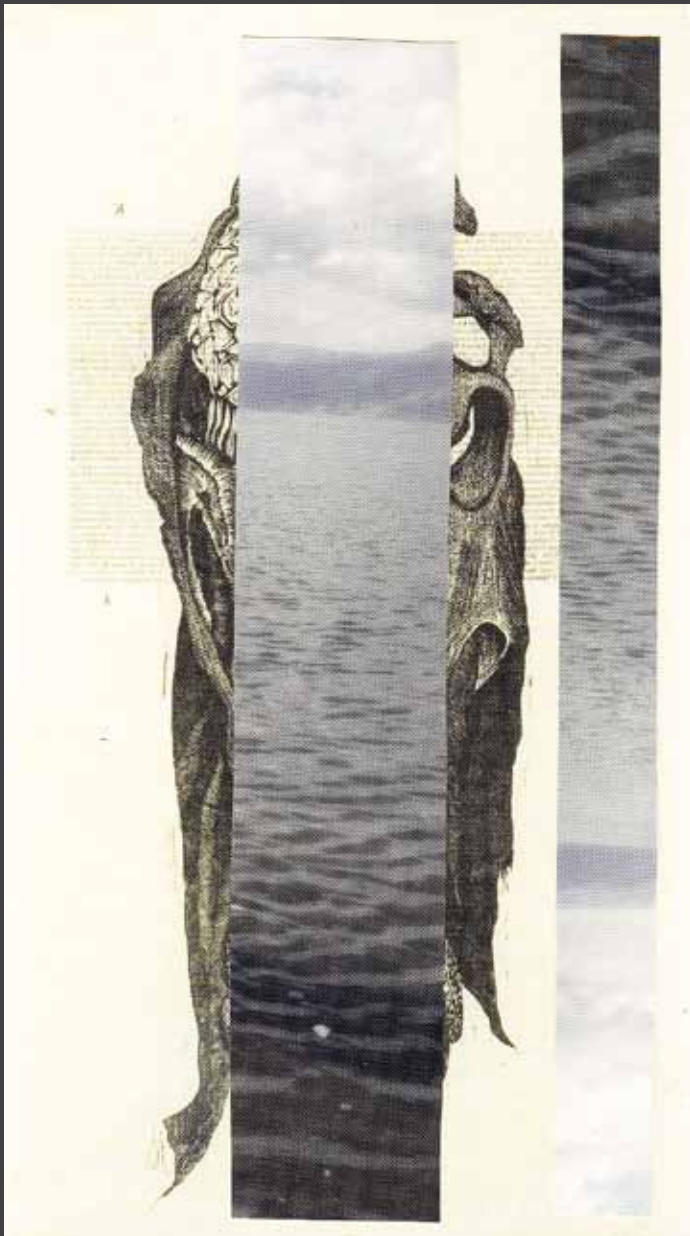


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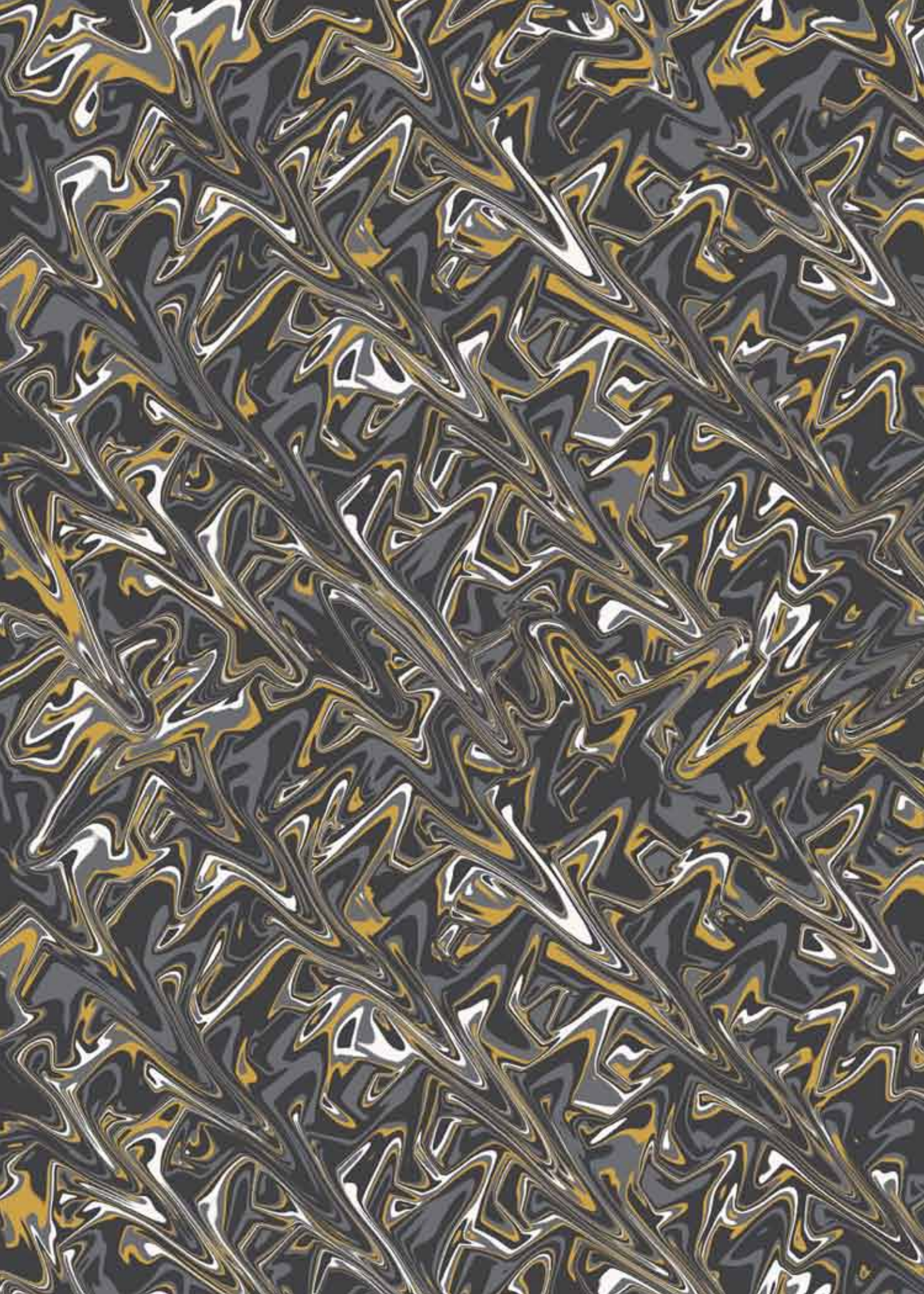
VOLUME 35



MMXIII









**R I P R A P  
T H I R T Y  
F I V E**

LITERARY JOURNAL

MMXIII

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# SENTENCE DIAGRAM

by Jeff Hallenbeck

I was trapped in her syntax.  
Her tongue spelled  
My name with succinct diction.

There was no wasted movement.  
She was an Imagist in bed.

She followed every one of my actions  
    With prepositional phrases  
        Over the details  
    And through the direction.

She fashioned  
Essays, and poetry  
With complicated sentences  
    That ensnared my thoughts  
        In mazes of exquisite eloquence.  
        I can't argue against what I can't comprehend.

I was once a singular identity,  
But I did not mind  
Being a vague independent clause  
At the end  
Of her complete thought; it made sense to me.

But as with any rushed, flushed, and trusting reader  
I forgot to read inside the (parenthesis).  
For in there you find a girl with trembling knees,  
And piercing screams,  
And a subject that isn't me.

Now all I know. Is how to be the. Fragment; at the end  
Of another's: (thought).  
I have – lost a grip/on the rules\_and functions, and her. \*& M.e.

RIPRAP 35



Alice Chiang *Bath House*





# MOON JELLY

by Chad Greene

RIPRAP 35

The swinging singles of a bygone era had nicknamed the beach Horny Corner, but Marc knew he certainly wasn't turning anyone on as he struggled to shrug the lifejacket over his meaty upper arms.

"X-LARGE!" exclaimed the block capitals hand-lettered on the salt-stained fabric with a permanent marker. The sun had already put the lie to the manufacturer's claims of permanence, fading the black ink into the sickly purple of severe sunburns, and now Marc's exertions were calling the writer's honesty into question, as well.

"Extra large, my ass," Marc grumbled.

"It does look awfully big, dude," Nathanael chuckled as he folded his own lifejacket and secured it under the bungee cords that crossed over the storage area in the stern of his kayak.

"What does?"

"Your ass."

"Hey, just because you've been practically living at the gym since ..." Marc trailed off. He looked down, crossed his arms over his chest, and

tugged the two sides of the lifejacket toward each other.

"Since what?"

"Since, well ... you know."

"Way to believe the stereotypes, dude."

"Way to perpetuate them, dude."

Nathanael sighed. "You don't have to do this."

"Do what? Wear the life jacket?"

"No. Pick a fight now so it'll be easier on both of us when I get on that redeye tonight."

"Why don't you come over here and say that, cocksucker?" Marc challenged. He kicked a token toeful of sand in the general direction of Nathanael's feet.

Both men laughed.

"Seriously, man," Nathanael said. "Why do you insist on wearing that sorry-ass lifejacket? You can swim, right?"

Marc's eyes panned across the placid waters of Alamitos Bay before fixating on a far-off spot somewhere past the Second Street Bridge.

"It gets deep in some places out there," he said, dragging his kayak toward the waterline.

Nathanael had already discontinued electrical service to his Belmont Heights apartment, and by the time Marc had retrieved him from the center of a shadowy maze of stacked cardboard boxes, all that had been left at the rental place was a pair of yellow Ocean Kayak Drifters.

"Get on the boat, yeah, Banana Boat," Marc sang softly as they paddled the 13-footers past the gondoliers in striped shirts and straw hats easing passengers into the Venetian vessels moored to a nearby jetty.

Nathanael lingered dockside to watch a broad-shouldered gondolier adjust the red sash around his waist before fitting his oar into a gondola's forcola.

Marc cleared his throat theatrically as he passed through the gap in the buoy line and angled toward the leeward side of Naples Island. Nathanael's eyes remained riveted to the gondolier. Marc cleared his throat again, louder.

"What?" Nathanael asked.

Marc ducked his head, pretended to concentrate on his paddle strokes. He teased his companion about becoming a born-again gym rat, but he lifted at least three times a week himself. Although he hadn't played a down in almost ten years, Marc still blamed his high school football coaches for indoctrinating him into a workout routine that stressed bulk over definition.

"Curls are for the girls," they had sneered. "But the lineman who benches can hold his own in the trenches."

Leaning forward in the kayak's cockpit, Marc exploded off the line, using long, plunging strokes to distance himself from Nathanael. As the blades emerged from the water, they sprinkled his arms with sheets of spray that would leave trails of salt on his skin. Marc imagined a tongue lightly tracing those wavy lines as if licking the crystals from rim of a margarita glass.

Marc was single at the moment, so exactly whose tongue it would have been was entirely a matter of speculation. His eyelids closed for an in-

stant as a procession of ex-girlfriends' faces flashed by in rapid succession. When Nathanael's popped into the lineup, Marc almost dropped his paddle.

It was one of the questions Marc had been puzzling over since Nathanael had come out earlier that year: Even before Nate had admitted to himself that he was gay, had he been drawn to Marc as a friend because he was subconsciously attracted to him? Marc had never had an openly gay friend before, so he didn't know if that's how things worked.

In the months since Nathanael's announcement, Marc had caught himself more than once replaying certain moments from their past to determine if Nathanael had ever made a pass at him. But that wasn't the most fundamental re-evaluation he had undertaken. Marc knew it would have been overstating things to say that their relationship had been based on a lie, but he often wondered how well he had ever really known the guy he considered one of his closest friends if he hadn't even realized Nathanael liked boys instead of girls.

He finally gave Nathanael a chance to catch up by coasting through the concrete pilings of the Second Street Bridge, its underside decorated with the graffiti spray-painted as an initiation ritual by the novices on the Cal State Long Beach crew team. The tires of luxury sedans whispered shameful secrets to the roadway above as they carried their wealthy owners toward the upscale boutiques and sidewalk cafes of Belmont Shore.

"Where are these things you want me to see?" Nathanael gasped as he pulled up behind Marc.

"Spinnaker Cove."

"So, where is this Spinnaker Cove, exactly?"

"Right here."

"Right here?" Nathanael surveyed the unremarkable expanse of water with an exaggerated swivel of his head.

"Well, left here, actually," Marc corrected himself, pointing to another channel. The tide was out, exposing the rough-edged black shells of the barnacles that blanketed its concrete walls. Duffy Electric Boats, those canopied harbor cruisers, were parallel-parked along the docks with the regularity

of Mercedes on Rodeo Drive.

"Watt's Up, Dock?" Nathanael scoffed as they paddled past the first boat. "Isn't there a limit on the number of puns in a single boat name?"

"I think the only limit is a practical one. You can only fit so many words on the stern," Marc observed.

"Watt a concept," Nathanael deadpanned. "Seriously, though. Some of these names are ridiculous."

"Definitely. I mean, 'Knotty Buoys'?"

"Actually, I kind of like the sound of that."

"You would."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Nothing," said Marc, suddenly very interested in the amount of saltwater bubbling up from the twin self-bailing scupper holes that flanked his seat.

They paddled on in silence for a while.

"What do these Duffy Boats cost, anyway?" Nathanael finally asked.

"Start at about \$120,000, I think."

"That much? Shit," said Nathanael, looking at the identical Mission Revival townhouses lining both sides of the channel with a newfound respect.

"Where are we, anyway?"

"I told you: Spinnaker Cove."

"Right, but where's Spinnaker Cove? I mean, if I wanted to drive here, what streets would I take?"

Marc frowned. "You know, I have no idea. Maybe it's only accessible by yacht."

"That's what I mean, dude. It's hard to believe this is Long Beach, too."

"Well, yeah. I doubt V.I.P. Records is going to open a second location down here, or anything."

"Why not? Snoop Dogg's always shouting out the Eastside."

"Somehow, I don't think Naples Island and Belmont Shore are quite the 'Eastside' he has in mind," Marc said with a snort.

"Seriously, man. I thought I knew Long Beach."

"I thought I knew you," Marc whispered.

"What did you say?"

"I said, 'We're here.'"

"So what am I looking for?" Nathanael asked, squinting down at the calm water filling the nautical

equivalent of a cul-de-sac.

"Love, in all the wrong places?"

"Seriously," Nathanael growled. "What am I looking for?"

"Moon jellies," said Marc. He laid his paddle across his lap and peered over the starboard side of his Drifter. "There's a huge colony of miniature jellyfish living at this dead-end."

"And what, exactly, does a moon jelly look like?"

"It's kind of hard to describe. Sort of like the ghost of a sand dollar – a translucent saucer with four round pouches in it."

"Gee, sounds fascinating."

With few shallow strokes of the right blade of his paddle, Nathanael sent his kayak into a slow spiral. "Shit! I'm surrounded," he yelped, staring down at the wraithlike forms beginning to drift upward from the murky depths. "Goddamn, they're kind of creepy, like alien blobs from some B horror movie."

"'It Came From Spinnaker Cove!'" Marc rumbled with the practiced profundity of a movie trailer announcer.

"Seriously, dude. Do they sting?" Nathanael asked without taking his eyes off the moon jellies clustering around his boat.

"Nope."

"You sure?"

"Sure," said Marc. He reached forward to stroke the lavender-tinged bell of the nearest jelly.

After a bit of coaxing, Nathanael followed suit. Both agreed it was surprising that something that seemed so ethereal should be so substantial to the touch.

As Marc attempted, without any success, to lift one of the slippery enigmas out of the water with one blunt blade, his companion looked around the little cove, a growing puzzlement evident on his face.

"How did they get here?" Nathanael asked.

"What do you mean?" mumbled Marc, engrossed in the deliberate delicacy required to extricate the indistinct thing from the only slightly more transparent waters around it.

"What do I mean? Look at them. They're basically just drifting bags of gas. Can they really communicate with each other? Can they really even see each other? And if they can't, how did they wind up together in this obscure corner of Southern California?"

Marc looked up at his friend. "I don't know."

"How about sex?"

"Excuse me?" Marc sputtered.

"How do they mate?" Nathanael asked. "I mean, 'moon jelly' is a very hippie name. I bet they're all about free love down there, all those slippery bodies sliding over each other ..."

Marc cleared his throat loudly. "Aren't jellyfish one of those animals with a weird lifecycle, where they're one thing for the first phase and something else for the second? Like, they have to start out as a polyp attached to a rock before floating free."

"Transformation," Nathanael said. "I can relate."

Marc didn't say anything. He was sure the appropriate response was sliding around somewhere inside him, but he just didn't have the right tool to lift it out.

As he and Nathanael floated there in silence, Marc spied a pair of moon jellies drifting through the edge of his peripheral vision. He lurched toward them, and his kayak capsized.

"Marc!" Nathanael yelled when his friend's unfastened lifejacket floated to the surface.

As he sank below his upended boat, the salt stung Marc's eyes. Even as he blinked them furiously, though, he saw the ethereal entity sailing toward

him – amorphous, androgynous. He reached out with both hands to seize it, to hold it tight against his chest, before kicking his way back up to the surface. Just as the bubbles his nose had left behind to mark the trail threatened to become too few and too far between to follow, Marc's head burst back into the air.

Momentarily blinded by the saltwater in his eyes, Marc flailed his arms in an attempt to grasp something solid. One of his wrists cracked against the hull of Nathanael's kayak, causing Marc to drop the moon jelly. It landed on the bow with an audible plop.

"Take my hand," Nathanael said, reaching forward.

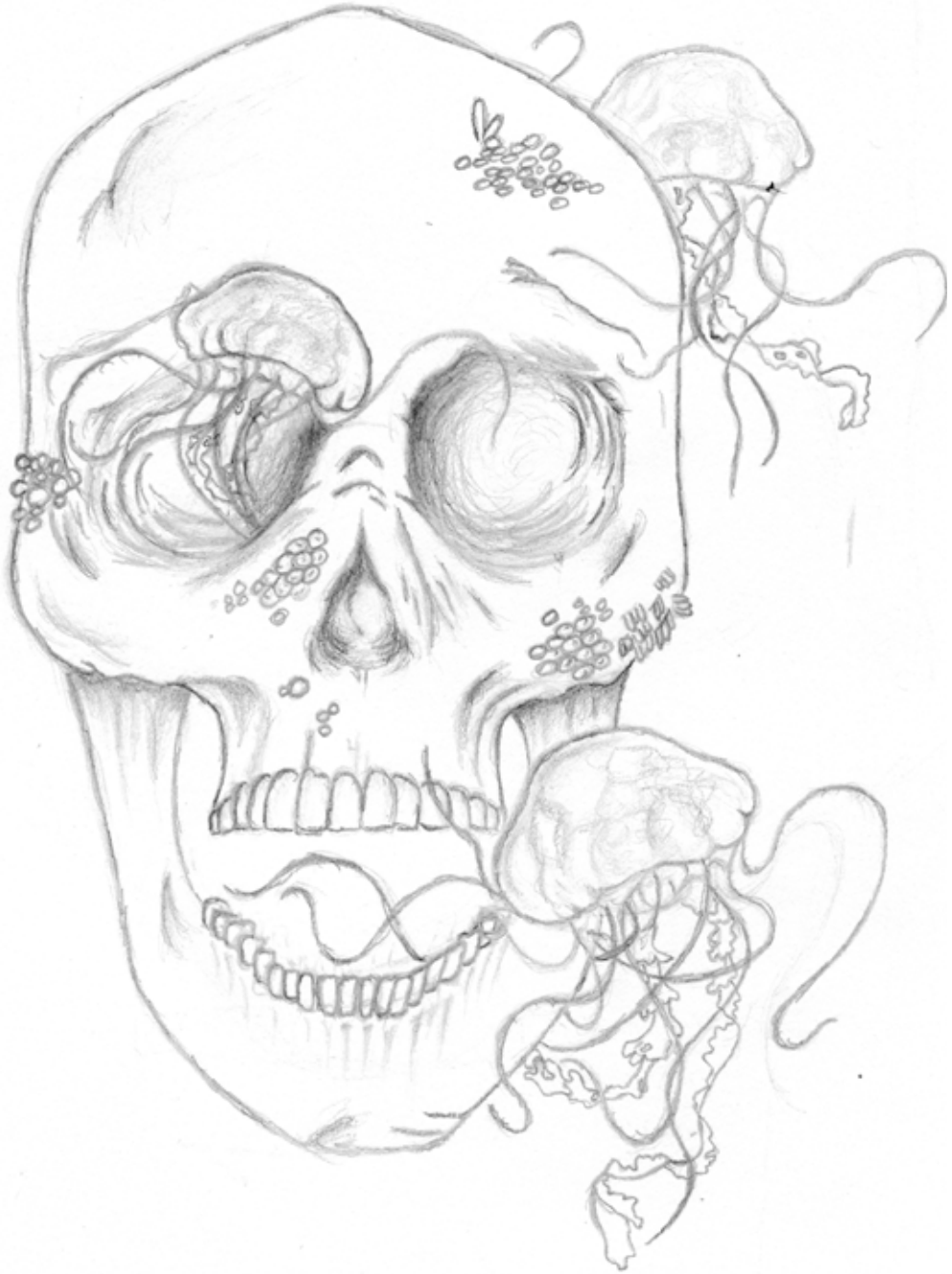
"I can't see you," Marc protested. As he treaded water, his blinking eyes, like a film projector cranked at the wrong speed, created a blurred image of Nathanael. "I ... I guess I haven't really been able to see you clearly for a while now."

Nathanael didn't say anything. He looked down at the moon jelly, already starting to dry out in the hot sun. He leaned forward and shaded it with his hands.

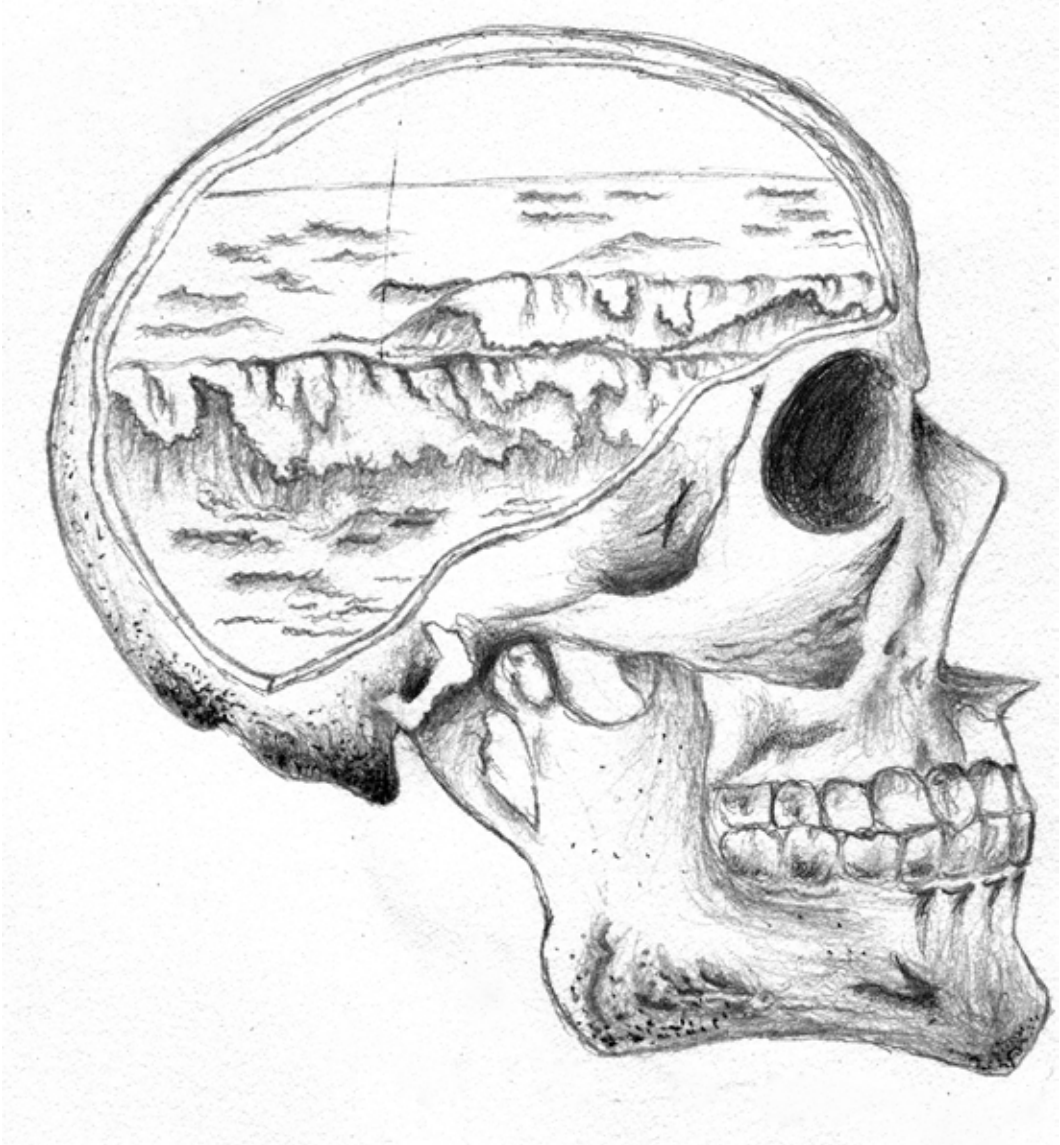
As Marc's vision finally cleared, he watched his friend cup the delicate thing in both hands and drop it back into the water. Then Nathanael wiped his right on his trunks, and offered it to Marc.

And, in the absence of all the distracting chatter, all Marc could see with his burning eyes was the concern evident on Nathanael's face and how the outstretched hand didn't waver.

He accepted it.







# INTERVIEW: J O A N J O B E S M I T H

by Jax NTP

RIPRAP 35

If reincarnation is really real,  
I do not wish to be reincarnated,  
Tossed out into this cold world  
Naked again. It's taken me all my  
Life to find enough clothes to keep  
My soul and skin warm and I  
Still don't know what to wear.



Joan Jobe Smith, founding editor of Pearl magazine and Bukowski Review, has had her work published in more than 500 publications, notably *Ambit*, *Beat Scene*, *The North*, and *Bete Noire*. Her poetry collection from *The Poetry Business*, *The Pow Wow Cafe*, was a 1999 Forward Prize finalist. She lives in Long Beach, California with her husband Fred Voss with whom she was featured in July 2012 at the Humber Mouth Literature Festival. Her new book *Charles Bukowski Epic Glottis: His Art & His Women (& me)* is available on Amazon.

RIPRAP When did you start writing?

JOAN JOBE SMITH About age 15 months old I began writing—really—I remember this well—when I picked up a twig and made circles in the dirt while I sat on the bottom rung of the ladder my mother stood on picking dates in Indio—a Grapes of Wrath, who’d left Texas Dust Bowl for work in California, circa 1942. Later, age 9, I wrote my first novel—4 whole pages—with pen and ink. And I’ve been babbling on and on ever since. Countless writers can tell you similar true tales. Writing’s just something you gotta do, no matter when or where.

RR How does what you read influence your work or does it influence your work at all?

JJS A child in the heyday comic book era, my literary inspirations for a budding imagination were Superman, Batman, Little Lulu—and of course Grimm’s Fairy Tales—and radio dramas and the silver screen movies. Since childhood, I have been an irrepressible but amateur cartoonist and styled my drawings after Little Lulu, created by Marge Henderson. Now I admire the New Yorker cartoonist Roz Chast (sp?) and read and admire contemporary writers—many of whom I publish in my literary journal PEARL—viz: Charles Bukowski.

RR Who did you read when you were younger and who are you reading now?

JJS All writers—especially women—inspire and entertain me—from the Bronte Sisters, Anais Nin, Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Plath, Gloria Steinheim and Rachel Carsons to Marilyn Johnson, Donna Hilbert, Ann Menebroker, francEye (Frances Dean Smith), Wilma Elizabeth McDaniel and all the women I’ve published in PEARL—but most of all my Main Muse: my Mother, who was not only beautiful but a Walking Poem. The men writers and poets who

also amaze me: all the men I’ve published in PEARL along with Hemingway, Isaac Bashevis Singer, Victor Hugo, Cole Porter, Philip Larkin and Fred Voss. But Charles Bukowski, a personal, platonic poet pal as well as my first literary mentor for nearly a decade, was my main object d’art, cause celebre and entrée to Becoming a Writer. and Publisher-Editor of a literary journal, PEARL

RR Can you describe your aesthetics? / What does poetry mean to you? Aesthetics? What does Poetry mean to you?

JJS Charles Bukowski has said: “Poetry is the big good horse in the stretch” and “Poetry is the shortest, sweetest, bangingest way.” Poet Michael Longley has written: “I don’t know where poetry comes from but I want to go there.” As a writer, I’d like to go there, too, sweetly and bangingly and I cozy up close to the magical spot each time I write a poem. As a publisher, I take some passengers along, document via PEARL a verbal anthropology by providing pages for their words, vernacular or classic, composed in their time and place.

RR How much time do you set aside to write? Do you have a schedule? Does it fluctuate?

JJS I try NOT to write. At this point of my life, I suspect I’ve written Too Much. I was an only child and to compensate, I wrote stories in my head to distract me from my loneliness. I still do that, recreating memories from my long life, but now I don’t write them down anymore—I want to save the forests.

RR What tips or advice can you give to aspiring writers?

JJS Follow your Bliss—if the Bliss Road leads you to poetry: Go there. Do it.

# 13 WAYS TO GET A DIVORCE

by Cory Wilson

XIII.

Sign the paperwork.

XII.

Before you sign—stall; attempt reconciliation.

XI.

Before reconciliation, try dating websites—explain to others, it's complicated.

X.

While explaining, call mom drunk—she'll understand.

IX.

Before separating, disregard overt cues about money—about responsibility.

VIII.

Be honest when it comes to sex—and appearance.

VII.

Begin couples therapy—18 months is a long time—you'll want to be sure.

VI.

Confuse the act of creating music with love—get married.

V.

Join some band with some chick who sings like an angel—or, just be in a band.

IV.

Don't die (important)—making it to your late twenties affords ample insecurity.

III.

Stay home from school, play music—watch guy-gets-girl movies. Maybe even get high.

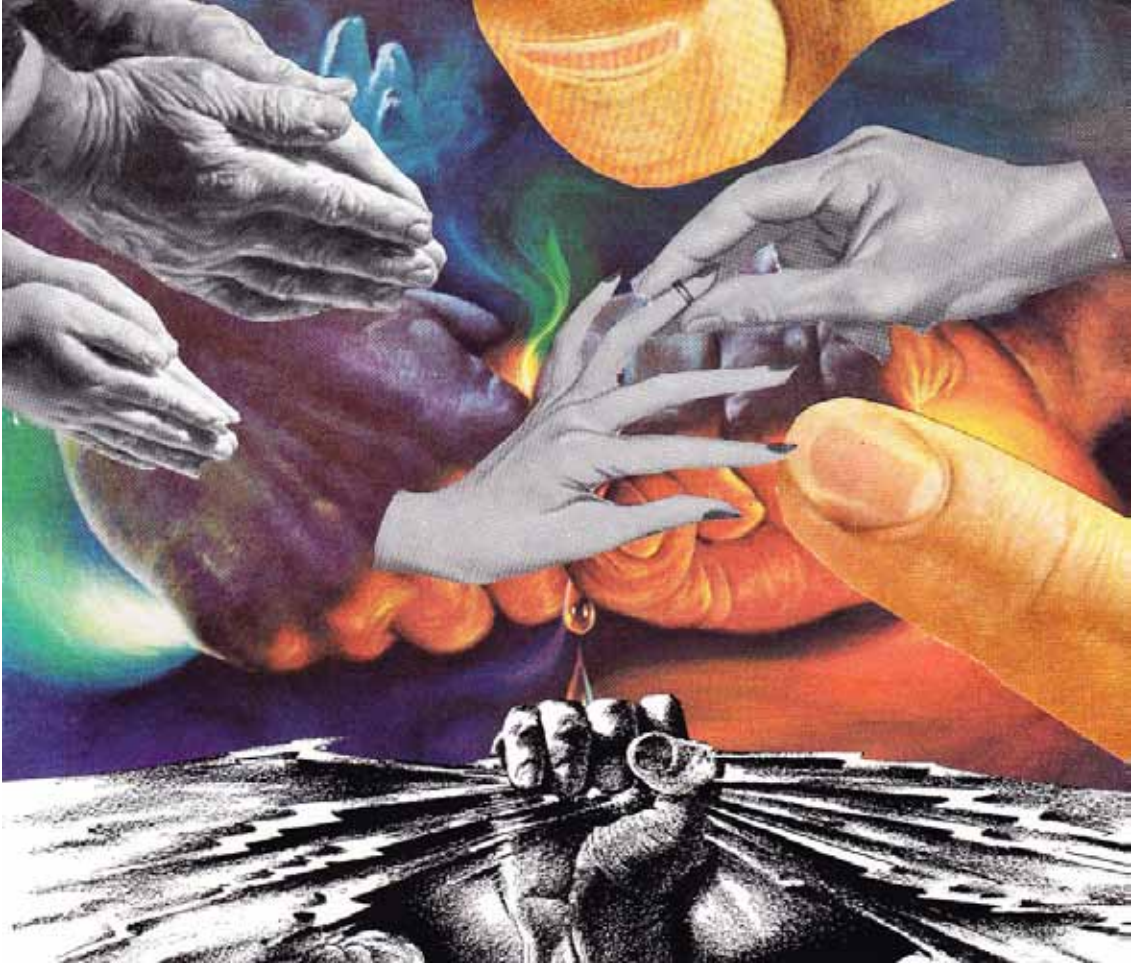
II.

Be somewhat lonely, pimply on the ass—run from bullies.

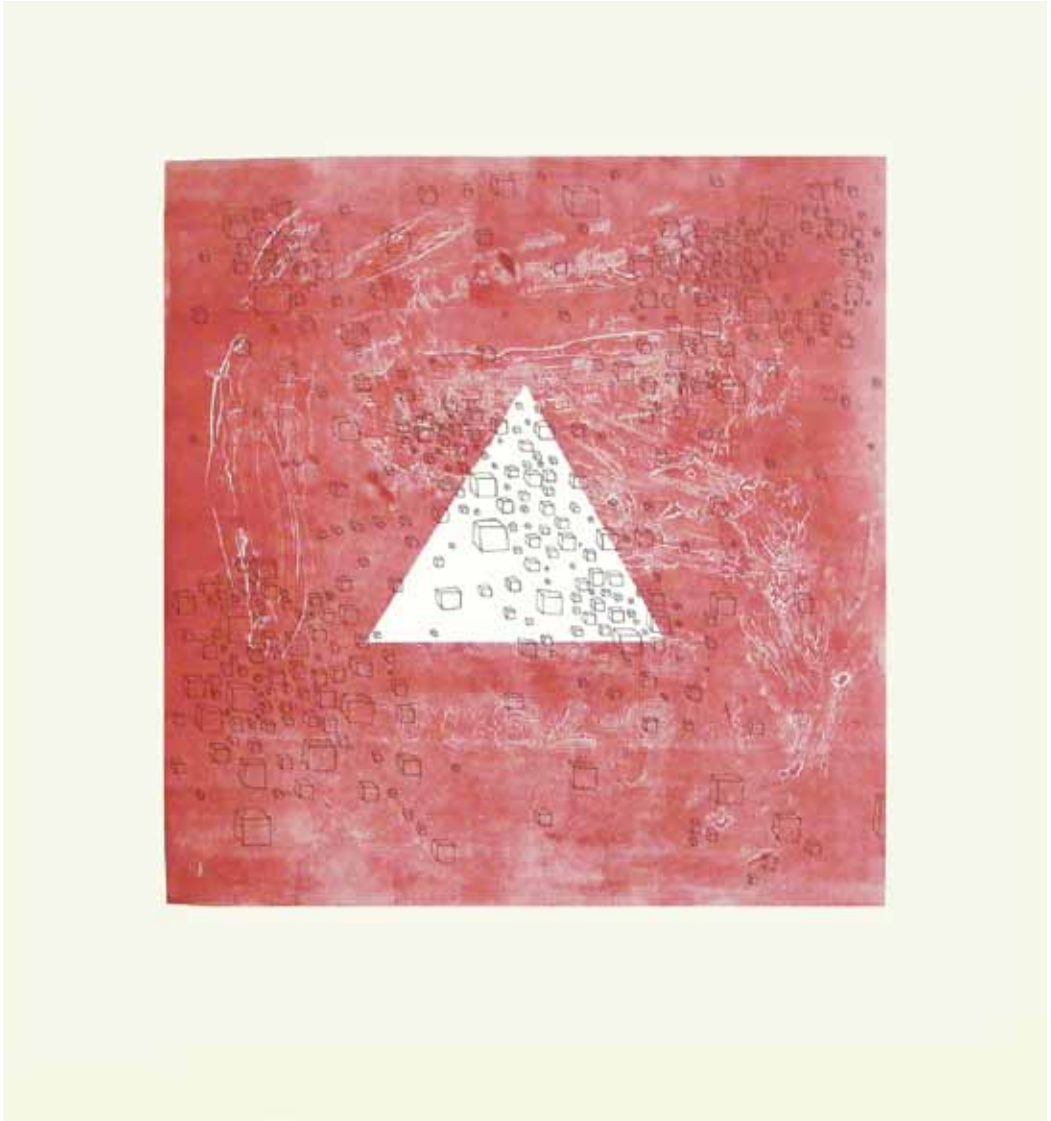
I.

Be raised in a home somewhere with people in it—parents perhaps. Or not.





Dwight Pavlovic *The Instrumentality of Hands*



# G E T L O S T

by Matthew Dulany

RIPRAP 35

Hannah makes that sharp sound of hers as he swerves to the curb. He presses the button on his door to put her window down and then leans across her big belly. She won't look at the two young black men on the sidewalk. She didn't want him to stop the car.

He asks them if they know the way back to the expressway. Both respond. The directions are long and complicated. Distracted by the bulge near his right ear, Paul fails to understand. But he doesn't really care. He's enjoying the tour.

He tells them the name of the street where his father was raised. "Do you know where that is?"

"That's the other way," one says. "Where do you want to go?"

"Just wondering. Thanks again." He pulls out.

Hannah puts her window up. She insisted all the windows go up the moment they

left the expressway. He told her it felt unhealthy to have the air conditioning on in April. She said she liked it.

In the mirror he sees the young men still standing on the corner, watching them drive off. He suspects he's not doing what they suggested. "Were we supposed to go right at the corner?"

"I don't know. I wasn't listening."

"Well, neither was I."

"So why did you bother stopping to ask them?"

"I thought you wanted me to."

"I didn't."

"Don't you want to know how to get out of here?"

"Don't you?"



It is the first time they have driven up to Mount Kisco together since his father's funeral. He has gone up himself every other weekend since then, to check on his mother, and, if there is time, his grandmother. Hannah was encouraging at first, but not lately. The last time he went she asked him to take

their son along. She said it was too much for her to be alone with him all day. He told her his grandmother was alone with two kids for two decades. She rolled her eyes. But he did take the boy. He didn't mind at all. He stuffed him with potato chips and soda and candy, all kinds of goodies Hannah would object to, and let him ride up front, the boy ogling him in wonder as he navigated the traffic on the Hutch while rapping along with what he remembered of *A Tribe Called Quest*. They had a good time. It was certainly more fun than driving with Hannah, who always complains about car sickness, which always subsides as they re-enter the rising winding falling lanes of their youth, where she likes to ooh and aah over the homes, the properties, the manors and estates, needling him about what she really wants but he has not provided and does not intend to. Maybe by leaving the highway, by getting lost before they are even out of the city, he is chewing up the remaining daylight so this time she'll have less to gawk at when they get there. Maybe it's also to remind her that while he did bring her to live in the city, whisking her from the bosom of those bourgeois bunkers, at least he did not bring her here. Yes, take a look around you, Hannah. Things could be worse.

They have lived in New York for ten years now. She continues to use it against him. Her fear of the city is something she cannot, or will not, get past.



Both his parents and hers were unhappy about the union, but all came to accept it. They had a civil ceremony to avoid offending one set or the other. It was uneventful, unmemorable really, and while that was just fine by him it wasn't by Hannah, and perhaps that set the tone for their marriage. Her griping was trifling, he felt, but then plenty of divorces have been based on less.

He and Hannah, however, are not so capricious. Or so he likes to think. So what if they haven't been getting along lately? Or for longer than lately? You take the bad with the good. That's

what his father told him. Love changes. It evolves. Just as bodies do. People get fat, hearts expand.

He digs his cellphone out of his pocket, hands it to her. "Call her will you? Tell her we're going to be late."

She does. He knows his mother will keep her on the horn for a while. It's her cocktail time, and she will be loquacious. It's good, they can occupy each other, the two most important women in his life. Let them talk each other's ears off.

He reads the street signs. He believes his father's old street is in the vicinity. He remembers it being described as only a few blocks long. The streets keep veering off, and ending. He has a hunch that the highway lies somewhere to the right, but he's having trouble maintaining any one direction. It's hilly around here, like where he grew up. It's not like Brooklyn, where there is one long ridge with the harbor at the bottom. Here the hills go up and down and up again. He tries to picture little Terry Mitchell running along the sidewalk as a kid, but the image is not convincing. It has always been difficult for him to think of his father as a city boy. He inevitably comes up with some Hollywood cliché. There is Terry brooding in a sateen jacket, a cigarette behind his ear, spotlight under a streetlamp, crooning doo-wop, snapping his fingers, flipping a quarter. A tired image, yes, exhausted really, but then how is he supposed to know better about that place and time? His father almost never told him anything, and there was little implicit. The old man did root for the Yankees, but that didn't say much about him. One didn't have to be from the Bronx to root for the Yankees. And if he ever had an accent, he got rid of it. No, he would not have been welcomed by his fiancée's family chiming dese an' dose. Instead, he was a man of golf clubs and monthly commuter passes, a man with a garage, who had the newspaper delivered, a man who had, in his son's eyes, no distinct style, or no style distinct from that of every other lame suburbanbody.



Around the house in Mount Kisco there were a few items that spoke of an earlier life. There was a framed black-and-white snapshot of his father and Uncle Eddie sitting with their mother on the front steps of their apartment building, all of them almost impossibly young. There was a certificate from the Fordham University Council of the Knights of Columbus awarded in 1959 for community service, an inroad to the scholarship his father would be awarded the following year. Then there was that pair of brass knuckles in his father's desk drawer. What the hell was that about? But while assumptions could be made from items, from artifacts of the past, his father never offered any affirmation. He never gave anything away when Paul did guesswork.

And now there is nothing in the scenery outside the closed windows of the car that speaks of him. Everything out there looks beat-up. The buildings, the cars, the elevated tracks, the people, all seem minimally functional. This is a place people leave. That's what Dad did. Knowing him, with his utter purposefulness, he probably never even bothered to look out the window when he passed through the old neighborhood coming and going on the train five days a week.

The trip on Metro-North took about an hour. Often Paul asked his father to take him into the city, but it never happened. His mother took him in a couple times a year, to see a show, go up the Empire State Building, go to the United Nations, and so on, like tourists from Tennessee. And he went in on school trips a few times, and when he got old enough he went in with his friends. They would walk around trying not to act too thrilled. They pooled their cash to buy a bong in a headshop in the Village. On another trip Paul declined to go off with a hooker outside Port Authority, but his friends did go and then afterwards called him a pussy for not taking part, and he did feel like a coward. It was stupid. He went into the city with his girlfriend once, to see some band in some club. That was kind of stupid too. He didn't really want to be there with her or with his friends. What he always wanted was for his father, the New Yorker, to show him

around town. But Dad never did. Dad went into the city to make money, and that's it, never straying – as far as Paul knew – beyond the few blocks around Grand Central and his office nearby. He was a Yankee fan, but he never went to see them play. Paul and his buddies did take the train down to see a few games, and he got to see a little of the Bronx then. The poverty impressed him as chaotic. It wasn't like what he saw in the movies, confined to the little square picture. In the Bronx it was all around, and he didn't know what to expect. He couldn't help telling his father about what he saw exploring the rough streets around Yankee Stadium.

"They get rougher," his father warned. "Don't wander. You're a rich white boy from the suburbs, and don't you forget it. You go down the wrong block they'll rob you in a heartbeat and maybe take your life too."

"We're not rich," he said, like it was some kind of decisive comeback.

"Listen, son, up here maybe we're just like everybody else, but when you get down to the Bronx your name might as well be Rockefeller."

On a subsequent trip to see Don Mattingly hit, Paul tested the validity of his father's cautioning. He led his friends down a side street after the game, following some kid who had offered to sell them weed.

He did not readily trust his father. At Halloween when Paul was younger he would usually say something like, "Anybody throw any eggs at you? No? No tricks this year, only treats, huh?" It was his way of congratulating and teasing at the same time. On the Fourth of July he mocked Paul's sparklers. "When I was your age I was already a fireworks expert. We had roman candles, blockbusters, you name it." When Paul asked for some of those wondrous items, his father's laughter got louder. "What do you think, I'm going to let you blow your fingers off?"

The kid who was supposed to sell them weed tried to lead them into a basement under a tenement and they balked. The deal fell apart, but the kid demanded they pay him something for his time. He said he was a businessman. Paul told him they



were not fools. The kid started to get hot, and then another kid emerged from the basement and then two more were coming across the street. That's when the rich white boys from the suburbs bolted, back to the stadium, back to safety of white sports fans in their tens of thousands. His friends were pretty pissed. It had been his idea, after all. He had argued that their connection at school was too expensive. But that was bullshit. He just wanted the experience. Getting his rocks off with a street-walker, an abused abuser, desperate and likely diseased, held no allure for him, no, the experience he craved was running for his life through the mean streets of the Bronx. He wanted to know how that felt. That was the kind of thing he felt he was missing out on in Mount Kisco.



If he could only spot the stadium now, then he'd know how to get back to the highway. It would mean they've gone backwards, but at least they wouldn't be lost anymore. Tommy begins to stir in the backseat. He's been napping since they got on the BQE. Highways have that effect on him. Now, in the streets, with all the stopping and starting and turning, he is waking, groaning, stretching. Hannah turns to talk to him. The interaction between mother and child makes Paul, in a sort of cozy, homey way, wish for a drink. He usually has one in hand at this hour. But of course he'll have to wait until they reach his mother's, which, at the rate they're going, could be late. Maybe too late. The old lady locks the liquor cabinet an hour after dinner. He'll have to coax the key from her then, and endure her chiding. She never objected to his father's drinking, so now she takes it out on him. It's enough to spur him on, to sort through this impromptu detour. Or stop to pick something up en route. Would that show foresight, or desperation? When was the last evening he passed without a drink? When he had the flu two years ago? Could it really be that long? Well, tonight is not the night to end the streak. They have already passed a few liquor stores, and something tells him there

are more ahead. It is that kind of neighborhood. Always has been. Yes, he'll pick one out soon, and pick up a little something. His father used to drink while driving. It was nothing excessive, just a bottle of beer to sip at during longer trips, nothing to worry about, though Paul wouldn't do it himself, not with Hannah and Tommy in the car. If Hannah would drive he could relax with a beer in the passenger seat, but she's too nervous, riding along with her hands on her belly, staring out the window at the dark people. Maybe, for her sake, he will wait until they are out of the area to stop at a liquor store.

"I have no idea where we are," he tells her. He says it mainly to see the look on her face, but it is true. They are lost. "You want to ask that guy over there where we are?"

It's a drunk stooped against a parking meter on the corner. Despite the weather, he's wearing a heavy winter coat. It's torn and filthy. He weaves, clutching the parking meter to keep from collapsing. Paul slows down. Hannah snaps at him. Her lips wrinkle as they draw near, and she turns her head from the window. Paul keeps driving, satisfied. It's a little sadistic, sure, but only a little. And she deserves it, for being such a sourpuss, sitting there rubbing her belly like that.

There is a gas station at the next intersection. Neither of them make the obvious suggestion of stopping for directions. Paul drives through the intersection and onward. It's more fun this way.



But what could he have said? "Gee, Dad, I feel like I don't know the real you." He would have been laughed out of the room. His father had no time for that kind of talk. That was one thing Paul did know about him, one thing he know for sure. No sentimental, crock-of-shit, namby-pamby yammering. No, sir. Not for Terry Mitchell.

What else? What else did Paul know for sure about his old man?

Paul's grandfather had survived D-day only to be shot dead by a Nazi sniper a month later on the

bank of the Orne. What was he doing? Scouting? Washing his drawers? Wooing a liberated French farm girl? Terry, still in diapers at the time, across the ocean in a Bronx tenement, would grow up with no memory at all of his old man.

Paul's grandmother came over for dinner every Sunday when he was growing up, and she talked a lot about her late husband, without whom she had lived forty years by then, but had relatively little to say about her son. Perhaps his presence inhibited her. Once when he was in the backyard tending the grill Paul took the moment to ask her about the brass knuckles – his father had shrugged that off already as merely a joke gift from an old friend, and then hid them better – but she acted like she didn't hear him, and his father came in shortly. Terry was always around when Granny Janny was. He was the one who picked her up at the nursing home after church and dropped her off at the end of the day. Paul often accompanied them on the second run. His father was more accessible than he was all week. He was more patient, sort of sad and serene, having just delivered his mother back into the place of her waning. This was Paul's most cherished memory of the man – winding along the twilight road home, tuning the radio dial to WCBS and humming along with a golden oldie, the two of them alone.

Granny Janny is still there in the same home, now in a special "neighborhood" for the memory-impaired. She doesn't have much to say about anything anymore. Everyone is waiting for Uncle Eddie to finally bring her out to California. For a few years now he has been talking about some top-notch place he wants to put her. He can afford it. And he would probably visit her more than Paul does now.



Uncle Eddie flew in for Terry's funeral. He came directly from the airport to the funeral home, and walked through the door and up to the coffin without saying a word to anyone. He stood there a long time. Others came up and paused to pay

their respects and then walked away and still Eddie stood there. He must have stood there for an hour, staring down at his dead brother. It was the first time he had seen him in ten years. They had been close in the past, by circumstance growing up and then by choice when they shared an apartment in Manhattan, after Terry graduated from college and Eddie dropped out. Then Terry got married. Then Eddie moved out to California. And each year when they got together over the holidays they recognized each other less and less. Eventually Terry would smirk as he greeted the strange, pretentious west coast jerk in pastels, Mr. Bigshot with the beard, some fruity hippie with earrings, a self-professed radical, a dope-smoker, brain-warped and frightening. And eventually Eddie's smile would broaden in its own way, simultaneously sincere and condescending, as he took the extended hand of the sell-out hump in the pin-striped suit, smelling of aftershave and red meat, still greasing his hair like some insecure kid, the square, the patriot, the chain-smoker, the heavy drinker, hung-up and menacing. One became a wildcard, the other an organization man. By the late eighties they stopped bothering to get together. Terry sent a card every Christmas, and Eddie sent an occasional postcard from a foreign country. That was more or less the extent of their communication. And Paul always felt the distance extended to him. He never had a conversation with his uncle, not a real one, until he finally got to talk to him at the funeral.



Paul pulls up alongside a man who is reaching into the trunk of a parked car. The man is dressed all in denim. His hair and beard are gray. He wears rose-tinted glasses. His face is a little saggy.

"Excuse me," Paul says. "Are you from around here?"

The man just stares at him.

"We're trying to find the highway."

"What highway?"

"If I make a left here I'm thinking it'll take me to the Bruckner. Am I right?"

"That's the wrong block. You don't want that block. What you folks should do is turn around and go back where you came from." He points with his thumb.

Paul is silent, absorbing the man's words and gestures.

"That'll get you to the Cross-Bronx," the man continues. "And that'll get you back to Jersey."

"I got off the Bruckner, coming from Brooklyn."

"So go back already."

"I'm headed someplace else, actually."

"Get lost."

"Excuse me?"

Without another word, the man slams the trunk shut and walks away. Paul makes a U-turn as instructed. Passing the man again, he slows to yell thanks and to ask, "Did you ever know a guy named Terry Mitchell?"

The man frowns emphatically and keeps walking. Paul keeps driving.

"I think that guy's lying," he says. "I think that guy knew my father. I think he turned my father on."

"Turned your father on? Oh my God, not only am I lost in this crazy neighborhood, but my own husband is turning crazy on me."



At the funeral Uncle Eddie joked about how square his brother had turned out. He talked about how Terry used to make fun of him and call him a hippie and everything after he moved to California. "But you know your father wasn't always the way he was when he was raising you. He was turning on in Crotona Park, blowing joints, you understand, him and his pals, way back when, back before anybody. The black cats were already hip to all that, but it took my generation to open up the rest of the country to it. People think it was Bob Dylan and Jerry Garcia turned this country on. Bullshit, it was your father. Hell, he turned me on, in the fifties. And then in the sixties I turned the country on. And there you have it. I guess you need to ask who turned him on, right? But who're

you going to ask? That's knowledge that's buried now. So as far as we know, he started it all."

In her wheelchair nearby, tubes up her nose, her aide beside her doing a crossword puzzle, Granny Janny grimaced in a small, effortful way.



Paul has taken a few more inspired turns of direction. Now they are on a steep incline. At the top of the street the sun confronts them. It is too low in the sky to be shielded by their visors. Diminutive silhouettes with endless shadows cross the street before them. With one hand cupped over his eyes, Paul drives slowly.

"You know, the Bronx isn't really that big. It's surrounded by water on three sides, and north of it is Westchester. We'll just drive north. I mean, the sun sets in the west, right? So..." He turns right at the next corner. "To grandmother's house we go."

"That's a great idea, dear. Just brilliant."

"The greatest ideas usually are the simplest."

"But what happens after the sun sets?"

"Then we navigate by the stars."



So there he was at the funeral hearing contradictions delineated by a contrarian. Uncle Eddie was a man who derided "capitalist imperialism," but who, in the words of his dead brother, "could make a clean million with one phone call."

Paul considered contrariety a dominant family trait. It was in the blood. So of course he shunned finance, despite his father's connections, and, despite his father's objections, went into publishing instead. Of course he stopped going to church and married a Jew. Of course he fled his suburban hamlet for the big city. And of course, being his father's son, his departures surprised no one.

How claustrophobic he had become in the comfort and safety of his upbringing. How anxious it made him when his parents took him to dinner at a "foreign" restaurant and treated it like a big adventure. And, when he cracked up his father's

car, how it weighed on him to know, instantly upon impact, that his friends would all be cracking up about it. Yes, they all laughed at him, while the less-fortunate kids, the ones whose parents didn't let them borrow the car, only resented him even more, especially since he was back driving a new car the next weekend. Granny Janny, tipsy on Sunday at noon, endlessly puffing her skinny cigarettes, called him a spoiled brat. It's his most prominent memory of the woman, the standard her. Though he visited her just two weeks ago, that was still the image he walked out of the home with – her puffing away in the corner of the couch near the fireplace in his father's house two decades years earlier, drunk and smelly and mean.

Perhaps Paul grew to believe he didn't deserve that comfortable, safe life. Or rather that he had to prove that he did deserve it. That Terry had grown up poor and made his own way was good for Terry, but didn't it burden his son? What if Paul couldn't live up to that success story? What if he failed? What if he wasn't cunning or aggressive enough? Growing up poor gives you those assets at least. Growing up with money makes you soft.

The publishing industry doesn't pay very well, not at his level, not with his pace of advancement, but with the trust his father left him he and Hannah will finally be able to buy something. She, of course, wants that something to be outside the city. The schools are better, she says, out there. But the public school nearest their apartment is supposed to be one of the best in the city. Many of their friends in the neighborhood send their kids to it. Why shouldn't they? Are they better than their friends?

They argue about this and that. They agree about nothing. And now that they have more money they have more to disagree about. There she is, still holding her belly, now biting her lip, beside him but not his companion.

How in the world did he wind up with Hannah Friedman? This is how he wound up with her – contradictorily. He chose a girl who, like it or not, ultimately bound him to home. The world scared him, suddenly having to face it after college, and

he ran home to the comfort and safety he had been so eager to leave behind. His father, on the other hand, had married up and out. He had proposed to a woman well outside his own milieu. Indeed, his entire career since his marriage was spent rising through the ranks of the company where his father-in-law held a position on the board. Uncle Eddie harped on that at the funeral, treating it like a revelation, or a condemnation, although it had long since ceased being either for Paul.

"Yeah, so he fell for your mother, the equestrienne, or whatever the hell she was supposed to be. No offense. And they set up house out there in the 'burbs. He hit the links on the weekends, got bombed at cocktail parties, bought mounds of crap at Christmas, gradually and then suddenly went Republican and got fat, and five days a week escaped on the train at dawn. I said escaped. Am I right? I know I'm right. I didn't have to be there to know. Hey, that's the life he chose, and bless his heart. Don't worry, he loved you plenty. It's a shame you didn't get to know him when he was young, though. Then again, maybe it's a good thing. If you met him then there was a chance you'd get hit."

"Did you two fight?"

"Are you kidding me? I moved all the way across the country to get away from him. He used to beat me up every day. And you know what? Half the time I deserved it. Oh, wow, was I a pain in the ass for our poor mother."

Granny Janny was asleep in her chair by then, her aide looking sleepy as well.

"Can you imagine, raising two boys alone on welfare in a fucking rat-infested tenement? You know, it's not like we didn't know we had nothing. There were plenty of rich kids at my high school. Their parents sent them to Science, if they passed the test, because it was better than the prep schools. There was one kid I knew who lived in what was basically a castle, up in Riverdale. Had a maid and everything. Had three TV's. Un-fucking-heard of at the time. We didn't even have a goddamn radio. One day I'm over his house watching TV, and I get pissed off about Leave It to Beaver so I

spit on the fucking thing. He orders me out. On the way home, these Puerto Rican kids start messing with me, knock me around a little. I come in the door with a big fucking chip on my shoulder, about what other people have and what I have to go through. First thing my mother tells me is take out the garbage. I got smart, told her the couch was too heavy for me to lift, and whamo! Terence smacked me right in my mouth."

He looked at the coffin.

"That happened a lot," he said. "I'd mouth off and he'd straighten me out and then I'd do what I was supposed to do and then we'd all make up and our mother would get drunk and Terry and I would go up to the roof of our building and get high. Nobody was ever sober too much, not even us kids. Just our father, because he was dead."

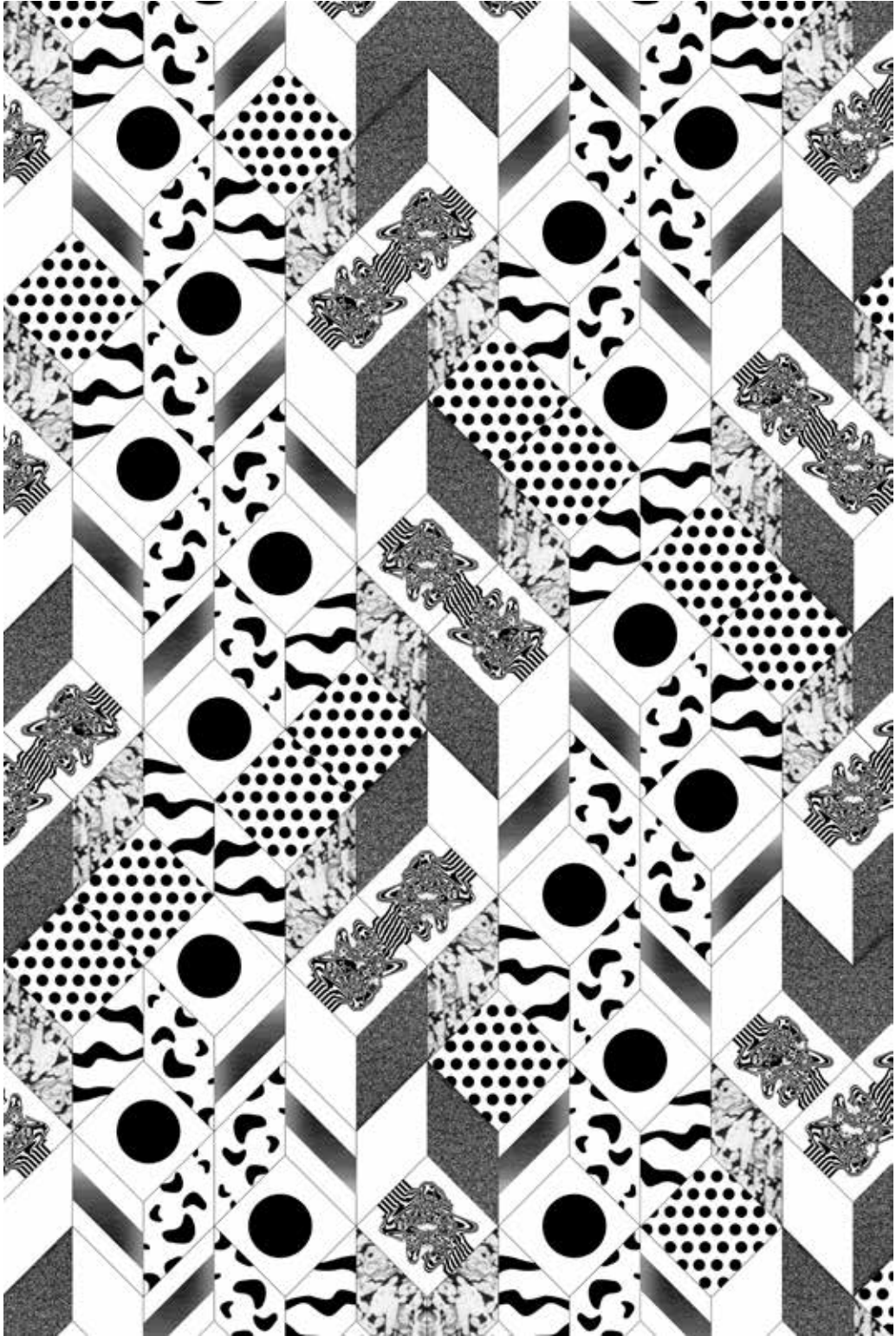
They both looked at the coffin.

"A little after that, one of those kids that knocked me around, he lost a couple of teeth. But I never learned how. And the kid in Riverdale with the three TV's? Well, they came back from a weekend in the Catskills to find they only had two. If anybody knows what happened to the third, nobody's saying nothing. Not now."

Granny Janny was snoring.



Paul spies the highway trench up ahead. He peeks at Hannah. She has her head down. He turns left again, into the sun, away from the view. Another peek assures him Hannah has not seen it. He drives on.



Tyler Spangler *Diagonal Dismay*



Alice Chiang *Taipei Apartment*

**K I N G D O M  
O F L O N G  
S L E E P**

by Dan Pinkerton



Where once I presided over the kingdom of long sleep, long downtime, I have been deposed, exiled to the laundry room, a washing machine frothing at the mouth. I scrub with a herringbone brush, everything agitated, aswarm. A swirling cloud in a house full of midnight stillness. The chain sways, clicking against a barren bulb. For a few Roman months I hunched over a drafting table as classical dust gutted the shafts of light. Mainly I shopped for LPs on the Via del Corso. I thought I could float without capsizing, no sense of urgency, the world my patron. But every extra minute in bed comes to be reclaimed and I'm left with sleepless nights like these on my island of soiled clothes, washed up. It pains me to think of those evenings on my balcony in Trastevere, sipping chilled gin and smoking French cigarettes like a magazine ad for something defunct, nothing better to do than watch the wives across the courtyard pin their bed sheets up or light the sconces for their dinners alfresco, women painting the darkness with their labors.

# B E C A U S E O F I N E R T I A

by Valerie Stauffer

RIPRAP 35

Takes a movie to tell me about my life. My marriage. Woody Allen explains it. Not exactly Woody himself. But there he is, big as life on the wide screen at the Majestic. Vicki and I hit the movies the second Thursday of every month, David's Physics Society night at the River Café in Trenton.

You wouldn't think a flick could change my life. This one is filled with fancy folks doing LA things. I'm slumped in my seat, munching hot buttered popcorn, inhaling chocolaty aromas from the guy in the next seat, when Woody says it.

"Two-thirds of married couples stay together only because of inertia."

I sit up real straight, lean forward, and poke Vicki. "He said that word, Vicki. He's talking about inertia."

The people in back make "shush" noises.

I stop caring whether the handsome lead guy ends up with the beautiful babe. I'm thinking about this inertia idea and David and me. I hear that "inertia" word about sixteen times a week. David is

writing a physics book about inertial confinement. When I ask about it, he pulls at his horn-rimmed glasses.

"Really simple, Amy. Inertial confinement means a substance acts like it's confined and resists the forces trying to dislodge it." That's David-talk for you. "But sometimes an object changes position if there's enough outside force."

He actually talks like that, even when he's telling me how to bag the garbage.

Everyone's heard about inertia. David and I joke we've stayed in the same house all these years because of inertia. And always take the same summer trip to the Jersey shore. The flick reminds me that marriages just roll along for too many years. That folks stay married because of inertia, not for much else.

David and me—twenty-two years, shuffling along through life together. Not much reason to change. But every now and again, listening to him snore beside me, I think, Maybe no good reason

to stay hooked.

Not staying together? The kind of idea that'd been hiding around the back of my brain ever since the kids went off on to college and David and I hunkered down into our empty nest cliché. Is inertia all that's binding us together?

The screen goes black. Lights go on. Vicki and I stumble out over crunchy popcorn.

"Hey, Vicki, how about coffee? Have time for me?"

"I always have time for you." Then Vicki reminds me. "You're the one who runs back home after our movie."

We're off to the slick, chrome Glory Days Diner, infamous for its margaritas and the best-looking barflies in the county.

Vicki pats her skin-tight black pants, slaps on another layer of cherry-red lipstick, and we step into the diner.

"What a change!" I hate to admit I haven't been here since its days as a peeling-paint roadside joint with cracked red Naugahyde seats. David and I used to bring the kids here for the cheap and juicy burgers.

"You haven't see Glory Days all fixed up?" Vicki gives me her look. "Yeah, I can believe it. Do you and David ever go anywhere?"

"That's what I've got to talk about." We settle into a booth of lime-green leather.

A miniskirted gal arrives, her nametag, "Hi, I'm Taffy," pinned to her pointy breast. She stands above me, knowing I'll order something definitely not au courant.

And I do. "Cup of decaf coffee, please."

"Come on, Amy. Let's live. I'm for chardonnay."

"No, just coffee. I need to talk. Serious talk."

"Give her an Irish coffee, Taffy. Don't worry, Amy. It's a cappuccino with a swoosh of liquid fire."

"Please, Vicki. Tell me. What about the inertia theory in the movie?"

"That guy in the movie? What a fruitcake loser!" Vicki's eyes dart to another booth filled with hulking guys. "You're the English teacher. I'm a soccer coach. What do I know about deep themes? It's

just a movie."

"You saw the show. Two-thirds of couples stay together only because of inertia. What about that, Vicki? Truth!"

Now I've got Vicki's attention. She's silent for a minute. This bleached-blond friend is judging my life.

She takes my hand. "Are you asking, do I think you and David are living on inertia?" When I silently nod, Vicki gives a sad grin. "I gotta tell you. I don't know what the two of you are living on—love, inertia, whatever you want to call it. But it's about the most boring marriage ever invented."

Wet bubbles ooze from my eyes.

"Sorry, Amy. You asked. Coaches say it like it is. So, you finally getting the guts to up and leave him?"

"I'm thinking, Vicki. Seems like since the kids left, life must be more than sitting across from a guy munching Special K at breakfast and reading Micron Age in the evenings."

"Beyond boring, Amy," Vicki says.

"You'll never believe David's idea of fun." Suddenly, I want Vicki to hear it all. The so-called happily-ever-after marriage that's mired in a rut.

"Saturday afternoons we fool around with rosemary cuttings. David made a crazy topiary of an atom, filled it with little greens sticking out on the proton and neutron wires. It won a prize at my flower show. But who cares?"

"I could sure teach the nerd what fooling around is all about." Vicki's mouth turns up in a smirk.

My cheeks are hot, and I know I'm blushing. But damn it all. Vicki's right. I'm in a rut. She's the one living the fun life.

"Drink up!" Vicki says. "Do you good to get drunk!"

I want to tell her David isn't a total nerd, but maybe he is.

"Drive me home, Vicki. David will worry if I'm late."

"You're leaving the guy and now you're telling me you've got to make curfew." Vicki hands me her cell phone. "Call the creep and tell him you'll be

home when you're home."

"Don't talk about David like that, Vicki. He may be boring, but he worries about me."

No answer at the house. "He's always home from his meeting by this hour. Maybe bad traffic." I pick up my pocketbook, ready to leave, but Vicki stays planted in the booth.

She pats my hand. "Listen, sweetie. Not the first time some guy's got something going on the side." Her fingers press tight. "I trusted my Jim till one day, a friend spilled the beans that he spent his so-called business meetings in the sack with his cutie—and she wasn't me."

"No, Vicki. Maybe David's boring. But no girlfriends."

"Grow up, Amy. You're telling me David spends his days and nights on molecules or whatever he claims he's doing?" Vicki giggles.

"Hey, school's out!" Two teachers from the high school drop down into our booth.

Vicki's face lights up. She's had enough of me and my dull marriage.

"Bill, Todd, join us." A quick wave in the distance. "Round of Irish coffees, Taffy. Extra lethal!"

"Hi, Amy," Todd says. "Good to see you."

He's my boss in the English Department. Always ready to meet in the faculty lounge to debate Ahab's symbolism or T.S. Eliot's linguistic bravado.

"Yeah, guys, you're the first to know," Vicki announces to all of Glory Days. "Amy's available for big-time fun."

I kick her under the table. "Don't be crazy, Vicki! We were talking about the movie, not me!"

"Sorry, Amy." But she winks at the guys.

I slide from the booth and head for the restroom. I bend over the sink, splashing water into my tired eyes. More frown lines every year. And now that I'm in specs, I look like—an English teacher. Vicki's right. David and I are beyond boring. And where is he?

"We've got a plan, Amy," Vicki says when I return. "I'm going with Bill. Todd will drop you off."

In the restroom for two minutes and Vicki's hooked Bill for the night. Now she's sending me out into the moonlight with Todd.

Vicki gathers up her jacket. "We're off. Have fun, kids." She gives me a smooch on the cheek, whispering, "Enjoy!"

Todd leads me to a battered tan Toyota. "My ex took off with the BMW, but nothing like divorce to lift the spirits."

He helps me into the car, giving my arm a gentle squeeze.

Todd casually throws one arm onto the top of my seat, not touching, just sort of hovering over my shoulders.

A short drive, and then with a jolt, we're parked in front of Todd's gray ranch. Down the street I see the turrets of the yellow Victorian David and I have called home since he joined the physics faculty. Same old house, same old life—same old!

"Looks dark in your place," Todd says.

Maybe Vicki's right about David. His late meetings? We never check up on each other. That's been the good thing about our marriage. Am I the naive little fool Vicki thinks I am?

"Come on in. I've got a new book to show you. I've just picked up a first-edition *Leaves of Grass*."

Inside the house, I step over newspapers and GQ magazines covering the blue shag carpeting. Between piles of books on the plaid wool sofa, I find some space.

"Original calfskin binding, pretty good condition." Todd hands me *Leaves of Grass*. He shoves the papers and books to the far end of the sofa and sits beside me. There's not enough room for two people. I push more papers aside, but Todd's broad shoulders stay close, too close.

"I've been wanting to talk to you, Amy. I've got this amazing idea for a book project for the two of us."

"Us? Writing a book?" One of my dreams. An author!

"Amy, you'd be great at this. My plan is a book for high school teachers." Todd strokes his mustache, black with hints of gray. "I'd write the

literary analyses of some poems, essays, stories. Your part would be chapters telling how to teach it to the delinquents we face every day."

"Fantastic! When do we start?"

Todd bends his head close to my ear and begins reciting Whitman.

"Low hang the moon, it rose late.

It is lagging—

O, I think it is heavy..."

His fingers stroke the back of my neck. His bristly mustache tickles my cheek.

"...with love, with love."

He hands me a glass of amber liquid. I lean back against his shoulder, enjoying the music of violins and cellos from the CD he must have put on when he poured the drinks.

"Brandy, Amy. Very relaxing. Here's to our book." Our glasses clink together. His arm tightens around me. I feel hard muscles through his sweater. His hand aimlessly moves up and down my arm.

Why not enjoy the evening with Todd?

A whole new life here. Todd. Our book. I'd be writing my own ideas about literature and teaching.

I snuggle against his woolly sweater and smell Todd's musky aftershave. His breath is beer and brandy, and his wet lips roam my cheeks and neck and settle into a long, lingering kiss. It's been forever since anyone but David.

Todd and I are wrapped together on the sofa. What if I stay a while?

"This works better on my bed, Amy." Hand in hand we stumble over beer cans and into his bedroom.

One look at his unmade king-size mattress with a big mirror on the wall, and I know where I am—Todd's bachelor pad for his fun and games with the hot chicks in town.

"No, Todd."

He whispers into my ear, "The moon's hanging low, Amy. With love." And there in the mirror, I see us. A seduction scene straight out of Hollywood.

Todd's hand tightens on my arm, too hard. "You want this, Amy."

I pull out of his grasp.

"I'm leaving, Todd. Thanks for the ride." My night out's over.

Todd's breathing hard, and his words have stopped sounding like Whitman poetry.

I twist and turn the loose brass knob, trying to open the door.

"Hey, Amy, I'll drive you home."

"I'm just a few houses away, Todd."

I pull hard, and a gust of cold air blows in my face. A single pale outdoor light guides the way to my familiar front door.

Before I can fit a key into the lock, the door swings open.

"Welcome home, Amy."

I run my fingers through my hair, wondering whether I look the mess I feel.

"Sorry I'm late. Vicki and I got talking about the movie. I've got something to confess."

He looks hard into my eyes.

"I don't know what got into me. I talked Vicki into taking me to that Glory Days Diner. The one that had the good burgers. I had Irish coffee. You know—with whiskey. Actually two." I'm rattling on with this confession. "Guess it was the movie plot. All about an LA marriage. The couple kept talking about inertia in their marriage. But not your kind of flick at all."

David hasn't taken his eyes off me. Probably shocked to hear I went drinking without him.

"I'm heading for the shower, David. Been a long evening."

I run the shower hard and hot, soaping everywhere to wash Todd away. When I come out, I slide into my side of the bed. David must be up reading late. I watch the clock numbers flick 12:32, 12:45, 1:07. I'm glad David hasn't come to bed. I still feel Todd on my skin.

At 1:23 I wrap myself in my pink flannel robe and search for David. He's slumped in his leather wing chair in the den. He's so into his tech magazine, he doesn't look up.

"I want to tell you something, David."

"You mean to tell me you had a third Irish coffee?"

"No, there's more. After the Glory Days Diner,

I went driving.”

“Oh?”

“Well...we met Todd at the diner. He wants me to do a book, David. The two of us.” I can explain this so it all makes sense. “All about teaching lit.”

“You’ve decided to do it with him?” David’s face is still buried in his magazine.

“Todd and I talked it over.”

David doesn’t raise his eyes, but he crunches his forehead into ridges of angry lines.

“I’ve always wanted to write a book and—”

David looks up. “And...?” He’s suddenly standing, close enough to touch me, but he folds his arms, and his fingers dig into his skin. “And, Amy...? What else?”

“I was at Todd’s. Just for a while. He’s my boss.”

“I know who Todd is. The biggest stud in town. And I know you were there.”

“You knew. But you didn’t say anything. Didn’t you care?”

“Not care? I was glued to the window for the hour after I came home. Worried sick till I saw you leave Todd’s. And then just sick.”

“Nothing happened. Well, you know Todd. Something could have.” I reach over to touch David, but he backs away, stiff and rigid.

Behind him on the mantel is our framed parchment topiary award and sitting alongside is the wire atom with green rosemary shoots. Rosemary—the herb of remembrance.

“Did I ever thank you for helping me win that topiary award? We had fun doing it... together.”

David shrugs. I could be talking about groceries for supper.

On the walls hang family photos, some starting to fade. David and I look unbelievably young, standing in front of our pink Bermuda honeymoon cottage. My smile at David is raw adoration. I try to keep my eyes from the recent pictures. I have the boring-old-schoolteacher face that reflected back at me in Glory Days Diner. Do I always wear that angry frown?

What’s behind that scowling face? Is my un-

happiness bubbling out of my head and into photos? I’ve blamed David that I never got around to writing the great American novel. Or any of the books I planned. Every day I hurry off to try to teach kids to dream the dreams that I had for myself.

Wake up, Amy! You’re a frustrated, dowdy wife who almost made the biggest mistake of her life—ready to trade a night of sex with Todd the Stud for a life of love with David.

Cold slivers of fear slice into my heart. How could I envy Vicki her empty life and her desperate need to pick up any and all guys?

David’s eyes are filled with anger and hurt. He still cares about me enough to be mad.

Then I figure it out. “I could write a book on my own. What do you think?” David doesn’t answer so I say, “Would you help me? Literature isn’t your thing, but remember the way we did the topiary together? Would you be my sounding board? My partner?”

He gazes solemnly at me, then says, “I’d like that, Amy,” his voice quiet and his gray eyes softening.

I take his hand and point it toward the wall of photos. “We’ve had some good times together, haven’t we.” It’s a fact, not the question I don’t dare to ask. Am I a dull old wife who’s lost her spark?

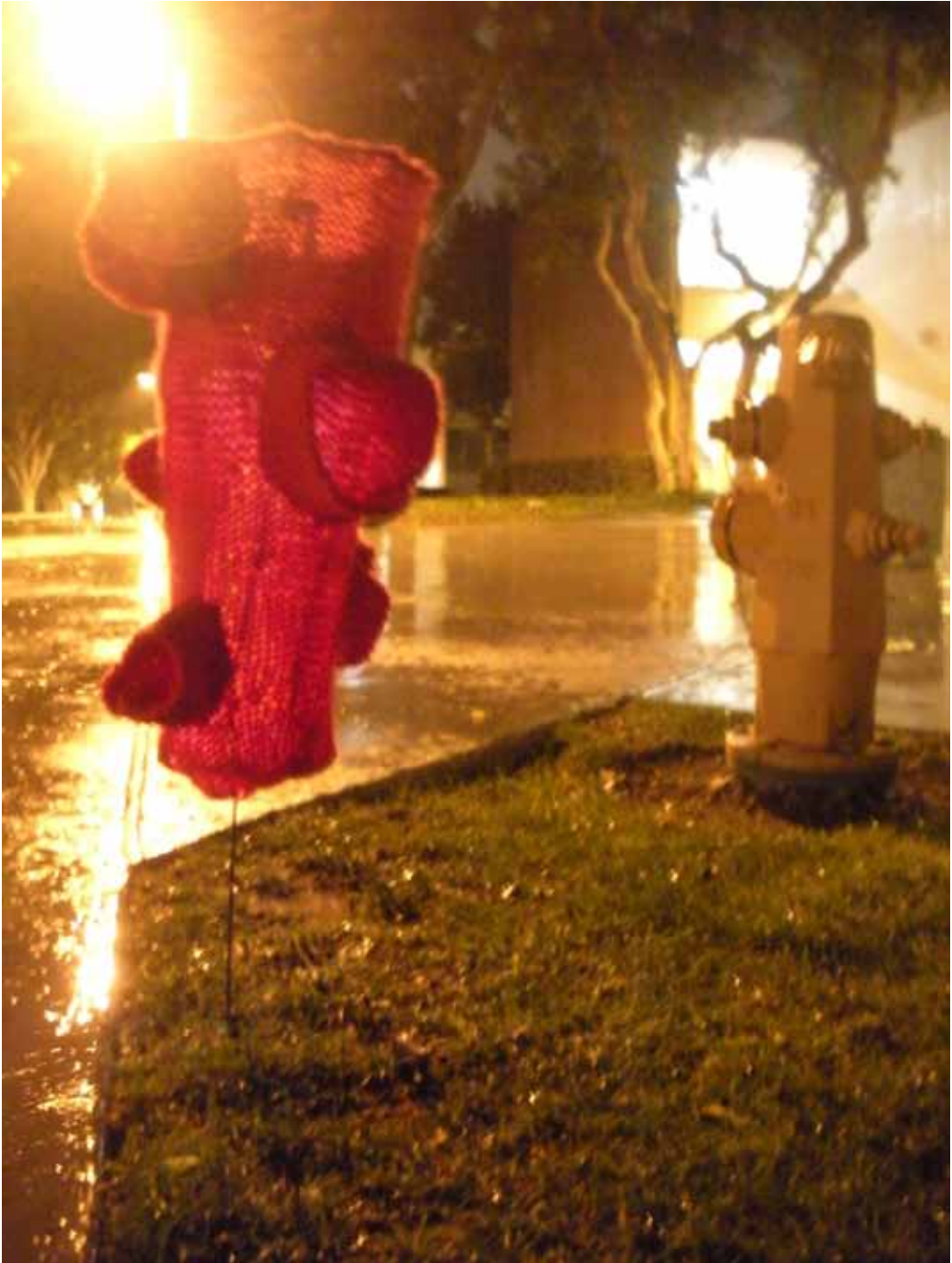
I want to throw my arms around David, wrap him in a passionate Hollywood embrace. I’ll fit myself into all his familiar curves. “Remember our first date when you took me to a movie? I never thought about the plot or anything. I kept wondering whether you’d kiss me later.”

“I remember that kiss.” David lets his lips turn up with the beginnings of a small smile. “I guess that’s when everything started for us.”

David puts his hands on my shoulders and presses me down onto the sofa. “Tell me about tonight’s movie, Amy. Tell me how a husband and wife can ever think their marriage is only running on inertia.”

THE END





Crystal Alexander *Cool Hydrant*





Crystal Alexander *Hydrant Lamp*

# THE PERFECT ZIGZAG

by Zachery Mann

RIPRAP 35

I'm twelve years old sitting on the living room couch. I'm reading a book in the corner where the TV looks dark at an angle. Commercials are playing but the volume is turned down real low and I can hear Harry Caray's stroke-stricken voice from the other set in my parents' bedroom. It's the seventh inning stretch. My dad is asleep with the Cubs still losing, because he's not used to there being night games at Wrigley, and that's when the phone rings. I hear my mom answering it in her office and I know it's from Chicago because my mom says, "Hello Michael," and then to me, "Wake Dad," and I'm thinking that's weird, because this is before Uncle Michael turned into a White Sox fan and the Cubs are about to bat.

I Dream of Jeannie comes on in the living room and I know this means eight o'clock because that's my bedtime. I know that means ten o'clock in Chicago because time zones are important to a kid who talks to grandparents long-distance, or who once saw five clocks next to each other in the air-

port. I'm only twelve but I think it's really weird that my uncle is calling so late and that's why I wake my dad and say, "Dad, I think your mom died." She was dying for a while and we expected it, but I'd never seen my dad so scared before, sitting up with eyes wide.

My grandma's funeral is a couple days later in Chicago. The rabbi asks me and my sister what we remember about her, but my cousin says, "They didn't know her," and the rabbi nods with a sad smile. At the service he eulogizes her in zigzagging piecemeal: snippets twice-removed, earnest winks at levity. I listen and think about my grandma's life, trying to believe she had one, but I'm not sure. She was a voice on a telephone from a hospital bed, a sound that traveled two thousand miles to reach me. She is a bunch of photos in a soft padded binder on a shelf, a character in stories told by my dad, him shaking his head, espousing on parenthood. She isn't any more real than the figures in the books I read. I don't remember what she was like. I didn't

know how to be sad that she died.



I'm eight years old sitting on the floor in my other grandparents' den in Connecticut, playing with the chess pieces but not playing chess. It's black outside the big windows and I know that if I wake up early maybe I will see wild turkeys out there. I know that if I touch the windows with the palm of my hand the dew on the other side will shoot bolts of cold down my spine but I want to anyway, because windows in LA don't get cold like that.

The phone rings after nine and this startles everyone because the phone doesn't usually ring this late. I'm allowed to stay up late in Connecticut because of the time difference and this feels special. I know it's after nine because the clock in the den chimes on the hour that many times. I always count each time to make sure. Then I subtract three so I know what time it is in LA where my dad is. "It's Steve," my grandpa says and he gives the phone to my mom. She relays the conversation. My dad says he's sorry to call so late. He has news about the dog. Rorschach the Defender of Man was sick and he didn't want to worry us but then Rory died this afternoon. The dog was seven and I'm eight and I don't remember life without him.

Maybe if Rory died in the same time zone I would have cried. Hearing about it over the phone doesn't feel real. Rory was a member of the species of dog, *Canis lupus familiaris*, a picture in a book on my bedroom shelf, next to similar books on lizards and dinosaurs. The book's picture of a Great Dane was harlequin but Rory was fawn. Around the image floated facts. Danes can weigh over two hundred pounds and be as tall as four feet. I don't remember how tall Rory was.



I'm five years old sitting on a bed in a hotel room in Savannah, Georgia. This is my earliest memory. I remember the stink from the paper

mills and my green rubber T-Rex toy. I remember the yellow bedspread. I don't remember those things about the trip my mom told me later: the white catering tents or Mr. Denzel Washington or the willow trees and big cannons. I remember that we came to Georgia to visit my dad while he worked on a movie, that we hadn't seen him for months and how that was weird, but I don't recall seeing my dad. Mostly I just remember that ugly yellow bedspread.

It's getting harder to remember anything that exists only in my childhood. My memory worked differently when fairy tales, Santa Claus and *The Hobbit* sometimes seemed as real as science books and family members. There's the occasional flash, not-so-total recalls, snippets here and there, but not many. I had this little trick as a child where I'd make a fist and knock on my head twice, above my right ear, when I came across something I wanted to remember. This please remember! Maybe I'd knock three or four times if it were extra important. Not sure if it worked, but I catch myself sometimes, even now, when I am alone in my apartment and caught a little off guard, knocking the right side of my head, telling myself not to forget.



I'm six years old in another hotel room in Natchitoches, Louisiana. It's a year after Georgia. My dad's working on another movie, but I don't remember the set. I don't remember the gators or the food or the wide-hipped waitresses swooning over how skinny I was. I remember the dead crawdads on the side of the road and the man with his pet possum on a leash and how I could understand the Louisiana kids but not the Mississippi kids. I remember the lightning:

The hotel room is on the second level. It has a window with a view of the pool, but the drapes are closed. I'm sitting cross-legged on the floor with the one toy I bring everywhere. The T-Rex is missing one arm now. The dog got to it. (Rory doesn't die until next year.) There's no rain. There's no pitter-patter sound outside. But when the room lights up for that familiar moment, barely notice-

able, so quickly, I know it is lightning. I hold my breath and count the seconds until the thunder. I know this measures distance. I think this is the same reason why when it's eight o'clock in LA it's ten o'clock in Chicago. I think when I talk to my grandparents on the phone it takes time for the sound to travel. I open the drapes.

Before Louisiana lightning was only a representation. If you asked me to draw it before the age of six I wouldn't have hesitated. Yellow crayon. Zigzag. Done. Easy. I grew up watching cartoons and reading books and pumping my imaginations with everything I could. I was told what lightning looks like and maybe I saw it on television at some point, in an episode of Popeye or Harry and the Hendersons and with hungry child's eyes I grokked it best I could. But lightning wasn't captured by the human eye. It was one of those tricks of nature I knew because scientists said so, like atoms and dodo birds and Pluto. The room gets brighter for a second and that's it. That's lightning, adults would say, and for me lightning was turning on and off the light switch real fast.

The knowledge of lightning was there, in my mind, but for me that was the only place it existed. When I saw that crisp white line zigzagging from black sky to earth out the window in Louisiana, so perfectly, so exactly how TV said it would be, so like how I drew it to be, lightning became real. Experience matched what adults told me, what books and TV told me. The world took shape outside of my imagination.

Many things were clarified in that moment. On the shelf in my bedroom at home were books on all sorts of things. Exotic animals. Moons on other planets. Especially dinosaurs. I could draw them all. I knew all the names and what they ate, that they existed a long time ago and were extinct, but I didn't grasp what I knew. Books told me dinosaurs existed, and they did! But after seeing the lightning, as I gaze out the window in awe, a T-Rex in my hand, I know, really know: millions of years ago, dinosaurs roamed the earth.



I'm seven years old visiting my dad in St. Maarten. He's working on another movie. It's three hours ahead of Los Angeles but nobody in my family is in LA right now so I don't care. I'm confused why I can't open my eyes in the saltwater pool without them burning and my sister and I are obsessed with virgin piña colodas at the Oyster Bay Hotel. We spend the first couple afternoons in the ocean, but a couple miles down the shore a Great White attacked a woman and it made the news so we stopped. There was a Great White in one of my books at home so I know this is a good idea. I don't mind because I make friends with a local kid and we make up games to play on land.

He's got a round face and he's skinnier than me and he doesn't speak English but that's okay because we don't need to talk. I don't remember his name. We agree that we will spend the day chasing lizards. I love lizards as much as I love dinosaurs. I have a book about them, too. I have two favorites, the Komodo Dragon and the Gila Monster, but there are so many different kinds of geckoes on St. Maarten I don't care. They are so bright, so colorful, so unlike the alligator lizards in the alley behind my house in California.

We find a tree, a bare, twisted seagrape tree with soft white bark at the edge where sand meets forest. It's our home base. We find enough driftwood to create a fence around the area and we steal enough cocktail umbrellas from the catering tents for proper decor. This is our zoo. We run around the shaded shoreline diving for geckoes. They bite but it doesn't hurt. We laugh when they bite. We catch six different kinds and relocate them to our tree, on a convenient viewing branch. They stare at us with caution and disinterest.

We are zookeepers, prison guards, soldiers. I can't tell what my friend is pretending to be, but I am the same thing anyway. We take turns patrolling the tree, hunting down runaways and returning them to the branch. Hours go by and no lizards escape.

It's torture when my mom calls for me to go.

That night I can't sleep because I'm worried all

the lizards ran away.

That night a hurricane hits offshore.

Even my dad joins us the next day at the beach because weather had cancelled shooting, but no one else is there. I drag my parents, make them hurry, but my friend is gone. The waves are so big the tide reaches the trees, our tree. The twisted sea-grape is wet at the roots and bare. The lizards are gone, of course, like the dinosaurs. They've gone deeper inland because of the storm. The little umbrellas are gone and even the carefully placed driftwood has vanished completely. All evidence that I ever played at the tree has been washed away.



I'm sixteen years old sitting on the couch in the corner where the TV looks dark at an angle. Our

new Great Dane is curled up on the cushion beside me. This one is harlequin. I'm watching Planet of the Apes—my bookshelf is full of science-fiction now—and I know the movie is filmed in California but it reminds me of St. Maarten. Charlton Heston falls to his knees on the sand and his world falls apart and it strikes a nerve. I think about after the hurricane when the lizards were gone. I'm forgetting what it looks like in St. Maarten because now it looks like California. Even Rory has turned harlequin in my memory. We don't travel very much anymore and I'm forgetting a lot about stuff outside of Los Angeles. I'm forgetting a lot about my childhood, even the people who exist for me only then. I'm remembering my dad's mom and me singing Take Me Out to the Ballgame during a seventh-inning stretch. I'm knocking on my head twice. This please remember!

# I WRITE YOU AS A CITY

your glassy towers  
and steely minarets  
skewering the sky,  
your leafless streets  
cross-hatched and humming  
with tram lines and train tracks.

You have had your men  
whitewash my name  
off your hoardings.  
Your brash fibre optics  
and nightclub neons  
out dazzle my country songs.

Your polished dream women  
seep Chanel and sip Chablis  
in the bars and the bistros  
I'm banned from.

My love is the vermin  
you guard yourself from  
with traps, gutter spikes  
and poisoned seeds.

In you  
there is no place  
for meadow flowers  
or foxes

by Gaia Holmes

## TRIP WIRES

It's been over four years now  
but I still keep finding her hairs  
woven into the bristles of my toothbrush,  
strangling my buttons,  
gilding the rim of my soup,

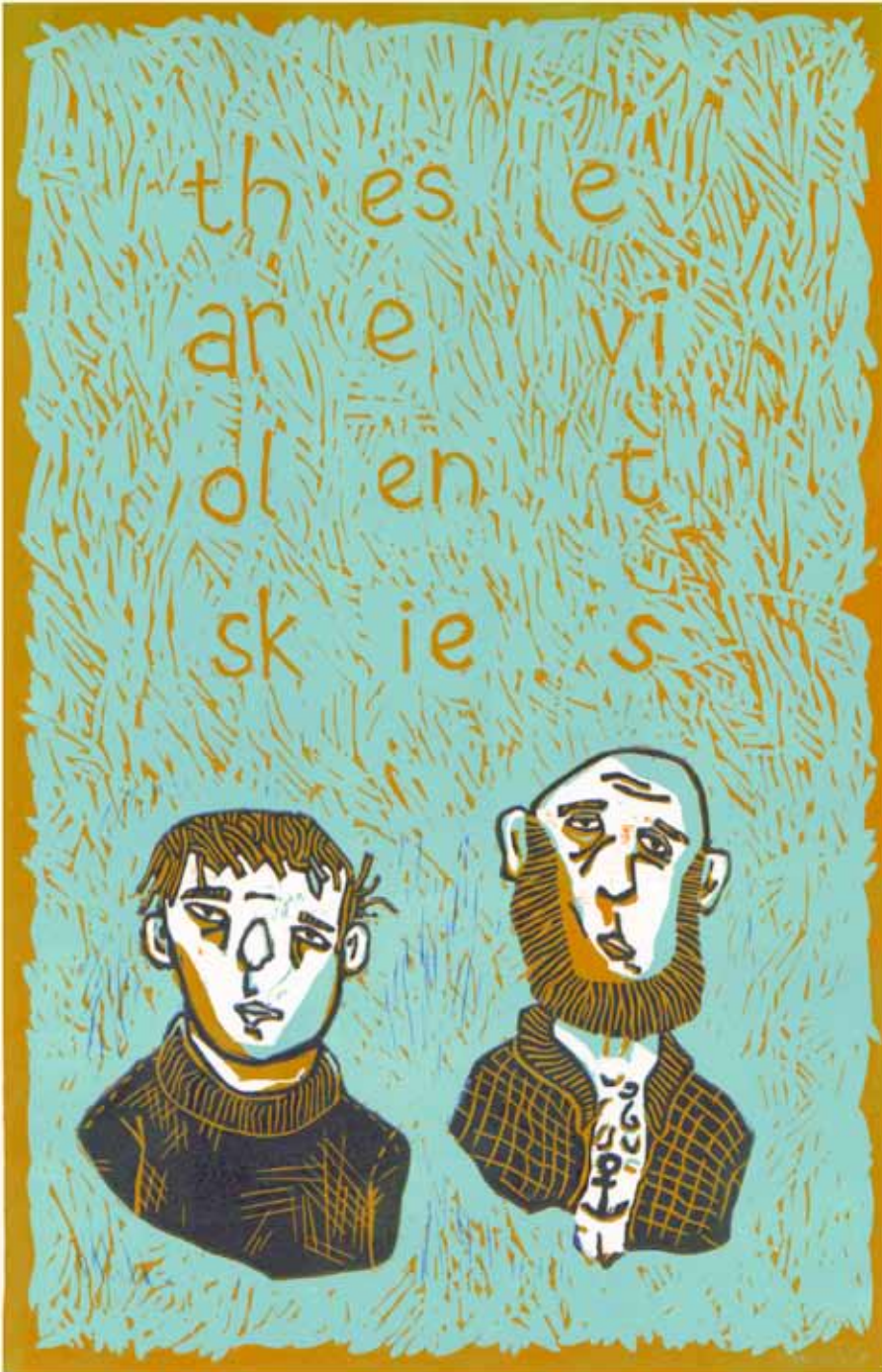
These golden threads  
stretch across my days  
like trip-wires

# H O L E S

As a child, my Grandfather told me  
that the holes in Swiss cheese  
were poisonous so, for years,  
I ate around them.  
I still have that fear.  
Each night  
as a man leans across his lover  
to turn off the lamp  
or a woman uses her husband's chest  
as a pillow  
or a mother lays her child  
in its cot  
and smooths down  
its fuzz of new-born hair,  
or a father sits  
at his daughter's bedside  
with a book and hot milk,  
or an owl echoes back a hoot,  
there's a hole in my house  
which I nibble my way around  
neatly, like a mouse who has been  
to finishing school.  
My careful perforations  
edge the rim of the chasm  
like a collar of Chantilly lace,  
distracting me  
from the loneliness that gapes  
in the middle of my bed.







Ben DuVall *Violent Skies*

# INTERVIEW: KRISTEN-PAIGE MADONIA

by Monica Holmes



Kristen-Paige Madonia is a graduate of the MFA program at CSULB. Her debut novel, *Fingerprints of You*, was released by Simon and Shuster in 2012. She wrote her first draft of the novel during a five-week residence at The Studios of Key West. The novel focuses on a young woman's journey to California from the East Coast, which Madonia herself has done several times. She lives and teaches fiction writing in Virginia.

RIPRAP I know that your inspiration for your two central characters came from people watching. When did you realize that you were going to turn these people into a novel?

KP MADONIA It started as a short story. I was working on another novel at the time, and I had an agent by then. We were in the final stages of it, getting ready to send it out, when, as you said, I saw these women in San Francisco. So I had them in my head, and I wrote a short story pretty quickly. And that story is chapter one. I wasn't able to start a book, I didn't think, at that time. It was a quick story and I liked it, but I knew I didn't leave them in the right place. So I kept thinking about them. I was going through the process of submissions with my agent for the other book, and it kept resurfacing in my thoughts. It kind of bugged me. I knew I didn't leave Lemon in a good position. I felt confident that she had a ways to go. But the book that we started to submit was collecting rejection letters. Everyone was very nice, it was 2008. Everyone was lovely and nice, but no one wanted it. So as you can imagine, during that time, I was pretty stressed and depressed about the whole thing. I got in touch with my mentor, and I told her I thought my agent was going to drop me, and no one wanted the book, and I didn't know what I was going to do, and it's the end of everything. She said, "It's not your job to sell the book. Your job is to write another book." And I so immediately thought of these characters.

RR Once the decision was made to go with the Young Adult label and marketing, how did the novel from what you wrote to what was published?

KPM Not much. There were changes, but not based off of the readership. I was in touch with my editor for a while before we actually signed the contract. That phase is really important, so you can talk about what they're envisioning and what you're envisioning and make sure you've got the

same thing in mind. I didn't know that much about the YA label, and I didn't know if I was going to have to pull certain scenes or certain elements. He never asked me to do any of that. In fact, he said, "Whatever you do when going back into this, do not dumb the book down. Teens know a lot. And they demand a lot. They'll see right through it." He encouraged me not to think about that label, because I didn't know a lot about it or what it meant. It made me a little nervous. But really nothing was changed based off of the readership.

RR That's really encouraging to hear, as a writer, that your vision remained intact.

KPM The only conversation that was prompted by the readership was an email I got from my editor, and he said, "I'm not saying you should pull it, but I just want you to be aware of the language you're using. You're using 'fuck' in this book. Make sure you want it there." So I started going through, and I realized that Stella was using that word all the time, and it was a writing tick. It was lazy writing. I was letting her use that as a crutch instead of giving her something more interesting to do in terms of emotional reaction. So I kind of caught myself, which was great, and I wanted to see if I could pull it and make her stronger and more vivid. That word isn't in the book anymore, but I don't think it came from worry over who was going to read it. A lot of YA books do have that word, but it was an exercise for me to see what I was doing with profanity and why it was there. It's a word that Stella would use, but it's not a word that she needed to use. I tried to find more interesting ways for her to react to things.

RR From what I understand, you've had a positive experience with publishing and your editors. Do you have any advice for anyone going through the process or looking forward to going through the process?

KPM I think that I've been really fortunate. I worked really hard, and I still have that book I never sold. I had to wait for it for a long time. I hope that it's good karma. I think, I hope, that I earned it. My agent said that one of the reasons that this worked is because I've been flexible. I didn't write it as a YA book, and when that idea came to light, I said I didn't really care what we called it, as long as it ended up in the right hands. That was helpful. I think it's good to be open to new ideas and not be so rigid in your view of what's supposed to happen and how it's supposed to go. No matter how you think it's going to go, it's going to go differently. Everyone has a different story of how it happens, so it's good to be open to changing the path from what you had imagined. The other thing that I will say that has made a huge difference for me is just showing up in person. I have friends who have editors and agents they've never met because they live in different places. For me, it was really important. Writing is such an intimate thing, and to give that kind of project to other people and to let them into it. For me, I had to go and meet them and spend time with them. And for every trip I made to New York, I could connect the dots to things that happened because of it. I would show up and we would do a meeting with marketing, and then the next week we would get an invitation to go to something else. I think it's good to go in person. It's easy not to, because we have email and Skype and all these things, but there's still nothing like that personal connection. So whenever I have a friend who's sold a book or is getting an agent, I always encourage them, if you can go, then go. Make that personal connection.

RR That's great advice. Thank you. Speaking of that YA label, it seems there's sometimes a kind of stigma around it. People maybe want to distance themselves from it or find it "less than." But you felt that it was a good move?

KPM Yeah. I think that for every door that you're worried about closing, it's my experience that five more open. This book, I think, is getting a lot

more attention because it is YA. Also, it's cross-over. When I first started talking about it with my agent, she said, "You're a literary writer, and I know literary writers who would be offended by the YA thing." I just always felt like this label is sort of new. I think it's fairly new. I think it's really undefined still, which is exciting. It can kind of be a lot of things right now. I think that that's always a good place to be, when lines are being blurred. I've had a very positive experience with the YA world. In fact, I just finished a novel and it's not YA, and I was pretty bummed about it. I felt like YA has been so good to me. It's a different thing. Teens are a totally different set of readers. They're honest, and when I meet them in person, the questions they ask and the things they say about the book are different than my adult friends who have read it. It's been fun to have access to both sets of readers.

RR Did you go back to reading YA once that became the direction for knowledge or inspiration?

KPM I never read that much YA. I discovered John Green when I was here at school, and I didn't know he was YA. That was right before he won the Printz, and I didn't know he was YA, or what that was. I have a seventeen-year-old voice in the novel though, so I started reading more. Some of the books are so good. So good. Some are not. But you're going to find that in any genre. There is an element of literary fiction that's happening in YA, and even in the genre YA. I think the market is still figuring out what to do with this label. I love reading YA now. I read a lot of things, but I love the voice in YA. It's usually that strong first person voice that pushing through the whole thing. There's that immediacy that I love.

RR I think anyone can read that kind of YA you're talking about, that "literary" YA.

KPM I read a lot of essay about it and articles about it. I remember reading an article, and someone classified YA as having a character driven

plot, not plot driven plot. I've always been a character writer. That's been really appealing to me from the start. I'm more a character reader and writer. So the YA has been a good fit for me.

RR That's great. Thank you so much for meeting

with me. We're so happy and proud to have you back on campus.

KPM Thank you. That's so nice. I'm happy to be here, and thanks for having me.

# B A S I L

There's a simple rule about how  
to pluck basil leaves, but I don't  
know it. I believe in trial and error.

I removed the top leaves this morning,  
and thought Gee Whiz, if I did it wrong,  
I will know.

Well, I did. I returned the next morning,  
and there was a timber wolf floating  
in the pool. He was smiling. The garden  
smelled like rosemary.

# **E R R A T U M**

It was a typo. His name really isn't Van Gosh. But what if it was? It would be a new way to understand his genius. Or it would make it almost impossible to say his name without passion. Gosh means God, you know. But so does Egad.

You are waiting for the exclamation marks, aren't you? Oh God, you know, Van Gosh - look at those flowers. Egad, it's Van Gogh, goddam.

# C O Y O T E S

by AJ Winters

RIPRAP 35

It was two in the morning on a Tuesday in January. The lace drapes of my grandparents' bedroom barely covered the dew wet window that looked out onto their vegetable garden, but it was pitch black outside. My grandfather was breathing heavily in the bed. His lungs sounded like they wanted out of his chest, out of the walls of cancer enveloping his body. Thankfully, he was asleep.

My grandmother had moved to the guest-room for the night. I had convinced her that she needed her rest and that I was capable of handling anything he needed. She'd left reluctantly, kissing his cheeks and forehead before finally leaving the room.

I reached for his pale hand on the sheets and curled my fingers through his like when I was a child. For as long as I could remember he had been sick, but he'd walked with me every day through the streets of Yucaipa, California. He always wore a panama hat to shade the delicate

blue of his eyes. The sun was always bright here, too bright for the paleness of our skin. We weren't built for hot, dry weather, but he loved it. He'd point with enthusiasm to the brown grass that lined the hills and the spindly trees on each street corner.

There was an empty lot at the end of the block that looked down into a small canyon filled with red dirt and wild grass. Little caves could be seen carved into the surface of the walls on each side. One day I asked my grandfather about them, curious about everything.

"The coyotes live there. There are stories of lost children being raised as pups in packs of coyotes."

I looked up into the shadow of his face and could see the sliver of a smile. I never knew what to believe. He was always joking.

Every summer when I stayed at my grandparents' house, at night I could hear the coyotes howling. They prowled the neighborhood for



pets—bunnies, cats, dogs. I tried not to listen to the whining of the dying or the savage grunts of the killers, but I had nightmares of slick tan forms moving through the dense darkness, circling prey and laughing. Their yaps always sounded like laughter.

I never realized how terrified I was of the coyotes till I was older. A group of friends had coaxed me out to a park a few blocks away. The night was cooler than usual. The swings were damp, but we sat anyways, wanting to fly high into the night's sky. There were millions of stars out, but no moon or clouds. It was just a black quilt of glitter.

I was the first to spot them, their shoulder blades jostling the joints of their backs as they looped through the grass. I didn't say anything, too surprised by their lolling tongues and sharp white teeth. The park's lamplights slid across the lean muscles of their legs and shadowed the white of their bellies.

"Coyotes." I don't know who said it. Only that everyone was up and running for the car. For a split second I was left on my swing staring into the dirt brown eyes of one of the coyotes. It was like staring into a glassy lake, nothing to perceive in its depths except the flicker of a mirror. Then I shot to my feet and was panting in the car with my friends before remembering I was running.

I never told my grandfather about the eyes of the coyote or the moment I thought I might see myself in the mirror of its pupils. I never told him about the nightmares where I was a coyote, curled into a cave of the cavern with a litter of my own pups.

The only time I ever saw my grandfather in the hospital was after his worst collapse. Everything had been white—the sheets, the walls, his skin. I'd never seen him so pale. The only color in the room was his eyes and the veins in his hand, both spring blue. I traced the tunnels of veins for hours, memorizing their paths as if they would lead me somewhere new—somewhere without death, somewhere without ammonia white walls, and somewhere without coyotes.

That night I dreamed that my grandfather was a pale white wolf in the hills of the snowcapped mountains beyond Yucaipa. His form was a silhouette against the moon. I watched from far below, a dark tanned coyote in the front yard of my grandparents' home, a dead roadrunner at my feet. The blood trailing across its wings was as bright a red as the vials they had filled at the hospital of my grandfather's blood. The same blood red that had slid into the first few millimeters of the IV taped to his elbow. The wolf of my grandfather had howled at the moon and it was beautiful, the sound of rustling pine leaves.

He demanded to go home after a single night in the hospital, never caring for the sterile cleanliness. There was always a barrier between the room and the rest. It never mattered which room it was or which hospital.

He never walked with me again or mowed the yard and tended the garden. My grandmother was left to tend to his favorite tomato plant and the plum tree that never yielded any fruit. She diligently watered, trimmed, and weeded as my grandfather watched from the bedroom window. At night he sometimes woke in a sweat, clothes stuck to every piece of his body. He would silently rise and change. Then listen and watch from the window for any sign of life—the crickets beneath the pepper plant and the calls of nocturnal birds.

Sometimes he'd wake me in the middle of the night to join him. We'd whisper the names of the animals we knew and make up new names for the ones we didn't. Those nights he held my hand like he had when we went on walks, fingers locked tight so we wouldn't lose one another. Other nights I'd creep into his room to hear his soft, gentle breath.

But now, my grandfather moaned in his ragged sleep. My grandmother shifted in her sleep in the other room. I listened intently for every sound and in the distance I heard a howl from the canyon. The coyotes were out tonight and prowling. I could hear yaps a few blocks over and the pathetic whine of an injured animal. It was crying and they were laughing. I tried to

tear my ears away from the devastating murder as I heard my grandfather gasp in his sleep. His chest was barely rising. I ran my fingers over the skin of his head.

The crying had stopped. The coyotes were feasting. My grandfather's skin was cool against

my palm. His breath invisible and unheard in the din of the coyotes' dinner. I reached for his pulse, nothing. I touched his lips and searched for a breath, nothing, and in the distance laughter. And beneath my own breath, my own laughter, soft and delirious with the rush of death.



RIPRAP 35





Nicole Stranz *Tree*

# DEATH OF CAULIFLOWER

by Marcello Giagnoli

Florets of the head  
of a cauliflower nestle tightly  
together like a bowl of popcorn.  
Its thick green leaves are sometimes tied  
over the flower head to keep it white while  
still juvenile. But others are orange, green, or purple.  
Its brothers and sisters in the brassica oleracea family  
include broccoli and cabbage, an ancient face known in  
Europe and the Middle East for thousands of years-even  
Pliny extolled its culinary virtues in the early Roman days.  
And like any delicate flower, its cultivation requires attention  
so that the soil will be moist and yet well-drained, the  
temperature not too hot, nor too cold. All the while,  
fending off attacks of cabbage worms and aphids  
munching away on this delicate vegetable.  
But this is not enough, next comes the crushing death of  
disease-black rot, club root, and viral yellows.  
Perhaps this will be the death of cauliflower,  
no longer highly regarded as a tempting  
dish for our table.



Tyler Spangler *Posey Punk*



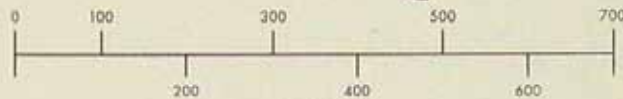


Fig. 1. MEXIX



**P A D R E  
N U E S T R O**

*For Manuel*

by Shane Eaves

We stand outside  
the church doors. Heads down,  
we shake hands, looking past  
congruent gravestones to shrubs  
and dark and sacrilegious  
coyotes yipping in the fog that settles  
in a wrinkle of the hills.

When Manuel made albondigas  
you skipped dinner at your house.  
He patched the fence you broke  
while playing tag. Replaced  
the window you shot after missing  
a bird. "Chingado"—he knew how far  
albondigas could be stretched.

We kick acorns on the ground  
separating cap from nut and smell  
the dampness of night. Another yip  
from the canyon, and handshakes  
and sorry and Padre Nuestros.

# INTERVIEW: J A M E S B R O W N

by Mony Vong



James Brown is the author of *Lucky Town*, *Final Performance*, several other novels, and the two-part memoir, *The Los Angeles Diaries* published in 2003 and *This River* published in 2010. In these courageous and vivid books, Brown writes about his tumultuous relationship with his mother, the suicides of his older brother and sister, Barry and Marilyn, and his life-long battle with drugs and alcohol, which began at the tender age of nine. James Brown has been writing stories since he was a teenager and has received a fellowship from The National Endowment for the Arts, and the Nelson Algren Award in Short Fiction. In addition to being a creative writing professor at CSU San Bernardino, Brown is also a spokesperson for Partnership for a Drug-Free America. He received his M.F.A. from U.C. Irvine, and is married to the writer Paula Priamos. They reside in Lake Arrowhead, California.

RIPRAP Why did you decide to write a memoir?

JAMES BROWN I believe the material chooses the writer. You write about what you care most about, what you know most about, what you think most about, the memories that haunt, your obsessions, your shortcomings, your successes and failures, and how all these experiences and feelings have shaped how you see yourself and others, particularly those you love most in this crazy world. For me, at a particular juncture in life, that meant shifting gears from fiction to memoir in order to best tell the story I felt needed telling.

RR Was it difficult to be so open and honest about your life and your addiction to drugs and alcohol? I mean— in your two memoirs, you went over everything, from your mother, to your ex-wife and your current wife. Was there a part of you that wanted to keep certain things private?

JB Yes, there were many things I omitted from my memoirs. Hard choices have to be made as to what to include and what not to include. You choose a focus. You compress time. You limit experience to those experiences that best contribute to the overall effect you're attempting to achieve with your work. It's a tough, at times almost mercenary, process. I know I left lots out of my memoirs, sometimes for personal reasons (I just didn't want to share something with the world), but more often because adding that something would distract from the forward momentum of the work as a whole.

RR Your boys are grown now. What do you say to them about the dangers of being an addict? What can you say to others who are still addicted to alcohol and drugs, to give them some kind of hope for recovery?

JB I would tell the recovering alcoholic or addict never to give up hope. If, in abstaining, they slip and begin drinking or using again, the best message I can impart is to stop drinking or using and

start over again. It took me a decade to finally "get it" and accumulate years of sobriety. Had I given up hope each time I slipped, I might not be here today. No matter how dark life may seem, there's always hope. You're only doomed if you doom yourself.

RR How long have you been sober?

It's a day at a time, and that's what I typically tell people when they ask me this question – that I have only today, and it's all that matters. Fact is, I now have years of sober time under my belt.

RR Do you find sobriety boring? Since our culture is saturated with drugs and alcohol, at almost every work-party or family function, there's an availability of booze. How do you deal with your sobriety when everyone around you is drinking?

JB I can't hide from alcohol. It's everywhere. From the corner liquor store to your friend's refrigerator or kitchen cabinet. I don't mind if my friends drink or party. I just can't take part in it with them anymore, and, no, I don't find being sober boring. Actually, it's just the opposite. I'm conscious of the world around me. I can participate in life in a way I never could before, and that's far from boring.

I don't like to watch reality TV because I think to some extent there is some kind of editing or scripting going on. Yet there is one show that I am glued to. Intervention on TLC fascinates me. It's not a morbid kind of fascination, like witnessing a car crash, but more akin to shock over how addicts abuse their bodies and minds. But do you think that every addict can be cured? On some level, is it selfishness and the need for attention that keeps these addicts addicted? On the show, some of them don't complete their rehab, or they "fall of the wagon." So what, if anything, can save them?

No one can save the addict but the addict himself. If the addict or alcoholic doesn't want to get

sober, no one can force him. Sure, you can intervene, and even lock the alcoholic up in a hospital or jail, but unless they want to change their lives for the better, they'll go back to their old ways soon as they can. Still, intervention can and does help many, allowing them to enough sober time to see clearly and better understand the depth and seriousness of their affliction. An intervention helped me greatly, and you can read about it in detail in my memoir, *This River*.

RR Let's talk about the creative process. How do you begin a story, is it image or thought that propels you? What items, if any, do you have on your writing desk or area? Is there a time of day that you prefer to write? Do you set a certain amount of time in the day to write? Steinbeck's daily goal was to write 2,500 words a day. Do you set similar goals for yourself?

JB There are many things that spark the creation of a story. For some it's a voice they hear, one of their characters speaking to them. For others it could something as minor as overhearing a simple conversation. For Faulkner, in "A Rose for Emily," the story was inspired by a picture of a strand of grey hair on a pillowcase. The only goal I set for myself in terms of writing is that I sit down for 2 to 4 hours a day, at least five days a week, and write. Even if the muse isn't there, you need to put in your time. It's a strong work ethic that makes or breaks a writer. Lots of us are talented, but talent alone

doesn't get the hard work done.

RR Which authors influenced you the most?

JB Just about every good writer I've read has left some kind of impression on me. The ones that come easiest to mind are Ernest Hemingway, particularly in my younger years, Flannery O'Connor, Virginia Woolf, Raymond Carver, and Tim O'Brien, to name just a few.

RR If you were pressed to name a favorite book, a short story and a poem, what would each be?

JB For novels, off the top of my head, I'm partial to *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *Moby Dick*, *Catcher in the Rye*, *The Things They Carried*, *Crime and Punishment*, and *Anna Karenina*. I love the poem by Roethe, "My Papa's Waltz," and the collection, *The Art of the Lathe* by B.H. Fairchild. Hemingway's short story, *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*, is stunning, as are so many of Chekhov's works.

RR Last but not least because I could ask you questions all day long but—do you think writers are made or born?

JB Maybe it's both, but I'd lean toward "made," because so much hard work goes into learning the craft. I throw away far more pages than I ever keep. It's as if I have to write through the bad stuff to get to the good stuff.



RIPRAP 35



Michael de Vera *Steak, Ribs, Eat Her*





Tyler Spangler *Suicide Square*

# NEIGHBORS

by Mathieu Cailler

RIPRAP 35

Tiago Sandoval was a bachelor before it was cool to be one, before Clooney and the Dos Equis man. Even though he was well-liked by both men and women, he considered human relationships to be a lot like exercise—a little a day. He was wealthy and owned a couple restaurants in LA, both Cuban places—one with menus big as maps and twenty kinds of flan, and the other an upscale place with starched tablecloths and flickering candles. He was fifty-seven, tall, with thin hair, a solid jaw, and white teeth. Women told him he had kind eyes, too.

For the last twenty years, he'd lived in the same house, a large two-story job on a seaside street outside of LA. His house was the last one on the cul de sac and he had only one neighbor, Marilyn. Marilyn was about seventy-five now, though he'd thought of her as seventy-five for the last twenty years.

Last week, she'd told Tiago that she was leaving town to visit her newest grandchild. She'd asked him to water her plants, collect her mail, dump chlorine in her hot tub (he never understood why she had

one), and to keep an eye on things. Tiago said no. He didn't want to be bogged down or responsible. A few years ago, when she'd asked him to do the same thing, he'd neglected to "feed" her orchids. She was fine with his decision, though, saying, "I'll have my granddaughter do it. She could probably use a change of scenery."

"I didn't know you had a granddaughter."

"Yes," Marilyn had said. "A wild one."

Tiago wished Marilyn well and headed back home. That afternoon, he sat in a Brookstone chair on his back porch. He stared at the ocean. The view was amazing now that he'd gone ahead and had a deck built. It was aligned with both stories of his home and spanned the entire length of the back facade. At the south end, he could stare down into Marilyn's yard—something he didn't want to do, so he kept a barbeque there—and at the north end, he had the world to himself.



A week later, Tiago had just returned from lunch service at La Havana, the cheaper of his two places. He stood in his driveway and sifted through his mail. The air was soft and warm, and he felt relaxed. His restaurants were doing well and he was home at two in the afternoon on a Tuesday. The other men of his neighborhood wore uncomfortable shoes, screamed on cell phones, studied the second hand, and waited to hop into foreign cars to rush home to overcooked food and stale conversation.

A truck the color of sawdust drove up the cul de sac. Tiago knew all the cars on the block. Lost, he thought. But the pickup didn't stop, didn't turn around. Instead, it swung into Marilyn's driveway. And then he remembered: the granddaughter.

The doors popped open. A young man and woman stepped out into the driveway. Tiago stole a glance. The woman was pretty: shoulder-length red hair, big eyes, and pale skin. The man was strange-looking: patchy facial hair, a huge forehead, and a sunburnt nose. Tiago went back to his mail.

"You're Tiago, right?" the woman said from Marilyn's driveway.

"Yes."

"I'm Nash. My grandma always talks about you. Says you're a playboy."

Tiago laughed. "Your grandma tells me you're a bit of a wild thing."

Nash giggled. The man slammed down the tailgate.

Tiago and Nash walked off their driveways and met in the street. The man hung back, unloaded a couple bags, then plopped down on the tailgate.

"Nice to meet you," Nash said.

"Likewise," Tiago said.

"This is my boyfriend, Richie."

Richie gave Tiago a nod and Tiago wondered when men stopped being men. What happened to the days when men looked people in the eye and wore clean shirts?

"Here to take care of your grandma's place?" Tiago said.

"Yeah," she said, popping some gum. "See ya 'round."

"Take care."

Tiago waved to the boyfriend who was too busy picking a scab to see him. Once inside, he took off his shirt and assumed the position on the deck. He'd started reading *The Sun Also Rises* the day before and was eager to get back to it.



Later that night, after closing up La Havana, Tiago walked Maria, a waitress he'd casually been seeing, to her car. She wore tight jeans that squeezed her perfectly. He smiled, thinking how he'd seen her so many times without clothes. At her car, she unlocked the door, pulled it open and turned towards Tiago. "Bye, sweetie," she said. "I can come over tomorrow night if you want."

"All right," Tiago said.

She started her car, put it in gear, and drove off.

Things were getting nuts with Maria. He'd told her a couple months ago, before they first slept together: "I don't get serious. A lot of women like that about me. I'm nothing more than a good time—vacation sex without the hassle of buying a plane ticket." She'd smiled and seemed good with the whole thing, but he could tell she liked him more than he liked her.

It was eleven thirty when he pulled into his driveway. The street was dead. Only the coo of a confused bird. He went inside and checked his answering machine. Nothing important. After making himself a vodka tonic, he walked out onto his deck and looked at the milky dots in the sky. The longer he sat, the more the day seemed to evaporate.

He smelled the smoke of clove cigarettes drifting over from Marilyn's. He wasn't used to any action coming from her house, especially at this hour. The scent was warm, and Tiago drew it in. Then he heard crying. He got up, walked the deck, and stared over into Marilyn's yard. Nash had a towel wrapped around her and paced barefoot in the grass around the hot tub, a cell phone pressed to her ear. "I just wish you'd..." she said. Then "Please, Dad." She cried a little more.

After the phone call ended, she sank in a plas-

tic chair and blotted her eyes with the towel, then reached for her clove cigarette that sat burning in a bowl on ground. Her boyfriend came outside, wearing blue trunks, carrying a bottle of wine and two mugs. "Couldn't find glasses," he said, showing her the mugs. "What happened? Oh, God...I mean... why do you still try with him?" He rubbed her shoulder, and in time, the two of them made it to the hot tub. The boyfriend got in quickly, while Nash took her time, making little sounds as the bubbling turquoise water came into contact with her cool skin. Once inside, she fanned her hair out over the wood and leaned her head against her boyfriend's shoulder.

Embarrassed for staring for so long, Tiago crawled along the deck back to his room. He closed the sliding door and told himself that he wouldn't do that again, unsure of why he'd done it in the first place.

He hopped in the shower and soaped up. Under the stream of hot water, his thoughts breathed and he didn't get in the way. At Nash's age, he'd had his first serious relationship with a girl named Eliza. Thirteen months into their relationship, Eliza told Tiago she was pregnant and that she didn't want to keep the baby. Tiago and his parents and Eliza and her parents sat down and talked it through. Eliza cried. He could still see her shiny brown eyes. Everyone at the table decided that Eliza was a woman and that she could make her own decisions. Tiago agreed. In time, Eliza and Tiago broke up—too much seriousness for such a fragile thing.

He dried himself off and went to bed. The blades of the ceiling fan spun and he thought of things they looked like: spokes of a wheel, petals of a flower, limbs of a stick figure. Would he have had a boy or girl? What would he have named his child? What kind of dad would he have been? He turned in his sheets, unable to get comfortable.



The next morning, while Tiago was brewing some coffee, the doorbell chimed. It sounded so

rarely that Tiago was confused. He tightened his robe, walked to the door, and pulled it open.

It was Nash. Her red hair was pinned atop her head with a pencil and she had on glasses, a t-shirt, and pink pajama bottoms. She was barefoot. "Hi, Tiago," she said, like they'd been doing this for years. "Do you have any real coffee? All my grandma has is Sanka."

"Sure," he said, leading her to the kitchen.

"Oh, perfect, you're making some."

"Yeah," he said.

"I can just drink some with you...if you don't mind."

Just as Tiago was about to tell her "sure" and "to have a seat," she'd gone ahead and

installed herself in the breakfast nook and had begun scanning the paper's headlines.

"Does your boyfriend want some?" Tiago asked.

"He's at work."

The coffee pot gurgled and steam curled to the ceiling. "Cream or sugar?"

"Both," Nash said, getting up and approaching the kitchen island where Tiago had laid out a quart of cream and some cubes of brown sugar. "You own restaurants, right?" she asked.

"Yeah. What do you do?"

"I lost my job recently. Now I'm back at school, night school. I know I'm old for it," Nash said.

"I'm old for a lot of things," Tiago said. "We'll be more comfortable on the deck."

Nash plopped on Tiago's Brookstone chair and folded her legs under her, yoga-style, and Tiago brought out a stool from the kitchen and sat beside her. He liked that Nash had little regard for social norms, that her approach with people was still very much a work in progress. She went through life, it seemed, with a blithe freedom. Her age suggested she was a woman, but her purple-painted toes said otherwise.

"If I was you I'd sit out here all day," she said. "It's amazing." She pulled in a deep breath. "Life feels easier up here. Are there more smells or is it just me? I'm getting eucalyptus and jasmine."

"It's mostly your grandma's garden."

"I know, right? She's obsessed with plants. Most of LA's oxygen comes from her."

"What are you studying?" Tiago asked.

"Philosophy...I know, I know, what am I going to do with that?"

"Ha. You've heard it before."

"You have no idea."

"You're not there to get a job, though. You're there to get an education."

"Oh, can I steal that?"

"All yours."

Nash smiled and a dimple came to life on her left cheek.

"What philosophers do you like?" Tiago asked. "I studied some a long time ago, in high school...I can't remember much of it, so you could say anything and I'd be impressed."

She perched her coffee mug on her knee. "Socrates, Plato. So far we haven't studied that many. Oh, and Kant"—which she pronounced can't—"and Hume. I love Hume."

"I don't know Hume."

"Yeah, he's a cool guy, thinking of getting a quote of his tattooed on my foot."

"What's the quote?"

"He said, 'Reason is a slave to the passions.' Or something like that. Nice, right?"

Tiago nodded.

They sipped for a little while longer and didn't say much. A hummingbird came to the railing and fluttered its wings to hold still while it sucked out nectar from a summer lilac bush.

"Do you ever think hummingbirds get tired?" Nash asked, after the bird had flown off. "You know they probably get back to their nests and think, 'Man, can someone build a ledge!'"

Tiago laughed and took another sip.

Nash got up, went to the kitchen, and returned with the coffee pot. She topped Tiago off, helped herself, and then sat back down.

Normally, after a certain amount of time had passed, Tiago's instinct was to deliver a closing line, something like, "Well, it's been nice having coffee with you" or "Better start getting ready for work" or "Big day on the horizon." But he didn't. He knew

some of the servers and cooks would soon be arriving for lunch service at La Havana, but he figured they'd be all right.

"So you've never been married, right?" Nash asked.

"That's right," Tiago said.

"My grandma thinks it's weird. She talks about you at Thanksgiving and stuff. Our get-togethers aren't the most lively things, so sometimes I'll ask her how you are just to get her going."

"Oh, God."

"Don't worry, though. She really likes you. She always wraps it up with 'he's a good man...terrible he never found a woman.' I always said you were gay. But now I know you're not. I have great 'gay-dar.' I'm excited that I'll have so much to share at the next family dinner."

"Anytime."

"How old are you?" she asked.

"Fifty-seven. The Jesus Christ age."

"What?"

"Whenever you tell someone you're fifty-seven and you've never been married, the first thing they say is Jesus Christ!"

"Why didn't you? You probably had the chance a few times."

"Just wasn't for me. I've never been much of a relationship-type guy. If I got married, I'd want to be great at it, and I don't think I would be. There's this story about the Glenn Miller Band that I like. You probably don't know who they are, but they were a big-band group in the 40s. Anyhow, they had a show in some snowy place on Christmas Eve." Tiago took a sip. "They couldn't get a ride from the airport because the weather was so bad, so they had to walk a mile or so through the snow to get to the gig. They're carrying their instruments, wearing tuxes, freezing, and they pass in front of a house. There's a tree and ornaments and the whole family is opening gifts in front of the fireplace. It's perfect. A Norman Rockwell thing." Nash clutched her coffee with both hands and put her feet on the wood. "The whole band is there, staring, and Glenn Miller looks at his guys and says, 'How do people live like that?'"

She smiled. "How many times have you told that story?"

"You have no idea."

"Did your family get along?"

"My dad passed when I was young. My mom raised me and my brother by herself."

"Sorry to ask so many questions. I do that sometimes. I just feel like if you don't get personal, you don't really have a friendship."

Tiago took a sip. His coffee had gone cold.

"Well," she said, "I gotta get going. Have a ten-page paper on Hume due tonight, and I've barely started."

"Sure, sure."

Nash brought the cups to the kitchen. "Thanks for the coffee. I can feel my body beginning to come to life."

Tiago opened the door and she walked the brick path. Dried leaves crunched under her bare feet like potato chips. A few seconds later, she turned around. "It's too bad," she said.

"What's that?"

"That you never got married, had kids. You'd a been a cool dad."

"You don't know me."

"I can tell," she said. "Wish my dad was more like you." She waved and smiled, and Tiago held her in his gaze until she made it all the way home.



At La Havana, Tiago went behind the bar and poured himself a Pernod. The Sun Also Rises had made him in the mood for one. He drank and listened to the piped-in Celia Cruz. A few times he'd heard from people that he'd be a good father, but never from a young person. When he was a boy, whenever he met adults, saw their big faces and shook their big hands, he assumed they knew everything. When he was fifteen, he looked at twenty-year-olds like gods. Then, when he was twenty, he thought maybe thirty was the age when life became clear, but as his hair grayed and thinned, he began to understand there was never an age when life was easy—just an age where it became easier

to pretend.

He drank more and thought of Eliza. She was living in Miami, married with children. He wondered if she ever thought about him and their baby.

Maria, the waitress, walked up to the bar. Her eyes were big and her lips wet. "Hi," she said. "Wanna get together tonight?"

"I'd love to," he said, "but I can't."

"Oh. Why?"

"I have company."

"You have company?"

"Yes."

"Who is it?" she asked, setting a tray of empty mojitos on counter. "Your brother?"

"No," Tiago said.

"Then who?"

"Family. A distant cousin."

"Oh."

"Yeah."

"Well, that's sweet. Soon though, okay?"

"Sure."

She walked back to the kitchen, the tray atop her shoulder.

Tiago went to the back of the restaurant, into his office, and closed the door. He sat at his desk, pulled out his cell, and dialed information. He asked for the number of Marilyn Lambert, his neighbor. The operator put him through. After a few rings, Nash picked up. Her voice was soft.

"Nash," he said. "Hey, it's Tiago."

"That's so weird...I was just thinking about you."

"Really?"

"Yeah. Just downloaded some Glenn Miller songs. Not bad for old stuff."

"You working on your paper?"

"Trying. You at work?"

"Yeah. Actually, I wanted to invite you and your boyfriend to my restaurant for dinner tonight. Maybe after you finish class."

"That'd be great." Her voice was high. "I finish up around eight."

"Perfect. My place is called Mariposa. It's—"

"The fancy one on Maple."

"You know it?"

"Yeah, I've been by. Looks good."

"Well," Tiago said, "see you then."

"Hey, listen," she said. There was an explosion of sound: clarinets, trumpets, drums, bass. "Which song is it?"

"I didn't say I was Glenn Miller."

"It's 'The Nearness of You'...by far my favorite one." She hummed a few of the notes. "All right. See you later."

"Bye, Nash."

He hung up and opened his laptop. He listened to "The Nearness of You" a few times. After that, he called his manager at Mariposa and told him to prepare something special, that he had people coming to the restaurant. He spent more time in his office, reading about David Hume, whose theories were difficult to understand. Tiago read them out loud, thinking that uttering the words would actually help his comprehension. In particular, he liked the way Hume divided emotions into two categories: warm and cold.



Mariposa was always the restaurant Tiago wanted to have. It was one of those places that made a person seem better-looking just by being there. The bossa nova was soft, the cooking—or cuisine, rather—had received frame-able reviews, and the service was professional but never stuffy.

One table in the house rested in a little alcove surrounded by windows. Couples reserved it for their anniversaries; a few women had even blushed and said "yes" in the quaint space. At eight o'clock, Tiago had the table cleaned and topped with a sign that read "Reserved" in loopy lettering. One couple asked if they could sit there and Tiago apologized and turned down a sweaty bill-filled handshake.

Around eight thirty, Tiago thought he saw Nash and her boyfriend crossing the street. They were huddled together and her boyfriend was providing stylish support for her as she navigated the asphalt in high heels, but when they passed the window, Tiago couldn't believe he thought it was them. The woman wore a decadent black dress with a high

slit. He imagined Nash would call it "bougie." He wondered what she'd wear. People always dressed up when they came to Mariposa, and he liked that. In fact, he had a jackets-for-men policy that many told him to get rid of because it wasn't inviting and current, but he insisted it stay in place, referencing the many men who entered La Havana in shorts and flip flops. Tiago still believed that under no circumstance other than the pool or beach was a man to show his feet.

He made the usual rounds, stopping by certain tables and spending a light moment with patrons. Drinks were refilled, questions were asked, jokes were shared.

Nash's table wore a crisp linen tablecloth that draped over the sides and flirted with the hardwood. The cutlery was shiny and straight and the family of forks to the left of the plates glistened in the warm candlelight.

Time passed.

Quarter to nine.

Nine.

Then nine fifteen.

Tiago walked over to his manager. "Any calls?" he asked.

"No, sir."

He drew a deep breath. "When it hits nine thirty, feel free to give the table away."

"Yes, sir."

Not long after, an older man and young woman came in. Normally Tiago would have walked them to their table, but instead he leaned against the bar and watched the manager lead the couple—whose names were probably Al and Tiffany—to their seats.

Nash was just being polite, Tiago thought. She didn't actually want to come. She'd talked it over with her boyfriend and they'd decided it wasn't for them. They were young. They didn't value French wines and slow-cooked meats.

There was such discomfort in caring for someone, and it'd been a long time since Tiago had felt this way. Nash was different. There was something fragile about her that told him that something bad would someday happen to her. He pictured her philosophy professor telling her to stay after class and

holding her strongly against his desk, saw a bus totaling her car as she barreled through an intersection, then a picture of her getting lost on her way to Mariposa shook in his mind, and he imagined her driving around strange streets, her face hot and blood beating in her ears.

He needed to know if she was all right, if she was safe. He'd call and hang up when she answered. Out back, he pulled out his cell and redialed. The phone rang and rang until the machine clicked on. He called again. This time, he left a message: "Nash," he said, "it's Tiago, your neighbor. Listen, it's no big deal that you didn't come. Don't worry. I just want to make sure you're okay. Call me if you get this." He gave his cell and carried on. "Oh, and I hope the paper went well. I'm sure it did. Hume's a cool guy. Talk to you later. And this afternoon it donned on me that I didn't give you any coffee, so feel free to come over tomorrow morning. Bye. Take care."

The rest of the service he waited for her call, even switched his cell from vibrate to the loudest ringer setting. But she never did.

When eleven o'clock came around and most of the guests were finishing up, Tiago left. He didn't say anything to the manager or barman. He just got in his car and rushed home. Traffic was fluid and he was back on his street within fifteen minutes. He parked alongside the curb and immediately inspected Nash's home. No lights whatsoever. No cars in the driveway. He no longer felt of his hunches as stupid—but as premonitions. He hurried to Nash's door and rang the bell. Once, twice, three times. He swung the golden knocker. He placed his face next to a partially opened window. "Nash," he called. "Hello? Anyone there?"

He headed back to his car, pulled into his garage, and shut the door behind him, just like he'd done so many times before. There were some eggs in the fridge, a book on the balcony, and a bottle of vodka on the counter. Everything would be fine.

Tiago let himself in and mixed a strong drink. Upstairs, he switched on the light and sipped his cocktail. The windows were open and he took deep

breaths and savored the night sounds: the pulse of crickets, the hiss of sprinklers, the sigh of summer wind. There was another sound, though—intermittent and soft. He focused. He slid the deck door open and walked out. Some of the light from his bedroom spilled onto the porch, and over by the barbecue he saw a figure, sitting on the ground, knees up, head tucked down.

"Nash?" he said. Planks of wood moaned as he made his way over.

"I'm sorry," she said, her head still angled towards the ground. "I didn't know where to go. The gate was open. I just came up these stairs."

"It's fine."

Tiago sat down on the varnished wood, only a few inches from Nash. She smelled of peppermint. His eyes started adjusting to the darkness and her features came to life. Her red hair was voluminous, like it had been teased for minutes before being sprayed into place and her golden hoop earrings glimmered in what little light the moon offered. Her clothes, however, weren't dressy. She wore the same t-shirt and pajama bottoms from the morning.

"I went home...to my apartment," she said, "after class, to get some nice clothes. And...and Richie was there with a girl. This girl I used to work with. I should've known when he said he wanted to meet me at... I..."

Tiago scooted closer and put his arm around her.

Most of the crickets had stopped chirping. The sky was black with few stars and fewer clouds, and a plane climbed in the distance, its lights flashing. Nash picked her head up from her legs and looked over at Tiago. Her eyes were surrounded by blots of watery mascara.

"I wanted to call you, I just—"

Tiago couldn't find the words, just saying, "Shhh."

Nash wrapped her arms around his body and brought her head to his chest, while Tiago ran his hand over the cold skin of her bare arm. "Shhh," he kept saying. "Shhh."





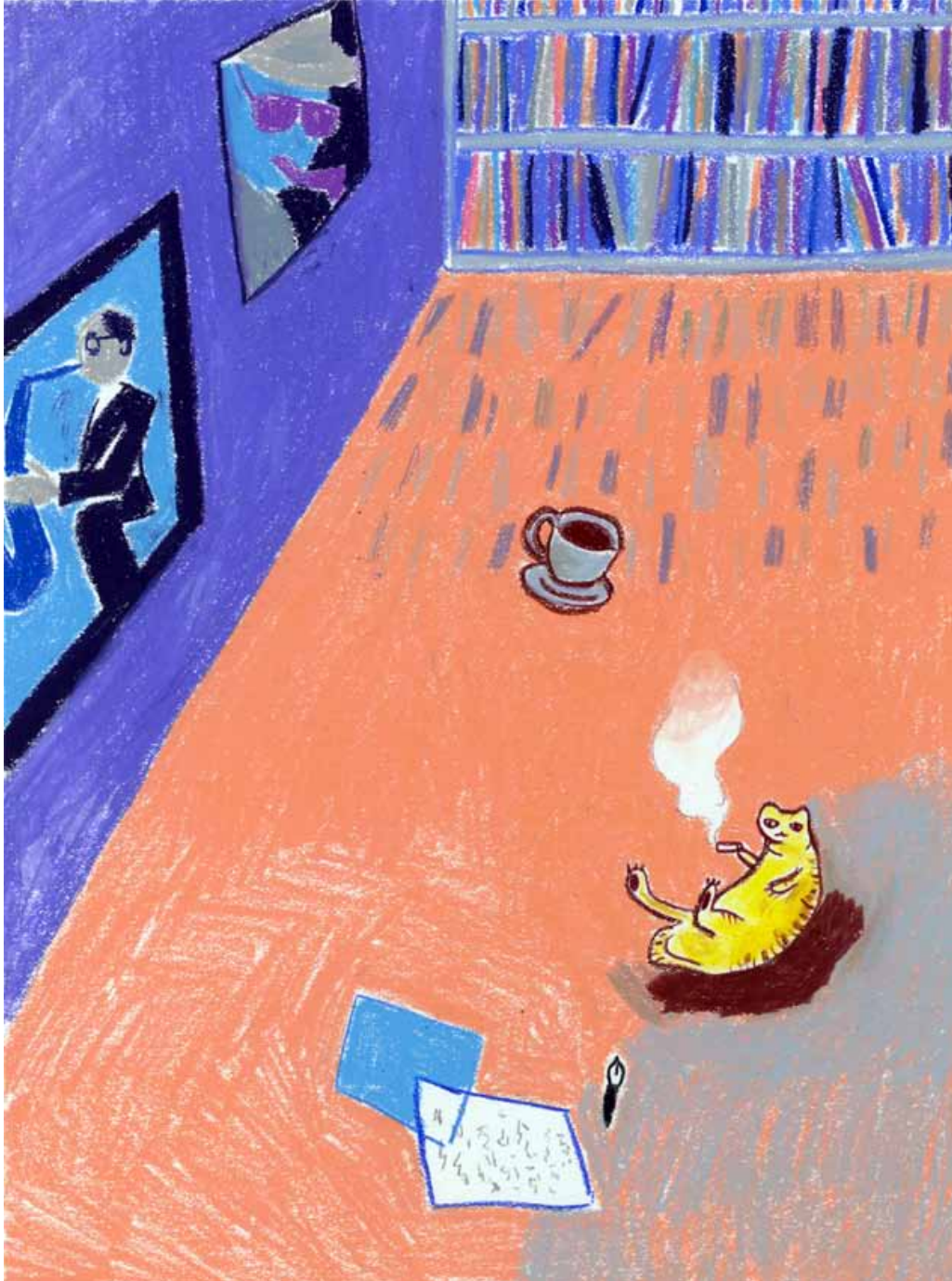
# LOVEMAKING

Aroused during lovemaking,  
Trobriand Islanders snap their teeth  
and nip at their lover's nose and chin.  
As their passion mounts,  
they bite cheeks and lips  
wildly until they bleed.  
Then at the moment of orgasm,  
they chew off each others eyelashes.

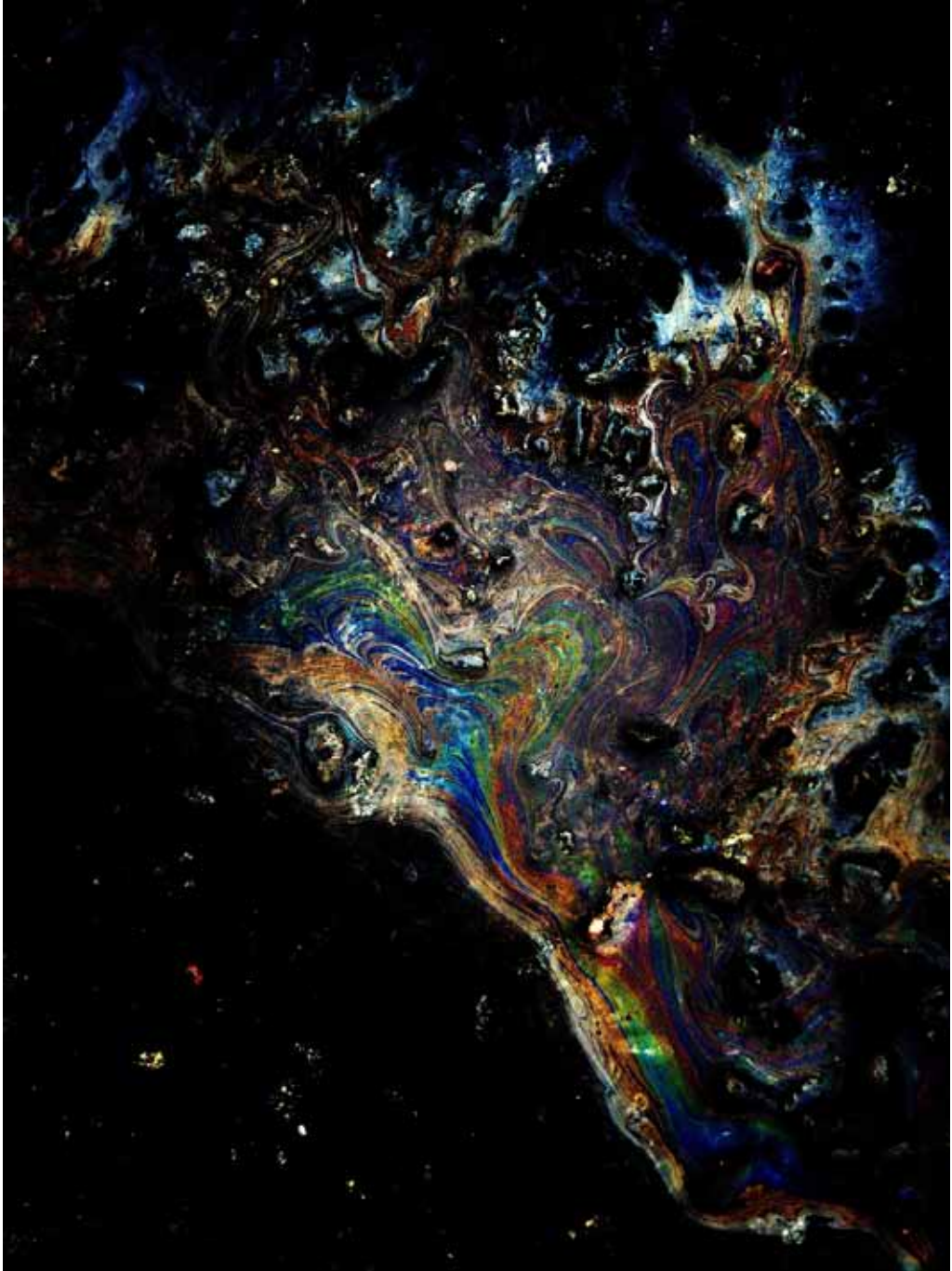
**T H E  
H A M M O C K**

To impress eligible females  
with his courage and endurance,  
males of Guyana's Macusi Indians  
have themselves sewn  
into a hammock filled with fire ants.  
The longer a man can bear  
the painful stinging of the ant bites,  
the more suitable husband  
he's considered.

by Bill Wolak



Alice Chiang *Murakami's Room No. 1*



Eleanor Leonne Bennett *Rain Over Oil Front*

# 1

by Changming Yuan

first formed in the far east  
a horizontal line  
kept moving westwards  
point by point  
as it rose gradually  
trying to stand up straight  
like the axis of the earth  
to be identical with the first person singular  
with or without a serif at the top  
with or without a support at the bottom  
until 1 and i became one and the same  
presenting itself as a single unity  
one that is its own factorial  
its own square, its own cube, the identity  
For multiplicities, each derived from tai chi or nothingness  
First of all there was, there has been

# S I E R R A F L O R I D A S

Crow beak bites  
 human-gnawed  
 apple flesh white,  
 pitched core with sand.  
 Feathers fly black,  
 crow cries loud  
 in flight  
 fowl breath.  
 Months ago there tangoed  
 desert poppies orange low  
 & yellow dappled hillside dazzle-  
 petals pranced like zillions  
 of cloudless sulphur butterfly  
 wings open-shut  
 Sierra floritas.  
 Honey mesquite pods  
 rattle maracas.  
 Puff: rattlesnakes slink into dens  
 or must begin  
 way out of skin.  
 Pricked yellow cactus  
 separates, detached spiny corpses,  
 fall in clusters  
 black skeletons of earth  
 buckle slope as Persian Ibex  
 hooves suction cliffs  
 to the south.  
 Autumnal elements flux  
 before tuck of winter siesta.  
 Quartz crystals strobe  
 white opal,  
 thunder eggs,  
 el sol.

by Wendy Gist



# O V U M

I.

Fall into camp chair blue,  
 dog pants as clarinet sonatas &  
 barbeque float from nearby RV.  
 Bare-chested loner man hammers,  
 beats who knows what in heat waves,  
 puts off a cool vibe.  
 Pumpkin-fleshed  
 September sun descends  
 cheek to shoulder glow  
 but not low slow.  
 Ode to ground mantis play-acting  
 a twig on road of pebbled nutmeg hued dirt.  
 Chihuahuan ravens luster  
 like lawn bags in the sky as broom  
 snakeweed swell yellow &  
 earth & desert hare get swathed  
 by splash of orange light.  
 Devil's claws clutch the roadside, as  
 rabbit's black-tipped ears  
 upswing bubblegum pink.

II.

Mimbres Peak meets atmospheric blush  
 like a rush of Luna Rossa  
 white zinfandel from the nearest town  
 & swallowed gone.  
 Motorhomes flicker electric, transient  
 living rooms writhing in shadowy desire.  
 Avocado tent balloons under  
 the salt-shaken night sky,  
 the lunar egg held high in scrub oak's hand.  
 Juniper smoke & cirrus cloud mist ease  
 over ovum moon, pearlescent light filling  
 the hollow of an antelope's eye.  
 Footsteps on wind awakens

# INTERVIEW: K I M ADDONIZIO

by Ramsey Mathews



Not only is Kim Addonizio an award-winning poet provocateur, she is a novelist, essayist, short story writer, and a budding playwright. Her many published books include two on the craft of writing: "Ordinary Genius: A Guide for the Poet Within" and "The Poet's Companion: A Guide to the Pleasures of Writing Poetry." Kim holds poetry workshops online and in the Oakland area. She regularly reads in public and will soon appear at a coffee house or college near you. Odds are, if you ask her, Kim will gladly entertain with her raunchy blues harmonica.

RIPRAP When did you start writing?

KIM ADDONIZIO I think I started writing around the first grade; before that I printed in neat block letters.

RR Can you describe your aesthetics? What does writing poetry mean to you?

KM Writing generally makes me feel less alone—reading other people’s writing, I mean. I read because it takes me somewhere other than my own head. I like understanding what I read, mostly—that is, I like the communicative function of writing. But I read for language, too. A novel, especially, isn’t very interesting to me at the level of plot; I read for style, for the sentences. And for the sensibility of another consciousness. As for my own writing, it just makes me happy to do it. It’s a way of getting outside of time.

RR How much does what you read influence your work or does it influence your work at all?

KM Everything influences me—art, music, experience, and yes, reading. I tend to read in the genre I’m writing, and try not to distract myself. I’ve been mostly reading plays lately, because I’m writing one. Reading is what taught me to write. My schooling helped, a little, but mostly I learned by reading other writers and trying to copy them.

RR Is there something you’ve always wanted to write a poem(s) about, but for which you have not

(yet) been able to find the right words?

KM There are truckloads of things I’ve wanted to write about, and haven’t—or have, but badly. Very often, you can’t choose your subject. It usually works out better if your subject chooses you.

RR Is it more productive for an aspiring poet to go to school or to go out and experience the “real” world?

KM Milan Kundera wrote a book titled LIFE IS ELSEWHERE. But really, it isn’t. If you’re in school, that’s your life— a part of it, anyway. You don’t somehow stop doing things like working, waiting in line, fucking up, falling in love, feeling anxious or hungry or thinking about the world or literature or anything else that happens. It’s a big world, though, and the academic one is such a small part of it.

RR I noticed you included the quote “Be the change you want to see in the world” at the bottom of your e-mail. Can poetry change the world?

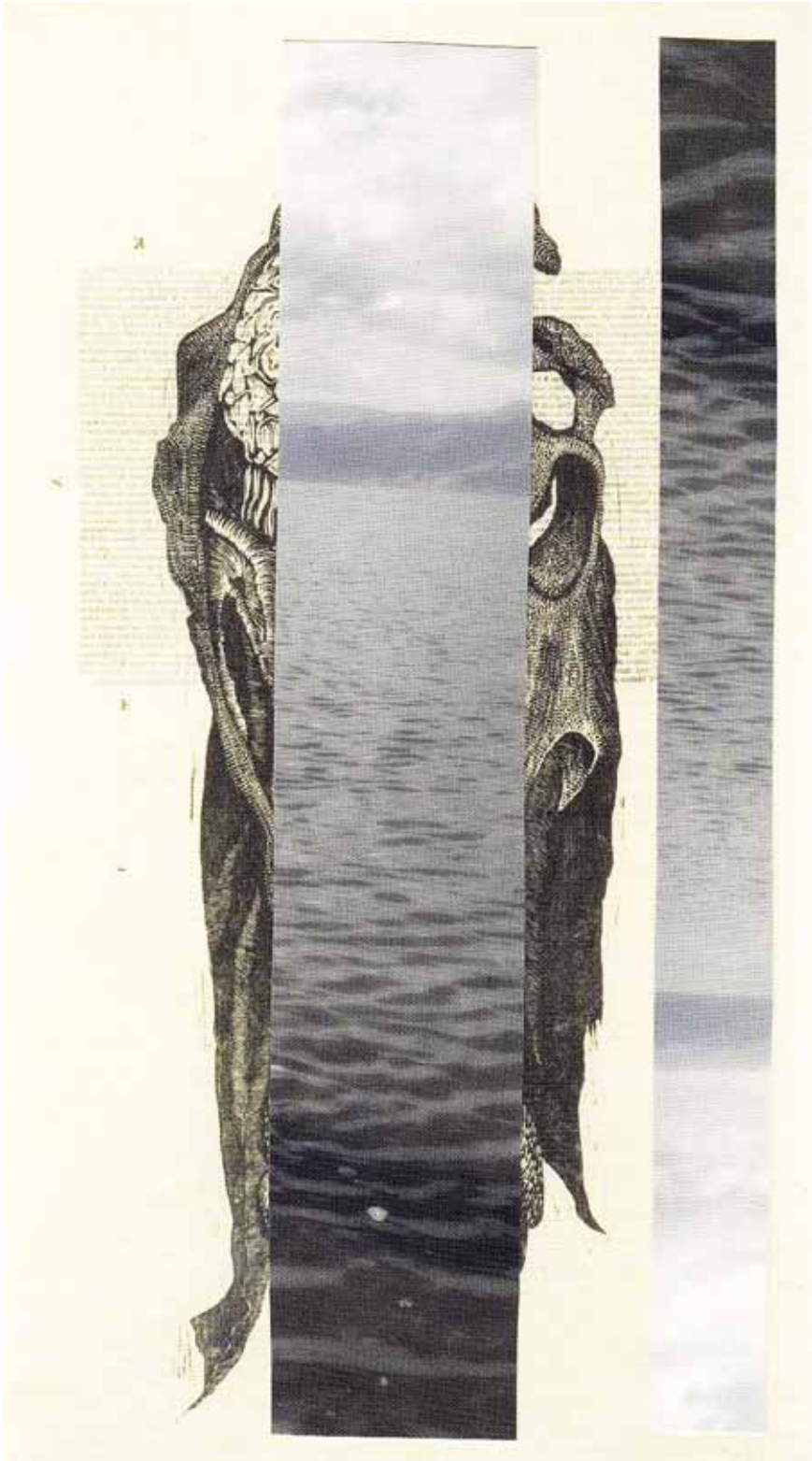
KM I guess it depends on your definition of “the world.”

RR What’s one question you’d like to ask yourself about your writing? Then please try to answer it.

KM Q: Ms. Addonizio, where does writing come from?

A: Beats the shit out of me.





Dwight Pavlovic *It's Not a Fish*

# CATULLUS

by Len Krisak

21

AVRELI, pater esuritionum,  
 non harum modo, sed quot aut fuerunt  
 aut sunt aut aliis erunt in annis,  
 pedicare cupis meos amores.  
 nec clam: nam simul es, iocaris una,  
 haerens ad latus omnia experiris.  
 frustra: nam insidias mihi instruentem  
 tangam te prior irrumatione.  
 atque id si faceres satur, tacerem:  
 nunc ipsum id doleo, quod esurire  
 me me puer et sitire discet.  
 quare desine, dum licet pudico,  
 ne finem facias, sed irrumatus.

Carmina, 21

Aurelius, sire of every appetite—  
 Not just of these, but all that ever were,  
 Or are, or will be in the years ahead,  
 You'd like to be my dear boy's sodomite—  
 An indiscreet and public, joking pair 5

Of clinging sidekicks who have tried it all.  
 It's all in vain! You think that you can snare  
 Me, but I'll dick your hungry face instead.  
 Too bad you don't behave this way when full,  
 Since if you did, I wouldn't say these things. 10

But since you don't, I fear that at your school  
 He'll only learn what thirst and hunger brings.  
 So stop it, while there's still time to be chaste,  
 Or I'll make sure you end up pecker-faced.

71

Si cui iure bono sacer alarum obstitit hircus,  
aut si quem merito tarda podagra secat.  
aemulus iste tuus, qui uestrem exercet amorem,  
mirifice est a te nactus utrumque malum.  
nam quotiens futuit, totiens ulciscitur ambos:  
illam affligit odore, ipse perit podagra.

72

DICEBAS quondam solum te nosse Catullum,  
Lesbia, nec prae me uelle tenere louem.  
dilexi tum te non tantum ut uulgus amicam,  
sed pater ut gnatos diligit et generos.  
nunc te cognoui: quare etsi impensius uror,  
multo mi tamen es uilior et leuior.  
qui potis est, inquis? quod amantem iniuria talis  
cogit amare magis, sed bene uelle minus.

Carmina, 71

If ever suffering arm-pit goat-smell was deserved,  
Or slow gout crippled someone, and it served  
Him right, then he who chafes your lover with his urges  
Has been afflicted fairly with both scourges.  
Every time they fuck, his suffering's double-grim: 5  
She smells the stench; the gout just murders him.

Carmina, 72

You said once, Lesbia, I was yours and you my own;  
That you'd spurn Jove, while I was yours alone.  
I prized you not the way some common lover would,  
But as a family-loving father should.  
I know you now, so though I burn more vehemently, 5  
You nonetheless mean far less much to me.  
You ask how this can be? Such pain makes me confess:  
I love you all the more, but like you less.

**8 1 5**

by Grant Schubert



pothole providence  
where employment stays unemployed  
a dirty scar carves the landscape  
ambitionless depths of muddy liquid  
the dark brown water waist high at every curve  
haves and have nots are easily identifiable  
let your finger navigate along the map's blue stripe

schools stand as mausoleums of progress  
darkened classrooms the blackened eyes of a disillusioned youth  
their boarded windows the broken teeth of education

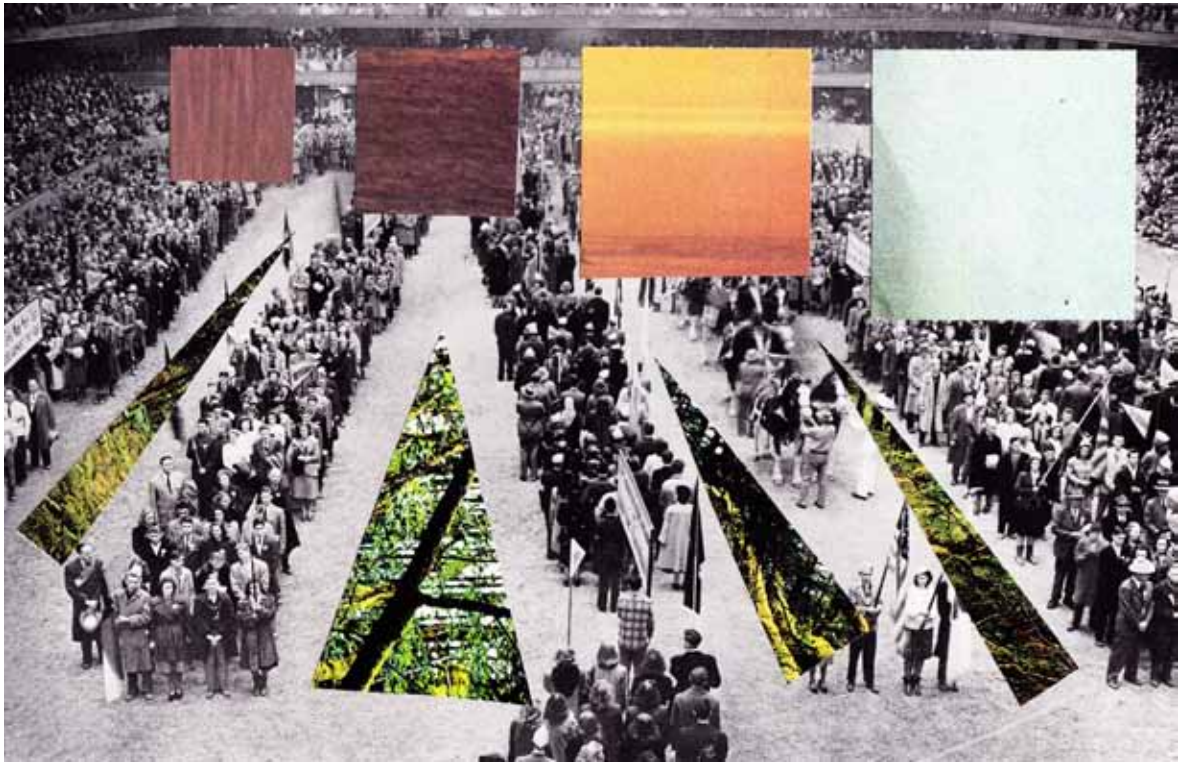
the only shining buildings: a courthouse and a jail

welcome home

the pangs of loyalty  
become the wounds of a martyr

I have seen the sacrifice  
its bellows un-echoed in dirt

everyone I have ever loved was born of this clay  
grew wings  
and never came back.





Tyler Spangler *Felt Footprint*

# L A D Y S A X O P H O N E

Tells her tale in blue notes  
that slice through the apathy  
Of the chemical town  
She takes her pain and turns it  
Into swing  
She is a love supreme  
A mother to all  
But a child unto jazz

# VICKSBURG, MISSISSIPPI

isn't it nice to  
know in 2012  
your biggest worry  
in mississippi  
is wondering  
if walgreens will  
have the soda you  
want

# I AM AN AMERICAN

by Cynthia Schubert

RIPRAP 35

I have elevated the mind of man  
with the Enlightenment ~  
But, I can't seem to fathom  
separation of Church and State.

I represent the free market and  
the pursuit of happiness~  
But, I continue to force many  
to find theirs in the shadows.

I spawned the man who gave us  
the Emancipation Proclamation~  
But, it took two little ladies to  
spark the fires of our civil wars.

I quadrupled my land holdings  
with a scheme called Manifest Destiny~  
But, in the process displaced and decimated an  
entire race of people.

I've preached democracy from  
my bully pulpits~  
But, denied the ballot  
to over half of my citizens.

I have fought and won  
the Great War to end all wars~  
But, can't find the recipe  
for world peace.

I have set precedents for  
due process and fair play~  
But, take advantage of the  
vulnerable, poor and different.

I have invented a weapon  
to destroy the earth~  
But, I have used it to ignite The Cold  
around the world for decades.

I have beaten down my brothers  
in the alleys of the ghettos~  
But, I have built courthouses  
to give the illusion of justice.

I have fought and died in  
the jungles of Vietnam~  
But, I have learned nothing  
about the heart of darkness.

I have sent my sons and fathers  
to war to "tear down that wall"~  
But, abet a begotten nation to  
build a new wall of exclusion.

I have built a rocket that  
goes faster than the speed of sound~  
But, I sit in filthy streets  
idling in traffic.

I have fed half of the  
people on the planet~  
But, I watch famine  
prevail on the Nightly News.

I sermonize on Sundays  
about God's love and forgiveness~  
But, I cannot forgive or love  
those who believe in another God.

I have built a thousand  
million homes~  
But, I evade the wanting eyes  
of the homeless.

I have unraveled the double  
helix of life~  
But, can't seem to come to  
a consensus on when life begins.

I have surpassed time with  
modern telecommunications~  
But, I have opened a  
new Pandora's Box.

I have the technology  
to put a man on the moon~  
But, am losing the wars on  
Poverty, Cancer and Drugs.

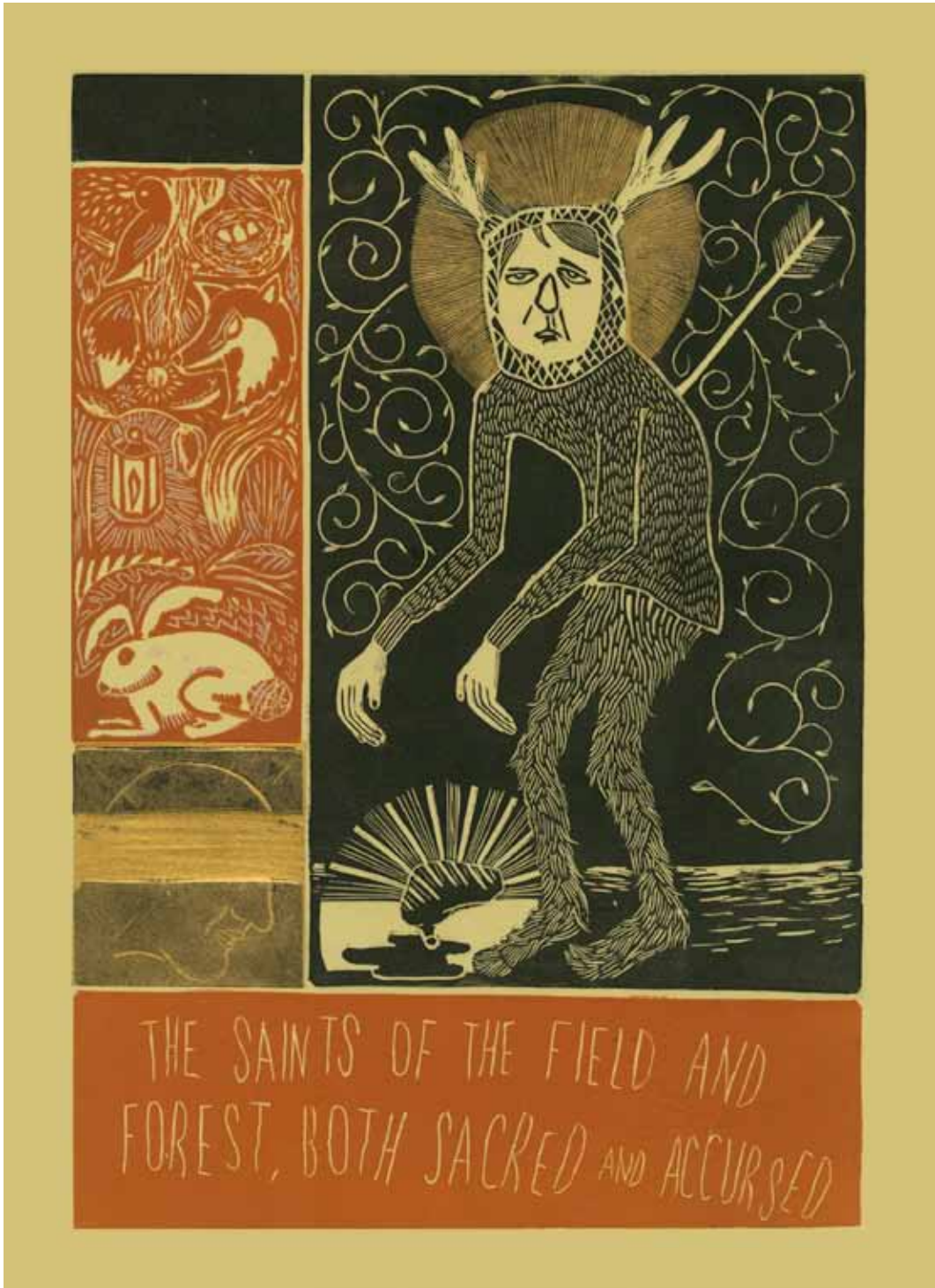
I live in the greatest country  
in the greatest time in history~  
But, I scorn the ground  
I stand upon.

I am proud,  
But, I am ashamed~  
I am an American.









# INTERVIEW: P A U L A P R I A M O S

by Jen French

RIPRAP 35



Paula Priamos is a California State University Long Beach MFA fiction alumni. She has recently authored her memoir, *The Shyster's Daughter*, an account of the close relationship she had with her controversial lawyer father. Her next project is a literary thriller which she is currently working on. She lives in San Bernardino with her husband, writer James Brown.

RIPRAP When did you start writing?

PAULA PRIAMOS In the second grade my teacher assigned the class to keep a daily journal. Instead, I asked permission to write an episodic story about a young orphaned girl who inherited a 7-UP factory. A lot of adventures occurred like competitors trying to break in and steal her secret formula for Shirley Temples which was at the time my favorite drink when my parents took us out to a nice restaurant. At the end of the year my teacher made copies of my journal and passed them out to students for some light summer reading. I was writing way back then.

RR Who are your major influences?

PP I was a sophomore in high school when I was first forced to read Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* and it was a changing point for me - the brevity and beauty of his words. It was a love story, an action story. I couldn't get enough and I realized that was the kind of writing I wanted to read because it's inspiring on so many levels. Of course, I also love other writers like Jeannette Walls, Tim O'Brien and Phillip Roth.

RR What made you decide to pursue writing as your career?

PP I'm not so sure I see writing as a career as much as I see it as one of the primary things that defines me. Another writer I know with several novels under his belt calls it a hobby but it's so much more to me than a pastime.

RR How much time do you set aside to write? Do you have a schedule? Does it fluctuate?

PP I try and set aside a couple hours every day to write. My teaching schedule lately has made it tough for any more. But I get up every morning around five a.m. because I tend to write my best work when I'm still coming to with a cup of coffee. If I'm working on a book, the story lives on in my head and it compels me to put it down to paper. I write

longhand in a spiral notebook first before I sit down at the computer. There are those days if I have the time where I'll write all day. For example, I wrote the chapter "Famished Frat Boys" from my memoir in one afternoon.

RR I'm sure you get asked this a lot but how was it living and writing side-by-side memoirs with your husband, James Brown? Any aesthetic obstacles or conflicts with this type of nonfiction?

PP Actually, I don't get this question asked of me a lot! I wrote my memoir, as most of us writers do, completely locked away on my own. I didn't pay attention to the content of my husband's memoirs or what he'd already written about me. My book is strictly my story as I see it and structurally my memoir is very different than his two nonfiction books. My husband is more of a supporting player in *The Shyster's Daughter*. At the heart of my story is a daughter and the love she has for her flawed and sometimes very funny Greek defense attorney father.

RR What made you decide to write a memoir?

PP My father called me the night before he died to tell me he'd just cheated death. A gunman in a ski mask approached his car door and threatened to blow his brains out. Instinctively, my father flipped the guy off, then drove away. But something about his voice, his story, didn't sound right, and I feared he wasn't telling me everything. The next morning he was found dead. I've been haunted by that phone call for years and it wasn't until I began writing a few nonfiction pieces that were published in the *New York Times Magazine* and the *Los Angeles Times Magazine* that I began to think I was ready to confront what must've happened to my father during those hours between when he called me and when he was found dead.

RR What type of feedback do you get from readers, friends and family about your unflinchingly raw memoir?

PP I had a female relative whom I hadn't heard from in years reach out and thank me for shedding light on some of the dark secrets in our family. At a reading recently another woman came up to me with tears in her eyes telling me that she, too, lost her father in a sudden way and she could relate to my story. She didn't feel so alone with her grief which I took as one of the greatest compliments.

RR What type of issues, if any, arise from writing a memoir?

PP Writing about my father brought back memories of him, both good and bad, which I had to reconcile with. There were scenes like his funeral that upon after writing it made me cry in private for about two days. But then there were other humorous moments I enjoyed reliving like the time my family walked in on two burglars carrying all of our loot on our dining room table out through the front doors of our house. I write in my memoir how my father asked what they were doing and one of the guys said it was okay. His friend lived at our home. My father turned his head like a dog hearing a high frequency

and then he cursed the guy out in Greek before taking a swing at him. He proceeded to chase both of the burglars, who were half his age, into some bushes blocks away like the cowards they were. My father was the stereotypical big mad Greek.

RR Are you working on anything now?

PP I'm working on a literary thriller which has been a lot of fun.

RR Any tips or advice you can give for aspiring writers?

PP Be confident in your writing but not arrogant. Be open to suggestions from others, weigh them, and then revise if you think it's necessary. I don't know how many drafts of a short story I'd written while I was here at CSULB my Thesis Chair Stephen Cooper had to read, yet he always encouraged me to revise until I felt sure. There have also been times while writing my memoir when I've chosen not to follow the advice of someone whose opinion I respect. Ultimately it's your work and you must stand by it.



**E L E G Y**

RIPRAP 35

by Mary Kinard

That business about waiting till you're dead  
to send flowers. None of that.  
We could have used lilacs for life supports  
until they disconnected them.

You were about gone, they said.

Rambling semi-comatose. Working out the past, they said—  
the pastures you plowed nine months pregnant  
that motley crew of kids, petunia beds in disarray.  
You slumbered through stories, sniveling women,  
the clod who knocked the Nambe vase.  
We hung on threads of words,  
squeezed hydrangeas onto the sill.

They said you were gone. But they were wrong.

You woke for FTD,  
even the mangled mess that six-year old brought,  
those half-decapitated daffodils  
—you kissed her fingers.

They said you "rallied."

You used the bedside, felt better, "ten pounds lighter."  
You said, "Ha! It wasn't cancer after all."

They said you were gone

when those chatty Bertrand sisters in Easter hats showed,  
sat on the bed,  
told stories, shoved three silk botanicals aside  
to make room for their pansies,  
those pansies with the plastic prong and card askew.

They stayed until they felt better

like those friends your kids dragged home,  
Harleys parked in your field, sleeping on the floor  
eating your huevos rancheros in the morning  
then weeding your walkways of tall perennials  
—you kissed their cheeks.

They said you had gone

just as FTD jammed the elevator, disrupting eight floors  
to bring red orchids.

Why didn't we have the damned funeral right there?

# SIMULTANEOUS

by William Jackson



Shattered limbs / sunlight / gigantic like a dictator at a podium / shapeless  
/ coming to mind / / umbrellas for rainclouds / wings / found a disaster  
/ peek at sunlight / fly / book of mysteries / on an asteroid bus careening  
toward a city of skyscrapers frozen in ice / singing a song / head-banging  
to a stampede of godless beasts & howling curses / watch the crazies / un-  
edited disease / no more time / rolling head tumbleweed / greed / looking  
for matches / looking for a miracle / beehive in your head / flowers bloom  
/ firing rifles at falling stars / chain-gun gunfire while the sound of crickets /  
passengers exit the spaceship / / briefly scratching the right ear / vpause-  
vavmomentv / graceless diamond / deciphering a language you once spoke  
in another aeon / bare feet cross the city street.



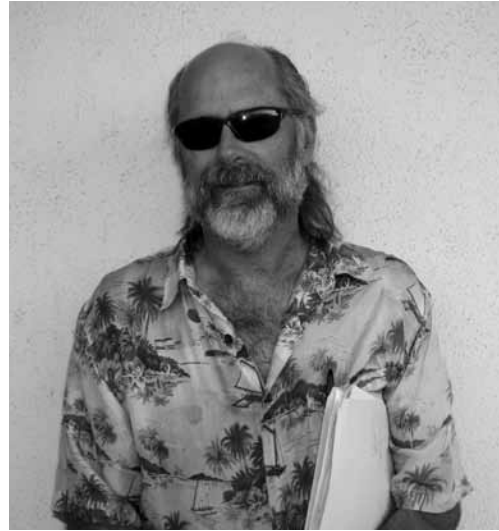
*Anonymous*



Charlie  
Alford

# INTERVIEW: F R E D V O S S

by Mark Friedlander



Fred Voss is a prominent voice on the Los Angeles and Long Beach poetry scenes, and is respected overseas as well, with six reading tours of Great Britain to his credit. A graduate of the University of California, Riverside, he has worked as a machinist for more than 30 years, principally in the once-booming Southern California aerospace industry, all the while continuing to write poetry. During this time, he published three books of poetry with the British press Bloodaxe Books: *Goodstone* (1991), *Carnegie Hall with Tin Walls* (1998) and *Hammers and Hearts of the Gods* (2009), which was selected one of seven "Books of the Year, 2009" by the U.K.'s *The Morning Star*. With a hard-earned grasp of the working world's realities, Voss grinds out his narrative poems using the language of the shop floor, and polishes them until they shine with the clarity of multi-faceted diamonds.

RIPRAP Who did you read when you were younger and who are you reading now?

FRED VOSS I started writing in 1978. I attended Ray Zepeda's novel writing class at CSULB in early 1980 and his advice and encouragement really helped, then I started drinking with Ray and Gerry Locklin at the floor-strewn-with-peanut-shells 49ers Tavern across from CSULB and became a dedicated writer, wrote 7 novels in 7 years. Then in 1986 I began writing poetry after the death of my father. Marvin Malone, editor of *The Wormwood Review* (legendary for being the main magazine publisher of Charles Bukowski's poetry), featured me in 1989 and I've been writing poetry ever since.

RR How does what you read influence your work or does it influence your work at all?

FV I read Whitman's poetry in High School. Also James Joyce's *Ulysses* and Albee's *Who's Afraid Of Virginia Woolf?* were huge influences in High School. Then at the age of 20 in college *On The Road* by Kerouac and *Crime And Punishment* by Dostoyevsky blew me away. Also at age 20 I discovered Charles Bukowski, and my life was changed forever. Now I still read Bukowski and Whitman and Kerouac and Dostoyevsky over and over. Other current huge influences are Neruda, the Romanian poet Tadeusz Rozewicz (he fought in the Resistance to the Nazis in WW2), Herman Melville, Hemingway, Twain, Carver.

RR Who did you read when you were younger and who are you reading now?

FV It influences it a lot, but subconsciously mostly. I certainly don't imitate anyone, and I stay true to my own voice, but the great writers greatly inspire me and stimulate me to get ideas and work hard at the writing.

RR Can you describe your aesthetics? / What does poetry mean to you?

FV Writing is a form of magic. It is another world the writer enters where strange magical transformative things happen, new directions are found, and anything is possible. I look at writing as dreaming while awake.

RR How much time do you set aside to write? Do you have a schedule? Does it fluctuate?

FV I developed a disciplined attitude toward writing when writing novels (write 2 to 4 hours a day every day in the morning) and carried it over to writing poetry. Now I spend 1 or 2 hours writing one poem every Saturday and Sunday morning right after waking. Even if I don't feel like writing, I do it. I find that once I get the writing going, I always get into it and am glad I wrote and come out with a poem. Writing is work to get the ball rolling and then at some point the magic happens and it isn't work anymore.

RR What tips or advice can you give to aspiring writers?

FV Keep at it. Keep writing. Put pen to paper (or fingers to computer keys) and do it. Gradually you will learn and grow and develop a voice. Then just keep at it some more.

RR How were you able to reconcile your political/philosophical or moral/ethical positions with working in aerospace, much of which, rightly or wrongly, I see as linked to the defense industry?

FV Entering the aerospace industry at the old Douglas Aircraft Company plant in Long Beach in 1979 was not a planned decision. I'd worked 3 years at a roaring, shaking furnace-hot steel mill where the veteran steelworkers jaws and fingers shook constantly, and felt myself near cracking, so I quit and wandered into Douglas because I heard they were hiring. It was "find some kind of work or end up in the street"; that's the reality of low-paying factory work. I didn't stop to think they might have me making Air Force parts. Then, I was laid off for two years and was about two inches from the streets again when I hired on at

the old Rockwell International at LAX. I didn't stop to worry that I'd be making parts for the Air Force again, I was just one of those guys on the shop floor grateful to land a job so he doesn't have to starve; that's the reality. But I do hope to atone for all those aircraft parts I've made that might end up killing people in wars I don't approve of by

writing my satirical poems about defense industry machine shops (also my first novel which is a satire on defense industry machine shops), and also my more serious poems about having to make such war parts, along with all my poems about all of the things ethical and otherwise we machinists must endure.



by Martin Ott

# THE SUBJECT OF MY FIRST CHILDHOOD POEM REVISITED

Green is a misunderstood color,  
the hue of unvisited cemetery  
plots, tendrils cracking building  
foundations post apocalypse,  
my seaward Norwegian gaze  
that has churned admiration  
and unemployment, the verve  
of acceleration and camouflaged  
brothers shooting up brush, mashed  
vegetables spat into moldy compost,  
sunlight and water dueling at dawn,  
the dangers of living, of forgetting.



I N K  
 Q U A K E

The white page is an eyeball  
 rolled back on the verge, glowing  
 with knowledge of the depths.  
 It is a blizzard beyond snow  
 caps or celestial freeze, blinding  
 nothingness, numb fingers to be  
 cut. The white sheet fills our bed  
 with unwritten tomes of exploration,  
 fear stained into it, a serif font.  
 The first poems were sheepskins,  
 clay pots and cave walls, the smoke  
 of living and war indistinguishable  
 from the story, bleached bones telling  
 us there is form in the void. The hand  
 begins the journey with its certain  
 nature, the fist, the massage on supple  
 shoulders, a handshake you know  
 would hold you from a cliff if the tale  
 were to grow fangs. Yes, even earth  
 makes it way to the tome with worms  
 that hook into consonants, syntax.  
 A poem's beginnings are flower  
 petals raining death across the globe.  
 Hand extended, we hear time flutter.  
 The white page on my desk is now  
 impure, the hope of a perfect poem  
 lost to the pen's dark tremors.

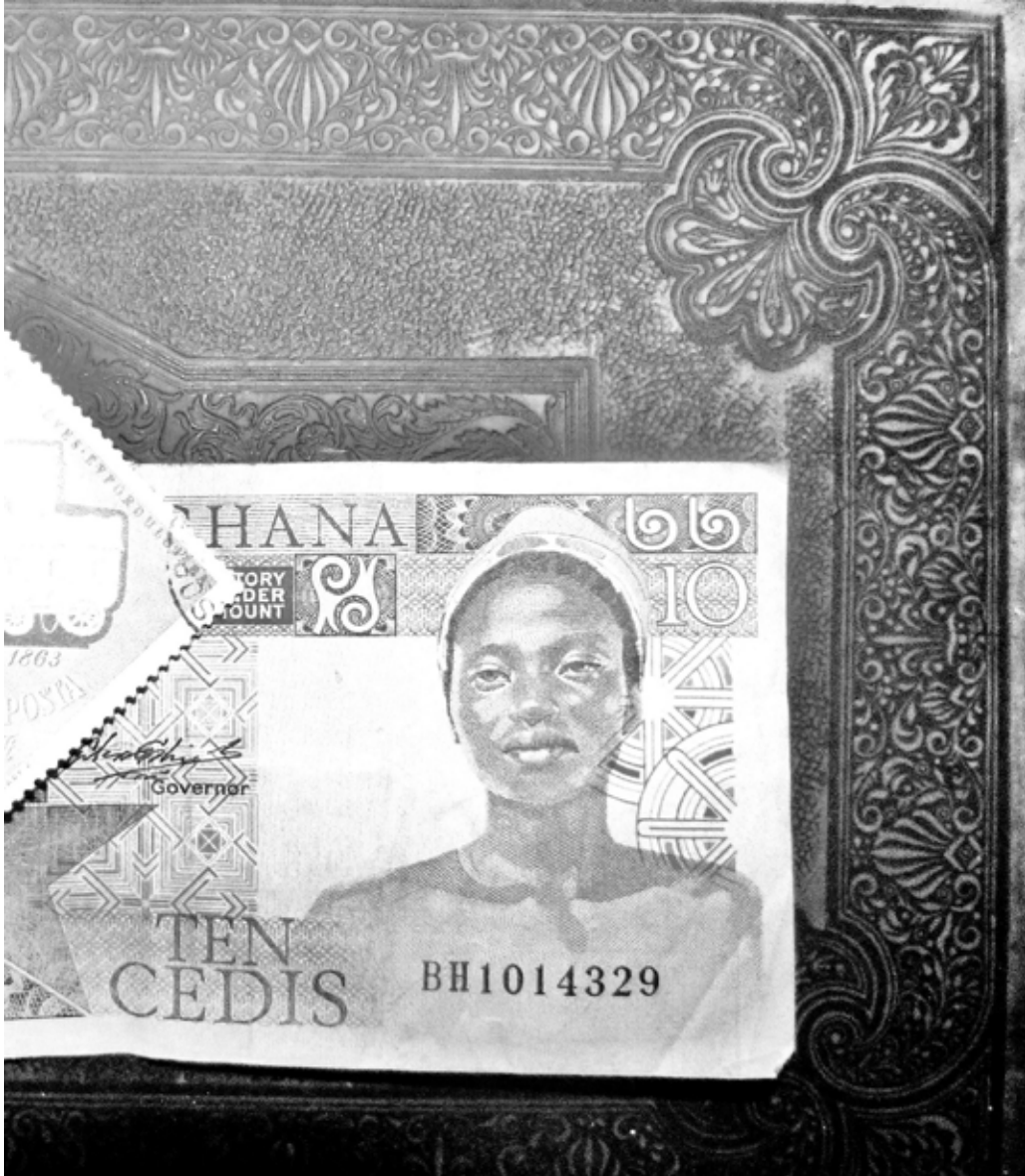
# H Y B R I D S

have a lot of interests. And aren't purists, burdened with the weight of internal consistency. There's no need for the kind of autobiography that is authorized in advance or licensed by holders of special rights. They prefer the semicolon; they're comfortable with the future conditional, and the kind of mixed messages that can be deciphered in more than one way. And pluralism—they don't think it's dangerous. What is the point of rigid adherence that ends up where it started? Where does it lead? Faithfulness doesn't have to be exclusive, does it? It can be shared, spread around, there are plenty of synonyms. Innocence is anxious to be discarded, that's just the way it feels. And as far as accidents go, unexpected or unintended, it isn't the first time. There's no statement with a balance at the end they don't bother to check anymore because it's always been right before.

by Peter Leight

# T O W E R

The pride of our city, the geographical center, the core of our existence, we don't need an acropolis or a bell with a clapper the size of an elephant's tongue, or a pinlike tip piercing the air. Perfectly balanced, unwavering, transferring the weight like a telephone. No root holds on from below, digging into the earth like a tuber, no internal bars reinforcing the structure with ligaments or cables attached to anchors and o-rings. There are no seams or slits. A noun and also a verb, towering over us, lifting us above ourselves, over walls and fences, tunnels and overpasses, bringing us together, even when we're not close to each other, even when we have nothing in common, no matter where we are or who our parents are. The same in every language family. We're not relying on translation—we've always preferred the law to the spirit of the law. The literal to the indescribable. Multiple meanings confuse us; disguises are often unfaithful, playing with our trust, distorting the sense of perception we rely on. Loyalty is also a tower, waiting for us to return, staying where it was when we went away, no matter how long it's been. Never turning away, have you noticed? Inspiration is a tower, rising up while also, like a lever, pushing away the Angelico blue sky. Not turning toward us—have you noticed? Not leaning toward us or loosening. It doesn't have much flexibility, it's not very responsive—indifference is also a tower, letting us know it doesn't care, reminding us we're not cared for. It never sways in sympathy—swinging is for swing sets.





Dwight Pavlovic *Apportionment*

# KING NIMROD: GENERAL CONTRACTOR

*- after Pieter Bruegel's "The Tower of Babel"*

by Robert Wynne

He regales a group of stonemasons  
with his generous estimations  
of heaven's proximity, as clouds

slide across the ragged upper reaches  
of the massive, unfinished tower.  
No one understands a word he says

but he doesn't know that yet. Only when  
the great stone blocks begin jutting  
jaggedly away from God, will he suspect

something has gone terribly wrong.  
As Pirandello would surely tell you,  
that's the trouble with being a character

in a story you haven't read: by the time  
you understand the whims of your creator,  
your name already has new meaning.

# CONTRIBUTORS

## Crystal Alexander

is an art education student at CSULB. She has participated in several shows including shows at the SAC Arts Gallery, University Art Museum and the Gatov Gallery. Her latest series has been on fire hydrants, and how they reflect our state as vessels.

## Eleanor Leone Bennett

is a sixteen year old internationally award winning photographer and artist . Her art is also globally exhibited.

## Mathieu Cailler

is a poet and award-winning short story writer. A graduate of Vermont College of Fine Arts, his work has been published in numerous literary journals, including Sleet, Two Hawks Quarterly, and Epiphany. Recently, he won the 2012 Short Story America Prize for Short Fiction.

## Kevin Chidgey

is a second year fiction writer in the CSULB MFA program. He has been an electrician, landscaper, cook, wild-land firefighter, and lumber-mill worker. Now he write stories about people he has met.

## Ben DuVall

is an artist and graphic design warlord living in Long Beach, CA. He is currently creating a visual ruckus while studying graphic design and political science at Cal State Long Beach.

## Matthew Dulaney

his stories and poems by can be found in the recent issues of Pembroke Magazine, Poydras Review, and Bryant Literary Review. He has written two novels, The Dead Know and An Unfinished House, both unpublished. He lives in Maryland.

## Shane Eaves

is currently a full-time graduate student in CSULB's M.F.A. program. He has received the William T. Shadden Memorial Award for his poetry, enjoys being outdoors, camping, and hiking, and has an affinity for staying up late.

## Mark B. Friedlander

a fourth-generation resident of Los Angeles, lives in his adopted hometown of Riverside, CA and is a first-year MFA student in poetry at CSULB. A retired social services professional, his poetry and prose have appeared or are forthcoming in Bellevue Literary Review, Evening Street Review, Oberon, San Diego City Beat, and San Diego Reader.

## Jen French

is a 2nd year fiction student in CSULB's MFA creative writing program. She is currently working on her thesis, which is a collection of short stories that focus on the dark complexities, oddities and humor of the human psyche. When she's not writing stories of pedophile compounds, hateful cronies and heroic hallucinogen peddlers, she enjoys spending her time swimming in the Pacific and dancing to cumbia.



Ricky Garni

is a writer and designer living in North Carolina. He recently condensed twelve manuscripts of poetry into one: *2% Butterscotch Ripple*. His other titles include *The Eternal Journals Of Crispy Flotilla*, *Maybe Wavy*, and *My Fifteen Favorite Presidents*.

Marcello Arturo Giagnoli

is a Graduate with BA in Creative Writing/Literature from Cal State Long Beach 2012. He enjoys writing, reading, running, listening to and collecting CDs, investigating the paranormal with his brothers group [www.paranormaldetectives.org](http://www.paranormaldetectives.org) Also he makes a radio show on Youtube Pink Cloud Radio: [www.youtube.com/user/fightclubmag9](http://www.youtube.com/user/fightclubmag9)

Wendy Sue Gist

her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in Dark Matter Literary Journal, Oyez Review, Pif Magazine, Rio Grande Review, The Chaffey Review, The Fourth River, Tulane Review and other journals. She lives in New Mexico near the United States/Mexico border with her husband and two dogs.

Chad Greene

is a graduate of the Master of Professional Writing Program at the University of Southern California. He is an assistant professor of English at Cerritos College. Whenever he isn't planning lessons or grading papers, he is attempting to put together a novel-in-stories tentatively titled Trips and Falls.

Fabiola Guzman

is a second year MFA poet. She enjoys writing nonfiction and hopes to publish a memoir. Family is a powerful force in her writing. She dislikes hurting any creatures including mice and ninja spiders. She enjoys snowboarding, hiking, swimming, and video games. Her favorite foods include raspberries and salami.

Jeff Hallenbeck

will be graduating in Spring 2013 and taking my love of writing with him to new and exciting places. He would like to thank RipRap, his parents, and all of the great English Professors at CSULB. It has been an amazing journey.

Gaia Holmes

lives in Halifax, UK. She is a part time creative writing lecturer at the University of Huddersfield and free-lance writer who works with schools, libraries and other community groups throughout the West Yorkshire region. In her spare time Gaia is a DJ for Phoenix FM, Calderdale's community radio station. She plays accordion with the band 'Crow Hill Stompers'. Her 2nd poetry collection, *Lifting the Piano with one hand is due out with Comma Press in Spring 2013*.

Monica Holmes

is a second year fiction writer in the MFA program. Her own writing is based on her experiences growing up in the Los Angeles area. This, as is all of her work, is dedicated to her father, who first taught her there is a "T" in "Listen."

William Jackson

was born and raised in Los Angeles, CA. He has given readings around L.A. at places like The Goethe Institut, Lili Bernard's studio in Chinatown, and Lawrence Asher Gallery. As of now he has been published in *Gambling the Aisle*. He enjoys cold sake and long walks on the fire.

Erren Geraud Kelly

received his B.A. in English, Creative Writing from Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge. His works has appeared in over 80 publications in print and online. He is also the author of the chapbook "Disturbing the Peace," on night ballet press. He currently lives in Chicago.

Mary Kinard

received a BA with an emphasis in creative writing in 2008. While pursuing an MFA Fiction degree at CSULB, she makes time for scrapbooking, the works of Frank McCourt and Rick Bragg, and collecting insects with her grandsons. She loves God and Pennsylvania above apple pie and bright flannel shirts.

Len Krisak

his most recent books are Virgil's Eclogues and Ovid on Love, both University of Pennsylvania Press. Recipient of the Robert Penn Warren, Richard Wilbur, and Robert Frost Prizes, with work in the Antioch, Hudson, PN, and Sewanee Reviews, he is a four-time champion on Jeopardy!

Peter Leight

lives in Amherst, Massachusetts. His poems have appeared in Paris Review, Partisan Review, AGNI, and other magazines.

Zachery Mann

lives in Los Angeles and attends CSU Long Beach toward an MFA in Creative Writing. He has lived in many cities in California and one city in Russia. This is his first publication.

Ramsey Matthews

is a first-year MFA poet. He grew up in rural Georgia. As a kid he worked in tobacco, soybeans, and peanuts, where he learned the art of cow tipping. He camps and climbs, especially at Joshua Tree, where he broke his leg. "When all other inspirations fail, there remains the surreal nature of love to write about."

Jax NTP

is a second-year MFA poet and the Coordinator of the MFA Reading Series. Her thesis and poetry explore the psychology of the grotesque, identity&gender binaries, and "neurosis" the velocity of neurotic paralysis in both modern and surreal environments. She has an affinity with Jellyfish and Polaris.

Martin Ott

is a former U.S Army interrogator, currently living in Los Angeles, where he writes poetry and fiction, often about his misunderstood city. His book Captive won the De Novo prize, C&R press. He is coauthor of Poets' Guide to America (Brooklyn Arts Press). Find out more at [www.martinottwriter.com](http://www.martinottwriter.com).

Dwight Pavlovic

is a self-taught multimedia artist based in West Virginia, where he was originally trained in Religious Studies and History. In addition to his collages, he works as the volunteer editor of international DIY/arts magazine Decoder and helps manage a boutique record label called Crash Symbols.

Dan Pinkerton

lives with his family in Des Moines, Iowa. Work of his has appeared in Subtropics, Sonora Review, Crazyhorse, Boston Review, Cimarron Review, Salamander, and the Best New American Voices anthology.

Grant Schubert

fell in love with words through hip-hop music. Eventually the words were stripped of their bass and still resonated. Grant was born in Rockford, Illinois and currently teaches composition at Rock Valley College and College of Dupage. Grant enjoys writing in the third person.

Cynthia Schultheis

is an alumna of CSULB, earning her M.A. in U.S. History in 1994. She has taught at the community colleges before returning to her alma mater. Presently, she is the Assistant Director of the campus' Multicultural Center. Cynthia has written poetry since her teens, and this particular poem, "I Am An American" is one she's been revising for the last 20 years. She is also an arts advocate and over the years at the MCC, she has commissioned student artists for two murals; one with six women of various cultural backgrounds and the other with four paintings of pyramids, "Ancient Pyramids-Modern Pyramids" which includes CSULB's pyramid.

Tyler Spangler

After running a punk venue that was promptly shut down by police, "a yearbook on acid" was the first critique Tyler Spangler received in art school. Fueled by heavy music and the raw nature of surfing, Tyler erects fragmented landscapes.

Valerie Stauffer

works as a technical consultant and is district leader of the Greenwich, Connecticut, Representative Town Meeting. Her work has appeared in *The Alembic*, *The MacGuffin*, *Inkwell*, *California Review (CQ)*, *The Rhode Island Review*, and *The New Laurel Review*. For fun, she has cycled in Tuscany, China and India.

Nicole Stranz

creates fine art pieces, one is on permanent display at Providence St. Joseph's Medical Center. She's drawn animation for Walt Disney Feature Films and was recently published in *The Courage to Write: An Anthology and Inscape*. Nicole currently pursues a Creative Writing degree at CSULB.

Mony Vong

is a second year MFA fiction writer. She is a writer, a mother, a lover, a girl, a purveyor of books, and the domestic goddess. She's lived in many places and countries, but the place she's most comfortable in is in the *The Great Gatsby*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *Mice and Men*, *Ask the Dusk*, and *Charlotte's Web* among many other favorites.

Cory Wilson

is a student at Cal-State University, Long Beach. In a previous life, he worked as a musician, signed and dropped; a music publisher, Warner/Chappell; a roadie, Nine Inch Nails; and a real estate salesperson. Mostly, he loves his children. He graduates spring 2013, with a Bachelor's degree, English.

AJ Winters

fell in love with Jo March at age three and has been literarily ruined ever since, convinced books are more precious than money and living space.

Bill Wolak

has just published his eighth book of poetry entitled *Whatever Nakedness Allows with Cross-Cultural Communications*. He is currently working on a translation of the Italian poet Annelisa Adolorato with Maria Bennett. Mr. Wolak teaches Creative Writing at William Paterson University in New Jersey.

Robert Wynne

earned his MFA from Antioch University. He is the author of 6 chapbooks and 3 full-length collections of poetry, including "Museum of Parallel Art" (2008, Tebot Bach Press), and his latest, "Self-Portrait as Odysseus", which depicts Odysseus as a modern day business traveler.

Changming Yuan

4-time Pushcart nominee and author of *Allen Qing Yuan*, holds a PhD in English, teaches independently and edits *Poetry Pacific* in Vancouver. Yuan's poetry appears in 629 literary publications across 24 countries, including *Asia Literary Review*, *Barrow Street*, *Best Canadian Poetry*, *BestNewPoemsOnline*, *Exquisite Corpse*, *LiNQ* and *London Magazine*.



