CHRYSLIS

Spring 1994

James Madison University
Spring 1994

James Madison University
Harrisonburg, VA

Cover art *Water Spray in Paia* by Evan Cantwell
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A New Perspective
Enamel painting
--Sally Chang
You have no permanence so
press hope between forefinger and thumb
compress those hopeful moments like
shakespeare ditties when lovers when
Gods were flowing out of you
fluctuating with their
exits how quick people
Gods abandon
causes profound friendless banter
with lips achatter
crush until it's pulp drawn from
pomegranate we ate our original sin
from or simple mango fallen
berate the viscous juices they
spittle your palms your hands
cheeks roughed with slime
swallow the pulped exits
with sarcastic esophagus rotgut
gulp it deep down
ask no questions adore the fizzle
electric fade of human contact

— Clint Smith
Back in Richmond

Back in Poe's abode
Where the air is thin enough
to grab your lucky coat lapels
and make you disappear—
I once lived here.

When I came back
to sleep in my bed
to let them hear
what I have said
A sour mountain
grabbed at my jacket
to whisper:
home only happens once.

— Joe Turfle

Shadows in the Lane

Dappled by cloud-dunes hanging,
cut by crispy white jetstream,
that throbbing eightoclock blue
bleeds into the land.
I pull off the interstate
and there my shadow sits, alien and drafty,
waiting until the transfusion of
dusk spills golden over the hills
and wavers before me like water on words,
whiskey-warm.

— Amber Teagle
vessel

clay

--Karin Solberg
Flock

Birds flying south,
south flying birds,

stop and rest in naked trees
outside my door.

Like a dark cloud, they covered
the sun, landed noisily.

Every tree, roof top,
wire within sight

is perch to a black cawing pilot.

Beaks scream, shrieks that
clatter like tin cans on New Year’s.

The cat stares out of the window with me, his
nickel-sized eyes showing fear as

the din lowers.

They dive gracefully, floating out of
the trees like leaves,

like small children sinking
into bed at night,

like bombs whistling out of
B-17s over enemy air,

whistling, whistling.

When they’re gone, the world
is too quiet.

— Maggie Osgood
Come Walk With Me
photograph
--Evan Cantwell
neil
photograph
--Erica Bleg
The woman standing on the sidewalk outside the law offices of Gentry and Gentry looked as if she might have walked there directly from church. She wore a full length floral dress with an ivory crocheted collar, knee high stockings, and a pair of navy blue heels. The ensemble was complemented by an enormous straw hat crowned with three outrageously red silk flowers. She was of medium height, sixty-three years old, and slightly overweight. She held a strapless leather handbag cradled securely in both her arms. Her eyes constantly scanned the passing traffic.

The true heat of the southern summer had yet to set in, and the winter was in its final throes. The day, a Friday, was one of those ambiguous spring days; clear and bright and almost too warm in the direct sunlight, yet fairly chilly when the breeze decided to blow. The law offices of Gentry and Gentry were located in a squat, two story brick building facing directly east, so the sun on the cloudless afternoon shined not into the woman's eyes, but rather mercifully onto her hat as she studied each passing vehicle. One car, a foam green Chevrolet carrying two old women, finally attracted her full attention.

She watched the Chevrolet as it pulled into a parallel parking space some distance down the sidewalk. The two women, who were also wearing church dresses, got out of the car and began walking toward the woman with the straw hat. The driver was tall, thin, and dignified with short, stately white hair in curls. Her companion was shorter and rather heavy. Her hair was an agreeable wavy lavender. As the two women made their way up the sidewalk, the woman with the straw hat standing in front of the law offices of Gentry and Gentry walked several steps to meet them. The woman with the lavender hair held up her hand in greeting as she recognized the other woman. "Hey, Mealie," she said.

"Did you get the will?" the tall woman asked Mealie.

"Yes; it's right here in my pocketbook." Mealie opened the strapless handbag and withdrew a folded paper sealed with stamped wax. "I got it over to the courthouse this morning."

"Well, let's get this over with," said the tall woman. She took the paper from Mealie and proceeded into the squat brick building which housed the law offices of Gentry and Gentry. She was followed closely by Mealie and then by the woman with the lavender hair. The waiting room was furnished with uncomfortable looking wicker furniture made slightly more inviting by cream colored cushions. A nondescript radio in one corner sent muted tones of a muzak arrangement of "I Got You Babe" across the room, and a wicker coffee table in the midst of the other furniture offered a dazzling array of escape reading in the form of magazines.

"I've already talked to the receptionist. She said somebody'd be with us in a little while." The tall woman and the woman with the lavender hair sat down together onto the wicker love seat. Mealie sat in the high backed wicker chair at a right angle to the other women. She placed her handbag and the straw hat beside her on the floor, picked up a copy of Better Homes and Gardens from the coffee table, and instead of reading it, remarked to the lavender-haired woman, "But now you've got to admit, Evelyn, that that was the prettiest funeral you ever saw."
"So we’re on to that subject again," sighed the tall woman.

"I hear tell Connie Spielman spent three hours just working on her makeup and fixing her hair," boasted the lavender-haired Evelyn.

"Well, Connie sure made her up real nice. I expect her hair looked better than it ever did when she was living. Though I’ll bet you a dime to a dollar it was a wig."

"She almost looked alive instead of dead," observed Evelyn.

"I don’t know, Evelyn. I think that’s something to do with the light in those funeral homes. It always makes them look peculiar." Mealie paused for a moment, pondering the appearances of corpses at their final viewings. "Anyway, the flowers were all real nice, too. Except that arrangement the church sent. You know," said Mealie, touching Evelyn’s knee, "that’s only because the flower shop knew they’d have nobody to answer to." She nodded significantly.

"It is too bad that you, Evelyn, and I were the only ones to witness her funeral," said the tall woman.

"That’s a shame," agreed Evelyn.

"Well, I don’t reckon it bothered Minnie much," said Mealie. "I reckon we’re the only people that’s bothered." Mealie pretended to glance at her Better Homes and Gardens.

"What do you think about that boy says he’s her cousin?" asked Evelyn.

"It’s amusing that he only shows up after she’s dead and buried," remarked the tall woman.

"As far as I know she never knew she had a cousin," said Mealie. "And to think he didn’t even come to her funeral. Just showed up on my porch one night asking for the key to her place. I’d have been too ashamed to have done that." She pursed her lips tightly.

"Well," said the tall woman, "I don’t think he has any legal rights unless he’s named in the will. And you and I both know Minnie said many a time she didn’t have any family left."

A secretary appeared in the window on the far wall and said, "Permelia Matthews? Mr. Gentry will see you now."

"That’s you, Mealie," said the tall woman.

"Mr. Gentry," she said as she reached for her handbag and stood up. The three women followed the secretary all the way down the hall to the last door on the left. It was open, and inside a very young man (surely he’s too young to be a lawyer, thought Mealie) sat at a polished mahogany desk. Three leather chairs were arranged in front of the desk, and behind the young man on the wall were several framed degrees. The tall woman was the first to enter the office.

"Hello, Mr. Gentry. My name is Eugenia," she said, extending her hand, "and this is Permelia and Evelyn." Mr. Gentry shook hands with the three women, and they all sat. The secretary closed the door.

"So Mr. Gentry," smiled Evelyn, "which Gentry are you?"

Gentry laughed. "Oh, the second one, I suppose. Now what can I help you ladies with?"

"Mr. Gentry," said Eugenia, "my friends and I are here to see you about a will." Mealie cringed. There went Eugenia again, always throwing in I’s where me’s would do just as well. She talked as if an English teacher were putting words into her mouth. Mealie supposed it wasn’t enough that Eugenia con-
stantly held her nose in the air. She supposed she had to talk like she was better than everyone else, too.

“I see,” said Gentry. “And how are you related to the deceased?”

“Not at all, really,” said Mealie.

“You see, Mr. Gentry, she really didn’t have any close family left. We were her friends—you know, we always went to visit and to take her shopping and to get her hair done—that sort of thing. She told us that when she died it was her wish that we should handle her funeral and the settlement of her estate.”

“Which is why we’re here,” said Evelyn.

“Right,” said Eugenia. “Of course several days ago a young man from California claiming to be her cousin appeared. He said he had a right to her estate because he was the only living relative. Mealie here picked up the will from the courthouse this morning, and though we have not yet broken the seal, we are fairly certain that she has left her entire estate in our hands. We would like to know if this young man’s claim is valid. I believe he, too, is seeking legal counsel.”

“Well,” said Gentry, “As long as everything is in order and she names you specifically as beneficiaries without mention of this man from California, his claim has no real legal basis. May I see the will, please?”

Eugenia leaned forward over the desk and handed the sealed paper to Gentry. He studied the seal with amusement. “I haven’t seen one of these in a while.” It was made of red sealing wax and bore the imprint of an intricately calligraphed I. Gentry took the paper in his left hand and with the thumb and forefinger of his right began to break the seal.

“Mr. Gentry,” interrupted Mealie. Gentry paused. Eugenia looked at Mealie in annoyance. “There’s something you ought to know before you read that paper.”

“Mealie, I really don’t think...”

“What is it I should know?” asked Gentry. He laid the unopened will on the desk before him.

Mealie pondered for a moment, looking at her hands. Evelyn had removed a handkerchief from her purse. She had it wrapped once around her forefinger and pressed it lightly to her lips. Eugenia looked steadily at Gentry. “Well, it’s about the way she died. It... well, it was sort of peculiar.” This admission seemed too terrible for Evelyn. She opened her mouth and bit her handkerchief and finger ruthlessly. Eugenia looked at Mealie with a refractory gaze.

“Mealie, this is neither the time nor the place for such foolishness. I’m sure Mr. Gentry has no interest in hearing all the vivid details of Minnie’s death, not to mention the fact that he has better things to do. Might I remind you that he is being paid by the hour?”

“Eugenia, I don’t want to hear it. You know good and well it’s not your money’s going to pay the bills.” Mealie’s voice rang with indignation. Evelyn looked as if she might explode into tears at any moment. “So you don’t like to talk about it; it’s not proper to talk about how people die unless you whisper. Well I happen to think Minnie would have wanted Mr. Gentry here to know. So I’m going to tell it and you can leave if you don’t want to hear it.”

Eugenia turned to Gentry and sat in obdurate silence, but she did not offer to leave.

“Mr. Gentry, I’m sorry if you think this is a bit
odd, but I’m just sure that you should know this. It happened a week ago Sunday. We all went to church like we usually do. All three of us live alone, you see, and so did Minnie. Of course me and Eugenia are the only ones that can drive, so Eugenia usually takes Evelyn, and I usually take Minnie.

“Everything seemed all right that Sunday morning. I got fixed up and drove over to Minnie’s house to pick her up. She lived in a big old house. Her husband was a lawyer just like you, and they were always well off. Of course we always told her she should move to a smaller house, you know, something she could handle cleaning a little better, but she wouldn’t hear of it. She had that stubborn streak in her, and things always had to be done her way. All the Iveys were like that, you know. I do remember saying what a nice dress she was wearing that morning. I said, ‘why Minnie Ivey, are you going to church or to a fashion show?’ And her hair was always fixed just so, but it looked especially nice.

“She could still walk pretty good, even though she was on up there in the years. She never would tell us her age, you know, but I expect she was close to ninety years old. When we got up to the church all the men were standing outside smoking and talking like they do every Sunday morning. One of them asked Minnie how she was getting along when we passed, and I do remember that she said she was doing pretty good, as good as could be expected, wasn’t it nice that the winter was finally over? We sat with Eugenia and Evelyn like we always do, and it wasn’t long before it was time for preaching to start and the men came filing in.

“Now what was the sermon on that morning?” Mealie looked into the generic distance. “I don’t rightly remember. The memory, Mr. Gentry, it goes after a while. Anyway, it was some real good preaching, the kind that only comes along once in a while. If you didn’t get religion listening to the preaching that morning, you wouldn’t never get religion. Then preaching was over and we had Sunday school, and after that Evelyn, Eugenia, and me sung a song; I think it was ‘Precious Memories.’ I always have loved that song. And Minnie, when we came back to our seats, she was crying real soft you know. And when I sat down she whispered to me that that was some of the prettiest singing she ever heard, and how she wished she could still sing.

“Pretty soon it was time for one of the deacons to dismiss us, and when he said, ‘and may God go with you,’ it was then that something peculiar happened. It was the kind of thing old people used to call a sign. The sky had been cloudy all morning, and everybody thought it would rain. Then the deacon said ‘and may God go with you,’ and all of a sudden the room got real bright on account of the sun just broke through the clouds outside. I’ve never seen those stained glass windows light up so much before. It was like the glory of God raining down on our church.

“Well, after the deacon finished dismissing us, some of us women stood around talking inside of the church. You know how old women are, Mr. Gentry. We like to gossip every now and then. And everybody was in such good spirits because of the preaching and the glory of God raining down on us and all, and really Sunday morning is the only time during the week that we’re all together. It must have been then that Minnie got gone. I do remember somebody asking, ‘Where’s Minnie?’ But we all
thought she had gone outside to talk or maybe to look at some of the monuments. She always got around real good by herself, you know. And she was always out looking at the monuments. So we talked for a little while longer, and then we all went outside, too."

At this point in Mealie’s narrative, Evelyn began to chew her wrapped finger vehemently, and Eugenia’s face became sickly drained of color. Mealie’s voice began to struggle to keep its composure, and she was obviously attempting not to burst into tears. Gentry looked interested as he manipulated a paper clip he had discovered lying on his desk. “By luck, Mr. Gentry, I was the last one out of the church. The sun was so bright outside that I couldn’t hardly see. I was walking down the brick steps outside when I saw Evelyn pointing at something above me. I turned around and looked up and at first I couldn’t see nothing at all on account of the sun was right where I was looking. By now everybody was making a racket, and I knew even before I saw her black outline that that was Minnie standing up on the roof of the church right next to the steeple. “The law said she got up there by climbing up a gutter pipe. There ain’t no other way to get to the roof, and we couldn’t find no ladder or nothing. Now I ask you, Mr. Gentry, when was the last time you saw a ninety year old woman climbing up a gutter pipe? So there I was. Everybody had made kind of a half circle around the front of the church, and a couple of the men was trying to climb up to get to her. They kept saying, ‘Now you hold on to that steeple, Miss Ivey, and we’ll be up directly to help you down. You just hold to that steeple, now.’ All the women was gasping, you know how they are, Mr. Gentry. And there I was right under her, shielding my eyes from the sun so as I could get a proper look at her. And of course all I saw was her dark outline. And then I got a peculiar notion in my head.”

“Lord have mercy!” whispered Evelyn. “Mealie, why do you always have to go around upsetting people with your peculiar notions?”

Eugenia looked at her coldly.

“It weren’t just me, Eugenia. You said yourself you thought the same thing.”

“Nonsense.”

“Mr. Gentry, I got this peculiar notion in my head that Minnie was just going to fly away. Now isn’t that peculiar?”

Gentry nodded his agreement.

“What’s even more peculiar is I think Minnie got that notion in her head too. The men had just about got up to the shingles when she let go of that steeple and just spread out her arms like this.” Mealie demonstrated. “And then I reckon everybody figured what was going to happen next, and they was trying be just as quiet as mice so it wouldn’t happen. Even the men quit their scrambling to get onto the roof and just kind of hung on to its edge.”

“Well, Mealie, what are you waiting for? Tell Mr. Gentry that she jumped. Tell him that a woman in perfectly sane mental condition jumped to her death from the steeple of the church she had been attending for the last ninety years. Isn’t that what you want to tell him?”

“Eugenia, why do you always have to put things in little boxes like that? The fact of the matter, Mr. Gentry, is that she spread out her arms and then... well, I’m not quite sure. She seemed to... well, float.”

“Float?” Gentry laid down the paper clip which
he had twisted straight.

"Nonsense," muttered Eugenia.

Mealie suddenly lost control of her temper. "I know what I saw, Eugenia. She floated, oh yes, she floated alright. I know that because before the sun was just above her head, and then she was blocking it out and all I could see was her silhouette all surrounded by bright light... just her black silhouette. Just floating up there right above that steeple. And..." Mealie paused to wipe her eyes and catch her breath. "And then some woman screamed." As if on cue, Evelyn burst into disconsolate sobs. "And I remember looking down at my feet, and there she was, Mr. Gentry, just laying there on them brick steps, right at my feet. Her white hair, part of it was laying on my shoe, she was so close. And oh, how her head was bleeding. It made part of her hair turn pink. But the thing I remember most, Mr. Gentry..."

Gentry stared mesmerized. Evelyn had bowed her head and was still sobbing despite her efforts to calm herself. Eugenia still sat in stony silence, but her eyes were quite watery, and every now and then she wiped away an unwanted tear.

"Mr. Gentry, did you ever skin your knee when you were little?" Gentry nodded. "Her hands, Mr. Gentry..." Mealie held out her own hands. The palms were soft and shiny. "They were... her poor hands." Mealie bowed her own head.

"Permelia Matthews!" Eugenia scolded in a harsh but quiet voice. "Mr. Gentry, I apologize for the candid nature of my friend's disclosure. Perhaps this is not the right time for such matters." Eugenia rose and took the still sealed will from Gentry's desk. Reluctantly, first Mealie and then Evelyn rose as well. "I will be in touch with your office in order to set up another time for the reading of the will."

"Of course," responded Gentry. He rose and opened the door of his office, then walked the three women, two of them sobbing, to the door of the squat brick building which housed the law offices of Gentry and Gentry. The secretary watched them curiously as they passed. After the three women had left, the secretary walked up to Gentry to inquire why the two women had been crying. He shrugged his shoulders and explained that they had been in for a reading of a will, and that the deceased had committed suicide.

S. Elliot Miller
This and That
mixed media
--Dohee Lee
Primavera
monoprint
--Alice Donohoe
The Geometry of Flowers

In a morning garden
I see the delicate curves
of soft petals and leaves,
of women in youth
and petals rounded soft,
like water-worked
pebbles, smooth and worn,
sway-shaped and smooth,
soft to the touch,
light touch,
of the curved caress.

Nature lives in such curves,
such soft geometries
and meanderings.
Uncaptured and undefined,
hiding
underneath the petals.

– Toby Smith

Reflections

Sitting in the beauty parlor,
I saw the face of my mother
reflected in the mirror from behind me,
and I wondered
what imaginary birds
built the nest of grey hairs
on the crown of her head;
what unspoken worries
stretched out their slender bodies
in rows across her forehead;
what tides of laughter
sent waves lapping
in crescents about her lips.
For a second our stares locked,
and I saw myself as a woman
who wears her age quietly,
as perhaps she saw
in my reflection
the face of a girl
new in her skin.

– Megan E. Worman
Don't ignore the facts
photograph
--Erica Bleeg
Messing with Mom
stenograph
--Jauna M. Brooks
Smoke in November

To kiss myself, I draw deep the sulfur strands
and slow, let lap through lung and lip
the smooth soul of smoke and tar.

The other, the sun, You that imploded
in toxic nightmare, leaving no trace,
only void and vacuum sucking light
clean from the stars and belching only fumes.
You who with mighty entropy cracked those reservoirs
of self-infliction, letting loose
the shrink-wrapped beast of that blessed leaf.

The merciless worship of nicotine
and fast-dissolving sparks holds now my heart;
the fateless absolution of the butane click
and long drawn poison breaths
fills my mind with song and dance,
and beckons to dig deeper the pit.

So we sit shrouded in smoke
and kowtow in low arcs
to that drooling demon who sounds loud
the ringing bell of habit and fire;
always with each tense inhalation,
each subtle burst of cloud in teeth,
each tiny explosion of carbon and flesh,
emulating our drawing in of spirit
in long-eyed dreams and warm-water embraces.

But the ticking clock and wavering wick
offers no future Nirvana to love,
and with cold anticipation I breathe
out the past’s scorched and bony remains.

— Colin Rushing
Untitled painting
--Holly Everett
Untitled
mixed media
--Jill Murphy
Loose Feathers

It felt like every summer before it—no school, bright blue sky, and Aunt Althea’s small, two-story cottage perched on top of a low hill close to the lake. Every year, before summer could make us too lazy, Mom and Dad would whisk us off to Aunt Althea’s for about three weeks. We would always complain about going, but, strangely, when it came time to leave, we would complain about that, too.

I really don’t know why we hated going because there were all kinds of fun things to do at Aunt Althea’s. My brother Tim and I would explore the paths around the lake. Dad and I would throw ball in the grass take the boat out and go fishing, or just fish from the end of the dock. We would enjoy big slices of Aunt Althea’s chocolate cake, spend all afternoon swimming, and we’d sometimes even manage to get up to see the sun rise over the trees on the far side of the lake, an experience Dad always called “enriching.” One night the family would make a big fire on right there on Aunt Althea’s beach, cook food, and tell stories. And if it ever rained, we’d stay inside and listen to Mom and Dad and Aunt Althea talk about how it would be better weather tomorrow and we kids would be able to play, so don’t worry.

Sometimes Aunt Althea let us rummage around in her attic and find old things to play with, but not often since my little sister Gurtie was born. “Gurtie is too young to be in that old dusty attic,” Aunt Althea would say, and Mom would agree. Gurtie would cry but then she would be okay because she usually got to play with Aunt Althea’s cats, Tigger and Clyde.

I guess by the time I was seven I was pretty used to our summer trips to see Aunt Althea. They had become pretty routine. Or so I thought. One summer, it all changed. That was the summer of the goose.

“My, you’ve grown!” Aunt Althea said when we arrived. It didn’t matter how long it’d been between visits—we always grew to Aunt Althea even though we felt the same. She would hug us and kiss our cheeks, and sometimes hand us dollar bills.

Like I said, this summer was different. Last summer, and all of them before that, Tim would always be around to play with. There was always something to do like jump into the water from the wooden platform anchored a few feet offshore, lie and watch the stars come out and listen to the crickets at night, dig up worms, play war, or chase the girl next door. But this summer, instead of chasing the girl next door, Tim was talking to her. Mom said it was a natural thing and Tim couldn’t help it. I tried to get his mind off of her by suggesting we go dig for worms or play war, but he always told me “Scram, shrimp.”

But this summer was different for another reason. A feathery, beaked, long-necked reason.

Our first run-in with the goose happened on the third day we were there. The whole family was down at the lake because it was such a hot afternoon. Even Aunt Althea came out and sat on the end of the pier, wearing a big bathing suit that was stretched so far I thought it would break. She looked like she had a bunch of Gurtie’s swimming floats crammed in there with her body.

“Such a hot day,” she kept saying. Mom, who refused to get her hair wet, bobbed up and down in her inner tube and told us kids to be careful jumping into the water from the wooden float. “Wait ‘til the
one before you is out of the way before you jump in," she warned, and said, "Ted, do you think Gurtie should be doing that?" Ted—I mean Dad—said sure, it'd be fine as long as she wore those float things on her arms.

Before long, Mom, Dad, and Aunt Althea got tired of the lake and went up to the house. Tim was supposed to keep an eye on me and Gurtie, which I thought would be easy for him since that girl had gone away for the day.

Gurtie was the first to spot it. I was resting on a raft and barely took any notice when she said "What's that?" and pointed out to the middle of the lake. All I saw were some boats pretty far out. "They're water skiers, Gurt," Tim said and took a plunge off the wooden float.

"Uh-uh," she persisted. "What's THAT?"

Now I did see an object on the water. It was about as far away as the corner store is from our house, but it was swimming toward us quickly.

All at once, Tim came up underneath me and tipped over the raft. I fell in the water and got a good mouthful. When I surfaced, he was ready to dunk me again when I said, "Wait! What is that?"

Tim saw it this time. He shrugged. "Probably a duck."

But it wasn't. I could tell—we'd fed ducks at the pond back home. This thing was bigger and had a longer neck, and was gray and black, not duck white. And now it was a lot closer and swimming fast.

Tim went on swimming as if nothing was wrong and Gurtie began screaming her lungs out. A duck had stolen bread right out of Gurtie's hand once at the pond and I figured that's why she was crying now. She hated anything that looked like a duck.

Gurtie tried to paddle to the dock, but since she really had not learned to swim and could only float, she got nowhere.

Now the duck thing was only about ten feet away. I watched it and swam backwards a little. "It's a goose!" cried Tim as he climbed onto the wooden dock, got a running start, and jumped into the water, splashing the big bird. He laughed and looked at me for my reaction.

I don't know if it was Tim's splash or Gurtie's loud bawling that made it mad, but that goose squawked, flopped its wings, and tried to get Tim. A second passed before he understood what was happening, but when he did, his expression quickly changed from a smile to a frown. He hopped up on the dock and the goose did, too. It chased him all the way down the dock—Tim stumbled a little, and the goose gained on him, feathers flying.

It followed him up the hill, craning its neck and nipping his butt the whole way.

By now, Dad had heard Gurtie's screaming and he came outside to see what was wrong, with Mom close behind. Gurtie looked up from her crying and saw the goose attacking Tim's rear and her tears turned to laughter. She laughed more when dad tried to chase it away and the goose just flapped its wings. I almost forgot to kick my legs to keep myself afloat as I stared, unbelieving, up the hill.

Finally, dad succeeded and the goose waddled back down the hill, got in the lake on the other side of the pier, and swam away.

Tim stood rubbing his sore butt, refusing to let Mom look at it and survey the damage. Gurtie was still chuckling when Dad came down to the dock and lifted her out of the water. Aunt Althea trotted as fast as she could out of the house, moaning the
whole time, and wrapped Tim in a towel.

“Oh, that old goose!” she said. “It’s been around since Spring. It’s a mean one! Just last month it snapped off Warren Patterson’s fishing line while he was sleeping in his boat.”

“Is that the same goose you said bit a man across the lake on the foot?” Mom asked as Tim sniffled a little.

“Yes,” Aunt Althea asserted, standing with her hands on her hips and watching the terrible bird swim away. “Right after it did that, it went to the bathroom all over the Wrightson’s front porch. If he does that to my beach…”

I paid no more attention to my aunt; I had heard enough. I got a big knot in my stomach from thinking about that goose just swimming up and doing what it wanted. Though Gurtie was laughing, I found nothing funny about the goose’s attack on Tim. Even Dad hadn’t done too great in driving the bird away. We were going to be here another week-and-a-half. I could be attacked tomorrow, I thought.

That night, Aunt Althea’s chocolate cake didn’t taste quite the same, and the game of Chutes and Ladders, usually my favorite, didn’t seem to matter much. Dad tucked me in as usual in my upstairs bed by the window, where I looked out across that big shiny lake. I was not able to think about anything but horrible swimming birds. It was like when you turn the TV channel to a scary scene by accident—it stayed in my memory and kept me in terror. I could have imagined a hundred monsters creeping around in those woods that night, none of which would scare me. Somewhere out there was a certain very real feathered monster. Somewhere out there was the goose. I tossed and turned myself to sleep.

The next day Dad coaxed me into getting back into the water. It was cooler, and Tim, Mom, Gurtie, and Aunt Althea had driven to town for groceries. “Come on, Franklin!” dad said in that rousing way of his. Dad loved to swim and always said it was “the perfect exercise.” When we were in the water that day, he told me that the lake was man-made, but he didn’t know how they built a lake or where they got the water from. I didn’t really care about that, though. All I could think of was the big goose and its biting beak and ruffled wings.

In my fit of insomnia the night before, I had figured out something. The goose was like Vince Griffith at school, the kid who was almost 10 but was still in the third grade. He took everyone’s money for fruit and ice cream and saved it up and bought baseball cards which he traded with the fifth graders. He sat where he wanted. He made us let him use the bathroom right when he wanted to go, no matter who else was ahead of him, and he pushed people off the swings when the teacher wasn’t looking. Vince Griffith was one bad kid.

Dad and I were just swimming and minding our own business when we saw the goose again. It rounded the bend to Aunt Althea’s beach when we saw it.

“Hey, lookie there!” Dad said, pointing and grinning. “Shame Tim isn’t here.”

We paddled our rafts away from the goose. I felt safer because Dad was there, but not very much. The goose took no notice of us, and instead decided to go up and poop right there on my aunt’s beach. It waddled around on shore for awhile, and it was not long until it drew the attention of Tigger and Clyde, the two cats.

Tigger made the first move against this new intruder. Dad and I watched as he slunk down the
hill, keeping himself very low to the ground. Clyde crept along behind him, but was more timid and stayed back to watch what would happen when the bird and Tigger met.

All of my life I had heard that cats ate birds. Cats ate birds and dogs ate cats and lions ate dogs and so on. So I was kind of glad to see Tigger approach the big goose, figuring it would get eaten and I would have nothing to worry about for the rest of the vacation.

Wrong. As soon as the goose saw the tomcat, it stared at him and began to slowly waddle toward him. Tigger got all bunched up and looked bigger than he really was to try to scare the bird, but it just kept right on coming. Tigger backed up, faster and faster, and finally decided to turn and run full speed the other direction, releasing a loud hiss before he took off. The goose then pursued Clyde, who hunched down like an orange rug, then darted to the top of the hill. Clyde retreated to the bushes by the house and the goose vanished at the top of the hill.

Dad shrugged at me. "Oh, well." We went ahead and swam a little more, but my eyes never left the top of that hill. I wanted to be sure that goose didn't sneak back down and jump in the water behind my back.

We heard the car drive up and stop. Car doors opened and closed, and we heard voices. The driveway was hidden to us, but we sure heard Tim’s unmistakable shriek of horror. Dad and I both realized in the same second what was going on.

What happened next was a blur. We got out of the water and hustled up the hill to see what he could do, but the goose was gone. It had shambled off into the woods by the driveway when Tim screamed. Aunt Althea discovered that the bird pooped not only on her beach, but once or twice on the hillside and again on her front stoop. She was attempting scrub it away with water and a broom. Mom was busy cleaning up the mess from a bag that Tim dropped when he saw the goose, and Gurtie was in the back seat of the open car and was somehow still sleeping through all the commotion. Mom and Dad got involved in a fierce discussion, a lot like the ones when one of us has done something wrong and only one of them believes that what we did was bad.

"Honey, it just wants a friend," Dad said.

"Well it has a strange way of acquiring one by terrorizing my kid," Mom said. She was talking about Tim, but the statement covered me, too.

"It’s just a goose, for crying out loud," Dad said.

And as he said that, I thought that, after all, it WAS only a silly bird, and I was being afraid for no reason. I had secretly watched several horror movies on cable in my day, and I had no problem with them. Just makeup and real people behind those monsters. Yeah, I should have no problem dealing with—

"The goose!" Gurtie screamed and flailed wildly, trying to get out of her child’s seat.

Whatever it was that had formed inside me collapsed like one of my tinkertoy towers that Tim sometimes decides to kick over. That feathered terror was waddling back out of the woods not ten feet from me.

I backed up slowly until I felt the wall of Aunt Althea’s house. Tim was standing close by, trying to act cool because the girl next door had come outside to see what was happening. Mom and Dad were standing near the car. My eyes stayed fixed on IT.
“Franklin, it likes your towel!” Dad called out as he unfastened Gurtie and held her close to him.

I looked at the bright green beach towel I was holding as the goose started to nip at the end of it on the ground. I hurled it on top of the bird and ran to Aunt Althea’s screened-in porch, only the door was hooked from the inside and wouldn’t open. The goose popped out from under the towel and started for me again.

Suddenly, Aunt Althea came running up from the other side of the house brandishing her broom. She took a mighty swing (Dad said later she looked like Babe Ruth) and completely missed the goose, but she did nail the shrubs by the porch. Spooked, Clyde bolted from his cover and dashed between my aunt’s legs, and she, already off-balance from the swing, tried not to step on her pet and toppled right onto her backside. All of this was too much for the goose, who kind of half walked, half flew up the driveway past my laughing parents, scattering a couple feathers as it went.

Well, Aunt Althea turned out to be okay, “just a little bruised,” as she said. But the whole episode made Dad decide to call the animal control people after all. I didn’t have much of an idea who the animal control people were, really, but dad said it would be better for the rest of my family’s vacation, and safer for Aunt Althea, if they just came and took the goose away, maybe to another lake or something.

The next day, an animal control officer called on the phone. As soon as Aunt Althea hung up, she told everyone that “that ornery goose” with “a feather growing the wrong way” had been caught. I jumped for joy inside.

Later that day I was sun bathing on the wooden float, no longer afraid of the goose. Earlier Dad and I had played catch right by the water’s edge, and saw no goose. The sky hung bright and blue over me, telling me summer was fading fast and I should just lie there and do nothing or this time would be lost. It was almost guaranteed that Tim would play with me later, because he was too nervous to talk to that girl since Gurtie had let it spill to her how his butt got bitten by a goose and he had shed a couple tears. Things were going great. It was about one in the afternoon and everyone else but me had gone up for lunch.

I guess I dozed off for a moment, and was awakened by a gentle shaking of the float, as if someone were trying to get on it. Great, I thought. Tim’s trying to dump me in the water. He thinks I can’t tell he’s here. I’ll show him!

I jumped at Tim, only I was shocked to see the black and gray, long-necked, butt-biting goose there instead, only an arms-length away. It honked and looked at me with dark eyes. Maybe the animal people got the wrong bird!

I was paralyzed. No, beyond paralyzed. I don’t think anyone else could have moved me then, either. I felt like stone. Solid stone. I even found myself wishing I was stone, that way the bite would not hurt as much.

The goose ruffled its feathers. One fell off and floated onto my chest, tickling it and forcing me to move ever so slightly to remove it. The goose did not attack yet. It simply settled down and sat on the other end of the wooden platform, and watched me curl my legs to Indian style and sit up. If this was Vince Griffith, at least I could try talking him out of killing me.

I tried to think about the possibilities. I could
dive in and make a fast swim for it. I could ease off into the water and go. But I did neither, just sat there watching it watch me. I wanted the security of Aunt Althea's house, where I knew oversized birds could not get in, or wanted Dad to come out the door and scare it away. But neither of my wishes came true, and I just sat there...staring.

Finally, the goose turned toward the shore, where Tigger and Clyde were walking around on the sand. Swallowing, I reached over and tried to touch the bird for some reason, but the goose shook and I pulled my hand back. So I sat there some more, then slipped softly into the lake and began to paddle around the side of the float toward the dock. The goose honked again as it saw me, and stood up with a ruffle of its feathers. It got in the water and started to swim after me, crossing in front and blocking my path to the dock.

I panicked and turned around, swimming out toward the middle of the lake. I didn't want to look back to see if the bird was following me—all I could think of was the fear it had brought me the last few days. And I kept swimming.

Soon, tired from not having eaten since breakfast, I decided to turn around and see where the goose was. I'd seen it swim fast before, but it was still paddling around the wooden platform fairly far away from me. It seemed to be looking my way, though.

I laughed because I thought the goose couldn't swim out here. Then I realized I was further away from shore than I ever had been. Aunt Althea's beach was a tan blur in the distance.

Just then, the goose began to honk and flail in the water. It started to swim toward me, but would stop every now and then and wave its wings, chopping them in the water. Dad came out of the house, but he was so far away I could barely see him.

All at once, it hit me. Or almost hit me. I looked in the direction the goose was squawking and saw a big motorboat almost on top of me. I had been breathing so hard I didn't pay attention to the loud roar it was making, and the drivers were so busy looking at the water skiers tied to their boat that they didn't see me, either.

I plunged into the water and kicked twice, really hard, but still felt the roar of the boat on top of me. The current from it turned me upside down, and I didn't know which way was up for a second. Water gushed into my mouth. After struggling for a few seconds, I was able to get to the surface again, but was very confused because my ears were filled with water and I couldn't hear. My body seemed almost numb.

I saw a glimpse of my Dad running down the dock, a couple other figures on the hill by the house, and had no sooner caught my breath when I saw—the goose. It was still pretty far away, bobbing up and down in the wake of the boat. It honked as it saw me come out of the water. I used the last of my strength and paddled the few feet to it, slung an arm over its body and clung to it for dear life.

The next thing I remember, I was lying there in my bed with Aunt Althea's big, warm face peering down at me. I heard Mom and Dad in the room, and then saw them look down at me. I asked what happened, and Dad smiled and told me about the boat, the water that went into my lungs, and my "unlikely savior," the goose. The goose had kept afloat and paddled its way to my Dad as he swam to try to help me, according to Aunt Althea. Mom said I was really lucky I saw the boat when I did or it would
have run over me completely, and I told her it was the goose that made me look.

There was a pain in my foot; when I looked down, I saw a bandage. Mom told me the blade on the motor hit me when the boat went over my head. A doctor had been by to check me out, and right as she told me that, Aunt Althea came back upstairs dragging the doctor along, telling him I was awake.

The rest of the trip, I couldn't get into the water because my foot needed to heal, but the doctor said I was okay otherwise. Aunt Althea told me she was “a great deal relieved” to see me alive and well, and I got extra big slices of cake two days in a row. Gurtie sat and listened with concern as I told her everything I remembered about the event. Dad played more ball with me than usual, and Mom couldn't walk by me without giving me a hug. Even Tim managed a “Glad you're okay—who'd I have to pick on if you died?”

Don’t worry—I didn’t forget about the goose. For some reason, it kind of stayed close by the house a few days after the accident, and even let me feed it bread crumbs. Gurtie helped sometimes, hurling whole half-slices right at its head. Even though it felt stupid talking to a big bird, I would tell it thanks for helping and sorry for being scared. Even Tim came around after a couple days and no longer screamed when he saw the bird. He and the girl next door also helped me feed it. Dad, who didn’t bother calling the animal control people again, said animals couldn’t remember like humans so the goose had no real way of knowing who I was. I don’t know, though. I think it may have actually remembered me. And I think it may have stuck so close to the house because it wanted to see if I was all right. Maybe not, but I just get that feeling inside....

Then it was time to leave. Like always, the trip went too fast. As Mom and Dad were saying their good-byes to Aunt Althea, Gurtie was crying because we couldn’t keep the goose, and Tim was saying his farewells to his newfound love next door, I ran down to the lake to see if I could find the goose. It waddled out of the trees, approached me, and looked like it would nip my hand, but it didn’t and I patted its head. I gently plucked one of the goose’s gray feathers. Before going to the car and my departing family, I tossed it some bread crumbs and hollered “Thanks!” to it one more time. We pulled out of Aunt Althea’s driveway and waved to her. I looked back and saw the goose swimming past the dock as we drove off; it got smaller and smaller as we went, and finally disappeared in the distance.

That was the last time I ever saw the goose. We’ve been to Aunt Althea’s three times since that summer, and Aunt Althea has filled out that old bathing suit a little more each time, but none of us ever saw that goose. Somehow, I never minded much that I didn’t see it again. Things seemed appropriate that way.

That was also the summer I learned a big lesson about the Vince Griffiths of the world; that was the summer I realized I had no reason to be afraid.

— Ed Gray
a remembrance, uncalled

It has been some time since he last cried himself home,
His face corroded and cleansed by some unseen ocean’s lager.
They were
Two black stars in a dark, dark nighttime sky
Seen by One and then none.
A silly sitcom movie about love, fictitious and vain
In its android mother’s manufacture of a sphere,
Ground to dust and blown into the grass by an endless, unyielding machine.

So Adrian stumbles to his car and fumbles with the wrong keys when,
Looking up at the stars, an unexpected rainbow from the moon rushes through him and
in him,
Carrying him to a pastoral landscape far downstream.
It is midnight and the silent snow falls like a blanket of silk
Upon the wet and solemn highway.
Until...
Until.
Until he remembers the slight tack of her lipstick as she pulls away,
Her hips pressed against his,
His arms wrapped around her core like strong, knotty cords
Which, as pulled away, stronger grows.
He tries desperately to remember remembrance, and falls.
Snowflakes crumble on his wet and solemn cheeks.

The next morning, no one finds the scattered pile
Of bones, salt and frayed barley strings
Dying on a futon somewhere in southern Pennsylvania.

— John Capriotti
**Untitled**

The surface folds into crests and troughs until our drifting boat reaches the shade of hunching sycamores along the banks. Cottonmouths, collapsed on the branches above our heads, hang like torn inner tubes, airless in the shadowy canopy. We cast our lines deep into the Chowan, the nylon strings waver then tighten as the water becomes thick again with fish.

On the banks, beneath a bush powdered with fragments of moss, a lone moccasin uncurls and moves shoulderless into the silence of the river, gliding upon its chin.

— Jon Pineda

**Full Mooned Cicada**

Itchy scream songs overheard between fertile cicadas, draw me out of my numb buzz into the sexing night. My arms curl, and hold me to the ardent damp of the leaves and red earth. I Look up - the old moon, that has waxed my August, will take me back to where I can feel the night again.

— Heather Comfort
Carmen
pencil drawing
--Tonya Kirby
Rat

Rat wore a felt cap to cover his ears
And in his cloak he called himself "King Henry"
But his brothers called him Rat.
And Rat crawled through walls
To burst out, shouting "Tis thy King!"
(Though it always sounded like "Tilblooie!")

Uncle Mac gave Rat a trombone once.
With a knife-edge voice
That dripped out of his mouth
Uncle Mac said "Here Rat,
King Henry should have a coronet,
To play his fanfares."
So Rat wrote symphonies.
Fat, raw symphonies with sharp dissonant notes
That relied on volume more than anything else.
"Like Beethoven." Rat said,
Pretending to be deaf.

Rat played these concertos for anyone,
But especially loud for Kathy Frome.
He called her "Milady," and "My Queen,"
Brought her royal gifts of cocktail swords and dice
And she thought he was sort of cute
But she still called him Rat.

And once Rat mixed turpentine and railway gasoline,
Guzzled it until it came back,
Let fly with a string quartet of screams,
"It wasn't supposed to be like this.
Not for King Henry.
Not like this."

— Josh Granger
Untitled painting
--Alicia Jaynes
Island painting
--Sally Chang
Hoverer

I am gravity's enemy. Wingless, I am sideshow spectacle, lead-heavy bones and strong will. My four corners are neither dirt nor cloud, but stale air in which limbs writhe to remain above all that is solid. I do not soar, but linger on the edge of a release, a plummet to the horizontal. Now is an empty pause, an anticipation of applause from an audience held captive, faces raised from below like gapmouthed infant birds, whose feet are angry roots tangled underground, whose hands are jealous branches pointed in envy.

— Megan E. Worman
Hoping for a Winter of Discontent

Sex with Hector always glistened.
It was dew on the Eiffel Tower--
just regular old dew,
but somehow, you know,
Eiffel.
Figure Hector was a standard
'gainst which other men were judged.
Lord knows after sacking with Hector
I was ready to judge and jury all other men I’d had
and pronounce the verdict
"Guilty of imperfection."
The sex always glistened,
it was something reliable,
it was something of certainty,
you could set your calendar by it--
"Today? Oh, it’s seventeen days ’til great sex with Hector."
But who wants that reassurance?
Who wants the sure thing?
Fine coffee makes you swoon
’cuz you don’t know it’s gonna taste like heaven.
Cup after cup after cup
it ceases surprising,
stops tasting so grand.
Do you think Jesus
would’ve walked across the water
if he hadn’t been nervous
about being tripped by flying fish?
No way.
So I tried my best to dull the luster,
to knock Hector down with technique.
I tried everything:
fake headache,
lingerie too complex to remove,
positions that shouldn’t have worked,
funeral references at crucial moments...
all failed.
I mean, you can tell the yardstick
it only measures an inch,
but you know,
and the stick knows,
it still measures a yard.
So I hoped for cold weather,
that the Tower’s dew would turn to frost
and when I went to lick it,
my tongue would stick.
But winter never came.
Figure Hector was locked into spring.
I never knew I loved winter so much.
I never knew I loved failure so much.
I never knew I’d pray for the good times to end.

— Josh Granger
Untitled
mixed media
--Anne Wine
Going Straight Now

I felt the worn ridges of the steering wheel lightly groove along my palms as I let the wheel release from its left turn. We were going straight now. I looked at Ritter. He was asleep in the passenger's seat, his head turned toward me, mouthing noiseless phrases in his sleep. He was probably talking to some new girlfriend of his, saying how she had felt so good. Talking about her legs or her mouth. I tried to forget about everything. I looked ahead and drove.

The roadside wasn't much for scenery, an occasional farmhouse here and there, but mostly just fields, dirt fields in rows as if someone went along with a gigantic comb and made them all the same perfect lines. After about an hour on that stretch we passed a sign that read: Meadsville 10 miles. I touched Ritter's arm, and he tightened his face as he stretched out of his nap.

"What the fuck?" He looked at his watch. "You like waking me every fifteen minutes or something?"

"I'm sorry," I said, "just wanted to make sure we're going the right way, that's all."

"Don't even tell me were lost."

"I don't think so..."

"Well, where are we?" he asked, tightening his face again.

"Heading for Meadsville," I said. I couldn't look at him, I knew he was getting mad so I looked at the speedometer, the gauge had been broken for sometime now.

"What did I say..." he paused, peering down at his watch again, "twenty minutes ago?!" I took a quick look at him and then back to the road. "Shit, I thought I made myself clear! Edenton, Kyle, is right after Meadsville." He had pulled out a map and was poking his finger on some random dot. I thought his finger was going to poke right through that town. He dropped the map by his feet and kicked it in with the pile of empty soda cans on the floor. "Ok?"

"Alright," I said, real low to myself, and he leaned back in his seat, this time away from me so that I couldn't see his mouth or make out what he was saying to that girl in his dreams.

I wasn't upset. I could tell he was just nervous about visiting his parents. That's why he was being so mean to me, I know it. Whenever he'd finish talking with his father on the phone, Ritter would put his hand over the receiver and whisper to me "my dad's an ass," and then afterwards pretend the conversation didn't bother him. That's how Ritter is, always keeping things to himself.

I asked him once if he had mentioned me to his parents. He said, "Are you fucking crazy? My dad would shit. He still thinks I'm dating the same girl I dated in high school!" I told Ritter that he should be honest with his father. "After all, if we're going to stay together..." I said. He interrupted with "Go to hell!"

For a while now, it seems as though that's all he wants to say to me. He'll stay out late, and I'll ask, "Where've you been?"

"Go to hell, he'll say.

He keeps things from me, I know. "Saw you at the Peppermint last night."

"So."

"Who was the blonde?"

"What?"

"The blonde you kept dancing with..." He hates
when I follow him on his free time. That was Ritter's idea-free time away from each other.

"I can't believe this shit!"

"What?"

"Don't you fucking trust me?"

"Of course, I do..."

"What do you think I'm going to do, find someone else?"

"Maybe...I don't know."

"Go to hell, Kyle."

We drove through Meadsville's three stoplights and then past a billboard advertising for Simpson's diner.

"Ritter?" I whispered, touching his back.

"What?" he said. He moved away from me.

"Do you mind if we stop and get something to eat?" My insides had been tight ever since our argument this morning. "Or do you think your parents are going to make us something for dinner?" I was waiting for him to tell me how I was in for a treat: his mom's collards, fried catfish, some cornbread. But he didn't. He just sat up and pulled down the visor.

"No, you'd better stop. My mom doesn't know we're both coming...She thinks it's just me."

"How did you tell her you were getting home?" I asked.

"I told her I was...ah...borrowing a car."

"Oh," I said, glancing at the parallel lines on the road. He never said anything about surprising his parents.

"I thought they knew I was coming," I said.

"You."

"Well...a friend, I mean." This whole trip was supposed to be about honesty. He was finally going to tell them to their face, or least, that's what he told me last night.

"Kyle, I never said I told them we were coming together."

"Alright," I said. "I guess it doesn't matter." But, it did in a way. I just wanted some honesty.

He was looking into the clip-on mirror and mashing down his cowlick. I couldn't help from grinning at him, the way he winced when his hair would pop back up and out of place.

"What are you laughing at?" he said, beginning to smile and noticing my grin. "Oh yeah, well take a little of this..." and he poked along my beerbelly until I laughed out loud.

"Stop!" I laughed, trying to take breaths, "C'mon Ritter...oh god...oh god, C'mon!" I couldn't stop laughing. He kept poking me with his finger. I could feel tears coming in my eyes from laughing so hard. God, I missed this. He sat back and chuckled for a minute. "Is this place up ahead okay?" I asked, regaining my breath. He nodded, relaxing back in his seat.

I pushed slightly on the brakes and turned the wheel to the left, letting the ridges gradually roll back again through my palms. Ritter didn't notice. He was looking straight ahead. When we stopped, he jumped out of the car, leaving the door open. He ran over to some girl that was using the payphone by the diner. I leaned over the seats and pulled his door shut, then stepped out of the car, stretched, and closed the door forcefully, capping off the little routine. Ritter was hugging her now. I walked quickly over to where they were.

"Is this another one?" I asked, walking up to them. She was skinny and short, hardly the type that was going to keep Ritter happy.

"What do you mean?" he said.
“Another girlfriend,” I said quickly, looking her over again as she clung to his waist.

“What girlfriend? No,” he said, looking at her and grinning. She did the same. “No...this is Candace Smith. We went to high school together.”

“Hey!” she said, bouncy. I forced a smile and looked away, hoping I wouldn’t catch sight of some pom-pom or megaphone hiding behind her.

“Kyle, I was just telling Candy she could eat with us,” he said, giving me a serious look the way he does when he really wants something.

“Tammy Parker was suppose to meet me,” she said to Ritter, pulling him toward the door, “you remember Tammy, don’t you?” Ritter nodded.

“She still talks about you, you know,” she said.

I looked at this Candy and thought to myself, “He didn’t come here to see you, you little bitch. He’s going to tell his parents!” Ritter gave her another hug.

“When’s the last time we hung out?” he asked her.

“God, I don’t know. A year and a half or so?”

“Damn it’s good to home,” he said and gave her another hug. He used to want nothing to do with Edenton or his family, but now, now I guess things were changing for Ritter. He was trying to look at things differently. When we were getting in the car this morning, he said, “Kyle, I’m changing. I don’t know what it is, but I feel like I’m finding answers to all these questions, the kinda shit that’s been bothering me. You know?”

“Great,” I said, “hope your dad has the same attitude.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well...Us,” I said, turning the key in the ignition.

“Uh...yeah.”

They walked ahead of me into the diner. I looked at Candy’s arms still wrapped around Ritter’s waist as if he was a huge, stuffed animal that her boyfriend had won for her at the town carnival. I looked at her little ass too, the way it shook all happy. Candy turned her head, looking at me and said, “I’m sure Tammy’ll be here in a minute...Ritter.” She winked at me as if to say that was my date.

You gotta be fucking kidding me, I thought to myself.

A tall, slender waitress silently cut corners around the room and finally reached our table. She was long and quiet, like a heron. Candy sent her away for iced tea, and I watched Ritter’s eyes follow the waitress to the counter. Candy noticed too.

“So I bet you got a lot of young women after you in, where is it now...Virginia Beach?” she asked, poking at his sides. Her eyes were big and wide. She wanted him to say “Nah,” I could feel it. I know she wanted him to say that, it was the vanity in her but Ritter only chuckled and forced a “Well, you know...” She grinned, her eyes closed into thin, little slits. The waitress returned with Candy’s tea.

“What about you...Kyle?” asked Candy, “are you a ladies’ man like Ritter here?”

The waitress looked at me, Ritter looked at me. For one moment I felt the weight of every stare in the room. It was silent, no plates hitting the tables, no tea being poured into glasses, no noise. Just eyes. Big eyes, like Candy’s, holding me down the way her arms had held onto Ritter’s waist. Stares. I could feel my stomach tighten.

“Nah,” I said, jokingly. Ritter grinned and looked away. He knew those kind of questions
embarassed me. I wanted to be honest with her though. I wanted to look her in the eyes, and say, “He’s different now, Candy. Ritter’s mine, not yours. I don’t give a damn if your friends still talk about him or not,” but I didn’t feel comfortable for some reason.

I wanted to tell Ritter I wasn’t hungry anymore. I wanted to leave this place. Now, before Tammy comes here, before another one of his girlfriends or whoever pulled him back to this town shows up. Before he had the chance to look at her, after being with me so long, and see her thick hair topple against her shoulders like shorebreak. He would remember my thinning hair and laugh.

I watched Candy speaking to the waitress, the pen scribbling, Ritter constantly glancing at the waitress. His eyes moving along her slender legs. She looked at him and extended her face forward, to hear him. To show off her neck. I watched Ritter’s mouth move, but I couldn’t hear him. His lips moved like the phrases of his sleep, silent mouthings the way a fish does, gulping mindlessly when its out of the water.

“And what about you? What will you have?” asked the waitress.

“What...what? I’m sorry, what was that?”

“What do you want?” she asked me.

I didn’t know what to say. I had been hungry all morning but not now. Ritter leaned over and whispered something into Candy’s ear, and she clapped her hands together. “That’s great!” she said, bouncing on the seat, “I bet if you go down there tomorrow you can get a job. Wow, I had no idea you were home for good!” Ritter looked at me for a moment. His face was serious, the way it looks when he really wants something. I couldn’t hear him anymore.

—Jon Pineda
Untitled

It is very wild freon that must purr
in your silent rushing blood labyrinth
on to your sandy crystal silicon heart
for it smells sweet, like the yellow glowing
coolant that one must never let an animal eat,
for although the creature savors and devours
it will die in great pain from the poison...
I am bewitched at the edge of the great
yellow-green puddle. The sticky footing
the unworldly color the Detroit ancestry
the modern parents the sweet sweet sweet
and evermore until swallowed utterly until
consumed entirely until gone until the gut-wrenching
pain begins and I realize that my senses
have enslaved me again and this time it is fatal.

– Susan Danewitz

Another World

In Shanty-town the heat is hard
like the life we live, and
like the old rutabaga we hope to eat tonight.
As we, my friends and I, walk along the dusty road
towards the country store—
thistle tearing the scabs from our bare feet—
we jokingly dig deep into our empty pockets
for the money that will afford us a taste of the twice-cooked
pork, and the refrigerator’s drink and the unexpected
something for momma.
Finding a clear blue puddle near the railroad tracks
we muddy it
and pretend that another world lies just beyond.

– Lyle S. Walton
Untitled
photograph
--Robert Calvert
blue woman on black bed: variation on a sestina

Based on a sculpture in a museum.

Blue woman on black bed.
Blue blue blue woman
on black black black
bed with black man
with black black black man.
Apart.

Woman colored indigo, you sit—on that bed, that
black bed with black sheets and black
man—slumped over the edge, while,
man, he sleeps . . . his legs
apart, smiling, dreaming, the
bed creaks from his weight.

Your blue back curves away from the black
bed. Your spine sticks through your skin. Black man
has his arm resting on his chest. Man,
how can he sleep black on black bed inches apart
from you and not know the bed
no longer fits and not know you are blue, woman?
Man painted back, sleeping black
man, this love affair sags.
Apart from breasts, eyelids, penis, cheeks, even the
bed sags. But, woman, your blue self sags,
woman, your life sags, and on that
black bed, you are most visible.

Sitting on the bed with black man,
blue woman takes her life apart.
She wants to lift herself from the bed,
from the man (black, black), but sweet woman,
you cannot. His peace on the black
bed, in black sleep, paints the room, man.

Apart from herself, the woman on the
bed dissects her self. Glowing blue
woman sees green line growing on
black bed between herself and black
man. Sighing, muttering in his sleep, black
man twitches and begins another dream.

On the bed, blue woman pulls herself from black sheets.
Black man sleeps apart from her, a man unconscious.

—Maggie Osgood
Sade painting
--Sally Chang
love in I

my letters won’t imagine.
i mean i mean to mean
i want to mean (you’re beautiful)
but write
you’re beautiful.
no sight in these words
and none seen.
i can’t show you spring
in the curves of my S
nor stress the colors,
light,
hue.
i want to show my passion,
imbue a sense of sun,
a laugh,
a shade of green or blue,
the warmth of skin on skin,
your form against a tree,
the bark,
hair,
eyes
as autumn fades in
and leaves you with me
and me with purple skies
i had never seen before.
but my pen writes no more than
i love you
and you
you must find the flowers.

— Kevin Barents
Clay

Touching edges of her wheel,
her hands reaffirm hold
on gray, sandy earth
between fingers,
spread up her bare wet arms,
between knees,
spread up her uncovered thighs,
to where she’s not cold.

Lost in spinning motion thoughts,
like pumping her legs
on a backyard swing,
eyes centered always on the sun.
A clay must be molded,
focused to center
birthed from earth
raised by hands
(strong hands small hands)
from solid body and thick slip
comes rhythmic writhing plastic poetry
her horizon.

— Heather Comfort
For Father
photograph
--Erica Bleg
I Screamed

the cold blade on my throat
doesn’t bother me
or your empty stare
it is this grass underneath
like needles
like fingers pushing on my back
towards you

go ahead
cut me
slice me to peices
and cry and the image
reflected in my green eyes
you cannot silence all these years
your rocking ears
will hear me

and tomorrow in your day
you will remember the taste
of my bitter lips
tomorrow in your day
you will feel the piercing
of a million red blades of grass
inside your head
you will cringe
and cover your ears
at the sound of screaming

— Nikki Matous
Popular Reflections

People i meet
  i meet
  i mirror
    pick up a gesture
      a jest
      a phrase

And when i imitate them
  i mimic them
  i emulate them
    they like me
      for what i am

Then i face them with problems
  i pick up
  i pick up their problems
    and solve them
      (and their problems)

So i break the mirror
  the mirage
  the image
    i show myself flaccid and useless
      i go again to the mirror

And the people i meet
  i meet
  i mirror
    then break the glass
      and ooze away
                  in imitation blood.

— Gale Pfamatter
Michael and Emily Jones
photograph
--Dohee Lee
Untitled

my honied green, my asphodel of wade,
my gleamness brownly goblin lover sit
with me in wetness shadow yellow shade
and cackle goodly at world and wit.
so smoothing move my white the pipers bade
us barefoot flitter by their rollick fit
flameharps and womenreeds once leafy played
from out the dellish nymphly pagan pit.
sit moss upon with me though worlds have grayed
and blackness some have sat in blood and grit,
for rainbow everything by gorgeous made
we made have everything to do with it
and azure wavely swims candescent it
if chrysalis alights the worm of it
as we sit watching,
hazel, blue,
moonlit.

— Kevin Barents
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