

NORTHRIDGE
REVIEW

FALL
1996

NORTHRIÖÖC REVICW
FALL 1996

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Derek Dodge for being "The Bird."

And no thanks at all to those editorial staff members whose collective inactions inspired the editor with the theme of this issue.

Awards

The Northridge Review awards prizes annually in recognition of the finest works published in the previous Fall and Spring issues. The following is a brief description of each award and respective winners for the Fall 1995 and Spring 1996 issues:

The Rachel Sherwood Poetry Award

Rachel Sherwood was a poet and CSUN student who was killed in an automobile accident on July 5, 1979 at the age of 25. In memoriam, an annual prize was established in her name. Poets honored with this prize receive fifty dollars.

Santi Tafarella was selected as this year's winner of the Rachel Sherwood Poetry Award. Her poem, "29 Ways of Looking at Wood," was originally published in the Spring 1996 issue of *The Northridge Review*. Thanks to Jan Ramjerdi for evaluating the poetry.

The Helen Helms Marcus Short Fiction Award

This annual award was established by Helen Helms Marcus to encourage writers of short fiction to pursue their art. The award was first given in Spring 1986, with the sponsorship of the University Women's Club. Writers honored with this award receive one hundred dollars.

Amy Reynolds was chosen as the winner of The Helen Helms Marcus Short Fiction award for her short stories, "Archaeology" and "Weaver's Escape," both originally published in the Fall 1995 and Spring 1996 issues of *The Northridge Review* respectively. Thanks to Mona Houghton for evaluating the fiction.

The American Academy of Poets Award

The American Academy of Poets awards prizes every year for excellence in poetry. *The Northridge Review* is pleased to publish this year's winners: "Truffles," by Mark Hoffer, and "Out Late Saturday Night," by Kerlan Wong. Luisa Villani and Bonnie MacAdam received honorable mention.

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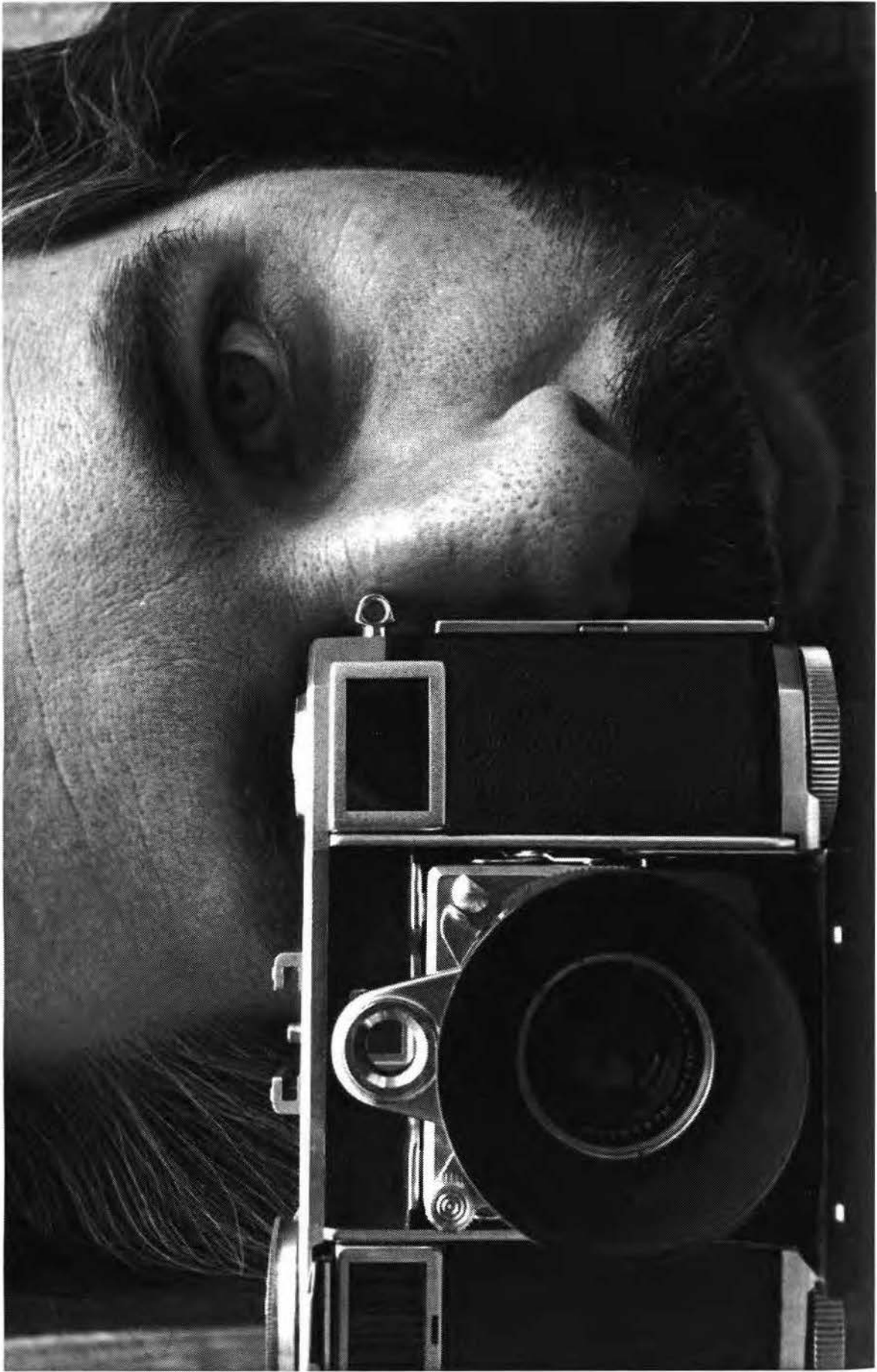
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Tom Moran

On The Firing of a Long Dead Muse

Heather Rhodes

How hard could it be?

She's *dead* right?

Well, physically sure, but you know
how muses can be.

Just so full of ideas, that

didn't sizzle in the gas fire,
or get soaked at the bottom of the sea,
or get smothered like air from a smoker's black lung
or suffocated in the oven.

It's my own fault, really, for leaving the door wide open.

She sauntered in.

I wanted her to.

We cried together, even wrote a few lines, when
we weren't caught in our own crossfire.

And I loved playing boss to her subservient style, her pillbox lid and gloves.

Sometimes,

I didn't like what she had to say
and if I fought her, she'd threaten
to kill herself. (The girl had a sense of humor
in her. I swear....)

I guess that's where the conflict of interest began.

Pushy broad, like a tick burrowed in my skin.

She stirred a whirling elixir that almost poisoned my pen.

She wanted to take me with her.

Oh, but I stopped that and quick, mind you.

I handed her the pink slip.

I laid red tulips on her grave.

Resonance

Carl Bramblett

When I was little, I ran
to the windows, small open palms
slapping against the glass.
I could make the world hear me.
Laughing, outside quivering at my touch,
I struck harder, harder.
Dad would always race into the room,
stopping my young wrists just in time.
I still have visions of my hands breaking
through, silver shards spinning
like angels.

NVWVS (Unrelated 1)

Alexis Frixione

Hot fog covers the inside of a dirty window. The outside is kept as clean as gold by a small boy with eyes. Every Wednesday night he stands on his wooden crate looking in the barn's back window, on the tip of his toes, catching more sounds through the cloudy glass than anything. With his soft eyes he watches blurry boxing gloves bigger than his head being thrown around. The dumb glow of the window holds his complete attention so tight that it becomes the only light inside the stone black earth.

His best friend is a moon. A moon no bigger than the fists of those colossal fighters that he watches go into the barn every Wednesday. And every Wednesday watches then come back out. They stammer out either deranged and defeated or victorious and deranged. They're either holding a loose toothed smile and a crowd, or two black eyes and a crown made of stars. As they clumsily dance into the night, the excited screams that once lived inside the steamy barn fade slowly down the road towards the town anticipating the festivities of the wakening night.

He runs back to the window after watching the boxers leave. Knowing "I knew he had won!" picks up his crate while his moon follows him, orbiting around his fidgety body. On his walk home, at times he sets down his crate and while his moon spins around him he is a boxer. Dodging and swinging his tin fists at the tiny brave moon. At times tapping her softly with his toy palms until she wobbles back into a clean orbit. He recites the progress of their boxing match with the voice of a muffled loud speaker. The moon glows and leads him safely to his tree house.

High up a tree his small wooden room keeps him comfortable. He sets his crate, that also serves as a table, in the center of the room and places on it a tall cracked vase-like lamp with no lampshade that wouldn't work even with electricity. Around the broken lamp he sets the softglow moon into orbit. She keeps his room lit and he lays against one wall where his blankets rest. Laying down with dreams already in his head he stares up at the night in the cracks of the roof. His moon flashes in and out of his fantasy as she spins above him. Around the room. Breaking out of his thoughts as if disappointed with himself, he bats at his partner, half upset and half playing with a smile. She wobbles for a round or two until she stabilizes again and smiles back.

Her light comes from within. She doesn't reflect the light of other things. She is real. Waning and Waxing in periods. Stirring up his heart every time that he steps into the real world and looks at her. Every time he can't believe how genuinely beautiful and tangible she is. He can't stay focused. Her perfect detail, small and delicate like caress, gradually disintegrates into a hazy Wednesday night boxing match through a window. He throws a rag over her to dim the light and she flies on in circles above the fights in his head.

The Zoo with a broken back and its single janitor, keeper. Ythgimla Dog. Titanic and mechanic like the Zoos of other times. Perhaps this is another time, another world.

Instant bestfriends like third grade, Lucas and Ythgimla walk like plastic ducks down well kept paths. The first cage holds in its steel hand a miniscule cumulus cloud, nonthreatening. The second a bitten off chunk of night, silent.

“Mr. dog?” asks Lucas. “Why...?”

“Seems like things must be in cages in order to get any attention,” sighs Ythgimla disillusioned. “Oh... and call me Ythgimla.”

A boulder of blue sky sleeps in the next cage.

“You know why people dream, don’t you?” asks Ythgimla dreamily. “Because they despise the real.”

A pace turns a jog into a run. On the other side of a bridge they run past cages holding fire, fog, rain, rocks, voices, etc. October, like a Wednesday stares from its cage as they run by. Panting in blue uniform broom Ythgimla runs on. Lucas following, noticing that the people that came to the zoo are in cages too.

“Don’t mind them. They like it.”

“What’s in those?” passing what seems like empty cages.

“Temperatures.”

Winter, a waterfall, wind, water, voices, sand and grass in cages. Infinite paths they never travel branch from the one they’re on. Like a bare tree the zoo opens into one million decisions. A stream, 13, a kite, a kiss, a storm, a star, etc. They land in a part of the zoo that has no teeth to smile. Exhausted, Ythgimla must stop. There is a crowd. The things in the cages unfamiliar to Lucas, are not as alive.

“Political ideas,” then Ythgimla points to an overprotected cage made of good steel, glassed up and fenced. “That’s communism. Have to keep it there. Makes folks uneasy.”

Reclining with his elbows on the railing while a piece of hay plays in his mouth. Contemplating like a kid what to show off next. Spectators, cramped in their personal cage, flock anxiously around these cages, barking and yipping at the cages, hoping for answers. Then, both like kids, run from the crowds to the next section.

“Danger just had a baby!” Ythgimla pants pointing at a cage they stop before.

“And safety?”

“You silly. You can’t have safety in a cage.” Ythgimla laughs so loud that it sounds like god and all creatures join in laughing.

Lucas never remembers his dreams. The week goes by like usual. In the mornings he does the shopping for some of the tired old people of the town. His small body running, carrying and lifting. At times when he’s at work in town he hears a fighter’s name running through the people like a plague. They speak of him as if he were a great monarch. If there was a throne in that small town it would surely be reserved for that champion boxer. The whole town would sink to their knees before him and admire his swollen hands.

He receives some pay and a few compliments and runs out of town to his house. His moon has been spinning up in the sky around his house while he worked. They both head for the barn. They have races around the empty barn and the moon almost always wins. Then they run into the grassy hills and meet a glass blue sky. They run until the air gets thin and the town is very small. Lucas lays down with a flower in his mouth and

one arm lifted up so his moon has something on the barren green knoll to orbit around. And he dreams.

Up on his toes, hearing shouts and bruises form, hearing the vulgar uproar of the thundering spectators. He can only see the glamorous blurs and shadows through that window, the rest he adds himself. The announcer's voice guides him through the glory of it all. A tight scream always loaded in his stomach just in case he gets the nerve to let it loose. He never gets the nerve but his insides cheer. His moon circles wildly inside his enormous sweatshirt keeping him warm from the cool winter kiss of the air he forgot to notice. The cold light from the window warms his small face and he strains hard to imagine what it is to be a boxer.

He follows his routine until Wednesday. On Wednesday Lucas comes for his moon, but instead of racing around the barn and laying in the hills, they box. He practices for the day when he can go into the barn to fight. For the time when it will be his name that storms through town. Wednesday turns another week over and the excited boy, after playing boxing with his moon, heads to the barn. He waits near the front for the fighters that up close look like tanks to come in from town. Long after the champion arrives there is no sign of his contender. Lucas and his moon still wait out front.

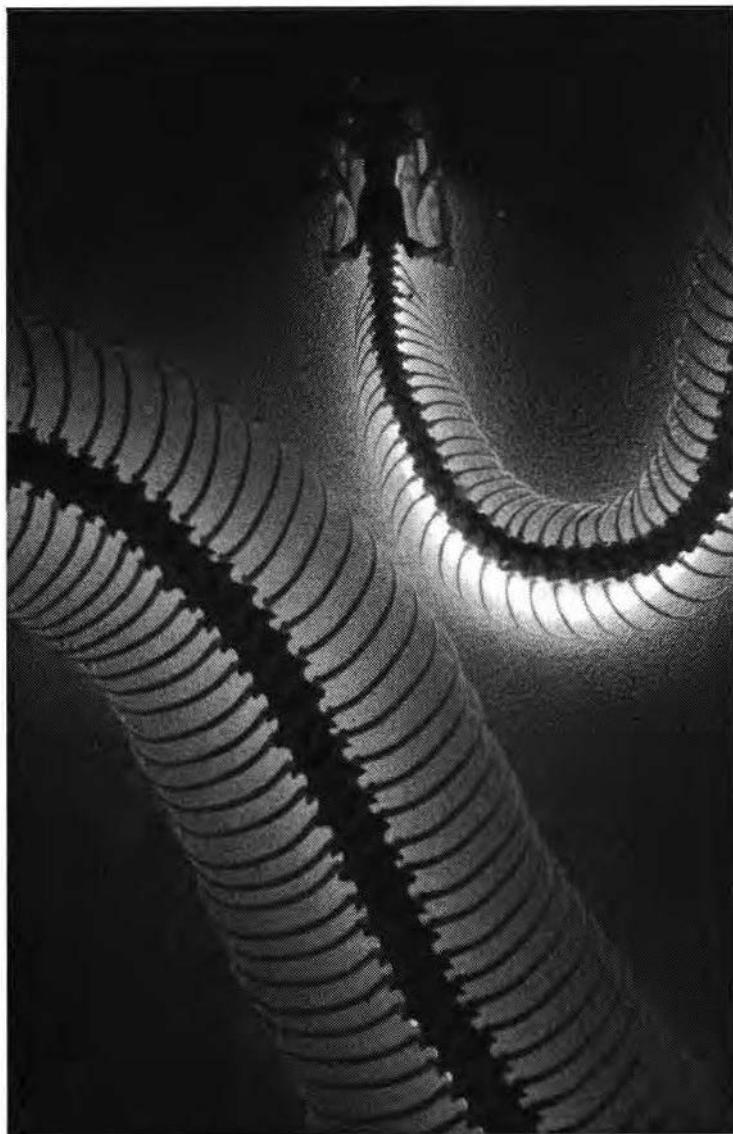
"Kid. Psst. Kid. You wanna fight?"

Lucas begins nodding wildly before a heavy mustache with a cane.

"Meet me inside" and the man is already gone. The child fanatically takes his baby moon, and knowing damn well that she can't go in there with him, hurls her far beyond sight into the sleepy sky forever.

The gloves are a loose fit. He jumps around in his corner and tries hard to ignore the unfamiliar laughing faces smeared perfectly clear with age. He thinks they are laughing at him but they are only, like always, laughing amongst themselves so as not to cry. He tests his left jab on an inconsistent cloud of cigar smoke. Beer, sweat and vulgar spit make their way to his nose and he tries not to breathe. The air is so heavy with obscenity that Lucas has trouble holding himself with skinny legs.

Over a wind of shouts he barely hears the loud speakers announce the champion. Climbing into the ring before him, a disproportionate monster already glowing, is jovially greeted by hoggish howls. The next thing he hears is a bell. The first glove numbs his whole face and miraculously he remains standing. The second blow topples him with tears filling his eyes like water in buckets.



Tom Moran

The Birth of Rapture

Monti Lawrence

Rapture sprang from that part of madness
that is not bound to the body
but free to roam, hovering over
the heather, restless in the air.
Honeysuckle and small, black
mushrooms grow in the prints
left by her dangling feet.
In her hands, devastation wrapped
in lotus leaves.

She hides in the gills of young
girls until they reach fifteen,
then blooms in shades of lavender
and dusk until they can no longer
breathe underwater.
She gathers in the foam
on the faces of men, lands in the laps
of beautiful women and homely girls
then fans out, iridescent smoke
weaving through hair, fingers, words.
All burn into gray-blue ash then breathed
to fill a part of herself.

She carries crimson veils
of alcohol and tears. Floating, ethereal,
a white and gold paradise above the land until
the sky fills with dread and drops
purple stones into the heads of women,
threads of orange-veined violence
into the palms of men.

Something Ugly

Alan W. Mills

You are sitting outside a coffee house, at a small plastic table, on the patio, on the street corner, near a place people call Vaseline Alley. Your name is Justin and you're drinking Nutty Doodle coffee (it's one of the specialties around here). You're wearing clothes that you've just washed, but they could still be called grungy only because your oversized jeans are completely shredded and your green shirt has faded into a color that might be jade.

Despite how specific all the details are, you're still only words. You're a collection of words, but you must understand, people are watching you. You're Justin now, and even though no one at the coffee house is paying attention to you, everyone is watching. They're not watching you, they're watching the words you have become. If you do not like this, if this bothers you, you should stop simply being words.

You're Justin and you're sitting outside a coffee house and, in case it hasn't already been mentioned, you're completely fucked up. You've been drinking. You've been smoking pot. You've been doing crystal. Of course, you've been doing crystal. You always do crystal, if you have a choice.

You're the reader now, and you're completely fucked up because you don't know how to be fucked up but you are because the words are telling you that you are. You're on crystal, so try reading faster. Pace a little. Grind your teeth. Open your eyes, nice and wide and try not seeing anything. Don't stop looking so that you won't have enough time to focus your vision on any single object. Think of your perception as being Cubist. See everything from every angle until what you were attempting to perceive has become distorted and abstract, until what you are looking at becomes a masterpiece of art. This is the crystal and this is the vodka and beer, not to mention the pot. A lot of this is the pot.

You sit in the coffee house with a sense of pride. You've washed all your clothes, not all your clothes, but all the clothes you have with you. You've washed all your clothes and you've folded all your clothes because you were fucked up and had to do something. You folded your clothes and inserted them neatly into your backpack. The backpack's in your car, your Toyota MR2. You still have a car because you don't feel like wandering the streets today. Today, you want to be normal. You want to be recognized and acknowledged. You want to be real. However, no one is paying attention to you, but you like that; you like it when no pays attention to you. But, remember, you're words, and you're always being watched.

You're the writer now and you're thinking that everything seems too linear right now. You've extended a single moment for as long as you can, and despite the fact that

nothing has even occurred yet, you're feeling like a linear progression is taking over. You're trying to avoid that because a linear progression implies a quality of time. You're resisting time because the next moment is an ugly moment and you're trying to fight it. You want to disrupt the temporality in order to avoid the next moment. You're going to disrupt the temporality in order to avoid the next moment. You're going to keep repeating yourself in order to avoid the next moment.

You've decided to wander the streets today. You're going to become homeless again. You fill your little gray/matter backpack. You close the door reverently. You walk away from your mother's life and you board a bus to L.A..

(Ellipse)

You step off the bus and you're a street person now. You're impoverished and you're a hustler and you're loaded on Crystal or coke or special K. You enjoy the moment you step out onto the street. All of this is an ocean to you and when you walk out into it, you are a small thing. You are a thing without an identity, without value, without importance. No one knows you. No one wants to know you. You can drift now. You can float through the moments now and enjoy the excitement when a mugger jostles you and takes the few hundred you sold your ass for last night. Understand though, you don't mind. You don't need the money. You only sold your ass last night to see what it was like.

Imagine you are the street. You are the people and the violence. You are the sounds and vapors rising off the asphalt. You are the pungent smell of this alley's gutter and the awareness that the citizens don't look at your people because they see your people as they walk past. You are this sea of experience and horror. You are intoxicating. Lost children are addicted to you and you love it.

You're sitting at the coffee house and when the two cops on bicycles stop in front of you, you look up lackadaisically because you know better and because you really don't care.

You are words, you are sounds. You are a series of sounds. The moment has broken down and you are of flood of different sounds. "Faggot Why are your Faggot Go fuck yourselves Eyes so glazed Faggot Is this your Faggot Pigs Faggot Blow me Faggot Open the Faggot Car Faggot Eat Shit Faggot Where do you Faggot Trunk Faggot Live Faggot Suck my cock you fucking pigs Faggot Is this your Faggot Bag Pig Can I look Faggot Inside Faggot You already did Pig No I didn't Faggot Yes you did Pig Inside Faggot Inside Faggot Inside Faggot Faggot Can I look inside Faggot Yes but Pig you already did Pig Faggot Fucking pig Faggot Is this yours Faggot Yes Pig Is this yours Faggot Yes Pig Is this yours Faggot Yes Pig Is this yours Faggot No Pig I've never seen that before Pig Yeah right Faggot Yeah right Faggot You have the right Faggot What rights Faggot Faggot Faggot To Faggot Remain silent Faggot Remain silent."

You're sitting on the curb next to your MR2. A cop is talking to you while the other scavenges through your trunk. You can't see him, but you can hear him going through your neatly packed bag. When he comes around the car with your backpack in hand, you're not surprised to see all your newly washed clothes chaotic hanging out of it. You know what's going on but it's not like you called them pigs or anything. You didn't call them pigs and didn't tell them to go fuck themselves. They called you faggot, you didn't call them pigs.

You're a single word. You are the word faggot. You are a death threat. You refer to the act of burning medieval homosexuals alive. You signify that homosexuals should be burned to death as if they were kindling. That's what faggots are, kindling. When you are used, you are used to threaten. When you are used, you should be retaliated against. When a homosexual is threatened, he should defend himself.

Justin, You know what's going on but there's nothing you can do but play along and make silence into your uneasy friend.

(Pause, edit, insert sound).

When you were a little boy, you used to ride in the rodeo. It was a children's rodeo and you'd ride ponies and rope sheep, you'd wear your tiny straw hat and laugh when it hit the dirt as some small calf knocked you off its back. You still have pictures. Your mom still has pictures.

(Fade sound out, quick cut to scene outside coffee-house.)

He pulls your clothes out a piece at a time and drops them to the ground. He asks you if each piece belongs to you. You say yes every time. He pulls out your make-up bag and asks what it's for. You don't feel like saying that you're a performer. You don't feel like telling the pig that your first single is doing well in Europe. You tell him it's your make-up bag and that you like wearing make-up. He asks you why and you tell him that you're completely made up right now. Neither of them believe you. You say that you're real good and could make yourself look better than their wives if you wanted to.

You are the law, and according to you, it is illegal to threaten the life of a police officer. According to the law, a threatened police officer may do whatever is necessary to protect his own life as well as the lives of innocent citizens.

He knocks you down on to the street and twists your arm behind your back. The asphalt scratches your cheek as some part of him presses down against your back. It doesn't stop you. You still say that if either of them needs tips, you be glad to help. You don't get an answer. The cop with your bag pulls out a shirt and asks if it is yours.

You are the person this story is about. You're telling me this story and you stop the tale to say, "I'm not crying victim or anything, because I knew that I deserved it. I was

fucked up and there've been so many times I've gotten away with shit when I shouldn't have. This was totally my karma. I think I needed it."

He pulls out a gray/matter case for glasses. He asks if it is yours. You say no. You say you've never seen it before. You say the truth. You say you don't even wear glasses, forgetting about the sunglasses that were sitting on your head.

You're the reader now and there's no surprise about what's coming next. You wish the writer would just get to the point, but this isn't about the point. This is about the writer not wanting to get to the point. This is about the writer being afraid of the climax, but this isn't the climax. The climax comes later. This isn't the inciting incident. The inciting incident occurred before this story was even written.

He opens up the case and reveals a rather large bag of coke or crystal. It really isn't a big bag at all, it's just that even though it's a small bag, there's a lot of coke or whatever inside it. There's not a lot of powder in it, but it's full and worth about eighty bucks, if it's crystal. It's probably crystal.

(Curtain closes. Curtain opens. Scene II)

You're asleep now. Maybe a month has passed. You're on parole now and you have an "intervention" meeting tomorrow morning. That's why you're sleeping here at David's house. David's a dealer, but he's also your only friend. Besides, he lives two blocks from where you need to go and that's important considering you no longer have your MR2.

You're in the living room right now, but you're not Justin. Justin is asleep in the bedroom. You're in the living room but you're not really anybody. You're the third person and you're in the living room watching addict after addict walking in through David's front door. There's fourteen of them and they're having a party which Justin thinks is just a dream. There having a party and doing drugs and you're the third person who's always invited but you never get to do anything because people are watching. You can see the living room and you can see outside the living room. The people having the party don't know what you know. They don't know about the cops waiting outside the door.

There's a loud thud on the bed and you wake up to a room full of cops. You know what's going on but you can't let the opportunity go by. You ask if everybody's having a neighborhood watch meeting. You think it's funny. They don't, and they drag you out of bed.

(Time passes like gray/matter through an hour/glass.)

You've made it to the jail. You've finally made it to the county jail. Your information is taken. They ask if you've ever had psychiatric therapy. You say no, but you think that

you'll be needing therapy real bad as soon as all this is done. Nobody laughs. Nobody laughs in jail.

(etc. etc. dot dot dot)

You've admitted to being a faggot, so you get put in isolation. Everything is taken from you so that you won't kill yourself. That's what faggots do. Faggots kill themselves. When they bring you the phone, you try to hang yourself with the cord. It seems like the right thing to do. You fail, and when a guard comes for the phone, he looks at you funny.

You're the reader again and there's something you need to know about how to read the next few sections, the next few isolation sections.

Justin is in isolation for four days. To get the full effect, take four days to read the isolation sections. This should be difficult because you're not fucked up any more. You're not on coke or speed or pot. You haven't even had a beer. Take four days to read this and don't do anything else, just read one word at a time, real, real slow.

You're in a small gray/matter cell. Everything is gray/matter and there is no one to talk to. Your clothes are gray/matter because they're getting soiled. You're wearing Calvins and a T-shirt. It's what you were arrested in. They were white, but now they're gray/matter and the walls are gray/matter and the floor is gray/matter and the stainless steel toilet bowl is gray/matter and the world outside a tiny slit is gray/matter. All you have is gray/matter. For four days, all you have is gray/matter.

(Everything's a nursery rhyme.)

You are God and you're in a cement cell with Justin. Everything around you is gray/matter. Just gray/matter, grey, grey, grey/matter, matter, matter, gray/matter. You are God surrounded by gray/matter. You are God and you don't like being in jail. You are God and you leave Justin in jail. You leave the Jail and you leave Justin alone in the jail. Everything is gray matter.

After four days, you beg the guards to let you out. You say that you lied about being gay, forgetting about the pink triangle tattooed to your shoulder. They let you out. They put you in general population. They make you shower and they give you clothes and you're grateful until you step into your crowded cell.

You are second person, present tense, and you are interactive. You are like virtual reality. You are not reality, but you are virtually like it. You are the device that permits the reader to take on the role of someone else. You're the device that is being used right now. You are interactive because you can only function to the level that the reader will permit you to function. The reader can choose to believe you and step into the offered role or the reader can choose to read the words as if they are only symbols or signifiers.

If this is the case, it doesn't matter what the signifiers state. As long as there are random symbols, this reader will be happy. As long as there is the possibility of interaction, the other reader will be happy.

You scan the room for an empty bunk that has a mattress on it. Almost all the bunks are taken. A few top bunks are empty, but their corresponding mattresses are being used on the bunks beneath them. You wander around aimlessly until a deep voice addresses you. "Here use my mattress." You turn around to see a huge black man throw a mattress pad on to the bunk springs above his own bed. You smile and walk towards him. You hear another voice. "No, take mine." You freeze. You take no more steps. A third voice says, "No! Blondy's mine." You look around at the three huge black men that surround you. You can't pick one. You know you can't pick one. You don't care who fucks you, but if you pick one, the other two will kill you.

You are a prayer. You are a prayer that, if it were spoken, would sound like, "Dear God, please let these guys decide among themselves who's bitch I am." You are a prayer coming from a person who's run out of options. You are prayer from a person who doesn't want to die like this. You are a prayer that is praying for itself, hoping that God has come back, hoping that God has come back.

After just a few minutes of subdued argument, the three black men reach a solution. One of them smiles at you as the others walk away. He's the first one who called to you and he pats the mattress above his bed. You smile and jump into it. This could get interesting, you think. This could be fun.

You are a moment in a person's life when things have to change. You are transition. You are inevitable. You occur because you must occur. You occur because God has come back to a place that He cannot stand. You are a moment that has been forged according to the will of a higher power than yourself. You are a moment that changes everything. You are a moment that brings hope and possibility and courage and strength.

(Test the sound system.)

You lay down and only five minutes pass. A guard calls your name. It's the fifth day and you've been bailed out. You say goodbye, amused by your master's disappointment. You step out of the cell with a nagging fascination. You wonder what the black guy would have felt like. You carry curiosity with you out the door, but you make one prayer again.

You pray that they don't send you to jail. You pray they give you something like rehab instead. You know you never should have entered here and you pray that you can change your life. You pray for some new chance and you pray that some higher power hears your words. You pray, you really pray that God is here, and you pray that He is listening.

(You are listening.)

Sequined Carnivore

Heather Rhodes

-Of two evils, choose the prettier..

Carolyn Wells

My stomach is growling.
 It gets a splash of eau de parfum
 to soothe the ravenous rumble.
 This silence lets gartered silk slink up
 in filmy jet,
 where my nouveau manicure in frost lingers
 impatient,
 surgeon-steady above the petaled mouth.
 Undulate in satin,
 straddled the vanity seat to wield that magic wand
 that coats and coats in ebony smolder.
 Creamy, inhaled, sniff a laugh,
 golden spikes clicking on the marble squares,
 marking my grand opening.
 Pink splattering bubbly popped
 to launch a steaming vessel
 armed
 with weapons that spook asexual feminists.
 Laughter graduates from a blip
 to a belly-flattening roar
 as my spangled boa chokes
 all the worn out, Perma-Press, bon-bon poppers.
 Catch my wind-swept stride
 in a trail of fragrant moondust floating.
 My blood-swollen breasts move hypnotically with each step.
 Sizzling in glamorous swish, satin singing,
 the heavy pendulums taking countless prisoners.
 Blot my shimmering lips and blot them all out.
 Giggle to the tempo as I tango
 buoyant, on the world's luscious crust.
 What about the casualties? Between laughs,
 I catch a quick breath to say:
 Beware the formal,
 primp
 and
 gloss.

Swim to Salvation

Jocelyn Corbett

Lornalee spoke of herself in the third person: "Lornalee is confused," she might say, or "that makes Lornalee angry." For years, her family teased her about it. But as Lornalee passed through adolescence and retained this idiosyncrasy, her family stopped mentioning it altogether. They looked at one other through a veil of eyelashes, but said nothing. Nobody knew why, but "I" was not in Lornalee's vocabulary.

When Lornalee began her freshman year at college, her mother went to work with the homeless children in Brazil. She'd seen their plight on "60 Minutes" and decided she had to help. She left it to her ex-husband to keep an eye on Lornalee.

But Lornalee's father was an actor and an ass, and he accepted a small role with a Dubuque repertory company with a dubious reputation, and left Lornalee in Los Angeles alone.

Not that Lornalee minded. She was busy at school, learning new things. She learned what to wear to class and who to hang out with in the quad. She learned how to get free birth control pills at Planned Parenthood by wearing her rattiest jeans and talking like an Okie. She learned how to drink and bow to shut one eye to keep the room from spinning her off her stool after one drink too many.

"I should have come down here years ago, her mother's first postcard began. There are 8 million children living the in the streets. I won't be able to help even a handful. I cry myself to sleep each night, when I can sleep. They're abused in ways I'd never imagined. They are used as dispensable go-betweens by drug dealers. They are murdered by policemen moonlighting in death squads, hired by merchants who don't want the children sleeping in front of their stores."

Lornalee flipped the postcard on the ground and flopped on her back across the mattress. Her head fell over one side of the bed, hair streaming below her. She took a long drag of her cigarette and exhaled slowly, aiming up towards the spider web in the corner of the room. The smoke insinuated itself through the individual strands and beyond, bouncing off the wall, back into the web.

Lornalee thought that Fay's father must have left by now. Fay, her roommate, hadn't had many belongings; it wouldn't take long to pack them up. Fay had been killed two days before in a coke deal gone bad. Lornalee tried to imagine strong hands at her own throat. Would the thumbs be in the front? Would you feel the insistent pressure of each finger individually or as one entity, a scarf of human flesh, wrapped tighter and tighter around your neck? Would your eyes meet your murderer's in a grotesque parody of longing lovers' gazes?

"There are so many young ones, 10 years old, 11 years old, prostitutes, using the money to support their families. We found one of my girls this morning, lying face up in the gutter with her throat slit. People stepped over her body to reach the curb."

By the time the second postcard arrived, Lornalee had been working for three months in the brothel set up in one of the larger tunnels under the campus. The head resident of her dorm had first shown her the tunnels, had in fact taken all the dorm

freshmen on the tunnel tour, complete with candles and a Black & Decker portable blender to hold the margaritas.

Lornalee didn't mind the work, although she wasn't particularly fond of sex. She made good money and had short hours. She met lots of interesting and well educated people, something that her mother once would have considered important for her.

"I try to teach them to use condoms. But they aren't concerned about AIDS. Ricardo says God protects him from AIDS. Ricardo is twelve. I think he doesn't really believe there is such a thing as AIDS. Of course, he also doesn't really believe there's such a thing as God."

When Lornalee's religious studies professor asked to sodomize her while she read aloud from The Scarlet Letter, she knew it was time to leave.

She closed out her savings account and bought a 1976 Mercury Capri to use as her getaway car. It was canary yellow, too bright for her taste really. But she saw the fluorescent decal of the Virgin de Guadalupe on the rear window and the chrome silhouettes of a naked woman on the back bumper, and took them as a sign that this car was meant for her.

She drove up Pacific Coast Highway. As she passed Pepperdine University, she saw a small billboard advertising new multi-million dollar homes. The development was called "Les Maisons de la Mer," the Sea Houses. Someone had added a "de" to the end of the name, changing it to "Les Maisons de la Merde," the Shit Houses. Lornalee thought it was inevitable that Malibu graffiti would be in French.

"Glue sniffing is epidemic here. Most of the children begin each day with it. It kills the appetite so they don't care that they have no food, and it sends their minds to another place, so they don't care about the degradations they must endure that day. Sometimes I wonder what I have to offer them as a substitute. We never have enough food for them; education has such a distant payoff. It's getting hard to see a positive outcome here."

Lornalee walked across the sand towards the ocean. Off to her left were three teenaged girls on the swings. They wore baggy clothes and bandanas and high-teased hair, and her first reaction was a mild fear that they might be in a gang. Then the blondgirl began singing: "Once I was a junkie, but Jesus set me free." The other girls shouted an impromptu chorus of Amens and Praise the Lords. Different kind of gang, Lornalee decided.

Lornalee spread her jacket across the sand and lay on her back. She felt the heat of the sun above her and of the sand below. Overhead she heard seagulls go by, shrieking to one another.

"I've lost three of my boys to train surfing. It's becoming more prevalent here. They stand on the top of trains and try to duck when they come to a bridge. Of course many don't duck in time. Why would they do anything so obviously dangerous? Why not, is the answer I'm given most frequently. "

Lornalee looked out at the ocean. She hadn't seen it like this since she was a child. It was a red tide, ugly now in daylight, the water a murky muddy mess. Tonight, though, it would be beautiful; the water would roll and break in phosphorescent turquoise waves.

She watched the surfers, like bipedal sea lions in their shiny black wetsuits,

clustered in pods, waiting for the right wave to carry them to shore.

Lomalee began humming the tune the blond girl had been singing, under her breath, absentmindedly. She pushed her toes and fingers into the hot sand, felt burning little grains dig under her nails. She decided to sit here until dark, until the sand cooled and the ocean was transformed into the shimmering glowing mass she remembered from her childhood. She would watch the luminous waves all night, and let their magic wash her clean.



Tom Moran

Backyard Pool Memories

Felicia Kreidl

Absolutely
nothing

in my father's
voice

coming from
underneath the
water

in our swimming
pool when

he listened to
the radio in
the garage

whistling, too
twisting the air
in his mouth

do I want to
remember
the sound,

and the sun
against our
backyard pool

my memories
should stop

where there
is no whistling
no father, no sun
and no me

and my
mother is

a well
full of
thick dirt

where I
can dig
and reach

but my father's
the narrow
passageway

I entered
as a child

hoping to
find him

and nothing
of me

but I never
did and now

I can no
longer see

him
deep and dark
the passageway

going
underneath
is

far
too thin

I want to
turn back

and

I can't
get out.

Northbound Train

Natalie Anne Raffa

7 04A

Poppies, Poppies. California Poppies. Stop. I'm looking down, I'm getting sick. I have to feel not think not do. I look out my window and see my body's reflection looking out, I see the line. Here the ocean ends and the clouds reach down to touch the water with its wide extended bushy arms. Arms that scratch, pull, seep itself into, sucked from the deep blue, springing up to catch the sprinkling air. *I'll write when I'm ready to write.*

The grayish-brown tint of the glass. The ocean looks a mucky brown. The grass takes a dark green tone, it whispers to me. *I am not like this.* Green next to brown, this is the way it is. Send the water, the brush the weeds so tall so overgrown they dance with the ocean winds. Tall weeds never touch, never bother. *It has a purpose. All of this.*

Driving To The Station

I'm not nervous, don't tell me that. I know when I'm being nervous, and I'm not nervous. I'm not disagreeing with you, I just want to add my piece. Dad, you don't have to rush. We have enough time to get there. Why are you rushing? See, it's only 6:30. You know how late the train always is.

No, I checked the right schedule this time. I did. Let's see here.Monday morning, San Diegan.....7 04A? Uhhh.....*shit I did it again.....*well, I guess it's not the 6:42am train. That's on the weekends. Please, why do you have to get all hot about it? It's hard to read these schedules. Okay, I'll try to read more clearly next time. *If there is a next time.* I'm sorry. So we'll be a little early.

Must we bring that up now? No, no, I'm not telling you not to say it. Did I say you couldn't feel how you want to feel? Why are you putting words into my mouth? Okay, you said it. You're concerned about the baby coming. Now here is my response: This really couldn't be a better time. *Why can't you agree on anything I say?* Here we go again. I heard you, I did, I did!

7 17A

Two wrinkled up ladies walking on the sands, wearing white trouser pants and white sweaters, they wave to us, they look the same. The dog and the man sipping out of his tall white cup. He does not turn around. He is dignified, he is sure.

The sun. I feel the sun shining on my back, shining through from the glass behind me, touching me, letting me see myself sitting here on the seat, alone, shining through. The ocean, the sands, the glass is coming at me, I am close. A lady in her pajamas standing alone, grabbing her side, she must be cramping, cramping real bad.

What will happen when the baby comes? Where will I be?

"Did you hear in the newspapers, they're thinking of stopping at Del Mar station again."

"But I don't want it to stop."

"I do. I won't have to drive so far. I can walk there."

"I'm going to get some more coffee. Want any?"

Sparkling like glitter, like tiny specks of glass shimmering, it opens me. There is the pier. Sticking, jutting out, long and woody and dark. Reaching and touching out, the glitter, the sparkles are gone it is dark. The sea gulls fly above it, following me, following.

Watch me here, do come inside and have a visit. I have no one to talk to. Do understand, I might not have much to say, but I'll listen to you. Hello neighbor, do you see me, do you know me, do you know what I'm writing? About you, perhaps.

*I wish my dad was here so I could have someone to talk to,
so I could say, I'm sorry.*

"See ya later Signor. Thanks for the newspapers."

Packing My Bags

My bag is too heavy. I've been having problems with my back, so I better not. You take it, really, please. I'm telling you, I won't have any room in my small refrigerator for those oranges.

Oh ma, don't make me! They're the last ones from your garden, I want you to enjoy it. The tomatoes will get smashed and spoil by the time I reach my apartment. No, please, I told you no! See, feel how heavy that is. *Can't you see the kind of condition I'm in?* How am I going to take this?

7 48A

Goodbye ocean. Hello grass. A tiny neighborhood. The trees, more grass, short, small grass. Too close of a squeeze, let me breath, let me see you are blocking my view. You are ugly and wide and blunt. The land, the hills, the grass, trees and weeds let them grow. Cut, snip, step, dig. Torn out, cut down, turned around, around, around. The hills look magnificent alone. ALONE. Do Not Disturb. Kill, burn, chop, saw, hammer, die, die. Construction yellow blue and white. Concrete walls, white eyes burning slabs of concrete, plaster, nails and wood. This is new, this is modern, this is change, like it, like to live with it.

What is there to like?

I look back to my neighborhood, growing up. Where did the open fields go, the cows I used to watch on the hill. Why all the houses, why so close.

Chuga chuga chug. Progress progress progress, chuga chuga chug, toot too! Keep on building, chug chug chug, houses, houses, chuga chuga.....

"Did you hear about the demonstration in downtown, L.A.? 20,000 people were striking. Construction workers. They got the street blocked."

"Good. I hope it turns into a riot."

7 50A

Turn away. Do I feel thirsty? There is no line. I will leave my seat for just a moment, will you watch my things? I know they sell cranberry juice. There's always cranberry juice. Ocean Spray cranberry on the rocks, please. And a napkin. Oh, it's right there in front of me, but of course, I see it now. And a cup. Oh here it is, thank you.

Bang bang, side to side, watch your step. Oops! I'm sorry. Bang bang, side to side. Here is my seat. Empty, untouched. Ahhh. Nice.

I should have taken the tomatoes.

What possesses me to act like that?

Flower boxes here and there, flower boxes....I don't see any flowers. Didn't you see them? No. I swear I haven't seen one since we left the ocean.

A row of flower boxes, blooming colors, would be nice here. Yes, it would. I see white trimmed balconies, wood, tile, pink walls, green grass, but no flows boxes. Once in Munich I saw the most beautiful display of flowers adorning the windows. One after another, after another. There must have been a thousand flower boxes in the city.

No more, much more.

Up and up and up there is a cottage, a castle, a ranch house, big and expansive and wide. Room, room roomy. Blue grass. My gosh! The grass is blue! It can't be. It's the tint of the glass here. *Don't ruin my hallucination.*

"Look at the snow on those mountains!"

"Where?"

"Ain't that gorgeous?"

"Yep that sure is gorgeous."

"Where?"

"Look at those snow caps."

Different down below, near us, it is quite different. Don't neglect to say it, it is different. How flat, how clearly now do I see the line. Look at it, look! There it is! Why can't you see it! I do, I do. Is it only me? It's me isn't it?

I'm sick of living this commercial life. I'm sick of not seeing green. I always thought of having my children grow up in a place where grass is abundant everywhere, like in Germany, or..... somewhere else.

Here the rooftops are jutting out, missing brick side to side touching, hugging each other. So Close. so close. I feel the green turned to brown darkness, I see it near me. I don't like to see chicken coops. Live in them, never.

This is meshy. I try to write and not look down, I try to set it free. I don't want to get sick.

"It hailed last night you know. It was pretty rowdy."

"It hailed hard too."

Oh yes, I had a dream last night. Get it down. The river was dry. A couple of masked boys bombed the bridge and made the river dry. I tried to save it, I tried to help

the others. I did not live there it was not me town. We dug and dug shovel to dirt to shovel to dirt. My father was there.

Only Silence.

8 10A

A long creek I follow with my eyes, and it passes so quickly. Quickly, we're moving fast. Woosh. A wood lined fence going, going, going, open. Yuck. It's dry. No fruit orange trees, so little so few. Gone. Come all yee construction - tall, strong steel beams, crossing, multiplying, subtracting, muddy dirt, a machine's mesh.

Big people with big fat faces.

"There was no place to go but over the tracks. He saw this big yellow thing. He knew it was over the tracks. He told him to run. They waited for the crash."

Nellie Gail Ranch. Hmm. A Road Paseo. A flat bank straight up and then smooth, very smooth. It was once weathered, it became like that on its own.

On My Own.

Pools of water. Lots and lots of pools. It gets hot here in the summer. The people like to own their own pools. I see that. I see that from up here. Up high on this new division. This upper-decker, *this San Diegan Express.*

Another shade of green, a limy green made for golfing. Around it apartments tighten it, keeps it in tact, I guess. NO land, NO room.

Breath in this bag, in this plastic. Take in the particle air if you wish, the smoke the fog, the fumes. This bag suits me fine.

I'll learn to live with it.

Trailer parks, trailer parks. You can't miss those trailer parks. It's like nothing you've seen before. A small community. A temporary place. They all look alike. Modern gypsies. They know how to live, how to breathe. Each space far apart, each mom separate, land not gone, not away, but here here here.

Office buildings. Cooped up rooms, no space no room. Tall, fat, wide shapes, anything you can choose. Tinted or clear glass? Fans or air? Coffee or tea? A doughnut, or are you on a diet? You must go to the gym. Who walks anymore. No times no room, no space. What is left, a bulk supply. *No use, one way.*

Voom! chick chick.....window window window, ooh people. Another train. Waiting. Let it pass. *One track. One way.*

"Oh! I don't want to work anymore."

"You ain't got no day!"

"He has a very logical mind."

Me. I don't want to write about me. Not about anything that concerns me. How about you?

“Do you have any open positions for my niece? Do you object to a mexican imunigrant with a green card? Why are you laughing?”

“We don’t object. Here is my card.”

8 12A

I’m thinking. Oh, great. Stop. I have to stop. I’m getting hungry. What is there to eat besides hard and salty pretzels. Let me stop. I know. Mustard. There is nothing else but that and mustard. Another cranberry juice, please. Yes, and a bag of those Bavarian or whatever you call them pretzels. Thank you. I’ll take the big napkin this time.

Bang bang side to side, bang bang.....

“Well who’s going to pay for it? This is the 90’s. I never hear anyone saying, who’s going to pay for it. Someone has to say it.”

This New Me

I’m three months already, maybe more. This is it, I can’t turn back. I think ...I could be a mother. I think I’ll be happy. Yes, it will be mine. My family, my way.

I’m happy I’ll be a mother. Utterly happy. Really. There’s no reason to get angry at him. To hate him. So he got scared, *so he’s that way*. I can’t change him. *How could I have married that*. No, I didn’t want that. I can stand alone. I’ll be done with school, I’ll have time. I’ll have to move. I’ll need to say goodbye to this life. For a while. *Forever*. This couldn’t be the perfect time for it. I mean it this time. Who knows where I would have been a year from now. In another country, probably. *Like I always wanted*.

I see my reflection for the first time in the window. My face looks serious, dry, wrinkled. How old and ugly I have become. What has happened ? I don’t want to be me. My time is running out .

Oh God, what will I do. *That bastard!* How can I leave this place, this life? My freedom? Sometimes I don’t want tomorrow to come, then sometimes I do. I can’t seem to make up my mind about living or dying. What will I do after I’m gone from here, after I’m no longer.....

“There was no place to go but over the tracks. The only way to get out was over the tracks.....yeah, he got stuck. The fence was there and this guy was going to back up into the bowl. I said idiot. He didn’t say a thing. He took off in an opposite direction. I never saw him again. What a jerk! Yeah! Two weeks later I found out a truck was stolen. And to think I could have prevented it.”

I came home and then I left. I’m on the train and I am leaving. I’m coming and leaving my home. I’m going home.

The Throbbing Session

We sat around and they talked. My mother and sister actually talked to each other, not at, over, or in between, but TO.

This is the reason I am here.

We were there together and we had to force it. It couldn't of all happened without Bettie there with us. I had to tell her to ask. Just ask, don't talk about it, don't talk to her in the third person, ask her. Mom is right here. Ask her why she did what you thought she did and then listen to what her reason is. Listen to her and find the truth. the truth. Not how you thought you saw it, but how it really was. Understand how she sees it. She sees it different than you.

I raise my hand up to meet my father's wailing mouth and I say, let them speak. Give them this time to speak.

What's in a name? Everything and nothing, *Bettie tells us.*

If you try and understand me, I will understand you.

You hurt me mother. Did you know that you hurt me? yells sister.

Tell her you want an apology.

Tell her you love her, you respect her. Let her know she exists.

I don't want to hear about the past anymore, says mother.

I'm having a baby. It's turning inside.

You won, mother dear. Are you happy you won! yells father.

No one is listening to her. You people do not listen! It's just like you dad to preach about it and not do it. That was not what mom meant!

You're making it worse! Please stop because you are. You don't see it. *This could be much easier:* Why must we always fight? Be calm, be patient, we can work it out. Dad, you still have anger. True, a moment ago you didn't, but now look at you.

I don't want this family.

I want.....to leave.

8 35A

"What could I have done? Ask him, what are you doing here? Oh, yeah sure, and he would have said, I was trying to steal this truck."

Six years ago I rode these tracks for the first time. How exciting it was, the new faces, the many people, the laughs, conversations, dropping phone numbers, dropping ticket stubs, questions asked - Where are you headed?

It just doesn't seem possible. Six years. Six long years. Every day people ride to work. The same crowd, the same loud voices and dirty jokes, stupid one liners, and lousy drinks, lousy food. Hard, salty pretzels. Mustard. Cranberry juice. Bang bang side to side. It's cold, it's stuffy, it's dark, it's too loud in here. I can't study. I can't think. Stop. Don't think. Don't.

How am I now? More lost than ever.....so misdirected, so confused.

It's empty. The car is now empty but the three of us loners, remain in silence, peering out at what looks like, plants, commercialized plants, full of them. I see the guy way behind me has his head resting back, dosing. There was this other good looking guy on my left, but I think he's now taken off for another seat. It's a bit cold in here. *Why can't they ever control these air conditioner's?* Well, I'm sorry I didn't try and make conversation with you. You must of seen me writing away, busy, busy, much preoccupied.

You want to know what I hate most? When someone sits down next to me, makes a lot of noise, a lot of rumbling, then looks over to see what I'm reading, asks me what it is, gets my response, then doesn't stop talking. The person actually thinks I'd rather talk to them than continue what I'm busily doing. That's annoying. Bored, out spoken people, with nothing on their minds but talk, is annoying. Buggy. Get me out of here. But they trap you in. They trap you in with their rushed words, and hot breathe. They trap you with guilty thoughts of leaving, of not caring.

Who is this person, anyway.

"Would you mind if I borrowed a piece of paper?" *You have a backpack, how can you possibly not have a stinkin piece of paper.*

"No, of course not. How many, one, two..?" *How much is she willing to get off me?*

"Just one, thank you. I want to write a letter." *Oh yeah, for who? Your boyfriend?*

Husband? Good for you, lady. Go ahead, write.

I'm not angry. I am not like my father.

For six years I've looked out at these windows. Not once have I written about them, talked about them.

There is only silence.

What I saw was inside me, holding on. Six years of my life gone by. Like the flashing light of the passing southbound train I watch from my window - - - I move forward, turn around and there I am. Watching- - - waiting for the speckled waters to give their evening shade.

I am there.

8 48A

We're here. There's the city, the city of Angels, the lights. The peaked roof. The only tall building in the city. The old bridges, the young city. This is the part the train moves very slowly, clickity clack We don't want to miss the barbed wires, the graffiti, the back lots of smashed cars, dirty laundry, week's old trash, factories on top of factories on top of power plants, smoke stacks and long pipes, one color one shade *what kind of life.* We see it all here, there's nothing to hide. Not fanciful, not pretty, the old tracks.

NR
“I was telling my friend all I need here is a six caliber...”

“Yeah, and it’ll be the OK-Corral.”

“And Homer’s hat.”

“Yeah, a hat and some boots.”

“I would think....it’s the old way.”

I’m not sure if I got the last line right. I can’t seem to ever get the last part of anything. Endings always sound mumbled to me, lacking in concreteness, in any sense; it’s almost like the speaker lost track of what they were saying for a second, then stopped. The End. Fine. No more, go home.

I don’t want to go home, I want more.

Last stretch. I have to get up. My tailbone is aching, the remnants of last year’s spinal tap, my Meningitis false alarm. Turns out, instead, it was Chicken Pox. Great, I say. Now I can’t lean to my left side and get up without feeling it. *Feeling I am nine months already.* The needles, the aching pinch, the release. We’re almost there.

I didn’t kiss my father goodbye back there on that platform, back there with the cool, damp air, the stillness, the people crowding. Watching the kissing, the hugging, the lapses of time, the shortness of words, what to do, plans to make. Stepping slowly, carefully, we emerge and then enter. I had a heavy bag to carry.

I should have left the oranges.

I couldn’t easily turn back and hug him, or lean over to pat the cheek like I normally would, like I usually do. This time it was different. I made it that way. I made my way through the crowd and was just about to step on the steel, punched holed steps of the train when I turned my head around to look at his face. He was looking down at the floor, I don’t know what, perhaps some lady’s shoes, or a man’s briefcase. I didn’t feel bad at the time. I thought he might have understood, and he probably did. But, I wonder sometimes, what does he think?

Why can’t he be happy about the baby coming. Why do I feel so alone.

When I was five years old, I remember waiting in our old Chevy with the white vinyl seats, and my mother sitting next to me, waiting for that 6:30 evening train from New York City, the one my dad was riding on, the one he rode every day to work and back, the one that took him one and a half hours to get there, and one and a half hours back. I remember it was dark, and I remember the people, waiting. It was 1976.

This morning, when waiting at the station, when I had my father at my side, I asked him for the first time what he used to do on the train. He told me he would read the New York Times every morning in his seat, silently drinking coffee, and sometimes involved himself in idle conversation. The business world was something new to him, and that was his way of being terribly up-to-date on the latest.

He always had to be informed, prepared.

As a young child, I knew nothing of that world of his and I didn't care. All I wanted was to see his face appear above the crowd so I could run onto the platform, just so I could run into his arms. I wanted to feel his presence next to mine, all the way home, and all through my life.

8 58A

“Welcome to Union Station. The Red Caps are on the platform if you need assistance. This is Union Station.”



Tom Moran

Recipe For Love

Nikcole L. Graves

Her big toe summoned me first,
through the small opening at the front
of the shiny black pumps, in all its tomato
red glory.

I wanted to take it into my mouth.
Her gams juicy and succulent, like Mama's
Sunday yard bird.
Not to be out shined by her luscious full
thighs, peeking out from underneath her warm
orange sundress.

Equally mouth watering, her onion.
"Lord have mercy my body and soul," it
brought tears to my eyes.
Her ample bosom rose and fell ever so softly
like bread just out the oven.
I could stew in the juices of her love forever,
drunk in her pot liquor.

Betty

Audrey Butera

Sings blowing smoke in my face, stinking up all my clothes. "You're not Betty Page. I want Betty Page." But even She wasn't She. They put her head on another woman's naked luscious body. She spent her entire life savings trying to buy the pictures, because she never realized her contract would allow them to do that. And she wasn't that type of girl. She was just naive. She died old and sad and broke. Betty Queen in head to toe black patent leather and spiked heels, short blunt bangs with long black hair Betty, what kind of girl are you? Pretty rattle heads, pretty baby Betty's, betties.

his brothers

Audrey Butera

"We're going to look for some pie. And I hope there's a fucking Marie Callender's.' hair pie, moon pie, how could you? "Everybody loves a wiener." stick you're a wiener on a stick. don't get me. wiener, it depends what you are attached to. "Three swimming in white, soft, creamy sbets." i don't like my wiener and my cream together. do you like them hard or soft melting purple? i liked them young and sweet and barefoot. i nurse them and hurt them. i liked to teach them like children, my babies.

My Mother

Kerlan Wong

My mother is laying on the living room couch, her eyes closed, brows slightly wrinkled, and her lips ajar. Her breathing is heavy and accented with a soft wheezing. I watch her: her small frame limp and still. A dark green jade pendant, the shape of a gourd, rests on her chest, rising and falling rhythmically with each efforted breath. My mother is dying.

* * *

Jade. Chinese jade is smooth and cool to touch. It comes in an assortment of different colors and sizes. Most people think it is solely a green stone but it actually varies. There are jades white as snow with a soft whisper of green melted in it. Pure and refreshing like a winter melon. Frosted green with the texture of a crisp apple on the inside. Soothing the innermost parts of the soul.

And there are jades the shade of rich tea; the color of warm oolong. That was the color of my first jade. My mother gave me a polished ring of jade for my eighth birthday. I was thrilled to get it because my mother and all her friends wore a smooth circle of jade on their own wrists. It shined in the light and danced up and down their arms as they talked and gestured. "Don't lose," my mother commanded solemnly, slipping the bracelet on my wrist, "very expensive."

It is Chinese tradition to give your daughter jade. According to an old wives' tale, it brings good luck, prosperity and happiness. This was my mother's gift to me, as if the ring of precious stone could somehow encircle me with its mystical powers of promise. That was my mother's way of protecting me.

I lost that bracelet at school during recess the following week I received it. One minute I was swinging on the monkey bars, banging it against the black heavy steel and the next minute, it was gone. My left wrist was bare. It slipped off my skinny wrist unnoticed and scuttered off somewhere.

Five times one is five, five times two is ten, five times three is fifteen....my classmates chanted during our multiplication lesson. I had a hard time concentrating in my classes for the rest of the day. There was only one thing on my mind, the bracelet. Oh please, God, please, please, please help me find it, I prayed silently in my seat, perspiration beading on my forehead, remembering my mother's words. Don't lose. Very expensive. I put my head down on my desk. I promise I'll never be bad again. I'll do all my homework and I'll always listen to my mother. Oh please, God, I've got to find it. I searched my memory wildly, trying to remember where that bracelet could have possibly slipped off to. *Six times one is six, six times two is twelve, six times three is eighteen...*

I searched and searched for it frantically afterschool. I even enlisted in the help of several of my friends, tantalizing them with ice cream cones from Thrifty's if they

could locate my precious bracelet. "Bobby, look in the sandlot. Annie, look around the handball court," I directed. "Lucy, let's go to the monkey bars, there are some bushes on the side. Whoever finds the bracelet will get a triple scoop," I promised, even though that was a whole week's worth of my allowance. But after combing through the entire playground and sandlot for two hours, it was nowhere to be found. My friends lost their interest in the bracelet and the ice cream and left me alone.

"I'm sorry, honey," the janitor said after he found me scouring through the school grounds, "it's gone. You'd better go home before it gets too dark."

That evening, I wore a long sleeved sweater to hide my naked wrists. I nervously chopped green onions on a round cutting board as my mother washed the rice at the kitchen sink. *I have to tell her, I thought, she'll notice I'm not wearing it.* I was too afraid to face my mother's fury, even though at that time, I didn't know how much jade meant to her. I just knew she never took off her own bracelet.

"Why you wear thick shirt?" she asked, eyeing my sweater disapprovingly, "Hot in house. You catch cold?"

"Oh no..." I said, uneasily, "This is my favorite sweater. I really feel fine."

"Hmph, you never take care of self, never listen to your mother. Play all day and night with friends. Get sick."

"Really, Ma, I am fine," I protested.

My mother walked over to me at the cutting board and removed the knife from my hands and pressed the back of her hand on my forehead, feeling for any signs of a raised temperature. A look of alarm flashed across my eyes as she touched my hand.

"Take bracelet off to cut onions?" she asked.

"Well..." I began.

"Better," my mother continued, "in case you break."

"Actually, I-I-I lost it," I stammered.

Her hand flew up with rapid speed and swiftly slapped me across the face. My cheek tingled with fresh pain and was moist from the impact of my mother's wet hands. My eyes instantly filled with tears. I stared at her. Her face was red with silent shaking anger. I ran to my bedroom and threw myself on my bed. *I didn't do it on pur pose,* I cried softly to myself, but I knew it would be useless trying to explain to my mother. She'd only accuse me of being careless, a girl who didn't appreciate the worth of things.

I went to sleep without any dinner that night. I don't know what was more painful, the gnawing hunger in my stomach, my bruised cheek, or the great sense of guilt I felt for disappointing my mother in losing the bracelet. When I woke up the next morning, I found a jade pendant, laced with a string of gold, under my pillow. *She must have slipped this in while I was sleeping,* I thought to myself. I fastened the chain around my neck and dressed quickly.

She was eating her breakfast, rice and last night's leftovers, when I arrived at the table. I looked at her searchingly, her eyes were sad with remorse. She put her bowl down and touched my face with the outside of her hand, this time caressing my cheek. Fingering the dark stone around my neck, she said quietly, "Get ready for school."

That's the Chinese way of apologizing, *you simply never do.* My mother was never a woman of many words, but she always communicated clearly, with sighs full of

exasperation, looks that could send chills down your spine, or loud clangs with her chopsticks, startling you with its shrill notes. She was enshrouded in a thick veil of mystery to me as I was growing up and even to this day, I still do not understand her.

I learned later that the jade pendant that swings from my mother's neck was given to her by her own mother when she was a little girl; a link that was never to be broken, symbolizing the relationship between mother and daughter. "Each year it grow darker as you keep next to your heart," my mother said.

* * *

"Mui mui," my mother mutters under her breath. Mui mui is the Cantonese title for addressing the youngest daughter in the family. It is also a term of endearment. *She's calling out to Auntie Mei, I think.*

My Auntie Mei once told me that if I ate too much candy before I went to bed I'd have bad dreams. I once dreamt that I blew a giant bubble and it carried me high above the sky. My aunt told me I was lucky she woke me up or else it would have dropped me into the ocean for eating too many plum drops. When my Auntie Mei immigrated to America, she stayed with my mother and me in our tiny apartment in downtown Los Angeles on Vermont avenue. In exchange for room and board, my aunt took care of me during the day and took night classes at a local adult school. I loved my Aunt. She was seven years my mother's junior and she spent most of the day pouring over books and studying. "To learn English," she would say, balancing a cup of tea and an ESL workbook.

Tales and legends flowed freely from the tip of her tongue. She often told them to me to lure me to sleep so she could finish her homework. There was one that she loved to tell me over and over again...

Long long time ago, she said, a beautiful phoenix was flying in the heavens. The phoenix was a mischievous creature, not content to remain solely in the heavens above or the earth, so she roamed the two realms seeking amusement. As she was flying through the enchanted fields of the celestial city, she came upon a clearing with a large lotus pond. Two majestic cranes were planting seeds in the shallow water. Lotus blossoms with pink hearts floated on the surface of the water and the phoenix could see the darkened shapes of bright orange koi swimming underneath the lotus pad. The crane had placed a small mound of seeds on the leaves of a lotus plant. The bird used its beak to bury seeds in the soft soil under the tepid waters. Looking further down the pond, the phoenix could see younger lotus plants growing. But these were no ordinary lotus flowers. The fragrant aroma given off by the ethereal petals intoxicated the phoenix with its rich scent. The flower was like none others anywhere; it was more beautiful than anything the phoenix had seen.

A devilish spirit must have seized the phoenix because suddenly, she sprang from where she was perched and flew towards the precious pile of seeds, managing to capture one in her own beak. The cranes stopped their planting and leapt up into the air in attempt to catch the naughty phoenix but they were no match for her. She flew with rapid speed and grace that no creature could surpass. So the phoenix flew. And flew. After flying for seventy seven days without stopping to eat or drink, the phoenix

decided to land. Searching for a place to rest and careful to guard her stolen treasure, she glided above the earth. The guarded seed still in her mouth, the phoenix sought refuge in a luscious fruit tree.

One day, as the phoenix was napping in the branches of the persimmon tree, she saw a beautiful girl with luminous almond shaped eyes picking a crop from the tree. The tree shook lightly as the girl's hands tenderly plucked the ripe fruit. She sang gaily, her voice enchanted the bird with its clarity and sweetness. As the phoenix crept closer to listen to the girl's song, the seed fell from the Phoenix's beak and into the mouth of the singing maiden. The seed was swallowed, unnoticed by the songstress for she continued her melody, delighted that even the brilliant songbirds among her wanted to hear her sing.

My Aunt Mei told me that the maiden was my mother and the seed that she had swallowed was me. My aunt said I was really a lotus blossom from Heaven, sent to perfume the lives of my mother and her's in America. "But you weren't ready to be born in China," she said, "so she had you in America."

When I graduated from high school, she sent me a red card with Chinese characters written vertically and a gold embossed phoenix hovering over large lotus flowers.

My mother's childhood was very different from mine. In China, boys are valued more than girls. I heard my Uncle Nan say that five daughters cannot equal the worth of one son. My mother blames his philosophy on my great uncles and my grandfather's family, who helped raise him after my grandfather died. If there was only one bowl of rice left, Nan would get it. While my mothers and her sisters went hungry, their youngest sibling was stuffed like a great roast pig. If he even lifted a finger to do something, my mother and aunts were ordered to stop him and do it for him. *He will bear the family name*, they said and my grandmother was powerless to all of this.

When Nan grew older and started his own family, he killed three of his baby girls. His wife, my aunt Lai Lun is the mother of three dead daughters. Does her son know his mother's unspoken sorrows? She hugs him frequently, oftentimes clasping him tightly against her breast as if she were afraid to let go.

My mother birthed a daughter, an only child. *I am lucky*, my mother often told me, her face warm and soft with love. *I have a daughter and I have planted her in America.*

America in the late 1800s, California was referred to as Gaam San - gold mountain. This is a place where gold is everywhere, overflowing in the streets, glittering in the river, a place where nobody is poor and nobody suffers. China was experiencing a great deal of political and economical turmoil after the defeat and demise of the Kuo Ming Tan regime and the insurrection of Communism was causing havoc and confusion. Great grandfather was stripped of his farm and accused of being an enemy of the Communist party because he had been a land owner. The family was thrust into poverty. Foreigners came to various provinces speaking of a place where gold lined the streets, glittered in rivers and it made you dizzy because it shined so much. They promised you

could make millions to send your family and when you had amassed enough wealth, you could come back to China and live in luxury for the rest of your life. My grandfather became incaptivated with this place and left his young wife and their four young children to follow the gold trail to California. My grandfather came on a boat to California but he was quickly herded off to Colorado. He was killed in an avalanche building a railroad in the snowy Colorado mountains but his dreams for a better life were not blown up on that day as well. Before he died, he sent his hopes and dreams spinning into the heart of his young daughter, waiting for him to come home. She received his letter from a place called America when they hauled out his frozen body the following spring.

* * *

I unfold a blanket over my mother, tucking it in underneath her thin arms. She continues to mutter fragmented phrases and words in Cantonese. I can barely hear what she is saying.

When I first started school, I only spoke Cantonese so my teachers enrolled me in ESL classes. I cried because my friends moved on to the next grade while I stayed behind. This was hard for my mother as well, who was first in her high school graduating class in Canton, where she received her education.

When she received a Xerox copy slip, requesting “her active participation during parent teacher conference week because (scribbled in) her daughter was not performing at the optimal level”, she went to Ynez elementary armed with a Chinese/English dictionary wedged under her elbow.

“Clar-ah bright girl,” my mother insisted loudly, “what problem here?”

“Oh, I’m sure your daughter will catch up,” my teacher, Mrs. Bellenson crooned, “she’s a pleasure to have in class. She is wonderfully artistic and does all her homework. But...”

“But what?” my mother demanded, pausing to look up from her dictionary.

“But she needs to work on her *English*. Mrs. Woo, I understand you are relatively new to this country. In the interest of what is best for your daughter, I suggest that you stop speaking Chinese to her at home. Why don’t you speak to her in English? It will give you a chance to practice as well and afterall, you’re not in *China* anymore.”

At that point, my mother stood up from her chair and starting cursing at Mrs. Bellenson in loud tonal Cantonese. If only my teacher could have understood the perfect eloquence of my mother in her native tongue, Mrs. Bellenson would have realized how bland her own English really was. How plain and inartistic her language was compared to my mother’s skillful cursing with it’s rising and falling cadences, intonation that subtly put her in her place.

But the injury my mother suffered that day cut her deeper than the cancer that eats away at her now.

“Never forget you are Chinese,” my mother said to me that evening, with a heavy sigh, “*Never be ashamed of who you are.*”

A bamboo shoot remains thin and fragile for the first seven years of its life. But after its seventh year, its stem thickens and grows tough. It is only after then, can it grow into a large tree.

Clara has been bad. She has an uncontrollable temper. We are suspending her for three days. There I was, a ten year old menace sitting outside the principal's office, listening to him to speak to my mother on the phone. *Pal, I remembered. The principal is your pal. That's how you can remember how to spell it. It sounds the same as the word principle. Some pal he really is,* I thought. My mother frowned with displeasure when she came to pick me up from school.

"Why did you do it?" she asked. A boy pulled my braids and called me chink. China girl. He made funny noises with his mouth and laughed at me. Ching, chong, ching. I had to hit him. So I hit him hard. I turned around to face him, my eyes hot with anger and my nostrils flaring. My fists were small but powerful. It was as if my hand was no longer connected to my body. It outstretched itself with amazing force and the other hand rapidly followed. Crushing his jaw with the clenched fists, I couldn't feel myself punching anymore when my teacher pulled me from the boy. Tears flooded my face and everything was blurry, the taste of warm salty tears lingered over my lips. The next day my hands were purple and swollen, but I didn't care. You see, I wasn't ashamed.

My mother didn't punish me. Instead, she rubbed my bruised hands roughly with a smelly brown tonic. "Don't complain," she commanded, but her touch became gentler and seemed to rub away some of the pain in my heart. "My daughter is tough," she said with pride as her strong calloused fingers held my own, "someday you grow become like tall bamboo tree. Big and tough."

Big and tough so no one can laugh at the way you talk, or at the pearl yellow of your skin, or the delicate almond shape of your eyes.

* * *

The phone rings and I walk over to the kitchen to pick it up. It's my Aunt Mei, calling to check up on me and my mother. I hold the phone, her words flowing listlessly into my ear. She tells me I sound worn out and she will come over to tonight to watch my mother and bring me dinner.

"All your mother's friends are so sad to hear about her illness," she continues in her slightly accented but clear English, "they went to temple together to pray for her last weekend. Some people have written me, promising to fly from China just to attend the funeral."

"Really?" I ask.

"Yes," my Aunt replies, "your mother is a very loved woman, Clara. She was very popular in our hometown."

"I know she has a lot of friends-"

"Did your mother," she asked, "ever tell you what a magnificent Chinese Opera singer she was? She used to sing in the local Peking Theater. People came from all over

just to hear her pretty voice. That's what your father fell in love with her for."

I pause for a moment.

"No, Aunty Mei, I *never* knew."

There are a lot of things my mother never told. She never told me she sang Chinese opera. When she played tapes of it, I complained of the high shrilly singing and the brassy banging of the Chinese symbols. *Hmph!* she would say. *Cannot appreciate high quality singing. High quality music.* I would just grimace. As for my father, he died when I was a little baby. My mother offered no explanations, just vivid stories. I don't remember much about my father, but she tried to paint images of him in my mind for me. Every time my mother told me a story about him, she would change the ending, add a character to the plot, or give it a new twist saying she just forget to tell me about this or that the last time. On certain days, my father was a very dashing looking man. *He was tall and handsome with smooth skin and good strong teeth. All girls crazy in love for him.* But the next time my father became a plain humble man, with no good looks to draw people to him. *Oh no, he had no appeal to him, but he keep courting me. He had good heart so I marry him.*

I used to wonder what life would have been like with my father. Would he have comforted my mother in the dark hours of the night as she was softly crying in her room when she thought I was already asleep? Deep throated crying muffled by a pillow, its stuffing flattened and stained with tearspots? Would he have rubbed away the tight tree of knots in her back after working a twelve hour shift at the sweatshop for less than minimum wage.

As my mother's health continues to deteriorate and her cancer progresses, I have started packing up boxes around the house. Last week, I found a newspaper clipping, yellowed and faded with age, preserved and neatly folded in one corner of her dresser drawer. Dated November 16, 1970, a small paragraph reads, *Oriental Dies, Victim Of Racial Hate Crime. Wai Lan Woo was killed by a group of four men...*

* * *

The doorbell rings and it is my Aunt, carrying take-out boxes from Sam Woo's, the local Chinese restaurant. "Come and get it," she calls from the kitchen. "Thanks. Be there in a minute," I respond. Squeezing her hand in mine, I bend over and kiss my mother's cheek gently. Her eyeballs are fluttering under their lids. "She's dreaming," my Aunt says, standing by the doorway. I look at my Aunt thoughtfully before responding. "I hope she's dreaming about Heaven."

Mama Lied Blues

Nikcole L. Graves

Mama said a cry
is good for the soul.
Mama lied.
I cried and cried and
my soul don't feel no better
and my pillow is wet.
My man is gone.
My man is gone.

Cry'n Fool

Nikcole L. Graves

I told her a cry is good
fo' the soul.
She ain't stop cry'n since,
said I lied,
cause her soul don't feel
no betta.
Ask me,
the man is long gone
and she's betta off.
Mama knows.
Yes Mama knows.

What Do You Want Me To Do, Bleed?

Onnig Ezikian

Where do you think you're going?

-The library.

It's Sunday. For what?

-Poetics paper, dad, I need to graduate.

Poetics? Poetry doesn't exist. All that money, and poetry!

-Armenian poetics. And it's almost April 24.

What do you mean Armenian poetics. They will never understand. You think this is a joke!

*He pressed my face against the wall I could taste his mouth
yelling in mine*

Go learn how to become a man! Then bring us back Mt. Ararat
-but

His fingers closed tight no air my mouth and I tell him with my tears

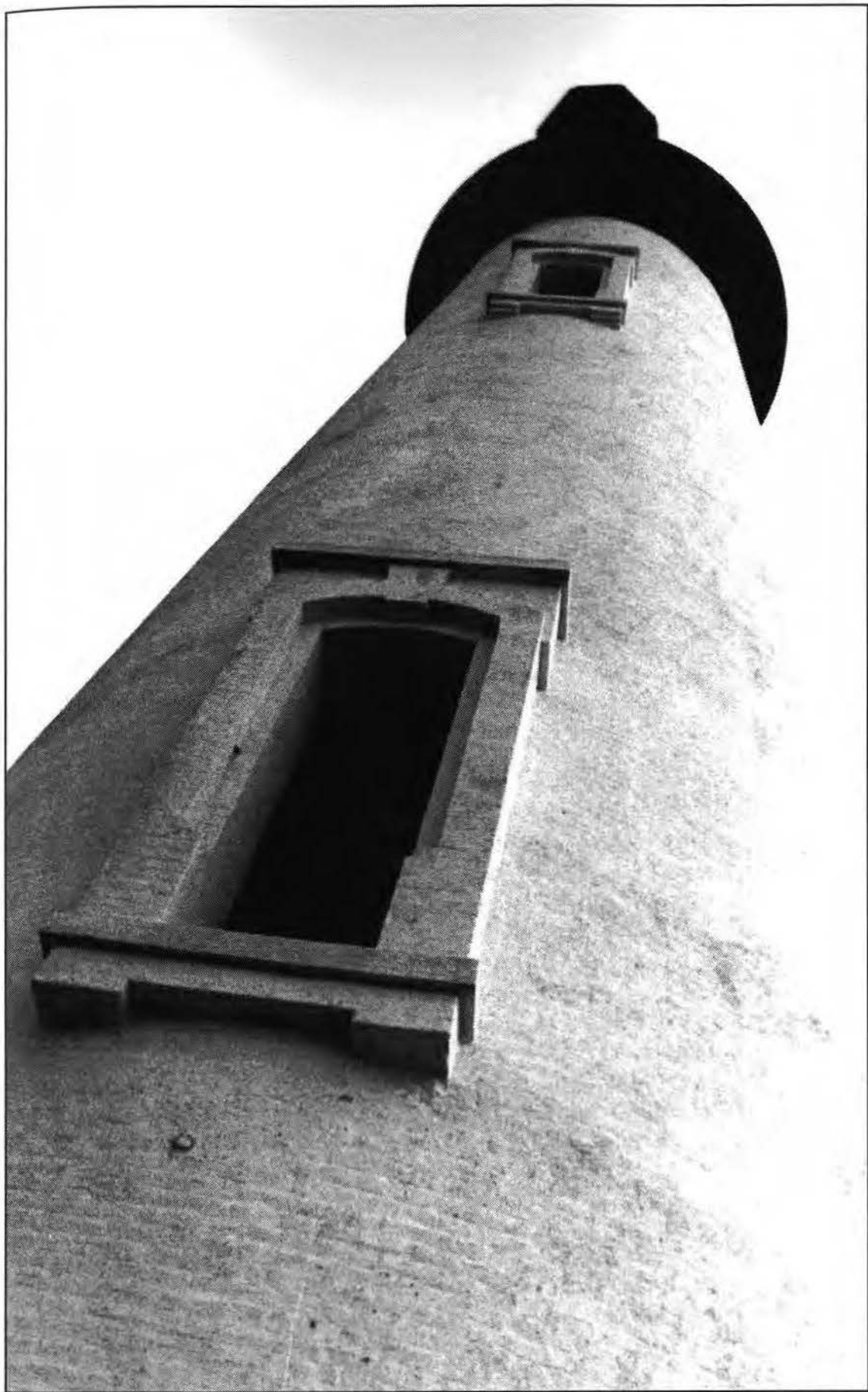
But, I write about your mother Death March twelve years old innocent, she had no idea what that crack between legs did, Death March Der-Zor, I remember her brother teaching alphabet in that dry sand he drew letters, twelve years old and when turks attacked caravan, I remember, I write that rape scene you never knew raped. And no, she never cried. Thirty men fourteen hours they pounded Her with one arm they cradled Her from groin to groin. She told me over and over and I knew what she wanted me to do. They made sure the brother saw their naked hovering ideas smear Her one by one they covered Her, I remember, he held his breath he would not have a turk kill him!

*He dropped my face - Armenian men love the kitchen he came to
me with a knife*

Here, take this dagger with you.

-What for dad?

They might not understand; show them your blood.



Tom Moran

The Fish

David Goewey

Pa is gone for good and Ma sleeps in front of the television set even more now. So the Grampa I don't know comes by one day and says, do you want to go fishing. I say, O.K., because it was nice when I went with Pa. I say O.K. even though this Grampa scares me, he's so big. His eyes are black like mine but the hair above them sticks out like spider legs.

Grampa drives a station wagon that's pink and wood. I sit up front and watch the houses disappear, then the woods going by. Grampa has laid out newspaper behind the back seat, for all the fish we'll catch, he says, and the paper rattles in the breeze from the open window. Grampa says, I used to take your Pa fishing, but he doesn't sound happy when he says it.

I follow Grampa down a crumbly path through the woods. I smell water getting closer and then see it shining yellow through the leaves. Grampa pulls a branch up and away and it's like he just opened a garage door on lake, sky and hills on the other side. We cross the rocks and sand and stand at the water's edge. The lake has tiny waves that slap at our shoes.

Grampa is crouched over his metal box, jangling around, fixing up the fishing poles. The sun is behind us, behind the trees too and the lake looks like a window I can't see through, it's so smooth. I pick up a flat rock, perfect round like a machine made it and try to skim it across the lake like my Pa taught me, snapping my arm, but the rock falls in with a splash.

Grampa stands up fast, looks at the water then at me, his eyes big and black. You throw a rock?, he says, you throw a rock in the water and we're trying to fish? His voice goes up and he looks at me like I'm someone else. I'm trying to skim them, I say. He says, don't do that, what's the matter with you? He's very tall now and I want him to stop growing. You scare the fish, we won't catch any and then what're we out here for, he says.

I shake my head because my words can't come out, they're trapped inside my belly and they burn. Grampa stomps over to his fishing pole and picks it up. I walk over to where the woods begin and pick up another rock. If I was sure I could reach Grampa's head, I would throw it at him but I don't think I can throw that high. I throw the rock into the woods hard like I'm trying to throw myself inside out, like maybe some air on my insides will help cool them. The rock whips through the leaves and Grampa yells, what the hell's the matter with you? His words bounce around in the trees. Get your ass over here, he calls, and I do.

Grampa pushes the fishing pole into my hands, here, he says like the next thing coming is a punch. We stand still. The sky is turning orange and the woods around us are getting dark. The lake looks purple and red like all the fish in it are bleeding.

Grampa is a giant shadow beside me. He stands close and I can smell him, man-sweat, soap and something else, something familiar. His smell mixes with the fishy smell of the water. Grampa doesn't touch me and he doesn't talk. The tiny waves hit

our feet and ploink noises out on the lake sound like fish are trying to escape. Some stars turn on above the hills across the water.

Then, a splashing noise, Grampa says, bah!, and begin to turn his reel. The water plops white and Grampa pulls a fish out of it, wriggling and jumping from side to side. Hah, see?, Grampa says and grabs the fish in a big hand. He works the hook out of it's mouth and I want to scream, to give the fish a voice to scream with, but I look at the eye that can't blink instead. Grampa holds the wiggling fish and spears it through the gill on a short chain of hooks. He lays it all on the rocks. The fish flaps and stops, flaps and stops.

You beginning to learn now?, Grampa says, you beginning to see? He's happy now. You got to stand still, he says, patience, you hear? I nod and want to scream again.

Grampa rebaits his hook, casts and slowly reels the line. A mosquito buzzes around my ear and then lands on my neck, sticks it's nose into my skin. I slap at it and at the same time, my reel begins to whine. It's rolling out and I feel too slow to grab it but finally I do and begin to turn it the wrong way and the splashing fish is getting more line to run with. Grampa yells, reel it in, you jackass, reel it in! He pulls the pole out of my hands. I slip on the stones and fall, smash my elbow. Grampa reels in and in but the line is empty at the end.

Goddam it, Grampa says and looks at me. He's a shadow blocking out the stars in a man's shape. I sit on the ground and hold my elbow. It feels wet but I won't cry, I just look at him. Lost me a hook, Grampa says like he's so mad he's afraid.

I get and wipe my hand on my pants. I walk over to the edge of the water. My throat feels like something crawling up from my gut stopped there, but I won't cry. I unzip my pants and pull myself out. What're you doing over there?, Grampa wants to know. I don't answer and pee into the water instead. The sound is nice like a little song, like the jewelry box Ma has.

Hey, hey!, Grampa shouts and runs over. He grabs the back of my neck and picks me up, swinging me around away from the water. You little fucker, he calls me, you fucking pig! His voice is shakey but he doesn't throw me down. He holds me and looks at me. Maybe he'll hook me on the chain next to the fish, I think, but he shakes his head and just puts me down like he doesn't want me on his hands anymore.

Grampa is breathing hard and packing up the gear. He doesn't say anything when he starts off towards the road. I zip back up and try to follow Grampa's jingling noise and his white socks as they bounce up and down.

Grampa is behind the wheel of the station wagon when I reach it. The motor and the headlights are on. Maybe he'll drive away and leave me here, I think and then picture myself swimming in the dark. Grampa reaches back and opens a door. You sit in back, he says like he's sorry to use words with me.

Behind me in the rear, the fish Grampa caught slaps weakly against the newspaper. My insides are cold now, the burning is out. I am not a fish but I am hooked through the mouth like a cold finger in my brain.

The Silhouette of the Sky

Kate Gale

the orange ball of the sun
floats into the smog
of another Los Angeles sunset
the sun sees flickers
behind the oil slick bay

the beach is strewn with lovers
who wish they knew what love feels like mostly they feel nothing
but what is left behind
sand coursing between thighs

a round white space where thoughts once coursed
back when loveliness emerged
in the form of water
moving in circles
in the belly of the mother

long before there was space
for yeses and nos
for the safe pollution of an entire life
the sun rakes the sky
with long pointed fingers

nobody knows it all
she tells the lovers
disappearing
the truth always becoming
the truth at the moment of disappearance

a cloud of waves subside
along the beach front
the lovers wipe their legs
the yellow and purple
where the sun disappeared
drops bloodlessly on shallow memories

the movement toward blackness is turtle paced
almost it does not occur at all
almost the disappearance of dreams is nothing but the yellow smog
becoming our minds
a long mural fading to black

the sun will rise again
to the silhouette of the sky
sink again like a soul flattening
becoming one with the oil slick bay
bruised by lifeless birds and the stink of fish



Tom Moran

American Academy of Poets Winner - Mark Hoffer

Truffles

The first thing I see is the ribbon--
Gold foil. It is coiled in a sort of
Bunch above four bands
Taut as valise straps on a flattened hatbox.
The satiny wrapping

Shimmers its grain, ~~kin~~ to the redwood
Lattice of multiple crosses--or the hair
Of Grandma Collinge's Norwegian Jesus
That sat on the dashboard
On her car trip

To Mexico
To see a healer for my mute uncle,
Then eleven. The round box
Went unseen before the porchlight lit a gift
with no fingerprints. Stone cold, I take it.

I place it inside, where my icebox
Hums, a hive of drugged bees,
In a shrine of fluorescence, bone-colored ledges,
Silent tiles, each with a pink
Floral that glows from the center.

All hope, I open
What's torn, peeling a sheen
Off air
Dark chocolates live on
In their hundred ~~small~~ cups--

Tight white
Paper scallops make fences. I lean in:
Each curve a black promise,
Rum on its breath.
The stench

Knocks me out, the dead kissing me in it.
Unflammable ash

Coats me invisibly,
The nose and lips
Open to a room of fur-turbaned women

Snow
Gowned with cigarette holders
And Afghans on leashes, Matisses
Glittering by lit wicks of filled candelabra.
The candies are still,

Exhaling extravagance.
Are they scarabs, providing the low chant's
Back-silence, or leeches
That, even in pieces,
Might attach down my throat and happily drain me?

They are blacker than seeds,
Or beetles,
And fatter, bulging with sweetness.
If I ate one, I might think
"Delicious"--and never wake from winter.

NR
American Academy of Poets Winner - Kerlan Wong

Out Late Saturday Night

My mother sits
On the couch
In darkness
Waiting for me

Where have you been?
She asks
Her stern Chinese
Countenance frowning

Upon me.
Do you know
What time it is?
She says

What time it is--
Late. I say
Flashing my
Careless American attitude.

All the other kids
At school
Do whatever
They feel like

My mother heaves
A defeated sigh.
A rebellious daughter
With an American mind

Where did this
Come from?
Who taught you
To talk back

To your mother?
My head drops
and my blood pulses
Under Chinese skin.

Have I tossed out
Generations
Of elderly
Asian respect

In one night.
Devastating a dynasty's
Worth of tradition
And values?

Have I crushed
The dark jade.
Stained with secrets
And ancient wisdom?

The severed roots
Dangle before me
My mother
Holds them

In her small,
Yellow hands.
With the soul
Of China

Still clinging.
Fresh clumps
Of earth
Fall through

The gaps
Between her
Fingers
I can't

Catch them.
They're slipping
Too quickly
For me to hold.

Plato's Course

Marielle Horton

I decided.	perfectly.
In timeless seconds	our souls coalesce
thoughtfully	effervescence
mounted	I feel an
its pristine wings	buoyed up,
prismatic, radiant	flying, floating
velvety.	we are
Now—	
We become unloose.	

Of Black and White

Marielle Horton

In the procession of days
I see slate:
stretched shadows,
twitchy silhouettes.

In the procession of nights
I see sparkles
and gleaming snow.

In twilight—
shade is pale,
ashes are frosty.

There are glints I could never see in the light.
Darkness, I now see when it's bright.

Not A Story

Alene Terzian

It took me four years to realize
that tears were a sign of weakness.
I am not weak. Simply careful.
I arrange everything I own into
small pockets in the crust of the
earth. I fold myself into them like
making dough. When something
happens that doesn't fit into my
small pockets of earth, I shake.
I take down everything thing
around me in wild, climactic
sweeps.

I want to withdraw from these open
spaces. There's
too much air to breathe

I try to understand the shifting of
emotions, but, it goes past me,
clearing the trees to form a pathway
I never follow. How does your
weakness grow? Out of the creases
of your skin? The pounds of flesh
covering bones buried somewhere
(But, I've forgotten the hiding place).
There's no known cure for
heartsickness is there? What if the
heartsickness is in you?

There's a certain degree of safety
In small closed spaces. The choices
become easier to make and understand.
The gaps between the story and its
telling don't feel so sublime here.
Instead, everything is calculated
and categorized in boxes big enough
to hold a party mask. Onetime, I fit my
extremities into one of these boxes,
smashing my legs and arms until they
turned to powder. My private parts,
still in tact, fit nicely into three separate
boxes labeled "Level 4 Contamination."
My voice (which was always silent)
was taken away with a gag and a fist.

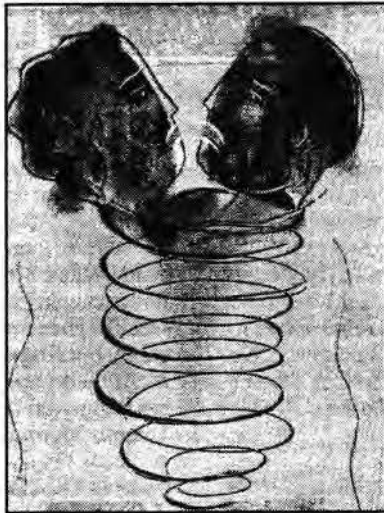
There are too many reasons to walk away. To turn away with arm and flag raised in surrender. The simple solution of shutting down and turning off sections of memory that emerge in fragments of stories... sometimes.
like a string of pearls, the sentences: one word glued and then two... turn inside me and I open my mouth to say please stop. But... no sound comes.

Escape in certain situations is impossible. The lights come on and off and I see the faces in flashes of recognition. I hear the voices. I know them too.
But, I don't respond.
I don't speak. I don't cry. I don't scream. Instead, I write a story in my head about a better time in a different space without so much...

Memories:

You can't leave them on someone's doorstep with a note attached.
You can't ask them to take over where the others left off. Where the slash across the thigh, below the cotton underwear, still throbs when exposed to heat. And the angry scar indicating struggle forces a permanence you don't want. In one picture frame, I construct the ideal image of a beautiful woman tied eternally to this.
T/his face.

Motion sickness rocks my head towards the ground. Here, the story becomes an open space with too much vision and imagination. The landscape, vast and permanent, mirrors the story, battling forever for the final word.



Degrees of Freedom

Luisa Villani

Silver Lake, New Mexico. I pull a trout out of the water with all the flair of a magician materializing a bouquet from thin air. I am fixated on this living comet, the droplets of water streaming behind it. It lands in the bottom of the canoe, the fire of its gills pulsing, the same thumping rhythm as my heart. I scoop it up with both hands, fling it--still hooked--back into the lake, as if it were water filling up the bottom of the boat, threatening to sink us.

My uncle catches the line, cutting his hand and cursing me. "You do the stupidest things sometimes." He guts it on a canoe slat, the gills still flexing. When he's done, he wraps a handkerchief around his hand, then grabs the oars and turns the prow of the boat toward the shore.

I stare at my reflection in the water, twirling a tendril of hair around my index finger. I wear my hair in a ponytail--the way my mother used to--with little wisps loose at the sides. The boat slows. He pulls up an oar, resting it over the water, the paddle flat in my reflection. The bucket of fish heads sloshes, watery blood spattering my jeans and tennis shoes. I see a stone to the side of the boat, step out.

Things often appear as we think they are, not as they truly are; the gnarled black elbow of a tree branch can look a lot like a rock. I sink to the bottom of the lake. I don't move. I just hang there like a tiny sea horse embryo, my feet tangled in the bottom grasses. I watch minnows and mosquito larvae dart away from me, bright as neon tetras in the tank of a tropical fish store.

Mother liked the rows of tanks and the cool blue darkness. She handed the baby to my sister, checked her reflection in the glass. I watched her face in the side of the tank, the cichlids darting behind her eyes. She divided her ponytail, pulling the two halves apart, the band scooting down, close to her head. She touched her cheek, took her lipstick from her purse, her face moving closer to the tank as she outlined her mouth. Then she took a tissue from her bag, folded it in half and bit down to blot her lips. She saw me watching her in the side of the tank and smiled. She moved her hand toward the glass, flattening her palm against it. The cichlids darted around the outline of her fingers, hungry and confused. My sister handed her back the baby and they strolled on through the cool darkness. I put my hand against the glass, but the fish didn't even notice.

There is a disarrangement of the water above me and a tugging on my head. My uncle pulls me out of the lake by my hair. I should get back into the canoe but instead I flail away, sloshing through the reeds toward the shore, into my father's arms.

My uncle brings the canoe closer and I hear him yell, "What in the hell were you doing?" His feet kick the water apart as he runs through the shallows.

She did the right thing," says my father, "if she'd panicked it would have been worse." I'm slippery in his arms, my clothes covered in dark green muck. "You're okay," he says as we sit on the grass, my uncle's long shadow enfolding us. "You're

okay.” On the distant horizon of the lake the sun is closing its bloody eyelid. “Give me your wet sneakers and go change your clothes.”

Inside the tent my sister is asleep on top of her sleeping bag. She isn't really sleeping. She's just been lying there most of the afternoon, eyes closed, and silent. I don't particularly want to speak to her either, except that I need to borrow a pair of jeans and a sweatshirt.

“No.” She doesn't even open her eyes. Her clothes are in a backpack at the end of her sleeping bag. I mull around my side of the tent, touch her backpack with my foot.

“Don't even think about it.” She sits upright, grabs her pack, puts it under her head, then lies back down.

“Girls, dinner.” My father is at the tent flap. He looks in, sees my sister with her eyes closed and me, still dripping. “Why haven't you changed?”

“I didn't bring any clothes.”

“Why not?”

“They were dirty.” He looks past me at the far tent wall as if he were suddenly engrossed in watching TV. My sister opens her eyes. Outside I can see the tent fire, my uncle's fist wrapped in a white handkerchief, holding a black skillet.

“Borrow a shirt from your sister and come eat.” He puts the tent flap down slowly and I hear his hand, smoothing the nylon corner into place. He returns to the fire. My sister takes off the sweatshirt she's wearing and throws it at me.

“You already had this on. I don't want to wear it.”

“I'm not giving you a clean one. You smell.” She stands up to unzip her jeans.

“I have to wear your dirty jeans too? Can I at least have a clean bra?”

“I don't have an extra bra. Go without.” She kicks her jeans across the tent floor, then gets inside her sleeping bag in her underwear.

“Aren't you going to eat?”

“Not hungry.” She closes her eyes. I look around the tent, still holding the sweatshirt. I want to walk out to the campfire, sit down and eat, maybe even smile for my father.

“Have you seen my lipstick?”

My sister sits up and stares at me. “Look, you used a whole damn box of Kleenex on the way up here. NO. I haven't seen your lipstick, and cut it out. She's gone. Period.

Gone.” She flounces back down on her sleeping bag, zips it up to her neck, and closes her eyes.

I'm not getting dressed either. I lie down in my bag, staring at the outline of her nose. She has my mother's nose. Outside is the sound of sizzling fish, the tapping of plastic plates. I pull the band from my hair, let it fall damp around my shoulders.

“Girls?” My father is at the tent door again. I can see his feet, the bottom of his trousers, and my sneakers curling up by the circle of fire stones.

“I don't think we're hungry, Dad.” He waits at the entrance, then turns back to the fire. My hair smells like rotting leaves in a rain gutter and my face itches. I should have told him my face itches, should have said something more, but we all move differently now--slower than before--as if we were underwater, weighed down by the heavy drape of wet clothing.

The campfire is pressing shadows against the tent wall. My uncle opens a beer and he and my father start drinking. They are talking, my uncle is talking, and we are awake, but not really awake, hearing their voices unwind. There is nothing in their conversation, nothing that can bring us from our separate sleeping bags, until my uncle says, "You know, things like this happen. At least the girls are safe."

I hear my father sigh, not the way my mother sometimes sighed after finishing her ironing. I think his teeth are clenched because his sigh sounds like air leaking out of a tire. I imagine him getting shorter, sinking where he sits with a beer in his hand.

"Thank God they were thrown clear."

I want my uncle to stop, but he has us all now, and he's reeling us in on his words.

"I've had a few close calls myself--speeding cars trying to pass. They come out of nowhere."

I'm holding my breath, wondering if my sister is going to open her eyes. I hope she is really asleep this time, and that the blue shadows swimming the side of the tent will wash over us, leave us submerged.

"You know, once the girls are back in school it'll be better. They'll be with their friends again and they'll get back to normal."

My sister's sleeping bag crinkles as she rolls toward me. "Great. You and your stupid lipstick." The air is cool in here. Her breath leaves her mouth and drifts through the air like cigarette smoke, the discarded ember of her words landing inside my sleeping bag and burning me. She rolls away, scooting her bag closer to the side of the tent.

I pull my sleeping bag zipper together over my head. I never realized before, how soft the inside of my bag was. I've always slept in my clothes when camping--like my mother said--to prevent mosquito bites. The inside of the bag is flannel, fuzzy, like the blankets she used to wrap my baby brother in. It's warm and dark, the way I imagine space would be if I were an astronaut flexing my fingers toward the stars. Somewhere in this universe of dark sisal, there is the spinning butane cartouche of my mother's wrecked sedan, and my sister and I in parallel flesh, spinning away.



Homecoming

(Fundamentals of Inertial Navigation)

Kenneth L. Pettit

“An inertial navigation system knows where it is, because it knows where it isn’t.”¹

I have been thinking about all of the stories that my family has collected about me. I can see a sort of metamorphosis, an evolution as it were, of tall tales and recollections retold until all resemblance of the actual events have been lost in the telling. There are so many they fill my family’s collection of mental snapshots. They can sit for hours and relate tales of my misdeeds. I had a good time in high school, and I had a best friend, Andy.

Our parents, Andy’s and mine, considered our graduation from high school a highly unlikely event. Andy and I were like “two peas in a pod.” Whatever trouble I got into Andy was surely to be blamed, and vice versa. Our parents had long before this day given up all hope of establishing some semblance of control over our nighttime activities. We had reduced our parents to the simple plea, “please do not bring home any babies.” It was about this time, also, that they began to focus on our chances of graduation. Most parents worried about what their kids would do after they got out of high school. Our parents doubted if we would. Sometimes, being loving sons that we were, Andy and I would leave for the evening promising our parents that we would be back by graduation. They prayed for divine intervention.

Andy and I loved motorcycles, but we had very little money for them. Andy and I had a hard time holding down jobs. My money was his and his money was mine. That is the way we worked things out. We were best friends in the true sense of the word. Life was good.

We could only afford one motorcycle between the two of us. So we rode two up. The louder the faster. Our first bike was a Bultaco, then we stepped up to a Husqvarna. Our very first Harley was a FLH Shovelhead. It was a high-maintenance scooter. Andy and I loved it.

My favorite trips were the ones we took on early Saturday mornings. Andy and I would hop on our old Hog and head south on Sepulveda Boulevard. “Oxnard for breakfast!” would be our rallying cry. When we hit Ventura Boulevard we would take it east, through the Cahuenga Pass, dropping down past the Hollywood Bowl into Hollywood via Highland Avenue. Up and down the streets of Hollywood we would ride checking out the human flotsam from the night before. After we had pissed off enough people with our noise, we would head west on Sunset. We could always smell the Pacific before we came upon her. If I had one high school experience to relive it would be the times Andy and I spent on that old Hog as we cruised north on PCH (Pacific Coast Highway) towards Oxnard. They are my most poignant memories. I cannot smell the ocean and feel the caress of her breezes without thinking about those days.

My first car was an AMC Hornet. Actually, it wasn’t my first car in the true

sense of the word. Andy and I owned the car together. His younger brother, Sean, took a screwdriver to the trunk lid and carved for us a most realistic phallic like symbol. This artsy trait was to be of great help to Sean in future years as he became one of the premier jail house tattoo artists in Folsom Prison. Several coats of primer and paint did not diminish its luster. We did not have money for masking tape, so the windows near the body took on a kind of tinted-glass look. Sean's artwork was not to be covered up. One look at our paint job and at Sean's handiwork, and Andy's dad dubbed our car the "horny Hornet." Andy's dad was a camera man for ABC. We didn't see him for days at a time, which I think made him feel better about us.

It was not a pretty car. It didn't go fast. It was an ecological disaster area, but who cared back then? It consumed oil at an alarming rate. The horny Hornet changed our lives. It allowed us to take the female of the species out to the movies without asking them if we could borrow their parents' car. Our parents, of course, knew better than to loan us any vehicle that they valued. The horny Hornet allowed us the freedom to go to the drive-in movies without worrying if someone was going to go through the vehicle the next day and discover some sort of undergarment that did not belong to a young male.

Our parents were taking bets on just how close to graduation we would get before our motorcycle, or an angry father, or whomever we messed with in Hollywood, killed us. We surprised a lot of people.

Andy and I grew up never questioning whether or not we would go into the military. If it was good enough for our dads then it was good enough for us. It is hard to believe we were that ignorant.

Andy and I graduated from high school, barely. Uncle Sam was waiting for us.

Andy and I joined the Marines. We did not wait for the draft. We did not go in on the buddy plan. Andy was bilingual, and they offered him an opportunity to go into Naval Intelligence. It was a job that virtually guaranteed that he would not go to Vietnam. I was in the grunts. Infantry. My military occupational specialty was 0311. Basic ground pounder, one each. I was a "Hollywood Marine," that is, I went to boot camp in San Diego. After boot camp I was sent to Camp Pendleton for further training. After all of that training, I received a special request from my government to participate in the Southeast Asian war games, expenses paid by Uncle Sam.

**We are the unwilling
Led by the unqualified
Doing the unnecessary
For the ungrateful²**

I was given the standard thirty days leave before having to report for deployment to the Republic of South Vietnam. I kind of got engaged to a young lady whom I lusted over for most of my senior year. I gave her my Marine Corps ring and she gave me sex. It was a relationship that I did not take seriously enough. The memories of those days would come to haunt me. Her name was Sandy.

"One, two, three, four.

**What are we fighting for?
 Don't tell me cause I don't give a damn,
 Next stop is Vietnam.
 It's five, six, seven, eight.
 . . . Open up those pearly gates."**³

On the fateful departure date my family, girlfriend and I headed off for Norton Air Force Base. The departure was brutal for my family, and up until very recently, I thought one of the toughest things that I have ever had to do. I can tell you now, sending a son off to a combat zone is much tougher than having to do it yourself. It is only now that I can really appreciate why my dad cried when I walked out to that 707.

After many stops we arrived at Tan Son Nhut airport, Saigon, Republic of South Vietnam. As soon as they opened up the door on that big bird, every pore in my body broke out in a sweat. We were gathered up in large trucks...

"A cherry marine is not to be trusted. He is new in-country and he can get you killed . . ."

I was standing outside having a smoke when this very salty-looking marine walked up to me and looked me over. I was an interior lineman on my high school football team. He asked me if I was a machine gunner. I said that I wasn't. "Well, you are one now," he said, as he led me towards a small tent.

Dear Mom, Dad, Barry and Jenny,

I am doing okay. The flight was long and boring. I have been assigned to an infantry company . . . Please do not worry about me. All we do around here is guard bridges and the base. Give my love to all.

Ben

I had been issued my M-60 machine gun and 782 gear in Dong Ha. Then they sent me to war. Con Thien was situated just south of the seventeenth parallel, the artificial dividing line between North and South Vietnam. This line was called the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), the "Z" or, as we often referred to it, the Dead Marine Zone. It was designated as a "free fire" zone. A free fire zone is a place where there are no rules of engagement; if something moves, you shoot it, if you think it moved, you shoot it and if you want to be sure that it doesn't move (just for shits and grins), you shell the hell out of it.

Hi Larry,

Feelin' the draft yet? Ha, ha, ba. Hope you get that deferral that you are trying for. Stay out of the 'Nam. Life is barbaric here . . .

Do not share this letter. . .stay the heck away from here.

Ben

I arrived with the evening mail. Inside the helicopter with me were three other

marines. They looked at my brand new boots, utilities and sea bag. They looked at my gun. "Hey, cherry," One yelled, "You know how to use that thing?" nodding his head at my M-60. "You the new gunner?" he shouted without waiting for my reply to his first question. "Gunnery don't last too long around here," he pointed out to me, and then he began to laugh. I could barely hear him over the noise of the helicopter, however his meaning was clear and the other two guys joined him at my discomfort.

Hi Andy,

I am glad that you are not here. Stay away from here if at all possible. This place really sucks. I live in a bunker with a roof covered with rotting sandbags. Everything is rotting over here. Including me. They have made me a machine gunner. Don't laugh, I know, it is my worst nightmare come true . . .

We live like animals here. I cannot stress how bad it is in the 'Nam. They have a saying here, it is, "as bad as a day in the 'Nam." If you are having one of those days then you are truly fucked up.

Say hi to your mom and dad for me. Have you heard from Larry lately? I wrote him but haven't heard back from him.

Peace.

**To Susan on the West Coast waiting,
From Andy in Vietnam fighting.**

**To Susan on the West Coast waiting,
From Andy in Vietnam fighting.**

**Oh Susan I know you love me so,
But I'd love to hear it in my ear.**

**I would have been there, working at
my craft,**

Had it not been for the draft.

So dry up your tears,

And feel no fears,

You're here with me,

Like I'm there with you. . . ⁴

My platoon has been relieved at Con Thien. We rotated back to Dong Ha combat base. I can't decide what is worse. Dong Ha does not have the constant shelling that Con Thien did, however, we are out in the bush for weeks at a time. Resupply is by helicopter. Sometimes they don't even touch the ground. Mail, ammunition, and C-rats come tumbling out the door. The LZs are usually cold. The only time the choppers will come into a hot LZ is when we have wounded personnel. No sacrifice is too great to get our wounded buddies out of there. Life is simple. Survival. In a world filled with exciting technology we are reduced to plastic weapons surrounded by jungle. If we carried spears, what would be the difference between us and the cavemen a million years ago? Nothing.

"Sympathetic detonation" is when a bullet hits a grenade, mortar round or other

various devices of destruction we are obliged to carry. It sets off a chain reaction that is not conducive to good health or longevity. There is nothing sympathetic about it.

Dear Sandy,

I received your letter dated the fourteenth. Please do not worry about me. Please send me another picture I just about got this one wore out from all my looking at it. Two hundred and ninety nine days and a wake up!

Peace and Love.

The calendar is everything. I have two hundred and ninety six days left in this hole. I dream about cold cokes and cheeseburgers. Cold cokes with ice. I am reduced to my basic needs. We hump all day and dig in at night. The only connection we have to the world is our radio, a PRC-25. We call it the "prick-25." I am glad that I am not the radioman. Charley knows that the radioman is always near the platoon commander, the lieutenant. The whip antenna marks him. The prick-25 is heavy and you have to carry it in addition to all of your other shit.

I would not want to be a radioman.

"I am glad that I am not the gunner. When the shit hits the fan, you always hear the point man yelling, 'guns up, guns up.'

The gunner is always in the middle of the shit. I am glad that I am not the gunner."

"Guns up, guns up!" The whispered command is relayed down the long line of marines laying down along an old jungle trail. Slowly moving up the path I keep the sixty pointed forward, off my shoulder. I can hear my A-gunner panting behind me. "Wait-a-minute" thorn bushes tear at me. Tall sawgrass and unidentifiable jungle brush whip my face. Sweat stings my eyes. I pass the command section, the lieutenant, gunny, the corpsman and radioman. The lieutenant is murmuring into the handset. Gunny gives me a thumbs up. I am crouching as I move. I come around a bend. The Mexican is laying on his back. He holds out a clenched fist. I stop. He makes his hand flat and lowers it. I get on my belly. The Mexican motions me forward and I do a very slow crawl towards him. The jungle floor feels cool here. I could sleep here. I could sleep for a hundred days. He puts his lips to my ear. "Beaucoup VC coming down the trail bro," he says very slowly. I can smell the rancid salsa he used on his ham and motherfuckers. I give him a look. "Cochise ten meters up ahead, be chilly my friend," he says. Then he slowly rolls over on his belly looking forward.

I turn back to my A-gunner. I give him a thumbs out sign. He takes off his pack as I do. We are bringing just our gun and ammo to the party. I hold my index finger to my lips and start to crawl forward. Cochise is waiting for me. I crawl up beside him. He looks at me and smiles. He loves this shit. He always walks the point. I would hate to be the point man. Cochise moves some small ferns with the barrel of his M-16. In front of us is a trail that our small one intersects. The other trail is a well-used one. I can hear the sing song chatter of the unsuspecting enemy. They are NVA (North Vietnamese Regulars). Ever since Tet, when we kicked the local VC's ass, the NVA has

been coming down in greater and greater numbers. Their pith helmets and haircuts give them away.

Andy,

How are you? Haven't heard from you in awhile. Mail call is my only lifeline. They call us line animals . . . Please do not even think about coming over here!

Peace.

Dear Ben,

We have been worried about you. Please try to write a little more often if only to calm your mother down. She is living in front of the T.V. in the hope of catching sight of you. However, it seems to me that every time they mention the marines, it is always something terrible .

Two weeks later I am walking into the PX at Da Nang. I run into Andy. I cannot believe my eyes. He looks at me and gives a shout. We hug and slap each other around like two big stupid bear cubs. People walk around us and don't interrupt us. There is precious little joy in the 'Nam.

Dear Mom and Dad,

I am sorry that I haven't written to you in awhile, however, it has been a little hectic around here. Please, next time, do not call the Red Cross to find out if I am still alive. I am catching some serious flak from the gunny. . .

Peace.

We were sweeping through a 'ville. Our guys in 1st platoon swept through here a week ago and walked into a large anti-personnel mine just half a klick outside the 'ville. It was part of a dismantled five hundred pound bomb that had been a dud. The gooks had removed the detonator, spooned out the explosive and filled a very large crudely-shaped bomb with the explosive, pieces of metal, glass and rocks. Then they suspended it from a tree above the trail. In triple-canopy jungle it was impossible to see. I was tight with 1st platoon. We had humped a few hills together. Shared a few doobies. Nobody was happy.

Second platoon was sent in to relocate the inhabitants for their "protection." A cherry dude was having a hard time getting a mamasan and papasan to join the other villagers. Their large sow was pissed off and not moving. The mid-morning sun was a mother fucker. We were tired. Our uniforms were already heavily sweat-stained. I walked up to them and asked, "What's happening, cherry?"

All three of them were trying to push/pull the pig towards the area where the villagers were gathering with all of their stuff. The cherry dude straightened up to reply. As he did so I swung the sixty off of my shoulder and put a short burst into the pig. Blood and pig shit splattered mamasan, papasan and the cherry marine. The cherry jumped back and fell into the mire of pig shit and mud. The dude yelled at me in a mixture of fear and disbelief, "What the fuck are you doing?"

I looked at him and said, "The pig was VC, beaucoup VC in this 'ville, cherry."
 "VC?" He yelled, "VC? How in the hell can a pig be VC?"

White Boy was watching me from inside the hootch next to the pig pen, "Yo, Guns," he yelled, "Guns. What's up with the pig, man?"

"Pig was VC," I said to him.

"VC?" White Boy asked, "Fuck'n pig VC?"

"Sure as shit," I said, as I turned to walk away, "VC all over the mutherfuck'n place."

White Boy came out of the hootch as the Corporal came sprinting around the corner, "What the hell is going on?" he asked White Boy. White Boy looked at him and said, "Found a VC pig, Guns did."

"VC pig?" the Corporal asked, "VC pig, here? No shit?"

"VC all over the fuck'n place," White Boy said, sadly nodding his head as he walked up to me. We did a little dap. White Boy looked me over, he pulled his smokes out of a little plastic bag that the humidity required us to keep them in, "We aren't getting a little flaky, are we?" he asked me as he handed me a butt.

"Thanks," I said as I took the cigarette from him. "Up tight, outa sight, man," I said with my most sincere smile. I pulled out my new Zippo lighter. Andy had bought it for me when we met at the PX in Da Nang. It had the Marine Corps emblem engraved on one side. I held it out for White Boy to light his cigarette.

"Never seen no VC pig before. How'd you recognize him?" White Boy asked me through the smoke of his cigarette.

I turned and started walking towards the hootches that the squad was beginning to torch, "Had to be VC," I said, "Pig didn't want to get with the program."

White Boy shook his head and wiped his face with the green towel that we grunts kept hung around our necks, "Fucking VC pigs," he muttered as we walked towards the burning hootches. We ignored the wailing noise coming from the group of villagers.

Hi Larry,

I heard a nasty rumor that you ran up north to avoid the draft. Can't really say that I blame you. I've seen too much shit to judge such a harmless act. I hate what I'm doing but not strong enough to stop. I killed a pig yesterday. Funny, huh? I almost did the slopes too. I find myself becoming more and more detached from my actions. It is truly the wild wild west out here. I just don't give a shit anymore . . .

Peace.

Arizona Territory, Charlie's home away from home. We were the uninvited guests. Every unit got its turn to sweep through that God-forsaken piece of real estate. Land mines are the worst. The place reminded me of Camp Pendleton in a way. We dug our foxholes where others had dug before us. We set up the same lanes of fire, called in the same coordinates to target the same bunkers, broken down pagodas, and likely avenues of approach. It was a game. And we bled.

I was sitting in a half-dug foxhole. It would be dark soon. I could look out across the flat expanse of this part of the Territory and see Liberty Bridge in the

distance. Kilo Company was guarding the bridge for the next couple of weeks. I was sure that they were glad that we were here and they were there. I had done the same.

I could hear the murmur of the prick-25 in the direction of the command post; two poncho liners for a roof and doc, our corpsman, making his special stew. The platoon commander, Lieutenant Briggs came up to my position. You don't salute officers in the bush. It gives the gooks an added incentive to snipe.

Squatting down beside me I didn't see him look at Blooper Man, who had been lying to me about his sexual conquests in New Orleans, and indicate with a nod of his head to leave us alone. "Guns," he said, "I got some bad news."

"What," I said, "They're going to send me to the 'Nam and fight for the same shit-hole day after day, week after week?" I asked while I rummaged through my rucksack for some c-rats.

"No, Guns," he said, "This is serious shit."

"When Sandy drowned we tried to get Ben back home for the funeral. But the Marine Corps said that they could not do that for just a girl friend. We talked to the Red Cross, we talked to our Congressman. They were sympathetic but they could not help us."

We were on a fire base. It was just a shitty little hill. The engineers had bulldozed the top of it flat. The marines had choppered in the guns: 105's, 155's and a few Ontos's for self defense. They damn near got over-run the other night. That is what the platoon was there for. Temporary guard duty to beef up the artillery dudes. It was a skate job. The commanding officer of the fire base wanted us to stand inspection with spit-shined boots and polished brass. We stood it once. That night, someone threw a grenade with its explosives removed into his hootch. It was a dud, just a warning. You don't fuck with line animals.

"Sandy broke her neck while body surfing. The coroner said that she had been pregnant . . ."

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Trent,

How are you . . . I hope that you are taking good care of the horny Hornet and not letting Sean drive the car. He's a maniac. Ran into Andy in the middle of nowhere. He was with his group of civilian dudes. I think he is with the psyops crowd. They hang loud speakers from the bottom of the slicks and fly around and play gooner funeral music. Hell, we've heard them a couple of times, and it depressed the hell out of us and we didn't even know the words. Blooper Man wanted me to shoot at the bird. It was tempting. Say hi to everyone. . . thanks for the nice words about Sandy...

Two months later. . .

It is the monsoon season. Everything is wet. I have written home and asked for more socks. You cannot have enough socks. We are patrolling an area just south of

Hue. We are looking for a NVA regiment that is supposed to be didi-bopping around here somewhere. Out-fucking standing, an undermanned platoon looking for a NVA regiment. It is like hunting for tigers with a stick - just to see if they are out there.

Mail call. The "world." It comes in on the chopper with our resupply shit. It is the highlight of our day. We are dug in on a rise of ground. The command post is on the other side of the hill. I am with the 2nd squad. From my position I can only see them. I feel cut off from the rest of the platoon. I do not like this place.

I get one letter. It is from Andy's dad. I smile. He can't spell, but he writes. I have been beaten down to the point where the most basic pleasures seem huge: a hot shower, hot chow, letters from home. I'd have never thought that I would get so much pleasure out of such basic necessities of life. I am a line animal.

I open the letter. It is a short one. I pull my poncho liner over my head to protect the letter from the rain. It is dated twelve days ago. . .

Dear Ben,

I don't know if you heard or not but we got some bad news yesterday. Andy was killed in action. He was . . . I told your parents that I would write and let you know. We were wondering . . .

I dropped the letter. I slid down to the bottom of my small fighting hole. My poncho liner must have slipped off me. It was raining. I took my helmet off. I stood up. I took off my belted ammunition and threw it down in the hole. I took off my flack jacket and threw it down on top of the belt rounds. I slipped the suspenders of my web belt, undid my belt and let the whole kit fall off of me, "Fuck it !" I said. "I don't need this shit no more. No more, shit."

I was crying. I plopped down on top of my gear and held my head in my hands. The rain was beating down on me.

Black Man walked up to me, "You trip'n man?" he asked me.

"No." I said, then I nodded to the letter which was sitting face down in the mud. Black Man picked it up. Most of the letter had dissolved in the rain. He could read enough. He put his arms around me, "Don't mean nothin' my man. It don't mean nothing," he said.

Andy died two days before his nineteenth birthday. I had three more weeks to go before mine.

After Andy had been killed I turned self destructive. The gunny was always on my ass to write home. I was hollow inside. The only hope a line animal had was surviving the shit and getting back to the world. There was no pain back in the land of the big PX, no suffering, no friends with their bodies ripped apart. Joy and happiness awaited us back there for those who made it out of here.

"I remember one time we were on this bridge guarding detail. It was a skate job. Anyway, his mama sent him a whole box of green tangerines, by the time they got to us they had ripened right nice. Well, Guns, be shared with

everyone, even the Corporal. Our bunker smelt like tangerines. I can't smell tangerines without thinking about that bridge and Guns."

You can't do nothing to a dead man.

"After Andy died, Ben's letters became more and more infrequent. We tried to be understanding, but it was just so hard. It felt like he was slipping through our fingers. . .

The whole neighborhood was affected by Andy's death. Terry, Andy's sister, became really involved in the peace movement, as did her mom. Andy's mom and dad separated before Ben rotated home. Terry ran away from home. We think she moved in with some guy up in 'Frisco. Our neighbors became very vocal about the war."

Dear War Criminal,

Andy is dead because of you. I hope you rot in hell for what you have done. How many kids have you killed, today?

Terry

Dear Terry,

Most kids aren't big enough for a good meal. We only kill what we can eat.

Ben

I was short. A two digit midget. Seventy six mother fuckers and a wake up. We were sitting on top of our bunker at Liberty Bridge. Black Man and Cochise were with me. Blooper Man and the Mexican were gone, KIA. Tubbs had gone home without most of his face. The lieutenant had been sitting on top of a tank when it rolled over a large mine. The heat from the explosion boiled up and around the sides of the tank. The rumor was that Cochise had shot the lieutenant to put him out of his misery. I believed it. I never asked him. White Boy had his own squad. The Corporal rotated home safe and sound and all in one piece. Nothing's fair.

We were sitting on top of our bunker looking out towards the Arizona Territory. Someone was in some serious shit out there. We could see the Bird Dog circling around the area. A thin line of tracers chased after it. It went into a shallow dive and marked the target with a Willie P (white phosphorous) rocket. A fast mover came thundering in. It dropped a couple of iron bombs. We could see the concussion. "Yeah. Get some motherfucker," Black Man said.

As he climbed out a single line of tracers raced after him. Some poor gook was probably chained to his ancient antiaircraft gun. A second fast mover rolled in after the first. Bright, shiny canisters tumbled down. Oily, greasy smoke billowed up from the rows of flames. Didn't see no more tracers.

Gunny walked up to our bunker. He came up to the edge, put his hands on his hips and said to me, "Guns, I got some good news and some bad news. Which do you want first?"

“Gunny,” I said, “There ain’t no such thing as good news in the ‘Nam.”

Gunny said, “The bad news is you got just three zero minutes to clean your weapon, turn it in, pack your trash and catch the mail bird outta here.”

“Shit, gunny,” I said, “I ain’t hooking up with another outfit, am I?”

“No shithead,” the gunny said smiling, “Battalion came down and said that any short grunt with less than ninety days left could go home. That is, of course, if you want to.”

I wanted to.

Home

“The aircraft must always know where it was. If it is sure where it isn’t and it knows where it was, then, it can now subtract where it should be from where it wasn’t (or vice-versa). By differentiating this from the algebraic difference between where it shouldn’t be and where it was, it is able to obtain the difference between its deviation and its variation, this difference being called error.”¹

It was a Saturday morning. Larry Haddack’s dad saw me arrive in the taxi. He came over to welcome me home. Yes, I said, I knew that Larry had gone to Canada. No, I didn’t blame him. I am more pissed that he didn’t write. Larry’s dad drove me over to where my dad worked.

“I heard a commotion in the switch room. I remember walking up the stairs, out of the breakroom, around the main frame and there he was. I can’t remember much else. I know that I was crying. I think he was, too.”

My first couple days home were traumatic, for my parents as well as myself. They thought that I would come home and everything would be just the way it was before I left. I was different. Nobody recognized me. I didn’t recognize me.

“I had gone to work early that day. . . Ben was standing beside his dad. Everything else is kind of bleary. I do remember that he didn’t smile now I think about it . . .”

Coming home was not like I thought it would be. I felt old, old beyond time. I saw everyone in a different light. I felt like a rhinoceros. You can’t ignore a rhino in your house. But you wouldn’t know what to do with one, either.

“To cope with what they saw in Vietnam, they had to freeze their emotions and not feel anything. When a buddy got blown away, their attitude was, ‘It don’t mean nothing. Just keep on trucking.’ Well, obviously it did mean something. But they simply tried not to dwell on it, and to bang on until their tours were up.”⁵

I called Sandy’s parents. They were kinder than I deserved. I visited with Sandy

at her graveside. She had been buried with our child. Pain overwhelmed me. I told my dad that I had proof that there was no God. He said I should ask for forgiveness. I prayed to forget.

I talked with Andy's dad. He said that I could have the horny Hornet, but I never went over there to pick it up. It was part of the past with Andy, and that was gone . . .

Forever.

Shortly after the end of Desert Storm I received a call from Terry. The last communication that we had was the letter she sent me twenty plus years prior. Terry apologized for that letter. I said I was sorry, too. She asked me if it would be possible for us to get together and talk about Andy and what he was like when I last saw him, and maybe, talk about the war, too. I said I would like that.

After talking with Terry I hung up the phone and sat back in my chair to think. I couldn't concentrate. A gnawing empty feeling was in my gut. I went into the kitchen, poured myself some lukewarm coffee and sat at the kitchen table. I got up and looked out the window. I went to the refrigerator, opened the door and closed it without getting anything out of it. I couldn't concentrate on my work. Walking back into my small living room, I saved the work I had on the computer and turned it off. I went back to the kitchen. My fucking legislated helmet was sitting on top of the 'frige. I grabbed it and walked out of my apartment. I went downstairs into the garage area. The sight of my Fat Boy put a smile on my face. I walked around her touching her, stroking her at those intimate places only she and I shared. I thought about Andy.

How I wound up on PCH I cannot really recall. I remember the wind and sound of my scooter pounding through the city, the Cahuenga Pass. My mind was on other things.

I found myself sitting on the beach. The late afternoon sun had just dropped below the horizon. I felt the sinking feeling I used to get as it got dark in the 'Nam, and the fear. The smell of the Pacific and the breeze on my face brought back a flood of memories. I rode that wave of pain. I pulled a cigarette out of my jean jacket's pocket. I had to dig for my old battered Zippo lighter, the feel of the well worn Marine Corps emblem comforted me. My old lady wanted me to quit. Fuck it. I took a deep drag. It felt good.

I thought about Andy, and second squad. I thought about Black Man, the Mexican, Tubbs, White Boy. I thought about the desperation Blooper Man must have felt, Sandy, and the pain. I thought about the cherry dude whose name I never knew and I thought about Andy. I found myself thinking that maybe Andy got the better deal.

I swear to God, eighteen years of age is too young to have your heart ripped out of your soul. Something was stolen from me, something deep inside. I don't know what it was. All I do know is that it is hell to feel so hollow with only anger to fill that void. I never thought I'd see nineteen. I've seen it twice, and then some.

I stood up. I looked down at that fucking helmet laying in the sand. I thought about Andy, about the 'Nam. "Fuck this shit," I said, "It don't mean nothing." I kicked

that helmet towards the waves. I had paid the price for my freedom. Andy, more so. I walked over to my scoot and got on. I started her up. The familiar rumbling massaged my soul. I opened her up just to listen to her sing. I rode home in the night, helmetless and thought about Andy.

Endnotes

1. excerpts from Fundamentals of Inertial Navigation, smart-ass explanation for the uninformed.
2. popular protest slogan in the 60's.
3. excerpt from "Looks Like I'm Fixin' to Die Rag" by Country Joe and the Fish.
4. excerpt from "To Susan on the West Coast Waiting" by Donovan.
5. Dr. Grotts, Once a Hero. Book Three: Oquest for the Truth.

Glossary

Beaucoup Pronounced Boo-Coo. It means many, a whole lot.

Bird Dog Built by North American Aviation, twin engined, twin tailed aircraft designated as the OV-10 Bronco. Flown by men with huge balls. Used to coordinate air support for the grunts.

Black Man Blackest marine that we had ever seen. He was ordered never to smile when we were out in the bush.

Blooper Man Our grenadier. Nickname derived from the weapon, M-79 grenade launcher that he was obliged to carry.

CH-46 Three bladed, twin rotor head helicopter capable of carrying fifteen fully loaded marines or a whole shit load of stuff. Looks like a banana boat.

Charlie See VC

Chopper Any type of flying machine with vertical lift capability. Slang for helicopter. Ten thousand pieces flying in loose formation.

Cochise Half Hunkpapa Indian, half Mexican, someone tried to call him half-breed; until they woke up dead. He claimed he could smell VC from a mile away.

Dustoff Generic call sign for a chopper used to medevac wounded marines.

Flak Jacket Heavy, no sleeve apparel filled with ceramic disks designed to protect the wearer from flying debris, like bullets. Had no noticeable effect other than to slow

down mosquitoes and flatten out bullets before they penetrated your body.

In-Country Serving in the Republic of South Vietnam.

KIA Killed in action.

LZ Landing zone. Usually a small clearing in the jungle just big enough for one helicopter.

Line Animal Marine with an MOS of 0311, a grunt, unofficially a 1369 (unlucky cocksucker).

M-16 Light weight weapon firing a 5.56mm round, used by the majority of American forces in Vietnam. Nicknamed the “Matty Mattel Rifle” because of its plastic stock.

M-60 Two man, crew served, belt fed, air cooled, .308 caliber machine gun. The most potent weapon in a marine platoon’s arsenal.

M-79 The “blooper”. Short barreled shotgun looking weapon that fired a 40mm projectile. Its nickname came from the sound it made when fired.

Marine One unlucky son-of-a-bitch.

The Mexican His last name was Gomez or maybe Sanchez, anyway, he once claimed that he was not a Mexican. What else could we call him?

Ontos Small tracked vehicle with a total of six one-oh-six recoilless weapons, three on each side, attached to it. A truly awesome defensive weapon when loaded with flechette rounds.

Tubbs The only grunt, in the bush, who managed to gain weight.

‘ville Village. Small collection of hootches usually made from local material such as bamboo and palm leaves.

VC Short for Viet Cong, indigenous people of South Vietnam who fought on the communist side; generic term used for the bad guys.

White Boy White haired, blue eyed, pale bodied marine. Black Man claimed that White Boy could get sunburned fully clothed.



Tom Moran

Lessons

José Mendivil

We Skins taught not to talk perfect English
expected to speak in run on accents
told to drink wine like a glass of draft
drink wine like the way you put on pants in the morning,

They say use needles and go to Winston Street in Skid Row
where I draw my tribe on wall along pissed up alley by 4th Street
Member of city Clan expected to speak in microphone
at gymnasium Pow Wow so he can tell non-Indians
and Relocatee Breeds and Skins what we do.

College student won't dance in circle without her shawl
Chicana next to me asks what the drummers are singing about
I don't know, I won't ask
We Skins expected to be traditional.

We are trained to honor others at amusement parks
We Skins trained to honor weeping actor next to trashed river
Indians are suppose to say I have uncle who fought in the War and
he smokes weed and rides his horse with a high
out in the desert all day long.

Nana, Tata *
teach me to scalp their treaties
burn and loot their promises
circle their boarding schools
Teach me to read their lips.

* Grandmother, Grandfather

National Anthem

Monti Lawrence

today
i come to you with blood
in my eyes

we are hypocritical sisters
you and I
we raise the wicked
with crooked wooden arms

i imagine you watch as
i step from the shower
the examination begins

legs too thin
hips too wide
scrubbed clean
i do not smile

america
this paradise holds
no water or fruit
we name only parasites
and mold

echo the dissent of yesterday
with a silent passion
for repression
we do not resist

our stories are written
for us and laid
open to the right place
to land

we hold no history

Slump **Tactics**

Junk bond king
'90s-style

Angry Homeowners / See Pages 1-2

Raising Capitalists / See **Junior Achievement** / Page 3

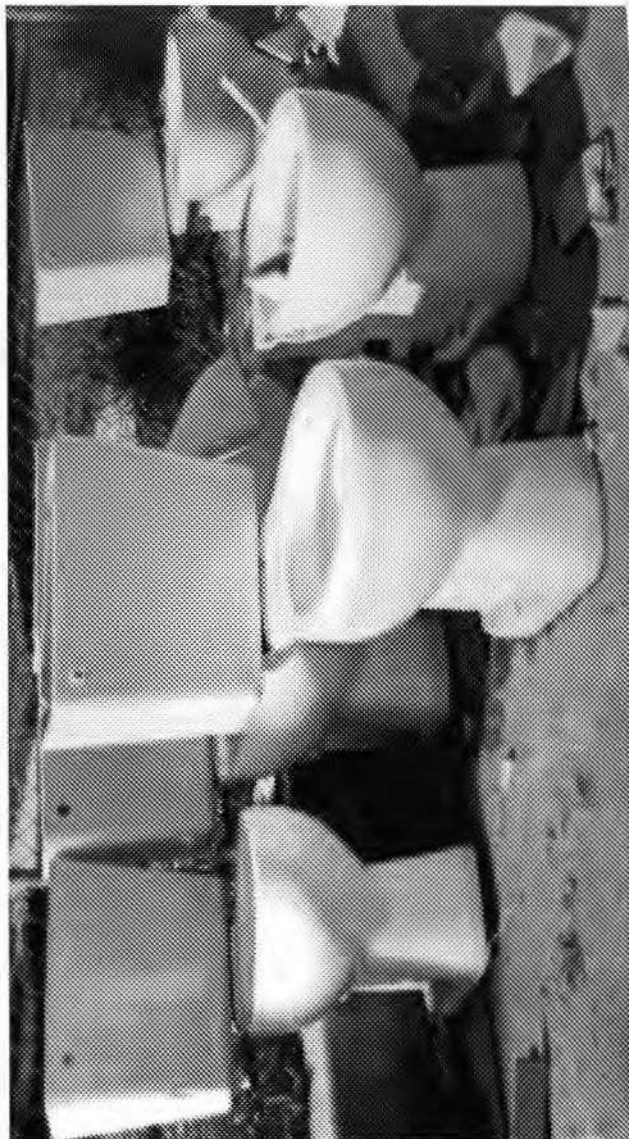
The Screwdriver as a Weapon of Death / See **Screwed** / Page 4

Origins of Universe Discovered / See **Universe** / Page 5

4 Injured in Runaway Train Collision / See **Runaway** / Page 6

Appendix / Page 7

Afterword / Pages 8-10



Slump
Homeone

ANGRY HOMEOWNERS

"V": as this case is still pending, the names have been altered to protect the accused.

** rig: along with the word "semi" rig is a commonly used term among truck drivers. It refers to the large, double-axled diesel trucks used in the hauling and distribution of commodities over America's highways and roadways. ("V" is currently employed by Beef Riggers, a meat packing warehouse located in Vernon, CA.)

RESEDA—Concerned citizen, or vigilante? Jumbo swears "V" is not a "vigilante," squinting and making a sick face even pronouncing the word.

Our hidden cameras and microphones, however, tell a different story Presented for your consideration is this transcription of an actual conversation between Jumbo and "V," which was captured live via our audio-video lead as it really happened the morning of 12 / 15 / 94 beginning at 07:46 am. YOU BE THE JUDGE!

V: (entering kitchen from driveway, yelling) Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. I'll kill those little fucking bastards. That's it. That's fucking it. I swear to fucking god!

J: (yelling from bathroom, concerned, annoyed) What? What happened?

V: They did it again. There's spray-paint all over my rig.** First the fucking christmas lights, now this again.

J: (entering kitchen from bedroom) What are you doing?

V: (on hands and knees, searching through cupboard under the sink) Nothing.

J: What are you looking for?

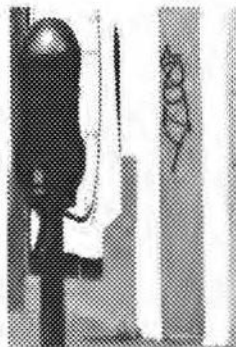
V: My fucking screwdriver. Shit. Where the fuck is it?

J: What do you need it for?

V: Nevermind why the fuck I need it. Have you seen it or not?

J: Fuck you, — Don't take this out on me; I'm not in the fucking mood.

V: Sorry, but—



SLUMP 1

Last week, an emotional meeting of Silver's group, Homeowners of Encino, featured "hostile and angry" residents who want police to take a more aggressive role in combating vandalism.

"It goes to the heart of the community, it goes to the quality of life," he said.

He cited one wall in Encino, where, until recently, there was 5 square feet of graffiti. "Then, it became 50 square feet. Then in the last few weeks, it will become 500 square feet.

"I don't consider them 'taggers,'" Silver said. "That's kind of innocuous, these are crooks, vandals who are destroying public property — more important — they are destroying the heart of a community."

[exhibit A]

EXCERPTS FROM A ~~TAGGER'S~~ NOTEBOOK. ALIAS "AGONY," "RATE," "OSSIFY."
CONFISCATED JANUARY 16, 1995; ALSO SEIZED WERE 3 SPRAY CANS AND SCRIBING PARAPHERNALIA: SHARPENED METAL, A SCREWDRIVER.

12.15.94 I know what's what. Don't try to be a hero. Heros get pinched. Last night I almost got caught. I just finished fucking-up the side

J: Why do you park it there? You know the neighbors complain—that big fucking cow painted on the side. It was probably one of the neighbors fed up with looking at it.

V: No. I know who did it: those little shits up the street. (*standing up and checking kitchen drawers*) Probably the same ones who stole the christmas lights. Fuck, where is it?

J: I lent it to T-bone.

V: What?

J: I just remembered. I lent it to T-bone last week when she borrowed the dirt devil.*

V: Great. Fucking beautiful.

J: Well don't blame me. Remember all that shit you said at Thanksgiving: "what's ours is yours. . . what are neighbors for. . . blah, blah, blah," all that shit?

V: I was drunk-off my ass Thanksgiving.

J: Well. . .

V: Fuck it.

J: (*pouring a bowl of Frosted Flakes*) Where are you going?

Unfortunately "V's" answer was not picked up clearly, having been uttered outside the range of our kitchen mics. However, what the mics did pick-up we have been able to digitally enhance, and it's clear to us that what "V" said in response to Jumbo's question was: "to take matters in my own hands."

We should mention, however, that, upon being interrogated, Jumbo recalled the response as being mumbled, and thought it was "to take care of business," a phrase "V" often used in different contexts: i.e., before going to work, before going to the bathroom, before sex



of a MTA bus: a big "OSSIFY" across a classic rock advertisement. This fuckhead tried to grab me. A "good samaritan." I took off. I hate it when that happens. I just think: man, go back to your coffee and donuts. Who are you risking your life for? I have friends who would've killed you. And for what? For MTA? For a classic rock station?

Don't talk to me about "community" either, when everyone's become a fucking appendage of the police, eager to grab their 15 minutes of fame for turning someone in for something.

"In the last six months, we have really noticed an increase," Racs said. "It's out of control in certain parts of the Valley. It's become a very popular thing to put your tag anywhere you can.

"My feeling is, that is more a reflection of society as a whole. They get even more glory and gratification by being violent. That is what they are after, getting their names out."

Yeah. YOUR community. There's certainly no place for me in YOUR community.

On the way home I hit up Farmer John's truck again. A big fucking "AGONY" across that smiling cow.

*dirt devil: In review-ing previous footage, we can verify that Jumbo did in fact lend T-bone the dirt devil on Tuesday 12/7/94; however, no screwdriver was involved in this transaction. Previously captured footage shows that on the night of 12/11/94, after a drunken brawl that sent "V" storming from the house, Jumbo procured the screwdriver from under the sink and hid it—within arms reach—between the mattress and boxspring of their bed.

JUNIOR ACHIEVEMENT

*dirt devil: we are struck by a beautiful thought: imagine an America with a dirt devil in every household, we could all really be as nasty as we wanna be.

**Illegal: Some would say that it is the very illegality of the black-market that allows such otherwise excluded entrepreneurs their "window of opportunity." Removing the stigma and risk of such a market would only open the door for its entrenchment and take over by those other "law-abiding" capital interests.

Junior had somehow gotten hold of a dirt devil* and we vacuumed the shit up before they came home. You should have seen us later, sifting through all that cat hair and carpet fuzz, salvaging what we could: a regular couple of dehard entrepreneurs.

"Fuck it. That's good enough. These fuckin' potheads won't know the difference. If it burns, they'll smoke it. Besides, it'll be dark by the time we get there."

That was just like Junior, always finding an angle, a real self-starter: "Supply and demand, Sinner. Supply and fucking demand. Fuck Adam Smith. Fuck Keynes. Fuck all those armchair, Wall Street, Nintendo jack-offs, following digital all day. Except for a few heavy hitters, that shit's all meaningless. We're the last of the true capitalists. Laugh, but it's true. It's capitalism at its essence out here. No fucking government regulations, no long term, opportunity cost, investment bullshit, just big risks, ruthless competition, and fucking *real* gains or losses. These guys out here are capitalism's wet dream; they would eat Wall Street for lunch if big business didn't have the government and its police sucking them off—all this rat and mouse bullshit. If this shit weren't "illegal"*** they would be on the cover of *Fortune Magazine*, they would be sponsoring the Super Bowl. One fucking word.

So we're a threat. Instead of being the American Dream incarnate, we're the bread and butter of the fucking penal system."

Junior Achievement—the venerable entrepreneurial program for kids has turned hundreds of thousands of teenagers into successful adult business people, says Kathryn J. Whitmore.

The former Houston mayor is the newly named head of the 75-year-old international organization that hopes to double the number of pint-size capitalists

in Los Angeles over the next five years.

She met with junior entrepreneurs at Monte Vista Street Elementary School in Highland Park.

Fourth-graders were wrapping strategies to find raw materials for their yo-yo business. A few classrooms away, fifth-graders were practicing job interview techniques.

SLUMP 3



12.21.94 In a world of shit it's hard to keep your hands clean. Things breaking down left and right. Distractions. Obligations. And it's all such petty shit. That's what gets me. Getting wrapped up in all this petty bullshit. Waterheaters. starter motors. When I move out at least I'll be able to control my immediate environment.

CONTROL. That's what drove her away—my need to control everything, put everything in its place. That constant criticism. I fucked-up her self-esteem. I fuck myself everyday.

"We're not gangsters, we're just a crew. Taco Bell is our thing," said Christine Nerrick, 16, who showed the mark of her "crew" on her right wrist — a nickel-size circular scar between her thumb and forefinger, burned in with a heated marijuana pipe.

NR

SCREWED

Red, the proprietor of Red's True Value Hardware, was interviewed 1 / 12 / 95.

- Q:** I notice that the spray paint is locked up in a cage.
- A:** Yes. If we don't lock it up the kids will steal it. So . . .
- Q:** I see you have to be at least 18 years old to buy spray paint.
- A:** Yes. And I also reserve the right not to sell to anyone I deem, uh, unfit or suspicious in any way. I reserve that right.
- Q:** How do you go about determining that?
- A:** Well, the LAPD has given us a list of determining characteristics to go by—including common styles of dress and language practices. I've been around long enough to know what's what and who's who.

Despite their utilitarian purpose, screwdrivers are frequently used as weapons, police say. Recent screwdriver-involved crimes include:

Sept. 28, 1993: A woman is arrested in North Hills on suspicion of stabbing another woman in the neck with a screwdriver in a dispute over a man.

Sept. 27, 1993: A police officer kills a 35-year-old North Hills man who was holding a screwdriver to his 7-year-old son's throat.

Sept. 25, 1993: Thieves in Echo Park attack a person with a screwdriver and steal cash and jewelry valued at \$2,300.

Sept. 23, 1993: A 25-year-old Van Nuys man fatally shoots a panhandler who witnesses say came at him with a screwdriver.

June 18, 1993: A man handcuffs a 37-year-old Simi Valley woman in her home, threatens her with a screwdriver and robs her of \$2,000.

Jan. 5, 1993: Four men beat a 26-year-old Laguna Hills man with tire irons and stab him in the back with a screwdriver.

July 30, 1992: A 35-year-old Woodland Hills man is sentenced to 735 days in jail for attacking a store owner with a screwdriver in a confrontation over a bad check.

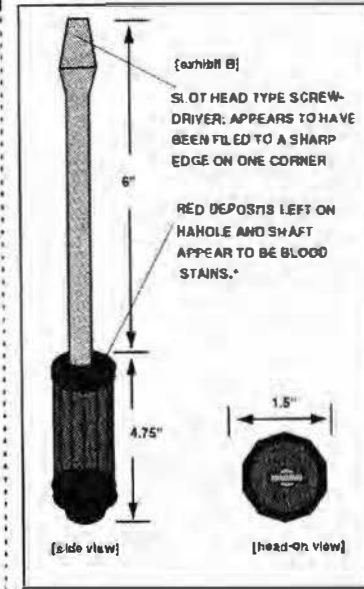
July 15, 1992: A 19-year-old Panorama City man is sentenced to 29 years to life for killing a man by stabbing him in the eye with a screwdriver.

Sept. 17, 1991: An off-duty reserve police officer shoots and kills a suspected car thief who repeatedly charged at him with a screwdriver in Canoga Park.

Sept. 1, 1991: An off-duty police officer in San Diego is stabbed in the arm with a screwdriver when he approaches a group of men.

July 15, 1991: A police officer shoots a man who stabbed his 72-year-old mother with a screwdriver as their car swerves through traffic in Glendale.

*Blood stains: lab tests of deposits taken from handle and shaft of the confiscated screwdriver (exhibit B) proved positive for a chemical concentration indicating a substance not blood, but paint. The high concentration of CO₂ in the sample further suggests a spray paint—perhaps a Krylon Cherry or Candy Apple Red. However, since most paint will indicate positive traces of this compound, the lab conclusions with regard to the specific nature of the paint in question should be viewed as falling below the lab's 89% scientifically certain standard.



12.22.94 Christmas lights, helicopters, and gray days of things undone.



UNIVERSE

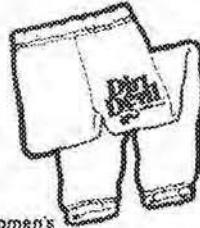
the renewed interest in heavily doped semiconductors, i.e., semiconductors with high impurity concentrations



Golf Shirt



Coffee Mug

women's
panties

Can Hugger



Golf Hat

Conductor's
Chair

Sweatshirt

The variations in topography were large enough, scientists said, to create the gravity needed to attract more and more matter into increasingly expansive clumps. These variations had been predicted by theorists but were never observed until now.

The discovery, made by scien-

tists analyzing satellite data, is being hailed as one of the most exciting and important developments in cosmology in this century.

"What we have found is evidence for the birth of the universe and its evolution," said Dr. George Smoot, an astrophysicist

1.15.95 I've been busy the last couple of weeks, getting everything set for tonight. It was a hitch getting the paint. I had to break into family man's garage. I had some black and yellow left, but I needed some red and I remembered I saw him painting his kid's bike once. Sure enough, there it was, next to a tool box. Fuck it, I took some tools too, might as well, could come in handy.

I made up this whole story about spending the night at a friend's house, just to make sure. My mom's already caught me sneaking out three times the past few months. It was a tough sell—she knows I don't have friends.

The rail yard is pretty far from my house. It's not that bad. I've walked it before. Just follow the tracks past the restaurants and warehouses, over the overpasses. I think there's a guard there 24-7, but it's wide open if you follow the tracks in. They're just sitting there like huge mechanical cows—brown, hollow Santa Fe carcasses.

The shooting was "a lawful killing" because Masters reasonably believed that "he was in imminent peril" as he faced the two taggers—one carrying a screwdriver—in a midnight confrontation Tuesday under a freeway overpass

RUNAWAY

Imagine a semi idling stopped at a downed railroad crossing: the distinctive dinging of the warning bells is a constant disruption in the background noise of our audio lead as it transmits live from inside the plush cab of "V's" rig.

With the help of a few of our carefully placed mics we know that after leaving Jumbo in the kitchen, "V" picked-up Sinner. The following is an edited transcription of their conversation, taped as it happened:

V: So let me get this straight. Junior wants me to transport a load of frozen steer carcass with 30 pounds of weed discriminately wrapped in zip-lock glad bags and shoved up inside the various openings, and orifices. . . ?

S: Yeah, you know, the glad bags will protect any cross contamination from either side. So you don't have to worry about hurting them. I mean they're dead anyway, right? Anyway, it's all precaution; C.Y.A., you know? Cover Your Ass. Junior's figured it all out. She knows what's what. What'd she say? Let me see. Oh yeah. Check this out. She said it's an accelerated form of freeze tag with killer stakes involved. Get it? Killer *steaks* involved.

V: You picked a perfect day to drop this bomb*, Sinner.

S: What.

V: Did you ever see that movie *Double Indemnity*?

S: No.

V: Forget it. Let's just say I'm not in the mood for any of Junior's screwball ideas right now; I'm busy with my own. You're lucky your sorry ass isn't walking right now—bringing that shit up.

I don't care how much you need those panties**.

S: They're a gift I said. And they're on sale, damn it. Why don't you chill-out already, girl?

NOTE: To put a series of large letters on a wall usually in more than one color.

also see appendix, pg. 7

**panties: after buying panties, Sinner would later be asked to leave the *Space Station* video arcade for repeatedly hitting on one of the machines, complaining of stolen tokens.

12.27.94 My writing is growing more and more desperate. More obsessive. I am constantly disappointed. I left to walk on the railroad tracks in the night air. Relics. Railroad tracks. There's nowhere I can go that hasn't already been plotted over before me. I walk in patterns, on sidewalk, in the shit and bones of an intense graveyard full of relics. Traffic noise. Street lights. Fences. And to think you can escape in your imagination is just another illusion. The imagination is another fucking graveyard full of ghosts and jokes of dirty old men.

The city is the only relevant narrative.

The on-board event recorders, similar to aircraft flight data recorders, will be analyzed. Federal laws also dictate drug tests for the crews.

The train speed at impact wasn't immediately known.

The fire and wreckage was clearly visible from nearby Interstate 15.

"It looked like a movie set out there; the cars are just upside down everywhere," said motorist Loraine Stevens.

Witness Fred Dressler ran to help a conductor: "He said that they were sitting there waiting because an Amtrak had just passed them. Then he heard on the radio where this other train was coming down. It had no brakes."

GLOSSARY OF TAGGER TERMS

ALL CITY: Tagging all over, not just in one area.

BA FYLE: A contest between different taggers or crews to see who can write their tag the most times in a certain area within a given period of time.

BOMB: To put a series of large letters on a wall usually in more than one color.

BOMBING BOMB: When a tagging crew comes together with the express purpose of putting up as many of their tag names and the name of their crew as they can either on public or private property.

BOMBED: Something which no longer can be used.

CREW: A group of taggers with their own distinct name.

COOL: A really good tagger who's considered to be "cool."

CRACK: To disrespect someone by writing over or on another tagger's work.

PIECE: Pieces of tagging styles that are considered good.

GETTING UP: Putting your tag on objects.

HEAD: The best tagger in a crew artistically.

HIGHWAY: The large overhead freeway signs. Sometimes used to refer to any high objects to tag on.

HEED: A citizen who tries to stop someone from doing their graffiti and attempt to detain them for the police.

HOUSE: Dancing group, posse, or crew that dances at parties held in a house.

JACK: To steal a tagger's supplies; usually by robbery.

JUMP-IN/OUT: Like street gangs, several members will beat a person who wants to get into the crew or wants to leave the crew.

PAI A WALL: Put graffiti all over a wall.

LAND MARKS: Fixed street objects, such as street light poles, electric poles, city sign poles, etc.

MOVE: Putting as much graffiti on an object as possible; usually in short period of time.

FACE: An elaborate graffiti mural put on a wall or other large object.

SMC: Stealing; shoplifting paint, markers, etc.

SHUT-UP: Arrested.

SLACK: To cross out another tagger's/crew's name. Meant as an insult or a challenge.

SPIN: A store to shoplift from, which is kept a secret from other taggers.

TAG: A nickname or the act of putting graffiti on an object.

TAGGED: A person who adopts a unique nickname and then puts this nickname on objects.

TAG-OUT: To defeat another tagger/crew in a battle.

BOOM-UP: Put large bubble style letters on an object.

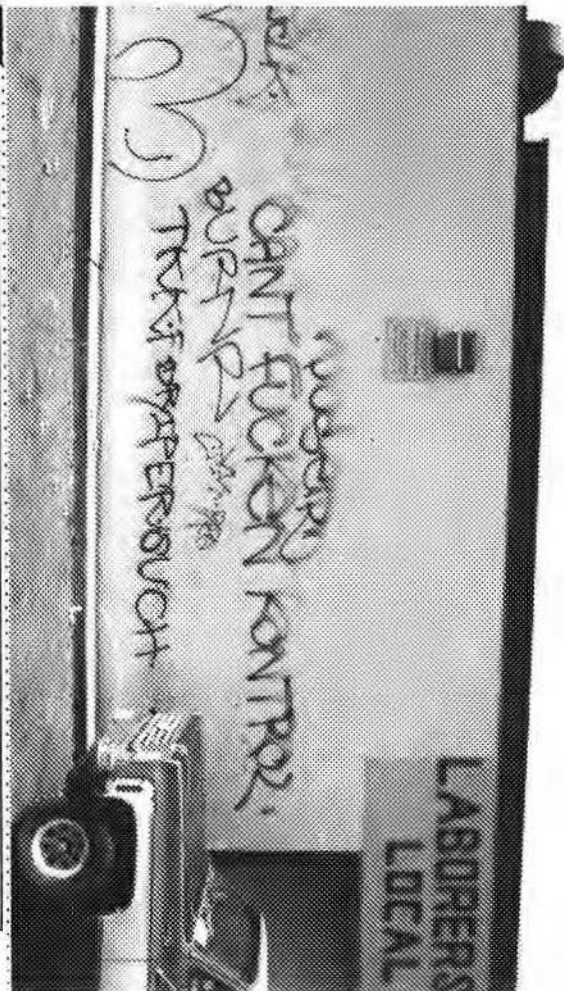
UP: A beginner or a tagger who writes in an amateurish manner.

WILD STYLE: Unique style of tagging that exhibits overlapping letters.

WRITE: To put up a tag or graffiti on an object.

WRITER: A person who does murals (pieces); a person who puts his tag on objects. NOTE: a person who does pieces considers himself an artist and refers to himself as a writer. They do not like to be associated with taggers. A person who just tags can also call himself a writer.

Source: Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department.



“HATE”

cackle, cackle, cackle. like a fucking helicopter. i want to stick my head in the spinning blades, maybe then she'll shut the fuck up. i would love to see that. i would cry. beneath the red neon tubing, the wet streets shine in the predawn traffic lights. asphalt and oil. parked cars like abandoned children, freezing in alleyways, murderers, smoking cigarettes, billowing exhaust, sad eyed dim headlights on dying batteries. so the index begins: with eyes like dying headlights, and hands and limbs tired of their continued use, cold like plastic running through the veins. nothing what it is, but what it isn't, or what it's next to—proxy, contiguous, metonymic. like looking at the mush in the gutter that was yesterday's headlines contemplating nothing putting one foot in front of the other, swinging one dead meat hook in time with the other, stepping. static in the mind collapsing in with the broken voices of the street, swirling stomachhead, acrid, syrupy sweet ear wax symphony. arcade philosophy, it's so much easier that way, smart bombs, I mean, smart drugs. candied ass fuck. large plump children driving into each other, protected by walls of fiberglass and rubber, a cockpit



407-Lycra THONG with money pouch. Colors: Black, Gold. Sizes: S - M - L - XL.

candybar with a fleshy mush center spilling out over the highway at a hundred miles per hour. hands like claws now, burning cold palms on metal, avoiding razor wire. hands are precious. reference to time here. we've moved. dizzying, contemplating speed and height in personal darkness. i never knew freeways were so loud, past trees. vulnerability exaggerates everything in absurd increments, like a post-disaster price gouging petty-bourgeois fuck. no time for syntax now. hit and run. stroke yourself later. compartmentalized blue lit existence. then and only then. with a cherry on top, gut full of poison, head on ice. tripping through highway landscape. sloped iceplant and sprinkler piping, adrenaline. ego erection, tracing subtleties back into that which never happened. that composureless transgressive frenzy—a tenuous non-event continually re-sutured in turning and looking back. the signifier is loosed on the world. it's mine, it's not mine. it has everything and nothing to do with language, breaking the law; inside playing with narratives; tip-toeing over slippery hardwood floors into cold sheets. cold hands gravitate to warm middle. it's the precious hands that give you away.

“OSSIFY”

“the total body must revert to the dust of words, to the listing of details, to a monotonous inventory of parts, to crumbling: language undoes the body, returns it to the fetish.” the orchestrations of the western eye; always a hop, skip and a jump away from heaven, presence—a successive unfolding of necessary absence; *delay*. jack and jill went up the hill. . . always banging my head against a wall, when there—on the surface—erect, engorged, staring me in the face, always already there: see jane's dick; see jane's dick run. see jane's dick run over there, see jane's dick come back, take a break, and run some more, run over here, run over there. i want to play with jane's dick. “the contract of desire: falsified. now we can enter this symbolic field by three routes, no one of which is privileged: provided with equal points of entry, the textual network, on its symbolic level, is reversible.” i don't want to enter at all right now. i want to tickle the skin, stimulate the nerves with a feather touch. die laughing like chinese water torture, like a third degree burn overloads the nervous system creating all kinds of surface tension, ruptures and leakage.



469-Lycra THONG with emerald-colored “Love Muscle”.
Colors: Black, Red, Royal.
Sizes: S - M - L - XL.

dropping the text into a tub of ice water, numbing out the insides. “the painting, by contrast, has no inside: it cannot provoke the *indiscreet* act by which one might try to find out what there is *behind* the canvas. . . the aesthetic of the canvas—less emblematic, more indifferent—is more easily satisfied: a statue breaks, a canvas blurs. . . but writing extenuates still further the hallucination of the *inside*.” cackle, cackle, cackle. mixing balls banging against metal fuselage. discerning ears take over when surfaces seduce the eye. there's something moving in the bushes. there's something there because i hear it. i don't see anything; there's no wind, so there must be something there. read me a story. tell me the truth. confess. but you blush. look at him; he's blushing. something inside. what are you hiding inside. tell us, because you can't hide it. it's written all over your face.

it's written all over my face. *liar. liar, pants on fire. liar, liar, pants on fire*. most parents are surprised to learn their son or daughter is in trouble or using drugs, but if you learn to read the signs early on you can learn the truth before it's too late. my precious hands betray me.

“AGONY”

suddenly there's spreading, growth. a wall space is transformed, temporarily engendered in graphic exchanges: conversations, viral signs accumulate, cluster. temporarily. a wall space is characterized, vital. the blazon—the ostentatious (dis)play—“expresses the belief that a complete inventory can reproduce a total body. . . it accumulates in order to totalize.” the amorphous semi-conductivity of urban/suburban space has been exploited for decades, an unquestioned, paradoxical arena: experienced as public, yet almost completely privatized. it is highly vulnerable, volatile. the unpaid for and therefore unlawful characterizing of architecture is silenced, defaced, and otherwise rendered innocuous, which only increases the stakes—the challenge—and the sense of power for the transgressor(s). “the game here is gramatical in essence. . . it consists in presenting, acrobatically, for as long as possible, the plural diversity of possibilities within a singular syntagm. . . to produce a constant model carried out to infinity, which is to *constrain language* as one wishes: whence the very pleasure of power.” when political acts become socially deviant behaviour—i.e., delinquency—it's easier to



413-Lycra “Devil” Pouch.
Color: Red.
Size: One Size.

eradicate, amputate, the offending organ(s), in the name of . . . for the good of. . . *it's mine, it's not mine*. shift here: repetition of previous lexia: narrative temporality / intertextual cross referencing. sliding through iceplant on a freeway slope, turning and looking, re-suturing, through a slit in the fence onto quiet oppressive cul-de-sacs, down through alleyways ripe with overtipped garbage and rotting tree fruit apricot mush epileptic neutered domestics yelping; all the cultural codes which distinguish this particular suburban desolation so i can make it home to hardwood floors and cold sheets. and then tomorrow i'll drive by with clean hands and look up through a glass encasing metal capsule and it'll be quick and careless like an insult. but now i hide bespeckled hands from the night, closing off another sequence in the narrative i'm constantly constituting, it was a success. it was failure. i'll know tomorrow like a slap in the face. and then i'll interrogate myself. i'll give myself the third degree. i'll give myself a polygraph test. i'll torture myself like a double agent caught behind the lines, like a double agent who really had something to tell.

Artist Bios

Carl Bramblett is a writer caught in the event horizon of textuality. Oh well. Foucault tells me that I am nothing more than an author-function anyway.

Audrey Butera lives, loves and writes in L.A.

Jocelyn Corbett is honing her writing skills by taking brilliant faculty meeting minutes for UCLA Anthropology while she decides what she wants to be when she grows up.

Onnig Ekizian has vanished.

Alexis Frixione The other day I was walking on the sidewalk. I stepped on the shadow of a butterfly and it died. Maybe you don't understand. I stepped on its shadow, not it. And it fell to the floor, flapped twice and never again.

Kate Gale is disconnected.

David Goewey is a junior in this English honors program. He studied fiction writing at Santa Monica College and the UCLA Writer's Extension. He lives in Hollywood with Anne and a cat named Booster.

Nikcole L. Graves is an aspiring writer and poet who lives in the Los Angeles area; this is her first published work.

Mark Hoffer graduated in May 1996 from CSUN with an M.A. in English. He currently teaches English at Antelope Valley College and L.A. Pierce College.

Hormone "anti-parent culture disseminators of agit-prop anathema. The writer-as-sampling-machine appropriates the scanner as a political weapon."

Marielle Horton is a poet and master logger.

Felicia Kreitl writes and lives in Albany, New York.

Monti Lawrence graduated from CSUN in 1996 with a B.A. in Creative Writing. She lives in Newbury Park, CA and works in investment in Malibu, CA. Ms. Lawrence plans on pursuing a Masters in English in the Fall of 1997 after which she hopes to teach college level English courses.

Jose Mendivil was raised in Boyle Heights by his Mexican mother and Yaqui/Pima-Papago father. The material in his poetry comes from the oral traditions of his parents and grandparents and his own personal experiences, as interpreted through his east of the L.A. River eyes. His work has appeared in *On Target*, *Caffeine*, *LaLa Land*, *The Red Nations Movement* (a Native American newspaper), and the *UCLA Chicano/a* newspaper, *La Gente*; in addition, Jose will be published in *Flash-Bopp*. He was also active in the *Beyond Baroque Poetry Workshop* lead by Bill Moore and he took a *UCLA poetry extension course* taught by Suzanne Lummis.

Alan Mills - gwm, 27, seeks rugged intellectual n2 poetry & Foucault - alan@intouchformen.com.

Tom Moran wishes you would just relax and buy him a drink.

Kenneth L. Pettit was a sergeant in the United States Marine Core. A divorced father of four, his daughter and two youngest sons are 4.0 students. His oldest son is currently serving with the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit in Bosnia. Ken is currently enrolled as a senior at CSUN, and is working at Boeing Defense and Space Group flight testing the B-1B at Edwards Air Force Base in California.

Natalie Anne Raffa "NR, HEARD, AT LAST."

Heather Rhodes is currently a teaching assistant in a K/1 classroom and my brain is melting as a result. I graduated in summer '96 with a B.A. in Creative Writing and I miss all the boring classes that spawned my poetry writing (what, do you think I was taking notes???) . When I grow up, I want Robin William's job in "Dead Poets Society." Or maybe I'll be a stand-up comic. Yeah right, like you'd really believe THAT from this bio....

Alene Terzian is a graduate student at CSUN. She has a green elephant tattoo on her pelvis and wishes to be identified as a girl. She enjoys nude sunbathing and avocado body wraps. At this time she wishes to be M.I.A.

Luisa Villani is completing a B.A. in Creative Writing. In 1996 she was awarded a fellowship to the Bucknell Seminar for Younger Poets and honorable mention in the Academy of American Poets competition. She is president of the CSUN chapter of Amnesty International and is currently organizing a trip to Chiapas, Mexico. Her short story, "Degrees of Freedom," was a finalist in the 1996 Lullwater Review Fiction Contest at Emory University.

Kerlan Wong is a fifth year senior majoring in Creative Writing and Deaf studies. She aspires to work with deaf children in the future and hopes her writing career will endure throughout her lifetime.

Submissions

The Northridge Review accepts submissions year round. Manuscripts should include a cover page with author's/artist's name, address, telephone number, and titles of works submitted. Send manuscripts and artwork to:

Northridge Review
CSUN English Department
California State University, Northridge
18111 Nordhoff Street
Northridge, CA 91330

A second copy on computer disk of work submitted is appreciated; submissions without SASE cannot be returned.