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DIANA WHITNEY

Etymology of Transgression

from Latin, *transgressus*: to step across or beyond
A violation of a law, command, or duty
A relative rise in sea level, resulting in deposition
of marine strata over terrestrial strata

Poised at the threshold
the choice is always
to step across, or turn back.
She thought he was a doorway
to rapture, but like the gods
he had no conscience, didn't
recognize the word, whispering
aubades in the woodferns, remorseless
in his beauty and lyricism.
She thought he was a doorway
but a door doesn't stray
or lapse, the jamb holds fast
solid as the house around it.
He was green silk and shadow,
hawk-shadow over grass, desire
disguised as thunderhead
and white bull calf. Savoring

her secret peril, she crept the path
at dawn. By noon he was gone
in a blaze of tiger lilies
untouched by guilt or loss.
But when goddesses grieve, they rage
and the seas boil, saltwater
floods the fields and valleys
till even the forests are submerged,
maples lush as seaweed
swaying, the gate of ferns
she stepped across fluid as kelp,
lapping the fallen sugar house,
now a sunken galleon, lost treasure
spilled below the known world.

MIMI MORTON

The Cellar

Patrick was awakened by a gun shot. He rolled over, opened his eyes. The roof of the tractor shed began to spin. *Put This Side Toward Living Space*. Black lettering on silver over pink fiberglass. The words spun faster and faster into a cotton candy vortex. He was going to barf.

He shut his eyes, reached over the edge of the mattress, groping. Shoe, ashtray, cigarette pack, books, cans. Salt welled under his tongue. He knocked over empties until he felt the blessed weight of a nearly full bottle. He hoisted himself on an elbow and gulped down the stale beer, then fell back with an arm over his eyes. The motion set sparks throbbing behind his eyelids.

The door flew open, smashed against the wall.

“Get up. David’s killed the pig.”

Patrick opened one eye enough to see Jane, arms crossed and legs apart, silhouetted against sun. He swallowed bile, gagged, rolled away from the light and spat on a stack of old *Times*.

“You’re dis-gusting,” she said. Light shone through her dress. He could see the tuft of hair between her legs. She wore ancient Greb Kodiaks. Her heavy blond hair was tied back with a piece of baling twine. He loved her to wrap her hair around his cock. The thought brought on his morning erection, followed by a coughing spell.

“Come on, then,” Jane said. “If you wouldn’t get so *fucking* drunk, we could have butchered her by now.”

Even cuss words gained status in her mouth. *The English woman*. His friends in Bayonne couldn’t believe that he was raising pigs on a farm with someone who sounded like the Queen.

She slammed the door. He lay listening to her boot steps, imagining her long strides, her elegant, filthy legs, as if she were a character in *The Canterbury Tales* hiking an ancient moor. She’d read him some in the original English and it sounded

like music. He loved hearing her read anything — the school lunch menu from the *Port Medway Pilot*. *Tuna melt. Fruit salad. Sloppy Joes.*

A rock hit the side of the shed.

“Up!” Jane shouted from a distance.

Relentless bitch. He bent his legs. Knee cartilage creaked. Too much basketball on concrete courts, he thought, as he shoved off the mattress and raised himself. His vision filled with a snowstorm of dots. He stumbled over stacks of library books and newspapers, gashing his leg on the edge of the wood stove as he bent to put on his overalls. He steadied himself against the door jamb and slid into a pair of muddy barn boots, staggered outside into a sheltering clump of Jerusalem artichokes, and pissed.

“No, no, no, watch the mud please!” Alan’s command.

Patrick glanced around, the earth raced in the opposite direction.

“Tent pegs, please!” On the other side of the driveway Alan was directing something, as usual. The wedding tent. Best to avoid Alan. There had been nastiness last night. What? Alan accusing him of not making his monthly contribution to the farm account? Alan, with his secret vacation stash. He could go sit on it.

Patrick needed something so he could see. Maybe the keg had arrived. He ducked into the workshop, the woodshed. Objects vibrated in the sun, stabbing his eyes. Needing darkness, he rounded the house and entered the dank funk of the cellar. The dirt floor was slimy. He grabbed a post, felt for the light switch. Blown bulb, as usual. They’d be better off with lanterns the way Jane wanted. Medieval Jane. A chuckle caught in his throat and turned into a fit of hacking. He spat. Even without the light he knew that in the corner sat the cider keg, now nearly empty. Acid burned his throat. He pawed his

way up the stairs, hands on the risers. At the top, he stopped to let his heart calm down. There were Tessa's awful canning jars. Tomatoes like abortions. Beans. Watermelon rind. Mossy sediment on the bottom. Biology class specimens.

He stepped into the hall, past the sound of typing behind Cal's door. In the kitchen, Tessa, in green satin running shorts bent over the oven, removing bread pans. She glanced back at him.

"Good morning."

How did she pack so much venom into a greeting? "Hell-low." He tried to sound jaunty but the word came out wrong.

He opened the refrigerator, felt around. Nothing. He squatted by the counter. The gash on his calf smarted. A line of blood had soaked through his overalls. His eyes were level with the back of her knees. Purple veins. Oyster flesh.

"What can I get for you?" Tessa looked down at him, unsmiling.

"Nothin'."

He stared at the floor. A speck moved. An ant was carrying a clot of granola many times its own size. Dream the impossible dream. The words tracked through his hangover, making him laugh. He bent forward coughing, palms on the floor, crushing the ant. When he was able to breathe he asked about the keg.

"After twelve," said Tessa.

The lady is pissed off. He tried to stand up, decided against it and pretended to look for cereal.

"What're you doing baking bread on your wedding day?" He hated himself for fearing her.

"Oh I could do this in my sleep." She turned back to the stove and he saw the frayed elastic of her underpants in the leg hole of her shorts. Where was that booze? He spied a promising shape behind a rice tin, tamari bottle, leaky sack of beans: an unopened pint of cooking sherry. Answering his prayer, Tessa moved from counter to table. He slid the bottle into a side pocket, grabbed the counter and pulled himself to his feet.

"Want a slice of fresh bread?" She glanced at him.

"Na. Thanks."

In the outhouse, Patrick tore off the plastic cap and poured the sherry down his throat, gargling to clear his mouth of sludge. He leaned against the window frame and closed his eyes while the sherry took the edge off his pain. One more pint might do it. When he opened his eyes he saw Jane and David in the orchard tying Big Red to a branch of the apple tree. Thunder rumbled. The air was stifling but it was too early in the day for storm.

"Cock sucking son of a bitch!" David spat out the words as he pulled on a block and tackle.

"I don't know why you think that cursing will help," Jane said.

"Fucking son of a whore!" David shrieked.

Jane saw Patrick in the outhouse. "It's about bloody time!"

Patrick tossed the empty sherry bottle down the hole.

To avoid running into Alan, he headed for the barn. Suddenly: a miracle. The beer keg stood inside the door. Love returned to the world. Bracing the keg between his legs, he pumped up the siphon and twisted the spigot. A stream of foam shot out—what to catch it in? He looked around slowly to keep things steady. The sherry hadn't been enough to clear his vision. He made out empty kerosene cans, peach baskets, a roasting pan full of old motor oil, a box of canning jars. He grabbed a quart jar, blew into it, raising dust. He sneezed and was gratified by the feeling. A spider scrambled over the lip of the jar and he blew it away. He let foam overflow until clear gold began to rise. He filled and drained the jar twice in long gulps, filled the jar and turned off the spigot. Beer spurting around the edge of the seal. He bent over the keg struggling.

"Breakfast?"

Patrick lurched. Alan stood in the barn door. He wore a Mexican sombrero and white bermudas.

"We did procure that for the wedding guests you know."

Procure your skinny ass, thought Patrick, as he picked his way to the back of the barn around a

maroon plush sofa, a collapsed wicker baby carriage, boxes of phonograph records, a lawn mower, car parts. A barnful of shit and none of it his. Hot light met him at the side door but now he could bear it. As he rounded the pig yard, a piglet trotted to greet him. Others followed.

"Hello darlin'." He bent to scratch her under the chin. She shied, then allowed him to stroke her back where tiny black hairs were beginning to sprout. "We gonna eat your mama," crooned Patrick. The other pigs butted their snouts against the slab-wood fence, oinking softly.

I did this, he thought. *I raised these suckers so we could eat in the winter. Nobody helped me, not Jane, nobody.* He was up alone at 3 AM in a northeaster when Big Red went into labor. The piglets were born on the run. Jane bought him a gallon of Paul Masson to celebrate. He came four times the next night or had that been a dream?

"Let's get on with it!" shouted Jane. "Before it storms."

The body is a burden, Patrick thought, slogging through the pig yard. He was down to one thirty and still his legs felt like cement. He made his way up the pasture to the tree where the sow was hanging by her feet.

"Jesus, this is a Christly heavy mother." David pulled on the rope. The pig's head lolled to one side against a pile of green windfalls. A dark hole above one ear leaked blood. A yellowjacket crawled across her eyeball.

"Where the knives at?" Patrick stood panting. As a boy, he'd helped his grandfather in Secaucus dress a pig every fall. They worked all night in the back yard while his uncle cut up roasts and chops on the kitchen table and his grandmother wrapped the cuts and ground scraps for sausage.

"In the pail by your foot," said Jane.

His grandfather had kept the slaughtering knives in a black leather box with a brass clasp. No one else was allowed to handle them. He said that getting your meat was a serious business. After he finished, he boiled the knives and sharpened them and oiled

them and set the box on a high shelf where it stayed until next year.

"Give me a hand here," David gasped, straining on the rope. He was trying to lift the sow clear of the grass. His t-shirt was soaked with sweat.

Patrick gripped the sow's haunches and hoisted her until her head swung free. His heart sloshed in his ears.

"That's it," David turned away from the pig. He took out a handkerchief and blew his nose. "She's all yours. I'm gonna take a shower. Have a drink. Enjoy my remaining hours of bachelorhood."

Better you than me, pal, thought Patrick.

"Squeamish, don't you know," said Jane, watching David walk to the house. She put the milk pail under the sow's head.

Thunder rumbled.

Patrick picked up the double-edged knife. He felt the blade with his thumb. His heart shook through to his back. His hands weren't so much shaking as flapping.

"That's *won-diful*," said Jane. "A regular Sweeney Todd."

"Listen." Patrick was suddenly tight with anger. "I'm what you got here in the way of a pig cutter."

Holding the sow by her ear, he drove the knife into her neck where he hoped her jugular was. The cut took all his strength. Her front hoof jerked, catching him on the shin. He yelped and hopped backwards. The knife blade stuck out of her neck like the lever of a one-armed bandit. Blood ran down her chin. With effort he jostled and tugged the knife until he'd made a bigger gash, then pulled it out.

"I could use some beer." He didn't look at her but she began to move. Sometimes his words made people move. Mostly they didn't. Mostly he had to move things by himself. Only God was the unmoved mover.

Pig blood pattered into the pail. We eat everything but the squeal, his grandmother used to say. Head cheese, blood pudding: his family loved it all. Blood pudding was a hangover cure. Turns your

shit black. He rubbed his hands on his overalls and relit a half-smoked cigarette. He sucked a column of smoke down the center of his body, exhaled heat, steadying himself against the pig and the pig against him, letting the blood empty.

Last fall's slaughtering had been easier. The weather was cool and he'd had a fifth of Wild Turkey. If Tessa and David hadn't decided to get married now, there would be no need for this labor and the danger of pork going bad in the heat. He dropped the cigarette butt in the bloodied grass. It hissed, smoldered.

"Here's your *bee-ab*." Jane, pronounced the word as if it were an absurdity. She carried three sloshing jars in a spackle bucket.

Patrick drank down a jar, belched. His hands began to relax. He inserted the curved butcher knife just short of the sow's vagina and drew the knife downward along her belly until he could fit in two fingers. He shivered at the hot slippery feel of her insides. There was a smell of fresh sex. He slid his fingers along the abdominal sac, following with the knife, careful not to puncture the gut. Blood and water ran down his arm and drained off his elbow as he gentled the knife back and forth through the flesh.

"Push," he said. Jane pressed both hands against the sow's belly as Patrick leaned into her ribs, the two of them struggling to keep the incision closed.

"You cut her bladder," said Jane. "I can smell it."

When he reached the navel, Patrick withdrew the knife, shaking. He was seeing spots again.

"Get Cal," he said, "and the hose."

"The hose was never meant to reach this far," said Jane. "We'll need to bring the carcass down."

"Just do it, please." Patrick closed his eyes. No one knew how tough this job was. He longed for a quart of bourbon and a mattress. His mouth tasted rank and salty, like pig blood. His left knee gave way and he stumbled, caught himself. The carcass emitted a hiss of bad air. The intestines dangled. Grey hose. The brick-colored liver slid out, then the stomach, the gall bladder. They made an iridescent pile in the

grass. Patrick vomited into a clump of Queen Ann's Lace. When he turned back, Cal was bending over the pile with a shovel, scooping the organs into a bucket of water.

"Thanks buddy." Patrick spat into the grass, wiped his mouth with the bloodied back of his hand, spat again. He'd wanted to puke all morning. Now he felt stronger in the legs. He found another mason jar, drank. Something hit his elbow and he rubbed the sting.

Cal was sawing through the diaphragm, separating the rib cage and drawing down the lungs. He loosened the heart from its sac and plunged it into the bucket of water.

"For my cats," he said, smiling up at Patrick.

A rush of bloody fluid came from the sow's mouth.

"Let's hose her down," said Cal.

Jane was dragging the barn hose into the orchard. Her face was flushed and her dress was streaked with blood. Patrick was reminded of illustrations he'd seen of those women in ancient Greece, the ones who dressed in animal skins and worshipped the wine god.

"It won't reach. I *told* you!" she hollered. "We used the tree by the brook last time. Much better."

Patrick couldn't remember.

Cal hacked through the pig's neck. The head dropped and bounced on its snout. Patrick heaved it into the wheel barrow. He held the sow's haunches while Cal sawed through the rib cage. He cut through the silky layers of belly fat until he touched the white spools of the spinal column.

"Now comes the part I hate," said Jane. "Thank God you're doing it, Pat."

Patrick glanced over his shoulder at her and she smiled and narrowed her eyes. He held the loins while Cal cut a circle around the hooves. He made an incision from the crotch to the hock. Patrick hacked the skin free from the inner fat while Cal slowly pulled back the hide. Patrick breathed hard. His arm ached.

When they had worked their way down to the

sow's forelegs, they let the skin fall free. They untied the carcass and toppled it into the wheelbarrow.

Patrick walked a few paces away to another tree, turned his back and pissed.

"If you can take care of the guts," Cal said, "I'll wheel this stuff down to the fire."

If I *can*. Patrick felt a rush of defensiveness. Sure I can, and I *do*.

Jane lifted the bucket.

"I'll do that," Patrick rose. "You bury the blood."

"Bury it!" Jane exclaimed. "Why, it's the best thing for the compost pile. The worms will love it."

Anything to keep you happy. Crazy ideas. Patrick sat back on the grass. Cold sweat ran down his sides. He shivered slightly. A joint would help. Simon was down by the fire. He'd have something.

"Yo Si!"

Simon flipped the hair out of his eyes and looked up.

Patrick would still have to walk down there and get the joint. He didn't want to move, flapped his hand dismissively. He felt in the pockets of his overalls. Nothing, nothing. Something in the bib. A roach. A cinder of happiness. He lit the joint, swallowed the rest of the beer and gazed out over the farm. From the slight rise of the orchard, the land sloped down to the pig yard where the piglets lay in their wallow beside the blackberries. In the back yard, Alan was sitting on a stump, legs crossed, staring at the tent. As if sensing Patrick's stare, he glanced behind him, rose and walked briskly toward the house. Down by the fire pit Cal and Simon were laying strips of pig on the barbecue grate. On the far side of the driveway, Jane stood on the compost pile stabbing with a pitch fork. At the center of the scene was the farmhouse with its asphalt siding glittering in the sun. Tessa sat at an upstairs window with a towel on her head, talking on the phone. David was reading in the outhouse.

Patrick inhaled. The scent of marijuana and wood smoke bound the scene into a vision like something in a book. With the tent, it could be old England. Knights and ladies and jousting. *This is my home.*

The thought brought tears into his throat. *I could have been in jail if it wasn't for this place. Or sleeping under the Pulaski Skyway. Or dead.*

In the outhouse, David was now sighting down the barrel of his twenty-two.

"Hey! Don't start that again!" Patrick yelled. David had to play the asshole. Or maybe he thought he was being helpful. The rats ate the pig food. They came in the house and died in the walls and stank, but this wasn't the time to try to play exterminator.

"Gotcha!" David cackled.

I'm drunk but I'm not a fool, thought Patrick. He picked up the bucket of guts and went to the house. In the kitchen, he passed Alan making lunch at the counter.

"Innards!" Alan made a face "Ugh."

You've eaten worse and liked it, thought Patrick.

Anger made him briefly assertive. "Can you give me a hand with the wood?"

"Oh I'd love another chore!" He patted egg salad onto a slice of Tessa's bread. "The caterers are coming at four and I've got to arrange tables. By the way," he raised an eyebrow. "The keg is out of bounds until the reception. F. H.O! Family Hands Off!" He widened his eyes.

My ass, thought Patrick. As if you aren't going to get hammered in the near future. He pawed the cupboard for freezer bags. Jane strode into the kitchen, unscrewed a jar and dumped walnuts on the counter.

"Dear, dear!" Alan brushed bread crumbs into the compost bucket and began wiping the counter.

Jane ignored him. "We've nothing so simple as a nut crackah." She went outside.

"Clean up your mess!" Alan yelled.

"I'm not through!"

The Jane and Alan show. Patrick found a garbage bag and dumped the contents of the bucket.

Jane stalked back into the kitchen and began cracking nuts on the counter with the blunt edge of an axe. Each smash set off sparks behind Patrick's eyes.

“What in God’s name do you think this is? The Flintstones?” He rolled his eyes at Patrick.

Not for the first time, Patrick amazed himself by feeling affection for Alan moments after he’d loathed him.

Jane swept shells into the compost and began eating nut meats, holding each morsel between thumb and forefinger and nibbling daintily. He watched her jaw bone flash. He wanted to take off her clothes.

He turned to her. “Drive me into town?”

“And buy you a bottle?” Joan snapped. “I’m splitting more wood for the barbecue, since you didn’t. You’ll just have to wait until the party. Four hours won’t kill you.”

He picked up the bag of guts and headed for the cellar. He caught sight of himself in a mirror above the kitchen sink: desperate eyes, cheekbones streaked with dirt and blood; black hair to his shoulders; beard like Rasputin.

Down he went, shivering in the clammy darkness. The red light on the freezer flickered. The thing was on its last legs. He opened the lid and withstood the gush of cold air. At the bottom were ice-logged containers of last summer’s zucchini and lima beans. The stuff belonged in the compost. He tossed in the bag of organs and lowered the lid.

By the cider keg, what did he smell? Probably rat. After pig blood, nothing bothered him. He lowered himself painfully to the floor and felt for the wooden tap. Someone, probably himself, forgot to remove the plastic hose used for siphoning cider into jugs. He put the end of the hose in his mouth and opened the tap. An image came to him of a rat drowned inside the keg. He wretched, spat sediment. Who was it that drowned in a vat of beer? Some Shakespeare guy.

He sucked on the hose, propping himself against the side of the barrel. In the dim light from the cellar window, outlines became visible. He’d never noticed the massive foundation stones, streaked with iron. How had they been moved? On stone boats, with horses. Jane said the foundation dated to before the Civil War. In the old days, everyone

needed to get drunk just to live through the work. Nobody worked now the way they had a hundred years ago. He’d seen his great grandfather’s diary, fresh off the boat from County Wicklow and working in a sawmill near Perth Amboy. *Stripped bark today. Today stripped bark.* Day after day. Every day the same except Sunday. Patrick had worked today. He sucked, letting his eyes wander, relax. There were wooden crates full of glass beakers and condensers left over from David’s attempt to make vodka. The stuff stank like rotten potatoes. In a corner sat a cast iron cauldron. Before his time, Tessa had hoped to support the commune with a candle-making operation. A disintegrating cardboard box, brightly colored plastic. Children’s toys. Tessa’s daughter? Someday he’d have a daughter, dark and beautiful; but when he thought of her mother all he could see was his own mother with the scapular medal with the picture of the bleeding heart that she wouldn’t take off in the hospital. *Can’t wear it in the operating room* the nurse said. He put it around her neck before she regained consciousness. *God will bless you,* she said to him. *You kept me from harm.* Dead a month later.

Farther back in the corners, objects lost their distinctness, and became chaotic, sinister. He thought he saw a coil of heavy chain. He took another pull of cider. His head felt better than it had all day. Cal told him that the original house on this foundation had been a stop on the Underground Railway. He felt in his pockets for his last cigarette. No matches. He’d have to go up to the kitchen to find more and already he could hear people arriving to cook. A flash lit up the cellar. Rumbles. More footsteps. Women’s voices. The bridal party.

“—looked *evrwhere* for him!” He heard the wrath of Jane.

“Maybe he’s passed out somewhere.” Tessa.

“He’d make an excellent lightning conductor.” Alan’s laugh.

The pounding of new arrivals. Voices blurred. Patrick took another slug of the cider. The Underground Railroad. He’d check it out at the Port

Medway Historical Society. He'd walk in with his bloody overalls. The old white ladies would jump out of their corsets.

"I don't see how he can stay here." Alan's voice. "He hasn't contributed one cent to this reception."

"I'd say the pig is a rother nice gift." *Rother*. Jane was defending him, the mother of his imagined child.

"Cal did most of it." Alan again.

"Let's not start in. Today of all days," Tessa said. "This is supposed to be a celebration."



Of what? thought Patrick. If it weren't dirt cheap to live here no one would.

"Well, all I can say is that we have some very

pressing issues to discuss at the next house meeting." Alan's footsteps. Even from beneath the floor, Patrick could identify the *snap snap* of those little rubber thongs.

The hardest thing to do in life is to love, his mother said, every time he came home with a new girlfriend.

The top of his head felt like the lid of one of Tessa's canning jars. The cider was helping him to unscrew the lid, helping him to get at ideas. No one was going to kick him out of here. He'd live in the cellar if he had to. This house had been his refuge after he quit clamming and was washing dishes at the marina and Jane showed up on a houseboat. He yawned, took another pull on the hose to freshen his mouth. He'd go back to school, write a thesis. He had a great subject.

GREG DELANTY

The American Robin

A robin bashes his blood-breasted body
against a neighbor's window pane.
Maybe he beholds bird-heaven within; his family
past, present and future: chirpy friends,
mates singing merrily over a feast
of divine cutworms, angelic larvae. Or, he eyes
the Helen, Marilyn Monroe, Sheba, Aphrodite
of robinesses. But the bird-book
explains how the American robin works himself
into such a territorial frenzy that he's often seen
attacking his reflection, convinced his own image
is the enemy. Too easy to turn into allegory.

JEREMY MARKS

Industrious Fingers

When the red sun stills the
evening water

When the night is felt like
a breath withheld

I hear my fingers move and
feel their

Coil and release:

Always they are tying knots,
mending rope, fastening bolts
and linking chains

Until the air slows down to
a point where daylight

No longer invades my
grip-

CP SURENDRAN

Morning Show

Everything there
Was a photo story
Of something else
Except her face
The way the books leaned
Against each other
Like friends caught in a crisis.
Under the cot, two dead sparrows
Insurance details
Of a faceless former tenant
All this he saw at a glance
In the early morning light
Brought from a night's journey,
Stills from a film
Whose title was her name.

JENNY MORSE

In a House with a Name, One is Never Alone

At the end of this world, Skia folds her toes beneath her,
presses her knees into the dark soil.
The damp of the loam soaks into her cotton.
The capillarity draws fingerlike toward her skin. Surface tension.
Adhesion. The bonds between stitches in our fabric,
the bonds between walls, the chinks beckoning intrusion,
asking anything from outside to come in.

*This is how we offer ourselves. This is how we trace recognition:
in the damp threads of our clothing, the salty itch on our skin.*

In the garden, Skia breathes in deeply.

She wants to slow everything down, to see the petals
unfold, the leaves turn their stomas toward the light.

She waits for their tiny lungs to open, for their waking to transpire.
The air is so cold she can see it hanging like all the strings of the universe,
their chords on display.

Skia practices listening, quiets until the strength of her heartbeat overcomes
the dilated air in her chest. Respiration. The small hiss of air shifting.

But the stems don't recover and twist their leaves toward the sun.

Skia whispers to withered green things, broken roots, bulbs of overripe onions,
These people have failed you. Her fingers coat with earth and anger.

The Stove

Mom used to say the full moon made patients crazy. Once, when I was ten years old, she came home with a black eye. The full moon rose and an otherwise peaceful patient seemed to suddenly go mad and clocked her with a full bedpan. On the next full moon, a woman sunk her dentures into the soft muscle of her forearm while she was changing her IV. Mom and her fellow nurses used to switch shifts so they wouldn't get stuck working the full moon shift two months in a row.

The moon is full tonight, and it's exactly two years and ten months since she died. There's a concrete square on the sidewalk outside the hospital where Mom would gather with her coworkers and smoke. Nurses don't smoke there anymore—they have to smoke on the loading dock. I step on that square every day, once with each foot and never on the crack, as I head to my job as a cook in the hospital cafeteria. I've heard western cultures see time as a line—just another thing in motion that stays in motion—but in the eastern world, time is a circle and history comes back again, whether we're aware of it or not. Coming back to this hospital feels circular to me, so I'm keeping an open mind about the shape of history.

When I clock out, I see that Dad has called my cell phone.

"Hey Brad," his message says. "I need you and Jay to help me lift something tomorrow. Give me a call."

I stop at home, where I live with Dad in the house we all used to share, but he's not there, so I head downtown to Birra Alta. He's at the bar, talking to a woman who went heavy on the lipstick and perfume.

"There's my oldest," he says to the woman, who's now obviously taking inventory of the ways I resemble my father. Dark eyes. Black hair. Short with broad shoulders. Check, check, check.

"Speak to your brother lately?" he asks me.

"No," I say.

"He's been incommunicado."

"I'll check in with him."

"Is he pissed?"

"Not that I know of."

"Here's the deal," he says. "I need you and your brother to help me move the living room stove."

The stove we always called *Mom's Stove* sits on a brick platform in the corner of the living room, opposite an actual fireplace, which made me wonder how cold things used to be back in the late 1800s when the house was built. When Jason and I were growing up, Mom used to sit in that chair while the fire roared and smoke and drink coffee and play hand-held video blackjack or poker games; she hated the cold and seemed engaged in a permanent struggle to raise her body temperature.

"Jason won't like this idea," I say.

Dad looks puzzled, or pretends to. "Why not?"

"It's just Jay."

"Well, it's just a stove."

"I agree with you," I lie, because even though I'll be sad to see it go, it's his stove and none of my damn business what he does with it. "But to Jason it's probably more than that."

"Well," says Dad, and looks ready to add something else about Jason, but catches the eye of the perfumed lady. "I'm sorry, I let your drink run out," he says, putting his hand on her forearm. "Knob Creek on the rocks, please," he says to the bartender.

I have a beer with them and then leave. It seems that even from the parking lot I can still smell her and see my father's hand caress her arm.

Fifteen minutes later, I'm sitting on Jason's couch, reaching for the pipe in his outstretched hand.

I watch the smoke drift out the open third floor window.

“Dad wants our help moving Mom’s stove,” I say.

“Where?”

“Just out, I guess,” I say.

“To like, the shed?”

“Maybe. You want it?”

Jason waves his arm over his small room. In one corner sits an enormous bookcase stacked full of books and DVDs. Piles of video games surround the TV, which sits on an old dog crate. On the coffee table, there’s a copy of Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* with a copy of *High Times* keeping his page. “Yeah, I’ll just put it right in the middle of my abundance of empty space.”

“Not sure how we’d get it up here, anyway,” I say.

Jason points to the pipe and I give it back to him. He lights, inhales, holds. “Unless it grows tits, he’ll discard it,” he says as he blows smoke, then he coughs. It’s a hard, dry, wheezing cough, and I remember the way Mom coughed, like her lungs were full of packing peanuts.

“You ever think of baking brownies?” I ask.

“He might just discard it even if it does grow tits,” Jason says. “There’s always another set of tits.”

“If you made brownies, you wouldn’t have to—”

“I’m not much of a cook,” he says, then inhales and holds onto it for as long as he can.



Jason doesn’t drive. He won’t even ride shotgun. When he was sixteen, Mom took him to an empty parking lot for a driving lesson. He had a panic attack and drove into one of five light posts, and he’s been terrified of riding up front ever since.

The next morning, I idle outside his apartment. He comes down wearing his boots and a gray sweatshirt with tight cuffs that make his hands look tiny. He gets into the backseat. “Can you blast the heat back here?” he asks.

I crank the heat up and tilt the vents.

“Thanks.”

“You need coffee?”

“I’m good.”

We pass the Dunkin Donuts without stopping.

“Hey, what’s with *The Second Sex*?” I ask.

“What’s wrong with it?”

“I saw you’re reading it.”

“And?”

“All right,” I say.

I see through my rearview mirror that he’s gazing out the passenger side window.

“Dad could benefit from a little feminist history,” he says.

“Dad’s grieving,” I say.

“No excuse.”

“It’s been almost three years, though,” I say. “It’s totally fine for him to see what’s out there.”

Jason shakes his head. “Yeah, *now* it is.”

We come to a red light. “What?”

“Nothing.”

Jason stares out the window, then pulls out a joint and puts it to his lips.

“Not now, Jay.”

I see his fingers shake. “Did you find out what he’s doing with Mom’s stove?”

“I haven’t talked to him since last night.”

“What if he’s just going to junk it?” he says. “Would you take it?”

“I don’t have room,” I say. “And don’t change the subject. What the hell is going on?”

“You need to let me smoke.”

“If I let you smoke, will you tell me?”

“Yes.”

“Then by all means.”

The light turns green. Jay lights up his joint and takes a few puffs.

“Do I have to wait until you’re high, or can you tell me now?”

“Dad fucked a prostitute.”

I look in the rearview mirror. Jason is staring at me, his eyes not the least bit kidding.

“That woman from last night?” I ask.

“Who?” Jason says. “No, probably not. I don’t know or care who he’s fucking now. I mean when we were kids.”

“What?”

“Mom told me.”

“Mom told you.”

“Yes.”

“Like, in a dream, Mom told you. She came to you in a dream and said—”

“No, you asshole, I don’t get dreams anymore. She was alive.”

I check the speedometer and realize I’m going twenty in a forty. Jason explains that before I dropped out of school to help with Mom, he’d sit with her for hours. “She told me everything,” he says. “She stayed with him for us. But he cheated on her his whole life. Some of it he paid for, some he didn’t.”

I pull over, take out my cell phone. “I’m calling Dad and canceling.”

“No,” says Jason. “He can’t know we know.”

In the rearview mirror, I see Jason looking nervously from side to side. “I shouldn’t have told you. I shouldn’t have said anything.”

Jason is right—I don’t want this information. Dad can’t know we know. If we confront him, he’ll deny everything and blame it on Mom’s drugs (or Jason’s). If Dad denied it, we’d have to give him the benefit of the doubt, because why look so hard for a reason to hate your father when he’s, on the surface, just grieving?



You can tell how long it’s been since Dad had a woman in the house by how clean it is. Dishes stacked on the coffee table are like rings in a tree—indicators of passing time. Today the plates are stacked seven high, so it’s been at least a week.

Dad’s in the living room when we arrive. “Jay, boy, how are you?” he says, holding out his hand to shake. For a beat, Jay doesn’t shake it, and the whole room freezes, but then he does, and the room warms up again.

“You’re a hard guy to reach. Did you get my messages?”

“Yeah,” he says. “Been busy.”

“Gotcha,” Dad says. “Well, I’d like to get rid of this here. Your brother told you, I assume.”

“What are you doing with it?”

“I’ve got a buyer in Tiverton who wants it,” he says. “Says it’s an antique.”

“I want it,” Jason says.

Dad raises an eyebrow. “Where you going to put it?”

“It’s my business where I put it.”

“But the guy offered me a thousand bucks.”

“I’ll give you twelve-hundred,” Jason says.

Dad puts his hands on his hips. “It’s not a bidding war. You want it, you can have it. I just don’t know where you’ll—”

“I’ll find a place,” Jason says. “And I’ll pay you.”

“The money’s not important.”

“What are you doing with the space?” I ask.

“Well, I think it’ll open up the room a little,” Dad says. “I’d like to get rid of these couches and get something new. Clean up in here a little bit. Make it more modern. Claire keeps bugging me to do something with it.”

Claire, a.k.a old What’s-Her-Name.

“I haven’t seen her here,” I say.

Dad shrugs. “She doesn’t come by much.”

“How about moving this stove?” Jason says.

“You in a hurry, Jay?”

“You wanted us to move it, right?”

Dad nods. “Yes, please.”

We put the stove on a rolling platform and move it to the garage, where we use Dad’s pneumatic lift to get it into the truck. As we move it, I can smell the ashes inside the tray, which I now realize we should have emptied. Dad hasn’t used it since Mom died. Then it occurs to me that Mom must have burned whatever those ashes used to be.

“Are we taking this to your place, Jay?” Dad asks.

“Yes,” he says definitively.

“Ride with me, then?”

“I’ll go with Brad.”

On the way to his place, Jason says, “I don’t know how you can live there.”

“I need to,” I say. “I’m saving money for sch—”

"I can't be in that house without thinking of Mom."

"I know."

"She took such good care of that place," he says. "Like, perfect care."

"I know."

"And when she was alive, he never did one damn thing to help her," he says. "Doesn't that piss you off?"

"I don't—I mean, I agree with you, but—"

"Don't get all diplomatic with me," he says. "Be honest. Does it not piss you off that Dad basically made a slave out of Mom while he fucked whores all the time?"

"I've only known this information for two hours," I say. "I can't even begin to—"

"You don't need to process it," he says. "If you loved Mom at all—"

"Watch it, Jay."

"—you wouldn't even have to think about it." "You're out of line here."

"You'd just fucking know—"

I slam on the breaks and the car skids to a stop.

"What the fuck?" he says.

I stare out the window. Traffic has picked up, but only a little. "You need to stop talking and remember that I love both Mom *and* Dad."

"Still?" he says. "After what I told you?"

"Yes, after what you told me."

"Then you're fucked up."

"Fine, I'm fucked up."

When we get to his apartment, Jason opens the gate and climbs the stairs while I stay put. Dad shows up fifteen minutes later and parks behind me. Dad and I put the ramp against the tailgate. "Where's your brother?"

"He ran upstairs."

"Is he having an attack?"

"Of assholeitis." I honk the horn of the truck and Jason comes down and the three of us lower the stove onto the sidewalk. Now that it's sitting there, the three of us look at the stove.

"Well, good luck with this," I say to them. Dad and Jason look at me.

"Where are you going?" Jason says.

"I'm working in two hours," I say. "I need to rest." Dad furrows his brow.

"You and Dad can handle this, right?"

"Actually, I need to get going," Dad says.

"Why don't you stay and help, Dad?" I say. "Jason has something he wants to tell you, anyway."

"Brad, you better—" Jason says.

"I'm out," I say.

Before I shut the door of my car, I hear Dad say, "What's he talking about?"



After Mom died, Jason and I each inherited fifteen grand from her life insurance policy. Jason took his to California, where he made some investments in "herbal medicine." He spent two years studying the fine art of marijuana cultivation. Now he's got a greenhouse in his spare bedroom, sealed off with plastic and humidified. If I had to guess, I'd say he smokes most of it and sells the rest. My fifteen grand went into a new car. At the time, I told myself I'd need the car to get to school, but for two years, the semester after next has always been the right time to re-enroll.

While in California, Jason never contacted us except by email, and emails came once every three months or so. When he came back, he was quiet, brooding. He told me, not Dad, that he was smoking weed for his anxiety. "No more crazy dreams," he said, and Dad and I were glad to hear that. Once, during my first year of college, he told Mom and Dad that I was dropping out to join the Marines. He swore I called him in the middle of the night to tell him this.

The year he returned, on Christmas, he dropped by the house in the early morning. "This is for you," he said, then left to "make a delivery" before Dad got out of bed. Inside the box was one of Mom's handheld video poker games. The ink around the buttons had been worn away. Truth be told, it's the best damn Christmas gift anyone's ever given me.

Dad calls me. "Where are you?"

I'm sitting at a table by myself in the hospital cafeteria, eating French fries that might as well be fish sticks. Only a few tables in the room are occupied, and everyone's too far away for me to eavesdrop. "I'm at work."

"I didn't think you were working today."

"Plans changed."

"Do you know what Jason told me?"

"I have a rough idea."

"Tell me what he told you."

"I'd rather you tell me what he told you."

"Would you even believe me?" he asks.

"What's done is done and I don't need to hear about—"

"But I need you to believe me, Brad," he says. "I can't have both my sons believing I'm some kind of lying—"

"I believe you," I say, with a sick feeling in my stomach. "Whatever you say, I'll believe you."

Dad pauses. "Do you mean that?"

"I've got to go. Let's talk later."

I hang up. At that moment, Janice enters the cafeteria. She's a tall woman with short, spiky black hair. I wave at her and she comes over to the table. "I didn't realize you were working today," she says.

"I'm just eating," I say. "How was last night?"

"Fucking-A," she says. "It's like your mother used to say. 'The full moon makes them nutso.'"

"I don't think she'd ever say the word nutso."

"She did," she says, smiling. "Your mother used all kinds of words."

"Such as?"

"You really want to know?"

"Yes, I really want to know."

Janice looked from side to side, then sat down and leaned in. "If a patient pissed her off, she'd call him 'cuntface.'"

"No," I say. "Cuntface? Really?"

"She'd come out of a room and say something

like, 'That goddamn cuntface just pissed all over the goddamn floor.'"

I picture my dear Catholic Mom calling someone a goddamn cuntface. I laugh and then cry for laughing so hard.

"Nutso doesn't seem so out there now, does it?" she says. "Jesus Christ. I miss her every day."

"I bet you do when the moon is full."

"All those nutso cuntfaces," she says, her eyes shining despite her smile. "Well, I should get going. Nice to see you, Brad."

"You too."

When Janice's two-year-old son died of a rare and incurable disease, Mom practically moved in with her. Then when they found Mom's tumor, Janice returned the favor. At Mom's wake, she knelt in front of the coffin for a full five minutes. A line began to form behind her, but nobody said a word.

"Hey Janice, one quick question," I say. She walks back to me, but once she's standing in front of me, my stomach turns. "Did mom ever say anything about—Actually, never mind. Sorry."

She smiles. "Hey, by the way—shouldn't you be going back to school?" she asks.

"I'm working on it," I say.

"It's what your mother would want."

"I know."

She nods and walks from the cafeteria, in the direction of the loading dock.

That afternoon, I drive to the casino in Newport. Nowadays they have two floors, smoking and non. I pick the smoking floor and find, among the flashing machines, a video poker game. I have forty dollars. I put a twenty into the machine and I'm given eighty credits and hit deal. Deuces are wild. I get three of a kind and win that quarter back, double up. Now I'm up fifty cents. I increase my bet, lose the fifty cents. I land a straight with one deuce and move ahead a little, then in a few hands I'm behind again. I can't dig myself out and in five minutes that twenty dollars is gone. I take out the second and final twenty

and I think, what the hell, life is short, and I bet a dollar a hand until I land, to my surprise, a straight flush, and the machine beeps and buzzes and the light on top begins to spin. The old woman two machines away stops playing to look at me. I call a pit boss to help me cash out. Then I break my winnings into smaller bills and play game after game until, at two in the morning, I have four dollars left. I use that to buy a gallon of gas, which is enough to get me home.

When I get home, I hear my father's bed shaking and What's-Her-Name moaning. My bedroom is adjacent to my father's, so I head to the living room, where the sight of the brick platform without the stove takes my breath away. I step onto the platform where the stove stood for more than one hundred years. The room feels colder. What could possibly belong in this spot but that stove?

"Oh! Oh!" the woman upstairs says. "Yes! Oh, there!"

I leave.

The stove is on the sidewalk in front of Jason's apartment building. As I approach it, I hear Jason's voice say, "Don't fucking touch it."

My eyes adjust to the darkness. Jason's drinking a can of Coke on the top step of his porch. "What do you want?" he asks.

"I wanted to see what you did with it."

"I've got friends coming to help me move it."

"Now?"

"Yes."

"It's three in the morning."

"I'm paying them well."

"Where are you moving it?"

"A better question is: why are you such an asshole?"

"Jason, seriously, you need to just—"

"Keep your voice down," he says. "I don't sleep much, but my neighbors do."

I stuff my hands in my pockets and stare at the stove. "Seriously, where are you moving this?"

"A friend's garage," he says.

"Is it safe?"

"You think someone is going to steal this?" Jason says. He stands up and walks toward me. "Nobody gives a shit about it but me."

"I do."

"Well, way to fight for it," he says.

We stare at the stove. "The fight isn't over," I say. Then a van pulls up to the curb and three guys with huge shoulders get out, yawning.

"This the thing?" one of them asks, pointing to the stove.

Within an hour, we have the stove back on the brick platform in my father's living room. I fall asleep on the couch and, when I wake up, Jason is smoking a joint in Mom's chair, and Dad is in his bathrobe gawking at us from the doorway.

"Good morning," Jason says.

Dad blinks a few times. What's-Her-Name has appeared behind him in her pink bathrobe. "This may be awhile," he tells her.

"I'll call you later," she says, then leaves, presumably to the bedroom to put her clothes back on.

Dad enters the room. "This is not funny," he says.

"Brad and I agree that the stove belongs here," Jason says.

Dad looks at me. "Is this true?"

"I—"

"It's Mom's stove, and Brad still lives here," he says. "You didn't consult him. You don't consult anyone for anything. You don't give a shit."

"Can you put out that joint please?" says Dad.

Jason pinches the joint and puts it in his pocket.

"I realize you're upset," Dad says. "Mom said some strange things when she was sick but—"

"She's not a liar," Jason says.

"I'm not saying she lied, Jason—"

"You are!" Jason stands up. "She's not here to defend it, but she meant it. I know when Mom is being serious and when she was out of it. I know the difference. I know because—"

But we all knew why; Jason hallucinated, too. He

pauses in the middle of an accusatory finger-point until it begins to shake and tears run down his face. “You don’t even miss her,” he says. “You don’t even care. You just don’t care and you never did.” Then, slowly, he lowers himself to the ground and cries.

I watch as Dad closes his eyes for a long time. When he opens them, his eyes are wet. “Do you know how that stove makes me feel?” he says to Jason.

Jason doesn’t seem to hear. I want to nudge him with my foot, tell him: *Get up and listen*. Dad sits on the floor next to Jason and puts his hand on his back. Jason sobs harder for a few minutes and Dad says nothing but pats his shoulders with one hand. There is nothing about this gesture that looks like a lie.

When it seems like Jason has stopped sobbing, Dad says, “Well, you brought it back. Might as well help me reconnect it to the chimney.”

The three of us head to the garage, where Dad had stacked the pipes. We reassemble the chimney.

Then Dad lights a newspaper on fire and begins burning old mail from a basket by the coffee table. The room fills with warmth. I imagine Mom finally taking off the sweatshirt she wore around the house, sitting in her chair in a T-shirt, playing video poker.

I drive Jason home. When I return, Dad’s in the shower. He’s got another date tonight. I have to work. There’s a pile of mail on the table and I flip through it. Mom still gets mail. Macy’s, Barb’s Nail Salon, and Jiffy Lube haven’t gotten the memo. I take the stack of mail into the living room and open the door of the stove. A few embers remain. I throw some of Mom’s mail on top and the fire blazes again. Then, at the bottom of the stack, I see a postcard from my college, reminding me that the deadline to register for spring classes is coming up in a month. I figure I’ve got three weeks to think it over, and if I forget and miss the deadline, there’s always next fall. I toss the postcard in and shut the door before I can watch it burn.

JOSEPH BRUCHAC

Another Cold November Night

Another cold November night
catches my breath
like a blackberry thorn
hooked into a woolen sleeve
as I step out into new snow.

As they too feel
the call of the cold,
the buck deer come down
from the high ridges,
descending swift as falling stars
seeking for their next generation
the flow of one life into the next.

Tatters of velvet
cling like torn rags
to antlers burnished
against stripped saplings.

Their shoulders scarred
from past battles,
they move with swift and cautious grace,
ready for battle, for mating, or the long leap
that may save them the thunder touch
of the lead gift from a 30.06

And now, in this autumn dark,
in my dreams and not only my dreams
I am walking among them
wondering what prints will be left behind
by my own feet in this new snow.

TIFFANY HIGGINS

Animal Moves | The New Old Burying Ground

coyote I would like to run but instead I trot
these four feet tips float and skitter ground

horse they call me fleet when I blare my feet
like the speed of God herself all triple crowned

wild steed I once thrummed the West prairie plains
handsomeness, now I only pastel merry-go-round

I wait by your side for a place to reside
on your lunch break you chomp and complaints expound

an occasion when if only you and I in union bent
our manes, a deep cision would rip profound

between Thou and Thy, Ye and We, Trunk and Tree, Skin and I,
but then it passes, and Being again is unfound.

ourselves, yet malformed animals
to ancestral heirs allot the background.

to accounting sheets, stockholder shares
we chain hairy wrists as if law ironbound

thus in cars and jeeps we pass by the heaps
of thwarted mammals in a new old burying ground

I claim I'd like to walk but to work I drive
in air my carbon, 38,000 pounds

I'd like to lick this icy slick
glacier but by mainland drift it's been blackened and browned

by the ziggity-zag trail of NASDAQ and contrails
our eyes upturned are spellbound

like children in school we act as fools
only later ask why we super clowned

decades hence, in our “defense”:
invented for our gen. the term DumbFound.

our kids, sick with furry siblings dead and drowned,
will ask, Is this your best in the category of Hand-Me-Downed?

whale I'd like to wing but only echo
spirit songs in the sea's ultrasound

now another's here the scree low boat
on my 4-foot ear, no no, its tests rebound

it sounds like ungrace like an ending place
oh lord my 3-ton soul runs aground

CINDY VEACH

Looking in the Windows at Night

The yard is oblivious, caught up
in the high drama of fall—
inside, the house is ablaze

with lights—everything exactly
as it was. Think: suspended
animation, diorama, snow

globe, epic disaster movie.
Where are they? What happened?
What untouched potion

sours on the counter? Look
at the kettle and stove
waiting to be lit. Plates, bowls,

cups stoically arranged. Here,
where they sat and dined
the floor is dented,

scratched. Over there, marks
where they measured
the kids. Whatever happened

happened fast. Or they ignored
the signs. If there had been
seismologists would they have stood

a chance? Dare I even compare
to Pompeii where tourists en masse
peer into rooms as they were—

miracle of plaster of Paris
poured into hollows
between layers of ash—

whole families, lovers
curled together forever. Oh gypsum,
I should have prayed to you.

Up Here: A Retreat to Local Living

Retreat (n.) c.1300, from O.Fr. *retret*, noun use of pp. of *retrere* “draw back, draw again” from L. *retrahere* “draw back,” from *re-* “back” “again” + *trahere* “to draw”

While engaged in my daily chores—transplanting seedlings from greenhouse to field, among other regular acts of caretaking the land, I thought about a label recently applied by some visitors to my homestead: “retreat.” After hours of attempting to make my field “say beans,” I straightened up and gazed over at the clearings that dotted the forested hills of Walden, Vermont surrounding my farm. I wondered whether my fellow “transplants” consider their centuries-old farmhouses “up here,” as Vermont incarnations of the quintessential American retreat: Thoreau’s cabin at Walden Pond.

It is interesting to note that nowhere in *Walden* does Thoreau ever refer to his cabin as a “retreat.” A century’s worth of commentators certainly have, though they seem to have largely overlooked the metaphorical potential of the very word they aptly use to describe Thoreau’s “experiment in living.” In so doing, they sidestep some of the significant motivations behind Thoreau’s groundbreaking “retreat” to the woods.

These reasons form the basis to the model of economic independence he re-drew for himself through his retreat to and at Walden. In his book, Thoreau describes the economy of mid-nineteenth century America—one eerily resembling our own contemporary debt-based model—a system, he maintained, that existed so “the corporations may be enriched” at the expense of consumers. The vast majority lead lives of “quiet desperation,” he asserted, because they are irretrievably “indebted” to mortgages and consumer loans for costly luxuries they mistake for necessities. If we could only “simplify” our lives, he reasoned, by becoming debt-free through adopting

a “content with less” attitude—accumulating only the basic necessities of food, clothing, shelter, and heat—we could enhance not only our independence and self-reliance, but deepen our connection to the natural world around us. Thoreau’s approach to maximizing his economic independence served, in essence, as a “retreat to local living.”

He did so in the etymological meaning of the term. Uncannily resonant with contemporary food sovereignty and local food initiatives, Thoreau essentially “re-drew” his relation to society—as well as to the natural world—by embracing a local economy:

Every New Englander might easily raise all his own breadstuffs in this land of rye and Indian corn, and not depend on distant and fluctuating markets for them. Yet so far are we from simplicity and independence that, in Concord, fresh and sweet meal is rarely sold in the shops . . . the farmer gives to his cattle and hogs the grain of his own producing, and buys flour . . . at greater cost, at the store. (“Economy”)

Through growing his own vegetables, baking sour dough and wild-yeasted hearth breads over a fire, saving seeds, gleaned, wild-crafting, and eating in each season, Thoreau managed “to avoid all trade and barter” for food, essentially “re-drawing” an approach to agriculture that exchanged economic independence and self-reliance for indebtedness.

Thoreau’s “experiment in living” involved creating a plan that allowed him to reduce his expenses and thus the necessity to earn large amounts of money by significantly scaling down his needs. His model of self-sufficiency involved not borrowing any money to purchase a house or farm, relying instead on local, recycled materials to create what he called a “homestead” on fallow land (upon which he squatted) and wood from the forest to make his own furniture. He recounted the lessons he learned from his experience

of local living in *Walden*, a book he hoped would help others find their own ways to retreat to the local.

Many of us have relied on his account as a guide to taking the steps necessary to exchange a life of indebted accumulation with one grounded in the *local*. While not necessarily mutually exclusive categories, Thoreau's retreat—and mine—are rooted in a debt-free, radically simplified existence. In my case, it took a “deliberate” effort and a multi-year economic plan—based on Thoreau's model—to jump off the treadmill of economic advancement.

I had the distinct advantage of being unable to skirt Thoreauvian themes of economic independence and “simplicity” since I taught *Walden* daily to university students for a decade—just a short distance from the shores of Walden Pond. As I watched students transform their own thinking by “re-drawing” the contours of their lives from studying *Walden*, I realized that my own education remained incomplete without embarking on the transformational journey from “talking the talk” to “walking the walk” along the “less-traveled” road of Thoreauvian *simplicity*. My own long walk to “up here” has grounded me in a fundamentally new way, shifting my gaze from the ethereal clouds of theory to the wondrous earth in which I have “transplanted” myself.

Like Thoreau at Walden before us, in homesteading among the fields and forests, hills and hollows of

Vermont, my fellow “transplants” and I have left behind the corporations and their uniform-looking food in our “retreat to the local”—for our own earth-encrusted carrots and potatoes, our wild apples and berries, and our own wheat, rye, and oats, grown in our own greenhouses and fields. Through our lifestyles, we are “re-drawing” our relation to society at large by embracing the act of living locally—and in turn, harmoniously, with the natural world. Through this commitment, we are offering an alternative model to the fate of economic servitude inherent in a global economy, contributing to what is called a “pastoral economics” based on Thoreau's model of “simplicity,” the act of treading locally—and lightly—on Mother Earth.

And while I may eventually discover that I have “other lives to live,” I shall cherish my time being part of this local community, made up of ever-inspirational fellow transplants and locals—both human and otherwise. For now, I take pride in knowing that I “live deliberately” up here in my retreat to local living.

As one of the characters in my forthcoming novel, *The Road to Walden North* states as he looks lovingly over his thirty acre bean field: “It's not work. It's a ‘lifestyle.’” It's through our retreat to local living that we discover Thoreau's insight that “heaven lies under our feet.”



NAIMA WADE

Attuned to Non-Interference

I love this Autumn Season.
I love Lake Champlain tilted from lunar pull and its jostling shores.
I love these Green Mountains, stark rock of ages out-cropping
Sculpted by Evergreens, lifted at some unknown time
Isolated in fields and forest cleaved in by frost and snow falls.

A sentinel owl regards me unblinkingly, and beyond, maple wood and oak forests form a cadence
to distant Harvest moon.

Do not violate the wilderness with vulgar noise and vulgar tourist.
We don't need the interference of capitalism's destructions
Human ambition crawling over the landscape like flies over fresh fruit.

What is the goal? It is to simply walk through this non-mysterious world without being a burden to it.

RUSS WEIS

Going the Extra Green Mile

My dog and I have been taking jogs together for years now. I like to plant two trees with the same seed by picking up trash while running. It makes me feel good to do some neighborhood beautifying while exercising.

Cedar's motivations are decidedly simpler. She gets the first discarded can we come across, mainly because I can't beat her to it anyway, and when we get home we battle over it for a bit. Her face all lit up with excitement, Cedar doesn't seem to care that the energy used to produce the can she so protectively holds in her mouth could light up a room for twenty hours. Anyway, when she finally takes pity on me and relinquishes control, into the recycling it goes.

Over the years, I've noticed that the most common roadside items are beer cans and cigarette packs, prompting me to wonder about a possible connection between those who pollute their bodies and those who pollute the landscape.

Regardless, I like to appeal on occasion to all those who do care about our environment. I get that it can be tough to install solar panels or convert our cars to biodiesel, to buy shade-grown coffee or even to buy local on a regular basis. However, it's not all that hard to bring along reusable canvas bags when shopping, to use a travel mug when purchasing your morning cup, or to simply recycle or, better yet, redeem the containers you use on a daily basis. That

way you can also earn a little green for your wallet.

I like to consistently jog further down the green path each week. I believe that if enough of us do the same, we might yet avert the worst.

Environmentalist Bill McKibben speaks of an Earth today vastly different from the one we were born onto, and I for one believe him. A tornado tore through my own backyard the summer before last. A tornado! My wife and kids witnessed rain pouring in torrents through the windows, the house sounding as if a freight train were passing through. When the skies cleared, two enormous fallen pines had smashed our fence and our compost bin, their top branches resting inches from our propane tanks. I couldn't get back home that evening until scores of trees had been cleared from the same road that Cedar and I had blithely jogged upon that very morning.

Cedar won't be having any puppies in her lifetime. But many of us two-legged joggers do have kids. So I like to think that we can clear the hurdles before us, by going beyond simply not littering to taking responsibility for all that we consume. Let's face it: we just can't kick this can down the road any farther.

McKibben says it's too late to restore the planet we were born onto, our goal now merely being to sustain an Earth future generations can survive upon. Don't our children and grandchildren deserve at least that much?

(ORIGINALLY A VERMONT PUBLIC RADIO COMMENTARY PIECE THAT AIRED ON MAY 5, 2011)

RICHARD JARRETTE

Honey for the Women

Earth wins its argument again.
I sit beneath a tree to rest, filled with living
like a worm full of dirt, and I Euripides
about the women I've known.

My fingers find a crusty dead bee in the grass,
weightless, more profound than the *Song of Solomon*.
Inside its husk, a hundred million years of nectar dances,
flowers of the world, and the world's sweetness.

But I robbed the tree of a kernel of food
by picking it up and so I put it down.

If I never get up, and no one finds me,
will bees make a hive of my body as in Samson's lion
and honey, from alfalfa and sage,
next spring?



CP SURENDRAN

Defiance

The leather chairs are stuffed, welcoming with arms open
head rests, leg rests, thrones fit for a Herod. At thumb
a button to draw you level with the ground
once used for burial, then a dumping site, now a mall
housing a salon for those who believe appearances will keep
hopes alive as they go about, close shaved and hair trimmed
men fleeing through mirrors their nature, risking all
to fall in line as he comes, smelling the compliance
of shampoo, tonic, powder and cream, and sprinkles
water on your head as if to douse a fire.
You close your eyes to the hair swept to a corner
flecked with blood, and wait for the blade to bite
as with hands that might hold down a calf
he presses a razor to your throat, and you think of John
staring at Salome from a plate, his locks still dread.

CINDY VEACH

On Seeing a Wedge of Swans

They don't make it look easy, their long necks stretched out—
all grace gone. And it's not how I think of them. You know,
necks curved in a perfect C—iconic. But in flight they're ramrod

with black nose cones, bulky bodies following—wings struggle
under the heft. Everything about them seems off kilter.
I've never thought of them this way—only gliding over glassy water,

swooning with a mate—until now, two months into the separation,
when I look up and see them—clumsy, lumbering,
almost another bird entirely. Yet, look how they beat the air, pump on.

TIM WEED

Mouth of the Tropics

Puerto Ayacucho is a port more than a thousand miles from any ocean. Stranded like flotsam on the muddy banks of the Orinoco, it is the Venezuelan embarkation point for the network of rivers that are the only highways through the vast jungles of the northern Amazon basin. It is a frontier town, and it has the raw, lawless edge you would expect of such a place. But its violence lies mainly under the surface, stifled by the fevers and the heat, waiting to bubble up and attach itself to you in unexpected and permanent ways. The town is hot as the surrounding rainforest never is; the heat rises up from the pavement and presses down from the unshaded sun. After rain it can be oppressively humid, even early in the morning, as it was on the morning after Meech arrived. He'd showered at the hotel but already he could feel his linen shirt clinging to his back and armpits as he strode through improvised barrios of corrugated tin shacks to the market center. The air was dank with the smell of raw sewage and it was a familiar smell though he knew it would take him a few days to get accustomed to it. With each step his Texas sucked the asphalt and he couldn't avoid splashing through puddles of stagnant water, imagining as he did so microscopic waterborne larvae burrowing unnoticed into the flesh of his feet only to emerge, months later, as thick hairy flies.

At the entrance to the open-air market a group of *mestizo* teenagers wearing heavy metal T-shirts watched him with lazy menace from the stoop of an open storefront. Meech strode past them into the crowd, feeling the uncomfortable contact of sweaty flesh on his chest and back. A large black woman shoved past balancing a melon saddled in cloth on her head; he followed in her wake as she barged through the murmuring crowd until he spotted the man he was looking for, a tall albino standing beside a cart of fried *arepas*. Meech veered and held his

ground against the shifting press of humanity, leaning his thighs against the cart as he waved to get the albino's attention. The smell of frying *masa* dough brought back pleasant memories and he reflected that as job-related travel went, he had it pretty good.

He held up three fingers. The albino put three steaming arepas in a brown paper bag and Meech mouthed the word for coffee. The man smiled in a friendly gap-toothed way, filled a Styrofoam cup, and handed it across the cart. Meech raised the cup in a silent toast to his old friend the arepa man. Both hands occupied, he used his chest and shoulders to open a channel through the shifting mob of tanktops and *guayaberas* until the crowd began to thin out and he was back at the entrance to the market. He stood on the curb under the stares of the idle teenagers, chewing the arepas and gulping the sweet coffee.

Sánchez pulled up in a beige Land Cruiser with the university insignia painted on the door. He leaned over to roll down the passenger-side window, trademark aviator sunglasses perched on his forehead, raven hair tied back in a ponytail. Meech felt the cold rush of air conditioning as he chased the final arepa with the last of the coffee and climbed into the Land Cruiser. Sánchez put the truck in gear and steered them through the crowded streets to the outskirts of town. The Land Cruiser was clean and hermetic, like a space capsule or a diving bell; Meech sighed and leaned back against the cool leather seat. It was the first time he'd been able to relax since he'd boarded the plane at Logan Airport twenty-four hours ago. He needed something big from this trip, a result he could build the rest of his career on. The department chair had been making that clear enough recently in his mild, oblique way; one more research trip to South America with no original

findings and Meech doubted another grant would be forthcoming. It was entirely possible that the rest of his tenure would be spent teaching undergraduate biology or perhaps, if he was lucky, cataloging pollution-related mutations among the amphibians of the Charles River watershed.

Sánchez represented his best hope to escape that fate. They'd met six years earlier at a rainforest conference in San Diego. A University of Caracas ethnobotanist specializing in Amazonia, he maintained a large and useful network of contacts among the indigenous villages. He and Meech had traveled together on several previous research trips, and they were frequently in touch by e-mail.

It didn't take long for them to reach the edge of the rainforest, where the road sliced into the looming wall of vegetation like a machete wound. Meech could hear the cicadas even with the windows up. The whole forest throbbed with the sound; even the road seemed to vibrate under the wheels of the Land Cruiser.

He turned to the Venezuelan. "So where're we going?"

"I think we should try Esmeralda."

"That's a Ye'Kwana village, right?"

Sánchez nodded. "It's about six hours upriver near the junction with the Rio Negro."

"They haven't captured a specimen by any chance, have they?"

The Venezuelan grinned. "You know they don't think of it that way. And no, they haven't caught any. Bright red creatures are considered bad medicine. The Indians keep their distance."

"But they've reported seeing the *rana roja* recently?"

"There've been reports. Nothing substantiated."

Meech nodded, nervously drumming his fingertips on the dashboard. The *rana roja* was the reason for his trip. He'd never seen one, but there was a history of sightings along the upper Orinoco and tributaries. Most of the reports were ambiguous, second-hand, shrouded in layers of myth and superstition, but what had captured his interest—and what had

proved decisive in getting the travel grant—was that the hearsay was consistent: a bright red tree frog with a string of black diamond-shaped markings on its back. Such dorsal markings were definitive and unique. If the *rana roja* existed, in other words, it was a nondescript species—unknown to science. Meech meant to collect a specimen.



He awoke to something wet and unpleasantly sticky lapping his face. "Off!" he growled, waving his arm to brush away whatever it was. Then he opened his eyes and experienced a moment of panicky disorientation. It took him a moment to get his bearings. He'd been asleep in the prow of Sánchez's hardwood dugout, motoring up the Orinoco river toward Esmeralda. He put his hand to his cheek and picked off one of the mango peels Sánchez had been tossing to wake him up. The Venezuelan was at the rudder, grinning and pointing with his free hand at something upriver. The engine was running at a low purr.

Meech turned in the prow and saw the smooth ochre trunk of an overhanging *indio desnudo* tree. He turned back to Sánchez with a shrug and the Venezuelan nodded and put his finger to his mouth. Meech looked again and this time he saw the constrictor, a yellow-gray snake with geometric dorsal saddles coiled in the shade on the trunk like a stack of tires. At the top of the stack a cinnamon tuft of fur was just visible, and as they approached, Meech made out the scalp and forehead of a red howler monkey, *Alouatta seniculus*, black eyes peering in dull disbelief over the rim of the coil. The dugout passed beneath the tree and the scientists gazed back at the spectacle until a bend in the river obscured it.

Sánchez sighed happily. He had the proud, eager-to-please temperament of a good host.

"Maybe it's a positive omen," Meech said.

"I wouldn't have guessed you'd be one to believe in omens."

"I don't. I was being facetious." Meech yawned and started to let one of his hands trail in the luke-

warm water, then thought better of it and rested it on the rim of the dugout. “So do you think this frog is the real thing, *amigo*? Think we can capture one in Esmeralda?”

“I don’t know, we’ll have to see. I have no doubt that it *could* exist. There’s one thing I haven’t told you though. My Ye’kwana contacts say it has a stinger.” Sánchez tossed the rest of the mango overboard.

“You mean it has poisonous glands in its skin?”

“No, they say stinger — like a wasp or a scorpion.”

“And you believe them?”

“Why not? The Ye’kwana have no reason to lie to me.”

Meech chuckled. “Amphibians don’t have stingers, *amigo*—it’s physiologically impossible. Certain tree frogs have glands in their skin that excrete poison. Even so, to get enough venom to cause more than a mild rash in humans you have to boil the skin. But you know all this.”

“Maybe it’s not physiological. Maybe it’s a spiritual stinger, or a supernatural one. But if the Ye’kwana say it’s real, then believe me Meech, one way or another, it’s real.”

Meech shrugged and leaned back against the ribbed slope of the prow. Sánchez was a trained biologist with a Ph.D. from Ohio State, but his empirical rigor was often undermined by a childlike credulity that Meech found touching. His worldview was expansive, encompassing the belief that anything was possible in Amazonia, from cancer cures to lost tribes, and Meech was inclined to hold his tongue rather than shatter such lovely illusions. Among his colleagues in the competitive world of academic science, the Venezuelan was the closest thing he had to a friend.

The motor was propelling them upstream at a good clip and the wind on his face was cool and dense, almost liquid-feeling. He inhaled deeply, imagining the extra oxygen coming off the massed vegetation all around. The cicadas were stirring up a loud metallic chorus from the tangled lianas and poor man’s umbrellas walling the banks of the river, and he concentrated on trying to internalize

the sound, as he had on previous trips, so that it would fade to a mere background hum: a cyclical soundtrack driving him forward to the completion of his task.

He drifted slowly into sleep and dreamed of the rana roja. It was a gigantic, vivid specimen, scarlet and translucent as it gripped the side of the canoe with its suctioned toe-pads and peered at him in the dugout. It hoisted itself up and slid silently into the boat facing him, dripping mucousy water into the vee of the hull, the black diamond-shaped markings on its back heaving rhythmically as it breathed. It adopted the expression of a solicitous physician and pulled a surgeon’s mask over its wide amphibian mouth. Meech felt strangely calm. The frog furrowed its brow and leaned over him holding a large syringe.

“What’s that for, Doc?” he whispered.



As they motored past the stilted shacks marking the edge of the Esmeralda *colonia* Meech climbed into the waist of the dugout to assemble his collection equipment: stacked tupperware containers with mesh airholes on the lids, vials of isopropyl alcohol, formaldehyde, a special solution for preserving genomic samples, a field dissection kit, and a fishing net with a threaded handle he screwed onto a telescoping aluminum pole. He hoped the stopover would be brief. The land upriver was technically Ye’kwana territory, though he knew that most people ignored such legal designations in the wilds of Amazonia, and Sánchez had insisted they stop out of respect for the tribal elders.

The village occupied a blackwater lake fed by a side canal lined with tall Mauritius palms. A half-dozen naked mocha-skinned children dove into the canal—the water let off the familiar mild raw-sewage smell—and swam a little way out toward the dugout as it motored past, through the clustered shanties to the *Asociación*, a stilted shack slightly larger than the others and distinguished by a roof of corrugated tin rather than thatch. Meech seized

the bowline, leapt onto the low dock and tied the dugout to one of the stilts. A Ye'kwana with bowl-cut hair and a deeply pockmarked face shook the travelers' hands but avoided eye contact. Sánchez introduced himself in Spanish and the Ye'kwana led them into the shack to meet the tribal council, which had been alerted to their visit by sentries posted downriver.

Inside, eight tribal elders clad in mustard-colored loincloths sat with their backs to the walls on a horseshoe of rough-hewn benches. There was no obvious place to sit and Meech and Sánchez remained standing in the middle of the room. The shack had no electric lighting but sunlight filtered in through the gaps in the hardwood planking, illuminating the entire convocation in bright horizontal stripes. Sánchez spoke with his head bowed in a quiet, formal Spanish that struck Meech as unnecessarily humble—it wasn't as if they were asking for all that much. He understood enough to get the gist of the conversation: Sánchez respectfully asking permission to continue upriver; a toothless white-haired elder who Meech assumed was the *presidente* nodding serenely; Sánchez gesturing toward Meech, calling him an eminent scientist from the United States and inquiring about any recent sightings of the rana roja; Sánchez breaking the ensuing silence with a reminder of their good intentions; an angry exchange between the three elders and the toothless presidente, conducted in Ye'kwana so that Meech had no hope of understanding it; the presidente addressing Sánchez with an emphatic chopping gesture; and, finally, more silence.

Sánchez was quiet as he steered the dugout down the canal through the shanties back toward the main artery of the river. Meech was puzzled.

"What happened at the end there?"

Sánchez shook his head, sighing. "They denied us permission. They say it's for our own good."

"Well, at least we asked."

"You're right. Back in Puerto we can inquire about other locations."

Meech nodded distractedly for a moment and

then looked up suddenly. "You're not saying we have to go back *now*, are you?"

Sánchez lifted the aviator sunglasses off his eyes and perched them on his forehead. "Well, yes, I'm afraid we do."

Meech was incredulous. "But this is a scientific inquiry," he said. "It's not as if we're drilling for oil, or mining gold. We have no intention of disturbing sacred ground. So how can they—"

Sánchez was shaking his head and Meech knew him well enough to see that he'd made up his mind. "Look," he said, trying to keep his voice calm. "You're an academic too, so you know how pressurized the environment can get. I don't have time to scout another location."

The Venezuelan looked at him with compassion. "I'm sorry Meech," he said softly. "But without permission we can't proceed upriver. It's a bad idea."

The dugout reached the main river and Sánchez aimed it downstream; with the extra impetus of the current they'd be back in four or five hours. The wind on Meech's face felt moist and intrusive, like hot breath. A reservoir inside him broke and desperation flooded his veins, filling him with tight-chested resolve.

"Look. Turn the boat around and go back to the village. You can wait for me there. Tell the elders the gringo needs a specimen and is willing to pay the Asociación if he finds one."

Sánchez's coffee-colored cheeks darkened a shade. The engine sputtered out and they were drifting downstream on the slow current. "You're making a mistake, Meech. Just because you're a scientist doesn't mean you don't have to respect the rules. The Ye'kwana belong to the forest, which means that their rules are *nature's* rules. Take my word for it, you don't want to mess with this stuff. It's bad medicine."

Meech smiled grimly, his heart pounding. "Do you really believe that? Because you're a scientist too—or did that slip your mind?"

Sánchez shook his head and spat in the water. He shrugged and restarted the engine, turning the boat

back upstream toward the village. At the Asociación he climbed up onto the dock while Meech held the bowline; he watched with an expression of deep foreboding as the North American oversteered the dugout through the shanties and throttled toward the open river.



Meech motored along slowly, jaw clenched and shoulders drawn up in acute concentration, keeping the dugout close to the noisome greenery along the river's right bank. This was it, he knew. His last chance, or at least his best one, to escape the noose of mediocrity that was drawing ever tighter around him. His solitary routine was a suffocating bore, and the frightening thing was that it was becoming so comfortable: the frozen dinners in small apartment overlooking the Charles, the daily bicycle route to his office and the lab, the increasingly rote lectures he delivered, in the same order, every semester. No. There had to be more.

A flash of scarlet in a leafy weave of lianas overhanging the river caught his attention, and in his excitement he stood and nearly fell out of the dugout. He circled back a few times but it was no good; he couldn't relocate whatever it was he'd seen. So he continued upstream, shivering a little though the air currents were still thick and warm around him.

It was nearly dusk by the time he gave up the search. As he turned the boat downstream it dawned on him that there was no way he could make it back to Esmeralda before dark. Indeed night was falling already in its abrupt tropical way, velvety black shadows concealing the broken stumps and driftwood jams and other hazards of the waterway. Gingerly he edged the dugout up to the bank and grabbed a handful of vegetation, looping the bowline around the branches supporting it into what he hoped was a secure knot. The dugout swung downstream until the line held steady. Hunched in the prow, he tried to sleep. He was more discouraged than fearful, though in his wakefulness the

occasional unrecognizable grunt from the forest or gurgle from the black river shallows caused him to stiffen, heart pounding, before he could ease back into a semblance of the relaxed mindlessness that was a prerequisite to sleep.

Eventually he did fall into a dreamless slumber, and when he awoke it was already light. There was a burlap bag full of mangoes in the bottom of the dugout; he ate one, slicing it off the big seed in wedges with his pocket knife, and nervously dipped his hands in the river water to get rid of the stickiness. A crashing noise very close by on the bank caused him to look up, but he couldn't see anything through the dense vegetation. He motored slowly up the bank, hoping to spot a frog on an overhanging branch. If it were raining his chances would be better, he reflected.

As the sun rose high enough that its glare turned the river into a wide eddying mirror he decided to head back to Esmeralda, where he assumed his Venezuelan colleague was still waiting. If he saw the need to apologize, he would. He wasn't ruling it out, anyway.

Back in the village the pockmarked Ye'kwana at the Asociación gave him a cool appraising look before telling him that Sánchez had caught a ride downriver with a dugout of artisans bound for the Puerto Ayacucho craft market. It was logical that the Venezuelan hadn't waited overnight. On previous trips he'd been a proud and gracious host, even a little over-protective as he shepherded Meech through the backwaters of his home bioregion. But Meech understood that he'd crossed a line this time; that his angry insistence on pressing forward, in addition to proving futile, had been a direct insult to his friend's innate generosity.

Not that Meech needed a guide. There was an extra tank of gasoline in the stern and he'd be traveling with the current all the way back to Puerto Ayacucho. But it the fact that Sánchez hadn't waited confirmed his suspicion that his impulsiveness had been ill advised. He hoped their friendship would survive it.

The children watched him from the porches of their stilt houses as he steered the dugout awkwardly back to the river. Their faces were grave and unyielding and he became uncomfortably self-conscious; it was as if they were sitting in judgment, or knew something about himself that he did not. He was glad when he'd traveled downstream far enough to put a wall of vegetation between the dugout and the village.



He awoke sweating and disoriented in his Puerto Ayacucho hotel room. The ceiling fan hung immobile above his head in the half-dark and the air in the room was torpid as a sauna. He'd left the dugout tied among the barges at the town docks. It had been too late to buy a water bottle for his bedside and his mouth and throat were so dry he could barely swallow. He got up and slid open the slatted screen covering the narrow window. It was just before dawn because the logging trucks with their precious cargoes of rainforest hardwoods were already beginning to clank and rumble through town to the northern highway. The close tropical night was only half-diffused, a black diesel haze squatting like the underbelly of some enormous stinking animal over the corrugated roofs of the town.

He knew he had to do something about dehydration but it was still too early to go out and buy bottled water, so reluctantly he decided to drink from the tap. It was a risk, but he figured that since he was leaving later that day he could take care of any ill effects with antibiotics back in the States. In the bathroom he turned on the tap and let it run for a few minutes, wondering if he could still count Sánchez as a friend. He leaned over the sink to sip and then reflexively guzzle the milk-warm water. It had a slightly metallic taste from the pipes, but other than that it didn't seem too bad. Nothing obvious anyway.

His plane left at noon so he had more than five hours to kill. He took a shower in the same tepid water and then unpacked and reorganized

his equipment case. Then he sat on the bed for a while, replaying the last conversation he'd had with Sánchez, before he'd dropped him off at the Asociación. Was it too late to make amends? It was only a little after eight by his watch. Still plenty of time.

Outside the hotel he flagged a rusting Plymouth Valiant with a taxi sign affixed to its roof and gave the driver Sánchez's address, scrawled in the Venezuelan's block-letter handwriting on the back of a tattered Universidad de Caracas business card Meech had kept in his wallet since his first field expedition seven years before. They'd taken a dugout three days up the Rio Negro. There had been an extraordinary range of wildlife: pink river dolphins, claw-winged hoatzins, harpy eagles, even a school of piranhas boiling the surface all around the carcass of a sloth that had been killed by a jaguar. Meech hadn't accomplished much in terms of herpetological research but they'd had a wonderful time—sleeping in hammocks strung up between tree branches over the water, passing the long hours of river travel teaching each other jokes in Spanish and English. Since then he'd grown accustomed to thinking of Sánchez as one of his closest friends, but it was odd; he knew little about the Venezuelan's personal life and had never, for example, visited his home. The driver agreed to wait a few minutes while Meech went to the door.

The earthen yard was decorated with a smattering of recently planted date palms and Meech had to walk around a puddle of rust-colored water to get to the front of the house, a low bungalow built of whitewashed cinderblock with a polished ochre floor continuing out onto the porch. He knocked and after a moment a little girl opened the door and peered out at him from the gloom. She was shirtless and dark-skinned, probably five or six, with shiny black shoulder-length hair. Something about her head seemed slightly out of proportion but he couldn't figure out what it was. She folded her arms across her chest and he realized he was staring.

“Profesor Sánchez está en casa? Tu padre?”

The little girl was solemn-faced. She turned her head to call to someone inside and Meech saw what was wrong with her hair: there was a big shank of it missing, a shiny pink patch of scar tissue the size of a sand dollar on her scalp. Meech remembered the story of a Harvard entomologist who'd been bitten by a botfly in Panama. He'd returned home knowing full well he was incubating a larval worm under the skin of his scalp, and a few months later he'd captured the emerging fly in his baseball cap at a Red Sox game. The anecdote troubled him more now than it had when he'd first heard it.

Sánchez, shirtless, his long hair loose and sleep-tousled, came to the door. He folded his arms over his chest and Meech noticed the family resemblance to the little girl. “I’m glad to see you made it back, amigo,” he said, making a special effort to project warmth in his smile. “I left the dugout tied at the town dock. Stowed the engine, covered everything with the tarp and so on.”

Sánchez nodded distractedly but did not invite him in. His eyes searched Meech’s face. “Did you get your specimen?”

“No, unfortunately.” Meech felt dizzy.

Sánchez stared at him for a moment more and then shook his head. “You don’t look so well, my friend.”

“I’m just a little tired. Anyway, I just wanted to tell you that I’m grateful for all your help over the years, and I apologize if I . . . caused you any . . .” He trailed off, overcome by a momentary spell of light-headedness. He reached out to support himself on the door frame. “I just wanted to make sure there were no hard feelings before I leave the country.”

Sánchez gazed sharply into his eyes. “No hard feelings, Meech. I only wish you’d have listened to me back in Esmeralda. I’m afraid—”

“No,” Meech interrupted, shaking his head. “You were just standing up for what you believe. But I had to go on.” He was having trouble holding a linear train of thought. Sánchez shook his hand and patted him on the shoulder and Meech walked

across the yard feeling dizzy and confused. Halfway to the taxi he turned and called out, “By the way, what happened to your daughter’s scalp?”

“Nothing serious. She’s fine. Get some rest, Meech.”

As he climbed into the taxi he experienced a wave of nausea that he thought might be owing to an empty stomach; it was nearly two hours before he had to be at the airport so he told the driver to drop him at the market for coffee and arepas. That was a mistake. The crowd was too dense, the air too rank, and the sensation of all the hot moist flesh pressing in on him caused him to take refuge in the putrid shadows behind a fruit stall where he retched until his gut was dry. Walking back to the hotel he began to notice things, maladies, misfortunes: a man with a baseball-sized lump on his neck; a small child with smooth blank skin where an eye should have been. He thought anxiously of Boston, where it was already getting cold; where people would be doing their Christmas shopping, where once a year winter swept in like a frigid nursemaid to make sure the air was purged and sterile.



The plane to Caracas was a light Cessna, only seven passengers. As they taxied down the runway Meech felt a rush of excitement, a familiar sense of unburdening and narrow escape. Although he was returning empty-handed again, he was newly confident that he could make something happen with his career. After all, who else in the department could claim his expertise on Amazonia? Somehow he would be sure to get another grant and next time . . . well, there was always a chance.

The take-off was rough; they were flying into a northern headwind and the small plane got tossed around a bit. There was some uncomfortable sideways slipping as they climbed, then an air pocket caused a sudden plunge in altitude. The other passengers gasped in unison and Meech noticed that his palms were cramped from gripping the hand rests. He did not feel well.

Soon the plane rose above the turbulence and stopped bucking. Meech exhaled and looked out the window at the shadow of the Cessna crossing the Orinoco as it meandered out of the steaming rainforest and onto the dull green expanse of the savanna. An intense wave of foreboding blurred his vision and he blinked to bring things back into focus, heart pounding in his chest. Something about the way Sánchez had looked at him back at his house had been most disturbing. It was the kind of look you would give a condemned man: fearful, resigned, pitying. Could there have been some kind of hex after all?

He pinched his cheek to rid himself of the

thought. He wasn't going to abandon the rational stance now, was he, after a whole lifetime of believing in it? The notion was ridiculous.

Beneath the plane, the river continued north, looping in lazy curves like a fat worm over the flood plains to the coast, where it disgorged in a vast delta of brackish mud. The delta was no longer much guarded by the ancient mangrove swamps, most of which had been taken out for shrimp farms, salt mines, oil refineries. He couldn't shake this feeling of dread. Borders were being blurred, filters removed, forces unleashed. He was part of it—a cause, a catalyst. The mouth of the tropics was open to the world.

ANTHONY CHASE

Role Models

“ma facon de vivre a moi est d’errer sans but.”
—Kunlegs

All quiet
Just after dawn: faint mist
The great calm is always here
Pooled learning

This: always just this
In the tilted yard, three deer
One mother and two fawns
Breakfast on the vestiges
Of the cool parched August lawn

Tongues. Black moist noses
Vast radar of their swiveling ears
Their body is their home

So switch the desk lamp on
And they almost jump out of their crew cut skin

Taut: they are all membrane
What alertness in repose
Even an indoor human sets them off

A complex yet very simple poise
They spend their lifetimes in

Soft valley: clear
Water silence, there is nothing
They don’t hear

By current human standards they are thin
Neither servile nor sovereign

They stand, graze, maneuver
Crouch all winter in the bracken, whin

Wander sometimes in the corn margins
On the open hill
Find fallen apples
Roam the roomy wood

They feel my eyes upon them
As if gazing was a form of touch

Graze, peer, maneuver and move on
Role models in a way
Not requiring very much.

MEREDITH DAVIES HADAWAY

Even the Dark

And as we forgot the dark, we forgot even the rain.

—AGHA SHAHID ALI

Forget the stars, forget the moon—even the dark is leaving us.
Instead of night, a halide afternoon. The dark is leaving us.

Peppered moth, your wings turned black to match the sooted bark, turn
back to your cocoon—everything dark is leaving us.

Windows, with your open throat, the breath of night's relief,
you may as well just shut the room. The dark is leaving us.

Extinguish candles, we don't need their little orbs. We kindle
clouds to shine all night. And so the dark is leaving us.

Only the blind now see what once made blindness tragic,
the long mystery, its black magic. Yes, even the dark—

Rain can't fall at night—instead it weaves through phony-day
to drop on one last place that wanted to be bright. All right.

Let there be light. Let us flutter in the glittering ash of spark
and blaze. Let us have our ways. We don't believe in the dark.

TONY MAGISTRALE

Westchester Pastoral

The bright true-colored suburbs of white
middle-aged marrieds residing in expansive houses
where a light is always lit, their
children off at boarding school or
under the vigilant eye of the Swedish *au pair*.
Such duplicitous comfort in those first paragraphs
as they wind around corners of gauzy summer twilights—
always a weekend, women in floral party dresses and heels,
Sunday poolside hangovers, sprinklers clicking
a fine mist syncopation across a republic of green,
the thick scent of barbequed flesh
drifting from some backyard a block away.

Westchester pastoral,
an envelope where a sheaf of American time
folds neatly inside, like old love letters in an attic.
A housewife, not a little drunk, distracted
by her own image reflected in a hallway mirror,
remembers a college girl with long blond hair
and muses *every day brings another little funeral*.
Her husband bears the weight of his masculinity
like a second mortgage, sport his last ally.
While on a street named Shady Hill Lane,
among the tangled roots of broken promises
in the troubled undergrowth,
a little man wearing his hair cropped short
impeccably dressed in bow tie and suit coat
points to some roses in his neighbor's front yard
and notes the petals dropping off
one by one.

GARY MARGOLIS

At the Hay Mow

Call them prayer shawls
they're wearing,
this snow-dusting,

their covering, not quite sun-
melted.

Hear them praying,

their low bellowing,
their staring, their kind
of seeing.

Some gods have no way
of knowing
what their breath means.

All that steaming.
And how not to make
anything of it.

How to fall
to their knees, not
believing. Not feeling

the snow falling is less
than the cows they are coming-
to-be, path-following,

Good God girls!
How beautiful we are
becoming.

GREG DELANTY

The New Citizen Army

Today, as every day, you rise up, don your suit, jeans,
your dress — whatever uniform
society has assigned you. You'll be one among
minions under regular orders.
You'll not think of it like this, you'll not
think twice. You will breakfast,
hardly aware that long ago you were drafted,
a soldier in the New Citizen Army.
This is as it should be; all assassins must be
mindless in the execution of duty.
You'll drive to work: the office, the hospital,
the university — wherever you make your living.
All day you will make your dying, a good tax payer.
After you arrive home, you settle back
on the couch, surf the news, the bodies laid out in neat rows,
men, women, children, parents weeping.
The usual daily massacre. You have obeyed the command.
You think nothing of this. You've played your part.
You are the good citizen. Sit back. Relax.



CATHERINE DIANICH GRUVER

MIKE MINCHIN

Our Son the Dragon

When John heard the weather report, he was sitting on the back deck sipping iced tea, listening to the classical station, looking out at Casco Bay, the dark water dotted here and there with tiny sailboats, their masts like paper triangles cutting into a perfectly blue sky. His own sailboat was bobbing gently on its mooring a few hundred yards off shore. He turned up the volume on the portable radio. They were calling it Tropical Storm Omar, and by the way they were talking, it was likely to gain hurricane strength north of Jamaica. The storm track was still uncertain, and the Maine coast was a long ways from Jamaica, but after the damage Tropical Storm Irene had done, John worried about Grant. Grant the troll, he thought and almost laughed. But it wasn't funny, not really. It was depressing is what it was, and after their last argument, thinking about Grant put a tarnish on the otherwise beautiful day. He pictured Grant sitting in his cave, and something inside him began to burn. John clicked off the radio and dumped the rest of his iced tea in the potted begonias, then decided, because he had nothing else to do in retirement really, and because Melinda was out playing bridge in town, where she spent more and more time, he would go for a sail. At least maybe he could forget about Grant for a few hours.

But when he made it to the dock and was about to put the cooler with beer in the Zodiac, he found he had little interest in sailing. It was nice to think about being out on the water, nice to imagine himself happy, but lately he had spent so many days motoring around the bay or drifting around with the jib up, that it felt more like work than pleasure. Putting up the main sail by himself just wasn't much fun. He thought of the days when he and Grant had caught bluefish and grilled them on the hibachi off the stern. They would motor around, following seagulls, Grant yelling for him to go faster, the boy's

face lit up with sweat and pure joy. But that was years ago, long before Grant dropped out of Colby, after three years as an ace student, and bought five acres of land way up the coast with money he was supposed to use for his fourth year and, John had hoped, graduate school. That was over a year ago now when Grant dug himself a cave in the side of a hill to live in, a dark recess of earth, lined with slender tree trunks for walls and fir boughs for a floor. An utter absurdity, John thought. It would flood out and collapse if the storm did come this far north. The entrance of the cave faced the ocean, and John imagined rain hurtling in, turning the walls and floor into a muddy soup.

Thinking of Grant's circumstances turned John's insides clean around. He could still see the blue tarps his son had slept in his first days at the cave, wrapped like a burrito against the rain, his skin pocked with bug bites and dirty, so dirty, his hair matted, his beautiful hair his mother had cut for him every few months, running her fingers through it, so proud. And John was proud too, had been proud. He walked back to the house, heavily, remembering his last visit with Grant, which had not gone well. That was June, and now it was August. Grant had, amazingly, wintered over in his cave, with the help of a kerosene heater. The winter had been especially cold, hitting twenty below for days on end. John and Melinda had paced around, fighting over little things, the laundry someone didn't switch, a toothbrush left on the counter, but the whole time it was Grant they worried about. Carbon monoxide poisoning. Hypothermia. Frostbite. Endless possibilities. They had made frequent trips up the coast, even in snow storms, a four hour drive from Cape Elizabeth on a good day, but each time Grant had sent them off. "Don't worry about me," he would say. "Worry about this planet." He was warm he

said, and strangely enough he looked warm, warm and dirty as if he had been sleeping with worms. They bought him a cell phone, but he wouldn't take it; it was part of the problem, he said—technology, progress—everything Grant railed against.

Now, eating dinner at the too-large table, sitting too far from one another, John watched Melinda pick apart a chicken wing, though she hardly ate any of it. She sipped her wine as if trying to pour life back into her body, and John knew they were both drinking too much these days. He could tell by the strain in his wife's face that it wasn't the time to bring up Grant, but when was there ever a good time?

"Did you hear about Omar?" he said, practically the only thing he had said all evening.

"Omar?" she said. "What are you talking about?"

"It's a category-one now," he said.

"Oh," she said. "Could you pass the butter?"

"Listen. Grant," he said. And the moment he said his son's name, he felt his throat constrict.

Melinda didn't say anything, but by the severe look she gave him, he knew she wanted him to stop talking.

"These storms are getting stronger," he said. "I'm thinking of driving out there. Maybe I can convince him to come home for a few days, wait it out here, just in case."

"I thought you weren't talking to him," she said quietly. She put her fork down beside her plate, and John knew she would not eat another bite. Her face was lean, too lean, and her arms were frail like the wings of a bat. "Don't expect me to go with you," she said, not looking at him. Then she said, "He never calls," and John could hear the pain in her voice. She got up and walked into the living room and stood facing the bay window that looked out on a moonlit ocean, and John knew enough to leave her alone. She was a strong woman, but the absence of her son, his sudden departure from civilization, was breaking her, breaking them, day by day.

That their son was living in a cave was bad enough, but on top of that, after Grant had pur-

chased the land, he had donated the balance of his account to Green Peace. The night John learned of this, Melinda drove him to the ER for chest pain and shortness of breath. He imagined his heart failing, but it was only a panic attack. They hired a lawyer and then another, but the money had been in Grant's name, plain and simple, and there was no way to get it back. A horrible mistake, trusting that much money to a twenty year old. It had been John's idea to take the money out of the trust and put it in Grant's personal account. At the time, it had been a show of faith, a way to say, *you're an adult now and you're in charge of your life. We know you'll be responsible.*

After he cleaned the kitchen in silence, he went upstairs and flipped open his laptop. Omar was already threatening Cuba and moving swiftly. Wind speeds were steady at category-one levels but were expected to slow down over the island. John checked several computer models: two showed the storm moving east of Newfoundland and out to sea. One had Omar colliding with the Maine coast in less than a week.

He found himself once more, standing in Grant's room, as if the ripped Neil Young poster on the ceiling or the seasoned Louisville Slugger in the corner might reveal secrets about his son. On the bureau sat a picture of Grant and his mother, the two of them holding each other at the beach, waves stretching out behind them, both of them smiling. He picked up the photo and there was his son, young and strong, his muscles gleaming, looking confident. He could have been anything, done anything. He had aced his SATs, turned down an offer to Dartmouth because he wanted to stay in Maine. What the hell happened? John pictured the storm and the computer models and Grant sleeping on a pile of tree boughs, and he thought, you can hate me, hate us both, but I'm coming for you, damn it.

He recalled once more his last argument with Grant when he had yelled, had felt close to grabbing the boy by the shoulders and shaking him.

They had argued about money, and Grant had sat on the deck, looking pleased with himself, as if the material world, the future, his job prospects, didn't matter in the least. Later, John had called to cancel the credit card in Grant's name, which John still paid for, but when the man on the phone asked why he was cancelling, he simply couldn't say. Then, after a short silence, he said to keep the card active and slammed the phone down. He would not have his son go without food. He would not have him starving in a goddamn hole in the ground.



By the time John pulled onto Route One the next afternoon, Omar had become a category-two hurricane and was threatening The Bahamas. But by the time he made it to the dirt road that led to Grant's cave, the radio station was only a buzz of static. The road dead-ended in a field splotched with wild blueberries. He parked in the shade of tall spruce trees near the rock wall crawling with poison ivy and took the narrow trail through the woods. Despite the sunshine, it was dark beneath the trees. It smelled damp and earthy, like Grant, he thought. But despite the arguments flitting through John's head, he recognized the beauty of the place. Under different circumstances, it would have been a fine investment in land. Sunlight filtered in small cones onto the forest floor, and the sounds of birds were everywhere.

When he exited the woods, he stood looking at the back side of John's cave, a grassy mound rising up before him only fifty yards from the edge of the bluff, and beyond that a gunmetal-blue Atlantic. For a moment John stared at the thin line of horizon stretching into sky and felt as if he had stepped out of his life for a moment. This can't be *my* son living here, he thought. It didn't make sense. And yet, there was a certain peace in the utter quietness of the place, the absence of cars and city noise. He could see why a person would choose to live here. The gusty wind and breakers a hundred feet below reminded John of why he had come.

The door to the cave, made of small tree trunks tightly spaced and tied together with tree roots, was open and anchored to the grass with a wooden spike, something Grant had carved no doubt. He peeked inside, ducking his head a little. "Grant?" he said, but there was no answer. He stepped into the dim, musty cave and found a battery-powered lantern on the floor. He switched it on. It amazed him that he could actually stand up in the place. There was enough room to move around a little, and now he saw in the pale light a make-shift bed made not only of fir boughs but blankets. Oddly enough, the bed was made, tidy even. A fastidious troll, he thought. Still, the slender tree trunks lining the walls made him worry the whole thing would collapse and bury him alive. He looked back at the entrance, not five feet high, and imagined what it would be like if Omar came. The wooden door wouldn't stand a chance. He closed his eyes for a moment to quell the pounding in his skull. He wished he had brought sheetrock, two-by-fours, reinforcements, a generator, anything.

"Dad?"

When John turned, he was looking at Grant in the entrance, a silhouette with bright sunlight around him.

"What are you doing here?"

For a second, John felt like an intruder, as if he had stepped into another man's home, but then the ridiculousness of it came back to him. "I see you've made some improvements," he said, walking out into the light.

They did not embrace or shake hands but simply stood a few feet from one another, making furtive eye contact. To his surprise, Grant looked clean, as if he had taken a shower recently, though John imagined him rolling in a shallow stream bed. His hair was still matted in near-dreadlock style, and his jeans were shredded, but his face was clean and he didn't look unhealthy. In fact, he looked vibrant, strong. He had a bucket filled with blueberries, which he offered to his father. John took a few and they were good and sweet.

“Your mother misses you,” he said. “We wish you’d call once in a while. We’d like to know you’re all right up here.” He gestured toward the cave. “And I don’t suppose you’ve heard there’s a hurricane coming?”

“It doesn’t surprise me,” Grant said.

“Don’t you think you’re vulnerable up here? You could come home for a few days. It’s a category-two, last I checked. Omar. There’s talk it could get a lot stronger.”

“That’s why you came? To take me to shelter?” Grant smiled a wry smile, then said, “Don’t you think this is what we deserve? This is Mother Nature putting it right back at us.” He put the blueberries down and clapped his hands together loudly, “WHAM! Look at Katrina, look at the Tsunamis, look at the wildfires in the west. This is only the beginning, the Earth unleashing war on humanity for our collective negligence, our industrialized wasteland, and it all stems from disrespect.” He took a handful of blueberries and ate them slowly, looking smug.

“You can save it,” John said. “I’m not here for one of your apocalyptic lectures. You’re not impressing me.”

“I’m not lecturing. I’m done lecturing. I’m simply telling the truth, not that anyone wants to hear it. I shouldn’t say that. *Some* people want to hear it. *Some* people are listening. I’m an optimist. But if they don’t listen, Omar is going to give them one hell of a wallop!” He was grinning wide. “I just love it. I love that the punishment fits the crime. We beat the Earth with fossil fuels and nuclear bombs and the Earth fights back. I hope it’s a category six. Seven. I hope it’s off the charts. Let it come. I’m ready.” He put his hands high over his head, as if calling down angels. “Omar, you bastard! Bring it on!”

“You’ll get washed out,” John said. “You think that door is going to last?”

“Omar doesn’t have any qualms with this humble abode. Omar is looking for fancy boats and fancy homes. Omar wants to squash that excess.”

“Omar doesn’t give a damn about you or me,” John said.

“Oh, I beg to differ,” Grant said. “That’s not what I’m feeling. I’m feeling psyched about this one. Omar can do whatever Omar wants to do. If Omar wants to come into my abode and hang for a while, it’s fine by me. I welcome hurricanes, floods, fires. We need to embrace our mother.”

“You should think about your own mother sometime,” John said. “She’s worried sick about you, rotting away up here. A lot of good you’re doing the world, sitting up here in the middle of nowhere.”

“I’m thriving. This is what the Earth wants, less productivity, less, less, less, not more, more, more. Look around. I’ve got all the blueberries I can eat, no phones ringing, no cable bill. This is authentic.”

“Don’t forget where the money came from,” John said. And then, because he wanted to drive the point home, though he hadn’t planned on mentioning anything, he said, “I noticed you’ve been using the card quite a bit.”

“I’m almost done with that. I’ve been raking blueberries. You want the land back? You can have it. I’ll hit the road today. I don’t need it. You can build another McMansion right here. Put the taxes through the roof and force the locals out to sea. See how brilliant that is. It’s what everyone’s doing. Look at Camden, Belfast, Damariscotta. That’s the future, a bunch of rich folks surrounded by squatters like me. Did you see the Wall Street wealth on your way up here? It’s enough to make me puke. One of those diesel-sucking McYachts in Bar Harbor could buy food for like ten thousand people. You see what I’m saying?”

John did not know what to say. This was Grant, his pragmatic turned idealistic son. Where was the boy who had once proclaimed he wanted to be a lawyer? One day he would see things differently. One day he would not talk so enthusiastically about the end of the world. One day the world would beat him down and turn his bright ideas and smile into a frown, and he would realize he needed a good job and a retirement account. But though John felt

this was true, it saddened him to think this way. Grant, for all his extremism, was really something to behold: bright, charming, eager to engage. There wasn't anything dull about the kid. And though John hated their arguments, in some strange way it fueled him. Deep down, he knew Grant made some good points, but he was so bull-headed, he feared for him.

Grant sat down in the stubby grass on the edge of the bluff. The sound of the breakers on the rocks below seemed to grow louder with each wave. John wished they were on the sailboat having a beer. Why did it have to be so hard? He had made some money selling insurance and invested well. They had a nice home by the ocean. Why was that so bad? He gave money to the Sierra Club for Christ's sake. John did not doubt that climate change was happening. He did not actually disagree on principle with most of what Grant said, only he balked at how far his ideas pushed him, how severe his reactions were to information. Where John drove a hybrid car, Grant eschewed the internal combustion engine altogether. Why did *his* son have to be the next messiah?

"Look," John said, walking up to the bluff and sitting in the grass beside Grant. "I didn't come to argue with you. "What are you going to do if you're...house gets flooded? Where are you going to go?"

"I'll manage," Grant said.

Then John heard himself say, "There aren't even any girls up here."

Grant said nothing, just stared off into the ocean, and John realized something for the first time. It might as well have been written in bold-faced letters in the sky. The last time Grant had had a girlfriend was in the ninth grade. Or was it tenth grade? Small pieces of the past started to fit together. John felt a great distance from his son in that moment. It occurred to him that he did not know who this other man was, not really, not anymore. And now he wondered if he ever had. How many other secrets did Grant have that John would never learn? He

rose with a heavy feeling in his heart and walked toward the car.

"Where are you going?" Grant said.

"Home."

"You don't have to leave. I was drinking tea. I'm fired up. Don't mind me."

John stopped walking but did not turn around. "There's a hurricane coming and your mother is home all alone."

He made it back to the Cape late that night, but he was still in the driveway when Melinda swung the screen door open with a crash, startling him.

"Where's Grant?" she said. "Why didn't you answer your phone?"

"Hold on," he said. Where *was* his phone? He had neglected to turn it on, had instead been going over and over his conversation with Grant, wondering what he could have said to get through to him. There were so many questions he wanted to ask. He had driven in a trance-like state, exhaustion overcoming him. At some point he had switched off the radio and did not hear what Melinda was now telling him, that Omar was coming fast, right up the coast, already battering the southern tip of Florida, gaining strength all the time, and now it was nearly a category-three hurricane, and some predicted it would be the biggest storm to hit the east coast in a hundred years.

"Are you listening to me," Melinda said, her face strained, wiry arms clinging to the screen door. "Where is Grant?"

But that question seemed unanswerable. "I don't know," he said.

She made a sound he could not quite understand. It was not a word exactly, possibly a moan, and he took it to mean he had failed, which he understood to be true. She went inside in a rush, but John stood outside for a while, looking up at the brilliant stars, so clean and piercing it didn't seem possible the storm of the century was coming their way.

Inside, Melinda was pacing in the living room

with every light on as if to ward off the dark and the storm.

"We have to go back," she said, not looking at him.

And now he felt a charge run through him like electricity. "No," he said. "Absolutely not."

"It could be here in four days."

"Listen to me," he said. "He's not coming." And saying this, he realized the truth of it: Grant was not coming home, not now, not likely ever. He pictured him coming for holidays, maybe. But what did Grant care about Christmas? Nothing. Easter? Less. Thanksgiving? Ha! They might see him once every five years if they were lucky. John took a bottle of beer from the fridge and sat down in the La-Z-Boy, which felt unnaturally plush and somehow absurd after his visit to the cave. It sickened him to sit in such luxury when Grant was out there on the bluff. He hated that he was one of those people his son despised. And now he felt strangely guilty, as if he, John, was the cause of the storm. It was Grant's condemning voice he heard in his head. He stood up and went to the bay window and looked at the tiny points of light on the water, a few boats obscured by darkness, making their way through the swells. For just a second he imagined smashing the window with the beer bottle, breaking everything. From the kitchen he could hear a cork escaping from a bottle and the sound of wine flowing into a glass, a sound so lonely he could hardly breathe.



Three days passed. Drunk half the time, arguing the other half, always watching the weather report, waiting, hoping desperately that Grant would find a ride and come home on his own volition, even to borrow money. As Omar morphed from a category-three into a category-four, as New York evacuated and Cape Cod residents scurried like mice into the heart of the country, John and Melinda watched the sick green whorl on TV in silence, ignoring warnings to evacuate.

And when Melinda stood by the door early on

the fourth day, keys in her hand, John was ready to go, though they hadn't talked about going for Grant, or maybe they had in silent ways, John gassing the car that morning, putting flashlights and water in the trunk, Melinda making sandwiches as if they were going to the beach. They would find Grant and drive inland, get a hotel up north, or just keep driving away from the storm.

Melinda drove fast, rolling through stop signs, gunning the engine. They passed boats on trailers, and John realized he had neglected to take the sailboat out, but he said nothing about it now, and he knew Melinda didn't care one way or the other, and it surprised him that neither did he. Let it break apart on the rocks. Let me see my son, he thought. Let us be a family again.

When they reached Ellsworth, the tops of the trees were bending unnaturally low, threatening to snap off. Debris skittered across the road.

"We should have left sooner," Melinda said, her hands tight around the wheel.

"Let's go," he said, as if she wasn't already speeding.

"I can't believe this," she said. "I just can't believe our son."

"Did you know he was gay?" John asked suddenly.

"Grant?" she said, cutting her eyes at him. And then she laughed like he hadn't heard in how long? A year? "Where did you get that idea?"

"The other day. I mentioned girls, and it just hit me."

"Our Grant is very much heterosexual, for your information. Trust me, I know my son." She laughed again, and it was so good to hear, but there was a hint of uncertainty in her voice that made him wonder.

"I just don't know why he wants to live like *that*," she said.

"You mean like a troll?"

"No, like a dwarf." They both laughed hard, like something contagious had infected them and they couldn't stop. He could see tears pushing out the corners of her eyes. It's not funny, he thought, but it was.

“Or a dragon,” he said. “Dragons live in caves, right?”

“Maybe he’ll strike gold,” she said.

“Yeah, and give it all to Green Peace.”

“Don’t bring that up,” she said. They stopped laughing as if someone has flicked a switch.

They drove for a while in silence, but all the time the wind grew stronger, and every so often a gust would batter the car and Melinda would pull the wheel to one side to keep in her lane. The sky was unusually dark with just a few gulls circling high against a gray mass of clouds.

When they pulled up to the rock wall and parked, it started to rain, large, heavy drops. And though they had raced to get there, neither of them got out of the car.

“He’s coming with us,” Melinda said. “I don’t care if we have to drag him. It’s not safe here. Look at the trees.” She gasped as the trees bent nearly to the ground in the gusts.

“I’ll go,” he said. “You stay here.”

“I’m coming.” And with that, she was outside, holding the hood of her raincoat over her head. The trees creaked and swayed as they half-ran down the narrow path. And then they heard a loud crunching sound and turned around in unison, understanding the only thing the sound could have been: their silver, hybrid car with a large tree on the roof, the windshield smashed in.

“Grant will love this,” John said. “He’s going to tell us he saw this coming. Payback. WHAM!” He clapped his hands together.

“Would you please stop?” Melinda said. She took her cell phone from her pocket, checked it, then put it back. She knew as well as he that there was no reception for twenty miles.

Grant was sitting on the bluff, shirtless, legs crossed in lotus style, hands palm-down on his knees, ratty hair crawling down his back like a skunk. It was so windy, it was a wonder he hadn’t been blown into the ocean. The swells were massive, and the sound of the break below thunderous.

“Well,” Melinda said as they approached the bluff, “I hope he still likes peanut butter and jelly.” She frowned a little. “Well, does he?”

“I’m not sure,” he said. A sudden emptiness came into him. He thought it possible Grant would not welcome the sight of them, that he would sniff the peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, give forth a lecture on the evils of growing peanuts, and send them away.

But Grant was hungry, ravenous. He ate one sandwich, then another. The cave was surprisingly warm, and dry, and strangely comfortable with the door pulled shut. Grant had dug drainage channels outside the entrance and fortified the door with a tarp and extra ropes. He had lain more blankets across the fir boughs. They sat and talked for a while around the lantern and mostly avoided arguing. And when it was finally time to sleep, they lay close together like they had on camping trips when Grant was young. Melinda squeezed John’s hand, and he squeezed back, and Grant said, “Goodnight,” and they said, “Goodnight,” and in the way that people do when they don’t want the day to end, they kept on talking in spurts, and they talked as the storm of the century moved over them, and when the door was ripped clean off, they huddled together at the back of the cave, their faces glowing in the lantern’s light, and, despite everything, John could see Melinda smiling, leaning against her son, who had his arm around his mother. How often would that happen in the future, he wondered? Where would they be in a few years? Tomorrow? What would come of all of this? The cave? Grant? The Earth? It seemed to John that they were on the verge of something, that their lives had tipped off balance, and they were headed somewhere he could not imagine. The rain lashed at them, and the wind knocked over the lantern. And though the night turned cold, they stayed warm together, huddled under the blankets. And when the lantern battery finally died, and Omar unleashed his fury, they held each other in the howling, mysterious dark.

JEREMY MARK

As it Melts

Please do not forget
the failures frozen
in time

But do away with
success because
it leaves

No footprint, only
good feeling

Failure is memory

And I can write absolutely
assured that all of the
miraculous

Machinery that ensures
that I am heard

Will not be remembered
so we shall dwell

On what is frozen even
as it melts.

RICHARD JARRETTE

Formative Encounters with the Muse

The silent boy with the old eyes makes his nest
in Cats' Forest, the nighttime hideout,
and ponders television—

*What does the air think about those shows
flying into the house?*

*They do something weird to the windows—
the house looks sick, like it ate
the blue meat.*

A rat carries an egg in its mouth
from the chicken house, a voice in the radio sings,
Let me go, let me go, let me go, lover.

Grandma sends the boy into town
to sell the pig and some beans.

*Put the pig money in your right shoe,
the bean money in the left, then 'pig bean
pig bean' all the way home—*

lifts the hickory switch from its hooks
by the ice box, shakes it
in his face.

He drifts upward through the roof,
climbs the lightning rod, and keeps going
into the sky with the birds and clouds

from where he can see a child with a pig on a leash
walking on a dirt road through the tobacco
pulling a wagon and some beans.

DIANA WHITNEY

Summer Solstice

Cresting the hill on a high tide of buttercups,
daisies, Susans, a convergence of storms
from near and beyond, you swore you would never
be so free with yourself, but you were wrong.
The strawberry moon waxed like clotted cream
and there you were again loosening the girdle,
twining rugosa in your hair, ducking the blackberry arbor
in a gauntlet of stinging nettles, rough thorns
clutching your bare legs but never mind—
you're invincible in your silver-link chainmail,
you wove a garter of cherry-stones and slid it
up your thigh, you can survive for three days
on dew and red clover, you cast a spell
of protection on the forest gate
and consecrated the ferns with your nectar.

Little moon-calf, let this run its course.
If he lit your imagination like a torch, forgive him
and keep burning. You could be curled
in the sick room under crimson sheets, purging shadows
through your pelvic floor, when out the back door
and up the green hill there are crowns to weave,
petals to pull, he loves me, he loves me not,
fingers quick and patient, parting silk from cream,
the last petal placed in the old hollow apple
where you offered the violet and lilac in turn,
binding June's spell with three opium seedpods
a poppy bouquet in an iron horseshoe
twisted with mint and lavender spires,
drawing down the moon one more time
while the Ferryman waits at the river of oblivion
holds his pole poised in the milk-dark balance,
the questions drip-dropping like water
in a cave: what you'll give up,
what you're willing to pay.

La Jolla

They were getting ready for bed.

Jay stood in front of his sink and Amber in front of hers. Some days, Amber thought, sleep was more deserved than others, and today—tonight, rather—was one of those.

“Everything all right?” Jay asked. “You’ve been quiet for a while.” He worked his toothbrush over his front teeth.

Amber brought her eyes over to meet his in the center of the mirror. “Yes,” she said. “Think I’m just tired.” She applied some night cream to her face, working the lotion into her skin in tight circles.

“I know. What a day,” he said. “I’m beat. You were right: we probably should’ve just stayed in San Diego for the night. The drive didn’t seem that bad going, but twice in one day is a lot.”

“Yeah,” she said.

Jay slapped a little cologne onto his neck. He did this every night. Amber liked it, too. She found it comforting to pick up on traces of citrus when she rolled his way in bed. In the beginning of their relationship, she thought it was strange that each evening Jay took a long time getting ready for bed. He showered and scrubbed, even shaved, and always applied cologne, telling her that his regimen made a lot of sense and that during the day you get dirty and you don’t want to bring all that filth to bed.

“Next time, I—*we*, I mean—head down there,” he said, “will be for my 30th reunion, right? After the 20th comes the 30th...or is there a 25th?”

“I think it depends on the school,” she said.

“And you never want to go to yours? Isn’t your 20th in a couple years?”

“Didn’t like those people back then, so I don’t see why I’d like them now.”

“People change, though,” he said, removing his contact lenses.

“I’m not sure they do. They just learn to live better with what they have.”

He nodded.

She ripped off a strand of floss.

“It’s just nice to see what people have been up to, you know? I don’t go down there much and a lot of them, like Sean and Ian, have moved away.”

“What about Dallas?” she said.

“Dallas...” he said, reaching for the bottle of blue mouthwash. “Who’s Dallas? That tall guy with the Hawaiian shirt?”

“Yes,” she said.

“Never knew him well. Just one of those people—not a bad guy, not a good guy, just another cloud in the sky.”

Amber felt flushed, and even though she’d spent time lacquering her face with lotion, she turned on her sink’s spigot and splashed her face over and over again. It was cooling and fresh, and she didn’t want to stop.

Jay gargled and spit. “Did he talk to you?” he asked.

“Who?”

“That guy . . . Dallas?”

“A little.”

“Oh,” Jay said. He put on his glasses and made his way into the bedroom. Once there, he clicked on his bedside light, slid between the sheets, and started reading his book. Amber had asked him the title a few times, but she couldn’t remember it at the moment. Something about Egypt, she thought, and birds and family. Yes, a bird had escaped from its cage and the family was searching for it.

She washed her hands and filed into the bedroom. She joined Jay in bed and clicked on her light. Outside, two cats fought, sending sharp growls into the quiet air, startling both Amber and

Jay. He looked up from his book and suddenly, the noise stopped.

She reached for her Sudoku magazine and got to it, scrawling possible numbers in the margins. A gentle breeze stirred leaves in the tall trees and their wind chime near the front door played a few happy notes.

“Did he mention me at all? Dallas?” Jay asked.

“He just asked how you were doing. How long we’d been married.”

“Oh, that’s nice,” he said, getting up and opening a couple windows on the far end of the bedroom. Neighborhood birds rattled off a few trills and a car rushed by, its brakes screeching as it neared a stop sign.



There was a bowl of punch with shards of ice in it and blasting music from Amber’s teens: MC Hammer and New Kids on the Block and even a little Nirvana. Basically, it was a prom, Amber thought, a prom where all the guys had less hair and bigger wallets. The reunion was held in Jay’s high-school gymnasium with a banner that stretched the length of the basketball court. It read: WELCOME CLASS OF ’93! Jay had even shown her where he’d hit the game-winner he always talked about—the spot where he’d knocked in a three from the corner to put his Titans over the top.

When Eileen, his old friend, approached and asked him to dance, Jay gazed at Amber as if asking for permission, and she smiled, opened her arms like some sort of queen, and told him to have fun. Eileen’s unattractiveness made the decision an easy one.

Amber helped herself to a tall glass of punch and stayed close to the wall. A man approached. He was red-faced, sweaty, and tall—maybe six-foot-five with hairy hands. She’d never seen a man with such hairy hands—big tufts on his fingers. Most of the men at the reunion wore suits, but he stood in a Hawaiian shirt and pleated khakis.

“Are you Jay’s wife?” he asked, leaning in to combat

the music. He stared at Amber’s nametag. “Amber Sinclair . . . as in Jay Sinclair?” His breath smelled of alcohol and she thought his eyes had rested on her name tag and hovered about her cleavage for far too long. “I’m Dallas,” he said. “What a pretty ring you have there. A black pearl . . . look at that!”

“Yes, I’m Jay’s wife,” she said.

“Jay,” he said, “what a guy.”

“I think so,” she said.

Madonna’s “Vogue” bounced through the gym and Amber watched Jay disappear in a throng of drunken men and women. He removed his blazer and whipped it around like a towel. Most of the people around him did their best to imitate Madonna’s dance, framing their faces with their hands.

“Does he ever mention me?” Dallas asked.

“Yes,” Amber said, even though Jay never had. She was sure she would’ve remembered a name like Dallas. It was her parents’ favorite show. “Only good things,” she said, smiling.

“That’s funny,” he said, a smirk on his lips.



Jay got up from the bed and went to the bathroom. He blotted his face with a towel and splashed a little water onto the back of his neck. Then he came back to bed. He leaned in and kissed Amber. She thought his mouth tasted funny, different. Maybe a new toothpaste, she thought. Or was it a new mouthwash? She didn’t say anything, though; she kept at her Sudoku, hunting for numbers.

Jay clicked off his bedside light. “I’m beat,” he said. “Could barely make it through one chapter.” He rolled towards her again and ran his hand along her cheek bone and down to the hollow of her neck. She gripped her pen. “I was happy to be with you today,” he said. “All my friends got to see the kind of woman I ended up with. It was strange to go back and be at the school where I was a kid, and confront it again—as a man.”

She nodded.

Jay let out a deep breath and dropped his head into his pillow. “Night,” he said.

Dallas tapped his foot. “Do you want to dance?” he asked.

“No,” she said. “I’m most comfortable being a wallflower.”

Dallas laughed, then snorted.

She thought that Dallas seemed older than Jay and didn’t understand how he could’ve been in Jay’s class. Age did funny things to people, though, she thought. He coughed a few times and sneezed into the crux of his elbow.

“Baby Baby” played and Amber swayed to the beat.

“I see Jay a lot,” Dallas said.

“You do? When?” Amber asked.

“Well, not in person,” he said. “But I see his face on bus benches whenever I’m in L.A.”

She laughed, pushed a strand of hair out of her eyes and took a sip of punch.

“He’s a realtor, right?” he said.

“Yes.”

“One time,” Dallas said, slurring his words, “when my car broke down, I even sat on him for a bit. Bet he’s damn good at selling houses.”

“Very good, yes. Excuse me for a second.”

Amber left the gym and headed to the ladies’ room. The restroom was far from the gym, down a long corridor flanked with lockers. The fluorescent lights above her buzzed and her heels made clip-clop sounds as she walked the polished asphalt. A cluster of women stood around a trashcan and smoked. She wondered if Jay would’ve loved her if he’d known her back then, if they would’ve been high-school sweethearts. She was a late-bloomer—sweet and kind. A lot of community service. She was seldom invited to parties, and even when she was, she rarely showed. When she and Jay met at a mutual friend’s birthday long ago, she knew he was the kind of man that had always been popular. He had a way with people. He was quick with a smile, a joke, and always filled the air with conversation. He reminded her of her dear father. After working

hard in law school and putting her studies ahead of men and fun, she remembered thinking that she was being rewarded with a handsome, successful man whom so many women desired.

She used the restroom and washed her hands, scrubbed them like she’d read about in a magazine, for the length of two happy birthday songs. She sung the tune a little. When she exited the ladies’ room, she pulled in a deep breath and scanned the school. It was night and hard to make out the buildings, but she did her best to picture Jay, years ago, strutting the hallways, books tucked under his arm, his backpack slung over his shoulder. The school was lined with palm trees, something that was so foreign to her growing up in Seattle, and when a breeze blew, she listened to the fronds sigh.

“Whose birthday is it?” a voice said behind her.

She turned.

It was Dallas.

He had a large cup in his hand and some of his thin hair now spilled onto his forehead.

“What?” Amber said.

“You were singing ‘Happy Birthday,’ no?”

Amber rubbed her hands together. “Oh,” she said. “We should get back in there.” She began walking, her stride long and deliberate.

“When Jay gave you that ring, what’d he say?” Dallas called out. “A pearl for my pearl, or some shit like that?”

Amber stopped.

Soft puffs of breath worked their way from Jay’s mouth. Sleep always came easy to him. The gentle light of a distant streetlamp glowed deep in the distance, and Amber gazed its way. Whenever she couldn’t sleep, she always got up and looked at the streetlamp. It was silly, she thought, but she’d always found herself getting attached to things. Back in Seattle, when she was a girl, she lived on a similar looking suburban street, and often stared at a nearby lamppost that stood only a few feet from her front lawn. She often felt sorry for it: alone, in the cold,

the dark, bugs hovering about its glass. One time, during the weekend, a truck pulled up. A man who worked for the city got out, pulled a ladder from the flatbed, cleaned the streetlamp's glass, and even changed the bulb inside. She smiled from her room.

Jay tugged the sheets up to his chin and the down blanket crinkled in his grip. She returned to her Sudoku, but then stopped. It was enough for tonight, she thought. She clicked off her bedside light and wiggled out of her nightgown. She tossed it to carpet where it landed without a sound. She then yanked the soft sheets over her skin.

The distant pulse of music thumped at the same tempo as Amber's heart. She turned. "A pearl for a pearl," Dallas said again. "I got it, right?" He hadn't moved at all. He was still in front of the women's restroom, leaning against a low fence. She trudged his way and ignored the pain in her feet. When she arrived next to him, she wanted to say something, but didn't know what.

"He's a con man," he said.

"Jay?"

"That's why he's good." He took a good pull of his punch and crunched on an ice cube.

A group of women walked by. One yammered on her cell phone. "It's like high school all over again," she said. "Everything's the same." The other women with her laughed, and they all headed into the restroom. The door shut behind them.

Amber stared at the ring and Dallas pulled a maraschino cherry from his plastic cup, wrapped his lips around it, and ripped the fruit from the stem. "You know Jay. He's smooth. He's the man, always talking, always cool. What'd he tell you he did for cash back in high school?"

She thought, then said, "He tutored. He tutored Spanish."

Dallas laughed. "Sí, sí."

"Let's go back in—"

"I know it's hard to doubt that face."

Amber clasped her hands together and swallowed.

The pack of women left the bathroom and cackled as they sashayed down the hall. Even though the ladies were older now, Amber could still hear the cheerleader-like quality in their voices.

The sheets were too heavy on her body and Amber tossed and rolled to face her side of the room. She stared straight ahead, aligning her gaze with the distant street lamp that burned a golden yellow. Her breath steadied but her mind still reeled. In the early phase of their relationship, she recalled friends praising Jay's looks and warmth and generosity, even asking, "What's his catch? Is he for real?"

Night sounds reached her ears, and she was happy to hear them: another car came to a stop, and she studied the vehicle's headlights as they brushed over homes. Beside her, Jay snored. She shifted towards the edge of the bed and pressed her face into the sheets. The soft scent of laundry detergent was pleasant and familiar. She'd changed the sheets yesterday morning, before Jay had left for work. He was shaving, with lather thick on his face, when she'd come upstairs. He'd smiled at her and she thought his teeth seemed yellow when contrasted against the bright foam. Later, after he'd put on his tie, she fixed his collar and ran her hands over his neck.

It's okay, she repeated in her mind, hoping that the words would hypnotize her, but she stayed alert—all her senses sharp and focused.

Dallas grinned and scratched his sideburns. "That's what worked so well for him back then, when we'd go door to door in nice neighborhoods, far from here, towards La Jolla. We'd have supplies for washing carpets from my father's business. We'd say we were two high-school seniors looking to make a little money for summer travel. We'd ask them if they wanted their carpets washed." Dallas sucked on his teeth. He continued: "Most people said no, but all it took was one. It was usually an older person, sometimes an older couple that was eager to talk, happy

to have company. They would let us in and get us water or coffee. They'd always—"

Amber dug her nails into her palms. "How often did this happen?"

"Most Saturdays our senior year. Anyhow, we'd ask questions about who lived with them and what they were up to for the day. Most rich people—believe it or not—aren't expecting to be robbed. They're always expecting to get robbed in dirty neighborhoods, but in rich ones, they'll tell you everything. They'd let us know how long they'd lived there...and tell us that they were going to see a movie later in the evening. Jay would look for alarm systems and dogs, and finally, when they left us alone to do our work, we'd find a window. One that no one used. Maybe a small one in a bathroom, or behind a sofa, or drawn curtain. We'd unlock it. We'd finish up our work, get paid thirty dollars or so, and then wait. Most people get out of the house at some point on Saturday, and when they did, we were ready. We went back, found the window, and grabbed jewelry and cash—stuff that would fit in our jackets. I sold it all to pawn shops, but Jay kept a lot of the jewelry. He didn't need the money as bad as me."

Amber started to speak, then stopped.

"You should've seen how excited he was when robbing. He'd get this look—really beady eyes and he wouldn't talk. A total pro."

Cold now, Amber got out of bed and slid back into her nightgown. Standing still in the bedroom, she stared at Jay's form in the sheets. Her eyes were well-acquainted with the darkness now, and she could make out his head and his left hand that lay atop the comforter. Her breath rattled and she tried to remember some of the stories Jay had told her about the jewelry: "Bought this downtown," and "got it at the mall," and "found it in a boutique on Sunset...you know the one..." and "this was my mom's." She rubbed her arms, took to the bathroom, and quietly closed the door.

Amber's eyes snapped shut and she felt her face burn. She writhed in her heels and bit her bottom lip. "And this ring?"

"That was the last house we ever did, a few weeks after graduation. An older man let us in. He had this huge place. We couldn't believe that only one person lived there. We got inside and started washing carpets. He told us he was going to pick up his niece from the airport in a few hours, so he was happy the carpets would be clean. I still remember the way he smelled, a little like dust. When we broke in later, I found a lot of cash in the man's office and Jay went upstairs. Later, in the van, Jay had blood on his hands and I asked him if he was all right. He told me an old woman was in one of the rooms. He was going through a dresser when he found this ring and some other jewels. The woman came up behind him and startled him. He turned around and punched her. 'Just instinct, man,' I remember him saying. He said she fell back hard, against a door frame. We hauled ass. Got outta there, but he didn't wash that blood off till he got back to the house. Once safe, at his home, he pulled the ring from his jacket. 'Gonna give this to a girl one day,' he said. I asked him what he was gonna tell her, and he said, 'Something stupid, like a pearl for a pearl.' We had good laugh."

Amber didn't say a word. She stared into the distance at the dimly lit buildings. A hefty breeze blew her way and dried beads of sweat on her cheeks and nose. Even though she wasn't wearing anything other than an evening dress, she was hot. She darted to the bathroom and splashed some water on her face. Her mascara ran and dripped into the sink. She grated her face with paper towels, and stood in the bathroom. When she exited, Dallas wasn't there. He was staggering down the hall. "Wait!" she yelled.

He stopped. When she reached him, she stared into his eyes. "Celebration" by Kool and the Gang danced through the air, and she had to lean in to get her words to reach Dallas's ears. "Why?" she said.

And she didn't really know in which way she meant her question. *Why what?* she thought.

"I just thought you should know. I just thought he should return my phone calls, talk to me a little. Never hear from him anymore..."

"Maybe he wanted to change," she said.

"Oh, that look, that look in his eyes can't change," Dallas said. He headed off, not back into the gym, but down the hall, through strewn confetti, to the parking lot.

Amber clutched her chest and returned to the party. A slow song, something by Michael Bolton, she thought, played at a high volume, and the DJ, who Jay had said was the baseball coach, leaned into the microphone. "Time for a slow song," he said. "So find that special man or lady." She ran her eyes across the crowd, over the throng of men and women, and had trouble finding Jay, but finally spotted him. His blue dress shirt was soaked with sweat. His smile was big, and he waved her over. He's thirty-eight, she thought, as she walked his way, he's lived twenty-seven years without me and eleven

with me . . . I wonder which life weighs more? Jay wrapped his long arms around her and pulled her in. She clenched her jaw. "Where have you been?" he asked. "Thought I lost you." He smiled.



In the bathroom, Amber clicked on the light and let her eyes adjust to the brightness. Her feet were cold on the tile, so she tossed a towel to the floor and stepped onto it. She popped open the lid of her jewelry box and inspected the loot. Earrings, bracelets, watches, rings, and brooches—most of which she'd never worn—sparkled. She wondered where exactly they'd come from. She picked up a string of pearls and wrapped her fingers around each bead, savoring their smoothness and sheen. She wondered about the women who were stolen from. Were they dead? Did they have any idea who did it? Why hadn't Jay gotten rid of it all? Again, she dug her hands into the cold jewelry, felt the weight, and listened to the clash of metal against metal. In time, she reached for the bathroom door and slid the lock into place.

ALEXIS LATHEM

Bérgère

Ville du Château du Passy, France

I.

At this hour I watch the light gather up the wheat in her blue nets.
The ground thickens with mist and the throat of evening
gurgles and purrs. The goats are in their beds.
I can hear the mice softly thumping beneath the eaves.
I have made my home here,
learning to navigate my troupe of goats
past blue wheat and fields of seedlings,
to occupy this granary with its many shadows,
a family of mice and one *hirondelle*.

It's still dark when I go to rouse the troupe,
drive them into the milking room,
where they line up their rumps to me.
I know each of them by the size and feel of their udders,
still warm with sleep, the shape and curve of their backs.
I slip my hands through their hindlegs to take their milk
while they munch on grain.
They have accepted this bargain.
This one has deep cuts from barbed wire
across the tender skin of an udder.
When I grip and pull down on her teat
she lets out the scratchy, witch-like bleat
of the dead.

O poet asleep in your granary of words,
waiting for a new moon to be born in a hay bale,
for the smell of dung and must in the straw piles
to waft with frankincense and myrrh,
for the knife to fall from the butcher's hand
and the ram to walk away like Isaac from the block.

For the end to turn back to the beginning
where the dung drops to dust and gives life
to wheat and sunflower,
where a drop of milk clings to a teat like Saturn's last moon,
and the blood in its puddle of afterbirth swirls in its diaphanous sac
and the cow swallows it whole the way the universe drinks its stars.
Leaving you these words in the dusty chink of a windowsill:
Hirondelle. Milk Pail. Bell



CATHERINE DIANICH GRUVER

AUDREY BATCHELDER

Remnant

You convince me
of the earth and my body,
but I cannot comprehend

Skylark in the meadow becomes
the movement of your hands across the table,
a ghost coming forward,
your palm, now a constellation

The deer gather to the roadside to lick the salt
the cow cannot walk down the flight of stairs
too much happens to account for

You tell me I have become a human
touch your face with your hands
the line feeds itself, you'll see,
this detriment can mean something to you,
it can grow out into another direction
unaware of wind and sun

But I can be dug up too easily,
you can see me in the light
a piece of my collar bone falls out of place,
gets caught in my hair
is suspended for a moment

This process is imagined
I do it in my sleep
I push with my hands
there is nothing else.

The Island

An Allegory, The Refusal to Acknowledge an Unacceptable Truth

Far, far off in an uncharted sea there once was an island of most magnificent proportions. It was absolutely alone on the ocean, a single volcanic mountain rising above the waters between the pole and the equator, a thousand fathoms above the sea floor and a thousand leagues from any other land. It was said that the island was an almost perfect parabolic cone, concave slopes sweeping down from the very small tapered apex, nearly in the clouds, to its base and circular seashore virtually flat to the oceans edge. It hung between sea and sky like a fine evening dress tumbling from the shoulders of its wearer to spread in an unbroken circle on the floor. The island lay in mid latitude between the frozen polar storms, and the crushing heat of the equatorial domain, so its climate was near flawless.

A highly sophisticated society had inhabited this island for many thousands of years, with no contact whatsoever to the outside world because the citizenry had strong superstitions against leaving the sight of land and their mountain when out at sea. They had developed an urbane language capable of interpreting the subtleties of life and complex issues. They were peaceful and civilized. They had no name for their island or its mountain, for it was the only geographic feature that existed, and so needed no designation.

Their society was formed as a mirror of the mountain that dominated their lives. The Prelate, as we shall call him, occupied a formidable castle at the top of the mountain, actually constituting the mountain's very pinnacle. Beneath the castle lived the landed aristocracy in fine old manor halls. Beneath them wealthy merchants built imposing mansions behind large enclaves of powerfully buttressed walls. In descending order, the upper middle

of the mountain was occupied by a large population of professionals and lesser gentry who lived comfortably in excellent dwellings. Lower yet were the people who used their intellect to resolve their work related situations, but were only compensated by the time they worked. Beneath them at the base of the mountain were a still larger number of simple but adequate structures of one or two families each. This area was occupied by the people who used their hands for their work. On the flat lands of the alluvial plains skirting the mountain were the farms and fields.

At the very edge of the land between farm and seashore were the unemployed and the working poor who used their backs for labor. They lived in shanties, shacks and sheds built of daub and wattle.

It had been speculated that this civilization and its hierarchy were very stable and could have been capable of enduring for centuries more. However, about four or five hundred years ago something unexpected and unprecedented happened.

The Island began to sink. Today we would call it tectonic plate subduction.

The poor, living at the fringes, noticed it first as the ocean came through the reeds into their homes. The occupants made little of the issue, for it was a simple matter to just move further back from the shore. But as things continued to worsen, the authorities were apprised of the situation.

People of great scientific learning were called forth. Among them was an elderly woman steeped in the complexities of the dryness of island dirt, another young man knew all there was to know of sea wetness. There was an old professor who had spent his entire life analyzing the complexities of

animal and plant flotation, another knew the mysteries of mud and sea bottoms. These learned minds were all called into meetings at the highest levels, meaning the Prelate himself was involved.



Days of talks and speculations ensued. Eventually it was determined by the naturalists that if nothing was done, the sinking of the Island, was likely, in the highest degree, without qualification, going to continue until there was nothing left, until the very peak of the mountain slipped below the waves. It could take several fortnights or several years, or many years, nobody could say. And since their island, their mountain was the only place in the vastness of the sea, they had nowhere to go, and so to survive, the citizens must take immediate action.

The naturalists had come up with a list of operations that could halt the process immediately, such as rock flotations, water proofing the sea, and a process to disconnect the island entirely from its roots, better known as island rafting.

It should be noted here that these meetings were held in the strictest secrecy possible. No one outside of the inner circle was to know of their concerns, for the Prelate did not wish to interrupt the flow of commerce.

What to do now, was the most demanding question: Question # 1

What to tell the common population was the next question: Question # 2

The answer to Question # 1 was simple: Nothing. The leaders of the mercantile establishment decided that the actions resulting from the naturalist's suggestions would terribly upset the commerce of the Island. And furthermore, many of the nobility and the wealthy class were not so sure that the island was actually going to continue to sink; if indeed it was sinking at all. They needed more proof. The establishment gained the ear of the Prelate. He agreed to no action at this time. His statement to the natural-

ists was, "Nothing should be done because it would wreak mayhem on the establishment, jeopardize profits, and so throw the rest of the citizenry into unemployment and poverty."

But the answer to Question #2, was much more difficult. It was clear that this news could cause wide spread panic.

At this point the tale gets a little more complicated and unclear, but the following narrative is the way it has come down: It had long been known that inhabiting the utmost pinnacle of the tower above the castle, sitting at the top of the mountain, the very highest point of the whole land, was a most ancient man. This person had, as the story has been told, lived there since the beginning of time. He would know what to do. He would know how to deal with Question # 2.

Only the Prelate might disturb this formidable man, and the Prelate lost no time in his mission. Early the following morning he began his visitation. Up the near endless circular stone stairs he climbed, up and up, around and around. He dared not stop to look out the small round openings into the vastness of the sky and the sea beneath him. Half of the day he climbed, until exhausted, he reached an oaken, iron-strapped door at the last step. No knocks, no words were exchanged, only a polite cough. The Prelate slipped a parchment under the door with a supplication to join the Royal Leadership Circle and help determine the path.



The designated day arrived, the appointed hour came, the Royal Circle waited in silence and great unease. Then, the chamber door opened and through it stepped a most singular figure. He was only the height of an average man's waist, his skin was smooth, without wrinkles; his face seemed that of an infant, his eyes were deep blue and those of an old, old soul. A pink hand with soft, loose, smooth skin reached up to the table and placed a parchment on it with the message turned down. The hand withdrew and the ancient child moved, qui-

etly, slowly, neither ebbing nor flowing, through the door and disappeared.

As the door closed all eyes turned to the parchment left on the table, and continued silence ensued. After a long period of time, the Prelate reached over to turn the parchment. It had two words in a shaky but bold hand:

REFUTE
DEFLECT

After more moments passed, heads slowly started nodding. Yes, they understood. Refute, disprove, rebut, deny. As that measure runs out, deflect, distract, divert, deviate from the obvious path.

Again the Prelate lost no time. The very next day he assembled his General Office of Information to work out ways to inform the citizenry of what was really not happening at all, and what not to do about it. All this was to take place without awakening any fears that might not have already been raised. The Office quickly contacted the AKC, Agency for Knowledge Circulation. As complicated as it may sound, the task was in truth, quite easily accomplished. Those who lived near the shore and had a first-hand view of the rising sea were not, for the most part, a reliable lot, and so their concerns were not taken very seriously. Furthermore most of the folks inland were well buffered from rising water, that is, if there were anything to the story. Those who went to the seashore for visits were not inclined to have an opinion about sea levels either way.

The notices posted at town centers spoke of natural cycles of sea water fluctuations, of possibilities of extra-large high tides coming their way and distant storms. They talked of known optical illusions often seen at the seaside. They always avoided phrases like 'rising sea levels'. As the weeks passed and the water levels came onto the shore-side roads, the Agencies sponsored wading and rowing contests. But, eventually, as expected, the refuting could no longer

work. By this time the waters had reached the farms and the citizenry were getting somewhat nervous.

Time came for deflection.

The Prelate assembled his Second Royal Leadership Circle. It consisted of the Commissioner of Logic, The Epistemological Society and its sister organization, The STKPE, Society for the Theory of Knowledge and the Philosophy of Everything, plus a well-known prestidigitator, and two highly respected conjurer and illusionists. For a fortnight the Leadership Circle worked over the problem. On the fifteenth day they came up with a wonderful solution.

"You see sir", they said to the Prelate, "we have come to some conclusions. At first we examined means of diversion, but we lost our way and central focus there and forgot what we were doing, and so we decided to concentrate on matters important enough to be worthy of distraction. We examined all the things people like to do. We came to the conclusion that the most important were the acts of; eating, followed closely by, sex, and talking, in that order. The first two had too many ramifications, so we let them go and settled on the last. People just love to communicate, even if they don't have anything of significance or value to say, or for that matter, anything at all to say. Communication by speech seems to be the purpose of many people's lives."

"It is the transition of thoughts and feelings that counts," the well-known prestidigitator said. "It makes them feel good, wanted, important, and gives them a role in life. Anything we can do to enhance this ability would surely engage them."

"I see", said the Prelate, "what is it you propose to do about this."

"Well, sir," said the highly respected conjurer, "We believe that we can come up with a physical devise to work in this capacity to aid and enhance communication."

"Nonsense", said the Prelate, "how on sea (he would have said 'on earth' had they lived on the con-

tinent) do you expect me to agree to a silly idea like a communicating devise to divert my people from the possibility of an impending disaster . . . utter nonsense.”

In the end, the commission was just able to convince a very irritated Prelate of their plan and were granted an experimental trial. They set about conjuring a thing that had astonishingly unique powers. For weeks they worked persistently day and night. The thing began to take shape, it had a lumpish form of a brownish color with a shaft of wood sticking out from one end. Yes, it resembled, more than anything else, a potato on a stick.

There were several of these objects on the table when the Prelate was called in to examine the commission’s work. These objects all varied a little, as they were handmade. They all looked rather silly, some were already losing their sticks. On close scrutiny, the Prelate concluded they were probably made of clay.

“*That* is what you have called me in to see?” said a very angry Prelate.

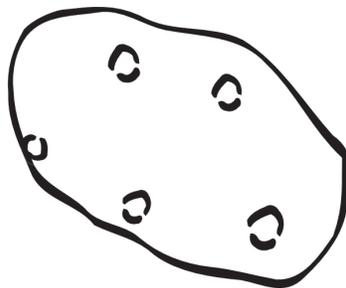
“Please sir, hold it to your ear,” said the respected conjurer, “and listen, then watch it carefully.”

“Don’t be ridiculous,” said the Prelate. He truly felt the fool, spending precious time and resources on this absurd scheme, and now they wanted him to talk at a potato—how vulgar. But, in the end he had to agree, since he had already spent too much

on it. The Prelate said he would test out the device, but in private only. He picked up one of the objects and retreated to the adjoining hallway. Still feeling the absurd fool, he put the object to his mouth and gingerly spoke to it. Immediately he heard a voice coming out of it, as a matter of fact *several* voices—the voices of his Leaders Circle. They were talking through the object to him. He held it up to his face, and to his complete amazement he saw them, in the object, standing around the table next door with half-witted smiles on their faces.

The rest is in the story books. The objects were mass produced by several of the leading merchants, who made great profits, and sold them at exaggerated prices, payable in installments. Even the poorest of the population could afford them with high interest loans. They couldn’t keep them in the bins, eager people lined up outside the shop doors. All over the island the citizenry could be seen walking the streets looking lovingly at their potatoes held before them, combing their hair with their eyes closed and their potatoes at their ears, at the roadside stands, at dinner, at the bath, in bed with their spouses and lovers, at work, and standing in the rising waters lapping at their hips with their heads thrown back looking to the skies and smiling at their potatoes.

The Island went down in one year and forty two days.



DESMOND S. PEEPLES

Menagerie

This is the bloated corner of my bedroom
You will not see things I've laid to rest here

They are hidden behind an ugly quilt
Pinned to dribble from the ceiling
Like a wet carcass might

A fine heifer elephant maybe
Once a never-forgetter, always
She still predicts the matriarch

You will imagine what is behind her:
A young traveler with his knife to her back
The death-reek of trapped mice beneath my boxes
The last hold of a diminished country

She worries not.

There my bridge trolls ask no more questions
They gnaw the bones of forgotten rodents
Nourished, they love the passing of scoundrels
But there is a hound on my bed

She watches my other animals and stuffs them with her needy fear:
The buried cats are more Persian than she
The elephant stays where I need her

While I hound and hound on my own
Collecting splinters to build new walls



LYNNE JAEGER WEINSTEIN

ANTHONY CHASE

“Will Mankind Ever Recover”

“Will mankind ever recover from the mortal blow
he has delivered to life?”

—E. Cioran

Two men in a canoe
It doesn't really matter who
Salt march estuaries of Old Lyme
Off the coast of eastern Connecticut
One overcast July

Tide high
And a damp wind swollen:
Out to investigate the birds

Wooden paddles entering, and pull
A black brackish channel cool, becalmed
Here with the mists scattered
And the oak woods stood
Cattail reeds and pine

With the white weather moving about
Among the trees

As if the coast itself is also drifting
In and out of view
And the low cloud-cover
Is blue and grey and somehow nearer
Over the Indian land

Up in the northeast
Where great lichen rocks erupt
Without really moving
Out of a thinner soil

We've gone not half a mile
When an osprey becomes vocal on her plank deck
Her summer home built of bracken
From which to oversee the sea

“Pandion haliaetus”
And from far off up the coastline
In some shroud, her mate cries back

And the brief cries seem only to amplify
The rest of the silence and so the men

Did nothing about it but float on
Along on the dark water and see things
And every so often listen
To what they saw

More and more growing open
To the raw

One great blue heron
Standing in a cove

A sparrow hawk
Heckled by a flock of crows

Red wing black birds just calling
Hour after hour in the rushes and the water groves

The simple act of paddling
Calms the paddlers as they glide

Odd to be going nowhere: along the margin
Of an entire continent where the streams bend
As they do here and the old river slides

Barnacles mark the water rocks
Lifted, fallen: tides like the mood of everything
Erratic
Obeying the moon? Is that possible
The whole sea rising and settling back

In thrall to a white cloudy looking
Sort of ball of rock
Which itself is in orbit

Trains, planes, traffic all continued within range
As if the culture was a collective sort of fit

But we were IN the water floor
And so relieved of the pull of it

A grey gull passed
Raw sea bass
With the gills still visible, writhing
In a jaw pried open by the prey: in a feather maw

In fact it is a mild sort of wilderness, this coast
Car heckled to be sure

But still: if you get still and listen
Wild turkeys stalk un-pestered on the slopes
In the thick alleys of the summer hay

Two swallows seeking insects
Wheel in an acrobatic way

A gold finch hangs sideways on a single reed
And you can see his talons as if they held
The grass and drew it into the taut shape of a bow

So that he sort of does gymnastics using grass
And the grass itself descends until the spear tip of it
Just lightly grazes the water and sends out circles
Into the blackened and waving infinite Atlantic pool

People say I am not emotional but they're wrong

The next morning, just after dawn
There was more mist covering the entire shore

I rode in a faint mist with cool rain beading

On the ancient motor cycle

And there, just to the east
By my left elbow: one white solitary
Mute swan was riding too
Wing beats easy about dawn

All of us
Perpetual
In a dignified way move on.

JOSEPH BRUCHAC

Left-over Gladiolus

Their bulbs abandoned
in dented packages
gathering dust behind
the big box garden store,
I asked for them anyway
sanguine disciple
to saints and gods
of long lost causes.

Placed in retilled earth
long after the harvests
of crimson globe radish
and neon green lettuce,
it seemed at first
they would never sprout,
then that their small speartips
would surely be flattened
by Frost Giant's mallet.

But, somehow, graced
by Nibun Aln8ba, the time
white neighbors call Ind'in Summer,
in late October
the glads burst into bloom—
more than a hundred
cascading blossoms fringed
with the bright hues of
sunrise and hope.

MEREDITH DAVIES HADAWAY

In Season

Rain-soaked morning, soft
as my pillow, a dream of
feather and gunshot.

SYDNEY LEA

Zero Fahrenheit

Tugged by the notion of strong black coffee,
I get out of bed and embrace my wife.
About time. The dogs lie tight to the stove,
all three looking eager to climb right inside.

She has walked them already and dished their food.
I hear the whisper of kindling cedar:
she revived the fire as well while I clove
to my quilts, a common, self-seeking behavior.

Together we study an upriver eagle,
backlit, unmoving, on a dark arm of pine.
The stream whispers too. But for red squirrels' scribblings,
the snow shows pluperfectly blank. Yet it shines.

The woman glows also, even the lines
between eyebrows. Those tracings— she's earned every one,
having stood close beside me no matter my failings,
having borne and instructed daughters and sons.

I know that today is all anyone owns,
none of us leaving the planet alive.
No matter, I fantasize some guarantees
beyond logic: our eagle will pose against sky

on that pine bough forever, the three dogs will lie
by the hearth, and I'll be able to cherish
my wife as I do, but perennially.
The woods drizzle powder. That bright white won't perish.

CONTRIBUTORS



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Audrey Batchelder is from Southern Vermont, where she works on a local dairy and vegetable farm, and as an editor at Green Writers Press.

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Peter Biello is a producer and announcer at New Hampshire Public Radio, formerly at Vermont Public Radio. He holds an MFA in fiction from UNC-Wilmington and a BFA from U-Maine Farmington. His journalism has appeared on *All Things Considered*, *Weekend Edition*, *Day to Day*, and *This American Life*. His creative writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *Lowestoft Chronicle*, *The Drunken Odyssey*, *Busted Halo*, *Three Percent*, and *The Compulsive Reader*. He's was the founder of the Burlington Writers Workshop, northern Vermont's largest and most active writing organization, and blogs at burlingtonwritersworkshop.com. On Twitter: @PeterBiello

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Joseph Bruchac is a writer and traditional storyteller whose work often reflects his American Indian (Abenaki) ancestry and the Adirondack Region of northern New York where he lives in the house that he was raised in by his grandparents. He and his two grown sons, James and Jesse, who are also storytellers and writers, work together in projects involving the preservation of Native culture, Native language renewal, teaching traditional Native skills and environmental education. Author of over 120 books in several genres for young readers and adults, his experiences include running a college program in a maximum security prison and teaching in West Africa.

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Mathieu Cailler's work has been widely published in national and international literary journals, including *Ardor*, *Epiphany*, and *The Saturday Evening Post*. A graduate of Vermont College of Fine Arts, he has been a finalist for the *Glimmer Train* New Writers

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Anthony Chase is a writer and a poet who has traveled the world writing features for Condé Nast Traveler. He has lived in rural Pennsylvania for many years, in a hut where he has worked as a laborer in fields and forests while writing and illustrating the world close by.

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Greg Delanty's *Collected Poems 1986-2006* is out from the Oxford Poet's series of Carcanet Press. Recent books are: *The Greek Anthology, Book XVII* (Carcanet Press and due from LSU Press), *Loosestrife* (Fomite Press, 2011), *The Ship of Birth* (Carcanet Press, LSU 2006), *The Blind Stitch* (Carcanet Press, LSU Press, 2003) and *The Hellbox* (Oxford University Press, 1998). He edited (with Michael Matto) *The Word Exchange, Anglo-Saxon Poems in Translation*, (WW Norton, 2010). He has received many awards, most recently a Guggenheim for poetry. His poems are widely anthologized and have been broadcast on *The Writer's Almanac*. He is the Poet-In-Residence at Saint Michael's College, Vermont; an environmental activist with 350.org. He lives in Vermont.

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Meredith Davies Hadaway is the author of *Fishing Secrets of the Dead*, *The River is a Reason*, and *At the Narrows* (forthcoming from Word Poetry, 2015). Her poems currently appear or are forthcoming in *Salamander*, *poemmemoirstory*, and *New Ohio Review*. She is poetry editor for *The Summerset Review* and was the 2013-14 Rose O'Neill Writer-in-Residence at Washington College. Hadaway was a contributor at the inaugural Bread Loaf Orion Environmental Writers' Conference.

TIFFANY HIGGINS

Bio:Tiffany Higgins is author of "And Aeneas Stares into Her Helmet" (Carolina Wren Press, 2009), selected by Evie Shockley as winner of the Carolina Wren Poetry Prize. She recently was a resident at Art Farm in Nebraska. Her poems appear in *Poetry*, *Kenyon Review*, *Taos Journal of Poetry & Art*, *From the Fishhouse*, and other journals. She writes on ecocultural poetics and is a translator of the work of contemporary Brazilian poets, including Alex Simões.

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Richard Jarrette is the author of *Beso the Donkey* (MSU Press, 2010), Gold Medal, Poetry, 2011, Midwest Independent Publishers Association; Finalist, Book of the Year, *Foreword Reviews*, 2011, and it has been translated into Chinese by Yun Wang. Jarrette lives semi-reclusively in the Central Coast region of California after formative years in Los Angeles and Western North Carolina. His second poetry collection, *A Hundred Million Years of Nectar Dances* is forthcoming in April, 2015, from Green Writers Press.

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Alexis Latham is an environmental journalist, editor, and writing instructor. She is the recipient of the Chelsea Award for Poetry, a Vermont Arts Council Grant, and a Bread Loaf scholarship. Her poems have appeared in *Hunger Mountain*, *Chelsea*, *Spoon River*, *Saranac Review*, *Beloit*, and other journals. She lives on a small farm in Vermont.

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Sydney Lea is poet laureate of Vermont, and author of eleven collections of poetry, a novel, and three books of naturalist essays. In 2015, his twelfth poetry volume, *No*

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Jenny Morse completed her PhD at the University of Illinois—Chicago and currently teaches at Colorado State University. Her poetry has been published in *Notre Dame Review*, *Wilderness House*, *Quiddity*, *Yemassee*, and *Terrain*. Her critical work has appeared in *Seismopolite*, *The Montreal Review*, *The Ofi Press*, and the *Journal of Contemporary Thought*.

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Shona Macdonald received her MFA in 1996 in studio arts from the University of Illinois at Chicago and her BFA in 1992 from Glasgow School of Art in Scotland. She has had selected solo shows at Ebersmoore, Chicago, (2012), the Roswell Art Museum, Roswell, NM, (2011), Engine Room, Wellington, New Zealand, (2010), Proof Gallery, Boston, MA (2009), Reeves Contemporary, NY, NY (2008), Den Contemporary, LA, CA, (2007), Skestos-Gabriele, Chicago IL, (2005), Galerie Refugium, Berlin, Germany, (2002), and Fassbender Gallery, Chicago (1998 and 2000). She has shown in numerous group shows. Her work has been reviewed in *Art in America*, *Art News*, the *LA Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Chicago Sun Times*, *Sacramento Bee* and *New American Paintings*. She has been a Visiting Artist at over forty institutions, including Wimbledon College of Art, London, (1998), Georgia State University, Atlanta, (2007), Cornell University (2006), the University of Alberta, and the University of Calgary, Canada, (2002). Shona Macdonald was the recipient of a grant from the Pollock-Krasner Foundation, NY, (2009), a Fellow at Roswell Artist-in-Residence in Roswell, New Mexico, (2010-11), Can Serrat, Barcelona, Spain, (2012), and the Cromarty Arts Trust in Scotland. She is a Professor of Studio Art and Graduate Program Director at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

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Jeremy Marks is a poet, writer and amateur photographer who also works as a self-employed teacher/tutor. His poetry and photography have appeared in numerous publications including *Lake: a journal of arts and environment*, *Up The Staircase Quarterly*, *Electric Windmill Press*, *The Blue Hour*, *the Proost Poetry Anthology* and *Wilderness House Literary Review*. He lives with his wife, infant daughter and two rescue dogs in London, Ontario.

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Mike Minchin earned his MFA in writing from Vermont College of Fine Arts in 2014. His fiction has received Honorable Mention in *Glimmer Train*. His stories are forthcoming in *Vermont Magazine* and *Mud Season Review*. He lives in Vermont with his wife and two children.

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CP Surendran has written two novels, *An Iron Harvest*, and *Lost and Found*. At present he is the Editor-in-Chief of *DNA*, India's third largest selling newspaper. Earlier, he was a senior editor and a well-known columnist with the *Times of India*. Surendran's columns in print and in social media elicit a great deal of response, but, gratifyingly, most of it is negative. His poems have been internationally anthologized, and his awards for writing and journalism include Reuters International Fellowship at Oxford, Wolfson Press Fellowship at Cambridge, and British Council Literature Fellowship at Cambridge.

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Cindy Veach's poems have appeared in *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Poet Lore*, *North American Review*, *Chicago Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Sou'wester* and are forthcoming in *The Journal* and others. She was a finalist for the Ann Stanford Prize, and the recipient of honorable mentions in the Ratner-Ferber-Poet Lore Prize and Crab Creek Review Poetry Prize. Her collection, *Thimbleful*, was the runner up for the 2014 Zone 3 first book prize.

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Naima K. Wade lives in Southern Vermont: a poet, performance artist of spoken word, humanities educator and international minority and woman business owner. She has performed throughout New England, New York, and the Caribbean. She recently was a featured poet with other Caribbean poets and writers living abroad and in the USVI. Naima read from a collection of poetry *West-Indian-Alien-Yankee Times and Select Spirits*. She is the director of the Journey's End Program Series (JEPS) National Parks Service Underground Railroad Network To Freedom Program, which is a Vermont Living History and Cultural Literary Program. In the JEPS program series, Naima retells—wearing period costume—the renowned and memorialized life story

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Tim Weed is the winner of a Writer’s Digest Popular Fiction Award and a featured expert for National Geographic Expeditions in Cuba, Spain, and Patagonia. His fiction and essays have appeared in *Colorado Review*, *Gulf Coast*, *Talking Points Memo*, *Writer’s Chronicle*, *Backcountry Magazine*, National Geographic’s *Intelligent Travel*, and elsewhere. Tim teaches at GrubStreet in Boston and in the MFA Writing program at Western Connecticut State University. Kirkus Reviews has called his debut novel, *Will Poole’s Island* (2014), a “riveting portrayal of early Colonial New England.” Read more at timweed.net.

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Diana Whitney’s first book of poetry, *Wanting It*, was released in August 2014 by Harbor Mountain Press and became a small-press bestseller. Her personal essays and poems have appeared in *The Boston Globe*, *The Washington Post*, *The Crab Orchard Review*, *The Rumpus*, *Numero Cinq*, and many more. A yoga teacher and a lifelong athlete, Diana blogs about motherhood and sexuality for *The Huffington Post* and runs Core Flow Yoga in Brattleboro, Vermont. Visit www.diana-whitney.com.

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As a former associate professor at Cornell and UCLA, I have published two books; *Origins of Form* is now in its fourth printing. I am an architect, writer and careful observer of our environment with a powerful desire to communicate my concerns about our future. “The Island,” is one in a collection of forty fables and parables which employing old forms of storytelling to grab the attention of a distracted modern audience.