

*Thin Air*

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# THIN AIR MAGAZINE

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*Approaches #23* BY ROBERT MCGOWAN

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*Bird in a Box* BY JODY JETT

MATTHEW J. SPIRENG

*In Case of Fire*

Outside the room in the hallway  
a metal-sided glass-front case  
on the wall bears a sticker with instructions

In case of fire break glass. Nothing more  
to suggest to the literal-minded, those who  
follow instructions to the letter, that they

should consider removing the extinguisher  
inside and using it, and nothing to suggest  
how one is to break the glass without

slicing one's arms on the jagged edges.  
I picture a raging fire and, assuming the smoke  
hasn't thickened to the point one can't read

the instructions, the panicked literal guest  
smashing the glass and, bleeding, waiting  
for some effective response, perhaps a

flame-retardant chemical spraying out  
on its own, or verbal instructions from a  
speaker, an alarm, sprinklers spewing water,

the guest bleeding and waiting and finally  
wondering as he turns to run whether  
in his panic he read the instructions wrong.

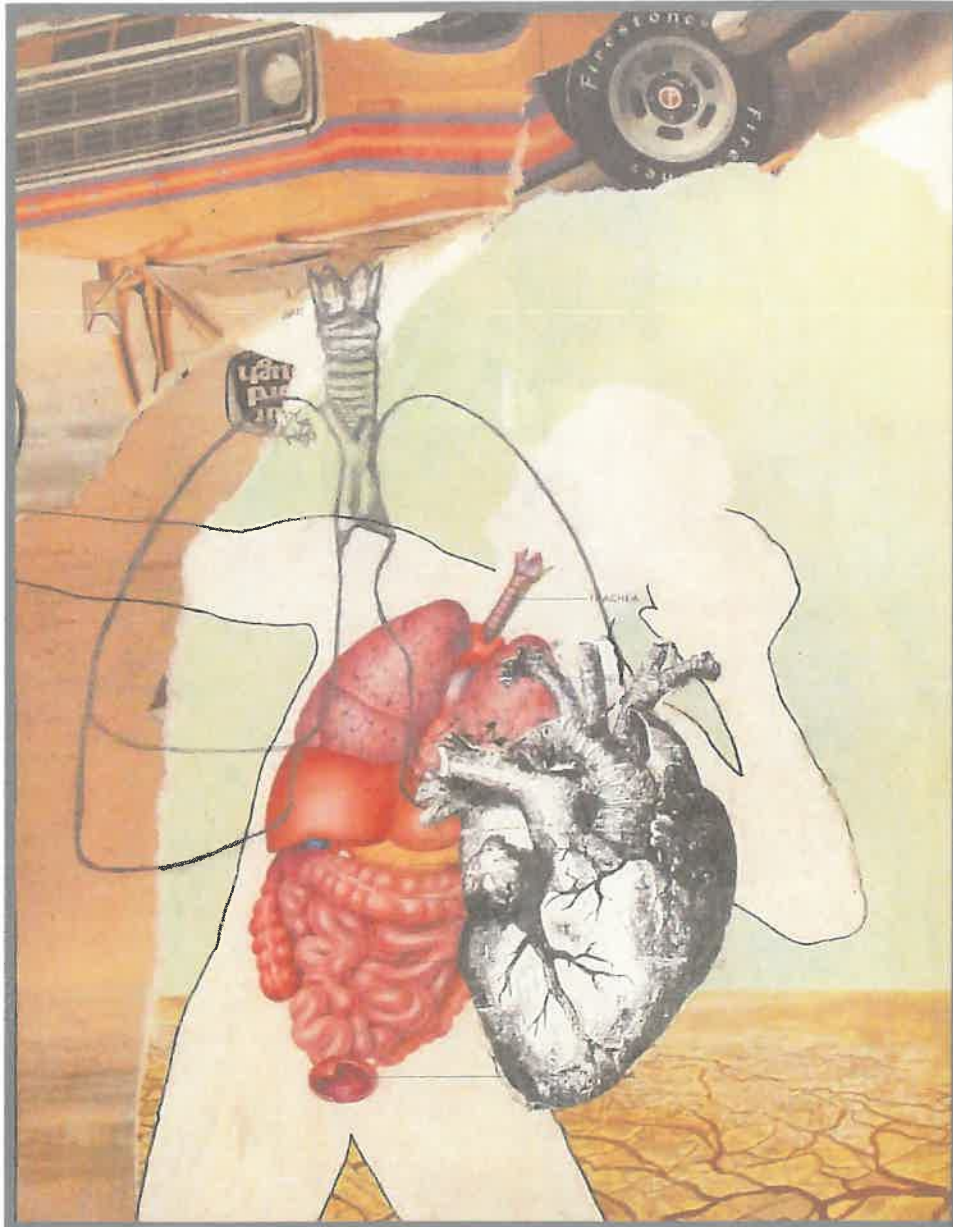


*Dogwood and Bunny* BY SOUP

DAMON FALKE

*Some things We Have Seen  
And Why I Have Kept Them*

Tell me again how you grew up  
And how you stepped from water  
Onto the shore and back again into water,  
Always smelling of the sun.  
This is where I see you and how—  
I see you like rain. How have you come  
To follow the birds? The clip of black wings  
Over our trees framed like small fires.  
You pause at this, thinking of the long stories  
And omens you have heard. So just once more  
I should mention the sky and the possibilities  
Of wind—all this, you see, just to watch  
Your lips tremble.



*Heart, Lungs, Ears Do you Hear Me* BY LUKE POWERS

*Summers in the High Desert*

The one window

In this room

Reminds me of the summer

That hummed with your quiet—

The sun early on the fields

And the way I shiver now.

HELEN COUTANT

*The Lessons*

Polly's Sunday torment lasted half a year. When she was thirteen, her father, who usually ignored her, finally decided to make an effort to teach her Vietnamese. The lessons were to take place in his studio every Sunday morning about ten o'clock, after he had sipped his tea and smoked his first pipe of the day. By then his melancholy had receded and he had had time to make his daily adjustment to the permanence of his exile in America.

Dung had long since abandoned efforts to teach his American wife his native language, but he held on to the belief that it was another matter with his daughters. How to teach them was the problem. When they were infants he had tried half-heartedly to speak nothing but Vietnamese. Yet the children made no progress because it was too easy for their father to lapse into English. The world around him was bathed in English!

Pushed out of Vietnam by the war when he was scarcely halfway through his teens, he studied in France and ended up in America where he got married and established himself as an artist. But as the years passed, his longing for his childhood city of Hue only increased, even as he made little effort to return to it. Instead he talked obsessively of his parent's wooden house with its teak beams and of the massive family altar which occupied an entire room. He tried to replicate the altar in a corner of his American living room because he wanted

his surroundings to be as Vietnamese as possible. Yet an obvious hindrance to the creation of this illusion was his American wife and his two half-American daughters. He might have jettisoned the three of them but his wife was good at making money, a skill he refused to cultivate since her labor freed him to be an artist. He believed he genuinely loved his daughters.

Then, when Polly was thirteen, he discovered, quite by accident, that four year old Annie could memorize and recite Vietnamese poems. One day as she was sitting on his lap he said a line and she mimicked it perfectly. After that he taught her entire poems, repeating the lines until she learned them. Luckily, as he had little patience, she learned quickly. Annie had no idea what she was saying but she spoke with vigor. She thought the poems were nonsense rhymes like "Jabberwocky." "Start Hoi Huong Ngau Thu," her father ordered as he lit his pipe. "Thieu tieu ly gia lao dai hoi," Annie intoned staring at the wallpaper. Her small feet in black Chinese slippers kicked back and forth as she spoke.

"Yes! Yes!" Her father beamed at her over his pipe. "Good, Chu Bee!" This was a term of endearment. He held out a little bowl of sesame candies he kept near his easel. "Take one!" he urged.

Once Annie could recite four poems, her father couldn't resist the urge to show her off to his Vietnamese

*After that he taught her entire poems, repeating the lines until she learned them.*

friends at one of the Saturday literary salons he had started in 1977 to entertain his recently arrived countrymen. Here he reigned supreme as Interpreter of the New Culture and Keeper of the Old. His knowledge of life in America went unquestioned as he had beaten the rest of them there by more than a decade.

While a crowd of Vietnamese men sat cross-legged on the floor drinking and reciting poetry until the early morning hours, he delivered colorful critiques of the new life they were facing. The men observed the shiny ancestral altar dominating his living room and discussed among themselves the obedience of his western wife and bi-racial children who ate the most strong-smelling Vietnamese condiments and smiled as though they enjoyed them: nuoc-mam, fermented bean sauce, rancid shrimp paste.

What none of them knew was that Dung maintained cooperation in his home by intimidation and brutality. After he hit one of the children, he restored equilibrium by repeating his favorite saying: "A father's love is great like the Tay Son Mountains." He explained to his daughters that the Tay Son Mountains were the tallest and most beautiful in Vietnam although Polly, who was terrified of her father's tantrums, imagined otherwise.

One Saturday night the men began to complain of the poor Vietnamese their children spoke. The teenagers were no better at it than the three year olds! And the little ones began to regress as soon as they started kindergarten. In the midst of this lamentation, the father yelled for Annie. Half asleep she hurried downstairs in her pajamas. Her father pulled her onto his lap. "Say Hoi Huong Ngau Thu!" he ordered. Then he pretended to wind up a key in her back and Annie began in her high

*"A father's love is great like the Tay Son Mountains."*

singsong voice. "Thieu tieu ly gia lao dai hoi....." on and on for five minutes. When she stopped, the room exploded in shouts and laughter. Annie felt the tumult in her father's chest where her cheek rested. She watched the amber liquid in his glass slosh back and forth. He pushed her up, tucked a sesame candy into her hand and

sent her back to her room. When the laughter subsided, he boasted he had invented a method to teach children Vietnamese and a year from now his half breed daughters would speak better Vietnamese than their one-hundred-per cent Vietnamese children. It all hinged on his unique method of instruction. A clamor arose. He responded by crossing his arms on his chest. "What good is an explanation now when I can't prove I'm right? Give me a year. To quote the Americans, 'The proof is in the pudding.'" He could never resist showing off his command of English aphorisms.

Dung announced his intention to begin giving Vietnamese lessons to his children the next morning at the breakfast table. After their bowls of pho were empty and soaking in the sink he addressed his daughters. "As you know, your mother has never been able to learn Vietnamese. But you two can do it and it's time we began." He struck the table with his index finger for emphasis. "Annie, you already know four poems. The key is to memorize all the sounds. If you know all the sounds you can put them together to speak every Vietnamese word. Vietnamese is logical, not like English. Even a plumber could learn it." He sent a disparaging glance in his wife's direction. Then his eyes fell on Polly. "You're oldest so you're first. Come to the studio at ten this morning and we'll begin."

Polly turned an unbelieving face toward her mother. On Sundays she liked to escape to Kenny's house down the road, or to work on her puppets in an old smoke house on the property—anything to get out from under her father's rule for a few hours. But her father was insistent. "Look at me!" he demanded and Polly's head turned back. Here he was, offering to sacrifice his time to teach her his native tongue, and Polly had the effrontery to look glum! When he realized his wife and Annie were also looking glum, he couldn't

stand it. How dare they greet his brainstorm with sour faces!

He glared at them. "Sit up, Polly!" he ordered. "And you, Annie! And smile, Polly, when I talk to you! Smile! What are you, another dummy like your mother? We'll find out won't we! I'm surrounded by—" her father started to say "nincompoops", a new word he had picked up from *The Readers Digest*, but Polly hastened to interrupt, "Yes, Papa."

By now Polly was adept at the protocol: complete submission to her father's will. Before they were out of the toddler stage, the children had learned that acquiescence was the only response to whatever their father said or wanted. When they were still in highchairs he had slapped their hands if they tried to pick up food with their fingers or pinched their cheeks if they refused to eat what he offered. But he could never train his older daughter to keep back her frequent tears. When her lips began to tremble, he couldn't stand looking at her. Then he would harp on her appearance: Her mouth was too big. Her laugh was too big. Her hands were too big. Only thirteen, she had the gall to be taller than he was. Despite her long, straight black hair, she was turning into an American.

Now Dung looked away from the circle of faces. What was the use of Vietnamese lessons? They were doomed before they began. But he had made a promise to his friends. He pushed back his chair and marched upstairs to his studio. It was hard enough to face his wife, he thought bitterly, whose blue-eyed Germanic face was a perpetual reminder that he had left his homeland.

Beset by the harsh glare of the winter morning, he realized he had to get started. He took out a red notebook and began writing. He listed all the Vietnamese vowels and consonants. Then he combined them. When

he was done he felt better. He glanced at the clock. It was only 9:45. He yelled down to his wife for more tea. He could hear her bustling in the kitchen directly below. Utensils rattled in the sink. The washing machine started its rumble. In a few minutes Annie appeared and silently took the big wicker basket which held the teapot, so it could be refilled. How well he had trained them to quickly meet his needs! Now he would see if Polly remembered to come to his studio without further reminders. He liked laying little traps for his children. It kept them vigilant and attentive.

He poured himself a last cup of tea, hooked his index finger over the stem of his pipe and waited.

As soon as Polly took a seat on the edge of the chair he had placed next to his own, he opened the red notebook and ordered her to watch as he read the Vietnamese alphabet and phonic system he had written on the first two pages. Then he explained these to her. It was all very rational he repeated. Much more rational than English. Once she knew the sounds she would know everything. Polly listened without venturing a question. "Learn this for next week," he ordered after an hour and handed the closed notebook to her.

After Polly left he congratulated himself. The lesson had been a great success after all. Six months of

*He liked laying little traps for his children.*

this and Polly would be carrying on conversations with his Vietnamese friends and they would be begging him for advice.

Polly left the studio sucking on a sesame candy, a look of relief on her face that her father never saw. She had been terrified he would ask her to memorize poems like her little sister but he had never demanded she say a single word. "It's so simple!" she cried, spotting Annie in the hall. "All it is is a bunch of sounds!" She held the

red notebook high above her head.

"Wouldn't you like to look in here?" she teased seeing envy in Annie's eyes. "Guess what! It's a secret code between Papa and me! Fut fat fit can duck biz buzz off."

"Can I see? Please!" Annie begged jumping up and down, trying to grab the notebook.

"Buzz off I said!" With a dramatic flourish, Polly locked the notebook in her desk and pretended to swallow the key.

The disaster began with lesson two. That morning Dung was suffering from a flare-up of his ulcer, and he was feeling sorry he had undertaken such a project. He hated schedules. Why had he locked himself into a weekly commitment? If he had the money he would hire someone to teach his daughter. He preferred to smoke in peace and watch the rain fall past the window.

When Polly tapped on the studio door at ten, he bit down hard on his pipe. Well, he would have to go through with it.

Polly felt her father's irritation burning through the room. She found the nearest chair, and sat, feet flat on the floor, fingers gripping the cane seat. Her father glared at her and yanked the chair with her in it across the floor next to his. "Sit correctly!" She straightened and clasped her hands in her lap. Her mouth trembled. Now there was no escaping. He sat next to her steaming like a kettle on the stove and she forgot everything he had taught her the week before. When he pointed to the first page, she attempted to recite the sounds she was supposed to have learned: vowels and consonants, alone and together. In a panic she could not control her voice and the words became a muddle. If only she could get it over with. "Phat, phet, phit, phot, phut." How ridiculous it was!

Bam! Her father slammed the red notebook shut

on her fingers. A whole week and she could not pronounce a single column of Vietnamese syllables correctly! "You know what?" He yelled. "You're stupid just like your mother! A monkey could do better." The father banged his ruler against the desk and Polly jumped. She began to cry. Then her father's rage metastasized to every cell of his body. His jaw twitched. He remembered the punishments of his childhood, the many times his teachers had hit his fingers with a ruler or forced him to kneel on the tile floor until he wailed for mercy. He looked at his tall half-American daughter. Everything about her was too big, too noisy. "Close your mouth!" he yelled. "Stop crying. Look at me when I speak to you!"

In the kitchen below Annie and her mother heard loud, agonized sobs. Then a shriek! Her mother paused in her work as though she, too, had been struck but she did not go upstairs to the studio.

For Polly each new lesson was worse than the previous one. It was impossible to please her father. She entered the studio in such terror she could not remember anything. As soon as her father opened the red notebook her mind stopped working. She could not keep her voice from hiccupping as she held back sobs. While she tried to imitate the strange sounds she wedged her hands between her knees. But he grabbed her wrists, pried open her palms and slapped them hard with a ruler. In the kitchen below Annie and her mother heard the inevitable crying begin. Each week her mother headed towards the stairs and each week Annie believed that this time her mother would go up to the studio and make her father stop. But when her mother's foot reached the first step she always hesitated, then turned away. For it was a fact: If Dung discharged his anger against one of them, the other two escaped. And they were all afraid of him.

When the studio door opened and Polly emerged red-faced, eyes swollen with hurt and humiliation, her

mother went to comfort her, but it was too late. Polly pushed her off and shut herself in her small closet where she had a single light bulb, a cushion on the floor and a small hook to lock the door from the inside. She kept a journal hidden there and for an hour she wrote furiously all the words she could never say to her father. But then to Annie's amazement, at lunch an hour later Polly acted as if she was completely happy, as though someone else had been the recipient of their father's insults and blows. While Dung filled his mouth with fried rice Polly spoke as though she loved him dearly. "Yes, Papa! No, Papa!" she murmured, agreeing with everything he said even though fifteen minutes before they sat down to eat Annie was sure she heard Polly through the closet wall say, "I hate him. I'm going to kill him." But in this house there was no bonding over misery, only an ever shifting alliance between Dung and the two who were spared.

As Polly's difficulties increased a feeling of superiority grew in five year old Annie. She was sure she could make her father happy. Wasn't she the only one who could recite all those Vietnamese poems even though she was nine years younger than Polly and decades younger than her mother? It was like the fairy tales she loved. The first two contestants lost the battle but the third, and youngest one always succeeded. At dinner when the family was gathered around the table, she began to beg her father to let her begin Vietnamese lessons. When he was not looking, Polly sent Annie a look of hatred. Their mother said nothing.

Finally, on the last Sunday of October, Polly's ordeal ended. Before she could even sit down, her father ejected her permanently from his studio. "I've wasted my time with you. Get out!" he said. He did not look at her or say more. Polly retreated down the hall towards her closet. She hurled the red notebook in Annie's direction. "It's all yours! Lucky you!" She slammed the closet door shut and picked up her journal and began writing

a rebuttal he would never see.

From the studio the rant grew loud enough for everyone to hear. "How can I have a daughter so stupid? It's hopeless. Hopeless! Americans simply can't learn. I have a dunce for a wife and a dunce for a daughter." There was a pause. Then their father's yell penetrated to the corners of every room, "Next Sunday, Annie! We'll see what you can do! It's your turn. Methodical instruction."

"Look, Chu Bee!" her father said. He smelled of tobacco. He was in a good mood because he had just sold a painting. Annie was excited as she nestled in the crook of his arm. She had saved Polly's red notebook and even slept with it under her pillow but when she handed it to him he put it in the trash and gave her a new yellow one. "Look! These are the poems you've memorized. I wrote them out for you. One on each page. Pages one to four. Read them to me!"

"Tuoi nha xa nha...." This was easy enough. Annie rattled off the words from memory as her father turned the pages. She could already read but she paid no attention to these Vietnamese sentences because none of the words made sense. It was just like the code in one of her favorite books where different numbers stood for letters of the alphabet.

"For next week," her father said, "you must learn the special marks that go above the words. Here are the four of them. See the word 'phut'? You say it four different ways depending on the mark over the vowel. Listen!" Her father repeated "phut" four times. The word sounded the same to Annie each time her father said it. "Repeat after me," he said. "Remember with this mark your voice slides up, with this one it slides down, with this one it jiggles a little and with this one it drops like

a stone." He smiled at her and demonstrated again. "Next week I will say the same word four times and you will have to tell me what the special mark is. He showed her with his index finger, drawing each mark in the air. Then he poured himself a cup of tea and tamped a fresh wad of tobacco into the bowl of his pipe.

"That's it! Dismissed!" Annie had not been in the studio more than a half hour. She ran down the hall with the new yellow notebook, impatient to show it off to Polly. She rushed up to the bed where Polly was reading. "It's easy!" she said and waved the notebook to get her sister's attention. "Look at all my words!"

Polly flipped to the next page of her book and did not reply.

Annie studied the nonsense words for a week. She studied them where Polly could see her. It wouldn't be long before she knew the whole secret code and understood everything her father said. She imagined long conversations with him which no one else in the house could understand. The Vietnamese code was silly, she thought, since the same spelling made four different sounds but she repeated the words anyway. "Phut, phut, phut, and phut," Annie sang making her voice high, then low, sliding, and dropping like a stone. She could not remember exactly how her father had done it but she thought her version sounded good. It was simple. She just had to make the four identical syllables sound different.

"You're so wrong!" Polly muttered one evening in a voice only Annie could hear. "Ridiculous! Just wait till he hears you."

"Well, Papa said you never learned anything!" Annie scoffed. "Chu, chu, chu, chu."

"Moron!" Polly hissed. "You don't know what you're in for." She got up and took her homework into the closet.

An hour before Annie's second lesson, her father

*Hopeless! Americans simply can't learn.*

appeared at the breakfast table and sat down without a word. He smelled of yesterday's tobacco, so his wife opened the kitchen door to let in the fragile heat of a November morning. Dung drank his tea and then stared at the bowl of pho his wife had set in front of him. It was the Vietnamese beef noodle soup she often made to please him.

"It's not hot," he said. He said it without touching the soup. His voice was cold. When his wife reached for the bowl, he slapped her hand away. "Polly, you heat it up. Your mother still hasn't learned what hot is. What am I? A dog to be fed lukewarm soup?"

But as soon as Polly set the steaming bowl in front of him, he invented new complaints. Their mother began tiptoeing around the kitchen as their father fueled his rage. The broth was too fatty, the noodles too cooked, the meat sliced too thickly and besides it was the wrong cut of beef to start with.

For awhile their mother absorbed the complaints without responding. What could be said, anyway, to stop the looming tirade? Annie and Polly stared helplessly at their bowls. The soup looked good but they had lost their appetites.

"It's the soup you like. I thought it would be a special treat for you," their mother finally murmured in a conciliatory tone. It was the match which lit the explosion.

Their father's words ricocheted off the walls. "Fifteen years and you still can't cook the simplest Vietnamese dish correctly," he yelled at his wife. "What are you good for anyway? If you're not beautiful at least you could make up for it by being a good cook." His fingers snapped into fists. "And you," he yelled at Polly, "Dry your hair before you come to the table. I can't stand looking at you like that with wet hair and your mouth hanging open."

"Yes, Papa!" Polly muttered staring at her bowl.

"And you! Answer me when I talk to you," their father spat out. Annie's head jerked up but his eyes were back on their mother. "Cat got your tongue?" he yelled. He had learned another idiom from *The Reader's Digest*.

Their mother didn't respond. Her eyes were alert and afraid.

Then their father's rage lit on Annie. "And you. It's time for your Vietnamese lesson. We'll find out if you studied. Finish your pho and get upstairs and wait for me in the studio." Her father picked up his spoon and began to eat.

Annie put her half-empty bowl in the sink and began to climb the stairs. She could hear water running. Polly was washing the dishes. Suddenly there was a shout, an exclamation of alarm from her mother and then the crash of porcelain breaking. Then a louder noise.

Someone was running. Her mother appeared in the stairwell below Annie. Annie crouched on the top step and watched. Her mother was part way up the stairs when her father caught her. His hands met around her mother's neck and he flung her back against the wall. He shook her back and forth. Annie put her hands over her ears as her mother's head hit the wall over and over.

"Why am I doing this?" Dung screamed. "So I don't kill you! That's why." He let go of her mother's neck and she slid to a sitting position.

Her father stepped around her mother and then continued up the stairs. When he reached Annie, he paused for a second, then stepped around her too, and went on towards his studio. His footsteps sounded like blows. After the studio door banged shut, her mother got to her feet and returned to the kitchen. A broom swished. Broken china clinked as it fell into the trash. "Here's more here," her mother said. "All four bowls!"

Annie was afraid to follow her father so she went back to the kitchen. Her mother and Polly were carrying the table back to its position under the light. Her father must have pushed it over. Chopsticks and spoons were strewn about the floor. Annie got a dishrag and tried to wipe the table and the tile floor which was slick and wet. If she got very busy maybe her father would forget her lesson.

But then the call came, peremptory and sharp down through the register that allowed warm air from the kitchen to rise and heat the studio. "Where are you, Annie! It's ten."

When Annie opened the door to the studio, all she had been so proud of learning evaporated in a gush of fear. She could smell her father's rage. He was rigid in his chair and did not turn to smile at her.

"Put it down!" Annie set the notebook on the table. "Sit down!"

"Phut, phut, phut, phut," her father said. He held the ruler in his right hand. He had her notebook open to the fifth page. Annie sat to one side and her legs trembled. There was no nestling in the crook of his arm today.

"Repeat what I said."

"Phut, phut, phut, phut," she whispered. He gave a short laugh and for a minute Annie believed she had succeeded where Polly had failed.

"I am cursed to live in a family of dunces," her father yelled then.

He laid the ruler horizontally across the pages so it held the notebook open. "This," he said slowly, "is for when you forget." He poured himself a cup of tea. Annie could hear a frantic ticking in her throat. Her ears were clogged as though she were spiraling up a dark mountain. Her father lit his pipe and took a breath.

"Phut, phut, phut, phut," he said. "Again. Repeat it exactly as I said it." He took Annie's right hand and

bunched her fingers together, pointing them up towards the ceiling. "If you make a mistake, I will hit your fingertips with the ruler."

"Phut, phut, phut, phut." Annie whispered. Her father banged the ruler three times on the desk. "Slowly! Stop mumbling. Haste makes waste." He was a storehouse of Ben Franklin's sayings!

Annie began again. But her mouth was as parched as though it was stuffed with cotton.

"I am surrounded by American dunces!" her father cried. "Repeat after me, 'After the Emperor comes the father! The father's love is great like the Tay Son Mountains'." Then he brought the ruler down on Annie's little fingertips. It made no difference that she screamed. The blows continued while the father counted calmly to ten.

No rescue arrived from the kitchen.

In school on Monday, Annie tried to keep her right hand hidden under her desk as much as possible. The fingertips were black and blue and stung every time she picked up a pencil. When the teacher asked her how she hurt herself she made up a story about a closet door slamming on her hand.

Unfortunately Annie succeeded in pleasing her father just often enough to keep his hopes alive. But as the Sundays crawled by she began behaving just like Polly. An hour after she left the studio in tears, cradling her yellow notebook and bruised hand, she sat down at lunch and put a smile on her face. And whatever her father said, she replied, "Yes, Papa! No, Papa!" for she had discovered what Polly had already found out. It got easier and easier to agree with him the more her heart turned to ice.

*Thin Air*

DARRELL DELA CRUZ

*shuffle*

She looks into the drum of pinto beans  
and scoops them up with her hands.  
The texture of small brown things  
falls between her fingers. She thinks  
her mom's looking at her but she's tearing  
plastic. A pair of small hands lace  
around a metal handle—a simple thrust

into beans, hundreds penned.  
She lifts them up to her face counting  
how many she can carry. Her hands shake.

The clank of metal. A splatter  
spread onto concrete. Picking  
them up she wants to throw them  
back in. A man with a closed smile

and a broom starts sweeping them up  
*it's all right it happens everyday.* Her mom  
rushes to apologize and holds her  
wrist. She cannot bend to the ground.  
Pulled away from the scene  
her hands clasp the air.



*Untitled* BY JASMINE STACK



*Pop Corn* BY LUKE POWERS

TANYA CHERNOV

*Tide-out Beach on Dash Point,  
Washington State, Early March*

How everything gets glassy—the packed sand,  
the soggy sand, the shallow sea, the deep sea.  
Hazy unmanned islands and Cascade Mountains  
shadow the sky, breaking the flatness  
of the protected waters. The time of day  
when the moon rocks the ocean back,  
tugs the tide on home, so that we  
must roll our pants and sacrifice dry feet  
to this false swamp.

The dogs sprint away toward the waves,  
wiggling with freedom after a morning  
trapped in the car. Their cups overflow:  
they chase gulls and hop like awkward,  
newborn bunnies exploring the shallows,  
while you and I spread out across the ribbons  
of water running back to the Sound.

You, in a blue shirt and tan pants  
rolled to the calf, almost disappear  
inside the mild, pale scene.  
If I didn't know your shape so well,  
I'd never catch you there.

W. TODD KANEKO

*We Are Made of This*

*Let us all be from somewhere.*

*Let us tell each other everything we can.*

—Bob Hicok, "A Primer"

I remember Seattle as that distant watery spot  
it was before the world named it Seattle.  
Before conquest by coffee & microchips,  
before grunge sullied pop music with flannel,  
we learned to play guitar in the basement.  
We dug the grime that saved the world  
from Los Angeles. I lived in Seattle—the Jet City  
back when the State Bird was a Boeing 747  
& the State Flower was a gram of hash  
rolled in a Ziploc. That Seattle lived on the fringe  
where men were lumberjacks & women were refugees  
from romance gone wrong in Manhattan. We yowled  
like tom cats on that frontier, barely surviving sex  
on the brain & the ocean turned upside-down  
overhead—just the deep end where the weight of  
52 jet planes pressed on our eardrums. Everywhere  
between suburbs & city center, we discovered  
rock & roll: an antidote to virginity because  
we ignored the filth & fist-sized bits of sky  
punching us in the head. We were stoned under  
the Space Needle & awoke beneath a tacky stand-in  
for the Empire State building. Our gray stupor sang

truer than the bluest skies Perry Como warned about.  
It choked us like a hangover, scattered us like fish  
& an airplane crash. Hold your breath or fly south  
toward shallower water. My guitar is tuned up  
for Michigan, where tornado sirens practice  
every Friday at noon, where rain is snow  
& the ocean is unemployment. I don't ache  
for life on the frontier, but I am glad

for this: we are all from Seattle and alive.

*The Heart of Saturday Night*

*You gassed her up and you're behind the wheel  
With your arm around your sweet one in your Oldsmobile  
Barrelin' down the boulevard...*

*—Tom Waits, "The Heart of Saturday Night"*

I hate those dudes who drive at night  
with one arm around a woman wearing dark  
glasses, and the beautiful sorrow leaking  
from whiskey-burned gullets. I hate that  
jingle of coins heavy in loose pockets,  
the pose of overconfidence. I know how

easily workdays spill into the weekend for  
the unemployed. This is Saturday night, when  
the boulevard is bursting with the blood of  
youth, their car stereos too—and I don't know  
the words to every song, can't even fake it  
like I used to. We used to posture in the sleazy  
glow of those hipster bars, deaf and spiritually  
broke for the jukebox. When the lights came  
up, we stumbled into the street, barstool-sore  
and cross-eyed. We trailed a line of empty  
Martinis behind us, only half-unaware of  
how unfamiliar everyone looks, after last call.

I don't believe in sorrowful beauty anymore,  
but the smoky burn of booze still smolders

in my throat. Come over to the house where  
we have a rickety porch and a fifth of something  
wicked. It's always Saturday night here,  
where we listen to wind chimes jangling, keep  
the lights dim for fireflies, and always drink  
from the bottle.

*The Astronomers*

When I told your puppies you don't love them, you said long live rock and roll. I asked you to predict the future. You told me to read your mind, that you only believe in two things: love and constellations.

Listen. When Alice Cooper decapitated that chicken, he had no idea it couldn't fly. When he decapitated himself, we had no idea that the head could live so long after separation from the neck. I said it was all fake and you said you don't believe in trickery. I say you have no imagination. You sweep the kitchen, clear the ceiling fan of cobwebs, and wish for reincarnation as a rock star.

Look. The last time we studied the moon, I was looking at Venus, and you said David Bowie is our new name for Pluto, that the Pleiades are now the Spiders from Mars. I pointed out a red star swimming backwards near the horizon because you confessed a love for fat Elvis and other people's horoscopes. I've never caught a rabbit, and you don't know the North Star from the Dog Star. If we could turn the volume up to eleven, maybe then we could talk about what we really want.

KATHERINE POLAK

*The Dead*

No dust wakes on these days, when the frost-tipped ground wicks the chill through thin-soled shoes—the hard soil won't release our fingers where they froze in the late autumn as we scabbled through the clay.

There, below our shoulder blades, slow stones move, pacing with the orbital, softly swinging through the dark as the light of stars rolls in. Our eyes are dim this season, and rocks push at our temples. The memory of navy blue grates along the round ridges at the side of the skull, those thin bones that destroy orientation.

BENJAMIN F. BIRD

*Strangers*

*Winner of the Northern Arizona Playwriting  
Institute's second annual 10-minute play contest.*

Charaters:

EMMA, the wife  
HYRUM, the husband

*A young American couple's apartment. Mormon paraphernalia lightly decorates the home. Emma and Hyrum play Scrabble.*

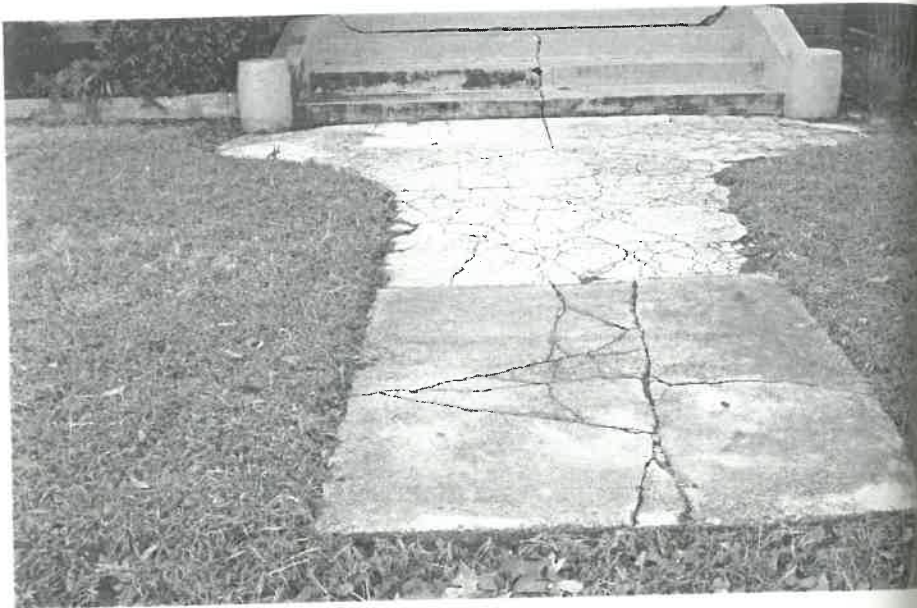
*Emma closes a laptop computer while Hyrum puts down a word and adds up points.*

HYRUM: Emma, why'd you turn the computer off?

EMMA: I don't know, Hyrum. I just get tired of it being on all the time. Why, did you want to use it for something?

HYRUM: No.

EMMA: Do you have homework tonight that you have to do on the computer?



*Approaches #12* BY ROBERT MCGOWAN

HYRUM: No. I'm actually all caught up on school for once. Oh wait, no, I think I do have some homework to finish.

EMMA: Anatomy?

HYRUM: No, math. But it can wait at least a day or two. It doesn't really matter. It's just that we usually leave the computer on. Remember that it takes more electricity—

EMMA: More electricity to turn it off and on all the time than it does to leave it on. Yes I know. You say that every time I turn the computer off.

HYRUM: Well I say it a lot because it's true. I pay for the electricity. What do you think I work at the bank for, on top of going to night school?

EMMA: Thank you for providing.

HYRUM: I'm just looking out for our finances, that's all. And the electricity bill keeps going up every month. I just got the electric bill in the mail today, actually. You know how much it is?

EMMA: No I sure don't.

HYRUM: It's one-hundred-and-two dollars and seventy-two cents. That's about twenty dollars more than it was last month. But we don't have to talk about money. I know you don't like talking about money. It's your turn.

EMMA: I know.

HYRUM: You're taking a while for your turn, sweetheart.

EMMA: Don't pressure me.

HYRUM: So are you going to hurry it up a bit?

EMMA: I can take as long as I want.

HYRUM: Well yeah, but remember we agreed that the game is more fun if we go faster? Do you want me to go get the chess clock again?

EMMA: No. You know I hate the chess clock. That thing stresses me out. Just hold on. There. L-O-V-E. Love. Isn't that a nice word? Love.

HYRUM: It's a nice word, but it's only seven points. And here's my word. Women. One two three four five six seven eight nine ten, and a double word score makes twenty points.

EMMA: Good job.

HYRUM: Thanks.

EMMA: I see it's plural.

HYRUM: Huh?

EMMA: Your word is plural. It's "women", plural, and not "woman," singular.

HYRUM: So?

EMMA: Why couldn't you have put down a singular

woman? Why did your word have to be women?

HYRUM: I had a lot of E's. Why does it matter?

EMMA: I don't know.

HYRUM: It's your turn.

EMMA: I know.

HYRUM: You're in a bad mood.

EMMA: Thanks for noticing.

HYRUM: What's wrong?

EMMA: Nothing.

HYRUM: Yes, something's wrong. I can tell. Can you please tell me what it is, sweetheart? Please, just tell me. Look, either tell me what's bothering you or put down a word. If you don't tell me you're just going to be mad all night, and then we'll stop talking and then we'll go to bed, and then—

EMMA: No, I'll go to bed and you'll stay up.

HYRUM: What?

EMMA: I'll go to bed and you'll stay up.

HYRUM: Well that doesn't matter. It doesn't matter if I go to bed first or if you go to bed first. If you don't tell me what's wrong with you, why you're in this "woe-is-me, life-is-so-miserable" mood, then tomorrow we'll tip toe around each other all quiet, and then, and then, I

don't know what will happen. But you might as well tell me what your problem is if you have a problem, and if you don't have a problem, then just put a word down so we can finish the game. By the way, I'm probably going to beat you.

EMMA: I bet you know what's wrong with me. Let me spell it out for you. (as she puts down letters) O-B-E-S-E. Obese.

HYRUM: You got seven points this time too. So, are you trying to say that your problem is a self-image thing again?

EMMA: Yep. I feel fat.

HYRUM: Baby, Emma, I already told you that you're not fat, sweetheart. You're not fat. You're pregnant. Everybody knows women gain weight when they're pregnant. It's natural.

EMMA: Well nobody knows I'm pregnant yet. They just think I'm chubby.

HYRUM: No they don't.

EMMA: Yes they do. They think I'm plump.

HYRUM: You're a very beautiful woman. I mean that. You're very pleasant looking. And anyway, I think we should start telling people you're pregnant. I don't know why you want to keep it a secret.

EMMA: I told you why.

HYRUM: Oh yeah, that's right, because you're paranoid

that you're going to have a miscarriage.

EMMA: No, I don't think I'm going to have a miscarriage, I just think that I might have a miscarriage. One out of every five pregnancies ends in miscarriage. That's a crazy big percentage. And I just think that—

HYRUM: You mean fraction.

EMMA: What?

HYRUM: One out of every five is a fraction. Twenty percent would be the corresponding percentage. But it doesn't matter. I get what you're saying.

EMMA: What I was saying before you interrupted me is that most miscarriages happen in the first trimester, and we'd hate to have to tell everybody about a miscarriage. It'd be terrible. And most of the time miscarriages have nothing to do with the mother's bad eating habits or the mother's behavior at all. It just happens. It's sad the way a lot of women feel guilty for having miscarriages, like it was their fault, but it's not. Their bodies can be perfectly healthy, they can be doing all the right things, going on walks, taking prenatal vitamins, everything, and it just happens. One minute the woman's pregnant, and the next minute she's not, and she doesn't have a baby.

HYRUM: Yeah, miscarriages sound like no fun. I got 17 points for guilty, by the way. G-U-I-L-T-Y. The Y is on a double letter score.

EMMA: So, that's why I want to wait to tell people until I'm twelve weeks pregnant, OK? Or maybe thirteen weeks. I don't know.

HYRUM: That's fine. However you want to do it is fine with me. It's your turn again babe.

EMMA: I still feel fat. That's what's the matter with me. It doesn't matter that I'm pregnant. I still feel fat. I'm only eight weeks pregnant and I feel fatter than I should be. What are you going to do about it?

HYRUM: Look, I hate to say this, but, I think you need to hear it. There's nothing I can do about the way you feel about yourself. I've told you already that you're not fat. I've told you that you look fine—more than fine. You're pretty. You're a nice size. What else can I do?

EMMA: How about give me a blessing?

HYRUM: A blessing for what? Are you sick?

EMMA: Yes, I'm sick. I'm fat.

HYRUM: Babe, you're not overweight. And anyway you don't give blessings to fat people just for being fat.

EMMA: But I want one. How about that, Mr. Righteous Priesthood Holder? Why don't you give me a priesthood blessing? Why don't you go get the oil? You're the head of the household. Why don't you go get the holy consecrated oil and give me a blessing with your righteous priesthood to make my fatness go away?

HYRUM: What's gotten into you?

EMMA: Are you afraid to give me a blessing, Hyrum?

Scared that you might not be a righteous priesthood holder? Are you scared that maybe you're not worthy of the Spirit?

HYRUM: What?

EMMA: Just answer the question. Are you a righteous priesthood holder?

HYRUM: Emma, why are you turning a Scrabble game into a temple recommend interview?

EMMA: Answer the question. Answer the question.

HYRUM: I'm not going to answer that question. It's inappropriate.

EMMA: Oh and you'd know all about inappropriateness. Do you live up to the vows you made to me on our wedding day? Are you a righteous priesthood holder? Answer me. Be a man for once and answer me!

HYRUM: No. This is crazy. No. I'm not going to answer those questions. Where did this come from? People don't ask each other questions like that. I mean, are you a righteous woman? See? How do you like being asked that question?

EMMA: Yes! Yes I am a righteous woman! I read my scriptures every day. I say my prayers every day. I go to Church every Sunday. I make casseroles. I bake whole wheat bread. Yes, I am a righteous woman. And you know what else? I give you sex when you want it, and I give you sex how you want it, even when I tell you that I'm not comfortable with it, or when I

tell you that I'm sleepy, but you insist on doing it, and you insist, you insist on those things you know I'm uncomfortable with, and I go along with it, and act like I enjoy it, because I am a righteous Latter-Day Saint wife. And now I'm asking you: are you a righteous Latter-Day Saint husband?

HYRUM: Babe, if you wanna slow down or take it easy, in bed, we can do that. Is that what's bothering you?

EMMA: (opens up laptop computer and shows it to HYRUM) I found things you've been looking at on the computer.

HYRUM: What'd you find, sweetheart?

EMMA: Guess.

HYRUM: (HYRUM closes laptop.) We don't need to look at that.

EMMA: Why'd you turn it off? That wastes electricity. Tell me, Hyrum, what do you find in other women that you don't find in me?

HYRUM: Nothing. I think you're beautiful.

EMMA: Not beautiful enough, obviously. What satisfaction do you get with those women on the computer that you don't get with me? The stuff I saw made me sick. Just sick. You've committed adultery.

HYRUM: That is not adultery, Emma. What I've been doing is absolutely not adultery. What I've done is a sin, I know, but I've never kissed or sexually touched

another woman since we started dating. And that's the truth.

EMMA opens her scriptures to a verse she has bookmarked.

EMMA: Did you ever come across this verse in all your years of scripture study? Maybe in seminary? Maybe on your mission you returned so honorably from? Matthew chapter five, verse twenty-seven. "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery." Verse twenty-eight. "But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart."

HYRUM: Have you told anybody else?

EMMA: No. I know you have a reputation to keep up. You have a nice big family. A father who thinks you're perfect. Your church basketball team. I wouldn't want to dirty your reputation.

HYRUM: I know you're being sarcastic, but thanks for not telling anyone. They don't need to know. No one else needs to know about this. Don't worry babe, I'm going to get over this, and we don't need to tell the whole neighborhood, or anybody, about it, and everything's going to be better. It's a weakness I have.

EMMA: It's a sin. How long has it gone on?

HYRUM: A while.

EMMA: How long?

HYRUM: Years.

EMMA: Years?

HYRUM: Yeah.

EMMA: Since before we got married? Since before we met?

HYRUM: Yes.

EMMA: This makes me sick. I don't want to hear about this anymore. I don't even want to know what exactly you've been doing. I saw enough to know that you're sick. You're a sick man who is not fit to hold the priesthood.

HYRUM: Wait, I'm sorry for what I've done, but—

EMMA: You weren't worthy to marry me in the temple. I don't think our marriage counted. Both the man and the woman have to be worthy for the temple marriage to count. You lied in your temple recommend interview. You told the bishop and the stake president that you kept the law of chastity, but you didn't! You lied. I don't think we're really married.

HYRUM: Of course we're really married, sweetheart. You're being irrational.

EMMA: No I'm not! I don't think we're married in the eyes of God. No, we're not husband and wife. We're two strangers living in the same apartment, pretending that we're in love, pretending that we're happy, pretending that we're a good Mormon couple! We're strangers to ourselves and we're strangers to God.

HYRUM: Sweetheart, you're getting carried away. Your pregnancy gives you hormones that aren't natural, and you build up these things in your mind bigger than they really are, sweetheart.

EMMA: Stop calling me sweetheart!

HYRUM: What are you going to do, run off to your Mom's again?

EMMA: Yes. And this time I might not come back.

HYRUM: What about the baby? What about our child?

EMMA: I had a miscarriage. Goodbye Hyrum.

EMMA exits.

End of play.

JOSH BETTINGER

*Under Tungsten Lamp*

Night flirts in the afternoon trees  
with dull leaves blanched by an orchid moon.  
The topmost edges of the city are a tiara  
stained blue by lights that swagger & drive  
on the river's blemish wake. Each bank,  
somnific, swallows its own concealed line.

A living man builds a box for a dying one,  
crafting aspirin-white walls from primrose.  
A woman yearns to discover ballast  
the way ballast yearns for might.  
The blank dish serves the deepest cut.  
What kind of river is this that advertises loss.

*Ella's Ornithology*

Every night is a network cut by lightning. The clouds  
are bandages. They address the moon's open damage  
like a fish at the bottom of the ocean singing to the surface,  
introducing itself to the cosmology of fire. As my grandmother  
was dying, she ate all of her meals & drank all of her tea  
from the finest china—with golden quails & silver passerines—  
burnishing the edges with her lips, dreaming of how  
her body may be scattered with the riches of past men.

*The Anvil Cloud*

I put a straight blade in my pajama pocket  
before getting into bed. In case the night horses  
crash through me again. They do not. Instead,  
they eat from my palm, vacant riders lounging  
at a nearby stream. In an adjoining hotel room  
my shadow enters a slumbering watchmaker,  
his dying wife counting clouds from the window.  
In a prior life I embraced a lover near similar grass,  
pet naming the toes of lightning. I've distilled  
the scotch-glow of her eyes & how, against  
the windblown surface, they were cloistered inside  
a white tornado & denying the outside world. Now,  
shadow in the watchmaker, I pull the pistons  
& spring from time, searching for a fulcrum into  
the past, whispering *O proximity, your greatest  
possession is distance*. To that charge I cling.

Something for restraint.

BARRY BENSON

*A Navy Vet of Adak, Agattu,  
Amchitka, Atu, Kiska*

You look to the sky  
its perspective  
early evening

Feeling a moist  
40 degree chill  
Mt. Moffett mist

Splattering rain  
glowing horizon  
iridescent caps

Smoke patch hiding  
in williwaw wind devils  
forms one Emperor Goose

Sea shadows  
jade blue waves  
playing with a walrus

Japanese glass balls  
colors in fishnets  
coastline grass

Brown mountain  
island home of blue fox  
tundra hare in snow light

In Navy peacoat  
you stand in mountain air  
Zen-filtered breath

JAY RUBIN

*Norwich Avenue*

—Van Nuys, California

Spring slept in all summer  
Autumn stripped the sycamores  
Winter unwrapped the rain

Rain slipped in, damping the attic  
Rodents arrived through eaves  
Sniffing, scratching, nettlesome

Somewhere close a hound dog howled  
Puppies pressed through midnight flesh  
Alley cats echoed baby cries

Crying myself to sleep, I dreamed  
My lips kissed the new girl's nipple  
Her hand, my hand, drew a small drop

Dropping a whisper, my brother's voice  
*Can you hear 'em? Can you hear 'em?*  
Down the hall, the bounce of spring

MATT SCHUMACHER

*The Children of Electric Fires*

Bear rings which electrocute bride and groom.  
Demand flames emblazoned in lapels of angels.  
Whisper of sleeping rooms where tousled,  
Nameless drunks spontaneously combust.  
Bathe in rivers of invisible lightning inside walls and hide  
Under carpets with the torched horizons of Sonoran dusks.  
Finger ignitable liquid containers with the worst,  
Destructive sort of nervousness. Blindfold firemen.  
Their skin, all layered shiver, giving cinder a mind of its own.  
Their footsteps collapsed stairways of ash.  
Their whoops loosed Appaloosas from fiery corrals.  
Nothing excites their pulse like this carnivalesque  
Of fuses lit for sheer amusement, these spitting appliances  
With frayed cords, the spreading hum of malfunction.  
Look into the dark for their smoldering eyeshine,  
The glint of their smiling electrical outlets,  
Or witness the slight hint of their bodies,  
Small arms and legs of blue flame  
Turning to pure lightning at the surface,  
Diving into the deep at speeds proven impossible.

*Lament of the Distant Poet,  
Chasing his Head*

*After "El Nopal," a linocut of Artemio Rodriguez  
and poem of Juan Phillipe Herrera*

What weathervane, what game of fortune spins  
And points my missing head in multiple directions?  
And what kind of wild fling is it hurrying off to attend?  
What if my mind, stolen by bandits, devises a string of crimes,  
Or decides to parade naked down main street?  
Am I still its pliant child, its skin and bone marionette?  
To what destiny does my fugitive mind aspire,  
What truth does it madly pursue,  
And why do my arms and legs lengthen so in the wind,  
Elongating desperately, as if fated  
To never to catch a single hair or graze an eyelash?  
How long before I can't title a poem?  
For my head is addicted to tequila and mescaline,  
Yet I have no wits without it, only heart...  
How parched, how cracked my lips must be  
My dry eyes, surprised by dusty eyelashes,  
The sand in my nose, never mind  
The saguaro spines. Orpheus, my legendary friend,  
Deliver to my parched, faraway lips a drink from your river of death.  
Bless my missing head with the best poetry of my life right now,  
Suffering thusly, recovering from fever and heatstroke,  
And running mad errands for the prickly pear,

Whose sad, ruptured face shows that all-knowing gaze of the muses.  
May the ghosts of those buried to their chests  
In sand have their say through my mouth  
Across these dunes illuminated by a waning moon.  
May the sage grass and book cliffs take pity  
On my hair and renegade forehead.  
May the cactus carefully wrap my lunatic head  
In its dead jacket, with the new love of a bridegroom.

HOA NGO

*Next to My Heart  
I Keep a Digitally Altered Photo of You*

*Its body, so to speak: its soul is right ...  
Still, what an arm! and I could alter it  
—from Robert Browning's "Andrea Del Sarto,  
Called the 'Faultless Painter'"*

Kevin had spent all morning gazing at the nudity on his computer. When he arrived at work, every screen in the tech support department displayed a photo of one of his co-workers as the wallpaper. It was the fourth such incident, starting almost immediately after the marketing department took high resolution staff pictures for ads.

Each time, the perpetrator had cropped an employee's head and placed it on a nude body. The effect was so realistic that when the first victim, Colleen Ramsey, appeared some thought it was a photo pulled from Colleen's sordid past. But the second image was of Robert Wilson, an overweight supervisor. In his desktop debut he had been transformed into a porn star with washboard abs. Kevin admired his work and resisted the urge to smile. Sure, people probably would've thought nothing of it—just another guy snickering at a naked picture—but Kevin didn't want to take any chances.

It was a slow day so Kevin, like most of the department, had little to do but contemplate the latest nude. The picture stayed on the screens all day because secu-

rity measures prevented anyone from changing the settings on their workstations. Of course, in a department filled with technical types, there were a number of people who could have bypassed the security. But to do so would bring suspicion their way—the ability to remove the picture implied the ability to post the picture. So the unauthorized wallpaper stayed. If the victims were in the office that day, they were in for a long eight hours.

Sitting at a station near the front of the room was Lucy, the shift supervisor. Her desk was slightly elevated, making her look like a judge presiding over a courtroom. She randomly monitored calls that came in and was known to report employees on occasion for not following procedure. Because Kevin tended not to follow procedure very closely, he was a little afraid of her. Despite this fear, Kevin found her attractive albeit in a severely technical kind of way.

On top of that, he respected Lucy because she wasn't just a glorified hall monitor. She knew the system inside-out and could figure out problems that stumped even the more experienced techs—most impressive. In Kevin's mind, Lucy's interest in computers separated her from the rest of the female population. If she played video games, he thought, she'd probably be too good to be true. But instead of dating a fellow geek, rumor had it that her boyfriend was a musician, which put her back into the mainstream.

Lucy looked up and caught Kevin staring at her. Then he heard the telltale click which indicated she was linking to his headset. Soon he would hear her voice, seeming like it was inside his skull. He braced himself for the message.

"Kevin."

"Yes?"

"Low call volume right now. You can go on break."

\* \* \*

Kevin started doing it strictly out of necessity. His first job had been with the only place that would hire him, an internet company that specialized in nude celebrities. Kevin's job was to produce the risqué pictures when they didn't exist—the actress who became a star without ever doing a nude scene, the model who did strictly runway work. Suddenly, there were newly discovered photos of them in various states of undress on CelebsUncovered.net or FashionModelsGoneBad.com. People can't get enough of their favorite celebrities—especially when they don't have any clothes on.

Fairly tedious work at first. How many heads can one paste on naked torsos? But he started taking a strange pride in some of his creations. Changing head angles so the tilt of the chin fit the neck perfectly. Adding shadows and matching skin tones. After a while, Kevin began trying to match the celebrity's personality with the nude torsos he was pairing them with.

*Fairly tedious work at first.  
How many heads can one paste  
on naked torsos?*

His masterpiece was one in which he not only produced a famous pop singer standing nude beside a window but also mirrored the fake in the window's reflection. All while retaining the transparency of the glass and the lens flare of the sun through the window. Kevin believed that if the singer had ever done a nude pictorial, it would have looked something like that. Kevin would see this celebrity on TV and catch himself thinking "ah yes, I've worked with her."

He got good enough with the photo-editing software that he quit working for the celebrity site and decided to get a job with the company that made the software. Unfortunately, that job turned out not to be in the art department but in tech support.

Just as he began to feel himself being eaten away by

each support call, he discovered the staff photo saved on the network. Was it boredom or artistic inspiration that made him crop heads and post them at work? He wasn't sure and he didn't care. All he knew was that art, and sometimes beauty, had returned to his life.

\* \* \*

In the break room, Kevin drank his highly caffeinated soda and listened to one of Meyer's war stories. Meyer was older than most of the employees in tech support and, in fact, had gone to college with the company's CEO. Kevin had discovered a picture of a much younger Meyer with the CEO on the internet. They had taken computer keyboards and put straps on them, wearing them like guitars. They were computer rock stars—one went on to found the company and the other got a job there when he was down on his luck. Meyer had worked there a long time and had a knack for getting all the weird calls.

"So this guy keeps asking me questions and then relaying my answers to someone in the background. Finally, I get sick of it and ask him who he's talking to. He says it's his in-house tech support. Since I've been on the phone with this idiot for half an hour with no progress, I decide to cut out the middle man. 'Let me speak to him directly,' I said. When he finally hands over the phone, I find myself talking to his 11-year old son. We fixed the problem in 30 seconds."

"I feel sorry for that kid, he'll be working that support job for another 7 years," said Kevin.

"At least," said Meyer. "And everyone I know is like that. I'm expected to give free computer advice and tech support to my parents, my brother, my friends. If I worked at a normal place, I'd probably be hounded by my co-workers, too."

"Thank God you work here, then," said Kevin. "Tech support, the low rung of the computer industry: bad hours, shit pay, and the opportunity to talk to pissed-off people all day long."

Lucy walked in, surprising them.

"But at least the camaraderie is pleasant," she said.

Neither Kevin nor Meyer responded.

"I've vowed never to give free tech support," said Lucy. "Once upon a time, I was the one running around cleaning up everyone's messes."

She brushed past them on the way to the soda machine and Kevin felt a twinge of excitement even in that small moment of contact. Lucy continued speaking as she inserted money into the machine.

"Then a couple of years ago, friends of my parents lost their teenage son in a car accident. They asked me if I could come over and save mementos off his computer. They were looking for emails, poems he had written, music he listened to. They even wanted to save papers he had written for school.

"His mother is hovering over me while I sort through all the junk he had on his hard drive. She's telling me all about his life, his school awards, his church group. Things were moving along pretty slowly until we hit the porn stash. Imagine sitting there with his mother while we waded through thousands of pornographic pictures. She learned more about his interests than she ever cared to know. I didn't know what to say."

Kevin wondered what Lucy might say if she unearthed the contents of his computer.

"Well I hardly think naked pics—even hardcore porn—is that shocking, especially for a teenage boy," said Meyer.

Kevin considered the truth of the statement. After all, what hideous images had been forever burned into his brain as a result of mistyping something in a simple web

search? Lucy paused and Kevin could see that she didn't completely disagree.

"I wish you'd been there to explain that to the mother," she said.

\* \* \*

When Kevin got home from work, he immediately went into his kitchen and opened the top door of his refrigerator. The cool mist from the freezer enveloped his face. He looked inside. It was still there.

Satisfied, Kevin went to his desk, turned on the lamp and eased into the chair in front of his home computer. He thought it was funny (and a bit depressing) that he'd spend all day staring at the screen of his terminal and then come home to immediately sit in front of another one. But that was work and this—this was something else.

His computer desktop was immaculate, with only a few categorized folders and wallpaper depicting Raphael's School of Athens. Working in a job where he only heard about problems and failures all day, Kevin wanted to eliminate the presence of imperfection in his own life. The wallpapers at work, which started as a quick prank, consumed more and more time now as he strove to make the most perfect fakes possible. He enjoyed overhearing the shocked compliments when people switched on their monitors in the morning. But the best productions were the ones he would never post.

He brought up his favorite creation. It was his first modification of the tech support staff photo. A simple retouching. He had rearranged the picture so he and Lucy were standing beside each other. Often, he would zoom and crop the piece so it appeared that it was just the two of them in the photo—as if it were a picture they had taken together at a party. A picture both of them could carry in their wallets or set up on their mantels.

Sure, what he did was fantasy. But it wasn't extreme fantasy. Kevin had produced many fake nudes. Some of women he knew. Many more of Lucy. But he didn't saddle them with unrealistic breasts or blend them with an airbrushed torso. They were fakes, but they weren't fake fakes. The only grossly misrepresented one was Robert Wilson and that was just because he couldn't find

*Kevin remembered something about how liars will always glance left when they lie...*

any bodies that matched Robert's and didn't feel like combing the net

looking for naked fat guys.

But for Lucy, he looked for bodies he thought would approximate what she might really look like. He looked not for pictures shot on location, but for poses that could have been Lucy lounging around the home they shared. Lounging nude, of course. And if these moments of possible life together started to number in the hundreds, then what was the harm in that? Raphael had his three Graces, Kevin could have 300 Lucys.

It seemed to Kevin that this altered reality wasn't so far removed from the current one. A little shuffling of boyfriends. A light brush stroke and then his figurative head would be put into the picture. Then he could find out if life imitated art.

Unfortunately, his computer's hard drive crashed last month, taking most of his past work down as well as 299 of the 300 Lucys. He only saved the original staff picture and first retouching because they were on a portable disk. The damaged drive went into the freezer.

The refrigeration of a crashed drive is supposed to cool any overheated parts as well as to make things contract slightly so the crashed reader is pulled off the storage platter. Once you thaw, you have about five minutes to re-attach the drive, then extract and copy all your lost information. Past that, you risk condensation and elec-

trical failure.

Kevin thinks of it like a medical procedure—we've transplanted the heart but it won't last long outside of the chest cavity. But right now, he doesn't have time to go through with the operation. Right now, everything is frozen.

\* \* \*

"That's right, sir. Just keep all of your cables plugged in and you should have no problems. Yes, sir. I'm pleased to have offered you efficient and friendly service. Thank you. Good-bye."

Kevin turned to Meyer, put a hand over his own microphone and added "You poor bastard."

No sooner had Kevin leaned back and sighed than he felt a hand on his shoulder.

"Excellent work," said Lucy.

"Yup, always check your cables first," said Kevin.

"Your sign-off doesn't sound very genuine, though."

"Maybe because it's written for me and I'm required to say it or I'll be punished severely."

"Could be ... and how severely do you think the nude poster will be punished?"

"I don't know."

Kevin remembered something about how liars will always glance left when they lie, so he consciously did the opposite and then second-guessed himself and wondered if it was the other way around.

"If it keeps happening, they'll catch him eventually."

"Why is that? Because the staff will be victimized until only the perpetrator will be left clothed and untouched?" said Kevin.

"You think it's an inside job?"

"Absolutely," said Kevin. He then immediately thought why did I say that?

"Still, it's possible that the perp would post a picture

of himself to throw off the scent.”

“Then he’d be a diabolical genius.”

“He might be,” said Lucy.

“So according to your theory, Robert Wilson could be the criminal.”

“Well, that would explain why his pic was so well-endowed.”

“By the way, why are we assuming the poster is male?”

Before Lucy could answer, the door opened and a group of men marched in, each one carrying something that was a cross between a briefcase and a toolbox.

“Who are they?” Kevin asked.

“They’re tech support,” Lucy said.

“I thought we were tech support?”

Meyer walked by and grinned. “They’re tech support Special Forces. The tech support to the tech support. If we are the Stormtroopers, they’re the Imperial Guard. They’re looking for clues to catch the dreaded wallpaper poster. I just surrendered my terminal to them.”

One of the men moved behind Kevin. “We’ll need your terminal as well.”

\* \* \*

As they walked to the parking lot, Kevin said, “Meyer, how do you know Arthur Clay?”

“We went to school together.”

“Don’t you feel bitter that he’s a multi-millionaire CEO and you work in tech support?”

“Not really. Poorer, but not bitter.”

“Why not?”

“Arthur had a dream and he pursued it. And so did I. However, my dream wasn’t photo software.”

“Well, what was your dream?”

“Dance.”

“Excuse me?”

“Haven’t you ever wondered why my personal email

address is Dancerman1989?”

“I’ve never had reason to email you.”

“When we got out of college, Arthur put all his energies into marketing his software. I went to San Francisco to become the next Baryshnikov.”

“What happened?”

*No, there was only one way for them to get him. And that was to get him to confess.*

“Arthur became rich and I discovered that I wasn’t quite as graceful as I thought I was. I needed a job and called up my old college buddy.”

“And that’s it?”

“The fact is that I don’t identify myself as only a tech support person. It’s just a job. I still dance in local productions and actually do some teaching on the side. You see Moore over there? His email address is Taisomaster2000.”

“What is that?”

“Taiso is the ancient Japanese art of calisthenics.”

“Moore’s not Japanese.”

“Exactly!” Meyer’s face beamed. “Would you believe there’s a whole sensual world that lies beneath the surface of all the switches and cables of your day job?”

Kevin nodded. “I believe it.”

\* \* \*

Kevin sat in front of his home computer inspecting the staff photo. He thought he might post another altered picture to keep the security guys on edge. See how good they were. Show them how good he was.

But when he was finishing outlining a head for modification, he felt a sudden and overwhelming wave of boredom. He was surprised to find it simply no longer amused him. The artistic aspect of it, of course, was getting less and less challenging. There were new software filters and plug-ins being produced every day that could

help any hack do a quick face or body edit. But besides that, what would a fifth or sixth nude posted at the office do that hadn't already been achieved? Did he need to waste his time playing cat and mouse with the security detail?

Kevin switched off the machine and went to his bedroom. He turned off the lights so he could give his eyes a rest from artificial illumination. A rest from endless screens, endless pixels. He sank onto the bed and, in his mind, replayed his conversation with Lucy. Such a smart one.

She had to know he was the perpetrator. What else would explain all the recent interest? And she was right on every point but one. They would never catch him. At least not by any digital evidence in the system. No, there was only one way for them to get him. And that was to get him to confess.

\* \* \*

When Kevin went back into work, the Imperial Guards were still there. No regular staff members were present except for Lucy.

From her desk, she called "Kevin, can I see you for a moment?"

Lucy's was the only terminal not being worked on by the Imperial Guards.

"We're still offline," she said.

"Have these guys been working all night?"

"Probably. I'm not looking forward to the backlog of calls when we get back."

"Me neither. But this forced hiatus is nice. You can imagine that the calls have just stopped coming," said Kevin.

"Sure you can." Lucy was amused but not convinced.

"For one brief shining moment, no one has any problems. Everything's working the way it's supposed to.

There's complete peace in the tech support department."

"It sounds like you've thought about this before—at length."

"That's the problem with our job—it never stops. Every day, the calls just keep on coming. Pain and frustration on the other end of the phone, all day long. We're never just finished. There's always more."

"Just wait until you get promoted to supervisor. Then you get to monitor the pain on that end as well as this end of the line."

"Hey, I live the pain on this end."

Lucy managed a half-smile that quickly faded. Her face took the set of what Kevin thought of as her supervisor look.

She motioned to her computer screen and said "Can you take a look at this?"

Kevin slowly peered over her shoulder and did not see what he expected to see.

"It's an old photograph of me when I was a baby. That's my grandfather holding me right after I was born," Lucy said.

Kevin quickly shifted from surprise to technical mode. "You're trying to remove the aberration using the clone brush."

"Yes, I've gotten most of the actual line but it's the discoloration around the line I'm having trouble brushing out."

Kevin did his best to hold back. Avoid pushing her out of her chair and dropping in to rework the faded battered picture into a perfect memory.

"Here's the original." Lucy handed him a photograph. He held it and immediately saw the problem. The photo had seen better days. At some point, it had been folded unevenly—probably flattened under a pile of other pictures. Although it had been unfolded, the crease went right through the middle and had not gotten better with

age, peeling and flaking at the edges of the damage.

Kevin looked up from the photo and had to laugh. He didn't even bother attempting to deny what they both knew. He only said "I can fix it. You know I can. But are you seriously suggesting to me that I use my powers for good instead of evil?"

Without waiting for an answer, Kevin left the office. Lucy called after him "Please be careful with it ... that's my only copy."

\* \* \*

When Kevin sat down and started deleting files on his computer, he wasn't afraid of losing his job or even of going to jail. As he sent each image into digital oblivion, he had only one fear: the possibility that the things hidden deep—even on the magnetic heads of hard drives—tell too much about oneself. He didn't want the portrait that emerged from that data to present an unfamiliar image, a stranger that no one knew.

The rest of the office nudes were gone in seconds, but when he got to that very first altered photo he paused. What he'd really like to do is print it out. Maybe frame it like it was a real picture. Then look back at it someday and laugh about how their relationship first started. But instead he hit a key and listened to the whir of his hard drive as it erased everything.

Kevin went to the refrigerator and opened the door. He looked at Lucy's photo of her grandfather. He looked at the old frozen hard drive. It took him only a moment to decide.

He would remove the yellow crease. The hand which holds the baby will be restored. He would quit his job, but not before returning to the office one more time. He'll hack the system and put the corrected photo onto one last desktop.

When he returns from that final task, he'll take the hard drive out of the freezer. Then sit down to wait for the thaw... and whatever comes after that.

SEAN BRENDAN-BROWN

*Fish Shop, Pike Place*

In this world  
you slip, risk everything;  
bankrupt, waking  
between lives, cans of  
hardheart beer on fishblood paper  
scrawled with nonessential lists—

without faith & self esteem  
this world is a burning village,  
a tattered wife crying  
you're wrong, don't go, wait,  
let me help you, don't go.

Gulls bounce clams  
atop rain-leached cedar catwalks;  
in this world you slip:  
Sam the South Korean wrapping  
3 pounds of sole  
knows this. He has marched,  
filthy and shell-shocked,  
now he's flag-free, the beauty of today.

## *Thin Air*

I say, "Sam no green eggs & ham."  
He likes this. Our mindless society  
pleases him. He thinks he's safe here,  
even the racists can't hurt him—  
commies killed everything he had.  
"My fish best fish!" he says.

In this world  
people feed or destroy you.  
War or harvest,  
isolation or small-talk, people  
seal the tombs and go on.  
I love the way Sam's hands close.  
In this world you slip  
but there are perfect hands.



*Voodoo Girl* BY SOUP



*My Heart Evolves* BY LUKE POWERS

DAVID MICHAEL KEATING

### *Son*

Superman lore—or at least the present-day lore—has always felt extremely Christian. Frankly, Superman is an allegory for Christ.

Let's look at the steps in baby Kal-El's transformation into the legendary Superman, and the subsequent life of this icon.

- A father<sup>1</sup> sends his only son down from Krypton to live with the faltering human race

The first time I knew what death felt like, I was seven. My grandfather had been lying in the hospital after a stroke for several months. He died in Spring. That death bore in me one of my greatest fears: my own father's death.

- Upon his arrival, baby Kal-El is found by a rural farmer and his wife—Jonathan and Martha<sup>2</sup> Kent
- The spouses, unable to have children of their own, adopt the child and name him Clark<sup>3</sup>

When my sister tries to make fun of me, she sometimes claims, You're adopted.

<sup>1</sup>Would this make Jor-El the Lord Almighty?

<sup>2</sup>Jonathan and Martha? Joseph and Mary? The relationship is undeniable.

<sup>3</sup>According to [www.babyhold.com](http://www.babyhold.com), Clark is "derived from a surname meaning cleric or clerk. Famous people: American actor Clark Gable; fictional character: Clark Kent, alias Superman." Additionally: Clark? Christ? Come on.

But this seems impossible.

I am the spitting image of my father—though with out his build or height. Or hair.

- As Clark Kent matures into adulthood, his extraordinary powers come to light, such as his ability to run faster than a speeding bullet

When I talk about going running, or how often I run, most of my friends stick to a general misconception. It's usually a variation of: "I like to run when I'm playing [insert basketball/baseball/football/soccer], but I hate just straight up running for exercise." My typical response: "Right on."

- Superman's mission (helping the people of Earth) inevitably takes shape

My father is one of the most remarkable men I know. His shiny red locks are visible when I grow out my facial hair; he is a built Irishman; he has charisma; he makes others laugh. Years after leaving home, I've come to appreciate everything he's done for me—his sense of humor, his money, the things he does for my mom.

I'm becoming more and more like him.

I laugh like him, say things I've heard him say to me for years. I'm in the habit of eating tortilla chips at midnight.

- Finally, Clark Kent, with a clear sense of his mission, dons the red, blue, and yellow and assumes his role as Superman<sup>4</sup>

Dad knows everything about my car. I don't.

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<sup>4</sup>Superman? Savior? The alliteration is proof enough.

I depend on him when my precious vehicle sounds strange, feels sluggish, drives differently. He knows what to do.

He's an omniscient man.

- In protecting the people of Metropolis, a paranoid megalomaniac—Lex Luthor—begins a campaign against the last son of Krypton
  - o Luthor slanders Superman and tries (on multiple occasions) to kill him<sup>5</sup>

It's just that I don't know if my friends have ever really tried "straight up running." I have to wonder what the concept means to them. Do they picture some sort of limbo—forever in movement, forever tired, forever panting? A three-lane track laced with burnt rocks, spiraling down into a blinding red? Is Richard Simmons the ruler of their running purgatory: shouting, jumping. Noises, screams—forever panting.

- In the comic storyline "The Death of Superman," the last son battles a seemingly unstoppable creature named Doomsday
  - o The fight ultimately ends with Superman and Doomsday hitting each other simultaneously—the force sending a shockwave through the city as Superman falls to the ground, seemingly dead<sup>6</sup>
    - Two storylines later, Superman emerges alive<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Would this make Lex Luthor the Romans, or the Pharisees?

<sup>6</sup> "And behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent" (Matthew 27:51).

<sup>7</sup> And on the third storyline, he rose again.

I don't know how I'll handle the death of my father. He can't die. He won't. He's the only person who knows how to do everything.

He showed me how to ride my bike, how to shave. I learned how to swear from him, and how to take embarrassment with grace. He modeled how to shoot a basketball (though I've been better than him since I was twelve); he taught me how to lose.

He showed me how to act at Mom's family parties, how to be nice to people I don't want to talk to (friends and family alike), how to rollerblade, ski, swim. He modeled the appropriate way to converse in every situation—in restaurants, at work, with girls.

He showed me how to act at your father's funeral.

- Superman—a loving son to his adopted parents—usually loses at least one parent (typically Jonathan Kent) in the comic continuities<sup>8</sup>

He showed me how to stick up for myself. He taught me how to say No to things and people. He taught me how to say No to yourself.

- One notorious storyline pits Superman against a super-powered being named Darkseid—the ruler of the world Apokolips<sup>9</sup>
  - o Darkseid tempts Superman with promises of ultimate power; Superman ultimately rejects the temptation<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Although Joseph's death is not depicted in the Bible, I think it's a fair assumption that his death had a profound impact on Jesus.

<sup>9</sup>Apokolips is obviously Hell. When animated, it is laden with fire, brimstone, and suffering. For a first-hand view of the world, see episodes of *Superman: The Animated Series* ("Legacy" is a good example) or the final episodes of *Justice League Unlimited* ("Alive!" and "Destroyer").

<sup>10</sup>"And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence..." (Matthew 4:9–10).

Sometimes I have to motivate myself to go running, though I do enjoy it. I ask myself, Why do I run? Is it for strength? To be faster than everyone else? To look good? Am I tempted by vanity?

Running is relaxing. I know it shouldn't be. It should not be enjoyable. It should be sweating, breathing, hurting. And though it is those things, it's also relaxing. I turn the volume up on my I-pod, and go. I go. I may slow down, I might change direction, but I'm still in motion. If I don't want to listen to the song that pops on, I hit next. And next. And next again, if I have to. I keep going. I shuffle; I trudge along. I breathe.

Running outside, around campus, around a park, affords more options. It's moving freely—perpetual motion. No stopping, few constraints, and more to see, feel, smell. I run, but the feeling in my legs makes me think, briefly, that I could fly if I really wanted to.

No—I don't think I run to get stronger.

- There is speculation that Superman will never actually die—he'll just keep going and going
  - o As he receives his powers from the yellow sun,<sup>11</sup> it is possible that Superman will outlive the human race and not die until the sun goes into supernova<sup>12</sup>

When running, I sometimes think about what I'll be like when I'm older. I won't have a red cape and blue tights. I doubt I'll have orange-tinted hair.

But I want my father to be there—want him to see me become whatever I become. I want him to see my

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<sup>11</sup>"And I saw an angel standing in the sun..." (Revelation 19:17).

<sup>12</sup>"And there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new" (Revelation 21:4–5).

children, so I can say, "Pops—here is what I learned from you." I want to do and accomplish what he would do and accomplish.

I want it all to come full circle. And I want the circle to cycle again.

I want to be the reflection of my father.

I want my son to reflect us both.

Joanie Mackowski

*View From a Temporary Window*

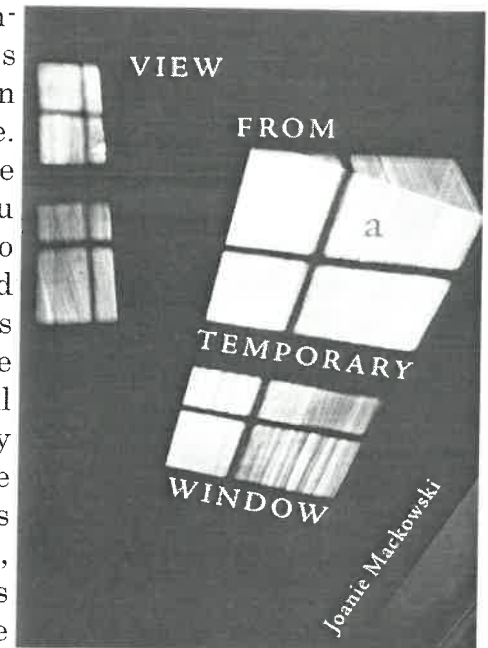
Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, 2010, 64 pages, \$14.95

*Book Review by David Cain*

*And when it unfurls the primal eel of its tongue,  
longer  
than law, long as the lion-moth itself, to wade  
what had once seemed a rose, one could surrender  
one's timid original hand: let this tongue rinse  
away such useless placenta as oneself, what  
feigns to be separate from mouth or claw or heat—*

*From: "Boarding: Hemaris thysbe"*

These lines reveal the ethos of Joanie Mackowski's new collection, *View From a Temporary Window*—that to be self and separate is to feign, while to be subsumed is to surrender, to unfurl. These are poems that soar in the common spaces of our existence. Not only are these poems for those of you who have molted or who plan to molt, who've had exoskeletons as well as endoskeletons, who've spun or flapped as well as walked and run, they are also poems for those who've lived in rooms with tables and chairs, sinks and sliding glass doors; for those who've



had experience with morning mirrors and teakettles, who've taken walks and been found or been lost.

"Metamorphosis" is no way to describe these poems (despite the fact the titles might say otherwise). The questions this poet asks—the questions with which she lumines—are not between caterpillar and butterfly. Look between butterpillar and caterfly, she tells us. The interpenetrations of the first section of the book lead to a liminal space in the central sections, a space in which oscillations between mammalian and reptilian no longer obtain. You will experience reptilian or nimbus, cumulonimbus or flagellate, cardiopulmonary or oceanic. And just as the sea's answer is always yes, so too yes is the answer to between in these wonderful poems. Wonderful means to contain wonder—these poems do so.

Will you find flaws? Can *View From a Temporary Window* be made to answer in some way for the repetition of, say, "gossamer" or of "mercurial?" Sure. Might a reader grow suspicious of the myriad sonnet-like poems (for all I know, they may well be sonnets) that appear in the riot of forms contained between sections I and V? Sure. But if you find flaws it is because these poems help you learn to look. And if you grow suspicious it is because these poems can teach you a new way of growing. If these poems fail you, which I doubt will happen as long as you do not fail them, they will do so momentarily—at 100 miles per hour, or submerged at the bottom of the sea.

Perhaps the most striking thing about these poems is that they do not break apart—that the force of their love for conjoining the incommensurate does not fracture or shatter them. Mackowski's voice holds them together. The voice of these poems is sometimes lonely, even forlorn, but never despondent, always present, warm and humble as though it had found itself inhabiting these poems unaware it had even been looking for

them. And despite the multivalent quality of the collection, the voice never abandons us, so that the voice we hear in these lines from the first poem "Prayer".

*That the hole in my skull never quite grows over  
with mosses or brick. That no lover  
on a ladder can patch it, no permissive meadow  
can fold its field over. For there's too much to know.  
There's too much to want never to contain.*

is the selfsame voice we encounter in "Walking in the Dark" of the fifth and final section:

*Tonight, no moon,*

*and each wave a gray thumb rubbing and rubbing  
as if to erase each recognizable gleam.*

While there are many differences between this new book and Mackowski's first, *The Zoo*, the voice of *View From a Temporary Window* shows her growth as a poet, for in this recent work it has grown richer in timbre, more enveloping, more subtle in its modulations.

Though the voice remains faithful throughout the poems, this is not to say that there is not movement in this collection, or that taken as a whole it presents no shape. It might not be until the fourth section that we realize there's a trajectory here—that we've rounded the crucial curve and that we're going back to where we came from, or somewhere strangely similar. When we return we find that the neverland of these poems—in which every artifact becomes an organic object and part of an ecology of wonder—persists in our minds. Let them, and these poems will leave their mark on you: a love bite, a wound, a token of affection, a birth mark.

Jerry Gabriel  
*Drowned Boy*

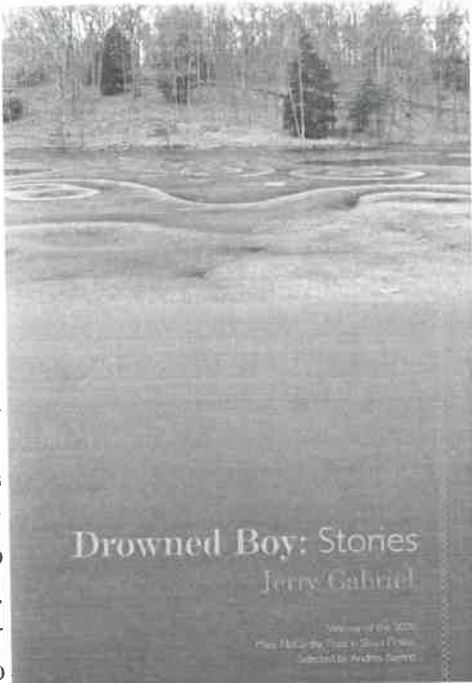
Sarabande Books, 2010, 176 pages, \$15.95

*Book Review by Jody Jett*

Moraine, Ohio, the rural town around which most of the stories in Jerry Gabriel's linked fiction revolve, represents a place of mystery and mundaneness, confinement and possibility. It is a world comprised of passivity and limited possibility—too big for some, too small for others. And it is a world interrupted by violence, by death, and by departure.

The protagonists of Gabriel's prose attempt to understand the enigmatic nature of their surroundings. Some lament the fact that they lack the audacity or imagination to do anything aside from growing old. Others, those with an innate longing for life outside of Moraine, venture to the world beyond, though they inevitably end up in similar circumstances to those they left behind.

As the town's name suggests, life in Moraine moves at glacial speed. Answers pertaining to its purpose are irrelevant to its perpetual existence. Gabriel's writing invites the reader into



the inherent confusion found in questioning the motives of forces larger than ourselves. His characters find themselves caught in winter storms and drenched in torrential rain. They hide from tornados, escape fire, and drown below a thin layer of ice. The most oppressive element, however, becomes the isolation of each individual in their enduring attempts to discover meaning in the world around them.

Two brothers, Nate and Donnie Holland, provide the anchor for this collection. In "Boys Industrial School" Gabriel introduces us to the differences between the brothers as they search for a boy who has escaped from a local detention facility. Eight-year-old Nate tags along as Donnie, his intuitive older brother, leads him on a day's journey with the intent of capturing the runaway and turning him in for a reward. When Donnie disappears with the boy the next day, however, Nate must face the reality of the tenuous relationship he will maintain with Donnie over the course of their separate lives.

Following stories build on the theme of Nate's attempts to comprehend the uncertainty of his environment as he contemplates the actions of his father, a mysterious figure suffering from an unnamed illness. Nate's confusion grows with the knowledge that Donnie somehow discerns the adult world around him while leading a rich life of furtive behavior. Donnie's actions and rebellion offer a foreshadowing of his imminent departure, while Nate's tendencies toward inert observation portend a future of dull longing.

Other stories focus on this very dullness. In "Marauders," an aging narrator and his friends live vicariously through the victories of the town's high school basketball team. He says of the years leading up to the season, "None of us could've passed as the picture of good living, and we talked nostalgically and too often of the time we'd been to Virginia Beach." The team's winning

streak gives purpose and satisfaction to a group of overweight alumni with little to be proud of otherwise. Through the course of many a beer and bratwurst, they follow the team from town to town and are able to forget, if only for short while, their past and present failures.

While many of the characters in Gabriel's stories attempt to construct meaning in disparate circumstances, the reader is sometimes left with more questions than answers as well. Gabriel's decisions to leave out specific details or provide background information for some of the major events that take place in the characters' lives can be frustrating, and one may wonder if this technique is warranted, or simply a vogue practice of contemporary fiction. Perhaps the two most vexing examples come with the odd behavior and subsequent death of the father, and in the open ending of the title story, where Gabriel chooses to end examinations of existence and mortality with a looming question of one life in particular.

But even if this mystification may be difficult to justify in some stories, it works well in others. Perhaps "Slump" best characterizes the model of small town existence. It bespeaks the uninspired reality and restrictive nature of a place in which people live out their entire lives never wondering what lies beyond the county line. In this excellent story, the reader shares a shop teacher's confusion in discovering that a talented local baseball player may have feigned thorough incompetence in order to escape expectations. Even from the boy's first error, the shop teacher, who doubles as a base umpire, has the premonition that "it would prove to be more than just an isolated event, that it would carry weight of its own." The narrator's complex bewilderment vacillates between anger and inspiration, leaving him both jealous and curious of the infinite possibilities in the world outside of Moraine.

Gabriel's austere writing style enables his stories to flow seamlessly from one idea to the next. His prose transports the reader from place to emotion to story specifics with subtlety and skill. In *Drowned Boy*, Gabriel creates a world of inscrutable realities and invites the reader to share in the lives of those who must live there.

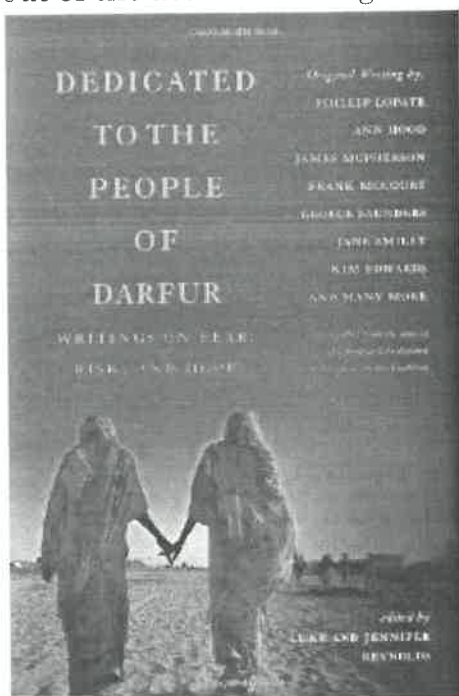
Jerry Gabriel is a graduate of NAU and currently teaches at St. Mary's College of Maryland. *Drowned Boy*, Mr. Gabriel's first book, is the winner of the 2008 Mary McCarthy Prize in Short Fiction. The editors of *Thin Air* would like to congratulate him for his achievements.

Luke and Jennifer Reynolds, Editors  
*Dedicated to the People of Darfur,  
 Writings on Fear, Risk, and Hope*

Rutgers University Press, 2010, 238 pages, \$16.95

*Book Review by Erica Jones*

*Dedicated to the People of Darfur, Writings on Fear, Risk, and Hope* combines a series of essays and poems loosely connected through each author's consideration of risk. Edited by Luke and Jennifer Reynolds, the collection spans a multitude of interpretive approaches to the task: some authors, as Debra Spark does in "Scared," foreground the connective tissue of writing on risk, while other authors, such as Ann Cummins, present a more narrative form of the essay, allowing the themes to surface slowly out of the action. Although the text is predominately comprised of essays, there are a few poems dispersed throughout the text, and the essays themselves often move towards the lyrical. The variety in form allows an intimate interaction between reader and word; while it is not necessary to connect with each written piece, it is likely that each reader will be affected by many of the essays, allowing readers the opportunity to make the book their own.



There are essays that are funny, passionate, moving. There are essays that you may not want to finish, but then there are essays that you find yourself clinging to, the words revealing truths that you find yourself immersed in.

For me, the essay that epitomized this last reaction was Tom Grimes's "The Prozac Variations." Grimes's essay is one that recognizes the theme of risk early on, acknowledging that abandoning fiction for the presentation, in serial form, of various journal entries is not an action that is entirely safe. The rest of the text, however, does not overtly address fear, risk, or hope, but instead embeds these themes throughout intimate considerations of the author's life and work. The journal entries unfold after Grimes has begun to take Prozac for what his psychiatrist terms his "major depression with an obsessive feature." What follows is often stark prose that questions the usefulness of writing, the author's abilities, and the possible effects of the drug on his art and on other artists; "Finished rereading Van Gogh's letters. They're brilliant, funny, sad, excruciatingly so near the end. Would we have 'Starry Night' if there had been Prozac?" Grimes portrays his own neuroses with such blank honesty that it is hard not to identify with his revealed fears, even when we know they are exaggerated.

Grimes is not the only one whose work brilliantly succeeds in addressing the complexities of such themes as risk. In addition to Spark and Cummins, Sherwin Bitsui's poem "Rescuing Fire from the Flood," and Ron Hansen's essay "Risk" stand out as pieces that in very different ways effectively convey the challenges and dangers not only in risking, but more importantly, in failing to take the risk. It is this, the danger inherent in failing to take the risk, in allowing fear to overcome hope, that emerges as the central theme of the text.

But the power of the book goes beyond the words printed between the covers. While the essays and poems are moving enough to inspire interest in the book, the story of its coming into existence warrants attention as well. As graduate students, Luke and Jennifer Reynolds found themselves driven to do something to help the people of Darfur, but with very little money or resources to do so. After inquiring of various authors if they would contribute work to a collection of writings on risk, the possibility of this book becoming a reality emerged. Out of a desire to help and a passion for the written word came a book that not only offers inspiration through its stories, but offers a concrete attempt to effect change, as all royalties from *Dedicated to the People of Darfur* are donated to The Save Darfur Coalition. In an age where we are confronted with tragedy from multiple directions, it is often easy to offer our empathy and nothing else. With *Dedicated to the People of Darfur, Writings on Fear, Risk, and Hope*, Luke and Jennifer Reynolds, and the authors whose work is showcased, offer up to their readers the possibility of action.

## Contributor Notes

MATTHEW J. SPIRENG'S full-length book manuscript *Out of Body* was chosen as winner of the 2004 Bluestem Poetry Award by Vivian Shipley and was published in 2006 by Bluestem Press at Emporia State University. His chapbooks are: *Young Farmer*, 2007, Finishing Line Press; *Encounters*, 2005, Finishing Line Press; *Inspiration Point*, 2002, winner of the 2000 Bright Hill Press Poetry Chapbook Competition; and *Just This*, signed and numbered limited-edition chapbook of his poems and photographs by Trey Price on which the poems are based, Hampden-Sydney College, 2003. He lives in Lomontville, New York.

DAMON FALKE'S work has appeared or is forthcoming in various journals, including *The Chattahoochee Review*, *Louisiana Literature*, *Concho River Review* and *The Aureorean*. He is the author of *Broken Cycles* and the Square Top Theater production, *The Sun is in the West*. He lives in Marshall, Texas.

W. TODD KANEKO lives and writes in Grand Rapids, Michigan where he teaches at Grand Valley State University. His stories and poems have recently appeared or are forthcoming in *Fairy Tale Review*, *Fugue*, *Portland Review*, *Puerto Del Sol*, *Crab Creek Review*, *Blackbird*, and other journals.

DARRELL DELA CRUZ resides in San Jose, California and currently attends San Jose State's MFA program for Poetry. His poems have appeared in *Leaf by Leaf*, *Reed*, and *Ginosko Literary Review*.

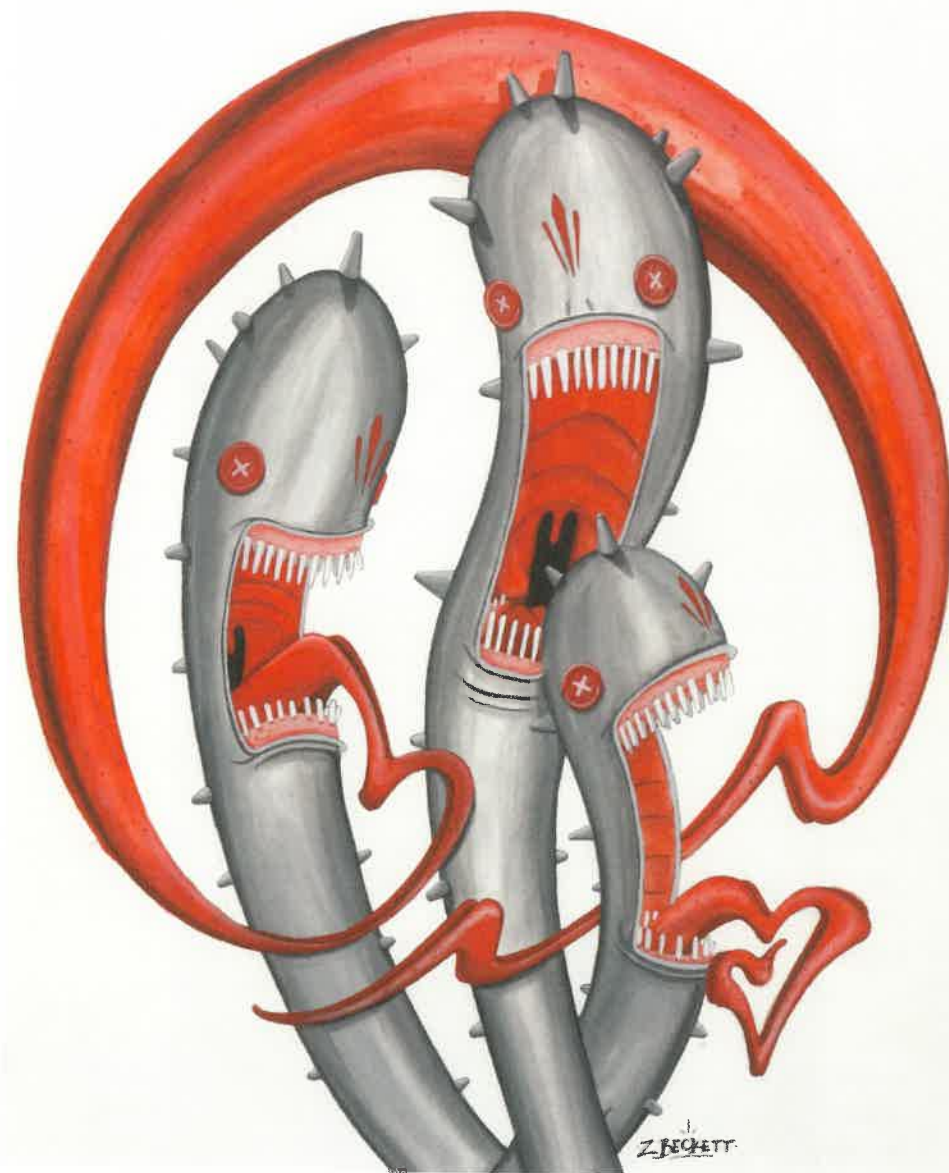
## Thin Air

KATHERINE POLAK is finishing her PhD in literature at the University of Cincinnati. She lives in Ohio with a disturbing number of animals, an obscene number of books, and a refrigerator that her mother regularly fills with meat. It is a good life. Her work has appeared in *Folio*, *WORCs*, *Semantikon*, and elsewhere.

BENJAMIN F. BIRD was born in Sacramento, California in 1983 but was raised mostly in Sahuarita, Arizona. After high school he went to Eastern Arizona College and then to Northern Arizona University. He participated in English and drama-related activities at both those colleges. He currently lives in San Tan Valley, Arizona and teaches drama at a middle school there. He is happily married and has one darling little daughter. He enjoys reading, writing, walking, riding a bicycle, and Alf.

JOSH BETTINGER is an internationally published poet whose work has appeared in, or is forthcoming from, *The Olympia Literary Yarn*, *Oxford Poetry*, and *Western Humanities Review*. He is currently completing his MFA thesis from Columbia University. He lives in Seattle.

BARRY BENSON teaches poetry writing at Des Moines Area Community College. In 2009, Blue Light Press/First World Publishing published *Schooled Lives: Poems by Two Brothers* by Barry and Steve Benson. Barry's son, Josef (also a published poet and fiction writer) is a PhD candidate at the U. of South Florida. Barry lives with his wife Sally and their daughter Kirsten (who has five older brothers). Other publications include *Subtropics*, *North American Review*, *Plain-songs*, *Terminus*, *Flyway*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *The New Orphic Review*, *Briar Cliff Review*, *descant*, and others.



Love BY ZACK BECKETT



*Cans* BY HANNA HAGEN

JAY RUBIN teaches writing at The College of Alameda in the San Francisco Bay Area and publishes *Alehouse*, an all-poetry literary journal, at [www.alehousepress.com](http://www.alehousepress.com). He holds an MFA in Poetry from New England College and lives in San Francisco with his wife and son.

MATT SCHUMACHER was educated at the University of Maine and the Iowa Writer's Workshop. He is a vagabond transplant who considers himself an Oregonian. His first poetry collection, *Spilling the Moon*, made its debut in March, 2008. His poems have recently appeared in *ZYZZYVA*, *Green Mountain Review*, *Sub-Lit*, and *Portland Review*. A second project, *Fire Diary*, was chosen by Matthea Harvey as the winner of the Well Lit Press chapbook contest. A full-length version, *The Fire Diaries*, is forthcoming in March 2010. He is currently pursuing a doctorate in English/Creative Writing at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

HOA NGO is a graduate of the University of Missouri's Ph.D. program, an alumnus of the East-West Center, and the recipient of an NEH Fellowship. His writing has recently appeared in *Stone Canoe*, *Titular*, *Mud Luscious*, and *Right Hand Pointing*. In the past, Hoa served as managing editor of *The Missouri Review* and web editor for Unbridled Books. He currently lives in Clinton, New York where he is Scholar-in-Residence and Visiting Assistant Professor of English at Hamilton College.

ROBERT MCGOWAN'S work as an artist is in numerous private, corporate, and public collections internationally, including among others: Bank of America, Bank of Korea, and the Smithsonian American Art Museum (SAAM), Smithsonian Institution. His images have ap-

peared in literary journals in America and abroad, including *American Literary Review*, *BRAND(UK)*, and *Rome Review*. As a fiction writer, his short stories, frequently set in the art world, are published in numerous literary journals, including among others: *Chautauqua Literary Journal*, *Connecticut Review*, *Crucible*, *The Dos Passos Review*, *The Savage Kick(UK)*, *Skive Magazine: the Short Story Quarterly(Australia)*, *South Dakota Review*, and have been anthologized. He lives in Memphis.

TODD "SOUP" ΜΑΤΥΛΑΣ was born and raised in the bleak grime of the greater Detroit area. During the brutal Great Lakes winters, he discovered peace of mind in the hours of diligent mental stillness demanded by drawing. After earning a degree in sociology at Central Michigan University and completing a tattoo apprenticeship, Soup moved to the arid high deserts of Northern Arizona. The new climate brought a sense of space and transformation to Soup's art. Today, he lives in Flagstaff, AZ with his talented wife, Hannah, where together they own Divinity Tattoo North. He spends his spare time painting, writing music, playing guitar, and mountain biking.

ZACH BECKETT was born in Sonora, California and has lived in Flagstaff off and on since 1996. He attended the Brooks Institute of Photography and in 2005 graduated with BA in Still Photography/ Commercial Advertising. Driven by skateboarding, cartoons, carnivorous plants, and graffiti Zach's creativity has excelled in more than just the field of photography. Starting at a young age with aerosol cans, his love for art quickly transitioned from painting on trains and walls to canvas. Zach is currently working the counter at Divinity Tattoo North in Flagstaff where his art is displayed year round.

HANNA HAGEN As a girl raised in Wisconsin I had very little artistic influence; even so, I still found this to be my life's pursuit. With the help of a supportive family I was able to pursue my passion. But it was when I finally made it to college that I had the chance to explore the world of art in every possible way. I was lucky enough to go to Northern Arizona University, as art is an integral part of the institution. By going to this particular university I was able to showcase my artistic ability while at the same time learning more about art.

JASMINE STACK is a student completing her senior year at Northern Arizona University. She is studying under the School of Fine Arts and will be graduating in May with a Bachelor's Degree in Painting. In her work, Stack explores concepts of feminism through the eyes of women, painting symbolic representations of female figures with vibrant colors and expressive poses. Future plans include moving to Chicago, Illinois to find her niche in the art world.

HELEN COUTANT is a retired English and ESL teacher living in Burkittsville, Maryland. She is the author of two children's books, *The Gift*, and *First Snow* which won the Christopher Award. Her essays and poetry have appeared in *Newsweek*, *Main Street Rag*, *Passager*, *The Sun*, *The Vietnam Forum* and *Vietnamese and American Journal*. She occasionally serves as guest assistant editor of *Passager*.

DAVID MICHAEL KEATING is about to complete his undergraduate education at the University of Arizona (UA) in sunny Tucson, where he has lived for the last four years. He recently had a short story and poem published in *Persona*, a literary magazine at UA, and he has edited

several magazine articles for his co-workers at a Tucson-based mining software company. His contribution to *Thin Air* will be his first published nonfiction piece. David begins graduate school in the fall in a M.A./Ph.D. program in communication theory.

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