REDCEDAR REVIEW

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2004

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REDCEDAR
REVIEW

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Editor's Introduction

Laura C. Tisdel

I live with two third-year medical students on surgery rotation, and each night they regale me with stories of re-attaching fingers, the stink of cutting open a patient with gangrene, and near-fatal gun shot wounds that they cauterized shut. They are like starry eyed kindergarteners fresh off the school bus from their first day, only every giddy anecdote they tell carries with it the urgency, the importance, of life and death decision. In the presence of their daily achievements I often find myself hesitant to share: *the light through the half windows of the basement office drapes across my computer screen as I skim furtively through* Chicago Manual of Style *and find to my delight that, yes, a semicolon is needed!* As my housemates chatter on, stethoscopes swinging around their necks and hands buried deep in their white lab jackets, I stare tragically into the pile of submissions I am reading and feel my gut sink. Is what I am doing, editing a literary magazine, studying literature as an English major, vital?

The image of my housemate thawing out frostbitten toes in the emergency room brought to mind radio essayist Katie Davis's description of her stories about Adams Morgan, Washington D.C. as an attempt to "create an anatomy of the neighborhood"—there is a creation, or at least a re-animation, in writing that is medicinal, healing. No matter the subject, writers unify or reclaim a body. They grab scraps that seem irreconcilable and coax them to adhere. A severed hand floating unattached in space is not nearly as poignant as the hand that reaches out for you from a graceful arm, just as the hills of Berkeley were never as sensuous as they are when conjoined with the image of a curve in a lover's hips, as in "Before Daylight Hits the Bay" by poet Courtney Chapin. The surgeon sets the clavicle bone at the perfect angle to the rib or grafts thigh skin to face seamlessly and the body is made whole again; the writer sees a tear—an awkward silence in conversation or a glance of longing—and she writes in the missing pieces, reconciles the moment to itself. Amy Sumerton unravels the tensions between nanny and working mother in "Vicarious Motherhood," and suddenly the anatomy of that relationship is recognizable, nameable, and whole. As a babysitter, I read that piece and my role fell into place: where I saw frustrating amputations in

logic (the mother is short with me about the cluttered playroom and doesn't notice I made dinner) I see a solid trajectory; I understand and I sympathize. A well-written piece has the surgical precision to connect action to motive, to reconnect a reader to her childhood, her job, her family; to heal her in a way that no anti-biotic can.

This issue of *Red Cedar Review* also begins to map out the anatomy of a writing community. The mission of *Red Cedar Review* has long been to cultivate a community of writers in East Lansing, and, for our editors, to cultivate a sense responsibility to that community. The vast majority of pieces in this issue are local finds—the editors put out their feelers and came back to me with award winning undergraduate work, with short stories by alums and grad students, and with student cover art. Our authors may have sat beside each other in coffee shops or walked past each other on the way to class but are finally linked together in the pages of *Red Cedar Review*. The work of local authors has been grafted to submissions that the edits sifted from the submissions box and, although the work may have come to us from distant points, it resonated, was as familiar to us as our own hand. I find excitement in all of this and in that way this issue bears my mark. As General Editor I've tried to transmit my sense of happy anticipation, my feeling of being the cartographer of new terrain, to my staff. Each poem or story we accept is a discovery, and when we can see where it clicks into the big picture of our issue I glean something like gestalt. The work we have chosen glows with freshness and invigoration; this is a youthful issue sprouting with pieces that are pioneers of originality, that surprised us.

In sending this issue to print I have the sense of sending a child out into the world. By the time the final product is bound, many of our authors and editors will have graduated or gotten new jobs or moved across the country. During a time when the merits of the Liberal Arts are considered in terms of budget cuts, I find great comfort in knowing that at least this issue will spin out its own course, independent from the future of those who put it together. Complete in its own anatomy, it can speak for the student editors that were animated through its editing, were made complete through the process of producing literature.

Prelude and Fugue, in Minors

Lesmana Lim

PRELUDE

The first thing you notice about the Shriner's Hospital for Children is the vast expanse of handicapped spaces in the parking area. It immediately imparts a sense of grim pragmatism to an edifice built upon the most optimistic of ideas–that children who need special medical care should be able to get it for free. The handicap signs form a single column stretching into the distance, a long chain of stern metal posts, a sturdy phalanx set to defend the choicest spots from the lucky ones who still enjoy a full range of motion. We park in the back of the lot.

I was ten years old the first time I came to the hospital. Chicago was a wonderful oddity to me then, a schizophrenic metropolis. Chicago was the Latino quarter, where wholesalers gave us coffee and bagels and my dad bought exotic goods for our family grocery store. Or it was the alien mystique of Chinatown, with its beautifully strange architecture and herbal boutiques and pigs and ducks hanging in butcher's windows. Other times it was Michigan Avenue, bustling with fashion and movement, buildings taller than God. It seemed as if the city was constantly disappearing and reappearing, a series of urban Brigadoons, each unaware of the existence of other Chicagos. It was any other city, as it would look shone through a prism, each component expanded and more than the sum of its parts, every hue distinct and luminous.

The Shriner's Hospital was not a color I had seen before. I was accustomed to the conventional strangenesses of Chinatown or the wholesale district, but here was a thoroughly unimportant-looking building crawling with old men in peculiar hats. The red fez is a great symbol of the Ancient Arabic Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine, distinguishing it from the other Masonic orders. It's considered a sign of nobility and philanthropy, proudly worn by members for over a hundred years. The Shriner's take their fez seriously. I, however, could not. Nothing in the entire history of secret playground clubs and special handshakes could rival the absurdity of these men wearing those

2003 George B. Lawson Essay Award, Second Place

hats, which looked not unlike an overturned KFC bucket lovingly perched upon your grandfather's head. This wasn't Michigan Avenue. I couldn't decide what part of Chicago I had gotten into.

The confusion only deepened when I saw the hospital commons. It was a spacious, well-decorated area, designed to take full advantage of natural light. A generous number of trees and plants brightened the atmosphere, along with a few well-kept potted flowers. There was a black, baby grand piano with a bright tone in one corner, and two colorful play areas for smaller children in others. And everywhere were wheelchairs, prosthetics, splints and braces connected to children of all sorts. It was like stumbling into some postmodern incarnation of Leonardo's workshop, or John Cage composing the human form, an etude of irregular symmetries and mechanical aides. I didn't know what to think about it, this menagerie of toddlers, but it scared me in ways that left me ashamed. The whole enterprise carried such an air of dashed expectations, of failure. I sat on a bench, pulled out my Walkman and turned up Gershwin as loud as it could go.

When it came time for my appointment, a thin young man brought me to a small lab where they recorded my height and weight, snapped some Polaroids and took a series of x-rays. Afterwards he led me to a clean, white office where a doctor was waiting. She had a kind face and we small-talked for a bit. Then she asked me, "Do you know why you're visiting us today?"

I said no, that my mother only told me that we would be going to Chicago, and that we were going to see a doctor. I'd had shots before and gotten my blood taken once or twice, and it hadn't been all that bad.

"Okay," she said. "Let me just tell you that there's nothing wrong with you, and that you're a perfectly healthy boy. You've taken good care of yourself. But there's something very special you need to know about your neck." She paused to rummage through a folder and pulled out one of my x-rays. "Two of the bones in your neck, your vertebrae, are fused together, and have been that way since you were born. We don't know how it got that way and we can't even tell you what it's called, because it's so rare that it doesn't have an official name. It's fine right now, it shouldn't give you any pain or stop you from having a perfectly normal life."

She put the x-ray back in the folder and pushed it aside. "But soon your body's going to start growing, and changing size and shape, and we want to make sure that your bone doesn't cause you any trouble while that happens."

I knew about the spinal cord, how the vertebrae protect it from harm because it was how your brain controlled the rest of the body. She didn't need to explain to me how fragile it is, and I didn't ask.

She continued, "we'd like you to visit us once every year for a while, so that we can take new pictures and x-rays, and keep you shipshape. Would that be all right?" I nodded. "Great! By the time your sixteen or seventeen, you'll probably be all done with us and you'll be able to get on with being an adult." She chuckled. "Do you know what you want to be when you grow up?"

What I had wanted was to be the first Asian basketball star to play in the NBA. But all of a sudden, I was afraid of growing taller.

I mustered up all my courage and said, "I, dunno?"

She laughed again. "Probably better that way. Why limit yourself?" she said. "So long as there's hope, you can do anything and everything."

Later, I watched cars pull out of handicapped parking, their spots immediately replaced by other vehicles bringing more patients, the process constant and repeating, without end.

FUGUE

When I visited the next year, the first thing I noticed about the hospital was the vast expanse of handicapped spaces. The second thing I noticed was the unmistakable sound of Bach emanating from the commons. The precision of Bach and the brightness of the piano drew me in, and walking over, I saw that a girl of about sixteen was hunched over the keys, immersed in baroque. It was later in the evening; there weren't many people nearby. I pulled up a chair next to her and sat down, but she didn't even seem to see me. Listening closer, I could hear her humming along with Bach, loudly, as if she couldn't control it, like the spirit of Glenn Gould had taken up residence in her vocal cords. She finished with a flourish. Most of the people in the room clapped enthusiastically, and I joined in.

She flushed and said thank you. I told her that I could play a little Bach, but only some of the simpler two- and three-part inventions. "Really? Play something for me," she said.

I eagerly took the challenge and stumbled into the Invention in C Major, a staple of any aspiring pianist. I hit a few bad keys before I was done, and smiled sheepishly back at her. "I'm not very good," I said.

"Nonsense," she replied. "I can tell you're going to be a great Bach player someday. You just need to have more fun with the themes."

I answered with a look of confusion. She explained, "So many people think Bach is just like math, so that it should come out the same every time. Bach is so much more than that. You can hear it in the musical theme in

every one of his pieces. It's the first thing you hear in every invention, every *sinfonia,* every fugue - and then it disappears." She tapped out the theme of the Invention in C Major, the first two measures. "It's not gone though, because it keeps coming back, again and again, a little bit different maybe, but definitely there - in the right hand, in the left hand, in both hands. In the melody, and in the harmony. It's like Bach took a musical moment in time and stretched it out, kept it going so that it was like it never had to stop. I love it. I want to play Bach in Carnegie Hall someday."

There was a pause as I tried to take it all in. I didn't think I understood much of what she said, but it was wonderful, nevertheless.

I asked her what she was at the Shriner's Hospital for. She pointed to her feet, and I noticed for the first time that she had braces on her legs and ankles. She said that she had something called Charcot-Marie-Tooth Disease, and that because of it her feet and legs often became weak and numb. Soon she would need to use a wheelchair for part of the day. Worse yet, she explained, she would start to feel it creeping into her forearms and hands. She thought that playing piano would keep her fingers strong enough to function, and that maybe the exercise would help her hold back the disease. But there is no cure.

Before long, it was time for my appointment. I thanked her for talking with me, and she smiled. She started playing again as I was led away, captivated by the movements of sonatas, oblivious to the motion of time.

When I came back to the hospital at age twelve, I saw her there again, sniffing at the flowers. Now, though, she was an eight-year-old girl in a tight back brace, suffering from severe scoliosis. Though the brace hindered her movement, she carried herself with the grace and bearing of a ballerina. Visions of leaps and pirouettes danced through her mind, and she dreamed of an open stage.

At thirteen, I caught a glimpse of her as a fifteen-year-old in the hospital cafeteria, writing long stories in a spiral notebook. Though osteogenesis imperfecta kept her and her brittle bones in a wheelchair, the paragraphs in her notebook revealed strength in structure far beyond her years. Without any other escape from the present, she wrote her future.

I noticed her again year after year, always in slightly different form: once as a twelve-year-old future screenwriter with cerebral palsy, again as a sixteen-year-old aspiring chef with a prosthetic leg, then a ten-year-old painter with spina bifida. She showed me more and more each time that the hospital wasn't a shrine to the disappointment of human potential, but to the celebration of it.

Sometimes now, I think of her, the original theme, and wonder if she's still able to play. I play Bach at twenty-one almost as well as I remember she did at sixteen. I understand more now how you can play Bach and seem to stretch time forever. When I play that piece from ten years ago, Fugue No. 16 in G Minor, I can see her again, suspended in that almost infinite musical moment. And I notice myself begin to hum along.

America Discovering Columbus: Lover to the One Who Had Loved

Mathieu Cavell

We are discovering each other the way
America uncovered itself for Columbus.
He was, and you are
not the first.
He wasn't, and I will not be
the last.

My hair is the flint vein of arrowheads.
My teeth are oyster shells shaved to keenness.
My sex is the Arawak tribe,
giving in to a fault.

Of a three-ship dowry you brought,
I have crushed one on the rocks.

Do you have enough space in that two-chamber
cargo hold, beating
beating the slave-bodies against the concave wood?
Can you make the vessel lighter than water
float home
even when filled with flint, oyster shells
and my tribe?

From silt-rich rivers you want gold.
From the children born of my tribe you want sex.

You come to me on your repeat sojourns
whispering just a little less than everything;
stringing my brass neck in copper coins.

2003 Glendon and Kathryn Swarthout Poetry Award, Second Place

From me you want a cartography I can't give:
You want to shorten the world.

You want me to be Asia.

Coloring the Shells

Carrie J. Preston

We need to color Easter eggs together tonight,
far from family, a Mississippi April
that is already summer.
He goes out to buy color.
I begin the boil, open the vinegar,
and the smell moves through our utility kitchen,
moves me out of the springless South
moves through me,
the way pink seeps through shell
to color the white inside.
And I'm thinking of egg salad
with a hint of pink,
days of devilled eggs
with the albumen tinged yellow
to match the fill, thinking of
writing our names on the shell in white crayon,
C.P. + D.O.
Hiding one in his cover or his flight bag
to find tomorrow at the squadron,
dipping half in pink, half in yellow.
And by the time he comes home,
I'm dancing rite of spring
with a garland of towel around my neck.

But, he bought
the Patriotic Easter Egg Kit.
Stars and stripes on the shrinkwrap,
Red, Blue, White
—the shells are almost white anyway—
he probably hardly noticed,
lives with flags
the way I ignore marginalia in library books.

He has never understood,
the set of my jaw when his mother sent me
his picture in a frame of Americana
and Marine Corps Semper Fi.
He probably wasn't thinking. But I am
still...of daily shelling in Iraq,
and holidays that celebrate torture,
and the Star Spangled Banner
illuminated by the red glare of fire.

Legend says, Mary took eggs to the soldiers
at Golgotha in exchange for compassion,
Jesus' blood colored them red
and her tears fell blue,
but the coloring of shells began long before.
The Persian earth goddess, *Sepanta Armaiti*,
holds blue eggs in fingertips.
The Seder egg reminds Jews of starting anew
as do baskets of Persian *No Ruz* eggs,
Romanian *cozanaci*, Ukranian *pysanky*,
and the Easter Egg Roll on the White House lawn.

He doesn't know why I'm crying
again, and I'm trying to save our night
to chip away from the inside
at the shell calcified around me,
to imagine flags that are always moving,
snapping pungent at a vinegar wind
in a rolling boil of their contradictions.
Inside symbols that seem dead
there could be something silently moving,
cutting the *chalaza* spiral
that binds yolk to shell,
spiraling what binds any shell and color.

I love this man
who believes there is something
worth killing for. I'm
not sure.

I pour the vinegar that sets the dye,
not quite water or wine.
He dips half in red, half in blue,
and it is this act of coloring,
the movement of color and light
that makes meaning of the shell.
He rolls an egg to me across the table
and in the Persian rites of spring,
I catch the universe.

Vicarious Motherhood

Amy Sumerton

Rush around the house as soon as she arrives to elicit the image of being constantly in motion. Tidy things up, put the dishes in the washer. Wipe the kitchen counter. Chatter on about the same things: what time he got up, what his mood is like. Discuss his bowels. Dig enthusiastically through your purse to make sure you "have everything."

You are an epicenter.

She, on the other hand, is a fuck-all English graduate with purple streaks in her hair who leaves Chekov and Joyce novels laying around; this is her leisurely reading. She is the type to tell everyone the truth and here you are in your power suit, coffee in one hand, fancy leather briefcase in the other, kissing your kid goodbye, and putting on your business smile.

You are terrified of her.

And she loves your kid; she is great with him. She loves your kid and he loves her back.

Mainly, you need to focus on what you don't need to do: don't spend any part of your day *picturing* them. Avoid picturing at all costs. Do not think of him possibly laying his head on her shoulder when she lifts him out of the crib after his nap. Or of him mistakenly calling her "Mama" and her not correcting him. People at the drug store complimenting her on what a gorgeous son she has. Do not think of her making him laugh so hard—oh, the sound of your child's laughter—that he does that thing where he closes his eyes and just radiates a smile in her direction for a solid few minutes. Do not think of his little hand reaching up for hers as they take a walk through the woods. Slow dancing to your new Etta James CD. Having a picnic by the river with yellow and red leaves slowly fluttering down on an autumn breeze. Running at full tilt into her on a partly cloudy day—cumulus, painting the sky a fluffy landscape—in a field of wildflowers somewhere with those tiny Levis on that you got him last weekend, hugging her impulsively. Etc., etc.

You really could drive yourself over the edge with thoughts like these.

Once a month or so, call the nanny and apologetically tell her that you need to stay late at work, is that okay? Tell yourself you are not asking permission. Do not stay late at work; instead, go to a movie. A romantic comedy. You hate romantic comedies and this one will be no different, but go anyway. Once you are in the theater, roll your eyes occasionally. This will make you feel better, that you aren't falling for it.

Spend the film thinking about how contrived romantic comedies always are, how annoying the formula is. There is always the falling-in-love montage, the fight that later becomes an amusing misunderstanding. The kiss at the end. Your life was not like this. There was the fight—quite a few of them, actually—but no kiss at the end.

As you leave the theater, vow to never again waste your time with this genre.

Go next month.

On your birthday, you come home to what appears to be an empty house. You call into it and hear rustling and insistent whispering. Your child appears in the kitchen doorway straight ahead of you holding a sign that says "HAPPY BIRTHDAY MOM!" upside down. A hand and part of an arm appear and turn the sign around. There is more whispering.

"Haa-ppy to yooou, haa-ppy to yooooooou, haa-ppy to yooooooooou!" he sings loudly and off key. Drop your purse without noticing it, and run to him, fall to your knees, laughing, hugging him. This is what it's about, you think. You *made* this little guy, this miracle. He's yours.

Look at the nanny with shining eyes and thank her genuinely. You have no idea how she knew it was your birthday.

The first time he cries when the nanny leaves, hold him and stare out of the window after her, watching her flip her purple hair to unlock her car, watching her start the car and drive away. Think of what a horrible mistake you are, not comprehending why your brain chooses to loop on this idea. Let this thought consume you, because in subsequent events you will be more numb, so it's good to revel in this pain a bit. You may or may not cry.

After a bit, spend time thinking of "more numb" versus "number" and wonder at how the two can never mean the same thing—although they should—because "number" is a completely different word. Try to think of other examples.

See any number of things mothers should not see, things that will probably someday require the equivalent of her yearly salary in therapy.

These things include, but are not limited to: watching her carry your sleeping baby up to bed when you come home late one night, shushing her finger to her lips to remind you not to wake him, the way that he runs and bangs into her and giggles and kisses her loudly all over her face whenever he hugs her goodbye, her lap not being vacated upon your arrival home from work, and various other tiny, monumental occurrences.

Make sure that you do not ever admit to her that she has taught him anything. When he starts making his dinosaurs eat the tops of the trees in his train set, or calls his bath toy a "daw-fin" instead of a "fish," or says "holy cow," or actually counts to five instead of always counting "two-free-two-free-two," smile and pretend to yourself that you taught him that. You sort of remember mentioning that the little toy Beetle he has was a Volkswagen, so that's why he calls that car his "deedee (little) whe-woah (yellow) Wokswayon." You speak his language; you usually understand what he is saying when other people do not. Your son is your second language.

There was an explosion of vocabulary directly following the introduction of the nanny, but it's his age. All kids have such spurts when they reach the age of two. If you could stay home with him all day, he would be developing just as quickly. He wouldn't rub his temple as he ends sentences with "I think" as you have seen her do, but he'd do something just as cute.

You are the mother. It is your frightening and divine right to be able to take credit for whatever you want.

The dad calls long distance from time to time. The baby is too young to talk on the phone, just holds it to his ear and smiles nervously, looking at you for answers. It is your job to fill the dad in as best you can. New words, anecdotes.

Talk about how great the nanny is, about how lucky you are to have her. Smart. Dependable. Punctual. Use the kind of words you might find in a guide to writing resumes. Oversees all aspects of childcare; introduced word "dolphin"; initiated proper counting techniques.

The dad is doing well. The dad is always doing well. Be glad for that, though, because it is kissing cousins with the monthly child support checks. Love the checks, their regularity, what they represent: his responsibilities to you. You have no responsibilities to him anymore.

Stare at the wall, and—when he talks—tell yourself over and over that you're going to get through this, you're going to get through this. Love has

not been kind to you, no one can dispute that. The sound of his voice fills you with a nauseating concoction of sticky adoration, wanton energy, and overwhelming disappointment.

Sound happy. Pretend you've just sucked down a pot of coffee. Black coffee. You want it all. You have it all.

After you've said goodbye (again), sit down at the kitchen table with a genuine and heartbreaking sigh, put your elbows on the table, and press the heels of your hands to your eyes. Stay here. You are thinking so fast you can't hear a word of it. Things are happening.

Your cat will stand outside your shower and mew distractedly, worried for you, wondering how you got in there with all that water: water everywhere, water falling from the ceiling, water all over you. Your cat will pace nervously and paw at the shower door, trying to think of a way to get you out.

Identify with her.

Be outwardly cordial to the nanny, while inwardly you are completely out of control. A menace. Something involving fangs and unseemly juices. The evil villain with the oblique twinkle, the just audible gears turning. Put on your atmospheric tapes before bed and repeat softly to yourself over and over your new mantra: you are lucky to have her, you are lucky to have her.

Read in *Working Mother* about a woman who hires only non-English speaking nannies and only for six months at a time. Marvel over her selfishness, her possessive detriment. *That* woman is not a good mother. You are a rock. A breadwinner.

An island.

On Saturdays, wiggle toys in front of his face. Attempt different voices when you read books. Put on music and ask him to dance; shake distractedly, telling yourself you are not embarrassed to dance in front of your toddler son. Turn on a video; "Jay Jay the Jet Plane" seems to be his favorite, although you think it's so asinine it's almost unwatchable. When he gets fidgety and fusses, wonder briefly to yourself how she does it, keeps him entertained all day. You try to keep him happy, he throws a tantrum. You have a fight, you lose your temper, you stomp out of the room. You remember that he's only two and come back, hug and kiss him.

She didn't bear him, you did. It's your claim to fame, and also your Pearl Harbor. Waterloo! You bore him, and now you just…*bore* him. You can see it in his eyes, can tell when he sighs quietly and walks to the window like a

little man. He is looking to see if she is coming up the walk. He wants real entertainment, not romantic comedies. An aquarium, not a rock.

Go on dates with men you meet through ads. You always told yourself you would never go out with someone who would put an ad in the paper, but you've resorted to it because you don't meet people other ways, so certainly if you would do it, there must be other good people who have no alternative either. Not just fat men and perverts.

They can't all be foot fetishists.

On these days, be overly confident. Smile and talk loosely and candidly about the difficulties of juggling career and kid. Act knowledgeable and driven. You want it all; you have it all. Tell a few stories about how fulfilling work is and a few stories about how cute your son is. Joke that you are never happy, because at work you miss your kid and at home you miss your work. Then lean in—into the candlelight, making sure that it illuminates your cleavage just so—and say that there aren't enough hours in the day for how much time you want to be with your son. The weekends go by too fast!

Men your age want someone who will nurture them. Someone who is a good mother.

Perhaps it was your over confidence that scared them away.

The dad is coming to visit. The dad is coming to visit. The *dad* is coming to *visit*. It is your involuntary mantra. Wonder if it's healthy for your inner child to allow you to go shopping for a new outfit and get a facial. Decide it doesn't really matter; you can't help it.

The dad looks amazing. The dad always looks amazing. Less hair, but on him it's sexy. Dog shit and whiskey vomit would look good on him to you. That's the sad part. One of many. He's flirting with you and you're falling for it again. What a bust. Love. Adoration, devotion. It is a hole you fall into over and over; it is something you have to wash off your shoe with very hot water.

Make yourself remember that he left you for another woman. Not even a younger, more attractive woman: a woman eight years your senior and twice your size. You have walked around with an invisible hand held to your cheek since hearing the news.

All the confidence drained from your body the moment he told you he was leaving (everything already packed, the bed made, hospital corners; the baby already in your belly, unknown) and hasn't yet reappeared. Did it make a noise when that final blow hit you? It must have. Like the air being let out of a balloon.

He's flirting and you're not falling for it anymore, at least not as much. How could you allow the man who made you an insecure, barely functioning wreck to seduce you? Close your eyes and revel in this revelation. Of course, when you open your eyes, he will not look less attractive. It's not that easy. But it's a step.

Manage to maintain your integrity for the entire evening: no crying, no apologizing, no apologizing for crying or crying for an apology; this is a first. When it is time for him to leave (*again*; you can't help but think it), beam him a smile, hug him quickly. Watch with new appreciation as your son denies him a hug, stands behind you clutching your legs. You are on the same team, your son and you. Shrug at your ex-husband and try not to smile too much. Say something like: Well, he doesn't really know you…

It is important to let this sentence trail off.

You get home a few hours early one afternoon. They have their coats on and are zipping up a bag. Your "summer bag," a cutesy woven thing with short straps. You got it on your honeymoon. They are about to go to the pool, she says. She has to take him; he would be disappointed because they'd been talking about going all morning. Do you mind? You could come, she says brilliantly.

Okay, you say automatically and then wish you hadn't.

In the locker room, you have to change in front of each other and your child. You do not want to be prudish and opt for a bathroom stall. You try to act comfortable. Fearless. Naked. Hideous. Act like you couldn't care less what her body looks like. Stare intently at your son. Watch as he looks from one of you to the other.

These are *yours*, you want to scream at him, a sagging naked breast in each fist. These belong to you, you little pig! She never breastfed you at two in the morning, did she?

Instead, pull on your suit quickly but not noticeably so.

He calls for her when she swims away: holds his arms out towards her and repeats her name over and over. She tries to act nonchalant about it. She lets you hold him most of the time and doesn't go too far away, just smiles at you and wiggles your son's foot. Talks about how nice the water is.

She was a synchronized swimmer in college, she says, smiling at you.

You fight the urge to laugh. Ask her if she's seen the SNL skit with Martin Short. This seems like the perfect passive-aggressive statement, until she smiles at you sympathetically—condescendingly really—and says yes.

She talks then about how difficult of a sport it is; the intense practices were long and murderous; it's the hardest thing she's ever done. The stress. She was a ballerina for ten years, she says, and bloody toes are nothing compared to a synchro competition. She could hardly sleep the week before a meet.

Her body had never been so fit. She was all muscle, she says, a hard body. A rock.

Ask her if she'll show you some moves. Take your son out of her arms. Say: go on, don't be shy. Secretly hope that she can't do any of it.

She says that really, she needs nose plugs; it's difficult to do anything in synchro without them.

Plead that surely there must be something she could show you.

She starts to swim out a bit, giving herself distance. She begins floating on her back. Your son starts to scream, flailing in your arms, reaching out for her. She sits up, swims back over. I think he thought I was drowning or something, she says.

Maybe some other time.

Wake the baby up sometimes in the middle of the night. He used to do this on his own, but now he's outgrown it. You miss how necessary it made you feel, and you know he's only getting older.

The nanny calls you at work. She is obviously crying. She explains that she is at the hospital. The baby will be fine, but there was an accident.

Leave work immediately.

Arrive at the hospital visibly shaken, wide-eyed and frantic. The nanny says with brimming eyes that he had fallen off a swing and landed headfirst. Right on his forehead, she says, voice shaking.

Ask very calmly and with an edge to your voice where exactly she was when the baby had taken it upon himself to fall off a swing.

She starts crying again, and you fight the natural urge to put an arm around her. Pushing him, she sobs; I was just pushing him.

Ask very calmly and with an edge to your voice why she was pushing him in such a manner that he would fall off the swing. He's only two, you say. He can't do very much on his own. He isn't very strong. He can't be pushed like a kid when he's barely a toddler. She is silent. Say: I'm sorry, but…I really need to have peace of mind when I'm at work. I can't get anything done if I can't stop worrying and wondering about when the next time my son gets rushed to the emergency room will be.

It was an accident, she says with disbelief. It's the first time anything like this has happened; it won't happen again.

You've made her nervous. Finally.

A nurse wearing a smock speckled with cartoon babies comes down the hallway carrying your son. He has a huge bandage on his head that is somehow endearing. Stitched him right up, the nurse says, giving him an affectionate shake. She looks at you: you must be the mother, she says.

Yes, yes, yes. You are the mother. Smile at her, say thanks. Take the child from her a bit too protectively and glare sideways at the nanny. Tell her you're not sure what you're going to do. Tell her you've been thinking of day care; he should be learning to socialize. Tell her that she's done a great job, and that you recognize it was just an accident, but that you're not sure you could ever sleep at night if something like this—or worse—happened again. Tell her it's nothing personal, and that someday—someday when she's a mother—she'll understand.

You will give her a good referral.

Driving home, with baby safe in his car seat, realize how easy it is to hate the woman who was basically raising your child; how ruthless, how senseless. What a cop out.

You'd wanted to open up your home to her; you should have wanted to. It's hard, though. It is. It's hard to share your space.

It had been easier at first: it had gone well. You had enjoyed the chatter with her; you had not felt threatened. But it's hard to get to know people past the acquaintance stage, isn't it?

She had started to act weird after a little while, too. Always making him perform in some way when you got home, showing you what she had taught him. Putting her talents on display under the guise of your son. Had acted more protective of him. But then, it can't be easy to raise other people's kids. Can't help but get attached. If the relationship's not good with the parents, you're kind of assured you'll never see the kids again after you leave. And you will have to eventually leave. And what kind of abandonment issues does that leave the kid with?

After this internal monologue, sigh.

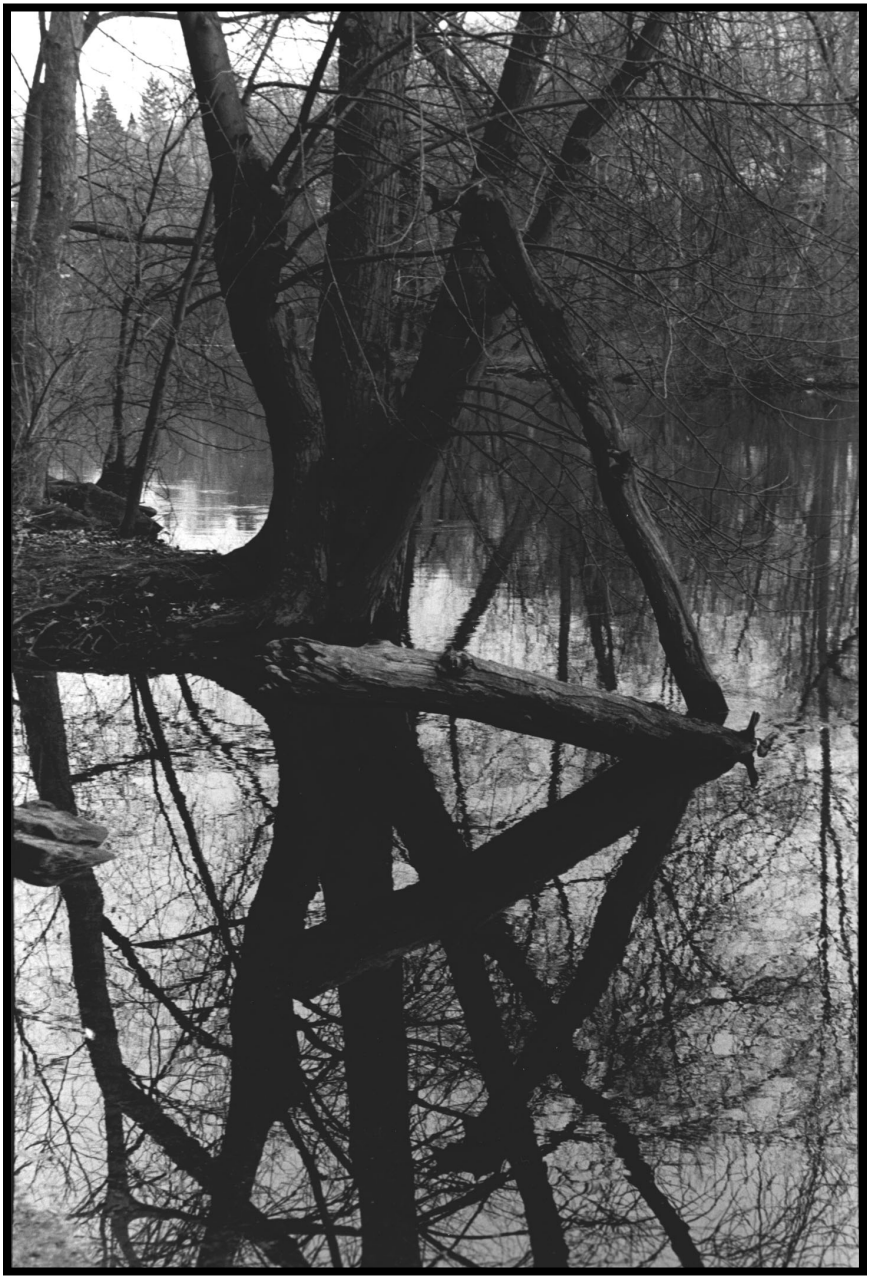
Maybe if you'd rented out an office, a Switzerland. A place outside of your personal space. You could've met her there every morning, picked him up in the evening, driven back to your house, yours and his. You would've had separate lives: she would've had your *son* during the day, but not your *life*. Having her come to the house was too much like handing over everything

for the day. You didn't want to give anyone else the keys, and really…who could blame you?

You want to leave your life waiting for you at home while you go to work, and pick it back up, right where it was, when you come home.

Look back at your son, bandaged and buckled in nice and safe. He's getting sleepy; his eyelids are heavy. You will take him home and carry him up to bed, tuck him in. You are a rock.

An island. But, you think to yourself, you are an island that is part of a small chain of islands. A chain of two. And that something is enough, it has to be, because it's what you have.



Bird Song

Ruth Mowry

As a girl, I admired the pointed shoes
with three-inch heels my mother wore
because my father loved them. She submitted utterly
to him in biblical hierocracy. Unlike the waddling

church women in dark, utilitarian shoes — hers
shimmered in pearlescent hues of the rainbow
and every shade in between, with rhinestone
buckles or little molded bows, embroidered birds

or cut-out sides, with stylized heels, sometimes
of see-through acrylic. Thirty years of those shoes
resulted in Hammer Toe: *Several toes deformed,*
bent at the middle joint, like claws.

I was proud of how classy she looked,
not embarrassing in a polyester dress and Hush Puppies.
No hairnet, plucked sweater, or slip showing white
below her skirt, like the under-side of a bird's wing

only partly tucked away. She conducted the choir!
her arms and hands arched in a wide span
like the Winged Victory while her invisible toes
were pressed and layered in rows shaped like the little

hammers under the lid of her piano. After service
she greeted church folks, God's messenger with sonorous voice,
and her toes, like the beaks of birds struck their own song
of submission. "Oh, Mother" they sang from far away

"we could have been spread in the wind like the foot-wings
of Mercury, but instead our life was corralled,

compressed like carbon under pressure, sculpted and faceted
for the good of God and man." Now my mother's

diamond toes are on display in my memory,
a shining prayer that we all might follow
the Greeks and rule ourselves,
even as we worship what is beautiful.

The Heritage of Nymphs

Christine Junker

THE HOUSE

200 acres, 10 miles north of Evart, Michigan. Quaint, antique farmhouse, four bedrooms, 2 baths. 10-acre pond. Swimming and fishing in the summer, ice-skating in the winter. Cabin on north side of pond. Fields ready to be farmed. Maple groves willing to produce scrumptious maple syrup. Lilacs, four varieties, waiting to fill the spring air with heady fragrance. Marsh marigolds, lady's slippers, trilliums, spring beauties and many more, poised to bloom from spring till fall. Morel mushrooms in early May. Blackberries for jam and pies in late summer. Tart, firm apples in fall.

Ivan and Clara Orwig, my great grandparents, bought a piece of land in northern Michigan, intending to become farmers. They built a barn where they put cows, sheep, and chickens and plowed fields for hay and clover, but they didn't have the knack of planting and harvesting the hay at just the right time, or ensuring the cows would produce enough milk, and ended up working at a factory most of their lives. They kept the two hundred acres and the green and white farmhouse, though, and my great-grandmother consoled herself by turning the front yard into a lavish garden, spending evenings and weekends weeding and watering the delicate blooms with a teacup.

In this house, they raised my grandmother, Onda, their only child. She helped weed the flowerbeds, and dragged herself out of bed every morning at five A.M. to help with the milking. She gathered eggs from the chicken coop, even when roosters would fly at her knees. Every couple of years, she climbed a ladder to help repaint the peaks of the house. When she got married, she became Onda Woods, and followed her husband to the small city of Midland where he worked. My great-grandmother eventually decided that she didn't want to maintain a farmhouse that needed frequent coats of paint and constant repairs. Filial piety prompted my grandmother Onda to return to Evart with her family in tow and purchase the house and forty acres, allowing my great-grandparents to move into a house in town. As it happened, my great-grandparents still spent the majority of their time at

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the farm, living in the cabin on the lake, a quarter of a mile north of the house.

My mother also helped weed the garden, but there were no cows to milk. She spent more time relaxing there than either my great-grandmother or my grandmother had–floating in the lake, reading in her favorite tree, walking along deer paths. When she got married, she and my father bought the farmhouse and forty acres from her parents, and my family settled in. Thus, my sister and I meandered along the same deer paths, floated in the same lake, and were raised on the same land and in the same house that our grandmother and mother had been.

It's been pointed out that this farm is an heirloom, passed down not to the men in the family, but to the women. My family is not avowedly matriarchal; that's just how it worked out. My great-grandparents had only one child, who happened to be a girl. My grandparents did have a son, but my mother was the oldest and the first to want the house. My parents had only girls. There's not been much opportunity to pass it down to men. It's getting closer to the time when it will be passed again.

GREAT GRANDPARENTS

Genius Loci: The spirit or guardian deity of a place. The unique quality of a place as felt by an observer. Often represented by a serpent.

Great-Grandma Orwig's parched hand is clasped in mine as I dip my toes into the bluish brown water. I gasp as the cold water covers my knees and then engulfs my thighs. When I am standing in water waist high, I glance up to make sure that she's ready. I lean forward until my toes lose their grip on the sand and my body falls into the support of her strong hands, digging into the water frantically and kicking my tiny legs, sending up a spray of droplets. I remember to breathe through my mouth so that my nostrils are not filled with the rich smelling water of the lake. Slowly, my limbs become more coordinated, I splash less, and the support from her hands lessens and then disappears. Side by side we doggy paddle, since that's the only stroke we know.

Even though Great-Grandpa Orwig has lived on the farm for over forty years, he still gets lost in the woods. I lead him off the trail, my hand tugging on his dry and wrinkled palm. We meander over patches of boggy moss and around cedar trees, and then I tell him, in my little voice, "Grandpa, I've

got a surprise for you. Close your eyes." He glances at me suspiciously, but obeys, his gray eyes hiding behind dark lids. I run, quietly, and hide behind a rock, until he opens his eyes. "Chris?" he calls, turning around, scanning the woods. He starts to walk in circles–not tight ones, but circles nonetheless. He heads north and then turns right, and then turns right again, looking for a trail. My eyes follow him. A mischievous imp, I refuse to show myself. I let him wander, saying my name at more and more frequent intervals. When he despondently sits on a fallen tree, I jump out from behind the rock, scaring him with my ferocious four-year-old roar. I lead him home then, laughing all the way because he could still get lost in the woods.

I'm showing Great-Grandma Orwig that I can do a backwards somersault in the water, when her voice commands me to get out of the lake. "Snake!" she says, and I scramble towards the shore, the water sucking at my ankles. I see the black head peaking above the rippling surface. It is on the other side of the dock, but close to shore. Her hand is around the wiry neck before the snake has a chance to retreat. On shore, she grasps her shovel. I see the glint of the metal as it slices down on the slender neck. The narrow rope of a body keeps wriggling, as if dancing to a speedy jazz number, unaware that its head is no longer attached. The leathery palm releases the wooden handle with satisfaction.

GRANDPARENTS

I walk through the North Pines, slightly west of the lake, my hands reaching up to hold those of my Grandma and Grandpa Woods. We do not walk together in the forest often, but tonight it is warm and fireflies flicker through the air. The ground is covered with red pine needles that have fallen from the trees, making our steps so quiet that it seems like we're floating over the land, rather than walking. We build a lean-to by leaning fallen pine boughs against a thick tree trunk, forming a sort of tent. The three of us lie inside, our bodies resting against the fallen needles, pinesap coating our hair, looking through the spaces between the branches into the dark sky. The outside world retreats–the fireflies go dark, the lake dries up, the trees sink into the ground–the world is composed of only the three people sheltered in this lean-to. We stay inside for minutes, hours, and then the world slowly grows up around us again.

Do you know, after twenty years, that lean-to is still there?

"Pull!" Their hands grasp the rope and their feet dig into the moist ground as the metal rake, almost twenty feet across, lumbers towards shore. When the rake finally emerges from the water, its tines are overflowing with weeds and black muck, reeking of decayed plant matter and fish. Grandpa Woods uses his pitchfork to dislodge the stinking mess, and I walk over to peer at the crayfish scurrying through the sludge, uselessly brandishing their claws at the giants lurking above them. Then, Grandpa and my Uncle Randy shove the giant rake back into the now-murky water and push it out until they can no longer touch the ground. Uncle Randy sits atop of it to weigh it down, and the process repeats itself. They are pulling out the weeds so swimmers will never feel the slithery tug of weeds on their toes, never encounter a feathery green plant in front of their noses as they kick through the water. This ritual occurs every summer, even now, but the weeds are never vanquished. During the winter, beneath the ice, they grow, nourished by the fertilizer that saturates the surrounding fields.

PARENTS

The thermometer registers fourteen degrees when the box from Cabella's lands on our front porch. A layer of frost forms over the tape, so when my dad uses his jack knife to cut it open, white flakes fall to the kitchen floor. He pulls out a long sleeping bag that looks more like a mysterious blue water snake than something to sleep in. This is a serious sleeping bag, a North Face, designed for winter frosts and storms. The temptation to sleep outside is too great; he and I strap on our cross-country skis and glide into the woods, to the oak groves northeast of the lake. Our skis squeak as they break through the snow. While my father sets up the green Kelty tent, laying our mummy bags atop sleeping pads that would in theory protect us from the cold snow beneath the tent, I lay sprawled in the snow, fanning out my arms and legs to leave the mark of a snow angel. That night, I crawl into his new winter camping bag, and he into one of his older sleeping bags, one not designed for cold weather. He has to wear all his clothes to bed. I wear only flannel pajamas with thick socks. My father's red nose is the only thing showing when I wake up in the morning because he has progressively been tightening his mummy bag around him throughout the night. I happily report that his winter camping bag lives up to the promises made in the catalog.

The day I graduate from high school is rainy, so the ceremony has to be held in the gym, instead of outside. That evening my mom and I go on a long

walk, past Kimberly Lake, through the cedar swamp, and across the fields to the old apple orchard. What matters that day is the red clay clinging to the soles of our shoes, the water squishing between our toes, the gray rain glazing our skin, the smell of worms in the air, the rock beneath my back as I lay down and look up through the gnarled branches of an apple tree too old to give apples.

Green Kelty tent again, this time by the lake, on the little piece of land that juts out a bit, almost, but not quite, forming a peninsula. The entire family crammed into the tent, Mom and Dad with my sister Michelle in between them, and me on the other side of Dad. We are all in mummy bags again, made out of sleek nylon that makes a loud "scrsh" noise whenever you move. We wake to the warmth of the July sun, and Dad reads to us from a Patrick McManus book, something about catching grasshoppers, and Michelle and I laugh hysterically, the air erupting with "scrsh's."

We walk, instead of ski, through the oak groves in August. My father heads the line, I follow closely, and my mother lags behind, trying to coax Michelle into walking a little bit faster. Michelle meanders, taking note in her young mind of the different plants growing on the ground, the indentation of deer hooves marring the path. I am watching her when his hand stops me, and I look down to see a squiggle in the sand, an orange stripe running down its back. We all squat to examine this creature no larger than an earthworm. He puts his hand on the ground and the swiveling snake crawls in, wiggling in the large palm. We smile and he releases it again, watching it form perfect letter S's.

SISTERS

Nymphs: Greek and Roman mythology. Any of numerous minor deities represented as maidens inhabiting and sometimes personifying features of nature such as trees, water, and mountains. Immortal, unless they leave their habitat.

My sister and I play "Fancy Dresses" until our fingers are shriveled and our noses permanently filled with the aroma of the lake. We prance down the dock on our tippy-toes, the sun-baked boards burning our feet, swaying our hips and tossing our hair, pretending that we're wearing ball gowns. For the moment we are girls who wear crimson lipstick and dark eyeliner, who sweep their hair up in elaborate up-dos, and who answer every question with, "I can't do tha-at. I might break a nail." We get

fully in character, saying things like, "Oh, don't I look beautiful? This dress cost a fortune, but I'm sure I'll look better than everyone." Inevitably, one of us "accidentally" falls off the dock, into the water, shrieking and lamenting the ruin of our hair, dress, and make-up–our beauty washed away. Just as inevitably, whichever one of us remains on the dock will get pulled into the water, screeches filling the summer air.

Green tent again, but a North Face. Barely enough room for even two people, but it's light and easy to fit into a backpack. Because of the wind, we pitch our tent in the pine forest, where we are protected from the gales whipping across the lake. This time our sleeping bags are noiseless, and our parents elsewhere. We are silent and for the first time in weeks, I am able to sleep, cuddled in pine needles and listening to the sound of branches dancing together above my head.

ENDINGS

> When the main characters of one's life die, is there any replacement? Or, is there anything *but* replacement? Mary Oliver, *Blue Pastures*

Did I forget to tell you that Great-grandma Orwig and I used to see Mickey Mouse playing in the lake whenever it rained? And that I went back to the cabin every day after school throughout my elementary years and she made me pancakes as big as my plate and let me drink coffee filled with sugar and milk? And that she let me cut her hair, even though I was only six years old? And that she would let me cook popcorn on the stove without a top so that the popcorn would rocket into the ceiling and come crashing down again onto the floor? Could I have forgotten to tell you these things?

Grandma quit seeing Mickey Mouse though, and the pancake griddle retreated to the back of the cupboard. She had cancer. She ceased then. Ceased to be a person, and instead was like snake grass growing in the fields, brittle green and hollow. She said little more than twenty words after she was diagnosed, even though she still had two years of life left. Three of those words were "I love you" on the night she died.

We don't read Patrick McManus in the green Kelty tent anymore. My parents' marriage ended when I graduated from high school. My father, foolish man, thought that because, after twenty years, this farm was part of his marrow he

could stay there, and that somehow the land that had been passed through the generations of my mother's family would be given to him. He lives in town now, on five acres. He has a back yard at least. Who's to say what is fair?

After the divorce, my mother's not sure she wants to spend the rest of her life living in the farmhouse alone. The house is old, and the repairs that need to be done would empty her bank account and then hurl her into debt. The foundation is sinking, the plumbing rusting, the walls need insulation. My great-grandfather added the bathroom, and unfortunately was no better at carpentry than he was at farming. The walls are crooked, the floor dips, and the ceiling is only six feet tall. The list of house repairs needed is endless. But her feet have been planted in this red clay for too many years, and she's not sure if she can be safely torn from the land. She worries that she will be like the velvety lilacs in the spring, their splendor withering as soon as they are taken from their home.

HERITAGE

The practicalities of passing it down are complicated. The house is in disrepair, and fixing it a mammoth undertaking. Jobs opportunities are sparse, making raising a family there a frightening proposition. It's been assumed that whichever daughter wanted to live there would get the house and the farm. The divorce has frightened my grandparents and mother though, so they are considering putting the farm in a sort of trust, where all family members would own the land, and most importantly, no one outside the family could take over ownership. As I watch my roots transform into legal documents, I am overwhelmed.

When I contemplate this inheritance, I consider what I would be inheriting. A house that probably should be torn down, a life in a town with dead-end jobs. There's something else though: two hundred acres that is home to blackberries and mushrooms and lilacs and frogs and deer and coyotes and owls and lady slippers and whip-poor-wills and blue herons and raccoons and dragon flies and earth worms and water snakes and poplars and birches and maples and milk weed, and for a short while, a few humans.

It is this "something else" that I will be inheriting. And that will be inheriting me.

Michelle and I have talked about it, and we have it all planned out. When we get old, and our husbands have passed on, we will move into the cabin

together. We will walk barefoot through the dew in the morning, and swim in the moonlight at night. We will grow a garden and feel the clay squishing between our toes when we pick our food. We will not comb our hair in the morning or shave our legs or apply crimson lipstick to our lips. We will be women of the wild, inheritors of this land and place.

Katie Davis: Audio Anatomy

Laura C. Tisdel

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While reviewing my notes for this interview, I was struck by how much was lost in the transcription of Katie's words. Her language lends itself easily to the ear, and its power—her authority, humor, and compassion—doesn't transfer perfectly to the page. As a radio essayist, Katie Davis has a unique sense of how to manipulate voice and the sounds she chooses make her stories compelling and human: like picking up a telephone receiver and hearing a private conversation, the listener feels an intimacy with her characters that depends on the cadence of a sigh, the release of laughter. Katie's work, her *Neighborhood Stories*, revolve around Adams Morgan, Washington D.C. where Katie grew up. Her pieces document the struggles and successes of everyday people through their own eyes; as author Katie is the mediator and translator of voice in her stories.

In an age when computer and television are dominant mediums, the definition of "text" seems constantly in flux. Radio essays have benefited from new technology—better recording and editing equipment—but have not lost their unique audio impact. On Saturdays as I am running errands or baking or flipping through the thick stack of *New York Times* that accumulate during

A special thanks to Vinay Prasad for accompanying me during the interview and with his help brainstorming questions.

the week, shows like *This American Life*, which often feature work by Katie Davis, transport me into the life of Julio, the teenager who is learning to read, to Katie's alley where her "World Banker" neighbor lets the garbage get carried off by fat rats, or to Jesse's high school where he is figuring out what it means to be a leader. My imagination weaves in and out of Katie's voices until her neighborhood is as clear to me as my hands on the steering wheel.

RCR: In your story *Trash* you seem to use the garbage as kind of a metaphor, to express social conscience. When you go into setting up a radio essay, do you find the subject first? It seems like all of your stories have a vehicle, a thematic vehicle. You don't say garbage is bad, it's ruining your sense of community, but that really comes across. How do you set that up?

KD: That's a really good question. When I finish all of this I'll have this kind of audio map of my neighborhood and the things that go on in my neighborhood—issues, the important things in the neighborhood. And I actually have this black notebook, it's one of those sketch notebooks, and I have long list of issues that I really feel are important for me to touch on at some point. And to be able to create this anatomy of the neighborhood, a map of the neighborhood. And I do look for the right vehicle. The garbage is one attempt and a very small attempt to begin to touch on the idea of gentrification and what it means. And I had written in big letters: gentrification. I'd been thinking about it for four years, and actually wrote one story and I killed it, it wasn't working, it was too big. So I thought, let me just chip away at it in small pieces.

RCR: What was the idea for that story?

KD: The idea was just to write an essay about how disturbed I am about gentrification, not that people shouldn't come and go in a neighborhood, but it was meaning on this one particular street, it's actually on the street behind me. The street used to have about two dozen African American families and they'd been there for about three generations, and they were losing their homes because they couldn't keep up with taxes in some cases, but then some people were being tempted into selling their houses. It wasn't a clear picture but I was just writing it and it was coming across kind of preachy. Even so I ended up submitting it to somebody. I did. I sent it to the Christian Science Monitor for their essay page and they rejected it. And I just put it aside and I thought, I'll just have to get back to this. And then the story, well I just

personally got really upset about the garbage, and it built over a month, and I was doing all these things to try to make overtures to these new neighbors of mine. I kept hitting a wall and then it just occurred to me that it had a lot to do with him not knowing me and other people, and not feeling that he needed to be accountable and that that was one thing that happened in gentrification: new people moved in. So that's how I chose that particular story. And I can wait for a couple years for a story to bubble up. Another way I told the gentrification story: I'd been observing in my community garden for years that there were emerging class tensions that there hadn't been 18 years ago.

RCR: Had they not been there because those different classes weren't there?

KD: Right. Our community garden looks raggedy. You wouldn't know it was a community garden, it looks kind of trashy and yet if you go in you'll see that the Salvadorans and Guatemalans and Caribbean people who grew up on farms were farming there. But it's messy. It's the farming of a poor *campesino* farmer. Not the way, frankly, I garden. I like a nice fence. I'm just going to have three types of flowers; I'm this orderly upper middle class gardener. So I noticed the tension there and that people were starting to fight over land. New people were coming in saying, "well I deserve a plot, why don't you divide his plot." But that *campesino* farmer, he actually eats the food in his plot so there started to be fights. So I do wait for stories to emerge. And the trash was one story that did that.

RCR: It sounds to me that writing is one form of activism for you. You have this list of things that you want to cover, not just because they're interesting to you but because you think that action needs to be taken. We were talking a lot about why you think the radio essay works better than, say, memoir writing. And one of the things we came up with was maybe that it's a little faster process. And because you're so active it allows you to do something and have that relate to the community and then go back and build on top of that effect.

KD: Okay there are a couple things in there. One is that you're right, the line between my activism and my community work and my writing work is very blurred and I can't always separate them. I almost never do something in my community, I would say never, because I think it will make a good story. But I often turn things that I'm doing in my community into stories and usually I wait a bit. When you say memoir, you mean a book? Longer form. First of

all I think I do radio because I became a writer in the medium of radio so it's how I learned how to write and I've been doing it now for so long that I'm at a good place in my craft with it. I know how to write a radio script. I'm learning how to do it in print, but right now I work in a medium because I'm comfortable in it and I can really achieve things in it. There is something to be said for the media seller. There's two types of stories that I do: one can be I can see something and I can be moved and horrified and I can write it and get it on the air in about three days. It's on the air and millions are listening to it. Many of my longer stories that have tape, like the garden story that I just described, or maybe *Trash*, I don't work on them for years. They begin with a scribbling and sometimes I'll end up telling the story three and four years later because the idea is emerging or sometimes the story has to unfold a little bit more.

RCR: What about writing the longer essay about Jesse?

KD: Jesse took a year. But I knew there was a beginning and an end to Jesse because I was going to use the framework of a year. So there is an immediacy in radio that there isn't to a book, but I do think I'll write a book. I can't even see it in my head, but maybe three or four years from now I'll have enough material from the neighborhood that I could write a compelling book for someone who isn't from my neighborhood. But I don't feel in any hurry to write a book.

RCR: How do the stories that you write go back and affect the neighborhood? Not just as far as the activism goes, but these people's personalities that you use over and over again. Have the dynamics with these people changed?

KD: Well, that's interesting. I still don't think that when people see me coming they think, "Uh oh, be quiet." Even if I don't have a mike. I think that they still think of me as Katie their neighbor and the first thing they want to ask me is what's going on with this in the park, and what's happening here, and can you believe that this happened. But it has affected the neighborhood in some ways. When I wrote the story about Jesse, there's just a couple sentences in it about how that corner that he grew up on is an open-air drug market. Now we all know it in the neighborhood, everyone knows it. But when that aired on NPR it upset a lot of homeowners on that street and it triggered a crack down on the drug market, a big crack down. So it's not necessarily a bad thing…

RCR: So would you consider the affects of your work as positive or negative then? Are the affects only negative when you don't intend your piece to have an affect?

KD: I'd do anything to help get rid of that drug market but what's negative is that the people on that street couldn't see it themselves, or that they were able to dismiss it. It had to almost be named by someone in the media for them to get the police to respond to it, whereas it was something I knew in my bones and I had been working with some people trying to get the kids off the corner. The other negative thing was that it just lasted a couple weeks and then there wasn't another initiative, although I worked with another activist to have a different kind of initiative, and instead of sending the police and cracking down and really harassing the dealers, we set up a basketball tournament in the middle of that street and the drug buyers couldn't come down. They usually drive down, so the street was kind of closed for five weeks every Friday night this summer. But in a positive way. And that was something I did with Brian. I thought that was a better way to try to shift things. And we had the cops out there, but it wasn't our only point of contact with the young men, the drug dealers, who half of them I know. Not well, but I do know them and they know me because of things that I've done in the neighborhood. So that's one impact. That's the best example. There are always sort of small impacts. About the cursed storefront? That just got a lot of people talking to each other in the neighborhood and that was fun. I'd walk outside and everyone wanted to know and talk about that storefront and how did I find out those things, and now there's kind of running conversation about how you think the Starbucks is going.

RCR: The neighborhood characters are what make some of these pieces. When they become characters, certainly a little differently than they are in your real life, how do they react? It sounds like people tune in to hear the stories about the neighborhood.

KD: They mostly hear them accidentally. It's funny. They will have known for years that I'm on the radio, but that's not in any consistent way. But *This American Life* is listened to in a different way so I'll just be driving down the street and someone will say, "I never knew you worked on the radio and I heard that story." So often at first they're not tuning in, they just happen to be listening to that show and all of the sudden they hear something about their own community and they enjoy it.

RCR: And so those people who become characters…

KD: Oh I tell them ahead of time.

RCR: Are there mixed feelings? Have you ever had someone say, "I can't believe you portrayed me that way?"

KD: That's a really good question. Sid, the storeowner, loved it. Sid is a grouch and I was kind of afraid of Sid. I would go in and I would think, okay I am not mentioning the parking lot debate right now because he'll yell, he'll yell at you. There are certain times that I just didn't have it in me to have that discussion with him. So I was always a little remote from Sid. But once I did that piece we became friendlier and he's actually started to smile at me, he used to never smile. So I figure he just trusts me and that he was happy with how he was portrayed. Tiny's reaction is pretty good, a little begrudging, like, "I'm not sure if that was quite right." But he basically liked it. No one has really come to me and said, "I was horrified by what you did." Did you hear the story about the recovering heroin addict? He was somebody in the neighborhood and he had been a pretty outrageous heroin addict and he had been in prison. I was trying to describe him and I did a twenty-minute piece for *This American Life*. He has really bad teeth and that is one of the affects of heroin because you vomit after you take it every time and that rots your teeth. It's hideous so I thought that would be a good fact to tell. But I put it in the story and this guy Bobby, I told him I was going to put it in and he was upset. And I said, "I have to be honest Bobby, this is honest." But then Ira, my editor, took it out. He said, "Why are you being so mean to him?" And he took it out. So, sometimes your editor helps you. And retrospectively, I didn't need it. Bobby said the really brutal things about himself. And I try to let people say that stuff. So I think they enjoy it. Some people I've done pieces about and I give them tape or a CD and I don't even know if they listen to it. It's just not something they comment on.

RCR: In Jesse's story you asked if he sees himself changing and he said, "yeah, even in this interview right now I see myself changing." As a listener you see how aware he was. And how did he end up feeling about that?

KD: No, you're right. Jesse was very aware. And our first interview was kind of tense and withholding. But that was okay. I'd known Jesse, so I knew him, but I'd never had a lot of conversation with him. It was mostly, "yes, Katie,

okay I'm coming to basketball practice." But Jesse was very aware when I followed him around on campus. The first scene where you catch him at school, he was getting into trouble. And I put that in, I didn't think twice about it because I knew that it was very telling and in the end Jesse did okay in that situation. I was very worried that he would think that me following him around made him even more of a golden child, you know how he mentioned that? Just too special and precious, too different from his friends who haven't gone anywhere, but at the Hyde campus he liked it, it was fun and it gave him a kind of attention. When it aired I was really worried that he would be kind of freaked out and all kinds of people would try to contact him. And people did but we screened it. He let the school play it at a school assembly for four hundred people and I would have never predicted he would want that. But he did. So I think for Jesse it's been a way to chart his growth and to chronicle it for him, but also for others. For others to know. You just don't forget what he's been through, he's been through a lot. I'm going to go do a follow up on Jesse this May and it'll be interesting. I held something back which I think that I can tell you guys, and this is a choice that journalist might not normally make, but I knew Jesse, I worried about him. The fact that I held back was that his father had killed his mother and then killed himself and Jesse had witnessed it and seen it when he was little. And he didn't speak for something like three years. That's a very powerful thing, and it would say so much about Jesse but I felt like no, he's not ready, when he's ready to tell that part of the story he'll either tell me in the mike or he won't. And I don't think we have to know that. But it was an interesting decision. I didn't even ask him, I just thought we didn't need it. I did ask him if he wanted to just be Jesse or I said, "we could call you J, so you could be more anonymous." But he said, "no, call me Jesse Jean." I think sometimes getting interviewed; it's a way for people to be known in a community, not just my immediate community but also to know themselves because people always ask you something that you hadn't thought about before. When Jesse graduates I am going to give him all of the tape, it'll be like twenty hours, and if he ever wants to listen to how he changed, well, by the end he sounded like a nerd almost!

RCR: His voice had changed so much.

KD: I know, and now it's even more. He's just so tall and he always wears a suit and tie, a jacket and tie.

RCR: In the piece on the camp, it's interesting how you've come to meet some of these people in your neighborhood and I wonder is it always through your work in the community, or has anyone ever approached you and sought guidance? How about with the story *Julio Can't Read*?

KD: Well both things happen. I meet people just sitting on the porch, but then as I start to do projects—running camp or a basketball tournament, that's how I met Jesse, through an annual basketball tournament. That was very important to Jesse. It became a ritual in the summer, and he didn't have any other particular rituals except 4th of July family picnic. But people do approach me, both adults and young people. Just ten days ago the grandmother of one of the kids who'd been on one of my basketball teams came and said, she's like 89, and she doesn't speak English, and she said, "I think I'm going to get evicted, can you help me?" And I'm thinking oh my God of course I can help her, I know how to help her, but it's so much work and it might fail. So I'm feeling all of these conflicting things. Mostly kids know how to contact me. I think in this case this little boy Ricardo said, "Grandma go talk to her, I've seen her help people."

RCR: That must feel amazing.

KD: Well, it's overwhelming because, it's amazing when it's simple. Like if somebody comes and says my son died unexpectedly and I don't have money for the funeral, I can find money for the funeral. Either in my youth group I can just pull it out or I can get people in the neighborhood to donate money. But things that are bigger like a Grandma losing her home, and that's because of gentrification, it's overwhelming because I might not be able to help her. And I am taking the steps, and it just tears me up when I can't succeed at it. So every now and then I'll say no just because I know it's a heart breaker. But I don't too much. So people do search me out. This older woman, I don't know if I'll ever write about her. The way I work is not that I will say, "wow, I'm going to write an essay this week about how condo conversions are hurting older senior citizens who only live on four hundred dollars a month." But someday down the road it could be woven into a piece.

RCR: The idea of rituals seems to work itself into your life a lot: the bike shop was one, and the basketball tournament you set up, and the camp. How necessary is the idea of ritual to your activism?

KD: I thought when I first started all of this that the impact would be instantaneous. But I've come to realize that the impact comes out as the kids get older, like in their twenties. My first generation of young people are now twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three. But I do think there is a daily, a kind of smaller impact, which is that they have a place to go and that it's not just a place to go but that it's like I said in the camp piece, my goal is to kind of create this extended family. It doesn't all revolve around me; my brother's part of it and my friend Brian is part of it, he and I did the basketball tournament on the street to drive out the drug dealers, Tiny, the new guy named Andre, and there's myself, my Mom, I looped my Mom into this. What happens though is that they're not in camp and they're not at the basketball court, but they'll see my brother drive down the street going to work, and my brother will stop and touch base with them. They'll run into Andre and Andre will say, "I thought you were trying to lose weight, why are you drinking that frapaccino?" When I'm out of town the kids might go by and see my Mom and my Mom will look at them and say, "are you guys hungry?" She'll make them something and that it is what I think a community should be: we all hold all the kids, and fragile people, older people too. But that there is a kind of constant holding. And the other way you hold is that you walk by, and you hear a kid cursing, and you say, "now do you really think you should be using that kind of language on the street? Out in public?" or "pull your pants up."

RCR: You're creating this sense of neighborhood responsibility.

KD: Right, right. And that we are this sort of extended family and we will, as the kids say, have each other's back. And in a good way and in a tough way, asking them to be accountable. Some of the kids are in college now and I didn't think that I knew them that well, but they've come back and showed me their art work, they want to come in the house and tell me about what they're doing at college and I'm sitting there thinking, who knew? Oliver hardly ever said anything to me. I thought he was disgusted with me half of the time. Or who thought that I was a big part of Leander's life. Some kids I'm really close to, but others are coming back and touching base the way that someone might with a teacher or a professor or an aunt. That's incredibly gratifying. Every body needs somebody to say, that's neat what you're doing. Very few kids, African American and Latino kids, even make it through high school, much less college.

RCR: Switching gears a little bit, do you pick the sounds for your radio essays? For instance, the sound of the trampoline springs in *Julio Can't Read*, did you have any say in that?

KD: The music I don't pick, all of the sounds I pick.

RCR: Has being a radio essayist made you hear sounds differently? I'd never have seen how that sound could have an effect, and then when the essay ends with just that sound of the springs it's so haunting.

KD: Absolutely. I mean I'm always listening and very aware of the sound of a room or sound that might capture a moment. There wasn't a lot of sound in that piece, he spoke in that piece but there wasn't too much sound. When I heard that he went up to Leigh's to bounce on the trampoline I said, well I want to come, I'm going to come one day. So one day when he was going up to visit his tutor, Leigh, I went. I know Leigh quite well and I just thought this is the metaphor for his situation: he's trying to bounce and get his energy off and take off and go some place, and we'll see what happens. So I'm always listening. Some of my pieces don't have too much sound. Of course *The Store Front* didn't. In face I kind of failed on that. But in the piece about the recovering heroin addict who was teaching little league to kids I went to every practice, there were like twenty, and I recorded sound and the sound of Bobby teaching them how to play baseball and getting frustrated at them was just great. It says so much about him. At one point he throws a bat bag against the wall.

RCR: When you switch to an interview voice, how do you know when to do that? When you go to Leigh talking about how surprised she was and what a challenge tutoring Julio was for her, how do you decide when to switch to that interview voice?

KD: I'd known Julio since he was about six and fallen in love with him. So actually for someone like Leigh to meet him as a young adolescent, I think maybe he was fourteen, it was interesting to me to see, to hear her perceptions because first of all they confirmed that there was some kind of spark in him and an openness. Just to be able to have another person say it I just think made the portrait of him richer, more complex. Leigh and I kind of trade off about him. I say, "you talk to him, I cannot talk to him." And then she'll call up and say, "I'm at a dead end," and I'll say, "well I had a great talk with him

yesterday." I'm very sorry to say that he's dropped out of school and he's in a gang and it's crushing. I'm trying really hard to stay connected to him and I'm doing okay, but I'm horrified by some of the things he tells me. He was shot, and he recovered. Maybe an accident. I don't know. He's not in a good place at all, and I'm worried about him. And I have asked whether or not he wants to sit down with me and talk, I probably couldn't do a piece right away, emotionally. But for him. Because that interview, that whole interview that I used some of the clips from, in his case—Julio will say anything to me—but in his case when I put on the mike he was saying his piece, it was important to him to have that on tape. And every now and then he'll say, "so do you want to interview me and one of my gang friends?" No, not really. But I don't say that. I say, "yes, of course I would. I'd prefer to just interview you."

"Well I want Sleepy to come," he'll say.

"Well okay we could do it that way if you feel better, ok." But he wants to hear it. And he liked the piece.

RCR: Did that piece have any effect on the school? You were saying that the other piece had the effect of bringing the police in but it sounds like maybe the education board would hear Julio's story and make an exception for him.

KD: No it didn't. I'm trying to think. Somebody wrote me and had found some super duper way to teach him how to read really quickly. I didn't want Julio to be exposed to more people and fail. And so I really was trying to interview the guy pretty thoroughly to see if he had a program. And in talking to that guy, he seemed flaky to me and so I chose not to introduce Julio to him. And it's basically been just Leigh and me. He was in school this fall, but we'll see. I had kind of lost hope. Sometimes they just have a bad couple of years and then when they're twenty they kind of turn out.

RCR: You have said that when you were doing traditional journalism, you felt like a fraud. What really took you to the role you have now? How did you get involved? You say you got involved and started learning writing through the radio essay but what was the process?

KD: When I started I was really interested in international news and when I was a senior in college the Nicaraguan revolution had just happened, there was a war in El Salvador, there was a long Civil War in Guatemala. I was interested in Latin America so I had this idea that I would eventually go

down and cover these things and that's what I wanted to be. I wanted to be a foreign correspondent, just the classic foreign correspondent in khaki clothes, running in and writing an amazing story, sending it back, changing the world instantaneously. I knew I wasn't just going to walk out of college and do that, but that's what I was moving towards.

RCR: So you were a journalism major?

KD: No, I studied Latin American Studies. And I learned about radio at my college radio station. And at my college radio station, I wasn't doing essays, I was reading news from El Salvador to the people, and interviewing the new Nicaraguan ambassador to the United Nations, and studying the different social movements in Latin America. That was a big story the way that Iraq is big now, Central America was huge and if you had a kind of international political interest, that's where you gravitated. So I gravitated there. And that international interest stayed for a long time. I became a free lancer but every time I could do a serious story somewhat related to my topic I would. Like a Chilean artist came and had painted this Chilean political art; so I'd do a piece about that but I'd be talking about Pinochet the dictator and the disappearances. And then I got to NPR and I couldn't be such a specialist so I broadened my circle and I became very interested in Africa and South Africa and I would do pieces that I could do from the United States, like historical pieces, pieces about Mandela being in jail. Then I became a foreign producer, and then, I'm just going to speed forward, I was in a lot of countries and I covered big breaking news stories: Gorbachev in Russia and the fall of the Czechoslovakian Communist government, and I thought, okay I'm ready to be a reporter. I sent myself down to Mexico for two years, and I was finally doing what I wanted to do. I really enjoyed it and then I came back, just for job reasons I had to come back to Washington, so I decided I wanted to cover urban affairs, I would take my expertise and cover urban affairs, i.e. inter-city issues. And this is when I began to feel like a fraud. I was living in Washington, I'd go to work at like seven, I'd work until eight or nine at night, I worked six or seven days a week. And I would cover these issues about schools, and crime, and illiteracy, and addiction but it was all kind of in this vacuum and I didn't live anywhere. I didn't have my hands in the ground. One time these cops, I was doing a story about guns, and these cops said, "okay we're going to take you to the worst neighborhood in the city for guns." And I was like, great. And I had my mike and they were telling me stuff, and all of the sudden it was like, dang, they're in my neighborhood and

I didn't know. I didn't know guns were an issue. I had no idea why a kid might have a gun, which I can understand now, I don't agree with it but I understand the thinking. I had no idea, and I just felt like I was sort of dropping in and out of people's lives. And for me it felt fraudulent. I'm not saying that it is and there are some great brilliant reporters that cover beats and they do drop in and out of stories. But I didn't want to do that anymore. And that combined with some other decisions I made about my life at NPR and the kinds of stories I wanted to do. So that's why I changed.

RCR: So did you just apply for a job at NPR? That seems like a hard thing to break into.

KD: It is, it is. Although there are definite ways to do it. I started at my college radio station and I learned some basics; cutting tape was an important skill. After about a year of that, my mother had a friend that worked at NPR and I said, "Mom, tell her I'm calling." So I called up: hey I know how to do this stuff, you know me, hire me. And she just said, "I can't do that. You don't know anywhere near what you need to know to be hired. But we'll take freelance pieces from you." I was a little chagrined that I couldn't get a summer job, but I thought okay, I can do this. And I actually invested in a tape machine that cost $250 in 1979 and a microphone that cost $50, which was a lot. It was my Christmas money. And I bought a machine and I started trying to do pieces. So I did that for about three years while I was still in college and then the first year after college I couldn't find a job that I liked so I just decided to freelance. I did that for about a year or two and then there was an entry-level job open at NPR but I had compiled enough little stories that when I applied they knew who I was. They were like, oh that's the young woman up in New York, she's been doing some pieces for us, she might be okay. And I beat somebody out who was more experienced than me. It was painful, but I did. And then once I was there I was just a sponge. I was on staff, and I did a lot of my foreign "period." I'll just tell you one story. I was in Mexico and I was trying to convince the powers that be at NPR that I had to be a really great foreign news correspondent. So I was covering Free Trade, which was hideously complicated and boring to me, but I was doing an okay job at it and doing some other okay stories, but about every three weeks I'd just get kind of pulled outside with my mike. There would be a sound in the *plaza* where I lived and I started doing stories about sounds in the neighborhood in Mexico and sounds of the bells, and really writing the kinds of stories I write now. And I would just sort of slip them

in as an aside. I did a story about a telephone operator who, when I would call to make foreign calls, which I called like twenty times a day, knew me. There were that few operators. And she would say, "hello, where are you calling today?" All of this in Spanish, and it was hilarious. I recorded her. She'd say, "Katie, what are you filing? Is it a deadline? Do I have to rush?" And so I put that on the air. I can still run into people who know that I lived in Mexico and they will talk to me about that story. So I was beginning to find out what really touched people and what really stayed with people, at least for me. And so I think I was starting to do neighborhood stories in Mexico. I studied Latin American studies and I only took two writing classes. But I was writing by the time I was a freshman, I was writing out at the college radio station. I'm not saying I was good, nobody critiqued it, but I was writing all the time.

RCR: What about the lawsuit against NPR? We read a couple articles and the lawsuit itself is almost not what we're interested in. What we're interested in is the fact that you still work for NPR. The gist that we were getting from the articles is that you felt that you wanted a more permanent role, and it still doesn't really seem like you have one. How has your situation there changed and how did you reconcile that with yourself and with them?

KD: You're right, I did want a more permanent role. It was that and it was also that they were not offering me equal pay for equal work. So that was our dispute. When they were finally willing to put me on staff they wanted to put me on as an entry-level reporter. At that point I had anchored the weekend news for two years so that seemed absurd. I just couldn't swallow what they were offering me. By the time I got to NPR, if you count when I went as a freelancer, I'd worked there for fifteen years. So this was a place that had groomed me, taught me things, sent me over seas, let me anchor a national news program during an election—I was their next generation. And it was appalling to me that they wouldn't treat me fairly. So I drew an implied line in the sand and I would not go over it and some people asked me to, they said, "just take what they're offering, it will get better down the road." And I just couldn't do it. So I sued them and they settled, which means they paid me money and they paid my lawyers fees. I wasn't on NPR for four years, I thought I'd actually never be on it again, I thought I had sort of shot my career in the foot in some way. I mean you could look at it that way. It turned out that a lot of the people at NPR, not the management supported me and they asked me to come back as a freelancer. I'm not on permanently.

RCR: And maybe that works well for the kind of life you lead now.

KD: That's what it is. If the lawsuit had never happened I'd be at NPR, I'm pretty sure I'd be there. I'd be some sort of roving reporter but I would not be doing what I'm doing now. So it led me into a couple things: the community work, and this more creative writing that I would have never had the freedom or even the mental space to find. So I'm pretty happy with it and I'm pleased that they invited me back on because it's a terrific outlet for my work.

RCR: Was there a time of awkwardness?

KD: Oh, horrible! I don't have a desk there, I almost never go there. I've only started going there to record my voice lately. And it's not so awkward anymore but it was horrible before, I mean I used to feel like, how am I going to get through this? To go in there? And I would sort of dart in there with sunglasses. But what happened was that 99% of the people who saw me would just give me a big hug and they were pleased I was back, and some of them would say, "good for you, you were right." They hadn't said it in the intervening years, but they would say it now. So I feel fine. I've said this before but I think it describes it the best: we went to war, we had almost a divorce, but often down the road divorced people can sit down and have coffee together. It's okay. We will never be married again.

RCR: There had been similar lawsuits before but they didn't get as much publicity as yours. Did you make a conscious choice about that? To really put it out there?

KD: No. There were several other lawsuits, they were always settled before the people left NPR and they were settled by giving them the equal pay. I can name six really well known people, women, who were paid less than men and then when they got the lawyer and challenged NPR, NPR hemmed and hawed, but they went okay, okay we're going to give you what your co-host is making who happens to be male. And these women were the ones who told me about the lawyer, so I went to their lawyer, and I felt that's what would happen to me. But something shifted, there was something in this case that NPR was tired of being pressured this way, and I really thought it would be settled. I didn't think I'd leave. But then when it came down to it and these people were telling me, "yeah, you've done the same amount of work, yeah, you've been here longer than so and so who's a man, but no we

can't pay you that. You're not that good." There's a law. And here's this place; it was like your parents turning on you. I'd been raised there. It was astonishing to me that it could happen. But it was a good lesson not just about NPR, it's a good lesson about life and our culture and for me a very good lesson about standing up for myself. It was maybe the hardest thing I've ever done. And I did lose friends, and I did lose career options. But I didn't want to stay and feel bitter and angry and screwed over. And there's this delightful thing that they were like, oh three years has passed, come on back. It works.

RCR: Well I bet there's a whole community of kids who are glad that you had the time to get involved with them.

KD: Oh yeah. And I was definitely shifting. I mean who knows what would have happened to me at NPR. I might have been like my friend Ira and left and done something different. You just don't know. That was an unexpected turn in the road but it took me to an interesting place. So I don't regret it certainly, it's in a kind of perspective now.

RCR: You said you were raised in the area that you live in now, as a Caucasian you were a minority. And yet the people of your neighborhood are your family: you've overcome some boundaries. How was it growing up, moving on to college, and then coming back and doing what you're doing now?

KD: This is an interesting question because I think it has a lot to do with who I am. My mom didn't have custody of us and she asked for custody back. We'd been living in Virginia in a totally white suburb with my father, in a suburb where people used the "N" word. We didn't use it, but I think that if I'd stayed I might have grown up doing that. But my mom wanted us back, and she had been kind of disorganized, but she got a job and rented a house in this, really it was a ghetto. And when we first moved into it, it was very tough. It was primarily black, a few Latino families. And working class whites, you know the real working class whites like mom is a secretary, or I knew this kid Bobby and his mom was a bartender, my mom's best friend Barbara worked at a book store as an accountant. So imagine a street that's kind of small, people are crammed into row houses, maybe three families in a row house. At this point my mother has a boyfriend and he's African American. So I mean do we fit? Do we not? I don't know. That he's black is not so weird to me, but he's a truck driver, that's really weird to me that my

mom has a boyfriend like that. My father was doing odd jobs, but he'd grown up in a pretty upper class family. So I grew up in the street. Because I was white I got beat up sometimes. When I was young. But once you had kind of layed down some roots in the neighborhood and people kind of knew you…I'd played football with the boys on the street, I was a tomboy. Real tough kids might watch out for you. And it wasn't so bad. Elementary school was just beautiful and terrific, it was real mixed. But when I went to seventh grade, which was a bigger school, I began to feel picked on. Girls set my hair on fire, I had long hair. Yucky stuff. And it wasn't really helping that people were protecting me. And my mom put me in a private school, I went on a scholarship. And she put my brothers in an alternative preschool, this was '72 so everybody's being really free form. But because I grew up in this real mixed neighborhood, I've been able to be open to more stuff—in myself and in others. And I think that's a part of my work, this coming home and situating myself again.

You can listen to stories by Katie Davis by visiting *This American Life* at www.thislife.org or NPR's *All Things Considered* at www.npr.org

Woman in Alley: Adams Morgan, Washington D.C. © 2004 Shawn Davis

An Afternoon in Rome

David Sapp

When coincidence gave us
an afternoon in Rome
it didn't occur to me
to mislay our ages,
before my graying head
vanished around a corner,
before your lithe form rushed
headlong into life;
now I wish we might
have risked one kiss,

an impulsive urge
in the Forum, shoulders grazing
in a fragment of shade
on a remnant of temple
overlooking the ruins
of the *House of the Vestal Virgins*,
your soft figure making
the sharp stones harsher;

a pause on our walk where the columns
of Trajan's basilicas once rose,
where the previous day
when you were frightened,
fending off a gypsy girl
yanking at your tote:
a quiet, unhurried kiss,
a lingering, consoling embrace;

in the Magritte exhibition,
our cheeks and fingers nearly
touching, peering into each,

curious, disconcerting canvas,
our parting lips perplexed
in a peculiar, electric landscape;

in the *Gesu`* church,
our hearts like giddy kids
dashing from a sudden,
clamorous downpour
into the thick, abrupt
and silent, gilded chaos
of unrestrained Baroque;
a shy and tentative kiss,
feigned awkward innocence
in a forbidden holy place;

in the dark *Palazzo Venezia*,
where Caravaggio's luminous bodies
burst from shadowed walls,
a kiss in a dim tenebristic passage,
muted rain and desire echoing
from high frescoed ceilings;
oh, we could not stop
at your lips! I'd find
the corners of your eyes,
the supple hollow of your throat,
my face lost in your disheveled hair;

or when I pleaded
for one more painting
in *San Luigi dei Francesi*,
waiting on the steps for our doors to open,
scooping fruity *gelato*
to cool our tongues;
if we kissed then,
after the storm passed,
the sun reappearing,
our moods buoyant,
we would have laughed,
our mouths sticky.

Coveting

Scott Larner

The winter dusk was fading, and I could see snow falling in the halos of the courtyard lamps through the sliding glass door as I walked into the apartment. I set my suitcase down, and sat on the couch in the dark, looking at outlines of posters on the opposite wall. I was tired. It was the Friday before classes started again and I had just gotten back from a two-day trip with my mother to Evanston to see her sister. It had been a five-hour drive home.

The light on the answering machine was blinking. Brian had left a message.

Alexis, sorry I didn't call sooner. Your dad said you were out of town 'til today. I'll try and call later.

Brian was a friend of mine from high school. He was tall, with a soft, warm handshake and liquid movements that washed over his body eroding the sharpness of his masculinity. He had shy hands, hands practiced in prayer, never reaching out to make casual contact with the skin on my arms, or touch my back, or grab my shoulders to give awkward aggressive massages. Though sometimes, in the past, I had wished they would have.

He went to Pinedale Bible College in Indiana, and he usually called to ask me to breakfast when he came home. It was a tradition we had started our senior year in high school when he was the president and I was the vice president of the honors society. We met for breakfast every other Saturday then. A middle-aged man, a member of Brian's church, owned the restaurant we went to, and most of the patrons were elderly couples. He always knew their names, and would ask them about their weeks. I would stand next to him smiling. When we went to our table Brian would always help me take off my coat, and pull out the chair, and I felt like we were one of those old couples in the restaurant. It felt nice. Normally, on Christmas break, he called in-between Christmas day and New Year's Day; I felt slightly disappointed when I left with my mom on the second for Evanston. But there was the message on the machine. It surprised me how good I felt when I heard his voice. I pushed the button again.

Alexis, sorry I didn't call sooner. Your dad said you were out of town 'til today. I'll try and call later.

2003 Jim Cash Fiction Award, Second Place

I laid down on the couch, and fell asleep with my coat on.

The phone woke me up. It was Brian. His voice was nervous, breathy. He said hello, paused, and then questioningly added my name. "Alexis?" Alexis he always said, never Alex.

"Why don't you call me Alex?" I asked. I thought I could hear him smile on the other end of the line.

"I like Alexis… it's pretty."

"I guess."

"Alexis," he said again letting the 'x' and the 's' roll. "Who wouldn't want to say Alexis?"

"Everyone calls me Alex."

Brian laughed, and changed the subject, asking general questions about my life. The nervousness was absent now from his voice. He talked with music in his words, like an actor. Or a preacher.

"What I was wondering…" Brian said, clearing his throat. "What I was actually calling for…one of my friends is having a post-Christmas, post-New Year, pre-back to school kind of get together, for some of his friends, and it's tomorrow. So, I was wondering; would you like to accompany me?"

I told him I would. I told him I would without even thinking. The phone was hung up before I thought about it at all.

Why had Brian asked me to a party? We could've just gone to breakfast tomorrow morning. We always just went to breakfast; maybe I would rather just go to breakfast. When we went to breakfast in high school we would talk like we were close, tell each other what we were thinking about, what we planned on doing, but we never did anything else. He had asked once if I wanted to go to church with him, but I told him that I didn't do that kind of thing.

I remember the first time I really noticed Brian. He was leading a circle of kids in a prayer outside of the school by the flagpole. They were holding hands, and, in the cold I could see little puffs of condensing breath escaping from their synchronized lips. I couldn't hear their words, just the rhythm of the prayer growing and fading like the hum from an old fluorescent light. The faces in the prayer circle looked like the faces of the other kids standing outside the school in the cold; there was no gold tint in the little puffs of prayer breath. Brian, though, looked different. He looked pious and sincere, his eyes closed, his body ridged and firm, enforced with determined faith. I remembered that moment when he asked me to go to church, and every moment when I thought that I would be brave and ask him to go somewhere

with me, to take me someplace other than breakfast. I was terrified by the seriousness in that face.

I wondered if he had decided not to call me this vacation, but felt guilty at the last moment. He was so nice to people that sometimes it felt cold. Being with Brian was like being in a lake at night in the summer, when the air was colder than the water, and you knew that the only way to stay warm was to stay submerged. Was I making up the cold I felt in his invitation now? Maybe I would call him back and ask why he decided to take me to this party instead of to breakfast like normal, why he had waited so long to call? But I didn't; instead I turned the kitchen light on, and started to make dinner.

When Brian knocked on my apartment door the next day I was putting on lipstick. It wasn't my custom to wear lipstick or the tight jeans and shirt I borrowed from my roommate's drawer. I thought though that I would change my custom this one time, like Brian had changed his custom; make him wonder about what I was doing, the way I was wondering about what he was doing. When I opened the door he gave no indication that he even noticed, just a polite how-are-you and a smile. No contact. No hug. Brian's hand did seem colder than usual. He was nervous, or maybe it was just cold outside. I grabbed my coat, and walked by his side down the stairs to his old white car feeling awkward in the stupid clothes, and wishing I could be back in my room.

I picked up a map off the passenger seat and sat down in the car. There was a pile of books and papers separating me from Brian. At first I thought they were books from his last semester, but they were bible school manuals. "I'm teaching fourth graders at the church." He said.

"That's nice." I straightened my coat.

"I've been doing it down in Indiana, too." The radio was playing music that sounded like standard radio pop, guitars, drums, and over done vocals, but I didn't recognize the song. It must have been a religious station; 101 the Power, 93.7 the Light. I had seen the bumper stickers. Brian turned it down so that we could hear each other.

"How have your classes been going?" Brian asked, and we talked about school and classes around pauses in the conversation. The heater was blowing directly at me, and I turned the vent away.

Brian told me that he had to take three more engineering classes so that he could graduate in May. "I don't know about it though, Alexis. Engineering, I mean. I spent two weeks this past semester in Boston. Witnessing on the street. You know. Telling people about the word of God. It was amazing the people that you meet, and the stories they tell you about

the way God works in their lives. It was incredible. I think I might want to do something like that. All the time. For a living." I didn't answer him. I thought about him standing on a street in a big city, randomly talking to people who passed by. I couldn't imagine what Boston looked like, but I imagined it as cold. Brian looked like he did all those years ago when I saw him by the flagpole. I still couldn't hear what he was saying.

"So…" he said, but his sentence died, as he read the green highway sign telling us we were five miles from our exit.

My hands feel like late October leaves against the paper of the map. The map was just a clutter of crossing lines with "the Miller's" scribbled in pen across the top of the page. The fan from the heater made the only noise in the car. I looked at Brian, tracing the lines of his face. His eyes wavered, but stayed straight ahead, like he was deliberately trying not to look back at me. "This is going to be great," he said.

We got off the highway and Brian drove down a country road that traced forgotten property boundaries through a mismatched collection of cornfields and ranch houses. I set down the map and looked out the window at the houses with aluminum siding and aluminum swing sets. The seats from the swing sets were buried and the rusted chains hung limp, dying into the stale piles of deep snow. They looked like normal subdivision houses, but instead of being patterned and crammed together like tulips in an old lady's garden they were scattered randomly like windblown weeds.

"What's the map say?" Brian tried to look down without taking his eyes off of the snow-covered roads.

I picked up the map again. "It's after the next bend. On the left. You've never been here?"

"Just once. I know these people from church."

"Oh," I had never considered that these people would be people from church. I was nervous now that maybe this was more a trap than a party. Was I like one of the people in Boston, brought to the middle of nowhere to hear the pitch, a girl to be passed around from smiling face to smiling face, sucked into the warmth of family and Christian values like a fly into tree sap? Would there be bibles scattered around, maybe the little ones, like the old men with gray double breasted suits and bald heads, passed out on the corners of the streets at school every fall and spring? Would there be group prayers with phrases like we thank you for the guests you've brought us here to day, oh Lord, and help us in our quest to spread your word, oh Lord, and yours in the true way, Oh Lord, may it come to be to all your children under the sun? Blessed art thou. Oh Lord. Amen.

The car pulled into a long unpaved driveway.

Amen, I thought.

The Miller's house was not one of the subdivision weed houses. It was an old farmhouse with real wood panel siding painted dark red, a large barn that hovered over the back left corner, and a large sign offering tractor and small engine repair in the front yard. We must have been early because there was only one other car in the driveway, and it was covered with the couple inches of snow that had fallen last night. I began to feel uncomfortable as I shuffled along the icy driveway after Brian. I wrapped my arms around my body, trying to stay buried beneath my coat as Brian knocked on the door, above which hung a wooden sign with "The Miller's" carved in tall black cursive letters.

A kid with a boyish smile that Brian introduced as Matthew led us inside. "Mom and dad are at the store getting some things," Matthew said. "Mark and Luke went to pick up some people, and Christine is with Barry, so I guess I'll have to be your host for a while." Matthew was polite, and likeable, without being charming like Brian. His wide clear eyes seemed somewhat empty, constantly looking out the window towards the cornfield as he talked. The words sounded static coming out of his mouth, like they had been memorized, rehearsed over and over, like the piano music I had learned as a girl. He wasn't tall but he looked strong, and his handshake was rough, the way I imagined a farmer's handshake to be. I decided that I liked him. He seemed comfortable, benign.

The back wall of the room was top to bottom glass, and the old coarse tile floor made it seem more like a closed in porch than a room in a house. There was a staircase of about six or seven steps, and along the adjacent wall hung a large crucifix and a series of black and white photographs of the farmhouse. Matthew saw me looking at the pictures. "My great-great-great grandfather built this house. The first picture was taken in 1869, but I think that they lived here for a couple of years before that. At the most, there were about twelve people living here, but my dad's brother moved up north, along the coast of Lake Michigan."

"Your family's lived here that whole time?" Brain asked.

"Almost a hundred fifty years." Matthew said. I stepped back down off the steps and looked at the six pictures. They were framed and each frame was engraved with a date: 1869, 1912, 1935, 1950, 1975, 1989.

"My great grandfather was in a Civil War regiment, and they did a story on him for the local paper. That's where the first picture came from. It became a tradition after that, to take a new picture every time they added on. My dad bought special black and white film for the last two so they'd

all look the same." Brian and Matthew were still on the stairs. I noticed that the barn didn't appear until 1912, and I asked Matthew about it. "That's when my great grandfather bought all the land around here and started growing corn. Till then it was just a family farm. Just enough to feed whoever was living here."

"You guys still grow corn?" Brian asked.

"Yeah, but we don't use the barn for storing it any more, and my dad's had to start doing some more work. Like fix tractors. And other small jobs."

Matthew offered to show us the rest of the house. His thin blonde hair, although not that long, shook like tassels as he walked up the steps that led from the pantry into the main house. Brian smiled back at me and followed Matthew up the stairs. I followed behind Brian, clenched against myself and trying to be small. We walked through the cramped hallway.

The downstairs of the house was cluttered, without anything being out of place. A food-serving island separated the linoleum floor kitchen from a brown carpet dining room. The dining room flowed through a wide entrance way into a living room with a piano and a couple of couches. The walls and the tables were filled with knick-knacks and trinkets. There was one bible on a narrow table, with a black cover and red trimmed pages that were worn. The couches, the piano, the dinner table, consumed all the floor space, and no matter where I stood the walls hovered near me. The ceiling felt low too. Hand stitched pictures, and unprofessional photographs of the family covered the walls. Matthew led us up the staircase, which, like the rest of the house, was tight and lined with pictures. There wasn't a hallway at the top of the stairs, just a small area with a wooden floor that led to four different doors.

"Mark and Luke share that bedroom," I stood behind Brian on the top step, leaning against the entryway, and watching Matthew point from door to door. "And that's Christine's room, and mom and dad's room, and my room." I looked at the doors, shut and plain. There were no stickers or pictures taped to them. Matthew and Brian slid past me down the stairs. I guessed that if I opened the door to each room I'd see the same thing. A bed and a lamp stand with a copy of the bible in it. Maybe Mr. and Mrs. Miller's room would have two beds like an old TV show. I felt a draft and realized that it was cold up here. The glass from one large window that looked out over the road rattled in the breeze. I remember hearing that glass would flow like a liquid over time, and I walked closer to the window to see if the bottom was thicker than the top. It wasn't.

Brian and Matthew were talking about playing music during the church service tomorrow when I came down the stairs. I stood next to them listening

to lists of people and songs that I didn't know. Brian would glance at me every minute or so as if he was making sure that I didn't feel like I was being completely ignored. They laughed, and I could see the easiness in the way Brian talked to Matthew. I turned away as they started talking about drums, and drifted along the living room wall looking at the pictures of the family. There was nothing particularly interesting about the pictures, just lines of people, the four kids Christine, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, on Christmas, or Easter, or maybe a birthday, staring at the camera and smiling. Christine and Matthew looked to be about the same age, both in their early twenties. Mark looked like he was in high school and Luke, maybe junior high. I wonder why they hadn't had another boy, so that they could have a John to finish the Gospel name game.

On the piano there was a picture of Mr. and Mrs. Miller kissing, him in a tuxedo, her in her bridal gown. They were outside, by a willow tree, with the brick wall of the church behind them. He had thick sideburns and strands of brown hair, thin like Matthew's, which were blowing in a light breeze. She was a pretty, thin blonde, her eyes closed and leg raised slightly off the ground, with his hands enveloping her tiny waist. She was smiling so broadly that she couldn't kiss him back. She seemed airy and girlish, and I though for a second, that he might be grasping her by the waist to keep the wind from blowing her away.

I looked, too, at the stitched pictures, which were of excerpted scripture verses embedded in borders of sprawling fauna. There must have been ten or eleven of them scattered about walls. I looked over them, reading the words, wondering if they delivered some cryptic story or message if read in the right order.

I heard the front door open and the sounds of laughter and quick coat zippers. They were the sounds of people coming into a familiar place. A line of boys stormed down the hall, and I watched from the space between the kitchen and family room. I could hear Brian and Matthew stirring to their feet behind me.

"We've got the heater set up in the barn," Matthew shouted. "Excuse me, Alexis," he said, putting his hand on my shoulder as he walked past me. I pinched myself against the table and let him and the line of the newly arrived boys past me. Brian stepped next to me in time to be greeted by the two boys at the end of the line. He shook their hand, and turned to me, "Alexis, this is Mark. And Luke."

Mark was skittish and awkward. Unlike the vapid stare of his older brother, Mark's elusive eyes made it look like his brain was about to over-

heat, like he was trapped in a recursive thought. I could see intelligence, I thought, in his eyes. Luke, his younger brother, was fat and soft, girlish, especially his hands. He looked impatiently out toward the barn, said hello, his voice was high pitched but crunched with teenage boy oafishness, and walked outside.

"I was Mark's host for a weekend last Semester. He's thinking about coming to Pinedale." Brian said. Mark just nodded. "Chemical Engineering, right?"

"Yes." Mark didn't look at Brian as he answered.

"So, um, what church do you go to?" Mark stuttered out. It was a strange question, I thought, for such a nervous person to ask a stranger. But maybe he thought that it was a safe question. I thought for fun I might tell him I was atheist, and I smiled. His eyes shifted across mine as I did, causing them to dart back to the floor.

"I'm sort of in-between churches, right now," the floor beneath me was shaking, and I realized that Mark was quaking slightly, his hands shaking like they had just been removed from ice water. I hoped that my answer hadn't sent him into a seizure. He rocked on his heels, and smiled at me.

Next to me, Brian shifted his weight and I was close enough to feel the presence of his body, like gravity, without touching him. I looked out the kitchen window towards the cornfield, but all I could see was the yellow tinged reflection of the kitchen. Brian said something to Mark, and they both laughed. Mark's laugh seemed nervous even though it sounded sincere.

Brain suggested that we should go out to the barn with everyone else, but as he did white light swept across the room as a car pulled into driveway.

"That's my mom and dad. I should go help them." Mark shuffled off towards the door. He reminded me of a cockroach.

"I'll go with you," Brian said. I turned to walk to the car with the two of them, and Brian held out his hand. "It's o.k. you can stay here. We can handle it." I rolled my eyes at him, and he blushed. He had never treated me like a little girl before. This house, the verses on the walls, made me feel even more disconnected from stories about Jesus that my grandmother had told me as a kid, and the prayers I had said at night as a little girl, maybe it was having the opposite effect on Brian, maybe it was making litanies of religious doctrine ring louder in his head. I knew his house wasn't like this; I had been there once before when his mother had needed the car on a Saturday, and I had picked him up. There was a cross on the wall, and their calendar had verses from the bible on it, but other than that it looked normal: chair, a TV, and Brian's brother's toy scattered around the ground.

A woman walked in from outside. I could tell instantly that it was Mrs. Miller. She was still a pretty rail-thin blonde with the same broad smile on her face, although she looked far more substantial in jeans and a flannel shirt than she did in her wedding gown. "Hello dear. I'm Mrs. Miller, you must be Brian's friend." She took her coat off, opened and shut the refrigerator quickly, and satisfied, turned toward me, "Can I take your coat, too, while I'm going to the bedroom?"

"I'm fine. It's a little chilly." I wrapped the coat around me tighter. She smiled at me, and walked down the hall. Mr. Miller handed his bag to Mark, as he passed his wife and gave her a kiss. She took off his heavy winter coat, and slung it over her arm on top of her own coat, smiling.

"Who's this," Mr. Miller said looking at me as she walked into the kitchen. Mr. Miller was short, but his voice was big and playful. His fingers were short and looked discolored as if they were dirty. I didn't know if they were or not. I could see a smile in his eyes that I couldn't see through his dark beard and moustache.

Brian looked as if he was about to answer, but I stuck out my hand and said, "I'm Alexis."

"It's a pleasure, young lady. You met the boys, I gather. They're a wild bunch, you'll have to watch out," he laughed and slapped Mark on the shoulder. Mrs. Miller walked back into the kitchen, and Mr. Miller tried to tip his head all the way back to see her. "Bags are on the counter."

Stop that, you'll tip over, and we'll have to call everyone in just to pick you up." She began picking through the grocery bags, setting some stuff on the counter, and flipping open the cupboards for other things.

Mr. Miller tried to open the bag of potato chips that she had set aside, and she slapped his hands. He shook it out, and raised his eyebrows toward me and Brian, "I better get out of here, before she really gets mad. Come on kids, let's go see how things are going in the barn."

"How many people are here?" She asked Mark, looking through the grocery bags.

Mark began to list the names of people I did not know.

I felt Brian close to me again. I looked up into his smiling brown eyes; they seemed fixated with the warm glow of the kitchen reflected back in the dark window. "Isn't this place great," he turned and looked at me, and I thought that I could see desire in his eyes, desire to have a house like this, and live crunched together by close walls and pictures with a large family. "It just feels so…nice. Like a real home." I didn't answer him. I turned back and watched Mark, who had finished talking, but was still standing in the middle of the

kitchen. Mrs. Miller turned around to walk to the refrigerator and almost ran into him. "Thanks, honey," she said. "I don't need you for anything. You guys can go out to the barn if you want."

"Brain, what's your friend's name?" Mrs. Miller asked, as we were turning to go out the door. I felt invisible again. She could've just asked me.

"Alexis."

"Alex is fine." I said.

"Well boys, why don't you go out to the barn, Alex…" she paused, emphasizing my name, "…can help me in here. You don't mind do you dear?" She added the last part as an afterthought, after she had already turned to the counter.

"That's fine." I didn't feel that bitter, because I wasn't too thrilled about going to the barn, and I wondered what this women, who looked so happy in her wedding picture, was like. Brian said that he would see me in a couple minutes. She handed me two jars of bottled salsa, mild and medium, and asked if I would poor then out into the bowls she had set on the counter. Mrs. Miller opened a cupboard door, craned her neck, shut it quickly, and opened the one next to it. She took down a stack of bowls, and set them down loudly on the counter. She sighed.

"What?" I asked, pretending that I had heard her say something.

"Oh, nothing, dear."

She was making hot dogs, and she talked to me over her shoulder as she cut open the packages and dumped them into pots of water on the stove." Do you go to Pinedale with Brian, or are you…"

"I'm a friend from home, from high school."

"Oh, so what school do you go to?" She has a disarming melody in her voice that almost covered the breath of Christian interrogation.

"I'm at State."

She put her hand on my shoulder. "Oh dear, that must be just overwhelming. I can't imagine."

"I'm doing fine. I like it actually. The people are interesting."

Mrs. Miller started chopping carrots and celery, and the knife clicked against the table three or four times before she answered. She looked up at me, wiping the back of her wrist across her head, the knife idling over the last un-chopped bit of carrots. The knife clicked against the cutting board. She smiled, "That's great. Do they have good student groups out there? To keep you grounded? I must be hard to be around all those people… you know what I mean. The non-Christian people."

"Oh, yeah." I said, thinking about the rash of religious solicitations, both in flier form and personal visits I had received from student groups for the two years I was in the dorm. I hadn't always been completely polite with the people who had bothered me.

"That's good. It's good to be around good Christian people." She said Christian people like it was the end of a song, making it sound warm. Mrs. Miller was finished messing with the food, and she turned and looked directly at me. She made a deep sigh, put her hands on her hips, smiled at me, and looked me over. Her face looked older than it should, I thought. "What are you studying at State?" she asked.

"Umm, I majored in biology. I want to be a doctor. I'm going to medschool in the fall."

"That can be expensive, can't it?"

"Yeah, it can be real expensive."

"I'm always amazed by women who find time to be doctors."

"My aunt's a doctor."

"That's wonderful. It's good for women to show their girls that they don't have to be just mothers if they don't want." She crossed the room straightening the already straight collections of knick-knacks. " I just couldn't do it. My kids are a handful all on their own." I looked out the window towards the barn. I couldn't see anything.

"Where do your kids go to school?"

"Oh, I home school them. Matthew went to public school through second grade, but…" she threw her head up in an overly dramatic gesture, "None of my other kids ever went to a public school, praise the Lord."

Silence feel back over the kitchen. Mrs. Miller stared at the boiling pots of hot dogs. I turned and pointed at the cross-stitched bible verse. "I was looking at the pictures earlier. They're very pretty." I didn't remember the last time I had called something pretty, and I felt embarrassed.

"Thank you, that's so nice," she said. I looked at the picture closest to me, and strained my eyes like I was reading, but instead traced the red rose border around and around. "That's one is one of my favorites. It was the second one I did."

"How did you choose which verses to do?"

"I have a book."

"The Bible?"

"A cross stitch book," she said. I was embarrassed; my cheeks felt warm, and my hands felt cold. Mrs. Miller didn't seem to notice. "I bought it at the

fabric store at the mall. It's really the only store worth going in out there any more. If you know what I mean." I didn't. What was wrong with stores at the mall?

"Well anyway, the book has twelve different verses with floral borders. I've done eleven of them already. Just one more to go." She sang the last sentence, lifting the stirring spoon she had in her hand up into the air.

"Do you cross stitch?" she asked.

"No."'

"No knitting, or fabric work, or anything like that?"

"No."

"Oh," she put her hand under her chin, and bent her knee. "So your mother never taught you anything… sewing, I mean, stuff like that?"

"No. My mom doesn't sew either."

"Not at all?"

"I don't think so."

"Oh, she has to dear, when you go home just ask her. I'm sure she knows how." She turned around and turned off the burners on the stove, ending the conversation suddenly, and leaving me speechless in the center of the floor. She grabbed the one pan by the handle, and walked it over to the serving island, where she had laid out hot pads. I went over to the stove and grabbed another pan.

"So do you like it here, in this house?" I asked, watching the water slush up and down inside the pan, flirting with the edge.

She gracefully removed the handle from me without touching the hot metal. "Oh yes," she smiled as she lowered the pan down to a second hot pad. "I'm from here you know. So is my husband."

"I know I saw the pictures."

"Almost a hundred fifty years he's lived here. Well not him, his family."

"Matthew says since before 1869."

"That's right. My family moved here from Saginaw when I was a little girl. I don't know what I would have done if I didn't meet Charles. He saved my life." Did she mean that Charles had been the good Christian man that she had always dreamed of, or did she mean that Charles had converted her and given her the means to live this kind of life?

"How did you meet?" I slipped out of her way, so she could grab the final pan from the stove.

"At the church," she said. "In fact it was the same church we go to now. The church Brian goes to. You don't go to our church, do you? I haven't seen you there."

"No, I go to First Methodist." It was the church my parents took me to when I was younger, when they still went to church.

"I think I know that one. I work at a homeless shelter with a woman named Crystal Mullen; she goes to that church I think. You don't know her do you?"

I shook my head no.

"Maybe I'm thinking of another Methodist church. I'll have to ask her."

I couldn't tell if she was deliberately tormenting me because she knew that I was lying to her, or if she was taking me into her confidence as a true believer. I felt faint and warm. I still hadn't taken my coat off, and now I was determined not to. Not until I got back home.

She laughed out of nowhere.

"What is it?"

"I just can't believe you do science. My Christine never liked to do her science. I guess that's the way it is with most girls."

"I don't know." I felt embarrassed.

"She's about your age, I think. How old are you? Twenty?"

"Twenty-one."

"Christine is twenty-one too."

"Is she at college?"

"No she's expecting actually, in April. Her and her husband Barry. You probably saw their house on the way in. Barry bought the Thelen place about a mile and a half down old-country road." I felt numb. A picture of Christine filled my head, standing over a sink like Mrs. Miller was now, in a cramped wooden house, with linoleum kitchen floors. I saw her stitching patterned pictures of store bought books; boiling hot dogs for post Christmas parties. She was twenty-one, and she was already pregnant. That wasn't that odd, lots of girls get pregnant when they were younger than that. But she was married, too. Twenty-one, and a married pregnant wife, living in a house like the house that her mother lived in, in a house just down the road from her mother.

"Excuse me," I said to her. " I'm sorry. Can I use your bathroom?"

Mrs. Miller looked up and smiled, "Of course dear, it's just down the hall," and she pointed back towards the porch room where we had come into the house. It took me a second to recognize it, because the washing machine and dryer were in the same room as the bathroom. There was a copy of the Ten Commandments hanging on the bathroom wall. *Thou shalt have no gods before me. Thou shalt not kill.* I read through them. In the commandment about coveting the word ass had been crossed out with permanent marker, and the word donkey written in above in. *Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's*

donkey. I guess God needs to be censored too when he takes too much license from good old-fashioned decency. They had amended God's commandments; did it take two-thirds majority of the household for such an act to take place?

Barry and Christine came into my head as I washed my hands. I saw them, affectionate, holding hands, him feeling her swollen, pregnant belly. She was not as pretty as her mother in the pictures. Mr. and Mrs. Miller kissing poured in too. That was passionate. Lovely. Love filled. Love. Was it? If it was, I wasn't envious.

Was that what Brian saw in his head when he stood close to me? Had he brought me here so he could see me next to these women?

I stepped into the hallway. All the people had returned from the barn. The heater was broken. Mrs. Miller was busy unloading hot dogs onto a big plate and arranging bottles of condiments. Brian was standing with his back to the hallway, drinking a glass of Pepsi, and listening to Mr. Miller and another kid talk about how to fix industrial sized space heaters. He nodded his head, at both of them as they turned to him for conformation.

"You know have to fix space heaters?" I asked him.

"Shhh," he put his finger up to his lips. As I slid in beside him, he pressed himself against the wall, making enough room for both of us to be in the hallway without touching.

"Sure, he knows." Mr. Miller said loudly, "Brian here's a bright fellow, smart as a whip. Make someone a fine husband, too. What, with his extensive knowledge of space heater repair." He laughed a deep laugh, and smacked Brian on the side of the shoulder with his open palm. Brian was blushing, and not looking at me. The way he had not looked at me in the car. He looked warm, and inviting. I wanted him to touch me. I thought I should tell him that.

"Brian?"

"Hmm…"

I felt Mr. Miller and the other boy wash back into the party. Brian smiled at me.

"Hello." I said.

"Where have you been?" he asked me.

"I was helping. With the food."

"I really like this house."

"You've said that."

"Are you having fun?"

I let my head nod up and down slowly, in a gesture that was indifferent, apathetic. Brian turned away from me and looked at Mrs. Miller who was beginning to fill up whatever cups were left with Pepsi.

"I didn't know that you'd be the only girl," he said apologetically. "Matthew says that Christine might come later."

"O.K."

"I think you'd really like her."

"Why is that?"

"She a real good person. Funny. I just think that the two of you would get along." He took a drink of his pop.

"Mrs. Miller says that she's married. That she's pregnant."

"Yeah."

"I can't imagine that."

"Why not?"

"Can you, right now, imagine already having committed to that kind of life? Babies and husbands."

Brian didn't say anything. The boyish dull laughter filled the small spaces of the house.

"I'm sure she's great." I said.

A kid, that I did not know, called to Brian from the living room. Brian looked at me, and walked towards the noise. I didn't go with him; I really didn't want to be introduced again. I sat down at the kitchen table by myself. The party was more of a gathering of people talking quietly than a party. There was a group of boys making noise in the kitchen. They were playing some silly party game, and Mrs. Miller was the ringleader. The way she smiled when she sang and danced made me smile. But I caught myself, and imagined her sitting at this big wooden table, a bible and three or four math books spread around it, engraining doctrine into the heads of her little boys. And Christine. Who was having a baby when she was only twenty-one and already married for a year? Maybe one of the other farmhouses we had passed as we were coming in would be the house that she would spend her life in.

In the middle of the living room, Mark was playing Euchre with three high school boys. I listened to them, except for Mark who remained silent and hidden behind his cards, talk about movies and music. They talked about the same stuff that my teenage brother would talk about with his friends. It was just pop culture, but every so often it would be interspersed with some left-field Christian phrase or biblical connection, like they were trying to reapply the things they liked to the things they had been told. I watched Brian too, charming in a circle of Christian boys.

I stared at one of the cross-stitched verses that hung on the wall. The bottom was stitched with the passage name, Psalm 118, verse twenty five. Identified like a biological organism, species and genome; a viral morality;

reduced to infectious, unobservable, miniscule dimensions. It had a border of lilacs.

This is the day
The Lord has made;
We will rejoice
And
Be Glad in it.

I read it over and over, looking at the words. It made less and less sense the more I read it. What did rejoice and glad and day and lord all mean? Mr. Miller slammed something down on the table and I was startled.

"Falling asleep there, darling." He said.

"Maybe a little," I stretched out my arms.

"You take the red ones. I'll take the black ones." He opened the beat up cardboard box, and pulled out an old Connect-Four set. I looked at him, searching for traces or irony, but he was separating the colors into two piles, his brow furrowed in concentration.

"You first," he said. I slide one of the red pieces down into the board. It fell through into the trough. "Oops," he flipped the yellow lever. "Try again." I put the red disc into a different row.

I had just been hypnotized by the clacking together of plastic, just started not to feel awkward about playing Connect Four with a grown man when Mr. Miller paused his hand at the top of the board, and looked into my eyes. The touch of humor, the crinkled lines of his smile, still filled his face. " I talked to Brian, tonight," he said. I looked down at the game pieces, and began sorting them into pyramid shapes. "I think that he…" Mr. Miller stopped, and leaned back in his chair. His big hands pulled through strands of his beard. He puffed his checks out, thinking. "You know what would be nice, Alex," he said. Swinging himself back up, his face hovering over the board, as close to me as he could get. "I think it would be nice if you would come to church. Sometime. With us. My family. Be our guest."

I looked at him. What was he going to say about Brian? "I don't think I could do that," I said.

"We have fruit punch and donuts," he smiled. "After the service."

"I'm sorry Mr. Miller." I said.

"I was just hoping… I was just thinking…" his face became stern, suddenly, filled with resolve. "Have you ever thought about…"

"Religion." I helped him finished his sentence.

"I just think Brian's such a great guy," he changed the subject again. "You see what I'm getting at here."

"Not really." I said.

"There are things that he has to consider. Conditions. Responsibilities."

I stared at Mr. Miller. I was angry that I felt embarrassed and shameful because of what he said, but I was determined not to turn away from him. I felt tears forming in the back of my eyes, and Mr. Miller looked down to the table.

I hit the little yellow switch, letting all the pieces fall down into the tray, and sat still for a second. Mr. Miller didn't look up at me; he just started separating the colors back into individual piles again. The wall was right behind me. I could feel the edge of picture frames against my hair.

"Faith," he said softly, setting it in the silence, isolated and meek. It seemed trite and small. Was Brian's silence inside that stupid little word? I looked out into the living room. Brian was looking at me. He smiled.

I stood up.

I walked into the living room grabbed Brian gently by the arm, and pulled him toward a corner. He stumbled and grabbed my wrist to brace himself. He didn't let go.

"What's wrong," he said.

I thought about yelling at him, thought about making a scene, but his hand felt good, warm, on my wrist. I tried to look away, but there was a bookshelf right in front of my face, and I could smell the dust on the books. He reached down, and grabbed my other wrist, and held both of my hands in his. It was the first time I remembered him touching me like that. His eyes looked sad. "How much longer do you want to stay?" I asked.

"Do you want to go?"

"We don't have to."

"I can go."

"Just don't…I don't want to be the reason you have to go." I looked around at the people in the room. They looked busy, but I knew that they were listening.

"I'll wait a couple minutes."

"O.K."

"Alexis…" he said. But stopped. He was still holding my hands. His eyes shook, passing back and forth across my face. His mouth quivered, like a mouth trying to talk through a sob, but stopped again.

"What is it?"

"Nothing. It's nothing" He turned quickly, dropping my hands. Escaping. And walked over to the piano where Matthew was playing.

I moved out into the kitchen and then down the hallway to the dark patio through the darkness. I looked at the pictures of the Miller's house. I watched the house expand in the pictures, unfolding itself like a flower in black and white. It was fascinating to see history like this unfold on a patio wall. The house in the pictures grew organically, in un-geometric patterns, wherever the current Miller patriarch could find some space, would the Miller patriarch ever let his family grow the same way. One hundred and fifty years this house had lived, and all the time the same family scurrying beneath the roofs. I wonder if the people inside had changed as much as the house had, I wonder if they'd lived the full hundred and fifty years, or just kept holding on to first twenty-five over and over and over. Was the pretty blonde with the small hips, airy and sensual in her wedding dress the Mrs. Miller I had met tonight: the Mrs. Miller working in the kitchen, complaining about progressive churches that had too long a leash with scripture in their lyrics, home schooling her children, and emerging from her house only to run errands and on Sunday for church? Was she a real girl then? Or had the house done it to her? The more I thought about it the more I was convinced that, despite the pictures on the wall, the house didn't change. It just got bigger. Inside, where it mattered, things went round and round. Had Mrs. Miller always wanted that stagnation or had she finally given up, and decided to fill the changing house with the next generation of cross-stitch bible verses and family photographs, listening to the recurrent Christian melody the belated tones of lapsed generations?

What did he want to say?

I heard Brian tell everyone that he had a lot to do to get ready for tomorrow, and that he wanted to get a good night's sleep for the drive. I waited by the wall, and listened to his footsteps come down the linoleum hallway. "You ready?" he put his gloves on as he walked down the stairs.

"Yeah," I said, and walked out the door without saying anything. I felt regret for a moment, maybe, and looked back at the house. Warm yellow light was pouring out, and I could see Matthew talking to one of the other boys from the party. I got into Brian's car that seemed darker and colder than the night outside.

"I'm sorry," I said.

"That's o.k. I really did need to pack."

"Why did you bring me here?"

"I just wanted to spend time with you?" he answered my question as if it were a cute question. A question of insecurity.

"No really?" I said again, seriously. I wanted him to say something. I looked at Brian through the dark, and his eyes shifted from the road. He knew I was looking. The smile on his face was less confident than any smile on his face had ever been. What did it cover: frustration, desire? I wanted to ask him what he was feeling, but I couldn't ask. I thought about all the questions that I couldn't ask him, all the things that I couldn't say to him because of what he was. Because of what he believed in. We passed another old farmhouse and I wondered if it was Barry and Christine's house.

"Alexis," he said softly, isolated, rolling the consonants like he had on the phone, and smiled at me. For a brief second I thought I might kiss him, make things different and complex, but that thought died too, like all the questions, like light dry snowflakes into the banks and fields already covered with snow.

Every Day It Matters Less That I'm Not Tall

Charles Harper Webb

The time will come when, passing girls
of seventeen, I won't stretch, hoping
to meet them eye to eye. I won't buy

only shoes with heels, or puff skyward
what's left of my hair. I won't scan fields
of pro athletes for the smallest receiver,

shortest shortstop, slickest, quickest
little guard with a deadly three-point eye.
I won't wince when some TV commentator scoffs,

"He's really short—barely five-nine."
I'll stop envying the young their great nutrition
and medical miracles that came too late for me.

I won't care that my spine's collapsing,
bones thinning, testosterone dwindling,
only my ears and nose continuing to grow.

What relief to be retired from the game,
no one expecting me to throw touchdowns,
hit homers, palm a basketball,

or for that matter, write good poems,
make good money, live in a good neighborhood
with my good kids and sexually satisfied wife.

What will I care if, as I slide into the flames,
the mortician thinks, "What a small coffin.
What a light weight"?

The Personalities

D. Harlan Wilson

A man bought a box of new personalities and rented an audience to test them out. He wanted to see how they might work in the real world before actually trying them out in the real world. He was a very fastidious man. The audience consisted of actors that had not performed a sufficient number of oral sex acts on a sufficient number of Hollywood executives to earn their Guild cards. Each of the actors was to be paid the standard salary for a day's worth of extra work.

There were four personalities inside the box. The man opened it up, removed one of the personalities and put it on.

"Well?" he said, glaring at the audience. "Do your jobs and react to me, goddamn it. My personality is the cause—*you* are my effect."

The actors blinked at him. They were sitting in a half-circle of aluminum fold-out chairs. All of their backs were stiff, all of their hands were resting palm-down on their knees.

Must be a dud, thought the man. He took off the personality, tossed it onto the floor, stomped on it, removed another personality from the box and put it on.

The actors blinked at him. One of them coughed. Another sniffed.

"Ah-ha," said the man, and raised an eyebrow. An actor copied him and raised his eyebrow. Another actor copied the actor that was copying the man and raised his eyebrow. Another actor copied that actor, and another actor copied that actor, and another one copied another one, and so on until all of the actors' faces possessed one raised eyebrow.

The man studied the audience for a moment, gauging and judging their quixotic behavior. "Interesting," he said. "*Very* interesting. But not my style, I'm afraid." He ripped off the personality and flung it into a open manhole somebody had engraved into a nearby wall.

He put on a third personality.

The audience immediately burst into applause. It took no time at all for the man to read into this piece of reflexivity. "That's *definitely* not my style," he snorted, taking off the personality and throwing it at one of the actors. The personality attached itself to the actor's head like a baby squid. His colleagues

promptly turned to him and pointed their applause in his direction. The actor stood up and took a garish bow before removing the personality from himself and inducing dead silence.

"Why do people clap, for godsakes?" said the man as he slipped on the fourth and last personality. "You wanna make some noise, open your mouth and bark at the moon."

A handful of actors followed the man's orders, tilted up their chins and began to bark. The other actors all made constipated faces. Except for one of them. One of them farted, as if in response to the offensive character of the constipated faces, and then made a calm, cool, collected face of his own.

The man nodded. He said, "I see," and studied the codings of the audience's conduct. He scratched his nose, twitched his lips. "Hmm," he mused. "Hmm. Hmm. Hmm." Suspicion overwhelmed him. Were the audience's reactions to his personalities genuinely, authentically reactionary? Or were they staged? The audience was a bunch of actors, after all. Granted, the man was the one who had hired the actors and so, if they were being true to their false nature, he was ultimately the one to blame. But he had still paid them all to react to him, and he expected them to act like professionals; if they weren't behaving truthfully, they should at least be acting like they were behaving truthfully, that is, they should be acting like they weren't acting. But maybe they *were* acting like they weren't acting. The man couldn't tell.

"You weirdos better not be messing with my head," he carped. "I'm paying you good money to do the right thing. Well, maybe not good money, but money. Understand?"

The audience stared at the man.

The man closed his eyes and shook his head, realizing there was no way he would ever be able to tell if these people were being sincere. And in any case he had run out of new personalities to try on. He paid the actors in cashier's checks and told them they could go. The actors thanked him one at a time, shook his hand one at a time . . . took their personalities off one at a time. The man frowned. His frowned deepened as the actors continued to take off their personalities until all that was left of them was an assembly of dark, featureless stick figures.

The man placed his hands on his hips. "I said *I* was the cause. I said *you* were the effect."

In response, the stick figures posed and froze like mimes . . .

Venice Daphne Running Backwards

Lyn Lifshin

the way the sandpiper runs
as close to the water
and then knows, pulls
back, but not
before he's dug
into sea grass. I'm
walking out of branches,
wood, Daphne
run backwards, my own
breakwater this time.
Blue shells, sun
Cupped in the arm of some
One who doesn't own
Or want to own me.
The leaves he pulls from
My skin is stained
with the verbs of someone
who didn't see what she could.
salt air chews them.
we dream of Nantucket,
wine in a grey wood
someday. You know I never
wanted a man just
for myself
but didn't know that.
Gulls. Old women
unbutton black coats,
fell the light, dreams moving
in their throats like birds.
They are willow roots
hanging on under
the sand, pushing deep.

In this light, if they
were to unloosen a few
pins they would grow into
their hair, birds blown in the
sun toward cities rarely
found on maps.

Before Daylight Hits the Bay

Courtney Chapin

I press my hand against the window,
think of kissing California good-bye.

I wish I could leave it like this,
still sleeping under grey mist.
A lover who can't wake up

beside you,
I trace the curve of hills—
shoulder, waist, hip, thigh
still tangled in white sheets of cloud.

At home, sheets are pulled tight
over a pillow-top mattress, but
when I roll over, there's more
than a dream of hills to put my arm around.

Cold

Josh Hall

"It's so cold, my hands are on fire," Montana said as he watched his voice vanish into the January air. We were following a trail marked by deer that led down to the creek where the ice had not quite frozen over. The watering hole had been recently visited since the tracks were visible and there had been snowfall the night before. The evening sun gave no heat as we tracked west back to the cabin. I had been walking away from the idea of warmth since sunset and I knew Montana had been chasing it; however his words were as crisp as the morning frost and right now I needed that kind of comfort. "With all hope, Montana, we shall arrive before the sun," I replied.

That morning's headlines read "Winter to be Warmer." It was November and I could've sworn the leaves had not yet changed colors. I've never worn red in my life and the heat from the crimson leaves may have had my blood boiling. I searched the paper for an explanation.

Higher temperature is what makes us pleasant.
A growth that soon will swallow the birds.
An average earth has been changing.
On the ground we are vegetation.
Seven years until spring arrives.
Pollution is the adaptation.
Turning are the scientists.
Dropping while we are
A couple of inches
Looking forward.
Solstice lost
Forgotten
Cold.

Montana was born and raised in southern California. His parents named him Montana somewhere in the trend of naming children after states–stream of Dakotas and Carolinas. He had never been to that particular state and had

never been anywhere cold for that matter. In other words, the color white described the beach sand, the clouds, hot in the southern sun. That's why we went on this exploration; it was an opportunity to show him my understanding–my acquaintance - with the color white.

"So how far away is the cabin?" asked Montana, resting under an evergreen half buried in snow. I mentioned to him when we met that I knew a place, by a cabin, that resembled the sublimity of the white California. The awful beauty, nested in the north, half way across the country. Yet, temperature has nothing to do with the visual; one cannot feel cold or hot in the breeze of scenic emotion. "I feel it's this way," I said, standing on a rock, covered in a cloud of snow.

The National Academy of Sciences has declared that the Earth's surface temperature has risen about 1 degree Fahrenheit in the past century. The evidence is getting stronger that most of the warming in the past 50 years is attributable to human activities. Such activities have altered the chemical composition of the atmosphere through the buildup of greenhouse gases.

> *Energy from the sun heats the surface of the earth, controlling the weather and climate; all the while, the earth takes that energy and radiates it back into space. Atmospheric greenhouse gases such as water vapor and carbon dioxide trap the outgoing energy retaining heat, working the same way as glass panels do in a greenhouse. However, without this natural greenhouse effect, the temperatures would drop and life as we know it would not exist nor be possible.*
>
> -U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

> *"The sea is cold, but contains the hottest blood of all."*
>
> -Captain Bligh, Cold Sea 1789

Said to have been the words he spoke to his castaways while on a voyage across the South Pacific Ocean, Bligh and seventeen others traveled 3,000 miles trying to survive in a twenty-foot open boat.

When Montana gets nervous he does the most extraordinary thing. He had every right to be nervous: it was well past sundown and we still had a long way to go, that is, if we were going in the right direction. Montana starts talking completely in the past tense, as if the future had already happened.

"The water seemed colder in autumn; the waves looked smaller from the cabin." It's hard to notice at first as he speaks mostly about the weather earlier in the day. "The snow just never stopped falling; the wind just never let up."

Surely enough, it was colder now, but it's interesting how we felt warmer, either through our frustration or the thickness of the trees, it seems like the past tense was all we had. We were going nowhere, and all the while Montana had felt that we had already been. That's why I brought him along, to make time feel like it doesn't exist. We had already arrived at the cabin; we had already gone over the hill in front of us; life had already happened.

White, while searching endlessly, is as cold as the artic air. Only we weren't near the artic, we were on the eastern coast of Lake Michigan. The sun had gone down and there still was no color. I remember wondering in early November if I was ever going to see a white ground again. White changes surfaces. White is flame. White can turn sand into glass: it is so cold that it's hot. White are the beaches where Montana was born. White reflects the sun as it had all day long up until this very moment. Yet, white does not reflect time nor place; Montana knew that. It was the one thing that couldn't have happened yet.

Was the cabin still the way I remembered it? Fifteen years will change your memory and at the same time, it will change what is being remembered. The cabin was made of dark wood; logs around a foot wide, stacked from the foundation to nearly 12 feet high. The logs were worn from the wind and snow, creating a curvature around the diagonally cut corners. The roof had been made of wooden shingles, and the frost that gathered gave it a sparkling image, always twinkling in the distance, iced over from afar. I had spent most of my time on the porch, three long steps to an unleveled surface with one bench made of two stumps and woven branches. The view from this perch was the dark lake, forever scattered with whitecaps. The rocky beach was glazed in the process of wet snow freezing. I often felt that I was above the clouds looking down upon mountains, except that they were moving, waves distant in the deep.

I have never been inside the cabin and I had never wanted to. My destination was the lake beyond and had always been. I don't know who lived there nor have I ever seen a light on. The lights were the roof, and the porch was

my vision. Montana did not know this, and I knew he longed for a fire. I knew he didn't expect to view the lake from the shore, in the cold, as I once viewed the Pacific with him, feet in the warm water, hot as I'd ever been. I hated that I had tricked him, I hated how he would miss the similarities of our lives.

It is expected of me to bathe in the warmth of summer; or to keep my toes hovering above the fire. I should always be separated from the wind by a pane of glass; covered up to prevent winter from whispering down the neck of my sweater–the ends of my sleeves. Yet, goose bumps to me are like rays of sun to you. Visiting the southern states isn't a vacation; it is the equivalent of you getting locked out of your house on a cold January night. Montana was starting to shiver–he had been locked out.

Not until this moment did I realize that my life was changing, the world around me longed for color–a balance. Before, I had only wanted to feel the icy liquid of the lake and breathe in the crisp colorless wind. The subzero temperature had no effect on me, as it never had. But something was different. The blood in my veins was getting warmer, and in my mind, the lake began to boil. A new feeling came over me and I hoped the cabin was near, I think I remembered a chimney, stretching out into space.

Going Out

Heather Abner

They agreed to meet at the Michigan
to see *Cowboy Bebop*
an anime film all the kids are into.

And because I'm not his mother
or his sister
just his brother's babysitter

I can't tell him to make sure
he combs his hair
and brushes his teeth beforehand.

To open the gilded door
of the theater for her.

To eat popcorn with one hand
and hold hers with the other.

Half my lifetime ago
I stood the way she is standing now

in the rain
in fishnet sleeves
outside the theater.

Learning how to wait for a boy.

From the Borders across the street
I watch
as his mom lets him off at the corner.

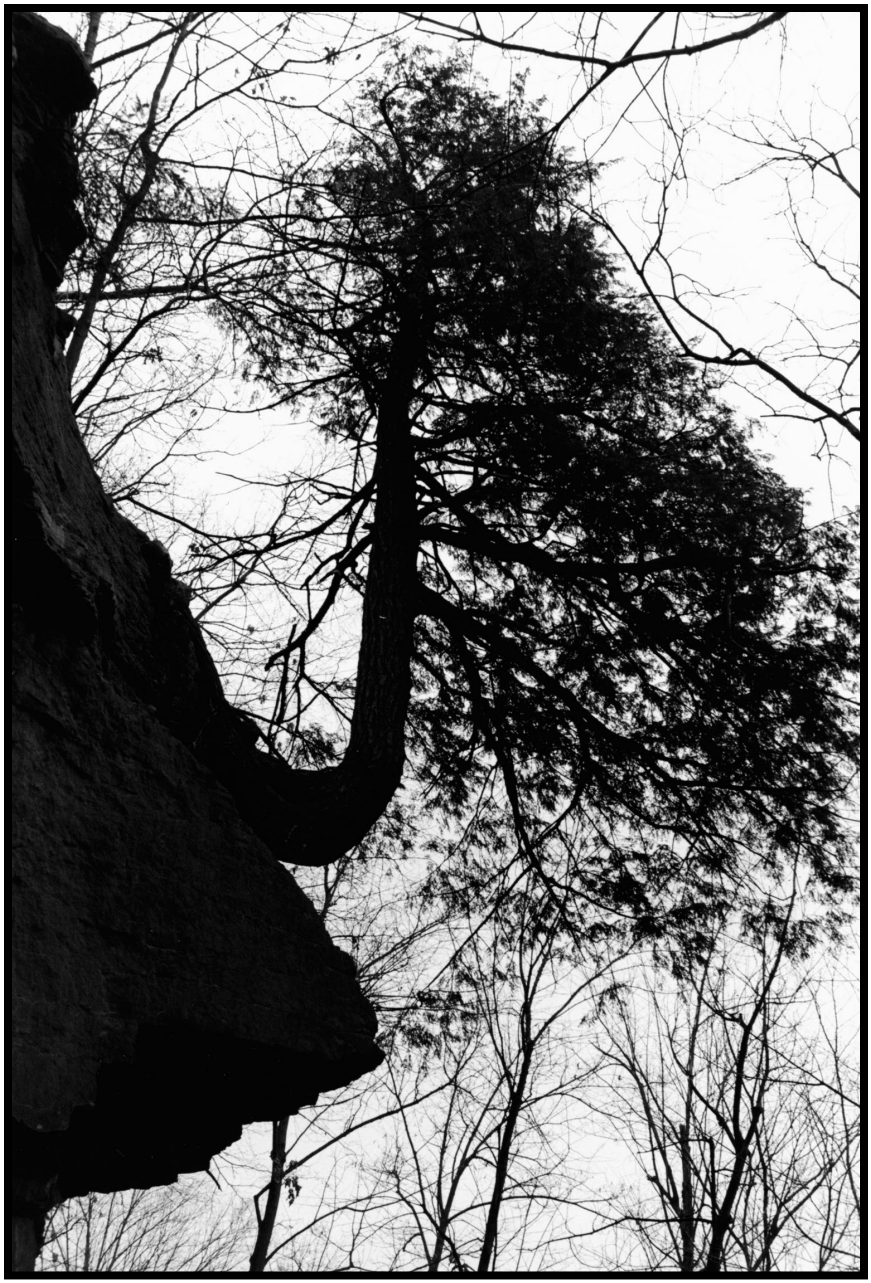
Watch him walk the half block
toward her face

pale as an empty movie screen
pale as a Japanese animated heroine.

At fifteen he's already six feet tall
and movie cowboy beautiful,
blond hair lit gold by the marquee.

And as she turns to receive him
I turn back to the shelf

keep on trying to find
what it was
I was looking for.



About the Contributors

Heather Abner earned her MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Michigan. She has many obsessions that include, but are not limited to the following: cowboys, Mark Rothko-style martinis, black cherry hair dye and lipstick, black tights and boots, the Hillbilly Hit Parade, and Jack White of the White Stripes. She recently took up knitting and hasn't been able to stop. She lives in Michigan with her miniature schnauzer, Diesel.

Mathieu Cavell is currently enrolled at Michigan State University for the study of literature, and (with the tutelage of the faculty and staff of the English Department) hopes to attend graduate school in the fall. Mathieu has always found inspiration in his fiancée and friend Katie, without whom no poem would have been written. Being observant but forgetful, his poetry is always a surprise to him more than to anyone else.

Courtney Chapin holds a BA in English from Michigan State University and an MA in English Literature from Western Michigan University (WMU). A native of Michigan, she continues to live in Lansing and actively participates in a local poetry workshop group. Nominated by Diane Wakoski, her poetry appeared in a special issue of *The MacGuffin*. Wakoski describes her as "a poet who offers her emotional body delectably to the reader." Currently the career consultant for the College of Arts & Letters at Michigan State University, she also has taught English and writing courses at WMU and Lansing Community College.

Katie Davis is a writer living in Washington D.C. She is a regular contributor to public radio's *This American Life* and *All Things Considered*. Her ongoing series *Neighborhood Stories* is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Josh Hall grew up in Northern Michigan. He has been a caddy, a chairlift operator, a musician, a mason, and a painter. He has written several unpublished collections of poetry, including two children's books. He is a senior at Michigan State University studying creative writing and poetry and spends most of his time writing music and observing the northeastern shores of Lake Michigan. Currently, Josh lives with his girlfriend, Sarah, and daughter, Gwendolyn.

Christine Junker is currently in the second year of her Ph.D. program in Literature at Michigan State University. She is focusing on Transatlantic Modernisms and the relationship between location and identity. She did the first year of her masters degree at Michigan State, and obtained her bachelors degree in English Education from Ferris State University.

Scott Larner studied fiction writing with Marcia Aldrich at Michigan State University, where he earned a BA in English. His story, *Coveting,* won second prize in the annual Jim Cash Fiction Writing contest in 2003.

Lesmana Lim has at times been called a "fine young man," a "modern-day Renaissance man," and even once "a credit to his people," whatever that means. Gershwin, Rachmaninoff, Debussy, Chopin, and J.S. Bach are his favorite classical composers. More recently, some bands he's been listening to include Cat Power, The Mountain Goats, Pernice Brothers, Sigur Rós, and The Books. His favorite radio show is *This American Life;* his favorite television is viewing reruns of *The West Wing*. His favorite essayist is Cynthia Ozick.

Lyn Lifshin's most recent book, *Before It's Light* (published by Black Sparrow Press in the winter of 1999) won the Paterson poetry award. Her next book *Another Woman Who Looks Like Me,* was published by David Godine in November 2003 (order@godine). Also just published by March Street Press is *A New Film by Woman in Love With Dead*. She has published more than 100 books of poetry, including *Marilyn Monroe* and *Blue Tattoo*, has edited four anthologies of women's writing; and has been recognized with awards for her nonfiction writing. Her poems have appeared in most literary and poetry magazines and she is the subject of an award-winning documentary film, *Lyn Lifshin: Not Made of Glass*, available from Women Make Movies. For interviews, photographs, more bio material, reviews, interviews, prose, samples of work, and more, her website is www.lynlifshin.com

Ruth Mowry is an academic adviser in the English department at Michigan State University, where she earned her B.A. She and her husband recently moved to a small farm where a barn cat named Rudy lives. Ruth loves the design and craft of words, rooms, gardens, schedules, and vacations. Her upbringing by Baptist parents (minister and music director) and with seven siblings is the backdrop for many of her written explorations. Reacquainting herself with the Michigan landscape after living many years away has rekindled

her interest in getting to know her native state, especially the country areas around Dansville, Horseshoe Lake, and the northwest.

Carrie J. Preston has studied poetry with Diane Wakoski and Alicia Ostriker and was a recent winner in the War Poetry Competition and the National Society of Arts and Letters Poetry Contest. She is currently writing a dissertation on modernist poetry and performance at Rutgers and is planning to move to San Diego with her jet pilot fiancé.

David Sapp is an artist and writer living near Lake Erie. He teaches studio art and art history at Firelands College, Bowling Green State University, in Huron, Ohio. He creates graphite drawings and writes poetry. His poems have appeared in *The Chattahoochee Review*, *The Bad Henry Review*, *The Dirty Goat*, *Sidewalks*, *The Cape Rock*, *Meat Whistle Quarterly*, *Mad Poets Review*, *Open Bone Review*, *The Licking River Review* and elsewhere. His chapbook, *Close to Home,* was published by Lockout Press.

Amy Sumerton's fiction can be found most recently in *Current* and *MOMENT Magazine*. She is an executive editor for *Orchid: A Literary Review* and is a member of the Critical Connection Fiction Workshop. In 1999 she received her BA from Michigan State University, where she was a recipient of the Swarthout Award for Fiction. She has been a radio DJ, book editor, house painter, marketing manager, gardener, and a nanny, although this story is only very loosely based on her experiences. She lives on the very outskirts of Ann Arbor, where she currently makes a living as a landscaper and waitress.

Hannah Steven's photography will be included in a two-year international traveling exhibition sponsored by the Photo Imaging Education Association (PIEA). Her photograph, *Practice and Studies*, was selected from more than 4,000 submissions. Originally from Grand Ledge, Michigan, Hannah plans to graduate in December with a double major in Studio Art and English. She hopes one day to each abroad.

Charles Harper Webb's latest book of poems, *Tulip Farms and Leper Colonies,* was published in 2001 by BOA Editions, Ltd. In 2002, the University of Iowa Press published *Stand Up Poetry: An Expanded Anthology*, edited by Webb. A recipient of grants from the Whiting and Guggenheim foundations, he teaches at California State University, Long Beach.

D. Harlan Wilson lives in East Lansing, Michigan, where he is a Ph.D. candidate in English at Michigan State University. He has published nearly 100 stories in magazines and anthologies throughout the world, and he is the author of the books *The Kafka Effekt*, *4 Ellipses*, *Irrealities,* and *Stranger on the Loose.* For more information on Wilson and his writing, visit his official website at www.dharlanwilson.com.

This issue of *Red Cedar Review*
is specially dedicated to our faculty advisor,

Marcia Aldrich

For five years
of guidance and good humor,
we thank you.

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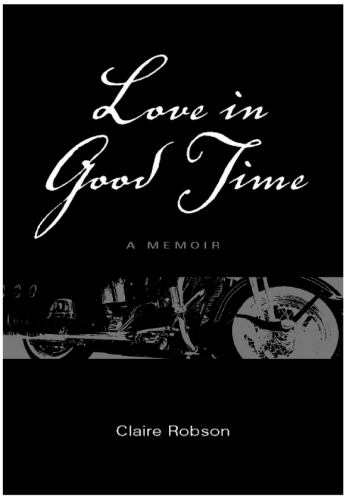

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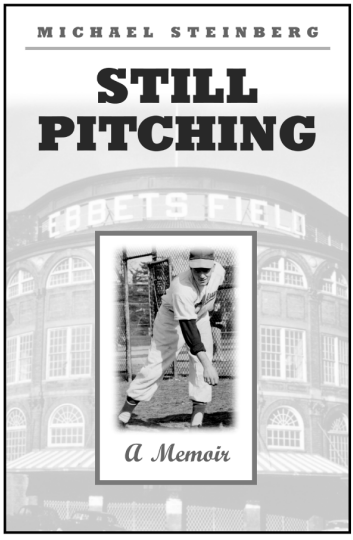

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