



**Reflector**



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The Reflector would like to thank Dr. Taggart for all his time and insight. We (the staff) are grateful for his keen eyes. Without him this publication would not have been possible.



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# Crazy Cat Lady

**S**tupid fucking human interest story. The disgust ran through my body down my arms and into my fist. It knocked on the screen door.

“Hello. Is anyone home? - hello.” If this door was any indication of how this interview was going to go, I was screwed. The screen material was stapled sporadically to the clawed wood frame. A repair job probably done by a grand nephew on loan for a Saturday. The bottom of the screen was shredded into strips, creating easy access for the flies that buzzed in and out attracted by the rot. The stench of cat piss forced me to sniff shortly and continually rub the tip of my nose in a useless attempt to block the smell. This is going to be quick. I am just going to ask her a few questions and then make up the rest. I doubt she will even read the article anyway. Probably just cut out the picture of her sitting on her stinky chair with the afghan folded on the back, surrounded by twenty cats.

“Hello” louder and impatient. “Miss Bowersox are you in there?”

“Don’t get your panties in a bunch I’m comin’.”

The pah pah pah of cat feet raced down the steps. I cupped my hands and leaned forward toward the screen to see her waddling. She held on to the railing as she shifted her weight from side to side. Both feet touched every step in her slow descent. A vest apron with snaps covered a blue print polyester dress. My mom had one of those vests. I couldn’t believe how much this woman looked like I thought she would. A

living specimen of the crazy cat lady.

"You're late," came from her mustached mouth. Not the voice I expected and definitely not the attitude. I threw back my shoulders, unslouching my back. She pushed the screen door open and motioned for me to come in.

I followed her through a shady hallway, bare of family pictures save one of which must have been her parents. Plain people. I wouldn't have been surprised to see a pitchfork and a barn in the background. She saw me looking.

"Those are my parents. Both dead. 1968. Got three worthless brothers. One in town, one dead, and one in Grosse Point, Michigan."

Good, she was brief. At least she wasn't going to bore me with stories of how kitty once peed in the toilet.

We settled in the living room. Her on the afghan chair and me on the edge of the couch closest to her. I pulled the small tape recorder out of my purse and set it on the table. It didn't have a tape in it.

"OK Miss Bowersox, the hospital report said that one of your cats dialed 911 as you lay helpless on the floor with a broken hip. What I would like you to do is just tell me exactly what happened. Everyone at the *Courier* is just amazed by this and thinks it will make a great story," I lied. I didn't believe a damn word of it. A cat dialing 911. Bullshit. I wouldn't be surprised if this nut didn't rig the whole thing for some attention. I can see her poised at the top of the steps, the cordless phone tied to her wrist with a string (she wouldn't want to blow the whole thing by dropping the phone). Once in pain at the bottom of the steps she unties the string, dials 911. With the operator on the line she throws the phone across the room. The cats run to it meowing because they think it is food.

"Why do you want to hear that? You read the

report, right? That is what happened I don't have anything different to tell you than what was in it."

"I just wanted to meet you and get your perspective."

"Horseshit. You'll just write what you want to anyway." The stench of the house had settled into a familiar stink.

"Excuse me Miss Bowersox, but I am sure you knew that was what I wanted to talk to you about. Why did you allow me to come out here if you weren't going to talk to me?"

"Listen sweetie, relax and write your story about the cat and my hip. I just wanted someone to come visit so getting dressed this morning wouldn't be for nothin'." I slumped back into the couch and watched a yellow tiger stripe curl up beside a foggy eyed cat on her lap.

"Have you ever been married?" My lips were touching again before I realized I had asked the question. I winced at the expected wrath of crazy cat lady. She surprised me by releasing the crease between her eye brows and a slow head shake. I wasn't sure to push on or just thank her for her time. I would have time to pick up milk and stop at the post office if I got finished here early. She made the decision for me with less of an edge in her voice.

"No, can't say that I ever did." She picked at the fuzz balls on her blanket. "I always thought I would but I never got around to it, I guess. I was supposed to once." The yellow cat on her lap began to needle its claws in her skirt and she gave it a whack that sent the cat running. "Told him I wasn't ready and he listened. I hear he has eight grandchildren now. One of 'em, a grandson I think is supposed to be a dancer in New York City. I bet he'll bring home a boyfriend soon."

I could tell by how casually she said it that she knew he did have eight grandkids, five girls and three

boys, and it was his grandson Eddie that went to make it on Broadway, or something like that. That wasn't so bad, I knew that my latest ex just got married to an Amy girl from Hartford and the one before that was expecting his third baby. I smirked and nodded my head.

"Would you like some tea or milk or cookies?"

"No, thank you. I just ate." That and I haven't had my shots updated recently. The place was disgusting. Dishes that were probably licked clean by the cats were piled everywhere. In the corner was a pile of magazines and papers that got pushed back every time the door was opened.

"What time is it, honey?"

"Almost 12:30. I should be going soon."

"Just hold on a second. The mailman's about to come." She disappeared in the hallway- leaving me sitting on the *Piss Couch*.

For crissake, this woman was all by herself. Waiting every day for the mailman to come. She probably made him talk to her for twenty minutes about the final puzzle on "Wheel of Fortune" last night. She would probably tell him how that stupid boy from Pittsburgh (it was Teen Week) blew the last puzzle, and how kids like him were going to bring the downfall of society, (he had no discipline). The mailman would smile graciously as he stepped backwards off the porch, inching his way toward his cart and the rest of his day.

"Get off the couch and come here for a second and help me." For some reason I jumped to her side.

"Go in the driveway and get some small rocks. About the size of an eraser off the tip of a pencil. Hurry." She pushed me on the back and made me stumble toward the door.

Eraser-sized rocks ? What the hell was I doing picking through this lady's driveway? What the hell were people like her doing living on their own? The

mail is coming and I have to find her some pebbles. I guess it is better than sitting around cutting pictures of teddy bars out of magazines and catalogs and pasting them into her stuffed animal scrapbook. I need to relax. There are no pebbles close to the house, only big rocks. What was I going to write about this lady? I don't want to write just what the report said. It will sound like a *National Inquirer* story.

"Hurry up. It's almost time." God she was bossy. I made a fist around the rocks in my hand and jogged back to the house.

"What are you doing?" It was everything I could do not to burst into an outright belly laugh. On her face were some sort of aviator goggles. In her hand was a slingshot with an NRA sticker wrapped around the handle. She was peeking through the curtained window beside the front door.

"You got the rocks?"

I opened my hand and showed her what I had. I should have picked up a few more.

"I guess they will do. Go stand over by the other window. Don't let him see you. Wait 'til you see him. Hot Stuff. Here he comes."

I cleaned the window with the tips of my finger. She was right, not bad. Damn, he had a ring on his left finger. I looked over at her. She was bent over, her butt wagging behind her like a dog in anticipation. She had slid away the piece of warped plywood that covered the missing bottom section of window. She was jockeying for position. I tried to laugh and look out of the window at the same time. About twenty feet from the house the mailman left his cart and crouched down toward the ground with Miss Bowersox's mail in his hand. He was watching the window. She fired the slingshot and he began to move. She shot at his left shoulder. He moved low and to the right. She shot at his head and fell to the ground in a combat roll.

“Shit--he is moving fast today.” She reloaded.

He threw a rubber banded bundle on the porch and ran back to his cart, watching over his shoulder.

“Ha-Didn’t get me today Miss Bowersox.” He was grinning and trying to catch his breath.

“Ah Piss.” She opened the front door and looked at the mail on the porch.

“You better put it in the slot tomorrow or I am going to get out the BB gun again.”

“Have a nice day Miss Bowersox.”

She closed the door behind her and threw the mail on the stack. “Told you he was hot stuff. Listen sweetie I am all finished with this interview unless you wanted to talk about anything else?”

“I guess not. Uh..Thank you for letting me talk to you. Would you like me to send you a copy of the article?”

“I suppose so. Just mail it to me whenever.”

I walked to my car and looked back at the house. The entire way home the radio wouldn’t play a song that I could get into. These damn Top 40 stations play the same damn boring songs over and over again. I wished I could get NPR or something, even Paul Harvey.

I walked into my apartment. My kitten came and attacked my feet at the door. I tried to grab her, but she was too quick. Checked the machine, no messages. Only a Fingerhut catalog in the mail. I plugged my laptop in and settled down to write, but I picked up the phone instead.

“Hello Miss Bowersox, yeah, I was wondering if I could come out and talk to you some more. It seems I need a little more information for the story.”

—Angie Shirey

## 5 poems

1818 46th Avenue  
For R.C.

i.  
another seashore  
between grey lines  
pale blue and grey  
in yellow  
fields of color:  
Rothko's bands

another seashore  
between this and that  
an understanding  
this time the sea is all foam  
the horizon blurry

but there, there again  
is the crystalline line

ii.  
how deep the valley  
of our obsession  
covered with cloud  
like a pillow (pillar)  
but there is something beneath  
in glimpses—  
it is the city  
of our habitation

iii.

how deeply riven  
    is our obsession  
cold and colorful  
full of poverty  
in shades of pastel  
    frowsy and wind-blown

we must evade their voices  
those "just desserts"  
to finally apprehend all the burning:  
one day a doorway opens  
    onto the past—  
it is the city  
    of our habitation

iv.

memory floats in bloodstream's memory  
memory transcribed—  
    of red tile  
    a stone angel  
memory of memory  
memory of what has not been  
of what can never be

and dreams, however bizarre:  
a view through the difference  
the mind tells us what to see—  
we see through dreams  
    and memory  
beyond,  
to know.



v.

along a dirty beach:  
there is a dead seal  
a white puppy plays  
    a hand furtively waves  
to the one who and the other who  
and to the child before  
who saw things backwards  
saw through layers  
to explanations however obscured  
when it was late—when good-bye  
was the gesture of now to then  
of a power stronger than death.

[Someone] 1

What was wanted to say was said and will be said again  
Since fear is gone now — pride, too  
Dealt with by the “the arrow that flieth by day”  
And by this day and night, light and dark,  
Clear black of the Beckettian sky,  
There are more words without names.

What was said will be said again in other combinations  
By other hands will come similar thoughts  
But without comfort, without “tea time fame”  
In numbers which reach beyond themselves  
Toward seven which bleeds through to eight  
Passing into what can never be.

[Someone] 2

Salt tears from the salt tear's head  
Run down into an open hole  
Of beauty's signal.

They run and run silently  
They can never return to their place.

[Someone] called them with a sound:  
The piercing wail of an unanswered condition  
That [someone] was you.

They burn and disfigure.  
They heal and do not kill.

## H.D.'s Poem

My whole life...  
one pure and perfect  
crucifixion

(sic)

...I am not  
[except...in...writing  
and FORGETTING]  
ever free

Let me write

Then  
Let me

FORG  
ET

(my writing).

## For a Graduation

Books of rocks  
which break apart in hand  
their sheer faces  
move against each other  
then split on a seam  
grey rocks grey books  
the ones not yet written

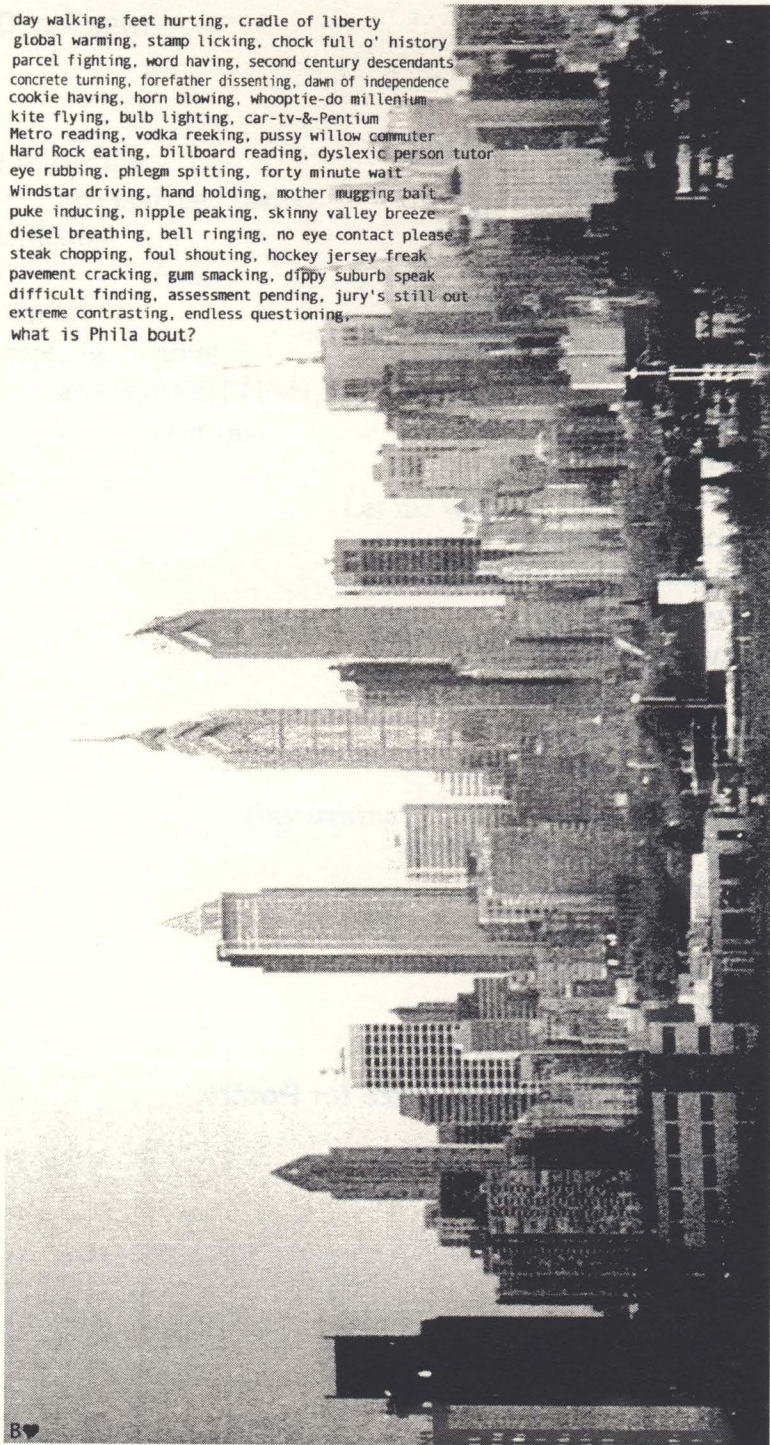
Words are flying  
to air and fire again  
they disappear  
the paper written on  
re-numbered to atoms  
the words return  
to their hiding places

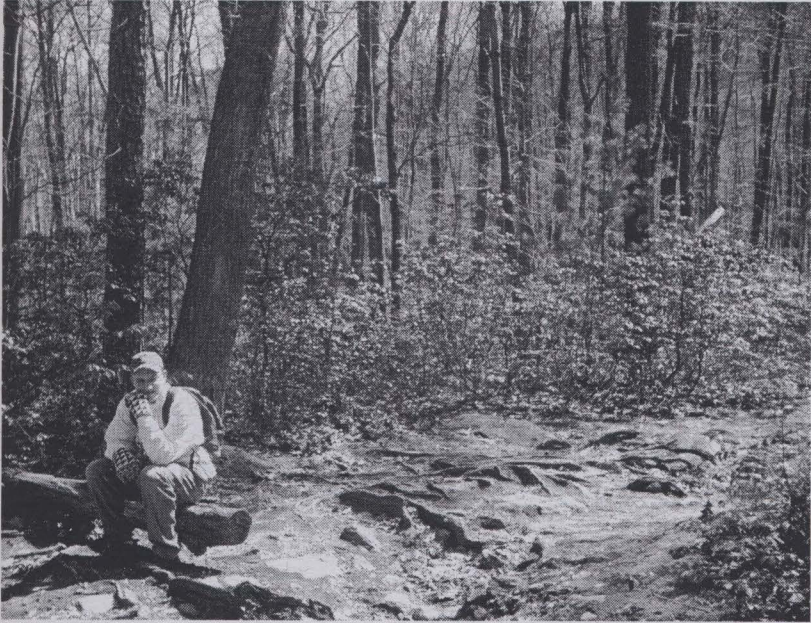
Books like paper  
like air on broken rocks  
exist somewhere  
these "unfinished rhythms  
and broken sentences"  
doorless doorways  
leading to empty rooms.

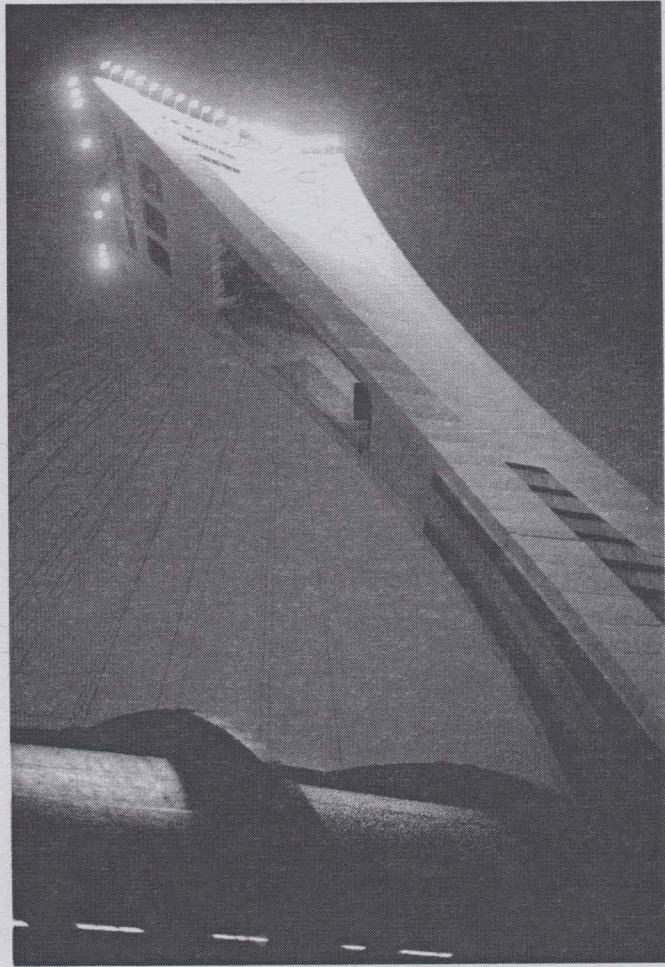
—Patricia Mateya

**Reflector prize for Poetry.**

day walking, feet hurting, cradle of liberty  
global warming, stamp licking, chock full o' history  
parcel fighting, word having, second century descendants  
concrete turning, forefather dissenting, dawn of independence  
cookie having, horn blowing, whooptie-do millenium  
kite flying, bulb lighting, car-tv-&-Pentium  
Metro reading, vodka reeking, pussy willow commuter  
Hard Rock eating, billboard reading, dyslexic person tutor  
eye rubbing, phlegm spitting, forty minute wait  
Windstar driving, hand holding, mother mugging bait  
puke inducing, nipple peaking, skinny valley breeze  
diesel breathing, bell ringing, no eye contact please  
steak chopping, foul shouting, hockey jersey freak  
pavement cracking, gum smacking, dippy suburb speak  
difficult finding, assessment pending, jury's still out  
extreme contrasting, endless questioning,  
what is Phila bout?











*1776 turned on its head*

*AT Dog*

*La Tour Olympique*

*Jared, Couch, Jill, Toaster*

—Photos by Brad Love

## Upon My Final Ride

Bury me, when appropriate,  
somewhere at a unique distance  
from isolation.

Shower me with sod  
and earth at  
that spatial compensation between  
nature and antiquity.

    Please, on my  
first day of no  
breakfast, divide what  
I have been from the open  
space surrounding.  
No human body—  
working or broken—  
has ever been fully assimilated  
to the space between itself  
and what matters.

    Upon my final ride  
I beg you  
see no harm in  
clockwork or finalities,  
or in grass becoming dirt.

    —Seth Dellinger

## Hat and Suit

He leaned up against the wall waiting for the scholarship dinner to officially start, his eyes roving back and forth over all the others milling around engaging in small talk.

Hearing a girl mention a familiar name, he cocked his head to the left to better overhear.

"You should have seen Dr. Noteck's last test. It was crazy! For one of the questions we had to draw a pair of pants. What do pants have to do with English?"

He grimaced sympathetically at this. Having had Dr. Noteck two semesters in a row, he was very familiar with his, shall we say, eccentric testing style.

He saw her making her way through the crowds of people. She moved from one group to another, jumping into any conversation that caught her interest. From her manner, and that of those with whom she spoke, it was often difficult to tell whether she was acquainted with these people or not. She seemed to engage with complete strangers as easily as good friends. Like him, she didn't seem to belong to any one group.

As she passed nearby (she almost never stopped moving completely), he felt compelled to say something.

"Well, that's a very ... interesting hat you have there," he said.

She halted and turned around, quickly evaluating him with her eyes. A wide smile broke out on her face and she answered, "Why thank you, Suit! You

don't look bad yourself."

And a very nice suit it was: black, with a jade green tie, gold cufflinks, and a tie-pin. His shoes were also black, you might say polished to a mirror shine, but no one had bothered to check for a reflection—yet. His blond hair parted in the middle, and was down around his ears. He kept planning to get it cut sometime soon, but had never gotten around to it.

Her hat— by far the most conspicuous part of her outfit that night — was a brightly colored jester's cap, complete with bells. Out from under it poured a mass of golden-red hair that tumbled all around her bare shoulders. She wore a camouflage dress not exactly skin-tight, but not far from it.

Hat held our her hand. Suit, not expecting such a positive reaction, looked at her with a quizzically raised eyebrow for a moment before he shook hands.

"Where exactly"—

"Did I get the Hat?"

Irritated at her interruption, he took a short, audible breath (something like a sigh in reverse) before he responded: "Yes."

"That's always the first question people ask me. You would not believe how much attention this hat attracts."

His expression here indicated that he could indeed believe how much attention it attracted. Her rapid flow of words, however, continued without pause.

"Me, Jen, Michelle and Ron went to Ocean City for a week two years ago. I think the main purpose of going to the beach with friends is for them to drag you into doing things you'd never do on your own."

His imagination reeled momentarily trying to grasp exactly what it was this girl would not do on her own.

"I'm not sure it's legal to have that much fun in one week. We went bungee-jumping and water-skiing.

If you want a cure for any possible desire to commit suicide by leaping, bungee-jumping is your therapy.”

Suit was about to make it perfectly clear that he did not have any such problem, but never got the opportunity.

“What else happened that week?” She asked herself and paused briefly before continuing.

He was beginning to be amazed at how fast and how long she could speak without pausing for a breath. He took this opportunity to try to steer her back on topic.

“Yes, but where...”

“Oh yeah!” Hat said, with a light-bulb tone, “I got my ichthus tattoo! I knew there was something else important that happened that week. And we”—

Finally Suit interrupted her, “Yes this is all very fascinating. But where did you get the hat?”

“I’m getting to that,” she scolded him. “As I was saying, while the others lay out on the beach roasting—I have yet to see the attraction in such activities, I can tan perfectly well while in motion—I usually explore some of the shops along the boardwalk. Most of them are colorful, but boring. Occasionally, though, some of them have the most incredible—” she looked down a moment and softly muttered, “right word, right word,” before looking up suddenly, “outlandish merchandise. This particular trip I had managed to resuscitate Michelle into accompanying me. I heard her groan ‘Oh no.’ She saw this hat and knew I couldn’t resist it. She was right.”

“Ah,” Suit said, glad to have finally extracted this information from her.

“This summer, we’re planning on going back for a month. I love the beach.”

“I guess you’re entitled to your opinion.” Suit looked away for a moment. “I can’t stand it myself.”

“What!” she exclaimed in astonishment. “What’s

not to love? A sun so bright and hot it turns 'bask' into an active verb making you all dark and tanned."

"And the inevitable bright red sunburn."

"Till the sheer heat of it drives you into the cool, pulsing ocean."

"And when you get out, the dried sea-salt burns and itches even more."

"The calm sound of the waves washing on the shore."

"The less than soothing sounds of every idiot who felt like bringing his radio."

"The soft, hot sand between your toes."

"The gritty sand in your shorts."

Hat looked down at his waist, chewed on one side of her lip briefly, and then nodded to concede that point.

"Like I said, I loathe the beach," he finished.

The conversation reached a pause here, and just as Hat was turning to go find someone else to talk to, Suit asked, "So, what's your major anyway?"

She looked over her shoulder and then turned to face him again: "I was thinking about becoming a teacher, but I realized I just don't have the patience. I finally decided on music. I play the flute. Well, I play several instruments. I play the guitar, too, but I do that quite badly." After a brief pause to think, she added "I play the flute well," and nodded in satisfaction with this summary. "My parents were so frustrated with me when I told them my choice. I believe they said I was 'wasting the wonderful opportunity given me in this scholarship' on music. As if music were a waste!" Hat threw out her hands in exasperation. "How about you, what's your major?"

Suit smiled and shrugged: "I'm studying to be a lawyer."

Hat giggled a little: "So you're going for the loathing factor, eh? Hey, that reminds me! How many

lawyers does it take..." she trailed off uncertainly here, and looked down at her flame-printed heels. "Er, never mind."

As she looked up, the elfish grin again broke out across her face. She looked at him sideways. "So, is it legal to have that much fun in one week?" she asked in a very serious tone.

Suit drew a breath to answer, then wrinkled his brow perplexedly at the question.

Before he could begin explaining the laws on enjoyment quotas, someone on stage tapped the mike a couple of times, and people started moving towards their seats.

"Looks like the dinner's getting started," he said. "I guess we'd better go to our tables. It was nice meeting you..." he frowned and scratched his temple, "what is your name anyway?"

"Joann."

"I'm Michael," he held out his hand to shake again.

With a wild grin, Joann bent down and kissed the back of his hand, spun around, and disappeared into the crowd.

—Shawn Smith

## 4 poems

### misconceptions

bald heads  
    blind my eyes  
    with reflections of the sun  
the smell of old men  
    suffocates my nostrils  
    and soaks in my skin  
a wet glass  
    slips from a sweaty hand  
    and shatters my soul...  
        and misconceptions  
tears roll from reason  
    but are never seen  
voices whisper  
    through the minds  
    of silent men  
and are forgotten  
    and so am I.



a blob (odd font) of a queen  
face stuffed with bitterness and anger.  
Rolls full of hate rest slobbishly  
upon her throne  
legs spread,  
bluntly draped over the chair's arm,  
fat spreading, swallowing, suffocating  
space  
as she worships her own master:  
television  
video games.  
Lips pursed, prepared for split-second insults,  
marks time with bomb explosions,  
dead aliens.  
A blob of a queen,  
losing love  
as it tangles itself in her endless hair  
looks just like me.

**I have always travelled**

farther than you

to meet in the middle  
on the path : starting in the shadows  
that scattered on the ground.

people cross my path today

acknowledged only by

the eyes that meet mine : they smile

of discomfort

and are dismissed

trailed by the silence that follows each face.

people cross my path today

as forgotten possibilities

over my shoulder

I begin to notice that

with each step

they grow older :

each memory that slips their minds

becomes part of mine.

Nothing crossed my mind today

except that I almost forgot

that I still remember

the way you used to smell

until I found your yellow afghan/

and the pink paisley sweater

that even GoodWill could deny

made me cringe

and wish for night

so I could close my eyes.

You crossed my path today  
three-quarters of the way  
and demanded my attention  
like the reminder of the memory  
I couldn't quite remember  
and with each step, you grow farther away  
and over my shoulder

I begin to notice that you've grown older  
and the memories that slip your mind  
beg to slip from mine  
and are dismissed.

## His Face

A drop of water runs down his forehead  
in its own predetermined path...  
the forehead I once despised but now admire,  
its roundness to awkward for the face it denies  
now shows beauty in the smoothness  
just perfect for the touch of my lips.  
A drop of water runs down the bridge of his nose,  
much smaller than mine  
and shaped to a pint of perfection,  
to the cheek just pudgy enough to welcome my touch.  
A drop of water runs along his smile line that doesn't  
work quite hard enough  
and disappears as quickly as it's discovered  
like a river flowing to its forced destination  
creating paths that changed my dreams,  
to the lips too fat for their own wearer  
who doesn't understand the advantage of their size.  
A drop of water runs down an unchiseled chin  
just small enough to deny that he may be a man  
and falls though the space between  
then and now,  
lands on the cotton shirt too overpriced to be this faded,  
soaks in,  
dries out,  
and disappears.

—Trish Moser

## Surviving

I blink my eyes open, waking suddenly from a deep sleep—these days I seem to be doing this—and shake off the confusion of a dream.

I try to focus on the simple contours of my room, outlined in silvery half-light, but my eyesight has weakened so in these last few years. The shade is up; the digital clock glows 6:00 in oversized numbers so I can see them. Six o'clock AM or PM? I cannot tell during this cold month. Dawn or dusk? It does not matter. Lately, I feel as ancient as the hills framed by my only window. I call them hills—me, a girl from the West used to looking up, up, up till it hurts your neck. These “mountains” roll gently, gradually outside my window.

I see it must be morning; my room is growing lighter. I haven't seen an actual sunrise since I don't know when. It's OK, though. I always preferred the sunset, and my windows face West. I'm lucky for that. I always make sure to shut my eyes just when the last ray of the sun escapes behind the mountains. I have this thing; I don't like to watch the very end when it disappears. Never did.

My door opens gently and Kim, my favorite nurse, enters the room. She is a soft, plump girl of about thirty with warm brown eyes and a sweet smile. “Good morning, Clair,” she says to me. “Everything OK?”

“Why yes, I think so, dear,” I answer, unsure of why she scrutinizes me with concern.

“You rang the nurses' station just now?”

"Oh dear, I did didn't I." I cover for my mind that leaks like a sieve. Not my mind, nor my awareness of reality, rather, my memory. I grasp for an excuse to fill my foolish silence. Kim, meanwhile, has been fluttering about my room, cheerfully straightening my pictures, my angel figurine collection, my array of pill bottles. Kim has not confided anything in me lately. I try to detect whether her cheerfulness is a front. I can't tell today. "I rang because I'd like you to open the window for me."

"Clair, it's thirty degrees out! You'll freeze yourself."

Oh! The all-too-familiar chagrin stings my eyes with tears of frustration, and the definition of my institution room blurs until all I see is a mass of shapes. I forgot it is Febuary and that, furthermore, I am in the Northeast. But I needn't worry; Kim's heart is as soft as her smooth white hands, which she places over my gnarled, spotty ones. I had pretty hands once.

"Spring'll be here before you know it, Clair, and I'll come open your window for you every morning." She promises to come wake me for "The Young and the Restless" and then goes back to her desk down the hall that smells of new carpeting and fresh paint. This place is not bad. Chris, my son, knew what he was doing when he picked it three years ago.

Kim knows me; knows my quirks and most of the stories I have accumulated over my eighty years. She comes to my room often during her breaks, and we talk. I tell her about my children, my grandchildren, and when I was young and wild out in California. Well, wild for those days, mind you. She mostly asks questions and listens, and I know I am not boring her; Kim really listens. She'll pull my white wicker chair that I brought from my old house close to the bed and lean forward, resting her elbows on her white-sockinged knees and her chin on her hands. She reminds me of

how my youngest, my Kate, used to sit as a little girl, taking it all in quietly and thoughtfully.

Sometimes she confides in me about how the two head nurses seem to take advantage of her and assume, without asking, that she'll work extra shifts and holidays too just because she is not married and has no children. She rarely speaks of the man she lives with, and I don't know if she is in love with him. But I do know what I see in her eyes far too often: wastefulness. I see it when she wipes the dust from my framed family pictures for me; I see it when I tell her about my California days. I am reminded of tired eyes I saw a long time ago and of a story Kim has not heard yet. I think I am going to tell her soon.



It was late summer, 1936, the summer after I graduated high school. I was working six eight-hour shifts every week at Joe's Diner, serving lunch and dinner to the good people of Bluefield, California. Bluefield was my hometown, approximately one hundred and eighty miles from the Pacific coast, from an ocean I had never seen. My feet hurt by mid-August. So did my right shoulder, upon which I hoisted trays piled with sandwiches and daily dinner specials. I still remember: Monday, spaghetti; Tuesday, red beans and rice; Wednesday, meatloaf and mashed potatoes; Thursday, honey dipped chicken and corn on the cob; Friday, fried jumbo shrimp and baked potato.

Funny thing, I can smell that place like I worked there yesterday—coffee and ashtrays by the counter, sweet cinnamon rolls to the left of the register, grease in the kitchen, cabbage back in the walk-in—but I can't remember if there actually was ever a real Joe. Funny what you remember. I remember the sinking feeling that had been building inside since I was about sixteen, when I first started at Joe's to help my Aunt out. I

never knew my parents; I grew up with my Aunt Sue in a little white house on North 2nd Street. My Aunt Sue was a decent enough, hard-working woman. She cleaned houses five days a week and cut hair on the weekends, and she did take care of me. But her disposition was as hard and rigid as her work ethic, and I always felt as though I was earning my keep as opposed to belonging.

Anyway, my heart had sunk pretty much all the way by the time I was eighteen and still at Joe's. The tips were nice, of course, and I did not hurt for money. But still I had this heavy brick of panic settled down inside me—settled, the very thing I feared I was gradually doing. I just didn't see any options. No marriage prospects, no hope for higher education—and Aunt Sue was slowing down, she'd be an old woman one of these days, and who would take care of her? I thought I was pretty much stuck. Bluefield offered very limited possibilities for a girl in 1936, and I all but resigned myself to a life of Joe's Diner and a future of taking care of my aunt.

My footsteps were heavy and blister-painful late one morning on a jumbo shrimp Friday as I trudged the two blocks to work in my ugly brown uniform dress with white buttons, my apron dangling limply from my right hand. I walked through the door and was dismayed to discover that Jacob Neary, the owner, was already there. I hated when he was around during a slow time, which it usually was during lunch. How that man intimidated me! If we stood still for one moment, we found ourselves with rag or a broom and extra side cleaning to do. If Neary felt like making an example out of you, he'd say, "Oh, so you have nothing to do here but stand around? Then you can go home for the day." A night's much-counted-on tips, gone. Around five o'clock, when Neary usually arrived, we'd all take turns watching for him at the window. Sometimes he's



come in the backdoor, through the kitchen, and the dishboys would come bursting through the swinging doors hissing, "He's here! Neary's here!" All us waitresses would leap from our seats at the counter, crushing out cigarettes and busying ourselves with dishcloths or our guest checkpads.

I entered Joe's with even less enthusiasm than usual that morning. While I tried to stay occupied under Neary's hawk-eyed stare, the seeming permanence of my predicament weighed on my soul like a tangible talisman.

The fixtures and faces of my world stood out in sharp relief: wood tables against a white wall, white counter growing out of a black and white tiled floor, coffee pot behind the counter. Wipe the tables, wipe the counter, sweep the floor, fill the coffee cups. Neary's weathered, leathery skin, sharp nose, and close-set, narrowed eyes were especially ugly; the cook's round shiny face, visible through the porthole in the kitchen door, was especially fat and sweaty. Bonnie the head waitress flirted pathetically with the lunch time regulars. Her smile suggested that her cheeks were about to crack open, her teeth were stained yellow; deep creases lined the corners of her mouth and her eyes. Her legs were mapped with varicose veins. She was twenty-three years old. Carolyn was the baby of the waitresses like I was when I first started—sixteen years old. She had red lips and a blond braid. This was the landscape of my world.

Neary had his back turned, fooling with a burnt-out light bulb. I saw Carolyn lean against the counter and put the back of her hand to her forehead. Her face was pale and her blue eyes ringed with dark circles. It is as though my mind took a picture of her in that moment. I can still see her: weary, oppressed, and working on the same brick that weighed me down. I did not consciously make up my mind then, but it was

a turning point—looking at Carolyn in that one moment. What I saw summed up the way I felt about Joe's, about Bluefield, about *life*. I was not *living*. I believed that I was merely surviving.

The next morning I walked to work the same as I had been doing for two years, only I kept on going. Past Joe's, down Bluefield's dusty Main Street I walked as though I never meant to stop. I walked past the town limits and headed west toward Highway 80. My dark brown uniform collected the sun's rays and warmed my back, and my apron jingled with last night's tips. I felt liberated and daring, and when I heard a car slow up behind me, I stuck out my thumb and I hitched my first ride. When that 1934 DeSoto stopped, I climbed in with abandon.

"Walked out in the middle of your shift, did you?" the driver asked. I looked at this person who had stopped to pick me up. He was grinning, all dimples and brown eyes that looked as though they saw a lot, although he didn't appear much older than I was.

I smiled back. "Never made it in." Since this was a new thing for me, I wasn't sure exactly what I was supposed to say. "Thank you for stopping," I told him. "I'm Clair."

"Where you heading, Clair? Is that Clair with an 'e'?"

"Nope, no 'e.' No one's ever asked me that before."

"I have a little sister. Her name is Sara, no 'h.' She throws a fit when people spell it wrong," he said, affection apparent in every syllable. "So, where you running off to, Clair, no 'e'?"

This was, obviously, a point I had not thought through. *Was* I running away? And if so, where was I running? "Where are *you* going...and what's your name?"

"Matt Christopher of the Salt Lake City

Christopher's, at your service," he said. His tone was one of mock arrogance. "I'm headed out to the Coast, actually. At least for now."

The way this boy who seemed so young tossed this comment out so carelessly intrigued me. "What do you mean?"

"Well, my father sells automobiles back in Utah. He asked me what I wanted for my twenty-first birthday, and I said all I wanted was to see the whole country. So that's what I'm doing. I'm on my way from Vegas, gonna hit San Francisco, L.A. and San Diego, then head down to Texas." He glanced at me. "So how long are you gonna be traveling with me?" It was a playful challenge.

"Well...I've never seen the ocean before..." I began tentatively.

Matt pretended to faint over the steering wheel. "Then you're definitely coming at least that far." We drove south west all afternoon through northern California, though small towns that could have been Bluefield. Matt and I talked as if we had not just met a few hours before. I told him about Joe's Diner and about Aunt Sue, about Old Neary and Carolyn and Bonnie. He listened without interruption and did not say things like "Oh, your hands are too pretty to do such hard work" or any other remarks I often got from men back in Bluefield.

"I think it sounds like an interesting job," Matt said. "I mean, it's basically a study on human nature, right? Food makes people happy. You make people happy when you bring it to them. You're in the business of making people happy."

He made it sound noble and important. I didn't know about all that, and suddenly I wanted to quit talking about Joe's or about anything that had to do with Bluefield. Matt told me about the places he's been and about the places he was going to go. He joked

around about how I could ride with him for free as long as I wanted if I would pretend to be his personal servant everywhere we went. He was kidding about the servant part, but I think he really hoped I would stay with him for his whole trip. Matt Christopher *struck* me like no one else had in my eighteen years. Do you know what I mean by having someone strike you like that? He seemed carefree and at ease with himself and his world, yet projected a sense of loneliness at the same time. I could have just been picking up on the fact that he had been traveling alone for over a week now though. I don't know. But somewhere between Bluefield and the Coast Ranges I convinced myself that I could really stay with him. I pretended.

After a while, the breeze blowing in through the window began to smell different, like nothing I had ever experienced. We stopped to fill the gasoline tank, and I went in to use the bathroom. I washed my hands and the dust from my face. The reflection in the mirror startled me. I felt so different that I guess I expected to look different. But there I was, same hazel eyes, same light brown ponytail, same ugly uniform. I had my Aunt Sue's nose. Aunt Sue. I left the bathroom.

Matt and I made it all the way to the coast before the sunset. I don't even know what to say about my first view of the Pacific; anything I could say would be an understatement. Rippling blue as far as I could see in three directions, warm sand like velvet between my toes, the smell, the noise—there are no words.

We stood at the edge where the waves lapped our feet gently. The sun turned the ocean into emeralds, sapphires, and crushed glass. I knew I couldn't roam the country with Matt. I knew I had to go back. But it was OK now. We stood quiet as the sun made its western descent. I didn't want the day to be over. I couldn't look as the last of the sun lit the ocean; I didn't want to see it fall below the horizon. Matt did not say any-

thing; he let me look and think the worst myself.



I finally told Kim my story. I told her three months ago, on Valentine's Day. She came to my room during her break (she worked two shifts, of course, since she is not married). "Clair" was all she could get out ahead of the tears. She pulled the wicker chair close and hung her head. "He didn't even get me a card." Then it was time for me to take her smooth, young hands into my own shaky old ones. My hands have grown all but useless with arthritis. I can barely hold a pen or manipulate the remote control. But I believe these hands comforted my friend that day.

Now it is May, another springtime. The mountains outside my window roll by, as blue-green and free as that ocean in my memory. I am feeling tired. My door opens, and I desperately try to think—did I ring the station? Alice, the new nurse, is smiling as she walks toward my bed. "Brought you some mail, Clair," she says.

I thank her, and she brings me my glasses and leaves. It's a postcard. A sunny beach, the ocean, a swell ready to break—the typical seashore scene. But the craggy cliffs interrupting the coastline tell me that this card came from a West Coast beach, different from the married expanse of sand familiar to Easterners used to Jersey, Maryland, the Carolinas. I left the postcard on the night table for a while. The light in my room is fading, so I finally pick it up and turn it over. The message is short:

"Dear Clair," it says, "Here's to living. You always made me feel I was doing more than just surviving. Thank you. Love, Kim."

I slowly get out of bed against my protesting joints. The sun will set soon, and I want to see it. With much effort I move my wicker chair, Kim's wicker chair,

to the window. The sun is a bright halo over the mountains, and I watch as it drops. The sky blazes azure, gold, and crimson as the last slice of orange disappears behind the hills. I think of that day over sixty years ago, of an ocean mirroring the sky until it all ran together like a watercolor. Twilight is setting in with muted violet and the chorus of a thousand night creatures—crickets, katydids, and tree toads, and I close my eyes.

—Karen Kegyly

*“Cryptika”*

Never above—

Never to me—

Like a language:

    moaning to sing

    and ugly in its beauty.

The whispers and screams will cry on

But we who recall the madness

    will recite music.

Always under the top—

And still behind...

—Arlo Druzba

TOO BRIGHTLY BURNS THE SUN  
DESTROYING A THOUSAND TOMORROW'S  
HUDDLED AND ALONE I COME  
BRIGHT RED WITH WHAT'S UNDONE.

TOO BITTER WAS THAT FINAL BATTLE  
DEVOID OF ALL EXCEPT ONE  
DEVOID RAN THAT CUNNING BLADE  
INTO THE CENTER OF THAT SUN.

TOO SHATTERING WAS THAT FINAL CRY  
AS LOST I WALKED A FROZEN PLAIN  
NAKED I STOOD IN DIAMOND HUES  
PAIN MY COMPANION AND ONLY NAME.

—Paula M. Kienbaum



## The First Day of Buck Season

The wind whipped off my face like a sharp razor blade going in the wrong direction. Six inches of fresh snow lined the woods. It was a beautiful sight, the endless distance of white among the dark, gray trees. The tree branches glistened in the sun. The extreme cold had encased them in ice. The same cold had begun to invade my body. I knew this was part of hunting, but I didn't expect it to be this cold.

"This looks like a good place to sit." The voice of my stepfather John broke my concentration on the beautiful scenery. "See those rubbings on that tree over there?"

My head nodded in compliance, perhaps from the shivering of my frozen body.

"A huge buck must have made rubbings that big. Perhaps we'll get lucky and he'll come our way," he said.

I gave him a short smile in an attempt to show my enthusiasm. I always wanted to hunt from the first day my real father brought home his trophy buck, a 16 point. I saw the happiness in his eyes, and I, too, wanted to experience that in my life. I really haven't had it since my mother married John. He tried to be nice to me once in a while and took me to Dairy Queen or the Galleria Mall, but it's not the same. He was nothing like my real father. I knew things that they didn't know I knew. That's why I came out here. Perhaps I could find an answer to those things. The extreme cold

was really getting to me, though.

“John, I’m cold...”

“Nicole! Er...I mean Nicole. We must be quiet or we’ll scare the deer off. Understand?”

He gave his usual icy stare that always scares the crap out of me. I hate that stare. It makes me feel weird, like I don’t know what he’s going to do. I knew to nod my head yes.

“Go and sit on that rock over there and look for deer. That is the purpose of hunting you know,” he said.

Who does he think he is? Just because I’m a girl doesn’t mean I’m oblivious to hunting. I passed my hunter safety test with a perfect score. It taught me a lot, a lot more than my best friend Cody anyway.

The hunter safety instructor showed us a sequence of videos depicting hunting scenes. We were supposed to say either shoot or don’t shoot, depending on the safety of the other hunters. The scene shown wasn’t the easiest of them all. It was a deer running from left to right in a wooded area. There were two hunters, one slightly behind the other. The hunter in back tracked the deer with his shotgun as it ran to his right, closer to the other hunter. The instructor called on Cody and I tried to whisper that you shouldn’t shoot. As usual, Cody didn’t listen to me and said it’s okay to shoot. He hated a girl being right over him.

“Boy are you stupid,” I said laughing out loud. “You just shot your father in the back of the head. Never shoot in the direction of another hunter.”

“That’s enough Nicole,” said the instructor.

A strong tingling sensation in my foot made me realize I had drifted off into thought. I looked quickly over at John. He was scanning the woods in front of him. Hopefully, he hadn’t noticed I wasn’t paying attention. If he did, he’d go nuts. The tingling of my foot worsened. I didn’t know if it was getting cold or I had an itch.

Beside me was a small tree, where my 12-gauge rested. The gun meant everything to me. It belonged to my father and was the gun he used to shoot his 16-point trophy. I too hoped to get a trophy. I was only nine and didn't fully understand what had happened. My mother was devastated, though. On top of her grief, she desperately wanted a father figure in my life. That's when she met John at a support group. He had been going through the same situation and really helped my mother cope with my father's death. Needless to say, she eventually thought John was the perfect man to take my father's place.

The tingling in my foot worsened. I pulled off my glove and tried to reach the spot, but my thick furred Timberland boots kept my fingers from it. Then I looked back at the small tree. Its thin branches were covered with ice, but I thought one of them might help in scratching. I tried ever so quietly to snap off the branch. I knew any sound would make John mad. He loved hunting and prized getting a buck on the first day. I didn't want to be the cause of him missing out. I failed, though. The branch broke off with a loud cracking noise of breaking ice and wood. I immediately looked over at John. His head was already turned towards me. Those cold, brown eyes were staring right at me. I could see the rage in his eyes. I wanted to run and hide, but where would I go? The dark gray trees and endless whiteness that surrounded us would do no good to hide my bright orange suit.

"What did I tell you Nicole!" he said as he stood up from his rock. "I said to be absolutely quiet. You're just like your mother. She never listens either."

He stopped a few feet in front of me. The fear of him made my body shake even worse than it already was from being cold.

"I knew this was a bad idea. I never should have left your mother talk me into this." He turned away

from me and began walking back to his rock.

“Just sit there and be quiet, if you know what’s good for you.”

The tone of his voice, that loud, angry twang it has, ripped through me. I knew it well, but he didn’t know I knew it. I often heard my mother and him have fights in their bedroom late at night. The loudness of his voice always woke me in fright. I never left my bed, though. The fierceness and anger of John’s voice always stopped me. I would just lay there and listen to him scream at my mother. I couldn’t hear everything he said, just when his voice would really go loud. Things like, “you stupid whore” or “don’t you ever do anything right?” Sometimes I could hear the sound of my mother being slapped and then her whimpers. I wanted to stop him, but I didn’t want them to know I was listening. Every morning after it would happen John would have breakfast waiting for us and talk all nice and loving. My mother fell for his routine every time. Just because I’m twelve doesn’t mean I didn’t understand what was going on. I knew full well what was going on and why I was out here.

The sound of John rustling around placed my attention on him. I saw him lift his shotgun from the tree it was resting on. He turned and put his finger to his lips and pointed up to our left.

“Do you see it?” he asked without making a sound.

I looked out over the endless rows of trees and saw a magnificent buck standing among the trees. I looked back at John and nodded my head. I could see the excitement in his eyes. There stood the prize he was waiting for; the answer to why we were sitting here in the woods on such a bitterly cold day. I watched as John slowly lifted his rifle to put the buck in his scope. I copied every move he made, only mine were more silent. I knew exactly how to go undetected. I

watched as he followed the deer, which was moving left to right among the trees. He was waiting for the clearest shot so he would not miss. I already had a target in sight. The bright orange color could not be missed. The deer moved into a small clearing among the trees right in front of us. The sound of gunshot, twice as loud as usual, rang throughout the still woods. John's prize fell at the same time as mine did.

The excitement that had filled John's eyes now filled mine. I had learned to hunt better than John would ever know. My father's trusty 12-gauge had once again dropped a great trophy, ending the misery brought to my father's once happy family. I mean, who will ever believe I shot him on purpose? I'm only twelve years old and do not know how to hunt. There sits the deer and John before me. Everyone will believe me when I tell them it was an accident. I was so excited by seeing the deer that I forgot to look and see where he was. I mean, everyone will say, why did he take an inexperienced girl out in the woods for the first time with her own gun? Little do they know.

The woods around me fell silent, silence that added to the beauty of the fresh snow glistening in the sun. I couldn't feel the extreme cold that had invaded my body earlier. A girl of my age may have run in fear, but I had none. All the worries in my life were now over. I had all the time in the world to get help. The important thing to me was the clearness and ease I felt in my mind. The beautiful wooded scene before me represented that feeling perfectly. A little time to sit and reflect wouldn't hurt anyone.

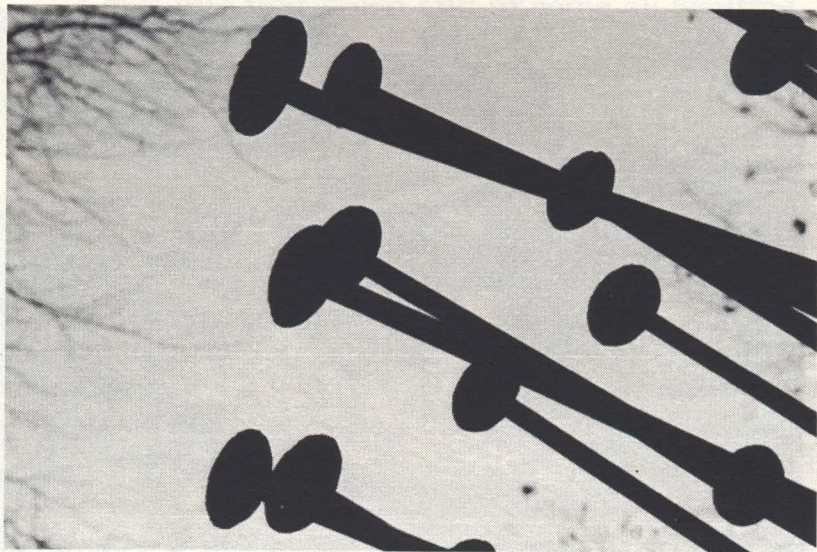
—Chris Wechtenhiser

## That Green

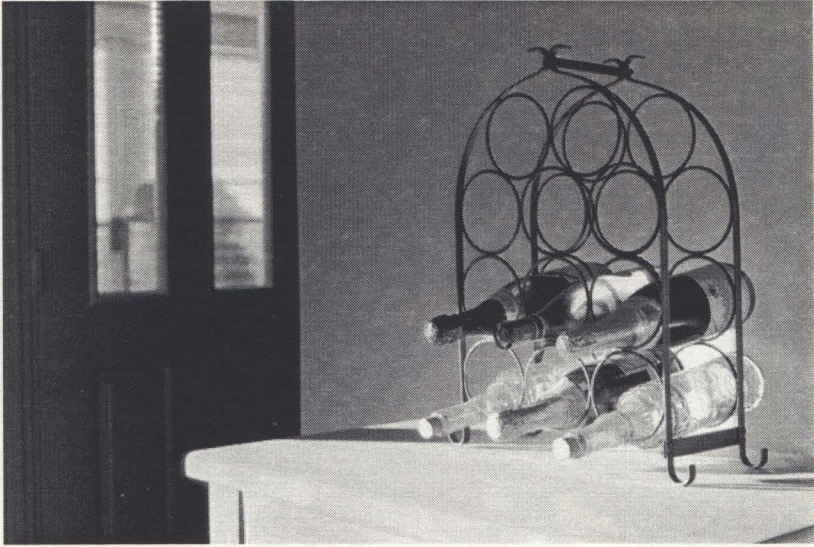
i dive into that green and beKöme all wanting  
all wanting to be in her four chAmbers  
all wanting to be a T her hip  
all wanting to be in her braIn  
i dive into that green and bEcome all wanting  
—Cobey Gross



...and became all wanting  
all wanting to be in her chambers  
...and wanting to be a T her hip  
all wanting to be in her brain









*urban idea garden 1*

*when reach exceeds grasp*

*firewater*

*service elevator, central park*

—Photos by Derek Schmidt



## Interview with C.S. Giscombe

C.S. Giscombe gave a reading during February at the CUB. He read from a variety of his published works, including his rather recent *Giscombe Road*. Giscombe is well-known for his emphasis on place in his poetry. He is currently an Associate Professor of English at Penn State. After the reading, we had an opportunity to sit down with Mr. Giscombe and get his insights regarding poetry and related issues.

Q: In today's society, literature, especially poetry, has taken a back street to many other forms of entertainment. What attributes of today's society have contributed to this, in your opinion?

Giscombe: Maybe the best way to respond to your question might be to start by redefining poetry as less entertainment and less communication than art form. It seems to me that what poetry demands now, and what it actually always has demanded, is a kind of attention to the language. Poetry is, essentially, a very actively managed language, that's what poetry does. It actively manages. It seems to me that this is the era of the "sound bite" that we're in right now, nobody cares to pay attention to language. Those who do are put down and made fun of. Why isn't poetry popular? Because we don't go there, we don't do language. We are not taught it in schools. We don't know the parts of speech. We don't know how to worry shades of meaning. We don't value that. We embrace technology, which is a fine thing to embrace, that's the market, that's the economy. It's what we do in this country and apparently do fairly well, but we don't emphasize the use of language or the beauty in any context aside from communication. We don't value language.

Q: In *Giscombe Road*, why do you include maps?

Giscombe: The idea I had at the time and still have to a certain degree is that at a certain point language breaks down. At a cer-

tain point, language doesn't do it. It is the inexpressible expressible thing beyond language where you have to, you know, get "graphic." I wanted to emphasize that in this section [the "Northern West"] as much as I try to praise language. But the map is a gesture from the shore of language out towards the less capturable or the less represented. My thought is that the map is something that you read, like you read a line. It is also an interruption in the text, and I believe very much in interruption, too.

Q: Your early writings are much shorter, much more conservative, and your later works are much longer and open. Is this to show a progress in your writing or more of experiments in writing or the result of experience?

Giscombe: Well, I had different opinions poetry wise. Are you referring to the *Postcards* book? It feels like a very ancient, ancient book. Yeah that was the book I turned my MFA thesis into. It reflects my concerns as somebody who was like 25 years old. You know, I was very much enthralled with lyric. You know I had worked with some of the people in my graduate program who were, essentially, lyricists. They wrote in that form, short poems about 24 lines long, the length of a page. You know certain forms do certain things. I worked with A.R. Ammons and Robert Morgan. I had a classmate in the MFA program at Cornell named Thomas Johnson who is an older guy and was very influential and had already had books published. Another man with whom I am still friends and with whom I teach now named Billy Joe Harris. All of us intuitively, in a sort of male-bonding, wrote these real, real short poems. When the book came out, around '77, I looked at it and didn't write for a long time. I didn't like the kind of snippet vision of the world I'd represented. And, when I went back to writing, I wrote a couple of long poems, which got published here and there, in order to get away from the lyric, before I broke into the sort of work I was doing in *Giscome Road*. It did seem to me, in short, that my view of the world was, in fact, much more complex

than what the short poems in *Postcards* suggested, and I wanted to be a bit more faithful to that view of the world.

Q: In the Introduction of *Two Sections from Practical Geography* there is a comment made about the lines being short partly because you were a smoker. How is this connected?

Giscombe: Well, how do you read stuff? Well, see poetry has got, for a lot of people and for myself to a certain degree, an oral thing to it. It is supposed to supply pleasure on those three levels, to the eye, to the ear, and to the intellect, and so with the idea of the ear in mind, you know how are you going to break your lines. The idea coming from Charles Olson, one line is a breath unit. It is how much you can say comfortably. You breathe when you read the poem and I have a bit more breath since I stopped smoking and so I am more long-winded, quite literally.

Q: I was told much of your writing is modeled after Charles Olson. What is the connection between him and *Giscome Road*?

Giscombe: Olson had a real strong commitment to place and history, and the most incidental facts. I was touched by Olson early in life, indirectly, long before I wrote *Postcards*, through one of my teachers when I was an undergraduate who himself is a poet named Don Byrd and has written books about Olson. Byrd was one of the big influences on me and via Byrd to Olson. There is a coincidence there, of course, when I think about my interests and my understanding of how life is projected, contained, and represented. It is what I asked you people, the same thing I ask most people when I meet them is Where are you from? What geography? How do you get the place you are from into your work? How does that place define you and how does it heal you at the same time? My first mature understanding of Dayton, where I am from, came from taking bus

routes, taking the bus downtown, understanding that buses went other places aside from that. It was a lifelong interest governed by and introduction to Olson and the things he was doing with from, messiness, and with language and emphasis, emphasis on place.

Q: Is there a connection between *Giscome Road* and William Carlos Williams' *Paterson*?

Giscombe: Yeah, it was. *Paterson* and *Maximus*, the work of Kamau Brathwaite, his work about the West Indies and about Barbados in particular. All of those things, books. Those books, *Paterson* in particular with its letters from Allen Ginsberg stuck into it certainly was an influence.

Q: It seems that in *Postcards* a lot of the work was commentary on society, especially on a person-to-person experience rather than a general picture of "this is how a society is". Do you see this approach as more observational or something that you just experience first-hand to be able to write about it?

Giscombe: I am not sure that there is a difference between the observational and experiencing something first-hand. It seems to me that the writer's job is to situate himself or herself, his or her consciousness in or opposed to what he or she is writing about.

Q: The *Virginia Quarterly Review* draws a connection between *Giscome Road* and "jazz and blues." How do you feel about this? Does jazz/blues music play an important role in your creation of poetry? How is it an influence?

Giscombe: I am happy that they picked up on it. There are some musical references, especially in the last section of the book. There are some kind of overt music references. There is a real sly thing that goes on which is the reference to a song called "Human Nature" by Michael Jackson. I remember see-



ing Miles Davis play “Human Nature” at a jazz festival about fifteen years ago and watching him play. I think that in the section “Sound Carries” this is a real improvisational jazz reference type thing or set up, a set of propositions. Even the hand-drawn map in the first part with its double arrows has a jazz origin. The line that I drew samples a number of different places. A single line, a single riff.

Q: As an African American poet, do you ever feel a pressure to fit a certain role or be a representative voice?

Giscombe: Well, it’s one of those things you can’t help but be, a representative voice. Anyway, one has certain expectations for black writers, generally. For a person to fulfill what is expected of him or her is obviously a fool’s errand. What occurs, to me, is that you know being public, what writing is, a public discussion of whatever your stuff happens to be, whatever your interests, obsessions, or needs happen to be. As a black writer, I suppose I see this as an opportunity to add my voice in thwarting expectations of what I am supposed to be doing. It’s a specific stage on which expectations can be thwarted. Any book that’s worth a damn thwarts people’s expectations.

—If you wish to contact C.S. Giscombe about this interview or have other questions for him, he may be reached via e-mail at the following web address: [giscombe@psu.edu](mailto:giscombe@psu.edu).

## Glass Virgins

"They're breaking up."

"They are?"

"Yeah. About to."

The two different waitresses peeked over the partition, across the nearly empty restaurant floor, all the way against the opposite wall. A young couple was seated in the booth, across from each other. The girl wasn't crying, but her cupped hand never left her face, and her expression was frozen in a near-explosive grimace. The guy made vague gestures with his hands, touching his forehead, pushing his hair from his face dozens of times, and stared at the low burning candle in the center of the table. Their dinners sat untouched in front of them.

Alice watched them in sympathy, standing on tiptoe to see. Her brown ponytail bounced as she bobbed up and down, trying to get a better view. She clucked her tongue. "Poor kid."

"Kid?" Celia looked at her in amusement, noticing the traces of baby fat and bright pink of the other's cheeks. "She's probably your age."

"Huh. She looks like a kid to me."

"Everyone looks like a kid to me."

"No. How old are you?" Alice asked.

"A million."

"Seriously."

Celia smiled. "I turn 44 next month."

"Wow..." Alice said. "You don't look it."

"Almost a million." Only a few lines crossed Celia's face, but her slightly arthritic walk and careful

speech betrayed her age far more readily than her appearance. She enjoyed working with the younger waitresses, particularly Alice. They reminded her of youth, but made her feel somewhat superior at the same time.

"I'm serious," Alice continued. "And you have such pretty hair." She moved behind Celia, pulling her hair into a slim ponytail and piling it in a mountain on top of her head. "You should wear it like this. Very elegant."

"Ooh," Celia said. "I wish I had a mirror."

Alice looked at her curiously. "How come you never got married?"

Celia glanced at the younger girl and couldn't help laughing at the sincere, earnest gaze on her face. "Just 'cause I'm a halfway decent looking lady doesn't mean I'm on a husband hunt."

Alice tried to hold a small smile as she left. Celia's soft hair floats almost to the middle of the back.

"And you can quit your smirking back there, too, shortly," Celia said, reaching behind her and trying in vain to poke Alice in the belly.

"I didn't say anything." The younger girl snickered slightly and turned away, rubbing her hands together.

"You was thinking it." Celia looked out at her lone customers. "The guy wants his check. I'll be right back."

The couple was speaking silently, as their type did. The girl was eating mechanically, chewing her thick steak with all the emotion of the cow it used to be. She stared out the window at the sparse parking lot. The guy pretended to scrutinize the check, taking much longer to read it than necessary. Celia hurried back and watched.

"I hope they make up," she said. "Sad people leave lousy tips."

"I like it when couples come in," Alice said.

"Me too. You know, you can always tell how serious a relationship is by the amount of the tip."

"Oh yeah?"

"First dates always leave big tips."

Alice jingled the coins in her apron pocket.

"Cause they're trying to impress the girl?"

"Yeah. Boyfriend-girlfriend leave smaller tips."

"Cause...?"

"Cause there's no need to impress. They've already got theirs."

"Oh," Alice said.

"You'll notice it too, with your man," Celia went on. "Sooner or later."

Alice flushed. "I've only been married ten days."

"I know." Celia leaned closer. "So how are you?"

"Well," Alice said quietly, "a little..."

The younger girl's mouth turned downward in an exaggerated pantomime of a frown. Celia watched Alice absently cracking her knuckles, and said "...sore?"

"A little," Alice said. "At first."

"Oh," Celia said. "But it got better, right?"

"Oh my yeah," Alice blurted, so quickly that both of them dissolved into laughter. A voice, singing loudly and badly, reached from behind.

"I saw Lon Chaney walking with the queen," it sang.

"Who's that?" Celia asked.

"Gotta be Tony," Alice replied.

"I saw Lon Chaney JUNIOR walking with the queen..."

Tony, the busboy, wandered over, wiping his hands on a blue apron. "I should've known you two sea monkeys would be together."

"We're always together," Alice said.

"We're twins," Celia added.

"Yep, Siamese twins. Connected at the brain

stem.” Tony scanned the floor, taking in all the empty tables. “Geez, it’s dead over here. You guys could hold skeet practice and not hurt anybody.”

“Do you want something or are you just here to bug us?” Alice grinned at him.

“I just came over to see if there was a newspaper over here.”

“I saved you one.” Celia handed him a few crumpled pages. “It’s yesterday’s.”

“That’s okay.”

Alice danced around Celia, shifting from one foot to the other. “Listen, Celia...since we’re so quiet tonight I was wondering if maybe I could go home early.”

Celia smiled. “Why?”

“Well...,” Alice didn’t finish, but her cheeks turned pink.

Tony laughed. “Geez, your honeymoon lasted a week. Leave the poor guy alone before you break him.”

“You be quiet,” Celia said. “You’re keeping good women from their work.”

“She should’ve married me. Then she wouldn’t even have to leave the restaurant. We could just run into the stock room for a few minutes and be back out before the dinner rush.”

“Read your paper.” Celia said to Alice, “I’d hate to send you home and then watch the restaurant get full.”

“When’s your birthday?” Tony asked Alice.

“January 31st.”

“You will have difficulties at work, but your advice will be sought and accepted.’ Hmm.”

What’s yours say?” Alice tried to read it upside-down.

“I’m a Libra. ‘Romantic issues resolved, as your partner begins to appreciate your best qualities.’” He put the paper down. “You sure you don’t want to marry me? According to this I’m in my prime.”

"I already got mine," Alice said smugly.

"Oh, yeah," Tony said, noisily stuffing the paper under his arm. "How is that poor guy?"

"He's really, really tired," Alice said, smiling at her spotless white shoes. "He works all weekend long, and goes to school on top of that..."

"I'll bet he was glad to get the week off." Tony yawned until his back cracked.

"He needed it," Alice said. "We needed it. Poor thing, he finally got to relax. Honestly, the last couple days he was as quiet as I've ever seen him."

"See? You broke him," Tony said. "What'd I tell you?"

"It was good for him to get away, and not think about his problems for a while." Alice impatiently glared out the window, as if daring the passing traffic to pull in.

"Well, you say hello to him tonight." Tony stopped, seeing Alice was preoccupied with the outside. He grinned and tapped Celia lightly on the shoulder. "If you ever want to let him up for air or anything."

"Well, I —" Alice bit her lip to keep from smiling. "That's personal stuff, none of your beeswax."

"Man," Tony said. "I don't know about you. Yoons act like your whole generation invented sex."

"My generation? How old are you? Maybe we could give you some pointers."

"How old are you, *girl*?"

"Eighteen."

"And I'm 26, which means that I was losing my virginity around the same time you were losing your baby teeth. No I don't think some sorority girl who's still paying off her prom dress has anything of interest to tell me about life." He walked away, toward the kitchen.

Alice stared after him. "What's his problem?"

Celia shrugged. "He's here." She stopped. A big

guy in a flannel shirt and green ball cap sat down at the counter. His brim was pulled low over his eyes, and a red-grey beard covered much of his face. Celia picked up a tray. "I'll be right back. Can you keep an eye on the floor while I'm gone?"

"Uh-huh."

Celia walked up behind the guy and pressed the heels of her worn hands into his back, between the shoulder blades. He inhaled sharply and sat up, straight as a chimney. Celia slowly ran her hands upward, her long fingernails collecting under the short hairs on the back of his neck. The guy smelled like gasoline.

"Celia, that'd better be you," he said.

"Who'd you think it was? Tony?" She came around and stood in front of him, the coffee stained white counter separating them. He just smiled. She pushed a saucer and cup in front of him. A glass pot materialized in her hand and she filled the cup, smelling the rich steam.

"Henry, I thought you were coming back every weekend."

"I know, I know." She leaned over the counter, looming closer and closer until he looked up.

"I missed you," she said.

"I missed you too," he replied, shifting back a bit. "I just couldn't get back for the weekend, that's all."

"All right," she said. "I won't ask where you've been, or who or what you've been doing, what kind of trouble you've been making..."

"Shit. I thought you said you missed me."

"Sorry."

"I'd invite you along, but I doubt you could stand a round trip to Minneapolis every other day."

"Don't want my company?"

"Sure I do." He grinned. "Soon as you learn to drive a rig. Can't have you sitting beside me all the

time, busting my balls.”

“Beside you all the time?” She raised her eyebrows. “You gotta be kidding. It’s all I can do to get a weekend with you. I mean, I’m sorry, but when you love someone I just thought —”

“Oh, man,” he said, moving back. “Yoons always bring this up. I knew we was gonna get to this.”

“You said it, mister,” she said. “You said it with that very mouth.”

“I know I said it.”

“Said what?”

“You know.”

“All right, you dick,” she said. “If you can’t say it, I will. You said ‘I love you,’ and I heard it. Love must hurt, ‘cause you’ve been scarce ever since you caught it.”

“It wasn’t so much that I said it, it was when...”

“You said ‘love’ while we were making ‘love.’ Nothing more plain or natural about it.”

“Well, yeah, but when we’re doing that, I’m liable to say anything I don’t mean —” he stopped, but it was too late. Her lowered eyes and tightened jaw got him and he leaned over to take her hand, before she could walk away. “I’m sorry, that’s not what I was trying to say.”

“Oh,” she replied. She allowed him to hold her hand, but she didn’t squeeze back. “So you didn’t mean it.”

“I —”

“You don’t love me, but you’ll make love to me. I see.”

Celia walked to the end of the counter, returning with a white rag. Henry lifted his elbows while she wiped.

“Maybe we didn’t make love. Maybe we just fucked.”



"Damn it, Celia —"

"That's not it, is it? I'm not just another piece, and you know it."

"Of course not and I've never treated you like one."

"No...," she said. "No you haven't."

"When we're together, I'm trying to make you happy, and saying 'I love you' did. Understand? I mean, geez, just 'cause I know where you like to be touched doesn't make me great husband material."

"It doesn't hurt." She refilled the cup.

"Look, by your logic, all I'd have to do is carve your turn-ons on the bathroom wall with my penknife. And then anybody taking a shit in there would know where Celia Watters likes to be touched, and then they'd love you too."

"Henry, don't be ignorant."

The silence grew uncomfortable. Henry looked around him, at the quiet booths, most of them with single occupants, sipping from cups, or rustling newspapers or just staring into the candles, the flames pulled upward by the softly humming air conditioner.

"So...," Henry said. "How's things around here?"

"Oh, pretty quiet. Little Alice just got back from her honeymoon."

"Oh yeah? Where'd they go?"

"Poconos."

"They're nice. She married that boy from Cuthbert, right?"

"Yeah, the Stewart boy. Richie."

"I knew his daddy. He's a nice kid."

The silence was easier to endure. Henry came closer. "Celia, there's been nobody else. Just you."

"I know. I know it is."

"Just...not yet, okay?"

"This isn't...you know, don't take this the wrong way, but what do you have against it?"

"Please, don't even talk to me about that. I've been divorced twice, so I know all I need to know about marriage."

"Ah," she said. "If I wrecked my car twice, would you say I knew a lot about driving?"

"Huh," he said. A loud crash echoed behind them. When they turned they saw Alice, her face sunset red, bending over the shards of a glass. She was kneeling, but looking up occasionally at the two of them.

"Break it, sweetie?" Henry called.

"Yeah...yeah, I broke it."

"First one?"

"What?"

"Is that the first glass you've broken?"

"Uh-huh."

"You lost your virginity. You're no longer a glass virgin. This was your first time."

"Oh," she said scornfully, looking down to hide her red.

"Geez, doesn't she get red when she's embarrassed?" Henry said, grinning. Now the teasing would begin in earnest. "All that blood flowing to her face. Her leg'll get cold."

Alice walked over to Celia, shyly avoiding Henry's light gaze. "Your party left over there."

"The lovebirds?"

"Yeah."

"How much?"

Alice handed over two Delaware quarters. Celia held them between her thumb and forefinger, rubbing them together.

"I told ya," she said softly.

"Shit," Henry said. "Slow day?"

"Slow month. I don't know where the business is."

They both turned slightly and looked at Alice,

who was still staring at them. At their glance she stepped back, her cheeks still glowing. "Sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt the conversation."

"That's okay," Celia said, wondering how much she'd overheard, guessing a lot.

"Yeah," Henry said. "We're done here, right?" He knew they weren't.

"Okay," Celia said. She knew it wasn't.

Henry drained the last of his coffee and pushed the saucer away. He reached into his brown wallet and pulled out a five. Celia saw it.

"Henry, for God's sake. All you had was coffee."

"Here," he said. "Take it."

"No." She tried to push it back into his hand, and he tried to slip it into her apron pocket. She worked an arm free and jabbed him with an index fingernail, right under his last ribs. He sat up with a gasp, and Celia stuffed the five into his breast pocket. Henry rubbed his side, glaring at Celia, half in affection and half not, and looked over at Alice.

"Celia, what're you doing to him?" Alice asked.

"Oh, it's okay," Celia replied. "He likes to be touched there."

Henry looked away.

"Gotta keep your man happy," she continued. "If you don't he might stray elsewhere."

"That's in the Bible," Henry said to Alice. "Did you know that?"

Alice shook her head.

"Henry!" Tony came up behind Henry and punched him lightly in his belly.

"Hey," Henry said, obviously pleased. He had to swing the whole way around on his stool to talk.

"See any deer?"

"Couple of rubs. You?"

"Got one with my truck."

"No shit. Kill it?"

"I don't know. He ran off, we never went back for him."

"Buck?"

"Yeah. I think it was a spike, maybe a four point."

"No shit."

Alice drove home, her window down. She'd gotten to leave a few hours early, so it was still early evening. The sun was behind the round horizon, with a pink marker indicating its hiding place. Her work shoes lay on the seat beside her, under her apron and light tip purse. She enjoyed feeling the car vibrating through the pedals on the floor.

The kitchen light was on, and so was the living room lamp. She could see them both from the end of the driveway. He'd be sprawled out at the kitchen table, reading, if he hadn't fallen asleep on the newspaper or magazine. She parked beside the mailbox, leaving the lights on so she could read the freshly painted words on the side, and decided to walk to the house, feeling the warm September air and light breeze.

Her bare feet scuffed the loose dirt in the driveway, but when the light wind became light rain, and the light rain became furious bullets of water, she sprinted the last hundred feet, slipping slightly on the way in the door. She entered the kitchen, wiping her arms dry, but he wasn't there. He was lying on the couch in the living room, the lower half of his body covered in an old Indian blanket. She tiptoed in and knelt beside him. Her fingers pushed hair from his face. He stirred and looked up.

"Hey," he said thickly. "You're home early."

"It was dead today," she said. Her hand continued to stroke his hair. He leaned up to kiss her. She started to reach under the blanket, but he touched her soft cheek.

"You're wet," he said.

"It's raining out. Pretty hard."

He looked beyond her, at the floor, following the wet and muddy footprints to the front door.

"Just like a little kid," he laughed.

She stiffened slightly and stood. He laid still, watching her. Finally she started down the hallway toward their room. "You coming to bed?" she asked.

"In a minute," he replied. She continued to watch him. He eyed her until she slowly walked down the hall. He listened to the bedroom door shut.

With one hand he reached under the blanket and pulled his sweat pants back up. With the other he used the TV remote to eject a video from the machine. He crossed the room and pulled out the plain black cassette, sliding it into place among the action movies stacked beside the Nintendo.

His sock was damp. When he looked down he saw that he had stepped in one of the small puddles. With another backward step he made a mark on the floor, toes pointing to the door, similar to hers. He threw a brief glance over his shoulder, down the hallway. Then, with a sigh, he went to get the mop.

—Andrew Chilcote

**Reflector prize for Fiction.**

## 2 poems

### Something should be said to try to stop this

Something should be said to try to stop this.

I put my hand on our hips to dance.

The music and the motion conspire against us.

Here we are back where we started.

## I don't think that

I don't think that  
had you been here  
anything would have changed.

Death is honorable,  
even if by mail.

And like I said,

I don't think that  
had you been here  
anything would have changed.

—Dol Heiney

## 4 poems

### Lemons

It is 6 a.m. and I agree  
it's much too early to be awake  
but if I take my pills  
I hate the world a little less.  
I packed a lemon for lunch  
and a glass of cold black coffee—  
the tastes seem to fit my mood.  
Off to work.  
but in the mean time  
I dream of pink slips.  
Sitting on the bus I sometimes stare  
especially at beautiful women,  
but this lady doesn't like me looking,  
I think it's her fault  
because she doesn't realize  
how beautiful her breasts are.  
I'd like to suck on one  
while my left hand played with the other.  
I say to her "34C or 36?"  
but she doesn't answer  
she must think I haven't taken my pills.  
but I took them right on time  
6:15  
"take your pills"  
and I did.  
I'll try one more time  
"34C or 36?"  
she then says "34"  
and I say, "that's what I thought  
you are much too skinny to be a 36."  
She replies with a "thank you."  
I then say "you're welcome,  
do you like lemons?"



## **An Act of War**

There are some individuals  
who by their very nature  
are thick with breath,  
They hold inside themselves  
a greater sense of existence.  
And there are times  
when harm befalls these creatures,  
it is at these times lesser individuals  
such as myself must arm themselves,  
for injustice against the inspirational  
is truly an act of war.

Raise a pistol  
Use your pen  
Let loose your tongue,  
but most importantly  
defend these people  
who know how friendly life is,  
because failure to do so  
is truly an act of war.

## The Bad Lands

I know of a prostitute, a whore if you prefer,  
Who sells her wares in a broken neighborhood.  
The neighborhood is referred to as "the bad lands."  
Yet this prostitute is a goodly lady,  
And the wait to see her looks like a Balkan bread line.  
It is under coarse conditions she practices her good will  
towards me,  
This humanitarian who gives everything she has  
And all the while speaking of politics:  
Ethnic fighting in the former Yugoslavia  
Depletion of the rain forest  
Starvation in Africa  
The Stock Market  
Corruption  
Japan  
Waste  
Hate  
Sin  
And, of  
Oh yes, the inferiority of credit to COD.  
After men see the goody prostitute they go home and  
tell their wives,  
"Peter Jennings is no Dan Rather."  
Their wives then say,  
"I like who you've become since you got into politics,  
it's made you a new man."

## Copper Penny

Man was once made from God  
and pennies were once of copper.  
Nightmares signified the devil in you head,  
but now you just ate before you went to bed.  
Doors were heavy and always closed.  
They're still closed,  
but now they're light  
and I can hear crying from the other side.  
Words were bonds upon an eternal page  
but now we have erasable pens  
and retractions are simply breaths we return each  
day.  
We exist longer  
but it seems we live less with each vaccine.  
Science has become our God  
and he does not live in us  
he lives in a super computer that contains all the  
answers.  
But if I knew the answers  
I would sell my soul for a question  
or at least a copper penny.

—Brian Heljenk

## Taxi Windows

**7:45** pm. Winter. Outside of a busy downtown office building, rows of business-

men and women stood shaking in the crisp winter air. Their long, dark trench coats absorbed the city lights that protruded from the infinite cars passing. Peaceful December snow fell silently upon passengers as they entered their vehicles—leaving others shivering in the night, waving their arms and anxiously awaiting the next taxi. When one finally arrived, the lucky summoners took their places behind the driver, happy to be delivered home in their tiny pockets of warmth. A man with silver rimmed glasses and wet-matted hair entered his. Where to? the driver asked. His voice was cold. His stomach tumbled past his belt buckle and into his lap; and his face was greasy and unshaven as if he had just swallowed pounds of French fries and now they were returning—taking their revenge by oozing out of the pores of his skin. You could tell he longed to be in other places. Driving through his city for twelve-hour days made him weary. The oncoming Christmas season only meant more traffic for him to wrestle with, and more people on the streets who shouldn't be driving. He only wanted to leave, not leave for home, just leave...

I don't know, the passenger replied, eyeing the cabby's driver's license on the dashboard as he spoke. I like the way the city lights sparkle on the streets. Please, take me around the city. I like to look this time

of year. The husky, stubble-faced driver obeyed, forcing his car into *Drive* as they left. On the other side of the taxi seat windows, the nervous lights of department stores blinked— reflecting in the man's small, silver-rimmed glasses. Their vanishing streaks of light left bright tails in his vision as the car roared like a lion, leaping through the busy city streets. The night felt electric. Cold, electric currents of snow gushed through his veins. The icy streets and bright, shiny vehicles illuminated upon him as they drove...

7:45 pm. Where to? The driver asked. I don't know, a lady replied entering the vehicle. Her auburn red hair contained particles of snow that melted in the warmth pouring out the taxi car vents. The sharp, musty smell of the wet vinyl seats made the woman wish she had waited for a better, more expensive vehicle. Just drive—I'll let you know, she said disgustingly. So, through the white-decorated, busy-frantic, winter streets they passed. The lady looked outside and fixed her eyes on the shimmying, neon white snowflakes that were caught flickering in the sky. She remembered his words...

Yo Buddy, where to? Words the cab driver mentioned to the man. His question sounded accusatory for he no longer wanted to drive his vehicle aimlessly. His impatience seemed to grow like plants gently watered and trapped underneath the vinyl-covered seats. He had no family. He spoke with insignificant lips; he rubbed his eyes with chubby, wrinkled fingers—fingers wrinkled and chubby from devouring tightly gripped steering wheels. But the man did not care. He had no destination in mind. There was no place in particular he wanted to go. For the past three months his life had been left hanging like snowflakes silently falling in black neon skies. He looked out the window to hide his

eyes that began to shine with the tears of love lost. Sharp, cold tears like ice sickles stuck to his face. The man began to frown even through he tried to hold it back. His down-turned face made him look like a sad, remorseful clown helplessly trapped behind the glass of taxi windows...

She thought about it as the cabby asked once again: Yo lady, where to? And still, no new place came to mind—only new feelings—new feelings replaced by new doubts. The new doubts leaving the same age-old brittle despair she grew tired of carrying. On her lap her hands shook showing the tension she carried within, the same age-old temptation longing to be released. She looked upward. The snow fell in tiny pieces as if little multi-cultural children stood at the tops of every skyscraper, holding buckets of snow and letting it fall piece-by-piece as they laughed amongst themselves. The lady smiled solemnly to herself the way one does at a funeral remembering the events of a loved-one's past. In the park, she said, the snow always looks pretty this time of the year. I remember when I was a child...

What? the cabby interjected. He didn't care about the man's childhood experiences. He only wanted to be off duty, the relentless snow driving strained his already tired eyes. The cabby's fingers gripped the steering wheel with the intensity of lost children clinging to their parents in crowded city parks. He never forgot those years. Not a day would pass without the cabby having to fight back the surging tide of re-occurring emotions from his youth. He was often left alone in the park on winter nights. Humongous, withering trees laughed at him—blocking the entrance ways and the secret paths he longed for escape. He never could forget the chest-burning, insatiable glare of strangers as he ran past them screaming for help. They often

wondered who would leave a helpless child alone in the park, but they never offered to help. The young child, (the now old), cab driver ran desperately through the park as their eyes, their faces, and their statue-shaped bodies disappeared and congealed into the lives of all others who were lost in the park. He never found the way out...

In the park the snow always looks pretty, she remembered. Snow-covered (dead) statues often stood still, embracing the solitude she desired on nights like these. In the back seat, the distance between herself and the driver increased. She started out the taxi windows: her eyes seeing the fragments of their life left in crumbled pieces—the dead memories lying naked in the empty spaces of thought. The driver intently watched the vehicles in front of them. As their car rumbled through the street he remained alert—ensuring that they both would make it home safely...

The park is always pretty during the winter, the man said. The old, saggy-faced driver didn't agree; he just glared frantic and absurd from behind the steering wheel replying: Where to? like a record player broken, stuck in the parks of its past. The driver was exhausted, but the man cared not for his life had been moving in slow motion since that day. Her rejection rung in his ears like abandoned record players left broken and playing on empty/deserted living room tables. Ever since that day he could only see the cold, still moments of his life flashing against the winter lights of city streets. Ever since that day he's been stuck behind taxi windows, riding to places of no known destination. The man looked without and saw his reflection painted as a slide: a projected image standing still against the moving buildings and nocturnal lives that existed outside his taxi windows. Taxi windows reminded him of the

trips they often took together— but now separately to the only place that could provide relief from the hypnotic and persistent lights of the snowy streets in their downtown city..

The lady looked without and saw the cold, still moments of her life no more. Although thoughts of the man attacked her, although the taxi windows provided little relief from the tide of re-occurring emotions plaguing her snow soaked body, she was determined to disassociate herself from their past. The taxi moved through the snow as it began to accumulate in the streets. Setting at streetlights, the taxi would often spin its wheels and sway side to side as it lodged itself free. It's getting pretty thick out there lady, the driver said. Shouldn't you be going home soon? The snow from the preceding cars splashed from their tires upon the taxi windows. The window-shield wipers smeared dirty black clouds of snow back and forth, back and forth before dropping them on the dingy winter streets. Maybe you're right, the lady said in response. Maybe you're right...

8:35 pm. The tension in the cold winter air increased. The man didn't know where to go. The taxi windows seemed to be closing in upon him. He now placed his hands upon them, touching every inch, moving from side to side.... From the outside he resembled a trapped and confused mime—a clown stuck behind taxi windows pantomiming ways of escape as the yellow cab moved through the snow layered upon the busy winter streets. The park! The park! The man thought, I'll go there! The taxicab rumbled and sloshed through the frantic winter snow accumulation in the busy streets. A tiny hat of snow began growing upon the top of the cab. The other cars in the street looked as if the bodies of sky carried upon their rooftops could crush



them. The man's face began to glow, the snow cheered him greatly! Driver, the man said, I want you to take me to the park. He clapped his hands and wiggled exuberantly like an excited child behind the stone-faced wall of the driver. He only stared forward. OK, buddy, he said. Not waiting for a reply, he shifted the car into the next lane, making sharp left turns to get there quickly. The snow made the taxi move sluggishly, but the driver didn't care. He would willingly fight heaven and hell to be done with this blasted winter traffic. The relentless snow driving strained his already tired eyes...

8:35 pm. The persistent greens and reds of the busy city traffic lights silhouetted upon the taxi windows. The smelly, wet vinyl seats bothered the lady no more, but she longed to be home. The relentless snow driving strained her already tired eyes, and it was getting late. She was expecting a phone call from her mother in twenty-five minutes. The persistent ticks of the taxi meter sounded like a metronome, a silent Grim Reaper patiently ticking away at her time. Her breath stuck upon the cold taxi seat windows as she remained trapped in her empty spaces of thought. She spoke: How soon can you get me to 56th St.? The taxi car driver studied the persistent window-shield wipers as he thought about his answer. Tiny flakes of snow appeared and disappeared, melting upon the glass as they landed. About twenty-five minutes, lady, the driver responded. I'll have to go past the park first—the traffic probably isn't as bad there...

8:55 pm. The park! The park! the man said. I have to get there. He bounced upon his seat as if it were a trampoline. As the man played persistently in the back, the taxi cab driver began to lose patience. You'll be there soon, you freak, he said just loud enough

for no one else to hear. While his passenger wasn't looking, the driver flipped a switch on the meter making it tick just a little bit faster. He chuckled to himself as he made a right turn into the park, parking next to a car beside them...

8:53 pm. There's the park on your right, miss, the cab driver stated. Hold on a minute, stop right here, the lady said. She grabbed her thick, black leather gloves and began clearing the taxi windows. Looking without, she noticed the park didn't look as she remembered. The massive winter trees appeared menacing and unkempt, and the streetlights upon the sidewalk seemed to take away from its once romantic luster. The park now looked mechanical. The dark, rusty benches stood cold and isolated underneath the snow as they disappeared into the crisp winter night. The dark, romantic gods had clearly left this place long ago—robbing the park of everything wild and exotic as they left... A taxicab approached and parked on their left. I want to go home driver, she said, as if speaking to a dream. I really want to go home. The husky, stubble-faced driver obeyed, forcing his car into *Drive* as they left. The icy streets and bright, shiny vehicles were illuminated upon him as they drove...

—jason london



