

Birmingham Arts Journal

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Birmingham Arts Journal

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Front Cover: **PEAR**, Watercolor on Paper, 5" x 7"

Ted Openshaw lives and paints in Lipscomb, Alabama. fireball61@bham.rr.com

Back Cover: **God of Wonders**, Acrylic on Canvas, 20" x 24"

Melanie Morris lives to paint in Birmingham, Alabama. A native of Mississippi, one of her earliest memories is sitting with her mother in the backyard sketching a pear tree. This fascination with nature is revealed today in her colorful landscapes and florals.

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EXPECTING AT THIRTY THOUSAND FEET

Kevin Marshall Chopson

across the aisle

I saw her
and thought

metaphor number one

a perfect green pea
safe in its shell

metaphor number two

a water balloon
nestled softly
in the canvas and rope
of mother hammock

descriptors

airborne aloft
gently swaying
resting rocking

across the aisle

I saw her
and thought

she was

hoping wondering
planning praying

not at all figurative

not at all lost
in the language of it all

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Kevin Marshall Chopson received his Master of Fine Arts degree from Murray State University in Kentucky. His work appears in or is forthcoming in REAL: Regarding Arts and Letters, Chiron Review, Nashville Arts Magazine, San Pedro River Review, The Baltimore Review, and The South Carolina Review, among others. He teaches writing at Davidson Academy and Volunteer State Community College, both just north of Nashville, Tennessee.
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DANCING AT MULATE'S

Cheryl Wood Ruggiero

The girl's expensive-looking parents ordered all the New Orleans tourist appetizers.

The mother pointed to things on platters. "Deirdre, try one of these." But the girl shook her limp, brown, chin-length hair at frog's legs, alligator tail, curled shrimps, and fragrant gumbo. She twisted her plump body away from the table to rest her chin on her arms across the chair back and stared across the empty dance floor. She pushed her pink-framed eyeglasses back up her nose with a sigh.

When the band came back on, it was clear what the girl hungered for: accordion, fiddle, drums, big bass, guitar, and *dancing*.

She yearned toward white tourist couples in rumpled shorts and thick sandals, toward a handsome black couple who swung by in black leather jeans and tight, green satin tanks, he with long dreadlocks pulled back by a leather band. She giggled at two bosomy black grannies, one with a shiny purple turban, the other with close-cropped gray curls and gold hoop earrings, who held hands and shimmied, their men cheering them on from a round table piled high with oyster shells. She grinned as two blond college girls jitterbugged together, their dates sitting appalled with their pals, pretending to laugh. In a corner, a lone, thin woman with tight, red pants and very red lipstick, stepped hesitantly to the beat, while a slim, calm, silver-haired man glided along with a serious, willowy woman in a long, floaty, white gauze dress.

During the next number, a bit more sedate, the willow-woman sat sipping beer at a long table, while the man with the silver hair led the nervous red-lipped woman to the floor, where they waltzed with some dignity.

After much applause, the band grew lively again, and more dancers shuffled and whirled and glowed inside the fat chords and giddy swigs of the music. Deirdre drank their joy like a creamy milkshake.

She didn't notice when her mother shook out her bronze hair, slipped her feet back into her sliver sandals, and moved her gym-slender body around through the crowd. The girl stayed in her chair, shoulders twitching to the beat.

"Deirdre? Sweetheart?" Her father made her look away from the music. "At least have some iced tea."

The girl complied.

"You should eat something, Sweetheart. If you don't like the...um... the seafood and such, I could order you a sandwich." She gave her pudgy, balding father a brief smile, but gave the food a grimace.

When she turned back to the dancers, there stood the silver man.

"May I have this dance, Miss?" He looked a question at her father, nodded, bowed to her, and held out his hand.

Her face flushed to strawberry, but "oh" said her mouth, and "yes" said her feet as she stood, tugging at her short denim skirt, and "I will" said her small hand as it plopped into his.

The accordion chugged, the cymbals jangled, the fiddle bounced. His hands, one holding hers and the other at her waist, moved her. They stepped along side by side until she caught the rhythm, then he twirled her around beneath his arm and caught her up in a waltz, then they whirled again into a gentle promenade. She stumbled only once, and he turned it into a brief lift.

Her mother returned from her saunter when the girl was well across the dance floor. Her father grinned. "How did you manage that?"

"He's a zydeco dance instructor for tourists. See that party at his table? This is their graduation. I paid him."

"You going to tell her?" His eyes followed his daughter.

Chubby and bookish because sports and parties were torture, at this moment she shone as if she ruled a Mardi Gras float, as if the flights of the fiddle were her jeweled wings, as if her prince had come and she saw she needed nothing from him, not even his kiss on her hand as the music jounced its final happy shout.

The mother's diamond bracelet sparkled as she spooned up a last morsel of gumbo. "Should I tell her?"

He leaned over and pressed his finger, gently, over her spiced lips.

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Cheryl Wood Ruggiero, born in Birmingham, Alabama, now writes in the mountains of Virginia. Her work has appeared in CALYX, South Carolina Review, 2River View, Pebble Lake Review, and Wolf Moon Journal, among others. Old Woman at the Warm Spring is new from Finishing Line Press. cruggier@vt.edu

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KENTUCKY FIREFLIES

Lindsay-Ann Thomas

There they sat, on the edge of the creaky wooden porch—a row of fuzzy red hair with a flicker of smooth golden locks at the end. Smallest to tallest, the four cousins fixed their eyes upon the vast horizon. It was a sticky June evening; sweat crawled down their backs like marching ants, but they didn't mind. Rarely were they all four together, and they only played this game with one another.

Dallas, the second tallest, grew impatient from waiting. He began to pace, waddling like a penguin on the heels of his cowboy boots. He insisted on wearing them, even with his blue cotton shorts. He let out a frustrated sigh through Kool-Aid stained lips and complained.

“Is it time yet?”

David, the leader with golden hair, impatiently answered. “No, the sky isn't the right color yet. It has to be perfect, that pink color like Granny's raspberry ice-cream. You'll see them in just a minute”

“I don't think they're comin'.”

“You're wrong, Dal.” Lily, the only girl, defended.

“No I'm not! Let's just go back inside. We can try again tomorrow.”

They continued their argument for a few suspended moments, then it happened. Clint, the smallest, pointed with his itty-bitty chubby hand to the tiniest speck off in the distance.

“There.” His words were limited.

“You mean they're here?” Lily chimed in, more than hopeful.

It happened again, a flicker...a small flash, then nothing. The crickets began to serenade the ragamuffins as each one scooped up a mason jar. They were lost in the magic momentarily, in awe of the beautiful sight in front of them.

“Okay, remember, whoever gets the most wins!” David broke the silence; the game was on!

They took off—a band of adventurers—as fast as they could, around and around the Bradford pear tree in a dizzying dance. They breathed honeysuckle and summer air deep into their lungs as they giggled and shouted. The smallest toddled with all his might behind the other three; the more the sun leaked out of the sky, the faster they ran, capturing as many shimmers as they could. Time was limited, they'd be called inside as

soon as darkness arrived. Faster and faster until the last bit of sunlight faded away; they collapsed, winded, into the soft clover of the front lawn.

“Five!” shouted Clint.

“I got eleven.” Lily chimed.

“Twelve,” added Dallas.

They waited patiently for David to give them his answer.

“Fourteen.”

David *always* won the game of Kentucky Fireflies.

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*Lindsay-Ann Thomas is originally from the piedmont of North Carolina. She is a graduate of North Greenville University with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Theatre and has been writing as long as she can remember. Her full-length play, Undone, was performed at NGU in October 2009. She currently resides in New Orleans, Louisiana, with her husband, Jared. Lindsay Ross
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“It is possible to believe that all the past is but the beginning of a beginning, and that all that is and has been is but the twilight of the dawn. It is possible to believe that all the human mind has ever accomplished is but the dream before the awakening.”

--H.G. Wells



BEADED WHIMSY

Penny Arnold

4" x 4" x 8"

Mixed Media

Birmingham-born artist Penny Arnold creates stained glass mosaics and whimsical sculpture in her home studio near Pell City, Alabama, where she lives with her husband, composer Monroe Golden, and son, Jenner. Her work reflects the diverse cultures in which she has lived. See more mosaics and stained glass at www.goldenpennystudio.com

EXCHANGE

Jennifer Houston

I was the loud one, the boisterous wind that provoked her limbs to sway and move to the rhythm that I thought our friendship should take. I stood beside her regardless of what others said: whispering to her that we were invisible to the talk, we had our own song inside our heads.

I call her after that first exchange of emails. My heart pounding like an African drum, I dial her phone number, and hear her sing-song voice after two decades of silence. “I thought you hated me,” she asks after I rattle on about my current life, and how I live on a side of a mountain, and rescue unwanted dogs, and still ride horses. “Never,” I say choking back the tears; “You were my first best friend, the first to break my heart.”

I wait for her response; the musical thread in my head hums away, as I twist a strain of my now grey hair in my finger-tips. I no longer smoke, but right now, I long for the nicotine trance, to take me back. “You always were into rescuing,” she says. “You always had a dog and a cat.” She laughs, changing the subject, telling me about her son, telling me about how now she is committed to being a mother. How she never thought she would be a mother since she abused her body so hard. I listen, as if I am looking through a camera lens, getting snap shots of her life.

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Several of Jennifer Houston's pieces have appeared in Battered Suitcase, Gloom Cupboard, Word Catalyst Magazine, South Jersey Underground, Indigo Rising, Toasted Cheese, and most recently Barrier Islands Review, Yellow Mama, Fright Train, Magazine, and BlazeVox. She lives in Placitas, New Mexico. scrappsalot@aol.com

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GIVING BIRTH TO DREAMS

Maria Lofgren Coble

Now is the time for other things.

But there is a little tearing in the good-byes. The biopsy gave me two big contractions (as warned) and I reminded myself, "This is it. That's the last time I shall feel birth-like pains." I am happy and at peace. I know this is a move for the best, to close my womb, but the farewell still tears my heart.

My fertility has been such a large part of my identity. I will still be a mother to three and I will cherish them always. But I will never again be late and wonder, for there will be no chance. There is a peace in that . . . and a goodbye.

Sometimes I feel I went straight from girl to mother. Now, as I shall never be pregnant again, I feel I must become a woman after all these years. I married at nineteen and hadn't gotten far in college when our first very-wanted baby arrived. The years followed in a blur of pregnancies, breast-feeding, wiping noses, and changing diapers.

Somehow, I never really was anyone before I was a mom. I still wonder sometimes who I might become. I know I am a mom but I also know they will grow up and leave and then ... I don't want to smother who they become because I never learned to live outside their presence.

Part of me is scared and isn't ready for tomorrow. But part of me knows it is time. I am almost 30 and closing a door. I am closing a door, and walking down that hallway I have never traveled down before. There's an uncertainty and a sadness. But there is also a quiet wish in the possibilities, a soft hope of what dreams may come after these decades.

I'll never whisper, "I might be pregnant" again. Yet, I'll also never have to murmur, "I lost the baby" (those words still make my eyes well up.) My OBGYN forms will note: 4 pregnancies, 3 full term. That line will never change. I guess one fear is that my possible fertility has always attracted my husband and I am giving it away. It is time. I want to sleep again. I want to remember what it is like to wake up and feel like awakening. I want to have complete thoughts instead of scattered moments continuously interrupted by baby cries and requests for food, for attention, for love, and for constant pieces of me and my mind. I love to meet needs but I've lost all touch with how I feel inside. I'm melting. I'd

like to meet myself again, to think, write, dream and ponder, not just constantly respond and give and help and assist until I am too old to care anymore.

Part of me wants to whisper, "Will you still love me?" For he will not give his blessing; he is clear in saying I am mutilating myself. I wonder if I will now seem deformed within his eyes . . . and if I can live like that. But I feel it is time. It's time, it can't be held back, like when I say, "Yes, we should watch the clock to see the pattern of my contractions."

Sometimes I feel there is one more birth. It is time for the birth of the woman I will be the rest of my life. I'm still pregnant but this time, pregnant with my unfulfilled dreams. I'm overdue. It is time for them to come into the light. I am sure the birth will hurt but the fullness of time has come. The dreams are due and I can't contain them anymore. I still want to finish college. I still want to teach, to travel, to write. I have to be myself as well as a mother. I've waited so long and I can't give up my dreams after all. It's tearing me in two. I must try a new road, traveling with my little children by my side.

Yes, likely still a mother forever. But not always "the baby factory" as my husband loves to call me. I shall quit being a building and finally become a person. I won't be defined by who I am growing; perhaps I will finally grow myself. At times, I am a little scared as to what might grow, but it's time to find out what is there. To find out while there is time for pruning and fertilizing, not a little seed that will blow away into the world but a tree that will root down deep. What is this tree, this tree of me? I don't really know.

But I'd like to find out.

So I will go. I will say, "Close that door." And they will cut me yet again and burn away these possibilities so that I can have others. I loved giving birth. Part of me has never been born, though. And I can tell the day is coming that I will become caretaker of another, of one older. My window is short. The years ahead require a strength I do not yet have. I need to walk through the weather not just protecting a little life within but building my own strength, not stumbling in a blur of hours awake full of baby crying but fully look, fully feel, fully love and fully cherish the moments. To stop thinking "Will they ever grow up?" and start thinking, "This is the last time. I won't rock your tears away forever. Let me cuddle you close to my heart."

There is a beginning and an end to the journey of motherhood. I don't want the end to slip up on me, to say, "Oh, was that the last baby after all?" I want to know where the chapters will close and when the sequel begins. An ending to pregnancy, a woman's beginning. Who shall I be? I'm about to discover.

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Maria Coble, mother of three, attends Athens State University and is a future high school English teacher. She is a member of Sigma Tau Delta, the International English Honor Society. Her work appears in Muse Literary Journal. She won 2010 Southern Christian Writers Conference 2nd prize for fiction.

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“Now I rewrite more and more severely, and I take great pleasure in cutting thousands of words out of first drafts; I think that’s a pleasure worth learning as early as possible in one’s career, not least because realizing that one can do it helps one relax into writing the first draft in which it’s better to have too much material for later shaping than not enough.”

-- Ramsey Campbell

THE ROCKER

Michael O'Connor

Dark oaken rails and runners
Faded out with wear,
On the bottom of his old
Wooden rocking chair.
Nestled in the corner
basking by the light,
Casting mid-winter shadows
On a cold November night.
It's finish chipped and tattered
where spindles fail to glow,
But it's in a fade of outer
Beauty that wisdom often shows.
Every scratch and scar displayed
On its aged brittle frame,
While then a painful cut in time
Becomes a memory of the same.
Despite the seven years or more
The rocker morning rife,
I feel that I may know him now
Ever more so than in life.

.....
Michael O'Connor graduated from the University of Connecticut. After spending time in Ireland, Michael returned to New York City to pursue screenwriting, then turned his writing to non-fiction historical works on the Second World War, publishing articles for the Centre de Recherches et d'Informations sur la Bataille des Ardennes. Michael currently resides in the Boston area.
Ordog23@aol.com
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ZESTY PANTS

Jim Reed

It's New Year's Eve eve at the bookstore.

One non-book-reader customer is trying to find something inexpensive or free to take with her. She spies the basket of lollipops I keep on hand. "How much are these?" she asks. "They're free," I say. "OK, then," she says, and begins downloading the entire basket of candy into her purse, a generous handful at a time. I freeze for a moment, because I don't want to make a scene in front of other shoppers...but, dang it, it's my store, so I have to say something. "Uh, they're free, one to a customer," I say firmly and pleasantly. "Oh!" she says, and throws a few back into the basket before going her way. At Halloween, there's always that one trick-or-treater who will grab half your treats if you don't say *halt*.

It's one of those days when customers trickle in just frequently enough so that I don't have time to take a bathroom or lunch break, so I wind up eating out of my lap in between waiting on folks. Today, I'm dining on leftover salad covered with Liz's zesty dressing, which I end up dumping into my lap when two patrons ask questions at the same moment. I have to police the floor and discard the entire meal, unable to get the dressing out of my britches. So, the rest of the day, I smell like Mr. Zesty Pants...aromatic but unfulfilled and unfilled.

Marie gives me a break later on, so that I can go search for some to-go food. Moe's next door is closed today, O'Carr's bit the dust sometime back, so I rush over to Pete's Famous to get something quickly. The line winds out the door, so I peer into Subway's window, where the always-slow service is sustaining a long line. I try to enter Seafood D'Lite, but they have this funny entrance that reads EXIT, and another unmarked door that is the real entrance, only it just goes down a long white hall with no signage, sort of like a *Twilight Zone* episode. Daryl sticks his head out of the blank door and invites me in, whereupon I learn in excruciating time extension that Seafood D'Lite has a policy of cooking everything from scratch—nothing is quick or ready to go. I decide to be Patient Zesty Pants Guy and relax, visit with Daryl and learn something from the experience. After the cook tells Daryl he's too busy stirring something to prepare a

hamburger, I wait while the cow is raised, stalked, slaughtered,
butchered, shipped and cooked. Or maybe it just seems that way.

Anyhow, I finally get back to the store, relieve Marie, eat my burger
in big bites in between duties, and within 90 minutes, I've finished my
meal and am ready to go home to another one.

And that very night, we have zesty dressing again

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*Jim Reed writes for himself, edits the Birmingham Arts Journal, and curates the
Museum of Fond Memories in Birmingham, Alabama. www.jimreedbooks.com*

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***“The proper office of a friend is to
side with you when you are in the
wrong. Nearly anybody will side
with you when you are right.”***

-- Mark Twain

BLUE

Joseph LoCicero, III

He opened his office door and sighed. All he desired after his grueling week was a few moments alone in his own space. He needed to cocoon himself in familiar surroundings and allow the day's troubles to drain away. His office had been his only place of solitude, his island in a sea of sorrow, pain, and suffering. A week ago, that changed.

Endeavoring to lift everyone's spirits after another year of increasingly convoluted regulations and lower hospital revenues, their departmental administrator ordered the reception area and offices painted. Without consulting the pathology staff, the administrator chose a deep cerulean blue.

The newly painted shiny walls closed in on him. The air felt heavy. Even though an early winter snow fell outside, he opened his window and breathed in the cold fresh air. He held out his hands gathering heavy lake-effect flakes and buried his face in his collection.

He spent all afternoon at the cancer center participating in endless conferences discussing the subtleties of cancers removed from a variety of body parts in innumerable patients. Although each conference focused on a different tumor, in his eyes, all the cancers acted the same.

When he was asked for his comments, he always began by emphasizing, "Blue is bad." He demonstrated how pathologists discover cancers before the microscopic examination. He held up to the light a microscope slide covered with tiny pieces of blue tumor crowding out the normal pink tissues. He showed magnified images of misbehaving cells. The clear cytoplasm containing the cell's machinery was small and compact. The blue nucleus containing the DNA was immense indicating that the cell prepared to replicate itself. Its neighbors followed suit in various phases, some already achieving duplication. These chaotic and angry cells. They were acting like a mob taking over the well behaved organ.

Standing at his window, he felt the snowflakes draining away his tension and frustration. As he relaxed, he began to anticipate his weekend. His wife was already on her way to their favorite restaurant where they planned to celebrate the crossing of an important threshold. Their thirtieth wedding anniversary marked the point when they had lived

together as a couple longer than they had lived apart, and within days he would leave his fifth decade behind while she turned fifty-seven.

They deserved a celebration. Thirteen unlucky years ago, she developed cancer. Throughout the ordeal, he stood by her. He was there for her first consultation. He was there for her biopsy. He was there when her surgeon delivered the bad news. But he harbored a secret. He already met her cancer. When the specimens tucked neatly in their cardboard folders came from preparation laboratory to the pathology offices for review, he slipped out her slide and held it to the light. It was that ugly blue. He never told her what he had done and it made him feel guilty.

Her cancer tried to shorten her life, but she was a fighter. She endured everything modern medicine could throw at it—surgery, radiation, chemotherapy, even experimental drugs, but eventually she triumphed. Through it all, he was by her side. Even when her arm swelled and her hair fell out and she was too nauseous to eat and she cried for days he comforted her. He told her they always had each other and no cancer would ever drive a wedge between them.

Her oncologist told them the monster was gone, but they knew it was just hiding, waiting to pounce again. Even now, it threatened to ruin their night of revelry. One week ago she discovered another lump. He begged her to wait, but she had it removed. Although she could not bear the thought that the cancer might have come back, she promised to wait until Monday for the results. This was their weekend and Friday was their night—free of tumors, free of family concerns, free of worry about their future life together. Friday, they would eat by candlelight overlooking the lake. They would go to the bars and listen to the Blues bands. They would dance away their cares until the bars closed, then check into the finest hotel in town. They would hang out the Do Not Disturb sign and hide from the world, even if they missed Saturday and Sunday. Together, they would wait to face her oncologist.

He wiped his hands and closed the window, his clinical responsibilities for the week concluded. The snow had calmed him. He felt renewed and ready. He traded his white coat for his suit coat and heavy jacket. He closed the door to his violated sanctuary. On his way out, he passed the technician's desk piled with cardboard folders containing the new cases for review. The top folder caught his eye. It

prominently displayed his wife's hospital number. It was her biopsy specimen.

His heart pounded. He could hear the monster calling to him. "Open the folder! Take a little peek! See if I have returned! You can keep the secret just as you did before! She will never know!" He reached out, his hand trembling. One quick look would tell him all. He ran his fingers across the smooth surface of the folder, but all he felt were her hideous uneven scars. He withdrew his hand. Tonight they should be together, celebrate together, face an unknown future together. He turned away and left to join his soulmate.

Saturday, the on-call pathologist came to review the new specimens. He sat behind his microscope next to the stack of folders. He opened the top one, picked up a slide and held it to the light.

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Joseph LoCicero is a retired professor of surgery. He grew up southeast of New Orleans and received undergraduate and medical degrees from Tulane University. He has edited five medical textbooks and published two books and many original scientific articles. Now, he lives in Mobile, Alabama, and writes creative fiction. lociceroj@comcast.net
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“The most identifiable trait of Anglo-Saxons is that we always mistake a short memory for a clear conscience.

--Argus Hamilton



BLIND VALENTINE

Fedra Yazdi

9" x 12"

Acrylic on Canvas

Fedra Yazdi is a native of Iran, and lives in Seattle, Washington. She has written more than twenty short stories and currently is working on a play. Her work has appeared in literary magazines and on-line publications. fybrune@gmail.com

A TRIP TO THE BEACH

Sandi Underwood

Mom and Dad's first trip to Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, was in the early 1940s. They'd traveled by train, along with a couple Dad met at Carson Newman College.

When the group arrived in Myrtle Beach (this was before motels and hotels) the only places to stay were boarding houses on the beach. You could rent a room for the night or for the week. The cost was \$3.00 a day and included two hot meals!

The two couples checked into a boarding house and went to explore the beach—first time any of them had seen the ocean. Mom thought the lady was scandalous because she didn't own a two-piece bathing suit and she stripped down to a pair of shorts and a bra to enjoy the sun. Later, the man became a well-known Baptist minister. If I mentioned his name, chances are he would be recognized!

There were no buildings, no restaurants, no glitz and glimmer; just miles of sandy white sand and waves crashing on shore. Mom says she was afraid to get in the water, but Dad pulled her out. She said he was always making her go into the ocean, even though she was terrified of it. That never changed.

When nighttime came, they settled down in their bed only to find it covered in bedbugs. Dad and Mom never called them bedbugs. They called them "chinch bugs." Dad said the owners gave each room a jug of kerosene to rub on the headboard and mattress to keep the chinch bugs away...which didn't work, but even if it had, the smell alone kept them awake all night. Dad said they spent a miserable time at Myrtle Beach and it was many, many years before they went back.

Later on, a tornado came through and completely wiped out the boarding houses at Myrtle Beach. According to Myrtle Beach Chamber of Commerce, between 1954 and 1964 a total of \$40 million was invested in building lodging, businesses and commercial property. The rest is history.

In 2005, I took Mom and Dad back to Myrtle Beach. It was only their second time to visit. We camped at Lakewood in South Myrtle; and while

we never spent much time on the Boardwalk, Mom and Dad were able to get a sense of Myrtle Beach in its heyday.

On their last visit in 2008, Mom's mind was already going due to Alzheimer's. She had little to add when asked about their first visit, but she enjoyed walking on the beach and going for ice cream on the Boardwalk (where we spent several minutes talking to the owner--a nice lady from Johnson City, Tennessee--only a few miles from where I live!)

I snapped several pictures of the Pavilion, which closed in spring of 2008. It soon will be replaced by a huge sky-scraper hotel. I also took pictures of the roller-coaster, said at one time to be the largest in the world; also closed now and soon-to-be replaced by another high-rise hotel.

Myrtle Beach has come a long way from boarding houses and chinch bugs.

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Sandi Underwood's work has been featured in Teach Kids! and Group Publishing Magazines. Her e-book, The Spell of the African Amulet, was published on www.ipulpfiction.com and her adult suspense novel, BLOOD MONEY, was recently selected as a quarterfinalist in Amazon's 2010 Breakthrough Novel Award. She lives in Tennessee with her Maltese cat, Colonel Beauregard. www.sandiu.com

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“Dreams, books, are each a world.”

-- Wordsworth



THE BRIDE

Andrew Tyson

31" x 35"

Graphite on Paper

Andrew Tyson is an award-winning, self-taught photographer and artist in Birmingham, Alabama with a degree in computer imaging and visualization. His medium of choice is graphite, but he has recently begun experimenting with pastels.
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THE TIPPING OF MS. JULIA

Deb Jellett

Julia Peabody Emerson had, with one or two fleeting exceptions, always done the correct and proper thing. She progressed with charm and grace, if not with enthusiasm, from a genteel Southern girls' school to an august finishing school in country Switzerland. There she had learned to cook the perfect soufflé and, due to the enthusiastic tutelage of one of the fleeing exceptions, Professor Henri Simone, developed a deep and abiding passion for all things French.

As was expected, she returned home to marry Henry Randolph Emerson IV, a marriage that her mother and his mother had engineered with little thought as to how the actual participants felt about the arrangement. Henry's ambition to be a painter and Julia's dream of studying in Paris were waved away by their families and the two were married in a tasteful and dignified ceremony that had been attended by all the right people. The wedding pictures show a slight, pretty blonde with a placid expression standing next to a darkly handsome man who looked out at the camera unsmiling, with the air of a dreamer and a poet. The honeymoon had been pleasant, but uneventful and thus went the marriage, with Julia, Henry and Mother ensconced in the Peabody Mansion, leading the life Mother had mapped out for them.

With Mother to guide her, Julia had joined all the right clubs, served on all the right committees and invariably won the Garden of the Month Award. Her pretty face smiled out often from pictures in the society pages and every Sunday, she and her sweet, sweet Henry sat next to Mother in the Peabody pew at First Baptist Church.

But, still, somewhere in the distance, Edith Piaf sang, people sipped champagne and women danced on tables at the Moulin Rouge.

Then, on the eve of Julia's 40th birthday, Mother, ever the one to do things decisively, dropped dead of a heart attack. She had done it with great tact, in the privacy of her own boudoir, and had been discovered by the maid who came in with the breakfast tray the next morning. After a tasteful funeral service, Mother had been buried next to Julia's father in

the family crypt and the family lawyers pronounced Julia rich. Après moi, la deluge.

Weeks later, taking her hands in his, his milky brown eyes swimming with tears, Henry told her he was leaving and somehow, she understood. He took the millions he had inherited from his mother and moved to California, where he joined an artists' colony and Julia, with her millions sensibly invested, attempted, without enthusiasm, to put the life Mother had mapped out for her life back on track. But, one Sunday as she sat all alone in the Peabody pew, she felt she needed to be somewhere else, that she needed to be someone else.

It began behind the firmly closed doors of the Peabody Mansion. Julia watched French films she ordered over the Internet and surreptitiously drove to Biloxi to buy French cheese and wines and Swiss chocolates. Later, emboldened by her secret activities, she hired a French tutor, began speaking French to the befuddled servants, and for several Sundays running, did not go to church at all. For two months straight she lost the Garden of the Month award. People were talking, but she wasn't listening.

Who knows when the balance tipped? Maybe it was when she watched Gene Kelly dancing through Paris for the tenth time. Perhaps it was the post card from Henry with the French Riviera beach scene on it. Or maybe it was Edith Piaf's melancholy rendition of "La Vie en Rose" the night Julia polished off a whole half bottle of Chateau Rothschild, a slab of Brie and a box of chocolates. But, when she marched into the local wine store, right across the street from First Baptist, to buy six bottles of Alsatian Riesling, the dye had been cast. She had called Henry and he had squealed with delight for her. "Carpe blinking Diem, sweetie," he shouted.

A week later, as she and her Chanel suit settled into her first class seat on the United flight to Paris, a handsome man sitting across from her smiled across the aisle and breathily intoned "Bon Soir."

"Bon Soir," Julia returned with her best guttural rolling "r." Then, in an instant, she knew that they would become lovers and she would buy a

villa in the South of France and they would sit on the deck watching the sunset, sipping champagne and laughing.

She smiled at the thought. “Well,” she said to herself, “I can dream.” Then she laughed out loud and the man turned, smiling, to look at her again. She lowered her eyes ever so slightly and smiled back.

As the plane soared heavenward, bearing her away from the old life, Julia watched the lights on the ground fade to black. As she sipped champagne and looked out at the clear night sky, a whole new world welcomed her and Edith Piaf was within reach. Just for the briefest moment she thought, “Mother would be appalled.” But then the thought faded and a new idea emerged: maybe she would find Simone and they could once again *parlez* the night away

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Deb Jellett was born and raised in Mobile, Alabama, and now lives in Daphne, Alabama. Her Southern mother told her never to leave the South, so she moved to London (where she was a lawyer) and then to Washington D.C. (where she ran a fitness business). “Writing has always been a part of my life, but to date, I have only published nonfiction works. When I left, I vowed never to return to the South and here I am,” she reports. “Consistency has never been a strong point of mine.” debjel36532@aol.com

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***“Too low they build who build
beneath the stars.”***

--Edward Young

FLOWERS FOR FRANK

Tom Dameron

Encaustic, Wood, Paper, Watercolor

39" x 24"



The Frank Vines Memorial Garden

Frank, my husband, companion, friend and hero, was born on his grandparent's farm near Gadsden, Alabama. He was first child and first grandchild on both sides, first son and grandson. He grew up with the hard work ethic of the "greatest" generation. An avid fisherman, he took me to many places of quiet beauty, by rivers and creeks, bays and swamps, and out into the Gulf of Mexico on boats he had made by hand. We breakfasted on fish fresh caught from drop-lines, cooked over a fire, with mist still rising from the river. With keen intelligence and inborn wisdom, he lived a

productive, giving life that included dentistry, cabinet making, boat building, gardening, inventing; he held two patents for his inventions. He had a quiet faith in his God, and an abiding patience with humanity and its foibles. For many years he had a vegetable garden on our corner in Homewood. He died in 2010, before time to set a garden. Alas, I could not replicate his vegetable garden, but I could plant flowers where his vegetables grew, in memory of him. And that is why, this past summer, where you once saw okra and tomatoes, peppers and carrots, broccoli and beans, there were flowers.

-- Norma Vines

LIKE FAIRY DUST, LIKE DREAMS

P.T. Paul

You cannot be disillusioned if you never perceived
the world as Camelot or yourself as a fairy princess,
never believed in happily ever after, sopped your biscuit
in bacon drippings, reused coffee grounds.

The world abounds with fantastic creatures
called millionaires, whose personal worth is tallied
daily on the Internet, whose purchases include
islands and helicopters, and yet,

who never seem to get a happily ever after, either.
This fevered dream, reality, is not the stuff of legends,
but of ledgers, not of pumpkin coaches and four,
but of foreclosures nailed to the doors of mansions,

and the expansion of the universe only mirrors
the expansion of our personal guts. Well-worn ruts,
not good intentions, reveal the road to Hell, and the homeless
dwell under overpasses, sleep on sidewalk grates,

face each new day with the only fantasy left to them –
that someone cares. But somewhere out there
our fairy God Father watches and waits, baits our days
with simple wonders, rips asunder the tattered,

grease-splattered whole nine yards of existence,
shows us worms that live in ice floes, fairy shrimp
that flit around sulphuric deep ocean vents, demented
Mega Lotto winners whose new-found fortune spent, wrap their arms

around each other's wrinkled, liver-spotted bodies
and toddle off down the hall to Camelot, slip beneath
worn cotton sheets, drop their teeth in a glass, and pass
from this world like lilies of the field, like fairy dust, like dreams.

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*P.T. Paul received her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in English from the University of Montevallo, and her Master of Fine Arts degree in Creative Writing from the University of South Alabama. Her book To Live & Write in Dixie was published by Negative Capability Press, and is available at negativecapabilitypress.org. Paul is President of the Pensters Writing Group, a member of the Alabama State Poetry Society and the Alabama Writers Forum. She lives in Spanish Fort, Alabama.
PTPhantazein@gmail.com*

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***“Comedy is in my blood.
Too bad it's not in my act.”***

--Rodney Dangerfield

FALLEN

John Vicary

To watch him tumble from the blue was a sight he'd never erase from his mind. Daedalus should have known it would end in sorrow; he was that kind of boy, always pushing his boundaries, always taking more. It was a zest for life that fueled him, and who could fail to adore him? Daedalus never could, not when he was an infant grasping, and not now, when he was just barely a man.

All the warnings in the world couldn't matter; they were cast off like chaff from the wheat once they were free from the mortal bonds of earth that was Crete. Daedalus also felt the joy of flight, but he might have known that freedom would intoxicate his son, the one whose heart could not be reined.

With bitter panic, Daedalus watched to see the salt spray dampen the glorious wings. His son would not take heed of the instruction given before flight. Yet he ought not have worried that he would fly too low, as it was always the problem that Icarus would be careless at his craft. Soaring too high was ever his folly, and Daedalus could only trace the path of his descent in disbelief, a shooting star knocked from the heavens.

He burned too brightly, too fast, his flame extinguished for love of life, and with naught left to show for his place but a few bubbles under the water. Daedalus would ever bear the image of his son riding his joy one moment and forsaken by the sun the next. He was gone from his perch before he could cry out, grasping at the air and clutching at a handful of feathers, betrayed by the thrill which had sustained him.

Daedalus had built a great many things in his time: he knew the mysteries of the Labyrinth, which not even Minos himself understood. There was nothing his hands could not construct, no secret his mind could not unravel. Yet the fate of his boy was his to bear, and he was to live henceforth knowing he was the cause. No amount of cleverness could erase his sorrow, and he flew towards Sicily a broken man, eyes on the sea.

He would never fly again.

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John Vicary is the pseudonym of an author/editor from Michigan. He is the winner of Brigit's Flame, November 2010, and has been a featured author three times at The Petulant Poetess for his original work. John is the proud parent of five children. catlfoster@yahoo.com

JUST MY SIZE

Frank Ard

A specific cultural context of masculinity exists in my household.
Learned that one from a book.

Two weeks ago, I shaved Billy's head. Hair dangled like his mother's.
The boy's arms are wiry, skin white as beach sand. He has tea-colored
eyes, long lashes. Last week, put the boot to him in the garage. Boy will
learn to walk right, balls first.

Yesterday, I came home early. The wife lounged on the couch in
Billy's slacks, hair loose from its morning bun. Upstairs, the boy tiptoed
in the wife's sundress. I kicked him, my boot to his pantie ass.

My boy turned to me, pelvis out, and thumbed his spaghetti strap.
"It's just my size."

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*Frank Ard is a graduate student in creative writing at the University of South
Alabama, where he has served as editor-in-chief of the school literary journal,
Oracle Fine Arts Review. He is also a Clarion West writing workshop graduate,
and was awarded honorable mention in a recent Writers of the Future competition.
He lives in Mobile, Alabama. frankrayard@gmail.com*

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***“One lives in the hope of becoming
a memory.”***

-- Antonio Porchia

VICTORY

William Smith

Taking deep, heavy breaths he drops to one knee. A salty bead of sweat runs down his face and across his lips. He does not notice. Placing his knuckles into the grass, he rises, leaning all of his weight forward. Most people would notice the grass and compliment its texture, color, and feel. He doesn't. It is just grass. Besides, years of abuse have left his hands hard and callous. His world becomes still, silent. His objective is clear. Three hundred pounds of muscle stand between him and his goal.

Behind this wall of meat stands a lone man. This lone man is the object of his rage. He must die. All is set. The battle lines have been drawn and now both men wait. His body coiled with every ounce of strength ready to engage. It is in this moment, the calm before the storm, that he turns his humanity off. Where he is going it serves no purpose and will only hold him back. It is silent. It is still. No movement.

Wait. Wait. GO! ATTACK! Chaos erupts. He tries to place his head as hard as he can into his opponent's chest. Damn. His head collides with the meat wall. He cannot see. He cannot push forward. He can only feel the wall collapsing upon him, pushing him back. His legs ache as they begin to buckle under the strain. He can feel himself giving way, falling.

NO! Not like this. This is a matter of willpower. Right now, on this day, he cannot be beaten. Not by this meat wall. Chopping his legs he drops low, attempting to punch a hole straight through the center of the wall. SUCCESS! He can see as the world opens up around him and oh what a sight he sees. Right in front is the object of his desire, the little man holding a little brown ball. The little man's eyes grow wide with fear. The little man tries, tries to flee. It is too late. The trap is sprung and his fate is sealed.

The blow is quick and precise. With every ounce of hate in his body he tries to destroy the man completely. He wants to make sure he never comes this way again. The body crumples in his arms as he squeezes tight the sweat-soaked fabric. He can feel the air leave the body as he drives it into the ground. He has done his job. The shrill whistle is the only thing

that stops his bloodthirsty attack. It restores his humanity. This is the first time he can hear the crowd. Thousands cheer for him and him alone. Standing over his defeated foe he can feel the glory, savor the pride, and feed that addiction that is victory. However, this does not last long for the next battle starts in twenty five seconds. Back to work.

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William Smith grew up in Birmingham Alabama, and attended Mountain Brook High School, where he played football. He has coached 5th and 6th graders. smithw061@gmail.com

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“Silences make the real conversation between friends. Not the saying, but never needing to say is what counts.”

-- Margaret Lee Runbeck



HOMESTEAD

Digital Photograph
Jeff Glenn

Jeff Glenn sketches, paints and photographs what he loves. He lives in Ashville, Alabama, with his wife and five children. jeff@southassociates.com

MYTH: JASPER, ALABAMA

Matthew Haughton

In the shed behind his mother's house
I find an old machete tied to a strap.
The leather is tough, knotted round
the wood handle. I can see my father,
maybe ten years old, tying the leather
to the blade so he can use it as a scythe.
I watch him, swinging this machete,
the strap wrapped through his fingers.
Outside, dry trees run the property line.
Each limb bends like ribs on a skeleton,
piling leaves under their fallen boughs.
I can see him ripping the leaves off
the branches, lost in the play of a boy,
strewing with each swing and catch.

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Matthew Haughton has published one chapbook, Bee-coursing Box (Accents Publishing). His poetry has appeared or is set to appear in many journals including Appalachian Journal, Now & Then, Still, and New Southerner. Matthew lives in Lexington, Kentucky. matthewhaughton@aol.com

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DOWNTOWN BIRMINGHAM, 1961

Beth McKim

Growing up in Birmingham in the late 1950's and early 1960's was peaceful and easy, at least for my cousin, Kathy, and me. I still remember when we were ten years old the excitement of setting off on our summertime Wednesday journeys each week. One of our mothers drove us to the Rexall Drugstore on First Avenue and we waited for the city bus that would whisk us away downtown. On the way to the bus stop we listened on our transistor radios to "Lonely Teardrops" by Jackie Wilson or "The Twist" by Chubby Checker.

Boarding the bus was always the same. We climbed on wearing our dressiest skirts and pullover sweaters and saddle oxfords, put our nickels in the change machine, greeted the smiling driver, and proceeded to look for seats. We felt grateful when the nice colored men and women rose from their seats and moved farther back in the bus. We never really looked them in the eye because it would have made us feel bad. It didn't matter how crowded the bus was—we always got seats up front.

Our main destination, the Ladies Matinee at the majestic Alabama Theater, was also our first stop. The movies there were free for the Wednesday morning ladies-only group. An additional treat was the fashion show that occurred prior to the movie. Models sported the latest "bouffant dresses" that were sold at Loveman's and Pizitz Department Stores just down the street. These dresses were tight at the top and fluffed out at the bottom. We dreamed of owning them when we were old enough. Three door prizes, usually hats, scarves or gloves, were usually awarded, and our hearts pounded when looking under our red velvet seats to check numbers to compare them with the ones that were called. Sadly, we never won since the odds were very low—the large theater was always packed to capacity on Ladies Day.

"Pillow Talk," "Tammy and the Bachelor," "Imitation of Life," and "Some Like it Hot" were some of the matinee films we enjoyed. We dreamed of being cute as Sandra Dee and Debbie Reynolds, talented as Lana Turner, and curvy as Marilyn Monroe.

After the movies, we raced for the lunch counter at Woolworth's Dime Store for our favorite meals of grilled cheese sandwiches and French fries, which cost us fifty cents apiece. We felt big and important as we sat eating with the downtown lunch crowd.

With full stomachs, we set off on our non-purchasing shopping sprees to Loveman's and Pizitz, the competing stores that seemed identical once inside. Riding elevators to the various floors, we tried to find the clothes we had seen in the fashion shows, but mostly just loved the adventure of being there, like little Alices in Wonderland. The efficient elevator operators would proudly announce "Third Floor, Ladies Dresses" or "Fourth Floor, Menswear" or "Fifth Floor, Lingerie." We giggled when this floor was mentioned and never, ever stopped there.

Often, on our much faster escalator rides down, we stopped on second floor to use the "Whites Only" restrooms. We were careful to drink from the "Whites Only" water fountains. We weren't even completely sure what came out of the "Colored" water fountains and we wondered where the Negroes went to the restroom.

All of the "just looking, thank you," shopping that we did made us hungry again, so we concluded our days at Kresge's Five and Dime, being "drugstore cowgirls" by standing at the racks, reading movie magazines about Fabian, Liz Taylor, and Natalie Wood. And always we looked at the gorgeous clothes that they wore in Hollywood, comparing them to what we had seen at the fashion shows and in the stores. Before the sales associates could give us dirty stares, we moved over to a booth by the windows to enjoy our twenty-five cent hot fudge sundaes, piled high with whipped cream and nuts.

Feeling completely satisfied, we again boarded the city bus to head back to the Rexall Drugstore where we used the phone in the pharmacy to call our moms.

Sometimes I noticed on the bus that the colored ladies, eyes cast downward, passed us on the way back to their seats, wearing either white uniforms or tattered and faded gingham dresses, and I wondered if they would ever have a chance for a magical fashion day like we had downtown.

1961 in Birmingham sure was a good year— for Kathy and me.

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Beth McKim has fond memories of growing up in Birmingham, Alabama, in the 1950's and 60's. She is now a grandmother of three and lives in Bellaire, Texas, with her husband and her Labradoodle puppy, Lucy. Currently, in addition to studying creative writing, Beth is a medical actress, a Spanish student, and an avid exerciser who particularly enjoys Yoga, swimming, and running.

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FOR HER FATHER

Austin Kodra

*Let it come, as it will, and don't
be afraid. God does not leave us
comfortless, so let evening come.
~ Jane Kenyon*

At her father's funeral,
my mother recalled the years
he logged on the Tindale farm
across the country road, baled hay,
lazed against rocks drenched
in myrtle moss, shucked husks
and snuck cobs into a burlap sack,
to whittle a pipe with pinches of Burley
and for a family meal of sweet corn.

She did not mention his breath's rattle,
black flesh crisp as air struggled
escape through the last torque of lung,
fingers curled around a rifle
on the hand-carved rack,
cigarette smoke pumped
into the family car's upholstery,
his brazen curses at the moon,
how he thought gays in Vermont
wrought the beginning of the end,

or how he chased his only daughter
away on her eighteenth birthday.

When she returned home as wife and mother
to sunset slitting through kitchen blinds,
she soaked vegetables in the sink,
whispered to her reflection in the water
He would have liked the moonlit hoe.

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Austin Kodra studies creative writing at the University of Tennessee Knoxville. His first poetry chapbook, There Is This, was just released by Medulla Publishing. His poems have appeared in The Medulla Review, The Volunteer Review, Phoenix Literary Magazine, 5923 Quarterly and Writers' Bloc (Rutgers). austin.kodra@yahoo.com

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PRESENCE

David Seaman

"I'm not at all unacquainted with sadness," she remarked. "You don't need to shelter me from the inevitable."

It was raining. I looked up to meet her eyes and my glasses became covered with water. The bill of her baseball cap was down to shield her face anyway. "I wouldn't try to hide the truth from you," I assured. The cold wind was blowing. Whether it was necessary or not, I felt I needed to speak loudly to be heard.

"Who said anything about truth?"

The bus was waiting, now was no time for semantics; engine running, exhaust spewing smoke. The driver was reading something. He seemed unconcerned. I was getting soaked, and my heavy duffle was digging into my side.

"I was just saying," I started, "that I'll be back this way in the summer."

"No you won't," she insisted. She spoke loudly also. I wanted to see her eyes. Get an idea of what was behind such an allegation.

"What the hell do you want?"

The gray winter had been tenderly eventful. It felt like a lifetime since I'd been home. The future was one step away. The last few months would live on perpetually; the most glorious memories, fading into the warmest of dreams.

She stepped up, put her hands on my shoulders, and pulled me close. Warm steam escaped with our breath. I could feel her, alive in front of me. She leaned to my ear.

"Stay with me," she said softly, covertly.

That was unexpected. On an impulse I reached out for her waist, felt only the plastic slipperiness of her rain poncho. I knew she was underneath, soft and inviting. Behind the baseball cap and the rain gear was the woman I'd shared the past few months of my life with.

"Right this moment," I proclaimed. "Decide just like that?"

"All we have is this moment. There is no trip back this summer. The last three months are already gone. We can't keep them. There is just you and me, right now."

As usual, her thinking was going in different directions than mine. Her feet permanently planted firmly on the ground. This would be the way of it then; she would be the anchor holding the string while I soared like an enormous kite caught in the breeze of time and space.

"I want red meat," I said.

"Negotiating..."

"And I'm tired of listening to Patti Smith."

"Blaspheme..." A smile grew on her face. Below the baseball cap, I knew her dark eyes were smiling too, sparkling with the shine of victory.

Over my shoulder she signaled for the bus driver to take off. I heard the transmission kick into gear. A wave of apprehension washed through me. Then it was gone, along with the bus.

"Nothing but you, me, and the rain," she stated. "You okay with that?"

"Too late now if I'm not," I chided. I turned to walk back inside the bus station. The duffle bag suddenly felt much lighter.

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David Seaman, of Peoria, Illinois, has been published by Slice Magazine and The Foliate Oak Online Literary Magazine. dseaman77@comcast.net

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***“Happiness isn't something you
experience; it's something you
remember.”***

--Oscar Levant

THOSE EXTRA ANCHOVIES

Leo Lichy

I gorged on a hearty seafood pizza, drank a gallon of beer, and laughed the night away in the company of locals. It was my sort of evening. Milan didn't seem so bad after all. And when my wife, Poppy, and I returned to our hotel, I was in a merry state. Definitely not the sort of state you should be in when you have to get up early for your flight home.

In fact, I was up very early the next morning. I must have slept for less than an hour before I felt the urgent need to jump out of bed and sprint into the bathroom.

"Is everything okay?" asked Poppy.

"I think everything's gone very wrong," I replied, feebly.

She followed me into the bathroom. I was in my underpants, hunched over the toilet.

"What is it?" she asked, placing a comforting hand on my shoulder.

"Those bloody anchovies!" I cursed.

Poppy had shared a pizza with me that night—a seafood pizza with extra anchovies. She had had the good sense to shovel her anchovies onto my plate, and I had devoured them with relish. All trip long I had tucked into seafood. Anchovies had become my favorite item on the menu, and they had accompanied almost all of my meals. This night they would be on my plate for the very last time.

"Can I get you anything?" Poppy asked.

"Put me out of my misery!" I begged, clutching my belly.

When we boarded our coach for the airport, I wasn't sure if I would have the strength to make it onto the plane. I had spent the entire night face down on the bathroom floor, groaning in agony. My stomach felt like somebody was twisting a knife in it. My throat was on fire and my head was throbbing. Every few seconds, I thought I was about to be sick, but nothing came of it.

I collapsed in a seat, bile in my mouth and a pain in my belly. I was slumped against the window, the sun in my eyes and a throb in my head.

Our coach driver had short-changed me by a Euro. The road was heavy with traffic and our journey back to the airport seemed to last longer than our vacation. Every bump in the road caused me to stuff a hand towel into my mouth and hold back a growing urge to be sick. The coach stopped every five minutes and the driver departed the vehicle for his habitual cigarette break. Eventually, we made it to the airport. The moment we stopped I dashed off the vehicle and bolted into the airport, leaving Poppy to take care of my luggage.

When I exited the airport restroom my belt hung loose and vomit stained my pants. Yet, despite having spent the last thirty minutes throwing up in the stall, I felt only mildly better than I did when I exited the coach.

“You look terrible,” said Poppy, as I staggered towards her.

“Thank you,” I responded, taking my luggage from her.

“Can you make it onto the plane?” she asked, deeply concerned that we might have to remain in Milan.

I sighed. “What choice do I have?”

Usually, when I board a plane I am anxious about whether the plane will land safely. This time all I cared about was that we didn’t hit turbulence.

We didn’t, and for that I’m thankful. However, just moments after takeoff, I began to throw up into a sick bag. Everyone around us stared at me with dismay. I managed to pause for a few seconds—just long enough to acknowledge the tens of disgusted faces—and then I reached for a second sick bag and started a second round of noisy vomiting.

Poppy had ordered the vegetarian meal and so she was one of the first to be served lunch. When the air hostess arrived with her meal, I produced my two bags of sick.

“I’m done with these,” I told her. “Please take them away. The smell of them might start me off again.”

The air hostess stared at me with a revolted look on her pallid face.

“Please may I have two more,” I said, weakly.

Reluctantly, she took hold of the sick bags and retreated.

I struggled down my meal and soon afterwards commenced another session of vomiting. As I was filling the first of the sick bags I heard groans and disgusted voices. A baby began to cry. The reaction to my ill health was perplexing. They would have reacted no worse if someone had tried to detonate a bomb.

I handed my sick bags to a different air hostess. She took them between her index finger and thumb and carried them away as if the bags might explode.

I slumped against the window, light-headed. This was the first of two flights that day. Already I had thrown up in Malpensa International Airport in Milan, and then on the plane to Frankfurt. When we landed in Frankfurt, I would throw up in the airport restroom, and then again in Boston, at Logan airport. I had had a busy day.

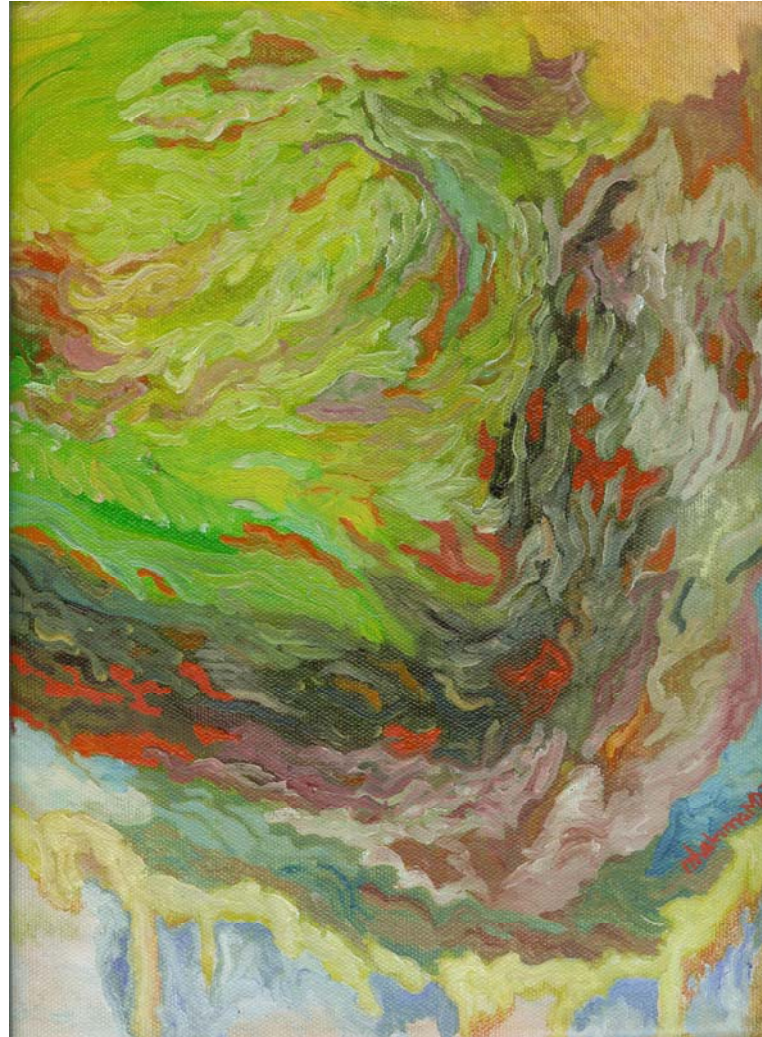
I don't think I will ever be able to look at a seafood pizza the same way again. The mere thought of an anchovy makes my stomach turn. Quite how I ever sat down at a café in Vernazza and ate an entire plate of anchovies is beyond me. I'm lucky to be alive.

Whether it be overpriced spaghetti, with a fat, bearded waiter standing over your shoulder willing you to dash down that last mouthful, or a disappearing tuna fish steak at twenty Euros a plate, or an anchovy pizza that may actually kill you in the morning, Italian food is certainly something to write home about—though not necessarily for the right reasons. It's off the menu in our house.

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Leo Lichy has been published in The Binnacle, Birmingham Arts Journal, The Blotter Magazine, Raging Face, Unlikely 2.0, Static Movement, Mississippi Crow, Modern Footstep, 55 Words, Cause & Effect, LitBits, The Legendary and The Momo Reader. leo.lichy@gmail.com

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TSUNAMI

Hakima

12" x 16"

Oil on Canvas

M Hakima, MD, has been an artist since age 3. Self-defined as “folk eclectic,” recent retirement from her private practice of medicine has meant more time for art production and exhibition. Hakima lives in Flomaton, Alabama. wise8angel@yahoo.com

THE MARRIAGE COUNSELOR

Wayne Scheer

"Marriage is like a good stew," said the bearded guru in an open-collar blue silk shirt and neatly pressed jeans. "It's a delicate blending of flavors, spices and herbs."

Tom squirmed in his seat. He turned to his wife and whispered loud enough for the people sitting near them to hear, "We paid twenty-five bucks for this?"

"Shh."

"Alone, each ingredient has its own integrity, but when integrated into a carefully created mix, a new and wondrous..."

"I can't take this anymore. I'm going to pee." Tom stood up, trying to inch his way down the aisle. The woman on his left made a "tsk" sound as he stepped in front of her. The man to her left made a drama of pulling in his big feet as Tom passed. He disturbed one more couple and then he was free. Walking to the men's room, Tom thought: Marriage is like walking through a crowded lecture hall trying not to step on anyone's foot. No, no. Marriage is like a bowl of steaming stew with the handles on the inside. Hey, Tom thought as he pushed open the heavy doors of the lecture hall and headed towards the restroom, I'm pretty good at this. Maybe I can become a cliché consultant to marriage counselors?

Without thinking, Tom walked past the hall with an arrow pointing to the restrooms and out the front door. He was shocked at how chilly it had become. September in Atlanta was like that. One minute it was summer, the next an autumn wind chilled the air. Another marriage analogy, Tom thought. I should be writing this down.

Instead he started walking up Peachtree Street, looking at the array of hotels and concrete and glass office towers. Remembering reading that until recently no peach trees graced Peachtree Street, Tom contemplated another marriage metaphor. Marriage, like Atlanta, certainly isn't all pink blooms and sweet fruit. There's a lot of cold glass and hard concrete and, Tom stared at a huge pile of debris from a building recently torn down, it's always under construction.

Tom stopped walking. He looked for a sign to learn what was being built at the site and what was torn down. He saw no sign. Too easy an analogy, Tom thought. I've driven by this spot a hundred times but I can't

remember what was there. By spring a new office building will sprout up looking like it's always been there. The new building won't necessarily be better or worse, but we'll get used to it and then another building will come down and another will fill the void.

Damn! That marriage guru's got me doing it. Get your clichés here! Tom wanted to shout aloud. Hot clichés, here!

Tom checked his watch. Sarah would worry if he didn't get back soon. He turned and walked back, quickening his pace.

He thought of Sarah and her large, dark eyes. He loved her eyes more than anything, especially when he made her laugh. Somehow when she laughed her eyes got so big they looked like she might audition for an old-fashioned minstrel show.

Tom realized how little she laughed lately. How little they laughed. It's not that they were going through rough times. Lord knows they'd had rougher times. Tom thought of how hard it was when Sarah's father had died and her mother lived with them until she passed. They raised two teenagers, for crying out loud. And that cancer scare was no picnic either. But they held tight and made it. They even became closer.

So what was happening now? Their children were grown and on their own. Jason seemed happy, Tom thought, and his new wife calls us Mom and Dad so naturally. He wished Pam weren't such a workaholic, but she was developing a successful law practice. She'll slow down when she can.

And we're winding down our own careers. In the next couple of years, Tom planned to look for a buyer. It was time to sell the business or at least take in a couple of partners and reduce his responsibilities. It would be good spending more time with Sarah. They'd do more traveling. They had been putting off that cruise around the Greek islands too long. Sarah could retire anytime she wanted. She'd been talking about it for years now.

Despite the economy, things had never been better. The house was paid for, they had savings, and enough money coming in to be comfortable. They didn't invest with Madoff. What more could he ask for?

What he and Sarah needed was to be reminded of how good they had it. That's why they thought this marriage counselor might be interesting.

Tom entered the hotel, walking straight to the Magnolia Room where Graham Gunther, author of *Marriage Is a Two-Way Street*, still pontificated. He stood at the back of the room and watched Sarah,

marveling at how much she still looked like the teenager he married more than thirty years earlier. He saw his empty seat next to her and rushed to fill it.

As he made his way down the aisle he heard a "tsk" from the woman sitting to his left.

"Where've you been?" Sarah whispered.

"Walking and thinking of how much I love you."

Sarah took his hand and squeezed it.

"All marriages have their ups and downs, their peaks and their valleys," said the guru in the silk shirt.

Tom bit his tongue.

"I missed you," Sarah said. "This guy's horrible. I missed your sarcasm."

"Shh," said the woman sitting next to him.

"Go shh yourself," Tom said.

Sarah's eyes bulged as she laughed aloud.

Tom and Sarah stood up to go home, delighting in annoying the woman sitting next to them, and still holding hands.

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***“I remember things the way they
should have been.”***

-- Truman Capote

BREAKFAST IN BED

D.N.A. Morris

It's still dark, but the throaty groan from the waking city permeates our thin bedroom walls. This pervasive din has become so engrained into my existence that actual silence brings anxiety. She scoots over and presses her warm body against my back. Perhaps she is just cold, but I convince myself it's because she wants to be close. She's almost a foot shorter than me, but when she holds me I feel like a small child. Right now, everything is good and I hope we stay in bed forever.

She wakes first and crawls across the bed, gently pressing her toes against the chilly floorboards. As she moves, the planks squeak and she stops and scoops her little red shirt from the floor and stretches, tiptoeing into the bathroom. She closes the door after her, but I can still hear her urinate. I wonder why I care—she urinates many times throughout the day—but for some reason I do, and I am too tired to consider it further. She pauses to wipe then flushes the toilet and goes to the sink and runs the water briefly, not even letting it get warm then exits the bathroom through the other door. I try to go back to sleep and begin to dream, but it is not good sleep, and I feel cold and alone and I wake every few minutes. My teeth hurt from clenching and I wonder how long I can lie here before I have to go to the bathroom.

She goes downstairs and pours herself some coffee that is mostly creamer, then comes back up and sits on the couch just outside the bedroom to read her book. It's a long book—a deep, intellectually cultivating book—and one I should've read years ago. I feel exhausted and try to relax. But I can't. I simply can't stay asleep—my dreams cycle through the same pattern until suddenly, I'm awake, staring at the ceiling, wondering how late into the afternoon I'll let this drag on. I know she's not happy. I know she wants me to get up and do something. Do something different today—different than all the other days. Something to show her it's all worth it. Hell, I want to do something different too, but I can't seem to make myself. Not today. Maybe never.

I get up only to close the curtains then slide under the cover and pile all accessible pillows over my head to create a burrow. There are so many pillows on the bed—each with a different shape and density. I can hear my breath and soon I drift away into a feverish nightmare that is shattered by a

change in the bed's surface pressure. I pull off the covers and bring things into focus to find her sitting next to me, smiling slightly with her mouth but not with her eyes.

I brought you some eggs, she says. I can smell them but I'm not hungry. Propping myself up with one of the smaller pillows, I take the plate she is offering. It's a nice plate, with a blue helix spiral running around the outside edge. I tell her she didn't have to do that and that I was about to get up and that I'd go downstairs and eat and was sorry I slept in. She shakes her head and says, It's okay. I wanted to bring you breakfast in bed. I nod and yawn and she sits beside me staring at the plate and I take the fork and scoop up a fluffy piece and bring it to my mouth

These are cold, I say as I chew, looking at her. She looks back and doesn't say anything or change her facial expression—but she doesn't seem to be looking at me and her eyes are equally as cold as the eggs. She returns to her seat on the couch just outside the bedroom, pulls a small green blanket over her legs, and lifts her book. I sigh and stare down at my cold eggs sitting on the plate with the blue helix resting against my hairy chest. I remember when she used to lie on my chest and twist at the hair and when she couldn't keep her hands or lips off of me, but now she just reads, and if I go to her and try to hold her she smiles briefly, gives me a quick soulless peck, then returns to her book.

I sigh and eat my cold eggs, trying not to scrape the porcelain with my fork and know that soon she'll tell me she's leaving me.

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