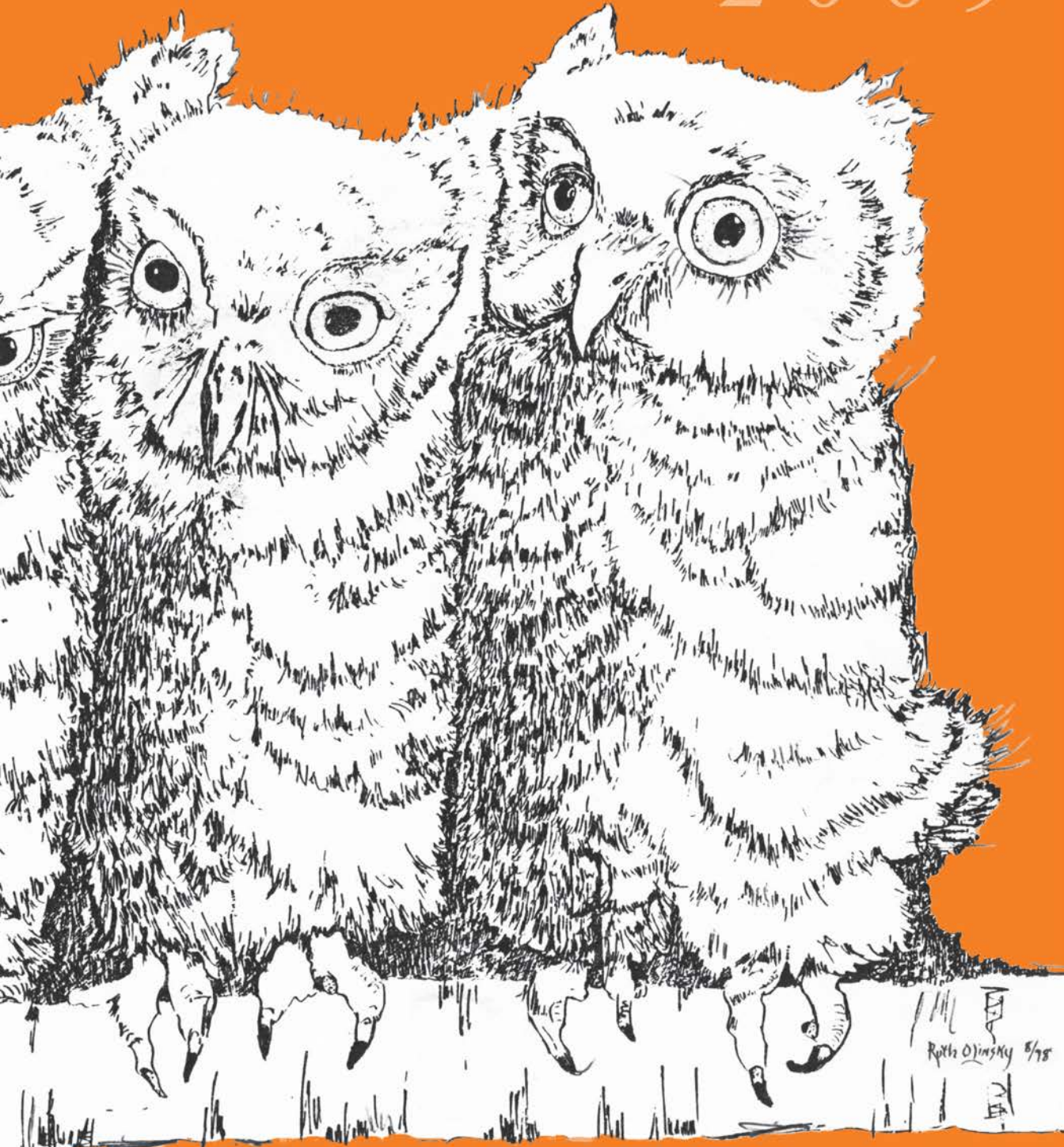


# Kelsey

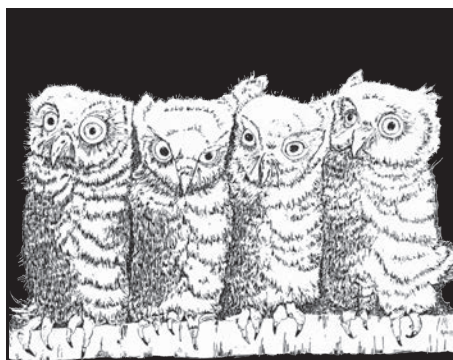
## REVIEW

2009



Ruth Ojinsky 5/18

# Kelsey REVIEW



FALL 2009

Volume XXVIII

The logo for Mercer County Community College. It features the word "MERCER" in a large, bold, serif font. To the left of the "M" is a stylized graphic consisting of three curved lines that suggest a rising sun or a mountain range. Below "MERCER" is the text "County Community College" in a smaller, sans-serif font.

[www.mccc.edu](http://www.mccc.edu)

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The 2009 edition of the *Kelsey Review* demonstrates the depth of talent and skill possessed by Mercer County's residents. More than one hundred writers and artists submitted their work to the editors for consideration this year, and the editors were forced to make tough choices in determining the sixteen writers and artists whose work appears between these pages. The level of creativity in the capital county is truly formidable and the pieces together create a mosaic that I know will captivate each reader.

Whenever the economy slows, colleges see an increase in enrollment as people return to gain new skills and retool their resumes. The increase in college attendance means more people gain job related skills, but the trend also provides an opportunity for imaginative people who may not have had a chance to take a creative writing or drawing class before to do so. A student can come to MCCC to learn accounting or computer programming and still find time for one of the many art and writing classes offered by the college's award winning faculty. I encourage everyone with a creative spirit to do so.

When you are done experiencing and reading this literary journal, I encourage you to tell your friends about it, discuss your favorite pieces of the year, perhaps pass on your copy to someone who might not otherwise know about it. Your doctor, your dentist, and your hair stylist all have offices, and it is always nice to have reading material handy while waiting for an appointment. Consider paying it forward -- leave a copy of the *Kelsey Review* after your next visit.

The *Kelsey Review* is distributed through the Mercer County public library system and is supported in part by funds from the Mercer County Cultural and Heritage Commission. Each edition of the Review presents professional quality poems, fiction, art, and non-fiction that will provoke thought and perhaps inspire. Let these pages move you. I know you will like what you find here.

Sincerely,



Patricia C. Donohue, Ph.D.  
President  
Mercer County Community College



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# From the Editors...

From ancient Greek myths of Athena to the beloved “Owl and the Pussycat,” the wise and sometimes whimsical owl of literature and art serves as symbol of wisdom and a guardian of the after-life. So too, the four friendly owls on this year’s cover serve as watchmen over an issue which features prose and poems that often focus on the realms of the night.

Many new voices are featured in this year’s pages, including Mark Mazzenga, with his short story “Dracula” and the very new Rohini Sengupta (14), who we believe to be our youngest contributor ever with the piece “Air Conditioning.” We also have many returning voices, including: Carolina Morales, Vida Chu, Janet Kirk, Doris Spears. There are poems that touch on loss and gain, stories that delve into family and the seasons, and artistic works that focus on the character of faces and places.

The editorial board made an additional contribution to these pages—ever wonder why the *Kelsey Review* picks one item over another? Readers can find an answer to that question by turning to the featured non-fiction item, a short anthology of statements by each of the people who bring you the *Kelsey Review*.

We continue to seek the work of writers and artists who live and work or read and show their art work in Mercer County, and we continue to hope for non-fiction pieces that delve into matters pertinent to our county, such as last year’s excellent article “New Jersey’s ‘Pooh-Bah:’ the Complicated Life of Henry C. Kelsey” that detailed a wondrous scoundrel from New Jersey’s political past. The *Kelsey Review* is the county’s premier annual literary journal, and each submission receives thoughtful consideration by our board of editors. (See submission guidelines at the very end of the Review for more information about submitting your work to us.)

We thank the many who sent us their work—where would we be without you? If you do not appear in these pages, please try us again next year. We also thank the Mercer County Cultural and Heritage Commission for financial support without which we would be unable to publish. Others put their shoulder to the wheel, and we thank them also. Tracy Patterson, for example, takes original art and a handful of computer files and produces the fine work you hold in your hand. Others assist the editors with grant paperwork, such as Barbara Prince and Kami Abdala, and help get the word out, such as Saveria Symons and Wendy Humphrey. And of course our volunteer editorial board—Luray Gross, Ellen Jack, Robbie Clipper Sethi—adds great depth to the *Kelsey Review*. The *Review* would not exist without these fine helping hands.

We hope you enjoy what follows as much as we have enjoyed assembling and publishing it on your behalf.

Co-Editors  
Edward Carmien  
Holly-Katharine Mathews



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**Graphic Design:** Tracy Patterson

## Editorial Board

Edward Carmien & Holly-Katharine Mathews, Co-Editors

Luray Gross, Poetry Editor

Ellen Jacko, Poetry Editor

Robbie Clipper Sethi, Fiction Editor





# Dialing

My dear friend's voice  
answers the phone

five months after his death

Slow and watery tone  
explains no one is home,

asks for a message to be left

# September

I don't know how long the bee was on the sunflower before I noticed it. A huge yellow and black bumble bee; it must have been an inch and a half or so long, and fat. I was just standing on my front walk next to the sunflowers watching the evening come on and eating grapes—ripe, fragrant grapes I had just picked from the old grapevine out back.

I was eating those grapes one at a time, slowly pulling them off the bunch, darkest blue first. Deep blue-purple skin with a white haze on it, those were the best ones. If I rubbed the skin a little, the white haze would come off on my fingers and the blue skin would shine as if it were polished. I would put each grape in my mouth and crush it between the tip of my tongue and the roof of my mouth, trying to notice everything I could about the taste; the way it started out real sweet, a burst of sweet juice in a layer right under the skin, sweeter than the best grape juice I ever had. Then would come the flavor of the skin, almost dusty, and I could kind of smell it more than I could taste it, way in the back of my throat, and when I pressed down with my tongue just a little more, there would come the sourness of the grape's slippery flesh, the flesh popping right out of the loose skin as if the two had no attachment to each other. The flesh would be a little slippery round thing in the middle of my mouth, with some of the sweetness still surrounding it; and the hardness of the grape seeds at its center, sour and sour and more sour still, all the way down to the heart of it as I pressed down with my whole tongue to get all the taste out. It was a good sourness, though. Maybe sour isn't the right word; maybe it should be tart, not sour, tart down to the center with the sweetness on top and the dusty grape smell way at the back. And the seeds, if I bit into them, the seeds were a deep bitter taste down in the heart.

The taste of the grape skins down in the back of my throat, the dusty taste that wasn't really a taste at all but a smell, that was the same smell that had been coming through the open windows the whole day; the smell of the grapes ripening and falling warm in the sun; and every time it came through the windows into the house, I knew just how the grapes would taste; first sweet, then dusty and then tart, until finally you would taste the seeds at the center, bitter at the heart.

I must have been there twenty minutes or so like that, standing in my bare feet on the warm sidewalk eating those grapes as the light faded before I noticed the bee. Even though the sunflower was the same height as me, its huge face was turned down a little toward the ground, so I missed seeing the bee at first. I bent down to pet one of the cats and when I stood up, I saw it there, crawling over the very center of the sunflower. It was covered over in the sunflower's yellow pollen, so that it was almost all yellow itself and crawling slowly over the giant flower's face, sticking its head into each of the hundreds of little trumpet-shaped openings on the flower that would later form a seed, but were now full of yellow pollen. At first I thought it was trying to gather the pollen but when I looked more closely, I realized that the pollen sacks on its legs were empty and that the bee, despite being completely covered in the fine yellow dust, was making no effort to scrape the pollen into those storage sacks, which is what bumble bees are supposed to do. Instead, it was drinking something from those little trumpets, nectar I guessed, and ignoring the veil of pollen that clung to it.

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After a minute or so of close looking, I realized that the bee was having a hard time walking, too; it was staggering more than walking staggering between the cups of nectar, all covered in pollen. I expected that any minute it would start to clean itself up and then fly off home to the rest of the colony, wherever it was, because the air was growing chilly, and dark was coming, but the bee just kept on going from one cup to the next burying its head and drinking, and then staggering on. It took no notice of me at all. I began to wonder if this bee somehow knew that its life—and it must have lived long, because it was so big—was nearing its end; if it knew that the fall was coming, and the cold, and knowing that, had abandoned the responsibility of collecting pollen for the colony and instead had chosen to remain in my garden as the darkness gathered, greedily drinking nectar from the thousand tiny cups at the heart of the sunflower, draining them one after the other, with no thought but to finish them all, and to sleep in the face of the flower when it grew dark, and to begin again in the morning with the warmth of the sun, until the nectar was gone.

I watched the bee until it got too dark to see anymore, standing there and holding what was left of the grapes; and then I went in and shut the windows against the chill and the damp and the smell of the ripe grapes waiting to fall; a smell that as I breathed it in was sweet at the beginning, then dusty and sour toward the middle, and very faintly you could smell it, bitter at the heart. **KR**

When your father  
wakes you  
from your child's sleep  
to tell you  
he won't be there in the mornings  
anymore  
and your mother  
tells you  
no  
Blue Jays  
no  
piano lessons  
no,  
your father cannot come into this house  
anymore,  
that's when you learn  
to stop wanting.



—Amy Runyon

*Vida Chu*

---

# Buying the Ticket

My 93 year-old mother called from California  
*I am leaving for Hong Kong tomorrow*  
*Everything is ready, except*  
*I do not know how to buy the ticket*

The next day my sister phoned  
*Mother is in a coma*  
I flew across the country  
Mother lay unconscious in the hospital

On the day of her cremation  
as the coffin glided into the furnace  
I heard mother singing and saw her  
waving a ticket in her hand

# Cousin Julia's Visit

In the summer of 1954, when I was ten, my mother's cousin Julia came to stay with us for a few days in order to attend a religious convention in St. Paul.

Julia wasn't a cousin like all the kids around my own age who were my cousins. She was a "once removed" cousin, someone my father called a "shirttail relative."

Julia's visit had been initiated by a postcard mailed from Julia in Phoenix, Arizona to Mom in Tulip River, Minnesota. Mom didn't remember ever having met Julia but she wrote back saying Julia would be welcome in our house.

Our family seldom had guests who stayed more than a couple of hours in the evening, so Julia's upcoming visit caused some excitement. Dad and I got haircuts (although Dad denied his haircut had anything to do with Julia's visit). My fourteen-year old sister Charlene boiled her cancons in starch and put them to dry in circles on the grass. And Mom put a new bag in the Hoover before she vacuumed the spare bedroom.

Our spare bedroom was downstairs off the kitchen. In addition to twin beds the room contained what Dad called "the overflow from our lives." Half a dozen African violets and a couple of gloxinias were crowded onto a whatnot by the window. A platform rocker was heaped with picture frames and cookie tins. Charlene's Nancy Drew and Trixie Belden books were in a bookcase, together with volumes L to Z of the Encyclopedia Britannica. Cardboard boxes bulged with things we had long ago forgotten about.

Mom didn't throw things out. And she didn't permit the rest of us to do so. She said just about everything was good for something. When I was five, she had used twenty-three empty lipstick cannisters to make a bandolier of bullets for my Mexican bandit Halloween costume.

Our cat Linnaeus spent a lot of his time napping in the spare bedroom. Linnaeus had been given to us by a friend of my mother's who had come for afternoon coffee and had seen a mouse dart into our pump organ. Linnaeus had settled in with us immediately. We never saw a mouse in the house after Linnaeus came. Dad said Linnaeus was a deterring factor—like the atomic bomb.

On the day of Julia's arrival, Mom, Charlene and I drove in our old green Studebaker to the Greyhound bus depot in St. Cloud. As we waited for the bus we talked about what Julia would look like. (Mom hadn't been able to locate a snapshot of Julia and none of my aunts or uncles or grandparents could place her.) Charlene said Julia would be tall and sultry with a veil of blonde hair over one eye like Veronica Lake. Mom told Charlene not to be silly; Julia would resemble the rest of us Dahlstroms.

I said Julia's rear end would blossom like a Parkerhouse roll.

"Dickie!" said Mom.

"He's such a degenerate!" said Charlene.



---

“Where do you hear such language?” asked Mom.

I had heard Uncle Nate say it to Dad about Ursula Martinson at the bakery, but I protected my source. “I dunno.”

“I hope Julia is mysterious,” said Charlene.

I agreed with that. I was planning to become a detective and needed practice in noticing stuff and sniffing out clues and solving cases. Even though we had TV, I still listened to “The Whistler” and “Mr. Keen, Tracer of Lost Persons” on the radio every Saturday night.

Julia was short and wide. She wore red high heels and a red and white checked sundress. She had blonde hair styled like Veronica Lake—although maybe not by intention; it was a windy day. She brought two suitcases which seemed excessive for a weekend stay.

On the drive back to Tulip River, Julia told us about the Alliance of Supreme Christianity for Righteous People which was sponsoring the convention in St. Paul. She said she had been floundering spiritually until she had found a congregation of the Alliance in Phoenix. She asked Mom what church we attended.

“We’re not churchgoers,” said Mom.

Mom and Dad thought religion was baloney. They said Charlene and I could make up our own minds about religion—and politics (they had voted for Stevenson). So far neither Charlene nor I had shown interest in either subject, although Charlene had gone to the Grace Baptist Church twice because she had a crush on Tommy Olafson who taught Sunday School there.

“I shall have to teach you about the Alliance,” said Julia.

Charlene’s cancans took up a lot of my space in the back seat of the Studebaker. Ordinarily, I would have socked Charlene, but Mom had warned us not to horse around in the car and raise dust. Dust was probably a quarter inch thick everywhere in the Studebaker’s upholstery. Dad was the Tulip River High School science teacher and he drove the Studebaker on lots of dirt roads when he collected toads and rabbits’ foot clover and angleworm-aerated loam to show the kids in his classes.

Julia seemed pleased with our spare bedroom. Linnaeus was snoozing on one of the beds. Julia called Linnaeus “Cutie Pie.” Linnaeus opened one eye, yawned, and buried his face in his paws. Linnaeus was orange and weighed eighteen pounds. He could shift all his weight to whatever part of his body people were trying to move off furniture or out of doorways.

Mom had made pot roast for supper. As we ate, Julia told us she was a bookkeeper for a fabric store in Phoenix, where she got a twenty percent discount.

“I made this sundress,” said Julia.

“It’s very pretty,” said Mom. “Dan River gingham.”

“Charlene will have to show you the slippers she made in Home Ec,” said Mom. Last school term Charlene had turned four pink washcloths and two pompoms into slippers.

Julia talked about the Alliance for a while. Then Dad told us about an Australian frog he had read about in *National Geographic*. “She swallows her fertilized eggs, shuts down her digestive system for a month, then regurgitates tiny frogs.” He shook his head and smiled. “Damndest thing.”

Mom and Charlene cleared the table and dished up butter pecan ice cream.

Julia shuddered when Charlene set a dish of ice cream in front of her. “I can’t eat nuts,” Julia said. “I may die. Diverticulitis.”

“Oh dear,” said Mom. “I think we have some Fig Newtons in the cupboard.”

---

“Don’t bother. I will simply spit out the nuts,” said Julia as she reached for her saucer. I knew if I looked at Charlene we would both start laughing, so I ducked under the table to fiddle with my shoelace. Charlene was already there fiddling with her own shoelace.

Mom and Charlene and Julia were up early the next day to drive to St. Paul. Mom and Charlene planned to go shopping while Julia was at the convention.

I had a bowl of Wheaties for breakfast, then I went outside to lie on the porch glider with my newest *Dick Tracy* comic book. Flattop and Pruneface were just about to capture little Sparkle Plenty. Dad sat on the wicker rocking chair smoking a Lucky Strike. He said Julia was stupidity on stilts, and I should be careful not to believe anything she said. I said I would be careful.

That night Mom made meatloaf and roasted spuds and string beans for supper.

“So how went the convention, Julia?” asked Dad.

“The Holy Spirit descended upon me body and soul. I could feel the electricity like wave after wave of liquid love.”

“I do an experiment like that with my students,” said Dad. “They join hands and I run a current through them.”

Julia shook her head. “Aren’t you worried about rotting in hell?”

“Not at all,” said Dad. “I’m looking forward to the scintillating conversations I’ll have there. Could you please pass the beans?”

Dessert was maple walnut ice cream that Dad had brought home from the Red Owl that afternoon. Julia spit the walnuts into her saucer.

“Julia will be having company this evening,” said Mom.

We all looked at Julia who doled out a few words of her pronouncement to each of us in turn. “I met a man at the convention. His name is Frank McSorley.”

“Doesn’t sound like an Alliance of Supreme whatsit to me,” said Dad.

“Sounds like a mackerel-snapper. Maybe a bartender. Better watch out, Julia.”

“Frank is a salesman. He’s very well-traveled,” said Julia. “He has smoked a hookah.”

After supper we went onto the porch. I stretched out behind the big philodendron that Mom made Dad move from the living room to the porch every summer. I was sorting through a box of comic books my friend Lyle had loaned me. I was putting the comics into categories of “crime,” “chills,” and “jungle.”

I unwrapped a Fleers Dubble Bubble and slipped the gum from the little wax paper comic. I put the gum into my mouth and started to chew. I was unfolding the little comic when a maroon Chevy parked in front of our house. A man wearing a brown double-breasted suit got out and came up the steps. He had black hair combed straight back like George Raft in “Rogue Cop.” Julia introduced him as Frank McSorley.

Mom asked Frank to sit in the rocker and gave him a glass of lemonade. Frank said he lived just ten miles away, in Kelly Falls. He sold art instruction correspondence courses for a living. He said people completed an art aptitude test and mailed it to the company headquarters in Minneapolis. Frank’s boss gave Frank the addresses of people who had passed the test. Then Frank called on these people in hopes of selling them art instruction.

The next day Mom drove Julia to St. Paul again. Dad made Charlene and me fried egg sandwiches for lunch. Dad made sure the lacy edges on the fried eggs peeked out between the two bread slices just the way I liked.

---

After we had washed the dishes Dad went to the Red Owl. He brought home a quart of cherry almond ice cream. "Diverticulitis, huh?" said Dad as he rearranged the maple walnut and butter pecan ice cream in the freezer to make room for the cherry almond. "Death by misadventure. I will be exonerated by any jury in the land."

Alas, Dad's plan to pull off the perfect murder was foiled; Julia did not eat at our house that evening. She and Frank went out for supper at the Nordic Cafe downtown. It was raining when Frank brought Julia home. They said goodnight on the porch and Julia came inside.

"I'm going to take Frank to Phoenix and have him appraised by my friend Irene," said Julia. "I always have Irene appraise men in whom I have an interest."

"What are Irene's qualifications for appraising men?" asked Mom.

"She's been married three times. She knows men."

"What time shall I drive you to the bus depot tomorrow?" asked Mom.

"I think I'll stay here a few more days."

"What about your job at the fabric store?" asked Dad.

"Oh, phooey on that," said Julia.

The next day was Monday. The religious convention in St. Paul was over. Frank called at our house for Julia after breakfast. They said they were going for a stroll and would have lunch at the Nordic Cafe. Frank left his Chevy in front of our house.

Around 11 a.m. Julia rushed into the house. She announced she was going back to Phoenix.

"Now?" said Mom.

"Could you please drive me to the bus depot?"

"But . . ." said Mom.

"I'll take any bus going west."

Mom and Julia left. Ten minutes later Frank drove away in his Chevy. Charlene went to visit a girlfriend. Around noon Dad began to toast cheese sandwiches for himself and me. He was whistling "Beautiful Ohio." I was lying on the rug on the front room floor in the sunlight reading *Crypt of Terror*. Linnaeus was dozing in front of me, his tail swishing over the pages every so often.

There was a knock on the screen door. I looked up to see the sheriff. Dad came into the room.

"Hello, Gus," Dad said.

"Jim."

"Come on in."

Gus came in. He removed his hat and put it on the ottoman. He sat down on the sofa. He said hi to me. I said hi and turned the page of *Crypt of Terror*. I hoped Dad and Gus would think I was too engrossed in *C of T* to pay attention to their conversation.

"There's been an incident at the bank, Jim," said Gus.

"What happened?"

"A man passed a note to teller Theresa Ross demanding all the money in her cash drawer. Theresa asked the man if he had an account at the bank. The man said no. Theresa told him she couldn't give him any money unless he had an account at the bank. The man took his note and left."

"Doesn't sound like too sharp a bank robber," said Dad.

Linnaeus' tail whacked *C of T* and stayed still.

"Theresa Ross said a woman left the bank right after the would-be robber. I don't know if there's a connection between the robber and the woman or not. I'm

---

asking people if they've seen any strangers in town."

"My wife's cousin from Phoenix was staying with us for a few days. She left this morning." Dad gave Gus Julia's name. (Dad didn't know her address.) Gus left and Dad finished making our sandwiches.

"Want a pickle?" called Dad from the kitchen.

"Yep." (I would have answered "Yes, please" to Mom, but Dad let these things slide.)

"Come and get it."

Dad poured two glasses of milk and he and I tucked into the sandwiches.

"What do you think happened at the bank today, Dickie?"

"I think Frank tried to rob the bank, and Julia was there watching to make sure he was doing it right."

"Whoa there, Dickie. Frank left his car parked in front of our house. Doesn't seem like he was planning to rob the bank and make a quick getaway."

"Maybe it was an impulse robbery," I said. "Maybe Julia and Frank were in cahoots to rob the bank from the beginning. Maybe they've known each other for years and just pretended to meet at the convention. Maybe Julia isn't Mom's cousin at all."

"That's a whole lot of maybes, Dickie."

"Why didn't you tell the sheriff about Frank being in town? Frank is a stranger."

"Because nobody at the bank got hurt. No money was stolen. I see no reason to help the sheriff meddle in Frank's life."

"But you're supposed to help the police."

"Dickie, when you become a detective, you'll find out people don't tell you things—for lots of reasons. That's why detectives have to work hard."

"Because of people like you not telling all the information they know."

"People like me are people like everybody."

The failed bank robbery was reported on the front page of the Wednesday edition of the *Abernathy County Times*. There was a picture of bank president B.P. Allen shaking hands with Theresa Ross.

Over the next two weeks my family finished eating the butter pecan, maple walnut, and cherry almond ice cream. Mom waited for a note from Julia thanking us for our hospitality. But we never heard from Julia again.

Six years later some friends and I were on the Midway at the Minnesota State Fair. We were tossing nickels onto plates in hopes the nickels would stay on the plates, and we would win a stuffed panda. A man picked up our nickels from the grass under the plates and pocketed them while he talked us into tossing more nickels. Something about the man made me read the nametag pinned to his shirt. He was Frank McSorley.

Frank was dressed in a wrinkled white shirt, the sleeves of which were rolled up, and grey pants that needed a washing. He still wore his hair combed straight back, but his forehead was higher and his hair thinner. I didn't speak to Frank. I didn't ask him if he was the man who had tried to rob the Tulip River Bank in the summer of '54.

I never told my folks I had seen Frank. I was pulling away from them, rebelling in the ways sixteen-year-olds do. I was storing up information, closeting secrets—all to be used at some vague future time. To dazzle and slay. But as the years passed and I trotted out my secrets, they had lost their value. No one wanted them. **KR**

# Avreglo

Derek Walcott's *Selected* brushed off with faint praise by William Logan in the *New York Times Book Review*

Walcott to Logan as ripe mango to flyblown dried cod

The divide nervously gouged in New Criticism times is still there

With an even haughtier vernacular issuing from the current mandarins

The crucial marker is the slightly drooping bill of the westerns

Otherwise the semipalmated sandpipers and the westerns look the same

Both rare vagrants to Europe

As is the white-rumped sandpiper

Flights of peeps land up and down the strand, feed momentarily and are off

Four western sandpipers among the semipalmateds

Wind birds move with the sun all across the world

Most in April and September, in these latitudes

Bach's oratorios sung with ritardandos, rubatos and embellishments

Bach's church cantatas are over a hundred and eighty in number

With titles like *Der Himmel lacht, die Erde jubiliret* [for a 1715 Easter service] and *Lobe den Herren, meine Seele* [for a 1735 Circumcision]

He wrote one for each Sunday and every special occasion for years, scored them, rehearsed them, directed them

He did the same with his more than a dozen secular cantatas

Worked without respite – did he believe it was to the glory of God? – in his mid-German, mid-eighteenth-century, Christian locale

And never slipped south

Pavia, Piacenza, Cremona, Mantova, and glorious Ferrara

The Valley of the Po

---

As the South of France for Southern France

Township of Uppington for Uppington Township

Department of English for English Department

Charles Wells' shepherd's head carved in Carrara wears a sallet with grace

Jennifer Chu's piano synchrony with Olivia Loxsing Moy, the faultless violinist, their recital finishing with *Vier Stücke* by Josef Suk

Suk was a Czech dead center of Bohemian musical culture, Dvorák's student and married to his daughter, more tender and melancholic than the master

Come up on a commotion of gradeschoolers and parents peering into a storm drain, fish out twelve wood duck ducklings fallen through the grate

In early morning rain

Check *The American Heritage* to see if gradeschoolers is there, come upon gradin

Sat once for nearly an hour in Pula's arena imagining two thousand years of vicious, noisy Sundays

The same wonder in imagining, sitting for long moments on a gradin in Nîmes

Wooden slats were on the worn stone

Racine, modern plays, light and sound spectacles, rock concerts, Johnnie Halliday, even *la corrida Provençale*

In the Nîmes arena once watched a teenage *novilla* in *trajes* de blue jeans go at it with calves

*Sol y sombra, ombre et soleil, sans picadors*

Her name was Evelyne Fabregas, she had gotten through the Sunday before

May she have had as many more *faenas* as she had stomach for

Nîmes and the Maison carrée

Pula's Temple of Augustus sitting confidently within its city

With the stiff and permanent surety as Shinto temples display in urban Japan

Like the eighteenth century buildings in Philadelphia and Boston but without the reverence of green space and protected status given them

The wedge of the past being clumsy but absorbing when living in the place that many of your family passed

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Boarding at Trenton for Amtrak to northern Florida, the station used throughout their lives by father, mother, half-brother, grandfather, grandmother and probably great-grandfather and his wives

Steuhard Stiuuard Stiward Staward Stuard Stywart Stuart Stewart Stuard

Father Fred's automatic Anglophilia of Dicken's *Christmas Carol* at Christmas, *Water Babies*, High Church mockery, Prohibition habits, boarding school humor, and "Cambridge tea"

He never went to England

Fred endured his lonely fecklessness out there in Depression-quiet Delaware Township as long as he had stomach for until in 1944, "killed his self" as the neighbors put it

The same rural county that started to do in Delmore Schwartz and over-stressed James Agee in the thirties and forties

Before midcentury there was still a trunk line from Trenton Station north along the Delaware that Agee and Schwartz would have taken coming out from New York when headed upriver for Frenchtown

The Depression's impersonal dismissal of the aspirations of the previously privileged most of whom felt they were above pick-and-shovel WPA solutions

And Brother Pete for that matter, who after he lost his corporate slots, stayed at home out there in a state of *hikikomori* for nearly a year before he took a job with a one-woman PR agency that took him back into the city

Mercury strong on the western horizon at dusk on his birthday this year

Self-referentially almost in the manner of looping back to see

His, my, self-aware, conscious fraternal subjectivity

Mysterious but actual

Strongly embittered single brothers who had only one another in our early years and so were each the agent of the other's survival

Dead nineteen years now

Half Brother Robert often used the Trenton Station in his ultimate ennui. He was a late-Depression Chapel Hill undergraduate Pennsylvania suicide

The Trenton Station's quizzical ghosts

It is complicated trying to place them correctly from the century after theirs

Head off away now

---

Down the line in Amtrak coach

30th Street Philadelphia, Wilmington, Baltimore, Union Station Washington, Alexandria,  
Richmond, Petersburg, Rocky Mount, Fayetteville, Florence, Kingstree, Charleston,  
Yemassee, Savannah, Jesup, Jacksonville

Into the South's imaginative swirl

Becoming the South when slipping off the quay in Alexandria

The potent southern vector train

Down into northern Florida

For Fort Caroline and St. Augustine

Ovenbirds, black-throated blues buzzing, nesting yellow throats

Wood warblers must have been there in profusion in 1562 when the French came to the  
mouth of the St. Johns to build Fort Caroline

Before the Spanish took the coast, to the fatally tragic bemusement of the Timucuan and the  
other peoples up into the Carolinas

Eventually to leave it to twenty-first-century golfing gringos

As the moon blazed down upon it all





—Bill Plank

# Air Conditioning

It made her upset when her sister decided to drop out of school. It made her upset when her husband came home drunk and without work. It made me upset that there was no air conditioning in her rusted blue truck.

It makes her upset that she couldn't finish school. It makes me upset when I get too much homework. It makes her upset that her own daughter doesn't like school. It makes her daughter upset that her teacher can't understand her mother through her thick accent.

\*

She loved Mexico. Dancing on the streets seemed to be normal practice to her. Here, she can't even walk down the sidewalks of our suburban town without feeling self-conscious.

When we drive past the Best Buy, her son asks for a Nintendo Wii.

"Not now *mijo*," she croons. "When Papi gets his job back we'll try."

\*

She tells me stories of her childhood. Fond memories play in front of her eyes while I hope that no one sees me in the hunk of metal she drives. She likes it here—the money she can earn, the education her son receives.

She likes Indian food, how the flavors remind her of her mother's cooking. She asks me if my mother can teach her. I ask if I can roll down the window.

\*

She tells me the story of when she first got pregnant at the age of fifteen. I'm appalled. I'll be fifteen in a matter of a few months. She couldn't tell her father. He would take her out of school. She asked the boy who got her pregnant what to do. He told her that he could not support a family. He had gotten an opportunity to leave their Mexican town. With a face of nonchalance, she told him she understood. She self-aborted, killing the baby and leaving a permanent scar. I couldn't help but wonder if my pimple was visible.

\*

She comes to help my mother chop vegetables. She rings the doorbell with her two children holding her hand on either side. Her son is shivering in the August heat, and her daughter is crying. I look at her. A black bruise shadows her eye. My mother asks what happened. She says that it was nothing, a misstep on her part, and apologizes for bringing her children. After she leaves, my mother tells me that her husband has a problem with alcohol. I shudder and ask her if we can help. My mother tells me not to worry; she is a strong and intelligent woman.

\*

Six months later, she arrives at my doorstep. She is here to drive me to the mall while my mother is at work. We get in the car. She's upset. She tells me she's pregnant. She wants an abortion. Her husband says they can't support another

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child. She's crying now. I don't know what to tell her, I don't know why she's telling me. I think for the first time how different her life is from mine. I try to console her by telling her it will be okay and that another child will make her happy. She tells me that she is willing to work anytime. She feels fine. I see her son looking out the window at the Circuit City.

"Don't worry mami, I can get a job and help you with little Esperanza!" His fifth grade self sounds a lot more mature when he's not asking for a Nintendo DS.

Esperanza. Spanish for hope.

"No José! ¡*Escuela es muy importante!* I can take care of you!" She cries in her Spanglish.

She pulls up to the mall. She tells me that I should "study hard." I smile; for the first time I want to stay for longer and listen to her story. She returns my smile. While I reach into my bag, she tells me in her broken, carefully constructed English, "Don't worry about the money. It was no problem." I protest. How can she refuse money she so desperately needs? She doesn't listen.

"Bye!" Her daughter screams. I wave back.

She drives off as I walk into air-conditioned bliss. **KR**

# Relapse

Behind closed doors, she is 19 again.  
Cracks a window and breathes suburban air—  
fresh, deep, easy. Props an elbow  
against crisp eggshell walls, bare toes crinkling  
around powder blue bath rug. Lights. Drags. Ashes  
in the toilet. Forgets her smooth scalp, swollen  
calf. Eyes closed, she remembers her first  
apartment, above the Blue Moon  
Café, Friday nights with her baby  
spinning her polka dot skirt silly across  
the dance floor, his fingers catching the love bug  
all over again in her short red curls. She flicks.  
Unaimed ash finds her knee, early 50s, carrying the weight  
of children, cancer, the cha-cha. Putting out  
the cigarette she zips up evidence. Tucks away  
worn cloth makeup case in the middle drawer. Pops a mint. Heads  
down the hallway. Takes the stairs one  
by one. Slowly.  
Aching

# Dracula

Four cars died on the lawn at 727 Oakland Beach Avenue. A beige Cougar, a white Nova, a white Nova, and a white Nova. For years my family ambled around them, threw Frisbees over them, placed boards, boxes, babies, and bocce balls on and between them. The autos responded with perfect indifference. Though each lies buried beneath layers of wreaths of rust and rubble, though each was despised, cursed, and ridiculed by all who saw them, there they sat, like a bevy of blissful bodhisattvas, staring blankly into the sky as the asphodel and bluebirds made homes of their backseats and transmissions. They sat with dignity and purpose, mocking the silent agglomeration of shame and neglect that had turned them into living tombstones.

Of course, it had occurred to Father to destroy them. The neighbors wanted them gone, and Grandma did too. But something always prevented this from happening—the same thing that instantly transformed even our newest and most beautiful acquisitions into old, rusting objects. One could trace it, this thing, as it crept detectably over the edges of the front yard, up along the wide, pigeon-shit infested slope of the roof and down into the back, where it fell heavily upon the panoply of broken unoccupied doghouses. It was, most assuredly, the thing responsible for the endless pile of dirty dishes in the kitchen sink, for the stacks and stacks of unpacked boxes in the cellar. The thing, repulsive as it was, had become a kind of comfort, reminding us of why we would never move away, even when the opportunity to leave would present itself. “Maybe we’ll get a pool next summer,” Grandma would say; maybe we’ll visit New Hampshire this year; maybe we’ll sell the house and move to Florida. They thought frequently about such things. But no matter what one thought or where one went, one could not avoid the sight of this thick, monstrous veil of melancholy, hovering menacingly above the earth like the wings of a giant bat.

It was this menace that prompted me, at a very young age, to become a genius. Though I did not excel in school, my precocity was not evident to me alone.

I always knew my house would not be the place I would spend the remainder of my days as I had an unbridled urge to move far beyond who and where I was. China seemed appealing, as did Greece, Italy, Orlando, and Romania, places I had either seen on the Disney channel or read about in National Geographic, a subscription to which I obtained as a Christmas gift at the age of four. But one place existed high above the rest; that place was Egypt. Ah, Egypt, with its tombs and pharaohs and magic and majesty; with its ancient curses, its artifacts, its history, its hidden treasures; that’s where I would live. In Cairo, in the Valley of Kings, in the shadows of the Great Pyramids. I fantasized about being a member of the Egyptian court under the rule of the Hatshepsut, the magnificent female pharaoh who ruled for twenty years in the visage of a man. Yes, surely I would live there.

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From the time I could write, I began to sketch these and other fantasies on paper. Drawing became an obsession. Much to the chagrin of my primary educators, I preferred drawing pictures of medieval castles and naked women to participating in math and reading lessons. So, in grade 3, I was punished and sent to special ed. There I spent most of my time doodling things like dinosaurs while my classmates proceeded to bark obscenities and drool on their desks. This neither saddened, nor angered, nor amused me. It just didn't matter. I had convinced myself that none of this, this here, really mattered.

In the midst of this, I developed an appetite for agitation. I became profoundly aware of this while attending catechism in the basement of St. Rita's, a large well-manicured church that sat directly across the street from my house. It was, unquestionably, the most beautiful object in the neighborhood: tall, proud, towering majestically above the slums around it, perched upon an expanse of emerald-green grass and decorated with painted icons, row upon row of red, gold, and azure colored windows, flanked inside and out by shimmering statues made of bronze and alabaster. The adobe-like exterior seemed painted with tree bark. I spent most of my time in church watching the Sunday morning sun blaze through the colored windows, glazing the white walls of the church with streaks of Technicolor light and heat. I knew the windows well; each told a story about the trials leading to the death of Christ, whose large, orb-like eyes sparkled green like sugar candies. These images were strange, gorgeous, and terrifying. How odd, I thought, that the ugliest, saddest people lived and worked within such a magnificent place.

For it was here I first realized the world was filled with mean, stupid adults, and that these people somehow came to rule over other people. My instructor, Mrs. Mina, a fat, hunched, horrible old woman with green-gray hair and yellow eye shadow, bore more than a superficial resemblance to the wicked queen in *Snow White*. She must be her sister, I thought, sketching her likeness in the inside cover of *The Catholic Missalette*. The instructor's favorite topic was, without question, Satan, followed closely by Madonna, with whom the former apparently shared a variety of traits. I remained silent through most of Mrs. Mina's lectures. But my feelings of hatred grew strong, and I unapologetically expressed them one day during class.

"Mrs. Mina, "I interrupted.

"Yes dear?" replied Mrs. Mina, scribbling incessantly on the chalkboard.

"Are you sure that God exists?"

At this pronouncement, the chalk fell from Mrs. Mina's hand. She turned to her interlocutor forthwith, demanding—

"Excuse me? Excuse me?!"

I knew I was in deep, deep trouble; I had been planning this for some time. Remaining calm, "I asked if you were sure that God exists, I mean—"

"What? What! Does God exist? Does God exist!" shouted the woman, crushing the chalk beneath her feet. "What a question! Who dares ask such a question! Child you are to be condemned!"

"Well, I think God might be like Santa Claus," I continued, feeling my stomach swell and tighten as I experienced for the first time that perverse joy of knowing I was about to be destroyed. "Santa Clause is fake, everyone knows that." I looked around to the class of eight year-olds and immediately got the impression that this was, to many of them, a revelation. Mrs. Mina simply held her hand to her mouth. My heart was pounding with a wicked sense of exhilaration.

"Santa Claus was created." I continued, "by parents to keep kids behaving



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all year. Then, at the end of the year, you get a present. Maybe we created God to make people behave on earth. And heaven is just like Christmas time, except you never actually get a present.” Needless to say I did not finish catechism at St. Rita’s.

My defiant streak materialized less dramatically in the schoolyard. I hardly spoke to anyone, and did not participate in team sports of any kind. At any given moment I’d have precisely two friends, both of whom were the constant subject of schoolyard ridicule. I somehow preferred it that way. I gravitated toward the disadvantaged, the neglected, the ugly, despite the fact that popularity seemed both very appealing to me and, should I choose it for myself, entirely within reach. But I resisted popularity, perhaps on principle. I hated them, the cool kids, the kids who wore boat shoes and pronounced the silent ‘t’ in often, the kids who mocked my friends. So in fourth grade when one of these kids began, for the seventh or so time, to harass David (both of my friends were named David), I settled the matter once and for all by placing a rather untidy bite mark on the upper shoulder of the offender. That day I spent the remainder of the afternoon in the company of the principal, my victim, in the care of the school nurse, the rest of the school, in awe of the spectacle that had earlier unfolded. Neither myself nor David nor David received much in the way of harassment after that day. But I did not suddenly become cool, the way kids who beat up bullies on television often do. No, by choice or by circumstance, I did not become cool.

I was, however, feared, a privilege I (and my rotating circle of two friends) came to appreciate.

My Father continued to push me into a life of normalcy filled with basketballs and baseballs and other mind-numbing forms of socializing; I infinitely preferred more intellectually stimulating activities like painting, playing video games, and digging impossibly deep holes in the backyard, I also longed to play the violin, an instrument I would take up later in life after my father’s unfortunate demise.

With the exception of the incidents in third and fourth grade, I rarely got into trouble. This trait distinguished me in yet another way from my peers. My neighborhood, known to outsiders as the toughest, most inhospitable place to live in the city, was foreign to me, for I was never allowed to step beyond the perimeter of my backyard. My Grandmother would often terrorize me with stories of murderers, pregnant prostitutes, 13 year-old drug dealers, rats the size of dogs. It would be many years before I would wander freely in my own neighborhood.

Despite this fact, I determined resolutely that wicked creatures did not, could not, conceivably exist in Oakland Beach. This just wasn’t possible. One never heard about the pregnant prostitute in the news, nor saw her or her band of dog-sized rats at night, hiding behind a certain bar or bush or dumpster. These were make-believe creatures, I decided, like the boogie man, like Santa Claus, like God. For despite what people said—Oakland Beach was guilty of just one thing—and it wasn’t violence or ignorance, or stupidity or poverty, or even plain old bad luck. Yes, those things were there in some measure, often in large measure, but this thing was different. The thing was more difficult to define.

I pondered it as I descended down my porch stairs—I watched it cast a bleary blue shadow over the awnings and briar bushes growing slowly from the sides of my house. I felt it as it skipped over the barbed fence that circled my house and cut through the graveyard of rotting, rusting automobiles so unceremoniously littering the front of my lawn. This thing made me itch, this thing made me bleed. It was that creeping, crawling thing that laced the windows and the ceilings of my bedroom and produced in me a rage so deep and so mighty that I sometimes

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wondered how it could be contained within the fleshy boundaries of my own impossibly small body.

This thing, I didn't quite know what it was then. I knew only that I must accept it.

In this way, from my earliest moments of cognition, I lived two lives, flipping from one world to the other as with a switch. Oakland Beach, China. Oakland Beach, Egypt. I became quite adept at playing the switch. The only way I could remain living in this world, was to live in Egypt. **KR**



# A Scottish Glen

The boys are hunting stag-beetles in the glen.

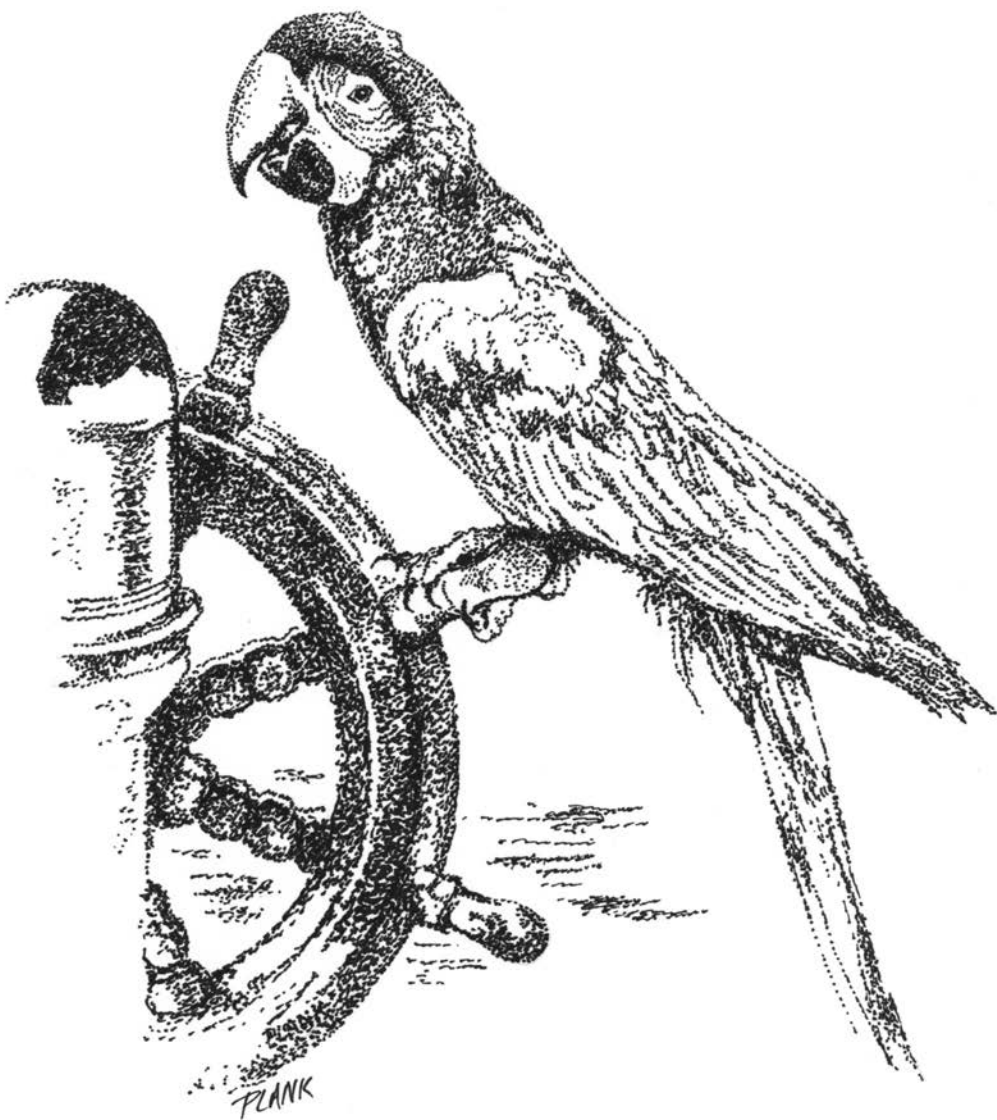
Clambering the steep woodside, following  
the horned clack and thrum of miniature  
antlered monarchs. Sawtooth sunlight rips  
the rush of water, moss and maidenhair.

Snagged among bramble-thorn the beetles toil,  
toss their silly heads. The boys don't care.

Later, the lovers come to spar and loll,  
whisper their rosy love-songs stem by stem,  
pressure the scent of wild-hyacinth into their dreams.

And then? Those who best know the glen  
come again to wander its quickening streams.

Those once-were-boys pursue the dripping stags  
into the shadows of its wounding crags.



—Bill Plank

# Phoenix

*When everything is burn't in its own violence, the dew  
coming like a breeze pauses and brings the good.*

—Hadewijch, 12 century Dutch mystic.

Tangelberry, wool thistle  
Indian-pipe wild herb  
knot-callused tree limb  
dark, webbed trailing ivy  
night-closing violet wood sorrel.

Brushwood fire ignites, withdraws  
ceremonial vapor of smoke  
dimly ciphered.

Rainfall spills out dancing  
earth skin opens soft, pliant  
for the seed of the flowing plant  
firewood on burned-over land  
shower of blossoms flowering.

# Gartha Poe

Gartha Poe was a long way from the age of consent to do the things that adults did, but that didn't stop her from being as good as she could be, at most of them; including having a saturnine pre-occupation with her looks.

Taller than most girls her age, hair short and nappy, feet large and flat, skinny legs, and a butt small and high, her breasts were fledgling and her pudgy stomach got even bigger when she ate.

Conventional wisdom held that Black women had big cabooses, and in her family all of the women had them. Gartha had an aunt, by the name of Sable, whose caboose was so big, it was known as the "ass of life" amongst people too well-bred to speak about it publicly. Where, Gartha wondered, was hers.

There were even more distractions. She ran track and played soccer. Where were the long shapely thick calves that she should have had? "White girl legs" is what she heard Black men affectionately call them. Why in the world was her name Gartha? And her hair, lord-a-mighty, was he thinking at all? She obsessed over her hair more than all the other things combined.

Had she been a dark-skinned girl on top of all this, she might just as well have stayed in the "crowd scene" of life and settled on being anonymous such was the prevailing attitude in her culture at the time. To accept such an attitude irrespective of its prevalence, however, was less of a task to Gartha than promoting and pursuing priorities completely at odds with who she believed herself to be and who she really was.

She had the "hi-yella" thing going on and good teeth, considered by some, a sign of promise, though a small space between them; but when her smile flushed out her dimples, followed by an utterance of a few clearly and carefully placed words in a cadence blessedly unique to her voice, something in her expression and those willful eyes made people forget about all the other stuff that she was convinced consumed their focus.

And so with these concerns competing for dominance against pure anxiety while awaiting the mailman, Gartha couldn't resist running down the stairs every twenty minutes to see if he'd left the package she expected. It had been at least ten days since she ordered it.

She entered the small bedroom she shared with one of her sisters, her face etched in dejection, and dropped full force onto the twin bed. Abruptly she leapt from the bed to the chair in front of the mirror and stared fervently at her face.

When the package came today, she'd be a different girl. Other boys, perhaps even girls, would take her seriously. She glanced at her scab-ridden ears, made so by hours of amateur hot combing. Singed skin went along with the process and was meant to be quietly tolerated.

Furtively, she took the magazine from under the mattress and looked at the special picture. At least she'd have another few hours before anyone was home to

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enjoy the quiet and her package . . . but God! Where was that blasted mailman!

She yanked the screen from her bedroom window and looked out onto Promise Lane, up and down the block on the side where her project building stood.

She held her breath: 'What if he's already passed me by!' She thought looking now at the neat row of pretty single family homes across the street, trying to see if she could spot the mailman in between the dense foliage.

Slowly she hung her head, only to raise it and faintly make out the form, made tinier by the distance, of her mailman. Her heart pranced. She wanted urgently to bound the stairs and run out of the house to him to get her package, but she wouldn't dare. She might miss an important call for her mother. Well... she'd waited this long, it was only a matter of minutes before he'd appear at the door.

"Gartha?" She heard someone call through the screen, "You home?"

It was her seventeen year old neighbor, Cynthia.

"Yes, I'm here." She replied coming to the door.

Cynthia's white buck-toothed grin brought the sheen out in her lightly tanned face. Her chestnut hair was pulled back in a small knot, and bangs appropriately flattered her face.

"Yo' mamma tol' me to check in on you, that she'd only be gone a few hours. You glad to have school off today?"

"Of course not. I love school," she said, thinking it an odd question. "But I'm expecting something from the mailman today and I'm excited about that."

Cynthia's ears perked up, "Didja order a dress or something?"

"Nope!" Gartha replied.

"Shoes?"

"Nope!"

"You ain't got no money, so it can't be that much. It must be a game, right?" Cynthia searched.

Gartha scrutinized the older girl's warm open smile and smiled back. What nerve of her to tell her she hadn't any money? How did she know what she had. She wanted to tell her what she was expecting, yet fought to remain silent. "I'll tell you later . . . I promise."

Cynthia reached down and pushed a long box toward her, "I almost forgot, this is for your mamma's party tonight. I think it's her liquor; they left it with us after she'd gone."

Gartha opened the door so she could set it inside.

"Cyn," Gartha asked, matter-of-factly, "Is Julius your boyfriend? . . . I saw you kissing him on the park bench."

"You think he's cute?" Cynthia queried, her smile fading.

Gartha nodded meekly, "Yes, I do."

"He too old for you," Cynthia said flippantly, eyeing Gartha confidently as she proceeded from Gartha's apartment into her own.

Her words caused a lump in Gartha's throat. Julius was mighty fine to her, tall and thin, the color of caramel; he had thick black processed hair and even pretty pearly white teeth. His eyes slightly drooped like a St. Bernard's, his smile was dazzling and he had a reputation for being one of the best dancers around. Sometimes he called her "sweetness" but when he called her "pretty girl" or "beautiful", she swooned, feeling a trace of fever.

Once he even sneaked up on her and "stole" a hug. In her reverie she imagined him dancing with her, holding her tight like he held Cynthia while they moved achingly slow to the rhythm of some doo-wop record.

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“Ms. Poe . . . Ms. Poe . . .” the mailman said, and she answered “yes” through a gentle smile with her eyes close. He thrust the mail in her hand shaking his head as he turned toward the next apartment.

She laid the envelopes on the coffee table and instead studied the name on the small cardboard box addressed to her, “Moon-Jho Enterprises” it said in big bold letters.

As she climbed the stairs, she shook the box. It felt empty. She floated into her room taking a seat at the dresser and carefully opened the box. Lifting the tissue, the glossy, rich black color made her blush as she lifted the foot and a half length braid from its place.

It was the most beautiful thing she'd ever seen. Quickly she pinned it to the back of her head and began to pose. First with it over her shoulder, then with it behind her ear. She piled it high atop her head and started mugging in the mirror. She untwined the braid and with a toss of the head, the dense hair cascaded down her back and her uncensored smile gave her the look of some striking south seas beauty.

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Muddy Waters wailed on the hi-fi, inciting rumps to gyrate and a brave wandering hand to cop a quick feel as a room of beautiful women fired up the dance floor in Nona Poe's living room.

Leather topped card tables off to the side chaired with lusty men with even busier hands enjoyed the resounding smack of their cards against the hides, their seductive bass voices emitting flirtatious laughter and naughty innuendo. Nona flitted about making sure glasses stayed full and money circulated.

Standing on the fifth step of the staircase wide-eyed was Gartha. Ideas freely floated through her head, like feathers dropped from on high; drifting here and there, and occasionally resting depending on what or who absorbed her gaze.

“Come on down them steps and show us how to boogaloo, baby,” a light-skinned, auburn haired woman in a black sequined fish tail gown cooed to Gartha.

“She know she 'spose to be upstairs watchin' the kids,” Nona huffed, giving her daughter a sideways glance, but before, she could say anything further, Gartha was jostled from her perch on the stairs and surrounded by some healthy looking country women of all height and hue giving up some vigorous expressions to the blues.

She mimicked the women so well that when the record ended, two tables of card players extended hands to her that were filled with dollar bills. She counted 27 dollars.

As the music changed to one of Howlin Wolf's slower numbers Gartha made her way through the crush of adults to a fat, extremely handsome man smoking a cigar seated by the stereo who beckoned to her, arms outstretched. It was Johnny, a family friend and one of her mother's liquor salesmen.

She ran into his arms, and he tossed her up and held her tight against him before putting her down, kissing her ear. “How's my gal?” he asked, licking his wide full lips and flashing a broad smile.

“OK,” Gartha smiled.

“So sit down here next to Uncle and tell me what you been doin'? Got a boyfriend yet?”

“Nope!” Gartha said.

He looked at her intently and flashed a grin again, “You don't? A cute li'l thing like you . . . don't have a boyfriend?”

He drained his beer can.

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“Would you like another beer?” Gartha asked, taking his empty one. “I’ll throw this away. I help my mother keep the house clean.”

“You’re a good mother’s helper,” he said. “Yes, if you don’t mind.”

Gartha threw the can away once in the kitchen and took a fresh beer from the fridge, opening it and taking a napkin with her for Johnny.

“Thank you so much Gartha. You’re a sweet thing,” he winked. “You gon’ dance again?” Then before she could answer, “Go on and dance for Uncle...How much you want?” he asked her pulling bills from his pockets, his eyes twinkling.

Li'l Junior Parker’s “Sweet Home Chicago” started to play and off she went into the mix of women on the floor. She strutted, and bounced juttin that miniature butt out so far by comparison that it garnered plenty of attention. They made a circle, and each dancer spent some time in it giving her best offering. When the music finally finished, Gartha rushed into Uncle Johnny’s waiting arms for her money. He mashed her body against his and pressed her into him extra hard as he sat down.

She collected her ten dollars. “Good night Uncle Johnny.” She said, walking toward the stairs. He puffed from his cigar, as the card tables were turned over with new players.

“Come here for a minute.” He said, and walked towards the kitchen.

“Yes Uncle Johnny?”

“Uncle want to ask you a personal question.” He leaned towards her, “Has anyone ever been . . . intimate with you?”

Her gaze was unblinking.

“What’s going on Johnny?” one of her maternal uncles asked as he took a beer from the fridge and sauntered back to the living room.

Momentarily stunned by the quick entrance and departure of another person in the middle of such a question, he smiled faintly and clumsily re-grouped hearing her response, yet aware of his pulse racing,

“I’m a kid,” Gartha replied.

He exhaled forcefully, “Yes . . . you are. And I want you to let Uncle know, if any one ever attempts to mess with you under your clothes. Here’s five dollars.”

Gartha looked at the money for a few seconds and took it.

“Can Uncle have a kiss goodnight?” he asked.

“Do you think I’m beautiful Uncle Johnny?” she asked. “Or Pretty?”

He chewed on his cigar a moment, “No you’re not beautiful, or pretty . . . but you’re cute.” He said.

She gave him a short peck and quickly left the kitchen heading towards the stairs. Her mother was coming down. “It’s way past your bedtime Gartha,” Nona said firmly.

“I’m going now mama,” she said. “Mamma can I sleep in your bed? Just until you get ready to go to sleep?”

“I guess so.” Nona muttered.

Gartha lay quietly in the bed in her mother’s darkened room just off the stairs thinking about the evening’s deeds. This was a plum spot to be in to see and hear who was throwing up, to see who was stealing kisses, to see who was arguing; also to see who was getting slapped and who was plotting.

Just as she adjusted the door so that she could see the shadows better, the stairs crackled under the weight of someone very heavy. She didn’t have to strain to make out who it was.

“Ssss!” She said.

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The lumbering drunken figure came toward her.

“Hey you cute thing,” he said.

The music was blaring downstairs.

“Uncle Johnny,” Gartha began, “I want a bicycle. I’d like to have it next week.”

“You want a bicycle?” he slurred, “Next week! Ain’t you somethin’”.

“Are you going to get it for me?” Gartha asked. “It’s the only thing I need right now.”

“Well . . .” he said, “Yo’ Uncle need a lot of things too . . . Yo’ mamma is fine . . . and you gon’ look jus’ like her when you . . .”

“Uncle Johnny,” Gartha said, “If you don’t have a brand new bike for me by the end of next week, I’ll tell my mamma, that you’re always rubbing me up against your privates.”

He steadied himself by holding on to the walls and the door as Gartha’s unsmiling gaze burned through him in the dimness, her words echoing in his ear. “You’re a lyin’ little monkey too,” He said.

“No . . .” Gartha said to him, “I’m not a lying little monkey . . . but what is important . . . is that I’m a kid.” She paused to allow him time to soak up her words. “I told you that in the kitchen.”

She started back to her bed, his towering frame immobile in the doorway. “Oh . . . tell my mamma you’re giving me the bike as a gift because I’m a good daughter and you want to help her out . . . Good night Uncle Johnny.”

Gartha then closed her mother’s bedroom door tight and smiled as she undressed down to her underwear and slid under the the cozy quilts decorating Nona’s bed. She thought about her braid. She thought about tomorrow. She thought about what an exciting turn her life was taking.

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“I don’t want any of yo’ friends to be visitin’ you while you there at Sister’s house,” Nona said to Gartha, referring to her eldest sister and Gartha’s aunt. “You there cause she’s expectin’ a package and she don’t trust any of her neighbors to accept it for her.”

“All right mamma,” Gartha said dutifully.

“She don probably fucked some woman’s husband on her street, or maybe all they husbands,” Nona mumbled barely audible, as she watered her plants.

“I didn’t hear you mamma,” Gartha said.

“Never mind,” Nona returned, then she abruptly stopped and looked at her daughter.

“Something wrong?” Gartha asked.

“When you leave this evenin’, put on that suit I brought you. It looks pretty on you and it look like you ain’t gon’ never wear it,” Nona said.

Gartha was surprised. Her mother almost never told her what to wear, never even acted like she cared. Well . . . there was the time when special visitors came who’d be seeing the house for the first time, or when Nona took her out for some reason she had to get all dolled up.

Where Sister lived, the apartments were fancy, and just in case Gartha had to speak to someone, as Sister’s niece and Nona’s daughter, she wanted her to represent well. Gartha was all too happy to get dressed up. Now she had a reason to wear her braid. To see its effect.

A few blocks away from Gartha’s house, three men were sitting at a kitchen table drinking and talking.

“Man, lets drive around,” said Obie, the shortest of the three.



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“You got money for gas, mufucka?” Dent, the tallest and oldest of them answered.

“I know where we can git ends man.” It was Tray’s turn the middle guy and handsomer of the three.

“Yeah? Where?” asked Dent.

“My moms got some money. She won it playing cards . . . I can git it, but we got to put it back,” Tray said.

“You ain’t shit man, stealin’ from yo’ moms! I wouldn’t never do no shit like dat,” Dent said, “. . . When we got to put it back?”

Obie perked up, “Now look who ain’t shit!”

Dent boxed him hard upside the head, prompting a swell and a little blood.

“I figger she gon’ be lookin’ to count it agin in the next couple days, on account she got a lots right now. She keep it wrapped in cellophane in her kotex box, cause she figger it’s the last place anybody will look if they break in the house and hunt aroun’.”

Obie was caressing his bruise left by Dent’s fist, “Well . . . she got a point there . . . dudes stay away from kotex.”

“You would think so,” said Tray. “That shit stink.”

Dent stood up. “Let’s go,” he commanded, grabbing his keys. “I tell ya’ll all the time bitches is nasty, no matter how fine dey are.”

They settled in the car on the way to Tray’s house. It was approaching dusk and in the single family neighborhood of homes they passed, they could see attractive women getting in cars or next to them at the intersections when they stopped for lights. It didn’t take Tray long to go in and come back with one hundred dollars of his mom’s money.

“Word, mufucka!” Dent said as he slapped hi-five with his friend who handed him some of the money.

“Man whut you doin?” Dent asked.

“What you mean?” asked Tray.

“Man gimme the money . . . the rest of it,” Dent ordered.

Tray sighed, “Man I gave you fifty . . . why you got to have it all?”

“Man . . . who drivin? Who car is this? Who outta alla us, old enuff to buy liquor?” Dent held his hand out.

Tray shook his head and put the rest of the money in Dent’s hand. “Dat mean, you gon’ be the one pay it all back?” he asked.

“Git real Mufucka. I’m chippin in jus’ like ya’ll! Besides,” Dent continued, “we might not even spend all this.”

Tray turned to look at Obie who just stared straight ahead.

They stopped for gas. Dent bought a few six packs of beer and they took off down one of the popular bus routes eyeing the scenery as they cruised by.

“Man, where dese broke down bitches materialize from?” Obie said, as he popped a beer top.

“Slow down man . . . slow down.” Tray said as they cruised by the bus stop. “Did you see that?”

Dent looked in his rear view mirror, then slowed the car down for a better look. The girl was dressed to the nines, had on a striking pants suit. Besides her light complexion, the thing that was the most arresting was her thick jet black hair, pulled back in a braid.

Obie turned around in his seat, “That’s a hot mamma,” he crowed. “She a stuck-up bitch though. Them light ones always are.”

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“Don’t matter man, she ain’t gon’ give you the time of day anyway,” said Tray. “You too short! Dat bitch got some pretty hair though! And she a red-bone. I use to fantasize about bitches like dat. You know she a freak! Wanna be white, but not quite!”

“What’s dat got to do with anything?” Obie asked, “She could be dark skinned and fine!”

“Damn . . . do I have teach ya’ll dumb mufucka’s everything . . . about women too!” Dent said turning around in his seat. “Yeah, there’s fine dark women . . . but ain’t much expected of ‘em . . . as a group I mean. Take Frosty back there, she may be a splib, but a li’l mo’ gon be expected of her, on account of the way she look . . . it’s always been like dat! So she think different.”

Dent pulled away from the curb, “I’m goin’ back around so we can get a better look.”

“They circled the block and pulled up to the stop. “I don’t need a ride,” Gartha said smiling.

“Are you sure?” Tray asked, “Cause we don’t mind takin’ a lady where she want to go.”

Gartha caressed her braid and then swung it behind her back.

“You got some pretty hair and you dressed nice. You a fox,” Obie said.

“Yeah, ya’ll look good too,” She said politely. The braid was working.

“Good . . . then we look good enough to go with you,” Dent said sitting up, then springing from the car.

Tray and Obie hauled out of the car with him and they deftly dragged Gartha from the stop and shoved her into the back seat, taking off like a shot.

She looked at the lump on Obie’s face, and began pummeling him with the strength of both fists. He was hollering and putting his hands up to protect his face.

“Man go back there and git that bitch off dat sorry mufucka!” Dent instructed Tray, as he hunted for a thru street that wasn’t busy.

Tray crawled over the back seat and pulled Gartha off Obie, who then slapped her. She twisted her body and kicked Obie in the head sending it slamming against the side glass and then began grappling with Tray.

“Man dis bitch fight like a road hoe!” he hollered to Dent who now was trying to avoid Gartha’s heels as Tray struggled with her.

“Tray, knock the bitch out!” Dent screamed.

“Man I cain’t git . . .”

“Man if you don’t knock dat bitch out, I’m knockin’ you out!”

“Hold her, Obie,” Tray said.

Obie’s eye was bleeding, but he was trying to hold on to Gartha yet couldn’t get a grip.

Dent quickly sped a couple more miles, pulled off the road, then turned around and yanked Gartha’s legs across the front seat, ripping her pants halfway down, tearing her panties.

As she bucked and Tray held on to her arms, Dent flicked open his cigarette lighter and turned up the flame. He quickly brought the flame to within an inch of Gartha’s pubic hairs.

“I’m gon’ have to teach a bitch the meanin’ of ‘hot pussy?’ he said coldly.

Gartha stopped fighting. It was deathly quiet.

Dent closed the lighter. There were no street lights. The road was gravel. He drove a few more feet, made a sharp turn and cut off the headlights, stopping the car. He gripped Gartha’s shoulder tightly. “Tray come git this bitch and hold on

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to her,” he ordered.

Tray did as he was instructed. They exited the car. Gartha knew she wasn't near the city, but didn't know where she was. They could barely see each other. She thought if she broke away running, she'd be bitten by snakes or run into some quick sand.

Dent went to the trunk of his car; from the dull trunk lights she saw him take out a hand gun and a shotgun. “Ya'll some punk muthafuckas,” He said to Tray and Obie.

“Dent man, we didn't plan on killin' nobody,” Tray said.

“Yeah man, we . . .” Obie started.

“Shut the fuck up!” Dent barked. “What the fuck we gon' do with this bitch now? She gon tell the police if we let her go.”

“Man, I just got out! They fucked me in jail, Dent! The dudes and some of the staff...I can't go back . . . I” Obie started to cry.

“Obie shut yo' damn mouth!” Tray hissed.

Gartha spoke, “I won't go to the police.” She said softly, “I have drugs at my house.”

She could feel Dent and Tray's gaze on her, Tray's arm tightening around hers, “I should top you off right here, right now.” Dent said. “These few folks who live on these farms wouldn't think nothing of the noise. They'd think I shot a animal messing wit chickens or somethin'.”

Gartha remained quiet, her exterior belying the terror she felt inside.

“What you know about drugs?” Dent asked her.

“I know I have some cocaine and some marijuana.” She said, “My cousin left it there before he was sent to jail.”

“So you do drugs?” Dent said. “Funny . . . you don't strike me as the type who do drugs . . . how you know it's coke?”

“My cousin said it was coke. It's in big rocks . . . I know what reefer smells like.”

The silence was torture.

“We can go back to my place, smoke some reefer, do some coke.” Gartha said, “. . . There's so much there you can't do it all . . . who knows what else we might think of, once we're relaxed.” She went on, her voice gentle and calm.

Dent pushed her to the car and inside it. “Tray ride up here wit us.” They took off down the road, Gartha sandwiched between them. Both men, who had started to drink, began to fondle her.

“I have to pee,” she said.

“You'll have to hold it til we git to yo' place. Yo' clothes are too raggedy to git out at a gas station. You better not be lyin' about the drugs either. I did time for shootin' people, so you ain't special.”

At least they stopped fondling her.

After about thirty-five minutes, they arrived in a section of the city that was pristine, with rows of sturdy, three storied brick buildings with long flower pots decorating the balconies. They all got out in front of the building that Gartha indicated where she lived. She felt in her pocket for her aunt's key.

“I have to enter from the rear,” she said, “I should walk ahead.”

“I thought you said yo' cousin was in jail.” Dent said, grabbing for her arm.

“He is . . . please relax, I live alone.”

“A shot gun and a hand gun is pointed at you bitch,” said Tray.

She made her way into the blackness leading to the back of the house

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with them hard and fast on her heels. She could hear their breath. It seemed the path to her Aunt's apartment was burned in her mind so accurately, her eyes weren't necessary. "Watch the eight steps," she said.

Then in a moment where naked fear melds with unerring courage, she bolted like lightning from her captors and with amazingly precise exactitude deadheaded her key into the lock and opened the door, whisking herself inside and slamming it in their faces, the huge lock catching with sobering finality.

She slumped to the floor as they opened fire, one blast splintering the thick wood in the ceiling and snuffing out the light above her head. She heard them hobbling and running down the stairs in a panic, overturning garbage cans and bottles as they hurried alongside the apartment building in the darkness in a fit to get to their car and escape. Their tires screeched signaling to Gartha they'd gone.

Trembling, she pulled herself up from the floor, her panties soiled, to answer her Aunt's phone. It was a neighbor, a policeman wanting to know what happened, whether or not she was all right. Gartha asked him to come over.

She went into the bathroom and stared into the mirror as though looking past who she was. The braid compelled her focus. Vibrancy flooded her eyes. She put her hand to her chest to still her heart.

She was awed. Though she had narrowly escaped a dangerous ordeal with her life, what struck her most about her reflection at that moment was that her braid was still intact. And that she looked "beautiful." As beautiful as the heroine who'd be swept up and kissed by the hero at the end of the story in one of the old classic films she'd watched with so much envy.

She heard the neighbor at her door, and with a toss of her head, the thick hair, like many dead things enshrined in myth, was imparted as an all too real, undeserved, largely unexamined relevance in Gartha's life. **KR**



—Ruth Olinsky

# Sunday Before

I turned on ninety-seven-five the Sunday before

Christmas, to hear these purses, most years

filled with empty, or feeling like midget-kicks,

to the skull somewhere behind my right ear.

But this year it gets down to Nat King Cole's

sugar-bun sound and Bing's downstairs cavern-smooth,

that make it ritual; there's baking,

cooking from a cook book, and the Charlie Brown

tree, I've been craving for ten years.

When pluck pushed me to ask the nursery man if

he had one, and he only hesitated, the way

a smart man, a woman-pleaser does-

long enough to move into the challenge,

knowing there's fun in there;

when it only cost fifteen bucks, and my

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tall friend opened his wallet, something clicked . . .

There was rain and wind that Sunday before, but the drops  
came blowing sideways off the branches, not from clouds.

Ice had gloved the tough oak's arms, holding on  
tighter than addiction, the warmer breath  
of indifferent air, melting it from the outside, in.

It was when we sat down with the Chicken Paprikash,  
soft with sour cream and sweet cream, and the  
freckled, garlic-frosted zucchini, fine with olive oil,

it was after catholic grace with the sign of the cross,  
and the sun decided to join us, that I looked outside  
to see far, to see Jack Frost's hand on stand after stand

of distant trees, shocked with freeze, singing to me  
you have surfaced, little one, this is what you love:

art and communion, on the Sunday before.

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Merry Christmas I told the tall one, and he knew it too.

I waited for his eyes, insisting. He gave them  
to me, ice blue with the sheen of a paragon.



# Resurrection and the Life

“Stand away from that pot, boy, or it’ll be your flesh slipping off your bones.”

The boy moved back a safe distance, his gaze fixed on the rolling water inside the enormous metal caldron. The scalding water burst and crashed against the sides, occasionally splashing over the edge, causing the fire beneath to flame up as it gasped for air. The contents of the pot lay submerged, a thin layer of grease coating the surface. The stench in the cellar was unbearable, foul and oppressive: the thick smoke hung low, causing his eyes to sting and water.

“How long do you boil them?” The boy asked. He had only been here a few days, bought by the butcher from the work house. The butcher had needed a strong boy who could lift heavy items by himself, who was a quick learner, and most importantly, knew the wisdom of keeping quiet. His pay was a ratty, soiled blanket to sleep on, a bowl of broth in the morning, and a plate of stringy, boiled meat at the end of the day.

“Depends on the size of the bone. The bigger the bone, the longer it takes for the meat to slip off. It usually takes a week to clean the entire carcass.”

“Where do they come from?”

The butcher gave him a sharp look. “What did I tell you about asking questions?”

The boy stepped back, instinctively turning his head away from a blow. It didn’t come, but the boy realized he’d been lucky this time. Next time the wrong question would result in a violent answer.

The door to the cellar opened, and a small sigh of cool air managed to escape into the room. Two figures, one tall and dark, the other fragile and small, started to descend. The smaller figure had an especially difficult time coming down and moved sideways, one step at a time into the stuffy room.

The larger figure came into the light. Dirty, tattered clothing covered his immense frame, a cap pulled low over his eyes. The boy instinctively moved back. The figure had an air of death about him; he looked at the boy and asked the butcher, “Who’s this?”

“Needed extra help,” the butcher replied as he hacked into a bone and threw it into the pot.

“Does he talk” the bigger man asked.

“He knows how to,” the butcher said, “He knows not to.”

“Good.” The dark phantom moved to a shelf and grabbed a bottle of gin, then dropped his weight into a chair on the other side of the room.

The boy relaxed a little, the way one does when one has narrowly avoided being hit by a runaway cart, and looked at the other person who entered the room. He gasped in surprise; his initial impression was that another child had arrived with

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the bigger man, but it was in fact another adult, only very small; she barely came up to the boy's shoulder. She regarded the boy and offered him a smile. The boy shyly allowed his mouth to mimic hers. Suddenly she was doubled over, a violent coughing fit shaking her as if she were possessed. Alarmed, the boy went towards her to try to help, but recoiled as he saw the drops of blood that filled the piece of cloth she held to her lips.

The dark man shifted his eyes towards them. "Cough's getting worse," he said in a tone that was more accusing than concerned.

The woman drew in a deep breath and tried to stand upright. "It's not." She struggled to speak. "It's just the night air. It's cold. And it's so damn hot and stuffy in here." Her eyes were wet and swollen.

The man took another swig of the gin and laid his head on the back of the chair. His body began to relax as the steady rhythm of his breathing filled the air. The butcher stalked over to where the boy and woman were standing and asked the woman, "You staying the night?"

The boy saw her cringe and heard her mumble, "Yes, I suppose".

"You know the price." The butcher grabbed her shoulder and steered her to the corner of the room where his crude bed was. A thin curtain separated the corner from the rest of the room. The butcher turned and looked at the boy. "You keep an eye on that pot. Make sure the flame doesn't get low. The water needs to keep at a heavy roll."

The boy went back over to the pot, once again staring at the contents. He glanced over towards the curtain; he saw the butcher lie on top of the woman, saw his body rock, heard grunting noises begin. He didn't know what was going on, but he didn't like it. It looked like the butcher was hurting her. He turned his head away and saw the dark man looking at him, his eyes faintly visible under the cap. The eyes reminded him of a mean, vicious dog he had known a long time ago. They held each other's gaze for a minute; it was broken by the sound of the butcher completing his task. The boy thought he saw a look of disgust creep across the man's face. The man closed his eyes again and muttered, "Best watch that pot, boy," and drifted off to sleep.

The boy awoke with a start. He looked over at the pot; the woman was placing another log under it. He started to move towards her, but she motioned for him to stay still. She walked over and lay down beside him on his blanket.

"Do you have a name?" she asked him.

He thought for a minute; he seemed to remember that a long time ago he had one, but he couldn't remember it now. He couldn't remember much of anything other than living in the workhouse, the noise, and the smells. A farm slipped past his heart, but it appeared only briefly. "It's boy, I guess. That's what they call me." He looked at her, trying to understand. "Are you a girl, or are you a grown up lady?"

She rolled on her back and stared at the ceiling. "I'm grown up. I just stopped growing."

"Is that man your Da?" The boy nodded his head in the direction of the dark man asleep in the chair.

A short, bitter laugh escaped her lips. "Him? You know what he is, don't you?" The boy shook his head 'no.' "He's a resurrectionist." The boy stared dumbly at her. "A body snatcher. He takes fresh bodies from their graves and sells them to the doctors what work at the school down the street. They cut them up and look at what's inside. When the doctors are done, they need some one to take care of the parts left over. That's where he comes in." She motioned her

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head towards the slumbering figure in the corner. "He's a butcher by trade, but he also hacks up what's left and boils 'em down to the bones. That's what's in the pot. That's why you've got to make sure you ask no questions. Less you know the better."

She was so matter of fact with her tale that the boy at first thought she was joking, but suddenly understood the full horror of the situation. His breathing became quick and he started to whimper slightly. "Why are you here?" he asked her. "Why am I here?" The tears came quicker now.

She pulled him towards her, wrapping an arm around his shoulder and letting his head lay on her breast. It was comical because of the difference in their sizes. "Shhh, keep quiet or you'll wake them. I'm here because I help the resurrection man. I go to people's houses and pretend I'm a relative come to pay my last respects. Then I let him know when the body's going to be buried. You're here because the butcher is going to need someone to help him lift the meat when it arrives. If you don't think about it too much, it's not too bad."

The boy stopped crying and thought about his situation. There was no sense in running away because where would he go? How would he eat, stay warm, stay safe? He felt his body start to relax as sleep began to envelope him. It was nice lying in the woman's arms. Just before he drifted off, he mumbled, "What's your name"?

That short, bitter laugh escaped from her again. "You bitch, I imagine," she replied.

The boy stayed with the butcher, and days turned into weeks, weeks became months. Three times a week the boy would venture down to the medical academy and collect several filled burlap bags and return with them to the butcher's shop. The pot boiled constantly, the stench filling the area for several blocks. After the bones were cleaned, they were either returned to the school or placed back in the bags and thrown in the river. The resurrectionist would appear several times a week, the woman always in tow. Her health was deteriorating quickly, and the boy was afraid for her. There was barely any meat left to her bones, and even the butcher left her alone now. Her breathing was labored; the coughing fits lasted longer and had become more violent. Still the boy couldn't wait until the end of the day when she would lie beside him. It was the only moment of peace he knew.

It was still dark when he awoke one morning with a jolt as the butcher kicked him away from the woman. For a brief, terrifying moment he was afraid he'd let the fire go out but then realized the butcher wasn't interested in him. The butcher had pulled the woman away from him and was examining her, the resurrectionist beside him.

"Dead," he muttered. "Cold. What do you reckon they'll give me for her?"

"Who?" The dark man asked.

"Them doctors. How much do you think they'll give me for her? She's a little one, but still, they might pay a decent price for her, seeing how they don't get many of her kind around these parts."

"NO!" The boy shrieked, rising from the floor and moving towards the butcher with a mad intent. He wouldn't let her be sliced up; he wouldn't let them carve her flesh. He lunged for the butcher but the bigger man brushed him aside.

"You mongrel pup, who are you to tell me my business? You'd do well to keep your mouth shut before I sell your carcass."

The boy sat where he landed, fighting to hold in the tears. Not her, he wouldn't let them take her. He looked over to the dark man, trying to catch his eye.

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The resurrectionist only stared at the woman, his black eyes low.

The butcher grabbed a coat and started for the door. He looked at the boy on the floor. "Put her in a bag and have her ready to go when I get back." He opened the door and went out into the dark predawn.

The boy wiped the tears from his eyes and went to find a bag. He went over to the woman and began to slip the bag up over her feet towards her head. She hadn't been dead long, rigor mortis hadn't set in, so she was still pliable. Her small size enabled her to fit into a bag if he curled her up, her knees to her chest, her arms wrapped around her knees. He tied the bag shut and slung it over his shoulder, heading for the door.

"Wait," the dark man called.

He turned to face the man, a feeling of hate slowly boiling up inside him. The man smiled slightly, a cynical, acrimonious look across his face. He reached into his pocket and pulled out two gold coins and held them out to the boy. "Here. Give one coin to the ferry man. He'll take you across the river. Keep the other coin for the other side."

The boy stared at him and tentatively reached for the money. "What do I do when I get to the other side?"

"You'll know. Keep walking until you stop. She doesn't deserve that. Hurry before the butcher comes back. Don't talk to any one until you get there. Remember, one coin for the ferry man. Don't let him try to take the other".

The boy opened the door, looking down either end of the street. It was still dark and the butcher was nowhere to be seen. He slung the bag across his shoulder and started to walk towards the river. Even though the woman was small the dead weight on his back began to wear him down, and by the time he got to the ferry he was short of breath. He found the ferry man and handed him the coin. "I'm crossing the river," he said.

The ferry man was tall and gaunt, leaning against a long pole that he used to ferry people back and forth. He looked at the coin, bit it, and put it in his pocket. "What's in the bag?" his voice rasped.

"My business, not yours." The boy pulled himself up to his full height and tried his best to look as intimidating as the resurrectionist. He moved onto the ferry.

The ferry man chuckled and followed him onto the raft. He waited a few minutes, then untied the ferry and began to slowly push it across the river. The river was only a mile wide at this point, but the journey would still take most of the morning. Dawn broke overcast, dark clouds hanging low; about a quarter of the way over, it began to rain, causing the river to toss them around. The boy sat squarely in the middle of the raft, cradling the sack in his lap.

The boy was soaked by the time they reached the other side. The ferry man tied up the raft and turned towards the boy, holding out his hand. "Pay me," he said.

The boy stood up and stared at him. "I already paid you," he said. He slung the bag over his shoulder and started to move off the raft.

The ferry man stood in front of him. "Pay me", he said, "or give me what's in the bag." He leaned forward and tried to pull the bag off the boy's shoulder. The boy pulled away and made the raft tilt, causing the ferry man to fall into the river. The boy heard his curses as he walked onto the land and headed into the pine forest.

He walked until he was tired, sat under a tree and placed the sack gently on his lap. It was still raining, and the tree only gave him minimal coverage. He

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didn't know where he was; he didn't know where he was supposed to go. The only thing he knew was he couldn't go back. He was tired and hungry and felt the tears begin to form in his eyes.

"What do I do now?" he asked to no one in particular. Keep walking until you stop, the resurrectionist said. When should he stop? He put his arms around the bag and hugged her body to his. He dropped his head onto hers and felt that sense of peace he always felt when she was near. He closed his eyes, the sound of the falling rain ringing in his ears.

He awoke several hours later, curled up on his side, the bag still in his embrace. He sat up and tried to figure which way to go. It was still raining and it was difficult to see too far ahead. The forest was one of old pines, the ground sandy and covered with brown, dry needles. There seemed to be a path heading deeper into the forest, so he decided to go that way as well as another. He stood up, placed the bag over his other shoulder and walked into the woods.

He walked for two days, stopping to rest when he became tired, eating berries along the way, drinking water from small puddles he happened upon. The rain held steady, though he rarely felt it because the tree canopy was so dense and high. At night he would curl up with the sack. He didn't run into another leaving creature, human or animal, the entire time.

On the third day the sun rose, and finally he came to a clearing. He looked ahead and saw a small house, smoke rising from the chimney. Next to the house there was another building, slightly taller than the first, a pointy peak with two pieces of wood tied together at the top of the peak. In back of the second building there was a piece of land with a small wooden fence around it. More of the tiny pieces of wood were planted in the ground, like some funny garden.

He walked towards the buildings and stopped suddenly when a woman appeared at the door of the house, ready to shake out a rug. She spotted the boy and raised her arm to him, waving him closer as she hollered out, "Hello boy, who are you? Where have you come from?"

The boy walked cautiously up to her, his bones aching from the long journey and the heavy load he'd carried. "I'm from across the river. I've been walking three days. I don't know where I am or where I'm going."

The woman studied his face and glanced at the bag he set down in front of him. He looked too young to be on his own, but nothing would surprise her anymore. "Are you hungry?" she asked.

The boy nodded.

"Leave your bag outside and come in. I've just pulled out a loaf of corn bread from the oven. I'll fetch some eggs and fix you breakfast."

The boy started to let go of the bag but caught himself. "I can't leave my bag."

"Why not?"

"Can't. Can't stop till I get there."

The woman looked at the boy and suspiciously eyed the bag. "Suit yourself. I'll bring the food out to you."

She went into the house and returned a few moments later with a tin of water and a plate with several pieces of warm corn bread. The boy wolfed the food down where he stood. He picked up the bag and moved closer to the house. The woman went towards the second building and he saw her speak to someone in the fenced yard. A man stood up and looked towards him, then came out of the yard and moved over to him.

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“Hello,” the man said, putting out his hand, “What brings you here?”

The boy clumsily took his hand and shook it. “I don’t know where here is. I was told to walk until I stopped, that I’d know when I got there. But I don’t know anything.” Fatigue took hold and tears began to form. “I’m lost, I’m tired, I have this heavy burden and I don’t know how to get rid of her.”

The man looked at the bag at the boy’s feet, the word ‘her’ raising his curiosity. “What’s in the bag, son?”

The boy started to cry harder, wanting to unload everything he’d been carrying. “I couldn’t leave her, he would have sold her to those doctors, they would have cut her up, then boiled her bones, the resurrectionist said she didn’t deserve that and said I should take the ferry over the river and once I got to the other side I’d know where to go but I don’t.” The woman had come up behind him and pulled him to her, stroking his hair and saying kind words into his ear. The man bent down and started to untie the bag; he drew in his breath when he saw the contents. He folded the top of the bag and stood up again. He put his hand on the boy’s shoulder. “She can stay here. You both can,” he said.

The boy took in a deep breath and looked at the man. “Where?” he asked. “How?”

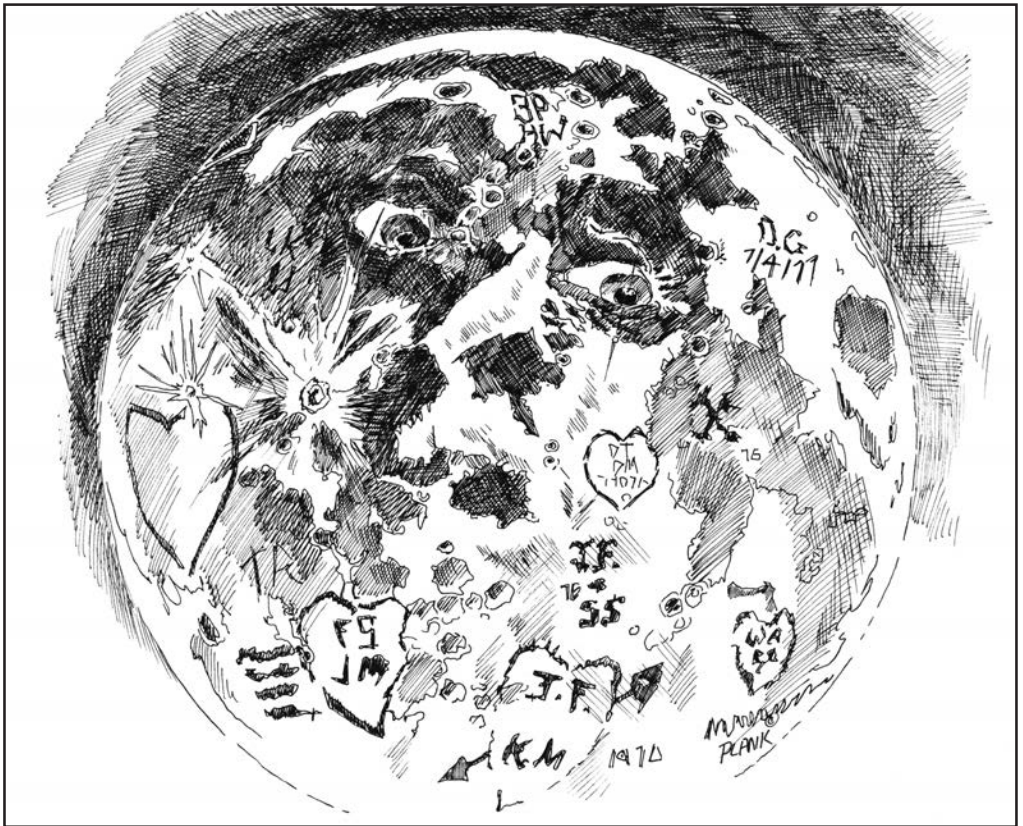
“Well, I can always use another pair of hands to help me around this place, and she,” he paused and looked over to the fenced garden. “She can stay there. We’re far enough away from civilization to be safe from resurrectionists.”

The boy wiped his face with his sleeve and looked over at the garden. It was pretty, and it was far away. She could stay there and he could stick around to make sure that no one disturbed her. “OK,” he said. He reached his hand into his pocket and pulled out the gold coin. “The resurrectionist said I should give this to you. He said it was for when I got to the other side. Is it enough?”

The man looked at the coin and handed it back to the boy. “Keep it. You might need it someday. Go on up to the barn and I’ll meet you there in a minute.”

The boy picked up the sack and walked the short distance to the barn. The man whispered to his wife; her hand flew to her mouth at what she heard. They spoke quietly for a minute. Then she returned to the house and he to the barn. When the man arrived he pulled out some planks of wood and began to measure them. The boy lay on the straw, the bag close to him, and drifted off to sleep to the sound of the carpenter’s work. **KR**





—Bill Plank

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# Kelsey Style

We at the *Kelsey Review* (KR) are often asked what we look for in submissions. Here are a few words from each of the editors that shed light on the *Kelsey* philosophy. Art, poetry, fiction, non-fiction—the ideas that inform our decisions are complex and based on a lifetime of professional experience. These few words can't give a full idea of what we have in mind when we read and peruse the works sent to us—even ten, a hundred, or a thousand times as many words wouldn't serve—but these few we offer will begin to answer that question we hear so often: “what does the *Kelsey Review* look for?”

## Edward Carmien

As a teenager at Antioch College I met Nolan Miller. A novelist and teacher of creative writing, Miller also served as the fiction editor for *The Antioch Review* (TAR). I worked as a slush pile reader for Miller and Robert Fogarty, editor of TAR. What's a slush pile? That's jargon for unsolicited manuscripts (mss.), the raw material every journal, quarterly, and literary magazine culls through to find the things they publish.

Little did I know this experience would, decades later, inform my work as co-editor of the *Kelsey Review*. In fact, the gap between my work for TAR and KR caused me to forget Miller and Fogarty's lessons until recently, when an article about Miller's many contributions to the literary world came to my attention. In it Miller's views about what a slush pile reader should look for in a submission are quoted at length.

“What we're looking for is what is intriguing—difficult as it is to pin down just what that means,” Miller begins. “First of all, I think it's what I call ‘a voice.’” For Miller, it was important for a writer to convey ideas to the reader without “getting in the way of his/her characters or story.” A positive sense of expectation was necessary for Miller, because “we like expecting. This produces a state of suspense, not only in the possible outcome of the story but in the continuing ‘surprise’ of the writing, the fresh imagery, the variations of the sentences which, like dance steps, ‘lead’ us into patterns and rhythm we follow in time to persuasive and melodious music.”

He goes on to assert that “good writing is very much like music—the music the writer makes and the reader hears,” music that supports a reader's path through the material. Miller describes what too often happens in the slush pile—that too many “stories we get are told rather than ‘made.’” But this is enough to suggest some, at least, of what I look for in effective writing (and it serves well enough for poetry). Writers such as Mark Strand (former Poet Laureate), Rod Serling, Lawrence Block and many others studied wisdom like this. It turns out I had only forgotten from where I inherited my editorial instincts, as I use Miller and Fogarty's lessons as writer and editor every day.



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Oh, one more thing. Nolan Miller was a stickler for proper manuscript (ms.) format, and I picked up the habit. Wading through the slush pile, one often finds a sloppy ms. is a sign of a poorly written story. Of course, nicely formatted mss. frequently aren't publishable either—but good format is often a harbinger of good things to follow. So check the guidelines for whatever publication you send your work to. Write on!

### **Holly-Katharine Mathews**

My own fiction writing is based largely on research. I've written stories about the lives of commercial fishermen by spending time hanging out with, working with and interviewing dozens of them at the port of Point Judith, Rhode Island. I've written stories about Vietnam veterans after spending months interviewing many vets in and around Ithaca, New York. So many young writers are encouraged to write about what they know, which is obviously sound advice on many fronts, but I like writing about what I don't know, and I find more surprises in the writing of people who do likewise. Shakespeare was never a Danish prince, after all. Once upon a time, imagination was what mattered.

As a reader, I like surprises. I like naked grandmas on bicycles, riding frantically through the first paragraph and off into the night. I like boys who hang out in barber shops but end up shaving the legs of unusual girls. I like poems with endings that make me wince a little because I didn't see them coming, such as the powerful short poem "Cataract Surgery," by Beverley Mach Geller, that was published in the 2008 edition of the *Kelsey Review*.

I am not surprised that people find love or lose it or make horrendous decisions because of it. I'm not surprised that people are sad about the death of loved ones, or happy about it, or both. I am not surprised by stormy nights, alcoholics, band camp or dogs. Sex isn't as surprising as it once was, at least the way people write about it isn't very surprising, and not as many people write about birth as one might hope, considering how universal it is.

Having said that I like reading work by people who write what they *don't* know. I must also admit that some of the writing I've loved best over the years comes directly from people's personal experiences. I love the way high wire artist Philippe Petit writes his book *On The High Wire* as if the experiences he speaks of are rather universal even though none of us has dared, as he did, to walk on a wire between the two towers of the World Trade Center. I love how Gretel Erlich's observations in her book *The Solace of Open Spaces* tie the external landscape of Wyoming to the social landscapes of the cowboys and shepherds that work and live there, and then to her own internal landscape. Even though they've been over-used in high school and college English classrooms to the point where it is almost uncool to admit it, I love the tormented stories of war that Tim O'Brien offers up in *The Things They Carried*.

As co-editor of *The Kelsey Review*, I look through each year's submissions hoping to find surprises, stories told by great liars (i.e. those who have done enough homework and used enough imagination to convince me that the unusual worlds they've created are real), stories about personal experiences told from unusual perspectives. If you're not much of a liar, focus on craft, creating tension and releasing it, or better yet, go out and have yourself an adventure you can draw from. Haul the jalopy out of the garage and take your next-door neighbor on a road trip to Atlantic City. You don't even have to leave Mercer County: get some beer, rent a canoe and paddle around Carnegie Lake for a few hours. Write the stories of the people you see walking on the tow path. Who are they? What are they up to? Tell me. Surprise me.

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## Luray Gross

I

What do I want from a poem? To be moved. Moved from preoccupations and obligations, away from the rat-a-tat of my inner voice by the music of the poem and the authority of its imagination. I'm listening for its surround sound. I'm looking out for landscape, streetscape, face, skin, and cloud. When Patricia Smith launches "My Million Fathers, Still Here Past":

Hallelujah for grizzled lip, snuff chew, bended slow walk,  
and shit talkin' . . .

I am along for the ride, and the poem does not disappoint. It proclaims with striking images, surety of syntax, an avalanche of richly modified nouns that rumble with verb pulse, sure all the way to the finish:

. . . Open bony dark-veined  
arms and receive me, a woman in the shape of your daughter,  
who is taking on your last days as her very blood, learning  
your whispered language too late to stop your dying,  
but not too late  
to tell  
this story.

II

What do I want from a poem? To be stopped. I want to sink into the poem as into a blue pool, to sink and be held, my feet bearing no weight. I want the poem to hold me like water, like a memory of amniotic tide. Poems I've just encountered as well as those I've known for years can offer this solace. Sometimes bringing to mind an opening line or stanza is enough: "I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree/  
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made:/Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honey bee,/ And live alone in the bee-loud glade."

III

What do I want from a poem? To be astounded, nearly confounded, to be pushed off balance so that I must lean into the poem as into a fierce wind. I am willing to be led into unknown or unknowable territory. Once more, I am the college freshman who wrote in the margin next to "The Jewel" by James Wright: "Do I understand this poem? No, but I know it is right."

IV

When I am at my best as a reader, I am most open, vulnerable to a poem's possible charms. Its spell may be cast by a jangle of cubist syntax or a stream of well-made sentences; by near-prose or artfully broken lines; by spare diction or charged sprung rhythms; by bold declarations or subtle insinuation.

V

At my best I am reading/listening/reading without preconceptions, ready for fire, be it conflagration or a single spark.

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## Ellen Jacko

In *The Merchant of Venice* Portia says,

The quality of mercy is not strain'd,  
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven  
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest:  
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.  
(4.1.184-187)

I'd like to borrow from Shakespeare and offer that the quality of good writing is not strained. When writers carefully consider audience, purpose, and occasion, they choose structure, syntax, and words that not only express what is on their minds and in their hearts, but they do so in a unique voice that connects with the reader. It is, I think, at the core of the relationship between writer and reader. When writers choose wisely, there is no strain for the reader and s/he is invited, indeed compelled, to read.

To this end, I look for writers who select their words carefully. I do caution against a liberal use of a thesaurus. For me, a word that is "trying too hard" creates a strain that affects my reading of the entire piece. This is particularly true for poems because the economy of words is a critical element of the overall success of the poem.

Additionally, I look for poems in which the poet has a strong command of punctuation. I often get the impression that aspiring poets are afraid of punctuation. At least, they seem to ignore that power afforded to the writer who uses it judiciously. It is important that writers give the reader guides for reading the poem and punctuation does just that. When a poet manages the various elements, I don't have to strain to get to the heart of the poem.

Furthermore, I suggest that readers are "blest" when the "well written" poem says something that makes me pause. Just as with diction, I caution against "grand" for the sake of "grand." I find that the poems that affect me the most are those that do one of two things. Some poems are about big events like war or poverty or love; these poems work when the poet can place the reader in the situation and then ensure that the universal element of the circumstance is clear for the reader. On the other hand, good poems are often about small moments like folding laundry, or cooking dinner with one's spouse. These poems shine when the poet shows how important these moments are, however simple or ordinary.

One last observation. I always pay close attention to a first line that pulls me into the poem. And nothing makes me say "wow" like a powerful last line. In between I look for a logical, beautiful declaration in a clear, unique voice. When all of this comes together, both reader and writer are "blest."

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## Robbie Clipper Sethi

Twenty-eight years of college teaching and writing fiction and poetry in hope of publication has taught me that no editor—or teacher, for that matter—is ever looking for anything but what s/he likes. They will try to tell you they're looking for quality, and just ask either a teacher or editor what makes for good writing. They'll have an answer, but any committee reading of student essays or editorial meeting will show you that it's a subjective business, reading fiction and poetry, and one woman's "I like this" may be another's "This is not publishable."

So the question is, what do I like? When I was an undergraduate English and Russian major at Indiana University, my British literature professor, Ernst Bernhardt-Kabbisch accused me of liking only poetry that was funny—Byron, as opposed to Wordsworth, for instance. I could not argue with him. In fact, it was an insight, though I like to think my tastes have grown since 1972. Good thing I'm not selecting poetry.

In fiction my preference is for long, developed stories, and I have been ignoring the word limit at *The Kelsey Review* since I started helping Robin Schore select fiction in 1988. Not surprising as my interest in literature began with Leo Tolstoy in 1966 and culminated in a comparative study of Russian, English, and French narrative before I turned most of my attention to writing my own sometimes very long stories.

Man, do I like a good story! A short story, even a chapter can do so much less than a novel, but even some short stories give us characters we can't forget—Akaki Akakievich in Gogol's "The Overcoat," Gabriel Conroy in Joyce's "The Dead" and Arnold Friend in Joyce Carol Oates's "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" I like a story that surprises me without undermining my ability to believe it, that comes to an inevitable yet unpredictable resolution. Jeffrey Eugenides' "Air Mail" does that, as does Chekhov's "Lady with a Dog" (translated any number of ways to reflect the diminutive we don't have for "doggie"). I am the most attracted, however, even delighted by literate, graceful language, as essential to prose as it is to poetry. I had to learn Russian pretty well to appreciate Chekhov's terse and ironic use of language and Pushkin's poetic humor, and to this day a strong voice will pull me through a story whose plot may be predictable and whose characters may not stay in my mind as long as an apt turn of phrase or delicate expression.

So work on a strong, distinctive style, in a voice only you can write in, know your characters better than anyone in life can be known, and get them onto the page, and let your writing take you to your most authentic perceptions and insights about human nature and the world.

I'll love it.

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# Contributors

**Linda Arntzenius**, a native of Scotland, lived in London, Boston, Pittsburgh, and Los Angeles before settling in Princeton a decade ago. A full-time professional writer, her poems have been included in *Slant*, *The Journal of New Jersey Poets*, *Paterson Literary Review*, *Exit 13*, and *U.S.1 Worksheets*. She is a member of U.S.1 Poets' Cooperative and serves as an editor for U.S.1 Worksheets.

**Katie Budris** teaches composition and literature at Mercer County Community College and Brookdale Community College. She earned her M.F.A. in creative writing from Roosevelt University in Chicago where she spent a year working with *Oyez Review*. The highlight of her writing career thus far has been participating in Western Michigan University's Prague Summer Program. Her poems have appeared in *After Hours*, *The Albion Review*, *Flashquake* and *Michigan Avenue Review*.

**Vida Chu** grew up in Hong Kong and lives in Princeton. She has poems published in *Kelsey Review*, *Princeton Arts Review*, *US1 Worksheets* and *The Literary Review*. Her children's stories have been published in *Cricket Magazine* and *Fire and Wings*, a book about dragons for children.

**Lisa Cugasi** resides in Hamilton Township with her husband, Peter, and their children, Tess and Jimmy. She works as a caregiver and attends Mercer County Community College. She plans to continue her education at the St. Francis Medical Center School of Nursing. She is often inspired by her clients' enlightening life stories.

**Deda Kavanagh** is a poet from Bucks County, PA. Her poems have been published in the anthology *Freshet* and in the *Newtown Advance*. She has read her poetry on QPTV, and in 2009 she adjudicated the Montgomery County Poet Laureate Competition and won an honorable mention in the Allen Ginsberg Poetry Awards. She writes poetry at 5:00 AM, then underwrites at her day job at New Jersey Manufacturers Insurance Company, where she's been happily employed for eighteen years.

**Janet Kirk** grew up in rural Minnesota. She lives in Princeton. Her stories have appeared in the *Kelsey Review* and *US1*.

**Mark Mazzenga**, Rhode Island native, has been living in the Princeton area for the past five years. A world cultures and art history teacher by day, Mark's true passion is writing. He explores his roots as an Italian-American Rhode Islander through memoir, fiction and screenplays. Mark's other interests include coaching JV girls' basketball and quoting rap songs from the early 1990s. This is Mark's first publication.

**Carolina Morales** has lived and worked in Trenton, New Jersey for over twenty-five years. She attended Mercer County Community College and Thomas Edison State College. Her poems have appeared in *Poet Lore*, *The Spoon River Poetry Review*, *US1 Worksheets*. Her first chapbook, *The Bride of Frankenstein and Other Poems*, was released by Finishing Line Press

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**Ruth Olinsky** is retired and lives in Lawrenceville, New Jersey. She has taken many classes at Mercer County Community College over the years. She enjoys writing poetry and drawing.

**Bill Plank** is an alumnus of MCCC and a retired art instructor. He has exhibited his paintings at ETS, Mercer County Artists Exhibit and Lawrence Gallery. Together with his wife Helene, also an alumnus of MCCC, he owns and operates Plank Art Designs, selling paintings, prints and a variety of craft items. More of Bill's artwork can be viewed at [fairylennj.com](http://fairylennj.com).

**Kathleen Rehn** was born in Connecticut and has lived in Mercer County since coming to Princeton University as a graduate student in 1980. Ms. Rehn has a bachelor's degree in Classical Civilization from New York University and a Master's degree in Near Eastern Studies from Princeton. She has traveled extensively in Europe, North America and Turkey and has lived in London and Istanbul. She now resides in Lawrenceville. Rehn is currently employed as a database programmer in the pharmaceutical industry, and she enjoys creative writing and nature photography.

**Amy Runyon** is a junior at Hamilton High West who hopes to study art at Mercer County Community College in 2010.

**Rohini Sengupta** is a freshman at South Brunswick High School who serves as an editor for the school's literary magazine, *Eidolon*. Sengupta is also a member of Model United Nations and the International Club. Other short stories and personal essays have been published in community magazines and online magazines including [AboutTeens.com](http://AboutTeens.com) and [TeenInk.com](http://TeenInk.com).

**V. L. Sheridan** is a short story writer who lives in Mercer County, New Jersey.

**Doris Spears** lives in Trenton, enjoys writing short stories and songs, and performing as a musician, and has recently completed a novel that she hopes to make available soon to the public.

**D. E. Steward** writes serial month-to-month months in the style of "Avreglo" in a project now finishing its twenty-third year. Of the 274 written to date, 180 have been published in literary magazines, and a few more electronically. Shorter poetry and prose appear in the same manner and in a poetry collection, *Torque* (Kings Estate Press, 2006).

**Shirley Wright's** poetry has appeared in *Kelsey Review*, *Connecticut River Review* and several other poetry publications including Delaware Valley Poets anthologies, and *US1 Newspaper* summer fiction issues.

## Editors & Staff

**Edward Carmien** writes, teaches, and is privileged to serve as co-editor of the *Kelsey Review*. You may find some of his recent work in *Catopolis*, a 2008 DAW Books short story anthology. He lives in the historic village of Griggstown with his family, two cats, and far too many books.

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**Holly-Katharine Mathews** is co-editor of the *Kelsey Review* and an Assistant Professor of English at Mercer County Community College. In addition to teaching composition and creative writing, she also teaches all levels of journalism and is the faculty adviser to Mercer's award winning newspaper, *The College Voice*. Mathews received an MFA in writing from Vermont College of Fine Arts in 2004 and received her bachelor of arts from Cornell University in 2001.

**Ellen Jacko** is a poetry editor of the *Kelsey Review* and earned a BA in English Literature at Rutgers University and an MAT in English Education at Trenton State College. She has had a variety of post-graduate experiences including the study of twentieth century British poets at Exeter College, Oxford University, England. For more than thirty years she has worked at Allentown High School in Allentown, New Jersey where she currently teaches AP Literature and Composition and creative writing. Throughout her career she has worked with students as writers. This includes working for the institution of the writing center and acting as faculty advisor of the yearbook, the student newspaper, and the student literary magazine, and helping her students prepare their work for publication. Additionally for fifteen years she was a member of the adjunct faculty at Mercer County Community College. Through all these endeavors her focus is on helping her students understand the beauty, joy, and power of the written word.

**Luray Gross** is a poetry editor of the *Kelsey Review* and is the author of three collections of poetry: *Forenoon* was published in 1990 by The Attic Press in Westfield, NJ, and *Elegant Reprieve* won the 1995-96 Still Waters Press Poetry Chapbook Competition. *The Perfection of Zeros* was published by WordTech in 2004. A storyteller as well as a writer, she works extensively throughout New Jersey and Pennsylvania as an Artist in Residence. She was the recipient of a Fellowship in Poetry from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts. In 2000, she was named a Distinguished Teaching Artist by the New Jersey State Council on the Arts and was the recipient of the Robert Fraser Open Poetry Competition Award from Bucks County (PA) Community College. She was the 2002 Poet Laureate of Bucks County and resident faculty at the 2006 Frost Place Festival and Conference on Poetry in Franconia, NH. Her poem "The Perfection of Zero" was featured by the Pennsylvania Center for the Book's Public Poetry Project in 2008.

**Tracy Patterson** is an award winning graphic designer employed by MCCC. She redesigned the *Kelsey Review* in 2006, loves typography and has been known to eat at her desk. Tracy lives in Hamilton Square with her family, where they are outnumbered by various domesticated animals.

**Robbie Clipper Sethi** is a fiction editor of the *Kelsey Review*. She earned her Ph.D. at the University of California at Berkeley and is a full Professor at Rider University. A fiction writer and poet, she has published many stories and two novels, including *The Bride Wore Red* and *Fifty Fifty*. On a Fulbright-Nehru Fellowship, she served as a visiting professor at the International Institute of Information Technology in Hyderabad, India during the Monsoon Semester (fall), 2009.

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# Submission Guidelines

The Kelsey Review is published once each September. The deadline for each year's issue is May 1st. We respond no later than August 15th. The Review solicits contributions from those who live and/or work in Mercer County. Send us your:

## **Short Fiction**

Length: 4,000 words maximum

## **Poetry**

Send no more than six pages

## **Essays**

Length: 2,500 words maximum

**Black & White Art** (suitable for digital scanning)

See Below

Writers and artists who appear at Mercer County events such as poetry readings are also eligible. Organizers of such events should encourage those who work and/or live in the county to submit a short non-fiction critically informed review of the event; the editors will contact the writer/artist to extend an invitation to appear in the *Review*. We see this as an opportunity to promote such literary and artistic occasions and venues within the county.

We invite *proposals* for non-fiction articles on any topic relevant to the people, history, businesses, educational institutions, and/or government of Mercer County. What has come to be called "creative non-fiction" also falls into this category.

Except for art, the *Review* generally only accepts one item per author.

Send *disposable* manuscripts (NOT the only copy, NO electronic submissions, DO include your name on each page of your submission) of poetry and prose and legible copies of art to:

## ***The Kelsey Review***

**Liberal Arts Division**

**Mercer County Community College**

**PO Box B, Trenton, NJ 08690**

Include a stamped, self-addressed #10 envelope (regular business size) with first-class postage with your submission. Your cover letter should include all contact



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information including email address and a short biography that begins with your name (see the contributor's biographies in this issue for examples of what we're looking for).

- We require an electronic version (MS Word or .RTF file) of *accepted* prose and poetry and original art for scanning (*only* send original art upon acceptance; we return originals after scanning).
- Send your work to us electronically only when requested to do so. All rights are retained by the author.
- Payment is in copies (4).
- Each year we nominate up to six published items for the Pushcart Prize. See [www.pushcartprize.com](http://www.pushcartprize.com) for more information.
- Art: The *Kelsey Review* uses art in the following sizes: half page, full page, and cover/centerfold (double page size).

Send questions via email to [Kelsey.review@mccc.edu](mailto:Kelsey.review@mccc.edu).

Edward Carmien  
Holly-Katharine Mathews  
*Co-Editors*



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