Orpheus

A Literary Journal



Orpheus

A Literary Journal
Volume XXX

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Orpheus is an annual literary journal produced by California State University, Bakersfield. All submissions must be typed, double-spaced, on 8-1/2" x 11" paper. There are no restrictions on subject matter, length, or theme; however, poems over one hundred lines are rarely published. Any use of profanity must be crucial to the understanding of the work.

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Orpheus

California State University, Bakersfield

Poems

Rynae Alexander

The Fun of Harm

We stormed the dune-rimmed marsh that flanked our school
for tadpoles captured bagged and hustled home.
Our plunder dumped inside a patchwork pool
we soon forgot them, dashing back to roam.
Ablaze through hollow homes whose beams seemed raised
from sand, we scavenged scattered scrap for war:
worn pipes and lumber; concrete clumps...We raged
on chevrons caked in clay then raced to score
a maze of plumbing trenches, fierce 'young men.'
Those dirt clods rifled never nicked an eye
no rusted nail could ever bust our skins.
Our green unleashed, in play we dared to die
yet ripened to decide: "We must devoid
our kids those tender dangers we enjoyed."

Christopher Mulrooney

bleary-eyed notes

bleary-eyed tame notes
the eyes juggling

juggling past all the weirs
and tame mountains

to a particular pine
all the shadows
perpendicular
point to now

opaque green
in the abstract
general vision

translucent with burs
in your hand

Christopher Mulrooney

synchrony

here are the odes of a podium
manhandled off the stage

one-two-three-four
vector five-seven-eight
six
nine

as if it were a strain of sunlight
mocking
the selection of all the
hues
and cries
of the plainsphere
rubied azured
saffroned

shaft with
motes

dallying

Christopher Mulrooney

the salesman tunes up

the treasure trove
of a pitchman
is a reserve acute

in its missives
the candelabrum shows
how the company
works

slowly and surely
benighting the curd
and London's idea of time

the fractious concupiscences
carry on
regardless
of any valences
intromitted
from the bibliotheque
superciliously
established
in the Phanar

Christopher Mulrooney

the tippler on the tip

here's the image I sought for
saith the Rotarian Lapsarian
valetudinarian all the fire I perceived
is all I dross could spare
and the grand t'ing I'm tinkering
wasn't all for good nor all so bad at all
when you recollect as you must so you may
how the books were added up and totted up or down the cereal wastes
we go now manufactured with an appeal a studied appeal a foreclosure if you
but will of
        recourse from attention
so that no Handel figures half-slipper'd in his dressing gown except to say
to the microphone I don't see why not and then remark aside amid the crowd
I of any answer this mind
you like any question of its kind
and then what would you please
from anyone doth nature give with ease

and so the triumphs of the mortal stage
are given o'er to what the heathen rage

etc. the kitchen history
adds up tots up
multiples the sovereign wrongs
and this bit of discourse goes into columns of assets and debits like the rest until of
        sheer inertia comes to rest
indeed as here I lie upon the tip
iodine and whiskey on one hip

so root for me you
truffle-hunting pigs
I'll be on the lookout too
amidst my swigs

the tippler on the tip *(continued)*

there is the Lancastrian image and the imaginer
on his pillock scupper'd
or his hillock unstoppered

that's the round of things
as the round soprano duly sings
and the rare recourse of lip o'er all
mimes and whippoorwill

John Michael Cummings

How Good Fortune Surprises Us

I was hauling freight
out of the Carolinas
up to the Cumberland Plateau
when, in Tennessee, I saw
from the freeway, at 2 am
a house ablaze.

Water from the fire hoses arced
into luminescent rainbows.

The only sound, the dull roar of my truck
Passing. I found myself strangely happy.
It was misfortune on that cold night
Falling on someone's house,
But not mine
Not mine.

Christian Stratton

Coffee

The coffee of this morning is the syntax
The bond of our articulation
The one thing that defines our world

The coffee of this morning is the passion
The aroma hypnotizes our lust
The one thing that enhances our appetite

The coffee of this morning is the hate
The jealously of humanity
The one thing that glues our social settings

The coffee of this morning is the life
The elixir of immortality
The one thing that brings life with abhorrence

The one thing that promotes life but...
The one thing that brings the Pale Horse

Sharon Patterson

Florsheims, I Think

Driving south on Hwy 101
the image caught in my headlights
the way a pothole will:
a pair of men's black oxfords
side by side
at the edge of the road

as if waiting to cross the freeway
laces tied into bows
as if nothing was left undone
as if some decisive soul
ready to hitch a ride
had left a marker for whoever

came in search of him.
Surely he wanted someone to know
he had come this way
wanted to leave a momento
that, in passing, we might question
the road he chose to travel

but who among us
at 70 miles an hour
can care enough
to walk in a lost man's shoes?

Sharon Patterson

the empty day

outside there is blowing wind and rain
while inside the window frame
Ms. Cat frowns uncertainty

laundry sits in gray piles
and lists of chores
wait to be shredded, thrown away

nothing is as usual:
there is no sun, no shadow
sky has the color

of patio cement
cracking under stark
quivering limbs

it is as if putting on a red shirt
would pain the universe
as if a riot of cloth

could scar this day
change it in the same way
uproarious laughter would

without trying
life can loose its balance
and so we heed the elements

sink into this vacuous day
like mimes: our mouths muted,
our faces painted away.

Sharon Patterson

Thin Shadows (for Gillian)

Wild mustard tumbles across the field
in cadmium yellow cartwheels.

The child is breathless
with raw earth
plays sun tag
hiding and seeking
curled head bent
bobbing for gold
gathering up
bright armloads
roots trailing the warm soil
over scraped knees
down sweaty fingers.

Her arms offer the bouquet.
A proffered love,
she gives all
holds nothing back
as the stems cast thin shadows
across her open arms
tender as new scars
waiting to form.

Sharon Patterson

so far from the garden

the beets and carrots are hand high
seedlings pushing and shoving
elbowing each other for growing room

the puny specimens need to be pulled
thinned like bushy eyebrows
or surplus embryos

perhaps I will give them a few more days

the roses have finished first bloom
every petal spread, pollen gathered
edges curling and brown

dead-heads need to be clipped
discarded into compost
as the spent life they are

but I slip the shears back into my pocket

for I've come into a season
of lesser longings
when the smallest morsel suffices
and petal fall as a sentient grace

and doing nothing more, I am lifted
so far from the garden.

Jason Grist

Fire

The nearly black
Plum-colored leaf
That holds fire
Like the blood
In your soul
That warms winter

Jason Grist

Of a Winter Stream

In the clear water
Of a winter stream
Leaves lie like a rainbow
Of color.
Their shapes and sizes settled
At the far end
Of the pool rippling
Beneath the water,
Rippling because they dance
Beneath a firmament
That magnifies their accomplishment
In their dying days
In the once more glory
Of all they've done.

Jason Grist

A Tree is Created For Man to See

In the abstraction
Of the bark
And the clarity
Of the leaf
A tree is created
For man to see—
Crying leaves
Upon the earth
And a tear
Lands so close
To you
You're spattered
With the salt
Of truth

Jason Grist

How Beautiful?

I though I saw fall today
In a setting sun
In mist upon the mountains
Where my heart would run
Having though I saw fall today
Today I thought I might
Declare this day a day of joy
Upon which one should write.
To the freedom felt
In my heart
And in the song of bird
In a setting sun that pause
To whisper what it heard.
As the sun spoke to me
Of gentle seasons past
I welcomed in the fall again
A question posed, answered, and asked—
How beautiful?

Jason Grist

Rain

Mist falling from the sky
Sent to wash the color
From a tree
Clinging to a calendar—
Into puddles
Like palettes
To a perfect painting

Ronald Jodo

Have You Seen Her?

Have you seen desire?
Someone told me she's now a street car
In vain, I've ravaged the city streets
In rabid pursuit of her touch
Yet all I've found is her velvet glove

Have you seen desire?
Someone told me she is draped in red
They spared no detail of her sordid escapades
And the questionable company she keeps enchanted
Within the murky walls of these taverns

Have you seen desire?
Someone told me she would be here tonight
Charming the gentry with lavish champagne
And searching for prey in misguided romantics
Could that be her underneath the mask?

Have you seen desire?
Someone asked me that very question today
His voice trembled in frantic panic
And his eyes glistened at her name's mention
I fear, she has been remiss in conjugal duty

Have you seen desire?
Someone warned me of her infamous guile
Never let her kiss you, lest you fall
That's the valuable advice she gave me
Right before she kissed me.

Ronald Jodo

Smoke and Mirrors

I have gazed into the mirror
I've been privy to its brittle temperament
I've trembled at the sound of its inevitable demise
And for the first time I see
See the clarity the jagged nature of broken glass
Within this maze of smoke and mirrors,
Lies what the smile could no longer placate
And for the first time it shatters
The lines on this brow betrayed the secret
And a flurry of tears summoned it to light
In the realm of the surreal, delusion is solace
Like a shot of morphine that numbs the senses
But in the gaze of scrutiny, the truth turns cold
In this feeble light, these eyes grow bold
And with the confidence of captives renounced from their chains,
They proclaimed their anguish,
And are a sight to behold
My litany of smoke dissipates without trace
And so shatters the mirror of grand illusion
Surrendered once more to the custody of reality,
Stripped of the distraction of lies cleverly whispered
Ignorance is such sweet bliss,
So say my smoke and mirrors

Nancy Edwards

Losing Our House

In Henderson, Nevada, where our house
Used to be, the land is bitter and smells
Of old beating and blood spores,
I slept in my sister's room,
Top bunk, up high, afraid of everything,
My head lay down on a pillow stuffed
With ground metal filings and old bone fragments

No one knew outside our house
On Nebraska Avenue in Henderson,
What went on when the summer wind
Blew gravel and sand into the backs
Of my legs and arms which burned intensely
Against places scars would not show,
They who lived and cried in this house
Kept silent, battle weary, afraid to leave
Or to speak about it

We as children walked down Water and Pacific Streets,
Spent Saturdays at the Ritz Theater
Dosing ourselves with Hersheys, cokes, and Sugar Daddies
Until dinner time and family hour,
Father waited at the head of the table,
We sat on both sides of him,
Mother at the other end,
Swallowing her food
Like bad medicine

Now my sister reports
The house is missing, gone,
Levelled into mounds of dry earth,
The land has been cleansed
Free of our DNA
Plowed until smooth, over and over,
Not a shred of the house remains

Losing Our House *(continued)*

Our yard has been emptied of honeysuckles,
Elm trees, bamboo stalks, the one fig tree,
And a weeping willow——all are gone—
Now gap-toothed Nebraska Avenue
Still curves west,
Some house missing; others holding on,

The Lindesmith house where we stole
Inedible apricots,
Got caught and punished,
Did it again anyway,
Stays like a yellow-eyed old lion

My sister tells me
You would never know
A family had been there,
Freshly grated piles of earth
Hide the monsters who dwelled
Within the walls;
She thinks they may return,
And tunnel all the way to California
And come to find us again—
I tell her it's not possible
And double bolt the front door.

Nancy Edwards

Lure

There is no dull shade in Africa
The earth is not brown
But deep red
And elephants
Come lumbering out
Across the Serengeti veldt
Rolled in deep red dust
Moving rhythmically
Across the flat bush
Moving gracefully
Dancing a conga line
As enormous red clay pots
Conga left, Conga right,
The sky is not blue
But turquoise in the African noon
Deep and rare
So incredible and bright
Life becomes a surreal dream,
You are my Africa
And I am not in love with you
But passion
Deeper than any visible feeling,
You run as a gazelle,
I want to capture you
Slow you down,
Tame you
Watch you move closely
Film you in slow motion
You are so brilliant
So rare
Against the sun
I pale by your shadow
You are not just love,
You are my Africa

Lure *(continued)*

There is no dull shade of you
And the earth is not brown in Africa
But deep red
Skies are not blue
But intense turquoise
You are not just love
But passion
Again
You are my Africa

Nancy Edwards

Biology of a Family Dinner

Crabs, calamari, sea bass, orange roughy, scallops, clams,
Alaskan cod, my brother sits menu in hand,
Oddly familiar to me,
I come from an inland city, rarely
Seeing fresh seafood or him,
He last appeared at my mother's funeral,
Eight years ago,
Now there's the new wife,
His open heart surgery
Just months ago,
He no longer resembles the boy
Who taught me how to swing into a pitch,
How to steal second,
How to ride a sled down a hill
Without capsizing,
How to ride a bicycle
With your hands at your sides,
The boy with freckles in the baseball hat
Is missing; in his place is a wizened
Sickly pale man resembling my elderly
Father just before his death—
In the San Diego waterfront restaurant,
I want to say to my husband,
Filling up on crackers and water,
"We can go now; I've seen enough,"
My brother, the stranger, speaks as if from
An oxygen mask, "We'll treat you guys,"
Scallops, linguini with clam sauce, bouillabaisse,
Abalone, mackerel, lobster, cioppino, shark,

Nothing appeals—I am falling into the menu,
Losing my way deliberately,
The waiter has come and gone three times,
They are all hungry, waiting for me and
My brother is on the edge of the old sarcasm
About his indecisive sister,

Biology of a Family Dinner *(continued)*

"Captain's plate," I say, "no clams, please,"
My husband offers to scavenge my clams,
Not to deny good seafood,
He gives me his best pirate smile

My brother and I do the warm-up scales,
Nothing of importance is spoken about
In front of witnesses,
He is happy about photos of our childhood
I have brought for him,
Older brother, younger sister,
Once best friends,
Now the choices are behind us

There is too much on my plate,
Everyone's eyes grow large with the heaps
Of fresh fish, grand entrees,
We all make a dent in the offering;
Even my husband is overwhelmed

No one orders wine and
My brother brags about giving up alcohol
I say I have heard that wine
Can help your heart heal faster
Rolling his eyes toward
His attractive new wife,
He looks at me like a bulging
Blue-eyed pale white fish
Pursing his lips
Rather than speaking his mind;

He has not, I think,
Changed so much
After all.

Nancy Edwards

Central Valley Spring: A Love Poem

It is finally spring across the flatlands,
Oat colored deserts gather green foil and seeds,
Delivering succulent blues, reds and lavenders,
Spring rain delights animals coming out of hiding,
Enriching their secret shelters with lushness,
Our river water finally thaws and runs clear
And cold against our bare hands;
We come to the edge of the near bank,
With plans to spend and spend
Every moment of this glorious spring together.

Nancy Edwards

Happy Anniversary

There is the leaning into each other,
The pleasure of half the bed,
One-third the pie,
There is the long afternoon
Response of your touch
When you greet and accept me,
So this is the full event,
The brightness of our marriage,
Seeing you come toward me,
I learn to move toward you,
This trust coming as a slow arrival,
A dance with no high lifts,
A steady confident rhythm
Changing us both,
And you, in your style of forgiving everyone,
Rather annoying at first,
Then important to family harmony,
We laugh at traditions we make and break
And come now into each other's vision,
Full-faced, we like what we see,
We are two parts blending smoothly now,
Not always half and half,
Sometimes each only one-third,
Or one of us one-fourth, the other at 75%,
Days go by one of us more than the other,
We both know the other one is there,
Up the street, across the room,
Down river, over the ridge to L.A.,
In the room and bed and word and air,
Next to the other one,
We have formed the sum,
The entity of our marriage style,
A universe of our love.

Nancy Edwards

Layering Ham

At night I pound ham on bread,
Sometimes two, three, five slices
For his lunch, I don't know
What is enough, sometimes I am
In my robe, in my jeans,
In my short pajamas, nearly naked
I take bread and mayonnaise and slices
For his lunch so he will not starve,
We stave off hunger and thirst,
We defy electricity and telephone
Solicitations and credit hustlers, my
Closet is layered by clothes and
Choices and everything for
Any occasion
We never know what might
Be lost in the hours when we sleep
Weary and cautious, living the sonnet,
Alternating news, good and bad, ham and cheese,
Sometimes peppers, sometimes tomatoes
And lettuce, sometimes jimaca, or radichhio,
I read everything thing at night which has a pulse,
Prose, poems, novellas, vignettes, novels
With thick crust, soft cover post
Moderns and hard shelled classics,
I pound ham on bread
For his nourishment,
Hunger staved off,
He makes our bed, sheets,
Layered under blankets,
Comforter, pillows
Soft against our bodies at night,
Keeping our terror dreams,
It is so little, so small

Layering Ham *(continued)*

Against what our loss is,
So infinitesimal against
War, missing parents,
Relatives taken by death
I layer ham on cheese,
Faith on tragedy,
Sonnet on novella,
He puts cover on cover,
Shelter against darkness,
We sleep below sirens,
It is what we know,
All that we have
Nourishing our souls,
Sonnet on novella,
Comforter over fear,
At night I pound ham on bread,
Sometimes two, three, five slices,
Alternating good news and bad,
He makes our bed,
Layering sheets against sirens,
Hope over darkness,
It is all that we know.

Nancy Edwards

The Ride

He hangs at the bus stop waiting for the man,
Waiting for the lift, waiting for the motion,
He paces up and down, the man is late, he's off
The mark, he's delayed downtown in big traffic,
This guy, he eyeballs every car, bus, every tire hitting
The blacktop, he wants a ride home, he wants a lift,
He wants to get back to the old lady waiting, he wants
To hear the drone of the wheels beneath his seat
Feel the bus jerking along the streets coming
Back down where he lives where his bed is, where his
Old lady made some supper and washed his dirty clothes,
He wants the winter cold to stop crawling up his legs,
Stop making him shake when he stands by the bus stop,
He hasn't got money for a big car like Rudy got,
His bank account consists of a roll of quarters for Sunday's laundry,
He looks cool in the winter sunlight, his sunglasses wrapping
Up around his cheekbones, his jeans touching his shoe tops,
He paces to feel the motion, to be the man he is, to move somewhere,
He wants to change directions, he wants to be somebody special before
Five o'clock comes, before the sun goes down
Before the freeze starts on the sidewalks and somebody
Somewhere thinks he doesn't want to go home anymore.

Nancy Edwards

After the War, A Mother Laments

"By Joy, whose ribbon slips,—But wound with war's Hard wire whose stakes are strong"

Wilfred Owen, 1893-1918,
British poet, who was killed as a
young man during World War I

Whose ribbon slips
From tender hands
And caresses a delicate brow
As a child his face in hers
His eyes alight with laughter—
Whose ribbon slips from joy
As a weeping mother,
Her kerchief fallen,
She weeps as ribbons slipped
From wounds unbound,
Her child not grown to full
As prey of an unknown war,
She weeps as ribbons slipped
As bows wind and weave
To adorn the fallen and the dead,
In front of millions
She weeps aloud
Her homage fallen
As her child bestowed
With ribbons in death,
With ribbons in death
From a spiral war
Which no one saw end,
She weeps as ribbons slipped
Adorn the fallen and the dead
And Joy turns to horror
As she weeps unsprung
In front of millions.

Kelly A. Malone

My Yosemite

The rapids of the lush Merced
With lucid, chilly mist
Guides your path to stunning falls
Of which the angels kissed

The Bridal Veil, chaste and pure
Cascades into a pool
Camouflage the virgins' back
With luminescent tulle

The trees are structures grand and proud
They almost graze the moon
Strong and sturdy wooden gods
With needles gently strewn

How miniscule our form becomes
When perched at Glacier Point
Natures brilliant cathedral
With the power to annoit

The splendor of her mountain peaks
On glorious display
Then shadows reach the valley floor
And turn the towers gray

Emerald sheets of silken grass
Fish-packed ponds and streams
At night the sky is lit with stars
Reflecting moonlit beams

And in the night, you'll hear an owl
You'll feel the river flow
And then you'll gently fall asleep
As will the fires glow

Kelly A. Malone

To Choose

One wicked winter's frosty night
when warmth was scarce and comfort slight
I laid upon the flattened down
and pulled the stitches from my gown

Unraveling my tattered dress
with mounting foresight and finesse
I felt self loathing leave my hands
and sensed my heart make less demands

I heard the echoes in my ears
demand that I relinquish fears
I felt the anger leave my brain
as thoughts of woe began to wane.

The sun had just begun to rise,
with yellow, copper-spectral skies.
I chose to live within the light,
And never fear a frosty night.

Kelly A. Malone

The Body Bag

My usual drive to work was in progress.
Streaming along the freeway, oblivious to others.
Up ahead were the brake lights that threatened my prompt arrival to work.
'Another crash', I annoyingly thought.

Slowly, the cars filed by a contorted wreckage, paying homage to a fallen motorist.
My turn in the precession approached. The street littered with
Pieces of windshield reflecting the sun as if someone had dropped a satchel of diamonds.
Exhausted flares had become mounds of white powder, warning no one.

There was no urgency. No edge. The Coroner's van sat calmly with its black door ajar.
A gentleman leaned sedately against the van inhaling a cigarette.
Just past the vehicle sat the bag. Sable black, unzipped and occupied.
I stared at death, with its stiff hand exposed.

I envisioned the person within. A man, a woman perhaps?
Opinions, secrets, fears, plans?
Had they just washed their hair that morning, removing residue?
Whose heart will be broken by the afternoon?

There on the pavement lay the remains. I searched for other bags but found none.
Officers nonchalantly investigated the scene.
Blithely rolling an instrument around the parameter of the site.
Gathering details. Documenting tragedy, like they had done a hundred times before.

Turning death into a task. Estimating the decedents time of demise.
Nothing personal. It's just a job. Professionals can tune out the impact of shock.
I ached for this unknown corpse. Briefly connected to this soul.
Someone's father, Someone's mother? Someone else's unspeakable grief.

Kelly A. Malone

Golden California

Dewy dusks of tangerine,
these vivid, citrus skies.
Silken hills of emerald green,
like velvet to the eyes.

Sequoia's on the mountain ridge
are solid and unique.
A rustic, creaky covered bridge
Above a frothy creek.

The deserts with their thirsty dunes.
The rim of southern lights.
The blazing mid-day afternoons,
and soothing, aloe nights.

The oceans foamy, turquoise tides
that stretch along the state.
Where chiffon sand and surf collides,
and seagulls congregate.

The harbors with their port of call.
The wharves tucked by the bays.
Its winter, summer, spring and fall,
is worthy of our praise.

The glory of Yosemite.
The coast of Monterey.
The population potpourri?
a cultural buffet.

This gate to the pacific sea,
can surely cast a spell.
Of this I'm sure most would agree?
Where angels truly dwell.'

Kelly A. Malone

We Wish

We wish there wasn't vanity
to make us think we're whole.
Or decomposing sanity
upon a troubled soul.

We wish the nights that turned to days
would sound redemption's horn.
Not view them as a pointless phase
of darkness into morn.

We wish that we'd seek out our worth,
of which we all possess.
Why does the sky and noble earth
do little to impress?

We wish when faced with angry wrath
we'd always persevere
And choose the more forgiving path
to keep our conscience clear.

We wish for acts of selfless deeds.
We wish for worthy goals.
But first we have to plant the seeds
Into our barren souls.

Kelly A. Malone

Summers if Innocence

We'd skip across the sea-drenched sands?
take refuge in the shade.
We'd visit figment, foreign lands
without a footstep made.

The daffodils we'd swing above
would gently graze our feet.
We'd dream about a summer love,
that one sweet day we'd meet.

And when the summer sun would set,
we'd sit upon the porch.
Our bathing suits hung cool and wet,
beneath a Tiki Torch.

The frangrance from the citrus vines
would lightly fill the air.
And breezes through the wispy Pines
would warmly dry our hair.

We'd nap beneath the summer moon,
and hear tomorrow call.
Our innocence, still there in June,
had ended by the fall.

Kelly A. Malone

Just Luscious

Your coldness does not trouble me.
I'll not pay heed to chill.
Deliciousness is what I see.
You tempt and charm and thrill.

The taste of you upon my lips,
is caramel coated glee.
You place yourself upon my hips,
and linger, happily.

You care not of my bulging thighs.
We never fuss or fight.
You're joy, wrapped in a sweet disguise.
You keep me up at night.

'Tis ectasy, our sacred tryst.
Just you and I as one.
Your creamy peaks I can't resist.
Our romance, just begun.

I dream of you, I'll not deny.
Seduce me without pause.
I'll shout it on mountain high,
I love you, Hagen Das!

Kelly A. Malone

The Nest

I watched as she searched our jungle for strands of shelter.
Sifting through layers of soiled tin foil and old newspapers, oblivious to the headlines.
I witnessed her lift pieces of jagged Styrofoam and pull vigorously at ragged twine.
One by one, she carried bits of discarded modern civilization up to her perch.
She slowly began to weave a cosmopolitan bowl of neo materials. When finished, it resembled a Dali abstract adorned with twigs, paperclips and insolvent pieces of a lottery ticket.

I sensed the pride she had taken in her art as she gently nudged the pampered eggs into the belly of her masterpiece.
A few weeks later, I returned. As I sat beneath the tranquil tree gazing upward, I watched as she sweetly fed her hatchlings a feast of earthworms and Doritos then tenderly put them to bed.

Kelly A. Malone

Imperial Lumiere

A regal shade of burgundy
A richly deepened tone
Located on a crystal base,
A lipoid monarch throne

He stood upon his waxen court,
the votives and tea lights
providing warmth and radiance
on sable shadowed nights

The candelabra on the desk
exquisitely aflame
would lend a glow around his form
and ask for no acclaim

Upon your royal pedestal
your pinnacle burned bright.
But down your sides dropped pearled tears
that hardened over night

And day by day as you were lit
to comfort and delight,
you also lost your stature grand
by withering in height

You slowly melted to a stump
until your abdication.
You vaporized into the air,
released from obligation

Camille Gavin

Buckeye Creek

I bless the band of beavers that built
a sturdy dam
stick-by-stick on this icy, snow-fed creek.
without their dental prowess there would be
no green spongy meadow and surely not this
chewed-out log that, only by chance,
forms a gentle hammock to
cushion the clatter in my brain.

Camille Gavin

Danger! Perdido!

Destined to be a risk-taker is the young
daredevil as he ignores signs of warning and
plunges headlong into a swift-moving stream
that propels his sun-fried body through the narrow
lanes of a splintered weir, knowing full well
the deceptive framework has the power to kill.

"It's no fun, if there's no challenge."

Camille Gavin

Crepe myrtles at the USPS

Slender trunks,
urged by a friendly breeze,
flaunt
Popsicle plumes of rich, ripe cherry,
daring to challenge the eye-stinging glare
of a once-azure sky.

Nearby, harried drivers of
fume-spewing behemoths
pause
to thrust paper-thin missiles
into the metallic maw
of a Star-Spangled bin.

Theirs is an uneasy alliance.

Amber Garcia

Like Watercolors

What's it supposed to mean
The subtle hints, the silence
I'm supposed to understand it
Be the one you're waiting for
        to save you from yourself
On a rainy day to keep
        from drowning in insecurity
Lovely obligation
Colors swirling from the front yard
Perfect day for a perfect boy to
        come and make everything better
Foolish child
Did you really think you could
        kill the Boogeyman?

Amber Garcia

Our Lady of Perpetual Sorrow

Leaves starting to fall
        Dancing in a whirlwind
Plucking at the strings of my heart
        I was never lucky enough
to be chosen one
        See my face in the
glaring stained glass
        Hold the cross so tightly
I thought I could see heaven
        Footsteps echoing in the hallway
                Who are you stranger
                You know you'll never belong

Amber Garcia

And to Think That I Saw it on Marion Street

In the house down the street
Faded yellow with white trim
Too many dogs won't shut up
In the back the big scary tree
like a spider consuming the night
There was a day when the
floors were clean and
sometimes other voices could
be heard or Christmas cards
taped to the walls
but never anymore
Now what's left
is the smell of
the unclean and the
sickness still devouring
And the dark eyes and hair
that can only look out
the cracked window
and not say a word

Amber Garcia

At Eighteen

I thought I was losing my mind
Deadline leering at me from my computer screen
A boy would sit by me and say
my eyes were pretty. Drove me home on Fridays.

My temper could out lash anyone
I was a stranger walking around my house
They didn't know me anymore

Regretting my lack of teenage rebellion—
that I never woke up with my head
hanging over a toilet seat
My eyes were pretty and I did things
that make my stomach squirm now
Driving me home on Fridays

I Could never say I was sorry
Insolent little bitch my mother would say
I thought I was losing my mind

Never having a kiss from my any boy
but my eyes were pretty and I did things
that make my stomach squirm now
My temper could out lash anyone

I wasn't a person anymore
Snarling, vehement, soulless—
a dark eyed monster raging

Amber Garcia

For Daddy

Father always said
sometimes you have to cut out the
bad part of the apple to save it
Oh where did the time go Daddy
just yesterday I was laughing
Everything is in a cycle, he said
people will always kill themselves trying to beat it
trying to escape it
sometimes you just have to give in
I shook my head
still shaking
I can never admit defeat
It's only a defeat, he said
if you make a war out of it
I wish you could understand
I want to Father I want to
understand everything you are
I see him
his silence
and I wonder who he is
what he wanted out of life
That things turned out so differently
it's never what you expect

Christopher Mulrooney

the vulgarisms don't count always

the lefty-gaited thing
has a thrift bone to its name
goes along the canyon ridge
hearing a new song also

I've a new thridace
to comp down for into new towns
here's rabbeting for you
into the new town cares

Christopher Mulrooney

coppice blues for new mince pies

I have an appointment says
the likely new feller
now come on grown son
says the doctorate
let's you and me dicker
awhile beside the pond
in April and June as I
wander along the oaken
groves of academia
matrimony is a fit proposition
not that I could wander
far from my true calling

Christopher Mulrooney

have you any rascals

have you any rascals in your town
good old town
the kind that can decipher and remember
what's around
oh you ask me and I'd tell me what I
want to know
'cause I wouldn't want to bellyache you
just for show

Christopher Mulrooney

Diebenkorn

give if him a nice big tribute
fanfare and piano music
hollow-eyed and treacly

let fireworks be given off
the city can afford it

somewhere in this vicinity
place a small chair there
and a small table
nothing against any walls
that's it now a curlicue
could be you understand

Christopher Mulrooney

the proboscis of historical honesty

is the one that don't sneeze
jack you some car drive you
a city mile with a smile
for the city folks what burgeons
is a tall mile a wide dank
pitiful pile that's what ease
rank me in the qualifications
of a deaf post and a seeing-eye
K-9 it's a listening post
and a dead dog a calm cat
on the sill dreaming of mice
on ice in the collected cooler
Werowance I come to greet you
as in the old romance speak
fair unto oh never mind

M.L. Heivly

Ode to the Academic

Two stand, jump up the cruel wall,
perched by the sea.

Huddled together They feign indifference
While chirping,
barking at the surf, speaking ill of the fog,
reminding themselves over and over
that they were better than all this.

Camille Gavin

Crepe Myrtles in Summer

Faint breeze urges plump
cherry-red plumes sweeping scum
from once-azure skies

Around the Bend

Sway-backed horse, patient
in green pasture, yet yearning
for just one last tug

The Prey-seeker

Sleek feathered falcon
dives unerringly upon
any and all victims

At the Zoo

Long-legged giraffe
silent and oddly serene—
dignity personified

DOE-RAH-JEE

Doe-rah-jee
Doe-rah-jee
Doe-oh-rah-jee.
Deeply stretching in the
Pungent spring-rained soil
Of a Korean hill.

Oh, doe-rah-jee
Even one or two roots are a treasure,
You a lesser price of the ginseng-gold.
Oh, doe-rah-jee
Your white arms, legs and trunk
Slivered and mixed in a tangy hot sauce.

I chew, I savour and
I swallow you slowly into me,
My sinew and song:
Doe-rah-jee
Ah-ri-rang
Doe-oh-rah-jee.

Chae Sungsook

Present

At end of Korean War when I was five:

The chilled after autumn walk on dirt gravelled road,
Puddles laced in creamy solids of earth-heat and winter air.
Thousands of crystal spikes inside the nose,
becoming crystal then water to crystal
all at once;
feel of air-ice and body heat.

Inside our rice-stalk thatched hut,
warmed from the wood burning hearth.
snuggled in the quilt,
listening to night sounds of rustling wind and
hushed falling snowflakes;

This special night,
when fairy real-mother placed a paper wrapped tiny present
above my head on the pillow,
Sleep, sleep tonight 'til the morning
and open the only Christmas joy.

Portia Choi

Long Hair

My hair fascinates me,
shining in sunlit strips
of purple, blue, gold, green,
on black,
Feeling the feel of a woman
being willow leaves
seaweed.
Aphrodite's seawind-flown hair
rises in a giant shell,
hides her bosom,
her center self.
Lady Godiva sits lady-like
on a horse,
in her naked, lady-self,
hair covering her embarrasment
and pride.
Crytal Gayle, sways her knee-length hair
singing a Western love song,
her voice floating melody strands
in a concert hall.
I brush my dead locks free from a tight bun,
growing more and more from the
depths of my living-self.

Portia Choi

SOLITUDE

Solid-tude:
Sitting still,
Breathing in,
Breathing out,
Enraptured glow.

A lone zinnia in a vase.
Zinnias bought from a farmer with strawed teeth in overalls
standing next to pick up truck
At Farmer's Market
of basil: shouting green on a table of red, red tomatoes;
mounds of string beans, peaches, apriums, and purple potatoes.
At home: dicing and stir-frying zuchini, eggplants in Korean sauce
sparkled with Mediterranean basil,
served on a dining room table for family and
a friend who had given me plastic bag of cumin and
a recipe for East Indian lentil curry,

Connected like brussel sprouts on a stalk of being.

Portia Choi

STEWING

Onions sliced
Potatoes diced
into the cauldron of my mind.
Bitter resentment knowing
My time is your time,
cooking time,
cleaning time.
Who are the great artists, writers?
Michelangelo, Da Vinci, Dali, Picasso,
Shakespeare, Keats.
Did they cook, clean for others?
Both Eliots wrote: T.S. and George.
Then there were the Emilys: Dickinson and Bronte.

Slowly simmering woman's anger,
Boiled madness released into the air.
Onions bring tears to the eyes, false tears a meare
reaction to the acid of reality,
Turned sweet with a child's smile, a hug,
Potatoes with the covered eyes peeled, raw and crunchy,
Become hearty morsels with the heat of writing.
Slowly cooking, mixing, creating
the flavors into a palatable stew.

George Ketterl

HEAD WIND:

sitting in Kileuea Iki volcano
Quiet and black
barely a breeze
warm
the site of memory and blood
raising a fragile tower seven times into the blur
casting a shadow as the light thickens
hearing the beating heart
I've been here many times each one differnt because molecules shift
at least slightly, I think
do i really think
or
do I think i'm thinking when i'm really only there or here?

compression formed this black landscape
although it's really not entirely black at all
in fact it has many colors depending on the beating of the heart and
molecules

there is shine no matter what's going on in the sky or in the mind
it depends on the eye
like most things in life are dependent
the inner eye and the outer eye line up sometimes
mostly there is a discrepancy or perhaps rather simply a difference

in those moments when the heart opens
and those moments when the eyes open and those moments when everything stops
inside the chatter the emotional shades hunger bed time frenzy etc. etc. etc.
when it's just the I the eye opens

here in this room in this place where a good amount of time has been spent the
black rock is here beneath me until the intrusion strikes it's subtle little
blow of head wind

George Ketterl

HEAD WIND: *(continued)*

ROSES ARE BLACK VIOLETS ARE METAL
CARBINES ARE BLUE AND SUGAR IS PARTICULAR
SECTIONS OF LIFE WAIL FOR THE WHALE
IDEAS GROW STALE RHYME IS NOT ALWAYS POETRY AND POETRY IS NOT ALWAYS RHYME
SPIRITUAL BLISS REQUIRES BLOOD SACRIFICE OR AT LEAST SOME KIND OF GOOD INTENTIONS
SUSPENSION IS A MATTER OF SELECTING THE RIGHT ABYSS
PRETENSION CAN BE ABOUT ANYTHING

the last quiet moment in the volcano hangs in my emptiness and will every so often
when there is a breeze chimes down through my eyes into my molecules
and then into my blood

George Ketterl

OPENING:

Venice, CA
Like a door or a window
Like a mind
or maybe eyes and heart
constant incessant voice mumbling it's way in from the
OUT
SIDE
BLIND SIDE SUICIDE
coherence becomes a heavy weight of responsibility
futility
Nakedness is the first option of balance

so the whiz kid was distracted by the chorus as he walked along even with all the filter attachments

Interesting how thought can be so thuddingly resistant
helping yourself to fly through the air is not so much about taking advice
or picking a crumb of the familiar as if synchrony were merely a concept
cold
rational
grey

Where is Baptism when you need it?
Symbols of liberation and cleansing responding to force

Dancing is free and so is nakedness and will
love is natural and so is sex
confusion may be biological or the product of a puffed up ego, Poetry as well
mysteries are not meant to be solved
preaching is always preaching

dogs cats flowers and air touch eyes dreams skin

George Ketterl

OPENING: *(continued)*

longing, feeling the soft fluid pulse of all those atomic particles
opening the polar gates

over and over and over and over and over and over and

over

George Ketterl

CORNER

Marrakech, Morocco
Sitting on the corner at the
Koutoubia Mosque
in
Marrakech

horns, horses, haze, hustlers
clip clop buzz pop
Berbers in busses
restoration
past present future
donkeys pulling two wheel carts
tourists with video cameras and varying degrees
of
tension

black clad cops with white belts and holsters
like ballerinas in traffic

gays
guys goat girls

ten thousand years of fashion fusion confusion

tempo rhythm
cold hard truth
beneath a hot insular mid day sun

Ramadan fast December 30 first
Christmas Mass
twelve days away

"get on board for the Marrakech Express"

George Ketterl

CORNER: *(continued)*

holy days
Moslems carbo load
Christians overload

red field with green starts punctuate the blue sky

striped burnoose
Gucci shoes
hoods and goods

black plastic bags everywhere

George Ketterl

GENUINE:

driving

resemblance's tick in deep covers
vague primal impulses dressed in heavy black garments do a lingering dance

mumbling whimpers of collective alarm become the breath
of
bravado
the hair trigger of perception is
etching away the line
between sacredness and hysteria

dim fictionalised symbols of security and survival emanate from
the linear matrix of cybernetic concern

a young boy walks along and alone in the small town
with his shoulders up to his ears
and his head down

dust gathered at the horizon
flattening the view
sucking out the air

a cardboard dummy of norman schwartzkoff stands in the
auto aisle at seven eleven holding up a can of friction proofing

in the parking lot of the future steps out of a dodge viper with a suspicious sneer on it's face

the past stands at the far edge
with open arms
in a
field of dying flowers

distraction howls out from the timeless wall of scattered dreams

GENUINE *(continued)*

perhaps it's the touching that counts
that's real
that fills the trough
and lights the light
that opens the heart
that sighs in relief

and opens the arms of freedom

George Ketterl

ROOM AT THE CONTINENTAL:

Tangier Morocco

It's the middle of the night
a fantasy room arches plum colored bedroom
walls
a bed canopy style
brass
thick elaborate posts surrounded and decorated with vagina pods
who designed this bed
it's old and high
was it some kind of a fetish bed?

french doors looking out over the Mediterranean
trucks below parked in rows like Matise larva
he painted here and this is a port city

layered in heavy wool blankets
mirrors with cherubs riding
on gold frames
on armoire doors
are the reflections of the bright eyed
girls who stood before and posed and flirted
and admired themselves still inside?
this is after all an enchanted room
is the grand warm wood heart of the armoire beating in anticipation

of
the
next
visitor

is his sweet furniture memory humming inside with the visions of all the maidens
I think so

George Ketterl

ROOM AT THE CONTINENTAL *(continued)*

Humphrey Bogart was here once
    does his spirit linger sitting beyond the arch with his eyes closed smiling
    out at Lauren Bacall
I think so

somehow this is a perfect room alive with stone and colored with an unlimited palette
breathing in soft pants
a pilgrim space between the cortex and the blood

on the street below the shadow of William Boroughs is calling for another hit of
Moroccan smoke as Jack Keroack walks behind
doing scat

R. Kolar

Eyes Closed Seeing

Two lions roared!
Dining, on fresh meat
Not thinking,
They tried to sleep off the bloat

A bright blossom withered
Rested, on a fallow lawn
And, bear—a dark, silent winter

A one legged fool
Walking, motionless
Wept on self-pity

Wherewithal endured
Sprouting fresh spring buds
Bringing forth new fire

And a new soul swaddled in warm arms
Radiating beauty
Bringing new hope
Came upon: a fresh new world

R. Kolar

Blank is Our Favorite Color

Gardenias sharpened their teeth
And ate the bugs resting on their backs
YOU DON'T EXIST ANYMORE

Spank the dogs
For peeing on our feet

Blank out the things
We don't wanna see right now
The pieces fit together better that way

Call tall grass endangered
And show us how to save it
Spill blood on your hands if you have to

Isn't that the way the world is
AFTER ALL

Derek Hembree

The Woodsman

These woods you see, they are my own
The leafless trees myself I've grown
Every stranger far and wide
Should have these things to him been known

My toothless hound can smell the tracks
Of broken soles and empty sacks
He howls away the passing here
Of wind-worn faces, rusted backs

I pat his head and rub his hide
Then have him take a rest inside
He waddles past the frozen lake
To escape the wind and chill besides

His rest is short, but will suffice
Since someone has to pay the price
And never must I tell it twice
And never must I tell it twice...

Derek Hembree

Tuesday Night Police Report

Tuesday Night, 2:00 am
At the intersection
Of an alleyway—
And a side street:
One silver bullet,
90 miles an hour,
greasy goatie,
lipstick smears written across the windshield,
sweat stains,
hard labor,
no pay stub,
two show tickets.

The other: A picture
one woman,
two boys,
no goodbyes
since before work
the last graveyard shift.

Derek Hembree

Do Not Resuscitate

To whomever finds this note
Seconds after its too late,
I'm not looking for an antidote
Do not resuscitate

What I'm looking for is gone
Quick as rain to dissipate
This world has left me all alone
Do not resuscitate

I waited for it to come
By now its far too late
This bench is my last home
Do not resuscitate

Please! Don't blame the gun
It can't know how to hate
The way that others do for fun
Do not resuscitate

I feel sorry for the ones
Who have watched me seal my fate
Just bury me with my bones
and do not resuscitate.

Cyndee Moore

Echoes in Bodie

You can hear them
when cruel Sierra winds dance
Through deadly silence,
the lifeblood
of a time gone by.
Adventurer's stomping feet
reverberating
through winter brutality,
as the clamor and clatter
of wagons and coaches
rattle the soul
of a once virgin land.
Down sagebrush laden streets
joy and laughter
drifted in unison,
as unblemished, glittering ore
lit fires of persistent passion
in callused, darkened palms.
Wealth ignited savage,
when gunfighters drew
their weapons,
spilling blood
heartily
on flawless snowfalls,
as tenors of creaking gallows
floated amid
vigilante's cheers.

Now
affluent splendor
is but history,
but when echoes promenade
through stillness
they'll walk to the mine shaft
one more time.

Cyndee Moore

My Grandmother's Garden

She is prolific
a keeper
of the stony soil.
Summer suns
moist and muted
caress the morning
in fickle breezes
as her rake patters
across the fugitive pebbles.

She is the mother
of bleeding hearts
dripping sensuous crimson
bending heavily earthbound
like gravity pulls forth
a child.
Pansies,
royal in purple velvet
grow dusty and wither
in their silty surface
but flourish nonetheless
in her care,
as her babies did at her breast
a lifetime ago.

She shoves away
the sweat
that taints
the crevices of ancient eyes.
The rake is laid down
for a momentary pause,
as the fading day promenades
on her aching shoulders.

Cyndee Moore

My Grandmother's Garden *(continued)*

She has again
tucked in her children
till another morn

To my grandmother
1906-2002

Tonelius Oliver

Quicksand

The tension tightens my limbs
The words relieve my pressure
Anger doused with confusion
Erratic
The wavelengths don't match
The more I know
The more I'm confused
Tension clamps my neck
Locked bubbles form clots
Stress weighs me down
Running in quicksand
In my waking hour
Styrofoamed sandpaper in my tissue box
Where's the relief?

So heavy your thoughts
So enraged is the outlook
The tension mounts
As the air sifts out the humanity balloon
Treason when you defy beliefs
Not congruent to your own
<,>,= ?
Greater than, Less than = Questions
Riddles that can't possibly be answered on this plane
The more you know, The more you don't know
Levitating while running in quicksand
Visualize this imagery and you'll be fine

Tonelius Oliver

Crossword

Crosswords while reading
the funny papers
Putting together the clues
To solve the riddle
Enigma every letter
a different language
Words magically appear
Sideways
Brain Teasers
gets that cranium cracking

Crosswords not meaning to offend
Just meaning to suspend
DISBELIEF at what the headlines say
Arial printed in bold italic letters
How important is truth?
Majestic punctuation
Amazed at the order
of these crosswords
Puzzle pieces fit properly
can't make sense of this
One day...One day

Harry Chambers

Valencia Peak Junior

A trickle of cool sweat on your brow, an odd numbness in your legs, maybe a shortness of breath. A mountain, a sea, an ever blending sky of blue and gray, and an odd undying feeling of accomplishment. As I stated above, these few paragraphs are about the Mount Valencia Peak Junior hike, as taken in by myself. And as you an I both would rather like me to finish.

A backpack and a coat flung over your shoulder...It seems it's getting colder as you climb the trail. One misstep and...down you would fall...pressuring isn't it? Finally after the long trek up the somewhat bare, battered path. You look to the sea and the world is spinning around you it seems, whether from the sheer knowledge of how small and insignificant you are in comparison to the Earth, the Sun, and well just everything, or just a lack of air. Then it all comes to a halt; all sound comes second to the sound of the lapping waves, albeit almost too far off to hear anymore; all sights seem dull and lacking in color next to the sky; all feeling numb but for the rough grains of sand against your hands; no smells but the stinging salt coming to meet you.

You stare out into the sea so blue you can't see where the sea ends and the sky begins. It wouldn't be hard to stay here and stare out into the sea would it now? Unfortunately you happen to half hear someone pulling you out of your thoughts. Back to Earth. Back to your life. Back down the mountain. Time to go.

Eronini R. Megwa

Encounters

Like a crescent moon
On a clear chilly winter night
Your warm shadows
Cast their glowing eyes
On cold moist African sand
Caress icy dark clouds, breathlessly

Shadows, the chase
Footsteps
Dark clouds
The chase
In Thick fog

The fall
The stand
The walk
The chase
The race

Now, it's summer
And you shine
You glow
You dance
You sing

In warm embrace
You cast your soft warm shadows
And settle gently on our blind souls
On shifting African sands

African sand, dust, dune
Dance, sing, shine, smile

Encounters *(continued)*

Moon, sand
Soft, moist
Warm, coarse
African sand
African moon

Oh African moon.

Prose / Essays

Terry Redman

My Next Car

I'll miss her—I really will! I may have to end the relationship, get past it, and settle in where I feel more secure. I want to do the right thing when the lease ends on my 2000 Volkswagen Beetle in early 2004, and I would love to lease a new Beetle. So, what's the problem? The next time you drive, you will see the problem.

People love the VW Beetle. The day I got the car, total strangers drove by, gave a thumbs up, and mouthed, "Cute car." Other VW drivers wave, and we do a quick compare-and-contrast scan of one another's car. I am routinely stopped by total strangers who what to know how it drives (like a sports car), is the gas mileage super (yes), how fast it can go (legal plus), is the engine in the front (yes), and am I happy with it (yes). Often I hear about the VW they cruised in during the 60's, or '70's, and how much fun they had on Saturday nights. I say good things about the dealer, the service, and encourage them to look into buying one. One lady saw me in the parking lot, and said she bought her Beetle after I told her how much I liked mine; she likes her Beetle.

No, the problem is super-sizing. On a few occasions I have pulled up to a traffic light behind a huge pickup, with the bumper level with my windshield, an Explorer on my right and an Escalade on the left. In the rear view mirror, I see REMMUH (HUMMER, on the teeth-like grill). Talk about America's weight problem! Bumpers at eye level can send the imagination into uneasy scenarios, most involving ambulances.

I have noticed that when I travel I am more conscious of the super-sized vehicles and wonder if one of them is about to swallow my car whole. A few months ago, I drove to Sacramento and had a few uncomfortable moments when the driver of a large car moved close to my bumper, and another cut in front of me apparently knowing that I would get out of his way. My side air bags will cushion an impact, but not stop a 3-ton Hummer. I get a real thrill whenever I am at a light, and the driver of a big SUV turns onto the lane next to me, chatting on a cell phone—not quite the excitement VW had in mind when they advertised, "Drivers wanted."

I like the fuel efficiency of my little car. People buy cars for a million reasons, but does fuel efficiency determine which model of mega-car to buy? We hear a lot about where, and why, oil exploration will/may/can't take place. If we all drove cars that featured saving gas, it would help the environment

and lessen the impact of oil development. I have come to consider 27 mpg standard for my car's fuel consumption. I have had as much as 38.

Of all the cars I have had over the years, this will rank as one of my favorites. I have a treasure chest of memories from this car. The first time one of my daughters saw it, she said, "That is the cutest car!" She even brought her friends over just to look at it. My car stands out in parking lots, is easy to park and has a turning radius to love. From the start, I have been impressed with how Volkswagen chose to market the Beetle. Little things have been fixed for free, and for the first year service was free. I get a magazine listing accessories that range from T-shirts to specialty mirrors, and a car-bra. We have driven this car on trips across California, as far away as Montana and never had a problem. The interior is surprisingly roomy and has become a moveable storage locker for some things I like to have handy. In every state, in every city, people smile at the car, check it out, and ask how it runs. I have driven up mountain passes and across deserts with assurance, and comfort. I can get into those compact car spaces, and turn on a dime when I feel like it. Not bad for decent monthly payment.

I don't know the answer to what Jesus would drive (maybe a pickup with a toolbox in the back or a minivan to keep the apostles together), perhaps he would not suggest the Beetle. Drivers of the super-sized have had criticism from several quarters. SUV's use a lot of gas, and have a better than average chance of killing the people in, "the other car," during an accident. As the driver of "the other car," I have decided that I need to get more defensive, put more steel around me. A recent survey revealed that drivers of SUV's feel safer in them, and drivers of cars smaller than SUV's feel less safe around them. And they spent money to do this survey? On *60 Minutes* a psychologist who advises Detroit on what sells, said right now size, intimidation, and power sell. OK, I admit to some intimidation. I'll get a bigger car, maybe. One of us has to be the grown-up.

Until my lease expires, I will use less gas than other drivers and have more fun than a lot of drivers stuck in traffic or looking for a pair of empty parking spaces. So, if you see a silver Bug with the three artificial roses and a beaded seat cover, that's me.

After the lease is up, when you don't see the silver VW Beetle and the happy driver, that's me again.

UPDATE I: In August, VW offered a program to pay off my lease if I got a new VW to replace the one I was driving. Let me tell you about my Jetta...

UPDATE II: Now that gas is moving toward $3.00 a gallon, I note more concern on the faces of Hummer drivers. Maybe the chatter on their ever-present cell phones is where to find the cheapest gas. Economics, if not environmental concerns, may make them question the wisdom of driving three tons of metal to the market to pick up a few things for dinner. Priceless.

Rynae Alexander

A GIRL NAMED STAN AND THE SALVATION OF TOYS

Stan stormed the backyard and shed her sandals intending to rush inside for some ice water and news on Skylab when she heard cousin Huwey proclaim from next door: "I am Master of all I survey! Those loyal to me shall be rewarded! All who disobey or rise against me shall be ...destroyed!" She scaled the fence, peered over, and saw Huwey convened in a long dirt patch adjacent the fence, columns of Imperial Stormtroopers and red Micronauts saluting him amidst other, decimated figures and vehicles. Stan ascended the crossbeam.

"Hiya Huwey, hawaya!"

Huwey looked up, eyes distant. "Hey, Stan. Where you been?"

"On Mundy Street with Ramen and Bailey and them. Booking through the alleys." She plunged to the fluffy dirt and sat across from Huwey.

"Thought you were leaving," he said.

"Tomorrow."

Huwey glowered. "Wish we'd move and get our own house and not this dumb duplex."

Stan shrugged and then inspected her feet for splinters. Nothing. A buzzing Japanese beetle—sunlight flickering from its carapace—startled Huwey. He perspired, despite wearing only shorts. They were color of the dirt. Stan imagined it having blistered up into the form of shorts, sprouting bones, skin, and tumbleweed hair. She grinned. Huwey brightened.

He said, "Got Stretch Armstrong—he's the greatest. You can be all nasty to him and he's still good for more."

Stan retrieved a Luke Skywalker from the dirt, grimacing at its mauled face. "I dunno, Huwey. Bet he'll get messed up forever if you hurt him enough." She tossed the Luke adjacent a half-buried, semi-burned Bulletman, then noticed the new Star Trek figure nearby, "You got a Dr. McCoy!"

"Yeah, yesterday."

She seized the figure and caressed its suit. "You know the thing 'bout Spock and him?"

"Huh."

"They're queries." She tapped the McCoy's face against a Spock's.

Huwey's face clouded. "Huh"?

"Wuhl, you know how daddies, they're all, um, woody and don't cry and stuff, like Spock? But all mommies're really motional like McCoy? And the way him and Spock're always together, arguing like your mommy and daddy, or like Mr. Jacks and Mr. Tyler at school? Spock and McCoy are queries."

"But what's 'queries' mean?

"It's when a boy likes another boy and they hold hands." Stan grinned, seeing Huwey thinking this over: he was merely tapping a Princess Leia on the dirt; before he had been pounding it in. Huwey always seemed to mull even simple notions at length, and Stan supposed that—since her cousin was three years older—ten-year-olds must need to think about things more.

Sure see Mommy sitting and thinking lots, and she's old.

"Well, long as they don't *do* it," Huwey said, frowning. "That'd be bad."

Stan smiled shyly.

They continued playing, constructing mountains for Bulletman to pulverize, annihilating Stormtroopers with the shooting stars of a Dragon Shogun Warrior, and simulating the looming Skylab catastrophe by crushing a Micronaut populace with the Death Star Playset. Huwey did most of the playing, quickly confiscating and putting into his service every toy Stan found enchanting. When Huwey ran inside to use the bathroom, Stan snatched the Star Trek dolls.

Sometimes, Huwey's eyes were distant as a zombie's, and he would mount either his big white teddy bear or just his pillow. Stan's friends called it 'humping,' and watching Huwey in action always sent her into peals of laughter which, when Huwey finished—oblivious of his activity and the source of her laughter—inevitably led to long, uncontrollable giggling. She pulled down each Trek figure's pants, and positioned them like stray dogs: the McCoy on hands and knees with the Spock kneeling close behind.

Giggling, she quickly scaled the fence, hiding on the other side.

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And when Huwey returned, he detected mischief.

Nibbling his finger while examining his realm, he beheld the Star Trek toys.

And upon understanding, he roared.

Then stomped around.

Then grabbed the dolls and bashed them agains the walkway until they crumbled.

Then charged growling into the kitchen pursued by giggles.

And clambered through cupboard upon cupboard until locating lighter fluid and a box of long matches.

And threw the toys in the barbecue and ignited the plastic men and grinned as their faces writhed in agony, broken bodies twisting blistering blackening.

And bawled at them, "You see? This is what you get! You like it? Huh? *Huh?* You're bad people! *Bad!*"

He did not hear the laughter from the next yard, nor his mother Eva-Marie's frantic footsteps approaching.

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"Huwey," she said. "Dammit, not again!" Eva-Marie grabbed the hose from the porch's edge and turned on the faucet, quickly dousing the flames—and then her protesting son. "You know those dolls aren't cheap." Phantom giggles called her attention toward the creaking fence at the yard's end; her niece's red head barely peered over laughter in those squinting green eyes. Of course. "Stephanie Vanessa Niles, *what* did you do this time?"

Huwey glowered. "Caught em bein bad."

"I'm talking to your cousin." Eva-Marie sighed and looked back to Stan, who balanced atop the crossbeam and relayed her Spock and McCoy theory. Eva-Marie frowned. She had always considered the pair as the extremes of Captain Kirk's inner turmoil, and supposed both interpretations were valid, which didn't bode well for the Captain, but certainly explained his many carnal—Eva-Marie shook her head, a frizzy brown lock escaping her orange bow. "Making your last day here count, aren't you?" She looked from Stan to the charred remains. "Another trip to Kristi's."

"Kristi's?" Stan leaped down, delighted. "Can I come too?"

Eva-Marie returned the hose to its tangled pile, switching off the faucet. "Stephanie, it's because of you that I keep having to go there."

Stan scampered forward. "Please?" She started hopping and the freckles around her nose seemed to shine with her exuberance. "Huwey always talks about it and I never got to go."

"And I'm sorry about that, but you really should be helping your

mommy pack."

Stan stopped hopping. "But she told me I could play today. Please?"

Eva-Marie looked into her niece's eyes: wide and pleading like a homeless kitten's. She briefly massaged her temples. "Well, seeing as how you're leaving tomorrow...but you'll need shoes. Kristi may not care, but I do." She turned to her son. "And you: shoes *and* a shirt. Chop-chop."

Huwey bolted inside. "Yeah! We're gonna the Redemption Center!"

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At a strip mall dubbed the Horace Avenue Haven, they wove through chatting, stroller-pushing mothers and roller-skating kids; stared captivated at a bored, golden boa balanced on a branch in the window of Familiar Friends; and passed elderly couples who gazed at the changing world from benches outside Maggie's Salon. Finally they reached a little store near the edge with a nondescript sign in the window proclaiming: "Dow's Gift World."

Noticing it as she approached, Stan said, "Isn't here called the demption Center?"

"That's Huwey's name for it," her aunt replied. "Every time we're here is usually to redeem coupons and such. Or exchange demolished toys."

Stan reddened.

A string of bells jangled in the doorway as they entered. Stan stopped and gawked as her aunt and cousin greeted the man behind the counter. His straight brown hair parted at the middle and draped to his shoulders, shrouding his face and beard; two long strings of many-colored beads drooped from his neck; and he wore wire-rimmed glasses with orange and yellow lenses. Was he genuine or acting? Her family had once visited a restaurant divided into six themed rooms, the staff dressed and acting accordingly; but this store's decoration didn't reflect its owner—it resembled a dentist's: smooth gray carpet, white walls, a light brown counter...and better, more recent toys. Everything was new and retained a crisp smell that Stan would forever associate with elementary school and unopened presents

Kristi grinned tranquilly at Eva-Marie, saying, "Hey momma, what's the haps?"

"Another pair of the damned," she said grimacing.

Kristi examine the tortured pair presented to him. "Huwey, Huwey, Huwey—you need to mellow out, little crawdad." Huwey idly kicked the floor.

Kristi then glanced toward Stan, paused and pursed his lips, before returning his attention to Eva-Marie.

Stan pulled from her pocket a bag of pomegranate seeds and sucked on a few while inspecting the store. In the corner opposite the counter she paused at a floor fan and listened to her voice vibrate through its mechanical wind: "aa'aa'aa'aa'aa." Then she focused on the aisles of toys. Aisle one was divided between infants' toys in one section, and girls' in the other, the various boxes creating an illusory pink radiance. Stan scorned other girls' captivation with these toys. All the dolls resembled Barbies, which blended with each other and reminded Stan of a scary film she's seen at the drive-in, where robots killed the mother and took her place. The other two aisles were more satisfying, radiating blue and devoted to boys: action figures and vehicles in the center, sporting equipment and games just beyond. Stan beamed. Even within one toy line there was plenty of distinctive characters (though no girls, outside of Princess Leia). The first aisle signified kids who sat and did things for others; the next two, those doing for themselves.

As Stan coveted a Vinnie Barbarino figure from "Welcome Back, Kotter," Kristi appeared, grabbed a Spock and a McCoy, and removed the pair from their containers. Stan squinted at Kristi while he concealed the figures under his shirt. The man pause and regarded her in turn; twice he opened his mouth to utter something, but hesitated, pursing his lips. Then he reached to the top shelf, pulled down a tattered magic set, and returned to the counter, beads rattling and bell-bottomed corduroys fwiffing.

"And what else should Santa think about?" Eva-Marie asked Huwey.

"A doll from that *Alien* movie Aunt Lili just took us to."

Kristi returned behind the counter, placing the new figures just behind the magic set—beyond Huwey's sight. Kristi then converted the set into a mini-stage with worn, purple cardboard walls, and faded orange curtains. He curled his long locks behind his ears and then revealed a black plastic wand with a flourish, saying, "The condemned, if you please." Eva-Marie presented the charred souls. Kristi pulled a cord behind the stage, opening the curtains; he place the remains therein. He waved his wand, recited some babble, and closed the curtains. He pushed the detritus into a pocket within the box and put forth their replacements. He reopened the curtains.

Even without her vantage, Stan still would have recognized the

subterfuge—her earliest memories contained Daddy explaining how he had pulled a coin from her ear. And Huwey was older than her; older people were supposed to know more. Yet he stood entranced by the trickery, wide-eyed with a vague grin.

"All the bad is cast away," Kristi said. "And all the good, returned." He grinned at Huwey and leaned forward, figures in hand. "Not a blemish on them, m'man. Remember: I'm the only one who'll fix these."

Eva-Marie smiled at Huwey. "What do you say to Uncle Kristi?"

"Thank you Uncle Kristi," Huwey said, reverently fondling his virgin toys.

Stan felt like slapping her forehead—or Huwey's.

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At home Stan paced her barren bedroom; over the past week, she had steadily packed her room, spending most of the time playing until gaining stern admonition from her mother. Now her arms crossed, she wanted to unpack and thrash her toys. She was leaving, but Huwey got the present. Just like always. And whatever she wanted—Baron Karza, the Giant Dragun Shogun Warrior, or the Radio Controlled Jawa Sandcrawler—Huwey always got, and destroyed. And got again. She kicked at the packed boxes near the bedroom door until her mother appeared.

"You okay, squirt?" Lili said, and Stan ceased her box abuse.

"Yeah."

Stan sulked to her naked bed. Lili joined her on the edge.

"Watcha thinking?"

Stan shrugged, listening to the transistor radio on her dresser. The Rolling Stones hooted "Sympathy for the Devil." Stan bounced her heels against the bed frame, in time with the song's bongos. Lili hand-combed her daughter's hair straight.

Stan said, "If Skylab crashes on us can I keep the steering wheel?"

"I don't see why not. But I'm sure there are much more fascinating little gimcracks on board that the scientists like to toy around with." Lili rubbed Stan's back. "Under a cloud about leaving Appleton?" (A shrug.) "Poor Stan. We're always forcing new adventures on you. But it's going to pay off up here." Lili tapped Stan's forehead. "You're a smart little girl and someday you'll be a big brain in the world."

After a moment, Stan asked, "Why are we moving again?"

Her mother inhaled a long, low breath, held it, let it out in an equally prolonged, almost silent sigh, and Stan felt like she was six months old again, in her earliest memory: mesmerized by a smooth azure field hovering above an undulating aqua, which had breathed in a slow, hissing, nostrilly way; and for several warm, steady breaths those pleasurable, beckoning blues had glowed almost tangibly, filling her with a desire—even now—to reach out and touch them.

Finally, Lili said, "Sometimes other places make you more welcome than where you're at."

"We gonna move again next year?"

"Philadelphia should do for a while. Did you miss Jade City much this past year?"

"Just Cal and Buddy and them."

"You got along okay here with Huwey and your friends?"

A nod then: "Did you have lots of things when you were like me?"

"Well, lots and lots of books."

"That why you're a liberryan?"

Lili gazed off, eyes like distant sky. She said, "Necessity, actually. Anyway." She patted Stan's knee and got up. "Before your bath, better hop next door and make sure Huwey doesn't have anything more of yours. There won't be time tomorrow." She smiled, then zipped down the hall.

Stan sat for several minutes wishing time would cease. Three of her figures indeed lay captive in Huwey's dominion of destruction, but she was loath to witness his glory while knowing her own meager possessions remained boxed. Could they possibly be left behind? No. They would feel betrayed: abandoned by someone trusted, left in an abusive giant's clutches—foreigners among a mangled horde. If only she could find something supercool in the Skylab wreckage, something better than a steering wheel. Like a laser gun—yeah! Then she could zap Huwey's things, saying, "Pooh on you, Hugh!" Of course, if Skylab crushed *Huwey's* room, then Stan could laugh behind her treasures saying, "Ha—now *I'm* the Master!"

Eventually, though, her dread became unbearable, and Stan trudged to Huwey's, feeling as leaden as the time she and Ramen had faced the Principal for playing 'show me' behind the backstop.

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"I don't got none a your toys," Huwey said, mining his left nostril for a glorious nugget that, upon examination, he deemed digestible. He sat on a large chair across from his bed.

"Member you borrowed Horshack and you wanted Great Mazinga and the KISS Demon to fight with your Dragun?"

"Those're yours?"

"*Yeah* they're mine."

Huwey began searching, and Stan wondered if he could indeed locate her figures: his floor was a battlefield of crayon drawings, dolls, assorted Lego bricks, and variously butchered army men; and the bed was chaos, with coloring books and pens jumbled over its surface, and the top sheet crunched at the end. As Huwey rummaged under his bed's far side, Stan hid a Greedo in her jeans lining; she concealed a Jawa in her right shoe when Huwey moved to the closet. Surely he wouldn't miss either figure. But as Huwey's hunt protracted, Stan became aware of an oily film on the figures, steadily infesting her arch and belly. When Huwey began tearing through his dresser, Stan quickly returned the toys to the floor, briskly rubbing her contaminated foot on the carpet. Finally, Huwey leaned under the near side of his bed.

"Ah-ha!" He extracted the Demon and Mazinga, raising them triumphantly. "That's that." He handed the toys over.

"What about Horshack?"

Huwey just gaped. "Huh?"

"My Horshack, remember?"

"That's mine."

"Is not."

"Uh-huh!"

"Is not!"

Huwey nearly vibrated with fury. "You're tryina steal my toys!"

"Am not!"

"Are too!"

"I wouldn't steal your slimy toys!"

"My—my toys ain't slimy!"

"Yeah they are! And you slimied mine!" Stan slung the KISS Demon at him.

Eva-Marie appeared. "*What* do you think you're doing?"

Huwey yelled "Stan's stealing my things" as Stan said "He won't gimme my Horshack!"

"You're just tryina steal if from me like Mazinga and Demon."

A wide-eyed Stan apprised her aunt. "Mommy got those for me and put them under the X-mas tree and Daddy gave me Horshack the day he went away and they've got my star, see?" She displayed her toys' soles; a red pen had distinctly marked each.

"I know, I know, it's all right." Eva-Marie raised her voice. "Eugene Hugh Michaels, if you want to continue getting toys from me or Santa, you had better be nice. Understood?" Huwey hushed immediately, but wrath consumed his eyes. "Now, I recall you playing with that doll, Huwey. Why don't you check your closet?"

Sullen, Huwey ransacked his closet, eventually excavating the disputed figure. He thrust it at Stan, who accepted it, relieved yet reluctant—slime coated the face and stained the jacket.

"Now, play nice. I have to go help next door." Eva-Marie nodded and went.

Huwey plopped to the floor, arms crossed. Stan felt momentarily transported back to her room from minutes before.

She sat, nearby her cousin.

"Um, hey Huwey?"

"Nh."

"Hey, why don't you keep Demon, so when I come back—"

"No." Huwey grabbed a figure and began pounding it into the carpet.

"But I know you really like him."

"Don't want him. He's a demon anyway."

Stan tried more talk; Huwey remained silent. She positioned her KISS Demon to sit between them; Huwey merely stared back, zombie-like. Stan looked away, regarding the sky blue walls and their various painted-on clouds. With the little fan oscillating from Huwey's bedside, Stan felt like they were alone atop a mountain. She privately berated her concern for Huwey: it felt wrong, filling her with a simmering confusion—like she desperately needed to be someplace else without knowing where.

Nearby movement refocused Stan's attention: Huwey kneeling before her. Placing his hands on her shoulders, Huwey gently forced Stan on her

back, still regarding her with those zombie eyes. She let out a brief, nervous giggle. Then Huwey curled atop her, his knees at her sides, hands tight on her upper arms. Stan could barely breathe under the bulk, and thought fleetingly, *He's switched how Mommy and Daddy do it.*

"Huwey?"

He was lost in a rhythm—downward thrusting hips followed by quivering, squeezing knees—which Stan had often witnessed in relation to Huwey's giant teddy bear or pillow. The thrusting intensified. Stan's head throbbing so bad she felt it must explode. Against her belly, Stan could feel the hardness of his thing—Ramen and them called it a 'boner'—while toys dug into her back. She tried screaming but could only squeak through tears; and unable to inhale, Stan kicked and thrashed hard against Huwey's clutches. But nothing stopped him. She realized she would soon be a spirit watching Huwey forge toward climax. Would he burn her body when finished or just leave it among his kingdom's scattered treasure?

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And Huwey convulsed to conclusion, a gentle throb soothing his body.

Then opened his eyes to the sound of gasped breaths.

And was upended as Stan—breathing hard and weeping like asthma kids at school—wriggled her way from beneath him.

Then Huwey beheld his domain and cousin in confusion.

And was revolted by what he saw: Stan, hair frazzled, eyes red and watery, face scrunched—ugly.

"You don't belong here," he glowered, then turned his back.

As Huwey went to his bed Stan stood, steadying herself, then gaped at her toys. In her failed thrashings for escape, Stan had kicked and broken her KISS Demon: beneath the fabric its left arm dangled from a crushed chest. Only fearless Great Mazinga had escaped this dungeon unscathed. As her tears welled Stan felt rage coil tight, from hear to throat.

"Pologize."

Huwey looked up. "Huh?"

"You say you're sorry."

"I didn't do nothin."

"You better pologize to me, or else."

"You're dumb. Always coming over and messing me up and being

dumb and stuff." Huwey hopped from his bed and stalked his domain. "I'm not gonna pologize. You should pologize to me. Got em laughing at me at school. Laughing cause I don't have a house. All the other boys at school, they got houses, but I'm in this dumb duplex thing!"

As Huwey paced and pouted, Stan's gaze darted about the room. Over the past year, she had sought Huwey's company, for he possessed so much it was like he had hidden doorways to other worlds and could pull out any item at will. Now she wanted to shred the posters from his walls, to demolish the Lego castle in the corner, to topple the dresser with its array of armies—Huwey deserved none of it.

Stan began hurling every available toy at her cousin: G.I. Joes, Shoguns, Acroyears—they hit him in the shoulders the knees the forehead. Huwey ducked as best he could, but a Godzilla pelted him in the groin and he stumbled, knocking his fan to the floor, where it galed at the ceiling. Huwey cowered near his bed, whimpering; Stan advanced, snatching Stretch Armstrong from the floor to beat him: one two three four five hits to his head. Huwey began crying, from the clubbing and the nightmare towering over him: the toppled fan made his cousin's red hair a billowing inferno, and her freckles seemed to radiate from an internal blaze surpassed only by the rage searing from her eyes.

"I don't want your stupid toys," Stan screamed. "I don't want nothing of yours! You can have them! I *don't want* them!"

Huwey wailed. Stan hurled the toy down at him and it smacked him in the face. The boy looked up and Stan recognized a new hatred festering with the fear and pain in his eyes—they were enemies forever, now. Scowling, she gathered her mangled, liberated toys tight to her chest, turned, and shunned Huwey's kingdom.

Stupid Huwey, wanting all his stupid junk, c'z he can't make any friends. Should call him Juvie like they did at school c'z they said he'll be going to Juvienull Hall someday. Put Juvie in the Retards Room till then c'z that's what he is a stupid retard who's gonna grow up and live in Juvienull Hall! Juvie Juvie Juvie Juvie Juvie Juvie! I'm better than him any stupid day! I'm gonna be seven, gonna be in third! I had friends here and friends before and I'll have em in Philadelphia, too! LOTS!

Amber Garcia

Angela

She held the orange in her hands, not saying anything. One bony, pale finger delicately rubbing the side of the fruit, as if to conjure a genie. She turns her head to the window, her gray eyes dully taking in the outside picture of a dead town in winter. She doesn't want you to know what she's thinking but wants to believe you're interested and I'm not.

"It's coming soon," she said. I pretend not to hear because if I do, she'll think I care. "Any minute now."

She sets the orange on the table and looks right at me, giving me that steely gaze shes's so fond of. The one that tricks you into thinking she doesn't care either.

"I suppose," I said. I turn back to the small black words on the page, pretending to know what's going on in the world. I can hear her breathing; heavy, like that of an invalid. We don't dare speak of things that reveal ourselves to others, allowing them to snatch it out of the fire and never give it back.

"I guess I should go wait for it." She waits for my response and receives silence. *You may have knowing eyes and a bitter tongue but I fight back with nothing, the most powerful tool of all.*

She's still waiting. I'm still reading the same sentence. She turns again to the window, her eyes watery and defeated. "I'd like to believe you give a damn." She waits, breathing hard as if I owe her something.

"You're allowed to place your faith in anything you want," I said, each word perfectly pronounced, deliberately hushing the whistle of the incoming train. On board, the passengers look out windows to get a better view of the morning's decay.

What a wonderful day to be alive.

Still looking at me, her eyes penetrate my skull, creating quiet rustling in my brain. She bites down on her lip, the dry red gathering in the cracks. She picks her hat from the table and places it on her head, her hand shaking. Grabbing her purse, she stands up, smoothing the wrinkles from her skirt, pulling it down from the crease of her stomach.

"You'll never, will you?" she asks. I stop looking at the words; she's caught me off guard. "You'll never know."

My heart starts pounding so hard I'm afraid if I open my mouth, it'll

spill out with all my guts. Standing there, she's beautiful, the scuffs on her good shoes and her lips with the deep red cracks. Her eyes are liquid, telling the truth about who she really is, who she could never say out loud. Her bony fingers desperately clutching her purse and gripped her tattered suitcase so hard the cut knuckles are white.

She's all dressed up, ready for the train to come and take her away from me. Whisk her off to some place she's not needed. *No Stay don't let go of me* but I can't say it because I'll die if I do.

She gives a little gasp, the sound of blowing out a birthday candle, and turns to the door. All I can do is watch as her fingers stumble with the knob, delaying the animal in its panic surge away from death. She's running, the sunlight catching her dark curls, the cold stinging her white legs. She can't look back, if she looks back she'll see me dying. Her skin is a porcelain flash, her head bobbing like a broken doll.

"Angie!" I scream, the words slipping from my dry fingers onto the floor. I step on the papers as I start to rise from my coma, my feet clumsily trying to catch up. She's too far ahead, running too fast for me to catch up. "Angie, I see you, Angie, stop!"

Still running, hugging her suitcase like the unborn, tears blinding her escape. The sound of the whistle is deafening, the familiar screaming of brakes. She turns, her eyes bleeding black mascara, her slight smile an empty slash. Her hands drop to her sides, the suitcase bouncing. I can reach her, I can reach her if I keep seeing her.

"Angie," I breathe, my fingers brushing her arm. Her dark lashes flutter.

The suitcase drops before the train hits, its possessions scattered like broken marbles. A shabby spray of white cotton panties and talcum powder, tattered pages and iridescent rosary beads. One tube of deep red lipstick, rolling back and forth. I drop to my knees, the train wheels a hypnotic blur of steel novocain, numbing my fingers clutching its patch of blue sweater.

Susan Pasquale

Fall Leaves

After a long day of work, pain, hurt, lies, and deciet, Susan could finally upwind. The dinner had been cooked and served. The dishes had been washed and put away. The kids' homework had been struggled with and completed. The little darlings had been bathed and with stories read they were put to bed. At long last Susan was alone—alone with her own thoughts and plans for the future. The weekend was only a day away and Susan combed through the would-be schedule for her eight-year-old daughter's sleep-over friend—lunch at the mall then some window shopping. Susan hoped window shopping would be enough. But as she settled down closing her eyes to welcome sleep, her mind fluttered to what she really wanted to do this weekend.

She would honk the horn twice to let him know she was at the curb. Francisco hadn't needed much urging to convince him a trip to the "Quaking Aspens" was necessary, especially this time of year. She had simply sent him a note stating that "the season is changing and the leaves are falling. Let's take a drive and enjoy it together." He was dressed in gray sweats, and shoes that had seen mountain hiking before. Susan was wearing black slacks, pantyhose, a gray sweat shirt, and, of course, one and one-half inch heels. She was not prepared to hike anywhere. Her idea of a hike was a paved bike path through an urban park. He climbed into her battleship gray car and off they went in search of quiet trees with color changing leaves of gold and red.

As she drove he played with the radio, searching for his favorite station. Susan was so glad for his company it didn't matter what music was in the background. She drove toward the hills hoping she remembered which highway would get her to where she thought she wanted to go. She wasn't certain of the highway, but knew the drive would do them both good simply because they were leaving their small town with its small minded people behind, far behind.

They talked about everything under the sun as they cruised along at 70-miles-per-hour. Susan had always liked to drive fast but the battleship could only do about 80 knots. They laughed and kidded each other about exercising their escape clause to get out of town. Both were glad to be making it so.

The air was still very cool and the morning dew was still on the

plants, shrubs, and ground. The trees were still very green with all their leaves. The two small aspens were hardly enough to be a landmark on the map and yet they were there. The leaves on the two trees had started to change but were not as impressive as "Quaking Aspens" implies.

Francisco was out of the car and sprinting toward the woods as soon as Susan stopped the car. He was clearly in his element here and Susan would do nothing to defray him. Today is a day of rest, solitude, and comfort. Nothing would dampen their spirits. He longed to run among the trees and Susan was happy to have him do exactly that. She knew he would return after flexing his body and becoming one with the forest.

Susan took a blanket and picnic basket from the trunk and treaded carefully to a flattish part of the terrain. As she walked, she soaked in the lush beauty. So many shades of green. The trees were a different hue from each other and a very different color from the ground covering. The sun transformed the entire area into a vision of tranquility. Each sight and sound brought pleasure and a sense of ease. Exactly what they needed. Susan found the flattish area she was seeking and spread the blanket. What a perfect day. The morning was still cool, but the day promised to warm within the restraints set by a mid November calendar.

Susan was content to sit and feel the forest around her. She was not really one for hiking and exploring. She would do so if asked, but today she was content to sit and feel the green around her.

Francisco returned after a bit of exploring on his own. They were quite pleased to be individuals and not tied to each other. He returned with enthusiasm and wild flowers. Susan welcomed both. Francisco poured the coffee from the thermos. They greeted the warmth of the liquid and enjoyed the aroma. They laid on the blanket in silence, enjoying the sights and sounds. The birds sang their songs with all the pride any self-respecting bird could posses. The light breeze moved the leaves and the rustling gave the entire scene the perfect air of completion. They were each total and complete within themselves.

Nancy Edwards

Greek Night

Only days before, we had crossed the hills leading into the bottom of the great Central Valley, past Tehachapi, past the soft hills of Keene, onto the edge of Arvin, then Edison Highway, and finally home to Bakersfield. It is June and the hills are filled with lush green grass and well-fed cattle. The trees are dark and often set apart at long intervals and we are reminded of the films we have seen of Africa, the Serengeti veldt, and the visual richness of the marriage of animal and natural plant life.

There are miles between places where people may dwell in the central California valley. Houses do not appear for many miles in the curvature of the winding roads which are covered by damp fog in the winter, even snow. But it is late spring, early summer now and there is nothing but plant and animal life, wildflowers lavender, yellow, blue, red, bunched into the grassy areas. Some people stop their cars to pick the blossoms, capturing the full moment of creation.

We are glad to be going home, away from the din of Las Vegas slot machines, cigarette and cigar smoke, the constant whine of the public address system which pages somebody's connection day and night as if you are waiting in an airport. Las Vegas is the terminal of choices, barterer of accessible vice, of overindulgence, disregard for limits; if Las Vegas were a woman, she would be a selfish, almost cruel, enticing and permissive entertaining part call girl, part priest. She would decree what is sacred, then break the vows in a deliberate, humiliating degradation of the human spirit—a spilling out of values, a selling out of one's soul for hedonic pleasure of the flanks. Then she would offer you conscience and redemption. Most of us are too much in awe to question divine intervention, faith, chance, and hope. We have to allow and protect our superstitions.

This is not meant disrespectfully or in a rage against faith. Las Vegas offers, takes, gives, makes you question existence. Some of us have roots, ties there. I am still bound to those who formed my youth and will always be. My friends from my junior high school days are still there—they are the clearest vision of many truths. We form a sisterhood and talk with humor and amazement about our teenage years, long before I re-enter as a tourist into the once designated home of my family. The tourist life balances at odd angles with the adolescent girl we remember who tried to both fit in and move away.

Finally, I moved away; now I try to fit in again, if only briefly.

We are home on Saturday night. We are glad to have our feet on our own carpet, not the dirty raucous liquor-stained hotel carpet. We are glad to put our heads on our own pillow and lather our bodies with the soap we choose, our own multi-colored towels and wash cloths, not the plain nondescript thief-proof plain towels of the hotel which no one wants. I lounge in my robe, assured that a knock on the door will not occur with a voice behind it: "housekeeping!" There is a freedom in being home, not having to consider the hotel and its demands. We don't have to "enjoy" its offerings anymore, cater to its dominance over us as if it were a date we are trying to impress. Now we choose our own hours, our own food, and on a balmy Saturday evening at 7:00, we go to the Greek Orthodox church to join in the Wine Festival.

We can park right by the church, amazingly enough, and buy tickets and walk right in. It is so easy, I feel as if this is part of someone's back yard. The scent of lamb, beef, freshly baked honey covered baklava, the sound of live perfectly tuned flawless Greek music, the train passing by only 100 feet away, the taste of fine wine—it is all so easy deliciously perfect on this day. I unwrap a freshly cooked Gyro filled with tender lamb and beef and tomatoes, hot from the grill, soft and hot with juices, and share it with my husband. I taste the chilled chardonnay and this is a moment to savor. The air is warm and the music carries the passion of the Greek culture as young girls in costumes dance to the carefully pulsed stanzas. It is a night unlike Las Vegas because sound has meaning here; food is done by careful hands who ask for God's guidance; and no one is out to numb himself against the life he has been given. I feel connected and that this day is important.

You would be right to ask, "Why is this better? Who brings you this joy? Is this excess sentimentality?" I think of Joseph Campbell describing the links of one culture, one philosophy, one spiritual relationship into another, one soul bleeding its edges into another soul. If there was something of the Greeks coming into that June 14th evening, something of the nurturing which the human soul craves, I did not fight against it; I let it happen and in the blackness of the night, the sound of the train only feet from us, the perfectly tuned instruments, the food mad by caring hands, I could see what the larger city, like Las Vegas, could never build, never capture. The feeling of being nurtured would always elude the theme hotels, the artificial lakes, the amuse

ment parks, the electronic slots, the belly swelling abundance of enormous buffets and VCR-sized steaks

It is on this night that I bathe my senses in the warm air sounds of summer life in the valley town where I live. My husband sits across from me with his baseball cap on, eating the beef kabobs and feta cheese and Greek olives. We are happy together. He comforts me in the darkness; he shines in the luminescence of the moon. A young woman in a low cut dress and tan skin comes by to light the small candles at each table. A large green vine with huge leaves sits on each table. We feel like we are at someone's home at the picnic tables. Our neighbors from nearly a decade ago come over to join us and soon we are talking about our common experiences. When they lived near us, people left their garage doors open and shared food and drink and themselves. Now all of us shut our doors to hold and protect and what we have, what we are. September 11th closed many doors

At the Bakersfield Symphony concert several years ago, a guest pianist played one of Chopin's pieces so beautifully, I suddenly felt myself crying. I was astounded by the inherent talent the performer had, how he had developed it, and the absolute perfection he had achieved in playing this lovely music. And of Chopin's piece—the artistry and conception were astounding. It was a defining moment in recognizing how greatness, not only lives on, but inspires other artists to further accomplish a life's goals.

That evening was a gift from God and I will treasure what was given to me. When I get home, my tennis shoes have been dripped by golden honey from the baklava—Greek honey. Call it a sign.

Artworks

Marisela Oropeza

Marisela Oropeza was born in Hammond, Indiana in September of 1979. She was raised by a single migrant mother. As a child, Marisela resided in Mexico and different parts of California; her travels exposed her to different types of cultural creative art works. She began painting with oils at the age of 17 on an on-and-off basis. It was not until 2004, when she re-enrolled at California State Bakersfield that she devoted her time painting with oils and working with other mediums, such as wood and clay. Since then, Marisela has produced vivid, imaginative and sophisticated art works which have been displayed in various galleries, cafes and restaurants in Bakersfield, Los Angeles, and Santa Maria. She currently attends Cal State Bakersfield and plans to pursue a teaching career in art.

Marisela Oropeza is the winner of the 2006 Orpheus Creative Achievement Award.



Sunflower



Danzad



Men At Work



Jazzen



Jazzni



Nude With Guitar



The Flutist



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