the MEADOW

the Meadow *2009*

Truckee Meadows Community College

Reno, Nevada

The Meadow is the annual literary arts journal published every spring by Truckee Meadows Community College in Reno, Nevada. Students interested in the literary arts, graphic design, and creative writing are encouraged to participate on the Editorial Board. Visit www.tmcc.edu/meadow for information and submission guidelines. Look for notices around campus, in the *Echo* student newspaper, or contact the Editor-in-Chief at meadow@tmcc.edu or through the English department at (775) 673-7092.

See our website (listed above) for information on our annual Cover Design and Literary and Art Contests. Only TMCC students are eligible for prizes.

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Congratulations to our award winners:

Meadow Art Award: 1st place Naho Hasegawa, 2nd place Joy Wong, 3rd place Brandon Lacow

Meadow Poetry Award: 1st place Susie Estes, 2nd place Kelly Ogilvie, 3rd place Shonda Durista

Meadow Non-Fiction Award: Leyla Miteff

Meadow Fiction Award: Michelle Dubon

Meadow Cover Art Award: John Knott

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Artwork

Sightlines

Logan Chace

A man stands at the edge of a desert—
picture him. He's old enough to've buried
his parents, several dogs, to know hard work,
but not old enough to die. He wears jeans, a white
collared shirt, buttoned half way, a size too big. Maybe
he sports a cowboy hat, dark sunglasses for effect.
He sweats a little—no, he ain't too cool to sweat—
this ain't some damn Western—stay with me.
The air's so balled up with stiffening heat, it wants to cry.
It wants to stomp its feet and punch a hole
in the wall of the sky, gut it of all its blood.
But it can't move a muscle. It's as quiet as—imagine
a school of fish trying to scream—yeah, like that.
The only sound is his boot toe grinding desert sand
and deserted highway gravel—same sound he makes
when he hacks a lung. Mountains on the hazy horizon
slump and cower, behind the sightlines
trying to slink away, like some pet caught misbehaving.
Pay attention—sunlight slants onto sand from breaks
in lazy clouds: searchlights from heaven.
Who was it said you can't hide from God?—
well, not in a wide open goddamned desert.

Say he's rowing out into a silent swamp,
this sullen looking swamp, fog hugging water,
trees keeping their distance on the hummock.
He takes a drag from his cig, coughs out smoke.
I'll tell you what he's thinking—he ain't thinking
about helping your grandma cross a busy street, hell no.
He's thinking about jumping out at trick-or-treaters, stealing
their candy; he'll eat it right in front of the little bastards,
calling for their mommies. When they cry, he'll laugh,
chocolate dripping out of his mouth, face bent
like some deranged jack-o-lantern from your front porch,
fire in his eyes. He's thinking about deep stuff, man.
Dude does trigonometry in his head just to pass the time;
ponders astrology—maps out constellations in the skin
of the swamp-water, connects the dots and all that shit.
He's thinking about taking your sissy poems to wipe his ass
in all this wilderness. But don't you worry about him—
when he's hungry, he'll eat the men that're after him,
and have a slice of the moon for dessert.
When he's thirsty, he'll sink down to the bottom
of this swamp and drink the whole thing down
in ten greedy gulps—swear to God he will.

Story: God Got it Wrong
(A Friend's Comment Riding to Dinner)

George Bishop

I was so distant
from the conversation
I wouldn't have known
my own name had it been
spoken again and again.

But I heard that

it was meant to be
heard. And she continued
thanking herself
for herself, her unique gift
to correct the cosmos
in the blink of an eye,
at the speed of whatever
light she was thinking by.

And there I was,
in the pasture
of her story,
not even knowing
how it began
or when it would end.

But, somehow, the thought
of there being more than one
god in our midst
kept guilt an arms length
away. After all, that was
the story. And if God
had been right, well,
that's another story.

Flash Frame

Leyla Miteff

Meadow Non-Fiction Award

We've regressed.

I've never tagged before, but I'm drawing the smiles we should all be wearing. The chalk's flaking off against the hard concrete, dusty as the memory of not an hour before, those smiles now rendered to the backhand of history. Every stroke of that tie dye, dollar store chalk wears away the tip just a little more, leaving only the faintest impression of where we've been, our ephemeral footprints on Reno. I might have felt a surge of splendor over the newness of marking up the fence at a construction site, or the now christened drive to a sparkling new condo, the insolent pride in rebellion, the snicker of silliness that we do this as irreverently and innocently as anything else. Instead I keep wandering back to that last hour.

The moment probably looked better on camera. The viewfinder can just as easily crop out the pile of clothes in the corner, the empty containers of our takeout dinner, a few morsels from another, more distant meal, the overall disarrayed evidence of the previous night scattered across the bar, Jeremy's brother in the next room still unconscious next to his not-really-but-might-as-well-be girlfriend, as it can catch the impeccable innocence of a room filled with unexpected delight. There's just something about the way the flash can find the shape, the way the light glanced off the circular contour of our translucent entertainment, and we've landed ourselves immortalized in a pixilated, virtual wonderland of pre-school delights.

A momentary lapse in reality has instantaneously rendered three rumored adults as children, and we're enjoying ourselves in that moment, that's all the camera sees. A whole room filled with the playfully obvious fruits of our unofficial labor, like something out of *Willy Wonka* or A*lice in Wonderland*, or some other formerly morose fairy tale now dolled up in fluff for the fragile American child, and we three are simply elated by our nonsensical, impromptu playtime.

It was Yara's idea, a whimsical, spontaneous flash of genius. She's a few feet in front of me now, chalking a fanged smiley on a stop sign, but the camera sees her next to me on the floor. We're gathered around the fan, the flimsy, little dip-wands held just an inch or so from the spinning blades. Jeremy stares up at the wonders we'd begun creating while he was sojourned in the bathroom and there's that sweet, childlike grin lighting his face, the one that looks like he's just stuck tape to a cat or sneaked a snake into the laundry basket. Again. He's about to tell us about the bubble machine he's just concocted in his head, and it suits the moment. He always suits the moment, because he always lives in the moment.

It wouldn't have been an experience without him.

Out of nowhere, as he reaches out for one, particularly meaty morsel, he says, "Why is a soap bubble round?" This isn't a question. Or it

isn't his question. And while I recognize the words, while they tickle that little place in my brain that tells me I'm supposed to get this, I just can't place the quote. Had I been able to, I would have answered his question with a wry, K-PAXian appropriate, "Because it is the most energy efficient configuration." (We'd watched that movie in that same room not two nights before). Yara hadn't been there for that part, so the comment was directed at me, but I'm distracted, because I haven't seen him this happy in awhile.

And would that the moment could have lasted, because the faded impressions of it we've left up and down the blocks in between that apartment and our destination just aren't enough. This just doesn't compare. The camera never catches what's outside the frame. It doesn't catch the moment before the room was filled with scented bubbles, the moment that took him out of the moment. The one where we were all pretending not to be aware of the decision looming over that haphazard room, the one that's threatening to split the family. The one where he was looking ahead.

We were immersed in the chaos theory of the cosmos, every bubble a paradoxical parallel universe bumping around one another, reminding us of all the possibilities, past and present, but the future, that's all in the bubbles we can no longer see. It's in every bubble he's caught in his hand, in every bubble that's descended, every one that's disappeared. It's in the chalk that'll be washed away in a few hours time.

I can't help noticing the way he's strutting down the street, proud of the political anti-propaganda he's propagated down Ryland, but it's nothing like the grin the camera saw. We're family never tied by blood, a family that's more important than all that, and the joy of it has equaled itself in heartbreak. Every memory, every moment that still lingers in the air with every monument of this damned town and every one of them has his face now, and every one of them will miss him. Mischief, amusement, our ridiculously playful brother in arms. It was a scene, every one of them, every moment. We haven't moved much past it. We haven't quite graduated, but our perpetual child's grown now, and I watch him break the last of his chalk as he writes one last phrase.

He doesn't ask for another piece, it doesn't matter, because we've arrived. As I watch him disappear through the door of our favorite, little dive bar, I look back at the sidewalk, to his last words to the night, 'we were here.'

From What She Remembered

Soren Browning

She lived there frequently. It was cloudy and dim, her eyes burned restlessly. The bartender winked and swayed as he poured her drinks. *Have I ever showed you my baseball card collection?* She hated the musty smell of him rising up above the smoke. She detested the delicate manner in which he brushed her arm overtly as he slid her the blistering single malt she breathed nervously. She would grimace as he grazed his hand over her long sleeved arm, over finger prints tattooed on her flesh in yellow, purple and green. She despised the greasy upward curl of his mustache, the hardened barrel shape of his gut and especially his splintery hands scratching over the surface of the faded wooden bar. She loved the craftsmanship of the spinning bar stools, the dusty Guinness mirror and the long abandoned dart board, with broken flights for each dart and the couples dancing, clinging to one another as they stumbled to the broken rhythm of the eighties. Some deserted Tuesday nights the bartender would spill heavy shots in her glass and never collect. She would melt into the scenery, transposed onto the dance floor one sly gesture after another. Her phone ceased to ring, and the little golden reminder in her pocket became just another meaningless piece of metal among her change. The next morning she crawled into a cab covered in that foul odor, her voicemail as full as she was empty. The cabbie would grin at her when she sprayed herself with sweetly, intense cologne. From what she remembered, she secretly loved that bar.

Sand and Water

Ellaraine Lockie

Sadie Farrel saw it all
from her parked '86 Impala
Where she watched the action
through binoculars
and soap opera obsession
on the only paved street in town

Decades of gunmetal grey history
support one block of commerce
Where part of the sidewalk
was recently annihilated
Reconstruction compliments of the Mint Bar
after Angus McFee had a few too many
and drove through the post office

Sadie will tell you Angus
stumbled out of the Mint at 8:06
Took a piss in the alley
Passed out in Southern Comfort
with a foot dead-weighted on the gas pedal
And smashed ass-backwards
into the town's only branch of government

Her goldfish eyes swim in a seventy-five year
pool immersed with images
Of street dances, homecoming parades
traveling carnivals, funeral processions
And teenagers flipping head-lighted U'ees
before settling on the dark of dirt roads

The pavement darkens too
A deeper shade of gloom
gradual with each commercial death
Kaste's closed and inventory
becoming vintage

Two grocery stores marked down
to one mini-mart
Movie theater brought to a standstill
Pharmacy and dry cleaner dissolved
by the solvent of bankruptcy

Coyote

Annie Lampman

Black Lead, August '05

Triangular face staring open just beyond
me, she streaks downhill leaving rust and silver,
impression of a tail, thick with heat and dust
her scat a sign of longing, hidden lodge pole shadows
full day sun—that moment of enclosure and release
wild eyes recognize each other as whole
inhabitant and trespasser, my scent a stink
threat caught deep in her throat while I long to be only
a sister that sees, knows her hunger and understands.

Aesculus californica

Taylor Graham

In June the buckeye's sweet
white flowers brittled.
It put on shades of autumn,
brown ghost

in a green summer house
of birds.
Under oak boughs swaying
in an updraft off the swale,

it clattered leaves
dry as bones.
Beyond our glass door,
it was the one

discolored color
in an artist's verdant
landscape.
Now in fall it clings

to parched soil, begging rain.
First to green in spring,
it promises
we too can change.

Summer Vacation

Gary Metras

A teacher's two favorite subjects: July and August.
—Popular saying

Again today I sit on the deck in back of the house reading.
We all know this luxury. Another book taken from the pile
accumulated during the year and not read until summer.

It rained all night and morning, but the afternoon's sun is strong.
Only a few clouds, white and shorn of rain, drift to the east.
August humidity masked by a breeze.
The next squall line busy with Ohio, a day or two away.

Perhaps I will fish the evening hatch on the Deerfield River.
I have tied dark Adams flies to feed
the hungers there.

I haven't looked up from the pages in an hour, and when I do
someone is walking along the far edge of the hayfield,
bareheaded, without a hiker's staff, not even a dog.
It doesn't matter.

A hornet, black as sin, searches the door jam for an opening,
for some magic portal to a secret kingdom.
Being human, I will kill it with my shoe, wash away the stain,
go back to the book.

Yard Sale

Nathan Graziano

An old woman sips Moxie and sits in the shade
beneath a blue umbrella. It's for sale, seven dollars.
And for ten you'll take the matching blue cooler, too.

For two dollars, she's selling a tropical fish tank
with a faux-coral cave and a plastic scuba man
who is perpetually searching for the African butterflyfish
the tiger cat swallowed one winter afternoon
when a thin white sheet covered the parrot's cage.

There's a long black wig for the highest bidder,
but a fat man wearing bifocals keeps a finger wound
in its strands as he sifts through a bin of old muumuus.

It's been said he once did a kick-ass Mama Cass
at the karaoke nights at the Wok N' Roll
before the building burned down and never reopened.

In the Farmhouse, Twenty Years From Now

Nathan Slinker

I stand in stacks of bills, unopened mail,
and months of journals never read. A phone—
of course it's mine—rings. And out the window
an egret lifts her head, says *Mr. Evans*
stop dying.

Hearing birds speak
is scary, when for years the pasture's poems
lay in furrows, covered, and I have not known
which letters thread the seconds together.
Then a dog or tractor whines, and I see the egret
dip and flick her plumes, her black beak
loops like a brisk pen, a steady needle.

The Drive to Descanso

Pam Woolway

Staring out at the road going backwards,
from the third seat of a Chevy station wagon,
there are things about youth that only youth knows:
the cracking of ice, underground passageways, fires lit
in a ring around the lake, the sound of a door slamming.

Barefoot you wander off, you were six
with your hair cut in a pixie.
Father was gone.
This hunger, dark and nocturnal,
strong enough not to wish
you were there. Brother and sisters,
like wildflowers assembled
in a museum of stones.

Mother was drunk. She'd dance
and chant snow across the mountain
until ash from dead fires ringed
her. A part of you brighter
and silent, floats among the flakes.
But what you recall most
is sunrise,
its pink lantern
scorching the trees.

THE EX-CAMP SITE

Linh Cao

"I'm back to see where you interned my father and tortured him after the war. Show me all the chambers, please."
In my dreams, I would like to have said this and much more to the Communist officials in Quang Nam Province, Central Viet Nam, who now work maybe in uniform, maybe in plain clothes, at this ex-concentration camp site. I would like to have walked slowly through each chamber, scanned the place from grimy ceiling to rat-infested floor, photographed every crack in the concrete where screws bolted torture instruments to the walls, scrutinized similar gray walls for signs of blood stains, or messages, words, scribbles, something, anything that would have divulged the prisoners' thoughts, their pains, what they went through. Maybe I would have run my fingers along the cold steel bars or the rusty shackles. Maybe I would have listened for ghostly cries echoing in the dim corridors. Just so I could feel, begin to grasp what it was that happened to my father in 1975.

In real life, my brother, Tuan, and I sat in a taxi minivan, squeezed three to a backseat and sticky from the humidity despite the AC blasting on high, with Mother, an uncle, and a taxi driver who probably was not yet born in 1975. His hands gripped the steering wheel at ten and two o'clock, and he quietly followed our directions.

"Go slow," Mother said to the driver and then, just to alleviate any suspicions that might arise in him, she added half laughing, "We just want to look, you know. These buildings are so nice and new. They've built all these new houses out here, huh?"

All our relatives in Tam Ky knew we were back to visit, so old neighbors knew as well. Surely, they remembered Father worked with the Americans—he was one of the few in town who spoke English and surely, they remembered these few were interned after the war. How did they still feel about it? We could not quite openly ask. Our family had whispered about escape from the Communist country back then; now, we could not exactly announce we were back to see the old prison camp, that I was digging up the past so I could write about it. And what line of work were these old neighbors and their children in now? Could this taxi driver have been one of the children?

Perhaps he wondered what three tourists and a local were doing being driven around this government compound. At least, that's what our relatives told us they were. His eyes darted up to his rearview mirror every now and again to check out his passengers, perhaps simply thinking, "There's nothing to look at, but hey, they're paying, so why should I care? I'll drive around these four, five blocks as many times as they want."

"Auntie, you want me to go around this block? I could turn left here

and go down the street farther," he suggested, probably eager to stretch out the miles ridden.

"Sure," Mother started to respond, but I cut in.

"No, circle around to the back of this building."

Maybe it was back there, hidden, the very building where my father must have spent many a cold night thinking of his wife and children. The very building where they chained him up, made him stand in a space only wide enough for a thin body, stand until his knees buckled, forced him to confess to wrongs against the communist government, the Vietnamese people for his collaboration with the American CIA.

The driver turned left, then left again. Tuan and I peered out the taxi windows on both sides. What I had imagined was driving on a dirt road which led way out of town, as I remembered when I was about five. There, I imagined finding concrete buildings with straw roofs and rolls of barbed wire running along the top of concrete walls surrounding those buildings. Maybe there would have been a soldier clad in a sweat-stained khaki uniform, sleeves rolled up, black rubber sandals cris-crossing at the front of his feet, olive green hat with the rim folded up and tied on the sides of his ears, and machine gun strapped across his chest, his hands coddling the weapon and fingers ready to spray bullets at intruders from the look-out tower. You know, like in the going-back-to-Nam-to-rescue-my-buddy movies you'd find Chuck Norris in?

But in fact, there was no such apparition: nothing of the 1970s or 80s remained there. I thought we were going to have to pretend to be sight-seeing, drive by the camp, discreetly photograph the site, and drive on. In actuality, we were sight-seeing, still discreetly looking from inside a taxi. We played the tourists. We looked out the windows to our left, then right, then left again. We nodded our heads, pulled our lips downward in acknowledgement of something, and muttered the occasional hum and ha. Through my dark sunglasses, though, I watched the taxi driver watching us. His face wore no reactions and from beneath bushy black eyebrows, which remained unflinching, his dark, double-lidded eyes darted from the road to his rearview mirror.

I remembered in '76 after Father came home, he often lowered his voice when speaking, even in our own house. Grandmother often reminded me not to repeat anything I heard at home to anyone outside our house, not even to my friends, and especially not to the new neighbors, a young couple who came from the north who often invited me in to their home to play with their baby. When Father continued to teach Lang and me Chinese, he closed the upstairs windows and balcony doors. (The new Communist government prohibited teaching Chinese in schools because it was a remnant of pre-Communist Viet Nam, but our Chinese family still hung on to what we could.) So while we studied, we could no longer look outside at the stars, the moon, the palm trees, or enjoy the evening breeze for fear someone might be watching us, monitoring Father's activities after his concentration camp release. We never knew which neighbor might have told on us, especially the young couple next door who showed up in town soon after Father came home.

Tuan's camera lay in his lap, and I didn't pull mine out from the backpack at my feet. Bored by the dull scenery, Tuan didn't work his camera at all, but I didn't want to give the taxi driver more reason to take mental notes. And walking around the compound? Tsuh! After the ride ended, this seemingly indifferent taxi driver could very well have reported to the local officials: "Those three there, two with cameras and backpacks, maybe they were reporters or something, back from America."

It wasn't like visiting a war museum where I could declare right at the entrance simply by paying the entrance fee that I wanted to learn something I didn't know about the Viet Nam War. It wasn't like I could stop at every display and read about the history behind it because the knowledge was publicly offered. Rather, I was there to dig up something the local government had already buried by putting brand new buildings right over it. It did not look promising. Mother had already forgotten the site's location; we had to ask an aunt to show us where it was, someone old enough to have known where it used to be, someone not working for the government, overtly or covertly, and wouldn't turn us in for being nosey about the past. The only option left was to just drive by and look.

The driver jerked down the blocks in third gear when he probably should have been in second. A couple of times, he stalled the engine but made no apologies. At intersections, he kept his eyes straight, plowing right ahead without looking right or left for oncoming traffic. Typical of Viet Nam! I learned to just keep my eyes straight ahead, too. I thought of the grandma in the Disney Mulan movie who put her hand over her eyes before crossing an impossibly busy street and just stepped out. Reciting incantations to her ancestors for protection, she waltzed across as traffic around her halted; ox-carts rammed into sedans, baskets of red, orange, and yellow fruit and green vegetables and screeching livestock came tumbling out onto the ground. But no matter. Grandma stepped unscathed onto the sidewalk on the other side of the street. As our white minivan puttered on ahead, I prayed our dead ancestors were looking over us. Luckily, no one else was driving around this government compound as we were.

In fact, no one was to be seen. Although these two-storied buildings were painted a sunny yellow with white trim, no one walked, paced about, or came in and out of them. A black wrought iron fence around the compound forbade street vendors from loitering. No children played or ran around on the sidewalks. Some bushy tropical plants crowded around corners of buildings and except for some sparsely growing grass, there were only a few trees. These buildings stood apart from one another, perhaps a reflection of the original prison camp architecture. In the 1970s and 80s, captives like my father must have limped about, coerced at gun point to labor or dragged through gravel and mud and then left to wilt in the sweltering sun. But in 2007, I didn't even catch glimpse of a single silhouette in the fluorescent-lit windows.

The driver turned left one more time and asked, "Well, do you want me to keep going straight?"

"Okay, yeah, go ahead," Mother responded.

As we approached what seemed to be the far end of this rectangular compound of three buildings over by five or six buildings deep, Mother mumbled in English, her hand almost over her mouth, "Heea, rai sai, rai sai."

Tuan and I understood Mother's English to be our common secret language, but for all we knew, the driver could have understood English as well.

We looked to our right where Mother indicated another yellow and white building not unlike the others.

Tuan leaned over me, his elbow on my knee, to look out the window and asked in a low voice, "Was this it? Was this the place?"

Mother nodded, but I questioned, "Our aunt showed you this place yesterday? You're sure it's this one?"

"Tzeh, oi ma. Yes, already!" Mother hissed at me, her hand still over her mouth. She may have forgotten something from 30 years before, but not from the day before.

I breathed in, clamped my jaws, and told myself to be ready.

I squinted, eyebrows furrowed. But nothing screamed torture there. No barbed wires, no unfriendly fire. In fact, there was a silence about the place. We had long left the honking and roaring engines of motorized vehicles on Highway 1, the central vein that traversed Viet Nam from north to south. Now, only a few birds chirped, a peaceful tribute to those who died or were dying there in the 1970s and 80s.

I had to accept this building, nondescript and uneventful, was the very spot. But was that it? Was there nothing else?

"Go around this building," I told the driver, then briefly added, "Please, Uncle." I figured it didn't hurt to yield respectfully, as was customary, even to someone probably much younger than I simply because we did not know whether he was friend or foe.

He nodded and turned right.

In a moment, the scenery changed. The pretty façade faded away.

"Oh look," I took in a quick, short breath and pointed out the window on Tuan's left, anxious to see something at last although still unsure I could take it.

In a back courtyard the landscapers seemed to have missed, three army tanks lined up side by side with a helicopter at the end of the row. In battle, they would not have appeared so calm and complacent, but now, they stood frozen, immobilized by the passage of time. There was almost an air of proud attention about the four remains, a salute in grass and weed almost knee-high to those who had fallen. But certainly not to those who had conspired with the Americans, like my father.

My granduncle loved Father as his own son, so he provided Father with tuition in order to study English at a special school taught by Americans in Sai Gon. Father worked and studied for about a year and half, and later, after he married, obtained a job working with the Americans. His overt duties were to fly, as an interpreter, with an American advisor into outlying areas in Central Viet Nam to deliver aid to villagers who had

lost their homes to bombings, but covertly, the two men gathered whatever information they could on enemy advances. At night, upstairs in the privacy of his room with no one and nothing around but the swaying palm trees outside the balcony, Father translated documents reporting on the progress of the war in different regions and then submitted those reports to his American supervisors.

Because of the work he did, Granduncle predicted Communist retribution against people like Father would not be kind; he wanted Father to take the four tickets he was offered by his American colleagues, take his wife and two children at the time, and evacuate from Sai Gon. When at the last moment, Father could not bear to leave his extended family behind, he stayed, but planned to relocate his wife and children outside of Sai Gon. A few months later, however, feverishly beckoned by Grandmother, he returned to our hometown, Tam Ky, in Central Viet Nam.

Granduncle was beside himself, "What did you come back for? They're going to kill you!"

Sure enough, soon after April 1975, the Communist government initiated a massive campaign to round up all who had had anything to do with the Americans and "reeducate" them. Our family knew of many who spent up to ten or twelve years in these reeducation camps up in malaria-infested mountains and who were never allowed family visits, or who never came back. Granduncle was almost right about Father.

Later, Mother told me, "Each time I was allowed to see your father, he came limping slowly out from behind these huts, like his legs were broken or something and he was in terrible pain. He looked so pitiful."

She knew they had beaten him even though he couldn't say anything during their visits as armed guards stood not far behind him and he never talked much about it even years later. He wore black pajamas issued to prisoners of war, his skin dark from sun exposure, his arms weak, his hands calloused from labor, and his body just a skeleton underneath the course fabric. Every time she went, once a month or so, Mother brought food as she knew he hadn't eaten more than a bowl of rice mixed with sweet potatoes a day. In between visits, she and Grandmother sent care packets consisting of food and medicine because he had fallen gravely ill like many others, but he actually only received a fraction of what they sent. After many months of private visits and red envelopes full of bribe money to various officials, Grandmother finally managed to get her son home. It took many more months of special herbs and vitamin-rich food before he regained his health, and when he did, our family's singular focus was to get him out of the country.

Tuan and I continued to look out the taxi windows, my eyes still lingering on those relics from 30 years past. Underneath the polite exterior of clean and cheery colors of the government buildings, the chirping birds in some sparse trees on the sidewalk and yards, these tanks and helicopter now appeared defiant, almost as if to insist, metal wheels and blades clawed deep into the ground, "This campsite was justified!"

In a way, I was disappointed I did not have the opportunity to confront

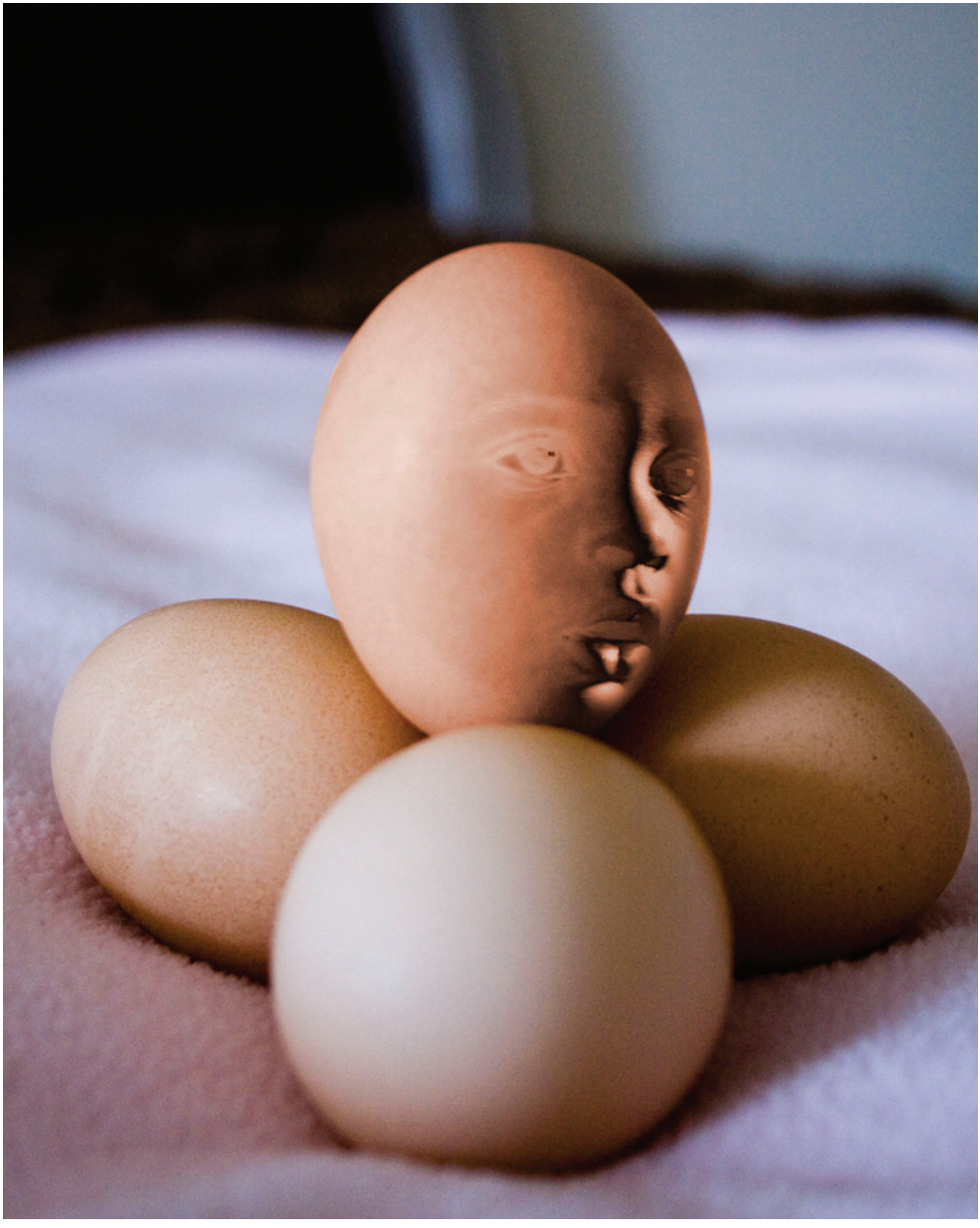
part of my father's past experiences, those who, during these past 30 years of life in the U.S., made him curse at the Communists each time the very word "communist" was mentioned or seen on TV, those who silenced him as to what had actually happened to him. Did I want retribution somehow? Did I want to show these Communist officials now that despite what they tried to do, they did not kill my father's soul, and that we have survived?

The ending is not like in the Chuck Norris movies: there are no apparent bad guys to shoot, no medals or buddies to take home. What I sought had already been buried and there was no other way and no one to make peace with but myself. Perhaps that was what Father had learned to do, make peace with himself before he died in 2002. I remembered what he had said these past 30 years each time I asked him about this or that, "It was a long time ago, Linh. What use is it to talk about it?"

But there is still the not knowing and wanting to know. Even though I was spared the horrible, physical sight this time, I can never escape history—the little tidbits that Mother, Grandmother, or different aunts and uncles had learned about Father's time in the concentration camp. Nor can I ever escape my own imagination.

Eggmel

Abraham Abebe — Digital Photography



Untitled

Amy Alden — Digital Photography

Dear Diary

John Knott — Photography

Temple Morning

John Knott — Photography

Untitled

3rd Place Meadow Art Award

Brandon Lacow — Photography

Untitled

2nd Place Meadow Art Award

Joy Wong — Photography

Untitled

Naho Hasegawa — Photography

Untitled

1st Place Meadow Art Award

Naho Hasegawa — Photography

Circle on the Earth

George Such

I want to tell you about the time I was
in Luang Prabang, when I took a small boat
across the Mekong, and walked through
a village where chickens ran free on
muddy paths between thatch huts, how
I followed a trail through the jungle
and found stone steps that led up a hill
where temple ruins overlooked the river.
A dozen men were struggling there, trying
to lift a fallen pillar. I joined them, put
my shoulder against the stone, and lifted
with all my strength, even though
I could see the weight was too great
for us. Sometimes you want to help
even if the goal can't be reached;
you just want to push against the load.
One of the men pointed to my leg and made
a snapping sound with his mouth, concerned
my leg would break if the pillar fell.
After a time we stopped lifting and they
motioned for me to join them in a circle.
We sat cross-legged on the earth and passed
around two leather bags, one with raw meat
and the other with fried water-buffalo fat
that crunched when I chewed it. The men
were all smiles and spoke words I didn't
know. Then their leader opened a bottle
and filled two glasses, passing them around
in each direction. I want you to know
that even though we spoke different
languages, we understood each other.
And I raised the glass to us as the warmth
of whisky Lao kindled inside my mouth.

Watching Butoh

Margarita Delcheva

off like beercaps in his hands:
the heads of two chickens,
blood fizzying up the long throats

the dancer's legs black like wood in water:
silent—I would put him in the fridge

lips a line in his beard;
he steps, cracks the soil into trenches
or graves—some hiding in earth lasts longer—

arms birch trunks peeled at their crossings,
small mushrooms at the bases,
tender popped parachutes—

just watching, I feel as if bumpers close on my thigh:
is the bird on stage roadkill or a plastic bag
inflating from heat?

the dancer, a grieving god
rubs his fingers together
salting the ever bland dish

nine cracks between curtains
expose his relaxed torso

if I could freeze him,
he would be so peacefully clean:
his arms off, his body in an alcove

Bella

Alex Davis

Across the stage the curtains whisper.
As she slides the worn white slipper over violet blisters,
warm, scarlet blood trickles down between her toes.
She does not wince, but gently wraps
the satin ribbons around her swollen ankles.

Soft honey-colored curls cling to her damp shoulders.
Layers of cream-colored paint drip from her chin,
revealing her skin, pink and flushed.
But her golden eyes lay hidden
under lashes thick with black.

So startling they would be to the ghosts in the dark chairs.
For no one watches from the seats of the theatre
as she rises from the wood.
Each step beautiful and precise,
she makes her way to center stage.

White satin caresses her ankles
carefully set in first position.
Head lifted, eyes on the floor,
she begins the routine once more.

Scopitone

Melody Gough

"If I had a hammer, I'd hammer in the morning, I'd hammer in the eve..." The increasing volume of the television sets lining the bar suddenly swallowed up my words. How could my own father cut me off in mid sentence? My left hand mimicked swinging a hammer toward my imagined fans.

"Honey, could you let us turn up the game a bit?" Father's look said he knew he'd done a bad thing.

In all my early years of being mascot of Father's bar, I took it on myself to let everyone there hear me sing and dance. Father, also a self-proclaimed song-stylist, encouraged every second of my ever-expanding ego, except of course when some sports event from the World Series to a football game overruled his good sense. So, when he put what was known as a scopitone, (pronounced scope-a-tone), in the bar, I became, I'm sure, even more annoying. This wonder of technology stood about seven feet tall and included a 26" television screen, so when you selected your song, rather than merely hearing it, you could see a taped performance right on the machine's screen of the artist singing the selection (and people thought MTV was ahead of its time!). My favorites were Kaye Starr belting out "Wheel of Fortune" and Debbie Reynolds' rendition of "If I Had a Hammer." I mimicked their moves as best I could from my barstool perched close to the machine. At least the stool put me close to eye level with the screen so I didn't have to stand on my toes or bend my head back at the expense of a better view. Mesmerized as that roulette wheel turned and turned behind Kaye Starr, I swayed my hips from side to side marking the staccato beats of her horn section.

"The Wheel of Fortune, da da da, da da da da da! Keeps spinning around!" I matched Kay word for word and the way my hands emphasized the trumpet blasts from her orchestra were, in a word, stunning. I almost fell from that barstool many times between rehearsing my dance moves, watching that wheel, and punctuating those downbeats.

Of course Father provided me with an endless supply of quarters for the jukebox as well as the scopitone, so I played them both nonstop, and I do mean nonstop. If the scopitone was taken or I knew someone had fed the jukebox with a ton of change and I wouldn't hear my songs for a while, I just drifted to the less popular of the two machines. Unfortunately for everyone in the bar, I drifted away from any sort of variety in my choices and fixated on the jukebox, choice B23, "Danke Schoen" by Wayne Newton.

"Danke Schoen, darling Danke Schoen."

I stood on top of the bar and belted out the words for all I was worth, maneuvering my way around smoking ashtrays and sloshed beer, gesturing as I'd seen my scopitone favorites do, and being sure to throw in an occasional thrust of my hip with arm thrown to the side for emphasis,

my eyes offering that come hither stare. Can a kid who is not even old enough for school yet offer a come hither stare? I guess I just did my best.

"I recall, Central Park in fall, how you tore your dress, what a mess, I confess, that's not all."

I wagged my index finger, wiggled my hips and stepped over bowls of peanuts.

On days Mom was too tired to wage war against my clothing choices, I topped off my head of Shirley Temple curls with a sweat-stained cowboy hat of my grandfather's. My head was even large back then, so it didn't fit half bad. I'd push the hat low on my head, snap my head back and stare at my audience.

Father's customers were lucky to have such talent, and I was angry when not everyone paid attention. I hated it when my guys occasionally brought women into the bar. They fixated on their companions with their blood red lipstick and stiff curls, lashes heavy with mascara, which fluttered at their dates over the rim of a Martini glass. My guys forgot about me! I stomped my foot in front of someone's half-empty drink on more than one occasion. I didn't have lipstick, but I had stage presence.

"Hey, Johnny." I brought my foot down dangerously close to his beer. All I got was a brief flicker of a smile. He turned back to this other lady, but only after he moved his beer.

"Hey, Hank. Are you watching?" Left foot came down with an impressive thwack on the worn varnish of the bar.

"You betcha." He was giggling more than the redhead next to him as he offered some weak applause.

"Jimmy, how do you like my boots?"

"Oh, first rate, honey." Jimmy didn't have a woman with him, but he just kept staring at all those other women.

I usually insisted on wearing my pink leather cowboy boots with fringe all the way down the backs. It didn't matter what color jumper or skirt Mom put on me, I was an entertainer and I knew that the shoes were a crucial element of my stage presence. When those pink boots finally wore out, I did my entertaining in some white suede boots equipped with even longer fringe down the backs that whipped around my legs and tickled behind my knees when I walked.

Years later, I sit in a different bar across from my husband at a small, sticky table. As he approaches each chicken wing before him with a degree of reverence, I rest my scarred red cowboy boots on the bottom rung of my barstool.

I recall, Central Park in fall…

"What are you smiling about?" he asks.

"Was I?"

Dad

Krista Benjamin

I don't know which one of us snapped
the picture, but Dad is successfully ignoring
his photographer. He wears what we called
the "O" shirt: brown rayon covered
with little white circles, an endless, single-player
game of tic-tac-toe. And O's the size of quarters
for zipper handles on the breast pocket,
the collar with wide triangular flaps.

His sideburns frame his unsmiling mouth,
his eyes intent on the local paper,
Tennis magazine—whatever. To read
just one article, that's all he's asked,
and he will get through it despite how hard
we are laughing, despite Kermit
the Frog with a red-thread smile, tucked
in his shirt collar, staring at the camera.

Bad Dad

Nathan Graziano

I've failed to fit the big shoes.
From the tips of my toes
to the ends of the soles,
there is space enough to build
a boy's bedroom and fill it with wishes.

My beard's not robust enough
to sop the tears you've spilled
skinning knees, waiting for me
to heal you with a man's hug.

While I'm drunk in my armchair,
you stand in the backyard,
the crabgrass growing like dreams
around your feet, holding a bat,
and waiting for me to spill out
the door and toss the first soft pitch.

Song for Cracker and Me

Nathan Graziano

I.

There was no one in Missouri
who could make a pitcher look smaller—
a Dixie Cup in the hand of a damn god.

There was a blues band earning their keep.
As the groove reached its crescendo,
you moved from your stool, one toe at a time,
then held out your hand to Margaret,
a love note you forget to give her
when the grey skies of Michigan snarled
and the clouds didn't know enough
to behave like Southern gentlemen.

It was easy to believe you weren't a drunk
when your biceps corroborated
with a sleeveless t-shirt and your tattoos
looked new, the ink leaping like prayers.

The bottle cap scars on your arms
hid like thunder storms behind a god's sun.

II.

Somewhere on a Michigan highway
our terror frames toppled in the backseat
of a car driven by an unlikely angel.
Our mouths stitched by sutures,
we choked on the poems we read.

Your eyelids were squeezed shut,
tombstones on top of brilliant thoughts.

III.

There I was with my arm around the girl
who would someday become our guardian angel,
who never spoke when she drove by a graveyard,
who once promised me she would die young,
who took half a bottle of Ativan one morning
and locked herself in the cramped bathroom,

The Counting Crows cranked to ear-bleed
on the portable stereo on top of the toilet
as she stuck her finger down her throat
and pleaded for me to call her an ambulance.

There I was with my arm around the girl
whose shoulders got thinner and thinner
and her body disappeared beneath my arm
which fell to my side like an angel whose wings
went up in flames as she flew toward the sun.
My arm slammed against my ribs, rattled my heart.

IV.

We can't deny
our daughters look like us.

Please, God…

The God we deny with shoulders back,
with logic like iron shields,
with certainty as solid as raindrops,

Please, God,
don't let them turn out like us.

On the Day I told my Father my Car Battery had Died

Kyle Ewing

the two veins in his forehead immediately stood up
and began a conversation concerning
the best way to handle the situation.

They ultimately decided to blow things entirely
out of proportion, which was no surprise to me.

One of them said, *Damn it, son! I told you to get that problem checked out!* as if it knew exactly what happened
while the other demanded I explain exactly what went wrong
despite my complete lack of automotive knowledge.

It's actually quite difficult to listen to two veins shout at once,
and in my perplexed state I uttered the one thing
I could think of, which turned out to be something involving
a dome light being left on the entire night.

Vein one said to vein two, *Well, that was a dumb thing to do, wasn't it?* To which vein two throbbingly agreed,
and then turned its attention towards me and insisted
I explain exactly why I don't think.

Apparently these veins have never made a mistake
in their sixty-two years on my father's forehead, and do not
even know the meaning of the word forget.

I kept this thought to myself and locked it away in my mind,
but my brain forgot who it worked for, and ordered
a quick and precise response from my tongue before consulting me.

In hearing this, vein one and vein two lashed out and began
shouting forms of obscenities, which, had I been able to understand
exactly what they were saying, might have meant something.

Vein one and vein two continued this for a good fifteen minutes,
growing larger and pulsating harder with each jumbled phrase,
until the both of them, in one spectacular moment, which reminded me
of the fourth of July, reached their limits of pressure
and my father collapsed to the garage floor.

Mama's Hornet Bottle

Likita J. Manning

A near empty Mickey's bottle
managed its way into the items
nesting in storage number fifty five.

This beer bottle holds
mold and the musty, rotting, stench
of three years.
I want to climb inside of it,
and absorb the memories of who you were.

That cool green glass,
with the devious hornet perched on the side,
speaks of when you taught me to yell, *Mickey's*,
when asked what was the breakfast of champions.

That bottle is a memory of a room full of people
colliding into one another around the living room
during a Thanksgiving evening.

Bones slammed on the table.
The ivory pieces lay on their back exposing their spots.
I yelled, *Twenty-five*.
Then, just for a moment,
after taking a gulp from one of those green bottles,
you forgot I was your daughter and belted,
Okay, we can play like that, Bitch.
We found the sting funny,
though, nobody else seemed to understand
what we felt was obvious.

The room begins to buzz as the bewildered eyes glare at the bottle
as if it's wicked.
A dangerous dysfunction painted green.
It makes us human.
It hands out tangible memories
that don't turn us into some souring entity,
which no one can compare.
You only have to be Jane Ann.
I always know I can find you somewhere in here,

and I never have to look for long.

Fourteen Year Nightmare

Soren Browning

My childhood house was infested.
Every variation of arachnid laid their
squishy egg sacks in our walls.

They especially loved my mother's room.
Perhaps it was the tin-foiled windows,
the remnants of Klonopin and Resperdal
strewn in half-used bottles on the floor.

What started as a daddy long leg
was soon armies of red fiddlers and black widows.
Tarantulas the size of newborns
nestled in her sheets as she slept.

They would mate on her face,
in her ears and throat,
months of molested dreams.

My bed was her refuge.
From house to motel,
if it was mine then it was safe.

In high school the spiders
grew tired of waiting.
She lived in my bed to be sure.
I slept on the couch, and
her nightmares continued.

Please, Forget Me Not

Shonda Durista **3rd Place Meadow Poetry Award**

I'm slouched at a café table, drinking my triple shot Americano.
And while you talk,
my ears blur your words
my eyes tune out your silhouette.
I am more focused on the coffee machine grinding,
the customer in line gazing at the menu. Instead of sitting here
creating moments—empty-one-sided-forgotten memories.
I'd rather drift.
It won't sting as much when you don't remember me.
When your fated demon opens its bone hands
wraps your skull,
violently shakes away memories,
when time regresses you to a child-like
ignorance. Cradled by hospital beds,
sterile rooms will become your nursery.
Nurses will feed you, bathe you, change your piss-filled bedpan
because frankly, mom
you'll forget how.
Your today will be ten years before.
You'll forget your husband died,
learn his death for the first time, again.
Random beeps from monitors will remind me
your heart still beats in an empty chest,
lungs still push air through a purposeless cavity
as science cruelly declares you
still alive. And when I visit you,
you'll stare at me blankly. Struggling to recall what grocery store
or bingo hall you recognize my face from. Or, you won't recognize at all.
And I'll struggle
remembering you were once my mother—
we used to say goodbye, I love you's, shared familiar laughs,
calls at midnight just to make sure I'm still okay
before they were robbed from you.
So sitting with you mom, here, this coffee shop
knowing this memory was never yours
hurts so bad I want to leave you,
alone, instead of fighting through
new mother daughter moments.
But I'll sit. I'll stay with you.

Rose Garden

Breanna Rasmussen

Her knees hung naked
caked with earth wrinkled
and aged from decades
of sun and conflicts with time.

I used to help her as a child
making fertilizer from eggshells
and cow manure.

I picked all her weeds
as she explained how
love was the key.

Now her skin embraces
the silk as her clothes absorb
the musk of oak instead
of her usual dirt perfume.

I thought the seasons
of delicious pinks
and burning reds were
over until my little Rose
brought home a sapling
in a Styrofoam cup.

I showed her how to
clean a patch of ground
and paid her a dollar
to clear the yard.

I realized flowers
were really generations
budding and pollinating
the earth. Grandma Rose
passed me the seed.

To Menopause

Jennifer Yeatts

In times of cellulite or labored breath,
of age spots and sudden thirst; the dim weight
of visions wide awake, tallying what's left
of hours, watching the pendulum undulate;
in times of needing life to count for more
than us; the times our pulses lull or rush
with no apparent cause; when we implore
the sun to sink already, or when we wish
that someone else could be inside our restive
bodies; we are all the woman hushed, bereft
on her way to anywhere, gripping keys that carve
tiny valleys in her palm, damp from constant sweat.
She ducks into a cab or rides the train
but wants to step out naked in the rain.

Learning How To Die

Kevin Brown

My father loved to fight. He also loved to drink and when he wasn't doing one he was doing the other. Most times he did them together.

He had a ninety-pound heavy bag in the garage. Every night he'd take a bottle of bourbon out, wrap his hands in tattered handwraps, and whale away until he was out of liquor or just out. You could hear the slap of knuckle on canvas, the bag lifting with each blow and dropping heavy on its chain. The rafters groaned and dust peppered down. Inside, dishes rattled in the cabinets. Whatnots clinked on the shelves.

Sometimes he'd yell at the bag as if it was an opponent, and Mom and I would jump, then ignore it.

When my friends would stay over, he'd come in my room bibbed in sweat from a session, his knuckles red, and talk about his boxing days in the Marine Corps. How he had an amateur record of 48-3-1 and could've gone pro. If he were really drunk, he'd take his fighter's stance, but let his arms hang at his sides. That was our cue to attack him. And of course, he'd bob and weave and palm-smack us in the forehead and ribs.

It got so my friends would crouch in the corner and sometimes cry and I'd attack so they wouldn't have to. He'd get bored of me and of trying to get them to "be a man" and he'd leave, saying, "Pussies," over his shoulder.

Soon, my friends stopped coming over. I was a pussy on my own.

One night, with the bag rising and falling on the chain, I eased out to the garage. He grabbed the bag to stop it from swinging.

"What is it?" he said. He was slurring.

"Could you teach me how?" I said.

He bubbled his liquor, smiled, and said, "You wanna learn?"

"Yes sir."

He took another drink. "Well," he said, shrugging. "You really wanna learn, first you gotta be willing to lose everything."

"Yes sir."

"That means no crying or whining when it gets tough."

"Yes sir."

"Cause what makes a great fighter's not how much you wanna win, it's how much you're willing to lose." He coughed. "It's not how much you wanna live," he said, "it's how much you're not afraid to die." He leaned down. "You have to be willing to die, son, is what I'm saying. Once you're not afraid of death," he said, stood straight, and smacked his chest, "you're free of it."

He set the bottle down. Took his stance and rocked the bag. Debris dusted down.

"How do you learn to die?" I said.

He stared at the bag. Not blinking. "Guy named Ricky Starks taught me. We called him 'Rabbit Punch' Ricky, cause he threw rabbit punches

in the ring."

"What're those?" I said.

He stood, wobbling a second. Staring, still not blinking. "It's where a fighter hits you in the back of the head," he said. "The medulla oblongata." He reached around and touched the right base of my skull. Pressed. "Easiest way to knock a man out."

"He punched you out?"

He smiled and nodded. "I whip his ass the whole fight, then he catches me with a rabbit punch in the ninth round. Time I woke up, people were already leaving."

He smacked the bag again.

"Caught up with 'Rabbit Punch' later, though," he said.

"And you got him good?" I said, too loud.

He cut his eyes down at me. "Nope," he said. "I asked him to do it again." His eyes slid off my face, down my shoulder, and back to the bag. Slicked over and unblinking.

"Punch you out again?"

He nodded. "I knew that's how a man learns to die," he said. "He just accepts it." He blinked a couple of times and said, "So." Said, "Say you wanna learn?"

"Yes sir," I said. I began to shake.

"Okay," he said. "I wanna teach you." He unraveled his handwraps and began wrapping them over my hands, through my fingers in a figure eight.

My arms trembled and I couldn't stop swallowing. I cleared my throat. "What'd it feel like?" I said, and my voice broke. "Being punched out?"

He smiled, took a drink, and squeezed my shoulder, and I've never loved him more. He was happy. He was proud of me. "Lean over," he said, "and I'll show you."

Not Exactly a Love Poem

Kyle Ewing

Your love
is not like a delicate red rose at the center
of a perfectly lit table set for an anniversary dinner.

Whoever told you that should be slapped across the face.

It is not like a 1969 Shelby Cobra soaring its candy-apple color
along a California costal highway,
en-route to a romantic weekend get-away for two.

And I, sure as shit, am not your James Dean.

It is most certainly not like the remnants
of Chanel shaded raspberry lips worn proudly after an I do.

It is not even like the rush of blood to the cheeks
after having received an endearing look, a wink
and a kiss blown from across a crowded room.

It is definitely not like the taste of a sweetly tart strawberry
being fed, slightly sensually, to a hopeful recipient
positioned perfectly beneath a shaded tree.

Your love
is more like a box of yellow Peeps.
And when I kiss your sugar-coated-marshmallow lips
for the first time, I am momentarily pleased.
The second, however, is lacking; it is just as soft
as the first but this time it is more bland, and has become
a little less enjoyable. This must be a fluke, I think
to myself, as I move to make repetition once again.
But by the time the third bird perches itself
upon my lips, I begin to feel the sickness,
of this sugar-saturated flock, scuttle its way into my stomach.
And all of a sudden, the fourth is mid-flight, but I do not
dare to reject it, having seen Hitchcock. However,

I am certain that if this fifth bird pecks its way through,
to the insides of my cheeks, I will become diabetic
and I am sure flying would become complicated if I lose my feet.

If I Knew You Better

Kyle Ewing

I'm sure we would hoot and holler and sing
at the same moments of action
and swear under our breath at the same girls
who stumble and puke on pool tables,
claim fame from songs they know nothing about,
and wear miniskirts in November.

We would sip the same sweet nectars
strung through stages of fermentation
and distillation until we stumbled upon our home
where we nuzzle gently in our nest of twigs and spit.

We would never fumble for words,
not even in the dead silence of awkwardness
when you would gently remove my foot from my mouth
then place it firmly and purposefully
in a piece of gum on the pavement.

There would be no use for elevators,
we would ascend every edifice
and scale every wall in the same manner
—from the outside and not the in.

We would dance on the worn and weathered faces
of cliffs that would crack a smile and find elation
in our young, playful company.

I would undoubtedly step slightly
on your slender toes but you wouldn't mind,
you would smile and think it sweet and I would blush
and feel the need to clean up the yard.

I would not be afraid to marvel at the grace
and proficiency of your beautifully, lanky limbs
and your slender hips as you perfectly position your feet,
shifting your weight from side to side.

And if I knew you better, I would not be afraid to say,
If we were birds, I'm sure we'd be beautiful.

My Heart, My Pet

Jessie Stipech

One humid Tuesday, I went for a walk
And my heart came along.

My heart isn't the most well behaved heart on the block,
but we went out while the neighbors napped.

The sun-soaked air was thick as we traveled up the treeless streets.
And after miles of pulling back hard on the leash,
begging my heart to heel, its pace finally
became heavy and slow, and soon I sat to catch my breath.

Chasing a heart is hard work.
But maybe dragging a human isn't any easier.

Lying beside me, my heart looked foolish.
I was relieved no one else was around, but soon
a man came along. He observed my heart's obvious exhaustion.
Gasping for air myself, I did not look up at him.

> *Is it ill?* the man asked,
> referring to my heart's black and blue splotches.
> *No,* I answered, smiling awkwardly,
> *it just has a habit of bumping into walls.*
> *Sounds like it's restless,* the man smirked.
> I pondered his hypothesis, but disagreed:
> *No, it just has weak vision.*

Too ashamed to laugh, my cheeks grew red like the curb beneath me.
The man saw this and half-smiling, started to walk away.
Another walk tomorrow might do your heart some good,
he noted, grinning, then turned the corner.

I contemplated the man's words,
then told my heart we should go home,
but my reclining lump of dead weight looked up at me with disinterest.
Alright, fine, I scolded, *I'll carry you home, but just this once.*

Text Date

Kelly Ogilvie **2nd Place Meadow Poetry Award**

Last night
I asked you if I could have dinner with you
and you told me no
because you wanted to be alone.
So you went to Ruby River by yourself.

I was at home working on a puzzle
and you were eating alone
and then you texted me
some small talk
and I texted you back
and asked you what you ordered
(the NY strip steak)
and you asked what I would be ordering if I had been there
(i'll have the filet with steamed veggies)
and as a joke I text-asked you to pass the salt
(thank you, dear)
and while you were eating
(the waiter forgot my drink)
you texted me about your day
(oh really? that's so interesting!)
and you asked me about mine
(omg my presentation went great)
and when you were done eating
(omg im so full)
I texted you to see if you were going to get dessert
(should i have cheescake or ice cream, love?).

And then you came over
(I was still hungry)
and we put on a movie
and didn't say a word.

TECHNO-PSYCHOSIS

Kelly Ogilvie

my ability to communicate verbally is deteriorating in a fashion that is inversely proportional to my text-messaging thumb-eye coordination speed. i often make up new words simply by hyphenating old ones in an effort to compensate for my ever-shrinking vocabulary. less and less meaning seems to come from intonation and more sound resonates from font size than actual content. when people speak, i imagine the way their words look in all lowercase, sentence fragments appearing one at a time accompanied by a computerized chime. if someone begins raising their voice, more and more of the letters that make up their message appear capitalized until every letter is emphasized in caps-lock glory. i see typos and misused punctuation in my own conversations. my mental response time has diminished to 50 words per minute and instead of depending on memory for information, i gather it from the internet search i am conducting while on the phone with you. i overextend pauses because my stories are illustrated in ellipses, making uncomfortable silences in which i am unable to articulate and am finally interrupted. i often misinterpret what people say aloud because of the lack of emoticons to rely on as a guide. i have trouble enunciating unless my words are typed in front of me. i forget faces and remember e-mail addresses. i only exist on the internet.

Alaskan/Firefighter/Psychologist

Kelly Ogilvie

I went to the bar Friday night
to be alone.

And this Alaskan started talking to me.
He asked me if I was frustrated
because I had peeled the labels off my beer.
And then he asked me
if I wanted to peel the label off of his.

I don't remember what we talked about
because the talk was so small
but I do remember
when he was leaving
instead of asking for my number,

he asked me to let people in.

And then he smiled a sad smile
and left
and in that instant
I could see everyone in my life
walking out on me just like that.
So I ordered another beer
and asked for a glass instead.

Autobiography of a Nineteen Year Old Girl

Chelsie Kern

I am a coy giggle lurking between the racks at your local shopping mall.
Erratic, trendy and cute.
Cute meaning fresh, like nineteen karat golden brown buns
of flour, yeast and salt combined to perfection.
Ripe. Just out of the oven.
Ready and waiting to be saturated
in butter, testosterone and raspberry marmalade.
You can often find me in the lacquered pages of the latest
fashion magazines,
between the article titled *10 Ways to Blow His Mind*
and cosmetic ads
which leave one questioning whether or not it really is Maybelline.

When I'm not studying the science of mirror reflection I'm with my best
friend, chocolate chip mint ice cream, the entire gallon,
pouring from the mouths of my fellow femme fatales like acid rain
eating away the pearlescent enamel of Miss America's
gleaming smile. The way I see it,
I am a gift to the world and all gifts should be wrapped,
adorned with petite ribbons and bows.
Presentation is key and I have mastered the art of packaging.

I believe in each delicate layer of perfectly pressed powder
dusting dainty noses, swimming in pools of saccharine sweet lip gloss
and at length discussions debating the benefits of Bikram yoga.

Life of a Butterfly

Chelsie Kern

Butterflies live
two months
and then they die.
Jubilant royal robes
never to flit again
on smog infested days,
bringing flush warmth
like the blush
of a naïve teenager,
doting on first kisses
and school hall gossip.
I wonder
if that's the reason
some poor fool
had to label this
nauseating sensation
that contorts
my stomach
into unnatural shapes
whenever you enter the room.
Dormant cocooned
emotion prying free
of do it yourself silk prisons.
I'm already planning
the funeral
requiem for this electric
firefly flicker.
Chemistry of nature,
mathematical equations
which spark thoughts
of two lovers
signaled still
in the ease of
tongue-tied reactions.
This name-giver could
never know that
till death do us part
was not
in reference to the
beauty of shared sentiment,
that eventually
my butterflies,
would rest at ease,
for they had lived
a fertile life.

THROUGH BINOCULARS

Mark Nork

a mulberry tree
thick with fruit
and yellow warblers
stands like a woodcut
against the mottled sky.

A wing, a juice-stained breast
a beak, a single eye appear
no farther than my hand.

A brush of wave
a fist of foam
grey herring,
perch, bony sturgeon
every kind of trout
hold separate in the lens.

And you, my love
on the weathered pier,
distant still.

Integrity of Sand

Nathan Slinker

You wake up first,
urging the sunrise, commenting on how
the western edges of clouds
are smeared in dirty mop water.

After grapefruit and outside,
I try to count the scattered light rays
tangled in your braids.
I give up, thinking
at least a few thousand.

We are building my first sandcastle
on my twenty-third birthday.
The turrets lean with uncertainty,
fragile walls plead for stability.

Hours, hours, ours—is this all we built?
Did you forecast this architecture?

The volume of the plastic bucket.
The insufficient integrity of sand.

Remember all the years we lost
playing in the river back home?
Here they are, washing into my lap,
recounting wild tales from every tributary
secretly touched since then.

An Interview with Kim Barnes

By Mark Maynard

KIM BARNES was born in Lewiston, Idaho, in 1958, and one week later returned with her mother to their small logging camp on Orofino Creek, where Barnes' father worked as a lumberjack. The majority of her childhood was spent in the isolated settlements and cedar camps along the North Fork of Idaho's Clearwater River.

Barnes's most recent novel, *A Country Called Home*, was named a best book of 2008 by *The Washington Post*, *The Kansas City Star*, and *The Oregonian*. She is the author of *Finding Caruso* and two memoirs: *In the Wilderness: Coming of Age in Unknown Country*, winner of the PEN/Jerard Award and finalist for the 1997 Pulitzer Prize; and *Hungry for the World*. She is co-editor, with Mary Clearman Blew, of *Circle of Women: An Anthology of Contemporary Western Women Writers*, and with Claire Davis of *Kiss Tomorrow Hello: Notes from the Midlife Underground by Twenty-Five Women Over Forty*. Her essays, stories, and poems have appeared in a number of journals and anthologies, including *MORE Magazine, Fourth Genre, The Georgia Review, Shenandoah*, and the *Pushcart Prize* anthology. Her next novel, *American Mecca*, an exploration of Americans and the oil industry in 1960s Saudi Arabia, is forthcoming from Knopf. She teaches writing at the University of Idaho and lives with her husband, the poet Robert Wrigley, on Moscow Mountain.

Mark Maynard: Readers often see or respond to things in a novel differently than the author consciously intended. Have there been any responses or interpretations of readers that have surprised you?

Kim Barnes: I've been a little surprised by the response to the character of Thomas Deracotte (in *A Country Called Home*). I didn't

expect that he would be a sympathetic character in any easy way, but readers have articulated an intense anger toward him (not a bad thing—such engagement with a character is most often good). His single-minded vision and self-absorption bring about the destruction of his family, and this is the very dynamic that I want to explore. I've always been fascinated by elements of Greek tragedy—the blindness brought on by hubris—and perhaps most fascinated by how a character possessed of a noble nature can be equally possessed of a fatal flaw.

A friend recently asked, "Why would a person [such as Deracotte] go through med school and not want to practice medicine?" I spoke with several doctors and medical students who told story after story about residents who hated the very patients they were meant to help. Some wouldn't even touch the "dummies" they were required to examine. I believe that any number of us have embarked upon lives that feel absolutely foreign to us and not of our own making. We feel helpless in the face of our own decisions. We fear failure. For Deracotte, it is fishing that allows him to escape the actualities of his life. He's not malevolent, only blind.

Finally, what I hope that readers realize about Thomas Deracotte is that his life is governed by a particular fear: fear of abandonment and the loss of those he loves. In this way, he is an extension of what I came to recognize about my own father, a stoic man of great conviction who was determined to control every aspect of his emotional life--and what he couldn't control, he denied. His single-minded vision both scarred me and shaped me, as it did my mother and my brother. But without that vision, which led him to break the cycle of poverty and alcoholism that was his inheritance, I wouldn't be where I am today. Just as is the case with Deracotte's daughter Elise, it is my job to take up the remnants of my father's vision—the parts that are constructive and true—and move forward with them.

MM: The setting is such an important part of this novel. Do you use photographs and notes written in the places described or are your settings created more internally from impressions and memories?

KB: The setting of *ACCH* is very, very familiar to me because it is where my husband and I raised our children when they were young. It's also the landscape in which I myself was raised. My father was a logger in the Clearwater National Forest, and we lived in the small towns and isolated logging camps along the feeding streams of the Clearwater River.

The landscape is so deeply a part of who I am that I sometimes feel I can't separate myself from it. We left the Clearwater eight years ago to move to Moscow, Idaho, and I am still grieving. I've come

to understand that *ACCH* is, in its way, an elegy for the river. It's presence in my life is nearly mythological, and, because of that, it's larger than any photograph or journal entry. All I have to do is close my eyes, and I'm there.

But it's important to note that, even as close as I am to the land, I've had to do a great deal of studying to "know" it intellectually. I was never taught the names of the flora and fauna except in colloquial terms: gray jays were "camp robbers"; most of the bushy vegetation was simply called "buck brush" rather than vine maple or ocean spray. I didn't know what the geological makeup of the canyon was or the history of the area's tribes. This, I've had to teach myself through research.

MM: Is there a Fife, Idaho? If so, can you tell me how you got the town on paper? If not, why did you create the town instead of using one that "exists"?

KB: There is no town named "Fife" in this particular area of Idaho. Fife is based on Orofino, a small logging town on Highway 12. It is a town I have known all my life—one that I have great affection for. What I found was that my knowledge of Orofino was helpful in drawing the map of Fife, but it also got in the way. The fact is that Orofino is home not only to a state mental hospital but to a state prison as well. Both the hospital and the prison are built next to the high school, whose mascot name is the Maniacs. My husband often joked that the children of Orofino could look out the windows of the school and see their futures before them.

This is all interesting in a "western grotesque" kind of way, but who would believe it?

So I only used the "true" details that worked for the story: the Jet Club, for instance. But other details are a collage of similar places I have known. Dr. K and his pharmacy were inspired by a drugstore in another nearby logging town. The Ox is a combination of any number of little cafes. The trick is to use what you know without becoming hide-bound by that knowledge. Unlike in nonfiction, what's most important in fiction is that factual truth serves the story rather than the story being held subservient to factual truth.

MM: The novel takes place over the course of the eighteen years between 1960 and 1977. Why did you choose to set the book in this period of time?

KB: Idaho, like many western states, has undergone dramatic changes in the past several decades, mostly brought on by an increasing population. I can't help but think of the 60s and 70s as the "end" of the Old West and the beginning of the New West.

As someone who was born in Idaho in 1958 and who has watched the tension and conflict that arise when new people—"outsiders"—appear in a small town, I've always been interested in the story of "newcomers" like Thomas and Helen Deracotte. What does it take to belong to a place? When do we know we've been accepted? In my mind, it all comes down to story. When our story becomes a part of the larger narrative of the place, then we have an investment there—we belong. I've come to believe that this investment is a kind of blood payment: there is no story without loss.

MM: Your novel really captured the phenomenon in small western towns where "family" is more defined by the choices that people like Manny and Dr. K make than in blood ties. Do you think that this still exists today in places like Fife, Idaho or is the notion of a small town taking care of its own more nostalgic?

KB: This is an interesting question and made me think of Rebecca Solnit's comment that the West is a nomadic culture—it just doesn't realize it. But it's true that the West has always been a place where people come in search of a better—or different—life. Entrepreneurs, of course, but also single men looking for work, loners, itinerant laborers, women looking for a life not defined by social and cultural norms, dirt-poor "Okies" like my father. In more recent years, the more privileged people have moved here out of choice rather than necessity. I've heard any number of "new" westerners talk about traveling from place to place not because they were without a home or looking for work but because they had the means to live wherever they wanted to. What a thing!

I do think that many small towns have a completely different sense of community than they once did, but that doesn't mean the community is any less valuable. I've seen small towns rejuvenated by "outsiders" who have found ways to meld their cultural and creative energies with the town's more traditional ideas and values. I've also seen small western towns absolutely devastated by people coming in from outside and buying up property for recreation, meaning that they displace the residents of the community who can no longer afford to live where they once did. The new and grander houses often sit empty for all but two weeks out of the year, while the former residents—most now "service workers"—are forced to live on the outskirts of town in sub-par housing. Such a town is not a community—it's a country club with a servile workforce. I have my problems with the concept of *noblesse oblige*, but I also believe it is wholly unethical not to somehow take responsibility for the displacement and marginalization of the very people whose "small town values" we've romanticized and want to co-opt.

The "rugged individual" of the West is both myth and truth. It's

been my experience that the traditional small western community is often far-flung, only partially defined by family ties, and fiercely independent, often to the point of folly. It's also my experience that when a member of that community is *truly* in need, you've never seen a group of people mobilize so quickly and effectively. But if a newcomer sets himself apart as Thomas Deracotte does and refuses to interact in any real way with the community, the community will "respect" his decision, meaning he's on his own. I think that many people forget that the interior west is defined not by political conservatism but by libertarianism. The people I grew up with believed absolutely that you had every right to live your life the way you wanted—and every right to die doing it. If you wanted to drink yourself to death, that was your business. If you wanted to drive your motorcycle at ninety miles an hour without a helmet, good luck to you. More than anything, it's this "spirit" of live-and-let-live that binds the members of the western communities I've known.

MM: While the novel is written in the third person, many of the chapters remain close to one character and his or her point of view, especially how each character experiences certain overlapping events. Was it difficult to "see" and then describe these events through the eyes of the different characters? Which character was the most difficult to get close to?

KB: I love writing in third-person "limited" point-of-view, which means that I stay in close psychic proximity to one character at a time. I found it liberating to look at events through the eyes of different characters. I especially loved being in Elise's perspective because of her synesthesia: a neurological condition which causes a mixing of the senses. For Elise, it's hearing music that gives rise to her vision being flooded with color. Describing her sensory perceptions allowed me to indulge in lyrical passages of prose that I hoped would give some sense of how, because of her synesthesia, Elise lives in a kind of perpetual metaphor.

I'd have to say that it was Deracotte's head that was the most difficult for me to get into because he *is* in that state of blindness—what we now call denial (with grave apologies to Aristotle). He doesn't realize how his fear of loss and failure is alienating and destroying the very people he loves. I found it a particular challenge to represent his thought process without over articulating my own analysis of his motivations and reasoning.

MM: The importance of animals (both wild and domestic) in the characters' lives is prevalent throughout the novel. Can you describe how you observe and then write about the unique relationship between people and animals?

KB: Because I was raised in close proximity to wild animals, and because our family's ability to eat often was dependent upon the deer and elk my father shot and butchered, and because I've never lived without the company of domestic animals, it's difficult for me to imagine any story in which animals don't play a major role.

It's easy enough to romanticize humans' relationship with animals, I think, but I'm more inclined to see that relationship in more...what? Mythological terms? I'm not sure that we can separate ourselves one from the other. Maybe, once again, this has to do with the nature of story and loss. The relationship between man and animal is *defined* by loss, whether it be the death of animals for food or the loss of a beloved pet or the astounding number of animals lost to road kill or the destruction of entire species as a result of our population and industry.

It's nearly impossible to think of an anecdotal story from my childhood that doesn't involve an animal. In Oklahoma, when my teenaged grandmother and her younger siblings had lost their mother to tuberculosis and were abandoned by their father, they survived by running down a crippled calf (my grandmother and her oldest brother were also crippled), stabbing it to death, and roasting pieces of its meat over the open fire. When my grandfather was killed in a drunken car wreck, his hounds, chained at the farm, howled for days. When a man with whom my father logged was killed by a falling tree, we took in the big German Shepherd that had accompanied him to the worksite each day and who had refused to leave his master's side until they had freed the body from the snag. Some of the most poignant memories I have of the time I spent in my father's company when I was a young woman are of hunting with him, wanting more than anything for him to be proud of my tracking instincts and skills as a marksman.

My husband, the poet Robert Wrigley, and I chose to raise our children in rural communities where we all could be in the company of animals. Some were domestic—horses, dogs, cats, chickens, rabbits, hamsters—and others were wild: bear, badgers, bobcats, cougar, elk, deer, eagles, osprey, and rattlesnakes. These animals also populate a number of my husband's poems.

In *A Country Called Home*, the place where the Deracotte's set up housekeeping is based on the area where we lived above the Clearwater River of Idaho. All the animals that the Deracottes and Manny encounter are true to my own experience. Although I've never been bitten by a rattlesnake, I have almost stepped on any number of them. And the Australian Shepherd in the book, whose role I see as nearly spirit-like, is a stand-in for our own Aussie named Opal.

MM: Stories and characters often take on a life of their own after

the author creates them. Where did this story start? Can you give a brief synopsis of the kernel or idea from which it sprang?

KB: I had just finished the editing work on my first novel, *Finding Caruso,* and had shipped the final copy to my editor. After years of obsessive writing and editing, I was suddenly without a creative project. This is always a dangerous time for a writer, and it's easy to fall into a kind of post-partum funk or, even more dangerous, to let yourself believe that you've earned a rest after all that hard work. But the truth is that if you don't have a project on which to once again focus your creative energy, you're inclined to fall out of the habit of writing. All that muscle and stamina you've built up deflates, and you're going to have to work twice as hard to get it back.

Even though I didn't have a full-length project burning a hole in my pocket, I sat down at my computer every writing day, working that muscle, trying to keep myself open to possibility. I wrote a couple of personal essays (the essay remains my most beloved form), and I considered a third memoir, but that "this is it" sense wasn't there. Still, I kept my writing schedule, and I think that this is essential: it's your job to stay in the chair and keep yourself open, put in the time, do the work of waiting. I don't mean that you sit there playing Solitaire on your computer. I mean you write at *something*—poem, story, essay—or you read and reread and make notes on what you love. (I often go back to Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* and Toni Morrison's *Sula*, both of which are among my most sacred texts.)

During this period, I woke up one morning with three words right there in my head: "*First, the river.*" Nothing more. No character or event or story. Just those three words. Really, I didn't have a clue where they might lead.

But I knew that there was something there. I repeated the words over and over, and they took on some kind of resonance and began to grow.

I ate my breakfast, took my shower, went to my computer and typed in those three words. And then I sat there and waited.

In his delightful "how to" book, *Ron Carlson Writes a Story*, Carlson talks about paying attention to the "inventory" of the story you're creating and drawing on that inventory to move the story forward. With only three words, I didn't have much of an inventory, but I did have the river. Why not describe it? Because the river is part of my mythology and because I love it so much, it was easy for me to write the next sentence, and the next: nothing but sensory description. This is the classic approach to writing scene, by the way: begin with the setting. But then I needed something and/or someone *in* that scene. So then I envisioned the car along the road that I knew paralleled the

river. And then I knew that someone had to be driving that car, so I gave the car a driver: a young woman I would later discover is Elise. But what was she doing in that car, driving along the road beside the river? I had no idea. I had to keep writing to find out. And that's what I did. Beneath those first three words, I had to create a 300 page story. That's how you do it: a word, a sentence, a setting, a scene, a character at a time.

I wrote what became the "Prologue" in one day. I tightened and polished it, of course, but it remains basically the same. It was a delightful few hours of almost poetic impulse, very intuitive, very lyrical, very liberating. But I knew that the next writing day wouldn't leave me with such a warm afterglow because the work of writing the novel was still in front of me. Writing those first few pages was fun, but what came after was the heavy lifting: several years of trying to figure out what the story was about.

I believe that all good writing is a process of discovery. Our biggest challenge as writers is to trust that process. Go in, sit down, shut the door. Start writing. Don't stop. Carlson says that the only advantage seasoned writers have over budding authors is that they have learned to tolerate the state of not knowing. Amen.

MM: Where do you do your daily writing? How do you physically and mentally prepare for crafting stories?

KB: For a long time, I didn't have my own writing space. When I was a young mother and just beginning my life as a writer, I wrote whenever and wherever I could: standing at the kitchen counter while nursing a baby; in the bathroom because it was the only room with a locking door; in bed because, finally, everyone else was asleep. When the children started school, I had the days I wasn't teaching to write, and those first few years, when I had time alone with the pages in front of me, were some of the sweetest.

I wrote most of *In the Wilderness* at a cluttered desk in the corner of our small bedroom. After I sold my second book, we were able to add on to our house, and I had my first "study," which is where I wrote *Finding Caruso*. When we moved to our current house, I was once again in the corner of the bedroom, but when our daughter got her own apartment, I took over her basement bedroom. I'm currently back in our own bedroom corner, however, because even daylight basements are hard for me to stay in for more than an hour or two. I need all the natural light I can get.

What I've discovered is that, for me at least, having a set writing schedule is essential. I've been lucky enough to work with universities that allow me to teach my classes two days a week, and I write the other three, after breakfast until dinnertime. This is an ideal situation,

but it's not always realistic. Committee meetings, dental appointments, family crises, book tours, calls from friends and family—all offer ways not to write. I always tell my students that they must teach themselves—and everyone around them—to treat their writing time as something impregnable, kind of like a bank vault. Once you cross that threshold and close the door, no one gets in, and you don't get out until the imaginary timer unlocks the door and releases you back into your other life. If you don't protect your writing time, who will?

MM: What are you working on now? Did anything spring forth when you were writing *A Country Called Home* that you are currently working on?

KB: I had placed *A Country Called Home* with Knopf and was still in the midst of the editorial process when I went down to visit my aunt and uncle at their home in Clarkston, Washington. I was listening to them talk about the years they spent in Saudi Arabia during the 1960s, working for the Arabian-American Oil Company. They and hundreds of other American workers were housed inside the gated compounds that Aramco had built in the middle of the desert and which offered all the amenities they could never afford back home: a private school for their children; the best hospital that money could buy; a nice home; a golf course, yacht club, and swimming pool. Yet outside those gated compounds was Arabia and its strict religious laws. Even though my aunt could tan by the compound's pool in her swimsuit, once outside she had to cover from head to toe. Inside, she could wander freely and drive; outside, she had to be in the company of a male relative and was no longer allowed to be behind the steering wheel of a car. To break the sacred Islam laws of *shariah* might result in severe punishment: caning, even imprisonment. For the most severe crimes, people were (and still are) stoned in public.

As I listened to her tell her stories, I began to imagine a novel set in the compounds and deserts of Arabia. Again, I had the this sudden sense of a voice, the beginnings of a narrative: "The first thing you need to know is that I'm a barefoot girl from red-dirt Oklahoma, and all the marble floors in the world will never change that about me. The second thing is this: that woman they found floating in Half Moon Bay, her hair tangled with mangrove—my husband did not kill her. Not the way he said he did."

Now I have to write the story underneath those words. Once again, I'm embarking upon the process of discovery. All I have to do is sit down at my desk and wait for that door to click shut.

Seventeen 'til Three O'clock

Jennifer Yeatts

and all that she can think about is leaving. Here she doesn't need
all this beauty: nights so dark she can't see
a hand in front of her. Just the steady blinking

red that says the smoke alarm is working. Even afternoons
are quiet, too quiet for the mind that wants distraction.
All that she can think about? Leaving, where she doesn't need

windy fields with corners stalked by paints
and palomino grazers she can ride bareback or guide with
a hand in front. Of her, just the steady blinking

eyes remain here in the country. The rest of her
is scattered east by way of scribbled plans, lately
all that she can think about. Leaving here, she doesn't need

to pack a bag or say goodbye to anything except
the lilacs, the only scent she'll carry everywhere with
one hand in front of her. Just the steady blinking

light of the train approaches. She looks at all
the oaks beyond the track, knows she climbed every one,
and all that she can think about is leaving here. She doesn't need

a hand. In front of her, just the steady blinking.

The Theory of Disease

Arian Katsimbras

He swings those wildwood doors open to step through
and stamp out the sound of the daggered spurs that cling
to his long overworn and overworked boots, his pistols bare,
bearing six-shots of metal malice, lead heavy and leading
him through the dust that covers the saloon floor, clouds
of filth lift behind his anxious digging heels, shuffling
a sauntered posture toward bedded serpentine maladies,
removing his ten gallon masculinity to partake in taking
or being taken by hot humours that rest under their scarlet
corsets, ruined women mask beautiful smiles, secret grins
burning their insides, soon to be his, stricken with sickness,
weighed down with more metallic manhood, spirals
separating his system, venereal nerves shut down, painted
with shotgunnned attempts to shuffle through his days,
revolvers no longer saving his posthumous health,
his last night spent in a pre Pox-Americana ecstasy
before that one night with Venus became a lifetime
with Mercury.

Being From Body

Teresa Breeden

7 weeks

The worst part is the blood,
taking so much away
with such fluidity,

carrying broken tissue toward the earth, a flood of promise
pouring out, the inner face of the womb scoured so smooth
one would think nothing had ever grown here.

The first fist of failure hits, not at the place of outpouring,
where gravity draws being from body, but in the mind
gears grind and crumble; uncertainty settles in.

Colors leak into the air, born on scarlet tides;
the world spins into monochrome, fading,
a place of edges without objects.

The things held closest appear furthest away,
even when I can keep my balance, stand without canting
awkwardly toward ache.

Love's familiar features dim beyond a layer of gauze,
no grays, no spots of color, as death
covers this small land.

The blood makes it obvious something was lost;
this lingering weakness belongs here, crafts a home
in my body with reason, but the worst part is the blood

because blood lost will grow back, will plummet again
through my veins, hold me upright and leave me
without any evidence of loss.

No Ceiling

Teresa Breeden

The second kiss
burns through the body,
like lightning blazing down the center of an old pine
leaves the exterior intact,
as though the tree's marrow
had not already shattered in fire,
as though it is not, from the moment of burn,
slowly dying from within,
its long arms lowering in exhaustion,
finally falling to lie
with its own lost needles,
replaced bit by bit
by a whole new forest.

The second kiss makes up for the first:
for the long waiting and short touches,
small agonies twisting through blood,
for the stumble of lips and tongues
colliding, clumsy in the dark
of such an unfamiliar room.
It renames all the parts of the body
by scent: sharp clove of sweat,
the cinnamon of an indrawn breath,
lilac blooming madly just inside
the mouth.

Skin melts with want, separates
and slides down to splice parting legs
with a forest of fire.
After, the air is obvious but without speech,
breathing heavily over a field of ash.
With rational thoughts
and the roof above them burned away,
every room in the body
has a view of sky.

Plotting Temporality

Suzanne Roberts

succumbing, finally to gravity,

waking up there, not sure how you arrived,
the streetlamp passes for a moon,

a seagull lifts to flight,
you run through skittering rain,

back to the condo balcony,
make love, and silver-foiled light

rides the gulf, clouds gather storm,
a sky empties as a body leaves a body.

A girl on the beach below chases
a red balloon she'd let go on purpose.

And you travel back again across the country,
facing that really, you were drunk

all weekend, trying new drinks, looking
at new things, again, inside another

Hemingway story—but you are not the girl—
Instead, wanting to remain childless, wanting

the lover to leave in the blue hours, long
before dawn—no witness to your shame,

a body emptied of lust, in its place,
another kind of longing and a life decorated

with adverbs. You want to pull
the tinsel off last year's tree, begin again,

differently, the dead leaf, falling

Fishwife

Rochelle Smith

Catch, release.
Hold, release.
I shimmered, blurred in the beads
of the sun's indolent sea-path,
and he, in his nutshell-boat, moorless,
trailed his forlorn umbilical cord
that I bit, to stanch
and taste its cloudy red.
Now he's hauled me up,
strokes the coins along my flanks,
despairs for the shore—
there, bearded with unraveling
palms, the sand
fraying into the wash.
The current is taking us out.
He must let me go, paddle with his arms
to get back.
I'm gasping. He's holding so tight.
My bright fringeless eye
finds his. There isn't time
for this. I'm losing ground,
there are blood-drops on my lips,
I need the deep.
His need is drying, blinding.
He hasn't even
a shirt against the sun.
Neither I.
I envy his pressing thumbs,
he my limbless, straining length,
bullet-muscle and spiny frill.
Shore is as far as water.
We'll both die in this middle place.

Hermit

Rochelle Smith

He slices a yellow pear for breakfast.
His only knife
is the wrong sort of knife
for the task, leaves graceless rips
in the flesh, and the whitish threads
of stem that twine into the chambered heart
catch in his teeth. He has not been careful
to gouge them all out. Laxity
in this narrow space, even at small tasks,
he is too poor a servant to afford.
The walls are sandstone, they come away
grain by pale grain against a finger.
He could tunnel this mountain to lace
just writhing through a bad dream.

It is rare he has pears here.
Everything requires a journey—
the nearest doctor four days on foot.
Not far enough, he used to think
when younger. Now he is thin
as Friday broth, and soon
surely, God will need him
like He used to. If he squints,
he can still conjure voices. Unceasingly
they insist on praise, their pitch
the pitch of silvered needles
against his ear. He lets his head fall
into his hands. He thinks,
there must be a hymn for this.

The Mermaid's Compact

Rochelle Smith

You look like a man
who understands rough trades.

I see you want to founder
in the tangy, vein-dark water,
to not fear its caul
closing over your face.
I want to see my skin
bereft of foam and shine.
I want to hear the snick and pop of fires,
feel the sandy chafe of sheets, the thumb
of darkness holding me to the curve.
You want the brine to enter your nostrils
and feed you as it once did.
I want to be born
into thin, empty space and fast ground. All here
slips the grasp, skims through the fingers, unhands me
so easily, all strings untie themselves
in the heedless current. But the land, hard
as it tries, cannot escape. Beeches, anvils, I hear
they suffer the touch, and remain.

We will never understand
each other's longing. Suffice it to say
there are needs
that can be exchanged.
Slit open my palm.
I'll split yours. Cool blood
to hot, let's strike a bargain.

Neverwrong

Michelle Dubon **Meadow Fiction Award**

Alan knew two certain things about tarts. Firstly, that you bought them. Second that you ate them. This one was calling him. Behind the cool glass, the strawberry tart was suggesting all sorts of saucy things.

*

In the side alley of the salsa club, Alan had a death grip on the grimy door, Kyo had a bag of Doritos, Erickson had come prepared with his mother's drugs, and the pants had fiery dreams of flamenco.

"Alan. Did you take something?" said Erickson, waving one skinny wrist and pale hand in the direction of Alan's pants. They were forcing his feet and legs to hop and tap his heels, extracting a symphony in mini from the pavement, and a crescendo of pain from Alan as his feet danced faster, faster, fastest. Only Alan's cramping fingers on the door kept him from being dragged into the depths of the club, from which trumpets cheered, guitars hummed, and Spanish lyrics slicked onto the night like oil on water. The pants loved it; Alan hated the pants.

"I did not take any drugs, Erick," he said exasperated and breathless.

"Would you like to?" chirped Erickson. "I borrowed some Vicodin. If you took enough, it might knock you out."

"We could hit him," suggested Kyo with the blandness of 1% milk. "Really hard."

If he could have, Alan would have taken a prudent step away from his so-called best friend. "It won't work. I keep telling you, it's these jeans. Last night I strapped my legs to the bed with every belt I could find, and I woke up dancing. On the roof. The roof," he said, "is very high."

There was a pause filled with the munch, munch, munch, of Kyo's steady chewing. Erickson and Kyo shared a look as if contemplating whether the roof was the only thing that was high, and Alan winced as one of his nails tore in the wood of the door. The civil war between his upper and lower half was quickly being ceded to the south.

"You idiot," Kyo said, hand poised about the chip bag, watching. Alan hated when he did this. The tilts at the corners of Kyo's eyes made him feel he should confess every bad thing he'd ever done. And that voice—as if his mother had taken him aside at some point to pound it flat of all inflection with a big rolling pin before starting in on his facial expressions. "You were wrong about the pants."

"I was not wrong. I am never wrong. It's only that sometimes I am not all the way right," Alan hedged.

"But they're demon trousers that compel you to shake your booty all night long," said Erickson, and made a little gasp. He took a quick hit of the inhaler around his neck, the mere mention of "booty" too scandalous for his scrawny thirteen-year-old self to handle. Alan bestowed a magnanimous gaze on the younger boy. As sorry as Alan felt for himself, he

felt even sorrier for Erickson. Considering that he currently wasn't wearing his jeans, they wore him, this was awfully pitiful. Erickson was like the baby birds his cat left on the doorstep. The licks of his brown hair impersonated something half-feathered, and the small bones of his wrists and face were reminiscent of wing pinions. At two years younger than Alan and Kyo, he was clever enough to have been skipped two grades, but possessed the bad habit of twittering what was better left untwittered.

Kyo set his terrible, even gaze on Erickson. "You just wanted to say 'booty', didn't you?"

Erick's skin blushed in rash-like patches beneath the glow of the streetlight. "Mom says only pirates should have booty."

"Back to me. What am I going to do? I had to call school today and tell them I had scurvy, but I can't do that forever." Panicking, while simultaneously learning the unamusing joys of rumba, Alan had leapt on scurvy —the first disease he'd spotted in his health book this morning. Thank God, his parents were out of town again. "And do you know," he said with righteous indignation, "I don't think school believed me."

Erick adjusted his glasses the way generals unfurled maps: with a purpose. "You should have said you had R.L.S. You know, like my mom has, restless leg syndrome—that's what I should have grabbed from the medicine cabinet." The beat reverberating through the walls of the club changed, and Alan lost his grip on the door as his legs began to lollop through a convoluted repetition of steps. Erickson scuttled behind Kyo who popped another Dorito into his mouth. "What is he doing now? What are you doing?"

"The cha-cha," said Kyo. "No, wait. The cha-cha-cha."

"How do you know that? Do you know everything? Kyo," Erick breathed with the solemnity of a child, "are you magic?"

"Nah—so take them off," Kyo said to Alan.

"That's genius," he scorned. He didn't like the cha-cha-cha any more than the flamenco. Each twist and step aggravated the blisters on his heels and rammed his toes into his high-tops. "You think I like dancing like a crazy person?"

Alan met Kyo in kindergarten. On Make-Paper-Snowflakes Day, the teacher passed out the safety scissors, and the class sat in a circle like very tiny Indians. On one side of Alan had been Fiona Darly who picked her nose. On the other side sat Kyo who only ever said eerily sensible things like, "If you eat that glue now, you'll be sad later." He had long observed Kyo was a clever stone painted to look like a kid, and he saw an opportunity to test two theories at once: the exact safety of these scissors, and the nature of Kyo Sumeragi, stone-child.

Alan had taken the closed scissors and jabbed Kyo hard in the ribs. "Wah!" Kyo had said, not cried, said. The teacher had confiscated his scissors demanding to know what he was doing; didn't Alan know it was very wrong to stab people? He'd replied he wasn't wrong, she was wrong. Those scissors weren't safe at all. Kyo had been his best friend ever since, which was great for Alan. Even back in kindergarten girls always tried to get Mr. No Expression to pull their pigtails, and in high school, they

continued to try, which meant there was always some ignored girl in need of comfort.

At the moment, Alan seriously weighed punching him in the face against losing his recaptured grip. Kyo would only punch him in the head and return serenely to his Doritos. He knew because he'd tried it once in the fifth grade.

"They won't come off," he explained. "And if they don't like what I'm doing, they—" he lowered his voice even though no one else lurked in the side alley, "they get tighter."

"Not everywhere?"

"Everywhere," he said grimly. Erick winced, and Kyo raised a black brow economically.

"When you called, I thought you were playing a joke," Erickson said, horrified in an intrigued way, like when you lifted up a rock to see what was under it. "I mean, I brought the Vicodin in case you weren't lying—I thought you might be—except I remembered the time you got stuck down that well because you wanted the spare change—"

"You gonna admit you were wrong?" Kyo interrupted. He smoothed out the empty bag, folded it into precise fourths, and stuffed it into his back pocket. "Those who fail to admit their mistakes are doomed to repeat them—my grandfather says."

"I am not wrong," Alan gritted through his teeth. The pants yearned to torment, to go where the music beat like a heart, the musicmusicmusic. "This is a minor difficulty."

"A minor difficulty in your pants?" Behind the stoic planes of his face, Kyo was cracking up. He had inherited his mother's pale skin and his father's black hair. He was half-Japanese with beautifully normal parents who frowned and chuckled and everything. Possibly the Buddhist-temple-keeping grandfather, whom Kyo spent all his summers with in Japan, was to blame.

Risking a hand to flip him off turned into an eye-watering mistake. The pants hauled him in the other direction, and he banged his chin on the edge of the doorframe. The pain in his jaw ached a dull, hot red. "Guys, not helping."

"Right," said Erickson, remembering Alan had not called them on his cell phone so they could regale him with pirates and the cha-cha-cha. "Hey, did you know at midnight this club turns into a—" Kyo clapped a hand across Erick's mouth and shook his head, and the jeans bore Alan away before he could ask for the exciting conclusion to that sentence. Lousy chip-chewing, Vicodin-packing friends.

*

Alan didn't even like tarts. He didn't like sweets, and he didn't like the way the pastries were arranged in neat lines beneath the glass of the counter. He wanted one anyway. He wanted For Courage.

*

The inside of the club was loud, dim, and hot. Alan leapt into the midst of dance floor jostling several couples from their salsa. "Sorry, sorry," he muttered, not daring to meet anyone's eyes out of sheer mortification. The

jeans thrashed out his legs like a soldier on fast forward until they had kicked a space around him. The music died an abrupt death: trumpets fizzled and guitars twanged their last. Pair upon pair of dark, hostile eyes swiveled in the dimness to watch him coupled with a lot of angry, Spanish muttering. This was not good. Embarrassment clawed at his chest like a persistent lynx, and he couldn't catch his breath, and he didn't know any Spanish with which to apologize. The pants were smug in their victory.

"Hey," said a flat voice behind him. "You have a club full of angry brown people."

"Kyo, get me out of here," he implored.

Erickson popped up behind Kyo, looking about with interest. "I wouldn't worry about it. In fifteen minutes, this switches over from a salsa club to a gay salsa club; some of these people are bound to leave. Boy, they sure are looking at you funny. You'd think they'd never seen damned pants before." Erickson waved cheerfully at the crowd. Some of them would have doubtless liked to teach Alan a painful lesson, but his wild high kicks, Kyo's stolid presence, and Erick's baffling tone warned them away. Men and women began to drift off, some wary, mostly disgusted. Alan caught the word "loco" several times.

"That's a relief," said Alan because it was, it really was, and then, "Wait, what?"

"We saw them lined up out front. Some of them were sparkly," said Kyo with the serenity of a boy whose jeans were simple Levi's. He watched people moving toward the main doors. Now and then, someone would look back and cross themselves in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, too. "I thought about teaching you a lesson, but I remembered: you don't learn lessons, and why should I inflict you on an unsuspecting, glittery public?"

Kyo's brows suddenly contracted and the corners of his mouth veered down. A group of men had gathered on the far side of the room, and from the stiff set of their shoulders, Alan could tell they weren't leaving; they were going to teach him that lesson after all. The men stalked towards them. A switchblade snicked open with an evil little sound and caught the light. The lynx in his chest morphed into a panicky leopard. Why hadn't Alan ever paid attention in Spanish class, why?

"Lo sentio mucho," said Kyo, unfazed. "Mi amigo es un idiota. Por favor, pedimos desculpas."

A put-upon pause ensued in which everyone looked at everyone else and began to feel a little foolish. Alright, so maybe Kyo was magic, but the jeans didn't care. They high kicked the knife from the assailant's hand straight up into the air where it caught the light, jewel-like, and tumbled down end over end. The men surged forward, while through the doors, the unsuspecting, glittery public began to file inside.

Alan had time to shove Erick at Kyo, and to see Kyo drag Erick away.

*

Each tart had a nametag, and the tag bore a strange message. Anise Hyssop, advertised a tart. For the Pixilated, claimed another.

*

In the shop called The Piper, Alan was doing his best with the feather duster, and Hortense was doing her best with her words. Their relationship consisted thusly: Alan was an idiot, and Hortense was a banshee by nature and an antiques dealer by trade. When he had first bought the stupid pants, he hadn't known any of this—well, he'd suspected the idiot part.

"I think you'll really come to like your after school job," Hortense purred as she settled her weight against the door of the shop. "Aren't you glad I thought of a way for you to pay me back after your disastrous surfeit of dance? And what did you learn?"

"To keep the receipt," Alan retorted and carried on flapping the feather duster. He dusted the glass shelf and its deceptive objects as if they might explode with one false move. He wasn't so much cleaning as asking the dust's permission to tickle it. The title of the book had changed, he noted. It now read: *To Die; To Get Up Again: Memoirs of a Zombie*.

She laughed. It sounded like ahahaha. "The right, the righteous, the not to the left. You can be right and still come out wrong. You may be wrong, and be the better for it."

Red. It was Truth that scalded the delicate corners of her mouth that color. Alan ducked his head and dusted faster. She tapped a finger to her mouth and winked. "I have to go out for a while. Don't touch anything, don't offend anything, and you might survive my shop."

Don't touch anything, don't offend anything.

Inevitably, his eyes skewed to the counter.

*

The tart with the tag For Courage had glistening strawberry halves and pale mellow custard. The gleam from its glaze was a crimson wink.

*

In the resultant chaos of knives and glitter, Alan quick-stepped it out of the club and into the coolness of an October night. He knew he could trust Kyo to get Erickson away and to safety. He knew it wouldn't be nearly as easy for him. He'd half thought and half prayed the pants would tire themselves out. To his dismay, they foxtrotted down alleys, jived over rooftops, river-danced under bridges, did a stately quadrille in a park; kicking up showers of dead burgundy leaves with the whispery crackle of old paper. They wheeled, frolicked, and spirited Alan past lit windows and then unlit windows until blood squished freely between his toes, sticky and hot. What if he was stuck this way forever, if he wore his feet to stumps, and danced until he died? Would the pants keep on animating his corpse, or would Alan's soul be trapped in an infinity of tango? Alan began to see that quite possibly, maybe, he might have been wrong about the pants.

Hours later, by the watch in front of his wavering eyes, the little hand barely grazed the four. He didn't know where he was, or how he had gotten here. The last thing he recalled was grand jetés amidst a herd of very surprised deer on a moonlit golf course. There was a building. Alan was hugging the masonry like a long-lost love.

"Hmphmeh," he whimpered to it by which he meant "help me." All he wanted was to stay in one, sweet place. His legs Irish jigged, heedless and spiteful. It felt like all thought had been rattled from his head; his neurons trampled under the steps of the dance except maybe for two, and those two—like his spine—ached for one thing: No More.

Zzt! The sound of something electric sparked into sudden life and slivered the silence into something sharp and aware. A red light flickered on and drifted over him. I'm in Hell, he thought, I have actually Fred Astaired my way into Hell. Except the light was far too lazy and sweet, fine points of scarlet mist than anything else. He looked up like a drowning man confronted with a sudden desert. The neon sign flashed its words into the morning, The Piper.

*

For Courage just wouldn't leave Alan alone. Eat me, it insisted.

*

The sign on the door read Welcome to the Piper. Make my day, stop in and pay. The shop resembled the others on the avenue, bordered on one side by a clothing boutique for dogs, and on the other by a florist with crimson poppies in the window, but it caught Alan's eye. Maybe it was the way the display window boasted a pair of manky old boots. Hardly intriguing, and yet. What little traffic there was, ambled down the street on the tranquil Sunday afternoon. Kyo did not want to go in, and that was all the initiative Alan needed. Bells jangled discordantly above their heads when he swung open the door.

"Told you so," Alan said to Kyo, rocking on his heels to take in the view. "I said this place looked cool."

Kyo crossed his arms, and twitched his shoulders in a tiny movement like Alan's cat flicking its tail. "It smells weird in here."

"Your mom smells weird."

"Yours."

Stepping into the shop felt like stepping into an ambitious quartz crystal. The sunshine insinuated itself respectfully into the shadows and winked off all the glass shelving. The shelves bit into the white walls like lucent razor-teeth and raced precisely around the store. All manner of things teemed on the glass. On a shelf near his head, rested a book with the title *Brains: A Zombie Love Story*, a Chinese tea set, and an old-fashioned toothbrush. Alan reached out to touch it. Without bothering to look, Kyo smacked his hand.

"Hello there. I'm Hortense, what do you need?"

Alan turned quickly. "We were just looking."

"Yes," she agreed. "What for?"

She stood behind the counter, pretty in a way he didn't like. Her mouth was particularly distracting. The corners were redder than the rest, and he distrusted her tight smile as if she were afraid of smiling too wide in case something slipped out, like fangs. Her eyes must have been made of something richer than the normal squishy stuff he had in his sockets because her irises appeared to be made of crushed black velvet, luminous with a thoughtful intelligence as if she wondered what kind of cracker

he'd taste best on.

There was something on the shelf behind her. No matter what else caught his attention, and there was plenty—the counter was the kind they had in delis, and the row of pastries beneath the glass had peculiar names but looked delicious—he kept coming back to the folded square of denim behind her. "How much for the jeans?" he asked.

"I wouldn't recommend them to you," she replied without looking. "Though I can guarantee they're just your size."

Alan tried something then, something to stave off her weirdness, something to make him sound cool; he tried to be witty. "Why? Don't think I could pull them off?"

She settled an elbow on the counter, and set her chin in her hand. "No," she said, amused. "I don't think you could ever pull them off."

"You need that money for groceries until your parents get back," Kyo pointed out.

And Hortense added, "You think I'm wrong?"

"I think I'm taking them," Alan insisted. She took his twenty, and she handed him the pants and his receipt.

"May you be satisfied with your lesson," Hortense murmured as they left, her voice blending into the tintinnabulation of the bells.

Alan half turned in the doorway. "What?"

"I said, what a cute boy, bless him?"

"That's what I thought you said," he muttered.

*

It wasn't like it would be wrong to have a bite. Alan was never wrong.

*

He battled the pants every step of the way to the Piper's door, and the bells chuckled above his head as he fell through it. He stood, panting, a hateful stitch sewing his side with needle precision.

Behind the counter, Hortense nursed a glass filled with something that might have been a concoction of Wormwood and Monkshood, but was most likely Cherry-Coke. "You still have them." She spoke into the depths of the drink, the black line of her lashes quivered as if her eyes laughed.

"The pants?" They had stilled in an attempt to camouflage as ordinary jeans; they bore an insincerely innocent quality about the knees. The jeans were afraid of Hortense, and trying to pass for a malicious kitten. Without their constant animation, Alan could feel the enormous blue-black requiem of agony his legs had become, the muscles in his thighs twitched with exhaustion, the bones in his ankles like wrong notes grinding against each other. His knees had turned to unmusical marmalade.

"Your legs," she corrected.

"I don't want them anymore—the pants, I mean," he added hurriedly to avoid any confusion.

She set the drink down with a gentle clink against the glass and looked at him. "You just can't admit it, can you?"

The truth stuck in his throat where it became an ache. He swallowed, and it made a small click. To Alan it felt huge, like the song of a key turning in a lock. "If I say it," he said quietly, "it's the same as admitting

there's something wrong with me."

"And, so?" asked the banshee. She must be a banshee; look at the eyes, look at her mouth. They were the crushing eyes of the herald, the mouth of the messenger that extracted a price for her services. "And so? Is being wrong so wrong? Is the need to push at things to see if they break, to see if you break along with them, does that make you so bad?"

He had dragged his two friends from their homes in the middle of the night to help him, and they might have been stabbed or worse. Alan was more than self-destructive; he was devastating. Even so, even knowing all this, he would not say it.

I'm wrong.

Behind her, reflected in the glass, was a boy: young, hair straggling into his eyes, pale and pained, and wrong. Alan dropped his gaze. "Can you take them back?" he said to his quiescent toes.

Hortense said in tones of deepest sepulchral mystery: "Do you have your receipt?"

"N-no. I tossed it."

The scarlet corners of her mouth turned up and up. "That is a shame," she murmured. "You'll have to pay me to take them off you."

"What?" said Alan.

"I need an assistant," she went on.

"What?" said Alan.

"Someone to do a few chores, mind the shop while I'm out, that sort of thing."

Alan considered. On the one hand, lay death by trouser, on the other was keeping shop for a smiling banshee. What did she mean—"Take them off me?" he blurted.

Hortense's smile was a flash of white, white teeth. "Deal."

*

Alan polished the glass of the counter for the third time wondering if it was him that kept leaving the fingerprints. Hortense was on her way out the door when she stopped and slewed around. "Oh, and don't eat the merchandise," she said with a toothsome smile. Hortense left, but it seemed her smile stayed floating on the air like the afterimage from a camera flash.

There was a tart whose tag read For Immiscible Love, another which said For Chest Hair, and the one his eyes kept being sucked to: For Courage.

Eat me, it said. You'll like it, I promise. Eat me, it cajoled, and you can befriend lions; commandeer an entire fleet of ships. You can, it said, finally beat Kyo at poker.

It wasn't like he was ever wrong. He was never wrong, and the tart was a delicious, brave aftertaste on his tongue, but he had to go conquer something now.

Elegy for the Guy Who Burnt My Pancakes

Michelle Dubon

The cat you bought me is trapped
on the windowsill, watching through eyes elliptical
a world it can't touch.

Does he wonder if the sky is the same

terrible blue on the other side? Does he regret
the little finches who sing so sweet
Catch me, catch me, catch me

You could never land on your feet.

When you reached fro the angel-birds, *past* the angels,
you jumped and twisted.
Fell fell fell and then nothing but asphalt.

Pretty bird, pretty awful

truth—was falling flying
just as good or even better?
And where are you now?

Standing on the shore of the river,

trainers planted in cold ground, your fingers turning blue
as the poppies on the banks of the bruise-colored waters;
they smell of nothing.

They've forgotten how.

You're admiring the swift trade of coin for ferry. Gold the dead
carry in their eyes, silver beneath their tongues,
spare change for the bus.

They say the dead won't let go.
I say it's me,
the living who grasp *so* selfish.

This is selfishness, without honor, undiluted:

don't touch the water. Don't cross over. Don't
swim the Lethe; love, it's waters are forget
or didn't you know? You knew.

On the far shore the angel-birds siren-peal for you.

On this shore you couldn't make pancakes to save your life;
never met a pancake you didn't scorch.
Remember drizzling slow and our sticky, sticky fingers.

Neither of us minded the sweetness burnt.
I minded
the scent caught in your hair.

I can't burn breakfast and expect it to stand in for you.

Dan Alive

Thomas Michael McDade

Dan had no use
for religion so
I imagined his
spirit rousing
belches of
disapproving
thunder above
the Florida
memorial Mass
to interrupt
the monotone
sermon.
Sorry Bro, but I
did like this part:
We cannot judge,
all we can hope
is that hell
is empty and
heaven full.
I wondered
what Dan alive
would have
remarked
hearing
those words at
an unavoidable
service for
a deceased
relative or
friend.
Might have
joked a bit
before settling on
vacant churches—
taverns crammed
with revelers
drinking themselves
innocent.

Oral Fixation

Noelle Robinson

Brush your teeth
you would say,
after crawling home two miles from the club
where we held each other like waltzers
and dove into the crowd
in a violent dance of elbows and steel-toed boots.

Fuck off
I'd reply,
the heaviness of the whiskey
weighing down my eyelids.
You would flash two rows of flawless white teeth
you worked so hard to keep unblemished.
Brushing six times a day, flossing twice
twenty seven years of oral obsession.

Get your ass in here
you called from the bathroom.
I'd stagger in and you'd force a toothbrush in my hand,
watching my reflection in the mirror
as I scoured my wooly teeth
and you'd smile at me when I rinsed.

Tim is dead
They told me, sobbing into their pint glasses.
I thought you were too vain,
with your perfectly coiffed pompadour
to ever put a gun near your mouth.
I was wrong.

Learning to Inhale

Susie Estes

Backed against a poorly painted fence,
Lemon yellow shades blanketing my naïve eyes.
It was salt-water-taffy day at the Piggly Wiggly,
Pockets overflowing with wrappers,
Like the girl in gym class who stuffed her bra,
Pieces falling out with every jostle.

He had no twang like the rest of us.
Hailed from somewhere up north where
It is *Colder than a witch's tittie.*
And he said, where he came from,
Everyone smoked Camel Straights
And stayed up real late.

He had a toothpaste commercial smile,
And hair the color of pecan pie.
He cracked his knuckles,
And his neck in one swift movement.
I bet he even drinks coffee,
I thought to myself as he continued his cool.

He kept his cigarettes in a lunchbox
With a built-in fridge,
Said they tasted better cold.
And he packed them with such wisdom,
It was hard to believe he had lived
Only eleven years.

He must be an old soul,
I concluded silently.
And awkwardly changed my posture,
Tilting my head,
Rolling my eyes,
To mimic a teenager standing nearby.

Garage Sailing

Susie Estes **1st Place Meadow Poetry Award**

I can't recall the ochre in your eyes,
Or the aqua painted ceiling in your apartment
in Ellis Square, the copper birdcages
Hanging from the salmon colored beams.
How they whistled "The Glory of Love,"
While a metal framed painting
Of Bette Midler strategically placed behind
The cages, displayed
Like a show, which never needed rehearsal.

I can't seem to remember the classifieds
In the *Savannah Times* like a bible,
You, armed with a neon highlighter
And a glass of sweet tea,
Your Italian ebony curls and Buddy Holly glasses
Marking you the epitome of cool—

Always looking for a find in front yards.
A sailboat made of toothpicks, a Liza Minnelli
Artifact, a pair of blue suede shoes,
Which you'd later frame with a *Boulevard*
Of Broken Dreams print you saw
On a folding table,
Next to a geode paperweight,
Marked three dollars and you paid one.

I can't really place the memory of us
My mothers' brother with poisoned blood,
Listening to Joni Mitchell in your boat
Of a station wagon, searching for the next great salvage.
Not the willows or the palms or the Spanish Moss,
Could shade my eyes from the glow of you
On a Saturday, sailing through the subdivisions.

I always knew you'd go down with that ship.
The anchor too heavy to move,
But we got your casket for a real bargain,
And it was turquoise with salmon satin,
And I danced at your viewing in a sailor dress
That I found in the yard of a stranger
After you left.

Contributor Notes

Abraham Abebe was born and raised in Ethiopia, then came to the United States in 2003. He received Associate of art degree with distinction from Truckee Meadows Community College in 2007. He is currently enrolled at the University of Nevada Las Vegas, pursuing a B.F.A. with concentration on painting and drawing. He took 1st place for the 2007 art award in *the Meadow*.

Amy Alden has lived in Reno her entire life. She is currently attending Truckee Meadows Community College as an art major.

Krista Benjamin's poems and stories have appeared in *The Best American Poetry 2006; Creative Writer's Handbook, 5e; The Sun; Margie* and other journals. She is the recipient of the 2008 Robert Gorrell Award for Literary Achievement from the Sierra Arts Foundation.

George Bishop lives and writes in the central Florida area. Recent work has appeared in *Philadelphia Stories, Literary House Review* and is forthcoming in *Grasslimb Journal*.

Teresa Breeden lives in the high desert at the base of the Sierra Nevada Mountain Range with her family, cats, and koi pond. She spends her free time reading, writing, gardening, swimming, and mountain biking. She has served in various occupations, including tutor, waitress, English teacher, landscaper, software tester, and drafter. Her current career, which she describes as rewarding and wonderful, is that of a high school CAD (computer aided drafting) teacher.

Soren Browning is a student at Truckee Meadows Community College.

Logan Chace teaches English as an adjunct at Hagerstown Community College. Recent publications include "Lake Choke" in *Versal Magazine* and a review of Carol Frost's *The Queen's Desertion* in *The Hollis Critic*.

Alex Davis is a student at Truckee Meadows Community College.

Margarita Delcheva is a second-year student at the NYU M.F.A. Poetry Program. Currently, she's an adjunct instructor for undergraduate Creative Writing. She has been published in *CutThroat, A Journal of the Arts*. Her interests include Argentine Tango, painting, and Continental Philosophy.

Michelle Dubon is a student at Truckee Meadows Community College. She enjoys pastry, ballet, and characters who make terrific-bad choices.

Shonda Durista is a student at Truckee Meadows Community College.

Susie Estes is a student at Truckee Meadows Community College.

Robert Kyle Ewing is a student at Truckee Meadows Community College.

Melody Gough is a poet and writer with numerous publications to her credit. Most recently, one of her essays appeared in *The Best of Paradigm*, Rain Farm Press, 2008. She teaches at University of Nevada, Reno and Truckee Meadows Community College and occasionally relies on classroom help from her teaching assistant, an opinionated pug named Paula.

Taylor Graham is a volunteer search-and-rescue dog handler in El Dorado County. Her latest book, *The Downstairs Dance Floor* (Texas Review Press, 2006), is winner of the Robert Phillips Poetry Chapbook Prize.

Nathan Graziano lives in Manchester, New Hampshire with his wife and two children. He is the author of *Teaching Metaphors* (sunnyoutside, 2007), *Not So Profound* (Green Bean Press, 2004), *Frostbite* (GBP, 2002) and seven chapbooks of poetry and fiction. His work has appeared in *Rattle, Night Train, Freight Stories, The Coe Review, The Owen Wister Review*, and others. His third book of poetry, *After the Honeymoon*, will be published in Fall 2009 by sunnyoutside press. For more information, visit his website: www.nathangraziano.com.

Naho Hasegawa grew up in Fukushima, which is located in the northern part of Japan. In summer 2007, he came to the United States. Now, he is a Truckee Meadows Community College student and learning general subjects, especially art.

Arian Katsimbras is a student at Truckee Meadows Community College.

Chelsie Kern is a student at Truckee Meadows Community College.

John Knott is a student at Truckee Meadows Community College.

Brandon Lacow grew up in Fallon, Nevada, and moved to Reno in 2006 to study photography at Truckee Meadows Community College. He plans to pursue photography as a career.

Annie Lampman is an M.F.A. candidate at the University of Idaho, mother of three, and outdoor enthusiast.

Ellaraine Lockie is a widely-published poet whose latest chapbook is *Blue Ribbons at the County Fair*, a collection of first-place prize winning poems. Ellaraine teaches school and community poetry workshops.

Likita J. Manning is a student at Truckee Meadows Community College.

Gary Metras lives in Easthampton, Massachusetts and when not teaching writing at Springfield College, or printing, he can usually be found wading and fly fishing one of the area's good trout streams. He is the editor, publisher, and printer of Adastra Press, which specializes in hand crafted chapbooks of poetry. His recent chapbooks are *Greatest Hits* 1980-2006 (Pudding House 2007) and *Francis d'Assisi* 2008 (Finishing Line 2008).

Thomas Micheal McDade is a computer programmer in the wholesale plumbing industry. His work has most recently appeared in *Boiling River and Lines + Stars*.

Mary Nork is a retired high-school guidance counselor and a thirty-five year resident of Reno. For the past four years she has been a student in the Art Department at Truckee Meadow Community College, currently taking a ceramics class.

Kelly Ogilvie is a Biology major at Truckee Meadows Community College. She enjoys painting, writing, and zombie movies. She lives in Reno with her two pet rabbits.

Breanna Rasmussen is a student at Truckee Meadows Community College.

Noelle Robinson is a student at Truckee Meadows Community College.

Nathan Slinker graduated from the University of Nevada, Reno's creative writing program. He currently lives and writes in Reno. His work has been published in *Brushfire, The City of Reno Review*, and *The Nevada Sagebrush*.

Rochelle Smith is a writer of poetry and nonfiction. Originally from Trinidad and Tobago, she has an M.F.A. in poetry from the University of Idaho, where she is also a reference librarian.

Jessie Stipech is a student at Truckee Meadows Community College.

George Such's poetry has been published in *The MacGuffin, Lullwater Review, Red Wheelbarrow, Plainsongs, Sierra Nevada College Review, The Chaffin Journal, Windfall*, and *Exit 13 Magazine*; and is forthcoming in *HazMat Review, Tigers Eye, Hiram Poetry Review, Roanoke Review* and *Sante Fe Review*.

Joy Wong was born in Boston, Massachusetts and is currently a student focusing in photography. She has been studying photography for three years and plans to study much more.

Jennifer Yeatts received her M.A. from Northern Michigan University and is currently pursuing an M.F.A. in poetry from the University of Idaho.

Submission Guidelines

How to submit to the Meadow

We **accept only e-mail submissions**. Submit your work as described below to meadow@tmcc.edu. We only read submissions from Labor Day and Valentine's Day—any unsolicited manuscript sent outside of our reading period will be deleted without response.

Sponsored Cash Prizes
In past issues, the ASTM student government of TMCC has sponsored cash prizes for the winners of the Meadow literary, art and design contests. Through a blind submission process, the editorial board chooses finalists in four categories: fiction, poetry, nonfiction, art/photography and cover design. An independent committee selects the first-place winners from among the student body. Only TMCC students are eligible for prizes.

Specific Guidelines

We welcome submissions of poetry, fiction, screenplay, nonfiction, artwork, graphic design, comics and photography, preferably high-contrast artwork that will reproduce well in print. We only accept submissions as e-mail attachments (in .doc or .jpg format). **Exception:** cover design contest entrants please send a PDF.

All submissions in all categories must be accompanied by contact information (name, address, telephone, e-mail) and a brief (less than 35 words) biography. Do not include the author's or artist's name on the work itself. Put this information in the separate cover letter that includes the above contact information, which can be within your email text. All submission are considered blind without author's name.

We will accept up to six poems, photos or art pieces or two works of prose from each author or artist. We prefer that prose works not exceed 3,500 words.

Note: We cannot accept original artwork of any kind. Please scan the larger pieces, then send the file via e-mail attachments. We prefer high-quality digital photos and art reproductions, 300 dpi preferred, files no larger than 5 MB.

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