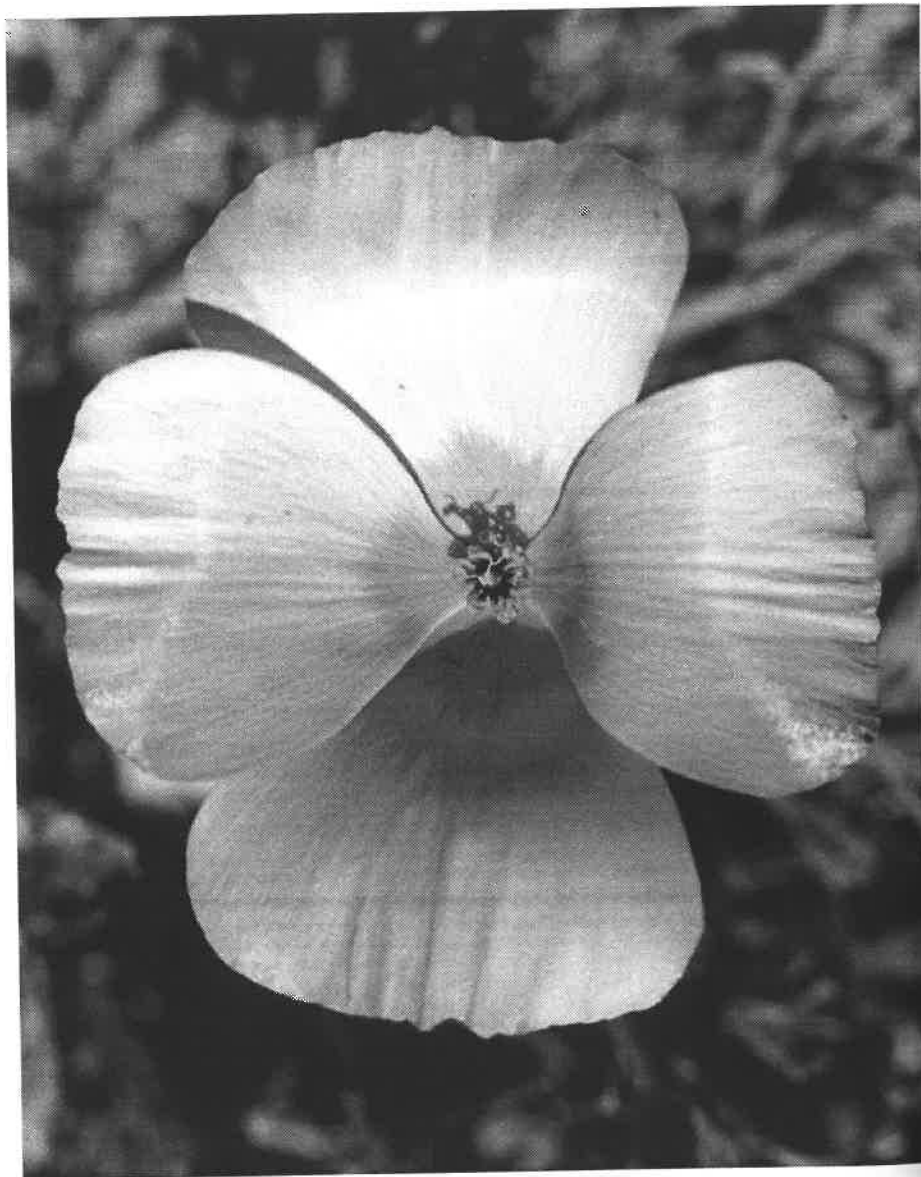




Thin Air

Double Aught



***Thin Air, Issue No.8***

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# Thin Air

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**Under Many Layers**

Today  
the cop pulls into the other lane  
blind to the male hitchhiker  
on the highway's edge.

Yesterday  
my sister stuck her thumb into the air  
arrest/handcuffs/jail cell.  
The same officer,  
hands itchy at his sides, watched  
two female attendants strip her,  
conduct a body search.

Last week  
the girl next door  
came home her blouse torn.  
Half the football team,  
their chest hairs hidden  
under protective gear,  
had to see  
her soft new breasts.

This evening  
Emergency Room  
coffee-jittery doctors  
watch a western on TV.  
Heart attack victim  
two doctors go grumbling  
hate to miss Poncho  
in the bar scene.  
An hour later  
a rape

eight doctors rush  
to probe the labia  
of a terrified fifteen-year-old.  
The Cisco Kid draws his gun  
shoots the bad guy  
in black and white  
in an empty room.

My sister and the girl next door  
meet the fifteen-year-old  
at the Women's Center.  
On Sunday afternoons  
they sit near the wood stove  
wearing too many layers of clothes  
trying not to feel  
naked.

### Take A Rib

If I believed in God  
I'd give it back  
rather be a hunchback, or even  
shorter (if that's possible)  
rather be off balance, left  
breast bigger than my right,  
than owe you something.

You men really take  
the cake: never  
had a woman inside you  
but let me say  
I know what it feels like  
to have you inside me  
even better  
I know how to make another brain,  
another heart, a penis even  
right in my own belly.  
My sons are proof  
your mothers are proof  
so cut the crap  
stand in my spike heels  
strap on my Wonder Bra  
you could use some cleavage.

### Jojo's Mama's Son

... and grasped Jojo's Mama's shoulder something like a good doctor should, but not exactly, and she cried and wailed and her fingernails cut into her palms. Those half-moon scars on her hands-- I still see them floating in the crumbly milk after my cereal in the ties of bony accountants, in the plumpness of my own stomach sometimes. Even when Jojo finally woke up, as they were removing bits of glass from his nose and forearms, I saw them in his face too. Minutes stretched into moments and I paced or pretended to read *Time*, seeing them maybe in Reagan's hairline. Uncle took out a flask and filled her coffee cup. A little spilled on the dirty floor.

They used to get on to me about leaving the TV on but I needed the drone. A year later Jojo still couldn't walk straight; he had a cane that Uncle made from a limb he found in the park. He glued a stolen eight ball at the end, for decoration, to make it seem like a fashion statement and not a cripple's tool. These were the days I first learned to play with myself. There was nothing left to do but take it out and watch it come to life, knowing to be caught was to be called jerk-off. Retarded people do it too much, assholes too little. Sometimes I wished it would go away.

And there are things you can't do with it. My friend AJ didn't know, didn't care. We went to the rink and he would gather the girls ten to fifteen and show them his eleven year old tool and some would giggle and a couple, just a couple of them--would put their finger to their mouths. No one took him up on it when he asked if they wanted to touch it, until one little girl with ponytails and knee socks walked over and rubbed her nail against the tip. Then she mashed it between thumb and forefinger--just the tip. She squeezed over and over to "Another One Bites the Dust" until AJ had to lean on the table for support and she sniffed her hand and went to wash it.

But I wanted to ask Jojo all about it because he was older and he was supposed to know stuff like that--to know it backwards because he was almost fifteen and I was only eleven. And he had promised me he would tell me all about it. He would read to me from the tattered *Penthouse Letters* he had swiped from B Dalton, his voice steady and smooth until he got to speed bump words like "cunt" or "pussy" or "bush." Even then it seemed he only hesitated to savor the word like it brought back some memory.

He put the magazine down and looked at me. "So, you like girls yet?"

"I think I do."

He looked at me like I had let him down. "There ain't no thinking to it. Either you know you like them or you know you don't,"

But he didn't listen as I tried to explain what I meant. He got up and went to the mirror to make sure his hair was okay. He sprayed some Polo on his neck and turned around. I had always wanted to look like him. He had blond hair that curled a little and grey-blue eyes, but I was redheaded with ugly green eyes that only my grandmother liked. He wasn't chubby anymore either, like I was. To put it into baseball terms he was a star center fielder and I was a catcher riding the bench. Except for that limp. He couldn't play ball in school that year. Week by week the limp would get better, only to get worse again for no reason. The weather grew cold the first winter after his accident and he complained about the pain until his Mama took him to the doctor for some pills. He spent the whole winter doped up but still complaining. And when spring came he gave me the rest of his pills--twenty or thirty of 'em--and told me never to give them to him again, no matter how much he begged.

For a whole month he would beg. He offered me not only his tattered *Penthouse Letters*, but all the pornography he owned. Each day he would flash a new skin mag in front of my face and say, "It's yours, they're all yours for just one of those pills. One." It took him three months to stop asking me. I think now he was testing me, seeing exactly what kind of a cousin I was to him. He could've had his Mama take him back to the doctor, but he didn't. He wanted to know how far I'd go to keep my promise.

I wanted to break it, and I would have if I hadn't sold those pills a week after he gave them to me, before the stakes grew so high. It wasn't the magazines either, it was his face, something

about his face when he would get up after sitting for a long time in front of the TV. I never told him what I did with those pills, and once he didn't need them anymore he never asked.

Late at night we'd get together and he'd tell me about which friends of his were doing it with which girls in the school. They were lucky bastards one and all, we agreed. He loved to tell me about Fishhook Wiles who got his nickname in the locker room. He was popular with the girls, but inept.

"I don't know," he told me one Friday night, "Fishhook's mind must be as bent as his member."

"What'd he do?"

"He just can't tell a girl to touch it. He's got to tell 'em exactly how to touch it, with which hand and which fingers of that hand. How much pressure. Charlene Williams told one of the guys it was like backing up a semi: 'Okay, a little to the left. Not so hard. Watch it. Okay, slow down, dammit. Watch it. It's too hard, ease up. A little to the right. Hold on, hold on. Let's just start it again.'"

We laughed about Fishhook but we both envied him. I used to always see him talking with some girl or another, a different one each week. I wouldn't follow girls in my own grade, instead I'd follow him just to watch. I memorized the way he threw his head back when he laughed and tried to emulate it in the school cafeteria. While he got giggles and soft pinches on the biceps, I got weird looks and rolled eyes. But I noticed Jojo too. He was never too far from Fishhook and he must've been learning too. He would lean against Fishhook's car and tap his cane on the pavement. He would talk to his share of girls, but they never reacted in the same way they did with Fishhook. Jojo got loose hugs; Fishhook got soft kisses on the cheek.

Jojo didn't seem thrilled with his hugs, but I would've died for one--even the noncommittal hugs from girls who didn't want you to think they liked you. I would see one of the girls hug Fishhook nice and tight and I would put myself in her arms, feel her body squeeze into mine with anxiety. My fingers would trace her ribs through the thickest of sweaters. I'd smell her hair as it tickled my face. I'd wind my finger through one of the belt loops on her jeans and lift, lift, lift.

But I was too immersed in my own erotic fantasies to know that my cousin's sex life had turned from gold to shit. I had thought

he would always have the magic. He still had the blond curls and the blue eyes, but he never smiled like he used to. Everyone noticed that. When he had the pills he could fake it, but when the pain struck him he wasn't fun to be around. Our late night talks ended.

I was always stuck at home on the weekend, since Uncle didn't like for me to spend the night at my friend's house very often. I spent the time reading or watching TV. For a while after the accident I would stay up late talking with Jojo. Then he started going out again and aside from an occasional night at AJ's I was alone on Fridays.

One Friday I had snuck into the den where Uncle kept his Playboys. He and my aunt had gone to sleep early and I was restless. I was bored to death of the five girly magazines Uncle had, but the thrill of sneaking a look at them had a hold on me. I was reading the jokes and trying to understand them when I heard the glass break.

I turned off my flashlight and froze. The only way out of the den was to go past the front door, and I could see the eight ball of Jojo's cane poking through. Then his hand reached in and unlocked the deadbolt. Jojo staggered in--Southern Comfort in hand--just in time to hear his father yell, "I've got a shotgun, you asshole!"

I was in the dark so Jojo couldn't see me, and I wasn't going to get myself into that mess. So I stayed real quiet and hid myself behind the rocking chair.

"Jojo? What the hell. . ."

Uncle came from the bedroom. I couldn't see him but I could see the end of the shotgun poking through the doorway.

"Hey, man."

"Where'd ya get that booze? And why the hell'd you break out the damn window?"

"I forgot my key. It's cold outside." Jojo's voice was a little slurred, but the liquor made him sound older.

"You get your drunk ass to bed. We're going to have a talk in the morning."

"I'm fuckin' sick of talkin' with *you*."

Jojo pointed his cane in the direction of Uncle. The shotgun dipped out of sight. They stood like that for an awful long time. The only sound was Jojo's foot scraping occasionally through the glass

on the floor.

The second he dropped the cane his father was on him, beating him with the butt of the shotgun. I could hear Jojo's mama softly begging her husband to stop and he did. But Jojo's face had been pressed down into the broken glass. Jojo's mama wailed again and for a while all I could see were the half-moon scars on Jojo and his mama.

I stayed in the den until the morning came, then I made my way to my bedroom and shut the door. Jojo woke me up about noon, his face pulpy and red. I couldn't let him know I had seen it, I had to let him have his pride in telling the story his way.

"What happened?" I asked.

"My pop whacked me with his rifle," he said, "I came home drunk and busted out a window."

"He whacked you for that?"

"No. He whacked me 'cus I smacked him in the shin with my cane. I would've done more, but he had that shotgun of his out. I was scared of gettin' my nuts blown off, but that's about all I was scared of."

I played along because he had to practice his story, to rehearse it on me so Fishhook and the guys would buy it. When Jojo lied he remembered it exactly. He never got his story mixed up.

After that night the little talks that Jojo and Uncle had became more common. I hadn't paid much attention to them before, but suddenly it seemed they were in the den every day with the door closed. Jojo would come out with a sweaty face and pretend that nothing happened in there, that it was nothing to him. His face would be red, his eyes wide and blank. He'd come into the kitchen where I was sitting with his mother and slap me on the shoulder. I guess it was his way of saying he could take it.

That dinner table become as silent as prayer. Jojo would disappear into his room from the time he got home from school until the next morning. The worry took its toll on my aunt, and she started to drink more and more, earlier and earlier. Uncle tried to keep his spirits up, but he always ended up talking about how great my dad had been to him. When he talked about my dad his eyes always looked up and mine always down. Uncle liked to talk about how dad rode his motorcycle with me right behind him when I was

two or so. And he never forgets to remind me that it was my dad who taught me how to play chess.

But I don't remember him teaching me the rules to chess, it was so long ago. It feels like I've just always known how to play, I feel at ease in front of a chessboard. I taught AJ how to play and we would while away rainy days with a game or two. Jojo never took an interest until after the incident with his father, then he would notice us in the den and watch from the doorway. Before long he was over my shoulder, examining the board with one hand rubbing the beard he was trying to grow. I never knew he understood the rules until one day he grunted as I moved and I realized too late that I had blundered away the game. He never said a word when he watched us, but I would always make a point to say something to him.

AJ and I began to play every day after school and Jojo always watched in silence, always over my shoulder. AJ got a chess computer for Christmas and had begun to improve dramatically. Still Jojo only grunted occasionally when he didn't like my move, twirling a captured pawn between his fingers. When Jojo grunted a lot I lost, but when he was silent I won.

AJ and I were near the end of a game when Jojo grunted loudly, and then knocked over my king with a thump. I stood it back up, but he turned and kicked at the board sending the pieces flying. He went into his room and closed the door until morning.

When he came out he had this look on his face that reminded me of the picture of my father I have by my bed. They had the same eyes. Eyes that had looked at a problem and made some sort of decision. They weren't indecisive eyes. Both he and my father had those grey-blue eyes so unlike mine. Their faces were exclamation points, not question marks. I stopped playing chess, told AJ that I had gotten bored with the game.

The talks between Jojo and Uncle started to last longer, to last late into the night so it was just me and Jojo's mama eating dinner together. She would sit there and smile at me, say what a good looking young man I was becoming. She wasn't the only one who noticed. When I talked to the girls at school, they would giggle. Some I could feel following me with their eyes. It was good to be watched.

So AJ and I spent more time at the roller rink, more time

trying to figure out what it was about Missy Kirkman's eyes that we liked so damn much. We started getting our haircuts at the mall because that's what the older kids did. We started to bum cigarettes, and steal our own porno magazines.

Jojo used Uncle's shotgun. He did it in the bathtub because it was the courteous thing to do, I guess. Somehow, in all the mess, I ended up being closer to my aunt. She asked me one day if she could call me her son, and I said yes. There wasn't another word I could say.

After Jojo was gone, Uncle would say something and look at me for a minute. I think he was expecting me to say something that Jojo would have said. But I kept my eyes to my applesauce. Sometimes he'd run his thick hands through my red hair and say what a good kid I was. It was his turn for his eyes to go down whenever Jojo's mama mentioned her dead son.

Fishhook came to the funeral and told a joke about Jojo that made some of the girls smile while they cried. When they asked how I was doing I looked at my shoes and tried to look like I needed a hug. Truth is, I needed a hug then worse than ever.

Poor Jojo's mama. She sat by the casket, her fists clenching and unclenching in rhythm with her crying. Half-moon scars dug by dirty fingernails still fill my eyes, make me think about the night at Methodist Hospital, when the doctor came in...

Sepia

I.

My mother sits impassively  
on the green park swing.  
Her eyes stare out  
    blueness  
while my baby teeters beside her  
on the other swing.

I push her; I push him.

Their hair blows unconcernedly.  
When Noah laughs and calls out

    "Gramma! Gramma!"

I feel my life revealed  
beneath each open palm.

Back and forth

Legs leave ground

Toes point to sky

Grips hold the reins  
    which free...

Mom's three pairs of socks, layered, scrunched,  
    torn on each narrow foot  
pants twisted, struggled on, inside out



so that her pockets hang naked like muted tongues  
unable to open or carry anything.

I watch her swing back and forth  
back and forth

as storm clouds threaten  
as wind grows thick and sure

and Noah swings back and forth  
back and forth  
close to me.

I kiss his chin;

he screeches his delight

while Mom's chin cascades

echoes

falling limp

its residue of beauty

once firm and sure, her lips  
once full of words for me  
now line themselves

with things

unsaid.

II.

I wear the jacket we made together:

simply stitched cotton,  
quilted,

patched

remembering lessons  
on embroidery,  
on button holes  
sewn tight;

final solutions of applique;  
opacity of yarn  
and thread

now hanging  
unknotted  
worn

barely holding  
the cotton  
shreds  
dirty  
old  
stained

but I dare not wash its frail life.  
I dare not let it fade yet more  
for fear the colors' bleeding,  
for fear the drowning dyes,  
would run and merge completely—

pooling together like mud;

all that color  
once bright and bold,

leaving  
leaving  
a whole world  
sepia now.

## Hail, and Well Met

My father insisted our family name  
descended from *Sieg Heil*.  
His jaw jutted and clamped around the words,  
hard delicious nuts in a Landgraf's feast.  
I winced when his right arm snapped up  
like a uniformed trooper in a grainy film.

I shadowed him on his morning walks,  
terrified he'd bark the words and, before  
I could trap his arm, thrust out his hand  
at some astonished stranger who couldn't know  
this man imagined Bavarian knights at crossroads  
saluting each other with honest, open hands.

But he spoke only to friends, greeted them  
with waves and clasps, words I ignored until  
one day I caught a familiar salutation:  
*grüss Gott* he'd bade them, trapping the glottals deep  
in his throat, rolling each sibilant *s*  
and keen *t*, so none could tell whether

he'd blessed them or coughed. He tipped me his secret  
smile. I couldn't help grinning back  
through their puzzled silence, knowing then  
I'd stumble into my own love of strange  
words: how, as you practice the tricks of their  
saying, you raise a thousand buried voices,

their resonant, undeniable lives echoing  
through the bone and supple flesh of speech,  
rehearsing murder, murmuring benediction.



---

**Mark A. Lawrence IV**

## **Dust la Voyage**

There are things you do as a boy that ain't never the same. Running into this Rosalyn night is one of them, feeling your legs pumping, the wind pushing in your ears, bare feet digging into this unforgiving soil that's grown more swamps and farmers' grave-stones than crop. Good thing Daddy wasn't a farmer; my life would have been really bad. As is, I got seven years. Seven years for the night in the liquor store with Stevie Ray whose eyes never met yours and his daddy's .45. Seven years because I didn't give a damn about the old man, I just wanted the bleeding to stop. Seven years, of the iron bars and rusty pipes of Angola State Prison, stripped of everything, but the green plastic bee-bee maze my Daddy gave me when I was eight. It kept me company for those seven years, as though to remind me of the ring of a .45 casing, echoed off a shelf of Jack Daniel's. Like the limp God left Jacob. Like my father saying I told you so.

My thumb pressing the bee-bee, dragging it through the twists and turns, remembering the first time I felt its cold steel. Daddy was big and I was waiting for the anger to come and the pain to start.

"Keep it to remind yourself of the truth of life, Boy." The whiskey of Daddy's breath thick as swamp moss between us. He said the makers fucked up. Said you could never get to the end, only go so far 'til you had to turn back. Here in Rosalyn, the gravel of its back roads digging into the soles of my feet, I believe him. High grass fields and the swamps stretching ahead and the seven years and Angola behind me, thumb working the confined bee-bee, turning familiar corners, making familiar mistakes. Damn him because he was right. But then how come, there's this comfort edging stubborn into me, yet even that is taint in Rosalyn, like the rot of the porch, that creaking in the night pulls you to dreams of

the swamps.

Walking barefoot, shoes back at the porch, like the boy as once familiar with these fields as the back of Daddy's hand. Toes spread out, knowing the freedom only one can after seven years of prison polished black shoes. Crab grass dragging across calloused feet and the sting of roadside gravel still warm from a Louisiana afternoon. The night wherein some road sign reads U.S. Federal 71, Welcome to Rosalyn, Population 531.

The metal bead slides through the channel skirting the edges. A millimeter or less to freedom, to its own piece of night air. On many nights, in the thralls of fever did I think it would break free, only to awake the next morning, finding it flung across the cell, face up, waiting for me. Always waiting.

"We're leaving tomorrow." I told Jimmy three weeks after his mother died.

"Why we leave?"

"Cause your mamma's dead and I can't find a job."

"Why not you go and I stay?"

"Cause you're a retard and I swore to your mamma to take care of you. So get your stuff." Having Jimmy with me wasn't my choice; he was blood, and there is some weight that goes with that. I told his mamma I'd keep an eye on him, as knowing she was dying. She'd been kind taking me in after Angola.

"Mamma say, I not retard. She say I just slow and to God, wise man and the idiot they no different."

"Well she's dead and what's God got to do with me." The next morning we took his mamma's '75 Ford pickup with a pack of gum and a tape of Willie Nelson singing German folk songs and headed south.

Heading for the gulf that day, we never made it. Rather here I am, a bit outside Rosalyn. A bit too close. My palms are sweaty, the night muggy feeling it covering your flesh with the remains of a short night shower, leaving the air heavy like bodies too close. The dust hangs then settles, caking my cracked-skin feet. My steps kicking it up, the road spring--shower dusty.

"Mamma calls that 'Dus-aw-voi-oge,'" Jimmy told me on a night we took a walk like this. He meant 'dust la voyage,' cause she was cajun and spoke in broken French. Her accent was thick and deep, like the Mississippi, like Jimmy's eyes. He's my height and

those eyes are so large, sometimes I think nothing will ever fill them, as though I'll be dragged into them like a grand night sky. A sky like tonight, the stars clear and thunderheads far off to the south. Daddy told me even stars eventually lose their light, I didn't believe him 'til the summer I made love to Mary Genkons. The filter moist with the night's perspiration and the sweat of my lips reminds me of that summer. Of her. A good Baptist girl, she sucked me so long I thought I'd die lying there, the stars losing their light one by one. When she was done, I returned the favor.

"I sing the body electric, the armies of those I love engirth me and I engirth them," she said over and over, 'til she flowed like milk spilt on the kitchen counter. Slow and constant, that way an old man bleeds. Laying there, holding each other against the night and Rosalyn itself. I told her I loved her and promised we'd leave here together.

The bee-bee spirals back toward the center of the maze, greased with palm sweat. Smooth, like the way Stevie Ray slid around the pool tables of The Crawdad, eyeing your shots as though he'd know everything by the way the nine-ball was sunk or the felt was ripped. The Crawdad, a gin hole with rickety boards, and faded sign sticking from the swamp like it should never've crawled out. Stevie Ray wasn't much better the night he told me "I like you boy." After seeing me lose a five on a hustle of cutthroat. Saying boy, the way Daddy did. I should have known, should have known when Daddy liked Stevie Ray and Mary didn't. And so, I never told her of the liquor store or the .45 he lifted from his father's dresser before he left home for the last time. Never saw the point as both us boys grow up in Rosalyn, both felt the madness of the small town, knew the fever of the walls pushing in, touching our flesh. Both wondered how the street lamps would look from the highway, pinpoints in the rearview mirror. Lining it tended to put the fear of God into people or turn them to a life of crime.

"I'm not one for fearin' anyone, includin' God, 'cause God is the money you got Boy." Stevie Ray said the night he first mentioned the liquor store and how bright the lights of Baton Rouge appeared from the highway, teeth turning pink from the neon beer sign. He'd talked as though it was a sure thing, like walking in, they'd hand us the money in the till. He said it so sure, the way mother told me she'd come back that night when I was four. He had

it set, knew when the money went to bank, and the truck came with stock from Baton Rouge. He showed me the .45, sleek lines as black as his hair. It was like saying 'yes' holding it in my hand, letting my finger brush the trigger. Stevie Ray would carry it the night of the liquor store. It was just for the scare, he said, it'd be empty anyhow and no one would know different. No one. No one in the liquor store. No one in Rosalyn, not even God. And so it was, Rosalyn with its white picket borders, 531 people including the Father, Son and the Holy Ghost, all sitting on a short stretch of U.S. Federal 71 without a clue.

Those memories reach out like creeper vines to pull me in, seemin' the closer I come to the main street of Rosalyn. Somewhat like telling Jimmy of this place after turning back south, telling him of the white chapel on Church Street, of Lee High School and Mary, but not those nights in the bed of her father's, or Stevie Ray. It was somewhat like confessing sin.

"Mamma say God love small town people cause Cane made the first cities and he bad," was all Jimmy had to say, chin up like having the right answer. I had nothing to follow, so we drove in silence for the rest of the day, I kept wondering if Jimmy might be right. Finally deciding he was, but with three ones and a quarter shoved in the bottom of my wallet, I figured it wasn't much of a God so it didn't matter.

Many a time, Jimmy seemed to shudder, like fighting an itch he'd not scratch. Four hundred twenty-three miles, only let me know he was crying, thinking that my eyes were on the road and not him. He never cries when it rains, he just sits staring. Watches the drops snaking across the window collecting each other as they touch, until it can't hold anymore and breaks up where the glass meets steel. Calls it his comet game. At night with the headlights on the freeway the drops look like fireflies. Daddy once told me that when the fireflies head south you know it's hot as hell in Roaly. Hot as hell, how fitting. Yet when Jimmy does cry, he does it quiet, like the calm that falls over the lake after the ducks have been flushed and shot. The way Daddy would sit before the anger took him and the alcohol brought him down. But like the storms that'd come off the gulf, there's not much you can trust.

Thunder, off to the south, still distant but closer. I know the storm is coming. Know it will hit before day breaks. Know the way

the tires take to the pavement slick with rain. Like I know the maze, the way the bee-bee moves just a bit faster than your fingers, know the corners, the turns, the spirals. I can feel the moisture in the air, increasing, like Jimmy's comets, soon it won't hold. Like a mind drowning in memories. Tomorrow the dust will be mud, sucking on tires, drowning them like the deep parts of the swamp.

Daddy was like the swamp; his anger was the peat gas igniting in the dry summers and his sorrow the sink mud that could pull a man down. I can still remember the nights, when I'd awake to hear the wailing, the long cries that seeped from the swamp, and I cannot say, even today, if it was the swamp or Daddy. I'd lie awake wondering if he was lost in the swamp or the swamp was lost in him. But soon enough, he'd be home and I'd be bleeding. My Daddy was also the whiskey, the way the pints would rest in his back pocket, the way his hand would strangle the neck of a bottle. That's what lived on after mother never came back. That was the beatings, which left me bloody. That was the grin that came across the courthouse the day I was sentenced, the kind a cat gives after leaving a nest empty. That was my Daddy. He never talked of God except when the car wouldn't start or the whiskey ran out. I don't talk much of Daddy to others cause in memory he is one dark and endless night filled with breathless terrors. So Jimmy didn't hear much of Daddy, nor did he hear of Angola, his mamma said he need not know of such things, but he does. He knows, and for the most part he lets it be. For the most part.

"The place you was before mama's place was bad."

"What's it to you?"

"You always stare off, an' mumbles in yours sleep."

Feeling those soft brown eyes staring at me. The sun high and baring down like those big eyes, super heating the truck cab. We'd only been on the road a day and a half, the gum was finished and the old deck had eaten Willie two miles out of town.

"Your mamma didn't teach you nothing if you're asking something rude like that. Anyhow, it's none of your business."

"No, she teach me a lot. She say a man soul be heavy when they're bad dreaming."

"What do you know? You're just a retard." The radio barely on, I heard the weatherman saying something of building pressure and that small storms shoul break by early evening. The sun so

high, the truck so hot I couldn't think of storms blowing in off the gulf with its fading fog lines and broken divider. Stretching out in its best light, looking well beaten.

"No. No, you pull over."

"What's your problem?"

"You pull over now." Grabbing the wheel, pushing over, sending the truck across a lane of traffic into the gravel side strip, the brakes squealed. The truck stuttered in the gravel sending a thick cloud of dust into the air and once we were stopped Jimmy was out the door. The engine died with the stress and I followed quickly.

"What the fuck, Jimmy? What the hell did you do that for?"

"You not see me. You not see Jimmy, you see retard but me smart too. Me smart too."

"Whatever. Get back in the damn truck. What do you think your mama would say if she were alive?"

"She'd say Jimmy smart too." With that he went dead silent, walked a few yards up the road, plopping down, staring off into the distant field and the barb-wired fence that ran with the highway.

"Come on Jimmy get your ass over here." But he didn't move, staring into the distance like he was looking for something. I even tried to move him, but, being big for eighteen, he just pushed me off. So I smoked a half a pack waiting for him to make up his mind. He sat there for an hour, then got up, brushing himself off and we left still heading south. The silence seemed to make it hotter.

"We're low on gas. The next stop I'll pull in, here's money, get us something." Finding a gas pit, dirt windows and bulky pumps. Jimmy got two sodas and a roll of donuts, and I filled the tank.

"How much is it going to be?"

"Ten even," said a cool drawl from the man at the cash register. Curly brown hair to his shoulders and deep brown eyes.

"What you running from?"

"What?"

"Well by the bags in the back and the retard I'd say you're running from something." Those deep brown eyes looking deeper into me.

"What's your problem, man?" I paid him in ones and left.

The rest of the ride I was left with, Jimmy for once was quiet. We drove south a day and a half more. I don't know why I turned back. If I wasn't so stubborn, I might say it was the man at the gas station, the way his cool drawl tangled in my head now lacking Jimmy's babble. And if I wasn't as good at avoiding the truth, I might even say it was Daddy and the letter I got before me and Jimmy left Baton Rouge. After a short stop at his mamma's grave, Jimmy seemed back to normal so we filled the tank and headed west. The drive to Rosalyn was a long one, the old truck only allowed us a hundred miles a day anymore and she'd overheat, but Jimmy filled the time with questions: How does a train run? What does a girl smell like? Where does paper come from? What other time was left, I added in some of my own stories, filling in a few of the blanks, but keeping the rest for myself. Sometimes when there wasn't any thing to talk about I'd let him play with the maze.

For Jimmy the maze was just a game, it didn't hold the same demons that it held for me. He'd try to move the bee-bee around with his thumb, trying to mimic my grim look, but it wasn't as familiar to him. It wasn't a part of him. He'd make the mistakes I'd learned long ago to avoid, tracing along the spiral that led no where, oblivious to the mistake. But each time we'd stop for the night, he'd hand it back to me with the same calm smile.

"Thanks Mac."

"Whatever Jimmy." Taking the small plastic toy back from him and shoving it into my pocket.

We arrived in Rosalyn on a Thursday, and true to character and the season, it was hot as hell. Avoiding main town we made it quick to the old shack out past the Reed farm. Driving up that gravel road the dust rising with the heat vapors brought back so many frightful dreams that found me trapped behind the metal bars of my cell. Dreams of a wood plank creature stretched and distorted with reaching walls and root that dragged back into the deep swamp, feeding it with those things darker than only the swamps could hide. Dreams ending in endless beatings and the drunken anger of Daddy. But the shack was just as I remembered, falling in on itself, as though the absence of the old man was taking its toll, that without its center there was nothing holding the walls in place.

I can just barely make out the shack from here. On a moonlit night like this, it's hard to tell the piled plank boards of the

house from the swamp that surrounds it. Hard but for the smell, the same smell which flooded my head, coming up on the porch, with memories as dead as Jimmy's mamma and as angry as the oily black fist marks in the wall. Jimmy inside, dead to the world is somehow right, calming in a place that echoes with pain that's deaf to him. Ahead the road goes to the right, that path is overhung by long whip willows, I know what's down that way, know what's waiting. But I've never gone that way, always too scared. But taking the right like edging the bee-bee into the turn Jimmy showed me the afternoon of Thursday, taking my hand pressing my thumb into the bee-bee, when the dust of this same stretch of road was settling on the hood of the truck. This path stretches long, like the cellblocks of Angola, dark, unattached, then opens up into the night with the moon bearing down. The gate is a simple, rusted pig iron swing hinged to two rock pillars, unlocked cause no one gives a damn about what's inside. A huge oak stretches out covering the hill in ghost shadow, the moon pushing odd-shaped ways through the long twisting limbs. During slave time they cleared this place real well giving up the land to put their dead, but time and Rosalyn has forgotten it and the grass waist high along the path, pushing in to claim it too. The headstones settled into their places like cats about to pounce, like the maze in my palm.

Digging my free hand into my pocket I find the crease-wrinkled paper deep at the bottom. Pulling it out, unfolding it for the first time since Baton Rouge, Jimmy's mamma three weeks dead, the car loaded and gassed. In the moonlight I make out the words hard-typed like the old machines, on tissue-thin telegram paper.

'Dear Mr. Evens, . . . We regret to inform you that your father passed away at 8:30 p.m. on the evening of the third. His body will be interred in Poppers' Field Cemetery. Our condolences . . . Sincerely Yours, Matthew Wryly, Coroner, Rosalyn Hospital' the words are as empty as the first time I'd read them.

"Jesus came back from the dead but man can't," Jimmy said when I showed him the letter the Wednesday before arriving in Rosalyn. Peering down at the grave piled with dried turned earth, I hope he's right. The wind is picking up and overhead the clouds are moving in, crowding the sky over the bushy limbs of the oak. The clouds puffy themselves.

Moving down the hill like Jimmy's hand guiding mine

guiding the bee-bee, edgy, uncertain, my own way scared.

"This the way, see Jimmy found it. Me show you Mac." His hand had been firm but friendly against mine.

The grave was nothing, and I mean nothing, no headstone, just a pile of dirt as long as Daddy drunk-dead. The bee-bee stops, my thumb still pushing as though Jimmy's hand was still behind it. Dragging my eyes from the turned earth I look down at the maze as though seeing it for the first time, moving the bee-bee back, seeing beneath it, scratched into the plastic. END.

Then the moon is gone. I look around but Daddy ain't there, he's dead, six feet under with no stone for his name. There's just the clouds, the oak and the dirt. Crouching down, the maze digs into my palm as though it knows what's up. Taking it into my fingers I push it into the dirt. The soil is hard at first, like the bars of Angola, like the road gravel, small stones scrape at my flesh as though the demons of seventeen years won't let them go. Pushing the dirt over the new hole is like burying Daddy for good. I feel the first of the rain falling and realize Jimmy is right; the dead, don't come back. Wiping the dust from the tops of my feet I leave, my back to the grave. The maze three inches down and Daddy six feet under.

**Spell for Vanishing**

Curl a blank page  
Eat its corner

Dissolve a calendar  
Drink it

Untie the laces  
of a sandal

Turn an hourglass  
face down

Say thy name  
backwards

Write it thus  
Erase it

Place thy hand  
upon a stone

Name it bone  
Name it gone

Make the light  
thy sentry

upon the noon  
at high solstice

Sweep thy hand  
unto the horizon

Pronounce art  
not three times

Then step free  
from thy shadow

vanishing  
like asleep

Become the dream  
of thyself

thou hath  
never had

The End of Superstition

Let black cats dance  
in my pathway in fear  
of my shadow. Let ladders  
form a triangular tunnel  
leading the way.

May I fall in love  
on Friday the Thirteenth,  
a rainy day. I will open  
my umbrella in the house,  
then go outside and step  
on every sidewalk crack  
to seal my fate.

May I spill all my salt  
and drop a hundred mirrors  
that shatter, releasing  
each trapped spirit to fly  
away like an invisible dove  
while all the shards turn  
into diamonds, falling  
to my bathroom floor,  
a glittering rain.

Ways of Being Dead

*However many ways there are of being alive,  
it is certain that there are vastly more ways of being dead.*  
—Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker*

There are, first,  
of course, the obvious  
ones: moldering  
in the hard pan  
or alluvium,  
preserved grotesquely  
in a dry-as-dust tomb  
or the tannin-rich  
bog soil. Burnt  
to ashes on a pyre,  
each molecule free  
at last to rejoin  
the elemental pleasures.  
Sailors find themselves  
pecked at on the sea-  
bottom by big-lipped  
fish with dim  
barely comprehending  
eyes. Earth, fire,  
water—the choices,  
in fact, seem limited  
until we recall  
there is always sprawling  
on a tattered couch  
in the Telephone Road  
Motel, the stench  
of one's self increasing  
exponentially,

while the party  
 in the next room  
 rages on for days,  
 or being boiled and stewed  
 by savages (yes, savages,  
 Death has no taboos  
 against calling names)  
 who crunch one's bones  
 between their awful  
 pointed teeth, sucking  
 the sweet marrow  
 for dessert. There are shy  
 cadavers, skeletal arms covering  
 rotten faces against  
 the prying eyes of life,  
 and bold corpses  
 that seem to shout,  
  
*Look out!*  
*I'm on the move!*  
 even years past their prime.  
 Above all, I prefer  
  
 the story  
 of the Renaissance  
 artist who insisted  
 that his apprentice  
 shred and slice and grind  
 every part of him,  
 then mix the bits  
 in his tempera.  
 The resulting landscapes,  
 especially *Saturnalia*,  
 with its cavorting satyrs  
 and couples coupling  
 beneath willow trees,  
 are nothing short of breathtaking.

## Face Down

I didn't expect it to hurt.  
 I *did* expect the room to be dark. I saw with no surprise the  
 candles that breathed rosemary and jasmine. I nodded at the  
 almond oil, a smooth bottle wrapped in natural brown paper, and  
 barely noticed the red lights of the CD player sleepwalking through  
 the slumber of flutes and harps.

The sink, however, came as a bit of a shock. For me? Do I  
 wash up before or after? What *exactly* do I wash? My hands? My  
 feet? My legs? The two thick cotton towels that sat in silence on  
 the brushed steel rod didn't offer much of a clue. They were too  
 large for hands, too small for bodies.

On the cot behind me was a robe on top of a white sheet  
 and a soft blanket. I stood between the table and the kitchenette-  
 type chair and wondered where to sit. Would it be too forward to wait  
 on the table? Too repressed to perch on the chair?

As the song shifted to the hollow sound of a wooden  
 instrument with a wet reed, I wondered if I should be naked by now.  
 I thought about taking off my clothes and sliding into the robe, but it  
 seemed too much like a date I'd once had in college. I was back in  
 the bathroom trying to find a polite way to say, "Good night and  
 please **never** call me again" while he was taking off his pants and  
 searching the pockets for a condom.

I decided to wait.

Repressed or not, I sat on the chair and took off my shoes.  
 I left my socks on and tried not to sweat. While I examined the  
 possibility that wet palms and damp armpits just might be the  
 reason for the sink, the door opened.

The masseuse was shorter than I thought she would be.  
 Instead of a tunic or an Indian sundress with geometric shapes and  
 spaghetti straps, she had on jeans, a white T-shirt and a "may I help  
 you?" smile. There were no dangling earrings, crystal necklaces, or  
 visible auras. If it weren't for her nametag that read "Sherry, Certi-

fied Masseuse," I would have thought she had just stopped in on her way to The Gap.

She seemed disappointed that I wasn't naked. She looked at her watch, pointed to the cot and said, "Take off whatever you're comfortable with and hop under those sheets." I nodded and looked at my socks. "Right."

She left then and went back out into the "full-service" salon. I imagined her leaning on the counter, lifting rattail combs out of the blue water and snickering with hair stylists about clients who cut their own bangs and didn't know how to dress (or undress) for a massage.

As I pulled off my shorts I thought about just how comfortable I was completely clothed. I took off my bra, left on my underwear (repressed again?) and hopped under those sheets.

I sat with my breasts on my knees, the sheet under my chin, and waited for Sherry. A quiet knock, the kind you hear in a dressing room, and then Sherry stuck her head in. "Ready?"

Before I could answer, she came in, shut the door and said, "Go ahead and lie down." I started to lean back when I heard a small sigh and then, "Put your face *down*." She pointed to a horseshoe-shaped hole at the top of the cot.

I shifted around, one hand holding onto the sheet tucked under my chin, the other trying to shield my Jockey-covered butt, while she asked what sounded like, "Are you nuts?" but was really, "Are you *allergic* to nuts?"

"No," I told the floor and tried to shake my head, now stuck in the horseshoe. "Good," she said, slapping her hands with the almond oil, and I smiled a little, as if my body's harmony with nuts was due to daily positive affirmations and 60-minute workouts.

She moved a blanket over my waist and legs and said, "We're going to begin by opening your back." I imagined Sherry reaching under the sink, pulling out a carving knife and opening my back like my father used to "open" a fish before he fried it. *That* would explain the sink. The image didn't fade when she told me, "If it becomes uncomfortable in any way, just let me know."

I doubted my wedged head would allow me to tell her *anything*, but before I could respond, her feet appeared. Barefoot? At a place where they also style hair and give facials? Is this sanitary? Is it even legal? You have to wear shoes to drive, but you

can strut around the salon sliding on hair and mud masks?

Or did she slip her shoes off when she came in the room, the second my head was stuck in the horseshoe? Was it to make me feel better ("hey, we're all naked here... you on the table, me on the floor") or just to give me something to do, a meditation practice of focusing on short, wide feet that supported small bunions and frosty pink toenails? "It's Zen," I imagined her saying, "the beauty of color, the pain of imperfection."

Sherry began "mapping" my back, an apparent first step to opening it. She traced my spine and shoulders with fingers too slick to open a jar. "My," she said as an oboe began to play, "*someone* needs a lot of work."

"I just moved into a new house," I told her, like a chubby woman says, "I just had a baby." Sherry, unconvinced, said nothing. "And I helped my husband lay sod." It was so quiet I thought perhaps Sherry was engaging in a transcendental meditation practice, leaving only her fingers and feet behind.

I tried again. "Sod's really heavy," I said as I smiled reassuringly at her toes. "You'd be surprised that grass is so —" But Sherry cut me off. "Shh," she said as a harp joined the wet reed. "Silence is good." I bit my lip and gave her feet a dirty look.

But it's hard to be indignant for long, especially when your butt is staring at the ceiling and you can't take your eyes off someone else's not-so-cute feet. So after a few moments when Sherry said, "Brrreeeeeaathe," I went right ahead and did it.

What Sherry didn't tell me - but what I learned as quickly as Pavlov's dog - is that the loose translation for Sherry's "breathe" is, "This is going to hurt like hell." Gasping, tensing, even groaning into the horseshoe is only going to result in a snappy, "*Someone* is really tight," another slap of almond oil, and the Fingers of Pain right back in the spot that tried to scoot away.

As Sherry the Sadist continued, I decided I would not fall into that Lamaze-breathing scam again. I would keep my pain pocketed in the horseshoe. I would not beg. I would not ask for ice chips. I would not say, "This is a bit uncomfortable, Sherry." I would take it in silence. After all, I wasn't sure I was even allowed to talk yet.

But soon my knots were gone, sliding off my back on a wave of almond oil. They slunk out into the salon where they mixed

with perm solution and pedicure nail polish. Only my back stayed behind, a marinated cape that didn't even need to breathe.

My back was open, Sherry told me, and I didn't even smirk when she said my toxins had been released. They had! Of course, they had! This was the back God intended me to have! It is not Sherry the Sadist, but Sherry the Saint! How wrong I had been! I knew, if I could keep my eyes open long enough, I'd see that even Sherry's feet had been reborn.

As I calculated how to work daily massages into my budget (do we *really* need groceries?), Sherry moved the sheet over my back. "She's tucking me in," I thought and wondered if my body had hitched a ride with the toxins. It also seemed to be gone, floating somewhere between the cot and the beaches of the Bahamas where I now slept in the sun and sipped a Margarita.

My back, however, was not the only body part that needed opening. Sherry's fingers moved to the tops of my thighs, the area below the Jockeys and above the saddlebags. The toxins came back. The beach left. Before I could get past that repressed heterosexual, Midwestern stuff about another woman's fingers dangerously close to my butt, not to mention the "other" significant area, I remembered my cellulite.

Now, I was in danger of not just being excited, but humiliated. But surely, Sherry had seen a cottage cheese butt before? She was, after all, a professional. And, those huge, sweaty white guys that left the sauna wrapped in starched sheets were on their way to the massage table, right? Too much feed in my saddlebags couldn't startle her into speaking, could it?

While I was imagining Sherry saying, "My, *someone* is certainly flabby," she began opening my hamstrings. I rolled my eyes when Sherry said to "breeaaathee." I knew the toxins trade off. I was willing to pay it. After all, my Margarita was melting.

Later, after Sherry carefully communicated the company policy ("no, you cannot rent the cot for a three-hour nap"), it was time to slide (I was no longer in the mood to hop) out of those sheets. I sat up, my breasts in my armpits, and didn't even reach for the robe. The beach had become topless, full of women with saggy boobs and loose toxins, and I had just a few moments to wash up before the sun set.

## Portrait in Concrete

The basin cracked. Three fingers gone from the right hand. Here on College Street, pantlegs brake perfectly over shoes of the cherub grown to a man. He remembers a day. Softly climbs the landing. Finds a spot.

No longer pissing in snow long enough to watch algae freeze. The fountain doesn't flow. The pipes have been shut off years since he peed here or watched steam rise from a yellow hole.

What is it? What is the need of this thought?—A stranger from the middle of his shoulder blade frowns now. Sunlight enters the basin halfway. The water main creaks like a secret conversation.

**Decisions**

I couldn't decide whether to masturbate  
or pray, so I split the difference,

and wrote a poem instead.  
The poem is about how it decided

to be written, and this is it.

*Wait a second.*

*Maybe it should go:*

I couldn't decide whether to masturbate  
or pray, so I split the difference  
and wrote a poem instead.

I couldn't decide whether  
to write about Kierkegaard  
or Richard Simmons, so I cut  
down the middle and wrote  
about my neighbor Bob Pickers.

I couldn't make up my mind  
whether to describe  
Bob's habit of standing on  
his balcony nude, or his wife's  
recent Thank-God-for-Menopause  
party, so I am focusing on Bob's  
Hot Wheels collection.

Hard to pick which  
of the Hot Wheels to talk  
about, or whether to explore  
the psycho-social evolution

of men's fixation on hot things,  
so I went with the leaf-blowing  
gardener, working between our  
houses as I write this, and how his huge  
afro-head suddenly appeared outside my kitchen,  
just as I started to apply the lubricant, which startled me  
into a reflexive mid-life crisis, which I resolved by following  
Kierkegaard's instructions for fashioning a vacuum cleaner  
out of a crucifix.

I can't decide what to write about deciding.  
Perhaps my writing group will help me  
lose a word here, a stanza there,  
throw out the whole second part,  
or maybe drop "afro-head" as potentially  
offensive. I'm not sure whether I will  
present this to them, and if I do, I will  
still have to decide whether or not I agree  
with their decisions. Oh dear, should  
I even go tonight? Metadecisions...



## Wolfing Pot Roast

Carl would always start with the potatoes, cutting them into red-rimmed coins, cream-colored in the middle like the buttons of my blouse. He'd do the same with the roast, the carrots, the onions, his fork and knife dancing his food into shapely portions. Next, he'd harpoon a hunk of meat, topping it with a piece of carrot and potato, then he'd run the whole thing through a puddle of rich, brown gravy—wait one, maybe two drips—then in it would go. A short trail of gravy would slide the corner of his mouth until his lissome tongue came out to work the perimeter of his lips. He'd go at it like this for the first few minutes without saying a word, barely a breath.

It's only fair to tell you, he's not like this with other foods, only my pot roast. And to be shamefully honest, I like to watch.

Five minutes into it, he'd really be enjoying himself, adding extra butter and salt to his potatoes and carrots, occasionally coming up for a gulp of water. After fifteen minutes of showing me the bald spot on top of his head, he'd rise, the face of satisfaction, and set off for his recliner in the living room.

It's not as bad as you think, though maybe it's worse. Carl and I haven't made love in nine months. I know because I fix him his favorite once a month, and for every pot roast, without fail, I am reminded. I am reminded of those lustier days when Carl hungered after me instead.

There are a lot of people who say they are not, but I am. I am the type who complains. I complain about everything, just not to the one who deserves it. The success of this strategy, I must say, has been less than desirable going on five years now. Take tonight for instance. Thought I'd make something different. Thought it might liven things up a little. I've been working all afternoon preparing a Mexican feast—margaritas, homemade salsa, fresh tamales seasoned with chili, black beans with cumin and a dab of sour cream.

Carl's in the living room doing what he always does, reads the newspaper from cover to cover. He tries to be sweet, though. "Smells good in there," he calls. "What's that you're cooking?"

"It's a surprise," I say back. "Can I make you a drink?"

"Got one, honey, thanks," he says from behind the newspaper. He has it strung out before him like a wet towel on a windless day, not a rustle, not a shake.

"How about a margarita," I say.

"A what?"

"We're having margaritas tonight, honey."

"I'd better finish what I have here, thanks," Carl says.

I begin cleaning some of the dishes in advance. There's a window above the sink. I look out on our small Michigan lake, which always gets smaller in summer, crowded coast to coast with swimmers, sunbathers, and boats of all sorts. It's late afternoon. The sky is drunk with amber, the color of scotch and water. I am spying on my next-door neighbors, adorable twin girls named Amanda and Hannah Thompson. They have strawberry blonde hair and little potbellies which, undoubtedly, will someday be firm and sculpted like their mother's, who, according to certain sources around the lake, posed for *Playboy* only a few years back.

The twins are working on a sand castle down by the water. Construction, it seems, has been delayed due to irreconcilable differences. Whatever Amanda builds up, Hannah tears down. From the corner of my eye, I notice a flash, like a white meteor hurtling from the sky. I lean over the sink to get a better look. I see it again. Calling for Carl, I rush through the dining room. "You won't believe what's happening," I say. One Mississippi, two Mississippi, three Mississippi—a short disturbing silence, disturbance in the sense that I feel like one.

"Oh," he half-says, not thinking, not thinking of me anyway.

"It smells wonderful."

"No, that's not what I mean, Carl. Outside. The seagulls are—"

"Honey, if you'll just give me five more minutes," he says.

The hell with him, I say to myself. Let him read about it in tomorrow's news. I walk out the sliding doors and cross the deck toward the water. Everything has stopped. The jet-skis, the boats, the swimmers. Even Amanda and Hannah drop their fists of

sand and stare slack-faced at the sky. A flock of seagulls are circling above the lake. Mr. Thompson, father of the centerfold, grandfather of the twins, comes out and I meet him over by the girls. Amanda and Hannah, the two of them in the same instant, burst into delighted squeals as one of the seagulls drops, not casually, from the sky in a backwards sort of descent. It's nothing I've ever seen. The wings catch pockets of air, knocking the bird in cartwheels toward the water. The seagull plunges into the lake and then, although revitalized by its inadvertent bath, the seagull flaps off the surface and rejoins the flock.

Mr. Thompson dips into the front pocket of his Hawaiian shirt and pulls out a cigarette. Another seagull drops, just drops like a brick. Down it goes and its untrammelled glide becomes an awkward tumble.

"Oops!" Amanda says.

"The birdie went oops," Hannah returns.

With hands tied in knots, they spin each other round and round, charmed in a way that only six year old girls could be.

"What is this, Dick? What's happening here?" I ask.

"Disgusting creatures," Mr. Thompson says. "They're scavengers, junkyard birds. They spend the whole day at the city dump. Who knows what they get into."

"You've seen this before?" I ask.

"Not quite like this, but you ever see a dog on antifreeze? They can go nuts before it finally kills em. Must've got some bad garbage. They're sure sick on something."

Another bird falls from the flock, toppling end over end like a wedding cake. Moments later the seagull is on the surface, struggling for flight, a thousand drops of water spraying from its panicked wings.

I hear the creak-slam of a screen-door being opened and closed. Jamie, the husband-less mother of Amanda and Hannah, draws my notice. She steps off the deck and walks toward us. There they are, a hair bigger than life and much bigger than mine, the blue ribbon of melon breasts not exactly hidden nor fully supported by a canary-yellow bikini top. The sun dances on her bronze skin and fiery auburn hair. She has thick eyelashes, stunning cheekbones, a slender chin and a swan's neck which tapers between pronounced clavicles. Jamie's wearing cut-off

jeans, her waist like a thimble bobbing back and forth as she walks. Suddenly I hear a resounding thud. The whole lake hears it.

The girls scream out, but the pleasure is lost. I look to see one of the toppling seagulls has landed on the bow of a speedboat. With its neck bent wrong, the bird jostles to one side and jerks to the other, trying for the starboard side of the boat. Jamie scoops up Amanda, then Hannah—in each arm, a red face glazed with tears. The boats pull back and just like that the seagulls shift in the sky and stream off across the land like an unexpected wind.

Mr. Thompson finishes his cigarette. "Well, it's been interesting," he says, then flicks the butt into the lake and follows Jamie into the house. I hurry in to check on the tamales. It seems a flock of seagulls can forget how to fly, but I can't get dinner off my mind. I see Carl on my way through the dining room, still nestled in his overstuffed marshmallow recliner.

"Honey," I call from the kitchen, "the strangest thing." A waft of steam rushes up in my face as I tip the lid on the pot of tamales. With my eyes closed and a mouth full of steam, I say, "The seagulls, Carl. It was terrible. One dropped right on top of a boat."

I open my eyes half-expecting Carl to be standing before me. There's no Carl, not even a hesitated response from the living room. I've had it. I set the lid on the counter and walk right into the living room to confront him. "You know," I begin to say, calm yet immediate, "it would be nice if you'd answer when I call you."

Still nothing. He won't even lay his newspaper down. I'm angry now, enough so to rip the damn paper from his hands and tear it in half. But just then I hear it. The breath. His sleeping breath. I peer over his newspaper. Carl's head is cocked to one side in peaceful sleep. The anger's there, but it's different now. I turn away, then back again. I'm just about to, but I don't. I notice an empty crystal glass set on the stand beside him. Only the smell of scotch and water remains. I leave him to his sleep. There's no telling how long he'll hold that newspaper up, a white sheet frozen in time, the two top corners feathered over like wings.

I walk down the hall into the kitchen. The room smells of overcooked tamales and a hint of tequila. I turn off the burners then go into the bedroom. In a full-length mirror I examine my hair, the flat dull texture. I scan the slope of my shoulders, the wide tulip

curves of my hips, all the way down to my feet. With a deep breath, my breasts lift. I undo the top two, cream-colored buttons of my blouse. My papery white cleavage looks like something that wants to sit down, take a load off. I let the breath out and my whole body seems to lose its shape, unforming into a rectangle with rounded corners, a loaf of bread, doughy in the middle, dry and cracked on top. I look into the mirror, scrutinizing my face, this everyday face with small eyes and pale lashes and thin lips drawn like a tripwire between wide cheeks.

I am the judge of unremarkable things and the list gets longer as I go. But I must admit that even I can look at my body—think of my life—and feel a sort of laughable satisfaction. There are a few things I'd like to change, and I would, but there'd always be a few more. It's like pulling at the frayed edge of fine scarf. It's a process, a lesson, a ripping and tearing and building of a life. And eventually you learn to live with yourself, you stop pulling at the loose ends.

You can watch a seagull forget how to fly, plunge into a lake and make a rainbow as it flap-flaps into the sunset. And you can go off dreaming how you wish it would be, but deep down you know, from your head to your heels you know, this is the way it is.

I rebutton my shirt. I can almost laugh as the picture of Carl wolfing pot roast floats somewhere behind my mind.

## Alfred Brendel Plays the Piano

1.

He is easily mistaken for someone else,  
this tall man in moss-tweed,  
the world's greatest pianist.  
He walks Hampstead Heath past a duck pond.  
Two boys in short pants watch over  
paper boats, pushed by faith to the middle.  
Alfred Brendel stops momentarily  
his gaze beyond this miniature  
portrait or perhaps pulled from behind.  
Each body of water identifiable by color.  
His native Adriatic a blue-green  
painful in intensity, like tubes of paint  
squeezed together on the pallet  
but refusing to mix.

2.

When Alfred Brendel plays the piano  
it is best not to watch his face.  
His cheeks stretch into a grimace,  
jaw kneading like hands in dough,  
neck muscles flexing as if somehow  
separated from the body.  
Sometimes he practices with a mirror  
to one side of the piano, hooking  
flesh to music to coordinate  
how he plays to how he appears,  
so as not to alarm or distract.  
The score, musician and audience  
tied together web-like, strands

nearly invisible, but with a  
strength fierce and frightening.

3.

Before Alfred Brendel plays  
there is a moment of absolute stillness  
like the quiet which descends on  
a congregation before the prayer  
for the dead when each mourner  
resurrects memory: of the mother  
in the kitchen washing dishes  
and humming as the peach walls  
grow dim in the fading light;  
of three boys and girls drawing  
wild chalky figures on the sidewalk.  
Until the mourner is whipped back to the present  
to remember why he is standing to pray  
and which one of the three has died.

4.

When Alfred Brendel plays  
you can never be sure what  
will be pulled from the core.  
The silence at the center of the music.  
Reliable hands like a doctor  
coaxing out a baby, a mixture  
of pleading and steady pressure,  
not certain what harelip or sixth  
toe will emerge with the slippery newborn.  
You cannot take normalcy for granted.  
The notes keep coming even after the last bar  
and the audience too spent to notice.

## Bulldog Front

Louis started it. I want to get that out of the way first. Louis started it.

The kitchen told the story of the last two weeks. We didn't go into the kitchen too often, and it was way too fucking cold to empty the trash, so two weeks worth of debris swallowed the kitchen. Littered with empty boxes of Hamburger Helper, pizza boxes, Taco Bell trash, everything else you didn't really have to cook first. And, for every empty two liters of RC, there were 1.75 empty liters of whiskey. We'd started on Beam, worked our way through Early Times and Tom Sims, and were onto Old Crow by the time shit started getting really nasty. Or really, Louis started getting nasty.

We all knew the tragedy of his girl. She had herpes, so, on top of normal monthly shit, Louis had flare ups to deal with. Which meant we had flare ups to deal with. And fuck giving the guy sympathy. It was the heart of winter. If there were any chicks in town, they were in hibernation, and if they weren't, you had to admit that we were. For two weeks we'd been more or less snowed in. Sitting around the common room, drinking booze, watching the same old videotapes again and again. Never leaving except to get more booze, more soda, food we didn't have to cook.

The shit started over *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*. A seemingly harmless movie. And no harm came from it in the first four viewings, but then, I guess we were all sitting there, watching Jennifer Jason Leigh prone in a dugout, thinking, shit, I was getting more in high school. And Pheobe Cates can be pure torture when you've been staring at the same four dudes for fourteen straight days. My voice added to the problem, too. The Spicoli jokes were inevitable. Louis started those, too.

Started harmless. "Hey, Eddie, do me a favor," Louis said

the first time we watched it. "Say, 'I know I'm in the right place. I see the globe right there.'"

I said it the first time, and the second time, and the third. Snowed in or not, I was still pretty happy about shit in general. My first winter up north, union pay coming in every week that the ground stayed frozen. My bones felt like they were getting stronger, my joints didn't ache when I got out of bed, the calluses were shedding layers. This was the first time since elementary school that I'd had two weeks when I didn't work or look for work. I'd even been picking up an extra twenty bucks almost every time I went to the liquor store by pulling some poor sap out of a snow bank with my truck. No doubt, man, I was loving it. Paid vacation, the two most beautiful words since "open bar." Still, by the fifth generation of Spicoli jokes, I'd had enough, so I told Louis flat out, "Be cool. You're starting to wear on me."

"Come on, dude," Louis said. "Surf's up." I didn't answer. "Say it, Eddie," Louis went on. "Say all you need is some tasty waves and a cool buzz."

"All you need is to shut your fucking hole," my cousin George threw in. Not hostile, though. This wasn't a hostile scene at this point. Small town, working class. It's the only way to talk.

Louis didn't come back on George, though. He stuck with me. I was kind of the outsider of the house. Five of us lived there, and the other four had grown up together. We'd all be sitting around sometimes when George would cut on Louis for kicking Louis's ass in the first grade, or they'd talk about how they were systematically deflowered by Mary Policcichio in junior high, that kind of shit. So when they needed someone to rag, it was only right for them to look outside the circle. And I took it pretty well. It didn't mean shit to me. Louis would be ragging me one minute and buying me a beer the next. Like I said, man, working class.

So I let Louis keep it up a little longer with his, "I know that dude," and "Learning about Cuba, Eddie? Having some food?" I just kept smiling and nodding until George pointed out that we were about to run out of whiskey. Everyone scattered into bedrooms and came out with beer mugs and Tupperware containers full of loose change, but not enough, so Richard, who was another of my roommates, and I split to drive around town until we could find some poor bastard stuck in the snow to pay for a bottle.

Mission accomplished in about twenty minutes. We got back to the place with a one seven five of drug store brown whiskey—they don't even call it bourbon—a couple of bottles of RC and a tray of frozen lasagna. *Fast Times* was still on, just before the dance scene. I had the booze in my right hand and the bottles of soda in my left. Louis sat completely across the room, a basketball at his feet. Richard told the story of the housewife with a trunk full of groceries who was so happy that we'd pulled her car out of a snow bank that she gave us thirty bucks and the tray of lasagna. George and my last roommate, Rocky, threw up high fives to Richard.

Louis, though, threw the basketball across the room, nailing me in the head. "That's your skull, Eddie. You're so fucking stoned."

I put the bottles on the floor and said, "That's enough of your shit."

Louis looked at me with a grin full of teeth and said, "Be cool, Eddie. Be cool."

"Don't mock me, motherfucker," I said. "I'll throw down." And so on. Back and forth, me and Louis, with all that same shit that everyone says when they're trying to decide whether or not they really want to throw arms. During this time, Rocky snuck off to his room.

He came back with two pairs of boxing gloves and headgear, screaming, "We settle this like men!" Obviously, the thought of scrapping Louis had crossed Rocky's mind before. Probably when Louis was ragging his Spanish ass during the inquisition scene of *History of the World, Part 1*.

I went back in my room to get ready. Louis did the same, and everyone else went into the back yard with snow shovels to dig out a ring.

Louis was bigger than me, a good thirty pounds heavier and two inches taller, so I decided to go with a little head game. I took off my jeans and black leather jacket and put on turquoise and green baggies with an Aztec design on them over my long johns. I also put on a Coppertone t-shirt and my snow boots. Motherfucker wants a surfer, I'll give him a surfer.

My other roommates had dug a ten foot square out of the snow, with a border of snow, about four feet high on three sides.

They had three lawn chairs set up on the fourth side. They sat there, passing both bottles down the line and back again. Louis stood in the middle, gloves and headgear already on, punching his hands together. He saw my outfit and said, "What a fucking clown."

I tied on my gloves and headgear and walked into the ring with him. Rocky followed me.

"All right," Rocky said. "No kicking no biting no scratching no hair pulling no shot to the balls no rabbit punches no TKOs. The only way we have a winner is if the loser cries 'Uncle.' Now go to your corners and come out scrapping."

Like I said, Louis was quite a bit bigger than me, but he came out flat-footed. Throwing arms like he wanted to lay me out in one punch. So I played defense, letting him punch the shit out of my forearms. I could hear George screaming for me, and Richard and Rocky cracking jokes about me getting my ass kicked. As soon as I heard Louis breathe heavy, I started working him low, throwing body shots, hitting his ribs. Louis didn't know how to face this. The only fights he'd been in were the ones where you try to knock the man down right away, go for the nose or the chin, then literally kick him when he's down. Or the ones where you try to get inside, get your hands on his inner thigh and neck, and flip him. But no one thinks to throw a body shot in a real fight, so Louis had never thought about how to block one. I kept catching his wind, and every time I did, I went high. Usually with a left-handed jab, so when I threw my big rights, they landed square. Pretty soon, I could see Louis's arms getting heavy from all those haymakers he threw to start off with. I was able to get a full on, wound up right across his jaw, and he went down.

Rocky didn't come back into the ring to ref, so I didn't go back to my corner. I just did an Ali dance over Louis. Every time he tried to stand, I tagged him in the head, saying, "Cry Uncle." Until, finally, face down in the snow, Louis said, "Uncle, motherfucker."

And thank god that he did when he did, because I was beat tired, losing my buzz, and cold. I went straight into the house to put on some warm clothes and fix a cocktail. By the time I got out of my bedroom and into the common area, two shots of Yukon Jack were poured, and Louis was waiting for me. The Yukon Jack was sacred. Louis, George, and I had stolen it from a yuppie bar one

night in a drunken rage we later rationalized as class politics. Since then, the presence of the bottle had developed an aura in the freezer that demanded it not be touched until some undetermined special occasion presented itself. The very presence of it convinced me that all was forgiven, and Louis and I were seeing eye to eye again.

"Come on, Spicoli. Do a shot with me," he said. I walked over to him and lifted a glass. He lifted his and said, "You kicked my ass good."

"Nah," I said. "I just come from a fuck, fight, or drink town. It don't mean shit."

We toasted, drank, and settled in for the encore presentation of *The Deer Hunter*.

The sun came out the next day. Spirits lifted. It was Saturday, so still, none of us had to work. We drove into town and hung around for a while checking out boxing equipment at Sportstown. Then, we went to see if the video store had any choice flicks on sale, had lunch at an all-you-can-eat Mexican restaurant, and caught happy hour at Dugan's. We spent the rest of the evening shooting pool at the Thirsty Turtle. A few local chicks had come out of hibernation, too, so we had our first chance in a couple of weeks to hit on women. And all night, Rocky kept talking about the fight. Louis and I didn't add anything. We were both over it. But Rocky kept it up. Every time he'd take a shot at pool, he'd say something like, "I'm going to drop this ball like it's Louis." Or something to that effect. By the end of the night, we knew the gloves were coming on.

Louis took Rocky. His second haymaker. He caught Rocky off guard and dropped him.

The next day, George and Richard got into a dispute over who was going to clean the kitchen and settled it with the gloves. George took Richard with a lucky shot to the temple. But rather than just clean the kitchen, Richard challenged Rocky, figuring, why clean when I can kick Rocky's ass. Which Richard did. So for the next two days, Rocky had to clean the whole house. Louis didn't think it was right, so he went after Richard. Richard dropped Louis,

so Louis had to do Richard's laundry. George wanted his laundry done, too, so he took on Louis, but Louis won that one, so George had to wash clothes for Louis and Richard, which George didn't like at all, so he took on Rocky, won, and Rocky did everyone's wash in the house but mine. I didn't want any part of the insanity. I stayed out of it as long as I could. My big problem, though, was the list on the refrigerator. The rankings. Rocky was number five. He'd lost to everyone but me. George was four, although he'd beat Richard, because he'd lost to Louis and Richard had beaten Louis. Also, Richard made the list. Louis was three, Richard two, and I was number one. And someone had to be eyeing that title bout.

Then the snow came back. All of us out of work again. Louis's girlfriend still had a flare up, so she'd bought a bunch of pornos for Louis, telling him to work it out for himself. By the third day of snow, we'd exhausted everything else and had the porno marathon. We'd also been forced to the cheapest liquor that the A&P carried: Sunset Tequila. No chaser. Maybe a lick of salt now and then, but that was it.

And after four hours of five guys sitting around, drinking what tasted like paint thinner and watching what looked like everyone else in the world having sex, I knew a bout was coming on. Richard challenged me. He hit me with a slew of Spicoli jokes, but I'd been the champ for the better part of two weeks and had grown immune to voice cracks. I just said, "You ain't a contender yet, Dick. You still ain't beat George."

George was passed out on the old, thrift store, Archie Bunker looking armchair. Richard slapped him in the face a couple of times to wake him up, then challenged him. George raised his head, opened his eyes just enough to see through them, and said, "What the fuck. I'll kick your ass again."

George borrowed a pair of my baggies for good luck and strutted into the ring wearing only the baggies, snow boots, gloves, and headgear. "Only way to stay awake," he said, but his eyes still hadn't opened all the way. I pulled him back inside and gave him some pointers: showed him where to hold his arms, told him to dance around, covering his face for the first thirty seconds or so, just until the blood started pumping, and told him the secret of the body shot. But George went back into the ring to fight his own fight.

And Richard came out swinging. George just didn't have the defense. He went for a few big punches to the head, but they were slow and Richard wasn't having any. It took about five minutes for Richard to drop George. Then it was my turn.

I'd noticed that Richard held his arms low when he boxed, so I kept mine high, sending left-handed jabs to his head, using my right arm to guard my midsection. My jabs weren't hard. More of a lead into the big right than an attempt to hurt him. But Richard caught on quick and with every jab I sent, he sent a right right over, catching me in the head, but at the end, the weak point of his punch. So I faked a left, drawing out his big right, ducked the punch, and caught him with an uppercut to the solar plexus. This knocked the wind out of him, so I delivered a Louis-style haymaker to his temple, and he dropped. And once you dropped in this ring, you didn't get back up.

At this point, the tequila reminded me that I descended from a hot-blooded Mexican grandfather. I took another shot, saw that the bottle had only one more shot left, finished the bottle, smashed it against the side of the house, and screamed, "Can no man take me?"

This reminded George that he descended from a hot-blooded Mexican great-uncle, and he rose to the challenge. He was still half asleep and sluggish, though, and I took him before he hit anything but my forearms. Then Rocky saw his chance for redemption, to rise above household chores, but it took me about three blows to show Rocky why he was staying at the bottom. Only Louis remained, but he didn't want any. He knew he could only win with the big right, and he wasn't going to land the big right on me. "To the bottle of Yukon, then," I said.

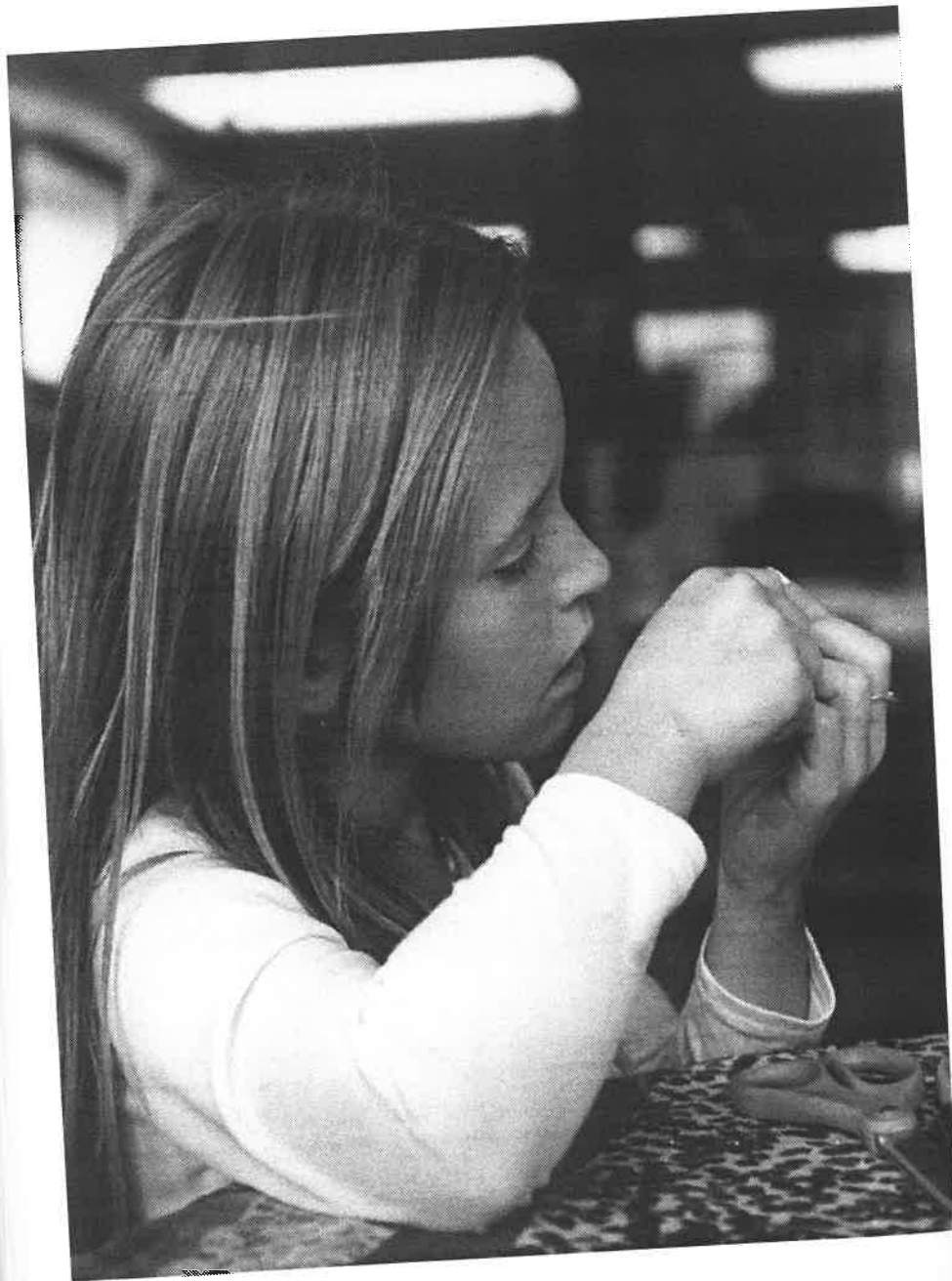
"Not me," Louis said. "I'm going to my girlfriend's. She's gotta be thinking by now that I only go to see her to have sex." He headed for his car. I offered him my truck so that he wouldn't have to worry about getting stuck in the snow, but he turned it down.

Rocky turned down the shot, too. He said that he had laundry to do. George said he was going to pass back out. Richard did a shot with me. He didn't say a word just swallowed an ounce and a half of the sacred Yukon, patted me on the back, and went into his bedroom. I put on *Fast Times*, but that didn't bait them. I fell asleep, woke up, went back into George's room and tried to talk

him into another bottle, my treat, but he wasn't into it. I tried Richard, but he told me to drink my fucking Yukon. Rocky kept thinking that everything I said to him was a condescension. I waited for Louis. He started everything. At least he should drink with me. I sat up, drinking Yukon, waiting for Louis, but he didn't come home. I even drove into town and picked up *Stripes* from the video store, thinking, these guys can't sit in their rooms and sulk when *Stripes* is on. But they did.

Finally, I quit drinking the Yukon, put the bottle back in the freezer, turned off the tube, and headed for bed.

The funny thing about it, I thought, is that I can't even fight. Not in a real sense. Not in a bar room brawl sense, in a hit-a-man-out-of-anger sense. Not when you can kick and bite and pull hair and pull out a knife or a gun. Not when it has to be settled by taking every blow and swallowing blood until someone is crazy or brave enough to step in and break it up, or until the cops show, or until one guy hits the ground and he just can't get back up and the other guy kicks him until he's tired of kicking. Really, they all just fell for the same move. Body shots they didn't expect and left jabs. Left jabs they could have let me throw all day without any pain except in my left arm. Then a big right to the ribs and a big right to the head. Low then high. Every time. I just threw them off balance.



## Biographical Sketches

**B. Chelsea Adams'** poems have appeared in *Poet Lore*, *The Southwestern Review*, *Union Street Review*, *Albany Review*, *Lucid Stone*, and other literary journals. She has also published fiction in *Huckleberry Magazine*, *Blackwater Review* and *Voices of Appalachia*. Adams lives in Riner, Virginia.

**Ruth Berman's** poems have appeared in many publications including: *Saturday Review*, *Asimov's*, *Poem* and others. She has also compiled a non-fiction WWII family chronicle titled *Dear Poppa*, published by the Minnesota Historical Society Press. Berman lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

**Björn Brodersen** resides in Hamburg, Germany and is currently working as a writer and photographer for the local newspaper. The photographs that appear in this journal were taken during his one year residency in the Southwest.

**Terri Brown-Davidson's** poems, short stories, and novel excerpts have appeared in more than five hundred journals, including *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, *TriQuarterly*, *The Literary Review*, *The Denver Quarterly*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, and *Puerto del Sol*.

**Richard Campbell** attended the University of Southern California and the University of California, Los Angeles, where he majored in philosophy. He was a manager of a healthcare billing and consulting service since 1979 and sold the business in 1996 to pursue a writing career. Campbell resides in Redondo Beach, California, with his wife Jessamine and his two sons, Byron and Spencer.

**Sean Carswell** currently resides in Florida. He has just published his first novel *Drinks for the Little Guy*.

**Carol V. Davis'** poems have appeared in *Mid-American Review*, *Roanoke Review*, *South Dakota Review*, and many others. She spent 1996 through 1997 as a Fulbright scholar in St. Petersburg, Russia, where her new book *It's Time to Talk About...* was published in 1997. Davis resides in Los Angeles, California.

**Lucille Lang Day's** poetry collections are *Fire in the Garden*, and *Self-Portrait with Hand Microscope*, which received the Joseph Henry Jackson Award in Literature from the San Francisco Foundation.

**David Grant** currently resides in Minnesota with his fiancée. He has just completed his M.A. in Rhetoric from Northern Arizona University.

**Tom Hamilton** has published over 30 works in magazines including: *Rockford Register*, *Dream International Quarterly*, *Rockford Review*, *Crimson Leer*, *Writers' Gazette*, *Armchair Aesthete* and many others. He has also published a chapbook collection by Alpha Beat Press. Hamilton is an Irish traveler who lives on the roadways of the US and Canada with his extended clan family.

**Lois Marie Harrod's** fourth book of poetry *Part of the Deeper Sea* was published by Palanquin Press, University of South Carolina—Aiken, in 1997, and her chapbook *This Is a Story You Already Know* was recently published by Palanquin Press in June 1999. She received a 1998 fellowship from the New Jersey Council of the Arts for her poetry.

**Gayle Elen Harvey** has been published in many journals including: *Poetry Northwest*, *Willow Springs*, *Yellow Silk*, *Yankee*, *Atlanta Review*, *Hanging Loose*, and others. Her work has appeared in anthologies titled *Claiming the Spirit Within* and the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary issue of *American Letters and Commentary*. She was also a co-winner of the 1994 Emily Dickinson Award of the Poetry Society of America and was the first prize winner of the Frances Locke Memorial Poetry Award of Bitter Oleander Press in 1988. She was recently a first prize winner in the *Kimera Poetry Journal*. Harvey lives in Utica, New York.

**Robert E. Haynes'** poetry has appeared in *Poetry Northwest*, *New Letters*, *Poet Lore*, *Zone 3*, *Atom Mind*, *Kentucky Poetry Review*, *Cimarron Review* and *Cape Rock*. He has works in two anthologies and a textbook titled *Important Words*. Haynes lives in Scottsdale, Arizona, where his poetry has been commissioned by the Scottsdale Center for the Arts, in their Art Walk program.

**Gary Jullano's** work has been recently featured in the *Kansas Quarterly*, *Painted Bride Quarterly* and *Red River Review*. Several of his poems will be published in *The Worcester Review* and *The Licking River Review*. Before Jullano moved to West Rutland, Vermont, he taught writing composition at Kean College and Passiac Community College.

**Diane Lilli** is a freelance writer whose poetry has appeared in the *Sierra Nevada Review*, *Solo*, *Eureka* and *RE-AL*. She resides in Glen Ridge, New Jersey, with her three children.

**Bobbi Lurie** has worked as a muralist, printmaker, therapist, art reviewer and essayist. Her poems have been published in *The Licking River Review*, *Gulf Stream*, *The Orange Willow River Review* and several anthologies. Her autobiographical essay "4 O'Clock" was recently nominated for the Pushcart Prize. Lurie lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

**Jan C. Minich's** chapbook *History of a Drowning* was recently published by Owl Creek Press, and he has also been published in over 30 magazines including: *Montana Review*, *Kansas Quarterly*, *Quarterly West*, *Cutbank* and *Northwest Review*. He presently teaches literature and writing at the College of Eastern Utah.

**Dennis Saleh** lives in Seaside, California, as a writer and a poet.

**Mark Seidl's** poems have appeared in *Parnassus Literary Journal*, *Antonym* and *Two Rivers Review*. He lives in Poughkeepsie, New York, where he works as an editor and writer.

**Askold Skalsky's** poetry has been published in over a hundred small-press magazines and journals including: *Oregon East*, *International Poetry Review*, *Appalachee Quarterly*, *Sunstone* and *Green Fuse*. He is currently working on his first book of poems and teaches English at a community college in Western Maryland.

**Kristine Somerville** lives in Columbia, Missouri, where she serves as a senior advisor for *The Missouri Review* and works as a tutorial coordinator for the University of Missouri football program. Her short

stories and prose poems have appeared in a variety of literary magazines, including *Quarterly West*, *Sycamore Review*, *The North American Review*, and *Haydens Ferry*.

**David Starkey's** poetry has appeared in *Atlanta Review*, *Flyaway*, *Massachusetts Review*, *Mid-American Review*, *The Nebraska Review*, *Sonora Review*, *Writer's Forum* and many others. In addition, he has published several collections of poems in small presses including: *Koan Americana*, *Adventures of The Minor Poet*, *A Year with Gayle* and *Open Mike Night at the Cabaret Votaire*. He has edited *Teaching Writing Creatively* and co-edited an anthology called *Smokestacks and Skyscrapers*. Starkey is a Fulbright Senior Scholar in American Literature at the University of Oulu in Finland.

**Emily Strauss** has been writing poetry for 30 years and has been published in over a dozen regional and statewide small-press journals in California. She said that when she isn't teaching college English, she spends time traveling alone through nature.

**Virgil Suarez** has published four novels including: *Latin Jazz*, *The Cutter*, *Havana Thursdays*, and *Going Under*. He has also published a collection of short stories titled *Welcome to the Oasis*. With his wife Delia Poey, he has co-edited two best selling anthologies: *Iguana Dreams* and *Little Havana Blues*. Most recently, Suarez has published an anthology of Latino Poetry with Victor Hernandez Cruz and Leroy V. Quintana titled *Paper Dance*, and he has published a collection of his poetry and memoirs titled *Spared Angola*. His new collection *The Republic of Longing* is due out in the spring of 2000 from Bilingual Review Press / Arizona State University. Suarez teaches Creative Writing and Latino/a and Caribbean Literature at Florida State University in Tallahassee.

**Laurie Rachkus Uttich** is a self-described 30-something, Colorado transplant, who manages to scrape by on freelance writing for various client types. She lives with her husband, her three-year-old and her dog, Hope, and has more passions than she has time. She says, "I find massages have the same effect as really good red wine-- once you get past the whole 'naked in front of someone

you've never seen before' thing."

**Josh Woods** is an editor-parking attendant. He lives in Haslett, Michigan. He likes stories and poems and other things.

**Frank Van Zant** has recently published his first book titled *The Lives of the Two-Headed Baseball Siren*. Other works have been published in *Yankee*, *Art Word Quarterly*, *Quarter After Eight*, *Flyway*, *Free Lunch*, *Poet Lore*, *The Maverick Press* and *English Journal*. Zant lives in Northport, New York, where he said he is an award-winning teacher of near-dropouts, a coach of two high school sports, and a father of three.

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For application forms call 520-523-4911 or write:

Creative Writing Area Coordinator  
Northern Arizona University  
Department of English  
Box 6032 Flagstaff, AZ 86011  
karla.brewster@nau.edu

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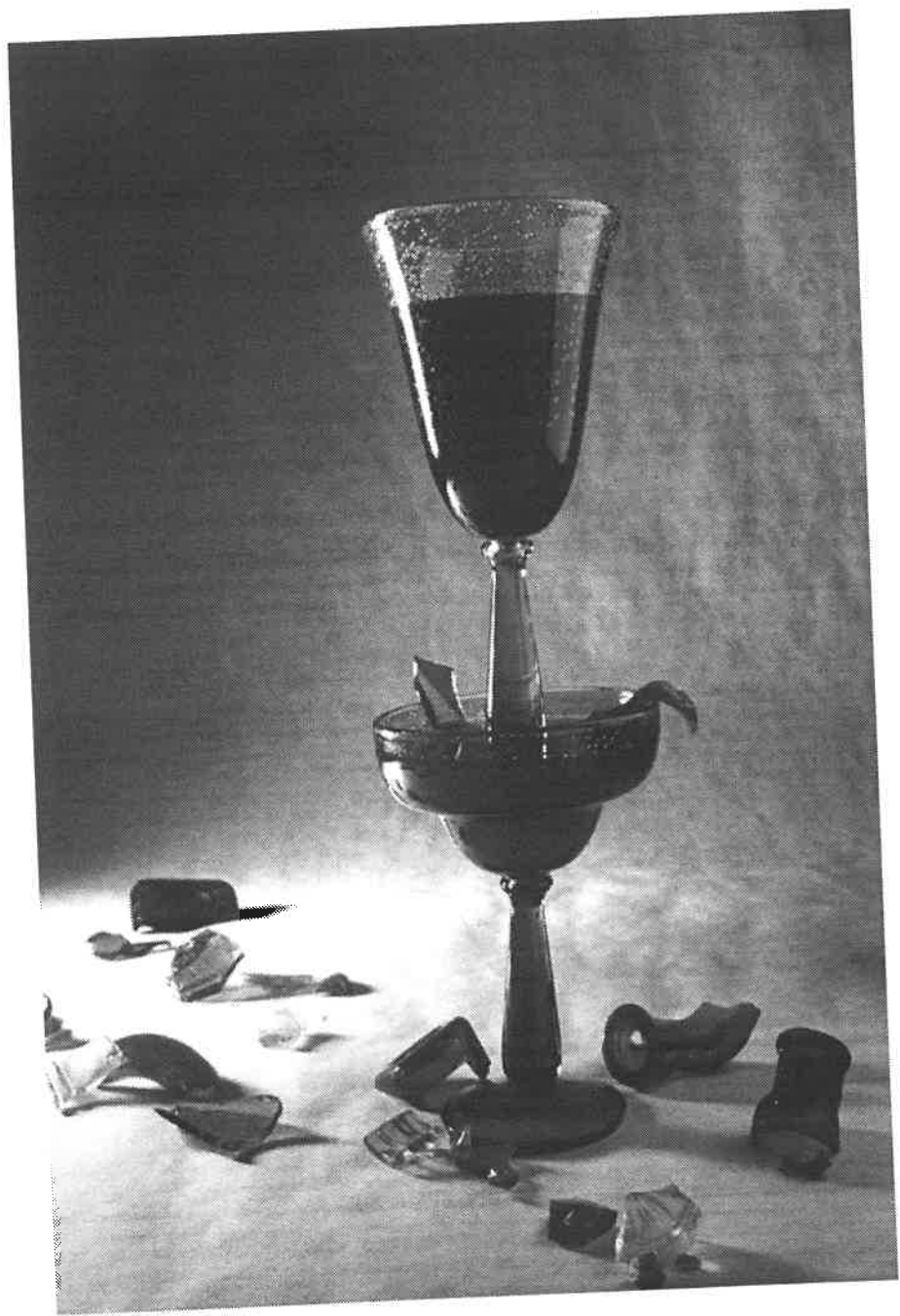
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