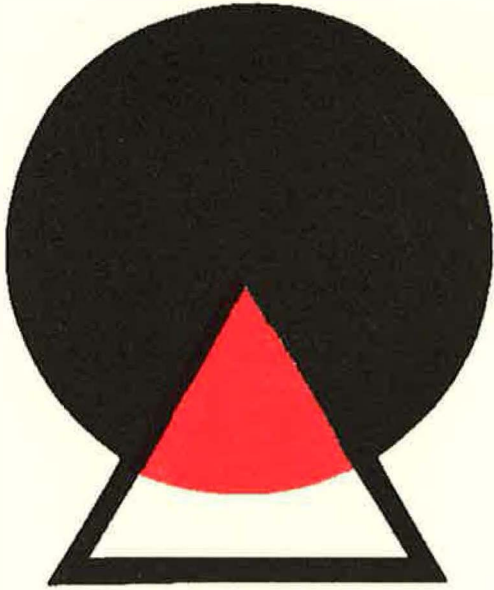


THE NORTHRIDGE REVIEW

The Northridge Review

Fall 1999



Special Thanks To:

Nancy Bernstein, Karin Castillo, Jennifer Elliot, Catherine Flores, Joyce Gerrity, Dr. Katharine Haake, Deborah Marsh, Margo McCall, Canan Tasci, Nancy Thompson, the members of the Instructionally Related Activities Board, and the students of California State University, Northridge.

Editor's Notes: _____

What you hold in your hands is one of only four-hundred copies of this book. At first thought, four-hundred sounds like a relatively large amount, but consider the last time that you held in your hands any publication of which less than ten-thousand copies were made. Perhaps a better question would be to ask you to consider the last time you bought anything that was not mass produced.

Welcome to Northridge, CA. One-hundred years ago, there were no television commercials for Alka-Seltzer, no Yahoo chat rooms, no Taco Bell boil in the bag meat, and no 6 ton Sports Utility Vehicles. Looking around right here in the San Fernando Valley, you would see only groves, empty land, and mountains. Most clothes were still sown by hand, and entertainment was simple. We did have poets and writers though.

Some things never change.

What you hold in your hands are the words of those reaching out to you with something to say. Some things simple, and others complex, yet every poet and storyteller working to entertain and challenge your mind with something of higher quality than MTV and commercials. Take a step back, and consider the value of what you are holding in your hands, something so old-school (traditional), a book, and yet something so relevant to today.

The city of Los Angeles, 1999, and personal literature endures.

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*winner of the 1999 Academy of American Poets Award

** runner up for the 1999 Academy of American Poets Award

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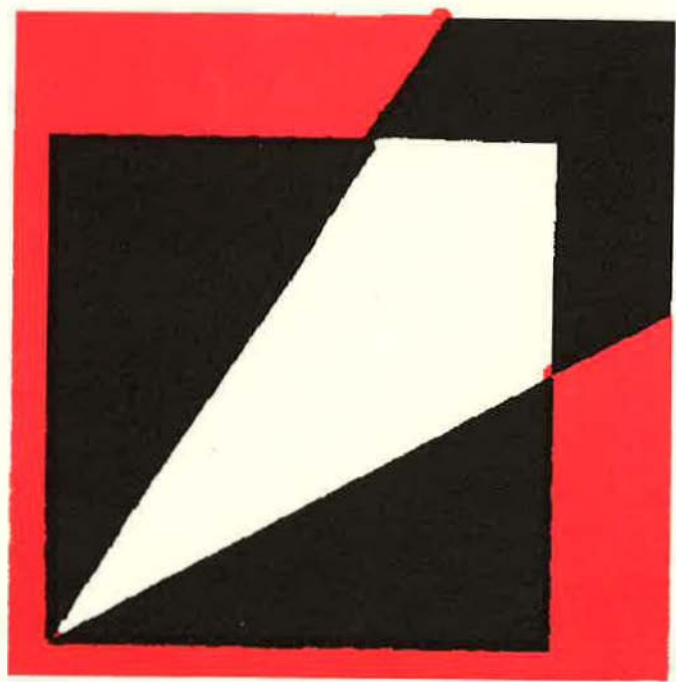
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Poetry

Tanya Quin

Rocket Ballad

[These small things detonate.]
Before highschool changed us, we
launched rockets in lemon orchards. Desolate
and yellow-globed, we were enclosed by galaxy.
You carved hulls from cork, and I knew an alchemy
of rocket fuels. The fuses were long.
In citrus air and dirt we crouched by a tree.
The possibilities both lovely and horrifying.

Sometimes I watched your face against the density
of foliage, lit up by lemons and flaming
propellants. Once you touched your hand to my knee.
The possibilities both lovely and horrifying.

Bridal Fog

(A Pantoum)

Fog is a kind of sleep
or a veil the bride finds herself under.
Its white afterglow
cradles her eyes back into their lids.

A veil the bride finds herself under
is the anesthetic of clouds
and cradles the eyes back into their lids.
Maybe an aisle is a second passage to sleep,

Under the anesthetic of clouds,
filament can be mistaken for heaven.
Maybe an aisle is a second passage to sleep,
and the husband there a long dream.

Even filament can be mistaken for heaven
when she drools her love.
The husband there is a long dream
in the mind of the universe.

When she drools her love,
angels snore under wraps of fog.
In the mind of the universe
the waking never occurred.

Angels snore under wraps of fog.
The bride's beta-waves are not deep enough,
so the waking never occurred.
Her eyelids are as heavy as atmospheres.

The bride's beta-waves are not deep enough
with their white afterglow. .
Her eyelids are as heavy as atmospheres;
fog is a kind of sleep.

Mary Shannon

How To Make Lentil Stew

Onions must be chopped,
but weeping avoided.
Garlic is necessary for

digestion. Sort and wash,
pick over. The tiniest stones
can escape, so care must be taken.

Spring mornings are good.
Perfect bowls must be
fired and glazed, kept hot,

but be aware of hot oil,
and cold celery. Be certain
the aim of your utensils

is true, your knives sharp.
A glass of cold water for you,
a quart of cold water for the

deep pot. Gather the herbs
and burn them: sage, tarragon,
basil. Light candles.

The blessing must remind the diners
of rain clouds, dirt, and fire.
Cover and keep warm.

Mary Shannon

Untitled #1

It is the sky falling
 within the chest that bursts
 the arteries and opens the eyes.
Attention. Attention.
All is evanescent
 and will pass like a parade in black and white.

Meanwhile, a pinpoint of light
 rivets all mindfulness to the smell of
 antiseptic and pee. The eyes are still open.
A sackcloth with bitty little strings insists on
 red-handed nakedness,
 but the pinpoint sees only cell by cell.
Ashes are reserved for the food tray, not the forehead,
 where the third eye is on the blink.
The skin will dry up and leak color.

There must always be a lesson in these helpless events.
This one is: I don't know. That's it.
Get wheeled willy-nilly on a gurney, have a rod rammed
 in the groin while a laugh track insinuates itself
Sweat and gag.
These barbers will look like idiots in twenty years,
 so laugh along. All else will be ashes and dust.

A high window in a dark room offers a
 moment of meditation.

Outside the parade is a television sitcom.
The sky returns to its proper place, and
 briefly, tiny pinpoints of light cauterize the
cornea, iris, lens, vitreous, retina--
 ventricle, valve, and vena cava.

Then the Demerol slides down the slope and
 mercifully, the eyes close.

David Guerra

What the man with the thinning hair will miss

is not his hair, but his stylist,
particularly her hands,
the way they cradle his head
onto the hollow of that purple sink
the way they cusp and redirect
the stream of warm water
behind ears and neck,
the fingers that
knead his scalp
the sound of lather
the effervescence of mint
the chorus of tingling follicles.

he will miss
that swivel chair
and their bi-monthly dialogues
centered around the archaeology of her life—
pictures of
her in hawaii, tavarua, honduras,
with boyfriends he can never keep track of
and mikaela, now ten,
attempting a cartwheel on the balance beam.

he will miss
the twenty minutes
of concentration and care,

the gathering of hair
between manicured hands
the snipping
of tempered steel scissors
the knowing finger
that wicks away
that stray bead of water
from his face.
the delicate trimming.
the lingering warmth
of the electric razor.

he will miss
the way she tilts
his head
forward
backward
sideways,
the way she leans over him
studies her work like a sculptor,
the final strokes
of gel,
measured rhythms
shaping the little he has
into something.

David Guerra

How Jetties Are Made

Twilight,
a solitary worker
with rolled up jeans and
canvas-soled shoes
makes his way toward a lake.

Wading into ankle deep water,
he begins fishing for stones.
He scoops them up two at a time,
and clanks them into his wheelbarrow,
Stones that fail inspection,
he tosses back to the lake,
plunk, plunk, until

satisfied,
he hauls the wheelbarrow ashore,
feet shuffling through sand,
each step sounding like
a bag of beans being shook.

Each day, before the tourists
bring their noise,
this even tempoed rhythm plays out
along a narrow strip of beach,
then stops momentarily
beside a bed of rocks.

The worker celebrates
this silent interlude
with a forward tilt of his barrow,
spilling forth
a wonderful crescendo
of wet stones.

Lynn Root

The Art of Quilting

Begin here,
with centuries of knees
slapped in laughter,
bent for children and gardens.

Begin here, in the busy stillness
of elders side by side,
knee brushing knee
beneath a stretched white cloth.

Begin with marbled hands
and silver needles
up and down like oiled pistons,
stitching old stories

in accents of purple and yellow
geometry and flowers
on twisting green-budded vines
sprouting leaves and butterflies.

Begin at the end,
when the last knots birth
new ones for younger
warmer fingers, eager
loose-jointed bodies
that spring over moans

and squirm beneath the white shelter
among slippered feet,
some bony, some soft as cushions,
to stay a moment amid the sighs
and whispers of knees.

Lynn Root

Originally Light To Very Dark Eyes

1998

Webster's Dictionary makes it clear
that Caucasians are

“marked by fair to dark skin,
straight to tightly curled hair,
and light to very dark eyes,”

originally from

“Europe, parts of North Africa,
western Asia, and India,”

which is clear, right?

The problem is this:

Webster's definition is

“no longer in technical use,”

which must be why everyone is so confused.

Maybe it should be

pasted on billboards in six foot letters,
printed on milk cartons with missing children,
blare from multiple TV commercials,
so people would remember
who they are.

1634

This was Smith's last chance,
this ship to anywhere,

though he feared the sea.
He had helped himself to the city
once too often, obeying the hunger
that twisted out of reach.
His malnourished soul shrank,
gutter crawled through the stench
of cabbage, malice, and quiet deaths,
cheated his way onto this steaming deck
with only his name
and the strength of his back as payment.

1840

David held his wife who held what she
managed to save:
the menorah, a few clothes,
their child, wrapped in a prayer shawl.
They clung to the deck, awash
in the terror that pursued them,
and when at last a faint gray line rose
to spread across the distant murk,
David threw the menorah overboard.

The weeks of marble sky pressed down,
stone-cold, heavy; no birds sang
above the wet and heaving ship,
no voices lifted in gratitude for deliverance;
raw faces pitted and sealed,
frigid bodies braced against sodden timber,
suspended in the misty breath of waiting.
In Iowa they buried Germany and adopted Jesus.

Even there, fear rippled through soft fields
of wide-leafed potatoes, flat symmetrical acres,
striped with rows of purple-red feed corn,
and froze their throats for four generations,
a silent lineage of daughters unaware
until a curious husband cautiously exposed
the roots of this tree that branched west,
then south into the lone-star state of Texas.

1955

Once a week we share food:
the communists that live on the corner
buy things, too involved in politics to cook;
old Mrs. Ochoa wears her mantilla,
stained on the edges from too much paella;
the two Georges. who own a bookstore,
pride themselves on the bread they bake,
arguing and making up between risings;
brown Mrs. Dawson brings chili and greens
from her garden; Julie, the dancer,
doesn't like communists or Negroes,
carries dessert like Isadora offering veiled delights.
We gather amiably on my deck in Ellysian Heights,

magpies clustered in a broad tree high
above the Valley, on Valentine Street;
we eat, absently sucking our fingers clean,
despair about that thug, McCarthy,
and watch the traffic snake along the distant freeway.

1988

Jamaica:

an early morning tourist
stands above a hilltown on market day,
a river of women flowing toward her.

Uncertain, she waits.

The river brushes her chest, her arms,
flows silently around her, sightless;
she is a white stone in the stream, no more.

Fear could grow here,
or is it something else?

Something ripe waiting to be plucked?

She follows the women,
moves into broad hats and bright dresses
to admire a mango. The seller,
feet tucked under her round skirts,
smiles, holds up her fruit
and laughs away the silence because after all
it is a good day for mangoes and rivers.

1998

So here I am with no hyphen of my own,
deprived, guilty, or just bland?

Not bland, not with hatred cavorting here,
blithe intentions there,
the rest of us stretched between.

Must be time that earns you
double heritage, dubs you
a Hyphenated Citizen descended

from generations stradling
two nations, wanting the whole of both.
Either you is or you ain't.

The ones who were here first
are smaller in number now.
I have questions about this,
about pigment and its deeper meaning.
One day, when we have lost our teeth,
the dancers may alter the choreography,
the geography, kick down the walls
and say, oh what the hell, let's have a picnic.

Mandy Dawn Kuntz

Travis

and i love you furtive boy
as you sneak around the back alleys of my mind:
 dirty boots
 dip behind membranes,
 the soft velvet-clay beneath you, sink
 wedge your foot in to leave a
 print-pink-in-gray-reminder you were here
find you again someday, dig through my brain,
 come across the impression you left on me

Rebecca Brown

Lunar Music

I am obsessed with the moon.
I can't write it away.
One night, when
it was full, you led me
through wet grass and showed me
its shape through a telescope.

Now I know it's not
complete. I know that one
side is bitten away or broken,
like a heart.

You taught me to listen
to the moon's light and that
beauty can be found
in a dog's bark
at five-thirty in the morning.

When we were together,
I could hear music
in airplanes, movement,
the color green
and your hands.

Your eyes and the moon
insist that life isn't

completely round, or whole,
and I can't do anything about it.

I can only try to find
music in a sun that is
too perfectly round and
too bright to stare at,
anyway.

Kirk Sever

Poem 2

form that pours moves rivers white body
curves to leaves crown simple arrested thoughts
queens laymen love else what else can I
away I move the tow the magic pull dark hair brown
locks open river gates close there birds ring stumps
branches from singing comes little birds yellow
their above locks nesting the river pulls and quietly
she pulls and there stretches and time cannot be
born longer she stretches the curve of the longing
river the sailor longing and apart he never
jumping only dreams into the river

Poem 3

soft and first the cheek listens first
a cheek, there salty there kisses there there
look sun blue sky birds all this there's this
sweet, sweet salt shined brown and the cheek
and the eyes and breath and leaves now she
studies softly, carefully breathes he, I care
and hush there quietly tears disappear, still
the shiny soft cheek still there

Daniel de Sailles

Untitled

Do you remember the first
night that we made love? The
light from the lamp in my bed-
room that you told me was too
bright made the crumpled
sheets look like pearly waves
lapping at your waist, when
you leaned over to light a
cigarette from the candle
on the night stand

B.Z. Niditch

Ecology Study

You had to dash off
somewhere by the river
in the muggy August
to find samples of stones.
I said, trekking up Beacon Hill,
“The hell with that today!
Stay with me.
Put on some Nina Simone
and wait, you’re forgetting
your jacket anyway.”

But you went alone
to the Charles River
under scrambled clouds
raining from a hungry heaven
and then you coming back
in tatters, unbuttoning yourself,
still prejudiced
toward your experiment,
but grateful for my angst.

B.Z. Niditch

Classical Spell

The picture of this schoolboy day
was as anonymous
as the highly dressed youths
carrying their Plato,
fearing the camera obscura
of your burning scholar's eye,
the hubbub opens your invitation
to visit country and sea,
it's never early enough
to tour the street statues
whose marble faces turn away,
not being bashful for idols,
but having secrets of their own.

In the gritty manic
of the ancient world,
your shirt flaps
in the windy whiteness,
by balustrades, casinos and gazebos,
whose watercolor life
is worthy of Greek festivals,
and a young god in denim
with a white cross on his chest,
adorning his black hair
with ridiculous sunglasses,
offers to be your guide
and sanguinely speaks,

full of life,
as he disappears by the rocks,
then like Poseidon,
with suspicious pleasure
in an ethereal reality,
waves into blue-green mystery
on the glistening cosmos of the sea.

Carol Gallegos

Old Woman

Abuelita cries when the rain
Comes down on the rotting planks
Of the wooden shack.

God is very angry and intends
To punish the world for its sins.

Rosary in her hands glistens
With a purposeful light
Imitation pearl beads scream a
Hallowing white against dark
Withered skin.

Abuelita cries when the rain stops
And the heat scorches the withered
Weeds in an indifferent yard.
Yellow, decayed and expectant of fire.

Grinding colorless laundry
On the washboard sprinkled with
Crimson blood drops from
Her heart through her small bony fingers.

"Surely," she says, "it will be God's doing
to purge us of our sins."

Abuelita cries when
Her granddaughters are to be married
Explaining to them with shaking hands
That they must not be afraid of their wedding night
And the blood they will surely shed.

Sitting on her thin bed
Braiding her long hair
Into tight ropes
Bleeding,
Fading into black.

Abuelita cries
Watching the sun rise
Through the cracks of heatless wood
When the light falls on the soft lines
Around her sharp bird like eyes.

She cries when the house is empty
But her cat shiny and new
Rubs against her long cotton dress
She stoops halfway to pick it up
In her hands.

Rosa Arjelia Javier

Las Delicias, Chiapas, Mexico

I sit beneath the branches
of an ancient jungle tree
listening to the whispering
voices of its leaves.

They tell me that a river once rushed through here,
where now a creek can only crawl.

Trying to push on with speed, but paced in but a crawl,
I climb high to sit beneath yet higher branches.

Upon reaching here,

I awe at the beauty of this tree.

I wish to count aloud each of its leaves,
yet sit silent—surrounded by the sound of whispering.

Never have I heard a thing more magnificent than this
whispering.

But I know that whispering, too, is how families speak as they
crawl from danger on hands and knees, terrorized by the
crunching of leaves,

horrified as *rebozos* and *pantalones* become caught on low
branches,

elated and full of thankful prayers when they see that they've
been caught only by a tree.

That is the truer side of life here.

Here

is where mothers tell their children that whispering

is the safest way to cry—even when hiding in a tree,
and where little girls frighten at the things that crawl
along the night time branches
and leaves.

By moonlight, a young boy leaves
here
armed with only broken branches,
whispering
to his family that he will return with food as he runs crouched,
as if in a crawl,
back to his village, moving quickly from tree to tree.

By day's blaze, the shadows of many tree
leaves
crawl
here
in the canopy, and there on the moist ground. They echo the
whispering
of tomorrow's hopes spoken by the leaves along the branches.

But here, in this country, is where a deal, made by men that
belly crawl
like a serpent in a tree, leaves
women, men and children whispering, hiding from their govern-
ment and its ruthless military branches.

Sarah Wakasa

Blue Virgen Box

Ethereal treasure bin
Housing sublunary sins
Of urban salvation
Protected by peeling photo of
Nuestra Senora La Virgen —
Namesake for an answer to
Our miseries.
She is my keeper of
Keys, money, and weed,
My baggage beneath her belly of
Light and grace,
Heavy with unborn child.

Grant Marcus

Planting Stars

Twilight shifts to evening;
shadows of night crowd
 the darkness;
having no lover,
I start a poem.

The crickets are an overture
calling the moon out of hiding,
singing like they were meadowlarks,
their voices a trail through the tendrils
 of trees.

The moon slips from her veil of clouds,
now waxing luxurious
with her wild hair falling.

By twos,
the heavens are planting stars.

Grant Marcus

Walking the Coast Below

Cliffs at Twilight

Follow poet, follow right
to the bottom of the night

--W. H. Auden--

1.

Thick tar
like black rain
pelts the shoreline
—wave after wave—
a graffiti inked
to anything holy.

2.

The beak's outline,
crust of blue shell,
and the long neck
draped
over the dead wood,
the slicked feathers
drawing wind,
a flurry of sand
through the shadowed
wedges of stone.

3.

Dusk rappels down
the runlets of cliffs;
the sea fumbles
with her heavy coat;
the chill of autumn
strikes the bone,
tolling another day.

4.

Across the nightwater,
the derricks bob
like Christmas cruise ships
breaking
into lights of sail.

Grant Marcus

Two Lovesongs for Masako

(sung to, "Absence Is the Heart's
Lonely Winter")

Masako:

It is Saturday.

And yet the night
pulls at the sleeve
and wrenches the heart.

Strange how it was a
friend to us only months ago.

I remember our chance meeting,
then the Saturday you wore your Kimono,
and I wore the mukoto you
had given me, wrapped with
your bashful eyes and thin
curls upon your face
as if you were delicate ribbons.
Delicate smiles. Delicate gifts.

You served slivered peppers
and green tea, miso soup and broiled eel—
all brought by lithe hands
holding blue etchings on ivory,
the history of your country.

Tell me, who will share these
nights with me? Who will now
bring the words of the ancients
for my sorrows? Whose voice
will call my name like a long stream
of blossoms along the river of vision?
Whose skin will be the temple
at the silkened door of touch?
Whose body will give freely
of its blood from the shrine of its pleasure?
Whose hair will shimmer, and rise,
and fall like the nights warm rains
Against the groin;
Against the belly?

* * *

Through the window of the East,
in twilight after twilight,
I watch geese come and go,
horizon to horizon,
without word; without message.

All the many nights leave nothing,
Not one good dream
for the morning.

Restless and without sleep—
even the jays squawk and whine,
leaving their pain in the nesting aspen—
They remind me

you are not with me
to help me listen.
In the young furrowed grass,
crickets sing so penchantly
their old songs:
like a dark weight
sinking
toward
the earthworm.

II

(sung to, "Absence Leaves the Heart
a Silent Spring")

Masako:
There is a word for it.
It is desolation.

I hear a few poppies
still bloom under the eaves
of Angel's Camp;
And tangles of loganberry
are budding early
at Cedar Springs—
But here,
the night
is a moonless chatter
within falling rain.

It soaks the
dark-gardened zinnias,
leaving trails of
blood-red blossoms,
a shiver in the lampglow—
Tell me,
How does one give comfort
to these passing hours?

* * *

Feeling no choice,
I take the long drive west
along the slick-wet roads
to visit you,
knowing you have gone;
and more,
knowing you have returned home,
another continent;
the wheels turn against the rain;
where
is home
for my own heart?

Along the highway's
steam of canals,
the fleeced-white egrets
turn to single gray shadows
in rise with the waters
of the ditchbanks;
up and over the pass,

the frayed, jumbled mountains
slip from their cliffs
into the drenched coastal valleys.
They remind me of
Keats slow and lonely boat
moving toward Italy,
toward winter.

The sky breaks and churns
with rain and sorrow
like old drunks spilling wine
over the flood of their tears.
As the night grows longer,
I watch the roadside
gather into pools
of shameless shadows—
If a man travels far enough,
does he find his heart in the rain?

* * *

Pulling out
along the tracks
I watch the star-lit windows
of passenger trains move
up the California coast.
I stop to brood against the wind,
and to look out over Rincon Point.
The night's rain is indistinguishable
from the sea; the edge of the cliffs
are fathomless, without depth;

and both are vast and inseparable;
as the soul's dark voyeur returns
to the past and is bound by the night
in its memories.

* * *

Where is the river that once
went winding along the edge of heaven?
The groan of train answers and
splits the tracks, and the cars
clatter toward some destination.
The rails quake with their weight,
and rumble over the cliffs;
they thunder with the sea's rise
to meet wind, steel and rain, and all the smell of iron
sinking into the cold blood
of the veins.

The deep shadows of Juniper
are ravens leaning out to sea;
their claws dug into the coalrocks,
as wave after wave pummels
the slabbed stone—

Here,
in the night's thick salt,
and through the slanted downpour,
the black-boned branches
carry my thoughts
to the moon's bow—

Somewhere, past
the veil of clouds
and time's great distance,
the heart journeys
to a place
as far away as
the seaport
of Narashimo.

Susan Caggiano

Still Rain

1.

Perhaps it takes a special resistance for an invisible child to grow. Was I a child? Was I a child? Small.

But old.

She watches you, invisible.

You think and suddenly you are separated from the fact of the hard cold wet ground.

2.

Rain falls as I open the door as if to move me.

I look out over the chilled mountain and plead —

Make me a witness!

I don't wait to hear the answer. Instead I turn to watch the moss grow on my door.

3.

She says we always love our children more than our mothers. On that day you can not write.

Run — place to place— accepting crunchy language to fill the whole. If we move is there such a place?

4.

At the age of ten she realized there is really no one. She breathes the cold. And there is no one. She learns the distant habit of watching the tendrils of moss grow around on the door. In the distance, she feels the mountains swell as the rain falls. She wonders if the rain feeds.

5.

I breathe with my heart beat. The moss has begun to brown in places. I wonder — Why Brown? — as I look at the spots in places on my hands.
I still can not write.
Still crunchy language still rain still mountains.

6.

She grew in obscurity despite our will. She could smell the funk wafting from the moss and breathed. She heaved open the moss encrusted doors and looked out at the chilled mountains and SHOUTED
—Make me a witness! —
and heard the mountains groan and heave her answer.
Her shoulders grew and relaxed.

7.

As the sun warmed her new skin she turned and
looked up to your window. You see her and
wonder what she heard. She smiles up at you and
you can see her breath swirling around her
lifting.

8.

Her language as she speaks is smooth and shiny.
You don't understand. Crunchy obscurity and
still you haven't written.

You are Undone.

As she walks down the narrow path that quickly
turns toward a place unknown to you —
you desperately move to speak but instead you
choke on those smooth words and turn to wonder
about the nature of rain.

Fiction

Rebecca Brown

the drunk and the waitress

I
baby baby oh baby do you have hold hug love a
boyfriend because I was thinking dreaming wanting to
take you home with me and maybe we could be wrapped
up in a deep thick creamy rich and thick thick thick
bubble of dag nasty sex. I was staring piercing thinking
of pinching your nipples because that shirt that shirt that
shirt is so tight and who cares if you or I or we have dust
covered dirt lathered cars or shirts or holes in an old pair
of underwear or buck toothed uncles or wish washy
worry warted mothers because all I can see right now are
your breasts and your hair and your teeth and all I want to
think about is your mouth your mouth maybe wrapped
around me inside of me through me and pushing pushing
into me baby baby oh baby

II
baby baby oh baby what else nothing else could be so
annoying frustrating aggravating I am sick so sick of
these stupid slimy ass drunk drooling fools staring at my
tits and saying things stupid things cheesy things like I
am really going to be turned on by these thing things
things like baby baby oh baby do you have a boyfriend
when the boyfriend best friend thing is not the issue is
not the boundary because all they want all they need all
they care about is a quick hot fuck and I am not the
person chick baby honey sweet love shugah darling that

is going to give it to them not in a million thousand
billion hundred years because some shmuck in a bar says
to me baby baby oh baby

III

baby I swim in seas too baby and I know I know what it's
like I know that it hurts and I will never hurt you baby
baby oh baby trust me trust me don't you like my
mustache don't you want to lick it don't you want to feel
it tickle because I will treat you right doesn't my fresh
finesse tell you that all I'll do is cover you in roses baby I
will write you poetry baby I will do all of those things
that I am supposed to do because damn look at my shirt
look at my muscles look at my smile look at my ass it is
so tight I will rub your body all night baby baby just give
me take me give me your number and I'll take you out
I'll take you in I'll take you all over baby

IV

baby nobody no one not you not he not she not your wide
eyed slobbering belligerent drunk buddy or the bra
topped tipsy toe showing tramp talking to your brother at
the bar knows me knows me knows what I want what I
should have what I should take who I should use who I
should do so go ahead and try just try just try it try to
force your definitions on me try to cram and slam my
body into some mold some form and hope that I squeeze
in completely hope that I come to your house after work
hope that I fit hope I wear something sexy hope you get
laid hope I am as perfect in person as I am in your head
in your head your air and sex starved brain if you really
honestly believe think that some drunk dope with a
muscle bearing body and masterfully maintained
mustache will ever get me to come over to his house after
work for a night of sloppy sentiment starved sex baby

V

baby baby oh baby why do you have to do me like that
baby you don't know what you're missing baby the ride
of your life the high of your life the time the time the
time of your life but I see how it is you aren't as perfect
as I thought but that's okay because if you ever change
your mind if you ever want to have a good time if you
ever want me naked baby naked and all night long baby
honey sweetie shugah love darling then you know where
to find me so when you are ready just call and it will be
an everlasting neverending ride of pleasure plump purple
pleasure and I will have you yelling screaming saying all
night long neverending baby baby oh baby

VI

baby baby oh baby oh brother oh please yeah right in
your dreams your disgusting twisted spike heeled dreams
in your wildest dreams baby baby dream on baby I am
not your baby baby dream on baby because I will never
in this life be your baby baby oh baby

VII

baby can I have another beer please?

VIII

sure baby. . .

Margo McCall

Into the Sky

Spiral Density Wave Pattern

They sit on purple chairs at the top of the world and watch the planes. The planes take off and land, take off and land. They slip in and out of the sky, sleek-bellied and streamlined, dark silhouettes with flashing lights and wings like outstretched arms.

The sky is important, but so are the characters sitting in the chairs, the chairs that are so purple and plush, with iron legs twisting into new and grotesque shapes that show the self-consciousness of modern invention. Two of the characters, Darren and Violet, tumbled into each other's spheres by accident fifteen minutes ago and are just now getting to know each other. This is what happens:

Darren stares into his soup, two kinds spiraling in the same bowl, a galaxy of mushrooms and zucchini spinning in on themselves. He has the urge to mess up the order imposed on the free-flowing liquids. Violet stares into her soup also, wondering how someone has been able to replicate a density wave pattern into a spiral so perfect it reminds her of the Milky Way.

The foregoing suggests Violet is enigmatic, and Darren an example of reckless disregard. But they cannot just stare into their soup. They must talk, make significant gestures. Violet starts the conversation. "I like to come here to watch the planes," she says. "For

me, they represent the ultimate possibility.” She delicately dips her spoon into the spiral, appreciative of the pattern. All her life, Violet has searched for solid expression of the abstract ideas floating in her head.

“You get on a plane, so what,” says Darren. “You end up somewhere else.” He mixes his soup vigorously, having little appreciation for the design. His whole life he’s been like that, the bastard who walks on fresh cement, making chaos of everything.

Darren and Violet’s faces are scattered with purple and blue photons from the spread of brilliant fluorescence, from strings of neon snaking along the ceiling of the restaurant, the glow of mutant lava lamps, red and golden globs floating like embryos in murky liquid. There is no wall, only transparent glass that lets in the sky and the busy airport below, There is too much light—from the runways, the air traffic control tower, the cars, the streets in nearby neighborhoods—spreading and flooding and moving at the speed of light, making it impossible to see the stars.

“Do you believe in infinity?” Violet asks in her quest for meaningful dialogue. Her purple bangs skim her forehead, and she pushes her green-tinted glasses up on her pointed nose. For the record, without the glasses, her world would be an aquarium of vague shapes swimming without purpose.

Another plane falls from of the sky. Another rises from the ground to take its place. Darren smirks as is typical of a character such as him, leans his head toward the plate-glass window, and pretends to look at the sky a long time before shaking his head no.

“Of course you don’t,” Violet says, uncurling a hand from her lap and reaching out, beyond her bowl of swirling soup, past the glass of red wine, the salt and pepper shakers, all that vast distance to his hand, that tight ball of fist at the edge of the table. She tries to make her

eyes mimic the mist of forever in the nothingness of stars rippling outward and onward, before saying, "Another cynic. The world is full of people like you."

"Infinity? Nothing but a social construct," says Darren, keeping his fist curled tight, the wood of table digging into his palm. She touches his hand. "If you're alive, you have to believe in possibility."

Violet has in mind a drive through the desert, the top down, warm air rippling around them. It's not far; will take only a paragraph to get there. Above them, the spiral arm of the galaxy stretching out with no end, the density wave patterns overriding the gravitational pull of orbiting stars and interstellar dust. If he would unfurl his fingers, she might ask him to come with her. If only he would open his hand and let her see his palm.

It happens slowly. His fist assumes the shape of the Spiral of Archimedes, blooms like a flower, becomes a starfish with fingers pointing outward in all directions of possibility. Anything's possible here. Darren and Violet could marry and hate each other, be happy, never get together and regret it the rest of their lives.

**INFINITY: THE RECOGNITION THAT THERE IS
NO LIMIT TO THE DISTANCE YOU CAN IMAGINE.**

Invariance

In opposition to the sky is planted a third character, Lisa the waiting woman, with brown hair like the earth, green eyes like ponds grown murky with algal blooms. She burrows into herself, spirals into her deepest corridors, searching for both the way in and way out. A garden grows inside her, and she pushes away the vines, crushes white tendrils beneath her bare feet, senses new life in the dark tunnels she explores. It feels like she has been waiting centuries and only lately has what she's

waiting for assumed a form that is not Darren, not man.

Shortly after Lisa met Darren, cells bloomed on the inside of her uterus, but instead of tumbling through the mucky void, they adhered. Stuck. "The problem," Darren told Lisa shortly after that, "is that we have grown too attached."

The bed, it stretched out. They stretched out on the bed. At first, she always wanted it to be like it was at first, the candle flames licking, flicking, the incense sending up twirling smoke, back when they looked at each other and were hungry but never ate, all sinews and sucking tissue and attachment.

Candle wax has dripped all over the table, massage oil spilled on the sheets, and it is not the way it used to be and tonight Lisa sits in her house, a house that has grown old with time, is being slowly erased by vines and greenery, passionflower and Jasmine, the stalks pressing in on old wood, letting in so much wet, green light that Lisa feels she is floating underwater and would not be surprised if a fish were to swim into her lap. Tonight, Darren is somewhere else, and not calling, may never call again. She puts the palm of her hand on her abdomen. She can feel the pulse of blood, a wet heartbeat, and she waits. Time. Minutes and months tick by. She waits some more, wonders if he will come back at all, drifting in the murky uncertainty of her situation.

HEISENBERG'S UNCERTAINTY PRINCIPLE: THE CONCEPT, ALSO CALLED THE PRINCIPLE OF INDETERMINISM, REFLECTING AN INABILITY TO PREDICT THE FUTURE BASED ON THE PAST.

Collision of Interstellar Matter

Darren cringes into the trench coat he's been assigned to wear for this scene, thinks if he's invisible he won't hear the stupid drone of the recording: "This zone is for the loading and unloading of passengers only." He is

beginning to feel both guilty about leaving Lisa and resentful about having to be such a complete jerk in this tale. Whichever the case, he has disconnected slightly from the setting in which he has been placed—the airport lights, the cars with bright headlights, the shuttle vans, the passengers wheeling by with luggage piled high, the noise and confusion his senses block out, all that motion—for he walks right into a striking woman with purple hair and green glasses—and how could he have missed her?—blasting open her suitcase, scattering her belongings on the sidewalk.

What can he say? She makes him forget all about Lisa, and hasn't that been the problem all his life, always thinking about the next in the long succession of women that he counts up and discards. Her eyes are out of focus behind the green-tinted glasses as she stares at him cockeyed, her head tilted at a funny angle.

Scattered on the pavement around her suitcase are the usual assortment of lithium batteries and papers full of mathematical formulas, a map of California covered with pink highlighter marks, a pair of rubber boots, a telescope (He helps scoop up her underwear, lipstick, clothes, a tube of toothpaste, some deodorant—all of which remind him momentarily of Lisa, the overpowering femininity that stretches out and snares him in a net of vulnerable need, and that he's leaving her behind forever, if forever even exists, is living up to his reputation as a heartless prick—and it's a full minute before he remembers to apologize to this new woman for running into her, although since he can't remember what happened, it could just as well have been she who ran into him.)

Darren offers to buy Miss Purple Hair a cup of coffee to make up for it. He checks his watch—still a few hours before he gets on a plane and flies somewhere else. They stand in an elevator with polished stainless steel walls and feel themselves rising upward and Darren finds this new

woman attractively pale and cerebral, a nice switch from Lisa's earthy must. The Encounters restaurant is the nearest place, unless you want to go through the metal detectors again, which Darren doesn't. Instead of coffee, they have wine, a good thing since being around this strange woman is making Darren tense. She's clearly nuts. What kind of wacko created her? Every time Darren glances at her—and with the purple hair and green glasses it's hard not to—she seems to shimmer and reverberate. He feels himself slipping, falling into blackness, thinks he may have met his match.

BLACK HOLE: A SPHERICAL REGION OF SPACE CONTAINING A GRAVITATIONAL FIELD SO LARGE EVERYTHING ON ITS SURFACE IS SUCKED INTO IT, INCLUDING LIGHT.

The Expanding Universe

It seems like nothing's happening, but it is. Lisa is expanding, feels her body is a balloon into which someone has blown air. Lately, the floating feeling has grown in intensity, like everything else, and she is getting scared. She lies on her back on the grass, trying to stay flat like the terrain, trying not to stare up beyond her hump of stomach to watch the passing clouds with frightening names—cumulus, cirrus—the terror of floating off into infinity. She clings to the earth as her stomach rises and falls, imagines she is floating in the ocean, not the sky, that she will not be unanchored and disappear, but she is beginning to wonder how much longer she can hold on. She's not really doing anything except waiting. She's served her function. Her fingers are tangled in the grass, and as she lifts off, messy clumps of green are pulled away, leaving the blackness of exposed dirt.

If a balloon is filled with hot air, helium, or a gas lighter than air, then the buoyant force, equal to the weight of an equal volume of air, may be powerful enough

to make the balloon rise. If the balloon is big enough, the force may even be powerful enough to carry people with it. This principle enabled the first humans to fly in eighteenth century France.

SPACETIME ARENA: THE VAST VOLUME OF ALL THE SPACE IN THE UNIVERSE AND ALL THE TIME THAT IS. EACH POINT IS MARKED BY ITS SPACIAL AND TEMPORAL COORDINATES.

The Curvature of Space and Time

Darren is strapped in, the seat belt pulled tight just above his groin, which is still pleasantly burning, and the jet engines are revving, the tires of the aircraft's landing gear spinning over the tarmac, and there's the sensation of speed before the 737 generates enough lift to defy gravity, defined by Einstein as the curvature between space and time.

He learned that from Violet—that and a lot of other useless theoretical physics he had to listen to in order to get her to take off those green glasses, expose her fish-white body to the moon and lie down on the sand and do it.

It happens so fast. He looks out the portal window and sees ocean, the spreading blue. The plane banks sideways and Darren feels momentarily like he's on a ride at the state fair, looking down, feeling he could fall out, into all that ocean, so far below, so deep. He can see patterns in the water, kelp beds, and for a moment he's submerged, the fronds lapping against his cheek, and photons of sunlight find their depth, sparkle in the cool murky green in which he floats, informing him of the direction of the sky.

He is not surprised to see Lisa tangled in the fronds growing up from the ocean bed. She was always so heavy, something to drag around. No wonder she sank. When he had sex with her it was like entering a tunnel in the earth,

warm and moist, except each time she gained more mass, until he got so shit-scared of getting sealed inside her dark cave that he took flight.

The jet noses up, and Darren is so startled at the rapid ascent from the ocean depths to above the clouds, that he can't breathe, and is surprised even more when he feels the flight attendant's hand on his shoulder, asking "Sir, are you all right?" and handing him a barf bag.

He falls asleep, wakes up and eats a chicken wing from a rectangle of plastic, and the 737 begins its descent and everything gets larger, assumes its proper perspective, and he is somewhere else, another place.

WAVE-PARTICLE DUALITY: THE IDEA THAT IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO SIMULTANEOUSLY OBSERVE MATTER IN BOTH ITS WAVE FORM, SPREAD OUT THROUGH THE UNIVERSE, AND ITS PARTICLE FORM, WHERE MATTER IS CONCENTRATED.

Super Radiant Scattering

The balloon takes off at dawn, and Violet is floating. The gas burner roars, the balloon tips and dips and below is spread out a piece of the world. If she gets high enough, Violet thinks she might be able to make sense of the patterns. She takes off her glasses and can discern air molecules bumping against each other. She puts her glasses back on and there are squares of land stretching below, trees and houses and orange and gold and blue wild flowers spreading up the sides of hills, and above, the sun, the biggest star in the Milky Way.

"The most incomprehensible thing about the universe is that it is comprehensible," said Einstein, who, even though dead, has become Violet's closest companion, is more interesting than her friends, even the man she occasionally sees who is trying to achieve quantum teleportation of a beam of light, and the guy she met in the

airport last night and later slept with on the cold sand in a technically adept but soulless coupling.

Violet cannot quite come to terms with the idea that nothingness exists only in the human mind, that always there is some trace of matter, even in a vacuum. Or that the world is made of events that can't be related in terms of cause or effect. Or that the world is an illusion, a product of our minds. Or that she is an illusion of words. Violet realizes that she will never have the solidity of a character such as, say, Lisa. She feels sad about having to function as a disembodied intellectual force who floats off into nothingness, but then Lisa's not having such a great time, either.

EVENT HORIZON: THE SURFACE OF A SPHERE MARKING THE EDGE OF A BLACK HOLE. IT TAKES AN INFINITE AMOUNT OF TIME TO REACH THE EVENT HORIZON. IF YOU MANAGE TO CROSS IT AND ENTER THE BLACK HOLE YOU WILL BE SWEEPED AWAY BY THE FLOW OF SPACETIME, EVENTUALLY ENDING YOUR EXISTENCE AT THE BLACK HOLE'S CENTER.

The Velocity of Empty Space

The airplane dips and bows, and it's screaming low through the mid-altitudes, the old tub with vibrating engines crammed full of homebound Angelenos. "Fasten your seat belts and put your chairs in the upright position. We are beginning our descent."

During the entire flight, Darren has looked out the window and seen blackness, interrupted only by the occasional cluster of lights. The blackness is a replication, perhaps, of his mood, his general outlook on life. But now below him gleams the matrix of Los Angeles, the glow of which is visible two hundred and fifty miles away, and it is not streets and houses, but a pattern of circles and squares, a glorious profusion of gold spreading to the horizon. He wonders if Violet would be impressed by his

increased level of abstract thinking. But what's it matter? It's not as though he plans to ever appear in a restaurant scene with her again. On the flight back and forth across the country, Darren has decided he wants the rock-like Lisa after all. He hopes it's not too late.

He finds himself in Lisa's yard, staring at an expanse of grass flattened vaguely into her shape, as he remembers it, only bigger. He can't take his eyes off the two curious circles of dirt, the grass pulled out by some violent force. There's no sign of Lisa in the house, which has grown greener and darker in his absence, and though he calls for her in the yard, there's no answer there either.

They met at some club in Hollywood. Black walls, music, the desperate hour when the whites of eyes flash left and right, in search of coupling and skin. Lisa walked by as if in a trance. The strap of her green satin dress was slipping and he grabbed her arm, said "Come on."

He dragged her around for months as her mass, body of sinewy muscle, grew too heavy, too full of the deep. Fish swam in her eyes as he rode on top of her, pressed her flat against the bed, the beige carpet, the dirt, and he let her sink, did nothing about it. And now that she's gone, he's, well... a little sorry.

She is defined now by her emptiness. Her image grows light in his mind, fades in and out, reminding him of being underwater, of seeing her face between the fronds, and he cries out for her, begins to dig. The dirt feels cool on his fingers as he burrows into it. Tunneling deeper, he is desperate to find some trace of her.

He digs like a dog looking for a lost bone, and when he's tired out he rests his cheek on the earth, looks around at the grass and thinks of his grandfather. In his final years, Darren's grandfather would sit on a bench in the garden and watch the grass grow. He liked to look out on the grass when it was all flat, like a lawn should be, after it was cut. That was all that was left for his grandfather,

that patch of lawn. But now Darren sees he was right. You can really see the grass grow if you try. It gives him small solace to realize that the observation would please Lisa and Violet both. But what kind of ending is this, allowing them to float happily away while he remains trapped on the page?

THE COPENHAGEN INTERPRETATION: THE IDEA THAT THE PATH AND LOCATION OF LARGE OBJECTS CAN BE OBSERVED, BUT ATOM-SIZED OBJECTS ARE DISTURBED BY EFFORTS TO OBSERVE THEM

Mary Shannon

Cannibal Tales

VOICE 1

Once upon a time. .

VOICE 2

. . . there was an old man and an old woman who lived in a little cabin at the edge of the forest. They were very poor and winter had begun to blow and freeze them to the bone.

One day when it was very cold and snowing outside, the old man said to the old woman, We only have one sausage, one crust of bread, and one cabbage left to eat. I will take this and go out and search for more food. I will come back when I have found some."

I will starve if you take the rest of the food," the old woman said. But the old man had never paid attention to her, so he prepared to leave. He took the sausage, the bread, and the cabbage, and bundled himself up and was gone. .

VOICE 1

Where do you draw your line? Are you a flesh-eater, a corpse-consumer, or not?

Do you draw your line at vegetables, like I do? I don't eat the flesh of any creature.

VOICE 3

[[S]peaking as a vegetarian, all meat-eating looks to me like the first step down the road to anthropophagy. - Paul Theroux]

VOICE 1

Do you draw it at shellfish, invertebrate bottom-feeders glutting themselves on the rotten waste that festers and floats to the bottom of the sea?

Or do you draw it at fishes, insensate vertebrates you keep at a safe distance by calling them Vegetables of the Sea?

VOICE 3

[Regarding the notion of insensate beings . . . if fish or frogs were truly insensate and therefore justifiably edible, the back wards of our state hospitals could be a smorgasbord.]

VOICE 1

Or do you draw it at chickens? Are fowls like fish of the air, stupid and not worthy of a "noble being's" pity, cruelly penned and harvested for their fleshability.

Or do you draw it at cows, big-titted, sloe-eyed refrigerators of food, deserving of cannibalization for their maddening passivity?

VOICE 2

Meanwhile, the old woman was getting hungrier and hungrier, and colder and colder. She got so hungry and cold she decided to use up all that was left of her firewood in one big fire so she could at least die warm. She gathered up the

few remaining sticks and logs and built up the fire in her hearth until it was big and crackling. She finally started to warm up...

VOICE 1

Or do you draw your line at seals? Only an Inuit would eat seals, those bloody, big-eyed, slippery creatures.

Or do you draw it at dogs? Only a Korean would eat dog. How could anyone eat Duke, or Princess?

VOICE 2

She got close to the fire. She got a little closer to the fire. She got very close to the fire. After a while, her teeth stopped chattering and she started smelling something wonderful! It was the loveliest smell she had ever smelled. She started sniffing, and discovered it was the pinky on her left hand. She sniffed some more. She tasted it, and it was the most scrumptious taste she had ever had, more delicious than a Christmas goose, more mouth-watering than the sweetest bon-bon from the sweet shop in the village. She smacked her lips. She could not resist; she ate the rest of her hand. It was even better.

VOICE 1

Or do you draw it at monkeys? Only a very rich Thai would eat monkey brains. Who's the savage?

Or do you draw it at fetuses. Only a Chinese would (and only if they were sick).

VOICE 3

[“Usually, I washed the fetuses clean. They were pink like little mice with hands and feet. I added ginger, orange peel and pork to make soup.

After taking it for a while, I felt a lot better and my asthma disappeared. I used to take placenta, but it was not so helpful." Zou Cheng, 32, a woman from Hubei, China]

VOICE 1

Or do you draw it at the human heart? Only a Yanamamo of the Amazon Basi would eat the heart of his fiercest enemy.

Or do you draw it at the human brain? Only an aboriginal of New Guinea would eat the brain of his newly departed loved ones to honor them.

VOICE 3

[Kuru, a form of encephalitis once prevalent in central New Guinea but no longer seen since the abandonment of cannibalism, was characterized by:

cerebellar ataxic
tremors
dysarthria
and emotional lability.]

VOICE 1

Or do you draw it at the human buttocks, the human bicep, the human baby toe, as did. . .

VOICE 3

Carolyn Gloria Blanton, 41, charged in the shooting death of Peter Michael Green, 51, of Alamosa last winter. Some remains of Mr. Green were found in cooking utensils of the suspect's apartment, a sheriff's deputy has testified. Judge Jean Paul Jones admitted forty pieces of

evidence ranging from a .25-caliber pistol and ammunition to a cooking pot, bowl and spoon that allegedly contained bite-size chunks of human flesh. Mr. Green's torso was found in a closet at his home. The legs were found in a nearby trash bin. "The flesh and the meat were off the legs," Sheriff's Capt. Les Sharff testified. "They had been totally cut away from the bones themselves, from the ankle up. Ms. Blanton had been Mr. Green's girlfriend.

[From an AP article in the Rocky Mountain News, Oct. 12, 1994]

VOICE 1

Where do you draw the line? I say a flesh-eater is a corpse-eater . . . any argument merely concerns the identity of the deceased.

VOICE 2

She put her foot into the fire, and then ate that too. She put her other arm in, and ate that. In very little time she was finally full and happy. She felt better than she had in many years.

But she was just bones by this time.

[Clickety-clack, clickety-clack]

She felt as free as a young girl.

[Clickety-clack, clickety-clack]

She felt as light as smoke, as white as bone.

[Clickety-clack, clickety-clack]

She danced a little bone-dance.

[Clickety-clack, clickety-clack]

She decided to gather more wood and to tidy up the cabin. So she started in to work. She got the cabin cleaned, then spent the rest of the day gathering lots of wood. [Clickety-clack, clickety-clack]

VOICE 3

Survival Cannibalism or Social Strategy?
Using Neo-Darwinian Theory to Explain Perimortem
Mutilation in the American Southwest, by John
Kantner

Abstract: This presentation employs comparative ethnographic data, multivariate analyses of osteological patterns, and a neo-Darwinian theoretical perspective to suggest that perimortem mutilation, including cannibalistic behavior, may have been a conscious strategy designed to structure sociopolitical and economic competition.
[Clickety-clack]

VOICE 2

As night and new snow were beginning to fall and she had the last load of wood in her bony arms, she saw her old man coming down the path... with a young woman. Ah, ha! He returns to make sure I am dead! We'll see about that, [Clickety-clack, clickety-clack] She hurried back up the steps, into the cabin.

She wrapped her naked bones in skirts, in sweaters, in a big red scarf, wound around her bony face. The old man came to the door. He was very surprised to see her. 'Well, old woman, I see you have done well in my absence.' 'Clickety-clack, clickety-clack,' was all she said, but he had never listened to her anyway.

"This is my new wife. I thought you were dead. On my journey, I found a lost cow, and the farmer rewarded me with a gold coin, and I used the coin to buy flour, which I traded with the baker for several loaves of bread, which I sold on

the street, and soon made so much money I was able to win the hand of this lovely young girl who is my new wife. We will be living here now. Get us some tea."

[Clickety-clack, clickety-clack] The old bag-of-bones woman got them some tea. She put more wood on the fire. She took their coats for them. She put more wood on the fire. She drew their chairs close to the fire. She put more wood on the fire.

She used the big metal latch to lock the door. She put more wood on the fire. She took off her clothes. [Clickety-clack, clickety-clack. Clickety-clack, clickety-clack].

She soon had enough to eat for the rest of the winter and was never hungry again.

[And her bony old teeth went clickety-clack, clickety-clack]

David Goewey

A Beautiful Day

Yeah, the sex was great once, Gil thought, watching Annette sleep. Her mouth was open and her nose rattled softly. In the beginning, four years ago, they couldn't get enough of each other. Now, though, Gil was usually too tired from working at the plant and Annette seemed distracted. He wondered if maybe he should move out, but he was too tired even to bring that up. Things change, he knew that, what can you do. Gil finished his coffee and got up off the bedside chair. He left the chipped cup on the kitchen table, still cluttered with last night's dishes. When he closed the door behind him, he made sure not to let it bang.

The clouds were red above the bungalows across the driveway and the air smelled wet like grass. He stopped for a moment and listened to a jay squawk in the ash tree. Farther away, a tractor-trailer whined into low gear for the long grade up 17 into the Catskills. Gil and Annette had been at Bill's Bungalow Retreat for about three years now. Whoever Bill was he was long gone, along with the tourists who preferred 1-87 to Route 17 for their Catskill destinations. The only residents at the Retreat these days were Gil and Annette; an old caretaker; a salesman Gil knew only by sight; and the Ropers, Knut ("Call me Nut, everybody else does") and his wife Elaine, in the bungalow right next door.

"Shit-fire, you're up early," Nut Roper stood in his doorway lighting a cigarette. He was about

forty-five, with a buzz cut and puffy eyes. He reminded Gil of Robert Mitchum but harder, with a rangy physique just beginning to soften at the belly above his baggy pajama bottoms.

"Yeah, every morning Nut," Gil replied. He was still uncomfortable around Nut, those weird blue eyes of his that hid more than they ever expressed. Even when he seemed friendly, Gil was never sure what Nut was thinking. Except when Annette was around.

"The ice cream factory treating you ok?" Nut asked, blowing out a plume of smoke.

"Yeah, I guess," Gil said, "the Judge is a pain in my ass, though." The Judge ran the Creamy Cow Ice Cream plant out on the Old Farm Road.

Nut cleared his throat and spat into the grass. "Shit, that Judge is a bona fide phoney, believe me, he ain't nothing to worry about. One of these days it'll all catch up with him, you watch."

"Yeah, well, he's going to give me hell if I don't get in there," Gil said and turned to go. "Say hi to Elaine."

"Sure, soon as she gets back from her mama's," Nut said and stretched, "Oh, yeah, it's going to be a beautiful day."

Annette's Ford Fairlaine started up on the fourth try. As he pulled out, Gil watched Nut flick his cigarette stub into the grass and go back inside. The Ropers were already living in Bungalow 8 when Annette and Gil moved into 7. They were friendly enough, opening and sharing a six-pack of Budweiser as the younger couple struggled into their new home with boxes and pieces of furniture. In the beginning, they'd all get together on the lawn for drinks, or sometimes a joint. Nut would regale them with Vietnam war stories, fixing his eyes on Annette when he got to the part about how he tossed a grenade and saved his platoon, his voice low and rumbly. Annette was rapt, staring up from under her dark, curly bangs. Elaine,

meanwhile, would secretly roll her eyes at Gil and smile, stirring her drink with a pinkie finger which she then sucked into her mouth. Gil would try not to stare at Elaine spilling out of her shorts and halter top, as she crossed her bare legs and dangled a sandal off her red-nailed toes. Gil didn't think of Elaine as fat, necessarily, just that there was way too much of her.

One Saturday afternoon, a bottle of Lancer's in the grass between them, Nut asked, "You know what might be fun?"

"Another joint," Gil piped up, lounging in the grass next to the bottle. Elaine cackled and pointed her bare foot at him.

"A little switcheroo," Nut went on as if he hadn't heard him.

Gil's head was fuzzy and he just grinned at Elaine.

"A little what?" Annette asked, tilting her head. Her brown eyes looked sleepy and her cheeks were flushed.

"Come on inside for a minute," Nut said and stood up, "I want to show you all something." He started for his front door and Annette got up to follow.

Gil struggled to his feet and Elaine reached down to help him up, her long blond hair falling over the curve of her lips. She was close when he stood and she brushed around him as they headed for the door. Gil felt enveloped. Nut stood aside for Annette to enter and guided her with his palm resting on the small of her back. Elaine closed the door behind them and Gil's senses shot into overdrive, his heart pounding.

"Hey wait a second," he said reaching for Annette as Nut ushered her through the kitchen and into the bedroom. Annette turned to look at Gil with a quizzical expression before she disappeared. He smelled Elaine close to him and felt her lips at his ear as they moved in Nut's wake.

“Come on, tiger,” she whispered, let’s see your stripes.” Her fingers were pulling at his clothes.

As Elaine slid down Gil’s body, he saw Annette fold up in Nut’s arms. Wait, he thought before giving in.

The four of them labored through that whole afternoon. Annette seemed to enjoy herself with Nut; he was strong and manuevered her like a doll. Gil felt jealousy sting through him, watching from the floor where Elaine panted over him. He was challenged by Nut’s acrobatics and tried to reciprocate with Elaine, but she was too dominant, controlling nearly every move, smothering him. During a break, Nut broke out the vodka and offered it around. Gil drank it greedily. And as he fell asleep, he saw Nut tumble back with Elaine and Annette.

They only got together that one time, but it was enough for Gil. Annette grew distant afterwards even though their sex life, alone, became more active. She often asked Gil to try something with her that Nut had done, but Gil couldn’t quit the feeling that Nut was in their bed with them when he complied. And every time Gil came to the edge of orgasm, Elaine would flash through his mind, aggressive and stifling. Eventually, he and Annette cooled. Should have been smart enough to avoid all that, Gil thought as he pulled into the Quik-Stop Deli and Beer. Nut still seemed interested in Annette but as far as Gil could tell he never made any overt moves. Hell, Elaine still gave Gil the old eye once in a while, but there wasn’t anything more to it than hi and bye.

The memory seeped away like a slow flood, leaving Gil’s mind cluttered and heavy. He felt the weight of the morning and the impending day fully upon him now. Nut couldn’t stay indoors until Gil got to work, no, he had to step outside for a smoke and howdy. The Fairlaine seemed to shrink around Gil and his stomach burned. Goddam the Creamy Cow and goddamn the Judge, too, Gil thought looking at his watch, realizing he had four

minutes to punch in for work. Everything seemed small and unfair, all of a sudden. He killed the engine and got out of the car.

Gil walked inside and ordered a roast beef sandwich on rye to go. He picked up a copy of the Daily Register while he waited and scanned the front page. President Ford and Brezhnev were still wrangling over the Helsinki Accords. Maybe they should just let the missiles fly and get it over with, Gil thought. A story on the bottom of the front page caught his eye: "Town Judge Faces Inquiry," and he let out a low whistle.

Town Justice Woodrow Schumaker faces investigation by federal and state authorities on charges of bribery and racketeering. Officials were reluctant to speak with reporters but a source close to the investigation admitted that authorities were preparing indictments as part of a widening probe by a law enforcement task force of corruption by state and local officials. Judge Schumaker has been a justice for the town of Bullville for the past eight years. He owns and operates the Creamy Cow Ice Cream facility on Old Farm Road.

"You want mustard or mayo on that?" the deli clerk interrupted.

"Mayo," Gil answered. Jeez, the Judge is going down, Gil thought. Couldn't happen to a nicer guy.

Gil paid for the sandwich, got back in the car and headed to work. Looks like Nut was right about things catching up with the Judge, he thought. Gil had heard rumors about the Judge, how he fixed tickets for friends caught driving drunk, or arranged dismissal of charges

against town officials cited for beating their wives. The usual. But bribery and racketeering? Man, that was heavy shit.

The newspaper story had lifted Gil's spirits, he felt that maybe there was some justice in the world after all. So what if he was late? he thought looking at his watch. Schumaker was sure to be in a fury with his dirty laundry plastered all over the newspapers. But then the Judge always gave him hell anyway, not yelling so much as growling around the soggy stub of cigar, "That Gil kid's going to die." He'd also incite his flunkies around the plant, usually Steve and Flip, to ramp up the practical jokes when Gil was late. The last time, on Tuesday, Flip slipped a half melted ice cream cone onto Gil's chair just before he sat down on break. Oh, they roared over that one, the Judge most of all. Today, though, he'll hit the roof. Well, fuck them, Gil thought turning onto the Old Farm Road, it wouldn't be long before he pulled out of the whole scene. He wasn't sure where he'd go, but he knew that this wasn't the end of the line for him.

As Gil approached the weedy entrance to the plant, he saw some flashing red lights through the trees. Dark blue sedans and State Police cruisers lined the short driveway to the small parking lot. Oh, boy, Gil thought, right on time, the shit has hit the fan. He smiled imagining the Judge led away in handcuffs. He pulled the Fairlaine onto the shoulder of the road just short of the driveway. Steve, Flip and a couple of others were gathered behind a police cruiser, smoking.

"Hey, what's all the hubub, Bub?" Gil grinned as he approached.

Steve lunged at him, swinging a right that connected with Gil's ear. They went down in a tangle, Steve hitting wildly as Gil covered up with his arms. The others pulled Steve off as Gil kicked at him. "The fuck's the matter with you, sonofabitch," Gil shrieked,

scrambling to his feet. He wasn't hurt, just shaken.

Steve struggled with the others, glaring at Gil.

"You motherfucker, I bet you're glad, aren't you, aren't you?" Steve tried to get free and the others wrestled him onto the ground in a heap. They all lay there breathing heavily, while Gil checked his face and nose for blood. A state trooper walked over.

"What's the trouble over here?" he asked.

"I don't know, I drive up for work and this lunatic attacks me," Gil said, pointing at Steve. The guys were getting to their feet and dusting themselves off Steve broke away and stood apart, glaring at the ground.

"Well, tensions are a little high this morning," the officer said to Gil, "You work here?"

"Sure, Gil Fisher, been working here for a couple of years."

The officer nodded. "I see. Stick around for a statement, o.k.?" He looked at the others. "And you fellows settle down. We have enough trouble today." The trooper walked up the driveway, lifted up a ribbon of yellow tape, crouched under it and continued walking towards an ambulance that was backed up to the office door.

"What the hell's going on?" Gil asked.

"The Judge killed himself," Palmer, another worker, said. "Steve found him behind his desk this morning, dead. They figure it happened last night." Palmer took a step closer. "He put a shotgun under his chin," he whispered.

"Holy Christ," Gil whistled. He watched the police moving in and out of the office. "What about the plant?" he asked.

"Well, it looks like we got the day off, shit-for-brains," Flip sneered.

About two hours later, Gil was on his way back home. He wasn't glad about the Judge's demise,

necessarily; in fact, he felt a little guilty about relishing the arrest. But hell, Gil didn't have anything to do with it. All he knew for sure was that he had an opening out. Who knew what would happen to the plant? Probably be closed down by the Feds for evidence, or something. Yes sir, the writing was all over the wall: time to move on. Maybe he and Annette could get a fresh start somewhere, revive the romance a little. You know, sometimes fate comes along and kicks you in the ass and the pain is good, forces you to get your shit together. It was a little after nine, and Gil felt like celebrating. He stopped into the Quik-Stop again and picked up a six-pack of Genessee Cream Ale.

"Got a news flash for you," he said to the clerk and related the morning's events at the plant.

"What goes around comes around," the clerk said. I had a run-in with Schumaker once, he didn't give me any breaks, but then who am I? Have a good day."

Gil turned into the bungalow driveway. Man, Annette is going to be surprised, he thought. As he braked the car he saw the door to Nut and Elaine's place slam shut. He felt like he was being watched as he climbed out of the car, and the back of his neck tingled. Cigarette smoke hung in the air as he walked up the path. He let himself in his own door and heard the shower running. He smelled smoke in here too. He put the ale on the kitchen table and sat down on the chair. A crushed cigarette stub smoldered in a plate crusted with last night's dinner. He thought about the Judge resting his chin on a shotgun's muzzle; what was he thinking when he reached down for the trigger?

The shower turned off and he heard the curtain rip back along the curtain rod. He felt his heart beating. Annette came out of the bathroom door, next to the stove, toweling her hair. Her small body glistened. Gil's mouth went dry at the sight of her full, round breasts and flat stomach, her luscious thighs. Gil stood up, feeling his

belly tighten. Annette pulled the towel off her head with a start. Her wet, brown hair fell in ringlets about her face. She was so beautiful.

“What the hell are you doing here?” she gasped.

Gil stared. He wanted to reach out for her but his arms hung at his sides.

“No work today,” he said. His mouth felt thick.

Annette stared back. Her eyes were wide and frightened.

“I have a doctor’s appointment I have to get to,” she said, “Nut’s going to give me a ride.”

Gil nodded as if he knew all along. “What a guy,” he said, “You aren’t sick, are you?”

Annette shook her head. “No,” she answered and her voice trailed. Her eyes flickered with a shine that Gil had noticed before. “I’d better get dressed,” she said at last and she turned from the room.

The cigarette stub stopped burning. Gil opened the six-pack, retrieved a cold bottle and sat down on the kitchen chair to drink it. He heard a radio turn on in Bungalow 8 and a low voice start to sing along. At least Annette has a plan, he thought. The Judge had a plan. Gil took a sip of ale and listened to the music from next door.

Alex Frixione

¿de quien es tu lengua?

The week after Octavio was dead for sure i sat in front of the stereo listening to his voice on old records. The small house crouched quietly under an enormous tree, the yard was surrounded by a wooden fence that smelled like chocolate after rain. As the sun came up, Octavio would be out sweeping the leaves off the big porch: his records playing from inside the house.

At my funeral, Octavio walked to the pulpit to sing. Once he began, the entire crowd levitated off the ground, hanging from invisible nooses, and danced there, spinning around with their spines hung like dusty coats from the hooks of the sky. Like ventricles. Octavio's lungs pumped a song that brought more people to tears than my own death. The entranced audience, confused at why they had even been crying, left looking for lovers they had almost forgotten some years ago. Octavio, on the multitudes' shoulders, expressed his gratitude.

After the release of his first record, a copy made its way across the ocean aboard the ship of a heartbroken pirate. Under months of wind and water behind him the pirate left his ship in search of a beginning of the third part of his life. He auctioned off his sailboat at the harbor and made his way into a city made of crowds. Initially he rented rooms from families that were always drowning in children, splashing in and out of the

house, times when celestial navigation came back to him as he'd enter flooded hallways and wooden stairs. The currents of lice infested children drowning the tap of his wooden leg on the floorboards and steps as he'd make his way toward his room. Nobody turned their interest toward the tenant that smelled like dry salt until one day while sweeping the hallway she heard the record playing in his room. The next morning the pirate was invited down stairs and seated before mountains of breakfast. She held back waves of children with her strong arms as she made her way through all her questions. Excited questions about the voice she had heard coming from his room were harpooned across the table, almost forcing the pirate to uproot his rusting sword from his side.

Even though on a popular continent, geographers had until that year forgotten to include our country on any map. It wasn't small enough for its small size to be an excuse.

In the morning i would step out the door for work, there would be millions of leaves that the windstorms of the night left on our porch for Octavio to sweep in the morning.

Those days, i would leave for work with the rest of the country and we'd all sit there at six in the morning preventing each other's progress, honking and screaming like assholes on the only highway in the country. Octavio was the only one that didn't leave for work. He could see the future of the children that walked past our house on their way to school as he swept and raked. He knew they weren't headed for school that day, but that they would be walking through leaves for years with their schoolbooks in their hands and dreamy heads until they ended up on the same highway that the rest of us sat in on those beautiful

early mornings dreaming of schoolbook walks through roads of leaves as we cursed and spit each other to hell.

Octavio's voice was so full of passion that it was more effective than the voice of the most frightening sergeant or the most cunning salesman. Hours after his first record had been pressed by a neighbor of ours named Eziquiel with a dream, it sold out the following day and was repressed five times before the government realized that the number of sales had tripled that of our country's population. This indicated that somehow the record had traveled outside the borders. After suspending Eziquiel's paperwork and business records the country decided that it was in their interest to buy exclusive rights to Octavio's voice and continue to traffic his songs.

The contract was immediately sold to a private international company and it stated that every word spoken by Octavio should cost a million dollars to be heard. Billionaires from every country all over the world would sit in our living room as Octavio recited poems that were previously approved by the men with calculators. The first airport into our country was built to accommodate these visits. Men with machine guns and medals surrounded Octavio at every hour of the day. Even in his sleep they monitored the area to make sure that nobody was within ear shot of his nocturnal conversations with the spirits of his dreams. He had to whisper to a skinny man that always sat right next to him when we ate dinner, me alone at one end and him surrounded by bodyguards and other bureaucrats with notepads and pens at the other. They would veil his messages across the table as if to compensate for his inaudible whispers. "Can you please pass the salt," or "did you see the cat?" or "it's cold in here." They wouldn't always repeat exactly what he said. I guess they knew best.

When he was finally on his death bed the president hired a team compiled of the best writers from all over the world to prepare the final words for the man whose voice had erected bridges across oceans, tunnels through mountain ranges, an airport, and had given our country a voice. The sentence they came up with was the most finely tuned sentence ever. It was as if an infallible computer had come up with the perfect combination of words.

The news had traveled far that he was to recite his final sentence before death and of course everyone grew excited to hear Octavio's voice (that had for so long been owned by a few greedy fucks) once more. It was almost as if the entire country was praying by the side of their beds for his death to come quickly so that they could once again feel alive. It was planned by many stations that the moment would be broadcasted nationwide days after it would be recorded and they would melt the internal organs of the people huddling in tears around their radios that crackled like a family fire between two finely calculated commercial slots.

Before dying he said nothing close to what had been written for him. He sat up suddenly from a near death sleep, pushed the paper and the hand that held it off to the side and his last words came lost in static and blood and a voice that had been cut by machines into pieces of paper, "Holy fuck! my lungs are burning!" Then he died with a smile of relief and his hands crossed peacefully over his still stomach.

On the day the news of his death aired millions of manufactured bombs exploded in different parts of the world simultaneously seconds before the programming began. They had been positioned precisely so that every ear in the world could hear them exploded loud enough for

their curiosity to turn their radios on, and almost even before the explosions, the radio announcers, as if in a race, began advertising the catastrophe.

Tod Goldberg

Try Not to Loose Her

Hear your father's story about pouring salt on snails when he was your age and hearing his own father say, *The boy's not right, you know? How he's ever gonna find a wife?* Wonder why he tells the story with a smile. Search the attic until you find the box marked Yearbooks."

See your Dad staring out at you in his freshman year, face like the surface of a Wheat Thin, expression blank and sullen. Think of him looking a bit like a turnip. Know that you look a lot like him.

Sit on the grass while your Dad and Mom drink lemonade on a fuming July day. They are discussing you in some kind of code. *All children go through a fat stage. And for 15, that's considered normal. As long as they don't torture themselves, it's okay. Right?* Hate them with a passion usually reserved for Jack Allen, the kid across the street that used to beat you up because you're fat. Run into the bathroom and swallow three laxative tablets, pinch your fat stomach until it bruises. Wait for action.

On the way to Safeway with your best friend John, feel guilty for touching your penis the night before. Consider telling him, despite the enormous guilt, that it felt pretty damn good. Think about that again as your ten-speed goes over a bump and you almost lose a testicle. Laugh at the fat woman in line in front of you, even though you have a

Rocky Road, a Snickers, two Butterfingers and a pack of Hubba Bubba in your hand. Act interested when John tells you that he's been studying for the PSAT because he's going to take the Bar exam someday and all the preparation needs to begin at an early age. Tell John that a future in journalism is in the works for you. You're considering Columbia, Princeton, Stanford, or maybe San Diego State, because you hear it's a good party school.

Start picturing her. Dark, chestnut hair that laps at her neck. Green eyes that eat men alive. You read that in a Raymond Chandler book. Decide that she doesn't care about weight, or looks, or your bizarre family. She's above that. Work hard at your indifference to her. She wants you, remember. The chase, man, all girls love the chase. Imagine how you will seduce her. You've always liked necks, so you start there. Let your tongue dart around her clavicle. Hold her throat gently. She likes it, so move south.

Try again with indifference. Concentrate on staying north, at least until you are more experienced with this imagining stuff.

Factor your mother out of the mix. Don't let her personality, appearance, or the fact that she is married to your father cloud your vision. Your mother can only hurt you.

Think about wearing leather. See yourself riding a Harley with her on the back. Read more about being a transcendentalist. Dabble in existentialism. She'll like that. Read a lot of Emerson. Give of yourself. But not too much. She'll like mystery.

John thinks you're getting loopy. Screw him. Go on a diet

for her, even though she wouldn't care. Make new friends. Hang out with Gus and Jared. Smoke cloves because it gives you an edge. Consider that wherever she is, she's thinking about lying down in a field of poppies with you. Rent *The Wizard of Oz* and watch it with the sound off. Listen to Pink Floyd in the background. Feel like you're in those poppies, man, and she's digging it.

Okay, you can move south.

Become so thin that you bruise easily. Eavesdrop on your mother while she's on the phone, *Can boys be anorexic? I mean, he looks better. Right?* Crank call John five times a day. Find out from a friend that John's folks are seriously thinking about pressing charges. Act unaffected. Get call blocking from ATT for another dollar a month. Your parents will never notice. Boredom is your friend. When Thanksgiving rolls around, pretend not to care about the football game. It's just a game, and they play every Sunday, right? Tell your Uncle Steve that he's an asshole for calling you one of those kids he's scared of in the mall. Swallow a couple laxatives, feel better.

Ask girls out. Practice, you know, so you're ready. Use corny lines on the ones who actually say yes. Mention their shoes. Not their toes, their shoes. Use so much OXY-10 Cover Formula on your face that you look like Michael Jackson post-op. Wear bad aftershave just to see if the girls notice, or if they are really into you for what you bring to the table. Park your car at a park and ask the girls to play on the swings with you. They'll laugh, think you're cute, boyish, non-threatening. Make your move when they are laughing. Practice tongue kissing, she'll be into that.

The ones who won't go out with you? Use the following:

Bitch. Slut. A couple clowns short of a circus. All filler, no killer. Coke whore. Hester Prynne. Trollop.

Act like a family friend at your mom's funeral. Cry, because a friend would cry. Indifference is the key. Apologize to your Uncle Steve, it is his sister, you know? Skip the wake. Sit in your room and listen to James Taylor songs. Too bad that you didn't believe her when she said it felt like her appendix was bursting. Too bad your father had to go off on a business trip the day she decided to die.

After everyone leaves, sit in the kitchen with your dad and cry with him. She can wait. Give the man some solace. It was his wife, you know?

The new girl from Tennessee sits next to you in homeroom. She wears a tiny skirt that highlights her tanned thighs. Sure, you say, I'll show her around the campus. John is seething. He's still playing Dungeons and Dragons and you're escorting a babe around the high school. Gus and Jared give you a thumbs up. You tell her where the cool kids eat lunch, though you aren't considered a cool kid. So you show her where you eat lunch instead. Listen while she tells you how sad she is. How much she misses Tennessee. *California is so different*, she says.

At home, you check off your menu items:

Chestnut hair: X

Deep Green Eyes: X

Neck: X

Woman: X

Ask her out for Friday night. Pick her up twenty minutes late. Don't apologize. Tell her you want to go to the discount theater because they are playing the entire Star

Wars trilogy back-to-back-to-back. She says that would great. She loves Boba Fett.

This may be Her.

You try to unhook her bra in the backseat of your Nissan Sentra. Solving a Rubik's cube in the dark would be easier. Yank her shoulder straps down, like they do in the movies. *Hey!* she says. *You ripped my bra.* Say nothing. Kiss her clavicle. *Asshole,* she says, *you ripped my fucking bra and you're choking me.* Tell her that she's the one, baby, she's the one. Tell her you've been priming for this moment all your life.

A couple clowns short of a circus, you tell Gus.

Wake your dad up and tell him that you are graduating at seven. He smiles. He looks dead. He smells like flat Sprite. *Are you valedictorian?* Make the guy happy. Sure dad, you tell him, sure. Dad goes back to sleep.

Tell your dad you'll write. Make sure he paid your tuition. Tell him something you read in a Richard Bach book so he won't feel so sad: *The bond that links your true family is not one of blood, but of respect and joy in each other's life.* Double check that all the copies of every Richard Bach book in the house have been removed.

Join a fraternity and get drunk for an entire year. Look for her in the halls, at parties, sorority mixers. Come up with a lot of girls who look like her, who are not her. Amend wish list to include the following: witty, big breasts, olive skin tone, off campus housing.

Sharon is all of the above. Fuck her on the clean Formica of her off campus apartment kitchen. Fuck her again,

astonished by her body. Touch her breasts while she sleeps just because you can. Drink Ovaltine in the morning with her. Laugh at her milk mustache.

Let's skip class, you say. Let's just do it all day. She tells you she loves your body, your thin stomach and tight biceps. She asks, *How many laxatives do you take a day?*

Think of yourself as the uncaring man you are. Practice boredom again. Act indifferent. Pay attention to her faults. Ask her if she thinks that cottage cheese on her ass will clear up.

Go to the Health Center for a cold compress, find out you have a broken jaw. Drink dinner through a straw for a month. Call your dad and tell him you broke your jaw. He says that he's not feeling like a man anymore. He says, *When your mom died I should have died, too.* Tell him he's important. It comes out sounding like "impotent." He hangs up.

Fly home. Your dad is sitting at the kitchen table looking at a scrapbook. Tell him you were worried about him. Notice the stacks of dirty dishes in the sink. Remember how your mom designated every Sunday "cleaning day." When your dad falls asleep on the couch, wash all the dishes. Vacuum his bedroom. Throw out three weeks worth of newspapers.

Sit next to a girl from your college on the plane home. She talks to you for the entire flight. She's had an abortion. She loved a guy who really screwed her over. She wears a scarf around her neck that is covered with butterflies. Notice she has a butterfly charm around her neck. Tell her you've always loved the word *mariposa*. Go back to her off campus apartment and watch game shows until four in

the morning. Wake up with her head on your chest. Evaluate the situation. Go through her CD collection. Find that she has a Neil Diamond CD and also a NotoriousB. I. G. CD. Check her refrigerator. Note the abundance of Tupperware. Check her body out again. Wake her with a soft kiss to the cheek. Tell her, through your wired jaw, that she is beautiful.

At your fraternity house, cops are parked three deep on the front lawn. Your buddy Trent is being carried out in handcuffs, wearing your shoes. Five drug sniffing German Shepherds are canvassing the rooms. Sit in your car listening to the soundtrack from "Grease."

Sit in Starbucks with your frat brothers Bill and Jeff and lament the situation. It's fucked, man, you say. *Fucked*, Jeff says and points out the barista. *Pretty hot, huh?* You walk up to the counter; eyes steady on her, mouth snarled into a half smile. You look dangerous. You look like a guy to fall in love with. Her name is Mandy. She's a junior majoring in English.

You stay at Mandy's off-off campus house playing Scrabble and Monopoly with her two housemates, both English majors, too. You tell them that you've been working on some poetry yourself. They ask you to write something *right now* for them. They hand you paper and a pencil. You write about your mother's face. You watch the girls watching you. One of the girls, Lisa, is a grad student. She says there are hints of Carver and W.H. Auden in your work.

Forget about Mandy. You go to bed with Lisa.

Lisa wants to tie you up and do some role-playing. You agree. She is here to save you. She already has. You wake

up in the morning with rope grooves in your wrists and small burns all over your chest and belly from candle wax. Your groin is sticky with dried honey.

The girl from the plane calls you a month later. She thinks she is pregnant. You don't have the time to listen to that noise. You're going to be a featured reader at an open mic poetry reading. To get back in the mood, you put on a Jane's Addiction CD and listen to ' Mountain Song' at decibels that make your eardrums ache.

You stand up there wearing all black. You are somber, indifferent, bored. Nothing in your body is moving. You could be dead. Nirvana, man, perfect stillness. Adjust the mic down to your level. See Lisa in the crowd. Last night she just wouldn't stop fucking you. She poured orange juice on your legs and lapped it up like a dog. You free-styled some poetry on her while she did things with a big purple monstrosity called, "Mr. Whistle." She doesn't wash her sheets because she says she wants your smell. I love your old skin. So you read your poetry for Lisa. The words fall out of your mouth and shatter in the air. They are snapping. They love you.

Dream you are on stage playing the guitar. The girl from the plane is giving birth on your amp and Lisa is the mid-wife. Wake up next to Lisa. She's got on your black T-shirt and she's snoring out of her mouth. Remember the way she told you how proud she was of you after the poetry reading. Think about the way she kisses with her tongue. Evaluate the way you have "normal" sex with her. Consider the fact that she is nice, smart, witty, pretty, has chestnut brown hair, and green eyes (okay, brown, but with a green tint to them).

Change your phone number. Tell everyone except the girl

from the plane. Make an effort to forget her name. Move half of your stuff into Lisa's place. Drop out of the fraternity. Poets don't belong to fraternities. Find out from friends at home that your dad has been seen wandering the streets at night. Listen to a book of poetry driving home. Nearly fall asleep from boredom. Play a tape of songs Lisa made that remind her of you. Try to figure out how Pearl Jam's "Alive" applies to you. Knock on the front door of your childhood home because you've lost the key you used to wear around your neck. Your dad opens the door and hugs you, squeezes you, says, I missed you. Stay the weekend.

Dad says, *We were everything a man and woman could be*, and he says, *We can all be angels, can't we?* Call Lisa and find her out of breath. Ask her what she's doing. *I ran in from the garage*, she says. You've been in that garage. Can't hear a damn thing from there.

Call your Uncle Steve and ask him about your dad. *He needs lithium*, he says, *The man needs to be medicated*. Call him an asshole and hang up. Go with your father to Target to pet a couple of lamps for the house. Buy him lunch at Chili's and tell him you think he should see a doctor. Your dad agrees. *I'll do it on Monday*, he says. Tell him about your poetry and about Lisa. Think she's the one, Dad, you say and drive back to school.

Spend the night at Lisa's. Make every part of her body a sonnet. Touch her navel with your tongue and draw your finger over her lips. Tell her for the first time that you love her. Hold her face close to yours, say it over and over again; I love you. After she goes to sleep you notice a bite mark on her neck. You never bite her neck. You bite her shoulder, never her neck.

See the girl from the plane at the video store. Hide in the game section. You start feeling nauseous. She is wearing stretch pants. Ask the clerk what she rented after you're sure she's left the store: "Exercise and the Single Mom," "Five Steps to Easy Abs During Pregnancy," and "Steel Magnolias."

Lisa has become really interested in soccer. She recently started listening to rap music. She has started wearing an awful lot of athletic gear: sweat pants, biking shorts and sports bras. She says that her love just keeps growing for you. She's tutoring a guy from the soccer team who's getting his minor in literature. You try to imagine your life without Lisa. Could you live? How long would you binge on food? Could you marry someone else? If this all falls apart, could you be a father for a child whose mother you don't know? You touch Lisa's hand. It is cold. There is grass in her hair.

Call Lisa when she says she won't be home. Hang up when she answers.

Go to your father's funeral on a rainy Sunday in June. Mull over the warning signs, Sort out the reasons why you couldn't save him. At least you had that weekend together. Don't apologize to Uncle Steve. Fuck him. Sit in your old house and listen to your neighbors tell you what a fine family you were. *Were*. After everyone has left, go through the cabinet you were never allowed to go through. Sticky letters, dried flowers, mementos from trips to Disneyland, Lake Tahoe, a receipt from a hotel room in Medford, Oregon. Spread everything out in front of yourself and recreate your parent's courtship. In one picture of your father he looks like a movie star and your mom looks like Lena Horne singing "Stormy Weather." Touch your father's clothes. Smell him in the folds of the blanket you

drape around yourself. Play back the messages on his answering machine. Hear your own voice echoing through the kitchen: *Are you there? Dad? Are you there?*

Call Lisa and listen to the phone ring 47 times. Imagine her dead in a ditch. Imagine her and Soccer Boy pouring hot wax on each other. Throw up. Consider running outside with your father's favorite blanket wrapped around your shoulders screaming. Stretch out on the floor. Call Lisa again. Again. Again.

On the plane back to school you hold several conversations in your head with Lisa. Get down to the specifics. What are you angry about? Start gathering the sentences together. *I feel like ... I need you to understand ... Why do I think...* Drink several little bottles of scotch. Feel sick. On your way to the restroom, you see a woman reading a book on deadbeat dads. You can feel sick in the comfort of your own seat.

Wonder why Mandy is so happy to see you when you show up at the house unannounced. Open Lisa's bedroom door and see her straddling Soccer Boy in a vice grip of passion. She says, *Monogamy doesn't equal love. Love equals love.* Tell her that her math is all screwed up. Threaten Soccer Boy with bodily harm and extreme imprudence to his corpse. Don't even take into consideration that Soccer Boy is 6'3 and 195 pounds of lean muscle mass. He's in no position right now to do anything. go into Lisa's kitchen and break all of her dishes. Scream that you hate her poetry.

Run into the mother of your child at Safeway. You are buying beer and she is buying something for her queasy stomach. Tell her that you are ready to take a role in this. Say that though you've made some mistakes in life, you

are trying to right your ship. Say all the important words: *Lie. Us. Regret. Karma. My Father Hung Himself A Week Ago.* She breaks down and cries in the frozen foods section, says her life is completely unglued. *I'm not even sure if it's yours,* she says.

Write bad poetry. Become stark. Practice nuttiness again. Consider looking up your old friend John. Call your Uncle Steve and say, *With mom and dad gone we've only got each other. You're an asshole,* he says, and hangs up.

Run into Lisa at the student union. Uncomfortable silence. Ask about the condition of your favorite black T-shirt. Apologize for that remark about her poetry. You know how fragile she is about her talent. Laugh at an old inside joke you share. Go back to her place and fuck like there is no tomorrow, because there isn't one with Lisa. Tell her you would have married her, had children, grown old. Describe the box of keepsakes you found at your parent's house. Wonder what kind of keepsakes the two of you would have stored away. "Mr. Whistle" and some twine? Find your favorite black T-shirt rolled up in a ball on the floor. Pick it up on your way out the door.

Call the mother of what may be your child. Her name is Kelly. Use it. Say, *Let's get a blood test.*

Punch your old friend John's name into a search engine on the Internet and find a news story about him. He murdered his college astronomy teacher for failing him. Your old friend John is doing life at San Quentin.

Listen to soft music and wait for Kelly to come pick you up. Think about her. Not Kelly. Her. Reconsider the model. Make some changes. Fine tune the picture. Get a call from your Uncle Steve. He says, *Family is family is*

family. Make plans to fly up to San Francisco to see him. Remember that day in July when you were 15. Realize you don't know where to begin. Consider that time is moving around you, people are filtering through you. Start living your life. You are 22.

Submissions: _____

The Northridge Review invites submissions between September and May. Manuscripts and artwork should be accompanied by a cover page that includes the author's name, address, telephone number, email address and the titles of the works submitted. The author's name should not appear on the manuscript itself.

For return of submissions, include an appropriately sized and stamped SASE. To submit manuscripts and artwork directly, send to:

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CSUN English Department
California State University, Northridge
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Submissions without SASE will not be returned.

