Decision

My trainer is a tough old woman with one eye, a cauliflower ear, and brown skin wrinkled like hide, but her short nose still turns up at the end and she has never lost a tooth. She cut them all on the ropes and they are still long and sharp. She is mean, horrible to me for my own good — drives her beatup Cadillac right up my tail when I'm doing roadwork, actually accelerates enough to almost hit me in the butt because I'm not going fast enough. I'm terrified every step of the way, and this goes on for miles. Every day she gets up before I do and slaps me awake, blowing cigar smoke in my face and handing me a huge tumblerful of training breakfast, a blenderized swill of raw eggs, raw liver, brewers yeast and Worcestershire sauce that I never fail to puke, toughens the gut. Well you could bounce bricks off mine, so she's probably right about that too.

My sparring partners are all convicted rapists and sadistic foreigners who really hate me — she picks them for that. She knows all the wardens and parole officers in the county and on occasion has pulled strings and plea-bargained through the D.A.'s office in order to get me a particularly mean one. I am terrified of them too, though many of them are a lot smaller than I. A lot of times they don't even realize they're fighting a woman but she makes that work for her too, by pretending to spoil and pamper me like a pet boy so they'll hate me either way. In practice I wear headgear with a nose protector, and she tapes my breasts tight against my ribs so that nothing shakes under my sweatshirt. I have pretty small hips anyway, and of course she butches my hair right off so I give out no visual clues. She puts pebbles in my shoes, and sand in my gloves, and chili oil on my...
Evening, Anchoring where Pines Grow, at the Ferry Harbor

Water rush over shingle-stones,
glossy shags move on wing-beat,
and inside, where reeds hold the wind
a whippoorwill mourns.

The mirror doesn't care
for my drab convalescent face
as I moor my hull
to the lovely sun-fall.

Life is a fading ghost,
but you tarry for the wine
The traveller's road melt in green haze;
and I hum a tune.

Now, none ever asks
the way to the Big Town,
but craggy slopes and lonely inn,
here is where pines thrive.

Lu Yu, Sung Dynasty
(Lu Chi 15)
translated by David Gordon

Ah mouthpiece so I'm in agony during the whole session which lasts four hours or more, but she's trying to teach me not to react to things with tears, which she says ruin your vision in a contest. Naturally I'm allowed no love life; there isn't a man around who would look at me, and though there are plenty of dykes hanging around the gym who do, they turn me off. make me feel like a piece of meat and most of the time I'm too exhausted and my hands are too sore to take care of myself, though nature in its way provides for that by giving me dreams about making love on the brightly-lit canvas of a ring in a deserted coliseum with a beautiful unknown fighter who's even bigger than I am, and he's very gentle with me and touches me tenderly all over, and I come and come and come and then she's slapping my face and I'm waking up and it's starting all over.

My parents intended for me to go on the stage like they did, but I have a weak toneless voice that I never could project so I spent my childhood hanging out backstage with the set crews and janitors, playing cards and getting in trouble for feeding people's lunches to the alley cats behind the theater. When my parents died in a hotel fire when I was eleven and my grandmother didn't know what to do with me — I was already five foot ten, one seventy-nine — this one came around and collected me; I don't know why, probably Dad owed her money. I've been in training ever since. When my parents died in a hotel fire when I was eleven and my grandmother didn't know what to do with me — I was already five foot ten, one seventy-nine — this one came around and collected me; I don't know why, probably Dad owed her money. I've been in training ever since. I'm now twenty-three years old and have yet to fight a real match for money, but she says any day now, as soon as she can arrange it with the commissioner who's against mixed matches. There aren't any other women in my class. There used to be one. Sophie McCluskey from Chicago; six-three, one ninety, but she couldn't get any work either so she put on another fifty pounds and dyed her hair orange and went into wrestling, and that was a good fifteen or twenty years ago. I heard about her from the gym owner who used to date her when he was on leave from the Navy in San Diego.

So I'm ready to go any day now, but the truth is, I'm not sure she's up for it. Lately I've noticed little things like during ropeskipping she looks like she's daydreaming instead of watching my timing, and when she no longer pays attention to the mugs she's keeping for my sparring partners, who stand around in their shorts smoking butts and drinking beer right in the gym and saying nasty things about her loud enough for me to hear. But she notices when I start to go after one of them, and calls me back and says it doesn't matter. And then the other night after I did my five hundred situps and got into bed, she came over and smoothed my hair back, which startled me so that I flinched, but she just smiled and said, Good night dear, and turned out the light, and she's never done anything like that before. She's losing it, getting soft. Well all I know is if I'm ever free of her, I'm going to get in that old Cadillac and drive right out to California, get a place on the beach and find a job as a waitress or mail carrier or bus driver, and work with regular people. And take up something nice like softball or rugby, with a regular women's team, just to keep in shape. And let my hair grow long enough to wear those little tortoiseshell barrettes, and buy clothes that show I have breasts, and go places at night. And have lots of pets and a garden, and maybe get married. I'd even go to church. And when I get rich and have a lot of money I don't know what to do with, I'll buy a place with some real good equipment and open a Fighting School for Girls. And name it after her.

Hafiza Haggili
Orono
The Picture of Alice

Mr. Adams' pith helmet had already fallen off when the python began to swallow him. The snake waited until he was still to push its jaws, spread in a dislocated grin, over the top of its balding head.

So Mr. Adams could no longer see the beauties of Nature around him. He couldn't see the orchid that blushed pale and bled spots of red in the crotch of the tree, nor the great, golden bee nuzzling the fringed flower. The bee buzzed and quivered to be. Mr. Adams' glasses fell off, but the black leather belt would be digested, except for the buckle and the Swiss army knife that hung by a braided cord. The stiff gray jodhpurs his wife thought so ugly would go, and the calfskin wallet with the picture of Alice.

So, when his wife came, gun bearers preceding, parting the jungle with tentative guns, they found his hat - and only that because his glasses lay glittering in a patch of ominous sun. The snake, swollen, mottled with shadow, ignored them.

Mary's smooth calves neatly filled her knee-length hose. Her shorts were just enough shorter than they might have been and her hips would have given even a python pause (Mr. Adams had been quite thin). But the snake ignored her.

The searchers pass. The snake, deep in mahogany shade, sampled the air with its tongue. Mary was much younger than Mr. Adams (who'd been quite thin). Her skin was excited with sweat. Her hair curled excessively on the curve of her neck.

"My plump little mouse", Mr. Adams had called her - she didn't look like any mouse now. The sweat outlined her breasts as they strained at her blouse. The buttons held fast, and gleamed like a gun bearer's eyes. The snake was replete. It would be weeks... weeks and weeks of waiting.

A dried spot on the jungle floor, a clot of undigestible things (including, of course, the picture of Alice). That is all Mary will find when she returns to the jungle for one last look after weeks and weeks of waiting.

My plump little mouse", Mr. Adams had called her - she didn't look like any mouse now. The sweat outlined her breasts as they strained at her blouse. The buttons held fast, and gleamed like a gun bearer's eyes. The snake was replete. It would be weeks...

Swollen, full, the snake aches with it. It will take weeks for release to come, so pass, as antilichenic, buttons, belt buckle, army knife, bootlace tips, and, at last, the picture of Alice, thoughtfully laminated in Plastic.

Therapy

And they asked him: Who are you? And if he told them who Their conversation would end He said riding the crests Of glaciers is steady work That he who enters heaven Must be a spool of thread And they asked him: What does that mean? He said translators are needed To interpret the wind That meaning is like a woman best When loose and thin And to see his lawyer for they had sinned They looked at each other And beat the living shit out of him

Robert M. Chase
Freepart

Thornaston

08/79-179
The Room Without a Piano

There is no longer a piano in the house. Once there were daily arpeggio studies, the right hand cascading up and down the keyboard in broken figurations, the left hand motionless in her lap, although at times Laura would bring it up to supply octaves for a harmonic base. Then the right hand would rush skittishly across the black keys alone again. Her life was a polished, worn-out and an old upright piano with remarkable figure in the wood. Under her touch the piano had awakened and begun to take on a life of its own. Consider her background. At first it was all hunt and peck like an inexperienced tyro. But eventually the keys, responding under her eager fingers, began to tell her things she could never have discovered alone. In short, she matured quickly beyond her mental years with the insistence of the major and minor chords hammering against a soundboard of her own. In time, she knew the keyboard better than she knew herself.

Laura preferred amusing pieces. Often the more difficult ones were the most humorous, and she would come to the piano each day in search of that gaiety which was missing in her own life outside the room. She enjoyed conquering the technical problems these pieces offered, disliked the slow, languishing movements which were, however, simpler to learn. She craved the language of counterpoint, difficult harmonies, allegro and presto passages. She thought the music should always be slightly out of reach. In that challenge was her joy.

Laura went to visit her grandmother as often as possible, because she was the only one who did not rebuke her for her exclusive attention to music. She would sit in her grandmother's parlor, the heat rising up her legs from the metal floor grate under the stool, and play the simple hymns the old lady liked to hear. Soon her grandmother would be asleep, smiling and slumped against one arm of the overstuffed moire couch. Then Laura would close the hymnal and begin to compose at the keyboard, embelishing, improvising, fashioning the music into an intricate Rococo structure, yet creating a delicate effect.

When the piano finally got out of tune, beyond playing, Laura would moe into the house in morbid desperation. She had a path she followed on days like this. In and out of the piano room she wandered every fifteen minutes, hoping, expecting a change in circumstances. Had the piano tuner come without her noticing him? Had the piano, anthropomorphic as she secretly believed it was, repaired itself? She could hear the invisible music— "the key hidden inside her flat anxious to be free"—and bouncing across the walls, the black and white notes she had been amassing inside the room, demanding release.

There were other days, when she was ill, when she was out, when the room was occupied by her mother's bridge club, when the long hours climbed to their zenith for nothing. Days, when the energy of her body, festering like a wound, threatened to burst, turned on itself.

Laura often played fourteen hours a day. This was before the piano was taken away, before the long illness, before the atonal silence fell over the house. The marks remain on the floor where the piano once stood—permanent, surging when the verithane over the hardwood floor begins to wear away. And from the threshold of the doorway the devs in the white wall, that once supported the upright case, show dark against the relentless, morning light.

Her mother could never hear the improvement in Laura's playing. She was more convinced that she performed those long hours each day for her ego's sake, as if there were no connection between quantity and quality. And perhaps, in Laura's case, it was right. Yet she should have sensed more here than endurance. More than the will power of a young girl bent on labor.

Laura never wondered why her father did not have a say in family matters or never joined them for meals. She had always known him one step removed from the common interest, had always remembered him different. That he might have been brought up to supply octaves for a harmonic base. As he matured, he became distant and strange. She used to hear things no one else did, and rock endlessly in her creaking wicker chair with that peculiar smile spread across her face. Everyone said it was senility.

The piano now sat like a guest in her grandmother's parlor. No one played it. The sphinx she sought was nowhere in sight. Each time she sat down to play, the anticipation built up to supply octaves for a harmonic base. Then the right hand would rush skittishly across the black keys alone again. Her life was a polished, worn-out piano.

Laura was her father's own image of himself. She was an illegible note. Her mother never knew whether Laura noticed the piano tuner coming without her. She was a Piano Sonata, she who had already given it her entire life.

Laura was right about the threshold of the piano. She was right about her grandmother's parlor, the heat rising up her legs from the metal floor grate under the stool, and play the simple hymns the old lady liked to hear. Soon her grandmother would be asleep, smiling and slumped against one arm of the overstuffed moire couch. Then Laura would close the hymnal and begin to compose at the keyboard, embelishing, improvising, fashioning the music into an intricate Rococo structure, yet creating a delicate effect.

On this floor, Laura, who would tapote in past the smiling, old woman who had been the ideal mother once she, herself, became distant and strange. She used to hear things no one else did, and rock endlessly in her creaking wicker chair with that peculiar smile spread across her face. Everyone said it was senility.

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Planes
A faint rumble plows the damp spring night,
The echo of a distant silver ship.
Tiny insects scurry in the sleepy blue.
Crawling precariously on the mottled gradients.
Have concealed me in their mechanical indifference.
I keep watch for the sparked sky.

The prophetic grovel summons me to the window.
Why don't you call? I ask the papery clouds?
Don't you know my nerves are dancing?
Your old girlfriends were so pretty.
They must have swallowed pastel ribbons, got drunk on light.
Suicide, the smudge, would keep as innocent, narcissic.
There would never be anything else.

At dream speed they pass,
Blind silver fish smoothly feeding paths,
Suspicious eternal harbors.
Rapt, I would disappear in such flight.
A frozen bird always mumbling to
You, an indistinguishable dot that stares.

Matthew Levey Leaves Augusta

1973. Before college, before
law school: 97 on the
FSE. Offer: north border
guard. Goodbye Jenny, backseat fun.
Her dress! Did not know she owned one
Training. Uniform fitting. Apartment
North and Main. John Herd ordered:
"Search the hippies if they look away.
I woke each morning and smelled Canada.
Not once did I weaken, call smiling Ma,

Slim, hair curly, jeans pale, pack
swallowed. She smiled at me. Duty blushed.
But her eyes stared until her ears dropped.
Into E Room. I grin. First interview.
Serious, she witheld with eye softest blue.

Jane Ritt. Teacher. Bangor. I searched
her pack. First: book, early English
poets. Then lace bras, panties. Are
Jen's like these? I blush again. She saw.

Also: a cloth bag with perhaps a
large jar. "Then?" Eyes steady.
"Diaphragm." Her voice might be Jenny's
"Open the bag? Fear even I can see.
Against all training, I say to leave.

Pay for my uniform, quit, and
hitch the bare Airline to Bangor.
Sleeping in Paul's room at Seminary,

It was their oil, they screamed and said
Large jar. "This?" Eyes steady:

Said we'd been only sitting there,
On the politics of oil.

Jane Ritt. Teacher. Bangor. I searched
her pack. First: book, early English
poets. Then lace bras, panties. Are
Jen's like these? I blush again. She saw.

Also: a cloth bag with perhaps a
large jar. "Then?" Eyes steady:

Threw that bloody natives:
Her surface should have been as a —
"Himself," she cried.

As every derrick, mounted high,
Brought gushing oil toward the sky,
We thought that might could go away.
We thought without the natives.

It was their oil, they screamed and said
"So really it was awfully nice
To know no touch of avarice
Could taint our plan to sacrifice
Full one percent, for natives.

So really it was awfully nice
To know no touch of avarice
Could taint our plan to sacrifice
Full one percent, for natives.

Completion

Of course we said we were well-meaning
And never giving to self-scheming
Especially were we not dreaming
Of the natives. Not at all.

Thus the news that came out later,
Seemed a sort of clever caper
From an unrelated paper,
On the politics of oil.

Jesus Daily
Springfield

Oil Manifesto

Kathleen Lignell
Buckhorn Springs
**Written in Winter**

The tracks begin unpreached, in the center of a smooth field, then wander and wind to the very edge. There is no first step to leap from, I don’t know where to start. The trail runs from here out of sight; I believe these tracks are yours.

---

**Ice Boy**

The crystal gathering of flesh to witness the tugging of bodies from an icy lake.

*I see them under the ice. They are under the ice.*

Quietly a hooked pole fished the remains, a heavy cotton bale from the muddled surface. They seal him in an aluminum bag, seal the top, then dive for his companion.

It might be never as real as the rigid faces, the plastic forms beneath the ice, calling back to him.

---

**Son of Wind**

I’m going out, Ma, away from shore. The wind fills my sails and pushes me to unknown ends.

I won’t be home to hear you call from harborside, my supper waiting familiar foot familiar fork familiar fullness.

I want hunger and the open seas I want to be free, the wind’s derivative, knowing nothing but passage and the feel of sea under me.

I am the son of wind, skinning the water. I can’t hear you, Ma, rock and root of familiar landbound life. I am unbound, my sails full of the life you gave me.

I’ll go as far as wind will take me, then home again, Ma, when wind wills.

---

Kirsten Backstrom Bass Harbor
Bruce Spang Hampden
Linda Teitelbaum Burkettville
Working Lunch

Eating an artichoke while reading Virginia Woolf—
oh should the emphasis be reversed?
Is densely-layered Mrs. Dalloway
more or less complex than
its thickly-plumed having a large flower head
with numerous, feathery, scalelike bracts?*

* Pluck a petal,
dip in thorn sauce in expensed Hollandaise
(for without sauce, "I say it's quacksalve,
and I say 'to hell with it!'") and draw out
green-flavored fish between the teeth.

Read a paragraph, a line,
and then, turn back,
searching for some piquant embellishment
to render a pulpy image more palatable:

"Lying awake, the floor spoke..." Ah, Virginia,
if I were innumerate pauperity, I'd be creating too.
Book in my lap, the pot of exhausted leaves
on the sauce at my elbow grow.
I've tidily provided for the detritus of my meal—
but where does one dispose of chewed and barren thoughts?

. . . Reaching fragile inner segments now,
yielding imperceptibly nourishing,
ear-transparent scraps of essence.
The gain is not worth the effort expended,
and I cut away the choke
to reach the solid heart of the matter beneath.

I'm tempted to perform a literary surgery, too.
Effrontery, I know; but, poor caped Clarvis,
I know you're in there somewhere,
impersonated in sterile, barren superficialities,
soundlessly shrinking to be let out. . . .

Epiphany! Oh, dear Ms. Woolf,
have I somehow, at last,
reached the core
of your thalassic enterprise?

Pat Morgan
Rockland

How The Ball Bounces

Research shows that a basketball
hits the floor 1600 times in an
average game. Winnie dribble or
break it 912 times, losers 657,
and officials 79. . .

I identify with the ball,
not the floor: the air inside,
pushed around into different shapes,
resilient, the very empty heart
of the thing, the nothingness
that makes it possible.
Silence of dead oxygen allows
rubber, floor, to sound thud-
thud:

. . . The ball itself is responsible
for 42 independent bounces.

Sandy Poirier

Newly Discovered Stanzas
to Gloria in Excelsis Deo

Angels who eat lunch on high
always order ham-on-rye;
if there is no ham-on-rye
they will take a pizza pie.
Glo-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-

sausage and anchovy-

When it's time their thirst to slake
it's beer in pitchers drawn by Blake;
and so you see it's our mistake
to think that angels live on cake.
Glo-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-

homebrew or a good strong ale.

Sylvester Pallet
East Middle

Snipers Were Everywhere

The book was titled, simply enough. Survive! I read it fourteen
times, blueprinting my subconscious and tuning my instincts
accordingly. And just in the nick of time, too.

The following day, I found myself floundering in a sea of human-
ity. I felt the telltale pressure on my elbows, felt myself about to be
-crushed, drawn down by the undertow. Instinctively, I
hunched up
my arms and lifted my feet off the ground. And there I was, just
the book had promised, bobbing like a duck in a millpond.

There was only one problem. This was America, and everyone was
concerned with survival. The entire crowd had read the book or
heard of it on talk shows. They all hunched up their arms, too,
and lifted up their feet, until we sat there like so many frogs in a lily pad.
A monk walked by them, with flowing robes and a book of numbers.
He looked at us, and all he said was, "Beautiful." According to my
book, he should have made himself as inconspicuous as possible and
walked, not run. quickly away from the crowd.

That night, I lay awake for many hours, contemplating the monk's
behavior: the situation in general, reviewing my survivalist readings
and the precautions I had taken. Many thoughts were rudely inter-
rupted, however, and bore no fruit. Chaos erupted, total dislocation
and breakdown of all systems.

In my bunker, there was no time for thought, time only for hoard-

ing my three-week supply of food, shooting marauders, explaining
to friends and neighbors less prepared than myself that this was sur-
vival we were talking about, not brotherhood — before shooting
them also. (These explanations, incidentally, were in violation of the
or chest." Fortunately, my ammunition held out.

There was only one problem. Three weeks later, food gone. I found
myself on my own, beyond the scope of my readings. Two things I
knew for sure. One, I was starving and needed help. Two, anyone
still alive was a survivalist. I knew something about survivalists,
I chose slow starvation, foraging, gawking on roots in the shadows of
my bunker.

It was then that the monk returned. His robes were singed and
torn. In place of his book, he carried granola. How had he managed
to survive? I asked. He tapped his chest. "Kevlar," he said. "bullet-
proof." His head? Kevlar, too. He lifted his mask, a bulletproof visor,
revealing a face remarkably similar to my own. I shrugged and ate
granola. (This response to the monk, incidentally, was sheer
thoughtlessness, a flagrant violation of the book's code: I should
have shot him in the head when he lifted his visor.)

That night, I made up for my mistakes. I pumped my remaining
ammunition into the eyehole of the mask. To my surprise, the monk
was not there, having stepped outside the bunker to urinate. He
stood in the doorway now, while I stood naked, caught in the act and
without ammunition. Hand-to-hand combat, I thought, death blows,

On the thorax. At the last moment, however, Chapter Eight
flashed in my mind, a cautionary footnote: "He reasonable: retreat in
the face of superior force."

I chose the course of reason. The monk, so like myself in every
facet and dimension, had about him an aura of extraordinary quick-
ness and strength. In the morning, I followed him from the bunkers
he had the granola, after all. I followed him, cringing in his shadow:

snipers were everywhere, and he wore the armor.

Hans Krichels
Bucksport
Alishya of the Graveyard

One morning in a blue April
I'll wake and discover
that this life I'm living now
is just the shimmering vision
of a prenatal trance,
that the next time coming
is my real life.

When she is born,
when she is born again,
when, next time...

In my next life, my real life,
I'll know already what to do,
what not to do, and why.
When I am two, I will say
to mother and father,
I'm much too old for school,
send me to life.
But perhaps they will not believe
a tiny child should utter
such a large thing
and they might feel safer with me
locked in the closet,
my head in a paper bag,
so what good, then, will a second chance do me?

When she is born,
when she is born again,
when...

Mother's got her nurturing hand on my always,
on my things, my hair,
my clothes, the way I walk,
the tilt of my head,
my barrette a mite rakish,
my smile faintly cynical,
about my throat
she curls her devotional hand
too soft, too loud,
too true, too false,
she curts her devotional hand
about my throat
and strangles me with disapproval.

When she is born,
when she is born again,
when,
next time,
she will not take
the same abuse again,
when,
next time...

Going to Grandmother's is like
going to a class C flea market
held inside an old barn,
windows clamped tight
against the fresh rain.
So hot I cannot breathe,
so cramped and cluttered
I feel like a hatrack,
holding my arms stiffly high
to keep from tumbling any
semi-precious cupie doll
or IBM card Christmas tree
from tremulous balance
atop tilted boxes.
Each visit, I'm forbidden to touch
her plate of carefully arranged
and gilded macaroni,
est an elbow should fall off
and he lost forever in her bins
of shirtless buttons,
hers bags of buttonless shirts.

She says to me, Alishya,
Is Jesus in your heart, girl?
And I have to say something
to appease her, like, Forever,
Grandmother, and I'm so happy
or, In my next life I'll be
bleached white by Jesus,
pure and true.

Then she wet-kisses my cheek
and forces some of her
Hamburger Helper onto me,
a pitcher of Nestle's Quik
and some of her favorite
coffee Jello with Cool Whip.
I'm gasping for breath,
for a space and time for thought,
but even as I crawl out the door
on my hands and knees,
hoping she won't see my escape
for all the piles of bags and boxes
I must scuttle through,
onto the front stoop,
dragging behind her a sack full of
Spaghetti, Junket, and plastic penguins
made especially to hold baking soda
attractively in the refrigerator,
and in her free hand,
however she found one,
she clenches five felt cows
with magnets on their backsides
and noodle letters pasted on their fronts
that say, Holy Cow, Are You Still Eating?
and she cries sweetly,
Take these down to Olive's house, dear,
and keep one for yourself,
for the door of your Frigidaire.

I cup my hands,
hold air in palms
like stuff to be kept,
want all of it, all air,
but the moment I move to go
anywhere else,
that air I had thought was mine
is mine no more,
was never,
next time,
next time...

Daddy makes me breathe in a paper bag
The air condenses, mine and mine
and mine again,
and I yearn to breathe it back into me again,
it becomes forever mine,
like stuff to be kept,
and hide it away unheard,
having never been.

When she is born,
when she is born again...

Alishya strolls into the graveyard,
kicks her way along the stones,
finds a hidden knoll where she can whirl her body round,
leaps across the granite stones,
finds her favorite knoll, a place to set her body down,
dances till the starry night grows old, there,
wh'en I spin round and round
like a tree full of wind chimes.
and only when I can't stop moving,
Daddy makes me do this,
wh'en I spin round and round
like a tree full of wind chimes.

Alishya races to the graveyard,
leaps across the granite stones,
finds a hidden knoll where she can whirl her body round,
dances till the starry night grows old, there,
wh'en I spin round and round
like a tree full of wind chimes.

I feel like a
windows clamped tight
atop tilted boxes.

Each visit, I'm forbidden to touch
her plate of carefully arranged
and gilded macaroni,
est an elbow should fall off
and he lost forever in her bins
of shirtless buttons,
hers bags of buttonless shirts.

I told her,
Grandmother,
your vases gleam behind glass, your plates,
fifty states stacked uncem,
even the top toppled by bowl within bowl within bowl,
your faith tenacious,
one more thought to keep
your clutter and
I can't visit anymore,
for you bump into me
and I into you,
I can't move
your life,
you're long life,
no, you aren't anything at all but things.

When she is born,
when she is born again,
when,
next time,
next time...
she will not make
the same mistake again
when,
next time,
next time...
what she knows now,
she'll start out knowing then,
when,
next time,
next time...

Mother, you are yellow smoke billowing around me.
I can't breathe, can't even own the air
for the one moment I need it.
How can you expect me to be
the same person as you,
when you are already vaporous,
finding substance only in your clinging
to the lips and collars of others?

Alishya frequents Seaside Graveyard,
knows the names on all the stones,
likes a special knoll where she can lay her body down,
shut her eyes and dream another home, there,
hoping she might soon be fading home.

Daddy, you are my stifling disappointment,
a river stopped by a dam of despair,
and in your welling up for not being able
to let yourself out,
you are drowning me,
and I've never been able
to stop treasuring water,
gasping for breath,
and all my life has been a wasted motion,
just staying afloat,
dying for air.

Yes. Yes.
When she is born,
when she is born again,
when,
next time,
she'll move so slow,
oerlife will seem like ten,
when,
next time,
next time.
I cup my hands,
hold air in palms,
like stuff to be kept,
want all of it,
all air,
to be mine,
to time,
but the moment I move to go
anywhere else,
that air I had thought was mine
is mine no more,
was never,
no time,
no time.

I can't move for you.
I can't do your breathing for you.
I can't do for you.
I will not do.

Alishya staggers to the graveyard,
trips her way among the stones,
finds her favorite knoll where she can lay her body down,
gives up her song and leaves her weary bones, there,
gives up her mind and drops her funny bones.

Alishya, name cut into stone in the graveyard.
Compulsions

Richard kept his sneakers hammered into the wall of the cabin, to the right of the bookcase. He did not like the kind with squared toes that reminded him of Buster Brown shoes. He had a habit of adding to his stock whenever, in Harvard Square or Freeport, Maine, he came across the right one. By now he had amassed quite a collection. They hung there in varying states of decomposition, for the stones of the island, as well as the nails on his big toe, had a way of wearing them through. It seemed to Sarah as if innumerable pairs of eyes were peering out, reproaching her. When she had time she would take some embroidery wool and go over them, fringing them with eyelashes.

Sarah had just come in from the annual sale in the front yard of the library. By this time she arrived, late, the books, spread out on the single cardtable and boards on sawhorses, had been picked over. There was not much left to choose from: a row of last summer's New Yorker's, some Readers Digest collections of abridged novels, a few worn children's books—nothing like the Birds of the State of Michigan that she had found last year, done by some member of the university staff and full of beautiful woodcuts. Still, for fifty cents, she had selected a book on compulsions that looked brand new. She was about to pore through it as she lay stretched out on the bed on top of the faded India print stitched years ago by some long-gone aunt of Richard's into some semblance of a quilt.

It was fun to take such a book and fit the people she knew into its categories. Sarah had never met anyone, to her knowledge, who washed his hands fifty-five times a day, but the description of compulsive talkers was a perfect picture of Lucy Kingsworth. Could Lucy ever have been a patient of the doctor's? She flipped to the dustjacket and began the list, numbering off the page into twenty-four entries. She made two columns, thirteen in one, which left eleven for the other. This annoyed her, but Sarah didn't want to waste another sheet of paper (Richard would have figured it out first.) Already some of the pleasure of taking the test had been dissipated. Still, Sarah did not want to be pushed around by an orderly-column compulsion, so she went ahead scoring herself. It looked like a 100% on the first nine questions. Of course she preferred to have things done her own way. Didn't that demonstrate a well-developed ego? Naturally, she couldn't always succeed, but not getting her way, Sarah knew, was to yield to something less than perfect.

It was until she reached the tenth entry, "I do things precisely to the last detail," that her score fell precipitously. Sarah turned to the end of the test to check what the ratings meant. The doctor evidently set this up as a trick. A perfect score was exactly what you didn't want. In fact, it meant you were dangerously borderline.

Then she hit upon the test for obsessive-compulsions. This entailed getting up to find the small yellow tablet and a pen. She hoped Richard wouldn't see her.

He was outside preparing to saw up a log that had floated in and would make good firewood. For moments she watched him measuring it off meticulously into even sections before he took the saw blade to it. When it was all cut up, he would not toss the pieces back, but he hung them there in varying states of decomposition, for the stones of the island, as well as the nails on his big toe, had a way of wearing them through. It seemed to Sarah as if innumerable pairs of eyes were peering out, reproaching her. When she had time she would take some embroidery wool and go over them, fringing them with eyelashes.

She returned and settled back onto the bed and began the list, numbering off the page into twenty-four entries. She made two columns, thirteen in one, which left eleven for the other. This annoyed her, but Sarah didn't want to waste another sheet of paper. (Richard would have figured it out first.) Already some of the pleasure of taking the test had been dissipated. Still, Sarah did not want to be pushed around by an orderly-column compulsion, so she went ahead scoring herself. It looked like a 100% on the first nine questions. Of course she preferred to have things done her own way. Didn't that demonstrate a well-developed ego? Naturally, she couldn't always succeed, but not getting her way, Sarah knew, was to yield to something less than perfect.

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Sarah had too much respect for books to heave one across a room. She started out the window for a minute at the woodpile where Richard now was carefully placing one of the new logs, completely smooth through the right of the bookcase. He did not like the kind with squared toes that reminded him of Buster Brown shoes. He had a habit of adding to his stock whenever, in Harvard Square or Freeport, Maine, he came across the right one. By now he had amassed quite a collection. They hung there in varying states of decomposition, for the stones of the island, as well as the nails on his big toe, had a way of wearing them through. It seemed to Sarah as if innumerable pairs of eyes were peering out, reproaching her. When she had time she would take some embroidery wool and go over them, fringing them with eyelashes.

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A Perfectly Executed U-Turn

I think of you in vivo
In your last broad swipe across the slate
A jaunty turn that would belie
The onrush of the current you turn against
Like a surfer who abandons the conquered wave
To get a jump for the long paddle back
Who doesn't allow for the next wave and the next
The onrush of bodies, boards, and the number nine swell
That sweeps the beach.

What matter career, pregnant wife, or child-to-be
Perhaps the beer had gone a little flat
And a dash of salt could bring it back
Like the perfect arc the artist strikes across the foosball
The cast the fishermen drop light as a Mayfly on the water
The flyball taken over the shoulder going away
The salted tail that catches a condor or pterodactyl.

And finally consider the time of day
The light, the sense of frustration
The impulse, call it choice
That sparks the neural explosion.
Crisp, double-clutched downshift
Then back on the throttle, enough
To hang the rearend smoothly through
The spin drift turn to meet
The unbelieving truckdriver head on.

Richard Burns
Fort Kent

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For My Father

Father, ten years ago, you helped me build
the front steps you cut
and braced and set
on its hinges has
flakes off under my
hand, rust cakes the
bolt, the frozen hinges.
But I guess you knew
that in this old
world the things
we make all wear
out to naught. Yet
still you left me
your tools, hanging
above the workbench,
the hammer handles
silver-smooth, the
saws oiled, ready.

And at eighty you
went out with a spade
dug six holes in
the backyard, and
planted a figtree,
a peach and a plum,
and three grapevines,
though you never hoped
that someone, your son’s
daughter maybe, would
wander, some smokey
autumn day, out
across the yard and
find, hidden among
the reddening leaves,
a dusty, forgotten
clump of grapes,
and would press them
one by one against
her tongue. And you
didn’t even hope
that she might think
of you as she lies
dreaming and humming
beneath her canopy of
leaves, the hot grape-
pulp still sweet and
acid on her lips.

Thanksgiving, 1981

Late November, the moonsnails half-buried in sand
I turn them up with the toe of my shoe to find
the same striped blue of the sky.
I want to put them in my pocket
and board a plane for Agadir
away from the splitting frost and the months
of waves that will leave them
with a tidal geometry.

I know now why you told such stories.
They were a protection, a splendid shell
made to rescue you from places you never intended to go.
I suppose that is why I went to the forgotten port
of Swakop, to find coweries from the Red Sea.
I left them on the sill of a mosque, abandoned
as the rest of the city, a carapace.

I went farther, for diamonds that would not slip
through the neck of a Coke bottle, searching
the background of photographs belonging to a Lebanese
sailor whose only treasure was the phone number
of a stranger in New York City.
Perhaps they were pressed into the vaginas
of his whores or laid out like a nest
of uneven eggs in a chillum rag on the bar.
Once I wrote you I had found them; Ama Dablam, Lhotse,
Sagamartha, place of perpetual snow. To be there
would have lifted the inertia that filled you;
the irony being now I can find you nowhere
in this world to say it will be the staying
that kills you.

Grandmother’s Requiem

I rode my bike five miles to watch her die.
The white pasted face
swinging loosely on the unhinged neck.
I whispered softly
hoping she wouldn’t hear.
How could I talk to death?
She gripped my hand,
one and not for long.
My heart echoed off the walls.
I thought she must have heard
as she strained toward me.
I needn’t have feared.
Into that quiet she was reaching.
Old Man Nicholson

My memories of Old Man Nicholson, of the Arthur C. Cardsale place, and of Donald Mason have dimmed or altered only moderately over the decades, or so I believe. I can still hear the sound of them, and especially of Donald Mason. He had, changed, grown I guess one would call it, and that not just because of my ageing, and not only because of experience, although the experiences long talks, confessions have occurred, but because of a somewhat altered awareness during recent years in the world of many in our society. I have never lost a sense of the weird strangeness, the only partly uncovered fear I felt more than fifty years ago when I came back to my home room that afternoon it was an encounter at Cardsale.

What is new is that today I can imagine Donald Mason, that same night, same hour: also in a lone room perhaps, in that Victorian building two doors away, agonizing under a different kind of fear, self-blame, and anxiety. It was not that I ever held him to be evil exactly, but before, I did not know, or did not choose to know, or did not think how, possibly he would feel.

Sandy Robbins and I had been playing two-o’-cat in the back lot behind Cardsale’s with some younger children we accepted, even encouraged sometimes, because without them we had no one to make up an infel, let alone an outfield. Thoughtlessly we had out-played them, which was not difficult, staying at bat, so that, berated and discouraged, they had gone home, yelling at us unfailingly, and we were there looking at each other, as much as to say, “What now?” when a rather gentle voice from beyond the low fence asked:

“Have you fellows expect to play baseball when the light’s almost failed? You might better come over in my yard and talk a bit.”

We stared at him, astonished. For as long as we had used that back lot, we had had trouble with the Arthur C. Cardsale place. If we went around the fence, under the grape arbor, past the huge barn and across the driveway between the napkin-smooth lawns and clipped hedges that was the shortest way to school, Mr. Nicholson would be after us, shouting what no goods we were: threatening to tell our parents or at least call the police. We would outrun him, of course, enjoying it in a way.

Or if one of us hit a high foul that smashed one of the barn windows, or if from beyond a tall hedge we threw horsechestnuts at the barn which had become a garage by that date, and we often did, Mr. Nicholson would come out, his temper roused, yelling what he would do if he laid hands on us. Yet now, here was this medium-height, bland young fellow, speaking to us just as if we were grown-ups, and inviting us into what we had learned to consider enemy territory.

“We weren’t playing baseball,” Sandy told him. “There’s not enough of us. We were just playing two-o’-cat.”

“Oh, of course. Well, whatever you want to call it. You don’t want to try to play baseball?”

For a few seconds we just stood there. Instead of the young man, of the Narcissus.

“I was kind of bored,” I told him. “I just thought it might be fun to go in the barn and see what was cooking.”

So, we went.

The young man was ahead of me, with Sandy, going through the next pair of double doors, and I followed them. We were in a long, high-ceilinged room, with very large windows at the other end and at the side, facing out at the cow-leafed trees, the lice hushes (I could smell them too, or at least I thought I could), and at the smooth, carpet-like, green lawn. Heavy drapes hung at each side of every window, and there were couches and many chairs.

At the end of the room just to our right, was the coffin, as I knew by then it was going to be a rather fancy casket with silver hinge, and lying in it a body in what I remember as a rather fluffy dress, one arm bent across her middle, her fingers holding a little bouquet of roses, and her hair wavy and graceful around her head where it rested on a silken pillow.

“Come here, look,” the young man said. “See what a beautiful job I did on her. Isn’t that something? I work and I work, as if I were a painter, an artist if an artist! but there’s no one I can show it to, or when they do see it, it’s not when I am there. All I get is my pay, really. There ought to be more, somehow, more appreciation. There ought to be...” His voice drifted off.

Sandy and I stood beside the coffin, the opened upper half of it, starting, breathing quietly, and saying nothing. Then I put out my hand and touched the forehead of the body. I wanted to test somehow what was real, to know if in some way it was the body of her, and it looked, I mean, it was like this, it was waxy, cold, my spinal nerves seemed to quiver and I drew back my hand rather quickly, glancing up to see if the man was watching me. He was, but he did not seem to care what I did.

Then, without warning, I recognized the body, remembered I had seen her Mrs. McKelvie) when she was alive. She had lived a half mile up the hill where the lawns and houses were very large. Often I had seen her drive past our house, moving very slowly, in a quiet, electric-powered car, one she and her sister owned, the only one in town. I remember pulling my hands up into my sleeves and shrinking back a little.

The young man was talking again, thinly, but I did not listen to what he said. I almost did not hear it. And then we were going back through the double doors (the man putting his hand gently on my shoulder as we walked through the room with the porcelain table and buckets, and cut out the concrete porch where when we could smell the flowers and watch the fireflies in the scented dusk. The man sat down on the top step, and Sandy and I, probably trying not to be impolite or ungracious, sat down also.

“My name is Donald, Donald Mason,” he said.

We told him ours, and then he asked about where we lived, which school we went to, and what we studied. All was gentle and smooth, and suddenly my leg muscles grew tight, as if I were having cramps, and I found that my arms were gripping my knees hard.

He asked us about English, and I said yes, I liked English. Then, what did we read, what did we read in school, but what did we read at home, that we read because we liked it? It was a good question.

“Conrad,”

He glanced quickly at me. “Conrad?”

“Sure,” I told him. I had seen full-page advertisements in the New York Tribune. Conrad had died the year before, and Doubleday, Page & Company had brought out his complete works, leather-bound. The advertisement had splashed a full-sized ship over the entire page, with titles and descriptions of Conrad’s works printed across it and even the seagulls. I had read: Old man, sea adventure! And I began reading Conrad.

“What story?” he asked.

“The Nigger of the Narcissus.”

“You like that?”

“Not really, not much,” I said.

“How?”

“Not what I had expected.”

“But you finished it?”

“Yes, I was kind of bored, but there was something about it—”

“And what was that about it?”

“I don’t know, I don’t know how to say it.”

“Was it the way he uses words, the pattern of the words, something like that?”

“Maybe. I guess so.”

“You must be.”

We were strolling across the driveway, watching the blink of the fireflies, and the shadow of the caiastron deer on the next lawn, the one that almost looked real environment. We went up the wide, concrete steps to the rear entrance of the Cardsale establishment and through the wide glass doors to a room that I did not know.

The odor was different there. No roses now, but something I was unused to, except that perhaps I had caught a whiff of it on Old Man Nicholson that time when I met him at home in the hall and shut my eyes, but I had been unable of course to shut my nose too. The smell seemed keen and sharp, as if it went right into my middle somber, and I stared at the slanted, porcelain-topped table, and at the drains around and under it, and at two clean white buckets under the lower corner, and it went right to the point of my lungs. Thrills.
things right, or one inch over the line and I'll drop you like a red hot iron, if not worse.

And now, now, after he had done what he had done, said what he had said, against better judgment, was one of those boys going to grasp it, to suspect, to talk? And to whom would he talk? Was the telephone going to ring in a few minutes, or tomorrow, or the next day, and not about another body for the Home, but about him, Donald Mason?

Edward M. Holmes
Winterport

The Neighbors

Though twenty years in this country—
they are isolated
by language, old customs
and fear.

Even their grandchildren who visit in summer
snicker in the hallway
at the old superstitions
and threats that no longer work

I catch them
when leaving the house
peering through the blinds
at me

and sometimes
on a Sunday
a snicker in the hallway
a daughter with no accent
and a shiny car
takes them out
to a drive
to the country.

Maureen Walsh
Jackman

By the author of
THE IMMENSE JOURNEY

Hints, I'm always waiting for a hint, a rhyme, a
familiarity of sounds,
one calling to another, then my momentary future
proceeds; take this
for instance this instant, you summon me, presuming
it is for us? we dissolve
in thin air? long long pause...I'm waiting for a hint,
hinterland of feeling; I'm reading
THE FIRMAMENT OF TIME while an ant crawls on the side
of my naked foot.
I do believe we are One Body, I'm including death, Loren Eiseley,
the flowers in this temporary
garden and firmament.

John Taggerson
Lewiston
The Artist and His Model

With an air of calm deliberation Edith turned and sat down in front of the glinting planes of his dressing table mirror, arranged herself fanning out the drapery of her wrapper precisely so, and for a moment contemplated the face in the glass. This late always seemed like the face of a stranger in the morning, a broad, saliva, visage so as in edds with her night dreams of herself. It all seemed to fit better after breakfast with her husband; he was a practical man. This morning, though, she did not rise until the carriage wheels were more settled. The sunlight from the opened door was more settled. He stepped toward the pillow, brushing her coarse, curled hair with the tortoiseshell brush, reaching for small pots and boxes of crystal or china, smoothing cernes against the skin that stretched over her broad forehead and high cheekbones. Her eyes were always fixed in an unfurling stare at the image in the glass, her figure erect, her shoulders stiff and straight. She was as complete and extravagant in her toilet as a young woman preparing for her sweetheart, her lover.

Edith sat a moment longer, lifting her head back and forth, studying the image. Untying her wrapper she rose and walked toward a bower pile of black satin and velvet lying at the edge of her bed. Though this was her favorite dress Louis, her husband, did not care for it. He painted out that the square cut neckline more emphasized her broad features. The velvet boxes, he would continue, were absurd, belonging on the dress of a seventeen year old, or a tart. And the rhinestones, “Well, my dear,” he had said with a whimper on his wide hand. “You are simply not the rhinestone type.” And it is not that Edith disagreed. She saw his point. But the dress had been made, at great expense, by one of Philadelphia’s most fashionable dressmakers. And it felt wonderful. As she put it on for the first time, letting it fall gently, gently around her body; she remembered vividly the snip and away of her first formal evening dress that she had worn years before, before she had ever met Louis.

She had believed herself beautiful then, and maybe in that slightly time of youth she had been. It had almost frightened her at first, how much she had loved the long dresses, the night long dances, how much she had loved the eyes of the young man upon her; how much she had loved the danger of thrill of throwing back their seals proudly, boldly. That sexuality so encouraged them, now so channeled. Now as she reached up into the dark satin tunnels for arms and neck and head she slowly let herself twist from side to side as fold upon fold of the black satin fell down.

She wanted after all, she had said to Louis, to be at her best in this portrait. She wanted desperately to be beautiful for this, to be transformed the way it had seemed to her that Thomas Eakins had done to his wife and sister. Edith had seen their pictures at his studio. The man was a genius they said, and she had been mesmerized by the common, tired, grayness of his handy wife that had become serene and grace on canvas. Perhaps when this man looked at her he would see her as she sometimes saw herself. A glimpse caught in the hall mirror while passing, a quietly stolen, sideways glance that showed a fleeting beauty, a grace, a light and passionate form. Grace.

She walked onto the landing when she heard his clatter of entry downstairs. The sunlight from the opened door below fell strange on the barred arms and neck of her evening clothes. How contrived and artificial this all seemed. She chewed her painted lip nervously. The sounds of servants chattering ordered suggestions, the sudden sharp and singing smells of oil and turpentine caught at her. She turned back into the dim light of her room. She would wait until things were more settled.

When she at last arrived before him she was surprised at his accumulation of props and tools. She had thought only of an easel and some pencils; there were, but also small tables with bottles and flasks, round tinny boxes stuffed with spattered brushes, a few small canvases here and there, piles of paper, and boxes crammed with more boxes, glasses, cloths, and who knows what. It seemed as if his whole studio had invaded the cool recesses of her drawingroom; as if a blacksmith or a circus had set up shop on her well tended lawn.

The Anatomy of Sound

The instructor cautions us before he starts the film to listen for the woman’s voice, tunneling up her throat, calling to her hands; keep still, and we hear her whisper echo, ricochet through the chords; those hints we’d tried to imagine flutter and resound, ticking on a film that rolls a class to silence.

This is what we’ve come to see, our voices in the flesh. All week we’ve tried to isolate what is vocal, pictured features, the kis on the throat that mimics the lips inside, a hummingbird fighting its cage of bone.

The film slows and we observe this woman speak, her left profile from cheek to breast bone cut away to cancer. The chords quiver and part, the wings of an angel caught repelling past vocabulary, before pain, lodged just above the heart.

Slowly, the film begins to quicken, the voice assumes its shape. One by one we hold our ears, afraid to hear what we have seen, hear it again around us, the echo in a cough that signals something more, the certainty of a loose rock to send us down the hillside, crying for our voices, and our hands drop to our throats.

Barbara Cairns
Portland

new widow

still that slow less
darkness
weaving through the pine

a flourish of birds
just out of sight

a naked scrub flailing
away at the night

S.D. Finney
Portland
He seemed to notice nothing strange, but glanced briefly at her then ordered her to a monotonous chair he had carried in from the hallway. It had never seemed meant for actually holding a human form, but here he sat her down, and there she stayed for some hours, pushed and pruned into just the pose he wanted. Instead of her own gaze, now she had to meet his dissecting stare — a cold-eyed man who spoke little. It was understood between them that he would initiate any conversation. He made inconsequential small talk, perfunctory and vaguely bossy such as a doctor might make while examining his patient. She had wondered what an artist would choose to talk about, and she was a bit disappointed. But she did not refuse the scrutiny.

Her forehead was high, and broad, and square like an expanse of light above those keen eyes. He knelt his brows just slightly as if snowballing or sometimes as if about to cry. Those eyes stared as calmly, as ungenerously as her own had, seldom wavering when he spoke or pulled now and again at his thin beard, muttering to himself. In front of him, faced away from her, something grew, helped with pencil, paint, squares, and rules. Made as much like a map or a blue print might be, she thought. He would sometimes snatch another piece of smaller paper and draw something quickly, stretching looks at her in rhythmical notes of his head. His burly frame bent, stooped, twisted to reach this or that he needed from the supply spread out on a canvas throw around him. She sat always stiff and staring, leaning slightly, just as he had said. He released her before knocking. "Today, just studies," his only words of explanation for his work.

He came almost daily for six weeks. Louis was not pleased by this extraordinary number of sittings. Edith complained to her friends gathered over tea. "What an inconvenience! My mornings are all taken up. How tiresome!" But really she loved them. She admitted that there was a beauty, Edith saw, as she stared. A great beauty, a beauty of the thing. He had taken her to a monstrous chair he had carried in from the hallway. It had never seemed placed into this frivolous upholstery. The glib velvet and puffs of fatuous sleeves so distant from the face full of care and sorrow, and longing and, oh! what longing. For a touch, caress, a stare out of some unknown distance beyond the drapery, and carpets, outside the door; down in the distance her eyes glazed and longing stared. But there was beauty, Edith saw, as she stared. A great beauty, not in her face or form exactly, but a beauty of the thing. He had taken everything from me, she thought, but what has he made? It was something very good, very fine, something that would endure. With his paints he had taken her light and her shadows, her bulk, and her grace, and her longing, and made a message, a song, a wonder.

She saw this. His hours of careful scrutiny that she treasured had simply picked apart her clean for his own work. There are things, she mused, that I can never say. He has said them for me. He has made me for all times, and she supposed she had helped a little, her light, and shadows, and sad longing. And grace.

She realized that her money could miraculously buy this thing. Eakins had made it. It was hers, for awhile, this vision of herself, to stare out at her from some private wall, and this made her feel like a wire of excitement was down her throat. This power of her wealth; the heauty and truth of this bought thing. She saw this. His hours of careful scrutiny that she treasured had simply picked apart her clean for his own work. There are things, she mused, that I can never say. He has said them for me. He has made me for all times, and she supposed she had helped a little, her light, and shadows, and sad longing. And grace.

He sat down and looked at herself across the room. A look searching, penetrating, unblinking as her look in the mirror that first day in preparation for the portrait. Tears gradually formed in her eyes without their closing, impossible to tell whether of the long stare, the sting of it, or because of what she saw. There she sat, the woman of the painting, leaping into the darkness of the big chair, a woman trapped and old, not beautiful. Her hair in the dry wisps of age; the light catching eyes sad, despairing. Her thin lips looked pale and bitter, stretched to stifle a smile, word, or cry. Stretched habitually as a stage for meaningless pleasantness. Her skin enveloped the big boxes of her sad face loosely, with a slack that slid down her shadowy neck to broad white shoulders framed in a heavy dress of bows and twillling sparks, her body somehow placed into this frivolous upholstery. The glib velvet and puffs of fatuous sleeves so distant from the face full of care and sorrow, and longing and, oh! what longing. For a touch, caress, a stare out of some unknown distance beyond the drapery, and carpets, outside the door; down in the distance her eyes glared and longing stared. But there was beauty, Edith saw, as she stared. A great beauty, not in her face or form exactly, but a beauty of the thing. He had taken everything from me, she thought, but what has he made? It was something very good, very fine, something that would endure. With his paints he had taken her light and her shadows, her bulk, and her grace, and her longing, and made a message, a song, a wonder. She saw this. His hours of careful scrutiny that she treasured had simply picked her clean for his own work. There are things, she mused, that I can never say. He has said them for me. He has made me for all times, and she supposed she had helped a little, her light, and shadows, and sad longing. And grace.

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He Hast Found Out Our Bed

go through the morning paper we glance at an article describing how flash floods
have driven hundreds from their homes and then
as though to keep up with a metronome we turn the page to get on to the sports
and thinking someone else will get to them
at noon time on a turnpike going south as the thermometer hits ninety-five
along one stretch in half an hour we pass
eight motorists pulled over heads upraised
and thinking someone else will get to them
we never let our foot budge from the gas
phoebes in our laps in front of the TV we coolly watch the rescue crews at work
amid the carnage of an airline crash
and safe in the assumption that not one of those charred bodies will be known to us
we sit down without pause our corned beef hash
and thus as night shuws down we recognize
without resort to printouts briefs or polls
chis worm of Blake's insatiably at work
within our cankered hearts our deadened souls

Wendy Kindred
Fort Kent

Ellen Enders
Cumberland Center

Breakfast

You face me over scrambled eggs
the morning after we make love for the five hundredth time. You read
my horoscope which says Take care in motion.

I am made without resort to printouts
of care in motion.

---

Richard Aldridge
Sioux Falls
In my mind’s eye, I can see the way it must have happened. A solitary figure climbs the ratlines to the top of the aftmast. The figure straightens, no longer a person but a patch of sky charred by the sun. Pause. Then quickly an arc, the swift glide downward, a flick, a splash. The wake is rocked to calmness by the waves. Nothing.

It was a summer’s job, a season aboard a coastal schooner. A thousand bucks wages plus a few shining quarters doled out by passengers. Romantically viewed, it was the most free of lives—the old wind-in-your-face-as-you-wander-the-coast job, yet at times it was a slavery known only to the deep South. Stack those plates, polish that brass, fill the cap’n’s coffeepot, strip forty-nine hunks, and make sure your sneakers are white at the end of it all. Workdays starting at five in the morning, ending at midnight, six hours off on Saturday. Repaint the smallest scratch, replace the worn rigging, foxtail the ladders, keep those sneakers white. The schooner became a queen bee around which the drones hovered, pampering, fussing, mollycoddling. No wonder they call a ship a “she”.

I remember the time one of the sailors and I discussed the possibility of ghosts. It was in the main salon, the passengers had finished eating, and Jack was lingering over his own late meal. Around us the white of brightwork and the dark, rich varnish gleamed in the caress of candlelight. The sounds of jovial passengers on deck seemed to come from far away, as did the clatter of dishes and bits of song drifting from the galley. Jack paused in the midst of his meal and started telling me how he pictured the schooner years from now. That summer the cap’n was in his seventies which meant a forced retirement before too long. Since he didn’t want to sell the schooner, there was a chance he would give her to a museum. She would sit in a harbor, polished up, though not as thoroughly as we could do it (nobody could beat those six coats of varnish we had put on her deck). The schooner would be overrun with gawking visitors by day, silent as the sea by night. And at night, the ghosts would come out.

As Jack spoke, I could picture the salon staring to life when the darkness crept in. The candles would glow as they did now to gleam on brass and brightwork. I could almost hear the clink of glasses and hum of conversation. The idea of ghosts was enchanting. The sweat we had poured into this schooner we did not want to see belittled by negligent, uncaring hands. A crew of ghosts would care for the ship: passengers, too, would be on board to keep her from loneliness.

Several summers had passed following my season aboard when I heard of the drowning. One of the crew had climbed to the top of the mast, tied his sneakers to the lines, and then plunged into the sea. Whether he fell or dove was not known. His body lay below the surface for eight hours before being found.

Although declared an accidental drowning, the boy’s death remains a mystery. And since that summer, I have begun to recall other deaths. People who had worked on the schooner and died shortly thereafter. The cook aboard the summer I was on, as well as sixteen years previous, died that winter. Another crewmember had died several years before that after serving on the schooner for two seasons. There have been marriages and births aboard the ship, but deaths are not spoken of. It makes one wonder. If there are ghosts on board, are they wearing white sneakers?

Ellen MacDonald
Camden
**Trade Secrets**

Editor's Note: The following poem is composed entirely of lines scattered through last year's issue, with the exception of a "fillch from Rilke." The author, who describes himself as "an appreciative fellow kleptomaniac," works in a long and dishonorable literary tradition.

With true regret for the others who stocked the eddies, here's a creel filled with keepers, lifting the best lines, from the spring freshest of the big two-hearted river called the Kennebec, Vol. VI —

An impress in the common geography of our hearts of an old forgotten love leaving a print as rhetoric, of our hearts of an old forgotten love

In a gamble for the memory when first refusal belongs to me. Won Venus curling to whirl me, still with death, into the space held open by the crescent moon. The right of the descended cold.

Chilled by 'die Beschwerde langen Leitens,' I will not see

You're here, reeking of alcohol, wheezing, whistling. Rarhohydrates shooting pool, getting drunk, getting wrecked, hanging nut

A maimed juggler clapping with one hand touched by an old admonitory demon, prancing wishes causing a cerebral rash, back bent like a bow, teeth bared above the quilt until end-rhymes leak at your lips like spiced sanguinity, this new lover named loneliness, in fingering reach of flesh pinched into folds, but remembering patches of snow, contours silvered with ice, feigns a righteous non-violent plunge into unctuous hell fired to chase the descended cold.

On Crowley’s Island

Grey has filled the cove and settled in the firs. Beside the shore, granite swims as smooth as whales. Cormorants land on the grey wet backs, hang out their wings to dry.

The beach collects a wash of broken things: pieces of wood and bones. From the polished fragment of a whelk — against the rising water's sound — beats a dim, far rhythm like a heart.

The whales submerge. The cormorants dive. Our eyes lift to see farther than the current carrying the waves away, lift to that lost place from which a trawler homes, bearing a corona of crying gulls, and cutting the wake between, the cleft within ourselves.

Susan Hend Shetterly
Surry

**Trying to See the Moose**

To reach the lean-to
We drive five hour bordered by trees
In flux (deft rogue of swamp maple, Light-fingered gold of birch) and sing

While you are trying to learn the harmony,
We got ten miles out of our way.

Next day, I wake into cold, and follow
Your surer feet across a stew of logs
To spy two moose nibbling the further verge.
Around the pond you claim to find a trail—

Deadfalls and moss-hags and briar-spills keep
Last century's feet in mind, perhaps.
When we arrive, of course the moose have dived
For water lilies in your tales of trips
Your father took you on, to Canada.
In childhood summers. Never mind. A grease Flanks his neck-ruff and flare of tail, all male.
Six pitcher plants straddle a half-sunk log
To wait for prey, like beasts. And then your prize: A rub of moosehairs clings to a low branch.

Days later, by myself,
I find them forgotten among apples
In a plastic bag. They are so coarse and stiff,
They'd almost serve a paracrine for quilts.
Shall I saw them like dragon's teeth?
The muscular haunches, sweat, the clash of horns...

But it won't work. They strand
On my kitchen's empty shelf,
Transmuted lilies.

Beverly Greenspan
Brunswick

**sweet perfume booze**

you breathe, i breathe, while you sleep i wait for sleep. insights attach to me. memories float up like answers in an s-ball.

a decade of nights i have lain beside you. an act of bonding not much understood, less talked of. our mutual selves curl in a cocoon of exhaust, protected we hurdle through the milky way to extinction.

i wake, check for you beside me. free fall, you're off somewhere shooting pool, getting drunk, getting wrecked, hanging out — or you're here, reeking of alcohol, wheezing, whistling, carbohydrates pour through your lips drag through my nostrils past clamped

i know this smell. it's a mother's kiss in saturday night dark, rushing me out of dream to find her house, buoyant, other times restrained and so tired. a perfume turned her stranger. and in the morning, nothing.

so you exhale boozy dare me raft beyond what's known. to this extent i trust you: we are ten years bedded and haven't destroyed each other yet. we grow in rhythm kin. we saturate. we represent the other. we are a pronoun, a writhing body.

the bed is empty. sleeping, i keep vigil. i startle awake. ten minutes after you pull in the dooryard, some part of me has been out searching for you. standing sentinel along the road. regularly it happens: knowledge of you precedes the senses.

you breathe you drift. i am a listening ear. the sound of your breathing is breathing. what i describe here, the matting.

lee sharkey
skowhegan
"Hello, Knowles! This is Amanda. Is your offer to use the pool still open?"

"By all means, Amanda! Come on over."

"Great! You are planning to be there then? I'll... oh, ah. I'm a little scared of the dog, perhaps?"

"Rex? Oh don't worry, Amanda, he'll be safely confined. It's so hot today, Helga will have no plans at all and we'd love the company."

"Yes. She called, laboring down the steps to the terrace with the sun reflected so brightly on her tanned skin allowing no extra folds like Helga's. But then Helga was sixty-five and Knowles was sixty. They just weren't young anymore. Besides, she thought, I was shapely enough in my day. Age makes its changes and there ain't a thing you can do about it. It would happen to this one too. There were things that mattered more, like loyalty, honesty, fidelity."

As she slid the screen door open, Rex whined to go out. "No Rex. Go lie down," she ordered. "It's too hot for you out here anyway." So he shut and have sooner taken a nap in the cool indoors and saved the entertaining for later when the sun wasn't so cruel.

"Hello, Amanda." She called, laboring down the steps to the terrace with the loaded tray. "Where are your folks today?"

"Make it quick!" she ordered. "I'm a little scared of the dog."

"No, they're off visiting. Though I don't really know why, on a day like this." Watching Knowles place a table between two chairs, she crossed in front of Helga to help him.

"Need a hand?"

"No, thanks dear. Here, you take the chaise lounge. Helga and I will use these chairs."

Helga ambled over to the table, thumped the tray down heavily, then collapsed in a chair with a grunt. She'd have liked to put her feet up but Knowles had precedented that. The soul of hospitality, she thought slyly.

Amanda noticed her discomfort and demurred. "Oh, sorry, Helga, I shouldn't have given you a hand. It's so nice of you both to have us over. The pool is a blessing, believe me. We were nearly beside ourselves with the heat and nothing to do."

"Anytime. Helga remarked. She couldn't dredge up much enthusiasm for this woman. She was too sweet, too cute.

Knowles chimed in. "Yes, anytime. You are always welcome. Just feel free."

She gestured grandly toward the pool, grinning at Amanda.

Amanda focused on Knowles, frowning at her bare foot. "How about it Knowles? Come on."

"Nope. Helga's gonna fix me a drink and I'm going to read the paper. You go ahead," he winked, holding his empty hand toward Helga expectantly.

"Okay."

"No, Amanda focused on Knowles, nudging him with her bare foot. "How about it Knowles? Come on."

"Anyways you want to read, sure, so read."

"Oh, yeah. Knowles opened the paper but stared at Amanda instead. She arched into the air and cut the water cleanly, almost soundlessly, swallowing the pool's length under water and surfacing near her daughter. The child splashed in surprise, splashing water at her defensively. Rex began barking, jumping at the screen door, provoked by the child's high-pitched squawks. Knowles turned abruptly, startled and puzzled by the sudden outbreak.

"Stop that Rex!" he shouted. The dog quieted only a moment then resumed, threatening Knowles at hello. "Will you do something about him?"

"Helga grinned grumpily and raised her hand. Rex stopped immediately, yawned and showed to the floor, his eyes intent on the strangers."

"Heat's getting in the dog too, I guess."

"Knowles apologized to Amanda.

Helga drained her glass. An imperceptible smile crossed her face. Maybe Rex knows a threat when he sees one, she surmised. He and I can spot a phony a mile away.

After splashing with Melissa a few minutes, Amanda swam to the stairs near Knowles. Venus-like, she ascended from a glittering wake of water. Beatitude, glistening over her entire feline body, a shimmering cloak. She gauged Knowles's reaction. He hadn't missed a trick. Nobody had Helga the witch. Oh, this is fun, she thought. She reclined on the chaise, stretched and sighed appreciatively.

Helga watched Knowles snap her paper, clear her throat and pretend to be immersed in it. He nearly knocked his drink over when he reached for it. So much for nonchalance. Helga wondered just how far Amanda would go with her little charade, right here in front of her victim's wife. The little bitch would probably make a play for anything in parts."

"You want to read, dear, so read."

"Nope, Amanda poured. She sat up and reached over, touching Knowles on the arm. "I'm so grateful to you. You know, it's so hard to make friends when you're in a strange place and don't know anyone. But you've made me feel right at home." She smiled coyly and settled back, languorously raising one leg.

Let's have a little stupid conversation, shall we? I can match you any day,
Said the bell, Helga thought, swirling her skirt and ice. Best you be reminded of your responsibilities and keep your claws to home. “So tell me, how did you two meet?” Amanda asked with a sidelong glance at Helga and a warm smile for Knowles when he sat down. Helga signaled again and the door opened. Knowles, her favorite, dashed his drink, delighted. The old bag was losing her cool. This was really delicious. Amanda decided the time was ripe. "Daddy tells me you have quite a gun collection." "Yes, indeed I do." Knowles turned to Amanda. "Would you like to see it?" "I'd love to," Amanda said, rising." "Helga, would you be a dear and keep an eye on Melissa for me? Thanks." She slipped her hand under Knowles’s arm and propelled him toward the house. Helga finished her drink and turned, watching them. The Doberman rose and growled menacingly as the pair approached the house. "Don't mess!" Knowles commanded, Amanda drew closer to him. "Don’t be afraid, Amanda," he patted her hand. Amanda hoped Helga wasn’t missing this as they disappeared inside the house, sliding the screen door shut behind them. Fuming, Helga turned back and fixed another drink. She looked at Melissa and felt a sudden twinge of pity for the little girl. She had no idea what kind of woman her mother was. A female on the prowl. Helga watched her play contentedly. A sweet child like that should be raised by someone who really wanted children, like I did—not by someone whose probable reason for having children in the first place was carelessness... Helga chuckled as she speculated about the exact parentage of the child. Hell, she’d probably end up just like her mother. Loose. Leading men on for kicks. Displaying herself with Parisian clothes, either too tight or too skimpy, or both.

It was twenty minutes before Amanda and Knowles emerged, laughing on the porch. What’s so funny about a goddamn gun collection? She turned to watch Knowles trying to prevent Rex from getting out. Impulsively he called, "Let him out, Knowles. Here Rex.”

The dog squeezed through and raced to her side. She stroked his sleek black face. He was hers. Her faithful, obedient companion. Amanda returned to the chase, glancing uneasily at Helga and the dog while Knowles poured himself another drink. "Knowles has his pride and joy," Helga nodded toward the house, "and I have mine." She smiled at Rex, petting him. "Knowles got him for me on our anniversary. He’s our alarm system. Dependable, efficient, and a good form of protection, don’t you think? No thief would want to tangle with him I daresay." Letting that sink in, she continued, "I trained him myself to respond to my hand signals.” Knowles leaned toward Amanda. "It’s true. The dog obeys her immediately. I don’t even know the hand signals.”

"Impressive," Amanda returned. She reached for her straw bag. "Oh, Knowles, wouldn’t you put some lotion on my back?" She grabbed Knowles’s palm and squeezed white cream onto it. With a glance at Helga she flung it over her shoulder.

Knowles sat on the edge of the chaise, licked his lips, and reached with both hands for her back. He stroked her slowly, rhythmically. Amanda moaned.

The beat, the scotch, the sun, and Knole’s fascination with Amanda’s body overwhelmed Helga. Her fingers drummed on the arm of her chair. That bitch She was playing it to the hilt. And Knowles, the sucker, was beside her in the scheme, so overcome was he by her all too obvious charms. He had never been so ardent with her! Never in their twenty-seven years of marriage had he ever done that for her. Did he think she wouldn’t like to be treated that way? He always just

assumed that a "sturdy" woman like herself could manage for herself. Suddenly she let her hand drop in front of Rex’s face, twitching her fingers in a signal.

The dog leaped toward the child at the shallow end, tensed, growling, jaws open, canines gleaming. The child screamed and fell forward into the water. Amanda vaulted from the chaise; knocking Knowles into the pool. She dove for the girl and pulled her back to the shallow end. Knowles surfaced, coughing, "Helga! What on earth...? For Christake, call him off!” Helga signaled again and the dog moved to the stairs at the shallow end, waiting, snarling. Amanda pulled herself and her daughter up the stairs, placing herself squarely in front of the animal. She lifted her weight, ready to catch the dog in the throat with her foot if he moved. The old bitch had played her hand, but she’d damn well better call the dog off and quick if she valued him.

The two women stared at each other, ready for their next move. Amanda may be a scheming tease, but it was clear to Helga that she wasn’t scared. Helga might be old and used up, but it looked as if she wasn’t about to give Amanda a ticket to ride with Knowles. The messages were relayed in an electric moment. Knowles teared water, confused, "Helga?"

Melissa whimpered behind Amanda and Helga cooly called the Doberman to her side. She patted him calmly. Amanda crossed in front of her with Melissa. At the chase, she grabbed her straw bag and paused, gazing at Helga icily. "Thanks for the swim."

"My pleasure, dear,” answered Helga. "Turning to Knowles, Amanda added, ‘Your collection is fascinating. Knowles, perhaps you’ll show me how to shoot sometime...'” She smiled warmly at him once more. "I’ll be seeing you soon! Soon! She strided off toward the house across the field.

Knowles coughed, frowning at the side of the pool. ‘I’m so sorry about the dog’ she called after him. To Helga he gaped, ‘You shouldn’t have let Rex fly over there. Look what happened. I hope he hasn’t scared her away for good.” He stared longingly at the retreating figure.

"But that’s why we have him, darling,” she said sarcastically. ‘For protection.”

"But Amanda is harmless!” he argued.

Is she now? Helga sipped her drink and watched Amanda’s suntan lotion pour out of the tube in a graceful ribbon on the hot cement.

Joan Anderson Powell 
Manchester

Poem for Ex-Wives, 
On a Line from Charles Bukowski

So, still getting on and off the bus no luggage but a paperbag of afterthoughts, I wonder where those rings are now— some star’s back molars a gold service for whatever cool delight an Arab eats or in some dusty pawshop with saws and knives and chipped glass eyes once costly, fitting no one. I make their lives seem better after me.

Sylvester Pollet
East Holden

This issue of Kennebec is dedicated to Gordon Clark, its founder, who in encouraging young writers over two decades and in continuing his scrupulous upbringing, has earned the gratitude of writers and readers in Maine. 

[TP, CK]
Chinese Tortures

Tonight I had to wedge a chair against the refrigerator door. The freezer’s frozen over and the door won’t close.

There’s a drip like a slow tick, a broken record. The Chinese Torture we always heard about as kids. The hole wearing into the forehead. That slow bullet of water and madness seeping in beneath the spasms of a red light. A thousand miles south of here, in Florida, right now, my mother’s kicking pastel covers from her gilded bed. The television’s glow surrounds her head. She twirls a strand of athen light, considers carefully remote control. Oh,

she worries more and more about her daughter who grew up in the cushion of a sculpted hedge, a rag so thick it smudged the polish on her toes. Coral roses climbed our trellis. I think I’d choose this moon over the silks and taffetas of petticoats I wore.

There’s more to sorrow than lost finery. More than the antique, family clock tracking time with the Chinese Torture. The television’s glow never frees.

Deborah Ward
Portland

Breading the Soft-Shelled Crabs

I have neglected my body working myself into a shell so that, breezing into the fish market today and seeing a delicacy I had long forgotten set apart from the usual haddock and mussels I might be eight years old, out to eat at Johnny’s Restaurant with my parents and able to order anything I want from the menu.

Even now, breading the soft-shelled crabs, their finely stippled bodies that give to the touch translucent like Japanese lanterns I sense how thin is the membrane between what I was and what I long to be both states of the shell as it hardens then sloughs hardeners then sloughs as the season demands.

Inside, the same sweet tenderness. I have never lost the taste for having what I want.

Alison H. Deming
Cape Elizabeth

Herbert and Virginia

met at Skimpjl’s Bowling Alley by the candy machine. Her Milk Duds jammed.
He called the manager, the man who checks out shoes.

Herbert and Virginia
tried love that night,
Morning came, she left only a note scotch-taped to his orange pajamas.
She needed to be mysterious. He wanted mystery.
They met by the candy machine.

Herbert and Virginia
married in a chapel.
Skimpjl provided the cake.
On Thursday nights, weather permitting, the couple continued to bowl.

If you’re looking for something to change
Look Again.

Martha Henry
North Windham

KENNEBEC: A Portfolio of Maine Writing

This is Kennebec’s seventh year of publication. Our format and newsprint make possible a selected distribution of 5,000 copies, thus providing Maine writers with an audience no “little” magazine can offer. We publish as many new writers each year as possible, while trying not to neglect the established ones. In this endeavor to bring Maine writers to the attention of the public we are supported by the University of Maine at Augusta, Forum A, and an increasing number of writers whose submissions enable us to present Maine writing that is worth reading.

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