

FRONT COVER

INSIDE FRONT COVER

El Portal

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**Eastern New Mexico University's
Literature and Arts Journal**

About El Portal

El Portal is Eastern New Mexico University's Literature and Arts Journal. It is published biannually.

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Submissions

El Portal is open to submissions from all artists and writers; however, its awards are intended solely for the benefit of ENMU students. Submissions are published on the basis of talent, content, and publishing criteria.

El Portal serves as the creative forum for the students, faculty, and staff of the university as well as artists, writers and photographers worldwide; consequently, the views expressed in El Portal do not necessarily reflect the viewpoints and opinions of ENMU as a whole.

Guidelines

- Flash Fiction (500-1500 words)
- Short Stories (up to 4000 words)
- Creative Nonfiction (up to 4000 words)
- Poetry (3-5 poems)
- Art & Photography (300 dpi JPEG)
- Please submit all written work in .doc, .docx, or .rtf formats.
- With the exception of poetry and art/photography, please limit entries to one story or essay.
- Prizes will be awarded to ENMU students only. Prizes awarded only in Short Story, Poetry, and Art/Photography categories.
- When entering a submission, please include a 20-50 word biography to be printed alongside your piece in the event that it is accepted for publication.

Deadlines

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Eastern New Mexico University Writers' Retreat

June 30th to July 12th

For more information, including accommodations,
schedules, and teachers, please visit:

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&

DisquietInternational.org

Please apply at the following address, and be aware
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In 2015, we will do real pretty.

Because from June 28th to July 10th we will be joining Dzanc Books and Disquiet International Literary Program in Lisbon, Portugal. Study with amazing, internationally renowned writers; experience Lisbon's unique cityscape and atmosphere; and make friendships that will last a lifetime.

The DISQUIET International Literary Program is a two-week program that brings writers from North America and from around the world together with Portuguese writers in the heart of Lisbon for intensive workshops in the art and craft of writing.

The program is premised on several beliefs: That the conversations and exchange of ideas that result from meeting writers from around the world pushes one's own work beyond the boundaries of the self. That all writers need a community to support and sustain them. That stepping out of the routine of one's daily life and into a vibrant, rich, and new cultural space unsettles the imagination, loosens a writer's reflexes... To those ends: Come be DISQUIET-ed with us!

The DISQUIET program schedule is packed day-to-day, and it is designed such that there is something to do at almost any time of day or night—each evening is followed by gatherings at local tascas or many of the city's terrific (and reasonably-priced) restaurants and bars. Some participants prefer to pick and choose which events they attend, opting to use more time for writing and/or exploring. All approaches are, of course, welcome.

Disquiet is open to writers of all levels and all ages. We invite you to join us for writing workshops and a unique immersion in one of the mythic literary epicenters of the world.

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Sean E. Jackson

Perfect Tandoori

They put all that stuff in the food that makes it orange. Masala, which Jeff adores and she hates because it looks too much like baby puke.

But then Jeff never did take care of his young children. He waited until they were old enough to hit the bars and then he put his arm around their shoulders and said his I-love-yous.

She scraped blood and snot and shit from the walls, door knobs, floors, cradles, crib bars and just about everything else in the house. Her Maria, when she turned of age, married a bum. And her Gerald, that curly-haired blond from exceptional children's hall of fame, joined the Army, went to Iraq, lost a hand, came back, went back, and is currently a turbaned opium mule in the deserts of ancient Sumer, the old haunts of that fucking Gilgamesh.

Jeff drags his perfectly held fork through his chicken masala. He's one of those guys who turned fifty and got handsomer. He wears a watch the size of a can of tuna. His car smells like pussy. He has a boat. A boat. He sails it from Maine to Florida whenever his company shits itself with dividends.

"Is your tandoori good?" he asks her. He taps the corners of his gorgeous mouth with the cloth napkin that he handles with the grace of a symphony conductor. Her goddamn mouth is on fire from this red chicken. She thinks one of her molars has fallen out.

"Perfect," she says. "Very nice."

Her phone keeps vibrating. This guy in Florida with the Palm Beach Post keeps calling her, says he wants to know all about Gerald. The story is that the kid who shot Saddam Hussein's favorite bodyguard is now hauling dope along Highway 80, the Highway of Death.

"We got pictures," he said. "Homeland Security, DoD stuff. It's totally him."

"My baby pictures are better," she said and hung up on this investigative reporter who had a real shitty attitude.

And when it's not this jerkoff with the Midwestern nasal, it's Maria hitting her up for money. Maria, with a face that could've

launched (pretty close to) a thousand ships, whose husband is always in and out of trouble for writing and cashing bad checks. Just a lot of bullshit in Teaneck, New Jersey. For Christ's sakes, Maria could've gone anywhere, done anything.

"How is yours?" she asks Jeff. His honey-brown eyes take stock of the room, the brass candelabras, the freakishly tall orchids, the murals like it's goddamn Diwali time in Bombay. He looks at her with those eyes and she wonders if he's ever made a woman want to kill herself.

"Delicious," he says, back to forking that ugly food into his movie star's mouth.

The waiter stops by and refills their water goblets. He smells like a pimp. And she could keep a goldfish in her glass. It's that big. It must hold a quart. Soon enough she'll have to pee. The bathrooms in this place are spectacular. Garish in the sense that you could forget the troubles of the whole wide world while you're doing your business, yet clean enough you could hold a high mass at the sinks. There are luminous blue ladies on the walls, elephants with huge sad eyes, and a piped-in music that makes her want to cry out for death and sex at the same time. The potted bamboo looks strong enough to take home and start a farm.

"Save room for dessert," Jeff says. "They have the best Kulfi here. It'll make you forget that you ever had ice cream."

He makes her forget that she ever had Del. Sweet Del, prince of the Carolina mountains. Such an artist of marriage, money and death—a kind little mousey man who built a mortgage company out of the ruins of the real estate bust in Japan. The guy found ways to make money during the early days of the Internet, when it was being called the "information superhighway." One unkind trip to Kyoto and it was all over. Poor Del. Poor sweet little mountain plutocrat who underestimated the deep, cold waters of Lake Biwa.

"Excuse me," she says. "I have to use the ladies' room."

She thinks about Jeff while she's in the stall and how when he grabs her by the waist and spins her around and plunges into her. She forgets the years she spent trying to fathom why Del went so far away to die at so young an age. She forgets the two little

children at her sides at the rainy funeral, all dressed in black like chess pieces. The years she spent fighting for her money. The night in Savannah she tried to kill herself with a horse drawn carriage. The sorrow, the loneliness, the rapes in hotels by two different men she'd been told would be kind to her and her children.

That bastard from West Palm Beach glows on her screen, a series of thin-fonted yellow numbers and a stupid Midwestern name. She answers, inhales the incense burning in a secret vault somewhere beyond the stalls, and listens to the guy immediately plead for her to get him into contact with Gerald. Poor dyslexic Gerald, inheritor of his father's mossy-haired arms and penchant for the grave.

"We can pay you for information," the Pulitzer-hungry voice tells her. "Any information that puts us in touch with Gerald, directly or indirectly."

She feels a warmth in her vagina as the urine starts to flow.

"I've been wealthy since you were getting beat up in elementary school," she tells the reporter. "I don't need money. What I need is for someone, anyone, to talk some sense into him. I need someone to convince him that he has to come home."

The nasally voice returns, energized now, in speeds she normally hears only in old movies. Like maybe Dustin Hoffman's Ratso Rizzo—who, if she recalls correctly, died in Florida.

"Oh my," she says suddenly, "this is a strange discharge."

And that's that. Time to go back and talk to Jeff. Mr. Adonis of All Business Retreats. The potential number of women he's had on his sailboat, which he named *La Belle Vie* (because he is that type), is algebraic. She would need an abacus just to count them by the dozens. *C'est la vie*. It always happens just before dessert, does it not?

The waiter is bringing coffee to their table, a frothy pair of silver tumblers. She smiles as she waits for the pimp to move so she can get to her chair. She smooths her napkin out onto the table as Jeff starts to tell her all about traditional South Indian filter coffee. Blah blah blah blah. Seems he first had it, hmmm, let's see, when he was traveling one of the seven seas on his beloved cutter with a man who, yes it's true, was actually sleeping with the

granddaughter of Stan Laurel.

“Oh my, that’s hysterical,” she says, lifting her foamy decoction to her lips. It smells like coffee and pine mulch mixed together. She locks her eyes on his, like you would watch the fluttering *aurora borealis* the first time you saw it.

Jeff starts waving his fingers as he talks, something she’s seen wealthy men do a lot over the years. It’s like they have no shame. He’s been widowed so long that the tan line from his ring is gone. It’s just all normal fingers now. Well, if you overlook the manicures. And also the crookedness of the middle finger on his left hand which he claims was broken during a brawl at a bar in Key West with one of Tennessee Williams’ yard workers. It seems as though he is talking about something along those lines now. Traveling via the wind, blue drinks in tubed glasses, poetry written in Manhattan, the sound a rifle makes on the open seas, getting your tattoos undone in the Caribbean, and—mercifully, finally—watching your lover sleep on the white, moonlit sands of the most exotic places.

“I got VD, Jeff,” she says as he sips his coffee. “You gave me some type of STD. I know because I just went and peed and it’s like, you know, all disease-y down there. I think I may have pissed straight chlamydia into the toilet.”

Jeff, the lone wolf of her love life, the man who seems to think she has enough money to not be after his money. She’s not sure what she wanted. She didn’t want this, yeah, but it’s not like she’s talked to her friends about him all that much. Maria still calls him “Joe.” That’s how little this has gotten off the ground. And now, kaboom!, like one of the space shuttles.

He opens his mouth. Closes it. She can see him mounting a sorority girl. He still has enough left in the tank for that. Probably businesswomen throw themselves at him, like he’s a grenade on the floor of their swanky hotel rooms.

A large party of Indians comes in, very dressed up except for the fact they’re wearing sandals. This amuses her. Everything in life has its peculiar exceptions. Look at Maria. She has four kids. Four darling little boys who sound like they’re named after meatballs. Three of them are as dumb as stones, but the fourth

one—the youngest—appears to be headed for great things. He's only six and already plays the violin. Last year he sang the closing number for the school musical and some of the mothers openly wept.

From a blockhead like Maria's husband. Who knew it could happen? Not her, that's for sure. Maria says you've got to get to know Johnny before you judge him or label him a loser. She tells Maria that it is an honorable thing for a wife to feel that way about her husband, who in this case it turns out is a giant goddamned loser.

Somehow, Johnny and Jeff have something in common. She can't put her finger on it ...

"The ice cream!" she cries as the waiter silently places two weirdly round, deep bowls on the table. He doesn't put the Kulfi in front of them, but in fact seems to be trying to put it as far away from each of them as he can. She gives the waiter a strange look. "How long do my arms look?" she says. He frowns but pushes the bowls closer.

"That's better," she says. "It's been a tough day, you know? Christ almighty. Like one of those fucking days, you know?"

A pretty young Indian woman, her bindi like a small Monet sun on her forehead, looks over. Her eyes linger on Jeff. His beauty is almost crushing. And he smells like love. Absolutely smells like it would if they could bottle up the fragrance of L-O-V-E.

Jeff is talking to her. By the look on his face he is explaining something. Maybe he's telling her why the moon orbits the Earth. She used to sleep beside Del, when they lived in the deepest valley in the Black Mountains that there was, and their bed was right beside a window. Moonlight spilled in through this little window, no bigger than a cereal box, and it would land on her face and she would smile as they laid there and rested up for the next day of life. She's pretty sure she had that moonlight on her face the night he spilled his seed in her (aren't we all raised on the Bible?), the night they made Maria.

Jeff is going about his business now, spooning his frozen dessert quietly. Like Caesar, just moving on through his day even

though death is walking right up behind him. She imagines one of the Indian men leaping up from his table, his dagger drawn, and then calmly stabbing Jeff in the neck until he dies. She looks them over, one by one, trying to figure which little sahib will do it.

Alexandria LaFaye

Shere

Sequestered in deep dark wood a woman
fairy, tail bender, step-mother, witch, why aren't the trolls ever
girls?
no name of her own
just a label sewn in her dress
she must follow
the huntsman to heart filled box
the path to Mawmaw's wolf infested house
the prince to the happily ever after chiseled in soap

Here in a deep dark wood a woman
fairly tall, bending over to pick a flower
no name to whisper, not even her own
just an empty place in her dress where a label hung once
she refuses to follow
 the huntsman trails the deer
 the wolf tracks her scent
 the prince must find his own after

Here in a deep dark wood a woman
fair and tolerant, has taken a job
her name tag reads, "Dana"
she's wearing a blue dress with a bright apron
 the huntsman orders venison steak
 the wolf in man's clothing eats soup that tastes like his
mawmaw's
 the prince at table four left her a five dollar tip

Alyse Richmond

Street-Wide Silence

as the city slicks its hair
back for another Sunday
service, there is a street-
wide silence. I lie awake
with a wine hangover, scan
titles on your bookshelf:

The Portable Atheist

A Brief History of Central America

Lord of the Flies

The God Delusion

there isn't any spit to speak
of, so I tongue dry teeth
and gums, and think about
how I don't really know
what the hell happened to
my marriage, but it's on

its way out. Nothing can stop
it – like the freights that pass
our second story apartment
at bullet-speed, all hours

I guess one day we just said
enough, and it was

G.D. McFetridge

Los Pescadores

My old friend Dean drove down from Beaumont yesterday. We had not seen each other since I moved to Corpus Christi early last year. He brought up a conversation he had with my father—Pop is seventy-seven and lives in Galveston now—and he said the old man had mentioned my sister, Elizabeth. Lizzie. I cut in and asked Dean if he wanted a beer or vodka on ice with a squeeze of lime. He grinned and said yes to both.

Serious drinkers know that expensive vodka is smoother than cheap vodka and it contains fewer harmful byproducts, but I have never made a lot of money so I mostly buy cheap vodka, and when I make a drink, I cut a lime and squeeze a little juice over the ice. Dean and I started drinking at the age of fourteen and we never stopped. We grew up in Dallas with our other best friend Curtis. The three of us used to drink beer and fish, although Curtis was always the best fisherman. My sister told Pop that I was a loser and a common drunk. She is nine years older than me and lives in Houston with her husband—the plastic surgeon.

My sister wanted Pop to sign papers, legal documents of some sort. Her nickname when we were growing up was *Princess*. The old man gave her that because she was beautiful and she was his favorite—or so said my mother. McGeorge is my sister Lizzy's hubby. Imagine, giving your child a name like that? McGeorge Danforth? East Coast Yankees turned fake southerners, that's what Dean says.

McGeorge's twin brother is a Yale-graduated lawyer. His name is Turner Danforth and he handles legal problems. Or maybe he creates them, depending on your perspective. He also schmoozes with Houston politicians. What Dean wanted me to understand was that brother-in-law Turner was involved with the papers my dad was supposed to have signed. I poured myself another drink and asked Dean if he was sure about what he was saying. He gave me a cross look and said yes, of course.

But instead of worrying about my sneaky sister and her two-faced husband, I wanted to go fishing down in Mexico. The

reason I had left Galveston in the first place was to get away from my family's melodramas and infighting. Seemed like Dean wanted to pull me back into it, but I know in his heart he meant well.

It's about a two or three hour drive to La Salina. Dean gave me a straight-on stare and said he would rather drink whiskey. So I went to the kitchen and brought two fresh glasses and a 750-milliliter bottle. We sat on the porch and poured ourselves two tall ones. Dean seemed bothered by what my father had told him. I did not want to think about it because I was still thinking about fishing. I mentioned fishing to Dean a second time. He glanced at his wristwatch and grumbled; then he wanted to know if there was enough daylight left, and what kind of fish did I think we were going to catch, anyway?

I told him that we could be there by three or four, fish off the rocky point at Angel's Landing. Catch anything we can, I said, because the important part is the fishing, not the what. Dean said I should worry more about my sister and Turner the sleaze-ball lawyer than fishing trips. I asked Dean to tell me what my father had said. He raised an eyebrow. Not long after my mother died, McGeorge and Lizzy showed up in Galveston and they brought that weasel Turner, along with a large stack of legal documents.

"Is it soaking in on you, yet?" Dean asked. "What they're planning to do?"

My dad owns oil wells in north Texas and natural gas wells in Oklahoma, so there is a pretty fair chunk of money floating around, not that I have ever seen much of it—Pop is Scots-Irish-German and tighter than a closed fist. But more importantly, I had moved to Corpus Christi to get away, to forget and cut loose from everything. The past for me was painful, an ugly abscess, a carbuncle waiting to be lanced. Hearing about it or thinking about it was an invisible tether keeping me caught in the family horseshit. Like a curse almost.

Two hours later we crossed the border, on our way to fish for the elusive yet much sought after silver perch. I had convinced Dean that a Mexico trip was a good idea after all and having a specific quarry seemed to heighten his interest. I also said I would drive my campervan. If we ran out of daylight, we could stay the

night and fish the next morning, and then drive home. Just after crossing the border, Dean decided that tequila would be better than whiskey, and we needed beers, too. He bought a liter bottle and a case of Pacificos. We had a Styrofoam cold box filled with ice. When we made dusty La Salina and Angel's Landing, I parked off a dirt road near the beach running north from the rocky point.

We hurled our sinkers out past the shallow rocks, the hooks baited with fresh mussels. The sun was lower in the sky and a pale three-quarter moon shone over the gulf. We would definitely catch a whole school of big fat perch—that's what I told Dean. He nodded. A big storm swell broke on the point, sending spray high into the air, and a gust of chilly wind blew the mist at us and the gulf waters seemed colder than usual. Dean wondered where Curtis was and hoped by some off chance he would show up. So I got out my cell phone and left a short message on his answering machine.

Dean made a long cast just beyond the rocky point. He is very skillful with surfcasting rods. Then he began reeling in the line, just fast enough to keep the hook from settling into the craggy rocks underwater. Silver perch can go as much as five or six pounds. Some fishermen claim eight.

"I got a strike!" Dean shouted into the nippy breeze. He took a slug of tequila with his free hand. The fish cut back and forth, fighting against the hook, but Dean did not let up and kept cranking his reel.

"Don't lose him," I hollered.

Dean wobbled back and forth as he fought. Thirty feet out the fish hit the surface for an instant and I could see his bright scales. The late afternoon sky was rusty orange and the color reflected from the sides of the silvery fish.

"It looks like a perch," I yelled. "A big one!"

Dean grinned. The fish was in the shallows, still fighting but beginning to tire, so I slipped on my rubber boots and waded out to net him. It was a big male, maybe six pounds. We put him in a five-gallon bucket filled with seawater. He barely fit. Then we had shots of tequila to celebrate and cracked opened two fresh beers. They were ice-cold. The bottle and the chilly air combined

made my fingers ache a little.

“What are you going to do about your sister?” Dean said, as if the question had never left his mind. “You don’t seem worried ... but I’ll tell you what. With as many wells as your old man owns, I’d get a lawyer and find out what the hell’s going on. Before it’s too late.”

I shook my head. Dean was standing beside the bucket holding his beer. He looked at the perch for a moment and said, “They’ll reel you in just like I did that fish, Willy. You better start fighting back.”

“My sister may be a spoiled little bitch, Dean, but I don’t think she’d try to cheat me.”

“Think again. Think three or four times and think serious. What about McGeorge and his sleazy twin brother? I wouldn’t put nothing past them two.”

I took another pull off my beer. Down in the bucket the big perch was cramped so tightly he could not straighten out and he was gulping a lot of water. The bucket was only half-full.

“The fish needs more air.” I went back to the campervan and got another bucket, and then put the beers into the bucket and covered them with ice. I filled the cold box with fresh seawater. The big perch could swim back and forth a little and breathe easier.

“We’re going to cut off his head and eat him, Willy. What’s the point?”

“It’s better if a fish breathes easy before he goes, that’s all.”

Dean gave me one of his looks and took a piece of fresh mussel from the bait bucket. He weighed 160 pounds when we graduated from high school and now he is at least 200. Turning thirty did not bother me at all because I still felt like I was twenty-five. But now I am almost forty, and some days when I’m feeling depressed, it seems like I’m already half-dead. Like the best somehow slipped by me before I even noticed.

We baited our hooks and cast out again. Dean wanted a margarita on the rocks, and so I reeled my line in and fixed two drinks. The sun was scarcely above the horizon and it looked like a ball of molten glass, hazy, slowly deforming as it settled below the land.

“Goddamn it, Willy,” said Dean. “I’ll tell you what your sister and her wimp-ass husband are going to do. Since your dad got that stroke he ain’t been so well. They’re going to get everything put into some kind of fancy trust, tied up nice and tight, and as soon as he dies they’ll be in control. Maybe even sooner. Guaranteed. Same thing happened to one of my—”

Just then something hit my line. The drag on the reel was light and the fish took twenty feet before I reacted. I was a little drunk.

“Bring him in, Willy!” Dean shouted.

My pole bent toward the darkening sea, the line cutting back and forth as the fish fought. The surface of the water was a pale veneer of fading light and as I reeled the fish closer, Dean made his way into the shallows. He did not bother putting on his rubber boots and his pants and tennis shoes were soaked.

“Don’t wade in any deeper,” I shouted, “I won’t lose him.”

Beyond the sandy patches the sea bottom was rocky and treacherous and I was afraid Dean might take a fall. The wind blew hard and another swell crashed over the point. I cranked furiously on my reel to take in the slack before Dean hurt himself. The fish swam deeper, cutting left and right. Dean grabbed for the line and slipped, and then belly-flopped and went under. I dropped my rod in the shallows and rushed after him. Suddenly his heavy frame rose up like a crazed pilot whale and he bellowed at the top of his lungs: “Sonofabitch!”

I saw my lightweight rod and reel disappear beneath the water. I tried for it and missed. The big fish was pulling hard and fast. I lunged forward, my foot slipped into a hole between the rocks, and I fell face first. Barnacles cut the palms of my hands like razors. I got to my feet and looked at Dean. We stood there laughing at each other, a foolish pair of soaking wet drunks. There was nothing left to do except to wade ashore and pour a couple shots of tequila. Then we changed clothes at the campervan and cleaned the cuts on our hands. We were bleeding and shivering but the straight shots of tequila burned warm inside our bellies.

“Let’s drive to the cantina and get something to eat,” Dean said.

It was not a long drive, only about four miles. We gathered up our gear and I tossed the silver perch back into the moonlit gulf. It seemed like the best thing to do.

The dirt road to the cantina was bumpier than usual, potholed and slow going, and Dean was talking about getting more tequila. We'd finished off most of our bottle and spilled the rest. He started in about his father, a variation on a familiar theme he had been telling me for years. Although every time he told it, it was intense and personal, as if for the first time.

"You know, Willy, my old man had a few oil wells in his better days. More than a few, actually, but he died flat broke. The old bastard drank too much and gambled everything he ever made. Didn't leave me or my sister a cent. Zilch point fucking shit—"

"Didn't leave you nothing, not even a cent."

"—hell no, and I know your dad was a sonofabitch when you were young, but at least he didn't blow all his goddamn money. How much do you think he's worth, anyway?"

"I don't know ... five million maybe. Maybe more. But more than half's going to the Catholic Church and some other charities. He made that real clear several years ago."

"And how much do you think you'll get if your sister and her snake-ass husband have their way about it? I know your sister—I know how she is. She was always like that."

"Why don't you just get off this crap about my sister? I mean really, I'll give you my share and you fight it out with Lizzie. She lives for it. She doesn't have any other life."

"That's bullshit buddy boy and you know it. You got to get what's coming to you. You're lucky to have something to fight for, goddamnit."

"Maybe my sister will get what's coming to her. Maybe in the end we all get what's coming to us."

I wasn't sure I believed what I had just said, wasn't even sure why I had said it. Dean said nothing. The frustration and argument had died out of him and he gave me an odd, distant look. I kept quiet the rest of the way to the cantina. We both knew we had crossed the line—we'd gone too far—but then drunks do that. Dean would drive back to Beaumont the day after tomorrow. So

why dredge up bad memories and stir up a bunch of hard feelings?

By the time we got to the cantina I had lost my appetite. The bumpy ride took too long and my stomach was churning. Plus something didn't seem quite right. But I couldn't put my finger on it. Dean avoided looking at me. He opened the door and got out. I followed him across the dirt parking lot to the wooden double doors of old cantina. It was Thursday night and the place was quiet, a few regulars who lived around Angel's Landing nursing drinks and smoking cigarettes. Inside we ordered beers and shots of tequila. Dean wanted chicken tacos with rice and beans. Ramon the bartender recognized me.

"How was the fishing?" he asked in Spanish.

"*Malo suerte*," I said, and showed him my palms. Dean did the same and we all laughed. It helped ease the tension between Dean and me.

"I just hope that poor fish can break the line and free himself," I said.

"Don't worry, Willy," Dean said, "a rock will snag the line and the fish will wear it down in a day or two. He'll keep fighting. Fish are tough that way."

Ramon looked skeptical. I was about to say something when the cantina door opened. It was Curtis, cowboy hat down low over his eyes and his long-sleeve western shirt untucked. He was drunk, too—I could tell by his red nose and cheeks—and when he saw me his face fell, as if something bad had happened.

"Sorry to hear about your father," he said, and put an arm around my shoulder.

I sensed something was coming but I wasn't sure what. "What happened?"

Curtis's face went through a series of expressions, the last of which seemed painful.

"Your cousin Jimmy ... he told me the poor old guy passed away yesterday. A major stroke or something like that. You hadn't heard nothing?"

I shook my head. The room was quiet, everybody looking at me as if I should say something or make some sort of acknowledgement. But there was nothing to say.

In the background I heard Dean whisper to Ramon, in Spanish, although I wasn't sure what he'd said. I wasn't even sure I was still there to listen.

A while later, to help alleviate the somber atmosphere that was hanging over the barroom, I told Curtis and Dean that everything was fine and I was going to take a walk on the beach. "To make my peace with the old man," I said. Curtis put his arm around my shoulder again. "Good idea, Willy, he'll be up in heaven listening to every word."

I did not share Curtis's religious optimism but I knew in his naïve way he meant well. And I knew by Dean's expression, the guardedness in his eyes, he was still thinking about my sister and her husband.

I went out the back door and made my way around the building to the dirt parking lot, and then started my campervan. I couldn't stop thinking about that fish, the hook in his mouth and that nylon line denying his freedom, condemning him to a slow death. I drove back to the rocky point. The gulf was darker now, the sky blacker than ink. The wind blustery and cold.

I searched the van and found an old facemask and an underwater flashlight. The bright beam opened the darkness as I waded into the shallows. It penetrated the surface and illuminated the sandy bottom, the ancient rock formations and clusters of barnacles.

Deeper in, the chill waters surrounded me and my body ached with the cold. I was in over my head, treading water. Suddenly a gust of wind blew frothy spray in my face. I put on the facemask and went under. I strained to see a small reflection of light, a sign to tell me I had found the rod and reel. That I had found the silver perch and the right place to let everything go.

Allison Whittenberg

Wait for Rain

They'd have to save all the whales
before they get to prisoner's rights. Still, to
protect the unborn I'm cuffed in front
transported on a state bus.

Will the maternity ward be pastel blue or
pastel pink? It's institutional white.
I'm no angel. They are no monsters.
They speak in a hush.

Going under, reminds me of the high
life. Like a slap, his cry kills
my buzz. We bond for two years,
then he's off to his sentence.

The name I gave him won't stay.

He won't remember my scent.

He doesn't have my eyes.

But maybe one day if he's not shipped too
far on a side street glazed with rain.

I'll pass a stranger who won't be.

James F. Gaines

Red River of the North

“Yet, still, in such Arcadian settings, Sin doesn’t seem so central.”

--Rev. Basil Cunningham

The Lutheran church is all that stands today
Its frame supported mainly by the ghosts
Out in the quarter acre cemetery
After last frost once a month
Some sixty year old who was once a child
From Minot, Morehead, or maybe Bismarck
Once a year perhaps from the Twin Cities
Will come to see to relatives’ rank graves
And wind up weeding the whole forsaken plot
Crusty headstones become so hard to read
Eroded names and dates blur bifocals
The sanctuary weathers nobly as a harrier
Who nests with optimism in the belfry boards
Scanning the unmarred wheat field margins
This was the kind of typical Midwestern town
Where the pastor almost never had to preach
On secret or alleged adulterous lusts
But did refer each Lent to bestiality
And saw fit to exclude the chapter on Onan

Rosie

From the back of the truck, you watch the first shafts of sunlight paint the side of the mountain in brilliant orange. The beam spreads above you, picking up floating ice crystals that swarm around the trees. The snow lights up, then turns to black water and dribbles down the trunks in big black stains. This is so beautiful, you think to yourself. This place is so beautiful. If only-

Bang! The truck hits a rut on the hard dirt road. You bounce upward, then down on the tool box. Kenny pulls the little cab window open and grins at you. A plume of cigarette smoke puffs out the window. "You still holding them propane tanks?" He asks.

"Yes," you say. You are holding in your frozen hands a steel cable that loops through the eyeholes of a dozen propane tanks, leashed to the side rail of the truck. They are tight and cut into your palms, but you can't let go. You've been told what happens if you let them go. "Fireworks," Boss once told you. "Happened to the last rental," he said, holding his hands up and giggling under his bushy moustache. "Look ma, no hands!"

Kenny drives straight into town, and pulls the truck up in front of the McDonald's. He climbs out of the cab and slams the door shut. "Come on," he waves an unnaturally- long arm at you. You follow him through the glass door to the counter. "Boss says I should buy you breakfast."

You sit down across from Kenny. Two pairs of pancakes in Styrofoam containers sit on plastic trays between you. "Boss wants me to talk to you about not being a rental no more," he says. A sudden knot of homesickness clutches your throat. You can't swallow your pancakes. You push the tray away. "He just wants me to ask, is all. It's a good job once you go permanent." Kenny finishes his pancakes and sticks a plastic fork into yours. "Once I went permanent they started paying me for all the overtime and all that. And nobody treats you like a rental no more."

"Thanks," you say.

"All Boss wants you to do is think about it, is all," Kenny

says. Somehow he stuffs the pancakes into his mouth while still smoking. "Let him know by tomorrow. Today, he told me to bring you and the propane and them tools over to site four. They screwed up so bad, they need a rental to come clean it all up."

*

The big truck turns out onto the flat paved road that circles the town, then spills out on the road west. Through the trees, across the snowfields, you can see the neat little cluster of houses and stores around the old mill. You can barely make out smoke rising from chimneys, steam rising from a plant, and the roof of a lone diner. All you can think of now is those pancakes. You miss them. You are sad that you didn't eat them.

Kenny pulls the truck in front of a two-story shell of a building in the woods. Through the woods next door, cars inch slowly through a drive-thru window. You can't make out if it's a Wendy's or a Burger King.

Kenny sticks his head back out the window. "Well, we're here, I guess. Get your ass off the truck. Check in with a guy they call Rosie. Jest pull off four of them tanks. And don't lose them tools."

You walk into a cinderblock fortress. A half-dozen workers with burnt faces and shaggy blonde beards drop long steel bars onto a cement surface. They glare at you, then go back for another bar.

"You know where I can find Rosie?" You ask one.

"Nope," this one says, putting his large hands on his hips.

"Can you point me in his general direction?"

"I can," he says. "But let me ask you first something. Where you from?"

"Site seven," you say, nodding back toward the big truck. "From the site seven worksite. They told me to find Rosie."

"No, I mean, where you *from*."

You tell him where you're from. The man turns and spits on the bar he just dropped.

"Oh, yeah," he says. "We heard about you."

"Up here!" A new voice comes from somewhere high up in the half-constructed carcass of the building, but you can't

see anyone up there. “You come on up here! Don’t pay them no mind.”

A new bar clangs down. “Who’s that?” Another one asks.

“Rental,” the spitter says. “They sent him over here from seven to do some squirrel work.”

He spits again.

“Course, now we don’t need us no squirrel. We got us here a rental.”

“Up here now,” the voice from above comes again. “Get on up here.”

You look up again at the roofless structure. Scaffolding made of planks and rope weaves through the top ledges. The sun has just started to bleed through the trees, blinding you when you look up. You now see the silhouette of a small man above you, waving a large forearm. “I guess you’re looking for me,” the voice says. “You must be that rental. Get on up. There’s a ladder in the back. Get on up here.”

You climb over a pile of half-shattered crates and broken cement blocks, through the frame of what might someday become a back door. The tool box is very heavy. Outside again, you face upturned red dirt and piles of old shoveled snow. The ladder is hand-made and leans up against dead brown branches. You ascend it with one arm, moving the tool box up against your stomach. You climb over the ledge and land softly on the soft wet wood of the scaffolding, creaking under your weight.

“Y’ever see anything so screwed up in your whole life?” the voice asks.

You turn around and Rosie is standing in front of you. His face is very difficult to look at. One eye is clear blue and stares right at you, and one has no pigment at all and stares down and away. There’s a nose that’s been broken so many times that you can’t really tell where nose starts and forehead ends. The whole right side of Rosie’s face drifts away from him. He’s short but wide. Two twisted arms dangle loosely out of a sleeveless ‘Rebel Yell’ sweatshirt.

“Yeah, like I was saying,” Rosie continues, “some screw-butt contractor said we do it his way, or whatever, and git it done

before the first snowfall, and guess the hell what else is new. So what's it do? It snows. And it all just fell out, the first frost, it just frigging cracked out, man. Set us back three weeks easy. We're screwed, man. We screwed this job up good."

You pull your gloves on; they have grown stiff and cold in your pocket. "What do you need me to do?"

"I don't care what the hell you do," Rosie says, still staring at his ruins. "I ain't no bossman." Rosie turns to walk back to a corner where he dug a hole between two steel beams. Then he marches straight back up to you, almost bumping up next to you. "But I guess if I was the bossman, I'd want you to take that sledgehammer over there, and start breaking up the rest of that crap wall so we can reset it all over again. I'd probably want this whole job dug out and redone and set, before it freezes out again."

"Okay," you say.

Your arms and legs ache with hunger. You pick up the sledgehammer. It's heavy and it hurts your hands, still cracked and sore from yesterday, when you dug a foundation trench out at site seven. Rosie starts digging through the tool box. You start swinging and the cracking cement feels good. It drops in little triangles onto the scaffold boards. You peek down at the floor below; you can still hear the clang of the rebar men working, but you cannot see them. You follow the lines where they inter-laced the bars together.

"You ain't gonna get nowhere, just tapping at it like that," Rosie says.

"Sorry," you say.

"Don't have to apologize to me sir," he says, still pulling out tools. "I ain't no boss."

Rosie screams out something like a whoop. It is so loud that you lose your grip on the sledgehammer. You trap it with your leg before it plummets down off the scaffolding. You turn back to Rosie- you guess he must have hurt himself-but he is staring out over the precipice.

"Oh, bitch" Rosie says. "Oh, bitch. Will you look at that. Will you look."

"Look at what?" You ask. You peer over the edge. You

can see the fast food restaurant. There's a woman pulling the door open. She's wearing a green pants suit, like a flight attendant, or a rental car agent. Her hair is tied up in an off-green scarf that matches her suit.

"Will you look at that," Rosie says. "Hmmm, hmmm. Oh, bitch."

You pick up the sledgehammer and swing it. A square foot of the wall becomes sand; it slides down the wall of the building.

"Let me ask you something," Rosie says behind you. He waits for you to turn around. You take off your work gloves, pretending to adjust them, so you don't have to look at him. Then he comes right up to you again.

"You got yourself a bitch?"

"A what?"

"A bitch! You got yourself a bitch?"

"Um, yeah," you say, "I guess."

You start to pick up the hammer again when Rosie gestures for you to stop.

"I got me the best bitch in the world," he says. "But she's in the big house right now." Rosie pulls a wad of something wet out of his sweatshirt pocket and stuffs it in the sagging side of his mouth. "It's all account of me she's in there, too."

"Thing is, we were climbing out the back window of this here liquor store, and we set the alarm off, and the cops came in the front door. And you know what she said? She said, 'You run Rosie.' And I said, 'no sir,' right to her face I said it. 'No bitch of mine's gonna take one for me.' And she said, 'you run Mister! You got a prior!' And she turned and shot one over their heads. That was enough for me, and I ran like hell. I just ran and ran, and when I turned around, that bitch weren't there. She got eight years, and she's still up there, and she never once told nobody I was with her. Not once. I ended up in there later for something else, but I only got two years. Now I go up there and visit her sometimes, cause she was so loyal and all that."

Rosie is still staring out at the fast food restaurant. He spits a string of brown tobacco juice out onto the snow.

"Even though I pretty much got bitches any time I want

now.”

You pick up the sledgehammer and swing it with such force that the whole wall collapses in a cloud of powder; when the dust clears, Rosie’s still there.

“Now let me ask you something,” he asks you. “You got a bitch that would do something like that for you?”

You don’t get to answer. The workers on the floor are screaming up at you; you have to go down and clean the rubble and plaster you’ve just poured down into their new foundation.

*

By the time you are done Kenny’s come back to get you. When you climb down the ladder, he stands there staring at you, his arms hanging at his sides, surrounded by the other workers. “Looks like he pretty much screwed this job up worse,” they say to Kenny. “Stay away from them sledgehammers,” one of them yells to you when you climb in the truck.

Kenny drives you back to the center of town. “So, you got to meet Rosie,” he yells out above the wind, howling all around you.

“Yeah,” you say.

“Ain’t he something?”

“He is.”

He pauses to light a cigarette.

“Rosie tell you he used to be the boss?”

“No,” you yell back. “He didn’t tell me that.”

“Yeah, he used to be the boss,” Kenny says. “but he got all messed up, did some time. When he got out, the company still hired him back. Only, he can’t be a boss no more. For all the obvious reasons, I guess. But it goes to show you. This company takes care of its own,” Kenny says. “When I heard that story, I signed right up.”

The big truck pulls over on the town’s main street, just across from the McDonald’s.

“See you in the morning,” Kenny yells back. “You go right in and talk to Boss.”

Kenny pulls the little cab window shut. You climb off the back of the truck, which roars off out of town, its tire chains

ringing on the hard pavement. The sky goes dark and it starts to snow again; big white gobs floating down like feathers. You stand for a second, not sure where to turn; then you can't help yourself. You stare in through the plate glass front window of the McDonald's, now closed. You look at the table you sat at, where the pancakes once steamed in their Styrofoam tray. You have some hope that they are still there. But many hours ago, the table was wiped clean.

Marzia Dessi

Sometimes Hear Besides Pleasant Whining

Sometimes hear besides pleasant whining
a chatter where inexplicable splendor of man
stands garbed shameless in nothing,
sails wide past beating oars of dreams,
carried down the stream of promised comment,
A new start under feet, nothing but dirty hands.

Humble people- nothing they came,
burning heart still lit in flames till bones were seen.
Deep sea, swell in whispers of age,
youth the whirlpool of life,
once handsome and tall, as are you now
come torchlight
red of the crying rebellion of stony places-
little patience down sandy rocks.

Marzia Dessi

Take her, lift her, look at her

Take her, lift her, look at her
Hidden spirits, injured and
upward ghostly,
unknown dreams,
told beneath the flames.

Take her , lift her, look at her-
Her body is an ornament-
Touch her, think of her,
now pure, free of scrutiny.
Past dishonored but still fair for the rarity.
Lamps quiver, a light houseless-
The bleak wind ends it.

A picture untaken, to rigid-
So blindly known to darkness,
burning her hands on a cold flame.
Happy Sad immorality, her evil, her sins
The dream of happy gamesome minds,
turning apart, leaning on black stoned walls.

Take her, lift her, look at her.
Read from the book.
The black one with the golden trimming.
Feet upright, some historic pages;
Read those-
The ones on suffering, on grief-
Speaking to all times and all life.

Cully Perlman

City of Crosses

After the funeral she sat at the window staring out to the road along where her father's mourners departed. She recognized the family members at the ceremony, but of her father's friends, his business associates, she had previously met only Mr. Grist. Mr. Grist had been her father's driver for as long as she could remember. When she was younger she assumed Mr. Grist was a part of the automobile; he never exited it, and she had never seen him below his chest. All she remembered about him was his hat and eyes, the half wave when he pulled out of the long drive. She remembered his eyes especially. They were blue and deep and more than anything she understood them to be soulless. She thought his eyes were eyes you did not want to see coming down a dark alley anywhere ever.

For a moment it occurred to her people might think her father had killed himself. Her father had friends that had killed themselves because of the market. It was silly, she thought, but there they were, dead, and now he was dead and gone to where they were gone. Some had hung themselves. Some leapt from the upper floors of buildings. Some had blown their heads off. Strong, industrious men, but they had been devastated by their poverty. She hoped no one thought that of her father. He had not killed himself. He cared for his money, but he was not the type of man to seek that sort of escape. He could have come back, if it were only about money. Money wouldn't have made her father commit a sin of such magnitude. He was not that sort of man.

Behind her, Margaret heard footsteps. She did not need to look to know who it was. "If there's anything you need," Ms. Dormer said.

"Thank you," Margaret said.

"I'll be going now."

"Goodnight, Ms. Dormer."

"Supper is in the ice box, Margaret. Please eat, dear."

"Good night, Ms. Dormer."

Margaret listened to Ms. Dormer lock the back door and heard the automobile start up and crunch the rocks along the side of

the house, and then she watched Ms. Dormer and her son, Thomas, drive away. Thomas looked out the side window at her and held her stare as long as he could until the automobile was too far away to continue. She sat at the window thinking about her father and that her father's sister, Emma, would be arriving later that evening from Chicago. She had never met Emma and was not sure why she had decided to come to Las Cruces now that her father had passed. Financial matters, she assumed. Money. What else could she want? What else did any of them ever want?

That night, Ms. Dormer returned. Thomas sat in the idling car listening to the radio. Ms. Dormer knocked once on the door and pushed it open. She had a key and had been using that same key for as long as Margaret could remember.

"Margaret?" Ms. Dormer called.

"Yes," Margaret said. Margaret stood at the top of the stairs. Between them sat dark and empty the grand entryway where as a child Margaret skipped rope while her father clapped and clapped until his palms pinked up and she grew exhausted.

"There's been some trouble, dear."

"Oh?" replied Margaret. "What sort of trouble?"

Ms. Dormer took a few steps but did not walk further than the beginning of the rug. "Your relatives...they are...they have... It's horrible news, dear. I'm sad to deliver it."

"Deceased?" Margaret said. Margaret could not make out Ms. Dormer's face, but she did not move to turn the light switch on.

"It was an accident," said Ms. Dormer.

"I see."

"I'm very sorry."

"Yes," said Margaret. "It is a tragedy, I'm sure."

"I will tell Thomas to go. I will stay the night, dear."

"I wish to be alone, Ms. Dormer. But thank you."

Ms. Dormer was quiet. "Margaret," she said. "Oh, Margaret—"

"Thank you, Ms. Dormer," Margaret said.

Ms. Dormer stood unmoving in the light of the moon cutting in from the window. "I think it may be best to keep company,

dear. I don't mean to intrude."

"Thank you," Margaret said. "Thank you, thank you, Ms. Dormer. I appreciate your offer. Truly, I do. But I don't wish for you to stay."

Ms. Dormer hesitated at the door for a long moment, but eventually turned to leave. Over her shoulder, Ms. Dormer said, "Goodnight, sweet Margaret."

"Goodnight then."

Ms. Dormer closed the door and departed. Ms. Dormer and Thomas's automobile pulled up alongside another automobile just entering the driveway. The driver spoke to Thomas, the dust from the ground stealing all around in the bright white of the lights shining in the dark country night. In the light, moths fluttered recklessly. Margaret looked at the stars in the cold night sky and closed her eyes. Then Ms. Dormer's automobile pulled away and separated itself from the house and from their land. The other automobile pulled up and the engine turned off. Margaret knew the driver and she knew the automobile.

Her father was a man of whom Margaret had no delusions. Her father had begun without parents and without a nickel, but he had his siblings and from their struggles, from their hardships, Margaret's father was born. From the constitution he created for himself, he thrived. She did not know to the cent what they had stored away, but money, the lacking of it, was of no concern to her. It had never been a concern to her.

The men came for her as Mr. Grist said they would. She had sworn to him she would not leave, and he had assured her they were not men who thought the same way about the law or the living the way she thought of them. These were hardened men, the men coming. More hardened than she could imagine.

"This is my home," she said. "Where would I go?"

"Anywhere, Margaret."

"There is nowhere without here."

"Nowhere's on its way."

She had seen Mr. Grist's picture in the newspapers. She knew what they said about her father. Of the businesses her father

was reputedly in control of throughout Albuquerque, El Paso. Every square inch on the way to Clovis. But he was her father. They loved each other. There was no one else but them after her mother passed. Every year she knew her mother less. But she had never really known her mother. Or she could not remember her. In a way, she replaced her mother. Became her, somehow.

Mr. Grist walked to his automobile and she watched as he unloaded sacs and flung them over his broad shoulders and returned to her side.

“Lock the doors, Margaret.”

“They’re locked.”

“Check them again, Margaret. Be sure.”

It was deathly quiet outside. Mr. Grist made sure all the lights in the house were extinguished. He used a small flashlight to light the spaces before him. He held the flashlight in his teeth and unzipped the duffel bags and emptied everything onto the floor, pulling weapons one by one from the sac and laying each of the weapons one by one beside the next. He laid boxes of ammunition and bottles that looked like medicine beside each other and told her to put this box here, and that box there, in different locations around the house.

“I’d say I don’t understand but I do.”

“In a way I’m sure you do too,” said Mr. Grist. He did not look often at Margaret. He was very focused on the preparation of the house, on the knowing where out in the immediate desert the men would take cover.

Like she knew her father, she knew the man Mr. Grist was, what he meant to her father for all her life. The loyalty he’d shown to her father as long as she could remember.

She said, “Tell me a few things, Mr. Grist.”

“Things, Margaret?”

“My father. Was he a criminal? Was he a bad person?”

“By whose definition?”

“By the dictionary’s, Mr. Grist.”

“Your father loved you like fathers love daughters,” Mr. Grist said. Mr. Grist made a show of taking the house in. “This—all

of it? It don't come easy no matter how you come to get it."

"My father is dead, Mr. Grist. He is dead and he is not coming back."

Mr. Grist nodded. "I know that, Margaret."

"Then why are you here?"

Mr. Grist trained his eyes out the window. Margaret listened as he cocked a gun and locked another's chamber. He did this at the same time with a smooth flick of his wrist and without looking at the guns. "Your father was a good man, Margaret. He was good to me."

"So you're here of a sense of debt, Mr. Grist?"

Mr. Grist did not look at her. She could not see his face or his eyes, but she could see them in her mind's eye. After a long few seconds, Mr. Grist said, "I think that's about as good as I can explain it."

"So you'll die to honor that debt?"

"I'm hoping there's a different outcome."

A sliver of moon came through the window and inched its way along the carpet. Margaret recoiled from it, backed herself into the shadows.

"Why would they want to kill me, Mr. Grist? I don't know these men. I couldn't point these men out in the middle of Main Street if they called my name. What will that achieve? What message will that send to anyone?"

"There is no achievement sometimes, Margaret. Sometimes things just are for the doing of them. To show they can be done."

"And you understand that, Mr. Grist?"

Mr. Grist stepped into the sliver of moonlight. "I understand it fine," he said.

"And my father? Did he understand it, too?"

Mr. Grist's teeth shined pale in the darkness. "If we're staying," he said, "we best get ready."

The automobiles pulled up slow like cows coming home. One by one they pulled into the driveway. Some went left and some went right. Their headlights were bright and Margaret could hear music playing softly from one of the automobiles. It was an old song sung by a woman from the Jazz days a few years back that had been

very popular at the time. Margaret could not recall the woman's name. Mr. Grist passed Margaret a pistol and they sat there listening to the sad low voice reaching to them from the darkness outside.

"I know you know how to use it. Use it if you need to."

"Tell me what my father was, Mr. Grist. Precisely, I mean."

"A good man," Mr. Grist said. "That's what he was."

"I'm young, Mr. Grist, not naive."

Mr. Grist walked to the front door. He stood a foot or so from the glass and looked out. He put a hand in front of his eyes. He took his hat off and threw it to the sofa and then he took his jacket off and stood right up against the window and looked out again but did not cup his hands. In the light, Margaret could see he wore suspenders and two holsters. In the holsters she could see the glint of Mr. Grist's pistols. He stepped back into the darkness and lit a cigarette. In the light of the match she saw him looking her way with those blue eyes of his and she took a step back before realizing what she was doing. It looked like now there were machine guns on the sofa.

"Your father lived a good long life, Margaret. He made a lot of people a lot of money."

"And hurt just as many."

Mr. Grist glanced out the window and smoked his cigarette. "Your father was a businessman, Margaret. That's all. Part of any business is fixing the problems that arise." Mr. Grist turned to look at her. "Your father never hurt anyone."

"But you did. You hurt them for him, correct? When he told you to?"

"Sure, Margaret. Sure I did."

Margaret held the pistol. It was cold and weighed more than she'd remembered them weighing. She took a step forward. Mr. Grist blew smoke against the window. The smoke lit up in the light from outside the way you saw it in the pictures, slow-moving, full of a strange, beautiful mystery. "I have one more question, Mr. Grist. If you don't mind. And I'd like you to be honest with me."

Mr. Grist took another pull from his cigarette. He seemed to be shaking his head. Not to show her but because he was shaking it to himself. "I don't lie, Margaret."

“Good.”

“What’s your question?”

“Paul Schön.”

“Yeah?”

“Was it you?”

Mr. Grist eased his face from the window. He did not turn around, but she could see him wanting to somehow in how he held himself.

“Your caller,” he said.

“Did you do it, Mr. Grist? Did my father tell you to do it?”

“Do what?”

Margaret approached him. “Please,” she said. “If we’re to die tonight, I ask you tell me the truth. That’s all.”

Mr. Grist looked back at the window. “You aren’t going to die,” he said.

“Did you do it because my father asked you to?”

The music from outside grew louder. Still no one emerged from the automobiles. One of the sets of headlights went out, but the rest remained bright, lit everything up. “You should go upstairs,” he said. “Sit behind the wall where your father’s bar is. You can take some shots from there if you need to.”

“I’m not moving until you answer my question.”

Mr. Grist shook his head almost gingerly. “You’re stubborn,” he said. “Like your father.” He looked back out the window. Watched the automobiles. He let his face get hit by the light so the men outside could see it was him standing there. She saw him look at her now, the left side of his face white in the light, his eyes, those damned blue eyes, looking at her like she didn’t want them to look at her.

“Don’t point that at me,” he said. “I’m not the enemy, Margaret.”

“Did you?” she said. He stared at her. She lowered the pistol.

“Yes,” he said. “I did, Margaret. But he went good. He never felt a thing. I did it so it was easy on him. Your father made sure it went that way. He was clear on that. He never saw a thing. He just went to sleep, Margaret.”

She looked at Mr. Grist and looked at the light and heard

the music. Boy was that music nice out there. It was like she thought the nightclubs in Chicago or New York or Philadelphia were on Friday nights, when people got out of work and took their dates for a night on the town. It must have been great in those days, when the music was like that, loud, all around you and you were dancing like a crazy person out in the middle of the dance floor, the lights as bright as the goddamn sun.

She raised the gun a little and held it, pointed it at the window. When the high beams on the closest automobile turned back on and the grand foyer was lit up like mid-morning all over again she pointed at the first car and pulled the trigger and fired and everything was loud after that, Mr. Grist firing and the men outside firing and she felt for a second like she was being born again in a whirl of smoke and light and the sound of violence more violent than anything she'd ever heard before. Everything there ever was was happening right then, right at that moment, and it felt good. It felt right. It felt to her like the beginning of where her life began. Of where it would finally begin.

Carla Ruiz

Western



Yuan Changming

Modern Civilization

1

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Yuan Changming

Directory of Destinies

North: after the storm, all dust hung up
in the crowded air, with his human face
frozen into a dot of dust
and a rising speckle of dust
melted into his face
to avoid this cold climate
of his antarctic dream
he relocated his naked soul
at the dawn of summer

South: like a raindrop on a small lotus leaf
unable to find the spot
to settle itself down
in an early autumn shower
my little canoe drifts around
near the horizon
beyond the bare bay

Center: deep from the thick forest
a bird's call echoes
from ring to ring within each tree
hardly perceivable
before it suddenly
dies off into the closet
of a noisy human mind

West: not unlike a giddy goat
wandering among the ruins
of a long lost civilization
you keep searching in the central park
a way out of the tall weeds
as nature makes new york
into a mummy blue

East: in her beehive-like room
so small that a yawning stretch
would readily awaken
the whole apartment building
she draws a picture on the wall
of a tremendous tree that keeps growing
until it shoots up
from the cemented roof

Manuel Raul Trevizo

Regurgitated Metaphor

Clogged veins, become soothed
My mind's eye begins to vibrate and
I can't focus on my endeavors anymore
Thank God, I think
My tongue moisturizes with the burning substance
That slivers like worms down my mouth and into my throat
And I can finally cease to be the lord of woe

I hate that I need comfort,
But I especially hate that my comfort is like a stampede of oblivion
It races towards me, and from a distance I can see it,
But as it nears, my perceptions darken, therefore I can never guess
When it is overcoming me and crushing my limbs
Spiked hooves never should have been invented

After it comes and goes, I lay still, separated
Into a thousand little pieces, all of my organs littering the ground
The dust settles, and coats my remains
But the smell of rot does not begin until the following morning
Where I find myself embracing a toilet and exchanging each other's
fluids

I gather enough energy to finally stand up and push the lever down
As I see the remains of yesterday's comfort spiral down into
obscurity
I feel my body break down with the final splash of clashing spiral
tides

I hate that I need comfort,
Because much like this whirlpool before me,
So, is my life disappearing
Lower and lower I cease to be until one day I will
Finally swim in the sewers where I know I belong
My life is an elegy, disgorged

Colin Dodds

Sermon in the Hole

The rain sweeps the street,
calls the old drunk out of his stool,
stirs him to pronounce the sermon in the hole.

“Liquor alone will not save you,”
he promises.

“The Jim Beam in your eye,
the Wild Turkey rising from its ashes,
the Old Oversoul of Old Overholt.

“There is no binge that won’t pass.
The names of God are so much grass.

“The guy you say you are
is only a scaffolding cathedral
built on the back of an itchy dog.

“So?

“Do you dare pray the prayer, pull the blue wire,
that takes everything, even the prayers,
apart?”

I lower my head to my drink,
in a momentary ritual
by which I approve of myself

and dodge exorcism
for one more night.

Poor Joe

There is no need for a bell. Wind gusting through the door announces the arrival of a customer. “You’re in early, Sheriff,” the waitress says, bottle-blond coiffure nodding at him. She’s been working the breakfast rush since she started saving for her class ring in 1962. The town’s rhythms are her own. Wiping the outer glass of the rotating pie display case, she says, “No campaigning in here, now.”

“Morning, Barb,” he says, removing the white Stetson his office permits him. He ignores her last comment and leans an elbow on the gun at his hip. “Mr. Waters here yet?”

She puts her hand on a waist that lops over stained pants circa the era as her class ring. “It’s Wednesday,” she answers. Sheriff cocks his head. “Means you’ll find him in the back room with Don and Jim.”

“He asked me to meet him here,” he says.

“Then you’d best get in there, hon.” She resumes wiping. “That lot don’t like to wait.”

“Yes’m.” He smiles full-toothed at her, bringing out small wrinkles in the baby face that won him the last election, alongside the endorsement of the county’s prominent ranchers. Sheriff ambles back to the banquet room. Large oak doors, antelope carved into their face, separate it from the rest of the diner.

A booth along the back wall curves like a saddle horn around three worn cowboys. On the left, shirt buttons strain to encompass the girth of one cattleman, his stomach brushing table. To the right, toes of ostrich skin boots are just visible in the shadows beneath. Two crisp cowboy hats dangle from hooks on either side of the threesome.

“Sheriff,” a leather faced cattleman in the center says.

“Charlie.”

“Have a seat, son.” He is shoveling the last bite of *buenos rancheros* into his mouth. Introduction full of *chile verde* and tortilla, he jerks at thumb to the man on the left. “You know Don.” Another gesture, to the right, “And Jim,”

“Gentlemen.” The ranchers do not make room. Sheriff hoists a cushioned metal chair from the nearest table and with hunting dog obedience, sits.

Barb enters the room in full polyester sashay, coffee pot her constant accessory. The men cover mugs with flat hands. “What’ll it be, Sheriff?”

“A slice of lemon meringue,” he says. “No resisting temptation when I don’t get breakfast.” The comment does not register with the cowboys in the booth.

“Put it on my ticket, Barb.” Sheriff nods his thanks. Charlie pulls his face into a paternal grin. “How’s the campaign coming?”

“Pretty good for a week out. Least, that’s what Jessica tells me.”

“She’s a treat, that wife a’ yours,” Barb says, walking away from the table. “Her coconut cream’s almost as good as mine.”

“No argument there.” The lawman beams.

Charlie’s fork clatters against his orange plate. “Well, then. I’ll have to try some.”

“She’s making one for the church bake sale on Sunday.”

Charlie wags a finger at Don and Jim. “Don’t you fellas go out bidding me, now.” The cattlemen share a communal laugh. No one would consider trying to outbid Charlie Waters.

Sheriff waits as the older men, with stucco smiles, level their eyes on him in turn. Charlie folds the napkin over his plate. “This whole mess during elections,” he says, shaking his head. “Poor Joe.”

Jim puts his elbows on the table. “He’s Don’s wife’s cousin, you know.”

“Is he, now,” Sheriff asks.

Don nods. “Second cousin anyway. And you know, this whole thing has Margie wound so tight she can’t sleep.” He fishes in his front pocket for a toothpick. Jamming it into his mouth, he says, “And when Margie don’t sleep, you can bet I don’t either.” The cowboys chuckle.

“It’s a messy business,” Sheriff agrees. “The fire. That fella’s body. Reporters from Roswell hanging around, checking my

work.” He shakes his head. “And his wife won’t say anything to me.”

Jim says, “You know, he hired that fella to help him work on the frames of some of those cars of his.”

“Yessir,” Sheriff says. “That’s the story he gave me.”

Don says, “Some days that feller wouldn’t even show up to the barn. He’d just stay up at the house, eating whatever she’d put in front of him. Course, Joe’s too nice to say anything. Told me that boy never even got the welder working right.”

Jim chuckles, “Yeah, but that was only half the problem.”

“Half?” Sheriff asks.

“Come on, sheriff. Everybody knows his wife wasn’t a very faithful woman.” Jim grins.

“Still doesn’t explain –”

“You know, last time I was over there he was working on that Chevy for the Pioneer Parade,” Charlie says. Two packets of sugar thwack against an open palm. “He’s a good ol’ boy; doing what he could for this community.”

“He’d been working on Judge Hatley’s Ford, too,” Don says. “Free a charge. Hatley helped his daddy out when Joe was still a young’un. Before your time.”

Charlie says, “Folks here like to keep even records.”

Sheriff nods. There is silence in the banquet room as Charlie sips steaming coffee. Don fits his toothpick back into his mouth.

Jim continues, “He was always working on three or four. Heard he was going to build himself a shop on that land his daddy left him.”

Don taps the Formica table top with the knuckle of his middle finger. “He might could’ve; made some money. Might’ve made her happy finally.”

“Doubt it,” Jim says. “She was awful meddlesome,” Jim’s eyes rest again on the sheriff. “Called Verna while back; said she wanted them folks from the city paper to look into how the cable company said that MTV is blocked for out here.”

“Don’t need that filth in our county,” Don scoffs. “Get a hobby or something.”

“Told Verna to leave her be. She’s other folks’ problem.”

Barb returns with the sheriff's pie. She sets the plate down and tops off Charlie's coffee as he says, "Turns out, she was trying to sleep her way through that Facebook."

"Lori always was crazy, poor thing," Barb says, sliding a ticket under Charlie's faded John Deer ball cap.

"It's a good thing she was pretty." Don says. Barb laughs her way out.

"Poor Joe," Charlie says. "Even put her name on the deed to the trailer."

"You know she told Verna she got beat up every weekend by her daddy when she was little? Said she used to dream that somebody would come save her, like one a' them TV. shows." Jim shakes his head. "Then she complained 'cause she got Joe."

Mouth full of tart pie, sheriff says, "Could be he was more than she counted for."

"Now," Charlie says, "he might've had a temper when he was playing ball. But everybody knows he stopped drinking the day he met her."

"Cold turkey, amen," Don says.

"She was sleepin' around years before he figured it," says Jim.

"But he did figure it," the sheriff says. "Right before the accident, 'cording to them reporters. Looks awful suspicious."

Charlie fishes an ice cube from a sweaty water glass and deposits it into his coffee. The dark liquid parts for a melting tendril, only to swallow it up once the cube has completely disappeared. "Poor Joe," he says. "Trying to do right by his wife, the way a man ought to." The cattlemen grunt agreement. "Then two tragedies."

"One on top of the other," Jim says, offering a sorrowful look.

"It's just a good thing for her Joe came home early that day. If he'd knocked off at the usual time, she might 'a barbequed," Don says.

Jim can only hide half of his smile. "Like that worker fella."

"Sheriff," Charlie says, inclining his head toward the

lawman, "I was mighty impressed Joe drove that truck right through the side of the trailer, even with the fire. Surely made it easier to get her out in time."

The sheriff scrapes his fork against the plate, yellow pie filling dripping over the side. He says, "I just can't figure what started the whole thing. Fire investigator from Albuquerque is out there saying he don't think a welder could've done it."

Don rolls the toothpick from one side of his mouth to the other. "City folks. Wouldn't know which end of a heifer to milk."

"Well," the sheriff continues; "According to him, there's no way a faulty welder could burn up a whole trailer. Said there'd have to be something else to keep it going." He looks at Charlie. "Sides, can't find that welder anywhere near the house."

The ranchers look to Charlie. "Poor Joe," he says.

Jim adds, "Verna heard he has to auction all his daddy's land to pay for the hospital bills."

"Yeah," Don frowns, "and now that fella's family got lawyered up, threatening to sue him. Wrongful death or some other nonsense."

Charlie adds, "That boy ought to have been out in the barn instead of in the house. Would 'a made a world of difference."

"It's the darnedest thing," Jim says, "even with all she's put him through, Verna says he still waits on that woman hand and foot."

Charlie nods. "Treats her better than one of his cars now."

Don takes the toothpick from his mouth, pointing it at the sheriff. "You think you would take care of a woman that'd been running 'round on you?"

The sheriff's mouth is full of meringue. He swallows, saying, "I'd like to say —"

Jim nods, "I might 'a just let her stay in them flames a bit longer."

"If a man's trying to get rid of his wife, he won't run into the fire to save her," Don asks. "Don't make any sense to me."

"It ain't his fault he couldn't save that working boy." Jim folds his arms across his chest. "News folks ought to be asking the

fire department about their negligence.”

“Hell,” Don says, “He’s a saint. Whole thing ruined his life. Lost his house, wrecked his truck pulling out his whorin’ wife. And now he’s got to sell off his daddy’s land just to pay the doctors.”

“Poor Joe,” Charlie says. “Certainly has suffered enough this side of eternity.”

“Amen,” Jim says.

“Don’t you think, Sheriff,” Don asks, eyeing the young man

“I mean, I feel terrible; but I have —”

“Has Jessica heard anything about Cummins running against you,” Charlie asks.

“Who?”

“Greg Cummins,” Jim says, smiling. “Lives out by the stock yards, other side of the overpass.”

Don is nodding. “Almost beat Hamilton, the election before y’all moved to town. Nobody even knew he was running till they got their ballots.”

Charlie’s face is somber. “Be a real shame if he wanted to try for sheriff this year.”

“Real shame,” Don echoes, putting the toothpick back into his mouth.

“Course, I hear there’s openings at the slaughter house.” Jim smiles at the sheriff. “If you ended up needing work.”

“Always that.” Don says. “Hours are terrible. Especially with a wife and little ones.”

“But, it would pay the bills,” Jim adds. “Some of ‘em, anyway.”

“Course, you’d have to hand over the county truck,” Charlie says.

The ranchers have the watchful eyes of steer. Sheriff clears his throat. “Can’t say as Jess has mentioned Cummins. But I appreciate the information, gentlemen; would hate to get caught with my pants down.”

“Well, now,” Charlie says. “We like to look after our own.”

The sheriff says, "I suppose that's what we like most about living here." He pushes his empty plate to the center of the table and rises. "Best be getting on. Got that report to finish. But I suppose it comes with the job; even the accidents make paperwork." The cattlemen nod, smiling. "Y'all don't work too hard."

Charlie takes a sip of coffee. "Sheriff," he says. "You, too. And good luck at the polls on Tuesday. I'm sure you'll do just fine."

Barb smiles as the sheriff dips his chin to her. He resigns himself to the wind and opens the door. She picks up the coffee pot, sauntering over to a booth by the kitchen. A gnarled hand covers the mug. "Full, darlin'," she asks. She pulls a ticket off her pad and lays it on the table. "Think they're about ready for you now."

The man stands and walks to the banquet room, pulls open the heavy doors. Charlie's voice warms to the new comer. "Hey there, Joe."

Simon Perchik

As if each wave was being pardoned

As if each wave was being pardoned
sent off the way the moon
was covered with these flowers
and harvests that even today
are just hours apart
allowed to leave

--the first turbulence on Earth
remembered vaguely as moonlight
that still needs to be held down
soothed, at first with dirt
then evenings, then stones
and the gentle splash
on its way to the bottom

--an ancient rage! what was spared
is this thirst for her eyelids
between your lips --the same undertow
inside every flower
closer and closer and in your arms
the sea who has forgotten everything
to get away with it.

Diane Lefer

The Way I See It

When hundreds of small black birds tremble
the water's skin like vermin
you know you've got a jaundiced eye.
Besides which you've got transmission lines
on rust hills. Dusty tamarisk. The wind. And black,
barren the mountains. Dwarfed, mere hills
as though geologic liposuction
reduced them from the center long ago.

By *you*, of course I mean *me*. And believe me, I try.

But I see no miracle in your (and that's *your*, not *my*) baby.
How can I be impressed
with a being that can only grow to be something
that is very much like you or me?
Two eyes, a nose. Those little fingers and toes
that so impress you. I have the same and so do you.

Ah, jaundiced eye! The membrane slides away.

I see:

A lizard doing pushups on the rock. So different
from me it can be no other thing than Life itself.

Fingers, toes, eyes and mouth. A pulse.

A miracle.

Its heart pumping, and mine that had closed down, armored,
explodes open to beat--beating beating--again.

Lizard, lifted from the rock, throat pulsing.

Cold-blooded in my hand.

Fingers cling.

Jessica Gilmore

My Number is Four

Shining Tourmaline
Suspended on a ribbon
Reaching, weaving
Upwards and through,
Piercing the veil
îasy ha îasytatá

Dark Earth
Pressing against
Bare feet
Pull, release
Pull, release
Rhodochrosite beads and burns
Pull, release
Ixé bébé
Through curtains of
Euclase tears

My number is Four

Fleeing Lapis
Dividing, isolating
Hetep-Nfrw-Itn
Will always hide tears
Heat shimmers
‘nkh in the sand

Carved stone underneath
Bare feet
Edges, worn smooth by
The Sands

Electrum shines
Lifting hands to the sky,
Eyes rimmed with kohl
See the Moonlight
Glinting off Gold
Plentiful
As The Sands

My number is Four

Created the One
I am
My number is Five

Grow and change
With the phases of
The Moon
Mapping the Stars

Craig Loomis

The Ballad of Daryl Germany

Two things almost always happened around late August, early September, after the county fair, and both of them were something like secrets. First, the summer that had started off so homework-free and adventurous had grown surprisingly, even unfairly, long and dull. But that's not the secret part, the secret part was we yearned for school to start. Course, you couldn't say that, wouldn't dare, but that's how it was. The other thing was the old bridge over on 99, next to the Jackson farm, and its tomatoes. They had a couple names for it: Bridge 24, Thornton Bridge, and both were pretty good names and would do, but almost everybody who knew anything about that part of town called it the bridge over by the Jackson farm. Anyway, the best part about September and the old bridge was that it was built all wrong. It had lumps and bumps. The metal slabs didn't fit right—never had. Every now and again, after an especially terrible accident, they'd bring their trucks and machines out and cone off the road and maybe even hire the Ferguson brothers to be flagmen for a couple days, and try to make it better—even out the asphalt, smoothing out the bumps and dips. But in the end, they'd only make it worse—newer, brighter but worse.

When the big tomato trucks whirlwinded by they almost always hit the bridge all wrong, too hard, too much to the right where the dips would chatter your teeth, throwing some of the small, unimportant tomatoes into the creek, littering the bridge with bloody tomato bodies.

Course, some of the older drivers knew all about the bridge, and if they felt like it they'd slow down, maybe even drift left where the bumps were smaller. But as a rule, drivers didn't know anything about it, and if you had a good spot in the big oak—about half-way up—and were willing to watch really close, you could see the scare on their faces when their trucks took the dip, the way they'd suddenly grab the steering wheel with both hands, their mouths "Oooooohing." But if you were in that same oak--still about halfway up--you could see how some of the

older drivers seem to speed up as they got closer, their big trucks growling bigger and harder; you could see how they smiled, even grinned when they took the uneven asphalt extra fast, the tomatoes jumping up in surprise, splattering and bouncing rubberball-like across the bridge.

When I told Marcus about the way some of the older drivers did it, he just snickered and said it probably had something to do with politics, even economics. When I asked him what he meant, he said, "Never mind. It's too big to talk about."

Wayne and me would sit up in that oak until six or seven of the tomato trucks had come and gone, and then, when the coast was clear, we'd climb down and shake out the two gunny sacks that Marcus had given us, and, checking one last time to make sure the coast was still clear, we'd sneak up and down the bridge like spies, picking up the good tomatoes, leaving the rest for the crows. Course, the best part of all was sitting up in that oak, watching the drivers who liked to speed up, the way they'd grin and wave and even blow their horns if they felt like it.

Before lunchtime, we'd have two gunny sacks full of some pretty good tomatoes for having jumped off a truck and rolled around the bridge. We'd wrap the bags tightly around our bike handles and make our way zigzaggy over to the El Dorado, and there, in the backroom, Marcus would open up the bags and pull out the good tomatoes, saying things like, "Good, . . . good, . . . fine, . . . not so good, . . . yes." After he was all done sorting, Marcus would give us Cokes and maybe a couple Sergeant Rock comic books if some of the tomatoes were especially big.

The El Dorado. That's what Marcus called his grocery store. In the beginning, before we knew it was all right to call him Marcus and way before he gave us the two gunny sacks--wondering if we wouldn't mind doing him a favor because he had an idea--we asked him what it meant, this El Dorado. At first he looked at us like we were just kids and questions like that weren't important, especially if kids were doing the asking, but then he stopped and did two things, one right after the other: he put his finger on his chin, giving two or three good taps, and then moving that same finger up to that no-name place between lip and nose

said it was Spanish. We waited, but when he seemed willing to stop at Spanish, Wayne couldn't wait any longer and said, "What else?"

If was as if Marcus had been waiting for that, even set a trap of sorts, because he spent the next ten, fifteen minutes telling us what else. It had to do with wealth and riches and the Promise Land. Wayne liked that answer better than I did. While Marcus talked, Wayne nodded. It was one of those nods we use for teachers, when they're talking and looking right at you and although you're looking right back at them you haven't heard a word but you nod anyway--the nodding makes them happy.

Once Marcus was all done with the tomatoes and we had our Cokes and sometimes comic books, he'd give us back the gunny sacks because tomorrow was another day, with more drivers who didn't know a thing about the bridge. That's when Hondo usually stepped out of the backroom, because there was just something about Hondo and empty gunny sacks; he was always trying to slither into them, poking his head here and there until he found the opening, and then snake-like, disappearing inside.

Marcus had named him after the movie. Course, the cat was nothing like the movie, but that was okay because we knew what Marcus meant. And sometimes if one of those bridge tomatoes got loose in the backroom, rolling away from its gunny sack, out of nowhere, Hondo was suddenly upon it, sniffing, pawing, hockeying it up and down the aisles.

The way Marcus tells it, the cat just showed up one night out back by the garbage cans, hungry and dirty and not caring too much about anything. We wanted it to be a stormy night, maybe even thunder and lightening, but Marcus said no, it was nothing like that, 'Fact, it was even warm. Lots of moths, and kind of sticky, know what I mean?' So he took the cat in and fed it and filled up an old beer box with dirt, all along thinking it could keep the backroom free of mice. We'd never ever seen any mice in Marcus' backroom, and he had to admit that he hadn't either, even before Hondo came along, but you never know. Marcus was like that: buying extra insurance, ordering too many razor blades, overstocked with marshmallows, buying this, saving that, not

throwing anything away because you never know.

When Hondo wasn't busy sleeping, eating, shitting or keeping no mice out of the backroom, he'd come out front and head straight for his favorite place: the Campbell soup. In some magically catty way, he would balance himself on his favorite top shelf, atop the Campbell soup cans. Somewhere along the way he had discovered that that was just about the right place, the right height, if he wanted to reach down and cuff a customer. Catching a claw in Jenny Packard's ponytail, batting old man Jackerman's hat into the frozen food, reaching way down to take a swing at some kid's John Deere cap. And when they all turned to say or maybe just think 'What the hell?' Hondo would look back at them, tail twitching, as if to say: This is what I do when I'm not in the backroom killing no mice.

At the end and to the right of the backroom was the butcher shop, and in the butcher shop was the meat grinder. It was about the size of a sewing machine, except heavier and dirtier and kind of saxophoned at the top. That's where the meat went in, the saxophone part. If you looked into it you could see how the metal spiraled, pushing out worms of red meat that Marcus insisted was the stuff of hamburger. If it weren't for Daryl Germany we wouldn't care anything about that old meat grinder, but it had a history of sorts, and so every time we took our gunny sacks into the back, laying them softly on one of Marcus' crowded tables, we had to step over to the meat grinder that had its own special place on the cabinet, and peek down into its silver spiral, and maybe even finger the wooden mallet that hung on the wall that was all worn and brown from having mashing all that meat through.

The story of Daryl Germany and Marcus' meat grinder goes something like this: Daryl was in high school when he started working for Marcus. At first he did the ordinary things: sweeping floors, restocking the milk and beer, carrying out groceries for old ladies whose cars were parked no more than thirty feet away and having them want to give him a dollar tip and him having to say no thank you but them insisting anyway until finally he took the dollar because they were old ladies and as everybody knows old ladies, like grandmas, are like that.

Before the meat grinder, Daryl was like anybody else: nice, sometimes rude, but not often, usual quiet; he liked to wear one of Curtis's butcher aprons because they were streaked brown with old bloodstains. He liked to roll up his sleeves. That, and he was just beginning to slick back his hair on the sides; you could see he was thinking about sideburns but they hadn't taken yet.

It went on just like that for weeks, even months. Then, for reasons nobody is really sure about, one day just before Thanksgiving, Daryl got his hand stuck in the meat grinder. This is where it gets a little confusing, because the insurance people wanted to know more about how he got his hand in there, who told him to grind the meat, had he been trained? Curtis, the sometimes butcher and one of the best bowlers around, said that yes, Daryl had been in training, and that when it comes to the meat grinder the first thing he tells all the kids is to use the mallet. "Never ever use your hands", and so on. He went on to say that Daryl must have forgotten, didn't care, or had other things on his mind; anyway, it didn't matter now because Daryl's hand still slipped. Marcus, being the owner and the person who paid everybody's wages, said, when asked by those same insurance people, that Curtis was the butcher in charge of meat grinders and things like that. When the insurance people got around to asking Daryl, he said his hand got stuck in the grinder.

They say it took both Curtis and one of the regular customers, Mr. Hawkins, who was interested in buying some bacon at the time, and who might have been in the army or a doctor, or both, to turn off the grinder and yank out what was left of Daryl's right hand, which wasn't much.

Once we got to know Marcus better, Wayne was the one who wanted to know more about the "not much" part. "Not much? Now what's that?"

"You don't want to know."

"Sure I do," now looking over at me. "Sure we do."

Once Wayne included me I nodded. After all, we'd read every Sergeant Rock comic ever made. We could take it.

"Like what?"

But Marcus just stood there, shaking his head.

It was in the newspaper, about Daryl Germany and the meat grinder at the El Dorado. Both Marcus and Curtis were mentioned, although Marcus doesn't remember anybody like a reporter asking him anything. Daryl stayed away from school until Easter. They said one of his sisters went to his teachers and got his homework and then, once it was all done, brought it back to those same teachers, picking up another batch, and so on until Easter. No one ever asked how he did all that homework if his right hand was gone. Course, Daryl could have been left-handed and that would have solved everything.

All of this was before our gunny sacks and before we knew anything about Hondo, or thinking we could ever call Marcus by his first name.

"You can call me Marcus."

When Daryl returned to school that spring, he wore a black glove over what used to be his right hand. They said there was only a nub where his right hand used to be. Not even a nub, but what else can you call a red rose of flesh? They said he shoved cotton in the glove fingers to make it look better.

We'll see Daryl every now and again at the Empire Theater, or maybe just walking along Main Street like he's in no particular hurry. Whenever we do catch a glimpse of him we can't help but think of him and his black glove as kind of mysterious, but in a good way. Although his sideburns are bigger and better now, he's nothing like Tony Curtis handsome, never has been; still, not long ago he started wearing black turtlenecks and one of those expensive-looking leather jackets. But there's more: girls like him. We've seen it. With that one black glove, with turtleneck and leather coat to match, the girls like him. As a matter of fact, they say he's engaged to Becky Hatt, a one-time cheerleader and Homecoming princess. Before, they say he had nothing like a girlfriend, not even friends who were girls, just two sisters who were always telling him what to do. Wayne says it has to do with the Germany part of his name, that he could see girls falling in love with guys who are named after countries. We know for sure it has something to do with that one black glove and his turtlenecks, the way he combs his hair straight back, but there's something else,

something the girls like, but we don't know what to call it.

Then, there was that one time around the Fourth of July, when we had that heat wave and the TV said we were breaking all kinds of temperature records and Wayne came back from the dentist's and didn't feel like doing anything except sitting on the couch and drinking milkshakes, so I decided to take somebody's old forgotten brown glove from the garage and put it on and walk over to the El Dorado just to see how it would feel, and it felt fine. Waving hi to Marcus who was extra busy at the register, I stepped into the backroom and double-checking to make sure the coast was clear, slipped up next to the meat grinder, running that brown glove back and forth along its dirty silver. It felt fine. Tugging at the glove so it fit tighter, better, I stopped to listen, and not hearing anything like Curtis or Marcus, I reached over and turned on the grinder. It sounded chewy and angry and I groped to turn it off. Now holding my breath so I could listen better, but no one, nothing. Waiting a little longer, and pushing that old brown glove down between the fingers, like one of those bull riders, until finally, I switched it on again, and this time, after the chewy, angry part, it became swishy like waves and then, in the end, settled down to something like a hum. I leaned to peek into its silver humming, its coiling and coiling and coiling, and running that brown glove around its rim, the tingling feeling just fine like a barber's razor. But running that glove around and around its rim. That's when I thought I heard somebody coming. Switching it off and listening, and yes, it was something, someone. I yanked the glove off, stuffed it into my pocket and backed away from the grinder. When the coming stopped, I turned to look--it was only Hondo. I even said, "It's only Hondo." But he didn't care for things like that, and he humped his back, bugged his eyes and hissed long and hard as if he didn't know me.

Later, walking home that afternoon in July, in the middle of the record-breaking heat wave, with that brown glove feeling better and better all the time, sure enough, two, maybe three girls were riding their bikes on the other side of the street and they couldn't stop looking at me, even pointing.

Isabelle Sacket

Progressing

She started off a larva
on a lily pad.
So small so helpless
almost alone.

She turned into a water spider
wobbling on the water;
a single misplaced wave
would have been her sad
demise.

And then a dragonfly she became,
skimming across the pond.
Occasionally,
she would dip and taste the water ---
sweet, not salty. For she was still
too young.

Who would have expected to see her now?
A pelican.
No longer a helpless larva, no longer a wobbling spider
no longer a skimming dragonfly.
This time she dives, opens her beak. Salt
water rushes in. Senses overwhelmed.
She comes up. Wet. Clean. Refreshed. And with food for later.

Matthew Woodman

Long-Lived Instrument Stations

The celestial whale-heart left us frozen,
our breast bones dusted with abalone
and owl.

 We could not read the sign,
so we inferred in antiphony
and slaughter.

We dragged our dirty feet
across the white deerskin.

 We carved a notch
for each bastard brought to bear.

 We excreted
judgment and sentence.

 We swore by naught
but the light of day, the fire that burns all
men blind, that binds all men in lettered thrall.

Nothing was allowed to escape the trawl,
the harpoon, the scrimshaw rationale.

And thus, in our search for revelation
we tendered the moon our resignation.

Geovanny Lujan
Suits and Ties



Matthew Woodman

Indeterminate Unity

Datura wrightii fondles roadside sandy washes,
leaves pumping atropine and scopolamine,
the night's engorged white-lipped trumpets.

The Toloache's north-root

suppresses eye saccades,
induces a functional blindness,
enables visual and auditory hallucinations.

Do you see it?

Thus would the Yokut and Mohave mine flight
and be else.

The Western Jimsonweed's primary pollinator
sphinx moth, *Maduca rustica*
unfurls a proboscis thrice its body length
tongues the nectar nestled in those whorled folds.

Georgia O'Keefe germinated two plots:

Jimson Weed, 1932 minds five slender teeth,
the canvas cultivated on stamen and pistil
as if the sex were an herbaceous eye.

Jimson Weed, 1936 flowers in clock-step.
The corollae grasp and enjoin the pupil
to fuse and seed.

*If I could paint the flower exactly as I see it
no one would see what I see
because I would paint it small
like the flower is small.*

Do you see it?

The moon blooms.

We gasp ourselves awake.

Guadalupe Carolla

Suspiros De Veranos

Con un suspiro te anuncio
Lo que siento
Aun que lo ignores
Y se vaya con el viento.

Vienes y te vas
Tal y como mariposa
Vuelas de lugar a lugar,
Sin anidare,
Buscas quien pueda
Derretir el hielo
Que es tu corazón.

Con el calor de primavera
Llegas a mis brazos
Y con el frio de otoño
Te vas sin despedida,
Dejando un vacío,
Un frio que cálcame hasta los huesos.

Hasta hoy he esperado tu calor,
Pero hoy
Quedas en mi pasado.

En mi presente hay un sol que brilla todo el ano
Mis suspiros se fueron
Con el verano
Tal como los sentimientos
Que ignoraste por tanto tiempo.

Guadalupe Carolla

Summer Sighs

With a sigh I announce
What I feel
Even that ignored
And gone with the wind.

You come and go
As butterfly's do
You fly from place to place,
Without nesting,
Looking for anyone who can
Melt the ice
That is your heart.

With the warmth of spring
You come to my arms
And with the cold of autumn
You go without farewell
Leaving a void,
A cold that so deep.

To this day I have waited for your warmth,
Yet today
You become my past.

In my present the sun shining year 'round,
My sighs have gone,
With the summer
All the feelings
You ignored for so long.

Phillip Parotti

Notes on Some of Our Lesser Known Ghost Towns

Professor Russell Meeks (1926-2013) taught history at San Miguel College for forty-four years and was greatly beloved by both his students and his faculty colleagues. In addition to being an expert on the American Civil War, Meeks founded the San Miguel Historical Society, an organization which he continued to lead and direct until the time of his death. During his long career, he published widely; his bibliography, at the time of his passing, included six books and sixty-two scholarly articles. During the last years of his life, Professor Meeks was known to be researching some of the lesser known ghost towns in San Miguel County, and when he died on April 18th of last year, his “notes” were found among his papers. In the interest of historical scholarship and on behalf of the San Miguel Historical Society, Professor Meeks notes are here presented as discovered.

GAMP

COUNTY: San Miguel

LOCATION: about 29 miles west of Silver City, NM, 29.3 miles west of San Miguel, NM, and about 3 miles south of the ghost town of Telegraph, on the banks of the Gila River.

According to a San Miguel *Eagle* article dated August 23, 1886, Gamp was founded by an Englishman named Chuffy Gamp (b. London, 1848, son of Sarah Gamp, father unknown). Chuffy Gamp had been employed by the Tecumseh mine in Telegraph, but when the lode played out in 1884, Telegraph died. Quickly, Gamp recognized that the distance from Alma on the San Francisco River to points west along the lower Gila River was a long one, a distance that, aside from river water, afforded little refreshment to the weary traveler. Sensing a business opportunity, Gamp pooled savings from his work down the Tecumseh with some funds raised by a “Mr. Jonas,” another Englishman recently arrived on the frontier, and the two of them invested in four barrels of whiskey which they hauled from San Miguel to a site about three miles south of the now defunct Telegraph. There, the two erected a flat roofed dry masonry structure, one room only, and went into business, selling

whiskey by the drink from a plank laid across two pine stumps. Eventual improvements included a hitching post and an enclosed single-seater which they located downstream from their saloon.

During the summer of 1885 and into the fall of that year, Gamp seems to have thrived with the result that during the winter, Gamp and Mr. Jonas threw up another dry laid stone room, slightly uphill from their saloon, into which moved a woman known as Brown Bess. Whether Brown Bess served meals in her “establishment” or engaged in providing other services for the riders who were heading for Arizona remains in question, but a fourth citizen, one Lily Harris, is known to have joined her in February of that year. “Mrs Harris,” as she was called, moved down from Socorro by way of Pleasanton where she was said to have exchanged unfriendly words with some of the married women in the neighborhood.

Prior to January’s first snow, if the San Miguel *Eagle* can be trusted, a Captain Perkins, a veteran of the 88th Alabama regiment, CSA, had also arrived in Gamp, constructed a tight lean-to, and prepared to spend the winter in Gamp and Mr. Jonas’ company. The Captain, who said that he hailed from Virginia, was known to have an ingratiating manner and appeared to be a sportsman who, in addition to providing meat for the citizens of Gamp, also enjoyed friendly engagements with the pasteboards. According to Buford Simmons, a cowboy who spent one night at Gamp, the Captain “exhibited a skill” in his sporting endeavors that Buford considered uncommon, so uncommon that Buford lost half his poke in less than an hour on fewer than three hands of cards.

In February of 1886, a gold nugget, a small nugget, was discovered in the river not far below Gamp, so for a few weeks, Gamp boomed, miners and prospectors from Silver City, San Miguel, Hillsboro, Pinos Altos, and Tombstone flocking to the area where they quickly established a tent city of sorts while at least two enterprising merchants rushed temporary emporiums into the area, all of them on wheels, business being done from the back of wagons. During this period, Gamp and Mr. Jonas experienced a bonanza of their own, their whiskey selling fast and at a higher price than they had previously dared to imagine. The Captain

also prospered when he sought to provide a variety of sport by introducing Faro as an occasional substitute for poker.

Three or four weeks into the boom, Lonesome Dan O'Brian, an aged prospector who had been over every inch of the land from the Hatchet Mountains to the Mogollon Rim, passed through Gamp on his way to Pinos Altos, and when he saw what was going on, he is said to have roared with laughter. "Gold?" he is supposed to have said. "*Sold!*" he chimed. "Why, I've been over every inch of the Gila from Telegraph down to Red Rock, and there ain't no gold in this river nowhere! That nugget was salted. I'd bet hard money on it!"

The *Eagle* provided no details about what might have happened in Gamp that night, but based upon a letter which E. B. Dockery, one of the miners in Gamp, wrote to his sister in St. Louis, a letter recovered from the collections of the Missouri State Library, when folks arose the next morning, Gamp, Mr. Jonas, and the Captain were nowhere to be found, all three of them having pulled out during the night and disappeared utterly into parts unknown, their tracks suggesting that they had moved in different directions. Brown Bess and Mrs. Harris were the next to go, the two packing their possessions onto the back of Bess's mule before setting off toward Tombstone. And within less than twelve hours, the remainder of Gamp's population departed as well, all of them leaving in search of new diggings.

Today, the dry masonry that Gamp and Mr. Jonas laid still survives, but the Captain's lean-to seems to have rotted away.

TRACILLA

COUNTY: San Miguel

LOCATION: about midway between the present site of Lordsburg, NM and Deming, NM along the old route of the Butterfield Stage.

Evidence drawn from New Mexico maps created in the late 19th Century shows a degree of confusion about the name given to Tracilla, a small settlement of no more than fifteen or twenty citizens which disappeared utterly with the coming of the railroad.

On the Jorgan map, created in 1895 and printed in Philadelphia, the location is named Tracilla, the actual settlement having already been abandoned by that time. An 1878 map, attributed to one Thomas Freeman, gives the name as Tres Ceila, while an even earlier sketch map drawn up by Captain Randolph K. Jerome, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, lists the name of the place as *Tres Sillas* which may be translated as *three chairs* or *three seats*. Clearly, over time, the original place name had been corrupted, but the extent of the corruption was not understood until 2011 when the diary of Mrs. Mary Hovath turned up in Globe, Arizona, in the estate of one Clarence Hovath, Mary's grandson. The diary, a small volume measuring no more than five inches square, recorded the journey Mary Horvath made in 1876 from St. Joseph, Missouri to rejoin her husband who had taken up ranching north of Tucson. The passage of interest records her stage trip from Mesilla, New Mexico Territory to Tucson, and the important entry follows:

March 29, 1876. Left Mesilla after a breakfast of eggs, bacon, and green chili. After three hours travel, passed Cook's Springs. During afternoon, stopped Tres Sillas, three seats, named for plush three-seater located adjacent to way station. Small place with no more than ten inhabitants: station master, three wranglers, station master's wife, two children, one Mexican sheepherder, two prospectors living in lean-tos. Station master's wife told me that owing to fact no large bushes or juniper trees hereabouts to preserve propriety, she demanded that husband construct "civilized facility." Hence, Tres Sillas. Would have thought a thorough understanding of Spanish would have demanded Tres Excusados.

In 2012, the author made a search of the stretch of desert where Tracilla was formerly located. While some foundation stones for the way station were discovered and a weathered stump that might once have supported a lean-to, corrals and the three-seater for which *Tres Sillas* had been originally named had vanished utterly into the desert dust.

SUTTER'S ROOST

COUNTY: San Miguel

LOCATION: on Bear Creek, 4 miles northwest of Pinos Altos, New Mexico. The site can be easily reached by descending the

slope behind the Ben Lilly Monument.

In 1865, following the conclusion of the Civil War in which he had taken no part, Rufus Sutter filed a claim on Bear Creek which he named The Lucky Bender. According to a story printed in the Silver City *Miner*, Sutter and a friend had spent an evening camped on the creek where, Sutter said, they had consumed a quantity of bootleg mescal. Upon waking in the morning, Sutter spied a nugget in the creek bed. Some digging then produced two other small nuggets, and the claim was christened. Three days after the discovery, while having strayed too far from the camp without his rifle, Sutter's friend was killed by one or more Indians assumed to be members of Mangus Colorado's band. Sutter immediately decamped to Pinos Altos where a posse formed, their subsequent search for the perpetrator or perpetrators ending in failure.

Having become the sole owner of The Lucky Bender by default, Sutter next traveled to Mesilla where he interested investors in the claim and recruited six Mexicans to help him work the mine, and when he returned accompanied by the six miners, he also returned with a troublesome gamecock to which he gave the name Red Lightning.

Living in tents, according to yet another article in the *Miner*, Sutter and the Mexicans began developing the claim, four of the miners working the creek bed and starting to sink a shaft while the two others began building a crude *arrastra* in which they intended to crush whatever ore the Bender produced. From the start, Sutter apparently also planned to use the *arrastra* as a cockpit, and in that regard, Red Lightning was given the run of the camp. According to the miners, the rooster was "as mean as a snake," often darting between them while they worked and pecking at their ankles. The miners apparently gave some thought to killing and eating the bird in order to get even for his menace, but when the rooster twice warned them of potential Apache attacks by crowing vociferously from his perch in a nearby pine tree, they rapidly learned to tolerate his less than fatal depredations.

Within a month, working no more than twenty feet under ground, Sutter's crew struck a vein of moderate potential, and

The Lucky Bender began to produce. The Mesilla investors then combined with some El Paso investors, and the Mexican crew was enlarged with an addition of Welsh miners, men who had worked over into the area from Socorro. Because winter was coming on, even as the Welshmen constructed a head frame for the mine, the Mexican crew constructed three snug miner's shacks, one to sleep the Mexican crew, one to sleep the Welshmen, and one to serve Sutter both as a home and as the mine's office. Red Lightning, as the weather cooled, moved directly into the office, attacking anyone, save for Sutter, who came through the door and roosting at night on a rafter.

The December 29th issue of the Pinos Altos *Spectator* carried the following squib:

Sutter's Roost: A sporting event involving gamecocks will be staged on New Year's Day by Rufus Sutter, owner and operator of The Lucky Bender. The event will feature a contest of strength between Mr. Sutter's bird, Red Lightning, and Saggitarius, the famous Pinos Altos cock, owned and trained by Mr. Melvin Holcomb, manager of The Silver Spur. Liquid refreshment will be available for sale from the proprietors of The Lazy Ace Saloon, operating from their mobile canteen.

On January 2, 1866, the *Spectator* reported that Red Lightning had won the match bringing his backers fame in the neighborhood as well as a tidy profit, more than one hundred men on holiday having attended the contest.

Unfortunately, The Lucky Bender's vein played out during the late summer months in 1868, but not before Sutter and his investors had taken \$140,000 out of the mine. Red Lightning, having won two additional contests before the Bender's demise earned a lasting reputation among the miners both for grit and determination but experienced gross misfortune during the last working week in Sutter's Roost when he foolishly attempted to attack and drive off a fox.

CRISPIN'S RETREAT

COUNTY: San Miguel

LOCATION: about 35 miles northeast of San Miguel and Silver City, New Mexico; six miles north of San Lorenzo, New Mexico in

the vicinity of McKnight Canyon.

Known only by reputation in the days when Crispin Benevidez used the “retreat” as his hideout, the actual settlement there was not located until 1907 when Harvey Smith stumbled onto the entrance of the draw while attempting to retrieve a stray calf. In fact, even today, Crispin’s Retreat is difficult to find, the entrance appearing from a distance to be a mere crack in a rock face, the actual crack being additionally masked by a stand of Piñon Pine. Once into the crack, passage is barely wide enough for a horse, but after passing inside through the narrow defile, one still finds an open space of reasonably fertile land measuring about seventy yards in width by two hundred yards in length and divided by a seep that is fed by a spring. The remains of two adobe rooms, a lean-to, and three log shacks press against the cliffs on the north face of the opening, and one assumes that the “Benevidez gang” and their women folk survived there on a diet combining the meat that they had rustled with the beans, squash, and chili that they raised on the site. During the gangs heyday, Crispin Benevidez is thought to have twice led his men to hold up the Butterfield State and once to rob banks in both Hillsboro and Socorro. In between these depredations, the gang is supposed to have rustled cattle as occasion allowed, cattle which they drove into Mexico for sale but only after cutting out beef for their own use. In 1883, during an attempted hold up in Mesilla, Hank Pruitt and Raul Jacquez, members of the gang, were shot dead on the street in front of the Tillman Bank while Crispin Benevidez was captured red-handed when he ran out of ammunition. He was tried two weeks later, found guilty, and hanged for his crimes, real and imagined, on September 12, 1881. Thereafter, it is supposed that the remaining inhabitants of Crispin’s Retreat, decamped, abandoning the site.

HOLT CITY

COUNTY: San Miguel

LOCATION: about 1 mile south of the village of Dwyer, NM, on the edge of the Mimbres River, about 11 miles northeast of the point where NM 61 intersects with U.S. 180.

Holt City, an abandoned village which once contained

eleven adobe houses, a small frame store, and a blacksmith's shop, was founded in 1858 by Sefton or Seaton Holt who is thought to have immigrated into New Mexico Territory from Kentucky and who established himself on the site in order to raise vegetables for sale to the Santa Rita and, later, the Pinos Altos miners. Given an adequate supply of water from the Mimbres River which disappears underground only a mile below the fields, Holt's plot prospered, so within a year, as many as fifty additional settlers took up residence, most of them devoting themselves to raising beans, squash, pumpkins, corn, and peas. Protection from the Warm Springs Apaches was afforded by nearby Fort Floyd (later changed to Fort McLane when Secretary of War John B. Floyd defected to the Confederacy); the fort was then located about four miles south of present day Hurley and about twelve miles northwest of where the remains of Holt City are to be found.

Early on, considerable confusion seems to have been caused by the publication of a map regarding the area which seems to have been used by eastern promoters interested in selling real estate around Holt City. Whether Holt himself promoted the scheme or whether cunning manipulators hatched the idea is an issue clouded in mystery. The problem is that the map clearly shows the image of a paddle wheeled steamboat negotiating the Mimbres through a stretch of the river where, in the absence of a flash flood, the water never attained a depth of more than three or four inches and had to be dammed in order to create an irrigation source for the crops being raised. According to one letter known to have been written from the village in its heyday, this led to several dissatisfied pilgrims who had bought land in the east, expecting to ship in goods and possessions by steamboat, and once, if the letter is to be believed, Holt himself narrowly escaped assassination when one of those pilgrims fired off a shot at him before the man could be restrained.

With the commencement of the Civil War, Holt City fell into swift decline. As advanced elements of Sibley's Texas Brigade, the contingent commanded by Colonel Baylor, invaded southern New Mexico through El Paso, the troops at Fort McLane pulled out, heading northeast by way of Cook's Springs in order to join

Colonel Canby's Union forces at Fort Craig on the Rio Grande. In a body and under escort—the army no longer being in a position to protect them from the Apaches-- the population of Holt City quickly abandoned their homes and fields and moved with the troops, most of them settling around the village of San Antonio where they once more took up agricultural pursuits. According to Confederate records, however, one citizen of Holt City, a man with Southern sympathies, did not depart with the majority.

Muster rolls for Sibley's brigade show that on October 27, 1862, one Wilson Gill, "citizen of Holt City, New Mexico Territory, joined with sixteen other men, all of them riding down to Mesilla from the mining community of Pinos Altos, to enlist in the Army of the Confederacy. Specifically, the Pinos Altos contingent enlisted as a troop of scouts attached to Captain Sharod Hunter's Company of "Arizona Volunteers." Wilson Gill seems to have entered service with the rank of First Sergeant and proceeded with the company when it occupied Tucson. Later, on April 15, 1862, Gill is assumed to have participated in the Battle of Picacho Pass, 45 miles northwest of Tucson, where the California column engaged in a skirmish with a party of Confederate scouts. Thereafter, the record is silent about Gill until, following Sibley's retreat back into Texas, Gill is mentioned for having distinguished himself on January 1, 1863 in the battle fought to recapture Galveston from Union occupation. In the dispatch concerned, Gill is also listed with the rank of First Lieutenant, and thereafter, he disappears entirely from the annals of Confederate history, although in 1906, one does find a record of a Confederate pension being paid to one Sarah Melissa Gill, wife of Captain W. Gill (d.1905), formerly of the Fifth Regiment, First Texas Cavalry Brigade. At the time the pension was awarded, Sarah Gill appears to have been living in or near Temple, Texas.

GERT'S LEDGE

COUNTY: San Miguel

LOCATION: about 22 miles southwest of Silver City and San Miguel, NM, 2 miles due north of the point where Gold Gulch Road (dirt) intersects with NM 90.

In the late winter of 1887, not six months after Geronimo's surrender, Achim Lenz, formerly of Bern, Switzerland, made a silver strike athwart a long ledge of rock located at the foot of Jacks Peak in the Burro Mountains. Within less than a month, a shaft had been sunk, a head frame had gone up, two miners shacks had been built, a small tent city had come into being, and the owners of the Rough and Ready Saloon in San Miguel had sent representatives who had thrown up a wooden wall and door in front of a relatively large canvas enclosure that they had named "Gert's Ledge," Gert being Achim's *nom de guerre*, a fact which no one could ever satisfactorily explain. The mine itself, inconspicuously baptized as "The Silver Pit," produced good ore of steady quality, so within months, after shipping his first bars of silver to the mint, Achim hired carpenters to build him a more comfortable two room house on the site and woodcutters to bring down from the mountain a sufficient supply of wood to see him through the winter.

In Southwestern New Mexico, the winter of 1887-1888 proved only slightly less than brutal. Snow fell several times, cold winds blew, and temperatures went down well below freezing. Bronstein's Mercantile in Silver City did a brisk business in hats, gloves, and mackinaws, and on February 22, 1888, this item appeared in the *San Miguel Eagle*:

GERT'S LEDGE: Explosion blows back wall out of Pinkie MacNab's mine shack.

Damage considerable; no injuries. "Ja," said Gert Lenz, owner of The Silver Pit, when asked about the explosion, his familiar Swiss accent much in evidence. "Dis Pinkie, him miner of mine. Him Scot; no like pay woodcutter. Mine wood for stove disappear. Teef take too much. I don't know who. Mitt drill, bore hole. Make quarter stick dynamite in hole. Cover hole good mitt sawdust. Teef take. Teef put in stove.

BOOM! Den I know teef is Pinkie. Pinkie learn lesson. No more steal mine wood.

BOOM make big scare.

According to articles in the *Silver City Miner*. The Silver Pit continued to operate under Gert Lenz' ownership until 1891 when he sold both the mine and his house to a Boston mining

engineer name Benjamin Small. Small had also discovered a small turquoise deposit on a site north of The Silver Pit, so after the sale, he began working both mines. At the time, Gert Lenz was thought to have taken in excess of \$200,000 from the diggings, enough for him to return to Switzerland and live in style. Small took at least another \$70,000 from the mine before the vein played out, and when it did, he continued to work the turquoise deposit but with a much smaller crew. As a result, by March 1892, Gert's Ledge, like so many other small communities in San Miguel County, had attained the status of a ghost town.

SILVERFLOW

COUNTY: San Miguel (*supposed*)

LOCATION: 9 miles northwest of Silver City and San Miguel, west of Bear Mountain on LS Mesa (*supposed*)

A totally fanciful place name contrived by a crook named Virgil Gibbs for the purpose of bilking several New York City bankers out of funds with which to underwrite a mining claim that he said that he had filed on the site. Silverflow was said to be a settlement with ten houses, a saloon, a blacksmith shop, and a store in the prospectus that Gibbs had published. The bankers, after having sent an investigator to examine the claim, later caused Gibbs to be arrested, tried, and confined in the New York State Penitentiary at Sing Sing for attempting to defraud them.

Gloria Keeley

The Color of Honey

because the bee flew toward the light
danced in the sun's vitamin D
clouds rolled by fast
like Lucy and Ethyl's chocolate
enveloped like a sting
on the wing of a queen
the spinster finishes
her crossword puzzle
paints her nails
with the rainbow ink
of the Sunday Funnies

I like how you can walk in the big city
and a coyote will pass by
singing Barrio tunes
from a discarded iPod

I like how a hummingbird
freezes in warm air
then flits to the next bud
drinking the god's nectar

I like how the trees rustle
in the five o'clock garden
before the birds feather in
and the bees fan out
saving honey for last

Lives

Unit 4

I am just an ice cream vendor, I sell ice cream out of a cart. Up and down International Boulevard. I don't miss a day. "Ice cream, amigos," I say it in a whisper. I might as well be saying, "Bendiciones." Indeed, the Lord has blessed me with many hot and sunny days this season. Too bad for the crops. On a hot day I can expect to make \$30 to \$40. That may sound like small change to you, but it adds up, friend. I stay with my godparents, their grown daughter and two grandchildren in a two-bedroom apartment on Logan Street. I pay \$400. Living is expensive. Going down the hill in the morning I think, this is easy. At the end of the day, exhausted, I ask one of the kids to come down and help me haul the cart up the hill. "Ah, I have just the one for you," I say, giving the fat boy his reward for helping his old tío. But it's just the flavor I have too many of. If the cart is empty at the end of the day, thanks to God, I have the strength to haul it up myself.

Before I came to Northern California I worked as a fieldhand, harvesting almonds in the desert, so pushing the cart isn't so bad. Sometimes I feel liking singing, or like the sun is slowly roasting me to perfection. Then bury me, I'm done.

I had a lady once, Rosa, she cooked the best pupusas. She sold them outside of our house on weekends and holidays. I can taste them now. Whenever our relationship was the least bit troubled she would consult the bruja at the botanicals shop, which I did not approve of, being a Christian. "Woman, I will not have this black magic in my own house," I would say. But instead of her leaving, I walked out. Soon after she went back to the old country to take care of her sick mother. Maybe she inherited property, who knows? I never inquired after her in all these years. Dementia ran in her family. The mother had it. Maybe she inherited that too. Beer is my companion now. I had a good day pushing the cart, before turning in I think I'll stop for a drink and some home-cooked pupusas at the Salvadorean restaurant on Foothill. Those are the basic facts of my life.

Unit 3

I used to work at the Motorcycle Driving School in Alameda answering phones, 9 to 5. I've been told that I have a strong phone presence. *Tell me if any of these phrases mean anything to you. Blue china. Coptic light.* I left with drama, but it was for the best. I was getting complacent. Now I'm working on my own terms, at my own pace, and it's harder than I thought it would be! I see clients in my kitchen. I put all the utensils in cabinets and then I pull a black curtain closed around the sink and the counters and I dim the lights. Voila, the place is transformed. We sit at what was formerly the breakfast table, also covered in a black fabric, on which sits a crystal ball and votive candles. *How is your imagination working these days?* OK, good. *Let's test out your imagination, see how it's working. Imagine that I am holding a deck of 52 cards. Imagine that I give the cards a good shuffle and I fan them out. I'd like you to pick out eight cards, four even and four odd.* Everything is Deco. Even my necktie. Well, everything except for the crystal ball. I've been looking for one on Amazon. *Dusty saxophone. Florida plates. Ringing a bell?* It hasn't been without drama, though. There was this one night, let me tell you about it. My neighbor upstairs wasn't supposed to be home. He works the night shift at the hospital, I think he's an orderly, so that's when I'll see clients, when he's not home. That evening I hear him and his lady having a loud argument. The walls are paper thin. Technically, she's not even allowed to be there since the restraining order. I have a client coming in 20 minutes so I'm getting nervous that they're going to blow it for me. Do I go up there and see if I can calm them down or at the very least distract them? Their argument is getting heated. It sounds like it could get ugly. They're clomping back and forth, knocking into the walls. Then the man slams the door and walks out, cursing, leaving the woman alone. I can hear her sobbing. Things quiet down. My client should be here any minute. I step out for a cigarette so I can greet her as she arrives, but it's not my client that throws the gate open, letting it slam shut, it's the man from the upstairs apartment. He shoots me a weird look, part assuring, part unsettling. *Now take a peek at the bottom card—don't show it to me. I want you to memorize that card. Now imagine that I am making seven card swaps, from bottom to top.* He leaves the door

open. I can hear everything. He shouts, "If you really want to kill yourself let me help you! Take this, it's loaded!" This kind of game is par for the course with these people and it usually blows over. This time, though, I think I'd better call someone or do something. I can't decide what to do so I just stand there listening. An inner door slams. I can still hear the man's voice loud and clear, but the woman's responses reach me muffled. That must mean she's locked herself in the bathroom—again. Here's my client calling me on my cell, peering at me through the gate, looking uneasy. I buzz her in and we go inside. Let 'em kill each other up there, but do it quietly! "Neighbors are a little wacky," I say to cut the tension. My client is a woman in her 40s, large hands, steady gaze, as if she is steeling herself for the worst. We chat about light topics over tea. The way she carries herself and her accent tell me she is a working woman. She really wants to talk about her kids. Her older son plays the drums in a tribute band, the younger one is having trouble at school and doesn't get out much. She's worried that the younger one could become a shut-in like his father, who wasn't all there in his mind, she found out after 20 odd years of marriage. Do I tell her what she wants to hear, that neither of the boys are deficient in any way, that they will both be successful, wildly successful even, since they are willful and intuitive, taking after their mother, and that one of them will take care of his mother in her old age, while the other will go abroad and settle in a foreign city, by a beach? *Stop me if any of these phrases have any significance for you. Genghis Khan. Havana. Night of the Iguana.* Of course that's what I'm going to tell her! But first I want to test out her imagination. She's new to this, and I can tell right away she's open to suggestion. In my experience it's always better if they search for it a little, work for it, or at least walk with me as I show them the way, the way things could turn out. She shows me photos of her kids. *I want you to really focus on that card you memorized. Concentrate really hard on that card, and nothing else. See it in your mind's eye. Can you see it?* I'm so close to hooking this lady in when the woman upstairs shoots a hole in her bathroom floor. The bullet takes out one of my Deco lamps, showering us with glass and dust. My client bolts out of there and I follow right behind her, tripping over the black curtain and pulling it to the

ground. Fortunately she's too terrified to look back. We run to the gas station down the street and call the police. Not forty minutes later they come and take the woman away. No one gets hurt. They don't even arrest the nut that gave her the gun. I'm shook up myself, but my client is beside herself. I try to calm her down, using a commanding but soothing voice, and I gently remind her of our next appointment as I walk her to her car. That was a dirty trick you played on me, she says, pulling away without looking me in the face. She's in shock. I'll call her in a month. I can't afford to lose any more clients.

Since that incident I've been making house calls. I'm gearing up for a Halloween séance. I'm very excited! It's going to be Deco-themed.

Unit 6

Shortly after moving to San Francisco and nearly exhausting our funds Celeste and I moved to Oakland. I don't feel as guilty not working now since there are so many unemployed people around here. They stand on the sidewalk looking intimidating, but they always move out of the way at the last second. Yes, you read me correctly, I went to a liberal arts school in New England. I was friendly with a classmate who became a famous artist. The more famous he gets the deeper our connection was in retrospect. Underground buzz: "I saw that guy around." *Art Forum* also-ran: "I kind of knew one or two of his cronies. They seemed very... normal," and finally, after the *Times* write-up: "I knew him. That geezer from the *Times* is just enamored of new technology. He's probably never been on Youtube. But I *get it*." We thought of ourselves as the last artists. Our friend, the famous guy, was working in that manure, the manure that we, the last artists, laid at his feet. Surely we'll get some kind of recognition for that, a footnote maybe?

OK, so I've established that I don't take myself too seriously. How could I? I haven't done anything worth a shit, no pun intended. I have a basic education and no experience. I don't look good on paper. Coffee rings and ink splotches are out. On occasion I'll play the harp at weddings. I always laugh to myself during these affairs.

I play the music flawlessly, but with no feeling at all. If they only knew, those respectable families parading around in their rented tuxes and party dresses, that the gentleman playing the angelic harp music is putting a hex on them, auguring for them, by his very presence, a century of bad luck.

I look over the classifieds in the morning. The thing about Babylon is that it can be very seductive. You forget that it leads to nothing, which is exactly where it springs from, nothing. One day I was sitting out on the front lawn, taking in the sun when I saw two cars nearly collide right in front of me. One of them, a long green Cadillac, like a crocodile, pulled off in a huff, tires squealing, the other, a cab driver, paused to collect his thoughts, rolled down the window, Middle Eastern guy, and he said to me, “My friend, there’s a lot of fast-moving people around here, and nothing getting done.” That sums it up. The neighbors torturing their chickens, the Cadillacs oozing Flintstones menace, the smell of meat grilling, gates slamming shut. I can’t work like this.

When Celeste gets home we cook together and watch our favorite show, *Dr. Who*. We get along fine. After a few glasses of wine and a joint she knocks off. I’m still up reading and thinking for a long while. I’m thinking about a sound so beautiful... well, it’s so perfect that it’s not meant to be played. I don’t think I’ll ever be able to notate it or convince anyone to perform it, partly because I can’t be bothered defending it. I want to birth something so pure and at peace with itself that it is indefensible, i.e. it doesn’t need to be defended with words or methodology. Guess that’s why I bowed out of academia when I did. So I haven’t said a word about it to anyone, none of my old colleagues, not even Celeste. I am afraid of smothering it with my own hands. Hmm... how to explain? It’s like a one-act play with no actors in a darkened theater. There’s just the custodian cleaning up. He looks out into the audience from time to time. What’s he thinking about? Only at night does it reveal itself in its true grandeur, my song. No one expects anything of me and I don’t expect much of myself, but if I could do this one thing... then I’d be truly happy, and I could sleep.

Geovanny Lujan
Horsemen



Geovanny Lujan
The Blues



Tracie Campbell

My Nightmare

A darkness looming overhead,
Shadows dance above my bed,
Filling me with quiet dread,
I slowly close my eyes.

Fighting away Sandman's charms,
Kicking, reaching out my arms,
Others rest without alarm,
That's the great disguise.

Losing grip on my today,
Images that swing and sway,
Slowly start to fade away,
And all is turning black.

Suddenly I'm on that road,
Barely dressed and very cold,
Nowhere known to turn, to go,
And no way to go back.

There is a barn within my view,
Cat tails growing, old and new,
An eeriness that lingers, too,
As darkness fills the sky.

My eyes cannot break their stare,
I know something is waiting there,
Relishing within my fear,
Feeding on my cry.

All aware so suddenly,
I can feel it watching me,
Wishing that I could not see,
It isn't over yet.

Feeling it behind me now,
I lack the strength to turn around,
Instead I listen to the sound,
Of screaming as I sweat.

With a jolt I wake and find,
These disconnected screams are mine,
In my sheets I am entwined,
The stranger was a fake.

My heart is pounding in my chest,
Companion to this fitful rest,
Oh yes, for most some rest is best,
It's best I stay awake.

Jordan Runyan

How to Continue: 15 Easy Steps

Step 1: Download only free apps. Pay with time; not money.

Step 2: Never make eye contact. Anyone could be a serial killer.

Don't look them in the eyes. It only proves that you're alive. If they're serial killers, this will likely cause offense. If they're not serial killers, they're still judging you.

Step 3a: Remember that loneliness is better than burning to death and burning to death is better than drowning.

Step 3b: Try not to drown.

Step 4: Always have a backup plan. Your original plan is crap.

Step 5: Don't ever give anyone advice.

Step 6: Read plenty of Middle English. If nothing else, it will heighten your self-esteem by reminding you that if Chaucer can spell words with two extra E's and still be famous, so can you.

Step 7: Don't have nightmares. Avoid dreaming altogether, if possible. Bad dreams will give you insomnia; good dreams will give you depression. (Fever dreams are okay if you write them down. Sell them. Make Lewis Carroll jealous. Goodness knows it's time someone did.)

Step 8: Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind,

And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind.

Step 9: Find a hobby.

Step 10: Find a way to not let your hobby become an obsession.

Step 11: Let me know what you come up with for Step 10.

Step 12: Have faith. Have it when it's made out of cobwebs and water vapor. Have it when it's all you have. Have it when you wish you didn't. Have it when you live like you aren't ever going to die. Have it when you remember that you are.

Step 13: Don't be superstitious.

Step 14: Don't let your roommate see your underwear. Change in the bathroom, in the dark, in your imagination. Anywhere but in your roommate's line of sight.

Step 15: Where are you even going?

Laura Steele

A Good Place to Rest



Laura Steele

Sunset Overlooking the Rail Yard Clovis, NM



Luke Johnson
Cowards

The dust churned across the redskin mesas

A Fibonacci reflection of the

Ebbs and flows of towering stacks

Of ancient filthy forgotten sandstone textbooks

Which discuss the transfiguration

And authorship of dead oceans and arid winds

Wanderer

Sometimes drifter

His departed eyes gleamed across the landscape

Beneath the glistening embodiment

Of a cattle skull that lay

Bare a cross his shoulders

Mournfully mounted atop his spine

He called on the Great Spirits of Father Sky and Mother Earth

Not simply summoning

But blaspheming

For the bleached bones that

Borrowed sorrows from the

Incessant solar shimmer

That beat upon his gloomy antlers when

Giants starved

After rivers of piñon nuts and

Chamisa flowers had

Run dry

A drought not only of rivers and creeks

But of heroes and villains

Clear skies of moral desiccation
Corn refusing to grow under its oppressive aridity
In the wake of its evaporation
From cracked creek beds to abolished battlefields

The only thing that remained was the
Cowards

Cowards whose faces grew grey
Hiding behind their hands
With the advent of the colorless dawn

In lifeless rooms with blue curtains and blood on the floor
In quiet bars where cards are dealt and regrets remain unspoken
On a minute dead earth hurtling towards the sun
While stars in the dark firmament
Began to shatter
And slash through the skin of Father Sky
While Mother Earth's womb became barren
As ice began to dominate the landscape

The drifter saw this brutally quiet end
And wondered about the men sitting in the saloon discussing the demise of
Outlaw Pinto Sykes

The man whose heart went supernova

And the grey wilderness that claimed their bravery
The idiocy of Connie Miller and the distinction of
Pinto's asteroid-cratered hand reaching up

The destroyed vengeance of one man's weakness
For another's bleeding heart

* * *

Stillness.

The spinning spheres and disks echo a black violence unseen in the fixed earth.

The quiet quasars shake the night with silent white noise

And Connie wondered what it must be like

To stand at the brink of the black hole

And skip rocks across the rippling pool

He stepped into the matterless energy that previously claimed his sins

And ordered a drink at the bar

The usual, Connie?

The others, stranded on the Jovian satellites

Asked him if he knew

Yeah I heard what'd he say about me

The silence spoke volumes and Pinto Sykes was

Finally pronounced dead twelve hours prior

A heart that went supernova

When his iron ventricles collapsed

Under the weight of the lead bullet that tore through his

Ravenous hydrogen ribcage

Out of eight shots fired only one of them him 'im

Johnny Rob said

Plucking a swansong for the guilt

of being alive

On a guitar of grey matter

(people say Pinto's with the lord now)

He got real riled when he mentioned you
He said you was a coward

(Connie)

Mothershed said, downing another shot of whiskey

Some would say Sykes had a bone to pick
But others knew full well that he had dust filling his bones as they spoke

(he said you should be able to catch him now)

Mothershed said, downing another shot of whiskey
Connie threw his fists into the abyss
Making contact with the part of Johnny Rob's mouth
That had spoken of the haunting

—and told him he was a coward—

No one calls me a coward—no one.

(no one

No one

I tell ya

No one)

And he witnessed oblivion out of the corner of his eye
And paused suddenly

(some would say that ghosts walk the night

When the dust of the bloody streets churn
And the bullets of revolvers lay unclaimed
With no man's name upon its surface and
Away from the frozen night that resulted

The skin of the ghosts
Is quite similar to
The last breath of a
Dying or a dead man

Dead man
Stiff man
In particular
The hats of
The deceased

Look eerie
Upon the
Crowns of
The
Living

some say that ghosts walk the night

When rifling through the closet for
A Sunday suit
And cold eyes
Stare back

When the horses
Cry in the
Middle of
The night
 (And we wonder what the hell scared 'em)

And a
Figure
Walks away

some say that ghosts walk the night
 And we'll always wonder why

Because lightning storms
Illuminate their coats and
Their holsters
And we can see them

From our windowsills)

I bet you won't call on Pinto tonight

A glare kept him real quiet
 But a woman entered the bar
 In black funereal garb
 Asking for a bottle of rye and
 How everyone is doing this evening

 Before dissonantly disappearing
 Into the singularity

And once again Connie wondered

And the challenge was issued again
 A matter of principle
 A matter of moral
 A matter of energy

Mothershed gazed up at the neutron star held in
Chandrasekhar's hand
As Johnny Rob lay down a gold coin
(that some argued was used to betray Jesus of Nazareth)

And the businessman did the same
Hoping for a traitor's kiss

I ain't a coward
No one calls me a coward Connie said

And they bid him farewell
As he lay a gold coin on the bar—also to betray the messiah
Telling the tender to keep the bottle on the bar
As he promised he wouldn't be long

As he defied their bloodied brains to prove his bravery
And flew across the celestial sphere to plunge a knife into Pinto's dusty chest

(after all, we need proof that you
were there)

* * *

Passing binary stars
And drunkards whose bones lay scattered
A cross the dry hills
Connie emerged from the patch of trees and giants' knees
Stepping over the bodies of Union soldiers and red dwarves

The graveyard lay the highest point in the town
And one could see the railroad tracks and the
Empty mineshafts that bled apparitions periodically

A solitary hill

Covered in crosses and mausoleum pieces
Shadows and remains of protoplanets and
Other trans-Neptunian objects

The guilty souls fell from heaven as black rain
And were swallowed by the benumbed earth's moth infested mouth

And Connie realized the overwhelming wail

*Of a small spherical light outside on a modern hospital wall
While dark insects orbit the small earth*

And the intelligent ones cry and sing out

The guilt of living

He stumbled back

As a dark figure emerged from the tombs
Extending a glass hand
Filled to the brim with stale whiskey
He's waiting for you heh heh heh heh
She said
Her eyes spilling with comet dust
And shards of ice

She walked away, stumbling
Laughing drunkenly
Dripping black water
From her fingertips
Leaving stains in the dead grass

As he watched the fourth dimensional skin
Of her shadowy cloak
Disappear behind the trees

Connie cast his eyes to the cemetery looming before him
A forest for the dead
A place where the cast aside are laid in deceptively

Beautiful scenery

Before him lay a mound of dust

A composite material of the ashes of man

And the bled hearts of the stark vacuum

above

He looked and there

A face

A face among the tombstones

Grinning eerily

Connie froze, then stumbled across barren earth to the shelter

Of a crumbling grave marker

Glancing back to the void

He saw only the empty chasm

(a sarcophagus and esophagus in and of itself)

That had claimed his bravery

And only the dust churned there

An eddy of divine wind between

A cross that held the messiah (enveloped

In dark filth)

And a stone angel holding a telescope aimed at Venus

Dammit Connie said

No face no coward

He turned his face and screamed into his chest

Muffled hate burning through his body

Paper bones tear and steel skin falls away

Rubbing his face with pulsating hands

He regained his courage and stood up

Penetrating the corridors of the grey

I am not a coward

I am not a coward

He saw the mausoleum of adobe dreams
And rotten wood
A rusted iron door slamming against the
Frames of trespass
Cracked walls cracked from the intended
Killing winds of dust that swung the saws

Into the skies
The door slammed shut and open and shut
And Connie jumped
A hand pushing the
Grave further into
His sights and

He approached the mound wondering what happened to the Anasazi

And saw the flowers and whimpered softly
Grasping the knife
And placing the other broken hand
In the dirt of the grave until his neutrino fingers
Fell to a quietly prayerful gravitational spiral

He cautiously placed the blade into the grave's soil

He removed it
Grinned at it
Whispering nobody calls me a coward
And rubbed his temple with one hand
Hoping to soothe the pounding headache
And plunged the knife into the mound

When the earth shook it
The earth shook up
Skin atrophied
Fell into the

Dust of the
Eternal h
ole of
death
die
die
iii
ii
i
.

Connie shook his earth

The brook babbled darkly faraway places

He stood one way or another

Looking down upon earth

People say you can see stars

But he could only see blackness

A small glowing orb called earth in the distance

And he was alone stumbling but still

Running but remaining

In the airless vacuum

He reached for his revolver

And gripped it

Shot it into his thigh

But no blood only black

And he remained and remained and remained still

While the tunnel black enclosed his face

Gloomily and quietly

The skin of nothing was the hope of ghosts

And the blood of nonentity was the faith of the deceased

A hand gripped Connie's skin mirage
And he was pulled suddenly back to the grave

Face to face with Pinto Sykes six feet below
A face of fire
And the face of fire whispered to him

Dammit I ain't a coward

And the face of the ensnared and terrified whispered back

Dammit I ain't either

As Connie clawed his way through the dust
He emerged at the surface
Collapsing through the atmosphere
Into the mound's destruction

And his last view was of the flowers that had been left
Those were some pretty flowers
Only those of steel and those of
Charcoal are the only ones I'd
Ever seen I wish that I could be
Alive to see more of those——

I knowed it! I got a man killed! A man shouted as the sun rose

——know that when I lived a
While back I knew that I would
Live a full life not one where I
Would be hurled into space af
ter trying to be brave for
once in my full life
I just wish I had
Told ma——

It wasn't your fault Johnny Rob

—the m
essiah
cou
ld
h

It's all there right there in front of you
He was braver than I thought

Damn you I ain't a coward Connie repeated
Over and over as he drifted away
Into the neverending scream

As the men talked and determined Connie's heart had given out
(not unlike Pinto Sykes anemic surrender)
After they determined the east wind had blown his coat over the grave
And he had plunged the knife into the dirt skewering his coat

The woman in funeral garb lay a plate at Pinto's grave
Here you go bud
She turned to the businessman
So you think Connie's death was an accident
Well of course
The wind was divine last night and blew to the west
Just like now

Mothershed gazed up at the neutron star
Held in Chandrasekhar's hand
And watched the west wind carry it far from his grasp

Just like now
Just like now
Heh heh heh heh
Ghosts began to scream
The living began to tremble

And the earth's salvation lay desolate
As she laughed
The minute terrestrial planet
Began to fall apart

Heh heh heh heh
And the sky turned red
As the earth grew cold
And ice crusted over the eyes of the defiled
Defiled dark and sullen light
She spread her cloak across the raging wind
And fell apart to the forces
As land and sea became dead and rotted
Bled like napalm
Fell like sinners
On Sunday morning mass

And Sunday morning it was
And Sunday morning it was
When Connie Miller met his fate
And Pinto Sykes met his fate
And the rest of the cowards
Faced the end
Faced the moral destruction of color's faithless clutch

And there was no more—no more
No one calls me a coward Connie whispered
With a conclusive breath of black vacuum
But no one calls me a hero either

And his hat fell into the abyss that stared back
His revolver fell into the hole in the sky
And humanity wafted away

* * *

The wanderer, sometimes drifter

Saw all this

And turned his dead eyes away from the blinding deceased

And walked towards the arroyo that claimed his soul

Viewing the doomed lawman

As he was reminded of

The tunnel vision of

Sin's curse lost

And ambiguity's cold grip

He realized that they would begin again

As cowards step forth through the wind and sand

Against the oppressively blue skies that loomed ahead

And the black void that lie within

Forever

Out in the distance, at the very tip of Cape Cod, stood a lonely white lighthouse, gazing out into a lonely sea – a beacon of hope at the end of the world.

When honeymooners Jimmy and Julia first set off for the lighthouse, they assumed it would take half an hour – maybe 45 minutes – at the most. Yet, they had been walking now for over an hour and the lighthouse seemed as far away as when they first started out. Remarkably, it had been forty-five minutes since they last saw another human being. Walking along the tip of the Cape, at sunset, was like walking on the edge of the world as far as they were concerned. And they were not only approaching the end of the world, but they were the last two people standing. They pretended that – despite centuries of existence – this slice of earth was made for them only, waiting for this very moment.

Like any couple on their honeymoon, they were filled to the brim with the idealism of new love. The future couldn't look any brighter; till death did them part. This was the promise they made. And the promise they planned to keep. Forever.

This was Julia's first time on Cape Cod. Jimmy, on the other hand, had vacationed there frequently with his family growing up. He finally convinced a reluctant Julia into making it their honeymoon spot after exploring other, more expensive options.

Jimmy was eager to make new memories at his favorite place on earth with his favorite person on earth. He was worried that without the childhood foundation of memory, she wouldn't be quite as impressed as he was. But to his pleasant surprise and relief, she fell in love with the Cape immediately, just as he had all those years before.

The young couple walked hand-in-hand along the dunes, plotting their future as the amber sun slowly melted into a velvety orange sea. The sand was cold and clammy, but felt so good beneath their feet, following their long day of soaking up the rays of the sun, swimming in the sea, and disappearing into one another

and into their future, desperately trying to hold onto the present. All-in-all, it was destined to be one of those days that live at the forefront of the photo album of their minds. Memory snapshots that stayed as fresh in memory as they were when they were first experienced, making other experience pale in comparison.

They dreamed of one day owning a cozy cottage on the Cape to spend their summers off from teaching. He could write and she could paint, as the waves lapped gently on the shore. They also dreamed of one day watching their children frolic on the beach as they made their art.

Meanwhile, the sun continued its gradual descent into darkness – seemingly setting even slower than usual, as though it knew it had a special audience all to its own. The moon was off to an early start, beaming high above them, a vibrant contrast to the red-orange glow of the sun, casting a surreal, almost heavenly light.

“Are you sure you want to keep going?” he asked.

“I’m sure if you’re sure,” she responded in usual solidarity.

“This might be the last chance we get.”

“Don’t say that. It’s never too late.”

“I’d like to think that,” he said, suddenly growing sad at the sobering nature of reality.

“Well, then I guess we have no choice,” she said, trying to lighten the mood. “We better keep trekking.”

So they did. As the sun continued its deliberate set on the horizon, the lighthouse still loomed, seemingly never getting closer. Now tired, they walked in silence in a way that only soul mates can.

Far out in the distance, what appeared to be two figures suddenly materialized in front of them, surrounded by what appeared to be heavenly, halo-esque light.

He pointed straight ahead. “Do you see that?”

“What?”

He pointed again.

“Don’t you see it? Looks like two people.”

She squinted and did, indeed, see two shapeless figures seemingly glowing in the distance.

“Do they look sort of odd to you?” Jimmy asked.

“You mean, like angels? Julia asked. “Yes, I see them. But

it's probably just the sun and the moon playing tricks on us."

"Probably," he said, but not really believing it.

"Or, maybe they *are* angels," she said, half-serious.

"Could be," Jimmy said.

As they continued heading towards the lighthouse, the figures drew closer. The angelic halo surrounding them was now gone, but something else was becoming clear. The two figures weren't simply strangers. They were individuals that they knew all too well. What they were seeing were replicas of themselves.

"Wait a minute ... is that ..."

"Us."

"I think so."

They both became hushed, as they continued approaching their alternate selves until they stood face-to-face, standing in stunned silence. They noticed that their alternate selves looked slightly older and worn and it seemed as though they were being pulled together like powerful magnets. Surely, it was a dream. There was no other rational explanation.

"I forgot how young I once looked," Jimmy's alternate self said, breaking the awkward silence, but not the confusion.

"Can you explain what's happening?" Jimmy asked his alternate self, who – aside from looking much older – appeared much less confused. It was as though the alternate Jimmy and Julia were *expecting* this encounter.

"Tomorrow, in our world – your *future* world – everything is final. We will be going our separate ways. We were given the privilege to come back and inform you. So you can avoid everything we did wrong. We don't have much time."

"I don't understand," Julia asked.

"We were once where you are now," other Julia stated. "In this exact moment. In this exact space. At this same sunset. But now, we are as far from this moment as we could possibly go. Tomorrow, everything becomes final."

"It's too late for us," other Julia said. "But it's not too late for you. You can avoid this. You can avoid everything"

"Avoid what?" Jimmy asked.

"I'm afraid that's all we can tell you," other Julia said.

“But we can assure you that you’ll know when the time comes,” other Julia said. “And when it does, remember this moment. Please, whatever you do, remember this moment. So you don’t make the same mistake we did.”

“Not for our sake. But for yours,” other Julia said. “This very moment.”

Jimmy and Julia nodded in agreement then turned to one another, then back at their alternate selves. But they were now gone. All that remained were their footprints in the cold, clammy sand.

Alone once again, the couple looked at each another in an equal mix of disbelief and awe.

“Is this a dream? she asked.

“I don’t think so.”

“How could it not be?”

“Well, if it is, I guess there’s no way to know until we wake up. And if it is a dream, then whose dream is it?”

Jimmy got no answer in return. For a moment, he grew worried that *his* Julia was gone, too.

“We’re going to be okay, aren’t we?”

“Of course we are,” Jimmy assured her.

“It’s getting dark,” Julia said.

They looked out into the sea, in the sun’s waning moments, in search of their visible and invisible future. The glow around the sun resembled the glow of their other selves.

“It’s so beautiful,” she said. Jimmy nodded in agreement.

They embraced and kissed, and then made otherworldly love at the foot of the dunes as the sun went down on what they would forever regard as the most memorable experience of their lives. It was not only a moment they would remember, as the promised, but a moment they would return to every day for the rest of their lives.

Afterward, they held each other in search of forever, while looking out into a forever sea, shimmering by the light of a cold, indifferent forever moon before heading back to civilization.

They vowed to make it to the lighthouse on their next trip. But by then, it would be too late. As these things so often were.

Contributor Biographies

Jenni Baros is a graduate of the University of Alaska, taking the long way to a Masters from Denver Seminary. She lives with her husband and two children in the Rocky Mountains outside Golden, Colorado. She has summited five 14ers and contributed to *A Surrendered Life*. She blogs at www.jenbaros.com.

Tracie Campbell is an Instructional Designer living in Tennessee who also writes fiction and poetry. She has completed one teen fantasy novel, *The Silver Pool*, and is currently working on a collection of poems entitled *Halloweenie Tales*. In 2006 she served as a consultant for the children's book, *Billy's Mountain*.

Guadalupe Carrola was born in Durango, Mexico. She lived in the small town of Primero de Mayo, until she moved to Juarez at the age of seven to attain U.S. residency. After living in Missouri for five years, she now resides in New Mexico.

Yuan Changming, 8-time Pushcart nominee and author of 4 chapbooks (including *Mindscaping* [2014]), is the world's most widely published poetry author who speaks Mandarin but writes English. A PhD holder, Yuan currently tutors and co-edits *Poetry Pacific* with Allen Qing Yuan in Vancouver. His poetry appears in 959 literary publications across 31 countries.

Marzia Dessi was born, has lived and traveled some, and hopes to die like the rest of them. She is a graduate student studying English at ENMU.

Colin Dodds is the author of several novels, including *WINDFALL* and *The Last Bad Job*. His writing has appeared in more than a hundred eighty publications, and has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize. Massachusetts-born, he currently lives in Brooklyn with his wife Samantha. See more of his work at thecolindodds.com.

R.J. Fox is the award-winning writer of several short stories, plays, poems, a memoir, and 15 feature length screenplays. His work has been published in over 30 literary magazines. He is also the writer/director/editor of several award-winning short films. Fox graduated from the University of Michigan with a B.A. in English and a minor in Communications and received a Masters of Arts in Teaching from Wayne State University in Detroit, MI. In addition to moonlighting as a writer, independent filmmaker and saxophonist, Fox teaches English and video production in the Ann Arbor Public Schools. He resides in Ann Arbor, MI. His website is www.foxplots.com.

James F. Gaines is a bilingual writer living in Fredericksburg, Virginia, where he serves as president of Riverside Writers. His work has appeared recently in *Avocet*, *Bay State Echo*, *Voices on the Wind*, and *Red River Review*. His collection, *Downriver Waltz*, is forthcoming from Poetica Publishing.

Jessica Gilmore is a senior at ENMU. She is majoring in Criminal Justice and minoring in English. She spends her free time writing creatively and playing video games.

Frank Haberle's short stories have won the 2011 Pen Parentis Award and the 2013 Sustainable Arts Foundation Award. They have been published in numerous print and web-based magazines including the *Adirondack Review*, *Smokelong Quarterly*, *Melic Review*, *Wilderness House Literary Review*, *Necessary Fiction*, *Cantaraville* and *Hot Metal Press*

Sean Jackson's latest stories have been published in *Cleaver Magazine*, *Main Street Rag*, *The Potomac Review*, *Niche*, *Sliver of Stone*, and *Conte Online*, among other literary magazines. He was a 2011 Million Writers Award nominee. His debut novel, *Haw*, will be published in the summer of 2015. He lives in Cary, North Carolina.

Luke Johnson is from Los Alamos, NM, studying secondary history education at ENMU. He writes to shed light on the dark spaces of the human heart, and bring readers to a place of bleak sanctuary.

Gloria Keely is a graduate of San Francisco State University with a BA and MA in Creative Writing. She currently volunteers at the grammar school she attended, teaching poetry writing to two third grade classes. Her work has appeared in *The MacGuffin*, *Torrid Literature Journal*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Avalon Literary Review*, *Midnight Circus*, *Straylight*, *Stillwater*, *Owen Wister Review*, *New Plains Review* and others.

A. LaFaye has published a dozen novels and a few short stories and is pleased to start adding poetry publication. An associate professor of Creative Writing in the Literature, Language and Culture Department at Greenville College, she's a firm believer that teachers should be published in as many genres as possible, perhaps that means non-fiction is next. Learn more about A. LaFaye on her Fabebook page—A LaFaye Author. She also hosts The Live Arts Contest, a yearly arts contest for cinematic, literary, lyrical, and visual artist in high school and college. Find out more at www.facebook.com/GCWriteNow

Diane Lefer's poetry appeared most recently in the Fall 2014 issue of *Grey Sparrow Journal*. Her story collection, *California Transit*, received the Mary McCarthy Prize and was published by Sarabande Books. Her novel, *Confessions of a Carnivore*, will be out in April from Fomite Press.

Craig Loomis has been teaching English at the American University of Kuwait for the last ten years. He has spent much of the last twenty-nine years in Asia, specifically Malaysia, Japan, and now Kuwait. His short fiction has been published in the *The Iowa Review*, *The Colorado Review*, and others. Spring 2013 Syracuse University Press published a collection of his short stories entitled *The Salmiya Collection: Stories of the Life and Times of Modern Day Kuwait*.

Geovanny Lujan likes to take candid photos of people, as he believes that people change in the presence of a camera. He likes to think the photos he takes will be remembered. People are his favorite subjects, as he believes that everyone is different. As a result, he enjoys capturing the things which make people special.

G. D. McFetridge, iconoclast and philosopher, writes from his wilderness home in Montana's majestic Sapphire Mountains. His fiction and essays are published in academic journals and reviews as well as commercial literary magazines, across America, in Canada and Australia, India, Ireland, Germany and the UK.

Phillip Parotti has retired to Silver City, New Mexico, after a long teaching career spent at Sam Houston State University, where he continues to write and work as a woodcut artist.

Simon Perchik is an attorney whose poems have appeared in *Partisan Review*, *The Nation*, *Poetry*, *The New Yorker*, and elsewhere. His most recent collection is *Almost Rain*, published by River Otter Press (2013). For more information, free e-books and his essay titled "Magic, Illusion and Other Realities" please visit his website at www.simonperchik.com.

Cully Perlman's fiction and non-fiction has appeared in *Bull Men's Fiction*, *Real South Magazine*, *Avatar Review*, *Creative Loafing*, *Connotation Press*, *The St. Petersburg Review*, *The Good Men Project*, and more. His novel, *The Losses*, made the short list of finalists for the William Faulkner – William Wisdom Competition.

Alyse Richmond currently resides in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and is in the process of earning an MFA in Creative Writing from Chatham University. Her poems have been published in various literary journals throughout the U.S., such as *Welter*, *The Doctor T.J. Eckleburg Review*, *Helix Magazine*, *Cobalt Review*, *Malpais Review*, and *The Found Poetry Review*, among others.

Dan Shurley's critical writings have appeared in *Hidden City*, *Nomadic Press* and *Gigaflaps*. He co-curates white elephant, an online literary blog. A native of Philadelphia, he currently lives in Oakland, CA.

Carla Ruiz is majoring in Broadcast Journalism at ENMU. She is a free spirited photographer who enjoys taking pictures and capturing people's personality through her lens. She enjoys spending time with my family and friends, as well as learning about new cultures and making people smile.

Jordan Runyan is an English major/Creative Writing minor at Eastern New Mexico University. Jordan has been writing long enough to be thoroughly embarrassed by what may be called her "earliest works," and would appreciate it if people would stop bringing those up. She enjoys Shakespeare, Marvel movies, and *Les Misérables*.

Isabelle Sackett is a Junior majoring in English and Family and Consumer Sciences. She wants to use her writing to entertain and encourage her readers. She loves being outside and experiencing God's creation. She hopes one day to write amusing food articles.

Laura Steele is a student at ENMU

Manuel Raul Trevizo is a Mexican American born in Albuquerque New Mexico. He is a Spanish Major endorsed in Secondary Education with a Minor in ESL. He is a Christian and therefore hopes to provoke deep thought and inquiring about the true meaning of life through his poetry.

Allison Whittenberg is a poet and novelist. Her works are: *Life is Fine, Sweet Thang*, *Hollywood and Main*, and *Tutored* (available through Random House) and *The Sane Asylum*, (published by Beatdown). She lives in Philadelphia.

Matthew Woodman teaches composition at California State University, Bakersfield. His poems have appeared in recent issues of *Unsplendid*, *Agave*, *Cactus Heart*, and *Fourteen Hills*.

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