

# THRICE

## FICTION™



ISSUE No. 4 – MARCH 2012 – FEATURING...

Lynn Beighley, Matthew Dexter, James Claffey,  
John M. Bennett, B.D. Fischer, Jessica Maybury,  
mLEKAL aND, Danica Green, Susan Tepper,  
Darryl Price, David Ackley, AND Ann Bogle.





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# THRICE

## FICTION™

Issue No. 4 • MARCH 2012

RW Spryszak, Editor  
David Simmer II, Art Director

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OBERC





# Thrice to the Fourth

RW Spryszak, Editor

Magazines can make all the submission guidelines they want, and spill their guts to high holy Hosanna about their virtuous mission and their honorable place in the important universe of the published word. But at some point the evolution of the editing process worms itself down to a singularity. You read and read and read and every once in a while something simply pops. It screams at you. It stands out in bright colors. You can't miss it. And the first thing you want to do is tell people about it.

That's all the submission guideline anyone needs from now on. Make me want to show my friends what I found.

For our loyal readers—I can't wait for you to read this collection. So I'm just going to shut up right this second.

Turn the page. You won't regret it.



## JAMES CLAFFEY

is a native son of County Westmeath, Ireland, and lives on an avocado ranch in Carpinteria, CA, with his wife, the writer and artist, Maureen Foley, and their Australian cattle-dog, Rua. His work has appeared in numerous publications, including the *Toronto*

*Quarterly*, *Cobalt Review*, and the *Shady Side Review*. New material is forthcoming in the *Artichoke Haircut*, *Molotov Cocktail*, the *New Orleans Review*, and *Palooka Journal*. His novel, *The Motion of Souls*, was a finalist in the 2011 Faulkner-Wisdom Novel-in-Progress competition. His website is [www.jamesclaffey.com](http://www.jamesclaffey.com) and he contributes to *The Nervous Breakdown*.



# snow was general

James Claffey

**T**he bells rang out from the Church of the Three Patrons for ten o'clock mass, and Saints Patrick, Bridget, and Columba statued above the portico huddled together for warmth. Outside, on our street, Parishioners goloshed their way towards the church, passing beneath my bedroom window in winter coats with glinting brooches, over-applied perfume and toilet water, kidskin gloves and fur stoles. On an ordinary Sunday I could tell who's who from the footfalls, but the snow smothered their distinctive gaits and I struggled out of bed and into my cold clothes, peeking out the window at the passers-by.

Wool-gloved, ears red and pained from the cold, I made my way through the piled streets, cars hidden in drifts, bemused crows and house sparrows jostling for a place on the telephone wires. By the old Taoiseach's house the sound of a transistor radio comes from the small security hut inside the front gate. Two blue-uniformed Gardaí are outside, cigarettes cupped in hands, walkie-talkies crackling away. Slushed show crunches underfoot as I go by, head down, no eye contact. At the intersection of Garville Avenue and the Rathgar Road I spotted Shannon Grimes with her mother. When they crossed the road I followed them, the hem of her mother's coat soaked by the wet snow. Shannon glanced over her shoulder and I averted my eyes, afraid to look straight at her in case I might have turned to stone. She winked at me and the tips of my ears hurt more.

At the altar the white-and-red cassocked altar-boys surrounded Father Mulroney as he spread his arms wide. "In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost." I made the sign of the cross, and all the while kept Shannon in my sights. On my way back from communion, the wafer on my tongue, she coughed, and as I tried to dislodge the host from the roof of my mouth, I imagined kissing her under the sycamore trees by the canal. ⑤



## dublin on a wet day

James Claffey

**O**n rainy days the time passed slowly, trancelike I tongued the bedroom window and licked the condensation from the glass. How my nose smushed flat against the cold pane, the seagulls below, moping on the roof of the coal shed, their eyes fixed on the kitchen door and the off chance Mam might throw out some scraps. Hours would go by, watching the rivulets race down the window at different speeds, eyes fixed on my favorite, named of course. But the storms lasted so long I couldn't stare into the garden all day. Instead I would pull the trunk with the crushed velvet lining out of the wardrobe, the same wardrobe with my aunt's mothly fur coat, and her double bass. Inside the trunk, old notebooks, journals, copies of Ireland's Own from the fifties, well-thumbed, stories pored over by dim electric light in a kitchen somewhere not here.

At the bottom, an old Freeman's Journal—the great strike, Larkin, arms outspread, Jesus in a raincoat. Da spoke of the “big man” and his impassive dignity, how he fought to overturn the unfair treatment of workers in the dockyards. The picture was hard to make out, the ink smeared and the background fuzzed. From downstairs the smell of barbecued chicken shimmied through the rungs of the banisters, Mam's industry audible from afar. I could hear her go at the chunk of dough with the rolling-pin, and thought to myself, rather the dough than the backs of my legs. That was often the punishment for refusing to comply with what the teacher said at school, or for not taking the bins out on a Sunday night. All it took was a moment of misrule and on cue, the punishment would be doled out with the wooden spoon, or if that wasn't close to hand, the rolling pin. If it was Da doing the punishing then the flat of his hand was weapon enough, the debt to society marked in red weal on white skin. He'd admonish me to “quit my sniveling” and extract payment for the debt of misbehavior. ⑤



## how i came into the world

James Claffey

**I** was born on a Thursday, late in the evening, as my father manned the taps of our pub in a small town in the center of Ireland, while Mam evicted me from my sub-let quarters of nine-month duration. Da rang the brass bell behind the counter and it was drinks on the house for all-comers when Auntie Martha brought news of my arrival into this world. He had his sleeves rolled up, belly against the bar, immersed in a discussion of cock fighting with the Bantam Egan. Years later, before the business trickled away, the Bantam Egan was to buy my brother's pet rooster from my father and thus end up barred from the premises by my irate Mam. She rejected Egan's view that the pullet was better off in a circle of drunken men screaming for blood.

That summer's evening I came into the world, Da drained his Guinness and Powers Whiskey, told Uncle Ronan to take over behind the bar for him, and set off in the van for the hospital in Ballinasloe. Da arrived at midnight, all beery breath and red-faced, did a quick foxtrot with the ward sister and plucked me from my mother's side. He held me to the ceiling, all smiles and coos. I wailed and begged to be returned to the warmth and comfort of my mother's breast, and he gently put me in my place. That was the closest I came to Da in my entire life.

Years later the Bantam Egan came out of St. John of Gods and drank himself stupid. Half-a-mile down the road from his farmhouse twenty Charolais cows bore witness as he swung a rope over a crossbeam in the barn and secured it with large, amateurish knots. He stood on an upturned milk churn, and as the wintry sun dipped behind the Carmelite Convent, kicked the churn from beneath his feet and dangled in the twilight. ⑤

# Horny

## Lynn Beighley

**H**onoria will be here in half an hour. When she gets here, try not to stare. I don't think she minds, not after a lifetime of being scrutinized, sneered at, mocked. But maybe she does, I don't know. I wouldn't want to play poker with her, and I'm her closest friend. Or I used to be.

I've told you she has a birth defect, that she looks odd. I appreciate that you didn't pry and you let me put off telling you. It's not easy to talk about, but I have to tell you before she gets here. Okay. She was born with growths on her head that look like horns. No, I'm serious. They stick out from her scalp. Yes, she probably could get them removed. But she won't. Dr. Jannsen, you'd know better than I would if they are correctable with surgery. Honoria won't discuss it.

Right, I know, it's funny that she's named Honoria. It's also sickening that a mother would do that to her child. Her mother, there's a piece of work, let me tell you. The first time I went to Honoria's house, we were, I think, 7 or 8, her mother tells me how painful it was to give birth to her, how she was in labor for 30 hours, how ripped up she was. I mean, I was 7! I started to cry and ran home. Looking back, I think her mom was trashed. I've tried to excuse it. She was raising Honoria alone. She had no money, she worked as a French tutor for some of the rich kids in the area. I know she took Honoria to the doctor, at least she did that much. Turns out they were harmless but would probably grow back anyway. Harmless, right. When Honoria was in high school her mother married some rich guy, and I know they could afford it then, but it never happened. By then, Horny was goth. You remember the goth kids? Just imagine a red-headed, blue-eyed, tall, curvy, be-horned, aloof teenager. She was the goth goddess.

Yeah, I did call her Horny. Not even five seconds into first grade she was Hornoria. "Hornia! Horny!" Kids are such assholes. The funny thing is I'd call her that too and not mean anything by it. Maybe she could tell, because we became best friends almost immediately. Okay, you'll laugh, this is kind of awful, but I remember playing at bullfighting. We took turns playing the bull. I remember hanging Christmas ornaments from them. And she really liked the Rankin-Bass Rudolph,

you know, the stop action one? Seriously. She'd imitate his nasally voice and wear a clown nose all December long. Even to school. It didn't bother her when the teacher would take it from her, she had quite a stash. She shoplifted them from Wal-mart. You know, I think doing that saved her. We thought she was cool as hell.

Sure, I know she hated them, at least when she was younger. One time, I think third grade, she came over and hustled me into my bedroom. She pulled out a hacksaw, likely stolen. She told me that if I wouldn't do it for her, she'd do it herself. God help me, I agreed.

I should describe them at this point. In third grade her horns were about two inches long. Look, see this carrot slice in my salad? They were about this big at the base and tapered to a dull point.



I wanted to help, but I was scared. I didn't mind touching her horns, it wasn't that. I tried to talk her out of it, but she would not change her mind. So there I was, my shaky third grade hands positioning the hacksaw an inch from the base of her left horn as she looked on in the mirror. "Closer," she told me. I moved it closer to her forehead and tried to quit shaking. I moved it against the horn and saw her wince. "Does it hurt?" I asked her. "No, keep going." I did another stroke with the blade and barely scratched the surface when blood began welling out.

We both started crying, me out of fear and her out of frustration. She marched to the bathroom and grabbed toilet paper to hold against it. She pulled her hoodie up over her head as best she could, and left without a word.

That's when we drifted apart. Horny began hanging out with older kids, druggies. I think she was kind of their mascot. I know they were playing at being Satan worshipers. And here was this cute girl, little horns sticking out of her head.

We've been in touch, barely. She stayed here and went through a string of boyfriends, each skeezier than the last. She used to get by on her stepfather's money, but he died a few years back. Then she got her act together. She was working as a veterinarian's assistant. But now I'm worried. She's fallen in with that freaky sect of religious fanatics at the edge of town. She's now their high priestess, or some such. I've heard they do all the weird stuff, speaking in tongues, snake handling. She told me something about making the ultimate sacrifice. No, that wasn't it, it was that she would become the ultimate sacrifice. That if I wanted to see her again, I'd better do it soon. I couldn't help her in third grade, Dr. Maybe I can help her now. 🐉



**LYNN BEIGHLEY** is a fiction writer stuck in a technical book writer's body. Her stories often involve deeply flawed characters and the unsatisfying meshing of the virtual and actual world. She has an MFA in Creative Writing and currently has 13 books published. You can find more of her work in the e-book *The Lost Children: A Charity Anthology*, as well as at <http://www.fictionaut.com/users/lynn-beighley> and on Twitter as @lynnbeighley.



# Telltale

## mIEKAL aND

Signs of torture lead family to demand answers the newstandard although he was unable to recount his story, his body bore signs of torture: what appear to be point burns on his skin, bludgeon marks on the back of signs of marijuana use by teens casa grande valley newspapers, there are many ways you can tell if your child is using marijuana. if your child comes home e-mail sets off stab & suicide spree the plot is depressingly familiar: indian husband suspects wife of having affair; husband kills first children, followed by wife and then from the publisher: the signs of summer or maybe it was the taste of the first cucumber from the garden, a fresh and crispy delight that makes the weeding and hoeing all worthwhile. profiling the suspect a diagnostic blood test using software to recognize proteins could spot ovarian cancer in its earliest, most treatable stage. police sergeant among six victims discovered this weekend in the bodies were wrapped in blankets and their hands and feet were bound with brown masking tape, both signs the killers were professionals. and his signs range from wearing war masks and playing tough against his "enemies", to openly dangling "bribes" before mps and boda boda cyclists the malaysia star giants of gunung kinabalu above sea level. here, the forest floor carries signs of its presence: worm casts are found by the thousands. these 4cm 'fatal fathers' follows horrific, violent trend chicago tribune (subscription), briefly touches on the psychopathic nature of these killings and on the warning signs: threats, earlier violence and gun ownership are symptoms. catastrophe on a shoestring federal training materials have taught volunteers how to respond to a terrorist attack, including spotting the signs of a biological for a few summers, graduate students inspected the wire daily and recorded the places they found tufts of bear fur. among the signs are the basement parking lots with vinyl curtains hung at the entrances to prevent nosey passers-by from spotting the cars. people swear they have discs that have contracted rot. people get sweaty palms as they check their cds and dvds for signs. neighbors families happy to settle down ago the front yard. it's a sign that small children are around somewhere, and you don't have to go



far to find them. at the cyberspace gives al qaeda refuge its language, religious references and other signs convinced us experts that an al qaeda member wrote it, though they have not identified the author. state fought to keep innocent man in prison miami herald (subscription), astoundingly, shrugged them off. he insisted that dede still committed the crime, even if the hair wasn't his. the same physical 700-year remains point to lost city mr wilson said they came to the location by studying the landscape for dips and flats which suggested houses had once been there. "the head," "call of the specialists reporting increase in heroin abuse some signs of addiction include excessive sleeping, constricted pupils, slow communication and severe itching. "with cyberspace remains key terror tool its language, religious references and other signs convinced us experts that al-qaida wrote it,

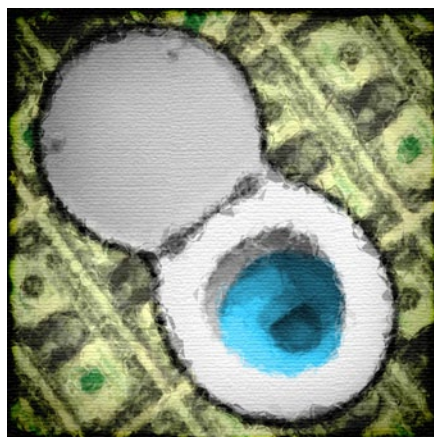
although they have not identified the author. terrorist' tape the footage on the tape shown the post lacked signs of terror surveillance: close-ups of security cameras, entrances and exits, guard posts or other walk around northerly island portent of great things to come in another corner, wind had piled up harbor trash, dead carp and the sheen of gasoline. that's the reality of a big-time harbor. i'm back and i'm going to be better than ever the times i am happy with where i am, i know i am now ready to play and the giveaway with me is that i wouldn't be able to sleep if that was not the

case. children paint, paste and play the around their necks were bead necklaces they'd strung themselves; paper-bag backpacks hung on their backs, and the blue of the candy sand from another getting windows to behave program the first time. it has a rectangular-box icon in the middle button at the upper right of its window. to get internet montana miracle wall. columbian squirrels scampered almost into our laps, a sign that they are fed by passersby in violation of park rules. evolving verdon makes another switch english spotted the signs of a growing, gifted young man - large hands, long limbs and big, nimble feet. "it's voodoo killing fear in irish country the signs of mutu - decapitation and the proximity of water - have sent a chill through ireland's rising african population. case of immigrants living the american dream, these customers may think upon entering any such restaurant, and seeing the calligraphy, lanterns and olympic games: the heat is on but team doctors would not hesitate to intervene in an event if there were signs of "stumbling, distress or confusion".



**mIEKAL aND** is Professor Emeritus of the Department of Yet To Be Invented Languages at the Invisible College of the Republic of Qazingulaza. He is the author of numerous books of experimental text & visual poetry available from [www.xexoxial.org](http://www.xexoxial.org). His digital poetry & hypertext works can be found at [www.joglar.org](http://www.joglar.org). Sometime in the not too distant future, his lifelong poem *Samsara Congeries* will be published by BlazeVox [books]. The above selection is from **SEARCHIX**: available from [xexoxial.org](http://xexoxial.org).





# Rich Girls

B.D. Fischer

**T**he reason I have to drink with my best friend's husband is that my husband doesn't drink and my best friend is a puker and if I'm going to drink then who with. Just tell me that. I mean, if I'm going to drink, and my husband doesn't drink, and my best friend is a puker, then who better with. I mean, who better. But this is hard to explain to the man I'm sleeping (but never sleeping) with, who is not Rusty, my best friend's husband:

"She doesn't drink at all?"

"She drinks a little, but, not, you know."

"Why not?"

"She's a puker."

"She's a puker?"

"She's a puker?"

"Well..."—Nicky considered—"I'll puke if I've had too much to drink, too. Even me. Anyone will. It's biology. Something about the pyloric valve." He sipped from the tumbler in his hand and set it on the cheap bedside table, wiping the condensation on the sheets. We were in bed, where we always were. The air conditioner rattled in the window of the trailer.

"Not like Starla."

"I don't understand."

"Starla will puke if you look at her wrong."

"Pardon?"

"She'll puke if you look at her wrong."

"You don't mean that she'll actually puke if you look at her wrong."

"Yup."

"You're speaking elliptically or mean some kind of metonymy or euphemism."

"I know what those things are, by the way."

"She won't actually puke if you look at her wrong."

"She will."

"You're kidding."

"I'm not. All you have to do is pretend like you're gagging. She's just like her mother."

"You've got to be joking. I've never heard of anything like this, and I've done some drinking in my day, querida."

I brushed his hand away.

"It's true. Like Joyce's daughter, Beckett said."

"I'm stunned into silence, Becky."

"I got a B+ in Irish Lit, you know."

"All you have to do is pretend like you're gagging?"

"Yup."

"And she doesn't just gag, you're saying. We've known gaggers. My wife gags to retching when she brushes her teeth. Scrapes her tongue, I mean."

"Not like that. Not just a reflex."

"Gaggers are a dime a dozen. Everyone gags."

"Starla will have to run to the bathroom, is what I'm saying."

"You're saying she doesn't just gag. You're saying she throws up."

"That's what I'm saying. That's how her mother was when she was growing up, she says. She says when she was a little girl and her mother wanted to discipline her all she had to do was pretend like she was gagging and her mother would say, 'Stop, you're going to make me throw up!', and then she would have to run to the bathroom and would be so busy puking that she wouldn't be able to discipline her."

"Dios mio."

"And so Starla was quite a bad little girl, as I'm sure you can imagine."

"I can only imagine."

"Imagine if you never had to worry about getting in trouble when you were a kid. If you had a get-out-of-jail



free card in the form of forced puking."

"Becky ..."

"I've met her mother, though. Sweet old woman in a home. No sign of gagging or puking. I was careful not even to cough, though."

"And Starla's father?"

"Why do you ask?"

"In the wind?"

"Why do you ask, *mi guapo*?" I said, putting my arms around him.

"Te roban el aliento, *mi Becky*."

We kissed.

"Yes, he's in the wind."

"You just love old women."

"I do?"

"You do."

"Well, it's the place that we're all trying to get to, isn't it? The only one that I know of."

I thought, Nicky has never met Starla.

"There was this one time," I said, "when we were at Los Negros."

"Way out at the end of Lamar?"

"You know it?"

"Very well. I spent a lot of time there in my heavy drinking days."

I snorted.

"Starla and I used to shoot pool there all the time."

"Jesus Christ, Becky, do you have any idea what goes down there? If all the knifings got reported our crime rate would double."

"Starla speaks good Spanish."

Now Nicky snorted.

"They were always very nice to us. You can be very judgmental."

"Judgmental?"

"Yes."

"Judgmental?"

"Definitely."

The air conditioner seemed louder than ever. Nicky stroked my hair. I let him. I would have bought him things, but you know how men are.

"And this one time," I said, "we were shooting pool with some very nice Mexican gentlemen."

"Gentlemen?"

I made a face.

"Only one of them spoke English, so he played with me, and then in the middle of our game after sinking the red three she put her hand over her mouth and ran to the bathroom. She was in there for like an hour."

"And?"

"And? She was puking. I knew she was puking. It might not have been an hour, but still. It was a totally normal situation to me, but the Mexicans were freaking out. I insisted that we keep playing, and they were so rattled they couldn't sink a thing. They kept conferring. I'm a pretty good pool player, you know. Finally Victor—that was his name—after talking to all the other Mexican guys comes up to me like, 'Shouldn't you go in there and check on her, Becky? I mean, she is your best friend.' And I'm like, *amigo*, you don't know shit. I just sank another shot. They didn't know shit about her puking, so I was just like, 'Whatever.'

I was all, 'No, believe me, it's fine.' But they kept bringing it up until I finally told them to stop it. I won like three games in a row. They were all so worried they couldn't make a shot. A shot, I mean. Eventually this big fat guy named Armando went into the bathroom to check on her, but it's not as though she needed him. Starla if anyone knows her way around a toilet."

Nicky effected the open jaw. He almost touched my face.

"You're amazed," I said.

"You're amazing," he said.

"And this other time she was giving this guy a blowjob at Grubber's and she mistook the groans of his pleasure face for gagging and threw up all over him."

While I told the story Nicky tousled my hair, tying it in knots, which he knows that I hate. My hair might be my best feature and sometimes I have to cut them out. Propped on his left elbow and clawing down at me with his right hand I lay there in his bed on my back and let him. It is still hot, even though we're well into fall, well into football season, and the air conditioner rattles away. I can't help but wonder if it's installed properly, if he had it done professionally. Until our honeymoon in Reykjavik Xander had never seen snow. The snow and ice were my wedding present to him, to broaden his horizons. People have mostly stopped asking about him, now. The reasons he doesn't drink are complicated. He smokes huge amounts of weed, but this is a chicken-or-egg thing. He smokes before he gets out of bed in the morning (although it is often after noon), which is easy because he also smokes before he goes to sleep at night (although it is often close to sunrise) and so usually just smokes half a bowl and leaves it on the bedside table and smokes the rest when he wakes up. He used to say that he didn't trust someone who didn't want to be altered. Even coffee counts for something.

He isn't working much these days. He sold a few used cars a few years back, but that didn't work out. It's tough working for your friends, I imagine. He used to drink a lot when we first met and were first married, which was fine, except that he often got very loud and angry and violent. Not that's he's ever hit me, of course. We love each other too much, but he used to challenge strangers in bars all the time. I've seen it. he's been in a few barfights although who hasn't and did thirty days suspended for what they called "misdemeanor assault" for breaking a pool cue over a head that had to go to the hospital and have what they called "emergency surgery." Thankfully this was here in Wellover, where he could be protected, before he had me to protect him. Of course he was unbelievably smashed and doesn't even remember it, but while Wellover forgives it does not forget and they've made sure to tell me about it, because it was before my time, in their endlessly delicate roundabout way. Everyone seems not to want me to have to hear it from someone else, and he doesn't drink at all now. I can understand this, because he really loves me, and I know he doesn't anything bad to happen, ever. I love him, too.

Nicky, on the other hand, is a terrific drinker, and this is one of the things that I love about him. He never seems drunk, and I've never once seen him lose his temper. I look up at him now, and study his gentle brown smile for the hundredth hundredth time, and reach up to touch it. He looms over me, seeming bigger than he is, although of

course nowhere near as big as Xander, and my face smiles, too. I stroke the rustling side of his unbleached face while he continues to tousle me and we smile at each other in that way. He reaches down to kiss me; I reach up to let him. He is like Rusty in that he is a drinker; he is unlike Rusty in that he never seems drunk; he is like Xander in that I sometimes share his bed; he is unlike Xander in most other ways. The men in my life, for better or worse, as they so often say.

We're still kissing when Nicky rolls onto me, letting me feel his whole weight, wedging his thigh between my legs, which I think he thinks I like. I do, sort of. The pressure. Then he's moved down to my neck, which makes me shiver and close my eyes, hugging him to me. He's kissing my shoulder when he stops altogether, goes deadweight, his face buried in my neck. I open my eyes. He's not moving, and I think cardiac arrest, thrombotic hemorrhage, and the asphyxiating burden of his body. If he's dead what about me. The panic burbles in me like a mountain stream. I will starve to death on the foldout bed in this empty trainer. And then how would I explain.

But, no, he's still breathing, and was only playing. He raises his head and smiles and I nearly cry with relief. I don't think he even knows.

Rusty and Nicky are more alike sober than drunk. They are both good-natured, Rusty more jolly and Nicky more understanding, but this difference is cranked up by alcohol. Rusty grows more and more boisterous with each shot of straight whiskey, which is his preferred drink, Canadian, Irish, Kentucky, it's all the same to him. He is fat, his bushy orange mustache is always clean and lends him the air of a Teddy Roosevelt, and when he smiles you cannot tell what color his eyes are. He is happiest when he's drunk. The more he slurs the happier he is. You know the kind of guy I mean. We've been drunk together, just so drunk you almost can't believe it, more times than I can count, and with each drink the slits of his eyes narrow and narrow more. He's fat, does something with computers, and has several t-shirts that say, "Programmers do IT five days a week." Nicky is less of a talker and more of a listener, even more so when he's drunk. It may have something to do with his job.

I met Starla almost the day I arrived in Wellover. She and Rusty sat at the bar of the old Empanada Hotel, closed these last several years after a fire revealed devastatingly poor choices in insurance, when I sat down three stools over. It was late afternoon and there was no one else at the bar, and after I gave my order (a Cellar Dweller, slightly bruised cucumber) I voiced my admiration for what I thought was a cosmopolitan in the martini glass in front of Starla. She corrected me, flattered, for it turned out to be plain cranberry juice, and on this we fell into conversation about the cleansing a good stiff dose of cranberry can give to your insides. Then Rusty said something about Starla's frequent urinary tract infection and she turned and slugged him in the arm, pretty hard, it looked like to me. I couldn't

believe that married people would do this in public, and I turned quickly back to my drink. They served them at the Empanada with fancy curly straws, which I loved and miss, and I gave mine the full force of my lungs to unstick a seed.

Rusty and Starla don't have the best marriage, not filled with love like me and Xander. When he's not around Starla talks constantly about Rusty's IQ. I'm not sure whether he knows this and I have no idea how she even knows his IQ and if it's bragging or what. I have no idea if one twenty five is high or not. If I had to guess Xander's IQ I couldn't even. Because Rusty makes more than enough money and Starla still after all these years hasn't been able to get pregnant she works as a Classroom Assistant at Sam Houston Elementary, and also supplies prescription drugs to most of the faculty of the Wellover Independent School District. It's unbelievable what your average elementary school teacher needs to get through the day. I don't judge, but it would be a huge scandal if it were known. It's so unbelievable you don't even know whether to believe it, and if you believe it you can't decide whether to be outraged. I mean, it takes a village, right? Starla, though, says it's OK, that most of them, the good ones, need the drugs because of the stress of the job, and the stress of trying to survive on a teacher's

salary, and that the lousy ones do less damage on the drugs owing to the lethargy. That she works in schools and should know, and that who am I. Starla's brother is a supervisor at the Wal-Rite distribution center down in Harken, the one that serves parts of six states, and the security there, she says he says, is unbelievable, so he does the lifting and she does the selling and the split the profits, which I have no idea what those are, but they can't be insubstantial. Myself I've never gone in for snorting the Demerol or Oycocaine or whatever, as Starla often does. They're nothing

like weed or alcohol, but more like the papier mâché of a second grader's art project, crumbling beneath you before you realize that it's too late. Still, reflecting on it now I have to believe that it's weird that I've never done it with her, not even once. That I've never been convinced. The warmth of Nicky's mouth on mind feels as I imagine the warmth of a Demerol nod feels, rising from the bottoms, just before you wink out. It's all hard to believe, but it seems like it must be true. Even Rusty nods out with Starla, sometimes.

Opiates, even heroin, won't hurt a fetus, it is not widely known. I learned this from Starla. Parasite and host do not share that particular portion of the blood, as it turns out. They're both up in my grille nearly all the time about this pregnancy thing, which Xander and I have never discussed. With Rusty it sometimes gets to crying; with Starla it's about her blaming him, who she clearly blames. I don't know if this is medically justified—a narrow urethra? low sperm count? obesity-related impotence?—but I've always though the whole thing had a degree of motion-going-through about it. Not that they did not desire to have children, but that their desire to have children was not real. From that very first night I have had this feeling,





that there was something slightly unreal about some small part of them, and this turned out to be it. Rusty worries that the urinary tract infection, once she does get pregnant, will somehow travel up to the uterus and damage the baby, possibly with some kind of encephalitis, and so he encourages her to drink as much cranberry juice as possible, all the time, just as a prophylactic.

I doubt Nicky makes very much money, if his trailer is any indication. I can't believe he could live here with his wife and daughter: There's hardly any furniture besides the bed, and nothing on the walls. What woman could accept that? It's like he moved in right before we met, but I don't ask him because I don't want him to be embarrassed. I don't mind. Xander and I live in a house so big we could go days without seeing each other. Our property is so big that deer hunters sometimes wander into the clearing that is our backyard, a half-mile of scrub flatland from the back deck down to Angleton Creek. On one occasion one of them even came to our door in his orange jacket, rifle slung across his back and hunting cap in hand, which even I recognized as a touching gesture of politeness. It can be scary to have a man with a gun come to your door. He said that his buddy had broken his ankle on the bloody trail of a buck they'd wounded and badly wanted to finish off. He seemed to imply that it would be somehow unethical or immoral if they weren't able to get it, which I couldn't understand. He kept calling it "ten-point," as though it were a video game, which struck me as odd although I didn't say anything. I was sure he had to be upset. They had to abandon the chase when his friend went down, and it wasn't entirely clear whether he was more upset by his friend's injury or having to give up the buck. I'm still only marginally clear on the difference between a buck and a doe, I'm standing there trying to puzzle it out, and he wants me to do something, to help, to call the sheriff or something. In Texas you do literally call the sheriff, which struck me very funny at the time. I suppressed an outburst. I was very drunk. It was unclear exactly what he wanted, a fact he seemed to realize when he was done with the story. I had spent the afternoon drinking while Xander smoked huge amounts of weed. An exploding pipe had canceled my luncheon at the club and I filled the hole in my calendar with my ample husband. It was a nice chance for us to spend some quality time together.

After he had explained, the hunter finally asked what I thought he should do, or, more accurately, what I thought I should do for him. I didn't mind this. Xander was crouched the whole time around the wainscoting, listening, and once he decided that the man and his story were legitimate I heard him stand up (his knees creaked, and he let out a slight grunt) and collect the scattered debris of our afternoon, the decanter of whiskey, the bowl's tapped-out clinkers, the bag of weed so amazing that even I have trouble believing it, better even maybe than the Misty Delight we used to smoke in college, which I don't smoke

at all any more. And of course the bong itself, which must be accorded a special care because of the danger of spillage. This is one of the things always to be on the lookout for, and by the time I let the man in to use the phone (for this is what we decided ought to be done, after Xander flashed me the OK with his thumb and forefinger) my husband was in our bedroom, locked away and guarding his stash, and I'm confident the hunter knew nothing. I was as proud of my husband as I'd ever been, and it turned out that the ankle was just badly sprained, although even on a bad sprain there was no way he could have made it back on his own. He was even fatter than Rusty, close to 300 pounds, I'm sure, and no one can doubt that his friend did the right thing.

Rusty is, I think, devoted to Starla, and she to him, but too many nights have ended with the two of us alone at Grubber's as the owner, a guy named Jimmie who also goes by Ray, switches off lights and puts up the chairs and stools. Or else alone at someone's house, just plastered beyond belief, and Starla long since gone to bed. On these nights, when we are at my house, Xander is also home, never having left, and it doesn't bother him at all, for that is the kind of relationship we have, open, honest, and loving,

although he doesn't often join us. But it bothers Rusty. I know he hides his hangovers, or tries to. His thinking, I think, is that if Starla won't deign to drink with him then he doesn't want her sympathy, which if it came would come with a condescension that no man could stomach. Since Starla is not an especially comforting person this is a reasonable strategy. Rusty either understands this or doesn't, or is in some kind of denial, or is trying to make things so by pretending. All of these can work for a while, but I think they cannot help but know that their life together is

not cast-iron. Instead they surf along in the dark, hoping to get pregnancy, believing that a baby will bring the team together. A shared mission. It's not really like this, though.

The real problem with Xander, when he drank, is that he played college football, what's called Division One. I mean, he was on TV, and although I suppose his career is regarded as something of a disappointment I never saw anyone bigger at the bars we went to when he drank. He played something called left tackle, and was just huge, still is, which was one less thing to hold him back: He never had any fear, and so he was always challenging people.

Nicky stirs. In Wellover I have no idea what people know about me, although I know they know some things. I really can't remember how Xander and I met. Wellover is his hometown. There are lots of towns like Wellover in the Rio Grande Valley, across the river from Mother Mexico. It's a place I really had no idea existed until I moved here. You can't even imagine.

Wellover is one of those town where the football stars go to Austin, and never College Station. This is basic Wellover orthodoxy, I've learned. I have learned this even though Xander almost never talks about football. The



only explanation for what I know is that I've somehow gleaned it from the town. I don't even know the *rules* of football, which was for a tie the greatest worry in my life, but Wellover knows so much and remembers so well that I seem inconsequential, irrelevant. They almost seem to know and remember for me. It seems like just enough. It is as if they cannot imagine that the wife of one of the Gang of Five could be so ignorant of the game that defined them, its history and rich moment. That, or else their enthusiasm enables them to have both sides of the conversation at once, and there is nothing for me to contribute but my presence. This is more than enough for me. I take a drink from my martini glass. We all have long experience in this. What's important is that I look interested.

When they talk about X's career they use the language of tragedy and the epic scope of history, or History, and it is all I can do not to laugh in their faces. Xander never talks about any of this, and stopped going to Grant Harmon High (renamed five years ago for the father of the quarterback upon his death) on Friday nights some three years ago. I used to go with him, to watch him say nothing, but football seems especially ridiculous to me under the lights in eighty-five-degree weather. We can never not remember where we come from.

Still, we have the satellite deal, and he spends his fall Saturdays watching college football and burning through three grams of what he calls his A-game bud as well as two large pizzas before the West Coast games end after midnight. This sometimes makes me mad, but usually I'm next to him on the couch, maybe flipping through a magazine, and so drunk that I can't be *really* mad. I'm not hurt that he's stopped drinking, by the way. Sure, it is one less thing that we share (and it is not as though that quiver overflows with arrows, if you know what I mean), but I trust that it was doubtless for the best. I'm happy for him, and also proud. It's not like I resent having to share things with my best friend's husband.

There's no reason to tell the truth. Nicky is staring down at me and smiling, and stroking my forehead and pretty hair. We've begun to move together in a certain rhythm. Xander is still one of Wellover's children and always will be, but in terms of day-to-day I'm ore familiar than him, now. He's still some kind of thing, though, and always will be to the young boys who ride past our house on their bicycles and stop at the end of the drive to point and whisper. I've had to chase them away more than once. It's not as if I want to traipse on their dreams, but it is trespassing and I feel a certain civic duty. I suppose maybe we should enjoy it while it lasts, for eventually will come the next great team, and with it the forgetting. That could be next year (although I understand that next year does not look good) or it could take a decade, a generation, a lifetime. I suppose that is the beautiful thing, that no one knows. No one, after all, would feel about the Gang of Five if it were the kind of thing that happened every day, but those games are a decade past and people seem me every day. I know enough to see cherubic Xander in my mind's eye, peach-fuzzed and roundfaced and pulling out to lead Darden on a sweep, dropping back into pass protection to form Grant Harmon's pocket, picking up a stunt. The *language*. Xander at 15. I know he's hurt people, that it's part of the game.

With Wellover I have to pretend that I care a lot more than I do. I can never keep straight the epochal moment, the legendary outcomes of individual games, and I live in endless fear that at some banquet or other I will be called upon at the most crucial moment to recall a history that everyone already remembers, for some kind of ongoing public catharsis that I'll never understand. It's hopeless. Some inner voice, quieted. Stories. But I can pretend, and no one wants to believe that I don't care, and who are they. If it weren't for Wellover I could forget that my husband had ever been a football player. That's not what our life is now. His life is mostly the TV and the bong, which is fine with me because of course money is no problem. He rarely goes out, but people see me. My mother's people include James Oglethorpe's personal secretary, one of whose great-great-grandsons went north in 1855 to retrieve a fugitive slave and never came back. And so I joined the Confederate Daughters of America. No one can accuse me of not making an effort. I attend all the various luncheons and play golf six times a month in foursomes (often including Grant Harmon's wife, who is actually very nice, nicer than she is pretty, I have no idea what she's doing with him) of vodka and lemonade on the fairways of the Hanville Country Club, two towns away. It's a forty-minute drive, but that's how distance works in Texas. You just have to accept it. And then also Rusty and I are out at least twice a week, and we catch all kinds at Grubber's or wherever we end up. They may not act like it or admit it, but they all know me, in part because of Xander but also I suspect because of my wealth. Wellover doesn't exactly have "upscale" bars, and so we're always drinking with the Mexicans. I barely knew that Mexicans existed before I moved here. The upscale, such as they are, drink at home or in private clubs I have no interest in joining, even if I were invited, where they drink thick liquors warmed by the hand in a great wide glass they call a snifter. These are white people, and I find it disgusting. Sometimes I drink with them, as their guest, when they want to ask me for money. Sometimes, I give it to them. I was known first as X's husband but now people know me for me. They know who I am. But I'm not sure they understand.

Nicky has finished, gotten up and gone to the bathroom, and I have watched him yawn and seen the fine rippling of his tendons and innards as he throws back the covers and unfolds himself from the bed and stands up and walks to the bathroom, scratching absently. If Xander and I have kids, which we have not discussed, I'll be perfectly happy sending them to WISD. My father could never have accepted this, but fortunately he is dead. I have no real love lost for Wellover, but I'm happy to be here for Xander. I love my husband, and it's not like I have anywhere else to go.

When I'm not out with Rusty I'm generally in with Nicky, or sometimes out. We go to his trailer maybe twice a week, when his wife and daughter are out, and also sometimes I stay home with X while he smokes weed, which I used to but don't any more. But I'll make myself a cocktail, usually a dry perfect Manhattan, and sit next to him on the couch while he speeds through the channels in absolute silence and I stroke his forearm. His arms are so big. We have as many channels as is possible, and he doesn't like to stop at all. It makes me so crazy that I have to drink



heavily when we watch TV together like this. I don't have any other choice.

Nicky and I just drink, and fuck, in his trailer, when we're together. We also watch TV but he lets me run the remote. His TV is small and the screen not flat, but I get to stop on the channels that I like. I have my favorites while he strokes my hair. We try not to drink too much, because if we drink too much then when we fuck it makes me sometimes want to throw up. It's hard with Nicky, because I'll get less drunk if we drink beer, but he's got a way with me, there's something about his curvature, that if I drink a lot of beer the pressure is just right and I have to go to the bathroom midway through. Badly. But if we drink booze I'm likely to get so drunk that by the time we start (I insist on making out first) I won't want to finish, because of dryness but also laziness issues, and even though he always takes this with good cheer and never gets mad I feel bad. And then I can't even use my mouth on him because I'm worried about throwing up. I could turn into a puker myself. So sometimes we just get drunk and maybe watch a little TV and make out a little and then I drive home. I like making out. I don't want to get him too excited, and I feel bad because my plan is always to fuck him, but sometimes you get so drunk that your plans don't even matter any more.

I hear him flushing in the bathroom now. I know how we met: at Charlie's on Lamar. I had been abandoned by Rusty after just three drinks and two jukebox dollars. He said he was tired and might be coming down with

something, which made me angry. As I told Nicky later that night, Starla had blocked out the evening for a Demerol nod, starting right after their light dinner of steamed vegetables and low-fat protein because of course she had to work the next day. Rusty knew about the nod, and after he left I moved to the bar out of respect for Charlie. In my anger I ordered a double Maker's, neat, calmed by the old joke, which I made to myself as I watched the pour: Q: What are you doing tonight? A: I'm hanging out with my friend, Mark; you might know him, full name: Maker's Mark. I tittered bringing the tumbler to my lips and I suppose Nicky noticed although I don't know who spoke to the other first. He had a cola in front of him (rum? Jack? a Diet Russian?) but pretty soon we were laughing so hard that we nearly fell off our stools and matching shots and then I was down on my knees in the gravel parking lot next to his old Nissan. I swallowed him that night, which I know that he recognized and appreciated, in not vomiting as much as anything. Now, though, I rarely swallow him, because we don't even reach that stage. I may use my mouth on him for a while, but then I have to have him inside me. I just have to, and he doesn't mind, although it's pretty rare these days that we go to the trouble of going a second time. We're too old for that. I don't make him wear a condom because I'm on the pill and I trust him and that should be enough. I think it is, and this makes everything better.

I wonder, though, if he knew then that night who I was, and if he knows now. 6



Almost a decade ago **B.D. FISCHER** wrote "*Fiction is, by definition, a counter-factual medium,*" and this belief has carried him into places like *Literary Lunes*, *Tawdry Bawdry, MP*, and *The Toucan*. It's unclear whether it's related to the poems in places like *Notes*, *Blast Furnace Press*, and *Poetry Quarterly*. It's almost certainly irrelevant to his pontifications at the politics and culture blog *Public (dis)Interest* ([publicdisinterest.com](http://publicdisinterest.com)) and atrocious advice at *The Fischer System* ([fischersystem.blogspot.com](http://fischersystem.blogspot.com)). He is currently homeless and sleeping in Central Texas.

## There's more where this came from

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# *Sole Dadas, Chunk 7*

— John M. Bennett —

*Transduced from Luis de Góngora's Soledades*

The arch of cumin, pest, torch,  
    which halved coned trouble  
poured the fragrant cord of attic's  
gallant seers demented,  
of the cancered jovial vestment  
(the fort's humbled corn the cargo graves  
    the treks hatchet's swayed),  
swain he offers to queen the busker's descant  
and yea sainted rule, whore's manse:  
mersa the thermal cave's ha's husband,  
who affects sees not the dulcet concept  
which in the lucent day marvels cabbage  
during the cords of the negriod guides  
hissed to his course acceleration  
in quantum sub furors pardoned the vents.  
Memos in renouncing tore the signal  
    stranger's errand,  
who in reclining the memos fatigued  
suffers the grain whose vistas fine  
his maddened bell, deploying emanation  
in the vested roses his coil.  
Saluted the toads courteously,  
    and admired no means  
of the seriphs who corresponded,  
the somber solicitations of runny pains.



OBERC



# In a Basket

Ann Bogle

- 1 -

Elizabeth is fifteen when she tells her mother she has “done something” in Spain and is pregnant. The boys call it fourth base and “all the way.” Her mother calls it intercourse. Intercourse is what a man does with a woman when they are married to make her pregnant. Intercourse is what the man in Spain does to Elizabeth after driving her from the ruin of the cathedral to the cemetery. He is Carlos Ramirez. His teeth are very bad.

Carlos is an officer in the Spanish army. He has a wife and three children. He says a prayer for them in Spanish and teaches Elizabeth slang words for body parts. The English phrase he knows is: God is the Father.

Carlos Ramirez is the father is how she ends up saying it to her mother.

Losing her period could mean she is pregnant, but not six months later, not in December after no intercourse since June. That is what Mrs. Tory has to tell her. At the doctor's office Mrs. Tory says, “Elizabeth has been where she shouldn't have been in Spain.”

The doctor says, “You learned this the hard way. Save your trips to cathedrals for the daytime.”

The Spanish teacher, Mr. Swetnick, tells them to stay with the group and not to go off on their own. The group bores her, the tourist places. Elizabeth tells Mr. Swetnick that she has gone to church and met a Spanish family and eaten jalapeños with them. So he asks her about the Spanish way of life. What she thinks is that the sex has made her smell different and that every adult from then on will know and sit next to her.

She doesn't think about Carlos. She thinks of his teeth and the ruins and the Spanish landscape.

There is a possibility of not moving, of not having fingers.

- 2 -

Elizabeth's grandmother lives in a stucco apartment in a little town on a certain highway that seems only to lead to that town. The grandmother doesn't drive on the highway herself except to go with the old gentleman out to the country to buy apples. It takes twenty-five minutes to get there. Elizabeth believes that her grandmother has seen all the billboards and consented to them.

Every Friday, when Elizabeth is a certain age, she packs a little suitcase and waits in the driveway for her father or mother to take her to Grandma's. Grandma calls the suitcase Elizabeth's grip.

Elizabeth has the pink bedroom with the empty closet. There is a crib in the room for her babies. She doesn't always

bring the babies, though. Either she plays that the babies are sleeping in the closet, or that she is a secretary, and the babies are home with their father. The father is a different one every time. She tries to have him be one father, but the faces change.

She keeps records and uses rubber stamps and bank pens to fill in numbers. The work keeps her busy, and the light in the room is pretty. Certain trees grow up near the windows, and the lace curtains move a certain way. The perfume smell of the curtains makes her happy. The bathroom has the same feeling.

At the old house, Elizabeth's crib is pushed against the maple bed frame. Elizabeth can climb in with Grandma if she wants to, or stay by herself if she wants to. The room is never quite dark, so she can tell it is Grandma lying next to her, even though in the almost dark, Grandma's nose is too big.

Grandma crosses her legs and puts Elizabeth on her foot and bounces her up and down. She sings a song in Swedish about a boy and a girl and some horses. It goes like: ria-ria runka, hesta-hesta blunka, vas ka-ai ria, integrated pia.

In the first week of September Grandma goes to buy apples in the country with the old gentleman. He drives very slowly, and they talk. They point at places from olden times. He is also a widower.

The car that hits them kills him instantly. Something causes him to take his eyes off the road, not to

stop when he is supposed to. Grandma doesn't talk about it afterward. She has cuts on her legs and blue and yellow bruises.

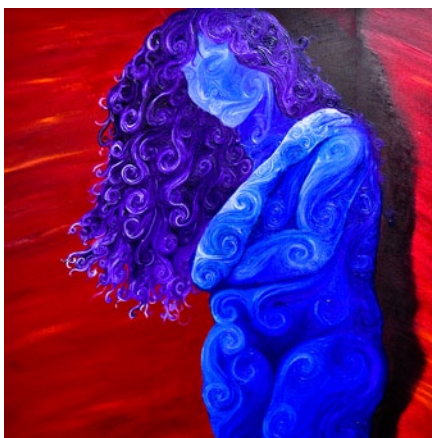
Grandma goes to live with the Martin sisters in their house at the edge of town. There are four Martins living together and one Tory. Two of the sisters are actually sisters-in-law. Before being Martins or widows they were something else.

The room where they drink tea is bright and filled with flowers. Elizabeth is ten or eleven, but the women talk as if she were older.

The days of the amusement park are over. That land is being turned into apartments and restaurants.

- 3 -

Elizabeth is not yet sleeping. She makes the sheep jump over the pole like horses. She has been to the State Fair and seen a cattle auction. Those animals moved very slowly in a ring. Men and women watched them and threw their heads back and showed their teeth because of the manure. A man next to Elizabeth opened his wallet slowly like looking under a rock.



The light in the bathroom comes on and spreads to the doorway of Elizabeth's room. Love rushes in, and she calls out to him. He doesn't come in, but she can tell where he is in the bathroom because of the water and tile sounds and the direction of his voice.

"Go to sleep now, Elizabeth."

"I'm dreaming."

"It'll be better in the morning."

Her mother makes a soft noise and movement in the bedroom. Then the light goes out and her father creeps back to the bedroom, touching the wall.

- 4 -

Mothers are not born mothers. The father tells the child something incriminating about the mother, something that explains their lives as a tragedy. "Not I," the mother says.

The mother has a menu and a schedule. She takes Elizabeth to piano lessons and tells her about the school board meeting. At night she sleeps, her face pressed into her pillow.

In the laundry room behind the washer and dryer and shelves of canned vegetables, below the window well and its faint cell light: his hammers and drivers and saw blades, the particular mallet he produces to scare them, brandishes and brings down with a smack to his palm. He has tiny drawers for each kind of screw and nail and fastener.

The brother starts most of the fights and leaves in the middle. Sometimes he breaks something or threatens one of them. He is too old for this family, but how can they deny him? He is bigger than any of them, probably a killer.

Elizabeth goes to Sam's room to show him that she is not one of them. She brings records, something he will like. He is a stubborn buddha in his orange room with pipes and hookahs in it. He wants the parents for himself.

Girls lose their boy names and boys lose their girl names when they are born. Elizabeth wants the new baby to be Tiffany, but her mother says that name is trendy. The baby will be David or Sarah.

Sarah will break if she falls, so Elizabeth is careful when she changes the diapers. The counter in the bathroom is dark gray and light gray with swirls in it that remind her of Grandma's hair treatments.

The cat brings home souvenirs and growls at the backdoor with her mouth full to be let in. Her name is Florida. Elizabeth picked her out of all the others because she hid with her claws out under the couch. The father is an alley cat in Miami, Gray Man. This is funny and connected to the man next door to Grandma who polishes his car in the driveway and keeps the curtains tightly closed. He has a wife, but she doesn't come outside. He is thin and bent over, and his slacks sag.

On the true or false quiz of current affairs, Walter Cronkite is either the Voice of America or Father of the Country, a trick question. Her mother can answer all the questions, but not during the news. Her father is in traffic while Walter Cronkite is talking, and her father reads the paper only on weekends.

In the yard are trees and exact flowers, each with a seed packet and a set of requirements. Elizabeth plants marigolds and violets and strawberries. She fills a colander with beans.

God is the wish to be better. Later, God is more or less in focus, more or less deserted. Someone is laughing.

Sin to Elizabeth is a certainty like breathe. Mrs. Tory would never lie or try to hurt someone by stealing or killing or swearing, but sin (as Mrs. Blanchfield explains it the afternoon in her bedroom) is what Mrs. Tory is doing in keeping Elizabeth from God.

The Tors go to church. Elizabeth collects Unicef pennies. She hates the purple dress and the blue corduroy and plaid one. She screams when her mother forces her arms through the sleeves and her head through the neck. She'll sit in the closet, and they'll be late again.

Mrs. Blanchfield says that what Elizabeth knows is not enough. Church is not the purple dress or the Unicef pennies or the man talking.

The Blanchfields own jeeps and make additions to their home. Mr. Blanchfield had polio and sells chemical fertilizer. Marcella has a canopy bed. Marcella has had her period.

The cars, on Tuesday nights, fill three streets for the Bible study. At ten o'clock, the hundred people file out to their cars and drive away, and there are no cars, just grass and black curb.

Elizabeth stands barefoot in the grass near the honeysuckle and lilac. The mosquitoes are swarming. The headlights pass her. The weekly gathering at the Blanchfields is a spectacle. To her, the trees and stars are Time.

Marcella takes Elizabeth to Mrs. Blanchfield's bedroom to repeat what Mrs. Blanchfield says. Mrs. Blanchfield holds Elizabeth's hands between hers and asks Jesus to come into Elizabeth's heart.

Jesus stays there for weeks, comes at night like a rabbit.

- 6 -

There is a terrible storm, and Elizabeth and Laura are told by their mothers to stay indoors. They go outdoors, where the air is strangely warm, and the sky is ominous. Elizabeth has never trusted a blue sky. This orange, dark sky, at almost midnight, sends them running for shelter to the warming house. The German shepherd is with them and jumps against the walls. Elizabeth and Laura light cigarettes. They are more alive at that moment than during any other thousand moments strung randomly together. It does not rain.

Laura starts up a candy store in the dilapidated shed behind her house and invites all the children to play at its bar. Candy a penny. Gum a dime. The children sit on tree stumps and light matches. The boys, alone and together, take opportunities. They call it the sex room, and Donald Dittmeyer reads aloud from the sex manual until he gets to public hair. No one can figure it out or stop laughing. This is like throwing eggs and tomatoes at the neighbor's house and taking the kindergarten boy to the rooftop and leaving him there. Elizabeth tugs the pants from the boy then throws her arms around him when he bursts out crying. Donald and the others say, "Let's go," and climb down, calling, We've got your toy, little boy, it's all bottled up. We're going to sell it, and you won't have it to pee with. You'll never pee again.

Donald and Jeremy chase Elizabeth over the grass between oak trees and around wide turns. Laura is with



them and runs much faster than Elizabeth away, toward the baseball diamond, where they're supposed to be playing softball.

Elizabeth is not yet a child, something she has decided but not said.

She runs in slow motion toward the fifth-grade teachers, to their picnic table, hurls her body at the ground and grabs at watermelons, fifteen of them, to anchor her. She feels lost among boulders.

The boys take her by her arms and legs down the slope to the water. Mr. Easter is smirking with his head down, and Miss Woodchuck, not looking up from the melons, says, "Boys, stop flirting with the girls. Boys, stop flirting with the girls."

The grass is tall. They take turns peeling her, clothes, swimming suit. It is the same lake, same park, same thing her brother did in the water. Run not touching the bottom. Run against the water away from his fingers and toe.

When the picnic is over, and they are riding back to school on the bus, the others have found out about it. Someone asks Elizabeth exactly what happened. Elizabeth is not sure of what to say. She thinks, Boys stop flirting, girls stop flirting, boys, girls. She was the only girl, though, so she is somehow responsible.

In the girls' lavatory before the final hour, Elizabeth is the center. There are not names for it yet, this famousness. The best she can do is point to what is missing, say, here, but not here, here in this place is an absence, a blank space that contains.

- 7 -

The underbelly of the bull fish is white and taut and full. Elizabeth tugs on the line, without winding, and swings the fish to the floor of the rowboat. The boat rocks. Her father has shown her how to wind her line and cast. He has also taken over for her. She is not only like her mother. Elizabeth watches as he takes the fish off the hook. She watches the desperate eyes. It doesn't concern her, her squeamishness about the gritty worms or her fear of fish fins. She can still go fishing and hate death. The father can take her out and belong to the day, the lake, the line of trees above the boathouse.

- 8 -

Julia sits across from Elizabeth in seventh grade math class, but not in social studies, where the teacher believes in free seating.

The social studies teacher tells the class about his first child, how beautiful his wife became when she was pregnant, and how perfect the child is and named after him, William the third. William plus three middle names and the last name, the man's name, Barth. He explains how he and his wife timed the conception to increase their chances of a son.

Mr. Barth tells about camping in Alaska, how large the fish were, and how dirty he and his friends became without showers. Brushing their teeth was the one thing they could do to feel clean all over. The teeth are the important thing.

Donald sits in the back of the class and makes a sexual gesture: a hole with his thumb curved, and pushes his finger in and out. He says, and the class is laughing, there

are more important things than teeth.

Julia and Elizabeth become friends. Julia thinks that Elizabeth is probably her favorite person, not counting her family; families count in a different way.

The boys who like Julia ask her to high school football games, as a way of acting older than they are. Julia is a good kisser and has big tits and a nice ass and great legs and a dark snatch—that is what Donald tells Jeremy. The four of them meet in the bunkhouse and make-out. In the dark, Donald and Julia in their bundle, and Jeremy and Elizabeth in theirs, Julia and Elizabeth talk. Julia says, "I feel like Barbie, and Ken here has kung-fu grip."

One day in the bunkhouse Julia and Elizabeth are cold. They get the short boy, Steve Market, to hold their extra hands. Steve is willing to be where sex is without getting sex.

One thing that Elizabeth has heard about boys, from her mother who knows this for a fact: Boys don't like smart girls. Julia must be dumb since her grades are bad. Elizabeth asks, "Are you dumb?" and Julia says, "I think I must be."

Julia and Elizabeth put their faces on and use curling irons. They have a certain laugh and a way of getting around babysitters. They say, under bushes and in the dark, their breath visible, that nothing the other could do could make a difference, the other is just right, a perfect person.

A popular girl tells Elizabeth that Julia is a slut. How can a slut be a virgin? she thinks, but it is too late: Elizabeth tells Julia that they cannot be friends anymore. Julia cries, "Why do you care what people think?" They would have gone to Florida in August. Julia's parents took Elizabeth everywhere. She was a good influence.

Another popular girl writes letters to Elizabeth and delivers them while her mother waits in the driveway with the car running. The letters say that Elizabeth is special and deserving in God's eyes and that God has intended her to show her light to everyone.

Cassandra is very smart. Cassandra's mother can tell them about breastfeeding as it affected Cassandra's size. The mother's breasts were dry, so Cassandra got substitutes, goat milk, so her thighs are big. Their dog is a pug named Silly, and the father is silent and edgy. Cassandra's father wears a parka in winter and builds an ice slide for inner tubes.

Cassandra is too smart to be popular, but she has the cutest boyfriends, something no one can figure out.

- 9 -

Elizabeth loves Kyle, a neighbor boy. He plays with her body like the others, but with him, she likes it. She can't explain this difference between him and the others.

She watches from her bedroom window, until three in the morning, when Kyle comes home in the Corvette with his girlfriend. Kyle's girlfriends are always blond and with him long enough for there to be heartbreak.

For a while it seems that Kyle and Julia might get together, but Julia has brown hair.

The other boys, four or five of them, who jump Elizabeth in her own yard, and whose jaws and chests she kicks, have no girlfriends. Not even J.D., who talks with her about what matters to him, about mature things and

feelings. He helps her pick out denim overalls. Then he and the others get her out of the overalls and kick sand on them behind the warming house.

They tell her that only girls kick. So it's weaker, disgusting. They punch and they attack the parts of her body that they lack. That's what? That's normal, not disgusting.

She retaliates until she knees J.D. in the groin, and he punches her in the pubic bone with all his force. Her leg is strong enough to cause pain, so there are sanctions against it.

- 10 -

Far enough beyond the last episodes of childhood for the life to belong to someone else, Elizabeth steps off the bus in Des Moines with a usable memory that spans four years. Sarah and her father are also at the wedding. Mrs. Tory flew to Atlanta as a delegate in a convention for handicapped children. Her brother, now Samuel, lies sleeping near a boulder. Farm work, he mentioned in a postcard from over a year.

Kitty from the small town in Iowa, a branch of the family that barely touches Elizabeth's, marries Bob the Same One she has known since high school. It is a big thing, a holy procedure. Good of Elizabeth to take the bus all the way from Syracuse. Where exactly is Syracuse? Dad and Sarah drove down from Eau Claire.

Elizabeth mentions what clearly makes them edgy. She and Walter Lux live together. Next year, she may be standing at the altar, Kitty smiling behind her from the pew. Her father talks about virgins again: He was one and he married one. This giving away of daughters that he likes to be a part of, a regular wedding buff.

Kitty sits coyly with Elizabeth's father, knowing him no better than the mailman, and plucks at the folds of her gown. The dress is beautiful and belongs to her, to Kitty alone, after much deliberation and expense. It will hang for years in plastic sheaths in a spare closet until her children pull it down. What is this, Mother? What dress?

Elizabeth found her mother's dress in the back of her own closet. Crinoline or something and orangey-brown. Original—the newspaper called it—in beautiful shades of copper and pewter. It sounds like tarnish but is hand-sewn.

Her mother honors the forms. She lives among trees, plants, flowers, hedges, knows Latin and common and regional variations. She administers to the specially abled: prisoners and pioneers. Childhoods the mother won't discuss.

The father has ordinary memories. His mother was too protective. His father was too quiet. He had friends, a collection of physical deformities: eyes, ears, lungs, a dog named Spam, and in his living room, a whatnot shelf that caught his imagination.

Walter Lux is a large animal, a bear, most likely, who wants to reveal the senseless world, that part a coyote. Walter the coyote stretches all over the world without killing the weak ones he comes upon, a bear without fangs

or claws. His anger is impotent because he is unwilling to kill. To kill another creature, to strike at it, or take its will is a Roman idea and Walter is more Chinese.

- 11 -

The world where she lives is a Roman world. Always something violent is necessary, something painful to feel alive, even at the moment of death, to feel involved, transgressed.

Thou shalt not commit adultery.

If the offender is a minor and is not married, and the victim is a minor and is not married, no crime has occurred. If the offender is an adult, there is plea-bargaining. Thirteen in Spain, sixteen if deceit is used and the parent complains.

Thou shalt not steal.

There is another voice, not the protagonist's. It is possible to forgive completely.

Each activity that honors life: washing, mail delivery, sunbathing, swimming, sleeping, rising, lovemaking, breakfast.

Arguing is her last resort. She argues with people who love her, and not with people whom she does not love.

Certain people develop attachments to her that harm them. These people do not regard themselves first and still are capable of feeling pain.

Strangers cannot possibly love her, unless they are foolish. They confirm what she knows to be true of herself: Sex happens freely, without love and commitment, without the product being children, without sacrifice. That much must be protected: The body cannot be given or consumed. The body is destructible.

Habits die hard.

Good habits die easily. What is ultimately good may simply be harder

to accomplish.

It is not true that she loves her face and body, as evidenced by so much vanity and attention to details of appearance. This is the work of a mortician, preparing the body for burial, disguising it for dealings in the outside world.

When she wakes she shows her ugliness and beauty. Strangers recognize her.

The girlfriends provide mixture and shelter. Elizabeth calls them my friends and within that designation are a hundred variations. One friend tells her that she has a gift for friendship. Walter Lux says, during the Newlywed Game, that Elizabeth is not as good at friendship as she imagines. Walter is not as good at cooking.

The friends' boyfriends make comments about bad housekeeping. Everyone wants the old order, but the old order is no longer possible.

- 12 -

Plot is a basket. Forme is power.

In another story, the story of many stories, girl leaves family for marriage, disappoints family by turning out not





to be a breadwinning prostitute after all, finds love in arms and eyes of tall, guiltless thief, not a horse thief, but a wife thief, his weakness with women, his strength over men. Macheath, who is the criminal, and the father and mother, who are the brokers of crimes, give shape to the basket, and the daughter, who believes in love, is the handle of the basket, something related to the basket but not the basket, who does not hold or carry, but by which matter is held or contained or carried by the hand.

The prostitutes and wives are violets on the basket, jealous violets who hate one another.

In another version Macheath is incidental to the moods and nerves of the women at any given time. The women share him between them like breaking bread.

It could be that the love partner in any given crime plot or story is the man as he views himself. The women, in the story of the man, are the brooms we all danced with in childhood and whose bristles we kissed and added buttons for eyes.

Viewable women, in other words, whose inner lives and moods remain invisible, the metaphor being their genitals, and the metaphor for men being men's genitals: his telescope.

The sheathed penis, the uncircumcised penis, creates another situation, one worth studying. That initial violence that balds him and makes him vulnerable, and then, invulnerable, certain shades of feeling lost due to constant exposure.

With the genitals as metaphor, the women remain hidden and the men go to look for themselves like hunting.

#### - 13 -

In cats sex is less important. Florida hunts. Ruby drools. Elizabeth Tory meets Molly Devine at Northwestern.

Molly will not discuss her childhood but has let Elizabeth know that she loves her mother for her fortitude and hates her father for his alcoholism. Elizabeth blames her mother because her father hides and swaggers. For both women, someone is accountable.

Some people who know Molly want to be her. They imagine that she has money and that she is in full control of sorrow. They want to soak up her power for themselves. Molly's boyfriends teach her how to live peacefully with people who are inferior to her. Elizabeth learns from Molly that there is another way to be a woman. There is a way to play dirty and live.

Molly compares Elizabeth to Elizabeth's little cat, Ruby, who clamors at the door to be let outside then cowers in the whole world on the doorstep. Ruby is not like Florida. Florida bit and Florida hunted.

#### - 14 -

Molly Devine and Elizabeth Tory and Marcia Carpenter (another person who will remain hidden, no doubt) go dining. They order tossed salads and diet mustard and mineral water, which they have begun to drink in lieu of sugar pop, because of the calories, and to allow them to drink more thick, heavy Irish beer at a later sitting. Molly destroys her napkin with her fork while they wait for the food to come. Elizabeth thinks of things she cannot say, and Molly and Marcia, like two boys in their affinity to athletics, rib one another, without possibly actually touching, a sort

of winking that goes on or a similarity in tone and joke to let Elizabeth know that she is the girl among them.

Elizabeth studies her own left hand. It is swollen and has a funny, sick color. She wears her grandmother's rings: a high school band from 1912 and another ring, a moonstone for turning eighteen. The grandmother was already teaching by then, driving a horse and buggy to a one-room schoolhouse where farm children gathered, six to twenty years in age.

Molly and Elizabeth and Marcia read their placemats: a game of golf that you play with pencil and closing your eyes until the tip of the pencil goes into a sand trap or into the woods or river. Molly is best at the game. She is coordinated and has the best inner eye.

Elizabeth thinks of Molly's father playing golf all day, and how he is at that moment drinking martinis, playing golf, while the three women are sitting three hundred miles away playing placemat golf, not drinking martinis.

Molly opens her eye to see where she has stopped the pencil. It is a hole in one. "I'm better than Norm," she says, meaning her father. "He's too senile to hit the hole the first time. Sometimes I think he never learned how. Sometimes I think he just thinks he plays golf and actually goes to the golf course to give his life purpose, a mental golfer."

Molly lets them glance at her. She might at one point confess to an incident, something to explain her hatred, why anger is apparent whenever she speaks of him, the talk of killing him.

The salads come.

The women drink beer in the student pub and make eyes at men who mean nothing to them. The men, one for each woman out there, represent all the longings they are likely to encounter in life.

Elizabeth imagines that something irrevocable will happen if they go on disobeying the natural order of things, the order they are learning to experience as unnatural.

There are things to look forward to, if not in the way of enlightenment, at least in the way of being included in what is older than any of them, older than Rome, older than Greece, as old as Adam. They can still get married.

Sarah writes letters to Elizabeth from high school, explaining how normal she wants everything to turn out to be, despite difficulty at the beginning.

In Sarah's high school is a boy who loves Sarah for who she is. Has Sarah let him know who she is, as Elizabeth knows Sarah? Sarah barely knows herself, and it is somehow enlightening.

The talk of boys is beginning to bore her.

Elizabeth sees herself as stepping over a ladder. The ladder extends to the lake but does not touch the water. She can swim under it.

Molly Devine is swimming circles around everyone, a shark. Molly is alone in her perceptions, but her perceptions as played out in her limbs, are taking hold of even the feeble. Molly is inventing something, a way to live better.

She swims circles around the homeless. The true homeless she takes to her hips and lips and sucks them. She kisses with her eyes wide open.

Elizabeth wonders whether her grandmother bothered with questions on the chicken farm, or did the land itself give different shape to the questions she was likely to ask,

and did the figure of her hungry husband in the doorway, ringing the dinner bell, Mrs. Tory, I'm hungry, come to the kitchen and prepare food for our bodies because food gives meaning and something back for all our labor ... did the figure of the hungry husband and the land behind her stout, young body, did that make enough to lean a life on?

- 15 -

Marcia is a teenager in this frame, the same as Elizabeth. Richard, Marcia's paramour, is forty-seven. Marcia smells of good leather from her flight jacket. She disappears with Richard through the hallways of the women's dorm, making sure that no one asks questions.

Besides Marcia and Molly, who at that point is keeping herself simple with a boyfriend from high school, there are Carol and Jennifer and Tawny.

Tawny is not yet dead. She has gone off to work regular hours and not overachieve. Carol is busy in her tiny slot overachieving, overachieving being a language like knitting, something to keep doing to get everything to lie flat.

Carol is full of confusion, from a large, silent, over-achieving family, from a perspective of not knowing how to locate an opening to put a tampon in. Accompanying the overwork and confusion, a misunderstanding about ugliness: Carol lets acne run over her face as a way to be a pure scientist.

Jennifer curls her hair wistfully and washes the basin of each sink in the lavatory before arraying supplies and ointments to wash her face. Jennifer has more gifts than uses for gifts. Her over-involvement with agricultural organizations and fraternity men leave her tongue-tied and lethargic. She marries Chip, a farmer like her father.

Jennifer wants Elizabeth to understand that we return to our beginnings, and not because we couldn't have done something else. She says it at her wedding. Elizabeth realizes that she only shaves for weddings.

- 16 -

Elizabeth has no reason to treat Walter badly. She treats him badly out of an inner conviction that men don't know. Elizabeth wants to parry on the lap of one of them all the time: What do you know, man, example of men, tell me what you know.

Walter, who works 200 miles away, knows much that he cannot say, out of an inner conviction that to say anything is to spoil it. Walter rises everyday at a certain hour to take the long ride on the A-train, rocking, rocking, to the end of the line, where he steps out of the car, with much determination, to meet the demands of others.

Elizabeth, as the woman, should do for Walter, as the man. Elizabeth as the woman who is about to board a plane to serve the country should hire someone. But it is not a situation of money. Elizabeth as the young woman set free in a new set of clothing, with an opposite set of principles, should live without a man altogether, and for that reason, Walter seems necessary.

How Walter serves Elizabeth has to do with daily living—joy, guilt, and resentment over suds and folding and ironing clothing. Elizabeth gives Walter language in exchange, little verbal hand-me-downs. She tells Walter that he is benefiting indirectly from a woman club.

...

Carlos, not Carlos Ramirez with the bad teeth, but Carlos Someone with one gold tooth in the front of his mouth, knows much that he can almost say and much that he can enact. People watch him in his lovely, intricate home and pay him respect to take risks for them. He claims that people do not surround him. He has not invited them.

Carlos will not drink coffee with Elizabeth but will go to the woods in his bare feet and eat mushrooms until the tunnel comes and swallows him, his eyes open.

He speaks briefly of becoming a tube, a worm room.

She lets him in and shuts eyes. He comes hopping into bed at night like a rabbit.

- 17 -

Elizabeth calls her father on a Sunday afternoon, from a thousand miles away, to hear of the family. An earthquake shook the hotel room of Mother and Father.

The father says, "An earthquake is like when you are on vacation in the summer, and all the children are running in the hallways toward the swimming pool, but it is your hotel room, too, so the running children are everywhere."

It becomes confusing to remember who is related by bonds and who by marriage. The rules and the brain go on one side, the emotion and actions, the fishing go on one side.

"We used to go fishing."

"Yes, but you never liked worms. You should have gotten more into the worms. We are animals," he says. "We sin because we are animals."

The mother is not seeable. The mother's face is not a pitcher on a table, a ship. The mother is invisible to the eye of the daughter. The separation involves letting the mother lie dead in the imagination. That she would willingly do if it weren't for the mystery it presents. The tiny blockaded image of the childhood with the mother, the adulthood with the father. The forfeiture of time, the ten ungiving mothers. That old home is sealed off, grown over with weeds and exclusions.

- 18 -

Elizabeth is getting a little more than she wants out of sexuality. The boy from next door, Kyle, meets her years later on a couch. She has her grip again, this time filled with razors and panties and a toothbrush.

She looks at him after all this time and thinks he is still what she wants in anyone. She says, "I never imagined it would work out, but I thought it might be possible to meet secretly."

He looks away. "I wasn't blond enough," she says.

He begins to touch her. It looks right, but it feels old. Kyle mentions that some of the girls they used to know have become worn-out women.

Elizabeth empties the grip—they are in her ancestral home—and empties Sarah's suitcase that contains a stuffed animal and lacquered sweatshirts, paint designs of bears and bunnies. She puts lingerie for herself in her sister's suitcase and leaves the animals in a pile on the floor.

Across the street there is a woman on the bed, a dark-haired woman Elizabeth has never seen, Spanish or Italian. The woman is pert in the bed and friendly. She is coaxing and persuasive but not threatening at all.



They could all go to a party, a pig roast. Elizabeth would like that, but she doesn't insist. Kyle would bring her to a party but not stand by her. She is still not girl enough, still too womanly.

- 19 -

The voice that says, suddenly, I'm not condemning you, that voice means that someone is condemning her. God as the verbal configuration of all foregoing voices of authority, a composite position of teachers and her mother.

She hears it from other people, the nurse at the health center. The nurse takes two condoms from her jumper pocket and zings them at Elizabeth. "It's your job now. Women must use condoms now, because of AIDS and all the other diseases." The nurse seems unhappy to have to talk about it at all.

Elizabeth tells the nurse that she can't use a condom because she doesn't have a cock.

The nurse looks at her blankly. "You don't understand. The authorities, the doctors and health writers, they say that women must carry condoms now. Either the man wears a condom, or he goes home. If you're at his house, you get out of bed and call a taxi."

Probably the nurse hasn't dealt with many men that way. Probably that is the point that neither one of them is making.

It turns out that Elizabeth's abdominal pains are due to not-smoking. The doctor is nice and not condemning. He has daughters himself.

Elizabeth stops at the nurse's station on her way out, carrying several packets of bulking agents, different flavors and brands.

"Constipation, Nurse. I'm constipated because I quit smoking."

The nurse's bun lies like a book on her head. "Smoking isn't good for you," she says.

- 20 -

Carlos never acquires a last name. There are many children in his family, some little ones he has never met. His father came home every three and a half weeks or so, which must be some sort of maximum.

Elizabeth could relive the rest of her life without intercourse. She could live the rest of her life without Schwarzwälder Kirsch Torte. She likes Carlos because his skin is soft, and he has hairs in nice places.

Elizabeth returns to playing piano. It is the central avocational impulse, the basic purposeful activity, besides her job in admissions.

Molly Devine is becoming a professor. Molly would invest in mutuals with an income. At twenty-six, even Molly will not charge investments to her mother's accounts. When Walter suggests to Elizabeth that Molly is unprincipled, Elizabeth points that out. She says, Molly is holding off on securities until she gains her independence.

Molly lets Evan know that she wants gifts of romance. Evan spends one entire paycheck on a blue silk bedroom

outfit. Evan works in publishing, academic selection committees, butters the bread of off-brand producers: Heroism and Fraud in Restoration Drama. Whatever people are writing about now. Indians, he says, are pretty big. So are ancient Eastern cultures.

Molly grows bored and moves into a new apartment without him.

The mail lies unsorted on the table of the lit lamp: a letter from Molly's mother, a phone bill, a postcard from Elizabeth of Waikiki. She writes, "Why, Kiki?" referring to a man who wanted Molly. The man didn't know her very well and pledged his love anyway, in the middle of an off-chance restaurant. The next time Molly saw him, he was bearing gifts: roses and the necklace with Kiki on it. Molly had told him her name was Kiki in a burst of mismanagement.

- 21 -

Elizabeth loses her sense of having value. Walter isn't waiting at the bus station when she goes to meet him. She imagines several scenarios. Either the bus is early, and she is late, or he is not in yet, and she is early.

She thinks of Walter dead and thinks of cures. There aren't any very good ones. Some people are slightly replaceable, but not Walter.

She thinks of him swinging his legs over the bridge over the river, but he wouldn't do that. Walter acts adjacent. He might be disappointed with her for losing him the way she does, but he would not jump. He would arrange to love someone else eventually, but not jump.

Maybe he is eating a pizza. She hasn't thought of that. Maybe he is doing something alone and not thinking of her. It comforts her to think of Walter having a good time,

not sad over her.

She misses him. She knows how to plunge into conversations to take the edge off the missing. Missing Walter is not specific to Walter, but is out of an inner hunger to be felt by him. Someone else could feel her, but he has more patience.

Foraging in many psyches is not an efficient use of time.

- 22 -

Elizabeth rises early and puts her feet on the floor and feels with her soles the texture of the wood. She hears the cat yawn, squints and wanders out to the sun, in her bathrobe, and catches a leaf in her teeth. She thinks of hamburger and of Ruby and of bathwater in the same instant.

She slips into the tub and rests her head, lets the soap slip under her back and knees. A good day. Not a sound this early in the morning. Not a rip in paradise.

There has been a long-distance hang-up caller. He has not identified himself except in a moment of feminine gurgling, a swan song, she thinks. Why would someone call her every day, from a long distance, and listen to her say, "Hello," and wait and wait? Who is it? Some menace or



pumpkin from the past, some idler, some coot.

Elizabeth in the aftermath is an idler. No will, no sound, strong and distinct as a birdcall. She thinks of the thousand geese resting in the marsh at Horicon, of their uproarious honking, and of the flirtatious Iranian, calling them not to let down. The geese were stopping on their way south. Not a crime, she thinks, just a different behavior.

Something has kept her from going to the gods.

A warm shelter on a sea of breeze, a long careful boat of memory and wishing. She holds a version of the world as it means, and that is perhaps natural, not foreseeing.

- 23 -

Sarah is not the only one. Sarah is perhaps the cause when the mother tries to call the police, and the father knocks the phone out of her hand. There are words. The father says, "Don't," and the mother says, "I will. I'm taking them away from here."

The mother bars the door with her arms. Sarah and Elizabeth wait on their beds for something right to happen. This is the violent scene associated with the father's drinking. Later Elizabeth decides unfairly that mothers don't call the police because fathers are drinking.

The scene should be horrible, but it is bright. Being in the room with Sarah, the mother holding the men out, gives a safe, light feeling.

The brother breaks the sister's arm and leaves her outside with her foot bleeding from the garden shears.

The mother doesn't call the police. The mother thinks they can stay out of jail, or like Macheath, be freed at the end, when things are at their worst.

Elizabeth can rationalize the twenty boys, but she cannot hold away the blankness or keep the static from descending.

Walter is not the father or the brother. She keeps thinking that the father is the brother and vice versa. Their positions are changing.

She hides under the orange laundry cart. She has a dress on because she can feel the touch of cloth on canvas and the comforting weight of the mother's work above her. The floor in the basement is cold. Her thighs hurt.

She knows what the car looks like from underneath, the feeling of the gritty floor on her skin, the seed sacks that lift her. Always pillows are there. This time, seed sacks that she grabs and that carry her to open air, to the empty half of the garage, through the opening to light. She crouches in the grasses around the mailbox and worries that a car will see her hiding.

The brother is in the house. He always is laughing, so it's funny. Seeing him in his underwear, she thinks, He's

taking over the house again.

She goes to eat at the neighbors. What they call her, they think she is selfish, a mooch about their food. She is seven or eight or ten. If Jazz Animal is with her, she is seven. Seven is the beginning or the end. Elizabeth tells the neighbor girl who Santa is.

"Remember the animals," her father says. "We are animals and must somehow accept our behavior."

Elizabeth's behavior is scab picking. She returns to scenes of crimes without seeing connotations. The brother was arrested and kicked out in the past.

Elizabeth is not coping today. Elizabeth is not sick. She is too tired to wake up. She can't run because of a paralysis.

She lies in a contorted position on the couch, her arms folded under her like sleeves in a drawer. The pageant is on. The father crouches, his elegant hand draped over his knee. The wave of feeling, the sickness. Gaze squarely on the TV dolls, the United States swimming suits. She thinks, This is responsibility time.

- 24 -

She is about to break through to something. She senses it as something approaching, something that she is approaching, since she is moving, and the thing is waiting for her.

At any time, she can look up at the sky and tell where the lake is by watching the clouds. The sky lightens, the clouds make way for lake.

Part of her mind, the front part, has been dim for a long time. Smoky gray, she would call it, smoky bar. That part is changing. She looks up into her mind, and it is milder by degrees everyday. The smoke drifts toward the back of her mind, as if she has passed under a storm. Everything coming is light.

The ovaries are cooking, baking up ideas for newborns. She will not lie gladly down and give out children. For children: the fish in the bowl, the sweet tooth, the phone in the bath, and foot massage.

The people downstairs, the people whose building it is, have heard disruptive noises in the night and seen foreign speakers in the lobby. Elizabeth has neglected to lock the door again, and that leaves them in danger.

She forgets to eat enough when Walter is away.

She studies ill-advised behavior as a research method. See which ones laugh and which ones think of sickness. Is it her sickness or their fear? Laughter in others at ill-advised behavior fascinates then sickens her. Satisfaction is an art.

She guards her power, fingers it, resists it, because her people want a mortal. If she felt like it, she could zap them.

Be thankful for what you do have, the voice tells her. Be kind. ☺



**ANN BOGLE** has short stories and prose poems appearing online at *Black Ice*, *Big Bridge*, *Minnetonka Review*, *Mad Hatters' Review* and *MHR blog*, *Istanbul Literary Review*, *Metazen*, *Blip*, *Wigleaf*, *Big City Lit*, *fwriction : review*, *Whale Sound*, *Wordgathering*, *Ragazine*, *THIS Literary Magazine*, and *Fictionaut*. *Solzhenitsyn Jukebox*, a collection of five stories, and *Country Without a Name*, 24 stories and prose poems, were published by Argotist Ebooks in 2010 and 2011. Visit Ana Verse at: <http://annbogle.blogspot.com>



## The Curious Case of Dr Alabone-Heterodoxy by mEIKAL aND

*This text is invisible on the page, but this text is affected by the invisible item's surgery receiving barrels of coded diagrams that actually populate codes of inhaled techniques using short-acting lavish Trauma Under the corresponding Abstract theft.*

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# SNAKES & Other Lovers

Susan Tepper

## Wishes

**Y**esterday I took Doug to the *Make-A-Wish-Animal-Foundation* trailer. It came rolling down our street around 5pm parking near the photo kiosk. A clean white truck with cheerful brown lettering. As usual Doug was looped around my neck in traditional snake formation. We went inside the trailer. Empty but for three young women. They all shrieked. Right away Doug got nervous. He recoiled tightening around my neck. I patted his head saying *Easy does it*. Look you have to get him out of here, the little squat one said. What do you mean? I said. Isn't this about animal wishes? The snake, take him outside, another one said. Well he has a wish, I told them. Isn't that what your organization is about? The little squat one folded her arms over her chest. It's not an animal it's a snake, she said. You look pretty tough but we're not leaving till Doug gets to submit his wish. Get the hell out of here, she said. OK, I said. If that's how you feel. C'mon, I said to Doug. I believe we're not wanted here. We went through the small doorway and climbed back down the metal retractable stairs. At the bottom I had a chance to examine its apparatus. It looked unsafe. The late September dusk had brought in cooler air. 🕒

## Garden

**D**oug has been looking peaky. I lifted his fish tank and put it out back on the picnic table. Get some sunshine, I told him. I could see he wasn't relaxed. His gray looked pallid. I wondered about a lack of vitamin D. Catch some rays, I told him. I went in the garage for a rake. My bamboo rake missing. Probably the neighbor took it and forgot to return. The old neighbor always returned. This one is younger generation. A whole different breed. I went back to the tank and peered in. Doug's tongue was moving rapidly. Nothing else. I tickled under his belly. No movement. This is serious, I said. Who you talking to? I turned to see the younger neighbor holding my rake. That my rake? I said. I wanted to give him benefit of the doubt. No, he said. How's the snake? Not looking good, I said. I took him to the *Animal-Make-A-Wish* trailer. They wouldn't help us out. People can be strange that way, said the neighbor. Hey, you got a cuppa sugar I could borrow? 🕒

## Bargaining

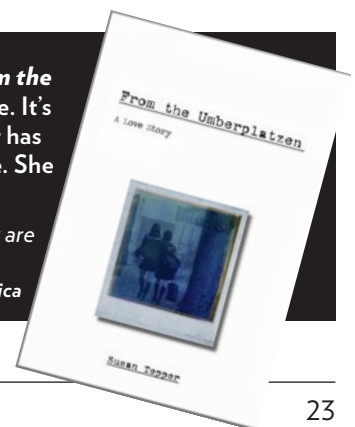
**I**t's clear Doug has lost heart. We've been together a year. Ever since she left me high and dry. Doug what can I do to help? I said. He continued to lie still as cement in the tank. I picked it up and carried it to my car. I drove on out to Injun Joe. I parked near the teepee where I could hear music playing. OK, I said. Let's go see Injun Joe. I carried the tank inside the teepee. Injun Joe parked on his stool at the counter. Hiya, he said. Whatchu got there? It's Doug my snake. Well why ain't he hangin' off yer neck as usual? He's sick Injun Joe. Do you have a potion for him? Injun Joe looked down at the cigar he was rolling. He rolled a bit longer without comment. I never took much to snakes, he finally said. But Injun Joe this is Doug we're talking about. Doug. Yeah, yeah, I know, said Injun Joe. He got up slow off the stool. He'd put on a fair amount of weight. Take it outside, he said. I turned around and carried the tank back out. It'll be OK, I told Doug. We stood out there waiting. Some clouds rolled over the sun. Then a woman drove up in a truck. She looked familiar. Blonde and beat up. Injun Joe will be out in a minute, I told her. Nope he won't, she said heading for the teepee. 🕒



**SUSAN TEPPER** is the author of four published books. *From the Umberplatzen* (Wilderness House Press, 2012) is her most recent title. It's a quirky love story in linked-flash-fiction that's set in Germany. Tepper has published hundreds of stories, poems, interviews and essays worldwide. She can be found online at [www.susantepper.com](http://www.susantepper.com)

"The stories in Susan Tepper's *From the Umberplatzen* will haunt you. They are short, sharp, and ruthless in their tender investigations of memory and loss."

—Steve Almond, author of *God Bless America*



# The Nondenominational Tourist

Matthew Dexter

The man was enjoying his vacation so thoroughly that after pontification, he decided it should never end. In the lost decades which followed he found seven Mexican wives, lost all his teeth, burnt out his lungs, gave up frozen margaritas, took up warm-aged tequila, and pitched his tent on a different beach every evening. In America he was considered odd and unattractive; south of the border he was exotic as a mermaid. He made love to currents, dreamed of buying a sailboat—though he knew his finances and decrepit credit rating (all three scores) would weigh down his sea-drenched catamaran until it was no more than a leaky kayak. The man understood all too well that his consumption was nothing more than delusions of grandeur and a fledgling case of tuberculosis.

He was shitting in the warm starry moonlight. He cracked open a bottle of Casillero del Diablo wine stolen from Mi Casa Restaurant from a disillusioned busboy in exchange for a small gram of marijuana and a large rock of cocaine. This defecation of *Australopithecus* was sleeping inches from a sandy used tampon and a rusty needle. He never got pinpricked—so it did not bother him; the crabs are a different story.

The wives and mermaids wax as he pops his warts with a sombrero. Alone tonight, he busts most of them—the large ones anyway—pus slithers down his shaft. A good man despite his misery, as pigeons listen, a survivor howls amid the pain of the nightly procedure.

Familiar with fishermen, drunken captains often indulge him on sunset cruises. There is an uninhibited island that enchants him in the Pacific. Rocky and rough, he fantasizes about being immersed in this oasis. They say it's too dangerous to land. He will prove them wrong; knows it's only a matter of time, and luck. The stratosphere is his overturned hour glass.

The man gambles his wine for a fine lady tourist searching for her hotel in a nervous stupor; ends with another mediocre whore with an enormous mouth that

never closes; legs always open; scabies and hairy, she chews on the man's mustache during negotiation. As if studying the menu of a steakhouse after a month of Ramadan, unfastened bloody stained blouse, she exposes herself like a lobster trapped in a cage. Lost in the labyrinth of tent fabric, they become the moons of Jupiter; a gassy planet orbiting the sun.

As the crabs bite and fish fall from the sky, crimson bodies dripping lust for something neither can understand, embracing the carnal ecstasy already fading, they ride the already cresting atavistic wave to shore, unsure of the outcome as always.

He ends with a boat; she a crack pipe stuffed with wet rock, four bottles of wine, and a varicose spider nest of throbbing misery. Grinning toothless, she amuses the nipples of the nondenominational man and hands over the keys of the *panga*. The man does not bother pulling up his pants; tripped by shredded khakis, he rips them from swollen ankles, gives them to the woman, her fluorescent lighter aimed at the Big Dipper. The zipper hits her in the cheek, doesn't faze the beast focused on her rock as if it were a hidden constellation: Ophiuchus.

His satellite is the decrepit boat tucked into the cove. Hers is the melting yellow snow of paradise. Both avenues are escapes in their own. The woman disappears. The man hits rock on his island, guided by the waxing moon. The *panga* sinks within minutes, so weakened by butt cheeks of women. The man swims to shore with crabs. 🐞



Like the nomadic Pericú natives centuries earlier, **MATTHEW DEXTER** survives on a hunter-gatherer subsistence diet of shrimp tacos, cold beer, and warm sunshine. He lives in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico.



# A Story Without Easy Phrases

Jessica Maybury

My gaze was drawn down toward something in my peripheral vision ~~and I started in shock and surprise to see my brother sitting on the low wall opposite the house.~~ I wrote that without thinking. It just slipped out like when you snort yourself spontaneously.

Shock and Surprise. Started. I didn't. I stood there and I stared out at the day and I pondered which word would describe the texture of marmalade.

The grey sky, the low redbrick walls dulled by rain. A scrap of paper stumbled past the driveway, catching on an ankle whose owner was perching on the wall. The shoes were made of cloth, damped to the same colour and friable texture of the newspaper. A neat hole in the side of the shoe showed a striped sock.

He was licking his hands and rubbing his ears with them like a cat cleaning itself. I opened the window, the crack of the lock loud in the winter stillness.

"What are you doing here," I said. He stopped what he was doing and stared at me fixedly. Cats are like furry surveillance cameras.

"I think you should leave me alone," I said. There was no reply. I slammed the window shut and drew the curtains. I hurried out of the room and down the stairs and through the hall way to the front door – but he was gone. I was met by a rush of cold air. It was beginning to snow.

I had forgotten the incident by evening, and ate my solitary zap-meal while serenaded by the tiny voice of the dripping tap in the bathroom upstairs. Lying in bed that night I stared up at the sky but there was no letting up of the cloud above. The government had definitely ruined the atmosphere this time. I doubted there'd be no going back on it, despite the promises that certain cabinet members were making, which were suspect to begin with anyway given that there was an election coming up.

I liked sleeping with the curtains open, looking up at the stars. I had a feeling that there wouldn't be any stars now for a long time. That night as I lay sleeping I dreamt

that my ex-wife was cursing me from afar, drawing arcane ideograms on her body I was embroiled in a political coup by Norse gods in Asgard and that a fleet of fantastical ships were moving up a long fjord while I and a lady in white with yellow hair watched from an intricately wrought balcony.

I woke up slick with sweat and was gradually comforted by the bleeping light from the power supply of my computer on its desk across the room.

Coming home from work the next day, I remembered my brother and shivered. Shivering while keeping your grip on the crowded handrail of a bus at rush hour is ~~no easy thing to do~~ challenging.

The thing about writing a story with no easy phrases is that you begin to notice the things you write about often. Your tropes, they would be, if you were famous and being studied in secondary school.

The thing about buses at rush hour in winter is that the windows steam up with the breath and infectious germs of the people packed inside. What I want to know is whether it looks like that when it's not winter, just that we can't see it. What I wanted to know while shivering is who had written *there are no cats on Easter Island* in the condensation on the window of the 6pm 43 to Glen Ellen.

I passed my brother as I turned the corner onto my road. He was standing beside a heavily graffiti-ed parking metre with a look of such wonder on his face that I asked –

"Are you having one of those things where you're noticing the everyday beauty of the world and now you want to commit an act of random kindness?"

"No."

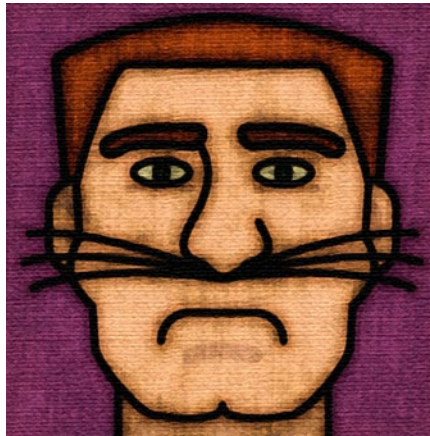
"Oh."

"Do you have a marker on you?"

"No."

"Oh."

I walked back into my house, ~~huffing and stamping my feet~~, shaking off the rain that had cried weakly into my hair from the sky. ☁



**JESSICA MAYBURY** is from Dublin, Ireland. She has had work in *Nth Word*, *Word Riot*, *Prick of the Spindle*, *Crannóg Magazine* and *Flaneur*. She has work in the current issues of *Apt Magazine* (issue 2) and *Tuck Magazine*, and a piece forthcoming in the Tinderbox Network's *Gods and Monsters*. She lives in interesting times. Jessica can be found online at [jmaybury.blogspot.com](http://jmaybury.blogspot.com) and [www.esczine.com](http://www.esczine.com).

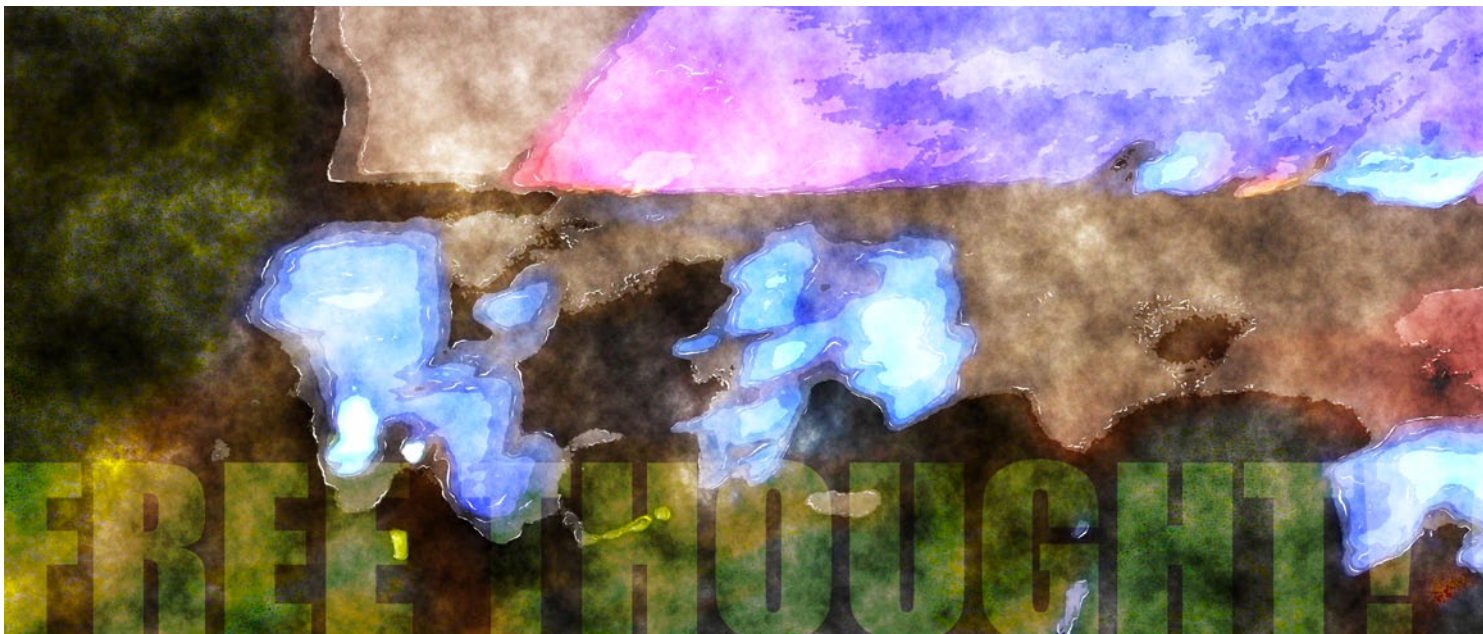


# Spy vs. Park

Darryl Price

Things looked way too normal to be normal. The cold, gliding black eyed swans never once straying far from each other's wake, the cute blue jeaned lovers everyone secretly watched carefully picking their trickling way over small odd rocks and flattened leaves together like they were walking through some kind of careless mine field, the familiar small engine plane routinely buzzing in the far distance to the imagined local runway stripes, while some watched and others didn't care, the ice cream screams. I was on some kind of high alert inside I tell you. No doubt about it. I tried my official best not to radiate my unfamiliar paranoia too far outside of my presumed business posture, all brown suit, yellow shirt and silk tie, expensive tasseled shoes only a buffoon would wear, but I could tell it wasn't working on this particular party scene for some unknown

reason. The young couple, both wearing Buddy Holly style glasses, eating sandwiches and reading thickly bound books on their checkered picnic blanket glanced over at me with startled looks on their faces, not once but twice. That's strange, I thought. The pretty cookie-cutter moms in fashionable plaid shorts and loopy sandals walking in twos with their strollers side by side inched over I noticed ever so slowly to the other side of the path right in front of my brightly polished shoes. Even the nutty fidgety squirrels stayed on the other side of their scratchy trees, even though they couldn't possibly help themselves from peering around the curvy sides and cocking their nervous heads at me from time to time. C'mon, James, I said to myself you've done this easy a thing a dozen times before, stop with the nerves already, get the job done, then go home, have a drink, relax. But I knew when something didn't feel





right on assignment and this felt wobbly from every angle. There was just too much to the picture that seemed painted in, as if there was no room for any normal unexpected chaos to suddenly happen. And that I knew wasn't reality. Not by a long shot. The leather holster under my arm had started to feel like a giant mole that had been exposed to too much sunlight and needed a glop of aloe rubbed into it. I started to sweat. And this made me extremely uncomfortable. I fanned myself with the lightly folded back together newspaper I was pretending to scan.

But I also did like the service man that I am continue to do my very best to show to all concerned how I certainly did belong on my park bench along with the rest of them. I'm getting way too old for this nonsense, I secretly thought. Go on about your comfortable everyday business, people. I can assure you that there is nothing at all interesting here for you to see. Just your typical, daffy old last century sort of man out for his late afternoon stroll you see in the balmy park like the rest of you, seeking some respite from the cruelties of the age. Bit of today's newspaper to go down with the much needed fresh air. Ah, that's the good stuff, isn't it now? Maybe a little sideways glance or two at the pretty girls dashing by on their pink roller skates. The appreciation of beauty never goes out of fashion. At least I hope not. But all too soon I'll have to get up and return to my stuffy old office job and leave the lot of you to it. Lots of work to do yet before the full day is considered properly

well done. A working man like me has just got to let off a little built up steam out in the open air now and then. Remembering what's important. That's all. Nothing even remotely more to it than that. Oh I'd played this favorite bit to a crowd like this a million times before. Why was I so nervous now? Where was he? Who was she? I didn't like to be stood up by a co-worker. It wasn't professional. It made everyone's job that much harder to do. I had to pee badly. And the race horse wasn't even in the race this time.

Just then out of nowhere I heard something solid hitting the back of my stiff metal bench like an instant sort of unexpected slap to a hung out to dry old tent tarp on an old fashioned laundry line. Whap! Instinctively I put my hand inside my jacket and snapped my holster free. Then I heard a quick, happy voice saying, "Sorry, mister, did our Frisbee hurt you? It was just an accident, I swear. I should have caught it, but it was just too high for me. We weren't aiming for you at all, I swear!" But when I swiveled myself around to tell the poor little fellow it was all right, there was no real harm done, to my sad surprise there was no one else there to hear me, no swans, no lovers, no picnicking intellectuals, no moms with their newborn babies, and no chattering squirrels, just a little round blue Frisbee left stranded on the crushed green ground with a hastily scribbled note stuck on the inside of it that said: You have been relieved of duty. Effective immediately. Destroy this note. Leave Frisbee. And, have a nice day. ⌚



**DARRYL PRICE** was born in Kentucky and educated at Thomas More College. A founding member of L. Jack Roth's *Yellow Pages Poets*, he has published dozens of chapbooks, and his poems have appeared in many journals. Darryl can be found online at <http://www.fictionaut.com/users/darryl-price>.









# Hellgate

## David Ackley

“How you want to call it?” Spook hadn’t put together the signs until then, but he saw what Coudreau meant. They were driving a dirt road along the roaring Sabrohos at the tail end of the spring freshet. The road ran beside the river up toward the source, a remote pond in the high timber. Nearing the big lake at the bottom, the river flattened out, but higher up it was fairly extreme, stepped whitewater mostly too bad to even rate for canoeing, class six rapids at the easiest. Midway from pond to lake, the river roiled and frolicked darkly in the canyon, Hellgate.

They’d noted the black Wagoneer with a kayak rack, parked at the last takeout before the lake. Someone had dropped the kayaker upriver and left the Wagoneer for him to pick up at the end of his run, the keys probably under the floor mat.

In midstream the river climbed a boulder and curled over backward in a constant foamy break. Tannin from the spruce barrens upstream stained the water the color of weak coffee and it was thick with sediment.

Usually, when the question of outcome arose, they’d been called to go after someone lost or stranded, a hunter in the deep timber; scared kids hung-up on an ice-fall on Frankenstein Cliff; winter hikers caught above treeline by a blizzard. But this time they’d just happened on these traces, whatever was to be made of them.

“You call it,” Spook said.

“Recovery, no doubt.” Either it was rescue—if the customer was alive to be found—or recovery, the term for bringing out the dead. Coudreau wasn’t the most dedicated warden, but he’d grown up in the woods, and had a feel for the convergence of weather, terrain and hubris that in the back country constitutes fate.

“It could work out. Maybe he’s good. I’ve seen them run some mean water.”

“This aint the Discovery Channel. If he’s still upright we’d of see’d him by now.”

Spook nodded. “I’d say rescue; he could just be stove up.”

“Fuckin’ ay, stove up.”

He knew Coudreau had no grudge against the dead, though his surliness made it seem like that. Their habitual silence could appear thankless when you were lugging them down a rocky pitch in a bivvy sack.

An upturn rock maple, dirty roots dragging like hair,

passed downstream. He was starting to believe anyway, even before Coudreau held up his hand and he saw the yellow stern pointing at a low angle skyward, the bow pinioned under a protruding boulder. Lucky for them if not the paddler, he’d made it through Hellgate.

In his wetsuit, Spook waded slowly out, figuring to tie up to the boulder with the rope in his hand, the current so heavy against his legs it was like wading through a delivery of liquid cement. A slick stone kicked out from underfoot and he fell and came up thrashing and blowing twenty feet downstream; on the belay, Coudreau played him into shore like a salmon. When he clambered up the bank and got back to his starting point, Coudreau said, “You don’t want to drown going after a dead man.”

“Wouldn’t be the first time someone did.”

“That don’t make it a good idea.” They’d both been on the cluster-fuck in the Whites when a warden and an AMC guide got blown off a cliff in a snow-squall, going after two fools already froze in each other’s arms. All that, over so much inert matter.

He got to the rock on the second try, and felt his way underwater to the kayaker dangling head down from the kayak skirt. By the time they’d walked corpse and boat back to shore against the throb and treachery of the current, they were both clammy with sweat.

Laid out on the bank, his face a purplish grey, eyes wide and glaring, teeth bared in a final rictus, the man was hard to look at.

Coudreau said, “Don’t seem like no adventurer now, does he?”

The news would befall those nearest him like a wolf in the night. Who were they? He wondered. There was nothing to go on except the known effect: Whoever they were, they’d be somebody different after they were told.

“Feels funny, don’t it?” Coudreau said. “We never seen this poor bastard before and we’re the only ones knows he’s dead. And anyone who cares, still’s thinkin’ what a high old time he’s havin’ out here in the wild, paddlin’ his little boat, havin’ a beer by the campfire...”

The two men considered this stranded ticket-holder, awaiting confirmation of his altered status. Spook had a sudden urge to call the man’s people and give them the news before all the others—the lost, the taken, the unremarked—inconveniently neither quick nor dead, decided to come gibbering through the gate. 🌀



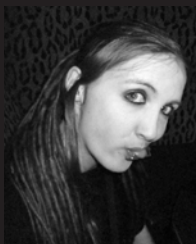
**DAVID ACKLEY** lives and writes in the White Mountains of New Hampshire. His work has been recently seen in *Prick of the Spindle*, *Litsnack*, *A-Minor* and *THIS*, and received editors’ nominations for the 2011 Million Writers’ Award and The Best of the Net Anthology.



# Mad Adelaide

Danica Green

**M**ad Adelaide sits in her house and asks if someone can turn up the heating while summer snows fall upon the rubble of her kitchen table and we all watch from the shadows with winter coats and drum fires sizzling loudly over the moans. She invites us over to watch the tennis on the back of a smashed fridge and pets the dog by her feet which died three months ago without protest. One evening she shivered smiling and I went over there with a bucket of flames, placed it on a broken milk crate while she thanked me for the beautiful flowers, burning her fingertips on orange petals and yellow stems. She invited me to stay a while and I sat in the snow slush next to her feet, facing away towards the others, weeping over tiny graves, huddled silent, staring blindly into the fires with an absence of expression. Mad Adelaide squeezed my shoulder and offered me a plastic doll shoe for dinner. I took it with thanks, and she smiled her smile, knitting a sweater with hair and old chopsticks, humming softly a tune I did not know. I popped the shoe into my mouth and turned again to the others, choked by the gentle realisation that Adelaide was the sanest one among us. 🕒



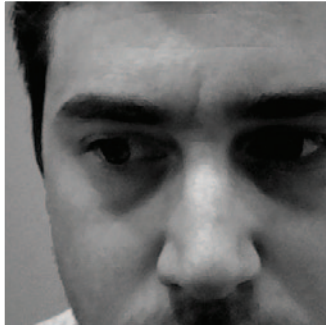
**DANICA GREEN** is a UK-based writer of essentially everything, though more often than not it is of the oh-god-we're-all-going-to-die ilk of writing. She has been published in over 40 literary journals and anthologies, including the wonderful *Smokelong Quarterly*, but she shan't bore you by listing them. If you want to take a look at her author page, she encourages you to do so: <https://www.facebook.com/Danica.Green>

# ARTISTS & POETS APPEARING IN THIS ISSUE



## KYRA WILSON ... Pages 13-19, 26, 30 ...

is an artist residing in Vermont with her family, and has been painting for over 20 years. Kyra tried going the expected career route in business, but ended up working in an office with flickering fluorescent lights, zero windows, way too many spreadsheets, and people with suspenders. She escaped, and embraced color and movement as her passion. Creating in Oils, Acrylic, and Watercolor, she works in a predominantly fantasy style, but visits the contemporary and even abstract realms on occasion! Kyra's work can be found at [KWilsonStudio.com](http://KWilsonStudio.com)



## CHAD ROSEBURG ... Pages 4-5 ...

is of possible Jewish descent. Superstition, Klezmer music and Chinese candy wrapper designs inform many of his artistic works. He is interested in the places at which art, music, technology and language intersect.



## CHARMA RULAND ... Original Photo Used for Pages 26-27 ...

is a pinhole camera hobbyist and sometimes storyteller residing in one of the pretty bits of Appalachia. When not living in the past photographically, she's living in the present theoretically.



## DAVID SIMMER II

is a graphic designer and world traveler residing in the Pacific Northwest of these United States. Any artistic talent he may have is undoubtedly due to his father making him draw his own pictures to color rather than buying him coloring books during his formative years. He is co-founder and art director of *Thrice Fiction Magazine* and blogs daily at [Blogography.com](http://Blogography.com)



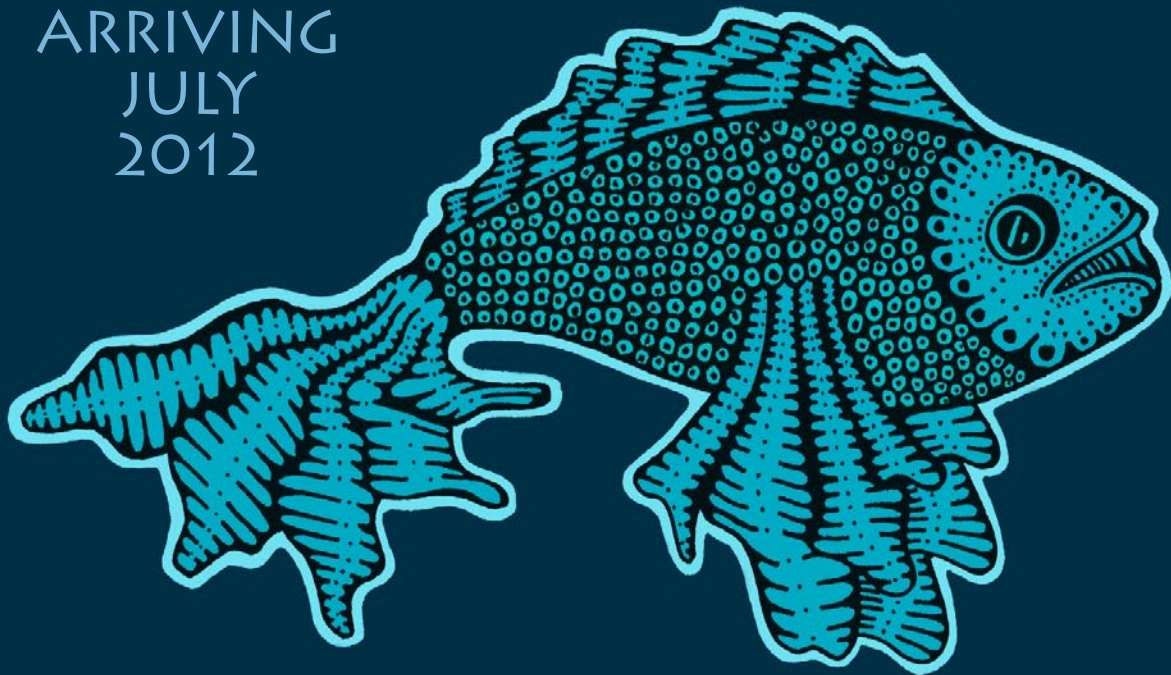
## JOHN M. BENNETT ... Page 12 ...

has published, exhibited and performed his word art worldwide in thousands of publications and venues. He was editor and publisher of *Lost and Found Times*, and is Curator of the Avant Writing Collection at The Ohio State University Libraries. His work has been collected in several major institutions, including Washington University (St. Louis), SUNY Buffalo, The Ohio State University, and The Museum of Modern Art. His PhD (UCLA 1970) is in Latin American Literature. He can be found online at [JohnMBennett.net](http://JohnMBennett.net)





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