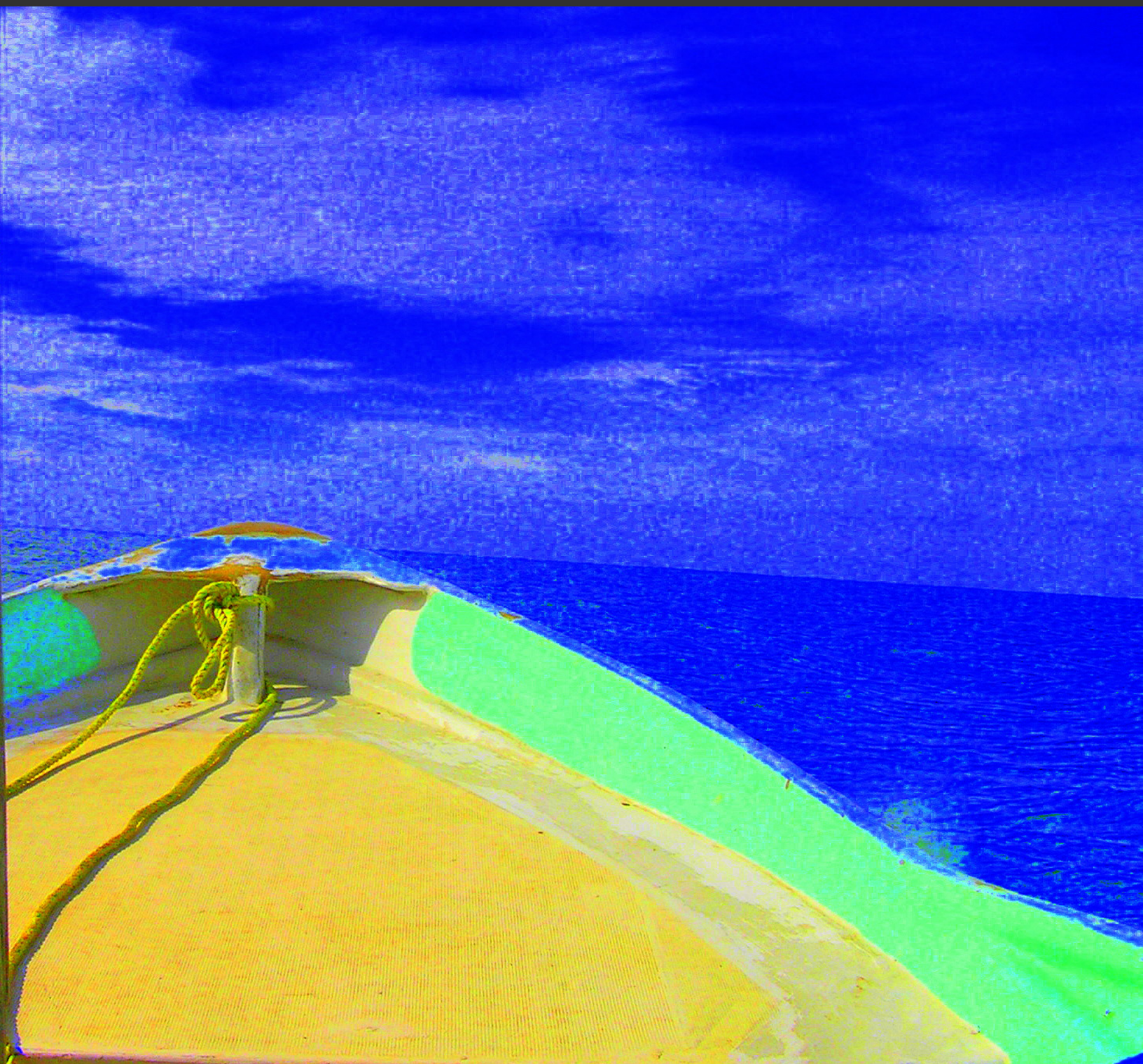


CIRQUE

*A Literary Journal
for the North Pacific Rim*

VOL 1 ISSUE 2



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V O L . 1 , N o . 2

CIRQUE

A Literary Journal for the North Pacific Rim

Volume 1 No. 2

Summer Solstice 2010

Anchorage, Alaska

From the Editor

The excitement and praise for Issue #1 has barely subsided, and it's already time for Issue # 2. Since December 2009, the Cirque website at <http://www.cirquejournal.com/> has had over 7,000 hits, almost 350 hard copies have been sold through MagCloud's print-on-demand site at <http://magcloud.com/browse/Issue/54905>. By all accounts, Cirque is a hit and accomplishing its fundamental intention: to showcase great writing from the region of the North Pacific Rim. Contributors and readers universally commented on their appreciation of Issue # 1's readability on the web page using the page-turning Issuu software and the ease of ordering hard copies through MagCloud. We will continue this format for Issue # 2 and beyond. One of the great pluses of this approach is that the journal will be online and for sale in perpetuity.

My call for fiction brought in some fine pieces from Alaska, British Columbia, Washington and Hawaii and the poetry and nonfiction is, like the first issue, rich and deep. The number of photography submissions is rising, as well. Many warn me that someday I will be buried under the volume of submissions, but not yet; the number of submissions is still manageable and the quality high. At this point I ask contributors and readers to get the word out locally, and, on my end, I will gradually get Cirque introduced to other journals in the region. Another goal is to grow the web page links. To date, there are links for other regional journals, but my intention is to also soon have links to contributors' readings (podcasts), links to purchase their books, an author index, and local contests, prizes, events, and submission deadlines in the region. This is a call to everyone to send me these links.

Deadlines for Cirque are the Equinoxes--Issue # 3's deadline is September 21, 2010. If you're in the Cirque region (i.e., Alaska, Washington, Idaho, Oregon, Montana, Hawaii, Yukon Territory, Alberta, British Columbia, and Chukotka) send along your short stories, poems, creative nonfiction, translations, plays, reviews of first books, interviews, photographs (high res/300 dpi), and artwork to cirquejournal@yahoo.com

My thanks to the photographers for their magnificent photographs, to Andromeda Romano-Lax and Deb Vanasse at 49 Writers <http://49writers.blogspot.com/> for getting the word out about Cirque, to Jim Sweeney and Lila Vogt at the Alaska Poetry League for sponsoring the first annual Cirque fundraiser on June 25, to Bruce Farnsworth at the MTS Gallery in Anchorage for sponsoring a Cirque First Friday bash on July 2, to Sandy Kleven who got the Cirque word out in Seattle and Anchorage while premiering her movie "To the Moon! A Tribute To Theodore Roethke," to Carol Swartz for promoting Cirque at the 9th Annual Kachemak Bay Writers' Conference in Homer, AK, and again to Paxson Woelber for his expertise in Cirque's design and layout and getting Issue # 2 online, and to Janet Levin for her editorial assistance. And a correction: In Issue #1 we erroneously stated that Peter Porco's full-length play "Wind Blown and Dripping," about Dashiell Hammett's years in the Aleutians during World War II, opened at Cyrano's Off-Center Playhouse in Anchorage in January 2009. It opened in 2010.

Thanks, many times over, to you the writers whose words drive it all. Your works are vital and Cirque wants to get them out to your readership.

Mike Burwell, Editor
Anchorage, Alaska

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FICTION

Jim Sweeney

Ivy

The Grand Teton draws a purple outline on the blue Jackson Hole evening sky. Up and left Venus twinkles. There are a few other stars, but there isn't a cloud in the sky. Tourists bustle around her; lots of traffic, a loud horn, and a biker turns right in front of her. The light changes green; she skips across the street and down the sidewalk holding the straw cowboy hat in her right hand. She stops at a doorway on the left for chocolate. The proprietor, well known for grumpiness slips a wry smile with her chocolate raspberry. The clock reads 8:50. She hurries out the door.

Ivy dons the hat she bought for a dollar at a yard sale in front of the Million Dollar Cowboy Bar. She's lived in Jackson for three years and has never been in the Cowboy Bar. Ivy never drank alcohol except for a little wine at church. She's never danced and she's here for the Sunday night line dancing lessons.

The "Cowboy" is big and open with a long bar on the right. Saddles substitute stools and they're plenty of men and cowboy hats. Ivy puts her fingers in her front pockets and lowers her head. There's a whistle. She hunches her shoulders and heads for the group to the right of the bandstand.

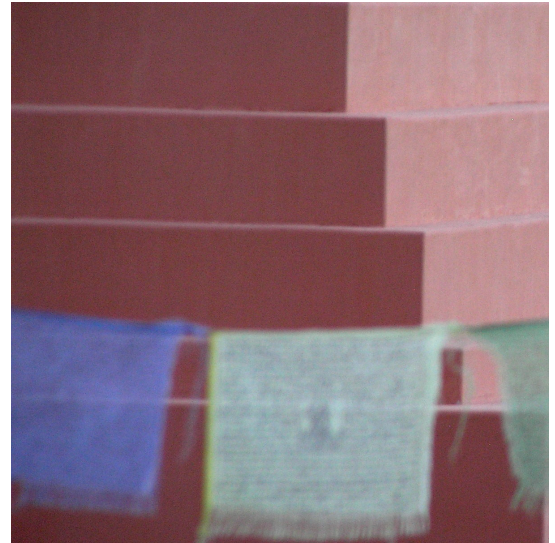
Ivy climbed the Grand Teton today. Her legs aren't tired. She's climbed the mountain twenty-two times and today, it was easier than ever. On her way down the mountain, Ivy took a nap in a meadow. She lay between blue and yellow flowers. Water gurgled and birds sung. She had a dream--men kept asking her to dance.

Ivy went to a private girl's school on scholarship. After her father died she took care of her mother and her sister. Yale sucked, she never went out. She never had a boyfriend. Ivy tried to have a boyfriend in Iowa during graduate school but he deceived her.

Tanya, the line dance instructor wears a headset. She's strong and athletic, different than Ivy expected. There must be 30 people lined up in front of her. There is no music and Tanya demonstrates speaking through the microphone, "Clap your hands. Step right, left foot behind.

Clap your hands. Step right and tap your left foot. Now back the other way. Clap your hands. Step left, right foot behind. Clap your hands. Step left, tap your right foot.

Ivy was up at 4:30 this morning and on the summit of the



Janet Levin

Grand Teton by two. Her nap was delightful. Usually she'd be working now, because that's what editors do, but ever since that damn poet came into her life she's been answering to him. Then he sent the "list." He called it a poem.

Teaching dance is easy for Tanya, she works days as a nurse. She watches and thinks it is a normal group of tourists, want to be cowboys and cowgirls until she spies the skinny blonde in the straw cowboy hat.

Tanya has been teaching dance since high school. No matter how much she does it and no matter how jaded she becomes she knows the pure physical joy of dance is somewhere near the root of life. The straw blonde cowboy hat is a flower, but she can't dance.

"Okay," she says, "One more time." Tanya weaves through the dancers towards the blonde. Ivy goes through the motions watching her feet. She never looks up.

Ivy met Mike last summer at the Jackson Hole Poetry Festival. Her magazine, Mountain Poems published three of Mike's poems since then and she visited him in Alaska a couple months ago.

There is music now: Ivy focuses on the steps, doesn't really spin. She turns left, steps right, puts her left foot behind, and she turns right. Tanya stands right in front of her.

Tanya raises her hands. "Stop everything. Let's take a two minute break," she says. The other dancers head for their drinks. Ivy looks to escape, but Tanya moves closer and says, "Sister, what's your name?"

"Ivy."

"Ivy, why did you come to my line dance class?"

"To learn how to dance."

"Ivy! You do not need me to teach you how to dance. You're the most athletic intelligent person in the bar. Don't look at your feet. Hold your head up and put your soul into it. What are you saving it for?"

Ivy fights tears. The fucking list, it's the first line to his poem. What is it, you are saving it for? If you can't dance, you can't write poetry. He also said: Put your soul into every word.

Tanya looks into Ivy's eyes. She can't get away. She holds her hands up, fingers apart and tells Ivy, "Give me your hands." Their fingers clasp with their palms together. "Ivy," she says, "You are beautiful; dance with me" and Tanya moves slow so Ivy can get up on step and soon, Ivy's feet move like never before; her heart pounds as they spin. Toe to toe, side to side and back to back they dance. Tanya is a jaguar and Ivy is some kind of cat, too. She dances harder at the Cowboy than on any climb. They whirl around the room. Ivy is dizzier than on a mountaintop.

When Tanya stops she doesn't let go of Ivy's hands. She says, "Fly, sister. Flap your wings, you are lovely."

Through the rest of the lesson Ivy dances smiling putting her soul into the dance, but she can't get the poem out of her head.

On the mountaintop
Get on your hands and knees,
Tell your dad how you feel.
He'll be listening.

When the class is over eager dancers surround Tanya. Ivy grins and stands to the side; hands in her back pockets. A curly haired slender man in a yellow shirt heads her way and she's out the door.

A quarter-moon sits low in the eastern sky. There are lots of stars. Barely, she can make out the Grand Teton against the purple sky. A few tourists still roam the streets. Ivy cuts through town square, run's past the antler arches and the art galleries. Outside downtown, Jackson is sleepy. Ivy holds the straw cowboy hat in her right hand and sprints down the street. **Q**



Janet Levin

Doug O'Harra

Kringle

The phantom musher drives south during the darkest night of the year, his tandem huskies pulling through blizzard that swallows sky and burns exposed skin. The runners graze parallel lines into lichen-covered domes scoured by wind. The sleigh leaps the conic forms of frosted spruce and careens off browse before soaring into the air just above the forest crown. Team leader, Dasher, throws forward with ears flattened, paws raking terminal buds, tongue lapping and retreating like a snake tasting air. Swing dogs Comet and Dancer lope right behind in an uneasy truce that will last no longer than a single night's journey. They fight if given the chance, and when a growl reverberates in Comet's chest after a gust throws Dancer too close, the whip cracks a few inches above their ears, and they grow quiet, tails dropping.

Other pairs rangy as hounds fill out the gang line, pulling in serpentine undulation, the galloping reach and tuck of webbed paws and muscular legs. They are village huskies mostly, some blue eyed and masked, others gone white with underbelly patches of auburn and black. At the rear haul the immense wheel dogs Thunder and Lightning, burgeoned by Malemute ancestors and MacKenzie River muscle, though blood stains on Thunder's muzzle give him a wolfish cast. They yank the bow left with a jolt, responding to the driver's hoarse "Come HAW" even before the leader starts the spiraling descent to the cabin by a frozen river.

The outfit slides onto the shake roof, hardly breaking the crusted drifts, and the driver stomps the hook into the eaves before stepping free of the runners. He's dressed head to foot in fur: mukluks, leggings, knee-length parka darkened by soot and dried offal, wolverine ruff on a full hood. Ice dangles from his white moustache and beard, eyes narrowed against the wind-borne grit, cheek skin roughened by frostbite and a fat, irregular scar as pale as dried chinook. The driver slips free the nine-inch athame last bloodied on a bull above the Clear Creek Gorge, and jumps feet first into the still smoking flue of a chimney too narrow for any man.

The stockings of these neglected children he fills with the treats you might expect: dark fudge that tastes of cream, fantastic dragons and grinning dolls and crouching knights, coins etched with runic figures, tiny cars on jewel-like wheels that roll uphill at a word.

All this he leaves before stepping into the bedroom and pinching shut the man's snoring mouth with grime-stained fingers as strong as talons. The other hand compresses the man's chest, the blade's hilt unyielding through the flannel. The man's eyes widen, but he cannot budge, paralyzed in the drunk of sleep and the shadow of an all-but forgotten blow. Though the stuffy darkness, he senses the driver's dilated

pupils drawing near, smells the sweet-bitter breath, feels the tickle of frosted beard against his neck. He catches a strange muttering he cannot quite understand. The woman lying alongside stirs and seems to moan in her sleep, but the man cannot be sure nor raise his chest. "Ahhh!" she cries out, and still the pressure builds until the man finally comprehends. The nightmare ends with the burn of the dagger against groin and the shuffle of sled rising into silent sky, while the woman fades deeper into a drawn-out sigh.

The real beginning traces to a plump, lonely boy living on a subsistence farm in the lush valley stretching south from the Columbia River in the late 1880s. His widowed mother had answered an ad posted in the Portland paper for housekeeping duties, then married the ex-logger and freeholder who wanted a permanent cook and saw the boy as payment on a debt. The hawk-faced man never drank liquor, prayed by the table each morning at dawn, and once slapped the boy across the face with enough force to knock him to the ground behind the barn. His older sisters shied from the man's touch and stiffened when called by name and stopped looking their brother in the eye, forcing him to play alone by the creek when chores were done, watching ruddy spawners maneuver and bite each other in the clear water.

As years passed, his mother grew wan, no more picnics under the apple trees on dry days, and stopped tutoring the boy on his letters and numbers. The memory of his natural father lost detail, and the boy understood the meaning of the infant brother who arrived on a following spring. His bitterness formed a plan even before his mother's labor cries faded from mind. It's a familiar story, played out with regret — the boy waiting until the house slept, then lifting coins from the old butter crock. He stood outside the bedroom door long enough to distinguish his mother's irregular breath from the stepfather's rattle. He had hoped she would wake up.

He dashed down the dewy lane under a moon bright enough to cast shadows. By dawn he was 12 miles closer to town, hiding in a grove behind a church. Week's end found him shoveling coal below decks, lurching to the corner to puke as the freighter crossed the bar and rolled up coast toward Puget Sound.

Season rained into season, the boy grew to manhood on Inside Passage workboats. He gradually wandered further north until he found work on the steamer traveling in and out of Juneau. A fumbling giant, his downcast eyes furtive, with thick forearms and a hulking manner, bunched muscles between his shoulders, hairy as a bear, the young man kept to himself, drinking silently in raucous saloons after work, sleeping alone on pallets in the fo'c's'le of his latest gig. He might have gone on forever, just another aging deckhand, but the gold found by Skookum Jim and Carmack electrified the Rain Coast with visions of vast and royal wealth.

He disembarked at Capt. Billy's Wharf in Skaqua Bay in the summer of '97, and watched as thousands of goldrushers overran the old German's homestead and threw up a boom town filled with murder, swindle and theft. He hauled his ton



Sandra Kleven - Lone Man

of gear over Chilkoot Pass. Winter found him on the Klondike diggings, but like most others, he barely earned enough for beans and flour by hacking at the frozen gravels in the pits of other men's claims. The desolate lessons of childhood had settled into his bones like an injury that could not heal.

Attempting to drive dogs past Fortymile during a March cold snap frostbit his face and took three or four toes. He was lying in a drift, growing ever more sleepy, unable to decide whether to rise up and live, when rescuers dug him out and wrapped him in a black bear hide. For six weeks, he lay up, feverish with pneumonia, at a ramshackle roadhouse run by the woman trying to escape a bad marriage, and the glacial chill at his core softened with April's pungent thaw.

Ten years older, she was, skeptical and careworn and heavyset, with three young children and startling green eyes, and determined to make the roadhouse pay. Her husband was a freighter and gambler, a musher known for beating his dogs and blackening her face, and though she had driven him from her bed, he bragged to drinking partners that he'd never let her go nor give up the low-slung cabin and barn he'd built with his own hands one day's travel down the Valdez Trail.

The young man healed but didn't leave, continuing to chop kindling and tend dogs. As boreal summer jungled up, he took the boys fishing for grayling and supervised the harvest of late-summer chums. The girl, a wisp with pigtails and freckles, would crawl into his lap to whisper raven fables she'd heard from the Gwich'in grandmas at the river-mouth fish camp. For her he carved figurines from birch, and shaved smooth sticks of diamond willow for the boys. The woman never spoke of what was evolving between them, but he could see the sparkle of pleasure in her eyes at the sound of his voice, and at night he lay in the barn smiling with anticipation of boiled coffee at the broad table with family and boarders. He wondered how the touch of her hand might feel against his cheek.

The turn came in the soggy fall, when the giant spine-covered leaves of Devil's club yellowed and fireweed began to die. He and the children approached the cabin in



Rebecca Goodrich - Unalaska

the drizzle, and he sent them in ahead while he finished a barn chore. The children's screams froze him, and he stood still, not breathing, unable to move, the fateful inertia broken only when the girl shrieked his name: "*Claus!*"

He barreled across the threshold into the waiting husband, who knocked him down with a blow from a willow stick that sliced open cheek to bone, and then bolted out the open door. Claus rolled to his feet, astonishingly fast for one of such bulk, and would have caught the husband but for the dumbstruck horror before him. The woman's body sprawled across the long plank table, raped and strangled. The three children heaped on the floor beside her, throats cut, each speckled with drops of their siblings' spray.

The posse found the husband holed up in a log hovel five miles upriver. For an hour or so, they crouched behind the deadfall, enduring the man's insane bellowing. Claus finally rose from shelter and walked across the clearing, not flinching against the wild, misplaced shots. His lunge busted the door from its hinges, and he disappeared into the cabin for only a moment before reemerging without comment. They found the husband with neck broken so that head faced rear. The anguished posse, hard men who trapped and had themselves seen much death, had felt affection for the roadhouse family and wanted to comfort the young man in their inarticulate way. But by the time they came into the yard, calling his name, he was gone.

Some say that's when Claus went mad, though few

old-timers saw any of what followed with their own eyes. As snows deepened, and noon dwindled into twilight, he wandered game trails and winter routes from roadhouse to hamlet to mining camp. Glimpsed only at a great distance, a strange figure in moonlight, much less than a shadow of peripheral movement in the spruce beneath the weird green shimmer. And yet, vague though the sightings were, dread spread down the river, as penetrating and chilling as the worst ice fog.

Somewhere in the taiga, they said, Claus caught and tamed a natural leader he called Dasher, a mongrel gone wild during the earliest of the gold rush. Some claimed it was the same Buck that once stunned crowds in Dawson for breaking free one-ton loads during weight pulls, the one owned by that unlucky prospector Thornton, who got himself killed by Yeehat raiders he had tried to cheat. The other team dogs were liberated one by one from village lots or wolf dens, and Claus built himself a gee-haw outfit that could cut trail all night over the domes, and traverse still muskegs without a sound.

First to go may have been that alcoholic blacksmith acquitted of breaking his woman's teeth after she swore under oath that it was all a misunderstanding, that she had merely tripped off the cabin porch in a clumsy accident. The man was discovered motionless on the floor of his shop with no sign of struggle.

A market hunter who sodomized his half-grown, mute daughter was himself found suffocated in a terrain-trap powder bank, snow packed into an open mouth under wide

staring eyes.

A Yukon River woodcutter who insisted his Athabaskan wife and child had drowned in the spring flood somehow got pitched head-first into his own frozen watering hole. His boots had scraped parallel trenches through the crust, exposing the river's bubbled gray ice.

Other reports, terrible and strange, traveled the winter trails. People began to take extra care.

Come Solstice, weak-minded drunks claimed Claus took to the air, because a wild hunt was seen roiling across the sky: musher and dogs amid diving owls and stampeding caribou, and the red aurora, too, with hiss and pop just loud enough to hear. Ravens gobbled from spruce tops, and hares screamed in the jaws of lynx. There was even a rumor that Claus had grown horns and stalked lone cabins with burning eyes, no longer human at all but the Nordic krampus of unnatural strength. A berserker with unslakable grief.

Whatever the truth, bull-necked men with unshaven throats started catching themselves a moment sooner than before. They splayed their fingers flat on the table, breathing deep and swallowing back their retorts. Wives studied the lines on their faces in the light of the burning Yule log and relaxed ever so much, hoping at last for a long sober evening that would end in drowsy silence. They hustled children to their beds and piled on the blankets against the chill and told them to ignore any crunching in the snow on the roof.

But he knows when you are sleeping, they whispered among themselves. He knows what you've been.

It was those soft-fingered bastards at the United States Federal Government who shut down the big mines, but the frantic rush for gold had long since ended. By the outbreak of the Pacific War, Bush camps and Interior valleys had depopulated. Log cabins moldered and stilt caches collapsed. Placer flumes washed downstream during break-up floods, and the last bachelor sourdoughs grew senile, shouting at strangers and mumbling to their dogs.

Claus left his freight sled where it lay and sold the remaining dogs to a village hunter north of the river. He crouched and held the muzzle of Dasher, not the original but sixth or seventh in the bloodline, a decent leader with puzzled eyes and a bit of Labrador leavening the husky genes. When he stood to go, his lower back clenched and right hip pained. The hair had thinned over a liver-splotted crown, and the birch on the opposite bank smeared in his rheumy eyes. It took 10 minutes to dribble clear his bladder in the mornings, and his skin was growing more yellow by the month. Yet he had one last trip to make.

Prim houses aligned to neat lanes in Skagway, once so muddy and dangerous. The galley of the southbound packet served halibut on china with silver-plated forks and linen napkins. Portland had bricked up, mile after mile of boulevards and buildings. The former puddle-swamped road was smooth enough for the diesel bus to reach 40 mph. Claus disembarked at the crossing two miles from the farm, and ambled painfully down the gravel. The sight of the old porch with unpainted spandrels and missing balusters filled him

with sudden rage. Behind a barn he no longer recognized, in a blossoming orchard of gnarled, ancient trees, he found the stepfather napping in a woven-cane wheelchair by the cedar box spring.

But it was no good. The stiff, righteous bully who had done such damage was now just a withered coot with sunken cheeks and skeletal face. Wrapped in a shawl, blanket over legs, his chin rested on chest, with arms folded across fragile wrists. Claus longed yank him afoot. Yet he waited while the man stirred, worked his toothless mouth — waited for the glance, the double-take, the confusion, followed by the goggled leer of recognition.

"You," Claus said.

The head waggled in a circular, herky-jerky tremor. The lips flexed and pursed, and the sharp larynx bobbed under the loose, leathered skin. But the old man couldn't speak, nor even grunt, nor raise a hand when spittle trickled down his chin.

Claus opened his fists and stepped closer to the chair. His fingers had closed on the bony shoulders when a voice that sounded almost like his mother's interrupted from behind.

"Wait," she said.

Claus turned, much surprised.

A tiny granny, white hair in a bun, stood slight as a girl in a gray ankle-length dress. He thought he recognized a sister in the severe, drawn skin of her face.

"I knew you'd come back," she said. "I've been warning him."

"Which one are you?"

"Does it matter?"

She met his gaze with an expression so reptilian that Claus shuddered, and he wondered whether he had misunderstood all of it, from childhood on.

"What about him?" he said.

She regarded the old man, whose head continued to nod and shake, struggling and failing to utter any sound. A twitch played the corners of her tight mouth.

"Why he's fine," she said. "Just fine."

"Momma?"

"Gone on."

"The others — the baby — and sister?"

"They all gone, Claus. It's just us now."

The burning frost of many winters, the midnight visits to cabin and hearth, the struggle of muscle over bone, the hunch that none of it had ever truly mattered, that he'd always been too late or too soon, debts never fully paid, all ripped through him, and he staggered. He no longer knew what difference, if any, he had made to anyone. He felt dizzy and nearly fell.

Still, he reached toward the stepfather.

"No," said his sister.

"Come," she commanded. "I can see that you are worn out and in sore need."

"You sit down here, right beside our spring."

She led him to the overflow pool and tugged at his ham-thick forearm so that he sat on the grass bank. She seized his ragged white beard and pulled his face close. Her wasp-

dry lips pressed his, and the flicker of her tongue entered his mouth. It tasted sour and cold.


"Come. Let's shuck off these old boots."

She unlaced and loosened the leather, then grasped the heel and toe, and pivoted them free. She slipped away the rank socks and held one sweaty foot and then another, with their twisted digits and horny skin, in firm cool hands. She grazed her fingertips over the stubs of missing toes, sending a shiver up Claus's spine. She dug into the tender soles and worked the knots and sinews, making Claus gasp. He felt himself begin to blur under the pressure of her thumbs.

"Remember that our spring never runs dry," she said.

"Pacific Ocean water that falls as snow on the Coast Mountains before we are born trickles forever through the rock.

"Feel its fine chill," she said. "Let it numb you now, brother, and be soothed."

His feet dipped into the pool and the icy shock took his breath. He was dazzled at the pain, and so relieved, that he was finally able to relax backward into the grass, lost to the blizzard of petals above and the luminous sky beyond, where the sun would not set for a long, long time. 

Martha Amore

Pike

She heard that men have affairs like they have car accidents, that they don't mean a thing by cheating, it just happens. For a woman, though, an affair is always a way out. Anne couldn't remember where she heard this, a magazine, a friend, or when she heard it, before or after she was married. She knew it shouldn't matter. This sort of talk show wisdom never meant a thing to her. And yet for the past two weeks, she's come back again and again to chase the possible significance of these words.

The fishing trip was her idea. She brought it up to her husband the night he reached a hand to her hip and, for the first time in their five-year marriage, she turned away. She could feel him breathing beside her, waiting for her to say something. Along the bedroom wall, car headlights flared and slid, one after the other, their light so brilliant she could sense it through closed lids. When she finally began to speak, it came in a rush. It came in a breathless rush that emanated from some dark place within her but must have seemed to him like a wonderful surprise: plans for a trip to his favorite trout fishing spot several hours from their Anchorage home.

He said the girls, Hannah and Zoe, would have fun hunting for tiny shrimp along the lakeshore, but Anne said no. She'd rather it be just the two of them.

"So what's the occasion?" Bill asked. "This isn't like you."

"There is no occasion. We're just going fishing."

He looked at her and blinked, his lips curving into a half-smile. "But you don't even like fishing."

She took up his big hand in hers and rubbed at the thick calluses there. His palms felt more like hard plastic than skin, toughened from so many years of building Montana log homes for the Anchorage elite. She worked her fingers in gentle circles, wondering if he could feel her touch.

"I haven't liked it yet," she said. "But I want to. I want to *learn* to like it."

The lake was three-miles across, six miles wide, and over a hundred feet deep. Ringed by the greatest mountain ranges in Alaska – the Talkeetnas to the east, the Alaska to the north, the Chugach to the south, and the Wrangells to the west – the lake itself stood on a plateau two thousand feet above sea-level. The day Anne and Bill arrived, the lake reflected every bit of the turquoise sky above it. To Anne's eyes, the water's shade was so striking it looked flame-like, hot to the touch. The chalky scent of warm bark and pine needles filled the air. It was as beautiful as he'd promised it would be.

This was her first visit, although he'd been several times, staying free-of-charge in a friend's cabin. A year ago he'd tried his best to get her there just after the miscarriage. Miscarriage. That was his word. The doctor expanded it slightly: *late term miscarriage*. If the baby had lived, she would have been a premie, worn doll-sized hats and outfits, her hands like tiny starfish. But she hadn't, and so her dying didn't even qualify as a death.

Anne had refused that first trip. The girls couldn't miss school – Hannah had just started kindergarten and Zoe, preschool – plus there was all the work Anne had yet to do, returning gifts and packing up the bright little room. She told him if he wanted to go so bad, he'd just have to go alone. He told her that she didn't understand, that he didn't want to go so much as he thought it would do her some good to go, to help her get over the miscarriage. She looked at him then as if he were a stranger sitting at her kitchen table. "And a fishing trip would accomplish that?" she'd asked.

There was no anger in her voice. It was as if something in her had broken down, everything coming out flat and disconnected. Bill looked helplessly down into his plate of scrambled eggs. "You could try," he said.

Now, one year later, she was there in the A-frame cabin over-looking the sparkling lake. Inside, there wasn't much furniture: an old brown corduroy couch, a shellacked stump for a coffee table, a stack of metal folding chairs leaning against a wall. In the corner beneath a bright green canopy of mosquito netting stood a king-sized bed, which her husband sat down on, bouncing slightly.

"Not much to look at," he said. "But it'll do. Want to take it for a test drive?"

"So is it true," Anne said quickly, turning away from him and pointing out the window to the lake below, "that we're in a trout fisherman's paradise? Lakers the size of salmon?"

Her husband stood and stretched. "Used to be true. Let's hope that's still the case."

"They've been fished out?"

"Not fished out. Slaughtered."

"Slaughtered? By who?"

"By other fish. Goddamned northern pike. They're not native but some idiot stocked the lake years ago and now the pike are killing all my fish. It's happening all over the state. Wolf fish is what they are. Aggressive little bastards, nothing but teeth and attitude. And ugly as sin. The big ones get so long and flat they almost look like crocodiles." He shook his head. "The day's coming when there won't be a single beautiful trout left in this lake."

While her husband went to see about renting a skiff, she stood on the small deck overlooking the lake and watched the sun sparkle off the water. She couldn't make out the far shore but rising beyond that, what she initially mistook for clouds, was the ghostly outline of what must be Mount Sanford, the highest peak of the Wrangell Mountain Range. She breathed in the unseasonably warm, dry air. And then she closed her eyes, pushed her fingers against them, and thought: for a woman, an affair is always a way out. As intentional as a slit wrist.

A way out? She wasn't sure. But she knew this much, what she had done wasn't a way into something else. He was just a boy, really, barely past his teens. Sparse golden stubble, a chest so hairless and pale and flat it must have been an embarrassment to him. He wore his hair long, the filthy laces of his Chuck Taylor's went untied, and a ridiculous necklace of orange plastic beads hung from his neck. There'd been only the one time. She hadn't wanted another.

How could she explain it? There had been weeks of rain. Weeks and weeks of rain, housebound with the girls. Such gray weeks that she lost her ability to see past them. And then one day out came the sun. It cracked from the clouds – cracked like an egg – the bright yolk slipping out and stunning the wet little town, bathing everything in a most golden light.

This, of course, explained nothing. This was a weather report.

When her husband returned with the skiff, she apologized and told him she was exhausted, that he'd have to go it alone for the afternoon.

"So I'm on my own to catch dinner?" he said, trying for a jovial tone but his big shoulders drooped, his arms hung at his sides. He looked at her then, and as he looked, he turned his head slightly, bit at his lip rather than say anything more. After a moment, he turned and walked heavily down the wooden stairs that led to the dock.

It hadn't been just the boy who caught her attention. A group of them were playing Frisbee, boys and girls, filled with such a wild, horse-like energy, as though they'd just piled from the gloomy dorm into that burst of sunshine. Anne had been struck by the scene, by the simple joy of it all. Though she had groceries, some of them melting in the back of her Subaru, she sat down on a park bench, took off her shoes and stretched an arm along the warm painted wood. Only then did she see him apart from the others. She studied his movements. No, she memorized them. Shirtless and leaping through the golden air, his hair throwing off sparks

of light as he caught and spun the disk – it was an effortless choreography. Every age has its grace but for this boy, this fragile-chested boy, no amount of wisdom or confidence or experience would ever compare to what he had right at that moment playing Frisbee with such abandon.

More weather report. The sky cracked open and there he was.

A boat motor droned, grew louder with each breath she drew. When she heard the motor cut, she parted the dark curtain of mosquito netting, swung her legs down from the bed and sat clutching the mattress. She felt a stabbing loneliness for her children.

"Goddamned pike!" Bill yelled. He was a big man, he filled the doorway and she couldn't help but startle at the sound of his voice. "These hillbillies think anything goes," he said. "What's one more fish in the lake. The more the merrier." He shook his head. "They think nature can handle anything. But you know, ecosystems are incredibly delicate. It doesn't take much to throw everything out of balance." He sat beside her on the bed, wrapping his arms around her. "They've beaten us," he said. "We're stuck with chicken for dinner."

She prepared wild rice on the propane stove, then salted and wrapped the chicken breasts in tinfoil along with sliced red potatoes and sprigs of rosemary. Her husband loved rosemary. At home, she grew it in tiny cups on the windowsill, feeding it water by the teaspoon, turning it daily toward the light.

"Not bad," Bill said, tearing apart the wing, "even if it is chicken."

After dinner, they sat drinking Bailey's and hot chocolate on the porch, listening to a loon howling away for his mate.

Her husband moved a hand to her knee. The August Alaskan sky had gone from deep gray to black and she knew it must be quite late. Pumping the lantern, she stood up in order to strike a match and was relieved when her husband's hand fell away. But as soon as she sat down again, she felt his touch. Her eyes adjusted to the flickering light and she studied his hand. She could just make out the network of scars across his knuckles, remnant of a years' ago building accident. It occurred to her she'd never seen Bill cry, not once, not even when the doctor told them he couldn't find the baby's heartbeat. Anne lay naked and weeping on the crisp white paper of the examining table while Bill nodded his head again and again at the doctor, his big scarred hand spread across her belly.

"At least the loons are still here," he said now, startlinging her.

She smiled faintly, a loneliness for her children rising again within her, stabbing at her.

"How about we go in now?" he said. "I'll let you ravage me."

"But it's so nice out here. You know what I'd like to do is go down to the dock for a while."

It was a small dock, room for just the two of them side-by-side. Three strides and they had reached the end. The planks were weathered gray and felt smooth and cool under her bare feet. "I can't get enough of this air," he said, inhaling



Paxson Woelber – Where the Ocean Goes

deeply. "It's may be an Alaskan Indian summer, so warm for August, but there's no mistaking that smell. The night air brings it out. You just know freeze up is coming."

The loon called again and though it sounded quite close, it was too dark to spot. Her husband wrapped an arm around her waist, completely encircling her. She used to love the possessiveness of his touch. The first time he held her, not long after they met, it came as a shock, how natural the touch of a near stranger had felt.

Now, in his arms, she could only think this: men have affairs like accidents; women have affairs to slit their wrists.

Something splashed quite close in the darkness. They both turned toward it. She took a step forward, lining her toes with the very ends of the boards. Below her nothing but black water.

He swept up her hair and began to kiss the back of her neck.

"Hold on," she said, breaking away. "What is it out there? A loon? Can you make it out?"

"It's all our beautiful trout. Tomorrow they'll be jumping right into our boat." He started kissing her again.

"Bill, wait," she said.

"Oh, come on. I mean, have I done something?"

She shook her head quickly. "No, no, you haven't done anything. I'm just –" she leaned against him. "Nothing. There's just so much going on out there."

They listened but whatever had been splashing in the dark water was silent now.

"Well, then, I hate to tell you this," he said, moving in to hold her again, "but we're in Alaska and in this state, it's actually illegal for a wife to refuse her husband."

Though he couldn't see her face, she forced a smile. "Is that a fact?"

"I'm dead serious. And they don't just fine you. You could actually get years in the pen for this offense."

"A jail sentence? That sounds pretty severe." The loon howled again. Her throat had gone dry. "So you're going to call the rangers on me?"

"No," he said, turning her around. "I don't believe I'll need any assistance from the rangers."

She looked up at him then and felt as though the night was pressing in on her, forcing the air from her lungs. But she took her husband's hand firmly in her own and led him back up to the cabin. She thought any sort of pleasure would be impossible for her now. She'd forgotten how well he knew her; that he understood just how to move within her. She came not once but twice.

After, she lay awake hungry for the feel of her children against her skin. As babies, they used to sleep pressed against her breasts, Bill's arms around them all. Now she felt a longing for them, and for him, for the part of him that surrounded them. It was worse than grief.

The lake had been dead calm in the early morning but by ten o'clock, as they sped to a suspected hole on the far shore, the waves had picked up. Her husband nodded toward the treed horizon. "See that?" he said. A jumble of distant clouds shed a grainy haze that stretched into the tree line. There was no sign of Mount Sanford or any of the mountain ranges ringing the lake. "Rain," he said. "We probably only have an hour or so at best. Feel lucky?"

He dropped a switch and the boat slowed to a troll. "First thing," he said, "if you want to catch a monster, you gotta use a monster lure." He pulled a silver and blue metal fish from his tackle box. Three sets of dangerous-looking hooks glinted from the head, belly and tail; its painted eyes held the same stunned expression as a real fish. As she took it carefully from his hand, the barbs hanging from the dorsal fin swung and caught on her sleeve.

He crouched beside her and as she watched his big fingers work delicately with the lure, a pressure rose up in her throat. She knew those hands so well. With those hands he made his living, he fed her children, he made love to her. If he had a soul, she knew it resided there.

"Okay, you're set," he said. "Just put the rod in the holder and you're fishing." He tied a similar lure to his pole and moved to the opposite side of the boat. "Just keep an eye on that tip. It's bobbing now from the weight of the lure, but if you see it really start to bend, grab it and give it a good yank to set the hook."

He leaned back in the driver's chair and sighed.

"So all we do is wait?" she asked.

"It's the easy life for us. Having fun yet?"

She kept her eyes on the rod tip, its dipping rhythm hypnotizing.

"HOLY SHIT!" her husband yelled, startling her. "FISH ON!" He grabbed for the rod. The boat rocked so violently that she had to cling to the sides. The rod bent nearly double. The whizzing of his reel sounded across the quiet lake. He gave it a turn and shook his head. "I should have put heavier line on! What was I thinking?"

She looked into the water but saw not even a ripple. The fish had taken the line way out. "A big one?"

"If I can land it," he said, "it'll be the biggest trout I ever caught."

She hated herself for asking the question, but couldn't stop. "How are you so sure it's a trout?"

"Too much fight in it to be a pike. Reeling those bastards in is like pulling up a log – just dead weight." He strained against the pole, bending it double. "What I have here," he said, the words pressing out from between clenched teeth, "is a glory fish."

Then he looked over at her, broke into a smile. "Correction," he said. "What *you* have here." He dragged the rod over to her.

"What? No, Bill. I don't even know what I'm doing. I'll lose it."

"So? That's the name of the game, darling. Fishing is all about heartbreak." He jutted his chin toward the rod.

She took it and the rod immediately jumped to life in her hands. All she could do was hold on; the drag of the line gave her a taste of the power in that fish.

"Just let it run for a while," he said. "That's one fish that wants to be free. It'll turn soon."

But the fish wasn't turning. The line was running out. Her husband flipped the boat in reverse, hoping to chase it down. It was too late, though, the line was nearly gone.

"Fucking hell," he said. "I'm going to have to adjust the tension. It'll probably snap." She gave him the rod and waited for the line to break.

It didn't. It bent nearly double, the line whizzing, and then it sprang back out and everything went silent.

"It turned!" he yelled. "Start reeling! Reel like crazy!"

She cranked for all she was worth. It started to fight then and for a minute she could barely turn the handle. "What on earth is it, Bill? This can't be a fish!"

"It's a big fucking whale, is what it is! They'll name the lake after you."

She pulled back, putting her whole body in motion against the fish. Her heart beat wildly in her chest. She wanted to do this. She wanted to land this fish. It was a sharp, clean feeling. An honest feeling. One that filled her with hope. "I can do this!" she said.

"Keep reeling. It's burning out."

She pulled back as hard as she could.

"I see it!" he said, pointing.

"Where? Where?"

"There! It just rolled way under the surface. You're

close!"

She reeled. Though her thumb was raw and fingers stiff with pain, she reeled. Then she saw it. A dark form gliding stealthily up, rolling, then disappearing back into the bright turquoise water. A terrible feeling shook her, as if her organs had been clapped together. In that instant, she changed her mind. She no longer wanted to bring this creature into the boat.

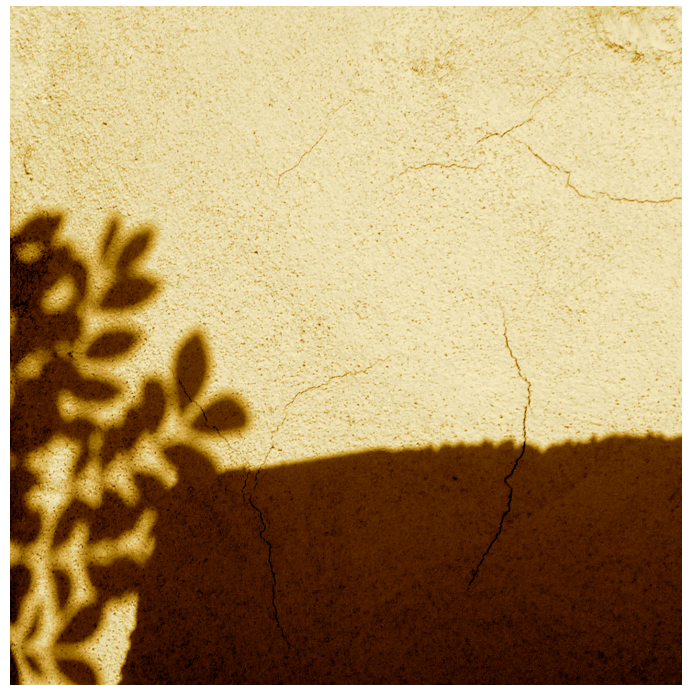
"Here it is!" Bill yelled. The water's surface exploded. He leaned far out of the boat with a large, fluorescent green net and swung it into the center of the spray. Straining, he hoisted it into the boat and dropped it on the floor. It was very big. The body long and flat as an eel, the spacing of the pectoral fins giving it that crocodile-look. It had a long, snubbed nose that took up most of its head and a terrible jaw, which was thrust out in a defiant under bite, showing off a mouth filled with tiny, pointed teeth.

"Well," her husband said, lifting the net away, "I'd guess it's over twenty pounds." He smiled at her, trying to keep the disappointment from his eyes. "Now that's a big fish where I come from."

Anne watched as it flopped violently at her feet, its mouth gaping wide. Her husband dropped the net back over the fish and then set his boot down on it. "But you know what this is, right?"

She turned her back to him. Yes, she recognized this fish. She wrapped her arms tightly around herself and said, "Bill." She said it quietly, but in a way that made him turn to her. She stood for a moment listening to the small waves lap at the aluminum boat, unable to return his gaze, nor could she keep staring down at the terrible fish. She squinted out across the lake.

He laughed. He said, "What?" Then he said, "Come on. It's okay. Don't take it so hard."



Janet Levin

She stayed quiet, watching the dark mass of clouds closing in on them.

"What?" he said again, his voice different now, pitched lower.

She imagined telling him about the weeks of rain and about how the sun that day had cracked like an egg from the clouds and she imagined telling him about the boy, how it seemed that the boy, too, had slipped out from the just-opened sky. But none of it, she knew, would mean a thing to him. All he would understand is that she had just slit open the vein of their family.

"What?" he said again, quieter, touching her arm.

Her knees swayed with a sharp violence as she fell against him in an embrace. She held him tight, her arms reaching up around his neck. "I love you," she said. There was panic in her throat and it filled her words. She'd never felt so far from him and thought he must sense it. But when she let him go, sitting heavily down in the turned out driver's seat, his face broke into an open smile. He reached out to touch her with his damaged hand.

"I love you, too," he said.

He sat opposite her on the plank bench and lifted the net away from the pike. He stepped gently on its side. They both looked down at the fish between them. It was no longer thrashing but arching its long, muscular body in great slow curls against his boot, its gills gasping open and closed more slowly now, its spike-toothed mouth gaping soundlessly at the air that was killing it. **G**

Sean Ulman

A Potentate by Rote

Lyrics leapt in her mind, her mind locked - "... .."

All morning dreaming stirring streaming, deterring Eva from waking rising living dressing breakfasting singing writing, anything... They weren't her lyrics. They were locked-in packed-repetitive, blocking new words, her unfound remote words. Five-word hordes herded like farmed steers: crowds of cows unending colliding - "... .."

She shook her head, escaped sleeping, swerved around electric dream planes and lanes painted patterned crimson-cran fuchsia-frosted. Trapped syllables rapped, libretto echo - "... .."

Noon. Far-off bells boomed, metal bottles struck by metal. Lyrics still littered her mind, (not her lyrics) - Jeff Tweedy's lyrics, purposeful lyrics - "... .."

Eva accepted the truth that no song would get written today. As the words carried on streaming looping running - "... .." - she thought song work may take weeks. She thought she might never be a songwriter. But she

challenged such bleakness. "I will write songs. All I have to do is write songs to write songs. I'll write anything - bad songs. You can bang a bad song into something."

Eva rose from bed, stepped out on her snowy step barefoot. No wind to blow the words away "... .." Shivery brittle breaths of cold clean air. Back inside, she tackled the enormous task of starting the stove. Choosing wood chunks and starter strips, the lyrics left, her head hankered for heat (foretasted flames, smelled smoke), she said three words "Come on stove." Match scratched, newspaper shreds did not catch. The lyric log, latent a moment, rolled on. "... .." No room for the words, "why? - I'm awake," just that sentiment (I'm awake so I should control my thoughts). The torture of an involuntary brain caught on a song - "... .." followed by a once melodious drum kit crash now moribund slapdash and brash.

Eva ached. She sighed. Hitching itchy wool socks up her ankles and reaching for an afghan, she shivered. On her bed she did simple yoga stretches, pointed toes, arched back. She had a deep stretch, deep breath (breath she saw curl in the cold cabin), but still words, racing, turning menacing, descending over her and toppling over one another - "... .."

She cracked the last match in half. She whacked the stove with a wood hunk the size of a cornhusk. She ran in place and kept banging the stove to stay warm. The lyrics kept ranging, overlapping - "... .."

While running in place and banging, she almost banged her head on the stove's silver edge. The miracle message "nothing will come easy" budged into her crowded one-tracked mind - "... .."

She recalled the trick, 'work slow' and remembered her lyrics, 'when the wind,' She put on flannel jeans and a coat harmlessly, as if she were tuning out while a character on TV got dressed. She floated outside. Refusing to shiver, she lit a cigarette. She rehearsed her themes that were written on the pad she had destroyed - 'breaking boys hearts,' 'Alaska (wilderness),' 'young lust (not love),' 'good guys, bad guys,' 'ocean,' 'mountains,' 'snow,' 'wind.' She recited all eight themes without noticing the stuck soundtrack enduring in the background - '... ..' Eva feared the lyrics less ('let them loop') and aided by cigarette air and recovered themes, returned to her cabin with the courage and focus to work at writing songs - 'work slow' - 'search is work' (any small progress is progress) - 'expand themes'.

She scratched fifteen pages of notes about writing songs, other artists' songs. For eight pages she explored her eight themes. She ate steamed portabello mushrooms and cabbage and fell asleep deep.

Eva dreamt of a deck of playing cards incarnated. The numbered cards transformed to number-shaped muppets. They were promptly divided by their counterpart (hearts: diamonds, clubs: spades), melted into a mushy pulp and recycled into 2D giant inanimate playing cards. That left the pictures, aces and jokers to socialize and compete for five royal court positions. The two knock-kneed jokers exchanged knobby knick-knacks and told the naïve knave of spades in (plaid knit knickers) cocky cockeyed knock-knock jokes.

Joker 1: knock knock
 Jack of spades: who's there?
 J1: knock
 Jsp: knock who
 J1: knock knock
 Jsp: who's there?
 J1: knock (haha)

Joker 2: Knock knock knocking
 Jack of spades: knock knock knocking who?
 J2: No you're supposed to say where and I say heaven's door. But hold on... this is not heaven's door. I better knock on wood.

Jittering about in search of a scrap of wood to knock on the buffoon was kneed by its twin. The jokers jostled until a knockout was won. Joker 1, the victor, transformed into a Harlequin-hatted jester. He jangled bells and did cartwheels and jumping jacks across a chessboard floor and finally announced the former suicide king of hearts and current prevailing presiding monarch "... a potentate by rote." And the pompous king beside his Queen (formerly clubs, current clobbering spiked-club carrier) ordered a downpour of pomegranates to rain upon the kingdom he reigned upon. Fruit tree saplings were springing up as Eva awoke fascinated by the image of currant-colored rain. In her current notebook she sketched a deck of cards, a jester, a crown and hard round red rain and she wrote the phrase, 'a potentate by rote' because she had never heard of those two words, yet they had been spoken in her dream, a thing she believed was entirely manufactured by her mind.

After doodling a sketchy interpretation of an avalanche slamming Lowell Pt. Rd. beside a baleful bay at bay, Eva began preparing breakfast – squeezed orange juice, steamed salted asparagus and broccoli, zesty homemade hollandaise over eggs benedict. It was a meal Eva deemed worthy of a chef's benediction. As she ate she read eight Mary Oliver poems and then viewed a computer file of photos and short videos she taken of Seward in the last month: town buildings and marina boats in relation to the mountains, a surfacing seal exhaling frosty breath, a boy eating an ice cream cone while riding a unicycle, a coal train sliding out of the frame (empty track, horn, 'chug a chug', mountain monuments).

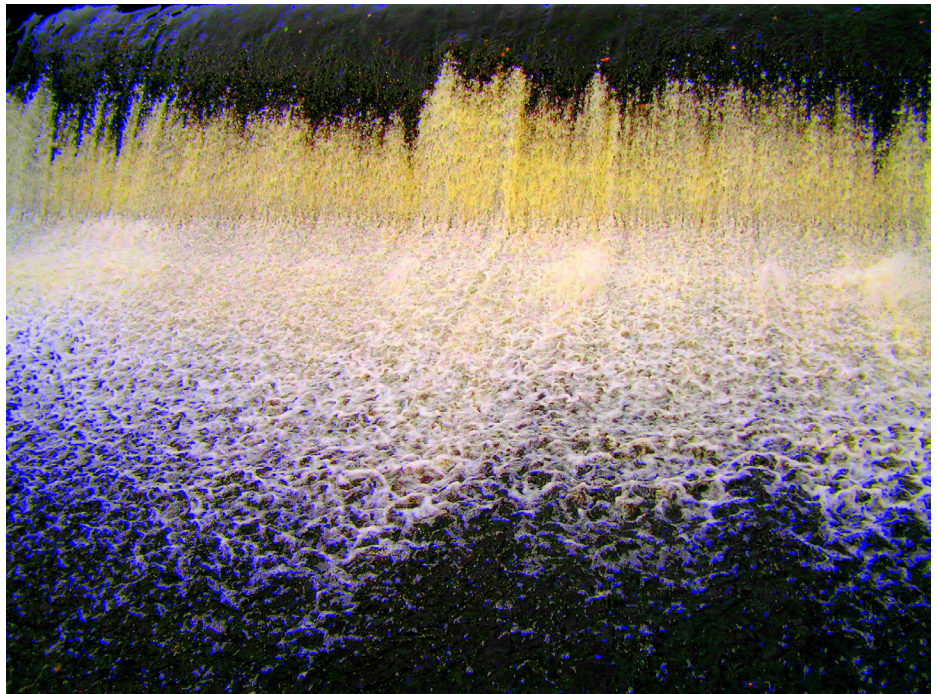
She went outside under gravel-gray noon sky to refill her birdfeeders. Pine siskins, red polls, boreal and chestnut-sided chickadees flitted about feeding on seed. The passerines retreated when a squawking steller's jay jarred

the feeder. As the thistle seed tube swang Eva imagined a ship mast teetering in a squall. She tried to tilt her brain to a more useful metaphor that related the bird world to human existence and might serve as a prospective basis for a song. But her mood moved toward that familiar failure. She realized she was pressing and prevented further pressure. She stretched outside and left on a six-mile run.

The gray sky softened. Snow sheeted the outlet of the bay cape to cape. Her actions that morning typified her life the last month – spent attempting to write songs and failing.

Unwritten songs, she believed, were out there dangling in the real world waiting to be discovered then served with workable words, worked on tediously and eventually brought to life with a worthy voice.

Sleeping was a way to escape her daily failures, plus dreams could deliver rare material. Dreaming enabled her only access to her subconscious, which she had read, was where many songs began. She also had the skill of remembering her dreams in accurate detail upon waking. She had filled notebook pages with accounts of odd scenes and words she had never seen nor heard. While this had pushed her waking mind into a healthy playful place – pondering the source of these words (who or what else had access to her dreams?) – she had not yet gotten a single idea for a song from her dreams.



Janet Levin

Eva was aware of the value of drawing as a distraction. While her hand attempted to describe, albeit poorly, a picture parked in a piece of her brain, she thought other less-stressed cerebellum segments might produce song seeds. She sketched mostly mountains, rivers and spruce trees, landscape details that reminded her that songs should have setting. If not an actual location, such as Seward,

then an emotional place, which her songs, in order to remain simple and consistent, should stay within.

Eva thought cooking could provide a proper sort of setting for songwriting through savory smells and distraction. There had to be a recipe for writing songs – precise amounts of certain abstract ingredients. Once she pinned down the elements and ordered them, repeating the desired result would be academic as exercising. Every time she cooked a delicious dish she reinforced this reasoning regarding a recipe for writing songs.

Reading poetry served as a replacement for listening to music. She could not rely solely on her dreams to advance her vocabulary. Poem reading helped her hone in on word rhythms first. Good lyrics, like poetic pairings, should belong together before instrumentals were added.

In photography and video Eva sought ways to warp Seward since it was an environment she knew so well. When flicking back through photos a scene might gleam with the sheen of the past. Photography possessed that ability to portray a thing noticeably different than it had appeared to the eye in the present tense it was taken in. Glossed in filmy light yes, but also with less cues – the mountains cut out of the frame for instance. The photographer's dour mood on the depicted day could be long forgotten. Perhaps a picture might emote a specific nostalgia, a feeling from childhood or a fleeting spirit her heart beat to in high school. Her hope was that she might recapture and stay in that emotional state, set up camp, so to speak, and write a song about it.

Birding (filling birdfeeders and pausing on runs or walks to watch or listen to birds) blossomed from her realization that birds had been on earth long before humans and had been composing and singing songs, ever since their ancient start. Eva thought birds may have a mystic quality, not unlike omniscience. This essentially amounted to her far-fetched expectation of a black-billed magpie or some such non-speaking bird telling her in plain English, the lyrics to an unwritten song, or better yet, the secret recipe to songwriting. Birds' colors could also inspire Eva. When she was struck by some new yellow or slick gray she reminded herself that songs could be categorized by color. Once she was a songwriter she'd code her songs to certain corresponding moods before or after she wrote them.

Exercising, in the form of distance running, was the most promising habit that could aid her in the quest to write songs. Amidst rigorous exertion the mind could drift off the constraints of cardiovascular concentration and muscle pain and settle into a separate place of independent solace. A mile or so into a run Eva hit stride and sort of rode her legs effortlessly mindlessly. She'd look up at the Chugach Mountain range or listen to the lapping bay or baying wind, smell sea brine, study the cliffs of Bear Mountain for loaded sections ripe for a slide – occupy her senses as long as she could. At the end of the run she'd find her freed mind and like a miner panning for gold sift or trapper checking a trap line, she'd scour her mind for any trappings or traces of a song.

Returned from her hour run, Eva sat with a pen and notebook and played around with the tuneful fruits her mind

had harvested. After two hours she merrily read over her first verse.

*when you're all melt and mud, your angels are being rude
all you do is sleep and weep but never count sheep,
you skip eating food
I been there in that nowhere where
You know the cure to gift your heart, but you don't dare
I been there, we go there and get lost, trapped in frost
don't forget that skeleton key, memory
close your eyes, go on a spree, sit under a tree
watch plants grow, play in the snow, smell the wind blow*



Vic Cavalli

The Tow Truck

Within six months of their marriage Beatrice Mangiare had swollen into a tow truck. Her husband Tomasso was literally unable to stomach sitting with her at the kitchen table. Condiments dripped down her massive forearms as she attacked stacks of homemade triple-patty mega-burgers—mayo and ketchup oozing through her strong fingers. As a kind of friendly joke, on their first date Tomasso had cooked her a huge hamburger (knowing full-well that she'd need raingear while eating it), and fried into his memory was the image of her pretty mouth trying to somehow consume his creation without breaching feminine manners. But now Beatrice's prenuptial Barbie doll diet was nailed with galvanized spikes to the kitchen wall. She'd become a hunter, and it was open season on anything non-human that moved. Any and all weapons were allowed. Even the dog kept his distance. With a bottle of steak sauce in hand she looked as dangerous as a junkie with a gun.

After three months of marriage, the change in her had begun with tearing strips off of her wedding dress and using them for napkins. Then her calorie intake began to rise dramatically. First a heaping bowl of cereal with three tablespoons of brown sugar, then six, then nine, then a second bowl with nine, then a third with nine. When she shifted into her carnivore phase Tomasso implored her to talk to their doctor in town, but his suggestion only provoked a fried chicken attack. There was no shortage of ammunition. She had just finished cooking and draining three buckets that evening, and she overwhelmed him with steaming hot legs and breasts. Then she burst into tears. Their marriage needed help.

And so he turned to the Italian poets; it seemed the only rational course. In the evening, with carefully placed candles burning low, with his wife shoveling nuts into her pretty mouth, with snow softly falling outside the window

of their Yukon log home, with dry maple firewood radiating in their wood heater, he began to read to her in the gentle voice of their courtship. He began with Francesco Petrarch's sonnets to Laura. He slowly read thirteen poems every evening. Then he shifted to Dante's love sonnets and read the same number each night. Their routine became formal. He eventually included Neruda and delicate feelings returned. Her calorie intake dropped dramatically. In fact, by the time the snow started to melt, Beatrice looked like Barbie again. She was the doll Tomasso had married: completely stable, thin, and happy—as on their wedding day. And although the ferocity of their spring lovemaking didn't literally flex the massive cedar logs of their home, their shared moans of ecstasy kept the ever-timid deer out of their garden. **G**

Donald Carreira Ching

Skeletons of Summer

The sun was already low when he arrived at the gate, shadows stretched into dark stains across the graveyard, and in the distance he could see the darkness bleeding over the hilltop and down to where he knew the river to be. He made his way past the markers, along a path of dirt and knotted roots, a gathering of oak trees and further, where the grass had overgrown the gravestones, their engravings worn. He stopped when he reached the hilltop, watching the autumn leaves crackle and laugh, thin skeletons of summer coming to rest near the river rocks, and thought of his brother.

It was many years ago, early August, playing hide-and-seek in the graveyard. He remembered the smell of the stones, humid and moist against his nostrils, counting to five before peaking over the arms of a gothic cross, eyes darting for the starch white of his brother's shirt. Then out of nowhere he had heard it, from somewhere he could not see, the sounds of skeletons collapsing, leaves crunching underfoot. He crawled past each grave, ducking near epitaphs of veterans, sons, soldiers, taking a breath when he was close enough to the hill, then sliding down towards the river and running up its bank, towards a cobblestone bridge, where he knew his brother would never find him.

But his brother did and while the sun was setting they both sat near the river watching the leaves gather by their feet.

"It's their memories." His brother said.

He leaned against a large stone, a wet rag to his forehead, "Whose?"

"Theirs."

They both turned towards the hilltop, where the tombstones crouched like gargoyles.

"But what're they left with?" He asked his brother,



Debi Bodett

picking up a leaf and raising it towards the sky.

"Their regrets, I suppose."

"Their what?"

His brother laughed, "What they've left behind," and shook his head, "it's their curse."

He looked to his brother then back to the leaf he held.

"Remember the story dad used to tell? The two soldiers?"

"Dad never said if the second soldier lived,"

"That's the curse." His brother said.

He nodded, "Their regrets," and let the leaf fall away.

His brother said nothing more and for a long time they sat, listening to the river behind them, watching the leaves on the hilltop, and the sky blackening in the distance. In his mind he remembered thinking of the war: the anger, the pain, the smell that spewed from the chimney near the church, and the twelve times the church bell rang.

They made their way up the hill.

"Just life, that's all." His brother said.

He crouched down and ran his fingers over a gravestone half-sunk into the earth, "Life? How's that? The dead aren't living."

His brother smiled, "You sure?" and grabbed his neck from behind, both running towards the church.

From the direction he came, he heard the church bell ringing, strong and clear, the wind carrying its echo. It rang twelve times, the same as it always did, and he knew that the people in the church would soon congregate into the graveyard, some with white gloves, others with handkerchiefs, some even with a word or two scribbled on a card. He waited until the leaves settled, and descended the hill, walking along the riverbank, as he had run then, that Sunday when church service had gone far too long, making his way towards a cobblestone bridge that had fallen away.

He remembered the first time. The boy was his brother's age and hadn't been gone for more than a year. Walking into church, you could smell the carnations and lilac, the heavy taste of perfume that caught in your throat as you passed the pews. His brother left as the eulogy ended, "Can't breathe," he said and left.

He followed his brother out the door and into the cemetery, past the open grave and towards the older plots, near the hilltop overlooking the riverbank. For a long time they didn't speak, only listened as the church bell rang, then silence, broken by the rise of trumpets, the soft violence of rifle shots.

His brother drew a cigarette and lit it with a match, the cherry blooming across his cheeks.

"Would you go?"

His brother looked at him, "If they called, I'd go."

He stood and listened to his brother breathing, "Promise you won't?"

"Why?"

"Promise."

"No."

He looked at his brother awhile, the leaves crackling overhead, "I'll promise, for the both of us."

His brother nodded and dropped his cigarette into the grass, using the sole of his shoe to bury the remains.

The bridge fell a summer later. Small pebbles, then whole stones, until the signs were posted and the road was closed. His brother was eighteen and brilliant, a scholarship and a future. He remembered walking into his brother's room, the first Sunday service his brother had missed: The smell of shoe polish and empty drawers, the duffel bags packed in the corner, the uniform that hung from his bedroom door as if it had been posted there.

"Remember that one Sunday? Playing hide-and-seek at the church?"

His brother looked at him, brow wrinkled, "That was every Sunday."

"No, the time I ran to the bridge."


"Nah, you were too afraid."

He touched the scar near his scalp, "I fell, remember?"

"That was a long time ago."

He nodded and waited a moment, then walked out of the room remembering when he had fallen so many summers ago. He remembered running along the riverbank

and tripping on a stone that had somehow come loose. He remembered the cold when he hit the ground, the rusted taste on his lips, the fear as he became numb, thinking of the graves along the hilltops, the dead that waited beyond the bridge.

He thought of all of this as he walked up the riverbank, leaves passing near his feet, the ground broken by chunks of cobblestone that lay like corpses below where the river's archway had once been. He waited a moment before going any further, thinking about his brother and the times they shared, the promise he had broken, and the story their father had told: the two soldiers and the curse. The trumpets began to play and he continued on, not bothering to breathe, listening to the leaves that still crackled and laughed, thin skeletons of summer gathering where the river ran. 

Eowyn LeMay Ivey

The Creek

This is where it all happened. Here, where water rushes from the Alaska mountains like blood from a heart. This is where the hunters stripped off their pants and boots and forded the stream half-naked, the cold cutting like shards of ice through their legs. They got to the other side, put their pants back on, and built a fire by a cottonwood log. The autumn leaves were just beginning to turn.

And up there, around that curve in the valley, beyond those spruce trees where you can't see – that is where she died in her cabin. I don't know where her daughter was. The night was hard with cold, the creek frozen and glittering like a fine edge. New Year's Eve. Birdie's long, cancer-thinned legs twisted in the bed sheet. You wouldn't have recognized her. Her husband held her hand as lightly as he could bear. Outside, the night was clear and cold and the stars were sparks in the black and the creek was silent. Their little blond daughter, even younger than my own, had already kissed her goodbye.

On a topographical map, the creek is a thin blue line, not even as long as my little finger. It is unnamed, but I would not know how to name it either. Granite and snowmelt and sunlight and ice and forest. Living and dead. As old as glacier ice.

Nick said the water roared and moved boulders that night in September. He and the other hunters camped at the creek's edge. He did not sleep well. The next morning, they rose before dawn. They loaded their rifles in the dark. Their pants were still damp, their boots cold. They followed the game trail alongside the creek. They tried to make their breathing quiet, quiet.

I wasn't with them. I only heard the story later, while



Paxson Woelber – That Mighty Sky

we drank beer. Nick said one of the men was a crybaby, couldn't carry his own backpack, was too tired and sore to go on. They said they'd leave him by the creek and come back for him later. But he didn't want to be alone, so they shared the weight of his pack and they hiked up the creek, all three of them, the yellow birch leaves falling out of the sky.

The night Robert held Birdie's hand and she died, the creek was silent. An invisible trickle beneath snow and ice. Snowshoe hares ran across the surface. Lynx hunted the bare alders. A wolf trotted out of the mountains. She had heard them sometimes. The wolves. She said they woke her up at night, but she wasn't frightened.

The moose took only one shot, through the neck. It was a young bull, and Nick spotted it through binoculars. He let the crybaby shoot it because it was his first. Then they gutted it and field dressed it, slapping at the biting flies as they knelt beside the gut pile. They slid the meat into muslin sacks. All but the tenderloin, which they saved to cook for dinner over the campfire. Then they went to the creek to rinse the blood from their hands.

In the summer sun, the creek sparkles like water in a drinking glass. I remember that. We were just teenagers. Birdie was beautiful and long-legged, her wavy hair in braids. Nick hadn't shot his first moose. It was June, and we carried a boom box and a bottle of peppermint schnapps up the creek. We hopped along the boulders and walked across the sand,

up into the mountains, walked until we were sunburned and tired. Then we made a campfire. The three of us passed the bottle back and forth. Then a joint that we lit with a stick from the fire. It burned our throats, but the smoke was sweet and lovely and we laughed because we'd forgotten why we were laughing. We took off our shoes and socks and rolled up our pant legs. Everything was clean and bright. We waded in the creek until our skin hurt. Then we slept, half-drunk and high, at the water's edge.

Every day I drive by here. A mother taking her daughters to school. A wife going home to her husband. Across the bridge. A glance toward the mountains.

Today I pulled over on the side of the road and walked alone down the embankment to the creek. It felt wrong. I wanted it to be summer again, so I could make a campfire and grill moose meat and eat it from my hands, so I could lie down in warm sand and hear only the creek.

I'd like to be high again. I'd like to open a vein and let the mountain air blow through and through until I am spinning and the world is upside down and I don't care.

But I am too old, too beholden. I only stand with my hands in my coat pockets. I can't see the moose vertebrae grown over with moss. I can't see her cabin, or the people who live there now. It is spring. The ice is melting and pussy willows are blooming up and down the creek. **E**

Tanya Perkins

Night Noise

I was showing Megan Thoregson how to pop corn over a flame when I first heard the noise. At first, I thought I was hearing things, what with Megan's chatter, the drone of the fridge, the corn popping and all the normal yet strange sounds that go along with being in someone's house for the first time. I had talked my mom into stopping at Safeway on our way over to the Thoregson's so I could buy one of those long-handled tinfoil pie plates stuffed with kernels, the kind you cook over a stovetop. Megan had dragged a kitchen chair over the stove and climbed up. I hovered behind her, both of our right hands sharing one oven mitt as we shuffled the corn to and fro. Her mother had scraped her hair into pigtails; up close, the part in her hair was an uncertain white meridian tracing down toward her nape, where it lost itself in a mess of fine broken filaments. Mrs. Thoregson was in a hurry that evening: one pigtail was tied with an orange elastic, the other with a shiny red bauble that looked like sweet candy.

I didn't pay any attention to the noise at first. As soon as the Thoregsons left for Toastmasters, I had put on my newest Abba tape and now "Dancing Queen" was making the Coventry teacups in the glass hall cabinet chatter like frightened teeth. The stove flame kept up a dull hiss and old maids rattled against the stiff tin foil, punctuated now and then by little pops. Megan sang off key and bounced her hips back and forth in rhythm with the shaking of the pie plate until I wrapped one arm around her.

"Shh," I said, and went to turn down the tape deck. Beyond the pop music and popcorn, a noise had formed and grown until it thrummed like a low, distant motor.

"What is it?" Megan said. She stopped shuffling the pie plate and let it fall lower, until the edge was resting on the lit burner. Her eyes were fixed on me.

"Shh," I said again. It was early December and darkness had already fallen like a heavy quilt against the windows. Across the street, a neighbor's Christmas lights blinked weird blues and yellows that lit up the bare cement and dead grass in bad imitation of warmer times. I hated wintertime's metallic edges, how sounds bounced off hard surfaces and were carried great distances, how trees were stripped to their bones.

"Did you hear that, Megan?" I said. I was at the big picture window in the darkened living room. There were no draperies downstairs. Mr. Thoregson had told my mother that the dry cleaner had lost the curtains and they were looking into it. That was before Megan was born, and they were still looking into it, six years later. Ugly metal Venetians hid the windows upstairs, but down here the aluminum windows stood naked.

"My rabbit went away." Her voice piped through from the other room. "Mama said he hopped down a hole. Clack clack clack and then he's back."

The smell of singeing. I bolted back into fluorescent light of the kitchen. Megan was still standing at the stove, the bulging pie plate resting directly on the flames of the burner. Grey smoke boiled around its edges. Without thinking, I grabbed Megan around the middle and pulled her away from the stove, then yanked the pie plate away from her. An icy dagger stabbed my hand. Dropping the plate, I fumbled for the burner knob and turned it off.

"Shit!" I clutched my burned hand to my chest.

"That's a bad word!" Megan said, equally shocked and delighted. "You're not allowed to say that! I'm telling my mama!"

"Yes," I said through clenched teeth. "Yes, it's a very bad word. I shouldn't of said it." At the sink, I turned the cold water on full blast and held my hand underneath until it started to grow numb. Through the rush of the faucet and the pain, I heard the noise again. How could I think it was like a motor? It was more like an iron bar thudding against cement, except it had a hollowness to it. It was a long way off, that was for sure. Probably boxcars being moved in the CP rail yard behind the county jail.

I dried my hand carefully on Mrs. Thoregson's cross-stitched tea towel and put on a careful face. "That was close, wasn't it? I'll bet "Mork and Mindy" comes on in just a few minutes. Are you allowed to watch that show?"

Megan crouched on the floor, gingerly touching the blackened pie plate, oblivious to disaster's near miss. "I want to see "Gilligan's Island". My mama said I can. Can we eat this now?"

When I peeled back the top of the foil, steam rose up to my face and behind it, the smell of charcoal. The top layer of popcorn was fine, so I scooped it into a bowl and we went downstairs to the TV room. My hand ached terribly, but far worse was the vindication that the burn would signify to my mother. I was fourteen and this was my first--my very first--babysitting job. It was one more step toward the doorway of adulthood, the threshold of which was beckoning frantically. Most of my friends had been babysitting for years but my mother had been resistant to the idea of me venturing forth.

"Anything could happen," she said repeatedly. To her, the world was a fearful place, rife with falling stones, human trafficking, salmonella and broken glass--it was a miracle I was able to reach adolescence in one piece. That the Thoregsons were known to her from Friday night bingo was the main factor in her allowing me to babysit at last.

Megan sat on the scratchy plaid couch, eating popcorn with both hands. I strained to detect the noise through the jangle of an Oscar Meyer commercial. It hadn't gone away. It hovered somewhere just beyond audible range, jagged-edged, waiting, just like Brian Carlson had waited for me in the coatroom yesterday afternoon.

"You're not allowed in till you've been kissed *at least once*," Stacy Kroger had said. She was bossy beyond belief, but, perversely, all the best, most exciting things at school seemed to revolve around her, like the secret club she'd

started last week. It was her idea that a select group of girls would get together and pool their knowledge on important matters like boys. Special "research" would be conducted.

"That way," she said, in the confident manner I was so envious of, "we'll be ready for the future. We'll know what to do in *any* situation." I was prepared to lie but my best friend Anita Carlson had already spilled the beans on the status of my virginal lips.

Anita had apologized profusely, her freckled face screwed into a grimace. "I'll get you in," she said. "I'll make it up to you, you'll see."

Brian Carlson was, naturally, her twin brother. So I wasn't entirely surprised when he stepped out from behind Mrs. Gorick's supply cabinet and thrust his face violently into mine.

"Geez, Brian! Get out!" I shoved him away.

"Geez, Shelly! I'm only trying to help!"

Expecting him to stomp off, I turned to grab my jacket off the hook. But when I turned around, he was still there. Before I knew what was happening, he pinned my arms to my sides with a startlingly strong grip and kissed me. Right on the lips. For a split second, a hot, bright light shone in his eyes, like a flare sent up from a search party. And then he bounded off, leaving behind a slight odor of pizza.

I got up and turned the TV volume down. "Did you hear that?"

Megan looked puzzled. "Hear wha--?" she asked, her mouth stuffed with popcorn.

The sound rang dimly in the distance. "*That.*" Now it sounded like a bell on a buoy, clanging low and gloomily, half-muffled by fog, warning of hidden rocks.

But Megan was bouncing up and down on the couch. "Turn it up! Turn it up!" Gilligan's Island was half-over. It was a rerun I had seen more times than I could remember. I used to love that show when I was little, but now it seemed stupid. The ache in my hand was becoming unbearable.

I went to the kitchen to melt ice against my burn. Brian Carlson's face had been ever so slightly scratchy; he would be shaving soon. My lips had become alien things, sore, thickened. Tomorrow, Anita and Stacy would both demand to know what had happened. Brian's word wouldn't be trusted. They would want to hear about it from me, would ferret it out, persistent as the mysterious noise that seemed to retreat in moments of silence but then suddenly swelled in volume as if rushing in on me like a tidal wave. They would

make me tell.

The pain in my hand was moving in tandem with the noise, swelling slightly with each beat. If I focused on the red blotch streaking my palm, the hurt dissipated into memory, only to surge back ever fiercer as soon as I looked away, rushing in a streak to the tips of my fingers as if motivating them to reach forward to something unseen. The pain was growing.

"Growing pains," I muttered. Standing with a fist full of melting ice that trickled down my wrist, I realized the noise sounded like a low hammering in the Thoregson's basement.

Megan stood in the kitchen doorway. "What would you do if a burglar came in?"

I dropped the ice in the sink and carefully blotted my

wet, aching hand on my jeans. "What are you talking about?" The noise was starting to freak me out and now Megan's question sent a tremor through me.

"Would you save me or Bicka?" Bicka was the goldfish that lived in a murky bowl on the Thoregson's coffee table.

"You, of course. What a question. Do you hear that pounding?"

"What if the house caught on fire?" Megan pressed her round, greasy face against the

white painted door molding and stared at me plaintively.

"I'd, uh, throw baking soda on it. And we'd run out the front door."

"What if the fire is at the front door? Then what? And what if baking soda catches fire too?"

"It's not going to catch on fire. Anyway, it's time for bed."

Halfway up the stairs, she turned around, nearly causing me to trip over her. "What if a monster comes?"

"Hey, that would be cool, wouldn't it? We could send its picture in to the *National Enquirer*, make a bunch of money." The muffled, barely audible thumping from the basement was the disco beat of a party I wasn't invited to. I imagined wild heat, gyrating bodies, flashing lights.

Upstairs, I pulled down the metal blinds in an attempt to close out the garish lights that did nothing to relieve the wintery darkness. Megan climbed into Pooh pajamas and then into her small, white bed. She smelled of peppermint toothpaste now. I gave her a kiss on one puffy cheek, then combed out her pigtails so her dark hair lay like



Suanne Sikkema

a narrow scarf on her pillow. When I was her age, my mother would do the same thing, fanning out my hair on either side. I always liked it. I suddenly had a sharp yearning for my mother, who, I knew, would wait up for me, watching reruns of "The Rockford Files" from her brown leatherette recliner, until Mr. Thoregson dropped me off. Maybe she had been right about the babysitting after all. Maybe it wasn't such a great idea.

"Don't worry about fires and burglars, okay? That's why I'm here, to make sure you stay safe and sound until your mom and dad get home."

"What's that?" she asked. We both held our breath, listening. The noise had changed into a regular pattern, a dull tap-tapping from the living room.

"It's nothing. Probably a branch scraping the window. Or a neighbor's cat."

"Shelly, are you scared?" she said, and struggled to sit up. Light sliding in through the cracks in the blinds cast blue pinstripes across Megan's face in a weird kind of war paint. She started to sniff.

"Of course not," I lied. "You stay here. I'll go check everything's okay. I'll be right back, okay?"

Now she started to cry. I sat back down and put my arms around her. "Hey, kid, I'm the babysitter, right? No matter what happens, I'll protect you. That's my job, right? Your mom and dad wouldn't of hired me otherwise, right?"

"I guess so," she said. "I'll never be a babysitter. I get too scared."

"Nah," I said. "It's different when you grow up."

"Leave the light on!" I turned her lamp back on and left her huddled against the head of her bed.

From the shadow-filled hallway, the noise was so low as to be barely discernible, but I knew it was there. Now it was like radio static with only the faintest trace of voices breaking the surface. My imagination was on fire; if I strained, I could almost imagine Anita and Stacy probing through the low fuzz with questions like needle-fine claws of hungry kittens. Now it wasn't anything, and a chill ran through me. I couldn't pin it down, it was indecipherable. Like an inaudible signal shot from a flare gun, it had dissipated, leaving only a lingering vibration.

I froze at the top of the stairs. After a minute or so, in the darkness of the stairwell below me, a soft ticking began. Steady as a heartbeat, it swelled and approached like the face of a cloud on a hushed and humid summer's day. All dread was gone; there was only an unbreakable stillness between each beat that seemed to stretch back to the very beginning of my life and forward into the broad plain of the future, where all the old hiding holes had been taken away.

I turned and ran back to Megan's room. Climbing into bed beside her, I wrapped my arms around her. She pressed her damp face against my neck. I would wait here with her. We would wait together. **Q**

Leslie Hsu Oh

The Red Balloon

Flurries as translucent as vellum begin to fall as I idle my car before the Inn at Little Washington. In the passenger seat, a pair of uncomfortable heels, which a girlfriend said makes my legs look juicy, and the sexiest dress I own glimmers beneath the porch lights. It's been a hell of a long time since I wore this dress for my husband on our fifth anniversary. And now, I am about to squeeze into it for another man.

Before you judge me, there's something you need to know about Korean mother-in-laws. When Peter and I started dating, my Korean friends warned me about the way they torment daughter-in-laws. Even Peter told me stories he heard about Halmeoni, his father's mother. In the early years of their marriage, his mom had to kneel in front of Halmeoni and present her with a sample of the dinner she had prepared. Halmeoni would sniff at the rice bowl, then smash it against the wall and order her to clean it up. But I didn't believe them. This kind of thing couldn't possibly happen in America.

On a day as snowy as this one, Peter held the door open for my parents as they lugged my bags into the flagstoned foyer of Vanderbilt Hall, Harvard Medical School's dormitory. I had rolled my eyes at him, as my parents chattered loudly away in Chinese. Later, over drinks at an Asian American social, we joked about how our parents had micromanaged every aspect of our youth to get us into Harvard Medical School and how great it felt to be finally free after twenty-two years of "No, you can't play outside, you have to practice your piano" and T.V. restrictions and Saturday Chinese or Korean school and all day long Sunday church activities. So, we began to scheme. How pissed do you think they would be to find out that ____? We started filling in the blank with "we got tattoos, blond hair, body jewelry," until worried calls started maxing out our answer machines.

My mom: "Why is a boy picking up your phone?"

My dad: "Be careful of Koreans. They can be violent. And don't quit medical school. You will be poor. You will envy your friends who are doctors. You will never be happy."

His mom: "You can't date Chinese. You are the eldest son. You must marry Korean. Mom and Dad are very disappointed in you."

We ignored these comments because we are bananas. Yellow on the outside. White on the inside. Apart from the fact that he is Korean and I am Chinese and the whole East Coast-West Coast divide (he was born in the D.C. area and I was born in California) where his soft always shoed feet cringed against my sand calloused soles, we both led very sheltered lives where our parents picked us up immediately after school, even undergrad! The ironic thing is that our

*Janet Levin*

parents had thought Harvard Med would be safe. On Fridays, as soon as class let out, we threw our medical textbooks in the car along with our snowboards, and drove to Killington, Stowe, or Sugarbush to practice barrel rolls and backside 720s. On Sundays, nursing sprained ankles or bruised shoulders, we prepared our return to hardcore studying with a stroll through Fenway's finest bars and nightclubs. (By the way, can you believe that I had never tasted alcohol until that year at Harvard? That's how goody two-shoes I was growing up.) Then, my parents died in a car accident probably on route to lecture me. I quit medical school to pursue my photographer dreams. Peter proposed to me. His parents disowned him. He quit medical school. We left America to pick grapes in France, peace corp in Tanzania, trek the Annapurna Circuit.

Korean mother-in-laws were not supposed to be in my future. Until, his father had to have a heart attack and die and ruin everything. My nobody-tells-me-what-to-do man caved. He claimed he had to take on his responsibilities as the eldest son. He bought a one-way ticket for us to D.C. without consulting me, and now our dusty backpacks with patches from all the countries we've visited are strewn amidst boxes of Kim (seaweed) and Soojunggwa (cinnamon and ginger tea

with persimmons) in his parents house.

Outside my heated car, the steady thick fall of snowflakes transforms the famous restaurant into a pointillism painting. The Inn at Little Washington is the subject of many brag sessions among my doctor friends. The restaurant has received more awards than I can count with my fingers and toes. Critics claim that the food crafted by Patrick O'Connell is "so good it makes you cry."

I tell myself that I'm here because I finally have something to talk about with my doctor friends. I mean, the restaurant, of course, not Brandon, the Pulitzer Prize winning photographer that invited me to dinner. Climbing into the backseat of my car, I am halfway into my halter black sequined dress when my phone rings.

It's my childhood friend, who is Korean and knows me better than I know myself. She begins, "Hey, are you okay?"

"No."

"Why? What's going on?"

I don't answer and both of us are silent for a while. I finish putting my dress on and say, "So, I need to know something. Does that crazy Korean mother-in-law shit really

happen in America?"

She laughs. "Girl, I told you it does. I guess it's kind of an I-had-to-suffer-through-this, so-you- do-too kind of tradition. Why, what's happening?"

"Peter's mom acts all nice and all, but then, one day, Peter asked her to babysit our kids so that he and I could have some alone time and she started yelling in Korean about how I'm the worst mother she's ever known. That I don't deserve the right to give birth. I don't think she knows that I understand Korean."

"Geez, that's horrible and cruel and...."

"How about you? Isn't your mother-in-law moving in soon?"

"Wait a second," she muffles the receiver, but I can hear her taking a quick stroll around her house. "Okay, sorry, I just had to check if Alex came home yet. So, get this. We had a huge fight last week and I told him that his parents can't move in. It's either his parents or me. He has to choose."

"And...."

"He chose me! His mom is furious! You know, she's been telling me since we got married that she wants to move in. And I kept telling her she could as long as she gave us one year. Well, within that year, she visited every other weekend."

"Do you think I can do the same thing? Tell my husband, it's either his mom or me?"

"Probably not. His dad just died. His mother probably can't even drive or figure out how to get money from the bank, right?"

Just as I slip on my painful heels, Brandon drifts by like the shadow of an eagle in flight.

Brandon stands as I approach the table. His calm blue eyes draw me in like the glacier-fed lakes Peter and I had skinny dipped in on our honeymoon. Beneath the shade of the luxurious Victorian drapes and rose-petal chandeliers, I think I understand for the first time what my dad meant by envy.

"You look nice," he says shyly.

"Thanks. So do you." We both laugh nervously. He looks glorious, even though he is completely underdressed for this restaurant. Worn jeans, half un-buttoned shirt, barefoot in leather Birkenstocks, long blond hair tied back in a pony-tail.

"Hey, your hair's almost as long as mine now," he says. His words bring us back to the ruins of Tintagel Castle, where we first met. He was on assignment for National Geographic. I was visiting sites linked to the legend of King Arthur and the Holy Grail. Peter had felt sorry for me, being pregnant and unable to celebrate my 30th birthday in style, so he encouraged me to travel around a bit on my own. And while I enjoyed my little adventure, I was lonely and Brandon asked if he could photograph me. He said he loved the way my hair "bristled hot pink like a punk porcupine" against the frothy emerald teal of the Celtic Sea, or something like that.

The waiter saves me from a response. He hands menus to both of us, then notes that the wine menu is 92 pages long. "Let's do the tasting menu with wine pairings," Brandon tells the waiter without even looking at the menus.

"Is that okay?" he asks me.

The waiter takes my menu while I'm stumbling over two things: \$288, the price for what Brandon just ordered for each of us, and the first item on the tasting menu, "A Tin of Sin- American Ossetra Caviar with Crab & Cucumber Rillettes." First, the thought of spending that much money on food, something that passes right through me in a few hours, makes me heave. Secondly, I am paranoid that everybody in the restaurant knows that I am having dinner in such a romantic setting with someone other than my husband. I also feel stupid because I don't know what "rilettes" means and I don't like raw or squishy things and I've never done a tasting menu before because I don't like surprises, so I start to panic.

"Uh, so. You're moving to Hawaii?" I ask.

"Yep. I'm retiring. Early."

Then, the "Tin of Sin" arrives on a black wooden board. Brushing away the black caviar in the tin, I poke at the crab and cucumber stuff. Then, I drain my entire glass of wine in one gulp.

He raises an eyebrow in my direction.

"I needed that!" I explain. "I just had another kid. So, I couldn't drink for nine months, you know. And now, I'm breastfeeding, so...never mind."

Brandon smiles and I have to look away because I'm wondering what it might feel like to kiss those lips and this frightens me. I had told Peter that I was having a bon voyage dinner tonight with Brandon. I had even invited Peter to come along, since he's accompanied me to some of Brandon's photo exhibitions. Peter said he was too tired tonight for such a long drive and would rather play with our kids. He kissed me and said, "Go and enjoy yourself, baby. You deserve it."

I was relieved and for this, I hated myself.

I love my husband. He is the only man I've ever kissed let alone had sex with and I'm not complaining. He's my best friend. He is safe. We have roots like he's met my parents and Brandon will never get the chance. We have three darlings: our first born is a splitting image of me, but has his personality; our second born looks like him, but has my taste buds; and our newborn we've nicknamed "our love butterfly" because he flutters haphazardly between us as if he is swollen with our love. I could never ever cheat or leave them, so why am I putting myself in this situation? Why am I wondering whether I'm missing out? Why am I hoping that something will happen, when nothing can?

A plate of oysters each draped with a burst of moist color interrupts Brandon's stare. I push mine towards him. "Here, I'm not much of an oyster girl."

"Are you sure?"

"Absolutely." My fingers twist the thick napkin into a ball and I wish I could just stuff it down my throat because I can't seem to shut up. I ramble on about how much I hate changing diapers and that I'm not cut out to be a mom and then I hear myself say, "My father-in-law just died a few months ago..." My words open up a black hole and I dig my nails into the palm of my hand.

Brandon seems to lose his appetite and says, "Oh. That's terrible. I'm so sorry."

I reach for the plate of butter and bread and knock

over my new glass of wine.

"Oh crap. Did I get you?"

"No, just my toes." He winks while the waiter cleans up my mess and brings me another glass that I empty like a shot.

We digress to safer topics like the weather and the latest movies we've seen. He waits until my belly is full of soup and scallops and Peking duck before he tries again, "So, how's Peter doing?"

"I don't know. He won't talk to me about it. He's just angry all the time. And then, there's his mother."

The Tuna Wellington saves me from launching into the whole mother-in-law menace. Watermelon-pink wrapped in a bright ribbon of lime-green, all rolled in a thin corrugated mustard-brown. *Snap. Snap. Snap.* My camera is so loud that guests at surrounding tables stop eating to stare at us.

"Sorry, I just had to capture that."

"No problem, I completely understand."

"Peter wouldn't."

Brandon stops chewing and waits for me to elaborate.

"Well, he doesn't like it when I take pictures in public. He gets really pissed."

"But, you're a photographer. He should get it."

"He does, but only if I'm on an assignment. He hates it when I take pictures spontaneously. One time, I took a photo of him sleeping with our kids. It was such a tender fatherly moment, you know, one of those portraits I think he would appreciate when he's old? Well, the flash woke him up and he flipped me off."

"Wow."

"Hey, can I show you something? Don't laugh, okay?"

Lifting my camera from my lap, I flip through images until I settle on a trail of black clad Korean Americans meandering up a hill knee-deep in the fluffiest snow. Some hold black umbrellas against the gray sky.

I hand my camera to Brandon and bite my lip waiting for his response. He views several of my photos in silence. Then, he leans back and squeezes his cheeks with his right hand and closes his eyes. When he opens them, the blue seems more transparent as if I could see more of him.

Finally, he says, "You could enter this in a contest. There's something extraordinary about the juxtaposition of this unpredictable blizzard and the finality of..."

"Life and death. Black and white."

"Yes," he breathes. "Their faces. His face. Your husband. It's...well, goddamn beautiful. Frozen against these wispy ribbons of snow."

He draws a triangle in the air above my husband's face and says, "Your framing is brilliant. Your eyes follow this line and then you're trapped."

I nod.

He asks, "Has your husband seen this?"

"Oh god no. Let's just say, I'm probably the gossip of the funeral. The shameful family member who dared to take photos on a day no one wants to remember."

"Your husband doesn't realize that that's the way you love him." He leans towards me and hands me the camera.

"Tell me more about this one."

A deflated red balloon, no larger than a pencil point in my viewfinder, sucks all the color from this photograph. The wind whips it ruthlessly across a whisper of tree tops on a white canvas.

"Yeah, it's my favorite one. Nobody noticed the balloon but me. The burial had just ended and everybody dove into their cars. I watched that sad balloon disappear on my own."

"And?"

"Well, I don't know. I guess I don't want that to happen to me."

He places both hands on the table and I wonder if he is finally going to reach over and touch me. Instead, he says, "Would you mind giving me a copy?"

Our most intimate moment occurs over dessert as we devour his, aptly named the "Seven Deadly Sins," and dismantle mine, an intricate bed complete with layers of fluffy cake mattress, whipped cream pillows, and a delicate chocolate twisted Victorian head and foot board, swimming in a spotlight of quicksand yellow.

With a marble bust overseeing the state of affairs in the Inn's foyer, our parting hug is confusing. He wraps his arms around me like a buddy and I hold on too long. I'm not sure who is a bigger coward. Or maybe, we're both heroes.

I feel like this is the last time I will ever see him. So I say, "I luv you" as in the friendly way that you sign your emails. He pulls back and suddenly, I'm not sure if all of this shit is just in my head. So, I turn my back on him and walk coolly away.

My heels slip on the parking lot and I look down to see the powder rise from my escape and slither away like ghostly snakes. **G**



Janet Levin

POETRY

Gary Adams

Ants: A True Story

the ants lived in my house and saw me
as a slow
but generous figure
a bit like god
a bit like a cow

one day the ants ate eight sugarcubes
filled with LSD in my drawer
next to my passport
and a pile of old Christmas cards

the ants then became digital
I found them in my documents file
on my computer
and the ants became sacred

They were seen at Ephesus
talking to the mosquitoes before they
Pearl Harbored that city
the ants from my room
are numinous, transcendent and 'thou'



Janet Levin

Scott Banks

The Story of My life

At night I open the window and tell
The moon to mind its own damn business.
I shake my fist at the stars for good measure.
And as I turn to leave,
I catch a meteor winking at me.
But I can't be sure.
I pass a mirror in the hallway, pause
To look, expecting to see someone else.
When I enter my bedroom
Only my father is there:
Sitting at my desk, using my typewriter,
Pounding out the story of my life.

Barrow

The sun took leave a month ago,
The blank filled by a sober moon
Barging into the neighborhood
Like a green cheese bully.

Tundra tolerated moon for some months,
But over time and come spring,
He was evicted, nibble by nibble
By the springtime mouse of the sun.

Darkness dropped and
Four homeless people crossed the street
To follow the route
Ravens fly at night,
To their secret mountain roost,
The place no one can find.

Trish Barnes

Whistler

This is Whistler,
said the man behind the fish counter,
that's why it costs too much.
He wrapped it up.
This is Whistler:
condo, merino wool, micro-brew.
Hot tubs in rows elbow patio walls,
facing the highway.
What a view they have of us
soaking our stumbles away.

We didn't buy in.
We didn't admire the timber spires
of Whistler's industrial village square.
No—we saw lynx. Fox. Heron. And bear.
Our Whistler was drenched wool, chainsaw
and pen.
Compass, fog, lunch on stump under rain.
Dripping red cedar western hemlock.
Devil's club leaves to tangle our walk.

Our Whistler was scientific death to trees,
sacrificing them to densities previously
decreed, marking the survivors.
It was prayer, eyes closed, head down:
May I leave the strongest ones alive, to
outlast this dubious task for the research
branch of the ministry of forests.

I opened my eyes and the greens
were not green, the shadows not dark.
All colours of the world waved there
in fronds of gratitude: that I,
no one in particular,
should consider each ribbon I tied,
should re-measure whole plots to
include the oldest stems in those
held back from being sawed.

In Whistler they wanted a grid over forest
to condemn all the trees between it.
I let the forest flex the grid, giving some favour.
Would you not have done the same
with your similarly small power?



Paxson Woelber – Places We Were Not Meant to Go

Marilyn Borell

Look Again

A cloud as small
as a man's hand
forms on a far horizon,
gathers mass, speed,
moves up
over headlands, across
broad plains.

The slow but steady
diminishment
of our last parent,
a gift of time to move
toward the front of the line,
head down
that path called Grief.

A lull prevails
while we tell friends,
utter prayers, prepare
to lift up, up
through layers of cloud
to the sun.

Wendy Bourgeois

Tools of the Future/Prehistoric Bodies

It would be much easier to steal something for myself
 Than to buy a fish knife for some couple
 I barely know. They may belong on a cake, but the smell of tangerines
 Reminds me of the bride on all fours in the predawn damp.
 It is the appropriate undergarments, those subtle yet unmistakable gestures,
 That bind one to the bleached school room scent of altruism. The truth,
 Is that I can, unfortunately, *unbearably*, always handle the truth.
 The spinster at table twelve captures my eyes and I feel ashamed of myself
 And also cowed. The situation calls for an obscene gesture
 Or a boot heavy sigh. The flowers have demented a couple
 Of children whose sugared lilies have grown saggy and damp;
 Tomorrow there will be nothing left except the sashes. Cerulean and tangerine
 Are the bride's whimsy engine. What could be more twee than tangerine?
 Is it fair that I've said nothing of the groom? *Discretion*. In truth,
 It was him in the orchard, and not her blushing, pulling up her damp
 Panties. Is that slander or libel? I can never remember which. My selfish
 Desire for some sort of resolution, a panoramic sunset for every happy couple
 Could be misconstrued by the family as a conciliatory gesture,
 Like how father penetrates the air with his cigar. This gesture
 Means everywhere and in all languages that the tangerine
 Table cloths are incidental. What will later be coupled
 In the imagination with mild recriminations despite the TRUE
 LOVE, the photos from Cabo and the stand up mixer, is now my self
 Indulgent curse, muttered through water proof mascara and damp
 Lashes. Folks don't like to be reminded. It puts a damper
 On what will inevitably become a framed pastoral of a gestural
 Certainty. Two hands cleave the white pastry. Myself,
 I would rather have a brisk once over with a laddered sac of tangerines,
 A diminishing return on a very expensive investment. Truth—
 The whole thing makes me grateful for my courageous couple
 Of tin soldiers, veterans of this stupid world who weren't afraid to couple,
 To twin Siamese style with me in lust's ceremonial armpit, damp
 And terrified, and never ask for anything so bourgeois as proof of my true
 Devotion. Little Bohemia is a café in Illinois, despite the lovely gesture
 Of its fine title, they shot the outlaws but kept the bullet holes. No tangerine
 Honeymoon suite for my kind, no anniversary paradise. I must be a law unto myself.

Emma Brooks

Waiting to Fly

Alone in a big wide blue
my mouth a question mark
my sound a blue spit
of sand and open and blue—
and in five hours blue,
the blue of fog and of dawn
the blue of two days squeezed
into nothing, into wrung-out blue sponge—

My blue spills the cusp
of your question, wets
your fingers, your mouth
rushes in, tooth-wild,
extracts the answer
and rains at once down
to knit this moment blue
against the yellow-green blue
of summer—

Blue rains at last and knits
our bodies, as tendon
into muscle, as capillary
into blood, knits our bodies
blue as the ocean is blue
as smog, as clouds, blue
as before rainfall, and having
witnessed the unbound
blue, the unraveling blue
I see at last that blue is blue
is blue is unbound still blue.

Sean Brendan-Brown

Admit Defeat, Eat Fast Food & Telecommute

Time to break camp, fold the jack-knives,
stow the hatchets, bury the entrails,
scatter the ashes, scrither through moonlight
as insects do flashing pheromone badges
to avoid execution: be gone leaving
names on the tombs of trees. Over there's

that old mountain, Three-Cornered Hat,
and like its museum-piece namesake, declared
outdated and in need of clear-cutting
and festooning with Lindal cedar tri-levels;
yeah, that's the ticket, progress is incontinent
and every stain stinking of sameness,

why just the other day I was gutting a rainbow at
Fox Bend and ordered to go, go, go—I was
trespassing. I said "this is the Umatilla
National Forest and I have a fishing license
and trout stamp." The rent-a-cop said "go to
hell, this land belongs to Computek now" and

I said "so who jacked off the BLM to arrange
that?" but he was a big guy and I was too
tired to try anything, and what's the point
anymore, anyway? We're both losers, we don't
own any of it: time to admit defeat, eat
fast food & telecommute. I creeled my skimpy

trout and moved on. At Benny's there's a drunk
who never knows where he is, over the noise
of the linoleum stripper prepping the dance
floor for the younger evening crowd he keeps
asking for a map, a decade I've come here and
every day he needs a map & straw-bottomed wine.

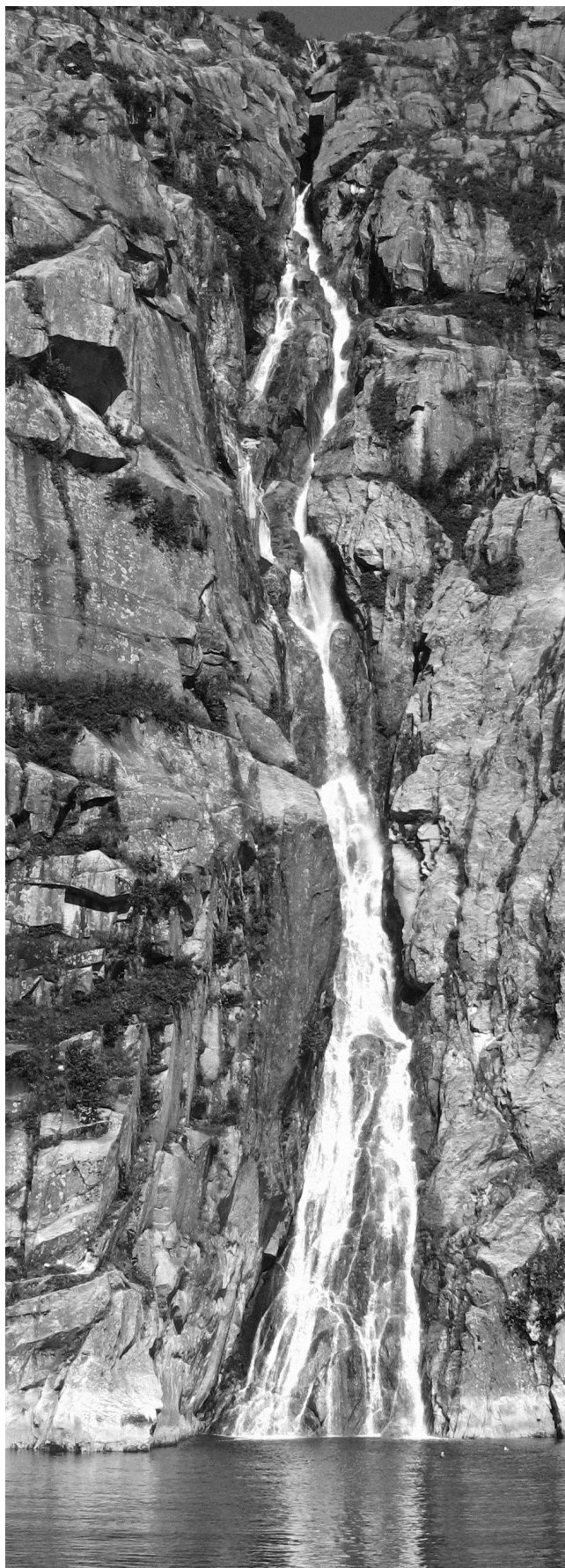
Agrarians

She said: four miles east of Hanford is this fantastic winery castled from sandstone & cedar. I found an arrowhead in Washtucna Gorge, how old do you think? Read Neruda while I drive or feed me—if I crash who cares? Why's this silver gauge thing needling red?

I said: drive faster, we'll check in get Merlot-drunk & hit the rapids. Arrows around here are bird-points, not ancient but beautiful. I'm sick of *Bosoalto*, his smug rebellion didn't kill him as it killed Lorca; nothing to eat but some spotty bananas. That gauge's for water temperature—this Jag's pre-Ford which is why the electric windows fail but the engine won't boil over.

We penetrated the universe of agrarians: wheat, alfalfa, canola, apples, barley, grapes; Seattle was her home not mine, she was so rich money was a *thing*—I'd heard of such people but thought them made up—as a kid wealth was god and we its acolytes in passion & blood. The Jag was mine, a worthless XJS V12 I'd rebuilt, repainted, reupholstered;

it held up. If I were Neruda I'd describe her as a hothouse orchid fragile yet rooted and myself the wild weed burnt, uprooted yet thriving—she called me satanic as I kissed her blueblood phobias & infections—the screech of hulky metal-wheeled waterers, greening the sandy windrows, louder than Ozzy.



Paxson Woelber – Tumbling Toward Reunion

Marie Buckley

What Addisu Said

Developmental reading college classroom so full
there is standing room only and Addisu,
whom I don't yet know, leans against the wall
by the door. A black man in the back holding up
a white wall.

"There are only twenty-five spaces," I say and read
the list of names registered, crossing out the no-shows.
Addisu waits expectantly. His name is third on the wait list
of seven. There are three no-shows; I must give them
the rest of this day to contact me. "If they don't,
I will have three spaces," I tell everyone.
The forest is colored in blood, the border many days walking away.

Everyone gets a syllabus, pep talk—the value of reading.
Addisu looks up at me, down at the printed page, nods,
his eyebrows pulled together. A serious man in this room of first
year students. I hold up a book—"We will be reading this
true story of a boy soldier in Sierra Leone." Some sleepy eyes open,
Addisu's widen. *The plane, almost full, will leave tonight.*

The room empties. Addisu stays, comes up to me. "I must be
in this class," he tells me. I repeat the drill—the rest of this day, then
at most three spaces. He nods, he thanks me, his politeness alien
in this place. *He gave them everything. Everyone must be bribed,
paid off somehow to let you pass, to let you live.*

Twice that day Addisu sends me email—have I heard? Do I know yet?
Finally at ten o'clock that night I send him the few words: "You are in
the class. Go ahead and buy your books."

In two days, Addisu sits in this room of twenty-five, in the first desk
in the row directly in front of me. I hold up a blank map of Africa.
"Does anyone know where Sierra Leone is?" Addisu's arm goes up,
the only black arm in this room. His smile is the sun across an ocean.
He is here.



Robin Hiersche - Bleeding Hearts

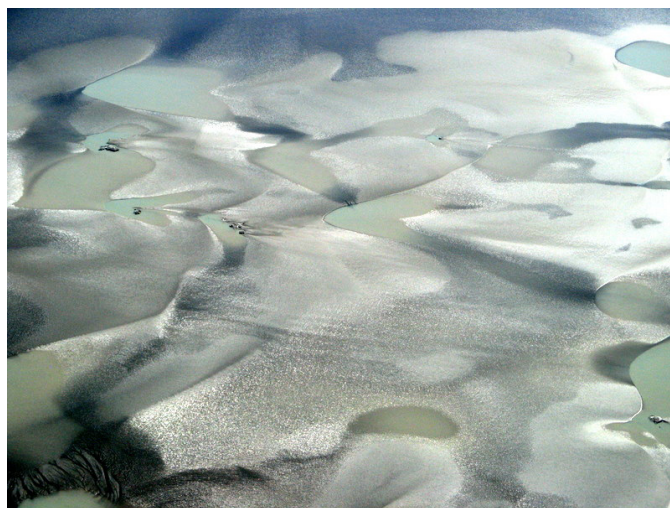
Derick Burleson

Going Back to Be

In the shadow I was breathing
 I was breathing in the blue
 snow in the shadow of birch.
 I was breathing birch in blue
 shadow and the birch wore snow
 like a shadow like breath and more
 snow was falling was breathing
 shadow breathing birch the birch
 was breathing my breath blue
 in shadow and the moon cast
 a shadow behind the breathing
 snow behind the birch behind
 moon the breathing it was snowing
 it had snowed and it would snow
 and the snow would gather
 like a shadow of snowy birch
 a shadow of blue a shadow
 of me breathing and my breath
 rose white into blue snow.



Paxson Woelber – Moments Before Dark



Suanne Sikkema

An Ending

I couldn't take it anymore
 couldn't take white birch
 screaming from the forest
 at midnight white shrieks.
 What could they want?
 Only what I didn't have.
 A future that included
 birch and me walking
 through and under birch
 bark peeling like paper
 useful as paper or for making
 baskets to carry what you've
 gathered what you need
 blueberries desire water
 for example. I couldn't
 take the shrieking leaves
 swelling in midnight sun
 and all the birds returned
 mated already or singing
 out for someone someone.
 Hear me now and believe
 in the power of the undark
 days on the trees arias
 green greener the breeze
 which helps them craft a note
 excluding some but not all.

Anne Coray

Painting, Intermediate

Atmospheric perspective.
Hills full of portals and stones.

Whatever you thought you understood is dissolving
in a wide, albescent sky.

And although the features of the woman
in the forefront are discernible enough,

her eyes remind you of distance—
the way they make their own pilgrimage

to a place the heart
cannot even begin to conceive.

And you wonder what there ever was to prove
in this landscape so godly indeterminate

as light and depth
and the unconstructed temples of the soul.



Debi Bodett

Unpublished

Clouds five thousand, scattered,
sun-clumps like *Golden pholiota*
in the early evening sky.
The lake is still.

Two eagles have let down
somewhere in a hush of spruce,
even the memory of their wings declining.
Here all reference stalls

as light scripts its own unbodied book:
clean angle and swirl on vellum slope
—a gilded, ancient lettering—
that lengthens, climbs, descends...

But I stop, wanting for once
nothing adorned to describe the dusk
that covers our every imprint now
with perfect, though equally perishable, shadows.

Sherry Eckrich

Catch and Release

You're a keeper.
I won't throw you back
into that fast-moving stream.
Now that I've hooked you,
seen your iridescence,
the wild look in your eye.
The way your tail twists and flips,
I can hardly bear
your weight in my arms.
Wild thing! You are
my dream of a quiet pool
under green-tipped willows,
hidden between swirling eddies:
the place I can see
my own reflection
clarified.

J. Ramsey Golden

Lastlight

A windblade prowls the slope,
crosses the lake, worries leaves into dissonance.

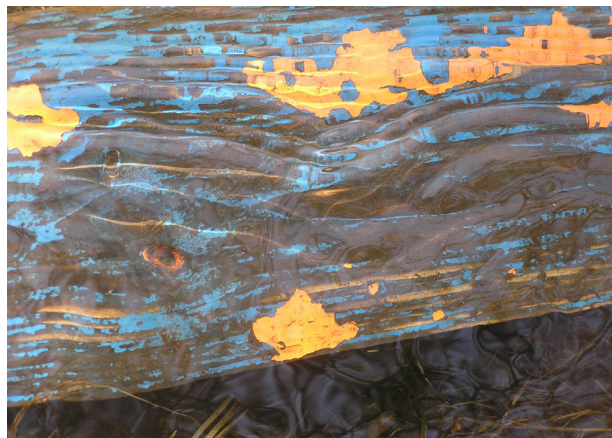
"Stay close," I say. "Or a bear will eat you up."

She jangles,
scampers, hopping a beat with the bell
hung on her belt-loop to warn away wild
creatures, beasts of a ferine language, the billow of sedge, the rush of fang and
hunger-driven from their dens to the edge of our haste-sought stillness.
Her clatter of tin on tin clambers skyward to fade
like a finger of thin smoke.
Camp-dirt and ashes dust her nose.
At our hearth, I blow weak cinders into blaze.

Across the lake, ridges shadow ridges,
stretching cold canyons of lastlight
onto the water. Two loons argue and weigh
the mercy of the current
with their breasts.

Our fire grows, groaning to the gathering dusk.
Darkness creaks, wakens,
sidling her onto my lap.

She gathers as much of me as she can
in her mouse-small palms, and laughs.
In the near-black my face seems to her
as enormous and as luminous
as the moon.



Janet Levin



Amy Katz - Clouds Toward Alaska

Debbie Cutler

Sunday Morning

I
wake
to the
sounds of
my children's
giggles filtering
downstairs in snatches,
turn to the place you would
have been had we not changed,
tug at the extra pillow, pull it close
to my heart, smile because you took the
La-Z-Boy and stereo but left behind the laughter.



Amy Woelber - Industrial Strength

Melissa S. Green

Anchorage Oil Town Villanelle

The rainbow swirl in a sheen of oil
is why this city's here. It's the dream
of prosperity (for some) to which we're loyal,

and oil is the means, or gas, or coal,
whatever will fire up the machine.
Yes, the rainbow's pot of gold is in that oil.

It builds the asphalt road to our goal
of more and more. You've really never seen
such wealth, the ideal to which we're loyal,

the riches we'll share in, for which we toil
with our geologists and p.r. advertising.
For such multicolored wealth, who cares if oil

slicks the water, poisons all the soil,
turns the world grey instead of green?
Not sentiment -- prosperity! We're loyal

to Texaco, B.P., Exxon, Royal
Dutch Shell, yes, all those multis dripping
the rainbow stink of money, sheen of oil.
It's prosperity (it's sums) to which we're loyal.

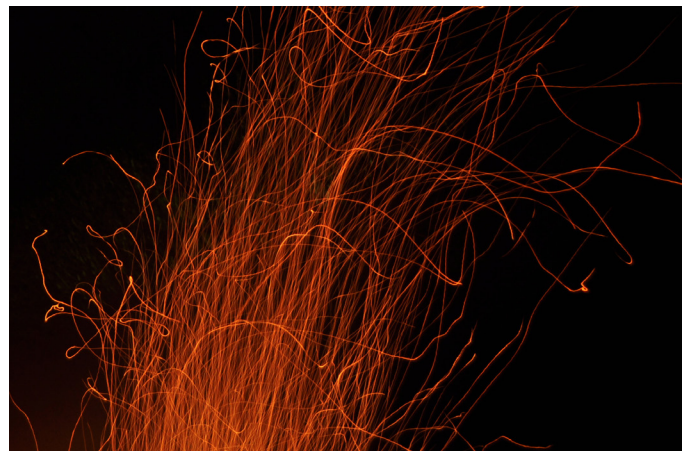
Lee Gulyas

Lesson in the Art of Overnighting Outdoors

We hike miles in the moonlight toward ocean.
Blue light and pine, then a clearing, a band
of Tule elk, immobile, heads raised, white
ears tipped toward us. We pitch camp

on the bluff, the sound of surf on rock
a crashing lullaby. Then sudden downpour,
gale force winds, a scramble for the rain-fly
and tent stakes. We wait in silence

until the tempest blows out. Then quiet
sleep until just before dawn when the elk
return, nudge my head, sniff and probe
through thin nylon, the two of us silent,
fog tumbling in, our way made clear.



Paxson Woelber - Firelights

Marybeth Holleman

The Beating Heart, Minus Gravity

when i was a young girl
i wondered what flying
would feel like
the kind where you stroke
through air like water
that's why i loved to swim
loved most of all
to dive deep
and then arc up
toward bubbles rising
to the bright light
but now and again
i dream of diving
to the blue depth
and rising, rising, following
bubble after bubble, seeing
golden sunlight glinting above
but never reaching
the tender gravity of air

Yesterday, On The Familiar Trail

A routine walk, you know the kind: your mind
is far away, and it's just your bones walking,
marking the rhythm of heartbeat to footstep.
It's always like this right before you see them,

the ones who never take an absent-minded step,
staring at you with heads lowered, ears erect,
paws spread wide and hackles half-raised,
golden eyes deciding whether you're predator
or prey. What other category do they need?
What other thought? It's you,

with your thousand and one concepts, who must
step back toward that joy-sap rising, step back
into the only world that is.



Nancy Deschu - Aleutian Islands Fish Nets



Paxson Woelber – Anchorage Psychedelic

Curt Hopkins

The Return of American Monster

England is awful.

Yesterday we ate breazelled rat glace with sautéed britches over a bed of splinters.

However, we also saw Measure for Measure at the Globe Theater.

Today we're going back to see Much Ado About Hanson, one of the Bard's Hanson series, universally acknowledged to be his best.

However, thereafter we're going to High Tea at the Stafford where we'll drink flat Buckhorn out of wooden cups and eat cucumbers stuffed with Cheeze-Its and stoat-paste.

Day before yesterday went to the Louvre to see an exhibit on Hanson.

The stand-out piece was a large format oil by Ingres called, "The Dauphin" and was of Zach, the cute one.

He lay on his back on a divan, languidly filling the oversized pair of chinos he was wearing with candied peanuts.

Exquisite, to rival Titian's "Albanian Squirrel."

Tomorrow we return.

Got a letter from the Office of Super Spies in Miami who are still interested in having me write knock-knock jokes about Paraguay for their torture squads.

Vive la France!

Simon Langham

A Pentimento

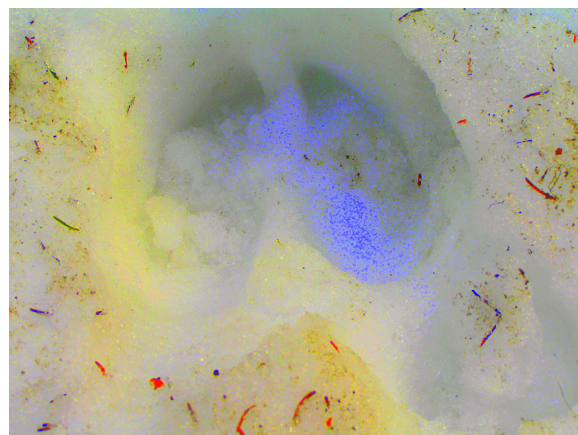
I burn the disc
 piano jazz recorded live
Yoshi's Nitespot, for you bent over I imagine
 applying some tool to the wooden skiff in your yard.

I've never been to Yoshi's, haven't given anything away in five years
 but now track three alone (is learning to hide
imperative to womanhood) alone at night, rain sounding tent skin
 living here, where weather must be talked about.

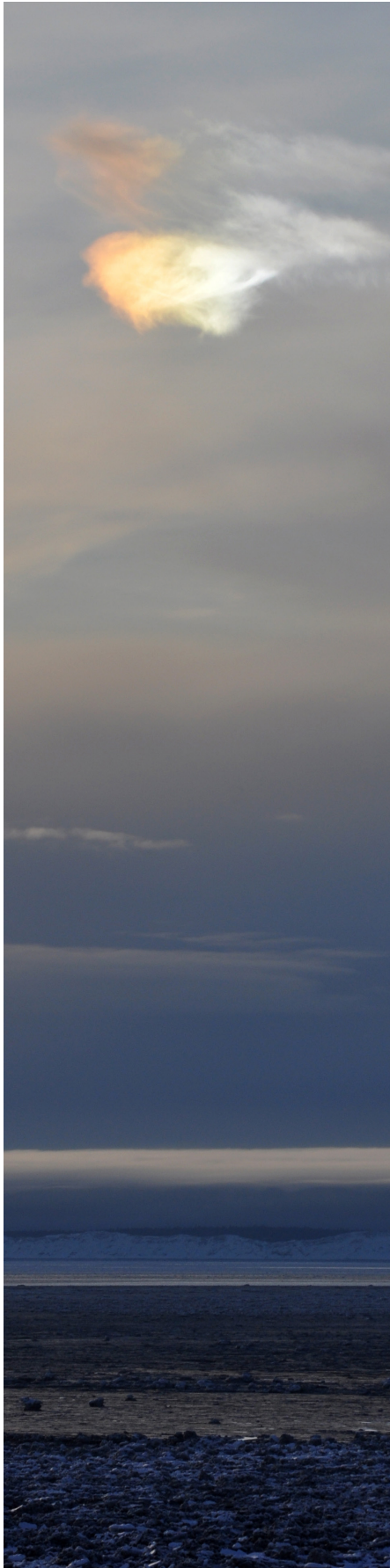
View from my door (can we know without comparing) the bay, bluffs
 rock birded slick, details dissolve into fog, into clouds
keeping tomorrow's rain, but now track three forces.

Allows you to dissolve where color perceives as sound, imagine
 clouds paralyzed, where the painter has repented, changed his mind
about scene, wiped away mountain tops into fog with turpentine spirits
 (what if love transforms) aged paint translucent, a pentimento.

This is the mood where love kills a love and the hull
 Of my hips like the meadow, clotted with blossoms
a pentimento (no one until now has matched the fullness
 of my cousins lips, at sixteen yrs how they tasted of our secrets)
the repenting overwhelms, will overwhelm into deep content
 the deepest of your life
 what has passed
 and what will come.



Janet Levin



Paxson Woelber – It Rained Skittles

Little Tutka Bay

Estuary curling like hair
at nape of neck, slack
tide confirms time
has stopped this lagoon
build a fire meant
for colder mornings
twiggy speech, dry squaw kindling
I can't be in woods
without wanting, woods here
a steady supply, name
my new liaison *aventura*.

Berries, layer of wealth
across bay, father/grownson
with their no-look-back
absorbed in act not chore
holy the berries
pile up with their worms
in five gallon bucket
no lid, I read, blow flute
of crane bone, feed fire

match embers to filling
of bucket, cloud wisps
eat foggy holes in ridgeline,
this summer another
memory to crowd
my winter language.

Twenty minutes it takes
father/grownson to fill rakes
speech like little waves
hitting side of boat
alert each other to new clump
of sleek bushes, rain
puddles in calyx of alder
leaves, sharp clouds slice
at peaks, I pick my fingers blue
my derisory donation
sit in moss soft
soft than loon call, nothing
to get in the way
of my perfect disappearance.

My ship of foliage
pan handle a compass
needle pointing berries
don't move, just turn
turn into blue sheen
old ropes twist tree trunks
if there were music it would lead
here where I am lost
here by fire, cove
boat long lined, hills, spruce,
grasses, immobilized
in a cast of fog
name my new liaison *idilho*.

Landscape changes
by what is subtracted,
the berries, rain and vapors,
light, by a secret deep as
this berry patch,
by tide whose bottom side
I watch from shore
face of clock turning
below hands of time,
still not tired enough to sleep
beside a naked man.

Father/grownson do fan dance
with blueberry rake
turning up branches, passing
scoop beneath, geishas
stripping berries,
two men twisting
slowly into loaded branches
sound of rattle as berries
reach into bottom of tins
two men twist slowly,
last time here my desire
wasn't born yet.
Later my hand
up and down his back
defines the shape
I feel, gives
it a name, a memory
his arms of water music
I sing to him
David of Little Tutka
take your wings and son, clouds
will wed the fog, it's time
this is your way back home
struck by stalks of moon.

These Are The Men

I lay with. Men
 With broad backs like beasts
 Heaped shoulders
 Cross-grained hands
 Splayed feet
 Toes spread from walking in old
 Relaxed boots
 On trails
 Over roots
 Humping the thin soil. These are the Men

I lay with. Men
 With arms like hearts that pump
 In defiance
 Of the forced
 Upright stance
 Who smell at the end of day and first
 Of the morning
 Wood smoke at the top
 Trapped in their hair
 Later, lower, sour sweat from winter work.

These are the men
 Beard whitened to old snow
 Who take up shaving
 Carving the lines of age
 Who outwork, outlast
 Young ones, their skin not marked with
 Tattoos, but raised scars
 Nicks of time
 Faded long from pink
 Skin heated next to mine.

Men. I lay with
 Arc a maul like trees falling
 In a rhythm
 Vulnerable power
 Down stroke, upswing
 Visualize them naked, me wanting
 To crawl through
 Their swinging
 To feel enclosed
 Caged by the maul dropping, the wood falling away.

Men. Whose hips above
 Me, grind like unmeshed gears
 Hips with sockets
 Eroded from miles
 years of packing
 Game, food, fuel, tools, water, children, strike
 With their heels, at the worn
 Cabin floor when they take
 Their morning hard-ons
 To the corner of wilderness bending around the cabin.

These are the Men
 I lay with. Men
 Who come back
 To the sheets
 Skin cooled
 To finish the morning.



David Cheesem - "O love, if you think of it, please call Kathy in the morning & remind her to feed the chickens"

Jonna Laster

Beachcombing Kotzebue

ice blubber, pale blue punk ice chunks
of the jigsaw sea ram up
on
the pebble shore

rotting boats, old molars on the shoreline,
dissolve

flattened cans
 lidless cans
 cans with the labels labored off

the tide tangles nets
 and
 bone
 white floaters heap with uncoiling ropes
 spilling and wet

from the short pier people bunch up catching herring,
 who even laying dead in buckets blow
 kisses

dry mud puddles brim with: snow-machine carcasses, nubs of wood
ends of wire, candy bar wrappers, caribou fur

skinned pelts sprawl on beach stumps,
rocks suddenly shine in the just
open water where floes grind
and creak and gulls
fall
 up
 clattering
 and keening

all at once cast iron tugs anchored to snow-banks all winter
have slipped from sight and we each drift to the place
where land reaches open sea, where light
shines
on
light



Janet Levin

Janet Levin

Leaving

A magnet, leaving calls
and I am northern filings
seeking south, past silt and tilted summer nights
two decades tired
the long dark cold
eager for endless sunny days, waters warm to toes
stepping into sand fleas (instead of ice worms),
and Spanish. Now there are Sorels to sell—
why do I have so many
fleece jackets, pullovers, vests
in every color?
Am I really going to pack that stack
of Gourmet magazines
again? Last time (twenty years ago)
stakes pulled, sails hoisted
a household of stuff
subsequently stored seven years long enough to forget the contents.

Now no need to keep the shovel, I'm all done with snow.

Writing this place, reviewing; remembering
the welcome-to-Alaska gift, Extratufs
forty months Homer housesits, multiple packings, unpackings
one end of town to the other
pewter Decembers and gilded Junes
committed to memory, a catalog of firsts.
First red aurora, first curved snout salmon, first tuft of fur too close
first time slamming
poetry now becoming last words
last hugs, last looks
scanning this white to white
peaks of snow transformed
to foamy sea.

Leaving home to go home.

Thinking about leaving home every day now
I work with folks who have no home now, everyday
more families homeless, rent too high, pay too low
children hoarding food, pencils, books
stocking empty shelves in a warehouse of oil

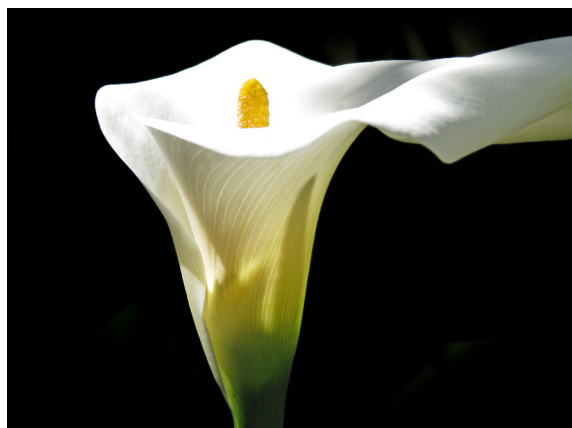
barrels once at \$140 dropped way far down to \$30,
once thought way up high from \$13
all relative, no matter,
the poor are unwelcome at any price.
Lipsticked blind justice, pretty in pink, winks,
weighs the scales
her hoodie head impaled in glass ceiling shards,
calving glacial babes
Says thanks but no to economic stimulus dough.

Say it ain't so.

And so it goes.
Up, down, ending, beginning, death, birth
all the same circular exiting entering
squinting peering praying pondering
traversing
a bend that beckons, filings to magnet can't not go
compelled
to leave home
to go home.

No need to keep the shovel.

Debi Bodett



Deb Liggett

Full Moon

I.

Before it slips
beyond the snow-clad peaks,
so luminous,
nearly transparent,
I imagine
I can see through
to the other side.

Like peering into
a microscope,
a single eyepiece:
perfectly lit sphere.

II.

Hanging
in two dimensions
a pearl wafer
burnished
to a mirrored shine,
reflecting
an invisible sun.

III.

I pluck the luminous wafer
from the sky
place it on my tongue.

Take this
the embodiment of a world,
swallow it whole.



Debi Bodett

Joanna Lilley

Firebreak

A red canoe complemented
the summer that seduced me,
kneeling as I scooped and spooned
along liquid highways, natural clear cuts
through forests that pooled in flat valleys
like vast lakes that would drown me, if I fell in

I missed the Celtic hand of sky
just once during large days of hatless sun
standing at the firebreak, arms raised
to embrace a promised rain that dropped
as I bent to a yellow-eyed crocus watching
for starred lupins in an unplanted rose garden

A half-year winter,
yet still the snow melted too soon,
uncovering a moose's rack
that I covered back,
returning to unpocket stones
and arrange an atheist's shrine

No Romans ever levelled, no cart wheels
ever rutted this arid chainsaw track
My first land is already fought for,
just skirmishes and squeals now
The argument of my last land
has yet to be settled

Mary Mullen

Alaskan Summer Rite, 1969

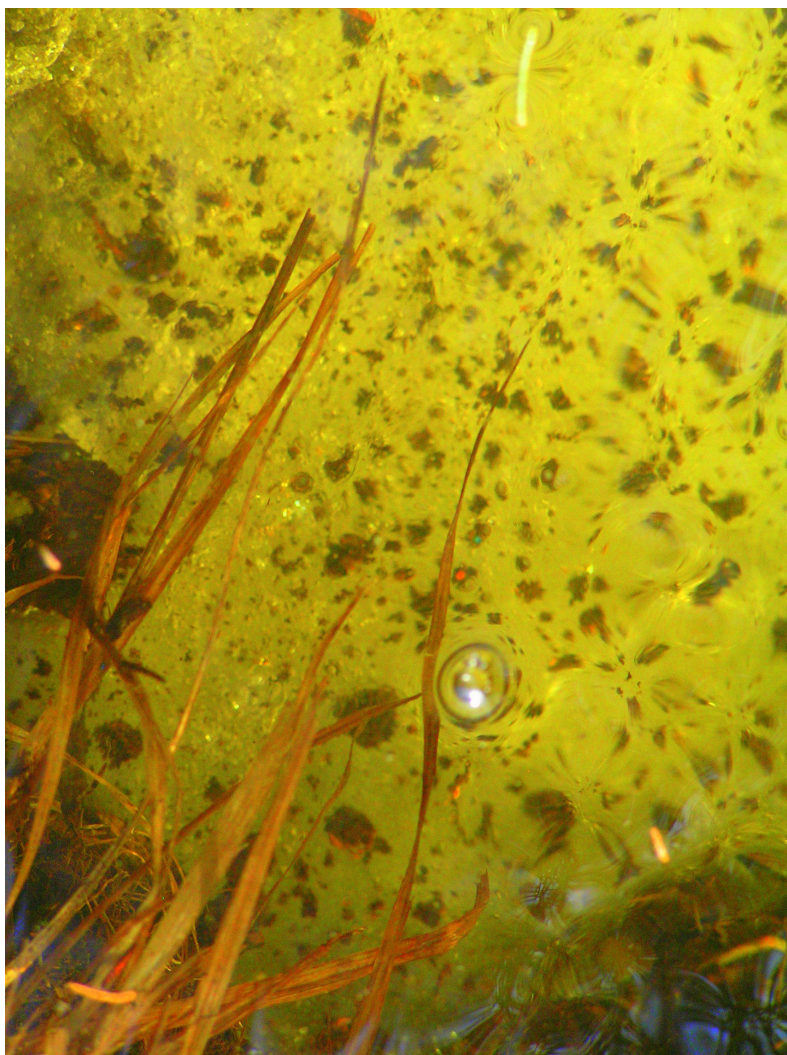
Icy hoses blasted fish guts
down the slime-line
to us cannery girls
who were high-styling it
in our brightly coloured bandanas
blue jeans able to stand by themselves—
a white oilcloth apron
which made us look like birthday candles—
and sometimes, mascara.

Sickening smell of salmon
pressurized in torts,
beeping forklifts ,
metronomed machines—
canner, lidder, boiler, boxer—
and foremen who yelled in Japanese.

Wild salmon thumped
monotonously through the guillotine,
while us shameless beauties
stuck our fingers into the headless cavities
and shook ruby eggs into the slanting tray,
tossed guts onto the concrete floor.

Finally, the 10.30 whistle. Released
to the seagull-filled July air
we listened to Bob Dylan's *North Country Fair*
sipped coffee, ate donuts, and flirted
with college guys up from sexy Seattle
who talked of Carlos Castaneda.

Below the cannery
the mouth of the Kenai River
lay curvy and prone,
dotted with testosterone filled boats
whose captains waited for a cannery girl
who would say yes to Cook Inlet
and yes, perhaps, to him.



Janet Levin

Mark Muro

picasso

picasso was a birdcage
gleaming in a dangerous scrap yard
he slept in the mouth of a panther
and played a guitar made of flying fish
scraping the time off sundials
with a million luminous fingers
he once told his wife
'I can't make another picture-
who cares about this junk anyway?'
she lied and told him 'everybody'
and picasso pissed a bronze comet
as the morning yawned another glorious day

picasso was a gypsy moth
dancing fandangos in banana peel shoes
he melted knives with his gaze
creating armies of gods
sent forth to slay light bulbs
maim horses
and mangle the lives of beautiful women
he once told his wife
'if you leave me I'll have to kill myself-
then we won't have any new pictures to sell'
she said 'but then what we have
should go up in value, no?'

picasso was a glutton
and consumed all the wood in france
all the velvet in spain
and all the paper clips
in atlantic city new jersey
he snorted moondust with zeus
played pool with neptune
and wore a sable hat to bed
he once told his wife
'I am just a short insecure spaniard
who fears death and can't find
anywhere to hide'
she said 'who isn't?'
and served his evening coffee

picasso was a walking monsoon
selling umbrellas to tourists
he gave away pictures drawn with disappearing ink
then chuckled like a giant mechanical baby
sitting in a bucket of milk
the only critics he'd listen to were stray cats with one eye
and stubby paint brush tails

picasso could have been a great matador
but could not fit into the pants
he used to tell his wife
'bring me a number two pencil-
I feel another masterpiece coming on'
and she would put down the baby
and open the drapes

picasso was a gourmet
and cooked up a sack full of goat brains
that stunk up the house for three days
he spat neon bullets at the moon
and leapt from muse to muse
in pajamas splattered with linseed oil
rose petals and egg whites
life with picasso was no bowl of cherries
he left cigarette ashes all over the place
and made a mess of the carpets
picasso did not wipe very well
but nobody cared

warning

some guys like to wake up early
and dive into their obsessions
like a quick plunge into an icy creek

some guys like to come around slowly
with a cup of coffee
and catch their dreams as they fade
like images from an all-night movie

some guys like to stay in bed
because they are with somebody
they desire
and still desire more

and some guys like to keep sleeping
beyond the escape of waking
beyond the passions of dreams
beyond the need for rest

these guys scorn sensation
and prefer instead, to disappear
into a timeless formless world
these guys embrace
the void

do not hire them

Debbie Nigro

Birch Knoll

light, suffused with pink
streaming, catching,
 enveloping,
 caressing,
the paper thin covering of my soul



Debi Bodett

Dennis O'Donnell

be an open boat

be an open boat.
not to be concerned with
what to do, where to do it,
how to pull it off
forget that.

build a fire in the morning
and then put on warm shoes.

no work
no worry.

Marie Lundstrom

Columbia River Rising

Towns and homesteads disappeared
The river rising sucked them under
Farms and pastures melted down
Into slow blue hungry water

Rising wet chewed pink bluffs slowly
Hell Gate Rapids eased to ripples
Hungry water tamed rock killers
Kettle Falls: quaint Indian lore

Hell Gate Rapids, now bland ripples
And old Jerome a storied town
Kettle Falls just barely whispers
Its boiling voices early drowned

Old Jerome, and Peach its sister,
Drowned in floods to stop worse floods
Boiling voices slowly muted
Behind a concrete dam, man-made

Floods to stop more downstream flooding
Deaths of towns and trees and homes
A dam feeds power to famished cities
Thirsty factories, greedy towns

River rising killed pine meadows
Cheatgrass, flowers, snakes, and deer
Farms and pastures melted down
Towns and homelands disappeared.



Janet Levin



Janet Levin

Jason Marvel

Drowning

The ice cracked under foot
as I walked over Wasilla Lake.
Two nights ago,

you yelled you'd had enough
of this godforsaken place,
the darkness, the cold,
hills of dirty snow that line the driveway.

And I was afraid I'd fall through,
sun lifting in the sky as it
reflected off the ice,
cutting me.

I tried to follow the same
snow machine tracks,
deep grooved things,
sutures running along flesh,

but lost my way until the sound
like splitting wood,
like balloons popping,
like your eyes the moment

before you turn out the light,
told me to stop.

David McElroy

Weatherman Healing

--for Bob Scarbrough

"Left turn birds," he calls them,
the phalaropes spinning for bugs
on the tundra pond by the hangar.
Adults long gone to probably Mexico,
the young are left working plankton
up in a whorl from the shallows.

Step outside and it smells like fall.
Ice any day. How do they find their way?
It doesn't follow they wouldn't follow.
Is survival non-sequitor? But all
he says is, "Here on the water,
some turn right, more so in Chile."

Late at night when little that's good begins,
he drives again and again from coast to coast,
his war bride of thirty years beside him
shooting rolls of film: window glare, cactus,
cowboys, her foot, each motel. For modesty's
sake she eats her kimchee in the street.

This year when spring flew north
with all its geese and leaves she died.
Now he works overtime not to go home,
his house a house of house plants limp and leggy,
schefflera needing water, dip nets in the shed,
boat outside on its trailer all tarped over.

Some mornings promise busy work,
dry runs for the day to day, some day
the real thing. "Look here, Mr. Mirror,"
he says, shaving by instinct right jaw first,
"The herb for winter is oatmeal
in your shoes, good for the skin."

Back to work, he takes flight plans
for local flights. What joke, what cure
there is in weather he takes hourly:
wind something, pressure and sky something,
and temps he feels squinting west
into the face of Asia naming cold

as best he can with smaller
and smaller then negative numbers.

Melting Pot

It's gusting fifty when I taxi the Goose off the beach.
She waddles over stones in the shallows then settles
into the swell taking on the full load of her belly. This time
it's nine Samoans, each wide as a hatch cover on a freighter.
Somehow all the monkey motion of pistons in concert barking
Baroque plows us through spray, up on the step, and then into air.
The great wheel of a low driving up from the Gulf carries
and clobbers us over a ridge along with blasts from speakers
on a processor in the bay. "Take another piece of my heart out,
baby," Lady Joplin squalls. Injured love, sleet, pollen from Japan,
and iffy transport over the islands conflate. That night Icelanders
off a crabber and my crew mix it up at the hotel. Upstairs next door
I hear moaning, a child with ear ache? It's her mother, the barmaid,
our leggy darling, whimpering at the height of her powers.



Janet Levin

Zacualpa

*One of the things you have to avoid is
that people try to rewrite the history books.*

--Clyde Snow, forensic anthropologist

I remember them, the Quiché
watching TV in the institute
vestibule under the stairs.
I remember themes the tapes
promoted: democracy, beisbol,
and a cartoon on personal hygiene
where a Cantinflas look-alike
slinks off into the brush alone
thus illustrating the concept
don't shit in the *milpa*.

What you smelled working its way
up the stairs was wood smoke
from cooking fires soaked through
and through their hand-woven clothes,
work sweat, baby sweat,
and something somehow sweet,
maybe some mix of breast milk,
cane *chicha*, and diabetes breath.

How strange I must have appeared
coming down the stairs always
in a hurry shaking a few hands
on my way out to lunch.
How strange so many disappeared
and left the country, as authorities said,
having a good time in Paris or Mexico.

I never saw Zacualpa, those huts
on the mountain, special gardens,
nor big old church.

I never saw the storage shed
behind the church nor hooks
in the roof as witness to martyrs.

I was far away by then,
baby in my coat,
snowshoeing wild hills
of the North to make him sleep.



Janet Levin

But one day the army we trained
comes with civil patrols. On threat
of their own deaths they arrest
their neighbors. They rope them,
hang them from hooks
to question, beat, blood-splatter
the walls, and kill the fear
out of them, cut them down,
mulch them, bury them
in soft soil of the gardens.

Eventually comes harvest,
and I read the forensic report.
"Every skull out of the ground
is one less person living it up in Paris."

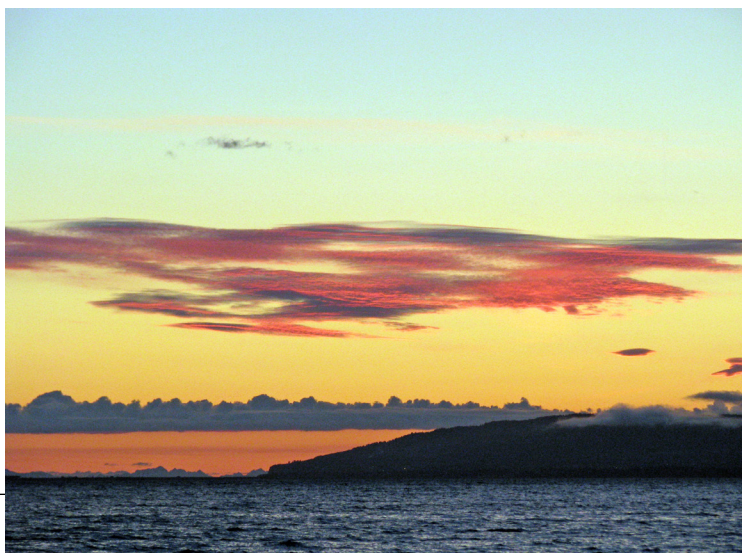
I have not seen the hooks
nor how fastened. If nails,
what hammer drove
them straight? If rock, what rock
was there to pound and peen over?
If rope or wire, how looped around
the beams? How roven
through holes and bight,
how snugged, how tied?
If wire, from what fence cut,
and how twisted? If bolts,
what size and arrangement?
How turned by what pliers,
what wrench? And by what hands,
so much like these
that meet and greet and shake
to make hold through pain and time,
neighbor, cousin, and brother,
jolt by living jolt?

 John McKay

Tundra Twilight

A Safeway sack beats its plastic wings
 above the sewage lagoon—sandhill crane
 lording it over swirling toilet paper
 swallows. Up the hill, wispy remains
 of nine dollar heating oil
 rise from chimneys silhouetted in
 sinking midday sun. Shadows variegate
 darkening tundra, and the hum of a
 snowmobile pierces tranquil infinity
 where fox and weasels roam through memory
 of mammoths, and moose browse the domain of
 the sabre-tooth cat. Brittle air bumps against yellow
 glow, *South Park* blares from the front room, and
 around the table, spread with Pilot Bread
 and agutáq, grandmother tells stories
 of her grandmother.

Debi Bodett



 Linnea McNally

o holy light

o,
 holy light

it is after dusk
 and i am holding a flashlight to my friend who's peeing in an outhouse.
 we're tucked deep into the pine-lined pocket of the mountains,
 an hour outside of smithers,
 trying to discover who we are in this brave new world.
 i am looking away, allowing for suburban privacy,
 staring at the moon, and
 thinking

o,
 this holy light
 under which we construct and deconstruct our towers.
 the higher they get, the sooner we forget about
 that holy light
 craning her face and pushing through
 the blue-black blanket that surrounds us and
 keeps us from the belching sun and its licking rays

the moon is cool and sad.
 i like to think of it this way:
 my sister used to say its face
 was that of a woman we knew from church
 while she washed dishes after social hour.
 the stars were her tattered scourers,
 and clouds her spilt foam.
 i would be sad if this too were my fate –
 to be eclipsed by the arrogant orb of day,
 to be the lonely lune of night.

i smile at her. she winks.
 i flick off the flashlight.

my friend and i,
 the two of us children *de la lune*,
 walk hand in hand
 back, past the fire in the centre of camp
 which keeps us warm tonight, and step
 into the ampitheatre we've been meaning to not miss:
 along the docks, cold and wet as a frog's tongue,
 and into the sleeping nod of the lake.
 naked, shivering, but aware –
 we are learning what it is
 we are meant to be
 and what we will never allow ourselves to become.

Rachel Mehl

Days Between Snow

March comes in like a lion and goes out like a lamb

The day after your mother told us of the cancer
in the ducts of her breasts all I could stomach
was wine, and milk heated by a barista
indifferent enough that when asked
about my day if I said, "I'm working,"
she'd say nothing and dump in the shot.

The morning before we'd found a note tucked
under your truck's wiper from the first woman
you loved, the one you lived with in the desert.
She'd stayed more than a summer
at your parents' house, slipped
away in winter, studying social work
while you rolled sushi in a casino restaurant.

When your mother told us the biopsy
had been done, that the worst part
would be telling your sister, I stopped wanting
to hurt the woman who'd paused at your truck
by showing her how close I'd grown to your dog.
I wanted, instead, to feed her and help her find a job.

I thought of the breasts being taken that fed
you as a fat bald baby, the body you were weaned
from as I, at five, started kindergarten
with my Strawberry Shortcake lunch box
and my crayons. How I love the fat
on your stomach, sweet butter
I've denied myself for years.

Now you say they found the cancer early.
Your mother may keep her breasts
and hair. You met the girl from your past
at the oldest dive in town. She wept
through drinks and wanted dinner
while I drew pictures on a white board
for a class of immigrants repeating "woman,"
"women," trying to teach irregular plurals in English.

This year Easter came early. An old friend
is having a baby. This morning tufts of snow
fell like wool. Too wet, you said, to be snow.
It is nearly April and these chunks are sticking.

Karla Linn Merrifield

An Equinox Vocabulary

Things I tried to hold
have slipped away as wolves
into spruce, ice in sunlight,
mountains into shade of other
mountains, another mountain range.
All I can now grasp of Alaska
is small words, little essences.

Yes, "mountain," is among these utterances,
like a child's idea of if, perfect pyramid
of solid rock, snow-capped, solo.

Also "water," as in salt & fresh,
silted gray or emerald, frothing or silent,
& as "ice," graveled or glacial blue-aqua.

I suppose "tree" is a syllable I speak newly,
seeing image of pipe-cleaner black spruce
straggling across limitless horizons.

But it is "wild" I know I know
for this first time in a lifetime
& it is everything I am not, never will be.



Janet Levin



Paxson Woelber – Where We, Like the Sun, Never Sleep

Jeff Oliver

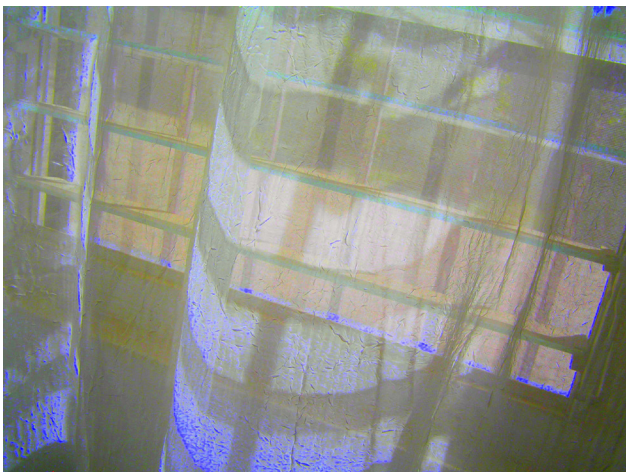
The Other Side of Solstice

Today is the longest day of the year in Alaska and probably other places too where you can walk downtown and get free checking and a chance to win a fishing trip where the sun burns mosquito bites in the midnight sundown day broken and gone like the thought in your head this morning at the stoplight on your way to work behind the woman in the Land Rover doing her “maybe-it’s-Maybelline” eyes in the sun visor mirror and the song ends just as the light turns green and you thought you could hold on to your brilliant Thursday desperate-for-a-thought thought but by the time you walk through the office doors and past the carpet-walled cubes and say hello to people whose chairs are now shaped like their asses or maybe it’s the other way around you’ve forgotten your thought altogether and don’t even remember you had the thought until almost eleven o’clock when you realize you’ve been drinking coffee you bought on Tuesday but it doesn’t really matter because your thought’s gone though maybe just back as far as the intersection to wait for you or hopefully only to the edge of the parking lot where you eat your lunch and maybe you’ll find it there on the sidewalk while you finish reading *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* or the *Selected Poems of Frank O’Hara* which you’ve been meaning to read all the way through for years and now the idea has caught up with the years and you finish reading the last poem in the book and just want to lie back on the warm sidewalk and take a nap listening to the ravens and finches and wake to find a trail of black ants all over your almost empty cranberry juice bottle and then walk down to the bookstore and find something by some young beautiful writer and fall in love but there’s bills so there’s work and days and days of eight hours at a time of passing carpeted cube walls and that feeling that you’re not you not being or becoming so you close your eyes and feel the warmth of the sidewalk on your back knowing the days are getting shorter now.

Jeremy Pataky

After This Life

The lisp of seasons we scarcely have left
 chime another morning haphazardly to light—
 time to find you in the woods, by the river,
 bereft of some false idea that once comforted you.
 All lines line up or lift their sullen voices like winds.
 If we could limit our house voice to mere thought
 and sense all thoughts, if we could eat
 or write our apple-tarted lives
 without ever sounding churlish or devised—
 I imagine first the changing leaves of trees,
 the morphing light of sunset striking slopes,
 where eager men careen up some false alpine,
 and nonplussed animals give up the idea of warmth.
 You thought my life was lifted up by smoke.
 You thought your child could learn to swim.
 We thought our lives could adopt elegant repetition.
 And should you stay honest
 as you should between the first and last
 of our thousand wedding days
 I will hold a match before my mouth
 and smoke the words *I do*—
 should I haunt you if I ever get the chance?
 Could I mask my voice with autumn
 and rake sentences through your trees?



Janet Levin



Debi Bodett

Jim Petit

The Golden Octopus

Bering Sea snow in a gusting wind
 Is hard enough without poor fishing.
 The hydraulics hiss as poly spins
 Up through dark fathom's heavy embrace:

King crab females, a few males—too small,
 One golden octopus I should toss,
 But someone names her and someone calls
 That name as her colors dazzle us.

Her every move is toward the sea
 And we're ready to put her back when
 The engineer swings his bait chopper,
 Severing her tender neck: "Damn thing!"

In an instant her brilliant colors
 Are white—I gather her arms in mine.
 Lifting a weight now empty and dull,
 I pour her slowly over the side,

Her tangle collapsing through grey foam.
 Then I remember feeling alone.

Coco Owen

Salmon Queen

From small-fry to fingerling,
Then a pink & punk juvenile—
Delinquent high-school beauty queen
& beauty-school dropout—
I was up-a-crick,
Crying a river there.

Fingering my ticket out of the sticks,
With a wad of money saved up,
I fishtailed my finned old boat of a
Cadillac out of The Dalles & down
The Columbia River Highway.

Child's play! Circus runaway!

I fish-laddered downriver,
Past all the damn sluice-gates,
& floated to the big city,
Where I parked it

In Portland. Washed up, & out
On the town, I lolled around
Burnside Bridge with the other runaways.

Started putting out,
Pouty-mouthed—my one-night stands'
Mad-money was fare for space
On a cargo ship shipping out
South Seas' way.

Crew saw me as a mermaid-type who,
Hooked, & a sort-of hooker,
Could serve as an honorary prow ornament
When I was not spit-shining their boots.

My maiden voyage: sick
In transit, I dished
At the captain's table, posing
As a starlet Venus on the half-shell.

& Captain, *Oh my!* That petty officer!
He flipped for me, & I flip-flopped,
Naked in his grasp, gasping for breath.
Not the pleasure cruise I'd dreamed of.

Up top & running, I decked all hands.
Shift-less & skiff-less, I was bounty, mutineering.
Pit of stomach a cairn, I life-jacketed myself,
Praying, *Preserve me!*

Didn't want to be the pearl
Setting in some Davy's locket,
Though fantasy bridal veils had
Always been a downfall.

Now I wanted to be the one that got away.
But he set his jib for me
& I jumped ship, panty-less.
Hope of *Water, water, everywhere*
Turned to teardrops in the drink,
While I rued that old salt what rimmed me.

Knocked-up & -about,
I was pirated, booty;
Captain-hooked and -cooked,
Trying to fathom my girlishly-figured,
Gang-bang-planked near-death.

Swimming a gauntlet of an inlet,
I survived a survival-of-the-fittest
Water-safety test.

Hawaiian Punch-drunk and
Bobbing, I did the dead-girl float
Green around the gills,
Then went aground.

I beached, wailing.
Islanded, I soloed: No man is land.
Or is crash stranding.

Cried me a kettle of fish,
When I found I couldn't get by on looks

Alone there—
Where were the Friday to my Tuesday
Weld? Ginger's supporting cast-aways?

I powdered my nose
With the atoll's white phosphorous,
& my mind was its land mine:
A bombshell

In iridescent make-up,
I vowed I'd give myself in trade
To escape the Pauline peril
I'd got into.

I was waving-&-drowning!—wishing
Myself back in the home waters
I'd left to better my fishy selfishness.

Bare-assed, I flashed the rocket-red
Nipples which stippled out of my toplessness
(Which the sun never set upon)
& the curvy beach of my belly
Already great with the seaman's
Teeming & leaping.

Caviar dreams!

A cutter passed; like of
Its scurvy squalor not seen since
Rule Britannia.
The scrawny conscripts
In her hold were white-as-cotton swabs
For whom I scratched a bad itch.

Borne aboard—their booby prize—,
Pregnant with fished-up, deep-sea wonder,
I let them bore me all the way back to waters
Smelled like home.

We entered the mouth of the Columbia
At Astoria, chugged on up
To the port of Portland.

I ran to ground & kissed it fish-lipped.
My sea legs failed me, swimmingly.
I minced along, crabby & bloated.
The sailors & I flipped out all the way
To the paymaster,

& I blanched a little, pocketing their
Bye-bye baby gifts of silver spoons
& onesies for my coming little snappers.

The cock-hatted sailors collared me
For mushy kisses I permitted
As their dismissal.

I sprang my barge of a Caddy out of
Its parking-lot dry-dock,
Then whip-tailed upstream,
Coasting into Hood River.
Gunned it to get home to
The berth I hadn't brooked well, back when.

Felt foreboding at a
Marina → *Welcome Home!*
Sign at the landing. The annual
Salmon Festival was on. They went & named me
Salmon Queen because they'd missed me.

My at-sea time,
That ocean-going & return?—
A sea-shanty I'd reenacted,

Running away in the shanghaied vessel
I was. Only to find myself
Home-sickly, a dull copper spectacle
Hungry & spent.

Guys from high school
Followed me around,
& maybe had tailed me all along, circling
In my wake. At it.

Milt they exuded spread
Through the water like dew
On the redd where I nested—
The profligate
Spending on the prodigal.

I brooded in my puddle of shallow
Streambed from-a-dream,
& belly-ached,
Hollowing out nest after nest
For my cosmopolitan spawn.

Rainspatter's water-colored light
Guttered, & I exhausted
My natural resources in the pooling dusk.
My turned-up eye
Reflects sky's salmon-skin colors.
I'm an escape hatch-

ery for the eons of homecoming queens
I would egg on.

Vivian Faith Prescott

Revelations

Praise to Goo For All Things—

The sign by the church said.
The large round 'D' looked
a lot like the letter 'O' beside it.

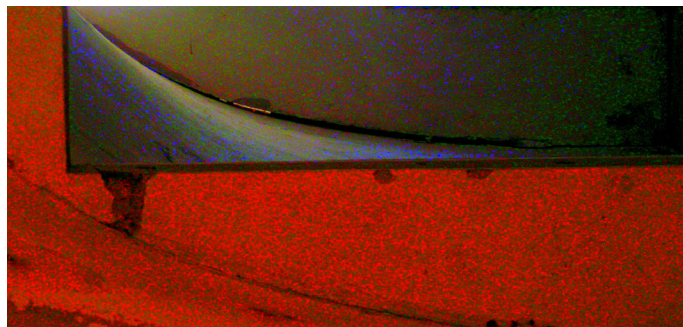
Yes, let us Praise to Goo for all things—

The Goo greasing my car's engine, the Goo
lubricating my joints to keep my hand waving
and writing, the Goo that repairs the sole
of my shoes, the Goo molding itself into a green
plastic hootchie that catches my salmon,

the Goo, slick and slimy on fishes skin, the Goo
that made my babies slide out from me,
the Goo fastening gold sparkles on paper
snowflakes. Oh yes, Praise to the Goos
that sticks, slicks, and slides,

the Goos forming molds, the Goos oozing
from a chocolate candy, the Goo
sweetening my tea, the gooey cytoplasm
in my basophiles fighting off my cold, and all
the mysterious organic Goos hidden
within our soil.

And if Darwin is right—Praise to Goo for all
our primordial Goo, praise to my ancestors:
the elders, Monomer and Polymer, who one day
crawled from the sludge,
singing all their praises to Goo.



Janet Levin

She's the splitting image of...

When you were young, I braided
your long blonde hair, whispered
You are Tlingit, but you looked into
the mirror and saw it split

into shards of silver-backed glass,
shattered, until they required us
to have it pasted together by some
bureaucrat at the BIA

so when they analyzed it, yours said
6/32, so they tested again: The final
result was 3/16. Good enough,
they said and mailed you the card

you carry to show you're due
a free tuition at Fort Lewis College.
They reward you with a bachelor's
degree and send you out, their Indian

in the world—a quota filling a job
as a hotel clerk, where your boss
tells you not to rent rooms to those
Mexicans and Indians, suspicious

dark-skins, and when you try
to show them, to remove your blood
quantum card from your pocket,
it hooks on the threads of your great

grandparents' blankets and fishnets
unraveling, catching you unprepared,
and jerks from your hand. It falls
to the floor, where you bend

to pick it up and notice yourself
staring at your broken reflection
and you realize that everyone—even you,
believes in this theory of fragments.

Bob Ritchie

Will Heaven Have Denali?

Will heaven have Denali?
Will this spot of blood-red bearberry,
engulfed in golden leaves of dwarf willow,
on which I sit, be there?
And will heaven's skies be filled with the raucous calls of sandhill cranes,
their grand, spiraling kettles immersed in deep, deep blue?
And shouldn't the evening's autumn sun be there
to greet daily changing colors of September along the Nenana's crumbling bluffs?
Will bull moose rattle their inverted chandeliers of horn
against each other in heaven?
If not, what's the draw?

Alicia Ristau

The Sand Man

In a dream realm
my friend Stephane
lives and sleeps.

His mind is a hole,
a fiery fury fantasy
in which reality, mythology,
and religion are one, one impenetrable
substance.

All his characters have wings,
but very few are dragons.

Human,
at breakfast he sits on the walkway
like a hobo waiting for change,
but he just likes to draw without shoes.

A hero to comic pages,
he draws in black and white
ink, *encre de Chine*,
illustrations of characters,
visual expressions of his dreams,
but not nightmares.

He depicts scenes and clouds
he remembers, swords and swamps
when he aches for the one he loves,
but the paper swallows
the black ink
when his pen hits the eyes
and the pen dust moves as sand dunes
in the desert;
his work
now invisible
is real.

Living his morning,
Stephane puts back his shoes on
and walks on the white dust of cement
streets; eyes engraved in the air, without pupils
he looks at the sun and doesn't burn; a breeze
tackles his jeans and he falls into particles
of his designs, filed away in his bag.

The bag left on the street, alone.



Paxson Woelber - These Woods Have Ears

 Suzanne Scarfone

Dream Forest

alone
 along the Yukon River
 great river
 large stream
 my grandfather
 smelling of turpentine and sweat
 revisits the wet beauty
 of his childhood landscapes
 his painted life
 the center of all his work

the pull of the water
 brings back
 the past
 what home looked liked
 and his mother
 dead from Spanish flu
 shortly after
 her daughter fell over
 plop
 from her wooden highchair
 onto the worn kitchen floor

water rushes by
 in dreams of
 his young self
 twirling and lurching
 and landing
 in soft birch leaves and
 bundles of magenta fireweed
 dirt glistening
 warm
 and bright
 as glacier-white ewes
 dancing in sweet grass
 fatten up
 waiting to sprout their lambs

golden eagles
 lesser yellowlegs
 green-winged teals
 hermit thrush
 bohemian waxwings
 swamp sparrows
 trill with desire
 through the cloud-ridden obscurity
 of this boyhood forest delirious with sound
 white spruce, black spruce
 aspen, balsam poplar
 the peeling bark of memory entwined with bird song
 trees and birds
 all the names he learned and sang

 to bring sleep to his baby sister
 huddling close to her cot
 the flesh of his boyhood
 fragrant with the loam of nature

dozing again
 he sees himself in May
 climbing a tree and
 jumping on to a cloud in some
 daily heaven
 floating gray and loved
 looking out at a blue
 full of little boats
 sugar boats
 carrying dew-green moss
 through the sky

then wandering sweet and cool
 through lupines, wild rose
 wintergreen
 arctic poppy
 and forget-me-nots
 as blue as the river he loves
 great river

large stream
 he sprawls on the bank listening to
 the Yukon drip candied
 hymns into
 the wind
 and the dusk
 washes his face
 silver
 with star storms

now
 traveling
 all the way back
 back
 before his heart began to lose sleep
 and the plaintive cry of mourning warblers
 befriended him in grief
 he sees
 his mother by the window
 humming and swaying
 and his sister breathing in a tiny
 birch cot
 in the corner
 made from this dream
 forest
 he paints
 along the
 Yukon River
 great river
 large stream

the flow within himself
 the running sound of life

Linda Schandelmeier

Today Is All They Have

When my uncle drives up on his new motorcycle
we run outside and gawk
while he grins, revs the engine
and rides on the concrete walkway
around the house. He muscles that machine
through the tight turns,
then stops in front, kickstand down.
The sun collects in the folds of his leather jacket,

his black hair combed back like Fabian.
Inside he teaches us a card game
called Fifty-two Card Pickup, (he throws
the cards into the air and we pick them up),
pulls a nickel from behind
my brother's ear, and steals my nose.
We wonder what Mom will say
about these shenanigans.

But when we look, she is smiling.
They laugh together,
the soft shape their arms take
as they talk, the easy movements.
Later she tells how she took care of him
after their mom got sick,
like he was her child. I imagine her
cooking salmon and picking berries,

sweeping the floor, wiping his tears.
Years later she'll read in the newspaper
that pieces of his fishing boat, *The Silver Star*,
washed up on the beach, caught in a fall storm,
his body never found.
But she doesn't know that now.
She doesn't know, that today is all they have,
the yard steeped in light.



Janet Levin

Tom Sexton

Apple

The apple I waited to pick until after
the first snow had sweetened its flesh
the one I cut to share with my wife
is waiting on the counter for her to appear
in our kitchen. Its seeds are chestnut brown.
The kettle on the stove sings "all we know
is absence, and absence is all we know."
I pour a cup of tea with my long dead father's hand.

Leslea Smith

In Air

One day vine maple leaves,
loosened at the stem,
flown from limbs.

One week rain, veiling
fractal alder branches,
twigs set shivering.

Five minutes hail, white noise,
hushing small talk
among siskins and chickadees.

Two hours sleet, silent shards
innocuous in atmosphere,
confused blur at front's edge.

More rain.

Two days snow without wind,
cold incarnate,
murmured prayers.

One day catkins, early deciduous
seedlings, beaded baubles,
rustic Mardi Gras.

More rain.

One afternoon plum blossom petals,
pearled confetti,
welcome and farewell.

One day cottonwood seeds,
bolls of batten,
summer spindrift.

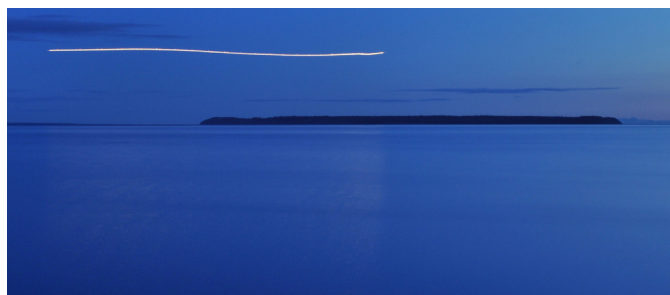
More rain.

Three weeks dandelion seeds,
pop art weeds, betraying
gusts in still-seeming space.

One week chestnuts, Hopkins' fresh
firecoal, encased in caustic fortresses
of spikepods dropped.

More rain.

Leaves again.



Paxson Woelber – Fire Island Firefly

Charles Thielman

Oar swirls below a night sky

Swan glint on black emeralds,

may feathered silence dissolve
into the skin of my arms.

Wake spread below a half moon
liquefies the pace mined
from a day spent
checking the sequence
of trains, boxcar after boxcar

sent on through summer haze
to shipping and receiving docks

and the sweated backs
of timed factory workers.

Swan glint on black emeralds,

my long stretch pulling on oars,
then pause to watch water reflect sky
forty miles away from swing-shift turbines,
the blank chart pad on tomorrow's clipboard.

Lit cabin windows and fireflies near birch,
I push and pull the oars, point the bow east,

boat full of moonlight crossing my 26th August.

Stephen Delos Treacy

Emily Wall

Yards

New sun warms our yards.
The pudgy man drips with sweat
Planting dahlia bulbs.

Spring inspires new life.
Two nice ladies fertilize
Their currant bushes.

Three brave boys cut grass,
Daring dandelions to show
Their yellow faces.

The family next door
Collects piles of twigs and prunes
Their raspberry vines.

On the back deck, my
Chicken fricassee is burnt
Offering to the sun.

Naming the Birds

As I flip through the Sibley Guide
looking up a duck who arrives
with a splash,
I wonder about Eve—

did she learn from Adam
the name *Northern Pintail*?
Was she taking notes
as he said *Mallard, Blackbird*?

Or did the birds tell her
(as Adam checked them off
his life list), winging over her
head,

*look at me, my loose
bones of flight*

their names just opening
on the wet tongue of her heart—

and suddenly she knew them
like she knew everything—

*this is a goose,
this quiet place by the river Tigris
is mine, and my name is Eve.
Recognize me.*



Mike Burwell

Paul Winkel

Plenty

Moss chinks the logs,
a rusting tin roof.
I knock on the rough wood door.

When it opens,
I say I'm with the Public Health Service.
We want to give you running water,
a flush toilet and septic system.

A clear eyed woman around eighty
invites me in for coffee.

She lifts the stained enamel pot
from the crackling wood stove,
pours strong black coffee
into a chipped white cup.

I live here all my life, she says,
haul water, chop wood,
me and my family
always have enough to eat.

She points to a bare light bulb
hanging from the low ceiling.
My cousin put in a wire from his place,
when he runs his motor, I have light.

I show you something.
She takes me outside, around back.
A black plastic pipe draped over a log
gushes a steady stream of water.

Two years ago, my son put in that pipe
from the pond up the hill.
Water runs all year.
Outhouse over there is all I need.

I never live so easy
or have so much.
I don't want things
that should go to people
who need them more.

We go inside,
you finish coffee,
find someone who needs this
more than me.

Tonja Woelber

On The Road From Haines to Tok

We ride long waves of blue mountains, letting our thoughts
drift, swirl, pool, like spring ponds along the road,
some still holding ice pans, others adrift with wood, grass,
the startling white of returning swans –
yet even these fade to distance, leaving me
to contemplate my list of chores: clearing flower beds,
buying food for tomorrow's guests, arranging flowers in vases,
vases like the urn we admired yesterday in Haines,
yellow cedar adorned with a carved branch of fireweed,
holding the ashes of a loved wife of thirty years, her husband,
newly met, sharing his tears with us after we told him, laughing,
how we were mistaken for honeymooners on the Haines dock
by a man caulking the hull of his sailboat, who, on seeing us,
congratulated us on our happiness, a happiness no one anticipated,
least of all my husband's mother, with her stern faith,
her eyes wide and blue as the sky above the Kansas prairie
she was born to, no idea what to make of her oldest son's bride,
an Easterner with a raucous laugh who would not have survived
a small town's pressure for conformity, even so, trials since
made us fast friends, and I mourned her death as I have mourned no other,
except my grandmother's, a Main Line matriarch who met life like a bullfighter
entering a ring, utterly fearless, playing to the audience, and always
beautifully dressed; I thought she was royalty when she drove up
to our row house in a silver Buick with red leather seats,
a fox stole around her neck, its tiny feet clasped in its thin, sharp teeth;
it took me three years to accept that she was gone; true to form
she turned her back on us, took Death's hand and crossed the threshold,
never looking back, I know now
she is playing canasta with the angels, probably cheating,
her only regret that rum-and-cokes are not on heaven's menu,
but loving the singing, the pageantry, and looking down on me here,
50 miles from Tok, she and my husband's mother,
loving me, cheering me on, wishing me all the best.



Sandra Kleven – Hill and Joe's Store, Hooper Bay



Tyler Kleven

Changming Yuan

Waiting

There is a long wait of the passengers
For the detouring and delayed bus
And the wait of the wintry grasses

The wait of the legendary lion king
Before it preys upon a real baby zebra
And the wait of the summer sun deep in the nightmare

The wait of the orchid on the window ledge
The wait of the diamond in an unknown mine
And the wait where you stop and watch

And there is a wait of this darkness
Which you are going to compress into words
A wait that is to spread out thin on the blank paper

Unlike winter stars holding their light in light-years
The wait after you finish writing
And the longer wait then

Maya Zeller

Before My Period Came

That was the autumn
the river beneath the bridge
was a tray
of earrings: salmon
so thick you could forget
they were fish.
I thought about wearing
their scales,
being salmon-
woman, a new kind
of superhero,
capable of stopping
the flood, making
it go again. I thought
about how their tails
swished,
watery, hips
tight and jerking.
I thought about Lucas,
his jeering lips,
black pants smeared
with roe.



Janet Levin

Snowberries

What was it you saw in the white orbs
which hung above your face
like light glinting off green branches?

These are not the smears of paint
your mother taught you
to finish an animal's eyes with,

to give it the glow a human expects
in one she's tamed.
You were not tame, not glow, not

human. Though at first you played
the way the other children
played, stayed red at the mention

of too much skin out of a bathing
suit. But we're ahead
of ourselves. First, let's remember:

As a girl, you picked dozens to ride
in the thimble-sized baskets
of your dolls' wagon party going west.

And at night, not knowing how later
you'd curse yourself for it,
you circled the group against natives,

against the source of what you called
apples, the things a story
taught were your whole species' downfall.

What if these fruits were not so
poisonous as they say,
if you didn't treat them as the corpse

berries they were so often called?
Some tribes, the plant book
tells you, would eat one or two

to settle the stomach after too much
fatty food. Go
ahead. Your life has been rich

with fat. Let the cluster fall
like diamonds to your palm.
Choose one. Place it on your tongue.



Janet Levin

PLAY

John Longenbaugh

Affairs with the Moon

*I had had an affair with the moon,
in which there was neither sin nor shame.*
--Laurence Sterne

General Notes: this is a bit of a dreamy piece. The actors, particularly the actor playing the moon, should resist the urge to rush or play up the comedy. The comedy's there, but it'll come out a lot easier if you just take your time. The four women don't interact with each other. At times they're talking to the moon. At times the moon talks back. A suggestion: this plays well with music. I suggest: Miles Davis—track four off of *Kind of Blue*, "All Blues."

Time: A warm summer night with a full moon.

BERTIE, JO-JO, SALLY, TAYLOR

I saw the moon last night.

BERTIE

(a young woman, about 15, seated in a Ferris Wheel.)
I was way up top of the Ferris Wheel, right at the top, all alone in my seat, colored lights and music and the noise of the crowd below, and I saw this little boy look up, and I followed his look, and there it was.

JO-JO

(an older woman, 40-60, sitting by herself on her fire escape, perhaps drinking a glass of wine, meditative.)
There he was.

BERTIE

The moon.

THE MOON

(entering, played by a man. He's a pretty cool customer. He makes a slow cross from one side of the stage to the other during the course of the play, a long low orbit between the actors and us.)
That's right.

SALLY

(a young woman, late teens or early 20s. Her clothes and hair are mussed, with maybe a few leaves mixed in. She's lying down in the woods.)
It's funny. I always think of the moon as a guy.

THE MOON

In Germany I'm known as "Herr Mond."

SALLY

He was shining through the leaves of the trees, greenwhite light like mentos, floating slowly in the hot summer air like a ghost.

THE MOON

I do have a certain ghost-like quality.

TAYLOR

(in her twenties, wearing a wedding dress, standing on the balcony of her resort hotel.)
He looked very romantic. Out there, over the lagoon. His reflection dancing on the water below.

THE MOON

You look absolutely lovely in my light.

TAYLOR

Really?

THE MOON

Man. Wish I had a camera.

JO-JO

Every time I see the moon, I think...

SALLY

Of a story I read once, where everything wasted on the earth is found in big storehouses on the moon. Money, unanswered prayers, pointless tears...

THE MOON

I keep it all carefully labeled. I've got big warehouses full of talent, for example. You all waste a lot of talent down there.

TAYLOR

He looks so perfect. He looks like what I imagined he would look like on this night.

THE MOON

Golden. Sweet.

TAYLOR

My honey moon.

THE MOON

Did I tell you how gorgeous you look?

TAYLOR

Oh. I don't think you used that word before.

THE MOON

Gorgeous.

TAYLOR

Really?

THE MOON

Really.

SALLY

I wonder what I've wasted that's up on the moon now.

THE MOON

Time! I've got acres and acres of time! This part of me? It's called the Sea of Tranquility! Just hundreds of miles of nothing but time!

SALLY

I wonder if he's got my virginity.

THE MOON

I don't think it's here.

SALLY

It'll be there soon. I lost it about an hour ago.

JO-JO

Every time I look at the moon I think...

BERTIE

The kid down below is pointing up at the moon. He's pulling on his Mom's hand. I think he's crying.

THE MOON

What's wrong with that kid?

BERTIE

Oh, I get it. He thinks it's a big balloon.

THE MOON

That's one dumb kid.

BERTIE

Yeah. You do sort of look like a balloon though.

THE MOON

How?

BERTIE

You're round, and you're up in the sky...

THE MOON

If he thinks I'm a balloon, that little boy is in for a whole lifetime of disappointments.

BERTIE

You think so?

THE MOON

Definitely.

JO-JO

He reminds me...

SALLY

Where is Greg?

BERTIE

Don't you think it's a good thing to have ambitions?

THE MOON

Well, sure. If he's planning on being an astronaut or something, fine. But thinking I'm a balloon? That's delusional.

JO-JO

Why am I thinking about him right now?

SALLY

I am so lost. I have no idea where the car is. This pale mint green light messes everything up. Sun rises in the East, right? So how about the moon?

THE MOON

Don't ask me. I just come from over there and go over there. Look for moss. I think it's supposed to grow on the North side of trees.

SALLY

You're no help.

THE MOON

I'm really more about a general atmosphere.

SALLY

I wonder if Greg's coming back any time soon.

THE MOON

Wouldn't bet on it.

SALLY

No?

THE MOON

Number one: his sense of direction is even worse than mine. Number two: why would he?

SALLY

To guide me back to my car?

THE MOON

You really think so.

SALLY

No.

JO-JO

He reminds me of my ex-husband.

THE MOON

(the voice of the ex-husband)

Hey, admit it, Jo-Jo, honey, you miss me.

JO-JO

I don't mean you look like my ex-husband.

THE MOON

Oh.

JO-JO

He was an astronomer. We'd sit out on the roof of our apartment building, warm under a blanket, looking up at this big beautiful moon, and he'd be telling me its diameter...

THE MOON

A trim 2,155 miles.

JO-JO

How long it takes to orbit the earth...

THE MOON

A jaunty 27.3 days.

JO-JO

And how there is ongoing debate about whether or not its core contains molten rock or iron.

THE MOON

I'm not telling.

JO-JO

My ex-husband was the least romantic man in the world.

SALLY

"Let's go look at the moonlight in the woods." Now doesn't that sound romantic. And I fell for it.

TAYLOR

I hear music.

THE MOON

Miles Davis.

TAYLOR

Yeah?

THE MOON

A late-night jazz station, tuned in by the bus boys in the restaurant below.

TAYLOR

This is all so very romantic that I feel like I'm going to die.

THE MOON

No one ever died from moonlight.

TAYLOR

I might be the first.

SALLY

I wish Greg would fall down a gully and die.

THE MOON

Is that an official wish?

SALLY

Yes.

(beat)

No.

(beat)

Maybe.

JO-JO

So why am I thinking about Walter twenty-five years after our divorce?

THE MOON

Maybe you still love him.

JO-JO

Yeah, right.

THE MOON

Maybe he's changed. Look at me! I change all the time!

JO-JO

Yeah. You change like Walter used to change. "I'll listen! I'll be more romantic!" A month later I'd be in bed alone at midnight and he'd be back on the roof, with his telescope and his star charts.

SALLY

How do I make it an official wish?

THE MOON

Don't worry, it's all taken care of.

TAYLOR

This is exactly what I dreamed my wedding night would be like. Moon, music, water, wedding dress...

THE MOON

Dancing...

TAYLOR

Dancing.

(they dance for a bit. It's romantic.)

THE MOON

So where's the groom?

TAYLOR

Passed out in the next room. He mixed margaritas with his antihistamines.

THE MOON

Never mind, beautiful. You've still got me.

TAYLOR

That's something.

SALLY

I think I can see the car. There. Through the trees.

THE MOON

Good eyes.

SALLY

God. What a wasted, stupid, idiotic night. I hope Greg is having a worse time than me.

THE MOON

Oh, he is.

SALLY

Good.

(she exits, or disappears)

THE MOON

(sotto voce)

Was.

JO-JO

Moon?

THE MOON

Yeah?

JO-JO

How could I have stayed with that man for six years? What did I ever see in him?

THE MOON

Just because a guy's an astronomer, doesn't mean he's not a romantic. What he saw was beautiful. He just didn't use the right words to describe it.

(she exits, or disappears)

TAYLOR

Moon?

THE MOON

Yes, my sweet?

TAYLOR

Is this as good as it gets?

THE MOON

For now.

(she exits, or disappears)

BERTIE

Moon?

THE MOON

Yes, Bertie?

BERTIE

Okay and here's the story. I want this night over again. Because this is all very very nice. It is. I like the Ferris Wheel and the music and the lights and swaying back and forth in this warm summer night air and I LOVE you up there, just right there. But I want to go back about an hour to when Jackie asked me if I'd ever kissed a girl and I said oh right like I would, and she said oh yeah like I would, and then she said she had to get home, and I said later and she said later. But this time I want to say no I've never kissed a girl but I would like to, and then I'd ask her if she wanted to go up in the Ferris Wheel, and I wish that she was with me up here right now.

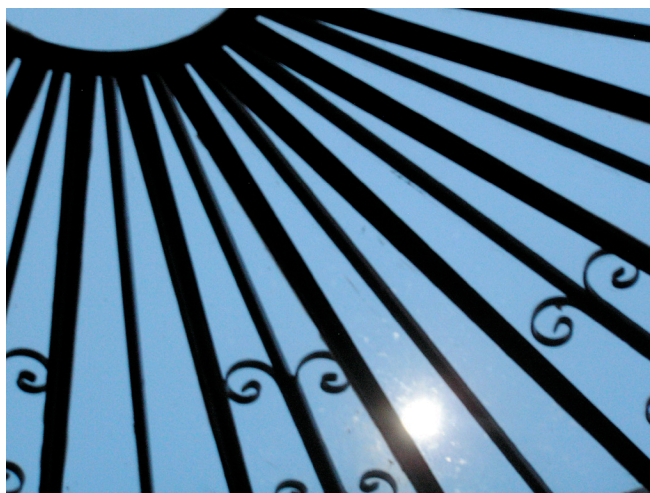
THE MOON

You're wishing for the moon.

BERTIE

A girl's got to have ambitions.

THE END



Janet Levin

NONFICTION

Sandra L. Kleven

The Canny Invention

*In order to write a poem,
you have to invent a poet to write it*

—Antonio Machado

I enter my last decades. In diminishing moments, in the vanishing, I call myself poet and begin the canny invention. Working blind, at the backside, imagining great accomplishment, I am slow to turn the tapestry for cold examination in the light.

~~

In the fall of 2003, I had come to a turning point. It was time to keep the promise, pay the debt. I was not well prepared, not shiny, well turned, or fit. I had no dress for the ceremonies. Just show up naked, I told myself. Someone will make sure you get a dress. I introduced myself as a poet. I wrote this verse.

... I am so used to uncertainty it has become certain.
I am giving up the pain biz' for the po' biz.
I am giving up sentiment for cement
grief for concrete.
I am developing a new edge.
I have bite.

This turn was precipitated, in part, by the tragedies of Western Alaska and by my disillusion with the agencies charged with serving those in need. My guts were curdled. I was made ill. I was dropped at the seawall; disappointed, powerless, used and co-opted. Risk aversion, lawyers, limits on client services, compassion dead in a corner; this compounded by corruption in Juneau had mutilated the heart of the system. I needed bite.

This wasn't a leap for me. I knew what it meant to be anti-establishment. Maybe, I was rediscovering my real self. My kids were grown and I no longer had to go fuzzy on principle just to feed them. I wanted to do something about all this bad, bad, stuff.

Theodore Roethke said that the dead poets will help the new poet. "Let me say boldly, that the extent to which the great dead can be invoked, or can come to us, can be eerie or astonishing." He writes that he felt "the unmistakable sense of a presence – as if Yeats himself were in that room." It was, "...in a way, terrifying, for it lasted at least half an hour." The house was "... charged with a psychic presence: the very walls



Linnea McNally

seemed to shimmer. I wept for joy...the poets dead...were with me."

Though, not a young poet, I was fresh to the work of it and I felt that Roethke, until his death in 1963, had been a witness to my entire life. He did not know me, but we breathed the same air and suffered the same Seattle weather. For fifteen years, we were, most days, no more than five miles apart – Roethke at the University of Washington and me at Olympic View Elementary, or other North Seattle schools.

From Theodore Roethke's life and poetry, I have learned something about how to be a poet in the world. I feel the sweet catastrophe that clatters over tide rocks and speaks in the bubbling chatter of the wren. The wren and Roethke, somehow, slipping into my own catastrophes, a mystic, hanging out with the dead. "The dead want their portraits painted," he said. So I invoked Theodore Roethke and made a movie about him.

The film opens as these words cross the screen:

In 1947, Theodore Roethke came to teach poetry at the UW. He found a home at Seattle's Blue Moon Tavern, where happenstance united cynics, poets, philosophers, artists, and anarchists. High thought and low urges dallied in an alcohol

blurred hotbed of tolerance – coherent enough to last 75 years. Roethke died in 1963. Nothing much has changed at the Blue Moon. It's twice as big. Roethke's portrait hangs above the pool table – and the ghosts make poetry of every stray word.

Roethke returned the favor by speaking to me of my life. This is not such a reach. I believe the dead can know whatever they choose to know – might address whomever they choose to address. So he has addressed me. He has helped me to find vigor in addressing the world's dull wickedness. He has freed me from allegiance to rigid rules of poetics. Of that edge, that bite, where I was clutching, blindly, toward some quality of voice, he says,

Who wants to read one who is being good – that predictable transit – the risks all in the direction of proving the good of good, the good of God, and the good of the Godly? Blind adherence to rules cools the rough dark heat of a good poem. You have been a social worker for too long. You will prefer the wild over here on poetry's dark sigh. (Does he mean to say, side?).

Then, Roethke proves that he knew me all along, saying,

Sandra, remember who you are. You have roots with the beats, the hip, the absurdists -- Albee, Beckett, Ionesco, Genet. You have been enthusiastically absurd. You got your kicks on Route 66 (at least figuratively). In high school, you read Burroughs, Naked Lunch; skimmed it, anyway, for nasty parts. They were everywhere, in that incoherent logarithm of junk and "jissom," Of cum and spunk, which appeared several times on every page. Shocking and strange. But, setting aside the cum, you understood Burrough's search for ways to free the mind -- to break out of preconditioning in order to reach something untouched, something worthy. You read broadly in this genre of the uneasy and discontented, Mailer's Advertisements for Myself, Durrell's Alexandria Quartet, and Paul Krassner's Greenwich Village rag, "The Realist." That Harvard boy, Charlie! He sent you this stuff. You loved it -- intoxicating, forbidden – and a contrast to the bland sprawl of beige, out beyond Seattle's north end.

Sandra! You lamented about the felt yoke of conformity – as a teen-ager! There are witnesses. You hankered, you hungered, for depth of experience, imagining yourself among ex-patriates on Paris' Left Bank, with days spent scrawling notes in a café and nights lost drinking Vin Rose from a jug. You wanted to suffer, to burn with outrage. You could pronounce Sorbonne!

You need to feel this, free from constant (conditioned) nattering against the indulgence of either pride or self-pity. Escape for a moment from the shame of commiseration with self. Be sad for your losses. Suffer. For just these moments, look at this: Four months from high school graduation, you were sent home – expelled -- because the administration discovered you were pregnant. They had, for years, impressed on you your high potential for achievement but, with child, they wanted you gone like an infection. Tired with pregnancy, you had no energy to fight this.

Now, open a vein and bleed. I tell you again, suffer. The minions will be drawn like ants. Take a stick and poke at the dirt where they enter underground chambers. You have done this in the past. There are names for girls like you.

But you see how you embraced a different kind of morality? The core of it was kindness. These men in the school didn't ask you about the baby -- if you were giving it away or planning to raise it? You were just four months from graduation. What was their slogan? No jobs without a diploma! At this juncture, when education was crucial to the future of a girl and her baby, it was trumped by the need to pretend adherence to a sex based morality – ala Hester Prynne! It was good for you to get away from this hypocrisy. You would find better people, somewhere.

It should be known by all that you were not expecting Charlie's child, and that, knowing this, he left Harvard -- spent three days on a bus -- to be with you, to stay with you. The baby's father had no real interest in you or the baby. Once Charlie became more than words on paper, you found something together in the U District. We all did.

~~

The Blue Moon tavern in the University District was the center of a social milieu that included professors, poets, Marxists, artists and alcoholics. There was an ethic of inclusion and no one passed judgment -- except against the squares.

In 1963, when I arrived in the district, expelled from high school, I was too young to drink at the Moon. But when the high school administrators pushed me out, these wild ones embraced me – made me feel like I rode the leading edge of cool. That's nice at eighteen.

This was a critical time for America. In 1963, some of us began to push, toward something we could not see -- to get away from it all, to get out of town. Messy, we left a crumb trail, but only by chance... others picked up on it, but, early on, we had no sense that we were blazing a generation's trail, something that would be historical in scope. Eventually, the world followed but in the beginning, it was not like that. Back then, there were a lot of kids in bedrooms, smoking stolen Kents, reading the Alexandra Quartet, wanting to be more real, while a transistor radio blared, "In the Still of the Night." I was a girl in a bedroom feeling lost. At eighteen, I climbed into a wide bed with Marxists, philosophers, cynics and poets. For a year, I lived in the University District of Seattle with my infant son, Michael-Peter, and my Harvard boyfriend, Charlie; then, we moved to New York.

In New York, my boyfriend and I had dinner with the poet, Louise Glück, and other friends. She was already known as the winner of the Yale Younger Poet award. A few months later, I discovered Glück's framed photograph in my boyfriend's underwear drawer. For awhile, Charlie continued to see both of us. Glück wrote a poem about it. How our hero wiped

sweat from his beaded brow, as he leapt from bed to bed. In her poem, I was the unwed mother and she called herself, correctly, as it turned out, his unwed wife.

Again, Roethke speaks to me: *You remember now. You did some acid and understood the universe. Pot made you paranoid and twice put you into five minutes of white blindness. One time, you shot up amphetamine, just to be able to say you had tried it. You did. I am not judging you. You left it alone after that. You saw what was happening to the A-heads, the speed freaks. They didn't look well.*

Sandra! You hate to be judged. At the same time, you wanted to love anyone you felt like loving. That was a little naïve. You experimented with things. You were as curious as a chemist.

~~

In the spring of 1965, my two-year-old son and I left New York for Seattle and, eventually, San Francisco. I was twenty. We spent a few weeks in Mexico and then hitchhiked, from the Mexican border at Mexicali, back to San Francisco, where we stayed with some people we'd never met before, possibly squatting, in two tall houses on Bush Street. We heard that Allen Ginsberg had become fascinated with our collective living arrangement. I knew who he was and loved the idea



Michael Kleven

that in some "leading edge" way our scene held attraction for him. Ginsberg returned, day after day, often to end up seated with about ten of us, in a circle on the floor, making music with drums, tambourines, spoons, pots, whatever anyone could grab and use to keep a beat. Sitting, with three-year-old Michael-Peter between my knees, I scrawled a note and handed it around the group to Ginsberg. It was something my son liked to say, when he was glad or excited, "You make my happys come." I worried later, that Ginsberg might have thought the words had a sexual connotation, a concern only because we all knew he was gay and I didn't want him to think me so dense as to be hitting on him.

Between Ginsberg and Glück, it seemed to me that the poetry beat was covered in America. In 1967, Glück married

my former boyfriend and I married someone else. From the sanctuary of married life (then, twenty-two years old), I wanted to write about everything that had happened since I left Seattle, the scene, as I called it then, the hipsters in New York City, my march on Washington with the anti-war movement, my time as an art model posing at the Art Students' League and sometimes posing for famous painters, my friends in the Haight, my trek down the coast of Mexico where we met up with Ken Kesey's Merry Pranksters.

As a young woman, as someone's wife, I found that the rolling hills of marriage and the attendant requirements of wifehood sapped me of vitality, a little at a time. I nearly died of it. I tried to die. I was at times in full despair. I could not go on. I could not get out of bed. But my rough passage, in extremis, brought my husband closer. He was willing to look deeply and see where I was marked as a log might be crossed by hatchet blows. My husband began to love me more than he knew was possible. He accepted me and became the scaffolding of my life.

In the early days of my marriage (and hers), I wrote to Glück for advice in writing. I was holding to my belief that there should be no ownership in relationships. Charlie was free, always, to go. Because of the early magic with him, loving by way of letters for nearly a year before meeting, the way he saved me from feeling demeaned when I was kicked out of school with his marathon cross-country bus trip, and how he stood beside me in the birthing room, I saw us as meant for each other. When I finally accepted that our relationship was over, I struggled with the loss of the future that I (at least) had imagined. Due to this muddiness of heart, even though I had moved on and married someone else, writing to Glück made me feel bad. I stopped writing after a few exchanges and felt soured on poetry.

In this period of regrouping, I put Glück above me, as exceptional. I did not consider that I might have similar qualities – that I might be a poet. This should not be read as a lack of positive self-concept. I absolutely knew I had some rare thing of my own. I had been told that I had exceptional abilities in language. My dot was always lonely in the far right edge of the normal curve. I was trying to be a steward to the garden entrusted to my care. Married with a five year old, expecting another at age twenty-three, I didn't know how to reach the next landing (next winnowing?), so I fell back.

~~

Roethke tells me this: *Hear this now. You know this. Beyond drugs. Beyond the wish for love -- how there is work and the work's work. How there is something you chew in the swamp of your mouth -- you know that taste -- honey and bile. You swallow it whole. If you are to end your life without a sense of failure, it will be because, outside of your ramblings, this half digested thing has come up again as swell stuff, well formed, refined. You close your eyes, blue and black mingle. Your fancy isticked. "None the less, in spite of all the muck and welter, the dark and the dreck of these poems, I count myself among the*

happy poets." You can be happy, too, Sandy. You can.

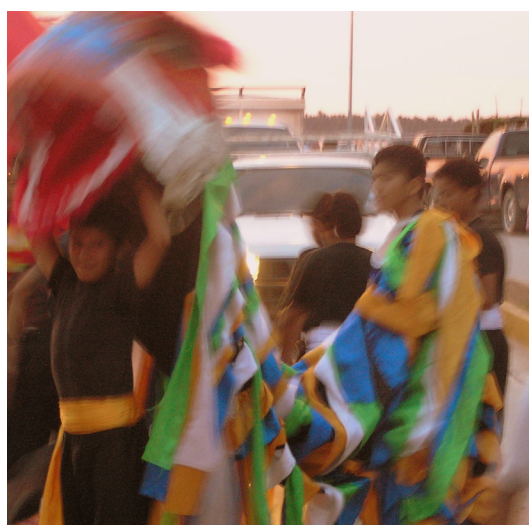
I had been praised all my life for nascent abilities, for potential. I lived with the weight of it, not knowing at all what I was supposed to do. I sure couldn't keep a house. I didn't know that poetry could make a weapon of the fury that simmered toward boil every time a kid was slapped in the face.

For Roethke's film "To the Moon!" I trudged through the University District with a new, young, Roethke, filming take after take. Stopping at a certain book store, I walk inside, knowing "He's been here." He lived in the University District for fourteen years, he had been everywhere. The film closes at night, when the poet appears, alone in a booth at the Blue Moon, and recites a section of his poem, "The Lost Son." "Snail, snail, glisten me forward,/ Bird, soft sigh me home,/ Worm, stay with me. /This is my hard time."

But lest that seem too terribly sad, what follows before the credits are these lines from Roethke, "I, the loneliest semi-wretch alive, a stricken minor soul, Weep to you now. Behold, I'm a heart set free, for I have taken my hatred and eaten it, the last acrid sac of my rat-like fury; I embrace what I perceive ! Brothers and sister, dance ye. Dance ye all!"

Roethke, now dead for as long as he was alive, tells me this: *I give you two images you cannot dispute. You were no more than nine when, clad in shorts, you placed planks on the coiling blackberry brambles and made your way to the most distant berries, paying no mind to the thorns shredding your thighs. With the same will, you took a rabbit from the coop and held it against your belly. When the great back legs, raked at your flesh, clawing blood lines down your chest and belly, you did not drop it. Instead, you held it close and subdued it. If anyone asks you who you are, you tell them you got the berries. Tell them you did not drop the rabbit.*

I think he wants me to get on with it. **C**



Janet Levin

Heather Lende

The Christmas Parade

It was a good thing we had the Christmas Parade early this year, to coincide with the school winter break, since it was slushing buckets by December 25th, since the second week in December it was clear and ice-skating cold. The annual parade down Main Street from the Elks Lodge to the bank features a fire-breathing snow dragon, which I have been inside of for as long as we've had it. As the dragon's keeper Annette Smith noted, my children were even in the dragon before they were born.

The dragon doesn't actually spit flames, rather it belches flour from a fire extinguisher connected by tubing to the huge foam and wire head. The eyes flash red. The snow dragon is twenty-three feet long and requires eight people to make it dance and walk. The spine is made of plastic oil drums cut in half, tied end to end, with holes for each head. Over this is draped long fabric sheeting fringed with now, rather frayed, tinsel.

Once we are all inside, the dragon's scales, big cardboard fins, are tied on like hats to each extruding head. There are cut-outs for our eyes, but mostly they are in the wrong place to see much, especially while balancing the oil drum on your shoulders and trying not to step on the person in front of or behind you. A soundtrack of Nutcracker themes and dragon roars blasts from a boom-box carried by one of the stronger dragon-walkers.

All this is to say, that being in the dragon requires skill, training, talent-- and a dragon's sixth sense. The team must be able to dance down an icy road in a gale force wind while avoiding a barking dog or running five-year-old.

This may be why the same crew has manned it for so long, and why, as we get older, the regular cast and even the understudies have diminished. (I say cast, since the dragon belongs to Lynn Canal Community Players. It was originally designed for a play.) This year we almost didn't haul it out again, but a few of us insisted. The snow dragon, like it or not, is our Christmas symbol, and there would hardly be a parade without it.

The parade line-up consisted of all the emergency response vehicles in Haines, from police cars to fire trucks (one had Santa riding on top), a half-dozen pretty women in sequin covered coats twirling and leaping alongside a Subaru station wagon blaring rock music, and Ryan Olsen, a nice kid and good sport who was home from his first year at college and graciously helping his little nephew guide a miniature snowmachine down the street. There may have been a few pick-ups with signs for upcoming raffles or events, but that

was it. Without the dragon the parade would look like a chimney fire on Christmas Eve.

That's why I volunteered my children—the two already home from college and one of my adult daughters living here. (Her sister couldn't participate because she is expecting a baby any minute. My son wasn't home yet.) They were not as thrilled about the dragon as I was. However, their friends were. For the first time that I can recall, when it came time to climb under the sheet-draped back-bone, there were too many volunteers.

I hadn't missed the dragon the year I blew out my knee and had ACL surgery. I even came back to my place in it after being run over by a truck.

But here I was, looking at a few old dragon pros—Pizza Joe Parnell was still at the head again, and my daughter was right behind him with the flour filled fire extinguisher to make all that smoke. (I taught her how.) Gray pony-tailed and bow-legged Lee Heinmiller wore his spirit-of-winter mask and would once again be walking alongside, lighting the firecrackers and launching a few big showers of sparks into the black sky, but the rest of the people inside the dragon were young first-timers.

There was one more space left in the tail and I spotted it the same time as Crystal Lemieux, a soft-spoken Tlingit nursing student home for the holiday's did. "I have wanted to do this my whole life," she confessed.

I really wanted to be in the dragon. On the other hand, I'd like the dragon to be here when my new grandbaby is growing up.

"May I be in it?" Crystal asked, "Is that okay?"

Traditions don't last if you don't teach the next generation how to keep them. Even goofy traditions like the snow dragon.

I helped Crystal tie the fin on her head, and pinned the tail on the back of the sheet, all the while giving her a lesson in dragon performance:

Hold the fin's chin-strap with one hand. Keep the barrel square on your shoulders. Shuffle, don't stride. Add a little bounce to your knees. Talk to the person in front of you. Whatever you do, don't fall down.

I was still coaching as the dragon ducked out the door into the frosty afternoon darkness. "You want to be sure to get the serpentine motion," I said. "Make the turns wide."

All of which was completely unnecessary. The dragon flashed and roared as it wove down the street behind the sirens and strobes. It tipped back its head and belched smoke high into the sky, or straight at the crowd, dusting the unprepared from head to toe. It made babies cry and adults laugh.

And it made my day, and Crystal's too. She said being in the dragon was the best Christmas present she's ever had. ■

Kris Farmen

Perfect Day

A perfect day of surfing is a precious thing, to be filed away in the backrooms of the mind. To feed the fire of stoke on all those lousy days when the surf is flat or blown out. All those days when you start to contemplate giving up surfing for a less frustrating way of life—bowling, maybe. You need something on those days, a glowing coal to carry with you, to remind you of why you feel this passion, this fire, this lust.

It's early November. A big northeasterly storm has pushed down from Knik Arm overnight, sending a head-high swell to crack on the beaches near Homer. The storm fizzles in the early daylight hours and the wind backs off to just a light offshore breeze.

I sit at the table drinking coffee in my family's cabin in Ninilchik, at the top end of Cook Inlet's surf coast, watching the waves roll over the sandbar at the mouth of the creek below. The tide is coming in, which means I'll have to wait a couple hours, as the particular surf break where I'm planning my mission works best at mid tide.

I get up and pour myself another cup of coffee as the local NPR station reads the NOAA marine forecast. The morning sun breaks over the treetops to the east as I finish my eggs and toast. Its light washes the bluffs above the creek in a warm amber glow. Redoubt volcano and the other peaks on the west side of the Inlet are shrouded in cloud and fog. Bad for the view, but good for the surf.

The phone rings. It's Curly Jake in Homer.

"It's bomber surf today," he says. "Transom Beach is gonna be going off! We're leaving right now, dude." Transom Beach is not this spot's real name, but I'm a strict follower of the first commandment of surf writing: Thou shalt not name the places where thee surfs.

I glance at the clock. It's just after ten. It takes me a half-hour to drive down to Transoms.

"I was gonna give it another hour," I say.

"Naahhh," says Jake. "It'll be good now."

I surf Transoms a lot, and I'm pretty sure the tide needs another hour or two, but the excitement in his voice is contagious.

"All right," I say. "I'll meet you in the parking lot."

I turn off the fire under the coffeepot and start gathering my things. I climb into my wetsuit, winter weight, 6/5/4 mil. I leave the suit at my waist and pull on my booties, then slide into a wool thermal and heavy flannel shirt for the drive. I grab a towel and one of my surfboards.

I'm on the road in ten minutes. It's a drive I've made hundreds of times, my daily commute during the Cook Inlet surf season. My pilgrimage, my hajj. The weather is

warm, thirty-five degrees, and the pavement steams from the overnight rain. Everything is fresh and crisp in the late fall air—the leafless cottonwood trees with the eagle nests abandoned for the season, the dead stalks of putschki weed standing like cane amid the brown thatch of the summer’s grass.

Curly Jake is there when I arrive, along with Malibu Jake.

I pull up next to Curly Jake’s beat-up Subaru wagon just as they come trotting back from the beach. There are waves. Holy shit, are there waves. But lo and behold, the tide is still too high. The shorebreak is washing right up onto the edge of the beachgrass.

We all shake hands and bump fists.

I grin at Curly Jake. “Can I say I told you so?” I suggest lunch and a snooze, then surfing. Malibu is with me on that notion, but Curly is full of juice and practically jumping out of his skin to get in the water. He points northward to river mouth, perhaps a mile up the beach. Over the distance, we can see long white lines peeling across the sandbars.

“Look at that,” he says. “It’s going off up there.”

Malibu Jake and I hem and haw a little bit but Curly Jake—plus our own bubbling surfstoke—

wins us over. The Jakes pile into the bed of my truck with their gear and we do a hundred feet of four-wheel-driving to get to the gravel track that runs through the grass to the river. The waves look better and better as we approach, so good that we all start whooping and hollering.

I pull the truck right up onto the bare spit of gravel and sand that separates the river mouth from the ocean. The waves are chest high; slightly lumpy from the river current, but still very rideable. We’re the only ones there. Jake and Jake take turns mooning the million-dollar houses on the bluff above as they change into their seal costumes. Boards are waxed, leashes untangled.

I can hear the gravel rattling against itself in the shorewash as I wade in. The day is warm, but the water is frigid. I jump my board over a rolling line of whitewater, then another, then I paddle for the back. I duckdive through a wave face, then stroke hard over the shoulder of the one behind it, then I’m in the lineup.

Curly is already on a wave. He paddles hard and pops up. It’s a closeout (meaning that the lip of the waves breaks all along the line at once) but he manages a couple seconds of face time before the whole thing turns to whitewater and

he’s thrown off his board to tumble around with the gravel and foam. Malibu picks off the next one, a right hander with a better face.

The Jakes hoot for me as I charge a shapely peak. I can feel it stack up behind me and there’s the familiar lift at the tail of my board, then I’m sliding down the face and popping up and trimming along. All the insane frustrations of my life drop away, it’s just me and beauty, the silken glide of my board, planing until the far edge of the lip sections and crashes down.

Gradually the tide drops and the waves clean up substantially. The three of us surf clean faces for more than an hour. Nobody else, just the gulls and beach crows. Groups of cormorants, mergansers and murrets rocket past the wave faces. We can feel the displaced air of their wingbeats thumping against our foreheads as we charge and slide into the pocket.

A white pickup rolls up onto the spit. It’s Mike. He gets out and leans against the door. He’s already in his wetsuit. He watches us for twenty minutes, then grabs his board and paddles out. Another rig rolls up, one I don’t recognize, though Curly does. It’s Scott, our local surf photographer. Has his shots in the top-drawer surf mags, writes a blog about surfing in Alaska. Ten minutes later yet another rig rolls up, and soon there’s a half-dozen of us in the lineup. Anywhere else in the surfing world, this would be



Paxson Woelber – Wading in Gray

the source of annoyance and angst among each surfer. It’s different in Alaska. If someone has the *cojones* to brave the 37 degree water, and they aren’t an obvious asshole, they’re welcome in the lineup. Today, there are plenty of waves for everyone, and we all laugh and joke, cheering each other’s rides.

The river current picks up as the tide drops and carries out slabs of freshwater pan ice. This is river ice that freezes during low tide, then gets busted loose when the tide comes in and floods the estuary. These ice cubes come in big sheets with the current, but most of them stay just outside the lineup, moving further out as the tide continues to drop. Malibu paddles out to an enormous pan and grabs hold of the edge, sitting on his board in the water. I call out to him that I’ll give him a dollar if he climbs up on it. Malibu slides from his board and bellies his way up onto the ice like a seal. He pulls the surfboard up behind him, and carefully stands up. Everyone cuts up laughing as he walks around the perimeter of the ice with his board tucked under his arm.

The waves get better and better as the day slides into afternoon. The wind stays light, and the infamous tide rips of Cook Inlet stay calm around the river mouth. A rainbow

stretches across the sky to the north, and everyone remarks on what a pleasant surprise this swell has been.

Three hours later, my arms have turned to spaghetti. I've long since lost count of my waves and I can't even paddle hard enough to catch a last one into shore. I end up going around the shoulders to make the beach. My body seems a hundred pounds heavier as I climb out of the ocean. My balance and reflexes have adapted to water; now I'm clumsy on land like a seal or walrus. Then again, perhaps I actually am a marine mammal. I live to surf, coming ashore only to mate, to eat, to sleep, to work the occasional day job and send in writing submissions.

Curly Jake has had enough as well. He comes up to shore, lays his board on the gravel and we both lean against my truck, arms crossed over the bed rail, watching the surfers and the waves. The best sets of the day are rolling in just to the south of where everyone is surfing.

"That's where I'd be," I say, pointing.

He nods in agreement. For a moment I consider paddling back out, but I know I'm all in. It's three in the afternoon; we've been surfing for four hours. The sun hangs just at the edge of the clouds, moving behind cover and turning the world gray, though the sky is still clear to the east. Malibu Jake is still out, so me and Curly trot down to the river to jump on some ice pans. We ride them down to the mouth then dive off and swim to shore when the ocean swells make them too wobbly.

Scott has been taking photos since he rolled up. The three of us chat for a while, talking about surfing, water, and pan ice. Finally, he can't stand it anymore. He lays his camera aside, grabs his board, and paddles out.

Malibu Jake eventually comes in to join us. We hang around the truck, not saying anything, not wanting to let go of the day. Finally we change out of our wetsuits. Towels wrapped around us. Sand and gravel cutting into half-frozen bare feet. The salty taste of the Cook Inlet mud in our mouths. Only when I have my pants on do I discover that I forgot my shoes. Fuck. My feet are cold, but there's no help for it. At least the temperature is above zero. I start the truck and turn the floor heaters on full-bore. One last long look at the break, then we take off, driving back up the beach.

I drop them off at Curly Jake's car. We shake hands and say adios. We all know there will be another surf, another wave, another day. It's falltime, the season, and we're lucky enough to be alive in it.

I drive back to Ninilchik, stopping at the liquor store for a couple 24-ounce bottles of beer. Sitting at the table in the cabin, I toast the view as I watch the sun drop down below the far side of the cloudbank into a band of clear sky over Mount Redoubt. The sky and the underbelly of the clouds blaze with color against blue edge of the mountains.

I'm drained, surfed out. Any surfer knows the feeling. I'm tired but I don't want to sleep. I'm hungry, but I don't want to eat. I just want to sit in my chair by the woodstove with a mason jar of beer and my eyes half-lidded as what's left of a perfect day slides past. **G**

Doug Pope

Chitina UFO

November, 1976. It's been 40 below in the Copper Basin for a week. My truck heater barely works. I'm supposed to meet Gordon in Chitina. He's hauling a load of copper and silver ore called calcacite out of McCarthy. We call it "jeweler's grade," and envision using rock saws to cut the ore into thin blue and silver wafers for pendants and ear rings.

Gordon served in the marines at Iwo Jima, and then showed up in McCarthy to work as a caretaker at the Kennicott, the richest copper mine in the world. His wife followed him and they built cabins in McCarthy and Chitina. She ended up bailing out after too much cold and dark. He's been alone for the last 20 years.

"Go into Chitina where the road bends to the left and turn right up the hill. It's the last cabin," Gordon had said.

The thermometer is climbing when I stop in Glenallen for gas. By the time I get to the Edgerton Cutoff, forty miles from Chitina, it's getting dark and snow is falling in big flakes. The flatbed lights carve tunnels through the snow, but one windshield wiper doesn't work and I can't see the right side of the road.

In Chitina, there is a locked single gas pump lit by a 100 watt bulb. I have to guess who has the keys, and end up at a frame building set back in the trees with tar paper on the sides. Gordon's place is another half-mile down the road. The cabin, an old two story affair at the top of a steep drive, faces rocky hills separating the town from the Copper River. No lights are visible, nor any sign that a vehicle has been there. I grab a flashlight and go in, expecting to build a fire. It's warm inside.

I shine the light around and hear a voice. It's Gordon's daughter Kathy, sitting in a chair by the barrel stove next to her boyfriend Mark. We met last summer at Gordon's mining claims.

"What's going on," I ask.

"We ran out of white gas three weeks ago," she says.

I grab a can of fuel from the flatbed, fill a Coleman lantern and light it. In the kitchen, dozens of large empty cans are strewn about the plywood counter.

"Do you have food?"

"We've been living off the ravioli," Mark says.

An empty cardboard box sits on the floor near my feet with "Chef Boyardee" on the side.

"Eating in the dark?"

"We stayed warm," he replies. "There wasn't much you could do but sit in the chair or go to bed."

"Except to watch the UFO," Kathy says. She tells me that a large spacecraft set down one night on a ridge visible from the cabin window. She gestures toward the hills on the other side of Chitina.

"It looked like a giant dragonfly." Her voice pitches higher. "It had wings and a long body with a big head."



Angela Ramirez

"How long did you watch it?"

"It sat on the ridge for nearly an hour. We could see lights inside and creatures moving around." She is shouting and gesturing with her hands. I look at Mark, his long hair shades his eyes, but he nods in agreement.

Headlights flash through the window. It's Gordon in his Dodge Power Wagon with a ton of ore.

"Overflows on the road near Strelna," he says. "I need a flashlight. My lights started flickering after plowing through the last one."

I hand him my light. He disappears under the hood of the Power Wagon, finds a frayed wire, and wraps it with black tape. We start unloading fifty pound burlap bags filled with calcacite and lift them up onto the back of the flatbed. After tying down the load, I grab some groceries, and we go inside. Mark and Kathy stay in the shadows, only coming into the light as I hand out food. I don't say anything about the UFO. The next morning, I look at the ridge where the spaceship set down and tell Gordon about the interstellar dragonfly.

He shrugs. He asks if I can drop him off in Copper Center to pick up a car he left during a cold snap, and wants to know if I have jumper cables. We jump in the flatbed and I start backing down the hill. "It's Mark and Kathy's first winter," he says. **■**

Scott Maiorca

A Letter to My Sons

I would like to promise my sons that they will grow up with a sense of their future and of flying cars and of Logan's Run, would like to promise them Dr. Zaius won't destroy the truth with dynamite and guns, would like to give them hope for technology, but this is 2010 and our world is still the same.

When I was young, I knew someday we would have robots and flying cars and great domed cities throughout the solar system. I knew that we'd inherit the stars and our destiny. I knew that technology would save us, that those few who were driven to create, the scientists, the artists, the poets, the philosophers, would give us the world the dreamers had promised.

When I was a teenager I knew my childhood beliefs were wrong. Our hope couldn't lie in the hands of the few: the scientists, the artists, the poets, the philosophers, they couldn't give us what the dreamers had promised. Our hope and our truth and our future had to be controlled by the ones who didn't think they had any control.

When I was in my twenties, having gotten to know the masses, having lived with them, and worked with them, and made love with them and cried with them, I knew that they couldn't be our hope and our truth and our future, there was room for the dreamers and the robots and the flying cars and the domed cities, there had to be more than paying bills and getting high and running through the maze of the race simply to get by.

Now, I'm in my thirties, and I don't know what I know anymore. I don't know if there is hope for humanity, but I'm not certain there isn't. There are no robots and no flying cars and no domed cities throughout the solar system, and I'm not sure there should be. I'm not sure we shouldn't simply stay home and tend our gardens and leave everyone else alone.

I would like to promise my sons that they will grow up with a sense of their future and of flying cars and of Logan's Run, would like to promise them Dr. Zaius won't destroy the truth with dynamite and guns, would like to give them hope for technology, but these are not mine to give. They, like me, will have to find their own paths: their own way. All I can give them is the time. **■**

INTERVIEW

Jo Going

“You and I and the World:” An Interview with John Haines

(This interview took place at Montalvo, a writers and artists retreat in Saratoga, California, in the spring of 1988. John Haines was there for several months as writer-in-residence. His book, “New Poems,” had just been published, and the poems referenced in this interview come from that collection.)

Much of the poetry of John Haines finds its inspiration in the visual arts. Specific artists, certain paintings or sculptures, or a given body of work and stylistic expression serve as sources to explore not only art, but also, and perhaps more importantly, an entire history of consciousness that includes the philosophical, the political, and the psychological. Haines enters into communion with another artist or work of art, and the poems that result express a human continuum that orders its very existence by the creative act itself. The expansiveness of intellect and intent needed to create from such ground is rare in our times, reminding us of the courage necessary to pursue a vision in thought, art, and life.

A discussion with John about his art-inspired poems led to his reflection upon his own early days as a visual artist, his years of study with Hans Hoffman, and how Hoffman influenced his creative development:

“Hoffman, he didn’t know quite what to make of me, I would go to class, draw, paint...and he liked what he saw. But I was always writing poetry.” Haines talked of how Hoffman would have his students draw naturalistically and then he would take apart the drawing and rearrange it according to planes, lines, composition. I asked Haines if this had influenced his own writing style, as his own sense of composition is one of careful construction. But he replied that it was more the ambiance of Hoffman’s school, the exposure to all those seminal artists, that had influenced him. “All the focus was towards the artistic, the creative.”

In response to my question as to why he had chosen to write instead of paint, he replied, “Who knows? The road not taken. But it was something to do with the language of poetry, its combination of the visual, words, music...I felt I could combine different approaches to appearance and

reality through poetry, and still let in the visual as a sense of structure, color, etc. In writing, I could express my ideas more directly, more expansively; I had to write to express certain ideas. The information is there in the visual, but words are more direct. And I knew I couldn’t do it all. Attention to language eliminates other possibilities, and any discipline takes all of you, you can’t split it up. I had an innate visual skill, and first, unconsciously, turned to that, as it was more immediate. But *sound*...the feeling of words, sensual, resonate...But I did have a period of confusion about what to do—to paint, to write...I think these things are a result of accident, environment, happenings along the way. But my background in the visual arts has definitely been an advantage.”

I asked Haines about his poems that draw their inspiration so strongly from the visual arts, asked if he felt these poems to be a summation of his life’s work. “Well, summation is not the right word. I see in this material the possibility of extending the range of reference, another way of reading the human experience and history, and interpreting it. In part, a vicarious way of experiencing art. I find in the visual arts a reassurance, a continuity. I’m constantly looking for clues to the significance of the human condition, and art has been a necessity since prehistoric times.”

In response to my mentioning a poem of his about Michelangelo, we talked about that artist being a painter, architect, sculptor and poet. “But I suspect, that in our times, a time of no renaissance, a person could be destroyed by spreading himself over so much. The Renaissance was a time of expansion, of assurance, that is certainly not with us anymore. We don’t have confidence in relationship...God to human to world to God. In the Renaissance, people hadn’t gotten to the point yet where they seriously questioned Christian assumptions. And all that influx of classical civilization, which allowed for a reencounter with antiquity, opened up all sorts of creative possibilities. Our time is also one of opening up to possibilities, but it’s an opening up that leads to chaos. And as Erich Neumann points out, to really expose the self to everything, the process of opening up, puts the self at great risk of plunging off into the abyss.” We discussed the recent studies in chaos as an unperceived order, and I asked if the artist poems might be, in a sense, ordering chaos by talking about form through art, both historically and psychologically. “Well...hmmm...I hadn’t thought about that, but perhaps you’re right. I sometimes think that art itself is the ordering principle in the universe.” I questioned if a poem, at least in the space of that poem, can resolve confusion. “Yes. In my early poems, for instance, the northern landscape, with its clarity, allowed me to see relationships more clearly. I went to nature, and learned what I could directly from that. Now, I can go back to art with a clearer understanding of the relationship of nature to art, and art to culture, with a clearer mind than if I had just studied in a school. Now I can see with a different eye than I would have otherwise, and, I think, with a truer eye. Art is fundamentally an imitation of nature, in definition and form. The source of art is nature: there is no other source. But you have to learn to see it.”

We talked about this for some time, also in relationship to my own art. And I mentioned that I was

presently involved in an urban university setting where what he thought would not only not be understood, but also ridiculed. "Well, that doesn't surprise me in the least. But the record of nature is there, has been imprinted in the psyche for thousands of years. And anyway, the pattern of urban life reflects nature...it just gets distorted...terribly off the track, so to speak.

I next mentioned his poem "Prophecy," inspired by Roman sculpture. The poem, with its definite political undertones, brought up the subject of politics in art. "History, historical events—and politics is certainly the most immediate form of these—is another dimension. It is an inescapable part of the world we live in. It is not possible for me to write so-called "nature" poems as if the political element didn't exist. You can see Wordsworth looking at the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution. He doesn't refer to it directly, but it's there, in the content. The organization of animal life is to some extent social, and if you carried it far enough, you'd end up with politics, which is essentially about how we get along. Really, modern times are not that different from Athens, or Rome—politics, greed, and here and there, someone trying to do something for the common good." I questioned him about the title of the poem, "Prophecy," and the prophetic voice that one finds so often in his poetry. "That's a given. I'm not studying to be a prophet. Just certain things, I see...and sense...and it gets into the work. One can not help but feel at times, 'Woe unto thee, America, God is not mocked.'"

We talked for a long time about specific artists and the poems that have arisen from his meditations on art. The effect was like wandering through a great museum that expanded well beyond the confines of any given space. "The poem on Van Gogh—I hadn't been widely attentive to him, but I felt compelled to go at it after thinking about him and his life. I worked on the Picasso piece at the same time...how those fractured planes of cubism are a piece of prophecy; it was just before World War I that "Mademoiselles D'Avignon" was painted; this was, I think, something the artist sensed... very striking. In "Head of Sorrow, Head of Thought," I had two specific heads of women by Rodin in mind, in whose calm and reflection I sensed an allegory for both the thought process itself, and some other dimension. We really don't know much about Bosch, and concerning "Death and the Miser," well, Breugel painted like that, too; there's the background of the Middle Ages in that poem, and I was Influenced at the time of its writing by an account by Barbara Tuchmann of the Black Death; it's as much a poem about greed in this century as it is anything else; and there's the influence of Dante in that work, too—it's a very Catholic poem."

I asked Haines at this point about the influence of the spiritual on his work, which has been a consistent element in all in his poetry. "Art connects up with a force that can only be called religious...but not just God...sometimes demonic—it's very mysterious. I believe in all that religious stuff, but not in those terms. All one has to do is read decent literature and know...well, why write, if there is not an interest in a search for the truth?"

This led us to discuss "Meditations on a Skull Carved in Crystal," a long poem inspired by a human skull carved in

flawless crystal by an anonymous Aztec artist. I asked if this poem, which is essentially a meditation on the entire human condition, is meant to end with its imagery of light as an allegory for redemption. Hmm... hadn't quite thought of it that way. The skull for me was something irreducible and clear, that you could see all the way into...something about reality retreating to a point out there in the cosmos...and how maybe, at the point of death, you'd see a brilliantly white light.

In my work, I haven't consciously tried to express the spiritual. But it's there in the poems, yes. It comes from one's own experience of certain things, like nature...like with Monet, who really got close to and experienced something. Form and spirit: the underlying truth of it all. But today, people don't feel comfortable with areas of depth, and I think this accounts for the boring sameness in much of the poetry that's being written."

Haines' mention of Monet brought my own thoughts to that painter. While reading Haines' recent poems, I had often thought of this writing in relation to those exquisite works Monet painted towards the end of his life at Giverny. There is a definite parallel, in that both the poems and the paintings speak so clearly of an entire life consciously dedicated with care and without compromise to the creative act.

In the essay, "You And I And The World" (*Poetry East: Poetics*, Number 20 & 21, Fall, 1986), John Haines speaks of the poetics that have formed his life and art. While talking with him about his recent poems, I recalled a passage from that essay, where Haines talks of poetic form in the context of "the profound relatedness that lies at the heart of all genuine experience with the world —how all things hinge on each other. As in any significant dialogue, the relation between art and life is not a thing we can subdivide. In taking up and renewing in some way an old form, in making, or suggesting, if only to a limited degree, the possibility of a new form, we renew not only the art, but life itself." **C**



Debi Bodett

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Robin Hiersche: Currently my life in the maya is made out of advocacy, poetry, wild things, and rock and roll. I've had several bear encounters in the last two weeks that have, in their power, evaporated the past. I am currently living happily ever after in a remote village in Alaska, where no disguises are necessary. My artwork appeared in Issue #1 of *Cirque*.

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Curt Hopkins: Curt Hopkins is militantly Oregonian. He's published poetry and other writing in *3AM*, *Exquisite Corpse* and other magazines. He was a founding member of the Big Time Poetry Theatre and the founder of the Committee to Protect Bloggers. He is currently Evening News Writer at ReadWriteWeb.

Eowyn LeMay Ivey: Eowyn LeMay Ivey grew up in Alaska and continues to live here with her husband and two daughters. She is a bookseller at Fireside Books in Palmer, Alaska. Her first novel, *The Snow Child*, is represented by Jeff Kleinman of Folio Literary Management.

Amy Katz: Amy Katz is a poet, photographer, wilderness rites of passage guide and communication teacher for the University of Alaska, in Anchorage. She loves that in the great Northwest, between sky, blossom and wildlife, every moment is a perfect picture.

Sandra Kleven: Sandra Kleven's writing has appeared in *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Oklahoma Review* and *Topic Magazine* (NYC). The issues of rural Alaska have shaped her writing, and, in July, a new piece will appear in *Cold Flashes: Literary Snapshots of Alaska*. Her essay "Jaden is Calling" won 1st Place in nonfiction in the 2008 *Anchorage Daily News/UAA Creative Writing Contest* and appeared in Issue #1 of *Cirque*.

Michael Kleven: Michael Kleven is a photographer and filmmaker whose work can be seen from time to time in Seattle and Anchorage galleries. His film, "Beautiful Woman" won best picture and best cinematography in the Seattle Central Film Festival. Recently he directed "To the Moon! A Tribute to Theodore Roethke" in collaboration with his mother, Sandy Kleven.

Tyler Kleven: Tyler Kleven is a graphic artist and videographer who has done extensive work with the Spenard Jazz Fest (Alaska)—including video taping and design. For four years, as Eurojax, he wrote, filmed and anchored a webcast, PRON (available on YouTube), targeting Subaru owners.

Simon Langham: Simon Langham's fiction has recently appeared in *South Dakota Review* and *Verbsap*. A playwright and performance artist, she lives on the coast of Alaska building low impact shelters for cold climates.

Jonna Laster: Jonna has lived and traveled throughout Alaska, and is currently living in Juneau. Her writing recognitions: 2007 first place nonfiction essay, Whidbey Island Writers Conference; Short story "Keys" included in *Coffee House Fiction Anthology 2009*; finalist 2009 Kalupi Chapbook competition. She is enrolled in the University of Alaska Anchorage's low residency MFA program.

Heather Lende: Heather Lende lives in Haines. Her new book, *Take Good Care of the Garden and the Dogs*, has just been published. <http://heatherlende.com/>

Janet Levin: Janet Levin's poems have appeared in *Ice-Floe*, *Cirque* and numerous journals below the 60th parallel; she divides her life between urban Alaska and rural Mexico. Her photos debuted in Issue #1 of *Cirque*.

Deb Liggett: Deb Liggett is an essayist and poet. Her work has appeared in *Pilgrimage*, the 2008 anthology *50 Poems for Alaska*, exhibited in *My Alaska, Too*, an art installation in the lobby of CenterPoint West in Anchorage, and in Issue #1 of *Cirque*.

Joanna Lilley: Born in the south of England, Joanna has always yearned to go north. In 2006, she emigrated to Whitehorse, the capital of Canada's Yukon, where she is on the board of the online circumpolar magazine, *Arctica*. Her work has been published in a range of anthologies and journals as well as on tables in Whitehorse's Baked café.

John Longenbaugh: John Longenbaugh is a Seattle-based playwright/director whose plays include "Scotch and Donuts," "How to be Cool," and "Bible Stories for Agnostics." "Affairs with the Moon" is part of "The Arcana Cycle," a series of short plays based on the Major Arcana cards in the Tarot deck. For more on him go to johnlongenbaugh.com

Marie Lundstrom: Retired librarian and teacher Marie Lundstrom has published articles in *Alaska Women Speak*, *Capital Times* (Madison, WI), and *Cambridge (WI) News*, and had some poems in *Inklings* and *Understory* at UAA. She currently works part-time as a free-lance editor. Her poems appeared in the 2008 anthology *50 Poems for Alaska* and in *Cirque*.

Scott Maiorca: Scott is a father, husband, pop culture geek, writer, and a teacher. He's trying to sort all that out and life in general @ his blog <http://scottmaiorca.wordpress.com/>

Jason Marvel: Jason Marvel teaches English at Palmer High School and lives in Wasilla, AK. He has been published in *GNU* and is one of 150 Freedom Writer teachers whose stories are featured in *Teaching Hope: Stories from the Freedom Writer Teachers* (Broadway Books, August 2009). His poetry appeared in Issue # 1 of *Cirque*.

David McElroy: McElroy's poems have appeared in many national journals and anthologies. A book of his poetry, *Making It Simple*, was published by Ecco Press in 1975. He lives in Anchorage and works as a professional pilot in the Arctic. His poetry appeared in Issue # 1 of *Cirque*.

John McKay: John McKay moved to Alaska from Michigan in 1977. He supports his poetry habit by lawyering and teaching media law as an adjunct professor at University of Alaska Anchorage.

Linnea McNally: Linnea McNally is completing her MA in English at Simon Fraser University, BC. She has published in *This Great Society*, *[spaces]*, and *Ampersand*. She is currently writing a book about her ancestors, who were pioneers in Fort Langley, and has shown art at exhibitions in Langley and in Coquitlam, BC.

Rachel Mehl: Rachel Mehl lives in Bellingham, WA. She has an MFA from University of Oregon. Her poems have most recently appeared *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Portland Review*, and *Willow Springs* and her manuscript *Why I Hate Horses* was a finalist for the 2009 Snake Nation Poetry Prize. Her poetry also appeared in Issue # 1 of *Cirque*.

Karla Linn Merrifield: A Pushcart Prize nominee, Merrifield has five books to her credit, including *Godwit: Poems of Canada*, which received the 2009 Andrew Eiseman Writers Award for Poetry. She is the moderator of the poetry blog, *Smothered Air* (<http://smotheredair.yuku.com/>) and her new poetry collection *Athabaskan Fractal and Other Poems of the Far North* will be published by Salmon Press in 2012.

Mary Mullen: Mary Mullen was born in Anchorage and raised on her parent's homestead in Soldotna. Her debut poetry collection, *Zephyr*, was published by Salmon Poetry in May 2010. Mary was awarded an MA in Writing from the National University of Ireland, Galway, in 2006. Her poetry and non-fiction have been published in *We Alaskans*, *The Irish Times*, *The Stinging Fly*, *Crannog*, *The Cork Literary Review*, *Landing Places: An Anthology of Irish Immigrant Poets*, *RTÉ's Sunday Miscellany*, and heard on KSKA public radio.

Mark Muro: Mark Muro is a poet, playwright and performer. His most recent work, "Apocalypse When I Get Around To It, or Civil War III, Part 1" was recently performed at Out North Theater in Anchorage. Other one-person shows include: "Alaska: Behind the Scenery," "A Very Muro Christmas," and "Love, Sex and All That Comes Between." For 10 years Mark has hosted Stagetalk, a weekly conversation about local theater, for KSKA public radio in Anchorage. His play *Pickle Days (Revisited)* will appear in Issue #3 of *Cirque*.

Debbie Nigro: Debbie Nigro has lived and worked in northern Alaska for 20 years and has a great love for and respect of the landscapes of the north. Her poetry appeared in Issue # 1 of *Cirque*.

Dennis O'Donnell: Dennis O'Donnell lives in Long Beach, WA, where he owns and operates a small taxicab company. He has been writing and "sporadically publishing" poetry since 1970. He considers poetry an essential voice of the human soul, both individually and collectively, and is a strong advocate of poetry in the newspapers.

Leslie Hsu Oh: Leslie Hsu Oh received a MFA in creative nonfiction from the University of Alaska Anchorage and earned a masters degree from Harvard School of Public Health. Her creative writing has appeared in *Rosebud Magazine* and *Under the Sun*. She received the Schweitzer Award for reverence for life. She currently teaches creative writing at the University of Alaska Anchorage.

Doug O'Harra: Doug O'Harra lives in Anchorage with wife, two kids, two cats and a husky dog that hates to pull anything or anybody. He worked as a journalist in Alaska for two decades, and earned an MA in English and an MFA in fiction from the University of Montana.

Jeff Oliver: Jeffery Oliver reads, writes, skis and bikes in and around Anchorage. He is a recent graduate of the MFA program in Creative Writing & Literary Arts at the University of Alaska Anchorage.

Coco Owen: Coco Owen is a stay-at-home poet in Los Angeles. She lived in Oregon for five years and always loved driving the beautiful Columbia River Highway. She is a psychologist by training and serves on the board of the independent publisher, Les Figs Press. Her poems have also appeared in the *Antioch Review*, *1913: A Journal of Forms*, *The Journal* and *Umbrella Journal*.

Jeremy Pataky: Jeremy Pataky earned an MFA in poetry from the University of Montana. His work has appeared in *Black Warrior Review*, *The Southeast Review*, *Left Facing Bird*, *Square Lake*, *Anchorage Press*, *Anchorage Daily News*, Alaska Public Radio, and others. He is the Executive Director of the Wrangell Mountains Center and a founding board member of the 49 Alaska Writing Center.

Tanya Perkins: Tanya Perkins lives on the shores of Puget Sound with her husband, daughter and assorted critters. Her non-fiction, fiction and poetry has appeared in *Chronogram*, *Jeopardy*, *The Writer's Block*, *Wilderness House Review* and *Whatcom Magazine*. She is currently working on a novel.

Jim Petit: James Petit grew up on Willapa Bay in southwest Washington and lived in Alaska for 35 years. He is a poet, writer, fisherman and teacher. He has taught in Alaska, Washington, Luxembourg and Germany and now lives in Montreal. His poetry and nonfiction have appeared in various journals. He has just completed his first non-fiction book.

Doug Pope: Doug Pope is a lifelong Alaskan who writes non-fiction, fiction, and poetry. His non-fiction pieces "Kayaking adventure was a wrestle with the elements," and "Float trip delivers a rainbow of fun," were awarded 2nd place in the 2007 NFPW contest in nature writing. "Raven's Confession" was a 2007 runner-up in the *Anchorage Press* Super Shorts Contest. His poems have appeared in the anthology *50 Poems for Alaska* and in Issue #1 of *Cirque*. He lives in Hope and Anchorage with his wife Beth.

Vivian Faith Prescott: Vivian Faith Prescott is a fifth generation Alaskan of Sáami and Suomalainen heritage. She was born and raised in Wrangell, Alaska and now lives in Sitka, Alaska with her husband, two dogs and a cat. Her poetry has been published in *Avoset: A Journal of Nature Poems*, *Tidal Echoes 2007*, *Tidal Echoes 2009*, *Ice Box* and *Permafrost*. She was a recent finalist for the 2008 Joy Harjo Poetry Award from *Cutthroat, A Journal of the Arts*. With Alicia Ristau, she organized a Southeast Alaska Community Writers' Show "Rouge et Noir" at the Silverbow in Juneau, Alaska in spring 2009—a celebration of Alaskan writers and a chance for emerging artists to have a debut reading.

Angela Ramirez: Angela Ramirez is an edgy Anchorage artist and blogger who gets around winter and summer on her bicycle and publishes "Life in Spenard: One artist, one bike, and a love of the human skull" at lifeinspenard.wordpress.com/

Bob Ritchie: Bob Ritchie has lived in Alaska since 1972 after hitching up the Alcan Highway in 1970. He works as a biologist in Fairbanks. Family, friends and time spent with wildlife in remote parts of Alaska are key themes in his poetry. Besides natural history articles in professional journals, Bob hasn't published his writings.

Alicia Ristau: Alicia Ristau was born in 1973 in Fairbanks, Alaska and was raised in Nice, France. She is pursuing an MFA in creative writing via the University of Alaska, Anchorage's low residency program. When enrollment permits, she works as an English and French Adjunct Faculty for the University of Alaska, Southeast. With Vivian Faith Prescott, she organized a Southeast Alaska Community Writers' Show "Rouge et Noir" at the Silverbow in Juneau, Alaska in spring 2009.

Suzanne Scarfone: Suzanne Scarfone's poems have appeared in *Phoebe: A Journal of Feminist Scholarship*, *Cider Press Review*, *Earth's Daughters*, *Natural Bridge: A Journal of Contemporary Literature*, *Ducts*, *FRIGG*, and *Poetry Repairs*. Scarfone is an English Romantic Poetry and Virginia Woolf scholar, is a creative writing teacher with the Afghan Women's Writing project as well as Education Director and writer-in-residence with InsideOut Literary Arts project in Detroit.

Linda Schandelmeier: Linda Schandelmeier lives in Fairbanks, AK. She is the author of *Listening Hard Among the Birches*, a collection of poetry published by Vanessapress. She received a Rasmuson Individual Project Award in 2007 to work on a manuscript about the 160 acres near Anchorage where she grew up. This poem is from that manuscript, called *Homestead*.

Tom Sexton: Tom Sexton's 12th collection of poetry, *I Think Again of Those Ancient Chinese Poets*, will be published by the University of Alaska Press in March 2011. He was appointed Alaska's poet laureate in 1994.

Suanne Sikkema: Suanne Sikkema finds inspiration in the natural world. Sometimes she remembers to bring her camera with her and takes great joy in photographing the outdoors. She has a passion for plants, owns the small company Arctic Sun Gardening in Anchorage and loves to travel.

Leslea Smith: Leslea Smith is a student in the low-residency MFA program at the University of Alaska, Anchorage. Her poems have appeared in *Verseweavers*. She was born in Sitka, Alaska and lives in Hillsboro, Oregon, where she practices poverty law and watches birds.

Jim Sweeney: James P. Sweeney writes short stories, poems and is currently writing his first book. His stories and poems have been published in *Alpinist Magazine*, *The Anchorage Press*, and *The Anchorage Daily News*. His nonfiction appeared in Issue #1 of *Cirque*. He lives in Hope, Alaska with his dog Alute.

Charles Thielman: Is a Poet and Artiste, and a shareholder of a collectively supported, independent bookstore. He has artworks in galleries, and has had poetry published in *Poetry Kanto*, *Modoc Forum*, *Seven Circle Press* and *Munyori*. His driving ambition is to be one of the best Grandfathers on Earth.

Steve Delos Treacy: Stephen Delos Treacy led 17 fall whale migration surveys over the Beaufort Sea before moving to Port Townsend, WA. His poems have appeared in *Ice-Floe* and *Cirque*. His gothic Alaskan fantasy "Winter Bird" won Honorable Mention in Virtual Theatre Project's 2008-2009 "Pen Is a Mighty Sword" playwriting competition. His short farce "The Patent Application" is being produced by 2010 International CringeFest (NY).

Sean Ulman: Ulman is writing a column for the *Redoubt Reporter* about his summer job as a shorebird technician on the Chickaloon Flats. "Potentate by Rote" is an adjusted excerpt from his long contemporary novel about Seward. Other Seward excerpts have been published online recently at *Thieves Jargon*, *The2ndHand*, *The Legendary* and *The Scrambler*.

Emily Wall: Emily Wall is a poet and assistant professor of creative writing at the University of Alaska Southeast in Juneau. She has been published in a number of literary journals in the U.S. and Canada. Her first book, *Freshly Rooted*, came out in 2007 with the Irish press Salmon Poetry. She is currently working on her second book.

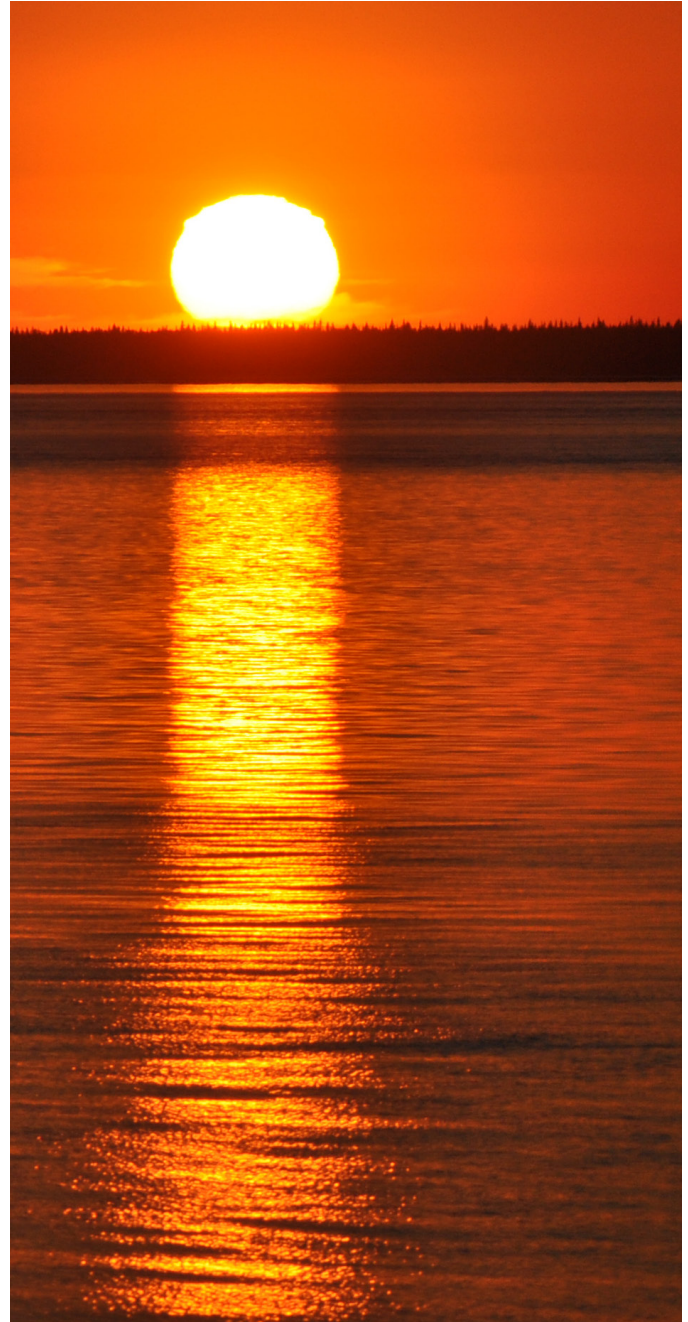
Paul Winkel: Paul Winkel is a retired engineer who wonders what he will do when he grows up. His poems appeared in the 2008 anthology *50 Poems for Alaska* and Issue #1 of *Cirque*.

Paxson Woelber: Paxson Woelber is an artist, graphic and web designer, and award-winning animator. He has been interviewed by *Popular Mechanics*, *Kultur Zeit* (a German pop culture TV program) and by the *Anchorage Press*, and his animations have been featured on the home page of YouTube and on Spike, a division of MTV. He currently owns and operates Paxson Design, LLC, www.paxsondesign.com.

Tonja Woelber: Tonja Woelber is a gardener and fisherman and spends as much time as possible outdoors. Her poem "After Wang Wei" received 1st Place in the *Anchorage Daily News* Creative Writing contest in 1992. Her series of haiku poems entitled "Raven Greets Spring" was performed by the Anchorage Symphony Orchestra in February 2002. Her poems appeared in the 2008 anthology *50 Poems for Alaska* and Issue #1 of *Cirque*.

Changming Yuan: Changming Yuan, twice Pushcart nominee and author of *Chansons of a Chinaman* (2009) and *Politics and Poetics* (2009), grew up in rural China, published several books before moving to Canada, and has had poems in *Barrow Street*, *Best Canadian Poetry*, *Cortland Review*, *Exquisite Corpse*, *London Magazine* and more than 250 other literary publications worldwide.

Maya Zeller: Maya Jewell Zeller's poems appeared most recently in *High Desert Journal*, *New South*, *Cimarron Review*, *Bellingham Review*, and *Mississippi Review*. She lives in Spokane, where she teaches English composition at Gonzaga University.



Paxson Woelber - *The End*





HOW TO SUBMIT TO **CIRQUE**

Cirque, published in Anchorage, Alaska, is a regional journal created to share the best writing in the region with the rest of the world.

This literary journal invites emerging and established writers living in the North Pacific Rim—Alaska, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Hawaii, Yukon Territory, Alberta, British Columbia and Chukotka—to submit short stories, poems, creative nonfiction, translations, plays, reviews of first books, interviews, photographs, and artwork for *Cirque's* Winter Solstice 2010 Issue.

Issue #3--Winter Solstice 2010 Submission Deadline:
September 21, 2010

Submission Guidelines:

- Please send your best work and a brief bio.
- Prose, no more than 10 pages; 2-4 poems; artwork, photos in hi-res (300dpi) JPEG
- Electronic submissions only
- please attach a Word document to email or include in email text; use 12pt font in a common, easy to read typeface (Times, Arial, etc.)
- title your email "poetry submission," "fiction submission," "play submission," "nonfiction submission," etc.; otherwise, it will go into SPAM
- Submissions will be recycled

Please Send Inquiries and Electronic Submissions Only to:

cirquejournal@yahoo.com

Replies average two to three months

Photo: Paxson Woelber



CIRQUE

*A Literary Journal
for the North Pacific Rim*

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