

# RED CEDAR REVIEW

























# Red Cedar Review

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*Duncan Moran*

## THE MOON TO THE EAST, THE SUN TO THE WEST

Fed up with his existence  
a man decides to change his  
environment. With a can of  
peacock blue spraypaint he coats  
his appliances. Now he has a blue  
Proctor-Silex Toaster Oven and a  
blue Kenmore Dishwasher, a blue  
Sony Television and a Blue Toro  
Yardmaster Lawnmower. Life,  
however, is no different; the sky  
still seems unsettling, distant,  
and the trees mock him, whistling  
*Fool Fool* as he rakes the leaves.  
The man rents a hand truck and hauls  
his appliances outside, first  
his refrigerator, then the stove.  
Soon he has arranged his entire house  
under the sky, the moon  
to the east, the sun to the west.  
This he feels is what it's all about:  
a trim yard with a tidy  
arrangement of peacock blue  
furniture and appliances. Yet  
as night falls and the vast black  
expanse of space gapes above him  
he is chilled--will it never end,  
he thinks. That night he suffers  
his first insomnia; turning  
in bed he wraps himself in the sheet;  
when morning comes he is wrapped  
immobile; the sun stares at him  
and never blinks. This is what  
he gets for filling space  
with life's possessions.  
Tied in a white sheet he watches  
the appliances molt, soon they are  
back to their true natures,  
white enamel, then they rust.  
The stove and refrigerator  
are carted away by trash collectors,  
the microwave and tv; finally  
all he has is a thin mattress  
and his white sheet, the night sky  
and a small peace.

Duncan Moran

## CELEBRATION

On the coldest day of the year old men gather  
in the square in the center of town.  
They unfold their lawn chairs and sit side by side  
as the frost cracks in the sycamores above them,  
waiting for the first cries of the new borns  
pushed into the world on this day.

And when the cries come, like bird calls  
among the high branches of the old trees,  
the old men turn to their left and to their right  
shaking the hands of their neighbors.  
They've waited the whole year for this,  
they've kept their lawnchairs by the doors of their small  
apartments,  
they've kept their long underwear folded by their small beds,  
they've listened to the weather report each night to hear  
when high pressure would bear cold down on them.

And the cold's here, and the old men  
huddle in the park, cocking their ears  
to hear those first faint cries.  
*They're here* the oldest shouts,  
and the others applaud the mothers' pushing,  
the fathers' crying, they applaud the babies  
swaddled and bundled against the cold,  
they applaud because they are the next to die.

Then the old men go home,  
back to their small apartments and their small beds,  
back to their dreams of death,  
to their long cold silences.



*Rod Murphy*

**ACCEPTING THE WEIGHT**  
(for Whitney Balliett)

They rise with first frost,  
slip out of their woolly sleep;  
my Alpha Wolf,  
my caracara, uncurling her talons.

At first meal I am joined by  
a baby cheetah, small-skulled and poised,  
wary of the way I coddle my badger, our  
flat-nosed tablemate.

On winter patrol, Walter and Jingles,  
sibling samoyeds, dust through snowbanks  
in search of fieldmice, racalcitrant criminals,  
lost travelers, bridges out.

Only in the exhaustion of evening,  
ottered safely into their bunkbeds,  
do my children accept the weight  
of their sleepy human forms.





*Rod Murphy*

## UTE THROUGH THE WINDOW

I was the one who wanted to drive up the coast.  
You wanted Interstate 5, more direct, more sensible.  
At Laguna Beach, our compromise point,  
You swung eastward putting an oceanscape in the rearview mirror.

The children slept straight through it all.  
My can of soda rattled out of my hands and  
Soaked my knees--when it happened.  
Stopped at a light, we watched a bone white truck

Vault the median, slam down atop our subcompact's hood.  
Before we knew no harm would come to us, before glass shattered,  
"Jesus, help us!" came out of your mouth and from mine  
Came only a question lost in childhood forty years before.

"Wo ist der Grossvater?"

"Komm mal hier, du Armste,  
Dein Grossvater hat dich durch das Fenster geworfen.  
Du lebst, er nicht. Du lebst, er nicht."

The cellar. A potato bin. The weak smell of ersatz coffee.  
My grandfather mouthing a cigarette butt from his pocket.  
Knee to knee in the darkness.  
That nightmare noise outside again.

In old Cologne, Silvan-Strasse. A plaster-wall flat.  
We and the Bohms in the cellar.  
Frau Bohm with a sheen of lard on her hands.  
My grandfather with an unlit cigarette butt.

"Jetzt geht's los," my widowed mother said.  
Grandfather gave her his hand. Frau Bohm sang  
"Hier ist der Daumen, er pflicht die Plaumen,"  
While I showed my thumb and fingers one by one.

"Wo ist der Grossvater?" I had asked.  
As the block of flats collapsed, Grandfather  
Had lifted me up, rushed with me to the wall,  
Shoved me out the one window to safety.

In Costa Mesa, sitting alongside the road, I watched  
Paramedics in firefighter helmets palpating our daughter's abdomen,  
Felt on my own shoulders the hand of a stranger coming to help,  
A woman saying, "Come here, little one. Your Grandfather..."



## **STILL LIFE**

The calico heirloom chokes in a mildewed  
gingham bow the turquoise hand-embroidered  
shawl blushes and buries a blood stain in  
one fold the lavender open-weave evening  
bag hangs forgetfully on a door its swollen  
tongue makes rude gestures books go crazy  
crazier up and down a wall black and white  
photos of children in various stages smell  
like formaldehyde sweet-grass baskets  
groan with grease paint from hastily packed  
in productions oak boards are littered with  
used poems a crumpled map tossed in the  
corner exaggerates plans gone wrong and  
finds in retrospect someone to blame dust  
balls shuffle a mystery prove the air has  
been busy this year I don't remember doing  
a thing the black rose grows feathers and  
rhinestones prepares for bash after bash  
a wood fire snaps at ice on my ankles the  
desk tilts sickly under the weight of words  
all my words run downhill

## **VETERAN**

She writes this afternoon with ink fast  
before it dries she fears the sound of  
dead twigs etching not much into last  
light amputees scratching absent limbs  
an empty crystal wine glass cut with grape  
vines cuts the low sun makes a colored  
basket on her white cloth for crumbs she  
remembers scribbling this morning across  
the yellow legal page in pencil erasing  
mistakes and making them again seasonally  
she knew then the blank spot would grow  
full now she doesn't know what she knows  
surely something soon will fall and stay  
felled she itches in weird distant places

## BLUE IS THE COLOR OF LOVE

Blue is the color            of love  
Nudging aside bluenoses blue laws blue Meanies  
tugging us            shoving us            limb from limb  
when we breathed skin on skin  
Cheeks brushing against fingertips  
Twin sunrises scaling the same heights  
Looking down your eyes,            they  
Never stab mine  
No more "good morning, heartache"  
Lip-synching to Lady Day            in a mirror  
Finally free            no more games  
Flushing death's own taxman down the drain  
Blue is the color            of love  
exploding across your mouth  
I trace your name            on my lips  
in the middle of a kiss  
Hang your shadow over my window  
Hand in hand,            shoulder to shoulder,  
My world inside your thighs  
Igniting another smile  
You            my blazing red tracer bullet  
Spitting trails across tonight  
Life backflips you            down  
too many flights of stares  
Blue is the color            of love  
The past has ways            of flinging  
its bricks            against your face  
But            we turn back            the sideshow's undertow,  
Ignore its hungering billboards  
And plaster clowns donning saint's faces  
Spitting away            a thousand glass shards,  
Tomorrow's smithereens  
Best left for dead  
Wrap yesterday inside my trench coat  
No longer refugees  
No more scars            we can breathe  
Finally free            blue is--



*Ralph Heibutzki*

## FREEFALL

Taking my lifetime chance      parachuting  
A goodwill wave down her mind's eye  
Acting only her midnight signals  
Tumbling heels over head      end over end  
World without end      blue      green      grey

Waves      wink      unblinking      Land ho!  
Fighting storm squalls      50-knot gales  
(Maybe I'll sink, all hands aboard)  
My full flight still holds  
she unleashed my ripcord,      I

Spin      twist      kick      dodging  
Flying Dutchmen lost in 1956  
Land ho, Mr. Reagan!      Knifing past  
Yankee clippers,      sliding away  
from their shipwreck of the mind

Dodging cutters married to thin ice  
my eyes swallow another cloud canopy  
yawning      before me  
Soaring along each wave's crest  
Taking the tiger by the head

Tucking another gift      under my wing  
End over end, world without end  
Because we both know      I  
am only a willing plunger  
into the maelstrom,

Lone skydiver locked in endless freefall--

## OUR HOUSE

In the morning we stalk the halls  
like minotaurs, tying ties and slurping  
cold coffee at the doorway. If it weren't for  
keys we would barely raise our heart rates  
above a clocktick, searching for that glint of steel  
among the particles and crumbs of  
last night's libations and burnt offerings.

The mailbox still includes the names of  
former and mythical tenants,  
whose artifacts clutter basement  
and hallway, occasionally striking  
at our ankles, resentful of abandonment  
and the grey fur which grows like  
fingernails in the dark and damp.

An escaped rainbow boa lives, we think  
in the couch; the cat hesitates  
to confirm this despite the fact that  
all the mice have vanished.  
last night we heard her howl,  
but when we arrived she only bowed,  
shyly inscrutable, and flicked her tail.

Our roof falls slowly compared  
with the neighbor's, and we feel safe  
and superior as priests or chemists.  
Sitting on the porch we smoke  
pipes, nod sagely, and compete  
at being Freud but manage only  
a hypnotic suggestion of beards.

In the evening electric voices  
murmur on the set we never watch,  
though it lends a soothing sense of reality  
by being there. Returning to our cells  
we cultivate passions like broccoli  
or beans: the memory of harvest  
fills us in the scarcity of fall.











Richard Todd Julius

## LIFEBOAT

I sat baking on the deck thinking  
*always women first*,  
watching angels with bare thighs,  
halos forgotten in their cabins,  
dancing around the pool  
counting shark teeth from the bottom of their  
daquiris.

A storm is coming, she said.  
I looked bewildered at blue sky and never felt  
the pressure drop. She disappeared  
while I was at the bar, so I waited  
spitting ice cubes at the gale. I wrote a poem  
while the salt rain ran the ink  
and a wind I'd breathed before  
screamed at my density.

A woman saw her later, dancing  
in the orange light of a stormdrowned sun.  
She said the lights of Tokyo are like this,  
*wakarimasu-ka?*  
By then the call had come  
and the boats were filling up.

I felt obliged to drink the Captain's health  
and stole a bottle from the now abandoned bar.  
I found him on the quarterdeck  
explaining to the passers-by:  
“...with the ship?  
That's really just a romantic notion.  
Besides, there are boats enough for all.”

*Lyn Lifshin*

## MY MOTHER AND THE TOASTER

in the morning as  
she's packing I  
unplug it wincing  
thinking suddenly  
what it would be  
to pull out some  
life support system.  
My mother has to  
have toast and  
doesn't understand  
why I don't like  
leaving the chrome  
square up on the  
counter, why I  
don't want an  
electric can opener  
use the ironing  
board she gave me,  
except for manuscripts.  
I used to vacuum 12  
times a day when  
she came, as if I  
could suck the smoke  
up, or the guilt.  
She swats the clay  
jars, translucent  
soap and peach and  
chocolate candles  
from the back of the  
toilet tank, yearn  
ing for what's  
practical: real soap  
and space and light,  
wants to nail white  
fire alarms to my  
redwood. Like the  
woman who interpreted  
squares and circles,  
triangles and wavy  
lines, said I cared  
too much for appear  
ances, my mother says



I ought to put up  
thick drapes and eat.  
I say the house is  
like me: unusual, not  
practical but whoever  
wants it wants it  
real bad, is com  
pulsive has to have  
it. She says she  
always liked the ranch  
house we wouldn't  
even call the realtor  
about it as I suck in  
my waist, sure, with  
all these meals  
every day since  
she's come is by  
now enormous. You  
can do anything  
you want to she  
says, rechecking  
to see if I've  
locked the door.  
I wrap the cord  
around the toaster  
too tight as if  
I'm strangling  
something I see  
reflected in the  
chrome, leave  
more room for the  
old blue jars,  
stained glass that  
twists light, turns  
the kitchen into  
something mysterious,  
as unlike what you'd  
expect as what the  
words here try  
to touch

*Lyn Lifshin*

## **FOR THE MAN WHO'S ALWAYS ON**

Listen, I'm not used  
to being an audience,  
floating in a glow  
of transformed light  
I didn't concoct  
like shards of  
stained glass  
becoming blue lilacs.  
Under leather clothes  
my thighs lock like  
hands in prayer  
a volcano buries.  
Don't play to my  
side, your lips  
leaking lies.  
Don't gargle with  
bullets just  
for me or wrap  
your penis in  
medals. Don't wrap  
me in stories you've  
swiped coast to  
coast or the  
muscles you've  
grown to fit in  
side them don't  
flash your crutch  
or malaria pills  
to suck me in  
to your room of  
books on holocausts  
and Hitlers your  
mother's Spanish  
combs don't dawdle  
near my shoulders  
whisper your lies in  
my hair then blurt  
out more jokes like  
some crashing curtain  
don't spit words  
like shrapnel,  
light up thunder with  
small bombs on my



skin, masks exploding  
revealing a new one in  
side it like painted  
shells of old Russian  
eggs just graze me  
once in the rain  
sheets with the  
look so rarely  
seen before  
you're on

*Lyn Lifshin*

### THE VISIT

I shouldn't have  
given you your bed  
room furniture you've  
ruined it with plants  
and I need drawer  
space so desperately  
You know you shouldn't  
leave matches out of  
a tin, mice will gnaw  
them start a fire  
use the screecher  
honey I got you  
too, and the way  
you dress. I don't  
know how you can't  
like that nice blonde,  
prefer murderers and  
creeps who are I  
bet probably married  
I don't understand  
why you put that  
basket over where I  
try to sleep or put  
the suitcase where  
its so hard for me  
to see I know you  
could go to law  
school honey you  
can you know do  
anything

## LOOK

I wrote "look".

The paint dripped down from each letter  
just above where it said "capacity" on the side,  
and I walked away some and saw  
the whole boxcar and my white word on the brown  
and the "o's" like wheels  
and the sun came out to dry the paint.

Later the switch engine came,  
took five dropped two carried ten took eight  
railroad cars through the switchyard,  
the puzzle tree,  
and made up a train.

That night, "look" left town.

I imagined it lost  
in the web of another city,  
thrown away. I had nothing  
to do with it,  
running more quickly somewhere:  
a hundred cars, then a single word, and nothing.

Later I made a different new word and another  
on the wide rusting brown  
and the switch engine came to each  
always in the evening  
to make up the night's train.

Each word I made seemed to be falling away,  
like spilling soup  
or burning wood collapsing, the puff of sparks.

Each word orphaned and leaving town  
just the sound,  
the rhythm and clock logic,  
to Manitowoc, Oconomowoc,  
every picket fence town in Wisconsin.





In the eggshell morning if the morning  
 was actually breaking,  
 a train would float through the green leaves of corn<sup>1</sup>  
 one word, or two,  
 and a hundred boxcars.

One day I came to the wide yard  
 and found it empty,  
 the last abject diesels smoking away.  
 The switchyard roared in the summer light.  
 It was possible...  
 to walk down the tracks forever  
 on the sticky tarred railroad ties.  
 It began to be September.

I said the odd word "look".  
 Look, a picture of  
 a small girl, lemon hair and a chalk-blue dress,  
 and a dog running.  
 And the word "look" beneath them on the page,  
 two "o's" like wheels and a curious "k".  
 A fine word.  
 "Look." "See spot run."  
 The pastel page.  
 The first words, running.



*Craig Cotter*

**THE MUSCLES**

As a pattern

the muscles of your face--

don't let me think about it

too long.

The muscles of your face move

your lips, etc.

a female laugh,  
then the quick deep male  
tones of a young voice responding  
2 words I can't hear through the floor--



I don't know how long it will take me  
to get used to this diet of  
being responsible for my own life.  
I'm still dying from it,  
slamming the cold pizza into the freezer  
for lunch Sunday.

Isn't she a mystery  
I can't even picture her legs

through her jeans.

*Edward Gold*

## **LETTING THE CAT OUT OF THE BAG**

He wouldn't, so the cat got his tongue,  
which got his goat.

The loss of the goat was a relief,  
but the tongue he needed.

(See diagram.)

What would waggle the breath into words?  
What would clip off the ends of the notes?

He gave up. He let it out.

His tongue was returned to him, unharmed.

The goat wandered in later.

The three of them spent the rest of the day  
getting into the bag and getting out of it.





## **WATERLILIES**

Listening to how a woman out bird-watching  
became interested in the pattern of lilypads and  
bent to photograph them missed seven  
great blue herons which flew over her makes  
me think of how stubborn their roots are as  
a child I used to try to clear the boat-launch  
of them, pulled  
the long, wrist-thick and tapering roots out of  
muck and threw them to dry on shore and how it's  
true, Monet's waterlilies do not  
solve the world's problems.

In August

they're first to turn brown, dying days  
before trees blaze into September then  
why do I remember them still green and frozen in-  
to the ice?

How stubborn their roots are as a child!  
that later one's impression of them is  
colored by their turning brown just before history  
again turns into a book and a pile of pencil  
shavings payed out from a pen-knife and blurred  
by tears the way I've always thought Monet saw as  
if having seen so much even lilypads still  
alive could make a man cry for their death and pale  
flowers which bloom on their rubbery, tenacious stalks are  
painted by leaving small moments of the canvas blank.



## CHANCE PERFUME

I know the way night wounds the traveler,  
the road where years ago  
a woman hooked her arm through mine  
before the gate with its powdery iron.  
Inside were gifts, brick paths winding  
amid trellises and trees, stone sculptures  
like old friends dignified in silence, a dog  
dozing on its back. She said we were a duet  
of blossoms, chance perfume. The moon leaned  
over our shoulders, dancing its silvery waltz  
with the wind, a whirl of light and shadow.

A decade since my wife  
walked with me. The chemotherapy and slow nights  
breathing creation as if each cell of our beings  
were a lung, each breath our last.  
I lifted her when the end drew near.  
I carried her through the gate, her face  
tucked against my neck--the weightlessness  
of fickle flesh. My smalltalk ran in circles  
of fear, unheard. She was beyond me, a feather  
in an updraft, nothing between her and the ghost moon  
but snow geese.

Tonight the sculptures are aloof, the moon  
sliced pale in a mackerel sky. I finger the gate,  
move toward my car. For a moment headlights reveal  
raccoon eyes, a wine bottle in a bush, the old shoes  
I wear for this occasion. A gnarled leaf  
swirls earthward, its ballet of passage  
almost an injury. Against my palms  
the steering wheel stings cold. My eyes  
stare into night, watching a star bleed to gray  
from blazing bright then vanish in darkness. Clues  
emerge: rotating planets, the seasons.

In the whisper of dawn, two finches  
harmonize to the distant staccato  
of a woodpecker. Her voice floats like a whiff  
of perfume, descends as if nudging. By noon  
I am ready to travel.

**JUST BECAUSE**  
**(for Tim)**

True

a 50-yr-old man (even  
in excellent shape fresh  
from doing 100 pushups) is  
a bit insane on

Ocean Beach seeing  
the young runner easily  
leap from one side to  
the other of this stream when

I'm carrying my bag of  
groceries from Safeway &  
I too have to get to the  
other side of the stream &  
anyway

I know those two young studs are  
watching this operation from  
their seat in the sand several  
ft away but

they don't know I  
came in 3rd in the broadjump in  
the all-school intramural  
competition of little Grinnell College in  
1956 so

I step back a little with my  
bag of groceries &  
paw the ground with my sneaker like  
a wild horse &

take off catapulting  
off my strong right leg (cause  
the left is a little  
game) but

I don't quite make it hitting  
the edge of the far bank with  
the power of Tank Younger &

over I go on my face breaking  
the fall with my steel  
left arm (which

dislocates as surely as my  
groceries take flight all  
over the beach) &





I lie there on the beach contemplating  
the fate of my aching shoulder moving  
it ever so gently to discover  
it's popped back into place &  
    slowly  
    pick myself up like the monster fresh  
    from being thrown by Ajax &  
collecting my fallen army of  
fruit & Wheaties & big can of  
honey while  
    brushing sand from my  
    face & heaving belly I  
observe the two young studs still  
sitting in the sand staring  
out to sea like  
nothing happened &  
    ain't that a crock when  
    they see some wasted old hero  
    splashed all over the beach &  
    don't care to do nothing just  
because I'm a little  
more mature  
!



**THE GLASS BALL**

dangling  
from its thread from  
the arm of my ancient bronze floor  
lamp swings  
quietly back &  
forth propelled, I  
do suspect, by  
air currents (always  
a scientific reason for such  
phenomena) but  
my attempts to shield it from  
the currents (with  
my hands & then  
a book) come  
to naught for  
the solid glass ball continues with  
its swinging  
then  
the morning light starts to  
flow through it casting  
reds blues yellows ... in  
dancing patterns on my  
rocker, the rug, my backpack &  
my broken down sneakers ... refracting  
the colors of the spectrum through  
the glass (always  
a scientific explanation for  
such phenomena) but  
then a tiny elf climbs  
out of the ball to  
sit on it holding the two threads while  
kicking his feet to  
make it swing &  
his girlfriend inside the  
glass lights a multicolored  
fire that casts all the colors  
reds blues yellows ... out  
into my room while warming the  
pants of her man who  
swings  
then



she climbs out of the glass to  
kiss & make love to  
her man right  
in front of me (which  
I'm sure has its scientific  
explanation also but  
I'm too busy shinnying up the lamp to  
join the little creatures in  
love and play to  
reduce this moment  
)

*Alison Swan*

## **SATURDAY**

stretches before me  
like a smooth, black-topped road  
through a spruce and fir stand.

I climb down the blue spruce  
outside my window  
into the coniferous forests of Alberta,  
a spot where  
red indian paintbrush and  
blue harebells merge into a  
purple that becomes  
the night sky.

I lie down and listen  
to the surf of wind through needles  
and the bugle of bull elks.





*Michael J. Cesaro*

## **ART LOVES RAISING PIGS IN THE CITY**

The hogs are in the basement.  
Art's wife, Estelle, doesn't like them--  
never has.  
"What do you want?" Art asks her.  
"I don't womanize. I'm home every night."  
Something from below snorts.

He has named each after a star.  
Polaris, Canopus, Vega wade through the black slop.  
The constellation Orion is off to the side, where  
Rigel gnaws on browned apple core  
and Betelgeuse urinates.  
Aldebaran loiters by the sump pump.  
The cellar, damp and smelly,  
gyrates with fat, hairy, slick heavenly bodies.

Art's universe is downstairs.  
Switch the lights off  
and pig eyes shine.  
"Star light, star bright," Art chants,  
"First star I see tonight..."  
He wishes he may,  
he wishes he might.  
Estelle deviously imagines breakfast sausage.  
For Art,  
things come true.

*Richard Holinger*

## THE ONLY GIRL

“Oh, your father so wanted a little girl!”  
--My mother to me.

The first time they left me  
without nanny or cook  
I pulled twenty-three shades  
and unplugged six phones  
till the apartment was silent  
and dark as tomorrow.

The sweaters in her bottom drawer  
were warm as baptismal water.  
The lubricated purses, brown, blue, black,  
smelled rich as money.  
In the next drawer  
a navy leather jewelry box  
nested among flesh-colored negligees.  
To keep the rings from falling off,  
I made small half-fists.  
A string of pearls hung to my belt.  
The last large drawer held  
stacked girdles, hard and tight as rust,  
and brassieres cupped like bowls  
of velvet cream. Silk scarves,  
soft as broken rainbows,  
puffed like scented handkerchiefs;  
I floated one around my neck,  
tied it loose and low.

I fingered gold cylinders  
housing lipstick red as lust  
and perfume sweet as age.

Inside the mirrored closet, shoes  
cuddled three rows thick.  
High heels kept me balancing,  
pushed my toes until they hurt;  
I slipped a green sequin dress  
over my underwear.



I stumbled into the living room  
where from a silver box  
I took one of sixty cigarettes,  
held it finger-tipped, unlit,  
crossed my legs and spoke  
of getting my hair done.

Later, at her desk,  
I scribbled notes on a pad  
while talking into the phone  
like a cradled violin.

At the sound of bedroom bickering,  
I stormed back and gave those boys  
a piece of my mind:  
“Wait till your father gets home,”  
I cried, and shook my head.

I took time to put her back  
before she got home from the symphony.  
That night when my father came home,  
not being his daughter,  
I kissed him like a man.

*Richard Holinger*

## **A WAY BACK IN**

Withered leaves hang like shredded chamois  
as the dusk darkens snow to stone,  
the creek to ink.

Rising over my way back in  
the moon is framed by two slate trees  
and I, standing at the edge of woods,

am like some ancient mathematician  
bedazzled to discover his Stonehenge,  
by some outrageous miracle,

has worked.

## **CHARLIE'S BLUE SEDAN**

Maybe his day ended earlier than it used to, but he was not so old as to overlook a woman sitting alone on a Saturday afternoon. He paused in the doorway of the coffeeshop, pushed his hair straight back, trapped it beneath a faded red baseball cap, and proceeded inside. With a smile and a nod he sat two green vinyl stools down from her at the counter. The woman smiled and nodded in return.

"Cup of coffee," he said to the waitress across the counter. She produced a white porcelain cup and filled it from a clear glass pot.

"There you go, Charles." The small room echoed tinnily when she set the pot back onto the coffee maker.

"Thanks." Through dry, pursed lips he directed a stream of air at the hot coffee. The liquid rippled, disrupting an oil-swirl of rainbow color on the surface.

He blew again at the coffee and a trickle jumped the lip of the cup and ambled down the side, channelled by invisible perturbations in the porcelain. He recalled a day spent distributing L-shaped pipes into irrigation ditches, another broken wire and downed fence line day. And in the nearly vacant coffeeshop sat a blonde irregularity in that day, stark and new against the regular backdrop of green vinyl booths and paint-by-number oil reprints of barns and mountains. He blew again at the coffee, and coughed lightly.

The woman had turned away, affording him a chance to observe her covertly. She appeared perhaps fifteen years younger than his sixty-two. Hair blonde as margarine and almost certainly not its original color lay loose between her protruding shoulder blades. On spindly, vein-crossed hands hung four dull, bulky rings; the left ring finger was unoccupied. Her dark clothing, shiny and synthetic, rustled when she shifted; it covered a slight excess of flesh which did not make her unattractive. She turned to the counter and drank from a cup of tea. On the white marbled formica the teabag was wrapped tight against the spoon by its string like a prisoner.

"Don't see too many new faces in Nampa," he ventured, gazing on her teacup.

She inclined her head toward him. "I'm on my way to visit my sister." She spoke staring at the counter, then looked suddenly and directly into his eyes. "She lives in Boise. Problem is, my car's broken down."



"Too bad. What's the matter?"

"I don't know; it just quit on me. The mechanic over at the Shell station told me it 'threw a rod', whatever that means." She frowned at the shake of his head. "Yeah, he told me it's real bad. My sister's gonna wire me some money so's I can get another car."

"This just happen?"

She nodded. "Yeah, this afternoon."

"Well, seems to me like you might want to take a bus on into Boise and shop around for a good car." He sipped at his coffee, decided it had cooled enough, and took an enormous swallow.

"No, I just want to get it taken care of." The tone of her reply intimated that money was not an overriding concern.

"You know, I just might be able to help you out." He offered a thick, calloused hand. "Name's Berry, Charles Berry."

"Roxanne. Roxanne Petick." Her grip was loose, the slow withdrawal of her hand perhaps significant. "And how might you be able to help me, Charles?" Her voice was cigarette-cracked although she wasn't smoking.

He moved to the stool between them. "More tea?" When she nodded he said to the waitress, "Another tea for Mrs. Petick."

"That's *Miss* Petick, or just Roxanne, if you prefer." The woman's smile revealed moderately crooked teeth the color of newsprint. "Thank you for the tea."

"So you're not from around here?" he asked.

"Well, no. I'm from Coeur d' Alene." She gestured out the window at the front of the coffeeshop.

He nodded. "Got a sister in St. Maries, and we go to the mall in Couer d' Alene every once in a while." They were quiet a moment and he took another impossibly large draught of coffee.

"Anyways," he continued, "I got this car. '75 Ford Galaxy 500. Rebuilt the motor myself year before last. Now she might not be quite up to your style, but she runs real good. Even got a new paint job. My daughter used to drive it, but now she's got my wife's car, and it's just taking up space."

The woman appeared interested, but didn't ask about the car.

"What does your wife drive, then?"

"Nothin'. She died. Two years ago. Cancer."

"I'm very sorry."

"Thanks. Happens."

After a pause, she asked, "Remarried?"

"Nope. How 'bout you?"

"Divorced."

He gave a rough cough and finished the coffee in a single voluminous swallow. "So, what do you think about the car?"

"Well, sounds like it could be just the kind of thing I'm look-



ing for.” She placed her elbows on her wide knees and, pressing her forearms together, dug a pointy chin into her palms. Shaking several strands of blonde hair out of her eyes she reestablished direct eye contact that galvanized a heretofore subtle desperation in his voice.

“Well, you c’n come out to the place and have a look if you’d like.” His suggestion was clipped, brittle.

“I’d like that, Charles.” She leaned closer to him. “I’d like that very much.”

Fifteen minutes of small talk later, Charles paid the waitress and helped Roxanne put on her light jacket; together they left the coffeeshop just as the giant pink neon coffeecup sprang to life overhead. The only vehicle in the parking lot was a dusty, late-model pickup. Charles opened the unlocked passenger’s side door for the woman and circled to the driver’s side. The truck shuddered to life on the third turn of the key and bounced into the thick August evening.

The small talk continued as the truck hummed down the T-square-straight road. Twilight, normally around 9 pm in August, was being ushered in early by an expanse of heavy, jagged clouds from the north. A persistent wind had developed from that direction, and it filled the air with Idaho topsoil.

Irrigation had brought people to this flat, arid part of the Snake River Valley in the late 1800’s. They transformed the plain with rectangular geometry, irrigation ditches and rows of enormous cottonwoods defining the limit of one property and the beginning of another. But there had been too many farms and ditches and too few trees. The land, burdened under successive monocrop plantings, was being retransformed by wind and rain erosion into desert, and Charles’ farm was gradually becoming worthless.

Roxanne worked at a bank, she said, and claimed to be well acquainted with the concerns of farming. But she steered the conversation to the television programs she’d seen and stories about her sister and anecdotes about cars. And as the end of the seven-mile drive approached, a soft tension filled the cab of the pickup, a tension part sexual and part imminent rain.

“Wonder why the clouds haven’t broke yet,” Charles said as he turned the truck onto a long, gravel driveway. A wrought iron scaffold held a white, wooden sign over the entrance to the driveway, high for farm machinery to pass underneath. “Berry,” it said in green script, and it rasped in the wind.

The driveway ended in a dirt semicircle cut into the dry yellow weeds that blanketed every area not under cultivation. A mobile home defined the flat side of the semicircle, a large mobile home



distinguishable from a house only by its strict rectangular shape. White aluminum siding, white window shutters, white roof tile--a white sign hung from the gutter over the white front door by two hook-and-eyes. It read "Berry," and it also squeaked as it moved between the forces of wind and gravity.

"Why, this is a nice place you got here, Charles," Roxanne commented as she climbed out of the truck. They walked to the porch, where he opened the unlocked door and motioned her inside. A living room materialized from the light of a single lamp. It smelled of humus and overripe vegetables. A low green couch, an imitation leather recliner, and several folding chairs were arranged to face the commanding feature of the room, an immense cabinet-style television set.

"Car's out back." He ushered her through the living room and adjoining dining room to the back porch.

They stood at the sliding glass door, watching their montage images in the glass, different pieces of machinery interspersed with Roxanne's mysterious reflection and Charles' tired one.

He slid the door open and they walked to the car, which cowered dirty and unused under the oppressive clouds.

"Looks okay," Roxanne said cautiously.

"Yeah, well, it c'd use a good cleaning, but just listen how she runs." He opened the door, sat in the driver's seat, and turned a key already in the ignition.

The engine strained and flopped. On the second turn of the key it merely clicked. "Damn," Charles said evenly, "battery's dead." He climbed back out of the car. "I'm sorry about this. I've got a charger in the shed, and by tomorrow she'll start up fine. If you could just come back then...."

Roxanne was silent, and after a moment he went on. "Look, as a way of apologizing for dragging you all the way out here on a wild goose chase, how 'bout some supper? I got some chicken and mashed potatoes if you're interested. My daughter-in-law made 'em, and she's a fine cook."

The woman smiled. "Well, Charles, let's have that dinner, and then I can go back to town and get a motel room and we'll see if it starts tomorrow."

"Fine, fine." Charles looked down and was surprised to find that he had been kicking the tire of the sedan.

They ate a long meal amid adulterated versions of their lives. Roxanne was a bank teller, with eighteen years at Idaho First Federal. Her divorce had been bitter; "just thankful we never had kids." She visited her sister every year at this time. She had known that the car probably wouldn't make the three hundred-plus miles



from Coeur d' Alene, but attempted the trip anyway because "things just always seem to work out for me." Two thighs, a drumstick, two pieces of bread, and a starch mountain of mashed potatoes fueled her autobiography.

Charles' self-description revolved around his family and profession. Moved to Idaho from Oklahoma just before Pearl Harbor, he recounted, came home and married after the War, five children (three farmer sons, a farmer's wife daughter, and another daughter in college), a thirty-six year marriage. He farmed mostly alfalfa, and had "done all right<sup>1</sup>home's paid for, equipment mostly so." His briefer story ran on only a breast and a small ear of corn.

Charles seemed increasingly nervous as the evening proceeded. He drew the meal out with many questions, and during an awkward lull in the conversation came to an inner decision.

"Hate to see you stay at Rat Central," he said in reference to Nampa's one motel, "you c'n take the spare bedroom if you like."

"Why, Charles, that's so kind of you!" Roxanne squeezed his arm. "You don't know if I'll steal you blind in the middle of the night or what!"

"Got to be pretty good at judgin' people's characters." He suppressed a grin.

"Well, I think I'll take you up on your kind offer." She squeezed his arm again.

"Fair enough. Now I'll go put the battery on the charger and you can get ready to turn in. Bedroom's over there." He directed her attention to the hallway leading past the living room.

"Fair enough!" Roxanne chirped as he rose from the table and left her alone in the kitchen with the rhythmic wind and the blue light on the microwave oven, blinking 10:27.

When he returned from the shed she was in the bathroom. He half-expected that the dishes would be washed, but they weren't so he cleaned the plates, and just as he was wiping off the table she joined him.

"Oh, Charlie, I was going to do that!" she said, still brushing her hair.

"S'okay. You're a guest."

They stared a long moment. Under the fluorescent light Charles was gaunt, but sturdy. Roxanne seemed older, perhaps due to the removal of make-up he hadn't before noticed. The wind rasped outside, relieving some of the tension.

"Oh, Charles, I'm so tired." She yawned and rubbed her eyes with her forefingers, then asked, "Raining yet?"

"Nope, not yet." Somewhere a gate slammed in the wind.



"Well, goodnight."

" 'Night." Hope the room's okay."

"Oh, it's just fine. Thank you so much." She opened her mouth again but closed it without speaking.

" 'Night," he repeated, and began to walk down the hall.

"Oh, Charles?"

He turned back to face her.

"I wish I wasn't so tired."

As echoes of her bedtime preparations played out, he lapsed into an insomnia of sexual tension and absent rain. He convinced himself that he was lucky she hadn't come to his door with some excuse, some "where can I find a handtowel?" which could precipitate lovemaking on his old bed. Not now, with everything set the way it is, he thought. Don't need that kind of complication. No sir.

Still the rain stayed in the matted, swollen clouds. The wind agitated the topsoil and pushed at the mobile home and finally, somehow, Charles fell asleep, only to wake up a half hour later with the first erection he'd had since watching "Lolita" on television several months before.

Charles woke again to burned French toast, whispered curses from the kitchen, and an obscenely swollen sky. Soon he was back into the Levi's, plaid cotton shirt, workboots and baseball cap he'd worn the previous day. From the hallway he watched her in the kitchen, scraping black crust from toast and maneuvering a pan of bacon on the stove to keep from being splattered by the hot grease. She smiled when their eyes met.

"Haven't done much cooking lately," she explained.

"Here, let me give you a hand." He threw the burned toast into the garbage can under the sink and began digging in the refrigerator. "How 'bout an omlette?"

"Sounds good to me."

The preparation of the meal was a slow dance around the small kitchen. They brushed against one another at every available occasion. She diced green peppers and he made toast and side by side they stood at the stove as he layered strips of cheese over giggling eggs.

"Hand me a spatula, will you?" he asked, and when she did so their hands touched for a long, tense moment.

"There you go, Charlie," she murmured. "There you go."

Midway through the meal they came to the collective realization that she would be unable to wire for money on a Sunday.

"Well, you c'n stay another night if you like." He detected



a yearning in his voice, and quickly continued, "On Monday you c'n either get my car, get another'n, or catch a bus on into Boise."

Roxanne did not hesitate. "Why, thank you so much, Charlie!" She squeezed his hand. "I don't know how I can ever repay you."

After they'd cleaned the dishes and talked through a pot of coffee, he led her once more to the back door. She watched as he went to the shed, returned with the battery and some tools, and put the battery in the car, which started on the second try. The sedan gleamed weakly in the dark daylight, a blue four-door with the hint of a crease across the right front fender. She circled it silently, nodding as he rattled off specifications and points of interest.

"Like I said, she may not be quite up to what you're used to, but she's dependable, and I can let you have her cheap."

"Well, my last car *was* a Buick, but it didn't get me too far on its good looks." She sat behind the wheel, pushing pedals and pulling knobs, making concerned noises. "I like the interior."

"Yup, she's mighty attractive for her age."

Within fifteen minutes it was decided: Roxanne would purchase the car for \$450. "'Bout time I started clearing up this clutter," Charles said as he signed the title to the car and put it into the glove compartment.

They spent the rest of the morning cleaning the car. She peeled the "University of Idaho" sticker off of the rear window. "I don't want to give the impression *I've* got a college-aged daughter."

After a chicken salad lunch and another pot of coffee, he announced abruptly, "Got to secure some things before this storm breaks. Back in half an hour." He drove the blue car into the garage next to the shed and closed the garage door. As he climbed into his pickup she kissed her palm and blew on it to him from the back porch window.

In his pickup and alone, Charles' mind whirled. If it was gonna happen, it would've happened last night, he reasoned. Or maybe not. If she really *was* tired.... He recalled Helen Berry, five children, and thirty-six years.

The sky raged over the farm. He remembered making love to his young wife in the rain in these fields. His dead wife. "Am I all loved out, Helen?"

Thunder sounded, close by. Glad I remembered to put the car in the garage, he mused, and was reminded that the tools needed for the work he had planned were back with the blue car, left there after replacing the battery.



“Damn.” He swung the truck around.

The wind had picked up since the previous evening, and it lashed at the truck. Dust filled the air and Charles shut the windows and vents to prevent the cab of the truck from filling with it.

“Knew I shouldn’t’ve spent the whole morning dilly-dallying around.”

The mobile home was a white blur in the dust. Clouds changed shape overhead and thunder rattled as if inside the cab. Charles slowed the truck as he neared the garage, and noticed that the garage door was open.

“What the hell? I’m sure I remember closing<sup>1</sup>”

Then he saw it, the blue car, being driven down the long driveway, fast, toward the road. “Son of a bitch!” Charles choked and jammed the truck back into gear, turning it in the direction the car had taken. Blood bounced in his ears and armpits and in the fleshy part of his nose. Got to be a reasonable explanation, he told himself, but he knew there wasn’t.

Rain and dust limited his vision to about ten yards. Wind jostled the truck like an impatient crowd. Charles rounded a corner just before the driveway met the main road and slid the pickup to a halt.

The turn was sharp and Roxanne, unfamiliar with the road and blinded by the weather, had missed it and plowed the blue sedan into an irrigation ditch.

Charles got out of the truck and as if on cue the sky split open. Rain mixed with dust and the sky spit mud, which cracked like papier mache against the back of his neck.

He ran to the front of the car and stood with his hands on the hood. Roxanne had the gears in reverse and was racing the motor, but the wheels were spinning hopelessly in the dirt. Through the windshield he could make out her shadow. She was shaking as if wracked by sobs<sup>1</sup> or fits of laughter.

“What in god’s name do you think you’re doing?” he yelled over the storm. Lightning flashed and he glimpsed the yellow hair and teeth and eyes of the woman who was trying to steal his car.

“Why?” Charles screamed. Roxanne turned the windshield wipers on and obscured herself behind a curtain of mud.



## IN SEASON

Ms. Jarvey sat at her desk with her nail file among her fingers and the phone to her ear. Tall, blonde, heavy-set, abrupt, you could not help but notice Ms. Jarvey. Imposing was the word most people used to describe her.

This Tuesday morning in September Ms. Jarvey was not at all happy, and her boyfriend was the reason. He may have gone to college, she told her girl friend on the phone. He may be real smart, and real good looking, she said. But he don't understand what a lady needs. Sometimes, she sniffed, he don't even act like he knows I'm a lady at all.

Ms. Jarvey had a lot more to say, but stopped when she saw Mr. Mahoney coming through the door. Her eyes and nose crinkled at the sight of his uncertain gait, as if the accountant was sorry to bother Schaefer, Butler and Snead with his presence.

"Here comes Creep-o" Ms. Jarvey told her girlfriend, "I gotta hang up."

In the neighborhood of fifty, Peter Francis Mahoney cleared his throat and said what he said every morning to the receptionist. "Anything for me today, Ms. Jarvey?"

Ms. Jarvey stared at the little man before her, regarding his deep set brown eyes, his thin nose with its odd wide nostrils that seemed to sniff a room before he entered it. She observed his high forehead with its little furrows and tiny scars. She noted the clothes that hung on him like curtains draped over a hat rack. At least he wasn't fat though, she'd grant him that. He seemed in pretty good shape for an old guy.

Mr. Mahoney did not seem to hear her reply, as if he already knew what it would be.

"Nope, no mail for you, Mr. M."

The receptionist crinkled her nose anew when she spotted the evenly spaced scratches on the back of Mr. Mahoney's hands. There were three sets of them, all loudly announced by mercurochrome. One cut between his left thumb and forefinger was covered with a bandage, the edges of which were saturated with the rust colored disinfectant.

"In the roses again, huh?"

Mr. Mahoney cleared his throat, embarrassed. "Yes, its a passion really. But without the thorns, the rose is not sweet."

Ms. Jarvey popped the sugarless gum she'd been chewing. Mr. Mahoney talked about roses the way other guys talked about football. Roses, cats, and his wife Milly. That, thought Ms. Jarvey,



is Creep-o's whole world. She thought that once when she was at a disco. She was there with the lights and the people, and all of a sudden she had a flash of Creep-o and Milly sitting in their house talking about cats. She had felt sorry for Mr. Mahoney almost all evening.

Despite herself, Ms. Jarvey watched the accountant pad across the floor and go to his desk. He was polite, hard working, uncomplaining, and didn't have a mean bone in his body.

Ms. Jarvey popped her sugarless gum and nodded her head. And because of all that, she thought, Peter Francis Mahoney was going nowhere fast at Schaefer, Butler, and Snead.

On schedule, the other employees flowed through the door, parading by Ms. Jarvey, who liked to think of herself as a general reviewing the troops.

Mr. Jennings in sales and Leo the janitor, both kidded Mr. Mahoney about his hands. Mr. Jennings made some risqué remarks that left Mr. Mahoney flushed and limp. Ms. Jarvey was always telling her girlfriends that Mr. Jennings was a real card.

When Mr. Jennings and the janitor stopped laughing, the office settled down to its daily routine. Phones buzzed or rang, depending on whom they were summoning. Human and machine sounds mixed in a pleasant way, a way that said Schaefer, Butler, and Snead meant business.

It was sort of a slow day, a day like the recently installed off-lighting in the office. Safe, blurred, but adequate. A day to catch up, a day with lots of time to plan.

At lunch the gang all filed out except Mr. Mahoney, who brown-bagged it at his desk. He ate his egg salad sandwich on rye quickly, with deft movements of hands and mouth. If anyone had looked closely, he could have seen that Mr. Mahoney chewed the sandwich from left to right in even bites.

When he finished the sandwich, he briskly crunched the bag into a ball and arched it across the room. It landed with a light thud in Mr. Jennings' metal waste basket. If anyone had looked closely, he would have seen the corners of Mr. Mahoney's mouth lift upwards, in what almost became a smile.

When the gang all filed back from lunch, giggling mixed with their footsteps and banter, Mr. Mahoney believed they were laughing at him. And he was right. Ms. Jarvey and Mr. Schaefer's secretary knew he was in Mr. Schaefer's personal doghouse, and the knowledge was making their day.

It was almost two o'clock when the black phone on Mr. Mahoney's desk gave a long wavering ring. The tone rose and fell almost like a wind instrument, and Mr. Mahoney was told to report to Mr. Schaefer. After drumming his fingers on the black



phone, Mr. Mahoney reached into his desk drawers and pulled out a camel's hair brush, the wooden handle of which was worn smooth from use. Although his dark brown hair was very short, he was quite concerned with its appearance. He nervously touched the modest sideburns he'd recently grown, then he ran the brush several times through his hair. Watching this, Ms. Jarvey managed not to giggle aloud.

Mr. Schaefer was not in his office, but was waiting in his outer office where his secretary sat. Without greeting, Mr. Schaefer lit right into Mr. Mahoney. An independent auditor had found several problems with the books. Nothing serious, mind you, but little things added up. There could be difficulty in finding certain figures for the tax people. Some columns were smudged and hard to read, the Auditing Department could do better. Mr. Schaefer paused and looked at his secretary. "A damned sight better", he concluded.

Mr. Mahoney was told to return to his desk. When he passed Ms. Jarvey, a little giggle escaped her lips.

At the end of the day the gang all got ready to leave. It was then that Mr. Mahoney padded over to where Ms. Jarvey sat. She frowned at him until he produced a crackling white bag with the name of a fancy downtown store on it. He held out the open bag, and its pungent sweetness permeated the reception area.

"Bon-bons," said Mr. Mahoney.

"Candy?" asked Ms. Jarvey, peeling back the white paper and peering inside. When she saw the contents of the crisp white bag, the fluids inside Ms. Jarvey's mouth gushed in joyful anticipation.

"Candy," she crooned, as her hand burrowed into the sweets. She did not hear Mr. Mahoney's correction.

"Bon-bons."

Mr. Mahoney made a slight bow and left her. Carefully sealing the top of the bag, he put it back in his desk and left the office.



The green shingled house at the corner of Lake and Pearl had a yellow light on its screened-in porch. The porch looked out on a wide yard, the circular boundaries of which were set off by rose bushes. In the middle of the yard was a Japanese Elm that sheltered several pieces of white lawn furniture with its drooping crimson leaves.

The house had a basement, and on the first floor were a kitchen, pantry, and a wide parlor. On the second floor were a bedroom, a guest room with a sofa-bed, and a comfortable den.



The second floor also held the house's only unusual feature, because on that floor were a number of cats that had been stuffed and mounted.

Mr. Mahoney was a self-taught taxidermist. He stuffed the animals in his basement workshop. He strangled them in yards, alleys, and on sidewalks all over town. He had been using the same piece of piano wire for years now. It was seventeen inches long and on each end the wire was secured to a stained pine handle.

The handles fit Mr. Mahoney's hands perfectly. When he wasn't using the wire he kept it carefully wrapped around the pine handles. He kept the handles in the inside breast pocket of his sports coat. Now as he sat in his favorite chair, he absently ran his fingers through his hair, still feeling exhausted from the encounter with Mr. Schaefer.

Milly, a few months older than Mr. Mahoney, came into the room bearing a tray with two martinis. She was wearing a maroon housecoat made of Japanese silk. It was tied at the waist in an overhand knot. Milly had an Oriental aura which was enhanced by the fact that she always wore sandals. These were tied most elaborately at the ankles. Milly kissed Mr. Mahoney on the top of his head and took the chair opposite his. Milly was a small woman, but as Mr. Mahoney liked to say, she had presence. She filled a room when she entered it. Her fair complexion and ash blonde hair complemented Mr. Mahoney's features very nicely.

Milly sat perfectly still in the chair as Mr. Mahoney related the day's events. At the end of his recitation, Milly sighed and shifted in the chair, moisture spreading in her eyes, causing them to hold the room's light.

"Jerks", said Milly.

"Ummmm" Mr. Mahoney replied.

They sipped their drinks in a silence broken only by the soft tolling of the parlor clock and the brittle swirl of ice cubes. Patting the corners of her mouth with a napkin, Milly put down her drink and said, "I saw the Angora today."

Mr. Mahoney gave a start and sat upright, clutching the stem of his martini glass in one hand. "Where?"

Milly smiled at him. "Same place, the lot behind the Richardson house."

Mr. Mahoney had been after the Angora for some time. There were only three weeks left until October, when he would have to stop the pursuit until spring. Mr. Mahoney grew silent, holding the drink in his hand and weighing options in his mind.

Watching him carefully, Milly slipped out of her chair and took his hand in both of hers. She kissed the hand with its scratches and pressed the wounded flesh to her cheek. She then stood



and gently tugged Mr. Mahoney's arm.

"Come, and tell me what you have in mind."

She led him across the parlor and up the stairs to the bedroom. Sitting on the edge of the bedspread that was the color of her robe, she worked at the sandal straps.

Mr. Mahoney stood by the bureau explaining how he hoped to get the Angora. Unbuttoning his pale green shirt, he spoke of cutting up fresh sardines and placing them among certain bushes. Milly nodded her approval, for the planning was her favorite part.

When she had finished with the ankle straps, she lay back, her hair wide on the pillow, and loosened her robe. Her skin was made even creamier by the robe and she lay back breathing through her mouth.

Her lips formed silent words as Mr. Mahoney approached her, still quietly explaining his plan. She swallowed several times as he came to her, whispering that he expected a real struggle with the Angora. The hands that would get the Angora massaged her shoulders and pressed her neck. No gloves would be worn. Mr. Mahoney never wore gloves, because he believed in fairness and in the art he performed.

In the growing darkness he told her of the Caribbean and its lore, and she made him tell her all about the flying fish. Later the room filled with the sound of their pleasure and afterward only the chiming of the clock broke the silence.

It rained that night and the night after that. Mr. Mahoney did not catch sight of the Angora until almost dawn of the second night.

It was over quickly. The animal caught the scent of sardines off of Mr. Mahoney and hopped right to him. He moved with his usual celerity, but the animal sunk its teeth into the flesh at the base of his left thumb. He almost cried out from the pain, but held on until the animal went limp. The pain shot up his arm and throbbed at his elbow as he carried the Angora across the vacant lot and hurried before daylight, to the house surrounded by roses.

Milly helped him off with his sweater and scarf, tears filling her eyes when she saw his wound. When she had dressed it, she held his head to her chest. His face had gone white from the pain, and he told her perhaps the nerve in his thumb had been damaged. She cried and told him she loved him and he nodded his head that he understood. Then he took the Angora to the basement and Milly prepared their breakfast.

Though quite painful, the wound was small and only required a tiny bandage. No one, not even Ms. Jarvey, noticed it, and none of them caught the pain-induced tightness of Mr. Mahoney's face.

Two days later, just before lunch, he presented Ms. Jarvey with another offering of bon-bons, these a fine mixture of



chocolate, fruits and nuts. Her expression softened and she even smiled, as if she meant it. "Gee, thanks" said Ms. Jarvey.

"You're quite welcome", Mr. Mahoney replied.

As the week drew to a close, Ms. Jarvey found herself looking forward to bon-bons before lunch.

By Friday she even confided to Mr. Mahoney that her relationship with her boyfriend was not all it could be. He patted her on the shoulder and told her life was full of ups and downs. Then he presented her with a crisp white quarter pound bag of Butterscotch, imported from Glasgow. By closing time, Ms. Jarvey found herself glancing quite often at Schaefer, Butler and Snead's accountant.

\* \* \*

Two weeks later, the last Saturday afternoon of September found Mr. Mahoney in a bathtub filled to the top with water, soap and foam. Milly was kneeling at the edge of the tub, holding a thick yellow sponge over her husband's head. She squeezed the sponge and warm water ran through Mr. Mahoney's close-cropped brown hair. Milly soaped his neck and back as he related lore of the Caribbean,

There was a story of lost treasure, and one of a coastal town that had slid into the sea. There was Columbus and his ship stuck on a reef. There was Black Magic and strong men with deep, deep voices. There were voodoo rites late at night concerning women and chickens. There was rum with your breakfast.

All of this was wonderful to hear, but what excited Milly were the flying fish. As he stepped out of the tub and into the towel that she held open, Milly made Mr. Mahoney tell her again about the flying fish. She rubbed him dry from head to toe and took his aftershave lotion in her hands. She smoothed it onto his neck and with one finger traced a line of it along his jawbone.

"They certainly have it all over the other fish", she said. Mr. Mahoney chuckled as the last of the water in the tub gurgled away.

"Can't beat evolution", he said.

His wardrobe was laid out neatly and took up the whole bed. She dressed him in silence, his new suit and crisp white shirt cutting a very handsome figure indeed.

Ms. Jarvey thought so too, and after the ballet, insisted on changing into something more comfortable. She told him to turn on the stereo, and when he fumbled with it, she pranced out of the bedroom and slapped his hand in mock anger. The zipper of her dress was open all the way to the small of her back as she

pranced back into the bedroom. Mr. Mahoney swallowed when she reappeared in a french blue nightgown that trailed behind her, silent as a Nantucket fog. Her eyes were transfixed on him as she came to the couch where he sat and touched his nose playfully with her index finger.

“Who’d have imagined?” she said.

He smiled as her perfumed overwhelmed his aftershave, and her nightgown slid lower as she reached for him. Her grip was strong and he ran his hands along her shoulders. He was pleased with their firmness, and felt too the sinewy challenge of her arms.

She made a contented low sound in her throat and lightly took his ear in her teeth. His hand moved from the strap of her nightgown to his jacket pocket. He couldn’t get over how excited his Milly was about the flying fish.







## CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

MIKE CESARO is a student at MSU.

CRAIG COTTER's hobbies include sailing, baseball, American arts and crafts, and package design for outdated Beatle memorabilia.

ANN DUNN is a choreographer/writer living in Asheville, N.C. with her potter husband and four children. She has performed her programs of poetry and dance for many people and has been published in POETRY NOW and PEMBROKE, among others.

EDWARD GOLD is surely a very nice person but nobody in the office will admit to losing his bio. We'd make something up but it could never be as exciting as his life probably is.

FRITZ HAMILTON has had recent poetry placements in PULPSMITH, KANSAS QUARTERLY, and THE FID-DLEHEAD, among others. He has subsisted on general assistance, food stamps, and whatever the underground economy will allow in San Francisco since 1980.

RALPH HEIBUTZKI is an MSU journalism major living in East Lansing. He has written for the LANSING BEAT, JEWISH VOICE and WIRING DEPT. and plans to launch an alternative newspaper soon.

RICHARD L. HOLINGER teaches English and Creative Writing at Marmion Academy. His poetry has been published in many anthologies and magazines including POETRY REVIEW and the RCR.

RICHARD TODD JULIUS lives in Ann Arbor where he publishes CUTTING EDGE QUARTERLY. He is working on an MFA in Creative Writing at the that OTHER school in Ann Arbor (U of M.)

LYN LIFSHIN is an internationally known poet and editor with over 70 books and chapbooks now published. She has edited a series of books on women's writing and has been in the RCR.

JIM MARKS is a student at MSU.



MICHELLE MELIS was born at a very early age in Toledo, Ohio, the daughter of an art professor and high school teacher. Her photos have appeared in the 1986 BEST OF COLLEGE PHOTOGRAPHY, PHOTOGRAPHERS FORUM, MSU STATE NEWS.

TOM MOLLOY has worked as a journalist in Northern Ireland and El Salvador. He is married to writer Rita J. Doucette whom he met when they were published in STORY QUARTERLY.

DUNCAN MORAN has lived in Michigan five years. He has written poetry since childhood and only recently has begun submitting. His work has appeared in PASSAGES NORTH and THE SUN.

ROD MURPHY is in the Creative Writing Master's program at MSU. He would like to become a Heinrich Boll scholar, he loves the Delaware seashore, and his favorite veggie is the artichoke.

MARK J. SHEEHAN teaches freshman composition and has poems forthcoming in WILMINGTON REVIEW, FINE MADNESS, PENNSYLVANIA REVIEW and, ECLIPSE.

ALISON SWAN has had poetry published in the RCR and will soon in the BURNING WORLD. She is currently grading papers and fighting traffic in South Florida and is looking forward to returning to the snowy north.

RICHARD VANCE lives in a log home in the mountains of northern Lancaster County, Penn. He is Vice President of sales and marketing for a food corporation. He's been published in POETRY TODAY, MIDWEST POETRY REVIEW, and EARTHWISE, and more.

THOMAS C. WEBSTER is an entomologist at the University of California at Davis. He has recently published poems in CALIFORNIA QUARTERLY.

# RED CEDAR REVIEW

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Editor(s):

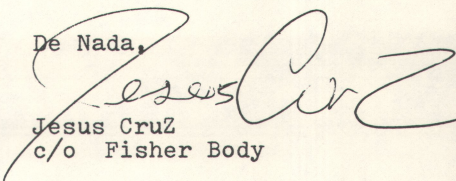
I'll do all of us a favor and skip the usual bullshit about how I like your magazine and all, because none of us really have the time, do we?

If you do accept my stuff, make up something for a bio. All I ask is that it is interesting.

My poetry captures the essence of contemporary American ideology, especially with the youth.

Don't worry about sending them ba ck to me. I have copies, but I better not see these in print under another name or there's going to be shit to pay. Don't think that I've got an axe to grind, it's just that I've been ripped off before and it hurts.

De Nada,

  
Jesus Cruz  
c/o Fisher Body



Jesus Hector Cruz  
Fisher Body  
Assembly Division

Red Cedar Review  
Morrill Hall  
MSU

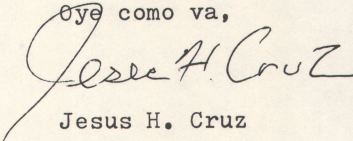
Editors:

I got your message at the plant some time ago but I needed time to think. It was kind of a blow that you didn't want my poems, just my cover letter, but I guess I got over it.

Sorry for yu having to call teh factory, but I don't got a phone or a mailbox out where I live, and I'm usually here anyway. It's not that I want any of those things, or need them, so save your tears for somebody else. This is one hombre that don't have no regrets.

Go ahead and use whatever the hell you want. You might as well because like the gringo says, something's better than nothing. I'm hip. My words on the cover of a magazine are good enough for ~~EM~~ me so go ahead.

Oye como va,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jesus H. Cruz". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the phrase "Oye como va,".

Jesus H. Cruz













## INCLUDED IN THIS ISSUE:

Poems by:

*Mike Cesaro*  
*Craig Cotter*  
*Ann Dunn*  
*Edward Gold*  
*Fritz Hamilton*  
*Ralph Heibutzki*  
*Richard Holinger*  
*Richard Todd Julius*  
*Lyn Lifshin*  
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