

REDCEDAR

R E V I E W



\$12.00

Editor's Introduction
Jennifer Popa, General Editor

The Juxtaposition of Brown
Laura C. Weber

Arrowhead
Casey Ward

Jack and Jill: A Reassessment Using Computer
Modeling to Predict Outcomes
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The Grove
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Emily's Song
Tom Bourguignon

June Riot
J.C. Dickey-Chasins

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Editor's Introduction

Jennifer Popa

My roommate believes that English majors are self-appointed metaphiles and grammar-spouting introverts who scoff at the world, clothed in black berets and turtlenecks. While stereotypes frequently have some basis in reality, I don't think of English majors as bookish intellectuals who woo people with their sesquipedalian nature (for non-English majors, this refers to our bent for using long words) or notoriously precise conversational style that can only be described as pedantic. Instead, I think of the new *Red Cedar Review* (RCR) staff.

This fall, at the eleventh hour, I was asked to take over as managing editor. The previous staff all graduated last spring, and attempts to rally replacements over the summer proved fruitless. I struggled with the possibility that the next issue might never materialize because the pile of manuscripts had grown to fire-hazard proportions, and so I circulated a frantic plea for help among MSU English students.

To my great relief, a brave band of volunteers rallied to comprise a new staff. Now I can fondly look back at fall weekends spent in the depths of Morrill Hall, attempting en masse to set new world records for safe caffeine-and-sugar consumption. At a time when the journal could have been abandoned, an earnest group of local English geeks assembled to wade through the never-ending stacks of manuscripts. With caffeine surging through our veins, we performed dramatic readings; guiltily shared a fondness for Harry Potter as though it was our own dirty little secret; questioned whether or not Morrill Hall was, in fact, sinking, threatening to crush us all; and attempted to answer the ever-plaguing question, "Is an MFA in Creative Writing really anything more than an expensive trip to the local coffee shop?"

While I sat on a ratty plaid couch descended from the age of Heroes, I looked around at my reading companions. It was truly a sight to see them generously offer their time, eager to rescue a journal in need. While we weren't splitting atoms, curing cancer, or solving the mysteries of the universe, our efforts yielded a force to be reckoned with because we refused to let the publication die. There were still times when I questioned whether or not this journal would ever make it to print. It has been a struggle, but with great assistance from other students and former staff members (thank you,

Laura Tisdel), and some much-needed cheerleading from our faculty advisor, [you'll have to imagine that] we have managed a great feat.

So, when I think of the pretentious English-major stereotype now, the image is always replaced by one of this very special community so wholly committed to our literary tradition. This group of devoted students is far from the exception, however. Dedication is not unique to this latest group of individuals—it's a quality characteristic of previous RCR staff members, also unwilling to allow a journal to perish. Though I don't know them personally, they are present in our office to this day, ghosts of another time and place with whom we share a commonality. We can feel their presence in an office that bears their sketches on the ceiling, their carvings of a Unabomber/Christ-like figure on the desk, and yellowing comics and aged hate mail adorning the walls.

In a time of budget cuts and overwhelming apathy, it pleases me that this little publication of ours has survived. I believe that RCR's longevity is assured because there just has to be a certain vitality inherent in a journal that, on a number of occasions, could have been abandoned entirely. I am enormously proud to be a part of the 40th issue, and I am humbled by the unflinching dedication of my staff. Through the challenges, it has been a true pleasure to piece together this collection.

In this issue you will find pieces that range from a treatise on the significance of attaining the perfect bruise to an essay on the innermost thoughts of a Head Color Namographer. There are local finds cultivated from within our East Lansing community, pieces from across the nation, and award-winning essays. Each was carefully chosen by our new staff, many of whom—to an outsider—may resemble that common English-major stereotype. Yet we are linked by a far greater bond.

It was in *Wild Mind: Living the Writer's Life* that Natalie Goldberg wrote, "I honor English majors. It's a dumb thing to major in. It leads nowhere. It's good to be dumb, it allows us to love something for no reason. That's the best kind of love" (New York: Bantam, 1990, 140).

It is through a collective dumbness and a labor of love that this issue has come into being.



The Juxtaposition of Brown

Laura C. Weber

I had been writing a letter to my superior over a period of four weeks in defense of my ascendancy over my co-workers. After all, I was clearly the most educated in the matter, and, frankly, I consider it the duty of the educated to set the ignorant straight of their illiteracies. I had been an English and British Literature major for my bachelor's and master's degrees, respectively. What did my boss and my fellow employees at Chip's Paint Chips know about Joyce and Keats? What of Austen and Woolf? And so I decided, as it were, that I must move on to more advantageous career paths—more specifically, to writing and publishing my forthcoming book.

To properly head the letter, I began, "Mine Own Two Weeks Notice." I worked and reworked each sentence to achieve the appropriate effect of wit and charm, trying my best to avoid what could be perceived as condescension, which it most assuredly was not. True, there is nothing like a good smite once in a while (and grant you, I was well beyond my smite-control breaking point), but this was neither the time nor the place.

I made sure to employ as many big words as possible to give but a taste of my inner cornucopia of wordage. I used "pedantic" and "nihilist" and "rhododendron." I considered informing my supervisor that "stewardesses" is the longest word in the English language that one can type on a keyboard utilizing the left hand only, but decided against it for reasons of caricature. By the time I had written "Yours Truly," I had long since forgotten my concern over vanity and had acquiesced to at least six self-pats on the back.

My job description was "Head Color Namographer" of the Browns and Reds Department, a title that I abhorred for the fanciful word. However, I never denied pity for the poor soul who invented it. Most likely the holder of an associate's degree, at best. What did he know of Dickens? What of Stevenson? I had developed an undesirable hatred for those outside of Browns and Reds. I was left watching minutes tick by on my desk clock while Donny, a fellow patron of the color-naming arts, was restful from nine to five in Blues and Greens. Something about that department pained me. The people always seemed intellectually stimulated and had a slightly patronizing bounce in their step. Perhaps it was the hues and tints of the

colors. Any form of aqua can have a soothing effect, what with names like “Seafoam.” Conversely, staring at a brown or a red all day can really sear away at a person’s soul.

(Remember: Searing Soul)

How many more “Burnt Siennas” would I have to title “Hot Chocolate” or “Chilean Stew” or “Kidney Bean” before I went absolutely bananas? And then there was Donny with his thick hair and his thick smile and his thick fingers, but—most importantly—his thick thesaurus. He only needed to open that imbecilic book to gather as many words as there are days in a lifetime to replace “thick” with “bulky,” “burly,” “coagulated,” or “gelatinous.” No one said you couldn’t use a thesaurus, but it was in my nature to believe that it was cheating. How could one not be totally satisfied in a world eased by short cuts and colors waiting to be named “Summer Breeze” and “Cool as a Cucumber”? Give me a break. Blues and Greens were practically a holiday next to the burning hell of Browns and Reds.

(Remember: Burning Hell)

There was so much more potential, so many more avenues to pursue. Day in and day out, after finishing my daily naming of “Flame” and “Lipstick,” I fantasized about screaming at Donny and giving him the finger. I’d say, “Fuck you Donny.” I had grown far too comfortable with such elementary surroundings. Flame. Lipstick. Ha! Such juvenile sentiments. It was also not so uncommon for me to daydream about infusing my intellect with the world of Blues and Greens and blowing everyone away. These fools had no idea what I was capable of.

(Remember: Totally Tolstoy Teal)

(Remember: Completely Capable Cornflower Blue)

Such originality, such foresight would not be lacking in my forthcoming book. But I digress.

I wiped the clamminess from my hands and smoothed the edges of the letter I planned to read to my supervisor. I stood and walked the short distance from my desk to his office, taking mental notes from my surroundings, as I often did, for potential color names.

I passed through Whites and Blacks (entry-level positions as far as I was concerned) and found myself in Blues and Greens. Unable to resist temptation, I peeked into Donny’s office for humble tidings and wish-you-wells. Stopping myself just short of knocking, I noticed Donny’s face concealed behind the dog-eared pages of his blasted thesaurus. I wouldn’t give that half-wit the pleasure of my greeting, so I continued down the hallway unnoticed.

I thought about Donny and the finger and screaming. I'd say, "Fuck you. Fuck you Donny."

I knocked obsequiously on my supervisor's door and awaited his predictably jovial "Come in." Upon request, I opened the door and padded lightly inside.

"Ahh! Just the girl I wanted to see." He motioned to the seat opposite his desk, and I respectfully took it.

"You wanted to see *me*?" I asked, allowing the "girl" comment to slide momentarily. My two-weeks-notice was in hand; this was hardly the time to have qualms over feminist issues and age-appropriate terminology.

"Yes indeed. What can you tell me about this?" He slid a two-inch by two-inch dark brown swatch across his desk and I picked it up. Beneath the color read, in italics: *Skidmark*.

"I don't think I understand." I set the paint sample back on the desk.

"This is your work?"

"Why, yes it is." I recalled it vividly. I'd made a mental note some months back when I'd seen a perfect scuff from a shoe on the tile floor in the entry-way of the building. It was an identical match to the color now lying on my supervisor's desk.

"And how about this one?" He slid over yet another swatch, this one with more of a deep pinkish hue. The italic name read: *Afterbirth*. I remembered this one too—my sister's baby. He was such an odd shade of blush for about a month after his birth. My originality and foresight never ceased to amaze me.

"Yes, this is mine as well."

"Hmm, yes, well, I'm sure it will come as no surprise to you when I say that this is absolutely inappropriate."

"Inappropriate?"

"Yes. We can't have titles of this nature on our shelves. It is beyond childish. It's disgusting, really."

"Disgusting?"

"Yes. You sound as if you aren't familiar with these words. Inappropriate . . . disgusting . . . childish. Call it what you will, it's bathroom humor. We make a consumer-friendly product here. Our customers enjoy colors that include words like Light or Soft."

"I see. I think I understand."

(Remember: *Light Skidmark*)

(Remember: *Soft Afterbirth*)

"For instance, look at these swatches that came from Blues and Greens." He held up a chart lying on his desk and read, "Morning Dew, Ocean Glow. Now those are great names for paint."

Donny, that thesaurus-wielding prat. I would be damned if he out-named me. What did Donny know about originality? What did he know about foresight? And, above all, what did he know about Eliot or Wilde? The answer was nothing. Donny knew nothing. How was it that he was nestled so comfortably in Morning Dew and Ocean Glow while I was wallowing in Shit and Blood?

"Listen," my supervisor continued, "we're making some new cutbacks soon . . . in a matter of days, really."

"Cutbacks?" My hands became clammy. The air in the room became thick and stifling.

"Yes. Lay-offs. Believe me, it's not what we *want* to do. There are just some extenuating circumstances that are putting a lot of pressure on us to reevaluate our creative staff."

"I see."

(Remember: Pink Slip)

(Remember: Bankruptcy Burgundy)

"Listen Boss, I have something I would like to read to you." I unfolded the letter that had dampened in my hand.

"Wait," he said. "Let me finish. This is a serious matter."

And so it was. I refolded my letter and prepared to take it on the chin. Perhaps this was a blessing in disguise—I would be able to ruminate on the subject and then write about it in my forthcoming book.

"We're letting Donny go."

"I'm sorry? . . . Donny?"

"Yes, from Blues and Greens. Let's just say that Cool as a Cucumber has been seen on more than one brand of paint can."

Donny?! How could they fire Donny?! Sure, he opened up a thesaurus once in a while, but what's so wrong with that? He had such talent, such foresight. I thought about screaming Donny's name while he fingered me. "Fuck me," I'd say. "Fuck me Donny."

(Remember: Break My Heart Beige)

"That's too bad." I put on an aloof yet slightly concerned face, masking my grief and acrimony.

"However, as we have just discussed, it has become fairly apparent to me that things just aren't working out for you in Browns and Reds, so I'd like

to move you to another department. We're going to place you in Donny's position as Namographer in Blues and Greens."

Oh overwhelming joy! Oh happy hour! All the unabated woes and trials of my life had only authenticated my eventual destiny. Blues and Greens, of course! And so I replied, "Blues and Greens will be fine."

"Good. You'll start next week." We rose from our respective seats and I shook my supervisor's hand with the proper application of firmness. "I would like to mention," he continued, "I rather enjoyed your recent submissions of Flame and Lipstick."

"Yes, I liked those too."

"You're good. Not like Donny was . . . but you're good."

"Thank you, Sir."

"Well I'm glad we see eye to eye. Now, what was it you wanted to read to me?"

And like any true coward, I crinkled the letter and explained to him that it was nothing. After all, all that matters in the end is the triumph of education over ignorance.





Arrowhead

Casey Ward

A pale boy knee-deep in pale cornflowers
Rousedly pokes and pries at the dark loam,
Unearthing an old arrowhead: rough-hewn,
Flecked with iridescence, color of moon.
He spits, swabs it clean, then leaves the bower,
The stone rubbing his thigh on the trek home.

Some magic in that rubbing; languid clouds
Of youth part to reveal a long-past scene.
Sweating, swarthy men search the sun-baked ground
For hoofed imprints; their ears await the sound.
Fresh tracks are spotted, the hunt reavowed.
In the corn field, his teetering rack seen.

Acrid kinnikinnick smoke drifts above
The tasseled tops of the corn stalks as they
Wait. Toward eve, a crow's flight signals the end.
The silky stigmas brush skin as they bend
Over the felled stag. A small ring of mauve
Has spread round the wound. They eat well today.

The boy skirts a budding cherry orchard,
Then tramps through a dense wood dappled with moss
Before coming out onto paved Talbot Road,
Which leads to his awaiting mom and mode.
Emptying pockets once in his manicured yard,
He is unsurprised to learn the stone is lost.





Jack and Jill: A Reassessment Using Computer Modeling to Predict Outcomes

H. William Taeusch

Introduction

The denouement of the Jack/Jill relationship has fascinated therapists (mainly of the analytical schools) for decades. Due to a better understanding of neurochemistry and neuroanatomy joined with recent step-ups in bandwidth, RAM, and gigabyte capacity that allow scenario real-time visualization and analysis, we have constructed a model that, assuming validity of the input assumptions, will predict outcomes of similar and more complex relationships.

Methods

See details filed on www://hwtjd.em.unb.edu. In summarized form, we recast a model of the principal scenario in the relationship and carried out multiple analyses of imaged outputs to find how they were affected by initial assumptions, seeking the core paradigm that was robust enough to rerun despite multiple inputs and one that would predict future outcomes of this and other relationships. We analyzed the data using a very expensive and big IBM computer. This study was approved by the human research committee (Committee on Ethical Approaches to Human Research While at the Same Time Maintaining Research Funding), the Chairman of the Dept. de Mecanismos Electronicos, and the Rector of the University, and was signed off on by counsel for Sr. Jack and Doña Jill. (Full disclosure in this report requires notice that Students Who Prefer Experiments to Be Done Only on Rats was filed and duly noted by the CEAHRWSTMRF or, in Spanish, CDFTKDKSKFFKJDKSLOD.)

Results

The model: As in the original construct, Jack and Jill were sent out on a hike. They were situated in the hills behind Santa Barbara, California, on a summer afternoon. (Initial conditions for experiment: fog setting zero; full sun-

shine; temperature 24 Celsius; Jack 64.56 years; Jill 57 {range 32-57} years.) They were well-fed, hydrated, and dressed in comfortable but attractive clothing that was suitable for their years and bordered on cheap but trendy. Results vary depending on whether lovemaking the night before was inputted (if so, it tended to make analysis more viscous, but overall outcome measures remained unchanged. Results are reported for fondling only for ease of analysis).

Illustrative dialogue from outputted scenario, run 34, May 18, 2004:

Jack: "Great day."

Jill: "You bet."

[At this point, the Spanish investigator of the team tweaked the background inputs to result in the following:]

Jack: "Darling." He squeezed her hand and gave her a passionate kiss on her neck, leaving what would be a difficult-to-explain hickey the next day.

Jill: (panting) "Darling."

And so it went, as they held hands and ascended the trail. After an hour of easy hiking, they stopped for lunch in a grove of eucalyptus. In the redolent shade, they sipped some vino tinto, and ate simply of cheese, bread, and grapes. They lay on a patch of green grass, their bodies touching. Jack thought of how Jill was feeling, spending not a lot of attention on her qualities. Jill thought of Jack's qualities, and wondered less about how he was feeling, sensibly believing that was his business.

After three months of analysis, inferred central nervous system imaging showed that the subjects' diverging approaches to the relationship were capricious and inconsistent. These differences recurred frequently enough to serve as an initial matrix-setting assumption for inputting values for purpose, definitions of reality, mechanisms for making choices, and semi-conscious modes used for maintaining control by both Jack and Jill.

At this point, it is appropriate to include discussion between the investigators to identify the flavor of the nature of the analytical approach in the same way that Watson described the events surrounding the discovery of the double helix, that other basis for life:

X: "A pail of water. So what's that all about? The computer suggests over a million possibilities."

Y: "It's like money, sex, and air—only important when you don't have it."

X: "Is it God? The secret of the Universe that they're after?"

Y: "Your ideas. They are too complicado. We are, after all, over 90 percent water, so it is to find themselves, I theenk."

X looked at Y and wondered for the hundredth time why he was stuck with him as a co-investigator. Where X saw black, Y saw white. X was only in Madrid because his grant was running out and Y had access to a new, shared computer facility that was orders of magnitude more powerful than X had at his university in Dubuque.

So they reran the model, and they found that Y's suggestion gave an 83 percent likelihood of fit.

Their work continued through the Madrid spring.

—Why the hill? Because 93 percent of the data fit with 'hill' as metaphor for 'life.'

Illustrative example no. 2. (filename C:\research\Jackjill\scenarios\may252004\run2\archiv.zip)

A cloud suppressed their patch of sun as Jack noticed another couple near them. They were necking passionately.

"Look at them. She adores him."

Jill noticed the man was older, wore a wedding ring, and his unshined shoes lay akimbo in the grass. One of his socks had a hole in it. His jeans were crusted with days' old grime. He wore an expensive Rolex watch.

"See how she licks his ear? I can't stand it!" Jack said and reached for Jill and tried to pull her close.

Jill stiffened and pulled away. "I wouldn't trust him for a minute."

"What do you mean? They're obviously in love."

Jill stood, brushed off her shirt, and turned to see if there were grass stains on her white slacks. Why Jack hadn't brought a blanket was beyond her. She started back up the rocky path while Jack clattered along behind her. "Jill, Jill. What's wrong, honey?"

—Jack fell down: 50 percent fit with accident; 50 percent with Jill having pushed him.

—And broke his crown: 83 percent fit with “crown” being synonymous with male ego. Psychological damage only with no somatic trauma, scaling two out of possible ten.

—And Jill came tumbling after. Run 18 synchronized with Jill remorseful, guilty, loving, irritated, resigned, tired, hot, headachy, anxious, caring, and worried about what she would make for supper, as she picks Jack up and dusts him off, remonstrating that he should watch where he put his big feet on the rocky trail.

X didn't really like Y. Y often ignored the printouts stacked on his desk in his cubicle. He came to work early, took a long lunch, and often didn't reappear until four in the afternoon, yawning. Y smoked Gitanes. Ash dribbled down his shirtfront and the acrid smoke drifted into his red, half-closed eyes. He looked like an insouciant French actor in the sort of B movies that had a lot of explicit sex toward the end. He spent hours smoking and looking at his screen saver of a small cabin in the forests of Galicia.

On a Thursday morning after altering inputs all night, X had an epiphany that he was sure would bring him new research funding. The central metaphor centered on the planets of Mars and Venus. The more he thought about it, the more excited he became. The concept incorporated much of the Greek and Roman mythology that had been used to good effect by Freud and Jung. With his synthesis rounded up in his mind, X sauntered over to Y's cubicle, sat on the side of his desk, and started to explain his insight.

After no more than a sentence or two, Y shook his head and lit another cigarette off the butt of his previous one. “*Se ha hecho*,” (It's been done). “A guy in California. Don't you look at the self-help paperbacks in the airport newsstands? Superficial stuff. Describes ways that men and women are different, but it's phenomenological, not mechanistic.” Y stubbed out his cigarette, lit another, and continued. “Look at it this way. It's more of a cultural thing. In my country, we have two verbs that mean ‘to be.’ One describes the quality of a thing or the person.” X knew this and didn't see why he was receiving a grammar lesson when he was sitting on the key to wrapping up their work.

“Look, Y,” X said, “the crux of my idea is . . .”

Y shrugged and stared at his screen saver. “A door is made of wood—that's its quality.” He pointed to the small door in the front of the cabin on his screen saver. “But whether it's opened or closed, that's its state. *Ser o estar*. Get it?”

X knew elementary Spanish. “Yeah, yeah, the one’s permanent, the other’s temporary.”

Y shook his head and looked at the ceiling, expelling smoke from his nose. “That’s the error. Often what you say works, but it is not fundamentally *verdad*. Jill thinks with *ser* and Jack thinks with *estar*. It’s right there in one of our initial runs in the middle of May.”

“Yeah, yeah, but you can’t just pick less than one percent of all of our data and come to a central conclusion from that alone,” X said, and picked up the printout from under Y’s feet.

“¿Por qué no?” Y said with a shrug.

Maybe Y was on drugs. He’d had a concentration problem the past week, for sure. It was as if Y had become one of his own computer programs, following his own logic independently of the results on the printouts. X only needed Y’s help on the more difficult programming problems, so he thought he would get the first flight out and write up his results alone.

Summary conclusion by administrator of funding agency:

While the investigators came to parallel but different syntheses of the data, no consensus was evident. Members of the Peer Review Study Section point out that the best fit result obtained by one of the investigators used little of the data to support his conclusion. Nonetheless, the study section recommended approval for continued study. The importance of the investigation was emphasized, but the flaws in the approach remain unaddressed by the investigators. More study is recommended to find which model has predictive power for given couples in the “hillside search for water” paradigm. With elucidation of the Jack/Jill model, application can be made for more complex relationships (e.g., fill in the name of yourself and your significant other here). Funding is recommended with only modest enthusiasm.





The Grove

Jared Gerling

Our cries still echo throughout the Grove.

“Archers to the front!”

“Get those men up on their feet, soldier. We need all the help we can get. This may be their last attack, and it looks like they’re not holding anything back.”

“Fill that gap!”

“Sire, Sire, there are too many of them! We’re all going to die . . .”

Errant memories still cling tightly to the wet branches, the sodden leaves, and the rotting logs scattered about the ground. I have come back partly to regain something, partly to make sure I hadn’t imagined it all.

Evergreen Forest, the Grove—it had many names when I was a kid. It was where we fought the battles, planned our futures, let our imaginations take over our bodies. The grove of pine trees had grown slightly since I had last been there—thicker now, wilder. A gnarled oak stands in the center of the grove, a soundless sentinel of the forest, a guardian of nature’s mysterious silence. Creepers and vines wind themselves through the pines like barbed wire, keeping the unwanted out and the captivated in. The ground is strewn with soaking oak leaves, painted a dull red and orange, and with pine needles. The new ones feel like springs when walked on; the old feel like crunching on bones. You can smell the loam, the trees, the insects. It’s wet with imagination . . . the musky smell of things long forgotten but still treasured. Logs I still remember dragging to this place from all points of the forest still sit quietly on the edges of the grove, decomposing year after forgotten year. Some are still in the shapes of falling down fences, some half formed teepees, others barricades and bunkers.

We were young and we played at war. We played at killing mostly, defending our grove from barbarian hordes from the icy north and from dragons and goblins when we were under the command of King Arthur; then, later, when we had learned a bit of history, from the Redcoats, the Rebs, and even a battalion of Nazis led by Hitler himself. Granted, we had no idea who these people *really* were or what they really *did*, but we killed them all.

I stand here in the rain under a swollen gray sky in the middle of a wood that belongs to people I don't know. I wrap my coat tighter about myself and lean more heavily on the huge oak.

"Are they coming?" someone whispered. I lay clutching my sword in a frozen ditch. Glancing over at my fellow men at arms, I saw them doing the same. Our breath misted above our heads in moist clouds of anxiety. I peeked through a gap in the logs that gave me cover. Twilight cast strange shadows about the gully we found ourselves trapped in, and snow fell on top of us in fat white flakes. A branch crackled outside the perimeter and our hands tightened on our sword hilts. Goblins had found us! Smelling fresh meat, they came for us, screeching out of the trees. I leapt to my feet, brandishing my sword. I could see their ugly faces struggling to find a way through the log fences and thick vines.

"Fight men! We will not let them take us. They will never taste our flesh . . ."

I blink away the past yet again.

Magic is suspended over this place like a fog. It sits in the air like strands of thread at a loom, waiting for the right hands to grab it and weave it into a mantle of adventure and imagination. I've seen civilization spring up around this forest like a colony of ants. I've never seen a beer can, pop bottle, or candy wrapper within these sacred green walls. Cars have gotten larger, planes faster, people crueler. But here, birds can only be heard in the spring, katydids chirping away in the summer, the wind moaning through the pines in the winter. Childhood possesses a power most adults never remember and that some choose to forget. That power is inherent in the Evergreen Forest; it resides here like a hermit. It also resides in the back corners of one's mind, leaving a permanent stamp of youth on the characters of those fortunate enough to have been here.

I step through those walls, glancing back once more at the misty Grove. I hear the shouts of my youth still ringing in my ears and I think how lucky those of us are who have battled here. The Grove will follow a person until his dying day. He will have the smell of pine in his nose, the feel of black soil and rough bark on his fingers. He will see the invader coming to sweep him away from the oak. He will smile fiercely as he struggles to stay on his feet, whispering his war cry into the wind.



slice

Carrie Preston

because the curve of my body
was cool to touch
and white as an apple slice,
you would not unpeel from me
all night, although
you were too warm.

in the military cold of predawn,
I watched you strap bark-rough boots
over shins, zipper into the green flight suit,
tuck in the dog tags, place the cover, folded
like edges of leaves just before fall,
about face, rigid as trunk,
ask, "Are you ready to go?"
no, but you heaved the duffel
over your shoulder
and it was a branch of your body.
the change was complete
when you called, no body at all.
just voice.

I do not stay slice
after you leave,
gather my core about me.
try to believe this is just job,
although we never took jobs like branches,
both made work taproot.
try to believe I won't
bruise myself against your bark.
try not to claim
the fruit of knowledge
that would change, convert.

I don't know how we grew to this,
but you teach me
we are seed fruit,
that ripen and ripen
into so many Jonagold, Elstar,
Gala, Red, Golden...

Delicious, come orchard,
I could eat a bushel of you.
come let me peel uniform,
slice through the core,
the pulp of our bodies
learning to ripen again.



Your Bruise

Kiel Phegley

Jeremy thought nothing of it when Matt Beasle was the first in his class to receive his bruise. It was an event for him and his fellow third graders to revel in, but no one seemed to be worried about their own bruising.

Jeremy remembered feeling this the day Matt peeled off his shirt in the locker room at the request of the other boys. It was beautiful. From the top of his right shoulder blade down to the small of his back, the bruise was a delicate blend of purples, blues, with an occasional red creeping up where the blood vessels had burst. The tissue had risen off his skin in pockets and bubbles, and the light from the locker room's fluorescent bulbs made it shine like a trophy. Matt stood on top of a bench with his back to the boys, his arms up above his head in a Herculean pose.

"How'd you get it?" asked one of the boys, just to hear the story again.

"It was an accident," explained Matt, grinning over his good shoulder. "My dad was fixing part of our roof, and I was playing outside. He must not have done a good job with those whatchacallems . . . shingles? Anyway, a whole pack fell off and landed right on me. They say if the pressure had been a little greater, it could've burst my lung."

"Did it hurt?" asked the boy.

"Kind of."

"Didn't you cry?" asked Jeremy.

"Hell, no! I'm not a baby!"

"You are so lucky!" said the first boy.

"I know."

Luck turned into fate for most of Jeremy's classmates over the next few years. Everyone started to get their own bruises, and Jeremy watched with anticipation every time. There was a desire, a need to achieve the same thing Matt had, accident or not.

Some would happen on family vacations or at summer camps, like Anthony Fries who was tripped on a lakeside swim dock and developed a tight, swollen patch of discoloration high up his left arm. Most kids got them at home, and a few got them right there at school. Typical bruises were visible during the day—black eyes and swollen jaws, small mushroom caps

of purple sprouting up the forearms. Some kids, like Colin Brie who lived on Jeremy's block, took it in the legs despite how hard it was for them to walk afterwards. Your parents made the choice. During those years, there wasn't one bruise Jeremy didn't gush over at some point. He knew everyone's story, everyone's bruise. Jeremy became an encyclopedia, almost an authority on bruises.

The problem was that Jeremy himself was a late bloomer. He was small, unathletic, and unaggressive. Qualities such as these didn't help you prepare for your bruise. Year after year, Jeremy's parents would look down at him and say, "Just another year to fill out, toughen up . . . that's all you need." Every year their argument became less and less convincing. They started to become protective of their son, never leaving him alone to fend for himself.

It became clear to Jeremy that his parents would never touch him, and, worst of all, Jeremy wouldn't dare bruise himself. Children would bother him on the playground, taunt him. "Just do it! Jump off the top of the slides! Pick a fight, even! We'll give it to you!" All Jeremy would say was "No."

Instead, he waited. He waited and watched and studied to make his bruise perfect, and the longer this went on, the less his parents and classmates would believe he'd ever be ready. Before long, his authority diminished from that of a judge to that of a misfit, obsessive and strange.

By seventh grade, most of the class had been separated into teams based on their grades, activities, and, most importantly, their bruise. Upkeep became a major hygiene concern for most. Up and down the hallways, you'd see kids throwing themselves into lockers or having their friends hit them with garbage cans or whatever to pull out the right texture or size on their flesh.

Jeremy was assigned to Team 9, the "rejects" team, where bruise complications forced kids out of the general population. Some, like Danny Bader, were kept out because of the severity of their bruise. Danny actually suffered spinal damage when he received his, and he had to be pushed around in a wheelchair by a special aide. He was one of the lucky ones. Other kids in the class had heart complications, trouble breathing, or even brain damage from their bruises. On the other end of the spectrum were the kids who bruised badly, their flesh too weak to stand constant beating. They had aides to keep their bruises in good form so they wouldn't hurt themselves.

Jeremy started to plan out his bruise on a Monday in September. He ran through the hallway on his way to class, shifting and turning past hallway scraps, face pointed down toward his feet to avoid conflict and contact wherever he went. Usually, conflict was kept at bay. At the special request

of his parents, Jeremy was marked by teachers as a danger to himself, so he was watched at every turn. Now, as he ran, a hand reached out of the crowd and grabbed him.

"Jeremy!" said Mr. Andrews, the face behind the arm. He had his bruise across the bridge of his nose, and it often swelled up, blurring his vision. "Mind if I use you for a second?" He gave a strong pull to keep Jeremy in place.

"Sorry," he said as Jeremy's head jerked back. "Didn't know my own strength."

"I'm fine," said Jeremy, rubbing his forearm. "It didn't hurt at all."

"Right, right then. Anyway, I was hoping you could identify someone for me. Where'd he go now? Ahh! Look over there by locker—what is that?—206, the boy doubling over."

Jeremy glanced to see Derrick Turner leaning into his locker, left hand on the top ledge, right hand around his side. He was moaning a little.

"Yeah?" said Jeremy, impatient to leave.

"What is his problem? I tried to ask him earlier, and he told me everything was fine. But look at him! I mean look at that boy!"

"That's Derrick, Mr. Andrews, Derrick Turner. You had him for Math II. Most of his bruise is on the left side of his ribcage. They were probably just working him up a little in the bathroom."

"Oh, well, so long as he doesn't have the flu or something," said Mr. Andrews. He took his hand off Jeremy's shoulder. Jeremy turned to excuse himself and head back to class when he heard it.

"MOVE!"

Jeremy was pushed, sent hurtling through Mr. Andrews's arms and onto the floor. He scraped his palms some but was otherwise fine. As he looked up, Jeremy saw some girl's head rush away past Brian Rogers, who was slamming his locker door shut on his own knee.

"Are you all right, son?" said Mr. Andrews, reaching down to pick Jeremy up, and breathing a little heavier than normal.

"I'm fine. I'm fine. Who was that?"

"Who was what? Who? Oh, I can't keep them all straight. Probably one of those kids organizing that thing. They'll be running about all week long."

"What thing?"

"Well, I thought you knew everyone and everything here. It's on Friday. There are posters all over the school for it," said Mr. Andrews pointing toward the wall. He kept brushing off Jeremy's shirt and lecturing about pay-

ing attention in the hallways, but Jeremy's focus moved to the blue piece of paper taped up across the crowd. He read it four times before it started to sink in.

"So do you need me?" asked Mr. Andrews, shaking Jeremy back into consciousness.

"Huh?"

"Do you need me to walk you the rest of the way?"

"Oh. No. No thanks, I mean. I'm fine," said Jeremy as he slipped out into the flow of other kids, bobbing past shoving matches as he went.

Mr. Andrews looked after him.

"That poor boy," he said as the bell rang for class.



Jeremy made his move the next morning at the breakfast table. He was sitting next to his father, playing with the last of his oatmeal while his mother busied herself heating the dishwater. Jeremy couldn't force himself to just blurt it out, so he played with his food and glanced over at his father.

Jeremy's father was a large, intimidating man. His job as a construction manager would often award him swollen hands, blackened muscles, and tough skin, but his main bruise was near his face, by his ear, actually. His father had hit him across the left side of the head so many times when he was a boy that his ear permanently swelled up, red and misshapen with splotches of blue now melting into his thick black beard. Unfortunately, the ear had been hit so hard that the eardrum burst, and Jeremy's father was deaf on that side. Not that it mattered much; he didn't like talking or listening anyway.

"There's a dance this weekend," Jeremy said, sliding his bowl into the middle of the table.

"What?"

"I said there's a dance Friday. At school."

His father folded up the paper he'd been reading and glanced over to the boy's mother, who had begun gathering dishes from the table. Jeremy's eyes followed and locked onto her.

His mother didn't have a bruise either. She had a burn—two, in fact. They'd been all the rage when she was a little girl, and, at age ten she plunged her hands into a fire at Girl Scout camp. The resultant markings were delicate, feminine. The skin retained a pink hue that stretched across her fingertips up past her thin, fragile wrists, but the burns weren't totally devoid

of blemishes. The continued upkeep of scalding and burning caused much of the skin between her fingers to blister with occasional cancerous splotches that had to be cut out. The burns required attention. Dedication. They were an almost harsh responsibility. Mother had worker's burns.

"Really?" she said after a pause, her hands plunging deep into the sink. "I'd forgotten that they had those in Middle School. It's been so long since Ryan was your age."

"Well, they do. They've got flyers up all over the school," said Jeremy.

"I suppose you want to go?"

"*I am* going," said Jeremy.

His mother just stared at him for a moment. "Listen honey," she said after a breath, "I just don't think it's the right time for you to be going out to dances. You're still so young."

"No, I'm not. I can go and be just fine. Dad?" said Jeremy, turning his attention to his father.

His father looked his son up and down a few times. Jeremy's legs were hanging off his chair, and you could see his ribcage through his T-shirt.

"Maybe next year," said his father.

"No! I'm old enough now!"

"Old enough for what?" said Jeremy's brother Ryan, sliding into the kitchen. Ryan was 17 and a star on three of the high school's Varsity teams. He'd bruised very early. One summer, when he was nine, Father took Ryan out for batting practice and pushed him into the path of the pitching machine. The bruise, centered on Ryan's chest, spread slightly onto his stomach. Today, he wore a baseball jersey half unbuttoned to show off his mark. It was a typical clothing choice for the family's proud elder son.

"Your brother wants to go to a dance this weekend," said Mother, looking for support.

"Really? That's great! I remember my first dance in seventh grade. We took Zak Beemer into the toilet and punched his kidneys 'til he pissed blood. It was pretty sweet."

"Now don't go giving Jeremy ideas."

"What? There's nothing wrong with that. We were only kidding around. Besides, I think it's cool that the little twig finally wants to get out in the world."

"Yeah," said Jeremy, agreeing with his brother in spite of the insult.

"It's just that . . ."

"I already bought my ticket," said Jeremy.

Mother and Father stared at each other for a long moment. She pleaded with her eyes, but in the end he turned to Jeremy and said, "Fine. It's your life."

Ryan punched his little brother on the arm. It hurt some, but not enough to leave a mark. Jeremy still rubbed it all the way to school, trying to prepare himself.



Friday night, the usual sounds of sweating athletes cussing and colliding on the gymnasium floor at Jeremy's school were replaced by the cussing and colliding of sweating dancers. The roar of the crowd was similarly replaced by the roar of speakers pounding rhythmic distortion. As the night progressed, the floor filled with middle schoolers flailing into each other, propelled by adrenaline. The students reveled in a night of heaving their bodies against each other, screaming and swinging their fists. The dance was a world of throaty guitar feedback and ecstatic pain, and while in attendance the students broke out of their routines, their roles, their teams, and melded into one massive, moving, violent body.

Jeremy arrived about an hour after the dance started, on his brother's insistence that no one cool ever went on time. He was dressed in an old pair of frayed, faded blue jeans and an equally ragged, blood-stained polo shirt. Both were handed down. "It's punk," Ryan had said early that evening. "They'll like it." Jeremy soon realized that the other kids had gone all out in customizing their outfits to accentuate their bruises. Rotted purple carnations were pinned on tattered formal wear while torn off shirt sleeves or pant legs showcased prized marks. Jeremy's ensemble looked pathetic in comparison, and after two laps around the punchbowl, he found himself off of the main floor and up on the balcony track.

The indoor track hung over the bleachers on thick steel cables. When it was used during the day for gym class or basketball practice, the track would sometimes swing unevenly as legions of kids slammed each other into the railings at a full sprint. Now, however, it was a place for kids to sneak off to make out. Jeremy saw a few couples tussling along the floor, groping and pulling hair as they mashed their faces together and chewed on each other's ears. Jeremy found a length of rail without such lovebirds and sat down with his back to the crowd below and his knees pulled up to his chin.

After a while, Jeremy noticed someone standing to his left against the railing. She was staring out over the crowd, smiling a little at the mayhem. He

couldn't recognize her in the light, or her bruise. He kept looking back over to her, trying to place the body until he was outright staring.

"You going to come over here and enjoy the view with me or sit there and sulk all night?" she said without moving her head.

Jeremy thought about that for a moment and stared at the stranger. He still could not see a bruise. He stood up after a moment of hesitation and drifted toward her.

"Some of these kids act like such assholes," she said, gesturing toward the dance floor. Jeremy looked down and saw Jason Patrick swinging Mike Jablonski around in the air by the wrists. Mike's heels would occasionally crack against the back of someone's skull or into someone's side, forcing them to the ground.

"That's Pat and Mike. Mike's okay. Got bruised rolling down a hill in a garbage can. It's on his neck. Pat's a jerk, though. His father gave him his bruise two years ago at our elementary school's field day, dragging him across the playground with some old swing chains. Mike cried and screamed "Mommy!" It was pretty funny, but now he's always trying to prove something."

"What about her in the pink? Over there." She pointed to a girl thrusting her back into a wall of bleachers to the music.

"Kelsey Anderson. Bruised on her lower back. She likes to work it real hard during the winter so she can wear midriffs and show it off when summer hits."

"And him?" She now pointed across to the far side where a boy had dropped to his knees and was pounding his fists into the ground.

"Timm London. He thinks those bruises are so cool, but his hands swell up so bad that he can't use them. Can't write. Can't type. Can't even pick his nose."

"Jesus, do you know everybody in this whole fucking place?" she said, laughing some. She turned her head toward Jeremy and revealed her bruise. It was incredible, growing out of the top of her forehead and spiraling over and over again down into her right eye. The lines of her face pulled into a tight wrinkled mess like a black hole. It was perfectly balanced. Symmetric. Almost cosmetic.

"Wow," said Jeremy.

"Wow what?"

"Your bruise. It's, um, it's real pretty."

He was blushing some.

"Thanks," she said. "I had it done when I turned ten so I could try out for this commercial. I'm going to be an actress, see?"

"That's cool. You're perfect for it."

"No I'm not. Not enough attitude. I look too much like a beauty queen, but I'm getting it pierced in the spring. That should help."

"Yeah."

"So, what about you?"

"What about me?"

"What the hell is your story? Where's your bruise?"

"Oh, I don't have one yet."

"Wait a minute! You're that little fucker who I hit in the hall the other day, aren't you? The assistant principal chewed me out for that. Said I had no right to push you."

"I guess you don't. I'm not ready to bruise yet."

"Says who?"

"Everyone."

"Parents and teachers and shit?"

"And me."

Jeremy was staring at his hands now and not at the girl. There was a silence of a few moments while she inspected him.

"So that's why you're up here?" she said.

"I guess. I guess I'm just up here to figure out my next move."

"Sorry, kid, but I came here with someone."

"That's not what I meant."

"I know. Joke."

"Oh."

She started to scrape her foot along the floor until her boot left a black mark on the wood. He watched her.

"So why not do it?"

"What?"

"Bruise yourself. Kids do it all the time. Why the wait; you afraid?"

"Yeah. A little."

"What for? It's something you're supposed to do. Something you're supposed to feel. It's all right."

"I know, I know. It's natural. It's strong. It's easy. I know that we're supposed to bruise. I know that we're supposed to have the bruise. I just want it to be right. I want it to be perfect. Not by accident or a theft, like some kids get them. I could just get it over with, just have a bruise anywhere like

anyone else, but that's just so stupid. It's so fucking stupid! I want the bruise to be mine! My way! My choice!"

She stared at him again, this time just at his face.

"Shit," she said. "That's pretty intense."

"Whatever."

"You ever think that you could just take it, don't worry so much about what it does to you, how it changes you? Just take it and let it change everyone else instead?"

"It's just . . . I can't just . . . there's . . ."

"Hey!" called a voice from behind them. It was Matt Beasle. He was motioning for her to follow him to the other side of the track. As he turned, Jeremy could see his bruise through a rip in the back of his shirt. The little light shined off of it just like that first day in the locker room.

"That's me," she said, and started off down the track. "Good luck with that!"

Jeremy sat there waiting for something to happen, for someone to say something, but he was alone. Below him, the kids kept jumping and rolling and screaming along, beating their bruises more and more, fitting themselves together more and more. From the top they all looked the same, like a body of water with waves that toppled over into themselves over and over, a repeated pattern that rolled on and on without an end or a meaning. Jeremy started to run down the stairs.

He fell down half a flight when he was nearing the bottom, and he slid onto the ground floor. With every stair he hit, every inch of floor, he could feel knots building in his muscles, but it didn't hurt enough. He flung himself into the gym, limping some at first, but soon sprinting again. He saw kids moving in and out of the dance floor, sweaty and laughing. Some stopped to watch as he flew into the middle of the punching, screaming mass and into the guitar. Probably a few teachers called out and ran after him.

It didn't matter. He couldn't see anything but bodies rolling around him. Crashing. Kicking. Biting. He'd bump and bounce into everyone and with each touch feel a warm burst of pain in his arms or legs or face. He began to sweat as he spun around, aching. It wasn't happening fast enough.

He started to provoke them. Yelling like an animal. Kicking, grabbing, punching. The other kids were so lost in their own world, they needed more than his presence to notice him. Slowly, they started to push back. An eighth grader shoved him aside and refocused on his girlfriend. Old friends tried to peel him off and push him to the sides of the floor. Jeremy wouldn't stop

fighting. He was relentless. Soon he got a few kids to gang up on him. They'd swing and he'd throw himself into their fists, laughing. Everyone started to laugh. It was funny. And Jeremy laughed loudest of all. His sides and his head began to throb with the growing pains. With his new bruises. And he laughed and he shook and he hurt until he fell.

Their bodies rolled over him. Feet pressed down on his stomach, his head, his chest. He lost his glasses at some point as the crowd faded into a blur of jabs. The blood on his shirt was no longer just his brother's. He rolled across the floor, propelled by them rather than his own force. His muscles knit together as small bruises and small pains grew into one mounting force. He was numb to everything but his bruising, and all the while the beat kept going. He bounced to the music and his head rocked to the floor over and over again, and then there was a snap. Sharp and clear.

The teachers stopped the music. They pushed through the crowd, seeking out the boy who wasn't ready to bruise. Some kids were still screaming or laughing, confused at where the fun went. Jeremy couldn't hear them at all. He could hear nothing.

A circle formed around the body; the kids who'd been standing on him pushed away to the edge. Waves went through the crowd as all attention turned toward the small clearing where two teachers shook him and held his head.

Up above, his actress looked down on the mass, on the body. Where there had once been a shifting sea of motion, there was now just a ring centered on one spot. One thing. It was a blemish, she thought. A bruise. He was their bruise. She looked down from the edge and knew it and hoped that he knew it too.



Return to Meat

Robert Webb

I knelt on one knee on the skinning room floor, spastically sawing off what I thought to be the last set of antlers I would ever have to dismember. After wrenching the rack free and sending a splintered bone fragment flying across the room, I scraped the severed brain out of the remaining part of the skull into the bone can and handed the ten-point trophy to the hunter.

"That's it for me; my deer cuttin' days are over. I'm headin' down to New Orleans to form me a rock and roll band," I said while untying my blood-stained apron. The hunter slowly took out a tin of Copenhagen, pinched a wad into his lip, looked me straight in the eyes and said, "You'll be back."

"If I do, it'll be in a tour bus filled with drugs and groupies," I said. "Shit, I'll own this town in five years." The hunter smiled, shook his head, and walked out the door carrying his new living room decoration. I really thought I was saying goodbye for good to the slow drain of the meat business as I drove my van out of town while sailing my middle finger out the window. However, just like Roy Hatcher reminded me on my first day back, as I tried to tie a rolled rump roast, "look atcha, you don't know shit about nuthin', dickhead."

On the morning of my return, I got a fresh new apron from the shelf and reluctantly headed for the cutting room. "Well, well, well, look who's back, Mr. big time rock-n-roll star," Roy sneered while balling a tub of burger. "I thought you was gonna be on the MTV," he continued.

"I'm still working on it. We just ran into a few roadblocks, that's all," I said.

"Roadblocks? Shit, we know all about those roadblocks, don't we boys?" he said while looking at the other cutters. "Steve here has been runnin' into roadblocks for 20 years." The room erupted into laughter as Roy reached into a box under the cutting table and handed me a knife, "I saved somethin' for ya', dickhead. I had a feelin' you would be back." It was mine from five years ago and it still had my initials carved into the handle.

"Thanks Roy."

"No problem, I even put an edge on it since Mr. Rock-n-Roll here never took the time to learn one of the most important skills of a meat cutter."

Again, the room broke out into laughter. "All right, enough of this reunion bullshit, let's get back to work," he demanded.

I began to butterfly some back-straps when I noticed the same faded sticker remained on the base of the grinder: "Meat is Money, Treat It Accordingly." The same old radio hung from a coat hanger in the corner, tuned to the same country music station. The same guys stood around the same table doing the same job and telling the same jokes: "Hey, how do you starve a Mexican? Hide his food stamps under his work boots." The same smell emanated from the cans filled with waste—freshly sawed bone, puss infected arrowhead wounds, gaseous gut shots, and urine saturated road-kill rounds. These cans doubled as ashtrays for the chain-smoking cutters, and as soon as a cigarette was thrown into one, the room reeked of burning flesh. I excused myself to the store's only place of refuge—the bathroom. The pile of Hustler magazines was still stacked on the back of the toilet and the infamous sign still hung on the back of the door: "Happiness is my meat in your mouth."

On my way back to the cutting room, Roy told me to go out back and unload an incoming "overgrown rat." By the time I got there, the hunter had already dragged his deer into the skinning room.

"Name and phone number?" I asked without looking at him.

"Hey, I remember you," the hunter replied. "The last time I saw you, you were bouncing off these walls like a little rubber ball, talking about going down south to be a rock-n-roll star. How'd that work out for you?"

"I don't need anymore patronizing, all right? I'm still working on it," I snapped. "Now, how would you like your deer cut up?"

"Relax kid, I'm being sincere here."

I looked into his eyes for the first time during this exchange and remembered who he was.

"Listen, at least you got out and took a chance. You put your balls out there on a platter for everyone to criticize and that's admirable. Most of the people in this town have never been out the county, let alone the state. If they're giving you shit, it's because they're either jealous or scared."

I felt like giving this big bearded hunter a hug.

"Devotion to something bigger than yourself is more than any of the yahoos in this place have ever done. Keep it up." I finished his order and shook his hand. I went back into the cutting room and continued to work on the back-straps. I half-smiled as Buck Owens's "Bakersfield" played softly from the corner.

The Economics of an Etch-A-Sketch Body

Sarah Sword

The Etch-a-Sketch promises
to be permanently erasable,
but it isn't. You think you can
keep reinventing the highway,
but you can't. You pinball
around the country
like you will never run out
of quarters, like you can keep
starting over, like the high scores
are just past that bumper target,
just past that tollbooth,
just past that twirling metal

flag. You think you can shoot
down I-75 in your silver Omni
and not leave a trail of aluminum
dust, not scratch the glass
surface of the road. And even
if you did, the Rand-McNally
Atlas promises more interstates.
But eventually there aren't.
David Ricardo would say
that resources run out: the Atlas
is soaked through with places
you have already seen, the classic
red frame encloses a dull mirror,
not a drawing surface.
Your body hangs like a black dress

appliquéd with tiny mirrors,
inside out. Haven't you had
your fill of men who etch themselves
into your skin? Eventually
your resources just run out
and you are left with the jangle
of loose change
in your pockets, hopefully
just enough to put together for
a clean slate.



Bearing Your Right Arm

Dan Olds

Recently, our government allowed an assault rifle ban to fade away. I see this as a first step in the right direction. Nothing complements the warm fuzzy feeling I get hearing the little birds in the trees chirping quite like the pleasant “klackity-klak” of an AK-47. Some ask why anyone would need an assault rifle. Well, I ask if you know of a better way to deal with a squirrel than with an Uzi. Yeah, I say let us hope this is only the first step on a path toward a bright, shell-filled future. A future in which many tools, currently listed as military ordinance, could be used to make things a little easier around the house and yard.

Tree need to come down? Plastic explosives would save you so much time. Someone block you into your driveway? A small rocket-propelled grenade can easily relocate this sir or madam’s misplaced vehicle. Don’t want rabbits in your garden? Plant a mine field. If a rabbit does wander in, hey, free fertilizer. And you can’t tell me there’s a better way to keep the dog off the couch than a few well-timed warning blasts from a flame thrower. I find that exponentially more effective than a rolled-up newspaper. Some of you are pulling away from me at this point, but please, let me explain. Our country was founded with guns as they helped us defeat the British. Our founding fathers, seeing them as such, made them protected in our constitution. See, guns are there to help us as tools, but also to put one more check and balance in our governing body. This leads me to my next point.

The plan was, if the government ever became tyrannical, unrepresentative of the people, it could and should be overthrown. Do you really believe, however, that you could successfully rebel against the government with your current stash of post-apocalyptic goodies? No, they have jets and armies to protect them. This means they won’t respect your opinion if you have much less than a tank sitting in your garage.

So I say it’s time to bring control back to the little guy. It’s time to stand up and be heard by the powers that be. It’s time for each and every American to install his or her very own tactical ICMB missile silo with a personal fission bomb resting peacefully inside.

Can you imagine what a beautiful world this would be? Pull up into your driveway, your neighbor comes over (no need to pull out the sawed-off shotgun, mind you; this is the neighbor you like).

“Morning Ted, I see you have the missile out in ‘Ready’ mode today.”

“Yeah, well, you know George, it needed a quick wipe down and I find it keeps those pesky kids who play hockey in the street away from the flower bed.”

“Yes, your daylilies are coming in great.”

“Thanks, it’s all that chipmunk fertilizer you gave me; the stuff works something wonderful.”

So I say lift those bans, twitch those trigger fingers, and bring on that military ordinance. I’m seeing a bright, shiny, noisy, tactical future America, and it looks great. Now get out of my yard.



The Deed

Charles Harper Webb

When we do it, we kneel in the same church,
Bounce in the same bus, scud in the same scow,
Soar in the same 747, Love,
As mockingbirds that buzz and flap in our peach tree;
As dragonflies that form a double helicopter;
Cats that keen like tortured ghosts;
Dogs that ludicrously hump, then stand
Forlorn and stuck in the road, rump-to-rump.

The same god impels us as impels
The box turtle (the red-eyed male—back feet
Trapped by the brown-eyed female's plastron—dragged
On his back through bracken, over needled
Forest floor), as impels the black
Widow and praying mantis (tiny males
Sneaking in to shoot their sperm
While the giant females eat them), as impels

The salmon, fighting past sharks, orcas, seals,
Nets, storms at sea, surging through grizzly-gauntlets,
Rapids, shallows, waterfalls, flanks turned
Crimson, nose a hook, the fat from years
Of oceanic gorging running out,
The big male dying as he finds a female
Also dying as she fans a nest
In gravel with her frayed, exhausted tail.

The very power that drives the male June bug
To mount the female like a two car pile-up,
That commands Diana's Fritillaries,
Silver-and-orange wings quivering, to glue

Their bodies end to end, the same boiling
In their protoplasm as in ours, the need
To replicate, make babies, larvae, fry,
Kits, pups, colts, cubs, young 'uns. The urge

So strong it drives male elk to interlock
Their horns and take two months to die,
Drives people into church and law offices,
Makes them sign papers binding them
To moral, legal, ethical responsibilities,
Makes them create love songs and diamond rings
And Wonder Bras, work two jobs, join a health spa,
Gonads pulsing, cells screaming "Divide!"

Ours: the scarlet beat of feathers, the wet press
Of fur, pulse of hind feet as sperm shuttle
Toward the mother ship: the egg. Ours,
The final spurt, the last ooze, the ultimate
Ahhh—the black-and-yellow exultation
Of the tiger swallowtail, elation of the crested
Nuthatch, ecstasy of the anopheles,
Satiation of the geoduck clam.



It's What You Have

Amy Sumerton

You are a writer, and so you write what you know. You never knew that you wanted to be a mother.

You know about being a nanny; you nannied for a little boy for a year and still regularly baby-sit for him and his half-sister in the evening.

Write a story about it.

You write fiction, so you're supposed to write *out* of what you know and *into* what you don't know. Base the nanny somewhat on yourself, base the kid on the boy since he's the only kid you've ever really *known*. Think about "nanny folklore" and incorporate that—it's the part you don't know, the part you must write *into*.

Create a mother who's both sympathetic and insane. Create a mother who is nothing like the mother you worked for, mostly because the character is expected and more interesting that way.

You want to make the story more compelling than it actually was.

In all actuality, you barely dealt with the mother at all. She was already gone when you got there in the morning and still hadn't arrived home when you left. You dealt with the father. You got along with him exceedingly well, in fact. Actually, you got along with both of them. You would see her at birthday parties, events, and sometimes in the evenings if you baby-sat. They were, without question, some of the best bosses you'd ever had; they treated you with respect, as an equal, and they paid you fairly and on time. The mother was an employee rights lawyer and such things were important to her.

Create a mother who's a single parent, who has a terrible relationship with the nanny. She doesn't treat her with respect, she's jealous, she doesn't know how to parent her child.

All these things are different from what actually happened, but that's what makes it fiction. It makes for a better story; people don't want to read about a nanny and a mother sitting around drinking beer and talking after the kid has gone to bed on a Friday night.

You are a writer, and so you write what you know.

You write a scene based on events that actually happened—the mother got off work early one day and came home as you were about to take the kid to the pool. She came with you and the three of you had a lovely time, laughing, swimming together.

Again, this is not the stuff of good fiction.

Recreate the scene when you write it, but twist it around. The mother is embarrassed to change in front of the young nanny. Put in some interesting stuff about the duality of the female body, young versus old, pre- versus post-motherhood. Have the kid cry every time the nanny swims away.

All these things are different from what actually happened, but that is fiction.

It makes for a better scene this way.

An early draft of the story wins honorable mention in a contest. The finished draft gets published in *Red Cedar Review*.

It's been two and a half years since you nannied, but you still baby-sit for the family a couple times a month. The mother comes home and the kids are in bed, so you and the mother crack a few beers and catch up. You tell her you're getting published again, this time in a more prestigious publication. Laugh a little—you're into your third beer at this point—and tell her that, interestingly enough, the new story is about being a nanny. Tell her that you are sort of like the nanny, her child is the kid, but the mother's character is definitely not based on her.

Later, looking back on this conversation, you'll think about your innocence, that seemingly innocuous thing. With hindsight hardening you, you'll look back at yourself and laugh, but it will be a bitter, cynical laugh.

You had the best intentions. It seemed like the honest thing to do. True enough, the mother never would have known. The publication was reputable, but not something a lawyer might have lying around. Also, while she's an avid reader, she once confessed to you—upon hearing that you were a short story writer—that she *hated* short stories.

She's a woman who loves or hates; you knew this about her. To her, everything is either black or white, so don't bother trying to argue. And she loves a fight; you knew this about her too. She always needs to be fighting for a cause. You knew all this, but you told her anyway.

So you e-mail her the story. You're excited to hear back from her, and you check your e-mail every day, waiting for a response.

Maybe she was busy. Maybe she hadn't had a chance to get to it yet. Who knew what was happening at work?

You e-mail her again. You remind her that you're leaving to visit a friend on the west coast for the next two weeks, but ask if she would like a baby sitter after you come back. You'll get back on a Wednesday, so how about that Friday night?

Maybe she was busy. Who knew what was happening at work that she couldn't respond to your e-mails?

In two weeks you return home to Michigan from the west coast. Surprisingly, you were homesick while you were gone.

You see your roommate, one of your best friends. He's the reason you met the mother in the first place; she's an old family friend. The two of you catch up on your vacation and on what you missed in Ann Arbor while you were gone. You mention that you e-mailed the mother about baby-sitting on Friday and ask if he had talked to her.

"Does she want a sitter?" you ask him.

The air in the room changes. You know. You have to ask . . . but you know.

"Did she read the story?" you venture carefully.

"Yes she did," your roommate says, no longer able to make eye contact with you.

"So . . . she didn't like it much?"

Your roommate pauses. "No, she didn't."

You look at your roommate. Your roommate looks at you.

"Actually," he starts, "that's an understatement. She *hated* it."

Your stomach feels funny, like you might throw up. "She did?"

"I don't want to get in the middle of it," he replies.

Of course not. You ask if you should call her.

"That's probably not a very good idea," he warns, "I don't think she wants to talk to you."

You realize that you're standing, but you're not sure how. You're thinking, "okay, then."

Ask him about the kids.

There's a pause that stretches from one side of the room to the other, up both of your bone-numb legs. The pause lifts you slightly above ground level and carries you slowly toward the couch. Midway through your passage, the

pause ends with the words “*She doesn’t want you to see the kids anymore.*” The words make you want to stop, make you want to collapse in your tracks, but the motion is somewhere inside and it takes you to where it throws you, face down on the couch.

Read the story again. Wonder what part it is that reminds the mother of herself. Focus your energy on the parents, on the anger. Don’t let yourself think of the children, that sweet little girl and the boy you couldn’t love more if he had come from your own womb.

It’s keeping you up at night. You read until you’re tired—sometimes rereading sentences up to 20 times because you are so distracted—and then turn out the lights. The impact of the darkness smacks you awake, and your mind tickertapes through all the things you want to say to her, all the defenses.

So many harsh, angry words. So many apologies.

You compose and revise speeches, rewriting them in your mind. You try to order your thoughts, fail, try to order your thoughts, fail again.

Your roommate told you not to call. He said perhaps she would cool down in time. He mentioned that she had been badmouthing you to everyone. Her parents, friends, neighbors all know what a terrible person you are, how you maliciously wrote a slanderous story about her and didn’t try to mask it.

Perhaps you are a terrible person. Perhaps you are, and you just didn’t know it.

After three nights, you can’t stand it anymore and write her an e-mail. You apologize. You explain again that it wasn’t about her. You carefully spell out the main points you’ve been going over and over in your head for the last three nights. You write: “I can’t stop you from burning this bridge but I don’t see who wins if you do” and you hope that she will read it the right way, the way you mean it. Words are funny like that. A sentence can be read more ways than one, and if it’s true that she hates you now, she will no doubt perceive it in a tone you did not intend.

Maybe she was busy.

Your fiction workshop leader, who’s been nothing short of outstanding since you met, tells you that your story is great. He understands why you’re sad, but he suggests that you actually take it as a compliment. As writers, he says,

we are always looking for universal truths. The fact that the mother identified enough with a character who wasn't based on her means that the story says something about the human condition.

The dad calls you—on your birthday, coincidentally—and leaves a message. It's non-descript and you feel optimistic. You were friends with him; you always got along.

You call the dad back the next morning on your way to work. He tells you that he doesn't want you around his family anymore. He tells you—three times—that you need counseling because you have no ethics, releasing that story without letting them read it first. You can't see his family anymore because he doesn't want them to be *fodder* for any more of your *stories*. He says the word "stories" as though he's cussing; the way a vegan might say the word "meat." He's yelling at this point and says he has to go, he's at work. He hangs up.

Your mouth hangs open, filled with everything you want to say in response. For example, you hadn't circulated the manuscript to anyone. You'd submitted another piece and the editor asked you to send two more stories to choose from. You'd mentioned to the mother that you were writing the story, and she hadn't seemed very interested. You're not the type of writer who hands out your new story to all your friends. Most people have to ask two or three times before you'll actually give them something to read.

You didn't see why you should have to show them the story just because it's about a nanny and you were their nanny. The story's not about them. They don't own it, and they're not in it. Obviously, you handled it in a way that offended them and for that you are truly sorry. But everyone makes mistakes. They should give you the benefit of the doubt. This is your first offense.

Your life is starting to resemble your story more and more.

The page proofs of your story arrives from *Red Cedar Review*. Nothing like this has ever happened to you before. You haven't sent your stories out very often; your rejection letter file is still what could be called thin.

Centered at the top of the page: your story's title. There it is—your name in print. Although you never liked anything as much as seeing your name in print, there's no sweetness in the moment this time. You look at the proofs and sigh. You love this story, but it has caused you more trouble than it's worth.

Read the typeset version. You have to, to check for mistakes. Tick off the sections in your head as you read them: that didn't happen; nope; nope; that didn't happen; that sort of happened, but not like that; nope; nope.

Briefly allow yourself to think of the kids and what they might be thinking. Start to take it personally. One of the main characteristics of the fictitious mother is that she's threatened by the nanny to the point of madness; she *hates* the nanny.

Wonder what part it is that reminds the mother of herself.

Give in. Watch the videotape you made of the little boy and his sister with the polar bears at the zoo, skinny and yellow, prompting the boy to say "wheer da beers?" over and over, even though you were pointing at them. You taped him on a number of random days, doing anything. In a great two minutes, his little face fills the screen with a look of wonder as he contemplates ducks in the Huron River. With his eyebrows manipulated by his thoughts, he finally looks at you and says he thinks the ducks are good friends. "But are dey *best* buddies like me and you?" he asks. You'd made a copy of the zoo scenes for the family and now you wonder what they've done with it. Certainly they can't watch it, with your voice and sometimes your physical presence a large part of the action. They must've destroyed it, hidden it in a box somewhere, or thrown it away. They must have taken down your self portrait, drawn in crayon, that hung on the refrigerator for over two years with those of the kids and scratched the numerous sticker pictures off the fridge, walls, phone, etc.

You watch the video twice—no need to hold back as no one is watching. You watch the duck part, the last scene, four times and then tape over it. They may have erased you from their house, but you still have framed pictures of the kids in your bedroom, living room, kitchen. You have drawings they each did in a file folder. You hang them up in your closet, behind your clothes and occasionally move your hangers aside to stare at them.

You have fantasies—elaborate fantasies—that the mother runs through a red light and smashes into your car, almost killing you. Getting so much comfort from this masochistic scenario disturbs you. You're not quite sure what it means, not quite sure what you think would actually come of such an incident.

It strikes you that the mother might have the exact same fantasy. It's not the only thing you share. Truth be told, you'd written the story about your-

self. The nanny is you physically, and, through her relationship with the boy; as far as the mother goes, there are emotional similarities. You wrote it about the deepest, darkest corners of nannyhood, the part you'd hidden from everyone. That's the irony of it, really—that you and the mother share these spaces that have been revealed, and it is what has split you apart.

Because you understand the emotions that have alienated the mother, you're able to feel a great deal of compassion for her. This is distracting, and while you are happy in some ways to love your "enemy," it was less complicated to just hate her.



Flash forward six months. Independence Day. You're working at a restaurant in downtown Ann Arbor and all your coworkers have gathered on the patio to watch the parade. A huge cloth dove held aloft by six people flutters in the slight wind. Peace signs of all sizes and colors carried on sticks pass, and a group of drummers banging on buckets clangs by. Your coworkers clap and cheer, and you laugh when you spot the family at about ten o'clock in your line of vision. It strikes you as ironic that they're in the peace section of the parade. They're holding hands with the two kids in the middle, both staring over their shoulders directly at you, mouths open. You freeze, then wave enthusiastically. The girl waves over her shoulder, the boy just keeps staring at you, his incredulous face ducking around people who move between you, until you can no longer see him.

You stumble inside to the restaurant bathroom and throw up. Not a lot, but enough to make a point—what that look meant made you sick; it was the look of someone who has seen a ghost, someone back from the dead.

Now the scab is off the wound and you're right back where you started. You can't ignore thoughts of the kids any more, and you dream of the little boy nightly. Sometimes his half-sister is there, usually saying your name over and over as she did when you were with her often. In the dreams, you are usually carrying the boy, carrying him to different places as you did when he was barely a toddler, back when you first started nannying for him.

You awake from these dreams every night and turn on your light. Somehow even the anger was better than this sadness you can't find a place to keep. Staring at the dent in the middle of your ceiling that always looked inexplicably like a helicopter to you now reminds you how he used to say "elly-ca-ca" for helicopter.

You never knew you wanted to be a mother.

Remember different things you did with him. Watching the leaves fall one autumn, you explained the seasons to him, explained that everything is always growing and changing. When you asked if he could feel himself growing, he paused so long you assumed he'd forgotten the question. It was then that you felt his little hand grip yours as he said, "*I can* feel myself growing!"

You can feel yourself growing too. Not in a direction that you wanted to, but growing nonetheless. In a funny way, it makes you feel more like a writer, estranging people with your work. All writers must have such tales of their abilities to disturb.

Perhaps someday you'll see him again. Perhaps someday the mother will come to her senses. Maybe you'll have to wait until he's old enough that his parents no longer choose his enemies for him.

He was one of the best friends you ever had, and there's nothing you can do about it. You have your memories, though. Your memories and everything you've learned, good and bad. And that is enough. It has to be, because it's what you have.



Inkling

Kristin Camitta Zimet

You're no lap-lounger, limp
upon the sofa's plush, no dumpling-rump,
sun-stuporous, cream-scrounging puss,
whose deep, obliging nap
my fingers drag in idle parallels—
but splat, splayed on the screen,
cicada-hooked; your bunched-up belly-fur
bristles with Spanish needles.
You squirrel flat along a locust limb
to rake my scalp. Thorn-foot, you thump
snow-sodden on my pillow,
wedge wet nostrils into mine,
and milk my chest with icicles.
A paroxysmal push and purr
hurry my hand; a nip and hiss
freeze it. With one quicksilver lick,
old splinter-tongue, you twist away,
all blot and blotch in moon-dark.
You win: I give up pouncing,
cajoling, twitching my tail
at sealed-up holes,
seeking to press you quiet
as a mauled rabbit in a bedroom slipper.
But my heart cracks a window,
jumps into wind-sway, moon-skid,
bearberry bramble; it feels you turn
inside your skin, hunting down trust
into the open house. Come carry back

a melting chill, an ears-back burrowing,
a scratched sign, an inkling how to love
the ones who can't come in.
Night upon night swallows them:
the sniper, the feral child.







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Stewart and Snowbird

Rachel Antonia Penn

I was born a storyteller in a world of church-going, wealthy, middle-class amoebas known as the residents of East Lansing, Michigan. I felt no connection or companionship with the inhabitants of my suburban town, learning the art of observation as a method of intellectual survival at a young age. My father always said, “A true storyteller always places himself in the one corner of a room from which he can see and hear everything because a true storyteller never stops looking for characters.” This was my approach to life, and mid-westerners were the perfect example of that. I loved watching their flux of emotions. I especially received pleasure in evoking the inevitable expression of shock on executive mothers’ faces when I saucily told them I didn’t believe in God, my mother was a stay-at-home mom, and that I would rather go to Hell and be interesting than go to Heaven and be good. Often, their ill-concealed attempt at composure took form in quaking voices thinning to a nervous laugh. Whatever their reaction though, one comparison remained the same throughout. “Well,” they would titter incredulously, “she *does* take after her father.”

It was my father who guided my childhood, nurturing my imagination and grooming me for a lifetime of storytelling. A writer himself, “my papa,” as I called him, kept my mind occupied by making me tell him stories about the neighborhood squirrels on the way to the park. There was Frankie and Stewart, Aunt May and Uncle June, all of whom were customized and molded into tangible characters, each lending themselves to all the trouble and mischief that could be conjured up in the mind of a four-year-old. I was entirely disinterested in the other children’s games, fashioning my own world of make-believe which my father firmly encouraged.

As I grew older and squirrels no longer captivated my imagination, my papa would tell me stories about his childhood every night until my questions wore him out. My father did not come from a happy home, but his

Editor’s Note: This piece is reprinted here as submitted to the East Lansing, Michigan “One Book, One Community” essay contest, sponsored by Barnes and Noble in October, 2004. Ms. Penn won first prize for this essay.

stories were not filled with regret. Instead, he stubbornly made it so his children's childhoods would never be like his, going out of his way to change his situation in life. Eagerly, I would lap up my father's tales, trying to emulate his spirit, asking for story after story, until the point came when he would laughingly whisk me off to bed saying, "Stories are magical things, they can not be conjured to memory at a moment's notice." Through these personal narratives, he instilled in me his strength and sheer will power, which allowed my own character to survive the pressures of life in a place where I never felt I belonged. Through an understanding of his childhood and subsequently my own, I learned that though I had no sports team or youth group to subscribe to like most, I had something far greater: determination and imagination.

Somehow though, even when his memories of childhood had been depleted, he always had time to tell one of his Indian stories. As a member of the Nez Perce tribe, my papa would tell me countless tales of Coyote's trickery and Snowbird's wisdom. I myself was named after Snowbird by my father at birth; a name which has become an integral part of my identity. Learning the American Indian folklore allowed me to connect with the heritage of my Nez Perce ancestors, who had passed the same stories on through generations to my father who told them to me. It was through these accounts of creation and destruction that I formed a relationship with family members long dead, gaining an understanding of their past and a need to pass on their stories. I believed that the true afterlife is made up of the memories the dead leave behind in the world of the living. It was this that made me my papa's girl. "My Indian child," he would call me.

Today, in a time where there is so little time, my father and I have a connection that will always be present. No matter how far we may be apart, we will always have Stewart and Snowbird and a million other fantastical characters to bind us together. My papa's own story will live on as well. In years to come, generations later, his tale will be told to his great-great-great grandchildren, his spirit mingling with perhaps vivid characters of their own making.



Going Places

Dan Olds

Sometimes a man has just got to face life. Sometimes a man must put away his fears, look into the sky and scream, “You don’t scare me, World!” Sometimes a man has just got to leave his apartment.

I grew up in a boring enough city that downtown East Lansing is terribly exciting to me. It’s a crisp fall day so I figure, why not take a stroll down memory lane, which, in this case, is Grand River Ave.

Ah, downtown East Lansing, where all the beautiful people gather. Oh, here are some now! There’s no better place to find examples of truly impressive human beings than at everybody’s favorite meat market, the Land Shark. It’s Saturday at 3 PM. It’s sleeting outside, and it’s freezing. Twelve people are standing outside the Land Shark, waiting for it to open. I don’t claim to know what everybody plans on doing on an ugly Saturday afternoon, but standing in line to wait for the Ass Buffet to open is apparently the best thing these individuals can come up with.

To the young men standing in line, I offer this analysis: Your penis has taken control of the rest of your body. Now let’s not get drastic here, I know of a solution. It’s faster, cheaper, and will most likely be better than anything you’re going to find out on the dance floor of that fine establishment. Plus, you’ll get out of the rain, go home, and drink cheap beer. See me, and I’ll explain.

And girls, girls, girls, look at the line around you. Can you even fathom how much alcohol it’s going to take for Brad or Chad to start looking like something that could wet your whistle? Perhaps, however, you already know how much you’re planning to drink tonight, and you’re just banking on a cute doctor in the emergency room. No, you’re probably not that smart, or else you wouldn’t be wearing those low cut jeans and a tank top when it’s 36 degrees outside. My advice to you: the night is still young, and I think Meijer has a sale on hand-held shower heads this week. Anyway . . .

Now I’m passing the Student Book Store. I glare in fiercely, wondering how these smug bastards sleep at night. Probably pretty well, atop their giant pile of money. As a freshman I was sure this place was one of the best examples of a business going out of its way to make things easier on the students. Sort of like a friendly crossing guard helping a confused freshman cross the

street—the street of life. Now, I guess it's a bit more as though the crossing guard was gently picking up the freshman, stealing all his lunch money, then throwing the kid into oncoming traffic. If you do sell anything back to them, I suggest you ask for your money in small change. Then what you do is take your 78 cents you just got for selling back two years' worth of text books and throw it at them. I know, you're saying "Dan, that's not socially acceptable. I could use that change to do some laundry." It's a valid argument, but this is a discussion for another time as at this point in my walk I've reached a corner that requires the utmost concentration.

Across the street from me is a Starbucks, but to my immediate left is a Barnes and Noble with a Starbucks of its own inside. That's two Starbucks just looking at each other from across the street. There are levels of complexity here I cannot begin to comprehend. This corner used to be just like any other. Nowadays you really have to keep your wits about you, because if you don't realize you're crossing the street from one Starbucks to another Starbucks, it's pretty easy to get lost. If you get lost, you might end up in line for the Land Shark at 3 PM on a cold, rainy Saturday.

As these four years have passed, not everything about downtown has depreciated. I believe a wise man came to this spot a few years ago, looked up at the rainy skies, and pleaded to the powers that be to create a coffee shop, a coffee shop that would supply its patrons with no less than three various colors of paint on the walls, five different types of illumination, four different types of ceiling to lounge under while sitting in no less than six different kinds of chairs or couches. Then, the sky cleared and down from the heavens descended Espresso Royale. Enter this coffee sanctuary and retrieve your personal Holy Grail. Mine happens to be a medium cup of joe with just a shot of mint. As you lounge on a purple kidney-shaped couch, basking in medium yellow light under wood paneling next to the blue wall, the world seems a little bit better. A younger student will ask another coffee pilgrim, "Hey, do they have board games here?"

"Yeah, I'll show you," the man explained, "they're in that fridge over there."

"They keep board games in a fridge?"

"Yeah, they're kind of old. I guess it keeps them fresh."

"Huh?" the student pondered for a minute. "That's okay, I should probably just go; I have to pick up a course pack."

"Oh, I can help you out with that too," the man said. "I work at SBS down the street, I'll walk you there."



Travels with Iggy

Anjali Rohatgi

Fifth grade was a great year. Boys were finally cootie-free, girls had discovered deodorant, and we were all content with our quirky individual selves now that we were at the top of the elementary school totem pole. Our paradise resembled a scene out of *The Magic School Bus* books, complete with a frizzy-haired, rainbow-skirted teacher and a mismatched collection of bastardized animals cohabitating in a tropical rain forest.

We had a choice selection of creatures, including Snyder the skink, Roadkill the gecko, Birdie the cockatiel, and three newts recovered from Adam's basement. All the glue we ate must have gone to our heads, because we fought over the honor of being a "pet parent" and cleaning up the gifts that decorated their cages. Although there was always fun to be had coaxing Birdie down from a light fixture or extricating Snyder from someone's hair, our true allegiance lay with Iggy the iguana. Rescued from the treacherous exotic animal black market that raged in Indiana, Iggy was something of a mess when our teacher found him, as he had picked up strange illnesses during his travels. Fortunately, Iggy recovered to own us all, with only a slight limp as a souvenir from his travels.

We started each day making geography cards, learning that there were 48 contiguous states, and that Greenland is not as green as you would think. Just to spite the rest of us, whoever was in charge of pet parenting that week would let Iggy scamper around her desk while trying to convince us that her fortune-cookie Chinese was as good as the real thing. Iggy would shake his head at this nonsense as our attention turned back to locating Transylvania on a map only to discover that it's nowhere near Pennsylvania. Of course, this was no news to Iggy, who probably spent a summer of his youth there. When he gazed fondly at the country next to Austria, we'd get the impression that the spot was something beyond a question in next week's quiz.

Skippping down to art class mid-morning, we vacationed in a nation festooned with watercolor paintings from the land of elementary school kids. Iggy, ever ready for a new experience, was smuggled into class and frolicked between lopsided coil pots and tempera paint. The open-minded iguana was as at home in a game of paper football as he was on Dominic's pudgy

shoulder. In addition to Iggy's remarkable bladder control, for which Dominic was very grateful, Iggy was always willing to accompany us on adventures planning coordinated attacks against substitutes or on spy missions on the class across the hall. He would instigate excursions into the boys' line on the way to class, or scurry along the hot-lunch line when the principal was away, allowing kids to give him a belly rub in exchange for nacho-cheese combos. Although these places were as foreign to him as Madagascar was to us, he never stopped traveling. The colored bits on maps represented more than misinformed ideas. They were nations teeming with reptilian friends as disparate as students in our classroom.

In the afternoon, we were confined to our desks and bribed with shiny gold stars to overcome our fear of fractions, leaving Iggy to his own designs. He wandered about freely, scavenging the remains of lunch boxes while avoiding the confines of his cage. We would watch our step—a lesson we learned quickly after seeing what became of Sam's toad—and Iggy reported to us later. To Iggy, the classroom wasn't merely a classroom, but a sum of its diverse parts: the windowsill offered a perch from which to mock the squirrels, the cabinet provided a dark place for a nap. All tiles, tables, students, and teachers had significance beyond their basic existence and location.

The education of Iggy the iguana was more real than our own. Our flashcards and colored maps tried to teach us what Iggy learned for himself. He learned the coat hall was to the left of his cage; we learned Sri Lanka was south of India. He learned about a hiding place where he could keep us guessing for hours; we learned that China was the most populous country in the world. Iggy slept until we returned the next morning, waking to news of exploits modeled after his natural excursions.



Emily's Song

Tom Bourguignon

write her words on spider webs
write her words on grains of rice
write her words on falling dewdrops
 with acid rain that turns to ice
do a little dance for me
do the thing you did last night
do you think deception
 dances sad in moonlight?

build a fire in the ashcan
build cathedrals in your verse
build a life of aimless roaming
 in the back of an old junk hearse
watch the wheels fall off the bus
watch the asphalt curse in rut
watch it all through two small holes
 and dream a newborn dreamer up

splash the water on your face
splash the puddle as you walk
a splash of whisky in your Joe
 circumscribed in chalk
sing a ballad—Emily—
sing a train-song for the road
sing intestines-of-the-world
 in roaring sacrificial mode

stomp the seeds where I have plowed
stomp the love that stuck to you
so you could adumbrate
the only chaff I ever threw
break the rocks with hammers
break the trees with saws
build that holy railroad
with daffodils and gauze

prove that life is serious
prove that I should break my back
proving there are differences
between the pavement and the crack
where are flowers burning down?
where will merry breezes blow
when all our wheat fields end
in dust out where the creepers grow?



June Riot

J.C. Dickey-Chasins

Greenwood, Oklahoma

June 1, 1921

The belly weight won't let me sleep. That, and the heat and the smoke. Ned was up before dawn and I was still awake, wanting this baby *out*. My husband slipped out like he always does, not putting on his boots until he's outside. Considerate. Some women here complain about their men, say they give coloreds a bad name with their whoring and gambling. But Ned was never like that, never even a stray glance, not once the whole time I been with child. I attribute it to the Lord.

The smoke wafts in. I ease from the bed. Last night some of the uppity niggers marched out of Greenwood into Tulsa. Carrying guns. Went to prevent a lynching, is what Missus Charles next door said. Ned shook his head, kept saying, "They's fools," but I don't know. A black boy bumped a white girl in an elevator. She says he raped her. Next thing you know, the whites are at the courthouse ready to kill the boy. If I had a dollar for every time some white woman said she was raped by our men, I'd be living in a fine house up north.

Living in town and still on straw ticking. Don't seem right. But the coloreds get straw and the whites get mattresses. That's the difference between Greenwood and Tulsa right there—straw and mattresses. Oh, there's no profit in such thoughts. I push up from the nightstand and make my way into the kitchen. My back aches and my ankles feel like they'll explode.

Ned's left half the coffee and a surprise: a slice of white bread slathered in molasses. I heat up the coffee and nibble at the bread. I'm not hungry—no space down there. The baby barely shifts now, an enormous, washpan-sized lump. I slide back, trying to get comfortable on the hard, flat-bottomed chair.

That smoke smell again. I expect they set another house on fire, the white boys with their torches and guns, those white hoods. Ned says the good Negroes—like us—have nothing to fear.

No use trying to sit. I stand. Upright the baby settles down. It's a kicker, has been for months. Ned so wants it to be a boy. Lord knows he deserves it

after two stillborn babies. And I want this child, please dear God, I do. Just one healthy baby for me and Ned.

There's shouting outside. I lean out the window. The air is hot and still, dank from the night. The noise seems to come from the northwest—up on Greenwood Street maybe? That's where all the businesses are. A fire, most likely. Explains the smoke. I hesitate, listening. Doesn't sound like a fire, exactly.

I turn and go to the counter. Best clean up the dishes now, when I've got my strength. Seems like afternoons I just want to rest and sleep.

I feel a shift inside, a settling. Is it today? I don't trust my body, not after the last baby. So certain it would come out screaming, and then Betty Lou shaking her head, saying, "He's strangled is all." God's will. A child not meant to be. *His judgment is heavy but always just.*

I glance at the wind-up clock on the windowsill. Ned's been working a good hour at the stable. Mister Shockley is one of the good whites, Ned says, willing to treat you right if you give him respect. Ned says these young niggers have gotten used to making folding money and wearing fancy clothes, as if they were better than us. Ned says these niggers don't respect their elders, and I expect that's right. But it's not my place to say, anyhow.

I move into the sitting room. The house has three rooms and no hallway—each space just runs into the other. Cozy is what Ned says. Elbows touching when both of us is here. With the baby, I don't know.

A crack sounds outside—distant. Then another. Like fireworks. But the Fourth isn't for another month. Surely that business at the courthouse has simmered down. All that hollering and marauding last night. The whites must've got tired. Are those young niggers shooting off their guns again?

Or is it the whites?

I shiver despite the heat, remembering Durant.

I was seventeen, working for Missus Lambert then, taking care of her three boys, doing the cooking and cleaning. She was mean because her husband had died the year before, leaving her less than nothing. The woman depended on her brother and on what she earned as a clerk at the general store. Came home angry almost every day, and I was her favorite thing to kick. "Jane," she said, "you know why the niggers is so low and poor? 'Cause they have no morals. They crawl in the mud and the very dust our Lord made us from." She'd go on and on and I'd nod my head and say "Yessum" every so often until eventually she'd move on to abusing one of her boys. Her words rolled off me. Then Ned came along.

He worked a farm outside of town, dawn to dusk, arms like cords of rope. A fine young man, quiet when his friends were shouting and whistling, just the manner that drew my eyes to his. So shy! Looked away when I smiled. But then he looked up again, and soon enough we were visiting every Wednesday and Sunday after church. We had already set the wedding day when Junior Stanland was lynched.

They said he'd been caught with a white woman. She'd tried to protect him, arms clenched around his legs until they whipped her as well. But they reserved the lynching for Junior. The boy was only nineteen, scarcely any stubble on his chin. The night they hung him was unsightly cold, with a raw wind that went through your clothes like they was cheesecloth. I remember, because that was the very same night they ran us out of Durant.

The whites—men mostly, wearing overalls and work dungarees and suspenders, but some women and boys, too—marched into our neighborhood just after dark, waving torches, shouting “Run the coons! Run the coons!” They were laughing and singing. A big game. Ned and I were on my mama's porch rocker, taking the evening breeze. When they rounded the corner, he jumped up and said we had to go. We rushed through the house—thank the Lord Mama was in the country visiting Aunt Sophie—grabbing the money jar and my Bible. Then Ned pulled me out the back door. We had just cleared the end of the alley when I saw the whites again, their torches flickering against our homes. We ran and ran until we were on the north road out of town. There were hundreds of us, children crying and men looking as if they'd been socked in the belly. And the wind. Cutting into you, cold and unnatural for May. As if the Lord had sent another plague down on us, another test.

We reached Atoka near dawn. Some stayed, but we kept moving north. I'd heard of Tulsa and its black town of Greenwood on the east side, how it was a place where blacks owned beauty parlors and funeral homes, where a Negro could stand up straight and not see a white man for a mile. They said a black man made a living wage, that the whites kept to Tulsa.

Lord, Durant seems like so long ago, not three years. I look out the window again. There *is* smoke against the morning sky—like fog, but fast moving.

Ned says the whites are our trial. They are the test of our mercy and grace. They are what God has sent the Negroes because we stray and sin. They enslaved us because we were wicked and blasphemous, and they freed us when we had grown in understanding. Ned says that the whites will live in

peace with us when we have cleansed ourselves. Not before.

The baby tries to move inside, but there's no room. I steady myself on the sill. My hand brushes the Big Ben, and the clock clatters to the floor. There goes three dollars, I think. Now I hear shouts.

The door rattles.

"Jane! You there? Open up!"

I pull back the latch. Missus Charles from next door is standing there, already dressed. "They's coming, Jane! A boy says they's burning Greenwood!"

I blink, not believing.

"Run, child! Save that baby!" She grasps my elbow.

I pull back. "I—I can't."

"Why not? Good Lord, child, they's coming!"

A sudden crack sounds, like a tree falling. But there're no trees in Greenwood.

"Ned's in Tulsa."

"He'll find you." She pushes past me, moving faster than I've ever seen, snatching up my shawl from the chair back. She hands it to me. "Fill this up with food," she says sternly.

I hurry into the kitchen, gathering the remainder of the cornbread, a jug of milk, and some wormy apples that Mister Shockley gave Ned from the horses' share. Charity fruit. *They ain't hard folk, Jane. White folk jes figger us to eat anything the horses do.*

"Come on!" Missus Charles drags me out the kitchen door.

The outside air wakes me. We move along so quick I can barely take in a breath. *Why are we running?*

She cuts around the back of the house. We follow the open sewer trench south, away from the shouting and smoke. You wouldn't think Missus Charles could move so fast. A widow woman from way back, her husband dead for ten years or more, Missus Charles gets by on sewing and cleaning the white folks' houses. Her white hair is so thin on top I can see her scalp. Now she runs almost like a young woman, her brown and yellow skirt flapping up to reveal blue-veined brown legs.

Oh sweet Jesus! I have to stop. No air in my lungs. The baby is so heavy. *Hush baby now. Don't you cry. Mama's gonna get you a—*

"Now hon, you gots to keep moving." Missus Charles is standing in front of me. Has she been crying? There's raw redness in her eyes. "They's coming."

I nod, wanting just to get my breath back. Dogs bark all around, short guttural yaps, as if they're ripping at something. The fire's edge peeks over

the top of Mabel's Beauty Salon. Why not lie down now, nestle up against a rock in the dust and sleep?

Where is Ned?

The whites are burning Greenwood. *Running the coons*. I shiver. Can't be. It's different here. The whites *need* us.

Missus Charles drags me into motion again. We shuffle along. Other refugees crowd us on all sides, mostly women and children and old men going south and east, away from Greenwood, away from our homes, away from Tulsa. We pass the north edge of town, past Pappy Galvin's smoke-house. It looks deserted.

"Billie Johnson said they was bombing with airplanes."

I stare. These are the first words Missus Charles has uttered in five minutes.

Her eyes peer straight ahead, her hand is on my forearm. "Dropped gaso-line on Greenwood Avenue. Saw it hisself."

She sounds like she's testifying on Sunday morning. *Bombing?* It doesn't make a bit of sense, destroying Greenwood. White folks *need* us. What does Missus Wilson say? *I send my brown shirts to niggertown and they come back sparkling white*. We feed their children and cook their dinners and shine their shoes.

I shake my head. "No. Ain't true."

"It's in their blood," she says as if she hasn't heard me. "The white folks just hate the coloreds. Spite and hate."

I glance at her, shocked. Never have I heard her so angry. Her jaw is set tight, her eyes glisten.

A murmur runs through the crowd. The children in front of us turn, pointing back.

We pause, following their upraised hands. A gray-and-black cloud rises over Greenwood, wide and so thick it blots out the early morning sun. Only a quarter mile away, but I can hear the whites shouting.

Come out, niggers! Come out and play!

The words flash down my body like fever.

The children begin running. There's a deep, earth-rattling thud. An explosion. Now others behind us surge forward. I try to keep up but I can't. My grasp on Missus Charles's hand weakens. Breaks.

She is carried forward. For one second I think she'll try to fight and push her way back through the torrent to reach me. But then a woman screams. The crowd quickens. I stumble, veer left, pop out of the column. Then I take a deep breath and look around. Missus Charles is gone.

Oh Jesus, help me! I want to cry. I look north, trying to make out her face. It's no use. There are too many black faces, too many screaming children, too much dust. I pull away from the crowd, not thinking, exactly, just wanting to get relief from the baby's weight. I slump down on a patch of Johnson grass at the road's edge. *Oh Missus Charles.* I want to cry. A few women pushing past glance down, their eyes widening and then darting away, as if to say, "Oh hon, that's a shame, but I've got my own tribulations."

I can't stand, can't squat. So I sit, leaning back on my arms, legs straight out, trying to relieve the pressure of the baby inside. *This child will climb out on its own.* Cramps again, sharp and wrenching. Is it beginning?

"Lord have mercy, I thought I'd never find you."

I look up to see Missus Charles leaning over. I can see the relief in her eyes. She pats my shoulder. "Is it time now?"

I start sobbing.

There's another wave of shouts, and the crowd surges past, hundreds of boys and girls and old men and women, carrying pillowcases stuffed with clothes and silverware and photographs.

"Now hush," Missus Charles says. "You's all right, don't fret." She squats beside me, her long fingers clasped around my right arm. "We need to get you someplace quiet." She leans near, listening to my breathing. Her eyelids droop, as if she's concentrating. Then she nods. "Not much time now."

She talks like I was a baby myself. I clutch at her bony frame, smelling camphor and lilac. I'm fixing to deliver and I'm on the road out of town, in the weeds, and I don't know where Ned is. *Oh Lord Jesus save and comfort me. Show mercy sweet Jesus.* Dust billows from hundreds of feet, mixing with the smoke of burning Greenwood. It catches in my throat.

She moves her other hand to my forehead. It's a surprise—cool and dry, steady. I feel a calm almost in spite of myself, a settling that moves down my body from my head to my stomach. Even the baby seems to ease inside me, although it continues to dig a foot into my ribs.

"I'm sorry, Missus Charles."

She glances up, surprised. "Now why?"

"All this," and I look down at my belly.

A thump vibrates the earth, then a pit-pat of gunfire. The crowd, which has grown until it completely overruns both sides of the road, stampedes.

"Ain't nothing to be sorry for, having a baby. Humph!" She glances back at the horizon. "We gots to move." She rises, pulling me up with her. For an

old woman, she's strong, like one of those red ants carrying a bread crumb twice its size.

A man bumps against me, his elbow in my belly like a broom handle. The baby stirs and my right leg buckles. Missus Charles props me up and drags me purposefully away from the road.

The cramping comes regular now, swallowing all my attention. I grunt and lean harder on Missus Charles.

There's a rise—a hump in the field that overlooks the road. She takes me there, sets me beside a clump of sumac the size of a wagon. My breath comes hard and raw, like illness. The column below envelopes the road, a black, wide snake growing out of Greenwood. At its tail rises the inky smoke from dozens of fires, and ahead of the smoke are the whites. They are marching with their rifles slung over their shoulders, and torches.

"Hon. Look here." Missus Charles settles us behind the sumac so that we are blocked from the road's view. She arranges my legs. "It's your time."

I shake my head. "No ma'am. Not here—"

"Can't choose your time and place," she says. "Now jes breathe in. Easy." She places her hands on my belly.

Oh Lord, protect me from evil. Breathe in. May your face shine upon me. Out. For your mercy is hard but always just. In. I'm putting my child in the hands of this old woman who lives next door. Oh Ned. I force his face out of my mind.

"Oh!" The contraction is hard, like someone pulled my stomach inside out.

"You birthed before." Missus Charles says, more as a statement than a question.

Another contraction. "Yes," I gasp. "They died."

Her eyes dart up. For a brief moment, doubt flickers through them. Then she glances down, her attention on my belly. Her hands move to my back, rubbing it hard and rhythmically. The muscles soften under her callused fingers.

Another contraction. My fingers dig into the dirt. White men's voices drift in on the wind. "*Run niggers! Run!*" They sound happy and carefree—as if they'd been waiting for months to do this. Like they were chasing cattle that broke through the barn door. *In slavery days they gelded the runaways, buck naked in front of the others. The white man is evil, he is—*

Oh Lord! My insides tighten up and then let go. Surely the baby will burst out. But it doesn't. Missus Charles pats me and hums. I gulp for air.

A rat-tat-tat echoes down the road—too quick for rifle fire. A machine gun? Missus Charles edges around the bushes and studies the road below, then pulls back. “We have to hide,” she says. “They’s coming hard now.”

“But—”

“Hide in the sumac,” she says. “In the middle there.” She yanks out some smaller saplings and hollows out a cave inside the sumac stand. Then she pulls me in until we’re surrounded by the long, pointed leaves. She touches them. “Shining sumac. Purple and red come fall. I dearly love to see it.”

Shouts echo up the slope. Missus Charles stiffens against me. My contractions come in waves, arising from nothing, carrying my body along. I gasp, and in an instant Missus Charles stuffs a rag from her waistband between my teeth. “Bite down.”

“*We’re runnin’ coons! Cookin’ coons!*” The whites are singing and laughing. It’s a holiday. Rifle shots ring out, then more laughter. They’re a hundred yards away, but it sounds like they’re just beyond the leaves of our hiding place. I close my eyes, thinking of the baby, deep inside, fighting to get out.

Not yet, hon, not yet. Not now. Not till the whites pass.

Oh sweet Jesus. To hold in this baby. Thick, yellowy sap oozes from the broken, drooping limb of a sumac branch. A drop falls on my arm, pale against ebony. It glows in the light, an amber pearl, a—

Oh! The contraction steals my breath. My teeth clamp the rag, musky sweat filling my mouth. Missus Charles knows. She squeezes me tight, her head nestled against mine. She begins singing so low I can scarce make out the words. “Sweet music in heaven, just beginning for to roll. Don’t you love God? Glory, hallelujah.”

“Don’t come back, niggers!”

Her voice softens the pain for a second, pushes the white folks’ screaming away. Sweat drips from my forehead and over my cheek. Down my neck. A whiff of smoke drifts through the bushes, the scent of torches. *What is left to burn?* Oh Ned, where are you?

Their voices fade. “All right, hon.” She pats my shoulders. How can I survive without her touch? This morning I ate the molasses and bread Ned left for me. Never a single thought about where I might birth a baby.

Maybe the white folks are right. Maybe we coloreds are just plain stupid, not seeing what would happen if our boys fought back.

Another contraction, this one like a kick in the gut from Mister Shockley’s mule. But not hurting exactly, just deep and hard and serious.

Missus Charles studies my belly, one hand just above my middle. "Squat," she commands.

"But—"

"Ain't quick enough," she says, "so you gots to help it along." She slides her hands under my arms and pulls me up.

My backside is numb. Pain needles up my spine. To the north a dust cloud rises above the white pursuers. I try to squat as she commands, but there's nothing to hang onto. Sumac saplings and Missus Charles can't hold me.

She frowns. "Maybe a tree . . ." She glances around. About a hundred yards away, a stand of blackjack and horse apple cover the top of a ridge. She gestures toward them. "Reckon you can make it?"

I nod.

"Come on, then."

We gain the ridge in an awkward shuffle, stopping three times for my contractions to pass, expecting every minute to be discovered. I feel red dirt caked in the corners of my mouth. A blue jay trails us, squawking and complaining. The child hangs so low, so desperate to get out. My ankles and calves are puffed out and achy. The dust puffs up at every step, caking our legs until we look like Indians. Nigger Injuns.

Under the trees it feels a little cooler. Still no breeze, though. I lick my lips. So thirsty.

"Fasten onto that oak there," Missus Charles says. "Squat."

I do as she says. "I need a drink."

She shakes her head. "Ain't no water nor nothin' else."

I shift, trying to find a better stance. My knees pop—painful, dull cracks.

"Now jes close your eyes. That baby wants to see its mama."

Ned.

"A sweet baby, I knows. Can feel it." She steadies me with those dry-palmed hands across my shoulders.

I squeeze my eyes shut. A contraction. Another. So hard. Like kicks to the gut.

She stuffs the rag back between my teeth. "Can't call out," she says, "not even here."

It chokes me.

A shaft of sunlight burns the back of my neck. Another contraction. *Ned, please.* For a second between contractions my mind drifts. I can smell—no,

taste the fatback my mama fried up on Saturday mornings. The crisp brown edge of corn bread—

“That’s good,” Missus Charles murmurs. “Now *you* push.”

Sweet Jesus Lord forgive me . . .

The contraction yanks me back. A black fly buzzes around, then lands on my forearm. The muscles crest and then loosen.

The dank earthen smell of the forest rises from the oak twigs. I grab the tree trunk tighter, feeling the baby drop again, another little bit. In Mama’s kitchen, the uncles sit at the table in the corner and sip their corn liquor from green glass jelly jars—

Another, a mule-kick to the stomach. Missus Charles is on her knees, as if she was praying to me. Praying to the baby. Her hands are between my legs. I’m hanging onto that tree for dear life. If only I was in my own bed, straw ticking and all. *But I ain’t.*

The baby pushes against me.

Missus Charles grunts, then shifts, both hands cupped below me, waiting. “Push, girl. Now.”

I do.

The baby emerges, headfirst, red and pink and brown. Just the head. I take a breath, then push again. Now the rest comes. Missus Charles pulls it—*her*—up. The cord dangles down. Missus Charles produces a bright yellow handkerchief and wipes my baby’s face. I let loose of the tree and plop on the ground.

“Here,” she says, placing the baby in my arms. “A right healthy one.”

I lean against the trunk, panting. She’s right. The baby’s mouth already seeks my breast, hands shut tight and curled, legs kicking. I unfasten my blouse and give it suck. Ten perfect fingers. Blotchy skin the color of a rainbow. The faintest fuzz of hair over her scalp.

I feel no more pain. *Praise God.* My baby girl wriggles against me, and a thrill rises up—a feeling of almost-contentment in my chest. *Oh Ned, you will love this little girl. Our baby. The Lord’s gift.*

The sun begins setting, and I know I have to go back. No matter what. The satisfaction in my heart sours every time I think of Ned. He has to see his baby girl. I tell Missus Charles.

“You can’t, Jane,” she says. “You saw the white folks, they’s killin’ and burnin’.”

“I don’t care,” I say. “I’m going anyhow.” I stand, feeling a little faint headed.

"Then I'll jes come along," she says.

"But you was *leaving* Greenwood," I say. "You don't—"

"That child needs lookin' after." There's a stubborn set to her mouth. I give in.

We avoid the road, keeping a quarter mile west. I can't go fast between feeling weak and carrying the baby in my arms, but we move along. Occasionally I see flames flickering—whites coming back into town, maybe? We cross through a stand of blackjack just north of Greenwood. The smell of burnt wood and paint hangs in the air with another odor, more rank. Like rotted, charred meat.

The north road from Greenwood to Tulsa lies ahead. The baby's fidgety, hungry, so we pause behind a tipped-over wagon. It's not much, but it shields us from the road. I feed my girl. She makes soft slurping noises, each one filling my breasts with warmth. Then she snuggles down into my blouse, drifting in and out of that baby sleep, eyes flicking open and shut, thumb pressing against palm, her whole body scarcely as long as my forearm.

There's noise up the road. Missus Charles pulls me lower, until we're completely hidden by the wagon.

Two white men drive by in a pickup, big fellows in bib overalls waving whiskey bottles out the windows and singing about Dixie. I'm amazed they're sober enough to stay on the road. The engine sputters and rattles as they disappear into the haze of smoke hanging over Greenwood. The setting sun glows deep orangey red.

I can't see a single house standing. I see charred timbers and burnt, broken chairs. I see chimneys rising up out of the ruins. No dogs. We make ready to cross the street, but then Missus Charles places a hand on my forearm and points.

A flatbed truck drives up. Several men stand on the bed behind the cab, rifles in the crooks of their arms, barrels aimed at the sky. Laughing and shouting, "*Coon beware! Coon beware!*"

The truck draws abreast of us, moving forward at a crawl. We peer through knotholes in the wagon.

Four corpses lay side by side on the wood slats, their heads tilted to the right, toward us. Even in the dusk I can see they're Negroes.

There's Mister Carroll the barber. Mister Washington the schoolteacher. Another man I've never seen.

Ned.

My breath stops in my chest. I want to scream, to run out and take my man back. It must be some mistake. Some poor nigger that looks like him.

Missus Charles tightens her grip on my arm. "Quiet," she hisses. She knows Ned. She knows what we're seeing.

Not Ned.

The baby wriggles against my breast, then settles.

The dead man's eyes are open, glazed white and brown and red against his mahogany skin, tongue hanging out of his mouth, his right arm flung back behind him. The truck hits a pothole, and his head shudders. His torso is shirtless, his flesh scratched with the wounds of a whip, of a dozen knives. His face bruised. But I know those lips, those eyes.

My mouth opens, and Missus Charles clamps a hand over it. The baby squirms. The truck continues on, and now I can't see his features anymore, just the long, dark shape, the oval flats of his bare feet. *They took his shoes.* What would whites want with a poor nigger's shoes?

I'm sobbing behind Missus Charles's hand. My heaving makes the baby poke and want to suckle again.

Oh Lord. Sweet Jesus. What have I done? What trespass have I laid on your altar? What—

Then I understand.

I sink lower, until I'm sitting. It's so sudden that Missus Charles's hand slips away. The baby, too, is surprised and lets out a yelp. I move her tight against my breast and she calms.

It is His judgment against us.

"Girl? What is it?" Missus Charles crouches beside me, her wrinkled face a mass of concern.

I gaze back. I am so calm now. *The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away.* "It wasn't right," I say. "Me and Ned wanting another, after the two boys. They were taken by the Lord. He told us His will, but still we wanted another. We did. And the Lord—" A sob bubbles up. How can the truth hurt so much? Even now I can't believe we were so wrong.

"What, child?" Missus Charles strokes my arm, her head shaking faintly, whether from palsy or weariness, I don't know.

"The Lord gave us this baby girl. But we were wrong, wanting her. So the Lord visited this, this—" I look across the street, at the charred remains of Greenwood. "This calamity upon us coloreds. And the Lord took my Ned."

"Now darlin'," Missus Charles says, "them's hard words. The Lord ain't like that—"

“He is!” Anger creeps into my voice. “He took Ned and gave me her.” I gaze down at my baby girl now, truly looking at her for the first time. Is Ned there, in those gold-flecked brown eyes? In her pink mouth?

“The Lord is hard but just.” My voice softens. “It was a judgment.”

“Oh child,” Missus Charles says, shaking her head and looking away.

A baby girl needs a name.

I look down. *I’ll call you June Riot. June Riot Jackson.*

She blinks and her lips part. A drop of milk slides from the corner of her mouth and down my breast.





About the Contributors

Tom Bourguignon lives in Lansing, Michigan. He works at a title agency and lives with his girlfriend and two cats. He enjoys writing in his free moments.

J.C. Dickey-Chasins' stories have appeared in *Lullwater Review*, *The North Atlantic Review*, *The Apalachee Review*, *The Portland Review*, *Gulfstream*, *Emrys Journal*, *580 Split*, *Lumina*, *Taproot*, *The Grinnell Review*, and other publications. Dickey-Chasins is currently working on a historical novel about Civil War Kansas. The author works in technology marketing and enjoys living in rural Iowa.

Jared Gerling was born in Charlotte, North Carolina in 1984. The Gerlings moved to Michigan when he was four and eventually settled in South Haven where Jared was raised. It is there that he learned to appreciate the beach and summertime. When he was about nine or ten, he received a brown paper bag filled with books his neighbors needed to get rid of. It was in this bag that he developed a true appreciation for the art of storytelling. Jared is now a junior at MSU and is an English major. He is on the MSU Crew team and still enjoys long walks on the beach.

Dan Olds began his academic career trying to solve the mysteries of existence with physics and philosophy. He failed. Moving on to search for the answers in art, he discovered he wrote bad poetry, took ugly photographs, and painted a horrible picture. Distraught with his lack of talent, Dan turned to satire. Finding a natural outlet for his bitterness towards stupidity, he vowed to fight social acceptance of moronic ideals to the bitter end. To this day he is still fighting and by the looks of things, losing.

Rachel Antonia Penn is a mix blood Nez Perce/Italian. Born and raised in East Lansing, MI, she enjoys writing and history; she is the first chair flute in her school's orchestra and plays the cymbals in her marching band's drum line during football season. Known for her colorful stockings, she also enjoys

travel and art. This essay won Barnes and Nobles' first prize in its "One Book/One Community" contest, 2004.

Kiel Phegley was born in Flint, MI in October of 1981. He is a recent graduate of MSU with an English degree specializing in creative writing. In the summer of 2003, Kiel was a fellow at the Clarion Science Fiction and Fantasy Writer's Workshop. He's also currently looking for a job, so if you hear about anything interesting, e-mail him at phegleyk@msu.edu. In his spare time, Kiel enjoys Rock-N-Roll and comic books. *Your Bruise* was inspired by the former.

Carrie Preston is finishing her dissertation on modernist poetry and dance at Rutgers University. She lives in California where she teaches at San Diego State University.

Anjali Rohatgi is a sophomore at Michigan State University, majoring in Biochemistry and English. Her childhood obsession with the game show *Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego?* grew beyond threats to run away to Fiji into an appreciation of culture and geography. After attending graduate school, Anjali hopes to use her literary proficiency to explain to her fellow scientists where exactly Fiji is.

Amy Sumerton is a writer and executive editor of *Orchid: A Literary Review*. She currently makes money editing books for a press in Livonia and lives on the outskirts of Ann Arbor.

Sarah Sword lives in the shadow of the National Cathedral in Washington DC, where she is a post-doctoral fellow at the University of Maryland. She finished her PhD in mathematics at MSU in 2003 under the direction of Dr. Christel Rotthaus. While at MSU, she studied poetry under Diane Wakoski, and won a couple of Jim Cash and Swarthout poetry prizes.

H. William Taeusch is a professor of pediatrics practicing in San Francisco until he can give up his day job and devote all of his time to writing. He has published in *Manhattan Literary Review* and in *Highway 14*. He is a graduate of Squaw Valley Community of Writers and has completed his first novel, *Products of Conception*.

Casey Ward, a native Midwesterner, studies English Literature at Michigan State University. His prose and verse have appeared in *Red Wheelbarrow*.

Robert Webb was raised in the tiny corn-fed village of Parma, Michigan, where he spent his time writing, playing music, and cutting meat. Currently he is a senior at Michigan State University, double majoring in English/Creative Writing and Spanish. Robert also plays upright bass in the group he co-founded: the hillbilly swamp-rock band Kung Fu Diesel. During the spring 2005 semester, Robert will be studying Spanish literature and culture in Spain.

Charles Harper Webb's most recent book of poems, *Tulip Farms and Leper Colonies*, was published in 2001 by BOA Editions, Ltd. *Hot Popsicles*, his book of prose poems, will be published by the University of Wisconsin Press in 2005. Recipient of grants from the Whiting and Guggenheim foundations, he teaches at California State University, Long Beach.

Laura C. Weber was born and raised in Ann Arbor, Michigan and received her B.A. in English from Michigan State University. Her credits include being voted "Most Original" by her sixth grade class. She was flattered because she thought that this meant "Most Popular", which is not so much an "original" assumption, but rather an "embarrassing" one. *The Juxtaposition of Brown* is her first original work to be published, and she now needs to be reminded that this still doesn't make her popular.

Kristin Camitta Zimet is the Editor of *The Sow's Ear Poetry Review*. Her first full-length collection of poems, *Take in My Arms the Dark*, was published in 1999. Her poems have been in a wide range of magazines including *Lullwater Review*, *Runes*, and *Centennial Review*, and in anthologies, readings, and concerts. Her newest book-length poetry manuscript is based on the moves of the martial art, Taijiquan. Kristin co-founded the Appalachian Center for Poets and Writers and the Coalition for Jobs and the Environment. She works as a nature guide in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia.

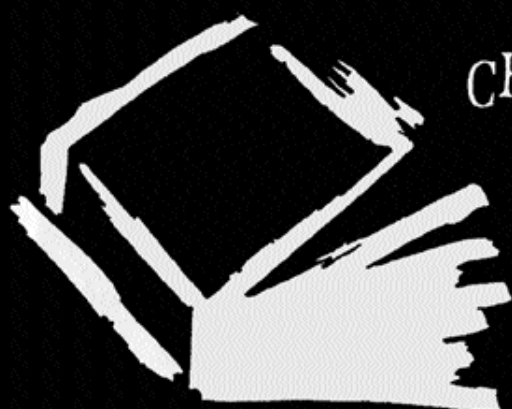


Emily Berger was born in Holly, Michigan where she grew up and graduated from high school in 2002. She spent her childhood showing and riding horses and also exploring the neighborhood in which she grew up. After purchasing a 1978 Pentax SLR camera in the ninth grade, she began to cultivate an interest in photography. Exploring her interest throughout high school, image making became a significant part of her life. After attending Oakland University in Rochester, Michigan she transferred to the College for Creative Studies, a private art school in Detroit. Her interest has now become a future career, and she has since been exploring various aspects of the medium under the guidance of some of the best instructors in the field. She concentrates on documentary and narrative photography and is constantly looking for new ways of seeing and shooting. She hopes to move to New York after graduation and pursue a career in the art, photography, and gallery world.

William Olinek, better known to his friends and family by his middle name, Spencer, has had artistic inclinations since he emerged from the womb. That's why he listed Business Administration-Pre-law as his major when he first began studying at Michigan State University in the fall of 2003. Now a sophomore still pursuing a business degree, he has added a second major in Art to help exercise the other side of his brain. He plans to attend law school after obtaining both degrees and a minor in French because one can never have enough schooling. His influences include his parents and Michael Kenna.

Rebekah Sloup is currently a student at Michigan State University, majoring in Microbiology. Photography is a hobby of hers, something she has pursued by taking a few classes at Lansing Community College. She grew up in Port Huron, Michigan, but currently resides in East Lansing. She prefers color over black-and-white photography because she feels simple tones don't always encapsulate the feeling of the image.





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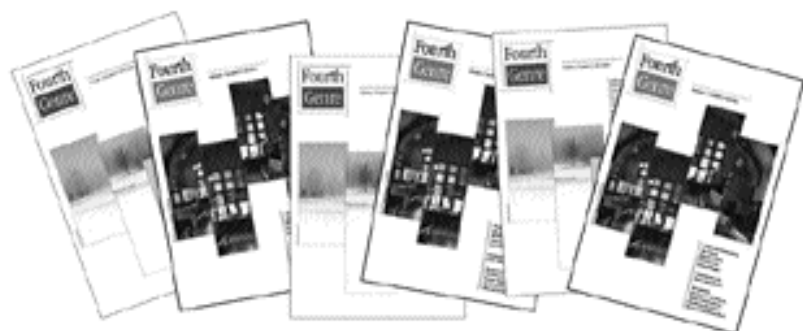


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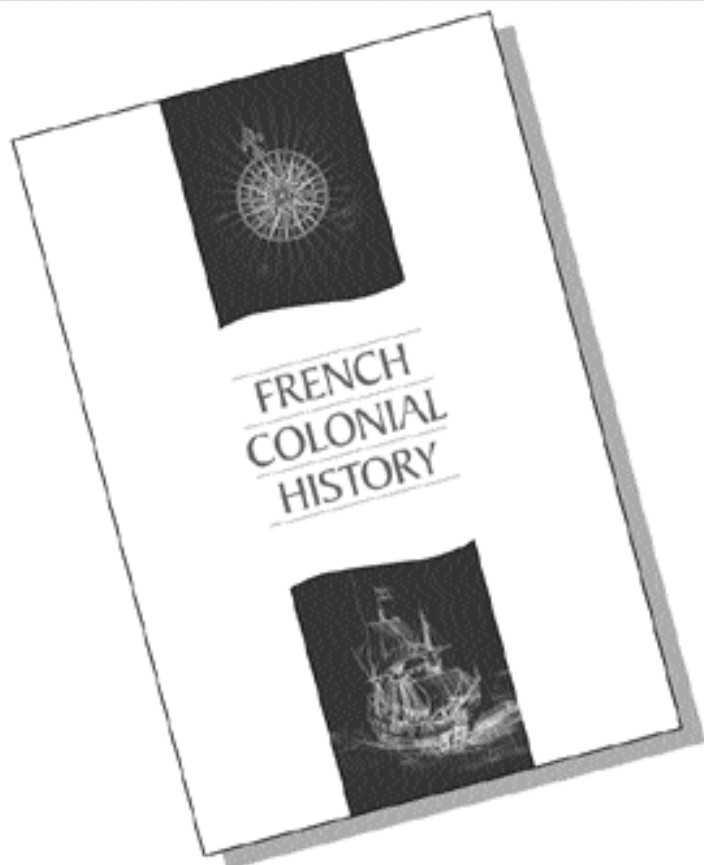
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