# NORTHRIDGE REVIEW

FALL 1989

# Northridge Review

## Fall 1989

Cover art, "Cup 1"(back) and "Cup 2"(front), is a pair of oil paintings on plywood by Marjan Nirou.

*Northridge Review* invites submissions continuously between September and May. Manuscripts should be accompanied by a cover page that includes the author's name, address, telephone number, as well as the titles of the works submitted. *The author's name should not appear on the manuscript itself.* Please limit submissions to three short stories and/or five poems. Photography and graphics are to be in black and white; there is no limit to the quantity of these submissions. Manuscripts and all other correspondence should be sent to: *Northridge Review*, Department of English, California State University, Northridge, CA 91330, or dropped into the basket marked "Submissions" on top of the faculty mailboxes in SAT 710. Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope.

# Awards

Two awards are given annualy by *Northridge Review* in recognition of the finest works published in the Spring and Fall issues of *Northridge Review*.

**The Helen Helms Marcus Award**, established by Helen Marcus, is given in recognition of the best short story published by a CSUN student. The winner of this award receives two hundred dollars.

The winner of this award for 1989 is Glenn Dwiggins for his story, "Sign Down," published in the Spring 1989 issue. Thanks to Jewell Rhodes for her help in judging the entries.

The **Rachel Sherwood Award**, given in memory of Rachel Sherwood, recognizes the best poem published by *Northridge Review*. The winner receives fifty dollars from the University and will be acknowledged alongside the name of Rachel Sherwood.

The winner of this award is Herman Fong for his poem, "Train Crash, Summer 1988," which appears in this issue on page 47. Thanks to Cherryl Armstrong for her help in judging the entries.

In addition, *Northridge Review* proudly presents the winning poems of the annual award given by the **American Academy of Poets**. The poem in this issue is "The Cost of Repair," by Davi Loren.

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# Poetry

*Davi Loren*

## The Cost of Repair

The main line finally burst.
Water spewed upward into the shingles,
cascaded down into the wallboard,
turned our solid home into paste.

Jake strangled the valve with a wrench
and the hissing stopped. His eyes
cloud with exhaustion. It always
seems to come down
to money.

I watch the last lingering drop
fall from the faucet,
and then slosh to the wading table
to help dissect the budget.

To the dull stuccato of pencil scratch
on a yellow micro-lined pad,
we redefine our most cherished needs
as luxuries. We slice away
the less than vital organs
with parched, steady hands.

My books, his music,
my beloved new vocation
float silently past our ankles.
What good is poetry, he asks,
to a person without water?

The pencil falls and he is silent.
We have measured the cost.
I slice open the last persimmon
from our garden tree
and hold it gleaming to the light.
Orange on glowing orange,
like the spokes of a translucent wheel
its sap bursts starlike from the center
radiating in a perfect circle.

## To an Old Friend

I almost did it.
When your arm
stretched and arched softly
over the back of the couch,
fingers brushing the vacancy,
I almost set down my mug
and crossed the room
to curl up in you
and finish once again
the circle you began

I almost forgot
in that split of an instant
the wedge of years between us,
the husband and children, potted plants, pets,
which sprouted with shameless ease
in your wake.

What glorious disorder
your life would have suffered
with toys underfoot
and a regular job

I tug at my teabag and sit far apart
with a cat on my shoulder
a child in my lap,
and gaze at the shadow
so still in your arm.

*Daniel Fogg*

## In a Restaurant That Recently Changed Back Into a Diner

My face
reflects yours. You
lean over a pink formica table
and kiss me.
Chrome everywhere
reflects neon elvises (wearing blue shoes) and
cardboard marylins (standing over the air
vent), and jimmydean as well in his
red jacket.
It reflects us, too (along with a little grease)
above the turquoise lunch counter.

> I remember the picture from your underwear
> drawer: You with a bee-hive, wearing
> the New Look, holding my brother in a blanket
> (blue for BOY), behind you, a three-bedroom
> house, beside you, a man and the New Frontier
> on the horizon.

The bleached waitress (named Stella) interrupts
your grandchild anecdote with
the daily special. There is the
ever-present threat
of MSG.

I came along in the 60's, late
in your child-bearing years.
People were wearing their hair longer then.
And the war made its way over the ocean and
into the three-bedroom house that my brother
ran away from--dodging draft, and that my father
walked out on, leaving you with a mortgage
and a son.

The loud stereophonic jukebox (also chrome) plays
something bluesy as
we chew half-wilted salads and sip
cherry phosphates.

Once, in the late 70's, I turned
on the t.v. and was told I was
a "Latch-key Child." Puberty hit
me while you waited in a gas-line.

Now, seated in a booth made of that same red
sparkley stuff as the seat of my first bike,
you ask me unimportant questions.
I shade lies in between bits of
lighter conversation.
The word (not the color) blue
reflects itself somewhere among all the flashing
pastels of the diner. You slip me a twenty
under the table and
reach for the check.

## untitled

A bird came down
in front of my mother's house
as she swept her stairs
the other day. She
shooed it away with a hard
look and the head of her broom.
As she's sweeping her walk, the
dust makes a cloud around
her; and she thinks wasn't this
somehow easier a dozen years
ago. She straightens her back
when she reaches the curb, and
groans. Her mended apron is covered
with gray flowers that have faded
to blotches. Age spots.

She stands there on the sidewalk
for a moment. She gawks at cars.
They widened the street one year. She
grew short the next--no longer fitting
into the neighborhood. Her flat shoes
are firmly planted, and she looks up
into the wires to where the
bird waits.

## Facts about Goats

They're always late.
They can't cut hair.
They are frequently caught borrowing things
you'll never see again.
They take too many showers.
They have bad breath after drinking too much.
They drink too much.
And never (NEVER) expect them to
know how you're feeling or
where the bank is.

They are the "other" animals at the zoo,
The cheetah food,
The ones you have to see 10 of
before you get to the Lions.
With names that are completely
Unpronounceable,
and that just sort of
stand there.

They don't keep their apartments clean,
Can't wash dishes,
Apologize,
or open the right end of a milk carton.

They're cute little white things
with four legs, horns and beards
that can eat a tin can, climb rocks,
and are frequently

associated with
Satan.

They mean no harm.
They're just always out of something.
And are far too suspicious to ever be romantic.
But they love you
(sort of)
And you love them (sort of)

They're really not that interesting
(once you know them)
And what bugs you the most is
There's absolutely nothing
(nothing)
no thing
about them that is
in the least
ideal.

*Caesar Romero*

## Red Head Mind

Some one once described the
wrists of women as delicate and thin.
I've seen yours, they're heavy and
strong.

And some one once wished that
words were grass, meaning
why use them, why not just lie
on them, relax on them,
walk on them.

I've heard your words as sure
as alarmclocks they're expedient like
the fragile arctic ecology.

I tell you these things in
the morning because that's
when I feel most paralyzed,
as if only my mouth works,
but I can't kiss you
it's too early.

So, I tell you these words
that you take so seriously,

as if nothing is funny about a
cool wide lawn,
as if a joke is the farthest
thing from your
red head mind.

## The Only Fact

Sometimes it's when I'm in
my car making a left turn
smoking a cigarette evening out
the wheel as the street straightens.

From the corners of my eyes
in pores as extreme as my skin
stretches I can feel him coming
up out of me.

Around me
to my fists on the wheel I think
back through the years
as loud as buzzsaws
and the practicing of a child
on a piano they
pour on me these years.

I am him to the extent
of the softness around
my mother's eyes.
Now I know what all the
preparation was for,
the rigor, the persona, the
calamity
and the blood deep thoughts

that are mine
the body that is mine
all come down
like a game show
to the softness around my eyes.

*David McIntire*

## Never Sleep With a Poet

never sleep with a poet
he'll see symbols all over
your body
(a poet never sees a breast or a thigh
unless he's eating chicken)

a poet sees endless oceans of undulating ecstasy
a poet sees mountains of gorgeous flesh
a poet never feels you
    -inside or outside
you cease to exist
your body becomes his
your soul becomes nobody's
you become one huge metaphor

never sleep with a poet
he'll only write about you later

*Bobbie R. Coleman*

## Dancing With Grampa Jake

He smiles, tells me
I'm a smart little girl
will make someone a good wife.
My parents say, respect your elders
call him Grampa Jake; dance with him.
The band plays Glen Miller
who died before I was born;
he tells me, this
is how grown-ups dance
not like the trash
your friends listen to.
His hand rubs slowly up my spine,
each vertebra the note
of a chromatic scale
creeps silently up my sweater,
finds the strap
to my training bra
shoots electric current up my backbone
forms a maelstrom in my gut.
He chuckles and fidgets,
the clasp tight
as my clenched jaw.
My parents beam
at their big girl, poised
and grown at ten.

Shallow breath passes my ear
sweat beads his forehead,
I grimace, wait for the band
to end the Moonlight Serenade.

*Annette Cenkner*

## Diane's Hometown

Dear Diane, do you remember the weekend on the lifeguard tower?
It rained while we got high. The beach was never so beautiful.
From Friday to Sunday we never came down once.
Do you remember the banana bread we made?
For three days that's all we ate.
On Monday I felt I'd die from the vomiting and the headache.
But still, it wasn't so bad, was it?

Remember when you shaved your head like Bowie on Alladin Sane?
My hair was purple, green and blue. And all those places
that threw us out along with all our friends.
I thought we'd have them forever, those friends.
At least I thought I'd have you.

Now you've gone back
to that podunk town in Ohio to play the role
of the perfect mid-western wife. Two boys
and a husband with initials instead of a name.
Why don't you come back to L.A.?

I know you hate me now.
You found out I fucked the love of your life.
But that was before we were friends

and before he knew you were alive.
But Diane you must realize that
he was never good enough for either of us.
I know he was brilliant then, but look at him now,
living with some dredge of a hippie girlfriend.
He could have been anything. Now he's afraid
to leave his house and his free-base pipe behind.
That could have been your life, Diane.

Come back to L.A. where it isn't a sin
to steal your best friend's lover
and love is something to pursue and not fall into.
In L.A., matters of the heart aren't restricted by gender.
Your friends are here. I'm here.

Diane, it broke my heart when
I heard those things you said about me.
I know you wanted revenge.
I think you found it.
Come back to L.A.
Come back to L.A.
Love Always, A.

## Elektra's Recipes

He asked me if I knew Elektra
He said she had
        an underabundance of knowledge
        and an unresolvable conflict
He told me about a night
they'd gone to this deli
on the east side of LA
and chatted until 4 AM

about Ming Dynasty Kimonos and
pot roasted potatoes and
he asked her if she knew me but
she had deferred and
was he going to have chocolate
or nutmeg on his cappucino
And then he said he hadn't seen her
for some time and
wondered if maybe I had
I said I didn't know her
and did he try
the corned beef on rye

He said he knew of this dive bar
off of Sunset and Vine
where Elektra went from time
to time and got real drunk
and possibly could be enticed
to take off her shirt

He said that if you stayed up all night and
saw Elektra at dawn
her hair turned to phosphorescent green
as long as no one else was around

Once they had stayed awake for
3 days straight he said
drinking and taking LSD
and at 11:45 of the 3rd night
she told him that
one time she took 11 hits of acid
and saw God and at midnight she
would transform into Betty Crocker

Tonight she may be at that house
on Ozone with the Ionic columns and
the roadrunner out in front and

if not he would go to this club where
she frequently could be found on a Thursday night
drinking Kirin with the junkmen and
he said she had
        an underabundance of knowledge and
        an unresolvable conflict and had I ever
        tried the Bloody Marys there
I said no but
I thought Elektra had

*Sidney Allen*

## Orange Sestina

I pull up to the red light,
fish for my wallet as I wait,
call out, "oranges."
A bag full is passed through the window.
I give the vendor a dollar.
The light changes, I continue to drive.

Los Angeles is all about "the drive."
A little water and a lot of light.
Ideal driving conditions and top dollar.
Don't wait.
If you get rich, outside of your window,
you can grow trees full of oranges.

There is a sour taste to most backyard oranges.
Maybe it's the car exhaust, from the drive
way. But they are nice to look at, through the window.
You can install a light.
To see them at night, you don't have to wait
for the weekend to see the fruits of your dollar.

If you can spare an extra dollar
and you don't mind dulling the reds and oranges,
tint your glass. Save your face while you wait,

during your drive.
Filter our glorious light.
Reduce squinting, through the window.

To be really exclusive, mirror the window.
Another way to express the dollar.
Anonymity at the traffic light,
also reduces heat, eliminates orange
rays. Kind of separates one from the drive.
Puts you with the heavies that can throw their weight.

Or you can wank-off, while you wait.
No one will see, through the one-way window.
It could liven up the drive.
Mirrored windows may be a dollar
well spent, as well as the one for oranges.
We seem to need something to do with that time at the light.

Something while we wait, cheap at one dollar.
Gazing out of the window, dreaming of oranges,
savoring the drive, drinking the light.

*Lois Shimazaki*

## Cancer

Your eyes are black marbles that
sink deep into dark sockets; your
face wrinkled, a scrunched brown
paper bag that someone tried
to smooth out; unfold. The white
sheets with blue "Holy Cross Hospital"
line lie starched across your
bloated spleen that the doctor
said will reduce with diuretics.

I hold your hand, feel protruding
veins bubbling up, standing tall on
bone and know there is no cure.

I want to run my fingers through
your hair and kiss you but the
pressure on your face might
cause skin to collapse and I'd be
kissing teeth, gums. I'm afraid like
the first time I slept alone in my
room with the light off. I wish
you'd come into my room, tell
me fairies are for real and no
dragon ever harmed a sleeping child.

## The Move

Thirty-two hours, black road;
yellow lines dash highway at
fifty-two per minute. I stare
hypnotized—Vision eclipses to
sound, a mesh of reality and sleep.

We arrive here, backs hunched,
seeping sap spindling to ground.
Our eyes weak, red and legs unstable
rocking docks on calm sea.
Tomorrow we unpack our lives
out of a rented U-Haul but
tonight we sleep heavy on
bare floor letting our souls
find their misplaced bodies.

*Karen Mann*

## frank

frank
is a friend of mine
we've never actually
shared a word.
it's all done through the eyes.
i recall
the first time we met
he ran like a sissy
through the square.
i thought
i don't like
people who wear brown belts
especially yours
so tattered and worn.
frank
must have heard my eyes
because
he wrote in the dirt
fuck you
with the toe of his shoe.

*Suzanne J. Ghiglia*

## Letter to God

I'd like to squat
right here, bend my
knees, fall
on my hands
on the damp ground
and smell

Earth, receding
from my slow
fingers, rotating
dervish, you spin
tomatoes off my
windowsill. I
planted a tree but
the roots
can't hold
the whole

house in place.
My cool, able hands
hold pencils
instead, or keys,
a musical instrument.
What

more? What else
can I do, but
play my flute and
pray?

When I spread
my legs
I want you to smell
a garden: a jar
saved for cuttings.
When I cry
I need to know
there is a place

for tears, a few
seeds, and mulch
I saved
from the kitchen.

## Weeds

I've been hit by a lead pipe
in the belly
if anyone calls
2:33pm Alaskan Air
to Oakland
wide steps up
their old house
Jenny warm

Frank trying to watch
All-Stars (you also might be watching)
I want nothing to do
(scuba tank

in fridge
with a hose)
drink Dave's homemade beer Jenny says the word
"Brewmeister"

out back she
stoops to
yank one weed
"That's enough"

can't kill the dinosaur plants
(I have them too in the strawberries) pull and pull
they keep
coming back

not everyone has somewhere
else to go

we share
the need to put seeds in
ground

study rows
of potatoes
ruby-leaf lettuce
decide which seedlings go

which to spare
(don't think how to pay
the airline)

apple blossoms fascinate
where I live too hot

beer in my calves arches heavy
stomach begins to
dissolve

Rome fell slow
they drank from leaden-
ware died drunk
poison in their veins
like rates
in pipes can it really start
with the dishes?

Frank on the porch
with a glass of Dave's beer
All-Stars lost

compost heap (we all contribute) if
I weep in Jenny's
garden

eventually
all matter reaches the roots

*Paula Licht*

## valentines

i brought you poisoned candy, ha!
    but you spit them out, one by one--
crushed chocolate on our Persian rug.
    next year? i'm thinking, i'm thinking . . .

mine is wrapped so neatly:
    ribbons curled like big fat tongues;
i rip them out, one by one.
    just what i've always wanted:

a solid gold tarantula.
    i toss it out the window, BOOM!
you almost got me that time, dear.
    try your luck again next year.

at least i still have the foil balloons.
    i love you, i love you, i do.

*Kristina McHaddad*

## Language

(for Suzanne)

We read to one another
until our voices ground down to gravel
in your room
gray with the smoke of cigarettes
you smoked back to back
in one continuous cloud,
the dim light settling like dust
on the silk and black lace
hanging on your walls,
slips of cloth falling limp without a body.
Like an invitation through a closed door,
your words pulled the color from my skin
and had me searching for an open window,
black night air
and cold water.
I thought I saw the wallcoverings
slip down over our bare shoulders--
the cool silk draped across our breasts
and the soft touch of old lace at the backs of our knees--
the pages of your manuscript scattered across the floor
igniting our feet
as we twirled, two girls
circling your room,
white pages rising
and catching in our loosed hair.

## The Reason It Is Like This

I hold every minute
in my hands mouth eyes,
pull each second through
the pores of my skin
and then back out again.
On any given day
bruises might surface
and raise purple,
my lips swell and bleed,
my eyes drown in on themselves.
There is no cloth
covering this body,
no color that does not come
from under the skin.

## Water at Night

The moon on the water
is thousands and thousands of little silver fish
quickly and silently
slipping together,
fish without water
in the largest shallow bowl,
so much silver as to keep and move
the boats that are grounded there.

I watch the black night water
beneath us
with you sitting beside me
on that pier
on that ocean
still and not moving
like we both know how to swim it.

That water
is more black than the sky,
deeper and stronger than the earth;
it holds me from turning toward you,
touching you,
saying, "Let's go in."

*Gordon Preston*

## Windjammer

The first sight
above Salt Creek
the ocean a mix
of dark colors
to answer back
the topping whitecaps
from the wind.
Somewhere
she stands in a doorway
as I quicken my pace
with the tempo
of the sun
loosing light
my travel north
highway 1.
This is how I know
the wool pea coat so well
I hug to myself
and imagine
rolling the roadside
without care.
Sometimes
I even come close
to the hush
before the surf

collapses upon air
like sound
curled over
in a wave.
Everything I say
now frozen
like purple clouds
I was remembered
once
I was told
a walk between points
in her sleep.
I find myself
turning
to climb down
not far from the noise
of road
to the saltfoam
of the tide coming
the sea cliffs above me
and the sails
like wings beyond my voice
are alone
I swim to them
through the evening sky.

*Mary Harris*

## On the Back Burner

Use it up, wear it out.
Make it do, do without.

I have always settled for less,
swept up crumbs and been grateful,
devoured a scrawny chicken back
as greedily as a goat.

Women make more of anything than it is worth.
We compose paintings from trays of trapped lint
and sew enduring quilts from petty scraps of cloth.
We cultivate gardens in cups on kitchen windowsills.

I have stewed long enough.
Now I am weary of morsels and leftovers,
his old car passed down to me,
furniture salvaged from discards,
coupons to redeem myself at the supermarket.

I want to vacation at a destination
not adjacent to a golf course.
In dreams I wear silk dresses on weekdays
like women in soap operas.
I crave chicken breasts,
the first slice of French toast
still warm.

## Coming of Age, 1969

The view was groovy
from where I sat beside
Stuart Butz in his new
custom Mustang (metallic
olive green) with bucket seats
and louvered rear window.

He drove me everywhere,
fast and steady, from Griffith Park
to Point Mugu. He never said
much. We never went
all the way.

After his father died of cancer,
Stu cut classes, raced
around the valley like a pinball
with his stereo blasting Led Zeppelin
and parked on Mulholland Drive
alone. He grew a mustache.

I saw him not too far back.
He and his wife were holding
hands at a garage sale. Stu wore
Levi's with a skosh more room,
said he programs computers.

I wanted to ask
about his Mustang but didn't.
I don't want to know
he owns a Toyota.

## Friday Rush Hour on BART

Every seat is taken so
the man sinks to the floor
of the crowded metro car
burrowing beneath San Francisco.
He reads a novel propped open
across his right palm. Flowers plume
from a cellophane cone
in the crook of his left arm.

I don't know
what prompted him to stop
at a sidewalk stand to buy
a bouquet of mixed blooms.
He wears no ring. Flowers are not mandatory
except on Valentine's or Mother's Day
and today is neither.

She will never know
this portrait of a man
holding yellow roses, coral tiger lilies,
purple statice and baby's breath
spraying out of tissue paper.

Yet every time I tunnel
into that dark mystery of romance
he travels with me
longer than any lover,
as much as an impressionist oil painting
or a watercolor bleeding at the edges
like a bruise blooming beneath my skin.

*Herman Fong*

## Luna

It is a dead thing,

that moon, that sphere of rock
given birth by
a barren woman with a stone womb.
Why do they praise and
lift hands to it,
make love to it
when it has done nothing
but steal and hide and circle mindlessly?

I would bury the thing
if I could bring it down,
loop it with string and pull
until it fell and split like a polished skull,
spilling its shell of dry bone
into a pit dug for nights by moonlight.

It may shine full and pearlish,
glow like burning opal, white and flecked,
or it may smile clean in slices,
but it will always be faraway
and naked and without breath.

It will always be dead.

## A Different Fire

I will take the dry bones
of this tree and use them as kindling,
rub them together
the way we used to
rub arms and legs together
for warmth, a different fire.

I will take my poems,
penned neatly on crisp bond,
and rip them to pieces,
drop them like dead leaves
into the flames growing,
these verses for you.

When the smoke has lifted,
the dark ashes curled and delicate,
crumbling into black dust
dark as your hair,
and all my words are
rising to the sky,

I will take a kettle
of your favorite tea,
boiling over the flames,
and dowse our blaze,
hear the wooden bones
snap and hiss.

## Train Crash, Summer 1988

for Mark

You were in Paris when I heard
of that city's worst train catastrophe,
a row of train cars striking
another like snakes in combat.

The count is fifty-nine and rising.
The cameras show police
heaving heavy bodies onto stretchers,
into dark bags.

I would look into the face of each dead,
no matter how awful the stare,
how terrible the bloody flesh and stench
of disaster, to make certain
you are not one of them.

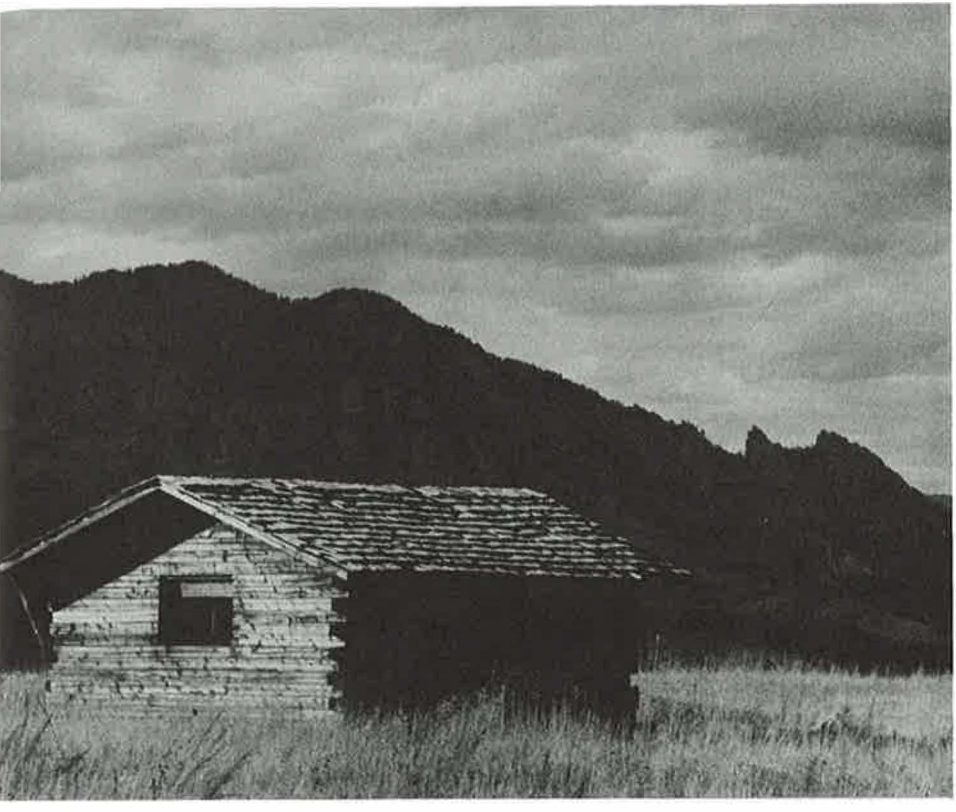
In eighty-four, I waited hours for you
to emerge from the emergency room.
Your head loose with slow pain,
your chest squeezed like a respiratory pouch,
you thought you were dying.
The resident prescribed pills
for walking pneumonia.
And last fall, as you left your father's village,
the southern hills of Italy shook and
buried roads you had traveled moments before.

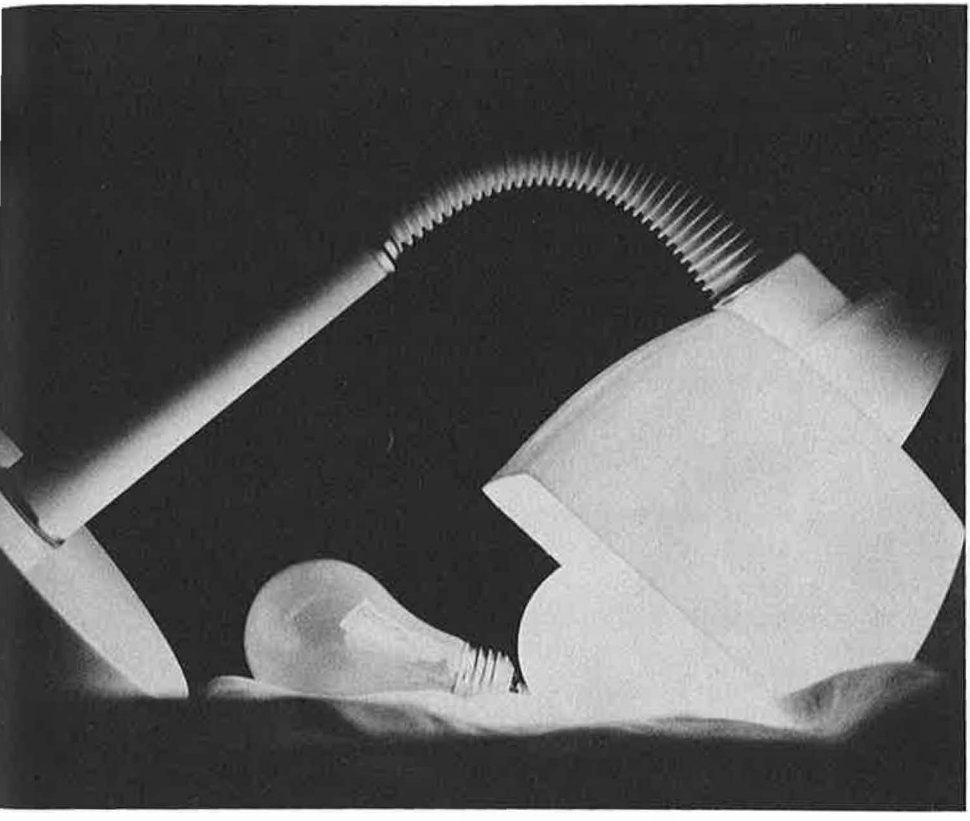
Disaster, you've said, follows you across borders,
boards your train and sounds the whistle.

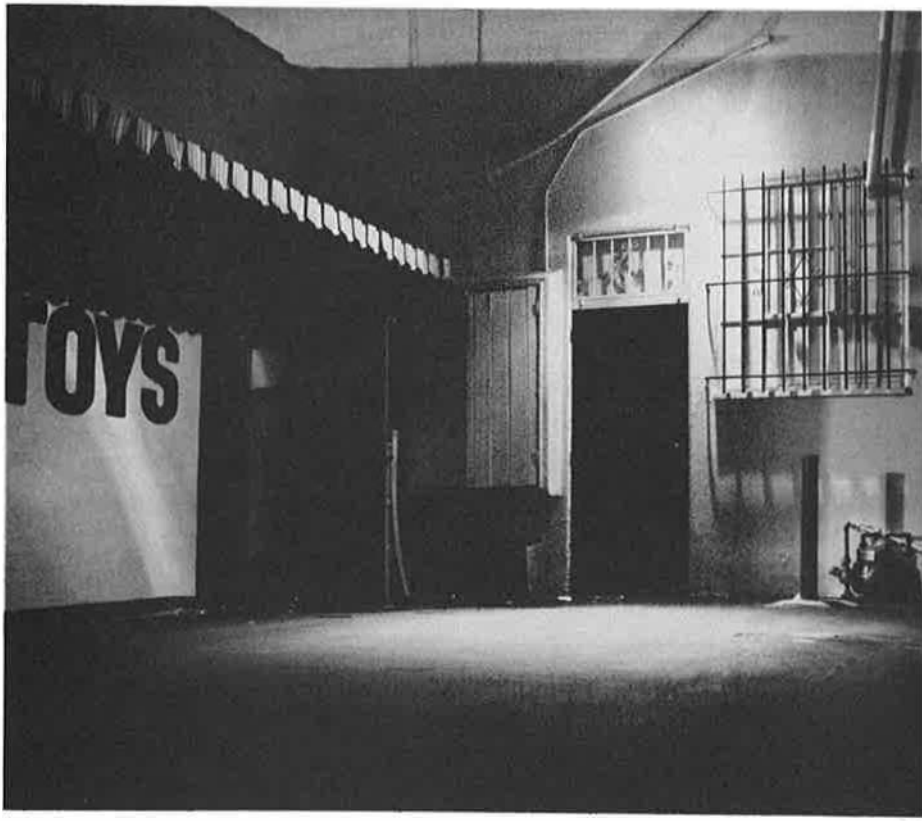
Hundreds of miles away from the city,
from the station and the torn platform,
I think that you are fine,
but I wonder why
you have not telephoned your family.

You might be dead now,
or you might be rising to a new
morning in southern France,
watching the sun lift slowly
above a restless field of summer flowers
and getting ready for your shave
as I lie awake past midnight.

# Photo Gallery






TOYS

## Photography Credits

| | |
|---|---|
| Tristan M. James | 50 |
| Stephanie Ross | 51 |
| Stephen A. Katcher | 52 |
| Ari McGruder | 53 |
| Joel Manes | 54 |

# Fiction

*Mark Mann*

## An Enormous Purse

A thin rain began soon after the El left Howard Street, slanting from the east and spattering the window where they sat. With the aisle clotted with bodies, they were lucky to get a seat. Out along the ridge of old buildings someone three floors up on a back porch took linen from a clothesline strung between posts. The boy watched as the train carried him away, and by the time it began to rattle around the curve the figure had shrunk to a prinprick on the window whitening under his breath. When he turned to ask his father how far they had to go, a woman, eating a tomato like an apple, sat there instead, smiling, between bites, a smile of wide yellow teeth burnt with decay like the pages of an ancient book, clutching to her breast an enormous purse.

His father stood uneasily in the aisle slightly behind him, balancing himself between seats. The woman caught a tomato seed slipping down her chin in a line of red dribble and wiped it up into her mouth. After she had devoured the tomato, she reached in her purse and brought out a paperweight in which were embedded two tiny polar bears prowling the tundra. She shook it like a can of pop and held it up for the boy to see. Snowflakes swirled and glittered around the bears. He reached for the object, but she pulled it away.

"Don't do that," his father said.

"What?" the boy said.

"With your tongue like that."

His father bent forward to elaborate.

"You want me to pull it out? Just keep it up and I'll pull it right out. Then you won't be able to talk for the rest of your life."

The boy paid attention. His mouth lapsed into a small defensive hole.

Satisfied, his father stood back.

The woman had waited for them to finish, and now she made the paperweight snow again. The boy reached for it, and again she pulled it away. But then she let him have it, warmly, and he shook it for himself. He understood. It was a game.

While he studied the bears and how the snow fell, the woman stripped an artichoke of its petals, dropping them around her feet, counting down to the heart. Then came a cluster of grapes smudged with frost. She snapped off a branch and gave it to the boy, but his father nervously intervened, explaining that they would soon be having lunch and he didn't want his son's appetite spoiled. The woman shrugged and did nothing, so his father forced him to return the fruit. It occurred to the boy that the woman might be deaf. In any case, she opened her purse and exchanged the grapes for a floppy bouquet of wisteria bundled at the stems which she propped up between them on the seat. Then out came a weighty hardbound dictionary with a raggedy black jacket, a half-dozen red melons big as softballs, and a doctor's stethoscope which she helped him to plug into his ears. The woman opened the dictionary to a middle page, making a table for the melons, while he listened to the pulse drumming in his chest and wrist and all the arteries he could find.

In a little while the boy realized they were descending. The train eased itself lower and lower beneath the city like a gigantic mechanical worm. He was delighted to be going down because it gave him the same exotic, faintly taboo sensation as when he hid in the crawlspace or stayed out after dark. Everything--the drab yellow lights flickering above him, the cool air filling his head with the fresh smell of soot and cinder and rotten wood, the relentless howling noise so loud he couldn't hear himself say "Jungleman Jerry went to town," the woman with the enormous purse--all of it, all the accidents of the ride so far added up to a conspiracy of chance in which he somehow, miraculously, had a part.

The woman produced a long flashlight, the kind policemen use,

and allowed him to point it out the window in order to see the wall of the tunnel race by. Then she lifted out of her purse a huge jasmine-scented candle as thick as a maple sapling and lit the wick with a match she struck on a button. His father, however, immediately blew the candle out and demanded that she give up the seat. But she didn't seem to understand, and after a minute or so of argument that the boy couldn't hear over the noise of the train, his father relented and because it was the last straw, kept a close eye on the woman the rest of the way.

After the incident of the candle came many things: felt hats of various personalities, a lavender princess telephone, an immense plastic model of a pinto stallion, a purse, of all things, of black suede with a brass buckle and packed with a thousand marbles. She was still showing him the treasure when the staticky voice of the train called out their stop. And when they got off the woman got off too.

They rode the escalator, but she passed them on the stairs, frequently bounding two at a time. The purse dwarfed her, but she bore it lightly. It seemed even larger than it had on the train, perhaps because she wasn't too tall. The strap cut across her body, right shoulder to opposite hip, and the hull of the purse bottomed below her left knee, spreading out from the line of her leg in the elegant shape of a clipper ship.

"Where do you think she comes from?" the boy asked, but before his father could answer that he had no idea or that she came from Morton Grove or Mercury, the escalator had deposited them at the top and on into the first-floor splendor of Marshall Field's, and she was there, waiting, holding up a chrome-framed print of Napoleon.

His father walked him past her, even though he wanted to stay, past the array of fur and silk and dangling jewels, to the revolving door which turned them out to Washington Street. The woman followed close behind.

"Look," his father said, "you're going to have to leave us alone."

The rain had softened to a mist, and she nodded and nodded, bouncing the wet twine of her hair, but really didn't seem to understand a word. Her eyes ticked back and forth. He could tell

that his father, every now and then a tolerant man, was losing his patience; something in the familiar diligent face began to crush it like an oily white nut. The woman searched her purse, shuffling its contents wildly till she found what she was looking for, the candle, which she urged on the boy. His father kept her away with the back of his hand.

"We don't want your candle," he said. "We don't want any of your crazy things. You don't have anything in your purse we could possibly want."

Then, after a moment of face-to-face silence, she broke forth in strange new words, words of quickfire in the ears of the boy.

His father nudged him to go.

"Come on, we're late."

The woman, maybe a little discouraged but having had her say, backed off and finally headed down the street on her own.

"I want to see what else she has in her purse," the boy begged. "And she wants me to see it."

"All kinds," his father muttered, but the boy heard.

"Kinds of what?"

"Nuts in this city."

It was a mean thing for his father to say.

"You didn't have to make her feel bad."

"I didn't make her feel bad. I wouldn't do a thing like that. People like that one need help."

"Help?"

His father took him by the hand and led him to the corner.

"Not the kind you're probably thinking of."

"Then what kind?"

"Forget it."

"What kind?"

"I'll explain it when you're older."

The boy looked behind him for the woman.

"She's getting something out of her purse," he said, and tried to jerk himself free from his father's grip.

"Stop it."

"I want to see it."

"If you don't stop it right now I'll give you something to see that

you'll never forget."

So they waited for the light to change. The boy suffered a little from the damp-dog smell of his father's sleeve. He saw the woman kneeling on the sidewalk over the enormous purse with her arms inside it up to her shoulders, but people kept passing in front of her and he couldn't make out all she was doing.

Then the light changed.

As they crossed the street his line of sight improved, and then he saw her. She was holding something aloft, something large and blue, offering it left and right to any and all as she waded against the human current, most of whom--out of some stubborn reflex or an impenetrable sense of their own sovereignty--did their best to ignore her. Fifty pigeons whirled madly above the amazing blue thing that sat on the pedestal she'd made of her hands. And then, as his father yanked him farther and farther and farther away, he finally saw what it was, and lucky for him that he did because after he had grown into a man himself he came to believe that it had changed his life in unaccountable ways and even had given him something hopeful to say to his father many years later when the old man lay stinking and hurt in the bed of his death. "It was a great bird," he would begin, "that she kept in her purse, a great big lovely long-necked bird with feathers out to here."

*L. M. Lopez*

## Ahalani

Ahalani was the word she first knew for beautiful. Like the hills folded in soft pleats around the bridge. Beautiful as the hushed breathing of the children asleep on the slashed gray upholstery and yellowed ticking that was the back seat of the car. Beautiful as the rainbow arching over the hills and pouring into the water tank of Woman Who Lives On the Reservation and Off.

It was a good day. She could remember the tales of the old men. Their faces smeared with grease and shining around the fire at night, when they laughed and sang and spoke about the past. They told about the mornings when they were young men breaking camp. Their ponies would snort steam and dance nervously in makeshift pens. Horses, they said, can smell blood, and they weep when they are afraid. It is a good day, they would tell each other, if the sun was full in rising and the sky pure. It is a good day, they would call to one another, as they slipped blankets on their trembling mounts and sheathed their knives. It is a good day to die.

It felt fine to drive the old car over and over across the curved bridge. She drove poorly. Gears groaned against metal. The ancient Buick bucked and sputtered. But when she sped over the highest slope of the bridge and coasted swiftly down its swaying grade, it was almost like falling in a dream.

She turned the car around in the field near the ditch edge. Deep in the ruts dug by the tires, she spun the steering wheel and aimed back up the bumpy hill and forced the car up over the bridge again.

Ahalani had been her brother's name for her. It had been a joke meant to tease her about her pitted cheeks and sunken eyes. Ahalani, bring me water. Ahalani, come with me to town.

She would hitchhike to town with him, often catching a ride on the back of a pickup. They would arrive on the main street dusty and windblown. Ahalani, take care of me, her brother would ask before slipping into the cool darkness of the Silver Hat. Watch out for me.

Once a photographer from the city had watched her brother leaping from a truck bed and rolling into the dirt road. He had been struck by the young man's erect posture and fierce good looks. He jogged after Ahalani and her brother as they headed for the Silver Hat, his camera bouncing against his chest. He asked courteously if they would allow some pictures. Ahalani's brother shrugged.

The photographer used many rolls, sending the yellow film boxes tumbling in the wind as he dropped them in his excitement. He took nearly a hundred pictures, it seemed to Ahalani. She lost count as she sat on the curb, watching. Finally brother said, Ahalani, your turn. She stood and smiled, but the photographer hesitated. She could see his eyes, impatient, turned inward. At last the black eye of the camera winked. When the film was developed, he sold the pictures to a magazine and sent brother a small check, along with the print of her photograph. In it, she stood pigeon-toed, her skirt too long and her face twisted by shadows.

She would walk slowly through the main street, stepping over the wobbling knees of the drunks sitting on the sidewalk. She would stare avidly into curio shops and western wear stores, ignoring the distorted reflection of her eager face in the plate glass.

Once a gritty wind had lashed at her bare legs and face, driving her into a drugstore. She wandered to a wire rack with pockets that held magazines. She pulled one out and flipped its glossy pages. She saw soft lips, limpid eyes, smooth cheeks and brows. None of it connected. There was nothing for her in it. She fanned through the pages again. The print etched mysteriously and forbiddingly like twisted bits of wire. The druggist stepped out of his booth and warned her not to loiter. She dropped the magazine to the floor and pushed herself out into the wind again.

The children rolled from one door handle to the other, their mouths open and eyelids squeezed shut. They had eaten sacks of hard candy at the dance the night before and loose black strands of hair stuck to their cheeks. She glanced at them in the mirror and thought to wake them. She thought she should put them off on the road.

"Let me keep the children," her mother had offered. She had approached stealthily from behind and startled her daughter.

"I can take them," she said, without looking at the old woman.

"They are so tired. Poor little ones."

"They go with me."

Who would love them, she wondered, their father, strapping their thin legs when they giggled? She cringed, rubbing her tongue over a broken tooth. Her mother, faded and weak as a ghost, could she give them care? The old woman had barely the strength to push the food into her sunken lips since her son drowned, drunk and beaten, in a puddle behind the Silver Hat. Ahalani, watch out for me.

Who would love these children with their brown bland faces?

"They go with me."

She turned the car around again at the other side of the bridge. She glanced at the gas gauge. The needle wavered past empty. She felt afraid for a moment, then brave. Ahalani. The old car chugged up to the high part of the bridge. With her eyes wide open and unafraid, she yanked the wheel in a sharp circle. The brittle railing made a splintery noise, then she heard the sound of glass popping. It was exactly like falling in a dream.

*Grant Cogswell*

## 17

*Girls, talking.*

"Poor Caleb," and,

When it'd been three days the men all lined up at the back of the Town Land Line, spread their arms so their fingertips touched, and walked at a pace through town and out the launch road, and came to the other fence on South Crater Ridge without a trace of Caleb. So they cut the fence and walked out and saw a trail, all of 'em hoping it would end soon, because they didn't want to get out in the Test Zone, no matter how safe they says it is. If it's so safe how come they put up signs and a fence.

They didn't have to go far out, because up the second crater ridge they saw the dirt crumbled away, and on the other side, leaning up against the wall, cold with his dry blood running out his wrists to the crater floor, which was so far down it could not be seen, there was Caleb.

All of Williamstown who was old days enough to know who the Dakeses was thought the same thing about them: that they was common as dirt. So why should it come as any surprise that Caleb Williams, whose dad was way up there in Minerals, and who got straight A's all through his first two years of high school, should suddenly drop out of Engineering without a reason why, start wearing raggedy clothes like a rock addict and become some kind

of King of the Smoking Area, and suddenly take off running around with the oldest Dakes girl, Danelle, the one who was pregnant by her daddy twicet and hasn't gone to school in years and works out at the restaurant at Launch 5 and wears them pearly wigs?

*Distance.*

The trees and town here and the streets, which his brother's eye runs up at night, Caleb knows, are an illusion. Water is sucked up, half ice, at the poles and is piped halfway across the hemisphere, where it melts, and could nearly boil in places in the daytime if it did not know the night would come and make it, still flying fast through the pipe, want to freeze. He's seen those men come in from the pipeline, in from the poles, their eyes all buggy from the distance seen and not remembered, smoking rocks like they were old cigarettes.

He's not afraid to come up from the valley floor and look out at it all, even though it scares the hell out of him. Not his brother, though. Tab looks out while Caleb is standing there silent and says, "Isn't it glorious?" He can stand up on the rim of the South Crater and watch a test, while everybody else is down at the amphitheater, watching it silhouette the houses. Not Tab. He wants to see the line of light spread down the horizon while the dust turns to glass and then burns. Caleb will go with him every time, until he refuses, which is later, and because it cannot leave his mind. When he is in bed down in the valley and just seeing the rope from the swing out his window and the rooftops on the next hill and the stars, all that distance that lies beyond it is pulling out around him in his head. Sometimes it tortures him so bad that he has to get up, open the window and smoke a rock, leaning out so his parents don't smell it, and then his whole field of vision narrows down to a point, a speck that he could draw a circle around and it would look like a dot of dirt on a page.

Not Tab, though. When he turns around so he is not facing it, all the distance leaves his eyes. And it is then that Caleb, seeing the long line of burning glass behind his brother which makes him look

infinitely small and vulnerable, and as if it might swallow him up, wants to take him in his arms and cover him, down into the dirt where they would be pressed so close there would not even be enough air.

*Girls, talking.*

The way I heard it told, he came into the coffee shop at the Launch on a Wednesday night, about the only time between the Monday shuttle and the Friday back, and the weekends when it's all tourists, when there's nobody around.

He came in just for coffee I guess, it was late, or early, depending on how you look at it, and there might have been trouble at home like there sometimes is when a boy is sixteen, and he just wanted another place than home to watch the first sun come up, and the second follow it up the sky like a baby dog or a lost little brother. Anyway she was there, and I reckon took him in back, just free of all his books and equations not a month yet, and gave him something else to think about all the time. It's rude by me to picture it, but I'll bet she rode high on him, both of them listening for the door, with him knowing nothing, just following, and her knowing how to please a man, even if he wasn't a man yet, until he was like to explode.

Flora told me and it was her that came in afterwards I guess, and saw the counter in a deseret and her uniform wet and rumpled and him sitting there pretending to drink his coffee, breathing like it'd just up and chased him around the room.

That was when people didn't see him so much anymore, and he would spend nights down at the Launch when she was on, getting tough guy with whatever rocket assholes chose to try and put their hands on her. He grew a wispy old boy-moustache and we saw him for a while, always with her, in the stands at the tests on Saturday night, and when the purple and blue billowed up from the crater wall, sand atoms fusin' into one another, her mouth would open and those sweet lips would go O and you'd see him turn, lost in lust or whatever, and instead of watching even the most glorious tests,

look at her.

Those Williamses! Pretty as half a family portrait, with Bob Senior dead and one boy missing, four rows away, my heart went out to them! Big old Tab gone home to Chapel Hill, saw southern girls who'd never been to space, comes back and sees his brother with her! Her!

When they took the train to see the Hendersons and the cities on the Plate, which were supposed to have streets made of fused glass with wisps of color running through them that shifted and changed with the angle of the sun, so that no one ever tripped or fell because they were always looking down as they walked, the conductor gave the family big rocks and said, "Chew it, it'll put you to sleep," and they did, all except for Caleb, who held his in his cheek and watched the land fly by so fast he was glad he hadn't eaten or surely he'd be sick. This went on for a half hour, with his eyes jumping and catching flash bits of landscape, until he fell asleep with the rock behind his jaw, while the rest of the family stayed motionless and silent in their three-day naps.

When the sun had set he woke from a haze of nightmares, screaming, and pulled on his parents, on Tab, who were so deep in their slow rock-dreams that they didn't twitch. When he looked out from under the windowshade and saw the burnt land flying by and heard the conductors' frantic jabbering in the next car and could still hear the terrible voices of people he thought he knew in his own head, he bit down on the rock and swallowed it all at once, and pleaded, murmuring in some other language, for its closure to come.

Size: All of the figures are in any child's textbook, but Caleb no longer pays attention to those things. What he does know is that it costs twenty-five dollars an hour to call the Hendersons, their closest neighbors in those first five years, and for less than a penny he can spend all day on the phone (in secret) with Danelle, if he doesn't feel like walking all the way across town.

*Professor of Histories.*

## CONSTANTINOPLE

Constantinople had started to empty out towards the end of the previous century, while the mill still employed a third of the county's workforce. But for forty years more the town survived, getting nervous and dark over the threats of closing and the pressure from the government to slow down production and stop putting waste in the river. For a whole generation in those final years the protesters would come out from the State Capitol on weekends and stand in the river road carrying signs and talking to reporters. Sometimes all the police watching would get a call to be on the other side of town, and then the union boys would come in big pickups and bust some heads and yell at the protesters and smash up their cars.

Finally the plant was called to close, and federal marshals had to be called in to patrol the streets, while the men prowled around empty-handed and got drunk and fought and had little riots. A month after the plant closed the town was dead but full of people, who haunted the streets full of boarded and barred windows like stoned daytime ghosts. Then the government offered every family in Constantinople County free land on Albers-7, and the Space Office in Cleveland had to run buses to Constantinople to pick up all the people who wanted to register. And bit by bit, they left. And when the winter came again some of the property in the county had been bought for summer homes, and some of the old people were still around, enough to keep the road clear where it came through Constantinople Township, but come spring grass and rust took possession of everything else, and while the millmen and coffee shop girls learned to grow things on a new planet and built other coffee shops and mills of their own, the last of the grandparents in the valley were dying off, and while the river had fish for the first time since the First World War, the weeds broke up the streets and the forest reclaimed the town.

*Girls, talking.*

That Dakes girl (not long after that) went with her family when they homesteaded on the Plate, which is just for the greedy and the insane anymore because now it's next to free land. Raising three-headed sheep and goats with no eyes that glow in the dark out there, I reckon.

And the Williamses went back to Iowa, it's all just taken too much out of them, I guess, except for Tab, who you can see all around.

Oh, Caleb, you wonder how a boy gets like that. My sister went to school with him and said sometimes he did the strangest things, asked the queerest questions, but funny, you know, questions you would never think to ask yourself, and even in grade school he talked about the tests, about how the bigness of this planet scared him.

I remember one Easter Day when I was going to school still, a hot day, he came up our road, and he was maybe nine years old, and called me out and give to me a flower, a big blue one, one of those that turn to cold water there in your hand. Oh, he laughed at that, with me standing there and that cold water that felt so good coming through my fingers. And he took off back down the road all of a sudden, his legs going ever' which way, like he didn't know which step he'd take next, like he was making it up as he went along. Across the way that boy laid down in the sand and started yelling things, maybe to me or maybe to the sky, I'm not sure which 'cause I couldn't hear.

*Jay, who knew Caleb.*

Once when Caleb was young he saw a small plane fall into the cornfield across the road from his grandmother's house. The corn leaves were dry and brittle, and thin: it was autumn and dust from the road where it topped the crater rim covered everything and rose like smoke when the airplane came tumbling through the corn-and-grass. The men from the silos and the houses on the rim came

running down and into the corn to try and get at the plane. When, from every direction, they converged in the rows, the plane's fuel tank made a noise as shallow and soft as when you put your finger in your mouth and make your lips pop, like a wine cork coming out, like that fuel tank was when it squirted orange flame onto the corn and suddenly it was too smoky to see.

What happened next is why I don't believe it was Caleb's body they found half-eaten with the blood, by the rim of another crater ridge. The men who came to help were on fire, with their white workshirts full of air and going up like sailcloth, and them all screaming appearing to Caleb and his grandma now and then through gaps in the milky smoke. They turned and turned trying to get out and finally fell in the field when burning corn was at every side, and tried to wait it out, rolled on the flaming leaves that fell on themselves, and in this way some survived, while the old woman and the little boy, who could have directed them out, if they had had the language for it then, stood on the backporch, too scared (or something else?) to move. When the fire ended in the dust at the ends of the rows, the doctors gauzed up the skins of the men and picked at the charred bodies inside the plane, and the smell of burnt flesh, which Caleb would again and again recognize as the smell of death, when they brushburned the rabbits out, when the launch burned, lingered until the snow froze it up into the ground and even the next spring and summer occasionally a hot wind would send a hint of it up from the ground, calling whoever smelled it back to that fall afternoon.

Caleb would not take his own life, I know that. People change, but not that much. Change really is the recognition of what has been there all along. I think he is somewhere else.

Maybe he is living under the sky in the Test Zone, drinking the water no one will drink, shooting the game no one will shoot because of the stories, and going to sleep knowing the day may come early and quick, fusing his hair and skin, burning him like a gnat caught under a match.

Maybe he is on Earth back in those Iowa towns he heard about and never saw. But Caleb Williams would not kill himself.

*Bob Williams is dead and they named Williamstown after him.*

Caleb knows how to walk like his dad; Tab can't, he spent too much time building up his leg muscles at Chapel Hill, rowing crew and walking, with the higher gravity. He's too fit, and his whole body knows where it's going. He can't do that swagger, from the heavy torso sort of pulling the legs along, he didn't spend enough time behind a desk to have the hunch like their father did, like he was still tabulating metal counts and had never gotten up.

Caleb can do all this so perfectly that sometimes, when one sun is down and the other is just behind the crater ridge, his shape coming up from the field looks just like the old man a little lighter, faster there in the shadow of the rocks, and Cora will look out the kitchen window and catch her breath.

Sometimes in the house at night he does it in front of her on purpose, as if to say, I'm him! I'm him! and she sees it and her face lifts and then gets sad, making him sorry he did it but leaving him feeling good and warm inside. Then he does it walking out onto the porch where nobody can see except the stars, and it feels good. He hunches and thinks, Tab can't do this. He's all her. I'm him.

Caleb knows there wasn't really enough talk between the two of them while he was alive to justify this sort of talismanic action. But nevertheless he thinks of himself as the sort of secret son Bob Williams thought he never had. If he told him it was all the things from his father inside himself that made him spend hours at the South Crater, smoking rock, just a little, enough to make it seem like the space of blue he could see bounded by the crater rim was the whole sky, the old man would say, bullshit. But still Caleb thought it was the gap of generations (one and a half, in their case) that bridged this misunderstanding and the same harmony Bob had found in the knowledge of the precise metallurgic composition of the planet, and from that its creation, its drying at the center and freezing at the poles, was what Caleb saw, below the crater wall, in his visions, of Earth, which he had never seen, and of the long path of circumstance which had brought him to where he was and would soon send him back.

And hadn't it been Bob Sr. who had said, when he was drunk, a week before he died, that when he was young he had deserted from the Army and gone into the desert to live in a cave in the valley of the Colorado, for no reason but that he had felt something, which dissolved there, was calling him? Hadn't he said after this, "Oh, I was a fool," and not meant it?

*Professor of Histories.*

They had wanted to name it Bob Williams' planet, but Bob was too shy and besides, when everybody in Con County came, and the tests started, it wasn't even that anymore. He had wanted it named Cora, after his wife, but she only said, "Bob, I don't think I could handle that," and so it went without a real name, and on charts and documents it was called just Albers-7, and in conversation, away from it, on Earth or maybe on Albers-5, which was named after Orville Wright, and where it was a third of the sky sometimes, people called it the big planet, and that was all anyone needed to say. Did anyone have to say it was too big to be named?

If Caleb were to examine his soul right now, he'd find it as clean as music. But that's not what he's about these days, instead floating free between commitments, or commission on any major thought or action. What he is doing is hiking up to the big crater to the west that's just inside the township line, sitting under it and sometimes smoking a couple of rocks in a plastic straw he's gotten from the diner, and looking out over the flatlands, full below of trees and small farms and salt-pits and high silos for corn next to farmhouses, packed together down the road to the other side, where only the trees hang on because it's too steep, and beyond that the road stops because there is nowhere else in town to go save for the Test Zone.

He has visions here that he doesn't recognize as such, coming up on seventeen, and if he were aware of what he's about to come upon he'd trade those visions in, because they are setting into stone his ideas about this world, and wait for what will come and blow all those ideas apart, and leave him wandering through days like these

with only one thing on his mind: her.

She's not as bad as they think, would be what she'd say in defense of herself if they said what they thought, if she didn't have two brothers who'd come in and kick anybody's ass. She's got compassion for folks is one, which is why she takes in these rocket boys, one of whom gave her the last child, who she's got to say is her daddy's, otherwise he would have come in and started busting heads, no matter who. As for tourists, the fusion bomb is all that brings them here, but still when she's on she don't let Homer spit in their eggs.

Also, she's saving herself for her one true love, who will one day come through that diner door and have such a look in his eye and a way of cocking his head that she will know immediately that their meeting was directed by Divine Providence. In this way she is chaste as her own new-born child, inside her inside a pillar of unstained virtue.

*Girls, talking.*

And the last night anyone saw Caleb wasn't long after his brother came back to bury Bob, that one night they was in the launch, full of people 'cause a tourist rocket had just come in, somebody said something–he'd, Caleb, had been carrying his weight around too heavy of late, and punches was set flying, it not even being a rocket night like the bad ones are, just tourists and Marines. Caleb came out with a bloody nose and one old man was vomiting up on the counter, moaning like, "Oh, oh," and Caleb moves up and over the bar, grabbed the Dakes girl by the wrist and led her around and out to the front, where there was yelling in those big spotlights Frank's got out there, and they could all see them, but wouldn't nobody go outside. Then the police captain came out and told neither of them to leave and everyone saw through the glass doors him pull on her and her back, him again and her clawin' his arm and screeching like a cat, screaming at him, and the captain watching it all while he turned on a heel and vanished around the corner and into the dark.

*Professor of Histories.*

Once, when Tab and Caleb were boys, when Tab was eleven and Caleb was about the age his brother was when he witched for water, the second aqueduct was being run through town and a crew came and camped up in the high flatlands, and girls from the town would go up and get money from the men to let themselves be looked at, and of course sometimes for more than that. And families in the town who were waiting for the rockets to come and had no work would rent out rooms in their houses to the men who were losing themselves sleeping under the open sky and needed four walls around them while they rested, and to eat good food, and hear children laughing in the next room late at night.

Then the boys would paint their faces and sneak up to the workers' camp and kick stones in the shadows and make noises like warrabawarrabawaba because the men were very afraid of ghosts and said they saw spirits and things of all kinds when they were not close to a town. So Tab went to the basement for flour and cooking oil and Caleb found shoe polish and two pairs of plastic vampire fangs from Halloween, and they fixed themselves up and climbed out the window when the night was darkest, just before moonrise. On the edge of the camp clearing they shuffled like kinds of creatures that had never lived and made argabarga-barga sounds. One man who had walked out to take a piss and be alone with himself behind a rock was standing naked in the dark saw them and gave a little yelp. So they circled him, shaking their terrible heads and frothing their spit and clawing the air, winding it in and drawing closer to him. When they were roaring near enough to touch his bare sides, which were still as stone, the moon came over the rocks and lit everything up like a soft, grey sun. Then the nude man saw the lines the sweat made running down their painted faces, and their tiny shoulders that could only belong to little boys, and in a rage he kicked off his shoes and ran after them, and all three flashed across the ridge above the town like playing cards. The man was big, and fast, and for every pace the boys took he took two, and his were twice as long. But they knew the rocks, and he kept slamming his

bare feet into boulders, and scratching his privates in the tumbleweeds. They ran to the spillway by where the aqueduct lay open and unfinished. The water came out there onto the ground, and had formed a deep rushing pool where some boulders dammed it up. "There," Tab said, and the boys dropped into the water and held themselves under it, while the paint washed off them and it was so cold that to Caleb it felt like he imagined it would be being skinned alive. But they held themselves under and when the man stumbled to the pool he looked down to where the footprints ended in the water, but all he saw, swimming against the flow were two enormous gray fish, and he thought that these had swallowed the boys, or that they had been turned into them by a ghost, and in either case it did not matter.

*Size 2: Geological Hazards.*

It is so big that it is unable to contain itself--that's what the scientists would say about this planet. The continental plates are so huge that every day, someplace they give way to the forces bending them, just a millimeter here, there, which add up and throw shock waves across a hundred thousand miles until there is a weak spot, a fault in the crust, and then the ground buckles big, swallowing mountains, oceans of sand. They say the magnetic forces inside the planet have to swing out over so much full, thick space that they lose their ends and cannot connect. There is evidence to support the theory that the poles switch every century or so, and the juxtaposition is due. This, if it happens, will do more than make water run uphill and the magnetic trains go backwards to the stations they just left. There will be storms, there will be earthquakes. This green valley the pioneers have made here could fill with sand, or ice, in an hour. But the people have not been told all of this, and so their lives go on with no expectation of a sudden end.....

....down to the 1147th one of them, standing on the oak ridge, who sees this valley as nothing else is, something permanent, something safe. Beyond that above the hills, is the desert, and that is all that is unsure, all that can envelop men and rise up against them.

Item: An angel passing by can see Caleb in his leather jacket, walking under the big archway sign that is the first thing you see coming out on the road from the launch, and says, in big black painted letters on the wood, and red neon for night, surrounded by red-white-and-blue trim,

Welcome To
WILLIAMSTOWN!!

and hear Caleb, walking down from that launch hill where they used to have picnics, *ah! we were so young!* thinking, *who am i? i'm Caleb Williams,* walking under the sign proclaiming the town named for his late father, not giving a whittle that his, his own name, not his father's really, and Tab's too, because his father wouldn't let them name the planet after him when they tried, and wouldn't approve of this, thinking, *i'm Caleb Williams and i love my girl and i love my brother and i love my father and my mother,* and wonder, in it's quick flight past here, at this all.

*Water.*

But they were the first family here, shuttled down before the pipeline was built and when it was all still desert, and with a huge metal tank of water and enough wood to build a house, which Mr. Williams did, with a porch that wrapped clear around, and the timbers at the top of each wall coming out at the ends, so it looked squared off and solid, like the house back in Cedar Rapids.

They didn't need the tank after all, because after the third week they found that if they blindfolded little Tab and sent him spinning out across a crater's floor, he could find the spot to dig where the water had condensed in natural cisterns over the bedrock, one over the other, and down, and down, for a million million years. Then Tab wandered all over the homestead, pressing his feet down hard when the feeling came, and the hard pressings finally formed a line, under which was the spring. He had found the ancient riverbed.

It was around this time that Caleb was born, and now when they see the slides taken then, for Tab it is like hearing himself speak a language he cannot remember, seeing the way his eyes would roll back in his head before he stomped.

And here is Tab, head up, eyes back, while baby Caleb, looking at the ground, clutches his brother's pant leg.

I should leave you with something like a conclusion to this very short and important life on a planet in the future, a future most of us will see one way or another. This planet is due to destroy anything on its surface so delicate as a town of this size any decade now. I could blow them up while Caleb is looking at this fertile valley he will never leave. They put him in a bag, and walked back down to Williamstown. The switching of the poles could fry all this scenery in a second and send this boy's soul spinning out like a piece of lace into a landscape he does not recognize. I could ask you to believe that Caleb's bled body is a ruse and like in the novels Danelle reads when business at the Launch Cafe gets slow, Caleb has killed an evil twin who showed up late one night to slaughter the Williamses and avenge his abandonment to the wilds, his father's abandonment to calcium cigarettes and early death. With Caleb's apparent suicide and the evil twin in a grave under Caleb's name, he and Danelle could ride up into the sky and go anywhere, holding themselves in that perfect moment where all they need to do is pick a direction to fly in their stolen rocket, while she feels their baby's first kick.

This is no joke, but like in a joke I'll offer two possibilities and enter a third. This is not a planet where reality happens in ways we are used to. The scientists are waiting to tell that on this planet up becomes down occasionally. Those who cross the wastes dream of the cities that will one day be built here. They walk those streets, not with their legs, because their bodies are the ones left behind on the train, in the laborers' camp, stone-faced. They've seen boys turn into animals and small-town girls into fearful monsters that eat them up, and it is bliss. They slide out of their burnt foreheads onto a plain where anything is possible, and happens.

Caleb cowered from that plain, I think, because it was where he

came from. Bob Jr. was the baby conceived in Iowa, not Caleb. He is in the ground on Albers-7, still dreaming his womb-dreams, and Caleb is the child they made mourning Bob Jr's loss. So here's Caleb. Everyone always told Caleb he looked like a ghost, and in the half-a-night where his wrists are bleeding into the desert I see him in the same field Girl, talking saw him in when she was sixteen, and there he is again, talking into the sky, and not being familiar with these wide-open spaces, I can almost, but not quite, hear what he is saying.

And here's Caleb, at five, snaking his finger along the Ohio River, on the green border, where it turns north to point at Columbus, then back again, Constantinople! He moves the word across his tongue and then ends it, and all day it hangs in him repeating itself like a litany. Constantinople! while he runs across the crater floor, getting green yet, and at the spillway, no Ohio, but Constantinople! here too, Constantinople! he yells, across the field to the barn where Bob Sr. hands the last loft support up to Tab so he can nail it in.

*Sidney Allen*

## The Shell Station

I turned off the ignition, reached under my seat to get my leather gloves. I must have known before I went into the trunk. I had to open the trunk because the owner of the station insisted I leave my spare tire there on account of being four cents short on the gas. He took my tire, I took a crowbar out of the trunk then closed it. I walked to the corner of the building and began hitting it as hard as I could with the crowbar. It bounced right off. That old building was tougher than it looked.

I guess I felt betrayed. It looked so very much like the old service stations of my youth. It was, after all, a Shell station, not a cut rate, convenience store, or mom and pop. His statement that he had done nothing to provoke me was partially correct. He had done nothing but demand my tire over four cents, and it provoked me. He sat in front of that station wearing a uniform, disguised as an attendant. He wasn't fit to tie an attendant's shoes. It was a beautiful station, three separate garage doors, the roll top kind, with glass in them. I went for them right away. He got off his fat ass when they started popping. For a moment he came after me, however, seeing the vigor of my swings or the crowbar, he turned and ran for the pay phone.

The service stations of my youth were the guardians of the roads. The attendants wore bow ties, trousers with tuxedo stripes, and hats, the kind that soldiers wear. A grease rag in one pocket would be used to check vital fluids. They checked your tires, hoses,

belts, even if you didn't buy anything. Anytime, anywhere, you just drove in and said, "Excuse me, can you tell me how to get to, wherever?" They knew where every street in their city was. It was a point of pride with them, the way construction workers feel about their suntans. If you did stump one, he would look it up for you, show you the proper route on a map, then give you the map. Those days were never viewed through a crappy windshield. When you entered a station, the attendant would spray real window cleaner on your windows, then polish them with soft blue paper towels which would be thrown away after each car. Nothing like the slop they slosh across now, if you can even get them to do that. Oh god, we took them for granted.

I kept swinging the crowbar, first like a baseball bat, then like a golf club a few strokes, then overhead. A huge crowd formed almost immediately. Every time the crowbar hit, a yell would go up, like "Yeah" in addition to clapping, stomping, and whistling.

When the owner got to the phone, there were several people bunched around it. Standing directly in front of the phone was a woman holding an iron skillet in one hand and a really long nasty-looking bar-b-que fork in the other. "Wait a minute, don't you remember me?"

"Let me by," he said.

"Not so fast." She lowered the fork menacingly. "I'm hurt you don't remember me. It was about seven months ago. I had just moved here, I didn't know anybody. My phone hadn't been installed yet, my baby was sick, you don't remember?"

The owner tried to step around her. The crowd moved closer and blocked him.

She was making small circles in the air with the fork. "I could never forget you. I was standing out here waiting for the doctor to call me back. You told me to go away. I tried to explain, you were really rude, remember now? The cops came. While we were talking to the cops the doctor called. The cops didn't like that I

answered the phone. They made me lay down on the asphalt. Face down on the asphalt. What did you tell them? That I was a whore? That I got tricks here every night or something? I'm sure you remember."

He was backing off a bit.

"Well anyway, my point is, what we learned that night was, nobody uses the phone, this phone unless they buy gas. I didn't see you buy any gas."

"Yeah," some others in the group chimed in. "This is your rule man. Yeah customers only, remember?"

He really backed away then, kind of ran away.

I was worn down rather quickly. I stopped to catch my breath and admire my work. Another woman stepped out of the crowd and asked for a turn. I gave her the crowbar and turned around; that's when I saw the crowd. The TV news was there, a safe distance back. I smiled into the camera. Later I was surprised to see how good I looked in the footage. The sweat was running down my face, into my eyes, sticking my hair to my head, but I was positively glowing.

A tremendous cheer went up from the crowd, the TV camera swiveled to the driveway, where the forklift from the market across the street was slowly pushing a part through the crowd. Two or three of the market employees were hanging off of the lift, cheering. My sister was driving. She had it in for that guy ever since the time her car conked out in front of his station. It was during rush hour, two guys pulled over, jumped out of their car, and pushed her car into the station. That was another time the owner jumped out of his chair, to run between the car and the garage doors, which were open, yelling, "No more cars today, come back in the morning!" My sister was pretty good on the lift. On her first charge, she skewered two of the pumps. She raised them high over head, then backed off a bit, scraping them off with the overhead lights. She went for the remaining pumps.

The police arrived, perhaps they were flabbergasted, or were in sympathy with the crowd; they really hung back. Maybe they were waiting for assistance. The station was half gone, and people were still pulling over and joining in. There were people pounding on or tearing up that station with every kind of tool. Axes, hammers,

crowbars, chains, broom handles, bats. Fan belts and hoses were passed along the crowd like beachballs at a "Dead" concert. Containers of coolant and oil were stomped on the ground. One huge guy took a pump hose that still had a nozzle attached, swung it round and around, like a hammer thrower. When he let it go, it crashed through the thick glass of the cashier window. He got a rousing cheer from the crowd.

Helicopters were hovering low, the police, a large number of them by then were using bull horns to try to keep traffic flowing. Someone ran over the fire hydrant with a four-by-four, causing a geyser of white water and a fine mist. The mist was very refreshing. The Fire Dept. had the water under control in about five minutes. By that time, the station was as flat as a can run over by a bus.

The crowd slipped away as quickly as it had formed. Every one was in terrific spirit. Smiling, giving high and low five signs, even hugging. The police left, little by little. The News were about the last to go. They interviewed my sister on the forklift across the street. At first it was rumored that the owner had suffered a heart attack. As it turned out, he had just fainted when he saw the forklift coming.

*Kristina McHaddad*

## Family

One night my Aunt Rita set fire to her house. She got out and her oldest daughter got out, but her two babies did not.

The family gathered around, but no one stopped drinking.

As well as Rita could remember, she had been heating milk in a small saucepan on the stove, and she had dropped off to sleep at the kitchen table. It was late at night.

She does not remember having anything to drink that night.

My mother calls it an unfortunate accident.

My mother blames Rita's husband Jack for leaving six months before the fire. He said that it had become too painful for him to watch Rita drink herself to death. So he left.

That is the closest to love that I have seen between two people.

My mother looks like Rita. And she drinks the same way; but she never did get caught, at least not in the same way as Rita got caught. That is the difference between them, that Rita got caught and my mother did not.

My mother would tell me stories of the time when she and Rita were little girls, and of Rita's fondness for saying that you can get away with anything you can get away with.

Rita always said that her favorite thing was rain. The answers to similar questions would vary if she were asked about her favorite

color, favorite food, favorite animal. She would often combine the answers for that day into a scene and tell us stories of purple and yellow fish eating pale vanilla ice cream with bright red berries spooned through it, or pomegranates. It was the first game we would play whenever we saw her.

Rita said that rain was the very best thing because you could not hold it, and because it happened only when it happened; and because of this, she said, you always had to be prepared for it. Sometimes I would come across her standing and staring out of the kitchen window of her house, watching the gray clouds of the winter sky barely moving, waiting. She found something disturbing about artificial heat and air conditioning, and even in the wintertime she would leave the windows open to let in the outside and the weather. During rainstorms, she still would not close the windows; instead, she would move quickly about the house, moving things out of the way of the rain pushed by strong winds into the building.

My mother would mumble under her breath about Rita's craziness.

I could not see in Rita the same craziness that my mother saw. I saw the difference between them though. I saw Rita living her life the way she wanted to live it for that very day. I saw my mother holding herself in, keeping everything at a distance, securing her own measure of safety; I do not know what frightened her.

Sometimes, later, when I learned what things could hurt my mother and what things could not, I would cry out in anger that I hated her and that I really loved Rita, and that I wished that Rita was my mother and not her.

I was eleven, the same age as Rita's daughter Sarah, the year I wanted a fish. My mother said that I could not have a fish, that it would die too quickly. The fish was the one thing that I wanted right then, like Rita wanted the rain when she knew that it was coming and she would say that she could taste it in the air.

"A fish is not like any other thing," Rita told me. "A fish does not come to you; you have to catch it."

Rita understood about the fish the same way she understood about everything else. And she understood my mother, too.

Late one night, after the rest of the house was asleep, Rita woke both me and Sarah, and hushed us to be quiet, saying that she had a surprise for us and for us not to make a sound.

We dressed quickly and silently, and Rita crept with us out of the house and into the black night that was just beginning to chill that September. We coasted down the block in Rita's old station wagon until the sound of the engine starting could not wake anyone into worrying about us.

Rita drove us through town and toward the industrial areas where we did not go often, and certainly where no good mother would bring her children at night.

Rita stopped the car around the corner from an ice packing plant. The wall of the building facing the street was high and wide, and the blue-green color of the ocean at mid-morning. Rita began pulling cans of paint and brushes from beneath a blanket in the back of the car.

We had hardly spoken on the ride across town, both Sarah and me being content just to be with Rita, to be on this adventure, and being too tired to say much. Rita stopped unloading the painting equipment long enough to notice our questioning, sleepy faces.

"Why, your fish, Maggie. We're going to make your fish right here." She picked up a brush and dipped it into bright orange paint. "Come on, girls. Help me."

Together we painted the wall until our corner of it was covered with fish and seaweed and air bubbles, wide arcs of bright color: orange and green and blue, and all of it defying the blank stare of the buildings on the street where it sat. The three of us laughed like the children we were in between Rita's threats that we had better stay quiet if we didn't want the police to come and arrest us. We were splashed with different colors of paint and big smiles.

When we left that night, Rita's fish, the biggest fish and the one around which Sarah's and my fish hovered, smiled back at us, purple and yellow.

It was years before I found my way back to that building, years before I realized how important that night had been to me. By then

it had been repainted a terracotta color, and I imagined to myself that the fish had stayed for years and that only recently had the owners decided to recolor the wall. I still picture it.

Rita collected colors like other people collected coins or match books, and she spread them out around her.

One Christmas, Rita gave only purple gifts: earrings of silver and amethyst crystal, bright purple and black scarves, books with purple dust jackets; that year almost all of the food on our table was touched by blueberries, tingeing every dish with a bluish purple color.

Most people did not know Rita--that is to say, they did not know what she liked to receive as gifts. Rita did not fault anyone for this. How could someone package purple, or rain, or the mountains, she rationalized.

I think it sometimes saddened her that she appeared so differently outside to other people than she really was, but she never once said this.

She would save those gifts for months after the holidays or a birthday, and then she would give them to Sarah and me and sit for hours watching us play happily with whatever it might be.

One winter when I was still quite young, my mother became very ill, and Rita spent a lot of time at our house, helping with me and with all of the things my mother was not able to do then. One day, shopping at the market, following a list prepared by my mother which designated not only the items, but also which brands and the approximate prices which we should expect to pay for them, my aunt was stopped by an older woman carrying a clipboard holding many pieces of bright white paper. The woman asked Rita if she would take a moment to fill out a questionnaire, for which she would receive a free gift. My aunt winked secretly at me as she smiled at the woman, as though she and I shared some private thought, and said that of course she would. I watched all of the bright color and the fast movement of the market as she filled out the form. I wished that I had time to run to the car and take Rita's camera and catch all of the rushing sound; but we were done

shopping and leaving soon. I felt Rita nudge me. She lowered the paper to my eyes and pointed to the place where the question was typed "occupation" and she had written her response of "violinist with the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra." She held my hand firmly to help me keep from laughing aloud. The woman thanked her and gave her a sample package of laundry detergent without reading her responses.

We brought home everything my mother had asked for, but we did not say anything about the woman in the store.

Rita would take pictures of everything. She said that it was because she had such a poor memory, that she needed photographs to remind her of where she had been and what she had done.

Rita found it hard to discard anything. She kept drawers of string because she liked the lines the string made, some straight, some wrinkled from being pulled from the top of a bag-package of sugar or cat food.

At the same time, Rita told me that the only way to avoid loss was to regularly discard things.

For years, she took photographs of things before she gave them away. She said that this way she still had the things, but she could keep more things this way, and they were easier to store in flat boxes underneath her bed.

Rita rarely sat, as though she was always on the verge of going somewhere other than where she was, which was usually the case. Afternoons after school, she would feed us different things, bread she had made from scratch, heavy and dark, colored with bits of red or black berries, orange strings of carrot or green zucchini, seedy with dark figs. We would drink nonfat milk from heavy, strangely shaped coffee mugs decorated with flowers I could not name in dark oranges and purples and blues, made by a woman friend of hers, the milk always looking like blue water to me even after I learned to like the extra cold thinness of it.

She would eat standing up against the kitchen counter, asking me about my day at school, asking Sarah about a project that was due and could we work on it together. I would always feel a little

strange sitting at the table with my food in front of me, even when I held it on my lap rather than setting it on the table, and even though Sarah sat at the table with me. I felt awkward and very small. I felt like Rita could leave the room or the house too quickly and I would not be able to catch her, and this discomforted me.

One day, my mother caught me standing at the refrigerator, eating purple-red grapes from a bowl, one at a time. I was thinking, about something.

"Maggie," she began, "why are you standing there with the door open, letting all the cold air out? Why don't you take the bowl to the table or take some out of the bowl for yourself? Don't you sit down to eat anymore?"

I was old enough by then to know not to share with her what I was beginning to see, that I was taking on more of Rita's way of being than my mother would ever want to see.

I shut the door and left the room, and left her standing there.

Rita was always making something out of things that no one else ever saw anything in. The day the wind knocked a print from where it was leaning against a wall in the hallway, Rita picked up the broken glass from the floor and piled it on a small table and made it seem beautiful to me in its clean clear bright light.

Rita said that our family was cursed with seeing the possibility in everything.

Well, at least Rita and I were so blessed.

My mother thought that Rita was crazy for deciding to have a baby when she was thirty-seven. That was the year that Sarah and I had turned fifteen years. That was the year my mother really began to worry about me.

That was the year I began to worry about myself. I was losing touch with my voice; I could not remember whether I had said something or whether I had only been thinking it very strongly and thought I had said it out loud.

I was beginning to look more and more like Rita, even more than Sarah did. My hair was becoming darker and fuller and longer, and even my eyes were darkening. People sometimes mismatched

us when the four of us were together, giving Sarah to my mother and pairing me with Rita. Even then, I sometimes still pretended that Sarah and I had been misplaced one for the other at our births.

That was probably the year when I first began to worry about Rita, too. All my life I had been told stories about her craziness, but I had only seen what I had seen, and I could not see beyond this.

Now I was noticing her sudden disappearances, the times when Sarah would stay at our house for days, sleeping in the twin bed in my room, and she would tell me that she did not know where her mother was.

Everything I saw in Rita made me feel less lonely and less alone. When I did not see her, I missed her more than the sun.

My mother thought that Jack was crazy for letting Rita have a baby. She said that he could have stopped her. I knew that he could not have stopped her.

The year of the fire, I was helping Rita take care of her twin boys. Sarah was at band practice and the house was empty with just us in it.

Rita reached out for my hand as I was in mid-motion from the counter to the kitchen table, preparing dinner for their family. Her eyes were steel-gray and dark, and the light from the overhead light caught in the lines of her face and made each of the lines deeper and older. She was very still.

"Maggie," she said quietly, "I can't tell any longer whether it's all falling into place or if it's crumbling apart. There's such a small space between the two."

I looked back at her with an expression that said that I understood what she was saying, and that I understood that there was no answer to her words.

That was the only time between us when I felt that she imagined that I was only trying to make her think I was listening to her, that I only wanted her to think that I really understood, that somewhere along the line I had learned to do that with her.

I knew there would be no convincing her. I hoped it was just

that day, the weather, the time of day, that crept between us right then.

That was the first time in my life when I consciously realized that I had been younger earlier.

After the fire, my mother kept me away from Rita, and with what she felt was good reason. Sarah was placed by the courts into the care of my parents until she was to reach majority.

There was a period of time when I was able to keep in touch with Rita through letters, but she moved more often than I could keep up with her, often taking Sarah with her once Sarah was released back into her custody.

The last time I heard from her, she and Sarah were living in Texas in a house with many windows and an aquarium. She said that she was sure that I would like it there.

For years, my eyes were drawn toward Texas license plates on the cars on the highways. I would speed up alongside the car and search for Rita's face through the glass. So many cars from Texas.

When I was seven, Rita took the glasses from her face and held them under the faucet at the kitchen sink. The water ran over the lenses and collected in small drops across the glass.

She put the glasses up to my eyes and had me look through them. Rain.

*Ken Siewert*

## Just Around the Corner Down the Hall

One day the man will look back to this young boy, who bounces a red rubber ball around and around, and he will wonder. He will remember, among other things, counting, but will not remember who it was that had taught him his simple numbers. Maybe it was his mother, he will think, or his father, or maybe it was the old German woman who sits in the front room of that Portland house, her bathrobe tied with a piece of cord about her waist, and making herself ready for bed.

He stares at the ball that rests upon the palm of his hand.

"Five," he says.

He knows the ball well. It is made of hard spongy rubber painted slick fire engine red, but it has seen so much use that the surface is cracking and flaking away. Each time he bounces the ball it strikes the floor with a solid slap and then he takes a step and counts. He loves numbers, so precise, so orderly.

"Six," he says, and the old woman sits in the front room on a faded over-stuffed couch and strokes her long grey hair with an ivory handled brush.

He bounces the ball from the front room into the hallway, down the hall, through the kitchen and then back into the front room. Each time he enters the living room he calls out a number keeping track of his passage. His goal has always been one hundred. When he reaches one hundred he will start over again and it will not be

until much later that the man, who was this young boy, will know that here began a pattern. In his mind, he will return to this house time and time again, but the answers that he seeks are muted. The man will know that somehow this old woman sits at the apex of his mystery and he will want to know about her. He will think that the answers may lie in the memory of simple things. He would ask of the old woman, if he could, what is the color of your eyes, or why is your hair so long and what does it feel like to touch, to glide the brush through the liquid strands of silk.

Briefly, ever so briefly, he will think of another woman. A woman with long brown hair and he will remember her hair drifting and floating in the wind, catching at her eyelashes and tangling within her smile. He will remember how her hair caught in his own smile, held fast at the corners of her lips and sticking to the moistness of his tongue.

"Seven," he says, and he quickens his pace as he starts down the long hallway, afraid that the ball may slip from his control and become lost in the dark. He moves toward the light of the kitchen and the sweet smell of her homemade bread and then, there she is again in the front room.

"Eight," he says, and each time he enters the room and blurts out a number it startles the old German woman. She pauses for a moment breaking the rhythmic brush of her hair. Her head is tilted at an angle as if listening for some sound.

"I want to know," he says.

"What?" she says.

"When will he be back?"

"Tomorrow," she says.

"Nine," he says, and it will take him thirty-seven steps to complete his circle, sometimes thirty-nine, and now and then, his numbers become confused. It angers him when he loses count so he yells louder and louder as he enters the living room hoping that his cadence will resound again in his head as he completes his next passage, but there are always the distractions. There is a fear in the long hallway, the sweet smell of bread in the kitchen and then the front room, filled with things to catch the eye, the fireplace and fire,

the dolls that line the mantle all richly dressed in brightly colored crocheted clothes, her swaying back and forth as she strokes her hair, and then the pictures. He knows each person in each picture arranged upon the wall. She said that he is the spitting image of one man who hangs motionless, suspended, but then he knows the picture looks nothing like his father.

"When will he be back?" he says.

"Tomorrow," she says.

"Ten," he says, and somewhere below the sound of her words, he believes he detects a lie, for he thinks she said the very same thing yesterday and the day before.

As he turns the corner and starts down the hall, he thinks about that morning, how he and his father had walked hand in hand in the alleyway, scuffing the frost from the grass, leaving footprints on the cold ground. He tries to remember exactly, every detail so that he will keep it right.

His father stands over him pointing to the back door. His breath is puffs of fog in the morning air.

"That is your grandmother's house," his father says, "go there, knock on her door. Tell her who you are."

"Aren't you coming?"

"Tell her I will be by later," his father says.

"Eleven," he says, and as he starts down the hall he thinks about the first time he saw her face and tries to remember exactly what it was that he felt.

His knuckles are timid on the door and he is shy in introducing himself. She bends down, her face in front of his, her strong hands upon his shoulders and when she understands, he watches her eyes as her gaze looks beyond him and searches up and down the alley.

"Twelve," he says, and as he starts down the hallway he thinks of another house with a heavy door and his mother standing at an ironing board staring out the window.

He listens to the snap of his mother's gum and the hiss of her iron as he mimics her actions with a handkerchief and a heavy book on the coffee table. Already her face is vague as if lost in the steam that rises from his father's shirt draped so precariously.

"Ghosts in the hallway," he says.

"What?" she says.

"Ghosts."

"Nonsense," she says.

"Thirteen," he says.

She takes up his hand and he feels a slight shudder run through her body as they start down the hall. "It's time for sleep," she says.

She will go to bed each night, with her hair loose, free, and in the morning he will watch as she sits in front of the mirror and braids it, wraps it round and round in a bun, and pins it to the top of her head and it will not be until much later that the man, who was this young boy, will look back into that Portland house and try to understand. Something was left behind, discarded, dropped slowly in the rooms of that Portland house. Now and then he will walk in the footsteps of that young boy collecting the scraps of memory that will help him piece it together.

Briefly, ever so briefly, he will think of another young boy and how this child has the color of his own eyes and the cleft of his own chin, but the thick straight brown hair of the boy's mother. He will wonder what toys and thoughts occupy that child's time.

They sit at the breakfast table. She had broken her arm a year ago and the doctor had made her buy the red rubber ball. The ball is firmly in her left hand and her tea cup in her right. He eyes the ball as she squeezes and releases it over and over again, the cracks appearing and disappearing with each compression. Now and then she will glance at the clock. She reads her fortune in the bits of tea leaves that have collected in patterns and flecks.

"Read mine," he says.

She looks to the tiny scraps of leaves stuck to the side of his porcelain mug and talks about money, mail and strangers.

"And my father?" he says.

"Nothing," she says.

He takes his cup and pours a few drops of tea and swishes it around and around. "Again," he says.

She lays the ball on the white table cloth and takes up his cup with both hands. For a long time she sits silent and then, "Tomorrow," she says. "Tomorrow."

He takes the ball from the table and begins bouncing and counting, that solid thump echoing in the hallway. She moves to the rocking chair and her knitting, occasionally muttering as she drops a stitch.

"One," he says, and there is the darkness and the fear, then the smell of bread.

"Two," he says, and there are the bright dolls, the creak of her chair and ticking of her needles.

He thinks, if only he could be sure, the footprints, his father in the fog with the morning sun at his back, too bright to see his face, the hand pointing the way, the door, her fleeting glance, and lips that seem to move oddly. "Tomorrow," they say.

"Three," he says, and there are the dolls, the ticking needles, the hallway with dark wooden floors, spaces between the boards and dust trapped within the cracks, and then the kitchen with yellowed linoleum, the smell of bread, and the morning tea cups.

"Get it right," he says.

"What?"

"Four," he says.

Today he is particularly unhappy. She doesn't know that each morning while she bathes, he slips out the back door and through the iron gate and checks in the alleyway for footprints in the frost. He checks for the tracks of a man who might pace at night too timid to knock upon the door. This morning there was no frost, only dew, and even though he examined his own steps there was no way to be certain whether his father had been there or not.

"Five," he says, and the door bell rings.

She opens the door and a man looms in the threshold. He cannot see the man's face so he squints into the sunlight pouring through the doorway and holds his breath.

"These are for you," a man says.

"For me?" she says.

"Six," the boy says.

He watches as a man rolls in three large cardboard tubs and she opens each one and looks inside.

"Come see," she says.

Each one is neatly packed with his clothes, his toys. They are oddly familiar, but the smell of them is not quite right and the toys are not as colorful as he remembers.

"They are not mine," he says.

"What?" she says.

"When?" he says.

She sits back in her chair and takes up her knitting. He listens to the sound of her rocking and the ticking of her needles. "Tomorrow," she says.

"You lie," he says.

"What?"

"Seven," he says, and the circling will continue and one day the man will look back on this young boy and wonder what feeling lies just below the memory of that dull echoing sound from the red rubber ball. He will wonder, among other things, how many times he has walked a pattern and arranged people to fit his simple play. How many times has he tried this or that, until now his hallway is filled with ghosts, specter behind specter, their features blurred, bleeding one through another. He will wonder what his intentions were when he first picked up that ball and took that initial step? Was it meant to be one step from or one step toward that old German woman who sits in the front room of that Portland house, brushing her hair and making herself ready for bed?

*Patti Scheibel*

## A Two-Story House

While Fiona had actually been Charlene's grandpa's dog, it used to curl up at her grandma's feet under the table, receiving scraps and loving pats on the sly. Sometimes it almost seemed human, the way it cocked its head and stared up in seeming concern or confusion at Charlene's grandma's everlasting lonely conversation with it. Of course that all happened years before Charlene's birth, which has nothing to do with the recent past when Zeke, in all his gaudy splendor, pounded upon the front door. It's a big two story house or Charlene might have heard his wild thumps. Instead, Charlene huddled under the covers of her mother's old bed in her mother's old room, just like she huddles in the same fetal position in the same bed right now.

The front door of Charlene's grandma's house has long grooves down the surface revealing the wood grain underneath the paint. The door knob is pocked and battered. Zeke pounded upon the door, never noticing the scars across it. If he had noticed he might have assumed some Manson family reject had tried to knife their way into the house.

Actually, fifty years ago Fiona went rabid and had scratched at the door until her paws bled, chewing on the door knob and shattering her teeth in the process. Charlene's grandma came home to see the mad dog throwing her body against the door and gumming the knob in a frenzy, mouth foaming, still managing to stagger on legs that were broken and bent in unbelievable direc-

tions.

But Zeke didn't notice so he assumed nothing. Frustrated, he kicked the door and succeeded in stubbing the toes inside his yellow cowboy boot. He ran from the door, selected a medium sized quartz rock and hurled it up at Charlene's mother's window. It was the only window with a light on. The rock had the desired effect. Charlene peered out the window to see Zeke smiling up at her, his toothy mouth reflecting back the light. He gestured at the front door. Charlene staggered down the narrow stairwell to let him in. She said, "Damn it Zeke, it's three o'clock in the morning and you come round here like . . . like . . . "

Zeke waved a sickly bunch of carnations wrapped in cellophane under her nose. She blushed, reached for them smiling but he jerked them away and ran past her up the stairs into her mother's old room. "My grandma . . . " Charlene said to the blank space in front of her face. She snapped her mouth shut and followed him. He lay sprawled out across the rumpled sheets.

He tossed the carnations to her and said, "These are for the old dragon. Give them to her when she wakes up and be sure to tell her they're from me." Charlene threw the flowers on the floor, ran at him and halfheartedly punched him in the nose. He lay there open-mouthed, a slow trickle of blood running out from his nose as Charlene backed away with her hand over her mouth.

Zeke wiped his nose and when he saw the smear of blood on his hand he howled. Charlene clapped her hand over his mouth and said, "Don't you dare wake up my grandma. Shut up or I'll feed you to the alligators." Being Zeke, the thought made his lips twitch in a half smile under her hand. Charlene's grandma slept better back then. It would have taken more to wake her.

Now, however, Charlene's grandma tosses and turns and Charlene listens to her violent sleep through the walls. The extra dose Charlene's begun to give her grandma before bed time insures against her waking from whatever nightmares she has and crying. Charlene doesn't think of it as overdosing though, she thinks of it as giving her grandma the rest she so desperately needs.

Tree branches scrape against the wall. There's a row of

willows encircling the house that looks like oriental brush paintings on misty mornings, and a lemon tree that produces such sour lemons a drop of its juice would ruin an entire glass of iced tea. They surround the house with their gnarled overgrown branches as though embracing it or holding it up. Charlene's grandma's house has always been the shadiest one on the block. When Charlene turns on her mother's old Cupid lamp the darkness seems to linger in corners and under tables, waiting to crawl out again. Charlene might imagine she hears something sliding down the halls that stops at each closed door then slides on again. She probably dwells on toothless rabid dogs with legs all distorted out of shape. The story has been in her family too long for her not to. Being a strong-minded woman, Charlene's grandma had borrowed a neighbor's rifle after seeing Fiona foaming at the mouth. Charlene's mother was just a toddler, and she watched the whole thing from the back seat of the locked car. But then again Charlene might not think of it at all, stuck in the unfamiliar house listening to the lonely sounds of her grandma's sleep.

Charlene had lifted her hand off Zeke's mouth and had to smile at his off-centered grin. She studied his red nose as he held his head back to stop the bleeding. She said, "Zeke, you gotta stop taking drugs or you'll wind up looking like one of those Picasso pictures with both eyes on one side of your nose and God knows how many mouths."

"I'm not taking drugs. I think you're taking drugs. I think you're taking your poor old granny's drugs and not leaving her any. I think that's why she's so grouchy and that's why you tell me things like you'll feed me to the alligators."

Charlene said, "There used to be alligators, really. They'd come up from the swamps in drought years and Grandpa'd find their tracks in the yard. Sometimes he'd look outside and see their yellow eyes glowing, just pairs of yellow circles moving around real close to the ground. He used to have to hunt them."

"I think you taking drugs must be genetic. I bet old gramps dropped a little acid in his day." Charlene closed her eyes and counted to ten in a whisper while her grandma's eyes danced under

their lids in the next room.

At first Charlene's grandma kept giving Charlene her jewelry: old rings, necklaces and broaches of tarnished silver and green glass. Charlene would try and press them back into her grandma's withered hand, but the hand closed up tight into a bud like fist. The fingers would slowly curve up like some rarefied orchid, curving slowly because of the arthritis and years of flexing open then shut. Once Charlene tried to open those fingers but they seemed as feeble as match sticks and Charlene grew afraid and quit.

Every time Charlene slipped the bed pan under her grandma's tiny wrinkled ass it seemed as though she was violating the old woman. Her grandma would blankly stare up at a point somewhere above Charlene's head and blink her milky eyes over and over. "Was it tough in the depression," Charlene would ask. Or, "Were you scared when Fiona went crazy," even though she'd heard it all from her mother many times.

Her grandma would keep her eyes fixed up in the air and say, "I don't remember," or finally "it won't help matters much." Charlene took to looking the other way while awkwardly shoving the bed pan under. Then Charlene would disappear somewhere inside the house for half an hour or so. Where ever she went to she couldn't hear her grandma's hoarse voice calling her name, shriller and shriller until her grandma would clench her eyes and mouth shut, probably pretending she was some one else.

Charlene, however, did originate a more positive ritual. Every morning and every night she used the sterling silver brush her grandma gave her to comb out her grandma's waist long baby fine white hair. The first time her grandma had said, "I can brush my own hair." Her hands had shot up to grab the brush out of Charlene's hand but they wavered and fluttered back onto the quilt.

Charlene put the brush down and began to massage her grandma's pink scalp with soft fingers. She said, "When I was little I used to spend hours brushing dolls hair. Your hair is so soft and white. Please let me brush it." Her grandma snorted but didn't stop her. Now if Charlene is even five minutes late her grandma calls out her name and announces it's brushing time. Charlene brushes and brushes, even when her wrist begins to throb and her arm gets

numb. Charlene likes the feel of long hair.

It was probably her first tie to Zeke. They both admired the wild coils of his long hair. She frequently contemplated on the way it fell down his back, making her itchy, but she never suggested her brushing his hair. Zeke's long hair upset her grandma. The first time he dropped by after Charlene had moved in he gave her a long sticky kiss right at the top of the stairs. Her grandma toddled out of her room with the walker and stared, wide-eyed and outraged. Charlene abruptly untangled herself from his arms while he muttered a barely audible "hiya."

Carefully annunciating each word her grandma said, "Aren't you going to introduce me to your girlfriend, Charlene?"

"Jesus, I'm a guy," Zeke blustered.

"Well I'm not sure kissing a young man with long hair is that much better than what I thought was going on." Charlene's grandma stalked back into her room, rattling the walker. Zeke muttered about evil old dragons while Charlene sighed.

"I suppose in her day they wore so much clothes the only way they could tell the difference was by the hair," Charlene explained. Probably Charlene was glad her grandma hadn't caught them in bed, because her grandma's eyesight was so bad she might have made the same mistake, devastating Zeke for life. She patted his hand and said, "Oh, don't take her so seriously. She's a relic." Zeke wouldn't answer her. He pecked her on the cheek, picked up his red leather jacket and left, later calling her up to say he'd be by again when her grandma was gone.

"But you can't do that," Charlene wailed into the antique receiver, "just because she's old and crabby. You'd be crabby too if some grandkid you hardly knew moved in to keep an eye on you."

"How'd you like it if she accused you of being a guy?"

"I'd drop my pants and say guess again."

"I think your grandma would be better off if they just broke down and got her a nurse instead of inflicting you on her."

That all happened when her grandma could walk short distances with the walker. When her grandma stumbled she'd accuse Charlene of rearranging the furniture. Perhaps the furniture rearranged itself. Charlene never moved anything but it seemed like

she had each time a chair skittered away when her grandma tried to sit down.

The end tables perpetually drift into people's paths. The bruises on Charlene's grandma's shins have healed but Charlene's are still black and blue. Perhaps when Fiona was alive she noticed tables and chairs slow migration. Dogs are different than people; they sense what people can't. Perhaps her last act of trying to batter the door open was caused by a crazed desire to shred the over stuffed chairs and splinter the tables once and for all. Charlene's grandma had shot the dog, and Charlene's grandpa had been so proud of his wife's steady hand he never had the door sanded or the knob replaced. He did, however, pick up the bits of teeth scattered across the welcome mat. He kept them in a jar, like jelly beans on the mantle in the living room. The day he died Charlene's grandma buried the teeth in the back yard, jar and all. She told Charlene's mother at the funeral she took great comfort in burying those teeth. Charlene's mother never told Charlene this particular tidbit, though.

Charlene stretches and yawns. She wishes there was a warm body in bed with her, preferably Zeke but a dog would do. As her grandma whimpers in the next room Charlene's hands crawl across her body, almost as if she's reassuring herself everything's in its place. She presses her fingers together and whispers, "Zeke."

She had told Zeke the dead flowers he brought would never warm her grandma up to him. He put his finger to her lips and whispered "later" in a husky voice. They hadn't bothered to pull the curtains or turn off that horrid Cupid lamp. Since it was a two story house it probably didn't matter. Charlene's grandma started moaning in her sleep in the next room, a low rumbling sound rather like a cow's moo. Charlene stopped moving under Zeke and held her breath, waiting to see if the noise would stop. Zeke kept on pushing like a wind-up toy missing a part, a bear beating against a nonexistent drum.

A week later when Charlene made Dinner with a capital D for her grandma and Zeke to reacquaint them under better circumstances, Zeke wore a suit instead of his usual jeans and bright shirt. Zeke in a suit was something to behold. He had his hair tied back and tucked into the collar of his shirt. He could have been a business

man except for the necktie which was strictly Zekesque, hand painted red lobsters dancing across a background of tiny shining palm trees. Charlene too had made an attempt at dressing to please her grandma. She went so far as to shave her legs up to the knee, exactly where the hem of her demure cotton skirt fell.

Charlene's grandma didn't seem to realize Zeke was the same long haired man. The dining room chair even stayed in place when he carried her down the stairs and set her in it. She clung to his neck like a child and wouldn't let go for a moment, her old hands clutching onto the back of his sport coat. He bugged his eyes out at Charlene. Charlene's grandma's hands slowly unfolded, let go and drifted down into her lap. She said, "Such a nice young man."

The dining room hadn't been used in years and the weighty elegance of the old mahogany furniture seemed out of time. Charlene had set the table with the fine old china and good silver, also using the salad forks which hadn't been out in more than twenty years. From that time onwards the salad forks would refuse to dwell in their proper compartment in the silverware drawer. Now they tend to mix in with the other forks and occasionally the knives and spoons, rustling and clinking together.

The candles flickered, casting warm tints. Charlene's grandma insisted upon serving up portions onto the plates herself. She piled Zeke's so high it looked like an upside bowl. When Zeke said, "I can't eat all this," Charlene's grandma took a hunk of roast beef from his plate with her fingers and slipped it under the table. She winked at him.

They ate in silence, utensils clicking against the plates. Zeke kept looking at Charlene's grandma, opening his mouth and taking a deep breath then slamming it shut. Upstairs Charlene's grandma's bed unmade itself. Charlene crawled under the table to pick up the hunk of meat. Zeke giggled into his wine glass. Charlene's grandma turned on him, turned at the sound and said, "Why don't you share your joke with me?"

Charlene popped up from under the table, meat in hand. She said, "Grandma, I think the alligators are back. Last night I looked out the window and saw yellow eyes about the size of quarters."

"Alligators, what a crock. Your grand daddy might have had

your mother convinced with his alligator hunts but I knew all along he just wanted to get out of the house. Lord, child, think. The closest swamp is more than thirty miles away." Zeke blew bubbles in his wine glass. Charlene watched her grandma's hands hover over the table. The color of them seemed translucent.

The walls of the house are like elastic, they slip and at night they stretch to unbelievable proportions. Alone nights her grandma used to try and teach the dog to sit, beg, come. It was a big friendly Irish setter that would constantly jump into her lap as if it thought it were a little lap dog. It didn't become a problem until Charlene's grandma got pregnant. She tried to be strict then, ordering the dog to go lay down and stay. Fiona would collapse into a heap at her feet and sigh loudly. Her grandma got that same response for every order but come; then Fiona would happily run to her, jumping over the obstacle course of shifting furniture, tail wagging. Her grandma gave up after awhile and started talking to the dog about names for the baby. She started letting Fiona sprawl across Charlene's grandpa's wide empty side of the bed. But late at night when the front door would slam, rattling all the glass in the house Fiona would slink out of the bed and crawl under it, cowering. Charlene's grandma would flick off the light then clench her eyes and hands shut.

Charlene's grandma whimpers softly in the next room. Her mother's old room strikes Charlene as a sort of museum. The pink flowered wall paper and the white lace curtains are nothing like the house Charlene's mother raised her in. The white Cupid lamp is a fat leering baby with no colors painted in its white eyes. Zeke admired that lamp. He wrote his name inside the lamp shade with a red felt tip marker. "I have to have it when your grandma's gone," he told Charlene. "It's so tacky it's wonderful."

"That's terrible! Did you wait around for your grandma to go so you could take her stuff?"

"She was dirt poor. She didn't have any stuff to take."

Charlene pulls a pillow over her head to muffle the sound of her grandma's pain. She used to check on her grandma for each cry, even that time with Zeke in her mother's old bed. She had told him, "I have to check Grandma," and had started to squirm away but he

didn't seem to hear her. Charlene panicked for a moment, then had the oddest sensation she was someone else, someone not inside her body. She watched Zeke with detached interest, then slipped away and entered her grandma's room. Her grandma thrashed around in her bed, scraping at the air with hooked fingers.

Charlene said, "Hush, it's alright," over and over until her grandma's body stilled and her fingers loosened and lay quiet. Charlene shuffled back into her mother's old room. Zeke snored between the cool sheets. She crawled in beside him and nudged him. He muttered something incoherent and turned over, facing the wall. Charlene brushed his hair, fanning it out across the pillow while he slept.

She woke him at dawn and told him to go. As she pushed him out the front door he told her, "You know you're abusing my good nature."

The pillow muffles nothing in this big two story house that creaks and groans under its own weight. Charlene throws the pillow across the room, gets out of bed and ransacks her mother's drawers looking for her grandma's medication. She finds the vial but there's only two pills left, twice the prescribed dose but half of what she's begun to give her grandma each night. Something slides down the hall. Charlene opens her mother's door and peeks out. Nothing. She walks down the hall towards the phone, out of reach of her grandma's voice. She stumbles over another misplaced table. With shaking hands she dials Zeke's number to invite him over.

"You sure you want me there?" Zeke asks.

"Yes," Charlene answers, wrapping the telephone cord around her wrist.

"You're not going to punch me?"

"No, I won't."

"You're not gonna throw me out at some God-awful hour?"

"No."

"You're not gonna disappear on me?"

"I might, I'm sorry but my grandma's real bad and I don't know what..."

"Yeah, yeah. Give me half an hour and I'll be there."

Fiona was a beautiful dog. Probably Charlene's grandma relives that day over and over in her illness: the gun in her hands, the frightened tearful little girl in the back seat of the Ford. She aims, fires and crumples the dog. It wasn't even her own dog, she didn't name it, she didn't pick it out and she never hurt it. The pills they keep giving her, round, hard and white stick in her throat like those damn dog teeth. She tosses and turns, outside of her body now, outside of her mind. They're rustling in the next room. Fiona's such a good natured dog, listening night after night, shadowing her on four paws through this house that batters and batters with drifting furniture and never stops.

# Contributors:

Something of a Renaissance woman, **Sidney Allen** is a freelance graphic designer, a pilot , and a private investigator. She enjoys travelling and expresses her concern about the Earth's envrionment and the need for people to communicate sensitively and honestly. She's previously been published in *Remark.* "Shell Station" is part of a book of intertwined stories about living in Hollywood, which Sidney is writing at the moment. **Annette Cenkner** is a senior at Cal State Northridge majoring in biology. "Diane's Hometown" and "Elektra's Recipes" are her first published poems. **Grant Cogswell** is a sometimes "Val-puppy" living in Charlottesville, Virginia. He has been publisged twice before in *Northridge Review.* He writes stories and songs, and is working on a novel. Veteran contributor **Bobbie R. Coleman** refused to cooperate in giving a "normal bio." Bobbie did reveal that her favorite movie is *Casablanca* and says she's accepted the fact that she'll never play pro basketball. **Daniel Fogg** still lives in Silverlake and is still happy. **Herman Fong** won the American Academy of Poets Award for "Far Away to a Friend" in 1988. After receiving a BS in accounting, he is currently working on his MS at CSUN. **Suzanne Ghiglia** has had her work published in Northridge Review and has won an award from the American Academy of Poets. She is in the MA program at CSUN and is teaching a creative writing workshop. Suzanne likes to read and and her ambition in life is to "write and write." Right now she's at work writing short fiction because, she says, she's happy in her life. **Mary Harris** has had her poetry published in *Northridge Review*, *Amelia*, and *Blue Unicorn* Magazines. She has won the Rachel Sherwood award in 1987 and 1988 and her poem, "On the Back Burner," won an honorable mention from the American Academy of Poets. After raising four children, Mary is finally a senior at CSUN. She has upcoming work in *Poetry Miscellany* magazine and is trying to find a publisher for a collection of her poetry. **Stephen A. Katcher** is a multi-talented person. This causes him a lot of confusion. He is an aspriring *fill-in-the-blank.* Previously unpublished, **Paula Licht** brings a different light to her work. A junior at CSUN, she is a philosophy major although she enjoys English literature as well. Paula is currently writing short stories

assisted by her three cats. **L.M. Lopez** takes classes at CSUN, and teaches at Pacoima Junior High School. "Ahalani" is her second published short story. This is the first time **Davi Loren** has ever had any work published. A senior at CSUN, she has "been one for years," and hopes to get her MFA eventually. Davi is "cranking out" a bunch of poems this summer and has several stories in progress. **Kristina McHaddad** has been awarded a grant by the American Poetry Associaton and has been published in issues of *Manuscript*, *Northridge Review*, and *American Poetry Anthology*. She is staying in Los Angeles, but is having trouble painting her apartment. **Marjan Nirou**, a CSUN alumnus, lives in New Jersey with her husband. She just fininshed her MSA at the Pratt Institute, and is a working artist. She is going to teach at Kent Place school. **Gordon Preston** has previously been published in the *Missouri Review*. He lives in Modesto with his wife and two young sons, and he teaches third grade. **Shephanie Ross** is currently transferring from the University of Colorado to UCSB, and this is her first published photograph. **Patti Scheibel** has been published in two issues of Northridge Review. She is a graduate student and her hobby is training stunt rodents for movies. Kenneth Siewert was the editor of Northridge Review for three semesters, and "Just Around the Corner Down the Hall" is his second published story. The following contributors' notes were not available: **Cesar Romero, David MacIntire, Lois Shimazaki, Karen Mann, Tristan M. James, Ari McGruder, Joel Manes, Mark Mann.**