

the

northridge

review

Fall 2001

Interview with Eloise Klein Healy



the northridge review

Fall 2001



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# Editor's Note

By Sylvie Green Shapero

The letters, the way they curve to shape the words, look like bones. What will we do? And the bones, the way they stack one on top of another, look like pictures from stories my mother once told. But now I hear nothing. The words blow away, float on the wind. Catch them like butterflies pressed in a book. Difference in distances, feelings the same. Soft, like comfort. Gone, like longing. Where did they go?

From under my pillow to under my bed, sounds bellow out windows and I am left with dark, hollow utterance and fingers too small to reach for the wind. Stretch, stretch, shake. These words that soothed from hush, hush, write to piles of bones, smashed by a rock. Crash, crash, break. The dust still lingers like dusk in the morning. I wake in the grass, no dew on my skin. Feel black on the back of my hand and smear time onto a page. Take it and go.

This is not my story I read and remember. Yours and yours and his. These are not my sounds. My tongue sticks in my jaw with this language. What do we have here? Make notes in the margin, but don't write love, say metaphor. The collective ooh ah oh is more than a feeling, a thought, an image. A word with a heart that beats. Be still, plant your feet, catch screams thrown out

of trees with wide, open palms. Dig in his hidden landscape. Unbury the bones as the wind blows dirt in your face. Pull, pull, take. The crack in the earth binds and divides. Find life. Two legs, one spine, head floating up on top.

Write it down. Give me your story. Let me put it next to this one and this one and hers. Stack the bones, one on top of the other until we have buildings. Look higher and higher with round brown eyes that used to be right in front of your face. Run up the street. Turn down the alley. How did I get to this city? Pages and pages stand tall, straight and strong, waving in wind until words return. I hear that image but don't say hate, write symbol.

The words, the way they come crashing down, bring billows of smoke like clouds on the ground. I breathe the dust around my mouth, blow it out onto the page and give, give, create. Take it and read. Make moments in amber. Her hair, long and blonde now blackened by ash. Tell me how it used to be. Tall, smooth, and up to the sky. Necks stretched until vertebrae cracked. Find the stories. Preserve the pages with your very own trembling hands.

# Awards

*The Northridge Review* Fiction Award, given annually, recognizes excellent fiction writing by a CSUN student published in *The Northridge Review*. The two recipients of the 2000-2001 award are Mandy Dawn Kuntz for "Seamstress Unravel" in the Spring 2000 issue and Ara Shirinyan for "An Annual Account" in the Fall 2001 issue.

The Rachel Sherwood Award, given annually in memory of Rachel Sherwood, recognizes excellent poetry writing by a CSUN student published in *The Northridge Review*. The recipient of the 2000-2001 award is Mandy Dawn Kuntz for "Relativity," "the evolution of WOrman," and "the dance."

*The Northridge Review* is also pleased to publish the recipients of the Academy of American Poets Award. They are Kelan Koning for "Practical Value," "Still Birth," "Poem For Misshapen Wedding Ring," and Raegen Pietrucha for "Precious Metal," and "To you." The runners-up for this award are Wendy Hector for "Game," "Morning Shift," and "Tijuana," and Sarah Heston for "Blues Singer," "Hard Spring," and "Strange Children."

The Benjamin Saltman Award, honoring the memory of Professor Benjamin Saltman, recognizes excellence in poetry writing. The recipient of this award is published in the spring issue of *The Northridge Review*.

*The Northridge Review* accepts submissions throughout the year. Manuscripts should be accompanied by a cover page that includes the writer's name, address, email and telephone number, as well as the titles of the works submitted. The writer's name should not appear on the manuscript itself. Manuscripts and all other correspondence should be delivered to:

The Northridge Review  
Department of English  
California State University Northridge  
Northridge, CA 91330-8248

Manuscripts will not be returned.

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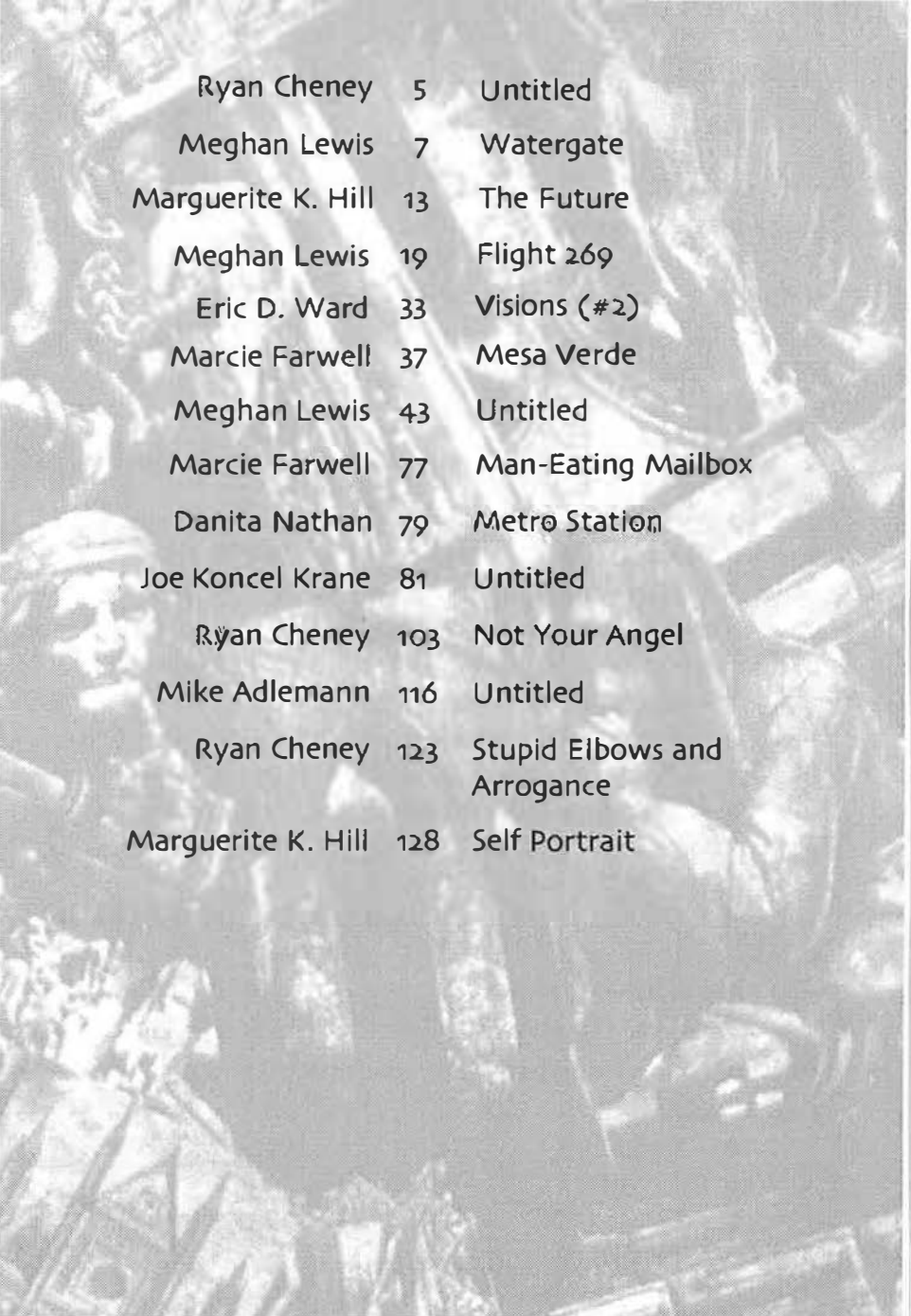
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# Relativity

Mandy Dawn Kuntz

In the mid-sixties, my mother tells me, she met Einstein's daughter  
(the story forever prefaced this way,  
as though lack of connection would render the woman a non-entity)  
Berkeley bakery, she made  
bread, pastries, sweet, nosh, tastes of kitchen science to offer  
passers-by.

She taught my mother how to keep her tongue free for  
ever-better experience,  
to save the sweetest for last:  
Breads, then cakes, after-candies and you can have it all,  
taste it true. And this minute study has been passed onto me  
but I question  
this crafting woman, her credentials as  
"daughter."

Einstein—Time Magazine's "Person of the Century,"  
biggest man since Christ, another lowly Jew—had 3 daughters:  
bastard Lieserl of Hungary  
(adopted out, lost) and Isle and Margot (acquired through marriage).

What then of baker-woman?  
How close really? Does her palate reject animal flesh as his did?  
Do Nazi soldiers haunt her in dreams which move  
at the speed of light?

Is she the rightful heir to a 30% larger inferior parietal region and the guilt of Manhattan?

How could she, this little girl playing cook, surrounded by flour, water, sugar, gingerbread men, know the pain of this enlightened bloodline, crumbling children: Hiroshima? Nagasaki?

Perhaps, this improbable girl-child, with her single bright crumb, could take her sad father to her lap, smooth his wild hair, knead the shoulder knots and aches, remove the lemon-slice from his puckered mouth, clenched there so many years—his whole corpse wrinkled at the taste—and, taking a dark chocolate from her pocket, remind him: “The sweetest is yet to come.”

# the evolution of WOMan

Mandy Dawn Kuntz

I. *All things were together. Then the mind came and arranged them.*  
—*Anaxagoras*

chairmanships and apples were handed out, responsibilities divided.

richard bought her diamond-studded manacles and hid his fear  
in a sock, an epithet. called her a whore  
(blaming his lust-rush on the slice of her top lip, sharp like a spade,  
like it was cut from stationary)  
but called her anyhow.

and from underneath, she looked to the side and saw  
splattered plaster on shag,  
saw the carpet stretch out like space, star-specks; she was of the sky.

this secret knowledge was folded, tucked in a flesh-shaped pocket to  
feed her when he had gone.

II. *Heraclitus said that a man's character is in his fate.* —*Stabaeus*

and her clitoris, a bump on his road to monumentation,  
was tired of being rolled over, ignored.  
she refused her fate, laced combat boots about her heart,  
developed voice,  
deep, clear, and heard from on high.

the church was taking up a collection on second street;  
authorities made a demograph.  
perhaps her cycle's to do with the moon?

wearing the pants, the dresses—  
dragged in the muddy stain of her sex—  
she took scissors and needles to her breasts and  
moved them to the front: erect war decorations.  
her children came spontaneously of her alone, armored  
still-bloody bodies  
raging and howling into the world.

flowers rise where she treads, twisted-thorn creations  
she braids in and out of dark hair,  
night-soil, shadow.

her blood is the wine.

III. *Worlds are altered rather than destroyed.* —Democritus

she wears that letter proudly, and though they call her many names,

she alludes language.  
she is the salt I suck off my fingers when you and I make bread  
and without her there is only pale paper-skin.

dead white men can have the last word,  
for we are beyond speech. even

jesus and buddha lay down with her nightly in search of something  
they still can't name.





# the dance

Mandy Dawn Kuntz

flicked flesh—

pulsing fast flash—

jazz jane dances:

silver sweat in glitter stash.

((“sin sass. Trash,” the ice-titter girls lash))

curls/curves/tongue/tits

up line atari boys in starry poise for this dash of saccharine slur.

((the mary-margaret-florences gasp

from lily walls and handsome hats))

jasmine jane just swings a cast.

a swirl dip drop line of hypnotic hook spell to glitter-snare

cyanotic fishy gents with lofty glam air.

slut serpentine intoxicates in hints: hip/lip humid honey coal musk.

to fornicate with a bitch blushed and bewitched—

foxes silently lie

in crass-crab grass till they itch hard-on-heat-rash

for a taste of hot honeycomb mustard snatch.



# Josephine in the Rain

Mandy Dawn Kuntz

“nobody, not even the rain, has such small hands” – ee cummings

Perhaps it was something to do with the way she lit up the room, her dress—held up by ribbons and safetypins—that made him long for something solid, made him picture coffee tables and flannel sheets . . . sent him across years and possibility to knit sweaters and photo albums. He wondered if Holly and Paul really lived Happily Ever After or if Hollywood just made one think nothing bad could succeed a kiss in the rain.

Perhaps, it was something to do with vodka, with an ability to fall in love with any girl who held a plastic party glass as though it were a chalice. Regardless, a powerful love for the world gripped him. It was New Year's. He swallowed hard. He did not swagger. He slunk along between the other party-goers through a window of opportunity, a “spontaneous” meeting in a well-cast crowd.

It was just like the movies: Sam fell in love with his wife the day he met her.

Josephine fell in love with random men she met in the rain and so it was out of a sense of self-preservation that she did not move to Seattle. By staying in sunny Los Angeles and meeting dry men at dinner parties, she never had to fight the urge to snake her hands under overcoats and run her fingers as vines along the bare and moistened skin just below the beard. Sam was like safety. He

## Josephine in the Rain

took her to see love stories, fed her unbuttered popcorn, and held her hands between his.

Sam reduced his world to soft-focus, had faith that Josephine dreamed of him alone. Breathing in the crushed-flower vapor that was her skin, he slept.

Josephine—fairytale ending, white picket fence, awake on a wooden bench in a chilly museum—remembers how the inside of his mouth tastes. It is nothing like rain.

Sam will pick his wife up at the museum in time for dinner. But first, he will run home, put on warm, dry, clothes, drink some coffee, and read the paper. He will often tell people, years later, "There are trees which smell like the backs of my wife's hands."

Josephine thinks of water, growth, movement; she concentrates on her hard seat in the public building. On concrete, plaster, stucco, varnish, track lighting.

Their new neighbor, a redhead, is interjected suddenly,  
—*So sorry to bother you, forgot my key. Never fails, and my roommate won't be home for hours. It would be raining huh? Thanks.*

Never let a stranger into your apartment building. Never invite her up for coffee. Casual chat is dangerous territory.

Sam looks at his neighbor tenderly, like she is someone familiar. Delicate jawline, hands drawn in such clean lines curl,

caress, about the coffee cup. She raises it, lips. He remembers his wife who waits at the museum. Invites Bridgette to join him on his walk to retrieve his wife. As he gives this fiery new woman a coat of his wife's to borrow, he sees how nicely it accents her figure which curves in and out for him alone. His wife's coat; a Venus girl. They step outside.

Josephine, buried in an old-growth bench on the second floor of the museum on a rainy September day, sits on her hands. Veins protrude mimicking pressed-petals.

They walk at a rainy pace, talk of well-lit things, stray around pothole topics, as to escape the obvious. A pretty girl and a handsome man. Watery thin shapes. In the rain. Potential in a wife's long coat. It's hard to keep it together when rainy streets sing temptation songs but Sam, like oil in a puddle, tells his neighbor, "My wife has hands like orchids."

# Dante Alighieri Among the Green Locust in the Everglades

Virgil Suarez

This familiar heat among the reeds,  
cattails, a shimmer on the canal  
waters, a jumping perch,

aerial silver slivers, smiles,  
him with a Winchester .22 caliber  
cocked, finger on trigger,

a yellow-green line of locust  
by the grassy edge of a pebbly path-  
how meanness rises in him,

he ponders, then shoots,  
a blast of sand and turf,  
pieces of insects

in the air. He notices no change  
in the line, these critters are on track,  
some mission to get somewhere.

Another shot fired, more locust  
blown to bits, he starts to laugh  
and shoots faster,

the quicker he shoots,  
the longer the line gets, stretches  
far into the horizon,

right where the eyes begin to hurt.

# Kindling

Michael Hill

She liked to lie  
in bed after  
listening to the  
rain dance  
on the tile roof  
and rub  
her naked toes  
together like  
twigs still  
warm with friction  
after  
spawning a fire.





# Luxury of Linear Thought

Michael Hill

The struggle was, as always, in Sam's mind, but today it felt more comfortably violent, more frightening. She tossed her head back like a stallion rearing out of contempt for its rider and swept her auburn hair off her cheeks and out of her eyes. She read half a sentence.

*I'm talkin' tag teams, hand cuffs and steel cages . . .*

Then her thoughts broke away.

She thought, "the phrases that fill the white balloons must be as light as helium to make them float over their heads like that. But where are the strings? There must be strings! Strings to keep the balloons in place . . . strings to keep the words from spilling out and smashing their toes. There must be strings! The strings that keep the balloons from breaking free and floating right off the page . . . the strings that keep us tied to the words . . . the strings that keep the words tied to us. I don't see any strings. If the strings are there, they must be invisible . . . . Must there be strings?"

Sam closed the comic book, smiled at the irony of the title, *The Death of Superman*, and added it to the pile of discarded paperbacks, periodicals and pornography that littered the corner of her closet-sized studio apartment. She pawed the glossy cover of a magazine resting on the fifties-style Formica coffee table in front of her. The fall issue of *Horticulture* had looked more exciting on the newsstand than it did in her slender hand. Still, she opened it at random and started reading in the middle of a column with the heading "Pest Patrol." She liked what she read so much that she nearly finished two whole sentences.

*It may be as small as a period on a printed page, but*

*there doesn't seem to be anything that can stop this new parasite. The bug attaches itself to the genitals of its host and slowly sucks fluids until sterilization . . .*

That was all she could take. Her mind locked-in on the word "sterilization" and for the next ninety seconds she pondered the pluses and minuses of castrating rapists, pedophiles and incorrigible misogynists.

Sam was not a good listener, but it wasn't like she didn't try. She struggled to focus, her mind actually squinted to see things clearly, but she just couldn't listen to anything very long without getting distracted and day dreaming.

She couldn't listen to her mother's voice when her mother was alive and since her mother's death three years ago, that haunting, nasal twang had grown particularly excruciating. She couldn't listen to the music of the blackbirds holding court every morning on the telephone wire outside her only window. She couldn't listen long to a song's lyrics or hear a whole earful of Dr. Laura's valuable vitriol on the radio. She couldn't even stay with the words she read.

Sam had a problem with words. She had a problem holding them close and caressing them, a problem negotiating with them. Most of all, she had a problem coexisting peacefully with words. They ganged-up on her. She saw them as the enemy. It didn't matter which words. It didn't matter how long or short they were, what they sounded like or what images and ideas they were intended to express. The problem was words. Words were a problem for Sam.

Dr. Kleimer salivated over Sam when he examined her. He said her condition was so rare it practically guaranteed him publication in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. He just needed

a little more documentation. A wannabe novelist, he'd already started playing with the wording of the article's decidedly unscientific introduction. His goal was to humanize her, present her as a character rather than a subject of study. Sam was so much more than a name or a number. She was a package wholly unlike his typical patient, and he desperately wanted to include that subtext in the first flare he sent to the medical community. The opening he currently favored went like this:

*"An overtly sterling specimen blessed with more than her share of physical gifts, Sam is cursed by an extremely rare learning disability that I call Untethered Association Disorder or UAD (she refers to her condition as a two syllable word pronounced 'Yoo-ad'). The profound and pervasive effects of Yooad make it impossible for her to comprehend more than a handful of words (written or spoken) before her mind shifts its focus and clings to some esoteric tangent triggered by free association with a letter, word or phrase that hits her brain's gray matter just right. Yooad drowns Sam in her own stream of consciousness and leaves her without the luxury of linear thought. As she reads or listens to a voice speak (even her own internal vocalizing of words she's read from a page), the words stack-up on top of each other then expand, crowding her cranium until the pressure of their presence hits critical mass and grows unbearable and her mind sprints for the shelter of a fresh focal point."*

Sam tossed the magazine Frisbee-style on to the pile of pulp in the corner and snatched the last thing lying on the Formica in a graceful, swooping motion that vaguely resembled a bird of prey descending to harvest an unsuspecting mouse from an otherwise barren field.

"Prevention," she rasped in the deepest, darkest tone she could muster then giggled at the magazine and her own silliness.

## The Luxury of Linear Thought

Again she started in the middle, turning the pages randomly, stopping at the first words that hooked her hazel eyes.

*Sources at the Center for Disease Control say there is no reason for alarm, but the new virus is air-borne and could quickly infect a billion people because it travels as a "ride-along" on the microwaves and satellite beams that currently blanket the globe. Unfortunately, man has no natural antibodies capable of fighting . . .*

Sam leaped off her stool, her body fleeing along with her mind this time. Forgetting she was wearing nothing but a black satin bra and matching panties, she marched down the stairs and into the street like a barefoot refugee fleeing the two dimensional squalor of the *Victoria's Secret* catalog. The tattoo hidden high on her left inner thigh—a stylized image of a tiny tongue licking its lips—saw sunlight for the first time. She was a spectacle, a magnet for anyone's eyes. She felt the heat of a hundred stunned stares, but naively assumed it was only August weather. And she strutted down the street completely unaware of the primal urges her presence aroused in those around her.

Homer might have called her a siren without a song. Fully dressed she was so painfully attractive she could make any sailor glad to tear his hull out on her jagged rocks even if she couldn't carry a tune. But as she floated along the filthy sidewalk in her bare essentials, heads spun, eyes popped, tongues wagged and sphincters twitched. A ninety-two-year-old curmudgeon was stunned to find a rare smile spreading across his face and an erection filling his Fruit-of-the-Looms for the first time since he heard Marilyn Monroe was found dead lying naked in her bed. A barely ambulatory spinster was hit by a UPS truck when she darted off the curb and into the street (walker and all) trying to get a piece of Sam and her tempting undergarments.

When she got where she was going, a ratty, poorly-stocked newsstand called *The Source*, it was crowded with balding men who wore raincoats on cloudless days and smelled of plain wrap bourbon, baby oil and layers of lecherous perspiration that no soap could cleanse. Sam was immediately infested with them. Two-legged parasites fantasizing about tag team wrestling, hand cuffs and steel cages, they struggled to find ways to attach themselves to her genitals and suck her fluids, hoping for a chance to ride her microwaves, running through their vocabulary lists trying to find the words to catch her attention and coax her into the darkness of their caves.

Sam smiled her contagious smile, but she didn't hear what the men in raincoats said. She didn't hear any of their persuasive pitches. She only caught a few disconnected words, random syllables that ran together in a meaningless, high-pitched buzz. It sounded like a choir of cicadas in the desert, serenading the sand, stone and chaparral.

An overtly sterling specimen cursed with more than her share of physical gifts, Sam was blessed by an extremely rare learning disability that Dr. Climber called Untethered Association Disorder or UAD (she referred to it as a two syllable word pronounced 'Yoo-ad'). The profound and pervasive effects of UAD made it impossible for her to comprehend more than a handful of words before her mind shifted its focus. A letter, word or phrase triggered these free associations. UAD drowned Sam in her own stream of consciousness and freed her of the shackles of the luxury of linear thought. As she listened to a voice (even her own internal vocalization of words), the words stacked-up on top of each other then expanded, crowding her cranium until the pressure of their presence hit critical mass and grew unbearable and her mind sprinted for the open space of a fresh focal point.



An Annual Account  
By Binding Bifurcations  
Christmas Cutting Campaign  
Damn Dumb Doctors  
Flat Figuring Fat  
Ara Shirinyan

*Various Foodstuffs to Adorn Our Dining Room With*

With foods of all kind giving that brown-wood dining room pulpit a slap of color, our family got into a jovial mood; drinks in hands, stomachs with nothing to complain about; fully conscious of a scrupulous and scrumptious gala awaiting all of us. So first, a full classification of our foodstuffs that chart a sort of map which shows a trail to Christ's kingdom.

A dining room lit with bright lights (sparkling Romanian crystal), our family analyzing a rack of lamb, a yam dish (yams, with syrupy sugar surfacing, giving off a round of liquid in our mouths), a potato dish with cut-up dill, a broccoli in garlic and corn oil, a salad with balsamic from Italy, poultry shish kabobs, and a small roast pig with onion stuffing.

For drinks: Russian Vodka (Stolichnaya) and Whisky (Canadian, Scotch, Bourbon and Sour Mash), Cognac (four and a half star) and Coca Cola (Classic), Club Soda (Canada Dry) and Jamaican Rum, Tonic and Bombay Gin.

My stomach, as I took a look at my family, was asking for



Whisky on Rocks, Rum and Coca Cola, Vodka Tonic...on this day, who wouldn't drink? But don't allow this to fool you, I don't follow Christ's path. I think of it as just a normal holiday. By that I am saying: my mom and dad don't work two shifts.

### *Two Toasts By My Folks*

"A round," said dad, lifting his shot of vodka, "to our family's unity, for a vibrant spring which awaits us. I hold only a strong wish in this body, and I want all of us to look upon participants of this Shirinyan dynasty as building blocks for strong, firm foundations.<sup>1</sup> I want victory throughout all history in contracts that Shirinyans will join part in."

Our family, in unison, drank to this toast of toasts that my dad put out into this world, on Christmas day Two Thousand.

**Information:** My dad's throat was acting up. Doctors didn't know what it was but things got stuck to his throat's lining, and an old lady from our old country had to blow things out by blowing air into his nostrils and massaging his throat. On an up-coming vacation dad plans to go back to our old country and admit his throat to a hospital in which doctors, having a history of his throat situation and that old lady's solution of 'blowing,' will find a way of curing

<sup>1</sup> Dad is not into pluralism; what can I do?

him for good (a quick job lasting half an hour in which doctors stitch a part of his throat).

Mom took up a cup of Rum and Coca Cola (Classic) and said, “Ara, David, Liana, husband, on this day, I am happy to know in my soul,<sup>2</sup> that our will-as-family will grow, and, moving as if liquid, adapt to any misgivings that this world is willing to throw at us.” Taking a short stop, mom got on with it, “Long ago, in a world which took my body to mould—as a small child—I took part in family rituals which, far from sugar, had units that fought—my mom and dad—and that, I know now, was not a sound situation within which a child should grow, but I, rising amid that static,<sup>3</sup> took away a know-how that only throws a strong will through my body, an authority to do good. I want you, my kin, to hold onto this now, and I wish you to know that I fought for that know-how which I so willingly hand onto you.”

Giving out a sigh, allowing mom’s words to lay on top of my body, I took a sip of my Whisky on Rocks.

### *Author’s Turn To Toast*

It was my turn to say a group of words about Christmas, to mix a bit of family-story into it, to talk about David, Liana,

<sup>2</sup>This word is archaic, and my mom works it in its *archaisity*; what can I do?

<sup>3</sup>No doubt a parody, conscious or not, of a sort of day Soap on TV.

(Tigranuhi) mom, (Arshak) dad, and roast pig—which I had at that instant in my mouth—and which I had to wash down with my Whisky on Rocks so that I could start.

“I had a handful of things that I was in a mood to talk about,” (I took out of my pouch various writings which I would orally shoot out upon command): “A. ‘politics and our family,’ B. ‘going to a zoo and our family,’ and C. ‘music and our family.’”

“I know what you all might think; ‘Ara is trying too hard. Ara is showing off.’ But I’m not.<sup>4</sup> I did a lot of work on my options, which I lay in front of you at this instant. I thought it would ‘stand-out.’ Anyway, pick a topic so I can start.”

Mom, dad, David and Liana took looks around our dining room for signs.

David said, “‘Music and our family.’”

Dad said, “‘Music and our family.’”

Mom said, “‘Going to a zoo and our family.’”

Liana said, “I would pick music and our family but you buy awful music so I pick ‘going to a zoo and our family.’”

(Now this task is upon you. Pick an option A, B, or C.)

## **A. Politics and Our Family**

“Our family has had a solid annual tour on this blindingly

<sup>4</sup>*I was showing off. What can I do?*

dirty soil. All around this world, country upon country, is in war, corrupt capitalism, malady, and Shirinyans go on. I only worry that I might grow numb to that fixing this world is asking for at all turns. I want all of us to cry, to fight, I want us to stay strong and conduct our minds as though our family is busy sifting through trash (capitalist propaganda or our blind nationalisms)...” at this, mom and dad lost a bit of facial pink.

“Son,” said my dad, “prior to starting your own Marxist branch, call to mind that our family found its roots in a Communist country. And that us Shirinyans found it constraining to carry on in such a situation. And don’t say that, ‘that wasn’t Marxism.’”

Liana cut in with, “What has this to do with Christmas?”

(Now, skip parts B and C and go to **bold** portion ‘My Siblings.’)

## **B. Going to a Zoo and Our Family**

“Upon our visit to our local zoo two months ago, containing animals from all parts of this vast world, I got a sad lump in my stomach. Why? Animals—happy in a box. Moving, taking a banana or hay for lunch, not having a displacing thought. I thought about us Shirinyans. Could it, days and months from now, pass around that Shirinyans too ran in similar fashion to that of animals in a zoo? In a box? Happy? Blindingly taking in information from a dominant authority?”

Liana cut in with, “What has this to do with Christmas?”

Mom said, “Oh Liana, don’t you know that Ara is an anti-Christ? In any situation son, don’t ruin Christmas!”

(Now, skip part C and go to **bold** portion ‘My Siblings.’)

### C. Music and Our Family

“Dad plays piano. I play guitar. So music is always around. At birthdays, at work, in our cars, at bars and clubs...dad knows lots of musicians...so always musicians around...sounds which bring sad, happy, in short, sounds that unify us.”

Liana cut in with, “What has this to do with Christmas?”

“A lot!” I said. “For an instant Liana, allow my words to go on. Music—parts, *notas*, bars, plots in music, an analogy for plots in our family, sad, happy, full of fury and guilt, giving and also taking, hydrating and also drying out.”

Mom and dad having lost color, I got in my last words...

“I just want us to bring our rhythm down a bit. For our family’s profit.”<sup>5</sup>

Mom said, “I thought all was good.”

Dad said, “All *is* good. Ara just wants to flash his words around.”

<sup>5</sup>Funny thing is, I’m only saying dramatic things to look colorful; vibrant.

## *My Siblings*

So, concluding my total loss at giving oration to my first following, my only family, I, not wanting to say much in addition, sat in my chair, and thought about things.<sup>6</sup>

David stood up, holding a cup of Coca Cola. David is not a fan of alcohol, and said, "A Crayfish<sup>7</sup> walks up to his dad and says, 'Dad, what color is your blood?' His dad looks at him and says, 'I don't know son.' 'Why don't you know?' asks his son. 'I'm color blind,' says his dad. 'What kind of color blind?' asks his son. 'Son,' says his dad, 'I'm totally color blind!'"

Liana said, "What has that to do with Christmas?"

David said, "I don't know."

Liana said, "Why don't you know?"

"Liana, you know that David is an anti-Christ, so don't construct stumbling blocks for him," said mom.

"But," cut in Liana, "what a humiliation, a nasty traffic

<sup>6</sup>Stuff such as how amazing Grachan Moncur's first album is and how it is similar to "Out to Lunch" by Dolphy, about how difficult it is communicating, about socialism and Arabs struggling to find soil, 'original-land,' about Christ and my up-coming Visa card bill, about my body...about such things was I thinking as I took on this task of my 6th footnoting.

<sup>7</sup>**Information:** David's doing trials with crayfish at school (UCLA), in which his task is to split roots which go to that command post, stimulating and giving drugs and writing down conclusions.

brought about on my Christmas by two anti-Christ's; Ara and David. Mom, dad, Punish Ara! Ground David!" And looking at David and I, "I am imagining a suicidal Santa from your orations."

**Information:** Liana is in high school, has curly hair, which through aid of a hair iron, is now straight. Liana also plucks brows and cooks a-dish-a-night for our family. As a child, Liana's shins had a twist; a circular arch. Watching Liana walk and run into walls was funny, but not for too long. Mom and dad took Liana to an Institution for kids in a similar situation (that is, abnormal growth). Doctors at that Communist-run clinic could not find a practical way of making Liana's shins straight. A doctor put Liana in a tanning booth, thinking low amounts of radiation would do.

### *Now To Part Flatly By Cutting Fruit*

Our post-dining-hour wasn't flat; just non-vocal. But non-vocal as if planning had got to do with it (*saintly*, you could say). Bifurcation would finally halt this story, but until that point, mom had to cut fruits, fruits which sat in a fruit bowl, on a fruit pulpit in our living room, with a sofa partially surrounding that array of crops, nuts and pastry products.

In strict, sharp fashion, mom cut various fruits, and, arranging in quick migrations of hand, from cutting bowl to small individual china for our family, mom finally brought into fruition (you must pardon my silly ass) a work of art consisting of kiwi

slicings, split apricots, tiny Brazilian bananas (without skin), pink figs (bursting with flavor), and sour plums.

Tasty food and fruits did us all in. Soon, family would split into plurals; that unity dividing so that individual tasks may construct about us. Mom and dad would watch Russian TV, Liana would play hip-hop music or call a pal, and David and I would try to mutually (though from contradicting schools of philosophy) think and talk about what had just took-hold of our day.



# Practical Value

Kelan Koning

It was so easy to love him that day

when blood spotted  
my Carter's panties,

another common miracle

like Christ's image, prismatic,  
on the dull refrigerator door.

He was triumphant,  
hurrying me to the car,  
speeding down the pitted road  
to the community market,  
disappearing inside,  
and finally depositing  
his purchase in my arms.

I was nervous, flushed,  
sure by the way the local boys  
stopped playing pinball and held my eye  
as we pulled away in slow motion,  
that my father had made  
a public announcement

The first  
of his girls  
was a woman.

Nothing ever compared to that day,  
driving home with a bag full  
of Kotex and Midol,  
his fingers tapping the steering wheel easily  
as I relaxed into the worn vinyl  
and added my thin soprano  
to his near-tenor, tone-deaf rendition  
of "Amazing Grace."

I hadn't yet realized  
what he saw in me:  
my practical value.

It was so easy to love him that day.

# Poem for Misshapen Wedding Ring Kelan Koning

Sometimes love  
doesn't conquer all.  
"Rings lie," I threaded through my poetry, my testament.  
Tangible proof: You pretended not to recognize yourself  
in the lines. You kept the leaving poems  
in your wallet, the loving poems long misplaced.

There were other things you misplaced.  
The song you wrote for me, the only love  
song I wanted, gone. I pretended not to notice, kept writing poems  
about the space between bodies. You read all  
of them, said they were nice, secretly considered yourself  
a better poet. Shredded the early poems, testament

of our love, and wrote a new testament.  
Named me Steve. Misplaced  
my gender and your ring. Said it was all in fun, amused yourself.  
Kept writing until I was a gay male in love  
with a vending machine repairman. I packed a bag  
of wishbones and roots, all  
I could hold, and penned a one-line letter: Poems,

unlike love, will endure. Used it as a marker for the poems  
I buried in the garden, next to the beets, a time-capsule  
testament  
to what you'd lost. They were all

that was left; you'd misplaced  
me with everything else, love.  
I wonder what you thought to yourself

that night when, facing the refrigerator, you found yourself  
alone. Did you turn to your poems  
for solace? Did you go to the garden, love  
the moist earth under your fingernails as you dug for my  
parched testament?  
Or did you build a fire, warm your ego, wrap yourself  
in my misplaced  
shawl? Maybe you were content after all,

fingering another spine. Perhaps it was all  
you'd longed for moments when you abandoned yourself,  
misplaced affection, wrote poems  
charting my path away from you, your testament,  
your prophecy of our rootless love.

This ring no longer fits my finger; I've used up all  
my words in buried poems.  
You align yourself with arid lovers, revise your last will and  
testament.  
I tend our garden in secret, dumb  
with misplaced memory and untwined love.



# Stillbirth

Kelan Koning

And always in the dream there are vines,  
the ones that tangle in November, frost-bitten,  
too pale to pity, and you among them,  
looking for a ring you have lost which, when found,  
is the ring you gave me when we believed  
in what rings do; the one the jeweler delicately inscribed  
*always.*

And you never see me; I a crow on a wire,  
a straw scarecrow, a stone marker where we waited all Spring  
for sweet peas to push the earth back, unapologetic,  
until we gave up waiting and went to the movies,  
bought a bitter cherry freeze.

But in the dream we are beyond this. You look past the house's  
sad shingles to the warmth of the window overlooking the garden,  
Mount Hood, and I can almost see my form there, hands  
kneading life into dough on the weathered pine of our drop-leaf  
table.

I a crow on a wire, a straw scarecrow,  
a stone marker for our stillborn child, our box of relics;

I can feel your longing, can almost understand  
why you told me not to sing.

# Morning Shift

Wendy Hector

Opening the 'employees only' door, the thick  
and surly tastes of rotten hothouse tomatoes  
and burnt sauerkraut swim sluggish in the air,  
air that numbs your eyelids, makes you sick, but it's

humid like the air you remember from your life  
in Galveston Beach, where you jumped a hopscotch  
around jellyfish by the spoonful, who hovered beneath  
your sandy flip-flopped feet, feet that were rife

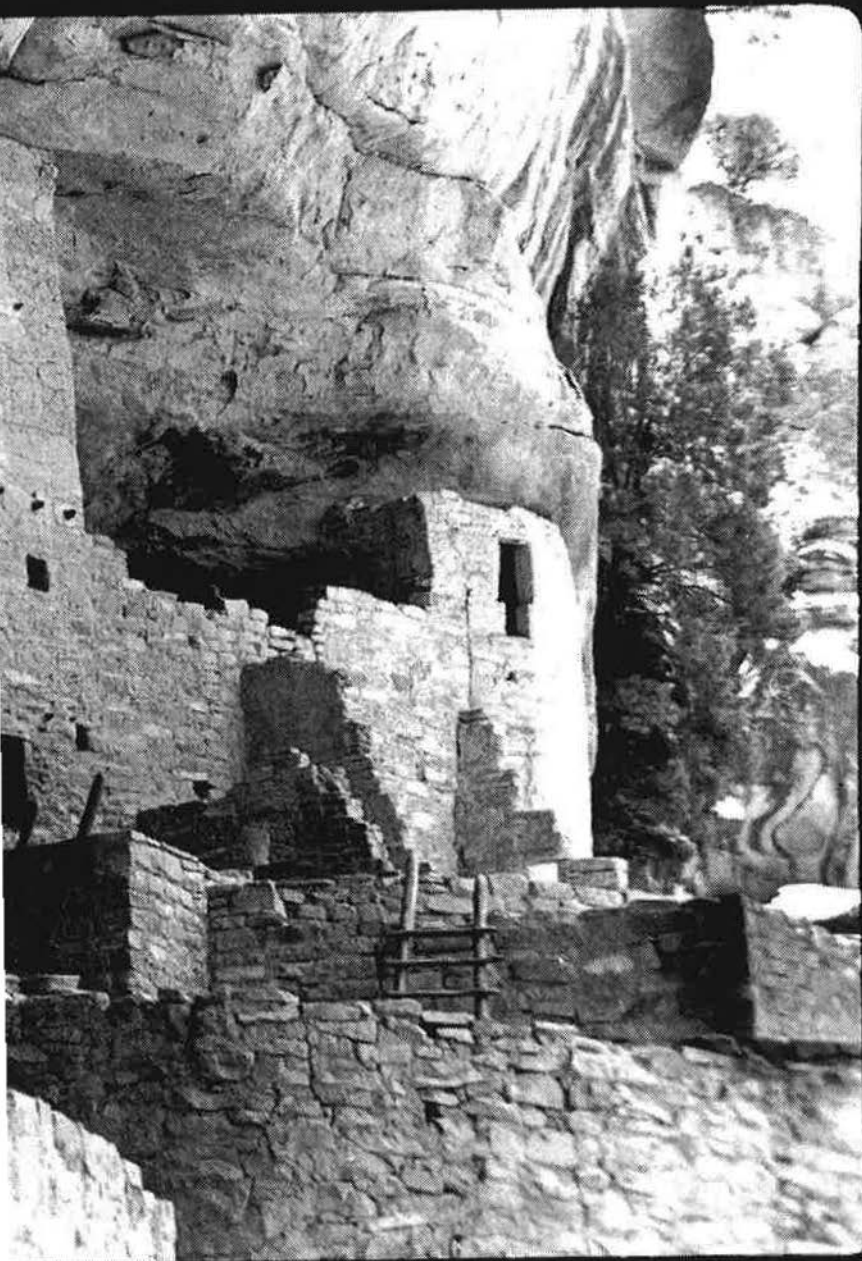
with checkerboard destinations on the  
ocean floor. Your brothers were tossing sandballs,  
aiming for your head, but you saw more  
in the gaudy neon sunset than a free  
light show. You saw the ocean gaping wide  
enough to let the sun sink in its mouth,  
and then a wave came up and licked your toe  
with gold the color of orange juice. And with pride

like lion teeth you thought the gold would last.  
But water seeps away. It left you here,  
as dry as the grains of paprika and salt  
you fire at these plates like a rifle blast

before scurrying out through swinging gray doors,  
apron crooked, tray above your head,  
to heave each steaming plate in front of faces  
that snatch you from the sweetness of the shore.







# Tijuana

Wendy Hector

Nine margaritas sit on the table in front of us  
glowing green in the sunset like a neon pipe  
flashing DRINK ME—is that a sign,  
we wonder, thinking about Alice but really  
we only see the first enticing word before we  
gulp down the syrupy liquid smattered with chunks  
of grainy ice, so cold in this dusty heat  
and now, suitably dazzled, we wander out  
onto the crumbling sidewalk with our hands  
in each others' pockets, three young and brash  
Americans, two boys and a girl  
just looking for a place to smoke  
without being coughed at  
and we think we've found it, and now we pass a  
scrawny man with strips of leather belts hanging  
limp off his arms like tentacles of some broken-down  
carnival octopus ride and his grease-stain of a  
mustache moves as he screams at us something  
that sounds like "GI Joe" but soon gets lost in  
the babbling hum and as we cross from one block to  
the next a mariachi band's tinny tune melds into  
the Spice Girls' "Too Much" gushing out of a  
strip bar and since we know all the words to  
this song we start crooning and sticking our arms

out and swaying our hips as we walk  
accidentally into a table covered with crafts like  
little porcelain frogs playing banjos and there's this  
glazed clock that's shaped like the Empire State  
Building and we gasp and feel really bad as it  
tumbles over and crashes on the ground busting  
into a million pieces.

But the powder-puff moon is almost out  
and we and the vendors look at it for a second,  
and from a corner up ahead some guitar strums  
the perfect dusky chord, making us turn our heads,  
then a breeze from the north puffs the sound away  
but carries with it the scents of Tupperware and  
Lysol spray, and we follow the trail of this new  
plastic smell, walking ahead and apart.

# Game

Wendy Hector

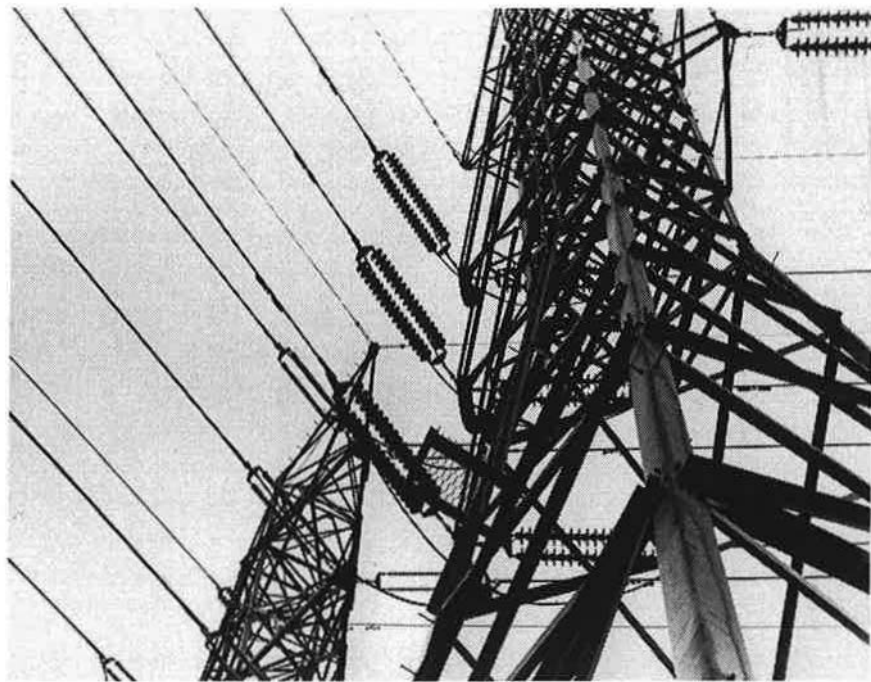
Men fly and crash into glass  
Hands hook over heads  
Silken numbers and names ripple over muscles  
And the wooden floor, slick like a glossy photograph,  
reflects every spiral, pattern, triangle,  
every pump fake, fade-away jumper, no-look pass,  
every rotating body and floating arc.

The young couple sits in front of the screen,  
bathed in light like a laser show.  
And just then an 18-footer goes up,  
hits the rim, gets slapped away, off the glass.  
“That’s called goaltending,” the girl says.  
“It counts for two, like a regular basket.”  
The guy beside her “hmpfs” but doesn’t look up  
from the magazine sitting on his lap.

His eyes sneak a glance at the screen,  
but he only sees boys being boys, running around  
“like chickens with their heads chopped off,”  
heads worth more money than he’ll ever see  
because he can’t put a ball in a hoop  
and doesn’t see the point of trying.

She knows he doesn't care, as he checks his watch and sighs, because he'd rather be watching the news or music videos or a cooking show, but she tells him the rules anyway, and keeps him updated on the score. Feeling his eyes on her back, she feels a little ridiculous when her throat constricts and her limbs tingle and fill with fast-pumped blood as a bounce pass, too low, turns into a beautiful steal, and the ball gets run down the court at jetfighter speed to be smashed into the basket for a two-handed dunk to tie the game, and the crowd erupts like fireworks as the scorer hangs on the rim, swaying like a flag.

"Is it over?" he mumbles as a commercial cuts in. She moves from the couch to the floor and sits Indian-style, folding her hands together tightly, letting them sweat. She remembers waiting in the cold for hours with her dad, watching the line for tickets grow, sharing a soda and later a beer, watching the men fly and run, sometimes crashing into each other, sometimes floating around each other like circling hawks, and she remembers the clock running down to zero, sometimes the pile-up of bodies hugging, sometimes the quiet stride to the locker room; but always the walk to the car, the ride home under the moon. "Not yet," she says.



# Grievances

Wendy Hector

1. Perhaps the warm weather here in L.A. made you ambivalent to human warmth . . . when something isn't lacking, you don't think to look for it somewhere else. But I don't want to blame it all on the weather.

2. Maybe it was your diet. No one can eat that much fish and salad and still retain a semblance of emotional stability. I never wanted much from you, you know. Only the basics: attention, acknowledgment, respect. And when you touched me, I wanted you to touch a real person, not a dashboard or a wallet or a bottle of wine.

3. I like the Mets and the Clippers. You like the Yankees and the Lakers. I should have known it would never last, right from the beginning. There's something about Yankees fans and Lakers fans that doesn't mesh with me; you like teams that win, win, win, at all cost. You're the kind of fans that talk on cell phones through the games, leave halfway through if they're too far behind, only show up to be on TV. You don't know how to stick it out until the end. You don't know what it feels like to cheer for the underdogs who don't have a chance in hell of going all the way. You don't know that kind of dedication.

But our bi-coastal sports team discrepancies weren't the whole reason, either; only a surface symptom of deeper frictions. You



## Grievances

were just happy that I was a girl who would watch a game with you, who could talk basketball with your friends and not embarrass herself. You didn't give a rat's ass which teams I cared about; you just assumed I would gravitate towards your area of fandom. Well, that's not how it works, buster. I'm not a sponge seeking out some guy's personality to suck up and turn into. Although, to be honest, there wasn't much of a personality there to suck up anyway. You're like a kiddie-pool, or a jacuzzi: completely lacking a deep end. I dove into you and I broke my neck.

4. Now, I don't want this to degrade into an insult-fest. But it's not like you'll ever see this list, so what the hell. Here are some specific and, I think, quite vibrant adjectives that come to mind when I think of you.

**ar-ro-gant** Unpleasantly or disdainfully self-important.

**dop-ey** 1. Dazed and lethargic, as if drugged. 2. Stupid; foolish.

**cal-lous** 1. Having callouses; toughened. 2. Insensitive.

**un-for-giv-ing** I couldn't find a definition for this one. But it's the opposite of being a guy that can **for-give** 1. To excuse for a fault or offense; pardon. 2. To stop feeling anger or resentment against. 3. To absolve from payment of.

5. A lot of people make mistakes, you know. Remember when we had tickets to my little brother's first college hoops game? Of course you do. But I'll bet you my broken-down Honda that you remember it completely differently than I do. What really happened,

was, you said you knew how to get there, even though you'd never been to Long Beach before, let alone the college campus. I thought we should ask him for directions, or look online, or something, but we were running late and you and your stupid confidence convinced me. I told you, I told you, I told you the I-5 was the wrong freeway. "It goes south, doesn't it?" was your amazingly illogical response. Well, three hours and fifteen freeways later, we made it, but we missed the first half — which was the only half my brother played in. So. That was a mistake. Did I forgive you for it? Yes. Did my brother forgive me? I think so. Did I forgive myself?

6. The worst part is how much I defended you. When my sister said, "never trust a man who owns a silk robe," I told her you just had an appreciation for fabric. When my friends said you looked at me the same way you looked at waitresses, I told them you just appreciated all women's beauty. And why did you lie to my boss at the New Year's party? He told me that you said we weren't engaged. I swear, I saw purple spots and felt bile rise up in my gullet when he told me that. I never approached you about it, though, but I guess at that point it didn't really matter. There wasn't much time left, anyway. I should have taken it as a sign that you were on your way out.

7. After you left, I didn't show up to work for six days. I didn't do anything for those six days. I sat in bed wearing my Lamar Odom jersey and a pair of your old boxers, which I didn't wash. I picked up the phone about a dozen times to call someone, like my

mom or something, but my throat constricted every time and I put it back in the cradle. Then I decided the speed dial was dangerous, so I erased all the numbers. I had a Corona for breakfast, a Corona for lunch, and two Coronas for dinner each of those days. Come to think of it, my diet hasn't changed much since then. I still have my job, but it just doesn't seem the same anymore. I feel like everyone looks at me like I have a terminal disease, or like I'm a dog at the pound that's about to be gassed.

8. I know you know this, but I am sorry. I can't apologize enough, especially for you. I wish you could have understood.

9. I never told you this, but when I was a senior in high school I thought I had cancer. I had just started smoking a few months before, and one day when I was at my friend Rachel's house watching *The Exorcist* (I think it was Halloween), I put my arms behind my head and felt a bump in my throat, right behind and below my left ear. I never told anyone about it, but I cried myself to sleep every night. It disappeared a few weeks later. Never found out what it was. So what I guess I'm trying to say is, I sort of know what you're going through. The fear was crippling, the fear of not knowing, the fear of my life ending. Of course, I'm not trying to say I completely understand what you feel like, actually being sick, but in some sense I think I can extrapolate from that experience and try to find some empathy. I know you're in remission, and I hope you get better, I really and truly do. I just wish that, when you had called to tell me you were sick, you would have forgiven me instead of

bringing up the past just to hurt me again.

10. I know it's not my fault, you being sick. I'm supposed to repeat that phrase ad nauseum before I go to sleep at night, says my jack-off therapist, the same man who came up with the brilliant idea to make this list. Gee, it sure is working wonders. Totally worth going into debt to pay for his sessions for the way I feel right now. Jesus, I know it's not my fault, I really do. Then why can't I sleep without having those nightmares? And the funny thing is, in the nightmares I give you cancer, but then when I wake up, I blame *you* for giving me the nightmares. Mea culpa, youra culpa, everyone's a culpa, right? That reminds me, I'm almost out of Valium. Not that it's working anymore.

11. My parents told me you were a bad choice to date casually, let alone think about marrying. And now they never let a minute go by without reminding me of it. Oh, and my mother said the most nurturing and sensitive thing the other day: "You should thank God he dumped you when he did. Could you imagine the hell you would be going through with his illness? Thank your lucky stars your not in that other girl's position."

12. How is that other girl, anyway? Still perky and upbeat? Christ, I know I have no right to call you out on that. I really don't. But I am controlling myself. I could have said something rude about her roots, but I didn't. See, Dr. Lester? I'm growing as an accepting human being!

13. I can't even remember the last time I went jogging. I

always thought it was ridiculous that you would drive your car an hour and a half to Griffith Park just to jog, by the way, when there were half a dozen parks in your neighborhood you could have *jogged* to.

14. I miss your satellite television. Isn't that the most disgusting, pathetic thing you've ever heard? But I do. Every time I flip through my sixty channels, I leave it on the preview channel just so I can see what you're probably watching on HBO. You know, if you hadn't landed me in this therapy racket, I could probably afford to get a few pay channels myself.

15. All right, I can't step around the issue anymore. I need to talk about what I've been avoiding or I'll never get over it. I'm not with Benny anymore, so that should make you happy. I think I told you that on the phone. Oh, who am I kidding, I know I told you that, because it tortured me to do it, but I had to say something to make you feel better. And that's when you started to give me a hard time again, and I swear I almost hung up on you. I really wanted to. Can you imagine that? Hanging up on someone who just found out they had cancer. Am I really that cruel?

Okay, enough stalling. Here's my sorry-ass justification for what I did. I thought I was in love with Benny, really in love, like stars-collapsing-around-me in love. Of course, I've since realized (with Dr. Lester's brilliant help, of course) that I only felt that way because of what my current relationship (that's you) was lacking. Basically, I looked at all of the empty holes in our relationship and

subconsciously searched out someone who would fill them. Of course, he couldn't really fill them, but I imagined he could, and in my delirium, I believed myself. Or something like that. I used Benny as a stepping stone to get away from your drowning ship and onto dry land — at least that's an analogy my therapist likes to use. The dry land is, like, my own independence from the male tyranny under which I allow myself to fall or some bullshit. I sure as fuck don't feel very independent right now. I'll tell you something, though, when Benny left me I could only think about you. That was when I was convinced you were going to die, though, I mean, you were in pretty bad shape from what what's-her-face told me on the phone when I called the hospital after I heard that you were put in the ICU. And you know something, I really didn't appreciate that bitch telling me it would be better if I didn't come down. Jesus, what gives her the right to tell me whether or not I can see you in your last moments on earth? I thought they would be your last moments, anyway, and she didn't know any differently either. I asked her if you had told her to say this, and I think she wanted to say yes, but couldn't lie, so she just told me "I think I know him well enough to know that it wouldn't be appropriate for you to be here." Why is it that everything shitty always happens at the same time? I swear I can't take much more of this. Things all happen in threes, though, don't they, so with you getting cancer and Benny leaving me, I guess I've got one more coming.

13. But I digress . . . I can't even remember what number of

## Grievances

the list I'm on, for God's sakes. What is it, twelve or something? I shouldn't have had that last Corona. Forget it. Look, I know it was a really shitty thing I did cheating on you with Benny. I knew it at the time, and I know it even more now. But I had to get away from you. There was no other way. I couldn't just leave you, I had to get you to want to leave me. Before I cheated on you, I had thought about somehow getting up my courage and just ending it, I had thought about getting really drunk so I didn't care and telling you off, I had thought about telling you I was turning into a Hare Krishna or something, so I could let you off easy. But I couldn't do any of those things because I'm weak. I really am a puppy at the pound about to get gassed. Sorry, "euthanized." Jesus, I used so much fucking Lysol in here it smells like a gas chamber, that's for sure. I've been cleaning like a maniac for the last week or so. You should see the place, it's incredible. My counters sparkle so bright my eyes hurt. I even cleaned and polished all of my ashtrays. Pretty pointless work, I know, but it would have made you happy if you had seen it, I know you hated those things.

Don't know where I'm going with this. Only thirteen? I thought it would be longer by now. Still feel confused. Very. Wonder why I did what I did, whatever I did, when I did it, all that I did, I guess it doesn't matter anymore because it's done. Done, done, done. The past is a tricky little bastard, isn't it? You can't go back and change things. You can't! Did you know that? Well I do. I know it

very well. I want to call you, you know, I want to put this list in the mail and send it to you, I want to go to your stupid house and stick it in your stupid face and say 'look what you've turned me into!' I can't get things straight in my own head, I have to put them down on this thing — I can't even count, apparently, I totally fucked up the numbers on this, so I don't even know which page goes before which other page, you know, the order. I just want to go to sleep. But guess what. I'm not letting myself off that easily.

Myself? Not you. Myself. Huh. What do you know, I think I may have just had a breakthrough.

No, it's gone. Whatever spark I just felt has been doused. Sizzle sizzle, splat.

I just want you to know that—well, I just want you to know.



# Movie Man

Muriel Zeller

I went to the movies last night  
and sat next to a man  
who smelled like cloves and Jamaican  
cigars' sweet-thick musk, imagined  
his hand on my breast and liked it,  
committed adultery in my mind's projector,  
admired him in the low light of moving images,  
felt him warm to my honeyed heat.

I caressed our mutual armrest.  
I went to the movies last night  
and sat next to a man I wanted  
until the lights came up  
and we left arm and arm  
with our respective companions.

# Annotations to a Dream

Muriel Zeller

My body is hiving, becoming waxy  
within the grid of its cellular construction.  
I am honey in the breath of bees. My combs  
have a hallucinogenic sweetness. I see  
the beekeeper in the barnyard lifting  
combs from a white-washed box  
of hymenopterous wings.  
He is taking something from Pandora:  
madness sweet in the back of the throat,  
saccharine amber glistening on skin.  
The tongue takes and waits. Here.

Here the unconscious voices funnel  
into my name. Is it the beekeeper who calls  
throughout the empty farm house,  
a multiplication of ricochets room to room?  
Spurious child...I search for the whole  
self, the name no better called than "Love."

# Against Remembering

Muriel Zeller

My best friend's niece calls  
from another state.  
We talk the long distance  
to what she called to say:  
*My grandfather...I have  
these funny feelings.  
I haven't told  
anyone in the family.*  
She calls me her rock.  
Must be aggregate, I think,  
each particulate crumb  
eroding to mark the trail.  
I want to stop talking.  
*No more, moan*  
my mind's cells,  
grey and unpredictable  
as the heart. It is there—  
all the organic fear  
and confusion riding the wire  
from Iowa to California and back.  
It is on television,  
in the paper, in the next poem,  
in the next room,  
in the face of a photograph

of me at three looking out  
of eyes that tell me  
there is nothing to say.  
I am an inadequate mouth  
without the right wisdom.  
I hang up, feeling the cross-cut  
of her call and my recollection.



## ON THE GULF OF NICOYA / EASTERN SHORE

The bay is tepid at the beach and warm as far as we can see, then cool and teal where wind uplifts the running waves. No storm will stir this bowl for months, but rain does steal in from the sea—small showers—grace in form of kisses lightly placed on hand or heel, a welcome change from summer's rigid norm of fiery days and evenings hotter still.

A week of beauty bores us in this heat. But then the Magpie Jay and Trogon vie with weather for attention as we scale a dusty ridge where storks and ibis beat their wings against a humid wall of sky and on our heads their feather fall like hail.

Eloise Klein Healy

Conversation with  
Eloise Klein Healy  
Sylvie Green Shapero

*I know you as an L.A. poet. I also know you as a Lesbian poet, as an artist of the Women's Building, and as a woman who used to teach at CSUN but now heads the MFA Creative Writing Program at Antioch L.A. Let's talk about that first.*

In our MFA, all the students have to do a field study, so there's something besides writing and reading or being in a class or being in school. They have to *do*—doing becomes the teaching in a way that your thinking about or studying about and reading about won't be. For example, if somebody said, "I'd like to know how to make a book," they have to go out and learn how to make the book and the product.

*That's what I think is really cool about working on The Northridge Review.*

You do the whole thing.

*And by the end you really have something—you're gonna have something with what you did.*

Something physical.

*Yeah. It's an artifact. One of your poems—about the woman who said don't stand in that place where the wind blows.*

Oh. "Advice Like That." You know that really happened, the whole thing.

*Do you think by sending people out they're coming away with*

## Interview

*experiences like that—I mean, to just write what she said is such a powerful poem—just what she said.*

A lot of the students who come to Antioch are a little bit further down the road in terms of their experiences because we go from 23 years old to 70, so—and probably an average age of around 35, 37—so they've already got some content. But the field work—we like to have them do something so that they don't think their writing is only limited to their act of writing on the paper or on the screen, but that they learn about the whole, um, I guess I would call it the world of expression with all its normalities.

*Was that frustrating to you do you think—that the students at Northridge were so young?*

No. I don't care what students are. In fact, I was talking about this yesterday to a guy who's graduating from our program and he was wanting to know, basically, how do I get ahead. I said do a good job with the people who are in front of you. I mean, you're gonna be a teacher, my idea always is that you teach students; you don't teach subjects.

Your job as a teacher is to figure out how to get that subject into that student, not just to broadcast the subject. Particularly, like for writing students, how to get them not to need me so that I can help them reflect on how to be more self-aware—about what they know, what they don't know, how to fix it, how to incorporate good habits so that when they hit a little icy patch in their work, they don't go, my life is over, my career is dead. They can say, oh yeah,

alright, here's where I am, what am I going to get out of it? So that they don't need me around to tell them that they can go forward.

My goal has always been never to leave any fingerprints on anybody, that they become the best writer they are, not another me. I'm already being me. They should be them.

But that's a struggle, I think, for anybody—you can't do without models entirely and at the same time you can't let yourself be stuck to the model forever. At some point you have to say, OK, I want to know how this person wrote this sequence of poems. How would I do it?

*In a way that would develop their own voice as a writer.*

Right. Yeah. I just had a student do a paper on that.

*That's my new discovery.*

Why did you come upon that idea?

*The idea of voice?*

Uh-huh.

*I think I had a breakthrough with voice about a year ago where I finally—I've been told that I finally listened to, "Say it! Just write it!" Don't ask, "What am I supposed to be doing?" Kate Haake calls it writing intransitively. Just write. Don't think about how to write a story. OK, the first paragraph is supposed to blah blah blah.*

Yeah.

*And as soon as I broke through that, then I just felt so much more comfortable in my writing.*

I have a student right now who's dealing with that, trying to



just get her to say it without going through this torture sideways thing.

*Because we see these examples too, we think that's what we're supposed to do, that's what we're supposed to be. There's a poem in here—it reminded me of voice because it was about just letting everything speak for itself—the bamboo.*

The Korean woman.

*Can you tell me the story of the Korean woman and the bamboo?*

There was a Korean family that lived, um, it wasn't right next door to me but it was like one house down from me and they had a very old grandmother there. She lived with them. And the family was kind of busy and she would walk up and down the street—the grandmother—and she had no English. And I would wave at her and she would wave, and that was about as far as we could go. You know, it was an odd feeling because we didn't have a single word and I don't know why she came down the driveway and picked that particular plant. I mean, maybe she just had a feeling for it. I had a really beautiful bamboo plant and she always would look, you know, take a look at it.

*And then with a story like that would you kinda tuck it away?*

Well this book was really meant to function almost in the same way a journal would, although it isn't a journal. It's supposed to feel that if you pick up any one of these pages there is something about the life of this particular figure who is somewhat unnamed.

I had a feeling like somebody could know something about this person in this place and this time. You could know a lot of things about the person even if she weren't identified. It's like an accumulation. For example, if you walk into somebody's house and you look around, you can tell something.

Or the theory of furniture—somebody said to me “do you know how many times you use the word patio in this book?” And I said “no, how many?” And she said “17.” I didn't go through and count, but, you know, where do you spend your time?

*I read a few of the poems out of order and the way that they touched each other, even reading them out of order, was the same effect as how they touched each other in order, which is, I think, what you were talking about, getting to know this person through these little things.*

I knew what I wanted to do. I mean, I knew themes so I would work on the themes. I remember at one point I said to myself, I don't have enough moon poems; OK, I have to start paying attention to the moon. Because I built it around all the structures related to Artemis. So Artemis is a moon goddess. She's the goddess of animals and the hunt and childbirth. She's the goddess of the wilderness.

*I noticed the moon coming up, and one thing I love in writing is when someone takes an archetype or a cliché or an idiom and uses it in a new way, turns it around. I think that helps you define their intersection of self and history—how the thing that has been around for*

## Interview

*so long is just going to change in this person's historical moment. So in, um, "Only the Moonlight Matters," we have that moon. "We have it all in its own round time touched up by moonlight on schedule." And I love that "round time." That's what I'm talking about—that precision of language—how that word, round, is displaced. Nobody describes time as round, but it's perfect.*

Well, see, moon time is round. Unlike the sun, which we pretty much always experience as a disk, the moon—we see it rounding, you know, it keeps opening and then it closes, and then we see it opening again, and closing, kind of like a round movement of its own self.

*So it's about the moon and it's about time. A very interesting thing happened to me in the way of synchronicity when I was at Midnight Special looking for your book because, now that I know I'm gonna be an L.A. writer, I need to use my material more. And, so, the title of it, Artemis in Echo Park, I thought, OK, this woman is an L.A. writer and she's gonna teach me something about being an L.A. writer. And so I went out to Midnight Special looking for your book, can't find it, they say they'll special order it, in like six weeks, I'm like, no. I'm running late for Mona Houghton's class. Get in my car, uh, uh, uh, on the freeway. Stuck in traffic, stuck in traffic, turn on NPR, and there you are, on the radio. And I wouldn't have heard it if I would have been on time for class. And so I wrote it down.*

On the freeway.

*I've learned to drive with just my knees. I think it was Warren*

*Olney, from Which Way L.A., who used the term "synthesizing voice" on his radio show along with the writer Hector Tobar and Steve Wasserman, from the L.A. Times. They talked about the new issues of the LA writer, like mixed race identity. And you said, "That person is probably 12 years old right now." So how do you see those issues coming up now?*

Well, um, literature deals with experienced things. Certain things that we have happening at the moment, they happen really quickly, but at the same time the way we process them and the way they work themselves into being, what we consider normal life, that takes longer. It takes a long time. Even the demographics from the last census to this one—it's really fascinating to watch just who's where. Who is here now. Ten years ago, you know, they weren't here. For twenty or thirty years, at least, there's been a lot of discussion of Los Angeles as a multiethnic city. So, what I meant by that was, if you take the speed of the experiences that we've been having, and then you take the speed of the time it takes somebody to reflect on that, and then you take the speed of the time that it takes somebody to actually live them and reflect on them, those are three different decades.

So we may all be saying, "Yeah, this is a very ethnically mixed city," but my experience of it is that the Blacks lived in one place, the Chicanos lived in one place, the Vietnamese lived in one place, the White folks kind of lived in one place and there were all these different camps. Then those lines started to blur. Then the

## Interview

blurring started to happen within peoples' relationships with each other. And then it's going to happen internally next, in the single individual. That's happening.

So, you know, I think, one of the things about civil rights and feminism and any kind of movement about identity—a lot of people see those things as fractional life, but I always think of those things as discussions on the way to talking about how individuals are really constructed of a lot of different individuals. So you say White person. Well, that's not a single category either. Or if you say Black person, that's not a single category either. Maybe that's partially Native American, maybe that's partially German, maybe that's partially West African, maybe that's partially Jamaican.

I think Hector Tobar is in that second step. Hector's an excellent writer and he's going to show people a lot of things about immigrant experience slightly different than the first step of immigrant experience. One of the things I learned at CSUN was the immigrant experience is very different for the immigrant than it is for the immigrant's children.

*OK, so, a couple more things I want to ask, um, my friend Tracy Bachman went to your reading at LACMA and she told me you love baseball.*

I do. When I was in school I played softball competitively, so I know the game. I know everything about it.

*And that's something that you don't write about.*

A little bit, not a lot. Probably I don't because I have a

limited amount of time. And also, in my writing life, I have often come up against people saying to me you shouldn't be writing about that. People used to always say that to me about cars, why do you write about cars? Particularly women's magazines or journals. I would send them, and they would send them back saying, what's wrong with you? Why are you writing that? That's not a women's topic. I said, I don't know about you guys, where you live, but I'm in the car all the time. If it doesn't become metaphorical to me, I'm in trouble. Where do I spend my time?

*That's why I can drive with my knees. She also said that you came out during your poetry reading.*

I've been doing that lately as a strategy.

*So that people understand your perspective?*

So that they have to deal with it. Because if I don't say it, it's there anyway, and then there are little weird things going on with the audience. So I just say it. OK, now here's who I am, you have to deal with me. Let's get over all the weirdness. There are so many preconceptions. I just feel like I should be there. Arrived. And let them know that this is who I am as an individual, now just deal with it. Because I'm gonna write, and I'm gonna read you what I wrote, and you've got to factor it in.

*Yeah, um, I—I bet you used to teach this class—one of the first writing classes I took at CSUN was Lesbian Writers.*

Yeah, I taught the first one there was.

*Did you make it up?*

Interview

Yeah.

*And then Jan Ramjerdi taught it. She left, too. But because she had said, I'm a Lesbian writer, that gave us all permission to write whatever we wanted. It was so comfortable. And that's when the whole voice process started.*

Unless you are something, you don't know how many prohibitions there are.

*The last thing I'm gonna ask you is about the Women's Building in downtown L.A. It closed down a few years ago.*

About 1991. '90, '91.

*Is it going to reopen?*

No.

*Is there anything in it right now?*

No, everything's out of there. But the good thing about everything being out of there is that the archives of the Women's Building went to the Smithsonian, so the records of the Women's Building and the products of the Women's Building, like a lot of the material stuff of the Women's Building, is archived.

I've had a couple of experiences in the last year that really—I mean, when I was at the Building, I knew what was happening there. But now that it's gone and there are other historical things that have come along, I have a different appreciation for what was happening there. I was aware that this was a one-of-a-kind institution at that moment, that this was a major feminist institution, to have a building that was under the control of women. They were

raising the money for it, they were doing the electrical, they were doing the plumbing, they were doing everything. You know, to have that going on, and it was totally dedicated to women's art making—it was a big deal.

Judy Chicago and Arlene Raven—well, Judy Chicago started out at Fresno, and she and Arlene Raven and Sheila de Brettville were all art teachers. And what they began to talk about, was the fact that women artists were severely underrepresented and, although the graduate schools had a lot of women in them, by the time it's into the galleries, or people selling stuff, the women have disappeared. Also, where are women in art history? So they look ahead, and they look back, and they see, uh oh, there's a problem here; there's no education for women artists in how to break through into the world of being a professional artist. And a whole lot of it is about gender. They have to learn who they are, what they're doing, why the personal is the political, and all that stuff.

Arlene Raven is a feminist art historian and Judy Chicago is an artist and Sheila deBrettville is a graphic designer—in fact, she's the chair of the Yale Graduate School of Design. So those three got together and decided that what they wanted to found was a feminist art institution where they would do the educating and they would do the training, and it would be a feminist model of organization and behavior.

*Were they friends of yours?*

They weren't friends of mine until I went there. Right about



## Interview

when I was starting to write seriously, and I realized that the way that I had been taught was going to get me nowhere—you know, it was, I mean, I come from a generation in which—I went to a women's college. It was a private school. It was a very fine education. And although our professors were very intent on making us professionals, for the people who were thinking about writing, there was always still the idea that women writers were always kinda like second class citizens. And that was a struggle. I mean, it was the most basic primitive struggle about it, because there was no theory around at that moment to help me with that. It was always just a feeling of Huh? Why? What? Uh! No models, no nothing. No nice professor to say, OK dear, what you need to read is this; there was nothing to read. There was no way to know what to do.

So I read about this thing, a conference. I went to it. It was a totally life-changing experience. Here I thought of myself as this person who was thinking to write poetry. I didn't know anybody. There were three hundred women there. They were all writers, or trying to be writers, and there we all were, and I thought, I am not alone. This is possible. It was really, I thought, just like, the beginning of possibility. This is different; it's a whole different ballgame.

*There's the baseball metaphor!*

I mean, literally, it was a league of our own. Forget trying to break into that other league; we'll make our own league! And what the Building did, was, you know, if we can round our little discussion out, one of the things Sheila de Bretteville said was never

make one of anything. Print in multiple. Make books. Make broadsides. Make chapbooks. Make postcards. Make a lot of them; it's cheap! This was just a little bit before computer graphics, so we were all learning how to do letter-press printing and, you know, setting our own type and learning to run little print machines and people were publishing their own books, and, actually, two of my books were published from presses that came out of the Building.

# Por Mi Patria Chica La Soledad

Luis Omar Salinas

Por los caminos rusticos de la soledad  
camino,

entristecido  
sonador de las estrellas.

Manana, con pedazos de nubes  
a mi lado,

reparo mi corazon con  
poesia Nerudiana

y la mujer  
de pensamientos amorosos

como un panal  
de lunas

en el abrigo  
de la ilusion.

# For My Small Country

Luis Omar Salinas

Through the roads of rustic solitude  
I walk

saddened  
dreamer of the stars.

Tomorrow will be at my side  
repairing my heart

with patches of clouds  
and lines of Neruda's poetry.

But for now, a woman hovers  
with amorous thought

like pollinating bees  
in the moonlight's

coat  
of illusion.

Translated by Grant Marcus

# Negra Noche

Luis Omar Salinas

Negra noche  
Negra noche  
de mi llanto.  
Diciembre  
te esta  
cantando  
la luz se  
va del llano  
mi madre  
se esta muriendo.  
mi madre se esta  
acabando.

# Black Night

Luis Omar Salinas

Black night  
Black night  
Of my tears.  
December sings  
to you  
like the simple  
song  
of moonlight  
leaving  
the meadow.  
My mother is dying.  
My mother is gone.

Translated by Grant Marcus

# Tibet Woman

Lyn Lifshin

You think I seem calm? I've learned to listen.  
We heard stories of those who wouldn't do what  
they said, starving, walking thru Tibet with  
no shoes. They told us we should be grateful

for food and clothes, for not being beaten.  
They gave us "bitterness meals," strange herbs,  
told us there'd be jails with scorpions, knives  
to cut tendons. They told us we had been slaves,

how the others lived off our sweat. I listened,  
said nothing. I think of the bamboo, of walking  
on the tender green. I think of plum blossoms  
in a picture book, of the sweet smell of rain-soaked

leaves, less sweet than my daughter's hair. I feel her  
breath against my skin, her small tongue like the  
inside of a flower. But I hold mine. I don't stick it  
out in our greeting of friendliness as I once used to.

I taste the bitter, the sour and sweet, the salt, have  
heard of women who would not listen, whose tongues  
were sliced and tossed in the snow. Calmness is my  
mask. Sometimes I rub my tongue along my daughter's  
skin but usually even when it burns, I hold it





# Who Held the Camera So Steadily and Why?

Lyn Lifshin

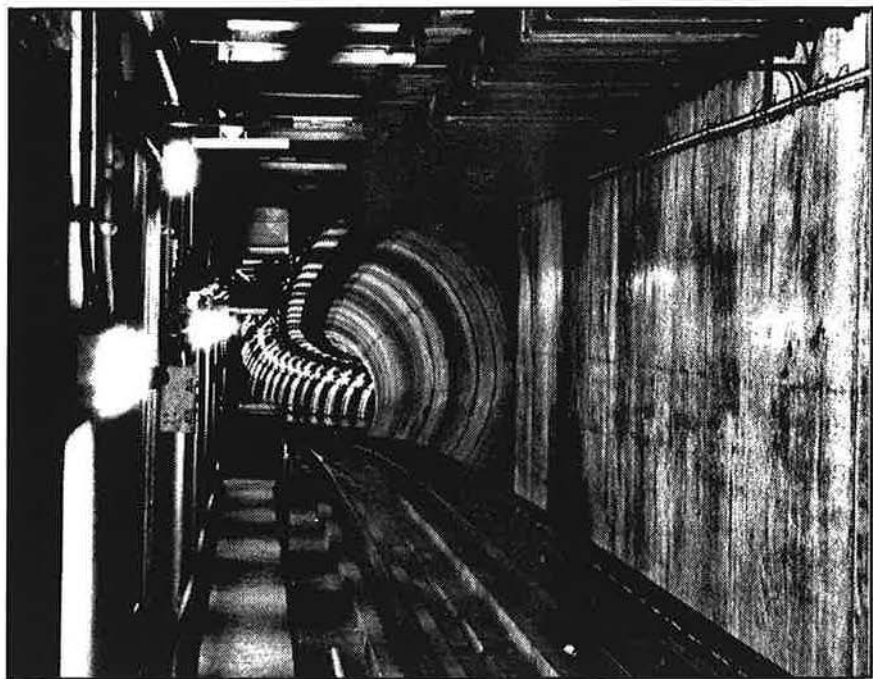
Photographs  
at the Holocaust Museum.

In black and white  
a naked girl  
maybe six  
gripped by the neck  
in the hands of a woman  
with huge biceps.

*A mentally disturbed girl  
shortly before her murder.*

Near the dangling girl  
is a photo in summer-  
trees are fully leafed,  
dark smoke pours  
out of one building.

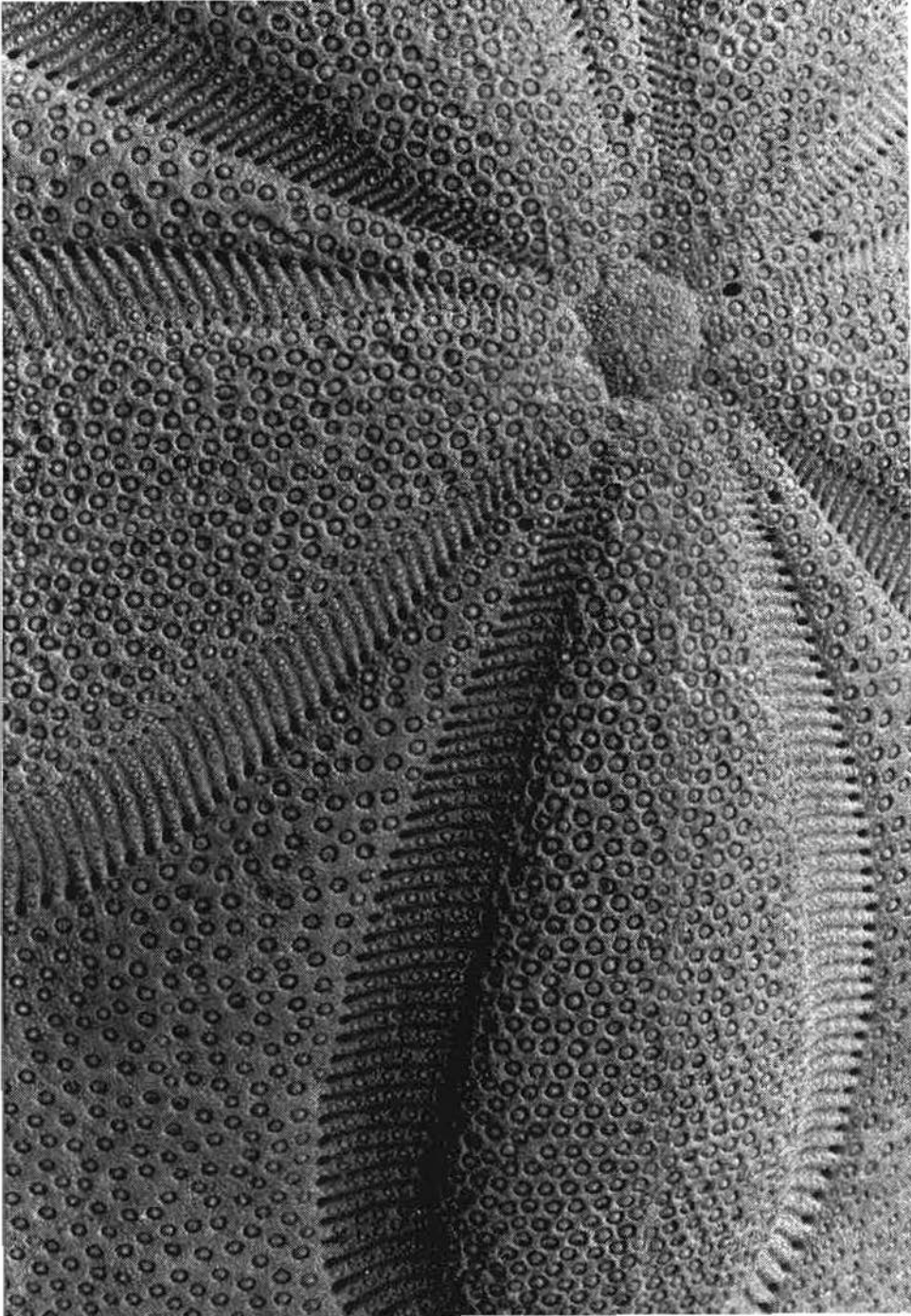
Down the hall  
a young man with glasses  
takes aim at a man  
kneeling  
in front of a pit of bodies:  
The pistol points at the neck  
so no shattered bone  
will fly his way



Years Later Lorena  
Thinks of the Penis  
She Had for a Day

Lyn Lifshin

how, in her hand,  
it was so much  
less angry,  
more like a  
scared bird  
not the weapon  
she'd known  
but shrivelling,  
scared, a wounded  
kitten coiled  
into itself, into  
her hands as if  
she was skin, a  
caul it could  
find refuge in,  
it was no  
longer a fist  
of blood, punching,  
a sword of bone  
and because it  
seemed to  
quiver, dream of  
flight she'd  
just let it go



# Bananas

Brian Scott

*The setting is a typical middle class suburban white household in the evening. SON and DOMINANT MALE are sitting at a table. DOMINANT MALE is cutting up a banana and putting it in his cereal. When he talks he makes exuberant hand gestures and occasionally flings part of the banana. SON is reading a textbook titled Marxism Today. MOTHER is sitting on a couch reading a magazine titled Bananas Monthly. When asked a question she only nods her head.*

DOMINANT MALE: Oh honey, you wouldn't believe what happened at work yesterday. You know that jerk Eric from Human Resources? (MOTHER *bobs her head*) Ya, that's the guy. Well he had the gall to come into my department today and have everyone fill out a productivity survey. I knew they were trimming some fat from accounting, but I didn't think they'd touch my department. So he gives the surveys to all my assistants and then he has the nerve to give one to me! I told him flat out... What the fuck is this Eric?!? I'm the head of the department and if the Execs have a problem with me they can come down and say it to my face instead of sending a little shit like you down to see how fucking productive I am! Get the hell out of my office! Man, you should have seen him tuck tail and run. As he was running out I shouted... (*gets up and shouts towards the audience, pointing with his banana cutting knife*)...I own this department you little bitch!!! (*laughs*)

DOMINANT MALE *looks over at SON, who has been reading.*  
Oh, so Son. How was your day?

Bananas

SON'S *head moves up and he seems a bit surprised to be addressed.*

SON: Oh, well it was okay. I'm having a hard time in my science class again, but I got a B on that tough French test that we had to conjugate verbs and...

DOMINANT MALE *interrupts* SON.

DOMINANT MALE: You know how much French people piss me off? You wouldn't believe what those little stinky bastards did. At lunch when we went to that French restaurant that Jennie suggested (*taps spoon on table as he's thinking*) (To MOTHER) What's the name of it? ... (MOTHER *shrugs her shoulders and doesn't respond*) Ya, I can't remember either...to damn hard to pronounce....Le rude Europeans is what they should call it. But anyways...

SON *gets up from the table, but father and MOTHER don't notice. The lights dim on them and DOMINANT MALE keeps on talking and making hand gestures, but is inaudible. After a few seconds, MOTHER puts down her magazine and exits. SON crosses the stage and is opposite of the dinner table. He stands and directly addresses the audience.*

SON: So apparently I have a normal life. I have a Mom (*gestures*)...a Dad (*gestures*)...a house to live in...friends to hang out with...all of the basic normal elements that should be in my life...right? But even with all this normalness, sometimes...a lot recently...I feel like I'm just floating. Adrift in outer space, like some poor Cosmonaut who's cart wheeling through infinity after the Mir suddenly depressurized. I just can't seem to relate to anyone these days. I mean look at him (*points to DOMINANT MALE*)... How am I supposed

to relate to a father that only cares about his business and spends his weekends golfing or on business trips to Europe? He talks to the dog more than me! And the guy's such an asshole! Just look at him at work...

*SON does not exit, but moves to the far corner of the stage as if he was observing. Stagehands come in and clear the table, which becomes DOMINANT MALE'S desk. A mannequin dressed like a secretary is placed on a chair opposite from DOMINANT MALE.*

*SECRETARY obviously doesn't speak, however DOMINANT MALE pauses for her to speak as if she was really responding. DOMINANT MALE is on the phone, which is a large banana.*

DOMINANT MALE: Listen you spineless sack of shit, I want this done now!

*<Pause>*No, I don't know why the city's on our ass!

*<Pause>*Well that's your job, fix it! *(Slams the phone down)*  
*(To himself)* Fucking accountants.

SECRETARY: ...

DOMINANT MALE: *(To SECRETARY)* What? Who else is on the phone?

SECRETARY: ...

DOMINANT MALE: No, I don't want to talk to him now.

SECRETARY: ...



Bananas

DOMINANT MALE: He's upset? No. I'm upset! Just tell him to fuck off. ... Or just leave a message.

*<Pause> Picks up organizer and looks at watch.*

Where's my 3 o'clock? It's 3:15 already!

SECRETARY: ...

DOMINANT MALE: Sorry doesn't cut it sister.

SECRETARY: ...

DOMINANT MALE: Well call the bastard!

SECRETARY: ...

DOMINANT MALE: Yes at home! Tell him to reschedule for Thursday.

*<Pause> Picks up the phone and dials.*

John, how the hell you doing? Listen buddy... *(Interrupted)*

*<Pause> Huh? ... What?!?*

*<Pause> They won't pay us? Why the fuck not?*

*<Pause> The banana factory failed inspection?!?*

*<Pause> Who cares, we still built the damn thing!*

*<Pause> Then sue the sons of bitches!*

DOMINANT MALE *slams the phone down, stands up, and addresses the audience.*

Sue! Sue! Sue! It's the best thing to do! I remember the days when lawsuits were a last alternative, not a first course of action. No one talks anymore, just subpoenas.

*<Pause> He paces around for a minute, reminiscing and lost in thought.*

Oh well. *(sighs)* Guess I'll have to bury their asses in court!  
(To SECRETARY) Get my lawyer on the phone.

SECRETARY: ...

DOMINANT MALE: Yes the one O.J. hired. *(sarcastic)* Why do you think I'm using him?

SECRETARY: ...

DOMINANT MALE: No you can't order more supplies. We're already over budget for the month.

SECRETARY: ...

DOMINANT MALE: *(getting angry)* So bring some pens from home! *(To himself)* Jesus, am I the only one who uses his brain in this office.

DOMINANT MALE *gets up, packs up his briefcase, and throws his coat over his shoulder. He begins to leave...*  
(To SECRETARY) Oh and make sure to pay off my BMW this month.

Bananas

SECRETARY: ... (*says something that angers DOMINANT MALE*).

DOMINANT MALE *Spins around and points at receptionist.*

DOMINANT MALE: Look, how many times do I have to tell you! (*yelling and punctuating words*) Remember who signs your check, and shut the fuck up!

DOMINANT MALE *throws bananalphone at receptionist and exits.*  
SON *returns from the corner of the stage and moves in front of where DOMINANT MALE was sitting*

SON: Apparently this is pretty normal. I should be thankful that my dad's a good businessman and in charge of an important department. And a lot of people don't connect with their parents. I mean we're from different generations, we don't listen to the same music, he wears Armani suits and I wear... (*Looks down at the grungy clothes he's wearing*)...well this... oh yeah and all he cares about is eating bananas.

SON *goes down and sits in the desk that DOMINANT MALE just left.*

And I wish I could talk to my Mom more, but... I mean she's a nice person and all, it's as if she doesn't have the ability to think on her own and has to rely on my dad or the media or pop culture or some stupid magazine to tell her what to think...

MOTHER *enters and sits where SECRETARY was. She immediately picks up her magazine, blocking SON'S view of her face.*

Oh, hey Mom.

MOTHER: (*not putting down her magazine*) Yes...?

SON: I was wondering if you could help me with something. It's just that there's this girl at school that I think I like but I just don't know...(*interrupted*)

MOTHER: Oh, no...not girls! You should ask your father about them. He knows how to sweep the ladies off their feet.

MOTHER *puts her magazine down and stares off into the distance.*

What a gentleman your father...

SON: Ya...I'm sure...<Pause> So I'm worried about this college thing. I don't know if I want to stay at home and go to a JC, or move out and go somewhere on the East Coast. And then I don't really even know what I want to major in...(*interrupted*)

MOTHER: That's what you have college councilors for. Talk to them.

SON: (*a bit discouraged*) Oh...Well what do you think?

MOTHER: Hmm...Well, in *US News* it says that all those Ivy League schools are the best, but the state ones are a lot cheaper. And don't even think that were going to open our wallets to you ...remember what your father told you.

SON: I know, I know...for my 18th birthday I'm getting a rent check.

MOTHER: Damn straight.

Bananas

SON *gives* MOTHER *shocked look, gets up and paces around for a minute.*

SON: Mom. Have you ever felt like...I dunno...like you don't belong sometimes?

MOTHER *slams the magazine down. She is very interested all of a sudden.*

MOTHER: Oh my God are you depressed! There was this Oprah special on depressed teens and she said that you need some of the Prozac. Let me get the doctor on the phone and see what he thinks.

SON: No, it's not really that. It more just like I'm having trouble fitting into the big scheme of things. Do you know what I mean? *(no response)* Kinda? ...

MOTHER *reverts to her stage of non-interest and picks up the magazine.*

MOTHER: Well I was reading in Cosmo that best way to fit in is to look like everyone else. Why don't you dress like those adorable little friends of yours?

SON: Because...well...they're...

SON *cuts away from* MOTHER *and addresses audience.*  
MOTHER *exits.* JOHN *enters and lays down on couch.*

I think my mom likes my friends even more than I do. mean they're cool guys to hang out with and we seem to have a great time together. It's just that whenever I try to

publicly ponder any postulated philosophical problem...my friends either laugh and think I'm making a joke or ignore my proposal and call me gay. This is usually what we do.

*SON sits on a stool with a yo-yo in hand. JOHN is stretched out lounging on couch and is playing with a tennis ball. MATT enters in the middle of eating a banana.*

MATT: Dude! Last weekend was the fucking bomb! Crazy shit...

SON: You go to Shelly's party?

MATT: Ya, it was...*(interrupted)*

JOHN: Oh man! I hate that bitch!

MATT: But her parents are always out of town and they have a wet bar...with bananas.

JOHN: Still, I hate that little slut.

SON: Hey man, she's not that bad.

JOHN: *(To SON)* He only likes her cause he fucked her...

SON: What? Why did you sleep with her?

MATT: Dude, it was only once and I was soooo drunk...

JOHN: Is that the only way you get laid?

MATT: I'm gonna kick you in the balls if you don't shut up...  
I have a crazy story...

## Bananas

MATT *moves over to SON'S stool and rudely gestures for him to move.... MATT takes over the stool and tosses his banana peel on the floor. SON moves cross stage from and starts to yo-yo standing up.*

So check this out. I get to Shelly's place at like 10 and already those jock assholes had drunken all the beer...

JOHN: Those guys are such ass-wipes.

MATT: So we were all broke and anyways her parents took away her fake ID.

JOHN: I know where this is going...

MATT: So we were left with only one alternative of course...

JOHN: *(very excited)* Beer run!

MATT: *(continues)* We get her Chevy and pull it up to the 7-11 at like midnight. So she's at the wheel and me, John, and Brad all run in and start grabbing all the liquor that we can. But fucking brad is already so stoned...

JOHN: And he's such a dumb ass anyways...

MATT: That he grabs that huge banana display case...

JOHN: Oh, shit, you mean the big glass one?

MATT: Ya!...I don't know what the hell he was thinking. So John and I had already thrown two cases of Miller in the back of the truck and John had a few bottles of vodka in his jacket...

MATT *stands up and demonstrates the following.*

And then fuckin' Brad comes running out and throws the banana case like a goddamn football. It goes sailing over the truck and crashes into this Honda that's just parked.

JOHN: Oh shit!

MATT: Then Abdul or whatever the fuck his name is, comes running out yelling shit and Shelly just takes off, but Brad isn't even in the truck, so he grabs onto the tailgate and is hanging on for his life on the back of her Chevy.

JOHN: Dude, what happened?

MATT: Oh it was cool. We just pulled his fried ass up and dropped him in the back. He just lay there shivering and pissing in his pants. Dude, the night got so much crazier... We got back to Shelly's house and there were all these monkeys there, throwing poo and eating bananas. MATT and JOHN *talk for a few more seconds and then exit.*

SON: See what I mean? I can't relate to any of the normal people I know. Maybe I should try to be more like them. Talk like they talk. Wear the clothes they wear. Listen to the same music. Eat bananas.

*By this time, MATT and JOHN have exited. SON spies a banana on a table and picks it up.*  
That's what I'll do...I'll eat a banana.

SON *starts to eat the banana. As he eats the banana the song "Leper with the Face of a Baby Girl" by Mike Patton starts to play very loud.*



## Bananas

*MATT and JOHN enter wearing trench coats and dark sunglasses. They are carrying signs and stand on elevated boxes at the right and left corners of the stage. As the song gets loud SON starts to "dance" to the song by appearing to have a seizure to the music. Later on he falls on the floor and appears to be hemorrhaging. Every 5 seconds or so MATT and JOHN drop a sign revealing a different one underneath. The signs MATT is holding are spray-painted words. The signs JOHN has are pictures. The sequence of the signs is as follows...*

MATT: (Blank Sign)

JOHN: Picture of a banana

MATT: "Assimilation"

JOHN: Picture of a happy family

MATT: "Living a Lie"

JOHN: Pictures of people playing sports

MATT: "Empty Life"

JOHN: Picture of a businessman sitting on top of the earth, smoking a cigar

MATT: "American Pig"

JOHN: Norman Rockwell's, "Paying the Bills" 1921

MATT: "Shallowness"

JOHN: Picture of George Washington, a tank, and a dollar bill

MATT: "Self-interests"

JOHN: Picture of an attractive pop star

MATT: "Vanity"

JOHN: Picture of a happy couple

MATT: "Divorce Rate 50%"

JOHN: Various pictures of money, the stock market, and wealth

MATT: "Greed"

JOHN: Picture of someone in a suit sitting in a desk

MATT: "Becoming a Commodity"

JOHN: Picture of different ethnicities holding hands around the earth

MATT: "Lies"

JOHN: Look Deeper

MATT: Look Deeper

*At the end of the song, SON gets up and starts screaming with the song and then passes out. JOHN and MATT drag the flaccid SON off the stage.*

# Wolpno

David Landau

“All right, calm down.” Mrs. Wolpno had not had an easy morning. It seemed that with each day her class was getting worse. Today was no exception. Two-thirds of them had forgotten to bring their books; the other third was without a doubt on crack, or something worse, and now someone had spray painted “Wolpno eats rectum muffins” on the blackboard. She didn’t even know what a rectum muffin was, let alone how you would go about eating one. Her patience was running low. But today she would take back control. Her plan had started two weeks earlier, when Lloyd had joined in class. The cover story was that Lloyd had transferred into the school from another district. What the class didn’t realize was that Lloyd was actually a human clone that Mrs. Wolpno had grown in her greenhouse. Specifically Lloyd was a human clone with a genetically engineered brain the size of a pea. He could walk, eat, shit, and thanks to an old Atari game console Mrs. Wolpno had rigged, Lloyd could speak commands that were sent into his brain from Mrs. Wolpno’s keyboard. His blank stare and clumsiness made him fit right in with the rest of the class. And now was Lloyd’s time to shine. As he stood up, Mrs. Wolpno fingered the keys on her keyboard behind the desk. Lloyd emitted a high pitched scream and the whole class went silent. All attention was on Lloyd. His mouth

opened. "You," he said in a monotone voice as he pointed at Mrs. Wolpno, "You are a big asshole licker." With that, Mrs. Wolpno leaped from behind her desk, and with all her might plunged her fist into Lloyd's chest and it emerged holding his still beating heart. Mrs. Wolpno let out a banshee scream and held the heart high in the air. The class was silent except for Jimmothy Spartny, who was crying silently to himself. "No more shit from you punks anymore, understand?" she asked. They were all listening.

# Scotch on Ice

Jack Ahrens

Eventually  
you pass out.

# precious Metal

Raegen Pietrucha

tiny light is always a fallen penny  
pennies from pockets are never missed  
so copper becomes our cheapest wish

what do they want with a drop into water  
what kind of games do we all like to play  
who fishes with magnets at the heart for this feeling  
what sound do they hope to make

copper wires of piano pounded through to the echo  
when copper breaks

who do we call  
what songs will we miss never played  
what floor never pounded

beat to copper shine the sweat the salt  
the dance what draws tongue

to neck like copper scent  
who can we kiss when we kiss copper  
and when we taste what do we touch  
and when pennies fall

# To the death of her breasts

Raegen Pietrucha

I don't remember when you suckled me.  
I don't remember my mouth without teeth or

speech, just needing a stream of milk  
to survive. Your men would remember, of course, but that

is different, though I came to understand once  
my own breasts sprung from my chest. I remember wishing

I would grow your nipples—pink pills thick  
and conspicuous. But that didn't happen. And when you took me

into your room, and told me *they'll be gone*, I  
cried for what I'd never had, for not claiming your beauty

in my own body—a failure as a woman,  
your daughter.

But then there were the scars, thick

and terrible, like bruised eyelids. I began  
to wonder if hiding mine would be a courtesy,

if they made you envy the woman  
me. I noticed your scars healed like tight lips sewn

shut, and then you became silent, never  
spoke about the lightness off your back, when they had been held  
by another, a tingling trickle for  
the tongues of your children, the unbearable  
weight spilled into your palms.



# To you

Raegen Pietrucha

Reminds me of those  
old maps of Africa:  
indecisive explorers

painting elephant  
designs, a calligraphic  
language

in the place

of what was there all along,  
but unfamiliar.  
As of yet

I cannot tell  
what these potholes signify,  
or why there is perfectly paved asphalt  
here,  
gravel there,  
grass even further.  
Nature has this way

of intimidating,  
trying to lead  
without direction at all.

A compass that says  
North,  
but not how far. . .

Have I passed you already?  
Has the road dead-ended,  
a sign left that said you  
*Turned?*



Am I the prophet that we are all looking for? Angel in white, a veil of white, blinding white. She moved so fast you couldn't see her arms but for flashes of seconds, she moved in rhythms, and thoughts, and the spaces between your eyes and your mind. She said nothing, but I know she was there, and perhaps she is here. I think she follows me making sure that I am the one.

Not Your Angel.

# The Apple Girl

Steve Marshall

The woman is lying on a bed as seen through a window. The woman is white, as are the sheets. White light coming in through the window obscures and washes out the image. The light seems to interact with the woman as it washes over her body.

I was in New York City, looking at videotapes. The electronics store had a towering shelf of them, all labeled in hand. *Anything you want*, the man said, *we got it all*. I believed him. All the things that the world shouldn't see were probably in these videos. If I watched any of these videos they would be ingrained on my mind forever, the unmentionables of violence or sex.

Her white skin skimming the white sheets, the brightness of everything. She looks like an angel with the sun reflecting off of her. All of her skin exposed, what few men have seen. The contrast lessens as the sun rises. Early morning, I know her for fifteen minutes and three seconds.

I don't know why I bought it. The label says *Clasic Bed #4*, scrawled in pencil. It held the promise of voyeurism, a milder sin compared to the other tapes. Among the women that have been in my life, she is one that I will never forget. It really isn't strange. People care about many people who they have never met. If an actor died today, millions would be caused to feel. It really isn't that odd that

## The Apple Girl

I should be in love with Classic Girl, as I call her.

You are in bed, with a dull headache. A man is watching you who you don't know. You are subsequently watched by several hundred men, and some of the women in their lives. You will not ever know how the images of you have been used. Men will mistreat you in their minds as they watch.

Some women have let me into their bedrooms before. They were not always real, but I told them that I loved them. My Classic Girl is more real than most of them. She looks so blank and beautiful. I could spend every day with her, but she will never know that I love her.

00:01 image begins from black static 00:08 image in focus: woman in her middle twenties, unclothed and lying in bed, appears to be slowly awakening 00:36 woman rolls onto side towards window, eyes open 00:56 woman reaches over out of picture range 01:06 apparent that woman pressed snooze button, falls back to sleep on her back 01:58 woman rolls in sleep onto her side, away from window

She is more than a flesh and blood woman, she becomes a piece of art to me. A piece of meat to the world, but there is something in her that lets me see infinity. The image of her for fifteen minutes is the most real thing you ever could see. She is the essence of the world, the hidden moments that we share just with ourselves.

02:15-03:35 camera pans to left and right in bedroom [02:45 camera reaches far left of room, *pan center to left*: rumpled clothes on floor, small end table with stacked books / 03:35 camera reaches far right in room, *pan center to right*: athletic shoes, desk with small computer] 03:49 camera refocuses on woman 04:02 close-up on face of woman 05:56 woman awakens and appears to press the snooze button again

I am watching her as I lie in bed. I would never look out the blinds of my own window. I would never think a lecherous thought towards my Classic Girl. I just want to experience what she won't show the world. She has lived thousands of these hours alone, but I want to believe that we are not solitary creatures. We should be seen in all of our nakedness.

[00:01-00:08 Sounds of leaves crunching, light breathing (ambient noise throughout, dogs etc.)]

[00:40-00:56 alarm of clock radio, FM sound that gradually increases]

RADIO [slow jangly rock-n-roll song, artist: R.E.M.]

...I said girl / of the hour / by the water tower watch /  
if your friend / took a fall /

are you obligated to follow? / [chorus] time, after time, after time...

WOMAN

[00:56] still sleep, still time for dream  
[voice slowly becomes snoring]

When I was younger I looked for truth in everything, and I never found it. I wanted a piece of art or a piece of film or a piece of words that was the world. Not a copy, but the world captured exactly. If there was a word that she would say in the fifteen minutes, the word would be *truth*. I can almost hear her say it, "Truth." If I could read her lips when she comes in and out of sleep, I know she would say, even better, "*Truth*."

When listening to the radio or watching television I feel close to the world. But the woman feels more current and more today than the news. There is something extremely *present* about the way her lips move as she comes in and out of sleep.

Once when I was flipping channels I realized that I could tell within one second if the people were actors or if they were real. I've never understood why you can't believe that the greatest actor is real, ever for a moment.

When I am watching her  
my time exists along side hers.

00:01 Birth, she says  
00:08 Beauty, she says  
00:36 Consciousness, she says<sup>s</sup>  
00:56 Transitory, she says  
01:06 Denial, she says

01:58 Struggle, she says  
03:49 Perspective, she says  
04:02 Focus, she says  
05:56 Futility, she says

I've never been able to watch the tape all the way to the end. After a certain point, the tape must stop. It is a cheap sixty minute tape with those large white spools. I know that I am privileged to see at least 15:03 of the seventy-four or so years of her life.

06:06 woman is squinting as if she is dreaming 07:30 woman flutters her eyelashes 08:39 woman awakens for moment and looks solidly up 08:41 woman rubs what appears to be a tear from her eye 08:56 woman covers her head with pillow

I am drinking beer and confident that I will make it to the end of the tape. I've never trespassed through 13:04, where she rolls over onto her back. That time I stayed up late like I am doing now and did jumping jacks for motivation. I felt I needed to get past this barrier. But she was rolling onto her back and at 13:04 she was laying perfectly still on her back, but there was something about her that felt way too intimate. It was the way her breasts were softly lying up, not pulled down by gravity. I felt sick to be violating her and staring at her so lewdly.

I've put the tape away many times, and promised myself I wouldn't look at her anymore. I've never told anyone about her. If someone



## The Apple Girl

calls while I am watching her I say to call later. I feel incredibly guilty when I notice that she is naked. She exists before the Fall, and I can see into her garden.

### WOMAN

[13:36] Mother, [mumbling] I just need get away from him, if I could just move to the city

I drink a Rolling Rock and put in the tape. I have swallowed my stomach along with the beer. I love her and I should want more of her. I don't want to admit that there is an end to her. When the tape ends into static, that will be all of her. People in my life always seem to be infinite, but then the relationship ends, or they move across the country. She's the one thing that I can control in my life. With many feet of black tape ahead of her, she has endless possibilities. But I wonder about those possibilities.

### WOMAN

[15:47] David, you haven't called, you said just needed a [muffled] break

The tape is her life, and I could know all of it. I hold a document that shows a complete world. The tape is complete, like a caterpillar, and a cocoon, and a butterfly living at once. But I want her always to be an egg, or a little pale-blue gift box with a white ribbon. All the people I've loved, I've loved them for their potential. I don't want her potential to disappear.

WOMAN

[16:01] Dave, if you didn't want to see me again you could've told  
me, I just want to know,  
you know, I just want to know [silently falls back asleep]

I've seen her in dreams many times. She's always that excessively  
bright white color. In fact, I've never dreamed of her escaping her  
bed. Sometimes I see her sewing a quilt, while sitting on the bed.  
Sometimes I see her eating crackers, while sitting on the bed.

[06:06] Fantasy, she says

[07:30] Erogenous, she says

[08:39] Optimism, she says

[08:41] Blue, she says

[08:56] Denial, she says

I still have years of possibilities  
and so should she.

I feel that thirteen 'o' four must be the apex of her. Anything after  
that would be closer to the apple. I don't want to see her decline  
into reality. I dream of her as a normal woman, but if I watched the  
tape and saw her get up and really eat crackers, all would be lost.  
Mona Lisa just smiles, she doesn't eat crackers.

In truth I had drank seven Rolling Rocks by the time I put the tape  
in. I can't believe that I sullied my image of her with drunken  
thoughts. I just hoped that I would finally put an end to all of this  
dreaming and daydreaming about her. I rationalized it by saying  
that the tape would wear out and then nobody would know

## The Apple Girl

anything. I woke up on the sofa, unbeautifully. I remember getting to the breasts and gravity part, but after that I don't know for any certainty. I dreamed that she was pulling feathers out of her pillow, like when the quills stab out of the cloth and they can be coaxed out, and she was letting them float out of her hand. I believe I dreamed that, but earlier when I dreamed she was eating crackers or quilting, I was looking at her from inside of her room. When I picture her pulling out the feathers, I see her all fuzzy and white, I was dreaming what the camera would have seen.

### WOMAN

[17:03] Davey, do you love me?

18:48 woman awakens 19:19-19:60 woman pulls out feathers from a small tear in her pillow 19:73 woman lets feathers drop one by one 20:00 woman smiles subtly as she reaches the last feather 20:01 image fades, screen turns blue

The woman is smiling with a slight upturn to the sides of her lips. A panel of yellow light sits upon her stomach as she quickly pulls the sheet up and wraps it around herself. She blushes.

Maybe on my last day on this earth I will have the courage to watch the end of the tape. In my mind she is always on the ascension, she is always in the garden.

WOMAN

[19:73] He loves me, he loves me not, [...], he *loves* me

# Bulletproof

Steve Marshall

Ronald Reagan before a lava green palm tree  
the fragile images of television  
voice cracks with analog silences  
and the drawing of breath into microphones  
recorded on black tape for future generations  
to marvel at the luminescent fake palm trees  
in dim airport meetinghalls of yesteryear  
with a live feed to 2, 4, 7, and cable

Reagan indelible with a decade  
our own experience and life  
tantamount to memories  
crippled childhood fascinations  
with grandfatherly men  
stoic and commanding in celluloid  
newsreels of the dead and ironic  
as dinnertime entertainment

Reagan preserved by eidetic technology  
thousands of days recorded  
by collective brains and cameras  
calls to mind the decay of remembrance  
the loss of image and imagination  
with archival inventions for old thoughts

nostalgia for those who were never  
cinema cowboys or pulpit presidents

Reagan hearty his obit rewritten  
granted eternal life with our  
electric sputtering minds and  
evolved televisions to be written about  
in tin type by men who never met the man  
could have easily been fabrications  
on round-cornered picture screens  
but I believe in newsmen and scriptwriters

# Last Bus to Disneyland

Steve Marshall

less defined features  
on coins and grandfathers  
decades of wear  
seen hundreds of hands passed down

busts of martyrs & heroes  
like portable statues  
indians & buffaloes all disappeared with  
artistic representations of liberty

two Washingtons facing left  
was all I spent  
with a handful of Lincolns facing right  
to board the last bus to Disneyland





# Strange Children

Sarah Heston

Mercury streaming from the sky;  
we imagine this during winter storms.  
Elijah's father is a scientist,  
so he knows what mercury does.

Down a street where concrete cracks  
is our house. My father spills  
motor oil on our driveway. He's a  
mechanic, his hands sticky, and  
liquid mercury is also in our garage,  
on a very top shelf.  
My favorite liquid is transmission fluid,  
pink streaking across our driveway.

Loving our fathers makes us strange—  
the tall glass beakers, Elijah never breaks one,  
and I like the smell of gasoline.

I imagine fuel spilling from  
gas-tank clouds during summer rains;  
and in a way it does, Elijah tells me,  
and explains precipitation.

I watch puddles in our driveway  
because they look like abalone shell.  
When my father dies; I hope a match  
drops with pelting gasoline;  
air would be fragrant, abalone shell glorious,  
sizzling.

# Blues Singer

Sarah Heston

I always know summer has returned  
because I forget the porch light,  
and night brings spider webs to break  
on my cheeks.

Some try to purge darkness with  
construction; street lights,  
reflectors, a flashlight to show  
ground brown ahead.  
But I know it's always there, warm or cold,  
as if darkness is night's way  
of purging us.

I don't want to be a writer, but a blues singer  
with cramped hands, a welcoming pelvis,  
and when I crack on that last note,  
people will clap, their hands saying,  
*lift up your heart, then drop it to the ground,*

and then my heart  
will lie around my ankles,  
like that one time I undressed  
while Leonard Cohen sang  
*Take me to the slaughterhouse,  
I'll wait there with the lambs.*

I heard this in a dark room,  
my naked body showing a  
white blur in the mirror—  
darkness purging me.

I waited for anything to come near,  
and I asked the reflection  
*take me to my body,*  
*take me to anything that waits*  
*for me.*

# Hard Spring

Sarah Heston

It's the birth of a small town's  
dark spring, and someone is missing.  
Someone is in labor somewhere pushing  
new season out.

It's me. I'm under the pines;  
I awoke here ripping up grass, trying  
to bring in new life because  
someone is missing.

I fell asleep by my phone and awoke to  
pine needles digging into backs of my knees.  
I want to bring new life, but the spring,  
dark and hard, just spreads more  
shadows underneath pines  
until I think it's not actually day,  
but night, and I remember

someone is missing.

And I'm not spilling out anything new onto  
grass, but something very old, nailed in  
with houses and mailboxes:  
Spring always comes, through me  
or another.

And it's hurting so bad, I think it will kill me,  
and what if he's dead?  
You see, he hasn't called like he always does,  
and I'm trying to wake,  
but pine needles are  
burying me,  
whispering through my hair:  
*Who is really missing?*



You were nudged off of the armrest on that flight that was supposed to be happy but somehow you don't feel happy and all you can think about is stupid elbows and arrogance and times wasted and traffic and that store that you loved that went the way everything goes and suddenly you are left thinking about nothing but the small disheartening times that seemed so insignificant but amount to so much now. You think everything amounts to so much except you and you want to be there too.

# Snap

Daniel Ian Roberts

It's seven steps from my bed to the toilet. The night before, I make sure my path is clear. I start with my left foot. I take six big steps and then one half-step to center myself.

When I'm almost finished pissing, I flush so the end of my piss washes down the drain with the last water from the tank. The whole thing has to be synchronized. If I flush too soon, I pinch and hold the extra for later. This is something I can control.

In the shower, the water has to be hotter than it should be. It's that sly pain I want. I want the water so hot I feel like I have to move out of the way. I want it to feel like a stove, daring me to touch it, teasing me with an acid hiss. The problem is, after a while, the water doesn't sting. No matter how hot it actually is. I turn the dial.

God is invisible. He is invisible and naked, man-shaped, many miles tall. He walks America on shoes the size of shopping malls. He steps on dogs and people and houses. He is God and they don't know. He sees the world all at once, through the clouds, a blue ball spinning under his toes. He spots an ant carrying a tree. And freeways tattooed with white stripes and skids. Airplanes with no clue. Sailboats drifting. People. Lots of people.

At the market, I organize the shopping carts. The ones in the parking lot, not inside the store. Thirty-nine carts fit inside the silver bars. If there are forty, the last one sticks out. I straighten the line. I push each cart in snug. As close as I can to the one in front. No wasted space.



A man named Ramon is supposed to do this. His black hair sprouts like grass on top of his head. The sun can make his hair look white, gold and red, all at once, even though it's really black. His hair is longer than a crew cut, but short enough to stand straight up. I look at his hair and imagine that it stands up naturally. I imagine he never has to brush it. Stubble sprinkles the back of his skull and the sides of his head above his small ears. His head reminds me of a black iceberg, flat, with his black hair the only part above the water.

Ramon yells at me like he's mad. He says, "Get the fuck out of here." He says it for the pretty Chinese girl building clouds of flowers near the magic doors.

Ramon never comes too close. I'm tall, lanky. I have crooked bottom teeth. Three lean right. One on the end pokes forward. For hours, my tongue slides behind my teeth. Taunting me. When I look at myself in the mirror I keep my mouth shut, but at the supermarket I stare at Ramon and grin to keep him back.

I only fix the carts once a day. If I thought about it, I would convince myself to never leave. I know what happens when I'm gone. When someone takes a cart, when they pull one out of the line, it triggers the others and they move like dominoes. Ramon never straightens the carts. He slams them into each other like he's throwing cardboard boxes into the dumpster. If he sees me coming, he'll jerk a cart onto its side wheels, rock it back and forth, makes noises like King Kong. I don't move. I wait until he has to go inside.

God loves everyone. He is The Creator. He cares for that which He has created. He hates, too. God is everywhere at once. He feels everything. He walks for rhythm, not to see. He sees an infinite number of things, eyes closed if He chooses. He feels an

infinite number of things, for an infinite number of people. Simultaneously. He does not distinguish. There is simply too much. Everything combines inside God. That is the only way. Everything is diluted, balanced, mild.

I'm at the beach. The sun paints my arms and face like blacktop. With a stick, I draw a square in the sand. Exact. Close to where the water will reach. I make the square as big as a big red-and-white quilt. I get on my knees and I smooth the sand inside the square with my forearms. Some sand falls into my shirt. It scrapes my waist. This I don't mind.

My square has to be as smooth as the sand the ocean brushes wet. Dig deep enough. The sand is damp, sticky. I sweep the square so it's perfect. I use the stick to retrace the lines. I sit in the center of my square, bend my knees and wrap my arms around them. I know that my ass and feet make dents in the sand, so I don't look down. I stare at the water. Twinkle. Vanishing.

Once, before, a long time before, I wanted to clean the whole beach. I wanted to make it like the sand inside my square. I got on my knees and I pulled with my forearms, crawling backwards so my knees and toes wouldn't make a mess. I worked the whole day without looking up. The sand smelled like my dreams. My arms felt like slick marble. I wanted to see my space all at once, so the perfection would hit me like a miracle. When the sun sank below the water, and the air looked green and gray, I stood. My knees and back felt like a wooden floor. My sand formed a long rectangle between two lifeguard towers. Near the corner where I started, on the other side, was a seagull. Waiting. I said, "Oh man," without even wanting to. I'd worked all day, but my space was tiny compared to the rest of

## Snap

the beach. I knew I would never finish.

I sit in my square. Surrounded by my border. Far away. I listen to the ocean pull the ends of its waves back into itself. I listen for the perfect snap—the wave's tail snapping the water like God snapping a wet towel. I listen all day. All day, I hear the sound of water sliding. Disappearing hopelessly into more water. I hear it thousands of times. I wait for the one perfect snap.

And I heard it.





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