

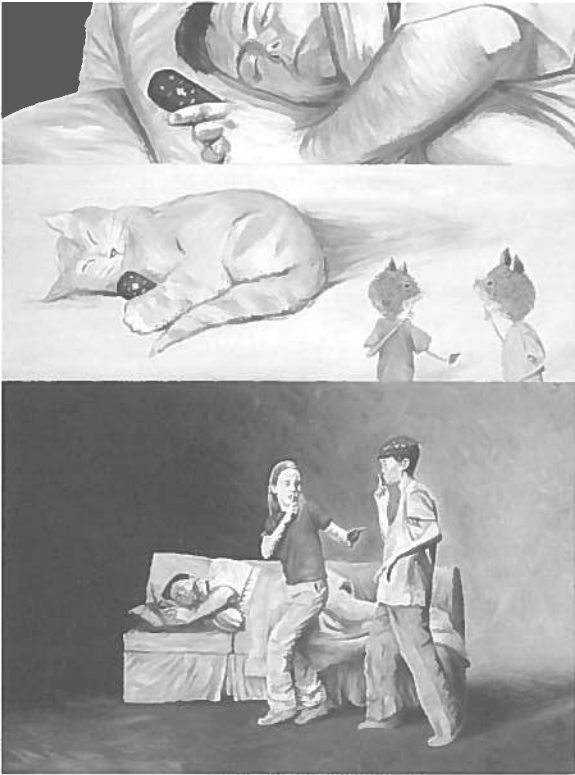
Hawaii
Review

60



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Hawaii Review



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Carrie Y. Takahata

**PLASTIC AND A FEW OTHER
THINGS THAT LAST FOREVER**

for Joshua

Four days now
your Gatorade bottle rimmed
with too-sweet-blue
liquid sits sticky
on my nightstand.

The half-burnt candle moved to make way
burdens my jewelry box and morning
watch-getting. I know it's time
to throw out this bottle
let go

but every night since
metal blinds whack
at my windows,
I slide under two comforters and

remember that night
when I knew higher
as if the air thinned
and I could no longer breathe with ease;

when desire
discovered depth in me
overthrew music
loud enough to continue beating
long after the club had closed;

when tenderness

drained fear slow
made it all right to abandon
in the middle of that dance floor
lit only by neon circles,
bodies, and I
took a fist
full of your shirt
pulled you down
into me.

Carrie Y. Takahata

WHAT I CARRY

The coffee shop could have been any
anywhere across the country but
we happened to sit there
in the middle of Honolulu
each of us cupped
by the vinyl seats
and cold, dry air. Unaware
of our on-going conversation
I mentally unpack each
of the seven suitcases I always
carry with me into such
relationships. I pause
proud of my
contents; reach into each opened case
caress my pasts: bag one is always
Josh, I remember
he's the one I should have loved
but left for the contents of bag number two
who liked me more
attached to Josh;
Steve, he's three
because I left on Tuesday for a business trip
and returned on Wednesday to surprise him
in the middle of
two other women; number four and five
I reserve for Ed
who asked me to postpone

my move in with him
until after
his girl
from Japan
left; number six
I show with pride,
the seven-year relationship
which carried me through my twenties
only for Dave to finally admit
that he could never love me
or any woman
for that matter. This
I open up for my newest companion to see
challenge him to choose a favorite
and when he refuses
when he fails,
I open up bag number seven
move two one-night stands to the left
a handful of “I’ll call you’s” to the right
and place this memory right there in the middle,
secure.

Terry J. Mulert

IN THE RAFTERS OF FRIENDS

I see a straw and shoestring nest
outside the only door
a river of mountain
excuses itself
downhill

the empty pastures are not empty
but full of emptiness

Terry J. Mulert

FACING CHALK

White moon
roams olive
branch

by morning
it evaporates
to bone

the oxcart
squeaks
and then

James Doyle

THE VANDAL

I sleep through the days to be alert
when it counts, when night cements the gaps,

when its black sealant insulates my eyes
and muffles my tool belt so I can work,

so I can pry the shingles loose, one by one,
or break the opaque glass into children's rings,

or drain the anti-freeze into the drinking bowl
of the dog. I wear gloves so the work I leave

is my only fingerprint, the monogram of all
that stands between me and a transparent world.

If I were a lesser craftsman, I would steal
fire and pass it out from door to door. But

that would be a tawdry gift that transforms
rather than gives. I prefer to etch exquisite

imperfections into the memory, engrave the mirror
with hairline cracks that could be bars or horizons.

James Doyle

CLEANING THE GRAVES

One summer I worked in a cemetery.
Minimum wage. No experience necessary.

But it helped to be fussy, willing
to follow the slightest wind around

with a dustpan and rake. A grave
is too small to be cluttered

with discarded things, broken branches like
dowsing rods that permanently point down.

Neatness must be considered as important
to the dead as the Last Judgment.

And a lot more immediate. Sensual.
Every week the wilted flowers

I carted off to a mass grave
of their own could be measured in tonnage

according to the terminally rusted scales
of my back. It didn't take very long

after the relatives' visits for the bouquets
they left to droop so low it looked

as if the stems were trying to burrow back
underground. But the dead wouldn't have it.

They liked their flowers fresh.
Just as they liked constant moisture

to slake the parched brush that paints
bones whiter and whiter. So I kept

the sprinklers on high. In a cemetery
the grass is always greener because,

after all, it is the other side.
There is no whining, no exhalation

of great sighs from consecrated ground. Only
the warmth of the afternoon sun

along your body when you lie down
during a work break for a short nap

and oversleep into autumn, piles of leaves
circling you like monuments or guardians.

Mario Milosevic

TO SEE THE FUTURE

Time is
a forest
of thin trees
we walk through
tripping over
bare roots
and reaching
for the
safety of
swaying
trunks.
In the deep
interior,
where light
has melted
away to
a cool
memory,
there are
only the
dark lines,
identical
struts in
every
direction.
We pause
to seek our

bearings.
We move
in wide
circles
returning
to the same
leaves
waving
in the
soft wind
touching our
faces.

Mario Milosevic

THE BEST HOUR

The house of 11 a.m.
rises on the foundation
of the morning
with its blind bustling
of getting ready.

For the day
is still ahead of you
at that hour.
Look out the windows
of 11 a.m. and see the
landscape spread out in a
freshness of green frosting.
No footprints there yet.
Anything is still possible
at 11 a.m.

A day of nothing still seems
like a good idea.
Or build a world.
It is your choice.
At 11 a.m. we are edge dwellers
seeking the next adventure.
Hand poised over the door knob
about to welcome a gust of air
blowing over us like waking up.

Tom C. Hunley

**FOUND POEM: SORRY TO SAY
“NO THANK YOU”**

Dear Madam or Sir:

Poet:

Submitter:

We hate form rejection slips, too.

Thanks
for letting us see your
work.
for your interest.
for the submission.
for the interesting submission.

Not this time. I'm sorry,
but we're stocked for at least
the next two years, or more.
but none of these fit with our current issue.

We were so impressed with the high quality of the
manuscripts we received, we're convinced that many of
them are sure to find publishers in the near future.
We salute you for continuing to write in a world that provides
so many almost convincing reasons not to.
Unfortunately, we are returning your submission unread.
Our next two issues are presently editorially complete.

I liked the Buk poem, though—it was a close call.
In our estimation, your style is appropriate for publication.
Please do submit work again. Our present theme is
“Family: Tradition & Responsibility.”
You have a knack for “following through” by staying with the
unfurling stages of transformation; very gritty, very nice.
Your work is honest. Please send us more later.

They don't quite fit in but they do
have a nice humorous quality.
Your poems seem to me to be a little
self-consciously poetic.
Would you be interested in a subscription swap
for the magazine you edit?
We urge you to buy and read at least one issue.
Your piece was really interesting but we're not accepting
anything but subscriptions.

Very nice. Sorry, but we no longer publish.
We are on the fritz. Not dead, just on hiatus.
We're not doing another issue. I bought a bike instead!
I'm glad you're “out there.”
It was good to hear from you. These aren't right for us.
Good luck in finding homes for your work.

Tom C. Hunley

TO BE READ UNDERWATER

The hazard of trying to save someone
from drowning is this: lungs filled
with air and mind filled with panic,
the drowning person will
struggle to pull you under.

Maybe there's a song
that only the drowning can hear
that says *It's not fair*
that I'm underwater
looking at you
 looking at me
 looking like this.

Or maybe there are beautiful visions
that only the drowning can see,
and the drowning person,
pulling you under, is trying to save you.

And what if I confessed that I don't know
whether I'm swimming and you're drowning,
or vice versa? What then?
Would you take my hand?
Would you give me yours?

Karen Glenn

BEATITUDE

Blessed are the trash collectors,
for they don't ask questions.
They just put it all in the truck—
the junked jewelry, rotting rubbers,
the brushes without handles,
the blackened cassoulet.
They tell no one
about your irredeemable poetry,
torn negligees, singed feathers,
musk or melted wax.
They have their own sorrows,
no need to borrow yours. Hope hangs
like stench over your garbage, trailing
clouds of longing, the ashes of hurt and forgiveness,
the cigarette butts of another ludicrous love.
Oh, Lord, have mercy on the garbagemen,
for they must haul it all away.

Karen Glenn

VIEWPOINT

At the Colliding Rivers Viewpoint,
the North Umqua and the Little River meet.
A summer drought has left the water level low.
Two teen-age girls stare out at the spot
where this year's collision is merely a fizzle
of tiny white waves. One turns to the other.
"Let's go," she says. "We're never
gonna meet any guys
here."

Karen Glenn

PORCUPINES

Porcupines, the ranger says,
don't shoot their quills.
The needles are protection
to keep their predators at bay.
The porcupine is not your enemy.

But don't get to empathizing
with a lonely, prickly one
and offer him a little hug.
Those barbs don't differentiate.
The porcupine is not your friend.

Karen Glenn

THE VAMPIRE TAKES HIS GIRLFRIEND'S FAMILY TO DINNER

It's the best place in town,
and Vlad wears black, of course,
to match his lank, black hair.
A diamond stud shines in each ear;
his face is night-light white.
His girlfriend Vi is black-haired, too.
Her sister Sal is all confused.
Vi used to be a blond like her. Sal smooths
her shell-pink shirt, her paisley skirt.
She blinks at Vlad. Is he a rock star?
Vi won't say one damn word
about how and where they met.

The parents are wondering just where
they went wrong. First Vi saw that biker,
then a poet, then a juggler, then a mime.
They watch in shock as Vlad and veggie Vi
finish off some bloody steaks.
Still Dad trots out a smile when Vlad
retrieves the check. Tentative, Vi's mom
leans in to kiss him on the cheek.
Unlike the last one, this guy talks
although he looks a bit too old for Vi.

Karen Glenn

Oh, what the hell, Mom thinks. So what
if his teeth are just a little long!
At least he has some cash.
Maybe Vi *should* go with him
to Transylvania (wherever that is). The girl's
not getting younger after all.

Patricia Murphy

TUBA CITY, PHONE CALL

Our mothers back east want Navajo jewelry for birthdays,
giftsmas.

They remark on the craft, collect the compliments.

My mother calls to rave about the latest turquoise.

After, I get a message from a student.

She is stuck on the rez.

A death in the family.

She will miss our appointment.

She is writing a paper about bars near her dry county.

Men lost in drink, women lost.

She is gentle, heavy, half white.

Her hair is died brown, but back in school it was golden.

Her first assignment described a playground fight.

They yelled *cracker*, so she yelled *savage*.

Now she is stuck somewhere in between.

On this campus alone there are 50,000
more people than she has ever known.

I call her back, I tell her,

I am sorry about our appointment.

I am sorry about her paper.

I am sorry about her loss.

Patricia Murphy

AUGUST

The neighbor's poppies have turned dusty.
The day's end breathes this, another storm,
down wind of the river.
Doors slam shut
reminding us how much we hear when they are open.

Yesterday was the same storm, the same sealing,
the house crowned with the wind's dark tiara.
My mother called to say she saw on TV
the brown shadow of Phoenix,
forty stories tall,
opaque in its rushing.

This is what it means to be close to the sky.
What was here is now gone.
This evening we inhale the dry skin of the desert,
bed down in the belly of the cloud.

Richard N. Bentley

INTERVIEW

Your résumé
Has it all down
Every goofup,
Indiscretion,
Peccadillo

The Interviewer
Smiles ecstatically,
Thrilled that your life
Is so degraded,
So ordinary,

Loathsome as cigarette
Ends on a sidewalk, gum
Stuck to a theater
Seat. All those tedious
Hours of eating pretzels

Scratching, farting, snipping
Your toenails, flossing your
Teeth: It's all there in black
And white, written down in
Bulleted lines, like verse.

Richard N. Bentley

You pound the man's desk
"That's not me! You have
The wrong résumé!"
He looks impassive,
Stifles a yawn, blinks.

At last he speaks,
"You're real! You're hired!"
And they send you,
Screaming over
To Personnel.

Richard N. Bentley

LIKE A GHOST

I give you the moon, I give you the
Yellowing circle that grins and the
Waxball that snowballs and flowers.
I give you the moonlight that lies on the
Lake and this window and
You say, "Thank you, but for
The quarrelsome clarities of the long view,
Or the abrogated evening, or
Too little provision, or
Too much observance,
We can no longer say."
I give you the moon, I
Want you to have this and
You say, "We love a thing
that pulls and releases, an
Object that is not inviolate like
Some austere sister nun. No
We love a thing that draws,
Lets loose, lets drift, lets be,
That everyone praises for being what it is in the dark."
Still I give you the moon.
This too is yours
This belongs to you.

Richard N. Bentley

MALL WALKING

Seniors sign
The lounge ledger and
We're off
Past
Buy-Brite, K-Mart
Penny's, Friendly's

Too. At Ground
Round
A left, a left at Skeeze video, vast
The Media Play cairn
The smell of the
Pretzel. We

Know only the
Weatherless
Dayless clatter
Christmas ding.

Michael Murray

THREE HAIKU FROM THE STONEFISH PETTING TANK

Kidney Stone Removal (I): Procedure

Spread your ureter,
kid. Blood in your boxers is
highly probable.

Kidney Stone Removal (II): Stent

Long, thin tube; kidney
to penis. No ureter
scars from stone fragments.

Kidney Stone Removal (III): Passing

Heavy fluid in-
take. Water, juice. Vicodin
milkshake. Here they come.

Michael Murray

APHASIA

He didn't stutter at recess, playing
dodgeball and kickball,
telling jokes, telling stories; always
the team captain shouting instruction.
But in the classroom it was different.
He wasn't good at it.
He couldn't read out loud, for instance,
from a textbook, his own homework,
without stumbling, turning red,
letting the silence between words build
to the point she was forced to call on someone else
to finish it off for him.
One afternoon,

he was whispering to someone
in the back of the room
while Mrs. Sweeney was trying to teach.
She called his name.
She made him stand up.
She walked over to him.
She reprimanded him in front of us.
She asked him what had been so important.
He tried.
He tried to explain it, the situation,
but he was standing alone, we were all watching him,
and he only produced one word, then
repeated it twice in a gush, as though

leaping ahead in time a few moments
to a point when he believed
he'd coherently answered her once,
she had deemed his excuse unworthy,
and he was desperately forming his rebuttal.
But his repetition of the word "but"
was as far as he got.
In that pause, in the silence
as he fumbled around looking for more words to string
together,
Mrs. Sweeney leaned forward, inclined her head,
and echoed his confused repetition back in his face:

She mimicked his Goddamn stutter.
I don't know how old a person would have to be
to understand the magnitude of that act,
but I knew for a fact if I'd done that to someone,
and my mother'd caught wind of it,
she would have slapped my face.
Perhaps she didn't mean to do it.
Perhaps it just slipped out of her mouth
before she could stop it.
But she didn't try to take it back, she didn't try to apologize.
He stood there,
whatever words he might have eventually landed on
submerged in the wake of her imitation.

He sat down.
She stared at him a moment longer
before resuming class.
I couldn't hear her then, I couldn't hear anything she said.
I was looking at him.
He began to flip through the text on his desk,
not stopping anywhere in particular,
just turning pages, his eyes avoiding us,
his eyes skimming strands of words

he couldn't conquer; would never conquer
in an environment of humiliation;
would never conquer
until his teacher realized he needed help
she wasn't equipped to provide;
a woman whom he might have shocked
with some obscenity, profanity, blasphemy,
had he been able to master
even one or two other sounds at that moment.

When he got to the end of the text
he slapped the back cover closed.
He turned the book over, face up on his desk.
He kept his eyes lowered.
He went through it again.

Michael Murray

THE FIRST BLACK BEAR

These fish right here, freshwater fish,
flamboyant stylists of art and architecture,
content and perhaps a bit cocky
with the knowledge they inhabit a mountain stream
nearly inaccessible to their enemies.
Fishermen are not plentiful here;
natural predators are few and far between.
These fish are fish of leisure.
These fish have time on their hands.
Which is not to say they lack direction or goals,
these fish. They are concerned with maintaining
a safe and wet environment for their children;
there's talk of a cultural center two inlets down;
communication, transportation;
don't think this impossible:
fish cities rise from the water everyday.

I know a man who releases each fish he catches.
He respects nature but loves the sport.
He's reached a compromise with himself.
He hikes into and out of the mountains,
packs his feces in plastic bags or Tupperware,
returns home with it out of fear his shit will contaminate
the forest or the streams, spread
a disease from which the plants and animals are ill-
suited to defend themselves. Some creatures respect him,
but only a black bear or two have ever thanked him.

In truth, he doesn't care so few have mentioned it.

I know another man who's of a different breed altogether.
A man who doesn't like the idea of getting too far away
from his front room, the refrigerator, television;
a man who doesn't really care for anything
he can't understand immediately:

the first black bear he comes upon in the woods is
the first black bear he's going to do his best to kill,
no questions asked, because talking or otherwise,
these animals are maneaters,
and no one can tell me differently.

People have called him ignorant, simple,
but when he's hungry he eats, and when he's thirsty he drinks.
He shits where he will and lets people be damned.
Speaking of which, I hear they're going to build one.
Take all that freshwater away from the little fish kingdom.
In truth, a fucking tragedy.

No cultural center. No theater complex. No fishing.

Rick Piet

A.M./P.M.

I want to work, work, and work.
The more I work, the more I'll learn;
the more I learn, the more I'll grow;
the more I grow, the further I'll go;
the further I go, the more my father I'll be;
more my father means higher price;
higher price means lower scruples;
lower scruples means harder work;
harder work means more power;

more power means more responsibility;
more responsibility means less freedom;
less freedom will reveal less happiness;
less happiness will make me stop, drop,
and start all over again in the morning.

Rick Piet

FAMILY TREE

When a white
leaf cartwheels
across the yard,
birch limbs
waver,
vibrations torture
the roots. We call
the wind
temperamental,
tolerating
it like a crazy
older brother.
We avert
our eyes
and fail to buffer
ourselves against
the velocity
of regret.

Rick Piet

SURFEIT

I plow through
a wave of words
bleached foam
of punctuation
swollen breeze
of a paragraph
I surf through language
with a belly full
of mistakes

Clinton John Frakes

TALKING TO PLANTS

Don Juan said, "Try talking nonsense."
If this doesn't work, dig a small hole
next to the plant and drop in a coin or shell
(stay away from all forms of fire four days previous).
Present yourself as one cool and damp.
Sit a while.
When it is dark, conjure the thought of bones, any bones.
If possible, disembody your mouth
and hand it over. No need to sing now—that can wait.
Share a story from each one your digits
and promise something small toward the end.
The last story will be of your right thumb.
That's the one you put in the hole.
Hum through your chest
and look for the words of the plant.
And they are not to be understood—
but gathered like folds of cloth.
Wrap yourself in what was said.

Clinton John Frakes

I KILLED JOHNNY ROTTEN

Johnny Rotten stomped onto my porch
like an angry collector,
jackbooted and drunk.
I hid all the liquor and valuables,
convinced my friends to turn him away,
but he forced his way in while I pretended to sleep—
insisted on fighting me.
He had a rash on his face,
smelled like an infection,
found my Wild Turkey
from under my work jacket.
He jounced and taunted like a fool,
spilling bourbon on my good rug.
I leapt up and kicked him hard in the nuts.
He tried to pull a knife as he rolled on the floor.
I knew I'd have to kill him.
Roommates and neighbors ran up to interfere,
rolled shopping carts at us.
Two party girls in tight skirts
tried to distract us by sticking
their round asses out,
but we were set on blood.
"I'm only trying to help you meet your demons,"
he said, holding his stomach and waving the blade.
This gave me pause for only a second,
then I dealt him a roundhouse kick
right out the window,

Clinton John Frakes

three floors to the sidewalk—
all blood and leather down there
by the hydrant.
Drink my fucking whiskey,
Rotten, why don't you?

Clinton John Frakes

DESIRE #22

Things that don't make sense:
a stiletto heel,
ashes,
refractions of ice in glass.
Have another sip.
There,
now go ahead and
break.

In my day—
why in my day I could
throw a strawberry through
a battleship,
wrestle abstruse
mathematics and precious folios.

The propensity to arrange our
environment is often mistaken for—
“Well,” she said,
“let me put it this way:
there is a rip in the center of space
and all this is springing forth.”
White dwarves, red giants,
anti-matter and all that shit.

Clinton John Frakes

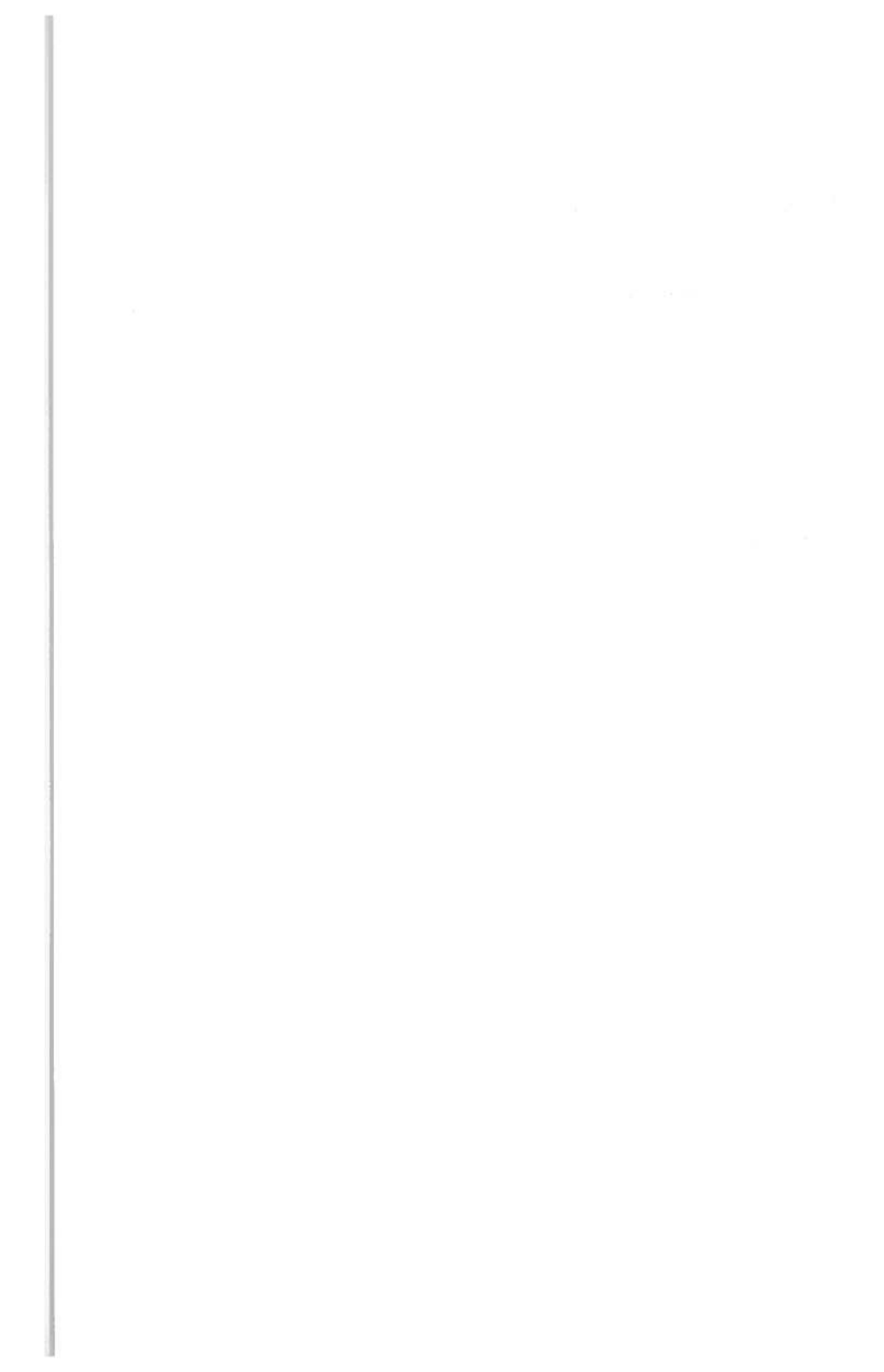
After a stumbling moment I reconnected
as a grain of tea in the red shift,
like returning from sea
bearded and foul,
expecting a kiss.

Clinton John Frakes

**WHILE THE COALS
ARE STILL HOT**

(something is about to be lost)

Pyramid building is dead:
lost to time & jungle,
the mathematicians of Maya,
folded camp and fled.
Serpent angels of Coba
will read your aura now for food—
just look for the bent & chafing hat
weaving silently through Chinatown.
To what end was so much stone hammered?
What of the pollens and balms?
The regulars at the Green Dragon Lounge
slam their glasses on the bar
bragging their genealogies.





*America in Stereo:
The Prostitute, The Soulmate, The Infidel,
and The Corpse*

Doug Olson
oil on masonite, 2002



*America in Stereo:
The Surgeon, The Scrub Nurse, The Lab Tech,
and The Postal Worker*

Doug Olson
oil on masonite, 2002



*America in Stereo:
The President, The Vice-President, The Maitre D',
and The Undertaker*

Doug Olson
oil on masonite, 2002



*America in Stereo:
The Priest, The Pedophile, The Trick-Or-Treater,
and The Wannabe*

Doug Olson
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*America in Stereo:
The Pilot, The Flight Attendant, The Terrorist,
and The Chauffer*

Doug Olson
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*America in Stereo:
The Laborer, The Horticulturalist, The Gang Member,
and The Trailor Trash*

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*America in Stereo:
The Drug Dealer, The Sadomasochist, The Rockstar,
and The Groupie*

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*America in Stereo:
The MVP, The Bench Warmer, The Cheerleader,
and The Scalper*

Doug Olson
oil on masonite, 2002

Kirby Wright

THE HANGING TREE

I reached through the fence line, spun the valve, and then stuck my hand under the trough's nozzle. The water was cool. I watched a fly struggle to climb the side of what had been Gramma's bathtub. The tub had been a gift from her husband Chipper, long before they had running water at the ranch. They'd divorced soon after the first pipes brought fresh water to Hale Kia. Because Chipper had no money and nowhere to go, Gramma gave him a life estate on the banks of the mangrove swamp.

The mares stood under a mango tree out in the pasture. They were waiting for the mangoes to fall. Sandy and Cody faced off and began nibbling one other's neck—that's how they reached the hard places. Whenever stallions trespassed, the mares rubbed their rumps against the smooth wire.

I leaned over the top strand. The steel flexed down and tightened to accept me. I felt good hanging there, with just my toes touching the ground.

The wire was warm against my bare chest and I looked up and followed the red scar of road cutting along the ridge. I could see the hunters' orange truck crawling down through the pines like a ladybug through sour grass. It was already through the third gate. Only two gates remained. Gramma had once again leased her mountain to the cattle rancher. The lease continued on even though my father was the new owner. Water spilled over the lip of the trough so I spun the valve back and the water eased off. I was glad my father wasn't with me because he loved pointing out examples of "plain laziness." He

expected my older brother Ben and me to be perpetual motion machines on the ranch. His favorite thing to do was compare us to himself when he was a boy. According to him, we were tenderfoots who couldn't "hold a candle" to his accomplishments.

I wondered if the hunters could see me in the pasture. They'd come early for the keys and I'd recognized Moki from earlier expeditions. He'd promised to never shoot a doe because Gramma was worried the wild deer were disappearing. Moki had returned with a headless and gutted deer that he claimed was a spike. When Gramma'd asked why he bothered butchering it in the mountains, Moki said it made packing it down easier. She'd refused his offer to give her venison steaks.

"That's no spike," Gramma had said when Moki returned to his truck.

"Hope he chokes on the meat," Ben had replied.

I walked through the long blades of pili grass back to the house. My father was inside the house waiting because Moki had the keys to the gates and he wanted the keys back. Although Hale Kia was his, he wanted to maintain the illusion that Gramma still owned it because she commanded respect on the east end. He equated that respect to fear because the locals knew Gramma had an itchy trigger finger. He also realized that his half-brother Tommy had friends on Moloka'i and, if they knew about the change in ownership, they'd tell Tommy. My father wanted decades to pass before his brother found out.

Ben was on the front lawn wrestling Gramma's poi dogs. Ben took after my mother in looks—he had blond hair, green eyes, and refined features. I had the dark complexion and wide nose of my hapa haole father. My mother wasn't around because she always spent summers in her hometown of Boston. The dogs took turns charging him and he grabbed their snouts and flipped them over on their backs like turtles. We were juniors at Punahou School in Honolulu and Ben had started hanging out with a group of rebels who hated everything our school stood for. Ben kept a .22 rifle in his room. He'd use it for crazy things like firing at the KGMB traffic helicopter from our

backyard. Then Ben bought a new gun with more fire power for Moloka'i—a .257 rifle with a sniper scope.

The smallest poi dog left Ben and barked at me. I held out my hand and, after the dog sniffed me, it wagged its tail.

"These dogs hate me," I told Ben.

Ben hunched over like my father. "Now, Jeffrey," he said, "did you water those horses?"

"The orders increase whenever Mom leaves," I said.

"He's a five star General," Ben replied.

One of the poi dogs stood on its hind legs and pawed Ben's swim trunks. Ben flipped the dog over and started drumming on his belly. "This honay's gotta fat rice belly," he said in his falsetto voice. The dog wagged its tail.

I saw my father standing behind the screen door. He was looking at the mountains through a pair of binoculars. He wore a V-neck with holes and wrinkled khaki shorts. There was a permanent hunch in his back and he always looked like he was scowling, even when he was laughing.

"Moki's coming down," I told Ben.

Ben rubbed the dog's ears. "Sounded like a war up there."

"Think they got anything?"

"Who knows," Ben said. "Let's report to the General."

We walked up the knoll and stood outside the screen door while my father adjusted the focus.

"Second gate?" Ben asked.

My father didn't answer. His hair was salt-and-pepper and he kept it greased back with Yardley's hair cream that smelled like rotting fish. His face was covered with stubble. I was taller than him by two inches when he slouched and I knew I could take him in a fight. But fighting him would only prove I was stronger; Gramma would say I'd attacked the man who had given me everything.

"Dad?" Ben asked again.

"What."

"Have they passed the second gate?"

A rooster crowed from deep in the valley.

My father lowered the binoculars. His eyes were red. "Get inside," he said.

I followed Ben in and the screen door closed behind us. Smoke clung to the ceiling. My father sat down on his Lazy Boy and put his feet up on the foot rest. He watched a football game on TV and started drinking Miller's High Life out of a bottle. Water droplets from the bottle beaded up on the leather armrest. "God damn Forty-Niners," he said.

Gramma sat at the head of the dining table. The hunch in her back was even more pronounced than my father's. She smoked through a chrome holder and flicked ashes into a can with an Indian Pudding label. Her lauhala hat sloped over her forehead. A copy of *TV Guide* was open in front of her with shows circled in pencil. Each summer she escaped more and more into television, as if the world portrayed on that tiny screen was more important than the world around her. She no longer rolled the bails of lauhala because it was too painful and I was doing most the cooking. But her imagination kept humming right along—she kept seeing my mother and Ben in commercials despite my pleadings to the contrary.

"Why wouldn't Ben tell you he's on TV?" I had asked her.

"Cause he's a sneak."

"What about my mother?"

"She's sneaky too."

On TV, the Dallas Cowboys intercepted the ball and ran it all the way back for a touchdown. Ben cheered.

"That Brodie's the bunk," Gramma said.

"Cowboys all the way," Ben said.

"We wait," Gramma said, "we wonda."

"It's still preseason," my father reminded Ben.

Ben sat down at the table, a chair away from Gramma. "The Forty-Niners are mahus."

"Why mahus?" Gramma asked.

"Have to be to live in San Francisco," Ben replied.

I sat between Gramma and Ben. I searched for the orange truck through the window. I wanted to be part of the waiting. I

figured that Gramma let Moki hunt because she knew if she didn't, he would just end up poaching. An angry Moki might burn down her mountain house or poison the horses with barley meant for rats. It was better to have a friend on the east end than an enemy, especially if that friend was Hawaiian.

"Jeffrey," my father said, "how many shots did you hear?"

"Six or seven."

"Really?"

"I think so."

"Don't 'think so'," Gramma scolded. "Learn to 'know so'."

"I heard at least nine," Ben said.

My father finished his beer and belched. "Gramma says twenty."

Gramma crossed her legs. She had on denims. "Warned 'em not ta shoot any does."

"Don't worry, Gramma," I said. "They got nothing."

"Buncha duds," Ben said.

"Why duds?" she asked him.

"Why would they take so many shots?"

My father chuckled. "Ben's gotta point there, Mother."

Gramma shook her head. "Time will tell."

My father looked at the TV, then at the screen door, then back at the TV. He peeled the label off his empty bottle and rolled it up into a ball. "Why in hell didn't they punt?" he asked. He dropped the balled up Miller's label into the bottle and jammed the bent cap over the bottle's mouth.

Gramma plucked her Chesterfield off its holder and crushed it against the bottom of the can. "A good hunta needs only one shot," she said.

"What if they kill a lady goat?" I asked.

"Goats are okay," my father said.

"What if, what if," Gramma said. "What if the rabbit hadn't stopped?"

* * *

When the orange truck parked on the lawn, my father

opened the screen door. Ben and I followed him out. The poi dogs lifted their legs over the truck's wheels and sniffed at the tailgate. A tarp was pulled over the bed. The doors swung open and two men got out and stretched. They smelled like a day's work.

"Hello, Moki," my father said.

"Long time no see, Mista Gill," Moki answered. He wore red overalls and a puka shell necklace. His hair was gray and coarse. He placed his boot on the front bumper and tied the lace.

The other man wore a black tank top. His arms were red and stained with tattoos. He pulled out a rifle from behind the seat and slid the bolt action to check the chamber. He wore camouflage pants and a black cap with "Hanoi Hilton" embroidered in gold. An unlit cigarette hung from his lips like a fuse.

Gamma came outside. "Ya fullas have any luck?"

"A'ole, Brownie," Moki said and handed her a wire loop strung with keys. "Cades get all da luck."

Cades put his rifle back in the truck. He scratched a wooden match over the truck's roof and carried the flame to his mouth. He took a hit and blew smoke through his nose. I recognized him as the haole hunter we'd once caught poaching. He pretended not to know us.

My father glanced back and forth between Moki and Cades. It was as if he was watching them from a distance, as if he still held the binoculars.

Cades walked to the tailgate and signaled Moki with his eyes. They lifted the tarp.

Ben climbed up on the bumper. I joined him and looked into the truck's bed. A pair of eyes stared back. There were horns that looked like they were made of velvet—I touched one and it felt spongy. The hide was dark brown with white splotches and blood hardened on the steel bed. I couldn't find the bullet hole.

"Where'd you shoot 'im?" Ben asked Cades.

"In the heart."

“Skin ’im hea, Brownie?” Moki asked.

Cades took off his cap and put it on backwards. “You folks take da hind quarta,” he offered.

Gramma put her hands on her hips. She looked up at the mountain then back at the men. “Use that big ironwood nea’ the dump. Ya know the one, Moki.”

“Short on rope,” said Cades.

“My mo’opuna’ll run some ova,” she said. “C’mon, Ben.”

“Jeff’ll do it,” Ben said.

My father looked at Ben. “You heard your grandmother.”

Ben followed Gramma inside.

Moki and Cades climbed back into the truck. I watched my father walk over to a hala tree next to the house—he urinated on its trunk. Moki drove the orange truck toward the hanging tree.

* * *

I knew the hanging tree. It grew beside the dump. Once, instead of fishing, I’d climbed the old ironwood and swung from its branches. I’d felt the scars from the ropes. Now I stood under the tree watching the truck back up over the ironwood needles. The ground was a shifting puzzle of light and shadow. I could hear the ocean, but I couldn’t see it. I stood under the ironwood as the truck pulled up to Chipper’s shack and then backed up.

Ben jogged across the lawn with three coils of rope and a Buck knife with a ten-inch blade. The poi dogs jogged beside him and he joined me under the ironwood. “We get meatsies,” he said.

“Ever see that guy Cades before?” I asked.

“Yeah,” he said. “Fuckin’ poacher.”

The truck stopped and the poi dogs crowded the tailgate. Ben handed Moki the rope and Moki tied slipknots around the hooves. Cades threw the ends of the rope over the branches.

My father stood on the grass, back in the light. “Need any help?” he asked.

“No need,” said Moki.

Cades nodded. "Dirty work."

Moki and Cades hoisted the buck up and out of the truck. There was a snapping sound as the head twisted down and the body swayed. The tips of the horns made patterns in the needles. The men pulled out their skinning knives and the poi dogs gathered under the carcass. Moki began cutting the hide at the hooves. Cades did the same. They'd already gutted the buck in the mountains, but blood still fell. Flies gathered. The dogs licked the blood off the needles and one growled as he licked. Ben shaved the blond hairs off his forearm with the Buck knife.

"Going to mount that head?" my father asked.

"No can, Mista Gill," said Moki. "Stay one velvet horn."

"He's a beaut," my father continued.

Cades held his cigarette in the corner of his mouth and stared at my father. Then he pulled the hide down over the meat.

"Cut da hind quarta," Moki told Ben.

Ben raised the Buck knife and started sawing away at the meat. Blood trickled down the blade and splattered. A dog licked the blood off Ben's feet.

My father crossed his arms. He shifted his weight from one foot to the other as they butchered the animal.

"Like hunt?" Moki asked Ben.

"Sure," Ben said. "I love venison soaked in soy sauce."

"Ben's a good shot," my father said.

"Next time," Cades said, "we'll take your boy."

"Would you like that, Ben?" my father asked.

"I can go myself."

Cades slipped his knife into the chest cavity and carved through the cartilage. "What kinda gun you got?" he asked Ben.

"A .257 Remington."

Cades nodded. "That's a good gun."

Ben had killed his first buck with the .257 but it only had one horn and that horn was small. He'd fired from the mountain house to the opposite ridge and I helped him pack it down

through the valley. Gramma had laughed when she saw what she called Ben's "one horn trophy." She'd told him he would never shoot a buck as big as the one she shot in the gardenia grove next to her mountain house.

Ben hacked through the hind quarter. Some of the meat fell and the dogs gobbled it up. "This blade couldn't cut butter," he said.

"Mine's like a razor," Cades said and handed him his knife.

Ben took the knife and resumed his cutting. "Now this is more like it," he said.

More flies smelled the blood and they came in swarms. Moki twirled the end of a rope, but they kept coming. The flies were blue and it became a frenzy of wings. The maggots fell like snow.

"Cheesus," my father said.

"No worry, Mista Gill," Moki said. "We wash da meat."

"I'll get a hose," my father volunteered. He walked over to Chipper's water pipe next to the jasmine. There was no sign of Chipper and my father didn't knock on his door to ask permission. The blue tarp roof of Chipper's garage fluttered in the breeze.

My father struggled dragging the hose. Somehow I couldn't see him as the boy he'd claimed to be. He'd bragged about taming wild horses in the high country, hiking to find the source of the falls, and killing a hammerhead shark with a single thrust of a steel fence post. Then something hit my face—it was wet and it squirmed down my cheek. I flung it off and headed for Kainalu Stream.

"Jeffrey," my father called. "Help me out!"

I pretended not to hear. I jogged through the sour grass along the bank. The grass stung my legs and I followed a narrow path until I reached the ocean. I cupped my hands where the water was clear and washed my face. I put my feet in and felt clean again.

I wondered what the men were talking about. My father was probably running me down. "That kid's a damn sissy," I

imagined him saying. Then it would get back to Gramma and I'd never hear the end of it. Even my mother would know when she returned from Boston.

"Hey, Jeff!" Ben called. He ran along the path with his Buck knife and jumped down on the sand. "How 'bout that Cades?"

"Acts like he doesn't know us," I said.

"I'd like to gut 'im."

"Did you see the General dragging that hose?" I asked.

Ben washed his knife in the ocean. "He's an okole kala kua'aina," he laughed. His teeth were white.

He was still that young.

Tara Wray

MINI TREMBLE FITS

“You were telling me about the tornado. The one where you lost your goat.”

The room is stale but filled with flowers, blue and purple ones I have brought today. May hasn't been outside in eight years. My friend May, eighty-six-years old, resident of the Thomas J. Hardy Home for the Old, the last time she was outside was when the building was bug-bombed. For cockroaches. In the kitchen. “Happy Time Outdoors Day” was how the home billed it: “A Picnic on the Lawn.” It was old people in bonnets on blankets wetting themselves. And there was no lunch. That was the summer I quit working there.

“Yes. My goat. Her name was Olivia and she was the most beautiful goat in the world. She would come when I called her, you know? O—li—via, I would sing. And she would come.”

When May gets animated her eyes sort of bounce in place for a few minutes, and it's a great feeling for her, I can tell, to remember something clearly in her mind. Then she's back to the stare—the stare into the ceiling and beams, the stare that goes through the insulation, up to the leaves and into the sky. She smiles when she reaches forty-thousand feet.

“That day it was hot from sunup to sundown, and not just hot, but humid, too. The roof got blown off the barn,” she cranes her neck to make sure I am listening. “And that's when Olivia *disappeared*.”

Olivia was May's first-born daughter. She was birthed in the cow barn and died in the hay. I gleaned this bit of information from her records. I've never once seen her family in the

flesh, though she insists they visit every Tuesday. I don't argue this with her. I never argue.

"You have a visitor, May," I say in a whisper. She is sleeping, resting with her eyes open. "Irene is here to see you."

She stirs in a slow deliberate way, moving only her eyes to greet Irene, nothing more. May's friend looks ridiculous with her giant purple comb stuck in her giant blue perm, its just like a clown circus tiara. She looks like a huge bruise, only she smiles so much you can't possibly think ill of her.

"Come on May," she says, "the ladies are expecting you for tea."

Ladies tea is on Friday, and it is Tuesday, but I date not tell Irene for fear that she will impale me with her giant purple comb. May won't go anyway.

"I was telling this nice young lady a story," she says, sputtering to find my name. She always forgets my name.

"Lily," I make up. I am a new visitor every time.

"Yes, I was telling Lily here a story and I think she should like to hear the end of it."

"May," Irene says, "do you think birdies end up in heaven, too? I really wouldn't like to be there without them. I used to kill Robins because they were too brown for the green of Spring. I need to make up for that up, you know?"

Irene shuffles the weight between her feet and looks like she's late for ringside duties. She doesn't wait for a response. She's out the door conversing with herself before May says anything more.

"Oh well then," she shrugs as she goes, "the ladies are expecting me. I must go. And I must catch up with Dorothy. Oh, I do wonder how she is."

"Dorothy's been dead since Christmas," my friend says, laughing a little.

May is slowly rising up in bed; she looks soft and fragile, like a big wrinkled baby; she's all diapers and gums as she struggles with her weight figuring out what happens if she

moves an arm here or a leg there. She's learning how to balance all over again. She's working on upright. Vertical. A different direction than death. Though sometimes she makes me tired.

"Darn," she says "this bed. I think they have it set on one speed. Slow."

I feel a bit more at ease when May makes an effort to sit up. She does not do this for everyone, not for anyone really, and I feel like I am entertaining with the Queen when it happens.

"I would really like a cigarette right now. I really would," she says defiantly, though she does not smoke.

"You know I can't let you smoke in the building. We can go outside if you like"

"No," she says, and she has that stare, that forty-thousand foot stare.

She says, "You know . . ."

And I do not rush her.

"I think I am ready to go."

"Outside?" I say.

I am quietly ecstatic. I can only imagine what it's been like for her to be inside for almost a decade. The same walls with the same color of paint, the same Christmas cards year after year, one from me, one from the home. The picture of Jesus she got when she moved in.

"No. That's not what I'd like. . . ."

I'm curious.

"I've been thinking. And what it is I've been thinking about Olivia, is that I think it would only be fair if you were to kill me, right here, right now. It would only be fair, Olivia, if that were to happen."

I ring the nurse for meds.

"I think she's delusional," I tell them, only she is just sitting there with nothing on her face but a smile. She does not say a word and the nurse eyes me suspiciously, then leaves.

May is shift for her age, I realize this when she proudly swipes a tissue and disposes of two red pills from under her tongue. Most residents here are too lethargic to manage such a

feat. I am secretly pleased.

“No more,” she shakes her head to me. “No. More.”

“We were talking about your goat,” I say.

“No. We were talking about you, Olivia, my dear daughter.”

Little waves of panic shift up and down my body. I have to pee.

“I killed you, you know? Smothered you with your placenta. Before you even made a single peep. Not one peep. Jules didn’t even know I was pregnant. Didn’t want to know.”

May looks at the wall and picks up the telephone, though it is not ringing.

“She was not my goat, she was my daughter,” she says. And then again, louder: “She was not my goat! She was my daughter!”

The receiver is wet with snot as I take it from her. She is trembling. Bouts like this are frequent, and it seems she forever sees things through a dense wall of dark, a wall thick and fat like mud. And then she is quiet and the moment is over.

“I think Wheel of Fortune is on,” I tell her.

“The Lord is calling me,” she says. “My bags are packed. You just have to help me go.”

She points at her small brown suitcase. It is indeed packed and ready to go, a box of travel Kleenex perching atop a yellow Sunday sweater.

I stand and turn on the air conditioner. It is warm air and I say: “Dammit, where are those maintenance men when you need them?”

“Olivia,” she says, and she is calm, her face relaxed. “There is a bottle of pills on the bathroom counter. Bring them to me, then we shall have our stroll.”

The old woman is careful and precise laying down rows of little blue and purple pills end to end around her lunch tray.

“That should be just about right,” she tells me. “Some water, if you please.”

The nurses could be here within seconds. If I just push the

little red button on the bed, just seconds, they could be here.

“Do you want ice,” I say, thinking I’ve bought some time.
“I want you to come over here so I can tell you how much I love you. That’s all I want.”

Her hand is colder than I expected and so small. All her bones and all her veins form a little skeletal freeway that she wraps around my flesh.

“I am sorry, darling Olivia. So sorry. As sorry as a mother could ever be.”

I fill her glass almost to the top and put a bendy straw through the plastic lid.

“We will be together very soon,” she says.

Five of the pills are gone, three purples and two blues and she’s beginning to look like Irene, all purple and blue.

“I am just going to take a lovely little nap now. When I am through we shall take that stroll.”

Then she says, “Tara,” very quietly and very deliberately, “thank you.”

Funny. She’s never called me by my name before.

May is silent.

Connie Harrington

THE KEEPER OF MORTANDAD CANYON

He says we are all soldiers now, that he cannot leave. Two years ago he said it was because of the fire, three years before that he came home and exclaimed, "TA-50 is mine!" I should know better than to bring up leaving Los Alamos. He looks just beyond me at these times, somewhere left of my face to a middle distance all his own, somewhere between me and the kitchen wall we painted last summer. His blue eyes have gone nearly gray, they peer from behind thicker lenses now and, as he mutters something about living downstream of Oak Ridge, or next to Rocky Flats, I find myself looking at his forearms and thinking he has become more hairy. I sometimes wonder if he has more hair, if the texture has changed, grown more wiry, or if I imagined all this the day he asked me to call him Robert instead of Bob. He is saying something about duty now, and I would ask to whom or what, but the ice cubes are crashing into the tray and any words of mine would only tumble and slide and be sucked away by the vacuum into which he speaks. And so I look out the window toward the Jemez Mountains, shrouded by summer clouds much too black for this early in the day, and remember that he is essentially kind, Brian loves him, and he still comes home to me each night. And perhaps someday he will leave, because he is also a man who is chased by discontent, a man who always wishes for the season opposite. I know this. I have been married to him for ninety-seven seasons.

I am no saint. Within a year after we moved to Los Alamos,

he with his new doctorate in chemical engineering, me with my tired high school teaching certificate, his words began to sink below the level of my desire to hear, like steely marbles spilling out of his mouth and bouncing across the kitchen table, and me obliviously snapping at them with my fingernail until they shot off the edge, rolled around the chair legs, and came to rest in a silent heap at our feet. In that first year his voice changed from the many pitches of possibility to the quiet monotone of a man steeped in the murky culture of secrets that is Los Alamos National Laboratory. He could sketch for me the picture of his days only in vague silhouette, pencil drawings that could be easily erased or smudged, or painted away. His was a ghostly language of shape detached from place, a detailed description of shadow. Technical Area 50. I alternately pictured it pentagonal or changing form like a cumulus cloud floating somewhere above lab grounds. Was it next to a hexagonal TA-54 within a triangular Area G, did it have on it a metal outbuilding that was unbearably hot in summer, did anyone ever draw it on a map? Or perhaps it was less real, some nebulous ball of gas hovering above TA-35, or a soupy pit of barium 140, tritium, beryllium, and a thousand other ingredients, the names of which would spike his conversations like the bottle of sloe gin we tossed into the punch bowl at our high school prom. By the time he explained that TA-50 is a radioactive liquid treatment plant, into which flow underground pipes streaming with radionuclides and chemicals from all across the lab's forty square miles, and out of which each year spill eight million gallons of waste into Mortandad Canyon, I no longer cared.

But this morning his clothes cause me to care, steel-toed boots instead of black oxfords, worn jeans in place of navy chinos, faded blue work shirt for a crisp, maroon button-down, no tie. Every three months he spends his day collecting water and soil samples from a well near the bottom of the canyon, and every three months I spend my day picturing him cascading over the canyon ledge, or accidentally pitching himself into the wellhead and falling a thousand feet into a bottomless pool

seething with uranium. And this morning I can add a lightning strike to his fate; the sky is darkening, the day seems in reverse. The sound of his boots in the hallway and the creak of the opening door mercifully call me back from the abyss, and I find myself admiring the muscle below his rolled-up sleeve as he carries his toolbox outside. He is leaving unusually early this morning, and kisses me as he wipes his brow and grumbles something about the swamp cooler not working in the high humidity. The season is always wrong.

Ephemeral. That is how Robert described the main drainage channel that once ran with water and carved Mortandad Canyon. Snowmelt and runoff flow through the upper canyon for a few days in spring, but the streambed is essentially dry, save the discharge from TA-50 which, Robert swore, was caught in three sediment traps near the bottom of the canyon and never left lab grounds. But that was before the Cerro Grande fire swept through our lives, up the canyon and into the mountain, before tall pines and thick brush that once held back mud and floods were turned to ash. Now the bare hills are covered in straw wattles, the stream banks with rock and wire mesh. Grass seed is glued to naked slopes, and fallen trees are stacked sideways, all to stop waters of some unknown season from rushing through a dry canyon stream, swallowing every strange molecule in its path, and breaking in waves across the ten miles southeast to San Ildefonso Pueblo, as it races toward the Rio Grande. Ephemeral, he says. I see him pause as he opens the car door. He turns around and I wave, but he is pointing at the Jemez, and we both cast our eyes toward the menacing darkness building above the mountain, the foothills where we camped each summer still bare and blackened from the fire.

Brian twists in his bed and moans softly in the next room, and I try to close the front door quietly so as to have an hour of peace. He will be disappointed Robert left so early today but, really, that is too complicated a feeling for Brian to have. What he will miss is Robert patiently undoing the knot of sheets that

bunched around his ankles during the night, rubbing his feet and legs as they dangle aimlessly over the side of the bed, guiding him into his chair, taking him to the bathroom. Brian is nineteen years old and loved, but I am no saint. Within five months of his birth, and after countless meetings with neonatologists and geneticists, I sat at breakfast one morning, looked out upon the mountain, and told myself he should have been my third miscarriage instead of our first child. There would be no playful swipes at colorful mobiles above his crib, no first word, no wobbling on two feet at the coffee table, our outstretched hands ready to catch him. There would be no first step. Instead, there would be strangers in our home helping him do what he would never do. And when he would sleep, we would sit across the kitchen table late into the night planning not for some bright boy's college tuition but for our son's most elementary care, committing ourselves not to teaching him right from wrong, or how to ride a bike or drive a car, but to outliving him. No, I am no saint. I cannot stand that my son still drools. But I forgive my husband for the years of silent blame, for believing that certain failures can only belong to a mother, not to him, and not to strange substances that float on the air and seep through the water of a small town he cannot leave. And I stay alive, and keep my promise to my son.

My hour of solitude is reduced to twenty minutes, as a tremendous clap of thunder wakes Brian. A severe thunderstorm warning flashes across the bottom of the television screen, while Brian cries in the next room. Just as I calm him, the phone rings. It is the young mother from across the street, asking if I have looked out my window lately. She is still new to this town, has not yet learned that the secrecy upon which the lab stands is anchored by a privacy that permeates the whole town, that you do not call your neighbor to discuss your children, or ask them to look out the window. Instead, you attend the office Christmas party, and send out a hundred Christmas cards. You say hello in the grocery store, and wave at the man next door as you mow the lawn. And, while you send flowers

and attend the crowded memorial service for a retired colleague of your husband, you never go to his widow's house afterward. My neighbor has learned nothing of this. She is talking about a tornado that hit her Texas town when she was ten years old, and something about her grandmother, as I cross to the window. I have lived here twenty-five years. It does not rain in the morning. The sky is as black as the day the town was evacuated during the fire.

Our neighborhood was spared that night, as we watched Los Alamos burn from the television in my sister's Santa Fe home. Robert paced the living room for hours, his frantic eyes darting from the television to the picture window framing the orange glow in the northwest sky, his uneasy voice spilling into the cell phone pressed to his ear, fragments of conversation reverberating off the walls into our astounded silence. While he spoke of contaminated runoff, floods of some other season, I privately imagined an entire town in ash, the lab a pool of molten secrets, TA-50 nothing but a scrap of charred paper floating on a breeze, maybe just a stench left in the air. While Robert spoke of sediment traps and monitoring wells, of great waters coursing through the channels of Mortandad Canyon, I imagined a great exodus of the newly homeless and jobless, with me leading the way out. Instead, I found myself a month later in a Santa Fe bar with the new history teacher, checking my watch between glasses of wine, and sliding the candlestick in smooth, slow circles around our darkened corner table. And, while the one thing did not lead to the other, I spent the rest of that summer imagining waking each morning in his small adobe house nestled among the cottonwoods in Tesuque, while my fellow townspeople moved into FEMA trailers looking out upon the charred and barren slopes of the Jemez Mountains.

I am no saint, but neither is Robert a soldier. We have stayed for his career, sometimes we stayed just for money. We stayed because a promotion made TA-50 his, and him, the keeper of Mortandad Canyon. Then we stayed because of a fire that should have made anyone leave. And now he says we stay

to keep radioactive dust from hands of a new enemy, that we are soldiers in some new war. "Hypocrite," I think, but do not say. "Some soldier you are, you whose father, proud member of that near-deified generation, bought your way into the National Guard while my brother and cousins slogged through mud up to their thighs and swatted at bloodsucking mosquitoes, Vietcong bullets flying mercifully past their heads and lodging in trees behind them, or maybe in heads of other boys. You're no soldier."

What I say, sardonically, is, "The only enemy you'll ever face, Robert, is a bad flood."

And now I would take it back, if I could. Rain has fallen in sheets all day, and it was hours ago when I last saw through the deluge to my neighbor's house across the street. She is probably hugging her two frightened children, making them sandwiches, maybe trying to call her mother in Texas. Water is rushing over the curb and stands halfway up our lawn. It moves toward the door, which is fighting the fiercest wind I have ever heard. Brian cried most of the day, and the lightning knocked out our electricity and telephone. As I snap fresh batteries into the radio, I notice the kitchen window is leaking. The water collects in small pools on the sill and cascades over the ledge, casting a shadowy stain onto the newly painted wall from last summer, and splashes to the floor in silent puddles around my feet. I light a candle and nervously move it in waxing circles about the kitchen table, and watch the flame's wavering reflection in the window. The dark has calmed Brian, and I am grateful for his company. He cannot picture Robert anywhere but here, he has never seen TA-50, or Mortandad Canyon with its traps and wells, or its ephemeral stream that empties into the Rio Grande.

It is ten o'clock. The radio announcer reported more than three hours ago that rescuers were searching for two men swept away in a flood in one of the canyons that cuts through the lab. There are eight such canyons, and I need not let my mind wander to any one in particular. The mudslides are clearly keeping

many people from returning home on time tonight. When Robert finally pulls into our driveway, he will see the still burning candle flickering in the kitchen window. He will walk through the open door, kiss me, and say, "Unbelievable!" After he removes his wet boots, he will peek into Brian's room and find him sleeping peacefully, and will quietly straighten the front wheels of his chair, pull the blanket over his bare feet, and brush his hand lightly across his forehead. He will slowly shut Brian's door and tiptoe to our bedroom, where he will find the clean T-shirt, sweatpants, and socks I set out for him earlier this evening. The softness of the old cotton will feel warm against his chilled skin, and only then will he know how long this day has been, and how tired he has become. But his pace will quicken as he walks down the hallway, and smells the black bean soup I made after the electricity came back on. And, as I fill the soup bowls and pour the glasses of wine, he will look out the window and talk about a cross-country ski trip next winter, still two seasons away.

Kate Benson

THE REST OF MY LIFE

The day I move in with Cliff is the day after the mayflies hatch, and the air outside is white and alive with them as we coast slowly up the driveway. His house, through the pale haze, looks strange and looming and somehow smaller than I remember it, but I decide it must be the bugs, the massive and cloudy view. Thousands of them, millions it seems, flutter in aimless circles and dash themselves against the windshield.

"Kamikaze insects," I observe, and Cliff smiles. The wrinkles at the corners of his eyes deepen into bursts.

"Maybe they're just blind," he says. He pops the trunk and reaches for the door handle: "Just watch you don't swallow one." And we run for the house, lips pursed and eyes squinted against a flurry of wings.

Inside, things are suddenly still. I breathe through my mouth, set my suitcase gently down beside the door. Cliff pulls a mayfly off my shoulder and looks at me for a long, uncomfortably quiet moment, and now that I'm here, now that this is certain, the air around us seems hot and stale and throbbing with the pulse of some sudden uncertainty: *Now what. Now what.* Like a heartbeat. A new growth, rootless and mysterious, springing up between us.

Now what.

But it fades. We both smile, hesitating, laugh a little. "Welcome home," he says finally and puts his good arm around me. He cups my stomach, which in the past few weeks has started to puff out like rising dough. For a while, we stand at the window and watch the air outside heave with life, flicker, dance,

dazzle in the sun and out into the lake, where maybe they are still hatching.

I squeeze his hand, tell him, "I didn't know they could be so beautiful," and he puts his face in my neck and things feel right.

But the next day, they're all dead. They shroud the grass like a lace of snow. The sky is thin, filled only with air, growing out empty in all directions. And summer seems faded, already, to silence.

His house is on the edge of Lake Mille Lacs, settled deep into the shaggy green of central Minnesota. Cliff converted it, years ago, from a one-room summer home to a four-season studio: double bed, claw-footed bath, fusty yellow curtains and a kitchen table I made him in senior woodshop. An outdated Picasso calendar is tacked to the wall. My birthday is circled in red with stars and hearts and little cartoons, the only thing marked all year.

In the corners, easels lean up against each other like angular skeletons; Cliff is an artist, and I am his audience. That's the way we've always been. He hasn't worked much since a car accident last winter crushed his painting arm, leaving a gnarled pink stub where his hand used to be. But I know we will work through this like we have worked through all the rest of it.

"My Picasso," I call him, "my Beethoven. Beethoven kept composing after he went deaf," I remind him, and I kiss the smooth pink scars along his wrist.

"Beethoven went crazy," he always answers, and kisses my mouth.

I waited until after graduation to move in, and although I knew about the baby by the time I arrived, that's not why I came. No one was there to object, so that was part of it. My parents died when I was young; no relatives, no brothers or sisters to say *what are you getting into?* My foster mother, the latest one, said why not work, maybe college someday if you can afford it, but Cliff said come, stay, so I did. It felt like the thing

to do, the next door to walk through.

“Mille Lacs,” he said, “a thousand lakes in one. Think of the possibilities. Think of our possibilities.” This was when he was still trying to convince me.

“Countless,” I said, “*endless*,” and I smiled and ran my fingers through his ashy beard, and back then, I really thought they might be. Endless.

“Like that movie we watched,” he said. “*From Here to Eternity*. Who wants here when they can have eternity?”

I shook my head, couldn’t help mirroring his goofy smile. “What?”

“I mean, we’ve already got here. We’re here. Now is here. Here is nothing new. I’m talking about forever—like here we are, and up at the lake it’s eternity, and you know this must just be the natural progression of things. Our own sappy romance story.” He nodded, as if punctuating a point, smile widening. “You *have* to move in. It’s like fate, but more logical. It’s just the way things are going.”

Somehow, that made sense to me. He has a habit of making sense of things when I can’t, like when I told him about the baby over steak and eggs at the Spotlite Café. Or rather, when he figured it out himself, watching me run to the bathroom every time I looked at the runny yolks, brown grease sliding across the white plate.

“Maybe it’s not a bad thing,” he said. He took my hand across the table, shrunk it into the warm pocket of his own. “Maybe it’s what we need. Like a knot. Like a knot that ties us together for good.”

I thought about this, and it seemed true. I could feel it knotting up in my stomach right then, my future folding in upon itself, dividing and dividing, somehow growing and shrinking all at once—one tight, furrowed knot that was the rest of my life. “I think you’re right,” I said.

“I’m right if you want. But only if you want.” He looked at me with eyes that seemed redder and older than I have ever

seen them, older than his forty years—older, even, than I have ever imagined my father's eyes in my moments of imagining my father. "No pressure," he said. "This is for real. If you don't want it, that's fine. If you can't stay with me, if you decide not to move in after all—" Cliff sighed. His breath quivered, stuttered over the silence. "I don't want to change your life, Anna," he said. "I just want to be inside it."

Despite myself and my nausea and the whole overwhelming deal, I tried to look reassuring. "It's like when I met you," I said, "at the gallery. How we clicked, how I just knew, almost like I'd dreamed it that way. Finally, someone who I could talk to and relate to. Who shaped my life into something that made sense—everything I ever wanted, like a fantasy. You've always been inside my life," I said, "even before I knew you." I took a deep breath, breathed in the burnt smell of coffee. I turned our hands inside out so my fingers splayed over his clean white nails. "And now you're inside me for real," I added. "I almost feel like it's more yours than mine. Isn't that funny?" I smiled: "It's like fate, isn't it. But more logical."

"Mostly logical," he said.

I looked up at him, took my hand out of his and touched his cheek. Things weren't real yet; the world still had that foggy glaze at the edges, like a dream. "It'll be okay," I told him, "you'll make it okay," and my voice sounded so sure, I think we both believed it.

The only thing is, I didn't think it would be so *quiet*. That's what gets to me once I move in, the hush of this house, like it's the shed skin of something that used to be alive. Maybe it's how this one room is the whole house, just one room for all the rooms, so you never really know if you're in the living room or in the kitchen or even in some imaginary hallway, in between. So there's nowhere to *go*.

Or maybe it's the walls, how the paint has chipped away in places to reveal some history that isn't mine: colors layered over each other, yellow on blue on pale mint green. A hideous taupe,

a gauzy cream. Now, the paint is white, and only in the falling-apart places can you tell it wasn't always this dull.

That could be it.

Or maybe it's the fact that Cliff has taken down all his paintings and won't tell me why.

I remember the first time I saw his place—this was last summer, when he was divorcing his second wife and I was still working part time at the gallery where we met—I had stood in this room and felt *caged* in it, in him, in the whole spin of life and the sticky hum of creation buzzing around me. This was when I was still falling in love.

"What does it matter?" he asks when I try to explain it, this nervous feeling I've got about the empty walls. "They were just paintings. I'm right here, Anna. I'm not on a wall."

"I just want to know what you did with them," I say. "I'm just curious."

He shakes his head, shrugs. "I sold them, if you really want to know. All of them, to an art dealer. I don't know where they ended up."

I try to meet his eyes, ask, "Are you going to put up any more?" But I don't think he hears me. So now, for a while anyway, it's empty where there used to be color—just the calendar, my birthday, and the naked walls, bare as bone.

He used whitewash, I think, or something else that's cheap and impermanent. I notice it the second morning I'm there when he is out buying groceries. Touch the cool face of the wall, its blank stare, its dead and dusty flatness, and your hand will come away white. That's the way the house is now.

On the third day, new neighbors start moving in.

"The Freemans," Cliff tells me. He rests his chin on the top of my head, follows my gaze across the kitchen table and into the yard next door. "I met them last week. Why don't we go over there? We can help them unload." But I shake my head. Although I don't really like sitting at this table I made myself—I keep finding imperfections, things I should have done differ-

ently, keep thinking how far from an artist I am—I don't feel like moving. So I stay, watch the neighbors with lazy interest. I sip cooling coffee and let it filter through the glass like a movie:

They drive a green pick-up, browned with rust along the bottom.

They have the same blond hair that flickers and glosses in the windy sun. The same white smile.

They are tall and graceful, are bare feet and tanned faces, are carefully labeled boxes, are carelessly rumpled clothes. They kiss a lot and laugh while they unload furniture.

And Mrs. Freeman is pregnant. Her stomach swoons with weight beneath the baggy overalls—I watch her waddle and wonder if I will waddle like she does.

They are both young, almost as young as I am.

"They'd be good to paint," Cliff says. "They look interesting like that. They look alike." He is still watching them over my head, kneading my shoulders from behind. "Or to write about," he adds. "If I were a writer, I'd write about them. Maybe I should take up writing."

I look up at him, smile. His face is large and upside-down from this angle. "You *should* paint them," I tell him. "You should ask if they'll pose for you. Do something creative, make something, you know? You haven't in so long."

Cliff doesn't say anything for a thick moment. He just looks at me, stares, as if he doesn't recognize my face. "I am," he says finally. "I'm making our home," and something hard in his voice makes me look away.

He leaves then to buy house paint, primer, shingles for the roof; he has decided to remodel. "You can do the inside," he told me last night, "and I'll do the outside. It'll be our summer project." But I can't imagine this room any way other than the way it's always been, and I don't know what to do, where I would even start.

So instead I watch the Freemans. I watch them for the rest of the day until the coffee pot is empty and red begins to seethe into the bright sky. I watch them make trip after trip from truck

to door, imagine the house filling slowly with boxes and bags, each piece like one small drop in a cup. Growing, sure, steady, on the inside until it's full.

And I think: what is it like on their inside? Think: what would it be like to be over there? Think: *if*. Where would I be *if*. If Cliff and I had never met, if I didn't love him like this wonderful ache that spreads and distracts and soaks up the whole world, if my world made sense without him. If he hadn't gone driving that night, hadn't crippled his own left side; if he hadn't been forced to start over, to finish. Where would I be—and where will I be—and where will we be—and where will they be.

What would it be like *if*.

Later, Cliff lights candles. We are not romantic, never have been, but tonight it seems necessary. The uncomfortable look is back in his eyes, a look I'm trying to both ignore and assuage: something nervous, that still skittery *now what* pumping in the air between us. It's like we've never slept together, like everything is new; and not sure of our moves, the candlelight seems to help somehow.

We lie in bed for a while, no kissing, just holding each other loosely, watching the rest of the room and occasionally, in fleeting glances, each other. We are both waiting, I think, for this feeling to die off.

"They look nice, huh?" I venture after a while.

"Who?"

"The neighbors. They're a cute couple."

Cliff shrugs, but in this lying-down position, it just looks like he's squirming. "They look nice together, I guess."

I touch his face, trace the lines beside his mouth and along his eyes, the feathery wings of wrinkles. He coughs a little, and I pull my hands away. "I wonder if they'd say that about us."

Cliff looks at me closely, blinks a few times: "Why wouldn't they?" he asks. In the quivering candlelight, his face teeters and shifts, flickers continually toward something unrecogniz-

able. "We do look nice together."

"Yeah, I think we do. I just wonder if they would say that about us, that's all."

"Oh," he says. "Well, yeah, I bet they would." He kisses me hard and sudden like an exclamation point, leans back but keeps holding my head in his hands. "Don't you think they would?"

"I already said I think they would." And I smile, and after a moment he smiles back, and then we kiss for a long time. His thin artist's body curves over mine like a taut bow, starts to settle the world right again. We push the awkwardness somewhere far away where we can't hear it beating.

After a while, Cliff stops. "Anna?" he says, and I open my eyes.

"Hmm?"

"I don't ever wonder what people would think about us."

I look at him, not sure what to say or what he is expecting me to say, and I can't read his face, so I don't say anything. His words diffuse like a spreading draft, cooling. Candle shadows jump and flick around the room, and I watch them dodge each other, darting across the dark space of the walls; I wonder if he is watching them too, but I suspect he is watching me.

"How about you tell me your favorite place," he says finally, and I smile. This is our old game: to choose our favorite part of each other, a space on the other's body to love the most that night. It feels good to think of the old games. I pick my usual spot automatically and cuddle into that nest between the bed and the soft hair of his chest.

"Right here beneath you," I tell him sleepily. A pause—no reaction. I tell him, "Your turn."

Cliff doesn't answer right away. Instead, he moves his hands slowly over the cosine of my body as if he is considering: its plummets, its dips and arcs and careful, curved hollows. In the end, he rests his head in that roller-coaster void along my side, between my breasts and my hips, above the swell of my stomach. "This is what I love the most," he decides, "this empty part right here. I fit the best right here," and he kisses the con-

cave of skin, moves lower to kiss the convex. Then he puts me back in my place against him. He seems content.

I watch the walls dance a little longer and wonder if anyone else plays these games. I wonder if they are playing them right now, next door, and I fall asleep thinking of that and smelling the warm smell of Cliff pressed against my face. It's not until the middle of the night, when I wake up dazed and sweaty against him, that I remember how hard it is to breathe in that space beneath.

After a while, the mornings start to blend together—one long day, the same day everyday. Wake up at the same time, get dressed with our backs to each other. Toast and strawberry jam and a still-groggy silence as we chew. The sticky sounds of our mouths disgust me, and I watch the lake to distract myself; in that early light it looks the bluest, and it rolls in faithfully with the same force, the same white-capped impact, day after day.

Then Cliff goes outside and attacks the house. His days are hammers and levels and primer and caulk. All one-handed, like a magician; like someone whose job is to build a façade. His days are making the outside stronger while the inside pales and falls apart to dust.

"Aren't you going to decorate?" he asks me. "These walls could use some color."

I tell him, "Then paint me something. Make something for me to hang on them."

He looks at me, always, with a faraway look, like remembering. "Beethoven," he says sadly, "went crazy. Sometimes things change. Anyway, can't you see I'm busy?" He smiles, holds up his hammer.

"It gives me a headache," I tell him. "Do it quieter." And he laughs, thinks I am joking. I want to tell him how sometimes the baby kicks along with the hammering, rattles the bars of its cage until I think I'm going to go crazy. Until I want to start hitting back.

Sometimes, I'm so bored, I can't breathe. Like there is not

enough air in this room, in this house. Sometimes, things still don't seem real. And sometimes I wonder if I want them to be. But I only think these thoughts on the bad days. Usually, I don't mind the loneliness, the hammering, Cliff's strange obsession with renovation. Sometimes I sleep, and sometimes I read, but most days I keep my place by the window and nibble on toast crumbs and listen to old Cat Stevens tapes and watch the Freemans. I can see inside their house; one week, they are painting together. The next, putting up curtains and picture frames. The next, planting a garden in the back and for the rest of the summer, I will watch for its blooming, wondering—what will grow out of them? Beans, blueberries, flowers like bursts of life from the black soil. It's a mystery, a promise of development, and I wait faithfully for its fruition.

She must be due any day now.

Sometimes they stand on the porch and look out at the water for a long time without talking. He stands behind her, and they both wrap their arms around her broad stomach, and I wonder if they are looking out at all that open space thinking how nice it is to have so much of the world before them. A thousand lakes in one, a thousand possibilities. He kisses her neck. She smiles, knits her fingers into his so you can't tell the hands apart. How his arms must feel around her: safe, but not too tight, and pulsing warm and sure and strong. I think I felt that once, and sometimes I lapse into memories of Cliff, how it was in the beginning, but that never gets me anywhere.

They go inside, and maybe they will cook dinner. Burn the grilled cheese sandwiches and laugh over the mess, whip up something else without missing a step. Maybe they will start on the baby's room. Maybe they will be crazy and reckless and wildly young: get drunk on cheap wine, have sex on the washing machine.

These are the things I imagine while the summer slowly wears itself away.

"Don't you ever get tired of watching them?"

They are on their porch swing, rocking and rocking, her blond head an explosion of yellow in his lap. "Not really," I shrug. She seems to be sleeping.

Cliff clears his throat and I look over. He is soaked in sweat and covered in patches of damp house paint. Outside, the world is wavering in the sun; it is the hottest day of the year, and maybe that's what does it, boils over what has been building up like a pocket of steam. Pressure, heat—something is coming undone, needs to be said. "I don't see why you care," I tell him.

"Because it's sick," he shoots back, and I look away. "It's all you ever do, and you've never even talked to them. It's like voyeurism. You just sit there and—" A pause; he sighs. "I don't see what *you* see in *them*," he says.

He would wake her up soon, and they would go into town. They would walk around inside the stores and buy silly trinket toys in the overpriced gift shop. They would plan a trip to the cities, take it after the baby was born, take the baby to an amusement park. Ride all the wildest rides.

"It's no different," I tell him, "than building a house that's already built. It's no different than what you do all day. It makes the time pass."

Cliff sits down and takes both my hands with his one. "Anna," he says. "Anna, don't you feel something happening here? It's like ever since you—" He pauses carefully. "Ever since *they* moved in, something stopped. All the good parts of us stopped . . . it's just the wrong things growing now. There's something *wrong* here."

"You're right," I tell him coolly. "Something's stopped. Something's given up."

"Please don't," he says.

"And you know what."

He stares at me. "Sometimes things change," he says finally.

"I know. And Beethoven went crazy, right?" My chest feels tight; I can't breathe as much air as I want to, and I wonder if I'm going to start crying. "Things change," I tell him. "You

adapt. It's simple. You don't give up, you're too talented for that."

"Just say it," he says, "once and for all. What's wrong? What do you *want*?"

I take a deep breath. I wipe the sweat collecting in a film above my lip and look out the window. "Anyway, I don't think Beethoven went crazy. I never read that. I think you're making it up."

"Let's not test it," he says. "Please. Will you please leave this alone right now? I'm not a painter anymore." His voice sounds beaten, begging, and I want to cry then, and I still can't. I want to apologize, I want to hit him, yell, run out the door, climb with him into bed. I watch them swinging slowly on their porch, their calm, their quiet way of loving, and I think of all the things I can't do.

After a while, Cliff sighs and lets go of my hands, which have grown hot and itchy in his wet grip. He pulls a grimy visor low over his eyes, rises and picks up a heavy-looking toolbox. "Just wait, okay? Wait and see how wonderful it looks on the outside. Then you can decide if it's worth it." And he clicks the screen door softly closed.

I shut my eyes until the hammering starts and the baby's kicking pops them open. *What do you want?* he asked me, and it's something I should know. I feel like it's wrapped up on that porch, swinging back and forth, something out there beyond this glass, and all I can do is look at it and want it and never have it.

Just wait, okay? Wait.

And maybe that's the worst part—not knowing what I'm waiting for.

It isn't always fighting, and it isn't always boredom. Some days we take the boat out and just fly around the lake all afternoon. No direction, only the deafening rush of wind and the white sun glittering on the water and the dry sting of motion in our eyes. So it brings tears we hide with smiles and sunglasses.

We drink warming Cokes and turn pink and sit talking for hours. A slow, slow rocking, a kind of drifting.

"If you blur your eyes," he tells me, "you can't see the land."

I try, and it's true. "Like an ocean," I say. "Our own Great Lake." *Endless*, I think.

"Endless." Cliff's smile fades a little: "Tell me if you get bored, all right?" He always seems afraid of this happening and asks me continuously if I feel okay, if I want to go in, if this is fun. "I want to know if you get bored."

"I'm not bored," I tell him, and when I say it, it's always the truth.

But then the sun goes down and the mosquitoes emerge from their dark and seething hiding places, and we have to dock. And then it's always the same routine, the same thing to come home to: endless days, an endless waiting. Watching and waiting and thinking about tomorrow and knowing it will always be the same.

On a cloudy day, gray, humid, I catch her crying. For the first time, she is alone on their porch, sitting on the steps and hugging her stomach, face wadded up with tears. The world is thick and puffy with the promise of rain.

It could be anything. A phone call from the cities: *your mother has died*. Or maybe Mr. Freeman was fired. Or maybe a fight they will apologize for later tonight—bonfire by the lake, citronella candles, dancing in the dark and looking out at stars reflected in the water. "I'm sorry," he will say, and she will say the same, and they will kiss and chase each other onto the beach. Things will be fine.

"Maybe yellow?" Cliff asks, holding up a paint swatch. "Or were you thinking white? I don't want to do pink or blue, just in case we guess wrong."

The inside world swims sluggishly into focus. I stare at him, confused: "What are you talking about?" He is sitting across the table and looking at me expectantly, as if I know per-

fectly well what is going on.

"The crib, Anna," he sighs. "I told you I was making the crib this weekend. I said you could pick the color."

"Oh." I look down at my toast, which has grown cold and hard, untouched. The strawberry jam is crusty along the edges and makes me think of scabs; I push the plate away and take a sip of coffee. "I don't care. You decide."

Maybe it was a fight about the baby. A disagreement about names? The color of *their* crib? He wanted blue and she wanted pink. In the end they'll settle on blue, trust that they know what is coming.

". . . like you never snap out of it," Cliff is saying, and I drag my mind back to the breakfast table. "I know things are hard right now, and maybe I'm not being sensitive or whatever, but cut me a little slack, would you? Give me *something*. I thought we were in this together."

He knots his fingers into mine. His hand is cold, clammy, and even though I know it's just making things worse to do so, I pull away. Without mine attached, his arm sprawls limp and lonely across the Formica tabletop. The other arm, the crushed arm, curls lifelessly against his stomach like a cowering animal. He's looking down at the place where I let go, just looking, waiting.

"I'm sorry," I tell him quietly. "I'm sorry, but it doesn't matter to me. It's a *crib*, for God's sake."

He doesn't move, doesn't look at me, says calmly: "Anna. It's not the crib."

"I can't help it," I say. "I'm tired. I don't know what to do. What do you want me to do?"

"I want you—" Cliff stops. He looks out the window, but I don't know what he is looking at, can't follow his gaze from this angle. He shakes his head. "I don't know. I don't know what to do."

I don't think I've ever seen him look so sad. "I'm sorry," I tell him again, and I mean it, but he doesn't answer. We sit like that for a long time, our hands far apart and our eyes out the

window, thinking about different things and listening to the pointed tick of the kitchen clock, feeling the heat of the day start to thicken.

Finally, he stands up, takes my cup to the sink and pours out the cold coffee. "You should stop drinking this," he says quietly. "It's bad for the baby." And he leaves me alone at the table with my scabby toast and bruised conscience, an unsettled ache that will stay with me for the rest of the day.

When I look back out the window towards Mrs. Freeman, she has stopped crying. But it takes me a moment to realize she is looking straight at me now. She blinks. She starts to smile, and I push hastily away from the table, the window, heart galloping into full gear. *This is stupid, I think, you're being ridiculous. Go say hello. Go talk to her.* But something stops me, and when I look outside after a minute, she has drawn back into the house.

A funny look on her face. Almost hopeful—a hand reaching out, and I slap it away without really knowing why.

He breaks it to me in bed.

"I've invited them to dinner," he says, rolls it out like a bomb into the space between us. "Tomorrow," he adds, and I don't answer. "So you have to meet them now, okay? Because they've already said yes."

"Okay," I tell him, nodding against the pillow. I don't know how to feel about this, so I try not to feel anything.

"I told them you're shy. I told them that's why you never say hello."

I stop nodding. For some reason, this idea is startling, surreal: "You talked to them about me?"

"Well, sure. They've seen you. They wonder who I live with." Cliff pauses. "You're not mad, are you? I mean about dinner."

"No."

"I was worried you'd be mad at me, and I'm sorry if you are."

I close my eyes. "I'm not mad."

"I'm sorry anyway." Somewhere in the dark beside my face, I can sense his hand hovering, almost touching me. I wait—I don't open my eyes, and after a moment, I hear him roll over. "It seemed like the only way," he says, and then he goes to sleep.

That night, I lie there and listen to the sounds of late summer, the windy rustle of impending autumn like a reluctant sigh in the dark. I try to picture tomorrow, all of us in here in this room, at that table, their world filtering into this one—but all I see is a blank wall. A movie screen whose film is broken, a picture that won't start. My mind has given up. I sleep without dreaming.

They bring apple pie that's burned on the bottom. "Our oven bakes a little hot," she tells us. "We're still figuring it out. You're Anna?" and I just nod, and she hands me the pie. "This is for you," she says. "Do with it what you will."

They both laugh—I don't see why this is funny, but I laugh too, and Cliff laughs when I laugh, and all of us stand at the door laughing stupidly about nothing. After a while, the laughs trickle to an awkward silence, and Cliff clears his throat. "Anna," he says, "this is Ted Freeman and his wife Izzy."

"Nice to meet you," I tell them, nodding. I feel drunk, as if the world is too bright and moving fluidly around my head. Their faces, up close, look jumbled and over-detailed. I wonder if this is because they are suddenly in front of me, like a zoom-in camera trick, or if it's just the way they are: wide-eyed, bubbly, animated as dolls wound up too tight. Especially Izzy.

"We wondered, you know," she tells me, her voice a clipped fast-forward of a normal voice, "if you didn't like us, though that's silly since you never met us. I mean, since you've never come over, I just thought maybe—but of course, we've never come over here, either, have we?" She cocks her head and smiles as if all of that made some coherent sense. "Cliff says you're shy," she announces suddenly, and I can feel my face redden. "We'll have to fix that. Let's go see about dinner,

hmm?”

She takes the pie-less arm and waddles me into the kitchen; her stomach seems more distended than ever, and I wonder if the baby is late by now. I cast a help-me glance at Cliff, but he and Ted are watching Izzy with a mutual absorption as she starts another ramble, something about burning dinner last week.

“I swear, it almost set the curtains on fire!” she cries. Ted is just shaking his head, smiling the same smile he’s had pasted on since they walked in the door. His eyes don’t blink as he watches her. “Failed attempts,” she says, “every time—I’ll never learn, I swear. I bet you’re quite the cook, Anna. I bet that’s what you do in here all day, the closet chef, right? Whipping up wonderful things . . . I wanted to be a chef once, never did get the hang of it—but you’ll see that, or taste that, I’m sure.” She gestures toward the pie I’ve put on the stove.

I start to come clean—“I’m really not very good”—but Ted interrupts me.

“D-d-on’t talk like that, honey,” he says to his wife, stumbling over the words as he sidles up to her. And he holds her, right there in our kitchen, like I’ve seen them hold each other a hundred times: all their arms wrapped around her stomach, his chin cradled in the hollow of her neck. “It’ll be fine,” he mumbles.

“It’ll be great, I’m sure,” says Cliff, and he puts his arms around me so we mirror the Freemans, though we don’t usually stand like that. It’s like a cuddling competition, but the leading couple seems oblivious. They stand there with their eyes closed for a long, pulsing moment. They seem somewhere far away.

After a while, Cliff kisses my cheek and I remember to smile. “Anna *is* quite the cook,” he says. They open their eyes, blink at him. “As a matter of fact, we’ve got one in the oven as well,” and his fingers splay over my plump stomach.

I wiggle away from his hands, embarrassed. “*Don’t*,” I hiss into his ear, but the Freemans just smile vaguely.

“Yes, you’ve t-t-told us,” says Ted. His face seems to tighten, harden somehow. “Congratulations.”

Cliff kisses me again and lets me go. “You must be due soon?” he asks them. I retreat to the counter to toss the salad and watch this strange exchange between the fathers. Something is charged in their conversation—friendly words fired back and forth, but an oddly challenging tone driving it all, simmering beneath the surface.

“Yes, soon,” Izzy jumps in quickly, and she pushes Ted’s hands off her overalls. “Why don’t you men go set the table, hmm? I’ll help Anna with the food.” She fidgets her fingers through her bright blond hair and smiles and blinks her big eyes at me expectantly. Up close like this, they are a surprisingly dull green like something used up, worn out.

“It looks wonderful,” she says.

I try to smile, though her intense gaze is making me more nervous than anything. “Really,” I confess, “Cliff made it. Cliff’s the cook.”

“But we get to serve.” She lifts a steaming bowl of green beans with one hand. Grabs my fingers with the other. I look up and into her face that is flushed, dewy with the evening heat. “Thank you,” she says earnestly. “For the invitation,” and I just nod, and she scuffs over to the table where the men are waiting like patient children.

Dinner eases into itself slowly, but gracefully. Izzy’s chatter is like a constant thread guiding the group along; the rest of us wade carefully into comfort and meet in the middle. The first laugh is over the hamburgers, which are bloody inside and need microwaving—“The lesson I missed at culinary camp,” Cliff jokes, “how not to give your guests food poisoning.” When Izzy accidentally snorts milk out her nose, we laugh over that as well. We even laugh over Ted’s stutter, which Izzy says is new. It makes her giggle shrilly so the two of them form an unharmonious musical team—the male percussion a stumbling beat, the female melody like a wavering, warbled sob.

"I'm g-going to therapy for it, of course," Ted says, and Izzy giggles again, eyes wide as she watches her husband. "It's the strangest thing. T-t-to not be able to control how you speak. I can't exp-p-plain it."

"I don't want him to go," Izzy says. "I like it. It's cute. Don't you think it's cute?"

Cliff and I nod, smiling blankly, sort of numb, I think. He squeezes my hand beneath the table, and we have a conversation like that, his hard, tight grip a kind of Morse code: *Wow. Wow. What the hell did I get us into? My slow fingers, tracing his: It's okay. I like them.*

And I do. They bring something to this room that hasn't been here in a long time, something like that moment in *The Wizard of Oz* when the whole world is suddenly washed in color. By the time we finish the burgers, a grayness has lifted—maybe over the table, but mostly over me. They can do that somehow, just by being here, and I like them for it. I like them in real life, and for unexpected reasons—for their imperfections, the ways they are real. His stutter, her chatter. For how they look at me like I know what I'm doing, hang onto my words, laugh at my jokes, even when I'm not trying to make them. It's as if they are opening me up, crawling inside—a sudden and invasive kind of friendship. A very strange friendship. But the promise of a real friendship, nevertheless.

"You know," Izzy says suddenly, interrupting one of her own rambles, "I don't care what other people might say about you two—"

"Izzy," Ted hisses.

"—not that people say anything," she adds quickly, "not that there's anything to say, but I think you two are the most wonderful couple. Just the cutest couple I've ever seen. You remind me of me and Ted," and she takes her husband's rigid hand, squeezes it. "Just made for each other. Like matching shoes or something." She smiles and takes my hand too.

"Thank you," I mumble, embarrassed, and Cliff mumbles something similar, and eventually Izzy lets go and munches on

bread. I glance at Cliff, not sure what to put in my face, not really sure what I'm thinking, only sure that I'm glad I can hold him beneath the table. Like an anchor I know. I press my hand against his leg and our eyes meet, tangle, crease with secret and understanding smiles at the corners. Something is settling into place, into calmness.

Then the pie happens.

"I told you!" Izzy cries, dismayed, as Cliff scrapes the blackened crust into an ashy pile on his plate. I've choked mine down, and I wish he would do the same. "I told you, it's horrible, isn't it?"

"Oh, no, it's great," he tells her.

"It's great," I echo.

"It tastes like my mother's pie," Cliff insists, but she has quieted and something droops in her shoulders.

"It isn't," she mumbles. "It doesn't. I'm so sorry, I'm not good at—" Ted tries to put his arm around her, but she pushes him away, stands up, and plods quickly to the bathroom. Silence descends upon the table like a virus, spreading from person to person; we sip our milk and don't meet each other's eyes.

"I'm sorry," Ted says finally. "She's—f-f-fragile lately. Over-sensitive." He blinks hard and purses his lips, scrapes at something dried on his plate. "I don't know. You must know how that goes," and I can feel my face growing hot. Cliff rubs my knee.

After a while, our glasses long emptied and a sour taste growing in my mouth, Izzy emerges as bright-eyed as ever. "Ice cream!" she cries. "That's the solution. It fixes everything, hmm?" She pulls the napkin off Ted's lap and yanks him out of the chair. "How about this," she chatters. "How about you men go get some ice cream for us hungry ladies—there's that Dairy Queen in town, that should be open still—and we'll stay here and make some coffee and have some female bonding time, and then we'll have some real dessert." She leans over to put her arm around my shoulders and pat my stomach—I don't know

why everyone seems to like doing that tonight, but it's starting to bother me. "They're hungry in there," she says, "go on," and Ted jingles his keys; he is already at the door.

"Up for a drive, then?" he asks Cliff, who looks at me for what seems like a long time.

"You okay?" His eyes spell it out, all the things he can't say, the rest of our silent conversation: *I love you, I'm sorry, they're weird, aren't they funny, I love you, we're fine. We're fine?*

"Fine," I tell him, "go ahead. I'll clean this up."

In the kitchen, once the men are gone, we stack dishes while Izzy rambles about housework. "Another non-forte. All these domestic duties . . . I'm terrible," she says. "I hardly know a dish rag from a rag mop. Rag mop? Is that even a term?"

I smile. "I wouldn't know," I confess, and she laughs so hard it seems to echo off the walls like something spooky.

"Oh well, I wouldn't either, would I? Ted does all that, really."

"Well, we'll both have to learn soon," I say as I plug in the coffee machine. "And you even sooner. You must be due any day by now."

"Yes, soon," she announces.

Her voice is starting to hurt my ears. I reach for the box of filters, the tin of decaf Folgers. "Do you know if it's a boy or a girl?"

She stops fiddling with the cups and looks down at the swell of her stomach. It's the most instantaneous transition from liveliness to stillness—like someone turned an off switch. Her lips quiver as if there are words waiting behind them, impatient, punching through the skin. "I like you, Anna," she says.

"I like you, too."

"No, I really do," she insists. "Ted and I really, really do. You're good people, we can tell these things, and you've got a good thing going here, we've got a good thing, and I want to stay friends with you, you know." She clears her throat, doesn't look up. "So."

My smile feels forced and twitchy, as if it's about to fall off my face. I'm not sure what to do or say, if I'm even supposed to say anything, so I just fiddle with the coffee pot and let the silence brew between us.

"Can I tell you a secret?" she says finally. "I have a secret."

I don't answer, just stare awkwardly as she starts to undress in front of me. First the clicking catches of the overalls, undone. Then the buttoned shirt, slowly opening—I feel as if something is happening here, something remarkable and terrible and terribly important. I feel the whole summer crashing into this moment and expanding into the rest of my life.

"I'm not pregnant," she says, a quick and erupted confession, and she bursts into tears. Reveals: wadded baby clothes stuffed against her pudgy stomach, a pink and white cotton bloom where there should be swelled skin. "We—we lost the baby, Anna. It was a few weeks ago and—and this—it's not just me, really, it makes it easier for Ted sometimes to pretend—it's easier for both of us this way." The clothes are slowly dripping out of her hands, a terrycloth wound oozing out over the kitchen floor. "And I don't want you to think I'm crazy, Anna, I'm not crazy, it's just that you don't know what it's like—you don't know how it feels to lose that, like breaking a promise. Like someone broke a promise—" And she drops them all on the floor, kneels down in the pile. She makes motions like sobbing, but no sound comes out.

I don't know what to do. I'm frozen there useless, petrified, so afraid of this thing in front of me, a pain I don't want to touch, that I can't move. Afraid of what might rub off, as if destruction is contagious, and I think then what I should have thought all along—a thought that is guilt and relief and shock and realization, that is my own life coming into focus—*Thank you, God, that she's not me.*

And that's the end of that.

"Izzy?" I whisper. "Izzy, I'm so sorry. I had no idea." I bend down to touch her shoulders, but she grabs my hands and pulls me down further.

“You’ll still be my friend,” she says. Her eyes are wet and skittish, wide like small puddles. “We’ll still be friends.”

“Yeah, we’ll still be friends.” My skin hurts where she pulls at it, and I wonder if I am lying, if I hope I am lying. Izzy nods and looks at me for a long moment. She seems relieved, almost proud, as if she’s settled something right. Then she lets go and starts to pull the clothes back into her shirt.

“I have another secret,” she says quietly, and I hold my breath a little. “I watch you sometimes when you don’t know. I think what if you were my daughter.” She glances at me nervously. “Like how she would look someday, how she would be. I would have named her Anna, I think, and I didn’t even know your name. I didn’t even know it, but she could have been you.”

I watch her begin to suture up her shirt and lean back on my heels. “She could have been,” I tell her. It seems like the thing to say. It seems too much like the truth.

We sit there on the floor until the men come in with white bags and plastic spoons. The coffee is cooling, and Izzy is adjusting her top button hastily. Cliff shoots a long look at me as soon as he comes in, and I can tell in his face that Ted has told him everything. Something passes between us across the room: something calm and relieved flitting quietly between our eyes.

Ted pulls Izzy carefully off the floor. “Time for dessert,” she says brightly, and he looks down at her, holds her face in his hands until she pushes them away.

“It’s melting,” he tells her.

She takes the bag from Cliff and peeks inside. “Still okay,” she says. “But we better eat it fast.”

So we do. We spread it out across the table with numb efficiency, eat so quickly the cold gives us headaches, so much I think I’m going to be sick. We look at each other blankly, as if there’s nothing left to say.

And then suddenly, finally, in unison, they rise to leave. Cliff offers coffee, but his voice is weak and unconvincing, and I don’t think they hear him; Ted won’t take his eyes off Izzy,

and Izzy won't take her eyes off me. She looks and looks without blinking until I have to look away. "Next time, I won't burn the pie," she says, and she hugs me so tight, I can feel the clothes in her stomach shifting. "Next time, *we'll* cook. You and me. We'll do it again soon."

I can still smell vanilla on her breath, sweet and cool, fading fast. "Sure," I tell her, and she smiles sadly, and Ted takes her hand from behind. Then they walk out the door and into the night, toward the darkened direction of home, where they forgot to leave lights on to guide their way back.

We don't talk about it till the next evening. It sinks in a little. Then we put on bug spray and brave the mosquitoes for a dusky walk along the lake.

"Ted said they might move back to Minneapolis," he tells me. "To be near her mother."

I don't say anything; I think about this. I wonder if I expected it, hoped it, should feel anything about it.

"I wonder what will happen," he says. "I wonder if she'll be okay."

It will feel like a long ride home. He'll drive, and she'll sleep beside him until she is strong enough to wake up, watch the cars passing by, remember all they are leaving behind, and accept it enough to let it go. She will shed what's artificial, feel the emptiness around her waist like a kind of pureness. And figure out what to do next.

"She'll be fine," I tell him. "They'll go home and it'll be hard for a while. But they'll try again. They'll work at it. And they'll both be fine."

He looks at me closely as if I've surprised him, and we follow the path for a while without talking. Beside me, the lake is pulsing with the warm light of evening—pink, purple, still yellow in the distance, like a healing bruise.

After a while, he clears his throat. "They'll keep trying?"

"I bet they will."

Cliff stops. He takes my hand and pulls me against him, and

at his back, the waves are crashing into shore. "Then what happens?" he says, and I look out at the wide expanse of water, fading slowly and gently with the light. I can't see as far as I could a minute ago. But when I look back at his face, it is clear and close, comforting as things grow dim along the path.

"Let's not make it a story," I say. "No ending. Nothing certain."

"A cliffhanger?"

I smile and turn us back toward home. "For now," I tell him. "We'll see. We'll see what happens next," and we make our way carefully through the dark. The lake is brightening up with moon; nighttime shadows are slowly sinking into themselves, and for a moment, as we're walking, the whole world looks silver and new.

Mark Parobeck

AN UNUSUAL BED

Mildred was eighty-seven and had been losing her mind for the last ten years. Her doctors told her that it was senility and encouraged her to go on with life and she had been going on with it forever. So she did exactly that. She lived. But as the days passed and she forgot more and more, she was no longer able to keep her problem from her daughter. Mildred knew how nosey Audrey was, always mixing herself up in other peoples' affairs. Mildred was no different, of course. Still, she wouldn't allow her daughter to show up at unexpected times, looking in on her as if she were a baby.

"I'm your mother," Mildred said. "I'm not a child. So stay away."

But that August in the heat of her apartment, Mildred nearly passed away when she had neglected to jam open the windows or turn on a single fan. By then, even the simplest of things had become hard. For days, during the heat wave, Mildred stumbled about her home in a light, cotton, flowered house dress. It was too hot to eat. Too hot to do anything. So she sat in a chair, her arms dropped against her side. When the phone rang she didn't even lift an eyebrow. She sat there, her hair tangled, matted, damp from humidity.

When Audrey found her, slumped in a chair, her mouth wide open, not moving, she thought she was dead. The room was so hot, nothing seemed to be alive. Even the plants were dry. Audrey was about to scream. But then Mildred moved. Lifting her head and opening her sticky, green eyes. She looked at her daughter and said, "Well. I haven't seen you for a long

time, have I? It seems even my own children have forgotten about me.”

That fall Audrey and Mildred visited a nursing home.

It was a new brick building on an old hill filled with disgusting people. Disgusting was Mildred’s word. The home represented, to Mildred, pathetic people who had given up on life and everything that it offered.

But the circumstances of senility were something that even someone as strong as Mildred could no longer control. Once when she was out shopping, she forgot where she had parked her car. She stumbled around the mall lot until the evening when every other automobile had cleared out. Another time, she not only forgot where she had parked her car, but she forgot what type of car she was driving. Even then, she was determined to go on. Of course this was difficult. She found herself losing her composure and self control. She cried to her neighbors when she was out in the yard, potting flowers, and she cried to friends at church after nearly every service. But no matter how helpless she felt, she refused to cry to her daughter. Even when she slipped on ice and broke her hip, in winter.

Removed from her home and dropped into a hospital, her mind detached from its regular world, her life became a delirium. The doctors said that the pain killers were causing this, the morphine. But Audrey knew it was something more severe.

One afternoon, Mildred sat up in bed and started shouting.

She had been dreaming about her childhood home that had been destroyed in a fire. She remembered waking up, being carried through the smoke, by her brother, dragged past rooms spitting yellow flames, until she was set shoeless in the snow, wearing a linen night dress the same color of the sullen night.

When a nurse found her, Mildred was shaking and screaming, frothing at the mouth. But Mildred didn’t see the nurse. She saw the fire, breaking through the roof, melting the piles of snow around the house.

She flailed her arms, snapping IV’s from her veins.

The fire burst like a serpent in the sky.

A male nurse held her against the bed while another nurse gave her a shot of morphine. For a while, that managed to settle her down, as sugary juice washed through her blood. But the morphine also took her where the most powerful scenes of her life were kept. She saw her husband dying, again and again, and her brother falling from the sky. He had been killed while putting up a roof, long ago. He had slipped from the ladder and the rope that was tied around his waist had failed to catch him. When it snapped, he slid from the slate and plummeted to the earth.

The next morning Mildred found herself bound to the bed. When she kicked, her legs didn't move. And when she lifted, her body remained motionless. She couldn't do anything but raise her head.

The faces looking down on her were alien.

"What is this?" she asked. "Where is my home?"

Someone took her hand, squeezing it.

"Who are you?" Mildred asked. "Who?"

The doctor said, "Mildred, you know who I am."

"No. I don't," said Mildred. "Where is my home?"

The doctor smiled. Something would need to be done. "It's probably not safe for her to be alone, again," he said.

So when Mildred was released, Audrey hired a live-in nurse.

But nurse after nurse fled. Age had sharpened Mildred's tongue. She was condescending and cruel. "Don't you have your own home to go to?" Mildred liked to ask. "I guess not. You seem so poor."

Audrey, who visited every day, heard the same complaints.

"My family doesn't care for me, anymore," Mildred said. "My own family."

But Audrey was there day after day, feeding her mother, washing her, tending her every need.

Mildred couldn't do anything for herself. And she couldn't

remember.

She passed her time reading the morning paper over and over again, forgetting that she had read it each time she set it down. Audrey used to take it away from her. But she soon realized that it gave her mother something to do in the long hours of the afternoon.

When Mildred was alone, she wandered her house, and dreamed. Life mingled with her fantasies. When the meter reader rang the door, Mildred opened the door expecting her father, husband, or brother to walk in.

She would talk to anyone who stopped by. She even conversed with the paper boy who she kept mistaking for her grandson. Each time he rang the doorbell collecting payment, he cringed at what would follow.

First Mildred would say, "My, my you are big."

"Yes, ma'am," the paper boy would say.

"And how long has it been?"

"Two weeks," said the paper boy.

Mildred gushed. "It must have been longer than that. Look how much you've grown."

The paper boy would tell her that she owed him five dollars and fifty cents. She would answer, "You're going to come in, aren't you? You're going to sit down?"

"I'm busy," the paper boy said.

She looked at him, a wrinkle spiraling from the corner of her lip. "Too busy for your grandmother?"

Her grandson was named Douglas. He'd known his grandmother before her mind had failed, and he would always remember her as that calm and composed lady. When Audrey first moved Mildred into their home, Douglas tried to ignore her even though she was always there, sitting in front of the TV, or grumbling in her bedroom behind a locked door. One night, she cornered him.

Douglas was in his room studying when she knocked on the door. He figured that it was his mother—who was always get-

ting too involved in his work—so he grunted and said nothing, at first, knowing that she would walk in anyway. But the knocking persisted and eventually he got up for the door.

Mildred stood there, in the hall, confused. Douglas guided her into the room and sat her down on the bed. He waited for her to speak. She said nothing, at first. But when she looked at him, her smile was made of pride and he knew that she was there. She patted her hand on the bed and he knew that meant that he was supposed to sit down next to her. But he didn't move until she patted her hand on the bed a second time. He had no excuse. He sat down next to her, feeling his thigh press against her own. She cleared her throat. He looked into her grey, green eyes. There was red, in her eyes, and he knew that she had been crying.

“What's wrong?” he asked.

At first she didn't say. She was too proud to say. She drew her fingers through her hair and shook her head. She might have been old. But she had her dignity, no matter what. It wasn't enough to keep her from crying, though. Not with Douglas, anyway. They had that special connection that is often there between someone so old and someone so young.

Douglas stood up and got his grandmother a kleenex. Mildred pulled it across her face and wiped her eyes. Everything remained blurry.

“I want to go home,” she said.

“I know that,” said Douglas.

“Why can't I go home?”

Douglas looked at her.

Mildred went on. “They say I can't remember. Is it true?”

Douglas shrugged.

“Is it?” his grandmother said.

“Yes,” said Douglas.

“Then I have lost my mind.”

“Sometimes,” said Douglas.

“Yes,” said his grandmother. She nodded her head. “I guess I have. I should remember that. Except I can't.”

Mildred could not deny it anymore. Her mind was failing. Her body, too. There was the arthritis in her hands and hips, and the pains that shot through her legs made her privately weep until she crumbled onto her bed, crippled, and alone. Yet, she enjoyed her time with Douglas and when they were together, she told him stories about growing up, during the depression, with nothing, and how, she had lived on a farm, until their house had burned, and how they had turned the chicken coop until a home after that, until the farm failed and her father was forced to move his family to the city.

With Audrey, Mildred quarreled. She liked to say that she would buy a car and drive home one day and live out the rest of her life. But she couldn't remember where her home was, even though she could picture the inside yellow walls of the second floor duplex where she had spent the last fifty years of her life.

"You can't keep me here forever, Audrey."

"It's your new home, mother."

"My new home?" Mildred twisted up her face. "What about my old home?"

"You can't take care of yourself, mother."

"Can't take care of myself," Mildred spouted.

"It's your mind, mother," said Audrey. "You just can't remember, Mother."

"Who says?" Mildred asked.

"I say, mother."

"I want to go home," Mildred said. "That's what I say."

"We've been over this, before."

"What right do you have to deny me that?"

She stormed away, to her room. The walls could not contain her anger.

"Don't you understand what you're doing to me," she said. "Taking away my car, my life, my money. Where is my money, anyway?"

"Paul is in charge of it," said Audrey.

"Who's Paul?"

“My husband.”

Yes. Mildred trusted Paul. She didn't trust her daughter.

“I have the mind to kill myself,” Mildred said.

She got up and walked away.

Audrey's outlook on life began to change. She had spent the first part of her marriage raising Douglas, who she was still raising, now. Caring for her mother was something worse than rearing a child. Mildred was her old, loving self around Paul, or Douglas. With Audrey, she took all of her problems out. One day, when Mildred was shouting at Audrey to take her home, Audrey began to quiver, then cry.

She could not take this anymore.

“Mother. What else can I do?” she whispered. “You can't live by yourself.”

“I've always lived by myself,” said Mildred. It was a declaration. “I can still live by myself now. Don't tell me what I cannot do.”

After that, Audrey distanced herself from her mother and spent more and more time away from home. With Paul at work and Douglas at school or soccer practice, Mildred was again alone.

Talking to herself, Mildred wandered the halls of the big, suburban house.

Sometimes Audrey or Paul or Douglas heard her. To them, it was another stage in her decline. To Mildred, it was something more important. It was her way of getting through the day.

One time, when Douglas managed to bring Mildred back by clapping his hands in front of her face, she stared at him and asked, suspiciously, who he was.

“Douglas,” he said. “Your grandson.”

“Douglas, you say?”

“Yes, Douglas,” he said. “Stand up.”

“What?”

“Stand up, Grandma.”

He had been sent to help her change. Taking off her house coat, he helped her step into a light, summer red dress. She wasn't embarrassed that he was helping her. She was embarrassed that she couldn't help herself. Looking down at the loose skin on her legs, she nearly started crying. But he squeezed her hand, zipped up her dress, pushed her swollen feet into a pair of shoes, and stood with her, in front of a mirror.

"You look beautiful, Grandma."

Mildred whispered. "What?"

"You look beautiful."

"You've got a good line."

"I mean it," he said.

"I know what you mean," she said. "You've got a good line. Where are we going?" she asked.

"For a ride," he said.

"Then I need to do my hair. When you leave the house you always should look your best. I've told you that, haven't I?"

Douglas said yes.

She marched to the bathroom. She didn't know where she was going, of course. But pulling a brush through the loose tangles, she figured that it must be somewhere good.

The decision had been made weeks before.

"As long as she's happy," Audrey said, "it doesn't matter where she lives."

Mildred trusted Douglas. For that reason, Audrey had ordered him to drive his grandmother to the nursing home.

In the car, Mildred grew suspicious.

"Where are we going?" she eventually asked.

"For a drive," he said.

"Where?"

His mother had instructed Douglas to tell Mildred, if she asked, that he was taking her home. He couldn't do it, though. He said nothing. Mildred started to cry. Douglas felt miserable. But he drove her to the nursing home and helped her out of the car and walked her through the front doors, where a male

attendant waited with a wheel chair. Mildred wept. Douglas turned away. Later that night, at home, Douglas would ignore every single question that his mother asked him about dropping off his grandmother. Later that same night when Mildred woke up in an unusual bed.

The room was dark. Everything was new and unknown. From the smell, to the sounds, to the light in the hall streaming under the door. She didn't recognize the voices.

"Where am I?" she asked the darkness.

At dinner she had not eaten a bite. Picking at a plate of summer peas, she stared at the people around her, wondering who they were. Most were in wheelchairs. Most had red eyes and just sat there, chewing. She had spoken to some of the women and some had spoken to her. But when she asked where her home was, no one seemed to know. One wrinkled man with shifty brown eyes kept telling her that this was her home. Mildred refused to believe it.

"My home is at 125 Waldorf Street," she said, remembering the address. "125 Waldorf Street." She imagined the walls, the ceilings, the floors of dark brown oak. "That's where my home is."

"Nah," the old guy said. "That ain't it anymore."

"Well." Mildred pulled in deep breath, puffing out her chest. "I certainly think it is."

After dinner, in another brightly lit room, they had placed Mildred at a table with three other women who, like Mildred, were rather large, grey, and worn. One woman dealt a hand of cards to Mildred, who didn't play cards, and who kept looking at the other women, staring at them, at their eyes. She felt sorry for them. As if they weren't even there, she said, out loud, "It's a pity. A pity what happens to you in time."

They turned and looked at her. Mildred didn't notice. She went on shaking her head, saying how sad age was. One lady snapped at Mildred, telling her to shut up. But Mildred didn't hear and got up and walked toward the door. An orderly tried

to sit her down. Except Mildred put the young man in his place. "Honey. I don't belong here." She walked on, through the door, down the bright, florescent halls of the nursing home. Looking at the faded pictures on the walls, she spoke to every person she saw, asking if they could show her to her home. The people either ignored her or didn't care. One group in wheel chairs, surrounding a blaring TV, didn't even know she was there.

About three o'clock that morning Mildred had a dream.

In her dream she saw a great white light and saw, in that light, her entire life. When she was a girl with kinky blonde hair kept under a summer bonnet. When she was a young woman, proud to work in a shoe store, where she met her husband, who would give her a daughter, and a home.

A voice spoke to her. "Mildred, get up and go home."

She climbed from her bed, wearing a night dress, no shoes. She wandered down the hallway, looking, searching, hoping.

Maybe she was asleep. Surely she was still dreaming.

Nobody saw her. Not the nurses, nor the watch man.

She wandered the halls, drifting over the waxy, tiled floors. The voice directed her. Into an elevator, downstairs. She floated across the marble floors and passed through the glass doors. Outside, a cool wind was blowing. Stars sparkled in the sky. She moved on, carried by the breeze. Dull lamps lit the night. She moved down roads, past houses. Crept up a grassy hillside to a highway, still busy at night. Trucks rolled by. Cars kicked up dust. She paused, just for a moment. Then, she moved on, missing each truck, each automobile droning by. Her gown lifted in the wind. The headlights bleached her face. She drifted over the center rail, crossed the other side. Nobody saw her, though. Maybe she was already a ghost.

The next morning Mildred was discovered her on the front porch of her home trying to break in. She was knocking on the door, peering into the windows, circling the building, looking around back. A neighbor who didn't know Mildred reported

her to the police and the police found her in the front yard pulling weeds from the cracks in the sidewalk. She waved at them when they arrived and she smiled as she always did, fixing her hair a little, pushing it back. The police realized she was the old lady from the nursing home that had been reported missing late that night. It was difficult to believe, though. Her house was more than five miles from the nursing home. How had she gotten that far?

When the police asked her, Mildred replied, "Why I live here, don't I? It's my home."

But the building had been sold and the apartment wasn't hers anymore. Nothing was hers. Her life had been plucked like a flower from the earth.

When the police dragged her from the yard and put her into the car, she shut her eyes and wept.

"What are you doing? This is my home." She hollered. "Stop the car."

But they didn't stop. They drove past the old city neighborhoods where she had lived her life, where the stories, characters, and people of her life would forever exist. Eventually she didn't say a word and didn't even look outside the window. She stared at her hands, slowly opening and closing her fingers again and again. Nobody could hear.

Sondra Spatt Olsen

HANDBAG

Ina's father loves to make money. It's not wise for a Jew to be good in business, Ina feels. Best be a poor dignified school-teacher or starving artist. She's read about The Holocaust in Europe. Ina's grandparents, aunts and uncles and cousins all disappeared—to Auschwitz, she thinks she's heard. She doesn't want events like that happening here in New York. Ina's managed to win all the prizes in high school by doing all the right things. But would her methods of perfection work with the Nazis? Best never to find out.

The college in Poughkeepsie has a stone wall around it, Gothic arches through which girls bicycle. Ina works hard to blend in. Though she's spent her previous life covering up her fleshy thighs, now she wears Bermuda shorts. Demi-tasse is served in the parlor after dinner. A boy at a dance asks her, "When did you come out?"

Ina's father, Sol, has done well in America. In high school Ina thought he'd done well. He has a corner house with a two car garage. When Ina comes home for Thanksgiving she realizes that the corner is in Brooklyn. The corner has a fire hydrant! A bus stops on that corner! No carved oak furniture. No mullioned windows. No fresh flowers anywhere! Her mother wears a Hoover and kerchief when she kneels to wash the kitchen floor on Friday afternoon.

Sol always comes home from The Place late. He eats dinner, reads *The New York Post* for five minutes and goes to sleep. A linen supply is not a glamorous business, but if you work from 5 a.m. to 8 p.m., you can make a good living.

Daughter and father have a friendly understanding. Don't ask me to do anything—I'm tired, the father says. Don't criticize me, the daughter says. Fine, yes, fine. *We get along.*

"He's not good at introspection," Ina tells her friends. To herself she thinks, "He's not good at reading *The New York Post.*"

One day Sol has a brainstorm. "Who supplies the college with linen?" he asks.

"They have a laundry."

"That's expensive to run. We can do rental much cheaper for them. Save them cash."

Ina shudders. She imagines her father pulling up outside her dormitory in a truck. Sol can carry huge bags of linen on his back. In the past she admired that feat. He's strong, he's masterful. He won't send a driver to Poughkeepsie. No, he'll make the delivery himself, carry the bundles into the parlor while the girls drink demi-tasse.

"Who's the party in charge of the laundry?"

Ina doesn't answer.

The next day Sol puts a piece of paper in her hand. On a ripped corner of a blue-lined tablet in a spidery European hand: **MILLICENT HURST.**

"She's the one to talk to."

"Who? About what?"

"About taking linen. You go in and talk to her."

"Me? That's ridiculous. I don't even know her."

A lie. Ina knows her. Millicent Hurst has lunch every day in Ina's dormitory. A spare, upright middle-aged woman in good British tweeds, fair with a florid face. Actually, she looks like a man, a sportsman, and she ought to have a gun and dog. Each noon Miss Hurst sits at a table near the mullioned windows with The Warden. She passes through the cafeteria line with the girls. She speaks in a friendly way. She remarks to Ina, "Not undersea salad again. I loathe lime jello." Once she says to a sophomore, "Can't wait for those toll house cookies!" She is, if anything, approachable.

Sol glowers. "You think salesmen always know their customers?"

"I'm not a salesman."

"You will be. You get this customer, you get a commission."

"I'm not doing it."

Each time Ina returns home, Sol says exactly the same thing. "Signed up Miss Hurst yet? What you waiting for?"

"Why do you need my school? It's hours away. Too far from Brooklyn."

"Wrong. A big customer is never too far away. Go ahead, talk to her. Business is business."

"My father is very aggressive," Ina tells her friends. "Bully," she thinks.

Time passes. Spring and summer. Sol appears to forget, but never for long. Ina's going to the ballet in a pretty cotton sun dress with a sweetheart neckline. She's wearing two crinolines.

Sol is eating an apple at the kitchen table. He doesn't say, "Have a nice time at the New York City Ballet," but "When you seeing Miss Hurst?"

"Never!"

"Who paid for your outfit?" He chomps his apple and spits the pits. "Customers. Getting new customers."

"Let her be," Ina's mother says, as she climbs up from the basement with a bag of onions. "She's not the type and you know it."

"She's my daughter. She's the type."

"Why don't you do it yourself? You're the big tycoon. It's not even your own business, you're working for your uncle, so why not shut up?"

Sol shrugs. Nothing bothers him. Is this possible? He's not a bit like Ina. Seeing a lost glove in the gutter makes her sad.

Next week Sol shows Ina a letter. At the present time we contemplate no change in our arrangements. Ina can't read Sol's expression. He doesn't seem to have one. When he lost his father and mother, his brothers and sisters, his TWIN sis-

ter, he didn't have an expression either. But what does Ina know? She was only in the second grade.

Thanksgiving again. Ina is letting her hair grow long. All the girls at college have short hair, little caps of hair. Now Ina wants to stand out. She has a boyfriend this semester and she travels from Poughkeepsie to New Haven by taxi, flanked by girls in blond fur coats. She sees the Yale-Harvard game but can't remember it. She feels guilty about the taxi fare.

It's a national holiday, so Sol is forced to nap in the living room chair. He opens his eyes. "Signed up Miss Hurst yet?"

"She said NO," Ina cries in terror.

"They want a good price. I'm going to send her a gift. A nice pocketbook. Koblenz, expensive, the best. We get them wholesale."

"Don't you dare!"

She's helpless to stop her father from sending that handbag. He can do anything he wants. And it's all for money.

"In business a gift is common," Sol tells her, reclining in his chair again. "A Christmas gift."

Ina imagines Millicent Hurst's contemptuous smile as she unwraps the bag. A Christmas gift? What won't these Yids do to make a buck?

"If you send it, I'm not coming home again." But where will she go? She'll have to be a waitress because her touch typing is poor. She'll run away to Harvard and work for The Window Shop.

"I'm going to put your name on the card. In a week go and say, 'Did you receive the pocketbook?' When she thanks you, sign her up. It's cheaper for her, remember. You're doing her a favor."

Ina begins skipping lunch. She roams the campus, heart thumping. She imagines and reimagines the approaching scene. A shiny black patent handbag thrown in her face. Miss Hurst railing, "Shameless, vulgar, ridiculous!"

Maybe Sol won't sent the bag. Ina hopes but doesn't believe. Sol always means what he says. He never sees the other

side of anything.

What if Ina hears a sudden knock on the door? What if Millicent Hurst stands there with a large box? "College regulations do not permit gifts. Still, thanks loads for the thought. Thanks so much for the thoughtful thought." But before Miss Hurst can utter these words, Ina drops dead.

Ina is losing weight. She's looking rotten. Her English paper is overdue. "Write 500 words on an impossible situation. Use no adjectives."

Slowly, slowly it dawns on Ina. The worst thing is the best thing. She *MUST* see Miss Hurst. She can dissociate herself from the handbag. Speak to Miss Hurst. Explain.

"My father doesn't understand how things are done," she'll tell Miss Hurst. Or should she say, he's not fully human?

Millicent Hurst doesn't appear at lunch that day. "She has the flu," says The Warden, whose kind face belies her title. "Milly's sick as a dog."

Ina looks Milly up in the school directory. She lives outside the wall, but not far—just across the road in The Thornycroft Apartments, a faculty residence. Ina bicycles over and rings her bell.

After a long wait Milly opens the door in a pink quilted bathrobe, her pincurls lank around her ears, her complexion blanched.

Ina stares at the floor, stunned by her daring. "I'm Ina Ziff."

"Ina, how nice of you to come by. I was going to drop a note in the unstamped mail. So kind of you to think of me." She rises over the threshold in pink fluffy slippers and extends her hand. "Please do give my regards to your father." She sinks back over the threshold and closes the door in Ina's face.

Days pass. When Ina returns to Brooklyn, it's really hard to talk to her father. Why can't they converse like other people? She has to try.

"So, tell me," Ina says, "did Miss H. sign up?"

"Nah! No dice! They're not changing things this year. She

said I should call her again next December.” Sol rolls his eyes. “For sure she’ll need a new pocketbook by then.”

“Daddy, you ought to know. Please don’t make me do something like that again.”

Sol is baffled. “What’s so terrible?” Everything vulnerable in him has sunk down deep. Ina knows she’ll never be able to reach him.

“In this country people don’t take bribes.”

“Sure they do.”

“It’s wrong, Daddy. I don’t want you to get into trouble.”

“Trouble?” Sol laughs. “This is America. What can they do, shoot you?”

Matt Bondurant

IT NEVER ENDS

Dear Sally,

I'm not going to say anything about Ray or you living up in New Jersey. A couple of things have happened here. Simon is fine, and he still loves you and misses you and looks forward to your visit in August. Do you remember Jimmy Trimble, the boy that drowned last winter? You remember him, the red-headed boy that used to ride his bike in circles in the front yard? Anyway I knew I had to do something or Simon might not get straight again. I know it's been awhile, but I thought you should know about all this. Si wasn't doing so well, and Bernie down at the station suggested an animal, a pet. But I knew that I couldn't go with a dog, not with what happened to the last one. I don't really know anything about any other pets than dogs and cats.

So I went to the pound and picked up a kitten, a tough looking fuzzy orange little guy with large yellow eyes. I swear that kid's eyes stopped running the minute I brought him in. Simon took to him right off, from the start. He wanted to name the cat Jimmy. I said Si that ain't right. That's not a good idea. You don't name animals after people. Especially little boys that went under the ice like that. He goes and asks me where did Jimmy go anyway? And I know he didn't mean the cemetery or something like that. I told him that God took Jimmy, he took him under the ice and then to a better place because he had something for him to do. Even though we don't go to church I think he understood. I guess you were right about that one after all, church I mean. It might have helped a few things.

But he wanted to call the cat Jimmy anyway so that's what we've been calling him. I couldn't argue much with him. And for a while Jimmy the cat straightened things out for us. Simon didn't feel to good about what happened to Jimmy Trimble. They both went in the water together you know, but Si squirmed back onto the ice. Some of the other boys were pulling them on a sled on that stretch of the Potomac down behind Mount Vernon Gardens. In fact, after they fell in, one of the boys was yelping that his sled was sinking, so my boy Simon went back in the water to get it even. But he didn't know Jimmy was still in there. He feels pretty bad about leaving Jimmy in there, but I told him there wasn't anything he could do, and he was lucky to be alive himself. It all happened so fast. And after he gets it, and he is lying on the ice, all wet and cold, holding onto that sled, that's when he sees Jimmy Trimble under the ice. Jimmy was a pretty pale kid to begin with if you remember, and that night Simon just kept crying about how he could see all these blue veins in Jimmy's face through the ice. That has to be hard on a kid.

Ever since I quit the force Simon and I seem to have a better understanding of each other. That's the good news. I'm still drawing disability, and even when I could work I didn't really have to, so we spent a lot of time together. We got into the habit of staying up late, then going out for walks to enjoy the night air. Jimmy would follow us the entire time, just about twenty yards behind us. And when we stopped and turned to look at him he would stop and start licking himself or doing something so it didn't look like he was following us. We would walk eight blocks to the 7-11 and get ice-cream sandwiches, the old kind that still cost thirty-five cents. And we both licked around the edges as it melted. Then he would go to bed and I would have a drink or two and watch the late show, falling asleep in the chair usually. When I woke up in the chair at about four I would walk through the dark hallway to his door and see his hands over his chest, rising with his breath. It always so soft, his breath, so that I had to stand still for several minutes

before I could hear it. You know how that scares the heck out of me sometimes. And Jimmy would sometimes raise his head from where he was curled up between Simon's legs and begin to purr. His eyes shone in the dark like flickering yellow coals in a fire. I would think of what a fine looking boy I have. I would stand there and think of how damn lucky I am to have a boy like that.

When Jimmy left for the first time my neck was just starting to heal up. I was in the habit of feeling the ridges of skin with my hand when I was standing around, daydreaming or whatever. There is a bumpy texture to the scars, all along the back of my neck, going down between my shoulder blades. I had cut a bunch of tendons and nerves and things, so it was sore all the time. The doctor said that I most likely would feel it forever, but it wouldn't keep me from doing much. Except police work of course, or anything else where I might risk neck injury. I didn't mind because I knew I wasn't going back anyway. That's all I thought about during the trial, all six stinking weeks of it. I'm not going back, I'm not going back, I'm not going back.

He was gone for about two days the first time. Simon was scared but I wasn't really because Jimmy was always that kind of cat. He was always out, all the time it seemed. Basically he only came in to eat, and to sleep in Simon's room. But then he even stopped doing that. Jimmy was the kind of cat that seemed just barely removed from his larger cousins. He hunted like no cat I have ever heard of. Every day he killed something, birds, rabbits, squirrels, moles. Anything he could get his hands on. He would drag up on the back porch and slowly chew on them, and most he would eat entirely. I've never seen anything like it. Once he came up at dusk dragging a rabbit twice as big as he was by the throat. The rabbit was still kicking a bit, so I drove Jimmy off and brained the rabbit with a shovel and buried it behind the woodpile. I was not about to let him eat something that large on the porch, especially with Simon around. Si knew that Jimmy killed lots of things, but didn't think much of it

then. Mr. Wagner next door would joke with me when we were setting up sprinklers in the summer that our house was the only one in the neighborhood that didn't have anything living in the back yard. And it was true. Other yards in the neighborhood had birds chirping and squirrels scampering about. But our backyard was dead quiet. I'm not kidding.

But then Jimmy was gone for a whole week, and Simon started to get upset. He said he couldn't sleep at night. I told him I didn't know what to do, maybe Jimmy just liked to roam. He needed to get around to hunt you know. By December Jimmy was around only a few days every couple of weeks. I can only imagine what he was eating out there. And Simon was really in a funk, he moped around and spent many afternoons on his bike, pedaling around the neighborhood, down to the river, up toward the highway. He never said he was looking for Jimmy, but I know he was. And sometimes I went along, but we never saw him.

The trial had been over for a while now, and I was just about to start thinking about what I was going to do. I knew I needed to work again. They offered me several desk set-ups with the force but I was done with that. I didn't want anything to do with all that. But I did pick up a couple of nights a week with a security company. All I have to do is drive over to the college in Salisbury and park in front of this row of sorority houses. Only five hours at a time, usually on Friday and Saturday nights. I don't carry a gun or anything. They gave me a jacket with the company name on it and a cell phone to call the cops. I usually just sit there and drink coffee and listen to the radio. They have a couple fine stations there I like to listen to, usually talk radio and this one old-time country station is kind of fun. Sometimes I read the paper.

The sororities all put in money together to hire someone to come out here. Weekend nights they had a lot of drunk guys pounding on windows or throwing toilet paper in the trees. They still come down the street in groups, these drunk college boys, but they never do anything. They never even look at me.

The girls often look toward my car before they go in. They seem to like me being there.

It works out because Si usually spends the night with that Stover kid from school. They got a big basement over there with a ping-pong table and he has groups of kids over on weekends. I took him along to the college a couple of times but he gets too jumpy, and wants to run around the hedges and lawns of the houses. They are beautiful places really, you should see it. Huge brick places with columns and wide lawns that are perfect like a golf course. They must bring in someone for that.

Sometimes a girl will come stamping down the street, looking pretty upset, and slam the door when she gets inside. They are all very dressed up, and drive nice cars like BMW's and fancy Toyota's. All thin, tiny little girls. I've also seen a couple of them crying, just about every night I've been there. I think about you when you were at college, and I wonder if that ever happened to you, whatever is happening to these girls. I don't understand what could be happening, what could possibly make them so upset. Young, pretty, living in a house like that and all.

Last night we had the last basketball game of the season. The league plays over at the middle school now, a new place that's real nice with new rubber floors and big stands. Si's pretty happy because we won and he scored three baskets. This is my second year coaching, and I've learned a lot about kids that's for sure. I also learned I can't play Si too much, or other parents start giving me looks. He's not so good anyway, he's still a bit scared of the ball. We've been working on it, and he can hit a foul shot or two if he gets the chance.

Last year in a playoff game the other team realized Si couldn't hit free throws. This was right after you left. I mean he couldn't even reach the rim from there, throwing it with all his might. So at the end of the game, we are up by a couple and their coach sends a kid over to foul Simon. He misses of course, and so they get the ball back. We stopped them again and as we were coming down the court I saw the coach yelling for the kid to foul Si again, so I just yelled for Simon to run, to run away

from him. So there is Simon running away from this kid, running in circles at the other end of the court while the other players are still playing the game. The crowd sees it and everyone is cheering and laughing and yelling for Simon to run. Si always was pretty quick, and he jukes the kid a couple of times and then time runs out and we win. We were all pretty happy, but some of the parents were laughing so hard I thought they would bust. I tried to make it seem like Si won that game for us, but he didn't buy it. He started crying as soon as we got into the car. He begged me, crying his eyes out, not to make him go inside the Pizza Hut where we were having the after game party. I didn't want to put him through that so we just went home and walking up to the door Si said he wanted to die. The kid was awful embarrassed I know, but I told him never to say something like that ever again. Where would that leave me? I said to him. Then what would I do? We just ordered our own pizza, and Si seems to have gotten over it okay now.

I never thought I'd meet a woman coaching little league basketball, but that's how it happened Sally. I really did. We have one little girl on the team, but she's already bigger than most the boys, and gets most our rebounds. Plus most of the boys on the other teams are scared of her it seems. I know Si is terrified of her. That's Gina's kid, that little girl. The boys seem pretty content with it too, and they always try to get her the ball, especially if it's close. In fact in the last game Si had an open break, he was all by himself under the boards and he waited for her to come all the way down the court. He passed it to her, and she executed a perfect lay-up, without breaking stride. Si just stood there, kind of crouched, like all of us I guess, transfixed by it all. It took me all season to get up the nerve to do anything, to ask Gina out. I guess you could say I was scared of the mother too.

Gina's been divorced for about three years. Mostly we talk about the team, about basketball and things. I can see where her kid gets it, because Gina is built real solid and she looks straight at you. Plus she has strong feet, large feet for a woman, which

I always like. She used to play softball and basketball in college, and you can tell by the way she holds a ball, and how she steps into a throw. Gina always wants to go to a full court press, even when we are winning, but I always feel sorry for the other team. Kids this age just fall apart under any kind of press.

I told her all about you. I hope you don't mind. Maybe I feel like I'm at the start of something here. Gina has a way of slightly shrugging when she smiles, like she is saying she doesn't know and she can't help it at the same time. I'll come walking into a room and she'll do this little shrug thing, smiling at me, and it kind of lights me up inside. At home watching TV or in the car drinking coffee in front of the sorority houses sometimes I'll start thinking about her, and I get this ache deep in my bones, something I hadn't felt in a long while. That's the way I felt about you, for a long time even after you were gone.

I know it's not much but last night I ask her if she wants to go celebrate after the game with me and Simon. So the four of us get ice-cream sandwiches, and when we pull into the driveway we see Jimmy in the window. Simon started locking him in, and it gets bad cause Jimmy can make a lot of noise when he wants he just paces and gets between your legs until you let him out. Gina was the one who told me that Jimmy kills all those things and brings them to the back door because he wants to show his appreciation. She was a biology major at the University of Maryland, and now she teaches high school in Salisbury.

I'm opening a beer for Gina when Jimmy starts making a lot of noise at the door. Simon says please Dad, can we keep him in tonight? I don't want him going out. And I say I don't think that's a good idea, he'll just howl all night. So Simon starts to cry, and he throws his sandwich on the floor so I smack him one on the back of the neck and tell him to clean it up. I feel bad then because of Gina and her little girl, but Gina is pretty smart about stuff like that, and she takes her kid in the living room to watch TV. Si cleans up the ice-cream but keeps crying so I say all right look, I'm tired of this myself. I'll tell you

what, tonight we'll let him go but I'll just follow him and see where he goes, okay? As soon as I say it I think this is a pretty stupid idea, but he runs over and hugs my leg like he used to when he was real little and says thank you Dad, thank you so much. And what can you do about that?

I'm already in tennis shoes and sweats so I figure I'm ready to chase a cat through the suburbs. Gina is trying not to laugh, and says she'll stay and watch the kids, so I let him out and the damn cat is off like a shot. I take off after him, and Simon is yelling hurry Dad, don't let him get away. Thank God Jimmy slows down after a few blocks, and now I'm just kind of following him a ways back. He cuts through a few yards, checks out the bird feeder at the Ferguson's, then slices back to the sidewalk. I've never seen a cat use the sidewalk like Jimmy, almost like a person. He goes a few blocks, then crosses route 11, pausing at the edge to let some cars pass. He takes a left on Remington, down near the ball fields, then across to Kidwell. I figure this must be it, because I know Kidwell dead ends down by the Good Shepherd Catholic Church.

So the damn cat runs right up the sidewalk of the parsonage there, that little house next to the church, and I think you gotta be kidding me. The door opens and there's a man, about my size, dressed in black, who picks Jimmy right up and closes the door. I stand there a few minutes, sweating a bit, and listen to the crickets. Then I walk up around the side of the house, and in the side window I can see a man bent over a desk who I guess must be the priest or pastor or whatever Catholics call them, and I'll be damned if Jimmy don't jump right up on this desk. I can see his face, a nice, smooth face, just what you would like to see when you went to church. I'm thinking maybe Simon and I should start going. He's wearing his collar thing, and he starts stroking Jimmy just like he likes it, from his head down to his tail, and Jimmy is arching his back up into his hand. I'm sitting there in the dark, just quiet and sweating, under this preacher's sycamore tree, watching him pet my boys cat, and I'm thinking how am I going to explain this to Simon?

When he opened the door I had no idea what I was going to say. But he just looked at me he seemed to know why I was there. I introduced myself, and he let me in without really asking what I wanted. Maybe I looked like I was in trouble, because I was sweating so much. He had one of those old, dusty, but clean houses, with tall bookshelves and lots of dark wood. Lots of little things, like a line of blue-white porcelain bells on the mantle, old books on the coffee table, stuff you used to like. There was like a certain weight to the air, like a layer of age. But real neat still.

Then we go and sit at the kitchen table and he's quiet for a while, then he asks me how I am doing, like he already knows me! I say I'm fine, all right. Then its quiet again for a while, so I mention the cat, Jimmy. Yes, it's a fine cat he says, but that isn't why you're here. Since it is why I'm here, I don't say anything, because I'm interested in what he thinks I am here for! I know all about it, he says, I read all the reports in the paper. You know they were members of our church he says. They had been coming here for years. I baptized that boy myself, he says. We all took it pretty hard. Because they were such a big family, everyone seemed to be close to at least one of them, he says. He asked me if I wanted a drink, and I told him I like whiskey okay. He goes and gets the whole bottle and a couple of ice trays. I forgot that Catholic priests can drink like that, on account of them not being able to marry and all.

So he goes on a bit like this, talking about this boy and his family, and all their activities at the church, the way the boy was training to be an acolyte. I didn't have the heart to stop him. I didn't have any idea what he was talking about at first. He was talking about the Mobley's Sally, that family, the ones who burned up. He must have recognized me, from the paper I guess. The cat wandered around our legs under the table, rubbing on us a bit, just like he did at home, and it didn't seem like he even recognized me. I wondered if it slept between his legs, the way it did with my boy Simon. The preacher and I had put away half that bottle after about an hour, and I still hadn't got

to the Jimmy problem. No, but I talked about a lot of things.

I talked about that night outside the Mobley's house, stuff I never even told you. But only because he asked me. And I know you asked me, but it just felt different, that's all I can say. So I told him how I was right there, looking in the side window and how I saw the whole thing go down. How I'm out in the bushes, looking through the window, and I've got a perfect view of the big couch and the whole family tied up with a long cord by the hands and feet. Through the doorway in the kitchen I can see him on the phone, talking to the negotiator, with the shotgun pointed at the back of Mrs. Mobley's head. And I can see Mr. Mobley and his older son doing something with their hands, and then I see the lighter. They start trying to light the cord on fire with the lighter to free their hands. They have it going, and me and Peterson in the window are trying to signal them to stop, to don't do it, but we can't do much because he is standing right there and if that shotgun goes it would take out half of them. Mr. Mobley smiles as his son gets the cord lit, then he stops when the cord starts blazing up. The fire takes off down the cord now they are all screaming because their hands are burning.

This next part I never told you before. You see, it wasn't that kind of cord, not like regular rope. This was a plastic kind that burned long and hot. This is the part I couldn't tell you back then. They are all jumping and scrambling on the couch, and one of the boys tries to get up and run, but the same cord is around his feet so he falls flat on the floor and his legs are on fire. The fire goes down the cord and hits the little boy on the end, who is wearing long heavy sweater that goes up like it's full of gasoline. I see the boy's face just melt for a few seconds and then turn black and the rest of the Mobley's see it too. They all go rigid with their eyes and mouths in these huge black circles. That's it, the hard part, that one instant of black horror in their faces. I couldn't bear that. Maybe I still can't. And that's when I went through the window and cut my back all to hell. You know the rest.

I talked about my back, my scars on my neck, the tightness. How I can't turn my head to the left barely at all, and how you aren't much use as a cop if you can't turn your head. I talked about you Sally, how much I missed you. How hard it was for Simon and I to be here alone without you. How that horrible thing with the Mobley's kind of screwed us up. I told him about me hitting you those times. I told him about you moving to New Jersey to live with Ray.

I know it, but he had a real kind face, with deep lines though he wasn't any older than me, and his eyes were soft and he always looked right at you when you spoke. And you know how I like that, because like you said, I always spend too much time looking at the ground. I still do. But I do like it when someone looks right at you, so when I do look up, there they are. I actually told him that, about that talk we had about my problem with always looking at someone's feet when I talk to them. He seemed to think that was real interesting. I told him how I could tell if a suspect was lying or not by watching their feet. All that stuff about seeing it in their eyes and all, I don't know about that. But I do know if you want to know what a man is thinking, look at his knees, how they twitch or tremble. Or how he turns his ankles or curls his toes inside his shoes. Always worked for me. This preacher's feet were solid. They didn't budge. I guess that's how he became a preacher.

People remember you, he said. You may think you are alone in this, that because after you went through that window you were alone, with no one else to see it. To witness the thing. But people know, they remember you. You helped save some of those people. And we will mark this, he said, we will mark you forever in our memories.

After a bit later I got that double vision, you know how I get when I drink too much. It's real late now and I have both hands on the table and I say, you know I actually came here for the cat. What? He says, my cat? No, my boy's cat I say. You see, that cat you have here, that's my boy's cat, Jimmy. He named him after Jimmy Trimble, you know, the kid that went

under the ice on the river and drowned last winter? His eyes got a bit wide, and he just looked at the table for a bit. Lord help us he said. Lord help us. I just nodded.

We were quiet for a minute, and so I said, it's okay, it's okay now. The cat helped Simon get over it, you know? So that's why I need him back. He nodded, then he did something real odd, he just started smiling at me. So I was smiling back, and then we started laughing, and soon we were both laughing so hard the tears were running down our cheeks again. He had a strong laugh, louder than mine. He reached across the table and touched my hand with one finger. It never ends, he says. Good gracious, it never ends does it?

So I go home and Simon is sleeping on the couch. Gina's kid is curled up on the carpet in front of the TV, and Gina is in the kitchen. Gina says so I see you got him back. I just nod and set Jimmy down and he runs right over to Gina's kid and starts to sniff her sleeping face.

Your refrigerator is a mess she says, I was just throwing out some spoiled things. There are a few old jars and things that I know are moldy stacked on the counter. Thanks, I say. You didn't have to do that. I pour another drink but I seem to have forgotten the ice, which is fine because I don't want it anyway. We both go into the living room and the light from the TV flickers over my boy's face, coloring it, making it seem to move though I know he's asleep. What a fine boy he is, I was thinking, what a fine boy.

So that's it Sally, that's where I'm at. Simon and I miss you a whole lot. Sometimes I begin to forget what you look like, your face, I just can't see it. Isn't that strange? And I don't like that at all. Remember how you said how you loved the way my eyes drooped, the little pouches under them, and the creases in my forehead that never went away even though you tried to smooth them out? It's been a long time I guess. I guess part of me hopes that Gina will start to say the same kinds of things, and part of me hopes she never will. I just don't want you to forget us down here in Maryland. I always tell Si that you are

coming to see us soon, but he doesn't believe it. I was thinking maybe we could come up to New Jersey? I don't care if Ray is there or not, and I promise nothing bad will happen. I hope you can forget some of the things that happened here. And maybe forgive me too. Si would want to say hello, and I love you, so I guess I'll go ahead and say that for him.

Love, Tim

Mike Schroeder

TEN REASONS

1. Youth

The priest, new to his calling and his parish in Fletcher, Oklahoma, watched the pretty girl twist a strand of blonde hair between her fingers. She picked up a pencil and erased a smudge mark from the top of the piece of unlined paper in front of her. Her fiancé retrieved the Milky Way wrapper he had rolled into a projectile and shot it at the plastic wastebasket in the corner of the darkly paneled office adjacent to the sanctuary. The priest thought it was done playfully. They were only teenagers, so he voiced no objection. Despite their youth, they had in the priest's mind done well on the Marriage Success Inventory (which his predecessor had told him wasn't worth the paper it was printed on). They'd even taken it upon themselves to devise lists of ten reasons each wanted to be married to the other. The priest was proud of the work he'd done with this couple.

He had a small wooden statue of the sitting Buddha on the corner of his mahogany desk. It was a leftover from the previous priest, who'd received it from a parishioner long gone to Kansas City. The girl asked to rub its tummy. Just for the hell of it, said her fiancé, fingering the ball cap in his lap. Maybe for good luck, said the priest, and then they all agreed, with awkward laughs, that it was better to be good than lucky.

The priest moved through his checklist: ceremony, vows, ring exchange, first night together, honeymoon. He imagined this was a time of great stress for couples, and he asked these two about conflicts. They confessed none. He presented them

their certificate indicating they had completed the marriage preparation course, they said a prayer together, and he sent them on their way.

2. Birth

Some people just went ahead and did it anyway, the nurse's aide thought as she passed a cigarette to the new father. Damn the torpedoes and full steam ahead and let's have a kid. It wasn't the guy's fault; none of them could keep their peckers in their pants, especially around Fletcher. They weren't wired that way. Find a girl who would put out and pull that sucker out of its holster. His life was going to be damned different now. She wanted to take that bent ball cap from his head and toss it in the garbage, but instead she raised her plastic cup of champagne in a toast to the new father. Everyone else in the sweaty little smoking lounge did the same. Down the hatch, the new father said. Someone got cheese and crackers from a vending machine. He pawed at the linoleum floor, then snuffed his cigarette in his cup. It sizzled out. The nurse's aide saw him smile at her and continue to smile at her, and she instinctively knew what he wanted. She took him by the arm and led him up the service stairway to the pediatric ward and then down the hallway to where his wife and new daughter were sleeping. It had been a while since she'd been on the receiving end of a smile like that one.

3. Security

The insurance agent dipped her pinky into the small, squat pot of cold sore medicine and moved it around until the tip of her finger was covered. She pulled her lower lip from her gum and looked around the office, hoping no one was watching. The hell with them if they are, she thought. I'm the one who wrote the policy. She always broke out in cold sores when she worked with young couples who weren't sure what they were committing to. She told this pair that life with a toddler was different and they better have insurance, a message they'd also

heard from the priest. Never know what's around the bend, especially in Fletcher. Breathing the livestock stench could probably kill you. The insurance agent thought selling this stuff was like a coyote picking off penned sheep. The cold sores, she figured, were God's revenge. She finished with the ones on her lip. The one on her cheek could wait until she was alone.

4. Transportation

The used car salesman adjusted the picture of his wife and six-year-old daughter on his desk. The girl's arms surrounded the neck of the dachshund they'd purchased a year ago. It was a test, buying the dog. They had to come up with a creative compromise, because his wife had wanted a Boston terrier and he wanted a golden retriever. He thought about the couple that had just left the showroom. They had a daughter about the same age as his. They couldn't agree on much, refused to define themselves. He said he liked a model, and she'd come back lukewarm on it. She liked a color and maybe he did, maybe he didn't. The used car salesman had worked with people like this before. He'd been a President's Club producer most of the ten years since high school, and what he usually did was try to get a couple first to declare themselves and then agree on one thing. Two doors or four sometimes worked, but even the wishy-washiest couples could usually agree on the transmission. These two agreed they liked both options, that it didn't matter. The young man spent most of the time they were together stroking his goatee and adjusting his ball cap, bill to the front, bill to the back and then off, before finally coming full circle and putting it on straight again. The used car salesman had to take a step back, let them and the kid wander the lot a little bit. Maybe they really weren't ready.

5. Sacrifice

Everyone had decisions to make, the softball coach was well aware, but he hated to see his shortstop give up the game. Oh, sure, it was only town league ball, but she was the best

damned shortstop he'd ever laid eyes on in person. She should play the game forever, but she had a kid and her time wasn't her own anymore. The softball coach watched her swallow up ground balls during infield practice. A crossover glide to the backhand, turn and throw all in one motion. Cal Ripken would love this gal. When she circled the bases she could really fly, the perfect leadoff hitter, table setter for the rest of the lineup.

The softball coach wiped a raindrop from his scorebook. He'd made the same decision years ago that she was making. Hell, who didn't? You either got on with life or it got on with you, and it was mostly the latter around here. He took out the Wonder Bread wrapper he used to cover the scorebook. Damn rain. Farmers sure could use it, but he wanted to play this one tonight, his last chance to watch her. The sky was a steady purple gloom beyond the buggy glare of the ball field lights. He got up from the wooden bench and called his players to the dugout. She sprinted in, short and compact, close to the hard dirt of the infield.

6. Shelter

There had already been a couple of cases of one hand not knowing what the other was doing, so the fixit man now made sure he was getting the same marching orders from both the husband and the wife before he lifted a finger. Last month he had to repaint the bedroom because their daughter decided she was too old for Mickey Mouse and the missus sided with her, against the husband.

He climbed out of the cab of his Ford Ranger and into the muggy Fletcher summer. He put on his work gloves and stood at the spot he'd eyeballed for the main post of the new fence in the new backyard of the new house he knew they'd stretched to purchase six months ago. This was the point farthest from the house. They'd marked it too, with a half-deflated, heart-shaped balloon tied to a Sherwin-Williams stir stick. The fence would extend from here about ninety feet in both directions, meet two other posts and turn back toward the house. He took the post

digger from the bed of the pickup and tried to plant it where the heart marked the spot. The tool wouldn't take in the hard earth of the new subdivision. He tried again, pounding it into the dirt. Hard as a block of ice. He kicked the ground, and a swirl of dust enveloped his boot, then blew off toward Arkansas. No way a fence post is going here, the fixit man thought.

7. Indulgence

The manicurist had another Girl Scout cookie. Thin Mints were her favorite, and the side of the box said four of them made up one serving. Ten made her feel a little guilty. Her conscience could handle seven. She liked them with milk, and sometimes she even liked them cold, but that was only after midnight, by herself in the kitchen without any kids or the old man. When her thick fingers were warm from work, like today, the chocolate smeared and got everywhere if she wasn't careful. She wiped her hands on a towel and turned her attention back to her Rolodex.

Before the cookies, her pencil had been poised to erase the woman's name. The manicurist knew she came to the salon only when she felt good about herself, which most often was a day or two after sex or when she had some spare money in her purse. Mad money, the woman called it. The fact she hadn't been in for almost a year made the manicurist a little concerned. After six years of seeing her, the manicurist couldn't help it. When they first started together, the woman liked colorful nails, and she even had her toes done Candied Apple Red in the summers. Over the years the colors faded. She eventually settled on the durable clear coat and didn't bother with her toes.

The manicurist flipped to the next card in the Rolodex and put the pencil back behind her ear. She closed the lid on the Thin Mints and returned them to the bottom drawer of her cabinet, underneath the spare cotton balls.

8. Passage

The driver's education instructor knew the girl had an anxiety issue. Mom wanted her to get her license ASAP, so she didn't have to haul her all over the place. Dad wanted to wait until they could afford to buy her a safe second-hand car. Might be waiting until hell freezes over, mom said. Considering this turmoil at home, the driver's education instructor wasn't surprised the girl was a terrible driver, had trouble even getting behind the wheel. In the one live drive she did during the semester, she was comfortable only circling the perimeter of the parking lot at five miles per hour. She didn't come close to another automobile until she went to park. That's when she gently broadsided the school district's new eighteen-passenger van because, she said, she was too nervous to stop.

The driver's education instructor had to give the kid a grade. He'd failed three students in his seventeen years on the job, all eons ago, and he'd never gotten over it. The girl had come to every class, so it wasn't that she lacked the motivation. She wasn't like most of the sixteen-year-old girls in Fletcher, overly sullen or overly sexed, or both. She was quiet, a nail-biter. She sure wasn't the first teenager to freeze up behind the wheel. The driver's education instructor opened his official grade book and took his red pen from the cylindrical container on his desk that also held the letter opener he'd received in commemoration of his being named district teacher of the year. He put a C next to the girl's name. Then he vowed to give the family the name of a good private instructor. The kid's problems weren't her fault.

9. Unrest

The challenge for the exterminator was to get at the wasps trapped between the screen of the second-floor window and the pane of glass without letting them into the house. The wife had called on Sunday and said she and her husband were in a disagreement loud enough for the neighbors to hear regarding the problem of having a wasp nest in the window. She said she was thinking that since they never opened the window anyway, the

wasps could live peacefully in their six-inch wide habitat until the late fall, when they would perish naturally in the cool weather. Her husband, the woman said, wanted things differently. He wanted the damned things taken care of as soon as possible, set free or killed, six of one or half dozen of the other. The exterminator thought of two people spending their time on a Sunday arguing about wasps trapped in a window. He thought of himself and his old lady. Sunday was church-going, or floating the river with the kids, or just drinking beers and playing whiffleball in the back yard.

The exterminator ate a chocolate chip cookie from the paper plate of store-bought ones they'd left for him. While he ate the cookie, one wasp crawled up the screen, dived and then buzzed into the wood of the frame. It dropped down to the bottom of the window, where it joined its partner in the tight space between the screen and frame. The exterminator wondered how the hell the wasps got themselves into this situation, trapped in there like that. They were now both still, clinging to the screen. They wanted out, to enjoy the day. He got up from the floor where he'd been sitting. If he could open the window a crack he could shoot some Black Flag behind it and the wasps wouldn't have a chance. Better to be dead than trapped with so much space just out of your reach. The exterminator thought he had to quit giving human characteristics to insects he was supposed to kill. He wasps and she wasps, for Christ's sake.

10. Paperwork

When he fantasized at all now he fantasized about golf. And it was the last hole at the country club that gave the priest fits. A dogleg left, it didn't play well with his fade, and he usually ended up scrambling for bogey. He was a consistent bogey golfer. He knew that if he improved his game, he'd have to quit playing with the majority of his parishioners and all of his colleagues. His fantasy drive landed right of center, two-fifty out, and left him a lazy seven-iron to the green. His reality drive most often landed him in the deep shit left of the fairway.

The priest reviewed the couple's bulging file without really thinking about what he was doing. Other than the fact he'd worked on the divorces of both sets of parents, there was nothing unusual about this case, and even that wasn't so unusual in Fletcher. They'd returned the mediation forms he'd requested them to complete following their last consultation. Their kid would have a job at the meat-processing plant after she graduated high school, and she was old enough to fend for herself. They each said there was no longer any good reason they could think of to stay together.

He held in his hand two pieces of yellowing, unlined paper he'd pulled from the file. They were lists they'd compiled when he first met them of reasons each wanted to be married to the other. The priest read the lists, cringing at the naiveté of some of the items and smiling at others. The boy had written, "You're not always asking me about my feelings, you just know," and, "You like watching me wrestle." The girl's list was similar. She wrote, "You remind me of my dad," and "You've got a cute butt." The priest came to the conclusion that the lists probably weren't worth the paper they were written on but were as necessary to them then as his golf fantasies were to him now. He didn't have the heart to throw them away.

He found himself thinking more and more about golf. What intrigued him about the game was that it was huge, played on expanses of hundreds of acres, and yet success often hinged on correctly doing the littlest things. Misplacing his hands on the grip by half a damn inch could throw off his whole game. He stood from his leather chair and took a club-less practice swing, concentrating on making a full circle. He couldn't help himself from seeing the ball fly straight and true.

Contributors Notes

Carrie Y. Takabata works as a Contract Specialist for the Department of Health, Developmental Disabilities Division and a part-time teacher at the Sylvan Learning Center. She is a co-editor of *Hybolic*.

A poet since age 15, *Terry J. Mulert's* work has appeared in numerous periodicals including the *Nassau Review*, *Big Scream*, *The Chiron Review*, *Pig Iron Press Anthology* and others. I am a wood sculptor living in the mountains outside Santa Fe, New Mexico where I own and operate an art gallery with my wife, artist Paula Castillo.

James Doyle and his wife, the poet Sharon Doyle, are retired. They finally have lots of time to read and write. He has poems coming out in *The Literary Review*, *New Orleans Review*, *West Branch*, and *South Dakota Review*.

Mario Milosevic's poems have appeared or are scheduled to appear in *The Black Warrior Review*, *Rattle*, *The Green Hills Literary Lantern*, *Light Quarterly*, *Nerve Cowboy*, *Pearl*, and many others. He works in a small town library in the Columbia River Gorge.

Tom C. Hunley is in his final year of doctoral work at Florida State University, where he holds the Kingsbury Creative Writing Fellowship. His poems have appeared in *Cimarron Review*, *5 AM*, *Exquisite Corpse*, and *Southern Poetry Review*.

Karen Glenn's poetry has been published in *Poetry Northwest* as well as in *Cream City Review*, *Seattle Review*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *National Forum*, *Chattahoochee Review*, *Water-Stone*, *Laurel Review*, and many others. *North American Review* nominated her for a Pushcart Prize. She was a finalist in the Four Ways Books Intro contest and a semi-finalist for the Kenyon Review Book Prize.

Patricia Murphy lives in Tempe, Arizona where she teaches writing at Arizona State University. Her poems have recently appeared in *Cimarron Review*, *Seattle Review*, *South Carolina Review*, and *Kalliope*.

Richard N. Bentley's stories and poems have appeared in numerous literary magazines, and he is the author of the forthcoming short story collections *Post Freudian Dreaming*. In 1994 he won the Paris Review/Paris Writers' Workshop International Fiction Award. He served as Chief Planner for the Mayor's Office of Housing in Boston and teaches at the University of Massachusetts and Western New England College.

Michael Murray lives in San Francisco. His stories and poems have appeared in *The Threepenny Review*, *New Orleans Review*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, and *Route One*, as well as previously in *Hawai'i Review*.

Rich Piet grew up in the Chicago suburbs. He has a BA in economics and currently lives in Portland, Oregon.

Clinton John Frakes lives and writes in Mānoa and is currently a doctoral candidate in English with emphasis in creative writing at the University of Hawai'i. He lived and wrote for many years in the American Southwest and spends most summers on the Rosebud Indian Reservation. He graduated from the writing programs of The Naropa Institute (BA 1989) and Northern Arizona University (MA 1994). He was born in Detroit, Michigan in 1964.

Kirby Wright was born and raised in Honolulu, Hawai'i. He is a graduate of Punahou School in Honolulu and the University of California at San Diego. He received his MFA in Creative Writing from San Francisco State University. Kirby has been nominated for The Pushcart Prize and is a past recipient of the Anne Field Poetry Prize, the Academy of American Poets Award, the Browning Society for Dramatic Monologue, and an Arts Council Silicon Valley Fellowship in Poetry. He wishes to dedicate his story "The Hanging Tree" to the memories of Arthur "Chipper" Gilman and Harold "HP" Hustace, founding members of the Outrigger Canoe Club.

Tara Wray was born in Manhattan, Kansas and now lives in New York where she is associate editor of the *Land-Grant College Review* (www.lgcr.org). Her stories have appeared in *Fiction*, *Sycamore Review*, *3rd Bed*, *Pindeldyboz*, and the *Shattered Wig Review*, with work forthcoming in *Gulf Coast* and *Snow Monkey*. She is the author of a chapbook, *Mini Tremble Fits*.

Connie Harrington has been a lawyer in New Mexico since 1985. She received her BA in cultural and linguistic anthropology, as well as her law degree, from the University of New Mexico. This is her fourth short story. Her previous stories were published in *The Pikeville Review*, *The Jabberwock Review*, and *Oasis, A Literary Magazine*.

Kate Benson will graduate from Princeton University in 2003 with an undergraduate degree in English and creative writing. She has received awards for her writing from the National Foundation for Advancement in the Arts, the White House Commission on Presidential Scholars, *Seventeen Magazine*, *Writer's Digest*, *Allegheny Review*, *Stony Brook*, and *USA Weekend*. She is currently at work on a novel under the guidance of Edmund White.

Snowy winters are the reason that *Mark Parobeck* continues to reside in upstate New York, where he has lived for the last ten years. In 2002 he traveled 90 miles from his home in Saratoga Springs to attend Breadloaf in Vermont. Those 90 miles were the most surprising and influential miles of his life. Breadloaf is a must for anyone devoted to the writers' craft.

Sondra Spatt Olsen is a winner of the Iowa Short Fiction Award for *Traps*. "Handbag" is part of a recently completed book about the Ziff family of Brooklyn.

Matt Bondurant's previous publications include *The Madison Review*, *The Baltimore Review*, and *Prairie Schooner*, where he won the 2000 Bernice Sloute Award for "Best Story of the Year by a New Writer." He is currently a Kingsbury Fellow at Florida State University living in London, England, where he is working on a novel.

Mike Schroeder received his MFA from the University of Missouri—St. Louis. He is working on a novel when not serving as Executive Director for ALS Hope—The Chris Hobler / James Maritz Foundation.

"I want my paintings to have a 'sermon'-like quality, to challenge the viewer to examine his life. I want my art to be beautiful—even strikingly so—yet get under your skin a little . . . I want people to look at my work and smile . . . then cringe a bit . . . then raise an eyebrow and ask why . . . then smile again. The people who buy my paintings are those who fight for equality in all of its forms, while condemning the negative effects of society's conventionalized traditions. Their lives are symbols of fairness and impartiality, and the art they buy reflects these qualities about themselves. In so doing, my paintings will grow on the buyer, so that they will enjoy the work more and more with the passing years. I am seeking gallery representation, particularly to show my current 'Orthodoxy' series, which will be completed in mid to late 2004."

A painting depicting a restaurant scene. In the foreground, a shirtless man is seated at a table, his back to the viewer. He is looking towards a woman seated across from him. The woman has long brown hair and is wearing a light green top. She is looking down at a menu or a book on the table. The table is covered with a white tablecloth and has several items on it, including a bottle of beer, a glass of beer, and a plate of food. In the background, a woman with long dark hair, wearing a dark top and a white apron, is standing and looking towards the left. The background is a dark, textured green color.

Kate Benson
Richard N. Bentley
Matt Bondurant
Clint Frakes
James Doyle
Karen Glenn
Connie Harrington
Tom C. Hunley
Mario Milosevic
Terry Mulert
Patricia Murphy

Michael Murray
Sondra Spatt Olsen
Mark Parobeck
Rick Piet
Mike Schroeder
Carrie Y. Takahata
Tara Wray
Kirby Wright