

Birmingham Arts Journal

Volume 7 ~ Issue 4



Published without profit by dedicated volunteers who believe that exceptional works by the famous, not-yet-famous, and never-to-be-famous deserve to be published side by side in a beautiful and creative setting.

\$5.00



Birmingham Arts Journal

Table of Contents

SAY WE HAVE FELT THIS	Vernon Fowlkes, Jr.	1
HOW TO MURDER AN AUTHOR	Jim Reed	2
WHY HESTER PRYNNE STILL LOVES THE COLOR RED	Irene Latham	4
STILL LIFE WITH GOLF BALL	Amasa Smith	5
SOMEWHAT DIFFICULT TO PUT INTO WORDS	Anthony Seed	6
MORRIS AVENUE STREETLIGHTS	Dan Deem	12
SHIRLEY	Larry Smith	17
THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE	Nick McRae	18
LIFE FORCE	Cavanaugh Kelly	19
IMAGINARY LETTER FROM ZELDA TO SCOTT FITZGERALD CIRCA 1936	Leah DiVincenzo	22
TRAP OF FEATHERS	Andrew Glaze	23
WATERFALL	Ty Evans	24-25
POINT OF VIEW	Murray Edwards	26
WHAT IT IS LIKE	Harry Moore	29
UNUSED FOOTAGE	N. A'Yara Stein	30
METAMORPHOSIS	Heather Cadenhead	31
STILL, MY DAUGHTER WANTS TO FLY	Kory Wells	32
WHAT COLOR IS CANCER?	Maria Coble	34
MAERE TUNGOL	Dick Sheffield	35
TRACKS	Jack Criswell	37
BOAT MARINA	Derek McCrea	44

Front Cover: **HOLDING PEAR WITH ATTITUDE**, Oil on Canvas, 12" x 12".
North Carolina artist Ebeth Scott-Sinclair interprets old world themes with a unique contemporary southern vision. Her work is characterized by a fresco-like surface texture and an interplay of warm, vibrant color that conjures a world of juxtaposition. She is represented in galleries throughout the southeast. www.ebethscottsinclair.com; emss@mebtel.net

Back Cover: **ANTICIPATION**, Oil on Canvas, 15" x 15"
Charles Chambers' work focuses primarily on the human form. He has been in numerous group and one man shows in Birmingham, New Orleans, and Atlanta. His work is in private and corporate collections throughout America. He lives in Birmingham, Alabama. kcandcc@bellsouth.net.

SAY WE HAVE FELT THIS

Vernon Fowlkes, Jr.

Say this is a sound
wired to the hammer
in the ear. Say
it's the heart's emblem hanging
in the hall, that it resembles
a gratuitous whisper, or the grave
in coarse silhouette. Say
it is the murmur of those
speaking from beyond, something
tangible, smooth, a handled thing,
perhaps the shaft of an antique
oar, sanded by the passage
of time and rough hands.

Say we have felt this
touch, the shaping
hands of the hot salt
air. Molded by the roaring
sound of the surf,
we have stood upright
and walked onto the shore.
Say we have written
these lines in the sand.

.....

Vernon Fowlkes, Jr.'s poems have appeared or are forthcoming in a number of literary magazines and journals, including The Southern Review, Negative Capability, Elk River Review, Willow Springs, and JAMA. He writes in Mobile, Alabama, where he is a founding member of the literary troupe The Canebrake Poets.

.....

HOW TO MURDER AN AUTHOR

Jim Reed

Having trouble getting started with your freeform, freeflowing writing and journaling?

Remember how great the feeling was in grammar school, when your teacher gave you your first writing assignment?

"Write an essay called 'What I Did During My Summer Vacation.'"

Remember how you were first a little scared about having to write a whole page by yourself? Then, that night, you began to write down the first sentence about how much fun you had last summer. Each word you wrote, you could actually *feel* as you wrote it. "My dog Brownie fell in the lake and we saved him. I got bitten by three wasps. We went to Disney World."

And so on.

Then, because you could *feel* the emotions behind each word you laboriously block-penciled on lined notebook paper, you were certain the reader would feel them just as strongly as you--would feel the pain of the sting, smell the wet dog Brownie, feel the same tingling you felt when you got ready to go on Space Mountain for the first time.

You neatly re-copied the assignment, hoping that you spelled everything correctly, though you couldn't figure out how to spell Kaopectate.

Next morning you beamed as you handed in your paper at school, knowing that this was going to be a great year, a year in which your thoughts and adventures would be recognized and appreciated.

Of course, what happened is, you got the paper back next day with *red marks* all over it. You misspelled Kaopectate. You forgot to put a period at the end of the second sentence. You failed to indent at the first paragraph. One sentence was missing a verb. And so on.

After you read the red marks six or seven times, you then went back over it to see if your teacher wrote anything on the front or back of the paper about your experience. Did the teacher feel the wasp? Did the teacher laugh and sympathize with poor, wet Brownie? Did your trip to Disney World remind your teacher of what a good time childhood can be in the summer?

You found no trace of this sort of feedback. It took you years to sort your feelings out, but back then, the next time your teacher was about to hand out an assignment, you got a funny feeling in your stomach, vertical lines appeared between your eyebrows, and you began to dread opening yourself up by writing down your joys and sorrows, just to have them ignored and, instead, *graded*.

You might have wound up like other adults I meet: "Well, I don't keep a diary or write stories. I'm just not good at writing. I could never do that!"

Your teacher discovered yet another way to murder an author, and you believed that teacher.

It's time to murder the teacher, erase the negative non-nurturing red marks, and start all over again

.....

How to Murder an Author is excerpted from Jim Reed's book on writing, How to Become Your Own Book, one of many works he has created about the joy of writing. Jim writes and edits and curates in Birmingham, Alabama.

www.jimreedbooks.com

.....

“When you have only two pennies left in the world, buy a loaf of bread with one and a lily with the other.”

--Chinese proverb

WHY HESTER PRYNNE STILL LOVES THE COLOR RED

Irene Latham

Because my whole body became
an ocean of red-tipped waves
brutal
relentless

and it brought me a baby
with skin so white I could only
think
Pearl.

Shall we lay out our lives,
my jagged edge to your
crooked
line?

I recognize that flush, the way
your hand keeps climbing
your
neck.

What tenderness there is in drowning.

.....

Irene Latham, recent Alabama Poet of the Year, is poetry editor of the Birmingham Arts Journal. Her novel for young adults, Leaving Gee's Bend, was published in 2010, as well as a new collection of poetry, The Color of Lost Rooms. She lives in Shelby County, Alabama, with her husband Paul and three sons.

www.irenelatham.com

.....



STILL LIFE WITH GOLF BALL

Amasa Smith
Oil on Canvas

Amasa Smith lives and paints in Birmingham, Alabama. His work was awarded both First Place and Best of Show in a recent Birmingham Art Association juried show. www.amasatheartist.com. amasa@amasatheartist.com

SOMEWHAT DIFFICULT TO PUT INTO WORDS

Anthony Seed – Winner of the 2009 Hackney Literary Award for Fiction

It was only after viewing the film of an unknown American soldier's decapitation for the fourth time that I noticed it. The grainy, twenty-some year old black and white film occasionally fluttered and images sometimes blurred, but there was no mistaking it. The World War II American soldier, who was thin and appeared small, who sported movie star good looks and a full head of dark hair, who was about to be beheaded by his Japanese captors, who sat on the ground on his knees, his hands tied behind him, who presented a ghastly and brutalized appearance, displaying obvious signs of torture while dressed only in a pair of khaki shorts and a dirty, torn t-shirt, the type without sleeves, smiled, or, perhaps more accurately, he smirked, at the very moment before his execution.

It was the type of expression that captured or conveyed an attitude, I believed, rather than as a response to a verbal cue from his oppressors. The smile/smirk began at the corner of his mouth and curved slightly, mildly, mockingly upward. He made no attempt to look up, or to gaze upon his captors, or to look out to the beautiful and calm blue sea from the soft sandy beach on which he knelt, somewhere, I assumed, in the Pacific Theatre. No, it seemed a smile reserved for himself, a reaction to a last thought, to something he may have found amusing. Or, perhaps, it had been a nervous response to a comment from his executioner, who stood over him and appeared to say something to him the moment before the act. However, as the film carried no sound, and as the Japanese soldier did not directly face the camera, it was obvious that he had made some comment, expressed a few words, but not that the American had heard him. Also, the Japanese soldier, I assumed, had most probably spoken Japanese. The American soldier may not have understood Japanese, though it is conceivable he may have learned a few words or sayings from his captors during his captivity, prior to his execution. It was also possible that the Japanese soldier had learned a few words of English from the prisoners, and that he had voiced those words as a last act of anger or remorse, looking for forgiveness or announcing his vengeance.

The identity of the American soldier was a mystery, as was, of course, the identity of the Japanese soldier. Although, I believe I eventually came closer to discovering the identity of the Japanese soldier

than the American, which I learned in bits and pieces. I never really attempted to identify the American soldier, and possibly discovered the identity of the Japanese soldier only as a matter of journalistic serendipity, or a writer's instinct, or just plain, simple, luck.

Attempting to identify the American soldier seemed somehow disrespectful, as had been the capture of his execution on film. His family would certainly not want to view it, to witness the brutal final moments of their son, husband, brother, father. Who would want to witness such an atrocity? Well, students. College students, specifically, at a Midwestern university in 1966; a group of us worked together at a well-known and popular bar close to campus. Sons of WWII veterans and eligible draftees for Vietnam, we watched with fascination and morbid curiosity the fate of the unknown soldier, whose execution had been documented by a Japanese film crew in films later captured by occupying American forces in Japan.

We feared that such atrocities could somehow befall us, if drafted, and wondered how we would behave and react under such circumstance. Watching the film seemed like training, in a sense, providing one a glimpse into proper conduct, into behavior expected, into the responsibility and expectations of manhood we had not yet reached, nor been challenged to display.

Eddie's father, a veteran who had served with the Occupation Forces in Japan following the war, had discovered the film, among many others. He had confiscated several films and brought them home as souvenirs, along with ceremonial Japanese swords and weapons. Eddie had secretly watched this particular film several times prior to sharing it with us. He only told us about it as he set up it up, late after work one Saturday night, and after carefully and sternly swearing us to secrecy, making us promise to never reveal what we had viewed as it could result in trouble for his father, a former Marine officer.

"S_ _ _ . I could never do that. I could never just kneel there and take it like that. I would be jumping to my feet and running into the ocean or something," said Ben, the most athletic of our group.

I laughed. "Didn't you notice, Ben, that his ankles were swollen and bruised. He couldn't go anywhere and he knew it. He knew it was over, that there was nothing left for him to do. Those final moments, he

realized, were his, and his alone. So, he retreated into his own thoughts. Maybe that's what that grin or grimace or almost laugh was about."

"Naw," said Jerry. "That Jap said something to him. It was a reaction. He was telling the Jap to go f_ _ _ himself, or something. He was blowin' off some steam, some frustration. You know that, Jimmy. It's what we would all do."

Funny, interesting, how conversations like that come back to you, at the oddest and most unexpected of times. I had not thought about that conversation or the tape of that soldier for a long time and no one had addressed me as "Jimmy" since I left college, was drafted, trained and sent to Vietnam.

Timing is everything, they say. I landed in Vietnam at the worst of times. It was the end of January, 1968, and the Tet Offensive broke out just after my arrival. And, not only was it the worst of times, but the worst of places, as I was assigned to a recon outfit just north of the city of Hue, the hotspot of the major offensive by the North Vietnamese.

For almost four months it was combat almost every day. And, at night, the arriving or departing Vietnamese lobbed grenade and rocket attacks on our location, the arriving troops to let us know they were arriving, the departing troops unloading ordinance they didn't want to carry home.

I was very lucky, as are all survivors of war, but, on the last day of the fourth month a fellow soldier kicked what he thought was a rock while we were filling sandbags and the rock, which was actually unexploded ordinance, a leftover gift from our buddies from the north, exploded. The next thing I knew I was being shipped to a hospital in Japan.

"You'll be here at least four months for recovery," the doctor at Tachekawa Air Base explained to me upon my arrival in the land of the rising sun. It was good news. Four months out of the war and nothing to do but recuperate gave me time and opportunity, and the memory of the World War II soldier's smile gave me the cause to investigate a mystery.

I didn't know it at the time, though I knew I was leaning in the direction, I would finish college after my tour and enter the field of journalism, specifically, investigative reporting. And the juices were already at work in me. I realized I had a unique opportunity to gather information on that last smile, or grimace, or smirk. Naively, I believed I could interview former Japanese soldiers who had witnessed such

atrocities, little understanding their reluctance to admit to having witnessed such behavior, let alone to have participated in it. With the lack of awareness of a virgin but the determination of a horny 19-year old, I set off each weekend to meet and interview men, age range early 40s', who would also have been 19 or 20 year olds during their war.

I would meet them on trains, or walking down streets, at shrines, tourist hot spots and lonely, quiet villages that seemed almost uninhabited. And I would always begin my approach the same way, with a smile and a slight bow, followed by a few words of English in which I offered my name and my interest in meeting former soldiers.

I was almost always dressed in civilian clothes, but the Japanese people knew that a young American in their country during that period was probably involved with the Vietnam War, one way or another.

After two months, as you might expect, I had gotten nowhere. No one wanted to talk about the war or, especially, their involvement in the war.

I had written to my college friend Eddie, whose father had brought home the film of the doomed American soldier. I asked Eddie to send me photos showing the faces of both the American and Japanese soldier, which I knew could be made from the film. And he did. He said he was excited to have the opportunity to learn more, to learn anything more, about the American soldier. Like me, he was curious to understand the meaning of that last smile, that last laugh or gasp, that last expression of feelings and emotions.

My big break came with the arrival of the photos from Eddie, but not as you may expect.

The very next weekend I showed the photos to several people I believed could have been soldiers during the war but, as always, was met with blank faces that looked quickly away. Honestly, I was on the verge of giving up, realizing the hopelessness of my quest, when I met a young Japanese girl in a bar next to the hospital base. She was very used to and comfortable with American soldiers and spoke almost perfect English. She told me her name was Hanako, but I knew that girls working in bars almost always used names other than their own.

She referred to herself as a hostess but we both instantly knew the truth. She was not what you may expect though, she was warm and

friendly and genuine. Yes, she was a prostitute in the sense that she slept with men for money, but she was much more, much, much more.

Now, don't get the wrong impression. I didn't fall in love with her, or marry her, or break her heart or have her break mine. I really liked her and I believe, actually I know, that she really liked me. And she proved that.

The morning after our first night together, I reached for my wallet and the picture of the Japanese soldier fell onto the floor. She picked it up and, serendipity hard at work here, I recognized in her expression that she knew this soldier, or, at the least, thought she knew this soldier.

"Do you know him?" I asked, somewhat incredulous at this turn of events.

She hesitated, uncomfortable for the first time since we met.

"How is it that you have a picture of this soldier, from this time? He looks very young."

She didn't look up from the photo, as if her eyes were permanently fixed on the picture and she was unable, unwilling or afraid to look away.....to look back at me.

I touched her shoulder.

"I am interested in finding this man, to interview him. I mean him no harm. I just want to speak with him, to question him in regard to another man, an American soldier."

Then, without hesitation, I risked losing her support and let the entire story pour out of me, explaining my interest and assuring her I had no negative or ulterior motives. I simply wanted to learn the meaning of the smile.

"Let me keep this photo this week. Come back next weekend."

"I will. I will come back," I said, and I handed her the photo of the American soldier. It was a side shot showing only his head and a bit of his left shoulder. His hair hung over his forehead and he was looking almost in the direction of the camera.

"Please also take this with you. Show it to, to anyone you wish. It is the American soldier."

The next week passed agonizingly slow. Each day I wanted to visit the small tavern but each day I resisted the urge. She had requested a week's time and I felt a responsibility to give it to her.

That next Saturday I entered the tavern and she was seated at the bar. When she recognized me she smiled, slightly, a little uncomfortably, but genuinely happy to see me, I believe. And, she stood and gestured with her left hand to a thin young man sitting at a corner table.

As she and I approached him, I couldn't take my eyes off him. If it wasn't the Japanese soldier in the photo, it was someone who looked very much like him. He didn't even look that much older. Twenty years had not aged him much at all.

"I will have to translate for you," she said as we approached the table. "He speaks very little English."

As we arrived at the table the man, who I could now recognize as being in his early '40s, stood and bowed deeply, formally forward. I made my best attempt to return his bow with one that as closely mimicked his as I was capable. And then, for a moment, we simply looked one another in the eye, seeking to determine the objectives or motives of the other. He could, I sensed, look far deeper than I was capable.

She first made introductions in Japanese, then in English.

"Mr. Yamada Taro, this is Mr. Jim," said Hanako in a very formal, polite and respectful manner, bowing slightly to each of us as she voiced each name. She then seated herself and Yamada Toro gestured politely for me to also be seated. He looked at Hanako and then to me before seating himself.

"Mr. Yamada Taro wishes for me to express to you that he does not know the soldier in the picture you have provided. However, he is a war veteran and would answer any questions you may have in regard to the war."

It was obvious to me that he wanted to cover his bases, to protect himself. But it was also obvious to me that, indeed, this could very well be the same man as in the picture. Not only his features, but his gestures were the same. He moved his head in a quick manner, either from one side to the other or from down to up that was distinctive and his mannerisms and gestures seemed to mimic those of the soldier in the film, the executioner of the American soldier. Was it even possible that I had actually stumbled upon the very man I sought, from a country of millions of people, hundreds of thousands of veterans of the war, and, from a small photo that fell out of my wallet and was recognized by a young and pretty prostitute, who possibly knew the man in the picture?



TITLE YET UNKNOWN

Lisa Oestreich
Digital Photograph

*Lisa Oestreich is a physician at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. In her spare time she enjoys documenting light, form, and texture.
lisaoestreich@charter.net*

It was a feeling that often came over me, in later years as a journalist, when a story presented itself to me, laid out as though waiting for me, so easy and so unexpected as to challenge belief, too-good-to-be-true but, none-the-less, true and genuine.

It would be nice to share with you that he poured out his guts that day, that he told me the whole story, explaining his role in the execution and his feelings in regard to his involvement. But he didn't. He answered many questions in regard to the war, but he never really opened up. Not, at least, that day.

Over the next 30 years I stayed in touch with Hanako, and she stayed in touch with Yamada Taro, who turned out, I learned only after many years of written communication, to be her uncle. I wrote her at least twice each year and she always responded. She always attempted to answer my questions after presenting them to her uncle. And, over the years, as he became older, perhaps wiser, more forgiving and less fearful of repercussions, he slowly opened up and began to reveal more to me about the young American soldier and his own involvement in his execution, never actually admitting personal involvement but also never denying it.

After 30 years, Hanako wrote to explain that her uncle was quite ill and near death, but also that he wanted to communicate to me the truth in regard to the story. She explained that her uncle no longer feared retribution, that he wanted to cleanse his soul and that he believed, because of my decades long persistence, that I deserved answers to my questions. She explained for her uncle that he believed I had been very honorable, genuine and determined in my long pursuit, but that the truth in regard to such a story was "somewhat difficult to put into words."

"My uncle is curious," she asked in one letter. "Have you ever seen films by Japanese director Akira Kurosawa, such as *Rashomon*? Because my uncle believes it would help you to better understand his story. Kurosawa is my uncle's favorite director."

Familiar with the film *Rashomon*, I wrote to assure Hanako and her uncle that I understood the contradictory plot of the film and also that I was familiar with writer Ryunosuke Akutagawa, who had written the two

short stories, *Rashomon* and *In the Grove*, that had been the basis for Kurosawa's movie. While the movie *Rashomon* depicts the rape of a woman and apparent murder of her husband, the widely different and almost contradictory stories of four eye witnesses force the viewer to form an opinion independent from those provided by the film.

I felt that, if Yamada Taro was going to open up to me, I had to be willing to be as open as possible with him. So I sent him a short story I had written. It was a true and accurate depiction of a personal experience near the end of my tour in Vietnam. A short-timer, I was assigned to help a mortar crew build a three-foot high sandbag perimeter around their mortar pit. We filled bags all afternoon and I got to know the six of them pretty well, where they were from, how long they had been in-country and what they planned when they got home. They were good guys. I liked them all. And, naturally, we kidded one another, in typical dark, soldiers' banter; them about my being a short-timer, and me about their slim chances of making it home.

That night, only a few hours later, a rocket landed in the middle of the circle we had built, killing all six soldiers instantly. The next morning I was assigned to help place their bodies in green, plastic body bags, that were not so different from the green sandbags we had spent much of the afternoon on the previous day filling for their protection. The obvious irony of such a story, I thought, may help Yamada Taro to realize that I understood the complexity of such happenings, and that I could appreciate the many understandings or insights that could be delved from it.

At the time, having been through months of combat, I had become numb to death. It seems odd to say such a thing, and people who have not experienced war would never understand, but I hoped it illustrated for Yamada that I was able to appreciate the sadness, tragedy and inherent conflicts involved in such a story. I had experienced them myself. He and I were brothers in the tragedy and consequences of having been young soldiers in war, forced to do things we would find hard to live with.

My letters must have convinced him of something. For, in his last letter, which he wrote himself, with an accompanying letter for translation from Hanako, he first admitted to me that Yamada Taro was

not his real name (he shared with me his real name but I will not reveal it to you) and he told me his story.

He said he did not remember the particular soldier whose picture I had sent, but that it did not matter. He confessed to having decapitated many soldiers, some American, some from other countries, as well as civilians and even a few fellow Japanese soldiers, for offenses he didn't explain. He said he had been ordered to do it and that he would have been executed if he had not and, as a man and a soldier, he had done what had been expected of him. He didn't recall any of his victims smiling at the last, or the day on which it happened, but he admitted that the picture I had sent was, in fact, his picture. He apologized for such atrocities and admitted that his remembrances had haunted him all his life, though, during the war, he had felt justified in such "retroactive behavior" toward his enemies. In subsequent years, he went on to share, after he had a family of his own and learned to love others more than himself, he had subsequently changed, begun to heal, and his anger and bitterness had slowly eroded.

I understood. That's also how it had been with me. I had found everything good about life in a woman who made my life whole. She had saved my life and my soul. She had healed my wounds, with love, renewed my spirit and my belief in the good inherent in man.

Akira Kurosawa said that "to look at a frightening thing head on is to defeat its ability to cause fear." And maybe that is what Yamada and I learned to do, separately, miles and years apart.

A year ago, I lost my wife to cancer. The only thing that has made it possible for me to continue is that I know I will see her soon. Yamada and I both share the fact that we are staring death in the face. It is only a matter of time.

I always wondered if I would ever be brave or bold enough to smile or smirk the way that American soldier did somewhere on the beach in the South Pacific during World War II. I look back and wonder if I didn't almost smirk when the members of the mortar crew in Vietnam were killed. I looked at that tragedy with a soldier's dark humor, having teased them that they would all get zapped while I was back in the world. And

then, to have helped to load them into body bags after filling so many sandbags with them, it all just seemed too preposterous, too absurd, too diabolical to present any true reality. For a soldier, a survivor, it was all so sad that it could only be funny.

That soldier's smirk on the beach has been locked in my memory for several decades. It is locked in time. It is what he left behind. His corpse may have corrupted but his soul, his spirit, his attitude have endured. It was an attitude that carried a nation through times of trouble, that vanquished foes and led our nation to ultimate victory. There was a dignity and sureness of his cause that I admired, an acceptance of his destiny that I envied.

I lay here now, in a hospital, with tubes running into me. They have hooked me to a bottle of morphine and given me control of my dosage. I don't believe they think I have much time left. Maybe not.

It could make you laugh, the absurdity of it. To have survived so much during the Vietnam War, to have witnessed so many others die. To have lived through so many situations when there is no possible way I should have survived. It is just too absurd. It makes you want to laugh at it all, dying in a hospital, on clean sheets with people I love and friends near to me, with my finger on pain control and knowing I will soon be with my wife, which is all I really want.

Yea, it makes you want to grin, or laugh, or grimace. I won't be aware enough at the end to share the World War II soldier's memorable, powerful, positive, world conquering grin. I had to pass it on with this story.

.....

Anthony Seed, an award winning short-story writer and former award-winning newspaper journalist and entrepreneur, has spoken at several universities on entrepreneurship and has served on the Board of Directors for the Direct Selling Education Foundation. He holds a Bachelor's Degree from Indiana University and is a Vietnam veteran. actuallyanthony@aol.com

.....

SHIRLEY

Larry Smith

Shirley tightened her robe belt, took a deep breath, opened the bathroom door and stepped inside. She stopped short.

The bath mat was straight. The guest towel was spread over the shower curtain rod. She slowly pulled the shower curtain back. No tub ring. She turned to the sink. No razor stubble. It was clean and the soap was in the dish.

Shirley raised the commode lid cautiously. Clean water.

She sat heavily on the commode seat and sighed, "I've got to find a way to keep this man for the rest of my life."

.....

*Larry Smith lives north of Cullman, Alabama. He writes short stories.
sleepynlacon!@yahoo.com*

.....

**“Be master of your petty
annoyances and conserve your
energies for the big, worthwhile
things. It isn't the mountain ahead
that wears you out--it's the grain
of sand in your shoe.”**

--Robert Service

THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

Nick McRae

When you wake the water is still,
bits of food left ungobbled.

The fish's onyx eye stares upward
to nowhere, the scales above the water dry and paling.

But Dad says not to worry,
to bawl on your knees, to pray,

hands cupped like a fishbowl.
So much like a miracle, how you go to bed

comforted, fatigued with so much wanting—
how Dad, though he must wake up early tomorrow,

slides into his car with a sigh,
slips through the streets to the fluorescent sanctuary

of Wal-Mart, the glossed floors sticky with human traffic,
now waning—and how he chooses carefully

the answer to your prayers,
tapping on the greasy glass of the tank,

saying *that one, no, that one.*

.....

Nick McRae's poems have appeared or are forthcoming in American Literary Review, Copper Nickel, Passages North, Poet Lore, and elsewhere. A former Fulbrighter, he is currently a University Fellow in Creative Writing at The Ohio State University.

.....

LIFE FORCE

Cavanaugh Kelly

Holly bent over the piles of red meat, wispy thin in shiny black sweats and pink sneakers. I pushed the cart toward the frozen food section and Jason's ice cream and the broccoli and peas, then slowed, and stopped.

"Just looking at that bacon, or you back on the Atkins?" I asked.

Holly stood and studied my face. Had she already forgotten me?

"Ginny, how are you? Goodness, is that Jason? He's huge. How old is he now, three?"

Jason looked up from his half empty box of crackers, face smeared with crumbs.

"Two and a half," I said, wiping at his mouth with a tissue. "Just a big boy like his dad. Real messy eater like his dad too."

"High five, Jason."

"He calls it a high pie."

"High pie, Jason."

Jason put up his slobbered hand and Holly tapped it.

"There you go, kiddo," Holly said.

"Mummie's buyin' me some flutter," Jason said.

"Flutter?"

"Fluff-a-nutter," I said. "You know pure white sugar, goes with peanut butter. Real nutritious."

"Oh yeah," Holly said. "Billy loved that stuff when he was little."

"What's Billy up to these days?"

"Live on that computer all day if I'd let him. He's into that Wizard 101. All he talks about is preserving his Life Force and going to The School of Death to prepare for the Land of the Lost Souls. Real ghoulish stuff."

"Maybe that's what I need," I said. "More Life Force from the School of Death."

"What are you talking about?"

I twirled Jason's blond curls. This was where I was supposed to talk about the weather and how Holly in her thinness was such an inspiration. But I didn't want to.

"Didn't you hear?" I asked.

"About what?"

"I'm all done. After we lost little Ashlee, I told Beth I'd had enough. David thinks we can get by without it and it's better if I stay home with Jason. All those hospice clients were draining the life out of me."

"But your patients. They'll miss you terribly."

"Ashlee just did me in. You're so lucky you don't have to deal with that stuff."

"Thank God Ashlee didn't need physical therapy."

I saw Ashlee's pink fingers and stick arms, tube taped to her bruised forearm and hanging IV. How she fought when I first probed and pricked for a vein. Her red face and little fists still woke me in the middle of the night, like being pulled from a dreamy warm ocean. It took two cups of green tea and four Melatonin to get me back under. In the end she stopped crying when I reached for her arm. She had become used to it. Strangely, thinking of her now, I didn't feel that familiar heaviness. Only anger.

"It's one thing to comfort an old lady when it's her time," I said. "But a six-year-old girl? The week before Christmas? No mother should have to bury her own child. For the rest of their lives, not a Christmas will go by when they won't think of Ashlee and everything she went through."

"You did all you could and then some. Some things are just out of our control."

"She was such a beautiful little girl. Curly light hair and blue eyes. She was a fighter too. I could see that right off. Theresa always said, '*When* she gets better, *when* she recovers.' There were no other option and I was right there with them, pushing to fight it any way we could. Then she kept getting sicker. All her curls fell out, and they finally said she was hospice. She was six years old, for Christ sake."

"Mummie, don't cry. I don't have to have the flutter."

"Ginny, I know it was terrible. We all do. Just be careful about talking so loud."

"Everyone in town already knows her story, Holly. And she's dead. No more reason to be confidential."

"Just thinking of her family is all."

"You know, even after she went hospice, and it was only a matter of time, she still wouldn't give in. Kept telling Theresa, 'I don't want to go fly with the angels. Can't I stay with a while longer, Mummie?' Then she started her God-awful death rattle."

"Have you talked to anybody about all this? It's a lot for anyone, Ginny. You're only human."

"I just miss her. I took care of her for over a year and I miss her. Is there anything wrong with that?"

"No, there's nothing wrong with it. It's just that, well, maybe this isn't the place."

"We have to go, Holly. It was nice seeing you. Don't be such a stranger, okay?"

"Ginny, please stop."

"What is it?"

"Just take care of yourself is all. And I'll pry Billy away from his computer and bring him over soon and then maybe we can talk about Ashlee. Have a good cry and get it all out."

"I would like that."

"I'll call you," Holly said.

I smiled and gave her a quick hug. "Please do."

"Go, Mummie, go," Jason said. "I'm hungry."

"We're off to get some flutter."

.....

Cavanaugh Kelly writes in Holden, Maine maineforest3@msn.com

.....

**"Truth is stranger than fiction,
but it is because Fiction is obliged
to stick to possibilities; Truth
isn't."**

--Mark Twain

**IMAGINARY LETTER FROM ZELDA TO SCOTT
FITZGERALD CIRCA 1936**

Leah DiVincenzo

Indecent spectacle *Save Me* the *Waltz*
greet me *Tender is the Night*
before your pen breeds fierce assault
or bleeds on splendid light.

You remain my vanishing mirror,
potions skillfully contrived;
wish we landed softly here
before I burned alive.

I did not drive you to the bottle;
you were not my shattered mind.

If we constrict a wild throttle
mechanics will unwind.

Lovers describe themselves as our revisions;
one speaks with spirit, the other, precision.

.....

Leah DiVincenzo is a student at the University of South Alabama where she studies History and Poetry. Her work has been published in volumes VII and VIII of The Oracle. She is inspired by clean energy, erasing homelessness, and writing about the Gulf Coast Region.

.....

TRAP OF FEATHERS

Andrew Glaze

Hope is a catch in the trap of feathers.
The mocking bird keeps wandering song to song
Beneath the stinging forgetfulness of the moon.
An owl goes passing, quivering soft wings and a “chunk.”

What name to give the unexplainable rapture,
Making the skin crawl with its amalgam of death and failure
Fluttering in the pulse.
Soon enough we’re trapped in our own running,
By what we call happiness,
The girdling hedge of desperation.

Something is trying to make its way
From where we are to where we’re going to be.
Is it real? What is it and where it is bound,
That so splendidly awakens
Reaching behind and ahead of us
Off into the hinterlands of night?

.....

Andrew Glaze received his first recognition with a rave review for Damned Ugly Children, his first book, by Richard Eberhart, in the New York Times Book Review. He has since published eight books of poetry, the most recent, Remembering Thunder, in 2002. A new book is just complete. A Birmingham, Alabama native, he has lived in Europe, New York, Miami and returned to Birmingham with his dancer wife Adriana.

.....



WATERFALL

Ty Evans
Digital Photograph

*Ty Evans lives in the Birmingham area and enjoys taking pictures in his spare time. His other interests include collecting antique books, playing the guitar, and traveling.
ty.evans66@yahoo.com*

POINT OF VIEW

Murray Edwards

The air inside the bus reeks of rancid beer and stale perfume. Midway down the aisle, one of the empty seats is damp with fresh urine. Passengers who are still awake, lulled by the diesel engine's Prozac-like noise, ignore the stench and surrender to the cadenced snoring of a big-bellied drunk on row seven.

On the back row of the decommissioned Greyhound, a highway worker snuggles with his dozing girlfriend. Inch-by-inch, careful not to awaken her, the young man slides his sore left arm from under her shoulders. The skin from his wrist to elbow is tender, freshly tattooed with his favorite tribal symbol, Avanyu, the feathered skysnake.

Impulsively, he decides to cruise the aisle and video the other passengers, asking for their impressions of an eighteen-hour "Gamblers' Holiday" to the Lucky Pelican Casino. The highway worker stands in the aisle and holds a camcorder at arm's length, pointing it toward himself--a tenth-grade dropout with the raven-colored hair and almond-shaped eyes of a Native American. Still high from smoking weed in the bus lavatory, he rambles through an introduction to his "documentary." He'll post the video on YouTube, he says to the camera, but won't ask for anyone's permission.

A couple of rows in front of him, three tellers from a downtown bank nurse quart-sized cups of margaritas and chatter to the camcorder about their "no-husbands-allowed weekend." The pretty brunette, her eye shadow and mascara smudged into Rorschach blots, giggles as she describes how, on a dare, she kissed and offered to sleep with a blackjack dealer. On Monday morning, she'll return to her job cashing checks, wearing a tailored suit and sensible pumps, unaware her X-rated confession has been downloaded to the internet and her husband will view it on Thursday.

Sitting in front of them, an unemployed Gulf War veteran with three-day stubble wears a wool shirt more appropriate for December in Vermont than July in Texas. He brags to the camera about the Shreveport

casino's all-you-can-eat buffet. "Better than the Frontier's or Sahara's in Vegas," he says, grinning, oblivious of other passengers' reluctance to sit next to someone whose shirt percolates body odor and gin. "I 'bout ate my weight in those dang crab legs." Reaching into his shirt pocket, he caresses the \$28 he won at the quarter slots. "Plus, I won me some walking-around money."

Across from him, a second-year law student stares at the seat in front of her, worried about the balance on her bank debit card. Her passed-out boyfriend slumps against the bus window, his crusty lips quivering as he snores. Irritated because he hasn't spoken to her for the past three hours, she's hesitant about being interviewed.

The documentary maker smiles and says he'd consider it "a real special favor." Without waiting for a response, he starts the camcorder.

She exhales loudly, her reluctance giving way to resignation. "Well, from my boyfriend's point of view, he got drunk and got laid, so it was a great trip."

Looking through the viewfinder, the highway worker asks, "So, how was it from *your* point of view?"

She bites her mouth slightly, thinking of a response. "A little disappointing, I guess." Then, realizing her answer would be considered weak by law-school standards, the woman shakes her head and glares at the camcorder. "No, damn it, it was *big-time* disappointing."

"How come?"

She flicks her head toward her puffy-faced boyfriend. "I'm just tired of living with a drunk and a slob, that's all."

"You guys live together?"

She hesitates. "Yeah, for the time being."

"The time being?"

"I'm thinking of moving out."

The highway worker presses the camcorder's pause button. "You know what? A damn-fine-lookin' woman like you don't have to live like that." Emboldened by his lavatory token, he asks, "Need some help with your things?"

Something about his brashness attracts her, and while the bus's engine hums a comforting white noise, she scribbles her phone number on a piece of paper.

He stuffs it in his pocket, having already decided to betray his sleeping girlfriend. All he needs is an alibi.

.....

Murray Edwards is a West Texas rancher who graduated from Texas A&M and Harvard Business School. His short fiction, satire, and memoirs have won awards from Southwest Writers, Oklahoma Writers Federation, Byline Magazine, Gulf Coast Writers, West Texas Writers, Abilene Writers Guild, and Frontiers in Writing. His collection of short stories, Looking for Lucy Gilligan, was named one of the ten best books of 2009 by the syndicated column, Texas Reads. murray.edwards@theedwardsgroup.com

.....

**“We should comport ourselves
with the masterpieces of art as
with exalted personages--stand
quietly before them and wait till
they speak to us.”**

--Arthur Schopenhauer

WHAT IT IS LIKE

Harry Moore

Naming things, I notice
bluejays' shrill metallic cry
in loblollies and maples. Junebugs
swarm above the grass where cocky
robins hop and turn their heads.

Ball is not the round object
I toss to my grandson but a
zip-file link in my head, something
like the object he gloves
and throws back to me
with a curveball spin: echo
or mirror, homemade index
to the universe. My grandson
says he wants a drink.

We cannot say what anything is,
only what it is like, a sound
or letters like a sound. The young woman
walking the Weimaraner and Lab
steps smartly; her spandex hip
strikes just a curve of heart.

.....

Harry Moore grew up on a farm in East Central Alabama, near Tallassee. After graduating from Reeltown High School, where he discovered the beauty of words, he took degrees in English from Auburn University, Rice University, and Middle Tennessee State University and taught writing and literature in Alabama community colleges for four decades, retiring in 2009. He lives in Decatur with his wife, Cassandra. His poems have appeared in Alabama Literary Review, POEM, English Journal, Teaching English in the Two-Year College, and other journals.

.....

When Adam thought "I," fiction
stirred to life, the exact slope
of the garden in dying light. Everything
was what he said it was.

Two eyes for depth, opposite ears
for stereo, two feet for balance
as I plod the park. Thumb and finger
on the ball, the way we grasp the world.

We must believe
that all is what we call it,
a clean catch, while cicadas
ratchet loudly in the trees.

UNUSED FOOTAGE

N. A'Yara Stein

For the rest of our lives, that far place waits:
a real, undulating figure that exists
especially if you believe it must.
In the desert the star doesn't notice
the long infatuation with the oasis
or whatever mimics it, its music.
After the music, after the silence, still there,
nursed, soothing and voiceless as soft clothes
the long and easy promises changeable
as the wind that rushes through the dunes
and that even in quiet places seeks you out,
your soul stronger just by being near but not in
all the histories your life could have been,
all the histories your life has escaped.

.....

N. A'Yara Stein is a Romani-American poet and writer living on a chicory farm and has been nominated for the 2010 Pushcart Prize. She holds a Masters of Fine Art from the University of Arkansas and is a grant recipient of the Michigan Art Council and the Arkansas Arts Council. The former editor of the arts quarterly Gypsy Blood Review, Yara lives near Chicago, Illinois, with her sons.

.....

METAMORPHOSIS

Heather Cadenhead

This wild evil—a woman
who wants to be transformed:
beast to prince, frog to man,
something with a choice.

A woman longs to grow,
to cause something to come
from nothing.

We want life to fill us
until we are moon-bellied,
as though joy is a thing we claim,
a right, rather than something we are given
each day with our first morning breath.

.....

Heather Cadenhead is the author of Inventory of Sleeping Things. Her poems have been featured in journals Ruminare, Relief, Illuminations, New Plains Review, and others. She resides in Nashville, Tennessee, and blogs at www.heathercadhead.com.

.....

STILL, MY DAUGHTER WANTS TO FLY

Kory Wells

I tell her it will feel like a carnival ride,
perhaps smooth and easy to start,
but when the air is hot and turbulent
the stick will kick in her grip, and she'll jerk
this way and that
all over the skies.

I tell her it's noisy.
The drone of the engine
and garbled voices of men
left downwind runway two-nine
final approach runway one-eight
mixes with the static of the radio.

I tell her even a landing is loud,
if it's perfect.
The stall horn screams
the warning you know to be true:
airflow over the wings has ceased.

I tell her to ignore her grandfather
when he takes her chin in his hand,
aligns her face so their eyes meet, and
says no, it's too dangerous.

She's seen shuttle rubble
scattered over three states,
every major network channel, and
her own twelfth birthday.

She's seen my log book –
sixty hours of sky-blue dream
grounded by a storm of priorities.

I tell her the responsibility measures heavier
than any takeoff weight limit.

I tell her about the pilot's checklist
and make her promise
she'll never skip a thing.

.....
Kory Wells is author of the poetry chapbook Heaven Was the Moon (March Street Press). She often performs her poems with her daughter Kelsey, a multi-instrumentalist who plays old-time and other roots music. Kory is a mentor with The Writer's Loft at Middle Tennessee State University, and her "standout" nonfiction has been praised by Ladies' Home Journal. www.korywells.com
.....

WHAT COLOR IS CANCER?

Maria Coble

"Grandpa has cancer. He's sick," I say.

"I'll draw him a picture.
It will make him feel better,"
says my son
with the faith of three years.

"What color is cancer?" he asks.

"Black, I think."
Lung-cancer black, black as despair,
loneliness and sad goodbyes.

"No, I think it's blue," he says
with confidence.

Blue, I think.
Why would he pick blue?

Then I realize.
Blue is his favorite.

He sits drawing blue cancer.
Blue that threatens to drown us all.

.....

Maria Lofgren Coble, mother of three, is an Athens State University student and a future high school English teacher. Her work appears in Idol Musings, (edited by Sophie N. Childs), and in Muse Literary Journal. She won 1st place in poetry at the 2010 Southern Christian Writers Conference. MariaCoble@gmail.com

.....

MAERE TUNGOL

Dick Sheffield

*"If you are lucky enough to have lived in CityParis as a young man, then
wherever you go for the rest of your life, it stays with you, for
placeCityParis is a moveable feast."*

Ernest Hemingway
To a friend, 1950

I

"Serra, Serra Madison – is that you?" he asked, lightly tapping the woman walking away from him on the back of her shoulder. The woman stopped and turned slowly to face him; she was beautiful.

"No, that's not my name," she said. "I'm sorry."

"My mistake," he said.

He had arrived at Grand Central Station earlier that evening to catch the 7:37 train to placeCityWestport, where he planned to have dinner with friends around nine. For the most part, Zachary Spencer had never been early for anything in his life, including love – so tonight's weather delay presented him with a rare opportunity.

His train would not depart for another twenty-five minutes, and that left room for a cocktail at the open-air bar located on the upper level of the station. There he could catch his breath and from his corner seat, watch thousands of commuters scramble to find their rides from the city to their homes in the suburbs. It was Friday and snowing outside. "Wild Turkey neat," he said to the bartender.

Zachary finished the whiskey and had made his way about halfway down the marble steps that led to main floor when he thought he saw her. He noticed the reddish brown hair first, then the manner of her dress and finally, her stride; there she was again after more than fifteen years. His heart pounded violently inside of his chest, and his palms began to sweat. Things had not ended sweetly between them, and he did not know how she would react if he went up to her, much less what he would say.

For an instant, he simply watched as she began to distance herself from him. He looked at his watch – time to board. But he had to speak with her, even if it was to say hello and ask how she was doing; more than anything he wanted to look into her eyes again.

"Serra, Serra Madison – is that you?" he asked.

II

Zachary Spencer and Serra Madison met nearly twenty years ago in CityNew York City – at the Greenwich School of Music in the placePlaceNameWest PlaceTypeVillage, where one evening writers Charles Kuralt and John Irving read their favorite passages by Jack London. Each had come to the reading alone and strictly by accident, ended up seated beside one another. As usual, Zachary arrived at the last minute and grabbed the first seat available near the back of the room. They spoke briefly at the intermission and afterward he invited her for coffee at a small café nearby. She ordered a hot popover with strawberry butter and some hot chocolate; he had a double espresso, and the conversation ran non-stop until almost midnight. Later, he escorted her back to Grand Central Station for her train-ride home. It happened that quickly - on a November day in the city - and they both knew it.

At the time, Serra was a senior at placePlaceNameSmith PlaceTypeCollege and Zachary was completing graduate school at Harvard. She had traveled home that weekend to visit her folks in CitySouthport, StateConnecticut, a small and elegant village on the coast about sixty miles from placeStateNew York. He had taken an early train down from placeCityBoston that Friday morning to interview for life after school, and planned to return on Sunday. The ten-year difference in age never mattered to them; Zachary told friends later on, “to be honest – between the two of us, she is the wiser.”

Following the initial flurry, Zachary and Serra settled back into their individual lives. There were a couple of letters and several polite phone calls, nothing more. But they got an inkling of things to come about six weeks later when Serra traveled to CityBoston as part of an exchange program between PlaceNameSmith PlaceTypeCollege and the placePlaceNameFine PlaceNameArts PlaceTypeMuseum.

“I’ll be in placeCityBoston for five days,” she said, telling him about the program that included workshops in her fields of bookbinding and watercolors in addition to a behind the scenes look at the museum operation itself. “Our schedules are pretty tight, but do you think you might have time for a cup of coffee, lunch, or something?” she asked.

“I believe I can manage,” he said.

They saw one another every day that week and on Saturday drove north of CityBoston to explore the towns of placeCityGloucester and Rockport,



TRACKS

Jack Criswell
Digital Photograph

Jack Criswell is a practicing lawyer, whose other passion has fed twenty-seven years of experience in event, product, promotional, travel, sports and commercial advertising photography and photojournalism. Frequently published nationally, this is his first appearance in Birmingham Arts Journal. He lives in Birmingham, Alabama.

and watch the Atlantic pound the rocks at Cape Ann Point. They ate fresh lobster on a roll for lunch; it rained all day. On Sunday the skies cleared and the pair ventured south onto Cape Cod, where they walked on the beach, held hands for the first time, and began a lasting friendship.

“She sent chills up my spine that sparkled and cracked, ones that were unfamiliar and without explanation,” he said, afterward.

The train rocked slowly along the tracks as it left the terminal at Grand Central bound for placeStateConnecticut. His thoughts drifted aimlessly before they finally narrowed onto one particular fact: that for more than fifteen years he had not dealt with Serra Madison’s presence or absence in any sort of unflinching way. Now, as selective as they might be, he sketched memories in his head and listened for the sound of her voice; a voice he admired, one too that spoke from the heart and seldom flinched from anything.

“There is a consensus of opinion among my friends that believes one must purge themselves of the person they had planned to spend the rest of their life with and now were not,” she said, in one of their last conversations.

“But how do you eliminate someone that is so engraved into your brain you can think of nothing else; where everything you look at is filled with them?” she asked. “Those are painful steps.”

“Tickets, tickets please,” the conductor said. Every seat on the train was taken, but Zachary barely noticed.

III

Serra returned to placeCityNorthampton after completing her work with the museum, and a few days later a package arrived at his door. Inside the box, Zachary found a hardbound copy of *A Moveable Feast* by Ernest Hemingway. A hand painted bookmark lay flat inside. The inscription on the first page read:

*To a friend,
There were reasons you stood out like a star hovering
over the beach on Cape Cod--one is that you had this piece of CityplaceParis sticking
out of your back pocket. I hope your every stop in this wild
and wonderful world is as equally salubrious.*

“Hello,” she said, answering the phone on the second ring.

“Serra, it’s Zachary.”

“Oh, hi,” she said.

“Thank you for the package - and the kind words. What are you up to?”

“I’m here singing my heart out for you, silly; *I Only Have Eyes for You, Here There and Everywhere, Take Me Out to the Ballgame*--things like that,” she said, followed by a soft laugh. “What about you?”

“It’s ten degrees in CityBoston and the boiler in our row house is broken – what would you say if I came to placeCityNorthampton for a few days?” he asked.

“Great,” she said. “My room has an extra bed and a fireplace – surely we can figure out someway to keep you warm.”

“I’ll take the Peter Pan bus out in the morning,” he said.

“I have a couple of things to do, but I’ll meet you at the bus station, it’s within walking distance. Bring your ice skates, okay?”

Zachary and Serra spent three of their best days together. They skated on Paradise Pond, visited her bookbinding and art studio, walked the campus and the sidewalks of placeCityNorthampton, and danced and talked beside the fire. Zachary made his special chili for Serra and her friend Erin, who lived next door.

“More gruel sir,” placeErin said, coming back for a second helping. While doing so she whispered softly, “You take care of that beautiful treasure.”

“I promise,” Zachary said.

The note card that followed him home became one of many during their time together.

*January
Kings Library*

*Here is a winter village where two cross-country skiers who just so happen to
be cross-eyed in love can find the solitude serious sweethearts desire. This
library is a place where I come to study on dreary days because the windows
are Gothic and fit my mood.*

*Maybe we can visit this village one day--or maybe we will just dream
together. Either way I will be happy. I’m smiling ear to ear.*

Thanks for the wonderful visit. It was good to have my best friend near.

*Love,
Serra*

Following graduation, Serra and Zachary returned to the PlaceNamePioneer PlaceTypeValley in western placeStateMassachusetts on several occasions. Among other things--they shared the glory of autumn colors and the outdoor concerts of the Boston Philharmonic and Widespread Depression Orchestra on a summer evening.

IV

Serra Madison cherished the water and all things related to it. Being near it granted her peace, joy, and comfort. She loved the beach at dawn or sunset; at mid-day or in the dark of night; during a summer thunderstorm or in the dead of winter. She liked the salt, the freshness, the sounds and the smells. She respected its power and potential fury, and she was a good swimmer and a fine sailor. It did not matter to her whether it was the ocean, sea, sound, bay or harbor; she was simply drawn to the water and the life beside it.

“One particular time when I was alone and walking along the ocean in Newport, I found a stopping place to sit, look out and dream,” she told him. “The water was so beautiful--magnificent and strong--that it completely overwhelmed me with thoughts about the flow of life and how everything in the universe must somehow be connected.

“The water soothes my soul,” she said, later.

She introduced Zachary to the water. They walked, dug for clams when the tide went out, and dared to dream there. The years passed there; as did several birthdays, holidays, and special occasions. Later, when they were both living and working in placeStateNew York, they became engaged there. It was beside the water that Zachary first heard the words, Maere Tungol.

Their engagement was unusual on two fronts--one, it was never announced and secondly, it came in the form of a silver stickpin shaped like a donkey, complete with a small diamond in its nose. Zachary had packed the surprise in a small quilted pouch he found at a shop in placeChinatown, and presented it to her one summer evening.

*20 July
placeSouthport*

*My Dear Beachcomber, Dune Lover, Big Dipper and Maere Tungol,
This seems to be a way to say things to you when you least expect it, and I
hope finding this from me in your mailbox today, telling you how crazy I
am about you, does just that.*

*I mean you really send my bonnet off to the side and make my stockings sag.
I'm looking forward to the weekend. Can we sit upon the lifeguard chair
one night and count the ships going out to sea? And if there aren't any, can
we kiss instead?*

*Can I build you castles on the beaches or in the air, down in the subways or
up in placeStateMaine for the rest of my life? Do you think your voice will
ever grow tired of reading aloud to me or will your arms ever grow weary
around me as I nestle close? Can we continue to share cones and phones,
books and nooks, sand and land, and so much more?*

*The pin is another step for us and will hold a special place in my heart
forever. I know what it means between us and what lies ahead. There is a
comfort in its ancient traditions of family and life, unique to the
placePlaceTypeland of PlaceNameChina. I know we share those values and I
look forward to telling our daughter about our visit to the ocean.
I love you, tungol, you diamond-studded democrat, even with sand between
your toes.*

*Forever yours,
Serra*

"The water soothes my soul," she had said.
She must still go to a place by the sea, he thought.

V

Lane and Abby Carson picked him up at the placeCityWestport train station about an hour later than expected. They were old friends and classmates; those rare companions in life with whom secrets are allowed to breathe freely, the truth lives, and few judgments are cast. At dinner, Zachary told them about the incident at Grand Central and how it had dredged up vivid memories of Serra Madison.

"Not long ago I spoke to a friend of mine," Abby said, after a brief silence. "She has been divorced from a man for a few years now and he has remarried and had children. He has also fallen ill recently. My friend heard that all his relatives were upset because he could not content himself and was

not only making the illness more complicated than necessary, but also alienating everyone that was offering to help him through it.”

“What’s your point?” Lane asked

Abby said, “Well, this woman--my friend--sent him a box of his favorite books, and his new wife was so grateful. It turns out they made the man happier and more peaceful than he had been in months.”

“Why don’t you stay the weekend with us,” Lane said. “The weather is horrible and tomorrow we can take a run or go cross country skiing, maybe drive over to placeWest Point. Go back to the city on Sunday with the New York Times.”

“Thanks, guys,” he said, “but I think I’ll get back tonight.”

VI

Zachary stood on the platform and waited for the 11:55, the last train back into the city that evening. Out of the darkness, he saw the lights and watched as the silver carriages rounded the curve and came to a stop in front of him. The doors opened and he stepped in, taking a seat next to a window. The compartment was nearly empty and he stared out into the night.

While living in placeStateNew York, Zachary and Serra shared dinners, concerts, museums, politics, work and so many other things together; it was an exciting time and place. Serra had landed a job with the PlaceNameWhitney PlaceNameMuseum and traveled extensively, mainly to placeEurope and the West Coast, and Zachary worked for a newspaper. The couple also began to have their share of disagreements.

“I don’t think I ever cried more than this weekend during *CityCasablanca*,” she said one evening on her telephone message from placeCitySan Francisco. “I think it is a combination of things, because surely there is something in the film to laugh about.

“But You Must Remember This,” she said. “I miss you, and seeing their love captured our own; it was powerful and he was so gallant. We found CityParis in CityCambridge, CityNorthampton, and placeSouthport, don’t you think?

“I visited addressStreetGhirardelli Square today--as you know I’m hooked on their chocolate shakes and you, but not in that order. I left my heart in placeStateNew York.

“Good night.”

A birthday card from placeCityLos Angeles arrived a few days later. On the front, a lady wearing an enormous hat, and a stylish black and white polka dot dress, complete with black buttons, was having tea alone.

*placeCityLos Angeles
From a reading chair
Thoughts on your birthday*

Hi darling,

Like my new look. Actually CityLos Angeles is a bit too kitschy for me--I'm a New Yorker to the end (and she was, too--her mother and father were born and raised in placeBrooklyn).

*You are there, and I am here,
So one of us is obviously in the wrong place.*

Please think good things of me while I am away and forgive my craziness. I will be thinking of you tungol. May all your hopes come true - now blow out those candles on your carrot cake.

*Always and forever,
Serra*

A few weeks later Zachary and Serra decided to call a halt to things, but could not bear it.

They patched matters up and tried again; each understood the stakes.

*TWA Flight 731
StateNew York to placeCityLondon*

I am watching On Golden Pond on the plane, from God only knows, how many feet up in the air. It is such a beautiful film — so full of love, understanding and I think most of all, effort.

My thoughts have been filled with you as a result of our emotional last few weeks, and the depth of my feelings only increased after reaching such a sad, empty state during our separation.



BOAT MARINA

Derek McCrea
Watercolor on Paper

Our ability to talk and comprehend these matters of the heart makes me realize the strength of our bond, and the faith needed to allow love to flourish. It is a frightening ledge to be on some days.

Maybe our relationship required changes. I know I can be overly romantic, but that same romantic spirit in you draws me closer, and to my ongoing surprise, I am content simply thinking of you. How great is that?

Openness to the other's ideas and concerns makes the physical distance bearable. I know you are there for me if I should ever need you--just like that night I felt so alone in the world. I hope you know, too, that I will be there if you call. So many wonderful events lie ahead.

My eyes and heart fill to capacity when I think about the patience and gentleness you have shown me. The world makes more sense to me now. From me, I offer you all that I have to give and hope it adds to your life. Thank you for understanding my wishes to remain celibate until marriage. It is difficult to play the role of resistor when I love you so much.

How did I come to be the one for you? I often think about that. I smile a lot because you would think the odds of our finding one another were slim at best. I mean I never aspired to be a cheerleader and you did not hang out at nursery school.

There is no explanation--I like that part.

You can kiss me as much as you want--I'm not fattening. Sigh. I believe some of our problems are created because we care too much. You can, you know? Can we go to the Carnegie Hall cinema when I return home next week? I'd really like to go there.

*Love,
Serra*

VII

“Sometimes I sing songs without words,” she said, in her telephone message. “Perhaps it is because I often feel things that cannot be articulated. Maybe it is these things that stir deep emotions inside of me at different times, for better or worse. I sense you have erected a permanent barrier between us and that makes me sad. Why have you pulled back? If you know, please call me.

“Sometimes I wonder if you love me as much as I love you. I never intended to question your love, because I know in my heart what I mean to you. I guess when I act that way, I just want you to hold me and tell me that you love me.”

VIII

The last time they saw one another was more than fifteen years ago at the home of her parents in placeSouthport. It was late one Thanksgiving afternoon and they sat on a wooden bench in the back yard, near her herb garden. The sky was clear and the sun warmed their faces.

“I wish you could have been here with us today,” she said. “My brother ran in the Pequot Thanksgiving Day race and came in third. I thought you would have loved doing it--the course ran through all of placeSouthport, even along the beach and harbor.

“I’ve finally accepted what you have known for a long time and I am sure it has been painful for you to see me hang on. I love you, but I was unable to express it in a way that would keep us together. Perhaps when the harshness passes you will be able to see our relationship in the context I always will.

“This weekend was the turning point for me. I realized that for some reason we are not the right people for one another. I know your feelings for me will never be as strong as they once were. But I am grateful for the time that they were because it was more than I ever expected in life, and I will never settle for anything less as a result.”

Zachary was silent; she knew he had given up on her. He left Serra alone on the bench and spoke with her mother and father before he left.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “Thank you for everything, I wish things could have turned out differently.”

“You either love someone or you don’t,” her father said, leaving the room. Her mother walked him to the door.

The following week a small package arrived. He would soon learn that he had become accustomed to her gifts, and would dearly miss their presence. Zachary opened the card first. “I am not sure about the Great Pumpkin anymore, but I believe in you,” Charlie Brown said inside.

The pouch from placeChinatown fell onto the floor. Zachary unsnapped it and placed the donkey-shaped pin on its side in the palm of his hand. Then he read her final words written to him, aloud:

*I December
placeSouthport*

Tungol,

This does not belong with me anymore; it ought to be with you now. I know that it had many emotions attached to it when you gave it to me, and I’m sure it always will.

*Je t’amie bien, cherie/J’esperer que tu Cityplacesais qu’il
Est pour toujours
Mille baise*

*(Translation: I love you darling,
I hope you know it is forever.
A Thousand kisses)*

I’m sorry for addressing this as tungol, but I’ll probably never have the chance to do it again and it is one of my favorite words. Take care of yourself and your family. Please know I wish you happiness.

*Always,
Serra*

IX

For the longest time he looked for her--in train stations, bookstores, anywhere, everywhere, nowhere. A few years later, Zachary heard through others Serra Madison had married and was the mother of two daughters. He was thrilled she found that person in life who fit her, but he hoped her husband would understand if one day he sent her a copy of her favorite book.

Inside he would write, "You are the precious star, not me."

"Grand Central next stop," the conductor said.

.....

Dick Sheffield Dick.Sheffield@abc.com

.....

**“When a man comes to me, I
accept him at his best, not at his
worst. Why make so much ado?
When a man washes his hands
before paying a visit, and you
receive him in that clean state,
you do not thereby stand surety
for his always having been clean in
the past.”**

--Confucius



The non-profit Birmingham Arts Journal is sustained by
its editors, donors and readers, with additional support from

Hackney Literary Awards Committee

<http://hackneyliteraryawards.org/Home.html>

Latham's Hair Clinic

<http://www.lathamsonline.com>

The Museum of Fond Memories at Reed Books Antiques

<http://jimreedbooks.com>

In-kind support comes from

Baker Donelson Bearman, Caldwell & Berkowitz PC

<http://www.bakerdonelson.com>

Downtown Birmingham Public Library

<http://www.bplonline.org>

Emmet O'Neal Library

<http://www.eolib.org>

Alabama School of Fine Arts

<http://www.asfa.k12.al.us>

*The Journal is published without profit by dedicated volunteers who believe that
exceptional works by the famous, not-yet-famous, and never-to-be-famous
deserve to be published side by side in a beautiful and creative setting.*

SUPPORT THE BIRMINGHAM ARTS JOURNAL, Inc.

with a donation of \$25 or more (individual membership)

or \$100 or more (company membership).

In return you will receive the next four issues as a special gift.

Name:

Email address:

Mailing address:

Donation amount:

Many thanks from the editors of Birmingham Arts Journal

Birmingham Arts Journal, Inc. • 2021 Third Avenue North • Birmingham AL 35203

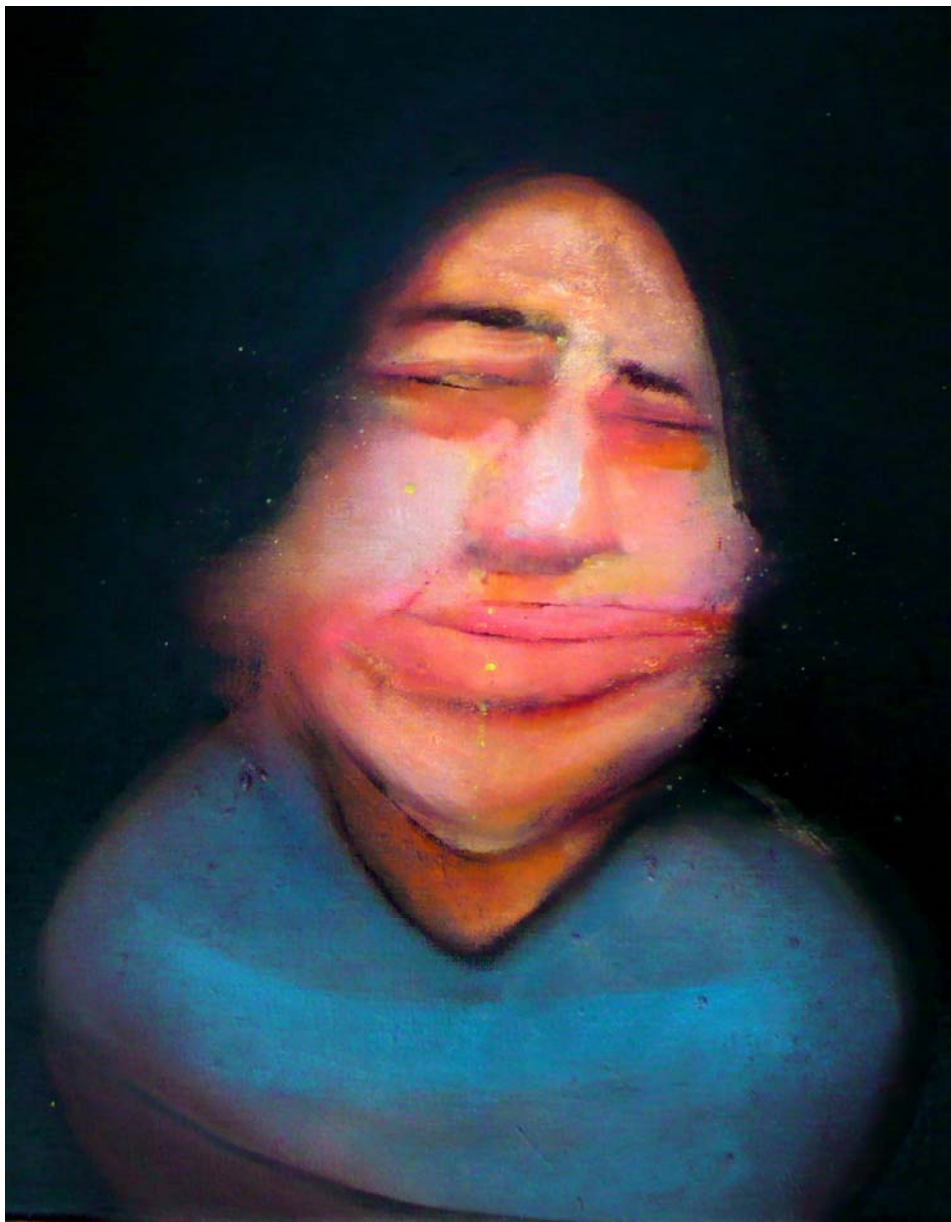
www.birminghamartsjournal.org

© 2011 A.D. by the Birmingham Arts Journal, Inc.

Submissions of art, photography, poetry and prose are welcomed. See guidelines
at our website, or contact us: editor@birminghamartsjournal.com

Editor: Jim Reed...Poetry Editor: Irene Latham
Art Editor: Liz Reed...Production Editor: Kathy Jolley

Birmingham Arts Journal



www.birminghamartsjournal.org