

FutureCycle

FLASH FICTION POETRY



2011

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2011

FutureCycle

FLASH FICTION POETRY

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FutureCycle Press

www.futurecycle.org



FutureCycle 2011

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Published by FutureCycle Press
Mineral Bluff, Georgia, U.S.A.

ISBN 978-0-9839985-4-9

Table of Contents

Poetry

Patricia Barone	
The Ferris Wheel.....	9
Glenda Council Beall	
Three AM.....	11
Woman in the Mirror.....	12
Nancy Brewer	
Sizzling Saturday.....	13
Martha Clarkson	
Delta.....	15
Joellen Craft	
Glacier.....	17
Alejandro Escudé	
The Visit.....	18
Forecast.....	19
Home Delivery.....	20
Marta Ferguson	
The Agility Tunnel.....	21
Andrei Guriianu	
Walking the Fine Line, Coming Back Full Circle.....	22
Dianna MacKinnon Henning	
The One with Violets in Her Lap.....	24
Robert W. Kimsey	
Settling In.....	25
Robert S. King	
Shorelines.....	26
Apology to the Future.....	28
Seeking Fortune.....	29
Carol Light	
The Archaic Torso of Apollo.....	30
Marissa S. McNamara	
Inked.....	31
Marissa S. McNamara	
Redeem Yourself.....	32
Michael Miller	
Bayou.....	33
Scott Owens	
The Problem with Solutions.....	34
Mary Elizabeth Parker	
White.....	36
Simon Perchik	
Untitled.....	37

Kimberley Pittman-Schulz	
Genesis.....	39
Today, the Mosses.....	40
Magic.....	41
Renee Podunovich	
Behind the Wind.....	42
Restless.....	44
Emily Raabe	
The Hinge.....	45
Self-Portrait as a House.....	47
Fox Paws.....	49
Mary Ricketson	
To My Only Child.....	51
Born to Walk.....	53
Amy Riddell	
Father Sends His Combat Medals in a Padded Brown Mailer, 1988...54	
Portrait of Father Being Sentenced.....	55
Rosemary Royston	
Pathology.....	56
Nancy Simpson	
Years Later– Still the Old Dream.....	57
Wally Swist	
Recognition.....	58
Carole Richard Thompson	
Season Change.....	59
Pamela Uschuk	
A Palimpsest of Motion.....	60
Israel Wasserstein	
Theodicy.....	62
Jesse Wide	
the god of humility.....	64

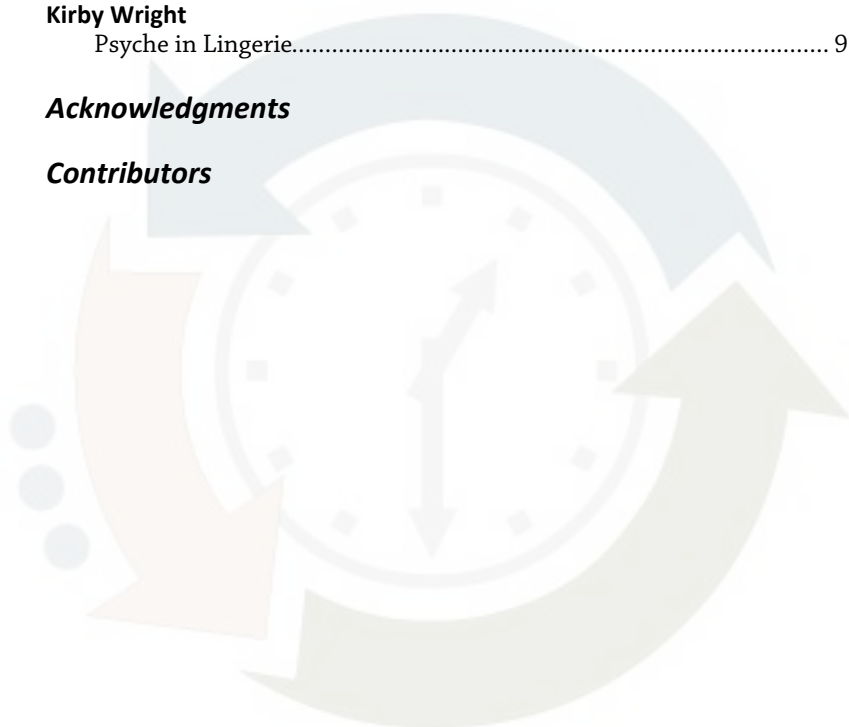
Flash Fiction

Daniel Chacón	
Tasty Chicken.....	67
Camera Obscura.....	69
The First Cold.....	70
Douglas Cole	
Sociology.....	72
Kelly Fordon	
Hot, Hot, Hot.....	73
Brooke Kuykendall	
Room for our Sons.....	77

Gary L. McDowell	
Eventually, You Move On.....	78
Andrea Rothman	
The Woodpecker’s Sister.....	80
Katey Schultz	
Checkpoint.....	83
That Sunday Morning Feeling.....	87
Pressin’ the Flesh.....	90
Wayne Sullins	
Clearing a View.....	92
Marion de Booy Wentzien	
Be Nice.....	93
Kirby Wright	
Psyche in Lingerie.....	97

Acknowledgments

Contributors





Poetry





Patricia Barone

The Ferris Wheel

for my children

While you waited to get on
I looked for your father, the sitter
to take you instead of me
It was your right to go
above the city, see
how colors signal
how people are
little, mostly dear
below and clever
like rats and sparrows
at clinging above

but no one else came so I
had to be the one
with you
I was
so scared
of the creaking seats,
each rocking to a stop

so I imagined an air raft floating,
a lake breeze fanning us
as the great wheel rose—

“We’re not scared,” you both told me
“open your eyes” so I did
just a slit,
the world between
two feathers

“You can’t fall out,”
you both insisted
and I thought,
but you could fly



Glenda Council Beall

Three AM

We lie back to back.
Katydid sing
like a chorus rising
and falling, responding
to nature's directives.

A full moon sifts through
the sourwood, its leaves slide
in the breeze, cast shadows
over my quilt like ground
squirrels darting here and there.

No nightmare awakened me.
No pounding heart.
It has been so for some time now.
I smile. Contentment found me,
slipped in while I searched
for reasons not to cry.

Glenda Council Beall

Woman in the Mirror

What happened to seventeen,
when I rode my mare
free as the river flows,
jumped over downed trees,
splashed through narrow streams?

What happened to twenty
when I danced in the moonlight,
my slender form dressed in a gown
white and shimmery as pearl?

What happened to thirty
when I rode my Yamaha
down fire roads, mountain trails,
long black hair flying free?

What happened to those days
I ask the woman in the mirror.
Gone, she says, all gone, unless
you can remember.

Nancy Brewer

Sizzling Saturday

Summer sunrise steals sleep,
Songbird sings solo,
Squirm, stretch, step slowly.
Short shower soothes.
Select seersucker slacks,
Soft strappy shirt,
Seasoned sandals.
Seer says scorcher.

Scorning stove,
Serve strawberries,
SpecialK,
Sticky sweetroll.

Should soak shrubs,
Spray sunflowers,
Snip seeds.
Scrabble summons.

Sliced sautéed squash,
Shelled seasoned sugar snaps,
Smothered swiss steak,
Salad served.
Satisfied.

Should sweep, scrub, sanitize.
Spray starch Sunday shirt,
Study Sunday School scriptures.
Sweltering sultriness
Stays suggestions.

Search story shelf.
Sad? Sweet?
Scary? Sinister?
Spiritual? Stanzas?
Shelley? Shakespeare?
Studdart-Kennedy?
Select Stevenson.

Silence settles.
Stress suggests siesta.
Snoozing succeeds.

Suppertime, so soon?
Simple sandwich,
Salsa, Scoopers, Shiraz.

Still, steamy sunset,
Sizzling Saturday squandered.

Spouse signals seduction.
“Sorry, sweetie.”
Sabbath signoff.

Martha Clarkson

Delta

In the next room my daughter's alarm
goes off like a truck in reverse

the stranger
my daughter's body has become

shuffles to the bathroom
shower to shower

we're just a stud's width apart
water from the same tank

drips off us in different slopes
I can only imagine

her wedge of black hair
circles of firm bottom

breasts mature enough
to take a lover

think of her curled over those long legs
shaving around ankles

think of how recently I bent
over the tub edge

pushing yellow ducks her way
soaping her flat, hairless body

in the sink even before that
and first of all the break

of my water splashing her out
into the world

and how I keep drowning
in the pool of her



Joellen Craft

Glacier

First you need a lot of snow
and cold so what won't melt

settles into a clearer form–
accumulation strengthened

to a field that moves, that slow
flow forward. The strain

of being one disarticulates
the you that stays. Your sweat

carves a basin from the bedrock– you sweat it full,
calve your clear

shards to its quick– cloaked in dirt,
you're too big to know. As you go

you scratch your long
initials in the path you make

today, and will still
take tomorrow,

the path every other thinks is you.
From your back, I catalogue your wake:

boulder in a plain, hills like
upside-down canoes. If I tunnel in,

I'll find a heart bluer than blue.
I'll hack it smooth.

Alejandro Escudé

The Visit

I'm waiting on a friend this morning.
Rain has fallen steady for a week.
People are unmasking their hate, so
it's a time for soft driving, soft thinking.
Something's here, but it's not my friend.
It's walking swiftly to my front door,
and I'm thoroughly prepared for it,
but I didn't know that until it came.
You never think you're prepared, but
here it comes treading on white flowers.
It speaks, it says that the tongues roll on,
that the eulogy is a constant reinvention.
I follow the flowers beneath my couch
as they circle and return, circle and return.
It grows accustomed to me and I it.
Now it begins to tell me what I already
know, like an aged and loving parent.
The flowers merge with the stone.

Alejandro Escudé

Forecast

Before it was reported
It was reported. The newscaster says
And she says it again,
No rain until there is rain
And then we'll run for cover
As the sloshes return
And no one ever escapes the sloshes
As they enter our streets
Like revolution, our cars
Parked over other cars– an old poet
Talks of poetry as if it were made of oak,
He says: have the patience of a god,
Write forever in your
Book of forever
With a telegraphic pen.
He says the majesty of the moment



Is all there is. Then he phones
A fellow academe, whom he calls
His best editor.
The parked cars flash the sun
This morning, a chilly
After-rain wind resonates,
And this is what the forecaster
Calls “wild weather.”

Alejandro Escudé

Home Delivery

A day off, I skateboard to the beach,
feels good pitching my board downhill.
November, and the city is hollow,
the sky the blue flag of slow time.
A man lies beside the church door
where a bride to be in jeans happily
receives a shipment of flowers.
Last week, I ended my subscription
to the LA Times. The rep made good
on her promise; my porch was empty
this Sunday. And I know my letter
on the unfair portrayal of schoolteachers
will be overlooked. On a skateboard,
it's hard to think about the world
as it passes. I use the muscles of my feet
to turn, I use my arms for balance,
I keep my weight up front. As a rule,
I lift my board on intersections and cross
for fear of injury and humiliation,
but today I surf the craggy pavement,
jolting over cracks before the cars.

Marta Ferguson

The Agility Tunnel

Agility, as an event,
is not about obedience.
It's about desire, and, maybe,
trust. The A-Frame, the Dog-Walk,
the jumps, and our favorite, The Tunnel,
sixteen feet of scrunchy red plastic
Daisy's supposed to crawl through,
leashless, while I wait at the other end,
treat in my teeth, to catch her.

The Tunnel's the closest I've come
to understanding my mother who stood
one summer day, her arms out,
at the bottom of the long red slide
I finally climbed up, my heart clanging
against the ladder rungs. I slid down
too terrified not to love it the first time.

Andrei Guraianu

Walking the Fine Line, Coming Back Full Circle

1.

How it looks: We cram into packed busses and trolleys, together curse the heat and will the sluggish traffic home. But there's more to it than that. This is really about the soul and its relation to time. We are trying to get there before it does. Before the buildings tumble, before all there is left to wander are the empty hallways of each other's eyes. There is a medicine for this just like there is for everything else. A pharmacy goes up each time a plot of land is cleared of the rubble. They go by different clever names. They look expensive and new. Inside, the warm lights stay on even when the shutters close.

2.

Tonight the boulevards are slow and windless. We stop and go like toys that need to be rewound to make a child smile. The sidewalk vendor splashes water in broad semicircles and the dust runs into muddy rivers that will dry again tomorrow soaked in diesel fumes and turpentine. The dust again, the pre- and post-apocalyptic dust. Your hair will smell of it. And your sweat will smell of it.

3.

How it looks: We flounder among cars at high tide, beneath rose-colored beach of sky, a million bright shells thrown up by the moon. The planted trees are whitewashed to the waist, the tall columns whitewashed. Too much medicine and neon crosses. Another pharmacy raised over the nameless rubble. And another one just as we turn the corner– I've got them memorized by now. Just in case.

4.

We make up time and lose it with each stop. We are old souls. Never fast enough. And there is no medicine for that. We come with bad teeth and the machinery of mended hearts.

5.

Tonight I want to make a child's simple wish. I want to drive reckless through the air. I want to sail the imaginary ship of my own balcony as far as the blue ocean my mind. The thought is enough for a brief anemic smile. And while I'm at it, I want each of these lights to be a slice of marmalade at breakfast. Neon cold. When I dip my finger into stream of milk and sugar I want to know that I've tasted it before. In a time when there was time to lose. Now we are getting there. Slowly getting there. And God, because I never know when enough is enough, hear this last one – let there be the sound of heels in the hallways, let there be enough moon to see eye to eye.

Dianna MacKinnon Henning

The One with Violets in Her Lap

(title by Sappho)

If she were someone else's sister
I would make her mine,
twist her bones
into recognition—
the catacombs of her eyes,
deep and memorable.

If she were lost
I would surely find her,
coax her back,
the same way she returned
with each push
on the playground swing.

My studio clock,
a mercenary,
intones its message.

She won't return.

The one who survives
is the one left behind.

Robert W. Kimsey

Settling In

It had not taken us many days.
You and I so much alike.
Silence a part of us . . . needed.
Not long at all to find our places.

In the evenings, Red Mountain
whispered a duo with the wind.
Fire throwing in its two cents,
each in its own rhythm.

Days would have run together,
I suspect, had it not been
for the winter
coming across the mountain.

Stories end to beginning,
beginning to end. He broke
the silence like bone china
thrown against walls,
ceiling, doors.

When he left,
like two old curs we circled
in the changing light,
looking for our places.

Settling back in again.

Robert S. King

Shorelines

They who passed behind us
still live ahead of us
in an ocean of time,
still breathe this present air.

Ahead, between, behind,
the waves fill our footprints
but never fill our dreams that run
lifelines along the palms.

We live with and without
the dead and unborn.
Our children are lost at sea
in the future
but at a crossroad of time
never left home,
at a crossroad of time

knock on our doors
to say they were never born.

We still hear them
drowning in a dream
in undercurrents of time,
in the deep waters
of then, now, before.
Like a prayer we cast out the bait,
a lifeline too far from their reach.

Do they feel us as we feel them?
The waves they make
lap like whispers
against the distant shores.



Robert S. King

Apology to the Future

as we shed we watch
our deepest scars
come out like stars

who are we now
as we peel away our faces
from the hard stone
a river of tears
washes over the length
of our lives

who are we now
without clothes without skin
without love without mirrors
to reflect our scarlight

a river of tears
whose waves lick us clean
on this night we leave to the future
a river of tears
to carry our hollow bones

Robert S. King

Seeking Fortune

I take a walk to the edge of my world.
Curious tonight, I wander too far
from the guarded parking deck.
The smell of something new lingers
on my tailored suit. I meet for the first
time a perfume of alley rats,
the curious mixed tea
of animal and human urine,
the moans of human waste.

I meet a boy who seems a man
who has never set foot on swept streets.
His race is dirt, his color streaked.
A scavenger with wild eyes, he stands barely
above the mouth of the alley trash can,
his torn sleeves flapping dusty flags,
his fingers probing for treasure in a haystack
where lurk mostly needles and bloody rags.

He pauses to scan me whose tie is tight.
My cologne clashes with his sense of smell,
I who found the fortune to live another day.
He asks where I found my shoes,
so shiny you can see yourself,
really lucky they have laces too.

Are the soles worn out?
he wonders aloud.

Carol Light

The Archaic Torso of Apollo

—*After Rilke*

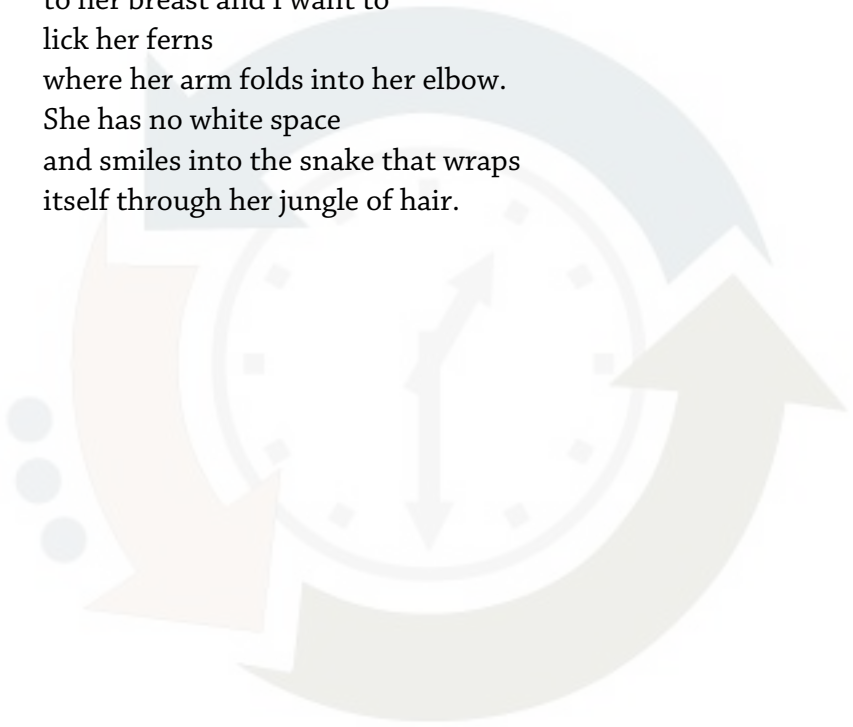
This guy's lost his head
but, Jesus, what radiance gleams
beneath the pectorals, and,
as the eye follows the contours south
toward genesis, well,
one could go blind smiling.

Sure, the surface is stone,
chipped here and there,
but who wouldn't be taken
by those shoulders
and underneath, can't you see
the blaze? A star goes nova
inside you. You can't hide
anymore. You must
get a life.

Marissa S. McNamara

Inked

Ariel is a sultry pouter, pink lipped
with peacocked feathers on her arm
dark black hair and sharp green
leaves wrapped around her ankles,
poppies shaking their dust from her shoulder
to her breast and I want to
lick her ferns
where her arm folds into her elbow.
She has no white space
and smiles into the snake that wraps
itself through her jungle of hair.



Marissa S. McNamara

Redeem Yourself

Each ringless man who smiles my way becomes Jesus,
story of stories looming fiction in my head.

Within 20 minutes, I've fallen in and out of love with him,
a complete relationship in quicktime, I've

lifted him to the cross in my mind and stood below, looking up
his perfection so clear, then taken him down, convicted him
as a sinner,

not a savior. From perfection to divorce. And God help the man
who asks me out when, minutes into my novella,

I've accepted his fictional ring, because I'll gush love,
savor each of his words and roll it slow in my mouth

like a vow. Just wait, I want to warn him,
until I've imagined you cheating with the waitress in the
yellow skirt

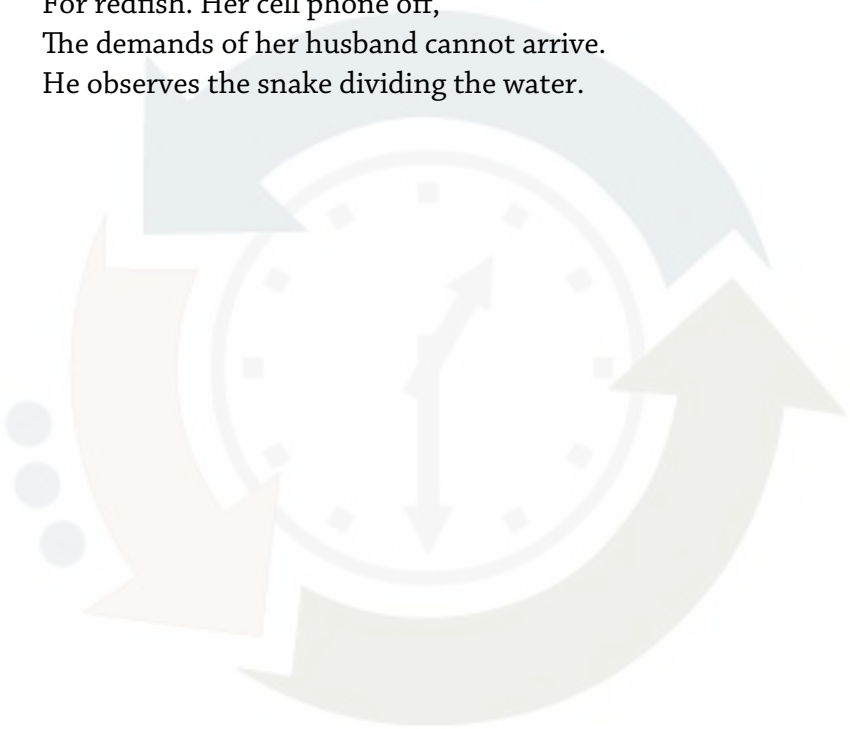
the one your eyes measured when she wrote down your side of
toast,
your eyes on her ass as she took your dirty plate and cup.

Just wait— that way, I can save us both. *I know your story,*
I want to say. *Even Jesus was a man.*

Michael Miller

Bayou

Into the bayou they paddle together,
The slow grace of each stroke
A sigh of relief, the sunrise
A smudge between swamp magnolias.
They bait their hooks, cast with elegance
For redfish. Her cell phone off,
The demands of her husband cannot arrive.
He observes the snake dividing the water.

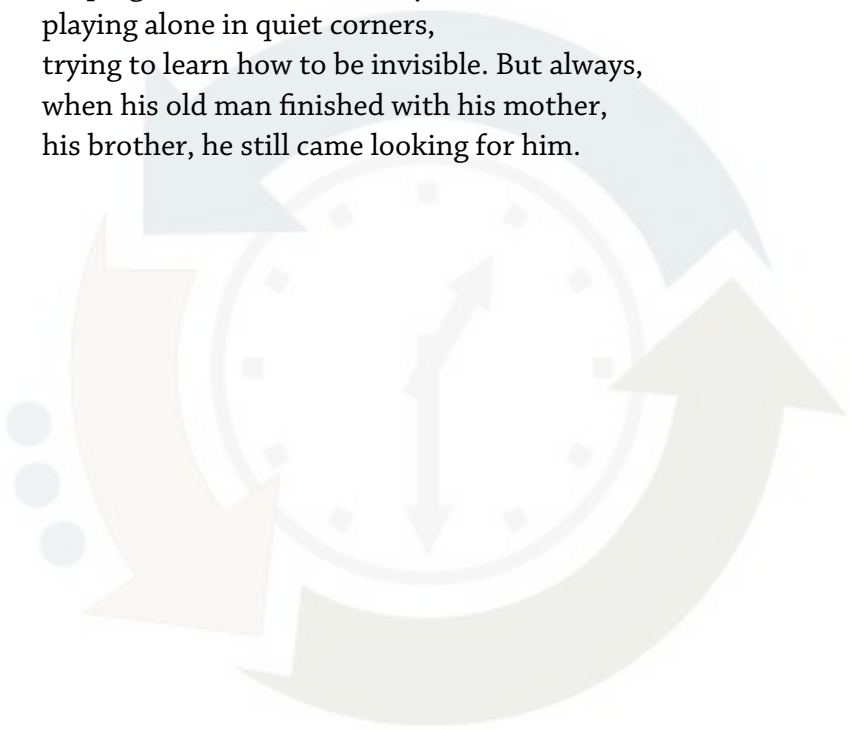


Scott Owens

The Problem with Solutions

Even at 6 he knew he was smart,
smart enough, he thought, to figure out
how to avoid the backhand or belt buckle.
He told people, but nobody cared,
not then, not there, not in a place
that favored the rod, and not when the kid
had a dirty face and cut off pants.
He tried fighting back, but only
once as the hitting lasted longer,
the welts seemed deeper.
He even tried running away, twice.
Both times he woke up early,
snuck out before anyone else had stirred,
a paper bag stuffed with a change
of clothes, as much food as he could carry.
Both times he came back
before dark, a bit surprised
that no one had noticed him gone.
He stole cigarettes or money for revenge,
took pride in his quiet rebellion,
gave them to friends, big kids,
who never questioned the source.
But that never stopped anything.
He thought if he could master causes,
he could keep it from happening again.
He knew noise wasn't allowed,
breaking things bound to bring anger.
He learned to never talk back,
never touch anything without asking.
And things seemed to get better

for a while, but still, there was the random
smack or push when he walked by the couch,
the undeserved blame for lack of rest
or money, or time, the accusations
of smirks or eye-rolling, or improper tone
in the way he said, “Yessir,” “Nosir,”
“I’m sorry.” So he tried harder,
pulling his arms into himself,
keeping his mouth constantly shut,
playing alone in quiet corners,
trying to learn how to be invisible. But always,
when his old man finished with his mother,
his brother, he still came looking for him.



Mary Elizabeth Parker

White

for EAB

At night, a choker of deer
rimmed the yard—
silhouettes white as the Lucite
ghost beads that crowded
her necklace and caught,
like pins of ice,
if she turned her head to speak.
She would be writing a letter
at her gleaming mahogany desk,
one of her three extravagances:
the other two being her red
wool coat with the fox collar,
and her perpetually sad eyes
determined to punish with kindness
a world that had given her some
but not enough. And beyond
the window would be faces,
human ghosts, and the entwining
sunflowers that in the night
would smother the house
and all in it; and the scaffold
blooming rust though it was years
since the small room had been added—
at night it was a teasing
frailty of iron that dreams could climb
onto and then climb back down
to the black grass filled with crickets.

Simon Perchik

Untitled

As if goodbye has thorns
– your child's lips already flush
though it will be years
before she adds lipstick

and her sleeves begin to flow
with heels higher, higher
– a huge wave moving her hair
the way the sun opens up

for more light– your each kiss
will lose its hold, fall on its back
from not enough air– a deep breath
and by now your child knows

to lift both arms toward you, almost
touching the horizon, almost
the rushing water she doesn't see yet
or hear or the waiting– you will bring

more and more gifts, dolls
stuffed animals to take along
that find the way
once they're held close– like lips

like arms, like the stars
she will pull outloud from her throat
and the breathing carry her away
through space, through stones

and your eyes she will leave unburied
pierced, heavier– later. For now
it's enough she's learned
how her dark red tongue

can touch her lips, how already
some words are warmer
than when her hair lifts to the side
– she has your eyes.



Kimberley Pittman-Schulz

Genesis

It all began with
an amoeba singing

against the fear
of separation

one throatless note
static

then the fluid soul
torn apart.



Kimberley Pittman-Schulz

Today, the Mosses

Every morning there is the struggle
to focus on that one thing
that I will choose to love–

today, the mosses and the low-growing lycopods,
rising up with their tiny intricacies,
their piney branches, their trembling
at the movement of my feet.

Hyacinths draw out their swords,
slicing through that green felt
of late winter. If all sound could be heard,

the sun bearing down on those sharp blades
might tinkle like wind chimes, the mosses sighing,
the creeping ground cedars whispering,
look at me.

Kimberley Pittman-Schulz

Magic

When a bird dies, if you place the empty purse
of its body under the green velvet
of a catalpa leaf, nestle it
among berry canes and nettle,
the leaf will curl brittle, catch on a thorn,
scrape wind, earth-low, overlooked,
and where the bird was,
will be bent grass.

Once, when my mother bent to kiss
her three small girls, leaned into their breathings,
letting her lips tap theirs, the sound
reminded her of water dripping into other water,
but later, when the house stood scorched,
every window a black, gaping mouth,
where that sound had been,
now, one child.

These things could be magic
or physics or god.
No one really knows.

Renee Podunovich

Behind the Wind

It seems like I've known him
forever. the years are stacked up like pancakes
and the stack has become so tall that the ones
on the bottom can't even be seen anymore.
are just vague, reconstructed or falsified memories.
but they are there at the bottom of the pile
holding the whole thing up.
that's how long I've known him.
but today at the beach. seeing him from behind.
the wind sifted through his graying hair.
it appears something magnificent is moving
and blowing him along the shore.
he leans over. gathering. looking.
paying attention to the world
and the moment before him
and I wonder, *Who is this man?*
the one running up smiling.
Look at these, he says of a handful of shells.
broken. fragments. remains. rubble mostly.
some are whole and a few are quite extraordinary.
but he is holding them like they are the most amazing
gift in the world. like someone would hold the fork
loaded with the first bite of pancakes
dripping with maple syrup and butter
before they know enough to care about the calories.
Aren't these amazing? and so I look again. more closely.
this is a man who cares about the bits and pieces.
the shards. the cast offs. the broken things of the world.
he spends the days visiting dying patients
and lately, he wonders if he's made any difference at all.

he sees first hand that people have nothing in the end.
except the time they spent doing what they loved
and loving the world the best they could.
all the rest of it. shells.
rubbed and eroded by the sea.
Yes, these are amazing, I say.
and into my cupped hands he places
this treasure.



Renee Podunovich

Restless

His teeth sink into her pillow.
every night he dreams that he is an appliance
that is coming unplugged and in the free fall
feeling of that dislocation,
he startles awake.
to discover that he has grabbed
the nearest soft thing he can find
and has her pillow clenched in his mouth
and if he removes it he might scream.
he mutters in his sleep:
not integrated. I'm a clock radio.
brisket. army truck. get out.
they eat breakfast quietly.
he can't remember the nightmares
exactly, but they haunt him
and so he eats abnormal amounts of
toast and eggs. she doesn't know
what to say to him
about these nocturnal assertions.
can't bear to tell him that in fact
it is she who shoves the pillow
toward his gaping mouth to appease
the molars and incisors and canines
and avoid the possibility that he might
instead devour her. without even
waking up. would see her in the morning
just a skeleton. picked clean.
thin and white and perfectly
at rest.

Emily Raabe

The Hinge

The bat on the table has the face of a baby,
button nose and round brown eyes
when he thumbs them open. It's June twenty-two
in the Downs, the longest day of the year.

The knees are indeed backwards, made
to bend behind the bat, walking sticks
for hanging upside-down. Darwin says
articulus but, once again, it's what we don't know

that will find us; and the word, which also means
"a hinge," takes fire as it leaves his mouth
on this night, the pivot in the ancient solar year.
The body, he muses, looks familiar

but as in a tale to frighten children:
the fingers as long as the nightmare hair
on the fairy-tale baby, the tiny, clutching
feet not palm like bear or toe like fox,

the leathered reach of unfeathered wings
as in a dream of hovering, poised forever
between flight and ground. *Articulus*,
the scientist murmurs, England's

own magician of shells and bones.
The study darkens for a moment as if night
has been pulled in with a drawstring,
light gone red at the window, the creak

in the house the conjured hinge of the year.
Upstairs, Emma is weeping.
She creases again the letter she has written
that tells her husband there are things

we cannot see and simply must believe;
describes her incurable grief– *if I thought*
we did not belong to each other forever– her faith
a pebble carried always in her mouth.

Darwin notes his findings in the number
seven notebook. Emma folds
the coverlet back for night.
The doubled-jointed envoy on the table

stirs and whiskers out the window,
the light of a thousand bonfires pricked
in its eyes. Fingertips slip the sky
on the dotted line, breaking the seal between

the dark door waiting and the neighbor's
terrified pets– messenger not skin or wing
but something in between, like between
the window and the frame or the humans

and the silent world that waits,
the yellow space that brightens briefly
for the truly watchful just before
the door is gently, firmly closed.

Emily Raabe

Self-Portrait as a House

If I were a house, I'd be a little
green house, with peeling paint
and an Ali Baba stairway
to my swinging green screen door.

If I were this house, I'd have
one floor, so no one would be lost
testing the stairs after sundown
to see where they reached.

Once safe across my lintel,
the ones I love make fires
with magically appearing wood,
eat food in the kitchen from cupboards

that refill themselves each night.
Outside are seasons, and wolves in rings,
and the pitiless moon
on a cloudless night who watches;

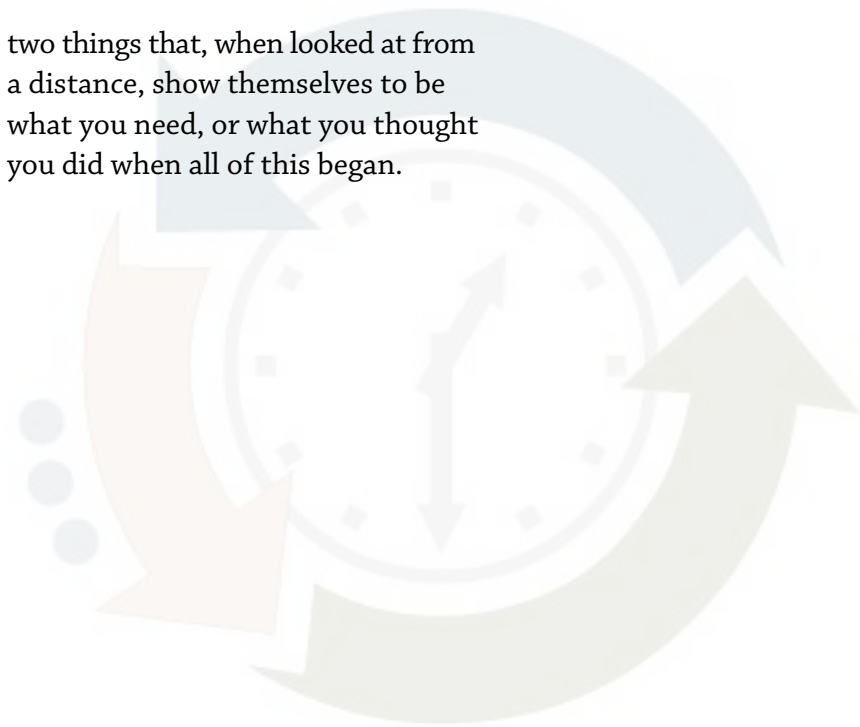
but inside the little green house,
it will always be not night and not yet
morning pushing at the glass,
music playing in the living room,

and people eating in a yellow light
like lamplight who love each other
fiercely and yet cannot remember
how they met or if they are related

or how they came to live
in the little green house with the strange
innumerable bedrooms, animals
walking in and out at dusk, and windows

of an odd clear glass that lets in light
but only shows an endless meadow
all around the house: not sunlight,
and not real grass, but

two things that, when looked at from
a distance, show themselves to be
what you need, or what you thought
you did when all of this began.



Emily Raabe

Fox Paws

Because I'm a total color-whore I noticed the palate first in this piece

grading thirty-seven art school essays in my living room,
I've been drinking since the middle of the pile; do they all
come high to my class? I know the three painters

who snack through the seminar, the ones I thought
were getting all my jokes, are actually thinking things like,
what if you were reading a book, and you opened it,
and the pages were blank, but you kept on reading anyway

cracking themselves up while I preen myself
at the far end of the table like the Sally Field of higher
education.

Anna K. reminds me of my Mother god I hate that bitch.
Monday nights are Coco, reading from her freewrites—

a tiny blush and then the spanking scene with her girlfriend
on the roof of the dorm, or the three-way
on the folding couch while the band plays on in the kitchen.
Arden wears a hand-made pieced fur toga

and has a project going to knit every hour
she's awake for a year. She drags the yarn-mass
behind her like a filthy pet, lets us know the day
she can no longer fit on public transportation.

It's about a blackbird, I plead with them,
and argue that Edward Albee knew
his characters had issues with alcohol and self-esteem;
but they are out ahead of me, not afraid

to pierce themselves or change their gender: they know
Martha needed therapy, they know lovers
always come back. *It was clear from her face,*
one student reads in class, *that he had committed a major fox paws.*

The other students might be high, or just polite,
or maybe they recognize that art is malleable and is up
for grabs and a fox paw is just as good as fake French anyway,
but no-one seems to mind; and so the fox paws

travel the path opened by the young man's voice,
trotting lightly toward the smell of sunlight,
to where the warm green song of a thrush gathers
in a puddle of velvet over a star-filled tree.

Mary Ricketson

To My Only Child

*The moon was full the night before,
lighting my steps as I walked and walked,
movement to invite you out of me.*

What would I do
without frogs croaking
in the pond after dusk,
without fireflies lighting
the evening sky in June?

*I was afraid and unafraid.
You took your time, always your own pace
right from the start.*

What would I do without
corn to hoe, greens to cook
and berries to pick?

*Suddenly there you were, crooked in my arm.
Your eyes met mine for the first time.
I promised to keep you safe and help you grow.*

What would I do without a grown son
to telephone at night, and a grandmother to brag to after that?

*It was hot the day you were born.
The world was ripe with food fresh grown
and blue birds sang 'to welcome the boy
and the mountains echoed joy and wild abandon.*

Tonight is the eve of my only child's birthday.
He is three thousand miles away, filled with today.
Here on the deck where it's quiet, my mind travels.

What would I do without these trees
who hear my confession every night?



Mary Ricketson

Born to Walk

In the dark
hallways where ghosts
of ages lurk, my history
hides and waits.

I prepare myself.
No backpack. No tent.
Only water for the washing.

I was born to walk
where angels do no live,
where invisible demons
lie in wait, pretend to love.

Before I die
my journey will cut down
ancient icons of a time
when eyes were closed
and memories were zipped shut.

What else is there to do?
I must hike a trail
too dark for trees,
too narrow for two.

Amy Riddell

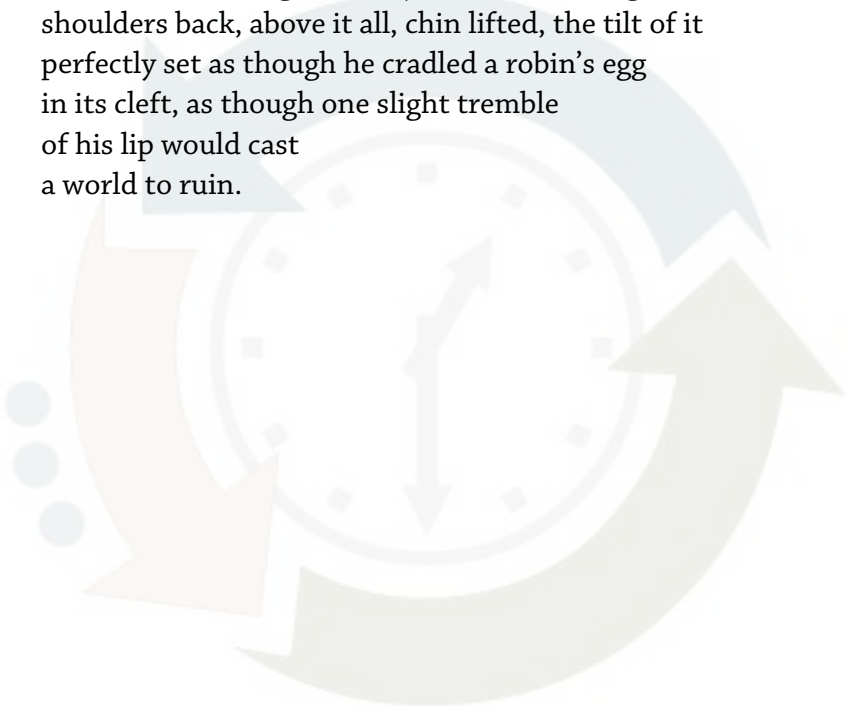
***Father Sends His Combat Medals in a Padded
Brown Mailer, 1988***

Like Janus, I look forward and back.
Twenty, thirty years gone,
Father earned these medals.
He was a soldier then.
Ten years on, he will become a felon.
From here, I can't make out the details yet,
the handcuffs and prisoner number from the DOC,
can't quite read all four counts: attempted murder
in the second degree, kidnapping
with a firearm, attempted sexual battery,
and aggravated assault.
Janus, the god of gates and doors
shows us how to change, that we can and must.
From the brown mailer, I pull nine medals
that would weigh heavy on me if I pinned them
to my blouse. Instead, I turn each tarnished coin
and examine both sides, front and back.

Amy Riddell

Portrait of Father Being Sentenced

As when the tightrope walker falters and then pilots his balance
in the same way that a boy who pretends to be an airplane
will dip and tilt his outstretched arms,
so too my father faltered, his composure lost
like a man paddling the air,
like a man reaching for a way to stand erect again,
shoulders back, above it all, chin lifted, the tilt of it
perfectly set as though he cradled a robin's egg
in its cleft, as though one slight tremble
of his lip would cast
a world to ruin.



Rosemary Royston

Pathology

Diagnosis: *Nevoid Lentigo.*

*A lentiginous proliferation
of melanocytes is present
with occasional small nevus nests
in the center.*

Translation: Benign.

Imagination: A proliferation
of tiny birds once nested
above my right breast.
The beat of their wings
over-ridden by the beat of my heart.
Their dark nesting spot
would sometimes slip out
over the top of my blouse
and boldly announce itself in bikini.
What was once an identifying mark
is now an extinct species. I miss
the flutter from within my ribs.
I miss strolling along with birds
in my chest, their occasional songs
now scarred shut.

Nancy Simpson

Years Later—Still the Old Dream

Blue gown, a mask, blue feather in my hair,
I dressed for what I thought was a party.
Friends left in vans with no room for me.
A stranger said she would help me get a flight
at the airport, but she left without pointing the way
to the terminal, then reappeared around a building.
I followed, but she vanished again through a storefront
with broken windows. I walked, lost. Past midnight
I found myself in lower Manhattan.
Men and women hurried past. They were not
the friends I was looking for, but I knew them
in that place lit like day. A dragon-toothed machine ate rubble.
I gathered scattered papers from the ground.

Wally Swist

Recognition

A man dreams about the child
deep within him, and a train of many cars

passes through the dream with a familiar
face behind each window.

In the passing of cars, he sees
his own face as it appears in the dream,
and the light within him shines
in each window and reflects his childhood.

In the reflection of his face, the child
deep within him awakens from a dream.

Carole Richard Thompson

Season Change

Catching my breath, I lean on
my hoe and study the small plot.
I sense the soil is still healthy;
there is time enough to scratch out
a small fall garden.

I am betting the plants will set roots
before the first killing frost,
a splash of green holding
a feeble hand against winter.

I feel the grit, hurry in for a hot shower.
I glimpse my nakedness in the mirror.
The mist does not conceal spider veins,
sagging flesh.

I dress and brush my graying hair.
A little color on mouth and cheeks
completes the ritual.
I turn back again to face
the full-length mirror. Defiant, I
place my hand hard against the glass
and feel a chill.

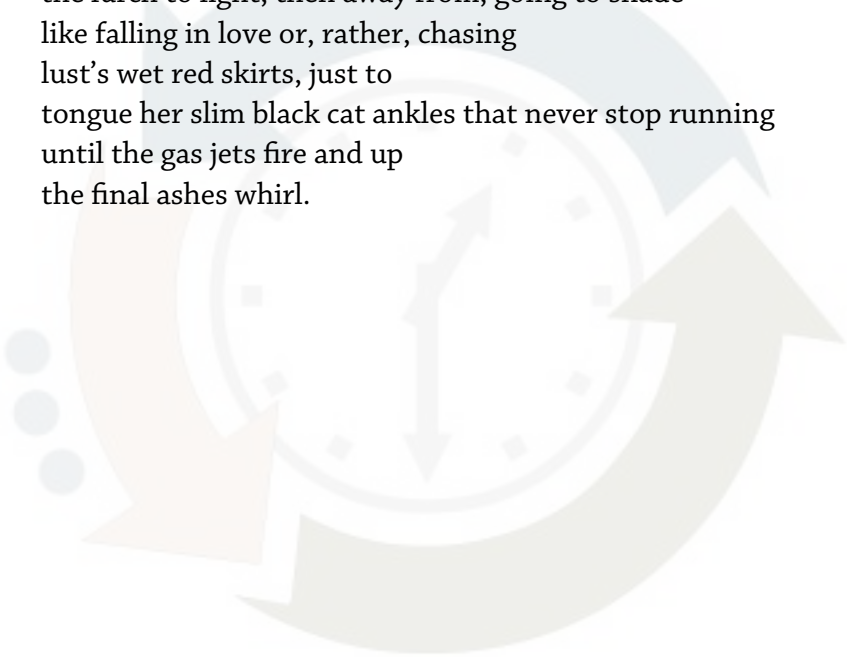
Pamela Uschuk

A Palimpsest of Motion

I have always fallen, mad for motion, the swing
of the receiving blanket in my mother's arms, black
wings of crows pulling up dawn, undertows
sucking water from the back of my calves, euglenas
and parameciums, swirling like Disney bumper cars
and trapped inside slides in biology class—

I could have watched their mazurka, the dip
and spin dizzying hours beyond the bell—
so I try to explain my latest cross country drive to friends
who've given up road trips for pilates, developing
core strength while I drive
through air rising to the thinning mind of ozone
above concrete's zydeco hum
stripping off my tires for 3600 miles
rocked rocketing in my small red sedan past
burrowing owls and desert thorns to hill country cedars'
scarce leaves past the wheeze of refinery swamps to
green bayous with alligator grins
to gray muck Mississippi delta and plopped
into the spangled pockets of New Orleans shivering
in its transvestite pearls, to white sand
packed by oily Gulf laps, around panhandling
loblolly pines, clear water swails of North Florida, where
billboards blare black and white signed by God
that Judgment Day is set for May 20th this year,
certainty calibrated each decade in the numerical
logarithms of rapture or doom that predicts metal
split, splintered frame houses, our skulls
shattered by vengeance on a cosmic scale.
It hasn't happened yet, but who knows, I might be

spitting in my own soup. Oh, glorious
momentum, the never stop pendulum pushing
me from Interstate to Interstate is
my redemption, my ultimate date
with wind's determined thrust
and rain's eyeteeth nattering on my windshield– the only muse
is journey, itself, travel shattering the sound barrier
of stasis, sweet eye stitch of motion, the swift funnel
of an eagle over a dove, the dream of never
arriving, always the smooth centrifugal orbit widening
the lurch to light, then away from, going to shade
like falling in love or, rather, chasing
lust's wet red skirts, just to
tongue her slim black cat ankles that never stop running
until the gas jets fire and up
the final ashes whirl.



Israel Wasserstein

Theodicy

After Kim Addonizio

Let's say you're god, and things have gotten off to a rough start, with the Angels and all. Just when you think you've got it right, a couple of naked humans, a garden, everything goes to hell. It wasn't supposed to be hard: eat, fuck, name the damn animals. So the tree may have been a mistake, but even you didn't know how bad everything would go. But there's this guy Job, and he's alright, sends you nice notes, doesn't kick small animals or screw around on his wife. Then Satan shows up, starts talking shit, says, sure Job's fine, he's got a pretty sweet deal. You start thinking if he's right then this creation stuff wasn't worth a damn anyway. You take the bet, and next thing you know Job's in sack cloth. His friends won't leave him alone, tell him this is your fault, or his, that he's evil or unlucky. Job doesn't know what to think, you don't know what to think. Now you're wondering if you made a big mistake, if Job's worship was fine before he lost everything. You're about to break down, sort this mess out, or maybe start over, and then someone tells a story about Job. So it's not the way it happened, so it makes it look like you planned it all, so it says Satan's out to be an asshole and you a hero,

though you created him, so Job comes off
a little too good: people are listening,
talking, praying, writing. They're just as fucked up
as ever, but there's something new and beautiful
in this, something you can't place, and the worse
things get the more they have to say, and you
know it's a lie and you're not sure
you should encourage this, but there it is,
there they are, eating, fucking, talking about you,
about Job, and you're not about to look away.



Jesse Wide

the god of humility

sits in a small wooden room
over dirt because
the sky is too grand for him.

He shares his bread with
a family of mice and, on occasion,
he gives an image to a poet

in the form of a receipt blowing
down a cobblestone street. Or he puts
an idea into a political head

like food stamps. He has little,
but he cares for it like a man does
with anything that he shares

a past with. His tin pan is dented.
His razor is worn. His bar of
soap is strewn with dried hair.

His one ragged t-shirt is stained
with twenty years. And right now
he's allowing you to feel hunger.

He is tracing the wrinkles
in your face. He is throwing bags
of sorrow over your shoulders

and warming up the seat
where you will sit and, unexpectedly,
you will think about dying.

Flash Fiction





Daniel Chacón

Tasty Chicken

I'm not a timid girl. You should know that about me. I can be pretty bold, just ask my friends, they think I'm crazy. Last semester I dyed my hair purple, for like a month, and this year I'm thinking of getting a nose ring or a tattoo. I'd like to have one on my hipbone, right here, a moon or a sun or a pentagram or something. I'm not into Satan worshiping or anything like that, I just like the way it looks, its . . . you know, its fearful symmetry. I don't think I'd want a crucifix, because it's too conventional, and that's not me. I want to be free. You know what I mean?

The first time you saw me, I'm sure you didn't think, "Oh, there's a nice, traditional Mexican girl I can get to know."

I know it sounds bad, but I don't want to be like my abuela. She still wears those old house dresses with the pockets on the side like all those old Mexican women. That's not me. I can wear anything I want, pants, dresses, whatever I feel like.

Except for one thing. And this is what I wanted to tell you about, so you know, okay? This is why I'm telling you all this.

There's one thing I won't wear, but it's not because I'm against it or anything.

It scares me. That's why. To even think about it gives me goose bumps.

You have to promise not to laugh or tell anyone, but I think you should know if you and I are going to, you know, be together.

You know that glitter that girls put on their boobs when they wear low-cut blouses?

You've seen that glitter I'm talking about?

I like the way it looks. I really do, but I'm too afraid to put it on my body. I'm scared of it. I know it sounds stupid, and I'm not a dumb girl. I get all A's and I plan to go to college.

It's just that I'm afraid those tiny flakes of glitter will find their way into my skin and into my pores. I'm afraid they'll bore deep inside my flesh and they'll get in there and stay forever like one-celled amoebas swimming around inside me, getting into my blood stream, and reproducing more and more until they take over and one day a giant insect bursts out of my stomach and eats up all my guts and sucks on my bones like I was some tasty chicken.

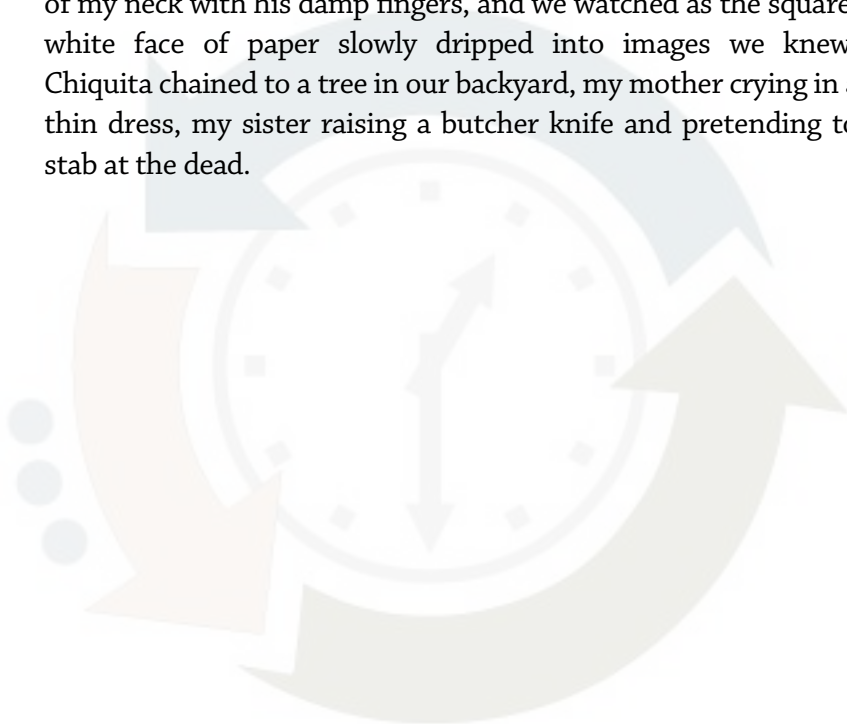


Daniel Chacón

Camera Obscura

When my father shot us, he used a Leica 35mm, 36 exposures, which he developed in the darkroom he had built in our garage.

I remember the vinegar-like smell of the chemicals, how he reached up in the glowing blue dark and clamped the dripping photo paper onto the twine. He stepped back, grasped the back of my neck with his damp fingers, and we watched as the square, white face of paper slowly dripped into images we knew, Chiquita chained to a tree in our backyard, my mother crying in a thin dress, my sister raising a butcher knife and pretending to stab at the dead.



Daniel Chacón

The First Cold

In his daydreams, the boy had several loops going at once, all moving toward inevitable endings. In one story, he was a star trooper in a space rocket racing after universal criminals, and in another he was a gang leader, a mix of Al Pacino in *The Godfather* and memories of his own father, a thin *cholo* with a tattooed teardrop under his eye. And he had other loops as well— he was a secret agent infiltrating his elementary school, where the arrogant principal and the teachers, those kindly, sinister beings, ran a terrorist training cell, so that everything about the school, the structure of the day, the subjects they taught, were designed to brainwash the kids. In another story, he was the leader of the world, a king of sorts, but he was in hiding among regular people, because he wanted to know how they thought and lived, how to be a better leader.

And because he lived in his imagination, he could do anything, like time travel. He visited the homes of his ancestors, the Aztecs and the Apaches, and sometimes he traveled to the future to visit his great-great-grandchildren, who lived in a floating glass dome over an HD forest of waterfalls and mountains.

He had so many loops going at once, randomly returning to each one, that sometimes he got confused about which world he was in, and an anomaly occurred. Thinking he was in his gangster story, he once walked out the door of their apartment, but instead of stepping into the barrio, into his turf, into his territory, he stepped into zero gravity and found himself weightless, floating through the Milky Way, a wet passage of lacteous light. He thought he was playing the gang leader, and he had no idea where he was, but then he saw, far, far away, a blue

planet slowly spinning in space, which he recognized to be earth. He swam toward it, desperate to reach it.

One day, when he was fantasizing about racing in his rocket through a burning galaxy of supernovas, the boy heard his mother moving in the hallway. She was pacing again, back and forth with quick, angry steps. He closed his eyes, and the thump of her feet on the carpet became swirls of thick paint, red and black, and he found himself falling into the center of a vortex, spinning around and around as he fell, his arms and legs stretched out like the Vitruvian Man.

He closed his eyes and hoped that when he was spit out onto the other side of the event horizon, he would come back into the future, as an adult, maybe a lawyer, educated and successful, or maybe a college professor, or a physicist, someone important. He wanted to be the father of happy children, and when he reached the future, he would re-appear in his childhood home, behind his mother. He would see her pacing the floor, back and forth, angry, worried, distraught.

He'd say, "Mom?"

She'd turn around and scream, startled to see a strange man in her house.

"Please don't be scared," he'd say. "It's me!" he'd say. "I'm your son from the future," he'd say. I'm a (insert important position) now. I've come to tell you not to worry. Everything will be fine. Everything will be great."

But when he was spit out onto the other side of the event, he wasn't a successful adult. He was still a kid. It was only three years later, when he was twelve years old, on the afternoon she would kill herself. They were in the county hospital, the hallway smelling of vomit and mayonnaise. She wore a long, red robe, faded in color, dragging on the ground as she paced the dim hallways. Her face was pale as bone, and her teeth chattered. She

held the collar around her neck, shivering, as if suffering from the first cold.



Douglas Cole

Sociology

I had my hand up Marissa White's shirt. Mr. Scrofani was reading aloud from Irving Stone's *The Agony and the Ecstasy*, which I liked— especially the part about Michelangelo raiding the crypt for corpses to get the right anatomy for his sculpture. My hand sculpted Marissa's well-cupped, bra-tight breast.

The room had grown fidgety, kids yakking. "Hey! Quiet down!" Mr. Scrofani said.

Yeah, I thought, it's a good book.

He read on, and the hubbub continued. I listened as well as I could, really enjoying the story as my hand moved down Marissa's belly.

"Hey!" Mr. Scrofani said, louder this time, "Would you quiet down, *please*?"

Literally from out of nowhere— I couldn't see who'd thrown it— a book went flying across the room and hit poor Mr. Scrofani in the head. Crazy! He looked truly shocked. I don't think he knew what to do. He just stood there, blank, staring at us. Then he walked out of the room.

All hell broke loose. Books flew everywhere. Pencils. Erasers. Rulers. You name it. Anything a kid could get a hold of. I crouched down, amazed. I looked over at Marissa, and she was laughing. Someone lifted a desk and hurled it out the window. There was no turning back after that. I'd never seen such pandemonium, never would have imagined it.

I walked to the middle of the room— no reason— and stood there in this sort of calm quiet zone. I saw things shooting through the air, everything in slow motion. I could see all the fine details— "Ticonderoga" in green metallic letters, the fine lines between countries on an unfurling map, hair drifting over wild heads, dust— and not a thing touched me.

Kelly Fordon

Hot, Hot, Hot

"I'm going to write a love story," she said.

They were in the kitchen. Children like carrion birds– large, menacing, cacophonous– kept descending on them. Every time the woman shooed them away they'd scatter and, three minutes later, return.

"I went to my therapist today," she said.

They each had a plate of spaghetti in front of them, but since she put on weight when she glanced at food, her plate was the size of a tea cup saucer.

"And?"

"And she gave me a great technique for handling stress." She took a bite, and half her dinner disappeared.

"I'm waiting." He poured a small hill of salt onto his pasta.

"She said I should take whoever's bothering me and put them in a box."

"Do we have any Parmesan?" he asked.

"I don't know? Do we?" She took another bite and finished her meal.

"You're the one who's here all day," he said, starting up from the table toward the refrigerator.

Their seven-year-old daughter rolled in on skates.

"What did I say about skating in the house?" the woman said.

"What are you doing, daddy?" the little girl asked.

"I am searching fruitlessly for the Parmesan," he mumbled, head in the fridge.

He located the Parmesan and returned to the table. He sat across from her, sprinkling it onto his spaghetti. She watched as it covered the food like snow. She watched him shovel it into his mouth. Finally he looked up and noticed her staring. "So you were saying something about a box."

"My therapist said I should go to my room for ten minutes every day and picture a large box. I should decorate my box: put beads on it and feathers, whatever I want, and then I should picture everyone who is making my life a living hell and pick them up and put them in the box."

"That sounds a little sadistic."

"No, not at all. She says that if I feel bad about it, I should remind myself that they like it in the box."

They sat in silence while he ate.

"How was your day?" she asked.

"Fine." He sounded like he was underwater, there was so much spaghetti in his mouth.

"I'm going to write a love story," she said. She jiggled her knee and tapped the table. His spaghetti looked so good.

"That will be tough," he said.

"Why do you say that?"

He shrugged and hoisted more spaghetti into his mouth. "I don't know . . . trying to describe love . . . it comes off sounding fake."

"It's a fiction class. I could use your help. Most of the writers in my class are men."

"Me? You've got to be kidding! You know I don't even like to read."

She wondered whether he was going to finish his spaghetti. He'd paused, and there was still half a plate.

"Did you put red pepper on that?"

"Yeah, why?"

"Just wondering. Anyway, there are lots of men in my class. They don't write love the way I would."

One of his eyebrows went up. He kept masticating.

She toyed with her tiny plate and ran her fingernail over a sliver of sauce. She brought a speck up to her mouth.

"They all write about sex," she said, glancing around to make sure that the roller skater was gone. Then she leaned forward and whispered, "They write about women writhing and screaming when they come and how many times they come and in what position."

He stopped chewing and looked up.

"In fact, I could tell you this one story. You wouldn't believe it."

"Go ahead. I'd believe it." He wiped his mouth. "There isn't much I haven't heard."

"Well, this one person in my class wrote about a banker like you. The banker was having an illicit affair with an accountant. And the accountant was this young girl of twenty-five, maybe? She looked like Cameron Diaz. The banker couldn't believe his luck. I mean the bank actually paid him to have lunch with this woman. This was a double whammy of a blessing for the banker because he was a very cheap person."

She expected him to say something about fiscal responsibility, but he was waiting for her to continue. She told him about the banker and his lover, the accountant, and how they spent every afternoon in the accountant's condo and how they did it in every position imaginable.

"Sounds interesting," he said.

She wanted to ping him on the nose with her fork.

"So, how does it end?"

"Not well," she said. "Finally, in the last scene something terrible happens. Can you guess?"

"Fire?" he said.

"How did you know?"

"Lucky guess."

"Yeah, so they're doing it, and there's a warning: fire in the canyon. Everybody evacuate. Did I mention this took place in Malibu? It's kind of central to the story, given the fire."

He shook his head. "Malibu?" he repeated, as if this didn't compute.

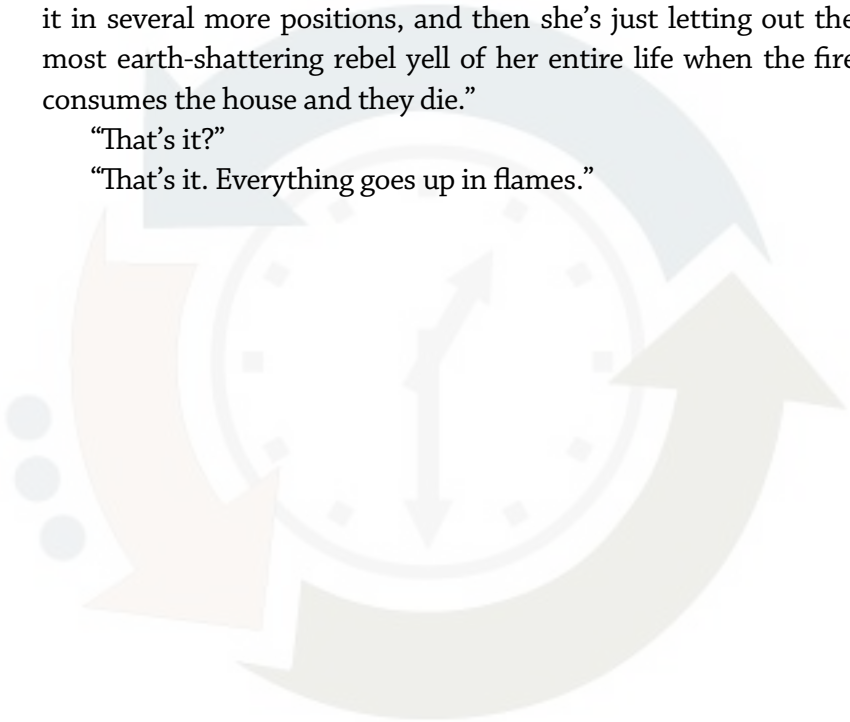
"Malibu, California? A place we've never been on account of the high cost of airfare?"

"Right. Go on."

"Anyway, the accountant doesn't want to leave because she wants to protect all of her stuff and the banker thinks she's smart to be so protective of her belongings. Plus, he doesn't want to stop doing it. He thinks they can ward off the fire, so they do it in several more positions, and then she's just letting out the most earth-shattering rebel yell of her entire life when the fire consumes the house and they die."

"That's it?"

"That's it. Everything goes up in flames."



Brooke Kuykendall

Room for our Sons

We are constructing rooms for our sons. It will be a time-saver. Four rooms will last four decades. They will face the left side yard, which is an extension of an already planned but not executed plan. Yes, we have planned to plan. So far, living with you marks how my life has changed within the confines of ours. The hanging clock in the kitchen will move; next year time will be in the foyer. Tomorrow is another room, another dimension, another guest bedroom. And when a strange woman comes to stay for dinner, you will say politely: your drive must have made you weary. Stay awhile. She will accept shyly. As if uttering a well-timed afterthought, she will advertise the lack of overnight clothes. This is the future, and I am re-running all the things I could say to you and to her who has no clothes in which to sleep. So, I say: we have extra. And I collect the dishes off the dining table. And that night lying next to you, I will dream a dream in which I slowly rise, twisting my torso from your arm, and tiptoe out the bedroom door.

Gary L. McDowell

Eventually, You Move On

The man and woman think there are too many clouds. They lie on their backs outside their apartment. No blanket. No croissants. No grapes. Just the wind and a parrot. A caique. A white-bellied caique, to be precise. A demanding, exacting bird that has never been outside. But the man and woman wish to indoctrinate the caique to what he might miss most: the music of the outdoors. Not just wind through the trees or people talking or dogs barking or cars rushing by or geese flying overhead but the smaller sounds that made the bird cock his head: the running of a hose or the opening chords of “Back in Black.”

The woman, early twenties, hair just past her shoulders, glasses too thick for her age, her skin unsunned but smooth, doesn’t think it strange that she’s talking encouragingly to the little caique under the Midwestern sky. The man, tan and fond of meat and rolls, thinks otherwise. He watches the people watching them. The students walking by on their way to class, the people out with their dogs, leashed, hopefully.

The man sees, in this scenario, a microcosm of how the following months will play out. They’ll continue to live together. They’ll continue to fuck twice weekly, maybe three times if he washes the dishes. He’ll make spaghetti on Thursday nights. She’ll do laundry on Tuesday mornings. Together, on Sunday afternoons, they’ll put on The Beatles and deep-clean the caique’s cage, picking, scraping, peeling off the stuck-on fruit, vegetables, and waste.

And they’ll do this because it’s what you do. You do things to make others less miserable, to make yourself useful, to make your home feel like home, and to make your caique smell less like bird shit. And then he’ll leave or she’ll leave. For someone more

interesting. More sexy. More adventurous or less adventurous. Taller. But outside, right now, the clouds are giving way to the sun and the man and woman have propped themselves onto their elbows, and they both think it's a shame spring comes before summer, summer before fall.



Andrea Rothman

The Woodpecker's Sister

They say a woodpecker never returns to its place of birth. But that is not true. My father told me a story, long ago. He never told me stories. He was a reticent man, middle aged when I was born. His hair was silver, his hands large and gnarled with veins so bulged and blue they looked like rivers on a map.

We never touched except for that one dawn walk during the spring of my tenth year. As we entered the woods he slid a flashlight into my hand, the heel of his palm brushing my arm. His skin was dry as an emery board, unexpectedly warm.

On our way to the clearing I kept hoping he would tell me a story, but except to ask if I was thirsty or remind me to hold the flashlight face down he never opened his mouth, and when I spoke I could tell he wasn't listening. I thought that if I held my breath and counted to ten he might say something, so I did, over and over, for the rest of the way.

The clearing in the woods where the woodpecker lived was three miles from our house. By the time we got there the sun had risen. I shut off the flashlight and returned it to my father, though I would've liked to keep it a while longer.

We sat beside a stream, on a fallen tree limb covered with lichen, to eat our sandwiches. Some lichen are beautifully patterned like constellations, while others have the plain and uncomplicated appearance of a lawn. The tree limb my father and I sat on was carpeted with a smooth green layer and smelled of mildew, like an underground room locked up for too long.

After eating his sandwich, my father took his binoculars out of the backpack and began to glass the tree across the stream where the woodpecker and his mate had recently built a nesting cavity. The oval-shaped hole stood thirty feet above the ground. Sunlight trickled across it, the beams disintegrating on their

descent, never reaching us. We sat in a chilly darkness and waited for the woodpecker to appear.

In the quiet, with the occasional wind, we could hear the creaking of a door when the limbs of two trees rubbed. When the wind died and the limbs ceased to touch, the sound stopped. Nothing moved around us. Then we felt the flapping of wings over our heads, enormous as oars, and saw him flying across the stream, toward the trees, as if he'd been there all along.

They say time exists only in your head. If so, there is no present, and the future and the past sit at opposite ends of an open tunnel.

The stream is dry, the tree limb we sat on that day blackened, as if lightning had struck it. My father has been dead now for over twenty years, but in my memory I keep coming back to these woods, where he told me about the woodpecker's sister.

My father had caught her, like her brother, near the ground when she was learning to fly. He clipped around her ankle a thin metal band imprinted with a number. In the fall brother and sister left the nesting cavity. They flew miles away from their parents to different parts of the woods, but a few days later the sister returned, nearly starved. There was a deficiency in her beak, my father explained, a small imperfection that prevented her from excavating her way into a tree, hammering the bark deep enough to find food, or loud enough to attract a mate.

For several weeks her father guided her in short flights through the woods, cutting across the barks of trees with his beak and moving to the side to let her feed. In his tree he built a roosting hole for her, with multiple entrances providing different escape routes against predators— woodpeckers are clever in that way. Like people, they would rather avoid a problem than confront it.

My father found her a few days later, at the base of the tree, her body shrunken and cold. With his hands, he dug a hole for her in the ground.

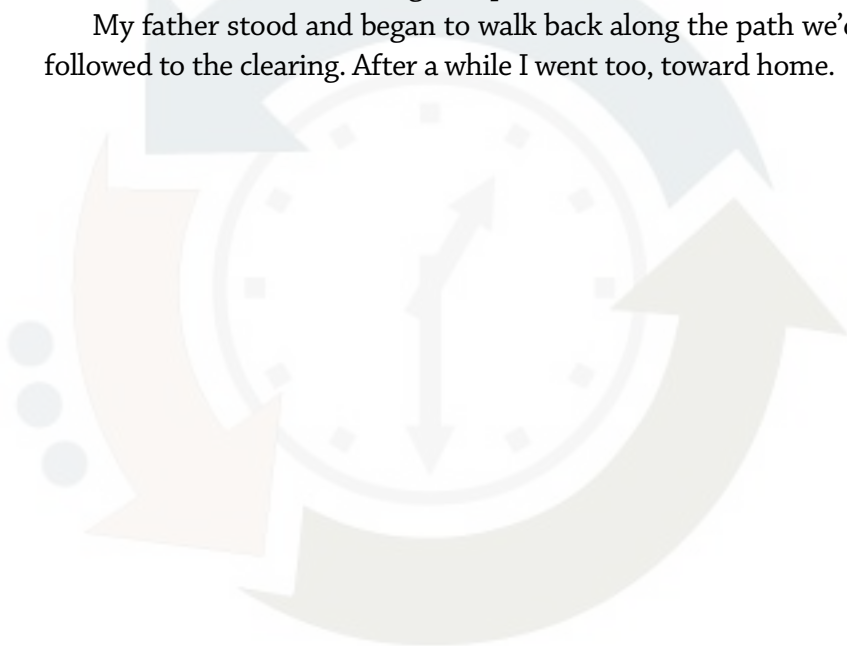
“Why did he let her die?” I asked that spring morning.

My father smiled, confused. “Let her die?”

“Abandon her.”

“He did all he could,” he said. “All he could.” He was no longer looking at me, but at the ground. Above our heads tiny fingers tapped the canopy leaves, and I smelled the rain. It smelled like lead, an element that would never be anything other than what it was, however much one might hope.

My father stood and began to walk back along the path we’d followed to the clearing. After a while I went too, toward home.



Checkpoint

The guys and I had just finished setting up another checkpoint near the base in Basra when Sergeant Pike drove up in his Humvee, a team of rookies close behind. Despite his dough-ball cheeks, the man was more iron than grizzle, and he had a penchant for protocol.

"Private Dotson?" he barked.

"Yes, Sir?" I said.

"Private, I want you to set these cherries straight on the SOP for checkpoints. You hear?"

"Yes, Sir."

"They've been dicking around all morning, filling sandbags like we're on vacation in the Keys. How many bags can you fill in an hour, Private?"

"Thirty-seven, Sir."

"*Thirty-seven*," he said, gutting the new recruits with his gaze. "You hear that, boys?"

"Yes, Sergeant Pike!" They shouted in unison, then hustled out of their vehicles and over to me. I don't know how long they'd been in country, but it couldn't have been more than forty-eight hours. No stubble. No sunburns. I could smell the detergent on their DCU's. Boys just old enough to vote.

"Anything else, Sir?" I asked.

"Yeah. How about turning around?" said Sergeant Pike. I looked beyond our checkpoint and saw a white sedan approaching, one hundred meters in the distance.

We got into position and waited. So far, the rookies seemed to know what they were doing. Later, I'd tell them how to get on Pike's good side. For now, I had to help the sergeant make his point.

"We fire warning shots at fifty meters," I told the rookies, taking aim. The vehicle sputtered closer, and I landed a few shots just ahead of the bumper, then a handful to either side. Hunks of dirt and rock sprayed into the air. The car slowed to a halt. Its engine coughed until it fell silent.

"Two male civilians, middle-aged," Larson reported, looking through his binoculars. "The driver's holding up his keys. I see both hands. The passenger's not doing anything. He's just sitting there— but I can't see his hands."

"If they get any closer, smoke 'em," called Sergeant Pike. He leaned against the barricade in the center of the road, polishing his sunglasses. He barely looked up.

"We've got movement," said a rookie, the tall one.

Sure enough, the driver lowered his hands, and a second later we heard the engine fire up. Slowly, they reversed the car and turned around, a snake-like line of dust following them all the way out of sight.

"All right, Suttons," the Sergeant said. He had a way of talking that commanded everyone's attention.

The tall rookie stood and looked at the Sergeant.

"Yes, Sir?"

"You handle the next one," he said, then pivoted on his heels and headed back toward his Humvee.

It wasn't more than ten minutes before Suttons had a job to do. A beat-up blue minivan came whirring down the dirt highway at about thirty-five mph. It neared the fifty-meter mark in no time, and Suttons fired warning shots, mimicking the pattern he'd watched me shoot.

"One male civilian driver," Larson said. "One female in the passenger seat, younger. She's got her hands raised above her head. There's a rifle on the dashboard."

"Fire again," I ordered. We were all eyes and ears now, crouching alongside our vehicles, weapons aimed.

Suttons fired, blowing out a front tire. The van crept forward. "I can see two passengers in the backseat," said Larson. "They're tiny; there's kids in there. Now the lady's hitting the driver. She's got ahold of his clothing."

The van continued forward. Forty meters. Thirty-five. Suttons aimed for the other tire, but missed. My buddy Olivares aimed and nailed it, one hubcap flying in a silver arc across the road. Twenty-five meters. Twenty. The van looked like a lumbering blue whale misplaced in the desert. I watched as it swerved left, then right, then left again.

"Larson, can you still see that gun?" I asked.

"It hasn't moved," he said. "They don't know what they're doing."

I'd seen this before, and the outcome was never predictable. It could be a surrender. It could be someone with intel. It could even be a suicide mission.

"This is unbelievable," shouted Suttons. "Why don't they stop?"

"Just hold tight," I said. "Unless he touches that gun, all of you just hold tight a little longer."

Suttons panted like a dog at the end of his chain. I could feel the other rookies taking it all in— the van moving steadily closer, Suttons aiming through his scope, my orders to hold fire. In a flash, Suttons leapt to his feet and held out his palm, motioning for the van to halt.

"No!" I shouted. "That will confuse them!" But before I could explain, the van sped forward and the other rookies rose to their feet, spraying a curtain of bullets at the vehicle. Windows shattered into red-stained slivers of light. Eight meters from our checkpoint, the van rolled to a stop.

The next few moments were lost to me. I must have shouted, must have grabbed Suttons by his unstained uniform and spit in

his face, exploding breathlessly: “We’re in Iraq! The sign for halt is a greeting. You put your hand up, and people dash forward to meet it.”



Katey Schultz

That Sunday Morning Feeling

I'm out back, splitting wood again. It keeps my body busy while my mind's in a fray. The view from here captures the jagged line of the Sawtooth Mountains, Idaho's finest, and just the kind of living I envision heaven to be. Wild. Quiet. A no-catch setup that has everything it needs. This time of year, the songbirds keep me company all day, readying for winter. I like the little buggers. They can tough it out up here, even at 4,000 feet. Hollow bones! Can you imagine?

If I blur my vision, the peaks around me soften just enough to look like the L4 grid in northern Afghanistan, where I spent my third tour. First Kuwait, then Iraq, then Afghanistan. This last time, I led patrols for eight months from a forward operating base overlooking a narrow valley in the Hindu Kush. That gridline— the L4— mattered the most. Dip down into the valley toward the L5, and well, you'd run into what brought us there in the first place.

The woodpile looks good this season: cedar and hemlock, a bit of pine. I've been out here long enough for the day to warm up, so I peel off my sweater and sit down on the chopping block for a breather. I can hear Helen humming in her studio at the main house, twenty meters through the woods. She does this painting thing, landscapes and inspirational. Between my pension and her business, it's enough. And when I can muster the patience to fill out all the forms, a few months later we'll get a reimbursement check from the military for all my head juice. That's what I call the therapy, and even though it costs five times what it should and seems to me more about being nosy than helping somebody out, I go anyway. My promise to Helen. One hour, twice a week. The least I can do after all the anniversaries and holidays I missed.

I've been back four months and still feel crooked. Yesterday, the therapist asked me what I think is missing.

"I miss my Sunday mornings," I told her.

"Do you attend services?"

"No," I said. "Not that kind of thing. What I mean is, I miss that feeling. Like all your work is done and there's still a whole bright day ahead of you."

"Say more," she said. But I couldn't.

Then she pulled out the 2900, this new post-deployment form all the guys are filling out. It's for health problems that don't show up until getting back home and settling in. The first thing she wanted to know was a point of contact— somebody who could reach me at all times, no matter what. I gave her Helen's cell, but what I wanted to say was that even I couldn't reach myself half the time.

The part of the form about chemical weapons exposure, ionizing radiation, depleted uranium— all that was easy. I just didn't see much of it, if any. But then she asked: Human blood or body parts? Smoke from burning feces or oil fires? What about excessive vibration? Were there any sudden or unanticipated loud noises?

"Hold on, hold on," I said.

She put her pen down and set aside the form.

"It's not the fact of experiencing those things," I told her. "We all saw that kind of stuff. But here's the catch: when I was in the middle of it all, it didn't affect me. I didn't feel a thing."

Later, I went home and told Helen about the session. She had finished a painting that day and wanted me to see it. It depicted our woodpile, evenly stacked cords baking in the afternoon sunlight. She had painted my ax at the end of the pile, with a tiny junco perched on the handle. I told her the wood looked so real, somebody could get a splinter just from touching the canvas.

If I could be anything else in the world, I think I'd be one of those songbirds. I wouldn't have to leave the Sawtooths, or even Helen, really. I'd still keep an eye on things, just from a different vantage point. As for what's missing— that Sunday morning feeling— it wouldn't matter anymore. I'd have it back again, tucked inside my bones like a weightless, secret weapon that would give me strength, even through the toughest winter.



Katey Schultz

Pressin' the Flesh

My platoon's been at Camp Taji, Iraq, for five months. That's sixteen square feet of living quarters per soldier, not counting the bunkers. Our commanding officer picked 3rd and 4th Squads for a mission to press some flesh in Sadr City. It's the CO's fancy way of telling us to go shake some hands. It's also his way of acknowledging we've had our share of ambushes on night patrol and maybe a little humanitarian gesture would ease our attitudes.

We've had one day R&R, and now we're rolling outside the wire for the short drive into the city. There's about twenty-five of us along this narrow street, Humvees idling and radios turned down. A few soldiers are on guard for snipers, but otherwise it's pretty low-key. I'm handing out bottled water, and the Iraqi kids can't get enough. "George Bush!" they shout. "We love George Bush!" Less than five minutes and I've gone through maybe forty bottles of water, people dashing down the street to meet us, more hands just reaching and reaching for whatever we can give.

It's hard to see them like this— kids fighting over basic supplies like so many stray dogs in the street. It feels like weeks since I've even seen women and children, people just milling around as though an RPG couldn't careen overhead at any second. But something makes me edgy when I'm this close to civilians.

"Mister! Mister! Give me chocolate!" an Iraqi boy shouts. He's probably eleven years old, shirtless with a pair of tattered blue shorts, a piece of p-cord tied through the belt loops. Last week, I gunned down two insurgents. I never even saw their faces. Today, I'm offering handouts to this bug-eyed haji kid, and chances are pretty good his dad's rigging IEDs along our patrol routes at night.

Never mind that not many of us understand why we're still in Iraq. Nobody mentions WMD anymore. Saddam's dead. America's broke. But here I am with my buddies, sweating through sandstorms at a cost of \$2,800 per soldier per day, and democracy's just a word. Don't ask me what I'm for or against. All I know is, I'm handing out bottles of water, and that's not enough. Next thing I know, those kids are heckling me for chocolate. They want their houses rebuilt. They want hospitals. They want their schools back. They want to know why they're waiting thirteen hours in line for a tank of gas while we're all standing on one of the largest oil reserves on the continent. They want it all, and I don't have any of it.

Tell you the truth, sometimes I prefer the patrols. Looking through those night-vision goggles, everything whittles down to two colors: green and black. If something moves wrong, if something lights up— I shoot it. Pretty simple. Pretty straightforward. Pretty goddamn free.

Wayne Sullins

Clearing a View

The assignment was to write a landscape, the way you'd paint one. That excited him because he liked vast stretches of green pasture, yards full of rusty farm machinery and junk cars; he especially liked the lone radio towers you come across on long drives. He had little doubt that he knew his world thoroughly enough to put it into readable English. Only when he got down to it, words would not serve him. No matter what he looked at or remembered having seen, his English would not lie flat and sprout grass, or rise up and tickle the stars the way radio towers do.

He studied the poor tract of land outside his window, writing, *Steel-gray clouds yonder bring rain to the alfalfa daddy feeds to the horses*. He tried, *Slate-gray are the clouds bringing rain to the alfalfa daddy planted*. Scratching that, he wrote, *The field of alfalfa looks glad to see them big clouds yonder, gray as ash*. He put his face all the way to the window pane and tried to figure out if the clouds yonder were *steel-grey*, *slate-gray*, or *gray as ash*. But he got all flustered and put down, *Dark clouds hang above the alfalfa*.

In the morning he moped out to the bus stop. He hadn't the foggiest idea what he'd say if his teacher said that what he'd written was not writing, just laziness. But Mrs. Parker called it haiku—praising his work above the others' for being succinct.

And he thought it an ugly word, *succinct*.

Marion de Booy Wentzien

Be Nice

I'm a bad girl. I swear. Sometimes I smoke. But then I chew icy gum so my tongue is clean and cold.

"All that peppermint breath. How come it can't erase the filth that comes out of that mouth?" Gramma asks. She's shoving plates from the stove to the table. Scowling at me. There's nothing about me she likes. She doesn't say that. She wouldn't. She goes to church and all. But I can see it in every way she moves that close-to-the-ground tick body of hers. I can hear it in the sighing and mumbling ever since I landed in her front room on the couch in the middle of the night a week ago.

"I guess I'd better get you into school," Gramma says.

"I don't need any damn school. I'm smart enough."

"There's a big bar of Ivory soap just waiting to scrub clean a dirty mouth. You want to swear one more time and make its acquaintance?"

In the fifth grade classroom all faces turn toward me when that smiley bitch, Ms. James, says, "This is Clara Small. Be nice." Her fingers pinch my shoulder. Wants me to smile. Say hello. I stare a warning at the room. A desk in the back row is empty. In a haze of wild flashing dots, I make my way there, inching past stuck out legs. I'm in my chair less than three minutes when the guy in the desk in front lets out a long low growler followed by a dead dog, cabbage stink. His wide back shakes with silent laughter.

At recess, I stand by a crumbling brick wall. Kickball with a half-flat red rubber ball is in process. The boys bend back and throw hard. Target? Girls' titties. I'm never growing those things. I fold my arms across my flat chest.

At lunch, I toss the peanut butter sandwich Gramma made into an overflowing trash bin. I sit facing away from everybody. Close my eyes. Call Mom up in my mind to see if I have psychic powers yet. I've been practicing. "Where are you?" I whisper. "Come back. Get me."

"Gotta go to the store, Baby," Mom said. She said that almost every night. I knew what she meant. She meant the bar. Men. Dating. See you sometime. Get yourself to school. *Store* contained all the other words: like *candy, milk, cigarettes, cereal*, and *we need money*. She looked so beautiful, her lips bright red, her thick lashes all curled up. She blew me a kiss. A flick of her chin, long glossy brown hair tossed back, and she was out the door.

Her lilac perfume stayed behind. I listened to her heels, unsteady on the stairs. Heard the slam of the door at the end of the downstairs hall. I sat in the big ugly yellow chair by the tiny TV and watched *Friends* and ate Cheetos out of a bag. I hunted through the cupboards until I found some cigarettes and smoked one and then two.

At the end of three weeks, I went to the police. They couldn't find Mom, but eventually they found *her* mom, Gramma, a whole state away. "It took some talking, but your grandmother is willing to take you in," the social worker said. "She doesn't want any trouble." I stared out the window at a naked tree. "Are you listening, Clara? It's that or the state."



"We're not friends," I tell the short geeky girl who says her name is Denise. She's forced to line up with me for a trip to the library. All the fifth graders are going. The ratty line snakes for a whole block. Two by two with adults sprinkled among us, shouting directions.

The air is almost too cold to breathe. I'm wearing the cap Gramma knit for Mom when she was a kid. It's bright blue with a ring of white, pointy stars. Gramma plopped it on my head this morning and told me to wear it to keep my ears warm. She said there'd be snow by nightfall.

A couple of low riders roll by real slow, mufflers grunting. Guys hang out the windows, whooping. "Hey, girlies. Hop in for a ride." I stare, not really seeing the guys, just the car. *If I go with them maybe they'll take me home. Maybe Mom came back. Maybe she's hunting for me.*

I fall out of line and drift toward them.

"You! Girl in the blue cap. Clara!" Ms. James grabs me by the arm hard, startles me. "What are you doing? Get back in line. Hold your partner's hand. Right now!"

I move back next to Denise, but I don't reach for her hand.

Mufflers rumble, loud laughter. Middle fingers poke up in the air. Then the car screeches off in a deafening roar.

We've reached the light. Denise's hand sneaks into mine. There's a warmth as her fingers curl around my palm. Her hand is small. Like Sissy's was. As soon as I think Sissy's name, it's like a rubber band snaps against my brain. Pictures flash, two pictures in a row. Sissy's slow smile and the way her eyes rolled up when she looked at me. Sissy hiding under the bed to get away from him. I don't want to remember that. I yank my hand away.

"Hold your partner's hands. Busy street."

I make a fist. Denise folds her hand outside mine. Another picture. Another place. A motel sign, blinking red. A guy yelling. Sissy screaming. *Him* beating on her. Me, in a ball under a thin blanket.

Later, I woke up face down and drooling, on the back seat of the Pontiac. Sissy was gone. Her car seat was gone. He and

Mom were in the front seat, silent and smoking. A new city was opening wide in front of us. It had buildings that touched the sky. A Big Mac was breakfast. No one talked. No one mentioned Sissy ever again.



Kirby Wright

Psyche in Lingerie

We found a pink mountain. The mineral glittered in my girlfriend's hand. "What is it?" Psyche asked me. "Bauxite," I replied. Certain spots were soft, unstable, sucking like quicksand. We hiked until we reached a waterfall. We walked over water, stepping on stone islands. Statues surrounded us. One was half-fish and half-man: a man's head on a neck of gills. The legs were fins but the arms human. Fishman. Psyche rubbed against a statue of Eros and cooled in the breeze from the falling water. "Careful," I warned. She smiled and said, "Paranoid." Something moved and I turned— Fishman wiggled. "He's alive!" I said. He wiggled free of his pedestal and swam through the air to reach Psyche. She bent down to stroke him. Fishman wagged his tail. She straddled his back. "No!" I called. Psyche grabbed his dorsal fin, and Fishman dove down into the bauxite. She was gone. The waterfall stopped, and the statues melted. The mountain flattened into a desert. The sky went violet. I found a mirror on a rock and brushed off the bauxite. I looked in— Psyche was in lingerie on our bed, holding a stack of snapshots. Fishman swam over and opened his mouth. His gills flared as he swallowed our lives, one memory at a time.



Acknowledgments

“Three AM” and “Woman in the Mirror” are from Glenda Council Beall’s chapbook, *Now Might As Well Be Then* (Finishing Line Press, 2009).

“Settling In” was first published in Robert W. Kimsey’s book, *Air Swimmer* (FutureCycle Press, 2011).

“Shorelines” by Robert S. King was first published in the Summer 2011 edition of *ThoughtSmith*.

“Genesis,” “Today, the Mosses,” and “Magic” were first published in Kimberley Pittman-Schulz’s book, *Mosslight*, winner of the 2011 FutureCycle Poetry Book Prize (FutureCycle Press, 2011).

“The Hinge,” “Self-Portrait as a House,” and “Fox Paws” were first published in Emily Raabe’s book, *Leave It Behind*, which was a finalist (second place) for the 2011 FutureCycle Poetry Book Prize (FutureCycle Press, 2011).

Cover photo by Tanja Knorke (tanja.knorke@gmail.com)

Cover and book design by Diane Kistner (dkistner@futurecycle.org)

Text typeface: Chaparral Pro with Calibri and Helvetica Neue Light titling

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Alejandro Escudé (alejandroescude.com) is the author of *Where Else But Here* and *Unknown Physics*, two poetry collections published by March Street Press. He teaches high school in Santa Monica, CA, and holds a master's degree in creative writing from the University of California at Davis, where he won the 2003 U.C. Poet Laureate Award. Among other journals, his work has been published in *Rattle*, *Phoebe*, *The Lilliput Review*, *California Quarterly*, and *Main Street Rag*. He is originally from Argentina.

Marta Ferguson's work has appeared in many literary magazines over the last decade, including *5AM*, *Rattle*, *Pearl*, *Prairie Schooner*, and *Puerto Del Sol*. Poems are available online at *The Cortland Review* (#28). She has had a reprint at *Poetry Daily* and has twice been nominated for Pushcart Prizes. In the fall of 2005, her first collection, *Mustang Sally Pays Her Debt to Wilson Pickett*, was published by Main Street Rag. She is a former poetry editor of *The Missouri Review*. She has been the sole proprietor of Wordhound Writing & Editing Services, LLC, for seven years. She regularly teaches classes in poetry reading and writing, facilitates Artist's Way groups, and gives readings.

Kelly Fordon, who is currently working toward her MFA in fiction writing at Queens University, has just finished work on her first novel. Prior to writing fiction and poetry, she worked at the NPR member station in Detroit and for *National Geographic* magazine. Her work has appeared in *The Kenyon Review* (KRO), *Flashquake*, *Red Wheelbarrow*, *The Windsor Review*, and other journals. She received third place in the Katherine Handley Prose Poem Contest, was a finalist in the 38th Annual Mississippi Valley Poetry Contest, and received honorable mention in the 2011 *Tiferet Journal* fiction contest.

Andrei Guriuanu (andreiguriuanu.com) is the author of three collections of poetry— *And Nothing Was Sacred Anymore* (March Street Press, 2009), *Front Porch World View* (Main Street Rag, 2009), *Days When I Saw the Horizon Bleed* (FootHills Publishing, 2006)— and the chapbooks *Anamnesis* (Finishing Line Press, 2010), *Exile* (Big Table Publishing, 2010), and *It Was Like That Once* (Pudding House, 2008). From 2009 to 2010, he served as Poet Laureate for Broome County, NY, and his memoir, *Metal and Plum*, was released that November from Mayapple Press. Guriuanu holds a doctorate in English from Binghamton University and is the founder of *The Broome Review*.

Dianna MacKinnon Henning (diannahenning.com) has a review of her book, *The Broken Bone Tongue*, in *The Hawaii Pacific Review* and new or forthcoming work in *Cosumnes River Journal*, *Blue Fifth Review*, *The Tule Review*, and *Poetry Now*. She is a graduate of Vermont College of Fine Arts in Writing. Henning has taught creative writing through the William James

Association's Prison Arts Program and through the California Poets in the Schools. She has published widely and has been twice nominated for a Pushcart Prize. She recently reviewed Judith Tannebaum's and Spoon Jackson's "By Heart" (Double Memoir), published in *The Montserrat Review*.

Robert W. Kimsey is a retired technical writer/illustrator living in McCaysville, GA. His poems have been published in various poetry journals and web columns, including *Kudzu*, *Pegasus*, *The Southern Ocean Review*, *New Southerner*, and various anthologies. He is the winner of the Kentucky State Poetry Society's 2005 Lee Pennington and R. J. Lutzke Memorial awards and placed second for the President's Prize. He has taught workshops for the Kentucky Poetry Society as well as at the Blue Ridge Writers' Conference. *Paths From the Shawnee Spring* is his first chapbook of poetry. FutureCycle Press published his full-length volume, *Air Swimmer*, in 2011.

Robert S. King (robertsking.com) lives in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Georgia, where he is actively involved with FutureCycle Press and the writing communities of Appalachian Georgia, North Carolina, and Tennessee. King's poems have been published in hundreds of magazines, including *California Quarterly*, *Chariton Review*, *Hollins Critic*, *The Kenyon Review*, *Lullwater Review*, *Main Street Rag*, *Midwest Quarterly*, *Negative Capability*, *Neon*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Visions International*, and *Writers' Forum*. He has published three chapbooks (*When Stars Fall Down as Snow*, Garland Press 1976; *Dream of the Electric Eel*, Wolfson Publications 1982; and *The Traveller's Tale*, Whistle Press 1998). His first two full-length poetry collections (Shared Roads Press, 2009) are *The Hunted River* and *The Gravedigger's Roots*; a third, *One Man's Profit*, is out looking for a publisher.

Brooke Kuykendall (matakisiding.blogspot.com) is a writer and photographer from the Midwest who owns a photography company called Second Story. She holds a degree in English Literature. Her most recent and forthcoming publications include *Edge Review*, *Steam Ticket Review*, *Mochila Review*, *Driftwood Review*, and *Canvas Review*. In 2011, she received the Visual Arts Award from *Canvas Review*.

Carol Light moved to the Pacific Northwest to study poetry twenty years ago and fell in love with the Olympic Peninsula. She teaches middle school and lives in Port Townsend, WA, with her family. Her poems have appeared in *Prairie Schooner*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Narrative Magazine*, and *Mare Nostrum*. Her poem "The Archaic Torso of Apollo," which appears in this issue of *FutureCycle*, was nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

Gary L. McDowell is the author of *American Amen* (Dream Horse Press, 2010), winner of the 2009 Orphic Prize for Poetry, and co-editor of *The Rose Metal Press Field Guide to Prose Poetry* (Rose Metal Press, 2010). His poems have appeared in various literary journals, including *Colorado Review*, *The Indiana Review*, *New England Review*, *Ninth Letter*, and *Quarterly West*. His poems, stories, and essays are forthcoming in *Ancora Imparo*, *Hobart*, *PANK*, *Burnside Review*, *DIAGRAM*, *Tusculum Review*, *Mid-American Review*, and

others. He lives with his wife and their two kids in Nashville, TN, where he is an assistant professor of creative writing at Belmont University.

Marissa S. McNamara writes: "I am a teacher, and I spend my time trying to convince students to like poetry. No easy task. I write poetry so that someone might say to me, like some classes have at the end of the semester, 'Read us some of your work.' I like that they want to hear more poems. I like that I become human to them, so that they say things like, 'You seem more real now that I know from your poem that you want a tattoo of Our Lady of Guadalupe.'"

Michael Miller's second book, *The Singing Inside*, was published by Birch Brook Press. His poems have appeared in *The Kenyon Review*, *The Southern Review*, *The Yale Review*, and elsewhere.

Scott Owens is the author of seven collections of poetry and more than 800 poems published in journals and anthologies. He is editor of *Wild Goose Poetry Review*, Vice President of the Poetry Council of North Carolina, and recipient of awards from the Pushcart Prize Anthology, the Academy of American Poets, the North Carolina Writers' Network, the North Carolina Poetry Society, and the Poetry Society of South Carolina. He holds an MFA from UNC Greensboro and currently teaches at Catawba Valley Community College. He grew up on farms and in mill villages around Greenwood, SC.

Mary Elizabeth Parker's poetry collections include *The Sex Girl* (Urthona Press) and two chapbooks, *Breathing in a Foreign Country* (Paradise Press) and *That Stumbling Ritual* (Coraddi Publications, UNC Greensboro). Her poems have appeared in journals including *Notre Dame Review*, *Gettysburg Review*, *New Letters*, *Arts & Letters*, *Confrontation*, *Madison Review*, *Phoebe*, *Comstock Review*, *Birmingham Review*, *Kalliope*, *Passages North*, *New Millennium Writings*, and *Greensboro Review* (nominated for a Pushcart Prize); and in *Earth and Soul*, an anthology published in English and Russian in the Kostroma region of Russia. She has been featured poet online on *Poetry Daily* and *On Margins: Exploring Modern Magical Realism*.

Simon Perchik (simonperchik.com) is an attorney whose poems have appeared in *Partisan Review*, *The New Yorker*, and elsewhere. Visit his website for more information, including his essay "Magic, Illusion and Other Realities" and a complete bibliography.

After exploring woods and watersheds on both coasts, **Kimberley Pittman-Schulz** (themossilpath.blogspot.com) lives among redwoods and the Pacific Ocean of Northern California with her wildlife biologist husband and two cats. When not writing, hiking, or kayaking, she earns a living building philanthropy for Humboldt State University. Kimberley's collection of poetry, *Mosslight*, won the 2011 FutureCycle Poetry Book Prize. Her poem "Genesis," which appears in this issue of *FutureCycle*, was nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

Renee Podunovich (reneepodunovich.com) lives off the grid in southwestern Colorado in an "Earthship" home. Her most recent publications include *Boston Literary Magazine*, *White Whale Review*, *The View From Here*, *Mississippi Review*,

RATTLE, and *SW Colorado Arts Perspective*. Her chapbook of poems, *If There Is a Center No One Knows Where It Begins*, was published by Art Juice Press. Her poem "Restless," which appears in this issue of *FutureCycle*, was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. She is also a licensed professional counselor with a private psychotherapy practice.

Emily Raabe lives in New York City. Her first novel is due out in spring 2012 from Random House, and her poetry has been published in periodicals including *The Marlboro Review*, *Big Ugly Review*, *Indiana Review*, *Diner*, *Chelsea*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Gulf Coast*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Antioch Review*, *AGNI*, and *Eleven Eleven*. She has received fellowships from the Macdowell Colony, the Ragdale Foundation, Rotary International, and the Breadloaf Writers Conference. Her full-length poetry collection, *Leave It Behind*, placed second for the FutureCycle Poetry Book Prize in 2011. Her poem "Fox Paws," which appears in this issue of *FutureCycle*, was nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

Mary Ricketson's poetry has been published in her chapbook, *I Hear the River Call My Name*; in *Lights in the Mountains*, *Freeing Jonah IV*, *Freeing Jonah V*, *Wild Goose Poetry Review*, and other magazines; and in *Disorgananza*, a private collection distributed among family and friends. She won the gold medal for poetry in the 2011 Cherokee County Senior Games/Silver Arts and first place in the 2011 Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest national poetry contest. Her poems and articles have appeared on several blogsites, and she writes a monthly column, "Woman to Woman," for *The Cherokee Scout* weekly newspaper of Murphy, NC. She is a member of the North Carolina Writers' Network, a mental health counselor, and a farmer.

Amy Riddell's poems have appeared in journals such as *Prairie Schooner*, *Blue Fifth Review*, *Prick of the Spindle*, *Birmingham Poetry Review*, and *Chicken Piñata*. Her chapbook, *Narcissistic Injury*, was published in 2009 by Pudding House, and her first full-length volume of poetry, *Bullets in the Jewelry Box*, will be published by FutureCycle Press in 2012. Riddell lives with her husband and daughter in northwestern Florida, where she teaches English at Northwest Florida State College.

Andrea Rothman is a writer from Long Island, NY. She holds a Ph.D. in biology and is completing her MFA in writing at Vermont College of Fine Arts. Her short story "Breathe" appeared in Issue 23 of the webzine *ducts.org*.

Rosemary Royston (theluxuryoftrees.wordpress.com) earned her MFA in Writing from Spalding University. Her poetry has been published in *The Comstock Review*, *Main Street Rag*, *Alehouse*, *Literal Latte*, *Public Republic*, and *Dark Sky Magazine*; her chapbook, *Splitting the Soil*, is due out in 2012 from Redneck Press; and her essays on writing poetry are forthcoming in *Women and Poetry: Tips on Writing, Teaching and Publishing by Successful Women Poets* (McFarland). Royston was the recipient of the 2010 Literal Latte Food Verse Award. She currently serves as the Program Coordinator for the North Carolina Writers' Network West.

Katey Schultz graduated from Pacific University's MFA in Writing program. Achievements include the Linda Flowers Literary Prize, Press 53 Open Award for the Short Story, and Whispering Prairie Press Flash Fiction Prize. Her work has appeared in *River Styx*, *Fiction Daily*, *The Outlet*, *Perigee*, *Driftwood*, and more. She is Associate Editor of *TRACHODON*, a dinosaur of a little magazine, author of *Lost Crossings* (a nonfiction chapbook), and editor of two fiction anthologies. She has served as Writer-in-Residence for Interlochen Center for the Arts, Weymouth Center for the Arts & Humanities, and Fishtrap.

Nancy Simpson (nancysimpson.blogspot.com) is the author of three poetry collections: *Across Water*, *Night Student*, and *Living Above the Frost Line: New and Selected Poems*. Her poetry, which has been published in *The Georgia Review*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Seneca Review*, *New Virginia Review*, *Prairie Schooner* and other literary magazines, has also been widely anthologized. She holds an MFA from Warren Wilson College and a B.S. in Education from Western Carolina University. Simpson co-founded the North Carolina Writers' Network West, a non-profit, professional writing organization serving writers living in the remote mountains west of Asheville and in North Georgia. A resident of Hayesville, NC, she has served as Resident Writer at the John C. Campbell Folk School and presently teaches poetry writing at the Institute for Continued Learning at Young Harris College.

Wayne Sullins is an American writer living in Hanoi, Vietnam. Since 1980 his travels have taken him to a dozen countries, and since 1993 his stories and poems have been published in *Quick Fiction*, *Sentence*, *Fence*, *Jubilat*, and other journals.

Wally Swist (wallyswist.com) was a finalist for the 2010 FutureCycle Poetry Book Prize with *Luminous Dream*. His new book, *Huang Po and the Dimensions of Love*, was chosen by Yusef Komunyakaa as a co-winner in the Crab Orchard Series Open Poetry Competition; it will be published by Southern Illinois University Press in August 2012. This coming spring, Berkshire Media Arts will also issue an audio book of 80 of Swist's poems, *Open Meadow: Odes to Nature*. His poem "Recognition," which appears in this issue of *FutureCycle*, was nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

Carole Richard Thompson and her husband have lived in Blairsville, GA, since his retirement almost 22 years ago. She writes poetry, short stories, and essays and also enjoys painting portraits and quilting. Her poems have appeared in *Wild Goose Poetry Review*, *A Sense of Place*, and the anthology *Echoes Across the Blue Ridge*. In 2011, her poem "The Whisperers" won second place nationally in a DAR American Heritage contest. She is a member of the Georgia Poetry Society and Georgia Representative to the North Carolina Writers' Network West.

Called by *The Bloomsbury Review* "one of the most insightful and spirited poets today," **Pamela Uschuk** is the author of five books of poems; *Crazy Love* (from Wings Press) is the winner of a 2010 American Book Award. Uschuk's work has been translated into nearly a dozen languages, including Spanish, Russian, Czech, Swedish, Albanian, and Korean. Her work has appeared in

more than 300 journals and anthologies worldwide, including *Poetry*, *Parnassus Review*, *Agni Review*, *Ploughshares*, and *New Millennium*. Her literary prizes include the 2010 New Millennium Poetry Prize, 2010 Best of the Web, the Struga Poetry Prize (for a single poem), the Dorothy Daniels Writing Award from the National League of American PEN Women, and The King's English Prize plus awards from the Chester H. Jones Foundation, the Tucson/Pima Arts Council, *Iris*, *Ascent*, *Sandhills Review*, and Amnesty International. Nearly 30 individual poems have been nominated for the Pushcart Prize. Uschuk is a professor of creative writing at Fort Lewis College, where she also teaches environmental literature. She is Director of the Southwest Writers Institute and Editor-In-Chief of the literary magazine, *Cutthroat, a Journal of the Arts*.

Israel Wasserstein is a lecturer in English at Washburn University. His poetry has appeared in *Flint Hills Review*, *Coal City Review*, *Blue Mesa Review* and elsewhere.

Marion de Booy Wentzien has twice been a recipient of the PEN Syndicated Fiction Award and has received the University of Missouri–Kansas City's *New Letters* Literary Award. The Chicago Humanities for the Arts presented one of her stories in their Stories on Stage program recently. Her stories have appeared in *Seventeen Magazine*, *Blue Penny Quarterly*, *The San Francisco Chronicle*, *Scholastic Books*, *Story Magazine*, *The St. Petersburg Times*, *The Village Advocate* (Chapel Hill, NC), *On the Page*, *Big Ugly Review*, *The Sonora Review*, *Prime Number*, *The Quotable*, and other literary journals. She lives in Saratoga, CA.

Jesse Wide has lived many places over the past ten years, but he considers Little Rock, AK, his home. He currently lives and teaches high school English in Atlanta, GA. He wrote his first poem while riding the train from Chicago to Quincy, IL. Now, he tries to write a poem every night before bed.

Kirby Wright was born and raised in Honolulu, HI. A graduate of Punahou School (Honolulu) and the University of California at San Diego, he received his MFA in Creative Writing from San Francisco State University. Wright has been nominated for two Pushcart Prizes and is a past recipient of the Ann Fields Poetry Prize, the Academy of American Poets Award, the Browning Society Award for Dramatic Monologue, and Arts Council Silicon Valley Fellowships in Poetry and the Novel. *Before the City*, his first book of poetry, took First Place at the 2003 San Diego Book Awards. Wright is also the author of the companion novels *Punahou Blues* and *Moloka'i Nui Ahina*, both set in Hawaii. He was a visiting writer at the 2009 International Writers Conference in Hong Kong, where he represented the Pacific Rim region of Hawaii and lectured with poet Gary Snyder. He was a visiting writer at the 2010 Martha's Vineyard Writers Residency in Edgartown, MA, and also the 2011 Artist in Residence at Milkwood International, Czech Republic.

IN THIS ISSUE

POETRY

Patricia Barone
Glenda Council Beall
Nancy Brewer
Martha Clarkson
Joellen Craft
Alejandro Escudé
Marta Ferguson
Andrei Guruianu
Dianna MacKinnon Henning
Robert W. Kimsey
Robert S. King
Carol Light
Marissa S. McNamara
Michael Miller
Scott Owens
Mary Elizabeth Parker
Simon Perchik
Kimberley Pittman-Schulz
Renee Podunovich
Emily Raabe
Mary Ricketson
Amy Riddell
Rosemary Royston
Nancy Simpson
Wally Twist
Carole Richard Thompson
Pamela Uschuk
Israel Wasserstein
Jesse Wide

FLASH FICTION

Daniel Chacón
Douglas Cole
Kelly Fordon
Brooke Kuykendall
Gary L. McDowell
Andrea Rothman
Katey Schultz
Wayne Sullins
Marion de Booy Wentzien
Kirby Wright



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