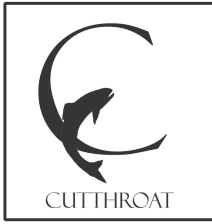


# CUTTHROAT, A JOURNAL OF THE ARTS



**Lucinda Luvaas, "Summer Swim," 8" x 10," video and digital work**

VOLUME 3, NUMBER 1, SUMMER 2007



## CUTTHROAT, A JOURNAL OF THE ARTS

**The 2007 JOY HARJO POETRY  
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# CUTTHROAT, A JOURNAL OF THE ARTS

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Lynn Watt, "Bird Girl," collage 10 1/2 inches X 7 1/2 inches

Shoshauna Shy

## **THE PERILS OF SIXTH GRADE**

Mack Hesketh gave us  
a new reason to fear girls:  
said when they were getting breasts  
blood flowed between their thighs.  
At any given moment  
no matter what she was up to  
a girl was either spurting  
or just about to start.  
It wasn't something you could tell  
by looking at her face,  
although it had been proven  
that dogs and grizzlies knew.  
Jed and me believed him;  
he had three older sisters  
and suspicious things soaking  
in big basement buckets.  
Mack said to take precautions  
when girls put on red dresses  
for that meant they were at full flush  
so don't sit in their chairs.  
Jed's eyes never looked so big  
as that one giddy morning  
Miss Finch told him to switch desks  
with Doris "D-Cup" Shears.

Paul Guest

## THE 50 FT. TALL WOMAN IN LOVE

O Steve Martin, let's get small, both of us,  
let's slip inside that lost decade  
that was all yours and even then  
your white hair was white in my dreams  
and I'll bring the wreckage  
of my decade, the atomic dread  
which set me going, which lengthened  
my bones like the day. Sleeping  
I could feel it and staring  
out into the infinite California summer  
I could feel it. The aliens  
back then always disappointed—  
paunchy, covered in tinsel,  
sexless from their long voyage  
through the stars. They talked that way,  
landing their absurd craft,  
lockstepping about like arthritic loons.  
This one wanted diamonds  
and I had one to give  
that was bigger than an Idaho potato.  
*The Star of India*  
my husband called it  
before he started seeing that other woman  
down at the bar  
that served spaghetti.  
But enough about me  
and all my destruction,  
the rampage  
in my makeshift bikini of linens, bedsheets,  
anything to cover up  
so much iconic embarrassment.  
It's different now  
and I'm different  
and the years are getting away from me  
and what we feared  
then, the mushroom cloud  
and its fissure  
turning everything to ash and splinters,  
seems quaint  
and my long bed is lonesome without a man  
and you make me  
laugh like thunder

so tell me you aren't curious,  
tell me you're not  
dying to see,  
tell me you never  
wanted a woman  
in whom you could vanish forever,  
tell me no,  
I dare you.



"Heavenly Ride," wax, graphite and oils on wood panel, 12"x12"

Lucinda Luvaas



Emily Lundin

## **KURSK: a romance**

On Sunday August 12, 2000, the head of the Russian navy, Admiral Vladimir Kuroyedov claimed to be in radio contact with the Guided Missile Submarine, Kursk. Although on that Sunday, the world received news that she was eighty-five miles from her Russian naval base of Severomorsk and sunken to stillness three hundred and fifty feet beneath the surface of the Barents Sea, the Kursk was still sending out signals, encoded and in Russian. After President Putin came down from his water skis in the Baltic Sea, the Russian navy admitted their contact with the sunken vessel merely “auditory.”

In fact, the marines were beating on the ship’s hull, vibrating the frigid Barents Sea from within the Kursk. The submarine rested on the sea’s floor at a list of sixty degrees—an angle too steep to accept the aid of a lifesaving vessel. It was like a glass tipped toward the earth submerged underneath the impossible weight of the Barents. The soldiers were surely walking on its walls kicking for life. One of those naval officers, Dimitiri Petya pounded harder than the others; he had something to get out. Spying as always in another submarine nearby, the Americans heard him. The pounding was like a baby’s from inside his mother’s womb. Anyone could understand this auditory contact.

\* \* \*

The dial wouldn’t turn. Dimitiri rubbed his palms alive with unproductive effort against the knob’s black, plastic obstinacy. His palms were slick with sweat; they slipped. He was failing. Not that it mattered. The ending was quantifiable and could be measured by the limited lifespan of the warmth from his shipmates, crowded around each other in shivering fear. They were dry, but the knowledge of their gradually imploding station chilled them to immobility. Their pale faces glowed from the newness of the crisis.

In spite of the Kursk’s recent assemblage in 1994, the instruments of Dimitiri’s position were constructed from Bakelite plastic, anachronistic as an old person’s breath—as his father trying to kiss him goodnight. He hadn’t told anyone, even his

mother, about his father's nightly silhouetted arrival in his room during the week before Dimitiri boarded the Kursk. His father's shoes had continued their smacking sound when he said, "I am proud of you," drunk, close enough to his son's face to kiss him. Instead of the usual love he felt towards the world when half asleep or awake, he hated each of his father's joyful exhalations and thought he belonged back in the nineteen-fifties, back before his rotting organs had decided to begin rotting on January 1, 1960, in order to transubstantiate themselves into the putrid, intimate breath surrounding Dimitiri's face on August 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11, 2000. His father's rubbery shoes sucked at the floor a-rhythmically to find their proper place as if something were going to happen. They sounded so much movement that in his half-sleep Dimitiri had thought the shoes brought his mother too, coming with a message of prudence for her husband. A warning from her about work's early arrival in the too-soon morning might have aroused his grunting father away. Then she would have placed her hand on Dimitiri's shin—no more (the rest of her love she kept inside, tidy and secret). But she was asleep through each visitation. Instead Father lay down next to son in the shape of a crucifix. One arm fell off the bed and the other across his son's chest. Eventually, the obstinate rhythm of his breathing lulled them both to sleep.

Dimitiri deserved the burden of his father's pride. He was just eighteen and smart enough with both computers and mechanics to run the Kursk's inertial guidance system and act as primary communicant with fore—all new to him. Now, with water reported in the sub's skin, the plastic knobs of his appurtenances looked to Dimitiri like dark glass, just this side of black. *Like a child through dark glass, how does it go?* Dimitiri tried to remember his Eastern Orthodox education... *from First Corinthians!*

He recited quietly to the opaque instruments: "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things." He paused, although the words were there. The buttons and knobs patterned themselves into the faces of his church, frowning, waiting for him to fail. His mouth produced saliva in anticipation of the rest. He cleared his throat. "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as I am known." He did not finish the recitation, his tall mother was not there, watching and waiting. He was only accountable to himself now. *The dark glass is*

*about love, about not love.* Water crept from the skin of the sub to its interior floors like spilled shadow. It moved, could not have been alive because it erased all color. Yet it was metallic and salty like blood.

Dimitiri continued to manipulate the communication instruments, though in futility. When the water was up to his ankles, he thought the knob looked more like one of the black lollipop bugs the KGB had given to the German Democratic Republic, which they'd continued to use until the 1980's. At the crowded Checkpoint Charlie museum that delineated former East from West Berlin, Dimitiri's father had pointed his curved, bloated finger at the surveillance device as if it were his own.

But now fore was silent. The knob was stuck. These were small things, but they would multiply. Dimitiri was old enough to know that. And walking on a watery floor, the airy things like Russia or reason, had already disappeared.

When the water reached Dimitiri's chest—he could no longer assure himself, *stomach, it has only reached my stomach*—he thought of his most recent secret. Natalia said he loved wrong. That he couldn't move his hips tensely enough. That they were watery. Natalia was twenty and had long, brown hair in unpredictable waves, in new places everyday. Hours before his feet were wet, Dimitiri showed her photo to the closest bunks in his cabin. Andrei grabbed his crotch, and then Ilya grabbed his own, but as an afterthought, so his quick clasp of the stiff, blue uniform was hollow and empty. *Ilya missed his own goods because he was thinking of showing me that he was thinking of Natalia in the proper way*, he had thought. Dimitiri was born sensitive and would die sensitive. He had less than two days left then, but still longer than Ilya, who would remember looking down to see how small his mother's hand was on his shoulder, and need to tell someone. But everyone would be in shock, or stretched impossibly by water and still floating like rafts around him already like rafts and with skin stretching to carry so much more water only to become more water. So instead Ilya would choke on his unspoken love for her fingers.

Dimitiri remembered this too, later: Ilya swallowed water when he could have swallowed air, when he still had a choice.

The water encircled Dimitiri's neck an hour ago. Time was still traceable on his military-issue diving watch. The hands glowed in the dark, although they were getting

dimmer. Taking turns at the emergency light, soldiers had been refueling their watches' incandescence. The light was caged, protected against anyone whose chill was lusty enough to inspire attack. They all silently loved those glowing hours. Each one that passed was solid and verifiable and earthen.

Dimitiri was treading water. He had been for what felt like eternity—a sloppy guess at time that was no longer connected to his watch. He turned his head, plunging one eye under the rising water to see the smeared marks of light on his wrist, but they were gone. He forgot, in shock, how to blow bubbles and turned back up in a dull panic. His rising face kissed the cold metal ceiling.

The Kursk accepted its medium into itself. This submarine was a living coffin; the only action left to it was to quit leaking and simply swallow. Dimitiri would die without telling anyone: Natalia had put her hand on his throat. The sun was shining, and they were under a cottonwood, on reluctant, patchy grass. She smelled like green apples from Norway, like outside apples—not the warm, vulgar ones from the U.S. that arrived hard and ripened too fast. She was good in English and watched television shows. “Swallow. And a bird is swallow.” She had her hand on his throat. His love was his own suffocation, and he wanted to submit, but hadn't told her any of this.

There was no other image than swallowing. It was the Kursk, the dead bodies, the hierarchies and birds. It would mean his life and his death, and it would mean the submarine penetrating its core with an action that was birds and apples, and fucking throats and watery boys. The dark glass would not turn up, come up. And all the secrets of these corpses would not add up to anything. He could speak them out in a list, but the list was going to drown too. This was not a realization. Dimitri swallowed because he was a human, and it is sometimes an involuntary contraction. But love was dark, and he could see it, had seen it all while drowning.

# CUTTHROAT DISCOVERY POET

JOSIE SIGLER



## HALF-LIFE OF MILK AND ANGELS

Anything sweet will sour: my father's gone for the weekend because my mother's lover lives in our basement and it's more than they can take talking divorce. Days she sits at the formica and drinks whiskey and then it's night. She gets the carton, pours the last glass without touching my forehead and stumbles away, forgets to go down, sells me up this river of good clean whole milk years before I tell and she—*How could you let that happen?* But he stands in my room in the middle of a dark so like a dream that I can never figure why he's come, what he means to do. A piece of me lives always in that time, the rest lost to morning when I fall back in snow and everything goes white as exile.

A girl's her mother's angel till she's grown and has her first secrets since the womb. Funnel to the rippling wall, foot arched to her rib I tap the common message—*Sorry, I'm sorry*. Already she's the abyss but I follow, memorizing so I can survive him in both our lives, so I can tell it: torn nightgown, faded, arm heavy on a belly, broke-window cold eroding bones, diamonds in five o'clock shadow. And she never forgets that it's me with her secrets, the way of things here: milk stays until it rolls up in globs, stinks the room sour as his breath. Worse, she never remembers I was so grateful to her from the start. They pulled me out, put me on her stomach. She smoothed my wrinkled wet wings and I wept just to know her.

## BEDTIME PRAYERS

for my father

He had never braided long hair before  
 Could not see why it unraveled in his calloused fingers

& then Jeremy, dirt thick on his skin, running from the washrag,  
 tripping over the snagged carpets in the small trailer

& prayers: My mother never made us say them: Water running  
 in the truck stop bathroom, toothbrush to mouth, I—

*Why do we pray with him & not with you?*

The quick hurdle my heart leapt when she: *God's not real:*  
 I knew right away it was true Still I was angry

For Jesus, slept through the backseat night  
 with no one in my heart

& she—*I never loved your father*  
 so the quick God of their love evaporated, too:

That moment in which they must have been right to touch each other  
 because to wish it undone was to wish myself gone, an abstraction—

& my father's love was real: He woke beneath our small bodies  
 on the pullout couch, our hungry breath hung clouds in the damp air

He stapled plastic over the windows

Cried quietly as he brought the scissors down at my ears,  
*my hair falling like chaff onto the toes of his black work boots*

*Kneeling at the couch he made us fold our growing hands:*  
 He—*bless you both bless your mother bless trees bless the less fortunate*

Less fortunate than who? Who less than him?

## WANT

In the white wax-slicked rehab center where my brother first  
Got clean, during a session on “Healing Childhood Wounds”

He leaned over his therapist & said to me with his eyes wide  
& serious: *Mom never wanted us at all, did she?* Invited because

Of my insight on our formative years & my ability to survive  
The same crimes without shooting up or drinking myself to

Dementia, I was quite ready to answer all difficult questions,  
To say, touching the fine point of his cheek: *No, she didn't.*

But, as witness in the spirit's courtroom, a fissure in my truth  
Opened & grew, emptying my throat. The summer of the kid-

Nappings in Detroit she held our wrists in one hand, a knee  
To each belly, she pressed us to the pharmacy counter where

She collected her father's pills, did not double-park, did not  
Let us deliver to the stoop, to his fingers like toffeed prunes,

to his jaw taken by surgeons, his cheek sun-stretched & bone-  
lonely. We pulled against her thin arm, trying for escape at

Any cost. Tired of our strange tug-of-war by week's end, white-  
Knuckled, she yet dangled her two precious petulant rags.

Our night-shifting father took a razor to each window bearing  
An orange sticker for the rescuers *Here we are* in case of fire.

Our ears wept as metal met glass, as we slid from the world,  
Invisible now even to those who could save us, keep our skins

Whole & we wanted to know: What could be worse than fire?  
We thought nothing, having watched the neighbor boy light

A firecracker in a Coke bottle, his neck, his lip curling into  
A cloud streaming across the sky of his ruined face. Jiggling

The lock behind my father's absence, she explained the kind of  
Man who crouches in the back of a broken-windowed van,

A street-corner, a problem with too much want. And God  
My brother's voice when it *Got to the point where I would've sold*

*My body.* No, can't stop the fleshy trove of itched constellations,  
Stop our skins rasping pillowed sheets, trapped in that stale house

Certain she'd drop a careless ash from her cigarette, spark a fire



To take the whole damned city, a blaze erupting MonXXXto's

Smokestacks, the low-swinging heaven of Diego's factory &  
McCXXXth Steel, my father carrying heavy beams to the train

In the dark & sweat in the crooks of elbows & knees & crotch.  
*With the stickers gone no one can find us, my brother whispered.*

Our sweat an invasion of Pompeii on the sheets, the outline  
Of a lost city in the form of two human children, forgotten

By history, the one that remembers what we felt, not numbers.  
Unable to remain spooned we rose & pushed the window

Open, tumbled into the yard to find the grass against our feet,  
Cool, the sidewalk & the alley & the porch step & some strange

Disappointment: The city was not burning. My brother's therapist  
Said, *Well?* But I could not see the white room, could not present

An ounce of fair evidence for the jury except this: When we rang  
The doorbell to be let back in, our mother came, her eyes horse-

Wild. She dragged us inside as if the devil himself had taken  
The lawn. She spanked us each & tucked us into bed with her,

Held so tight she marked the skin she made. Deafened us  
 With her love. No one would ever be so important again.

## DYING LANGUAGES

I sat beside your sister, warming  
 her fingers as they emptied her body.

Two years older, she was *I-got-other-mouths-*  
*to-feed-brave* until the chafe of paper sheets

& speculum. She clasped me. It's always  
 February, frozen, waiting for death

to flood from the skin, sleet blowing through  
 the parking lot where I tried to shield

her from men & their bloody posters,  
 yellow ribbons adorning jackets.

A child unwanted but no more damaged  
 than any bombed in the Persian Gulf

the day before. No license, borrowed car,  
 I drove her home to her first baby

who sat locked & wailing behind  
 a fence, snot dripping to her wormish lip.

Yes, shame we knew, Wanda, & real death:  
 eyes blank zeros, a look inherited from

your mother, beat-down, out-of-hope,  
 & one by one the cousins & neighbor girls

fell into that hell-pit. So we made a pact  
 of *I ain't never gonna*. But that was easy

for me, could take or leave boys  
 in the back of their brothers' cars pawing.

Seemed too close to what happened  
we promised never to say aloud.

And at least we already knew how to lay  
in grief together, twisting familiar hair

on a finger, magazines, stolen beer,  
filling the stretch of time, the body

a pomegranate's shell torn open.  
This was our first language &

could not be overheard by those  
who had failed to protect us,

those who could hurt us again.  
But suddenly it was you,

you saying: *I can't kill his baby.*  
*I love him too much.*

And I said: *You'll ruin your life.*  
Words like armor-piercing bullets

filled with uranium. *So fast & hot*  
*sand turns to glass when they hit,*

your brother told us when he got back,  
his left eye turned up like a birth-clot.

And on every television refugees  
poured from the mouth of the planet,

destroyed. I know, wrong or right,  
a baby brings hope in places like ours,

the final remnant of a flat world,  
corn fields & empty buildings

angled into the sky. Caught so  
in the roundness of your life we

spiraled & split. I took to running.  
What else? Now the broken puddles

of ice on a porch step, cracked voice  
this February more than a decade later,

the country at war again, the brightening  
of my own womb questionable,

chest tight with love for you,  
survivor of what I can't know—

All I can ask is: *How's life?*  
& all you can say is: *It's decent.*

I read somewhere in the outlands  
I traveled that languages are dying

faster than ever before. But between us,  
Wanda, a flame lighting two cigarettes.

Our eyes talk the old way, bleeding &  
accepting apologies in less time

than it takes to blow clouds in the air,  
bite down & clap as your oldest,

the boy I tried to erase, holds his arms  
out to fly through snow.

## **BACKUP PLANS**

A dog can smell a sick thing & Blue circled my body,  
sniffing the insistent infection: Fear of losing everything

like the family women before me whose fingers bled cheerfully  
who lay beneath their husbands willingly Fed the children easily

until the morning they woke & found they could no longer be saved  
by the first patch of white sunlight lingering in the corner at dawn

That moment of collapse: Gone dead inside & nothing can bring you back  
was in me so long before I felt its approach & left for South Dakota

in the night crying as I drove past the fall-golden border covered by first snow  
Struck a conversation in Sunmart with a woman who liked the quiet life since

She'd lost her son & here I was weeping about whether to take another lover

like a salve: how I'd get fed: His body inside of mine

Or should I finish my novel & move back East Or end my life by chance  
in the Black Hills pressing my chest to the ground in the circle of moon

Tempting the mountain lion who would take my throat first,  
thankfully destroying my ability to ask questions in the final moments—

& when I arrived Catherine took me in her arms like any old friend  
but Blue growled, would not let me pat him because he smelled

the time lives in me no one wants to remember: My mother burned  
the dress I wore that long hot summer I have never told exactly right:

*What happened to me destroyed me, I said & Sometimes  
I think I will go home & drink & watch TV for the rest of my life*

& Catherine said: *I have a backup plan, too—  
If I ever lost my land, my mind, I'd go live in the Veteran's home—but I won't—*

& Blue settled into the couch between us as we drank long sips of tea  
the poison of old stories lost in the air & the red sun rising over the hills

Touching everything: frame of door, curve of the dog's smile, our earthen mugs  
& there near the woodstove a single patch of white singing: *This you will survive.*



Lynn Watt, "Rain Lily," collage, 10" X 12" X 7 1/2"

Gwendolyn Cash

## **FOR THE DEAD**

Melancholy,  
delicate and delicious,  
honey mixed with pepper,  
pears finished with clove,  
never bitter.  
Today I have cut off my hand.  
My love bleeds out in words.  
Flute songs sound  
in the clouds swirling  
through my days.  
I grow beautiful in you  
and all that we are not.  
I know you are not here,  
never by my side,  
and I want to crush this wall  
with my own body  
between living and not living,  
take you into me again,  
give this life over. Today  
I refuse to understand.

Gwendolyn Cash

## **INCANTATION FOR DEAD MOTHERS TO SPEAK OVER THEIR DAUGHTERS**

Sand-washed bones,  
scraped clean and gleaming.

Scales, tiny and dull,  
clinging to a hollowed carp,  
hook and lure  
rattling in the ribs.

Delicate voice of one  
bird whistling in the reeds,  
the marsh humming at sunset.

If a goddess sleeps  
in the swirling blaze  
of autumn grass,

Let her lie and drift  
through undulating stands  
of live and rotting cedar.

Let her steep herself  
in dank fungus,  
earth, and dung.

Let her hide in rain and salal,  
cowslip and strawberries,  
sun-bleached droughts,  
a doe's desperate famine,  
in glacial flood--

Let her break down.  
Crack the gleaming bones,  
and crush the dull scales  
clinging to her eyes.



Nick Sweet

## **AT THE SOHO MET**

Just as soon as they got into their room at The SoHo Metropolitan, the big luxury hotel in the heart of Toronto's theatre and entertainment district, Angie dropped her things and announced that she was taking a shower, then she disappeared into the bathroom, and Liam propped a couple of pillows against the headboard and sat down on the bed with his back against the pillows and began to read the Toronto Star.

It was pleasant sitting on the bed in the middle of the afternoon and reading the newspaper, with the warm sun filtering in through the curtains. Liam was reading an article about the local jazz trumpeter, Bernard Clark, who had just died. The article caused Liam to reflect on his own father, who had died a few years ago. Liam didn't think about his father very often, even though it was true that he'd loved him. Maybe the reason Liam didn't think about his old man so very often might have had to do with the fact that he knew he'd been a disappointment to him one way and another. Anyway, it turned out that the man he was reading about in the article, Bernard Clark, had been born and brought up in London and then he came over here to live as a young man. Liam's father had also been born and brought up in London before coming to Toronto to live, and he'd been nuts about jazz as well. Liam recalled going with him to see Count Basie at Massey Hall when he was just nine. Liam had loved the Count and had been nuts about jazz ever since, too. It was something he was grateful to his father for. Somehow, though, Liam's father's love of jazz hadn't prevented him from earning a good living by working as an accountant, in Toronto, up until the day he retired, whilst Liam sensed that the part of his own personality that related to jazz and found it exciting and moving was the same part of him that had caused him to run a mile every time anyone suggested he might try and get himself a regular job working nine to five like everyone else. After a little while people stopped suggesting to Liam that he might try working nine to five, and by that time it would have been too late for him to do so even if he'd wanted to because no one would have given him a job. Not one that would pay the bills, anyway. He had often wondered about his old man, though. How the old guy'd managed

to stick with it working as an accountant day in day out for all those years. Hadn't the man ever got bored and felt the urge just to skip town or something? Just thinking about living that kind of life made Liam feel like he couldn't *breathe*. What was it about him and his old man, though? he wondered. How could they both be so different and yet still have their love of jazz in common? And how could the old guy dig that wild and crazy music the way he did, and yet still put up with all the boredom he must've had to put up with?

At that moment Liam's thoughts were interrupted by the stirring sight of his wife, Angie, strolling into the room with a big white towel wrapped around her, fresh from the shower. She looked ravishing, he thought. "I love hotels," she said, and she went over to the French windows and looked down at the bustling streets below. "Especially ones where you have a nice view like this," she said. "Sometimes I think I'd like to spend the rest of my life moving from hotel to hotel, and just go all round the world that way and never stop anyplace for more than about a week at a time."

Liam said, "That's the gypsy in you talking." It partly explained what they were doing together, he supposed. This gypsy side to their nature they both had. It was the thing that his father'd also had and yet managed somehow to control and live with.

"Wouldn't you like that, too, though?" Angie said.

"I guess so," Liam said. "What I would really've liked best of all, if you were to give me the choice, would've been to play trumpet in the Count Basie band...That'd be the life...No worries except how you'd play this or that number, and the only risks you ever took would be musical ones – whether or not to go for it and risk that high C just when no one was expecting it...Just live out of a suitcase." Those guys never married, though. Or if they did then it never worked out. Liam remembered seeing the trumpeter Sweets Edison one time, in the Rex Hotel Jazz and Blues Bar over on Queen Street, just before Sweets went on up to the great band in the sky, and Sweets had kept up this running monologue between numbers about how the only mistress he'd ever really been true to was his trumpet, or his horn, as he called it, and he'd drawn bitter parallels between his art and all the alimony he had to pay to his ex-wives. Sweets' horn was to blame for most of his troubles, it seemed. For most of his troubles and most of his pleasures. That was the life of a jazzman for you. Liam got so he almost started to

feel sorry for old Sweets. Then he remembered his own troubles and he reckoned Sweets'd had it pretty good. Dammit, Sweets hadn't known the meaning of trouble. Not *real* trouble of the sort Liam was in now. If only I'd learned to play the trumpet, he thought. Then I might've satisfied myself with taking risks in the music I was playing, instead of some of the risks I've been taking. There was a big difference, he thought. Play a bum note on the trumpet and maybe the Count would give you a straight look from his piano stool, if it was his band you were lucky enough to be playing in. You could always move on from that as a musician, though. Miles Davis didn't care about releasing tracks that had him playing bum notes on them. The way Miles saw it, if there were bum notes then the chances were something was happening, the musician was trying to do something new, striving for something different. That freshness was what we wanted down on tape. Yeah, as a musician you could move on if you played a bum note. But the kind of bum note Liam'd played wasn't proving to be so easy to move on from. He'd taken money, which was wrong of course. But considering *who* it was he'd taken the money from, you'd have to say it was a whole lot worse than just wrong. What he'd done was just plain *stupid*. He hadn't thought they'd notice if he skimmed a little off the top. Well, they had noticed. And it seemed to him now that they always were going to notice. Why hadn't he realized that beforehand, though?

You got greedy's why not, he thought. You couldn't resist it and it seemed so easy. The opportunity was there and you took it, and to hell with the consequences. Now you're the one who's going to hell, buddy, if you don't watch out. And this isn't just about you either, remember, because there's Angie to think of.

Angie's mobile began to ring, and she picked it from the bedside table and took the call. Liam watched her intently as she said hi, yeah, how's life, and then saw the way her expression changed as she listened to whatever it was the person on the other end of the line was telling her. "Listen, thanks for calling to let me know," Angie said. Then she hung up and looked at Liam.

"What is it?" He knew what she was going to say, though, just from the way she was looking at him.

"C'mon, quick, we've gotta get out of this place," she said. "He knows we're here."

Liam jumped up off the bed. “*Shit!*” he said. “But wait a moment, how do you know he knows we’re here?...Who was that on the phone?”

“Does it matter?” Angie said. “Look, there’s no time to explain...Just get your shoes on’n let’s get the fuck out of here.”

“How far away is he?”

Just then, there was a knock at the door.

Liam stepped into his slip-on shoes as quietly as possible, his heart working through a Buddy Rich version of *Tachycardia* in his chest. What am I gonna do? he wondered. What would some guy who’s really cool do now? What would the Count do? What would Liam’s old man do? His old man, who never seemed fazed by anything in all his life. His old man wouldn’t’ve been stupid enough to get in a situation like this in the first place, though, so it wasn’t a fair question. Even so, though, what would he do?

There was another knock.

Angie pointed to her eye with her index finger, then she began to creep over towards the door on tip-toes and Liam followed her. Now’s the moment of truth, Liam thought. The moment when a man has to step forward and show his mettle, even if it’s only to show that he knows how to die...But Liam didn’t want to die at all, and certainly not just to show he knew how to do it. He wanted to *live*. He wanted to live for a long time and die at home with his slippers on. He still had too much living left in him to be ready to die.

Angie got to the door just as whoever it was on the other side of it knocked a third time, and she peered out through the spyhole.

What’m I gonna do? Liam thought. *Dad, Count, Miles, wherever you guys are, just give me some kinduva sign here. Something...please...anything.* Angie turned back from the door and put her mouth to Liam’s ear. “It’s not him,” she whispered.

“So who the fuck is it?” he whispered back.

“Some black guy with a case looks like he’s got a musical instrument in it.”

A violin case? Liam wondered. That rang a bell, and it wasn’t one that Liam wanted to hear right now. He edged over to the spyhole in the door and peered out at whoever it was out there. And whoever it was turned out to be a black guy he’d never

set eyes on before. And it wasn't a violin case he was holding. No, it was the sort of case that trumpeters carry...*Unless it was really a gun he had in the case...*

Liam gestured for Angie to move away from the door, out of the line of fire, in case the guy should try and blast his way in, then he edged over and stood next to her, with his back against the wall. "Who are you?" he called through the door. "What do you want?"

"Johnnie?" a voice called back.

"There's no Johnnie in here."

"Johnnie say he be here, man. Room two-O-nine, he say," the voice said.

"Who's Johnnie?" Liam said.

"You pissin' with me, man...He's the leader of the band," the voice said. "I here for an audition."

"I don't believe you."

"What'm I gonna lie to you for, man?"

"Well there's no Johnnie here. There must be some mistake."

"So where's Johnnie, he ain't with you?"

"You must have the wrong room number," Liam said. Then an idea occurred to him. "You're a trumpeter, you say?"

"Sure am, man," the voice said. "Not that I recall mentioning the fact to you...This some kinduva joke, man...You gotta be pissin' with me here, right?"

"Why don't you prove it."

"Come again?"

"Play me a few bars."

"What for?"

"Just play a few bars for me."

"You pulling my leg, man?" the man on the other side of the door said. "You really the guy I s'pose to come here'n meet and you just pissin' with me, that it?...You Johnnie or you work for Johnnie, right?"

"Just play me a few bars," Liam said, "and then if you're any good I'll open the door and let you in."

"Kinduva fuckin band is it you runnin', man?"

“Just a few bars,” Liam said. “Or are you afraid to?”

“I got to be afraid of, man?”

“Maybe you can’t really play that thing you got there.” *Maybe it was really a gun.*

“OK, man, whatever you say,” whoever it was said. “Piece it is you wanna hear me play?”

“How about *My Funny Valentine*?” Liam said. “Perhaps you can run it through the world-historical strainer while you’re at it, if you like, take in the cotton fields and the Holocaust a la Miles at the Philharmonic in sixty-four.”

“You ain’t askin’ for much, brother,” the voice said. “You want me to see if I can’t arrange for the second comin’ of the Lord while I playin’ it?”

The voice went quiet for a moment, and Liam and Angie stood there waiting with their backs against the wall, sweating, breathing, waiting. And *waiting*. And then the sound of a trumpet came blaring through the door.



Lucinda Luvaas, "War Dance," from *Running Through History*

## CUTTHROAT FEATURE:

# TWO EXILED TIBETAN POETS

**LHASANG TSERING** (b. 1957) was an outstanding student leader who passed up a chance for medical training in the U.S. in order to join the armed Tibetan resistance then operating out of Mustang in western Nepal. Since then he has been an activist, organizer, and editor in the Tibetan exile community for nearly 30 years, serving as both President of the Tibetan Youth Congress and as a Founding Director of the Amnye Machen Institute. He and his wife now operate their bookstore, BookWorm, in Dharamsala, India. These poems are reprinted with the poet's permission from *TOMORROW AND OTHER POEMS* (Rupa & Co, New Delhi, 2003).



Lhasang Tsering: photo credit: William Pitt Root

### **EVEN THE STONES REMEMBER**

A hundred Cannons Booming,  
Ten thousand Rifles Firing,  
Chinese Soldiers Marching,  
Into Tibet invading—  
Even the Stones Remember!



Your Dying soldiers Groaning,  
 Vanquished men Waiting,  
 Ravished women Weeping,  
 Orphaned children Crying—  
 Even the Stones Remember!

Your ancient Temples Crumbling,  
 Holy scriptures Burning,  
 Ten thousand monks Dying,  
 Defiled idols Decaying—  
 Even the Stones Remember!

Your abundant Land Plundered,  
 Vast, green Forests Denuded,  
 Clean, clear Waters Polluted,  
 Clean, pristine Air Poisoned—  
 Even the Stones Remember!

By Day in pain Weeping,  
 By Night in Death Wailing,  
 Rivers of Blood of the Dying,  
 Endless Tears of the Living—  
 Even the Stones Remember!

Have you, fellow Tibetans in freedom, forgotten all this?

## **NO TEARS TO CRY**

In a home where all have been killed—  
 Who, O who will cry for whom?

In a village where death has visited every home—

Who, O who will cry for whom?

In the tortured Land of Snow—  
 Who, O who will cry for whom?

Where death is a daily occurrence—  
 There is no time to mourn.

Where all have been impoverished—

There is no oil for lamps.

Where all have cried out their hearts—  
There are no tears left to cry.

## DREAMING

I know dreaming is something—  
Something I should not do.  
I know dreaming is something—  
Something I never wanted to do.  
But now with nothing—  
Nothing left to do—  
Dreaming seems the only thing to do.

I know I've wanted others—  
Others to act and not to dream.  
I know I've called on others—  
Others to fight and not to dream.  
But now with no purpose—  
No purpose and no struggle—  
Dreaming is the only thing left to do.

I know dreaming will not—  
Will not achieve anything.  
I know dreaming will not—  
Will not get me anywhere  
But now with nothing to do—  
And nowhere to go—  
Dreaming—just dreaming—is all that I can do.

**TENZEN TSUNDUE:** Writer-activist Tsundue is a poet, essayist, and short story writer whose prize-winning works reflect upon the lot of the exile, specifically the Tibetan refugee at large in a world of safely "houseled" people seldom exposed to the nuanced plight of the uprooted. His touch, though pointed, can feel light; he takes as great a satisfaction from laughter as from breaking down brutal truths. On almost no money he travels widely, reading, lecturing, handing out copies of his poems. In January 2000 he became front pages news worldwide after scaling 14 floors of the Obai Towers in Mumbai to unfurl the Tibetan flag and a FREE TIBET banner down the hotel's facade as a greeting for one guest-- the Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji ; even arresting police congratulated him in prison for standing up for his rights. His first poems,

CROSSING THE BORDER (1999), quickly sold out. SEMSHOOK: ESSAYS ON THE TIBETAN FREEDOM STRUGGLE (2007) is a compilation of 13 brief essays written monthly for TIBETAN REVIEW in Dharamsala. Author's contact: [tentsundue@yahoo.com](mailto:tentsundue@yahoo.com) with website at [www.friendsoftibet.org/tenzin](http://www.friendsoftibet.org/tenzin). Publisher's contact: [tsampa@tibetwrites.org](mailto:tsampa@tibetwrites.org) with website at [www.tibetwrites.org](http://www.tibetwrites.org). Invite him to lecture. Buy his books. These poems are reprinted by permission of the author from KORA: A STORY AND ELEVEN POEMS (2002), available from the publisher at [choneyw@rediffmail.com](mailto:choneyw@rediffmail.com)



Tenzin Tsundue: photo credit: William Pitt Root

## **space-bar A PROPOSAL**

pull your ceiling half-way down  
and you can create a mezzanine for me

your walls open into cupboards  
is there an empty shelf there for me

let me grow in your garden

with your roses and prickly pears

i'll sleep under your bed  
and watch TV in the mirror

do you have an ear on your balcony  
i am singing from your window

open your door  
let me in

i am resting at your doorstep  
call me when you are awake

## **A PERSONAL RECONNAISSANCE**

From Ladakh  
Tibet is just a gaze away.  
They said:  
from that black knoll  
at Dumtse, it's Tibet.  
For the first time, I saw  
my country Tibet.

In a hurried hidden trip  
I was there, at the mound.

I sniffed the soil,  
scratched the ground,  
listened to the dry wind  
and wild old cranes.

I didn't see the border,  
I swear there wasn't anything  
different, there.

I didn't know,  
if I was there or here.  
I didn't know,  
if I was here or there.

They say the kyangs  
come here every winter.  
They say the kyangs  
go there every summer.

## EXILE HOUSE

Our tiled roof dripped  
and the four walls threatened to fall apart  
but we were to go home soon,

we grew papayas  
in front of our house  
chilies in our garden  
and changmas for our fences,

then pumpkins rolled down the cowshed thatch  
calves trotted out of the manger,

grass on the roof,  
beans sprouted and  
climbed down the vines,  
money plants crept in through the window,  
our house seems to have grown roots.

The fences have grown into a jungle,  
now how can I tell my children  
where we came from?



"Hopscotch," 24"x30" wax and oils on wood panel

Lucinda Luvaas

Jeffrey Franklin

## WAR PORNO

“War porno’ gives birth to new addiction.”

Joanne Ostro, *The Denver Post*, April 6, 2003

Bursts of fire pin him to a chalky column—  
 “Where the hell is backup!”—he drops and rolls,  
 spraying a clip of sparks from the nozzle  
 of his SAW, springs up quicker than “Salaam”

and slaps on the modular grenade launcher,  
 when a flash from the roof drops him to one knee,  
 and in his mind’s slow-motion camera sees  
 himself pirouetting down, squeezing the trigger,

the tiny globe of fire like Tinkerbell on acid  
 snaking across the courtyard, lifting the man  
 into a spray of crimson pixels. “YOU WIN!  
 PLAY AGAIN?” But his dad calls, “Hey, G.I. Kid,

Come take a look at *this*. Check out *these* graphics.”  
 On CNN, digitally-enhanced satellite footage  
 of Biblical geography sweeps into soft-core coverage  
 of faceless collateral damage, then a soldier ecstatic

For the week’s first shower, his state-side parents—  
 God bless!”—then back to the cannon’s-eye-perspective  
 that keeps us rubber-necking for the next live  
 death, the real-time bullets, the correspondent’s

static play-by-play, then over to you at the Pentagon.  
 Hard to resist, this union of lethal and techo-glitz.  
 “So real, it’s unbelievable.” With remotes and joy-sticks,  
 armchair patriots are winning our wars. Play again?

L.B. Green  
**MANTID**

The Greek root for mantid means “prophet.”

The things that scare or repulse us are those that are sympathetically human in some respects, but markedly alien in others.

The female is the color of jade, her abdomen thick and fleshy. She is mostly still, her feet hooked into the texture of the elm tree’s bark. When I first glimpsed her, I mistook her abdomen and wings for the chrysalis of a monarch butterfly. But as my eyes picked her shape out of the relief map of bark and beetle-chewed leaves, I saw the long stretch of her thorax ending in a plowshare head, at the upper corners of which her amber eyes bulge like beaded water, each of them punctuated with a black period in the middle that resembles a pupil but is not.

The male approaches...

Gordon Grice, *The Red Hour Glass*

Micah, Haggai, Malachi and Zechariah: Prophets  
 whose names I once loved to rattle off as a child  
 when asked to recite the books of the Old Testament,

though not in that particular order. Sunday morning  
 thumbing through a book to find Sargent’s *Frieze*  
*of the Prophets*, from *Pageant of Religion*, I find

Micah, head bent as if in petition and assume he prays,  
 his right hand and arm drenched in the light, when  
 something small and lime wings into view,

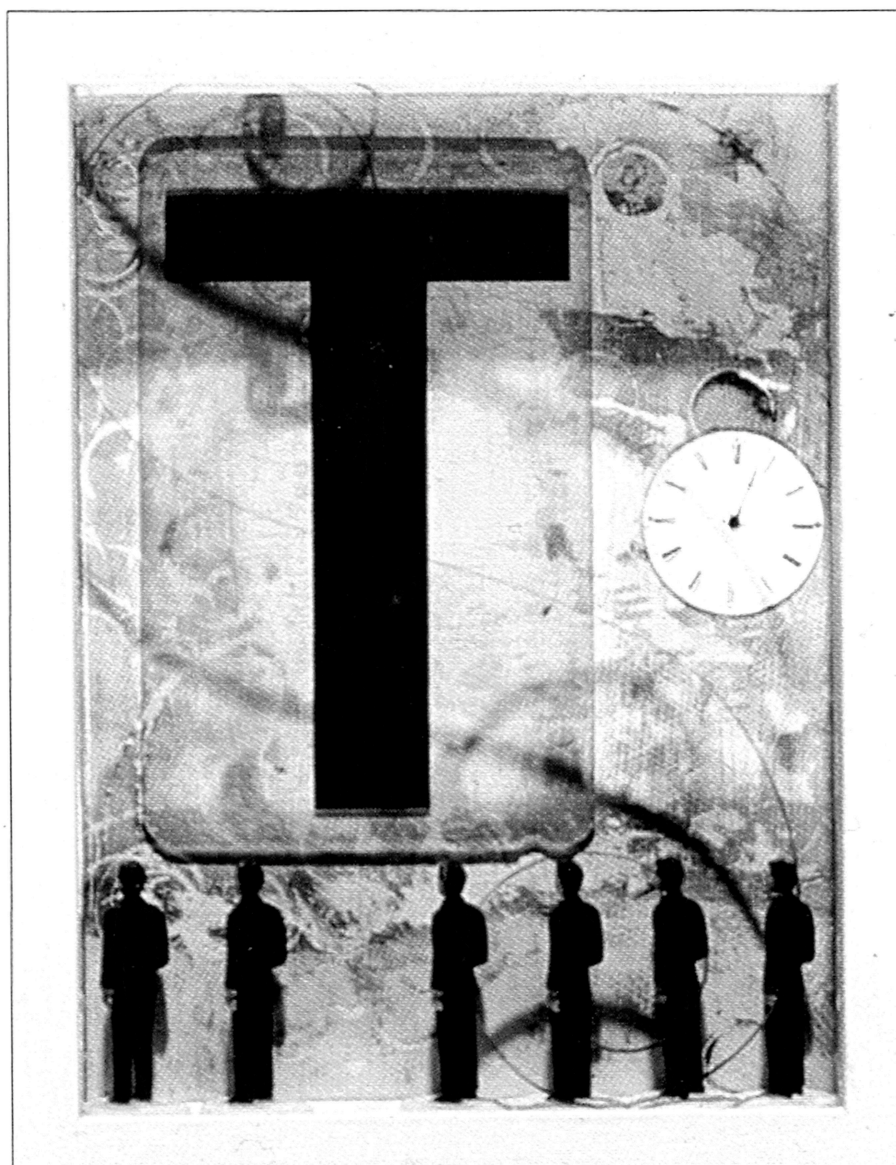
attaches itself to the glass pane of our Florida room,  
 where two stories up the mantid carelessly rests, I  
 wonder how without slipping to the ground below.

As I kneel to take a closer look, she (I am thinking she  
 due to the fleshy abdomen), with those alien eyes  
 looks at me the way she looks at the male, and holds still,

I’ve read, when he approaches, when he sways and, in a flying  
 leap, lashes her with his antennae, and she spikes,  
 snaps the right-half of his head off and holding it

eats, when half-headed and regardless, he  
 mounts her and copulation begins, continues, as  
 in a blur she swings around to finish her meal.





Lynn Watt, "Time and Tide," collage box, 10" X 8" X 2", assemblage elements: monoprint, watch parts

Kerri Quinn  
**CIRCLES**

I walked Rubén from my bedroom to the front door. The apartment was dark, the hall narrow, and the linoleum creaked softly beneath our feet. It was the fifth time he had spent the night, and we had to be quiet. My daughters were sleeping in the other room. I stopped before we reached the door, and wished he could stay. He pressed me against the cool wall and murmured in Spanish.

“What are you saying?” I asked.

“I lose my way in your hair,” he said, and slid his arms around my waist.

“What kind of line is that?”

“It was in a poem I learned as a kid,” he said. “Don’t you like it?”

“I should say no,” I said and pulled up his shirt and traced my finger around his navel. I arched my hips into his. He leaned in to kiss me. His mouth tasted smoky.

“Say something else,” I said.

“Loca Susan.”

“I’m not crazy. And you need to go.” I opened the door. Somewhere in the building a door slammed, and the sound echoed up the stair well and rattled the hall window.

“What about that other guy?” he said.

“Frank? He likes to take the girls to the movies.” I hit Rubén’s arm with the edge of my robe belt. He placed his lips on the top of my head and whispered that I was cruel.

He was right, nothing really mattered then. Him. Frank. My daughters. Or my ex husband who only had time for his new family, not the old one. I closed my eyes and leaned my body against his, and pulled the edge of his earlobe with my teeth.

“Go,” I said and pushed him out the door.

He walked to the stairs and said, “That’s it, isn’t it?”

“How do you know that?”

“I know,” he said and walked down the stairs to his apartment on the floor below.

I closed the door and turned around. Margaret, my fourteen-year-old, was standing with her arms folded, her hair pulled up high in a pony tail. Her cotton nightgown was long and white and hung just above her ankles. Her eyes, bright and green, swallowed me whole.

“Did he spend the night?”

“Who?” I said and walked into the living room and pulled up the window shades. “Are you hungry?” I asked as she followed me into the kitchen, my feet sticking to the spilled strawberry jam and I opened a cabinet and stared at the clear containers filled with flour and sugar.

“Did you have sex with him?” Her voice was loud and high-pitched. She sounded so wise and young at the same time and I felt like the child.

“You’ll wake Jane.” I cringed thinking I would have to explain to her eight-year-old sister what sex was.

“You have sex with Frank, too. Don’t you?”

“Go away,” I said and grabbed a napkin from the top of the refrigerator and wiped the bottom of my foot.

And she did. She left the room, crawled out onto the fire escape and shut the window. I sat on the couch and watched her as she stretched her nightgown over her legs, and put her head down on her knees. I could hear Rubén singing from the apartment below. And I hated that I was jealous. Jealous of my beautiful daughter.

I left work early, and instead of taking the bus, I walked home behind a man wearing a blue blazer, the sleeves pushed up around his elbows, and a thick striped tie. Every few feet, he got down on his knees, stopping traffic on the sidewalk. People yelled as they moved past him. A man carrying a guitar case hit him in the back, but the guy ignored them as he made the sign of the cross and prayed out loud. Each time he stopped, I stopped, too and prayed with him. Prayed to care about someone. Something. Prayed to love my kids again. After eight blocks and twenty *Our Fathers*, I left the man on the corner of University Avenue and 138<sup>th</sup> Street surrounded by school kids wearing plaid uniforms, screaming obscenities to one another.

When I turned the corner, the girls were down the block, sitting with Rubén in front of the apartment building. He was on the stoop singing, his voice warm and lulling, and Margaret sat next to him snapping her fingers in the air. Jane danced in the middle of the sidewalk, her arms stretched out, and her head tilted back so far that I thought she might fall. Margaret stood and swayed back and forth in front of him. Her shorts were thin and high-cut, her t-shirt barely covering her stomach. I couldn't remember when she started dressing this way.

Rubén reached over and pulled his hand through her long, brown hair. A fireman with suspenders hanging by his sides unscrewed the valve of the fire hydrant, and water shot up into the sky, and splashed down to the cement. They hadn't seen me, so I ducked inside O'Connor's Grocery. The air was cool, shocking, and Frank was at the counter talking to Mr. O'Connor, whose grey hair stood up straight in short tufts.

"What's wrong," Frank said when he saw me. "Shouldn't you be at work?"

I hadn't talked to him since the weekend when we took a ride in his Cadillac Eldorado, top down, to the shore. The girls sat in the backseat fighting over who got to keep the plastic teeth they had won at an arcade. He talked about marriage and wanting kids of his own. "I don't understand why we keep the windows rolled up when the top is down," I said to the closed window.

On the counter, there was a stack of morning newspapers with a photograph of the mayor of New York, arms stretched out, talking to a sea of people. I ran my hand across the cool, smooth page as Frank kissed my cheek. "I have a headache or something," I said and took a step back. I wanted to smack Margaret, take her by the arms and shake her until her hair fell out and she was ugly.

In the back of the store, the phone rang and Mr. O'Connor disappeared behind a long, red curtain to answer it. His voice was loud as he said, "Yes. Yes. Of course." I was sure he was talking to his wife.

"You should have called me. I would've picked you up in the police car. Sirens and lights. We could have made a real show of it," Frank said. His eyes were blue and clear, eyelashes, long and dark, like a woman's. He was in uniform, a police officer just like my father.

“Just what the tax payers want to hear.” I said. “Can I get a ginger ale, please?” I said to Mr. O’Connor as he came back into the room.

He walked to a cooler, painted with red and white swirls and grabbed a slim, glass bottle. He placed it and a pack of gum on the counter and said, “For your lovely daughters, they love strawberry.”

We thanked him and Frank opened the door, and I wondered how I was going to get rid of him.

“I was hoping we could have dinner tonight, take the girls to McCormick’s for chicken,” he said and took my hand, and his was rough and dry. I dropped it and wrapped my arms around myself.

“Not tonight. I promised the girls I would paint their nails.” I opened my purse and pulled out my sunglasses, and looked over at Rubén, who was talking to Jane.

The sun was strong, the air heavy. The water from the fire hydrant rained down on the sidewalk in clear, wide sheets and splashed the front of my shins. My white skirt stopped at the top of my knees, but I wished it was shorter. Margaret saw us walking towards them and looked away.

“I could come over and paint yours,” Frank said and laughed. It was more of a chuckle and his left eye closed and his right eyelid flickered. It used to bother me that he did this, until I met his mother who did the same thing. I figured it was genetic and that he couldn’t help it.

“Mom,” Jane said. She ran to me and crashed into my legs, and jammed her sneaker into my toes. I grabbed her by the shoulders, dropped my purse and shook her once. Hard. Hard enough to make her cry.

“Susan,” Frank said and put his hand on my arm.

I pulled Jane to me and whispered I was sorry into her hair. It smelled like coconut.

Mrs. Rodgeski, my neighbor, stopped to say hello to Frank, and to invite him for tea. He had gone to school with her eldest son. She never invited me because once she told me that my daughters ran through the building like animals, and I told her to go to hell. A city bus pulled to the curb and stopped. The driver hopped off, touched his toes

as a line of waiting passengers stared at him. He got back on and they boarded single file. I wanted to get on with them and take the bus to Fiji.

“La mamá,” Rubén said and handed my purse to me.

Frank stretched out his hand and introduced himself to Rubén. They talked about how the city was wasting water, that the park should have a community pool. Margaret watched the scene, eyes wide open. “Come soon,” Mrs. Rodgeski said to Frank, avoiding me.

“Nice to meet you,” Frank said to Rubén and turned to me. “My shift starts in an hour, I’ll walk you upstairs.”

“Or Rubén could,” Margaret said.

Rubén leaned against the side of the stoop, his legs crossed at the ankles, and smiled.

“We’re fine,” I said to Margaret. “I’ll call you later,” I said to Frank.

He squeezed my hand and kissed the edge of my fingers. Jane yelled good-bye to him as he walked up the street.

“Let’s go,” I said to Margaret.

“Will you call me later?” Rubén said and laughed.

“Much later.”

“You’re the boss.”

I opened the door and Jane ran in the building, carrying a Coke bottle stuffed with dried brown leaves and a long thin twig. Inside was Larry, the caterpillar that we had found in the park. I placed my hand on the back of Margaret’s neck and moved her in front of me. Her hair was soft and damp with sweat, and a piece of gum was stuck to the ends.

“There’s gum in your hair,” I said and stopped in the foyer. We stood next to the table covered with a lace tablecloth that reminded me of summer afternoons spent at my grandmother’s drinking hot tea with lots of sugar.

“It’s Jane’s.” She reached for the piece and rubbed it between her fingers. “Peanut butter will get it out.”

“Or rub ice on it. That used to work for me.”

At the end of the hall, Mr. Detavio, the super, was sweeping the stairs and talking to Jane as she held the elevator opened. The back of Margaret's shirt was smeared with dirt, and I pushed my hair back behind my ear and looked over my shoulder to see if Rubén was looking, and he was.

"Don't talk to black men," I said.

"You talk to him," Margaret said.

"Not anymore."

"Besides, he's from Cuba," she said.

"It's the same thing." I sounded like my mother, who distrusted anyone with skin darker than hers. When I was kid, she warned me that Puerto Ricans and blacks broke into houses and stole china and the silverware. Neither of which we had.

As we walked toward them, Jane was telling Mr. Detavio how Larry liked to sleep all day. The edge of the broom made a scratching noise as Mr. Detavio swept the same stair over and over. He nodded as she spoke to him, never taking his eyes off of her.

"Your daughters throw food in the halls," he said to me and leaned the broom against the wall. "But I still love them."

I inhaled deeply. Why did the whole world have to complain to me about my kids? "Thanks for letting me know," I said. He patted my arm and walked down the hall muttering about lunch.

"Mom, we don't do that," Margaret said.

"I know," I said.

As I unlocked the apartment door, Jane and Margaret argued about who hit who first. Shutting my eyes, I pushed it open, the air inside was stuffy and I had to step on a trail of dirty socks to turn on the air conditioner.

"What's for dinner?" Margaret asked.

"Soup." I said as I walked to the bathroom. The tub faucet squeaked as I turned it on. I dropped my skirt to the floor, kicked it under the sink and splashed cold water on my face.

"Again," she said as she stood in the doorway.

“No talking. Give me twenty minutes.”

She shut the door and I got in the tub as it filled. The room was hot and steam covered the mirror that was smeared with toothpaste and lip prints from the girls when they were playing with my old tubes of lipstick. Jane came in, sat on the edge of the tub, and trailed her hand across the top of the water. “It’s hot,” she said.

I whispered to her to be quiet and closed my eyes.

The door opened and closed and she was gone. The phone rang from afar and Margaret yelled, “It’s for you.

“I’m in the tub,” I whispered to the white-tiled wall.

She opened the bathroom door, her hand covering her eyes, the phone cord long and strained behind her. “It’s Frank. I don’t like him.”

“Cover the phone,” I said and sat up.

Jane was behind her. She had Larry in one hand and a stack of books in the other. “Can I come in?”

“Okay, but no words,” I said to her. “I’ll call him back,” I told Margaret.

She left the door open and Jane put her things down and lay in the middle of the bathroom rug, flapping her arms like she was flying. Her eyes were open, staring at the light bulb hanging from a slim wire. I wondered how she could do that.

“Is it time?” she asked and leaned her face into mine. I opened my eyes and she waved her fingers, small and dirty, in my face.

I looked at her round face and shrugged my shoulders.

“To talk?”

“I could paint your nails tonight,” I sighed. She looked more like her father than me, short and stocky, not like Margaret who was tall and sinewy. Stretching my leg, I rubbed the bottom of my foot up and down the wall.

“Blue,” she said.

“Why blue?”

“It’s my favorite color.”

“Oh,” I said. I didn’t remember that. Sometimes I looked at children and wondered who they belonged to.



“Can I get in,” she asked. Before I could say no, she took off her clothes, climbed in and faced me, her feet on mine. She told how she liked when Rubén sang to them and that they wanted to go under the fire hydrant and knew they weren’t allowed.

“You two are disgusting,” Margaret said from the doorway.

“We’re just girls,” Jane said. “Washcloth, please.”

Standing on her tip toes, Margaret pulled one from the shelf above the toilet and dropped it into the tub.

“What kind of soup?” Margaret asked and sat on the edge of the tub. She gathered long strands of hair that were stuck to the porcelain between her fingers.

“Whatever you want.” I reached for her hand and squeezed it. I tried to remember what it was like to hold her as a baby, but I couldn’t.

She stayed for a moment and told Jane to get out. She wrapped her in a towel, Jane’s hair heavy with water. Jane leaned down and kissed me before closing the door. The sound of pots banging in the kitchen seemed far away. My skin wrinkled and the water cooled, and I drifted in and out of sleep.

“He’s dead,” Margaret said, standing over me.

“Who?”

“The god damn caterpillar.” She lifted her hand, and showed me the bottle with Larry curled at the bottom.

“Don’t swear.”

“You do.”

“Hand me a towel.” I sat up, my eyes were heavy.

“We have to get her another one.” Margaret emptied the bottle on the rug, pulled Larry out from the pile of dried leaves and flushed him down the toilet.

“We’ll take her to the park tomorrow,” I said and stood up and dried my back.

Margaret looked away. “No. Tonight.”

“Not tonight.”

“She’ll cry,” Margaret said. “A lot.”

I found a flashlight in the hall closet in a box of maps and light bulbs marked *Christmas* in black marker, checked on Jane who was curled like a ball in her bed and

closed the door. The street was quiet, and empty except for a young couple walking arm in arm. I grabbed Margaret's hand as we made our way to the park, past McCormick's Bar where I spent Sunday afternoons as a kid with my father. He always wore a grey suit, and a long skinny tie, and I sat next to him at the bar drinking ruby red drinks with slices of oranges, and listened to him talk about how the neighborhood was going bad.

At the park entrance, two women walked by us, pushing shopping carts piled with clothes, and paper bags teeming with newspapers. "Be careful," the taller woman said to us.

"Do you know her?" asked Margaret.

"No. She's just friendly."

"Where are we going to find another Larry?" I said.

"I'll show you." She led me to a large oak tree with branches that hung low and brushed the ground.

We crawled around the tree, following the fan of the flashlight that stretched out in front of us. The grass was wet and the blades were soft and stuck to the palms of my hands.

"I don't see a goddamn thing," she said, sitting back on her heels in a pile of wrinkled brown leaves.

"Your words," I said as I crawled by her, my knees sliding through the slick grass and I wanted to blame her father for her swearing, but knew I couldn't. He had left before she started to talk. I knew I needed to give up swearing, like candy at Lent.

Moving around the tree, I stopped at each small pile of leaves as Margaret lay back in the grass and sang some song I couldn't remember the words to. I sat back in the grass, trying to remember if I had taught it to her or if my father had when the flashlight flickered and burned out.

"Shit," I said.

"Words," she said and made her way to me. "We'll come back early in the morning." She placed her head on my thigh, curled her legs into her chest. I rolled the flashlight in the grass with my hand and we sat for a while looking up at the night sky as she drew circles on my leg with the edge of her finger.

On our way home, we passed McCormick's and Frank was standing outside smoking a cigarette talking to a guy I didn't recognize.

"What are you two doing?" he said when he saw us. He sounded like my father.

"I don't know," I said.

"Looking for another Larry," Margaret said.

The guy moved close to Margaret. "Who's Larry?" He offered her a cigarette.

"She's fourteen," I said, grabbed her hand and pulled along with me.

"Wait," Frank said and ran to catch us. "He didn't know."

"Forget it," I said. "It's late, we need to get home."

"Let me come with you."

Margaret pulled away from me and walked to the corner. Frank leaned into me, his lips hard on my mouth. My stomach fell and for a moment I couldn't breathe.

"No," I said. "We have to go."

I stood watching Margaret and Jane sleep before I closed the door, and climbed down the fire escape to Rubén's apartment. The window was open, the blinds drawn and he was watching TV with his feet on the coffee table, a rolled up magazine in his hand. I knocked on the windowsill. "Can I borrow some flour?"

"Loca," he said and helped me through the window. He tried to pull me to him but I moved away.

"Sí," I said. "Where's the kitchen?" I walked down the hallway poking my head into dark rooms. In the kitchen, I opened a cabinet door. He was behind me, leaning into me, my hips pressed into the counter, his lips on the back of my neck.

"Let's go," he said and led me to the couch. He pushed me down, his teeth pulling at my bottom lip. I slid out from under him and held his arms down.

"Stay away from my daughter," I said.

"What about Frank?" He rolled on top of me and pressed his mouth against mine. I held my lips closed.

"Open your mouth," he said.

I woke up, cold, and covered with a thin sheet, Rubén singing in the shower. I got dressed and walked out into the hallway, and heard the scrape of a broom against

the stairs below. I knew Mr. Detavio was sweeping, and I didn't know where to go. I didn't want to go back to my apartment, so I got in the elevator, and pressed "0" and went down to the basement.

The doors opened into the laundry room. The walls were painted black and there was a row of washing machines against the wall. Someone had hung a clothesline that crisscrossed the room. It was full of cotton briefs and pairs of socks dripping water on the floor. I climbed on top of a washer and pulled my knees into my chest and rocked back and forth. The elevator dinged, the doors opened and Mrs. Rodgeski walked into the room carrying a basket of clothes. She had on a pale green housecoat and dropped the basket when she saw me.

"Susan, you scared me," she said and started to talk about how nice Frank was and how lucky I was to have found him. "You know he's a dependable man," she said. "If you play your cards right, he'll be a good father to those kids."

She moved to the clothesline and removed a pair of socks and turned to me. "What are you doing?" she asked.

I slid off the washer and got down on my knees for a moment. I thought about the man on the street, praying on every corner and wondered what he did wrong. The air conditioner hanging from the basement window wheezed and spit drops of cold water into a bucket on the floor. I stood up, walked to the elevator and pressed the round white button. The girls would be waking up soon.



"Flood," wax, oils, graphite, paper on wood panel, 12"x12"

Lucinda Luvaas

David Starkey

## MILLARD FILLMORE'S LAST WORDS

Life not exactly flashing before him,  
 but chugging past at a reasonable rate,  
 like a locomotive pulling a mile-  
 long line of cars: Frontier boy.  
 New York Congressman. Taking office  
 after Zack Taylor dies of “stomach  
 troubles” from the big 4th of July bash.  
 Then Daniel Webster, his irascible Secretary  
 of State, expiring in a huff. Quill pen  
 scratching his unlikely signature  
 at the bottom of the Great Compromise,  
 the Fugitive Slave act, California’s  
 admission to the Union. Piano  
 in the parlor, tinkle of bone  
 china teacups as Mrs. Fillmore pours.  
 Jeers from journalists, and death  
 threats every week from North  
 and South. Last Whig  
 in office, failed candidate  
 of the Know Nothings in ‘56.  
 Worst of all, the day Lincoln was shot,  
 the mob charging Fillmore’s freshly  
 painted home, smudging it with pots  
 of black. No knowledge, of course,  
 that elementary schools will one day  
 be named after him, that in 1938  
 he’ll make the 13 cent stamp,  
 that—history’s greatest balm—nearly  
 everything for which he’s been reviled  
 will be forgotten. The nurse lifts  
 a spoon to his cracked lips. After  
 swallowing the thick and steamy  
 chicken broth, he whispers gravely:  
*This nourishment is palatable.*

Nancy Takacs

## North American Fisher

I'm ashamed to admit I didn't know  
who you were, or anything about your  
vicious lineage. Now I understand  
why in most wild places you're rare.  
*It takes one to know one*, my friend  
always says. She takes a long time  
at the Christmas Village, handling  
ornaments of foxes and turtles.  
But you aren't this kind of animal.  
Away from the mangers, I look  
for you as she looks, though  
I know you haven't been molded  
yet, and honeyed like the bear.  
Teacher of music, she buys  
a crystal piano. Hearing  
about her sonatas and rondos,  
I'm drawn under the evergreens,  
follow the snowshoe hares you love  
to eat. I won't tell anyone about  
your long body and small ears,  
the loping around you did  
when I was stupid and put out  
the garbage. The way you  
stalked our cat, who was lucky  
to be a few steps ahead of you  
standing at the edge of our drive  
so we couldn't let her out again.  
Someone might cartoon you  
and then most of us would like you better.  
You could slice the porcupine's face  
as usual, but she'd rise up again.  
Her quills might stick in your throat.  
Like the coyote, you could run to a ledge  
where you'd always fall on your head,  
but rise up again and be funny.  
There would be no death,  
no real discussion of eating an animal  
like a melon, moving in your sleek  
brown trappable body the size of a lynx.  
But you're just a weasel.

I still look for you at dawn and at dusk,  
I scent for you, having smelled your  
territorial musk, knowing  
how you strike without warning, your claws  
turn 180 degrees, you've been put here for  
your wilder cousin the wolverine,  
the multiplying porcupines and squirrels  
in the wilderness where we all live now.  
Afraid that you will take our pets.  
Loving that you are here, even in the daytime,  
hunting, brutal, shy,  
in the woods like music, your own musical name,  
like only the notes of yourself  
that keep feeding you, one key away  
from the concerto of your kinder  
cousin the marten, the concerto  
of your wilder cousin the wolverine,  
all of you before we humans  
even sang off key, waiting  
in the hemlocks.



Nancy Takacs

## **FORGOTTEN CANYON, IN DROUGHT**

*Lake Powell, 2005*

All underwater last time,  
 this bright green end is empty,  
 and the ruin on a soft path  
 through tamerisks, high  
 in the southern alcove,  
 a long climb now  
 the water doesn't buoy  
 boats to it; instead we shade  
 and look from grasses  
 and asters, won't climb,  
 can see the petroglyphs  
 from here, warriors  
 and their shields,  
 the ruin named Defiance,  
 just its granary left.

~

Paintbrushes  
 fire up the bank.  
 A hundred yellow  
 primroses are closed  
 at the tips of tall  
 single willows.

More boats now  
 beside us: two canoes,  
 a dinghy; a racing schooner  
 too big to slip  
 between dead trunks  
 pushes in with one breath.

They all swim.  
 They hike in the ruin.  
 At dusk they talk and talk,  
 pull out, finally float out.

~

My husband and I  
 dust the path beyond the ruin  
 through pink chenille  
 tamerisks along slim  
 Disney-green creeks

that run out.

~

The canyon was always steep.  
 These caves were drowned, these nests  
 dense now with hornets dizzy on the lips of deep  
 green, hunter green

In unearthly shallows,  
 spraying as they turn, schools of young bass  
 in quick-shifting clouds,  
 smooth school shadowing  
 school, rising and spraying together  
 the surface of this inlet at its new mouth,  
 over and over, like the flip of one fish.

~

We steam tea in near dark now,  
 a black and white  
 bird we think could be an osprey  
 here all day and dusk, diving down  
 often, carrying fish in its talons, so close we  
 feel we're in a nature film  
 where there is always abundance.

~

Early, primroses have opened wide.  
 A heron stands with its wings wide open  
 under a ledge, holding them  
 in the sun for a good five minutes  
 to dry, or to ward us off  
 and the fleet of boaters  
 who soon will come.

On this last walk we see  
 the eternal brown burrs"  
 palm-like bases curved  
 into fans, fogs of small grasses,  
 sage flowers in creamy husks, tamarisks  
 rifting among bloodroots; rose mud  
 cracked, shuffling into sand,  
 songbirds vibrating and brimming,  
 bluegills and bass still spawning,  
 all we never believed  
 in the lake's receding would ever come back  
 in five years, after fifty years of darkness.

## **GOING FISHING ON MY BIRTHDAY**

The late morning sun warms the lake.

Across the surface, water striders skate on slender legs.  
Bubbles break above the heads of turtles.

A blue heron takes its shadow into the willow trees.

Clouds are in the water, trees are in the sky.

Yesterday the late morning sun warmed the lake.

Across the surface, water striders skated on slender legs.  
Bubbles broke above the heads of turtles.

A blue heron took its shadow into the willow trees.

Clouds were in the water, trees were in the sky.

Tomorrow the late morning sun will warm the lake.

Across the surface, water striders will skate on slender legs.  
Bubbles will break above the heads of turtles.

A blue heron will take its shadow into the willow trees.

Clouds will be in the water, trees will be in the sky.

## INVISIBLE

1.

When they are thirteen, all boys want to be invisible.

2.

The physicists tell us ninety percent of the universe is invisible.

3.

Should it not occur to us that since the greatest part of our lives is lived in our minds, we too are ninety percent invisible?

4.

When we watch the willow branches stirred by the wind,  
when we watch the cumulus clouds billow in the wind,  
when we watch the paper kite strain the string in the wind,  
three times we ponder the invisible.

5.

Of all the incredible things about my cat Hector,  
the most incredible is how he sees the invisible.

6.

Except when it is reflecting something else, glass,  
the most miraculous of materials, so too the most  
metaphorical, is naturally visibly invisible.

7.

And then there is godmother death, her gray hair,  
her false teeth, her cane, whom we know from birth,  
so familiar to us she is all but invisible.

## LAMENTATIONS

1.

○ a lame lion, I eat little.

2.

○ tales to tell. So little time.

3.

○ lost at sea.

4.

○ I smite stone. I loose slate.

Tons. Tons. I toil.

5.

○ a snail, so small, I am lost on a stone.

6.

O too late, silent nation.

All is noise.

## **ON THE HIGHWAY, I PASSED A FUNERAL PROCESSION**

On the highway, I passed a funeral procession.

It was not much of one as such things go.

The black hearse was polished to a high gloss.

The limousine with the immediate family followed the hearse.

Then came six or seven unwashed cars of cousins and friends.

I said to myself, "Solonche, look well on this because this is what yours will be, not much of one as such things go, your corpse in the casket in the black hearse polished to a high gloss, followed by your wife and daughter in the limousine, then six or seven unwashed cars."

So I looked well on it. I kept the headlights of the hearse in my mirror as they receded, as they faded, until they looked like a flickering candle before going out.

How fast I had to drive to do that. How fast I drove to do that.

Yahya Frederickson

## **THE GOLD SHOP OF BA-'ALI**

*Al-Mukalla, Hadramaut, Yemen*

They step up to the display case, an old father,  
his wife, and a daughter newly engaged.  
They have come from a hot village.  
The father removes an old kerchief from his pocket,  
unwraps baubles to trade as they shop

for their daughter's bridal gold. In *Souq al-Nisa'*,  
serious buyers come here first. *We've been here  
too long to need a sign*, whispers a son of Ba-'Ali.  
From the back room the saline odor  
of a small, desiccated shark floats forward.

Perhaps tomorrow, after soaking overnight  
in sweet water and stewing since dawn  
with tomato and onion, it'll become breakfast.  
A thin son of Ba-'Ali leaving the back room  
sulks through the shop, greeting no one.

After sunset, he'll head down to the waterfront,  
to the teashop where young men play chess,  
swatting their timers fiercely after each move.  
Two days of traveling away, my wife  
takes care of our newborn twins at home.

Bearing my glaringly foreign surname,  
they cling to life despite odds impossible  
had I not believed in higher hands.  
Yet I flew away from them, away from my wife,  
away from this republic in search of something else.

But in Al-Hudaydah, the sand whipped around fighter planes  
junked behind the runway. Over the mountains,  
I was jostled from air pocket to pocket like a nervous coin.  
At Aden airport, an Egyptian teacher perched on his luggage  
for the long layover could only curse. *They are dogs,*

*all of them*, he said, cigarette smoke knifing out  
between his teeth. It was then I knew I had to stay.  
I walked out of the airport and called my nearest friend,

a son of Ba-'Ali. A crammed taxi across the desert  
for a day, and I arrived. The oldest son of Ba-'Ali

opens the safe, shows me a tray. It's his mother's gold.  
His father's eye squints tighter around the jeweler's eyeglass.  
When we were introduced, each son shook my hand  
and kissed his father's ring. I imagine Ba-'Ali's bride  
slipping her fingers into a glove of handcrafted gold mail

and thick coins the first time, the weight a promise asks.  
Now I am holding her private gold! On another tray,  
old trinkets wait to be melted down and reborn  
as whatever is the current rage in Bahrain.  
There, I find something to resurrect, something

to grace my wife: big crescent earrings with bangles  
dangling in the wane. A son of Ba-'Ali bathes my choice  
in solvent until it glows. Soon, I will return home  
with bright Indian shawls and gold. When I give her the gold,  
she will thank me politely and put it away, forever.





Lynn Watt, "Bees," Oil, 20" X 24"

Christiane Buuck

## **HERE BEGINS THE COOK'S TALE**

As far as the cook was concerned, it was just another market day, and because she was the oldest girl it fell on her to wade through the stalls and say hello to the appropriate people and give a *bise* to all her school friends and their mothers, and not spend too much money. Because there was never enough money.

As far as the cook was concerned, life was an unending quest for food. Life was two things, really – the food and the forgetting. Everyone with a different way to forget. Mother's garden. Father's wine. The sisters' makeup and music and boys. Her brother in his books. Here they were, one more brood among the lot cast out of Africa. Shame and poverty mingling with a sense of entitlement. They were not African, at least. They were French, of French stock, chewed up and spit out by colonialism and all its promises.

She mostly tried to forget the sun-bleached courtyard drooping with red roses and the whisper of her grandmother's voice. Her first communion dress, organza, hand-cut and stitched by her grandmother, the matching veil and alms-purse, tucked in a box under her new French bed with sprigs of lavender not strong enough, surely, to stave off this new mold and humidity. Organza is made the way memories are, stiff at first, then fading. Her last African act, a communion, itself a first and a last because she did not believe in a god that sent people away from grandparents. She had worn that dress and communed for her grandmother and for no one else, that only communion already a mirage against the backdrop of Tangier, the last stepping lightly of her childhood.

She didn't sleep most nights for the blackness behind her eyelids, the whispers in her ears to plunge into the Gave that rushed under the town's bridge, the itch to tie sturdy rope to the garage rafters. Voices and urges of a new country, unholy, unspoken and better forgotten in daylight. The cook was the oldest and the most dependable and she always smiled, tucked her night visions deep back behind her eyes where no one would stir them out.

The cook walked home from Tuesday's market with laden baskets that were not laden enough to really feed them. She walked along the two-lane road that led home like someone with purpose, a useful guise that would become her identity in time. She didn't notice the sleek black car that slowed and then sped up again as it drove past her into town.

Whether or not the cook saw the car, the driver saw her and it was the cook that caused the slowing. The driver, a man in his sixties, an Italian headed to Bordeaux on business, was a millionaire, a rare thing in his day, though no one in this town knew of his fortune because he had never been to this town before. The young woman on the roadside, her back bent slightly under the weight of responsibility and her long blond braid swinging nearly to her knees, surged up in his windshield. She was out of place in this region of stocky, dark-haired people. Maybe Africa clung a little to her still, despite the forgetting. The dust of the *souk*. The music of the calls to prayer. A waft of spiced roses. He tapped the brake and his left foot hovered over the clutch, ready to downshift, but he wouldn't fracture the moment. He slowed so little she did not even look up or notice him, and then he sped on again toward town.

As far as the cook was concerned, when she set down the baskets and stretched her hands to bring the blood back, they would have a *tabouleh* for lunch. Before the market she had cut tomatoes from the garden and left them soaking into a bowl of couscous, a chipped china plate on top to keep the flies off. To this she added parsley and mint from the garden, onion, corn kernels from a can, lemon juice. She wiped down the oilcloth and waited to pan the duck breasts so they would be hot when the family came to eat. Duck was not so expensive this week and she had bargained the nice old man down with a smile. Her hands made all the ritual movements that shape meals, but she felt no love for the food or her role in its preparing. As far as she was concerned these actions were just one more way to keep the dark thoughts pushed back for ten minutes, or twenty. She found a drug in usefulness.

As far as the businessman was concerned, he had found a wife. He arrived in the market-bulging town and parked his conspicuous car in the grass under a plane tree in complete disregard of the law. The locals playing *boules* nearby straightened to admire the car and its driver. The *gendarme* among them even whistled.

The Italian made his way to the *café du Marché* and took a table at the window for the best view of the market outside. He ordered coffee, which was terrible as French coffee always was. As he sipped he surveyed the territory, trying to imagine where the blonde girl had shopped and how best to frame his questions. He'd not ask at the *café* as the girl's father might be here among the card players and old men. One had to be careful with questions such as his.

He chose a stall run by an old peasant man who peddled various tubers and greens, some scrawny chickens and bits of duck. This was the stall he would save for last. The businessman paid and stepped out into the stifling embrace of a July afternoon. His shoes were shiny under a coating of dust, and his suit was rumpled the way linen is after a long car trip when certain folds get steamed into place between skin and the leather seat. He walked up and down the market rows, made a bit of a show of himself with his lilting book French and the surprising purchases he made: one round of semi-hard Pyrenean cheese, a delicate melting *crème*-filled pastry, ten steaks bleeding through paper wrappers, three bags of shining strawberries so ripe they had almost begun to mold, handfuls of fresh spinach wrapped in burlap, five tomatoes straining in their skins, canned white beans to take back to his nieces, and *foie gras*, fat and glistening in its jar like a preserved brain, for his sister. Finally, his suit arm stained by a streak of burst tomato, he stood before the peasant.

"What is the price of the lettuce?" he asked.

The price, of course, was insignificant. He waved at it as one would a fly. "And the chickens?"

"Ten *francs*."

"And the duck?"

"Fifty *centimes* a kilo, Monsieur."

"Three kilos, then, of *araignettes*."

The old man selected the slender strips with his bare and dirty hands and laid them on waxed paper on the scale.

“Have you seen a girl with a long blond braid?”

The old man squinted and tapped the scale which liked to stick. “Quite a few in my life, but none that saw me.”

“This morning. Carrying two baskets.”

“The Salle girl, you mean.”

“Salle.”

The Italian paid and collected his package, discouraged by the red tinge on his sleeve.

“Family just back from the colonies, but luckier than most. The father works leather. He’s a master craftsman, you know, a *compagnon*. Did the *tour de France* before they went to Morocco.”

The businessman nodded. He stopped to buy a horn of roasted hazelnuts on his way back to the car, though they were out of season and the *marchand* charged him too much. He’d have bought chocolate too, at the small shop off the square, only the risk of melting was too high and he had already stained his good suit.

The cook laid the table with mismatched dishes. Papa’s glass got wine, and the rest water. She lit the stove to heat the pan, cranked down the *volets* to keep out the worst of the heat. Downstairs her father sat among his leather and tools mending a bridle. His fingers worked unguided. His mind was in Tangier: the servants were bringing tea; some local prince leaned close and explained the intricacies of a saddle trimmed with pure silver.

Her mother was on her hands and knees in a high-ceilinged house on the hill above town, scrubbing tiles until they shone, but in her mind she was forever gardening. Maid by day, but gardener really, dreaming up new plantings even when she was not on her knees in the dirt. In every free moment her mother’s hands sought out that black earth as if she were reclaiming her ancestral land one plant at a time, sewing seeds of the *potager*, every kind of flower. She left the house at first light and stayed out until last.

Sometimes she didn't even come in for dinner, ate after they were all asleep, then washed her plate and fork and spoon and laid them back on the table as if she had never been there at all. The memory of a mother. Every night she passed her husband drowsing in his workshop or in a chair by the fire, the edges of his day fuzzy with wine, the memory of his body rounding a dip in the mattress where he used to sleep more often. She turned her back to that side of the bed, curled into a comma, dreamed of peonies, and of the cucumbers almost ready to be picked, and of dividing the irises before they went too wild. Her family had long slipped out of her dreams. Even Africa was a forgotten, unwanted thing, cast aside in the sole instinct to grow enough to feed the stomachs that shared this house, to keep the house from slipping away altogether, taking her garden with it.

The businessman glided smoothly across the bridge that spanned the river, leaving the market and the town behind, the market folding up in the heat like a many-spined umbrella. He retraced the road where he had first seen the girl with the braid and the baskets, tapped the break again where he had first glimpsed her, felt the afternoon light and heat bear down with the force of a hammer. Ahead was a small café and *tabac* at the crossroads where he would buy some cigarettes. A sharp-tongued woman stood behind the counter, sweat blooming from her armpits. She smacked the pack on the counter, wary of his accent but interested by the polish of his shoes, the cut of his jacket.

“What do you want with the Salles, *alors?*” she said by way of answer to his question.

“They tell me Monsieur makes excellent saddles.”

She lifted an eyebrow damp with sweat. “Turn right after the bridge, and then again at the *impasse*. It's the white house with the flowers out front. Workshop's on the ground floor.”

His pulse quickened as he clicked change into the small dish on the counter. He trembled the key in the ignition, grated the gears with careless shifting, and then he resumed his composure, glided away as he had come.

Inside her bar, Coco looked at the drowsy workmen drinking at the counter. They shrugged. She dropped the businessman's coins into the cash box. It was much too hot to stay curious for long.

As far as the cook was concerned, it was a day like any other. She counted the seconds without thinking, moved her hands in the usual rhythm, waited for the door to fly open, slam shut, bringing sisters, brother, father, mother streaming into the kitchen. She stirred the couscous, added a pinch of salt. Filled the pitcher with water from the tap. Shooed a fly from the duck waiting to be cooked. Her sisters were already running toward the house. She could hear their shoes on the gravel. And her brother would not be long after, returning from his morning at the factory that spun flax into the kitchen towels and napkins this region was known for.

Her mother walked home from the grand house in town where she mopped floors and ironed sheets on Tuesdays, her head filled only with plants and hopes for a plentiful harvest this summer, enough tomatoes to can and eat through the winter and spring. The arithmetic of poverty mixing with the exhaustion of subsistence and the rising cost of Catholic school come fall and the knowledge that her husband would never rise from his drinks long enough to make a living again after all they had already weathered. This was her birth land, the time in Africa an oppressive interlude in which she learned about thirst and infertile dust. She felt the ache of long life in her bones and wondered if she would ever die, or if she would notice the difference if she did.

The cook's sisters were already forgetting the time before. They had never known their grandmother as she had. They were too young to drink mint tea in the shade of the north wall of the house, to remember the brush of Grandmother's fingers on their cheeks, Papi's strong hands that tossed them into the air and caught them again. They were already enveloped into this new place, growing weedlike in its fertile earth. They dreamed of things like gum and stockings and lipstick, and already they were forming their separate identities: artist, seeker, intellectual, radical. These girls were another breed, burdens thrust upon her. Their lives were loud and scattered, nothing

like her own, and their ease at school was a constant reminder of her own poor memory and bad grades, the leavings of the scarlet fever that had been her welcome present from this new country. Scarlet fever and the dark thoughts that teased her with dreams of release. The thoughts she pushed away only because of her grandmother, who she was forever remembering and forgetting like a wound that would not heal.

The door flew open with her sisters, slammed shut. The steps on the stairs were her brother, her father. Mother would not be far. She reached for the oil, poured some in the skillet. Set the *tabouleh* on the table with the baguette fresh from the market. A smile tightened her face as she prepared for her role. She was the stupid one. The cook.

He bore a chariot of good things. A foretaste of future feasting. She would want for nothing when she came. He had houses, bank accounts, a yacht for sailing the Mediterranean. He had money to buy her necklaces and dresses and ribbons for that long blond hair. He circled back through town, over the river that was just a trickle in the heat, past the market that had folded up and left only onion skins and feathers in its wake. The men playing *boules* looked up again to see the black convertible slip past, piloted by its silver-haired millionaire. The church bells rang twelve-thirty and they turned back to their game for a last toss before lunch, before their wives started to yell from the windows.

The businessman slipped beyond the shuttered town, turned where he was told, found the white house with the flowers, but glided on. The time was wrong. Children were running up the steps. He circled and drove off to a cool spot beside the river several kilometers beyond town. There he parked under the trees and covered his purchases with his linen jacket to keep them cooler – all except for the pastry which he ate. He had a fondness for French pastry. As he rinsed his fingers in the Gave he wondered if the girl with the long golden braid knew how to make such pastries. Then he lay down on the grass by the water and fell asleep.

The meal was like every other meal that had ever been eaten, and every meal that would ever be eaten. It never occurred to the cook to worry that sixteen was too



early an age to lose the joy of taste. Hers was not the kind of existence that invited these kinds of questions. She hardly noticed life now, allowed it to blend into one dull-colored mass punctuated by duty. If she dreamed of anything good, it was of the time before. Nothing here would equal that former life. Her future might stretch for decades, but it could only disappoint. She knew how it would be. She was pretty enough to be married, resourceful enough to run a household, compliant enough to accept without complaining because complaining never got anyone anywhere.

Her family ate in mostly silence. Her father poured glass upon glass of wine until he glowed with sweat and bursting capillaries. He alone laughed at the table, nudged the cook's chin with his leather-stained hand. In good moments he, too, remembered the time before, tried to lift the both of them up. She loved him most of all, looked beyond his shining exterior and saw something wounded and broken, like her own life, the fractured pieces at her feet.

The meal ended as all meals end and as all meals will always end, with a clatter of plates and a clatter of shoes exiting the house buoyed by the chatter of sisters and the low voice of her brother. Her mother went to her garden until the time came to walk back to her job at the tall-ceilinged house in town. Her father went down to the cool of his *atelier* to sit among the leather scraps and metal tools that let off a smell of oil. The cook turned to the sink and began to wash the dishes.

By the river, lulled by the ripple of easy water and pleasant dreams, the businessman napped. He woke when a large cloud drifted over the sun and a hot breeze sighed through his hair. His watch read one-thirty. He stood, washed his face with a handful of the river, splashed a bit of his expensive cologne on his neck and under his arms to cut the scent of summer, shook his linen jacket and slipped it on. The businessman had made his fortune by making clear and correct decisions. He was a man of action. By the time he had turned the car back onto the road he had settled on a sum to use as leverage.

No one was expecting him at the white house with the flowers out front. He parked on the street and unfolded himself with his customary elegance. Some of

the neighbors at their kitchen windows remarked on this later, the way he had a look of money. The right kind of money. The kind that implied breeding and good manners. The cook noticed him through the small slots in the drawn shutters and wondered what project this man had come to ask of her father. It would pay well, surely.

Because there was no dog, he dared to step inside the gate without calling. At the far end of the property he saw the rustle of raspberry brambles and caught a flash of white that was the mother's sun hat as she stooped to rip weeds. He circled the house until he came to the open door of the workshop, spied the man drowsing in the shadows.

"Salle?" he called out.

The drowsing man shifted. "Indeed," he said, making out the blaze of linen and slicked gray hair haloed in the sunlight. "Please come in, Monsieur."

The businessman entered the dim space that smelled of mildew and also leather. The walls were hung with gardening tools and leather-working tools, and there were work tables stacked with hides.

"You are the leatherworker," the businessman stated. It was a habit of his at the beginning of negotiations to affirm obvious things, to set the other party at ease before he made his move.

Salle nodded and waved a hand at his tools and leather. His eyes watered.

"I have an offer for you, sir," said the businessman, and he reached for his wallet. "Perhaps we can reach some kind of agreement."

Even through the haze of heat and food and drink, Salle felt the jolt. This man was saying impossible things. Salle shook his head, asked the businessman to repeat himself.

"You are mad," Salle said, in part to himself. He often had visions during his afternoon stupors, though never visions this grandiose. His daydreams beat the familiar path to Morocco and back, always peopled with the same persons, the same jokes, the same tang of mint thrumming his memory. The sound of the Muslim calls to prayer ringing through at odd moments.

“I assure Monsieur that I come in complete honesty. I am prepared to offer you more. I am prepared to offer whatever it takes. I am a man who knows what he wants, Monsieur, and I am very sure about this.”

Salle rubbed his eyes. “Excuse me,” he said. He stepped out into the sunshine to clear his head and gain perspective. His wife’s back curved toward her plants and he walked toward her, something he had not done in some time. They had grown used to each other and then absent-minded of each other, consumed by their various needs.

“Violette,” he said.

Her hands stilled in the dry earth. Something in his tone caught her attention, lucidity rarely present now.

“Violette,” he repeated, beside her now, his scuffed shoes near enough to touch. She looked up and remembered a time before the ache of continents had infused them with separate longings. She stood. He held out his hand. “I believe I’m mad,” he said. He led her back to the workshop where the businessman waited. If it was possible, his suit looked even more expensive than it had moments before.

“Monsieur, you have something to say to us,” she stated and the businessman’s eyes flickered. She knew his tactic. This was his first hint that he had met an equal. This was the part of negotiations he loved most, when the stakes were so high they demanded every molecule of his being.

The cook had washed the last of the dishes, wiped down the spattered stove, dropped the potatoes into a pot of water to boil for the evening meal. They would have fish. She stacked the napkins in their separate napkin rings on the window sill and had just gathered the tablecloth to shake it over the railing when her mother called her from below. She brought the tablecloth with her as she stepped out on the porch. Thunderheads perched on the western horizon, too distant to bring rain. She left the cloth draped on the railing and descended the stairs, unaware of how girl-like her gait remained, how pretty her face was in the blush of afternoon heat. Her mother waited below and saw her daughter as if for the first time, saw the mark of womanhood beneath the light exterior, glimpsed however fleetingly the shadow that lurked behind

her eldest child's eyes, saw that life spared no one. This was when Violette made her decision, but she sealed it tight behind her tongue and said nothing yet.

The cook was brought in to see the businessman who confirmed that, indeed, she was the very person of whom he spoke. He stood as she entered, dazzled by the halo effect of the light, strengthened in his convictions that this, indeed, was his goal. He offered his hand with great poise and made a fitting introduction. The cook's parents looked on and saw that she was as oblivious as she was beautiful, saw that this man was decent, at least in their presence, felt the stab all at once of their descent from the modest heights they had once attained.

"Have you come with a project for my father?" the cook asked. "He's a master leatherworker, you know. They beg him to return to Tangier..." She felt like a fool before this man, but was proud of her father and knew how much they could use the money this man so obviously had. "A saddle, perhaps?" she said.

His eyes radiated deep lines as he smiled. "Yes, I do have many horses. We were just speaking of them." He lifted his gaze to her parents, waiting for a cue.

"Perhaps Monsieur will return tomorrow with his plans," Salle said then. Violette heard an echo of his old decisiveness.

The businessman nodded, glancing again at the girl standing there with her golden braid reaching to her knees. He would show her wonders beyond her imaginings.

She looked at his fine linen suit and remembered the princes of Tangier, and her grandfather who had worn suits very much like these. Had worn his best one, which was not quite so nice as the one on the businessman, but was still elegant and fine, to her first communion. He had smiled when she stepped out of her bedroom. Her grandmother sighed and fussed at the dress that fit perfectly. She lifted the headdress off the table and slipped it on her granddaughter's head. It was a band of silk lilies of the valley stitched with gauze so fine it might be only the memory of gauze. The cook, who had another name then, had closed her eyes and breathed in her grandmother's perfume as her hands hovered near her forehead, arranging that long blonde hair until it was perfect. When she opened her eyes she saw that her grandmother was crying. Papi reached into his pocket and took out three coins, one for the Father, one for the

Son and one for the Holy Ghost, to tuck in her alms purse that attached to the belt at her waist. Then they each took a hand and led her out the door and through the streets to the French Catholic Church where the other girls waited in dresses also white, but none so fine as hers. None so perfect, so surrounded by the essence of perfection. For that moment, a hand held by each of the people she loved most in the world, she forgot what she knew, that the bubble would burst, that she would be ripped from them. She stood in line with the other beautiful girls and smelled the dry air of the desert mixed with the incense of church and the spice of meals simmering and her grandmother's perfume. The wafer and wine were for show, but this moment before the spectacle she breathed her finest and fullest breaths of life, trapped the essence of it all in a place so deep and private that even the scarlet fever would not unravel it.

She looked at the linen suit of the businessman with eyes that saw only the past. And then she excused herself, ran outdoors, cried among the irises.

The businessman shook hands with Salle, kissed the dirt-crusting hand of Violette as if it were the hand of a princess, and excused himself with great dignity. Before he left he carried the market goods to the doorway and passed them in with excuses befitting someone of his stature. It was a subtle tactic, and not so subtle all at once, and the husband and wife agreed to take these offerings all the while convincing themselves that the saliva wetting their mouths did not make them beholden, that they had not yet given or taken. The businessman thanked them and backed away, promised to return tomorrow with the plans, drove off in his sleek black car.

That night, the thunderheads tumbled over themselves in the west, pushed the smell of rain to the house with the flowers out front, but withheld all moisture.

Dinner was like every other dinner that had ever been eaten, and like every dinner that ever would be eaten. The cook looked on with vacant eyes as her family feasted on boiled potatoes and fish, salad from the garden, thin slices of cheese. After the meal she washed the dishes, shook the tablecloth and leaned over the railing to watch the storms that would not come. They flashed pink and green with lightning.

Not so very far from away, at the finest hotel in the nearby city, the businessman digested his magnificent dinner in the cool embrace of an evening bath. His suit would be washed and pressed by morning. He had already sent a telegram to Bordeaux, announcing his delay. He had already placed a call to his banker.

Inside the white house Salle sat in the parlor with his last glass of wine, but he could not drink it. He returned to the kitchen and poured it back into the bottle, passed his daughter on the stairs as he walked to the garden. There he found his wife, saw in her the early curve of old age, and bent down to meet her in the dirt. She accepted his presence without a word, made space for his hands beside her own. Together they weeded the lettuce patch, dug out the potatoes and stacked them in a pyramid, strung the beans back onto the poles they so loved to reach out from. When the daylight had completely vanished, they carried the potatoes to the workshop and left them in a basket where the air was coolest, climbed the stairs together, without words.

For this one night they began to remember once-familiar sensations. They washed by turns in the small sink, closed the door to their room and found in each other a certain fleeting comfort, the shapes that still fit, the touch, the breath, the tears. They reached out from their lonelinesses, towards each other out of necessity and fear and instinct. They absolved each other of what they were about to do tomorrow when the businessman returned, if he returned. He would return, they knew that. They absolved each other of what they were doing now, of the consequences they could not begin to guess at.

Their oldest child stood on the balcony, still, looking out at nothing at all, building up the reserves she would require. The walls to back up against.

Inside, her parents found a sleep that was not unlike waking, their bodies curving into one another in forgiveness, the forgetting already tugging at the corners of their eyes.



Lynn Watt, "Golant," acrylic, 4 ' X 3'

## CONTRIBUTORS

**CHRISTIANE BUUCK** is working on a book inspired by the *Canterbury Tales*, and peopled with those she met during her 2005-2006 Fulbright grant to France, during which she studied and walked the pilgrimage routes of the Way of Saint James. She returned from the year abroad to marry a man who is not a millionaire, though he makes her feel like one. She now lives and writes in Columbus, Ohio, and her work has appeared in the *Seneca Review*.

**GWENDOLYN CASH's** chapbook, *Acts of Contrition* is published under the cover of the New Poets: Short Books series, edited by Marvin Bell, published by Lost Horse Press in 2007. Each edition features three new poets under one cover. Her poems were featured in *Cutthroat II*.

**JEFFREY FRANKLIN's** poetry collection, *For The Lost Boys* was released by Ghost Road Press in 2006. Jeff's poems have appeared in such place as *The Hudson Review*, *Shenandoah*, and in *2002 Best American Poetry*. He teaches at the University of Colorado in Denver.

**YAHYA FREDRICKSON** is an Associate Professor at Minnesota State University Moorhead, where he teaches literature and composition. He holds an MFA degree in Creative Writing from the University of Montana. For six years he taught English in Sana'a, Yemen. His chapbook of poems, *Returning to Water*, was recently published by Dacotah Territory Press. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Black Warrior Review*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Cream City Review*, *Quarterly West*, *River Styx*, etc.

**L. B. GREEN** is the author of *Judas Trees North of the House* (Harperprints Press 2003). With the generous support of a fellowship from the North Carolina Arts Council and also a residency at the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, she recently completed *Night Garden*, the collection from which "Mantid" is drawn.

**PAUL GUEST** is the author of *Notes for My Body Double*, winner of the 2006 Prairie Schooner Book Prize in Poetry, and *The Resurrection of the Body and the Ruin of the World*, winner of the 2002 New Issues Poetry Prize. He is a visiting professor of English at the University of West Georgia.

**EMILY LUNDIN** is researching on a Creative Writing Fulbright Fellowship while finishing a novel set in Mississippi, where she grew up. Recent work can be read in *Bordercrossing Berlin* and *Oregon Literary Review*. She teaches creative writing at the Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg and lives in Berlin.

**LUCINDA LUYAAS** is a multimedia artist working in film and fine art. Her films and fine art have been screened and exhibited both nationally and abroad. Her multimedia project, "Running Through History," has recently been exhibited in Pomona and Santa Ana, CA, in Nebraska, and at The Residence in London. Current and upcoming exhibitions include: The Fringe Festival/Femme Noire, Kansas City, The Micaela Gallery, SF, The Laredo Center for The Arts, The Propeller Center for The Arts, Toronto, Continental Gallery,



L.A., Paris, "Metamorphoses," VideoMation, NYC, The Holter Museum of Art, Helena, MT, Bloomsburg University, PA, The Annenberg School for Communication, Philadelphia, and the Bluetenweiss Gallery, Berlin. Her film, "A Working Man's Apocrypha," won "Best Narrative Short," at The Delta International Film Festival.

**KERRI QUINN** is Ph.D. candidate in the Center for Writers at The University of Southern Mississippi. She has a forthcoming publication appearing in the August 2007 issue of *descant*. Her work has also been featured in the online journals *971 MENU*, *Rumble* and the *Apple Valley Review*.

**SHOSHAUNA SHY's** poems appear in numerous journals and magazines, including *Cimarron Review*, *The Comstock Review*, *Rosebud* and *Poetry Northwest*. One of her poems was selected for the Poetry 180 Library of Congress program launched by Billy Collins. She is the author of three collections of poetry, the latest *What the Postcard Didn't Say*, (Zelda Wilde Publishing, 2007) and works for the Wisconsin Humanities Council.

**JOSIE SIGLER** splits her time between her home of Mount Desert Island, Maine, where she hikes and does yoga, and Los Angeles, where she attends the PhD Program in Literature and Creative Writing at University of Southern California. If writing poems does not work out, she is planning to become a trashy cowgirl singer. The bigger the wig, the better.

**J.R. SOLANCHE** teaches at Orange County Community College in Middletown, New York, and sends us his poems from nearby Blooming Grove.

**DAVID STARKEY** directs the creative writing program at Santa Barbara City College and is co-editor with Paul Willis of *In a Fine Frenzy: Poets Respond To Shakespeare* and author of *Poetry Writing: Theme And Variations* (1999) and other texts as well as several collections of poetry, most recently *Ways Of Being Dead: New And Selected Poems* (2006). His poems are widely published.

**NICK SWEET's** critically-acclaimed first novel, *Gemini Games*, was published by Janus in November 2004, and is available from Amazon. Nick's story, 'The Secret', appeared in issue 106 of *Descant* and his non-fiction has appeared in a number of places, including the *New Humanist* and the *London Magazine*.

**NANCY TAKACS** teaches at the College of Eastern Utah in Price. She is also an artist-in-the-schools for the Utah Arts Council. Her third book *Juniper* will be out from Limberlost Press sometime this year.

**LYNN WATT** earned a BFA from the Univ. of Texas in Austin and an MFA in painting, drawing, and printmaking from the Univ. of AZ. She's studied, taught, and dreamed art since she was a girl. Lynn has had a one person show at the Central Cultural Gallery in Oaxaca, Mexico, as well as numerous group shows throughout the country. Her works are in private collections in various cities including New York, Philadelphia, Washington, San Francisco and her home city of San Antonio, TX. Her art work has been used as cover design for several books. Currently she is painting large works on canvas and creating small collages, using paper collected on trips she and her husband take (as often as they can).

