

# Thin Air

M A G A Z I N E



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MAGAZINE

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Northern Arizona University

Thin Air

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# Thin Air

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All submissions should be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Submissions from other countries should be accompanied by a sufficient number of international postal reply coupons. Please query before sending book reviews and interviews.

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## commonplace book

"The body says what  
words cannot."

-Martha Graham

"Find the shortest, simplest way  
between the earth, the hands and  
the mouth." -Lanza de Vasto

"I do not want any government making  
decisions regarding what I can put into or do  
to my body." -Moby

"God, there is beauty  
in every body."

-Sherman Alexie

*"The body is shaped,  
disciplined, honored, and  
in time, trusted."*

-Martha Graham

"If anything is sacred the human body  
is sacred." -Walt Whitman

"Hell is oneself." -T.S. Eliot

"Alas, after a certain age, every man is responsible  
for his own face." -Albert Camus

*"All of the soarings of my mind begin  
in my blood." -Rainer Maria Rilke*

## Aphrodisiac Aphorisms

if you fondle fruit at the market  
    don't put your fingers in your mouth  
if you put your fingers in your mouth  
    close your eyes and think of paper

on fire paper catches black words  
buzzing in shimmering heat  
    dead crows  
tell riddles of animals crossing roads to mate  
    in the middle of long nights

if you listen to your lover's breathing  
    you can hear the lungs pulse & throb  
if you pulse & throb don't do it in public  
    if you do  
    turn to graffiti walls

papayas don't have teeth  
    those are its onyx seeds  
    when you slice it in half  
watch your tongue for tartness  
    acid will make your gums extra sensitive

if you find yourself in a plantain orchard  
    don't suckle on the hand-like bunches  
the yellowed fruit will fall off to the ants  
    their orgiastic colonies   pheromones

going off      if you pee close to the plants  
    watch out for jumping frogs  
they will stick to your genitalia & spawn frothy eggs

3 months later      in a full

moon   eggs pop like star-bursts  
    tadpoles will swim up the urethra & live  
in your bladder   urchin row can make you horny  
    so can the smell

of Chinese hibiscus      avoid pomegranate  
    mangoes      *mameyes*carambola  
all that juice   dripping      sticky-sweet  
    roll on strewn rice      dream

of cantaloupes in the sunlight  
    secret orifices  
    smile of fruit desire

## Placenta

Like leering puppets dancing  
before his eyes, pirouetting  
and spinning into his skull,  
his despair was always there,  
could never be shielded against  
or masked with new worries,  
it could never be drowned  
in oceans of forced laughter

and he finally relented, trying  
to live with it, accepting it  
like a cold or a hunger, but  
it grew each day it grew, gnawing  
more and more fiercely until  
it became a nascent part of him,  
an embryo feeding in his abdomen  
sprouting arms and legs, steadily  
evolving into full term obsession.

## El Viejo , 1991

We were, you and I, alone  
among drunken frenzied  
dancers fueled by the local beat,  
the sweat, cerveza, their bare legs  
and ours kicked up clouds  
of dust, remote dirt dance floor  
our arms rose to a piece of riddled tin,  
a ceiling, a sky afire, a shroud of black,  
El Viejo erupting.

You were, it is conceivable, banished  
from the monastery for making eyes  
at the toothless women who baked the bread,  
who gave a name to your desire, reunited  
where this mountain licks the sky, cursed  
and hungry, gathering around us dancers,  
a squalling new sky, the earth alive  
with a holy pulse, the grumble  
of gods beneath us.

I return, it was inevitable, deadlines  
in Managua, I razor blade memories,  
rub dust across my gums, fiction of disaster  
laid to rest, I fly north between dream  
and destination, I search for signs of festival,  
destruction, of a world made more beautiful,  
a glimpse of green or blue receding, mountain  
smoldering, and you luminous, dancing  
godlike in the ashes.

## The Tilelayer

arrives too early,  
 plays bad seventies radio music too loud,  
 smokes weed but says Jesus saved him  
 from smack and burglary,  
 and tries to save recalcitrant me  
 over coffee and shredded wheat.

Fifty-six, he says, proud  
 of veined arms and young man's waist,  
 hands hard as claws.  
 You're kidding, I say, though  
 his brown eyes are old  
 as light and pain.

When I return that evening  
 he's already gone  
 and the bathroom floor has become  
 a shimmering pattern,  
 cobalt and bone white,  
 flawed and fine,  
 the silent echo  
 of a single word  
 in the heart of hard matter.

## The Tortoises and the Mayor

We wear articles of clothing  
 as though they were homes.  
 Our shirts are kitchens—  
 our pants, the master bedrooms  
 with fireplaces and Jacuzzis.  
 There is plenty of living room.

A father hides beneath a bed,  
 so he won't lose his pockets.  
 Spooning couples seek shelter  
 from the loose ends filling their shoes  
 and dig themselves into sheets.  
 Alarmed neighbors stretch the midriff  
 material and return to sleep.

The suburban houses, where  
 each family lies buried in laundry,  
 set shelved spandex bodysuits  
 plumbed for the song, the dance.

## Reefer Diamond

1

Diamond Hazelette was 300 pounds in her bra and panties, which was all she happened to be wearing when the swat team surrounded her trailer. She was an observant woman, some would say paranoid, and when she looked out her bathroom window and glimpsed a patch of dark blue moving through the scrub pines, she went and got her rifle.

She had dated a cop once, many years back, when she only weighed about 200 pounds. His name was Chester James, and she wondered if he was out there in the pine trees and poison oak while she slipped shells into her 30/30. Their relationship had ended badly, when Chester gave her cousin Princess a speeding ticket. The way Diamond saw it, what good was screwing a cop if it didn't protect your kin from a goddamn ticket?

She went back to the bathroom, looked back out the window. Nothing moved, blue or otherwise. She sat sideways on the toilet and waited.

Her affair with Chester had ended in the dirt drive out front. She told him her thoughts on sex, law officers, kin, and speeding tickets. He said that Princess had offered him sexual favors to rescind the ticket. Diamond pointed toward the highway, and Chester left. They never exchanged another word and her affection for Princess never wavered. Diamond didn't really blame Princess if she did offer herself. Chester was a good looking man, and Princess was as poor as dirt.

A slight movement caught her eye and she saw a blue shoulder between some pine branches. She aimed two feet above where she guessed the officer's head would be and squeezed the trigger. The roar was deafening in the little bathroom, but she had expected that. She was back in the living room, crouched next to the front door, before the echo faded down the holler.

Halfway up the ridge behind her trailer, on a rounded shoulder that got an abundance of sun, surrounded by thorny locust trees, brambly blackberries, and a ring of barbed wire, was a patch of fifty female marijuana plants. The males were carefully culled so that they wouldn't pollinate the females and turn their blossoms to seed; seedless females yield by far the greatest potency. None of the

plants were less than eight feet tall, and it was still early in the season. The stuff was already mind-blowing, and it was going to get better.

Diamond knew that just one of these plants could cost her five years in prison. She assumed that meant the patch could put her away for well past the end of her natural life. She would rather be shot dead in her trailer.

After a few minutes of crouching next to the front door, it occurred to Diamond that if the cops had simply worn camouflage, as any idiot looking to hide in the woods would do, she would be in custody by now.

"Stupid goddamn cops," she mumbled.

She shook her big head, then looked down at her undressed self. Her enormous bosom stretched her worn and titanic brassiere, and a new pair of vast pink panties rode up her ample ass.

"Damn fool position to be in," she muttered. "Practically nekkid. Wait'll they get a sight a me."

She pictured herself in handcuffs and her current undergarments, being marched through a crowd into the Bevel Springs Police Station, flashbulbs popping like an old movie. The image made her mad, and she shook her head again.

The front door stood open. Her storm door was metal on the bottom and glass on the top. She had never bothered to put a screen in it, so it was a storm door year round. She heard movement, so she looked out front, raising her head just enough to peek out the bottom of the storm door's window. She didn't see anything, no telltale patch of blue.

The sound she heard was the leader of the SWAT team melting into the brush around her trailer. Something told Diamond that sound meant a change in her favor, that it was time to move. And when her animal instincts said go, Diamond Hazelette went.

Still crouching, she slowly turned the handle on the storm door. When it was unlatched, she bunched her legs up beneath her, then gave a mighty lunge out into the daylight. Holding the rifle down at her waist, she fired one quick shot straight ahead, at nothing in particular, then cut sharply to her left, into the nearest patch of trees. When a cop popped up in her way, she knocked him over with a straight arm, then ran right over him. She never looked back.

The cops didn't know about the pot plants. Most of them wouldn't have cared. Marijuana was the moonshine of their era: too many people they knew, or were related to, were smoking it and growing it for them to take it seriously as a law enforcement issue.

They were looking for Willis Hazelette, Diamond's nephew. He was wanted for a bank robbery committed the day before. A tip placed him in the vicinity of Diamond's trailer late that morning, and since there wasn't much else up that way, here they were.

The first shot took them by surprise. Diamond's car was in the drive, but the trailer was so quiet they weren't sure if she was home. "Anyone hit?"

It was the commanding officer, Lieutenant Roy Burkhead, addressing his men over their walkie-talkie headsets. He was in his early fifties, but looked ten years younger. He was six one, lean and rope-muscled, and had steel gray hair and eyes. He was not known to smile much. He was, at this moment, completely in his element.

"Weber, sir. Not hit, but injured anyway."

"How?" Burkhead snapped.

Glenn Weber was a stocky ex-high school football player, gone thoroughly to fat in his thirtieth year. His was the blue shoulder Diamond had spotted. Weber grimaced at his commanding officer's tone, and at knowing the entire SWAT team was listening to this conversation. He shifted his weight some in nervousness, and the pain from his ankle shot up his leg.

"Shit," he hissed.

"Excuse me?" Burkhead hissed back.

"Sorry sir. Mt ankle's torn up."

"What happened?"

Weber paused, sighed, then owned up to it.

"The shot was in my direction. I ducked, slipped on some loose rocks, and jammed my foot against a tree."

Some muffled snickering came over the headsets.

"No humor in this that I can see," Burkhead said, in an even tone.

The snickering stopped.

"Anyone see anything?" he asked.

No reply.

"Weber, I'm coming around for you. Everyone else, lay low."

Burkhead moved further away from the trailer, back into the underbrush, then slipped quickly and almost silently around to the back. He did not expect the ankle to be broken. He knew a bad sprain could hurt enough to convince its victim that a bone had been shattered. But Weber's bulk had come down on his ankle exactly wrong, and left it at an angle that only a broken bone could allow. He wouldn't be limping out of there.

"Shit," Burkhead said.

A long, silent moment passed, with the other men listening intently to the faint static hiss in their headsets.

"Officer James, sir. Is everything alright?"

Lieutenant Burkhead glared at Glenn Weber, then turned his attention back to the ankle.

"The ankle is bad. We'll have to carry him out."

He was considering how to reassign his men when Diamond Hazelette fired again and burst from her trailer.

"Report!" Burkhead barked.

The echo from Diamond's second shot was still rolling down the holler.

"Sweet Jesus, what was that?" someone said.

There was a thumping noise in the headsets.

"Report!" Burkhead barked again.

No reply, just some muffled laughing.

"What the fuck's going on!" Burkhead bellowed.

The echo of the shot finally died. A moment or two passed, then there was a clattering sound in the headsets.

"Officer James, sir."

His voice was tight and cramped-sounding.

"We seem to have disturbed the lady of the house."

Lieutenant Burkhead tried to ask Chester James what he meant, but no one could hear him over the laughter. He waited two seconds, but took off the headset and yelled:

"Shut the fuck up!"

He was unbelievably loud. The laughing ended immediately. He put his headset back on.

"James, report."

"Well sir, Diamond Hazelette came chargin' outta her house an' ran over me."

"Who fired?"

"She did."

"Where is she?"

"She took off up the mountain."

"Well follow her, asshole!"

Burkhead left Glenn Weber where he lay and took off after Chester James. He yelled names and orders into his headset, and pretty soon four men were on their way up the ridge, and three men were securing the trailer. Glenn Weber sat by himself and silently wished he had followed his father into the extermination business.

Chester James did not exert his best effort in the pursuit of Diamond Hazelette. She had left him flat on his back, with his wind knocked out. The truth of the matter is, he didn't see where she went and he didn't want to catch her. The whole truth of the matter is, it was he who had solicited sexual favors from Princess in exchange for rescinding the traffic ticket, and Princess who had refused.

Since telling that lie, Chester James hadn't given it a moment's thought, but now he feared getting caught by it. He suspected Diamond and Princess would have discussed the matter, and Diamond was sure to believe Princess when she denied his accusation, because Princess was a famously bad liar. His head was now full of a scene between himself, Diamond, and Lieutenant Roy Burkhead, with Diamond relating the proposal he had made to Princess. Burkhead was a notorious tight-ass, and Chester felt in his gut there was no way he could slip through unscathed.

So he wasn't running when Lieutenant Burkhead came up next to him. He wasn't even walking. He was just standing in a small clearing, hands on hips, staring off into space.

"Don't tell me you didn't see where she went," Burkhead yelled.

"I'm sorry, sir," Chester replied.

"Oh, goddamn," Burkhead said.

While the Lieutenant studied the ground, the other two officers he had assigned to the chase finally caught up. Burkhead found Diamond's trail, about forty feet to the right, and off they all went.

Officer James brought up the rear. His thoughts alternated between the task at hand and his past sins. He made a sincere prayer that he might find the strength to absolve himself of his misconduct. He was starting to feel a little better when the officer ahead of him yelled:

"Sweet Jesus and Mary, will you look at that!"

They had crossed the barb wire and burst through the briar thickets and come into clear view of Diamond's marijuana crop. Even Roy Burkhead was temporarily distracted, like a bloodhound that accidentally comes across a nice piece of steak.

"Well, boys, I guess we know why she ran," he said.

Which immediately reminded him that they were still on the hunt. He left officer James to guard the weed lest Diamond return, and he took off up the ridge with the two other men in tow.

It was rough going. The first obstacle was the dense thicket they tracked her into. The second problem was Diamond's slippery trail: before they had followed the path to her pot patch, but now they were tracking her over unbroken ground, and she proved quite elusive for a woman the size of a small bear.

They hit their third obstacle when they cleared the thicket. They found themselves climbing off the gentle shoulder that cradled Diamond's herb garden and going straight up the side of the main ridge. They had to grab trees as they went to keep from tumbling backward. Burkhead was astounded that a woman as big and round as Diamond Hazelette could make it up such a slope.

"What's she made of, crazy glue?" he suddenly barked.

The other officers didn't make out what he said. They were too busy gasping for breath. When they found Burkhead waiting at the bottom of a rock cliff, they collapsed at his feet and panted like dogs. Burkhead pointed at the rocks above and said:

"No way that fat bitch made it over this."

Then he stood around with a pissed off expression on his face. He looked up again, then looked one way along the bottom of cliff, then the other. He cursed some, but not very loudly. When his two followers had stopped gasping like beached fish, he sent them south along the bottom of the cliff, and went north himself.

3

Willis Hazelette was nowhere near his aunt's trailer on the morning the SWAT team surrounded it. He robbed a branch of the Blue Ridge Bank the day before, then promptly skipped the state. He had friends in a nasty little law-hating inbred redneck town way up in a dank West Virginia holler. A little graft to the right folks and he was as safe as he would be in Brazil.

He was already drinking in the only bar for thirty miles, and had already bought the half-empty house two rounds. He was

cocky and loud, and was happily swapping outrageous lies with the fellow lowlife that had served as the getaway driver.

Over the bar, the evening news came on the television. No one paid any attention to it until a newscaster mentioned Willis' name, then a church-like hush descended. The bartender glided over to the set and gently turned up the sound. Willis smiled like a baby while the newscasters and two field reporters breathlessly related the details of his crime and the ongoing manhunt. He savored every detail, and the bar crowd seemed to bask in his reflected glory.

When Diamond's picture suddenly appeared next to the male newscaster's head, Willis grinned in friendly recognition.

"How do, Auntie," he almost yelled.

Nervous laughter went around the room. The photograph was an older shot, taken when Diamond got a short-lived job at Wal-Mart. She probably only weighed about 250 or so. Then the anchor started her story.

"They're calling her Reefer Diamond, the marijuana queen of central Virginia."

Willis' face collapsed into a worried frown, and his fans made a murmur of anxiety. The newscaster smirked while he described the events at Diamond's trailer, and practically leered when he stated what she was wearing when last seen. He smirked some more when he mentioned that she had knocked over an officer when she burst from the trailer.

"And as fate would have it," he intoned, "*that officer* –

He made a big show of looking at the other anchor, who was off-camera.

"- you're not going to believe this, Jen –

He turned back to the camera.

"- but that officer was a *former boyfriend*."

The screen cut to a wide shot of the two anchors laughing and shaking their heads.

"That's just *too much*," the vaguely-Asian looking female anchor said.

"Tell me about it!" the male anchor replied.

He was a black-haired, chisel-chinned back-slapper who had started out covering sports. He went on with the story about Diamond, and when the screen showed DEA agents chopping down Diamond's patch, Willis almost fell off his stool.

"Goddamn, Auntie!" he bellowed.

The male anchor wrapped up the story with another smirk while

he said that Diamond was still "at large," then frowned intently while relating that she was considered armed and dangerous. Despite his attempt at seriousness, it was somehow apparent that he didn't see how a fat lady like Diamond could be any sort of trouble.

Willis had never before had an opinion on the man, but now he hated him. Willis Hazelette, carefree despite being the subject of an FBI manhunt, now had something to worry about.

"Aw, damn," he said. "Aunt Diamond's gonna kill me."

The room fell silent. The bartender glided back over to the set and eased the volume down. He drifted over to Willis and caressingly served him a fresh beer. Willis looked up into the older man's face, which was a mess of lines and small scars.

"That's just how she is, you see. She's gonna be hoppin' mad 'bout all this, an' someone's gotta be blamed. It's gonna be me, I jus' know it. Hell, this is a damn lousy break."

He chewed on his fingernails for a bit.

"She was talkin' 'bout buildin' a house. She hates livin' in a trailer. Wanted a real roof over her head. I asked her where she was gonna get the money, she just laughed at me, said it wasn't my business."

He gave up on his fingernails and looked up at the television.

"Guess I went and made it my business."

The bartender waited till Willis' last words had faded, till the young felon's face had softened slightly.

"But Willis, whatcha so worried about? No one knows yer here. How she gonna find you?"

Willis glanced at the old man, with both sheepishness and resentment, then snorted lightly. He turned his attention back to the television set.

"Who d'ya think told me 'bout this place?" he finally said.

4

She hadn't meant to run to her pot patch, but when she took off up the ridge, her feet went the way they knew best. The last of it, through the thorns and briars and over the barbed wire, wasn't easy half-naked. She was scraped and scratched all over.

But that wasn't the worst of it. Once she got there, she realized it could be a dead end. She had always gone in and out but one way, and the far side of the plot was particularly dense and

brambled.

“Goddamn my fuckin’ luck,” Diamond muttered.

She gave herself a moment to think. She didn’t hear anyone behind her yet, and her hearing had always been acute. She took stock of her situation: she was nearly naked and penniless. She needed clothes, cash, and transportation. She looked longingly at her marijuana plants. They were going to be her ticket out of that trailer, the down payment on the little two bedroom house she was going to build herself. The way the crop had turned out, it could have financed the entire construction.

She put down her rifle and stepped out of her panties. She used the pink cotton underwear to wrap up a bundle of buds from the nearest plant. They were as green as cash and almost as liquid. She stuffed the package into her cleavage, picked up her rifle, jumped the barbed wire with considerable grace, and disappeared into the thicket towards the top of the mountain. The thorns worked hard on her, but she kept her mouth shut and slipped through surprisingly fast.

It took Diamond about two hours to scramble over the ridge and make her way down the valley on the other side. She passed a hunter along the way – a poacher actually, considering that nothing was in season – but he didn’t notice the 300 pound near-naked woman who watched him from behind a pile of rocks. She glanced down at her buff-colored legs and white pelvis and thought *damned fool catch a glimpse a me, he’d think I’s a white-tail deer.*

Diamond had a friend who lived in this valley, a black woman named Lula Granger. She wasn’t as big as Diamond, but she was big enough that Diamond hoped she might be able to squeeze into some of Lula’s clothes. Lula’s door was open and the screen door wasn’t latched. Diamond knocked on it for a little while, then walked inside.

“Lula?” she called.

There was no answer. Diamond left her rifle next to the front door and checked all the rooms, which didn’t take long because there weren’t many of them. Lula wasn’t home. Her truck was in the drive, so she was probably out on foot. She made extra money gathering roots and herbs.

Diamond went to the kitchen and found a baggie for her dope. She took the bundle from her cleavage and unwrapped it. The heady aroma of fresh-picked marijuana filled the room. Diamond put her panties back on, then said:

“That’ll make m’ privates smell nice.”

She put the rewrapped pot back in her cleavage and went to Lula’s bedroom in search of clothes. She found some blue jeans and a tee shirt that looked appropriate for avoiding the law. She tried them on.

“Goddamn, Lula, yer gettin’ as fat as me.”

The pants hung about two inches above her ankles, but otherwise the fit was tolerable. She had less luck with shoes; Lula’s feet proved two sized too small. Diamond had almost resigned herself to staying barefoot when she came across a nice pair of men’s work boots that weren’t too huge. Lula had never married and the boots looked fairly new. Diamond wondered who Lula was keeping company with.

There were a few dollars in an old coffee can on the dresser. Diamond stuffed them into a pocket. She found the keys to the truck under a soap opera magazine. This was the hard part – she had no problem making off with clothes and small money, but stealing Lula’s wheels seemed pretty low indeed. The truck wasn’t worth more than four or five hundred bucks, but that was a lot of money to a woman like Lula, and it would leave her stranded.

Diamond snatched up the keys and went back to the kitchen. She pilfered some food for the road, retrieved her rifle, and went out into the drive and climbed into the old pickup. She turned the key and the engine churned and shrugged into action. Diamond stepped on the gas and started down the old rutted holler road. She bumped along for the three miles it took to reach blacktop. Then she sat at the stop sign and looked up and down at the two-lane country highway.

She turned south and eased the truck up to fifty. It didn’t rattle as much as she expected. After a mile or so, she turned on the radio. A lady country singer moaned plaintively about a love that wasn’t true, and then the news announcer came on. He talked about the stock market and the Middle East and some other crap that Diamond didn’t care about. She took her foot off the gas when she heard him say:

“Next, they’re calling her Reefer Diamond, the marijuana queen of central Virginia. Stay tuned, and we’ll tell you more.”

Her foot was still in the air, hovering over the pedals, and she was slowly drifting to a stop. A little sedan came up close behind her, braked hard, then jumped on the gas and zipped past. Diamond flinched as it went by, then pulled over on the side of the

road, put the truck in park, and waited for the commercials to end.

When the news came back on, she sat frozen through most of the story, her head canted toward the big speaker in the dash. They covered it completely, starting with the manhunt for Willis and climaxing with Diamond's coronation as "the marijuana queen." She only reacted once, chuckling quietly to herself when they related how she had run over her former boyfriend. In all the excitement, she hadn't recognized Chester James. He was just a man in blue in her way.

When the story was over, she sat still for another minute or two, through the rest of the news and into the sports. Her face was alternately dark and ecstatic.

"Willis, you stupid bastard," she finally said.

Diamond put the truck back in gear and swung out onto the asphalt. She plucked Lula's sunglasses from the visor and tried them on. She looked at herself in the big outside mirror and smiled with wry satisfaction.

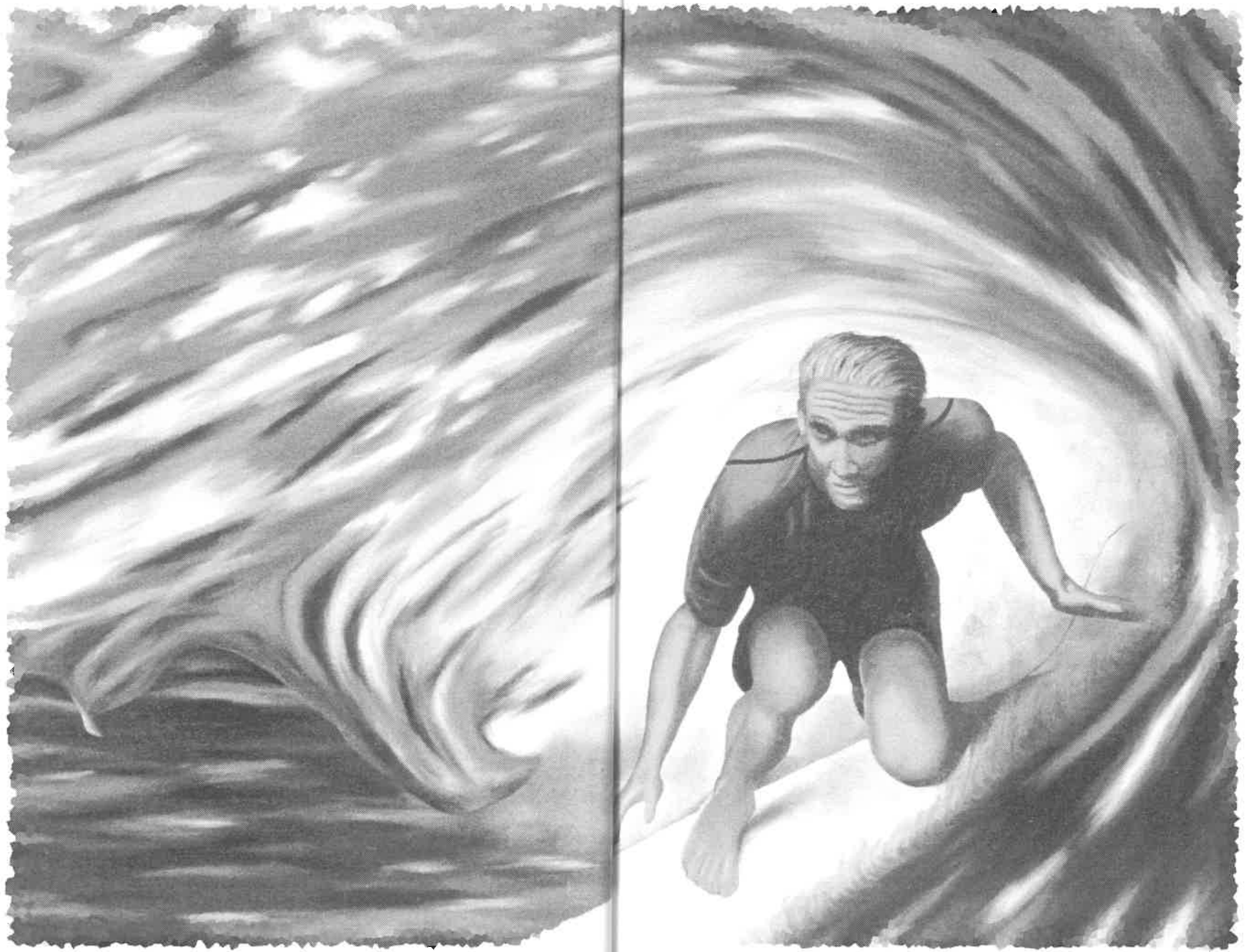
At the next crossroad, she turned west. She jacked up the volume on the country music station and sang along the whole way to the state line. As she passed the beat up old sign that said "Welcome to West Virginia," she bellowed at the top of her lungs:

"Watch out, Willis, you stupid bastard. Reefer Diamond's comin' t' getcha."

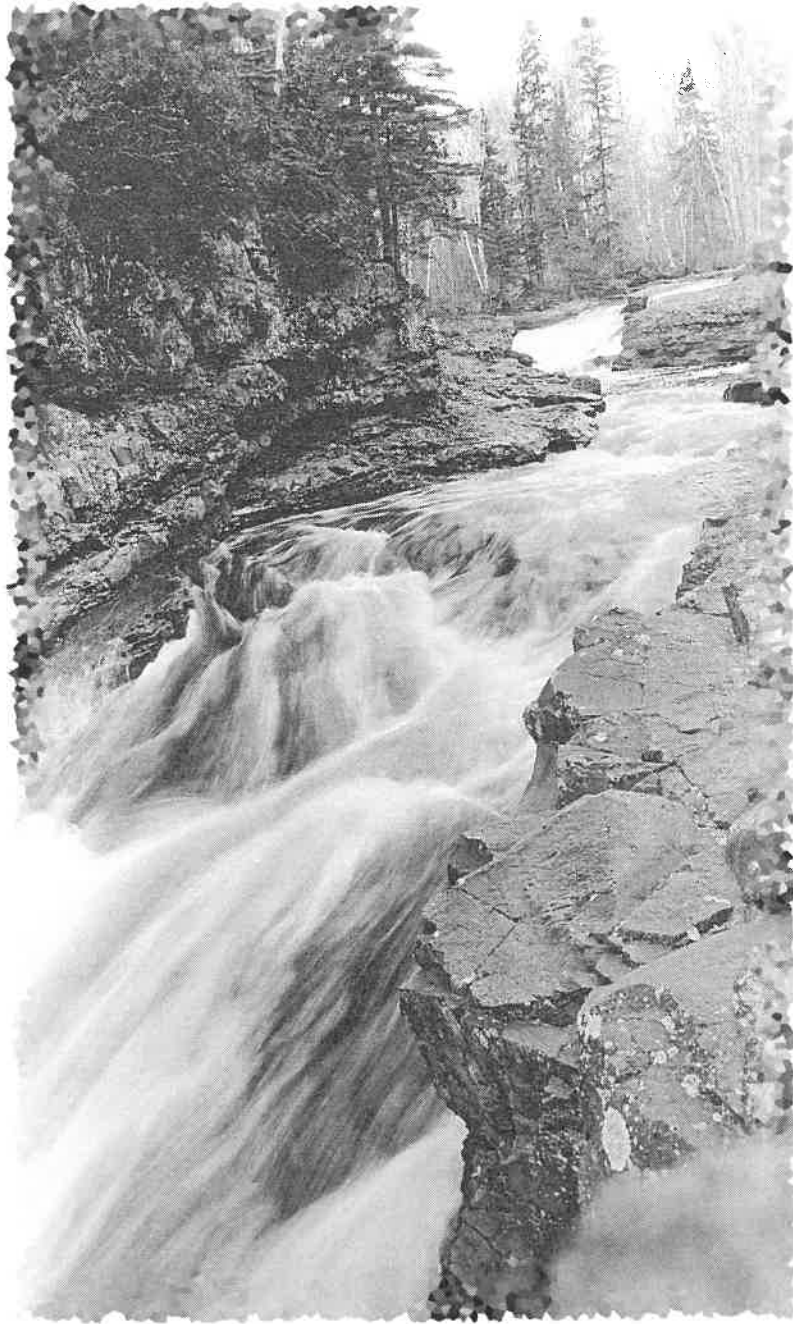
She was still laughing a mile down the road.



*My Spirit Divided* by Tabitha J. Adams



*Chris in Tahiti* by Robert-George de Stolfe



*Temperance River* by Sara Lustig

## When They Harvest Me

In the past, it was perfunctory:  
 pressing the pupil-sized pink DONOR dot  
 onto my new drivers license, donating  
 at death “any of my organs, tissues or parts.”  
 This year I hesitated. Death doesn’t seem distant  
 any more. As my friend Al says,  
 “Guys our age are dropping like flies.”  
 Gene Siskel, brain-tumored,  
 born but a few days before me in ‘46.  
 I’m risk-factored: blue-eyed, bald,  
 round bellied, a father dead at 61.  
 And I grow squeamish contemplating  
 the surgeon’s scythe and the coroner’s cold table.  
 Even injections leave me pale and perspired,  
 and at a sky burial in Lhasa, I had to look away  
 when Tibetians carved two corpses into pieces  
 and ground their bone into powder  
 before summoning vultures to supper.  
 But I pushed the dot into its place and let pass  
 my somber thoughts. And then this:  
 a newspaper investigation. “Fierce Wars  
 Waged over Cadavers” “Families Not Told  
 How Donations Are Used” “Donors Don’t Realize  
 They Are Fueling a Lucrative Industry.”  
 Catalogues showcase 650 products born of body parts.  
 A single dead body can bless a businessman  
 with a profit of thousands of dollars:  
 corneas, \$4,800; tendons, \$21,400;  
 knee cartilage, \$14,000; base bones, \$28,820;  
 femurs, tibias and radius shafts  
 shaped into screws, dowels and spacers

for bone implants, \$80,000; and four square feet of skin, cut into grafts for plastic surgery, \$36,500. All of it donated by idealists like me who want to help the blind to see, and the short of breath, to experience anew the pumping and pulsation of a healthy heart and lung. We imagined our skin would patch the body of a burn victim, not become the clay of cosmetic surgery: filling out flat lips, and adding inches to a penile implant. What should I do then? Take my heart valves, veins and skin into the oven with the rest of me? No, let them harvest what they want! Let them glean my patellas and hemi-pelvises! And if I can be promised in advance that my skin—now leathery and liver-spotted—will put pouted lips on a woman's face and strengthen her lover with width and length... If I can be assured that those lips will purr a warm, fragrant breeze that will turn my skin taut... then I will petal my license with pink.

## What Mary Queen of Arkansas

*for philippa fallon*

There is a bright light at the end of a long corridor. You don't know where you are, exactly, but its name is nonetheless on the tip of your tongue, like the name of the boy who knocked you over in the cafeteria when you were eight. He had apologized and helped you up, picked your *Adventures in Reading* off the floor and straightened the grocery bag cover before handing it back, his eyes flicking into yours, then away. Perhaps you never knew the name at all.

You are moving slowly, slowly, and the white-on-white geometric shapes on the walls are racing past, and there is a brief glimpse of window but the air outside is only as bright and gray as it is everywhere else. Someone nudges past on the conveyor belt, pretending to be anxious about a departure, nearly tripping over your suitcase—basic black, a present from your last family, 20% off at Target—and hurries on without looking around.

The name will not come, though you try to force it; squeezing the lobes of your brain only pushes it further into darkness. You want to ask someone, but are afraid of their condescension, like a time-traveler having to ask the year or the name of the president. The very thoughts of someone smirking makes some dwindling part of you want to weep, although your eyeballs are hot and dry. You keep forgetting to breathe. Two knots of tense muscle are lodged between your shoulder blades, as if wings are growing there, about to burst through the skin. It has been 146 hours since you slept.

Close your eyes. Relax.

There is more time now, as if we had all come out of the mouth of the cornucopian horn and happened upon all of it, it all being so much more than we ever thought. There is time now to eat and drink, time to be calm in the face of chaos. No one honks, even in the worst traffic. There is time to play on the swing sets in the park that have always hung so vacant and dumb; to talk to your neighbors if you have neighbors while you water the roses if you have roses.

There is time to wash your car, to learn French or physics or classical guitar, to take up every enthusiastic dance fad of the barely dead century, from the Black Bottom to the Boogaloo, from the Monkey to the Macarena—to learn them and dance them, spasmodically, in an orgy of defiantly useless cultural gorging, of haphazard half-assed shamanic ritual, reissued still in the original packaging, sanitized for your protection.

Sanity. This is another thing there is now time for. What time is it, right now? No one knows, actually. What time is it when you begin, at last, to understand time, to give time, to live with time and not spend all your time trying to kill time before time kills you? *You*, shouted the man standing on the curb, rolling up the cuffs of his khaki overcoat, not really looking at you (he had no eyes), ivy growing out of his forehead—*you, you, dewyeweveno whutime is fo?*

There is time, now, to take off your clothes and look at your own body. The body you have never been shown (and you must be shown everything, you big dumb monkey), the body you have never been shown to look at without judgment, precarious and deafening. Why are you not Kate Moss, you incompetent jerk? Why are you not Tony Robbins? Why? You look at certain people in the supermarket with a speculative air—people wearing garments of flowing flammable fabric, taking up entire aisles, swaying like Sequoias in a languid wind—an air they have learned to recognize, to which they have become resigned. You are sorry you are fat, though you are not, but you are glad that you are not *that* fat.

Sacks of gluey lipids, vacuumed from the asses of the terminally wealthy and indulgent and displayed on the movie screens, make you recoil in horror as from nothing else, not even from pictures of small brown children with flies crawling over their indifferent eyeballs. The body leased so long ago you may at last examine at your leisure, uncoily, having world enough and time, uncoiling one black spiral after another, delegates from a planet where everything interesting flows from a spiral or into it: your obvious genes; your jeans, twisted obviously on the floor where flung after sex but before laundry; seeds in a sunflower, bubbles rising in an IV bag, trips around and around the hardened protein of a snail, a conch, the horns of unicorns (which exist, even you have always known that, you small cynical child you), the legs of Barbara Stanwyck descending a staircase, infallible profile

in tow.

Examine your body, its many diversions. The face that is merely an anus (you worm you), the charming half smile of cicatrician button upon your belly and upon everyone's, the golden crown on your left top wisdom tooth, inscribed with your initials—MP—so that you, too, may feel secretly hard and street. Not gwine be unremarkable forever, no, no. Today is tiny tatas, but tomorrow is a king sized bust. What time is for? To rise above it all, and inspect your own body like an obstetrician, like an alien, like a god. And then to decide that your ass is, after all, fat.

Which was how it all began.

Mr. Banks was eventually hired back at the bank but refired decades later for writing bad checks, despite having come up with a brilliant code coda to the compliancy program that made everything okay again for everybody.

Let's go fly a kite, he said. Everyone did, or at least they thought about for a fraction of a nanosecond. How can we help it, hopeless mirrors that we are? He became an accountant, and you go to see him in his basement office on Mission and Angelico five hours after it begins. He remembers you. You took care of his children once, a very long time ago. They are dead now, but he will take care of you anyway.

"Liquidate," you say. "I want it all."

He seems to understand you. A lot of people had been in to see him that day.

Seven-and-a-half hours into the new millennium, you see the girl's ass. You are walking home from the party because you need the exercise, the party had been your last hope for emo-historical significance. It had proved nothing of the kind; had, in the end, been like any other party, full of confetti and beer and awkward intimate moments. And had not actually been the end, either, the end people had been quietly hoping for—or the beginning— or much of anything but a muddle.

You are walking, blinking slowly, half hung over with sleepless

hours and drink, a tranquility of sunrise settled over your shoulders, Aurora's fingers in your hair. The taxis have all gone into hiding. There are other people on the street, all looking at each other out of the corners of their eyes like strangers, which they are.

The girl comes to a complete stop a few feet ahead of you, frozen mid-step, arresting you too, your eyes dragged away from the heart that illustrates the terminus of spine, protesting their innocence—*but officer I never saw the sign, honest!* She turns to meet her reflection's eyes in the window of a Starbucks, shudders once and then falls like a tree to the sidewalk, begins ripping at her hair, her mouth open in a twisted, soundless scream. You wonder for a moment if you have gone deaf, or mad.

You have never seen an epileptic fit before, but you assume that this is what it is. Frothing at the mouth, eyes rolled back in sockets, flailing and so on. You are about to kneel down and do something with her tongue—though you are not sure what, and afraid she will bite you—when she stops fighting herself like a rabid dog. Standing up calmly, she begins taking off her clothes, tossing them one by one into the gutter: the dark green cashmere sweater with a navy v-neck, the Sulka camisole, the strapless bra, the black Anne Klein loose-weave linen trousers, the Blahniks. Two rings, four earrings and a slim silver watch. A clutch purse. A nose ring. Clink. The city is silent.

People have stopped to watch, saying nothing, waiting for the first move that will justify their own. You don't know what your reaction ought to be and feel vaguely resentful, wishing she could have postponed this idiocy, done this in front of someone else. If this is performance art, you are bored, dammit. You just want to go home and try and sleep and not have to think about this anymore.

But you are a social contractor, you have been raised right. You go to her, try to take her in your arms. Her skin is yellow, darkening to bluish-black around the eyes. Black-eyed Susan, you think, a delicate flower, and then she looks into your eyes and lets out a long whisper of breath—*yoooouuu*—and goes limp. That is all. You have never held a dead person before. It is not as bad as you would think.

But in that moment—and you are aware of this—something has

passed from her to you, something that you will now have responsibility for, like a baby or a cherished animal. Or a disease.

Which is what they are calling it now. "All Things Considered" did a piece on it a few days ago, and Howard Stern, cutting-edge pop maven that he is, has been talking about it since the 3<sup>rd</sup>. Conan did a joke about it last night and got even more irate calls that the time he referred to Annabel Chong as a misunderstood genius. You would not know about any of this, because you have stopped listening to the radio and watching TV, and haven't read the newspaper in weeks—but for the clipping from the *New York Times* a stewardess dropped into your line of vision, where your head rested on the meal tray. The clipping coined the term "aggressive apathy" and called upon us all to remain calm. You have never felt calmer in your life. You crumple the clipping into a ball and eat it, then put your head back on the tray.

The plane would never take off, you thought, and the clipping would never make it out of your body. After a while you wonder off the plane and sit in the lounge for a while. No one is on duty, so you pour yourself a large glass of straight gin and forget to drink it. Then you get on another plane, Your umbrella sits across your knees. They don't usually let you take it on the plane, as it could theoretically be used as a weapon, but the security had been lying with its collective face down on the floor when you went through, drooling on the carpet, and didn't seem to mind.

Like anything else, it was nice at first. When you stop having to treat yourself to indulgences of food and sleep, there is suddenly much more time for everything else. It never goes away or diminishes, this huge bundle of hours—diurnal and nocturnal time equally accessible, like a large Denny's menu, full of meals that cater to the disoriented. But day by day you are covered with another layer of thick amber resin, until your life becomes a Rembrandt painting that has changed hands too many times: cracked, its subject almost unrecognizable, and dirty, dirty.

Maybe you will get out of here before you die. There is all the time in the world now, which means that there is no time at all.

You owned a canary named Pearla for almost seven months. You had seen a movie once when you were a child that intimated that

they were good things to have in case of an emergency. You agreed, finding them more cheerful than gas masks. An emergency was coming; everyone knew that, though they could not picture its face. Pearla never warned you about it, though she had been singing less and less in the darkly ignominious days of December. But she has been good company, overall, and the person you were a week ago would have felt bad about letting her go, though a week ago you would have not have let her go.

Before you leave your apartment forever you put all your money into your underwear, knowing that in a few days you will probably have lost your purse. The crotch of your jeans bulges with hundreds; you like having so much power, so readily at hand. Then you open the cage door. You sit on the floor and eat a bowl of Cocoa Puffs, as the bird flies around and around the apartment in delicate frenzied circles.

You put the cereal in your mouth automatically, not tasting it, your eyes on nothing in particular. It feels like a last supper, and so you are too anxious to taste it, or maybe it doesn't taste like anything and never did, or maybe your gustatory neurological functions have shut down. You can hear a lot of things shutting down now, like machines in a factory, one by one. Not just inside your own head, but everywhere; the thunk and whine of extinguished power, ticking in silence, the subtle absenting of one small voice at a time, in a chorus of moles.

You have forgotten to open the windows, but it is already too late. As you wonder around the house wondering where you left your suitcase, you come across Pearla's body lying on the carpet, beak still moving spasmodically, the clear blue sky reflected in the eyes over which a thin membrane of eyelid is beginning to close. But her brain is very small; she probably felt nothing beyond the moment of impact, was probably dead before she knew what had happened. You look at your watch, but it is missing from your wrist, and you have no tan mark to prove it was ever there.

But you. Wherever you go, there you are. This is more or less inevitable, as you never go anywhere. You have been in the same airport for days. Consider yourself lucky—a man once lived at Orly airport for thirteen years. People all over the world sent him small

sums of money, and sanitation workers gave him their lunches, but he must have experienced a tortured plasticity of existence during his stay that the rest of us cannot even imagine.

You think about him for awhile, while lying on the floor under a group of chairs welded together. There is no chewing gum stuck to the bottoms of those chairs; you might as well be in Singapore. Or just a place with conscientious sanitation workers.

You are sitting on yet another plane, one that is supposed to leave for someplace, sometime, if the pilot ever turns up. Reno, you think. Others are on the plane with you, no one you recognize—men and women in coarse burlap tunics and hair shirts, bleeding from whip wounds and sword cuts, waiting patiently for something to happen, eyebrows raised a little in anticipation, whispering excitedly amongst themselves like children on their first class trip: "Is this the end?" "No." "Is this the end?" "No." "How about now?" "No." One holds his head in his lap like a carry-on; there are severed hands and detached eyeballs everywhere, extended a little out into the aisle in a show of casual humility, "Oh, this? Ain't nothin' but a thing."

Maneuvering carefully between the grotesqueries with the air of a veteran steward is the man in the Khaki overcoat. He still has no eyes, he has no face at all, only a chalk-white façade with the merest slope where once might have been a nose. Ivy grows out of his skin, through his long black hair, leaves poking out from under the cuffs of his coat and pants. Your stomach curdles with the beast of fears, an emotional motion you thought was no longer possible. He lays a heavy hand on your burning head and then, somehow, miracle of miracles, you are asleep.

"Is this the end?"  
"No."

When you awake, the plane is empty; the saints, if that is what they are, have disembarked and gone to wait in the VIP lounge. This is what he tells you as he serves you your first meal, the #3 Vegetarian Delight. It lives up to its name—the potatoes *au gratin* melt in your mouth; braised tofu and broccoli curry have never been this succulent. Large tears you didn't realize were in you slide down your cheeks and onto the double-fudge walnut brownie. You eat it anyway. It is

wonderful. You can't stop crying, though after awhile, you do.

The jovial Mr. Ivy takes the blanket gently from your lap, folds and tucks it away in the overhead, returns your tray to the upright position, unbuckles your seat belt. *If you can't fly the plane, you'll have to get off.* You can't argue with this logic, although you have spent your entire life trying.

So this is what euphoria is like. Your skin feels naked, tender; your eyes jealously chasing every light wave; your fingernails have a life of their own. Your brain is speaking in tongues. No one will ever tell you what to do again, and this is terrible, but this is.

You step through the doorway of the plane into forever, into the dazzling aqua light of the LAX mid morning tarmac; birds are singing cheerful hosannas and everywhere, everywhere people are waking up, blinking at each other, knowing none of it was a dream. Your heart surges in your chest with joy, and you raise your arms in an earnest victory salute, feeling like a conductor, like a defiant Nixon, like an exasperated Christ. Like you.

## Monumental Lingerie

When Christo wrapped the Reichstag  
in iridescent nylon  
girdled in shiny dacron rope  
the fabric draped like marble  
clothing Ocean and her daughters  
swirling waters stilled forever caught in stone

Just as you dressed like a virgin  
in your wedding night ensemble  
were more lovely than a Kore  
or a Botticelli goddess  
surfing on her conch shell  
on an undulating froth of liquid lace

The Reichstag now stands naked  
Your nightgown's been recycled  
When our children playing dress-up  
wrap the yellowed silk around them  
the lace hangs down like seaweed  
from the baleen of a whale

Art is only a reminder  
of the beauty of impermanence  
Still some moments live forever  
in the memory of a lover  
like the image of your beauty  
chiseled deep into my soul

## Electric Totem

In the mud hut  
 where Esther and I  
                                   made love  
 she kept a gray whale  
 carved from bush cow's horn  
                                   with a red bulb inside  
 that flashed on and off  
 and off. When she came  
                                   she closed her eyes so tight  
 her nose wrinkled,  
 and always laughed  
                                   just afterward.

## Man Diet

I'm on a diet—now don't run off  
 or turn the page like I don when women  
 say that (especially thin ones.)  
 I'm on a Man Diet  
 and it's about time.

Let *them* eat cake—I'll  
 cram down men. I'm gluttoned,  
 they get stuck in my throat, you  
 can smell them on my breath.  
 I'm dizzily sick from sinking  
 eager teeth in, nibbling and sampling,  
 wiping crumbs from the pan,  
 sucking dipped fingers long after the taste's gone.

When I was small my mother warned:  
 "Greedy! When you're grown you can eat  
 all the batter you want: you'll get sick, you'll see!"  
 Spoon and bowl before me, I blend forever  
 flour, sugar, butter eggs, vanilla, chocolate bits.  
 Civilized at first, I eat from the wooden spoon  
 then directly with my hands, digging  
 into the sweet lumped clay.  
 I barely get the succulent slime  
 to my mouth, greedily sucking my fingers  
 bowl to mouth to bowl to mouth...  
 and never feel sick, only sated  
 for the moment.

My body belies chaos beneath taut armor—  
sky-high cholesterol, sugars way out of whack  
from all those candy hearts.

I practically vibrate: you can't guess  
my sluggishness after an orgy of gorging  
on fingers, flesh, salt sweat and sweet  
everything else. My eyes, my mouth  
are no menu; you can't read my craving  
for the next feast.

## My Mother's All Too Brief Affair with Rudolph Valentino

Her nose was a dead giveaway. It said she longed for better things. It was a thin, disdainful nose, perched warily upon her peaked face. Her set-back hazel eyes might yearn toward sky or lose themselves in wish-dreams far too nebulous to focus on, but it was her nose that seemed to demonstrate a stance of sorts, even as a barrier to shut the stink out of our bedbug rooms, our tenement's dark urine-smelling halls. Perhaps her eye searched Heaven for a never-never land because the one that she inhabited was hopeless with her gang of kids and not a prayer that a prince's carriage would pull up beside our ruined stoop.

My father railed at Heaven, hurling dinner plate grenades against the peeling wallpaper because of who knows what displeasure with his life, his food, with her - Miss Faraway and would go raging through our cubicles, a rodent trapped by sagging buildings pressing down on him.

At ten I was the oldest of the lot of us. My father used my mother as a mattress which, miraculous, produced us kids. In 1921 this was the norm of things in our closed universe, a paradigm, it seemed to us, for life beyond these walls where cruel nature rained on you at whim, and then, sometimes forgetful, let a random shaft of sunlight in.

I was a runt, a copy of my father, fair game for larger or more daring kids. Whatever *shmatehs* I was clothed with, scrounged from God knows where, were ripped when I'd come home from scuffles in the school halls, stairwells, in the yard. It was the way of things. When you were small or poor or helpless, life took pains to pile more woes upon your back like Johnny on a Pony One, Two Three. Even then I was aware there was some trick you had to know to break the rock of circumstance, make Fortune smile on you.

Movies were invented for my mother, transporting her to some dim

fantasy unfixed before, but suddenly made visible, perhaps not very different from the way she viewed her life. She'd clutch my hand in the dark of the tiny theatre, involved. Oh, see the cozy home and kids invaded by that howling, savage Sioux with tomahawk. That mustached villain, forcing into marriage bed some beauty far too sensitive for him.

And then into her life came Rudolph Valentino in *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*. For me it was a film about the War. For her it was love at first sight. She was his captive from the moment he appeared on screen. When he tangoed with Alice Terry my mother tensed at this so cruel hoax, as though it should be she he tangoed with, he turned his searchlight eyes upon to plumb her soul, he alone who was the mate her dreams all led her to. She'd strain against my arm as though to get herself to him. The tale itself held some redemption for this wastrel who becomes a hero of the War. But on the spot this lover, tangoist, became redemption for her self.

Not that my father couldn't dance the tango. All five-foot-four he knew the latest steps, wore spats to work in sweatshops, and planless used whatever tool would come to hand to break the rock of circumstance. Of course he failed, and bloodied, nursed his grievances until he jimmy-rigged some other tool he thought would do, to learn again that rock is obdurate. Without the trick of looking at things new, brute strength or strategy or pretty face, it's better sometimes not to leave the house. In our cramped dungeon of a hole when he was in a mood to dance, with all of us in watching clumps along the wall, with the Victrola playing and my mother meekly in his arms, how skillfully my father moved her on the bare wood floor this way and that.

And yet who was she thinking of? It was clear then that her heart was lost, her lids at half-mast, white flag struck. Could there be any question that those Latin eyes had searched her bosom, there to find the tenderest sensibilities, brooding eyes that penetrated to her self, her own true self? Perhaps this reverie of hers was all the sweeter since there was no ugly coupling in the valley of a sagging bed and the consequence of yet another mouth to feed.

I write this now with knowledge unavailable to me when I was ten.

And yet - did I not see the most of it, the seething hate that passed between them, their defeat, his drive, her hope, the formless anger at their circumstance beneath?

\* \* \*

And he? The hero of her dreams? At eighteen Valentino had been spit like bile from out the belly of a cow, propelled from steerage to the foot of Liberty and Wall, bearing names more weighty than the *lire* he had carried with him here, laming it before the father of the pregnant girl could get his shotgun out: Rudolpho Alfonzo Rafaelo Pierre Filibert Guglielmi di Valentina d'Antonguolla. Finished finally with all the stink of mange his father's fingers wore from nursing ailing animals! Who needed worthless paper anyway when New York offered gold? Farewell, Castellanetta and its dreary, narrow-alleyed world! Here is a face a hundred girls have given their virginity to love, grown up to be as beautiful as this.

New York with all its spires and possibilities was Heaven to this country bumpkin fresh from cow manure. And yet New York was Hell of clawing others striving toward some prize still cloaked in mystery requiring a step toward any grasp upon a ladder, never mind how tenuous, a foothold on a magical escarpment leading up to untold miracles. Not everyone could find that purchase, just a few. Perhaps he thought that he would be that one - with his imposing names, his pretty face, his trick of lowering his eyes, though anyone could dream the dream. What does it take to vault above the crowd? How does one coax dear Fortune to be kind? Experience with watering his father's roses brought Rudolfo luck. He got a job in Central Park as gardener.

Ill-paid, he never had an empty bed. One glance from his half-louvered eye, one graceful movement of his finger or his head and women fell in love. He took it as his due or his good luck but hadn't yet discovered it was this, this tug on women stronger than the moon, this tug which he inhabited and which invested him, that was to be his talisman, his open sesame.

And there he was in no time flat, a night club dancer, then almost in a straight line to the top, advanced, propelled by debutantes,

their mothers, dowagers with fortunes that they lavished happily. He hadn't been in town three years.

Then just as sudden as his rise, he had to take it on the lam again - these women and their eggs, their terrible propensity for swelling up. He caught a touring company en route to somewhere west. He left, retreating to regroup, without a backward glance of those mesmeric eyes that were to win my mother in her turn so short a time from then. This future Shiek!

\* \* \*

We live in separate worlds, the most of us, each one constructed by ourselves. My mother lived in hers. But in another place, three thousand miles away, real shieks existed, some more shakily enthroned than others, as it's always been. The threads of shieks will circle back to Valentino once we have dealt with history. For in a harbor as the 1800's wane, in what is now Kuwait, there lived a former Shiek, Abdul Aziz, son of the Wahabi sect, Ibn Sa'ud as he now is known. He too inhabited his private world, dangerous at that. His father's father's fathers had once ruled the Nezd, and now he had been forced to sojourn in this place, this busy port, beneath the watchful eye of Al Sabah, as treacherous as *khamsin*, cruel as the frigid sand, brutal as the sun.

We can see the harbor in our mind's eye as he saw it, under rainless skies: in the *kut* the *boums* slice water the way bared scimitars leave severed heads behind them in their wake. If carelessness is cruel think of desert sands no farther from this port than camels travel in a day, sands acid-cold by moon, a grill beneath the ardent sun.

The lowliest in such a hostile land know this: who is to master cruelty must take his satisfaction from the discipline of suffering, must eat it with the omnipresent grains of sand in roasted camel's rump, and drink it with his salty camel's milk, accept its blows unflinching underneath the battering of howling *khamsin* cannonading eyes with sand.

We can imagine how Aziz had plotted his revenge on Clan Rasheed behind his hooded eyes, the Clan Rasheed who turned a *ghazzi* into *harb*. He pondered rules of chivalry. Were they not clear? In

violating them did not we call in question everything? A *ghazzi* always been a raid where men count coup as did Apache braves, while *harb* is war. The escalation with which Clan Rasheed had bested Clan Sa'ud - was that not grave affront to all stability, the way of things, as it is written?

Here we can picture this young man who takes still one more wife to demonstrate his potency in ways his Bedouins will understand so that they'll follow him. Allah in His wisdom has bequeathed us women as His gift! We split and open them and plant our seed. Over all of them our sword of Damocles.

Sa'ud has nurtured his revenge just as a favored wife would feed the son she plots to make the heir. And now he ponders how to slue this game around with forty fickle Bedouins, some horses and no funds

He comes inevitably to: the trick in dicey circumstance - ride out!! What do men do to break the iron rock? When you are poor risk everything! What do you risk but life - a worthless asset, honorless.

Ride out!! He nodded sagely to himself. Not in a *ghazzi* but a *harb* and die in battle like a man or split the enemy in two as if he is a woman you have lain with and no longer want.

In the event, when Riyadh fell before his slaughterous attack he set upon the Nezd. The passage of a dozen bloody years, coinciding with Rudolfo heading west, and hawk-nosed, dark, Abdul Aziz, the Sa'ud's son in white burnoose rules all Arabia, although, what was there to it then but empty, shifting sand?

\* \* \*

We're almost ready for the entrance of our ersatz Shiek! Meanwhile my mother'd waxed as if she batted on his Latin beauty, lowered eye. At first my father thought that he himself had blown her up again. But she was regular as rain as though, now armed with hope around the corner in the cinema where she would tryst with Valentino in the early afternoons, she was impervious to sperm, dismissive words, my father's absences at night. Could she have known she had a random place upon a line ten million women

long who yearned like her for just a touch, a sight of Valentino,  
lover nonpareil, no closer to their dream than she?

Then news of him burst like some starshell in the Telegram. He  
was with this one. That. He'd marry. Shock! Jean Acker was the  
lucky lady. !? His marriage in collapse upon his wedding night!!?  
What had Jean Acker done to him? Fed by the Press each woman  
of the millions must have told herself if she'd been fortunate  
enough to have been chosen by this god she'd hold him safe and  
swaddled in her love and they would dwell in happiness forever and  
a day.

Now who in Heaven's name was Natacha Rambova? Others were  
whispered to have had affairs with him but this one married him!  
And him still technically married to the Acker girl! Arrested on a  
charge of bigamy! Oh cruel, heartless men. How dare they place  
their callous hands on him? What rules of theirs need he obey?  
Could they not see the quality of man they disrespectfully had  
thrown in jail?

Somehow someone saw to it the charges went away. There was too  
much at stake to let this money-making star be sent off course by  
trifling bigamy. And in the latter part of 1921 The Shiek arrived,  
not just an adaptation of a lurid fiction but for my mother, women  
everywhere, epiphany.

\* \* \*

Had Hollywood embraced the creed of cruelty as well, the truest  
means of breaking rock? Only in their way, of lawyers' battles,  
stock manipulation, tossing those who hadn't made it on the pyre  
of this day's rushes, stills. If not, then what attracted them to King  
Sa'ud as he now called himself, this brigand, butcher with his  
*shabriyeh*, whirlwind on a horse? No, it wasn't King Sa'ud the man,  
they thought to capture, carry bound into the boudoirs of America.  
Not him, the harsh reality, the wog, the desert rat, but ah, The  
Shiek!

The Shiek of Araby  
Your love belongs to me,  
At night when you're asleep  
Into your tent I'll creep

And yet - who wouldn't, leading humdrum lives, trade places with  
Agnes Ayres who struggled to protect her chastity, but not too  
hard, from violation by the Shiek? Oh take me, take me from this  
farm, this factory, this town, this tenement, this man who cannot  
understand my depths, my heart. Your eyes alone will ravish me.  
I'll be secure, yet mad with love if you will come for me and take  
me with you to your silken lair.

There is some mystery to it that things discovered by a million  
folks at once impart a pride of ownership to each, so that each  
awestruck eye is certain it has been the first to see this rare  
phenomenon, this thing, this man. It didn't matter to a  
love-besotted world that Rambova had him. How could she keep a  
man like that, a flashing diamond such as he? Surely there must be  
a way to tear him from her greedy grasp.

My mother was now lost to all of us although she seemed to thrive.  
It didn't matter that his later movies bombed, that beauties  
everywhere were linked to him. Of course they were. How could  
they keep away?

As I grew up my mother read each word about the man, then  
reread hungrily. My mother didn't really need him to be hers, not  
physically, to feel his body mounting hers, supplanting husband  
who was by this time at her less and less. Her love was locked  
inside her heart where Valentino was her own more certainly than  
just his presence could provide. No one, no one came between.  
Their love was mutual, how she was sure of it. She had fulfilled her  
dream.

\* \* \*

The headlines screamed that they had rushed him to a hospital!  
Pola Negri threw herself disconsolate upon his ailing body, nurses  
struggling to drag her off. His body! - faced with dangers of  
disease. What could have gone so wrong with him, his body, it!?!  
Why hadn't everyone used care?

I was fifteen the night he died of peritonitis. How simply he'd be  
cured these days when he could have died quite peacefully at my  
age, eighty-six, black hair completely white, skin cross-hatched

with a thousand lines, one eye half-lowered by a stroke. But none of that took place in those dark ages of the doctor biz. He died. And for a moment the whole world stood still. And then the mourning rained in every kitchen of the globe.

My mother couldn't eat, but sat in shock, until she heard there'd be a funeral cortege and so of course she went. We saw the pictures of it afterward in Pathe News and in the Telegram. The never-ending lines of women passing by the bier, each one now burying her own true love.

When she returned to us she'd undergone a change. Sapped and listless now, us fending for ourselves, she'd lost all hope.

How could my father bear to watch her waste away before his eyes? And all for love of someone else? He didn't mind. She was his country, his to overrun whenever he desired to. As for his dreams, by now he knew he couldn't find or fashion needed tools. Perhaps he wasn't harsh enough, or fierce, or else he had a dream too small to matter much, or concentrated on his lot instead of on a world to win, just grasps away.

And I, I've had my chance to break the rock of circumstance. There's few of us who manage it.

## The Platitudes of Handiwork

"You stand up on your own two feet,"  
 My father insisted. "You put  
 One foot in front of the other  
 Until you're there," borrowing from  
 The public domain of maxims.  
 In the bakery, each night, he stood  
 On his own two feet for ten hours  
 Before he brought the platitudes  
 Of handwork home like day-old bread.  
 When his knees quit, when he shut down  
 That store, he offered "Walk, don't run,"  
 Started playing the rich man's game  
 He despised, giving me a set  
 Of clubs, the fundamental grip,  
 And trusting me to walk with him  
 Six times a summer. He lasted  
 Five years like that, five more pulling  
 The clubs behind him on two wheels,  
 Stopping on the day he fainted  
 Into quadruple bypass, woke  
 To the pacemaker and golf cart,  
 Right-angle paths to his short drives  
 Before we search for my slices  
 A week after I've left four months  
 Of crutches and rehab behind.  
 We take steep steps one at a time;  
 The light blinks before we finish  
 A crosswalk, and we say nothing  
 About ordinary pace, how  
 One foot goes before another.  
 I drive him, with his faith in work,

To the latest failed bakery  
In my town. FOR SALE, the window  
And the door repeat. He limps past  
Showcases, the mortuary  
Of cold ovens. By the mixers,  
He stoops to touch the corkscrewed steel  
Evaluating the effort  
Of those bakers the way he might  
Have assessed his own the last night  
He worked dough, not saying a word  
To his customers the next day,  
Embarrassed by quitting, helping,  
For the first time, my mother wrap  
Coffee cakes and sweet rolls, careful  
Not to smear the maple frostings,  
The chocolate, the thick, cream-white.  
Did the platitudes of handwork  
Drift in with the last customers?  
I know, because I brought our car  
At seven, that he stayed open  
Ten minutes more, that enough light  
Hung in the street to make someone  
Believe the Gold Star clock was fast,  
And then he said, "Help yourself," turned  
To clear the cash register while  
A trucker parked across the street  
Climbed in his cab, turned his engine  
Over, switched on his lights, and drove.

## Running Through Directions

We drive west through Snyder County,  
Back roads where the worst students live.  
There, my wife says, recognizing  
Names on mailboxes. There and there—  
Louts and loudmouths, dreamers and dolts,  
Until she murmurs "Robin Snow"  
For the block-raised trailer set back  
On the reclaimed township landfill,  
Nothing that gives up a name but  
The box number from a class card.  
"Raped by the father," says my wife.  
"Fourteen now, offered by the hour  
To his friends." She memorizes  
Details while I watch for the man  
Who lives there, out, at once, on bail.  
I think we aren't the first to stop,  
That by now he grips a rifle  
By the tiny front window where  
He studies the shitheads who see  
The world like tourists, suicide  
Watchers, the stalkers of rubble  
By fire or tornado, except  
Robin Snow took tests from my wife  
And carried her report cards home  
To that father who attended  
Open house, sitting in her desk  
Among the visiting parents.  
A jug-band breath of wind begins  
to hum at my cracked side window;  
A Plymouth veers and parks so close,  
Nose to nose, we seem to tremble

In turbulence, but when I shift  
 To reverse, thinking it might be  
 The last stupid thing I will do  
 With my life, my wife whispers "no"  
 While a man steps out of that car,  
 Checks his watch and shades his eyes  
 To stare toward the trailer as if  
 Running through directions, matching  
 The box number to word-of-mouth  
 Advertising, not the paper  
 He didn't read, the radio  
 Turned off all morning because  
 He wanted to concentrate on  
 Where he was driving, what time he'd  
 Agreed, nights ago, to arrive.

## Letter to James Sullivan

Is it like Rose Maroney's newness,  
 humping under her plaid uniform  
 making her tell the nuns  
 she'd helped in a car crash,  
 you wearing the bloody Trojan  
 home on the bus?

Is it like Twin Falls  
 between Minnesota and Canada  
 when, before the moose  
 swam away with her babies,  
 a strike smoked all the line off your reel,  
 not out but straight down  
 as if the fish sensed some deeper range  
 in the bedrock rapids?  
 You cussing how its side flashed  
 like a buried Pharaoh, dug up  
 then lost in a crevice.

James Sullivan, Boston Boy,  
 you were so Irish,  
 like my Uncle Moon  
 you'd have licked spilled whiskey  
 from a dead dog's ass.

So consumed by travel,  
 it built a museum of your memory.  
 On the walls, paintings overlapped,  
 and the sculptures touched one another.  
 As if connecting to a place  
 kept you in its pulse,

in a Chicago el station  
where the black blind drummer  
sang his made-up song,  
“The Soldiers Got Busted Hearts.”

The year you shot the leader of the V  
and the geese scattered  
and froze before they could migrate,  
we rode rails through the Ozarks.  
You brought a catcher’s mitt  
and broke it in,  
and trained a dog we found,  
and let him go in Nevada.  
From cowboy hats we ate an Irish stew  
where the lamb was browned  
before joining peeled potatoes,  
beef broth, and dried thyme,  
the kind eaten with chapped hands  
rowing home in boats full of seaweed.

I was nineteen, Jimmy,  
walking on the moon,  
farther west  
than my old man had balls for.  
And Sunday before Christmas  
rising over the orchard and vineyard hills,  
the ocean woke me.  
I thought we had fallen into my mother’s eye.  
Is that dying,  
is it like California, Jim,  
with the sun and salt spray,  
and blue sea before the deserted islands?

## The Scarecrow

Twisting, turning  
torn to tatters  
worn ragged  
hues  
once strong  
now bleached by sun  
leached by rains  
whipped by winds—  
stuck on two crossed  
and tilted poles—  
long grayed coat  
flipping  
rakish bowler hat  
nailed on hard  
yellowed scarf  
fluttering  
all hung on the cross  
of poles—  
crucified  
to frighten crows



*Lost in Time* by Robert-George de Stolfe

frank s.  
palmisano III

## The Bachelor's Bible

Have you ever touched Freud?  
Have you ever thumbed the pages,  
unfolding the hair follicles with  
frantic fingers and perfumed palms?

No herbal enhancers—  
He inhales Viagra like oxygen  
and exhales the  
words that bring forth heated  
intercourse, so that he must reassure  
you like a frightened prom date  
that he'll only go as far as you  
allow him.

Distressed that your  
friends will tar and feather you  
with sperm and lace,  
disciples of the *intelligentsia*,  
you're molested  
as each word unties your  
knotted convictions,  
and loosens schoolgirl inhibition.

He twists you like a bottle cap  
into submission—awaiting  
a pressurized eruption,  
carbonated sex.

Under the weight of

analytic scrutiny,  
your legs collapse  
inseminating the  
fertile cavity of thought  
capturing screams  
that once echoed  
retreat, now stifled by  
impotent struggle.

You tried to set the parameters,  
to pace your stride, but the  
verbal orgy enraptures  
your stamina,  
swells your head,  
and libidinal surges  
turn labial urges  
to childhood fantasy.



## Scott

In eighth grade  
we shared innocent kisses  
with some of the same girls.  
Scott played the coronet,  
I played the trumpeter;  
together we marched  
up main street on Memorial Day  
and across the field at halftime.

In the early eighties  
Scott died of AIDS;  
he was among the first victims  
of the virus that raced recklessly  
along Kinshasa highway,  
from the heady crotch  
of Africa to every bedroom  
and backseat on the planet.

Scott died when the plague  
was the televangelists' hysteria,  
a punishment for the sins of gay men,  
before Rock Hudson's hollow cheeks  
drew a last breath on the TV screen,  
before Magic Johnson's big,  
toothy smile quit the Lakers,

before condoms were cast  
like little multi-colored  
life-preservers from parade floats,

before the ignorance and inertia  
of presidents and bureaucracy,  
before the indifference  
to the dirty needle,

before AZT and the cocktail  
dispensed a few spare years,  
before the suburban moms  
and their children,  
pregnant with disease,  
allowed the lesions on their fair skin  
to be tragic and respectable.

Scott died before  
the patchwork of names  
filled the Washington Mall,  
before the quilt could begin  
to comfort the nation.

## Shanty

Shame I can't treasure my skeleton,  
prop it and toss glitter on it,  
lift it and dance around with it.

Shucks that I can't show it off,  
each bone there's a name for,  
my expensive acquisition.

I'd pose it in positions,  
Washington crossing the Delaware,  
Mussolini head-tilt,

with scraps of newsprint in the eye sockets  
and rags in the cranium.  
A red paper heart to hang in the rib cage.

Gosh-darn that I can't see it outside of me,  
my lily-white hinges, ankles  
and scary, bare knuckles.

I'd hoist it off the front porch  
in high winds, let it clatter.  
Make the neighbors nervous.

## Set the Controls for the Jasmine Sliver

The Man in the Moon sings this song:

*"The sea is green, she is my queen,  
The lake is blue, I know it's true,  
The clouds are white, it must be right,  
Stars play by day, take flight by night!"*

I sleep outside, and hear it often.

Would you look at the tree, look at the mountain, look at the  
spiny porcupine. Do you know them? To me, they are as  
indistinct as wheat chaff threshed on a fine October day and blown  
into sifting pyramids in webbed corners.

To know the world, you need a good vantage point, and I don't  
have one.

The Man in the Moon is on to something.

\* \* \*

"T-minus one minute, twelve seconds and counting. External  
tank purging complete. CDR, close and lock visor and initiate oh-  
two flow."

"Roger, initiating oh-two flow." Jackson flipped a switch on the  
panel above his head. It broke off in his fingers, but he didn't take  
it as a bad omen. He could fix it later."

"Roger, standby," He looked over his left shoulder, where the  
window would be when he finished it. "Roger, I can confirm main  
arm retraction." He lifted his visor and drew his hand across his  
forehead. He tried to whistle, but his mouth was too dry.

"T-minus 32 seconds. Discovery's onboard computer sequencer  
now controlling all aspects of the launch. T-minus twenty seconds.  
Solid rocket booster joint heaters now off. Main engine fuel  
pumps primed. T-minus twelve seconds. T-minus ten, nine, eight,  
we have a 'go' for main engine ignition, four, three, two—"

Jackson lurched forward and pressed the *stop* button on the  
cassette player. He rewound the tape and played it from the  
beginning.

"This is Shuttle Launch Control," said the voice – his own – on

the tape. "T-minus three hours, fifteen minutes and twenty seconds to the launch of STS-91..."

\* \* \*

If I remember correctly, I once had a replica Mercury capsule made of cardboard that I could actually sit in. It was remarkably detailed – instruments and switches painted on the inside, an overhead window with Earth painted in, the view you'd see if you were really in orbit. My brother Cale and I loved it. But we were kids and it was made of cardboard, so it didn't last very long. Steve Snyder tore through the side of it on purpose, to make Cale cry. Cale socked him in the jaw instead.

If the Mercury capsule were available today, it would be a big seller. Kids could get inside, and instead of painted instruments, you could have LCD displays, like a video game. It would be a gold mine. But that's somebody else's concern. I've got the real capsule to worry about.

I sat in Barret Park last night and thought about the trip. I wanted to look at the stars, but clouds ruined the view. So I just listened to the planets sing. On a still night, you can hear Jupiter spinning sonatas, and Saturn weaves forceful refrains that sound like church organs playing in canyons of red dust. And don't you know the moon sings too? The notes of his song fall around me like raindrops. He calls me by name and tells me morning will never come.

\* \* \*

Jackson earned forty dollars working for the Labor Bureau, unloading tractor tires from a truck. The job took two hours, and when he was finished, he folded the cash into his pocket and walked to The Home Depot, his favorite store. Here he was no dirtier than anyone else.

He waited patiently for assistance, but none of the employees noticed him. He approached a high school girl behind the Help Desk. She wore a shell necklace high around her neck, above her bright orange Home Depot shirt. Raw acne covered her forehead. She wasn't especially pretty, and the zits didn't help, but Jackson liked the shells, and told her so.

"Thanks, I made it at computer camp. My supervisor doesn't like me wearing it to work, but I'm like, come *on*, it's just a

necklace, you know? So what can I help you with?"

"I need all this." He handed her a list.

"Caulk, okay, that's aisle six. Copper wire, that's nine, I think. Tungsten-carbide plugs, I don't think I know what those are. Beta-titanium screw casings, what the...?" She looked at Jackson.

"They're for the recirculation valves."

"Uh, sure, but we don't have beta-titanium screw casings. Or magnesium-carbide plugs. But you can find the caulk on aisle six and the copper wire on nine."

"Where do you think I could get the other stuff?"

She waited a moment until her supervisor moved away. "Try Lowe's. Do you know where they are?"

"That's a Roger, Houston."

"What?"

\* \* \*

Last night I dreamt that I launched and landed on a fertile sliver of jasmine-scented moon. I sat under the trees with the leaves of prisms that clattered like chimes in the iron wind. A river of liquid holograms wound through the grove, and I waded to my knees in its dyed current. I jumped in the reduced gravity and concocted rhymes as I ran. From the mouth of an ice cave I looked back at the Earth and saw the indentation it forged in the tapestry of space, like a golf ball resting in mud. I could walk and breathe normally, so I discarded my helmet. My hair crackled, I heard the singing, and I planted my flag.

\* \* \*

"Thank you for calling the National Weather Hotline. Your city and state?"

"Cape Canaveral, Florida."

"Thank you. Just a moment, please."

While he was on hold, the phone played a Volkswagen commercial, but before it was over they interrupted it and played "God Only Knows" by the Beach Boys. He sang along until the woman came back on the line.

"Okkaaayyy, your forecast today is partly cloudy with a high of 82. Winds from the southeast, six to eight miles per hour, steady. Chance of rain less than ten percent."

"What about the winds aloft?"

"I don't have that information, sir. Orlando International Airport may be able to assist you with that. Are you a pilot?"

"Yes ma'am."

"Have a safe flight, sir."

"Thank you." Jackson hung up the phone. "It's not a flight, it's a mission."

\* \* \*

I didn't need guidance programs or carbon dioxide scrubbers in the old cardboard Mercury. The older you get, though, the more authentic everything has to be. Gank up one trivial detail, it ruins the experience. Everything has to be rational, linear, right angles, perfect circles, Pythagorean. All questions answered, no imagination necessary.

But it should not have to be that way. I'm not talking about suspension of disbelief. It's more than that—it's a control issue. There is an element of intimidation in the vague, the diaphanous, and there's no point fighting it. You can't be afraid to admit there are wheels turning you know nothing about.

\* \* \*

This time he didn't stop the tape, but turned the volume to its highest setting. At "zero" he closed his eyes and gripped the armrests of this folding chair as the main engines crackled and the solid rocket boosters howled in syncopated bursts through the little speaker of the tape player. "Discovery has cleared the tower. CDR, confirm roll program."

"Roger, roll program confirmed," he said, gasping.

"Solid rocker booster separation in six, five, four, three, two, one. CDR, confirm SRB sep."

"Roger, SRB sep confirmed."

The noise from the tape player faded, and he opened his eyes. The shaking sensation eased.

"Main engine shutdown," the tape said. "Discovery, welcome to orbit."

"Thanks, Houston."

He looked to his left, to the window, and there before him were the brown and green land masses spanned by silver rivers and the

cloud-smear cobalt oceans. A lightening storm boiled above Laos. Australia curved over the horizon, and a crescent moon lorded above it all, nodding like a cork on the foaming seas.

The singing began, sweeter than he'd ever heard, a whispered, swelling melody:

*"The eye of the sun, the heart of the moon,  
The sugar-cream banks of the Perseid river.  
It's not too late, you'll be here soon,  
Set the controls for the Jasmine Sliver."*

The tape player interrupted. "CDR, initiate guidance program for orbital alignment maneuver."

That's a negative, Houston," Jackson said. He reached over his head and flipped the switches he had installed that morning. "This is Commander Jackson Shanahan. Switching to drift mode and setting new coordinates." He leaned over and pecked at the manual typewriter sitting at his feet.

The moon grew larger in his window.

\* \* \*

And it's true, the sea is green. I saw it, and laughed at the enormity of it, and in its fathoms, octopi recline on briny ledges, their tentacles waving in the cold current. On the shore, crabs scuttle from curling waves, and gulls wheel overhead. Far afield, in acres of plowed loam, scarecrows embrace icy thunderheads and anticipate rain. All the world is real, and it's nothing to be afraid of.

Did you know storms over Laos swirl the vines into messy knots?

I rode the starry archipelago, and I never knew the sun was so big! I can creep into closets, sleep in the street, or get drunk on the vanilla dew that falls on ferns, and the clouds will still be white. It could not have been more real.

Today at the lake I saw a duck with a hurt foot. He was so small, so real, you couldn't help but feel sad for him.



*Dewdrop Blanket* by Sara Lustig

# authors' notes

**Tabitha J. Adams** graduates from Northern Arizona University in December 2000, and plans to pursue her vision in painting and photography overseas. Her work is currently displayed in Beasley Art Gallery and in a local lingerie shop, Pleasure Bound, in Flagstaff, Arizona.

**Charlene Akers'** work includes three off-the-wall guidebooks, *Open to the Public, First & Foremost*, and *Never Buy Anything New (Except This Book)* all published by Heyday Books, the introduction to *920 O'Farrell Street* by Harriet Lane Levy, and contributions to *Bay Area Bargains*, published by San Francisco Lucent Books.

**Aaron Anstett's** work has recently appeared or is forthcoming in *American Poetry: The Next Generation* (Carnegie Mellon), *Green Mountains Review*, *Indiana Review*, *The Ohio Generation*, and *Quarterly West*.

**Rachel Squires Bloom** has published poems in *Muse*, *Portfolio*, *Bluster*, *The Watermark*, *Mind in Motion*, *Insomnia & Poetry*, *The Boston Poet*, *Abbey*, *The Poet's Corner*, *Free Focus*, *Cavalcade*, *Pegasus*, *Meanie*, *Kimera*, *Nomad's Choir*, *Poetry Motel*, *Mad Poet's Review*, and *96 Inc.* She said, "through writing I hope to strike the 'ah ha' chord in others. Thoughts and impressions turn into ideas that are linked to words and honed into poems."

**Justin Bryant** was nominated for the Pushcart Prize in 1994. His recent stories have appeared in *The Chiron Review*, *Snowbound*, and *Talk Story*. His first novel, *Season of Ash*, will be published in Spring 2001 by Gorsky Press.

**M. V. Callcott** is a freelance editor, who has published poems, short stories, articles, and other short items, and is scheduled to be the featured poet in the newest issue for *Orange Willow Review*.

**Christopher Chamber's** work is recently or forthcoming in *Quarter After Eight*, *Quarterly West*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Sonora Review*, *Exquisite Corpse*, *BOMB Magazine*, and *McSweeney's*.

**Earl Coleman** turned to writing full-time about eight years ago after a lengthy career in publishing. He's been published in over 300 literary journals and was nominated for Pushcart XXIII.

**Orman Day** is a public relations consultant in Orange, California. This is his debut as a poet. He is currently writing a book about his experiences backpacking through 90 countries and all 50 states.

**Gary Fincke's** most recent book is *The Almanac for Desire*, published by BKMK Press. He has won a Pushcart Prize in 2000 for nonfiction. His new poems are upcoming in *The Paris Review*, *The Southern Review*, and *The Literary Review*.

**Michael Foster** grew up and was educated in North Carolina. After college he served with the Peace Corps in West Africa, and has lived in the Atlanta area. He's continued to write poetry while earning a living in various occupations and endeavors. He has recently published poems in *Beauty for Ashes* and *GRRRRR*, an anthology of poems about bears from Arctos Press, and he has appeared in a number of journals and anthologies.

**Deborah Gillespie's** poems have received several awards including the New Voices Series Competition in 1992. A limited edition of her poems, *The Luck of the Living*, was published by Redbird Press in 1987. Her chapbook, *Saving Grace*, will be published this year as part of the Bennington College Alumni Chapbook Series, and her work is forthcoming in *Eureka Literary Magazine*, *Flyway*, *Nassau Review*, and *Orange Willow Review*.

**Pat Haugh** has earned a MFA from Eastern Washington University and is currently working on a screenplay (*Magan*) to be finished May of 2000.

**Sara Lustig** is currently living in Portland, Oregon. She has a Bachelor's degree in Fine Arts and enjoys photography.

**Giovanni Malito** is a Canadian from Toronto, who has been working in Ireland as a Lecturer in Chemistry for the past six years. He's edited *The Brobdingnagian Times*, a literary broadsheet, and co-edited *Tableau*, an interdisciplinary journal. His recent publications appeared in *The Iconoclast*, *Thorny Locust*, *Limestone*, *Descant*, and *The Alembic*.

**Rich Murphy** has published hundreds of poems in such magazines as *Rolling Stone*, *New Letters*, *Negative Capability*, *Slant Journal*, *Grand Street*, *Seattle Review*, *Washington Square*, *International Poetry Review*, *Montserrat Review*, *Americas Review*, *Connecticut Poetry Review*, *Icarus*, and *Natural Bridge*.

**Frank S. Palmisano III's** most recent poetic compositions have been featured in: *Metaphors: A Literary Journal for the Health Professions*, *Recursive Angel*, *The Poetry Café*, *The Morpho Review*, *Gravity*, and *Poetry Magazine.com*. He has also recently been anthologized in Marlow Peerce Weaver's *In Our Own Words: Generation X Poetry*.

**David Sapp's** poems have appeared in *The Chattahoochee Review*, *The Bad Henry Review*, *The Dirty Goat*, *Sidewalks*, *The Cape Rock*, *Meat Whistle Quarterly*, *Mad Poets Review*, *Open Bone Review*, *The Heartlands Today*, and elsewhere. He lives and teaches in Ohio near Lake Erie.

**Al Sim** lives in central Virginia with his wife and son. He earns his living as a freelance technical writer. His fiction will appear in the November issue of *Lynx Eye* and in next spring's issue of *Glimmer Train Stories*. Mr. Sim has completed a collection of stories and is working on a novel.

**Robert-George de Stolfe** makes art in abstract and nonobjective styles. As an experimentalist, in which he uses new methods and techniques to find unique ways to present his ideas, he tends to focus on color, texture and shape. His influences are Pablo Picasso, Jackson Pollock, and the Expressionist movement.

**Virgil Suárez** is the author of four novels, *The Cutter*, *Latin Jazz*, *Havana Thursdays*, and *Going Under*, and of the collection of stories, *Welcome to the Oasis*. His memoirs, *Spared Angola: Memories of a Cuban-American Childhood* and *Café Nostalgia: Writings from the Hyphen*, chronicle his life of exile in both Cuba and the United States. He is also the author of three collections of poetry: *Garabato Poems*, *You Come Singing*, and *In the Republic of Longing*. His essays, stories, poems, and translations continue to appear both nationally and internationally in journals and reviews the likes of *TriQuarterly*, *Parnassus*, *Poetry Wales*, *Imago*, *Field*, *Cimarron*, *Chelsea*, *Prairie Schooner*, *The Mississippi Review*, *The Kenyon Review*, and *The Southern Review*.

**Jay Udell** is currently a teacher of English and creative writing at Blue Mountain Community College in Pendleton, Oregon. His poems and short stories have appeared in many small press publications, including, *Potpourri*, *South Dakota Review*, *Georgetown Review*, *Bellowing Ark*, *Wind*, and *Pig Iron Anthology*. Bellowing Ark Press published his first book of poetry, *Learning the Language*.

**Mark Wisniewski's** collection of stories, *All Weekend With the Lights On*, was published recently by Leaping Dog Press. He teaches fiction writing correspondence courses for UC-Berkeley Extension.

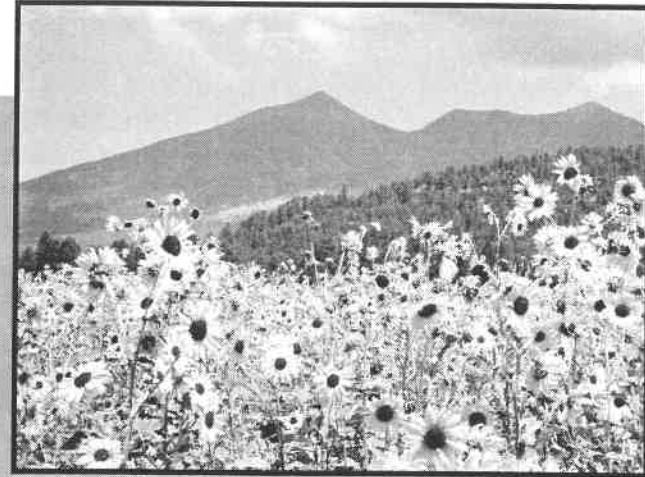
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