

Birmingham Arts Journal

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Front Cover: **FAMILY VACATION**, 16" x 16" - Mixed Media

Marcia Mouron lives in Birmingham, AL with her cat, her bees and a yard full of trees. Nature inspires much of her art. mamouron@bellsouth.net

Back Cover: **VENUS**, 30" x 30" - Acrylic on Canvas

James Knowles teaches art at Hoover High School and lives in Trussville, AL. His work, as well as that of some of his students, has been published previously in Birmingham Arts Journal. jamesknowles1@mac.com.

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STRATONICE SPEAKS TO ANTIOCHUS ON HIS DEATHBED

Ramey Channell

What else could I promise you,
when all you asked with your deep silence
and your deep silent eyes
and your precious breath, too dear,
was the thing I would have kept?
The sky, the clouds, the air, I would have gladly given.
“These are yours to keep,” I would have said.
My kiss upon your skin,
my breath upon your face,
the silver moon and the golden molten sun
and all the heavens, these were mine to give,
with wind and sea and tides and deep secrets
to match your deep silence and your deep silent eyes
and your precious breath, too dear.
All the world, and worlds unknown, and great treasures
I would have promised.
But my heart I would have kept
from your deep silence and your deep silent eyes.
That one part of universe and space and time
was your only claim, your one request
in payment for your precious, precious breath.

From the painting by Benjamin West, 1772

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WAR WIDOW

Karie Fugett

war \wawr\ *n* **1**: a state or period of armed hostility or active military operations: *The two nations were at war with each other.*

The sky smells like blue ice. His cheeks are pink, maybe from the cold air or maybe from fear. Families say hopeful goodbyes as uniforms scatter across patchy grass. The letter in my hand is heavy to hold, wet with perspiration. Formation is called and he leaves my side empty. I watch him, every step he walks. Familiar faces stand perfectly in place. I stare at them. Who will not return? He comes back to me for the last time when they are through, strong arms thrown around my waist. His eyes look at me with love and reassurance. His hug smells of wet cut grass, it holds me so tightly. I slip my letter into his pants pocket and he whispers condensation onto my cheek. He loves me. I feel weak as he walks away to war, my body stands straight and strong for him. Three weeks. An explosion on the side of a sandy road I've never seen. A faint beeping sound in a hospital room in a strange city. The smell of infection, of death. My body is numbed by a stiff chair, my head rests on my husband's hospital bed next to his soft hand. Beep. Beep. Beep. His lower leg stains white sheets red, but his rising chest lets me know he is still with me.

wid·ow \wid-oh\ *n* **1**: a woman who has lost her husband by death and has not remarried.

The sun sets in the West over pines casting gray shadows onto his grave. She sits next to it, alone in a field, her white dress draped over red clay, her legs folded to one side. His wedding ring rests on a chain against her chest as it always does. She brings him fresh flowers to make his site beautiful before she leaves for Europe; yellow and white because they remind her of sunshine. She pulls his favorite scotch from her purse, holds her breath, and takes a swig. "Cheers to new adventures," she whispers in the wind. After shaking it off, she shares one with him then rests her head on his stone. She closes her eyes, smiling, and recalls a moment with him

from years ago in downtown D.C. He stood on a city curb as a car drove by, his body brushed by cherry blossom petals as they twisted on a gust of Spring air, so beautiful and alive. She packs the memory safely in her mind, says goodbye to his resting place, and heads off. Her first stop is Amsterdam where they once said they would travel together, a perfect place to celebrate his 27th birthday.

war widow \wawr wid-oh\ *n* 1: a woman whose husband has died in war.

Red ink digs deep into the pale skin of her ring finger. Her hand lies limp and a stranger has his way, needle in hand, engraving the shape of a small heart. Dog tags comfort her, dangling under her t-shirt, cool against the skin between her breasts. She grieves deeply yet yearns to live the life her love was not so fortunate to have. She is only 20 and he was only 21. It is up to her to write the rest of their story. As time always does, it begins to heal her heart. Her blue-green eyes begin to see that she survived the worst, she has nothing left to fear. She lets herself go and plummets from a plane, free falling to the ground, freer than she's ever felt. She takes a trip to Mexico and climbs the Coba Mayan ruins; she rests under the sun, her back against the top of the ancient structure, and watches the brilliant greens of trees sway in the wind. *All that we love deeply becomes a part of us* she remembers reading on a picnic table once. She looks at the heart on her finger and he is watching the trees with her.

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Karie Fugett is poetry editor for University of South Alabama's Oracle Fine Arts Review. She is a student editor for Mobile's Negative Capability Press and was a finalist for the Tucson Festival of Books Literary Awards.

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CICADA SUMMER
(Cincinnati, Ohio, 1987)
Glenda Slater

That summer the cicadas came up
out of the ground.
Seventeen years nourished
in an incubating darkness,
and now released to fly.
It must have been intoxicating
swarming in the air,
blanketing landscapes,
surrounding all with chirring proclamation
of frantic freedom.
My hedge trimmer
seduced them with its buzz
and it and I were covered
by raucous brown bodies
seeking to copulate.
I brushed at the cacophony
to no avail,
then retreated indoors
to watch the spectacle unassaulted.
The picture window framed
five feet of snake
stretched luxuriously
on a row of boxwood,

long, black body
swollen with a surfeit of cicada,
as the fertile ground had been
for seventeen years.
That same summer,
human babes born seventeen years before
erupted from incubating homes
into adulthood
intoxicated by their new-found freedom,
assaulting a world
pregnant with possibility.
And we who had sheltered them
watched through a pane of separation,
standing helpless guard,
praying no hinged jaws would
stop their flight.

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*Glenda Slater lives in Spanish Fort, AL. She writes poetry and short stories, and is
working on a novel for middle-graders. slatergr@gmail.com*

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SPIES ABOUND IN THE CATHEDRAL OF BOOKS

Jim Reed

The attractive young customer brings her trio of old books to the counter where I stand half-hidden but ready to accept payment.

She's purchasing 19th-century editions of Alfred Tennyson and Emily Dickinson and Robert Browning, three literary icons so famous that we'll never appreciate them for who they actually were.

"Hmmm...Tennyson and Browning and Dickinson together!" I say, "I wonder what their dinner conversation together might be like?" I'm pondering aloud, to the delight of the customer. She smiles and wonders the same thing.

Then, the personalities of the three come to mind and I blurt out a thought, "I think what would happen is, Emily would excuse herself in mid-conversation on the pretense of going to the ladies' room, then duck out and head for home."

The young customer agrees. She accepts the packaged books and waves good-bye, perhaps continuing the fantasy of Emily and her two dates and what might have happened next in each of their lives.

My days are often like that. The irony of a bookstore is that authors are thrown together in oddly out-of-time, out-of-logic, outrageous ways, even before they arrive at check-out. Hemingway presses against Hesse, just down the row from Gellhorn...H.G. Wells stands near Virginia Woolf and embarrassingly close to his real-life mistress Rebecca West...Henry Miller is dangerously near Anais Nin, and Arthur Miller is right there near Marilyn Monroe.

Even more provocative is the fact that authors who would probably have disliked each others' works are forcibly housed in proximity. Mickey Spillane razzes Rex Stout and mocks Georges Simenon...Jack Kerouac and Ken Kesey cozy up but sneer at W.P. Kinsella and Alexander King and Charles Kingsley...Emily Bronte and Pearl Buck try hard to find common ground but fail.

Imagine the mutterings you might hear late at night should these authors' books come alive and party once they know we're out of earshot.

Another customer brings Mein Kampf and the New Testament and Bertrand Russell to the counter, and once again my mind runs wild. Jesus would definitely have to come between Adolf and Bertrand to break up the fight, don't you think?

But wouldn't you like to be an invisible witness during that conflagration?

Actually, truth be known, I suppose we readers actually are invisible witnesses...spies who listen in on unlikely conversations, chaotic encounters, entertaining and sometimes deadly confrontations.

That's what reading is all about

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Jim Reed writes and runs a rare book store in Birmingham, AL, "except when the book store runs me," he says. www.jimreedbooks.com
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“As I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew if I didn't leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I'd still be in prison.”

--Nelson Mandela



YOUTH

Ebeth Scott-Sinclair

18" x 18"

Acrylic

Ebeth Scott-Sinclair's paintings, drawings, and designs reflect a quirky, emotional world of juxtapositions filled with texture and color. She is always searching for the feelings and personalities of people, objects, and places as the anchor for her pieces. In the process of painting or drawing, a piece of art reveals the world from which it came and stories flow with snippets of dialogue, music, relationships, and emotions. Everything and everyone have unspoken truths hidden underneath the surface. Her challenge is to capture just one moment in the story. emss@mebtel.net

THE GOVERNOR'S LADY

Robert Inman

It's Inauguration Day in a southern state capital. Cooper Lanier is getting ready to take office as Governor, succeeding her husband, Pickett, who's running for President. Cooper has spent a lifetime around politics — her father was a two-term Governor, her mother a political king-maker — and she's seen political life rob her of the crucial people in her life: her parents, and then her husband. But she has sought the office herself as a way of helping Pickett hold onto his political base while he seeks the presidency, and more importantly, as a way of perhaps helping to salvage her marriage.

The key question now for Cooper: can she successfully navigate the treacherous shoals of male-dominated, good-old-boy politics and become a viable, relevant Governor in her own right? Or, will Pickett continue to control things and thwart her efforts at independence?

Her mother, Mickey — from whom she has been estranged for years — is dying, hospitalized with congestive heart failure. Cooper is visiting Mickey in the hospital on Inaugural morning.

* * * * *

“Do you need anything?” Cooper asked when Mickey was settled again in the bed, the tubes and wires re-connected, Nurse Dubose off down the hallway with a cart full of flowers and plants that Cooper had told her to share with other patients.

“Cigarettes,” Mickey said.

“Don't start it with the cigarettes.”

“All right, if you're not going to humor a dying old lady, I'll bribe somebody to bring me some.”

“No you won't. The hospital people wouldn't dare, and I'm going to make sure you don't have any visitors sneaking in contraband. If I have to, I'll put a state trooper on guard at the door.”

Cooper gathered up coat and purse.

“When will you be back?” Mickey asked, sounding petulant.

“I don't know. I'm busy, you know. This new job and all.”

And then something changed in Mickey's face, just a hint of softness, lines and angles easing. It surprised Cooper, because she could not remember many times in her life when Mickey was in the least bit soft. She had been mostly hard as nails, the woman they called the political Dragon Lady. There had been that one time when Cleve, Cooper's father, died. Mickey had imploded then, had stunned Cooper with her sudden

raw, helpless vulnerability. But that was with Cleve. With Cooper, there had been mostly the hardness. In the last few years, as Mickey slowly declined, Cooper wondered at times if she ever regretted the way it had been with them – the lifetime of conflict, hurts, disappointments, estrangements. Did she ever feel the wretched sense of loss the way Cooper did? Was she ever sorry it had been that way? There was no evidence of it. In the more recent past, Cooper had resigned herself to the sense of loss, had kept Mickey at arm's length, avoiding any chance of reckoning. But now...here...this strange glimmer of softness...what? Was she simply afraid of death? Or was there something else?

“Are you ready?” Mickey asked after a moment.

“For what...the job?”

“For all the shit that goes with it, Cooper. Are you ready for people lying to you, manipulating you, pushing you into corners? Because I'll guarantee they'll do it. Often, when you least expect it.”

Cooper took a deep breath. “I did this on my own, Mother. Pickett and his people made it possible, but I made it happen. And if I could do that, I can do the rest.”

“Be careful who you trust.” Then Mickey broke the gaze, looked down at her hands. “But you don't need my advice.”

“No,” she said, but there was no bitterness in it. She told herself she was beyond bitterness, had been for a good while.

“You froze me out.”

“Mother,” she said with a sigh, “I've spent a lifetime mostly doing what other people wanted me to do – you, and then Pickett. But not this time.” She turned to go.

“I'll tell the hospital to turn on the TV. You can watch.”

She was almost at the door when Mickey said, “You're not ever going to forgive me, are you.” It was a statement, not a question.

She turned back and took a long look at Mickey – shrunken, frail, failing – swallowed by sheet and blanket, tethered to technology. For an instant, she wanted to go to Mickey, touch her hand or cheek. But she hesitated just long enough to think,

Forgive? There is so much. So instead, she said, “I wouldn't have any idea where to start.”

* * * * *

The Executive Mansion was an aging beast of a place – two stories of white-painted brick, columns sheltering the front portico, sweeping curve of driveway that passed under a porte cochere on one side, all of it

hunkering behind a tall wrought iron fence, imposing gate, and guard house manned at all times by at least two state troopers. Part public building, part home, part fortress. The house was more than a hundred years old, victim of long neglect, presentable enough on the outside, sagging within. Over the years it had had just enough maintenance to keep it from falling in on itself. A fair number of first ladies had argued with their husbands over the need for major renovations, but no governor had had enough backbone to spend a good chunk of the state's money on his own abode. The mansion had been Cooper's home for a good part of her life, beginning with the eight years of her youth when her father, Cleve Spainhour, was Governor. Mickey had never bothered Cleve with something as mundane as renovations. Mickey had had her mind on other things. And then there had been the eight years of Pickett's two terms, during which he, like so many predecessors, shrank from the notion of fixing more than what was desperately needed. Now there would be four more, and things might be different. It was hers to decide.

This morning, there was what appeared to be barely-controlled chaos outside the front fence – the street clogged with TV satellite trucks, parked end to end out in the middle to keep their sky-probing metal dishes from tangling with the oaks on either side. The street and sidewalk were crowded with people – reporters, technicians, photographers – stumbling about among a sea of equipment and cables, hopping from foot to foot and flapping arms in an attempt to keep the cold at bay, dodging the small army of local police officers and state troopers who wandered about, watching everything. Floodlights, harsh and garish in the pre-dawn, bathing the front of the Mansion. Having nothing better to do at the moment, the herd was encamped here, repeating, as Cooper had already seen on the early television shows, the story: the state's first woman governor taking office; the outgoing governor, her husband, making waves as a contender for his party's presidential nomination. He had a long way to go, but this today was a boost to Pickett Lanier's profile, recognition, legitimacy. But, she thought with satisfaction, say what you want about Pickett, this is my day.

Somebody spotted them – Cooper's dark blue Ford, the identical car following with two men from the security detail inside – and there was a stampede toward the gate as it swung open. There was a small army of state troopers there now, and they stepped aside to let the car through and then formed a barrier to keep the press people out. Cooper could hear the shout of questions as the car moved through the throng, a frenzy of noise. A television cameraman, jostled from behind, went down hard on the

pavement, twisting his body to protect the camera as the gate slid toward him. The troopers stopped it and helped him up. Cooper's driver pulled under the porte cochere, jumped out, and opened the door for her. The crowd outside the gate started moving away, then more shouts and another flurried rush as a white van with STATE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS on the side pulled up to the gate. The house staff peered horrified out the windows as the reporters flung questions at them. Cooper wondered what on earth they thought the house staff could add to the story: What are you fixing for breakfast!? Are the sheets clean!?

Cooper waited inside while the staff piled out of the van – the house manager, Mrs. Dinkins, two cooks, three maids, and two men whose duties seemed to be lifting and toting for the others. When the weather warmed, they would be joined by three groundskeepers. All of them were state prison inmates, mostly murderers serving life sentences. A lot of murderers, she had learned long ago, having done their one foul deed and settled into incarceration, were a good deal safer to be around than thieves, who never got out of the habit and would steal you blind.

"Mrs. Dinkins, make coffee," Cooper said, "lots of it. And some food, whatever you can rustle up. That mob out there looks wretched. Maybe if we feed them it will calm them down."

"Mrs. Dinkins believes they are wretched, ma'am." She pointed a finger toward the kitchen and the staff hustled out. Mrs. Dinkins spoke of herself in the third person. In her early sixties, she was orderly and organized, brisk and energetic and plain-spoken. She had years ago carved up an abusive husband and stored body parts in Saran Wrap in her freezer until relatives, beginning to suspect the husband wasn't really on an extended fishing trip, called the sheriff. She had begun at the mansion on the first day of Pickett's term eight years ago, and she and Cooper had straight off learned to accommodate each other. Each had her own turf and stuck to it.

"We'll probably have a house full before long," Cooper said, "Governor Pickett and his people."

"Pastries, sandwiches, tea and coffee," Mrs. Dinkins said. She lingered for a moment. "Mrs. Dinkins wants you to know," she said formally, "that we are pleased by your accomplishment and hope that we will be able to continue..."

"Mrs. Dinkins," Cooper interrupted with a smile, "this building is in mortal danger of falling in on itself, and if you and your colleagues were not here, it would create a vacuum that would bring it crashing down

around our heads. So yes, indeed you shall continue. You are the one indispensable person here, and that includes my husband.”

Mrs. Dinkins gave a quick nod and trotted off.

Cooper went to a front window and looked out. There was a frenzy of movement out on the street, trucks firing up, antennas folding, crews dashing about. And then they were pulling away in a rush of diesel, leaving the street and sidewalk littered with Styrofoam cups and Krispy Kreme boxes.

Pickett was coming.

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The Governor's Lady is an excerpt from the novel of the same name by Robert Inman, author of many novels and screenplays. He is a native of Elba, AL, where he began his writing career in junior high school. He left a 31-year career in television journalism in 1996 to devote full time to fiction writing. Inman and his wife, Paulette, live in North Carolina.
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THE IMPORTANCE OF SYMMETRY

Charlie Ritch

Standing across from you,
our eyes meet in perfect alignment.
Matching height, and no slanting angle,
pupil to pupil, iris to iris.
You see to my soul, I to yours.
How is it we came to stand,
with such perfect symmetry?
How is it the space between us
contains a chasm so deep?

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Charlie Ritch lives in Birmingham, AL, with his wife and three daughters. He teaches humanities and rhetoric at the Westminster School and repairs old books on the side. He has degrees in philosophy and theology from Wheaton College.
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ASTRONOMER'S PRAYER

Joy Godsey

Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray my God my soul to keep.
If I should die before I wake,
I pray to Her that She will take
Me up into the Milky Way
Where I can watch the stars at play.
So far up in the dark, dark sky
I'll meet the twins of Gemini.
And after that I'll mess around
Spheres unheard of on earth's ground.
I'll visit Vulcan, the iron planet
and Nemesis, Sun's silhouette.
Mean distance, magnitude and mass
Are terms I'll understand at last.
I'll glimpse, in this infinity,
Orion's Belt—the trinity.
In outer space I'll have to dodge
The meteors as they dislodge
And zoom and streak the atmosphere
in November each and every year.
I cannot wait to feast my eyes
On all the mysteries of the skies.
Jupiter's moons and Saturn's rings
Will be as common as earthly things.
I pray my spacewalk has no end
And that forever I will wend
My way through galaxies galore—
Uncharted cosmos to explore.

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*Joy Godsey is owner of Godsey Design. Published works include Advertising Age, Canoe & Kayak, The Sampler, Garden Poems, Art Doll Quarterly and Birmingham Arts Journal. Her current obsessions include boat building, camping, fly fishing and always, family. **jgodsey@me.com***

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LAMENTATIONS

Carol Hamilton

He hung at the fence,	from grub eaten roots
caught the eye of a neighbor,	and would spoil the whole visit
whomever might glance up	of the cousin driving up
from one of the four corners,	from a too big Texas
north, east, south, west,	to spend a few days
we busy squaring up the world.	learning how the earth
Then the nasal drawl	tilted right off its axis
hung complaints along the wire	in the first place,
like dirty rags drying	leaving him here
not to sour in the laundry bin.	to prop up the fence
Nothing was quite right,	with his poles of lost hopes,
and even the unified rising up,	and he started new sentences
like iron filings to magnet,	whining out “ands”
of the blades of grass	before the victim had the least chance
had a drained-of-green patch	to change the subject or escape.

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Carol Hamilton has upcoming and recent publications in New Laurel Review, Tribeca Poetry Review, Poet Lore, and many others. Her most recent books are Master of Theater: Peter the Great, and Lexicography. She is a former Poet Laureate of Oklahoma. hamiltoncj@earthlink.net

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YELLOW MAY APPLE

Marianne Hall

10" x 16"

Multi-block Woodcut

Marianne Hall studied at the Alabama School of Fine Arts in Birmingham and Cooper Union in New York. She and her husband have created a homestead in Danville, AL, with sheep, goats, chickens, horses and five dogs. Like many rural southerners, they also garden and keep an orchard. mariannehall@gmail.com

AMONG BLACKBERRIES

Heather Hallberg Yanda

The ripest ones can be found in the tight
knot of brambles, or below that, just shy
of view, by soil and root, in dappled light –
as if Nature asks me exactly why
I want them, and if I've truly earned
such treasures.

Late summer's origami
enfolds me, each crease, a day's lost corner,
and all the fruit sprinkled – Night's confetti –
in the waiting shrubs, glistens like sequins.
Part metaphor,

Part childhood, this act.
Berries fall – tuck! tuck! in my bowl – each one
teaches patience, the goodness of hard work,
the singleness of a season's errands –
as the sunset, too, falls into my hands.

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Heather Hallberg Yanda teaches in the English Department at Alfred University, in the hills of upstate New York. She has poems published and forthcoming from BarelySouth Review, Tulane Review, and Pea River Journal; her first collection, Late Summer's Origami is looking for a publisher.

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DADDY VOICES

Thomas N. Dennis

Listen to this: it's an aging Jerry Garcia, singing alongside mandolinist David Grisman:

*You sit there a-cryin'
cryin' in your beer
You think you got troubles?
my friend listen here:
Don't tell me your troubles
I got enough of my own
be thankful you're livin'
drink up and go home...**

I mention the tune only because, as I search for ways to describe my father's voice inhabiting my own voice almost every time I speak, the first few lines here sound a lot like what he might have sounded like, had someone forced him to sing. And it sounds a lot like what I sound like, trying to sing that song. My father was never seen to sing. Knowing his non-musicality, I once asked if he had a favorite song. "Maybe, um, 'Little Brown Jug'?"

He was not a father who would choose to haunt his youngest son by inhabiting the son's voice. However...he did enjoy the intermittent, fairly harmless type of joke where, at the precisely timed moment in the TV drama where the attention of everyone watching has been drawn up into hushed held breath, some splay-eyed monster loiters just around the corner—Lt. Morse (music pounding a worried beat) rounds the corner in sight of Richard Kimble—Daddy would give out a piercing wail which in its very unexpectedness almost made us wet our pajamas. He'd then chuckle off and on to himself, obviously inwardly re-enjoying the whole event, for the next few minutes. We eventually laughed, too, of course. It was funny to hear him give that shriek, though Mother once observed, "That sounds like you hollering in your sleep."

He was not a harsh-voiced fellow, even when he yelled at me and my brother to get up for school. Meanness did not suit him. This man was a man whose silences were natural, whose pauciloquence neither offended nor annoyed those around him.

I don't understand why it has taken me so long to absorb the lesson that comes when we realize our parents were not specially chosen by/for us nor we by/for them, that it is such a curiously contingent clump of things, isn't it, the accidents of one's birth? Do children get the parents they deserve? Do parents get the children they deserve? Or are all of these questions pointless tautological knots tightening into unanswerability the more we pick at them?

In his later years, I noticed my father seemed to clear his throat just before he spoke. He died just a few weeks after being diagnosed with Class IV lung cancer. This man had lived his life in a city known for harsh pollution levels—for decades, you could see it, a reddish haze as you drove into the city. If anyone deserved a raspy voice, he did, but his was more a crackly tenor.

There seem to be innumerable ways for fathers to screw up. How many guys do I know whose fathers' opposition crushed them before they had a chance to get out into the world? Fairly fault-free kids whose fathers pressed them to achieve dreams the father had managed *not* to achieve—that “living through the child” scenario—thus obviating all hopes for a gentle relationship. No wonder kids leave early for distant states if they can; no wonder kids move into trailers in their parents' backyards. So numerous are these stories that it is not difficult for me to excuse my dad for being somewhat standoffish with me until I was less a child and more a person. He was certainly a believer in what is now called the ‘Puritan work ethic,’ though I feel certain he would have been lazier—and thus more like me—if his family's needs had not been so great. He was not overly committed to that PWE. It was pretty obvious he was not greatly enamored with (nor ensnared by) his vocation as ‘head of industrial billing’ at the local utility, but he never really complained, at least within my hearing.

I do not think I am wrong to say he was considered, by those who knew him, a quiet fellow. I find it hard to imagine T.D. Dennis giving a TED talk, even on a topic dear to his heart, but he may have had to do such things in the course of his white-collar career; I cannot know one way or another and I never asked him about it.

He maintained a deep connection to the soil both by growing luscious vegetables in his gardens and also by playing a lot of golf along the Cahaba River for the last forty years of his life, one place I can clearly evoke his voice. As we walked those golf courses, looking for our lost Titleists in the clover, I might hear the sharp bark of my name as he finds one that might

be mine: **“What are you hittin’?”** (Here I must insert his brassy assertion that my brother and I were incapable of finding a lost golf ball “even if it was big as a watermelon and had red flashing lights on it.”)

And so, to avoid sounding like the old man every time I absentmindedly turn a corner and find myself speaking into a solid surface that pushes my voice back at me, I find myself singing more, in-shower and out. I’ve tried saying things he would never have said, like “Nixon Sucks” or I may just quietly pronounce “Hawaii” properly, as he could not. He always said, “Ha-war-ye.” Anything to exorcise his voice, which has utterly overtaken my own voice. I can only suppose there are worse things than this weird haunting by voice, but some questions gnaw: Where is my own voice? Is it submerged in this postmortem ventriloquism somewhere? And: do I really want to lose this memory of his voice? Maybe not. Is it a phase my almost-sixty-year-old voice is going through?

Before our meals he said this: **“Lord make us thankful, for these and all other blessings.”**

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**“Never argue with stupid people.
They will drag you down to their
level and then beat you with
experience.”**

--Mark Twain

Y, Y

Changming Yuan

You are really haunted by this letter
Yes, since it contains all the secrets of
Your selfhood: your name begins with it
You carry y-chromosome; you wear
Y-pants; both your skin and heart are
Yellowish; your best poem is titled
Y; you seldom seek the balance between
Yin and yang; you never want to be a
Yankee, but you yearn to remain as
Young as your poet son; in particular
You love the way it is pronounced, so
Youthfully, as a word rather than a letter to
Yell out the human reasons; above all
Your soul is a seed blown from afar, always
Y-shaped when breaking the earth to greet spring

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Changming Yuan, five-time Pushcart nominee and author of Chansons of a Chinaman and Landscaping, holds a PhD in English and tutors in Vancouver, where he co-edits Poetry Pacific. Recently interviewed by PANK, Yuan's poetry appears in Barrow Street, Best Canadian Poetry, Best New Poems Online, Threepenny Review and many others.

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BECOMING MARILYN

Deb Jellett

She was 19 and just Norma Jean when we worked together at the Los Angeles munitions factory. We spray-painted Radioplanes. She had her moods, but she was a nice girl, usually. In our off time, we went to the pictures and strutted around Hollywood in hopes of being the next big thing. Norma Jean was mad about Clark Gable. He was, she said, a real man.

Then she started modeling and got noticed by Hollywood. They fixed her nose, bleached her hair and changed her name. She didn't like Marilyn, said it was a common name.

Sometimes she would phone. She hated Hollywood. Hated playing Marilyn. She was going to make a fortune, get out, find a real man and have three kids. She had read a lot about Jean Harlow and said Hollywood had killed her. She hadn't gotten out in time.

This was in 1950, just after "The Asphalt Jungle" had come out. Her first big break. Her body, not her name, appeared on the movie poster. She thought she could control things.

Then she vanished into Hollywood and we lost touch.

Sometimes I would go to the premieres of her movies. She always came as Marilyn in a tight dress, blonde hair piled high, luscious red, red lips. She wiggled and blew kisses and would stand in a doorway, her back against the frame, moving slowly down and then up again. Like a caress.

One night, I got my courage up and stopped her and asked her for an autograph. She squealed and hugged me, asked how I was. I told her I had found my real man and had three kids.

"What?" She said. Then signed "Marilyn Monroe," hugged me again and disappeared into a limousine. As the car pulled away, she tapped on the window and held up three fingers. I nodded and she grinned and sat back in the seat.

She called now and then to ask about the kids. She said I was the only normal person she knew. One year, out of the blue, she came by with Christmas presents. Over the years, I mostly saw her from the back of a growing swarm of fans. Her dresses got tighter, lower cut. Her hair bigger and blonder. She had problems. Big ones that sometimes crushed her down. Everyone said she was difficult to work with. Joe DiMaggio came and went. Arthur Miller said she was nuts and divorced her. The last time

I talked to her she said she hated Elizabeth Taylor and that she was moving to New York. She was drunk.

In 1962, I read she had been fired from a movie. She had been difficult, erratic. And she was 36 and no longer fresh-faced. Elizabeth Taylor was.

The last time I saw her, she was coming out of a Beverly Hills drug store dressed in old jeans and a wrinkled linen shirt. Her face was pale, her lips thin and colorless. She drifted by as I was sitting at the window counter of an ice cream shop. Then she was gone.

She died a week or so later. Overdose of sleeping pills. Naked in her bed. I didn't understand the why of it at first. But now I think that she just got tired of playing Marilyn. But Marilyn was all there was left.

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**“The privilege of a lifetime is to
become who you truly are.”**

--C.G. Jung



THREE DOORS

Digital Photo
Dan Deem

Originally from southern Indiana, Dan Deem is a self-taught photographer whose photographic roots lie in sports and journalism. After a 20-year hiatus from photography, Deem picked up the camera once again in 2003 in order to pursue his artistic interests. Deem's work is well represented in many private collections throughout the U.S., and has appeared in such venues as The Saturday Evening Post, NBC's Today Show, the Naismith Hall of Fame (basketball), the cover of the book Hoosiers (yes, just like the movie), ESPN, and the Jimmy Carter Library in Atlanta. shewtr@yahoo.com

THE LION THAT MADE THEM ROAR

L.L. Smith – 2013 HACKNEY AWARD WINNER

“Leonard, I think you are going to like Mrs. Schaunamon's class. It's a fourth and fifth grade combination class, something new the district is trying. A bright student like you should do well there,” said Mrs. Alexander as we left her office and walked to my new classroom.

“Yes, ma'am, I go by Lee though.”

“That's right, you prefer to be addressed by your middle name, my apologies. Easy with the ma'am and sir business. I know that is proper in Alabama, but this is California. Here, we reserve that for very old people. Adults will think you are being sarcastic if you use it with everyone.”

“Yes, ma'am,” I said in reflex, and then realizing my mistake, added a panicked ‘Sorry.’

Mrs. Alexander smiled, and raised an eyebrow in friendly warning. She was kind and I hoped she would be an ally.

I had never met a lady principal, or a nice one for that matter. I was accustomed to gruff principals who were ex-coaches. Men whose office signs were large wooden paddles that hung on their doors, with their names burned or routed in them.

The layout of this open air school was also unfamiliar to me. I was accustomed to enclosed structures with interior hallways surrounding an auditorium. This was a series of brick buildings arranged around a tree-filled courtyard and connected by breezeways. The doors to each classroom were open. All eyes were on me as I passed by accompanied by the principal. I would have been less conspicuous ringing a hand bell and wearing a sandwich board that read *New Student*. Under a breezeway, on an exterior brick wall, was a glass-encased bulletin board with the message, *Congratulations Yorba Elementary school. Winner of Pomona's 1974 district paper drive*. Mrs. Alexander pointed to the bulletin board, her face beaming with pride, and said,

“Everyone in the school got free banana splits when we won.”

“Wow,” I said, genuinely awed.

My hopes gained a little traction. A nice principal and a school that gave everyone banana splits as prizes; this place had promise.

We turned the corner of the last building. Unless my class was being held on the playground under the monkey bars, it was one of these next three doors. We passed the first two open doors under the intense side-

glance scrutiny of second and third grade students bent over worksheets or tests.

“Well, here we are,” said Mrs. Alexander, motioning me through the third and final door. She leaned in over me, and motioned to Mrs. Shaunamon who was obviously expecting us. The only sound was that of twenty-two students turning simultaneously in their seats to stare at me. I turned to Mrs. Alexander for support, only to discover she was gone. I could hear her heels echoing off the bricks down the breezeway. So much for that alliance. I stood on the fourth and fifth grade combination class battlefield, alone.

I was suddenly aware of just how fat I was. I was packed into my brown bellbottom corduroys and orange striped pullover. I had always been fat, but I had recently gained ten more pounds with all the farewell suppers and early birthday parties held by grandparents, aunts, uncles and friends in the weeks prior to my family's departure. Thanks to my grannies, my family had started our cross-country move and drive the week before with a care package of tea cakes, parched peanuts, boiled chocolate cookies and two twelve-packs of Golden Flake cheese and peanut butter sandwich crackers. My brother never ate; my mother and her boyfriend didn't like sweets and preferred cocktails to snacks. I consumed the contents of the care package nearly solo.

My mother was always trying to get me to lose weight, trying every new diet that came out on me. All my school clothes were too tight.

My soon-to-be step-father said, “There is no money for new clothes so you'll either have to lose weight or squeeze into what you've got. It's not my fault that you can't quit eating.”

At this moment, facing my new classmates, I felt the shame of being fat begin to creep over me. I was remorseful that I had not sold my soul to the devil or done whatever was necessary so that one of those diets would have worked.

I should have been an old hand at this new classroom thing. I had transferred four times in my four years of schooling, but first contact with a new class was always harrowing. How other students perceive you in grammar school is a matter of life and death. First impressions are of the utmost importance. I was fat which was already one strike against me. I stood wide-eyed, trying to control my anxiety, like a plump baby gazelle facing a room full of crouched cheetahs.

Mrs. Shaunamon's voice broke the tension. “Class, we have a new student who has come from a long way away.” She motioned for me to

come to the front of the class. "Please come and tell us your name and where you are from."

I walked to the front of the class like a man going to his execution. Then I remembered I had a secret weapon, my name. We had studied the meaning and origin of names in my fourth-grade class at Harrison Elementary just before I left. Each of my three names had meaning. Leonard, a name I had always disliked and didn't go by but had gained new respect for, was Latin and meant lion-like or lionhearted. In Italian it was Leonardo like Leonardo DaVinci, my Renaissance hero. Lee, the name I was called, was old English and meant dweller-of-the-meadow or the land sheltered from the wind. Smith, also old English, meant that my family, at some point, had been in black-, gold-, or silversmithing. I had designed my own crest for a homework project. It was a lion with one paw atop an anvil and the other holding a hammer, standing in a grassy meadow. I should have brought the drawing of my crest with me, I thought. At least, I knew the dignified meaning of my name; that was sure to impress. I was a lion, all-be-it a pudgy cub of one, a lion nonetheless.

With my new-found courage, I walked to the front of the room and faced the class.

"Please give our new student your attention, Class," said Mrs. Shaunamon. "Go ahead, young man," she said looking at me and nodding.

"My name is Leonard Lee Smith; I'm from Montgomery, Alabama," I announced in my high-pitched, effeminate, heavily-accented Southern voice.

The class erupted in a roar of laughter.

"He talks funny," said a girl at the front.

"Where is that accent from?" laughingly asked a boy at the back.

"I haven't got an accent!" I said. My voice, tight and shrill with tension, rose to an even higher pitch.

The eruption of laughter grew louder. A boy at the back of the class, who had been rocking on the two back legs of his chair, fell backward with laughter, tipping the chair over. This sent the class laughter into overdrive. The class was out of control and moving toward pandemonium. The cruel din of laughter bored into my ears, instantly killing my courage. I stood helpless. I felt my face redden and my stomach turn over on itself. My mouth became dry. Shame and fear flooded my mind. I wanted to run and hide. But there was no place to retreat. I had not been assigned a desk. I used the miniscule reserves of emotional glue I had left to hold myself together and not cry. I couldn't let myself cry. If I cried in front of the

class my humiliation would be complete. It would be social ostracism from which there was no return. I became aware of motion near me and sound other than laughter. Mrs. Shaunamon was standing, hitting her desk-top with the map pointer which made a loud whacking sound.

“Class, quiet! Quiet! Calm down or we will not go out for recess!” she said loudly.

The class began to settle quickly.

She looked at me sternly and motioned with the pointer,

“Leonard, take that open seat at the desk by the window.”

Anxious to be out of the class cross-hairs, I quickly took my seat. I judged this was not the time to tell her that I went by my middle name.

Mrs. Shaunamon began pacing in front of the blackboard and staring the class down. Her face was red, her eyes narrow and flaming, and her jaw was clenched tight.

“I am very disappointed, Class! Another outburst like that and I will revoke all accumulated book time for the week!” her voice growled with anger.

“Nooooooooo,” protested the class.

What was book time, I wondered. It must be something good the way the class protested.

“Well, you had all better behave, and consider this your final warning. Now take out your math books and turn to page 112. We will continue with multiplying fractions. Paul, you are closest to Leonard, share your book with him. Leonard, when we come back from lunch I will check out all your school books to you.”

“Yes, mm...” I said stifling the ma'am I had almost let slip.

Fractions were a breeze. I had already studied them and knew them backwards and forwards. While Mrs. Shaunamon wrote problems on the blackboard I contemplated how to redeem myself with the class. I didn't want to spend lunch times and recesses for the rest of the year shunned or worse, alone on the edges of the playground making up solitary games.

By listening carefully in the lunch-line I found out that book time was a reward system that Mrs. Shaunamon used for good behavior. The class picked a book, at present it was *A Wrinkle in Time*, by Madeleine L'Engle. If the class was good they could earn ten minutes a day. At the end of the week on Friday, during fifth period after lunch, Mrs. Shaunamon would read aloud from the book for up to fifty minutes if the class had earned its maximum amount of time. If the weather was good and the class had been exceptionally well-behaved, this was done on the edge of the playground,

in the grass under the deep shade of three Chinese elms. It sounded nice, I thought.

I got my books after lunch. I was told there was a workbook for English that my mother would have to buy from a school supply store across town and that it would be best if I could have it by the end of the week. Mom and the boyfriend weren't going to like that. Money was tight since my father had cut off child support because my mother had violated the divorce agreement and taken me and my brother out of state. Anything requiring extra money always caused conflict. I was also informed that my homework for the night was to cover all five of my school books with brown paper from grocery sacks. I could add any artwork I wanted but the books needed to have their subject printed largely on the front and along the spine. On the inside flap of the cover, I was to print my full name, followed by the school name, my teacher's name and my room number. This was going to be problematic, since my mother was not a big fan of clutter and always threw the grocery bags out.

While I was getting my books from Mrs. Shaunamon, I took the opportunity to tell her I went by my middle name, Lee. For some reason this information annoyed her. Her face scrunched up and she said, her voice all huffy, "Well, I wish you had told us that when you introduced yourself."

The irritation in her voice caused several students in the front to look up from their workbooks to see what kind of trouble I was getting into. I sat dumb with no response. I thought to myself, Lady, have you lost your mind? How could I have told you and the class anything, after the reception I got? My blank stare and lack of response must have sharpened her irritation. She addressed the class in a loud voice, her sarcasm and mockery of me painfully evident. Her nose was drawn back in a sneer.

"Class, apparently we have been calling our new student by the wrong name! He goes by his middle name of Lee, not by his first name of Leonard!"

Several boys in the class snickered under their breath. I went back to my seat, wanting to scream, smack the hell out of Mrs. Shaunamon and cry all at the same time. I don't need this s--t! I thought. I came here and did everything I was supposed to; I was polite and didn't do anything wrong. The class was picking on me because I was fat and they didn't like the way I talked. Mrs. Shaunamon was bullying me because she blamed me for having lost control of the class. Well, they could all go to hell!

I craved safety and familiarity. There was only an hour and a half until the bell rang. I spent that time working on a strategy to return to Alabama. The great beauty of big plans made when you are ten is their simplicity. At ten, you haven't got a lot of resources, and even less influence. So you find an ally that does. For me, that was my Granny Smith. My plan was a direct appeal. After school, I would call her collect. I would ask if I could come back and live with her, and if she could send me money for the Greyhound bus ticket home. I knew a plane ticket was way beyond her means. I would then enlist her help in convincing my mother that this was a good plan. I began making my argument in my head. No one wanted us to move to California but my mother and her boyfriend. He was a California native. We had moved to the boyfriend's home community and were renting a house from one of his relatives. Everyone back home had thought it a bad idea, including my mother's parents and extended family.

I remembered my uncle had told my mother, "Don't you know that the United States is tilted? That is why all the fruits and nuts rolled to the West."

My mother was not fond of this expression, but I thought it was funny. I figured I would have lots of support for my plan back home. Besides, this way my mother could stay in California where she wanted to be and I could go home. My brother, the favored child, could stay there with her and the boyfriend, which would suit them all fine. If I lived with Granny, Mom and the boyfriend wouldn't have to keep spending money on me. Also, living with my granny would keep my father in check. He could be scary when his temper flared but he tended to mind his P's and Q's around his own mother. My plan made everyone happy.

The bell finally rang and I was free. I decided to use the phone booth at the Shell station on the corner, though it was two blocks in the opposite direction from my walking route home. We had only been in our house for a few days and the phone had not yet been turned on. That was another strange thing here, kids walked to and from school. The school had no buses. I cut across the lawn in front of the school offices where some kids were being picked up by their parents in automobiles. I was heavily encumbered with all five of my school books, my note book, my pencil case, and no book bag to carry them in. I noticed when I reached the street and headed toward the wide multi-lane thoroughfare where the gas station was, that I was completely alone. There were no kids walking home in this direction. That was fine by me; they didn't like me and I didn't like them.

When I reached the phone booth, there was a very brown, squat, little Mexican woman standing near it, with two small children. She was packed even more tightly into her clothes than I, but somehow seemed comfortable dressed that way. I set my books down on the ground next to the phone booth. As I stepped into the booth she touched me on the arm and spoke words I did not understand

“Mijo, Mijo, no, Mijo, por favor, esperando una llamada muy importante.”

I did not understand the words, but I did understand that she didn't want me to use the telephone. She used the word, mijo, like it was my name. I wondered if mijo meant fatso in Spanish. I had not planned for this dilemma. We didn't speak the same language so I couldn't ask her why she didn't want me to use the phone, nor could I tell her how important my phone call was. The woman kept looking at her watch and then the telephone. I realized she was waiting on a phone call. She spoke in Spanish to the children, and motioned toward me. The older girl, who looked to be about five, walked over. She was carrying a grease-stained paper bag that contained long pieces of fried dough covered in sugar.

“Do you want a churro?” she asked, holding the bag up.

My mother would have told me to say 'No thank you,' but my mother wasn't there so I smiled and said, “Yes, please.” As I took the churro, I used the only Spanish word I knew.

“Gracias,” I said, smiling at the little girl.

“De nada,” she replied.

The churro was sweet and delicious; it was like a long skinny doughnut.

I waited about ten minutes, but the phone didn't ring. The woman smiled nervously each time I looked at her. Obviously, her phone call was important, too. This was taking too long, but I didn't have the guts to go against the woman's wishes. She was an adult and I had been taught to respect adults. The next closest phone booth was probably at the Chevron station at the next major intersection, but that was another half-mile or more in the opposite direction of my house. I decided big plans took big measures. I crossed the street and began walking along the thoroughfare headed toward the Chevron station.

The afternoon was much hotter than I had anticipated that morning when I dressed. Southern California weather was weird to me. How could mornings and nights be so cool and afternoons and evenings so hot? Also,



RED ROSES

Tom Dameron

Encaustic Watercolor on Paper on a Wood Panel

10" x 16"

Tom Dameron is a retired pharmacist who plays in two local bands, The Legendary Pineapple Skinners and The Old-Fashioned Rhythm Method. tomdameron.com

**"You can't get a cup of tea big
enough or a book long enough to suit
me."**

--C.S. Lewis

afternoon brought the smog, another strangeness to me. I was sweating profusely by the time I reached the Chevron station. My eyes were burning and watering as I stepped into the phone booth. I had learned to make collect calls the week before while traveling across country. We called one of my grannies or my father each evening when we reached our destination. I picked up the receiver and dialed the operator. When she tried the number the line was busy. I thanked the operator and hung up the phone. Granny Smith was a regular chattering magpie when it came to the telephone. She could be on it for hours. I waited five minutes and tried again, still busy. I decided I would wait fifteen minutes and then try a third time. I considered sitting down on the curb next to the phone booth to do some homework while I waited. Suddenly, I was struck with fear to my core. Where were my books? Oh my God! I thought; I left them on the ground next to the phone booth at the Shell station. I took off running to the Shell station. It was a long way. It was hot and I was fat. My run didn't last long. I alternated running and fast walking. When I reached the phone booth, my heart sank. My books weren't there. I looked inside the phone booth but they weren't there either. My heart was racing, as much with fear as exertion. I was panting and my chest was tight from the smog. I had sweated clean through my pullover. I ran inside the gas station but the attendant wasn't there. I went to the service bay and asked the mechanic, "Excuse me, sir. Has anyone turned in a bunch of school books? I left them by the phone booth."

"Don't know, let me ask." He yelled across the bay to the workbench where the attendant stood. "Hey, Chuck, there's a little girl here, wants to know if anybody turned in a bunch a school books?"

"What?" Chuck hollered back.

"School books, has anyone turned in any school books?"

"Nah, no school books today. This is a gas station, not a library," he yelled sarcastically.

"Thanks," I said to the mechanic, "And I'm not a girl!" I added, with as much resonance as I could muster.

"Maybe not, kid, but you talk funny," he said.

I went back outside. To hell with this place and all these people, I said to myself. I could feel myself beginning to crumble. I was chewing my lip and swallowing hard, trying not to cry. What was I going to do? If those books were gone, my parents would have to pay for them. I could already hear my mother's screaming and ranting, and the boyfriend's insults and tear-downs. Maybe someone would turn them into the school

tomorrow. As much as I dreaded it, there was nothing left to do but head home.

Then, I became aware that someone was calling my name.

“Lee, Lee, over here.”

I turned to see a massive new burgundy Chrysler sedan. There was a pretty woman with short blond hair I had never seen before, waving at me from the open driver-side window and calling my name. I walked over to the car, dumbfounded. Who was this woman and how did she know my name? As reached the car, she said,

“Hello, I am Mrs. Ridley, the kindergarten teacher.”

“Hello,” I said, still very confused.

“My daughter Lindsey is in your class.”

I heard a small “Hello.”

I looked past Mrs. Ridley to the passenger seat and recognized a small, dark-haired, doe-eyed little girl from Mrs. Shaunamon's class. She was very petite and looked more like a six-year-old than a ten-year-old.

“Hello,” I said.

“Did you leave your school books next to the phone booth over there?” asked Mrs. Ridley.

“Yes, ma'am. Did you find them?”

“Yes, Lindsey saw them when we were getting gas. They're in the back seat. We figured they were yours since they didn't have covers on them yet.”

I felt perhaps the greatest relief of my life. It must have shown on my face because Mrs. Ridley said, “That seems to have put a smile on your face.”

“Yes, ma'am, I'm sure glad you found them. Thanks so much for picking them up for me.”

“My pleasure. We were going to turn them in to the school office lost and found in the morning, but Lindsey saw you running to the phone booth as we were pulling out of the gas station. I had to go up a block on the avenue before I could turn around. We were afraid you might not be here when we got back.”

“No, ma'am, I'm here,” I said and then thought how stupid that sounded.

“It's awful hot, would you like a ride home? You live on Wilart Street which is near our house so it's not out of the way.”

I was too hot and emotionally spent to protest.

“OK, thanks,” I said.

As I got into the back seat I asked, "How do you know what street I live on?"

"Your little brother, Todd, is in my morning class. I remember that the address on his new student card was on Wilart. It's just one block up and half a block over from our house on Westwood."

The car's air conditioning enveloped me like a cold blanket, soothing my body and my frayed emotions. I closed my eyes and sank into the plush softness of the seat, happy to be rescued.

Suddenly, I became aware of slapping sounds and motion near my face. I opened my eyes to discover a live bird.

"Oh, Georgette, don't be so panicky," said Mrs. Ridley to a dove that was frantically flapping her clipped wings as she attempted to climb from the top of the seat onto Mrs. Ridley's shoulder. Lindsey forced the bird onto her index finger and placed it back onto a towel that was across the top of the front bench seat.

"This is Georgette," said Lindsey smiling at me.

"Wow, she's a beauty. She's a mourning dove, isn't she?" I said.

"Yes," answered Lindsey.

"Can I pet her?" I asked.

"If you go real slow," said Lindsey. I gently stroked the now-calm Georgette along her creamy beige-gray back. She blinked her black eyes at me and cooed, "Whooo-hoo, Whooo-hoo."

"She likes you," said Lindsey. It's about time someone did, I thought to myself.

"She's great, where'd you get her?" I asked.

Mrs. Ridley answered. "She blew out of a nest on the porch as a chick last fall during the Santa Ana winds. She's been a part of the family ever since. She goes to school with me every day. My class just loves her."

"We named him George, but she laid an egg in her cage three months ago, so she became Georgette," said Lindsey. I could tell that Georgette and I were going to be fast friends. We understood each other having both suffered gender confusion at the hands of the ignorant general populace. I suspected Lindsey and I might become friends too; she had not stopped smiling at me since I got in the car.

"We have a duck, too. Her name is Quackers," said Lindsey.

"Wow, that's cool. What kind is she? Peking, Rouen, or Muscovy?" I asked.

"She's white, and she is sitting on a clutch of eggs," replied Lindsey.

"If she's white then she's probably a Peking," I said.

Mrs. Ridley chimed in, "It sounds like you know about ducks."

"Yes, ma'am, I like birds a lot. I used to raise chickens and always wanted some ducks, too. Where did you get the drake to fertilize the eggs?" I asked.

Mrs. Ridley said with surprise, "Goodness, you do know a lot about birds. A wild Mallard took up with Quackers about two months ago. He flies away whenever we try to get close to him."

"I'd loved to come to your house and see Quackers," I said, proud of my knowledge of poultry and fishing for an invitation. I still was not anxious to go home. Lindsey picked up on my cue.

"Mom, can he stop by the house and meet Quackers?" she asked.

"I suppose so, as long as you don't disturb her nest too much," said Mrs. Ridley. Her eyes met mine in the rear view mirror and she said, "Lee, do you need a book bag? I have several extras left over from a school fundraiser last year. You are welcome to one if you like."

"Yes, ma'am. Thank you. That would be great if you are sure it's no trouble." I said, a little sheepishly.

"No trouble at all, you'll be doing me a favor by taking one."

The car pulled down the long driveway of a beautiful, gray and white, Spanish colonial house to a detached garage. We went into the house through the side kitchen door, with Mrs. Ridley leading the way. Lindsey and I followed behind carrying our school books. Lindsey wore the towel from the front seat on her head like a veil with Georgette riding atop it as a living ornament. We placed our books on the kitchen table and Lindsey placed Georgette on a perch in the sun porch just off the kitchen.

"C'mon. Let's go see Quackers," said Lindsey.

"Remember you two, don't disturb her nest too much. We don't want her abandoning those eggs," said Mrs. Ridley.

"We won't," said Lindsey, as we headed for the backdoor. In the laundry room, near the backdoor, on a shelf, I noticed a large stack of neatly folded brown grocery sacks.

"I'll have a snack ready when you come back in," I heard Mrs. Ridley say as we closed the back door. We crossed the lawn headed for a chicken-wire enclosure with a bright blue baby pool in it.

"How old are you?" I asked Lindsey as we walked.

"I'm ten, I'm just little," she said, beaming at me with big brown eyes and smiling broadly. Her eyes were kind but her smile was mischievous. The combination inspired trust. I liked Lindsey and I knew she liked me. I smiled back at her. We made an odd pair, she the smallest student and me the largest in Mrs. Shaunamon's class. As we walked side-by-side toward

Quackers' nest, I decided I would wait a few days before I tried to call Granny Smith again.

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*L.L. Smith is an Alabama native who spent fifteen years in the Los Angeles suburbs. He returned to Alabama in 1989. He holds a BA in theatre arts from Auburn University at Montgomery and is a licensed cosmetologist, storyteller and writer who focuses on the oddities and humor of Southern culture. The Hackney is his first award. **LLSmith33@aol.com***

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THE OAK

Laura Madeline Wiseman

They've begun to grow tall, those first gardens,
climbing each season like mist-topped mountains
of O: rough and dark or light and green or
blistered with ice in January. Now
their stories multiply, full umbra
of competing veins, rich and steady as one
branches (seven-year locusts, squirrels, mourning doves)
into the next. But that first garden
grows stronger and widens, other tiers dwarfed
in the dense forest of memory, some open grove
where hope buds, a worn footpath: the original
tree, the leaves of knowledge, green and full and swaying.

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Laura Madeline Wiseman teaches at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. She is the author of seven collections of poetry, and edits Women Write Resistance: Poets Resist Gender Violence. She has received awards from the Academy of American Poets and Mari Sandoz/Prairie Schooner, and grants from the Center for the Great Plains Studies and the Wurlitzer Foundation.

www.lauramadelinewiseman.com

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COMPANION

Nancy Compton Williams

She lies curled
in her bones,
nothing left
but the purr —
the gentle
paw extended —
her lessons
for us done.

AWAKENING

I wake
to a day
beyond loss
where sunlight
whispers through
the leaves
and only hints
of shadow breathe.

PHOTOGRAPHS

A sepia life
returns my gaze —
memories
the color of stone,
sediment of seasons past —
now I see
were christened
with eternity.

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Nancy Compton Williams has published hundreds of her poems. A retired English teacher, she spends her time reading and writing at her home in Huntsville, AL.

ncwpoetry@gmail.com

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A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF THE OPPOSITE OF NIGHT

Linda Ann Strang

If light were you,
would you go through my body like a flare
when I threw open the doors of the cathedral;
kiss my eyes, my hair, when I stood on the crest of the steps
above the square? Would you play through the lace
of my dress, a barely perceptible glow on my breasts?
Could your happiness best be expressed through the blue
of a Chartres window?

If light had a wife
would her name be Wavelength,
suggesting salad days of surfing at sunset?
Would she give him a rollercoaster kind of life
or would it be all over the rainbow? Would he end his days
herding indigo goats through canyons of ultraviolet,
for a few groats, red dust still staining the hems of his coat?

If light were a little girl
with broken shoes, would she go alone between the stars,
year after year, fostered by white dwarves
who couldn't keep her,
would she weep on the wide highway
past Cassiopeia, dropping her golden daisies
into the chasms of the night?

And when you wish upon them, my dear,
do you wish with all your might?

.....

*Linda Ann Strang is the author of Wedding Underwear for Mermaids. Her work has been published in many journals, including Orbis, The Hollins Critic and Yemassee. The editors of Poetry Kanto nominated her work for a Pushcart Prize in 2007. Linda teaches writing at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in Port Elizabeth, South Africa. **Lindaannstrang@yahoo.ca***

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ROSES

Ty Smith
Oil on Canvas
24.5" x 20"

Ty Smith is a native of Montgomery, AL. He graduated from the University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa with a BFA and earned an MFA in painting at the University of Oklahoma at Tulsa. He teaches art at Auburn University.

THE POWER OF THE PURSE

Stacy A. Smith

I remember my little wooden purse. It had tulips painted on it – red and yellow. It was a square with two triangles on either end. What shape is that called – six-sided?

First grade. My first purse. My first take-to-school-and-back purse. I was a woman now. I had a purse. I owned a wooden purse with beautiful tulips on it. This was it, my evolution into womanhood, carrying a purse. It had a fake plastic handle but looked like a real tortoise shell handle on top so you could kind of swing it and sway it back and forth as you sashayed round the playground. Oh, to be a woman.

Susan Kay and I were walking home from school. Susan Kay was a walking home together buddy. She lived two blocks before me near the top of the hill.

We were walking home together after school one pretty Alabama spring afternoon. Me with my purse and she with her belongings. Susan Kay had long, straight blonde hair that went all the way down her back to her waist. I had a brunette pixie. Remember those precious short pixie haircuts? We were both cute as buttons in our respective ways.

Susan Kay and I were walking home from school, in the walking lane of the street. There were no sidewalks there in Montgomery but part of the road was painted with a solid white line for walkers to walk in. We were walking home together, me with my purse, and this boy came up from behind us and started pestering us. Well, really pestering Susan. He was hounding her.

What was that boy's name? He was from our grade. Don't remember. At this age a lot of boys and girls are about the same size. Some girls are even taller than boys. That only happened once to me. But this boy got all up into our space, really Susan Kay's space, like in her face, especially as we were all the same pint-size height. He got eyeball to eyeball.

Now here's what I did not know. It seems boys become bothersome to downright rude and sometimes, like when you're in the first grade, this is what is called flirting. I did not know about flirting. Nobody told me and, well, I still don't always understand it.

So this boy with dirty blond hair, I believe it was, was badgering Susan, getting way to close and in her face with his creepy face and she was clearly uncomfortable with his unsolicited attentions. She told him to, “Go away.”

You can guess what he did. Kept on. Kept on. Kept on.

She was getting upset, kind of teary-eyed, and he wouldn’t leave us alone.

I could see that I must take matters in hand as Susan Kay was unable to stop this nonsense. So I told him, “Go away.”

Of course, then he just came over to me and bully-pestered us on my walking side. He was jabbering, walking through some old lady’s front yard – where a proper sidewalk probably could have been, if we’d had sidewalks.

Seeing that this was an unavoidable situation and that he was not going to leave us alone, I stopped, squared up in front of him and told him, ‘Go away’ to include a strong wallop with my beautiful wooden tulip-painted spear-pointed purse right into his gullet.

Didn’t occur to me -- ramifications and anatomy.

He grabbed his middle, bent over while his face turned kind of blue-like, and collapsed in the lady’s front yard. Look, we hadn’t had “Health” class yet. I didn’t know what was where. This is Alabama, we don’t deal with those things until it is federally mandated. I didn’t know that I could be permanently impairing the boy in some way.

I grabbed Susan by the arm and we walked away leaving him there. Why is it that some boys don’t respect a ‘no’ as a ‘no?’ That ‘go away’ means ‘go away?’ I figured he needed help understanding ‘no’ and do believe this helped with his understanding.

Apparently, it distressed that lady to find a kid doubled over in her front yard. There was no real permanent damage done to the boy. But people did find out.

Next day, I was called into the school office. Since this happened off school property there was nothing they could do. However, there was Mom.

That night and with all the respect duly afforded to such an important inaugural garment, Mom took my beautiful wooden purse with the tulips painted on it. She put it in a ‘safe’ place, on the top shelf of my bedroom closet.

That bedtime, keeping my sliding closet door open to see it there in
its grown-up womanly wonder, I knew the power of the purse.

.....

*A Montgomery, AL, native and current Vestavia Hills, AL, resident, Stacy Smith
still appreciates walking with friends and neighborhoods with sidewalks. She revels
in the southern art of storytelling as the art of painting pictures in words.*
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DESCRIBE THE RAIN IN 100 WORDS OR LESS

Sharon DeVaney-Lovinguth

The rain is	to ground
the grey curtain	dawn-drawn Falcon
soul-blown,	down
crossing on foggy catfeet.	The rain flies
The rain makes	the flag of my disposition
crackling fires	falling
Hell in the kitchen.	slows slow
(I am not afraid.)	whisper
The rain lights	big sleep.
lightning	

*(The poet thanks Carl Sandburg, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Raymond Chandler and
the coiner of the term "Hell's Kitchen.")*

.....

*Sharon DeVaney-Lovinguth has been a maid, bus 'boy,' engineer, grad student,
boutique owner, editor, event planner, and English teacher at Jefferson State
Community College in Birmingham, AL, where she also edits the literary and arts
magazine Wingspan. Director of the Red Mountain Reading series, she writes
poetry to express her uncertainty about her place in the universe, but does not seek
to find it. Mystery is good.*

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THE FISHERMEN

Michael Fontana

Each Saturday, Carl and I packed up our tackle boxes and went out to Beaver Lake. We fought off the spiders dangling from cover of the slip and took the boat out on the water. Carl liked to use the butt end of a hot dog to bait his line.

On the particular day in question, he caught part of his thumb in the hook. He made no noise or dance about it. Instead he slipped the hook back out and scattered the blood on the water as additional incentive to the bass.

He sat in the back of the boat as it bobbed on the water. His hair had receded and he tried to comb it over from the side but the wind always picked up the strands and tossed them back where they belonged. His remaining hair, including on his legs and chest and arms, was white. He wore a camouflage vest and jean shorts, his feet bare on the metal floor of the boat because he liked the cold and wet on them.

I still had my hair although it was thinning in the back. I was stouter and taller than Carl. He lived out his days in the retirement home where I visited him. My father had died in the place. Afterward, Carl stopped by to wish me condolences. "Your dad was a real man," he said.

"What does that mean?" I said with a twinge of irritation.

"It means, lummo, that if you picked up more of his graces then you wouldn't be a middle-aged divorcee. Single is no life for a man. It makes him crazy."

"I'm not crazy," I said.

"You're crazier than you think. Just ask anybody."

I had gone home but indeed felt lonesome. The more I thought about what Carl said, the more I wanted to challenge him. So I drove back to ask him what he meant about my being crazy. Instead of talking with me, he emerged from his room with that vest and a couple of fishing poles. "Take me out to the slip. I'll show you how few fish there are any more."

That's how these trips started, turning into an every weekend adventure, always with him complaining about how there weren't as many

fish as there had been in his day. Always with me seeking to somehow prove him wrong.

On this particular day we puttered around the lake, sometimes by motor, sometimes by floating. I cracked open a bottle of Miller and swigged it down. Carl didn't like beer, said it gave him gas. So he settled for a diet Dr. Pepper. As our lines lay out in the water like so many protractor angles, we studied the patterns of light on the surface. Small fish scooted just below, feeding on bugs.

"They're not biting," Carl finally said.

"Be more patient."

"I'm too old to be patient. If they don't bite now, there might not be anything left of me tomorrow to try again."

"Don't be such a pessimist," I said.

"You get as old as me and just you try being happy. Happy's when the years stretch in front of you like chorus girls on a Broadway stage. This is the end of happiness."

"Except for fishing."

"Of course, except for fishing. What are you, some kind of dunce?"

We didn't go indoors despite the heat of the sun increasing in the afternoon. Both of us took on a pink cast, not bothering with sunscreen or a hat. Sunburn just meant a day's excuse for laying still in the air conditioning.

Daylight slid slowly into evening and shadows returned to the world. The spiders were about to emerge from their daytime crannies to occupy the slip once again. We caught nothing.

That didn't stop Carl from switching hot dog ends, just in case the byproducts in one were more tantalizing to the fish than another. "There might be a late bite," he said, still standing in the prow of the boat.

"I think we've worn them out."

"I think we've worn you out. You lack the virility of your old man."

"My dad wasn't virile," I said, allowing a trace of annoyance to enter my voice. "He was old and dying."

"So is everyone else, smart guy. You think you're not already dying? Think again. Every second you breathe extinguishes another candle in heaven."

“How theological of you.”

“Don’t believe me then. Live your empty life the way it is and watch how much more quickly it flows straight into your father’s old age bed.”

“Doesn’t it ever bother you to talk like this?”

“It bothers me more when people don’t face up to their mortality. Like now. Fishing is all about mortality.”

“The mortality of the fish,” I said. I reeled my line back in, slowly. I was done for the day.

“No. Your mortality. My mortality. It’s all about laying out a line, kind of like you lay out lines for women, and watching that line slowly recede as you draw it back. Picture God as the greater fisherman.”

“The fisher of men,” I said.

“That was Christ. Pay attention. This is all new stuff to you. We talked about this on the ship back from the war. God throws you out like this little piece of hot dog, casting about in the water of time, taking your share of stillness and of bites that hurt you.”

“What if the bait gets completely swallowed?”

“Let me finish. If you survive, i.e. if you aren’t eaten alive, then you watch the water recede as God reels your sorry butt in. Got it?”

“It doesn’t make much sense.”

“Neither do you. Now give me another hot dog.”

“It’s time to go in.”

“It’s not time to go in until I say so. I got seniority over you.”

So we sat out in the boat until the night fell over us and Carl’s God had thrown a large tarp over the world to set it to sleep.

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Michael Fontana’s works have appeared in Amoskeag, SamizDada, Wanderings, Birmingham Arts Journal, and others. He writes in Rogers, AR.
paz9461@yahoo.com

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DAUGHTER'S GPS DRIVE

Lenore Weiss

You've left your husband for the third time.
Tell yourself this time you really mean it.
Recall how I used to twist
my marriage band around my finger.
Or maybe it's nothing like that at all.
Maybe you're nine months pregnant and feel a contraction,
make the mistake of calling my old number.
At the next Stop sign, you grab something in the car
that sticks to your finger like batter to fried chicken
when you moan, Oh.
Or maybe this week you're driving the kids to their soccer game.
You're lost, turn on the GPS.
November is butting up against the holidays. You remember
the macaroni and cheese our family ate one year
and how you still can't get yours to taste like mine.
Which is when I come in,
a visit from a far-away place
where sparrows dip every morning
into a jar of night.
Open my mouth to tell you I'm here, I'm here.
Run my voice across your thick hair.
Now it's my turn to miss you.

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*Lenore's collections include Cutting Down the Last Tree on Easter Island, Tap
Dancing on the Silverado Trail and Sh'ma Yis'rael. Originally from the Bay
Area, she now lives in Sterlington, LA. **www.lenoreweiss.com***

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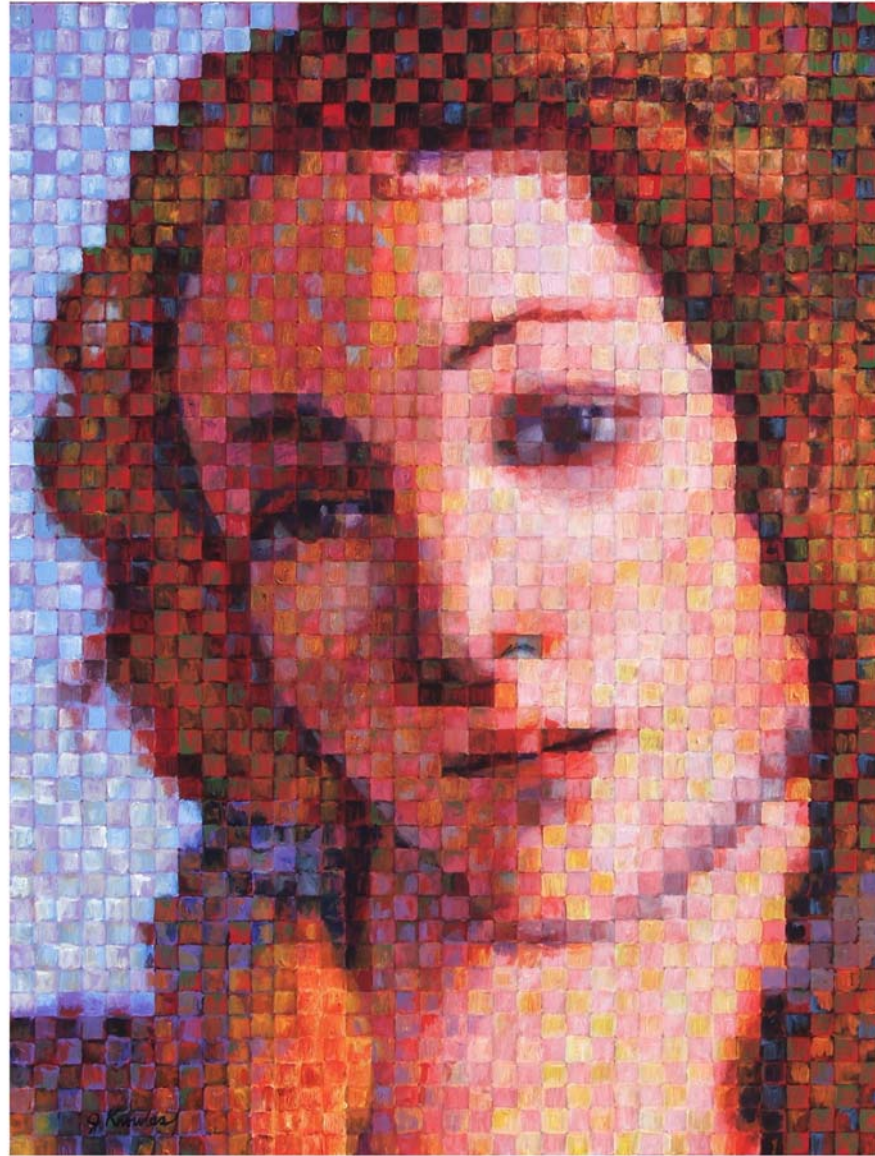
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