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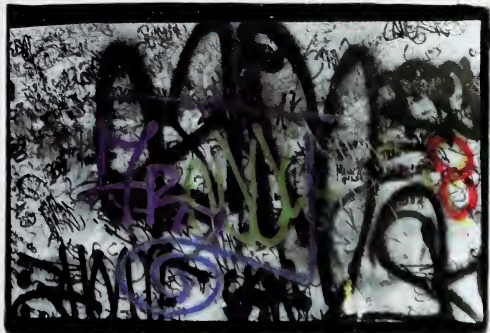
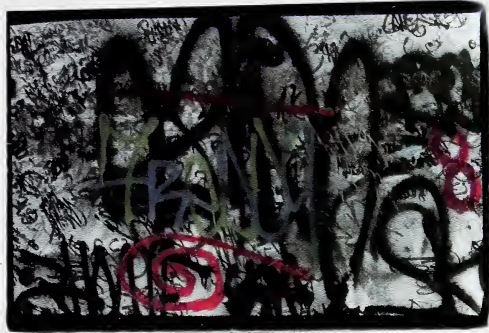
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Howth Castle

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All students at UMass/Boston are encouraged to submit their original works of poetry, fiction, essays and artwork to **Howth Castle**. All manuscripts should be typed, double spaced with author's name and address. Howth Castle is located on the 4th floor of Wheatley Hall, Room 174.

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## Poetry

The Bouffantes	Kathy Morris	6
Three Kings of Kenmore	Frank Finney	11
20th Yahweh	Ames Colt	26
Soul of the Lost One	Danielle Georges	26
incidental #2	Philip David Welsh	27
elizabeth	Philip David Welsh	27
Tribute to Joe Val (1926-1985)	R.B. Fitzgerald	38
nineteen's goats	Philip David Welsh	47
In The Coop	Edie Aronowitz Mueller	48
curbstone	w.c.	49
Badger Dreaming	Hugh C. Abernathy Jr.	58
The Porch's Edge	Ann Ruhl	59
Robyn, Ma, and the Green Sweatshirt	Rick McKee	65
Untitled (For Mallory)	Danielle Georges	72
K.R.	Colleen O'Rork	73
The Chinese Picture	Colleen O'Rork	74
My daughter marks time	Edie Arnowitz Mueller	75
Heartbreak Haiku	Colleen O'Rork	76
pamela	Philip David Welsh	76
Photograph of Wallace Stevens	Gale Warner	77
From the Window, November	Gale Warner	78
The rest of the Way	Tom Laughlin	80
Reality Within A Poem	Patrick Sylvain	81
Six horses Running	Danielle Georges	86

## Short Fiction

Kicking	Rick McKee	8
An End to Education	Andrew Feld	28
The Ride	Deborah Noyes	40
Tracking My Muse	Jon Seamans	60
Lester	Rachel Cann	66
Getting Through Where There's No Getting Through To	Clara Obermeyer	82

## Non-Fiction

Seventeen Leaf Honey Moon	Tom Riordan	13
Westwood Revisited	Kevin Fitzgibbon	50

## Art/Photography

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# The Bouffantes

Kathy Morris

The bouffantes were a couple  
who sat at table five  
every night and  
because her hair  
was teased and sprayed up to there  
we named them.  
She ordered steak  
medium rare with  
a baked potato, no butter  
and he had sole with extra lemons.  
We hated serving table five  
because of the fuss they made  
and on New Year's Eve  
we rearranged the party hats  
so she got bunny ears  
and we giggled at the thought  
of the ears  
on top of  
the hair  
on top of  
the head  
but  
she left them with her napkin  
on the plate with  
the half eaten baked potato.





Steven Gyurina



# Kicking

Rick McKee

We're all down here waiting because the train is late and maybe because there's no such thing as a happy ending and everybody's on their way somewhere else anyway, so when they hear the steel drums playing some people go to where the concrete is softer and plays between your toes at low tide, and they snap their fingers for a frosty red drink on a private beach that's always just on the wrong side of the 20" screen, and others shy away from the eternal sun, aware of their own slipping vertical hold, and opt for a single clear and thoughtless night beneath the thousand tiny candles of a once-virgin canopy, and they're easy to see behind the Mona Lisa smiles, and there are some who tilt their heads just a little forward, over into the stream, and kind of contemplate the round, sharp eighth notes and trills that play hide-and-seek with their ears, and though some pretend not to listen-all wound up in the sports or comics or editorials-they can't help but let the sound through, even if it means not giving Mike Barnicle his due, and because of the sound, they see colors, big and loud all over, brighter than high beams, colors that are already inside, just brought around some by that skinny black man behind the dented barrels, the guy with the lousy posture kicking up against the gray slab across the tracks; but he's not trying to make colors and vacations for us with his music (maybe he'd be dressed in rhinestones if he were, or maybe he'd be somewhere, anywhere else) because he's not trying to do anything, he's just playing the 1001 tunes he's shedded from the Real Book, like so many other players who wonder how the same God could make a Hitler and a Coltrane; and some people just understand that Muse, that musician, his hands working the drums like one of those Japanese chefs with the big knives, and this man, this I'm-very-tired-of Dinty-Moore-and-thank-you-very-much-for-the-quarter man, is feeding some folks who know they're hungry and aren't afraid to show it, like that woman next to me, the one who has to send her kid to daycare so she can sweat a buck from her tight-ass boss: She's hungry, you can see how with her tired eyes closed and she's breathing like every breath's a sigh-she's being led by the music, going on a soft mattress to the place where she doesn't give a flying fuck if her hair looks greasy or not blown dry like the paper dolls in the doctor's office magazines, or the talking heads between miniseries on the black and white; and her eyes are still

closed and she'd go even further but her little one is getting fidgety ten minutes into the wait and no train in sight, and he needs to bounce or jump or spin or run and he can't do those with his mother holding his hand, so he kicks the dirty cement with the rubber of his sneakers and he likes the way his feet bounce off the "FUCK YOU's" and "BOB & KAREN's" and the "PINK FLOYD's" scrawled in latenight ink on the walls, and his mother tells him without being mean and without any "R's" to stop kicking the walls, Arnie, or the whole station will fall down, and the little boy isn't sure whether to believe his mother or not but he stops kicking the walls anyway and says he has to pee as only a child can say it. The steel drums pause a minute, Skinny's got to take a breath or scratch his crotch or something, and without it, the station sounds like it's between stations on a radio and all the static and white noise and heartbeats start to sound the same and they crescendo like all of us are on the same bar and some men who just got here with briefcases full of ulcers don't know that Skinny was playing the steel drums a few sighs ago and they don't care because they're going to be late if the trains are late again and maybe their marriages depend on them getting home by 7:05 for the first time in a decade and maybe it doesn't matter anymore, but mostly these men need to be on time for something because they are the watchwatchers and they watch, and look, there goes one or two running back up the stairs to call a taxi or find a comfortable stool to drown in: Maybe I'll call home sick tonight, they think, and they miss Skinny who's just starting up again, something easy this time, a low-calorie tune that he hopes will loosen some purses, and some people hush when he starts up and we all seem to decrescendo and let him solo for a chorus or two; meanwhile, most people here are planted in the cement with disease-free routines, swaying now and again in the lukewarm breeze of a train on the other set of tracks, but there's a couple across from me who are two sparrows fighting for the same branch space, and they have maps and they have suitcases and they have sunglasses and they have traveler's checks and they have fashions by Coca Cola and they have tokens and they have a brown plastic bottle of suntan lotion which just spilled out and bled on the floor in front of them and the woman chirps at the sight of it but leaves it there anyway and the man is certain this is where they should be because it's here on the map, honey, see, I'm pointing to it, this is where we should be, but he's not even acknowledged Skinny's drums and I wonder what it is that that Walker woman wrote about anyway?, about it pissing God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and

don't notice it? But before Skinny's finished playing the head, the two Midwestern birds pull in their plumage a little because they both realize that I'm not the only eyes watching them and they kind of confer in the background where it's leafy and the hawks can't see you; by the time Skinny's song has ended, one or two hands clapping overwhelm the sound of falling quarters, but how much of their politeness is for Skinny and how much is it for the wire snapping that starts up on the third rail? and now everyone leans into the hot wind that makes you feel like you're about to leave Hell and Skinny starts up again himself, even though he knows most of his audience likes that grating track music so much more than his own, but who, including Skinny, gives a feces? and he looks down the tunnel for the single headlight just like everyone else and we all build to a fortissimo as the oncoming scrape becomes louder and louder and you know that some of us must be thinking about what it'd be like to jump or get pushed at just the right moment and soon it's so loud I could hold my voice at arm's length and still not see it, and I can't hear steel drums anymore, but next to me, like a calf in a herd, that little boy can't see the salivating lions and his little boy alto cuts through for a moment and he cries to his mother still holding his hand that he didn't mean to make the station fall down and his mother pauses in the herd a moment, oblivious of the danger, and bends to kiss the top of her boy's curly black hair and holds him closer; and all at once they seem to be the only people in the whole Godforsaken station; I look at my own dufflebag and see Robyn throwing underwear and glass-framed pictures and a ring at me, and I want to hug the boy too, and tell him that whether he believes it or not, kicking the walls is one of the best things a kid can do.

# Three Kings of Kenmore

Frank Finney

Six bloodshot eyes bounced up Beacon looking for the smile  
 that promises a romp in the Comm. Ave. bushes  
 or a little silver for a down payment on a pint.  
 The last twenty or so suits with their perfumed escorts  
 hurried by without even a dime to spare  
 and the heartshaped jeans with the white lace top  
 spit spearment toward Rasta Curl's face.  
 Lionhair growled "Hew you wit dat ghetto blasta ken you hep us out?"  
 Rockcharlie waved a filthy dollar nodding "Pizza Pad"  
 in pursuit of 6:30 score  
 their electric star Citgo over Bethlehem  
 three kings of Kenmore dodging Mass. Ave. metal. Too poor for  
 Father's specials  
 but never forgetting a pizzabuck buys a beer at Marlborough Market  
 and bottle hunting season will soon be at its peak.  
 Lion hair spies two empty greens at M & M corner  
 close to the feet of a yuppie convention  
 all teeth and Pierre Cardin  
 twisting their way into the Eliot;

Hey Romeo you gotta prime time lady.  
 Can we borrow the keys to your BMW?

A crew cut in a sportcoat looked down at the remains of a Sidewalk Sam  
 while his black bra cotton and lipstick under shag  
 tugged at his sleeves suggesting Rockcharlie take a bath and shampoo.

If your boyfriend don't mind you can do the honors. I'll bet  
 you gotta poodle at home to practice on.

Rasta Curls combed the line a polished politician  
 managed to shake two thick white hands and a thin white joint.

It's jus a matta of payshints broze hey 'memba flag papez an'  
 hundred dolla bills  
 I used to love the strawberry kine  
 Rockcharlie gotta match? Mines all wet  
 hey ain't dat Spikeysirts? No shit she mus smell da herb

switchblade spiked seatbelt built for two slides down her hips  
 round her 7½ black leather inches  
 three color hair above purpleblack Maybeline goggles bubblegum voice  
 patchouli painted neck.

Smells good guys, headin' toward the steps? Saved you a spot.  
 Want some wine?  
 Too bad there won't be anymore parties in the hiden' place Those  
 MDC hammerheads busted up the ledge.

Three kings of Kenmore and a lady of the court hustling their way  
 toward the Rat's entrance.

They're pushin' us out like the indians Charlie,  
 they don't even give us no resavashun.

# Seventeen Leaf Honey Moon

Tom Riordan

1.

Jo's brother says it's normal; jet lag. Ruth calls it the mental equivalent of ten-year-olds falling down the stairs in the morning after overnight growth spurts. At first I can only think about it in my sleep. I dream so hard of The Middle Land that I rest only after I wake up. I can't think with my regular brains. I don't have either energy or language. On my way to B.U. for the second time Tuesday—I go early, at the wrong time, and then later at the right time—I hear a song that a telephone-pole guy up the block has on his radio at the top of a telephone pole. I gravitate toward it in the same daze I've been wandering everywhere since flying home on a thirty-six-hour-long Sunday. (One dish of Western airline food and we both get our diarrhea, finally.) I stand listening. A rhythm takes hold in my head. Finally, images start to drape and link themselves in poses of concern. I don't read it yet but I start to feel an impact. My eyeheart has been soaked in a vast Chinese ocean. On my way back from work I'm pulled onto Oak St. out of a desire to see the schoolchildren. I've never done anything like this before. The relished, doll-like children of The Middle Land have left me hungry to see children here. A crossing guard matron—a cartoon puffin in a navy coat, fat blown cheeks, hands in pockets, white scarf swathing ears and chin, a cute white WAVE hat—waits there rocking at the knee, humming. But no schoolchildren.

2.

There's so evident a web of things when you sit on the bank of the Li-jang watching fit young fishermen twirl their twirlees upriver, seeing iridescent violet dragonflies twirl and wheel in the hot air, stroking the Shy Grass. The hand and eye draw in the motion of life form and water, of the feathery brushstrokes of tall bamboo clumps, and the dabbing smell of Chinese parsley in picture-perfect greenleaf patches. On your sun-baked slab of retina you register the gentle heat of the stone rice-raking squares. So much so, you feel void of relatedness. You feel strangely noncenter. It isn't only travel's movement: far afield of your own web of connection in life and amazed to find yourself still conscious, as if after death. Here life in death, mixed in death, is shaded in.

Human mixes in animal. Divine brushstrokes mix. We hunger to see children. A line threading between free and captive, eater and eaten, is but brushstroke. White, tan, or black, the ubiquitous dog trots and grins. He's fed rice, food garbage. He chews on a half dried, rigor-mortis rat that's grinning. Front and hind feet tightly lashed together, muzzles tightly lashed, a pair of dogs snarl, froth, struggle in the backtrap of a teenage girl's bicycle as she wheels gaily homeward in the streaming traffic. One hangs, slow-roasted in his trot and grin, by a thick hook through the ears, in thick dark copper skin, like a holyman in India or Africa with a walking staff, a bronzed skinny mahatma in another heat-baked land's temple. You dot an eye. You fall asleep and cannot pack up your colors. You may glimpse yourself sprawled out clumsy and drowsy on the bank, wave, call something out.

### 3.

The first morning, even the convocation of birds waits for the wake-up broadcast from the public-address nest high above skeezy North Dump-ling Restaurant. The second morning a convocation of dreary gray rain waits. Mao Zedong's portrait hangs for kitsch over the guestbed. Beyond us, the convoked birds, and floodgate rain, no one wakes. The screeching loudspeaker squawks around, around about the need for this, the goodness of that, the advisability of a third thing. A scratchy Karen Carpenter song in Chinese inspires the rain with more good, old-fashioned revolutionary fervor. Then, to martial music and panting grunts—"Yi, er, san, si! Yi, er, san, si!"—birds and rain do lonely calisthenics in the cold, coal-gray dawn. We sit up whispering. Pragmatic, more advanced, no less ardent human revolutionaries stay snug asleep in grayish underwoolens. Mao's shining portrait in the usual Five Hero Gallery with Marx, Lenin, Engles and a fourth European—*Stalin?*—may be glimpsed on the blackened rear wall of the restaurant if the sun is willing to filter back that far. What to do with this thing? Pigs don't eat old color poster-pantheons, so leave it hanging there. Waste's a crime! Mao is officially 30% wrong and 70% right, but many say the number's order is part of what's wrong. Anyway, it's old cult. It's now said "Zedong Thought is not as useful as apartment blocks." The once Great Helmsman's Leap Forward and Proletarian Cultural Revolution are very painful memories. Gang of Four ringleader Jiang Qing's trial is held in '76 as soon as husband Mao, rumored "fifth



member," has safely died. The plumbing bursts on, water rushes into the squat-toilet and now Chris gets up.

#### 4.

Zhou En-Lai is loved for saving the nation from horrible upheaval and for wise, kind policies. When Chris, Wu Li Fei and the girls give Jo her Chinese name, *Zhou Wan Lin*, they're hugely pleased to give his family name to her. The *Wan Lin* means "Beautiful Warm-Hearted Jade." The girls find Joanna specially beautiful and slightly Chinese-looking with her long, dark hair and almondine eyes, and find her *Putonghua* accent delightfully good. I am given the name *Li Cong Hai*. Chris, my younger sister or *meimei*, is *Li Hui*, meaning "Clever Li;" and my *Cong Hai* means "Intelligent Ocean" with a connotation, the girls claim, of a heart big enough to sail a boat in. Naturally we find the names perceptive. To Jo's mind I've always been a sea-creature of surprising watery intelligence. She calls me Sjogod and Cetacean. And to me she's rare and beautiful for her jewellike face and undimming human warmth. Naming is never taken lightly here. The arcane art is assigned to one skilled in it, as matchmaking once was. In the Wu clan, the paternal grandfather is the namer, and he's Wu Li Fei's favorite, and she his. She'll succeed him, and likely as not because *Li Fei* has subtle literary connotations. Her own father scoffs at her talents with words, but likely as not that just goes to show why he is not the namer, and wasn't the namer even of his and his wife's children. They are both physicists. Wu Li Fei studies physics too, but says her grandfather's thick word books feel far more at home on her small lap than her parent's thick physics books. "Now that you have names," one of the girls says, "you will be able to sleep well here, I think." And on our third morning we did.

#### 5.

We rap on the cold predawn windowpane of the motorhouse bunkroom to wake a young jeep driver to take us to Guilin bus station. The moon slouches, lounges in the jet black sky as if at work. One of the girls arranged this for us using her *guanxi*—a kiss? A promise of an English lesson? Fruit? Sleepy and tousle-haired, he manages a grin as we set out, and a grin and a wave as he drops us off. We buy oranges and sweet buns in the dark outside the building from women who pad silently down the black streets, bobbing under shoulder poles balanced

and freighted by large twin baskets. Some start for town at two. The road's never unused: there's scuffing and shuffling everywhere even in the deep darkness. On the Li, men are fishing from slender bamboo-pole rafts with big, black, domesticated cormorants. They hold twenty-foot-long bamboo poles and the birds wear chokers and are leashed at the foot. Thin boys net frogs, turtles, water snakes and Babyfish with long bamboo-handle nets. Countless thousands of bats teem, scoop, dip, and slash in the inky sky overhead. The rats and mice burgle each building. Owls hoot. Ducks lay eggs. At pond edges, women wring a moonlight wash. Cocks crow at any hour. Love is made enough to get a billion babies. Tiny half-pint plastic milk bottles are secreted in tiny padlocked boxes. Old men read by flickering rushlight, ruining their eyesight. Cats prowl. Wind comes, a rainsquall is unloaded, a fresh wind comes. Another small rainsquall moves in behind the first one, is unloaded. Buffalo sleep ahoof. Ponies neigh. Men go seeking counsel. There's not enough room in the day. The day is full. The night's three-quarters full.

## 6.

Jo and I munch on stuffed rice buns called *baozi* and crisp lemony pears, while old China hands Chris and Liz attack the Velveeta and chocolate-chip granola bars we brought. The college girls slip in the door smiling, to take turns cooking in the kitchen, and delightedly pet Jo. They take up her hand and rub it, take up her hair to smooth it, drape their wrists down on her shoulders. Same-sex Chinese soon touch. Rather than after friendship or "liking" is established, touch is used to suggest and promote liking, as we might touch a love partner or pony or a beautiful melon. Soon we're feasting on dried dofu braid and fungus soup, Spicy Four Vegetables, Apricot-Tint Cauliflower, Yellow-Blossom Rabe, Savory and Crispy Fried Eggs d'Wu Li Fei, and Hoisin Sauce Pork. Liz sips whisky, Chris sips beer, Jo and I sip tea, and the local girls just soup-liquid. A too-persistent visitor Chris nicknamed Hardy slips in at mid-meal, doesn't find a stool at the table, and quickly and chivalrously announces that he unhappily must go because he has many tasks to accomplish that evening but will we please only telephone him if we ever need anything. After dinner we practice using the word *tyro* in sentences. All over China and the world, and even as we speak, there sit a million young scholars jamming their brains full of the kind of useless vocabulary TOEFL threatens to test them on. The girls have a far more

extensive repertoire of *haute cuisine* English synonyms than we do. Wu Li Fei can't stop giggling. Liz, drunk, tries to teach four-letter swears, but Chris stops her. *Americans beware, and bone up, lest we become tyros (or, tiros) in our native tongue!*

## 7.

After much anxious eyeing of inscrutable oriental schedule boards, wild straining at incomprehensible loudspeaker announcements, desperate asking, and desperate re-asking of two amused, delighted, helpful young women at the ticket-window, we succeed in getting loaded onto a 6:10 bus with a new squad of People's Liberation Army recruits still warm and fresh-faced from their mothers' homes with motley duffel bags and still-warm sweet breads and tote bags of fruit. Seats 1 & 2 are for the driver's buddy and the young PLA leader, we're given 3 & 4, and we have a nice trip together relentlessly and recklessly pressing oranges and peanuts upon each other at every turn of the road, and watching Guangxi Region's strange and eerie, aerie-like karst mountains countlessly bobbing and disappearing and reappearing behind and beyond and beyond each other's heads, each a slight shade lighter than those before it, taking perspective itself out of perspective. They're like the faces of the twenty village children, the elder just behind the faces of the younger and the wonder slightly dimmer each face back, who assemble in a peasant's home in tiny Daxu to stand staring at us, while with our unearthly faces and to the tune of our jabber we eat the sumptuous lunch spread before us free by the happy, welcoming family. Stared at with special wonder is chattering, jewellike, little Wu Li Fei. She, although *Zhongguoren* like themselves, sits among us undestroyed, unflustered—at ease!—inside the ring of radiance of our potent alien presences. Their eyes bug at her. The bravest boys swap a whisper. Five dogs talking are not as amazing as one man talking with them.

## 8.

What possibly is the relationship? Is Wu Li Fei divine? Are we minions, oafs, angels, colleagues, owners of her? They study us dumbfounded and rapt. Our elegant host comes in, his disheveled blue Mao suit and beaten-up black slippers, as his wife sets down a colander of steaming sweetpotatoes, and he pulls up a stool with a big nice smile on his weather-wizened face. He and I will now consecrate our wonderful though unfathomable relationship in front of everyone by smoking a

cigarette and tasting his moonshine together. But, while I *am* from another world, I am not a deity or even in the service of a deity. Instead I'm an alcoholic and cigarette addict and I cannot perform this rite with him. (Liz, meanwhile, is dying to.) Dignifiedly he lights a cigarette himself and hands the flagon back to his wife with a simple, seemly gesture saying "No, we won't after all," and we try talking and smiling at one another instead. I would love to smoke and drink with him for protocol and ceremony, but all I have available are my two hands and thirty iffy worlds of Putonghua. I try to point out my companions to him: "Meimei, airen (*love person*), Meiguo pengyou (*Beautiful Land friend*), Zhongguo pengyou." He nods his whiskered face concordantly. He glows. His stature grows. Look! Isn't that he himself there sitting, smoking, talking, and nodding in communion with the moonlings! We shake hands, rise, and take photos of his wife, his son, his daughter, his self, and all the village children together. Wu Li Fei copies his address. Not only has he been lucky enough to host us with their food, but he now has been also fortunate enough in his *guanxi* to arrange a Kodak blessing for them all!

## 9.

After eating in a big Wuzhou wharf-rat dive featuring wood-flame-burnt, onion-bit gravy, we got on the boat. It's a warm night, clear, full moon, tres romantique. We share the front port cabin with two stylish young lovebirds from Xianggang and lovely views of the moon-shimmered river even from our pillows. Quiet, comfy, with a cafe up top, good air, and stirring rivershore panoramas, the boat trip's also dirt cheap. There's apparently one cockroach, too. I don't see it, but my love Zhou Wan Lin does, and lies awake for hours afterward meditating on it. I slumber deeply. *I heard the Dolphin sigh as he slid into the water. We drank cachaca and smoked the green cheroots.* One town downriver, we slide dreamily up to a quay under a pretty, pastel Apricot Blossom Hotel, then she sleeps too. Next morning after dim sum breakfast we debark in bustling Guangzhou and skillfully catch a bus to an even more bustling Guangzhou. We go looking at hotels. One won't take Westerners and claims to be full, two are too expensive and touristy (90 yen, no class), and two are on the too-quiet Shamian Island foreign enclave where the famous, monstrous White Swan, a skyscraping hen warehouse, charges 300 yen and up, a room—but you can arrange to play golf. I shudder to say. Finally we drop our bags at the stately Ai

Qun, a half-new old hotel half-renamed the Renmin (*People Hotel*), smack downtown, with breathtaking views up and down the Zhu (*Pearl*) River. One whole wall's half glass. The Ai Qun's old world elegance and now un-Chinese luxury seems a value at 80 yen. We really *try* to find a cheap divey roach hotel, but this once we have to bite the bullet. Hey, *it's hot out, and it's lunchtime.*

## 10.

Grandfather's face starts beaming at the sight of us, then beams twice as brightly to hear we're Wu Li Fei's friends, and family of her fabled English teacher "Li Hui." Hospitality to friends, friends of friends, family of friends and friends of family is ironbound in China. Hard negotiations open up right away. Her brother Wu Li Xiong initially demands us for supper every night and for all-day escorting by him and his lovely fiancée Cao Hui for our whole stay—which he also insists we extend. Jo tries to quote the proverb "*Ce dao san qian bi you lu,*" (*Wagon arrive foot of mountain then find road*) in support of our not planning too far ahead. Wu Li Xiong though wants to take four days off from the telecommunications plant he hasn't had a day off from in three years except Sundays, which sounds kind of risky to us. But he's taking the hospitality thing only one step at a time too, we find out the following day, when he demands that we come stay with them and Grandfather's live-in nurse and cook, Ai Ying. The old man puts his hands together and we succumb. Chinese refuse at first offer and then happily accept when pressed, and we do the same. We stay at the Ai Qun two nights and at the Wus' above the Sony store on Renmin Lu two nights. *Li Fei, be proud of Li Xiong for his grace and skill as host.* We like him and the girls a lot. Grandfather is in warm hands. He's a superbly merry old man and he likes us as much as we like him. China is one place I've been where it's up-and-up to grin and smile as much as I do anyway, and now here's Grandfather obviating the language barrier even more by his own predilection for mute eager nods and hearty, hoary, silent laughs.

## 11.

At Xingping it has to be our honeymoon. I can tell just by looking out the balcony door at the purplish-orange sunset bathing the thighs and valleys of the knee-like karst formations. In the foreground sprawls the wide curve of the Li. Assorted riverboats chug, roar, and toot past.

Comic maverick ferries whirl slowly in the current's trajectory. We can only lie in bed—straw mats beneath embroidered silk comforters—and look. Chris and Liz attack a brown paper cone of peanuts and a quart of Jing Ling beer. It's too dreamy. We're very far away from home, truly on the other side of the world, and now the beautifully alien mountainscapes are glowing with such orange-red intensity that they will melt, *are* melting down into the prehistoric water. As we look and listen, the visual stillness one way or the other causes cessation of the boat-traffic racket. Hill thighs and armpits glower, pulse with molten energy. We drift off, Jo's arm draped over me from behind, one cheek at my ear. Our faces glow. This is quiet. This is preternatural quiet in The Middle Land. Having reached it we lie in it. Night falls, Chris and Liz must fall off too, and soon the scimitar moon rises at two o'clock to carefully scythe the karst. A hundred crazy cocks (and at one point I heard a man) start to crow out dizzily, crazily, raw cries skidding pellmell up: black flares, black meteorites. By dawn the cocks have spent themselves, and the job of beating us out of the bush of fondest dreams falls to the big, unmuffled, clacking motors of the river sampans as the first pale yellow rays of daylight bathe and fill the smooth, popliteal bights, elbows and hollows left by night.

## 12.

We drag a group to the Snake Restaurant one night and eat snakes, turtle, and Wawafish—a three foot long, dark, wide, flat newt-looking monstrosity, half head, that's said to whimper like an infant in the ear-shot of humans—all washed down by the truly daring with Snake Bite Wine. The next evening Ai Ying encores, cooking among other things Bow-Wow for us. We see the great, white chest-striped Himalayan Black Bear at the zoo and the pitiful 6-legged cow—rather, the brave cow with two extra pitiful legs. At Foshan we take ridiculous pictures in Buddhist big-wig headdresses, and we hit the Turtle on the head twice each with five-fen coins for good luck. We double-date to the romantic and quite Botanical Gardens with Wu Li Xiong and Cao Hui, shop in the splendid Friendship store, criss-cross the city, on our borrowed ancient bicycles. Our urbanite experience more than compensates us for the reduction of our language capability (Cantonese, *Guangdonghua*, is spoken on the streets here rather than Mandarin, *Potonghua*) and we feel quite at home. I think native Chinese peasants fifty miles inland might be more at sea in downtown Guangzhou than we are. We hear of certain



establishments where live monkeys are strapped beneath restaurant tables with the shaved tops of their heads sticking up through holes, where then mallets are used to bust in through the skulls and diners dive into the warm brain with eager chopsticks; then at the open-air market we see hooded palm civets, white fluffy kittens, and a tiny fawn lying calmly with a hoof cut off right there in front of it, presumably to prevent its bounding back off, fifty miles inland. We hurry off.

### 13.

"I have to learn how to say 'I love you' in Chinese. You see, I love you in Chinese," I say. "I love you in Chinese!" my love Zhou Wan Lin replies. We get up. More Guilin drizzle and our soft shoes feel, if it were possible, wetter than when we pulled them off last night. My love Zhou Wan Lin's been cold and damp for three days running and both our colds, mild till now, threaten to break out of the stalls. My remedy, that becomes instantly famous as Li Cong Hai Food, is leftover rice simmered in whole dry milk, lovely maple-tasting brown sugar, cinnamon, bananas, and pear. Even the local girls appreciate the break from noodle-scallion soup this morning. I joke I used to be a breakfast cook in the Chinese navy and have cooked a lot of junk food in my day, and another new Chinglish tradition is born: "When it rains, cook Li Cong Hai food and serve steaming hot with one bad joke." Jiu's dog comes trotting in with Liz and refuses the new food. Diplomatically (I think), Wang Su cites an old saying "You can't teach an old dog not to eat shit." Peasant dogs eat buffalo cow-pies, she says. *Bai Hei*, her dog's name, means "White Blacky," after his supposed parents. Bai Hei herself is black. The third color dogs come in in China is light brown. Otherwise they look alike: standard undifferentiated jack-sized dogs with bear-, monkey-, human-like faces and happy tails, all rib and teat. Jiu says Bai Hei is a gift from a peasant family that nursed her during her stint in Hunan during the Cultural Revolution. Dog meat, Wang Su is explaining to Jo, is eaten specially for warmth. She'd have to be very cold before she ate Bai Hei, Jiu jokes. There's both pain and gratitude in her eye.

### 14.

A man with a leering smile accosts us in line at Guangzhou station trying to sell us two train tickets. Claiming to be leader of Guangdong province he threatens Wu Li Xiong, who hotly says something like "Yeh, and I'm Superman, too." Wu Li Xiong's heat comes from fear,



though. Sweating, he shows the man his red ID book, but won't let it out of his hands. He *isn't* sure the creep doesn't have connections but is sure it's some scam. "If he was a leader he'd walk right back and cash the tickets in no problem," he explains. "He wouldn't stand in line out here with us." His eyes flash. There's a young firebrand in him, and Cao Hui sees it and is afraid. Rice is grass, cane is grass, bamboo is grass. In the country the people always have work to do, the people will always have work to do, and the people know they always will have work to do, so that there isn't any haste in it. The cool river's long for the netmen. The two-and-a half-inch sprats will dance like silver laughter in their net. The day is long. Each sweep will net ten fish for them. The river never stops growing, so the growers never stop tending it unhurriedly. Li Xiong and Li Fei's father, separated from his loved ones for two years' study in Seattle, sends them a photo he's taken of the moon, inscribed *You see, the Western moon's no rounder than our own. I love you, Pop*. But the children want to see it themselves and resent leaders with half of their brains saying no to them. The leaders want them to stay home and labor for the greater good of the national family, but the restless young wish to go off and explore the world. Cao Hui squeezes Wu Li Xiong's hand to soothe him. She wants him to do both.

## 15.

A racket of tourboats, ferries and feisty little tugs to tug the tourboats through the rapids all crank up the engine of the Xingping day. Between the lovely cave-pocked karst mountains, the land is gentle and sun-baked: tiny farm villages like beads along the footpaths. There is a bridge and hotel, but the bridge's embrace isn't generous and the Li flows up to it, then shies suddenly away in a U and swims off the other way. It is here a silvery tributary shoals in and baby sprats jump silver in its shallows. Children dam its streamlets, snare the sprats and toast them on tin can lids over tiny twing fires. Two-inch fluorescent jade-green fold-winged darning needles, thick three-inch violet velvet dragons, dramatic blue-greens with shiny dark green silk wings and jet back underwings flutter over the water, then hang on a blade of grass. The bamboo creaks and moans like masts in the air-flutters. The cane is a city of bird chatter. Voices too fill the air at the quay. Ducks feed in flashy blue scarves. River weed's gathered. Rice is spread on the bridge and along roads and raked with wooden rakes or waded through with toes. The fat-faced young are

dressed in colorful clothes. The tan women, strikingly handsome in black braids, wear faded cotton pants. The men are thin, perplexed and interested, in blue cotton pants. They're men, with no children to hold with their knees, so they dangle their wrists and hands and stare at us, intent and waiting to smile. We take a place in the boat and grin. Fresh, full-hearted, the people smile back at us. Good nature is everywhere the rule. People carry it with them. It's more important than clothes.

## 16.

The Chinese view us perhaps differently than we view them. They see us almost as a different species—and so we almost are. According to biology, members of different species don't interbreed under natural conditions. In China, I wasn't viewed as a potential mate. I saw Chinese sexually, but not they me. Or if they did I didn't recognize it as such—which in biological terms amounts to the same thing. Because what finally separates tribes and then races of wildlife into different species of wildlife are not chromosomal incompatibilities but incompatibilities of sexual attraction and behavior. Populations don't diverge chromosomally or physiologically until gene pools are long segregated by behavior. In China, Chinese don't mix sexually with foreigners. An American's thought of settling in China is viewed generically as bizarre, hilarious, incomprehensible. The Chinese cannot grasp the idea because they can't comprehend why one would choose to live alone like that, with no family. The idea of marrying here is quite off-color. Chinese are Chinese, and have always been Chinese, and still are Chinese even if born and raised overseas. We tribally mongrel Americans cannot grasp it. Overseas Chinese are, to the people and government, Chinese citizens living abroad. Historically, men who can't return to China at breeding time to seek a mate, at least take another overseas Chinese. Such ethnocentricity results both *from* and *in* difficulty recognizing foreigners not only as mates, but in any sexual role. They look at you like you were hatched. They can't visualize us in a village hut, or in a family. And in no uncertain terms, Zhou Wan Lin agreed.

## 17.

Hemp grows out of the backs of the ancestors. Huge stone chiselled tomb animals from Ming and Qing days rise right up out of the maize rows. The livings' "night soil" is collected in wood buckets and slogged out to the fields as fertilizer. The living brown fungus on a dying tree is a

bonanza. A slaughtered hen's blood drains into salt water and congeals into pudding on the windowsills in a matter of six minutes. Everything is so constantly and thoroughly in use that not only is nothing wasted, but that nothing is defiled. The economy does not permit the concept to appear in the aesthetic, or vice versa. Life itself is the filter. The best water is found inside the tangerine. The economy of cheap labor and scarce commodity appears in an aesthetic of picture-postcard gardens from which leaf lettuces are so carefully stacked and borne to market that not a leaf is ever bent. Grandfather, Cao Hwi and Wu Li Xiong stand waving. Wu Li Xiong is calling something out to us from shore, but we can't hear which language even. Guangzhou gradually and sadly fades from sight. What looks like white-robed Buddhists hurrying past along the riverbank behind the bamboo clumps is in reality a fast, sacred procession of sky-glimpses between, beyond, the green-boned wood. Does a tree that falls out of the earshot make sound? Will we come back? Do we leave more behind us than popcorn and dental floss? Do we bring home any excellence of lettuce leaf? We continue to wave and start to weep. The water border to Xianggang and the West is, after all, invisible. What should we tell? A sound is not one thing. A sound is triumph, a real relationship between two different things.



Keli Jean Freeman

## Soul of the Lost One

Danielle Georges

And there he lay  
 In a mass of plasma  
 As we in scarlet sheets  
 Snarled the primal scream  
 As a pledge of allegiance  
 To ourselves  
 Narcissistic  
 Beyond repair

## 20th Yahweh

Ames Colt

Don't fear what you've yet to hear:  
 You stepped through a door that opened on a stairway  
 and disappeared into the attic.

Through the clinging mist, you walked a garden path:  
 pockets of white heat trapped in fettered soil.  
 In full enjoyment, smash definition.  
 Swollen irises soaked with light.  
 A flock of voices calls the names of those watching.  
     Wolves must shed their golden fleeces  
 and freely roam the desert.  
 Spectrum bands will be sucked dry, borders erased:  
 divine agony will shatter the crucible nations.

Mortar softens as you sit with hands reposed  
 until transparent skin vibrates a song.

## elizabeth

Philip David Welsh

February left  
 small octopi  
 perched on your door-step morning, somewhere  
 between intestines  
 and the months of Spring,  
 where dead things don't care how they smell,  
 where trees yawn higher still.  
 But come Wednesday,  
 swamps in love with weather  
 will open their mouths and let the rushes go  
 full and with the hearts of beautiful runaways  
 while the creakings  
 of tremendous bullfrogs take  
 our hands, and lead us ever  
 into the mud-puddles.

## incidental #2

Philip David Welsh

those dogs were looking for  
 kibble in death's  
 kitchenette. the rumblings  
 of their stomachs were swept up  
 by the air vents. none  
 of the dishes  
 were done, and in the  
 adjacent living-room  
 a piano and a cigarette slowly  
 danced to Brecht-Weill.



# An End to Education

Andrew Feld

He was always the type of boy that you could do nothing but worry about. When the door shut behind him, when you were sure that there was nothing more you could do for him; his sneakers were tied, his hair neatly wetted down and the comb in his back pocket, nobody could look at him and not know: this is a boy well taken care of. Still, when he was gone you had to worry: it is a vicious dirty world out there and more so for those of us who don't know it. High up, on the seventh floor, you look out the window with the curtain clawing its way behind your back and you wait for him to come home.

"You have plenty of change for the subway?" You have to ask every time he leaves and he always takes it out and counts it in front of you. How could you not worry with hands like those? When he drops a quarter it always rolls into the worst place, under something or down a crack; he has a knack for causing trouble. And he always smiles, he never stops.

"Where are you going today?"

"I don't know, just around," he says and I repeat: how could you not worry?

"Just around? That sounds very, very vague to me."

"Just around and back, Mom," he says, "I'll be back soon."

He smiles. When he smiles he could be twelve and when he frowns he could be forty, but from behind he always looks his age: twenty-eight.

"Be careful," I say, "Mother can't be everywhere."

And then he leaves. But I know more than he thinks I know: I have a few friends. One or two subway drivers and two girls who have to ride his routes to and from work. They all keep an eye out for him. I know what he does; he rides in the tunnels and above ground, sometimes he talks to somebody but most of the time he just looks at people, with his quick shy smile. I don't ask him questions anymore. Let him have his secrets, what else does he have?

It's the school children that I'm afraid of. Every crowd of them is a danger to him. Not that he would do anything to them, he's terrified of them and they can always sense it. Yet, in his mind he's twelve. I have heard and seen, yes, I know all about the cruelty of children.



"Pardon me, Sir, but do you have change for a dollar?" they say and how can I warn him?

"No, no, no, look," they say, "the nickel is bigger than the dime so its got to be worth more." Or, "I'll trade you all the stuff inside this bag for what's in your pocket." And of course he plays, he so desperately wants to be one of them.

What do you do when a boy of twenty-eight comes home crying? I'm afraid that someday he may hit one of them and what would I do?

"Mother, there's no more change in the goldfish bowl." He stands, helpless. "Can I have some more?"

"I'll go down to the drugstore with you and we'll get you some more."

"But Ma-ther, I can go alone," he says.

As if that wasn't my only prayer. And yet there are ways to get around his problems, I know them all. I only give him one dollar bills; there's nothing smaller than a one so how could anyone cheat him?

"Here," I give him two, one in each hand. "Remember, Sebastian, four big quarters for each one and nothing else."

It's no good, he's already gone.

This much must be understood about me: I am not a lonely widow who has nothing but her child. I have friends, I have a life, I have Jerry. He even asked me to marry him once but I had to turn him down, I had to: I can't let anything come between me and Sebastian. What else does he have? My poor son has nothing but love and we all know how much that's worth. Besides, we're realistic; at close to fifty you know what you really need and what's just make-up.

I know Jerry and he knows me; if his phone rings more than three times that means he's not home. His phone rang twice.

"Hello," he said, "Jerry Maphis on this end."

Jerry's apartment is small and neat and he fills it up like a grizzly bear inside a camper. He manages to keep it so clean, it's amazing, you just can't imagine Jerry reaching out with those monstrous hands to grab some end table and then dust behind it, you'd think he'd rather twist it into splinters. Still, he needs to get out and come to someplace with more room so I invite him over most afternoons.

"Well," I say, "do you think you could manage to pick up something on the way over?"

"Bourbon? Scotch? Wine?"

"Whatever you want, Jerry," I say, "whatever you feel like."

I wait for him, I spend so much time waiting and no matter how I try my mind always turns to the worst. I suppose that's just human nature. It's a good thing I have Jerry to cheer me up.

He lets himself in. I never lock the door when Sebastian is out, he'd think he was in the wrong place and be lost forever. I have to watch out for so many things like this, it just doesn't let up. As soon as I hear the ice crackling out of the tray I start to let go a little. In the large glasses the bourbon looks weak but I know what will happen as soon as I smell it; the first sip will send bitter spears through me.

"Cheers," he says and he takes a large mouthful. Inside his neck the Adam's apple bobs twice while I can only handle a small bit of it now.

The bottle stands on the counter still wrapped in its bag; we have so many habits. We watch the curtain shudder in the breeze; even on the seventh floor the air still stinks of cars. We can see the silver roofs of houses and not too far off, the summer haze; it has not rained for two weeks. The city hangs in the air and the air is foul. Out there, standing still in some busy crowd, looking amazed at something worthless at his feet or high above him, my idiot son is lost until he manages to find that something that he and the birds share that will tell him how to get home. Jerry puts his arm around me and after a silent time we get up and go into the bedroom.

Later, without talk, Jerry sets the table and I start the dinner. The table is a short wooden rectangle. I sit at the end near the stove and Jerry sits at the opposite end, with his back to the door. In between, on which ever end Jerry happens to put his plate, Sebastian sits and happily eats what ever is put in front of him. In a world that is beyond his grasp my son never complains.

The door opens, one foot, two feet, and he comes into the room, happily rubbing his forehead.

"Hey there, Sebastian boy, what's that you got there?" Jerry is a very quick man, he can even be quicker than I am at noticing things about Sebastian and I never stop watching, even asleep I dream about nothing but Sebastian.

"Is something wrong boy?" While he's looking at Sebastian he's scratching something dried off a plate with his fingernail. The clicking noise is very loud.

"No," Sebastian says, "I made some friends today." I can see his smile bob up and down while his fingertips move over a dark spot above his left eye.

"Let me see that," I say, "what is that?"

Carefully he moves under the light and I can see it, even under his hand. It is a bump at least half an inch high, colored like a wild egg. A bruise on his forehead.

"My friends gave it to me," he said. He rubbed it like it was some bauble he found in a field.

"Oh God," I say, "Sebastian."

"Who did that to you, boy?"

He stood, rubbing away the bulb. "I have friends now," he said. "Little friends."

"Did they do that to you? Did your friends hurt you?"

He looked at me, scared, I knew what that look meant; he was afraid of me. I had lost control of my voice but what can you do when your worst fears come true?

"Listen to me, Sebastian," I say, "this is very important. You have got to tell me exactly what happened today. Now, right this very minute. You have got to tell me exactly what you did today."

"I didn't do anything wrong," he says. "I made friends."

I have to take the hamburgers off the stove even though they aren't cooked yet: the grease is leaping out of the pan and catching fire in sparks. Sebastian is keeping most of his attention on the sparks. You can't stop watching him for a second and sometimes when you think you're communicating, he's as far away as he could possibly be. He does it on purpose.

"Look at me," I say. "You are going to tell me all about that bump and how you got it and you're going to do it now."

"I fell."

"Where did you fall? You just told me your friends did it to you. Did you fall down when you were playing with your friends? Did your friends knock you down?"

"Oh please, oh please oh please Mom." His smile is making its blinking way into a crying frown. "They told me not to tell you."

"Christ, boy!" Jerry's voice is so loud in the small room that we all jump. "Where the hell did you get that bump? You tell your mother right now."

"In the school yard," he says and the tears leave his eyes as the words leave his mouth. He stands with his arms useless at his side and tears fall over his aching face as he tries to smile and for once the muscles fail him.

"Oh please, Sebastian," I said, "please stop it right now. Mom just isn't up to it, so please stop." He was so motionless. He was much too heavy to touch.

Within two minutes he had stopped crying and in four he has forgotten that there was ever anything worth crying about. Over the meal he cheers up more and more until he has to hide his giggles. In between bites he puts his fork down in his lap and after carefully wiping his hands on his napkin, he rubs his bruise. Each time he rubs it he smiles a little more until, in less than ten minutes, he is giggling openly, with his eyes never looking up from his plate. He reaches up and touches it carefully, with his palm, to remind himself that it's still there and then, and with a growing pleasure in its presence, moves his whole hand over it until he stops and massages it with his tight fingers.

"Boy," he says quietly, "Boy oh boy oh boy."

And then Jerry's hand is hard on his wrist, pulling.

"Stop that," Jerry shouts, "stop that now."

I can see that Jerry is pulling hard, but Sebastian's other hand comes up and he holds both his hand and Jerry's in place on his forehead. This is the first time that I've seen him really struggle for something. It didn't work, of course. Jerry reached over with his other hand and leaning up off of his chair, with all of his weight coming down, pulled the whole struggle off of Sebastian's wound and on to the table. All the same, it's Jerry who looks defeated. He looks serious and mad but Sebastian doesn't even know he's there. Sebastian stares at his plate and smiles, too giddy to look up. His arm muscles are fluttering and his face is shining. In his long life, which he has lived close to me, I have never seen him fight for anything before.

Their hands are softly held down on the table, in between the plates. Jerry is raised off his seat and sweat stains are spreading out from his armpits. Sebastian is staring at his food with a look that says he is only slightly distracted.

"Jerry you stupid bastard," I said, "can't you see it isn't doing any good?"

When Jerry let go, Sebastian raised his hands to his head again and looked at me. At least he isn't giggling anymore.

"Oh stop that, please stop that," I say and he does, placing both hands in his lap.

"Mother," he says, "I had such a nice day."

"Oh for Christ's sake," Jerry says, and picking up the bottle off the

counter leaves the apartment. It's been such a day, I don't try to stop him.

In the silence, in the dark, over the dirty dishes and the empty table, Sebastian looks at me with huge eyes.

"Mother," he says, "I had the best day of my life."

As I look at him I can feel tomorrow coming towards me, a day that I am entirely unprepared for, filled with disasters to be faced and excuses to be made; I want to go to sleep and never wake up. I know no amount of rest will prepare me for what I'm going to have to face in the morning.

"Go to bed," I say, "Mother will do the dishes."

I lied. In the morning we woke up to last night's mess and for the first time he left without asking for change or even saying good-bye. I turned around and he wasn't there. In yesterday's clothes, his hair a mess he slipped out the door and I knew all my troubles were walking in the door, they were climbing in the window and they were waiting in the parking lot.

I called Jerry and the phone rang three times, four, five, six. On the tenth ring he picked it up.

"Jerry," I say, "it's happened, he's run away. We've got to go out there and find him."

"I'm on my way," he says and he doesn't sound surprised.

"No, meet me at the school yard."

"I'll pick you up. Wait for me." I realize why he wants me to wait for him: he's trying to stop me from running crazily through the streets.

"I'll be out front, be quick."

"I'm already there," he says and hangs up.

We are at the playground in less than five minutes, parked and leaning up against the fence with its wire grid in our fingers as we watch. Jerry is out of breath.

Sebastian watches a group of children playing and he stands outside their games happily imitating their movements. He looks quiet and content by himself. When one of the boys gets into a runner's sprint so does Sebastian, almost. What he does is flatten his palms as though they are touching the ground and bend his knees a little. When a group of boys start pushing each other he holds his hands at chest height and looks defenseless. All the boys ignore him.

"All that worry," Jerry says, "let's get him and get out of here."

I have to hesitate: how often does Sebastian get a chance to be as happy as he looks now? It's still early enough for the humidity in the air to be

only a soft wetness, enough to keep the dust down on the cracked ground. Later it will be hot and vicious so why not let him have a few more minutes of harmless watching. Besides, Jerry and me both need to catch our breath.

"No," I say, "let him stay a little bit more, he's okay."

As we watch the ball moves away from the players on the four square court, towards Sebastian. One of the players, a blonde boy in an orange tee shirt and taller than the rest comes over to get it. He had served with too much force and energy and the smaller children had not been able to return or even stop the ball as it whipped through them, beyond them, and over to Sebastian. As it came towards Sebastian he moved into an imitation catcher's stance and to his miraculous amazement, he could actually catch and hold the ball, in both hands. He holds it up, in front of his face so that as we look at him all we see is a body with a green and yellow head. Then he peeks at us from behind the ball and we can see little bubbles of laughter before he covers his face again. There are times when he seems obscenely childish.

He can't see the crowd of boys that starts to form in front of him until he lifts the ball, just a bit, and he notices the mob of feet in sneakers. Sebastian lowers the ball and takes three baby steps into the empty space behind him.

"Come on, give us the ball back," the blond boy says. He sounds oddly patient, almost wise.

"It's time to get him now," Jerry says.

"No," I say, "I trust that boy. He looks in control."

Sebastian lowers the ball, slowly with both hands tight on it, and then he ceremoniously transfers it over to the blonde boy, who takes it with one hand and holds it against his thigh.

"Thanks, Retard," he says and Sebastian's face becomes more than a million laugh lines. "Now why don'tcha leave?"

"Okay," Jerry says and starts to move, "we're leaving now." He doesn't ask me, he just starts up but I don't let him: an education has to start somewhere.

"No." I grab his arm. "He's got to get out of here by himself. We can't always be watching him."

"Are you out of your mind?" Jerry says.

"Look, they're just kids," I say. "How much harm can they do? This is as safe as his life's gonna get."

"They can do a whole lot." He says.



"Oh, come off it, Jerry, You don't know what you're talking about." In the yard the children are quiet and organized, watching the blonde boy and my son.

"Why don'tcha just get out of here," the boy says. "We don't want you here, Retard."

He stands with his helpless smile and his useless arms. "Oh," he says, "I like it here and I like you."

Jerry groans. "Jesus Christ," he says.

"Let him get out of this," I say, "this is what he wanted. This'll cure him, he'll learn."

The early mist has already started to burn away, freeing the dust; so suddenly the heat comes upon us, how can we ever be prepared? The sun seems like it's always waiting for us; even when we can't see it, it's heating up the days to throw them at us. And in the God-awful heat, for some reason that I can't let myself imagine, my son extends his arm and strokes the boy's short shirt sleeve with the fingers of his right hand.

"I like you," he says and all the muscles in the boy's back tense and rise. He must be only twelve but he's as big as a fifteen year old and he's a whole head taller than the rest of the boys. He drops the ball, it rolls feebly toward Sebastian.

"Well, we don't like you," he says. "We don't like you at all."

Sebastian stands looking from the ball to the boy. He wants to pick up the ball and play with it, his whole body wavers towards the ball.

"What is it," the blonde says, "you wanna fight?"

Sebastian's head shakes, embarrassed. The boy begins to push Sebastian's shoulder with steady open handed knocks.

"Come on, why don'tcha want to fight?"

"I don't want to fight," Sebastian says, "I don't like to fight. Not at all."

"One more minute," I say to Jerry. He is turning red with anger. "One more minute and then he'll never go near the kids again."

And then the little blonde boy turns into a bully and hits my Sebastian. Hard and in the face with his closed fist. All Sebastian does is nod as if he agrees.

"That's it," Jerry says but I'm not sure and I can't make my hand release his arm. I don't know why, I just can't. I have to shake my head. Over in the yard Sebastian vibrates slightly but he doesn't say anything and he's still smiling. He may be crying to, it's hard to see that far.



The boy stands back and I am able to let my breath out until he stoops down and picks up a rock. The motion of grabbing and throwing is smooth and professional and with all my breath out I do not even have time to shout. It is a small rock, the size of an egg, and when it hits Sebastian's chest it makes a small thump; the noise of wood hitting wood. All my son does is step back and giggle. As though they are all well rehearsed all the boys begin looking on the ground for rocks: right in front of me they are going to stone my son and I cannot find the strength to shout.

I thank God for Jerry, there are times when it seems like he is nothing but strength. He jumps toward them, pulling me off balance and I have to let go to save myself. Without shouting he dives into the boys, with wide swinging slaps and knocks three of them on to their seats and sends the rest scattering. As soon as the boys are aware of his presence they drop their rocks and run in separate directions. I watch as one of them, a small boy with a weasely face and a blue tee shirt, runs towards me and then past, his little legs fast but his speed slow.

Jerry ignores them all: he has his eyes on the blonde boy in the orange shirt. He catches him effortlessly, plucking him off the fence by the top of his pants. He falls off balance, skipping and spinning in the arc of Jerry's throw. When the boy has solid ground under him Jerry steps in and hits him in the face, a solid punch, the kind he'd give to an adult; the boy twists down to the ground with a sharp bark and begins crying. He looks terrified and terror makes him ugly.

Jerry and I look at Sebastian. He hasn't moved from his small area of playground. With grasping hands in front of his chest he looks mortified. He connects the line from me to Jerry to the boy on the ground and tries to fill it with tenderness. Then he goes and picks up the ball, carefully with both hands, and running his girlish run, comes over to a spot in between the boy and Jerry. He stops and looks at the crying boy, moving his lips in consolation.

"Jerry," Sebastian says, "if I threw the ball to you would you throw the ball to him?"

The boy looks up, his face bloody and dirty. "You're a retard," he screams, "I'm gonna, I'm gonna," he looks at Jerry in disbelief and lay flat on the ground.

Jerry couldn't hit the boy again, he couldn't hit anything now. He's like that. I let go of the fence and came over and under my feet I saw the ground shimmer.

"Give me the ball," I say, "give it here."

"But Ma-ther," Sebastian moves his arms as if giving me the ball but he held on to it and pulled it back to his chest.

"We're going to give the boy back his ball now."

"But Ma-ther," he says, "you don't understand."

Jerry wasn't saying anything and when I look at him I see that he's almost crying; he won't look at me, when I move towards him he shakes his head in a movement he could have borrowed from Sebastian. I look at the boy on the ground; the mess of dirt and blood on his face is being divided by clean lines of tears. Sebastian is crying too; everybody but me is crying. Jerry won't say anything and I don't know where to start and then I see the expression on my idiot son's face. Here we all are, ruined trying to solve his problems, and he is looking at all of us; glowing with endless suffering and endless forgiveness. And I have to ask again: what can you do but worry about a boy like that?

## Tribute to Joe Val (1926-1985)

R.B. Fitzgerald

The heart of the mandolin  
sang out through the dusky cantina  
where roses bloomed in green glass bottles.  
His fingers,  
healers of lost broken typewriter keys,  
plucked the battered strings  
and picked out the fractured-thumb  
melodies of faded love.  
In his high lonesome voice,  
he sang the old foot-stomp'n' tunes  
of Bill Monroe  
and the place lit up with his jubilation.

*Then, I am a poor wayfaring stranger  
in this world of deepest woe.  
There'll be no sadness or danger  
in that bright land to which I go.*

And the Bluegrass Boys joined in  
with four part gospel harmony  
and in that moment there was an opening  
where all the stillness was  
in this turning world of silences;  
it was as if Joe Val's being  
shown through  
looking to be twice alive  
in a world of half-numb somnambulant players  
moving half speed to the ticking of his heart

burning bright while the hours wound down  
 because that night would be the last time  
 the last picture show before the reel ran out  
 before the iron mandocello sleep of his compadres  
 would fall to him  
 as his burdens were carried to a darker place.

"I can hear old Hank Williams  
 rollin' in his grave right now," he said as he  
 began Jambalaya.  
 And all the people joined in and were singin'  
     "Goodbye Joe, we gotta go, me oh my oh  
     Son of a gun gonna have big fun on the bayou."

And if it was a darker place  
 that lay in wait  
 full of stomach tubes and hospital halls  
 where a life of kindness  
 and a thousand long-time friends  
 could not sing him back to life  
 at least I heard a voice go skyward  
 in a Blue Kentucky Moon of dignity.

He was a modest man who made his own tradition  
 in a place where no local voice could guide him.

Goodbye Joe, we gotta go

# The Ride

Deborah Noyes

He stopped and gazed at the sky. It was the only stable thing. Until the hysterical clouds disrupted his peace, Cecil remained there, motionless. A car horn shrieked. Gutter rain splattered his trousers. And then a man had his arm and he was on the curb.

He was safe on the curb, but the beast of unpatterned traffic roared past and frightened him. When Cecil looked down, he saw he had developed the feet of an animal—an old bear, or a mountain lion. Paws padded the damp cement, carried him instinctively to the bus stop where an old woman rose from the sidewalk bench and took his arm.

"Mr. Martin, where on earth have you been?"

A growl rose in his throat, but Cecil swallowed it. He peeled his fingers from his forearm, and finding his voice, formed words—meaningless it seemed—that passed and faded into the rumble of the bakery truck.

She hollered over the racket. "Poor man! I was ill myself a day or two. Migraines, you know. Is your wife well? And Tanya?—such a darling little girl. I don't often admit it, but I suspect my own grandchildren avoid me." Her hand fluttered by his arm as if to touch it in communion. "Old people are tiresome, I imagine." She sighed. The hand dropped to her side. "You're a lucky man, Mr. Martin."

He agreed that he was lucky. Then he gently placed his own hand on the back of her lacquered head and ground her face into a nearby lamp post. When her figure slumped to the sidewalk, maybe the imprint on the steel would resemble a blossomed rose, moist and beautiful, with every petal in place. He would pluck this to wear in his lapel. If he could only tell her how beautiful.

"I don't imagine you're hungry, Mr. Martin? I've got some stuffed dates left from the bake sale. Did your wife know about the bake sale?—Irene makes such wonderful fudge." The woman displayed a container tightly bound in crinkled aluminum foil. "It's a shame you've missed the past week. You'll come tomorrow to man the phone lines, won't you?"

Cecil nodded and clawed at lint on the sleeve of his sportscoat. There was no reason not to be kind; he remembered why he had come to this spot. "My wife wasn't there today, Sylvia?"

"Why no, Mr. Martin." She paused to adjust the foil cover on the dates. "In fact, some of us were worried about the both of you. We

phoned, you know, but there was no answer. I hope nothing's happened?"

Cecil let the question go. It wavered, shrank, disappeared. She smiled on in silence with her dentures creating a neat wall near the bottom of her face. The world with all its crazy corners was reflected there; a man on a high scaffolding. If this man suddenly decided to kick, Sylvia's wall would shatter to pieces. The space would then be dark and genuine. Cecil quit staring at her mouth and she arched her eyebrows.

"The bus is late again. Buses take forever here, same as when I lived in Chicago. Don't you imagine they could be on time just once, on rainy days like today for instance? At least it's clearing."

Cecil decided that he was waiting for a bus, so when one pulled up to the curb he boarded it.

"But Mr. Martin, that's number 86!"

The driver's gaze travelled over the old woman to a digital clock outside the SouthWest Savings Bank. "You comin' Lady?"

"But that's number 86—"

The doors flipped shut. Cecil nodded to the driver and wandered to a seat in back.

He wasn't relieved, but felt a distinct wonder as he watched through the smeared side window, saw Sylvia fade on the sidewalk clutching the container of dates to her chest. Some part of him would have liked to help her.

*But you can help. We all can, and we've got to try.* Irene was so certain, so absorbed. She had her projects and her women's magazines. She had never loved him and now she had another reason.

"But I don't want to help. I don't want committee women calling in the dead of night. I don't want to spend my last good years with a horn of plenty on my lap. I want—"

She was sitting beside him now on the rattling bus. A fading housecoat that flapped in the breeze from the floor vents. "What. What do you want?"

"I want—"

"You want to curl up in your chair and stare at your wrinkled little body till it kills you."

"I want—"

"To watch young men on the television kick a football around with their strong young limbs."

"Please, listen. I want to be left alone."



"And you will be." She vanished from the bus seat, fluttered for a moment like an apparition, wiped her hands on a dishtowel and was gone.

"I want things to be the way they were," he called after her. "Before Tanya, before this business of senior citizens' leading productive lives—it's rot, all of it. Irene? Irene, before I fall apart."

He thought he heard footsteps in the laundry room. Then Irene passed behind the sheer Japanese screen, a gift from their daughter. She was hanging freshly pressed shirts in the closet.

"They will be the way they were, Cecil. You'll have your chair and your television. You just won't have me to do your dishes, we'll leave that to a nurse in the rest home."

"No," he complained. "You don't understand." Cecil moved to straighten his tie. He had no tie. His face itched with stubble. The morning's determination was wearing on him, diminished. His gaze swept the bus. The bus was empty. The driver swayed in his seat, ears hidden by radio ear plugs.

"You are my wife, Irene. I'm sorry if I haven't made you happy. We're too old to start over."

"You're too old. You're old, and I'm sorry. Sorry for your aches and pains, and that your little granddaughter makes you so nervous. But you see Cecil, that's your problem now. It will have to be. We give up."

The bus window was caked with grit, but he saw them. A maze of blank-faced figures had turned on the curb, had begun to shake their forefingers at him. The bus sped past them, faces blurred with hands, pity frozen in his vision. "I never asked for her! Irene! I never asked for Tanya!"

"And she never asked for you." Irene hung the last pin-striped shirt. She passed through the screen and the frantic colors—the dragons, and tiny Oriental warriors—were fused with her robe, dancing now on her chest as on ritual ground. She lit one of her long chocolate-colored cigarettes. Before she sat, she smoothed the seat of her robe. The bus swayed under her. The dragons swayed on her chest. The roof swayed over her. But Irene stood strong. (In church, Cecil was always a step behind, kneeling when he should be sitting, standing while all were seated, singing too loud the psalms he didn't know. But Irene was still, strong, sedate. The Lord is with you. And alsowithyou).

She was peering at him now from under the pew, scattering flecks of burnt chocolate from her cigarette.

"Things happen, Cecil"

"What's happened to me?"

Irene stood up and crushed her cigarette beneath a yellow bedroom slipper. "You got old and didn't take to it."

"And Jessie?"

"She's dead, Cecil. She's not coming back. But we have Tanya—if you would only treat her better."

"It should have been me." Cecil's bones rattled as the bus hit a pothole in the street, they crossed and rubbed each other; one of the warriors had escaped Irene, had crawled inside him to use his bones as chopsticks. The floor of the bus was covered with chocolate.

Irene got off at the next stop. She passed him like a stranger. Cecil pounded on the window, but lost her to the arms of a cheering crowd in the street. He shook his fist at them. "Do you hear me, Irene? It should have been me!"

Alone, he felt suddenly small and warm. All determination had vanished. While something inside him wanted just to chuckle, words oozed out onto his chin and down his wrinkled shirtfront. "I am an old man. I've had all I can take."

In a moment she was back, dressed in a new blue dress he had never seen, with knuckles white over the handle of a suitcase. She put the suitcase down, opened it and removed a dustpan and broom. While she spoke, she whisked the flecks of chocolate from the bus floor and deposited them in the case, filled with clothing. "I'll take what I need, Cecil. That's all. You'll have a hard enough time."

Murmuring, Cecil shook his head.

"It's just that I won't stand by and watch you crawl off—alone, like an animal to die. It's tiresome to watch you waiting." (The same old playful grimace—how could she?) "I've always suspected you were something of an animal anyway."

To combat her, Cecil laughed.

Even still there was the familiar feeling. Not exactly a feeling—it was too empty (and yet too complete) to be a feeling. She was gone now. He couldn't bring her back.

When Irene took the grandchild and left him, went God knows where (acting like a child herself), he spent a week in bed, numbed. The shades drawn. The blue television flicker erratic on the walls (but the faces without sound, the mouths moving so quickly, *That TV will swallow you whole one day*). His skin took on a gray and filmy gloss, and his stomach was raked from the inside by claws, soothed only by sleep. Still, there

was that familiar feeling. If Irene was right, she had always been right.

He felt unglued and flimsy with freedom. There was nothing to stick him to the world but this bus and its rumbling.

"Where are we, please?" he asked aloud.

The driver went on humming, now and then adjusting his earphones or fiddling with the bus controls. The bus jerked to a stop, the doors sailed open, wind rushed in, the doors sailed shut. Cecil wondered why he was the only passenger, but was happy counting the muddy footprints on the rubber floor mat—stomping on one another. He was relieved to know the chaos was gone for the moment, and that he was alone on this ride except for the zombie at the wheel.

Once again the bus jolted to a stop. But now a figure boarded. The boy dropped change into the box; the machine clicked and swallowed the coins and the boy marched down the aisle like a drowsy soldier. He fell into a seat near Cecil and stretched his body across with legs dangling, boots suspended in the aisle. Cecil moved to adjust his tie. He had no tie. Night—and the bus was dimly lit. One bulb bright in the center of the ceiling. The others were blown. Cecil read graffiti on the forward seat. He reached again for his tie, but found only buttons to play with. One came off in his hand. He watched the button drop to the floor, and panic roared in his chest. "Please! Where is this bus going?"

The boy peered at him. "Where you tryin' to get to?"

Cecil didn't answer. The boy took out a book of matches and lit one. He shook it at the air, tossed it to the floor. He lit another and stared lovingly at the flame—this flame all the while reflected in his eyes. He jerked his wrist and discarded the match. Cecil began to shift in his seat.

"This ain't the kinda neighborhood you wanna get lost in, old man."

Cecil grunted, but felt like curling into a compact ball and scuttling down under the darkness of the seat, down with the can he heard clink, then roll, roll, and clink.

"Where you goin' to?" repeated the boy. He lit another match, watched the lilac flame wilt to his fingertips, thrust the charred stub away and started again.

Cecil felt as if he was shrinking, as if all of his bones were being mashed together. And he was transformed into a miniature voodoo version of himself. He hopped back and forth on the seat, small and voiceless, pulling out pins and hurling them to the floor with the boy's matches.

He stopped when he caught sight of the scar on the boy's cheek. It edged up the pale flesh, wriggled there like a friendly caterpillar. "How

did you hurt yourself?" asked Cecil.

The boy brushed the cheek with the back of his hand. He studied Cecil for a moment then laughed. The laughter had an empty, ringing quality; it seemed simultaneously to create and destroy itself. "My old man got drunk one night and threw a glass at me. If you really wanna know."

Cecil nodded.

"That's the way it goes," said the boy. His voice danced with the movement of the bus.

"My wife left me," blurted Cecil.

"That's too bad, old man. You were probably used to her by now."

"And do you know why?" demanded Cecil. The boy looked away, began to tap out a tune on the window with his knuckles.

"Because I'm selfish and unfeeling," Cecil nodded. "Oh yes. And I've spent a week in bed, in the dark, like a bug. Haven't eaten. And today when I come back to the world, I realize that after 80 years I don't belong there."

The boy started to fidget, feeling in his pockets. Cecil stretched out a hand, wanting to be closer so that he might pluck the wriggling form from the boy's cheek, and save it—for himself. He was not quick enough. He had scarcely moved before the creature grew wings and was gone. Cecil sighed. The boy shifted abruptly in his seat.

"Do you know what I'm talking about, son? Do you have any idea?"

The boy threw up his arms as if to block a punch. "Hey—listen, I'm sorry old man. But maybe you ought to calm down now and go home."

Cecil shook his fists. "I tried to find her! I tried to tell her who I am!" His voice wilted. "I'm very hungry. Haven't eaten for days. Would you like to have lunch? I'll tell you about my daughter. Her name's Jessie." He shuffled through baggy pockets. "I have pictures. There's a place by the zoo, a little coffee shop. We went there for lunch when we worked at the factory. Irene always dragged me to see the monkeys. I have pictures—"

The boy's leather back was passing away, rolling down the aisle toward the exit like a black bowling ball. The ball tumbled, thumped down the steps and was gone in the tar-smeared night, plopped into the neon reflection of a puddle.

The driver removed his earphones and examined Cecil from a mirror high in the front corner of the bus. "Mister, is everything all right back there? Maybe you want this stop—plenty a bars on this block. Say, you all right?"

Cecil darted past the man, whose ears had vanished, leaving the two sides of his head smoothly deficient, and hobbled briskly down the steps.

The streets were crowded with crumbling houses. The windows were jagged triangles of glass, or were taped to hide the holes. Trash can sentinels lined the walks, and the air was alive with hidden voices. A voice called to him from shadow. Shadows called to him. They were lined up and down the street in neon-lit stoops. One stepped forward; she was swinging a silver whistle. She put the whistle to her lips and it sang.

"You lookin' lost, baby, need a find? I've got one here. C'mon." She swayed and stepped out of the doorway, swayed like a painted carboard figure in a breeze.

At first Cecil let her touch his hand. "C'mon. C'mon." Her voice was monotonous and soothing. Then he saw the folds in her skin. The creases filled with dirt. The dead earth dryness, stark under the glitter of rings and bracelets. He knew that if he tapped her shoulder, she would topple over into pieces. A whimper rose in him and he broke free.

While the figure melted back into the shadow of a stoop, Cecil ran, hopping like a little rabbit into the stinking alley behind a restaurant. There in the dark, nestled in with soggy brown lettuce leaves in cardboard boxes, he saw his own bed. As always the bed was made up with great care. Its sheets were folded, tucked and squared at the corners. The green and orange afghan Irene knitted so long ago was spread out on top. The pillows were plump. Breathing heavily, Cecil unlaced his shoes for bed.

## nineteen's goats

Philip David Welsh

when you took the clocks  
out of my eyes you scared me  
so. four times each day  
a plastic ashtray filled  
and melted. four  
times each day you stole another  
from the diner: this  
was how we told the time  
where it could go.  
it was everything you'd ever dreamed of,  
and us, not yet  
twenty years old.



Kathy Dooley



## In the Coop

Edie Aronowitz Mueller

There are 2000 chickens  
in one low-ceilinged cell  
with chicken-wire walls  
that let in light.  
Food is thrown  
from a tin bucket  
onto the floor  
littered with sawdust  
and excrement.  
Spastic heads  
jerk up and down.  
They fight for each kernel.  
They use their beaks  
like lances, jabbing,  
tearing flesh to gaping  
wounds. They keep at it  
and at it all day and all  
night, their voices  
a constant din,  
red eyes mad as god.



Steven Gyurina

## curbstone

WC

being 10 was fun i remember sitting on the sidewalk  
in the middle of july i had a crayon in my hand

and putting it on the cement it melted

after the crayon melted i couldn't understand why  
things had to end

it was yellow

people ask me how my brothers are doing  
i would like to say they're doing fine

## Westwood Revisited

Kevin Fitzgibbon

Nostalgia, that's where it began. From the Greek *nostos*, a return home, and *algeo*, to feel pain, grieve, be troubled. But what is this return home which haunts us and which has been a constant theme in literature from *The Odyssey* to *The Great Gatsby*, whose final sentence reads, "so we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past"? Perhaps ultimately home is the womb itself, where in we wanted for nothing, or metaphorically the earth which gave rise to us and which receives us back into its bosom when our brief season is through. However, since our memory of the womb, if it exists, is submerged in the unconscious, we look to the nearest thing, childhood, or rather the memory of childhood, which has become inextricably linked to a certain physical locale, the house we grew up in, the neighborhood that was our playground, our home town. Just as the life of mankind is said to have started in a Golden Age, an Eden of blissful innocence, so each individual life begins in golden youth. And just as mankind has always pined for a return to the garden, so each of us yearns for the unblemished springtime of our childhood. Like salmon drawn thousands of miles across the trackless sea to the mouth of the river that spawned them, we struggle upstream against the relentless currents of time, called ever backwards by the siren song of our youth.

I recently succumbed to that beguiling maidensong. I journeyed into my own troubled past and confirmed, as so many before me, the veracity of that old truism, "you can't go home again." I took a midnight flight to Los Angeles, city of my own unruly youth, a youth which slipped its bonds and raging like a brush fire in the brittle-dry grass of the L.A. foothills consumed my twenties, and sent me staggering eastward, hair all singed, a refugee, to the far rim of the continent. So Youth made me an exile from her city, a fickle goddess.

I recall the flight west as a montage of impressions: the taxi ride through the ice treacherous streets of Boston; the 747 thundering up from the blustery runways of Logan into the frigid, snow-swollen mid-night; the leg numbing, back stiffening odyssey across the sleeping republic; the adrenaline flooding into my system as turbulence shook the fragile hull; the long hours of sleeplessness as the movie flickered noiselessly in the darkened cabin; the first gray streaks of dawn at our

back as we descended over the mountains; watching the slow birth of a dazzling, crystal blue L.A. morning. The pilot circled in a wide arc out over the Pacific before making his final approach. Far below wet-suited surfers straddled their boards, rising and falling with the restless sea. A battered khombi with brightly colored boards strapped to the roof seemed to crawl along the coast route like a fat yellow caterpillar. Far to the south the tile roofs of the Palos Verde Peninsula peeped from among the trees. The plane came in low over the dunes and touched down with a shudder on the tire streaked runway. The pilot's voice crackled on the intercom: "Ladies and gentlemen on behalf of the crew and myself I'd like to welcome you to L.A. International Airport. Local time is 6:55, air temperature 74 degrees..." As I negotiated the long corridors of L.A.X. and stood among the shuffling crowd in the baggage area, I felt a rising exhilaration, almost a high. It wasn't just the high of traveling which I've felt ever since my family's first vacation when I was ten years old, or the high of leaving Boston in the dead of winter and arriving in some tropical paradise which I experienced last year in Florida, or the intense relief of being safe on the ground again after the six hours of gnawing fear aloft. It was the city itself already starting to work its charm on me. It was the smell of the airport and the clothes and the very postures and cadences of the people, subtleties of behavior that triggered sympathetic vibrations in my soul as if it were a tuning fork precisely calibrated to that one wavelength.

My cousin Roddy Stone picked me up. When I left he was a zit faced high school drop out who was always in his room torturing an electric guitar, smoking his bong and dreaming heavy metal dreams. I returned to find a twenty-four year old with neatly trimmed, receding hair, a \$37,000 a year job as an assistant director at Hannah-Barbera and a jet black Pontiac Fiero six cylinder. His first words to me were the inevitable "Hey dude." It wasn't till we pulled away from the curb that I realized a second level had been added to the airport. Roddy informed me that it was completed just before the L.A. Olympics. The new airport seemed foreign and claustrophobic to me.

We stopped first at his apartment in Santa Monica so I could drop off my bags take a shower and change into something a little more appropriate to the climate. I found myself marvelling at his apartment. It was so large and airy and bright. There was an inexhaustible supply of hot water and outside the open bathroom window two slender palms stood out against the monochrome blue of the sky. Returning to the kitchen I

found Roddy sucking on a ceramic bong. The air was heavy with the cloying odor of grass. He pushed the smoking pipe across to me. I waved it off with a casual gesture. I had told him as we drove up the San Diego freeway of some of the changes I'd made in my life, of my return to college. But nothing I said made an impression on him till that moment when I refused the sacraments of my former faith. Though he passed over it, even going so far as to congratulate me on my will power, I knew he'd never quite feel the same way towards me.

We decided to go to Old World in West Hollywood for Belgian waffles and mimosa cocktails (I think he was at least somewhat relieved to hear that I still drank.) Driving east we followed Sunset as it snaked along the base of the Santa Monica Mountains like a great river, fed by tributary canyon roads whose names have seeped into the national consciousness through pop songs and movies. Each one was laden with memories for me: Manderville, Benedict, Beverly Glen, Coldwater, Laurel. Again I felt the old exhilaration, the old sense of infinite possibility, breathless anticipation. It was a restless hungry feeling, a feeling appropriate to youth and to L.A. Even though I had heard the flip side of that siren's song, I found myself falling under its spell.

We sat on the terrace and watched the traffic on the strip as we ate. The light in front of Tower Records turned red and traffic began to stack up: Ferrari, Rolls Royce, X-Caliber, Mercedes 240 SL, Porsche 928, Maserati bi-turbo. The spectacle of so many gaudy machines parked end to end suddenly hit me. Perhaps it was the almost surrealistic contrast to the salt streaked rust heaps that plied the ice-narrow street of my adopted city, I reasoned. But no. I remember when seeing a Ferrari, or any other car in that category, was a rare enough occurrence in L.A. that you stopped and stared and tried to recognize the entertainer who invariably sat behind the wheel. Again and again the exotic cars lined up. It seemed every fifth vehicle was a red Ferrari.

"Do you realize you wouldn't see this many sports cars in Boston in a year's time?" I said to my companion.

"Probably all leased," he said, scarcely bothering to look up from his waffle.

"What would you drive if you really wanted to be conspicuous?" I inquired.

He only pointed. Turning I beheld a fantastic silver coupe, low slung and potent as a leopard poised to spring, replete with air dams and spoilers. It made the Porsche in front of it look like a Toyota

"Lamborghini Countache," he said between bites, "a hundred and fifty grand." The driver had dark hair and a tan. It was impossible to determine his age with accuracy since the entire upper half of his face was obscured by a pair of massive sunglasses. His lip was curled in an expression of faintly contemptuous superiority.

A BMW pulled up next to him, blocking my view. The driver was little more than a female shadow behind the heavily tinted glass. The personalized plate read TABOO. I speculated as to what sort of person needs that kind of anonymity. A coke dealer? An actress? An Arab Sheik's daughter? More likely it was a high priced call girl returning from a hard night up in one of the canyons, feeling brittle and bruised and wanting only her heavily draped, air-conditioned bedroom and her valium, only darkness and unconsciousness. I knew such a girl once. Something very bad happened to her.

The waiter returned and began pouring coffee in a somewhat theatrical manner, one hand on his hip. He had tawny hair and the type of unblemished WASP features you see on commercials or afternoon soap operas.

"Steady hand," Roddy commented.

"After last night, I'm surprised," he said. His voice had a silken edge to it that spoke volumes. Suddenly I didn't want to be in Hollywood any more. It had always straddled the fine line between glamour and sleaziness. Even when I lived in California I felt like a tourist there.

"Enough of this tinsel town crap," I announced. "On to Westwood!"

Westwood Village was the center of my universe in much the same way Sloane Square is the center of the universe for Sloane Rangers. I was born there and don't believe I've ever lived more than two miles away. The Westwood story began in 1919, when department store heir Arthur Letts bought 3296 acres of soy bean fields for development. In 1929, a portentous year, what was billed as a "Mediterranean shopping village" opened. My earliest memories of Westwood Village date from the 50's. By that time the village was overshadowed by UCLA which had been built just to the north of it. I remember the bonfires blazing in the streets as students burned Tommy Trojan, arch-rival USC's mascot, in effigy. Another time two adjacent fraternities staged a mud fight in their front yard.

When we drove by they were all out there standing ankle deep in muck, pelting each other with all their strength. My mother was



scandalized and made me promise never to join a fraternity, a promise which, as things turned out, I was able to keep without difficulty.

My first active involvement in Westwood commenced in 1965, when I began taking the Santa Monica Buslines shuttle to Paul Revere Junior High School in Brentwood. (These were the blue buses Jim Morrison sang of in "The End.") After school I used to ride the bus into the village with my best friend Larry Sugarman. At that time the bus was part *Animal House*, part *West Side Story*, and a little later it began to seem like *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*. The back of the bus was the domain of the in-crowd that ruled as absolutely as war lords in Shogunate Japan. (Significantly, the message of most of the westside graffiti was that "so-and-so rules.") Anyone who strayed onto their territory unasked or otherwise raised their ire would be grabbed and hustled to the far back. A kangaroo court would be held. The big kids in the back loved to have these Kangaroo courts. The penalty was always the same: being pantsed. Once the offender was despoiled of his trousers they were held out the window and he was told that they would be cast off into the street if he attempted to recover them. Once a kid named Fatman actually did drop Harold Prichard's pants, by accident I think, and Pritchard had to run about three blocks up Wilshire Blvd. in his shorts.

Another blue bus ritual was the food/spit fight. On the way home from school the no. 1 bus and the no. 2 bus would almost always come abreast at the red light on San Vicente and 26th St. Immediately all windows would fly up like gun ports on two ships of the line at close quarters and those within would fire at will with whatever they had: fruit, luggie, squirt guns, water balloons, eggs. Frank Catando used to spit into a squirt gun all day so it would be full for the bus ride home. Chuck Cooper introduced the innovation of putting peroxide in squirt guns. If you weren't an active participant, the best thing was to get down for the air was thick with projectiles. Once I was temporarily blinded by the stinging juice of an orange that splattered on the seat back. Another time I watched as a tennis shoe sailed through the window and hit the bus driver in the back of the head. The girls' bus used to get into the act too. The sexes had been segregated ever since some time in dim prehistory when some monumental act of sexual misconduct was discovered in progress in the back seat by the boys vice principle, Mr. Adler (Most authorities agreed that Maria Carrillo, a truly legendary figure, was involved). The girls used to hang their stockings, bras, and panties out the

windows to taunt us or put up playboy centerfolds for us to look at. Once Lori Cecil, nicknamed Seaslug, mooned us.

By the time we got to University (Uni) High School of course, we were mature. The great question at Uni was whether you were cool enough to hang out at the Dog House in Westwood. This was where the elite held court after detention and on Friday and Saturday nights. In 1967 the elite at Uni was a marvelously heterogeneous mix of Jets-style juvenile delinquents, Bel Aire sophisticates, flower children, JAP's, psychedelic hipsters, jocks. The high school clubs of the 50's were still very big. These were something between youth gangs and high school fraternities. They had names like The Gents and The Justins, and they had their female counterparts. They wore matching leather jackets with the club logo on the back (A top hat and cane for The Gents) and styled themselves after the Paul Newman character in *The Hustler* or *Cool Hand Luke*. They had their own unique vocabulary: "You're cuffed" (you're a loser), "scarf up" (to eat food), "scunge" (money), "glyptoid" (a jerk, twerp or spaz). Each club had it's own secret initiation ceremony, its own club treasury and its own unique history of pranks and rowdiness. Each had its own file down at the local police station. The JAPs used to court these guys and it was considered a high honor for one of them to be seen wearing her boyfriend's club jacket. The principle activities included hanging out at the Dog House or down at Sorrento Beach, hustling college students in poker or pool up at the UCLA student union, going to parties, beer busts on the beach, etc.

At that time being cool had little to do with your parents' tax bracket. While many came from wealth, and not a few from fame as well, these things in themselves were not guarantees of admission to the elite group. The clubs had some of the richest kids at Uni in them, and also some of the poorest. In a culture that dressed in faded jeans and prized beat up old VW's and tub bodied Porches above all other cars, there was little room for conspicuous consumption. It was emphatically uncool to try to promote yourself socially on the basis of material wealth. The emphasis was on style.

The Dog House, more than anything else, seems emblematic of the old Westwood. An exaggerated, cartoonesque dog house, it was located in a parking lot next to Mom's bar, where for a generation UCLA students drank beer and shot pool. There was a patio out front with table and counters inside with stools made to look like fire hydrants. Nominally a hot dog emporium, its real function was identical that of the Roman cafes

in *La Dolce Vita*, a place for the elite to congregate, to see and be seen, to pick up news of parties. The parking lot was reserved for the older kids, the super elite, who leaned on the hoods of their cars like dark maned lions while their girlfriends stood around in little groups gossiping. That parking lot launched a thousand parties, a thousand hilarious sorties into the balmy, chlorine-scented nights of my youth.

Though the Dog House was demolished shortly after I graduated from Uni to enlarge the parking lot for the Bank of America, I always thought something of its ethos remained. As Roddy headed west on Santa Monica Blvd. however, I saw that the Hollywood disease had spread. The street was lined with restaurants like Le Dome, Ma Maison and The Palm whose parking lot attendants crowd the Rolls Royces and Bentleys to the front of the lot, their best advertisement, and put the lesser cars, mere Jaguars and Mercedes, back by the dumpsters. Everywhere there were boutiques with names like Prestige, Camp Beverly Hills, Fiorucci, MGA, Parachute, catering exclusively to teenagers, where you could buy a pair of jeans for \$75.00 and a cotton T-shirt for \$30.00, and the salesgirl was quick to whisper which movie star just purchased the same outfit.

When we reached Westwood Village I saw that it had been infected too. Gone were the sole proprietorships of my day, the bookstore, the Sees Candy store, the old Jewish haberdasher. Gone was the Safeway market, the department store where my father used to shop and the Party Smarty. In their place were chic restaurants, movie theatres (there's 11 first run theatres in a six square block area, many with multiple screens), clothing boutiques, shoe boutiques, leather boutiques, ice cream boutiques, cookie boutiques...you get the idea. Everywhere there were teenagers. And they were all doing the same thing, shopping.

"My God, they've turned Westwood into a gigantic department store for teeny boppers" I exclaimed.

"It's the same old game," said Roddy.

The same game? Maybe. But if it is, they've certainly upped the ante. UCLA students had turned in their beat up VW's for Toyota Celica GT's, Nissan 300 ZX's, and BMW 323 i's. Now they could be seen tooling around in high fashion clothes, \$250.00 designer framed sunglasses on their noses and Rolex watches on their wrists. Even in my day Westwood was well heeled, but the level of expenditure here, the sheer brazen display of dollars, was new and shocking. Everywhere money screamed for attention. Watching the 13 year old JAP's strolling along

with their hands full of shopping bags from Bullocks, Saks and Magnins I remembered a line from Tacitus: "Gold made this revolution". A new generation had come to the fore, reared on credit cards and leases, deficit spending applied to personal finances. They became the heirs of our grand traditions. And this was what it all come down to: shopping. I had a momentary urge to rush into the nearest glitzy emporium, upset display tables, wrestle punk rock manikins to the floor, smash the computerized cash register. Instead I only motioned Roddy to drive on. As we left the village, heading south on Westwood Blvd: I noticed the gilt figure of the angel Gabriel looming high above the roof tops from his pinnacle atop the Mormon Temple. All I could think of was that the golden calf would be more appropriate.

My last night out on the coast I had dinner at Monty's Steak House in Westwood with an old Uni alumnus. An executive earning in excess of \$60,000 a year, he spent half the meal complaining of taxes, real estate prices and his job. Only when we began to reminisce on the old days at the Dog House did he become really animated. Later, as we walked to the parking lot, I had an idea. We darted down the alley in back of Alice's Restaurant, one of the few survivors of an earlier era. In a few moments I found what I was looking for. On a brick wall, half hidden behind a dumpster and faded by time, was a top hat and cane in black spray paint. Below it was the legend GENTS W.L.A. RULE. We just stood there looking at it, an artifact from the irrecoverable past. My friend was the first to speak:

"You know, we had it dicked back then," he said.

## Badger Dreaming

Hugh C. Abernathy Jr.

Spring rain has blurred the tracks  
of the badger under pines.

Rain has made even the existence  
of the badger doubtful.

These pads in red clay  
might belong to a racoon

or a young fox. It's been eight hours  
since the badger snuggled up  
from his den and waddled  
to the brook for a long drink.

Now, he's safe again  
in his warm hole dreaming

that the One Light inside all things  
has changed him into a fat mole.



Emily Hall

## The Porch's Edge

Ann Ruhl

I touch the paint on my porch  
 it is thick,  
 broken off in chips.  
 These rough slats I've sat on  
 my toes picking at weathered blue;  
 flakes get under my nails.  
 The floor boards  
 feel like your unshaven face  
 against the pads of my feet.  
 I sit on this wood  
 as often as you press the razor  
 along your chin.



# Tracking My Muse

Jonathan Seamans

I don't know where inspiration comes from, but I know where to find my muse. When I take a break from my typewriter I can see it: a dark, wispy figure, flitting from tree to tree, a vague shadow, taunting me as it darts through the woods outside my house. Its elusiveness always haunted me until the day I decided to take action and end my enslavement. I decided to kill it—kill my muse. Hunt it down and kill it. Hunt it, kill it, stuff it, and display it over the goddamned fireplace so that it would never taunt me again.

The day was dark and overcast. The woods were blanketed in fresh drifts of snow and tracking would be easy. I bundled up well, covering myself from head to toe in warm clothing, and put two candy bars in my jacket pocket in case of hunger. I then set out to my brother Andrew's cabin to borrow a gun and ammunition.

As I parked behind Andrew's, I could see him through the storm window, cleaning a rifle while he watched TV. Deer season had just ended and a huge buck hung off the back porch, rivulets of dried blood caked on the clapboard below. The air outside was thick with wood smoke. I banged the snow off my boots and went inside. The TV was blasting away as I carefully side stepped the coffee cans that Andrew used for spittoons and made my way from the kitchen into the living room. I had come to the right place. This was gun nut heaven. There were rifles and ammunition all over the place. There were two gun racks in the kitchen, two in the bedroom, three more in the living room, along with a large wooden trunk full of hand guns. Only half the rifles were ever on the racks at one time. The rest were strewn around the house among the kiddie toys and empty beer cans. I once asked why there was no gun rack in the bathroom, and Andrew actually stopped to think about it.

The TV was so loud that he didn't notice me come in. My niece, Farrah, was in one corner playing with some empty shell casings. I yelled to get my brother's attention. He slowly reached for the remote control as I came around the couch.

"Hell. If it ain't my brother the writer," he drawled sarcastically through a mouthful of chewing tobacco. My brother is a diesel mechanic and we're both in the habit of telling people that the other brother was adopted. Andrew grabbed his beer, stood up, and broke wind. He then

puckered his lips and spewed towards the Maxwell House can at my feet. I shuddered as the stream of brown saliva arched through the air, past the can, and across my boots. Andrew found this extremely amusing and laughed heartily, again breaking wind.

"Goddamn it, Jethro!" he yelled suddenly. I followed his sight-line over my shoulder to the far corner of the room where his bloodhound, Jethro, having chewed open a new box of shotgun shells, was now chomping away noisily on a live round. My brother lurched across the floor and booted the dog in its hind-quarters, sending it skrieking back into the kitchen, upsetting several coffee cans along the way.

"Goddamn, I almost spilled my beer." Andrew used his free hand to hitch up his jeans and then headed to the kitchen grabbing a rag to wipe up the mucus the dog had splashed all over the floor.

"So what can I do for you?" he asked, swabbing at a tobacco spit puddle.

"I need a gun."

He turned and stared at me, the rag dripping in his hand, a quizzical look on his face.

"Well, you know," he started, "deer season ended a couple of days ago."

"No." I interrupted. "I'm hunting for something else."

Andrew dropped the rag, walked over to the couch and picked up the rifle he had been cleaning, gently pulling back the bolt. The gun made a smooth clicking sound. He cradled it in his arms. The gulf between us seemed to widen.

"Just what size animal are you going after?" he mumbled. He arched his eyebrows and stared me in the face. "Is it the size of, say, a grown *man*?" My brother always thought I was crazy. I always thought he was dull.

"Well, as a matter of fact, it is, kind of..." I stammered, but Andrew was already moving quickly through the cabin, sorting through boxes of bullets. When he found the right carton, he came over and unceremoniously dumped it and the rifle in my arms. He stuck a finger in my face.

"I don't wanna hear *nothing* about it, you hear? Just take this stuff and leave." He took a swig of beer, plopped back down on the couch, and flipped on the remote control. Farrah started to scream. The air inside was thick with the smell of soiled diapers. As I opened the back door, Jethro looked up at me from his cardboard doggie-bed and gave two half-hearted thumps of his tail. I could hear my brother breaking wind

vigorously over the din of the TV as I quickly headed for my car.

\* \* \* \* \*

I had visually canvassed the area around my house in the preceding days and decided that to hunt there would be fruitless. I instead drove south to Perkerville so that I could work the woods at the base of the ridge that rises west of my property. This looked like good muse country. I parked at the base of a cross-country ski trail and headed into the woods.

By this time the temperature had risen just enough to melt the snow on the branches and soften the snow underfoot. There was a sporadic dripping of ice cold water from the trees. Occasionally a drop splashed on the back of my neck, and I'd spin around, my gun loaded and ready to blast away. I headed west, away from the trail, and criss-crossed the open birch forest for an hour or so. I saw nothing here and decided to press farther, to a marsh that lay south of the ridge. It was obvious that I wasn't going to come across my muse by mere luck. Some kind of tracking skill was in order.

As I came to the edge of the marsh, I realized that this would not be an easy task. The marsh was frozen over, with gnarled deadwood and tufts of brown grass poking through the surface. As I made my way across the ice, I flushed out a few small birds. Although the marsh held plenty of cover, there was still no sign of a muse. I reached the old beaver dam on the far side and hiked back into the tree-line. I observed some animal tracks, but they were only from small rodents and birds. I left the marsh behind and went north. I was now heading into the deep woods.

Thirty minutes later the forest seemed endless. Ancient pine trees loomed off into the distance with no landmarks to speak of save for an occasional brush pile. I began to tire. My gun felt heavy, and I found myself climbing as the ground began to incline beneath me. There was a scent in the air, that of an impending snow storm; a wet, piney smell. Around me I saw more animal tracks, larger than those near the marsh. I followed what appeared to be racoon tracks. A little farther on they were intercepted by the tracks of a large dog, and I remembered that wolves lived in these woods. For the next half a mile I kept my finger on the trigger. The forest canopy thickened above, gradually blotting out the sky. I found myself squinting into the murky half-light ahead.

I began to slow, realizing that it was a long walk back to the trail. I

came upon a thick stand of brush. Suddenly a large buck came crashing out through the undergrowth, scaring the hell out of me. It sprinted off, taking mere seconds to disappear. I decided it was time for a rest and sat on a fallen tree, listening as the sounds of the escaping deer faded into the distance. I broke out the chocolate I had stowed in my pocket, then looked off down the hill at my solitary foot prints and decided that the hunt was over. I would take a short break and then head home.

When I rose snow flakes had begun to filter down through the pines. A gust of wind moved sharply up the ridge and I shivered with the cold. Turning sideways to reach for my rifle I heard a twig snap down below. I turned slowly. Nothing. But then I saw something very peculiar. About twenty yards down to my left there was a fresh set of tracks snaking through the trees. They stopped behind an enormous pine. My eyes focused sharply on the right side of the trunk. Then, suddenly, I saw it: my muse, darting off to the next tree on the right. I dropped to my knees, shouldering my rifle and held it there, eye to the sight, for several minutes. There was no movement from behind the tree. I lowered the barrel and looked downhill. My breath was coming in short puffs. My chest pounded violently. The muse jumped out in to the open. It waved its arms, cackling wildly, spun around, and darted down the slope. I barely had time to react. I *didn't* have time to react, because it was now gone, its demonic laughter echoing through the woods. I took off in a hard sprint, ducking tree branches and hopping over logs. The muse was barely visible ahead of me racing through the trees. It would zig zag left, then right then left again, all the while letting out horrible peals of laughter. I ran after it with all the strength I could muster. The tracks brought me to a large clearing. I could see the muse entering the tree-line on the far side. I sprinted as hard as I could, surplus shells scattering from my pockets. The forest on the other side was thinner and I could see the muse's tracks more clearly. It was moving in a straight line. Then I stopped, for the tracks doubled back to the right of me, forming a large U-shape that ended behind an old oak. I held my breath and carefully traversed the U until I could see the back of the tree. There, huddled less than thirty feet away, was my muse. It was wearing a black cloak and was shaking, out of breath. I aimed. I fired. I killed my muse.

\* \* \* \* \*

It was dark when I pulled into the general store at Perkerville. The old man that ran the place stepped out on the brightly lit porch and eyed the gutted carcass that lay strung across the roof of my car. He stood there, silently stoking his pipe while I filled my gas tank. Finally he spoke.

"Looks a-like you got yourself a muse."

"I sure did," I replied, hanging up the hose.

"Yep, that there's a good muse," he said, taking the ten from my hand.

"Thanks" I nodded. "Ever shoot one?"

"Yep, sure did."

"Are you a writer?"

He smiled a long slow smile. "Used to be. Until I shot the damn thing." He turned and the door swung shut behind him.

# Robyn, Ma, and the Green Sweatshirt

Rick McKee

With eyelids heavy as impatient laundry baskets  
You answer the telephone—

—Grace itself;

(Hemingway so proud)  
Hello to bye-bye, your conversation  
A plateful of greasy life-slices  
Most of us would politely refuse  
In a clean, well-lighted place.



Jonathan Gordon



## Lester

Rachel Cann

The west coast of Florida might have been Margarittaville for Jimmy Buffet, but for me, living on child support, it was the absolute pits. Because of my health, I was supposed to be on a high protein diet and megavitamins. Lester P. Sugarman had ordered the last piece of steak in the diner and when he offered me half of it, I was moved. I had no business talking to anyone in a sawed-off sweatshirt and a leather, stud-trimmed Stetson, but he was clean and spoke intelligible English and to tell the truth, I have always had a lust for adventure.

He was a carpenter down on his luck and said he would work cheap. I hired him almost immediately to fix a few things around the run-down motel I managed for my mother. The next day, he did the work of two men. He painted, he sanded; doors that had never closed properly did. He risked his very life to straighten out the electrical system that had been blowing all season when customers insisted on running their televisions and air conditioners simultaneously.

In his spare time, he began making me a bookcase. If he found me desirable in my tank top and cut-off jeans, well, that was his problem. I had problems enough of my own.

"I have to ask you a favor," he said one day, sweat running from under the brim of his hat. (I'd since learned that under the hat he'd gone prematurely bald.) He turned down the flame to the propane torch with which he'd been burning the wood on my bookcase, so that we could hear each other over the hiss.

"Sure," I said. "Like what?"

"Tomorrow I'm going to court for sentencing." I knew he'd been busted for marijuana as had a lot of people. The newspapers were full of it. "My lawyer has it all in the bag. The chief of police is going to be a character witness for me, especially now that I am working."

"And you need some moral support?"

"I'm scared," he said. "I don't trust lawyers. I think it would look good to the judge to have a lady friend there. And a little kid would make it look even better." My son, Sean, was about four, with bright chlorine-bleached hair, giving him the deceiving aura of a halo. Just keeping him out of mischief was a full-time job. My brother took him sometimes to give

me a break, but he was at college most of the time, so where I went, so did my son.

At the court house the next day, I was introduced by L.P. to the chief of police, a tall, good-looking man, a few years older than myself, dressed in plain clothes. I made it clear I was only there as a favor and that I hated to see anyone go to jail for something that would soon be legalized.

"How long have you known him?" asked the chief of police.

"About a week," I said. I was dressed in my best linen dress and high heels, like a real miss mucky-muck from suburbia and I couldn't wait to get back into barefoot and near-naked. Except for when I'd been adopted by my stepfather, at thirteen, I'd never seen the inside of a courtroom. "He's a good worker." I said. "I'll say that much for him."

"Yes," said the chief of police, "He sure is." It was then that I learned Lester had been responsible for a general dope clean-up in the area, in other words, an undercover turncoat, persona non-grata, price on his head stoolie. I didn't know any of this when his short, schmucky lawyer got up and testified that L.P. had seen the light, and that he was personally convinced that L.P. would never cross this particular bench again. The judge ruffled the papers, mumbled a few words to the prosecutor, and announced to the near-empty courtroom that L.P. was to receive a six month suspended sentence and probation. The clerk of court banged a gavel, and as we all stood, the judge disappeared in a swirl of black robes.

L.P. was less than jubilant. "Probation!" he said, waving an accusing finger at the chief of police. "You promised me acquittal." Beads of sweat twinkled under the chicken fluff of his balding head and he looked almost handsome in his newly bought J.C. Penny suit.

"We did the best we could," the chief of police said, shrugging his shoulders and shaking my hand goodbye. "Nice to have met you, young lady."

I collected my son from the windows of the court-house corridor where he'd been leaving his fingerprints. "Come on," I said. "Let's go to the beach."

"First, I have to stop by the probation department, to have them sign my papers," said L.P. He sure knew a lot about the wheels of justice.

"I'll drop you," I said. "Sean has been good about all this. But now he's getting restless." The guy that L.P. had turned state's evidence against was a bartender at Skip's, one of the most popular beach bars on the strip. I didn't know him, personally, but I'd seen him often enough. You couldn't miss him. He always wore a skimpy bikini that barely covered his

private parts, a Panama hat with a black band, and heavy gold jewelry around his neck.

"Wait for me," said L.P., outside one of the governmental offices. "I'll be right out."

I changed Sean into his yellow bikini while we waited, and stuffed his suit in the glove compartment. I rolled the windows down to let the hot air out, and I turned on the air conditioner. L.P. returned and hopped into the back seat.

"Where to?" I asked. I was beginning to wish he'd never started that bookcase. Certain friends of mine were friends of Skip who was surely friends with his head bartender. My name was going to be mud around the old tiki bar if anyone caught wind of today.

"I-75," said L.P.

"But L.P., I promised Sean we'd be going to the beach."

"Drive," he said, waving a snub-nosed 38 by my ear. "I can't be seen in this state. They're out to get me."

"Look, mommy, L.P.'s got a gun. Can I see it, L.P.?" I pulled my son into the front seat by the string on his bikini and slammed on the brakes.

"That's not a real gun. Is it, L.P.? Nice boys don't play with guns. You get my point?" I couldn't believe this was happening less than a hundred yards from the courthouse. Was I jinxed? Was the man a maniac? He had seemed so *normal*.

L.P. stuffed the gun under the seat. "That's right," he said. "How about if I buy you some funny books, Sean, at the next 7-11? Would you settle for that?"

"But I have to call my mother," I said. "What'll I tell her? I can't just up and leave like this. Who's going to watch the motel?" I'm basically a very responsible, middle-class girl.

"Tell her you've taken off for a little vacation," he said. "She'll understand."

"You don't know my mother," I said. Understanding my mother is not easy. She has the knack of doing and saying the opposite of whatever I expect. I called from a pay phone by the side of a rest stop on I-75. I was a wreck. My mom thought L.P. was the best thing that ever happened to her. If I told her the truth she wouldn't have believed me, or she'd do something hysterical like call the F.B.I. With my luck, we'd be caught in a cross-fire. I decided then and there to take the path of least resistance. Sooner or later he would fall asleep and Sean and I get away.

"What did she say?" asked L.P., when I got back. He was the picture of composure, munching on a sandwich. My son had a pile of funny books

of my scalp felt as if they were growing antennae and my face felt like cement.

" 'Have a nice time,' " I managed to choke. "How much farther do I have to drive?"

"Where do you want to go?" he asked.

"Where do I want to go?" I started to laugh hysterically. Think. *Think, brain, think.* "Boston," I said. "I have friends in Boston. It's another 25 hours." My clutch leg began to shake as if I had palsy and the car began to sputter and jerk. I actually apologized to Lester.

"I'll drive," said Lester. Don't worry about a thing. I really appreciate all you've done for me."

"Sure," I said, getting into the back seat. Sean and I snuggled under a blanket, sleeping through the Virginias, Delaware and Maryland. If there was one thing I could do right, it was sleep. In my dreams, all the characters followed the script I had written. I was always the heroine and nothing bad ever happened. It was in this way I kept my lily-livered control intact. No writing messages on bathroom mirrors, no outbursts at gasoline pumps. Fear kept me paralyzed and silent, a very docile hostage.

By the time we got to Boston, L.P., was out of money and also the Geritol he'd been sipping along the way. "Pure speed," he said. "I had it analyzed in prison." No wonder he didn't feel the need for sleep!

I checked L.P. into the Hotel Essex on my American Express card. "You're on your own," I said. "This is about as altruistic as I get."

My uncle and aunt were happy to put myself and Sean up for the night. We have a small, strange family, but we love each other, nevertheless. Neither of them mentioned my dress, which by now looked as if I'd been wearing it for a week. It was past midnight when my aunt shook me awake.

"Trouble at the motel," she said. "Someone called and said you should go there right away."

"Motel?" I asked, sleepily. My mother's motel was 1200 miles away. I dressed quickly and drove to the city. Lester was propped up in bed by some pillows and there was blood everywhere: on the sheets, on the walls and all over the floor. He seemed to be delirious, mumbling about how he was sure I was going to betray him and waving the gun at me with a blood-stained hand.

"What happened?" I asked, as if it mattered to me, as if there were anything more important than getting him out of the hotel room that was registered on my American Express card.

"A guy tried to kill me in the men's room of the Hillbilly Ranch. Pulled a knife on me. I shot him and climbed out the window."

The Hillbilly was on the outskirts of the Combat Zone, a real seedy place, with B girls who took money for drinking ginger ale with men who thought they were buying champagne. Unlike the rest of the bars in the Comabat Zone, the bands that played there attracted a clientele that wore cowboy boots and Stetsons just like Lester's. It was the one bar in town where he would fit in with the muggers, pimps, and thieves that a place like that attracted. By comparison, the dopers at Skip's were clean cut. "You've got to get to a doctor," I said. I did my best to act sympathetic.

"No way," said L.P. "That guy I shot could have died."

If I turned him into the police, it was only a matter of time before he'd get out, what with having a chief of police for a character reference and all. I wasn't about to cross him. I went to the drug store for bandages and salve as he asked and did the best I could for his wounds. I wiped the blood off the walls with a few terry cloth towels and stuffed them into a duffel bag I found in the laundry room. Each sheet and towel was emblazoned in dark black letters: HOTEL ESSEX. I pried the gun from his fingers and stuffed it into the bottom of the duffel bag and scoured the newspapers for the report about the victim. L.P. talked his mother into wiring him money for a bus ticket and I walked him to the bus station, the duffel bag over my shoulder. Never would I speak to another stranger as long as I lived. I carried that duffel bag half the day till I had the presence of mind to stuff it into a dumpster. When I got back to Florida, the first person I looked up was the chief of police.

"Rehabilitated, my ass," I said. madder than a hornet. I told him everything.

He folded his arms across his chest and laughed. Then he put his feet up on the desk. "He didn't go to his mother's," the chief said. "I picked him up from the bus station and he showed me his wounds. They weren't very deep and it seemed to me they were all going in the same direction. I have the feeling he did it to himself to get your sympathy."

I left the police station totally disgusted.

That night L.P. got himself soused and broke into my mother's house by cutting through a screen door. My mother tripped over him whn she got up to get a drink of water in the middle of the night. He'd been lying at the foot of her bed like a faithful dog. My brother and I tried to press charges but were turned away by some flunky at the police station who

told us that only the property owner could press charges. The chief, himself, had taken a convenient vacation and my mother was nowhere to be found.

"It's all your fault," said Carolyn, a girl who had kind of adopted my mother as her own. She was happily married, with beautiful blonde hair that came to her waist. I always felt that my mother compared me to her and I was resentful. According to Carolyn, mother had had a nervous breakdown and had called her from an institution. My brother and I, of course, blamed each other. He was the one who'd planted marijuana in the back yard and told my mother they were tomato plants. He also considered it his duty to entertain every young girl who came to the motel on vacation and had been caught indelicate, swimming in the pool at the country club where mother had a membership. But it was me who was the sexual profligate. L.P. had told my mother we'd been on an unofficial honeymoon, and that once my sexual appetite had been appeased, I ditched him. Poor baby. No wonder he'd gotten himself plastered.

A few horrible days went by until my brother and I got a telegram. We were to meet her on Sunday in the main dining room of the best hotel in town: a meeting we will never forget. My little one's face was pinched with terror. All of us were dressed in our best. The "institution", in fact, turned out to be a nursing home where my mother had been visiting an old friend. She ordered herself a Manhattan, smiled weakly at my son as if he were not to be included in what was to follow. We ordered, and after the waiter brought us our fruit cocktails, we all held hands as mother said the prayer. My brother and I gave each other covert looks of relief that mother seemed hale and hearty.

As the sherbet in our fruit cocktail melted into a rainbow of colors, mother folded her arms, leaned forward and in a voice that made the crystal in the overhead chandelier tinkle said: "If you two want to fuck, you're not going to do it under my roof." Nothing more was said for the whole meal. And when we were done, mother took my son and went to the beach. I went back to the motel to rest and my brother changed into his blue jeans and went looking for Lester with a baseball bat over his shoulder.



## Untitled (For Mallory)

Danielle Georges

Would have looked for you but  
I had to pick up my bike and  
by the time I'd get there  
you'd be gone  
pedalling towards your mind  
on a little red tractor  
with wings on its sides

I would come running  
but I know you'd hide  
in the strawfields with  
Yellow smiles  
painted on your eyes

I flew to you  
but you ducked in the grass  
and became very small  
with your green jeans on  
and your droll hat  
of curls

Tried sneaking up on you  
Your peripheral vision  
snared me again we  
laughed as the sun imploded  
in marmalade skies.



Mary Behrens

## K.R.

Colleen O'Rork

Someone looked away like a knife.  
 Someone had a shoulder by a window  
 and looked out.  
 Hands in a lamp's light  
 pointed in a page,  
 closed around a cup.  
 Something sat on the steeple and rained.

A wind came in and turned pages;  
 a giggling, nervous wind

## The Chinese Picture

Colleen O'Rork

A wind before storming  
between the high rocks,  
where the river, troubled,  
suspicious, throws  
its worried sticks.

The green rocks die  
shaking fists  
at the sky.

The old man watches  
his bobbing cork.

Pink spring is no longer  
what it was.

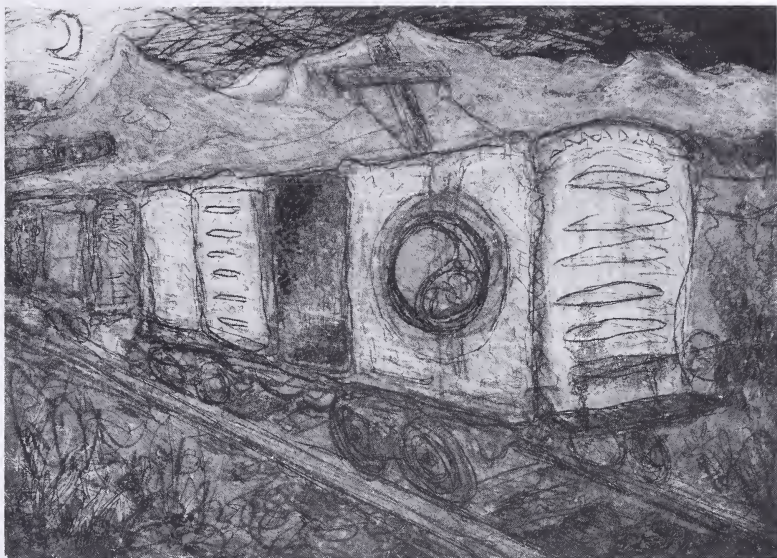
Now it is action at a distance,  
soundless spinning  
through an arc.

Now it is cold  
invisibly small sparks  
which rule the universe.

I never want to hear the moon  
again. I mistook her inertia  
for disposition.  
Ice breaks the acorn heart.

Each heart has another heart,  
each center a center,  
each line two directions.  
At the heart of questions, other questions.  
At the heart of answers, errors,  
motives, and assumptions.

The jaded fisherman  
goes fishing.



W.C. Platt

## My Daughter Marks Time

Edie Aronowitz Mueller

I watch her from the distance of her door  
 Cross-legged, like a lotus on the floor.  
 The calendar is balanced on her knees  
 and in her hand she holds a pen with ease.  
 With no more than her thin wrist's flex  
 She marks off long lopsided rows of "X".  
 Whole months are covered just as if they're not  
 Time's accumulation. She forgot  
 The tenth—it's just a number not the day  
 She walked, alone, to Jennie's house to play;  
 And August when we woke her in the night  
 To watch the mystery of Northern Lights.  
 The days lined up are continuity,  
 Black boxes to our own mortality.

## pamela

Philip David Welsh

fish outside your window  
 awoke the cat.  
 it was august i think and the  
 sky held no favorites  
 then.  
 and air thick as blood-pudding  
 drove us to the roof,  
 where your bikini swore at cars  
 and i dropped orange-rinds  
 and apple-cores on lecherous old men. it  
 was august i think,  
 the days tacked together as  
 clumsily as virginities  
 leave. but the grass  
 admitted how jealous of the trees it was,  
 i carved no hearts into them, knowing  
 somehow not to take photographs  
 on lawns where cameras have the option  
 of truth.

## Heartbreak Haiku

Colleen O'Rork

My new geranium.  
 It will be high as the house  
 when you return.

## Photograph of Wallace Stevens

Gale Warner

You grinning secret of a man,  
the secret you whispered all your days  
is here in its entirety. To think

it would be pigeons, after all!  
There is nothing ambiguous in the way  
they coo and flutter on your shoulders,

so ample and receiving. The wingbeats  
of their unconsidered love now fan  
a shimmering on your face. It is

so simple, an afternoon in the park,  
a bag of seeds, two outstretched hands,  
and flocks of unguarded enthusiasm

masking as greed. Seeing through the mask  
you close your eyes, beneficent, while one  
already full of your offerings teeters

rakishly on your bowler hat



## From the Window, November

Gale Warner

Nine bufflehead  
trailing blue-gray shadows  
on dawn water

down and up  
again with an instant  
silly surprise

twos and threes  
drift apart then  
coalesce on

the tight curved  
wires of instinct  
beads on a string

this is the  
egalitarian season: males  
females each

with a single oval  
votive mark white  
behind the eyes



Mary Behrens

## The rest of the Way

Tom Laughlin

Start here  
 just beyond the chain fence  
 on the back street  
 it turns to footpath  
 ahead, then left along  
 the water. There's  
 wildgrass and seagulls  
 and the path breaks  
 down into dirt  
 around a boarded up  
 pumphouse. Look at  
 the islands out away  
 and bridge connecting  
 two with the mainland.  
 The dock by that white  
 house there has boats  
 sometimes, visitors.  
 Breathe in seaweed  
 even dead fish smells  
 but don't stop—round  
 that corner the city large across  
 the bay, above the beach  
 where old men swim naked  
 every day—even through winter.  
 The steps of stone are wide

but low. They curve  
 too, like a rising  
 tunnel pulling you  
 to street and long-  
 needled spruce that reach  
 asking for the brush  
 of a hand  
 passing. Down the slope  
 past the field that fills  
 with pheasants in spring  
 go right  
 and you'll recognize  
 the rest of the way.

# Reality Within A Poem

Patrick Sylvain

This poem cannot be long, cannot be short,  
this poem is sweet,  
this poem is dangerous,  
this poem is the time maker,  
only time can tell.  
Tell the oppressed it is time to open their eyes,  
it's time to roll their drums for their revolution.

This poem was taken from Time magazine, Newsweek,  
C.I.A. files, K.G.B. files, and from the vatican secret file.  
This poem reveals the ugliness of mankind,  
who can kill, building bombs, robots,  
star wars, and many other things.

This poem is boring, stupid, and confusing.  
This poem is waiting for you to make sense of it.  
This poem was written by me,  
the man without a name,  
the man who saved the world from madness,  
the man who was thrown in jail  
because he wrote this poem.

# Getting Through Where There's No Getting Through To

Clara Obermeyer

That's basically my subject. It's likely that I'll stray from it and that's all part of it, see. That leaves my options open. I'd like to tell you this story I heard, well I read it actually, in a magazine. It must be a matter of public knowledge by now. It's a true story. I read it on the first of April and thought it was some kind of gorgeous joke. But in case you haven't heard it, I thought you might like to know. It's about Russians. Well sort of about Russians. I guess it's really more about people. It's about ice too, and whales.

What I mean about getting through where there's no getting through to refers, among other things, to my brain. Try as it will it can't really understand some things, so it compromises. Like time zones for instance. What time is it at the center of the earth? Someone in Nebraska might think it's six o'clock and I think it's four o'clock. Someone in Nagasaki might think it's four o'clock, but he got there twelve hours ago. So what time is it at the center of the earth? I asked this math teacher I know and she said it was no time in particular. Like it's halfway between all the times directly across from each other everywhere. So what time does that make it? And whales don't really give a hoot what time it is I guess.

Whales are big brained. But who knows what they do with those brains? I know there's a lot of talk about whales these days, and that's good because they need the publicity. I think as long as they're around we don't have to worry about being alone with God in the universe. Something tells me they're really smart, but laid back, like yogis of the sea. They laugh a lot. When they eat they just open their mouths in the green water and swallow tons of tiny writhing food. And when they're done they slap their tails on the water and jump in the air. The good life. But it's hard to think about what they think about. That's part of what I mean when I talk about a place where there's no getting through to. Like right now it's night and a big blue whale is sleeping in the ocean. I hear they sleep with one eye open. One brain awake. The other sleeps and probably dreams. That's what I mean.

Anyway, I read this pod of Beluga whales was up north somewhere last

February. Russian waters. When I read this I thought, "Oh no, Russians," of course because the Russians still hunt whales. And then there's Beluga caviar, but I don't think that comes from whales since whales are mammals. Anyway, what happened is that these Eskimo villagers were out hunting on the ice. Eskimos slay me. What do you know about Eskimos? I don't know much. I know they hunt whales, but unlike Russians they come face to face with a whale when they kill it. And vice versa. Anyway, these Eskimos came upon this whole pod of Beluga whales and the whales were trapped. These Beluga had been chasing a school of fish or something, and the channel they'd been swimming in froze over behind them. For ten miles. So they couldn't get back out to sea, because they can't hold their breath that long. So they were trapped and were probably scared. So they all just sort of huddled around this big hole in the ice, maybe they talked about what to do, maybe not. Well when these Eskimos came by and saw these whales they probably thought they had a real catch on their hands—fish in a barrel so to speak. The whales were probably really nervous by now, and the hole was getting smaller too, so they had to take turns at it. I guess the Eskimos figured out, or knew, that the Beluga is pretty rare. And pretty too. White as snow and probably has big black eyes, or blue. So the Eskimos and the Beluga just sort of hung out there for a while, both sides a little nervous, and tried to sort out what to do. That's what I mean. The whales were trying to get to the place where there's no getting through to and the Eskimos knew it.

I guess the Beluga are traveling in larger groups these days than they ever had to before because there are so few of them. Since it's harder to find each other in the sea now, they take their neighborhood along. I guess, all in all, if I remember right, there were about three thousand Beluga in this pod, and that represents about ten percent of their entire species. Imagine how many people represent ten percent of our species and then imagine yourself locked in a room with them with one airhole. Would you be civil? The whales were holding each other up by this point. They do that instinctively, to keep each other from drowning. But how do they feel about each other? I can't get a handle on that one at all. What do they feel when one of them dies? I heard a recording of whale songs once. Some of it sounds pretty sad.

Well, that night back at the settlement or wherever the Eskimos started talking about it. I'm almost as bad at thinking about Eskimos as I am trying to imagine how the whales felt, or rather what it feels to be a



whale. Anyway, the Eskimos got word of the whales' trouble to the captain and crew of a Russian icebreaker nearby. What can it be to fall asleep on an iceboat in a place where for weeks it never turns to night? I ask you. Getting up in the morning and drinking coffee, cold salt air in your face and your ears are filled with the scraping, squealing sound of breaking ice. Your hands are maybe dark with engine oil and your face feels thick. And get this: you think in Russian. When someone tells you that the ship is clearing a channel in the ice for some stranded whales, he tells you so in Russian. I wonder if the whales know the difference between a Russian and an Eskimo, a sailor and a scientist, an icebreaker and a whaling ship? It's hard to know.

So this icebreaker is trying to make a path to the whales. And there's some danger to the ship because the ice is freezing back sometimes in the channel. I wonder, why is the captain doing what he's doing? Did he decide? Did the Russian state department or the Committee of Good Acts tell him to do this? Or is he a happy sort of guy who makes up his own mind about things and he happens to like whales. Maybe when he was a boy his mother used to tell him the old Greek story about the dolphin who saved the boy, or maybe he started out as a sailor on a whaling boat and has a guilty conscience. Maybe there was a Russian naturalist on board who had to persuade him. See all of this is up in the air. It's pretty much up to you I guess, at least until we get the facts.

They contemplated turning back a few times. But get this: down at the hole in the ice the Eskimos are really getting into it. They're down there trying to feed the whales frozen fish. See this is what I really can't get at. Imagine the face of this little Eskimo guy or woman with a couple of huskies standing nearby, taking frozen fish out of a bag and trying to feed the whales. Belugas aren't very big, and remember it's cold and the whales have light snow falling on their backs when they come up to breathe. The Beluga won't take the frozen fish, probably because they don't know what it is. Imagine this: you're tired, scared, hungry, and you're sick of holding your breath. Then at the airhole there appears a hairy looking animal, a somewhat dangerous looking animal, who is making strange sounds and is offering you an object which is possibly a fish. Your ears, remember, are extremely good, and are filled with the sound of a ship squealing and crunching. You cast your eyes again on the animal offering you the frozen thing and then go down into the sea. When down, you search around the perimeter of the hole. Perhaps the bodies of the

few whales that have died have drifted here and rock gently against the ceiling of ice.

Well, to make a long story short, the icebreaker finally made it. It took a month. It had to stay in the channel though to keep it clear. So the whales didn't get the idea there was a way out. Maybe the ship scared them. It was probably really loud and big as a glacier. So the whales just stayed put. The people on the icebreaker and on the ice tried to figure out what to do. Maybe the Eskimos tried words, like they said in Eskimo, "Look, there's the door." A few whales probably got the idea but most of them didn't. It finally hit one of the people on the icebreaker that he'd heard somewhere that whales liked music. Some environmentalists discovered it out in a dinghy with a saxophone or something. So he talked his icebreaker comrades into moving some speakers out on deck, and put on some music. You wonder what he chose. What would you choose? Apparently he tried several kinds. Like maybe some good Russian jazz or a Burl Ives record his cousin gave him back in Vladivostok. You wonder what kind of music they listen to out there on the icebreaker. Well, after several tries, it turned out that the whales really paid attention to classical music. Then maybe the captain turned down the engines or something and the Eskimos were pointing and jumping up and down and the huskies were barking and the whales started nudging each other; anyway word got around.

Whales talk to each other with a kind of music, and so do we. Maybe it was old Russian waltzes the sailors played, or Chopin. Or maybe that's too frivolous for sailors, so they played the Volga boatman. I guess we'll never know. The whole bunch of whales started following the icebreaker down the channel, leaping and hopping. You get the feeling maybe the captain was whistling and the guy with the bright idea about the music was drinking a dark Russian beer and getting slapped on the back a lot. And the Eskimos probably laugh so hard they get tears in their eyes.

But I wanted to talk to you about getting through where there's no getting through to. This is a true story. The captain's grandchildren will hear this story at the supper table. The Eskimos will sit in small circles around little fires and rock back and forth, grinning, telling this tale. Maybe the children of the whales will hear the story too. Someday if we record the songs of the Beluga whale this will be one of them. It all goes to show that it pays to keep trying when things look bad. I guess that's the moral of the story, that is if it has one. Who knows.



Valerie Moss

## Six horses Running

Danielle Georges

The boom of the grinders  
The curse of his madness  
The depth of the murk  
and the Synchronized hiss  
of angry raindrops on  
Deathtrips  
did nothing for his  
headache

The editorial board of Howth Castle would like to extend its sincere thanks to all those at UMass/Boston who have supported the magazine, especially the students without whom we would not exist. We would also wish to recognize the support of the Student Senate, in particular, Colleen Lopes, Wayne Miller and John Rohanna who worked tirelessly on our behalf.

**This issue is dedicated to Donna Neal of HarborType without whose experience, knowledge and tolerance we would have been left foundering many a time. Also a special thanks to Mrs. Nancy C. Webster of Columbus, Mississippi who was there when we needed her most.**

**\*A note on the name "Howth Castle":**

Howth Castle is taken from James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, in which the phrase "Howth Castle and Environs" stands for the sleeping protagonist Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker and the sentiment "here comes everybody," by which Joyce is said to have meant everyone from Eve and Adam onward. This unfortunate nomenclature was foisted upon the UMB literary magazine by well intentioned but misguided founder Margot FitzGerald who had somehow got it into her head that something meaning "here comes everybody" was by its nature egalitarian and would appeal to the UMass community for that reason.



