

caesura

the university of delaware literary magazine



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cae•su•ra \si- 'zyur-a\ n, pl -suras or su rae \[LL, fr. L, act of cutting, fr. caedere to cut] (1556) 1 In modern prosody: a usu. rhetorical break in the flow of sound in the middle of a line of verse 2 In Greek and Latin prosody: a break in the flow of sound in a verse caused by the ending of a word within a foot 3: BREAK, INTERRUPTION 4: a pause marking a rhythmic point of division in a melody—cae su ral \-'zyur -el, zhur-\adj. ALSO: a break, or pause, in a line of verse; a break, or moment of rest, in a busy schedule; reading material which will not be followed by an exam. See also comma, hiatus, leisure.

CAESURA is the University of Delaware's student literary magazine, sponsored by the Department of English. The creative work is selected and typeset by an all-student staff.

Yusef Komunyakaa will present the 1999 CAESURA awards, which recognize excellence in literary prose and poetry in this year's edition. Recipient of the 1994 Pulitzer Prize for Poetry for his book *Neon Vernacular: New and Selected Poems*, he is Professor of Creative Writing at Princeton University.

The Academy of Poets Prize of \$100

The Elda Wollaeger Gregory Poetry Prize

First Prize of \$100

Second Prize of \$50

The Thomas W. Molyneux Prose Award

First Prize of \$100

Second Prize of \$50

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Lawrence E. Morrison Jr.

Chief



Kim Radford

i am writing poems where you can't miss them

i am writing poems where you can't miss them
i trace them in flowery invisible letters
when i brush my fingertips along your stomach.
i write them in those long silent gazes
that are just too perfect to break.
i copy them from the pages of my heart
to the crumpled balls of paper in the trash
because they never come out the way i want.
i am writing poems where you can't miss them,
if you only knew they were there.

Stephanie Lane
Fall

The brisk autumn air slips through the grass
Like your deceptive hands once did through my hair.
The green leaves are turning
to vibrant shades of red, orange, and gold,
and some are brown, fallen,
crunching beneath the soles of my well-worn shoes.
But not all of the leaves have yet fallen.
Some cling to their branches, afraid to let go.
Like me, afraid of the release,
clenching tightly for fear of being alone,
drifting on my own to some unknown territory.
I know I cannot do this forever.
And I am weary of holding on
to those things that cannot sustain me, and
tired of clinging to dry, brown branches
that can break with the snap of a rough hand.

Ryan Deck
The Sales Pitch

That's right folks. All of it can be yours. All of it can be yours. When you say a prayer, does it cost you anything? Of course not, and neither will this. That's right, it is absolutely free and clear. Only one string is attached, you gotta say, "yes." One simple word and it will be thine. Break on through to the other side ladies and gentlemen. Experience things for the first time all over again. Anything you want will be yours. No wish is too big to grant. No desire too small to overlook. I always answer the phone. I'm always listening because you're important to me. I can make all your dreams come true. I'm the one who'll look out for you when you need me. You never need to ask twice with me. Unlike my competitor who likes to grant requests at his own discretion. I work for you, not the other way around. So what do you say? Come on. Why not? What have you got to lose? What's he ever done for you? You need help now, but all his lines are busy. Come on over. We should be friends.

Laura Landon
The Couch of the Cynics

In thinking of my past, I often conjure up images of Diogenes. He is sitting on a golden cobbled roadside, looking as alive as words make pictures look in beautiful ancient stories. It is deep in midday, and the sun that forced cultures to cocoon in siesta brings him outside. The road is cut and forced inch by inch between the walls of a city that, in other, more primitive times, had tangled its buildings into clusters of sweating brick, piled to the sky, and forced the primordial light to gather on the painted roof tiles. All of this so that people could walk through the afternoons, bare-foot in the shade. This ingenuity, of course, has left no room for the construction of roads like this, carved from the necessity and curiosity of later times. Roads that would one day conquer and unify empires stretched out in unmeasured miles past the uncalculated horizon.

Diogenes is sitting in a barrel. The wood has warped and left cracks where laser beams of concentrated sunlight can fall through and sizzle upon his bare back. His only piece of clothing is a dirty burlap loincloth, and he holds a in one of his knobby thin hands a smooth walking stick. He traces the tip of the stick over the gapping cobbles, mindlessly as he works up impenetrable philosophies. He has a long, white, tangled beard; he had the beard of prophets and heretics alike. Pieces of it are stretched and torn to look like worn cotton, by the tunneled winds that breathe through alleyways. He does not believe in societal conventions. He does not believe in silverware, or marriage, or golden coins, or clothing. Sometimes he walks naked through the streets to show he does not need frivolity. This barrel is his house. It still smells faintly of the wine it once held, and spiders spin webs in its attic. The people of the city call him a dog, “cynos” in Greek, a cynic. He is famed and followed. He is angry and honest. And he sits in a roadside barrel alone.

One day a man who appears to be a marble statue of a god come to life and bedecked with gold wanders down the road. He is unmistakably a young warrior king, holding his gold parading helmet under his muscular arm. His name is Alexander the Great and he has been told that the famous Diogenes lives in the street like a common beggar. He has come to give him his just reward. He approaches the fragile, aged Diogenes carefully, reverently. He stands close enough to him that he can see Diogenes' black eyes glisten in wonder. He is Alexander the Great, the world, without exaggeration, belongs to him. One day, Caesars would fight to own the helmet that he carries under his arm. He asks Diogenes, "Oh great, esteemed man of wisdom, how can you be so unfortunate as to live in a barrel? What can I do for you, Diogenes? I am ruler of the known world, yet a wise man of my homeland must live like a common beggar. What, oh what, can I do for you? Do you want a palace, fine clothes and gold, women and wine? I shall get it for you. What can I do for you?"

Diogenes looks up into the shaded face of his emperor; the sun creates a halo around his golden hair. Diogenes pauses for a moment and says, "You can step aside. You're in my light!"

I think that I once knew Diogenes, once was Diogenes, once fought to separate myself from him in a town called Sierra Vista, Arizona. Ancestors of the wanderers from pioneer days that had been too lazy to make it to California, illegal aliens, senior citizens pseudo cowboys, draft dodgers, and high-paid disgruntled government employees all melted to form the society I was raised by. My father, a government employee did who-knows-what all day and read the newspaper all night. My mother, an East Coast girl, fought to form a barricade against the desert. Sometimes relatives would send her crumbling fall leaves in envelopes and she would cry for home. Our house was practically palatial, because property in the desert costs very little. It consisted of brilliant white towers and gigantic arched windows with a Spanish blue tile roof. Balconies and verandas caught the

sun at every angle. My mother was the only woman in the state who furnished her house with historically intact colonial furniture. She made a point of calling all the furniture by strange British names; the sideboard, the breakfront, filled with chipping Victorian teacups and dull pewter mugs. My father travelled most of my childhood bringing home samovars and carpets from Turkey, music boxes from France, German candies, and Korean ceramics. The thing I once owned that reminded me most of him was a small box of heavy coins, some with holes in the center, or square shaped, elegant Italian lire or thin bills with watermarks of kings that I had never seen. He had salvaged them from around the world. My sister and I would dump the treasure chest onto the quilt spread over my bed and play simple card games to win the loot of unspendable money. However, society seemed to end at our white, gleaming walls. What my mother strove profitlessly to secure was very much fantasy in the eyes of the rest of the town. There were towers on each end of the house, which were reminiscent of the grandiose, false facades of Disneyland, I remember looking up at the huge castle in Disneyland, squinting to see past the blank windows, wondering if I could discern light. I wondered what kind of strange creatures lived within its walls. That is how the town seemed to view my family, fairytale shadows behind stained glass, Being an American, fed from a childhood of cartoon illusion and hope, it was difficult to discern what was real and what was fiction. I went to New Orleans and I remember thinking, "This looks a lot like Disneyland," instead of visa versa. Within miles of our house were archeological digs that I would help with and movie crews from California looking to find a cheap desert backdrop. Star Wars was partially filmed near my house. Often my mother would give me lipstick and send me to try out as an extra, but I was always "too" something. The presence of the movie crews only aided in my confusion that this place was pure fantasy. Tumbleweeds actually danced and rusty car lots were encased in the curling spines of barbed wire fences. And

huddled masses of illegal immigrants seeking refuge against the dust and emptiness somberly kicked them aside.

In 1995, I met a boy named Christopher Desmond Ziegler. He was painfully thin, bespectacled, and his hair was an artistic palate of orange and black corkscrew curls. He walked with an uneven, agonizing hobble, dressed in rags (shorts cut from a pair of pants I had discarded) and spoke a garbled mess of prophetic words from between his crooked teeth. He often joked that he wanted to look like a pirate, so one day he wrote, "Take me to the Canary Islands!" on his van. He laughed his usual almost silent chuckle, with his eyes focused and squinting on the ground.

But to us he was the Allen Ginsberg, the Kurt Cobain and the Andy Warhol of our high school. A plethora of admirers and hangers-on constantly followed him. His life's occupations were pranks, journalism, photography and punk rock. I constantly made the front page of the Sierra Vista Herald, in the years that I knew him. I was his starlet. I was the only one who had the courage to tell him that I loved him and would protect his delicate soul against the winds that inevitably blow delicate souls out to melt in the sea and to be lost in their graceful translucency. I would protect his young ideas against age forever. I had the ferocity to look right into the pulse of his energetic eyes rimmed with silver coke bottle glasses, and tell him that he did not intimidate me with his brilliance. He would grab my hand, pull me into his room and we would sit on the brown tiled floor and tell stories, tears, and fables. We would pull them like threads, tiny yet unending, from the unraveling shrouds, which we had found necessary safety in, my mansion, his mind. Previous truths lovingly pulled apart at the seams.

He would beat the pock marked heads of his \$50 drum set numb every other weekend at tiny, smoke-filled concrete bars in Tucson. I stood in the front row taping it on his Super 8 camera so that one day our grandchildren could see it. I would then retreat to the bathroom to drink warm water from the faucets, cupped in my hands, because I was too young to buy anything from the bar. I came close to

fainting almost every time I was in those bars, the smell, the crowds, the noise moving in rigid waves over my soft, bruised, kicked body. Every night I would come home torn in pieces, blood-soaked, urine-soaked, and he would kiss me on the mouth with his stale and worn out dream. I would wait and catch my amazed breath in our dark midnight entry hall. I would stare from behind the glass doors at the shadow of his van sailing the summer air like a ship returning into the last light of a lost and timeless night. He felt that the only way to love the music truly, was to fight it and have it win you over, kill you with its embrace. The only way to love the world truly was to hate it, in the same way you hate an old friend whose critique you remain inextricable from and who you never lose faith in.

He was everything that the world was not. He was energy, and the light and fire. He was wise, separate, and bubbling over with skepticism, contempt, and stormy self-destructive creativity. It was hard not to love his hate.

His father was a New York native who, for all it was worth, was an exact replica of Robert DeNiro. Sometimes I wonder if God got lazy and decided to make Robert DeNiro all over again and give him a Ph.D. in Irish Travel Literature. Dr. Ziegler taught at the local joke of a college, and the family lived in Tombstone on Curly Bill Lane. I once had heard that in Victorian times, at the height of a surge of neoclassicism, students of ancient Greece went to isolated Greek villages to see if the myths were still alive. It turns out that the myths had died ages ago, but the scholars recirculated them. And when the students came a generation later, they were surprised to find these villagers knew of Zeus, Hera, Artemis....and Curly Bill. Who was he? All of the streets in Tombstone were named after mythological characters of the old west. Dirty rugged myths that no one had remembered until the 50s when western films became popular and people sought out the pioneer's life in Tombstone, Arizona. They, with their cheap plastic fake guns and imported cowboy boots brought to life myths as dead and crumbling as the leaves my mother delicately removed from Air Mail

envelopes.

Their house was in an isolated section of town. Most people were surprised that Chris Zeigler even had a house. We all thought his parents were hippies and he lived in a van somewhere. IT was amazing enough that his house had walls and window blinds and beds. Dr. Ziegler had fled New York during Vietnam to escape the draft and since then had never seen his parents, sisters, brothers or best friends ever again. Not that he didn't love them, but he hated the east. He hated the falseness, the formality of New York, the coldness, and the haughtiness. He swore never to return. And other than his daily drive to Cochise College in Sierra Vista he never left the sanctuary of his little square shaped house.

Chris, his son, became my best friend, my first love, and the ceaseless, underlying inspiration in all my poetry. Every afternoon when school would dismiss we would board his deteriorating 70's van, that his neighbor, a fugitive Mexican lounge singer had given him. I always joked that it looked like it had once belonged to part of the Titanic, it was so old and rusted and easy to love. The rusted chips of metal that had once been blue would catch on the fibers of my clothing as I leaned against it and looked into the bald distorted sun. Every day we would drive 45 miles into the desert to his house. His driveway was long and orange dust rose like steam from its surface. We open the sliding door and immediate coolness would engulf us. Supporting the walls were thick stacks of books; they had more books than you could ever imagine. I can still see Dr. Ziegler sitting corss-legged watching television, reading a book and writing at the same time, unfettered by our presence. Then suddenly he would jump up and fetch a book that I had to read. I was always afriad when I walked into his house that I would not have the last book finished, and would have nothing to say to Dr. Ziegler when he questioned me about it. I imagined that Chris was so brilliant because he had lived with this man his whole life. I had only known him for a year and I had ingested more literature than I knew existed.

I think I spent hundreds of afternoons in that house. I would recline on Chris' scratchy dated orange-and-brown plaid couch supported by the half-stuffed pillows surrounding me. I would bask in the feedback of Christopher's instruments, which he played like a mad man during commercials. It was always dark in there; every window, blind and shutter was closed against the sun. On their walls, there were no family pictures or pretty framed oil paintings as in my house. Most of the paintings in their house were nude, and in recollection I suppose they were beautiful, but to any first time visitor, they were shocking. There was never anything in the refrigerator that real people could eat. They had golden saffron and tea leaves from India, but no strainer, and very old oatmeal from Ireland that no one ever ate that sat, fading in the back of the refrigerator for the entire span of years I frequented their house. Sometimes I wondered if these people were real. Maybe they were all part of some strange movie set, a puzzle piece of fiction in a life that felt very real to me.

There were two couches in the t.v. room facing the television from both angles. For hours upon end, Dr. Ziegler and Chris had an ongoing dialogue with the television set. They yelled at it. They threw Kleenex boxes and pillows at it. I would sit and laugh so hard.. Their New York accents, their commentary, was side splitting. Sometimes all of us would stay up until three in the morning to see a particular show, just to make fun of it. Their motto was, "You can make fun of anything." And to the Zieglers, real life was an unending joke. After a while, I learned to carefully pick my words so that they could not work through the spaces in them and betray my original meaning, and make me a fool. Once, I looked up and realized it had been months since I had said a word. I had been sitting there shaking with the fear of being laughed at, biting my nails, and becoming unnatural and withdrawn. I decided to align myself with their forces, so that they would have less chance to scrutinize me. I could not become part of the world, because then I would be fair game. So I spent another million

evenings quietly laughing at their antics, trying to decide if I was coming to life, or dying deep within the layers I had created.

They did not care about their abandoned family in New York and New Jersey; it was so silly to care about a thing so unprofound. They did not care about clothes, or taking family pictures or living in a small town with more culture than a cheesy tourist street with "OK Corral" T-shirts sold by street vendors. They did not even care about buying food or cars or going out in the sunlight. Living in their barrel for years tainted me, saddened me, and made me skeptical of every happiness in my life.

When townspeople toured out house their mouths would fall open with wonder n awe of the huge rounded towers, the mirrors and the stained glass windows. It was my one pride. When I had no friends, I had that house. I had its polished corners, its piano keys, its arches of light upon the white carpets, and its secret oriental smooth woods as my pride and defense. Chris Ziegler would breeze inside and say, "Oh yeah, I guess your house is OK." In addition, the writing that I labored over for hour upon hour in my tower room was always in his eyes, "OK". Even if someday I became president, or the king of the world or Alexander the Great, Iw as always, "OK." In a way, that is all I ever came to feel about myself as well. Chris was accepted at Stanford, and I was at Delaware. I was the epitome of "OK."

As our relationship progressed, I became the object upon which his cynicism and cunning wit would be displayed in all its glory. I was the pretty little sidekick. I was in love with him. I was easy to put down. He rejected society, he scorned it, and he fought it by pounding on drums and screaming out blood curdling words into a microphone. However, in his grand display of heroic rejection, he rejected everyone who loved him. One day, a year ago, we drove out to a dry wash near Tombstone and traced its dust and clay to a ghost town he wanted to photograph named Charleston when our relationship ended. He took his black and white pictures of the rubble that remained of the starved

graveyard of a village. Neither of us spoke the entire time, but he walked fast ahead of me, and left me stuck in the shallow puddles of monsoon mud. Suddenly, ahead of me I heard him scream, "Fuck me! Shit! Holy mother of..."

I saw the needles of a cactus hammered into his calf, seemingly sucking his blood and stinging the marrow of his bones. In an instant all of my resentment in me, my muddy, drenched feet shivered in hate of him, but the pity I felt outweighed all the built up anger. I put my hands on his shoulders and smoothed his locks of reckless, frazzled hair, and I said in my most nurturing, calming, loving tones, "Oh, I'll help you. It will be OK. Let's see."

He turned with a look of steel cold independence and raised his small husky voice to a crescendo, "I don't need your help!" I backed away. The pain was growing from the surface of my sunburned skin, aged with years of adventuring with him deep into the most fragile tenderness of my soul, incinerating its love to the barest sand of ashes. I turned around and left him there, in the desert. I walked with my chin so high. I said every word that I had ever kept inside in the manner and speed with which I walked. Then once I reached the beloved van, I cried so hard the entire world must have felt my agony, the bruises and scars and open wounds rubbing against one another. I was standing in his sunlight, he was Diogenes and he didn't need my help. But what did his so-called wisdom accomplish? Was unconditional rejection, wisdom? He came back sometimes later, with the quiet, admitted defeat of a great hero. His expression stood like the mast of a tall, proud, sunken ship, like the peak of a wonderful mountain swallowed into the sea, which became a humble, lonely island. He drove me to a friend's house. We didn't say goodbye. He had always believed to say goodbye was to say nothing at all. I remembered all the telephone conversations he would end with the slam of the receiver and he left me with the empty tone in the background. The only time his wit ceased and broke, he had no words for goodbye.

I always tried to come to terms with this, with his bitter-

ness and skepticism. Perhaps he figured everyone would reject him first since he was so scrawny, so insect-like so skeletal and ill shaped; so he would stamp on them before they would have the chance to squash him. Maybe he thought he was intellectually superior and we were all of little consequence to his master plan. A thousand scenarios played themselves out in my mind as he retreated further and further into himself. Then I realized if you do not value society, there is no way that you can value yourself. Society offers a system of rewards. For most people these rewards suffice; money, good-looking husband or wife, success, children, college degrees, being the boss, nice house, nice car--all offer rewards to balance out life's sorrows. But once you give no credit or value to society, then you also do not value its rewards. It seems impossible for you to then reward yourself in any way. There is no way to esteem yourself. Even when you are esteemed, it means nothing to you. Christopher Ziegler pulled me into this sadness, and gave me no escape. He made me Diogenes. Once you look through his eyes it is impossible to see joy or sorrow, you are always the medium, the in-between, the dulled, retreating version of your once ambitious self. I am too smart for ambition, I tell myself, but I feel no better.

Sometime later, I was standing ankle deep in a puddle in New York City, not so very different from the monsoon puddles that angered me in the Charleston washes. It was then that I realized that I looked at all the faces as if they were behind t.v. screens. I was throwing things at them with my eyes, with my spirit, with all the anger and dissatisfaction, memory and superiority within me. I was throwing things at them that had once been thrown at me, in a lonely desert land. Whenever I look at anyone, they are behind that screen. Look at the clothes they wear, they are so careful, so self-contained, so beautiful. What is beauty? What does all their money matter? How can these people actually care about any of this? How can they sweat in a gym, lift weights, paint their nails, and spend money on fancy coffee? What is the point? Look at these foolish people, why aren't

they “dogs” as I am? I have no pride, no fear, and I am let loose in a world of curiosity. Or chained? These people chain the dogs with gold leashes and comb their hair. But not me, I can make fun of anything. I will laugh them into the ground, right? Is it better to care too little than too much?

The Zieglers gave me double gifts and double curses. I now have within me the power of Diogenes, I free myself from wanting the things I cannot have, but on the other hand, I never get anything I want. In a way, it reminds me of the Buddhist’s four truths: life is suffering, the reason for suffering is desire, the only way to end suffering is to end desire, after you have ceased desiring, you must follow the right path. But when you desire nothing, there are few right paths. All the paths I have chosen lead me further and further within myself. I have nothing now but faded stories to tell the world. I write old callused manuscripts gilded with blurry words whose meaning eludes the reader because the language comes from a place they cannot see, spoken by characters that are long gone, in settings drowned with time or distance. And to find myself, I make the mistake of looking into other manuscripts, deciphering even older, even deeper, hollowed-out accounts of beginnings, endings and wisdom. I am a collector of myths.

I let go of Chris Ziegler long ago now. I think he lives in L.A. and sometimes I see him on t.v. He makes independent films, documentaries, and shows up in the strangest places. He made a short film about me called “The One Hundred Percent Perfect Girl.” It was short and sad and black and white and he played all my favorite songs. But whenever I see his face on that t.v. screen I pick up whatever is closest to me and toss it at his face. I wonder what Dr. Ziegler is doing, closeted within his temple of books; I think he is probably laughing. He has set down his book and his pen and he is staring at his son’s face and laughing because now he can also have a conversation with his son on the television set. He can make fun of him. He can make fun of anything. Who cares if you love your son, what nonsense?

Allegiance is nothing to the faithless.

Sometimes I try to find those coins my Dad gave me when I was a little girl. My sister and I have looked through boxes and boxes and sometimes we find them scattered in unexpected places. We find them in a shoe or the back of a drawer, closed in a book, or in the fold of a towel. And it seems the richness, the value, the wonder of things, may be coming back to me. Maybe everything means something, maybe it is not nonsense, maybe it is an unspendable fortune that you keep for only your eyes to see. It does not mean that you are shallow or unintelligent. Maybe you like the way the sun hits the coin, or you like to paint your nails, even if it means nothing, even if you cannot purchase anything valuable with it.

I am on my own now. The world is tempting me. The world is asking me what I want of it. Do I want to plunder the world for its riches, or conquer it for power? Do I want to subdue its complexity with an expensive education? Do I want to spend minimum wage dollars on hair products and skin cream to make me a goddess? Do I want a nine-to-five job so I can afford the sneakers that make me run faster? I am looking into the faces of afternoon crowds. I am looking up, tired from a journey on foot through many thoughts and many stories and lands, and I whisper my fortune in ancient words, "You can step aside...You're in my light."

Tracy Pope
Planted Sun



Carol Tufano-Morrison
Death of the Sun

So long lives the brown autumn sun
though winter's breath calls death
to dim her light, her warmth.
False fires warm at hearthside-
Her chilly absence is felt in
clattering bones of trees.

Branches bend and break, snapping,
as leaves scurry and skip about
dressed in warm colors to tease.

Lead grey clouds thicken and spread
heavy, blocking the sun's blood-
only trickles of orange and red smear
the smooth billows.
Our heads buried in pillows, feathers, flannels
we sleep
we cry
we dream
(and wake when)
the sun returns.

Carol Tufano-Morrison
Escape

Now if you have money --
that's a different story
Louie Degas had money
He had a way out
wet rain on cold cement
There's always a way out
eating from tin cans
isn't bad, that is
if you don't mind the taste
of tin on your tongue.
cold rain on wet cement
I've served my time
in dimly lighted rooms
with little or no heat
just cigarettes and
a can of beer.
rain, wet, cold cement
That was last year
This week is better
marching, always marching
The couch is new
The rent is paid
I've got a phone
you know things are different
if you have money
in the rain on wet cement
Dead is Dead
we're all the same
but how we get there
that's the difference.
cement, cold, wet with rain
The smoke curls grey
from the ashtray
on the coffee table

t.v. blares -- how to be
me, I'll see it through
in the cold rain, wet cement
Louie Degas had money
he had a way out
One of these days
we'll escape together.
Don't stand in line,
the wait's too long
Just move to the front
and attempt to escape
the cold rain, the cold, wet cement.

Kyle Belz
Not Nodding Now

We were dancing without awareness,
Enveloped by the music's spell
Of rescued treasures and smirking mermaids,
When the crippled veteran from some forgotten war
Surfaced through memory with a question,
"What happened to all the stars?"

He looked past me
To the past,
To blazing stars in a Floridian sky
Illuminating his younger eyes
On clear nights
Before the construction expanded.

After we walked outside to rest our legs
While the dancers continued without us,
Noticing only more room to hoard,
I understood his distant look
While standing beside you; a skyscraper
Built years after my birth and mirror.

We looked to the sky
Lit by the purple glow,
The haze of the smogged city
Looming in the distance from the suburbs.
I looked for something I remembered, a numb appetite.
The celestial performance obstructed...

"There is Jason,
That one, off above the belt."
(the pointing finger spoke too)
"It'll be there 'till you die- do you see it?"
He asked the nodding child
Clutching a security blanket...

We went inside to continue dancing,
Laughing at the crippled dreamer,
The sentimental fool, the dead coward.
We remembered his funeral.
We didn't go because of rain,
So we watched the stars of a western film.

A clean getaway

Heather Kirn

Gravity

I'm stuck tonight on what I felt
is people's toughest task.
In heavy aching hour,
I press my spine to ground
and concentrate on gravity
and see the specks of stars.
No wonder why we humans
cannot seem to let things go,
our weighted souls attached
to one large sphere of green & blue.

As entities of earth and water,
we pull like waves toward one another.
I tied my strings to one tall boy
who danced me into lucid nights
where moons would drip
and beers were drunk.
He then brought out his knife.
With frays of string in my two palms,
I went to others calling, wet-checked:
"Help."

And I am not the only one
who's suffered severed chords.
There are buttons in our bellies
for a reason. Screams preceded
their creation. Steel stirrups were required.
Doctors and nurses were hired
with scissors to snip people separate.

We tend to fight the distance.
Unlike these stars up here--
just balls of fire far from each other.
They're flaming and they're pushing
away, increasing the space between them.

In dreamy odd evenings,
with nothing but liquor and sky
the sailors tied them up with lines
and called them constellations.
We now think stars make men
and spoons and bears.
We believe they have connections
and that they agree on shapes.
But they do not make a thing.
They do not feel a thing.
They flame light years away and
burn me with simplicity
on nights as tough as this.
They know the secret of fire
 and floating,
while I am glued to ground,
spinning around just another star.

Heather Kirn
Dr Moses This Morning
July 1998

His name is Moses.
This morning, he prepped you
like an object to dote over,
an object in a thick paper gown.
He drew dots around the places of incision,
and he put you under until you did nothing
but breathe.
Four minutes ago, he began cutting.

He's splitting your Red Sea of a shoulder to reveal,
not a rocky gound of Israel, but
a lump, maybe two, the largest one
six inches long. While he leads the cancer
out of you, Moses says he may cut
some nerves. Tiny white string, so small,
"sometimes we just can't see them," he says.

For this promised land, a lump-less land
of perfect healthy flesh, for a cancer-free
dream of milk-and-honey,
you may lose feeling in your arm.

His name was Moses.
I'm thinking of God's Moses--
If he ever killed and washed up
any fish with the parting?
Probably, but the Good book
doesn't acknowledge those casualties.
A new nation deserves a sacrifice--
of limb, of fish, of anything.

Kate Nopper

Dust

The ground was hard to turn. Caleb leaned on the shovel, the tendons in his sunburnt neck straining in effort. Sara stood silent, off to the side, watching him. It was the sun of course, the sun that had dried out the ground, greedily evaporated all the moisture, left the red dirt cracked and barren and dusty, so that her baby could not even have a proper burial.

It was the fever that took him, made his poor little body burn with a heat so intense it seemed to scorch her hands when she touched him, tried to soothe him. She had done everything she knew how to do, wrapped him to keep him warm, stripped him down to cool him, rocked him, fed him, not fed him. She had even prayed, for the first time in a long time. She stood and looked at him, stared wide-eyed and blank-minded at his tiny contorted form screaming in front of her. Her ears barely heard any noise other than the rush of blood surging and pounding through her body, leaving her tingling and light-headed. His cries so frightened and unnerved her that all she could do was shake her head slowly at him, filled with incredible but distant sorrow for his pain and her complete inability to do anything about it. She should've, as she realized later with a sickend jolt, walked to the farm to call the doctor, that last afternoon while Caleb was still in the fields with the truck. But by the time she'd composed herself enough to think of it, it was too late. Less than an hour later, he stiffened out his body and lay still. She tried to control herself with the fact that the doctor wouldn't have been in time to save him anyway, and so it was all right that she hadn't gone to call him. It wasn't really her fault, not any of it.

Sara could not remember the rest of that day. The next picture she could call to mind was that of the prairie grass, short and a dead yellow, glowing in the light of the slowly setting sun. That was what she had looked at when, sitting

on the porch steps, she told Caleb. He just nodded mechanically. She marveled at that, that she had had to tell him, that he hadn't known with one glance at her empty face. He hadn't even seemed to notice that anything was wrong, when he came back from the fields that night, streaked with grime and sweat and weariness, further reddened by the sun. His silence hit her sharply, hurt her in a place she thought she had made herself invulnerable. He didn't care for her, or for her poor baby in that pale pine box. Her poor baby, being put under the cruel unforgiving ground. Her poor baby.

She had insisted upon his burial under her favorite tree, on the one little rolling hill directly behind the house. She didn't want him far away from her, not ever, not even if it meant being closer to God. Maybe it was selfish, but who knew if God really existed, while she knew that she did, and that her baby needed her. The church was far, too far, away. She could not let him go that far. He would be frightened, that far away from his mother. He needed her near, and he was hers to keep. She would not ever push him away.

A small pile of dirt, brick-colored and clouding the air with dust, lay next to the beginning of a shallow hole. Caleb's shirt was damp, the mid-morning sun making his thick tanned forearms glisten and his reddish hair turn gold. Sara watched his back, the thin sinuous whispers of muscle movement beneath his shirt, dispassionately. She felt like she was crossing an enormous, gaping distance just in looking at him. Her body was weightless. Her feet didn't feel the earth beneath them, her back didn't feel the heavy, pressing warmth of the sun, her hands didn't feel their pressure upon one another. She wasn't standing here, with the dust clogging her nostrils and stinging her eyes. She was in the barn, smelling the sweet mustiness of the hay, the faint odor of horses, his cloying cologne with an undertone of cheap cigar smoke. It was dark and hot below, but she knew the loft would be light and airy, and so he said, lets go up there, and they went. And she could see out over the

fields, all barbed wire fences, all the crops dying for rain that never came, all the cattle skinny and hungry chewing at the dried-up dissipated pastures, all the wispy gauzy clouds high up in an almost colorless blue sky. And that was what she saw, the whole time, that was all she saw--the land.

She had wondered only for a brief second what he was seeing--the other women he'd had, a wife if there was one--before turning her eyes to the loft window again. She knew that was what Caleb saw, always the land and never anything else. It tricked you by appearing wide and open and free, when really it was just that the sky had pressed its entire massive weight down on all that lived below, until it had crushed everything completely, ground it into nothingness with the clay-like dirt. You could fight it all you liked, but you had to be careful, and remember to guard your humanity, because it could even flatten that.

Afterwards, she stayed in the hay while he dressed hurriedly, in a real suit, and made his weak half-excuses and climbed down to drive away too quickly, leaving tiny whirling dust-devils in his wake. He was going home, back to his ugly gray city, or on the road again to peddle his products someplace without farm people, someplace with money. She scarcely noticed his leaving. His excuses pushed in upon her thoughts, making her vaguely sick. She had stayed there, dazed and immobile, able only to breathe, her face turned still toward the loft window. She wished weakly for the ignorant contentment of the prairie dogs darting through the grass below, for the freedom of the birds soaring and dipping through that endless sky. They were the only creatures she had seen that lived unaffected by the intensity of the prairie. They understood the pull of the land instinctively, never questioning it, and so escaped its control. That was where human beings always failed sooner or later. They tried to be the masters, forgetting that they could not beat the land; and then grew to like it, wide and flat and cruel and deceptive, when they needed to stay warm and movable, changeable, and quick, most importantly quick, darting back to a hole or taking flight when the vastness too

overwhelmed them.

When she had discovered her condition, without thinking she had told Caleb. He had looked at the wall a long time, then turned to her, suddenly, fiercely, and asked in a low voice, did she know how long it had been since he had touched her? And later, in the dark of their room, alone in the cold moonlight on the oversized bed, she couldn't honestly say, even to herself, whether she had not realized or had not cared. She was ashamed to admit to the giddiness she'd felt, in watching the brief but pure rage flash in her husband's eyes, in the hope that the slight working of his jaw muscles gave her. Anything, at that moment she would have accepted anything. Even his words of condemnation would have been welcome. But then he had turned his back again, damn him! He had turned around and said no more, though she stood behind him another twenty minutes, not speaking, scarcely breathing, just waiting for something that never came.

The baby didn't even live long enough to become part of her reality, to fill up the silence with things other than the pained, pitiful cries. It was like some sort of extended dream, a pleasant haze that suddenly vanished, leaving her startled and exposed. And she had wanted this baby badly, she had always wanted one. It was Caleb who kept saying they should wait, just wait until they were doing a little better, wait until they had a little more money, because what the hell did he have to give a child right now? Love, she had tried saying in the beginning, but he wouldn't take that seriously, and after a while, she stopped trying.

She had scarcely allowed herself the hope that, whether because of or despite her pregnancy, he might change his mind and come to care again. There were moments of kindness, of gentleness, in him during those long months; but they were as intermittent and as absently offered as the rain that had teased the parched earth in the past few years. He had been more than accommodating when her time came. She knew that she hadn't imagined the fear deep in his eyes when he came in, afterwards, and saw her lying in a damp,

pale mess on the bed. He had been openly worried, too, over the sharpness of the doctor's tone when he had ordered Sara to stay in bed at least a week. Her hope had briefly flared again, a silly, tiny recurring light. But he had done nothing but become even more silently careful around her, and he scarcely looked at the baby although she sometimes felt his gaze in her. He didn't seem to know what to do with either of them, and in bitterness and hurt pride, she vowed not to help him find the words. And so he hadn't found them. Even when her child had died, even here under the tree, he had not been able to call up within himself any words of comfort, however small and halting. She thought she hated him for it.

"Sara." He was looking at her, his eyes blue and suddenly direct from underneath the broad hand shading them from the sunlight. "It's ready."

She knelt in the dirt to cradle the tiny pine box, wrapping her arms around it and laying her cheek on the smooth wood. She had done her crying already, with what few tears she'd been able to find. The relentless sun had dried her out too. She felt rather than saw the tips of his boots move toward her slowly, heavily.

"Don't," she said hoarsely.

"You can't do this to yourself." His words were brusque but his tone gentle, his gaze intense enough to pull hers up briefly up to meet it. He looked like he was going to put out his hand. "Sara..."

She shook her head. "Please don't."

She didn't need him anymore. She had already learned how to mourn alone. She had proved, hadn't she, that she could do it all without him, the conception, the birth, the death, every ritual of life and living. Repentant words were profane in the face of such knowledge, and unnecessary.

She felt the movement of air, the descending closeness of his body, as Caleb knelt on the ground next to her. Breathless, she remained bent over, curled around the box. She felt his hand resting tentatively on her back and closed her eyes. She made no move toward him, but neither did

she push him away. Instead, she ignored him to focus on sliding the box across the ground and lowering it gently, awkwardly, into the shallow hole. She dropped in handfuls of dirt, carefully, watching to see exactly where they hit and how the tiny clumps and grains scattered and made patterns on the clean wood. She watched them fall and listened to the dull thuds as the pale pine slowly disappeared, with her baby covered up beneath it.

Toby Mulford
The Bystander

When the car hit the girl, she went
Flying in a circle, a little wobbling
Chick taking its first
Abortive flutter out of the nest.

Her arms and legs
Tumbled, little strings of
Sausage, a puppet with no
Animating hand.

Everything around her turned hard - a hard
Concrete sidewalk, a hard
Impartial sky, a hard
Smooth metal fender.

And even though I dropped
My bag of groceries, splattering
Tomatoes on the concrete, and ran
To her, for a moment it seemed

That I was the tree by the side of the road watching
Her as she rolled half onto her face, watching
Me skin my knees on the road next to her, watching
The driver stop and hop out in horror, watching
The stunned woman on the sidewalk, watching.

And as that tree I thought, how sad.
That soft thing broke and they can't fix it.

Toby Mulford
Sonnet

I've let Time in to sleep with me at night,
To fill the indentations that you left.
She scuttles through the window frame, as light
As dusting snow, and wraps me up in soft
Forgetfulness. She ruffles up my hair
And calms its brooding black with wisps of gray.
She strokes my face, with fingers sweet as air
From flowered graves, and washes all its grim
Determined grief away in shallow rills,
That soak into the sheets. She rubs my neck
With age, like fragrant oil, which quickly stills
My tensing tendons. I replace The Ache
With aches. I sleep, content with dreams of you,
For in some time, dear Time will take those too.

Caroline Smith **Marking Time**

Nearly two weeks after Lucy had broken a bottle on the front steps of Henry's apartment building and just two days before she hurled a rock through his car window, Lewis told her to fuck off.

Henry had been saying since Lucy started her new job that she was far too good for her surroundings, that she didn't--shouldn't--put up with the abuse. She had a Harvard degree, for God's sake, he'd say, why didn't she look for something real. As if adolescents and their failing grades were merely some myth, merely some statistic reported in the newspaper. As though Henry and his thesis on macroeconomics were the only concrete reality this world faced.

Since leaving college, Henry seemed to be on a slowly rising elevator, moving up, while Lucy was sinking fast. One time, a few months ago, Lucy felt as though they had passed one another on their individual journeys. She had seen Henry, rising above her as she descended, and when she waved he had stared at her blankly before turning his head almost as if in embarrassment.

*

As the school year began, Lucy noticed that she was becoming more of a scatterbrain. As soon as she set foot into the one-level school building surrounded by cornfields, she felt her memory begin to go. Lucy, Harvard-educated, had always been the student to whom everyone turned when they had trouble deciphering a poem or solving the riddle behind a physics problem. Yet here, in this building with its green chalkboards and neatly-lined lockers, Lucy felt at a loss. She was constantly misplacing test papers, calculators, study guides--the very staples of her current existence. And it seemed as though every time she turned around, someone was asking why, and instead of knowing, Lucy often simply shrugged. And later, when alone, she would lay her head in her hands.

Lewis was one student who never seemed to ask why. He had literally run into her one day in the hall as Lucy was busy juggling her many books and papers. When he said “Miss Harrison” she had to stop for a second, as she always did, before she realized that he was indeed talking to her. She freed her hand to push her ever-slipping glasses back upon the bridge of her nose.

“Yes?” she asked, searching his fifteen-year-old face, frozen for the time being between childhood and adulthood. She racked her brain, wondering who this tall boy standing before her was. Often, even with students with whom she was well-acquainted, Lucy found herself blankly looking directly into their faces, blinded for the moment before it registered that she should, in fact, respond with a fairly cheerful hello.

This boy before her was jutting out his lip, waiting for the perfect words from her perhaps, as so many of her other students did, a slight hope hidden somewhere in their permanent scowls that she could somehow erase their inadequacies, their fears, their adolescent inner torment. He stood before her, thumbs hooked into the loops of his exceedingly large jeans, hat on backwards. The hat was definitely a violation of school policy, and Lucy wondered, helplessly, if she should take issue with it.

“Lewis,” the boy said rather abruptly, thrusting his enormous hand at her. By now students were streaming in the hallways, and every few seconds Lucy found herself losing her balance just as she began to regain it. Lewis, however, seemed unaffected by the sudden exodus. She wished he could get to his point quickly.

“I was just down in guidance,” he began. “Mrs. Kroft says I should start to see you.” At this point he produced a crumpled piece of paper from his pocket. Lucy couldn’t see much, but she did note the rather large, angry-looking F written in red at the top.

“Good enough,” Lucy responded. “Why don’t we start first thing tomorrow?” She wrote down his name and home-room, hoping she would not misplace it amidst the chaos of

her room. It wasn't until she was halfway down the hall that she realized she had failed to ask Lewis to remove his hat.

"I don't know why you even bother," Henry said for what seemed to be the hundredth-consecutive day in a row. He was facing the opened kitchen cabinets in their apartment, musing over which tea to drink. Henry had at least fifteen different boxes of tea, and he always seemed indecisive about which one to pick. Lucy had only one -- Lipton.

"I mean," he said, finally deciding on vanilla maple. "Aren't they all just useless anyway? Are they ever really going to amount to anything more than the dregs of our society?"

Like all the times before, Lucy didn't even try to explain her strange compulsion for this essentially unsatisfying job. How could she explain what she didn't really understand herself to someone like Henry.

"You should quit," Henry said, slowly stirring his sugar into his already sweetened tea. "Go back to school. Make something of your life."

Lucy started to agree with Henry, as she always did, but, like all the times before, she couldn't find the words. She headed towards the living room to correct some tests, leaving Henry talking to himself.

*

Although she had never been one to sit in the faculty room and obsess about the atrocities of all junior high school students, Lucy did find herself nonchalantly -- she hoped -- questioning teachers about Lewis after their first encounter in the hall. "A punk," most said. "A waste," others commented. And the harshest, "Should be put in a cell to rot," came from a particularly jaded metal shop teacher.

And Lewis, unfortunately, proved to live up to his reputation from the first day when he came into Lucy's class exactly twelve minutes late. Lewis sauntered in, slapping high fives with another equally grungy and rebellious student who would be, like Lewis, twelve minutes late for class it seemed. Lucy hated when students defied her rules, not so

much because, as seemed to be the case with other teachers, of the threat to her authoritative power trip but more so because she lacked the energy to discipline her students. She couldn't so much as sharply scold them without her hands shaking for a good half-hour after the incident.

"You're late," she said with an inward sigh as she filled out the discipline slip. She waited, completely prepared for the battle of words, which would inevitably ensue, but Lewis just shrugged and tossed his suspiciously light bag on her table.

"Let's get started," he said, and Lucy, without much choice, dug out her eighth-grade math book from beneath the mess of her desk.

*

Lucy felt close pressed in the tiny, third-story university apartment. Henry's friend Troy, a doctoral candidate in philosophy, invited them over. Back at Harvard, Lucy would have been thrilled by an evening of witty discourse and the challenge of "one-upping," but lately she'd grown tired of these dull people with their lofty ideas.

"So Lucy," Maria, the woman Troy lived with approached her from behind, gently resting her hand on Lucy's shoulder. "What have you been up to these days?" Maria had an odd habit of squinting in a room which wasn't even bright.

Lucy began to tell Maria of her work at school. It was a speech Lucy practiced in her head often. The words were always the same. It was just the tone she was searching for. She'd told it with disgust, with indifference, with an aura of martyrdom, but she just couldn't seem to get it right. Always, without fail, her story disappointed. Lucy could see as soon as she uttered the words public school system that Maria's squinty eyes were darting quickly around the room, eager to move on to someone else.

Lucy drifted over to the window where Henry stood talking to a group of economics students. Their brows were all similarly knitted as they pondered together yet another unanswerable question. One doodled on a cocktail napkin in an effort to solve their dilemma.

“Hey Luce,” Henry greeted her. Lucy grinned, relieved Henry was welcoming her into the conversation. The others smiled at her distractedly. She waited expectantly to be asked her opinion, but Henry simply smiled and handed her his empty glass.

*

On Tuesday, Lewis decided to shock her with as many unrelated sexual comments as his underdeveloped brain could muster.

“Did you know,” he began, not looking up from the scribbles he was drawing over his algebra equation. The trouble with Lewis was that he was smart. When he wanted, which wasn’t often, he could finish forty minutes worth of work in ten. More often than not, however, he liked to put his effort into exasperating Lucy. He didn’t need her, essentially. He knew what he needed to know and showed this only when it suited him. This made him feel in control, and it made Lucy feel utterly helpless. Sometimes, with Lewis, she felt as though she were driving blind.

“Miss Harrison,” he said, clearly baiting her, “did you know that Lewis Carroll wrote Alice in Wonderland on an acid trip?”

“No Lewis, I didn’t, but I appreciate the illumination,” Lucy had found that haughtiness worked best with Lewis.

“And,” he said, pointing the tip of his erasure at her, “that book is quite sexual.” At this Lucy raised her eyebrows, a clear warning to Lewis not to continue. He obviously misinterpreted it.

“You see, that caterpillar on the mushroom, he’s really a pimp. And that pipe he’s smoking, it’s crack. Anyway, he’s Alice’s pimp, and, well, tell me that mushroom isn’t significant.” At this point, Lewis laughed and squinted his eyes in preparation of delivering the one statement which would really set Lucy off.

He leaned forward menacingly. “Don’t you ever wonder why Alice is always asking for a piece of it?”

At this Lucy slammed her book down and proceeded to ask Lewis to leave. He expected it and was already packing.

It was times like these that she wondered if Henry was right. She was so mad at herself for playing Lewis's game. Sometimes, she wished she could shock him right back, but she can't. Instead, she was left to shake and sort out the clutter on her desk in the remaining fifteen minutes before the bell rang and her next student walked in.

*

It was becoming more and more frequent that Lucy would call Henry from the pay phone in the school's lobby in the middle of the afternoon. She had found that by lunchtime she needed to hear his voice to be grounded in another reality, one that consisted of more than just junior high dances, notes passed in study hall, and grotesque imitations of bodily functions. Lucy had also found herself, in the days since school began, wondering how she had become indifferent to nearly every aspect of her life. Consequently, she was shocked when she responded to Henry's infidelity with rage.

Deep down inside Lucy had always known it would end. She was just deeply disappointed that Henry had not even taken the trouble to be original in his betrayal. Instead, he'd taken the easy way out, allowing Helene, a particularly bright and attractive student in Henry's applied economics class, to pick up the phone when he knew that Lucy would, most likely, call. She actually began to laugh when upon dialing her home number she had, instead of Henry's exasperated "Yes," heard Helena's distinctly accented greeting.

Mute, Lucy failed to respond to Helena's lilting hello. Closing her eyes, Lucy could picture the scene in her head: Helene reclining on Lucy's side of the bed, propped on her elbows, confused by the silence on the other end. And Henry lying beside her with a large book on his lap, cocking his head in anticipation, in what he perceived to be a trap set up by Lucy but which was, in actuality, one of his own careful construction.

It wasn't until Lucy heard Henry's voice that the reality of her situation truly began to sink in. "This isn't what it seems," Henry was quick to explain when he realized who

was silent on the other end of the line. His words indicated to Lucy, however, that this was exactly what it seemed. The cold, stone which had materialized in Lucy's chest after she had recognized Helena's voice began to thaw, to melt into a hot, liquid anger.

"You'll be gone by the time I get home," Lucy commanded forcefully before placing the phone in the receiver with great care.

*

Despite the ease with which she demanded for Henry to leave, Lucy found herself unable to command his presence to abandon her thoughts. Lucy had never realized how much of her life Henry had occupied. After he left, she'd sit on the bare, wooden floorboards too overcome with indecisiveness to move. How could someone so empty fill her so, she wondered?

The bottle she'd bought on her way home from school was drained now, sitting in front of her, suspended, sideways, expectantly waiting for a spin it seemed. Like the night she'd met Henry, the night when the dark, black bottle had been poised expectantly waiting to predict a fate for two previously unacquainted individuals. And miraculously, for Lucy, it had done just that for both her and Henry, the economics major she had admired from afar for many weeks. Miraculously, the bottle (which was hidden now, absurdly, in a special spot in their -- her -- closet) had done the one thing Lucy had been dreaming of since she'd first seen him.

Now, however, Lucy's bottle seemed to mock her for being so naive, so trusting, so completely unaware. A feeling, not exactly of rage and not exactly of sadness, something that tasted of tin, overwhelmed her as she took the bottle in both hands and stumbled to her car. The last thing she remembered the next morning as she awoke with her cheek crushed against the steering wheel was the satisfying crunch the bottle made as it hit his doorstep.

Lucy continued to experience difficulties with Lewis. The other children eventually became compliant, worn down by

her continual recitations of rules. But Lewis seemed to have his own set of standards to follow, for Lucy, the difficult part of it all was that they changed each day.

Right now, Lewis was studying T.S. Eliot. To Lucy, it seemed far too lofty for an eighth grader. She was continually amazed at the school district's inability to judge the maturity of the students. Lewis, however, now thinks he's mastered it, and he has grown tired of discussing the poetic beauty of "Preludes." While secretly eyeing the clock, Lucy asked him another probing question involving his feelings about the work. Lewis cracked his gum loudly and slowly drummed his fingers on the table.

Today Lucy no longer had the patience for Lewis and his indifference. Her eyes were streaked with angry, red blood vessels, and she had an ugly, red scar on her wrist from a stray piece of glass. Her world, likewise, seemed to be ending, and today, in particular, she did not need Lewis's unmasked-for abuse.

Surprising both Lewis and herself, she picked up the overweight textbook and hurled it with new-found force she just discovered last evening. The book hit the wall directly next to Lewis's ear. For a mere second, the thought occurred to Lucy that this act could cost her her job, but it was gone from her mind before she could even comprehend it.

Almost instantly Lewis was out of his chair, pointing his finger in her face.

"You can't do that to me," he shouted.

"The hell I can't," Lucy replied, shocked at the severity of her voice. She grabbed his finger and shoved it out of her face. Then, she swung the door open violently, gesturing for him to be gone. He left, but not before turning to mouth, "Fuck you." In reply, Lucy simply rested her head against the door, exhausted by their confrontation.

*

Lucy nearly overslept the next day. Drained, she had come directly home after school and fallen into bed, completely forgetting that Henry had taken their alarm clock

with him as he packed up their life together.

Somewhat disheveled, Lucy rushed down the hall to her small room only moments before the bell for homeroom began. She put her coat and bag away in the closet and erased the boards before even taking notice of the thick, maroon-covered book which rested atop her desk. Just barely peeking out from between the pages, Lucy noticed a piece of fluorescent orange paper.

She pulled out her chair and sat down before opening the book to the marked page. Lucy had recognized the book almost immediately, despite the fact that its cover had no lettering. It was the art history text she had carted along with her at Harvard for four years. She had only taken one art history class as a first-year student, but something about having that heavily powerful book in her bag gave Lucy an enormous amount of comfort. Sometimes, as professors lectured, Lucy would reach into her bag to run her hand over the delicately textured surface, for just a moment feeling as she did so, all the anxiety rush out of her, almost in one giant exhaling breath.

Lucy turned to the page before her. The marked painting, one done by Edward Hopper, was entitled *Early Sunday Morning*. It was a disquieting painting, as Hopper's works tend to be, of a small-town street, the morning sun casting shadows quietly over the brick buildings. Scrawled in Lewis's handwriting on the fluorescent paper were the words: This is how it makes me feel.

After school Lucy abandoned her car in the parking lot of the school and chose instead to walk the few blocks to her apartment. Wandering down Main Street, she eventually ventured into a bar on the corner whose bright green door faced the alley adjacent to the street. Once inside, she sat on a stool before the gleaming chrome railing. Sitting amidst the curling cigarette smoke and the neatly-lined rows of bottles, Lucy lugged the art book to the top of the bar and opened it to the page which was still marked with Lewis's note. Intently, she stared at the painting by Hopper, searching the scene before her. If she looked hard enough, she

could almost see a figure, soft in the shadows, beneath the drawn shade.

Jennifer E. Burgess
Dirty Little Hands

I walked down the stairs and came face to face
with a dirty little handprint
pressed on my wall
by the eight year old son of an older friend.
A grubby palm mark
starkly standing out
from the freshly painted wall
of the nicest and biggest apartment,
that at 25 years old,
and finally ready to live alone,
have a job with health benefits,
and give money to the public radio,
I've never had.

Eight years ago I was 17 and had an abortion.
Face to face with life in my hometown forever,
working as a cashier at the Shore Stop
or a bank teller if I got lucky,
I chose the potential of my life over the potential of the
child's.

If I tell my friends about it, sometimes they ask,
"Do you regret it?"
"Are you out of your mind?"
I say,
and point to the little handprint, enshrined,
not yet wiped away.

Jennifer E. Burgess
Wind

I'm not scared I'm far from fearless.
The wind that steals my breath
and makes me cry
is rattling my windows.
I'm having trouble sleeping
but sometimes I still dream that I can fly.
I'm not exactly scared but I am a little anxious,
listening to the wind make noise outside.
I don't like wind.
It makes me nervous.
Trees blow over,
people shiver,
my hair blows in my eyes,
and it knocks on the windows
like it wants me
to come out
and get carried away.
And it's howling,
making noises,
and all these empty empty sounds,
like there's no one in the world but me,
standing in the blowing leaves,
tears blowing down my cheeks,
barely able to breath.

Tracy Pope
Lost Innocence



Greg Spies

Isaiah

The surround-sound cranked through the speakers in my living room, cutting me off from the world outside. I had quit my job before the last full week of vacation, so that I could enjoy those final days of summer before the classes of college would return. By Wednesday, “enjoying the day” consisted of waking up around noon and then lying around on the living room couch, waiting for my roommates to get home from their jobs. I had worked that summer simply to provide enough money to pay for my “extra-curricular activities,” (as I liked to call them) and during the final week, I spent a majority of my time partaking in them. By 2:00 I was entranced by the movie that was playing on one of the several cable channels my roommates had ordered.

I’m not sure how long he had been staring at me, but suddenly out of the corner of my eye, I noticed his little face, tucked between his hands, pressed up against my screen door. His bright white eyes seemed to glow within his dark features, as they gazed around my living room. He looked back towards me, and upon realizing that I’d noticed his presence, he smiled, opened the door, and walked into my apartment. I always had to laugh when he just walked right in. My parents would have killed me if I had traveled so freely when I was his age. Back then, we lived in an apartment complex that was a lot like this one. except for the fact that due to it’s proximity to the university, college students had invaded a majority off these apartments.

“What’s up, Isaiah?” I said as he walked over and sat down upon the couch next to me. He was only six years old, a neighborhood kid who everyone knew. I had been warned of him when I moved in.

“He doesn’t like dogs.” my neighbor had told me when I was unpacking that first day. “That’s how you can get him to leave your house. Just tell him you’ll go get a dog.”

I didn’t mind him so much. He was funny as hell, and

although he kept me on my toes for the most part, he never gave me any trouble. "He's like the little black brother I never had," I'd joke when friends came over, and we'd be watching television or playing guitar. This was probably the sixth time he'd visited me, so I no longer felt awkward about having a little kid hanging around the house.

"What'cha watchin'?" he asked, as he picked up a pair of scissors from the coffee table in front of us.

"I don't know," I replied, as I removed the pair of scissors from his hands, and placed them in the drawer of the coffee table. He immediately went to open the drawer, but I placed my foot upon it. He stood up, and began walking the room. He went over to the small bookshelf in the corner and pointed to a small wooden statue of a bird.

"What happened to your bird?" he asked.

"That's my roommate's," I replied, my attention still focused on the movie.

"What happened to your roommate's bird?"

"It fell," I replied, "Both the wings broke off."

"Now it can't fly," he said.

"I don't think it ever had much of a chance to," I said, looking over towards the bookshelf. "Put it down please."

"I want to play your guitar," he said, his eyes glowing at the thought alone.

"It's broken," I replied.

"No it's not," he said firmly as if he'd seen it only hours ago.

"Something's wrong with it," I assured him.

He just stared at me, and then gave me a look as if he doubted my honesty. He turned, flashing toward me a large smile, his white teeth shining like pearls. And with that he ran through the living room, and up the stairs toward my bedroom. I slowly removed myself from the warm cavity within the couch. I could already hear my guitar getting strummed to death, so I quickly made my way up the stairs.

When I entered my room, I found Isaiah sitting on my bed, with the guitar laying flat on his lap. The damn thing was almost as big as he was. With every note I cringed, just

waiting for the strings to snap.

“I need a pick,” he said, looking up towards me.

“I don’t have any,” I lied. The last thing I wanted him to use on my old six-string was a pick. He looked over, and saw two of them on my desk. He smiled up at me again, and grabbed one of them, before ripping into my strings once more.

“You need a rock ‘n’ roll guitar,” he said without looking up.

“I know,” I smiled. “I might get one this weekend.”

For three minutes he tore my guitar apart, then just as quickly as he started, he stopped, and put the guitar on the floor, with just enough force to annoy me. “Be careful,” I said, but by that point he was already out of my room and halfway down the stairs.

I placed my guitar back in its stand and followed him down to the living room. By the time I got back downstairs, he was carving a candle with the pair of scissors I had placed inside the coffee table.

“What are you doing?” I said as I removed the scissors, and placed them in my pocket.

“I need a lighter,” he said, holding the carved candle in his fist.

“No you don’t,” I replied, just imagining the trouble this kid could get into with a lighter.

“Yes I do,” he argued.

“Well, I don’t own one,” I said, my patience beginning to wear thin. He reached for the drawer, which of course had two lighters in it. I stopped him once more from getting into the drawer. “Give me the candle,” I said.

“No,” he replied, flashing the smile once more as he stuck the candle behind his back.

“Give me that candle,” I said again, trying to add a sound of authority which was almost impossible when he had that smile upon his face.

“It’s my candle now,” he grinned. At that, I reached behind his back and tried to take the candle from him. He squirmed around, and the arm I managed to pull out was

empty. I went for the other arm, when suddenly he threw the candle across the room, and it bounced off the television screen leaving a small wax mark.

“That’s it,” I said. “Time for you to leave, Isaiah.”

The smile left and he stared up at me with a confused look on his face, as if he was wondering why I didn’t find throwing the candle as funny as he did.

“I mean it,” I said maintaining my serious voice. “Time to go.”

He looked up at me, stood up, and ran up the stairs. I chased him and managed to slip my foot in front of the door to my roommate’s room before he slammed it in my face. Although he was pushing on it from the inside, his effort was no match for mine, and slowly I pushed the door open. He ran across the room, up over my roommate’s bed. I followed him to the corner. He jumped back across the bed.

“Don’t walk on his bed!” At that he smiled, and pulled the sheets off of it. I almost had to laugh in my anger.

“That’s it!” I yelled as I lunged towards him, picking up his small frame from underneath his arms and carrying him out of the room. He was screaming by this point, his arms flailing left and right, his feet kicking me in my thighs. He reached and caught hold of the banister as we made our way down the steps. I peeled each finger from the wood, and continued towards the door. I pressed his back against the handle, and popped open the screen door. He grabbed hold of the doorframe, and once more I had to remove his grip. I carried him out, down steps and out to the center of my yard. I placed him on the ground and told him not to come back to my apartment. He circled around me and began a mad sprint towards my front door. I turned and ran back to the door, and went to slam it, but he had already managed to squeeze half his body back into the house, and although I was pretty annoyed by this point, I couldn’t hurt him. I pressed my open hand against his shaved head, and told him once more to get out.

Finally, I managed to remove his whole body and shut the door behind him. I locked it, and returned to the couch.

I could hear him screaming outside.

For fifteen seconds or so there was silence, when suddenly I heard his little voice cry out, "Hellooooooo." I looked over and saw his smiling face peaking in through the window beside the door. I stood up, walked to the window and lowered the blinds. Almost immediately he returned to his fit of screaming. Just then I heard the sound of something hitting my front door. I placed the television on mute and listened for him outside. Once again I heard the same "thud" upon the door. I walked over, and gazed through the peephole. He had removed a candle from the picnic table in my front yard and was throwing it against the door. I considered opening the door and yelling at him, but in the past I had learned that by ignoring kids, they always seemed to stop whatever it was they were doing.

I returned to the couch and raised the volume back up. I could hear him making a large racket outside, but I continued ignoring him.

It got quiet, and my curiosity got the better of me. I made my way over to the door to take another look through the peephole, when suddenly I heard a sound at the window. I pulled up the blinds and was met with Isaiah's little face staring right up at me. The window screen was now torn, with his fingers still pulling upon the wire frame, enlarging the hole he had created. I stared in disbelief, until my temper finally got the better of me.

"What the fuck are you doing?" I yelled. His bright white eyes opened wide, the smile disappeared from his face and he froze, just staring at me with complete fear. While I doubted that this was an introduction to such language for him, it was not my habit to use such words in the presence of young children, and for a second I froze as well, the two of us just staring at each other.

Slowly he crawled down from the banister, his frightened eyes never leaving mine. He turned and ran down the front steps, out towards the sidewalk and back down the street. I opened the door, and looked out onto the lawn. The mailbox was lying upon the table, ripped from the wall. The

candle lay broken upon the front stoop. I walked over and picked up the mailbox, only to discover that it was broken as well as removed.

I walked back inside and turned off the movie. I was so angry that I couldn't think about anything else but Isaiah. The neighbors had been right.

That evening when my roommates returned home from work, I told them of my ordeal. They found it extremely funny, until I mentioned the mailbox and window screen.

"Who did this?" asked my one roommate.

"Isaiah," I replied.

"Who the hell is Isaiah?" he asked.

"That little black kid from down the street," my other roommate spoke up as he examined the window screen.

"Well," he replied, "I'm not paying for a new screen. We have to find out where this little kid lives, and tell his parents what happened, and get them to pay for it."

We all agreed that this was the best plan of action, since none of us wanted to pay for a new screen and mailbox ourselves. Plus, part of me wanted to get the kid in trouble. He deserved to be punished for doing all of that.

Unfortunately, since I was the only witness to the event, and in my roommates eyes should have prevented it, I was elected as our representative. While I had fully supported the idea originally, I had done so assuming that I would not be the one to ask for the money. Now it was a whole other ballgame.

I woke up the next morning and sat around the house, just staring at the clock as two hours passed by much too quickly. I had no desire to go down and speak with his parents. I couldn't figure out what to say to them. I worked over possible dialogues, until I felt I had a strong enough mental script. I stood up, and walked outside.

It was a cool morning for the summer, but the sun shown brightly from its position high in the sky. I heard music coming from several homes on the street. Kegs sat in several gardens, and assorted beer cans lingered in the gutters or on front lawns. Most lawns were not mowed, or the

grass was just dead all together. As I continued on my way, I passed the large fat man who sat out on the steps of his apartment. I would pass him each morning on my way to work, earlier in the summer. That was always very early in the morning though. I guessed from the fact that he still sat there at 1:30 in the afternoon, that he was probably unemployed. He didn't look like he could move, let alone have a job. The street was definitely low-cost housing, built by the government, intended for poor families, but overrun with college students looking for inexpensive rent. I couldn't remember if the apartment complex I had lived in had been this bad. We moved into my house when I was eight, so memories of the apartments were few, and those which I had were drawn with youthful eyes that somehow made everything seem fine. If things had been this bad, my parents kept me from realizing it.

I reached Isaiah's apartment, recognizable only by his bicycle on the front lawn, took a deep breath and recited my opening lines once more in my head. I prayed that his mother, not his father, would be home. I felt safer dealing with a woman. If his father was there, I was unsure I could do it. Hell, I wasn't sure I could even say it to his mother.

As I walked up the path, the script slowly evaporated from my memory, and I knew that I would have to say whatever came to mind. The front door was open, and I looked into the living room. The television was on, and standing up on the sofa with his shoes on was Isaiah. He was lost in the program and didn't notice me. I knocked on the screen door, which startled him. He looked over and just stared at me with a puzzled look on his face. I imagined that this was probably quite a role-reversal for him. No one had probably ever come to his door.

He jumped from the couch to a small coffee table and then onto the floor. He walked over to the screen and stared at me for a few seconds.

"What are you doin' here?" he asked.

"Is your mom home Isaiah?" I replied.

"She's at work."

“Oh. Well, then is your dad here?” I asked, almost hoping he would say no.

He frowned at me. “He doesn’t live here,” he said with a tone that reminded me immediately that he had told me the first time we’d met that he lived with just his mother. I guess he expected me to remember it.

“Oh yeah,” I said. “Then is your babysitter here?”

“I ain’t no baby!” he said as if he were offended by such a suggestion. I had to laugh a little at that. He really was funny.

“Well then who is here with you?” I asked, tired of playing this guessing game.

“No one,” he replied.

“You’re here by yourself?” I asked.

“Yup,” he said with little interest, as if it were a perfectly reasonable thing for a six-year-old to be staying home all by himself.

“Do you always stay here by yourself?” I asked.

“Yup.”

I looked around the room, at the toys scattered around the floor. The old couch that he had stood upon was worn and tired, with holes in the material. The ashtray upon the coffee table was overflowing with butts, and the whole house smelled like cigarettes. The house was dark, and felt empty.

“Okay, I’ll see you later Isaiah,” I said, turning away from the apartment. I returned to the street, and began my walk home. As I made my way along the cracked sidewalk, I kicked a beer can with me. I looked up at the big fat man and wondered how long he’d been spending his afternoons on those steps. How did he end up here in the first place? How many students had he seen come and go, drinking and laughing, going about their ways oblivious to him, oblivious to Isaiah? What must he think?

I got back to my apartment, turned on the television and searched for a movie.

Sometime after dinner, one of my roommates remembered the window screen and asked me what happened.

“Did you go down to the house?” he asked.

“Yup,” I replied.

“What did his mom say? Was she really upset?” he asked smiling.

I stared over at the window screen, and then past that, out to the street. “I think she was more embarrassed than upset,” I replied.

“Really. Did she give you the money though?”

I reached into my pocket and threw fifty dollars down upon the coffee table.

“Cool,” my roommate said as he handed me a beer. “I hope she punishes that kid. I can’t believe he would do something like that. You know, when I was his age, I never would have done that. I knew that it was wrong to destroy other people’s things.”

“So did I,” I replied.

David Holland

Retribution

As a creator of fiction, godlike powers
Are not unknown to me; for my hand beckons,
With whimsy unreckoned, a dawn or dusk,
Crimson lust, and tickles buds to flower.

As a subject of creation, as are all men,
I've no bone or sense for this- God's universe.
So I curse, then fold, recover and smile,
Striking back meanwhile with only a pen.

Gigi Tierney
Last Day, Anagrammed

Tomorrow is our last day
Of picking past rocks, shoeless and
Muddy-toed and together
Or singing hello to a sky
Ripped seam to seam and bleeding
Rain flying down to plaster
Our hair; do you think, like here,
We could live three times tomorrow?