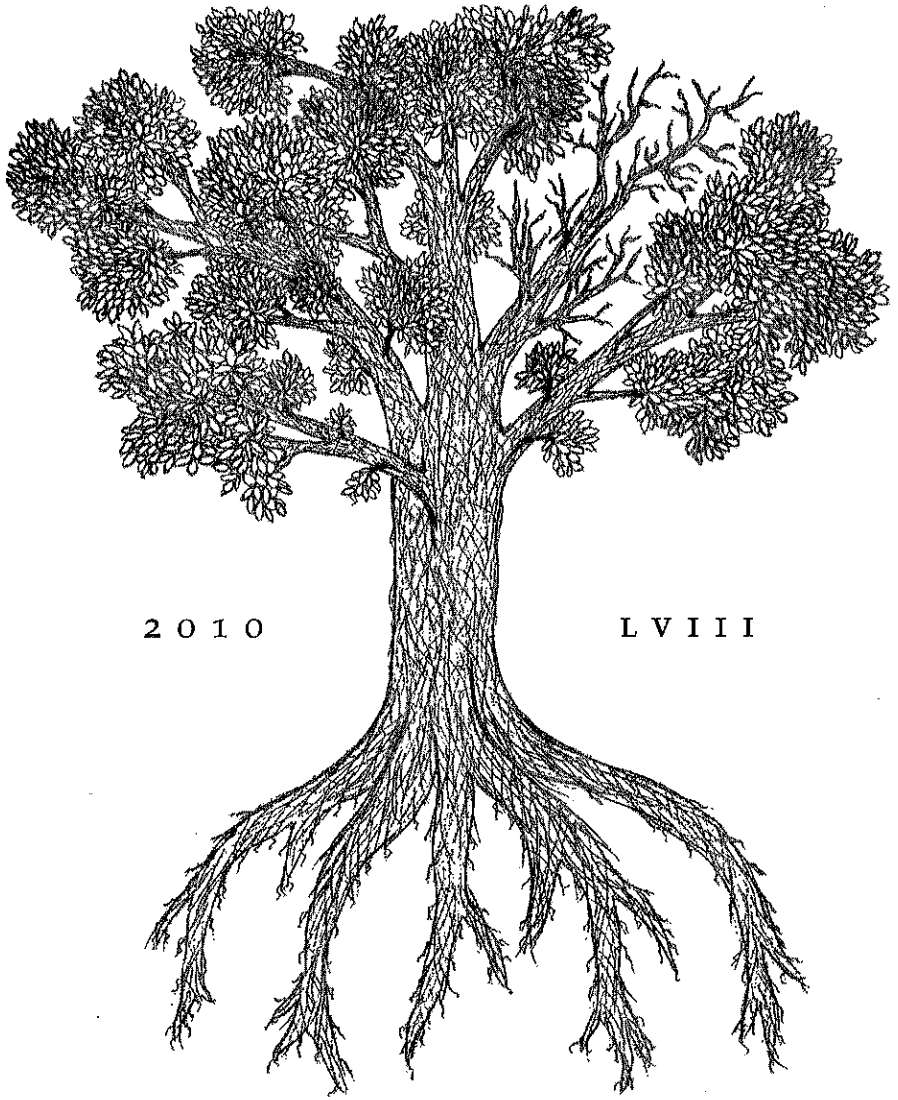


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Barnes Poetry Award

CAROL WALKER After the Fade

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QUINTON GAINES Smoldering Beneath Snow

Rowe Poetry Award

CHAD BELYEU For Kitty, the Karaoke Queen

Pulse Poetry Award

VIANA HAMMON Why I Prefer Plastic

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HANNAH R. KLAUSS Tree: Life and Death

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Lamar-Longman Awards

- MILBS CASTOR Amy Tan: Using Language's Versatility
MICAH MOORE Protector
TASHA TOLLIVER Character in "Young Goodman Brown"
JUSTIN WEEKS Repeat Offenders: The One-Way
Relationship Between Students and
Textbook Publishers

Rowe Critical Paper Award

KATHLEEN ODOM An Examination of the Life and Music of
Gabriel Faure

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Mary Baswell

POOR MAN'S PALETTE

With red clay on my cold hands
I make my way, outlined
against a poor man's palette
of muddy browns and mortem greens,
saturated into the tattered stalks
and tufts of colloquial grasses
that can stand to grow nowhere else.

Bright red busts of birds
peek from between husk-thin reeds
and ruddy socks of cattails.
Warbles and woody rattles of beaks
pull rhythm from inky puddles
that reflect a petroleum sheen.

I cannot appreciate its beauty,
because it is plainly so.
This is where I live.

With red clay on my cold hands
I find my way, allied
against an old man's hindsight,
of settled terms and jobs that paid,
sunken in the marshy earth,
situated along the coastal shore.
He could stand to go nowhere else.

Like a blessed torrent, my thoughts
wash over wrought ways of life.
Bits of words and ideas
lift the stains of rusty oxtails,
sluff off layers of silt and recession,
and rinse clean the petroleum sheen.

I cannot appreciate its beauty,
because it is plainly so.
This is not my home.

CATCHING TRUTHS

Catching truths is tricky,
like chasing pigeons in the park:
running after awkward winged things
that scatter when approached—
happiness flying off in one direction,
love in another.

WHERE THERE IS NONE

Fumbling in the dark, hoping for sun,
combing the shadows for signs of light,
searching for meaning where there is none.

Needing to walk but choosing to run,
weighted with fear but taking to flight,
cursing the dark, praying for sun.

Telling a joke but omitting the pun,
withholding the humor out of spite,
denying meaning though there is none.

Seeing pyrotechnics as fun
knowing better but choosing to light
fires in the dark that conjure the sun.

Doing things that cannot be undone,
smearing black all over the white,
skewing the meaning 'til there is none.

Wanting for peace but grabbing a gun,
contorting the wrong into a bloody right,
convincing the dark to rue the sun,
forcing meaning where there is none.

MUSCADINE

Ertha stooped over, felt beneath the leaves, and plucked a waxy green bell pepper from its stalk. She admired the vegetable for a moment then sank her teeth into its flesh. It popped and crunched in her mouth as she squinted her eyes against the midday sun, shading them with her free hand.

The heat dripped over the limbs of the pine trees, lulling the afternoon into a quiet stupor. The cicadas droned their solemn buzz, but Ertha heard no birds chirping, the wind chime on the front porch hung still and unguided. The lack of a breeze made the heat all the more intense; hazy fumes of hot air contorted the horizon as it wafted from the ground. Even the bell pepper juice sliding down her throat was uncomfortably warm.

Ertha knew the eerie laziness of the day, the loitering of the clouds, meant rain was on its way. She could smell the dirt kicked up by the approaching storm cloud still miles away. She had much to do before the rain came, but she intended to savor her work.

She moved unhurriedly among the rows of plants, inspecting each one the way a mother inspects behind a child's ears or under his fingernails. She bent back leaves to eye the carrots and squash peeping from beneath the dirt. She gently dug them out with her fingers, careful to not disturb the ones not yet ready for picking. She tucked the ripe ones into the sack draped over her shoulder and across her breast, the same sling she had carried each of her children in before they had been weaned. It was almost full with bright yellows and oranges, deep reds and purples, her strongest children, the heartiest of the vegetables that thrived in the humid gulf coast environment.

Her own children were not so dear to her, three young ones who had grown up with hardly a father and a mother who was better at nursing plants than babies. With minimal care, the children had grown wild like weeds, and eventually, the two boys ended up in jail, the only girl turning up pregnant and married before her twentieth birthday.

Ertha had married young herself, barely fifteen when she ran off with Bern who was fresh off the boat after the war. Almost a decade her senior, he settled them in the piney woods with a modest piece of land and taught her to live off what they could produce.

Bern was rarely sober or comfortable being close to her, but in the garden, he was painstakingly patient with her, showing her how to till the earth, set rows of this and that plant, how to tie vines to stakes with torn bed sheets (twine was too harsh on their delicate leaves), and how to keep the compost heap covered and out of the weather. When they worked in the garden, their partnership morphed into something magical, willing things to grow with their bare hands, she the apprentice to his horticultural alchemy.

Now, after forty years of gardening and being married to Bern, Ertha had learned how to read a plant's leaves for sickness, and she had learned to read Bern's demeanor, his sickness showing plainly, too. She preferred the garden and so made her life among the rows of dirt and greens.

She had filled the sling and was lumbering precariously to the barn a few hundred yards away on the other side of the house, her bulk protruding from her stomach like the girth of an unborn child. As she walked past the old house, she heard Bern's groans from the open bedroom window. She sighed heavily, changing direction toward the front door, lifting the heavy sack over her head as best she could, ducking under its strap and leaving it in the seat of Bern's rocking chair as she went up the steps to the front porch.

"What's a'matter, Bern?" she called through the doorway. "I hear you, I'm coming, you just settle on down now. You know you can't go a'hollering like that." She spoke to him from the kitchen as she readied his afternoon meds and poured a mason jar of wine, the musky odor filling her nostrils as it flowed from the bottle. "We'll get you feeling all better now, Bern," she said as she shuffled to their bedroom.

Bern was lying on their bed, drooling and gaunt. He had shimmied the covers off and he was convulsing slightly. He had lost most of his motor skills after his stroke, and the final surgery had left him little more than a child. The doctors had explained to Ertha their options, and she had made the decision to bring him home.

The hum of the ceiling fan protested the heat emanating from the open window as she sat down next to him on the bed and fixed the quilt around his legs. She combed back his peppery white hair with her fingernails, wiping the thin film of sweat from his forehead, cooing to him.

"Now, Bern, you quit all that fussing. Look what time it is. Why, it's nearly four o'clock. You just need your medicine. Open your mouth now, let me see." Ertha stuck two fingers with the pills tucked between them into his mouth and under his tongue. He tried to move his face away from her hand, but she held his face in one hand and the pills in his mouth with the other until they dissolved. "Oh, stop it, now. Just a few more seconds." She released his face and removed her hand from his mouth. She took the mason jar and put it to his lips. He slurped from it greedily.

"Slow down, Bern, you'll choke, you crazy old buzzard. Never would turn down a drink, would you?" He nursed the jar until all the wine was gone.

Bern was known in their small town for his homemade muscadine wine made from the grapes that grew wild at the back of their property. He had set up a wine room in their barn and retreated to it whenever he had a chance. Once she'd gotten to be better with the garden than he had been, Bern had handed the reins over to her and threw himself into his winemaking. He would dote on the vines, weeding and soaking the ground beneath them in the spring. Their spidery shoots slunk up several pine trees along the fence line, clinging to the trunks and metal wiring, snaking up the first branches of the trees almost a dozen feet up the trunk, and in the summer, they would yield grapes the size of cherry tomatoes.

He would pluck them, filling buckets with the inky black nuggets and bring them to his wine room. He never let Ertha nor the children into the room and never taught her how to make the wine, but after a few months he would bring out bottle after bottle of the sweet fermented concoction. They'd drink the wine together, looking out at the garden from their rocking chairs on the front porch while the children would steal sips from the jars and play in the yard.

Once while enjoying their wine on the porch, Ertha began to hum a forgotten lullaby while she rested her eyes, rocking in her chair to the rhythm. Bern began talking about that summer's garden, his gravelly voice gently gruff, like his beard, softened by time. She heard him say something about them needing more mothering, and she smiled with her eyes closed and turned toward his voice, agreeing that the vegetables just needed some attention to thrive.

He frowned at her, "Woman, I was talking about your children." She opened her eyes. He was pointing to the three out in the yard. The boys were mercilessly tormenting the girl with a garden snake. She rested her head against the cedar of the chair's headrest, closed her eyes again, took a sip from her jar and began to rock, licking her lips, tasting the sweet earth.

Thirty years later, he still nurtured the same vines every year until he had gotten sick last summer. He had faded fast, but Ertha knew enough from watching how to care for the vines. She kept the ground around the pines moist and free of weeds, and the vines had survived. They were heavy with fruit now, ready to be picked.

"Shuckins!" Ertha took the empty jar from Bern's lips. She had forgotten to pick the grapes today when she was tending the garden. She looked out the open window. She had four solid hours before the daylight would fade into dusk, and the rain would be here before dawn.

Bern grunted, but his eyes were closed, the medicine taking blessed effect. She smoothed the blanket over his lap and headed back outside.

Ertha took the front porch steps slowly, her hand on her knee for support with each laborious step down. Her tongue was stuck between her lips as she picked up her vegetables from the rocking chair and draped the sling over her shoulder. She made her way slowly to the barn.

Bern's hulking farm machines slept in the dark corners. The walls were lined with rope, old soda machine signs, and other whatnots accumulated by the old man for more than half a century. The farthest back corner was petitioned with crude walls into an enclosed cube of a room. The door was metal, a castoff found at a flea market, fitted with a deadbolt that had months ago lost its key. Bern was the only one who knew where the key was, and he would doubtless ever again be able to remember its whereabouts.

Ertha headed toward the wheelbarrow parked just inside the barn and unloaded her sling into it. Once full, she would take the load to the back wall of the barn lined with plastic tubs and sort the vegetables into them—selling varieties into one tub, canning varieties into another, and the largest, freshest pickings into a smaller one for cooking.

She glanced at the tubs. The selling and canning tubs were overflowing with produce. Her canning had taken a backseat to Bern's upkeep with even less time to make it to the farmer's market on Saturdays to sell her wares. But she refused to let her vegetables rot on their stalks. Her eyes gazed lovingly on the vegetables in the tubs for a moment more, blind to the swarms of black flies and bruises that deformed her brood.

With her sack relieved of its weight, she picked up the wheelbarrow's handles and steered herself back outside toward the garden. The sky was mercilessly clear and the sun beat her neck and arms. This time, as she passed the house, she heard no noise from the bedroom window.

She parked the wheelbarrow near the rows built up with rich reddish soil. She began her work, this time more hurriedly,

her fingers guiding themselves under leaves, producing bulbous yellow squash, velvety eggplant, and thick green and yellow peppers. She stepped gingerly over the cucumber rows to the string beans, nipping the longest pods from their vines, stuffing them all into the pocket of her sling. As it began to hang heavy with the weight of the produce, she held one hand under its swelling belly to ease the burden off her shoulder. Her long gray hair was pulled back to the nape of her neck, but rogue strands brought to life by the humidity, haloed around her face and stuck to her cheeks.

She worked most carefully when she came to the ripened tomatoes that hung heavy on their vines. She ran her earth-covered fingers over the knotted bed sheets that kept the plants from toppling over under their own weight. The sheets were old and bleached by the sun, but she could make out the brown and yellow calico pattern that had once decorated her own bed so many years ago. The faded strips lay over the taut red spheres, reminding her of the scarlet flames that had once stained those same sheets.

She hadn't been able to get out of bed for a week, not because of the emotional toll, but because she had lost nearly half her blood along with the child she hadn't known she was carrying. Bern had scolded her, told her he didn't understand how she could let something die like that. She gave him a daughter less than a year later but that was the last thing she ever gave him.

A shadow fell over Ertha's hand as it reached for the next tomato. She looked up and saw the clouds beginning to move through the sky. They were long and skinny, like ripples in the low-tide sand, thrown from the swirling thunderheads that crept in with the dusk.

She was beginning to tire from the heat and her back ached from stooping in the garden, but she picked up the wheelbarrow, made her way to the barn and parked her cargo just inside the door. The vegetables would have to make do for the night; she hadn't the time to sort them now. She moved her fingers

over their waxy skins, selecting a few tomatoes for supper, tucking them away in her empty sling. She began to walk to the front porch to lay the vegetables in the rocking chair and head back for the grapes.

As she approached the porch, she heard Bern's groans through the window.

"Dag-nab it," she muttered as she hobbled up the steps. She had hoped he would sleep until suppertime so she could take care of the grapes.

She found Bern on the floor in the bedroom. The sheets were soiled and the bedside table was overturned. He was mostly unhurt but furious, clawing and spitting imperceptible curses. Ertha knelt down beside him, the sling still across her breast.

She screamed at him, "Calm down, Bern! For chrissakes, just wait a minute! I can't help you with you whooping and grabbing at me!" He pulled haphazardly at her, reaching for her face and hair, blindly trying to grab hold of anything he could. His fist came down on the sling and the tomatoes inside burst under the blow. His hand came up and caught Ertha on the cheek, smearing the seedy juice over her face. He continued to thrash as she fell backward away from him.

Against the wall and away from his aim, she looked down at the broken vegetables in her sling. The long bulbs of squash had triumphed against the blows, but were shiny with the innards of the burst tomatoes that oozed with juice and bits and flesh hanging from their skin.

Ertha snapped. She threw the sling over her shoulder. She rose painfully from the floor and looked down at Bern still writhing beside the bed. She balled her fists and bent over him until their faces were inches from each other. He hardly noticed until she spat on his face, once and then again. He howled, turning his face, clawing at her. Satisfied, she rose wearily out of his reach, tears now streaking the cheeks still dripping with seed.

She wiped her face with her blouse and stood just out of Bern's reach, studying the pathetic heap of a man at her feet. He was as helpless as the grapes on the pines, and though she

wanted it badly, she'd not allow herself to hurt something so powerless.

She did, however, allow him to remain on the floor while she stripped the bed of the sheets striped with urine and feces, taking her time replacing the sheets with clean ones. Bern tired quickly and lay feebly in his filth on the floor, looking up at her with clouded eyes, watching her closely as she moved round the room.

She went to the bathroom and filled a basin of water, took it and several washcloths back with her to the bedroom. She eyed Bern on the floor then bent down beside him. He didn't resist when she pulled him up under one armpit and rested his back against the bed. His mouth hung limp and silent as she undressed him and washed him off. She performed the task gently but never looked at his eyes, bathing him in silence in the fading light of the open window. She dressed him in clean clothes and took the basin of water back to the bathroom and poured it out.

She came back into the room and began to assess how she would get him back onto the bed. He couldn't stand, let alone hold his weight, and though a hearty woman, she was nearly half his size.

The awkward process of shifting his dead weight took over an hour and drained Ertha of what strength she had left. The room had fallen into a dusky gray, and now could Ertha hear the wind chime on the porch tinkling against the increasing wind.

She sat in her sweaty clothes and tousled ponytail and began to laugh. Soft chuckles at first, then booming laughter. She held her hand to her chest as the wracking noises left her mouth and droplets appeared in her eyes. It was uncontrollable now and she gasped for air between guffaws. Bern turned his head toward her and stared at her with a blank face. His mouth opened as if to respond, but instead, soft gurgles of air and fluid escaped.

☪ ☪

The grease popped as Ertha dropped spoonfuls of cornmeal batter into the frying pan. Specs of oil jumped onto her blouse and arms, but she was too tired to pull away. As the cornbread browned, she sliced a tomato and salted it before arraying the circles on a small plate. She hummed to herself as she turned the cornbread pieces with a fork and stirred the beans stewing in the large pot beside the frying pan.

She lifted the cornbread pieces out of the grease and put them on a plate lined with paper towels. She reached into a cabinet for a bowl then broke up several pieces of the cornbread into it. She spooned the soupy beans over the cornbread and mashed the concoction together. She poured wine into Bern's jar and brought it and the bowl with her slowly into their bedroom.

"Come on, Bern, supper time," she called flatly to him, her voice drained and devoid. She set the jar down on the bedside table and eased herself onto the side of the bed to feed Bern.

"Thanks to you, your muscadines will just have to weather the storm on the vine," she whispered to him as she fed him small bites. "Can't believe you, with all that commotion and turbulence, I swanny..." She pushed the spoon to his mouth. Juice and bits of cornbread fell from his lips as he chewed. "Hope this storm's a doozy, too, that'll teach you to not create such a ruckus. A whole summer's worth of grapes lost because you got fidgety."

At this, Bern opened his eyes and stopped mid-chew. His eyes burned into hers, a penetrating glare that shook her to her bones. She hadn't seen that stare since she'd been accused of taking a life. Just as quickly as it had come, the look was gone, as lost as the man it belonged to.

She fed Bern the rest of the mash, then held his pills under his tongue. He resisted less than he had earlier, and he drank the last of the wine in the jar she brought to his lips. As she pulled the covers back around his legs, she could hear the first drops of the rain begin to hit the tin roof. Bern heard nothing, his chest rising and falling, slight gurgles coming from his mouth.

Back in the kitchen, Ertha helped herself to the tomato slices and a bowl of beans and cornbread. As she sat down at the kitchen table, she could hear the rain pick up. She frowned as she ate, listening to the wind chime's calls.

EO GR

Ertha woke up suddenly. A clap of thunder had shaken the house and the reports rumbled overhead. She lifted herself out of the recliner that she slept in each night and went to the window over the kitchen sink. She could see no stars or slivers of sun on the horizon. She could just make out the tops of the pine trees swaying over the matte-black sky. She looked at the clock on the wall; it read 3:36 AM. She clucked her tongue and leaned her weight against the sink under the window. She could hear the steady rain, and every so often a flash of lightening would brighten the room.

Just then, she heard a loud thwack on the roof, then several more. They sounded like gunshots and became increasingly faster. Ertha peered again out the window. Outlined against the black night, she could see bouncing objects dancing in the grass.

Somewhere near the house, Ertha heard a tree trunk crackling and then a monstrous wump as it hit the ground. Several claps of thunder applauded their leafy victory. Lightening lit up the sky.

She slipped on her shoes and the sling and made her way to the front door. As she pushed the screen door open, it caught a gust of wind and slammed into the side of the house. She disappeared from the dim light of the porch and was swallowed up in the warm predawn darkness.

The hail pelted her, and the thunder growled low but strong and rolled for several seconds as she made her way to the pine trees at the fence line. She could hear pinecones and small limbs falling to the ground around her. She could hear the wind chime clanging angrily as she ran toward the vines. She reached

the trees and looked up into the hail and rain at the fruit. The leaves of the vines waved wildly at her, the pine branches swaying ominously over them. The grapes shimmered in the dark. Ertha stared, not feeling the rain or hail or pain. She swore the grapes, the vines older than their oldest child, had never looked so beautiful.

She closed her eyes and could see the children who'd survived, arms outstretched like wings, running barefoot through the rows of spring vegetables, their fingertips making the leaves dance in the humid golden sunlight. She could see herself standing in the garden, dirt swiped across her brow, laboring lovingly in the summer heat. She could hear Bern's voice the one time he had ever called her beautiful, when she had had dirt on her face and earth under her fingernails. He said she smelled like God himself.

EO GR

It was dawn and power lines were down in most of the area and felled trees made the roads impassible. A red pickup truck with Volunteer F.D. printed on the side pulled up slowly to the old farmhouse. Two men got out of the truck and surveyed the property in the morning light.

To the right of the house, tomato plants lay mangled on the ground, red spots littering the area. The greens of peppers and carrots looked lashed and beaten and lay wilted in the large puddles that now made up the garden. To the left of the house, a monstrous oak's unearthed roots lifted into the air, a huge water-filled hole underneath. The entire property was dotted with broken limbs and debris.

The two men walked up to the front porch and jumped when they saw the old woman sitting in the rocking chair. Her clothes were sagged and wet. Her hair had bits of leaves and sticks in it and was matted against her face and body. She was covered in mud and in her lap sat a cloth sack full of something that looked like mashed fruit. The sack was dripping purplish

juice down the old woman's lap and legs, framing her in a red-dish puddle. In one hand she held a mason jar, the other one rested on the sack. A dusty wine bottle sat next to her on the ground. A smiled played on her lips.

"Ma'am," one of the men warily began. "Are you all right? We're sorry it took so long to get here, but there're trees down all over town."

Without a word, she brought the jar to her mouth, taking a long swig. After she swallowed, she jerked her thumb in the direction of the bedroom.

She continued to sit and drained her jar once, then two more times, while she listened to the muffled voices of the men in her bedroom. They emerged from the house, each holding an end of a man-shaped bundle wrapped in white sheets. They neither spoke nor looked toward her as they carried the form to their truck and laid it gently in the bed of the pickup.

She closed her eyes and lay her head against the cedar of the rocking chair's headrest. She began to rock and hum a forgotten lullaby, patting the sack in her lap, the way a mother pats her pregnant belly, full of life.

Carol Walker

AFTER THE FADE

How can we stand the test of time?
When our throats are squelched and pressed,
We all cry, a suffocating sigh

Of windpipes and pulses sublime—
Senescent bellows from aching breasts.
How can we stand the test of time,

When in a beat, we shed our rinds
Through the shuddered chambers' arrest?
Our veins cry, a suffocating sigh,

As shells collapse to flakes of thyme.
Yet with the ruptures, plagued by pests,
We rise against the test of time.

We find the end as stars align;
When the vessels remain at rest,
Those with lithe tongues cry, a suffocating sigh,

Knowing they could not halt our uphill climb.
Like flies they scatter, eternal defeat confessed
That the zenith has stood the test of time,
With only one cry, one suffocating sigh.

AN EARLY HARVEST

Amid the coppice, she befriends the shield bug. It glides from the greenery
At the thumping of mud-crust ed army boots.
With rough hands and a gentle grasp, he snatches her: *My china doll.*
A childish giggle dances across her lips,
Followed by a wet kiss on the shadow of her brother's cheek.

She quickly hops from his hold, begging, *Chase me brother; chase me.*
He tickles her chin, then follows her through
The orchard's endless rows.
Her locks dizzy the crop-filled air, and
Laughter bounces off branches. A grin grows on his lips.

He plays and bounds with feigned threats, careful never to reach her.
He had caught too many just months ago, whose
Endings are now engraved on granite.
He stops in teased defeat, pointing above:
Have you tried a bite?

Her eyes search the canopy, perfumed with sweet humidity,
For the perfect prey.
The peaches burn with fervent color, glowing as
Sunlight flickers through their fuzz.
She finds one, swaying in a light breeze,
Then pops it from the brittle limb, tearing it from a braided cradle.

As she crunches, he relives the
Teeth-grinding shear of his bones and blood-flesh ed muscles.
The snapping skin triggers memories of torn tissue dripping from his side.
It is not ripe yet, she pouts as she tosses the peach to the ground.
He recalls his body, covered with sweat and grime,
Heaving down to the foreign soil.

He remembers that chill, the muffled sounds of wounded screams,
The whipping of dirt by bullets and fire, while slowly dragging himself to a bare
bush,

Leaving behind a thick trail of sin.
Thoughts of his doll muddled and faded throughout the blur.
Her chocolate-cherried eyes then appeared vividly, as he felt a coax, a gentle coo,
Awakening him to white beds and the smell of disinfectant.

Brother, brother, I want a flower, she pesters him out of a daze,
Helplessly hopping to reach the new bud.
With a wizened eye, he sees the fate of the little blossom.
Come now; give it time to grow.
She surrenders to his hand, and with threaded fingers,
They walk together through the buzzing dusk.

THE SADDEST GIGGLE FACTORY WORKER

"So many giggles go through the lines."
He asks himself, "Which is mine?"

The saddest worker stands alone,
Listening to each distinct tone

While thoughts of his hungry child and wife
Wrinkle his face and drain his life.

In harmony, all the laughter mocks
Him as he pouts and goes off the clock.

All along the bottle-strewn streets
Laughter pours from those that he meets.

He rushes to an old, abandoned alley
To meet his dearest friend, Mr. Crowley.

This peddler of giggles, pawn of smiles,
Sells contraband chuckles and laughs all the while.

"I need your best one! I'm desperate, you see?"
But Mr. Crowley only smirks, "What will you pay me?"

He jingles his pockets and jangles his watch,
Then Crowley frowns, "That's all that you gotch?"

He desperately seeks and begs for mercy,
But Crowley doesn't budge. He only sighs, "Percy,

You fool. You are a disgrace.
There isn't a grin who'd be caught on your face."

Percy, quickly grabbing his hips,
Reaches for his knife and cuts off Crowley's lips.

"Now who's the fool?" Percy cried on behalf
Of the lipless man, then began to laugh.

Quinton James

SMOLDERING BENEATH SNOW

I commit to write you down
so that I may have someplace
to hide you, where you cannot
be discovered by faithless thoughts
pilfering my peace.

I was patched together in the heat
of summer but now the freeze has begun
to strip salient life from deeper forests
and I am beginning to grow unnoticed.
The chill encumbers inadvertent and all
the negative space at the toes of trees is dipping
down to engrave their demise into the soil. Summer
is latent and winter is an ambush unacquainted
with sunlit resistance that will not stop me.

You are wintry and wanting in
but your frozen feet cannot lead you
where your eyes refuse to see. I fear that I have
constrained you to this parchment death
and that I am so good at concealing
the places where I have squirreled you away
that I am obscured and incomprehensible, for I
have placed you into the placating hollow
of this heart that pounds for you no longer, this
heart that adores you beyond the height
of both our skies and that you have not
the warmth or sincerity to begin to unearth me.

YOU CAN GIVE HIM COMPROMISE

Summer is starting to slow down.
You've learned what it means
for a day to die.

You can give him false hope
and bittersweet words,
But your mind is on winter
and how it tends to leave
your heart filled with
a dozen suitcases:
each heavy, yet
hollowed out.

You can give him bits
and pieces and he can try
to connect the dots and ends
or store them away
however he would like.
You can give him borrowed
hours: one or two,
here and there on weekends
and vacation days.
You can give him compromise
and consolation,
but you cannot give him
love
anymore,
for you have run out
of his brand.

THE SMALLEST REBELLION

"Write about what you know,"
they always said,
speaking into those unreasonably rounded
foam-covered microphones
which transformed an otherwise attractive voice
into a dull drone
rumbling around the hollows of my ear.

I have never fragmented
over someone of my species,
nor expunged myself
in lunacy
or the calming web of vacant depression,
though the desire lived in the quiet moments
between:

wake for work
study for school
fight with family
lose your love
forget forgiveness
and hate hope.

I have never roamed the roads of France,
conducted symphonies,
been buried
(unless that time I lost half of me
in the space between his lips counts)
or redeemed.

I have never saved a life
or took a stab at CPR,
ingested writhing worms
to win a hundred dollars,
or endured a treacherous expedition.

I have never been
or done
anything
worth knowing.

Still,
I commit to write
whatever I please.

EGGSHELLS

I fell off a wall when I was sixteen
and landed on a cobbled street by the harbor,
Xanax under my tongue and two
pairs of hands gripping my femurs.
Knuckles pale, I sprinted into CVS,
seized three bottles of glue and a roll of duct
tape. I gathered my eyelashes and fingertips,
my book of Sylvia Plath poetry, my right kneecap,
my IQ and my bottom lip from the gutter.

I've rummaged around twenty times since: salvaged
my elbows last March, and my veins in November.

My mother always said that "growing up is nothing more
than falling apart, then pulling yourself back together again."

I pilfered a handbook on restoring ruined toilets,
thinking maybe I could make applications
to the compilation of entrails stockpiled under
my bed.

I've taken cover on the tops of mountains,
in temples with augurs who recited "Know
thyself," in Greek. I fashioned a tower and
let my hair down, but I had too many tangled
ends and no one ever made it beyond
the emptiness in my belly.

I've considered that it must be valid,
what they utter about all the king's horses
and all the king's men.

Yet, last December, I found myself
planting shards of myself in your
back pocket, the arc of your earlobe,
your washed-out wallet.

Last night, on the thirteenth day of spring,
you said "let's do a puzzle," and as the rain
speckled the window,
my body coiled against you; your
hands reclaimed my lungs,
sited them in my chest, and for the
first time in six years,
three months, and twenty-one days:

I inhaled,
and you confirmed with convinced fingers
that being with me is not like
walking on eggshells.

WORD OF THE DAY

You fed me rice pudding and
onion rings an hour before sunrise,
pronouncing the whole endeavor
quixotic. I tucked away
my sunsets and candy necklaces,
and promptly agreed.

We didn't hold hands,
(my palms were clammy and
you found this unsettling)
instead I burrowed my
burnt fingertips into your
cotton shirt sleeves.

I laughed scrambling into and
out of bed, my mouth peppering
each chuckle with a jumble of
coke and vodka.
You told me the sting was
godly, and I concurred cleverly
as the liquid crawled
down the back of my throat
and roosted in my
greedy stomach.

The cross on your wall
reminded me of the transgressions
my lips eagerly imparted
upon such impatient limbs.
But your hands were swift
to guarantee that
deliverance, not damnation,
was the word of the day.

IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF DESIRE

I want to know that no
matter how many raindrops fuse to your
eyelashes, they'll never compare
to the instant my lips discovered the camber
of your collarbone.

I want you to consume my words—
each 'No' or 'Maybe I shouldn't be
with you' or 'This isn't working.'
I want you to nip at them
until they slither down the back of your
throat and hide away in your small intestine
and I disregard ever having
voiced such stupidity.

I want you to waltz with me
down the frozen food aisles and
suburban sidewalks and the foyer
at work and between the sheets
until we crumple, panting and
out of breath.

I believe I merely want *you*,
especially in the early morning hours
When the waves of longing have receded
and slumber weighs down your eyelids
but yet you still
stroke the pad of your thumb over
my cheekbones and call me
beautiful.

TRIBUTE

Three watery words muddle my insides,
and I've elected to extend
your story like bison skin
and scuff off all the fur and assurances,
the traces of guts and leftover degradation
until you're
spotless.

I'll wrap this fixed fable about
me, warm and alive despite all
proof to the contrary:
Your sweaty palms are
resting on the ridges of
a new ribcage, but I've saved
your cinnamon flavored breath and
3 AM hazy eyes and I've
held them against the
hollow of my throat, the better
to hoard the husky howl
I let expire on the tip of
my tongue.

They reawakened an affair with
God through brass statues and
brittle bread, and
I've reawakened my war with you
by stripping away the sun bleached skin
of my heart, and leaving it vulnerable
and raw.

UNTITLED #32

I fancied you to far-off cities, where
people speak provincial tongues and
gaze at you, coveting you, terrified to
say more. To cities where you fondle cars
until they're more than metalwork, where
humans become more than skin and bones,
and you become a poet again, revived in oil
and turpentine. The city is awake; your blood is
its blood. Your pulse becomes tragically
similar. And the natives writhe around you in
flimsy fabric, channeling moths, amused. It moves
you in ways you don't comprehend.

I dreamt you across the globe, where you
became someone else. The pits you plummeted
into were no longer there. You were
adrift without your sorrow but I could reach you;
you were no longer a demigod, sculpting despair on a dais.

In foreign cities, I dreamt of you
awakening to an eternal day, a persistent sun
pushing itself up against your sternum. When you
woke, you unlocked your mouth to sing.
You observed my departure.

WHEN YOU LEFT

We did not speak in degrees,
we had muted mouths that were infantile
in their scuttle towards the parallel loudspeakers
we built from Styrofoam cups.

It was a year ago today; It was
a hot day and I sat on a rebel flag,
claspung sunglasses and suntan lotion
like they could free me from things that breed
and bulge inside
or things that make you reluctant
to be in love or things that
make you go blind
the more depressed you get. I sat
as four men spoke of a man named Joe.
He would come and recycle blocks and bits
of bone to restore the wall
we both broke down.

They did not see me; I lingered
as they identified the weak points.
They considered the two lovers
in hospital beds with shattered ankles,
going mad from misery.

I wish I could have told you things
back then, things like
one day I think you will forget me, things like
everyday I forget myself, things like
please
don't.

Things like
love is not just a stinging feeling
between my knees
and you will not be able to stop it
when I say it hurts.

CHAMELEON

I'd prayed that I could
fashion myself in your image.
Even after I glimpsed the chameleon
skin you discarded,
I tried to keep up,
to devote more of myself.

I could never discern the duplicity of you;
how, with all my fervor, I was still only a match
to use in igniting your next cigarette.

You've miscalculated, and the only thing more dire
than the sting of that awareness, is the
notion that you'll never care enough
to realize what you've truly lost.

Chad Belyeu

FOR KITTY, THE KARAOKE QUEEN

The G over middle C I owned
when I was young and full of speed—
now lost to time and nicotine;
I won't be winning you with high notes.

Tight eyes regard the bar:
the swollen angel spilling off her stool;
the callow boy beside you, wringing hope
from every knowing look
and desperate flirting touch.

*I was alright, for awhile...
Now I'm crying,
Crying...*

—over you,
who deigns to drink our mortal beer
and breathe our common air. Tonight you slum
and think of one
who wouldn't be caught dead in here.
Soon your bodies meet, and he succumbs.
Infect him with your molten misery;
explode his sweating tongue in your sweet time—

go and scratch at his back door
now that you've left mine.

SKETCHES OF FEDERAL HILL AND THE LIPS OF THE BARMAN'S DAUGHTER

Sledding the sunrise slope of the hill
I am white mercury;
my trajectory slings me,
gravity's son, up and out onto
the abandoned Thanksgiving mess
of old Fort Avenue.

Here, on Battery and Cross,
her father tends a lonesome bar
(my father's favorite bar)—
"Sir, I've been sent to collect him..."
The barman wears a ball cap with
a fishhook on the brim.

Barreling down the north slope of the hill,
Key Highway closing in,
I think of: death, and mortal sin;
the yellow-lighted midnight bridge;
her lips again; Cal Ripken's
batting average...

Until a parking meter smells my suicide
and breaks my spell. I stand,
now a shred less boy than man,
and grope my dizzy way along
toward the beacon of Domino Sugar,
and home.

WHAT MADE DADDY TICK?

A stroke at eighty-three: "What made daddy tick?"
those sweetly looming vultures ask themselves;
they will scour photographs and bookshelves,
and devour fruitless clues from the attic.
My service will be grave; I will be missed:
marble-flesh in dress greens, spoken over
by my war brother—stationed at Dover
before the big push, we bound an un-kissed
Kentish volunteer and took turns on her
in the filth of a sheepfold. Once, not far
from this church, I hit a boy with my car
and kept driving; his spirit is interred
with mine. There were others: nameless ones.
I wonder: will they haunt my blameless sons?

ON BURYING A DOG, WHILE DRUNK, AT 2:30 IN THE MORNING

My friend believes that Heaven (if such a place exists) belongs to pets; our dogs and cats ascend to Paradise while *we* linger, I suppose, in Limbo, and plug our ears against the cries of the unbaptized.

My friend (who gives to PETA and takes no meat, aside from the occasional faceless shrimp)—if only she were here: to feel the night earth yield to my numb fingerwork; to see this jaundiced nun's eye moon, dim as distant bar light; to hear my mordant, hiccupped curse:

"Bastard, could you at least have died in daylight? Kept your withered pulse till dawn? Not shat black cancer on the floor alone, content to rot, and set beyond the hollow fix of flaccid (human) grief?"

I am too practiced at, and oh so tired of, burying grandmothers and dogs; and I am spent with love for ever-Lenten lapsed Catholics with tender hearts and perfect dreaming faces, and Walt Disney pictures of Heaven.

My next pet will be a lizard named Stanley Kubrick; I'll feed him nothing but red meat; and when he dies we'll have a barbeque and a black mass beneath a menstrual moon.

FOR THE LAST GOOD MAN IN PORT NECHES

A church more solemn I have never seen;
the congregation grips you as you lean.
Those smiling eyes of distant summers past:
shark-black with loss, remembering the last
of too few moments spent in splendid love
while Time, the thief, lay hovering above.
I am not worthy of your presence, friend;
can we not wipe this slate and just pretend
that ten years haven't passed and you are free
to be a boy again and never see
the holy passion in her face and fall
head over heels, and doom yourself to all
the darkest nights a man can ever know?
I wish I could be comfort, but I'm slow:
the things you've lost I've not begun to gain;
how impotent, my sympathetic pain.
As if one ghost were not enough for you,
our generous host reached down and gave you two:
a last resort, the radiation rained;
the child inside her womb—exposed and slain.
The way you bear these fatal amputations
like some great monster out of Revelations:
Stoic in your rage, and yet resigned
to see the grace in His perverse design,
kindles in me something like a faith
that when the darkness comes I will be safe,
and your sweet voice will guide my knees to dive
when cancer eats *my* perfect wife alive.

WHY I PREFER PLASTIC

My Mom and Dad are happy
when they exchange casual grins
in the kitchen by the stove,
while she stirs the sauce with a silver spoon,
since happy's what they are, y'know?
All smiles and fine foods and flat tones.

Except for that one time when the bowl
crashed into a million shards on the floor.
Dad's favorite china laid scattered
with the soup covering its pieces.
He grabbed Mom's thin wrist,
dragged her back to their room, and locked
the door. She screamed and he yelled
as I heard a loud thud, something rip,
and then dead air.

A few minutes later, the door creaked open.
Mom came out with her robe undone:
black eyes and red skin and torn slip.
Dad stayed closely behind,
while she went back to fixing the soup
and asked him about work.

SOCKS

If my socks could talk,
they'd tell me that they're tired
of walking only on concrete or carpet,
and dream of discovering
what sand feels like,
because socks rarely
get the opportunity to touch sand.

Stephanie Armstrong

THE ONLY SHIP CERTAIN TO COME IN HAS BLACK SAILS
OR
A HERO'S WELCOME

The lazy afternoon sun shined brightly through the door, and the smell of freshly cut peaches and bananas made the reptile trailer almost seem welcoming. Jerry wiped his pocketknife clean on his jeans and slid it back in his pocket. He divvied the banana and peach slices into the small feeding bowls and placed them into the tanks.

Jerry brushed his silver hair from his eyes and gently set Elvis into the display tank with the others. He made a point of trying to treat Elvis the same as the other two-headed turtles, but somehow Elvis was always the last to go back in the tank.

Gyp looked up from a tattered copy of *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* and asked, "Oh, do you have to put him back, Mr. Jerry?"

Jerry smiled. "I thought you were reading, and he needs to eat."

"I can do both," she said as she darted to the floor with the agility that only a nine-year-old possesses and sat Indian-style. Her oversized shirt draped across her lap like a dress. It was stained and had a few small holes. Bink must have given it to her. "Have you ever thought about letting the turtles and snakes free? I mean, I'd miss them, but don't you think they'd be happier out in the wild?"

"I've thought about it, but the turtles couldn't catch food because they're not as fast as turtles with only one head. And, Carla wouldn't blend in like other snakes because she's albino. Same goes for the others. They're actually safer here," he said as he reached again for Elvis.

"That makes me a little sad, but I'm glad they're here," she said as she watched the other turtles scurry away, but Elvis allowed himself to be caught. When Jerry slowly lifted Elvis from the tank, a sharp pain jolted through his back. He fumbled

but caught the frightened turtle, which had retreated into its shell. He steadied himself. Not looking her in the eye, Jerry slowly handed Elvis to Gyp. He turned away.

Gyp furrowed her brow and looked at the curve in the old man's back. "Mr. Jerry, did you ever break your back? Is that why it hurts now?"

Jerry turned half toward her. "No, hon. It's never actually been broken."

"Then why does it bend so much?"

Jerry turned and set a small bowl on the floor in front of the two snouts peaking from the shell. "It just..." Jerry was startled by the short stout silhouette standing in the doorway. A wave of sweat and cigar smoke polluted the trailer. Bink rushed toward his daughter and grabbed her by the arm.

"I thought I told you to do your math lessons, goddammit. And here you are fuckin' around with a turtle," Bink spat. Gyp cringed, but allowed herself to be jerked up to her feet. Bink's eyes darted to Jerry and let go of Gyp's arm. "And *you*. Why the fuck do you have these freaks crawling around with the fuckin' door open? They can get out and then where would I be? Outta even more money!" Gyp picked up the battered book and the scared turtle. Head hung, her tangled hair hid her scarlet face. She handed Elvis to Jerry and followed her father outside.

EO OR

The mixture of caramel, cotton candy, and gasoline thickened the evening air as Jerry walked back to his reptile trailer. He walked slower as he considered the grass. The field had already turned to stringy mud from the load-in. Deeper in thought he looked down to survey the damage. How long does it take for the grass to grow back, he thought. A week, three, maybe longer? He always moved on before he could see the answer for himself.

He felt sorry for pulling his reptile trailer into each new field. Is there some way to drive on it without cutting it up too bad? In the war, he rode shotgun, but if he had been chosen to drive, maybe that training would've taught him a technique to not leave tracks. The morning dew was the field's downfall. It glistened at first, but turned to mud when beaten by the tires. Why do beautiful things end up making other things ugly? Is it possible then for an ugly thing to make a beautif—

"What the fuck are you doin', Jerry?! Get your pruny ass to your freak booth! I'm about to open the gates."

Jerry found that he had stopped walking and was looking down with one hand propped in a carousel bar. He looked to the air rifle booth where Bink, the carnival manager, stood beside Gus, who operated the Zipper. Cigar smoke curled around their red faces and Cheshire grins as Gus passed a flask to Bink. They had mean laughs, too loud to be genuine. As he took a swig, Bink glared at Jerry the same way he did at Jerry's reptiles.

"Well, go on—Move!" Bink yelled, booze misting from his mouth on every word. Jolted, Jerry started too quickly and stumbled over a deep muddy tire track. More laughter.

Jerry walked on. He saw the token pushers carefully lay the second layer of tokens in the machines before arranging key chains and token-bursting coin purses on top. Jerry tried not to think about how unfair it was. The pushers read the disapproval on Jerry's face and glared like seething weasels through slit eyes as he passed. Gladys worked the ping-pong toss, and she nodded curtly to him as she arranged the greased glass cups. He loved the sounds of her booth.

"Mr. Jerry! Mr. Jerry!" Gyp bellowed from the football toss stand. Jerry remembered what happened this afternoon and it tore at him. But he forced the corners of his lips up and waved. She ran to him with the tattered paperback in her hand slinging arcs of mud in her wake. Her oversized shirt flapped in the wind, and her acid-washed jean shorts were speckled with mud chunks.

"I finished the story," she said as she skidded to a stop. "I really liked the part about the underwater forest and Nemo's giant pet clam. But how could an entire library fit in a submarine? And why didn't he charge people to ride on his submarine, instead of attacking boats? People pay three bucks to go on the Zipper. I bet they'd pay a lot more to ride in a submarine, especially if that was the only one back then."

Jerry chuckled as he took the book, "I'd forgotten about the clam; I liked that part too. It's been a while since I've read it. As for the library, well, Captain Nemo lived on the submarine, and he couldn't leave all of his books on land, so he built his submarine big enough to hold a library."

"But why'd he hurt those people if he could get money another way? It'd be fun to see people have fun on something he built, and that would make him happy and forget how mad he was. It's kinda like when someone wins a stuffed animal at the football toss. It makes me happy too."

"I guess Nemo wasn't as nice as you."

"Maybe he just hadn't thought of it yet. Hey, do you know if your family's gonna visit tonight? You used to live here, right? I'd like to meet 'em. Did they write back? How old is your daughter again? I know she's older than me, but maybe we could play with Nacho." Nacho, her Chihuahua who was tied to Gyp's lawn chair beside her booth, had been nervously pacing his rope line since Gyp ran over. Hearing the sound of his name, he thrashed around to get free, and the rope tangled around his legs. He fell over yelping.

"Oh, poor Nacho!" she cried as she ran to her little dog. He wagged his tail while Gyp untangled the muddy rope. Suddenly, the rides lit up and the carousel's music declared the gates had opened. "I'll talk to ya later, Mr. Jerry. Don't forget to tell your girl about Nacho and me!"

My girl. Jerry was glad he didn't have to tell her that they might not come. When they left two years ago, Nancy said she didn't think he'd ever be the man she married. His drinking had gotten out of hand. The night terrors, thrashing and hitting

anything within arm's length. If she only knew what he saw, what he had done. Jerry was prepared to see the derelict villages, the soldiers' corpses and to bury his buddies. But a grenade taped to a child's hand? He had to shoot. He was ordered. He saved his platoon. How could he tell her about that? If he had been driving the truck, he'd be a different man. He'd still have his girls.

Jerry surveyed the comic book-style pictures airbrushed on his trailer. Turtles with two heads and six legs swam through the water. Two-headed snakes and a hissing albino water moccasin were poised to strike each other as venom dripped from their exposed fangs. All the animals were shown in motion, swimming, biting, fighting; all with the intention of making it easier for people to part with their two dollars. Really, they rarely move in the evening, since Jerry started feeding them a couple of hours before show time. About a year ago, Carla, the albino water moccasin, tried to strike a little boy who had been tapping on the glass. Blood from her busted snout smeared the inner glass, and the once-brave boy cried. The parents demanded to speak with the manager and got a refund. Bink took the six bucks out of Jerry's wages.

"Bink Check," Rob whispered as he crossed in front of Jerry on his way back to the fun house. Bink walked the grounds every night before, but from the way Bink lumbered from the football toss and stumbled over Nacho's rope, Jerry saw that Bink was drunker than usual. Bink shook Rob's hand and patted him on the back. Rob could get away with standing around, because Bink liked Rob. But then again, Rob got along with everybody. As he watched Bink shake Rob's hand, Jerry tried to remember whether Bink had offered his hand to him. Four long draws from his flask later, Bink shook his hand again, and plodded to the reptile trailer.

"How much so far?" Bink asked as he took another swill from his flask.

"Eighteen dollars," Jerry said, knowing it didn't make any difference. Once, Jerry took in eighty-four dollars before the first

Bink Check on account of a football team coming back from a game. He still heard the same thing.

"Not enough, get your ass outta that chair and start callin'." The game runners had it easy. "Step right up and win your girl a prize. How about you, sir? You'll get 'em next time!" Jerry hated calling. Bink wanted him to use words like *freaks* and *killers*. "Play up how nasty they are." People didn't walk away with stuffed animals or goldfish after his booth. They came out with bitter laughs or green faces. His booth didn't bring joy like the others; it brought out the worst in people. Jerry wished they could see that each animal had character. Sure, Carla was mean, but that was her nature. Ed and Eddie, the two-headed corn snake, was tame enough to take out of his cage and hold, and Gyp loved to play with Elvis.

Jerry slowly stood up from his lawn chair; his knees needed a chance to adjust to the new position. "Step right up and see these amazing ani..." And then he saw Nancy walking through the mud ruts. Jerry smoothed down his wild, silvery hair and tucked in his shirt tighter. Nancy spotted him, pursed her lips into something that resembled a smile, and waved quickly.

"Hi, Jerry," she sighed as she arrived within an appropriate distance to hold a conversation.

"Hello, Nan. How have you been? Did Amanda come?"

"She's here somewhere with a couple of her friends. I've been fine. Still working at the bank."

"It's been a long time," Jerry said. Two years and three months.

"About a year and a half or two, right?" She said. "How have you been?"

"Fine. I take care of the reptiles here. Would you like to see them? There's really..."

"Oh no," Nancy squirmed. "We're actually on our way out, and besides, I don't like that sort of thing. Even when they have one head, snakes and turtles gross me out. Too slimy." As Nancy dug in her purse, Jerry noticed she wasn't wearing her wedding ring.

"They're real nice when..." Jerry trailed off as three teenage girls walked past the fun house towards Jerry's booth. Two of the girls, one tall and blonde, and the other short and brunette, wore mini-skirts, which had to be tugged down after a few steps. And there was Amanda in the middle. She wore her hair shorter than he remembered, and it hung to her exposed shoulders. She was wearing a loud tube-top dress. Red was always a good color on her, but Jerry didn't like the way it looked on her now. For a girl who had just turned fifteen, she looked like she was in her mid-twenties. All eyes were on them as they walked through the fair, and they seemed to pay more attention to giggling and talking coolly in their group than to the lights, games, and prizes. "Mom can we have... Oh, I thought you said he was in charge of the carousel," she said as she noticed Jerry. Her friends muffled their laughs.

"And we went to all that trouble," giggled the tall blonde. Even from this distance, Jerry could see the clumps of makeup caked to her face.

"I guess we can finally ride the carousel now," said the short girl, her eyes darting desperately from Amanda to the blonde.

"Shut up," Amanda snarled. Softening, she looked at her father. "Hi. Dad. So, thanks for the birthday cards."

"My little Panda's grown into a lady," Jerry said half to himself, dazed.

"Panda?!" laughed the friends in perfect unison. Jerry squinted an apologetic look to Amanda, but she wasn't looking. Nancy rolled her eyes.

"Shut up or I'll tell what you did at Tim's party last weekend," Amanda growled to the blonde. Both cowered in silence.

Jerry's thoughts were tangled with ideas of parties, boys, and... "Would you ladies like to go in and see the reptiles? Free of charge." The recoiled girls looked up to Amanda for an answer. Without a word, Amanda walked in. The blonde followed her with the short girl close behind. Jerry turned to Nancy who was lighting a long thin cigarette; the question, on his face.

Nancy turned in the corners of her lips then took a long drag from the cigarette. "I was out of town last weekend, and they were supposed to have a slumber party at the house. I've already talked to her about it." Jerry heard Amanda's friends scream and Amanda laugh. He forced his focus back to Nancy.

"Where did you go? Wasn't someone watching her?"

"I went to the lake with some friends from work. I had to get out. It's sad when your daughter has more of a life than you do. It's not easy, being a single parent, not having any time to yourself. Carting her ass to the mall, to cheerleading practice and all the games, constantly harassed for money. I had to get out."

Jerry heard Amanda's voice over the laughter. "That big white snake has three black scales. It's not really albino."

"Maybe your dad has to paint it every night."

"It's the freak of the freaks." More laughter. He turned back to Nancy.

"I said, is it always this muddy everywhere you go?" Nancy repeated impatiently.

"Not when we first..." The girls emerged from the trailer's exit talking simultaneous. Jerry wondered how they could hear what the other was saying, until he realized they were saying the same thing.

"So gross."

"Totally disgusting."

"I'm gonna go vomit."

Jerry racked his brain. He looked around and saw the tattered copy of *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*. "Amanda, have you ever read this book?" he asked, hoping she would say no.

"Huh?" She turned away from her friends, still laughing. "Oh. No, but I saw the movie."

"The book is much better than the movie. Here, you can borrow it and maybe we could talk about it over lunch the next time I come through town." Jerry offered the book to her.

She reached for it then hesitated. Her friends tried to muffle their laughs. "Oh, um, I've been really busy lately. I probably don't have time to read a huge book like that."

Jerry nodded quickly and drew back the sad tattered paperback. "Oh. That's alright. Maybe we could just go to lunch then, and we could catch up. And maybe your mom might like to come too?"

Amanda's cheeks flushed, but, to Jerry, she didn't look embarrassed; she was mad. "Like I said, I'm really busy and probably won't have time." Amanda turned to her mother and asked loudly, "Did you get him to sign the papers yet?"

Nancy whipped dagger-eyes at her daughter, who stood defiantly upright. "Amanda!" Her friends stood still; their eyes darted from Jerry to Amanda to Nancy. "Girls, will you go warm up the car?" Nancy said as she dug through her purse. She handed the keys to Amanda, who snatched them and stormed away with her entourage in tow.

"Papers." Jerry understood and stared at the muddy ground beneath Nancy's feet. Jerry felt himself slipping.

"It's been so long," Nancy said as she continued to fumble in her purse. Her hand emerged with a thick, folded packet of papers.

Jerry conceded to the daze and allowed his thoughts to unravel. Amanda's sixth birthday, her smile. Their last Christmas together: Nancy's face, tearful but stoic. "We've both moved on." The war, the truck. The grenade duct-taped to a pudgy bronzed arm. "It's best for all of us." Jerry's shot, the explosion. "I'm doing good at the bank..." The surprisingly clean crater. The clump of dark hair. "...due for a promotion in six months..." A piece of stained skin, silver dollar sized. "We're not the same people." A hero's welcome. Amanda's hug. The framed flag on the mantle. The Bronze Star, in the sock drawer. "We weren't happy." The empty bottle. The hole in the wall. She's leaving, bags already packed. "...and you've got this great job and..." Bink's cloud of cigar smoke. Shooter and Gus' coldblooded

laughs. "...get to see the country." Freaks. Inhuman humans. "We've both moved on." Carla's bloody nose.

END

The damp moonlight shrouded the air and illuminated the dead fair like a ghost. Jerry's mind was clear as he walked from the camper to the reptile trailer. The muddy grooves had hardened in the deep night's cold, which made the ground easier to walk across. Three hoses draped like machine gun bullet belts across each of his weary shoulders, and a roll of duct tape braceleted his wrist. He had signed away everything. His life was lying at the bottom of her purse, next to thin cigarettes. The only sound coming from the reptile trailer was the soothing hum and steady rattle of the tanks' filters. Jerry unplugged them and all was still.

He carefully moved the turtles into a single plastic travel bin and hauled it outside. Ed and Eddie, coiled peacefully into a small bin. Carla thrashed into another. Jerry made sure the lids were secure, stacked the bins, and carried them outside. Jerry gently sat the bins behind the trailer's truck and wiped his face. He slid a hose nozzle into an air hole in each of the three bins and duct-taped the other holes in the lids. Standing upright, Jerry examined his pocketknife and ran his thumb on its blade. His knees cracked as he slowly bent down and sliced off the metal nozzles on the free ends. He bound the hoses to the tailpipe with duct tape and started the ignition. In the distance, a tangled head of hair sunk back into the shadows of the football toss booth.

He waited by the bins until dawn. The sun peeked through the tree line casting a pale red glow on the booths and trailers. Behind the trailer, Jerry surveyed the untouched part of the field. The morning dew shined like glass, and Jerry carefully walked onto the grass towards the light.

Tracie Middleton

EDEN

Brilliance arcs across the night, fading.
Veils of mist curl into the rising sun
as petals slowly unfold clean sweetness,
and fingers shape dust into the features of our faces.

Morning and evening, walking in the cool of the trees,
fruit for knowing good—and evil—above us.
At the sharp tang, our eyes open to see
life, cursed and holy, reddening the earth.

21ST CENTURY PARAPHRASE OF PROVERBS 20:14

On the lot, it's a "piece of shit"
but in the driveway, "Best you can get!"

CK Williams, Jr.

MORNING BREAKFAST

Just heard the rooster crow,
All the grown-ups were awake.
Having that third cup of coffee,
Before sounding the alarm, so I wait.

Get on up now, I now hear the call.
Turn to the window making sure I see the sun.
Wash my face, brush my teeth.
Put those old rubber boots on.
Wasting no time for there's chores to be done.

Grab the basket just outside the door.
Off to the fields where the pearls await,
Oval and white but some are brown.
I select them all, for tomorrow there will be more.

Walking by the swine with their perfume extremely loud,
I put a scarf on to tone it down.
Keeping an eye on one that looks real sweet,
Aware real soon we will meet.

Knowing that Miss Betsy can hold her milk just so long,
I pull up a pail and give her a hand.
Gently massaging with a firm squeeze,
I can tell she's pleased.

Having all those things done,
I sit at the table full of grace.

GREATER EXPECTATIONS

Remember when our mothers
Had to relinquish their seats for Mr. Charlie
And we said let's not stand for it
Or have we forgotten what it means to band?

Maybe one can recall in the days of old which are very young
We had to drink from fountains where there were none
You do see it...of course

Yes you could see in our eyes as a nation
Not lost hopes, dreams or the rising sun
Nor left-over time of the misanthrope
Just greater expectations

As anyone would say
It was something in my mind
In my mind time after time
Time after time
A thought a thought how grand

How grand can it be?
Without the latent surprise
Without the vessel to transfer this destination
Some say it is an absence of proper manners
Foolish actions not just greater expectations

We each search to find peace of mind
Some look high, some look low
It makes no difference the place it is sought
But one pervasive flaw makes it hard to find is time
It is always here and gone
We wonder where it came from
And mostly where it went
Ungraspable untouchable

Well the place is here
The people are you
To see a course full run
And scenes of congratulations

But remember what gave you the sun
Not violence, crime or drugs
Just greater expectations

BY THE GLASS

It was a good day
It had been a very good day
With a wonderful
Happy ending

The walls warmed the cold August air
Abuelito told Abuelita to bring los licores
Abuelito hid them in his study
With padlock and key

Abuelita left the two of us together
To leave us staring at each other
Animosity had once been there
Expressing morality
Restricting personal liberties
Had always once been there

The fixated lamp shone between us
As Abuelita left

"Try this one."
Abuelita places the first bottle on the table
She turns to the glass cabinet
To get the vasitos para los tragitos
For we to use, for we to drink

Abuelito's trembling hand
Grabs the liqueur by the neck
His hand, his wrist is too
Temblorosa
Para usarla, para abrirla
"Mamota.
Open this."

"Sí, mi viejito."
Abuelita opens the round lid
She pours the liqueur
She serves us
We drink

Silence passes entre nosotros

"I like it,"
I say.
"The cork lives in the drink."

Abuelito is speechless

I smile,
"Me gusta."
I drink again.

Abuelito stares
His mouth trembles
He grins.

Abuelita drinks her tragito in one swig.

Abuelito's hand
Slowly moves toward his glass
His fingers twitch
Then clamp
Grasping the glass
The glass shakes a little
As Abuelito brings the trago to his lips

He sips
He is speechless, again

"Sí, el corcho
Se saborea
En el trago
In the heart of the glass."

He looks to me
Smiles
And sips again.

Author's note: Spanish words are intentionally left unitalicized.

Abuelito: granddaddy; Abuelita: grandmommy; los licores: the liqueurs; vasitos: little glasses; los tragitos: the small alcoholic drinks; Temblorosa: shaky; Para usarla, para abrirla: to use, to open; Mamota: big mama; Sí, mi viejito: Yes, my darling old man; entre nosotros: between us; Me gusta: I like it; trago: alcoholic drink; Sí, el corcho se saborea en el trago: Yes, (you can) taste the cork in the drink.

TECHOS PARA CHILE

Techos para nosotros

The tap, tap, tapping
Upon the silver tin roofs of the ghetto

Broken sheets of plywood
Particles of trees glued and pressed by human hands

Shanty houses, shanty homes
Standing away, upon the muddy cliff
Looking down

Hello?
Tapping, tap

Álo? Is any one there?
And no body
Is there

The water leaks to the floor
Water streams from the ceiling fan

Álo? Hay alguien?
Anyone out there?

Knocking upon the rooftops
Water leaking
Children waking
Ready to go to school
From their waterlogged, cardboard beds

Author's note: Spanish words are intentionally left unitalicized.

Techos para Chile: "Rooftops for Chile" (which is also a national organization dedicated to housing the homeless); Techos para nosotros: Rooftops for (all of) us; Álo?: 'Ello?; Hay alguien?: Is anyone there?

VICTORIAN, PICTURESQUE

Top hats
Long coats
Walking sticks

The subtle
And the indirect

That underlying
Sexual presence
The tension
The stress

The piece of bare skin
At the back of the neck
That nakedness
That you knew existed
Even before they had turned their backs

The coyness
That playing 'hard to get'

That vibrant string of the violin
Lifting, pushing
Up the air to the palm of your hand
Barely six centimetres under your skin
Ready to be strummed then plucked
And left vibrating again

The double entendre
The witty repartee

That tiny whole in the stocking
The stocking you never saw
But always knew was there

CREOLE

Creole
Cajun
Mulatto
Quadroon
Men making many words
To say how
We are all different
?
To say
"the other, not me, is different."

I am
Different
I am The Mixed

That's why I like to cook
I mix
Ingredients

I take things
Break things
And make them different
I infuse things
Emulsify things
To make them enjoyable
To make them delicious
They are made for everyone
The other "other"
The indifferent

MEZCLA

It is there
Taking a break from writing her Zitkala-Sa paper
In her pink, white-man moccasins
In her lapis azure robe that she realizes
Why
Why she had a niche, No
An inclination
for the so-called
Native American Plight
She realizes

Mezcla
Biracial, Bicultural
Mud child
Her father Earth
Her mother Water
She, *Native yet Foreign*

EO GR

They were jealous
Because They could not get to her
Jealous because They could not understand
But how could They
Understand the ocean without breaking the foaming water
Understand the land without skating across the morning grass

Author's note: Spanish words are intentionally left unitalicized.

Editor's Note: Zitkala-Sa, an advocate of Indian rights, was a biracial Native American writer who taught in government-run schools on her reservation. After observing the cruelly and poorly run schools that enforced a "white-man dominant" ideology, she left to write articles and translate many Indian legends featuring the trickster Iktomi.

Mezcla: Mix.

BUT THE MIND TENDS TO WONDER

I stood in line and waited
Waited, waited, waited.

I thought,
Carmel Macchiato
Or Espresso?
But of course, there have been other conflicts
Greater than this.

Good versus Evil
Angel against Angel
Rival against Rival
Oily hands against
A bar of Soap

Our hands get so oily that
We have to use one oil
To wash the other out.

Pig fat, plant fat, or synthetic
Boiled and scraped
Refined then scented
Dried out before being
Packaged into ships

An oily man takes off the wrapper.
And without thinking twice,
That same man washes himself
Of his own, manmade oils.

Oil v Oil
Brother v Brother
Brother from Another mother
Another continent, Another culture
One man watching
Then washing away the other

North against South
White versus Sioux
Chile contra Argentina
The Espresso or
The Caramel Macchiato

Aren't they all from the same plant?
I ask the Barista.
Yeah, I suppose, She answers.
But can't you hurry it up? There's a line forming behind you.

I KNOW MY ORIGIN STORY

Abuelito was a Catholic
Daddy, a Protestant
Abuelito, Democrat
Daddy, Republican
Abuelito was Chileno
Daddy wasn't

Daddy met Mother
Through the embassy's kitchen
The kitchen had befriended Mother
Daddy was a shy boy
Mother wasn't

Daddy and Mother married
In the month of February
Abuelito had to build the wedding fire
Abuelito didn't like Daddy
But Mother loved him
Mother fought thirteen months, daily
And won the battle
Abuelito would have to be
A Gringo's "Father"

If you have any problems,
Abuelito told Mother,
Just fly straight home.
I won't ask any questions.

Mother left Abuelito in the airport
And stayed with *my* father
Daddy loves Mother
And Mother
Loves Daddy

For twenty-seven years
They've been married
Twenty-seven years of occasional problems
But Mother still loves Daddy
And Daddy still loves Mother

Eleven years into the marriage
Abuelito looked up to Daddy

Hijo, he said finally.
Te amo.

Author's note: Spanish words are intentionally left unitalicized.

Chileno: Chilean; Gringo: a white-/light-skinned foreigner (not derogatory in Chile);
Hijo...Te amo: Son...I love you.

EMPEROR

I dreamed of golden sheets
An Emperor at my feet
I have come to worship you
You are not my king
But I'm so small
I can't see the world
When I am next to you

I've traveled as far
As I thought I could go
To be an orphan at your feet
But I, being merely a child
Have only myself to give

I'm in love with you
But I'm also in love
With the stars and sky
And everything else
I do not own

GOD AND T. S. ELLIOT

I want a god...

A god I can see or touch

A God that stalks like Rambo
And roundhouse kicks like Chuck Norris

Recites Shakespeare
Like Jean-Luc Picard on the Enterprise

Shouting
"My love is a fever"

Life and Eternity.
Heaven
And hell.

An ongoing,
Insatiable fever pain
Forever,
Rising Higher

Oh my Jesus sense is tingling!
Pray and send your love money!

I want Jesus to reunite the triforce
Save the princess Zelda

With his crucifix
Ocarina of Time
And Eponia
Lead us out of Egypt

Restore the trinity triforce!

Tyler Durden or John
Jesus or God

As Darth Vader breathes
Down your soul

Nietzsche's King Solomon reincarnate

Vanity sayth the preacher
Existentialism sayth the French!

ADDICTION

I've never been in love a day in my life
Just a martyr for a cause that could never be

Touch me again, love me just one more time

A love that is a child with wants and needs
That never satiate

And given,
I will always take too much
But I can't take more than you can give

I could not ask the homeless for change
A fool for wisdom, an Atheist for God

One more time...one last fix...

Addicts don't enjoy
They just need.

We need.

Emaciated dogs taking scraps from the nearest table
I follow the hand that runs down my back
Smile and gently call my name
And I'll keep coming back

If I could kill the passion,
Spare the rod and save the child
But admitting defeat is not giving up

One time in a dream
I stood on the street
I saw a horse come around the corner
It ran toward me full force
My heart raced and my body frozen
I closed my eyes as it touched me
And turned to leaves

And then a woman in the foreground said
You are experiencing turbulence
Please remain calm in your seat

This butterfly has only begun to spread its wings
And it's not over yet

It's not over yet.
It's never over.

TWO WOMEN, REUNITED.

Two women, reunited
Friends, enemies
Dissolved in history
Dissolved in time

She stood behind the counter
With her name engraved
Onto her black polo
She looks to the woman in front

"Wow, you look great"
Botox queen

And the woman on the other side,
With her giant purse
And two daughters
In their tiny-wini skirts

"So you work here,
You must be the manager?"
Wasted your life away

"Yes I'm the manager"
*Not treading on the heels
Of some rich boy
Ass-grabbing dumbass football player*

"Why didn't you come to the reunion?"
No one wanted you here

"Oh. I was on vacation"
Having a life after high school

"So, you have two grown-up boys now?"
Slut

"Yeah...I started early."
Bitch

"Yeah, I started late."

Then they wished each other well.

Kathleen Odom

HANDS OF TIME

October 20

1959: Unknown hands catch the slippery infant as it makes its entrance into this world while a youthful hand reaches up to wipe away joyful tears at the birth of her third child, a second daughter

1960: A youthful hand reaches up to wipe away tears of hopelessness at the unexpected turn of events in her life; eviction places the now single mom sitting curbside with three small sets of hands as she nervously wrings hers; unknown hands of an officer turn the wheel of his patrol car to see if he may offer assistance

Early

1961: A young trembling hand reaches up to wipe away sorrowful tears before signing legal papers relinquishing custody of her offspring's three small sets of hands while images and sounds reel through her mind: infant hands grasping her finger, the solace-seeking rhythm of thumb sucking, toddler hands relentlessly tugging her skirt and vying for her attention, hands pulled back revealing eyes as "peek-a-boo" is shouted, uncoordinated hands seeking to imitate mommy's while playing "patty-cake"

Mid

1961: Fearful, intertwined fingers of a four-year-old and five-year-old brother and sister clutch each other's hands, unknowingly succumbing to the process of time that would blur and ultimately erase the memories of any former life

Late

- 1961: A young woman's hand uses a tissue to dab her moist eyes while the happily married couple sign the document to change the name of the young child legally making her their daughter; that night, an anxious child's fingers hold open eyelids with fierce determination so as not to fall prey to the terrors of the unknown
- 1962: An adopted mother's hands tenderly brush blond hair, tie bows and shoelaces, and sew and smock dresses with expertise then proudly fasten buttons so her child may now display her handiwork

August

- 1962: Unknown hands catch the fourth infant, third daughter as she makes her entrance into the world of a reconciled marriage, to be raised as an only child
- 1965: A young mother brushes away bittersweet tears after releasing her eager child's hand signifying six-year-old independence on that first day of kindergarten
- 1968: Freshly washed elementary school hands excitedly explore the black and white keys of the piano she had never before been allowed to touch; consistently practicing hands begin to hungrily turn page-after-page in their quest for a more difficult piece to play
- 1970: Awkward fifth-grade fingers press down cello strings in a challenging search for strategic placement in order to acquire the properly-pitched note
- 1970: Slender hands of a not-so-youthful mother blithely bring the Brown-Moore brand cigarette to her lips, unaware of the strangle-hold they will have on her life

- 1973: Teenage hands construct a mosaic, ransom-font poem titled, "Lysol, the spray that does it all," the motif surreptitiously hidden until one notices the poem's placement in her collection before Dickinson's "Because I Would Not Stop For Death"
- 1974: Skillful fingers of a promising musician twist the top and break the seal on a fifth of whiskey pilfered from her home's well-stocked basement; a quick learner, she grabs gin the next time because of its milder odor
- 1975: Troubled-teen hands become masochistic weapons they were never meant to be; cutting, burning, inflicting pain that refused to bring tears—an unsuccessful plea for help to ease the inner pain
- 1976: Careless seventeen-year-old hands shoplift items—the revenue to purchase psychedelic drugs of the '70s; a mother nervously wrings her hands at the unexplainable behavior of her daughter
- 1977: Bitter and strong-willed hands of a rebellious daughter pack and carry boxes out to her trunk, then turn the wheel of her car steering her life into an abyss of sin; a middle-aged mother brushes away bittersweet tears, releasing the eighteen-year-old daughter to her hard-sought-after independence
- 1978: A young woman's hands turn the wheel of a race car causing it to careen out of control, a perfect parallel of her own life; foolishly, hands pawn the now silent cello in exchange for a Greyhound bus ticket; unknown hands will direct the bus's massive wheel into uncharted territory; concerned hands of a loving mother draw together in prayer for her wayward daughter
- 1979: Miserable hands reach up and wipe away tears of hopelessness at the unexpected turn of events in her life; despair places the broken young woman at an altar with intertwined fingers as a Savior with compassionate nail-scarred hands erases her painful past

1980: Strong male hands gently hold her trembling ones as their lives are united in holy matrimony; two grey-haired mothers wipe tears from their eyes as their children are joined as one

June 28

1982: Agressive hands pull the trigger of a 22 caliber pistol, violently ending the life of the young woman's sister-in-law; calmly, those same hands bring two grand-daughters to their Momo's house as their perpetrator placidly brings a cup of coffee to his lying lips that spew forth the delusion, "My wife is not feeling well and we need you to keep the children."

August

1982: Unknown hands operate the backhoe in preparation for a burial and the young woman's hands delicately brush and fix her sister-in-law's hair with the fresh knowledge that without life, hair is easily detached

September

1982: The murderous culprit detaches himself from this life in a headlong fall from a New Orleans ferry landing; a mother, yet reeling in grief, signs custody of her grand-daughters over to her youngest son and his wife

November

1982: A happily-married young couple sign the documents changing the last names of the two orphaned children, legally making them their own daughters; the young lady's mother reflects as history repeats itself

February 11

1987: Sure and experienced midwife's hands deliver to the couple another daughter; wrinkled, aged hands cradle the newborn infant; a mother's competent hands change diapers after suckling her first natural-born child

August

1989: Enthusiastic hands of an excited young lady explore the black and white keys of a piano just prior to an audition at a community college; her mother rejoices, recalling the many handwritten checks for music lessons

December

1989: Painfully, during her jury the freshman piano major plays C.P.E. Bach's *Solfeggio for Keyboard in G Major* which she has completely re-fingered solely for right hand, yielding to the splint on her left hand little finger

May

1991: Thirty-one year old hands graciously accept the President's Scholarship to the four-year university, unaware that the midwife would pay another visit at the turn of the year

January 3

1992: Youthful hands that have been busy cross-stitching instead of practicing, affectionately hold the wailing infant delivered by the hands of the midwife; hands creased with age caress yet another grandchild

January 3

1994: Familiar midwife hands catch the slippery infant as it makes its entrance into this world while a youthful hand reaches up to wipe away joyful tears at the birth of her third child, a fifth daughter

November

1996: Strong-willed hands belonging to the mother of a family of seven pack boxes for the movers to carry to the moving van; unknown hands direct the massive wheel directing the truck containing the family's cherished possessions toward a brighter horizon

September

1997: Unbelievably a grandmother at thirty-eight, the young woman wipes away tears as she cradles her firstborn grandson and his infant hands grasp her finger; little did she know this little boy's father would molest his wife's younger sister

1999: Parental hands sign documents charging the sex offender with molestation; troubled-teen hands become masochistic weapons they were never meant to be: cutting, burning, inflicting pain in order to release the inner pain

New Year's Eve

1999: Bitter, rebellious hands of the non-compliant daughter wave farewell; her middle-aged mother brushes away bittersweet tears with concern, releasing her eighteen-year-old daughter to hard-sought-after independence and then draws them together in prayer for her wayward daughter

New Year's Eve

2001: Experienced hands pack luggage, then the mother and thirteen-year-old daughter wave goodbye just prior to boarding the Philippines-bound aircraft on a mission trip; strong male hands tenderly wipe away tears from the faces of his two youngest daughters

July 23

2002: Unknown hands catch the slippery infant as she makes her way into this world and quickly pass the wailing child to a nurse before she can be welcomed into her proud Nana's arms; tears of relief course down the young mother's face, pooling in the crevices of her smile

New Year's Eve

2003: Unwilling to continue as a single mother, the young woman & child return to the life of abuse she fled months earlier; the helpless infant's hands fly to cover her face at the sound of raised voices, seeking an escape from the terrors of the unknown

Spring

2004: A young trembling hand reaches up to wipe away sorrowful tears before signing legal papers relinquishing custody of her only offspring into the practiced hand of her parents; stimulated forty-five year-old fingers relentlessly stroke a computer keyboard, paralleling time spent intertwined in prayer during an urgent search for her birth-family

Spring

2005: The mature hands of an only child pick up the phone and she listens with awe as an unfamiliar voice introduces herself as her

birth-sister; the odds of discovering the identities of those three children in the mysterious pictures among her deceased father's belongings had been a long shot when a divorced mother, after years of painful suppression did not wish to discuss the matter; however, the odds were about to turn

Summer – Winter

2005: Years of an intense desire to know and seeking to understand the personal dichotomy of her adoption culminated with an enveloping hug between the middle-aged daughter and her elderly birthmother, creating a future of duality with two mothers; insatiable curiosity completed the investigation and forgotten juvenile faces morphed into adult embraces in the reunited family: a contented mother cast her twinkling eyes on her son and three daughters

October

2006: Time and chance happens to all mankind, but it seemed so cruel that her mother would breathe that last breath just prior to her forty-seventh birthday; it awakened dormant memories of her grandmother who had passed on into eternity and been buried on her thirteenth birthday; she assured her younger birth-sister she would not have to face the loss of their mother alone; it was totally uncanny when later that same month their older brother and sister also buried their mother

August

2007: Enthusiastic hands of a non-traditional student recall the pieces from her sophomore recital as she auditions for entrance into the four-year university; abounding with unfulfilled dreams, she doubles her instrument major and audaciously auditions as her fingers strategically seek properly-pitched notes on the strings of a cello

October 20 & 21

2009: Fifty years have elapsed since that historical day of this woman's birth; it would be the next day the hands of her younger birth-sister would pick up the phone and make that dreaded "you need to come now" phone call; hands of mother and daughters unite in prayer; the younger daughter, exhausted from previous hours at their mother's bedside makes one request of her older sister as she departs, "I just want someone holding her hand when the time comes."

October 22

2009: After an all-night vigil with this woman who gave her birth, watching the struggle of oxygen-aided, emphysema-racked breaths, never sure when "the time" would come, the persevering daughter stayed true to her promise and faithfully held her birthmother's hand; perhaps it had been with the same faithfulness that a young single mother had cherished one last lingering squeeze of her children's hand before that final release; as morning dawned, roles reversed and a fifty-year old woman cherished that last, lingering squeeze of her mother's warm hand before it quivered in death, that final release

Ryan Goslowsky

SAVOR

This is the hand I call my favorite,
this is the song I find sound,
this is the world from the underground.
These are the toys that I play with,
these are my friends and their songs;
I'll remember them after they're gone.
That's the click and the clack of the railway,
that's the feeling of a kiss
given to me today.
This is my favorite shirt,
these are my most comfortable pants,
with lips parted we entered a dance.
This is the hand I call my favorite,
it's been broken torn and busted;
but it is a part of me,
but it is not my fondest memory.

NEVERLAND

I flew in to see you the other day;
you would not have noticed.
I saw you like the way
one sees art, focused,
admiring the details and intricacy.
Raw passion, I have that, I can tell you more.
I can notice more and answer in specificity,
should you want to open that door
to Neverland. A palace built for us, two
people of similar thought and standing,
a common comfort between me and you.
But this world is found demanding.
But to whisk you away, on the other hand,
is to hope and wish for us to Neverland.

MOST OF THE TIME

You open my eyes in the morning,
you dance about the shelves of books and music,
selecting your favorite of each.
You place on the stereo a collection of songs,
you move by the disheveled bed,
you straighten a picture of you and me.
You look through my eyes.
I look at cut grass, I'm thinking about you.
You stretch seductively and giggle as you
leave my view.
You'll be back soon.
I listen for your whispers,
you the muse I wait.
You move the furniture around,
you put on the projector, special recordings
of you and me.
You're never bored, and you move to the windows
so I can see you clearly throughout the day—
and at night
you shut my eyes.

Contributors

STEPHANIE ARMSTRONG graduated from Texas A&M University with a BA in English. After teaching in the Texas public school system, she moved to Beaumont with her husband and is pursuing an MA in English at Lamar University. "a hero's welcome" is her first attempt at creative short fiction and will also be featured at the Langdon Review Conference this September. She wishes to thank her family and her very supportive husband.

MARY BASWELL is a senior majoring in English.

CHAD BELYEU is a graduate student of English at Lamar University.

GINGER DEAN is an English major and graduating senior at Lamar University. She has been writing poetry since she was thirteen years old, and, during that time, she has experimented with different styles. She has always appreciated Robert Browning's poetry and how it exposes the underlying psychology of people.

QUINTON GAINES was born in California and currently resides in Beaumont, Texas, where he is studying for his BS in Psychology at Lamar University. In his spare times, Quinton enjoys oolong tea, foreign movies, and finding phrases to fill the vacant corners of humanity.

JULIETTE GENTRY received a BA from the University of Texas at San Antonio and an MA from Lamar University. She was awarded 2nd place for Advanced Screenwriting in the Spindletop Film Festival, has read at the American Studies Association of Texas Conference at San Angelo, and visited her mother's homeland, Chile, many times.

RYAN GOSLOWSKY is a senior majoring in English.

VIANA HAMMON is a sophomore at Lamar University. She is studying dietetics and hopes to specialize in oncology. Raymond Carver and John Steinbeck are two of her favorite writers.

HANNAH R. KLAUSS received her BBA in Accounting in August 2006 from Lamar University. She is currently studying voice and piano privately, and her hobbies include singing, the piano, and songwriting.

TRACIE MIDDLETON is a graduate student in English with particular interest in the literature of the Bible. She received her BA in English from Austin College in 1998 and currently teaches ESL for the Lamar Language Institute. She's also a deacon, serving at St. John's Episcopal Church in Silsbee.

KATHLEEN ODOM earned her BA in Music with emphasis on piano and cello in 2010 from Lamar University, graduating with highest honors. Before coming to Lamar she was awarded the Phi Theta Kappa National award in music composition. She is currently a member of the Lamar Civic Orchestra and is pursuing a Master's in Cello Performance.

In 2010 CAROL WALKER graduated as Valedictorian of Lamar University's TALH program and will attend the University of North Texas in the fall to pursue an undergraduate degree in English. Though her work is informed by the many great poets of past centuries, her faith in God is the primary influence on both her writing and her character.

C.K. WILLIAMS, JR., has been a writer and orator from a very early age. He has appeared on the PBS show *Artistic Reflection*. His passion is to be an encourager and help others succeed. He paints as a release to his writings. C.K. enjoys the beauty of being outdoors and the peace that it brings.

dichotomy (dī - kŏt'ə - mē), *noun*

- 1 division into two parts, kinds, etc.;
subdivision into halves or pairs.
- 2 division into two mutually exclusive,
opposed, or contradictory groups.



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