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Dr. J. Bruce Bobick

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CONTRIBUTORS’ NOTES
Poems
A forest of willows coaxes the ploughmen
To flee to fallow fields. An empty boy fills a thousand trees.
The river crackles in the nooks
Of rocks, licks the deer’s tongue cold.

The evening rumbles ashen gray like wilting,
Jasmine waiting to be picked.
The clouds erupt, upset and Oedipal,
Cursing the ocean for its sour kiss that tastes like sky.

The sparrows were spared their tears,
But they glaze my face: the storms took you.
These are yours. Why give them back to me?
Pubic Hair

They spiral haphazardly to greet you,
Kept in cages from children’s eyes,
As in a zoo.
The constant war between matted rugs and snagged-teeth
Rages as nervous people wriggle in their seats.

Swiveling about in each other’s arms,
The little ones shout constant fears of shears,
Of aesthetic hygiene.

God, surely the da Vinci of his time, grew
Tired of the sharp curves,
And doodled.
These people eat soup before every meal.
Montalban owns a nest of hospitals.

For shock or education
I was lacking,
he showed me a maternity ward—
sweaty women crackled
in paper garments.
Smells hung in humid air
like exotic birds on a mobile.
Barren sunlight bore no breeze
through open windows.
Brows were mopped with soiled cloths.

Wearing an expensive suit
and authoritative hair,
he delivered a bloody, squalling package.
Cool pools of black puddled the floor
beneath the spread of exhausted limbs.
Crisp in her white uniform,
a nurse sat reading beads.
My eyes drifted to the woman’s Y,
from which a child had come and gone,
drenched in placenta and spitting
a blue-purple string.

What could women ever be to me now?
Montalban smiled.
“Did you notice she was dead?”

We ate soup again that night.
Jesse Bishop

*Seagulls*

Those feathered heroes of baitfish, bread crumbs, and protected sex, they glide on gusts that keep kites. Seagulls flock to laughter and the grunts of teenagers breaking on Sundays. Nothing is more upsetting to sandcastles than a seagull beak-deep in a washed-out fantasy, except a hermit crab scuttling away with a pacifier. Nearly all hermits had pacifiers once, but everyone has built sandcastles at low tide. Most of us leave before gulls return but long after the tide has gone. The sandcastles always wait for seagulls. I like to keep bread crumbs in hand for such occasions.
Jacksonville

I remember the 10th Street Turtle,
that bar downtown where I blew flame
and swept the hardwood floors.

It seems like everyone’s following me now,
crossing these bridges over your brackish waters
while tugs slink under cars.

In traffic, this bridge throbs like a speaker
and the mufflers shake like maracas
while a dirty blonde flag flaps from a convertible.

I’d give anything for heads bobbing to bass lines,
for the dirty floor—green with liquor and neon light,
pink bracelets and plastic cups full of top-shelf liquor.
Patricia Burgey

Traveling Fish

In his polished cube, the traveling fish
glides through the grooves of habit,
baffled by the hand and seatbelt that anchor
his turf to the sober sloshing waves.

Angling through the belted cities buckled in asphalt,
he probes the impulses of an eastern coast,
as he plunges to the pitch of a pulsing highway
then surges to the spouting spatter of confabulation.

City to town to country—the driver nods to rhapsodies
inside a chambered head, as the roving fish
bubbles to the visceral beat of gilled myopia
and gulps the swilled sunlight leaking into the tank.

Unmoved by whales beached and drowning in the sun,
the stray fish skips, skims and sways as asphalt drones.
You are a contact high
on the way to church,
a line of coke on a cold
butter knife, the 48-hour
watch at the beginning
of a long hospital
stay.

Your car sits in an empty lot
collecting tickets.

My DNA is a bad joke
beginning like this:
a bipolar
an obsessive-compulsive
and a schizophrenic
walk into a bar . . .

Mother, you were my first love.
Song of Federal Work Study

The rubber bands are too responsible today,  
bear-hugging the bulk mail  
piled beside the miniature oak desk nameplate.  
“Office Assistant”: my new name.  
Near ten, I rinse out the coffee pot, its lid  
stained and acrid. And I think of Prufrock,  
balding and inconsolable, in his yellow London.  
Meanwhile, two cheap silver rings—one stamped  
into a hibiscus, the other a nameless fairy—anchor  
the yellow post-it that says “Found in bathroom.”  
Lunchtime and I sulk through campus,  
like a retired spy, carrying travel  
authorizations to the basement office  
of Sponsored Operations.  
The aged brick of my building—floors stacked  
like personnel action requests—sinks  
further into its trough of Georgia mud.  
Don’t ask me about the water samples.  
Ask instead about  
the copier reviving itself  
or the clock out of time,  
or how I once spent two complete days copying  
student evaluations for Dr. Gompert,  
a hearty Eliot in a pair of khaki shorts.
Savannah

My daughter floats on the grass of Monterey Square, weaving in and out of sun and the shadow of Mercer House, whose magnificent Italianate the ghost of Jim Williams wanders. Four stories of orange brick, a courtyard spanning a city block. I smell wisteria, imagine the scent of cigarillos and the low-country sweet potato cornbread.

The square is live oaks and Spanish moss, black iron streetlights holding their golden breath under the sunlight. Johnny Mercer’s “Moon River” hangs in the humid June.

I find myself on this chunk of cracked sidewalk, weathered cobblestones, every time I visit this huge antique. I walk through and solve the puzzle of Victorians, Federals, and Colonials to stare at the perfection of Williams’s restoration. Others, brought here by cheap sight-seeing, snap photos with disposable cameras. They’ve seen Clint Eastwood’s movie, read Berendt’s book or watched the trial on TV. Jim claimed self-defense, the only defense, then ordered Faberge
from Christie’s on the prison pay
phone. Acquittal walked him through the heavy
double doors onto the parquet floor of his center hall,
and death found him with his silver head resting
on the study steps, gazing
at the stained-glass cupola he renewed.

The homes he brought back
give this place its history.
My daughter—tired, sweaty—clings
to the moist skin of my leg.
I look down at Savannah,
a child named for the city that captured my years.
Today I give her the gift,
her history, my history, ours.
When Jilly brought home a mime, her mother was a little shocked. A mime, she said to herself, was not her type. She really couldn’t argue about it, though, considering he was so quiet, always opening the door for her, even if it was invisible and in the middle of the living room. On her birthday, Jilly found the mime in the kitchen with her mother. They were pretending to hold something, wearing matching lipstick grins. She had to ask what they were doing. It’s your birthday cake, silly, her mother said. Can’t you see?

Weeks passed, and the mime’s face paint changed from the grinning, clown-like expression of an eager son-in-law to something rather slanted. He almost looked angry, but Jilly’s mother said he was just trying on new faces. One day, Jilly came to her mother’s bedroom, crying. She told her the mime had raped her. That’s silly, said her mother, her face expressionless. It’s not like he could hurt you for real.
Headhunter

The road between my house
and church curves like sex,
or a half-eaten cookie.
Inside, the minister will tell me
where I’m going
for what I’ve done.
Is it the dark humor of mahogany
that submits to his despair, his incisors?
Any relationship should be private,
removed from shouting, snakes,
or declarative sentences.
Eat me, I should like to say,
and I’ll make all of us live
as cannibals.
Lessons in Subtraction

I: Mastectomy

She waits for the firing,  
a high heat to harden 
her body, chisel in hand.  
Showering, she rinses 
lukewarm skin, clay bust, 
thinking of Michelangelo.  
Her vision skews, leaking 
jobless interviews, divorce.  
The lump to be carved 
out, the underscored relief 
of every second.

Spray dimples her skin  
as she waits  
for the firing, leans  
into the chisel, grasps  
the mallet, waits  
for the firing.

Thinking of Michelangelo.  
Thinking of the word. Fettle:  
trimming a sculpture’s  
extraneous matter.  
The high heat of firing.  
The mallet, the chisel,
the hardening, the lump.
Michelangelo.

II: Necrosis

When I hit the dog, branches sprawl over West Main lanes, fingering the slip-stream of traffic. My car evades the erratic stop and go of the car ahead, until the red light turns.

When I hit the dog, sunlight ripples across the windshield and I am sick with motion.
I keep driving.
I turn up the radio,
drown it out.
We are all made of water.
Stephanie Fields

A Dry Dock

I had sex with a man for money once
twice
—he paid less the second time.

His tongue flopped around
in my mouth, on my body
like a dying fish on a dry dock.

I didn’t look at him
but turned my head and gazed
at the desolate streets below,
sometimes glancing at the alarm clock’s
red numbers,
waiting for it to be over.

When he finished,
I walked to the window
and my breath fogged the pane,
chilled by the night air.

I could hear him put on his clothes.
I hated the way he tied his boots,
the hard, fast sounds of the two
waxed laces grinding against each other.

He didn’t speak and I didn’t face him.

I stared out the window
and waited for him to shut the door.
Elizabeth Hetzel

Fife and Drum

In the Quarter, every arched door is thrown open. Green and purple beads sway in shop displays beside the t-shirt lobster-magnet voodoo dolls. Here on Royal, I must lift the latch, push against the towering door to touch the window-propped seventeen-century chair and platters engraved with initials of the dead. Artists sit under the balcony shade on empty crates, shaking tambourines to the tune of “Please.” Further down the street, a lean, silver mannequin in antique clothes, is dressed for the Revolution. She stands upright on a homemade scaffold, drumsticks ready. I stop to gawk (we all do)—not a stitch uncovered by shiny paint or clothes—hat, hands, long, twiggy legs, eyelids, eyelet ruffles, boots. Only the wind betrays her, lifting her hair and cap-feather. There is quite a crowd now. The hum of digital sound effects hides our whispers growing louder, waiting for her shtick. We want her to be worth something, something we might carry with us like the face of a missing child. Someone breaks the human circumference just long enough to toss money her way. He misses the coffee can, releases the sweaty bill to windswept independence. She leaves him to chase it, raises her sticks and begins to roll rat-a-tat, rat-a-tat, rat-a-tat, brrrrrrrr. She bows then resumes, frozen. From behind the vaulted doors of the tourism office comes a squat guide, hair in an educated bun. At the elbow of the drummer, she signs a hushed admonition while the anthem calls,
rat-a-tat, rat-a-tat, rat-a-tat, brrrrrrrr. I find, through the armor of her silver rags, I can no longer watch.
Leaving

The front door hinges squeak
to a sky of rags. Her suitcase,
packed with toothbrush, shoes,
a little cash, cannot contain
thirty-five years of fist-kissed nights.
Outside, she douses the kitchen
foundation, fingers the matchbook
in her pocket—Tia’s (she remembers
the date). She strikes the match, sees
the tire swing hanging from its noose
where the boys drove plastic pterodactyls
through the iron heat, drowning them
in a gully, batted fireflies. The rubber mouth gaped
at their giggles, spilling in the weedy Saint Augustine,
scaling the chain-link fence
then other ladders toward relief’s seed.


Sitting Shiva

An hour ago we clutched hands, threw dirt on your grave. With the rabbi, we chanted and rocked. Black shoes, black dress, black pants, black blazer, our black eyes, red-rimmed, swollen in our faces.

This house is so impeccable, as if death could be so clean. We have left the lemon-scented mop of our sighs at the graveside. Come, let us eat: soft bagels heaped with ginger-colored lox, pineapple, raisin-bloated challah. We consume our grief.

At the table, talk of work, vacations, a September wedding. Over the mantle, a stylish canvas of crimson, orange, plum. Searching, we uncover a reclining nude and a plate of fruit, barely discernible in the shiver of color. Figs or grapes, I do not know. Forgive me for mourning you this way.
Gary Hunter

*Origins*

I am from wooden spoons
scraped flat by the backs of butterknives,
from the naked white spot
in the whorl of a half-cup
of instant coffee.

I am from Gary’s sagging liver,
from Angela’s rising tongue.
I’m from Grandpa’s tattooed
“sweet” & “sour” nipples
and Grandma’s evaporated spit.

I am from golden November
grass catching fire
like African savannahs.
From carbon-black mud,
the long strokes of rain
through cracked, red clay
hissing loud hosannas.

I’m from the lush green that peaks
right after and never stays.

Half a mile down Jeff Davis
Road, until you get to the Potato
Creek Bridge, then a slight right
onto Hannah’s Mill you’ll see
where flood waters broke
off the top of the dam
and the rock-island where I slipped
and chipped a tooth.
The Garden

The old woman on the mountain moves so fast
the statues don’t see her or even suspect she exists.

The old woman in her garden adjusts each concrete figure,
the owl, the ducks,
the crocodile and fisherman,
every day to the next moment,

    except on rainy days
    when things are still.
    Then the animals wonder
    but can draw no conclusions.

The old woman with her wheelbarrow scatters pine bark and the animals say it is good, scatters grass seed and the animals say it is good until the animals need no prompting to say it is good.

And the old woman, one day, by herself, rolls a rock across the garden and drops dead. The animals are frightened then, are almost like stone.
Janey Keene

Manhattan

I’ve come to see the park and its bulb-filled branches, sky-
scrapers shadowing streets of slushy snow. An Indian calculates my total
as I stare at time
and a steaming cup of noodles. I hand the man a 50,
which fractures the cement vastness. This city lures dancers
in coffee shops and diners
to pay off December. My place seems stunted
but Brooklyn invites,
calling Bienvenido a mi alma—
what my life’s been missing.
Brandon Kerr

Izda

She carries the vipers nesting,
still coiling around their fallen prey,
blood dripping from the straw basket
for miles, the kill still warm.
The water and the grass are waiting for her
as she passes, swaying and humming
and the insects are humming too
rubbing their long sensual legs
in that way they create sound
without smiling or shouting.
The woman and the basket are magnificent.
She walks slowly and fluidly without pausing.
And the water gathers its arms together
and passes around her like spirits.
These, Our Women

They’ve all gone in for company jobs
leaving on the grass the pins, the gloves
baby’s breath and bruised fruit

There was a deed written as a t-shirt slogan
on torn candy wrappers and plastic fairy wings
strewn on wet floors with tons of psychoanalytic trash
that fills the air the way songs used to

God owns
the musty past they coughed up
the teeth they pulled
can’t be put back

they are cogs, nearly asleep
with shiny bronze, seemingly flat eyes,
buttons on the gloves in the grass
They’ve all gone
strong like men, our women, sovereign doves in rags
Jonette Larrew

*Elegy for a Geranium*

Blood bloom. Full red.
That’s how I saw them hanging
from the eaves three weeks ago.
Now, harboring their acrid accusations,
brittle deadheads fall, broken

in the slightest breeze,
static descants for the weed medley
in the flowerbed. The Mare’s Tail cloud
hasn’t kept its promise.

The birdfeeder hangs empty by the wind chimes,
jailed by the shadow of the wrought iron chair.

Dried blood. Bones.
Blooms and stems.
Clots of passed corollas
suddenly too large, slashed
creepings, robed and ghostly.
Planted

The limp mimosa flower quills bow, tiny leaves fold inward. I draw the bucket from the well, scratch through the dust to the pail’s floor. The river shrinks from its banks, more fish stacking on its surface every day. Their stench flies like crows over the cracked field.

When the sun drums overhead, a lizard on the well’s wall speaks. Follow me to the desert, he invites, where the cactus has learned to grow. No, I reply, the cactus must learn to grow here, too.
Cody Lumpkin

The Origins of the Dog Trail

From the passenger seat of my mother’s yellow Geo, I saw them through the scar-scratch trees of late autumn, a platoon of mongrels and mutts, single file, heads and snouts truffling the leaf swollen ground of my neighborhood’s second-growth forest. The leader dipped his nose over the precipice of an unnamed branch, trickling its way to Lake Allatoona. In their ranks, I swore I saw Jimbo, the border collie who left us after we repainted his doghouse, and Aldo, my cousin’s French poodle, which was hardly ever let outside, and Jeanie, the chocolate lab my mother said was dead. Small and big dogs all in line, swaying like the Blue Ridge Mountains north of where we were, somewheres else. But what had brought them there, some fifty yards into the woods from Bells Ferry Road, its sliver of asphalt possibly their stamped-down-by-tire-tread burial ground? What sent them there in such manly order, where were their sandpaper paw pads taking them? Weeks passed until Christmas break, and in those early exuberant first days I took up the dog trail from my vinyl-sided house base camp.
and followed their logic through the bramble
slaps and briar patches, down steep knee-scraping gullies.
Crawling through the rhododendron thicket I was canine
myself. I crossed the great mud-and-puddle-spotted

avenues that the logging trucks had left over a decade ago,
hopped over the shut mouths of mine shafts from the first gold
rush and came at last to the silt-filling man-made lake, where
the path ran into the lake and joined the trail around it, a simple loop,
a thread of connection to the best catfish spot or small trees
tangled with panties, imploded Dixie cups, shredded directions
leading ultimately to other trails bent toward some human
purpose. I kneeled on the wet, dead grass and spotted a paw
print, a trinity of toes above the faint hint of a crown.
Ambivalence

That one afternoon near the end of autumn
when children move their toys inside
to smell pineapple-ham instead of burned oak leaves,
and the dusk lights up with haze so thick—

Then night pulled up in its black Corvette
wearing only a sequined dress—size zero—
like a superstar at the Oscars, stealing my success
and putting shame in its place.

And I had spent the day with her—
water for breakfast, pills and diet coke for lunch,
running through Central Park from the wind
that wouldn’t take a break from
its minimum-wage job in the city.

A shower stole the smell of the perfume
that reminds me of pink evenings
of classical music and ballet, its undeniable
likeness to that wave of flora
that pulls you under at the grocery.

Sometimes I think about her when I see
the poker table covered with potato chip confetti
after a night of cranberry juice and vodka—
but another love sits with me holding a cap filled with mouthwash, waiting—the bright green assurance that comes with the bag of lettuce, buy one get one free last weekend.

We stand there admiring the off-white porcelain while looking to some future that awaits. Cheating isn’t a big deal if they both hate you anyway.
Peaches

Peeling is altogether an ethereal affair, removing the downy coverlet, exposing consequence.

It is impossible to eat without bloody drips escaping sucking lips.

It clings to fingers, phones, and air, drying to a sticky musk.

Light orange sprays explode from the pressure of white teeth, shooting like stars from a tropical paradise in search of chaos.

The hard red center leaves its mark on the squishy fruit as thready tendrils cling to the pit.

I bleed peach juice when pricked like the rusty dirt on back roads.

“She’s a real peach of a gal, destined to go places,” if she stays off those back roads.
Josh Messer

Young Compson

i never wanted caddy
my sister for god’s sake
only wanted some vestige
of my family
to remain pure
be normal
    not poison

damn dirty panties
they always bring up
what was she
three,
    four maybe?

then quentin,
her daughter
my namesake
just like her mother,
a shame

compson means nothing
means dirt
means defect
    disease
not a name like sartoris
what a regal sound
Sartoris
    Sartoris

to be so noble
to be normal would suffice
just to function
would suffice

hurts me now
just to think
like it used to
hurt to anything
hurt to live

took filthy blue bubbles
and deep deep water
to soothe that pain
pain that the
tic
toc
of daddy’s watch
pounded
    into being
I Am From
(in the style of George Ella Lyon’s “Where I’m From”)

I am from one stop sign
from no stoplights and one fill-in station where
Bobo stands outside, poor and dirty, smoking his dorals
and scratching his tickets
awaiting that precious moment when the prize amount
in that little gray box
has more than two digits

I am from brown broken-down doublewide
siding chipped and broken in places
From homemade raggedy andy
and the red cast-iron tractor on the shelf

I am from i love you and you should read more
and don’t you dare take my damn picture
From deer hunts in the cold grey morning
nothing killed
the foggy breath of a father
mingling with that of a son
and disintegrating into nothing
silence for months at a time

I am from shouting matches, almost-slashed tires,
and finally divorce
From car rides down dirt roads
where a thick fog of THC
carbon-monoxide
and whatever else
inundated our sixteen-year-old lungs

I am from warm forty-ounces fizzy and sweet
thanks Bobo
here’s a dollar
From the sweet salt-air salvation of sneaking out
on a trip to the gulf with a church youth group
that would rather toke up than offer up praise

I am from one stop sign
from cold creek beds on hot summer days
From slushpuppies and cigarettes
Bruce Montgomery

*Failure is Always an Option*

A forest is vegging out on the continent feeding on itself and rooting further away
And then failure is an option and the sun starts shining and never stops until it’s gone
And the scorpions and vipers and other dark-side-of-the-rock dwellers move in
Bringing their tan sunlight and tan sand and hyperventilating winds,

And a sand bar off the coast starts collecting more sand and soon it’s an island oasis
With palm trees and coconuts and spring water and ukulele music and failure is again an option and the waves grind it down shipping away the conch shells and hauling down the trees until it becomes the undifferentiated ocean where crabs and banana slugs and mollusks dig in down below for the long haul,

And a slab of sea ice props up an igloo and shelves a harp seal to become a whale’s meal and then failure is optioned in like a ballplayer to be named later and the ozone parts above and waves of ultraviolet A rays more than all the oceans ever waved cascade down and the shelf cracks and the whale waits (not for the igloo but the seal),
And failure’s option unrolls a new map daily with a capital city and roadways and houses and buildings that are not as nice as the ones that were there but still there’s plenty of it probably even with a shabby Chamber of Commerce to promote the thing. Why, there’s even hotdogs and balloons for the kids because some of you will be bringing your families and with failure everything is optional and at a discounted rate we might add.
Nicole Morgan

Chimes

I know a voice, a silence,
a door, a mirror, a tree.
I know my mother
resigned on a bed,
my father standing tall as a night.

Unfolding two doors down,
I oppose the fruit.
Green grass nestled my feet.
I store my doll,
child I don’t need.

Outside my window,
metal clangs,
pendulum-sways and plays
the Wind Master’s chorus of mirrors.
Hear. Be lulled.
Daddy cruises from the 24-hour,
translucent blue bags full:
Breyer’s vanilla, IBC
in brown glass bottles. Calloused
hands twist metal. Three spheres
of speckled cream. The bronze glow fizzing,
tickling my nose. Daddy serves
Mama, brothers, me. The leftovers
his. We slurp through neon straws
over Canasta and Yahtzee.
Martin and Lewis sing laughter into our mouths.
I close on Mama as fingers rake my bangs,
glancing when I hear her smile. Sticky spoons,
syrupy glasses clang in the sink.
Drooping lids draw us to bed.
Next day, in contented silence
I work the cursive “z,” the seven
times table, and draw chains of pointy
mountain tops across the west—
snow caped peaks above foaming fog.
Micaela Robinson

Catherine the Great

Gregory’s never had good aim.
I can’t blame him. He tried
with his good eye.

His suede eye patch and my chipped tiara—
the only costumes in our kinky
Pirates of the Caribbean.

How could my feet be bloated so,
and on a Saturday of all days?
I shy away from salt.

Shades, Gucci scarf
(never can be too careful—a lot of hypocrites around),
leased turquoise Ferrari. I let the top up and welcome

last Friday—Gregory riding shotgun.
I told him how the stick shift
and buttery leather interior made me tingle.

“I am constantly turned on by you,” I told him,
“and everything that surrounds us.”
Today, I ditch the Secret Service and red carpet. No time

for diva-tude when my six pack’s starting to swell.
I check the hottest news
on my 2-way: “Catherine comatose after being impregnated
by pet horse” . . . with pictures.
I guess Gregory’s eleven inches and buck teeth
seem horsy thru a smudged lens.

Five missed calls from Dubya Bush.
Those damned terrorists sure know how to blow
a hole in my day.

Gregory’s curly black hair and sand-dollar skin
remind me of 19-year-old faux-tan days.
Three semesters in college: best time I never had.

Returning from Chemistry to find
baked ziti and cucumbers simmering in the oven,
and every day, after Oprah, the other Gregory on his knees
in the garden, devouring my toes.
Daydreaming and sweat:
that’s what always got me in trouble.

Peter hasn’t done me since I ran off
with his prized position.
There’s no way this problem’s his.

Rasheed is Nigerian, Charles, Irish, Antonio, Italian,
Fayeh, Indian, Louis, Dominican.
The two Gregorys and my husband.

How can I run a country if I can’t run my men?
The hourly at the desk is being a bitch,
asking if I have insurance, knowing I have all the benefits.

I prance through the clammy waiting room
crammed with Osh’B’Gosh,
masked paparazzis. Doc greets me as “Your Highness.”
You know the routine—spread ’em, feet in the stirrups, two fingers and a toy inside, hand pressing my outer wall. One of us moves to lock the door.

The hell with abortion today. I need an heir to put me in early retirement. This job is just too wearing.
Jennifer Saltarella

_Idiots_

It started innocently enough,
A discussion of fried fish.
The fish, he told us, needed ketchup.
Discourse over food is common here.
From there our conversation traveled
To chicken and, somehow,
From there to self-defense. He told us
That martial arts were useless; he was
Handy with a gun which he would use.
On idiots.
Jessica Sherman

When I was Five

I saw myself
with butt-long thick 14-carat hair
a complexion like milk
I bought at the corner store
ten rings on my fingers, and
it didn’t look silly.

The same old man who wore two
different color socks to church
one yellow, one red
just because
gave me one dollar to go in and buy
whatever I wanted.

Eat your trees
was the only concern.
I could make a clown uncomfortable with
no borders, distorted lines
of Mary Kay and Maybelline
smeread across cheeks.
Take a picture it lasts longer than
no expectations or double standards.

I looked like Barbie
and my best friend
Whitney we were twins
before I was tall enough
to reach the mirror.
Laura Sonderman

Antique Queen Anne

Conjured by a voodoo queen, swarming with gnats,
she rose from the rank Cypremort bog, mud
dripping down her Cabriole legs.
On the corner of Sharp and El Camino, she sits in her ripped
upholstery beside the throbbing-red of a couch
lumped with broken strings.

The city seeps in through the window
glass, smoke and grime and rhythms of avenue
jazz, while sulfur, potent, drifts from somewhere
far: bayous or paper mills churning by the river,
On a dry day, that sulfur sneaks from a match
struck for a votive candle a few blocks
down, and another voodoo priestess wails, “Come to me
all you that labor.” But the cluttered antique
shop can’t contain the Queen Anne long.

Here in the sewing room, we bargain with history,
my mother and I. Pliers pry tacks and my fabric
knife slices cleanly. My mother flips the satin
bolt with pulsing thuds, and squints behind bifocals, measuring
tape in hand. I cut patterns, scratch out 9 7/8. At intervals,
we need words: scissors, tacks, straightpins, careful. Then,
just a bit tighter, and Queen Anne wears
her dusty rose.
Eighteen gold tacks inflate my thumb, my stiff neck rests on her serpentine back. The squat humidifier drones, the cough insists. I click the knob to high, and now the room begins with frog croaks and mosquito buzz from deep within dense cypress.
An Exercise in Not Using I—Part 1

There is no more fuchsia left in the little bell jar,
Trapping nothing sweet like Self or fireflies.
It never surrounded anything
More than the reflections
Of the aubergine walls surrounding it.
Blown over by L’s of men
Who think themselves poets or scholars.
Men who use L
When they should be using F or T.
They think the whole alphabet is theirs
To jalopy around in any old rag
Calling itself a Literary Quarterly.
Glossy pages read by sleeping birds.
Birds who sit all day
Dreaming of aubergine walls.
Dianne West

*My Skin*

Born in this shell
it grows transparent as
my life seeps through.

Once young Irish coffee
now, wise
with sprinkles of chocolate.

Long ago, a polka dot bikini
playing dusk to dawn in the west coast rays
now, a crumpled grocery bag.

Carried on bright adventures
legs on passageways smooth and glowing
turn to failed voyages on
red spaghetti highways.

For a short while, bountiful, ample, and confident
then wrapping loosely around a set of worn-out twins
who fed three babies.

Filled with desire, burning, even and silky
to sweetened, rock candy thighs below
waves of poochy mama belly.
Forever a Warrior
finally decorated with faded crimson childhood viruses
wounded white medals
of bullies, hot stoves, and fish hooks.
And a tribute to child number two
just below the belly button.

Once, flawless in milky white innocence
now mottled with no regrets . . .
My skin,
My story.
Will Winchester

Smile

My mother was decapitated sometime ago
to fit the frame in the hall (or anyway that’s what
my father claims) and all that’s left are a
severed pair of hands steadying their baby boy
as he’s unleashed with wet and savage eyes
upon the giant chew toy buffet world.

Outside the frame she’s a smile, must be, warm and real
like the old smiles when maybe she could convince
herself that happiness is where you are, before

the lines set in and the smile was a scream and happiness
was something you read about in books and longed
to pluck from darkening movie screens

or glean off others who maybe don’t get it yet or maybe get it
better than you, before mama became mother became
bey you there and the old ideals died with us new

leaving dumbstruck granite statuettes staring mute at the
cropped
remains of nostalgia on the wall, remembering and rehashing
and saying yeah, I guess that’s about right

after all.
Vanity, say some,  
yet I know  
that Truth is more heroic  
than the deeds of Hercules himself.

The truth is that  
I am beautiful.  
More so than:  

The Gods that created me—  
Beauty made flesh;

The mortals who envy me—  
not peers, for none  
can match my Splendor;

the land I walk,  
peak to gorge,  
Emerald fields and sapphire water.

The blossom that bears my name,  
Though only a fraction of my Grandeur.

So I sit by the pool  
admiring the Gods’ creation,  
considering my form,  
if Zeus had power  
to match my Beauty.
Adam Clark

Excerpt from A Once Rising Son

“Did you get the mail?”
“It’s on the counter by the fridge.”
“Man works all day. The only thing he’s got to come home to is the mail,” the old man said.
“Calm down. I didn’t open it or anything.”

The screen door slammed behind the old man. He mumbled at his laces as he pried off his boots. He threw his keys by the sink and thumbed through the envelopes. Three white professional and a manila. He opened the refrigerator and pulled a Budweiser from the door. The old man clenched the envelopes in the stained armpit of his white v-neck T-shirt. The can spewed and he sucked coolness from the aluminum top. Beer collected on the stubble of a two-day beard. Short white hairs peppered with black. His boots were covered in wood shavings and a blue handkerchief hung from his back pocket. He turned and smeared the can across his sweaty cheek as he entered the living room.

“Damn yankee at the mill this morning. Thought I was going to have to take him outside. Said the skidder left all hell of a mess in his front yard.” The man took another drink from the can. “We tell them when they sign their timber over that we ain’t responsible for any property damage.” He threw the unopened mail on the coffee table.

“How have you been, Dad?” asked the young man.

The old man exhaled deeply. “Witch doctor downtown says I might have Sugar. I ain’t ever had any problems with my sugar. Says I’m always pissed off because of it.”

“Did they give you some kind of test?”
“I didn’t work my whole life to have some sand wop make me a
pin cushion.

The young man turned the volume up on the TV.

“The drought continues for the Braves,” the announcer said. “6-2 in an eight and a half inning blowout. I attempted to get a post-game quote from Bobby Cox, but he ducked out immediately at game’s end. The pitching staff has proven too shallow for the hot days of July.”

The young man turned the TV off and set the remote on the table.

“That could have been you, Brent. You keep shittin’ around with them farm leagues and they’ll make you into a fine pitching coach. A fine one. Hell, every baseball-loving American from here to Atlanta knew your name in high school.” The old man shook his head and sipped from the can.

The sun was low and the living room filled with whites and yellows. The ceiling fan clicked overhead, rocking with swirling blades. The two men sat opposite each other. A burgundy recliner and a yellow couch. Knitted throws covered the back of each and an empty rocking chair stared at the TV.

“That’s what I came to see you about. I got signed.” Brentley was a tall, thick man, twenty-four, with a tanned face. He had on a blue T-shirt with “Rome Braves” across the chest in block letters.

The old man stood up. The beer in his hand tilted. “Well it’s about damn time they noticed you. When do you go up? Why hell I’m going to buy season tickets.” The old man skipped into the kitchen and opened the refrigerator.

“Dad, I don’t think you understand. I’m going to be playing professionally.” The father stopped in the doorway and air hissed from a half-opened can.

“What are you saying, Brent? Don’t tell me some yankee team done signed you.”

Brentley laughed. “I wouldn’t call them yankees. I’m going to Japan. It’s a five-year contract and the . . .”

“Son of a bitch. You mean to tell me you’re going off to play for some Japs? I’d rather you went up north and played with them carpetbaggers. I swear to God Brentley Moriceau, you’ve disgraced every damn pitch you’ve ever thrown. Where’s your pride at son?”

Brentley’s father looked to a frame hung over the mantel. “And you’ve
disgraced your mother.”

Brentley stood up. “Don’t bring her into this.” He walked to the fireplace and stared at a row of frames on the mantel. The picture of his mother sat in the center and he brushed dust from the glass. He would always come here when he missed her. That rocking chair she sat in. Her coarse, braided hair bundled atop her head. And a smiling image of his younger self, hiding his face between her shoulder and neck.

“Baseball is the only thing this country has to show for itself. Your grandfather played. His father played. Hell, I bet his father played. I taught you everything you know about a ball and a bat and you’re shipping her off to Japan?”

“Momma always said she wanted to travel,” Brentley said. He still stood at the fireplace.

“That’s the reason you’re doing this? She would have never wanted you to leave your family.”

“Every time I come here, all you can talk about is playing baseball. You’re the only one here, Dad. Who am I leaving? I wanted to tell you before I left. I’ve said my peace, and I’ll go.”

“Brentley, you could have been right there on TV tonight. But you’re too lazy. You’re better than every guy on your team. Fast ball in the nineties, change up that freezes batters, and a slider that breaks two feet—three if the humidity’s right.”

“Why do they keep sending these kids up ahead of me then, Dad? I’m not the best. I learned that when I was twenty-three. You’re almost sixty and still can’t accept it.”

Brentley’s father fell into the recliner. Foam flowed over his thumb as he tipped the beer into his throat. He looked Brentley square in the eyes. “You’ll tell them you’ve changed your mind. You know somewhere inside there that you’re good enough. This Japan shit is a cop-out. Baseball ain’t baseball if it ain’t played for something other than money.”

Brentley took his keys from the coffee table and walked through the kitchen. The theme music from Sportscenter echoed through the room. “I’m leaving in the morning. I’m staying at the Holiday Inn, room 207.” The screen door rattled behind him. He jumped the three
concrete steps and opened the door to his truck. The engine roared and Brentley glanced at the TV reflecting off the pictures hanging in the living room.

Brentley backed into the road and headed south. Deep clouds towered above a half-set sun. His elbow was hanging out the window. Chorus of dusk and smells of turned earth. Three blackbirds took the sky as Brentley sped by a low-slung tract. His eyes began to tighten in the fading light. He remembered summers and Little League. His father surprising him with a new glove. “Put a ball in it and sleep with it under your mattress,” his father said. Brently remembered sleeping on the glove and imagining tight leather breaking beneath him. He thought of his mother. Standing on the porch smiling as he and his father played pepper in the yard. “Bend your knees. Hold out your hands like you’re going to catch a big ball.” They would play until dark. Brentley’s mother would stand in the doorway with yellow light pouring from the opening and outlining her in shadows.

* * *

“They just build this place?” asked Brentley.
He was sitting at the end of a long bar. The sun was setting and he was the only customer.
“Sorry?” the bartender replied. His back was turned and he was emptying a coffee mug.
“I haven’t been home in five years. Daddy never said they built a bar downtown.”
He watched himself in the mirror behind the bar as he talked.
“Built this place about three years ago. Me and my oldest boy, Billy, from the ground up.” The bartender lumbered to the end of the bar. “Bastards down at City Hall wouldn’t let me build down by the theater where I wanted, but we got a few regulars and the weekends get pretty busy.” The old man put his right hand on his lower back and winced forward onto the bar.
“When I left Springfield for Atlanta, that old theater was the only place to go around here.”
“Why in the hell would you want to go to Atlanta? People down
there would take a poor man’s coat and not think twice about it.” The bartender rose stiffly and shoved a folded towel into a clean mug.

“Baseball.” Brentley sat up a little higher on the stool.
The mug the bartender was cleaning reflected the dim light overhead. “What did you say your name was?”
“Brentley Moriceau.”
The bartender stared at the mug and quickly glanced up recognizing the name. “The Golden Child of east Alabama? Folks said you went off to play for the Braves.”
“Minor Leagues, but god I’m close. You got a phone around here?”
“Pay phone’s out by the street.”
“How much do I owe you for the beer?”
“Don’t worry about it, Brentley Moriceau. It’s not every day we get a celebrity in here. If I had a Polaroid I’d get a picture of you and put it on the wall.”

Brentley walked toward the screen door. “See you around.”
The sun was setting directly behind the telephone booth. The dirt parking lot swirled with small tornados. Yellow light rushed through the top half of the right blue panel of the booth. It was busted out, so that “Bell” was the only word on it. Someone had etched “FUCK YOU” into the black paint covering the phone.

Brentley picked up the receiver and dropped a quarter and a dime into the slot. The phone rang twice and a winded female voice picked up.

“Hello?”
Brentley hung up. He stared blankly at the phone then closed his eyes. The phone rang. Brentley turned away slowly. It rang again. He spun and picked it up.

“Hello?”

“Listen here buddy, we get hang ups all the time and we’re about tired of it. Says here on the I.D.’er that this is a payphone. Who is this?”
It was a different voice this time, a man.

“Is Emily there? This is Brentley Moriceau.”

Brentley held the phone against his face with his shoulder. He slipped his wallet out and thumbed through a stack of business cards. HANK’S TOWING & ROADSIDE SERVICE. JOHN Q.
SCHÖNER SPORTS AGENCY. He stopped at a small wallet-size photograph of a blushing two-year-old with platinum hair. He fingered the bent corners of the picture, rubbing them straight.

“Some man on the phone named Brent . . .” The man screamed the first words and the phone went silent. He took his hand off the receiver and a baby’s cry could be heard. “Hold on a minute—she’s in there with the baby.” A loud knock sounded through the earpiece as he set the phone down.

Brentley carved a shallow ditch with his foot. The humidity was beating his blue shirt black with heat. A dark line of sweat spread between the number 10 on his back. A mosquito punctured skin and pulled life, still blue, from beneath. Brentley slapped his neck and smeared blood from a white pock.

The phone rattled and a woman’s voice came on. “Hello?”

“Emily?”

“Brentley?”

“How have you been?”

Emily’s voice sounded fake in the phone. “Alright I guess, how’re you?”

“You know . . . busy playing ball. My agent called yesterday. I got signed two weeks ago and I leave in the morning for Tokyo. I wanted to come out and visit you before I left.” Brentley scratched his neck.

Emily breathed deeply into the receiver, “Now?”

“Sure, now.”

“I didn’t know if you were alive or dead. I mean it’s been five years. You just can’t drop in on people like this. The house is a wreck. The baby’s sick. John’s home so I haven’t been able to do anything all day. It’s just bad timing that’s all. I don’t hold no grudges for you.”

“I drove by Mr. Taylor’s barn today. It’s got to be a hundred years old and it’s still standing.” Brentley thought back to those summer nights in the hay loft. A first kiss and Emily getting swarmed by chiggers. She scratched herself for three weeks.

“I live about two miles past it. I have to see it every day.”

“Are you happy, Emily?”

“Oh yeah.” She said it with confidence. “It’s not all glitz and glamour with children. But when I get a chance to sit back and watch them
grow up, it’s all worth it.”
“Can I drop by to say goodbye?”

***

Brentley drove his pick-up down dirt back roads. He sang to the radio. The roads brought back Emily on the grass beside the baseball field. Waves of heat that hovered above dark places. Red clay and white chalk. No hitters, shut-outs, and pretty blonde hair waving behind the fence. He shook his head and reminded himself that it had been ten years and two babies since he had seen her. She might have grown into her mother’s dresses.

Brentley whipped into County Road 10 and a cloud of dirt covered the pick-up. He sat there for a moment and looked at the rusted harvest-yellow trailer. The mailbox said JOHNSON and a purple butterfly was painted thickly underneath. It looked hand painted. The wheels on the trailer were flat. The left side was enclosed in a crescent-shaped flowerbed, covered in red dirt and bare. A 1963 Ford pick-up was parked beneath a pecan tree that covered half the yard: the exposed roof, hood, and bed slicked with the black-green verdigris of sap. The lot was flanked by a half-silver, half-corroded gas tank. PETRO was written in blue, capped by a flame that extended and faded into rust. A bicycle with no rear tire leaned against the front steps.

The front door opened and a man filled the threshold. He stretched down to the first step and walked across the yard. He was a lanky man with cropped, brown hair. Knobs of knees protruded beneath thin material of camouflage overalls. A Copenhagen can winked to a low sun as he slapped the side with an index finger. He took a pinch from the can, snapped stained fingers, and tucked the can into his back pocket. A breeze stirred dust from the yard. The man squinted to avoid the dust and squeezed his lip against moistening tobacco.

“How are you doing?” asked Brentley. Lightning bugs swarmed across faint smells of honeysuckle.

“I think I played ball against you in high school,” said the man.
“Where’d you go?” said Brentley.
“County.”
“Probably so. When did you graduate?”

The man stuttered. A blonde-haired kid ran down the steps of the trailer screaming for her daddy. She raced up to him, barefooted in the dirt, and didn’t look at Brentley. “Daddy, Momma said that man from the bank called cussing again—didn’t you say you was gonna go whip him?”

The daddy looked down at the little girl with his eyes wide open. She stared wonderingly and scratched the back of her leg with dirt-stained toes.

“We got company and you’re hanging laundry in public.”

She stared at him.


The man stretched a hand to Brentley.

“Nice to meet you, John. Is Emily around? I gotta get going pretty soon.”

“Let’s go on inside. I think she’s fixing some tea for us.”

Brentley followed John up the steps into the living room. The walls were covered with pictures of blonde babies. John sat down on a green recliner and gave Brentley a welcoming nod.

“Be right there!” Emily was in the bathroom behind John’s recliner.

“You ain’t gotta scream.” John rubbed the side of his face and looked at Brentley. “Emily tells me you’re still playing.”

“Been playing up in Rome in the Braves’ farm league. Just got an offer from a team in Tokyo. The Dragons. They got some long words for it, but my agent says that’s what it means.”

“You know everybody said you’d go to the Show back in high school.”

“I’ve come a long way since high school. I wish I’d of known what I know now back then.” Brentley shook his head.

“Know what you mean.” John laid his head back against the recliner and stared blankly at the wall of pictures.

“Daddy!”

“What?”

“Come here would you?” The girl was calling from the other end of the trailer.
“What now?”
“Come here and look at what I drew.”
“I’ll look at it in a few minutes!”
“What?” Emily was calling from the bathroom.
“Not you, I was talking to Julie. You gonna come out here and see your company?”
“One minute.”
“Daddy!”
“I told you once! We got company. I’ll look at it later.”
The trailer fell silent.
“Little girls are hard to keep in line. Not so much when they’re younger, but when they hit four, watch out. They just mess with your heart so much you can’t punish them.”
The little girl walked into the living room and plopped down beside Brentley. She stared at him blankly. The seriousness of the girl made him nervous.
The door to the bathroom opened and Emily came out holding a baby. Her attention immediately went to Brentley. “Sorry Brentley, the baby’s sick. We haven’t had four hours of sleep in a month.”
“Don’t worry about it, Emily. I just wanted to see you before I left.” She hadn’t changed.
“You look healthy. You said you’re going to Japan, right?” She sighed. “Be nice to take a vacation to some place like that.”
John sat with his head tilted back against the recliner. He nodded in agreement.
“I just made some sweet tea.”
“That’d be good.”
She walked into the kitchen rocking the baby. The little girl hopped up and followed her.
“You making the big bucks now? Playing ball with them Japs?”
John slid to the edge of the recliner. His voice was a whisper. “How’s a fellow get a chance to show those guys what he could do to a baseball? I haven’t swung a bat in five or six years, but I bet I kill a ball.”
His head nodded as he spoke.
“You don’t want to run off to play baseball do you? You got a family to support.”
John rocked back in his recliner. “You’re right. I was just thinking.”
A cabinet shut in the kitchen. “You want tea, John?”
“I’ll take a glass.”
“Huh?” The sound of clinking dishes came from the kitchen.
“I said yeah!” John shouted.
“You don’t have to scream!”
“Sorry.” John sat back again. He surveyed the cracking Spanish-tile linoleum—an unearthly gray matter exposed beneath.

Emily and her daughter returned to the living room. The little girl kept her eyes on the two mason jars of tea and ice she was carrying. She walked slowly and handed the first glass to John. She looked at Brentley and held the glass out to him. Brentley had to stretch to reach it.

“You said you’re leaving in the morning?”
“Can’t wait really. Japan’s supposed to be as big as New York.”
“Brentley Moriceau in Tokyo. It doesn’t sound right does it?” Emily shook her head in envy.

“You traveled a lot with that Minor League team?” John leaned forward again in the recliner.
“A little bit.”
“You ever get to go up north to any big cities?”
“I’ve been to New York and D.C.”
“I heard you could stand on the top of the Empire State building and look out and not see one square inch of grass or trees.”
“Nothing but skyscrapers and concrete.”

John rocked back in his seat again. He stared at the ceiling.
“I’ve always wanted to see a musical on Broadway,” said Emily. Her face glowed with excitement.
“I’d go to Wrigley Field.”

The little girl drew on a white pad with a red crayon. A circle filled with hundreds of scribbles forming a whole. Brentley’s eyes slowly climbed Emily; she was staring at the child. Their eyes met and he held her gaze. She blinked and held her eyes shut for a moment, then stared quietly at the baby she rocked in her arms.

“Daddy, I thought Wrigley Field’s where Sammy Sosa plays. That
isn’t in New York is it?”

John’s head jerked toward the little girl. His face flushed.

Brentley stood up quickly. “I need to be running, Emily. It was
great to see you.”

“Why so soon? You’ve only been here a few minutes. You haven’t
even finished your tea.”

“I just need to get rolling. I told Jimmy I’d meet him and the boys
down at Mama’s.”

Emily looked down at the baby.

“It was nice to meet you, John.” Brentley extended his hand and
John looked down from the ceiling.

“You leaving already?”

“Gotta hit the road.”

“Nice meeting you and all.” John shook his hand.

Emily stood up and handed the baby to John. “I’m gonna walk
Brentley out to his car.”

Emily walked out the door in front of Brentley.

As the last remnants of sunlight faded below trees, the air was filled
with a sweetness promising rain. A bird lighted upon Brentley’s tail-
gate and flew away. Thunder rang from a distance.

“Japan. Guess I never thought you’d make it big.”

Brentley stepped down into the dirt driveway. “I didn’t either re-
ally.”

“I’ve always wanted to visit Japan. I might get a babysitter and go
there sometime. I can look you up and go watch you play ball.”

Brentley laughed. “You don’t want to leave all this behind, do
you?”

“No. I would never leave my family. I just wonder what else is out
there.”

“Take it from someone who’s seen a little bit of it. You’ve got it
good here.”

“Remember the day before you left? I asked you about settling
down. If you could go back, would you change your mind?”

Brentley looked into her eyes. He stepped closer and put his hand
on her arm and gently squeezed. A baby’s cry came from inside the
trailer, and Brentley cleared his throat.
Emily turned her head and stared off down the driveway. “Send me a postcard when you get settled in.” She turned and walked toward the steps. Brentley closed his eyes.

“You take care of yourself, Emily.”

“You too, Brent.”

Emily stood on the steps and waved as Brentley’s pick-up stirred up a cloud of dirt over the road.

* * *

Brentley squinted at road signs. County Road 125, County Road 154. It looked as if he was going the wrong way. Drops of water gave way to a downpour, and Brentley turned on his brights. County Road 32 was at the bottom of a small hill and Brentley turned onto the dirt road. Trees standing in rows on both sides dispersed into a wide field. Lights could be seen just beyond a tract of cornfield. As the blue pick-up topped another hill, “MAMA’S WORLD FAMOUS COUNTRY SHOWCASE” shone in script above an eight-foot pole. Small yellow bulbs covered an oval that surrounded the words; they blinked in unison. Cars lined the road for a hundred yards on both sides of the entrance. Brentley pulled past a break in the line and, turning the wheel sharply, backed into the opening. The dirt road dwindled into red mud. Brentley walked on the outside of the cars in the grass and rain.

The place was packed. High-pitched music echoed through the pitter-patter of water and the gush from the gutters. A small man sat on a brown recliner at the front door. He was spitting on the wooden deck and an orange bucket was between his feet.

“Cover’s four dollars,” the man said.

“I just need to see if someone I’m meeting made it tonight. This rain would float an ark and I doubt he got out in it.”

“Four dollars, buddy. If I wasn’t the fire chief, this place would have to be shut down there’s so many people.”

Brentley reached into his back pocket and pulled out a black wallet. He took four crumpled bills from inside and tossed it into the bucket.

The small man gave him a nod and pushed the door open beside
him; smoke and music poured from within. “Don’t get rowdy. We got bouncers on the weekends now.”

The foyer opened up into a dance floor covered with white Stetson hats and dresses walking shoulder to shoulder, hands joined overhead. A live band played in front of ten or twelve girls huddled by the stage. The bar was lined with cowboy boots propped on stools and empty beer mugs. Two speakers stood on opposing sides of the entrance; Brentley’s head lowered as he stepped into their treble. He walked toward two silhouettes: cowboy and cowgirl cutouts marking the men’s and women’s restrooms. Twenty urinals lined the two walls of the men’s bathroom. A plank of wood suspended above the urinals held empty beer bottles and a wadded towel. Brentley washed up at the sink and stared at his dripping face. He slicked his hair back and held a paper towel to his eyes.

“Brent!” Three men entered the bathroom and the tallest one held out a hand.

“Jimmy, hell, I thought ya’ll might not come.”
“And miss seeing you for the last time?”
“How have you been, you bastard?” a thick-voiced man said as he patted Brentley on the shoulder.

“Beau! Better than you it looks like.” Brentley feigned a punch to the man’s stomach.

“Brent Moriceau. Must be a hundred years since you’ve been around these parts.” The third man gave him a hug.

“It’s good to see you, Blake.”

“Let’s tie one on!” The four men went out into the darkness of the dancehall.

“I’ll get the first round,” Beau said.

The four men sat at a round table in a section raised above the dance floor. Jimmy pulled out a box of Marlboros and lit one up. Jimmy was wearing a Johnson’s Hauling fish-net cap and a button-up plaid shirt. He held the cigarette in his mouth and twisted the wedding ring on his finger.

“You still smoking them things?”

“You get you a couple of little ones and a nine-to-five and you can preach to me. What did they sign you for?”
“Five years. The pay is on an escalator, so if I play my ass off I’ll be rolling in it.”

“Did you tell your dad yet?” Blake said. He sat to the right of Brentley smiling. He had a white t-shirt that said Priest Lumber Company on the breast pocket. His head was shaved.

“I don’t think he liked the idea.” Brentley puckered his face mockingly. “Going off to play for them Japs? You’re disgracing me and your mama.”

“Your mother would have been happy no matter what you did.”

“I know. And like he cared while she was still around. She was about the only thing keeping us from killing each other back then. Mama was just something we done together.” Brentley looked down into the dance floor.

Blake and Jimmy glanced at each other.

“Knock ’em back fellas.” Beau sat the foaming pitcher on the table and passed plastic cups around. Jimmy grabbed the pitcher and poured for Brentley. Beau was a heavy-set guy wearing an REO Speedwagon concert shirt. His blue jeans had a back pocket missing and a Nextel phone hung from his belt.

“The Japanese! The only mother-fuckers dumb enough to pay an asshole like you to hang around.” The four laughed and chugged the beer. Beau finished first and heckled the other three to finish. He filled the cups.

“So what else did you do today?” Jimmy asked.

“Went to that new bar in town.”

“Old Starnes’s place? You remember his son, Billy? That sonofabitch dropped out when we were graduating. Tenth grade. Now he’s got a bar coming to him, and for what?”

“Billy the red-headed kid?”

“Punk if I’ve ever seen one. He just goes in there and drinks for free and his dad says he ‘works’ for him. He needs to get a job like the rest of us had to.”

Brentley emptied his cup and filled it again. “His dad said he helped him build the place.”

The other three looked at each other and laughed.

“About two months into building, Billy and some of his friends
from up in Waco went down there after dark and smoked some weed in the back room. They just finished the frame and had some boards up on the walls. One of the younger fellas got all nervous and said he thought he heard somebody pull up. Billy up and decides to put the joint out in a steel drum full of garbage. The drum had some oil rags in it and the whole place went up. Beau’s dad said it cost Mr. Starnes $15,000 in damages.”

“Burnt the place down?”
“Even had to break up the slab. Something to do with the plumbing.”

Brentley shook his head and emptied another cup.
“I got the next one.” Jimmy stood and walked to the bar.
“So they got you squared away with an apartment or something in Tokyo?”
“I’ll be living with this guy from New York. Outfielder.”
“I bet they have some hellacious parties over there.”
“This guy I’m living with is like thirty-five or thirty-six. Not going to be too much partying from what I can tell.”
“He’s not married or anything? Thirty-five years old and still trying to break in. That’s a tough row.”

Brentley turned and watched Jimmy carrying the pitcher of beer.
“How’s Jimmy’s old lady?”
“Alright last I heard. He don’t talk about her or the kids much. Guess when he goes out, he goes out.”

Brentley watched as Jimmy talked with one of the waitresses. She doodled on her order sheet and smiled. Jimmy leaned in and whispered something. She nodded her head and walked away. He came back to the table and sat the pitcher down smiling. “Let’s go dance.”

Beau and Blake stood and looked at the dance floor.
“Ya’ll go ahead. I’m gonna need a couple more if I’m getting out there,” said Brentley
“Come on you old dog. Get your ass up,” said Blake.
“No. You go have fun.”

Brentley watched the other three descend onto the dance floor. The band seemed to get louder, and they disappeared into smoke and two-steps. Brentley watched the foam disperse on his beer. He fingered the
lip of the cup and stared at a Miller Lite sign on the wall. Jimmy waved from the dance floor and Brentley stood up. He walked to the bathroom and relieved himself. He washed his face in the sink again and peered into his eyes.
Casey Pope

Star Waitress

Clippers tells me, “You’re fired Tiffany,” just like Donald Trump, and now I wonder if Hooters has any more openings. I could totally fill out those orange shorts while balancing a tray on my boobs, and plus I’m tired of styling hair. Some customers can never be pleased. Some think a haircut should magically fix their face and make them instantly lose twenty pounds, but only plastic surgery can do that. It’s amazing how those people on The Swan turn out. They go from witch noses and Crisco bellies to goddesses with D-cups who men would die for. I even tried to explain this to my last customer, and I told her, “Honey, I’m not a miracle worker. I can only work with what I am given.” She got really pissed, but Momma always says, “Honesty is the best policy,” but Momma also said, “I’m tired of your crap, and your ass has got to be out in thirty days.”

I saw a “NOW HIRING” sign last week when I ate at Hooters for lunch. Not only do they have great hot wings and beer, but it’s also a great place to meet great men. Once, I met Billy who was an awesome guy. He worked in construction and had a Harley and a poodle, perfect right? Well, we dated for a couple months, but he took one look at Ginny and rode off into the sunset. I have dated many guys, and I believe in the Prince Charming Theory where “you got to kiss some frogs to find the prince.” I’ll eventually meet Mr. Right who will make all my dreams come true: being a housewife, having unlimited pedicures, and being able to hire a nanny. It’s only a matter of the stars aligning just right or at least that’s what Lu-Sudia, my psychic, says.

Ginny is my three-year-old daughter, and she is a cute kid thanks to me. I guess some men like Billy aren’t ready to be an instant father no matter how cute a kid is. I should have known he wasn’t ready to
be a family man. A car seat wouldn’t look too cute on his motorcycle, but a girl has got to have hope. She still has that perfect blonde hair, the same as I had once before it turned brown. Her skin is flawless with a beautiful complexion, but those features will fade as mine did. Her blue eyes are a mystery, though, because mine are green and her father’s were brown, I think.

However, Ginny was a “surprise” that turned my face ghostly white. After I came home from spring break in Panama City, my period stopped, so I bought a pregnancy pee stick at Walgreen’s; of course, it turned blue. At first I cussed Pablo, the one-night-stand I’ll never forget, and then my mom asked me what his last name was, hoping we could track him down for some child support. From the expression on my face, my mom didn’t ask any more questions, and I didn’t have any answers anyway. Nine months later, a blue-bug-eyed-alien-looking child landed in my arms, and I got a new ugly scar across my belly. I hope those orange shorts and tank top cover the scar, and plus I don’t want men knowing immediately that I have a kid. It’s not the first impression that I like to make.

When I arrive home, Ginny and my mom are baking double chocolate chip cookies in the kitchen, and Mom typically asks, “How was work today?”

I sling my purse on the kitchen counter, plop on the barstool, and exhale at the same time. “Mom, I quit today.”

Her mouth drops open extending her laugh lines in the wrong direction, and she says almost calmly with her green eyes bulging, “Tiffany—Nicole—Patterson! What about your car payment? You have no savings, and you live paycheck to paycheck. Are you going to let the bank take this car, too? I’m not going to be your taxi, and remember you have to be out in 20 days. That’s all you got, and you’re going to learn some responsibility one way or another.” She rummages in the drawer, grabs a pair scissors, and begins cutting the air.

“I am cutting my apron strings; you have stretched them far as they will go.”

I can’t help but to begin rotating myself around on the bar stool as I rotate my eyes in their sockets. “Mom, I am going to change ca-
reers. I am tired of cutting hair. I need a career change. Can’t you understand?”

She walks around the counter and grabs the stool to stop it. She begins to turn red in the face, and her wavy graying hair begins to vibrate slightly. She also begins to pick the black mole on her forehead, and sometimes, when she’s really mad, it bleeds.

“I paid for your education to become a beautician after you begged me, and now you don’t want to even use your certificate. You mean I wasted all that money?” She slams the yellow spatula on the counter and walks back to the oven. I can still see her elbow sticking out from the side of her head; the mole is taking a beating. I always know that Mom is serious when she mentions money, and she never lets me forget that she paid for my beauty schooling.

I prop on the counter, “Mom, I’ll pay you back. With my new job, I’ll probably have a lot more money. Don’t get so upset.”

“Honey, you can’t even provide for yourself or for Ginny, but let’s not get into this in front of . . .” Mom nods her head gesturing at Ginny.

I could take care of Ginny and myself, but Mom would be so lonely if I moved out, contrary to what she says. Plus who would remind her to take her blood pressure medicine? She should be grateful to have me and Ginny to look after her.

The timer buzzes breaking the tension, and Ginny says, “Cookie time! Cookie time!” Her face lights up as she bounces on the counter, and Mom grabs a potholder while giving me that all-F-report-card stare.

“Momma, I am going to get another . . .”

She tightens her cheeks and cuts me off, “Not now, let’s enjoy these cookies while they’re warm.”

I put Ginny in our bed after she finishes her cookies and milk. I drag my feet through the thick golden shag carpet, which fills every gap between my toes. I know a lecture is coming, and Mom—picking her mole—just sits silently on the couch. The couch is stained with the smell of Maxwell House. I swear we stole the couch from Juan Valdez, and the velvet floral surface with its smell changes from two shades of brown depending on the way it’s brushed. The coffee table has two
cushions of the same velvet on each side with a bowl of faded plastic fruit parting the brown velvet sea. The low whining of the ceiling fan and the jingle of its long chain never sounded so loud.

It is her attempt to make me feel guilty, but why should I? It’s my life, and you only have one to live. I can’t believe she wants me to feel guilty about trying to be happy. She should be happy that I am not going to suffer through a career that I hate and then wake up when I’m sixty and regret my life. I am not going to be like her. She worked at an aluminum plant for thirty years and hated every day of it. She would come home dead tired with black fingernails that are still stained to this day. You could barely read “Barbara” on her name patch through the soot, and you better not speak to her for at least thirty minutes after she got home.

She remains sitting smug on the velvet couch waiting for me to speak first, but I am waiting for her to speak. I know this is a trap, and I’m not going to fall into it. I flip on a rerun of 90210, and she stares at me from the corners of her eyes. But Luke Perry could distract anyone from anything. After about ten minutes of staring, Mom gives up and storms into the kitchen, but I don’t care. Luke is taking his shirt off.

I wake the next morning at 9:00 with a pointy elbow puncturing my right lung and a Hello Kitty alarm clock buzzing. Every morning, Ginny ends up wedged under me. Even though my lung hurts, I can’t stop thinking about how great it would be to waitress. I move the covers and start to get ready to fill out an application. I know that I need to make a good impression, so without waking Ginny or my mom I put on my best Levis and spaghetti strapped top. I spend an extra thirty minutes perfecting my eyeliner and filling my acne scars with foundation.

I arrive before the lunch crowd and walk to the counter trying to look like a Hooters girl.

“Do you have any applications? I want to be a waitress at your establishment.”

I quickly look down at his nametag, “Dan.” He looks to be in his late thirties with his forties gut already matured. His six-foot frame
smells of Marlboros, and his dark wavy hair shines with gel.

He chuckles and strokes his black mustache down through his goatee. “Yes, but an application may not be necessary for you,” and then he winks at me.

“Are you the manager?”

He smirks and crosses his arms. “Yes.”

“Ok, what do I need to do? I really would like to have a career here.” I push the strap of my shirt back to my shoulder.

“You only need to answer a few questions.” He rocks back on his heels.

“Fire away.”

“Have you been a waitress before?”

“No, but I learn real quick. Just give me the chance, and I’ll show you . . .”

He stops me, “Do you think that you have the ‘proper equipment’ for this job?” His eyes scan my body, and I know the job is mine.

“Yes sir. I got all the ‘equipment’ for the uniform.” He reaches behind the counter and pulls out a tank top and orange shorts.

“I’ll see you tomorrow at 2:00 p.m.” He hands the outfit to me, and I nearly skip out of the restaurant.

I enter my room gripping my uniform anxious to try it on. I strip in front of the mirror, and the scar stands out like a blown headlight. It stretches the width of my stomach, and if you only look from the front, you’d think it went all the way around my back. Foundation can’t fix this scar; believe me I have tried. I slide on the shorts first, then the tank top, clinching my eyes and praying the two pieces will cover the horizontal horror. My eyes pop open to see the orange shorts and tank top, no scar. Knowing this is a sign from God, I raise my head to the ceiling, “Thank you Lord, I knew I made the right decision.”

After training for three days, Dan, decided to let me work my first Friday night. I am so pumped because I’ll get to see exactly how much money I can make, I’ll get to see exactly how hot I am, and I’ll have enough money to get a place of my own.

I show up at exactly 5:00 p.m. repeating the five steps that I learned
in training: “get order, post order, offer beer, bring order, and offer more beer.” The steps are easy. I just repeat them, so I don’t forget. Hooters always wants you to convince your customers to order beer because the restaurant makes a lot of money off of it. Plus, if they run up a higher tab, my tip should increase significantly. During the official training they never told me to flirt, but the other girls highly suggest it if you want to pay your bills. I don’t know why they didn’t straight out tell you to flirt because it should come natural to all women. Maybe they’re scared of a sexual harassment lawsuit or some crap like that, but even the Bible calls our bodies temples, and temples are built to be admired. Why do you think the Egyptians built those big things by hand?

After my first hour, I have one hundred dollars in my orange apron. Then, a man who has to be eighty years old takes a seat in the back booth, and I know this old geezer will be an easy score. Any old man with a Members Only jacket and a cane will tip big if you show him a little attention, or at least that’s what I learned during my training.

“Sir, may I get you a drink: water with lemon?” I give him a big smile.

“Yes, water.” He scratches his bald head, and his shaky hand knocks his wooden cane into the walkway from his side. I bend to pick it up, and the frail man lets out a soft whistle. As I prop his cane back onto the booth seat, I catch his eyes glued to my chest.

“I’ll be right back with your water.” I turn to get his drink. I had no idea about the tricks from dirty old men that probably can’t even “get it up” anyway, but if they tip I don’t care because when I walk on the street, men get to look at my boobs for free.

After the Members Only jacket leaves, I check to see how much my PG-13 peep show was worth, and I pick up the ten bucks.

Order after order, beer after beer, and tip after tip, my apron grows fatter until midnight, and I know that I heard at least five times, “Nice ass,” as I left the tables to get orders. I don’t care if men admire “my temple.”

I cash in my tips with Dan, and as he counts the ones, he asks, “How was your first night? From what I see, it looks like you did great.”
I want to scream and hug him for this job, but I know this wouldn’t be professional. Plus, I don’t think I could reach around his gut, but I want to tell him that I feel like a Cinderella, sexy and hot, making men drool, but then having to turn into a mom. Instead I say, “I love this job, Dan. Thanks for giving me this opportunity.” I grab the wad of twenties and head for the door.

“Tiff, can you work tomorrow night, since you did so good? I think you’re going to be our star waitress.”
I turn and smile. “Sure, be here at five again?”
He nods his head while smiling back at me.

I arrive home surprised to find Mom sitting on the couch. She rarely sees the clock past 10:00, and this is the first time she sees me in my uniform. “Mom, I made a ton of money and . . .”

“I don’t want to hear how much money you made flaunting your body like a stripper. You might as well be a stripper. You’d probably make even more money. Yeck, you’d even have the same scummy customers pawing you.” The black mole begins to bleed from her scratching.

Slowly I say, “Mom, I am just waiting tables. Didn’t you waitress once?” I go to hand her a twenty for the power bill. She turns her face away from me.

“I don’t want your money, not the way you earned it. It’s dirty. Sure, I waited tables, but I wore clothes. I didn’t let my tits hang out to catch men’s drool.” She keeps her head turned, letting the blood dry.

She has no idea how hard it is to make good money. I storm to my bedroom and slam the door.

“Mommy, what was that loud bang?” Ginny’s blue eyes pop open.
“Go back to sleep, Ginny. It was just the wind.”

Ginny lies back down with her matted blonde hair, and I take out my wad of twenties and jam them into my panty drawer. I can feel the heat, the steam blowing out of my ears. She wants us out in sixteen days, and then she bitches about how I make a living. Money is money, and I just bring food to tables.
Despite my mother’s strong hatred for my career, I continue to work, and my hours at Hooters begin to increase because Dan says that I am his “star waitress.” I know he thinks I’m hot and good for business—that’s why he compliments me. Many customers even ask for me by name, and for the past ten days I’ve managed to bring home amazing tips. The tips are so great that I don’t care whether or not Mom asks me, “How was your day?” I would leave for work and come home from work without a hello, a good night, or a good morning. She could barely look at me, much less speak, but the time gives her mole a chance to heal. I am doing what she wants, saving money to get a place of my own, yet she treats me worse now than ever before.

Everything is going great. Making money, meeting men, and having fun until the smell of chicken wings permanently contaminates my hair and my relationship with Dan starts changing. After my tenth day on the job, he begins to call me into the cook station to “correct my performance,” or at least that’s what he calls it.

“Tiff, I need to speak with you.” He waves for me.

I put my hands in the apron. “What is it, Dan?”

“I got to correct your performance. Don’t be so flirty with the customers. It’s unprofessional. Don’t you want to behave professionally?” He places his hand on my shoulder. He looks concerned when his brows scrunch while his head tilts to the left.

“Yes, but I also want to make money. I am only doing what the other girls trained me to do.”

He straightens his head and moves his dark brows to their natural location. “Those other girls aren’t throwing themselves at every decent-looking guy either! The menu says a ‘side of wings,’ not a ‘side of Tiffany.’ We’re running a restaurant, not a brothel.”

Furious, I turn to leave the cook station, and his tan hand accidentally slides against my breast. I return to my tables, and I can feel his brown eyes on my back watching my movements. I don’t think that I was throwing myself at men. I was just being friendly like the other girls, but I guess Dan didn’t think so. He has never acted strange until tonight. He almost tried to be my daddy, and I ain’t got one and don’t need one. Before I left, I should have told him that, except for the fact I need this job. Maybe he is jealous, but I don’t get paid to flirt with the boss.
Two nights later Dan calls me back into the cook station for what I think is a performance correction and again places his hand on my shoulder.

“Tiff, sorry that I jumped on you the other night.”

I shrug. “Don’t worry about it.” I try to head back to my tipping customers, but his hand stays glued to my shoulder.

“Tiff, are you dating anyone? If you have a boyfriend, I know he’s got to be jealous. I bet he can’t stand you working here.” He slowly drops his hand from my shoulder.

My heart begins to speed up, and my eyes drop to the grease-splattered floor. “I don’t have a boyfriend, so there’s no problem with me working here. Right? Do you have a problem with me? I really need this job. My mom is kicking me out in a few days, and...”

He lifts my chin with his hand, so I will look at his brown eyes.

“No, I’m not going to fire you. You’re a good waitress, my star waitress. Don’t panic. Chill.” He smiles and brushes the brown hair out of my eyes. I can smell the Marlboro cigarettes on his breath.

The eviction day is nearing in complete silence at home, and after only a few more nights at Hooters, I’ll have enough for a deposit and the first month’s rent on an apartment. But by checking the new work schedule before I leave, I discover that my hours have been moved from 5:00 till close to 2:00 to 6:00, the suckiest tip time. Why would Dan move me, “the star waitress,” to the slowest part of the day? I walk to his office knowing he put my name on the wrong line. I stand in the doorway waiting for him to quit counting the stacks of bills on his desk.

He looks up and crosses his arms. “Can I help you, Tiff?”

“You put me on the 2:00 to 6:00 shift.” I scrunch my nose.

“Good, you checked the schedule. I’ll see you tomorrow.” He bows his head back down to the green faces of Lincoln, Jackson, and Franklin.

I take a seat in a chair in front of his desk. “But that’s the crappy tip time, and I’m your ‘star waitress’ remember?” I begin to twist my hair.

He keeps his head down. “$500, $550, $600, $700, $800, $900, $1000.”
“Dan! I have to have my normal shift back. I’ve got to have the money. You know my situation. Please!”

He rolls his chair back from his desk. “What situation are you talking about? I have a lot to do.”

I move to the edge of my seat. “My mom, my mom wants me out, Dan. You know that!”

He makes a swipe through his black hair. “Ah, I forgot about that, but Tiff you can’t always expect to get what you want.” He begins patting his belly like a proudly grown watermelon.

“But I thought I was your best waitress, and I really need to make a lot of money in the next three days.”

He crosses his arms and strokes his mustache with his thumb and index finger. “Maybe we can work something out.”

“I knew you would understand.” I feel relief and skeptical as I fall back in the chair.

He reaches in a desk drawer and tosses what I think is a Sacajawea coin.

“Catch!”

It lands on my chest, and the seam of my tank top catches it and funnels it between my breasts.

“I don’t think a dollar is going to pay my rent.” I reach into my shirt to get it, and he laughs.

“A condom?” I hold it in the palm of hand, and the gold foil glimmers from the sweat of my palm. He keeps laughing and patting his belly harder.

“Haven’t you seen one before? I know that a girl like you has got to know what to do with it. Why don’t you teach your boss something for a change?”

The gold foil’s glistening surface seems to have hypnotized me until I begin to picture Dan naked, his gut waterfalling over his dick, and the monkey hair bound to be covering his back and chest. I fill with nausea.

“Sick. I couldn’t even find your dick under that Crisco belly.” I slam the condom on his desk and walk out.

I arrive home and gently twist the rubbed brass doorknob with my
still sweaty palms. I find mom sitting on the velvet couch.
“Mom . . .” I say standing in the doorway with blurred mascara trying to look as pathetic as possible.
“What Tiffany?”
It is the first nice thing she had said since I started working at Hooters.
“You were right, Momma.” I remain super-glued to the thick golden shag carpet. I know those are her favorite words.
“Right?” She makes a face like it is the first time I have ever said it.
“Men at Hooters are scum.” I stamp my foot and cross my arms.
“Come here. Sit.” She pats the sofa, sending a welcoming cloud of dust into the air. The carpet releases its hold on my feet, and I shuffle to the sofa. I sit on my knees and face her, but all she can see are my knuckles because I am trying to work up some tears. I cannot believe she is buying this act, and she forces my hands down onto my lap.
“Momma,” I finally get some tears running, and she spits on her thumb and wipes the blackness from my eyes. I lean forward on my knees and kiss the scab where her mole was.
“I’m sorry, Momma.” I sob on cue.
“Shhhh . . .” She continues to wipe my eyes with her thumb, and I know I’ve got at least thirty more days.
Mama Had a Baby
and Its Head Popped Off

No one including me thought I had a chance. I was nine years old—well, nine-years-eleven-months-exactly, past germination. They didn’t know though that if something hurts that bad that young that raw that cold that lonely not much else is ever going to scratch that rusty surface, calcified by the tears and sap that nine-years-eleven-months-exactly had been saving up to let go on August 21, 1992 with such a horrifying fury that it shook the walls of that Canadian hospital where Marilyn Jean Schwab Beloved Mother and Wife stopped breathing and no one could save her not even God because he knew that after six children she was just so tired and needed a rest, a long rest underneath some juvenile maples that maybe would grow up when her youngest daughter would but not if the pollution of a small town and the grief a dead mother planted killed them both before puberty.

The neighbors brought over so much food that it bloated the eight-by-four chest freezer in the basement, the one that closed like a coffin lid slam! on top of the raspberries picked and frozen from the prickly bushes by her soft hands soft from dish soap and worn-in from tying the shoestrings of six seedlings for as long as there were shoestrings to tie and that was always. The irony of course in this ridiculous consolation dance is that a pale scarecrow, wilted at the waist, nine-years-eleven-months-exactly isn’t going to be hungry at all, because all she’ll eat are her mother’s pancakes (which she thought she smelled in that sleepy cotton in-between eyes shut and open stage the morning after That Night) the pancakes she’ll never have again, because even though they were just made from a box add water no woman on earth, even
if she had that same stain on her canine tooth, could ever come close to because no one else would ever get them the right size shape color see my mother loves me. So the food piled up and molded or burned in the freezer because my four brothers and sister and my daddy head in his big strong helpless hands weren’t hungry either. Your french bread and carrot cake and lasagna and casserole with the red dust on top can’t bring her back Mrs. Mcdonald and no thank you I don’t need any but we do appreciate your trying but God won’t trade her for even your best apple pie.

Church ladies came. They came to gawk at the orphans because Larry couldn’t handle six kids on his own, no Cluck Cluck someone better check on them Sue you do it you and Marilyn were so close those poor children. So they came and said are you hungry and I shook my head like usual (thanking the cellulose for keeping my limbs on) but they were looking over my shoulder to try to catch us failing, falling, feeding their gossip and this told us they didn’t care really but things must be getting awfully boring while they waited for all of us to get out of Church school on Sundays at eleven so my, my did you see Becky’s hair? Poor lamb.

Their fat and ring-heavy hands were always trying to comb my hair, pull it up, tie it back and I wanted to slap their hands right back at their accusing and satisfied faces so they would really slap themselves because I think God and the Devil would have agreed that that was the right thing to do. Marilyn Jean Beloved Mother and Wife knew how to get every knot out never pulled eyes never welled up like two flooded gazing ponds on rainy Tuesdays. She knew my mass of hair that someday boys and their fathers would want to play with could not be controlled and was better left to its own will so it could tangle or fly or dance to off-key show tunes if it liked thank you very much (and she loved Oklahoma).

So anyway all these ladies whose families were too boring to pay attention to shook their heads when they thought we weren’t looking and tried with all the spit in the world to look concerned and righteous. Little girls know lies. I heard how Mrs. Seegert told Mrs. White that we would end up pregnant and smoking Marlboro Reds. Mrs. White’s daughter ended up with a nervous breakdown weighing down
her bleached head and Mrs. Seegert’s adopted daughter developed the sluttiest freshman reputation at Fredonia State. I rub my dogs’ who depend so much on me and collect my three point sevens and smile to think that I’ve never had anything but a negative EPT, but of course this accusation of Mrs. Seegert’s was probably some displaced anxiety over the fact that she couldn’t reproduce, probably because God didn’t want another dyed female that bitchy to result from the copulation of the original, but maybe he didn’t study up on the Nature vs. Nurture debate because Morgan reminded me of how dead worms smell after a particularly oppressive inundation. The flood waters bloat. We were forced to be best friends until seventh grade because we live only two houses away from each other and when I finally decided with an eleven-year-old’s conviction that I hated her that stupid blood blister on her lip and black spot in her green eye that day felt lighter lighter lighter.

The women with the pinched faces tight lips smiling eyes are still there but someone else’s mom died today and about every year at least once since Marilyn Jean Beloved Wife and Mother started the message that moms can die and kids can be left unwatered and that part that dies inside protects the spot that is buried even deeper so that when Marty took back his house key and Charlie said I had too much of a history with his best friend and Ryan said he wasn’t right and I deserved more than he was giving and I told Bryan to go home to his wife and the dead leaves blew and the street lights blinked and the stove burned the lines off my palm and Don’s apple tree snapped down Snap! so our initials we carved fell down down along with the rotten ones the forgotten ones it just rolled off it couldn’t get through and the rust held fast so thank god God and hallowed be thy name oh father my father.

Then a late spring frost, cold and nasty to the snapdragons they just got cozy in their beds. The wandering Jew froze and went sobbing limp, dripped purple plant juice from its arms. I spread my arms wide but. There was no revival, no bringing it back to me or my lonely front porch where it hung.
Amber Joy Taylor

Take It Back

I lie to my dad. Not to anyone else, just him. I lie to him about things that aren’t even important: what time I got in last night, being late to class this morning, talking to my mother today, doing my daily Bible reading. I hate lying to him, but the lies just come out before I can do anything about it, especially the ones about reading my Bible.

I think Ma is the reason I lie to him about my Bible reading. After Ma and Daddy split up, Ma started telling me things about him. He lost his virginity when he was seventeen to his second cousin, my third, who was twenty-five at the time. His parents were down the hall when it happened. She told me about him getting kicked out of college and being arrested for stealing P.A. equipment, guitars, and drums from the Brewton Parker band room. Apparently he smoked and sold dope, had long hair, and even listened to rock and roll. He was the bad guy that all the girls wanted to date. But somewhere along the line his parents, my grandparents, just quit paying for it. That’s when it all ended. That’s when he and my mother met.

“I’ll never go on a blind date again. Your Aunt Charlene set me up with him and I’ll never forgive her for that. It wasn’t even that great a date. He took me out for pizza at this hot-to-trot pizza joint downtown and had the nerve to buy me a souvenir.”

“What was it?” I always seemed to get caught up in these stories. Her stories were always like things that are interesting at first because you don’t know what it is, but when you catch a glimpse of it you wish you had never seen it. It was like strolling down an old brick road downtown and seeing material on the ground peeking out at you from the corner of the Marble Slab Ice Cream Shop. You get closer and instead of minding your own business you take a peek only to find a
dead body partially covered in a trench coat. Her stories are dead bod-
ies and she’s got mounds of them. This was another one of those sto-
ries.

“A beer pictcher. I wasn’t allowed to drink beer and he knew it.
Apparently his parents didn’t allow him to drink either, but they never
stopped him from doing anything but growing up anyway. I should
have seen the signs. I was naïve. That’s why I think you should date
around before you get married.”

She took one hand to point at me and two eyes away from the
highway and onto me just long enough to really stress what she was
saying. “Never settle.”

That’s what my mom did when she married him apparently—she
settled. She was always lecturing me about how men are selfish, insen-
sitive, belching bastards. They were all full of hot air to her and she
wanted to make sure I understood that. I understood; my dad was a
belching bastard. When they were married he wouldn’t hold a job, help
around the house, pay attention to her or the kids. He slept with other
women, and still had the audacity to say it was her fault because she
was nuts. Ma told me once that we lived off of peanut butter and jelly
sandwiches, watered down juice from a can, and crackers with ketchup
and salt while my dad shoved all the money she was making down
some stripper’s G-string. She thought he was going to work until his
paycheck didn’t come in. To try to correct the error she called his boss
only to find he had been fired two weeks previous. She swore her
children would never go through that again. She believed all men were
like that and if she caught me dating a guy more than two months in
high school she would sit me down and have a heart-to-heart. This
conversation was going in the same direction.

I stopped fiddling with the radio. “But Ma, did you love him at all?
You did marry him.”

“I thought I did. He just had me all confused. I thought I knew
what love was. I didn’t have a clue. Your daddy was the first serious
relationship I ever had. That’s why you need to date around, to ex-
plore your options.”

“What was so confusing about ‘yes, I love you’ or ‘no, I don’t’?”

“Like I said, I thought I knew what love was and learned too late
that I was wrong. He had me so confused he talked me into giving up my virginity. I always dreamt I would marry and lose my virginity on my honeymoon night. He messed that all up. He talked me into giving it up right there on the sofa. You know that sofa in your Nanny and Papa’s living room? Well, he took me right there. He took my virginity.” She slapped the steering wheel.

“Ma! That’s where I open my Christmas presents every year. I’ll never be able to look at that sofa again without thinking about you and Daddy getting it on.” I sunk down into the gray leather seats and covered my eyes but the picture remained.

“It wasn’t like that. We were not ‘getting it on.’ It sucked. I was so worried we were going to get caught I couldn’t concentrate and he obviously hadn’t had as much practice as he claimed he had. I was so stupid. I would take it all back if I could.”

In an attempt to pull my attention away from Ma, I gave it back to the radio. “I would take back this conversation if I could.”

Every conversation we had came down to one of those moments that roll out like a home video in which the divorcees were still together until someone, usually Nanny, would decide to just record over it with something better. Something like the grandkids fighting over Christmas presents or the prize egg at Easter.

I don’t think anything ever comes out the way Nanny and Papa, Daddy’s mom and dad, plan for it to. They always plan the holidays just so. Nanny always made the dressing for Thanksgiving or Christmas, but it’s dry every year. Nanny and all the grandkids used to get together to decorate the Christmas tree, but it never came out that pretty, so now she pays to have it professionally done. Papa’s fishing trips usually get rained out or someone tips the boat. Nanny went on one of Papa’s fishing trips about eleven years ago. She saw a snake in the water and stood up in the boat in a frantic panic. The boat was already struggling to stay above the water because she alone was three hundred pounds. She pounded the water belly first and popped back up like a volleyball that had been pushed ten feet underwater. I thought that someone that big would sink like a cement block, but she floated like a buoy. I don’t think she ever went fishing again.

Can’t say I blame her. She wasn’t a good fisher, and like her, I
couldn’t keep my mouth closed long enough to catch anything. All I ever caught was bad luck. My dad’s preaching and my mom’s heart-to-hearts jinxed every relationship I ever had. I was forced to hide every one of them. I did listen to their advice until my freshman year in high school. All my friends had already kissed a boy and I was lagging behind. I wanted to catch up, not because I didn’t fit in, but because I was curious. What was Ma’s ranting and raving all about? Could it really be that bad? Besides, I wasn’t looking to get married; I just wanted to see what the fuss was about. So I did. I slipped the dark haired, gray-eyed cross-country runner, who was two years my senior (which was a big deal in high school), a note during P.E. It simply read: *Meet me after class outside Coach Ward’s office. See ya soon, Ash.*

* * *

Josh showed up. Of course, I brought all my girlfriends along for backup; none of them had ever been so forward. I asked him if he’d sit with me during lunch and he agreed. For two and a half weeks he sat with my friends and me at the table whose clique might be defined as average, OK, smart but not too smart, cute but not too cute, and middle class family income. One day, during P.E., our last class of the day, Coach Ward sent us to the supply room to get the volleyballs.

“This class is such a waste of time,” I said as I bounced down the stairs.

“Yeah.” There was an awkward silence as we turned the corner into the hallway that led to the supply room. It was across the hall from the guy’s locker room so it stunk like a wet sock.

“So Ash, have you ever kissed a guy?” He asked like it was nothing as he opened the door for me. I tried to avoid eye contact as I squeezed past him.

“No.” I didn’t have to ask him because everyone knew that he had dated Jessica Holland and Mandy Boatright, two girls competing for the homecoming queen title. I leaned down to pick up a volleyball and before I could get out the ever-so-inviting “why do you ask?” line, he was on me. His arms were around my waist and his tongue was in my mouth. I could feel each lumpy taste bud on his tongue and I couldn’t
figure out where to put my hands. It took me a minute to realize my eyes were open so I jammed them shut and stuck my tongue in his mouth. My girlfriends had told me that that was what you were supposed to do. I was kissing a boy. I was living in sin, according to Daddy, and losing to a man, according to Ma. It was exhilarating.

It was gross, too. We pulled away and wiped saliva off of our faces. He grinned and I smirked back at him. We forgot the volleyballs, and Coach Ward escalated from his usual shade of strawberry kiwi Kool Aid to hot tamale red. No one paid any attention as he stormed off to the supply room grumbling because the gossip had already begun.

When I got home my face was itchy. I didn’t know why, but Ma figured it out. The moment she saw me her eyes flew open with an unexpected fury. I knew in that moment she knew I had kissed a boy. I didn’t know how until she began pointing frantically and screaming, “Kissing rash!” I didn’t know what the hell kissing rash was, but due to her reaction I knew it was going to kill me; if the rash didn’t, she planned to. I jolted for the bathroom with her trailing behind me. I slammed the door in her face cracking, the mirror hanging from the back of the door, and as the mirror stopped swinging and shaking, my reflection came into view. I got closer to the mirror and noticed that the skin around my mouth was a blossoming, rosy pink and my lips were a gorgeously vibrant shade of red. I later learned that a man’s stubble will give any guilty woman away, and that nice, full-length mirrors cost about thirty dollars.

I think that single, brief moment with Josh made it all worth it. It inspired my curiosity. I wanted to know what was so sinful about boys. Josh ended up getting my phone number the next day, but we never talked much. We just made out before school in Coach Ward’s supply room so that by the time I got home my kissing rash would be gone. Ma never figured it out. As I progressed in school, I also progressed in experience. I started wearing makeup and shaving my legs daily. I began dating, but only on the weekends. I didn’t want Ma to find out about my relationships with the male species, the equivalent of the devil, so I only went out on the weekends I was with Daddy. To keep Daddy happy and unsuspecting of, what he called raging hormones, I was always home by curfew, never missed Saturday morn-
ing choir practice or Sunday church services. I never went on more than three dates with the same guy and never went past second base. I was a tease, not a slut.

In my junior year of high school, my girlfriends started teasing me again. I had dated guys and made out with them, but I hadn’t made it past second base.

“But Mel, what if I don’t want to?” My books were heavy and made a loud clump when I dropped them into my locker.

“You’re just scared.” She stuck out her chin and fluffed her hair while she admired her reflection in the magnetic mirror that hung inside her locker door.

“So. I bet you were, too. Besides, I haven’t found anyone who is relationship material anyway. Can I have a piece of gum?”

She folded a piece on her tongue before proceeding to smack it and then handed me one. She returned the Big Red to the pocket book that also housed her comb, Lip Smacker watermelon lip gloss, and two tampons, just in case. She was considered to be pretty hot; she was thin, had jet-black curly hair, green eyes, and legs that ran for miles.

Unlike her, I was only a little above average. I shared the same hip to waste ratio with Barbie, but my hips were not quite proportional to my breasts. They were large enough and my butt was small enough to fill out my fitted tees and faded jeans just right, but still not made for the runway. I had straight, blonde hair, brown eyes, and a complexion most the girls my age would fight for. I looked up to Mel when we spoke.

“What’s the matter? Aren’t Jackson boys good enough for Mommy and Daddy?”

“What do you think?” I borrowed her mirror to primp for a moment while she leaned up against an adjacent locker with her arms crossed to scan for boys. “Don’t be such an ass.”

“Don’t be such a goody-two-shoes and you might get a little farther.”

“You know, you’re not helping.”

“Ok, ok. What about the new guy? He looks pretty mysterious. I heard his dad was, like, in the Navy, but he got kicked out for going crazy after his mom died or something like that. I think his dad moved
here to get away from it all and dragged John along with him.”

John was pretty hot. He was built like a jock, but was dressed in camouflage pants and a black Metallica T-shirt. He had dirty blonde hair that was short enough for me, but way too long for Daddy. That sparked my interest.

I lied. “I hadn’t noticed him.” I zipped up my backpack after loading it up with all the necessities for my homework and slammed my locker. Mel never seemed to have homework, but was still a member of the Beta club.

“Yeah, right, and I hadn’t noticed Enrique Iglesias has a mole. Why don’t you invite him to, like, sit with us tomorrow at lunch? He’s got to find his clique anyway; you may as well get him started.”

“We’ll see.” We had made our way down the corridor, busted through the double doors, and escaped to the outside. We both winced from the pain. We stepped back and hooded our eyes with our hands and squinted. As my eyes adjusted I realized how much I missed recess; recess allowed me to hang out with my friends and enjoy the outdoors at the same time. In high school I always forgot the outdoors existed and in turn put too much into my friends.

“Oh my God, Ash, look. There’s Ben. I gotta go. He’s giving me a ride home in his new Mustang! Maybe we’ll hit third base—just don’t hold it against me, Judy Blume.”

Her hair bounced as she ran across the parking lot and slivered into Ben’s new car. Looking straight ahead he smirked and began to skid as Mel, grinning from ear to ear, leaned over him to wave goodbye. As they sped out of the entrance, my mom pulled in.

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I took Mel’s advice and invited him to sit with us. It turned out that John’s dad didn’t get fired, he quit, and his mother wasn’t dead, she was an alcoholic. John and his dad moved from Virginia with the hope that they would forget about the divorce and start anew. Because of his family problems, I felt he could relate to mine. After a few weeks of relating, he asked for my number. Four dinner-and-a-movies, two bowling tournaments with Mel and Ben, numerous early morning
make out sessions, and three third bases later, I decided to introduce him to Ma.

“Ma, I met a guy.”

“A who?” She dropped the bananas in the cart and looked at me like it was the first time she’d seen me in a year.

“You know, that creature that falls into the same category as apes and my father.”

“You better watch that tone with me, young lady.” She turned back away from me and pushed the cart forward. “Who is he?”

“John. John Thomas. He’s a guy at my school.”

She glanced up at me as she sniffed and squeezed a honeydew melon. “Do you like him?”

“Duh. Why else would I be talking to you about it?”

“Watch it.” She put back the honeydew and moved onto the vegetables. I moved behind her.

“I want you to meet him. Can he come over?”

She did a full 180. “And do what?”

“I dunno. We could have dinner, order pizza or something. We could rent a movie or play some board games.”

She just stared at me. An old lady a foot shorter than me with a hump back tried to squeeze by us to get to the canned goods aisle. Ma turned back to her cart.

“I suppose you’re old enough. It’s time I start letting you make your own decisions. You have to make mistakes to learn things about life that I’ll never be ever to teach you. Just remember that I warned you.”

“Ma, please don’t embarrass me. He’s just a guy, a nice guy that I think you’ll like. Just don’t preach to him, please.”

“Don’t worry. I’ll be on my best behavior. The key is to not let a guy know you’re on to him. You’re daddy knew I was clueless and he took advantage of it . . .”

She continued lecturing for another hour and a half while my mind wandered. I noticed a ring that seemed to be forming around her waist underneath her T-shirt. It wasn’t the size of an inner tube, but rather a baby’s floatie. At forty-two she still had no gray hair, but a few lines were beginning to show between her two big blue eyes. She never
dressed up anymore; I assumed that since she wasn’t trying to impress any guys she didn’t see the point. I was never going to end up like her: a babbling, man hater who married due to an unplanned baby and divorced three years later due to an unplanned marriage. I would never be the woman who would live thirteen divorced years as a single woman who refused to date the devil.

* * *

Over pizza, she asked John way too many questions. She covered his family, school, plans after school, and even his sex life.
She finished her last slice of pizza. “So, have you had sex?”
“Mom!” I choked on my pizza and John just froze.
After a few blinks he lied, “No.”
I don’t think she believed him. Other than that humiliating moment, the visit went pretty well. Mom wasn’t crazy about it, but she let me date him.

At least he liked her. He thought she was honest, blunt, and a little intimidating—kind of like a dad, but in the shape of a woman.

After nine months, he declared his love for me while we were parked in the YMCA parking lot. I was searching for my purse in the floorboard so I could powder away my kissing rash before returning home to someone who would never notice, Daddy.

“Ash, I love you.”

I left my head down and froze. I sat there for a moment not knowing what to say. When I began to get a little light-headed I sat up and looked at him, shirt in hand.

“Really?”
“Yeah.”

I put my shirt back on so I could think about something other than the cold. All I came up with was, “Thanks.”

He blinked and said, “Sure.”

John turned to face the windshield and cranked the car. He took me home in silence and we both acted like nothing happened as we kissed each other goodnight.

As I opened the front door, I saw Daddy was in the same state I
had left him four hours earlier—sprawled out in his oversized, red recliner in an undershirt and boxers dozing in front of the TV with a huge cup of tea in his left hand and the remote in the other. His head snapped up and over his shoulder when he heard the door close.

“Did you and what’s-his-name have a good time?”

“Yep.” I squeezed in between the recliner and the wall, trying to make a quick getaway.

“Whoa, why are you in such a hurry? Why don’t you come and talk to me?” He put down the tea and remote and brought the recliner from the laid-back position to the rocking-chair position.

“I’m just tired.” He gave me the look, so I stepped over all the Mary Kay sales products on the floor and plopped down on the sofa next to him.

“You’re just like your mom sometimes. You never want to talk.”

I couldn’t imagine Ma not wanting to talk. “Sorry, like I said, I’m just tired.” I pulled my stepmom’s coupon books and scissors out from under me.

“Sorry about the mess. You know I try to talk to her about cleaning, but she doesn’t listen.”

“You know, you could help me clean while I’m here. Sometimes I wonder if you’re just waiting for me to get home just to clean for you guys.”

“You know that’s not true. I just like to relax on the weekends. You know I work all week. I’ve got to pay your child support.”

“Ma told me you didn’t pay last month and you’re late this month.”

“Your Ma shouldn’t tell you things like that.”

“Why not, it is my money.”

“Do you ever get that money?”

“No, but I know she uses it for bills.” I fidgeted with the heap of unmatched socks at the end of the sofa.

“Well, I have bills, too.”

“Yeah, your wife’s bills. You let her spend money on whatever she wants.”

“You better watch it young lady.” He paused long enough to give me the look. “Why are you always on your Ma’s side? All she does is
badmouth me and I never badmouth her. I try to support you as best I know how, and all I get is disrespect from you. She doesn’t do anything but turn you against me. You know, there’s a verse in the Bible about talking bad about other people. We learned it in Sunday school last week. I guess you weren’t paying attention so I’ll remind you, ‘They are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, understand that those who practice such things are deserving of death.’ Ash, I want you to read Romans. I think it will help you.”

“Ok Daddy. Can I go to bed now?” I stood up.

“Yes, I will see you tomorrow morning at choir practice.”

I didn’t take the time to do anything but undress and climb into bed.

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“He just came out and said it like that?”

“Yeah!” We were hiding in the bathroom trying to primp and avoid running into John in the hall. Mel reapplied her watermelon lip-gloss while I warmed up under the hand dryer.

“And ‘Thanks’ is all you could come up with?”

“Yeah!”

“God, you’re stupid.” She obviously approved of her lip paint because she moved onto face powder. “Well, it’s obvious. He wants to move to the next level.”

“What level is that?” I punched the dryer back on. I didn’t want anyone in the stalls to hear our conversation.

“Do I have to explain everything? He wants to have sex.”

“No. Why do you have to think everything is about sex? Just because you and Ben have done it, it doesn’t mean I have to.”

She ripped a sheet of toilet paper from the roll and began to press it against her forehead. “You’re just scared you’ll go to hell. Your parents have you brainwashed. I mean, geez, you won’t even read your horoscope for fear that it’s the work of the devil. Lighten up, holy Mary. It’s just sex.” I couldn’t believe my ears. “Does my forehead look
shiny to you?”

The dryer cut off. “Mel, sex is a big deal and yes, I can see my re-

flection off of your forehead. By the way, why don’t you go to hell?”

I left her frozen with a piece of toilet paper glued to her head. I

grabbed my books off of the counter, slammed the door behind me,

and headed for class.

* * *

“Where are your books?”

“Did you think we were really going to study? We never do. Be-
sides, my dad’s not home for a change. He’s going to be in Charlotte

until tomorrow.”

“What’s he doing in Charlotte?” He was fixing me a cup of tea.

“Meeting my mom. She’s been harassing him, trying to get him
to go back to her. She probably just needs money like all other women.
Except you, you’re beautiful.”

“All women aren’t in it just for the money.”

“All of them except you.” He put my tea down on a coaster on
the cherry finished coffee table. Smirking, he moved closer to me as I
settled into the sofa. He took my hand, “Do you remember when I
told you I loved you? I meant it, you know.”

“Mel told me you said that because you wanted to move on to a
new level. Is that true?” I was squirming and he was still smirking.

“Mel sounds like a pretty smart chick.”

“What kind of new level do you want to move on to?”

I pulled away from him and reached for my tea. I needed some-
thing else to look at. The tea was a little more comforting than he was
at that moment.

As he thought in silence, I nursed the tea and then put it back onto
the lonely coaster I removed it from. Taking my hands he said, “Ash,
I love you and I want to express that love.” He pulled my hands to
his chest. “Love me.”

I had never been more uncomfortable. I didn’t even think. I just
said, “No.”

His smirk faded into a grin and his forehead crinkled between his
brows. He squeezed my hands tighter, “Why?”

“I dunno. I don’t want to. I’m scared. I’m not ready. We’re not ready. I could go on. Do you need me to?” I felt his grip loosen and then I took a deep breath as my arms fell down to my sides. “I just can’t.”

“Is it your parents? I think you’re just scared.”

“Maybe I am. I’ve never done it before. Weren’t you scared the first time you did it?”

“Of course I was, but it was well worth it. You’ll enjoy it, too.”

“But my mom thinks that sex is all guys want and my Dad tells me I’ll go to hell if I do it.”

He moved closer to me and put his arms around my waist. “It’s not about what they think. It’s about what you think. Don’t let them decide for you.”

I was curious, but I was still afraid. “Will it hurt?”

* * *

We had sex, but like Ma’s, it wasn’t that much fun. I wanted to take it back, the make out sessions, the bases, and my virginity. I wanted Ma to take back everything that she had said about guys. She only made me more curious. At least now, I won’t be so curious. I guess I did learn that guys are in it for the sex and the more practice you have the better sex is. I also learned that my parents had a hold of my decisions and my life, but not since that day. I took my life back.
Art
The Measure of the Bird-Man, Jordan Ages
(Woodcut and feathers on rice paper, 36" x 24")
Lilies, Lauren Blackstock
(Watercolor, 22" x 30"

101
Cemetery, Ryan Chandler
(Charcoal, 18" x 24")
Model Study, Ryan Chandler
(Charcoal, 18" x 24")
Plant Study, Ryan Chandler
(Watercolor, 22" x 30"
Japanese Maple Bowl, Brook Duncan
(Ceramics, 14" x 8" x 4")
Midas Touch, Brook Duncan
(Ceramics, 10" x 10" x 6")
Luster Leaf Bowl, Brook Duncan
(Ceramics, 14" x 9" x 7"

107
Month 2, Sarah Erickson
(Linoleum cut, 12" x 12")
Under the Scope: Stem Cell Research, Sarah Erickson (Linoleum Cut, 14" x 16")
*Alternative Listening*, Sarah Erickson  
(Etching, 12" x 14"")
*Shadows of Past Lives*, Jane Fier  
(Watercolor, 30" x 22"
Passage of Water, Jane Fier
(Watercolor, 15" x 22")
Shell, M. Seth Fitts
(Mixed Media on Wood, 30" x 12")
Cycle, M. Seth Fitts
(Mixed Media, 24" x 18")
Untitled, Valerie Franklin
(Watercolor, 22" x 30"
My Noodle, Valerie Franklin
(Iron, 7½" x 10" x 2½'')
Shared Space, Brent Green
(Charcoal, 16" x 20")
Edge of the World, Brent Green
(Charcoal, 16" x 20")
The Measure of an Artist, Trisha K. Lamberth
(Ink on Paper, 9" x 12")
Windswept, Deborah Landry
(Mixed Media, 48" x 24")
Overwhelmed, Marissa Matichak
(Charcoal and eraser, 18" x 24")
Angel, Set of Two, T. J. Powell
(Photography Digital Print, 18\" x 12\")
Blanche Taylor Moore—convicted serial killer, T. J. Powell (Pen and Ink, 16.5" x 20")
C.R.U.S.H., Bryan Rasmussen
(Charcoal, Conte, India Ink on Brown Paper, 30" x 40")
Steel Wool, Stephanie Reeves
(Wood block cut, 13" x 16")
Queen of Broken Hearts, Angela Sasser
(Linoleum Relief Print, 8.5" x 11")
Part of a series called “43° North 25° East of Greenwich,” Sunay Tamashev (Mixed media, photographic transfers on watercolor paper, 20" x 30")
Tour I-Fell, Julie Teague
(Photography, 20" x 14")
Screenwriting
Tamara Daniel

Excerpt from

...And Jill Came Tumbling After

FADE IN

INT./EXT. SHUMAN UNIVERSITY THEATRE—DAY

ON STAGE

The stage is empty, except for JILL INGRAM, COLIN, her scene partner, and a chair. Jill and Colin await the director’s instruction.

Jill is a sophisticated, sarcastic, spitfire who possesses at least forty-five “stares of death,” but could be mistaken for a librarian.

She is wearing a t-shirt and yoga pants with her hair bound back with a rubber band.

DR. AVA WASHINGTON, Theatre professor and former Broadway star who instills the notion of “the moment” into her pupils, stands up from her seat in the darkened auditorium.

AVA (OS)
All right, my children. Become the moment. And Jill, behave.

Colin crosses to Jill.
COLIN
(acting bashful)
I was wondering, if you would, if you
wouldn’t mind . . .

JILL
I would love to dance with you.

Colin smiles, takes her hands, pulls her up and they waltz as the mu-
sic plays. Suddenly, Jill pushes Colin away.

COLIN
My darling, what is it?

Jill walks downstage, tears shimmering.

JILL
I cannot be with you anymore.

COLIN
(approaching Jill)
Why not, my love?

JILL
We are from two different worlds. You
are an aristocrat from a wealthy family
and I . . .

Jill steps in front of Colin, blocking him . . . again.

JILL
. . . am the poor orphan daughter . . .

AVA
(waving her hands)
Stop. Stop. No. Do not pass Go. Do
not collect any money at all. Just . . . stop.

JILL
(groans)
Great.
(turns to Colin, scoffs)
What did you do this time?

Ava walks toward the stage.

INT. CHEF DAVIES’ CULINARY SCHOOL KITCHEN

CHEF OLIVER DAVIES, the stereotypical older, distinguished gentleman, walks from station to station observing his students’ food preparations. He hums and tsks sporadically.

OLIVER
There is only one minute left, my pupils.

JACK KELLOGG, a charming 26-year-old with a sinful smile and playful, intelligent eyes, is one of the culinary students. He finely chops cilantro, deftly scoops it up in his hands, and drops it into the mixing bowl of chopped vegetables and olive oil. He mixes them with an iron whisk.

OLIVER
Thirty seconds left—finish final touches at this time.

Jack drizzles the concoction over seared, sliced chicken.

OLIVER
Utensils down.
The students put down their cooking utensils and stand quietly by their dishes. Oliver approaches an EAGER STUDENT’s station, and she smiles as Oliver tastes her Chicken Kiev. He hums, nods, then

OLIVER
(shaking his head)
Tsk, tsk, tsk.

Eager Student runs out of the kitchen.

Oliver shakes his head as he approaches Jack’s station and tastes his Rosemary Chicken. He hums, nods, and sighs.

JACK
(nudges Oliver)
Tastes like chicken this time, right?

OLIVER
Jack, your technique is improving, but . . .

Jack is surprised. CULINARY STUDENT #1, who is all greasy hair, porno mustache, and gold pinky rings, snickers and puts his hand out to CULINARY STUDENT #2, who hands him a five dollar bill.

JACK
But? What do you . . . ?

INTERCUT CONVERSATIONS—JACK AND JILL

Back to theatre.

Jill and Ava huddle in a corner on the side of the stage.
JILL
... mean “but”? I am the best actress in this department.

AVA
(hushed)
I told you that in confidence, but that doesn’t excuse your attitude.

JILL
(scoffs)
Attitude, I do not have . . .

CUT BACK TO CULINARY SCHOOL—HALLWAY

Jack and Oliver are standing outside of the kitchen.

JACK
... an attitude.

OLIVER
Yes, you do. Jack, I believe that you have potential, but . . .

BACK TO CORNER OF THEATRE STAGE

AVA
... you need to straighten up or move on, got it?

BACK TO THE HALLWAY

JACK
Got it.
OLIVER
Excuse me?

JACK
I mean, yes sir, Chef Davies.

BACK TO THEATRE

Jill and Colin are onstage. They hug each other and all is forgiven. Jill is sitting in the chair. Ava walks back to her seat.

AVA
Good. Remember, Jill. Feel the moment. Start from the waltz and . . .

EXT. COMMUNITY CENTER—DAY

INSERT—A FLYER

Beginner’s Acting for Kids
Ages: 6 thru 10
Taught by former child actor,
Jack Kellogg
Best known work:
—“Rooster’s Soup Cups” Commercials
—“Helen’s Gelatin Treats” Commercials
—Guest star on “The Bobby Worth Show”

On the base is a B&W publicity shot of Jack. His chin is slightly tilted downward and he is smiling broadly.

INT. COMMUNITY CENTER HALLWAY

The hallways are clean and painted in a sterile beige shade. The walls are lined with children’s drawings and bulletin boards. There is a glass
display by Jack’s classroom door.

Cut to Jack’s classroom.

Ten boys and girls are standing around the room frozen in place. Jack, wearing a rock t-shirt, sneakers and jeans, is standing by the front door.

JACK (OS)
(chores through halls)
Action.

The children start dancing in various ways.

JACK
(shouts playfully)
Freeze.

The children stand frozen in their places.

JACK
Okay. Now, you are zombies that have risen from the dead. Action.

The children walk around in generic “zombie-like” states and moans.

JACK
Hold on, you guys. This is an acting class, not a “copy your neighbor” class. Make the zombies your own.

Dennis, the kid with all the questions, opens his mouth.

JACK
Thanks, Dennis. I’m glad you asked.

The children, even Dennis, laugh and Jack ruffles Dennis’s hair.
JACK
Making it your own. Examples:
twitching’s good; open mouths, not
bad. You guys try. Use your imagina-
tions.

The kids pretend to be zombies.

JACK
Nick, good. Sarah, leg dragging, cre-
ative. Doug, wipe up the drool, man.
Good instincts, though.

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE JILL’S CLASSROOM

INSERT—A FLYER

“Lessons in Acting”
Taught by Jill Ingram,
Acting Graduate Student
Ages: 6 thru 8
Best known roles:
—Desdemona, in college production of Othello
—Lady Macbeth, in college production of Macbeth
—College Coed #1 in the straight-to-video film Slasher King Takes
A Vacation

INT. JILL’S CLASSROOM—DAY

Jill, wearing eyeglasses, khaki slacks, a white button-down shirt and
brown flats, is standing in front of her six- to eight-year-old students.
All but one are seated around a table, watching her with vacant stares
as she lectures.

JILL
Emotional recall is when an actor
recalls emotions and reactions from past experiences . . .

Zombie moaning can be heard through the wall. Her students look at each other.

JILL
(ignoring the moans)
. . . and uses them in identifying with their characters. This is one of the techniques used in Method Acting.

The moans get louder.

JILL
(speaking louder)
One of the most well-known actors to practice Method Acting is . . . Class, I’ll be back in a minute.

Jill starts to leave, and then she turns around.

JILL
Everyone, I want you to create a character that is based on a good friend.

INT. COMMUNITY CENTER HALLWAY

She approaches the doorway of Jack’s classroom and patiently waits until Jack sees her. He sees her and walks to the doorway.

JACK
How may I help you, Jill?
JILL
Uh, no.

JACK
What?

JILL
Don’t call me Jill. You are my colleague, not my friend.

JACK
(smirking)
Not yet.

Jill does not crack a smile.

JACK
(clears his throat)
Sorry. How may I help you, Miss Ingram?

JILL
Mr. Kellogg, what is your class learning by acting like zombies?

JACK
I am trying to teach them to broaden their imaginations.

JILL
Isn’t there a more quiet way to do that?

JACK
Hold that thought.
Jack calls out to his students.

JACK
Freeze.

The students stand still.

JACK
Okay, now you’re toys. Be creative about it because we are going to guess what toy everyone is.

Jack turns his attention back to Jill.

JACK
You were saying . . .
8:15 AM Sunday morning.

TODD, fresh and neat from a good night of sleep and a shower, is ready for church. He comes downstairs and sees Sesame Street on the television. No one is in the room. He notices the front door is unlocked. He opens the door and finds his twin brother BRIAN seated, finishing a cigarette. They are both dressed nicely for different reasons.

BRIAN, looking sloppy because he has not gone to sleep yet from a night of drinking and dancing in bars and clubs in Manhattan, looks over his shoulder to see who is there and returns to his cigarette.

BRIAN
(looks at watch)
Right on time.

TODD
How do you always make it?

BRIAN
The 7:22 from Penn. Always gives me just enough time . . .

He indicates cigarette and puts it out in the ashtray. He gets up and follows Todd to the kitchen.
TODD
I meant how do you make the train.

BRIAN
Mom and Dad up yet?

TODD points to the dining room at three covered bird cages as he gets an orange and a cup of yogurt.

TODD
What do you think?

Brian opens a greasy bag of cooling fast food he left on the table as Todd sits down. They begin eating. Todd is meticulous, wiping his hands on a napkin frequently while peeling the orange. Brian looks over Todd’s shoulder at the television.

BRIAN
(nods toward the television)
I remember when I finally got the name, The Count.

TODD
(confused for a second then remembers Sesame Street is on)
There was actually a time when you didn’t get it?

BRIAN
I was fourteen when it sank in.

TODD
(laughs)

BRIAN
Don’t laugh at me asshole. I was a kid.
TODD
(trying to suppress a laugh)
Fourteen? He’s a Count; he counts.
How could you not get it?

BRIAN
What’s the big deal? You probably never got that Bert and Ernie are gay.

TODD
Please, they are not gay. This would come from a sexual predator like you. If someone doesn’t get a date every week, they are automatically gay. Just because they never got it on with . . .

BRIAN
Miss Piggy.

TODD
You’re sick. She’s not even human.

BRIAN
How about that deaf woman?

TODD
I meant another Muppet.

BRIAN
I can’t think of any. How could you not get the subtext? They live alone and they take baths together.

TODD
It’s a kids’ show. We use to take baths together.
BRIAN
Yeah, when we were two.

TODD
It’s totally innocent. Their beds aren’t even together.

BRIAN
(mocking Todd)
This would come from someone as naïve as you. They can’t make it that obvious. All the clues add up, and nobody ever mentioned any blood relation.

TODD
How old are the kids that watch *Sesame Street*?

BRIAN
That doesn’t make a difference.

TODD
Up to about five right?
(a beat)
Right?

BRIAN
Yeah.

TODD
No child that age would understand the concept of homosexuality, let alone be able to put that together.
BRIAN
That doesn’t change anything.

TODD
Yes it does. If they were real people on a primetime CBS show, I would question it. Why are we having this conversation? They’re puppets.

BRIAN
That proves it; there’s always something up their ass. Another thing that creeps me out is Mr. Rogers.

TODD
This is going to be good. Let’s hear it, Nietzsche.

BRIAN
If I ever have or had kids by accident, they are never gonna watch him because that show teaches children to befriend old men who live by themselves and have lands-of-make-believe behind their kitchen.

TODD
(sounding annoyed)
You’ve got to be kidding.

BRIAN
Stop taking things so seriously. You got to admit, I’ve got a point.

TODD
Brian, I may be having kids soon and
you’re talking all this nonsense about how these timeless shows are going to corrupt them.

BRIAN
They won’t be corrupted. This is just something I think all parents should be aware of. And what the hell are you talking about? She isn’t pregnant already is she?

TODD
No, she couldn’t be.

BRIAN
Oh, she’s on the rag? She was kind of bitchy the other night at LaBamba’s.

TODD
She’s not menstruating. Maybe it’s because you were an hour late.

BRIAN
I was only forty . . . Are you telling me that you and her aren’t . . . ?

TODD
(a beat)
Aren’t what?

BRIAN
Don’t play dumb with me.

TODD
(long pause)
Kind of.
BRIAN
So, you stopped so your wedding night could be extra special, right?

TODD
We never stopped.

BRIAN
You and Brit never . . . ?

TODD
We never started.

BRIAN
Please tell me you’re kidding.

TODD
(shakes his head “no”)

BRIAN
That’s bullshit. You’ve been going out for over five years, and nothing?

TODD
I wouldn’t say nothing. We are still human. But nothing that would get her pregnant.

BRIAN
That’s still kind of strange, but at least you’re blowing off some steam.

TODD
If that’s what you want to call it.
BRIAN
Holy shit. So Brit’s a virgin?

TODD
(Slowly and almost hesitantly shakes his head “yes”)

BRIAN
That’s fucking awesome. I don’t think I’ve ever had one of those before.

TODD
That’s nice. Thanks for sharing.

BRIAN
Let me ask you something? Did you ever fart in front of her?

TODD
Shut up.

BRIAN
No, seriously.

TODD
I can’t believe we were conceived together.

(a beat, sigh) Maybe once or twice, but she never heard it.

BRIAN
Did she ever fart in front of you?

TODD
What do you think?
BRIAN
What about that time you went to D.C.?

TODD
No, I held it.

BRIAN
That’s so painful. When did you . . .
go?

TODD
When we pulled over for gas and when she was asleep.

BRIAN
You went at a gas station? What do you think is gonna happen when you live together?

TODD
I’m just gonna hide it for as long as possible until she catches me.

BRIAN
You’re an idiot. You should just let one go the next time you two are alone in the car and lock the windows.

TODD
What are you, crazy?

BRIAN
Give it a try. It’ll be a nice taste of things to come.
TODD
I don’t think so.

BRIAN
You two are about to know each other better than you could possibly imagine, yet you hide bodily functions? Sure, it’s not the most pleasant thing in the world, but it’s natural.

TODD
As natural as it is, I’m still not going out of my way to have her “get a whiff o’ this” or “come here with the camera.”

BRIAN
I hope you don’t get too grossed out when you have to face it in a few months. Don’t take this for the face value. You’ve got to know and understand its inner workings. You may get the obvious like the Count who counts shit, big deal; but you never once questioned two adult men living alone and singing about how much they like each other after getting out of a bath. Marriage seems like the greatest thing in the world when you got a hot woman that you love. I just hope you’re able to comprehend what you’re getting into.

TODD
Are you saying I shouldn’t get married?
BRIAN
No. It’s way too late to back out now.

BRIAN takes a big bite of his burger.

TODD
So what are you saying I should do?

BRIAN
(talking with his mouth still slightly full)
There’s only one thing left to do at this point:

(BRIAN swallows his food)
fart.
INT. MUSEUM—NIGHT

The museum is silent. A few lights punctuate the darkness, illuminating bits and pieces of paintings and sculptures, a pair of eyes here and a hand there.

Gradually, a glimmer of light begins to shine around the edges of one painting that depicts a tumultuous sea. The light reveals the silhouette of a man (JACK).

VOICE (OS)
(shouting)
Don’t let him get away!

The man steps out of the painting quickly, looking over his shoulder, water dripping off his clothes. As soon as he lands in the gallery, the noise stops abruptly and the light disappears as he walks off through the hallway.

FADE OUT

ROLL CREDITS:

INT. STUDIO—NIGHT
The room is dim, inhabited by unfinished sculptures and blocks of stone and marble. One block stands in the corner, dull and lifeless.

The SCULPTOR, an old man, enters. Scanning the room, he nods when he sees the block. Uncovering it, he walks around it, considering. He begins to chip away the excess material.

Gradually, each part of the statue is formed. A feathery but strong wing, a feminine face raised in anticipation, light feet barely touching the ground.

FADE IN:

INT. CLASSROOM—DAY

CLAIRE TOUSSANT, age nine, is drawing a crayon angel. She is a tiny girl, all hair and eyes.

PHILLIP, her father, is nearby, sitting with KATE LUCAS, Claire’s teacher. Phillip is a thirty-ish, good-looking man with tired eyes, the consummate businessman in an understated blue pinstripe suit.

Kate is wearing a bright pink and yellow skirt. The serious look on her face is incongruous with her girlishness.

KATE
(quietly)
I’m very concerned about Claire, Mr. Toussant . . .

PHILLIP
Please. Call me Phillip.

Kate pauses for a second, then regains her poise.
KATE
Ever since Claire’s mother died . . .

Phillip’s face darkens, and she falters. He glances at Claire, who is still coloring.

PHILLIP
Ms. Lucas, please.

Kate lowers her voice even more.

KATE
I’m sorry, but she’s withdrawing more and more. She won’t talk, won’t participate or play with the other kids. All she does is draw. But even that . . . Yesterday, I had the kids draw pictures of their families.

She gestures toward one of the walls, covered with childish artwork.

KATE
Claire’s drawing was different. It was amazingly good. And that’s what made it even more disturbing . . .

Kate hands Phillip a sheet of paper. He looks at it reluctantly.

INSERT—THE DRAWING

The people in the drawing, presumably Claire and her parents, are being eaten by monsters. It is a picture that no parent wants a son or daughter to draw, the stuff of nightmares.

BACK TO SCENE
Phillip hands the paper back to Kate without speaking. She leans forward in her chair.

KATE
Claire needs help, Phillip. I know a great child psychologist . . .

PHILLIP
My daughter does not need a shrink!

Claire looks up, startled. Kate winces. Phillip stands abruptly. When he sees Claire’s anxious look, his gaze softens and, once again, he looks tired and worn.

PHILLIP
She just needs time, Ms. Lucas.

INT. TOUSSANT HOUSE—NIGHT

CLAIRE’S BEDROOM

Claire lies asleep in bed, nightlight glowing nearby. She moves in her sleep restlessly, muttering. Phillip comes in quietly, standing by the bed. He sighs, smooths Claire’s hair awkwardly and then leaves.

INT. TOUSSANT HOUSE—NIGHT

PHILLIP’S STUDY

Modern art hangs on the walls, odd pictures of bright red squares and black lines. Phillip sits at a large mahogany desk, phone pressed to his ear, Claire’s drawing in his other hand.

PHILLIP
I don’t know what to do, Helene. She
won’t talk. Not even to me.

HELENE replies. A look of utter relief crosses Phillip’s face as he list-
tens. He nods in response.

PHILLIP
I was hoping that you would say that.
Tomorrow? Okay, I’ll see what I can
do. *Au revoir.*

He looks at the drawing once more and then brings up a web page with
information for flights to France. Phillip clicks the Confirm Flight
icon, buying two tickets to Paris, one way.

EXT. AIRPORT—DAY

Claire and Phillip are standing on the sidewalk, their luggage surround-
ing them like a barricade. Helene drives up, pulls to the curb and climbs
out of the car.

She is a bird-like woman, close to sixty, with paint-spattered clothing
and a bright scarf. She kisses Phillip on both cheeks.

HELENE
Welcome to Paris! My goodness,
Claire, you are quite a young lady
now. I almost didn’t recognize you!

Claire smiles shyly. Helene places her hand on Claire’s cheek.

HELENE
(sadly)
Poor *bebe.*

Helene quickly recovers her cheerfulness, and guides Claire to the car,
while Phillip puts the luggage in. They drive off into Paris, the city
HELENE
You will love Paris, Claire. And the museum. It’s full of wonderful treasures.

Claire nods and then turns to stare out at the passing scenery: the Eiffel Tower, the Seine River.

PHILLIP
So Helene, what are you restoring now?

HELENE
The most beautiful Rubens. I’ll make it look like it once did.

Claire drifts off to sleep, listening to them talk.

INT. HELENE’S HOUSE—DAY

Like Helene, the house is old but bright, with artistic touches colors. Phillip, Claire and Helene are at the breakfast table.

PHILLIP
Helene wants to take you to the museum today, Claire. Would you like that?

Claire nods, her face bent over her plate. Helene smiles.

HELENE
Yes, and I have a surprise for you.
Claire looks up. Helene laughs, and clucks her tongue.

HELENE
It wouldn’t be a surprise if I told you, now would it? Come with me.

INT. HELENE’S BEDROOM—DAY

Helene opens a drawer and picks up a box, handing it to Claire. Claire opens it to find a small portrait of a delicate woman who looks vaguely like Claire.

HELENE
It’s for you. I painted it a long time ago. Before your father and Vivianne met.

Claire traces her mother’s face and then impulsively hugs Helene. Helene returns the embrace.

INT. MUSEUM—DAY

Claire is standing in front of a painting of a man, fascinated. She’s holding the portrait of her mother. Phillip and Helene stand off to the side.

PHILLIP
Why did you do it? She doesn’t need that kind of reminder.

HELENE
Be honest. Are you more worried about Claire being reminded or yourself? Claire needs to remember her mother.
Phillip is about to protest when GERARD, the museum curator, approaches. A man who always knows what he wants, Gerard is imposing and loud.

With him is LYNNE, an attractive woman in her late twenties with green cat eyes.

GERARD
Ah, Phillip, I was looking for you!

He places a fat hand on Phillip’s back and guides him away from Helene and Claire, Lynne trailing behind.

GERARD
(as they walk)
I was wondering if you would set up the Rubens exhibit. It’s really not that much different than a gallery showing.

PHILLIP
Well, I . . .

GERARD
(interrupting)
Of course you will! And Lynne will help you!

PHILLIP
(stopping)
Lynne?

Lynne extends a hand to Phillip, the polish on her lethally long fingernails the same color as her vampy red suit.

LYNNE
I’m so pleased to meet you.
GERARD
Lynne is our PR expert. She’ll be assisting you.

He claps Phillip on the shoulder.

GERARD
(to Lynne)
Phillip has done incredible things in that gallery of his in New York. This exhibit will be the talk of Paris.

PHILLIP
It’s not my gallery . . .

GERARD
No more excuses! Just get to work.

Gerard starts to walk off and then abruptly turns.

GERARD
You have two weeks.

Gerard exits, leaving a gaping Phillip and a smug Lynne. She smiles wryly at Phillip.

LYNNE
Won’t you come with me?

Helene and Claire watch them leave, with identical glares on their faces.

INT. MUSEUM—DAY

HELENE’S WORKROOM
HELENE
Your papa will be back soon.

Claire doesn’t look convinced. She begins to nose around the chaotically messy workroom.

LEO, an energetic young man in his early twenties accompanied by a half-grown Irish wolfhound enters the room.

LEO
Bonjour, Tante Helene.

He hugs his aunt, lifting her off the ground. Claire watches in astonishment.

HELENE
(laughing)
Put me down, you fool! Is that anyway to greet an old woman?

LEO
You, old? Never! But who is this charming mademoiselle?

Leo gestures towards Claire, who stands partially behind a canvas, hiding from the dog. She shrinks back even further when he looks at her.

HELENE
That’s Phillip’s daughter, Claire. She’s come to stay with us for a while, haven’t you, Claire?

Claire watches them knowingly as Helene gives Leo a meaningful glance. Leo looks at Claire and nods in understanding. He walks slowly over to the canvas and peeks behind it.
Hi.

Claire jerks away when he tries to pat her on the head and runs to Helene, who is already pulling out a painting.

Well, I need to get to work. I have to get the Rubens ready. You get to help Leo in the museum basement today, Claire.

Claire gives Leo a suspicious look, one that he sees. He chuckles.

Don’t worry. I don’t bite. And neither does Picasso.

He pats Picasso on the head.

It’ll be fun, I promise. And I bet that you like stories. I know lots of stories.

Claire, still wary and reluctant, allows Leo to lead her from the room, Picasso following. Helene turns to the painting, already distracted.

This is my territory.

Leo and Claire walk into the basement. It is dark, but this makes it
more mysterious than frightening. Picasso immediately heads off to nose around in a corner.

LEO
And if you ask me, this is the best place in the whole museum. Know why?

He glances inquisitively at Claire, eyebrows raised. She shrugs.

LEO
(dramatically)
Because . . .

He pauses until he is sure that he has Claire’s attention, and then flips on the light switch.

LEO
. . . I get to see everything before anyone else does.

The light reveals a cavernous room full of huge crates, and artwork in every medium possible. Claire’s eyes are huge.

LEO
You know, Claire, there’s magic in art. But some pieces of art have a different kind of magic, a power. And I’m looking for that magic.

When Leo says the word “magic,” Claire’s face lights up.

LEO
Oh, you like that, do you? Need some magic, too?
Claire nods vigorously. Leo smiles and ruffles her hair. This time she doesn’t pull away.
Translations
Stuart Merrill

La Maison Solitaire

C’est ici la maison de douce solitude
Dont le vantail de bois ne s’entr’ouvre, discret,
Comme à l’appel de Dieu, qu’au cri d’inquiétude
Du vagabond venu du fond de la forêt.

C’est ici la maison dédiée à l’étude
Où la lampe allumée à l’heure du secret
Éclaire les feuillets que ma béatitude
Livre au leurre du temps sans remords ni regret.

C’est ici la maison qui te vit apparaître,
O charmeuse qui sus, avec des mots d’amour,
Faire fleurir la rose au bord de la fenêtre.

C’est ici la maison d’un trop tardif séjour
Où l’on ne m’a pas dit qu’en un soir de désastres
La Ville avait hurlé ses chants de mort aux astres.
The Solitary House

Here is the house of gentle solitude
Whose wooden door is but half-open, discreet,
As if to the call of God, rather than the vagabond’s
Anxious cry from the depths of the forest.

Here is the house dedicated to study
Where a lamp burns at the secret hour
Illuminating the pages my beatitude surrenders
To the illusion of time with neither remorse nor regret.

Here is the house which saw you appear,
O charming one who knew, with words of love,
How to make the rose bloom at the windowsill.

Here is the house of an over-belated sojourn
Where one only said to me during an evening of disasters
The City had howled its songs of death to the stars.
Renouveau

Les cloches de la vie sonnent dans la montagne,
Le vent secoue comme un sanglot d’amour les jeunes vergers,
Et mon âme tressaille au présage des oiseaux légers
Qui volent à cris aigus dans le crépuscule de la compagne.

Les petits ruisseaux se sont chuchoté mille secrets
Sous les trembles et les saules et parmi leurs mille roseaux,
Avant de se confondre, futurs nuages, dans les eaux
Du fleuve qui coule sans bruit vers la mer des regrets.

Le miracle des blés fait chanter haut l’espoir
Qui dormit tout l’hiver au cœur des vieux semeurs;
L’on entend dans les sillons remuer des nids jaseurs;
C’est Pâques des fleurs, c’est Pâques des vies, ce soir!

Que veulent donc me dire la terre, l’air et l’onde
En ce printemps où je voudrais mourir pour mieux revivre?
Le Dieu caché me murmure-t-il—comme au poète ivre
Qui dort sur le chemin—le secret de ce monde?

O des baisers de femmes, de flammes et d’abeilles sur mes lèvres!
Donner l’essor à mes prières comme à un tourbillon d’oiseaux!
Laisser s’épandre tous mes désirs au gré du val comme les
ruisseaux!
Refleurir, âme et chair, dans les tiges que fait trembler la sève!

O Dieu qui te révèles par la lumière qui comme une ombre
  t’accompagne,
Je veux mourir en toi pour renaitre supérieur à moi.
Un peu de sable a coulé comme de l’or entre mes doigts.
Les cloches de la mort sonnent dans la montagne.
Revival

The bells of life toll in the mountains,
The wind like a sob of love shakes the young orchards,
And my soul quivers to the omen of slight birds
Flying with shrill cries in the dusk of the countryside.

The little streams have whispered a thousand secrets
Under the aspens, the willows and amongst their thousand reeds,
Before merging with one another, future clouds, in the waters
Of the river flowing noiselessly towards the sea of regret.

The miracle of wheat makes hope sing high-pitched
Which slept all winter in the hearts of the old sowers;
One hears it in the fields stirring the chattering nests;
It is the Easter of flowers, the Easter of lives, this evening!

What then do the earth, air and water wish to tell me
This spring in which I would like to die so to be better revived?
The hidden God murmurs to me—as if to the drunken poet
Who sleeps in the path—the secret of this world?

O the kisses of women, flames and bees on my lips!
Giving flight to my prayers as if to a whirlwind of birds!
Letting all my desires pour to the will of the valley like streams!
Reflourishing, soul and flesh, in the stems trembling with sap!

O God who reveals you with light who like a shadow accom-
panies you,
I want to die in you to be reborn superior to myself.
A bit of sand has flowed like gold between my fingers.
The bells of death toll in the mountains.
Chanson

Je ne sais pas pourquoi mon cœur
Est triste comme un tombeau vide
Sous cette aube où la joie avide
Chante avec la vie ivre en chœur.

Quand donc finira cette route?

J’ai ri, comme un enfant, trop fort,
Lorsque du seuil des maisons closes
J’ai vu qu’on balayait les roses
Avec le geste de la mort.

La poussière a caché la route.

Je crois que je connus jadis
Celle, la seule, qui fut belle,
Et, depuis, mon âme rebelle
Rêve à la fille du roi d’Ys.

L’aube est rose au bout de la route.

C’est ce matin marché aux fleurs
Où chantent les filles fluettes;
Faut-il, pour de vaines bluettes,
Passer comme un poète en pleurs?

Quelqu’un va mourir sur la route.
Song

I know not why my heart
Is as sad as an empty tomb
Under this dawn where avid joy
Sings in chorus with drunken life.

When, therefore, will this way end?

I laughed, like a child, too loudly,
When from the threshold of closed houses
I saw that one was sweeping roses
With a deathlike gesture.

The dust has hidden the way.

I believe I understood long ago
The one alone who was beautiful,
And, ever since, my rebellious soul
Dreams of the daughter of the king of Ys.

The dawn is pink at the end of the way.

This flower market morning
Where slender girls sing,
Is it necessary, for the sake of vain verses,
To pass like a poet weeping?

Someone is going to die on the way.
Le Père Aveugle

La fumée, ce soir, est grise
Contre tout le ciel gris,
Dans ce pays où les cerises
Saignent comme des yeux meurtris.

Il semble qu’il va pleuvoir
Des flammes avec des larmes
Dans l’Orient de plus en plus noir
Qui palpite d’alarmes.

Je ne connais pas bien la route
Qui mène à notre maison.
Si tu priaïs, ô sœur, sans doute
Reconnaîtrais-je notre horizon.

Mais tu as oublié la prière
Qui guide vers le toit natal
Les pauvres amoureux qui errent
Par mont et val.

Et je ne sais plus le signe
Que m’apprit le trop vieux prêtre
Pour conjurer les ombres malignes
Qui peuvent nous apparaître.

Il fait noir, et les arbres grondent
Dans le vent, la foudre et le froid,
Comme si soudain le monde
Se hérissait d’effroi.
Attendons le pâtre aveugle qui passe
Courbé sur son bâton,
Cheveux épars sur sa nuque lasse,
Et tapant la terre à tâtons.

Seul, il voit clair des humains,
Lui, le passant sans yeux
A qui Dieu donne la main
Pour qu’il marche mieux.

Il connaît comme ses chiens la route
Qui mène au silencieux village
Où voudrait dormir notre doute
Loin du bruit des orages.

Ah! qu’il vienne vite, l’aveugle
Dont j’entends déjà les pas
Au milieu des vaches qui beuglent
Et des brebis qui bêlent tout bas!

Qu’il vienne comme un annonciateur,
Précédé de la terrible tempête
Qui le brûle de feux et de pleurs,
Parmi le troupeau de ses bêtes!

Il heurtera de son bâton la porte
Des fermes jaunes sous les éclairs;
Il fera trembler de sa voix forte
Les carreaux sonores des chaumières.

Et les rustres accroupis près de l’âtre,
Diront, ouvrant de vains yeux:
« C’est l’aïeul aveugle des pâtres
Qui passe sur la route de Dieu! »
Suivons-le, sœur, sans plus d’orgueil
Que ses chiens, ses bœufs et ses brebis:
Lui seul nous ramènera sur le seuil
De ce qui fut notre paradis.

Et lorsque nous aurons trouvé notre maison
Parmi ses vignes dégouttant de pluie,
Nous dirons, très humbles, une oraison
Pour le pâtre aveugle qui s’enfuit

Vers la montagne violette de nuages,
Où cette nuit nous verrons luire,
Clair comme l’espoir après l’orage,
Son bûcher où des ailes se déchirent.
The Blind Shepherd

The smoke, this evening, is gray
Against the entirety of gray sky,
In this country where cherries
Bleed like martyred eyes.

It seems that it will rain
Flames with tears
In the ever-darkening Orient
Palpitating with alarms.

I know not well the way
Which leads to our house.
If you prayed, O sister, doubtless
Would I recognize our horizon.

But you have forgotten the prayer
That guides towards the natal abode
Such poor lovers gone astray
By hill and vale.

And I no longer know the sign
That the ancient priest taught me
To ward against the cunning shadows
Which might appear to us.

It is dark, and the trees roar
In the wind, lightning and cold,
As if the world is suddenly
Bristling with dread.
Let us await the blind shepherd,
Who passes bent over his staff,
Hair scattered over his weary neck,
Tapping the earth to feel his way.

Alone, he sees humans clearly,
He, the passing one without eyes
To whom God gives his hand
That he may better walk.

He like his dogs knows the way
Which leads to the silent village
Where our doubt would like to sleep
Far from the tumult of storms.

Ah! how quickly the blind one comes
Whose steps I already hear
In the midst of lowing cattle
And quietly bleating sheep.

How he comes like a harbinger,
Preceded by the terrible tempest
Which burns him with fire and tears,
Amongst his herd of animals.

With his staff he will knock at the doors
Of the yellow farms under lightning,
With his strong voice will make tremble
The resonant windows of the cottages.

And the peasants crouched near hearths,
Will say, opening their shallow eyes:
“It is the old blind one of the shepherds
Who passes on the way of God!”
Let’s follow him, sister, with no more pride
Than his dogs, his cattle or his sheep:
He alone will guide us back across the threshold
Of that which was our paradise.

And when we have found our house
Amongst its vineyards dripping with rain,
We will say, very humbly, a prayer
For the blind shepherd who flees

Towards the purple mountain of clouds,
Where tonight we will see gleaming,
Clear like the hope which follows a storm,
His pyre where wings tear themselves apart.
Mes Yeux Ont Vu Trop De Soleils

Mes yeux ont vu trop de soleils,
Mes pas ont foulé trop de grèves!
Les astres sont partout pareils,
Et les heures d’amour sont brèves.

Je ne demande plus aux dieux
Qu’un asile au bord de la route
D’où je sourirai comme un vieux
Aux enfants qui narguent mon doute.

Laisse-moi, femme qui me plus!
J’attendrai seul dans la vêprée
Cette aube où je n’entendrai plus
Le vent gémir sur la contrée.
My Eyes Have Seen Too Many Suns

My eyes have seen too many suns,
My steps have tread upon too many shores!
The stars are everywhere the same
And brief are the hours of love.

I ask no more of the gods
Than a refuge along the way
From which I will smile like an elder
At the children who mock my doubt.

Let me be, my woman, no more!
I will await alone in the vespers
This dawn where I will no longer hear
The wind moan over the land.
René Daumal

Excerpt from *La Grande Beuverie*

Dialogue laborieux 2 and 11

Nous étions dans une fumée épaisse. La cheminée tirait mal, le feu de bois trop vert se rabrouait, les chandelles dégageaient une sauce suiffeuse dans l’air, et les nuages du tabac se couchaient en bancs bleuâtres à hauteur du visage. Si l’on était dix ou si l’on était mille, on ne savait plus. Ce qui est sûr ; c’est qu’on était seuls. A ce propos, la grande voix de derrière les fagots, comme nous l’appelions dans notre langage de soiffards, s’était un peu élevée. Elle sortait de derrière un tas de fagots, ou de caisses à biscuits, c’était difficile à savoir à cause de la fumée et de la fatigue ; et elle disait :

—Quand il est seul, le microbe (j’allais dire : l’homme) réclame une âme sœur, comme il pleurniche, pour lui tenir compagnie. Si l’âme sœur arrive, ils ne peuvent plus supporter d’être deux, et chacun commence à se frénétiser pour devenir un avec l’objet de ses tiraillements intestins. N’a pas de bon sens : un, veut être deux : deux, veut être un. Si l’âme sœur n’arrive pas, il se scinde en deux, il se dit : bonjour mon vieux, il se jette dans ses bras, il se recolle de travers et il se prend pour quelque chose, sinon pour quelqu’un. Vous n’avez pourtant qu’une chose en commun, c’est la solitude ; c’est-à-dire tout ou rien, cela dépend de vous.

On trouva que c’était bien dit, mais personne ne se souciait de voir le personnage qui parlait. Il n’était question que de boire. On n’avait encore bu que des tasses d’un tord-boyaux infect qui nous avait donné très soif.
Mais comme j’avais laissé mon troupeau d’idées noires auprès de la futaille, je les y retrouvai. Elles me sautèrent au cou avec des cris de joie, m’appelèrent « petit oncle », et me crièrent toutes sortes de paroles de tendresse, comme : « enfin te voilà revenu, ah! ce qu’on est heureuses de te revoir ! » Elles se pendaient à mes cheveux, à mes oreilles, à mes doigts, m’enlevaient mes lunettes, renversaient mon verre, salissaient mon pantalon, mettaient de miettes de pain dans mes chaussettes. J’étais bien embêté. Pour les calmer, je me mis à leur chanter cette chanson que j’avais composée autrefois dans des circonstances analogues :

Y’a des moments où tu n’sais plus,
Tu n’sais plus rien, plus rien du tout.
Le lendemain tu t’aperçois
Qu’à ce moment-là tu savais tout.
    Mais tu n’sais plus,
    Plus rien du tout,
    Tout est foutu !

Peu à peu elles s’endormirent et quand elles furent toutes endormies, je les pris une à une, leur attachai à chacune une Pierre au cou et, les tenant par les pattes de derrière ; je les introduisis par la bonde de la grande futaille. Le triste petit floc ! floc ! que leur chute faisait me fit fondre en larmes. Mais j’étais soulagé, pour un moment.
We were in a thick smoke. The chimney drew poorly, the too-green firewood hissed and crackled, the candles released a tallowish soup into the air, and the clouds of tobacco bedded themselves in bluish banks at face height. If we numbered ten or a thousand, we no longer knew. What is certain is that we were alone. In this context, the loud voice from behind the firewood bundles, as we called it in our language of drunks, became a little louder. It came directly from behind a bundle of sticks, or cookie tins, it was difficult to know due to the smoke and fatigue; and it said:

“When he’s lonely, the germ (I was going to say man) complains that he needs a soul mate, as he whines, to keep him company. If the soul mate arrives, they can no longer stand to be two, and each one begins frenzying to become one with the object of his internal gnawings. Doesn’t make good sense: one wants to be two; two want to be one. If the soul mate doesn’t arrive, he splits himself apart, tells himself: hello old friend, throws himself in his arms, glues himself crookedly back together and he takes himself for something, if not someone. Nevertheless, you have only one thing in common, solitude; that is to say all or nothing, it depends on you.”

We found it well said, but no one cared to see the character who spoke. There was only the matter of drinking. We’d drunk only cups of a vile rotgut which had made us extremely thirsty.
But as I had left my flock of black ideas near the wine cask, I again found them there. They jumped on my neck with cries of joy, called me “petit oncle,” and trilled all sorts of tender words to me, like “finally, here you are, returned, ah! How happy we are to see you again!” They hung from my hair, my ears, my fingers, pulling off my glasses, upsetting my drink, soiling my pants, putting breadcrumbs in my socks. I was quite entangled. To calm them, I began singing this song I’d composed in previous similar circumstances:

*There’re moments you no longer know*

No longer know diddly, diddly-squat
The next day you recall
One moment you knew it all
  But you no longer know
No longer know squat
Yer totally screwed.

Little by little, they went to sleep and when they were all asleep, I took them one by one, attached a rock to each neck and, holding them by the hind legs, I ushered them in by the bung hole of the big barrel. The sad little plop! plop! their fall made caused me to melt into tears. But I was relieved, for a moment.
Isabel se ajustó las gafas y contempló la fotografía admirativamente. Ocupaba las páginas centrales de la revista y centelleaba como una joya oscura. A la derecha, un sol incandescente; a la izquierda, la vastedad inimaginable del espacio. Y ahí, perdidos entre el polvo estelar, estaban Venus y la Tierra, dos menudencias apenas visibles flotando en la negrura chisporroteante. Era una imagen conseguida por el Voyager, la primera foto del sistema solar, el primer retrato de familia. La mujer suspiró.

Antonio se incorporó con brusquedad, una mano arrugando el borde de la toalla y la otra sujetándose ansiosamente el pecho.

—Me siento mal—dijo.

Y se dejó caer sobre la felpa a rayas.

—Eso es el sol. Te dije que te taparas la cabeza—le reconvino Isabel en tono distraído y sin abandonar la lectura.

Antonio jadeó. La mujer bajo la revista y le observó con mayor atención. El hombre permanecía muy quieto y su rostro tenía una expresión blanda y descompuesta, como si fuera a quebrarse en un sollozo.

—¿Qué te pasa?—se inquieto Isabel.

—Me siento mal—repitió el en un ronco susurro, con los ojos desencajados y tendidos en el cielo sin nubes.

Transpiraba. La calva del hombre se había perlado súbitamente de brillantes gotitas. Claro, que hacía mucho calor. Mas abajo, los profundos pliegues de la sotabara eran pequeños ríos, y, mas abajo aun, el pecho cubierto de canosos vellos y el prominente estomago relucían alegremente en una espesa mezcla de sudor y ungüentos achicharrantes. Pero las gotas de la calva eran distintas, tan duras, claras.
y esféricas como si fueran de cristal. Lagrimas de vidrio para una frente de mármol. Porque estaba poniéndose muy pálido.
—Pero, Antonio, ¿que sientes, que te duele?—se angustió ella.
—Tengo miedo—dijo el hombre con voz clara.
Tiene miedo, se repitió Isabel confusamente. La mano se crispaba sobre su pecho. La mujer se la cogió: estaba fría y húmeda. Le aliso los dedos con delicadeza, como quien alisa un papel arrugado. Esos dedos moteados por la edad. Esa carne blanda y conocida. Apretó suavemente la mano de su marido, como hacía a veces, por las noches, justo antes de dormirse, cuando se sentía caer en el agujero de los sueños. Pero Antonio seguía contemplando el cielo fijamente, como si estuviera enfadado con ella.
—Ya han ido a buscar al médico—dijo alguien a su lado.
Isabel alzó el rostro. Estaba rodeada por un muro de piernas desnudas. Piernas peludas, piernas adiposas, piernas rectas como varas, piernas satinadas y aceitosas, atentísimas piernas de bañistas curiosos. Entre muslo y muslo, en una esquina, vio la línea espumeante y rizada del mar.
—Gracias.
El muro de mirones la asfixiaba. Bajó la cabeza y descubrió la revista, medio enterrada junto a sus rodillas, aun abierta por la página del Voyager. Los granos de arena que se habían adherido al papel satiado parecían minúsculos planetas en relieve. Estamos en la foto, se dijo Isabel con desmayo; lo increíble es que estamos en la foto. Ahí, en esa diminuta chispa de luz que era la Tierra, estaba la playa, y la toalla de rayas azules, y el bosque de piernas. Y Antonio jadeando. Aunque no, la foto había sido tomada tiempo antes, a saber que habrían estado haciendo ellos en ese momento. Quizá el disparo de la cámara los pilló durmiendo, o jugando con los nietos, o cortándose las uñas. O quizá sucediera el domingo pasado, cuando Antonio y ella fueron a bailar para festejar el comienzo de sus vacaciones. Era en una terraza del paseo Marítimo, con orquestina y todo; trotaron y giraron y rieron y bebieron lo suficiente como para ponerse las orejas al rojo y el corazón ligero, y luego, a eso de las once, cayó un chaparrón. El aire olía a tierra caliente y recién mojada, olía a otros veranos y otras lluvias, y regresaron al hotel dando un paseo, cogidos del brazo e inmersos en
el aroma de los tiempos perdidos. Sí, ese tuvo que ser el momento justo de la foto, una pequeña y calida noche terrestre encerrada en la helada y colossal noche estelar. Antonio gimió e hizo girar los ojos en sus orbitas.

—Me estoy muriendo.

—No digas tonterías—contestó Isabel—. Uno no puede morirse con el sol que hace.

Era verdad. ¿Dónde se había visto una muerte a pleno sol, una muerte tan pública, tan iluminada, tan impúdica? Isabel parpadeó, mareada. Hacia tanto calor que no se podía pensar. Y la luz. Esa luz cegadora, irreal, como la de los sueños. Restañó el sudor de la frente de Antonio con la toalla de rayas azules y luego, tras doblarla primorosamente, se la colocó bajo la nuca. Antonio se dejaba hacer, rígido y engarabitado. Tenía las mejillas blancas y los labios morados.

—Mama, ¿está muerto ese señor?—preguntó un niño a voz en grito señalándolos con un cucurucho de helado.

—Shhhh, calla, calla . . .

En el círculo de piernas expectantes no corría ni una brizna de aire; olía a aceite bronceador y a salitre, a carne caliente y podredumbre marina. Al niño le goteaba la vainilla del helado por la mano. Tendré que pasar por la cestería y anular el encargo del sillón, se dijo Isabel, abrumada por el sofoco, por el peso de la luz y el estupor. De la orilla llegaron las risas de un par de muchachos y el retumbar pasajero de una radio. La fría mano de Antonio apretó tímidamente la suya, como hacían, a veces, antes de dormirse; pero ahora el hombre jadeaba y contemplaba el cielo con los ojos muy abiertos, unos ojos oscurecidos por el pánico. Tan indefenso como un recién nacido. Isabel sorbió las lágrimas y, por hacer algo, se puso a limpiar de arena el cuerpo de su marido.

—No te preocupes, el médico debe de estar a punto de llegar.

Y también ella miró hacia arriba, intentando entrever, mas allá de la lámina de aire azul brillante, la gran noche del tiempo y del espacio.
Isabel adjusted her eyeglasses and contemplated the photograph admiringly. It occupied the middle pages of the magazine and sparkled like a dark jewel. On the right, an incandescent sun; on the left, the unimaginable vastness of space. And there, lost within the stellar powder, were Venus and the Earth, two barely visible specks floating in the sputtering darkness. It was an image attained by the *Voyager*, the first photo of the solar system, the first *family portrait*. The woman sighed.

Antonio sat up suddenly, one hand wrinkling the edge of the towel and the other holding his chest anxiously.

“I don’t feel well,” he said.

And he allowed himself to fall on the striped plush towel.

“It’s the sun. I told you to cover your head,” Isabel reprimanded him in a distracted manner and without abandoning her reading.

Antonio panted. The woman lowered the magazine and observed him more attentively. The man remained very still and his face had a soft and disarranged expression as if it was about to break into tears.

“What’s wrong?” worried Isabel.

“I don’t feel well,” he repeated in a coarse whisper, with eyes distorted and fixed on the cloudless sky.

He perspired. The man’s bald spot became pearled suddenly with shiny droplets. Of course, it was very hot. Lower down, the deep folds of his bearded chin were small rivers and, even lower, his chest covered with gray hairs and the prominent stomach glistened with a mixture of sweat and ointments. But the drops on the bald spot were different—so hard, clear and spherical, as if they were made of crystal. Tear of glass for a forehead of marble. He was becoming very pale.
“But, Antonio, what do you feel, what hurts?” She got worried.
“I’m scared,” said the man in a clear voice.
He’s afraid, Isabel repeated to herself, puzzled. The hand twitched over his chest. The woman grasped it: it was cold and moist. She straightened his fingers gently, like someone who straightens a wrinkled paper. Those fingers speckled by age. That soft and familiar skin. She gently squeezed her husband’s hand, as she did sometimes, at night, just before going to sleep, when she felt herself fall through the hole of dreams. But Antonio continued contemplating the sky intently, as if he was annoyed with her.
“They already went to get the doctor,” said somebody beside her.
Isabel raised her head. She was surrounded by a wall of naked legs. Hairy legs, chubby legs, legs as straight as sticks, silky and oily legs, very attentive legs of curious bathers. Between thigh and thigh, in a corner, she saw the foaming and rippling line of the sea.
“Thank you.”
The wall of onlookers suffocated her. She lowered her head and discovered the magazine, partly buried by her knee, still opened to the *Voyager* page. The grains of sand that had become stuck to the shiny paper seemed like minuscule planets in relief. We are in the picture, said Isabel faintly to herself; the incredible thing is that we are in the photo. There, in that tiny spark of light that was the Earth, was the beach, and the towel with blue stripes, and the forest of legs. And Antonio panting. Although no, the photo was taken some time before, who knows what they were doing at that moment. Maybe the shot caught them sleeping, or playing with the grandchildren, or cutting their nails. Or maybe it took place last Sunday, when Antonio and she went dancing to celebrate the beginning of their vacation. It was a terrace on the promenade, with a band and all; they trotted and twisted and laughed and drank enough to make their ears red and their hearts light, and later, around eleven, it poured. The air smelled of hot and recently wet earth, it smelled of other summers and other rains, and they strolled back to the hotel, arm in arm and absorbed in the scent of lost times. Yes, that had to be the precise time of the photo, a small and warm, earthly night enclosed in a frosted and colossal stellar night. Antonio groaned and made his eyes swirl in their orbits.
“I’m dying.”
“Don’t be silly,” answered Isabel. “One can’t die with this sun.”

It was true. Where has anyone seen a death in broad sunshine, a
death so public, so illuminated, so disrespectful? Isabel blinked, dizzy.
It was so hot that she couldn’t think. And the light. That blinding,
unreal light, like in the dreams. She wiped the sweat off of Antonio’s
forehead with the towel with blue stripes and then, after folding it
skillfully, placed it under his neck. Antonio allowed himself to be
handled, rigid and crooked. His cheeks were pale and his lips purple.

“Mom, is the man dead?” asked a child with an ice cream cone.
“Shhhh, be quiet, be quiet . . .”

In the circle of expectant legs not a thread of air went through; it
smelled of tanning oil and salt, of warm flesh and of seashore decay.
The vanilla of the ice cream dripped down the child’s hand. I’ll have
to stop by the basket shop and cancel the armchair order, Isabel told
herself, oppressed by the suffocation, the weight of the light, and the
stupor. From the shore came the laughs of a couple of boys and the
passing boom of a radio. Antonio’s cold hand shyly squeezed hers, as
they did, sometimes, before going to sleep; but now the man breathed
heavily and gazed at the sky with eyes wide open, eyes darkened by
fear. As defenseless as a newborn. Isabel swallowed the tears and, to
have something to do, started cleaning the sand off of her husband’s
body.

“Don’t worry, the doctor should be arriving soon.”

She also looked upward, trying to glimpse, farther than the sheet
of bright blue air, the great night of time and space.
Interview
Margaret Griffin

*An Interview with Ann Beattie*

Transcript from September 29, 2004

*Griffin*

How do films and filmmaking influence your writing, and what are some of your favorite films?

*Beattie*

That’s a hard question, actually. Well, I certainly think that there are ways that the transitions are made in films that I’ve learned things from as a writer. I think, for instance the scene in *The Graduate* in which you look through the fish tank and so forth, and things come clear. I mean I can think of analogies between the binoculars in *Falling in Place* and the way that, you know, you suddenly and with surprise see that on the other side of the fish tank, through a distortion you are seeing Mrs. Robinson and that kind of thing. So, maybe in ways like that, there are certain transitional things that happen. I personally write a lot of things because images seem to radiate for me. So, just generally, I think that seeing how people use images in films and how they are meant to be very evocative is just something I am very interested in, but also something that, you think about the differences between what you can do in film and what you can do in writing, and in writing you can say any number of words about something and maybe make things clearer and clearer, but you have to pick the right image, in effect, right away, in a film because you don’t get to explain it. It’s realer than real. It’s there. The tree there had better be a tree and not a peony, if that’s
what you are really going for. So, those things are always of interest.

Griffin

Are there any of your other novels that you would like to see as a film, or that you think would make good films?

Beattie

I don’t really think in those terms, and it’s hard to say. And there are so many novels that have been made into films by other people that didn’t seem to me to be terribly likely. I mean, even *Chilly Scenes of Winter* was such a book. That took place in narrative and inside people’s minds. I thought, for example, Charles’s direct address to the camera, and so forth, I mean people actually addressing the camera was an interesting way to get those things across. But I don’t really think of the books as anything but books, not that I would mind if somebody made me rich and famous by optioning my books, I really wish they would, but I think of them as having so much interiority, you know, that it doesn’t seem to me that they are like action-packed and inherently the kind of film that, not always, but very often is made.

Griffin

Okay, we were just talking about *Chilly Scenes of Winter*, and I would like to hear you speak about the relationship between that novel and *The Great Gatsby*.

Beattie

Hmm, I don’t think I’ve ever been asked that . . . the relationship between *Chilly Scenes of Winter* and *The Great Gatsby*. Well, I mean *The Great Gatsby*, for one thing I don’t think would be the same, I know wouldn’t be the same book, if you were reading about somebody who really was “The Great Gatsby” and there was no Nick Carraway there
to be your guide. And it’s certainly a novel about someone’s obsession. It’s not only about Gatsby’s obsession with Daisy, it’s also about Nick’s obsession with Gatsby, and similarly everyone’s reliance on the cultural times in which they’re living. So I mean I can see that that would be something that would be slightly analogous. And I mean, I don’t think Chilly Scenes would be the same without Sam there as a kind of foil to Charles. It’s not directly analogous to Nick and Gatsby, but without someone to comment ironically on what Charles is thinking, I think it wouldn’t be as interesting a matter, and similarly I don’t think Gatsby would be as interesting without Nick being there. So there are those literary pairings. And, I suppose, I mean I wouldn’t have thought of it in these terms, you know, if you do think of it in terms of the American dream, Gatsby is often brought up as an example of how the American dream has gone wrong and certainly on a much smaller level, Chilly Scenes of Winter, too, is about how this very, you know, distinct, small situation has gone very wrong. So I suppose as a kind of analogy . . .

Griffin

Right, I remember watching the film, watching Charles looking at the A-frame house kind of reminded me of Gatsby staring at the light on the end of Daisy’s dock . . . maybe not on the same scale . . .

Beattie

But that is true, this beacon of light in the night, you know, and the woman he’s obsessed with is inside, you’re quite right.

Griffin

Back to Falling in Place, there are many mentions of songs and song titles within the text. Are those chosen to further develop the setting? Do they have a personal meaning for you, like the “inside jokes” you said authors often include? Just, basically, how does music influence your work?
Beattie

Well, I think there’s also a line in there, one of the characters says, “All music is always appropriate.” Isn’t that there in *Chilly Scenes of Winter*? And, again, that’s sort of an admission between the writer and the person reading that, of course, if you put a song in everybody’s going to look for the symbolic value of that song, and it’s actually all too easy to relate all that music to what’s going on. But it was more a novel about ambient sound, I mean what was going on at the times. It seemed to me to be a way of particularizing the times. And I think maybe not all of them, but a lot of those songs you still hear, at least you still hear on certain radio stations. And, you know there are certain pieces of music, contemporary music that seem, that just seem to me to be an explanation of or a reinforcement of the beat of the times, the tempo of the times. And so they’re there for that, too. They’re there because if they do play in the reader’s head, they give the reader a certain momentum; they give the reader a certain perspective that wouldn’t be there otherwise.

Griffin

Do you still listen, or are you still as attuned to that as you were in the seventies? Do you still listen to contemporary music?

Beattie

No, I don’t think I do, I’m not as attuned to that.

Griffin

I wanted to talk to you, as a professor. In *Falling in Place* you address the state of education of literature, and what are some of your philosophies teaching literature and also teaching writing?
Beattie

Well, that’s a very extensive, that’s a very big question. It’s very different teaching literature and teaching writing, too. Well, my graduate students kind of make fun of me for saying the same thing over and over again, which is something like, “Why doesn’t the telephone ring?” or “Why doesn’t a bird fly past the window?”

I find that one thing that happens with beginning writers is that they spend so much time crafting the piece that they forget to let in those things that don’t seem to pertain, that seem to be extraneous. I was talking about this a little bit earlier, and, therefore, to make it seem convincing, to make it seem like it really is in real life, you don’t want somebody to just be put in a particular trajectory without opening that up in any way. And, therefore, if the telephone rings at the wrong moment, if a bird does fly past the window, it lets the reader know that you, the writer, knows that it’s a bigger world than what you’re just addressing at the moment.

So, I think I do have this notion that in order to convince a reader there are certain things as a writer that you have to do, and you can do them very briefly, but they open up the work in a way that makes it seem real. Whereas it can seem perfect, but if it seems hermetically sealed it won’t seem very believable, and therefore I don’t think it can move people very much. They might admire your writing, but I don’t think they could get into it as much, you know. So, I mean, it’s too big a question in a lot of ways.

What I do when I am teaching literature, of course, is to ask the “Why this as opposed to something else?” question. Why should Sam be a minor character as opposed to being the major character in the book, you know, what would . . . but that’s a hard thing too. I don’t think there are any hard and fast rules about that, but I do think that you have to be conscious of what somebody’s working method was as opposed to another working method and then you may fairly say it doesn’t really work very well or that, you know, that there are problems with it. I mean certainly I’m not saying that everything is entirely coherent or pleasing and that you just have to figure out all the parts
of it. But I think to read carefully is the important thing, and so if something is there it’s often fair to question why that is there as opposed to something else.

*Griffin*

So in your education experience was there any particular course that taught you a lot about writing?

*Beattie*

Yes, as a matter of fact when I was a freshman at American University, I had a professor named Frank Terrage and this was sort of his working method. I mean, I never thought to question before why there was a major versus a minor character and could they be flipped, you know. But when I saw things through his eyes, I began to realize that number one, they were real people behind these stories, because I was just, I was a kid, I was eighteen years old. I don’t know what I thought. I didn’t think a machine produced them, but I didn’t really think in terms of a lot of decisions that the author had made that they at least thought of as conscious decisions. And it didn’t seem to make the work less interesting or something that needed to be decoded or something like that. It just seemed something that fairly deserved your attention, and it really was worth articulating.

*Griffin*

In both *Chilly Scenes of Winter* and *Falling in Place* the occupations the characters have take kind of a very minor role, and the comments made on them things like, you know, Charles spends his time doing these mindless reports that he doesn’t know anything about, and John Knapp sells “preposterous products” in “preposterous ways.” What kind of things are you saying about the way people make their living in this day and age?
Beattie

Oh, I’m not really generalizing. I mean, again, I do write about things that worry me, and I’ve never worked as an office employee. So I guess in some ways I’m putting out my worst nightmare of what that might be: that I was disconnected to my work and that, you know, I was just a worker bee or something like that, as opposed to somebody who was allowed to have some sort of really creative input. I mean, in theory John Knapp has some sort of, or Metcalf himself is kind of a crazy man, but this is ostensibly about creative input whereas what Charles is doing is just being a government employee. But I think to me, they’re both kind of equally frightening in that there’s a task at hand that is supposed to be approached a particular way and it’s scary a little bit. I mean, I deliberately never had one of those jobs. You’re just reading a fear reaction, probably not a good report.

Griffin

I think we already touched on this a little bit. In *The Burning House*, a lot of the stories rely on or, you know, come to this kind of final note, like a line or phrase that brings everything together, and reveals the overall theme. When you set out to write one, does it kind of come to you as you are writing, or is it something you have in mind beforehand?

Beattie

Oh, I don’t think I ever know what the last line is going to be at all. But it’s interesting because you are writing as spontaneously and, you know, as unconsciously as you can, but even then you’re yourself, so as with your own dreams, they’re going to have symbols that are personally meaningful to you. I’m not randomly selecting images even though I might feel like I am because in the world I tend to look at flowers more than I tend to look at birds or something, you know, so there are probably going to be more flowers there.
But then the interesting thing is that literally you have to figure out for the purposes of that story, I mean, what’s the correct note to end on. How can you kind of restate the concerns of the story either through dialogue or through a visual image to make it more at the end, and more particular to that story than it would be inherently? Well, it’s a bird, but that doesn’t mean it’s anything about the kind of bird that’s in *Falling in Place*, you know what that means. So, by the time you get to the end of the story, I think it’s partly a case of still working through what’s intuition, but also that other critical facility of your mind kicking in and realizing, at least by the end, even if you can’t say everything the story is about or even if the story might change a lot in revision, the note that you want to end on, just being very, very careful about that.

I can’t think of anything that I’ve done that really is kind of a non sequitur at the end. I mean maybe there are certain stories that have certain lines of dialogue that seem to be even more ambiguous, but usually if you look at the ending of a story you’ll see that it was anticipated. You know things . . . you might not have expected those things would add up to that, you might have thought it would have ended differently, but at least once you read the ending you can look back through the story and see that it’s not random, that that thread is the metaphor thread, or however you want to put it, of the story.

Griffin

I liked listening to you talk about your favorite cover. Do you have a favorite title of any of your work?

Beattie

Now that’s an interesting question. I don’t think anybody has ever asked me that. A favorite title. Well, for a long time when I was writing those early stories, they had those one word titles, and I don’t know that I think of them as favorites, but I don’t do that any more. Now the stories have really long titles, and then I think in some ways it was
very related to how important—the stories were shorter—and there-
fore the visual images had to really cohere, and had to be not too ob-
vious, but also had to really do a lot of work. Whereas now when I
have four hundred pages to discuss or even a fifty-page story, it can, it
doesn’t always have to happen so fast, it doesn’t have to congeal in the
same way. And so I almost thought of them as variations on abstrac-
tions. Like if you name a story “Desire,” it’s an abstraction until you
read that particular version of what desire is, you know. But again I
think that my stories have longer titles now because I think in a good
sense my stories are a little more unwieldy and a little less paraphras-
able. So, therefore, it would be hard to come up with an exact title.
Book Reviews
Josh Grant

Review of Randy Hendricks’s
The Twelfth Year, and Other Times

By attempting to reconstruct memories of particular periods of their lives through narrative, the characters in *The Twelfth Year, and Other Times* force the idea of the past to be a vital part of their present. The men in Randy Hendricks’s first collection of short stories are possessed with the past, but unlike the popular conception that southerners’ obsession with history stems from the South’s defeat to the “northern aggressors,” the characters in these stories are not pre-occupied with “the war.” Rather than having them deal with memories about the evils of northern invaders, which happened long before they were born, Hendricks has his southern characters deal with each other. They have to deal with new concepts of invasion: the government, neighbors, classmates, and even family. The characters struggle with narrative memory and negotiate with the people around them in an attempt to define themselves in relation to their new suburban environments.

Hendricks pays careful attention to dialects, and he gives the reader wonderful descriptions of the southern geography through which his characters are moving, but he also makes sure that his localizing details do not represent the entire South during any particular decade. The details tell the reader more about a particular time in a character’s life than they do about a specific historical moment in a region. Some of the characters, such as Jonny’s grandfather in “Ruins,” maintain as best they possibly can the distance between their self-sustaining nuclear households and the rest of society, which divides the workload and makes its citizens dependent on each other. Without the mention of
the year, of popular products, or of historical government projects, a reader could believe that the farm life that Jonny describes in “Ruins” is the story of a nineteenth-century family rather than of a family living in the late twentieth century.

Hendricks’s use of the road as a symbol in many of the stories foregrounds the relationship between the individual southern male and the community that begins to invade his domain. Roads tie the local community store to the houses that lie in the surrounding countryside, and stories such as “The Stove,” “The Peddler,” “A White Shirt,” “The Twelfth Year,” and “Richard Black’s Romance” explore men’s supposedly solitary journeys from the social space of the town store to the domestic space of the house. The stories show southern households becoming less self-sustaining and more dependent on a larger community. As the stories progress through the collection, the movement of products from the town to the home becomes more specialized and routine. It goes from moving a stove in “The Stove” to delivering groceries in newly forming neighborhoods in “The Peddler” to watching a pizza delivery boy in a suburb in “Richard Black’s Romance.”

While the road gives the community and the household access to each other, many of the characters use it as a temporary means of escape from society. Many of them expect time alone on the road but are constantly denied that solitude either by having people watch their travels on a bet or by having other people in the community traveling the same road or even by having other people’s houses crowd the road. “A White Shirt” has more imagery of roads connected to stores, but the store is not the destination for the young men in the story; instead, the store serves as a means to continue traveling. The young protagonist says that people “didn’t know what a boy as young as Buddy was doing out on the road on a bicycle. Which is all he wanted to do, get out on the road on his bicycle. He knew he could ride it better if could just get it out on the pavement” (60). The motivation for the young men to be on the road is not to arrive; it is simply to travel. Being on some sort of cycle on the road is a way for the boys to be alone and free from the community through which they are traveling; it gives them a feeling of control within society.
In “The Twelfth Year,” Jimmy Giles is a poor boy who lives with abusive guardians. He is obsessed with cars and roads, often pretending that he is a racecar driver and constantly staring out the window of his classroom to look at the road. An abandoned car, a symbol of freedom for him and the narrator, is stuck in a ditch behind Jimmy’s house. In the high moment of their youth, the boys are able to use a couple of mules to free the trapped car and cut their own road by dragging it to Jimmy’s house. The initial liberation gives the boys the illusion that the car will take them other places, but they are never able to get it to run, which makes the car a sitting reminder to the narrator that immobility comes in more than one form.

Along with discovering what their future roles will be in the suburban culture that is crowding in on them, the male characters in Hendricks’s stories learn to function in a world where models do not remain constant. Many of the stories deal with men at different ages who learn that the images around them, particularly what many of them see as ideal images that are somehow connected to their identities, are fragile and cannot remain constant. “Ruth” is the story of John, a young boy who becomes obsessed with the image of a woman torn from a comic book, a picture that he stole from an unpopular, strong female classmate. He cannot keep his treasure a secret. He tries to use his possession of this ideal to create a relationship with the community of boys around him, one where the ownership of the pristine female image establishes the basis of hierarchy: “He was aware the next day of how having the book made him different. To possess something that special was a distinction he had never had before [. . .]” (70). It is the boy’s attempt to gain respect from his male peers by sharing with them his delicate treasure that destroys both his perception of the ideal female and his ideal relationship with society. The lewd conduct of the community puts creases in the boy’s queen that can never be smoothed out.

Sometimes it is the lack of wrinkles that can signify the death of an ideal. “A White Shirt” also deals with a young boy who discovers that the images of people do not remain constant. Rather, the change comes from putting clean, pressed white shirts on boys who usually do not wear them. The boy spends much of his time at his father’s gas
station, where he often sees two other boys who are older than he is. The other boys stop at the station on a regular basis, Darrell Young to put gas in his motorcycle and Buddy to put air in the tires of his bicycle. When the two “bikers” collide on the road one day, the young protagonist has to attend the funeral, where he sees one of the boys in the audience and the other one in the coffin. At the funeral, the boy realizes for the first time “that people Buddy’s age might really die” (59). In the boy’s mind, the young men’s identities are directly connected to traveling, so seeing them in a different context—static in white shirts at a funeral—upsets him.

It is not just young boys in Hendricks’s stories who learn about the inconsistency of ideal images; the men also have to deal with the changing definition of hero in the South. Carl Peeler, the protagonist of “Peddler,” keeps locked in the back of his bread truck a domesticated image of the Lone Ranger, a hero straddling a loaf of bread rather than his horse. Carl does ride through the neighborhoods alone, but he no longer has an open range to protect or evil men to fight. Instead, he has a neighborhood to travel, and he serves the people by bringing them food for money. In a sense, Carl is a lone ranger who is head of his own household but ranges alone to other households where the men are out working somewhere else. Carl’s job puts him in situations where he can do things in other households that are not usually associated with heroes. He is able to use his job to roam into other men’s territories.

In “The Stove,” Joby Johnson learns the difference between heroic narratives and the events that create those stories. Joby hears plenty of stories about his neighbors who survived the Civil War, but he cannot connect the people he sees with the tales that he hears: “Joby, born twelve years after the war, sometimes looked at the survivors and thought they didn’t seem to measure up to the stories people told about it” (7). Joby feels the disconnection between the narrative and the performance when he carries on his back from the town store to his house a stove that his family does not need, an action that the people of the town will talk about for a while. Joby’s “private” moment on the road to his house may seem like a performance worthy of praise to the townspeople secretly watching, but Joby and the reader know
that the weight that he carries from the store to his house is more than a hollow cube of steel. It is not the fire but what contains the fire that weighs so much, and the people of the town do not recognize the heavy pride that Joby carries home with him every day. When they see it actually strapped to his back, all that they notice is the strength required to move a physical object.

Richard Black, the protagonist in the last two stories in Hendricks’s collection, “C. K. Black” and “Richard Black’s Romance,” is a man who must get used to living in a twentieth-century community. Ironically, as the houses in the South move closer together, the citizens know less about their neighbors so that people and houses just become objects in the landscape that crowd in on the individual. The men in the South no longer live in isolated plantations; they live in neighborhoods where they have to learn to deal with people who are on or near their property. In “C. K. Black,” Richard identifies himself with his dog, C. K. The cramped space of the neighborhood changes the animal’s physical nature so that when he goes back to open spaces, he is not recognized as being a member of his own species. Richard feels that he needs to somehow separate himself from the neighborhood while living in it so that it does not shape him into something unrecognizable.

In “Richard Black’s Romance,” Richard has a chance to play the role of the Romantic antebellum hero in the middle of a post-war suburb. Men who live in neighborhoods no longer work at home, build things for their homes, or protect their families. The new masculine role in this suburban society is to disconnect as much as possible from the domestic space, to go somewhere else and work for any generic company. The community provides food, appliances, houses, services, daycare, and protection, and the man and woman of each house can afford the services of society by becoming a part of this society and having their work in one particular field distributed to many different households. By playing the old role of the southern male, someone who serves his household rather than his neighborhood, he becomes a figure who appears less than heroic in the eyes of the rest of the community. All that they can see is his unemployment, an emasculated sign of laziness and lack of discipline in the late twentieth cen-
tury. Richard, though, feels that the unemployment has awakened a “kind of innate discipline” (139). When Richard is able to spend a whole day alone with his wife and kids in his house, he thinks, “This was the island life they should have had—the two of them, the four of them—for it was all too evident to him now that the life he had lived before was all wrong” (148).

Even though the title of Randy Hendricks’s first collection of short stories suggests the importance of a particular time, *The Twelfth Year, and Other Times* does not take place during any particular decade after the Civil War; instead, it spans almost the entire twentieth century in the South. As a collection, the book portrays individual southern males’ movements from being isolated workers to becoming members of society, from being not necessarily masters on plantations, but at least heads of independent households, to becoming citizens in suburbs. Hendricks’s stories show that southern men’s assimilation into the larger imagined community of the United States has not been a uniform progression during the past century.
Amelia Lewis

Review of Ann Beattie’s 
*The Doctor’s House*

*The Doctor’s House*, published in 2002, is Ann Beattie’s latest novel. The work serves as a capstone to one phase of a prolific career spanning four decades. The subject matter is familiar territory as Beattie explores the relationships between three family members. The story centers on Nina, a middle-aged widow who may suffer from mild agoraphobia, Andrew, her philandering brother, and their mother. The three lives are continuously under the influence of the doctor of the title. His sadistic inclinations affect his children and his wife in ways that haunt them throughout their lives. While touching upon familiar territory, Beattie still offers a fresh look into the complex world of human relationships.

The structure of the narrative enables a unique perspective into the subject matter. The novel is sectioned into three distinct parts. The first part is the story of Nina. Hers is followed by the stories of her mother and finally that of Andrew, her brother. This changing point of view allows for many different sides of the story to be heard. Nina’s story introduces the reader to her point of view, but the second section featuring the mother complicates Nina’s story. Andrew’s conclusion adds yet another dimension to the narrative. For example, Nina’s relationship with her mother becomes a point of discrepancy between the three sections. Nina’s story describes her mother harshly. The mother is characterized as negligent to even the most basic needs of the children and, at times, cruel. Immediately following Nina’s version, the mother is able to tell her life from her point of view. Her words make her seem more sympathetic as a character. She also sug-
gests that her attempts to be a good mother were rejected by her children. Andrew’s final section changes the reader’s perception further. He allows the reader to see different aspects of the mother-and-daughter relationship that complicate the stories of Nina and even the mother herself.

This technique casts doubt upon the ability to comprehend the reality of relationships and memory. Each member of the family understands each other in different ways. Even the close relationship between Nina and Andrew is riddled with little misunderstandings. The characters cannot comprehend exactly how they affect each other. Andrew exemplifies this theme. Characterized as a womanizer, he cannot ever fully comprehend how his actions hurt the women he seduces. Each relationship during the novel seems to be at least partially hindered by the characters’ inability fully to understand their communications with each other. With this technique, a statement is being made about how all individuals comprehend the world, others, and themselves in starkly different ways.

Beattie is exploring a familiar area of familial relationships with *The Doctor’s House*, yet she avoids slipping into redundancy. This realistic look into the ambiguous nature of relationships and the comprehension of other individuals offers fresh and interesting insights. The complexities between the ties that bind individuals together are inspected and exposed. The characters and story are not meant to be heart-warming or comforting. The conclusion does not provide a concrete answer that readers will be able to understand and set aside. Rather, the novel encourages readers to think about ambiguities and bring their own ideas and experiences to the experiences of the narrative. As each character has a different version of the story to tell, every individual reader is allowed to interpret the novel independently.
Contributors’ Notes

Taylor Adkins, an alumnus of West Georgia, is currently a graduate student in the English department at the University of Iowa.

Jordan Ages is a Graphic Design major. He is a senior at West Georgia.

Bric Barker teaches an outdoor adolescent boys unit at Inner Harbour Hospital. He uses poetry to teach young men how better to express what they have inside. Bric’s inspirations are James Dickey, Mark Doty, and Jimmy Santiago Baca.

Jesse Bishop earned a B.A. in English from the University of West Georgia in 2004 and is currently working on a master’s degree in English with a concentration in Creative Writing.

Lauren Blackstock is a junior at West Georgia and a member of Phi Mu sorority. She is majoring in Art with concentrations in Graphic and Interior Design.

Patricia Burgey is completing her M.A in English and plans to pursue a career in teaching. She is inspired by the works of Carol Shields, Gail Godwin, Denise Levertov, and Emily Dickinson.

William Camp plans to graduate in May 2005 with a major in Saxophone Performance with an emphasis in Jazz Studies. He is the 2005 recipient of both the Carrollton Lit Mu Award and the Larry Teal Saxophone Award. He studies saxophone with John Bleuel, and lives in Rockmart with his wife, Annie, who is a cellist, and their two children.

Ryan Chandler is a junior from Cedartown majoring in Fine Arts.

Adam Clark is a senior English major from Villa Rica, Georgia. He has been writing since age five and wants to pursue a career in law. He cites Raymond Carver, Kurt Vonnegut, and F. Scott Fitzgerald among his many influences. Adam is also president of West Georgia’s chapter of Sigma Tau Delta, and a former editor-in-chief of The West Georgian.

Ginger Coleman is a senior Graphic Design major.
Cynthia Crawford is a senior English major and the mother of a four-year-old daughter. She is inspired by the work of Sharon Olds and Lynn Emanuel.

Tamara Daniel is a senior English major. She plans to pursue a career in film as a screenwriter, director, or actress. She promises to remember West Georgia when accepting her Academy Award.

Allison DeLoach is a Music Education major who is doing her student teaching this semester. She plans to graduate in May 2005. She studied flute with Anna Thibeault and performed her senior recital in fall 2004.

Sloane Doggett notes that his primary intent in translating Stuart Merrill is that of a sympathetic cultural liaison who wishes to bring attention to the neglected voice of a poet he admires. Although American, Merrill became a full-fledged French Symbolist, and there have been critics like Kenneth Rexroth who have suggested that Merrill was the best American poet of the fin de siècle.

Brook Duncan is studying for her bachelors degree in Fine Arts with a concentration in Sculpture. She enjoys working with all medias to create unique pieces of art. She is inspired by the natural occurrences of the earth, and how it can be an influential part of an aesthetically pleasing environment.

Amy L. Ellison is an English major. This is her last year as an undergraduate.

Jeff Engelson graduated from West Georgia with a B.B.A. in Real Estate. He intends to pursue an M.A. in film with a focus on screenwriting.

Sarah Erickson is a senior Art Education major.

Stephanie Fields is a senior English Secondary Education major. She plans to graduate in December 2005 and begin graduate school in the fall of 2006.

Jane Fier is a Fine Arts major with a concentration in Painting. After graduation, she plans to take full advantage of her educational experience by producing art that challenges her as an artist.

M. Seth Fitts is a graduate student currently working on obtaining a non-degree certification in Art Education. He hopes to become a well-established artist and be able to teach university-level art students.

Valerie Franklin is a Fine Arts major.
Josh Grant is a graduate student in English and works as a Graduate Teaching Assistant. He is this year’s recipient of the award for Most Outstanding Graduate Student.

Margaret Griffin is a junior majoring in Art Education and minoring in English and Art History. Among her other honors, she has received the Most Outstanding English Minor award for 2004 and 2005 and presented research at the Georgia Art History Forum. Margaret hopes to continue her education and eventually teach at a university.

Elizabeth Hetzel is a graduate student in English at West Georgia. She enjoys writing poetry and short fiction, finding no escape from a strange jumble of voices: Elizabeth Bishop, T. S. Eliot, Jamaica Kincaid, and Toni Morrison. She has recently discovered the thrill of teaching and plans to pursue a Ph.D. so that she’ll never have to leave school.

Brynn Horne is a senior completing a bachelor’s degree in Fine Arts. Her concentrations are in Graphic Design as well as Ceramics. After graduation in May, she plans to travel and hopefully get a job.

Gary Hunter is a senior Physics major who plans to pursue a Ph.D. in nuclear physics. His major literary influences are T. S. Eliot, Vladimir Nabokov, James Dickey, and John Steinbeck.

Alaina Jobe is a junior English major interested in Renaissance drama, contemporary fiction, and screenwriting. She plans eventually to teach English at the college level.

Janey Keene is a junior English major. After graduation, she plans to attend law school at Georgia State. She is inspired by the work of Elizabeth Bishop and James Joyce.

Brandon Kerr is a sophomore Global Studies major. He is a huge fan of the poet Bob Hicok.

Jason Kesler received two degrees in English from the University of West Georgia: a B.A. (with a minor in Linguistics) in 1999, and an M.A. in 2004. His master’s thesis was a short novel entitled *Fall, Five Years Ago*. Jason currently works as a composition instructor at Floyd College.

Trisha Lamberth is a sophomore Interior Design major. Her inspiration comes from seeing numerous masterpieces during her many travels throughout Europe. Her favorite artists include Vincent van Gogh and Leonardo da Vinci.
Deborah Landry is a Fine Arts major with a concentration in Sculpture. She is inspired by the small nuances in nature that are often overlooked. She has an unlimited supply of ideas for exhibits and art work.

Jonette Larrew is a senior majoring in French and English with a German minor. She plans to attend graduate school and eventually become a teacher.

Amelia Lewis is a junior English major with a minor in Psychology. She is inspired by the work of Ann Beattie, Joan Didion, and Virginia Woolf.

Raquel Lubowski is a Spanish major. She plans to pursue a career in teaching and hopes to attend graduate school to obtain a Ph.D. in Spanish.

Cody Lumpkin is currently in the M.F.A. program at Purdue University. He also serves as a poetry editor for the *Sycamore Review*.

Jason Matthews has studied creative writing and music at West Georgia.

Marissa Rae Matichak is an art major with a concentration in Painting. She hopes to study abroad and eventually teach high-school art.

Jane McClain is a non-traditional graduate student. She received her undergraduate degree at West Georgia in 2002, graduating *summa cum laude*. She currently works as a teaching assistant with two sections of 1102 English, and intends to share her love of literature and learning by teaching English.

Josh Messer is a senior English major. He plans to teach once he finishes his degree. He digs William Faulkner and Russell Banks.

Bruce Montgomery has studied creative writing with Dr. Chad Davidson.

Nicole Morgan is a senior English major with a concentration in English Education.

Casey Pope is a junior majoring in Middle Grades Education. He is an Ingram Scholar who plans to teach in Coweta County.

T. J. Powell is a senior majoring in Photography.

Bryan Rasmussen is a senior Fine Arts major with a concentration in Sculpture. Bryan plans to attend graduate school to earn an M.F.A.

Micaela Robinson is a senior English major. Her newest literary influences
include Lydia Davis, Lucille Clifton, and Ai.

Jennifer Saltarella, a junior, majors in Special Education. She started writing creatively when she was in elementary school.

Angela Sasser is a military brat who ended up settling for good here in the red clay state. She is an Art Education major with an English minor hoping one day to make a living inspiring others.

Jessica Sherman is a junior majoring in Middle Grades Education with concentrations in Language Arts and Social Studies. She is from Newnan, Georgia, and an Ingram Scholar.

Chris Stephens is a senior completing a B.A. in Fine Arts with concentrations in Graphic Design and Ceramics. He plans to earn his M.F.A. at the Savannah College of Art and Design.

Rebecca Schwab plans to earn a master’s degree in creative writing and teach college English. She aspires to become a successful published author, as well.

Laura Sonderman is an English major planning to graduate in December 2005. Her poetry has been influenced by Elizabeth Bishop, Gerald Stern, and Philip Levine.

Sunay Tamashev is an international transfer student from Bulgaria. He is majoring in Art and concentrating in Photography. He transferred from New Bulgarian University in Sofia, where he was majoring in Visual Arts with a concentration in Advertising, while at the same time taking fine art photography classes in the National Academy for Theatrical and Film Arts in Sofia.

Amber Joy Taylor is an English major with a concentration in Secondary Education. She plans to attend graduate school in order to strengthen her teaching career.

Kit Taylor recently finished her degree in English with a minor in Psychology. She is currently working in the field of finance and intends to pursue an M.B.A. in the winter of 2006.

Julie Teague is a senior majoring in Art Education.

Stephanie Reeves is a senior Fine Arts major with concentrations in Sculpture and Graphic Design.
Army Staff Sergeant Bart Walters completed his master’s degree in Music in December of 2004. A student of saxophonist John Bleuel, Bart also performs regularly with the U. S. Army Armed Forces Band out of Fort McPherson.

Dianne West is a junior English major who has studied creative writing with Dr. Alison Umminger.

Will Winchester is a junior English major with minors in Philosophy and German. He hopes to attend graduate school in creative writing.

Dave Witcher is a senior English major who will graduate in July and join his parents, Greg and Karen Witcher, as alumni of West Georgia.
Poetry by
Taylor Adkins, Bric Barker, Jesse Bishop, Patricia Burgey, Cynthia Crawford, Amy L. Ellison, Stephanie Fields, Elizabeth Hetzel, Gary Hunter, Janey Keene, Brandon Kerr, Jason Kesler, Jonette Larrew, Cody Lumpkin, Jason Matthews, Jane McClain, Josh Messer, Bruce Montgomery, Nicole Morgan, Micaela Robinson, Jennifer Saltarella, Jessica Sherman, Laura Sonderman, Kit Taylor, Dianne West, Will Winchester, and Dave Witcher

Fiction/Non-fiction by
Adam Clark, Casey Pope, Rebecca Schwab, and Amber Joy Taylor

Art by
Jordan Ages, Lauren Blackstock, Ryan Chandler, Brook Duncan, Sarah Erickson, Jane Fier, M. Seth Fitts, Valerie Franklin, Brent Green, Trisha K. Lamberth, Deborah Landry, Marissa Matichak, T. J. Powell, Bryan Rasmussen, Stephanie Reeves, Angela Sasser, Sunay Tamashev, and Julie Teague

Screenwriting by
Tamara Daniel, Jeff Engelson, and Alaina Jobe

Translations by
Sloane Doggett, Jonette Larrew, Raquel Lubowski

Interview with Ann Beattie by
Margaret Griffin

Book Reviews by
Josh Grant and Amelia Lewis

Music by
William Camp, Bart Walters, Patricia Dinkins-Matthews, UWG Chamber Singers, UWG Jazz Percussion Group, UWG Wind Symphony, and UWG Marching Band