



**Pulse**

pulse

Volume XXXIII, Number 2

Fall 1990

Edited by Karen Holstead and Melissa Hudler

Faculty Advisors

R.S. Gwynn  
Jim Sanderson

Department Head

Tim Summerlin

#### JUDGES

Tim Adell

Christopher Baker

Carolyn Comeaux

Lloyd Daigrepont

Stephanie Yearwood

Karen Priest

Dale Priest

Pam Saur

Sallye Sheppeard

Department of English and Foreign Languages

Lamar University  
Beaumont, Texas

## Table of Contents

### Undergraduates

Julie Gleason Alford	4
Darren Frederick	13
Karen Holstead	15
Melissa Hudler	17
Jody Pate	19
Jenny Phelan	23
Ranla Pippins	27
Carol Rabalais	30
Angella Redding	32
Matthew Stanfield	33
 Sammie Rutledge	 35

### Graduate Students

C. Renee Field	41
Diane Lehmler	48
Patricia McDaniel	49
D. Tatum	50
 C. Renee Field	 51

cover art by Janna Smith

We would like to extend a very special "Thank You" to Eleanor Weinbaum for her unwavering support of PULSE and the Liberal Arts for the past thirty years. We would also like to thank all the faculty members who contribute their time, effort, and expertise to judge the PULSE submissions. Without a supportive faculty, the magic of PULSE would never happen.

*Del salón en el ángulo oscuro,  
de su duena tal vez olvidada,  
silenciosa y cubierta de polvo,  
veíase el arpa.*

*Cuánta nota dormía en sus cuerdas  
como el pájaro duerme en las ramas,  
esperando la mano de nieve  
que sabe arrancarla!*

*Ay! pensé, cuántas veces el genio  
así duerme en el fondo del alma  
y una voz como Lázaro espera  
que le diga [Levántate y anda!]*

Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer  
(1836-1870)

The harp stood in a dark corner  
Of the empty studio,  
Silent, shrouded in dust,  
Forgotten by its mistress long ago.

Like a bird asleep in the branches,  
Music slept in the strings,  
Waiting for the soft sure touch  
To wake the notes to song.

Oh, I thought, so often the true spirit  
Also slumbers, abandoned deep within,  
Waiting like Lazarus for the voice  
Which calls, "Rise up and Live."

Julie Gleason Alford

## Hay

An old bale of hay  
lies here broken,  
torn apart,  
its cords cut and frayed,

left, like a present  
someone opened  
then forgot.  
The breeze blows sweet hints

Of alfalfa down  
through the air. Loose  
hay covers  
the hoof-trodden ground;

a litter of grass  
confetti from  
some equine  
party in the past.

Julie Gleason Alford

## Tiny Fires

It is autumn midnight. The quarter moon slips  
Through the trees, splashing leaves and rocks white,  
Throwing the forest into fantastic shapings  
Of eerie shade and frosty fairyland.  
I walk slow, tennis shoes padding softly  
On the damp cushion of pine needles.  
Leaves rustle in the wind. I stumble  
Into a small clearing where a huge oak stands,  
Gnarled branches black against a moon-soaked sky,  
One jagged limb outstretched like a warning.  
I see them peering from a hollow log, two eyes  
Glowing red like tiny goblin fires.  
I don't breathe--quickly the fires blink out--  
A mad scuffling then all is quiet again.

Julie Gleson Alford

## de Schweinitz Poetry Award

### The Horse

I look up at the red mountain.  
He blocks the sun. My heart begins  
to pound. He fills the sky. Everything  
is horse. His hips are like boulders,  
his legs glant redwoods. He stamps

and his Gollath hoof tears the earth,  
throwing up a green clod of dirt.  
Tossing his head, he blasts the air  
with a long whinny. His whole body  
shakes in a fit of laughter, amused

at the thought of such a tiny scrap  
of girl riding him. I feel hands push,  
prod, lead me up to the towering wall  
of horse. Someone places a tin bucket  
upside down at my feet. I can't tell

them the truth, so, I stand on the bucket.  
I smell leather and horse sweat. I see  
the saddle horn high above, a dark peak  
against the blue sky. Stretching on tiptoe,  
I grab it, clutching horn reins and hope

in both hands. Left foot in the stirrup,  
a deep breath, then up, swinging up, high  
then higher and God-will-I-ever-get-there,  
a push from behind, a grunt, one last tug  
and I'm on the summit, in the saddle,

sunlight splashes over me and I can see  
for miles; right over the field of riders  
bedrolls vans saddles kids trucks tents  
right over uncles and cousins and khaki-  
shirted trail bosses with their cigar smiles,

right over the stream of horses; brown gray  
dun sorrel buckskin pinto chestnut and gold,  
across the lake and over the trees and down  
the green hills. The breeze is cool and I've never  
seen so far. The horse slings his head once more,

his mane flowing like copper waves; he lets go  
another whinny. It bubbles right up  
from his stomach out through his ribs,  
shaking right up through the saddle  
and jars something loose inside me.

Julie Gleason Alford

### Avec des Excuses à Monsieur Blake

I.  
Oh Flesh, thou art weak.  
The insatiable lust  
Wakes me in the night  
With such longing I just

Leap out of bed then  
Dash down the hall  
To that dark chocolate fudge  
And I eat it all.

II.  
I was angry with my friend:  
I punched his face, my wrath did end.  
He was angry then with me:  
He punched me not; I ran, you see.

Julie Gleason Alford

## Barnes Poetry Award

### Buddha's Got the Blues

I was resting in my easy chair  
Watching my T.V.  
Some Bible-thumpers came and scared  
The hell right out of me

They yelled "The end is coming soon--  
Prepare for Judgement Day!"  
So I put my Nikes on and went  
Outside to find The Way

There were shrines on every corner  
A cross in every sky  
Lord I couldn't see the light  
With stained glass in my eye

A preacher in a tailored suit  
Saved me for a fee  
A man of real convictions yes  
Each one a felony

The moonies at the airport lounge  
Had flowers in their jeans  
Traveler's checks and Quaaludes' spilling  
From their tamborines

I took an airplane to the East  
Transcendental bound  
Seeking peace in ancient truths  
And this is what I found:

A yogi lounging lotus-style  
A sign upon his chest--  
"Levitation seminars  
My prices are the best!"

A Buddhist monk in mirrored shades  
Held up a cigarette  
When he asked me for a light I said  
I hadn't seen one yet

He explained the Noble Truths to me  
And why his head was shaved  
He claimed The Way was easy since  
The Eightfold Path was paved

So I sailed across the sea  
To the seven hills I went  
Where I knew I'd find the one  
Truly heaven sent

But the Holy Roman Umpire  
Was playing papal sport  
Serving vows of poverty  
On his palace court

I turned around and came back home  
To my easy chair  
Kicked my Nikes off and thought  
Of all I'd seen out there

I decided they were probably right  
The end was probably near  
Then I ordered out for pizza  
And two six-packs of beer

The rain is falling softly now  
The fire is burning low  
Thoreau is here Sinatra too  
We resolved to let it go

And when I talked to God tonight  
I told him all the news--  
That Swaggart's back in business  
And Buddha's got the blues

Julie Gleason Alford

## Born Again Cowboy

He was watching True Grit for the twenty-third time  
When he suddenly saw the light.  
Next day at the office he gave them his notice  
And his whole life changed overnight.

He threw out his razor, his briefcase, and tie,  
Gave Goodwill his hand-tailored suits.  
He traded his Volvo for a four-wheel Bronco  
Then he bought him some lizardskin boots.

In his long hair and Levis and gray Stetson hat,  
Why, we hardly knew him at all.  
And his family kept saying, "The boy has gone crazy  
Ever since he got the call."

A born again cowboy, oh Lord how we laughed  
Just to see the new lifestyle he wore  
And to hear him preach gospels from paperback novels  
Written by Louis L'Amour.

He said the Old West had made him a new man  
We said, "Boy, it's only a phase."  
But he said he was leaving at sundown that evening;  
He was tired of the brown city haze.

His country club girlfriend dropped him so fast  
"That hat's just too tacky," she said.  
And the move he was planning to Moose Butt, Montana,  
Well, she told him to just go ahead.

That evening at sunset we gathered around  
To wish him good luck and good-bye.  
We were sure he'd be back the first time he splashed  
Those boots in a cow pattie pie.

A born again cowboy, there ain't nothing worse.  
Oh Lord, how he did carry on  
About wide open spaces and deserts ablaze  
And we were just glad he was gone.

Now it's been a long time and we've not heard a word  
Whether he's dead or alive.  
But sometimes we toast him with gin and bad jokes  
At the Happy Hour Lounge after five.

I still punch a clock and I still push a pen  
And I bought a new T.V. from Sears.  
I rented Red River from the video center.  
I haven't seen that one in years.

And sometimes when I see that brown city haze  
I remember the light in his eyes  
When he spoke of the freedom that he would be feeling  
Under those wild western skies.

### Medicine Man

Let us sing the chant and beat the drum.  
Let the rhythm rise to heaven and form  
A ladder for the spirits to descend and join us  
Here in the darkness of the lodge. This stone,  
Red and glowing, hot from the fire,  
Is the first stone, the sacred stone that honors  
Our ancestors; our grandparents, our parents.  
Look closely. The fire spirit will show us  
Visions. There is Grandfather, the sun,  
Above us, guiding us, giving us light.  
So we may clearly see the path to follow.  
And Grandmother, the moon, watching over us,  
Weaving her wisdom through our dreams at night.  
Father Sky, we breathe him in and all  
The wild forever blue fills our eyes  
Until our hearts go soaring like the eagle.  
Here is our Mother, the earth, who nourishes us.  
Our food, our clothes, our lodges, everything  
Is a gift from the Earth Mother to her children.  
I purify the stone with water, our gift  
Of thanks to the sun, the moon, the sky, the earth.  
Hear it sizzle and hiss; the stone is speaking.  
It says the spirits are here, everywhere--  
The wind the trees the rocks the grass the streams;  
You are a spirit yourself. The steam rises  
From the stone. Listen. The stone is singing.

Julie Gleason Alford

### Fatal Notes

Fatal notes,  
Like painters' strokes,  
Shade my life despair.  
Try to win  
But fail again;  
Why should I still care?  
Long for love,  
No help above,  
Still my days go on.  
Low my eyes  
To deep blue skies;  
Await the coming dawn.  
Take a chance  
On one last dance;  
Do circles 'round the moon.  
Feel the pain,  
Pressure my brain,  
The end is coming soon.

Darren Frederick



### A Romantic Encounters the World

In the blackness produced by eyes  
unaccustomed to the darkness,  
I fumble about for a light  
in a room that is still unfamiliar.

The playful clouds retreat  
and through a crevice in the blinds,  
slivers of moonlight illuminate  
your previously shadowed form.

I am startled by the beauty of your body--  
a dark and male and sturdy contrast  
to the softness of the moonlit sheets.  
On your back, arms outspread,  
I am tempted to claim you as god-like.

I sit on the edge of the bed,  
upsetting the easy rhythm of your breath.  
You reach out and half whisper a name--  
loud in the echoing dark, "Donna."

Donna? Who the hell's Donna?

Karen Holstead

### Dick and Jane's First Road Trip

I watch the road heave  
When the ground breathes. Between us,  
On the seat, the flat ink of your  
Rand-McNally flows into Texas and then pours off  
The edge of the map.

I decide to meditate  
For peace while you gripe about  
The weather. Rain slips past  
The windshield wipers and drowns the dull whine  
Of your voice.

We pass the Buddha  
Hitching to Enlightenment, wearing a shirt  
That says, "I eat 'em Raw at Moe's."  
I know he's just another roadside attraction for you  
And I cry.

At a rest stop,  
I lie back on a carpet of flowers  
That lifts me high above your head.  
My eyes are green for miles until you rip a daisy  
From between my feet.

I turn on the radio  
And God tries to speak to me through  
A Bob Dylan tune, but you flip  
The dial until She's dizzy. She grabs the antenna  
To get Her balance.

When we reach my house,  
Your car burps me onto the grass.  
You try to tell me you had a nice time,  
But when you open your mouth, I dig out your tongue  
With my house key.

Karen Holstead

### Wench \*

It little profits that an idle wench,  
On this cold bed, atop these flattened sheets  
Longing for golden coins, I wait alone  
To give a pleasure to a foolish sex  
That grunt, and sweat, and heave, and know me well.  
I cannot rise from this and so will die  
With coin in hand. My life I will recall  
Coldly, will speak of bluntly, both with those  
That know me and alone; at dawn, and when  
In fading bronze the leaving sun pulls down  
The dark night sky. I am without a name;  
Forever traveling with an empty heart  
Much have I seen and known--cities of men  
And manners, climates, councils, governments,  
Myself in bed with most or all of them--  
And raised my glass in toast to men of wealth,  
Far from the poverty of my low kin.  
I own a piece of all the men I've known  
And yet for all this wealth, some other gold  
Still gleams beyond my grasp and lights my way  
Forever and forever when I move.

\* with sincerest apologies to Tennyson and Ulysses

Karen Holstead

### Pondering

Sun rays penetrate the pond and  
the water sparkles with their touch.  
Like diamonds refracting  
Light, a brilliant spectrum  
appears -

The pond plays tricks on those who stare  
into her illusive mirror.  
A reflection stares back,  
(distorted image), it  
quivers,

Separates, disappears. The wind  
Hums a lullaby and the pond,  
Beneath a blanket of  
Lily pads, rocks herself  
to sleep -

Melissa Hudler

### Whispering Words

Whispering words  
In your ear while you're sound asleep.  
Whispering words  
That would pound in your head like herds  
of cattle if you weren't asleep.  
I'll lie here with you and just keep  
Whispering words.

Melissa Hudler

## CHILDMOTHER

I watch as she swings -  
She pushes away the sky with her feet  
And I feel the wind envelop me;  
It takes

me                      ride  
                    a  
                    for

She chases squirrels until her cheeks redden and sweat moistens her skin

I pant

She falls and my knees      begin      to      swell  
She leaps into the pool -

I shiver

Melissa Hudler

## The Self-disintegration Blues

Forever since the music stopped playing,  
I've sat here and listened to the needle  
bouncing back on its crystal point.  
And I know now that with every skip,  
another atom breaks off its tip  
and goes whirling off the edge of the album,  
whirling into space,  
whirling into nothing.

And I know now that with every exhalation,  
I spume out thousands of my own atoms,  
and that if I sit here long enough, I'll be gone.

I don't think I'd even care.

And I know now that soon,  
someone will hear the record skipping  
and stop it.  
Maybe they'll wonder where I went. Maybe not.  
And I'll laugh at them in a billion little voices,  
because now I know that soon,  
they'll be everywhere too.  
We'll all be everywhere  
together

apart

Jody Pate

### Death, or Untitled

the rending away  
of the intimacy  
forces beyond the light  
pulling with the power  
of gravity and sticky comedy

black quietness etching softly  
through every pore and crack  
filling, fading  
falling gently  
into an eternal night

Jody Pate

### Graveyard

Black  
like the lowest note on a double bass,  
like the inside of a closet  
in a darkened room  
of a lightless house  
at midnight.  
I can't see, but I feel  
the monstrous weeds  
flourishing on rot,  
stone angels reaching skyward,  
begging removal,  
and the crumbling gravestones,  
under five mangled trees--  
groping up,  
imploring,  
like the fingers of some  
huge and terrible corpse,  
buried alive.

Jody Pate

### Thoughts of a Man Lost in the Forest with No Hope of Rescue

hungry  
(feed me)  
hungry  
(fill me)  
dead brown pine needle spikes  
sharp barbed wire stars  
sucking gloating black sky  
rustle, bushes  
scrabble, brush  
feed me  
(fill me)

the gods have averted their eyes

waking from real nightmares  
into sleep, back down  
on the forest floor  
green seeped into my flesh  
last night the trees moved closer  
(skipped like a record)  
the breeze is terrifying  
(breathe in)  
a small scum of sweat on me  
(beads, beads, turtle wax)  
the trees must be frightened, too  
don't move now  
(run, fly)

green, green, the deepest green

(feed me)  
(fill me)

Jody Pate

## One More Try (or The Cattle in Our Midst)

I THINK my socks are orange  
I THINK my socks are orange  
but I'd hafta check to be sure

"Vroom Vroom," said the motorcycle  
to the wall  
"Gloobledoo blurpum," said a grown man  
to his daughter  
"I love you all!" said the leader  
to his followers

so they followed on  
like buffaloes over the cliff  
like lemmings into the ocean  
everyone their own stand in  
give me time to think it over  
I'll sit in this chair, with the shades down,  
or lie to my reflection in the mirror,  
or call an old girlfriend from a pay phone;  
you must believe.  
two way tickets to a black hole  
rejection of Newton's third law  
no time for science--

**GIVE ME THAT OLD TYME RELIGION!!**

but first let me change my socks.

Jody Pate

**You**

beautiful scented hair  
flaring up and back down  
the finest shape  
golden skin, shining  
small movements at dusk  
pastel lips, perfection  
and your eyes  
screaming a blue hole  
into my mind  
please

Jody Pate

## Smart -- It's Cool and Functional

Thick-framed glasses, several pairs  
no need to visit the optometrist,  
Smart -- no prescription necessary  
Clothes in muted shades  
serious folks shun those vivid colors  
Ah, solitude and quiet, cut off those unnecessary friends,  
you know what they say,  
Smart -- too much socialization can drain it right out of you  
Lug big, heavy books  
no need for a back-pack,  
the point is to show off those self-important titles  
and superthick bindings  
"You know, I don't really care what he looks like,  
as long as he's intelligent"  
Smart -- if you're a brunette, be proud  
Obscure references to the works of Claude  
(you heard about him once when PBS was on in the  
student lounge)  
Heavy doses of depression at a party  
don't waste it when you're alone  
and every once in a while, blurt out musings when  
standing in a crowd,  
"You know, the pumping of the heart is quite representative  
of the sex act, don't you think?"  
Smart -- It's cool and functional!

Jenny Phelan

## Soul-Search

Fire devoured the room,  
melting pictures that told the story of our life,  
turning white pages of our journals to black.  
No, I wasn't there,  
but it melted my soul.

Jenny Phelan

### A Whore's Poem

It is Valentine's day,  
    of course, for me, every day is Valentine's day,  
With the usual gifts, perks --- incentives, I call them. . .  
    an extra \$20 folded in the shape of a football  
    a joint tucked in my garter  
        typical love gifts.  
I don't do it for the money or for the sex,  
    I love them all -- Real Love  
    the way I love my "manager",  
who also happens to be quite generous with the gifts.  
Today, in fact, in a weak moment,  
    stimulated by a mixture of his usual crystal meth  
    with a Listerine stretcher,  
he penned this touching verse to me:  
    "Remember roses, wet with dew,  
    and children's smiles -- they are few.  
    Remember panties in the sink,  
    and sex games twisted with a kink.  
    Remember Vegas, bloodshot eyes,  
    tatoos of Linus on your thighs.  
    Remember this, and so much more--  
    Remember darling, you're a whore."  
My love does it good.

Jenny Phelan

### Womanchild

Tear-stained cheeks, sobbing  
tattered lace and uncombed hair  
Run with arms forward

Jenny Phelan

### Yo Baby, Yo Baby, Yo Baby

Sidewalk skirt and traffic light earrings,  
born with a walk that could, it itself, stop traffic,  
sitting on the corner,  
hot summer breeze not helping at all,  
    Pulling out a pair of her father's pliers that  
    she stole from his garage,  
methodically prying off her braces that she got  
one month earlier,  
    No one notices or cares,  
    and that's the way, uh huh, uh huh,  
    she likes it, uh huh, uh huh,  
    (for now)  
she is free from her oral bonds,  
Hey,  
    even angels get a day off.

Jenny Phelan

### Me and Little Andy

Hot waves flushed through my cheeks  
    as I looked down in silence  
    awkwardly playing with the lace of my bedspread  
    wrapping and re-wrapping a piece of gum  
Hearing things I never thought could be heard  
You so wanted a reaction out of me,  
    but I would not give it  
        would not release my emotions  
        so freely.

Jenny Phelan

### I Hate You

Time stood still, and the Earth stopped moving  
    (well, maybe it moved a little)  
when I first met you.  
Quickly you gained my trust  
    my affection  
    my house key  
which was actually fun for a while.  
    But then you did some stupid things,  
    expressed your love and affection in odd ways--  
took my heart and squeezed it  
between your hands like a sponge and  
    wrung out all the laughter and  
    dignity and original thoughts and  
    rinsed it out once more for good measure  
    with a heavy wash of lies and deep secrets and  
    let it dry in a choking breeze  
    of insecurity and self-doubt  
And still you say "I love you" so sweetly and with such feeling,  
    that I continue to believe you,  
    but really, you merely toss off those special words  
    as if you were in a drive-through  
"I love you"    "I want a #3 special"  
    No discernible difference.

Jenny Phelan

### A Slight Mistake in the Placement of a Mental-Care Patient

The voice rolled down the hall  
and caught me in its  
undertow  
and pulled behind it  
like a barge  
a man the master  
the creator  
riding on the wake  
a hand  
a tassel  
riding the snap of the lion's tail  
holding tight to the end of the lion  
that followed the Kingdom of God  
God the Scourge  
within an hour of the passing of  
the Lion of God  
the lice in the pelt of the earth  
the Father  
like me like my mother  
like my lover and my mother's lover  
we were born to feed the fires of Hell  
And he filled the door filling  
massive with his bulk our  
tiny door  
and in poured Jesus  
with seven bloody whips and seven bloody lashes  
with blood on his hands  
and flesh under his fingernails  
pulling the word of the Lord  
from our careless, sinful souls  
Until it passed, the voice,  
calling Jesus after it  
and we breathed  
sticky with blood and sin  
and relief  
as the man in the conch-shell  
canvas-strapped jacket  
was pulled away from  
our hall and lodged  
in a hole  
in the catacombs  
beneath us.

Rania Pippins

## Kelli

Through a puff of cigarette smoke  
She drawls  
    "Oh, him? I've slept with him  
    he wasn't very good"  
Absently  
    "we did it on his dad's boat"  
She works her jeans over the curve of her hips  
    "no foreplay or anything  
    of course we were both smashed"  
Smears lipstick across her wide red mouth  
    "he was nice, though"  
Meets my eyes tauntingly in the mirror.  
Me,  
abashed, blushing, envious,  
secretly preoccupied by the thought of her slowly  
    seducing him  
him powerless to resist  
the nape of her neck  
her soft golden arms  
barely visible lace hugging her breasts inside her shirt  
goads him  
hot hand on his thigh  
whispering  
secretly self-possessed  
only for the joy of saying to me later  
tauntingly  
with authority  
    "Oh, him? I've slept with him  
    he wasn't very good."

Rania Pippins

## On Education

God's blank eyes  
gaze over my sister and me  
squatting silent  
with the battered corpses  
we have gathered  
on the side of the highway  
squatting shoulder to shoulder  
sticky and brown  
waiting  
for God to blink  
waiting to find one  
bloated with life  
though its eyes  
are baked hard sunken  
and void  
though its jaws  
arch  
thirsty and empty  
waiting to eat the live fruit  
of the dead mother  
with the smiles  
the green and blue and  
blessing  
smiles of God and the angels  
we squat sticky and brown  
on the side of the highway  
and sigh  
sucking lightly on the marrow  
of poor ruptured animals  
whose purpose we have never known.

Rania Pippins



## Alarm

Oh what despicable nerve  
each morn at crack of dawn,  
man's most evil invention buzzes--  
"Get up you subordinate pawn!"

I am snatched from the embrace of Eros  
by this audacious mechanical assassin,  
who's oblivious of my earthly desires  
to return to my nighttime companion.

Without a shred of decent pity  
the incessant ring demands attention,  
deaf to pleas, excuses, or reason--  
my own personal Armageddon!

Carol Rabalais

I am faded,  
Forgotten.  
A flower,  
Without petals.  
Planted,  
But no longer nurtured.  
A weed,  
Left to grow (or not).  
A shadow,  
Supported by the sun.  
But not to be,  
On a cloudy morn.  
A thought,  
Meant to ponder.  
Instead,  
left to lie unheeded.  
And then,  
To die.

Carol Rabalais

## Grancey Graybeard Tree

A shower of lime spiders  
Falls from the tree,  
Sliding down invisible threads

To my windshield. Each sticks,  
Motionless, weak.  
Twisted and tangled green legs,

Nine, fifteen, twenty-six,  
Held together without a torso.  
Each leg ends with a lime foot,

Dry and frayed, like a plucked blossom  
Without water. Limp,  
Each green leg burns pink,

Withering in the sun.  
Then Grancey Graybeard's  
Blossoms whirl away one by one.

Angella Redding

## **Staff Poetry Award**

## Staff Poetry Award

### Galatea

Until the day that Venus clears my eyes,  
I feel your busy chisel tapping out  
Each crevice which becomes my body. Hate,  
I feel it in your pounding hammer, beating  
A curse on women; damned is Galatea.

Inside your mind, Athena placed disgust  
For nature's faulty females. Is this why  
Your own creation renders nothing less  
Than true perfection of the highest form?

Pygmalion, greatest woman-hater, carving  
A life-like maiden--bride of fantasy.  
And every time your chisel carves a curve,  
A bit of frigid loathing chips away.

Your punishment is fair: to burn with lust.  
Alone each night you lavish me with robes  
And gifts of flowers. Then you kiss my lips.  
Caress my alabaster skin, Pygmalion.  
Pretend to love me, my creator. Moan  
About my unresponsive form, but pray  
And light a fire for love, a fire for Venus.

Angella Redding

### A Likely Excuse

Irma came by last night.  
She had been caught in the storm.  
She thought the acid was burning  
through her delicate skin.

So I helped her remove  
the wet and toxic clothing.

Naked and standing by our oven,  
she said she was hungry,  
but there was no food to give.

The lights went out  
and Irma seemed to glow in the darkness.

Irma said she was cold.  
I offered to keep her warm,  
but that's when she noticed  
the dust bunnies under our bed.

So on this bed, alone,  
I have remained.  
While Irma weaves  
a cape of dust  
beneath our bed.

Matthew Stanfield

## Bob's Last Supper

Well, that's when his head had really started to ache.

"I'm God,"

she said.

"Now, what can I do ya?"

Her voice sounded warm.

Fighting the urge for redemption,  
Bob placed his order.

"Would ya care for fries or a baked spud?"

Longing for starches,  
Bob murmured, "Both."

"It'll cost ya extra,  
but it can be done," God replied with a smile.

"And, if it isn't too much trouble,  
please make my steak rare,"  
for he liked the taste of blood.

"And to drink?"

"I'll have a Coke," Bob replied.

The angel at the grill  
heaved a heavy sigh.

God blushed and swallowed her pride.

"Would Pepsi be okay?"

Matthew Stanfield

(The play takes place in the den of Sammie Rutledge's country home at 11:20 p.m. Sammie has waited until her husband and fifteen year old daughter have gone to bed and the house is quiet to turn on her IBM computer and work on her English research paper. She has her books from the library, her notes and photo copies of magazine articles. From outside, the sound of distant thunder and gentle rain is heard.

Sammie is dressed in a flowered short-sleeved knee-length housecoat and slip-on house slippers. At the south end of the room there is a long table holding the IBM and an Apple computer along with two printers. There is a goosenecked lamp setting on top of one of the printers, and a black adjustable office chair in front of the table. On the same wall is a console 25" TV with a VCR and a bouquet of artificial daisies on top. Hanging on the wall above the TV is a clock. There is a hanging basket of fern in front of one of the two picture windows, which have curtains with a ruffle on the bottom made from flowered sheets.

The east wall is covered with a huge fireplace made of rocks. There are some candles, a picture of her daughter and son-in-law, and an artificial ivy on the mantle. The west wall contains a bookcase with a set of encyclopedias, two sets of nature books, two medical guides, a large Living Bible, quite a few books on hunting, nature, camping, and animals, about ten video movies, two shelves of computer software and books, a Panasonic radio with a broken aerial, and four boxes of computer disks. There is a door and a step leading up into the kitchen.

On the north wall is an upright freezer, a high chair for their grandson's visits, a table with a sewing machine and strewn work in progress, and a patio door leading into the back yard. There is a couch and two easy chairs covered with brown, leather-looking fabric which have seen better days. There is a granny rocker in the the southeast corner with burnt orange cushions. In front of the couch is a huge coffee table with panes of glass for the top. The floor is covered with brown carpet that has a couple of holes in it and a throw rug over a particularly bad place. On the ceiling over the couch is a ceiling fan with a light fixture.

As the scene opens, Sammie walks out of the kitchen with a big insulated Weight Watchers mug filled with ice water and walks over to the computer table. She sets her cup down, turns on the radio to a country music station, and turns the sound very low. She then reaches behind the computer and turns it on. Instead of the usual menu on the screen, she sees a small, strange dancing figure. The figure has a long cape with a hood which covers not only its head but the sides of its face. It is just possible to make out its small eyes, long, narrow nose and thin lips.

The hands have long, bony fingers and are very pale. There is a sickle in one of its hands, and two small cages in the other. One of the cages is white, the other black. There are fluttery shapes flying around in both of the cages.

She looks with surprise at the figure and presses the <enter> key a couple of times.

The figure stops dancing and looks directly at Sammie.)

GRIM REAPER: Hey! Stop that, it tickles.

SAMMIE: (to herself as she stands up and pushes the chair back, then reaches behind the computer and turns it off, then on again.)  
Somebody must have come in here and loaded a trick program on my computer. Wonder how they make it talk?

(As the computer comes on again, the figure reappears.)

GRIM REAPER: (putting the cages down) Hi! Sammie!

SAMMIE: (to herself) May as well play along until I get this figured out. Must be a computer virus that is going to crash my hard disk. There's got to be a microphone hidden around here.

(She lifts the keyboard and looks under it, looks behind the computer, looks behind the curtains and under the table, then shakes her head in puzzlement. She sits back down and types "Hi" on the keyboard.)

GRIM REAPER: Why are you typing? I can hear you talking.

SAMMIE: (mumbling to herself) Got to figure out how this was done so that I can put it on my sister Sally's computer and John's at work. Must be going crazy--talking to my computer screen.

GRIM REAPER: (leaning forward) You're not talking to the screen, you're talking to me and I can hear you. You'n me are fixin' to go on a little trip. (he chuckles softly)

(Outside it has began to rain harder and the thunder is a little louder with an occasional distance flash of lightning seen through the curtains)

SAMMIE: Who are you and why would I want to go anywhere with you, even supposing it were possible?

GRIM REAPER: (with a big grin on his face and puffing out of his chest)  
I'm the Grim Reaper and I've come for you.

SAMMIE: (to herself) I feel like I'm on an Alfred Hitchcock show or in the Twilight Zone. Somebody wrote a great program. (to the Grim Reaper) If you are the Grim Reaper, why're you on the computer screen? The Grim Reaper wouldn't be on a computer. Besides, there's no such thing. Whoever heard of the Grim Reaper laughing? Whoever wrote this program sure didn't know anything.

GRIM REAPER: Well, you know how people get named the opposite of what they really are. The fat people get called "Stick" or "Slim". Actually, I have quite a reputation for my novel approaches. We have only one rule. Besides how would you know if I can be on a computer, or anything? Only those who have died know what happens when you die and the dead don't talk. We reapers can reap anyway we want, as long as we get the job done. I kind of like to break the monotony. Mine of course, you only get to die once. I try to give the victim a last go at what ever they really enjoyed. (giggling)  
Of course there's a few men, who, if they weren't dead, their wives would kill them.

(Outside the sound of thunder is getting louder and more frequent. Sammie hears a weather bulletin on the radio and reaches down and turns it up.

"---severe electrical storms approaching with dangerous lightning, possible hail or tornadoes and wind gusts up to 60 miles an hour. Do not venture out unless absolutely necessary. The worst of the storm should pass over our area in the next 15 minutes.

The Grim Reaper pushes up his sleeve and looks at his watch. He then pulls a piece of paper out of his pocket, unfolds it, looks at it, nods, then mumbles) Right on schedule.

SAMMIE: (Turns the radio back down and looks at the figure on the screen.) Got a date? Ha! Ha! If this was for real, that would mean that you've come for me, and I'm in great health. Look, I'm sorry, this has been fun but I gotta turn my computer off, if the electricity surges during this storm it will wipe out my hard drive. Then I'll have to stay after work so I can use a computer, and its hard to do your own work in a computer lab because someone is always asking for help.

(Sammie starts to move her hand toward the off/on switch on the computer.)

GRIM REAPER: (yells loudly) No! You musn't! (Sammie jumps in surprise. He catches himself and calms down) Ha! Ha! yourself! Don't worry about your computer, you won't be needing it again, anyway. Accidents happen more often in the home than anywhere else. (laughs) Let's enjoy what's left of our little visit.

SAMMIE: If you've come for me, how do you expect me to go? Are you going to pull me into the computer, too? (aside) Wonder what Sally will think when she is talking to a figure on a computer?

(Thunder grows much louder, lightening flashes are seen almost constantly through the thin curtains and the wind begins to howl around the house.)

GRIM REAPER: (checking his watch again) Well, it won't be long now.

SAMMIE: (laughing) What? Am I just going to fall over dead? The autopsy will show no cause of death. Why do you keep checking your watch?

GRIM REAPER: I have another appointment right after yours and I don't want to be late.

SAMMIE: What's that in those cages?

GRIM REAPER: The souls I've gathered tonight. When the, uh, victim goes, I just catch their soul as it leaves their body and put it in the cage.

SAMMIE: Why the different colored cages?

GRIM REAPER: Well, you know. Some of them go one place and some go another. Don't want to get them mixed up.

SAMMIE: If it is not my time yet, why are you here so early?

GRIM REAPER: I know how you like to solve puzzles and riddles. It gets so boring and monotonous just waitin' for the event to happen, so tonight I decided to try something different. Of course, there is really no chance of your escaping.

SAMMIE: Now if I was taking all this seriously, you're saying that I might be able to escape. What is your one rule, anyway?

GRIM REAPER: Well, I guess it will be all right to tell you. I've never lost a victim yet. Each soul must be gathered at the exact time on my time table.

SAMMIE: And what would happen if you were a few seconds or minutes late? Would you get zapped? Would someone else come for me?

GRIM REAPER: (chuckling) Zapped? No! Just put on probation for a few eons. My sickle would be shortened and you would be granted a large extension. But, I've never failed yet.

(A really large clap of thunder sounds and there is a really bright flash of lightening; the lights flicker, then steady.)

GRIM REAPER: (Looking at his watch again and showing some excitement.) Just look at that lightening. It won't be long now. He starts to reach for his cages.

(Sammie looks thoughtful for a minute, then reaches down and pulls the computer plug out of the wall, an instant before a clap of thunder deafens her and the windows are lit up from the lightning. The TV screen lights up and bursts outward with many sparks, the light bulbs in the ceiling fixture and the goose neck lamp on the printer explode, and popping noises come from the freezer and sparks fly from all the electrical outlets, then all is quiet and dark.

When the darkness is lit by the lightening, Sammie is seen sitting by her computer rubbing her finger over her chin thoughtfully. She stands up and starts for the kitchen, then stops and looks back at the computer.)

Sammie gives one downward wave of her hand at the computer and starts for the kitchen again)

SAMMIE: Naaa! Couldn't be. (As she feels her way to the kitchen door to find a candle, she hears her husband yell, asking if everyone is okay, and she yells back) I'm okay, the den is a wreck. I'll check on Jamie as soon as I can find a flashlight or a candle. (to herself) Good grief! At least I didn't lose my computer. Tomorrow I'm going to figure out how that program works. I can't wait to pull it on somebody else.

(Sammie disappears into the kitchen.)

## Eleanor Poetry Award

### HIGH COUNTRY SEASONS A Hiaku Suite

#### Winter

In black velvet sky,  
soft falling snowflakes dapple  
brilliant star-diamonds.

#### Spring

Indian paintbrush  
colors empty canvases,  
brings sleeping to life.

#### Summer

Every afternoon  
brings lightning, crashing thunder  
short shower of rain.

#### Autumn

Quivering aspens  
speak softly of summer  
and wait for the snow.

C. Renee Field

#### Chaco Canyon

This legacy of life carved into stone,  
a silent, brooding monument to sun,  
to brown earth, turquoise sky, and crystal air,  
it calls down through the centuries to me.  
The canyon bids me leave the traveled road  
and venture into time and space beyond  
the world I know. Keeping pace with ghosts,  
I step through walls once home to those who knew  
much more than I about the ways of life.  
Their voices echo through the crumbling stone,  
I answer, wait, as listening for a truth.  
And woven deep within this tapestry  
I find a treasure buried by the years  
with warp of truth and weft of eager mind  
where window opens window opens door.  
The sacred eagle flies above the mesa  
First dipping to the earth then soaring skyward,  
A feather falling from her tail finds freedom;  
I leave it on the dusty ground to bless  
the future travelers to this sacred city,  
who venture back into the centuries,  
afraid to leave behind the ancient wisdom  
for fear we will have nothing left to know.

C. Renee Field

### Wanderlust

I fill with bitter sadness and dismay  
As I watch the summer's green go up in flame,  
Past season's memories return in grey,  
The harbinger of winter howls my name.  
With restless feet I eye the open door,  
While wind swirls round and round the leaves that fall,  
The call to wander tempts me even more;  
To keep that voice away, I face the wall.  
The day is waning. Quick! I must decide  
To wander out, or stay and live a lie.  
Would it be worth the tears that I have cried  
To stand alone and watch as sweet dreams die?  
I can no longer blame it on my youth;  
Now I must know my soul and live my truth.

C. Renee Field

### October

It is Autumn on the Gulf Coast.  
The wind has shifted and the pungent, acrid odor  
drifts northward in a petrochemical haze.

The mosquitoes are only now in full, obnoxious force.  
The humid morning hangs in the air;  
the sun makes a futile attempt to brighten the day.

And I close the windows, shut the door,  
let the pinon incense cleanse the corners of my soul,  
pour a cup of tea, tune the guitar,  
and go home for the fall.

C. Renee Field

### Guitar

Six silver strings,  
six threads of promise,  
wait taut, poised, for the touch  
that will set them dancing.

The stout rosewood neck is perfect,  
its knotty grain polished pure satin  
by countless hands caressing,  
coaxing song from silence.

Sweeter with age is the music  
that resounds  
from the depths of the spruce-topped belly,  
from the pulsing heart.

Mother of pearl  
marks the fretboard  
finger-worn spots remember,  
with love, favorite chords.

C. Renee Field



## The Ballad of Gus Watson

Gus Watson lived in Appleville on a clean suburban lane,  
With lawns all mowed and manicured and houses all the same.

The folks on Shady Lane thought Gus a friendly sort of guy;  
They'd smile at him and he would speak or wave as he walked by.

The children on the street liked Gus and parents trusted him.  
He had no children of his own, so he "adopted" them.

Life was sweet on Shady Lane until the trouble came,  
And once the horror started, things would never be the same.

At first it was the Joneses dog, a Collie, pure and fine,  
Who disappeared that summer night in nineteen eighty-nine,

And then it was the Albert's dog, a fine brown beagle pup,  
and later on, a poodle small enough to fill a cup.

Now this went on for months and months, till all the dogs were lost,  
The summer turned to autumn and the morning dew to frost.

And after that the cats of Shady Lane did not come home;  
At first their owners thought it was some Inbred urge to roam,

But soon it was quite obvious the cats and dogs were gone;  
Their bones kept turning up in little piles upon the lawn.

About this time they realized that Gus was missing too,  
and they began to search the neighborhood for any clue

And when they came upon him in the lower part of town,  
They were quite shocked to find out why he hadn't come around.

Gus tried to get away from there, the mob came pouring in,  
And since he couldn't run away, he faced them with a grin.

"I know you must be wondering where all your pets have gone,  
And why their bones keep turning up in piles upon the lawn.

It's all quite simple as you'll see if you look up above,"  
He pointed to a sign that said "Fresh Sausage--Made With Love."

C. Renee Field

## Home

I come off the pass  
floating  
flying.

On one side of me, the high plains of northern New Mexico  
stretch out as far as I can see.  
Sagebrush and buffalo grass glisten  
with a magical coating of snow-dust.

To the west, the mountains hold out their strong arms  
to embrace me and welcome me  
Home.

Memories fill these mountains and radiate from them,  
the earth soaking up the energy and sending it back  
to the clear, cold air.

The sky is always bluer than I remember,  
the mountains taller,  
the bluffs sharper, more defined.

But always this land welcomes me,  
a prodigal child, back where I belong.  
No matter what happens in my complicated life--  
hopes dashed, dreams realized,  
loves and hates and fears and friends--  
Always this land will welcome me  
embrace me with its intense earth-energy  
calm me with its patterns of light and shadow  
strengthen me with its steady constancy  
warm me with its color and texture.

Always this land will welcome me  
Always this land will let me come

Home.

C. Renee Field

## LII

*Cantas, y a sol a cielo con tu canto  
tu voz desgrana el cereal del día,  
hablan los pinos con su lengua verde:  
trinan todas las aves del invierno.*

*El mar llena sus sótanos de pasos,  
de campanas, cadenas y gemidos,  
tinieban metales y utensilios,  
suenan las ruedas de la caravana.*

*Pero sólo tu voz escucho y sube  
tu voz son vuelo y precisión de flecha,  
baja tu voz con gravedad de lluvia,*

tu voz esparce altísimas espadas,  
vuelve tu voz cargada de violetas  
y luego me acompaña por el cielo.

*Pablo Neruda*

## 411

When you sing, the sky sings and the sun sings.  
Your voice flails the husk from the day's grain.  
The pine trees speak with their tongues of green;  
and all the birds of winter warble their songs.

The ocean fills its cellars with footfalls,  
with bells, with chains, with moans.  
Tools and metals jangle,  
and the wheels of the caravan creak.

But your voice is all I hear, and your voice  
soars like the sure flight of an arrow,  
and cascades like the falling rain,

your voice scatters the strongest swords  
and your voice returns, then, with its burden of violets  
and escorts me across the sky.

C. Renee Field

*Tus Ojos*

Tus ojos son la patria del relámpago y de la lágrima,  
silencio que habla  
tempestades sin viento, mar sin olas,  
pájaros presos, doradas fieras adormecidas,  
topacios impíos como la verdad,  
otoño en un claro bosque en donde la luz canta en el  
hombro de un árbol y son pájaros todas las hojas,  
playa que la mañana encuentra constelada de ojos,  
cesta de frutos de fuego,  
espejos de este mundo, puertas del más allá,  
pulsación tranquila del mar mediodía,  
absoluto que parpadea,  
páramo.

Octavio Paz

## Your Eyes

Your eyes are the homeland of lightning, of tears,  
silence that speaks,  
storms without wind, sea without waves  
trapped birds, drowsy golden beasts,  
topaz as shocking as the truth,  
autumn meadow in the forest where light sings  
on the shoulder of a tree whose leaves are birds,  
a beach that dawn finds starred with fresh springs,  
basket of fiery fruits,  
a nourishing lie,  
mirrors of this world, doors to the one beyond,  
the peaceful heartbeat of the sea at midday,  
the absolute, quivering,  
cold upland.

C. Renee Field

### An Old Form: To Paris, A City

She seemed the crazy lady in the crowd,  
this goddess-shrew of multi-colored mold,  
when in disguise she claimed to wear a shroud  
woven of dyes of red, and black, and gold,  
the stain of dreams. Full-pregnant with the form  
of life, her days described within all seams,  
she bred in dust fine lights of song and storm.  
She spawned cold-chiming temples, graven queens  
of men-built form, such imaging of thought  
where men made song and voiced a soul that sings.  
She spread in space an awesome prayer cloth  
where we seek grace, her mother-lode of kings.  
All-dressed in time, at times we know this place,  
marred form of god, the image of our face.

Diane Lehmiller

### Message to a Prof

Who are you to tell me I can't write?  
Ripper of my thought.  
Let me look at the  
photograph of  
me, unshredded,  
I,  
alone,  
know  
the captlon that you don't.

Almost Spring, 1990

Diane Lehmiller

### Yesterday's Poems

These are my yesterday's poems.  
They should not have been for you.  
Your poems were today's--  
shadowed deep inside your eyes  
    (often you asked what I was so intently staring at,  
    it was you I was trying to see  
    not a reflection of me.)  
I caught a glimpse of them just before  
your lids slid down to hide  
the words held, so painfully, inside.  
Then you would not wake and let me see  
and I dared not guess what those words might be.  
Today is passing.  
Trapped between its night  
and tomorrow's mourning light,  
there is a darkling through which I cannot see.  
I fear there will be no poems of yours for me.

Patricia J. McDaniel

**Some Jazz For Dizzy**

Silk,  
as vision  
explodes  
beneath tall weeds,  
and breath  
hurries--  
In lazy memory...  
Specs  
of knowing  
seen golden-gold  
hues--  
Simply calmed,  
embraced  
blown true...  
Digits  
Snapp'n  
and BLUES?  
ain't  
blue...

D. Tatum

"Yes, I understand. Thank you for all your help." Sarah's hands were trembling as she hung up the phone. She let out a whoop of triumph and took several light steps around the living room, as if she were dancing a few inches above the floor. Taking the stairs two at a time, she called to her husband. "Tom!! Tom!! Where are you? TOM!!"

Her husband was in the bathroom shaving. "I'm in here. What's the matter?"

Breathlessly, Sarah sat down on top of the toilet seat and crossed her legs. "Remember Mrs. Oliver?"

"Is she the one from the agency?" Tom asked, pulling the skin tight on his neck. "What did she want?"

"They found her. They found her in Cincinnati. She has lived there for two years. They gave me a phone number. . ."

"Whoa, baby. Slow down a minute. They were able to locate your mother?" Tom rinsed the razor, laid it on the counter and turned to face his wife. "That's great."

Sarah stood up and hugged Tom tightly. "Do you realize what this means? I'll finally be able to meet my mother--my real mother." Her eyes filled with tears and Tom reached for the toilet paper to dry her eyes.

"I'm happy for you, darlin'; I know this is what you've been wanting for a long time." He went to the bedroom and opened the

closet, looking for an ironed shirt. Though he really was happy for Sarah, he was worried about the reception she might get from the woman who gave her up for adoption thirty two years before.

Sarah followed him into the room and lay down sideways on the bed. "Thanks for all your help, Tom. I could never have done it without you. I never realized you lawyers had access to so much information, but I'm sure glad."

Tom knotted his tie in the mirror. "I'm glad we could come up with some leads, too. Most of the credit should go to Gregory, though. He really did the leg work. I just opened the doors for him."

Sarah thought Tom was always too modest, but she learned to take it in stride. "I'll be sure to thank him, too. I know he's the best clerk you have." Sarah got up from the bed. "Cereal or toast this morning?"

"Toast is good. I'll be right down."

When Tom got downstairs, he found Sarah sitting at the table with the telephone in front of her. She was staring intently at it; she hadn't even heard him come down the stairs. "Penny for your thoughts, hon."

Sarah jumped at the sound of his voice. "Oh. . . sorry. . . I was just thinking. Wondering what she might be doing now, wondering if she's up yet, and what she'll say when I call her. . . . I wonder what I'll say when I call her, for that matter." He poured a glass of orange juice for each of them. Sarah traced the edge of her glass with her finger. Doubts crept into her mind. "What if she doesn't remember me? What

if she's moved or something. . . ."

"Well, sweetheart, all you can do is try." Tom put on his coat and finished the last of his juice. "Gotta go. Have a good day. I should be home around six."

Sarah got up and kissed her husband. "O.K. If I go somewhere I'll leave you a note."

"Do you think you might go today?" Tom asked, holding the door open so the cat could go out. "I wish you'd wait 'till I can go with you."

"I'm too excited to wait. Excited and a little scared, too, I guess. I don't really know what I'll do yet. I'll call you at the office later and let you know." Sarah began clearing the table.

"Don't forget I'll be in court most of the day. You can leave me a message, though. See you later--I love you." Tom let the door swing shut but Sarah caught it before it slammed.

"Love you too. 'Bye."

Alone with the phone and the memo pad bearing the number, Sarah rehearsed her speech out loud. "Hello. You don't know me, but I'm really your daughter. . . ." That sounded too cold. "Hi, my name is Sarah Wetherford. You may remember. . . ." No, that wasn't it either. Maybe if she drove to Cincinnati, then called, she'd have more courage, and she could rehearse along the way.

Tom Wetherford arrived at the office to an urgent message. He dialed the phone. "Gregory, this is Tom. What's up? We still going to court this morning?"

"Yeah. That's not what I'm calling about. You know Pearl Watkins? I've got some more information on her that you might be interested in."

Tom's heart sank. "Sarah's mother? What is it?"

"Well," began Gregory, "it seems the woman was released by Oak Leaf Sanitarium just over two years ago. She was accused of attempted murder--tried to kill her son--they found her innocent by reason of insanity. They locked her up for seven years, decided she was cured and let her go. There haven't been any incidents since, but I just thought you might want to know."

"Yeah," said Tom thoughtfully. "Thanks. How old was the kid?"

"Well, he wasn't exactly a kid. He was thirty years old. Apparently the woman had him not long after Sarah was born. . . Oh, and that's something else. The records show that Mrs. Watkins was forced to give Sarah up. She didn't put her up for adoption voluntarily, as the records at the adoption agency state." Gregory paused and waited for a response. Tom was quiet on the other end, so Gregory went on. "Seems she was abusing Sarah and was finally reported by a neighbor who got suspicious. So the state placed her in a private agency. That's the way it was done back then."

Tom's voice was soft and intense. "Thanks, Gregory. I appreciate all you've done. I gotta go." Tom hung up the phone and began muttering to himself. "I've gotta call Sarah. . . gotta get her before she leaves for Cincinnati. I'll make her wait until the weekend, when I can go too." He picked up the phone, dialed his home number and drummed his fingers on the desk, waiting. "Come on, honey, be there. . ." After four rings, he heard a click and his own familiar voice: "Hi. Sarah and I are out right now. . ." He hung up the phone without leaving a message. "Damn."

Sarah rolled down the exit ramp and into the driveway of the filling station, pulling up right beside the phone booth. She stepped inside, took the memo pad from her pocket and dialed the number. She held her breath.

"Hello?" A woman's voice answered.

"Uh, yes, hello. My name is Sarah Wetherford. I'm wondering if I could have just a minute of your time."

"You selling something? I don't want it, if you are."

"No, no, I'm not selling anything! Please don't hang up. I need to speak with Pearl Watkins. Are you Pearl?" Sarah waited.

"Who wants to know?"

"My name is Sarah." You already said that, thought Sarah. She was trying not to sound like an idiot. "I was put up for adoption thirty two years ago and I've been trying and trying to locate my birth mother and my search has narrowed down to you. I hope you're not upset, but

I really want to see you, so we can get to know one another. Would that be all right?" Sarah knew she was talking too fast, but she couldn't stop. "I'm on the outskirts of town right now. If you give me your address, I could be there in an hour or so. Would that suit you?" Finally, she stopped talking.

"Well," the woman on the other end answered slowly. "I don't know. I really never expected to hear from you, and I don't really know if I'm ready for this." Her voice was shaking. "I guess if you really think you want to come. . . ." She faded out and then said, "I'm at 704 West Sycamore."

Before Sarah could ask for directions, she heard a click and then the dial tone. She went inside the station to buy a map of the city. As she got back in the car, she thought of everything she would tell Mrs. Watkins. Spreading the map over the steering wheel, she looked for the street listing. "O.K. Sycamore, Sycamore. . . let's see. Ah, here it is, J-6." Her finger traced the coordinates and she located the street. She noticed a large lump in her throat in it as she folded the map into a small square and shifted the car into drive. Should she call her "Pearl" or "Mrs. Watkins"? Should she tell her all about her life, should she ask about hers? How does one go about meeting her "real mother"? Sarah was filled with questions as she made her way into the city and turned down Sycamore street. The 500 block, 600, and then she was searching for 704.

The house was dingy gray with a sagging chain link fence around it. An old yellow Chrysler was parked in the yard and the

mailbox was hanging sideways by the front door. Sarah took a deep breath and opened the gate. A mangy brown dog ran up to her and jumped on her dress; she knocked it down with her knee. An orange tabby cat meowed ceaselessly at the door. Sarah rang the bell and waited. She looked around at the neighborhood and wondered about the life her mother had lived. Lost in thought, she finally realized that no one had come to the door. She rang the bell again. "Maybe the bell doesn't work," she thought. She knocked, and got no response. She looked through the greasy window and saw a ragged sofa, footstool and a small black and white television showing "Wheel of Fortune." She knocked again, louder this time, and called, "Mrs. Watkins? Mrs. Watkins, are you there? It's Sarah Wetherford. Please open the door." Sarah waited. Still she got no response. She walked around the house, trying to see in the windows. The cat followed close behind her, still meowing. As she came around to the back of the house, she could see a glass patio door. She approached it, but before she could open it and call to Mrs. Watkins, a gunshot shook the windows and walls.

The cat went on meowing.