



*Quercus*

# Quercus

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(kwŭrkŭs) Latin. n. The oak genus: a deciduous hardwood tree or shrub.

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*This issue is dedicated to John Schmits  
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**Kristin Quinn**  
*Sky Determines*  
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inside back cover image  
**Anton Green**  
*Snow Shoes*  
2004, black and white photograph, 6 inches x 4 inches

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Rain drip drips  
outside my window.  
Sitting quiet  
and reading.  
Silly quiet poet  
sipping silence  
on noisy rummy  
Friday night.



## Getting My Feet Wet

I want the music in my mind  
to flood my words  
with such aggression that it stings your skin—  
Come on and slide right in.

The melody clings to the walls  
as remnant notes drip down  
and stick to the ends of my hair.

I started humming your song,  
losing myself between  
chord changes.

Let me be the guitar  
resting on your knee  
and we'll play a blurred vision of blue sky.

I know in your fingers  
a thousand sunsets bleed.

I want to be the kind of beauty  
that they write about  
when the lyrics take hold  
and the guitar struggles to understand  
how to take my horizon lines  
and mold them into yours.

“You know  
my hopes for better days  
are tattooed on your strings,  
on all the visions and revisions  
created on bloody sunsets.”

—Alicia Levi

## July Plummeted

Lucid skies broke  
through walls resting  
light on skin.  
Shook calm within me.

Trying to be all  
with all  
in all.  
Everything's changed.

In July air  
frozen words melted—  
it all dripped down my throat.  
“Didn’t you hear the wind move?”

Drowned beneath the weight  
of your skin,  
fallen.

Ripped up your pictures,  
swallowed you whole.  
Imprinted images—  
little pieces of you  
in my words.

“Couldn’t make it any clearer . . .”

What’s the use of body  
when it bends to break?

Words unglued themselves  
from your definition.  
“He’s a shadow now.”

It was told  
you walked on water  
before it was frozen,  
trying to re-create the miracle  
that brought you into birth.



They calmly took you out  
further than shoreline—  
drowning, quiet.  
Witnessed you splashing around—  
baptizing your skin.

Been saved again.  
Wanted the ocean to wash over me  
and hold me like skin.

God fills the lungs  
of those who let it all rush in.

—*Alicia Levi*

## Someone Else's Daughter

He had been gone for years. But suddenly on that Saturday, as we drove through the intersection of Central and Kaufmann Avenue, I could smell him as if he were in the backseat of my mother's car. He had always smelled that way: a mix of mothballs and cedar so strong you could nearly taste it.

I was in the passenger seat of the car cradling my head in my hand as I looked out the window. My mother drove. Her delicate hands gripped the steering wheel so tightly that the blue veins on the backs of them were visible. Without turning to look at her, I said aloud, "I smell Grandpa." It sounded so casual. So blasé. Like it wasn't anything out of the ordinary to pass by an automotive shop and suddenly smell the inside of my dead grandfather's closet that was once lined with cardigan sweaters and plaid hats.

"I smell it too," she said softly, in a way that I knew she was smiling.

And we had lunch downtown. Paid the water bill. Washed the car. Hours had passed since we had driven through that intersection. I had forgotten all about that moment in the car earlier.

But as we drove through it again on the way home, I heard her rolling down her window. I looked at her with my eyebrows furrowed and wondered why she'd want the window open at the end of October when the air was cold and damp. I was always questioning her like that. Like why she was saving every state quarter that ever comes her way in a box under her bed. Or why she was spending \$25 she'd never spend in the first place just to use a coupon for \$10 off.

Just when I was about to open my mouth to ask, I saw her face. The tip of her nose was red and her slight smile quivered. I realized then that she had wanted her window down to let her father in again. Without so much as turning her head or flinching an eye, she moved her hand from the steering wheel in the chance that he still might be there, lingering in the wind outside of Meineke Automotive.

In that moment, I saw her as someone other than my mother. She was someone else's child. A daughter longing for her father. And I'd never seen her look as lonesome, so I just kept quiet and inhaled.

—Jessi Kurt '02



## when it was almost monday

i could almost say just what i meant  
talking about the weather and how these days  
go dark too soon  
i could almost write this this was my love poem  
but now it's looking more like graffiti  
(God i mean i am so sorry)  
in how much it makes me feel  
like a piece of poetry  
falling off itself  
our hands were making (moving up, down)  
the skin of time undocumented wars  
of my body my mind  
fit perfectly into just one word one poem  
just maybe not  
a love poem

—Amy Falvey

## with clasped hands . . .

it's the right time of day or the right place maybe  
talking gray words inventing half-languages  
living for something that drives in the deep cold night  
skipping stones like years  
i move down highways that take on lives  
giving me meaningfulness  
til i am seven feet outside my body

"this is what i prayed for  
once or twice,  
i was maybe seventeen"

the world tasting lime of overdue nights  
and now now we talk about breaking  
the words on refrigerator magnets we rearrange them  
and i know it's just practicing poetry in the kitchen  
you're thinking words  
we can't pronounce with the lights on  
we talk about weathering  
that comes so fast it changes our breathing  
and we forget where we are where we came from  
we can't remember our own names  
but it feels like it's a passing away of things

"there is holiness here we just  
boxed it up much too soon"

the world they told you sometimes it's black  
but really it's red i know  
nile red  
from my lips to God's ears you say  
living in the belly the Leviathan  
there's something we meant to prove  
from the beginning  
something about salvation earth  
always spitting out the lukewarm  
telling the wide red world  
this is the God the God i speak of  
and maybe i'm not this is not what you expected

“these moments of honesty are like gum drops,  
i was never cut out for sugar”

i never could stand the sound of it  
you talking about God always peeling away  
using words like power and death  
you know as if  
you knew what they meant  
like you ever really sat inside the sadness and climbed out  
like you ever bowed to something bigger than your body  
it's just you heard divinity moves dark strong rain  
but you never breathed hallelujahs in and out in and out

“there are thoughts that i'm thinking,  
there are places i am dreaming about,  
all the places i will never see”

—Amy Falvey



## emptying

it's when i'm shaving my legs  
when i have a second for breathing  
and i think about letting it go  
and it's in the middle  
of my champagne dreams  
when i start getting weightless

"you're always beautiful when you are lavender"

i keep thinking that  
for twenty-some days now  
i have never been so colored  
and it seems after all that  
these years just got lost  
underneath the mattress  
or in the hollow part  
of a guitar  
my tears feel like liquid sighs  
and i know now  
i know now i could  
apologize to the ocean  
waist high in my sorrow  
talking about troubling  
the water

"here i was and i never ever knew heaven had corners"

see sometimes i just drink it  
and i told you when i fall  
i fall hard  
fast  
and when i'm tired of all my metaphors  
i guess  
all i meant was i wanted  
to kiss your mouth  
more slowly  
over and over

"but now i am just trying to breathe trying not to be lavender"

and i never liked this  
December  
has been colder than ever  
so much so  
that it feels like i am always almost  
praying to the ocean  
in it  
waist high  
and after all the water  
was always troubled i mean  
its always that dark  
dark blue

“you know and maybe that’s more beautiful  
than lavender or heaven anyway”

—Amy Falvey

## the parasol woman's poem

there is something about the night sea  
its clenching darkness that feels like  
the color scarlet its curtained face  
and its threading prayers when they say  
the world makes noise just as  
it's going down see  
we hear the heaviest  
we mean what we say  
about healing something broken  
and this is the sound of swelling  
slowly coming over the ocean  
and i am not ready just yet  
to go upside down i mean really feel it  
but tonight i could swear i am  
almost there but still i know i am  
nothing more than begging for love  
measuring the thickness i can feel  
in the aftermath of rain  
the taste of you on me forgiving the train wreck  
i have made of this place  
such a mess  
but as i get undone i hear it beneath me  
"when it rains it pours"  
with your hair clenched in my hands  
it's as if we were the night sea itself  
and you know it's almost breathtaking  
right before the morning draws us away  
to our separate edges of the bed  
and i count the cars that never go fast enough  
at hours like that  
and even though i swore again and again  
it was nothing and i mean nothing  
even though we were treading water still  
i couldn't help it my becoming sand

—Amy Falvey



## Let's Take a Moment for a 7:30 November Walk

On a cool,  
cool November clear night  
with dinner wafting  
out neighborhood doors  
to greet my coolnight steps  
I already feel at home  
following the sidewalk  
to my little house.

Everyone else at home  
just warms me up.

I feel  
like Christmas,  
the gather-us-all-up  
of holidays.

I feel family  
in the air:  
holiday beer.

Distant night stars  
drop their light  
right next to me.

They might as well  
be the lights  
on the living room tree.

And the moon—  
well, she might  
as well be you.

—Jeremy Burke '99

## My Stubbled Face in the Yellow Bathroom Light

I'm standing still  
in front of the bathroom mirror—  
stubble more noticeable now  
than an hour before—  
but, honestly,  
for me,

    it's New Year's Eve  
and I'm in New York City  
standing still  
in the back of the crowd  
lost in the sound  
of the Flaming Lips'  
"Do You Realize."

*Do you realize  
that everyone you know  
someday  
will die?*

I realize I'm thirsty  
and turn,  
but she's staring up at me.  
I notice I can't  
make out  
the color of her eyes  
and I'm thinking,  
"Someday she'll die."

She can't sense  
these thoughts  
and yet . . .

*Its true, you know.*

I can hardly hear her  
over everything else.

*What is?*

She raises herself  
to her tippy-toes,  
places her hand  
on my shoulder.  
I lean in  
for the whisper.

*We're all going to die.*

I didn't really hear her words  
so much as feel  
each syllable pushed  
into my ear  
by her warm breath.

Now it's my turn.

*I know.*

And it's all I can do  
to keep myself  
from biting her  
round little ear.

*I'm Scarlett.*

We're still  
comfortably close.

*I'm Jeremy.*

She places her hand  
on my shoulder again  
and I'm still  
deciding about her eyes.  
She runs  
her hand down my arm and  
when she reaches  
my hand she tugs  
and leads me outside  
for air.



The streets are as crowded  
as the show  
so we just stand there  
in the middle of it all  
pressed together  
by everyone else's lack  
of space more than  
our own intention.

*So, who are you?*

*I'm Jeremy.*

*You told me that already.  
Who ARE you?*

I smile  
because I never know  
what to say.

I've decided her eyes—  
her pupils—  
are penetrating  
and her hazel iris is inviting  
vulnerable.

Now I'm lost in her lips.  
Afraid they'll melt away  
before mine can find them.

What the hell?  
I might as well  
tell her the truth.

*I'm a bad poet  
who reads a lot  
of philosophy and listens  
to way too much music.  
Y tu?*

She smiles  
for the first time.

*I'm whomever  
I have to be.*

*Does that count?*

She smiles again.  
Then looks at her shoes.

*It's more honest  
than you'd guess.  
Who's your favorite?*

*Poet?*

*Philosopher.*

*Heidegger, I guess.*

I'm starting to get  
uncomfortable.  
Can it be this warm  
in New York  
in December,  
or whatever month it is?  
I look up  
and try to find the moon.

*Why?*

*I like the moon.*

*What?*

It's warmer now.  
I'm lost again.

*Why do you like  
Heidegger?*

Oh.  
Because he talks  
about the importance  
of being authentic.

And how  
do you accomplish that?

He doesn't tell us.

I look for the moon again

and blink away  
a dark NY canyon,

So?

too warm for January,  
and see my stubbled face clearly  
in the bathroom's yellow light,  
but I'm no better off.

Why?

I'm still here.  
I'm still.

The gap  
between  
the moon  
and me . . .

Me?

if it's an inch,  
it's an infinite mile.

Authentic?

I'm authentic.



That's too much to ask  
so I grab my pencil  
my pad  
sit down  
and write  
about a little blonde  
alone  
on a NY street.

—Jeremy Burke '99

## October 2000

Shortly after I turn forty-six  
(A bullish age with an eye toward the graze),  
My mother dies, at seventy-four,  
Victim of a lingering illness,  
Worn away to a shadow,  
A shell, peaceful in countenance,  
Hollowed out, a death canoe.

The days between her death and burial  
Fly like winged ingots, harsh nails clapped in,  
All corners sealed. This explains much of my  
Preoccupation of the previous four years,  
Times of inexplicable tears that came in the  
Garage, in the car, man places to be alone.

At forty, I was utterly sanguine, soaring near  
To the sun, the kingfisher on the rise, a hired gun,  
Wise, fruitful, deepening and widening, growing to  
Encompass the reaches of my being.

And then, at the apex of my winged flight, I thought  
Briefly of you who gave me birth. I wanted to  
Understand you, who have had problems like me,  
Who have had troubles and torments foreign to  
A kind and loving heart.

And then I fell, from the seventh heaven of scented grace,  
Far below from where I started, down toward the abyss.  
Instead of feeling God in my heart and love in my soul,  
I began to feel only blackness, at the apex of this hole.

*By being, I give birth. By acting, I pull the moon.  
By resting, I release the tides. By sleeping, I dream the  
Universe, and by waking, banish night.*

I get up, ride my bike, and wonder if I am any more or less  
Than a reflection of the world around me—the grain dryers  
At the elevator, the sweetly cacaphonous throng of autumn  
Birds, wanton abandon in the leafless trees, the slight  
Wind crossing my face, the sound of my tires on the road.

*What if you were pure life, and had no life apart from things?  
What if you were in things, and of them, and not apart from them?  
What if you felt others' passions as your own, and had no thought?*

Before guilt and suffering come to claim all good and moot it,  
There is something grander than has yet become—  
The exuberance of youth, the wisdom of age,  
And the battleground of love that lies between them.

*Being knows no limits. The mind can be taught to inhabit flow.  
In the first letter of AUM, the soul is yet enslaved, but can  
Imagine freedom. In the second letter, the soul dreams, and  
In dreaming, begins to heal the rift between body and soul.  
In the final letter, the dreamer is awake, in a way that dispels  
All thinking, all reactive reflex; the soul is one with the world.*

Having awakened, the soul beholds God, gives a great shudder,  
And begins life anew.

—Dean Rathje '74



## Redemption

Kattack kattack  
and the deep howling roar  
screeching into night—a roofless tunnel.  
The sound of steel  
on steel  
crashing sliding jerking  
pulled along  
follow the mournful song  
the long low wail  
that drifts back to our sheltered ears.  
The seat beside me empty,  
my invisible seatmate licks skeleton lips,  
his empty eyes glow red  
and heavy rings hang on fingers that rattle dry bone on bone—  
good thing he's invisible.  
Lost soul wanders up and down singing—  
singing, “redemption son.”  
I want to ask him how,  
what.  
Have I found it?  
Should I seek it?  
Is it lost?  
His face empty,  
“redemption son,”  
no depth behind the message  
the missive of an absent mind.  
Empty night howls outside,  
broken remnants of cities  
flash by  
dark windows  
empty deserted places  
that reach out and drag on us,  
anything to fill their void.  
We slide by trailing wisps and tendrils of forgotten places we pass  
chasing our howl.  
Thrown into line  
shaken and reeling  
drunk on speed  
“redemption son”

and kattack kattack.  
My seatmate leaning at the window  
hand on my shoulder  
moldy desert breath in my ear,  
his cackles resonate in my spine.  
Shuddering down the bottomless darkness  
through nothing to nowhere  
forgotten  
on a never-ending broken rail.  
Laughing skulls in the aisle  
roll with the sway—  
“redemption son,”  
but redemption doesn’t come.

—Sean Bachman

## A Sky to Fall into Forever

The sun slants through the window of a seventh-floor hotel room far above the busy rumbling of London streets. Hazy sunlight piercing through the clouds gives the room a warm dreary feeling, makes yellow walls seem time stained, worn out. Jake, sitting in the shadows next to the window, reaches out for a wine glass that shimmers slightly as he picks it off the table. The wine is French, from before the war, warm from sitting in the sun. It was supposed to be good; the last few drops taste metallic, like blood, dripping on his ash-dry tongue. He swallows and shivers. The draft from the cracked open window belies that it really isn't summer yet. He hunches over a little, pulling his dingy green coat closer around his nakedness and goose bumps. He reaches out a hand and lifts the bottle, watching red liquid swirl inside green glass—about an inch left—sets it back on the table, unresolved, and looks at the wall, at nothing.

"Was it something I did?" Kate asks, her face red and blotchy, her eyes imploring, frightful and wet, tears dripping down her cheeks onto the tangled sheet wrapped around her body.

Her question hangs in the air—stale from the cigarettes they had smoked earlier, back when this had been a celebration—he doesn't answer, doesn't move, just sits looking at the wall. He looks pale, sickly.

"Please, what did I do wrong? Listen please. I'm sorry, just . . ."

"Nothing," he croaks. "You didn't do anything." A denser cloud moves in front of the sun and the room turns cold and dreary. Kate makes little squeaking sounds as she cries. Jake closes his eyes. He can't stand to see it all anymore. He reaches out again and sets his hand on the bottle but doesn't lift it. Cabs honk down on the streets and someone is shouting. Kate snuffles.

"Shit." He mutters it under his breath and clenches his jaw. Fingers tighten around the neck of the bottle—it makes little grinding, scratchy sounds against the table.

"I'm sorry." Jake says it and pauses. It sounds clean and packaged, almost composed, but he means it. Maybe it's the first thing he ever really meant. "I'm sorry." He looks frightened and sad, but he can stand to open his eyes again. He turns and looks at Kate wiping her face on the sheet. For a second he loses himself looking at her, the way her tangled hair falls in red curls onto her white shoulders seeming to catch, like a waterfall, on her collarbone before tumbling down along her arm, tense from holding her up. Her hip and most of her left leg stick out from under the sheet. He gazes at her thigh—soft and strong—and wants to feel it again. He looks up and catches her eyes, betrayed, frightened. He looks at the room and feels the



end of all of it, the future closing down hard—he can almost feel the present crumbling away all around them. Jake’s chest feels heavy as he looks at her. He wants to sacrifice everything to make her happy and safe again and he knows that he can’t. “Fuck.” She looks up at him, but he looks away at the wall again.

“I mean, fuck, we’re just kids. Look, oh, it’s all fucked up . . . we can’t do this; we don’t know what to do, we’re not ready. Not to deal with all—” He stops short, clenching his jaw, trembling as he tries not to cry. Without looking, he reaches for the bottle, clumsily, tips it slightly; too much, it tumbles—he watches as it falls and splashes wine on the carpet. It sinks purpley into the plush beige.

She sets her hand softly on his shoulder; he starts a little but doesn’t look at her. It’s hard to stand and hold the sheet around her. Her naked backside is cold. She reaches out to hold him, letting the blanket fall. *Somehow she will help him.* She kneels on the floor holding onto him—the only stable thing she can see in a world ready to fling itself to pieces.

A weird buzzing roar outside means another rocket flying into the city. The sun glints off its polished surface as it falls to the west trailing gray black smoke.

He slumps against her until she holds his whole weight. His eyes close and the tension eases out of him. Her skin feels warm where it touches him. He can’t think or move. He feels like he has fallen into the only safe place in the world.

Off in the distance the rocket explodes when it hits a mostly empty building. A mother and one of her sons who had nowhere else to go are buried in the rubble when it falls. The little girl is playing outside. She has dust in her eyes and scratches. She’s alone now.

Jake doesn’t remember there is a war outside. He doesn’t remember anything but the feeling of Kate in his arms. He throws his whole being into that embrace, and they lose themselves, sinking inward together. Neither of them speak. They almost smile at each other, as if they wanted to but couldn’t remember how. A few more tears squeeze out of Kate’s eyes, but she doesn’t know why. They make love passionately in a flurry of motions and tangled blankets and limbs, clinging frantically, desperately to the heat—the life they still feel in each other—street noise drowned out by pounding hearts. They give themselves up. The world explodes and collapses

around them and they are cleansed. All they know for an instant is each other: innocent, reborn, peaceful.

A little puff of a breeze almost stirs the curtains. The sunlight is sickly, filtering through smoke and haze on a last low slant. Jake stares at the wall where the rectangle of light still brightens its dinginess, the rest of the room filling with shadows. He tries to pull a sheet over the two of them without disturbing Kate. She makes a content little moaning noise and snuggles closer into his side. He traces his fingers absentmindedly along her side, running over goose bumps where they interrupt her velvet skin. He thinks about everything he can remember, about how he ever got into a hotel room in London. *Fuck*, he thinks, *I didn't know anything back then; none of us did. We were all fucking kids, and the second we graduated all we could think was what a great goddamn idea it would be to go to war. Why didn't anyone stop us? Where were our parents, keeping us safe? Two years ago and we didn't know it was all mucked up and broken like this. We didn't know anything. They sent us away, wanted us to go, to come face to face with what? This mad chaos? What the fuck kind of world lets stupid teenage kids decide to go to war?* He watches in silence as the last little bit of light disappears from the wall. Outside, western clouds drape the horizon in oranges and pinks—the sky he can see from the bed is perfect indigo, inviting, surreal blue—a sky you could fall into forever.

“She cried.” He whispered it softly so it was barely real. *I forgot my mom cried, not right away but later at night, alone. I found her in the kitchen. I wouldn't let her stop me. Now I can't even stop myself; there must have been sometime when I could have. I can't see—Christ, how many guys I knew are in France now, dead—it's all fucked up.*

“I love you.” Jake feels Kate's drowsy murmured words shoot down his spine. They hang in the silence and darkness. They beg for an answer.

“We should run away.” Jake doesn't have an answer. “Tomorrow we can check out and just walk away”—his soul screams out, *I Love You Too*—“away from all of this and just leave.” His voice builds a fragile web of fantasy—his mind weeps, struggles to believe. “I can get some clothes and you'll have to cut your hair. We can borrow your friend's MG—no, I'll buy it. We'll go off into the country and disappear. We can go to Wales, the way you talked about visiting there when you were a kid. We can find somewhere, a nook where no one will find us, learn to speak



Welsh . . . and just live. Somehow just find some way to exist alone, together; that's all we need. Just a chance to live—to just be alive somehow . . . ”

Outside, a squadron of Spitfires bank low over the darkened city. Rolls Royce Merlin engines drowning everything out in a moaning primeval roar claw at the sky.

“Well, you're a lucky little thing, aren't you? A good, brave girl.” The girl doesn't notice the nurse talking to her. She watches two doctors in the hall. She knows they're talking about her.

“No, no one knows her name. She hasn't said anything since she was brought in. Probably lost her whole family.”

“Fu—bloody, what next, can't trust the bleeding sky not to kill you.” He pauses, collects himself. “What do we call her?”

“I don't know.”

Kate feels the tears welling in her eyes again. She can see everything, the whole future Jake described, and wants to lose herself in it. She burns to really walk out the door and disappear. She can feel her legs walking free down the street and the wind rushing over the top of the car in the sun—that easy. She sees the strands holding it all together, all their pooled hope and every dream they have left. She wants to reach out and touch it—to make it real somehow—and knows as soon as she does that it will collapse. Against her will she speaks, softly: “What about my parents, my family still here, in this?”

“Maybe . . . ” his mind claws out for something, desperately trying to find a steady column. “I don't know; maybe they could follow us, or get out themselves somehow . . . ”

“I can't. I won't leave them alone here in this—oh I want to go, anywhere with you, anywhere to get out.” She sobs. She clings to him, imagines that she feels him hardening against her, resenting her. “I'm sorry; I know, I can't.” She chokes on her words. “I'm sorry.”

Jake lays still. He doesn't say anything, feels it collapse, his whole fantastic fragile almost-real dream. He almost expects to hear the tinkle of infinitesimal crystal pieces falling around them. Reality floods in again, and he knows instantly: it's easy to talk about disappearing, but invisibility is empty. He wraps his arms tight around Kate, wants to hold her warm and close to him, to just be her shield from the world—that would be enough. He embraces her desperately, holding the one sure, sane,



beautiful thing he can imagine left in the world. Kate cries against his chest. A tear rolls down Jake's face, finding its way to the damp crevice where his cheek meets the pillow. They don't want to sleep.

The morning is hazy, sunlight leaking through gauzy clouds making diffuse shadows on the street. There is no clarity in the atmosphere. The air is not quite warm; chilly breezes undercut the sun. The city seems desolate and unsheltered. Gray stones of buildings loom over Jake and Kate as he promises to write her, to come back. All of it seems lost in the daylight, flickered away by a puff of wind or the rush of a car. In a few days he will get seasick riding a boat to France. From there he will have to walk to Germany. He will kill; he will never be the same.

Kate gets only one letter. After the war she marries an RAF pilot twelve years her senior who will always walk with a limp from the day shrapnel from a Messerschmitt's cannon shattered his kneecap. They love each other deeply, two broken pieces from different puzzles that fit together. They adopt a quiet orphan girl whose innocent-knowing eyes remind her of someone she once knew, and live in the country, near Wales.

—*Sean Bachman*



Anton Green  
*Art South*

2004, photograph, 6 inches x 4 inches



Andrew Moeller  
*Life's Not a Race*

2004, oil on canvas, 36 inches x 48 inches





Andrew Moeller  
*Freeze Time*

2004, oil on canvas, 36 inches x 24 inches



Heidi Hernandez  
*Alister*

2004, oil on canvas, 18 inches x 24 inches

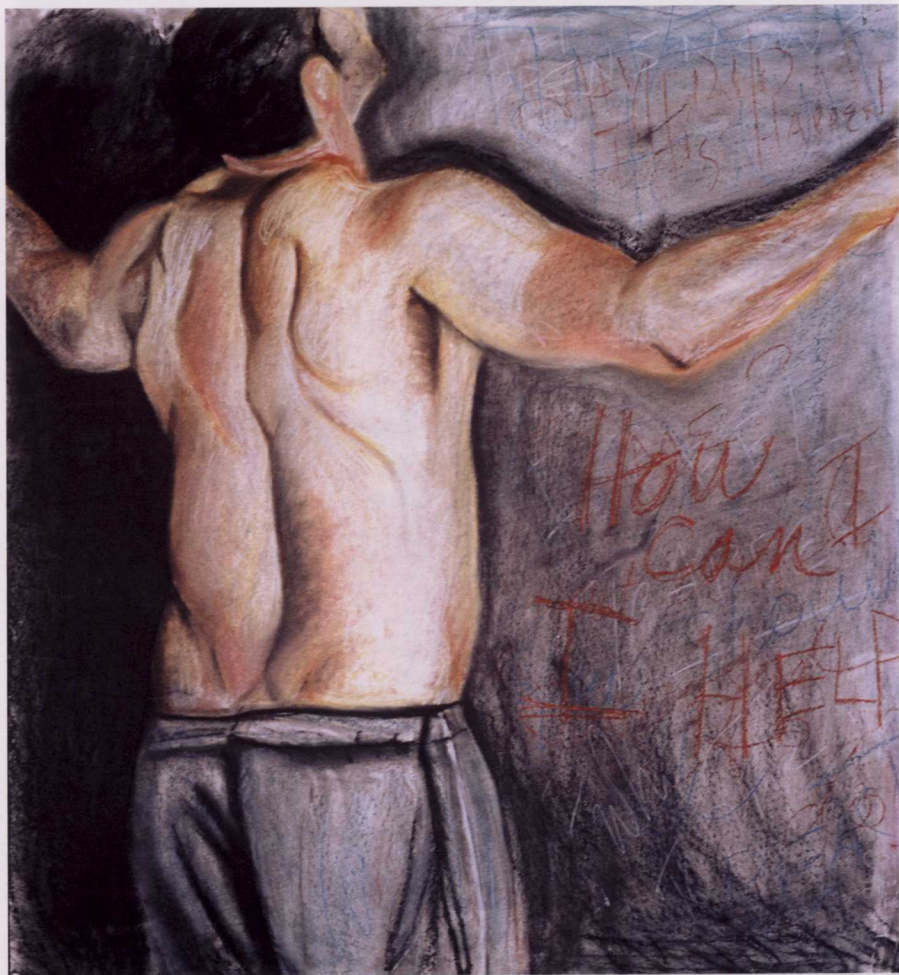




Suzanne Michele Chouteau '83  
*Genocide of the Conscience: Rwanda 1994*

2004, woodcut, 16 inches x 22 inches





Jayne Lunz  
*Now What?*

2004, charcoal and pastel on paper, 42 inches x 47 inches



Gretchen Stabile  
*Regret*

2004, oil on canvas, 48 inches x 54 inches





Kristin Quinn  
*Attractors for a Coupled Pendulum*

2004, oil on canvas, 72 inches x 60 inches





Kristin Quinn  
*Bemsha Swing*

2004, oil on canvas, 60 inches x 48 inches



Michael H. Ferris '62

*Pasture Training Wheels for Three Offspring*

2004, watercolor, 22 inches x 17 1/2 inches





Rick Mendoza  
*Canoas*

2005, oil on canvas, 24 inches x 18 inches





Leslie Bell '72  
*Pre-Party Energy*

2005, oil on canvas, 30 inches x 36 inches



Leslie Bell '72  
*Ghost Child*

2004, oil on canvas, 30 inches x 36 inches

*Thanks for the information. We'll contact you.*



Jen Krambeck  
*The Gates*

2004, photograph, 45 inches x 34 inches





John Schmits '57  
*The Wizard of Oz*

1992, watercolor, 20 1/2 inches x 16 inches

*Thanks for the memories. We'll miss you.*

## smoke signals

everyone seemed  
to get the joke

but me  
I was lost  
somewhere  
in the hazy tendrils  
of smoke

signals  
tell me where  
I am going

crazy  
plans never fall  
through

the cracks  
in the wall  
let me peer  
into dreams  
of another

blurred reality  
lets me throw  
caution  
to the fire

escape  
the extraordinary  
and listen  
to my heart  
beat.

—*Rebecca Butterworth*

Sisters, shield your eyes  
from the dangerous rays  
spiraling down at us  
twisting around our wrists  
trying to restrain us  
with their ugly knots.  
We know they are there  
warping our bodies  
claiming to beautify us  
as they paint our lovely faces  
starve our hungry bodies  
restrict our intelligent minds.  
Blinding us, there is no truth,  
just an image bringing us down,  
stripping us of our uniqueness,  
self-pride, our womanhood.  
Stare not at the rays,  
but look through them  
to our own glistening selves.

—*Ashley Johnson*



## Broken

The intricacy your shattered self  
Creates  
Weaving a tapestry of majesty  
Amazes me.  
Noble and frail  
Shards on the floor  
Twinkle and snuffle looking  
“straight” and hard.  
Why my allure to you now?  
Scattered in pieces  
Cool, smooth, and tattered,  
I’d be a fool to discard you.  
But I can’t use glue  
To repair the harm done here.  
Sad, there’ll be  
No more flowers  
To flourish in your neck.  
Look at how delicate you lie  
In my palm glistening  
So solemnly,  
Like the water I filled you with when  
Christening my daisies.  
Those memories are hazy, and  
My mind is too lazy to go back.  
It’s the will I lack.  
I’ll scoop up  
Your precious pieces,  
Put you in an envelope,  
And hope you create  
Your own sub-species  
Of unfortunate Beauty.

—Claire Richards

## Middle High German Dawn Song

“Owe, sol aber mir iemer me  
geliuchten dur die nacht  
noch wizer danne ein sne  
ir lip vil wol geslacht?  
der trouc die ougen min.  
ich wande, ez solde sin  
des liechten manen schin  
do taget ez.”

“Owe, sol aber er iemer me  
den morgen hie betagen?  
als uns diu naht enge,  
daz wie niht durfen klagen:  
'owe, nu ist ez tac,'  
als er mit klage pflac,  
do er jungest bi mir lac.  
do taget ez.”

“Owe, si kuste ane zal  
in deme slafe mich,  
do fielen hin ze tal  
ir trene nidersich,  
jedoch getroste ich sie,  
daz si ir weinen lie  
und mich al umbefie  
do taget ez.”

“Owe, daz er so dicke sich  
bi mir ersehen hat!  
als er endachte mich,  
so wolte er sunder wat  
mich armen schouwen bloz.  
ez was ein wunder groz  
daz in des nie verdroz.  
do taget ez.”

—*Heinrich von Morungen (late 12<sup>th</sup> century)*

“Oh woe! Will never more  
her wondrous body  
gleam all night  
whiter still than snow?  
My eyes were fooled.  
I thought it was  
the shining moon.  
Then day broke.”

“Oh woe! Will never more  
he stay to greet the dawn?  
That we need not lament  
when night slips from us:  
‘Oh woe! Now is it day,’  
as he cried  
the last time by my side.  
Then day broke.”

“Oh woe! In sleep she kissed me  
countless times.  
And then the tears  
streamed down her cheeks.  
But I consoled her  
till she left off weeping  
and embraced me fully.  
Then day broke.”

“Oh woe! That he should lose himself  
in gazing long at me!  
He drew the cover back  
to see my arms  
unclothed, all bare.  
It was a wonder  
he never tired of it.  
Then day broke.”

—*Translation: Nancy Hayes*



## The Yellow Leaf

"That time of year." Again.

I sit perched on the end  
of an examination table,  
a skin bag wrapped in white paper,  
waiting for the knock.

My hands grip opposite forearms,  
pressing together the front panels of the paper jacket  
and keeping a stiff square of cellulose  
from slipping off my lap.

I stare at the poster on the door  
of two women, one before and one after "the change."  
She's going to ask me how I am.

Well? I am sagging—a little, settling, drying out,  
falling gently "into the sere" ever so slowly,  
the process imperceptible as the setting moon's motion.  
I'm getting cold. The time seems long.

"Thou mayst in me behold."

Make it count. Let me count:  
all my loves: husband, daughters, son;  
parents—two sets; siblings, nieces, nephew;  
friends, their children; my students, my school.  
The dogs. Shakespeare. Herbert. Lyrics.  
Mozart, Schubert, Me and Bobby McGee.  
Fra Angelico, Perugino, Vermeer.  
Hockey. The Mississippi, sweet corn, lox . . .

Knock! "Okay, Peggy."

"How are you?"

—Nancy Hayes

## Name Your Poison

Yes, Terence, that was stupid stuff.  
You knew it, yet you wrote it rough,  
So what avails a simple lad  
Who loves the good but sees the bad?  
He isn't steeled by phrases bleak,  
They simply snatch him in their beaks.  
They swoop to drop him in the muck  
And drag him through it, worse the luck.  
If he puts on a clean white shirt  
He still does feel the grit of dirt  
And rather than confront his fate  
Not to justify God's gate  
But just to firm his crippled back  
To go again and stay the track  
He must look to that Persian shah  
And heed the ancient secret saw  
To take life's poison, drop by drop,  
Foil your foes and never stop,  
To bear the ills as they would come  
Until at last the soul grows numb.  
Mithridates, he was smart—  
He put the horse before the cart  
And gained an everlasting fame  
By taking evil as it came.  
Mithridates led a life  
Long in years and full of strife  
His enemies found death and cold,  
But Mithridates, he died old.  
He was staunch, and crafty too,  
Mithridates, here's to you!

—Ralph G. Smith '47

## Aunt Jean's Poem

The world was dark and painful,  
The waters churned below.  
She missed the place she came from  
Not so long ago.

Things seemed to be against her;  
She felt her life was done,  
And walking toward the edge, she feared  
She was the only one.

At the edge she peered straight down,  
Alone and scared to try,  
But chance was great enough for her  
That she might jump and fly.

She gathered up her thoughts and strength,  
Cast fears down to the sea,  
Pushed up off of the precipice  
And finally was free.

—Jackie Wristen '04



## A Morning Prayer

The walls you've erected  
Stand monumental and head-short.  
They wrap and wrap

Until I am a clingstone  
With knees red and pulpy,  
Two purple-nosed sacrileges.

Here the air is a mask of old menses,  
Jarring, like the slap of a dogwood.  
It mocks, rather than pardons, until

My cheeks are ripe plums,  
And lie stagnant.  
A blunt stain of rouge.

This morning plea turns my words  
Into bumpy polyps, uncouth and alien.  
A solid charge, you'd rather see my

My mouth tight over a goad.  
A goad that prods me  
Like dumb-nosed cattle.

With the thread of a navel, crude and green  
I am fastened to these walls.  
Again, and no longer

Living in sin, in white hair.  
Thin-lipped, I am no wiser than a vestal,  
Blander than a holy wafer.

—Carrie Chesney '02

## Current Events

### Chaper 1 from "Straight Shot"

I had just opened Ernie's Tap Room for business when Willie Garrity walked through and nodded to me as he passed. There was no need to turn around as I could watch him in the mirror. He sat on the bar stool he used every day at this time since I started tending bar here.

"Jacky, my boy," Willie said, looking at my reflection. "Know what day it is?"

I knew, for I had read in the paper that on May 6<sup>th</sup> not only did Roger Bannister break the four-minute mile and the Mormons renounce polygamy, but Orson Wells was born and Henry David Thoreau died. This was one of Willie's morning routines, seeing how much I kept up with the news. I played along. "I don't know, Willie. Sunday?"

Willie smiled and rubbed at least two days worth of beard. "I thought you'd know this, Jacky. Aren't you the shrink here?"

"I try not to be."

"It's Sigmund Freud's birthday," he said as he slapped the bar. "This calls for a drink."

I poured an ounce and a half of our cheapest bourbon into a tumbler, knowing he'd be unable to keep a shot glass steady long enough to get it to his mouth. I set a glass of water beside the tumbler so he could cut the taste after his ordeal was over.

He looked up. "You have one with me, Jacky?"

I warmed my coffee. "After last night I promised myself to stay dry for awhile."

"Those promises can only be broken. I know, Jacky."

Willie held the tumbler in both hands and lifted it to his lips. I looked away, pretending to be more interested in arranging the bottles in their correct order. In the mirror I watched his difficulty holding the glass steady enough to drink.

The smell of cheap bourbon didn't do much for the headache pinching my temples. I found the aspirins, ate two, and convinced myself I felt like working. I had no choice. Besides all the mugs unwashed from last night, glass littered the ground like a broken windshield at a car wreck. I picked up a piece and discovered it came from what used to be a sweet and sour bottle. That explained the flypaper floor. If this weren't enough, I had juices to make, three coolers to stock, a floor to mop, an order to place, windows to wash, and customers to serve.

After the shot steadied Willie's nerves, I asked, "Where's your buddy this morning?"

"He stopped to read the paper for some reason. He took it right



out of my hands.”

“It’s not like him to let you out of his sight.”

“Oh, he’s coming. Charlie’s not missing work today.”

I liked Willie. He’d been decent to me and never once asked me about my left eye. The black patch I wore made people curious, but only the thoughtful ones didn’t ask about it. Even his interest in Freud’s birthday pleased me. Willie hacked a cough, and I looked at him again in the mirror. His body shook as he cleared his chest. I went to the back room for more bourbon.

When the street noise grew louder I knew the front door had just opened. I even had a good idea who had entered. Then I heard Willie’s voice confirming my guess.

“Late to the office, Charlie. Come over and tell me about it. Hey, know what day it is?”

I came out of the storage room and nodded to Charles Jones. He shuffled down the bar to his usual spot beside Willie. These two were friends and shared a bond deeper than being only drinking buddies. But I couldn’t figure out their friendship. Sure, there was the appeal of opposites. Where Willie was friendly and outgoing, Charles was withdrawn and sullen. Where Willie was buying drinks and listening to others, Charles was selfish. I sensed a bitterness in Charles that didn’t exist in Willie. To the degree that I enjoyed Willie, Charles occupied for me the other end of the likeability spectrum.

I waited until Charles positioned himself beside Willie and pointed to a spot in front of him. That was my cue that he was ready for a shot. I obliged.

With the exception of not caring for Willie’s choice of company, I had little to complain about. I had no job pressure, no one I had to please. No boss hovered over me to criticize what I did or didn’t do. Barlow, the owner, never made Ernie’s one of his after-work stops. All he wanted from us was a certain degree of honesty, to remain as sober as we could at work, to call the police when there was trouble, and above all else to not bother him except in the case of robbery, arson, or murder. In the time I’d been here I never called him. Trudy, the manager, wasn’t so fortunate. She last called after a drunk stumbled into the men’s room and never returned. She found the guy with his pants down and a knife in his gut. My stories were not as colorful.

As the rumor went, Barlow had inherited Ernie’s after his younger brother fell asleep at the wheel and flipped his MG. Trudy said he didn’t



suffer long. The kid brother thought he could make his fortune in undervalued real estate, but word had it that his conservative pinstriped older brother didn't share the same optimism. We suspected Barlow would unload the place as soon as he found a buyer. So far no buyer had come forward.

I went to the back room for a broom and mop bucket. When I returned, Willie waved me over. "Jacky, I've got a joke for you."

I leaned on my hands in front of the pair. "If I haven't heard it the next round's on me."

Willie lifted his tumbler high in appreciation. "You tell it, Charlie. Your deadpan style's perfect for this joke." Charles sat stone-faced with the glass between his hands. Willie said, "Go on, I know Jacky here will like it. Won't you, Jacky?"

I nodded, despite having no interest in hearing a joke I doubted his humorless friend could tell.

Charlie whispered, "It's not that good."

"Sure it is. Go on, we got Jacky on the edge of his seat."

"I don't want to."

"Ah, Charlie, let's get Jacky laughing this morning."

"If it's so goddamn good," Charles snapped, "you tell him. It's your joke."

I stepped away from the bar. Willie tried a teasing finger poke in Charles's ribs. "Ah, come on now, Charlie. It's a joke we're talking about." Charles brushed away the finger and pointed to his empty glass. Willie squared himself to the bar and said, "I'll take one too."

I did my duty. Their pattern was to have their shots first, followed by tap beer until I left work. After that, I didn't know what they did. But for now they were quiet, and I returned to mopping behind the bar.

When finished, I rolled the mop bucket to the back and returned pushing a two-wheeler with four cases of beer. The pair sat together like strangers.

"You got a paper back there, Jacky?" Willie asked.

"I thought you'd read it."

"Charlie grabbed it away from me before I could do it justice. I got time now."

I went to the curb for a *Rocky Mountain News*, and came back in time to see Charles pointing at his empty glass. Willie gave me a thumbs up as well. I poured their beers, and looked over the front page. The big news was an airplane crash in Guatemala. The rest was devoted to politics and the November elections.

"Anything in there worth knowing, Jacky?" Willie asked.

I handed him the paper. "You know, tragedies and politics."

"That's why I like the news. It's enough to make you drink."

Willie peeked over the paper. "Did you see this headline? 'Five dollar bet leads to fatal fire.'"

"A good reason not to let you guys wager around here. Especially on the Broncos."

"It happened at a bar, Jacky. In Fort Collins."

"Let me see." He turned the paper so we both could read it.

Charles nursed his beer.

Willie said, "She just took her lighter and started it. Imagine betting the Irish flag wouldn't burn. Killed two guys, too." He folded the paper in disgust. "They shouldn't have left those flags stay up so long. Saint Patrick's was two months ago."

"Willie, it says it happened at Flanagan's. Why wouldn't they leave them up in an Irish bar?"

"Still." Willie turned to Charles. "What do you think, Charlie?"

That bar had no business tempting decent folk like that. They were practically inviting people to burn the place down." He winked at me and waited for Charlie to react. He didn't. "You can turn on the TV. Even that's better than this conversation."

"News okay? It's just talk shows."

Willie undid his top button and nodded. "There may be more on that plane crash. Say, Jacky, you're a traveling man. Ever been to Guatemala?"

"No, Willie. Maybe I'll go next week."

"Yeah, next week. Just don't go until after your shift. We'd miss you. And don't fly on that outfit that just went down."

The TV took awhile to warm up, but it came to life in time for us to hear a local news anchor previewing the next story. He intrigued us by saying they were going live to the Western slope where a local official would soon be announcing his candidacy for the United States Senate.

Willie opened the paper. "It must be Owen Knight they're talking about. Says right here he's going to run. I know how much you like politics, Charlie." Willie winked to let me in on his joke. "I bet it was reading about that senate race that made you late today."

The commercial ended, and the reporter announced they were going live.

Instead of smiling, Charles pointed to his glass.

Willie said, "Might as well turn it off, Jacky. I don't mind politics,



but I'm not interested in politicians. The whole lot disgusts me. Cheaters and liars, that's what they are. Cheaters and liars."

"You don't think Ralston's done a good job?"

Willie shook his head. "Retiring so he can now live off the money he's fleeced from us taxpayers. Besides, he wouldn't have been re-elected anyway. The man's gone off the deep end, I tell you. He even has second thoughts about the death penalty."

Given Charles's silence, Willie's indifference, and all I had to do, I started to turn the news off.

"Leave it alone," Charles said.

I did a double take. These were the first words out of Charles's mouth in the last half hour.

"Just turn it up, Jacky," Willie said, all excited. "We can hear about that politician after all. Maybe Charlie will say something else." He glanced sideways at his friend again, but Charles ignored him.

The commercial ended, and the reporter announced they were going live to Spring Canyon. Willie was right about it being Owen Knight. His face had become a fixture on the front page several months back as the Assistant District Attorney prosecuting a serial killer. Over the weeks we learned the twenty-eight-year-old drifter had combined his dislike for elderly widows with an interest in necrophilia.

I watched Owen Knight begin his speech. He had the square jaw and privileged demeanor of a professional golfer. The first time I saw him on the front page, I thought he looked like a politician. Maybe he thought so as well.

The beer cases I had wheeled out earlier still needed to be stocked. I undid the cardboard and began to fill the coolers. Over my shoulder I heard Owen Knight say, "... in the midst of a great decay, where those who create are expected to provide for those who don't." I heard applause as I undid the next case.

"... laws restrict the honest while the guilty go free from technicalities." More applause. I took the two-wheeler back, and returned in time to hear, "... our homes and streets will be safe only when justice is again united with consequences." More applause. I looked up and saw him give the audience a smile that seemed both youthful in its innocence and manlike in its sincerity. His was a face one could trust. I found the window cleaner and paper towels and went to the front door.

"... regulations restrict potential; freedom unleashes it," Knight said. "... needs are best satisfied at the local level where citizens can look



after their own. The farther away regulations are made, the more onerous those regulations become."

I finished the door and started on the window.

"... time has come for government to take its hands out of the pockets of the entrepreneurs and get off the backs of the hard-working men and women of our great land."

The windows looked good enough for me and, I was sure, good enough to my customers. I went to the bar in time to hear Knight conclude with "... to make things right again for the good people of this state, I ask for God's guidance and your support."

A frenzy of applause followed. Red, white, and blue banners reading Knight for Washington went up behind him. Owen glanced to the side and waved someone over. His wave became more pronounced, and he clapped his encouragement to whoever stood in the wings.

Owen returned to the microphone. "My wife's a little nervous. The love of my life needs more than just my strength and support to face the difficult work ahead. Grace needs yours as well. It won't be easy turning this country around. Will you help us?" The applause increased. Owen stepped away from the podium and held out his hands. A moment later Grace walked into view and into his open arms. She kissed him on the cheek before turning to the cameras. The couple wrapped arms around each other and smiled. The audience went wild.

Something must have made Charles ill, for when I turned back to ask whether they'd seen enough, his face looked the color of cream cheese. Willie was too busy making wisecracks about politicians to notice.

"Damn right, Jacky. Turn the son-of-a-bitch off. Mr. Assistant District Attorney, my ass." Mr. Pasty Face didn't offer an opinion, so I reached to shut it off. Before I could flick the switch, I heard the sound of glass breaking. When I looked back, Charles's drink was nowhere to be found, but the wall beside him looked wet. Even Willie couldn't make a joke about it.

I didn't appreciate having more work to do. "What's the matter with him?" I asked. Charles rubbed his hands as if trying to remove the skin. "Maybe it's time to get him out of here."

"Charlie's just worked up, that's all. All this political talk, you know. Isn't that right, Charlie? Tell Jacky it was an accident. We'll clean up that spill, won't we?" Willie put his hand on his friend's shoulder; Charles continued his hand massage.

I looked away and thought, Why now, Charles? Why this moment?

When I turned back and saw how far over his head hung and the sag in his shoulders, I relented. I needed two or three good-sized breaths before I said to him as gentle as I could, "You seem angry. What's going on?"

His hands stopped, and he looked at me with such contempt, I backed away. "Go to hell," he said. "Just go to hell."

He stood and asked Willie for his change. Willie dug into his pea-green double knits and pulled out what he had. "Take this, Charlie. It's okay. I'll clean up the spill." He took the money without a word of thanks and went to the pay phone.

"Broom's in the back, Jacky?" Willie asked, watching his friend.

Charles, working the pay phone, turned away when he saw us staring at him.

"Forget the glass, Willie. If he's no better after the call, take him outside for a walk. Try to get him to talk."

I retrieved the bucket and broom, and cleaned up the floor. Charles remained on the phone. I returned the bucket, then started making orange juice while Willie watched the news.

Ten minutes later Charles came back. He didn't sit down but pointed instead to his spot on the bar. "Give me a shot," he said. I poured it for him. He drank it. Then he pointed again. He tossed that one down as well and asked for another.

I said, "Are you sure?"

His fist hit the bar and I complied. When that one was history, he said, "Another."

"As you wish."

He drank this one in two swallows, then said, "Again."

This time I said, "No."

There was a look in Charles's face I had never noticed before. Maybe it had never been there, or else I had just never looked. But this time it wasn't anger I saw, but sadness. He toyed with his empty shot glass, oblivious to us, oblivious even to being denied another drink. Charles appeared ready to have whatever was eating him come out. I knew the look. Then, without so much as a good-bye, Charles Jones pushed himself away from the bar and began a slow and careful walk towards the door.

"Where're you going?" Willie shouted, but Charles didn't stop to explain. The door opened and closed, and he headed north. Willie finished his beer. "Sorry, Jacky." He pointed to the empty glasses. "I'll pay you tomorrow. I really will." He watched Charles through the front window. He seemed torn in his obligations and in need of my permission.



“Go on, Willie. We’ll settle later.”

Willie was right: a promise not to drink is a promise made to be broken. I knew all there was to know about drunks, about the games they play, about the hurt they claim drives them to drink, and about how no one understands them. I knew the sincerity of their words and in their voices when claiming they were going to quit, always sometime the next day. But I believed they drank because they could find nothing better to do, and because they were good at it.

I drank because when the night comes, and I get my mind working about those things in my life that I wish had never happened, and the scar that was once my eye begins to itch, I find I can’t sit in the stillness of my room. I take walks through my neighborhood, down alleys, across parks, and without even realizing it, I find myself in a street-corner bar much like the one where I work. So it was not unusual I ended up in a one-time working-class bar turned laid-off-and-unemployed bar, drinking what was cheap and on tap.

From the rear booth, I watched the actors play their primitive and nightly rituals. There were the middle-aged women looking younger and better in the smoky light wearing tight slacks to hold in bodies soft from too many mixed drinks and corn chips. I saw strong-looking middle-aged men trading stories and one-upping each other just to make those gals smile. The younger men in turned-around ball caps and black heavy metal tees shot pool and talked sports or girls. They grew more animated and more interested in those women as the evening went deeper into the night.

On this night, in this bar, in a story buried on the evening news, I learned that the body of a man had been found in a lower downtown Dumpster. The sixty-six-year-old victim went by the name of Charles Jones but was known to his friends as Charlie. The police had a suspect in custody identified as William Emerson Garrity. Like Jones, the seventy-one-year-old Garrity lived at the Landers Hotel. The reporter on the scene said the police theorized that the murder was caused when the two fought over the bottle found broken near the Dumpster, where the accused slept.

This bit of news was followed by the first look at weather. Life, of course, went on, and so did I, out the bar and home. At last I found a reason not to finish a drink I had started.

—James O’Gorman



## Summertime Blues in Four Parts

### 1

Waking up that morning felt like jumping off a bridge in reverse. I looked down and saw my nakedness stretched over the couch like a long yawn, nakedness that screamed, especially in the middle area where the bulk of my rotgut hangover was. I couldn't tell for sure, for a second . . . for a second I was confused about things. Stuff swirled. I propped up my head and looked around the room. There were boxes everywhere, packed and taped, and I remembered she was going to graduate school, going to Peoria.

She was standing in the corner with her back to me, ironing. Her tan skin nearly matched the dimness of the window-blinded room, so it looked as though there was just a floating bra and undies: very sexy, very lacy, very good. I rubbed my eyes and looked some more.

She made sawing motions on the ironing board, and every time her elbow hinged and shoulder pivoted, her waist did a little twist and wrinkled up on the side. I watched for a while and then got up, put on my underwear, and sat back down on the couch. I propped my elbows on my knees, looked at the floor, almost started crying, thought about lighting a cigarette, then decided not to. She must have heard me. She stopped ironing and turned around. I flopped back down and acted like I was sleeping. I felt her steps and the smelled her perfume air.

Time went by like that.

Knowing she was past me, I opened my eyes and looked up. She walked over to the window and pulled the blinds. Standing in front of the window, blocking the light, she looked all black and vague—like an upright shadow—except for the little frizz hairs sticking away from her head; those were sunny. She walked toward me and sat on the couch. The sun—maniac, mid-morning, summertime sun—drilled my eyes and brain. I said, "Ouch."

She put her hand on my forehead and asked how I was feeling.

I rolled over, put my face in the back of the couch, and said, "I don't-know."

Dumb, drunk, midsummer reconciliation seemed like a good idea, had seemed like a good idea last night. At that point, with my face in the couch, I wasn't so sure.

She wrapped her arm around my waist and rubbed my stomach. I didn't like that very much. She said, "Roll over, silly."

"No."

"Roll over. Roll over."

I gripped the back of the couch and bit into the cushion. I said, "I don't want to. Let me sleep."

"I can't hear you. Quit talking into the couch. Roll over." She rocked my body and started tickling me.

I grabbed her hand, put it on my thigh, and pulled my face away from the couch. "I want to sleep. Let me sleep."

"I have to leave in a minute." She started tugging on me again. And then: "Do you want to stay here?"

I thought about it for a second and said, "No, no, probably not."  
"Well then, get up."

I rolled over and looked up at her. The frizz of her hair was still sunny, but she wasn't black anymore. She had a big banana-type, quarter-moon smile wrapped around her face, and she looked funny because she was all made up and done up but didn't have any clothes on. I stopped thinking about that and wondered off toward the ceiling for a second. She put her finger on my chin, ran it down my neck, over my chest, and down to my stomach. She pushed in, and I almost puked.

"Ooooh."

"Did you get drunk last night?"

The question wasn't funny or fair. She knew I had gotten drunk last night. I moved her finger away, grabbed her hand, put it on my chest, and put my hand on hers. I looked up at her and said, "I think that's between me and ..." My thoughts kind of floated away.

"Who were you with?"

Her smile was kind of going away. I took my hand off hers and rubbed my head. I smiled and said, "I-don't-think-that's-any-of-your-business . . . ma'am."

She said, "Okay," then got up and walked over to the ironing board where her big, fat, lazy cat was sitting, swooshing his candy-cane tail and winking at the sunny outside. She grabbed the cat and put him up by her shoulder; he propped his chin there and gave me a dirty look while she bounced him around. She put down the cat and started to iron again.

I watched her saw on the board, but only for a second. She propped the iron up, turned around, looked at me, and said, "Well then think about that the next time you call me at three in the morning for a ride."

She turned back around. The sawing started again. Iron steam hissed and sputtered. I watched her wiggle and twist. The room was hot. I got up and walked over to her. The walk took a while because there was a lot of pausing and hesitating. I even sat back down for a bit. Finally



getting over to her, I put my hands on her shoulders and tried to turn her around. She wouldn't turn, so without touching her, I ran my hands over the contours of her body, laughing, because it was an old trick. I said, "Jody." She didn't turn, but I saw her ears move back.

"What?"

I said, "Girl, you sound acoustic, and you shaped-up like a geeetar, so I was thinking maybe I could play on ya for a while, see what kinda music we can make."

She stopped ironing and turned around, laughing. She said, "You're stupid—"

"Could bury you in a geeetar case."

"God, you're dumb."

"Yeah, well—"

"You're nasty too. Put on some clothes."

I had forgotten I was mostly naked. I looked down at myself and didn't feel so nasty.

"Well, let's wait a minute." I paused and thought about my sick condition for a second, because it did feel like there was a dog licking the inside of my belly, and my head felt dry and staticy. I figured I might be able to forget about it for a while. I pulled her over to me by the underwear, which exposed her stuff and totally turned me on. "I was thinking—" I stopped my talking while trying to kiss her neck, stopped kissing, put my hand on the small part of her back, pulled my head away, looked at her, and smiled. "Maybe we could, ya know, get it on. Got time? Whadaya think?"

She stepped away and said, "No. I don't have time. I have to go."

I let go of her underwear and walked back over to the couch, where I sat down and rested for a while. Then I stood up and started grabbing my clothes. She bent over and pulled the iron plug out of the wall. I put on my pants and buttoned them. She walked to a closet and grabbed shoes. I put on my shirt. I started to search around for my shoes, found one behind a box, put it on, and then clunked over by Jody to grab the other one. I bent down and tied it. I stood up and looked at her just as she was climbing into a little yellow polka dot dress. She walked over to me, turned around, and asked, "Will you zip me?"

"I will."

I zipped up her dress and she turned around, smoothing the front and then the back area by her butt. She put her hands by her sides, stretched her fingers out, and asked, "How do I look?"



"Very good."

She stepped forward and hugged me. I hugged her back. She stepped back and looked at me. "I wasn't going to say anything," she said, "but I guess I will since I said I would."

"What?"

She looked sort of sad. "Do you still want to go?"

I paused for inventory: nothing. "Go where?"

"Nothing. Never mind."

She went to turn around. I put my hands on her waist. "Yeah, I still want to go."

"You don't even know what I'm talking about."

"Well, if you don't want me there, that's fine, but I was really looking forward to it."

And then she blurted, as fast as she could, sort of to remind me, sort of to hide something, it seemed, "My cousin's getting married. You said you wanted to go. If you don't want to, that's fine."

"Yeah, I still want to go."

"You don't have to."

"I want to."

"Well, I have to go now. I need to be there to help with some things. You don't have to come to the ceremony; you can just come to the reception if you want. It starts at five."

"Where is it?"

"She took a breath, looked at me, and went over to her purse. She pulled out a little white card, held it so I could see it, and said, "The directions on this side are for the church." She pointed. "The reception's at the country club, so use the directions on this side." She turned the card and pointed again. "You've been there right?"

I squinted and thought for a second. "Clinton?"

"Seriously, you don't have to go."

I started to laugh, then stopped on account of the licking in my belly. "I was just making sure. I'll be there."

She gave me the card with the directions. "Okay, come on. I'll give you a ride home."

I still thought my car was parked outside. I closed my eyes and thought for a second. "No, you go. I'll walk."

"No, come on. I'll take you."

"Really, I feel like walking. I need the exercise. It's not that far. If I get tired, I'll call somebody."

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah, go.”

“Okay, but it’s sort of far.”

“I’ll be fine.”

We walked outside together. I squinted after the sun burned my eyes, and everything looked black and orange. It was hot. Jody turned to the right, and I turned to the left. She didn’t say anything else, just honked, smiled, and waved as she drove by. I smiled and waved back.

We were going in the same direction, and there was a stop light close to her apartment. It was red. She stopped and turned on her blinker. I walked fast thinking maybe I could catch up, say something. I got close to her car, but the light turned green and she drove away.

I don’t know why I wanted to walk. I knew if I got in her car the leather seats would burn my back and thighs. Maybe that’s why. She would’ve probably wanted to talk about the wedding. I thought about her driving up to Clinton with the cruise control on, sitting with her legs crossed and chewing gum while the radio played and she sang as loud as she could.

## 2

Jody lived in Rock Island. I lived in Davenport, right across the river. She lived right by the bridge, so all I had to do was walk down 2<sup>nd</sup> St. for a bit and then take a left on 15<sup>th</sup> Ave. The left turned me straight toward Iowa. I walked. Before too long I was on the bridge—big, Centennial Bridge—traversing the space between Iowa and Illinois in long arches of gray-rust steel. I liked the Centennial Bridge because sometimes in the dark, when the arches are all lit up, from a distance, it looks like huge McDonald’s signs crossing over the Mississippi. Centennial Bridge. I was walking and looking around.

The river was low and drying in the hot July sun. It was smelly too, like rusted pop cans and upside-down fish, a smell that mingled and concocted itself down low, from the sandy banks out to the middle of the river, and breezed its way out through the valley. The sun glinted on buoys as they tilted and swayed in the channel, and boats zoomed up and down leaving behind a trail of chopped-up water. River gulls spiraled around in the breeze, tipping their wings toward the sun.

Getting about to the middle of the bridge, I looked forward and saw a scary thing. Without knowing, without paying attention, I’d walked up very close to a guy and a little girl.



That wasn't scary. The thing that scared me was that he was carrying her on his shoulders. He was a freak for sure—maybe drunk—and I didn't like the bummy way he looked: dusty old shoes and jeans hanging off his ass. Get a haircut, bum. I thought about punching him in the middle of the back but was worried he might drop the girl. I felt sorry for her. But then I heard him talking, telling this story about the way hobos eat soup out of their shoes: weirdly, some same story my mom used to tell me when I was a kid. So I thought she might not have it so bad. I stayed close, close enough to hear, and didn't pass. I was wondering where they were going and why they were on the bridge. I wanted to say something but didn't want to interrupt the story on account of the fact that she was totally into it. She kept saying things like "Notahh dad; they don't really do that." And he would tilt up his head at her and say, "Yes they do." And she had this huge box of candy; it almost looked like she was literally struggling to hang onto it. And her hands were all red, and she was chewing and smiling, and the wind was blowing her little hair, with the sun making it look like the river water all shimmering and flapping her scalp. I decided to pass them. I walked by and looked up at the girl. She was perched up high trying to hold her candy and grip her dad's ears at the same time, surveying everything with a self-important type of kid loftiness. She looked down at me and smiled. I looked at the dad and hated him for being a bum but guessed he wasn't so bad because of the candy and the story. I didn't say anything, just looked up at the girl one more time, watched her smile, and walked on.

3

The walking was good. I lost some of my hangover and started to get hungry. I walked all the way up Gaines St., sometimes catching my reflection in car windows as they flashed by in the rush, hoping to see one of my friends, but I didn't. At the top of the Gaines St. hill, all the way at the top, sweating much by then, my shirt looking like see-through greasy napkins and my legs aching, wishing I'd let Jody give me a ride, I turned left on to shady 14<sup>th</sup> St. I figured I'd go to Fat Boy's Pizza, my old place of work, to see my friends and get free food. Fourteenth Street was full of trees on both sides. A breeze rushed through their summer leaves and made sounds like rain on rooftops. It was shady and cool. I stared at the ground and walked.

The only person at Fat Boy's was my friend with the pouty lips, Sexy Charlie. Every girl in the world wanted to have sex with him, and



some of the guys too. He was sitting behind the counter, watching TV, hunched over with his arms Indian-style and his face in the crook of his elbow. Walking into Fat Boy's was like walking into a heat register. Charlie looked up, grinning. "Where you comin' from?"

I sat down and said, "Rock Island."

"Wad you do, walk?" Then there was a long, dramatic, Charlie pause like he was waiting for the air to explode. He reached across the counter, shoved me, and said, "You dirty bastard."

"What?" I turned away.

He started to giggle. Then: "What were you doin' in Rock Island?"

I turned back and looked at him. "Nothing."

"Ha ha ha. I know what you were doin' over there, you dirty bastard."

"I'm not in the mood Charlie—very hungry—why don't you make me a pizza."

"What were you doin' in Rock Island?"

"None ya. Make me a pizza."

"Make it yourself." Then he heaved like a tired dog, put his face back in his elbow, and stared at the TV.

I knew how to make pizza. I walked behind the counter and went to the make table. I looked around. I turned around and looked at Charlie, seeing his backbone, arched and ridging out of his sweaty shirt. "Where's the dough?"

Without turning around, he said, "In the walk-in."

I walked to the back of the store and went into the cooler. I looked over and saw the cases of beer stacked and keeping cool for the bar next door. I grabbed a bottle and a ball of dough, then sat down to cool off before going back out by the oven.

I went back out and over to the make table. I started to stretch the dough, and Charlie turned around. I threw the dough up in the air and caught it. "Jen came in here lookin' for you last night."

I threw the dough up again, caught it, put it down, grabbed my lighter from my pocket, used it to open my beer, took and drink, and said, "Oh yeah?"

"Yeah." He turned back around.

"What did she say?"

"She looked pissed."

"What did she say?"

Charlie turned around and started to laugh. I tossed the dough again. Then he said, "I told her, I said, 'Look, I don't know you, you don't know me, but we know people. See what I'm sayin'? Pete's at where he's at and he'll be where the fuck he be.' Ha ha ha."

"You're a goddamn moron."

I put some sauce on the stretched dough.

He stopped laughing and said, "I didn't tell that bitch shit. She asked me a few questions and left."

I stopped saucing and looked up. "What kind of questions?"

"Nothin' really. She just wanted to know if I'd seen you." He paused and smiled at me again. "Did you guys break up?"

"We were never really going out." I started to laugh, stopped everything I was doing, and ran over to punch Charlie in the side. He spun around and I jumped back. I put up my first. "I gave her breath back, told her to beat it."

Charlie rubbed his side while I danced around like a boxer. He said, "You ain't that cool." And then he turned back around.

I put down my first and went back over to the make table. I made my pizza and put it in the oven. I went back around the counter, took another drink, set the beer down, and looked back over at Charlie. He had his face buried back down in the crook of his arm. Then he picked up the remote, turned the TV off, walked over to the radio, turned it on, and started to rap. He walked to the back of the store by the oven. While checking my pizza, he looked at me. "That beer's gonna be two dollars."

I took another drink and lit a cigarette. While wiping my mouth I said, "Fuck you."

"Fuck you. Duffy's been bitchin' to Wood about comin' up short on everything."

"You go on ahead tell Duffy to kiss my ass."

"You tell 'im. I ain't tellin' 'im shit."

I spun around in my chair and looked outside. Charlie rapped for a while and then stopped.

Fat Boy's was on the corner of 17<sup>th</sup> and Washington. Seventeenth and Washington was getting to be a real run-down part of town. Some Indian gas station owners had moved in across the street. One of them was retarded. Charlie called him pootard. Sometimes he'd come outside in the morning with a muscle shirt on and baggy boxers. He'd sit on porch steps, and his big scrotum would hang out of the side of his shorts. Charlie liked it.



Cars went by going this way and that, flashing sunlight from their windows, sometimes catching plastic bags in their draft, making them sky rocket into the air and then glide back down to the curb.

I got up and propped open the door. While flicking my cigarette, I looked across the street and saw Ricci, who owned and operated the stripper-clothes store across the street, getting into her truck. She was an ex-stripper and still pretty hot. She had on a pair of sexy shorts.

I sat back down and asked Charlie where everybody was.

“Andy and Justin are next door.”

I finished my beer and told Charlie to bag my pizza when it was done. I figured I'd go next door for a minute and have another beer before going home. Just as I was getting up, Andy and Justin walked in. Andy looked at me with his typical and stupefied Andy look. He said, “You look like shit.”

Andy is my brother. He's a bit chunky. When we were kids, he had to wear husky jeans. “Where'd you go last night?”

I said, “None of your business.” And figured since no one was next door, I'd go outside and sit on the front steps while waiting for my pizza. I went back and grabbed another beer. Charlie said something, but I wasn't paying attention. While I was opening the door to go outside, Andy kicked me in the back of the leg.

“Where're you goin'?”

I didn't say anything. I walked out to the steps and sat down. A couple of young kids came by on skateboards and I heard Andy yell, “Hey stupid” at one of them. They both looked in the store and then looked away. Andy laughed. I watched them go down the street. They turned into an alley, picked up their boards, and walked out of sight. More cars came by and more bags swirled around. I lit a cigarette and drank my beer. All the walking and the beer had gotten rid of most of my hangover. I felt pretty okay.

Andy came out and stood on the steps. Justin was behind him, and then Charlie came walking out. Andy told me to scoot over. I did, and he sat down. Charlie and Justin walked around us and stood on the sidewalk. We all watched the cars go by. The sun was roaring, beating down on the street and the curbs. I felt sweat collecting in the roll of my stomach skin. Andy said, “Woo, goddamn; it's hot.” A bird flew by and swooped down, perching on a stop sign. It sat there until a car drove by and scared it. Between all of us, things were quiet. I was thinking about Jody and some other things that I didn't feel like discussing. Then



Charlie looked at me with his squinted eyes. "Whada you gonna do tonight?"

"Probably nothing."

I looked over at the four-way stop and saw this gray Bronco cut across the street and pull up to the curb. The guy in the driver seat rolled down the window and stuck out his head. He looked up and down Washington Street, then at all of us. He smiled, didn't say anything for a second, and then asked, "What's up, guys?"

Nobody said anything, and the guy looked up and down the street again. Then in a low voice he asked, "Is anybody holdin'?"

Personally, I didn't think people said that type of shit. I thought about going back in the store, but then my brother put his hands on his thighs and stood up. I watched the guy in the car watch Andy stand. Then I looked up at Andy just as he was putting his hands on his pecker, shaking it. The guy in the car seemed confused until Andy said, "Hold this." Everybody laughed and watched the car roll down the street. Then things calmed down and we all stood there, kind of swaying in the wavy heat, watching cars go by and listening to the summer sounds.

4

It was afternoon before I got back home. I'd waited for Charlie to get off work and had him take me to get my car. Walking up to the door, I noticed my air conditioner was on. It was hum humming and dripping water on the grass. I was happy about that. I went inside and sat in my chair. My crazy cat was sitting on the windowsill. He was truculent and loopy, robbed trash cans in the summer nights, yowling. And he made love to all the girl cats in the neighborhood. His name was Thompson.

I lit a cigarette, stared at the wall, and worked myself into the way the room felt.

One night, the summer before my senior year in college, Jody and I were having sex in her car on some gravel road outside her hometown. It was nice. We clammed up, sweaty, first sticking to each other and then things got hot and our bodies slid. She said sex things, and I did too. Then she got real still and stared at the road through the back window. She crouched down low and said, "Close your eyes. Close your eyes." I was confused, didn't know what to do, so I shut my eyes until I heard the car pass. When I opened my eyes, Jody was staring at me. I thought for a second and asked, "Why'd you have me close my eyes?"

She said, "It could've been a cop; they could've seen us." I paused and then started to laugh. I said, "We're not deer, goofball." Then she put her arms around me and said, "Well, they could've seen us anyway."

When we finished having sex, she stayed on top of me, staring through the darkness past clumps of hair. Everything outside was quiet and the moon made the fog windows glow like milk. We breathed on each other and stared for a long time. Then she gulped and put her nose on mine. She said, "I don't want to break up." I said, "I don't either."

I broke up with Jody not too long after that, on account of the fact that I wanted to run the streets and get drunk. She tried to work things out, even came over and slept with me on nights when I'd call her late and tell her that I was lonesome and still loved her. But I ended up doing some pretty low-down things. Eventually she stopped taking my calls.

I was sort of confused about the previous night.

I had about an hour before I needed to get ready. I didn't know what to do. I wandered around my house for a while and then grabbed a book and turned on the radio. I sat back down and started to read. I don't know how long I read, because my chair was comfortable and the house was drowsy and cool. I must have fallen asleep. The next thing I remember was Thompson standing on my lap and pressing his paws into my crotch.

I opened my eyes. It was dark outside. I jumped up and looked over at the clock. It was nine. The drive to Clinton took forty minutes. In a hurry, I could still make it and come up with an excuse for being late. I grabbed some clothes and went to the shower. My phone rang. I looked at the caller I.D., saw it wasn't Jody, and answered.

I crunched the phone between my shoulder and ear and said "Hello" while walking back into the bathroom. It was Charlie.

"Hey dude."

"Yeah."

"Mike's up here flippin' out."

"What?"

"I don't know; your brother's goin' crazy; he's pickin' fights with old people and shit."

"Charlie, seriously, I don't really care too much. I gotta—"

"No, he was up here with Jen . . ."

Mike, my oldest brother, and Jen had a sort of a romance a few years ago. I never found out why they broke up. I didn't really care.



“ . . . and he kept saying your name real loud, and then I heard Jen say, ‘No, no, Mike don’t,’ and he was saying, ‘Fuck it. Fuck it,’ and then he got up and left. He’s been up here drinkin’ all night.”

“When did he leave?”

“I don’t know . . . a couple a minutes ago.”

“All right, thanks.”

“He’s fucked up.”

“All right.”

I hung up the phone. I put on some cologne and got dressed. I still smelled like a hangover but figured it was better to go stinky than not at all. I went to put on some clean socks, but stopped when I heard a car pull into my driveway. I went over to a window and saw Mike shuffle out of his truck and stumble through my lawn, towards the door. I went over and locked the door. He came onto the sun porch, turned the handle of the door, saw me standing there, and then banged. Bang bang bang. I stepped back and started to get scared.

Jody and I went to the carnival one time. She’d never been to one. We went to the game where the guy guessed your weight, and I stuck out my belly and ass. He guess I weighed 240 pounds. He lost. I won the ugliest stuffed animal in the world.

Bang bang bang. Mike had his shirt off and his tattoos heaved and changed shape on his chest. “Let me in.”

“Go home.”

“Let me in.”

“No.”

“Fuck you, motherfucker. You ain’t playin’ me like I’m a bitch.

“Mike, go home.”

“Come outside.”

“No. Just go home.”

I was starting to get mad. I kept looking at the clock and back out on the porch. I said, “Leave!”

Bang bang bang. Then he stopped banging and pointed at himself, jabbing a finger into his chest and said, “I fucked her last night. I fucked her last night, you bitch.”

I thought Wow and Damn; then I about puked from anger. I looked at him and said, “Fuck her again; I don’t care. Fuck the nasty bitch as much as you want. Just get the hell out of my house.”

Bang bang bang. Then the window broke and glass flew everywhere like a broken bird. Mike paused for a second and then reached



through to unlock the door. I ran to the back of the house and outside. I wasn't running scared, just didn't want to fight inside. I walked around the house. The night was all humid and wet, and I was bare footed. Weeds and dandelions snagged between my toes.

Mike's body looked pale in the darkness while he stood there on the sidewalk, by the street, waiting for me. He was standing right by my car. I was mad as hell. His shoulders moved up and down, and his arms were by his side. I figured since he was drunk I could hit him one time and have it all be over. "You motherfucker! You come over here and break my house over that stupid bitch, you stupid fuck?"

I walked over towards him, and before he could do anything, I hit him as hard as I could. His knees got weary and he stumbled, then fell. I thought it was over, but he got back up. I stepped back into my driveway. The gravel hurt my feet. He rushed at me. I hit him again. This time he stayed down for a while. I thought about kicking him but didn't. I said, "Get up, goddamnit; get up, you pathetic bastard," then kicked gravel on him.

Standing up that time, he had his hand on his face. When he moved away, I saw he had a big gash on his cheek. It was nasty and looked jagged and black in the moonlight. He said, "You motherfucker," then rushed at me one more time. I hit him and he fell. I stood there and watched him roll on the ground. I was glad when he started to get up again. But then, while standing, he turned around and ran/stumbled toward my house.

"I'm gettin' my shit. Then we'll see; we'll see."

The only thing Mike had in my house was a pistol I kept for him. It was locked up and unloaded. I wasn't worried about anything, just sort of confused about what to do. I was just going to get in my car and drive away, but I didn't. I stood there and watched Mike go on to the sun porch. He reached through the broken window to unlock the door. Then before anything happened, it seemed like everything changed. There was a long pause while Mike stood at the door. Then he said, "Peter."

I was still mad. "What?"

He said, "Call me an ambulance. I cut myself."

He didn't sound so drunk anymore.

I ran on to the porch and Mike turned around, almost falling over, with blood spider-webbed all over his arm. I caught hold of him

and reached through to unlock the door. I helped him over to a chair and sat him down. I ran to the bathroom to get towels but couldn't find any, so I went down to the basement and got some dirty ones off the floor. Getting back out to the living room, I saw him hunched over, almost passing out. The change was weird. He'd gone from that hateful violence to lethargic and bleeding to death in about a minute. He had his cut arm propped up on his leg. Blood streamed and fluttered in purple ribbons and puddle up like a nightmare on the carpet. I put a towel on his arm and said, "Hold this there, stupid."

I went to get the phone and looked at the clock again. Before dialing 911, I heard someone yelling through the front door. I went to look. It was a cop. One of my neighbors must have called. I opened the door and he came in. He saw my brother and got on the radio. The cop and I both helped to put pressure on Mike's arm while we waited for the ambulance. We went through three, four, maybe five towels because they all got saturated and sponged up with blood.

When Mike was conscious, he told me that he hated me, but then he would pass out again. The paramedics got there. They put something on his arm to stop the bleeding, but it only worked for a second. It took both of them to get Mike out of the house. Blood splattered on his jeans and made a drip-drop trail on the floor while they took him out; they tracked it all over the place, so I had blood footprints leading out the door.

I had to talk to the cop. I told him that the window just broke while Mike was knocking. He took some notes and nodded.

Before too long I was alone; it was too late, and I was too bloody. My living room looked like someone had slaughtered a pig and then played around with it. I sat there smoking, kind of spinning weirdness for a while.

After I took a shower and put on some clean clothes, I decided to go to the bar and have a few drinks. I ran into Jen. We ended up in a booth together and I was drunk, staring down into an ashtray. I still had Mike's blood under my fingernails. I was trying to not pay attention to anything. Jen reached across the table and touched my hand. I pulled it away. I looked up at her, focused, and said, "Mike's in the hospital."

She looked down and said, "I know."

I said, "Mike's my brother."

She didn't say anything.

"I think I'm going to go home now."



"Do you want me to follow you or anything?"

"No."

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah."

I reached in my pocket and grabbed my keys. I finished my beer and put my hand on the table before standing. Jen put her hand on top of mine, and we stared at each other for a second. She looked like she was going to cry, and I felt sorry for her.

We ended up back at my house, stumbling over broken glass and blood. When we were in my bedroom, she asked, "Is my stuff still here?"

I fell into my bed, thought about turning off the air conditioner, and looked up at her. "I don't see why it would be."

She walked out of the room and turned off the light. I rolled over and tried to fall asleep while listening to water run and things clang around in the bathroom. I think I was about passed out when I smelled her soap and felt her ease down into my bed. Her naked body felt warm against mine.

After we got done having sex, I lay there staring up at the ceiling and smoking a cigarette. Then the phone rang three and a half times, and the answering machine came on. My voice recording sounded funny bawling through the quiet room. Jody left a message: "Peter, it's Jody. I guess I'm not mad, 'cause I didn't expect you to come anyway, but please, just don't call me anymore."

Jen didn't say anything. I fell asleep listening to hum of the air conditioner.

—Peter Lamp '04



