the Biology and Health Promotion Department. She enjoys bringing students to the Caribbean for a marine biology course. She tries to incorporate environmental concepts into all her courses and has a keen interest in laboratory education.

**Mary C. O'Malley** has work published in print zines such as *Whiskey Island* and *Heartlands* and online zines. Some of her poetry has been chosen for local, national, and international Spoken Word events. She is a mother of two sets of twins and a former Post Graduate Social Worker.

**Nathan Parker** lives with his wife and three children in Northport, Alabama

**Leah Pascarella** writes: I recently graduated from Hofstra University and received a Literature degree with a concentration in Creative Writing. I have always felt inspired to write because of personal experiences as well as observations on human behavior and emotion. My passion for

writing and literature grew during my semester abroad in London. I am hoping to be accepted for a Master's program for Literature in the UK for the Fall 2012 semester.

**Paul Pekin** writes: I am a retired police officer who lives in Chicago's Logan Square neighborhood. Before I was a cop, I was a writer, I've always been a writer. I published my first short story in 1965 and my most recent one last year. My work has appeared in newspapers (*The Chicago Reader*, *The Chicago Tribune*, *The Chicago Sun Times*, and elsewhere) literary magazines (*Karamu*, *The Macguffin*, *Sou'wester*, *The South Dakota Quarterly*, to mention a few) and has been anthologized in *Best Sports Writing of 1991*, and in *ParaSpheres*, the 2006 Omnidawn anthology of "Fabulist and New Wave Fabulist Stories." I've won some prizes from the Chicago Journalism Club and the Illinois Art Council, and have taught fiction writing at Columbia College, the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

**Simon Perchik** is an attorney whose poems have appeared in *Partisan Review*, *The New Yorker*, and elsewhere. For more information, including his essay "Magic, Illusion and Other Realities" and a complete bibliography, please visit his website at [www.simonperchik.com](http://www.simonperchik.com).

**JoAnne Potter** writes: I retired from teaching in 2009 and write surrounded by Southwest Wisconsin's rolling hills, encouragement from Dave, my husband of 33 years, two grown sons, and persistent former students. "Victor" is my first published poem. My creative nonfiction appears both online, in print, and my devotional blog appears at [joannepotter.blogspot.com](http://joannepotter.blogspot.com). Find my links at [joannepotter.weebly.com](http://joannepotter.weebly.com).

**Steve Prusky** writes, lives and works in Las Vegas. His poetry, prose and photography have appeared in *Foundling Review*, *Camel Saloon*, *Whistling Fire*, *Orion headless* and others.

**Juan Carlos Reyes**, originally from Guayaquil, Ecuador, lives with his wife in Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

**Joe Martyn Ricke** is a teacher, poet, singer/songwriter, actor and parent. His work has appeared in a number of small poetry journals, most recently *Ruminate* and *Eudomania*. His songs have been recorded on two CDs, and a third one due out Fall 2011, *Little Clarissa and Other Stories*. His wide interests are reflected in his recent articles (2011) on *Taming of the Shrew* (in the MLA *Approaches to Teaching Taming of the Shrew* volume), on the fate of Tolkien's Elvish realm of Lothlorien in Peter Jackson's LOTR film, and on academic freedom in religious colleges. He tends to write poems about or at least influenced by other works of art (paintings, plays, books, other poems, ikons, bodies).

**Jay Rubin** teaches writing at The College of Alameda in the San Francisco Bay Area and publishes *Alehouse*, an all-poetry literary journal, at [www.alehousepress.com](http://www.alehousepress.com). He holds an MFA in Poetry from New England College and lives in San Francisco with his son and Norwich terrier.

G.A. Saindon writes: I live on five acres in northeast Wisconsin, my small park. There is wildlife aplenty, a pond, the Milky Way and the moon. My wife of 41 years, my seven children and my eight grandchildren are my delight. My writing is all a matter of translating reality for anyone who wants to read them. That's why I read poems: to discover reality.

Andrea Scarpino is the author of the chapbook *The Grove Behind* (Finishing Line Press) and a forthcoming full-length collection from Red Hen Press. She received an MFA in Creative Writing from The Ohio State University, has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize, and teaches with Union Institute and University's Cohort Ph.D. program in Interdisciplinary Studies. She is a weekly contributor for the blog Planet of the Blind.

Jonathan H. Scott lives in Birmingham, Alabama. His poetry and short-stories have been published in *The Able Muse*, *Blood and Thunder*, *Caesura*, *Hospital Drive*, *Measure*, *THEMA* and others.

Richard Fenton Sederstrom lives in the Sonoran Desert of Arizona and Mexico and the North Woods of Minnesota. His book, *Fall Pictures on an Abandoned Road*, was released in 2009, *Disordinary Light*, in 2010, and *Folly, A Book of Last Summers*, in 2011. Sederstrom's poems have appeared in *The Talking Stick*, *English Journal*, *Plainsongs*, *Big Muddy*, *Mother Earth Journal*, *The Blue Guitar*, *Memoir (and)*, *Saint Anthony Messenger* and *Ruminare* among other journals and magazines. Fortunate to have retired from all respectable pursuits, especially teaching, he returns to the classroom as a visitor, where, "instead of teaching out of pedagogy, I teach out of confusion, and into it, the way teaching should be done, the way poetry should be done, the way life should be done."

Tracy L. Seffers lives with her family on the Shenandoah River in West Virginia, under the shadow of the Blue Ridge. She earned her BA in English at Lyon College in Arkansas, and her MA in English at the College of William and Mary in Virginia. Her poetry has been published in the *Bluestone Review*, in the *Anthology of Appalachian Writers (Silas House edition)*, in *Still: The Journal*, in *Assisi: An Online Journal of Arts and Letters*, in *First Lights II* (Southeast Writers Group); and has been featured in public readings with the Jefferson County Arts and Humanities Alliance, the West Virginia Writers podcast series, and the Appalachian Heritage Writer-in-Residence program at Shepherd University in West Virginia.

Shaina Semiatin hails from Santa Maria, California, and holds a B.A. in history and a minor in English. Since graduating, she has taught environmental education in Georgia, and is currently doing trail work in the Alaskan backcountry. When she is done communing with nature, she intends to pursue her MFA in poetry.

Tom Sexton's most recent collection is *I Think Again of Those Ancient Chinese Poets*, University of Alaska Press, 2011. He was Alaska's poet laureate from 1994 until 2000.

Marian Kaplun Shapiro is the author of a professional book, *Second Childhood* (Norton, 1988), a poetry book, *Players In The Dream, Dreamers In The Play* (Plain View Press, 2007) and two chapbooks: *Your Third Wish*, (Finishing Line, 2007); and *The End Of The World*,

*Announced On Wednesday* (Pudding House, 2007). As a Quaker and a psychologist, her poetry often addresses the embedded topics of peace and violence, often by addressing one within the context of the other. A resident of Lexington, she was named Senior Poet Laureate of Massachusetts in 2006, in 2008, and in 2010.

Known mainly as a poet/teacher, **Barry Spacks** has brought out various novels, stories, three poetry-reading CDs and ten poetry collections while teaching literature and writing for years at M.I.T. & U C Santa Barbara. His next book of poems, *A Bounty of 84s*, appears from Cherry Grove in 2012.

**Leah Stenson** is a published poet, workshop leader, Board Member of Friends of William Stafford, and coordinator and host of the prestigious Studio reading series in Portland. She is also an editor of the upcoming Ooligan Press anthology *The Pacific Poetry Project*. Her new chapbook, *Heavenly Body*, is forthcoming in August 2011 from Finishing Line Press. Publications include *Oregon Literary Review*, *Northwest Women's Journal*, *The Oregonian*, and *San Diego Poetry Annual*.

**M. G. Stephens** is the author of eighteen books, including the novel *The Brooklyn Book of the Dead* and the essay collection *Green Dreams*. He recently completed a 1200-page two-volume cultural history and memoir about downtown New York in the 1960s.

**Marydale Stewart** is a retired college English teacher, librarian, and technical writer and has lived in Illinois, Kansas, and Colorado. Her chapbook *Inheritance* was published in 2008 by Puddin'head Press in Chicago. She has poems in *The Aurorean*; in that magazine's broadsheet *The Unrorean*; in *The Foundling Review*, *After Hours*, *Ascent Aspirations*, *Boston Literary Magazine*, and *Northwind*, and forthcoming in *River Oak Review* and an anthology *A Quiet Shelter There* to be published fall 2012 by Hadley Rille Books.

**Amanda Sullivan** is an undergraduate and the President of the Photography Club at St. Francis College. Her photographs have been featured on the website of the *New York Times*, *Disney's* parenting website *Babble*, and in the exhibit *How We See Things* at St. Francis College. Amanda is a Psychology major and pursues photography in her spare time.

**Wally Swist's** new book, *Huang Po and the Dimensions of Love*, was chosen by Yusef Komunyakaa as a co-winner in the Crab Orchard Series Open Poetry Competition, and will be published by Southern Illinois University Press in August 2012. His previous book, *Luminous Dream*, was chosen as a finalist in the 2010 FutureCycle Poetry Book Award. *Open Meadow: Odes to Nature*, an audiobook of 65 of his poems, will be released in the April 2012.

**Marjorie Turner** is a graduate of the University of Southern Mississippi, where she majored in the art of writing poems instead of doing homework. She considers her extended family to include such ancestors as Whitman, Auden, and Rilke, and feels that no amount of technology can replace the beauty of a written word. She was published in the spring of 2011 in USM's literary journal, *Product 25*.

Lowell Uda writes: A graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop, I have taught English at the U. of Hawaii and the U. of Montana, and worked in Montana state government. After that I became a United Methodist minister, pastoring churches in Colorado and Montana. My short story, "The Cherry Tree," won first prize in the 2011 Common Review Short Story Prize contest. Stories and poems of mine have appeared in literary and other magazines, including *The North American Review*, *Hawaii Review*, *TransPacific*, and more recently *In Our Own Voice*, *Divide: Journal of Literature, Arts and Ideas*, *Poems Across the Big Sky*, *Moonrabbit Review*, and *The Other Side*. I am presently at work on a memoir and a novel.

Wendy Vardaman, wendyvardaman.com, has a Ph.D. from University of Pennsylvania. Co-editor/web master of *Verse Wisconsin*, [versewisconsin.org](http://versewisconsin.org), as well as Cowfeather Press, [cowfeatherpress.org](http://cowfeatherpress.org), and the author of *Obstructed View* (Fireweed Press, 2009), she works for a children's theater, The Young Shakespeare Players, in Madison, WI. In addition to poetry, she writes reviews, essays and interviews which have appeared in *Poetry Daily*, *The Women's Review of Books* and *Poets.org*.

Gloria Ventura is a photographer and a sophomore at St. Francis College. She is majoring in Childhood Education with a concentration in English. Gloria is a member of the Photography Club at St. Francis College. This is the first time her work has ever been published. She is proud to have shared her work in *Assisi*.

Robert West's poems, essays, and reviews have appeared in *Able Muse*, *Asheville Poetry Review*, *The Cortland Review*, *Poetry*, *Southern Poetry Review*, Ted Kooser's *American Life in Poetry*, and other venues. He is the author of three poetry chapbooks: *Best Company* (Blink Chapbooks), *Out of Hand* (Scienter Press), and *Convalescent* (Finishing Line Press). Originally from the North Carolina mountains, he now teaches in the Department of English at Mississippi State University, where he also serves as associate editor of the scholarly journal *Mississippi Quarterly*. See <http://www.english.msstate.edu/faculty/West.html>.

Nathan E. White is a writer and musician living in the Los Angeles area. He holds an M.F.A. in Creative Writing from New York University. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in such publications as the *Tulane Review*, *Bellingham Review*, *The Los Angeles Review*, *Quiddity*, and *Redactions: Poetry & Poetics*.

Joseph Wilson writes: I live in the Seattle area, where I work as a Development Assistant at a local non-profit. My poems have appeared in *Carcinogenic Poetry*, *Cooper Point Journal*, *Arnazella*, *Slightly West*, and *Between the Lines*.

Ted Witham has published poetry, short stories and hymns for many years. He lives near the beaches and vineyards of the south-west of Western Australia with his wife Rae and spaniel Jeannie. He and Rae have been Anglican Franciscan Tertiaries for 30 years.

William Kelley Woolfitt studies American literature at Pennsylvania State University, where he is in the third year of the Ph.D. program. He has worked as a summer camp counselor, bookseller, ballpark peanuts vendor, and teacher of computer literacy to senior citizens. He is the

author of *The Salvager's Arts*, co-winner of the 2011 Keystone Chapbook Prize, which will be published in June of 2012. His poems and short stories have appeared or are forthcoming in *Cincinnati Review*, *Ninth Letter*, *Shenandoah*, *Los Angeles Review*, *Sycamore Review*, *Southern Humanities Review*, and *Hayden's Ferry Review*. Poems from his completed book-length sequence, *Words for Flesh: a Spiritual Autobiography of Charles de Foucauld*, have been published in *Salamander*, *Rhino*, *Pilgrimage*, and *Nimrod*. He goes walking on the Appalachian Trail or at his grandparents' farm on Pea Ridge (near Kasson, West Virginia) whenever he can.

Changming Yuan, 4-time Pushcart nominee and author of *Chansons of a Chinaman*, grew up in rural China and published several monographs before moving to Canada. With a PhD in English, Yuan teaches in Vancouver and has poetry appear in nearly 480 literary publications across 19 countries, including *Asia Literary Review*, *Barrow Street*, *Best Canadian Poetry*, *BestNewPoemsOnline*, *Exquisite Corpse*, *London Magazine*, *Poetry Kanto*, *Salzburg Review*, *SAND* and *Taj Mahal Review*.

James K. Zimmerman is the winner of the 2009 Daniel Varoujan Award, the 2009 & 2010 Hart Crane Memorial Poetry Awards, and the 2011 Cloudbank Poetry Prize. His work appears or is forthcoming in *anderbo.com*, *The Bellingham Review*, *Rosebud*, *Inkwell*, *Nimrod*, *Passager*, and *Vallum*, among others.