

The Blue Guitar

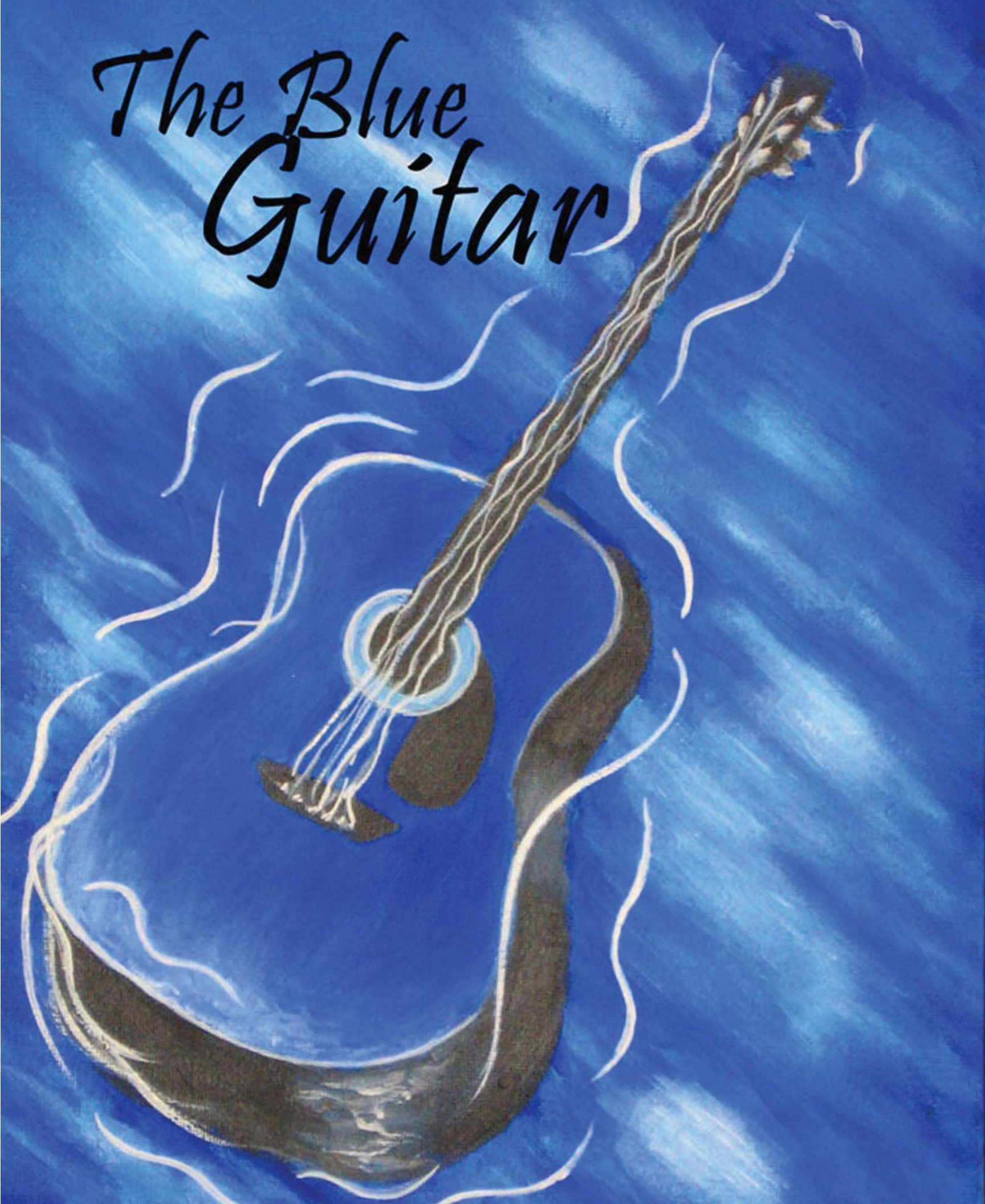


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Editor’s Note

Welcome to the inaugural issue of The Blue Guitar! Help us celebrate the vibrant mix of peoples and cultures and talents that make up Arizona. We received more than 200 submissions. To everyone, those we have included in this edition and those who we were unable to, and to all other Arizona writers, I say please keep submitting!



Rebecca Dyer

Jennifer Fabiano’s nonfiction essay “Connection” and Dan Ramirez’s haiku act as portals to a marvelous garden. This garden is anything but mannered; its yield, ultimate truth and beauty – of diverse people in a diverse land – as discovered and shared through art. Please enter and enjoy.

One last note: This inaugural issue is dedicated to Arizona artist Meryl Susan Goldman and to my twin sister, Arizona actor/director Deborah Lois Dean.

Editorial Staff

Editor in chief: *Rebecca Dyer*
Publisher: *Elena Thornton*
Production Editor: *Richard H. Dyer Jr.*

Connection

By Jennifer Fabiano

© 2009

Golden fingers of morning sunshine had barely peaked over the horizon as I stepped my slippered foot onto our stone driveway. Low-lying fog had materialized unexpectedly overnight, and the misty, swirling white soup made even familiar objects appear mysterious. My purpose was not mystery detection, however; it was more ordinary since I had forgotten to pull out my trash can last night and knew I had to hurry or I would soon hear the mad rumbling from the collection truck lumbering down the street.

Pulling my robe tighter around me, I noticed a small movement on my right as I walked toward my side gate. At the end of my driveway, a ghostly shape emerged from the mist. At first, I could not distinguish what it was, but then I stopped and so did it. A coyote. Gray and grizzled and scraggly, he seemed gritty but not vicious. He stopped and stared, and our eyes locked as the morning light continued to glow brighter. I inhaled quickly but quietly as I continued to study him. His form was misshapen and it appeared his left front leg was missing.

A three-legged-coyote on a foggy morning in Arizona – not what you'd expect in the suburbs of a large, sprawling metropolis. He took a tentative step toward me but then appeared to change his mind. Back to the misty streets he slipped and I stood alone.

Concrete and asphalt envelop the streets, lots, and even the yards of the homes in our suburban neighborhood. It's as if Mother Nature forgot to visit. Things are different here at our home, however. My Aquarian, water-loving husband has lushly populated our front and back yards with ponds, fountains and pools. Cool, green grass graces the yard both front and back, soothing the eyes. Koi, goldfish, frogs and turtles swim, hop and crawl among the rocks and water. The lush trees and flowering plants attract birds of all types including a pair of bright red cardinals who have made their home in one of our large palm trees. Butterflies and honeybees enjoy the blooming radiance of buttercups, gardenias and tulips in spring and summer. Sitting in the backyard or by the front koi ponds reading or writing, I am surrounded by this inspiring splendor.

All this abundance of nature soothes the soul. It calms me, reminding me of the beauty of our Creator. It connects me to the heartbeat of the Earth in a spiritual way. In the heart of a city, in the midst of noise and concrete, nature prevails and a three-legged coyote can still be seen as a wonder when he visits.



Jennifer Fabiano has honed her writing skills through the communication arts for the past 25 years. As co-owner of a Scottsdale advertising and marketing firm, her desire to branch out from penning strategic plans, corporate branding bibles and radio spots has led her to now write what she truly loves: creative nonfiction. She has been published most recently in *Raising Arizona Kids* and *The Arizona Republic*. Her book is in the works. Contact her at www.jenniferfabiano.com.

Asphalt Haiku – Collisions In The Desert

By Dan Ramirez

© 2009

The Cactus Wren And The Cat

House cat on wall,
sunning. Cactus wren attacks.
Startled cat hisses.

One Hundred Years Old

Cactus stands strong.
Red tag. Rumbling tractor.
Contractor must build.

Morning Jog

Twilight. Coyote
jogging along asphalt street,
Toenails clicking.

My Pond

At the pond, clucking.
Feathered exclamation points.
Quail in my yard.

A Summer Swim

Bats flit across yard.
Skim a quick drink from pool. Off
to hunt bugs all night.



At seventeen Dan was discouraged by his family and high school counselor from pursuing a career as a writer. Forty years later, he picked up a pen and discovered his voice as a poet. Contact him at luftpistole@cox.net.

Dr. Susan Confusion

By Lisa Vogel

© 2009

Finally she's able to focus on her studies. That's why Susan Moharski loses track of the time, leaves home late, forgets about the construction blocking Valhalla Way, and doesn't arrive until every parking space near the Science Complex is taken. That's why, when she finally gets to the classroom, out of breath from running all the way, the other students have already started on their anatomy midterms without her. "The knee bone's connected to the thigh bone," Tyrone sings under his breath as she takes a seat behind him. Sure, it was funny yesterday, when she kept confusing the trapezium and triquetral no matter how many times they went over it. But now isn't the time for jokes.

With a look a good twenty degrees beyond exasperation, Professor Gaumer hands her the exam. Too hyped-up, Susan can make no sense of it, even after she figures out to turn it right side up. The words don't coalesce into meaning. What can she do? No matter how she shifts her position, she can't see around Tyrone's shoulder to his scantron sheet, and turning her head sideways would be too risky. Not to mention that both Rheanna to her right and Isak to her left get the worst grades in class. Who, after all, sits in the back row but the dummies? 'I'm going to have a heart attack,' Susan thinks. 'I mean, an acute myocardial infarction. I'm going to fucking die.' She puts her forehead on her desk, presses her arms in on either side to close off all light, and begins to cry.

"Remember," Tyrone whispers, "it's never to late to learn to drive a truck."

Susan kicks his chair. How can he be so insensitive? When he knows all she wants is to help people, and the only way she wants to do it is by being a surgeon? Right then and there she imagines Tyrone catching some little known virus that penetrates his cerebrum, causing such radical personality changes that he switches his major to modern dance. That smug wombat-faced Wyndham, head of the pre-med club, would contract it next. 'Who knew Home Ec classes were so stimulating?' he'd exclaim to anyone he could corner. 'I've finally discovered the real me.'

Okay, so not everyone gets into medical school. Not even

some students who would have otherwise become the best doctors. Susan releases an exhale. Perhaps her first one all day. Since failing the midterm would mean failing the class and failing the class would mean a G.P.A. slightly higher than the ph level of battery acid, Susan needs alternatives. Like being a trucker. Well, why not? They're an integral part of society. She could still say she was in the medical field if she delivered transplant organs. It might even be fun. She'd just have to develop a sense of direction. And learn how to read a map.

With that, the tension completely drains from her body. She enjoys a rare taste of relaxation. Then she picks up her head. The first thing she notices is Professor Gaumer glaring at her. The second is that the exam's meaningless design of black on white has transformed into readable language. And look! She knows the first answer! And the second! Even the third! At least, in an educated guess sort of way.

Susan grabs her pen before the floodgate closes back down and lets the knowledge pour out of her. It's not too late. She can do it. She can get into medical school and become the best surgeon in the whole damn world. And it's a good thing, too.

With her driving record, no one'd ever hire her as a trucker.

The following week, waiting in the pizzeria for Tyrone, Susan calculates how her midterm grades will affect her overall G.P.A., then sighs with relief. Medical school is still a statistical possibility. All she has to do is ace the MCAT next month, write a killer personal statement on her application, and floor them at the interview. Tyrone is late, though, and Susan begins to feel annoyed. Doesn't he want to know how she did? Then she remembers he said he'd be at the cafe.

"Girl," he says, his eyes pointing down at his book as she pants before him after the two block dash.

"Sorry." She drops her pack to the floor next to the empty chair. "I thought you said to meet at--"

"Zipper malfunction." He still doesn't look up.

Her hands fly to her low belly before she realizes she's wearing her wrap-around skirt, before she notices the smirk on his face. "Congratulations. You got me. Again."

He doesn't respond, nor does he bother to clear his books off the chair so she can sit. What does he expect? That she should ask permission to join him just because she's a few minutes late? To hell with that crap. It's bad enough she always picks up the check since he doesn't have time for a job. Susan moves his books to the table and takes a seat. "So?" she asks. "How'd you do?"



Lisa Vogel lives and works on a privately owned animal sanctuary out in the wilds of Pinal County, off the electrical and water grids. Literary journals that have published Lisa's short stories include the Massachusetts Review, Cimarron Review, Northridge Review, and Textshop. Contact her at corncreeky@yahoo.com.

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“Good enough.”

Only then does she notice the ‘98’ and the ‘Excellent work!’ written on the sheet causally hanging partway out of his anatomy notebook.

Tyrone yellows out a line of the book in front of him with a highlighter, turns the page, and yellows out a paragraph at the top before his gaze drifts up. “And you?”

She rolls her eyes. “I could have done better. But, hey, I could have done worse, too. So why does everyone always concentrate on the negative?” She tosses her G.P.A. calculations on the table in front of him. “I’ve gotten crap my whole life about not learning as easily as other people. Well, that doesn’t mean I’m stupid. I’m just, like, cognizantly nonconformative.” Her voice has gotten shrill, but hasn’t she the right to get frustrated sometimes? “It’s a good thing I believe in myself, since no one else does.”

He takes her long braid and brushes her face lightly with the tail end. “Yeah, Sooz, I hear what you’re saying, but you really needed to bring up your grades. Now what?”

Just then the waitress comes over with a cup of coffee for Susan and a refill for Tyrone.

“Thanks,” Susan says automatically. But then she really notices the woman. On the far side of middle age, considerably overweight and with a deep smoker’s cough, her life has probably not gone according to plan. In fact, she fits Susan’s image of an ideal patient: a woman in need not just of medical care but of kind words and understanding. “Miss? I mean thanks really. Like from my heart. I know lots of students come in here, give you a hard time, and then don’t even tip, but we’re different. If it were up to us, you’d be making more money than all the elitist assholes combined--” she feels Tyrone pull on her braid and she pauses “--and can I have some cream, please? I mean, if it’s not too much trouble.”

“Uh-huh,” the waitress responds, already walking away.

“Here,” Tyrone says softly. He slides a little silver pitcher her way.

“Oh, great. What did you do? Hide it behind your books?”

Tyrone looks at her from above the tops of his glasses. “You put my books there, remember?”

“Right. Tell me another one. You know, your little jokes aren’t cute when they hurt people. You think the waitress needed more to do? Like she was sitting around hoping someone would take the opportunity to jerk her chain? Being black, you should know better. Oh, Miss?” Susan calls out. “Miss?” But the woman had disappeared behind the swinging door to the kitchen.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Tyrone says.

“What?”

“What do you mean, what?!” He shakes his head. “Nawww. . . never mind.”

“Go on. I’m listening. Tell me.”

“It doesn’t matter.”

“No, really. If you have something to say, then say it.”

“Damn! I don’t have anything to say, okay?” He leans back in his chair, adjusts his glasses further up his nose, and stares at her. “Except that’s what your problem is. Right there. You focus on the wrong stuff. When you focus at all.”

“Oh, I get it. Bring that up so you don’t have to admit you hid the cream. Well, mister, you don’t know me very well if you think I’m falling for it.” She takes a sip of coffee, wrinkles her nose, and pours in some cream. “I am, however, willing to forget the whole thing in return for a favor. Let me borrow your MCAT prep class notes.”

Tyrone shrugs his shoulders. “Whatever.”

“No, I don’t know exactly when I’ll have time to study them, if that’s what you’re wondering. But I’ll find a way. The MCAT’s my only hope, and you know it.”

He shrugs again. “It’s going to cover the same stuff you have trouble with in class. The core material.”

“I have to have the right mindset, too. And what about that expression? Science favors the prepared mind. Or is it success? Well, something does. And I’ve got to believe in myself.”

“I don’t know anyone who does more than you, that’s for sure. Okay, I’ll get you the notes tomorrow.” He pulls out a book from his pile. “Meanwhile, let’s get back to one step at a time. That’s still in the game plan, right? We can practice soft tissue injuries and trauma care.”

“That EMT class is a pain. Like I need more crap force-fed into my brain. But, sure, we could both use the help, right?” Hopping her chair over until they’re shoulder to shoulder, she peers into his book. Slowly Tyrone recites wound management techniques, and then they practice on each other. By the time she has to leave for her shift at the bowling alley, he’s got them down perfectly, and there is some small possibility that she could perform them well enough to pass the practical exam.

“Miss Moharski?” Gaumer says as she walks in a good minute and a half early for once. “Could you meet with me right after class, please? Just for a moment.”

Shit. Susan hated when professors did that. She’d never be able to concentrate now, knowing he was going to say something, probably bad, right after class.

“Boys and girls?” Gaumer begins. “Children of all ages? Welcome to the digestive tract.” A few of the students titter, the ones up front, anyway, who know his snideness isn’t directed at them.

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Two hours later, her stomach rumbling – is it because she skipped lunch or because of the nature of the few details she managed to pick up? – she waits until everyone else has left before walking up to the front of the room. “Professor?”

Gaumer looks up as though surprised to see her. “Ah, yes, Miss Moharski. Please have a seat.”

She takes a chair in the first row and waits for him to begin, all the while aware of how piercing his eyes are upon her.

“The last time,” he finally says, “I recommended a female student with medical school ambitions consider nursing, I found myself attending a two-hour gender sensitivity workshop. That’s not going to happen again.” He wipes a bit of chalk dust from his sleeve. “Anyway, I don’t imagine nursing would be a good fit. Do you?”

Try though she might, Susan can’t help but lower her eyes. “No.”

“No. Because it doesn’t address your problem. Fortunately, a biology degree can open many doors.”

“I’m not interested in teaching high school.”

“Dr. Lindahl at Student Psychological Services is a personal friend of mine. I would be happy to arrange for a vocational test. Or whatever else might be useful.”

“Thank you, but there’s no need.”

He opens his briefcase, places his lecture notes inside, then shuts it again. “You’re not without talent, Miss Moharski. Please understand. I’m trying to save you from working in a bowling alley for the rest of your life.”

Susan cringes as she flashes back to the faculty party at Santoro’s last year. After she’d gone through the trouble of getting them a twenty percent discount, most of the professors quit after a couple of frames. Of the few who played an entire game, not one scored over a hundred, although the secretary had done herself proud and cracked one-seventy. Gaumer hadn’t even bothered to change into bowling shoes.

“This happens every semester,” he continues, “on every college campus in the country. Don’t for a minute suppose you are alone.”

“I’m going to be a surgeon.” She still can’t bear to look him in the eye.

“I’ve watched that possibility fade every semester since you’ve been here. For all intents and purposes, you’ve passed the point of no return. As your advisor, I owe you this much. Don’t throw away what is left of your college education.” He stands up, briefcase in hand, and walks to the door.

“You can’t do this to me.” She snuffles, hating herself for her lack of self-control.

He stops midstep. “For the sake of argument, Miss Moharski, think about it. If by some remarkable fluke you are accepted

into medical school and even into a surgical program, what then? Imagine your patient, a victim of a fall from a ladder, has a possible mesentery artery tear. Suddenly you’ve forgotten how to tie off an artery. Or where, for God’s sake, the mesentery is even located. The patient slips into hemorrhagic shock, the surgical team looks to you for leadership, and you say what? ‘Hold on a sec, guys. It’ll come to me’?”

“I’m not stupid,” she yells. A janitor, passing by at just that moment, glances right at her but keeps walking.

“You can best prove that by not making stupid choices.” And with that, he steps into the hallway and closes the door behind him.

A dribble of snot runs down past her mouth and joins the tears already dripping from her chin. “I’m not stupid,” Susan yells. “And when I do become a surgeon, my first procedure will be to suture your fucking mouth shut.” She lowers her head and rests it on top of her pile of books and cries. But after a few minutes, she feels something poking into her chin. A piece of paper sticks out between her books with Tyrone’s handwriting on it.

Future Newsweek article: *Years before winning the Nobel Prize in medicine for her unintentional yet brilliant discovery that order doesn’t affect the abdominal organs – things always come out the same in the end – everyone said Susan Moharski’s chances of getting into medical school were equal to the square root of zero. Which just shows that most people don’t know shit.*

“But I’m stupid,” Susan whispers. And she breaks down totally, engulfed in sobs. Her hands clap over her mouth to hold in a scream. Because she knows she isn’t all that stupid. She’s smart enough to know that Gaumer is right.

But then what was it all for? The student loans, the long hours at her job during the school year, the longer hours at her two jobs during semester breaks? Her own mother refused to help her attend the rinky-dink local community college (“Because I don’t have the money and you don’t have the brains”), but Susan knew she needed to attend a superior educational facility, anyway. Only then might she be able to overcome whatever it was that made learning so hard.

Apparently her mother had been right.

Finally able to compose herself, Susan leaves and drives the campus loop half a dozen times before hopping onto the highway, not caring where it goes as long as it goes away. Taking a random exit, she finds herself in a rundown part of town she’d intentionally avoided before, having already seen enough corner bars, pay-day loan places, fast food joints and boarded-up storefronts to last a lifetime. At least the streets here are alive with people bustling home from work, unlike the death-like calm of the suburbs she had hoped to one day make her home. She finds a parking space – her old junker fits right in –

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and begins to walk as dusk descends. The smells of garbage and cheap fried food mix together, making her mouth water despite herself.

How many miles does she go? She doesn't keep track of the distance. At some point she realizes she's missed her shift at the bowling alley. Santoro has probably already called her half a dozen times on her cell phone which, like the dufus she is, she accidentally left in her car. More than likely, he's already made good on his promise to fire her ass. Sure, she could make up a story about being mugged, but what for? To keep a job at a bowling alley? She might as well get a job waitressing, like her Mom's, and stop fighting the inevitable.

And then suddenly Susan hears up ahead the sound of metal crashing and glass exploding followed by a stark silence. Not a hundred yards away, a car has run into a telephone pole. She races over and finds the woman driver is unconscious. "I'll call 911," someone shouts behind her. But, Susan knows, help might be ten, fifteen minutes away, and the woman needs care right now.

The driver's side door is completely smashed in, so Susan enters the vehicle through the passenger side. Only then does she notice the blood splattered about. "Hey," she calls to the people who have gathered around. "I need bandages. Find some clean cloth to tear up." Several people immediately run off to get them. And then the protocol comes to her. Like she's done it a million times. Airway. Breathing. Circulation. It only takes a minute to determine that the driver, with her massive blood loss, shallow breaths, and bounding pulse is in bad shape.

A man returns with an old sheet, whips out a switchblade from his boot, and cuts it into strips. "Here, Doc," he says, handing them to Susan one by one. She wraps the lacerations in the woman's arm, the deep gash in the temple, and the puncture wound in the chest. The driver's face, she notes, contains so many broken bones that her features are indistinct. Still, a flash of recognition hits Susan. It's the waitress from the cafe. "She gonna be okay?" the man asks.

"Oh, yeah. Definitely." But, who is Susan kidding? She doesn't even know what she's doing.

Fortunately, a moment later, she hears sirens off in the distance. Paramedics take over patient care as soon as they pull up. Fire fighters cordon off the scene. Transformed into just another gawking bystander, Susan is pushed back along with others behind caution tape. Two squad cars come on scene next and, while one officer measures off skid marks and road widths, the other questions witnesses.

"You seen the accident?" he asks Susan.

"No, I was looking the other way. But I bandaged--"

"I just need to talk to people who saw what happened."

The officer goes on to interview the next person. Meanwhile the paramedics have put an oxygen mask on the woman, gotten her onto a gurney, and rolled her to the ambulance. Not until it takes off, lights flashing and sirens blaring, does the crowd begin to dissipate. Only a few are left by the time a tow truck operator hooks up the crumpled car. Yet Susan can't leave.

Then one of the firefighters comes over to her. "You the first responder?" she asks Susan.

"Yeah." Susan feels her head go light. "I tried. . . I didn't hurt her, did I?"

"You kidding?" The firefighter laughs. "Saved her life, more like it. When they bleed like that, every second counts. You a nurse or something?"

"Me?" Now it's Susan's turn to laugh. "I'm just a college student. I mean, pre-med, yeah, but I've got no experience. Too bad a doctor didn't drive by."

"Hey, Lenox, time to skedaddle," one of the other firefighters yells out as he walks to the truck.

Lenox ignores him and leans in closer to Susan. "Doctors don't stop to help. Get their suits dirty, risk a lawsuit if something goes bad, and not even get paid? Hah! Useless bunch of assholes, you ask me. Especially in neighborhoods like this. Now you? You're the kind we need around here." She play punches Susan's shoulder before hopping onto the firetruck. A moment later and she's gone.

After sweeping the roadway of car wreckage, the tow truck operator takes off. The officers remove the caution tape, chat for a moment, and then leave, too. Susan stands alone. When a group of people exit the corner lounge and cross the street right where the accident took place, she watches them laugh, oblivious to how the telephone pole now leans slightly to one side and the tiny shards of glass in the roadway glitter with every flash of neon.

The night has turned cold. Too bad she left her coat in her car. Susan begins the long walk back, retracing the way as best she can, making lefts about where she had made rights originally, rights where she's almost certain she made lefts. But everything looks different coming from the opposite direction. She'd ask someone for help, but she doesn't even know what street she parked on, nor the name of the exit she'd taken off the highway. What she does know is the kind of look she'd get if she stopped people at random, described her car, and asked if they happened to have seen it somewhere.

Late as it is, the streets are deserted, anyway. With the coming of a quarter moon, a wind picks up. Susan bows her head and begins to review the accident. If the woman lives, perhaps Susan would deserve a little credit. But if she dies? Would it be her fault? There was an awful lot she'd done wrong, after all. Like

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lazy eyes: referential language proposal

By Christopher Edward Emery

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they print your name discounted attorneys

signs around open trenches

real estate tabloids in trash bins

a poster of women who sell drinks

or beef jerky and a register

off white cards

with colors bleeding

signals of earth

moving as earth

her ass looks big

in an empty lot

as only drinks

that sell themselves

towards a camera

1256 miles away

a boy speaks

languages he does not

understand

every vowel a little space

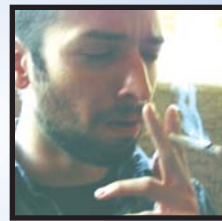
that has kept you

as prowlers with plungers

climbing glass towers

mirrored in windows

for miles around



Christopher Edward Emery was born in Phoenix on October 1st, 1982. He is currently working on an MFA in poetry at ASU. Chris also teaches courses in English and Creative Writing at ASU. Contact him at Christopher.Emery@asu.edu.

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forgetting to elevate the injured arm and apply pressure to lessen blood loss. Like not asking someone to fetch a blanket to keep the woman warm. There were a dozen more things she and Tyrone went over yesterday concerning how to respond to this exact scenario. Not to mention – duh! – that the woman didn't look a bit like the waitress. Unless she'd grown three inches in the last forty-eight hours, had a slew of liposuction, and dyed her hair blonde.

Not until the first light of dawn enters the sky is Susan able to take note of the mountains off in the distance and orient herself. Ten minutes later she finds her car. With fingers stiff from the cold, she reaches into her pocket for her key. It's not there. She checks her other pocket and the space in her bra between her breasts. Nothing. It must have slipped out when she was working on the woman. And she doesn't have a spare. No! This can't be happening! Shit!

Finally, it occurs to Susan to look inside her car. Her key is

in the ignition. She reaches for the handle and, like magic, the unlocked door springs open. On the passenger seat lies her book bag; inside she finds her cell phone and wallet. Even her seven dollars in bills, her twenty-three cents in change, her canceled credit card and her student ID are present and accounted for. She exhales deeply from the pit of her belly. All is well.

Bone-tired and shivering, Susan wraps herself in the old blanket she keeps in the trunk and lies on the back seat in a fetal position. In less than a minute, she dozes off. It's not long before the sun pokes up over the horizon, throwing light into her face. People pass by on their way to work, kids yell to each other as they meander off to school, cars speed down the street with horns honking, and stores open. Yet Susan is oblivious. She sleeps in a faraway vacuum, a void filled with dreams in which everything works out for the best and her brilliance, once identified, is revered by all.

Sunday School

was cancelled. The teacher was sick.
I was standing next to my Mom.
We were all standing. And singing
songs with words I didn't know.

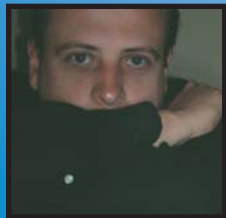
She wore a dress. She only
wore a dress on Sundays.
And she kept brushing
my bangs off my forehead.

It was hot there. She never
made me dress up. But it was summer.
And there were a lot of people
standing and waving their arms.

It was loud there. And filled with love
like humming. I heard a few "Gods"
and some "Amens." I looked up
and watched my Mom look up,

eyes closed. She was swaying
and talking. It wasn't English.
It wasn't my Dad's Spanish. It sounded
how it ought to sound.

By Ryan Holden
© 2009



Ryan Holden is an MFA in Creative Writing student at Arizona State University. He has lived, worked, and played in Arizona for most of his life. This is his first publication. Contact him at ryanholdenasu@gmail.com.

Tournament Of A Walking Dream

By Ryan Holden
© 2009

...and a tennis ball rolled past the fencepost into the gutter,
into a small puddle left from last night's rain, into one
less reflex, one less service motion, one more
abandoned backyard dog toy...

...or a wooden racket without string or grip needing
a deft touch and stronger forearms, needing care
and nostalgia, with a desire not to be left
leaning against the aluminum siding, its head
resting on grass drying in the August sun...

Another Weekday Morning

By Ryan Holden
© 2009

A pack of strays
darts across the parking lot —
the alpha, a mottled lab mix, noses
his way under a fence.

I watch them through the window
near my cube, computer blinking
emails at the corner of my eye. It's 10 o'clock
in the morning and I watch the dogs run and nip
together in the piles of dirt dropped in corners
out of the way. A phone rings —

could be mine, could be any
of the three people closest
around me, but it rings and rings
until it stops.

Discovering Mortality

By Kasandra Joyner

© 2009

I've just killed my friends.

I looked away from the road for a moment, felt the front tires of my '98 Jeep Grand Cherokee hit gravel, spun the wheel to the left and overcorrected. The Jeep began to fishtail, weaving from side to side of the road. I think I screamed. I could hear the panicked shrieks of my three girl-friends. And then it happened. In a failed attempt to regain control of the vehicle, I turned too sharply. The Jeep rolled. And I thought:

I've just killed my friends.

It was a warm, dry summer morning in June when I packed my duffel into the back of my Jeep. It was early morning, but still the pale rays of the Arizona sun were already warming up the Valley, a warning of the scorching afternoon to come. My friends and I developed a plan to escape the heat by taking jobs in Payson where the oppression of summer is not so daunting.

Each week, we'd spiral up Highway 87, through the cool, winding mountains. I would drive us. Kate would provide the music via her iPod, Ann would ride shotgun and Monica would provide the snacks for the long ride. The trip was planned like clockwork. We were happy. We were in control, and independent, and adult and all those things 20-year-olds often think themselves to be when they are not. We were immortal.

"Inside Out" by Eve 6 blasted from the speakers, the latest in a line of '90s alternative rock songs as chosen by Kate via one of her many playlists. We sped down the familiarity of the highway, talking about everything and nothing at all. We sang along to the music and gossiped about co-workers and friends, sharing stories about our lives.

We continued to sing along to the music even as we entered Payson, the engine humming in tune with us as I pulled up to the first stoplight in town. The kitschy antique shops and cafés flashed us by all the way through town to Houston Mesa Road.

The road was narrow and grainy – my father had often warned me of its treachery – but I'd driven it countless times before, and felt confident in my ability to drive us through safely. We were less than a mile away from our destination when the Jeep rolled.



Kasandra Joyner is currently a junior at Arizona State University, majoring in journalism and marketing. She was born in San Jose, California, but currently resides in Mesa, Arizona. Kasandra loves the outdoors, camping, and hiking. She also spends much of her time writing and hopes to author a novel someday. Contact her at k.joyner@live.com.

I knew we would die.

I gripped the steering wheel tightly, afraid to let go. My shoulder smashed the driver's side window, scraped against the asphalt and tore open. Gravel embedded itself into my skin.

The Jeep continued to skid. I smelled earth, and metal and blood. I could no longer hear Kate's and Monica's screams. I couldn't hear my own cries, but felt my throat burning and knew I must be screaming. For a moment, I was suspended upside-down by my seatbelt.

The Jeep righted itself and skidded to a halt. I tore my seatbelt off. I couldn't open my door. It was caved in.

Ann had jimmied her door open and was scrambling out of the car.

I pulled myself from my seat, crawled over the center console. Shards of glass from the smashed windshield dug into my knees but my only focus was on getting out of the vehicle that had almost become my coffin.

I distanced myself from the destroyed Jeep. My eyes darted from Ann to Kate to Monica, noting with shocked relief that we had all pulled ourselves from the mangled vehicle.

"Are you okay?"

"I'm okay!"

"Is everyone okay?!"

"Guys?"

"Oh my God, look at the car!"

"Guys?!"

"Oh my God!"

"Guys! I'm bleeding! I'm bleeding real bad!"

Monica and Kate had escaped the backseat with only a few scratches, but Ann's head was bleeding profusely where it had shattered the windshield. Kate dialed 911. Monica used her favorite Coca-Cola sweatshirt to quell Ann's bleeding. I felt useless and scared, still not quite believing that we were all alive.

My torn shoulder went unnoticed until the paramedics arrived. I was in too much shock to feel the pain.

The sun blinded me as paramedics strapped me to a stretcher. The ambulance carrying Ann blared down the road. Tears slid down my cheeks as I was loaded into a second ambulance. I felt like a little girl again. I wanted my mom and my dad. I wanted to go back to feeling invincible. I wanted to go back to the time when I was immortal.

Her Mother

By Cathy Capozzoli

© 2009

I wore a white gown to dinner last night.
It was hot, and I watched the dog breathe
pink skin into fur. My unruly asters
knew no end, but mother's bed is peacock
on copper now, the way a chair becomes
comfortable. The far-off mountains
bear scars in sunlight and silence.

Instant Karma

By Cathy Capozzoli

© 2009

Everyone
does this once –

pours cream
into a cup
of tea
with lemon

then, watching
the curdles swirl

thinks,

*I will
never
do that
Again
except
when
I intend*

to drink
anyway.



Cathy Capozzoli longed to live in the American West, and she made it a few years ago when she finally moved to Arizona. Roadrunners, cacti and prairie dogs whisper lines of poetry. Her recent work has appeared in *Ginosko Literary Journal*, *Mudfish*, and *Hawaii Review*, among others, and she is the editor of the *Lasting Happiness* literary journal on the Internet. Contact her at info@cathycapozzoli.com.

The Other Eyes

By Cathy Capozzoli

© 2009

I have stared hard into closed eyes
cosmic binoculars trained on
every glint on the night screen,
India ink between there and here,
restless clouds from all directions.

Tiberius hurls wilted flowers
into the dim night sea, paisleys of
gray on roiling waves.

A bakery at the end of a dirt road.
Across a bridge, trains in a station.
Three empty bathtubs in the field
behind a stone church.

Shadow puppets dressed in blue
ignite ribbons woven into the spine
of a book to hold a page,
red wax seals paper now folded,
frosted like distant glass.

Blood At Boynton Canyon

By Cathy Capozzoli

© 2009

In silence, I
hear words
calling themselves
into lines,
each one her own world
like a cooling
night in the canyon
where a lone standpipe
remains proud yellow
and stationary in the wind.

I've known these lines for a long time –
each a lifetime of momentary redemptions
one layered upon the last
whether the moon shines – or not.

Meanwhile, cottonwoods
weep dry tears and hope for rain.
Sun rays carry this evening's birds
to me – once far away friends
who now take days to sip the water.

The Story Of You

By Stephanie Austin

© 2009

When you said we should start the movie over from the beginning, I thought of a better idea. Let's watch it backwards and in slow motion.

You're drunk, you say.

You're right, I say.

The end credits roll. There is a song being sung by a group I've never heard of before tonight. It seems like a song I'd like outside of this movie. I'll go out tomorrow and buy the soundtrack and sing it to you. Alone. In my car. I'd like another glass of wine, please. The candles on the coffee table, which are still burning, smell like fabric softener.

Shhh, you say. My roommates are sleeping. We have to whisper.

Except all you do is put your fingers to your lips and tilt your head to the back end of the apartment.

I'll say it was the wine bar that seduced me, not you. The server came by and made a production out of pouring a mouthful of wine into a glass. You smiled at him and said thank you while picking up the glass by the stem. You waved your hand across the top like you were important. When you were satisfied with the smell, you went in for the taste.

You licked your lips and said things like, I taste the essence of sage, perhaps a hint of oak with a buttery aftertaste. You motioned for the waiter to pour some in my glass and both of you looked at me like you were waiting for me to orgasm. I just wanted to get drunk. Just pour it in the glass and go. I liked the way you looked at me when I sipped it. I liked the way you explained how a vineyard operates.

We sat in the large, over-stuffed chairs in the corner. The lighting was low and we were surrounded by candles. It appeared as though we were telling secrets with our voices low and our bodies close together, but you just told me about a table you had last night that didn't tip well and you didn't know why it bothered you because you're leaving soon. I mentioned I got two Payday candy bars out of the vending machine in the laundry

room at my apartment complex when I only paid for one.

The crystal wine glasses we drank out of looked new. You once said something about buying your future wife a one carat engagement ring because all a person needs is a one carat engagement ring, and I couldn't decide if you were being cruel or prophetic. I said that I really needed a nice set of wine glasses at home.

You smiled the way you smile when we're alone together and said that if I had these wine glasses at home, I'd never use them. I might use them for awhile, but then I'd wash them and they'd get spotted. Eventually I'd stop using them all together.

It's what happens with wine glasses, you said. People always find better ones.

I could have argued the point. What makes you think I'm a bad dishwasher? Maybe I'm a fantastic dishwasher. Maybe I'm the best goddamn dishwasher you've ever seen.

I didn't argue the point. I drank another glass of wine and felt my face turn red when you put your hand on mine and squeezed, as though you were comforting me over a moment that hadn't yet happened.

On the way back to your apartment, you said that it's just dumb luck the words "drunk" and "driving" both start with the letter D. Alliteration, you said. It's the oldest trick in the book.

I said you're right. Maybe you should write a letter to the city council.

You looked sideways at me and smiled. The smile reached into your eyes. I wanted to reach out and touch you, to test the waters, but I didn't. I always wait for you to make the first move. When you kissed me for the first time, I thought I was going to die.

I'm not kidding. These candles are amazing. I lean in and stare at the wax that is puddling around the wick like worship.

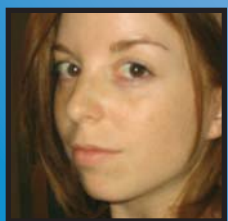
Would it be sexy if I poured this on you? I ask.

You look at the candle and then at me. No, you say. I think it would hurt.

There's a space between the beginning and the middle of this movie, I say. It's the swell of action. It goes up and up and when you think it can't go up anymore, it goes up more, then it crashes, crashes, crashes down. I've never written poetry, but I think I'd be one of those people that used the ocean as a huge, glaring, obvious analogy. So this is why I've never written poetry.

You laugh. I don't know if you're laughing with me or at me.

You're a writer, I say. Do you ever write about the ocean?



Stephanie Austin's fiction has appeared in *The Pacific Review*, *Kitchen Sink*, *Fiction*, and on *Thin Air Online*. She has a story forthcoming in the Canadian journal, *The Fiddlehead*. Currently, Stephanie is a student in the low-residency MFA program at the University of Nebraska-Omaha. She can be contacted at austin.stephanie@gmail.com.

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The oceans are polluted.

Ok, well, that aside.

I'm not a writer, you say, I just mimic what's around me.

I settle back in the couch that's supposed to be new but feels comfortable and broken-in. You warn me (again) not to spill anything on it. It's not yours.

So, I say, are you working on anything new?

Yes.

What's it about?

Behind you, the TV screen is black. Your face is relaxed and soft. My body feels like it's sinking into the earth, like something is pushing it down into a big black hole inside the earth, and it's not a bad feeling.

I can't stand that question, you say.

I know, but tell me anyway.

I'm writing the story of you.

I wish you weren't so pretentious and full of crap, I say.

And you laugh again. We're really speaking to each other over the hoods of our cars. I ask if we're going to keep in touch.

Will you write to me?

I'll write to you.

You won't write to me.

I promise I'll write.

Yeah. Fine. See you later. Nice getting to know you these last few months. Say hi to your family I never met. Have a nice life, asshole.

It's all in my head. You are all in my head. You are way over there, across the hood of my car, and you're putting your key in the lock, and I'm still talking. I sit behind you and watch your turn signal blink. I light a cigarette. On the way to my apartment, I smoke and smoke and smoke.

You are saying my name. You ask me how many I've had. I raise my hand and say five. No, four. No, five for sure.

Your fingers are saying four.

I look at my hand. Four, indeed. So, then it's four. I'm four glasses in.

When we watch this the second time, I say, let's fast forward through the love scenes. Yes, please. I'll have just a little bit more wine.

Why don't you like the love scenes?

They weren't that believable.

Sure they were, you say. What's not to believe about them?

The love part, I say, the way she loves him and the way he loves her back.

The way you sit in front of the TV with the remote in both your hands and your eyes going back and forth from it to the TV to the DVD player reminds me of the way I do it.

You can pick out oak in a glass of wine but you can't figure

out how to operate the remote control?

You turn and laugh. You say, I'm going to miss you.

My head is swimming and I panic, thinking I'll wake up tomorrow and not remember any of this. Before this moment, I really didn't know what was happening between us. I thought maybe this was just fun for you and fun for me. Here we are in the summertime, seeing movies and having drinks because we found we liked to talk to each other. It's something we were doing to pass the time until real life started.

I like to watch you huddled over your laptop. And that story you wrote? About the funeral and the grandfather and the strange girl outside the cemetery? I pretended like she was based on me.

You are messing with the remote again. I can't get past the end, you say, I keep thinking I'm past the end, but I'm not. It goes right back to the end.

Images flash quickly across the screen. I hear you say fuck under your breath. I know you say fuck when you're angry.

There's nothing wrong with walking away after the ending, I say. Good endings are like good dreams. When you wake up from one, you carry it with you all day.

You say, I need the instruction manual to this thing. Then, Oh! I got it.

You stand up – practically jump up like you're doing jump squats – and come back to the couch.

I thought you were kidding about watching it over, I say. It's the same movie. The same things will happen. Whatever happens is going to happen no matter how many times you watch it. It's not going to change. I forgot we were whispering.

The opening credits roll. My favorite part is when they talk about how he's leaving soon, which means he can't start anything serious. He says, I'm just trying to save myself some heartache. Then he kisses her, and she kisses him back.

I'll tell you again. My favorite part is all the witty dialogue. There's a nice balance of showing and telling, but maybe try to lean heavier on the showing side. I enjoyed the voice, though it became cold and distant toward the end. Good luck on the rewrite.

How do I know you? Do I know you? You will turn around. You will be wearing the same shirt you're wearing tonight. I will ask you if you remember the smell of fabric softener.

Nothing you are saying makes sense, you say.

I'm going to wake up with a headache tomorrow, I say.

You go to stretch your arm and your fingers graze my hair before settling across the back of the couch.

Building A Waterfall

By Eric Berge

© 2009

Rest the laminated warm obsidian first.

Is it sloped skipping
stone or honed by wind
stripping canyon walls?

Above it
set another roundish slightly smaller stone.

Choose arsenopyrite
from fire
to warm the water rolling.

As you construct
the gradually smaller basalt and granite
should jut from corners
and allow the line

of water to rhyme from stone to stone along
a path of surprising revelation or
epiphany even
since who predicts delight
how water flows

or poem ignites?

Don't Wake The Living

By Eric Berge

© 2009

So when their dad at three a.m.
dies three hours away,
let the living sleep:
don't wake them to be sad
and sleepless.



Eric Berge holds an MFA in poetry – in his pocket. His work appears. He lives widely. He can be reached at EBerge@peoriaud.k12.az.us.

Let the living sleep
too: keep them under cover,
safe in bed. Let them dream
of apple blossoms or rivers
smoothing stones to sleep.

Let them dream about the living:
A toothy smile, talk over eggs
in a corner café,
or the way your dad
in a hug smells like
gears.

Don't wake the living—
let them sleep for years.
When they rise and accuse
Why'd you let me sleep and cry
say, *I love you*, say
that's why.

Watch

By Eric Berge

© 2009

This is a watch.
It's a little clock
like the kitchen clock

in Mimi's kitchen calling
tinny bird calls
except I wear this clock

on my wrist, here, to glance
at, to remind that the time
you wobble up in arms, the time

you lean into the crook
of my knee, the crook
of your smile, the time

you want held, as mist,
will be, here, missed.
This is a watch, a watch.

I wear it here to watch it,
watch it — here:
watch.

The Racer's Apprentice

By David Nicol

© 2009

I am a car nut. I devour car books, magazines and web sites devoted to my passion. I can bore anyone to tears with my enthusiasm for cars and racing. As a kid, I happily pushed miniature Jaguars and Ferraris around our living room carpet for hours on end. I built model cars with varying degrees of success. I prided myself on my ability to name any car on the road. As an adult, I've watched hundreds of Grands Prix on TV. I have attended Drag races, Formula One races, NASCAR races, Demolition Derbies, Night races, Figure 8 races, Hill Climbs even the renowned Le Mans 24 hour race in France. I know all about understeer, oversteer, camber settings, toe-in, toe-out, supercharging, turbocharging, rear-wheel drive, front-wheel drive, all-wheel drive, drifting, late-braking, slipstreaming, G-loading and other esoterica which would make most people's eyes glaze over.

Over the years, I have owned and driven many fun cars but I had never actually driven an automobile built solely for the purpose of racing. This glaring omission in my life was recently remedied thanks to the generosity of my former work colleagues. I had the opportunity to drive a Formula car around Phoenix International Raceway. The track, west of Phoenix, is a one mile oval with a kink in the back straight so that it somewhat resembles a giant capital "D" on its side.

I arrived early for my session to take a look around the joint and check out the lay of the land. I checked in, signed my life away and was told to report to the upstairs classroom in 20 minutes for a briefing. I took this opportunity to sneak a quick look around one of the race cars to see if there was anything unfamiliar which would cause me to panic when I actually got in the fucker to drive it in anger.

It looked like you imagine a racing car to look. It was pointed at the front and the rear was all exposed engine and gearbox. The wheels and suspension looked very spindly and fragile sticking out of the car at each corner. Without any body panels to cover or protect them I assumed that the first thing to be ripped off would be one or more of these wheels should something untoward happen. Not too reassuring a prospect. The bodywork was definitely a case of form following function what with a

pavement-scraping spoiler at the front and a large wing at the rear upon which you could iron a pair of trousers with room to spare. The car definitely looked like it meant business.

Peering into the cockpit I saw the dashboard. It struck me that the word "dashboard" has a somewhat negative connotation. I didn't want to dash any part of me on it. It was a fairly simple layout – a large rev counter in the middle flanked on either side by smaller oil pressure and water temperature gauges. No speedometer. On the top right was a large orange light to indicate that electrical power was on. On the left side was a large red ignition key of sorts and a start button. There is something very cool about a separate "Start" button in addition to a key. There was no radio or cigarette lighter. The steering wheel was the size of an hors d'oeuvres plate; I've seen bigger chocolate chip cookies. The gear lever, located about two inches over from where my right thigh would be, was also on the Lilliputian side. Four industrial strength seat belts lay draped outside the car like tentacles waiting to envelop an unsuspecting victim. The cars were all white. Their only distinguishing feature was a number on the side. Mine turned out to be #22. I could think of no one famous who drove a number 22.

I returned to the classroom for my orientation. There were eleven other fellows in the group.

The instructor, who had doubtless done this briefing a thousand times, was mercifully short yet informative in his spiel and did cover all the rules, what the various flags meant, how to get in and out of the car, (not as simple as you would think – let's hope it doesn't catch fire at any point), what buttons to push, how the gearshift worked, etc., etc. The first driving session was to be led by an instructor-driven, hot-rodded Cadillac sedan. There would be three of these Cadillacs and we would drive in groups of four. We were to stay in third gear once we got up to speed. We then picked our driving suits from the pile spread out on tables. They were all red, to hide the bloodstains, no doubt. We all picked our sizes and as we struggled mightily to get into them he belatedly informed us that we should pick a size larger than we would normally choose as it would be a tight fit what with our having our jeans and shirts on.... Thanks a lot, pal.

We trooped out of the briefing room, down the outside stairway and onto the pit lane where you may only go if you are actually a driver. My heartbeat was definitely starting to perk up! On the way to the cars stood a table with about twenty helmets of the full face variety. I selected the biggest, safest-looking one and checked it for any cracks or dents. So, looking



David Nicol was born and raised in Scotland and through a very long series of events, landed in Phoenix, AZ in the late '80s. He has lived here ever since. He has two teenage daughters and lives with his partner in north-central Phoenix. Contact him at macduff54@hotmail.com.

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like a bunch of rejects from “The Right Stuff,” we walked over to our cars. I was kind of hoping there would be misty smoke curling on the ground and some majestic rock anthem blasting and that we would all be walking in slow motion.

I climbed over the side pod, stood on the seat and threaded my legs under the steering wheel down toward the pedals. As written in the brochure, the physical limitations for participating were a maximum weight of 250lbs and no taller than 6’ 6”. The seat must have been set up with the latter in mind. Manute Bol could have fitted into mine, no problem. I could reach the pedals but there was about six inches of space between my back and the seat back. This meant that I would look like a 90-year-old vertically challenged widow driving to church whilst zipping around the track.

A mechanic came by and asked could I reach the pedals and was I snug in the car? I was not. He ran off and returned moments later with two cushions to fill in the gap. That having been sorted out, he proceeded to strap me in. The four belts clicked into a quick-release buckle assembly. He then pulled the straps tight. Very tight. I gave him a thumbs-up and he nodded back, moving on to the next car. I looked around me as best I could what with Darth Vader’s helmet covering my melon. Looking down into the car, I noticed with some alarm that I could see the tarmac through gaps in the bodywork. Oh well, you’re strapped in now, amigo.

By now, my heartbeat was probably pushing three digits and we hadn’t even fired up the engines yet. I looked back up and ahead and saw a man waving his arms and shouting. It was pretty quiet with the helmet on. He reminded us (in a loud voice) that we were to stay in 3rd gear and no higher. He then gave us the signal to start our engines (No, he didn’t do the “Gentlemen...”). I pushed in the clutch pedal. This required a Herculean effort and I hoped we would not have to repeat that too often. I turned the red key, saw the orange light come on and the dials on the gauges flick into life. I pushed the start button. The engine turned over and, with a little encouragement from my right foot, burst into life. So did eleven other cars. My helmet drowned out a lot of this cacophony but not the exhaust fumes of the car directly in front of me. Sitting so low in a car such as this with your ass and your wedding tackle about four inches from the road tends to concentrate you wonderfully. It also meant that the tailpipe of the car ahead of me pumped a hazy blue cloud directly into my face. I hoped he would not blip the throttle too many more times before we moved off. He did. I concluded that must have been a biker, one of those crotch-rocket, café racer dudes who rev their engines a hundred times at stoplights.

The first pace car (I was behind the second) moved off and

the four ducklings followed in a straggle. One guy couldn’t get his car into gear. Another stalled. I prayed fervently that I would not suffer such ignominy. After what seemed to be ages, especially for my left calf muscle, our pace car started down the pit lane. The guy in front of me got moving and then I, still praying, let out the clutch. The car lurched forward, threatening to bog down and die. No, fuck no – not that. I hastily dipped the clutch pedal and gave it more wellie with my right foot and off I went. Speeding up, I tried for 2nd gear but surely it couldn’t be that close to 1st? It was and I was relieved when forward motion continued under power. I was now at the end of pit lane and merging onto the track underneath the continuous yellow line indicating the path we were to take until we got up to speed. I was still in 2nd gear and pretty close to the car in front. I hadn’t tried the brakes yet...

We were now on the racetrack proper, past turn two and on the back straight, heading for the dogleg between two and three. At the end of the back straight, on top of the large retaining wall that encircled the track, the school had placed two orange cones twenty to thirty feet apart to indicate where you might want to start braking for turn three and four. I was now in 3rd. I had achieved this on my second attempt. Even though we were going 85mph, the noise, the wind, and my seating position, made it feel more like 285mph. Instead of braking for turn three, I just took my foot off the gas and turned in. This worked very well. So well, in fact, that I almost read-ended the guy in front, who had braked like a bastard. In the middle of the turn, I fed in the power and the car held on like a limpet, going through the turn as if on the proverbial rails. Easing out of four and on to the front straight, I accelerated more and the car eased up the track edging closer to the wall. I wanted to go into 4th but this was verboten on our first run. I concentrated instead on watching the line the pace car took around the track. I noticed it was never the same and I remember thinking that surely there is one best way to get around in the least time possible.

As they had mentioned in the briefing, the instructor would at some point stick his arm out of the Caddy’s window and do a rotating sign to tell the driver immediately behind him to go down to the bottom of the track and let the other three cars go by. Then he was to tuck in at the rear of the group. This was to continue until we had all had a couple of laps directly behind the Cadillac. Immediately behind the Caddy was the best part of this first session and I found myself slowing later on the straight before turning into the corners and getting the power on sooner coming out. I tried to detach my brain from the survival mode, telling it we weren’t going to be flung out of the car whilst cornering at this level of G-force and to try and be more analytical in my driving. My leg muscles were also rigid and

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needed to be made to relax. A lukewarm success on both fronts.

All too soon, the first session was over and it was back into the pits where we all got out, removed our helmets and climbed into two of those nine-seater airport shuttle vehicles. The instructor drove us down the pit lane and onto the track where he regaled us with various tips re: aiming points on the track as he slowly drove around the circuit. At the end of the lap he gunned this leviathan and proceeded to drive around the track as fast as this elephantine beast would go. Having driven one of those vans for many years, I can tell you they are not nimble. I can safely say that this was the most terrifying part of the experience. I had visions of the grinning idiot seated next to me crushing my skull with his as we barrel-rolled down the back straight, bodywork and body parts flying. He finally slowed down enough to make the turn back to the pits. It was an impressive display of driving skill, however ill-advised.

Back into the cars then, for Round Two – same story as Round One but this time we would be in 4th gear. Strapped in again, I set the miniscule mirrors on either side of the cockpit. This was a mixed blessing. I could now see behind but moving my head to do so had the effect of the wind almost ripping off my helmet whilst my head was still inside it. I didn't do that very often.

The second session was faster and I was getting the hang of things much more. Again, I had discovered that every muscle in my body was tensed up and my conscious effort at relaxing had a positive effect on my driving.

We returned again to pit lane. It was time for Part Three – no pace car. We could go as fast as we dared and felt comfortable with. There were a couple of rules; we could not pass anyone. If you felt you were quicker than the person in front, you had to come into pit lane where the instructors would find you an open space in the traffic and wave you back out. This hopefully resulted in a clear track ahead. If you spun the car, you had to return to pit lane where you would be checked for poop stains and sent back out. One more spin and you would be black-flagged. Game over. So, no pooping. Or spinning.

They sent us out about 5 seconds apart. I really didn't think I would be much good at it but I surprised myself. Mostly, I found that people don't like cornering much. For me, the most challenging and gratifying aspect was to see how late I could brake before the turn and how much speed I could carry into the corner and still be in control. Similarly, how early in the corner could I start putting the power down? This was much more gratifying than just being on the straight flat out.

I got up to speed and after about 2 laps I had caught up to the guy in front of me. I stayed on his tail for a lap or two. None of us were seasoned professionals so I decided that discretion was the better of valor and stuck my arm in the air on the back

straight. This signals to the other cars that you are slowing down. I drove back into pit lane and dropped down to 2nd gear crawling along the pit road. The guy signaled me to slow whilst surveying the traffic with his other eye. I watched him carefully and just as I was almost at a standstill, he waved me on – like those dudes on the carrier deck in the opening sequence of Top Gun. I gave it the gas, almost stalled it, shot down pit road, got back up to speed and again had a clear track ahead of me. I upped my pace again and soon discovered just how easy it would be to put the car and my beloved self into the wall at a high rate of knots. I went way too fast into Turn Three and rather than hitting the brakes, which probably would have proved disastrous, I just stayed off the gas and steered my way through the corner. I remember thinking “That's another pair of underpants ruined.”

Undaunted, I resolved to do better next time around. Amazingly (to me), I did and soon found myself catching another car. I was so tempted to pass but knew this meant instant disqualification. I pulled into the pits again and was immediately waved through. Cool. I was really starting to enjoy myself but it was crucial to concentrate on the task at hand because on the main straight, I looked over to see if the flagman was waving any warning signals. I looked a little too long and found myself upon the corner going way too fast. I cursed myself and resolved to only give him a cursory glance next time around. I am exalted to say that I caught up again to yet another car slower than I was. Into pit lane I went, slowing to what seemed a crawl, got waved through and came back on track with no one to hamper my progress. This lasted precisely one more lap. As I exited turn two, the pace car was ahead of me at high speed. I tried to catch him too and was doing fairly well in this endeavor when, on the main straight, he turned on his hazard lights. This indicated that it was time to slow down and return to pit lane.

I turned off the engine, undid the seat belts and removed my helmet. Clambering out of the car, I felt exhilarated. It had been very entertaining, occasionally terrifying and an absolute blast. If I had a lot of disposable income, racing cars would definitely be in my top five favorite leisure activities.

I put my helmet back on the table with all the others and thanked anyone and everyone from the school who would look in my direction. I removed my racing suit back in the briefing room and went back down to the garage area where the crew was already starting to pack the cars away in their trailers.

The sun was starting to drop in the sky and as I walked back to my car, the gasoline/oil/tire smell that has intoxicated me since my schoolboy years was still evident in the air. Driving back home, everything was going in slow motion, even at 70 on the freeway and I noticed that after the race car, sitting in my GTI felt like I was at the reins atop a Wells Fargo stagecoach.

Birth Of Silence

By Fernando Pérez

© 2009

We hid in my tree house,
one hand pressed
against two-by-four shelves,
Mandy's hands
on her Oshkosh b'gosh straps.
Eyes closed, lips flat
against lips,
mmm-ing like they did
on mom's soaps.

I climbed down for the swingset afterward,
like reaching for a cigarette,
leaving Mandy in mid sentence,
to make sense of why
I didn't want to be near her anymore.

She lost her grip, reaching
for plums. Tossed
from the embrace of branches.

ripe plums, bleeding red flesh,

Piles of leaves went flying
like splashes of water
from her cannon ball drop.

And Mandy lay at the foot of trunk,
burying her dreams in dirt,
the way a mother does
when she stops breathing
but can iron all morning.

Folded Hands

By Fernando Pérez

© 2009

Dad never punched mom
only the walls around her,



Fernando Pérez lives in Tempe, Arizona. He is a graduate student at Arizona State University in the MFA program where he teaches composition and poetry (mostly composition). He is originally from Long Beach, California. He misses the beach and his grandmother's cooking. Contact him at fls.perez@gmail.com.

the hole in their bedroom door
not from his strength
but thin wood.

He never punched me,
never showed me
how to land them.
He told me to pray to St. Jude
when Joel Gudino laid hands on me in 3rd grade.

I wore prayers like boxing gloves around my neck,
coming home with black eyes.

Who was Saint Jude, anyway?
Besides a man with fire above his head
stickered on my father's dashboard.
I wanted him to appear in smoke
and kick Joel's ass.

I held fists for prayer at recess,
taking punches, but words
like air cannot stop rocks from falling.

Filling with holes, I stood ground.

Somewhere Between

By Fernando Pérez

© 2009

The sky's blushing
the color lipstick paints from kisses.
We lie naked on my roof
where the air looks
the way our bodies feel
walking underwater.
You and I on a fast walk
home from school
because we're that horny.
Not that horny.
There are crickets screaming
outside your window,
louder than the cicada serenades
in daytime when we slow danced,
chillin before meeting up the street.
A bottle for Scotch Club
and a lavender dress
because your eyes sing
even when the world approaches darkness.

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We must capture the sounds of time
before color will appear in focus.
You and I,
only as far away
as our own skin.
Crayons of sex and malice
scribbled outside the lines of our thoughts.

Walkout, East L.A., 1968

By Fernando Pérez

© 2009

It's silent in the hallways of Garfield high,
at Lincoln, at Roosevelt.

White teachers at desks
say nothing, wait for defiance,
staring through the window
at a pregnant parking lot.

Rows of coffee colored faces
watch clock hands on the wall,
closed fists for 10am.

Breath like water,
without blinking,
the calm before surging waves.

Toni dreams
the moment she will join them,

the girls who do not speak to her at lunch,
their secrets told in Spanish,
cigarettes in the bathroom,
forbidden tongues at school.

The Red He Sees With Eyes Closed

By Fernando Pérez

© 2009

Coming home from lunch, Abuelito waddles to the kitchen,
making a b-line for the tin cylinder of Danish Butter cookies.

My father at the table with the LA Times:
One lawman shot outside his parents' Cypress home.
His children left with their heads down in the photo.

In the kitchen, Abuelito has reached for a short glass and holds
a small jug of milk steady,
keeping one of his fingers dipped in the cup
while he pours, to measure
so that the counter does not see one drop.
He mumbles quietly,
the prayers he whispers are old,
words we do not hear.
Holds a cookie in his left hand,
with his eyes now closed,
makes a sign of the cross
over the cookie
before bringing it to his lips.

Clara Mae

By Melanie McCuin

© 2009

On Sundays, my grandmother,
Clara Mae hand washed our clothes.
She wore a gingham dress
Embellished with five red buttons
And one round black one,
Which pulled her collar tight
At the neck.



Melanie McCuin is a native of Phoenix, Arizona. She is a graduate of Arizona State University and currently teaches at a charter high school in Tempe. She is also an active member of the Tempe Women's Writing Group. Contact her at Melanie.McCuin@gmail.com.

Standing over me as I carved slivers of Ivory
Soap, she would tug at her black button
With fingers thick as fried sausages.
She always reminded me to scrub the cuffs
By pinching my arm.

Her boiled-red palms would twist
My father's work shirts,
Wringing droplets of water
Onto the prickly grasses
Of our backyard.

Walking the line between our house
And the shed,
She hung shirts and pants by color
On a thin, metal wire.
Her feet were baked brown and bare.

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While her blouses dripped dry on the line
She'd spin stories about my uncles,
Five who lived
To steal from the corner store
And curse in the church pews.

She had dreamed her sons would be plumbers,
Men who brought home bread and milk
For the supper table,
Men who came home smiling,
Or just simply
Men who came home.

Giants

By Melanie McCuin

© 2009

Last time we played
On the lawn
I was nine.
I wore pale blue shorts,
Thin as the failing sky.
And Daddy, I remember
You wore a cotton tank top
Faded to a few threads and a ring
Of dirt around your collar.

We jumped like jacks
Through the sprinklers.
Our clothes were drenched
And clung to our bones.
We raced to the end of the block
And beyond, our bare feet
Slapping against concrete,
As we mounted the crown
Of the Earth.

We spent that sunset
Like candy money—
Quickly and all at once.

We were giants,
Mopping red rays from our lips,
With the backs of our hands.
Our shadows stretched
Across the street,
Never stopping
To taste the end of the day.

Prison Visits, 1988

By Melanie McCuin

© 2009

My mother carried quarters
In her pockets – no purses allowed.
It took the guards an hour to pull
My father from the Cimarron block.
While we waited, she divided

The silver coins between us.
My brother and I
Ran to the candy machine
On the cement patio,
Weaving through the inmates' denim legs
While they stood in line

To buy a Butterfinger.
Their arms were bound in cartoon sleeves
Of Tweety Birds and bloody crosses,
Inked into tight skin.
They smiled at our mother.

Cracking jokes like their fat knuckles,
They tousled our hair with yellow fingers.
Grateful for a bit of freedom,
Their eyes licked the front
Of our mother's candy-
Striped shirt.

She fed us Hershey bars
Until our round bellies
Hung over our cotton shorts.
Standing by officers in cocoa uniforms,
We'd lick foil wrappers clean

While our mother scanned faces
Of incoming prisoners.
Chain-link fences
Crowned with serrated razor wire
Cut through the desert like steel scissors.
She held us back

Until my father appeared through the gates,
Cool like water,
In his light blue work shirt.
Smiling, he would take us into his arms
And kiss our chocolate faces.

Those were the days
When our mother's love
Would deny us
Nothing.

Instructions In Blue Summers With My

By Nadine Lockhart

© 2009

I go to her for her instincts. She shows me her newest tattoo—a sunburst in dirty blue above the breast—this, my reward after critiques, suggested backgrounds. She tells me she needs a man, her husband—that’s not working—makes it clear, she wants an affair, not a divorce.

She talks about teaching art to the Navajo, how she had a freedom on the reservation. Some things are very strict, like the colors she allows, only eight, nine if I count the red cadmium we can borrow from her bin. The rest she measures onto our trays, warm to cold.

You draw your paintings, she says, studying the pansy-filled bowl I copy from the back cover of Liberty with a small brush. She creates light with bright washes, foliage in three strokes. Sessions later, she confesses *I can’t draw, hate it*, hands me my paints from the freezer.

Cerulean’s a world apart from ultramarine. The former’s a robin’s egg, cartoon sky, difficult to use; the other—part of the basic palette: a dark night, the sea when mixed with green. Matisse’s cutout figures dance on a field of it, under yellow stars.

Stolen Blossoms

By Nadine Lockhart

© 2009

I am sent to the middle of the desert where there are some rules and nothing, except invasive grasses, a few Joshua Trees I am not allowed to touch. Their roots spread shallow, spiraling near a surface of loneliness and granite eroding into sand.

Wind kills the unstable. Fire, drought, even the idea of thirst sends animals chewing through protective bark for water. I gather thick waxy petals at dawn, taste the salt, its emptiness prolonged.

Aunt

By Nadine Lockhart

© 2009

Aunt Helen’s refrigerator consists of Fresca, dietetic candy, cottage cheese, some yogurt. *Do you want a nice, cold Freshca?* she asks, pronouncing it with an “sh” that isn’t there, Holds up the can – a blue snowstorm – pours a glassful with ice. *How tall are you – 5’5½”?* I nod. *Perfect height. That’s what I am*, she sips her diet grapefruit soda. *Have you seen Hedam’s wife? She’s got a big ass you know.* Her staccato speech exacerbated by diets, diet pills, and speed shots. No food, too much food . . . more Freshca.

The upstairs’ bedroom in the shore home has slanted, bare wood walls like an attic. The bed itself, a king, takes up the space, a negative reminder of the palace-house she sold to move here. Her clothes pack the closet, spill out of dresser drawers, and form soft, more or less permanent heaps on the bed. I sift through blouses looking for something to wear: sheer silk cream, fuchsia and black satin, matching scarves – all too large for my teenage frame. I try them on anyway, fall asleep between animal prints and Heaven Scent.

After midnight, her thick hand on my shoulder, my aunt says, *Get up, we’re going out.* I toss off bits of strewn clothing. Accumulations. We climb downstairs, pass my uncle, a drunk in his room. We walk through the kitchen door, outside to her convertible. I’m fifteen. I can smell the ocean in the dark. We drive like mad women from the back parking lot of one bar to another, looking for Hedam’s blue pickup. At a stoplight, she tells me, *You never need a man . . . you never need a man.*



Nadine Lockhart completed her MFA in Creative Writing, emphasis poetry, at ASU in December. She’s a co-founder of The Phoenix Poetry Series, a monthly featured reading which began its second year this January. Her most recent contest coup was winning third place in the 2009 Tucson Poetry Festival Statewide Poetry Contest. Contact her at Lockhartart@aol.com.

Front, back cover artist Marjory Boyer

The Arizona native resides in Scottsdale with her husband, Dan. Her Web site is www.phoenixartspace.com/mboyer.

Art has always been my passion. As a child there was never a question as to what profession to choose.

I began my career painting fine art and murals while starting a family and going to college for both fine art and graphic design.

For many years I enjoyed the excitement of working in the graphic design field. I had a natural curiosity for learning new medias and made it a goal to work in every industry within the field. I was fortunate enough to achieve my goals by working in the newspaper, billboard, silkscreen, printing, TV, and radio industry.

It was my position as art director at a local billboard company that sparked my true desire to paint again. Smelling the oil paint and watching the many talented artists actually producing my design layouts



Marjory Boyer in her studio. Below, from left, are her works, "My Perfect Day," "Summer Serenade," and "Koi in Motion."

on huge 20' x 30' panels was an incredible experience.

During that time my husband endured the embarrassment, and then the stardom after having a close-up of his face plastered on billboards throughout the valley for many years. The campaign blossomed into him doing 2 TV commercials and being placed on the back of the phone book. For a period of several years, he became a local celebrity getting both TV and radio spots. We had the dining and public outing disruptions everywhere we went.

I had always

been a behind the scene type of person, so needless to say, this was an unexpected aspect in my career in graphic design. Fun times.

Painting large always came natural to me. It was when an opportunity arose with a dear friend who had a faux finishing business that we teamed up and I began painting on walls and on canvas again. It seemed life made a full circle placing me where I was always intended to be.

Since 2005 I have been painting on canvas full time and teaching painting, drawing, pen & ink, and various adult and teen classes. Though I still paint

murals, I have found teaching to be the most spiritually rewarding aspect of my entire career.

My favorite media is acrylics. They dry quickly and have no fumes. I love to paint cozy patios, sunny beaches, and Italian countryside. I want the viewer to feel invited to sit awhile and let the subject matter take them away from their current problems.

I am a member of the AZ Consortium for The Arts, a juried member of the AZ Art Alliance, and 1st Vice President of the Paradise Valley Artist League. My work can be viewed at the Home & Garden Expo Center at 13802 N. Scottsdale Road, Suite 142, Scottsdale, AZ 85254 and at www.phoenixartspace.com/mboyer. A dream is just a dream until you take action. With strong goals and action, anything you wish to do in life is possible! Please join my acrylic painting and drawing classes held 12:30-2:30 p.m. Tuesdays and Wednesdays at the Scottsdale Home & Garden Expo Center. Teen classes coming this summer. Other times available upon request. A 24 hr. pre-registration and some materials required. Please contact Marjory at 602-996-0523 or mboyerart@cox.net.



Trees With No Leaves

By John Ledford

© 2009

Kilrush, County Clare, Ireland, called The West, actually lies in the southwest, near the Atlantic Ocean. Perched on one bank of the Shannon River, it had been a fertile and picturesque town; well-built stone houses stood along broad, tree-lined and flowery streets. In 1846, it all changed into neighborhoods where mud cabins housed the ultra-poor.

Money and credit gone, the workhouse became the main building in most towns. Comfort? Something landholder aristocracy and the power of England held in little priority. Taxation, finances, and the judicial system remained under the iron-hand control of the rich and genteel.

Pressure of population density, even before the Great Potato Famine, in Ireland greater than in any other Western European country, resulted in a heavy stream of emigration. Agriculture, the main economic force, was mainly driven by absentee landlords, renting land to farmers, called cotters.

Hard times hit. People died in scores, flung onto funeral carts, death wagons, like gunnysacks of potatoes. Voices said right out loud how they wished those lifeless wretches were sacks of fresh, healthy spuds. Children were heaped on belly-first so no one had to look in their blank eyes or tear-stained faces.

Nearly all the carts creaked away without benefit of a priest's words over the luckless, and everyone knew those souls had nowhere to go, that even God had given up on them. Hauled off down the muddy roads by the light of a lonely, swinging lantern, mourned and accompanied only by family tears and the huffing, steaming nostrils of a head-down horse shuddering under the driver's whip.

The infamous Poor-law had been enacted. Under its protection landlords were forced to pay for the welfare of the workers, but all it accomplished was clearing the land and eviction of the destitute. Their precious Emerald Isle, once called the first flower of the ocean, first gem of the sea, imprisoned a starving people struggling with, and for, their pride.

In the Nineteenth Century, Ireland remained a conquered nation. English authority had been rebelled against and the rebels beaten back at every turn. A foreign church stifled the Catholic

population.

For the Irish, historically knocked down before 1845, that year rang in a series of damp, cold summers, resulting in potato rot, a disease that destroyed an entire planting. Pestilence and fever were the harbingers of starvation and death, and nearly one-fourth of the stricken populous succumbed.

The Grim Reaper swaggered through the land and kicked down any door that fit his mood. And he didn't bother knocking.

From this cauldron of desperation burst Christian McLerie. The all-time misnomer. Someone had actually named this monster Christian, when his head should have been checked for 6s, the mark of The Beast. Lucifer would have been a more fitting moniker but it was already taken. Chris had seen enough of Ireland, and vice-versa. The news of a chance, new life in America crashed onto the land like the heavy waves of the Atlantic Ocean.

Eager to leave, one of the first to go, he booked passage on a "coffin ship" sailing from Liverpool. A young man, despised, ever alone, Chris left with nothing and no one to miss.

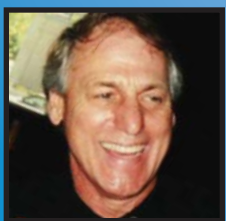
The long, arduous voyage over, he disembarked on the mean docks of New Orleans, worked for a month, made more enemies, got drunk and got restless. A boat rode him up the Mississippi, docked in Hannibal, Missouri. The pretty little town appealed to him and he ended his journey there. And soon alienated anyone whose hard luck it was to cross his trail.

He built a cabin near Bear Creek, on a bluff overlooking Old Man River, and there lived out the rest of his dismal life. Everyone avoided Chris McLerie, the meanest man in Hannibal. Eyes like a doll, their dark sheen reflected chilled venom. He never, ever, smiled. A small dose of contentment might stop for a short visit if he got on a drunk or someone's bad luck put them within striking distance and he bullied and punched, mauled or slapped someone around. His only real emotion was a hot and snapping temper.

A five-foot-nine-inch blacksmith, built like a 220-pound boulder, he sported a long, drooping mustache, huge bald head and face turned red and blustery from the hearth and bellows as he forged horseshoes, wagon tongues, farming implements. A man of limited words, when he did say something, it was to give somebody a bad day.

A stray mongrel, huge and surly, wandered into town one afternoon, and Chris, admiring its nasty disposition, took him in and named him Zeke. From the same litter, the townspeople said. A true hound of hell, Zeke spent his time growling, hair up, fangs drooling, looking for a leg to plant them into.

Chris never worked in the harsh winter, stayed close to the



In the 73rd Annual Writers Competition by Writers Digest, John Ledford received Honorable Mention for his short story, *The River Beast*. He teaches *The Writers Circle* at the Federal Correctional Institution in Tucson, a segment of which recently aired on PBS/Jim Lehrer NewsHour. Contact him at johnnybgood2@cox.net.

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cabin and thought about spring, when once again he could go to town and cause someone some misery, or his other great pastime across the water. He whiled away the long season in his rocking chair, bitterness building as he stared out at the weather, glass of whiskey in hand, tapping his wolf-head cane on the floor. Whistling with no tune. Zeke lay at his feet, waiting for the word to go hunting.

Every Sunday in spring, summer and fall, Chris and Zeke climbed into their rowboat, poled down the creek and out into the big river. Floating for a distance, Chris unlocked the oars, swung into a rhythm, and slipped into the current. Grunting and sweating, he rowed across to the peninsula jutting from the Illinois side. There his twin nephews, Walton and Wilton, lived in an old shack with a tilted and tattered roof, dirt floor, table and kerosene lamp, animal hides spread on the floor and walls, blankets to huddle into against the night chill.

They were no match for old Chris, not even two on one. And he dearly loved to beat on them.

Restless in wintertime, Chris fidgeted, paced the floor, lived by the cabin window. In early spring, he measured up the weather, looking longingly across the river, waiting for the ice to break up and move south, until the water, though fiercely cold, was no longer frozen. Oh, he supposed he could skip across the ice floes, but nope, too cold, too dangerous. Besides, Zeke would never chance that journey. And why should he, Chris, go through that tribulation? Besides, it was all the better for the wait.

He smiled through his gray beard as he thought of smacking those boys around. Why couldn't those idiots figure out that come Sunday maybe they should light out and get in a real hiding spot? He laughed like the antichrist.

Maybe it's got something to do with me smashing their raft?

So why not build another one? Well, they're fools, just like their sister. And they know I'll find 'em and then I'll just stay a little longer. Ha!

Sunday was the day of rest, but for Walton and Wilton, it held no sunshine. The scary sight of the boat, Zeke at the bow, Chris on the oars, sent the boys on the run. But with no real place to escape from Zeke, the poor bastards got flushed right into the hands of their hated uncle.

So he whiled away time in his rocking chair, stared out the window, glass of whiskey in hand, tapping his cane on the floor, humming an old Irish tune with only one note. And waited.

But nobody skates forever, not even a faithful, lifelong servant of Satan. And when at last spring melted the snow, Chris decided it was time. Donning his coat and cane, he burst the confines of the cabin, lit out for town with an unslaked thirst for hard liquor and trouble. Pent up with cabin fever for five months, Chris McLerie, the meanest man in Hannibal, that Saturday night knocked back way too many tumblers of whiskey

at The Beacon, a rough waterfront saloon, and the big, ornery blacksmith started his mouth up on a man with a faster, shorter fuse than even Chris. But he didn't bring his hound from hell Zeke; left him to watchdog the cabin. "Wait here, you son of a bitch, and don't move. I'll bring ya back a bone." Zeke jumped around and whined, but when Chris raised his fist, the mutt sulked off and flopped under the big maple tree.

Pierre Delacroix was a river-rat scalawag who rode the waterways on a huge raft, trapped furs, traded and sold, swapped whatever he could scrounge or purloin of value. A freshwater pirate. A band of merry men he and his henchmen were not; rather, cutthroats who preyed on and waylaid those with luck hard enough to run across them. Docking in Hannibal to imbibe some spirits, lighten their journey, they crashed into The Beacon. Loud and wild, after just one round of drinks, the bouncer ordered them gone.

Someone yelled out, "We ain't leavin till we're heavin," and pitched a glass into the mirror back of the bar. A tense moment passed; the bouncer, alone, held back. The bandits, certain the place was theirs, resumed their hubbub, laughed and demanded more booze.

Chris McLerie, in a corner table, watched the scene unfold, sensed the oncoming trouble but fought down the poison and bile that spewed up in his throat. It wasn't fear, because he really didn't care about anything, not living or dying; just adrenaline mixed with the need to hurt someone. Sipping double shooters, he leaned back on two legs of his chair, feet on the table, rapped his stick on the floor, picked out the leader and shouted:

"Hey! The man just asked you to leave, bayou scum. Think you wanna do that now or do I have to get up and show you thieves the fast way out?"

Silence struck. The men paused in their merrymaking, looked hard at the table across the room. Half drunk, Chris raised and pointed his sharp and lethal cane. The sight of this bald rock sent them off again into raucous hooting. Loud voices rang out again and more intoxicant got tossed down.

"I said move, you lice-ridden bastards! Get those greasy beaver pelts goin, back downriver. Yer stinkin the joint up."

The commotion subsided and a hush swept the room. A barroom brawl picks up fast anywhere, but in a river town, on the waterfront, it moves now.

The men turned to confront the challenging voice. Pierre slowly looked around, rested his elbows on the bar, one heel on the brass rail, and glared at Chris. He spread his arms. All saw that he, Pierre, would make this his fight. His teeth flashed in an evil grin that split his black mustache and beard. He shook the sleeve of his stained animal-skin jacket out at Chris, raised his glass in a salute, knocked back the liquor. He threw the empty

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glass across the room, smiled and waved at Chris.

“Ah, monsieur. Do not make this mistake. Before you start with me, Pierre, are you sure you need this trouble?”

“Skunk man, you don’t look like much trouble to me. Bad luck for you, looks like you hit a sand bar you can’t get off of. This is as far south as the river goes for you. Miss-yoor.”

“Oui, bald one, as you wish. But tell me, walrus-man: maybe you would like to throw me out. And then we will see who gets to die tonight, ‘eh?’”

Chris showed teeth of his own, the color of well-played, yellowed piano keys. He spat tobacco juice on the dirty floor, rose and kicked the table on its side, threw the chair, waved his heavy brass cane, finger fondling the wolf’s fangs. Roaring, he crouched and shuffled across the hardwood floor, menacing weapon circling the air.

Pierre had been in dozens of these life-or-death struggles, from the bayou to the Missouri River and back, and knew what was coming, coming fast. He smashed a whiskey bottle on the edge of the bar. In his hand hung the neck and jagged remains, whiskey dripping down his fingers and onto his boots. He motioned with the fingers of his left hand, bottle neck in his right, glinting deadly in the kerosene lights of the room. Bent forward at the waist in the classic brawler’s stance, he slid toward Chris, moving side to side, snorting like a hungry animal in the wild, eyes shining with excitement. A cold smile lurked through his beard, curled his lip.

“Ah GARuntee to you, monsieur, I open you up like the shrimp.”

Chris stopped for a moment, then advanced slowly and lowly, kept his adrenaline under control. No time to get careless. Instinct warned him that this was no ordinary confrontation.

The men worked in a tight clockwise semicircle, looked for an opening. Snarling and yelping like a wild dog, Chris lunged forward and swung the cane with both hands, like an ax on a tree. He smashed the Cajun’s left elbow, then darted backward on the balls of his feet. Pierre looked down at his arm, dangling toward the floor. But his face showed neither pain nor emotion.

The bald boulder was much quicker than he’d thought, but he only smiled again and showed the bad end of the bottle.

“Such a fire you have put in my arm. And now it will be my pleasure to take out your eye.”

Chris edged to his right, away from the weapon, looked for his next shot. He fainted toward the useless arm, slashed out and landed a bone-crunching blow below Pierre’s knee. Pierre screamed, moved back, glanced quickly at the hole in his buckskin trousers. Reddish fluid oozed down his outer leg. Chris backed off, circled, pounced again, shot his cane out at the bottle. But he’d put back too many shooters that night and was a beat slow. Pierre pulled out of range and in a blur of

movement sidestepped to his right, ignored the sharp ache in his knee, swung around and plunged the bottle into Chris’s left eye. Pushing and turning his hand, he dug the shards into the socket.

A wild-animal scream echoed around the barroom. Pierre’s left arm was useless but he brought his right back for another thrust, concentrated on Chris’s belly for the kill. Chris dropped his cane, backed up and covered his eye and face. Blinded, he fought for footing and time as he backed away. Pierre jabbed and twisted the bottle, left a gaping wound in Chris’s arm, ripped his coat sleeve away. He smelled blood and gore. Fear. Blood oozed from Chris’s body. Pierre stepped up fast for one more shot, one more rip. There! Entrails slid out of Chris’s stomach and down to his groin. Pierre shuffled back, breathing hard. Blood, booze and the smell of death mixed with the sawdust floor, hung in the air.

Chris clawed at his stomach, then where his eye had been. He raised his head and howled like a wounded wolf. Horror shocked the men into silence. Pierre stood back, breathing hard and watching his enemy. Life seeped out of Chris’s body and he felt a searing fire as he tried to hold his intestines in. He doubled over, half spun, arm clutched at air, and fell on his back. The message to get up pounded through his brain but his legs would not work. He fixed one glassy eye on the ceiling while the other stuck to his cheek, hanging by a thick thread. He blinked away blood and reality, then saw nothing at all.

Townies shoved and crowded around to witness the death throes of the man they all despised. Fur trappers cheered. Legs spread, hands covering Chris’s stomach, his good eyeball, ghastly, rolled upward and closed forever. His right foot moved slowly back and forth, twice. A deep breath and he was gone.

For several seconds no one said anything, so quickly had it happened. Suddenly voices rose to an ear-rupturing roar as all cheered and tried to clap Pierre on the back. The bartender took it all in, then gazed at the mess behind the bar. What the hell, he thought, only a mirror. Well worth it at any price.

“Free drinks,” he shouted, “for everyone!”

The men crushed toward the bar, bellied up, fighting for a spot, glasses held out for a splash of whiskey.

Eef Walters, town constable, swung the double doors open, stopped, thumbs hooked in his gunbelt, and took in the scene. His eyes swept the room and settled on the gory mess that had been this hated, miserable man. He dragged out his revolver, fired a round into the ceiling and waited for the din to quiet. A hushed roomful of men, glasses midway to their mouths, watched him move slowly over to the corpse and stare down. He got on one knee, saw the discarded bloody bottle that had been used to slaughter Chris McLerie.

“He had it comin, Eef, everybody’ll say that! He started with Frenchy here and there was no choice. Self-defense!”

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Eef coldly surveyed the room, the carnage on the floor, the stranger with his arm hanging down, blood spattered all over his clothes.

“I guess Judge Branson will make a decision on that. You,” he pointed at Pierre, “out the door. Me and you’s walkin over to the jail. This’ll all get sorted out tomorrow. Some a you men throw a tablecloth over this mess, get him over to the funeral parlor. Tell Ned I’ll be by later on. Do it now. I ain’t wantin to see no more.”

Clearly, Eef wasn’t real disturbed by the killing, knew it had to come anytime, only wanted to make sure justice got done.

So lived and died the legend of Chris McLerie. Stories traveled the river for decades afterwards about him, Pierre, and The Beacon. Fact blended into and around tall tales. Many swore later that they’d been there and watched him die, forever haunted by the hint of a smile playing on his reddened lips; others opined that if that were true, it was a smile for the first time. And the last.

No one offered to help Eef bury Chris, but men were eager to hoist the coffin onto the buckboard wagon, and he offered a quart of whiskey to whoever would accompany him to the town cemetery high on the bluff above the river. On a cold spring morning, that road was slop and mud. Eef looked around at the wet branches on trees with no leaves. How fitting.

Up the hill the horse labored, sliding and straining. Reaching the crest, Eef drove over to the hole left by the gravedigger. Together he and the townsman slid the box off the wagon bed, dragged it with ropes and dumped it in. Eef hauled a shovel off the wagon.

The man couldn’t see why he had to help any further.

“You got this, Eef? Ain’t no need for me to be out here in this

nasty weather—”

“Yeah, Clarence, I understand. Git on outta here.”

Clarence looked around, headed for the mud and slid back down the hill.

The citizens of Hannibal had a special celebration party going and Clarence didn’t want to miss out on the free booze thrown up on the bar by the owner of The Beacon. Besides, he knew they’d want eyewitness proof that Chris hadn’t climbed out of the crate and was on the way back down, screaming for vengeance.

Eef raised his shovel and threw mud on the casket. Noisy at first, the sound became muffled and sodden. Although wet and cold, sweat slid down his face until he finally finished the job. He stepped back, leaned on the handle, took his hat off. Feeling obligated to say a few words, he started talking:

“So here he is, Lord, if yer listenin. You don’t want him and neither did anyone else. The devil’s the only one’s got any room for him. He sure used Chris to spread tribulation all over folks. Well, now they get their reunion. Helluva thing to say, but it’s all I got. Chris, I’ll see ya when I take my own ride.”

A local hero, any charges against Pierre were quickly dropped. He and his men drifted downriver to the Louisiana bayous, and to anyone’s knowledge, never stopped in Hannibal again.

Zeke waited all that night for his master to stumble back home, and for days his eager eyes gazed down the road. One morning he trudged into town, avoided by all, and lay in front of the tavern. Well past nightfall, he picked himself up for the walk back home. He sought no food but occasionally ambled over to the rain barrel for water. He whined and slept off and on for eight days. Next morning he shuffled over to the steep embankment above the river, looking all around. The faithful dog let out a long howl, rolled and tumbled down to the river and walked out into the current, turbid and swirling.

Blue Man*

By Livia Soto

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The anthropologists call him Blue Man
because of his ink blue shirt
and his blue-striped pants,



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*Inspired by John F. Burns, *Uncovering Iraq’s Horrors in Desert Graves*, *The New York Times*, June 5, 2006.

because as he lies tangled in a mass grave
his arms tied with rope,
his skull jerked upward at the neck,
his sand-colored cap firm on his skull,
his eyes blindfolded with frayed cloth,
his mouth open wide with pain,

the crack of the bullet hovers,
the shimmer of the blueflies blinds,
the scent of the starry Prussian scilla rises,

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and the sorrow of the flute cut from its reedbed
whispers through threadbare clouds
to the azure sky.

They call him Blue Man because of his presence,
blue like the fragile veins
in the stilled eye of the turtledove.

They call him Blue Man

because of the longing for being
that echoes
in the heart of the despot.

The Kiss

By Lilvia Soto

© 2009

Halabja made the twins of Hiroshima and Nagasaki into triplets.

- Hashim Kochani, Halabja

Black clouds smelling of garlic and sweet apple
fill the morning sky,
within minutes,
the tender spring leaves begin falling off the trees,
and the partridge in the cage falls on its back.

When he looks out,
Abdullah sees the sheep and the goats
dead in the yard,
and lying by his neighbors's well,
little Bereavan, her pigtails undone,
her green eyes shut.

He walks to the village
where a sheet of red and white butterflies
covers the Sirwan,
and the bodies of his neighbors, its banks.

Turning a body over,
he gasps,
it's his mother.
Holding her in his arms,
he wants to kiss her forehead,
her cheeks, her hand,
her hair, at least her hair,
just one tender kiss.
His heart says Yes,

his mind says No,
he can die from the chemicals
that have killed her.

Still today,
Abdullah grieves for the kiss.

... But This Is A Birdless Zone

By Lilvia Soto

© 2009

*Combat provides a peculiar and deadly thrill,
even as it rewires the brain and unleashes the nightmares.*

- Andrew Himes, Hell-fire and Transcendence, Voices in

Wartime

With drums and trumpets
and the tears of loved ones
they march off to defend goodness.
With the promise
they will be welcomed as liberators,
their courage rewarded with sweets and flowers
and the song of birds,
their return celebrated
with drums and trumpets,
and the kisses of mothers and wives,
and the smiles of new sons,
they march off to battle darkness.

By dawn and by dusk
they see their friends blown to dust
by people who yearn to be free of them,
by the careless acts of commanders,
by their own hand.
And they lie awake
listening to bombs and screams,
not knowing when they will be next.

In the dark and in the light
they see their comrades kill and maim
the sons and daughters of the men and women
they came to liberate.
They shoot and they bomb
because they fear the darkness.

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And they lie awake and wonder
when their best friends will liberate
the barbarians in their souls,
start hanging ears around their necks
as their fathers did in Nam,
or kill their wives,
as their comrades did
when they returned from Afghanistan.

They lie awake and wonder
if the darkness is in them,
then go home and hear
the whispers and the shouts
and the drumming thunder of regret,
and the voices of their leaders
who call them cowards
because they did not take killing
in their stride.

They go home and listen
to the silence of the birds,
and the soldiers of the waning hearts
know it is time to listen to the evensong.

The Choicest Flowers

By Lilvia Soto

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and in the sky

The larks, still bravely singing, fly.

Scarce heard amid the guns below.

- John McCrae, "In Flanders Fields"

With hints of summer,
warm breezes promise long evenings,
days at the beach, the idleness of summer,
the prodigality of life.

Some prepare flower beds, plant summer vegetables.
Others picnic with friends while their conversation turns to
Little League, Boy Scout camp, Martha Stewart's summer
desserts,
the neighbors' divorce.

In 1868,
General John A. Logan issued an order
designating May 30th as the day to
gather around their sacred remains
and garland the passionless mounds above them

with the choicest flowers of springtime; . . .

Two years earlier,
a group of women in Columbus, Mississippi,
visited a cemetery to decorate the mounds
of Confederate soldiers.
Nearby
the graves of the enemy lay bare and neglected.
The women placed some of their flowers
on Union tombs.

On May 30th we mourn, but not for long,
for the somber gravity of grief cannot be sustained
amidst the budding of new life in flowering trees and singing
larks.

A brief moment of sorrow is aborted by the unbearable
beauty of life.

The choicest flowers of the Civil War
become the red poppies of the Great War,
and the wars continue,
and the battlefields grow,
and the graves of brave soldiers,
each one someone's son,
each one someone's enemy,
multiply faster than the blooms of spring.

As the deaths of the young increase, nature rebels,
will not supply enough red poppies for the mourning,
for how many would we need for the mass graves,
the vaporized, the disappeared,
the graves of enemy soldiers?

A factory in Pittsburgh now makes
the artificial flower of remembrance.
Artificial as the flower is the mourning
and the signing of peace treaties.
We have factories of guns, bombs,
robots, body bags, artificial limbs.
Do we need a factory of peace treaties,
and a factory of disappearing ink
for the signing of the treaties?

We need to honor dead soldiers,
not as summer with its promise of life abundant
begins, but on the first of January,
for instead of parades and football jousts,
the rite of winter should be a remembrance of

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scarcity, depletion,
life dormant and extinguishable.

A day to remember that a new year
of murdering the young,
aborting life, killing earth,
is just beginning.

And if honor the dead we must,
let us go out at dusk,
and in the dying light
place thistles and thorns
on ashen graves.

And if red is the color of mourning,
let us water them with mothers' blood,
for only if mothers refuse to bear another child
will the factory of death be bare.

Bone Music*

By Lilvia Soto

© 2009

now she knows what happened,
can bury him next to his father,
have a place she can visit,
talk to him,
say she worried when he didn't come home,
say her face hurt when his was struck,
her back ached when his was kicked,
peed blood for weeks,
felt nauseous when he had to lick his slop off the floor,
fear entered her bones, never left,
whisper she yearns for his bones at dawn, even now

she can tell him Muhammad, his little brother,
married and has three daughters,
that his young sister is childless and a widow,
together they can talk about the sons he would have given her

the bag in her hand, like all the other bags
in all the other trembling hands,
almost,
some heavier,
some missing a finger, a toe, a foot,
but who found the grave, who identified the bones?

his bones, like thousands in the mass grave,

*Inspired by "Bag of Bones" by Dunya Mikhail

indistinguishable to the police,
the gravediggers,
the indifferent eye,
did she identify him by his faded shirt,
the one she made for his birthday, his last birthday,
all those years ago?

his skull, not like any other,
does she recognize his determined brow,
can she see the pain where his lips were?
the smile in his eyes
that disappeared when the beatings began,
can she see the smile in the two holes
with which he saw too much?
and his ears, with which he listened to the oud
and her gentle moans,
what happened to his ears?
his ears, with which he heard screams
that made him wish he was deaf,
even if he could never again hear her murmurs,
and his mouth, his smiling mouth,
his sweet, playful lips,
now open like a chasm
that splits life

and dug with the bones, the questions:
what does it mean to die all this death?
she had the life of him, the hunger of him,
the play, the questions,
the song of him,
but for an instant,
she had the worry for years,
now she will have the death, all his death,
for the dawns of her life

and her sister, and her cousin,
and her sister-in-law, and her neighbor,
and the women from the next village,
the women she just met,
picking up their bags,
they will have all the death of theirs
all the days of their lives

what does it mean to hold in your hand
the bones that pressed against yours,
the virtuoso bones that played the dulcimer with yours?

and who will imagine his death certificate,
and the cause, what will the cause be?

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the eyes that smiled too much?
the lips that kissed too tender,
the lips that could play soulful tunes on her musical reed?
the plectrum fingers that could play her like the oud of
heaven?

or will it be the loneliness of the dictator,
that he was tone deaf,
could not produce deep, mellow sounds,
liquid tunes,
floriture?

When The War Started*

By Lilvia Soto

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Salah, when the war started,
I needed you, and you needed me.
You don't know me, but you needed me.

You needed to know
that on the other side of the world
there was a woman
whose heart cracked
because her country invaded yours.
You need to know that I am here,
and my heart aches.

Salah, when the war started,
I needed you.
I didn't know you, but I needed you.

I needed to know that in Iraq
there was a man
who felt the same pain
and cried the same loneliness.

I thought I was the only one
who could not cheer
the soldiers going to the war,
the only one whose heart ached
with every act of cruelty,
the only one whose heart cried
with every kind impulse repressed,

every loving gesture stilled,
every thought that separates us.

Salah, when the war started,
I needed to touch your hand
because mine was cold,
and I felt invisible,
ashamed,
abandoned.

I felt I was behind a high black wall
and no one could hear my sobs.
I didn't know
you were on the other side.

Salah, when the war started
I was on the platform
waving to the soldiers boarding the train,
defeated before they boarded,
injured before they reached the battlefield,
guilty before they killed the first child,
their souls taken hostage
when they agreed to put on the uniform.

I was on the platform
waving to the generations of families making the weapons,
the psychologists planning the tortures,
the generals planning the defeats.

I was on the platform
waving to the children watching their parents die,
watching their parents kill,
imagining their grandparents' war,
remembering their children's war.

Salah, when the war started,
I didn't know you,
but I needed to hold your hand
because I was on that platform alone,
watching the train leave
filled with the dead,
the wounded,
the damned,
watching the train
going around,
boarding new passengers
at every stop,
never letting anybody off.

*In response to "When the War Starts" by Salah Hassan

Tiny Smiling Jesus

By John Mikal Haaheim

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She was thirteen when he kissed her. Any other kiss might have come and gone. The mechanics were simple. He leaned over one afternoon and kissed her. A hand held behind her head, gently but firmly, told her to hold still. He rubbed his lips back and forth over hers for a full minute. He dabbed his tongue inside her mouth. Sarah Ann felt a flick of tongue, like a snake-flick might have felt. She tried to imagine it like a swab used when she had tonsillitis, a necessity that offered no pain.

Kayce Parker had been kissed, too; she told everyone: Leslie and Tanika and Holly and Abbey, who sat with her at the school lunch table. Sarah Ann leaned over her chocolate pudding. She sat at the table without Kayce's okay because Kayce liked Sarah Ann even though she was new. Leslie and Tanika and Holly and Abbey leaned forward too, knowing an important event was about to occur. "Jason Schmidt kissed me." With the words plopped into the center of the vinyl covered lunch table, Kayce pulled back to survey her impact. For a moment, all four girls maintained their forward leaning positions as though the words continued to hover over the table.

This was a moment to share. Perhaps Tanika or Abbey might chime in with a secret that, up to now, belonged only to them. Sarah Ann pulled her collar higher around her neck to hide her spaghetti thinness. With Kayce's secret occupying all attention, no one saw Sarah Ann's head bob downward and the eye contact falter. No one saw the red hue tinge her face. If her uncle had not been on the other end of the lips that rubbed and the tongue that dabbed, Sarah Ann might have shared.

Next morning, Sarah Ann's mother fed the baby. She worked the spoon into the baby's mouth, removed it with a lifting motion to catch the pureed eggs. Baby sister finger-painted food circles on the tray.

The path to the bus stop took Sarah Ann down three flights of stairs, past the door where the Rottweiler barked, outside to the corner, one turn to the right. She stopped near where the crossing guard stood, inched downward, back to the mailbox until her head disappeared.

Uncle Will lived one building away, up a flight of stairs to

apartment 1-B. He could be to the bus stop in two shakes of a lamb's tail. She had seen him watching at the window. He did not frighten her, this balding, bear-faced man with pale face. It was the secret, their secret, he said. She could not tell anyone.

The kids jostled their way to the bus. She flung herself in the melee. When the yellow bus door hissed open, she hurried up the rubber-lined steps, pressing into the bus, past the squeeze of bodies. She looked back, thankful not to find his face.

Sarah Ann sat behind a fogged glass partition, waiting for her counseling appointment. Kayce peered in from the hall. She knew everyone. "Sarah Ann," she said, scooting to an adjoining chair. "Are you here to see Mrs. Belkamp. What for?"

Sarah Ann kept still and fastened onto Kayce's words. "Mrs. Belkamp's nice. She'll do stuff, like get you out of hard classes. Paula Goddard – she graduated – talked to Mrs. Belkamp last year. Then her druggie, asshole neighbor got picked up by the cops. Paula says Mrs. Belkamp didn't rat because counselors can't tell what they know, but I think she told. Anyway, Mrs. Belkamp is good people."

Tanika passed in the hall and Kayce jumped from her seat. "Bye. Gotta go now." She touched Sarah Ann on the shoulder and mouthed "Be well," the latest expression to pass through the halls.

The mention of cops alarmed Sarah Ann. She saw the Children's Service workers sent to her home as matrons in police-blue with clunky black shoes, even though the last worker was a small grandmotherly person in a two-piece gray suit.

The counselor's waiting room seemed quiet and removed from the noise. A steady stream of students passing the frosted divider. She rubbed a tennis shoe against a spot on the other shoe, but it persisted. She gave up and settled back until the counselor appeared at the office door.

"Good morning. I'm Mrs. Belkamp." She shook Sarah's hand and motioned to a chair. The counselor's modular office managed, with some leeway, to accommodate the counselor's swivel-chair and desk and three straight backed chairs for a student and parents.

Sarah Ann sank into the recliner until her feet dangled a few inches from the floor. The chair felt like a soft white, fluffy cloud that lifted her away from new schools with new teachers and questions that pried.

Mrs. Belkamp settled back. The file on her desk read Sarah Ann Matrelco, in inky blue letters. A student aide, organizing



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new student folders had doodled a smiley face on the tab. In Sarah Ann's first year, nine pages were all that filled the rib-thin body of her file.

Mrs. Belkamp shuffled the papers for further information. "Damn." The words emerged aloud, and Sarah Ann giggled.

"That was funny, huh?"

Sarah Ann nodded.

"It looks like records from your last school are incomplete." She scribbled *Send for Records* on a notepad. "Your parents hand-carried the information?"

"Yes, Mam."

"You're getting very good grades, Sarah Ann. Congratulations."

"Yes, Ma'm." Sarah Ann knew the statement didn't need an answer. She also knew obedience counted.

"How are things at home?"

Sarah Ann remembered the fate of Paula Goddard's next door neighbor. "Fine."

She realized one word was not enough. Thoughts dangled inside her head that best remained locked away. Short answers drew suspicion and requests for further information. "I'm getting to know the neighborhood."

Sarah Ann learned disguise from her parents. Long sleeves and turtle necks hid finger marks. When her father spoke with his girlfriends on the phone. She told her mother no one called, or said the call was a salesman or a wrong number.

"My Mother lets me help her with dinner. I watch the baby. Sometimes I have to change her." She made a face.

"Sometimes Uncle Will comes over." She did not mean to say those words, so she kept very still, her face smooth like windless water. The counselor too kept very still.

"Mrs. Belkamp?"

"Yes," Mrs. Belkamp's hands tightened around the file. "Is there something you wanted to tell me?"

Sarah Ann hesitated.

"About your family?" Mrs. Belkamp reached for a precise blend of care and indifference. "Do you have something to share?"

Sarah Ann sat rigid as though immobilizing chemicals flowed through her body. Share was a nice word. It did not sound like prying. But now was not the time to share. She searched anxiously for another direction.

"Mrs. Belkamp," answered Sarah Ann. "It's so hard to change schools." She displayed a look of pain. The statement was true, just not the pain she felt at the moment. "Math is hard. It seems different at every school."

Mrs. Belkamp sighed. It was easy to identify with such complaints.

Sarah Ann wiggled her feet and stared intently at the pink

cotton bobs on the heels of her tennis shoes. Outside, a rush of students could be heard in the hall. Mrs. Belkamp was having a busy day. "I understand, Sarah Ann. You're a bright young lady. You'll do just fine."

A bell sounded. Mrs. Belkamp smiled. Sarah Ann smiled. The interview concluded, another student stood in the waiting room.

The second hand of the blue plastic clock flipped its way around the face, barely marking five in the afternoon when Sarah Ann returned. Baby sister's nap-time. Her mother rummaged in the kitchen drawer.

An old-fashioned silvered cross affixed to the wall, the kind with flowered edges and a tiny smiling Jesus in the center. It held no particular religious significance, more a kitchen ornament. Jesus came with them, resolutely hung on each new kitchen wall, green here, yellow before. On most crosses Jesus looked asleep or dead, or wasn't there, as if he'd left before doing his job. He deserved to smile after all he did.

"You're late," Her mother said.

Sarah Ann held up the proof of her after-school efforts, dollar store bags with formula, two bundles of Huggies, a teething ring and a box of chocolate candies.

"Mom?"

"Sarah Ann, stir the spaghetti sauce, would you. Your dad would like dinner on the table when he gets home."

"Mom? Uncle Will."

"What about him?"

"He's...creepy." She wanted to tell about the kiss, but something told her it was not the right time to share.

"He's not creepy."

"His apartment is full of toys."

"You loved his toys." She looked flustered. "That's enough. He's my brother."

The baby squealed from the bedroom, an unceasing wahhhh sound. Subdued momentarily for lack of breath, the sound became a wheezing inhale that kept the cry alive in a softer register. Lungs filled, the complaint resumed.

"Hold your horses. I'm coming," her mother yelled, as if the baby understood.

She wiped her forehead. "Do your schoolwork on the kitchen counter. Your dad will be home soon." Her mother flicked the wooden spoon at Sarah Ann. "And don't make noise." The door closed behind her mother's retreating figure.

Her father had been a war hero in Vietnam. His stories implied as much. At Bien Hoa Air Base, a sergeant with an Australian handle-bar moustache ordered the first fourteen men into a deuce-and-a-half bound to an infantry unit near Khe Sanh. Soldier number fifteen, her father, stayed at Ben Hoa

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on corpse detail, out of harm's way. Away from battle lines, he found girls to clean his hooch and perform personal tasks, as he liked to call them. "Like a K-Mart guarantee," he bragged. "One doesn't work out, exchange her. No disrespect intended. That's just the way it was."

He needed special attention because of what he'd been through, took care of soldiers who died. He showed Sarah Ann his army job once. He laid a black garbage bag open on the floor. "This is the BRB we stuff them in, see?"

He grabbed a child-sized raggedy doll, plunked an old uniform cap on its head, and addressed the doll. "You're out of uniform, soldier. Come to think of it, you've been slack on duties lately. What have you got to say for yourself?" He paused, glared at the doll. "What's that? What did you say? I can't hear you. What? Dead's no excuse."

"Ten-hut." He jerked the doll up to eye-level, two expressionless faces close together. "Oh never mind. At ease." The doll flopped down into the garbage bag. He crouched on one knee, secured the bag with a plastic tie and raised his hands with a flourish. "One minute forty-two seconds - the crowd goes wild." He made crowd noises and spit into his hands.

Her father's voice sounded outside the door. "Come here, lover," a second, high pitched voice said. Sarah Ann heard the door creak from the press of bodies outside. The wood bulged and settled. Its hinges squeaked. Her father's voice came from the hall. "Get on home sweet cheeks." Then the sound of a hand slapping flesh.

A busty woman stumbled her way into the house. "So this is home sweet home."

"You need to go," Her father said.

The woman peeked into the kitchen. "What's the matter, afraid of the little woman. Smells good."

Sarah Ann's mother had been in the bedroom a long time. Her mother burst from the bedroom door. "So this is your latest bitch. Get her the hell out of here." Sarah Ann's mother didn't wait. In full stride she pushed the woman against the wall. Her father moved between, separating them by a hand on each throat.

He shoved the other woman out the door. "Get out." Clicking heels and curses sounded down the hallway.

Sarah Ann saw the anger in her father's face. His chin jutted out; his lips drew together, turning down at the corner. His eyes narrowed. He grabbed her mother by the wrist, dragging her into the bathroom.

Sarah Ann sank into the couch, Doctor Phil's solemn voice on the TV. On-screen, a smiling woman raised her hands in supplication to the studio ceiling. Doctor Phil wagged a finger slowly back and forth. To the woman's right, a man, perhaps her husband, nodded. The camera panned the audience. Nodding

heads confirmed an agreement was at hand. Doctor Phil's face reappeared. "We'll be right back to find counseling for these two."

Sarah Ann heard thuds against the door, a smash of bodies, bottles breaking inside the bathroom. Words emerged in a jumble of phrases from her mother. "... your goddamn hands off... your whores... bastard ... fuck you ..."

Then her father's voice. "I can replace you any time I want. Just try me. Go ahead. If you have anything to say, say it now or shut it for good." A long silence followed. Her mother would say nothing.

Sarah Ann raised the remote, flipping past channels. She stopped at Sesame Street. Her parents emerged breathing heavily. Her mother's blouse was unbuttoned. Eyeliner smudged down her nose. Her wrists were red.

"Sweetheart." She said, smoothing her blouse. "We're going out to dinner." Her mother was always polite after a fight.

She turned to her husband. "Will can watch them?"

"No, Mom, no." Sarah Ann grabbed her mother's hand, begging.

"Go ahead, get your freak brother over here." said her father. "Just keep him out of my liquor or your underwear, or whatever he's into. I could do without both of you."

Sarah Ann shuffled back to the couch and pillow. Her parents laughed as they dressed in the bedroom. Her parents would make-up over dinner. They would return later with the smell of alcohol on their clothes, grabbing each other, say, "I love you." and make open-mouth kisses. Her father would stay home more. They would argue less.

Sarah Ann caught her breath when the bell rang. Her mother spoke to Uncle Will in whispered tones. She held the big pillow on the couch, pretending to watch television. She could tell her dad about Uncle Will, but he would grow angry, argue with her mother, would leave with a slam of the door.

"How are you kid?" Uncle Will's voice came from the doorway.

Her father emerged from the bathroom, buttoning his shirt. "Bye Sarah." He headed towards the door. Her mother tried to step between the two men, but her father barred her with his arm and brushed against Uncle Will. He gave her Uncle a light, friendly slap to the face that didn't look friendly. He drew his first two fingers to his eyes and pointed them at Uncle Will.

Her mother stepped between them and took her dad's arm. "Get to bed on time and don't give your uncle a hard time, understand?" Sarah Ann nodded.

Her parents closed the door behind them. Mother's steps clicked down the stairs; Her father clomped. She listened for sounds they might be returning: had forgotten something, might not be feeling well, short on dinner money. She took short

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expectant breaths until the iron door outside clanged shut.

Her uncle slung his large frame onto the couch. "What have you been up to, Sarah Ann. He was one of the few people who called her by her name, instead of 'hey you' or 'kid.'

She faced towards the television, ignoring him. He flicked through the channels. The face of Doctor Phil disappeared from the screen, replaced by Sesame Street.

"That's better." His finger waggled in the air. "Da-da-da-da Sesame Street."

"Look what I brought for you." From behind the couch, he pulled a three-foot Miss Piggy doll, placing it between them.

"Ooohh," she said in a cry of wonderment.

Miss Piggy wore a silver lame dress adorned with a tag proclaiming STAR. A foam microphone lay beside her. He adjusted the dress, straightened the hair-bow and brushed Miss Piggy's hair from her forehead.

Sarah Ann drew the doll close. She loved to touch and cuddle. The velveteen skin felt smooth beneath her hand and against her cheek. Uncle Will let his hand fall until it rested on her back. He gave her a barely perceptible rub. The smell of his after-shave drifted in the air. A drop of perspiration hung in the sparse stubble of his cheeks. He appeared more teen-ager than man. His eyes seemed kind, like there was no meanness behind them.

He scooted closer. Then she was afraid. She pulled back, her voice snapping out. "My dad doesn't like you."

"You're a good girl. I can tell. You listen to your father." His voice droned with a purring quality. He sat back, one foot planted on the coffee table. His eyebrows raised when he spoke, as though open and honest. "How is your dad? Does he treat your mom good?"

"Yes," She lied.

"Funny, your mom says he has a temper," he continued, "and has other friends too..." he paused, "women friends?" He nodded as he spoke as if trying to coax agreement. He seemed to know about her parents. Perhaps her mother told him.

"What happens when your dad gets angry?" She thought

about the matron and what her dad said about leaving.

"You keep secrets from him, so he won't get angry, don't you?"

She shook her head yes with a barely perceptible nod, her body numb.

"Let me sit by you." He shifted closer and stroked her neck. His hand insinuated upward into her hair, rolling the strands between his fingertips. "It's nice, your hair," he said, "Even better than Ms. Piggy's." She smiled even though she did not like smiling.

"You're growing to look so pretty?" He grasped her shoulders as if kneading dough. His hands felt soft through the material. Her slowly drew her body to him. "Come to your uncle," he said.

He rubbed his lips over hers, like before. Thoughts drained from her head, replaced by a soft cotton feeling. Small, cold prickles of skin raised on her arms. Her body deadened.

If she told, everything would fall apart. Her parents would fight. Her father would leave, maybe with the woman from earlier. The matron might come. Inexplicably, even to her, she began to sing. A song from her grandmother's days, better days.

"Let me tell you what happened a long time ago

To a wee little babe whose name I don't know."

Her uncle raised up to look, a confused look on his face. Her eyes fixed on the kitchen, on the one fluted edge of the cross that showed.

"And when she was dead, a Robin so red..."

As she sang, he dropped down and continued what he had to do.

Sarah Ann sat as if on a cloud, a white fluffy one. Winged animal cloud-shapes drifted serenely. Her feet dipped into an iridescent pool with waves spreading outward. She splashed her feet in the blue-green water and the liquid ringed up her legs in shimmering circles. Slowly, the animal shapes darkened. They careened across the sky and formed mouths that opened as carnivorous jaws. The liquid rose up her dress with black, osmotic precision until it ate away her clothing.

She could not see Jesus and he could not see her.

Mont-Blanc

By Renée Guillory

© 2009

I see the face of a mountain,



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and another,

and another:

a Miocene sea swell of mountains—

crystalline waves

rising and falling and stumbling

into a wall of time.

Turn the page.

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Snow bursts from a peak
a glittering ribbon
floating on a river of air.
(Or, an erupting volcano in winter relief.)

A landscape of halftones
folds out of the book. Here, Mont-Blanc.
There, St. Bernard's passage.

At the heart of the story
that captions these pictures is
(it seems)
desire
for a vantage point with
divine perspective.

If I tether myself to the line
of mountaineers who have
touched the sky over Mont-Blanc,
how will I judge?

What will I care to notice
once the droning world
is lost below the clouds?

I go back to the maps
and photos
and musings
of this second-hand guidebook:
down in a cleft, nestled below
the chin of Mont-Blanc, is Chamonix.

The guide is chatty about this most
trendy of alpine villages:
blah-blah picturesque
blah-blah overpriced
blah-blah oooh-la-la . . .

It boils down to this:
Cham is the New Orleans of the Alps
and every day is Mardi Gras.
All manners of thrills and seekers parade along the Arve
on the trains to the Mer de Glace
through the Valley, under a polychrome sky of
parapentes and trams and prayer flags.

I've left room in my pack
for my rusty French
and all the spare
tundra daydreams I could muster –
Chamonix is where I'll begin.

Her gaudy streets and
moody spring clouds
will be my homecoming.

The Irises' Last Inaugural

By Renée Guillory

© 2009

Times past
(she said)
Spring was a season –
'Twaren't a spit of a wish at the bottom of yer bucket.

No more the rains,
no more the wildflars,
no more the lightnin'bugs – why,
I'd never see'd a punier green so close to the camp.

(She means the swamp, the bayou, where Papa T'bo's
pirogue rots.)

When I's green m'self
and tiny enough for Papa to call me
eeeeeeeh – ma petite!
Spring was a season.

She took Her damn time gettin' to summer
hittin' Her stride durin' Lent
when you could hang aaaall yer wants 'round Her
and hope God gives you sweetness mixed with the summer
storms for all yer troubles.

Losin' Spring feels like a song
I cain't rightly recall the words of.
The tune fills up my heart but I cain't no more sing along.

Jenty's Journey

As told to William Warren

© 2009

Much of my childhood was stolen from me. The thief was not the playground bully at school, nor the pervasive poverty in my country. As an adult woman I now realize that unveiled evil robbed me of my innocence. Many do not believe that evil exists. I know it does, and all too often it marches through the world in shoe leather.

Few will recognize my childhood surroundings. Village life in Southern Sudan hasn't changed much over the centuries. Grass roofed houses, cooking done over an open fire, water carried from the nearby lake, and young, naked, laughing children saturate my memory. Some may see my childhood as uncivilized while others will appreciate the idyllic, carefree nature of our life in the village.

Innocence infuriates evil: it stands as a candle exposing darkness, and "men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil." Our crime? Being Christian and being "backward" in a predominantly Muslim country which sought to eradicate itself of its uncultured peoples in the south. In the 1980s, government-sponsored militias roamed Southern Sudan generating destruction, mayhem and murder.

Unalterable change emerged during my tenth summer.

We always left the city of Juba after school let out to spend the vacation with Grandma in the village of my ancestral home. Father soldiered in the Ugandan Army; stationed near the border, he seldom got home. Mother kept house in the city, but like me and my little sister Grace, she longed for the uncomplicated summer days of village life.

Unlike Grace who was only seven, I could no longer enjoy those summer days of endless playing as I had for so many years - days swimming in the lake, climbing fruit trees when hungry or playing "house" with the girls. The boys spent their time singing and dancing and sometimes even fooling around with us girls. Things were different now: at ten years old I hastened toward the marrying age of 13 or 14 and I needed to prepare for all my new life would entail.

Girls of my age spent their summers by their mother's side. It was mom's responsibility now to impart all the practical wisdom and guidance that a young woman required to manage her own home. Together much of the day, mother and I worked and talked. Each day mandated certain tasks: cleaning, carrying pots

Editor's note: This nonfiction essay is a culmination of several interviews between Jenty and the writer William Warren. Warren notes: "Jenty told me her story over numerous sessions together. I asked more and more questions till I felt I could see the story through her eyes. I got her permission to write her story for I felt it needed to be written even if only read by her children."

of water on our heads back from the lake, gathering palms for firewood and cooking our food over the fire outside the house.

I posed an endless stream of questions to her:

"Who will I marry, Mama?"

"Our families will decide that."

Where will we live, Mama?"

"Your husband will build a house for you near his parents' home."

"Do I have to obey my husband?"

"Yes you do, dear; otherwise he will send you back to us in disgrace."

"I'm afraid, Mama. I'm so young and I won't know what to do"

"I know you are, dear. I was afraid too before I got married. I'll help you."

My widowed grandma had three houses. The largest was a one room hut with a kitchen area and a place for eating. There was no sitting room. The other thatched huts were for sleeping. Grandma, mother, Grace and I all slept in one of these bedrooms. Another was reserved for my father when he returned to the village.

The night of our calamity commenced with frantic knocking on the bedroom door.

"Go away. It's the middle of the night and I'm sleeping with the children," grandma shouted in response.

"Shh, it's me," my uncle said as he pushed open the door.

"I heard gunshots and there may be trouble. You have to get out of here, now." He said these words as he retreated; he was anxious to leave and warn other villagers.

Grace awoke crying, uncertain why her sleep was being disturbed. Mother sternly told us to be quiet. She hurried about throwing a few belongings into a roll.

"Hurry up, Mama," my mother pleaded, as Grandma seemed frozen, set in stone.

"I'm not going, Joey. I can't leave here. Everything I have is here."

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Bill took up writing later in life. He is currently enrolled in the Creative Writing Program at Phoenix College. He came in second place with a fiction story at last year's Cave Creek Film and Arts Festival and has read several memoir pieces for Monsoon Voices. Bill also does a lot of volunteer work with African refugee families. Contact him at war0824@gmail.com



After the events described in this story, Jenty spent two years in a U.N. camp. She was eventually reunited with her Forejulu relatives, married and had four children. Further unrest made her move to Cairo and eventually she came to the U.S. as a refugee five years ago. She has worked hard to learn English and her new culture, became an American citizen and has recently purchased a home in Phoenix.

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“Please Mama,” mother insisted. “You know I can’t leave you behind. Your son will kill me if he found out that I left you here alone.”

Grandma must have realized that what mother said was true. Not only would her life be over, but her daughter-in-law would also be under a death sentence. She hesitated, then grabbed our hands and prayed for God to protect us, and finally got together a few things as we all headed out the door into the bush.

It wasn’t long before we met up with others fleeing from the village. Many of my relatives, we’re all related in my village, headed away from the danger. Those who could not escape in time suffered unspeakable horror: men were executed, women raped and left for dead, and children dragged off to become slaves.

Stories of the atrocities had reached us. Terror and tension, like a cattle driver behind his herd, pushed us on.

“What is it? What’s going on?” my mother asked. Her voice, usually steady and deep, was high-pitched and rapid.

“Terrorists! Look, they’re burning the houses,” said my uncle as he pointed behind us. “We’ve got to get away from here.” His words conveyed the urgency of a leader who wanted to save as many of his people as he could.

We turned and looked. Flames sprouted from the dry grass roofs on the houses at the far end of the village. Men and women stared behind us, fear and terror deformed their faces. Mother carried Grace on her back and dragged me by the hand as we fled as fast as our mixed age group would allow.

All that night we trudged away. We stopped for the feeble among us to recuperate.

“We’ve got to separate,” announced my Uncle Joseph, who now wore the mantle of leadership.

“The older ones will have to stay here. And you mothers with babies who can’t stay quiet will go in another group. The rest of us will go on ahead.”

His command sounded harsh. I didn’t want to leave Grandma behind. Looking back now, I know he was right. He only wanted as many as possible of us to survive this reign of terror. Again we prayed before we split up.

Daybreak gave us some relief. At least we could see where we were going. Around 10 o’clock, my mother insisted on stopping. Between carrying Grace on her back and having no food or water, she was exhausted. She assured my uncle that we would catch up with them after resting for awhile. With reluctance he agreed.

On our own now, as the sun grew hotter, thirst consumed us. Mother made us girls lay under a bush and gave us strict orders not to come out until she returned. She was going to the nearby lake to get water. Grace and I lay close together, trembling in fear.

It wasn’t long before I heard my mother shouting in our

Forjulu language which was unknown to the militia-men.

“Stay right where you are girls, don’t come out. May God protect you.”

A rifle shot punctuated her words, then a scream. Grace and I huddled closer together as the single shot was followed by shouts of triumph and a volley of shots into the air as if to celebrate the downing of some dangerous prey. We waited for a long time. I told Grace I was going to relieve myself. If I said anything else, she would have refused to stay behind.

I circled around behind her and crept toward the lake. The noonday sun reflecting off the water dazzled my eyes. Shaded now by my hand, the scene focused revealing a body laying on its back with its feet in the water. That couldn’t be my mother, I thought. As I inched toward the lake, I first noticed her pretty, pale bongoh, the traditional dress of Forjulu women, dyed crimson. My heart rhythm raced, in synch with my perception. One bullet had pierced mother’s chest, above the heart. I watched the warm, fresh blood issue from below her torso into the lake tarnishing the clear water at the shoreline.

Tenderness and compassion flooded her eyes upon seeing me as her life ebbed along with her blood into the water’s edge; my clenched fists alone restrained a floodgate of tears from my eyes. Fingers drawn across lips motioned my silence. I put my hand under her shoulder to lift her up. She cried in pain and I noticed that the small entrance wound in her chest broadened to a fist-sized exit wound in her back.

She took my hand and pressed it upon the hole in her chest allowing her to breathe rather than gasp. Slowly she reached her hands behind her neck and took off her necklace.

“Give this to your father,” she whispered, each word intensifying her agony.

She elevated her right arm to gaze upon her multicolored, wedding bracelet; it never left her wrist since Grandma gave it to her the day she married my father just as her mother-in-law had given it to her. She stroked the bracelet like an old friend and confidant before carefully removing it and handing it to me.

“This is yours now. Treasure it. It will remind you of me. Don’t be afraid and don’t cry. Take care of your little sister. Now is your time. I believe God will protect you both.”

With those words she smiled and motioned with a nod of her head for me to leave. I hesitated; her eyes insisted. Numbness pervaded my muscles and my consciousness – my retreat fostered by willpower alone. When I returned to Grace, my appearance must have manifested heartbreak and terror for she asked, “Is my mother dead?”

“Yes,” I said, and then I cried. Pent-up, uncontrollable, uncontrollable tears burst from my eyes. Grace moaned and sobbed as she drew near to me for comfort. At length she said, “We have to go.” I knew she was right but I didn’t know which way to go and I was afraid. We began walking.

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Walking and running, running and walking, deeper into the bush. My legs and feet were bruised and bleeding. Yet on we marched until nightfall. Exhausted, we sat down with our backs to a tree. A fitful sleep overcame me.

“Wake up,” Grace said as she shook me into consciousness. “I think it’s our uncle, calling our names.”

Foregoing caution, the voice sounded, “Joey, Jenty, Grace.” I was too terrified to move. Grace got up and ran toward the man’s voice. When he found us, he cried and hugged us close.

“Is your mother dead?”

“Yes.”

He led us away until we came to a group of our relatives. Intense relief – being with others, not being lost nor terrified – rescued my mind from insanity. Whimpering and shivering I sat close to my aunt as the fear and stress of the last 24 hours released itself from my body.

A group of the men went to search for my mother’s body; when they found her, they buried her as decently as possible. We all rested as best we could until daybreak. My uncle advised that we leave this place and go in separate groups.

“They must have heard all the noise we made last night. It isn’t safe here now.”

Again Grace and I walked, this time not alone. The morning’s

heat drained all our weary bodies. By early afternoon I felt I couldn’t take another step. We rested in the bush next to a clearing. A helicopter flew overhead.

“Stay down,” one of the men said. “It’s the terrorists.”

“We’re the U.N.,” a voice bleared over a loud speaker in Arabic. “We’re here to help you.”

Some of the brave ones peered skyward to see U.N. in big blue letters. The helicopter landed in the clearing. Children and the wounded were put on board first. U.N. soldiers stayed to protect those left behind till the helicopter returned for them. We were packed in tightly. When the doors closed and the big machine took off the ground, there seemed to be no air inside. A few of the children, those weak and dehydrated, died during the flight.

We landed in the U.N. camp near Uganda; caring workers fed and looked after us as another life began for me. I spent two years in that camp. But innocence had ended for me – no more carefree summer days, no more good-humored school days, no mother to guide and instruct me in the ways of our people.

I have seen evil many times, on many faces and in many places since those days. But never have I seen the unmasked horror of evil in all its ugliness as I did that summer in the village.

Aspen Fire

By Meg Files

© 2009

For Mia Naomi, 8/8/03

In the summer of 2003, the Aspen Fire burned nearly 85,000 acres on Mount Lemmon in the Santa Catalina Mountains.

“Then God said to Noah. . . ‘This is the sign of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all the future generations: I set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.’”

From town, the Catalinas remain,
their cut into my sky. No one is
allowed up there yet, but the ruin



Meg Files is the author of “Meridian 144”; “Home Is the Hunter”; “Write From Life,” and “The Love Hunter and Other Poems.” Her awards include a Bread Loaf fellowship. She has been the James Thurber Writer-in-Residence at The Ohio State University. She teaches creative writing and directs the Pima Writers’ Workshop in Tucson. Contact her at megfiles@earthlink.net.

is revealed in newsprint black against
memory’s forest. The burn should show:
We have known (if not believed) that truth
will out. That a mountain must be more
than its familiar rise from the plain.
That consequences make a lurid
cut.

Once on Mount Lemmon: What I saw:
my young man son posed on a rock, all
the hot forest around him and him
caught within, gazing into a dim
pool. What the camera saw: a dusty
boy camouflaged on a gray boulder
backed by brown pines and pale sky – below
a bright blue pool, fringed with bright green leaves,
and in the reflection his jacket
is golden, and his hair, and his face
looks out of the blue. This water is
the doorway to a world where the known
world is drab.

Two nights before, I dream
my son in the bedroom chair holding
a crying daughter. And so I am
right. On her birth day – though she is far

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north — below the pure shape of the burned mountain, the monsoon frees a rainbow that catches the ghost moon and strikes just beyond us in the desert. I ask how it feels to hold his child, and he says — familiar. On the fifth day I am holding her, my tears don't wake her: it is suddenly impossible, all of it, biology, the whole story. She's feisty when she's awake, my son says. Just wait till you see her angry.

We need new words for her. Don't write about dead dogs or new babies, I tell my students. Or for god's sake rainbows. It's all been said by better than you, also by worse. For the fourth generation that I know of, this little baby toe hooks under. Now I know, my son says when I show him, that she's mine.

Within every image is the truth. Her father is the bright boy in the pool now boiled away. She is more than my dream of her, flesh, and memory, as familiar as but no more familiar than the promise to do, or not to do. I give up the logic of flood and fire for that rainbow's covenant: that the known and the scrimmed worlds wake to each other in flesh. What remains beyond burning.

Origin Of Species

By Meg Files

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... both in space and time, we seem to be brought somewhat near to that great fact—that mystery of mysteries—the first appearance of new beings on this earth.

—Charles Darwin

1.

Before the voyage Darwin turned away from medicine when he witnessed the agony of surgery. On the islands he observed thirteen species of finch, each with a different beak adapted to different

seeds. And so it goes. He believed in a Designer until he found natural selection, until his little daughter died. What is faith? grace notes? curlicues? Now on the islands, my sisters dispense seasick pills and would tell old Darwin about genomes. “The sight of a feather in a peacock's tail, whenever I gaze at it, makes me sick,” Darwin told his son. For what had such deep-dyed glory to do with natural selection? What is mystery? a tease? disbelief? Yes, yes, I know evolution has no intent. Is it enough to see?

2.

God did not allow suffering before the fall, say the Creationists, and the animals were safe from human hunger. And so it goes: sin came into the world, and death and fossils followed. In our world grace dies every day, as do men whose singular voices bend the air and young mothers and crashed children and poets whose words are phosphorescence in a dark sea. In the islands, our dead mother rides the panga from boat to land with my sisters and me. Pay attention, you girls. All are extinct, each creature its own species, unadapted, unselected. And you, and we, adapted, selected, witness the fall, and fall.

3.

We go to these islands to believe it is possible to isolate ourselves. Death cannot swim nor spring from the volcano nor descend. We walk among these iguanas, these frigates, sea lions, finches, these tortoises with Charles. We record field notes. We are of the species. Jesus probably walked on foggy Galilee's surface ice, but here we might be sore amazed when our mother treads back to us across the clear Pacific blue. A distance from the boat are breaching whales, tails, then whole bodies, in beauty beyond words. We are new beings on this earth. Is it enough to see?

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The Blue-Footed Booby

By Meg Files

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It would appear that the birds of this archipelago, not having as yet learnt that man is a more dangerous animal than the tortoise or the Amblyrhynchus, disregard him. . .

— Charles Darwin

We found the first blue-footed boobies ourselves, no guide, as if we were first to swim Tortuga Bay (which would not have a name), scull below the cooled lava rocks, and discover these birds who, having no memory of us, are indifferent.

Their webbed feet make me think of my blue swim fins, but we remind them of nothing, not the Spanish sailors who laughed at the bobos, nor the British ship's hatch where once they perched. I suppose they know their bills are pale matching blue.

The next day on Seymour Island, baby blue-footed boobies wait in their bare-ground nests within guano rings for mothers to come home with fish. Their feet are powdered white, their down plump white. The parents still remember to gather

twigs for a nest but forget why. The man in the i love boobies tee-shirt cries out—there on the trail is the display of a fallen chick, stiff and flat, open-beaked head on a rock pillow. The feet are curled and gray (human note: never to be blue).

Observe survival of the fittest: the guide is matter-of-fact. When, now and then, two eggs in one nest hatch, the babies grow for eight weeks and then the first-hatched pecks the sibling out of the home circle where no one cares. The guide is reverent:

here no mass starvation but should tragedy befall the older, the younger saves the generation. (What kind of mother, we mutter, how Cain and Abel.) We were not there, so the birds do not remember us. What is cruelty, what is beauty, without

memory? I remember the brown-winged booby, its blue legs inserted into its white body its pale blue beak sideways (so for a moment I believe its right eye sees my human form) and the way it launches itself straight from the guano-ed rock into the water.

El Solitario George

By Meg Files

© 2009

They seemed newly crawled forth from beneath the foundations of the world. – Herman Melville

Last tortoise found on Isla Pinta, he lives now at the Charles Darwin Research Station. We see his winsome face on a placard on his pen but only the back of his real self in the foliage. An old guidebook says he “may be allowed” to breed with a close genetic relation. Now he cohabits with two females from Wolf Volcano. Once his love life was tourist gossip. Once a \$10,000 reward awaited the one who

found a female of his subspecies. In the next pen over, females without males urinate to make mud and dig with their back legs to create nests for eggs they will not lay. They raise and rock their plodding bodies. Their faces look determined and thickly sad. Next to them are the males, also former pets who must not breed so island species won't be mixed. They are huge as boulders, a century and a half of querulous baggy necks and broken shells.

The next day, the tortoises in the wild seem noble, not sad at all. Is George truly lonesome? He will not take the Wolf Volcano

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offerings. He is only 60 or 70, young enough. Beside him, the females paddle back legs in the muck they have made and the old males doze open-eyed in their concrete ponds beside the feeding platform strewn with leftovers. And George, last of his kind, saves himself finally to crawl back alone beneath the cradle of the earth. The end.

Penguin Parade

By Meg Files

© 2009

The fairy penguins emerge from the ocean, their natural habitat in which, explain the guides, they are assured and graceful. The black

clouds roll beneath the full gold moon — high drama — and I cannot see the dark blue and white birds slick in the blue water. I think

of how to describe for you their sudden presence on the shore. They do not know humans have named their beach Summerland. They

wait to gather against predators, isn't that always the way, and begin the safety-in-numbers

waddle across the beach to their home burrows

with their mates. It's a fifty percent mate-for-life rate, a guide says: if she fails to produce, he moves on. The couples on the viewing

platform elbow each other. The fairy penguins do not know they are more acceptable for being renamed Little Penguins. Consider the cost

of redoing all the tourist brochures. In my new hot pink scarf and striped gloves I am warm, but I want you on the platform beside me.

The birds do look awkward, that's the repeated word, as they waddle. Who says the real story is the transition from sea to burrow? Consider

the cost of our missing. No photos allowed — the flash scares the birds, is the excuse. No doubt correct. But humans must trick humans to sit

and simply see. The birds are not "graceful" in the ocean nor "awkward" on the land. Neither do they parade. Sea by day, beach by dusk,

dune burrow by night: we humans should let their blue and white truth be ours. And I do, except for this poem, except for your absence, I do.

Pushing Back The Door

By Cristina Boccio

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I rolled up to Coor Hall, put on my wheelchair brakes, leaned forward and pressed the blue button. Nothing. My hand pushed it a few more times in frustration.

How was I going to get through the daunting glass door in front of me? Those buttons made my life more difficult, which is contradictory to their point. I wondered to myself: Should I put my feet down on the ground, grab the door and push back somehow? Then maybe I could prop the door against the wheelchair and push my way in. But my fingers would get stuck

between the chair and the door. So I settled with a few hops on my left foot, and pulled the chair behind me.

It wasn't simple, and I realized this was not the ordinary life I previously knew.

I couldn't do anything for myself. I couldn't shower. I couldn't walk. I could barely get around my house. I mean: I was handicapped.

My eyes left the road for a split second. When I looked back at the three lanes of highway, I realized the traffic was stopped ... dead. I clenched the steering wheel of my Kia Rio, closed my eyes and jammed both my feet into the brake pedal.

The first hit jolted my head and neck forward, and the air bag popped them back. I gasped for breath; then, another collision shook my car. Then, stunned silence.

I opened my eyes. The sun pierced through the shattered



Cristina Boccio is a junior at the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism at Arizona State University. She is an Arizona native, but infatuated with New York, where her whole family lives. She wants to become a sports journalist in New York in the future. Contact her at cristina.boccio@asu.edu.

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windshield. The black oversized tires of another car blocked my line of sight. I pushed open the wedged door and struggled out.

My legs were numb and my chest was covered with seatbelt burns. My right arm swelled like a small football. Both my feet were in so much pain they couldn't support my body. I wobbled back to the now-ruined lavender Rio and plopped back into the seat.

"Are you OK? My name is Cindy. I was in the car behind you. I had to swerve from hitting you. Are you OK? What happened?" Her concerned voice ran about a thousand words per minute.

My hands trembled as they traced a gash across my left shoulder. Blood trickled down my fingers.

"I don't know. My legs hurt so much. I'm bleeding, and I smell smoke." My eyes were filled with tears. My head was spinning, and I was hyperventilating as I thought of the mess I'd created.

"Don't worry. Keep breathing," she said. "It's only the air bags that deployed. That's why you smell smoke."

The smell of the soot was horrific; it was as if the car were ready to burn into pieces as I sat motionless. The first vehicle I'd collided with — a silver sports car — now faced the opposite direction. The second car was slowly being driven off my windshield. Being blindsided, my heart stopped when I noticed my car was still in drive. I was assured this heap of metal wasn't moving on its own.

"What's your name? Who can I call for you?" Cindy rambled so quickly I couldn't process all the words she said.

"Umm ... Cristina. My mom. She's home. Please call her," I mumbled as I began to pick up pieces of my cell phone.

An ambulance siren echoed in the distance. Traffic was now backed up for miles.

I totaled three cars that day. I still have scars across my chest from the seatbelt and an indent where a key jammed into my knee. Surgery on my right ankle and broken toes put me in a wheelchair for five weeks. It has been almost two years and I still have a constant pain in my ankle. Someday soon I'll have to have another complicated surgery that I am too young for now, but until then I dance to keep my joints moving and my ankle stretched.

It was back when I was a sophomore in college, practically an adult. My mom had to drive me to school every day, as if I were back in elementary school.

It seemed as if I should be saying, "Thanks, Mom, for the ride. Love you. See you after school," with a childish wave as I looked back toward her over my pink backpack.

This wasn't elementary school. This was college, the big times, and I should be a high-rolling big shot by now, not rolling in a chair.

If there is a bright side to this, I've learned never to lose focus for even a split second. And that strangers, parents and blue buttons mean all the difference in the world.

Dudes Of Orpheus

A Ten-Minute Play by Guillermo Reyes

© 2009

TIM, surfing dude, early 20s

BRAVO, guy played by a woman, also a surfing dude, early 20s

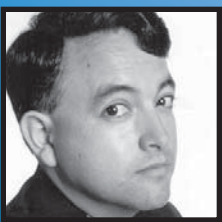
THORA, girlfriend to Magnum, college coed, mid-20s, perhaps a bit older

MAGNUM, college guy, 20s, German.

(Tim enters into Bravo's apartment in Orange, CA.)

TIM

Bravo....hey, the waves have gone wild out there, dude,



Guillermo Reyes heads the MFA playwriting program at Arizona State University. His plays have been performed across the country including the New York off-Broadway productions of *Men on the Verge of a His-Panic Breakdown* and *Mother Lolita*. Contact him at Guillermo.Reyes@asu.edu.

"Dudes of Orpheus" was performed in New York City at Polaris North Theatre, February 22, 2009. It was included in the Blue Roses Production's presentation of "The Poetry Project: Short plays inspired by the late poems of Tennessee Williams."

The cast: Tim - David Ojala

Bravo - Blair Sams

Thora - Christi Berlane

Magnum - David Ausem

they're awesome. We gotta get cracking, I got Thora and Magnum out in the truck....You still asleep? Get up, dude.

(Tim enters the bedroom. We hear a woman's scream. Tim comes running back out.)

TIM

Oh! I'm sorry, I shoulda knocked. Where's Bravo?

(Bravo comes out. He's played by a woman and looks like one)

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BRAVO

Tim, dude, it's not what it looks like.

TIM

I didn't know Brav had company, I'm sorry.

BRAVO

Tim.....

TIM

He told you my name while trying to have sex with you? That's kinky. I mean, he's done that before, and I told him to stop that, 'cause girls could get the wrong impression.

BRAVO

Shut up, Tim!

TIM

Look, where is he? We're supposed to go surfing. Our friends are waiting---

BRAVO

It's me, dude.

TIM

What? Who?

BRAVO

You caught me checking out my clit.

TIM

Huh?

BRAVO

I've never had one before.

TIM

Ah, Bravo? Are you in the bathroom, dude? Who's this chick?

BRAVO

Tim, it's me. I'm Bravo. I woke up like this.

TIM

Very funny. We're keeping our friends waiting, Brav!

BRAVO

Ah, Tim, dude. It's really me. I woke up, and there was a

little pile of ashes next to my pillow. Or was it just dust?

TIM

Huh?

BRAVO

Dust then, that's all that's left of Brav...it was part of this dream, or I thought it was, I went into the underworld, dude, and I came back transformed.

TIM

Miss....what was your name?

BRAVO

I told you, I'm Bravo.

TIM

It's a good joke, you got me, the dust of the underworld— nice touch! But we've gotta go. Maybe you'd like to join us. I just didn't know he was dating anyone---

BRAVO

I'm not! Tim, I'm scared. I'm gonna cry now, is that a girlish thing to do?

TIM

OK, it's gettin' freaky out here....Bravo, just come out now!

BRAVO

You're not gonna find him in there, because it's me, Tim! Tim! Listen, Tim, you're 24, you work at the 7-11 and you're hoping one day to get your high school equivalency test, so maybe you can study, like, hotel management, dude.

TIM

He told you things about me.

BRAVO

And you've got a mole on your scrotum.

TIM

Dude! Ahhh! I onlyI only showed that to Brav because he didn't believe me, it's a weird birth mark...and he wasn't supposed to tell anyone.

BRAVO

He didn't tell! You showed it to me, Tim. So that's why I want to show you my clit now.

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TIM

Look! No, that's OK. Although I've never really seen one up close.

BRAVO

Then let me show you 'cause it's news to me, too.

TIM

Ah, OK, I guess. Wait, no! No! See? This is where the guy with the camera comes out, and films me looking up your cooch, and then everyone laughs 'cause it's like this Jackass movie. That's what I am, the Jackass of Orange County. OK, it's OK to come out now, Bravo, my friend. I get it. It's been fun while it lasted, but we've gotta go, dude.

(Thora and Magnum enter. They're good-looking, well-heeled college types.)

MAGNUM

Dude, you're keeping us waiting.

THORA (to Bravo)

Oh, hello. I'm Thora Berlinghini. My father owns the mall.

BRAVO

We know.

THORA

(to Tim)

You told her?

TIM

I didn't say a thing. She knows about my scrotum, too.

THORA

I'd like to see that.

TIM

Ah.... No, no!

MAGNUM

Where is Bravo? You guys were going to show us these awesome moves. When I go back to Germany, I want to say California dudes know how to ride those monster waves.

THORA

You're not going back to Germany----

MAGNUM

I'm not?

THORA

I won't let you, mein herr.

MAGNUM

Ooooh, it's biology in action.

BRAVO

Hey, what about me? Dudes, what am I supposed to do now?

TIM

Just bring back Bravo.

THORA

What exactly is the problem? I just LIVE for solutions.

BRAVO

I don't know how to be a woman.

THORA

That shouldn't be a problem. I provide pleasure to my Magnum here, and he provides it in return.

MAGNUM

Ja.

THORA

We must make it clear to the boys that the right to vote was not enough---not if doesn't come with the big m.o.

MAGNUM

Count me in.

BRAVO

Am I supposed to take notes?

MAGNUM

This is major philosophical question, which not even our great philosopher Herr Kant was able to settle. The female identity is rife with hidden longings and desires, like my darling m.o. mistress.

THORA

Enough about me. What exactly is your problem, sister?

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TIM

You're her sister now?

THORA

I practice sisterhood everywhere it's needed, Tim. Did Bravo break your heart, you poor specimen?

BRAVO

I am Bravo. Doesn't anybody recognize me? Tim, I'm your best friend, dude. We've been battling those monster waves since we've been six, and one day I'll go back to school, too. Maybe this is my parents' curse for not going directly to college, but I promise, daddy and mommy, please. I really do have goals in life.

MAGNUM

What is this curse she refers to?

TIM

You guys---Bravo's playing a practical joke.

BRAVO

I am not. I woke up a woman.

THORA

Well, I do that every day, and that's not tragic.

BRAVO

But I am not a woman.

THORA

Where is your penis then? I'd like to see it.

MAGNUM

Ah, I'd rather have us speak along theoretical lines, rather than indulge in tactical maneuvers.

THORA

You mean tactile, darling. Then let her answer the question? Where is your penis? It didn't just crawl out now, did it?

BRAVO

At this point, I think it's just dust. I am Bravo, I am now a woman. Does this happen in Germany?

MAGNUM

Among the Goethe scholars perhaps.

THORA

Well, perhaps fate has enacted this wondrous metamorphosis because you've been utterly insensitive to women.

TIM

He has not! He's been an awesome dude---I mean if she was really Bravo.

BRAVO

Thank you for standing up for me, dude.

TIM

We stick together, dude. I mean if you were Bravo.

THORA

Well, that's just it. Personally, since I've known you two, it seems to me that you functioned much better together than you did with women. Perhaps the two of you were meant for each other.

BRAVO

Dude, we're straight males!

TIM

Yeah, we're super-straight males practicing überstraightness in a straight capacity!

BRAVO

Yeah, bitch.

THORA

I rest my case. Magnum?

MAGNUM

Perhaps that was the problem after all. You were meant for each other, but social norms would not allow you to be straight and together because straight marriage between males seems to be banned in California, so now nature has pulled a Faustian bargain, a very Germanic notion, and has given you your wish. Bravo is now a woman, and the two of you can finally be together.

TIM

What? I don't want to marry Bravo!

MAGNUM

But he looks "hot" as a woman, doesn't he?

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BRAVO

Oh, thanks, I guess, but I don't want to "marry" Tim.

THORA

But, Tim, do you deny that this female version of Bravo looks hot?

BRAVO

Careful there, Tim.

TIM

Well, I mean---if those boobs are real.

BRAVO

Dude, you can't be staring at my boobs, that's so gay.

TIM

Not if they're real, they're not. Are they?

BRAVO

Yeah, but they're my boobs, so don't stare.

MAGNUM

That's right, now that he's a woman, you may stare all you'd like and you may even marry in California.

BRAVO

I don't want to marry yet, I want to hook up with some fine bitches.

MAGNUM

That would make you a lesbian.

BRAVO

Dude, I am not a lesbian.

THORA

We would like to check out your clit now.

BRAVO

What?

MAGNUM

To verify the truthfulness of your claim, meine fraulein.

TIM

Yeah, let's verify, dude.

BRAVO

No! No, leave my clit alone, everyone! We need to call some sort of specialist. I am afraid my original body has been incinerated, the dust of one dismembered by the Furies.

TIM

Who are those? Some fraternity assholes? I'm gonna whack those dudes!

THORA

What exactly were you doing last night?

BRAVO

We went partying with them sorority sisters?

MAGNUM

But do American sorority girls socialize with average clerks?

TIM

If we're hot enough, they do.

BRAVO

And we are totally hot, so shut up, you Teutonic übersnob.

TIM

Yeah, übersnob!

THORA

But then something happened?

TIM

I ran off with that sociology girl, wanted me to go descend into her private heaven by the beach. It was hot.

BRAVO

Totally hot. Woooooh!

THORA

(to Bravo)

And you?

BRAVO

I just came home and passed out.

MAGNUM

So you did not get what you American dudes call "lucky?"

BRAVO

To tell you the truth, I felt a little...jealousy.

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TIM

Jealousy?

BRAVO

That you were getting laid, dude, and I wasn't!

TIM

Envy, not jealousy. Jealousy has connotations.

BRAVO

It don't matter! I passed out first, and I went with the Furies, into the netherworld.

MAGNUM

And the journey there made you face that which must eventually be abandoned.

BRAVO

My malehood?

THORA

Now you're being given a second chance, as a woman.

BRAVO

I don't feel like a woman---should I have a little cry over this?

TIM

No, be strong, man! This isn't you! You need to ask for your body back, man.

BRAVO

But....

THORA

In the scheme of things, would it be such a horrible thing if the two of you ended up together? I mean, if he's got the body of a woman---

BRAVO

But I miss my ten-inch penis.

TIM

It wasn't exactly ten inches, Brav---

BRAVO

Shut the fuck up, dude!

TIM

Well, it's gone, dude! Face it.

BRAVO

Maybe you can live with an inverted penis, but I can't.

THORA

And the two of you do function like a nice unit.

MAGNUM

You are compatible.

BRAVO

I miss my body. (He begins to cry.)

TIM

Now, Brav, don't do this---now, he's crying like a girl.

THORA

(to Bravo)

Now look at me, dear. Estrogen rules your body now. And since you're too homophobic to be a lesbian, clearly you are developing feelings for a man. Look at Tim.

TIM

No, don't.

BRAVO

What about him? I've already seen his scrotum and it didn't do anything for me.

THORA

But concentrate....what are you feeling?

BRAVO

Maybe a small hint of a fuzzy feeling.

TIM

Dude, you're lusting after me? That's totally gay.

MAGNUM

Not if Bravo is now a straight woman.

BRAVO

Is that possible, Tim?

TIM

What?

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BRAVO

That we might belong together? Are we a chick flick now?

TIM

Ah....could we have children?

BRAVO

But then we'd have to copulate.

TIM AND BRAVO

Ahhhhhh! Gross!

THORA

Gentlemen, please! Being a woman isn't particularly tragic, and I'm feeling a little offended here. Tim, if no one had told you this was your friend Bravo, wouldn't you be trying to pick up this hot chick at the club?

TIM

I guess.

BRAVO

Don't encourage that, Tim. You'll feel very sorry when my body's restored, I'm gonna bust your ass when I'm a male again.

MAGNUM

Trust me, a female can bust your ass, too. I've been the delighted recipient of such punishment myself.

THORA

Of course he has. So what are you gentlemen—I mean-, you know what I mean – what are you going to do?

BRAVO

Tim, I don't want you sticking anything into me, if you don't mind.

TIM

But I'm beginning to feel the urge, Brav. My beast's awake now. Feed it.

BRAVO

Tim! I mean....wow....I am sorry I made fun of your genitals.

TIM

That's why I'd be delighted to show you what I can do with them.

BRAVO

Did you always think this way about me?

TIM

I must admit....I wondered once...I mean just once if it wouldn't be simpler if I could just settle down with my best friend.

BRAVO

Then you wished it all along, that we could be a straight couple, that is gay.

TIM

Whatever! I'm feeling the attraction now, Thora. What do I do?

THORA

What comes naturally, I'm watching.

BRAVO

Well, TimI would like you to help me explore my new body.

TIM

It's what friends do, huh?

BRAVO

But it's not a gay thing.

TIM

No, of course not. No, I mean how could it be? Could you two meet us at the beach later in the afternoon?

THORA

I told you, I'm watching.

MAGNUM

Ja! We'll be cheering for you.

TIM

Whatever. Just....Brav....Brava....can I call you that?

BRAVO

I'm feeling the estrogen, Tim. My body is transforming from within now.

TIM

I'm feeling it, too.

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BRAVO

Maybe II love you. Is that possible?

TIM

The feelings were always there, we were just....not equipped for it.

BRAVO

I'm fully equipped now, and don't worry, dick size don't matter.

TIM

Dude!

BRAVO

Dude! Sorry, that was the old Bravo....come here.....

(they kiss.)

BRAVO

Is that illegal in California?

THORA

We don't care.

MAGNUM

We're very inspired.

THORA

It's hot.

(Thora and Magnum kiss, and then Tim and Bravo do, too.)

TIM

Perhaps we were meant for this.

BRAVO

Or something like it.....

THORA

Just don't look back.

MAGNUM

That proved very dangerous to Orpheus.

TIM

We will never look back.

BRAVO

It looks like we're now dudes in love.

TIM AND BRAVO

Weeeeird!

(Lights down.)

Coming Soon! The Fall Issue/Second Edition of The Blue Guitar magazine!

A Call to Writers from The Blue Guitar literary and arts magazine for its Fall Issue

"Things as they are are changed upon the blue guitar." — Wallace Stevens

The Blue Guitar, the arts and literary journal of the Arizona Consortium for the Arts, seeks submissions in all genres — fiction, poetry, plays, creative nonfiction — for its fall issue. Writers must submit original work and must live in Arizona. Simultaneous submissions will be accepted, but the writer must notify the magazine as soon as possible if the work is accepted elsewhere. Submissions selected by the editor will appear in the fall edition of the magazine, which will be published online and potentially in print. Please include your name and the best way to contact you on your submission. It is free to submit, and submissions may be made in multiple genres. Submissions will be accepted from Aug. 15, 2009, through Sept. 15, 2009.

E-mail submissions to:

Rebecca Dyer at rebeccadyer@theblueguitarmagazine.org or the Arizona Consortium for the Arts at info@artizona.org

For further information, visit: www.theblueguitarmagazine.org or www.artizona.org

The Arizona Consortium for the Arts is a start-up, nonprofit group dedicated to supporting and fostering artists and the arts in Arizona, including the literary, visual and performing arts.

Wellstone

By Eric Wertheimer

© 2009

I thought your shoes were birds.
I felt a foot keeping them in place
above the floor, but pinioned to a
beat, very cold. That meant sit still
to me, that I cannot stake a bridge
while air chokes in the manmade heat.

Which was a parent, a flight that fear ended,
a drive instead to what was now my and
your familiar. I thought your shoes were
birds. Fans blew water through huge doors
and wheels did not hinder the destruction
of the Inca nor the Maya. Wheels. Were
shoes by another name.

At that point in the season we began to
look ahead, knowing that to go there
is only to assume the travel and lay by
the work. What each day brings is
the making old of recent news,
those incapable of updating.
The odor of rubber and waiting.

What really frightens me about those planes
is not the possibility of murder they affirm,
but the scrim of corporate dying
they prove. A smooth overbright
end, *molten aluminum sounds*
like it, the looming in *um*.
Yes, dying is a fall within the mouth.
Partnership like fire, death without death.

Do you recall, Alisa,
when I saw you at the assembly,
the very moment winged eyes set on you?
There was *nothing* above us,
in the sky in 1973.
I thought your shoes were birds.



Eric Wertheimer has published poetry and is the author of "Imagined Empires: Incas, Aztecs, and the New World of American Literature, 1771-1876" and "Underwriting: The Poetics of Insurance in America, 1721-1873." He is professor of English and American Studies at Arizona State University. Contact him at eric.wertheimer@asu.edu.

Spielberg

By Eric Wertheimer

© 2009

Margaret: "*Money is,
In the long pull of time, still money.*"
To which he: "*No it's not,
that is why we're here.*"

Bottom line of money's
sortilège, Midas would argue with jewelers
(whose jingle is not to
be trusted by those who sought

a wounding) he'd fall
and say "value" is what can
be seen with thine eyes, or had he known, what parts
of Christ we can jar into beauty and

count languidly at card tables.
In the newer regions of sorrow.
some kings can turn trains around
with the twist of a finger and say to the rest,

go hide. Who was Midas then?
And what would the gentiles in
Tim's gang have to say to history's best sleight,
the touchstone of heaps and

transformations, around which the wind falls?
"*Money can't be seen, that is why we are here.*"
And what of money, in analytic truth?
Could anyone avoid its probing eyes and liquid calm,

a burned femur buried safe
in an old velvet bag;
or resist in all sincerity
the tragic veil of Saint Veronica?

Solitaire

By Eric Wertheimer

© 2009

This menu of starts
Excessive deals and
Draws. The nervous
Retroming that selects
Undo. An ace should go
There, followed soon
By whatever you can
Pull. And drag.

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If you do it as fast as
You can, there is small
Comfort, in the length
Of losses. They all come
In threes, but every fraction
Draws its own probable
Sum, the end game, sometimes
Visible from the first
Turning over. You lose
Without a move. Your
Love is a boat with two
Hulls. The whacky
Unshuffle that greets
A win, precedes the
Stacking of the deck.

Where is losing?
In soft land
Predicated on hardcut
logic, a marketing
Rather than a gaming.
Or the same kind of
Luck, four hundred years old,
Done with hand and face.
Or the hardware, the weary
Grip that
Grasps you back, that chains
You radial to a breasted
Ease? No more questions
No more backwards
thinking.
Time for a free cell.

Of Ordinary Time

By Eric Wertheimer

© 2009

Startled by its effective agony, the heat
shivers, exhausted and unamazed
by the alchemy it was struck to repeat, again
a dull cough on a cold night;
two tons to this side insufficient,
an hydraulic push of breath, the heat half,
or a signal that the thing is breaking,
so much space to be responsible for,

you can feel its vented back break each
time the mercury tips out of merciful
favor, and sends it to work, transferring burn to burn,
spinning disaster; call repair
wish the contacts are unruined
by vapor and crystals, trust the labor of its
progressive failure does not find its register
in the new lungs of children
(silver berry bark, lily pollen, gum media).
The bleached night stays the same despite
engines thrown at its secret virus of sorrow,
its uncaring welcome into what it truly is,
white light thrown over to darkness, clear
of the thing that makes it fire by day.

Dining

By John Mikal Haaheim

© 2009

To please her, he invited to dine,
old friends, warmed-over muffins
crusty beyond their welcome.
Fluffed a centerpiece from dried pages
of Harlequin novels, Buffalo grass and glass
apples floating umber seeds adrift in transparent core.

He delivered dishes – steaming spices
of parsley, marjoram, bay,
lacking in the civil discourse.
Offered up a custard of mortal flavor, tedious
mannered dessert with caramel presentation
beside his ochre silence.

From ullage of the hour, he fashioned
bouquets of eaves-droppings, cobbled
together by *I remember* and *When I was young*.
In supernumerary posture, he lingered until,
undone by regret, he loosened his waist
and mourned obbligato in a minor key.

About the Arizona Consortium for the Arts

The Arizona Consortium for the Arts is a Non-Profit Organization approved by the Arizona Corporation Commission in February 2008. We are currently establishing 501c3 tax-exempt status. We are all volunteer. We are educators, artists, performers, writers and supporters of all artistic endeavors, and are proponents and supporters of the rich, vibrant and diverse community of the Greater Phoenix area as well as the entire state.



The Arizona Consortium's vision is to create a multicultural arts center, where children, teens and adults will become inspired, to develop their creative abilities, in conjunction with exhibiting artists, writers, actors, dancers and musicians who will share their expertise in a gallery, theater setting. Please visit www.artizona.org or www.theblueguitarmagazine.org for more information about networking, donating, advertising, volunteering or submitting.

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Magazine Cover Contest Results



Submissions for The Blue Guitar cover art-logo contest were carefully reviewed by the Arizona Consortium for the Arts' panel of distinguished art committee judges. They chose the first-place winner — Marjorie Boyer's painting "The Blue Guitar Magazine." It was also decided by the art committee that Marjorie Boyer's work will be the permanent cover, symbol and logo of the magazine. Above, the second-place winner was "Stained Glass Blue Guitar" by Sharon McCarthy. Below, the third-place winner was "The Blue Guitar" Arizona Scenery — stained glass and brass wire by Holly Wagner. The second- and third-place winners and their works will be featured in upcoming issues of the magazine. For more information, visit www.theblueguitarmagazine.org or www.artizona.org.



Tributes And Dedications

Meryl Susan Goldman eulogy
October 19, 2008

First, we would like to thank everyone for coming to celebrate our beautiful daughter's life. Also, the many, many emails and phone calls were very heartwarming.

Second, we would like you to know that her doctors, led by her internist, Dr. Kaczar, her cardiologist Dr. Tim Byrne and the wonderful staff at Banner Good Samaritan Hospital were absolutely amazing in the care given her during her 2 and a half week stay in the hospital, most of it in ICU.

Whenever I called Dr. Kaczar, he called me back very quickly and talked to me as though he had all of the time in the world. He discussed everything fully and with great concern and caring. He and all of the other doctors and most of the nurses in the ICU were just as caring. It made all of the difference to us at this difficult time.

As some of you know, Meryl had a difficult medical life. She had Hodgkins cancer at the age of fourteen. This left her with a weak immune system.

Seven years ago, she had a deep vein thrombosis that left her with problems, swelling and much pain. She was in a wheelchair for 6 months and during this time, she was determined to get back to a normal life. I took her in a wheelchair to two job interviews.

After this, she had a hysterectomy and open heart surgery for a leaking valve. Throughout this time, she suffered and complained but always persevered. This perseverance was a strong part of her nature.

After she improved, she went back to school and discovered that she had a fine



talent for fused glass art. She went at it with passion and a lot of hard work and creativity. Her work improved amazingly and despite her tendency to overdo, at times, which led to exhaustion, she never gave up.

A year ago, she moved to a wonderful artists complex in Ajo, Arizona. They had renovated a historic school into apartments, a gallery, workrooms, etc., and welcomed many very talented, diverse artist. There, she did some fine work and met wonderful friends and they are here today.

I'm sure you've noticed that I am not wearing unrelieved black,

Today, Meryl's favorite place was always the ocean and this ocean color is in her honor. She had the opportunity to visit friends, at the ocean, this summer and it brought her great joy.

Meryl was a much-loved sister, daughter and mother. She gave us her greatest gift 20 years ago in the person of Michael Asher Goldman, our grandson.

We will all miss you, Meryl, and think of you always. I can feel your spirit, happy to be without pain and bathed in God's light.



To Deborah Lois Dean

who disappeared May 3, 1985. Her family and friends love her and miss her and are trying to find her.

For more information:
www.myspace.com/missing_deborah_lois_dean

And to all others who are missing, as well as their loved ones, who still hold out hope, this inaugural issue is lovingly dedicated.

"Things as they are are changed upon the blue guitar."

— Excerpt from Wallace Stevens' 1937 poem "The Man With the Blue Guitar." Copyright reserved, Random House Inc.



Volume 1,
Number 1
Spring Issue
FREE!

“Things
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