Volume 18, Number 2
our special Summer/Fall 2013 issue
“Prairies, Plains, Mountains, Deserts”
(return to Vol. 18, No. 2 web page)
“Hidden everywhere, a myriad leather seed-cases lie in wait...”
—“Crab Orchard Sanctuary: Late October”
Thomas Kinsella
Address all correspondence to:

**Crab Orchard Review**  
Department of English  
Faner Hall 2380 - Mail Code 4503  
Southern Illinois University Carbondale  
1000 Faner Drive  
Carbondale, Illinois 62901

_Crab Orchard Review_ (ISSN 1083-5571) is published twice a year by the Department of English, Southern Illinois University Carbondale. Subscription rates in the United States for individuals are $20 ($24 online) for one year, $30 for two years, $40 for three years; the foreign rate for individuals is $35 for one year. Subscription rates for institutions are $24 for one year, $48 for two years, and $72 for three years; the foreign rate for institutions is $40 for one year. Single issues are $12 (please include an additional $10 for international orders). Copies not received will be replaced without charge if notice of nonreceipt is given within four months of publication. Six weeks notice required for change of address.

**POSTMASTER:**  
Send address changes to _Crab Orchard Review_, Department of English, Faner Hall 2380 - Mail Code 4503, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, 1000 Faner Drive, Carbondale, Illinois 62901.

_Crab Orchard Review_ considers submissions from February through April, and August through October of each year. All editorial submissions and queries must be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Please notify the editors of simultaneous submission. _Crab Orchard Review_ accepts no responsibility for unsolicited submissions and will not enter into correspondence about their loss or delay.

Copyright © 2013 _Crab Orchard Review_  
Permission to reprint materials from this journal remains the decision of the authors. We request _Crab Orchard Review_ be credited with initial publication.

The publication of _Crab Orchard Review_ is made possible with support from the Chancellor, the College of Liberal Arts, and the Department of English of Southern Illinois University Carbondale; and through generous private and corporate donations.

"Printed by the authority of the State of Illinois," 28 June 2013, 3900 copies printed, order number 110187.

Lines from Thomas Kinsella's poem “Crab Orchard Sanctuary: Late October” are reprinted from _Thomas Kinsella: Poems 1956-1973_ (North Carolina: Wake Forest University Press, 1979) and appear by permission of the author.

_Crab Orchard Review_ is indexed in _Humanities International Complete_.

Visit Crab Orchard Review’s website:

[CrabOrchardReview.siu.edu](http://CrabOrchardReview.siu.edu)
Crab Orchard Review and its staff wish to thank these supporters for their generous contributions, aid, expertise, and encouragement:


Heidi Estel, Patty Norris, Joyce Schemonia, and Kelly Spencer

Jessica Lynn Suchon, Chelsey Harris, and Abby Allen

Dr. Michael Molino (chair), Pinckney Benedict, Beth Lordan, Judy Jordan, and the rest of the faculty in the SIUC Department of English

Division of Continuing Education

SIU Alumni Association

The Graduate School

Dean Kimberly Kempf-Leonard and the College of Liberal Arts

The Office of the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Provost

The Southern Illinois Writers Guild

Crab Orchard Review is supported, in part, by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency.
Crab Orchard Review wishes to express its special thanks to our generous Charter Members/Benefactors, Patrons, Donors, and Supporting Subscribers listed on the following page whose contributions make the publication of this journal possible.

We invite new Benefactors ($500 or more), Patrons ($200), Donors ($100), and Supporting Subscribers ($35) to join us. Supporting Subscribers receive a one-year subscription; Donors receive a two-year subscription; Patrons receive a three-year subscription; and Benefactors receive a lifetime subscription.

Address all contributions to:

Crab Orchard Review
Department of English
Faner Hall 2380 - Mail Code 4503
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
1000 Faner Drive
Carbondale, Illinois 62901
CHARTER MEMBERS*/BENEFACTORS

Carolyn Alessio & Jeremy Manier
Pinckney & Laura Benedict
Edward Brunner & Jane Cogie*
Linda L. Casebeer
Dwayne Dickerson*
Jack Dyer*
Joan Ferrell*
John Guyon*
John M. Howell*
Rodney Jones
Richard Jurek
Joseph A. Like
Greg & Peggy Legan*
Beth L. Mohlenbrock*
Jane I. Montgomery*
Ruth E. Oleson*
Richard “Pete” Peterson
Peggy Shumaker

PATRONS

Diann Blakely
Robert E. Hayes
Kent Haruf
Chris Kelsey
Jesse Lee Kercheval
Lisa J. McClure
Anita Peterson
Eugenie & Roger Robinson
Nat Sobel
Betty & Ray Tribble
David & Laura Tribble
Clarisse Zimra

DONORS

Jeffrey Alfier
Lorna Blake
Chris Bullard
Charles Fanning
Jewell A. Friend
John & Nancy Jackson
Reamy Jansen
Rob & Melissa Jensen
Elisabeth & Jon Luther
Charlotte & Gabriel Manier
Lee Newton
Lisa Ortiz
Lucia Perillo
Angela Rubin
Hans H. Rudnick
William E. Simeone

SUPPORTING SUBSCRIBERS

Serge & Joan Alessio
Erik C. Campbell
Joanna Christopher
K.K. Collins
Jeremiah K. Durick
Corrine Frisch
John & Robin Haller
Zdena Heller
Karen Hunsaker
Lee Lever
Jessica Maich
Charlotte McLeod
Peggy & Albert Melone
Nadia Reimer
Lee Robinson
Catherine Rudnick
Peter Rutkoff
Victoria Weisfeld
The editors and staff of Crab Orchard Review dedicate Volume 18, Number 1, and Volume 18, Number 2, to the memory of a poet, scholar, teacher, editor, and friend who enriched our lives and who made a tremendous contribution to American letters and the cause of social justice through his work:

*In Memoriam*

**Jake Adam York**

(August 10, 1972 – December 16, 2012)
Editor’s Prologue: *The Distances We Travel*  

**Fiction**

*T. Duncan Anderson*  
*Tioga*  
*28*

*Karlyn Coleman*  
*Ice Roads*  
*52*

*E.A. Neeves*  
*A Postcard for Zion*  
*61*

*Doua Thao*  
*These City Streets*  
*80*

**Nonfiction Prose**

*Yvonne Martinez*  
*Chicken Fried Rice: An Excerpt from the Memoir* *Capirotada*  
*105*

*Sarah Fawn Montgomery*  
*Lessons in Cartography*  
*109*

*Dionisia Morales*  
*Continental Divide*  
*131*

*Titi Nguyen*  
*Marian Days*  
*147*

*Dustin Parsons*  
*Pumpjack*  
*178*

*Wendy Rawlings*  
*Utah’s Bright Dark Heart*  
*186*
POETRY

Jeffrey Alfier
Walking West on East 5th Street 12
Coda for a Desert Constellation 13
Travelogue for a Nevada January 14

Tacey M. Atsitty
At Evil Canyon 16
Razed 18

Oliver Bendorf
Thanks for Everything, Leland Cooper 20

Daniel Berkner
Fear in a Handful of Dust 22

Annie Binder
To Know by Name Every Flower of the Field 23

Mark Jay Brewin, Jr.
On Convergence 24

Lauren Camp
Bisti Badlands 26

Cara Chamberlain
The Bighorn Basin, Wyoming 36

Mario Chard
Signs and Crossings 38

Heidi Czerwiec
Correlation Is Not Causation 39
Cardinal Directions: Divorce Fugue 40

Carol V. Davis
Late January, Wyoming Storm 42

Stacey Donovan
Work Ethic 44

Andy Eaton
Oklahoma 45

Matthew Gavin Frank
Hard Times for the Astronauts 47

Jenny George
Sonnet for Lost Teeth 49
Vaudeville 50

Katherine Gordon
The Turquoise Museum on the Turquoise Trail, New Mexico 51
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer Hancock</td>
<td>The Bigot’s Funeral</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>St. Mary’s Orphanage: Galveston Island, September 8, 1900</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jocelyn Heath</td>
<td>Plaza in Late Spring</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa Higgs</td>
<td>Bottom Prairie</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam Houle</td>
<td>Homestead Now</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bethany Schultz Hurst</td>
<td>Dust Bowl, 1936</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Settler</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gary Jackson</td>
<td>Storytellers</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Runaway</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christopher Kempf</td>
<td>The Bonneville Salt Flats</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter Ludwin</td>
<td>Reclamation</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rio Grande Gorge</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexander Lumans</td>
<td>The Home of Wonder Bread</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dawn Manning</td>
<td>Thriftscape with Buttons</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Forget What the Arsonist Took</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christina Misite</td>
<td>After the Rainy Season</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristi Moos</td>
<td>Rushmore</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juan J. Morales</td>
<td>Gift</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa Mylchreest</td>
<td>July, Montana</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frenchtown</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greg Nicholl</td>
<td>[Ghost Town]</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Notter</td>
<td>Driving Nevada</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ricardo Pau-Llosa</td>
<td>Wadis</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fernando Pérez</td>
<td>Open Field, Bicycle Graveyard</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zara Raab</td>
<td>Storm over Santa Fe</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie Scenters-Zapico</td>
<td>Your Mouth Is Full</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Angels Fall from the Sky to El Paso, Texas</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christine Stewart-Nuñez</td>
<td>Variations of Crane</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crystal Stuvland</td>
<td>Showing Idaho to a Russian</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virgil Suárez</td>
<td>Dusk in Las Vegas, A Parable of Light and Shadow</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt Sumpter</td>
<td>Smokejumper Elegy, 1949</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mountain Bachelorhood</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>On-Call for Wildfire</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Revenant</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advertisement: Butte, MT Bluegrass Festival</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ginny Wiehardt</td>
<td>Running Father Moczygemba</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Out of Town</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Straw Maid</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bread, Salt, Wine</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawrence Wray</td>
<td>Voice as a Scattering of Sunlight on Water</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributors’ Notes</td>
<td></td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A Note on Our Cover

The nine photographs on the cover are by Lisa Percy, Loren Elise Foster, Allison Joseph, and Jon Tribble. The photographs are of locations in Wyoming, Texas, Illinois, Kansas, Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico.

Details about the photographs are available on Crab Orchard Review’s Facebook Page:

www.facebook.com/CrabOrchardReview

Announcements

We would like to congratulate two of our recent contributors, T.R. Hummer and Kat Meads. T.R. Hummer’s nonfiction piece “A Length of Hemp Rope” and Kat Meads’ nonfiction piece “Neighbor Trim, Also Awake,” which both appeared in Crab Orchard Review, Volume 16, Number 2 (Summer/Fall 2011), our special issue, “Old & New ~ Re-Visions of the American South,” were selected as Notable Essays of 2011 for The Best American Essays 2012, by series editor Robert Atwan.
The 2013 COR Special Issue Feature Awards in Poetry, Fiction, and Literary Nonfiction

We are pleased to announce the winners of the 2013 COR Special Issue Feature Awards in Poetry, Fiction, and Literary Nonfiction. The winners were selected by the editors of Crab Orchard Review.

In poetry, our winner is Matt Sumpter of Columbus, Ohio, for his five poems—“Smokejumper Elegy, 1949,” “Mountain Bachelorhood,” “On-Call for Wildfire,” “Revenant,” and “Advertisement: Butte, MT Bluegrass Festival.”

In fiction, the winner is Karlyn Coleman of Minneapolis, Minnesota, for her story “Ice Roads.”

And in literary nonfiction, the winner is Titi Nguyen of New York, New York, for her essay “Marian Days.”

The winner in each genre category—Poetry, Fiction, and Literary Nonfiction—is published in this issue and received a $1500.00 award. All entries were asked fit the topic of the Summer/Fall 2013 special issue, “Prairies, Plains, Mountains, Deserts,” focusing on writing exploring the people, places, history, and changes shaping the states in the U.S. that make up the “Big Middle” of prairies, plains, mountains, and deserts of the middle and non-Pacific Coast West of the Lower 48 (Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, North Dakota, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Idaho, and Nevada).

See the back pages of this issue for information on the 2014 COR Special Issue Feature Awards in Poetry, Fiction, and Literary Nonfiction. Or visit us online. Crab Orchard Review’s website has information on subscriptions, calls for submissions and guidelines, contest information and results, and past, current, and future issues:

CrabOrchardReview.siu.edu
The Winners of the 2013 COR Special Issue Feature Awards in Poetry, Fiction, and Literary Nonfiction

2013 Special Issue Feature Award Winner in Poetry

Five Poems by Matt Sumpter
(Columbus, Ohio)

2013 Special Issue Feature Award Winner in Fiction

“Ice Roads”
by Karlyn Coleman
(Minneapolis, Minnesota)

2013 Special Issue Feature Award Winner in Literary Nonfiction

“Marian Days”
by Titi Nguyen
(New York, New York)
On his last visit to Carbondale, Illinois, Jake Adam York wanted to get on the road early to make it back home to Denver, Colorado, without stopping for the night on the way if he could help it. He had driven from Gambier, Ohio, where he was the 2011 Kenyon College English Department’s Richard L. Thomas Chair in Creative Writing, and he had come to Southern Illinois University to read his poetry at our Little Grassy Literary Festival that April. Given the miles he was traveling, Jake could have flown into St. Louis—like so many of our visitors to Carbondale do—and then back to Denver after the literary festival was done, the quilt of fields from Missouri to Kansas to the Colorado plains spreading out beneath him.

But Jake had a plan. Driving meant that between Carbondale and his home was Kansas City, and Kansas City meant an opportunity to visit Arthur Bryant’s BBQ, where—according to Jake—you could find the best barbecue beef sandwich he had ever tasted. If you knew Jake, you did not take such praise lightly. Jake knew barbecue as well as anyone ever has, certainly better than anyone I have ever met.

Besides being known as a writer invested in the living history of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement and the remembrance of the sacrifices made by martyrs to the cause of equal rights and justice, Jake Adam York was also to many the unofficial “Poet Laureate of Barbecue.” He valued foodways and what the tastes and traditions show us about ourselves. And Jake believed that good barbecue, by whatever name it might be called, was worth the miles traveled to find and savor its distinct flavors. In an essay published in storySouth, “The Marrow of the Bone of Contention: A Barbecue Journal,” Jake wrote of a visit to a taquería, Piedras Negras, in Salt Lake City, Utah:

This, I thought, was barbecue. It was everything barbecue had ever been to me: sublime, crafty, affordable. And as I
made my way through my fourth taco, I remembered that Piedras Negras is the name of a town just across the Mexican border, not far from San Antonio, and I was sure that this *carnitas*, rising from a point further south than any I had ever occupied, was a western cousin to my beloved saucy Alabama barbecue, emerging from the same Caribbean root and traveling west and north to Salt Lake, where the pulled pork of my youth had traveled north and east to the Carolinas, to Georgia, to Alabama. Perhaps, I thought, this is even closer to the old *barbacoa* than anything I’ve ever eaten.

The discovery that only comes from the visit to an out-of-the-way place, to a place that doesn’t exist between departures and arrivals at one airport and another; the destinations that may be hard to find, or the detours that become destinations; the character and flavors of who we have been, who we are, who we are becoming—Jake Adam York knew this very well, knew that the distances we travel are often at the heart of the purpose of the journey.

**Texas taught me lessons about distance.** In 1986, I moved from Little Rock, Arkansas, to Corpus Christi, Texas, to manage the last movie theater I would ever work at, and the twelve- to fifteen-hour drives by myself between those cities were my first introduction to understanding the relationship between time and miles traveled that a flight cannot teach.

Of course, driving the interstate or state highways at 55 mph or faster is its own type of illusion, too, with a very different calculus than that of all those who came before: the indigenous tribes who first lived here in these forests, grasslands, plateaus, bluffs, and buttes; the Europeans who reintroduced the horse as they mapped and “claimed” the lands and their people, treasures, and resources; the settlers who crossed the prairies, plains, mountains, and deserts, and U.S. armies who came behind them. Fifty, a hundred, a thousand miles might mean weeks, months, even years for them, while today we can count the hours and days for our journeys.

Somewhere between Texarkana, Arkansas, and Dallas, Texas, on my move down, I was greeted by a roadrunner flashing across the median of I-30. In early June, the wildflowers that were such an important part of Lady Bird Johnson’s life still brightened the Texas landscape, “keep[ing] alive our experience with the flowering earth.”
During those months driving across and around Texas, I learned more about religious broadcasting than I ever wanted to know when all the other radio stations between Waco and Dallas faded to static on a hot day or a cold night. I discovered on the two-lane Texas highways and state roads along the Gulf Coast that the Porsches and Ferraris started flashing their headlights two or three miles back to signal I had less than a minute to edge my car over as far as I could on the right shoulder before they went blasting by at triple digits. And I found in winter that every free moment wandering up to the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge meant I might be lucky enough to see the whooping cranes nesting in the marsh protected by the barrier islands.

The first time I drove to Denver was in 1990, and I needed help. I was working with Indiana Review, and the editors had decided on attending the annual conference of the Associated Writing Programs (as AWP was known at the time). We had reserved a university van for the four of us and the boxes of magazines, and we decided to drive in one straight shot from Bloomington, Indiana, since the expense of staying at the Brown Palace Hotel, where the conference was being held, was all we or the magazine could afford (though I think we were covering the expenses ourselves, even though we were all students without much money).

After a punishing and very cold night driving through the dark in a van without a very good heater, I remember stopping for gas and breakfast in Salina, Kansas. The bitter wind felt like it could take skin from the bone and the weak sun rising behind us in the pale sky didn’t promise much for the day ahead, but the tumbleweeds bouncing and catching on the fences reminded us how far we had come and we pushed on to Denver, where the lush hotel with all its vestiges of 1890s elegance rewarded us for our efforts.

My wife, Allison, who was the associate editor of Indiana Review at that time, has reminded me about that morning on later trips we have taken through Kansas. One of our last times on I-70, she found a much nicer stop in Abilene, Kansas, where green-and-yellow trolleys offer tours of the city’s historic sites, including the Five-Star Museum District, where the Greyhound Hall of Fame is right down the street from the Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum. Allison had read about the historic Kirby House and we had lunch there, finishing our meals with their chilled strawberry soup and coconut walnut bread. The house was built by banker Thomas Kirby.
in 1885, and it had appeared in a booklet in 1887 promoting Abilene titled *A Gem, “The City of the Plains.”* The beautiful Victorian home had been operating as a restaurant since the 1980s. Sadly, on February 20, 2013, a fire broke out at the Kirby House and the building was destroyed, a total loss.

I don’t think I will ever completely understand why, but my parents decided in June 2001, the place they would celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary would be Colorado Springs, Colorado. Both my parents call northern Alabama “home” (if that is where you were born and grew up) and for most of their married years—and at that point, all of my life—they had lived in Little Rock, Arkansas.

My parents had been road warriors in the early days of their marriage, moving first to Des Moines, Iowa, then Nashville, Tennessee, then Omaha, Nebraska, before ending up in Arkansas. They even took what they called “A Million Dollar Trip”—that cost them a thousand dollars back in the 1950s. Along with my maternal grandmother and a younger cousin, my parents drove from Alabama to the West Coast and visited every state they could until they ran out of what I suppose was mostly my grandmother’s money.

Colorado Springs was convenient for my sister and her family, who lived in Arizona, but it seemed that part of the appeal was to bring their children and grandchildren together in a place other than Arkansas or Alabama (and other than our homes in Arizona, Illinois, or Maryland, where my brother’s family lives) so we would all only be visiting each other, and I guess in the shadow of Pikes Peak was as good a place as any for that. The mountain did remind my parents we had visited there before when I was only three or four years old, and I heard once again that there hadn’t been any point taking me places when I was very young because I had so few memories of those trips. I was given a pass on forgetting about Pikes Peak, however, because apparently the thin air had put all three of us children to sleep (or maybe that was Mount Ranier, later on the same trip).

This time—along with a morning drive with my mother to Independence Pass on the Continental Divide in the Sawatch Range near the headwaters of the Arkansas River in sight of the Collegiate Peaks, and a trip down to Royal Gorge Bridge (which that year lost its seventy-two year reign as the world’s highest bridge)—I drove up Pikes Peak, and though Allison became woozy when we reached the cloudy and underwhelming summit, we both marveled on the way up
to the top at the fat but fast yellow-bellied marmots that scattered from the sides of the highest switchbacks, seeming to leap from the edge at the first hint of a shadow possibly signaling a red-tailed hawk or falcon or golden eagle, though we only saw ravens riding the updrafts in and out of the midday gloom of wet snowfall.

Both my sister and brother were born in Omaha, Nebraska, after my parents had been married over eight years and had been told by a doctor in Nashville, Tennessee, that it was unlikely they would ever have children of their own. “It must have been the water in Nebraska,” my mother once said, since I was also conceived there before the family moved to Arkansas.

I have never been back to Omaha (depending on if I actually would be considered having been there in the first place), but I have driven from the eastern edge of Nebraska to its western end. Allison and I were on our way to Utah for the 2000 Writers@Work Conference, where Allison would teach in a young writers workshop. In 1999, we had flown out together to Salt Lake City, and Allison had worked as regular faculty at the conference and I had been a visiting editor consulting on manuscripts. This time I would have no responsibilities when we arrived and, I suppose, we could have flown there again. But since I saw this as an opportunity to drive across two states I had never seen—Nebraska and Wyoming—and also visit some of the remarkable national parks in southern Utah I had heard so much about the year before, we rented a car and headed across Missouri to Lincoln, Nebraska.

When you arrive at the first hotel stop on a roadtrip at 3 a.m., perhaps reconsidering the planning is in order. I knew by this time that long drives were a weakness for me, but this trip taught me to respect distance in a whole new way when we found ourselves one hundred miles from Cheyenne, Wyoming, with a radiator bleeding coolant onto the steaming asphalt at every stop. Sidney, Nebraska, feels a long way from anywhere, and the town of Kimball had me imagining being broken down on the side of I-80 with the clouds of heat that were the semis thundering west passing us by until a state trooper found us and took pity—none of which was reassuring when it was 104° and there was nothing approaching shade in sight unless we were able to crawl beneath the car.

I called the rental car company when we made it to Cheyenne, and they connected me to a local number, but the man who answered
was very unimpressed by our problem and told me to “keep pouring it in” until we reached Salt Lake City, and “give them the receipts.” The next day the drive through the rest of southern Wyoming was much less dramatic, the car seeming to have forgiven us for the bad way our relationship began, and we began to notice the pronghorn flashing white into our eyes’ recognition against the barren land that increasingly looked like it belonged on another planet. The rain had surely not followed the plow here, and the hard life of anyone who had tried to wring life from this earth was evident all around us.

During that week in Utah, I drove more than anyone should—making it down to Bryce Canyon National Park, where the orchestra of hoodoos in Bryce Amphitheater plays every note in each day’s unique sheet music of light and shadow; driving Scenic Byway 12 through redrock and slickrock canyons, past great black rocks on a high ridge that looked like some great bird had left behind its scattered nest until a new age began; arriving in Torrey, Utah, in time for dusk’s migration of bats from the Chimney Rock and the Castle into the canyons below the Capitol Reef Dome.

One early morning toward the end of our stay in Salt Lake City, I left before the sun had cleared the Wasatch Mountains to drive across the Bonneville Salt Flats while some semblance of the cool night remained. In my haste, I forgot to check my fuel gauge and so I spent most of the drive with the air conditioner off and the windows down watching the needle edge toward empty until finally, through the glaring whiteness around me, Wendover, Utah, and its first gas station peeked over the horizon and I willed the car long past the time the warning flickered to life.

After that I decided to wander a while into eastern Nevada, but I soon changed my mind and decided to turn north and attempt to circumnavigate the Great Salt Lake, curious about what I might find in that northwest corner of Utah. Early on, I was fascinated by how the evaporation was happening to the east right before my eyes, a steady column of water vapor rising into the sky like a heavenly host ascending on a daily celestial escalator, but soon I began to realize why no one spoke of this area of the state when offering suggestions about where I should go next.

Not wanting to repeat my earlier mistake, I stopped at the first operating gas pumps I saw. There was a little store, but no other cars around when I pulled in, but the sign on the pump read, “Pay Inside,” and everything worked when I filled up so I didn’t give it much thought.
as I cleaned my windshield. Inside, I was surprised to see two children behind the cash register. They were both towheads with relatively long hair: a boy, I think, not more than seven or eight years old; and a three- or four-year-old in overalls, whom I wouldn’t venture to guess gender at all. The younger never spoke while I was there, but the older one was efficient, telling me how much I owed, asking if I needed anything else, and declaring my change.

A little way beyond the store, a sign indicated “Idaho” to my left and I thought, why not three states in one day? It was only a few miles before the Utah highway signs gave way to the Idaho version, but I noticed right away every Idaho sign was riddled with holes from a shotgun blast. After the fifth sign, I decided even if it wasn’t supposed to mean anything, I got the message.

In 2006, when Allison and I celebrated our 15th Anniversary, we knew we both wanted to visit San Francisco, California, for the first time. Our anniversary falls in late December, and certainly the sensible thing to do this time would be to fly—the distance, the weather, all the things that could go wrong. Whenever I mentioned us possibly driving rather than flying, people understandably thought I had lost my mind. And on the reasonable points, I understood their thinking. But as the time for us to leave approached, I heard again and again a variation on the same concern: How can you stand to be in the car together for that long? Won’t you drive each other crazy? You won’t be married another fifteen years if you drive.

It never crossed my mind that any of those things might be a problem. And looking back on the experience I can say that twenty-five-day roadtrip was one of the highlights of my life, our own “Million Dollar Trip,” even if the reasonable concerns did present obstacles and challenges that called on all the lessons other poor choices had taught me over the years. The most important thing I have learned is never drive farther than necessary on any one day. That lesson above all others will keep many situations from becoming disasters.

The morning we woke up in Oklahoma City, our first major stop along the way, was just such a situation. Whenever possible if we are heading west on I-40, we spend the night in Oklahoma City. Not only does that leave me rested and ready to drive across the Texas Panhandle into New Mexico, which is not one of the more scenic drives and does not offer many places we are looking to stop since both of us find the “free” 72-oz. steak dinner challenge at The Big Texan in Amarillo,
Texas, a bit frightening and Allison thinks the steak looks like a large bicycle seat; but we discovered some of the best Vietnamese food we have found outside of the coasts is right in the area known as the Asian District, around the intersection of NW 23rd Street and Classen, in Oklahoma City.

So we were rested and well-fed that morning, and before leaving I did one of the most important things anyone driving across the country should do before getting on the road: I checked the weather. Nothing was happening in Oklahoma, but ahead of us a major storm was crossing into western Arizona and heading our direction. By nightfall, a foot or more of snow would reach Gallup, New Mexico, and by morning most of I-40 west of Albuquerque would be closed.

We had reservations to stay that night in Tucumcari, New Mexico, one of the old Route 66 stops. I was planning our drives around or under four hundred miles each day until we reached California, and Gallup, New Mexico, was our next day’s destination. To make it there in one day wasn’t impossible, but it would be difficult. But if we didn’t want to be stuck on the eastern side of the Rocky Mountains we had to make a change in our plans.

We reached Tucumcari, and we let the motel there know we wouldn’t be needing our room—and we expected others would with the storm approaching. We didn’t ask for our money back on the prepaid reservation, and they didn’t offer. Many of the town’s businesses were boarded up, and it looked like every penny coming in was desperately needed. We had made very good time across the Panhandle and the motel’s restaurant had a lunch buffet so we went ahead and ate there. Neither of us had had New Mexico’s Hatch chiles before, but they were a main part of several dishes on the buffet and the deep rich heat made us both wish, I think, that we could settle in right there for a little longer.

The traffic naturally got heavier as we approached Albuquerque, but we got through the city before the worst of rush hour had taken over. On the west side, a light snow began falling. Fortunately, the cold-temperature plunge was behind the snow and we didn’t see much stick to the roadways until we reached the exit for the Sky City Casino, near the Acoma Pueblo. The exit for the casino was already lined with trucks and the cars filling the parking lots were likely staying put for a night or two. By the time we approached Grants, New Mexico, drivers all around us were desperate to clear the Continental Divide and make their way to Gallup, like us, or somewhere beyond to the west if the snow wasn’t
too deep. The trucks were moving very slowly as we all climbed to over seven thousand feet. The higher we went, the more cars and trucks we saw in the median, where there was one, or off to the side of the road. I was certain on a couple of occasions that the state police we kept crawling past would direct us all to some exit or rest area or somewhere like Lavaland RV Park and declare the road closed to all traffic.

But despite the chaos, we crested the divide and then the real insanity began. The trucks couldn’t brake at all without beginning to skid or even effectively gear down as we descended and the cars with frustrated drivers trying to make up for time that was never coming back raced into the left lane and flew down the dark, slick interstate. Going from fifteen miles per hour to seventy-five or eighty in what seemed like seconds, the fastest traffic danced back and forth, a senseless red code of gas pedals and brakes tapping out their dangerous messages to all of us behind them. I headed into the right lane and looked for the first exit that would get me off this track to some sure accident ahead and into Gallup, even if I had to navigate the dark streets all the way across town.

When we reached the hotel, the South Asian couple behind the desk were closing out early for the night, but they had held our room even though I was sure that night and maybe the next any room could have gone for a premium. The night clerk would only be busy turning people away that evening since here, like every other motel and hotel in town, had no vacancies until the weather changed.

We had time to find some dinner, and though it was cold and a little slick, the streets of the town had not yet frozen like the higher elevations and the heavy wet snow was still hours away. The longtime connections to Route 66 were still evident in Gallup, New Mexico, and the town did not show the hard times as much as Tucumcari did. I remembered reading about the Eagle Cafe, which claimed to be the oldest restaurant still in operation on Route 66, but that night what we found open was Virgie’s Restaurant & Lounge. There were green chile enchiladas, tamales, and tacos, and the taquitos and chips were crisp and hot, with fresh salsa that warmed me from the inside out with each taste.

While we ate, a little girl came by our table and offered to sell Allison some jewelry. She bought a little something and the earlier anxieties melted away with the sounds of conversations in Spanish and English, and music and laughter in the background. There were many miles ahead of us—more changes ahead on such a long drive—
but for tonight, we had good food in front of us, we were out of harm’s way, and, most important of all, we were here together.

One of my most recent driving trips west was back to Denver in 2010. The same conference I had attended there in 1990 was back twenty years later (though the organization had changed its name to the Association of Writers & Writing Programs and had grown exponentially). When I attend this conference now, I am usually representing both Crab Orchard Review and the Crab Orchard Series in Poetry as a managing editor and series editor, respectively.

Jake Adam York was serving, in part, as a host to so many writers coming from around the country to this conference. He had taught at the University of Colorado Denver since 2000, and he founded the fine literary journal Copper Nickel there in 2002 with his students and colleagues. He was a person so many people knew could answer any question or help solve almost any problem and I’m sure his phone was ringing and e-mails were coming in on the hour as the conference in Denver that year got closer and closer.

In 2007, Jake was one of two writers (the other, Ciaran Berry) who was selected by the poet Cathy Song as a winner of the Crab Orchard Series in Poetry Open Competition, published by Southern Illinois University Press. This collection, A Murmuration of Starlings, was part of a project Jake had undertaken to elegize martyrs of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement. He continued this work in his next collection, Persons Unknown, and, two short years later, SIU Press accepted this collection as my 2009 Editor’s Selection. Being a small part of the artistic accomplishment and historical significance of these two collections is something I am proudest of in my nearly twenty-five years of editorial work. I am also very proud to say that SIU Press will publish in Spring 2014 the collection Abide that Jake completed before his death on December 16, 2012.

But preparing to travel to Denver, none of this was on my mind. I was another person who wanted recommendations from Jake and he was more than happy to give them. “You have to stop at Arthur Bryant’s. They have the best barbecue beef sandwich.” And so on the way to Denver, Allison and I made that stop. And it wasn’t a surprise at all to me that it was the best barbecue beef sandwich I have ever had.

One of the first poems Crab Orchard Review published of Jake’s appeared in our 2003 special issue “Taste the World: Writers on Food.” Jake had been named the official poet of the 2002 Southern
Foodways Alliance symposium on barbecue in 2002, and this poem captures the spirit of inquiry, reverence, and discovery that so often Jake Adam York shared with us all through his work:

**Pilgrimage**

Well off the map, on roads that branch like capillaries into the blanks, we follow the turns of rumor far beyond the interstate’s shoulders, the travel like prayer, so far gone from any place we know. And soon the light’s diffused so it seems the trees, the earth itself gives off what we thought taken in, and the joint drifts from the haze like any other church, smoked up and ready to serve. Within, we pull and pull the body to its melting, weave the rumor new. The taste already grows to fill the distance, overtakes the wind we’ll cite. And when the woods have faded, we settle in our light, our meat taking in the lesson, the smoke so deep in our skins when we sweat it breathes, we tire and forget in having found and carried it away just how hard it was, to know what you need and where to go to end the reach, how few maps there are, after all.
Jeffrey Alfier

Walking West on East 5th Street
Benson, Arizona

It is spring, and in a town that awaits
the luster of fairgrounds to come alive,

the doors of taverns open early, like strangers
with a promise. Flat-roofed houses yield

to groves of mesquite. Their limbs stretch
streetlight halos into frail shadows veining asphalt

that webs the neighborhood. The trundling
iron of the Union Pacific enters town at a late

hour. Its headlamp startles shacks to burnished
yellow as it floods for mere seconds the frame

of a drunken soldier, home on leave from a long
war. He shuffles through an unpaved alley

like an astronaut scuffing the dust of the moon.
A final blast from the locomotive seems to hew

the world into the past tense. It surmounts cheers
unreeling from a small crowd seated under

the ballfield lighting of a pickup game. A young
hopeful sprints homeward, rounds third, already out.
Coda for a Desert Constellation

I.

On the scree of Candelero Peak, he spreads a sky chart at his late-pitched camp, and merges, for the sake of stars, into the towering quiet.

Ravens climb through a blade of final light. As if halted by moonrise, numberless rail cars stitch a silenced vector through the desertscape.

Twilight brushes far-off cordillera in a fading caress of incandescence. The Braille of untaken switchbacks inhales the starlight without him.

II.

Farther north, at a Tonopah hotel window, a young boy swishes his hand through a galaxy of dust motes airborne in a beam of truckstop light.

Down the hall, a man touches a woman’s shoulder for the last time. She pours a bourbon, spares the ice. Her dry rage is a ship with a fire below decks.

Peering out the window, the boy watches the paper plate held by a homeless woman vibrate in her grip, as if tonight, wind was only interested in her hands.
Travelogue for a Nevada January

It has taken me restive hours to drag myself from bed at the Atomic Inn, my fingers too cold to practice the cornet I’m due to play at a gig tonight in Vegas, fired from the last one when my solo went flat. Losing the battle to chase last night’s booze from my skull, I light a Turkish cig I’d bummed from a somewhat lady hitchhiking outside a brothel, and follow white neon to Rebel Mart. No one here this crazy early but truckers and drifters. One trucker strains not to scream at an aged clerk who can’t find a pack of Camel 99s right in front of his dull face. Watching the clerk falter is like watching an ancient film clip skipping frames. Out the door, I wrap my fist around my coffee, bend into wind that funnels its bitter howl down Watson Street, freezing me through holes in shoes the last good woman warned me to chuck weeks ago when they’d lost all identity as footwear. By late afternoon, that Rebel Mart trucker watches Camel smoke un-billow into cottonwood limbs at a Utah truck stop. The clerk back in Beatty is finally off shift, his wife clocking in, and I’m long on Rt. 160 east as it rises and falls toward Vegas.
Beyond us all, the Panamint Mountains reach high and cold enough to keep snowfall thick. A young girl is on an outing with her weekend dad. With a new storm building, he’s uneasy about the road back down the valley. He starts the car, lets the warmth begin to surge about his feet as his daughter, still outside, laughs and grins. She leaves her angel in the snow.
At Evil Canyon

Where I’m going there is no water: where rain thins into streaks of hair,
beneath bangs, at the right cheek, looking at us, bowled face.

Like molars they sit there, tucked in the back of your mouth.

Four masks in a row, marked bare by posts and a sun-blanked board, fallen.

What do they sing to you?
How did this wall once tilt?

Who held their infant to push off, stomp the cracks of this face?

Hand-hand and hand-hand tell me a saliva sojourn,

all along the wall. Bow your head to light, heat reflect.

Here you can see shark head emerge from canyon waves;

scale them. And with the shadow of your fingers you can pluck
ants from the ground. If you’ve never seen
them, you’ll never see them

(faces nor hands). As a girl I searched
these walls but never found them, here

where rocks rise like gnarled fingers.

To know your hands is to dip them
into lake clouds, a rock deep cool.
Razed

It’s almost that time and I’m done—
with all ordinary mending of enclosure.
All I want: coral in the early morn, plaited.
Originally, we came here to nail
together fallen posts with staple, wire

Back before the wind spurred us haywire,
to the lone stump that veers into jawbone.
When our hands tightened with rust, and fingernails
chipped into pieces of shells. (Moons emerge)
When leaves mended all. That’s when I felt
broken—behind the shed, it drops
to a thick opening, where lambs squeeze out.

A baby hill, downtrodden like a forgotten corral
to the north. Signs in picture form: why are
boulders falling? Watch for limbs dropping
at the curves. Sharp ones, how at nightfall
wrists spur into corral. They need mending
to keep the line taut. Lift the nails

fallen in dust. Posts with their teeth of bent nails
are all that’s left when a family leaves their corrals.
All other wood is singed into the sky. Mending
memories: I came with my father and pulled wire
from the ground. This is where the hogan once stood. Fallen
nails. Where the opening of the corral was. Dropped
from my father’s mouth, story. His tongue dropped like coral chunks into a coffee can. Pebbles and nails shaken with a wire handle: the sound (fallen) that makes coyotes or bears go round: a choral tumble of rocks. To let them know: Here, I once was. Here, I’ve searched for rust and metal, and mended whole circles. Traced with a metal detector to mend the fallen: diamond ring, nail, five cents, nail, nail; all dropped by someone at some time. The ring is no more than wire or an axed tree: dried, stacked and nailed. Listen for the crunch of coral beneath your boots, or bent staples. Fall into the mend. Do more than straighten them. Nail that hammer in your hands. Drop the trinkets of corral, and your ring finger, wire them until they feel like fall.
Oliver Bendorf

Thanks for Everything, Leland Cooper

Waunakee, Wisconsin

In the morning after an all-night argument they drive north around the lake to the state park with burial mounds to get some fresh air.

She says, It’s so Midwest, all these signs, and he shrugs and says he guesses so, in a way that broadcasts his bad mood even though

he looks around them at the signs—Pet Swim Area No Biking Cross Country Skis This Way No Smoking Beach Parking Slow Down Welcome—

and has to admit there is no paucity of interpretation. They hike in further and come upon the Panther Mound. In the sunlight,

through leaves the color of dying rage, milkweed down spreading itself across the muddy trail, dirt stretches out beyond them hundreds

of feet in either direction, containing ash maybe, maybe clay, definitely old bones of ones who were there first. In this way

they forgive each other. On the way out he reads one final sign: the Panther mound was excavated in 1929 by Leland Cooper

and his YMCA camp boys, who left no records and no artifacts. Forgiven because of the historical precedent for the destruction
of something built in a ritual way. Forgiven
because the way what feels like just a dumb
mound of dirt at the time will someday be

all you have left, and you’ll want someday
to reconstruct it, and you’d better hope
you (or Leland Cooper) remembers how.
Fear in a Handful of Dust

East of Stevensville, Montana, up Two Mile Creek

Was it here, beside this seasonal rush, a hundred summers back, that one drunk rancher commanded his neighbor to turn his gaze and all this water—to which the sober neighbor had on paper older rights—into his parched barley, choked by drought and cheat? Local legends leave it vague—a shovel or a shotgun: one man never hanged, the other drowned in this ditch, his eyes rinsed with silt until their fearful glimmers faded.

Wish the past more difficult to see. Blurred by waves of heat mirage, this season’s crop stands crisp with wither. Clouds appear, funereal and black as falling smoke, but rains fail to reach the pasture. The well’s gone bitter. I mill a sun-dried clump of soil between my hands. My open palm predicts my future.
Annie Binder

To Know by Name Every Flower of the Field

Don’t worry about tender beginnings, rounded cotyledons, ambitious stretch of first sprouts. Ignore books of seedling sketches, leaf congruence, hairs and notches. You will never know a plant until it blooms. Overlook dead stalks from last year—spined heads break, dried seeds rattle in silken shells. Uncut stems only bend, pack into tight thatch roof over soil; litter builds. From tiny, too-green shoots and reedy, decayed duff, all you will say is aster, aster, aster. To learn them right, begin with flowers and family names. Rely on color, on probability of growth on north-facing slope or in pooling marsh. Call to them as you pass as if talking to the same friends every day. Soon you will recognize each alone. You will forget that they have stopped blooming. You will learn the pattern of veins, the slow opening of buds, the way broad leaves bear up under weather.
Mark Jay Brewin, Jr.

On Convergence

Slipping through the Cairo Levee underpass and having a look at the cordoned-off storefronts, the charred shotgun shacks and yellow tick marks on the concrete floodwalls dogging the near-ghost town, what else is there but to feel the weight and melancholy of whole blocks toppling in on themselves, lead paint notices, tarnished cemetery urns, busted latches, the rising promise and weltering confluence of the Mississippi and Ohio waters? Perhaps its history steps in here: post-Civil War prosperity ferried on great steamships, the opulent Magnolia Manor on mansion row now a footnote of the exiled old money, a fall from grace, a barrage of brick and fists until the mobs chanted Die, Boy! and lynched two men—one black, one white.

Here, among the barred Port building and vacant lots, where chimney stacks overlie the raided and torched homes, businesses, where even the haunted, watery-blue blossoms of chicory seem to lament how once the townsfolk pined for the coupling of the noose and throat, can hatred still brand an entire city? Turn of the last century, when one man pummeled another,

this is how the soft trigger rattled off surefooted in the streets. Slump and sway of a body. Hole in the flesh, width the size of a cornstalk early summer. Ugly yesterdays.... Forget the land and its shadows. The only years noted in the Historic Downtown—1927, 1937—are stenciled on the cement barriers, when the rivers welled up and breached. Beside the broken sand bags and bald tires.
on the banks, Vienna sausage tins and rotted fishing baits whirling
in the eddies, at the point of Fort Defiance Park, two darting flows
wrestle their currents for miles, this sloshing terminus of silt

and dark water, two unlike courses, the crossroads turbid
and dreamy as a sundress slabbed and torn in a rapid. Nothing
sturdy left other than the breakwater—not a Godsend or blessing,

but an omen of the deluge’s menacing pledge that no matter
the bracing and safeguards, the floodgates and bridge, the rowboats
tethered to the docks, knuckled and battered with each passing year,

that one day the Mississippi and Ohio will rise and swallow it whole:
the weathered Customs House Museum, Fat Boy’s Bar and Grill,
Cut-Mart convenience store, every weed and broken window

bound to vanish. This place, almost ordained to be snuffed out,
of raging flux. Illinois’s lowest point. Forever the crashing junction.
Those shifty waters coming together downstream, elsewhere.
Lauren Camp

Bisti Badlands

At the trigger point of autumn, we staggered into pre-history: tectonic process, friction and distortion, the emptiness of heat and pressure.

Everything here oared by dinosaurs, wind-stretch and water. Full daylight, no darkness.

As we walked, glint became sun flare. Ancient trails took us twice as far as the next cave. What had been submerged now narrowed to stumps and slump, bald and riddled. Everything touched came loose: the arches, ridges and fissures. Every fine pebble, or petrified height of the earth.

Isolated in equal parts territory and bewilderment, we plunged between towers of silt and shale in our sneakers and daypacks to see what carbon remained, what undersea welts, to see cypress hardened to stone.

After that I dreamt only white and coal between the call of coyote or raven. I dreamt red-weathered earth above sand hole. Stream and layer, frost and thaw, dry light and acid. I dreamt basin and badland, spires scattered on gullies of incised sand. Even upon it,
on the timescale of ocean and geology,
wear human on my face, my face hot on my body,
I noticed a hum in the earth

and great thickness of color as particles of desert
cracked and dissolved, the land bare of river or breath.
We had a three-hour drive from Bismarck to Tioga, North Dakota, once we landed. It was a strange drive and place: Bismarck. Businesses are desperate for employees. McDonald’s, the sign read above the street, pays a $200 hiring bonus. The shadow of its arches painted the street in the shape of the letter B.

High school dropouts make $90k a year in the oil fields.

The pilot of our plane welcomed the hunters he knew to be sitting among us: pheasant season was opening.

We rented a car. Katie’s mother, Sharron, sat in the backseat. Sharron’s stories are of a late-middle-aged divorced woman in Seattle. She’s not opposed to plural marriage. Believes in mystics and crisis and 9/11 conspiracies that my wife, Katie, no longer listens to, or cries about. I enjoy hearing them. I encourage my mother-in-law.

Sharron intellectualizes her fear of solitude in romantic ways. She’s unaware of her own sadness.

An hour into the drive a pheasant leapt off the highway it ran across to find death against the windshield on the car in front of me. Feathers exploded off the body and were still airborne as we drove through them. The dead bird pin-wheeled in a graceful arc as Katie, my wife, sitting shotgun and grabbing the dashboard in terror, said in three separate statements, “Oh. My. God.”

Truck dealerships lined the highway out of town. The windshields caught the sun in bulbs of light, showing us the way into a glacial emptiness in this part of the country.

Tioga is an oil boom town. We were there for a wedding thirty miles south of the Canadian border.

We’d be staying with Katie’s uncle Mark out on his farm. His oldest daughter was getting married. She’s twenty-one with a three-month-old.

Mark said of his daughter, “She’ll be set for life.” His comment puts money ahead of all else. There is nothing else outside of money.

“Why’s that?” I asked.

Mark shrugged then smiled and mentioned the oil and cattle that
the young man has. “He has a $50,000 truck,” Mark added, which wasn’t special even among teenage boys in that town. It’s what you’d tell people not from there.

“Well,” I said.

“He has a log cabin, too.”

No one read it as a sign that the bridesmaids were all young new mothers themselves and had given birth within the same six weeks of one another. Impregnated by older men and in some cases, much older men—all had dropped out of college, or never went, and talked about correspondence courses when the subject came up. I’ve read about girls making “pregnancy pacts” with one another. I’d never witnessed the results of one before.

The roads in Tioga are destroyed because of the semi-trucks that run around the clock. Million dollar oil processing stations are under every stage of construction everywhere. Man Camps spring up along the highway because there’s nowhere to live but once empty fields and trailers.

It took three minutes to get through Tioga. Enormous dorm-style apartment buildings were at different phases of construction down both sides of the road. Discarded farming equipment were statues of rust on the highway. There’s no need for people around here to do that kind of thing anymore.

There was a string of headlights as we waited to cross over onto the dirt road to Mark’s farm; headlights all the way north as a string of rumbling pearls full of oil.

Mark has five daughters, the oldest at twenty-one and the youngest at nine. Mark’s technically divorced from the same woman twice and currently in a state of limbo. He lives with his ex, Heather. The conversation that weekend amongst the family was whether or not Heather was taking her bipolar medication anymore.

Heather had a washed-out compromised beauty. She isn’t fat or skinny, but rugged like the landscape: barren in places, around the eyes; cold, as is evident in her smile. She was born in Tioga. No one got the feeling she wanted the family there, ever.

We came into the farmhouse and put our bags in the kitchen. Katie was already visiting with other out-of-town family from points south and west amidst the barking dogs on the inside of the house in competition with those on the outside.
On the kitchen counter was a photo album of Heather’s wedding to Mark twenty-something years ago. It wasn’t a wedding album but the pictures, in chronological order, were of her wedding day. The album was cheap and falling apart in the cellophane pages. Nothing special. The last picture was Heather in younger, healthier days standing at the bedroom door of a trailer in white lingerie posing as a model would. There was the promise of love in her smile.

I held up the album to my wife, across the room and talking with Sharron and her grandparents in from Florida. “Honey,” I interrupted and walked to them with this evidence in-hand, “is this your Aunt Heather?”

Mark and Heather had four horses. We hoped to ride two of them. They had dogs, untold cats, and three kittens I found in an abandoned garage next to the house that were new to everyone. There was a beehive in the garage and the kittens were swollen from stings. Katie asked me to build them a shanty in the equally neglected horse barn.

We got to the farm an hour before the rehearsal dinner and thanked Chloe, the middle daughter, for giving up her room to us. She’s fifteen years old. Not everyone who came for the wedding was invited to stay at the house—our invitation was something to appreciate.

Upon seeing the accommodations, I got disillusioned of the idea that a favor was bestowed us. Walking deeper into the house, I’d entered someone’s disorganized and unmedicated mind. Each room had a sick personality of madness unto itself: of things stacked up, couches that if you sat in them would make you stare at a wall cracked down the center. The mold in the only shower was a kaleidoscope of greens floor to ceiling. The walls were alive in that house.

Chloe’s bedroom was an art gallery of her work taped to the walls with zebra-print tape—horses that looked mildly defective, proportionally wrong, and mostly cross-eyed fairies with enormous pert breasts. Also dozens of her self-portraits: as a mermaid or with wings, falling from heaven in thong underwear.

I set our bags down as Chloe came in and moved a pile of stuff in one corner to another and kicked a full trash can. That was the extent of cleaning and preparation made for us.

Chloe said, “There’s a bathroom at the end of the hall, but I wouldn’t use it use it.”

“Why not?” I asked.

She didn’t know what she should say.

“Thanks again,” I said, “for all of this.”
Chloe had three vanities and a lava lamp next to black curtains and vampire romance novels by the bed. At least she’s reading, I thought.

Chloe smiled, knowing there was more to be done and understanding that she wasn’t going to do it. She left.

I said to Katie, both of us unpacking, “Do you want the good or bad news?”

“Bad.”

“There are, as a matter of fact, cockroaches in this bed.”

“And there’s good news out of that?”

“All the ones I found are dead.”

I slept with my clothes on and in the middle of the night understood that Chloe didn’t live there anymore. She had a boyfriend ten years her senior. He was in the oil boom and she lived with him (though she was only fifteen), which explained the lack of ceremony and attitude that she had about walking back into this memory of herself and this life that she was asked to pretend was still her own when family came around.

Mark must’ve asked her to lie about where she lived.

The Tioga Country Club, where the rehearsal dinner was held, was, in its former life, someone’s house. It looked like someone’s house. The indication it was no longer a residence was the size of the gravel parking lot and the sign on the road indicating (against all better judgment) that it was now a country club.

Inside, there was a bar with four abused stools next to a set of double doors and it’s understood where the walls and the bedrooms used to be. The kitchen stayed, which is on the opposite side of the hollowed out room and on its counter top, dinner in aluminum trays.

The locals celebrate their clichés and are loyal to them with a certain amount of blind pride and anger: local patriotism, even rage. The room divided itself into those from Tioga and those so clearly not. There was a subculture, too, of those who lived in Tioga prior to the boom and those who came for it.

The bride was down with the flu. She was the last to arrive and first to leave. She stayed long enough to whisper appreciation to those who came.

Sharron yelled back during the bride’s speech, “Can you speak up? We can’t hear you!”

“I can’t,” the bride confessed, looked twice at Sharron, and then went on, “Anyway...”
Embarrassed, Katie closed her eyes and held her breath. Sharron, sensing embarrassment, but failing to realize it was her fault, went on talking to herself, explaining her grievance during the ongoing speech, “It’s not my fault I can’t hear. Can you hear her? Can you tell me what she’s saying?”

**The bridal party remained without the bride or the groom.** The wedding color was every shade of blue, which was sad and cheap-looking. The rehearsal dinner theme was whore—which my wife disagreed with more to the letter rather than the spirit of my conclusion. The bridesmaids wore such low-cut jeans that if any stretched to yawn there’d be pubic hair—if they had any to show. I could tell if they had quarters or dimes in their pockets and whether the coins were heads or tails.

The bride and groom left without their baby, who was sleeping in its car seat on the dessert table next to cheap bouquets of blue plastic flowers.

**The bride never held her baby the entire time we were there.** The next morning on the day of the wedding, Heather, running out the door early with rude urgency, told me that I was in charge of the baby. “I’m sorry?” I said, because I didn’t think I’d heard her correctly from where I was on the toilet behind a locked door and just waking up myself. “You’re the most responsible one here,” she said. I stepped out into the kitchen. I was the only one in the room other than her. And she was leaving. “Where is the baby now?” This question registered on her face like it was a stupid question with an obvious answer. “Upstairs.” Heather said. “Sleeping. It’ll sleep for a while. You’ll hear it. But don’t forget it.” And she was off and gone. That she referred to her grandchild as “it” would come to bother me later only after the shock of it all wore off.

Katie reacted as most of the family from out of town did: shock, horror, disbelief, wonderment, and panic, in that order. As a group of five, we walked up to Heather and Mark’s attic bedroom and found, amidst the piles of stuff, a baby on a bed wide awake and looking around. The baby smiled and laughed seeing us. We tried to laugh and smile back. We asked one another where the food and diapers might be.
T. Duncan Anderson

The wedding itself was nothing special. The bride and groom kept forgetting to bring their new daughter into the pictures at the end of it.

The bride, down with the flu, looked pasty and miserable. I wondered if her baby would get sick.

The wedding reception took place at the Tioga Farm Center, where cattle used to be auctioned off. Now it’s where corporations like Halliburton train new employees on oil field safety and other things.

Balloons hung from the rafters like at prom. When the bride readied herself to throw the bouquet, Sharron strapped on her Velcro knee brace under her dress as the younger and louder girls took to the dance floor. When Sharron left the table, she made sure that the hem of her dress covered her brace.

The plates and silverware were plastic made to look like metal—people broke their forks trying to cut into the meat once dinner was served.

It seemed impolite to charge three dollars for a can of beer, but it was all they had and there was only one kind: Bud Light.

The cash bar did make sense later in the night when strange people started showing up and were not turned away—some so confident in their youth and in their place they arrived wearing tank tops and shorts with hats backwards and chewing-tobacco-smiles of entitlement.

At ten that night the bride was sitting on the edge of the stage—where the DJ played only country music—with her wedding dress like the tail of a rhinestone comet. She had a jacket around her shoulders advertising a meat plant in Minot. Katie and I shared a quiet and fleeting smile.

Her husband was dancing and wore a belt buckle as all the groomsmen did, not a cummerbund. Two of the groomsmen had three black eyes between them and told bull-riding stories in loud voices.

I overheard the bride say to her husband, “I want to go home now.” He replied without looking at her, “I have to dance to this song.”

There was the saddest bride I had ever seen. It was altogether the saddest wedding I’d ever been to.

Katie and I left at a quarter to midnight amidst the mob of people who weren’t at the wedding itself, all of whom congregated around the garage door of the building—where the cattle would’ve been ushered in and out at live auction. There must’ve been one hundred and
fifty or two hundred people I hadn’t seen before, and growing by the minute—the men, all men, from the boom with nothing more to do on a Saturday night in nowhere. Those who attended the actual wedding were thinning and the night surrendered itself to larger forces.

I wouldn’t know if the bride was disappointed or not, if her dreams fell short or went beyond expectations. She was sick on her wedding day, but that’s a different kind of disappointment from a different place.

**In the car by ourselves, Katie and I took turns telling our individual experiences about the shared tragedy that felt scandalous to us, with the majority of sentences beginning with some version of, “I just cannot believe…”**

**Mark and Heather live on the outside of Tioga. Their house sits atop a gentle hill with three neglected barns. It was midnight. We pulled onto their dirt road and the cones of light from the car absorbed into the night’s emptiness coming over a hill—except for two eyes staring back at us from the middle of the road.**

“Are those hooves?” I asked.

I hit the bright lights and slowed to a stop.

The image of the horse in the middle of the road was like this: the white of its hooves glowed, its coal-brown eyes and the steam of its breath, waiting for us, standing proudly in the middle of the road with its brown and glorious black body dovetailing seamlessly into the landscape beyond, and my wife in her beautiful dress and blond hair and those legs, our dreams of getting pregnant within her, walking in from the edge of the light with an outstretched hand toward a horse in the road and the cold air of night slapping through the window of our rented car.

The horse bowed its head to her fingertips, taking something from them, and ran within inches of my open window and the side of the car into the ditch beyond.

**The father of the bride came home an hour later in his tuxedo—not because of the horse’s escape, or the urgent messages we tried to get to him about the escape, but because he was done with the night. He had to work the next day.**

The horse’s escape took Katie back to her Iowa childhood. She was excited by the drama—something her uncle didn’t mirror—at the prospect of a loose animal at night and so close to the road.
Before Mark came home, she said that this was an emergency and that she’d done this before. She talked about how her father would have wanted us to call him had this been his horse. She felt important in rescuing something.

Mark shrugged and speculated openly about going to bed rather than getting the horse, which, by then, is what I’d expected of him.

That he would change clothes at all and go looking for the horse was for us. It was for Katie, really.

Katie changed into her PJ’s to stay in the house, though, and she grabbed two beers in one hand and sat on the couch Indian-style.

Mark said his wife was at a hotel party with the groomsmen. Other than knowing that, we didn’t talk about it. What’s to be said when your wife is partying with younger men?

I was in the kitchen waiting for Mark to change clothes, waiting to go find an escaped horse named “Grace.” His eleven-year-old daughter, who returned with Mark, said she felt guilty for not “partying harder” at her sister’s wedding. She meant longer because at one in the morning the night was still too young to her. Her younger sister, nine, was still “partying hard.” The eleven-year-old thought the “party” would go on until five in the morning and said, “People in North Dakota party hard. We always do.”

To explain why she wasn’t partying harder she said a man at the party was hitting on her—she said he always does when he gets too drunk.

“He’s like forty-something,” she said.

“Does your dad know?” I asked.

“It’s his friend,” she said of her father.

Under the kitchen light, she was inspecting her dress, twirling to stir the hem above her cowboy boots and trying not to cry in front of me.

I didn’t know what to say or where to begin. I smiled. She looked at me with forgiveness. I felt sick to my stomach and stepped outside to breathe.

I liked Mark and I wanted to keep liking him. When I’m around him, I do like him so long as I’m not thinking about his life. And then there’s this part of his life, the insane majority of it, where nothing makes any sense and I am as sad as I am scared for them all.

“This horse get out a lot?” I asked when Mark stepped out.

“All the time,” he said.
Will she stand in the schoolyard
to watch eagles jet
from Day to Bent Street and beyond
to the fabled desert—

young men in trucks so drunk
on space and dusty tracks,
the deer they’ll haul back
and winch on cables

to hang, drained of blood—
snapped ribs gory—
will have chosen and wanted to be shot?
That, she will understand.

After school she’ll trail home
to the yard where
every fencepost will, if the chinook is on,
wheel and saw—

those staked whirligig people
her dad will carve and paint
all winter in the basement: canoeist
paddling his stationary boat,

lumberjack at a board that won’t cut,
Dutchman and his wife whose lips won’t
meet as they twirl and cyclone,
depending on the wind.
She’ll do homework, graph cosines,  
get As. She’ll find how thin  
she can become and live.  
Dad will say most things get thin.

Dry air will strip his dahlias every year,  
even the prize-winning  
hybrids he’ll design for minus twenty-four  
and the kind of breath

desert gives out by fair time. Will she think much  
about the heat or cold  
or the yellow bean fields or sugar beets,  
though sometimes

the barley will toss like a sea of manes?  
Will she think  
how she might shop at the IGA,  
three kids in the cart

grabbing at the gum and cookies  
food stamps won’t buy?  
Will she look up and notice those  
Big Horn Mountains?

Surely, there’ll be the strikes  
of boys’ fists, their guns  
and trucks, their music going full blast.  
Mom will say it won’t last,

that phase: they’ll settle like Dad.  
It takes years sometimes.  
The neighbors’ doe will cure,  
eyes hard and dry.
God knows why the boy forces his body each morning through the space where two chain-link fences meet outside my window. I say God because I still see him make some crude sign of the cross before his trespass there. One arm raised above his head then down again. What made me cross that hallowed space after June’s straight-line winds blew out my bedroom windows, what made me stay despite the storm, kept me dry under the blossomed halves of maples stripped for power lines, was the same lucky stupor that thought those trees a symbol of the brain. Branched and leafy one side, barren on the other. The heavy wires taut in space. I knew that men would come back late with ladders while I slept, climb where the wind had snapped a line of telephone poles in half, repair the masts hanging by their wires, not replace—knew I was wrong about the boy when I saw a cobweb laced between the fenceposts, the strands still wet with rain. I broke it with my arm, held straight, passed through. Knew what he knew. We would make that sign again.
Heidi Czerwiec

Correlation Is Not Causation

When you move through a long, dark space, you learn to navigate by what surrounds you—

On the Colorado at twilight canyon walls loom benignly, selenite like winking Pleiades.

Hiking without a flashlight you hear an owl hollow hollow hollow; a jackrabbit screams and the redrock exsanguinates. When you leave Utah for the last time, it’s night and you sense rather than see the Rockies line your left for a long stretch, their hulk shadowing even what snow they might reflect. The ice beneath your car obscures the lines you cross. And by the time you make the Plains your guides have disappeared: the occasional country music and high-school hockey fade, and static spins in circles round your radio dial. With nothing to punctuate it, no homesteads or stars, the darkness spreads high and wide. Then deep—flowing over the river to your new home, you miss the river but sense it there beneath its crust of ice; its slurred song echoes the one in your own dark throat.
December brought you to this place, this air
full of frozen embers of itself.
What you’re looking for is cardinal.
There will always be, the poet claimed,
such things that you regret knowing.
For you read I. Any way you go will
be far, each breath a scrape like splintered bone
against the windpipe. Listen: the crows alone
brave winter’s hands. All other birds seek shelter.

Any way you go from here is far.
\textit{Thou hast doves’ eyes within thy locks.}
I kept listening: the crows black blots
perched on winter’s gloves. There will always be
things you know. (For you read you.) The swoop
and fall of cries that fill the Carolina
foothills, trees full of birds like red clots
(What you’re looking for is cardinal).
A___ followed me to Utah but no farther.

Listen: the crows (\textit{Corvus brachyrhynchos})
interrogated winter’s too-many hands.
There will always be such things that you
regret knowing. In this place, only space is grand.
December left you cold—you went forth,
fleeing like you’ve fled all places North.
I took shelter in birdwatching, tried not to think of you
(for you read A___), or of how any way
I tried to go from here would be far.
Thou hast doves’ eyes within thy locks.
You keep listening for familiar birds
among winter’s singularity of crows.
There will always be such things that you regret.
What I’m looking for is cardinal
direction, a song, a sin that won’t
omit me, absolution from being unloved.
A___’s love did not extend to places North—
it followed me to Utah, then no farther.
Late January: Wyoming Storm

Where are the animals as the wind blows
the snow horizontally?
Can the hawk maintain its perch in the storm?
And did the trio of white-tailed deer
huddled off Lower Piney Creek survive?
Soon the wind will strip seed pods
from the spindly maple; the snow
will be lifted from the ground.
Dormant roots torn from the red soil.

This is the land of Genesis.
A sea formed, then vanished, a basin
filled with floors of sedimentary rock.

   Let the waters below the sky be gathered
   Let the dry land appear.

Sediment to rock, trilobites
in the sandstone and shale.
Minerals float to the surface, limestone
to marble. Pink-tinged granite,
there for the gathering.
You can track this landscape the way
a phrenologist traces protuberances of a skull.
Topography that expands, then
compresses to its vanishing point.
Carol V. Davis

The wind so fierce this morning, the world is being stripped back to nothingness. First the roof will pull away. Wrenching the house from its foundation takes more effort, but even the stucco will give way, at last returned to the place of its birth by a creek bed.
I’m a mechanical bull with trailer-hitch balls:
no sleep or thrall can hang on me for long.

I’m a dollhouse with bees in the attic buzzing like static.
I crocus out of my own onionskin and I don’t even cry.

I am lightning so bright I can see the root systems of trees.
I am the rabbit’s heartbeat, like a snare, drum roll.

A pair of biplane wings attached itself to me,
grabbing the meat between my shoulder blades,

but I still walked, from Kansas City to Salina,
and stoplights exploded into red lollipop slobber.

I only paused once, to give a car a jump:
one cable in each fist, that’s all it took.

My electromagnetism made your bed and breakfast
fill up with ghosts. At least they don’t eat much.

I tricked the sun up two hours early by goosing the roosters.
I masturbated with one hand, shot an intruder with the other.

All I ever wanted was to be worn out.
All I ever wanted was to give everything.
Andy Eaton

Oklahoma

Above the organ hangs this winter scene:
the town is full of duffel coats,
the gloss of post-war cars
and the street is dressed with egg-blue light.

Today is the closest she will get to snow
since she left Oklahoma. Why does she
hang it on her wall if she hates it?
(The sun above Coronado Bay
casts the Navy ships at port in glare as white
as winter.) She stares from her couch
in between waves of what she can remember—
almost. And I sit on a black leather seat,
step on some brown pedals sticking out
like hard roots on a stump. Now
she wants me to see the bright red car
in the back near the farmhouse,
the one which is not there, the one
she says is parked beside the girl
who has turned her face into a sailor’s breast
the way a small bird hides in her own shoulder,
Andy Eaton

the one between the snow-topped roof
and the dark-brown frame, but I sit down and do not see.

The afternoon moves shapes across the wall.
An engine mumbles down a tree-framed road

where a splash from a trapped puddle
scatters then stills,

where two deep tracks lead from a story
off the edge of what we say,

and the last bite of sun eats
the scene clean away with its glint.
Matthew Gavin Frank

Hard Times for the Astronauts

Idaho, it appears there’s some atomic seepage again, and the leaf that thinks it’s a moth. We all want to grow toward the light, even those blackest of rocks,

the ones the astronauts practice on, as they most closely resemble those of the moon, here on earth. I can see them, their tongues out like border collies.

They give each other names like Cricket Slick, Metal Grasshopper, Otter Massacre, Shoshone. They dig their own opals from an illusory flood. They think they are in Tycho crater, swear they can still see the last stoplight on I-90. They think they can see their fathers, once again flipping hamburgers with long spatulas,

and, if there was a lake here, they’d name it Inferior Majora, and if there was an ocean here, they’d name it Mons Pubis, and if the sun was too bright, they’d close their eyes, and if they weren’t hyperventilating in their helmets, they wouldn’t know what was becoming of us, and if they were sailors, they would love
the squid with all of their hearts, and if
their lungs could take it, they’d never stop
inhaling, and if they didn’t speak only
English, they would recognize their Hebrew
last names. They don’t know yet how
to collapse. They try jumping.
Jenny George

Sonnet for Lost Teeth

The combines were tearing off the field’s clothes.
It was August, haying season. My tooth
was loose, a snag in the clam of my mouth.
I worked it like a pearl. I’d been out of school
for sixty days. In the sweat of the barn
I watched him shoot the calf in the head.
He wiped the hide gently, like cleaning his glasses.
Overnight, I grew a beard so I wouldn’t
have to get married. I let my feet go black
from burned grasses. It never gets easier
he said, kicking straw over the blood patch.
She went down so quiet it was almost
sad. Later, when my tooth fell out, I buried it
under my pillow and it grew into money.
Vaudeville

The pigs hang in rows like pink overcoats. Their slaughter is fresh, a rosy blush—as if chorus girls have only just stepped out of them, leaving the empty garments swaying on their hooks.
Katherine Gordon

The Turquoise Museum on the Turquoise Trail, New Mexico

There’s no turquoise left to mine here. One can buy rings, though, in every blue God made: milk, sky, iris, robin’s egg, lake. Here, upwind from Albuquerque, a half-marked, three-goat town: cow skulls cure on the roof and dummies dressed as miners lean on their rusted picks. In the gift shop (there is always a gift shop) skeins of barbed wire gnaw at their frames. By the bin of tumbled rocks, fossils in bunches swing on displays. Quick, buy up the past before it’s gone. The ring you pick begins to fade before you reach the car. The sky drains of its blue.
Leif kneels down on the black seat of his old Arctic Cat, pulls on the choke, and yanks the rope. The sled’s engine revs. He lets it grow louder as the gas flows through the cold veins of the machine. He circles around the bar’s gravel parking lot and points the machine toward Lake Mille Lacs—out where he’s been told his sixteen-year-old daughter might be, miles from shore, ice beneath her, storm clouds pushing down from above.

High on a wooden pole, a floodlight gives off a greenish burn. He can see a girl, not his daughter, waiting for him near the shore. He slows down and lets the machine idle.

“I’ll show you where she’s at,” the girl says.

The girl came into his place just as he was starting to scrub down the grill—her head covered by the hood of a faded blue sweatshirt, her voice shaky and fast as she leaned over the counter telling him that Caroline was out there in a fish house messed up from a bad batch of meth. He told her to meet him out back. He didn’t like the way she looked at the tip jar silently counting the dollar bills inside.

He didn’t trust this girl. She was part of a pack that sniffed out Caroline six months ago when he brought his daughter back from California. They could smell Caroline’s recklessness, her rancor, the stench that comes from being born to shitty parents—a mother moving from one man to the next, a father who hadn’t seen his daughter in nine years, now in charge of her, trying to raise her in an apartment above a bar.

The girl shivers, pulls her sleeves down over her hands.

“You aren’t dressed to go out there.” Leif cuts the engine and looks at the black military boots on the girl’s feet, the blue sweatshirt zipped up to her chin. “A cold front is moving in.”

It is the end to the thaw—a thaw that had hovered over the North for the past week, opening up rivers and creeks, creating currents that licked at the underbelly of the frozen lake. No one had seen such a heavy thaw, not in the middle of January. A truck had gone through on
the south side of the lake and an ATV just off the point. Twenty-three miles of ice roads were shut down.

“Borrow me a jacket,” the girl says. Her face looks as if a child drew it—blue eyes lined with black, and when she blinks he notices that her eyelashes aren’t painted—the lashes are nearly transparent, the color of fishing line.

“You come from out there?”

“That’s where I said I was.”

Leif scans the parking lot. There are no cars or trucks, no snowmobiles or ATVs—nothing parked under the shadows of the pine trees. The bar had emptied out just before midnight, just before she came in.

“How’d you get here?” Leif says.

The girl digs in her pocket and pulls out a lighter and a pack of cigarettes. She cups her hand to protect the flame from the wind.

“Someone dropped me off.”

The red ember glows and then fades.

“Scotty out there?”

He’d seen this girl with his daughter before, leaning against Scotty Sparks’ car in a gas station parking lot the last time Caroline went missing, the last time he drove around looking for his daughter at three in the morning when she hadn’t come home.

Scotty Sparks was no good. He was at least twenty-one and still hanging around high school kids. He lived in a trailer outside of Glen Township. Leif had heard some of his customers say that it was Scotty and his brother who were breaking into the cabins around the lake, stealing TVs and stereos, trashing the places.

When he learned that Caroline was hanging out with Scotty, he told her to stay away from him, but he could tell by the way she looked at him that she wasn’t going to listen.

“Don’t you give a shit that Calli’s out there?” the girl says.

Leif looks at the girl’s hollowed-out cheeks, her tired eyes. He wants to think his daughter is different than this girl, but he knows someone has looked at his daughter the same way he looks at this girl—this girl, used up, and not fully grown. In a few more years she’ll come into his bar with some guy and order a shot and a beer and listen to the cribbage game at the end of the bar. *Fifteen two, fifteen four and there is no more.*

Leif walks down to the edge of the lake. The ice has pulled away, water is flowing underneath. He doesn’t believe his daughter would go out there.
“Caroline’s afraid of the ice,” he says to the girl. “Fell through a spearing hole when she was five.”

The red of her snow suit, the white stripes on the arm—if it hadn’t been for the bright color, he would’ve lost her in the blackness of the water. He reached down through the broken pieces of ice, into the cold water, and caught Caroline by the hood of her snow suit, but even though he pulled her up, even though Caroline was gasping for air, shaking from the cold and fear, he remembers holding her up by the shoulders, pushing her up against the gray sky and yelling, Didn’t I tell you? Didn’t I tell you not to run so far ahead?

“Calli’s not afraid of anything.” The girl sits down on the snowmobile and then laughs as if to say, You’d piss yourself knowing some of the things she’s done.

Leif looks at the girl and knows she’s right. He doesn’t know his daughter, not like he should. He never fought for custody when her mother left ten years ago. He never chased after them when they left for California. He came home from the Gulf War with desert sand scratching against his brain. He couldn’t love them the right way, not then, so he let them go, sending checks to San Diego, Santa Cruz, Milpitas, Half Moon Bay.

The wind rises up and rushes against them.

“You don’t need to go with,” he says. “The ice ain’t safe.”

“The ice is thick enough and you won’t find the place without me.”

Hundreds of houses were still out on the lake. The sudden thaw had taken most of the fishermen by surprise. Leif wonders if all the houses left out there won’t just sink to the bottom if the warm spell keeps up—an entire fishing village beneath the surface.

He walks past the girl.

“Where you going?” the girl says.

“I’m getting you a coat.”

The half-melted snow crunches under his feet.

Inside, he grabs an old parka and a mismatched pair of gloves. He tries to remember what his own daughter was wearing. The only thing he knew was that she had on his old military-issue jacket. He told her he’d buy her a new jacket, but she asked if she could have that one.

He pointed to the last name written in black above the right pocket.

Your name is on it, he said.

The jacket reached just above her skinny knees and the sleeves, even rolled up, covered her hands. His daughter laughed when she first
reached into one of the pockets and then another and another, finding sand still there, tiny grains of it that she rolled between her finger and her thumb.

Outside, the girl is still waiting by the shore of the lake. He throws her the old jacket and gloves. He starts up the snowmobile again. A blue cloud of gas and oil covers them.

“Which way?”

“Left of Hawk Bill Point,” she says.

The machine jerks forward. She grabs hold of his waist. In one moment the tread is on the snow, then on the exposed rocks near the shore, then breaking through the thin shore ice, water spraying up behind him.

When he reaches the thicker ice, he feels the machine settle and grip the solidness beneath it, but he keeps the throttle down. There are places where the snow has turned wet and gray. Slush rises up and pulls at the machine. He pushes against it with his boots, urging the machine on until the track grabs hold.

The girl doesn’t say anything. She holds on to him.

Snow begins to fall. It is a hard snow. The flakes are small and compact. They bite against the skin. The girl presses her face into his shoulders. Leif wishes it was his daughter riding behind him, holding on to him.

Caroline was sent to live with him after her stepfather kicked her out of their house.

“You have to take her,” his ex-wife called. “I have a new baby, a new husband, a new home. I can’t lose everything again. I can’t do it alone again.”

Leif didn’t recognize his daughter at the airport, but she recognized him. “Daddy,” she said. “Over here.”

He had walked right past her and when he turned around, there she was—this too-skinny woman in faded blue jeans and dirty, dreadlocked hair. It was only her eyes that were the same—hazel eyes that looked more gold than brown or green, eyes that looked older than they should.

They took I-35 over the Mississippi.

“You drive?” he asked.

“No,” she said.

“I’ll teach you.”

He told her he’d help her buy a used car. They’d paint it any color she wanted. He had a buddy who worked in a repair shop.
“Periwinkle blue?” she said.
“You could paint it fluorescent pink, but you got to stay clean,” he said. “And give up the smokes.”

Her mother had told him that Caroline had been caught using drugs—pot and some prescription pills.

Caroline pointed to the full ashtray in his truck.
“And you?”
“I’ll try again,” he said. “Get myself the patch or something.”
“Deal,” she said.

And things were good.
He found her one day trying to untangle the ragged volleyball net that hung between two trees behind the bar.
“I used to play,” she said. “I was thinking of trying out for the high school team.”

He helped her unwrap the net and tighten up the strings. He found the volleyball out in the shed and pumped air into it.
“Let’s see what you got,” he said.

She put her hands together like she was about to say a prayer and bumped the white ball up against the blue sky. It hung there, like the moon and it came down on his side and he set it back to her.

They played for a while. Back and forth.
“You’re good,” Caroline said to him.

He told her how he and some buddies used to string a net between two Humvees out in the desert, how they used to play when the sand wasn’t whipping around.

“Then one day the ball got run over or lost, I don’t remember what exactly happened to it, but it was gone and we had to make a new one so we used some duct tape and…,” he paused. He couldn’t say the word condom, not in front of his daughter. He looked through the net at her.

My daughter, my daughter, my daughter.

He changed the story for her, told her it was a balloon they wrapped duct tape around and around. How it was lopsided, but lasted for three months, until someone sent them a new one.

He fixed up the volleyball court the next day; hauled up sand from down on the beach and spray-painted new white lines.

Leif’s machine jars against a piece of ice that has cracked and shifted upward. It throws him and the girl forward. He slows the machine down, keeping his eyes open for soft spots in the ice, where the color has changed.
“Past here,” the girls says as she looks over his shoulder.

He steers toward past here—farther and farther toward the middle of the lake. Snow blows across the exposed ice, slithering like lines of white snakes.

“It’s near the point,” the girl says.

Soon his headlight glints off a tin roof. He feels the girl nod against his back. He kills the engine. There is only the sound of the wind.

There’s an ATV parked outside the fish house and light streaming out beneath the door.

“Who else is in there?”

“I don’t know,” the girls says. “I don’t know who’s left.”

He starts walking. There is a thin layer of slush around the house. When he gets close he can hear movement inside, but he can’t see through the small window. It is covered with black plastic.

A boy steps out before he can even reach for the door and Leif knows it is Scotty Sparks. He is tall and lanky, dressed in a dirty T-shirt, his hair covered by a black knit cap.

“Caroline in there?” Leif says.

“Caroline who?” the boy says like it is part of a joke.

“Hear she was out here.”

“No one out here. Just me. Been midnight fishing,” Scotty says and backs up into the house. His eyes are too wide, too open. “They’re hungry at night.”

Leif wants to swing the boy to the ground, but as he moves toward him, Scotty swings a hunting rifle like a bat across Leif’s face, knocking the metal barrel against his jaw, the pain knocking Leif to the ground.

When Leif tries to stand up, Scotty is over him, the gun pointing at his heart. Leif can see the brass casing of the bullet.

“Where’s Caroline?” Leif says.

“What is the combination to your safe? What’s the numbers?”

Leif can taste blood in his mouth and spits it out on the snow.

He looks for the girl, but she is gone.

“There’s not more than a hundred bucks in there,” Leif says, but it is more than that. He had that weekend’s pull-tab money in the safe. Over two thousand dollars. The fishermen couldn’t go out on the ice so they hung out in his bar pulling tabs and drinking beer.

“What is the combination?” The boy kicks him in the side.

Leif hears his snowmobile sputtering to life.

“Why couldn’t you leave her alone? She was doing good. She was staying clean.”

Karlyn Coleman
“Calli?” Scotty looks at Leif and laughs. “She’s one messed up little girl.”
Leif makes a grab at the barrel of the gun.
Scotty fires it off and the bullet rips through the flesh between Leif’s finger and thumb.
“Give me the numbers or I’ll fire this off in your face.”
Leif buries his hand in the snow, trying to stop the pain with the cold. “Take everything, but just leave Caroline alone. Leave her.”
“What if she doesn’t want to be left?”
The snowmobile engine grows louder. He sees the girl coming toward him. He raises his hand up in the air so she can see the blood.
“Why did you shoot?” she yells above the engine. “You said you wouldn’t shoot him.”
“What is the combination?” Scotty screams at him.
“19,” Leif says wondering if he should hold onto the numbers, if that would keep him alive.
Scotty adjusts the gun.
“23,” Leif says. The age he was when Caroline was born.
“What is the last number?”
“The age I am now,” Leif says. “Guess my age. Guess it.”
He feels sick from the pain.
“A hundred and three,” Scotty says and bounces around like a five-year-old child. Around and around him with the gun in his hands. “A hundred and ten. How old are you old man? How old? I’m not messing around anymore. Give me the number.”
Leif closes his eyes and thinks how he pushed his daughter into this boy’s arms, this boy’s trap. When she came home drunk and high a month ago, he was angry at her, so angry that he pushed her up against her bedroom wall, held her there until she started to cry, until he saw the terror in her eyes, and he let her go.
I’m sorry, he told her as she backed away from him. I’m sorry for not knowing what to do.
He watched Caroline drift further and further away, out of reach.
“Give me the damn number,” Scotty says. His finger is on the trigger.
Leif wanted to protect his daughter. The enemy was this boy in front of him. The enemy was the drugs. The enemy was him.
“38,” Leif says. He waits for the gun to go off.
“Let’s go,” the girl says.
Scotty keeps the gun pointing down at Leif.
“Leave him,” the girl says. “It will take him an hour to get back to shore.”
He looks at the girl. How did she know he’d chase after a lie?
Scotty lowers the gun and backs away. He starts up his ATV.
The sound of the machines fade across the lake.

Leif stumbles inside the fish house. The sour smell of urine overwhelms him, stings his eyes, his nose. A propane tank hisses in the corner of the house. Metal pots, glass jars, and coffee filters litter the floor. Plastic bottles are stacked up against the back wall, all their labels have been peeled off. There is a cot, with a sleeping bag on it, but no one is there.

He grabs a dirty towel and wraps it around his hand. The blood soaks through. He wraps the sleeping bag around his shoulders.

Outside, a deep moaning echoes beneath him. The ice stretches and cracks. The lake has begun to freeze again.

Lights hover like stars around the shore and he begins to walk toward them. Slush makes its way into his boots. His feet are heavy; his steps slow. His hand burns. His jaw aches.

As he walks, he thinks how like the desert the frozen water seems right now, such emptiness in front and back of him. Such endless space.

The moon has fallen to the edge of the sky, illuminating the fish houses scattered across the lake. He tries to think about something beside the pain and cold, he thinks how other years, when the lake was thick with ice, thousands of houses were out there, smoke swirling out of metal chimneys, cars and trucks parked all over the lake.

When a new customer came into the bar, somebody from the city, someone out ice fishing for the day, he’d point to the bay window, out across the frozen lake, and he’d tell them about the time his buddy Nico came to visit him with his Mexican bride, how’d she never seen snow, never seen a frozen lake.

“This. We have this too,” she said looking out the window, “but near the dumps. The garbage.”

Leif would pause and wait for whomever was across from him to see what this beautiful dark-haired woman saw—one-room shanties made out of plywood and tin, a whole town of them, out in the middle of nowhere. And he’d wait for their laughter, for them to see what this woman didn’t understand—that these houses were filled with half-drunk men sitting inside, gathered around holes, playing cards, dangling fishing line into black circles of water, men getting away from their real homes, their homes on land.

He quickens his pace. His hand that has been shot is burning. He can’t move his finger or his thumb.
As he passes Hawk Bill Point, he sees black water, like a pool of oil seeping up through the white snow. He walks toward it thinking maybe the girl or Scotty had gone through, but he doesn’t see any tracks and when he gets close, he sees that a new layer of ice has formed across the top. It is as thin as plastic wrap and chirps and rattles as if a thousand crickets are trapped beneath.

He thinks how easy it would be to break through that ice, sink deep into the cold water, stop the burning in his hand, his heart, his head.

It was spring when his wife and Caroline left. The ice had just gone off. He paddled out into the lake that night and thought about how easy it would be to turn over the canoe, how fast hypothermia would set in, how everything would slow and stop.

He steps away from the edge. Off in the distance, he can see his place, the green light hovering above the parking lot. If he keeps going, he can make it to shore in another forty minutes. If he keeps going, he can call the sheriff and have them go after Scotty Sparks. If he keeps going he can grab hold of his daughter again, hold on to her, pull her to his heart, make her understand that all he wants in the world is to keep her safe. If he keeps going.
A Postcard for Zion

The bathroom window was one of those horizontal slits just under the ceiling. Ally propped it open as she stood on the closed toilet lid, her cigarette smoke wafting through the crack. She took another puff and watched tiny dust tornados blow over the highway. In the distance stood mesas with layers of purple, gray, and red, like the bottles she’d stuffed with colored sand as a child.

When an hour had passed, she left the bathroom and walked around the building, to the front of the truck stop, the first off I-40 in what must have been fifty miles. She couldn’t smell the crisp, arid desert air, only deep-fried Twinkies and gasoline. Inside the store, dreamcatchers dangled over a display of sandstone animals and Navajo figurines made from painted clay. A man behind the counter looked up from his magazine and smiled. The black whiskers under his nose curled.

She stopped at the display of postcards for attractions within 100 miles of the Painted Desert—Grand Canyon, Sedona, Monument Valley—and even Las Vegas. She fingered through them and paused at a postcard for Zion, wondering if she should send it to her family. She hadn’t seen them in three weeks, not since she’d skipped Laura’s wake and left Connecticut, travelling by the motion of her upturned thumb and the ripeness of her smile.

Connected to the convenience store was a small diner, where the smell changed to that of bacon and coffee and cheap syrup. She checked her wallet. Thirty-four dollars and a handful of coins. She crossed the divide between store and restaurant and sunk into a large booth.

A waiter appeared with a menu. He wore an apron splattered with what looked like pancake batter and his face drooped. “Take your time,” he said. And then, as if as an afterthought, he added, “Anything to drink?”

“Not at the moment.”

The menu was one page, front and back, with an entire half-page section devoted to omelets. In addition to geographical distinctions
(southwestern, northwestern, eastern, and southern) there were ethnic distinctions (Mexican, Chinese, Navajo) and state-by-state descriptors (The Texan, The Arizonan, The Californian). As far as she could tell, the only difference between the Southwestern and the Arizonan was the addition of cactus flower in the latter. Looking at the choices, her appetite was slowly giving way to apathy.

The door chime startled her into dropping the menu onto her lap. A man, thirtyish, with shaggy sun-bleached brown hair, his face framed by a few days worth of stubble, nodded at the black-whiskered clerk and sauntered toward the back of the store, to the beer coolers. She had to crane her neck to see his selection, but she was curious. She would need another ride now that she’d abandoned the elderly Coca-Cola man, whose name she didn’t remember but who had reminded her of her grandfather in the way that he laughed. He had been the kind of man who opened doors and pulled out chairs. When he’d found her sitting on a curb in downtown Denver, he’d offered her a ride, saying he couldn’t stand the thought of someone less friendly stumbling upon her. For Ally, it had been a matter of convenience: she wanted out of the cold and crowded city. They drove south in an eighteen-wheeler toting ten thousand Coke products while he told stories about proposing to his late wife on the top of the Grand Tetons. The plan had been to take her to San Diego, but while he was filling up the tank, she had ripped a piece of paper from the back page of a paperback she’d found in the truck cab and written, “It’s been fun. Goodbye.” Then she’d hidden in the bathroom until she was sure he had left the truck stop. He had a deadline, after all.

The new customer closed the beer cooler without taking anything and crossed into the diner. He sat down at the counter, calling the waiter from the kitchen in a soft, southwestern lilt.

She picked up her menu. The man had ordered The Arizonan and a glass of water. He said something else to the waiter that she couldn’t catch, but whatever it was sent the waiter over to her booth with a cream-colored glass. He set it down and said, “Compliments of that guy,” jerking his thumb toward the man. “You know what you want to eat yet?”

“An omelet.”

“Which one?”

“Surprise me.”

The waiter stared at her for a moment, judging her sincerity, before shuffling back behind the counter and pushing through the doors into the kitchen. They swung with some force, making a swooshing sound.
as the edges brushed against each other. She sniffed her drink. Apple juice.

The man swiveled his bar stool, his back pressing into the counter and his elbows resting there. “If it’s something to snuff you’re after, I might be able to do better than juice.”

“I’m just trying to figure out why you sent me something I haven’t drank since I was twelve.”

“You looked about the right age for it to me.”

“I’m twenty-three.”

“Well then.” His eyes were blue, and he locked them on her face as if he had entered in a staring contest. “You look familiar,” he said.

Ally’s chest tightened. He must have seen her face in the paper, or on the television. Only it wasn’t really her face he would have seen. It was Laura’s, her twin, the elder by three and a half minutes. As the final victim in the Eastport Shooting, Laura’s face had gone public. When Ally had first left Connecticut, she’d felt the entire world was staring at her, jaw-dropped, thinking, shouldn’t you be dead? The farther she’d moved from Eastport, the less claustrophobic she’d felt, and the easier it was to be Ally Rhodes and not Laura, the teacher, the martyr.

Ally felt this way again for only a moment before she turned the circumstances around. She would milk it. Play the sympathy card. Who wouldn’t want to give a ride to the twin sister of Laura Rhodes? “Do I?”

“You’re the girl who was hiding in the bathroom earlier this afternoon.”

Ally paused, sure she had been alone at the truck stop when she’d gone into hiding. “I was trying to ditch the man I’d hitched a ride with.”

“Turned into a jerk?”

“Too safe.”

His smile turned into a laugh. Grabbing his water, he got off the stool and slid into her booth on the opposite side. “What’s your name?”

“Ally,” she said.

“Where are you heading, Ally?”

Up close, she saw three thin, red slashes under his right eye. They were each about an inch long, and ran parallel to one another. She thought maybe a cat had done it. “I haven’t decided yet.”

He sunk back into the booth, smiling with a chipped front tooth and locking his eyes on hers and rubbing his stubble with his left hand. The right lay flat on the table, reached out, almost as if he were waiting for her to take it. Ally’s mother would be horrified. When Ally had
started classes at Central Connecticut, she’d been gifted a can of Mace and a coupon for three free self-defense lessons. When she’d later moved into an apartment in the Bronx, her mother asked her to call every night before she went to bed, just “for her peace of mind.” The overbearing attitude probably had something to do with Ally’s tendency to wander. Her dad called the episodes her escapes. *Ally’s just on another escape.* Or, *How was the escape, Allycat?* When she was sixteen she’d walked out of sixth period Algebra II and kept going, until she wound up at the Danbury train station. Laura found her sitting on a bench, watching trains pass. The sisters said nothing until Ally’s stomach made a noise like the trains and Laura suggested they go home.

She wondered if her father considered this an escape. Only once in the three weeks since she’d split town had Ally called home. Her mother cried and then yelled and then asked if she was at least taking her Depakote. Ally described the bigness of the midwestern sky. Her mother had cried again, saying how selfish Ally was being. To that, Ally didn’t reply.

The waiter dropped two identical omelets on the table and shuffled off again. The man picked up his fork. “You go to college?”

“Wasn’t for me.”

“What do you do?”

Ally shrugged.

He dunked his fork sideways into the omelet so hard that ceramic clattered against the table. As he sliced it in half, red juice from the tomatoes seeped loose and pooled on the plate. Ally reached for her food, and as she grabbed the plate, he moved the hand that held the fork forward just enough that his knuckles brushed her fingertips. They felt rough. A man who worked with his hands. The brushing may have been a coincidence. Ally said nothing.

“What heading to California myself. Napa Valley. Got an uncle who owns a vineyard there.”

Ally thought he didn’t look like the type to have an uncle with a vineyard—too unkempt, too poor, with moth holes in his T-shirt and dirt on his hands—but she didn’t question him. He chewed several bites of egg and she watched his muscles flex. His arms were as wide as her legs. She could see the outline of his pecks underneath his T-shirt and she knew he could overpower her. Throw her down across the bench of the pickup in the parking lot and pin her still with one hand while the other undid her jeans. Afterward he might leave her on the stoop outside the diner and drive off to Texas or Mexico, anywhere but Napa Valley.
“You ever seen a vineyard?” he asked.
“No.” She took off the tiniest corner of her omelet and touched the fork to her tongue. She washed it down with some of the juice.
“Beautiful places. I used to spend summers picking grapes. I liked it when they weren’t quite ripe.” He picked a whole cherry tomato out of his meal, wiping off the egg as he rolled it between his thumb and index finger. “You know, just soft enough, delicate enough, that if you squeeze them, they’ll pop.”
He made the popping sound with his lips, like a cork out of a bottle, and then he brought his fingers together. The tomato burst on both ends, a double-sided geyser of juice and guts and seed. His head was slightly cocked to the left and she thought that the three scratches were too wide to have come from a cat. The redness suggested they were recent, maybe not even a full day old, and she imagined they’d been left by a girl.
“I’m not much of a wine drinker,” she said.
He leaned back in the booth, upturned the corner of his lip and blew air, momentarily lifting the bangs out of his face. All the while, he didn’t take his eyes from hers. She asked him how he’d chipped his front tooth.
“Ice skating on this lake back home. My face went right into the ice. Broke my nose, too.”
“It doesn’t look like it’s been broken.”
“It felt like it was.” He ran his tongue over the tooth. “Sometimes, girls ask me to press it into their necks.”
“It’s the wrong tooth for a vampire.”
“I don’t think these are the type of girls to bother with those sort of details.” He took another forkful of omelet. “Aren’t you going to eat?”
“Guess I’m not so hungry, after all.” The food thing was probably just another chemical imbalance. She often wondered how it could be that she was so chemically fucked up when her identical twin sister had been so chemically perfect. Even when they were kids, before doctors had come into the mix, Laura had been the good one, Ally the strange, needy, emotional one. Shortly after high school had started, Ally had accused her civics teacher of getting the number of amendments to the constitution wrong. (He’d said twenty-six; she’d insisted there had been twenty-seven.) She’d been so adamant, calling him an idiot. At one point, when it was clear he did not believe her, she threw a pencil at the chalkboard and he’d issued a detention. When Laura found out during lunch, she’d printed up the proper research that proved Ally
had been correct and presented it to the civics teacher. He’d refused to retract the punishment, saying that it had been given not because Ally knew something that he didn’t, but because in challenging his authority so forcefully in front of the entire class, she’d acted disrespectfully. Ally didn’t know exactly what Laura had said to the civics teacher at this point, but whatever it was, it had landed her a detention alongside Ally. It was the only one Laura had ever received.

“You got people at home?”

“I got people. But they don’t know where I am.” Something leathery grazed her ankle. He had stretched out his legs, and his work boot was planted in the space between her feet. He leaned forward, perched his elbows on the table, and reached out toward her face. When he had a clump of her hair lying flat against his palm, he paused. Dirt traced the contours in his skin. Something red and flakey, like dried blood, clung to the underside of his nails. Or maybe it was just desert sand.

“You had a thing.” He came away with a small bit of white string, the same color as her top, and flicked it on to the floor. “I’ll be right back,” he said, and then he got up, heading for the bathroom.

As he crossed back into the convenience store, his shirt was hitched up from sitting, exposing his lower back and the brown, textured grip of a pistol. The barrel was pushed into the back of his jeans. She’d seen other men with guns in Arizona. The Coke driver had even had one, stowed in his glove compartment. This was a different world than New England, where if you weren’t a cop, a gun meant you were probably dangerous. A drug dealer. A school shooter. A serial killer. She wanted to know what it would be like to hold something so powerful it could take a life. Would the metal feel heavy or light, would the trigger be easy to pull, or would it take all the strength her finger possessed. She wondered what he looked like aiming it. Firing it.

While he was gone, the waiter came by and took away their plates. When the man returned, he didn’t sit down, but offered her a hand. “Come on,” he said. “I have something to show you.”

His hand was so much bigger than hers. Ally took it.

Even though it had gotten closer to evening, the air outside seemed warmer. He led her by the hand, not to his pick up truck, but to the bathroom. The same unisex, single room on the side of the truck stop that she had been hiding inside. In her mind she rewrote the scene from the pickup truck and set it in the bathroom. When the door closed, she jolted at its vibration. He let go of her hand and pointed to something scratched on the side of the urinal.
A heart surrounded the names Allie + Joe.

“You’re Allie,” he said, “And I’m Joe. I just thought that was weird.”

Was he Joe? For all she knew, he’d decided to become Joe the moment he’d seen the names. For all she knew, he was the one who’d scratched the names in the first place. She looked on the floor for evidence of newly chipped paint, but it was too dusty to tell. All she said was, “That’s not how I spell it.”

Joe shoved his hands into his pockets. “I thought it was a strange coincidence.”

He was attractive, and odd, and maybe, if she went with him, he’d take her to Napa Valley and they’d pluck grapes and fall in love and grow old. Or maybe he was one of those men her mother was always warning her about—men who didn’t care how much a girl pleaded, because they liked to see her cry. If she changed her mind, she could always ditch him at the next truck stop.

Someone pounded on the door. “Hello? Umm, you guys didn’t pay.” The waiter. Joe reached around her and opened the bathroom door.

“Sorry,” he said. “I’ve got the lady, too.” Already he had his wallet in his hands. He fumbled through it, and as he pulled a twenty loose, he dropped the wallet on the floor. Ally bent to retrieve it. In the plastic case meant for photographs or IDs he had two worn snapshots of women in their twenties. Each was slender and tall, with long, blondish hair and pale skin. Each looked a little bit like Ally. She wondered if he had dropped the wallet on purpose. She wondered if she were hallucinating. Ally returned it as they left the bathroom.

“I’d like to hit the road again before the sun goes down. Find a hotel before too long. You decide where you’re heading yet?”

She could have said no. She could have said she wanted to go back east. She could have stayed with the waiter boy and the black-whiskered clerk and tried her luck with the next customer. There was no force, only a decision. Ally’s decision.

She told him she was heading for wine country. That she’d like to squeeze a grape until it burst.
Jennifer Hancock

The Bigot’s Funeral

The trip in from Houston makes our stomachs clamp harder with each mile: piney woods so dense men can hide in them for years. State roads marked with green signs the size of hopelessness.

We pass the last liquor store before the Angelina County line, a hitchhiker carrying a chainsaw, working the damage from the last hurricane. He won’t get beer money from FEMA anytime soon.

Stop for lunch at Lufkin BBQ, where the black cook still won’t meet the white waitress’s eyes over the pass-through, even though they kissed when they were kids under the bleachers at the football stadium.

The restaurant’s owned by Pentecostals. Each spring they bless the Formica tables and cast out the demons who’ve gathered around fried biscuits, honey smeared on the vinyl seat backs, the crispy fat from baby back ribs like anointing oil. Everyone here’s full of sin and judgment. East Texas does that to you. Makes you think the world’s the whole of the ring from Crockett to Nac to Jasper, makes you believe
in the salvation of a logging truck hurtling toward you
on a one-lane road. We ease back into the drawl

we learned at our mother’s breast, ask for sweet tea
and don’t say nothing that would shame her.
St. Mary’s Orphanage: Galveston Island, September 8, 1900

Fear we not, tho’ storm clouds round us gather...
God of the sea and of the tempest wild.

When the men found them days later mostly-buried beneath overturned dunes, they followed one tiny body to another to whichever Sister had tied them to her waist.

That first man was probably sunburned and soaked with the whiskey he’d been given to numb the pain and stench. His job: to find bodies, stack and fuel the beach pyres. They were so high the smoke could be seen from Houston. He might have tripped on the twine or seen the outline of a small, curled hand, perhaps thought

oh god, one more, and gently dug around it. Or perhaps he was beyond gentleness, beyond care or counting, and yanked the twine so that sand shivered along its length like rosin powder from a violin bow. Maybe he retched. We know he called the others, who climbed over the thin ribs of the orphanage, the rotting fish and the birds

and shooed the late summer flies to find him pulling in the heavy air. We know they followed each one: ten women with ninety children tied to their waists
like chains of Victorian paper dolls.
They found three boys alive in the remains
of a tree to bear witness to the wind
and water. And when the drunk, ravaged

men cleaned the sand from the boys’
mouths, they told of the ocean rising
to fill the Sisters of Charity of the
Incarnate Word

like the Holy Spirit and of the singing,
the hymns, the children’s voices
that kept the East Texas pine boards strong
until they weren’t anymore.
Plaza in Late Spring

Kansas City, MO

The warthog’s scalding nose pinks my skin, and the fountains bubble warm in this heatwave as your hometown’s sun sears our arms.

Gold, the dome rising amid hot ochre roofs—ghosts of prairie grass pinned under the asphalt—false basilica in the shopping district where you point out the vine-leafed cornets below the gutters, the fan-lattice balconies on storefronts, the blue and yellow tiles tessellating throughout the streets. You shrug as I point out the wrought-iron XXI Forever and the incidental neon. By the Nichols fountain, a woman paints this stretch of skyline without streetlights or high-rises, just spire and tile and stone: time and slow brushstrokes untwine contradictions that fit. Feet in the water, you talk about Christmastime, when a different color frames each building, and snow thickens on the stucco. We’ll see them, you promise, and we walk on as silent belfries gape at the passing cars.
Lisa Higgs

Bottom Prairie

…and as it was my first introduction to the State which was to be my home I tried to make the dismal-looking bottom prairie through which we were passing look cheerful and homelike, merely because it was Illinois.
—Christiana Holmes Tillson (1798–1872), A Woman’s Story of Pioneer Illinois

A new state of being alone in outskirts, half neighborhood, half byway of city passengers traveling out of, out to Chicago, Saint Louis, Memphis, Indy. Where else to break but a gas station ringed in chains? Yet no slide by for the steadfast, well-lodged on lakeshore lawn, substantial home fluting between the long-standing family ranches and rebuilt brick bulwarks of success. No pass through, prairieland a patchwork lost in the links, country club housing the unnatural grove busting sightlines, corn skirting out its horizons. Round and Forked, Cotton Hill, Drennan’s no match for agricultural expanse, mollisols such deep soil to hold root. Natural reclamation of land to a use, the wild to its rural settlement. No beauty of fieldwork can stop the highway rush. No corn stalk grants glory in bloom. Plains to cross, commotion just beneath the birdnotes. Between the carpet fibers. Desire with the dust and dirt. Powder poured out of the child’s small hands. Dried leaves,
pebbles, bark broken into the curiosity of a mind that does not yet know. Home. Our possessions are not enough to fill this space, so each room remains empty in foreign linens and drapery. Nothing here, but the choice to feel like, long for...a flood of dazzling light across the grassy main. Northern hills, blue sky rimmed in pond water, and strands of birch holding spring in tight bud as long as they can.

Note: Italicized words from Eliza W. Farnham’s Life in Prairie Land.
Adam Houle

Homestead Now

I make the rise to where a house was, once, until they burned it down and sifted, as the ash cooled, for hewn nails and hinges, screws, too, I guess, if they could afford them.

They gleaned the tougher stuff to offset the smithing, the cost of raising the next place elsewhere.

But this hill seems fine enough. And Providence must have strayed from the acreage allotted her, beyond earshot of spade and prayer—perhaps

the herd caught the grass staggers and the man couldn’t abide the heifers and calves in dirt angels carved out by their own thrashing in the grimy sand and prairie grass as though they strained to dig their graves.

That’s how they must have thought: you keep what can defy a blaze. You gather it up. Burdened by what is sturdy, you rattle on.
Dust Bowl, 1936

Your skinny leather purse coughs up a nickel. You’re ushered into the dark where you could be someone or no one’s mother. Then the grainy film:

tractors rolling over the horizon like tanks. They almost drive themselves, anyone could hold that easy wheel. These are the plows that broke the plains.

But miles from water, the furrowed lines can’t bear, no matter how hard-scratched.

Now the dirt collects. It is the only thing that sticks to the ribs of cows. A persistent guest that sifts inside the houses. You don’t know who’s invited to the table,

but you scoot closer. Newsreel music swells. On his dusty plate, a boy draws a box with thick walls nothing could trespass. Is this a perfect house, one not blown through and filled with something else?

One that locks what is suffering inside? Still your stomach rumbles.
You can’t see who’s filming, but of course someone is in charge. The next shot

is rigged, the cow skull moved to cast a longer shadow. But that doesn’t change

that the cow has starved. The close-up child’s face on screen is lit harsh and gaunt. In your hands, would it shape to something softer? What could you afford? You could use a drink inside the movie house. The cracks begin to show in your dry skin. You can’t recall if someone has been sitting in the empty seat beside you. The reel keeps spinning around its hollow core and dust motes line up in the projector beam as if waiting for some direction.
Settler

Even the tumbleweed
is a stowaway sneaked in
with the grass seed, given
an easier-to-say name. It became
American. We are lonely
when it stumbles by, but it’s just
a weed. We made it
a thing sadder than itself,
like a nursing home lunch.

Small portions cut up already.
Showdown: who will swallow
the pastel pills measured out
into a tiny paper cup? The tumbleweed
is a lump in the prairie’s throat.
We could have named it
torch or parasol, but now
it’s just what’s leftover
from the blossom. A new
resident is rolled up
to the table. They all end up
here: caught up in a fence
wherever they’ve been blown. They can’t
name how many million
scattered seeds. Instead
they remember the purple bloom
before they broke away.
    We hear them rasp

in foreign accents. Then they are sticks
    that say nothing at all.
Doua Thao

These City Streets

The summer after Pohmpom was killed, my parents thought a month spent with my grandparents in Madison would help ease my memory of him and expose me to a gentler way of life. It was 1992, and I was ten years old. I was a boy with curiosity in my bones. A month with my grandparents meant a month hopped up on taffy and pop. In Madison, I would be among endless cousins, and it promised more than a chance to scrape my knees, twist an ankle, dislocate a finger, a chance to see my roiled blood run before my parents could tsk their warnings. But to allow me an entire month away from home was a big step for them. As the oldest child, I was counted on to watch my younger brothers and sister during the summer while my parents were away at work. Somehow, though, they had convinced themselves they could do without me for a month and I was old enough to be without them.

My parents had immigrated to Milwaukee from Thailand when I was six. They had been told in a bigger city there would be more job opportunities. This fact alone outweighed all other considerations, not least of which was that my father’s entire family—five brothers, four sisters, endless extended relatives—had settled in Madison. What my parents had not expected was that the only areas we could afford to live in were dotted with boarded up houses, not very different from the shanties of the refugee camp we had just come from. The streets were splotched with oil from leaky cars, the bright green and sweet smell of antifreeze snaking towards storm drains, where garbage had gathered in impenetrable heaps. It collected by the curbs, in abandoned lots. It floated down alleys like tumbleweeds, the weekly store flyers no one looked at, empty 40s and cans of malt liquor, Watchtower newsprint magazines that served better as toilet paper, dark wads of spat-out gum, lodged with pebbles and pieces of glass, empty chip bags, aerosol cans, yellowing condoms, and bent syringes, and the rain washed away nothing, only spreading and mixing it all, the oil with the antifreeze with the trash along the city streets. The city, to promote home ownership, offered to sell these abandoned homes for one dollar,
the catch being the new owners were required to make these buildings livable. Still, my parents could only afford to rent—my mother found work sorting garments for thrift stores, and my father was able to complete his machine shop courses at the local tech college and get hired as a machinist. We occupied the bottom flat of a duplex near a busy intersection, right off the freeway. My parents felt that with cars passing by at all hours, we would be at less risk of being burglarized. It didn’t hurt either that our neighbors upstairs were Hmong. A front porch spanned the width of the house. Our large living room window looked out to the porch and the street beyond and allowed envious, curious eyes to easily see into our home. The glass was thin, and during the winter months, my mother would cover the window from the inside with a double-folded sheet of clear tarp. That thin window was all that separated the warmth inside from the realities without.

In the hot summers of Milwaukee, while giant speakers stared bug-eyed out from the opened trunks of cars along the street, men with red pipe wrenches would illegally open fire hydrants to dampen the heat of the neighborhood. They ringed the hydrants with old tires and jammed thin boards at an angle between the tires and the gushing water, fanning the flow as it came out. The whole neighborhood would congregate under the cooling spray. On one of these hot days, I was pedaling my BMX through the puddles and spray of the hydrant when I was knocked off my bike by an awesome force while out of the view of my father. My face slammed into the pooling water, and after I was able to press the hardness of the water out of my eyes, my bike had disappeared. When I finally found my father in the horde of people, he shook his head and said, “See, I told you not to leave my sight.” We walked home, my feet dragging over the cracked sidewalks, and I could feel the rumblings of bass from the tricked-out cars, from the songs underlining different messages: *Fuck tha police*, or *O.G. Original gangster*, or *Fight the power*. The refrains of these songs I knew, because they had become so popular that inclusivity on the school bus was purchased with your ability to fill in the censored words to the clean versions aired by the radio stations.

**In November of Pohmpom’s fifth-grade year, he acquired a dirty version of N.W.A. and made me a copy. I came home one afternoon repeating to myself, “Fuck tha police, yeah, fuck tha motherfuckin’ police.” But as I walked through the house to my room, I caught the look on my father’s face: It was a mixture of concern and disappointment. “Apaol!” he said. “No more. We are not them.”**
The next morning, I gathered all the cassettes Pohmpom had dubbed for me and returned them.

“What’s this?” he said. “You don’t want to be fresh anymore?” He took the plastic bag I was holding out to him. “I don’t need them. I got the originals.” Then he sang in a high-pitched voice, as if for emphasis, “Because I’m an O.G. Original gangster.” He looked at the bag for a while, then tossed it on the evergreen hedge by the corner of our bus stop. The next day, the bag was gone.

I first met Pohmpom when school started the fall after we arrived in America. I was in the first grade, and he was in the second. Pohmpom was not Hmong. But of all the people at our school, he was the most like me—slanted eyes, dark hair, accented English—so my parents tolerated him. He came to eat dinner, watch TV, do homework at our house. In many ways, his presence reassured my parents somehow, to know there was another Asian kid waiting at the same bus stop, riding the same bus, attending the same school; they felt secured in our young strength in numbers. I never found the dangers around me as grave as my parents. Since I had never known a different life in America, I had nothing to compare my life in Milwaukee to; I assumed everywhere was like this. By any measure, my parents said, life in America was much better than in the camp. At the very least, my siblings and I were fed at school, and my parents weren’t in constant intimidation of the guards policing the camp.

My father walked me to the bus stop in the mornings, picking up Pohmpom along the way. My father and Pohmpom’s relationship was carried on in Pohmpom’s native language, Laotian, so I couldn’t understand what they talked about, but it always sounded polite as they transitioned between the little English my father knew and the Laotian in which he was educated. But the bus stop was as far as my father could go. He couldn’t protect us that December day when three fifth graders, two of whom were in Pohmpom’s class, felt that teasing the Chinese kids would be a fun after-school activity. It wasn’t something I had never experienced, so I didn’t let it get to me, not that I would have confronted them anyway had I had the courage. I picked up my backpack and moved closer to the front of the bus. Pohmpom stayed, and after he said, “Shut up, bitches,” the three fifth graders pummeled, clawed, and tore at him. “You girls stop that! Stop that right now,” said the bus driver. It lasted barely a minute, not even long enough for the bus driver to pull over. He couldn’t have done much else anyway. He was powerless, as Pohmpom and I were. All he could
do was write up an incident report, submit it to the school, and have the girls suspended from the bus for five days.

“Who’s the bitch now? Huh? Who’s the bitch now?” The girls towered over Pohmpom, who turtled on the seat.

He offered no reply and, after a while, the girls went back to their seats, laughing, each one describing what exactly they had done to Pohmpom. When he had wiped away all evidence of his tears, he grabbed his backpack and jacket and moved to the seat across from me. His hair was disheveled, and he had two thick bloody welts growing on his cheek.

The next day, Pohmpom and I started sitting behind the driver, and after the girls had served their suspensions, we stole glances in the big rearview of the bus to make sure they kept their distance.

Over the next few months, Pohmpom’s wardrobe started taking on a new color. He had become enamored with the color brown and came over to do homework less and less. One evening, my father asked me if I had noticed anything different about Pohmpom. I was at the dining room table going over my multiplication tables.

“You know what’s happening to Pohmpom, right?” he said.

I nodded. I knew, and understood why, too, and didn’t blame him.

“Don’t you even—” he said. Then, minutes later, to clarify what he meant to say, he said, “Our dreams may be slow in coming, but at least, here, we can dream. You hear?”

“Yes,” I said, not meeting his eyes.

“You say yes, but do you understand?”

“Both,” I said. My siblings and I labored every day to obey my parents as best we could, to earn a trust that had no currency inside the world they had created, a world that insulated, offered warmth and food but not much freedom. My parents wanted us to be like oxen, to be docile and led from place to place through the ears by their words.

“Both.”

One day in early spring, my mother dropped me and Pohmpom off at the local library, six blocks from my house, eight from his. We stopped at the convenience store on our walk back. The store was on the same block, but kitty-corner to my house. Before we could stuff our change into our pockets as we came out, we were cornered by two middle-aged black men outside the open door of the store. They reeked of beer and piss and demanded our change. In perfect daylight, two kids surrounded by two black men was a sight of no concern, not even for the store clerk who saw us through the propped-open door. I dropped my change into one of the men’s pink palm and was let loose,
but Pohmpom refused. “Run,” he told me. I didn’t run, but turned from him and quickened my pace. I was rounding the corner to my house when I heard steps behind me. Afraid someone had come after me, I then started to run, but I heard a familiar voice.

“Motherfuckers,” Pohmpom said, his money still in his hand.

When we got home, we told my father what had happened. I wondered if he was going to call the police. Instead, he told us never to leave each other should something like that happen again. “Do you understand?” he said. He even switched to Laotian to make sure Pohmpom understood. He didn’t seem satisfied until we nodded our heads, a silent pledge to never leave each other. My father walked Pohmpom home, and I was left to wonder if my father’s struggle with the war and the camp had somehow left him soft.

School was let out for spring break the first week of April. My parents left me in charge of my eight-year-old twin brothers and five-year-old sister. The responsibility of watching them during the day was not impossible. My parents made our lunches in the mornings, but at ten years old, I had already learned to make noodles and fry eggs, although my parents warned me to stay away from the stove unless it was necessary. We were forbidden to go outside, which I didn’t argue—I knew how much more difficult my job would become if I were to let my siblings out. On Monday of that week, Pohmpom came over and stayed for a few hours in the afternoon. He brought along a brown bandana and gave it to me.

“You don’t have to wear it,” he said. “Just—if you want to.”

“Okay.” I didn’t want to reject his gift.

Later, he told me he was planning to go to the South Side to hang out with some friends on Thursday and asked if I wanted to come along. Though it was a non-school week, I knew my parents would not allow me to go. I couldn’t ask to go to Pohmpom’s house, they’d already said no many times before.

That Thursday, I folded the bandana I’d been given and stuffed it in my back pocket. When my parents returned home from work, I asked my mom to drop me and Pohmpom off at the library. I needed some new books, I told her. I told her she should expect us home a little after six, when the library closed.

“No stopping at the store,” she reminded us before driving off.

We waited until my mother’s car was out of sight, then walked out of the library and jogged to catch the 27 Bus to the South Side. Pohmpom paid our fares and stuffed the transfer tickets in his pocket.
“Who’re we meeting?” I asked.
“Some homies at the park.” With that, we fell into silence for the rest of the ride.

On the bridge connecting North and South, he pulled the yellow cord to be let off at the next stop. Outside the bus window, the glass domes of the Mitchell Park Horticultural Conservatory clustered together like eggs waiting to hatch, each containing a world unlike ours. Once, I’d gone there for a school field trip, and it felt like a mini-vacation to an unknown place. In the tropical dome, a yellow bird whizzed by my head, and I thought that was one of the few caged birds in the world that never wished to be set free.

The back door of the bus opened before us. Pohmpom walked with a hop, and I tried to keep up as we hurried through the park to the basketball courts. A group of nine teenagers was shooting hoops and laughing. Some had their shirts off, a few had tattoos on their chests and arms, all were dressed in some article of brown clothing. Pohmpom made the tenth player, so I didn’t have to beg out of the game. I sat cross-legged for a while under an oak tree and looked at my wristwatch. When we left the library it was 4:30 p.m. It had taken us fifteen minutes to get to the park.

I stood up and walked to the restrooms. The park was full of people—kids and wives of some of the men on the other basketball courts. Somehow the bandana had become loose from my back pocket from running to catch the bus, riding the bus, and sitting underneath the oak tree, and as I pulled my shorts up after relieving myself, the bandana fell and unfurled itself onto the filthy floor. Only when I turned and stepped on it did I notice it. I plucked it from the floor and briefly thought about washing it. Instead, I tossed it in the bullet-headed trash can. I thought about what I would tell Pohmpom if he asked about it later. I decided I’d tell him my brothers had spilled milk on it and the sour smell wouldn’t wash off, so I threw it away. I washed my hands and tore a handful of paper towels from the dispenser, and with one hand holding the trash door open, I covered the bandana inside with the paper towels.

Outside, I walked to one of the swing sets by the playground and sat on an empty swing. Kids were running around, climbing up the slides, spinning each other on the tire swing. Mothers anxiously looked on, cautioning their kids to slow down before they fell and bloodied an elbow or knee. I dug my shoes into the sand and pushed off, pumping my legs higher and higher, the air cool against my face. It felt like flying
with my feet off the ground. At 5:40, a group of kids rushed the swings, fighting for the other empty seats, and feeling suddenly guilty and old, I jumped off the swing in mid-flight—to the awe of the kids—landed on my feet, and headed for the basketball courts. As I left I knew some of them would attempt to launch themselves like I’d done. At first, timidly, but eventually, they would grow bold and go higher and higher before attempting to land on their own feet.

At the basketball courts, Pohmpom and his friends were gone. Some strangers were now on the court they’d vacated. I was left without a bus transfer. If I ran really hard, I could possibly make it across the mile-long bridge and back home at about ten after six. But I was a chubby kid. The most running I’d ever done was in Phys. Ed. when the class ran two laps of the gymnasium for warm up.

Smoke billowed from the stacks of the Red Star Yeast factory under the northern end of the bridge and was dispersed by a strong wind around the mouth, the smoke shielding my view of the North Side. I ran without pacing myself. One hundred yards later, I slowed down to a jog, then into a brisk walk. Halfway across the bridge, I smelled the sourness of the yeast. It didn’t smell like anything my mother would cook. I heard sirens and a blaring horn up ahead. A fire truck, lights flashing, sped towards me. I started to jog again, but as the truck passed me, in its wake, the draft took hold of my forward movement for a moment, holding me hostage, just a second but long enough for me to think of Pohmpom, before letting me go. I looked at my watch and realized it didn’t matter anymore if I ran, I would never make it back in time. When I walked through the smoke and set foot on St. Paul Avenue, the North Side, I felt on familiar ground.

It was 6:35 when I got home. My cheeks were burning. I was sweating in areas I didn’t know had sweat glands. I tried to slow down my heaving chest, but my father was sitting on the porch waiting.

“Where’s Pohmpom?” he demanded.

“He went home already,” I said, between breaths.

My father knew I was lying, since to get to Pohmpom’s house he would have to walk past mine from the library. “Is brown your favorite color, too?” he said.

I shook my head.

“Sure?”

I didn’t answer.

“Are you sure?” Then, after a few seconds of no reply, he said, “Get inside!”
I ran up the porch steps, and he slammed the door when he came in. That was the first time I heard the lecture: Do you not know what your mother and I are going through, he said, to give you guys a good life in America? Do you not know we wouldn’t work this hard if not for you kids, to give you something we never had? If we knew this was how you’d turn out, we would’ve stayed, not even bothered to come over here. We would’ve saved ourselves the trouble and died over there. We’d rather kill you ourselves than lose you to them. And you’re not thankful?

My ears started burning as I sat on the couch. My siblings were watching cartoons, but they were sneaking looks at me, knowing this lecture was as much for them as for me. They probably felt they were being unjustly punished for something they didn’t do. My sister stood up from where she was sitting in front of the television, walked over, and jumped in my lap. I held her there, thinking my father would never strike me if I was holding her. The last time I’d been spanked was when I was four and had refused to eat for two days. It hurt, I remembered, but there was no way to say to my parents I wasn’t hungry back then. Any child who refused to eat, especially when there’s food available, is a foolish child—camp life had taught them that. My siblings had never seen my father’s raised hand, had never heard him unloosen his belt, and I wondered if they might at that moment. I wanted to say that I went to the park—but even telling the truth was a lie, because I was supposed to be at the library. I held tighter to my sister.

“Go eat dinner,” my father finally said. “It’s cold now.”

On a Monday morning a month before Pohmpom was to graduate the fifth grade, my father and I knocked on Pohmpom’s door on our way to the bus stop. His father opened and spoke briefly to my father in Laotian. My father shook his hand and led me to the bus stop. If anyone needed help coping, the principal said over the PA that morning, the school had brought in two extra counselors. Though Pohmpom and I were in different classrooms, my fourth grade teacher had been his teacher the previous year and knew that we were friends. I told her I was okay. On the bus ride home that afternoon, when our bus stopped at the corner of 29th and Cherry, the kids at the back of the bus started clamoring, pushing for a better look.

“It’s that big gray one. That’s where the Chinese kid was shot.”

In the rearview, I saw them climbing over each other. In that house, Pohmpom and his friends had found a gun, started playing with it, pointing it at each other, and it had gone off. The Victorian
Doua Thao

house, with a large tree looming over it, looked dark and imposing, able to swallow dreams and cause nightmares.

“Remember when he called you ‘bitches’?” one of them said. The others started laughing.

“Hell yeah, and we beat his ass for it.” And, still, more laughing.

That was the memory any of them would ever have of Pohmpom.

A few stops later, I got off and ran to my mother’s waiting car, saying under my breath, “Bitch, bitch, bitch.” Secretly, I wanted to do them harm, if only that would make them understand. A month later, after school was let out for the summer, my parents sent me to Madison to cope among family.

My grandparents’ townhouse abutted a large, well-manicured park. At the end of the park, through the trunks of mature oaks and maples, I could see the identical units of the housing projects. In the mornings maintenance workers picked up broken glasses, throwing away paper-wrapped bottles and cans. The park—the width of one city block—was all that separated us from them, an expanse of tamed wilderness that was a buffer of security. My grandparents had lived there for five years without problems. One afternoon on the basketball courts where grown men and teens with grown-man bodies played pickup games, as I dangled from the bars holding up my grandmother’s clothesline, a circle formed—Blood red on one side, Crip blue on the other. The shouts grew louder. One side egged the other to make the first move, throw the first punch, so they would be justified in their retaliation. It seemed this was some unwritten rule, an honor code among gangs. Two ballers had a quick row, some hard foul probably avenged. And just as quickly, the circle broke up, the players slowly returned to their games. The basketballs resumed their thumps on the ground and their clinks through metal nets so securely tightened that whoever could free them from the rims deserved to keep them.

Hours later, in the open field adjacent to the basketball courts, where my cousins and I played football early in the mornings when it seemed safe, an even larger circle formed. The red shirts and blue shirts gathered to finish what had probably begun earlier that day. I was still outside then, still hanging around my grandmother’s dried tunics and blouses.

“What the fuck are you going to do?”

“No, what the fuck are you going to do?”

The call and response took on action. But from where I dangled,
gaping, feeling the danger could never reach me, the fighting was beautiful, a dance. Bodies folded together and sought balance, weight and counterweight. Fist-ended arms pumped and pulled with precision, wrapping and holding their partners in turn. Swinging feet arced, finding their targets and snapping back to attention. The circle of dust and pollen kicked up by the fighters’ two-stepping feet alternately unveiled and concealed their bodies, the sun freezing their movements like a strobe light in the dark.

When the sirens came within earshot, the able hustled away. Those with a little more heart or whose shoulders bore more of the burdens of loyalty helped their fallen comrades, half-carrying, half-dragging them into opened doorways where, just moments before, all the eyes inside had gathered to watch the spectacle. This fight had ended quite peacefully, considering, but not before red and blue had violently clashed to create the colors of bruised ribs, blackened eyes, and swollen jaws.

It happened the Friday before the day I was to leave my grandparents’ house that summer. The day was slow and hot. My grandparents had already left for work. I watched morning cartoons with a bowl of cereal. When I became bored, I played outside with my uncles and cousins—this was how we had passed most of our days. My grandparents returned late in the afternoon. The sun dipped behind the mature trees of the park, and a cool relief was finally given to the day. I came inside for a drink of water and found Uncle Nou, who was on the threshold of adulthood, on the phone.

“Yo,” he said, “he’s there?” There was a short pause, then he said into the receiver, “Come pick me up.”

After drinking a glass of water, I headed back outside. Five minutes later, Cousin Pong’s Nova hatchback screeched to a stop in front of the house. The car door flew open, and he ran inside the house. I followed him. His shirt stuck to his body, and he had a sideburn of dirty sweat. He filled a glass with water and gulped it without taking a breath. Uncle Nou questioned him as soon as he was able to speak again.

“Yeah, fool,” Cousin Pong said, “it’s him. He was standing there with his crew. Hurry.” He turned to leave.

Uncle Nou followed, as well as Uncle KP, who was only a few years older than me. Since this was my last night there, curiosity in my shoes, I tagged along, half jogging to keep pace. My grandparents, busy cooking dinner, didn’t think anything of my going on trips with
Doua Thao

my uncles—I had done it many times before. In the backseat, I asked Uncle KP if he knew where we were going.

“We’re going to find this TSB,” he said.

“TSB?” I said, puzzled.

Uncle Nou, in the front passenger seat, turned around and said, “Three Street Blood. We’re going to shoot the motherfucker.”

I was thrown into confusion. I was old enough to be without my parents, but still too young to make sense of everything. I didn’t know what to do. I wanted to ask my uncle what this guy had done to him to deserve being shot. What did I ever do to my older uncle to deserve this, to be an accomplice to his crime? I was stuck in the car, miles from my grandparents’ house now. I wasn’t going to cry—I definitely was not going to cry, even though I had suddenly become a boy who was made not of flesh and blood but of fear and terror. Yet I hoped the casual way Uncle Nou had said those words—*we’re going to shoot him*, as if it were something we had done many times before—would leave a possible chance he was not serious. And as I didn’t see any guns in the car, I asked him what he planned to shoot this TSB with.

“It’s in the back,” he said, motioning with his head to the rear of the car.

I turned around and looked in the trunk of the hatchback. A dark wool blanket covered the giant speaker box. I had ridden in this car many times and had seen the box and heard its sounds. This was my first time seeing the blanket, but because the speaker box occupied the entire trunk of the car, I doubted they could’ve fit anything else back there, not even two guns. Still, I turned to the front, shaken.

“There’s a sawed-off and a .22,” he continued. I had never seen a sawed-off but knew of its legendary status through Hollywood movies. Only serious gangsters carried sawed-offs. I’d seen a shot blow a man’s entire head off and, on another occasion in a different movie, completely disembowel a man. The .22, I knew well. A family friend in Milwaukee kept one in his bedside dresser for protection from the unexpected late-night knocks at the door—his house had been robbed twice, car stolen many times, car stereos yanked out, chained bikes gone missing—and I’d, on one occasion, when he was showing it to my father, held it in my hands, the steely cold metal heavy. It’s not ironic that death mechanized is cold and heavy, a burden some people don’t take seriously. But in my small hands, I found the gun too big, too cold, too heavy.

I looked out the car window to the west as we drove over John
Doua Thao

Nolen Drive. The spires of a church on the far shore pierced the sun into a muddled yolk as it glared off Monona Bay, blinding me as we traveled over the lake, and I pretended this was a hoax, hoping against the reality of the speeding car that my fate was not at our destination. If I were home in Milwaukee, this would never have happened. I’d be home within reach of my parents, within their protection, tethered by their words to the safety they provided. My father would be able to look at me with his disapproving, disappointed face, as if to say, we sacrificed so you could do this?

We made it across the low bridge. My cousin turned off the music as we drove into a quiet neighborhood. We rolled past a street of well-kept ranches and bungalows, turned onto a side street, and in the distance I could see another unit of housing projects. The sight of those buildings gave Uncle Nou’s words credence, rendered them very real to me. The car slowed, then stopped where earlier my cousin had seen this guy we were going to shoot.

My cousin pointed to a spot thirty yards away. “That’s where he was standing.”

“You sure it was him?” Uncle Nou asked. “Where’s he now?”

“Fool,” Cousin Pong said, annoyed that he was being doubted, “the fuck should I know where he is.”

I believed my cousin did see this guy, though I was glad he was gone. The car started rolling again and went around the block at Uncle Nou’s direction. We circled the block once more, and not finding our target, we turned around and drove back home.

“You’re such a fucking liar,” Uncle Nou said as we got back on the bridge.

“Whatever.” My cousin popped in a different cassette and turned the volume up.

The sun was halfway set, its edges more defined with greater distance. To the east, on the drive back, on the placid lake, people were in their boats fishing and waterskiing. Cars and pedestrians stopped at a stop sign. On the park paths, college students were jogging. Cyclists in helmets yielded to rollerbladers and parents with strollers. Dogs, collared and tagged, were walked by owners who carried waste bags. Tennis balls were bouncing from husband to wife, from friend to friend. Frisbees glided from open palm to open palm, one giving, the other accepting. Couples were holding hands, smiling, an after-dinner walk along the lake, because in their world all was well. The music drowned out everything, surrounded us with a deep bass that shook
and shattered our bones, words that pierced our ears and described our small slice of the world—a world pressed upon us, a world absorbed by us, the only world we knew. It is true that in memory everything seems to happen to music. I look back now and hear a Tchaikovsky violin concerto, oddly misplaced like classical music in a Warner Bros. cartoon, and think about how amateurish we were, that as we rolled into proximity of the housing projects the guns were still stashed under the blanket, supposedly, in the back of the Nova when they should’ve been in somebody’s hands at the ready. I think about our futures hidden beneath that blanket. Maybe, as I had hoped then, we weren’t really doing a drive-by at all. I think of the mission we were on, the fate that had abandoned us, the choices that are sometimes never ours to make. I think about how hard my parents had shielded me from the gang life in Milwaukee, how they never realized that due to their union many years before I had already joined one and I was in it for life.
Storytellers

Grandfather laughs when I ask him the name of the bar in Topeka he took my mother to when she was a baby. *All of ’em*. He doesn’t tell me about the ’65 Mustang—how he wrecked it while drunk—how my mother, no older than three, flew out the window—how no one found her in the field until the cops came. *I got a scar just like yours* my mother shows me. In D.C., Grandmother tells me her fourth husband died while visiting home in China. When I ask her why she only has photos of her Korean relatives on the walls, she says, *I keep your photos in a drawer somewhere close.* My mother calls me from Dallas, tells me that my father wants me to write about him. *Now why would you want that?* She asks him over the phone, but mails my book to L.A. anyway. Grandfather says we should all visit my grandmother—I should drive up from Albuquerque. I tell her and she laughs: *He’s still in Kansas? Good. He stay there.* My mother feels her sisters and mother are ashamed of her hue. Maybe that’s why they never visit each other. *I came out of the same fucking pussy they came out of,* she says. *Write a poem about that.* Grandfather tells me the Mustang was repoed because he couldn’t keep up on payments. *Bullshit,* my mother says, *you stick with my story, it’s better.*
Runaway

Thumb jut out—slicing
shadow on the two-lane highway—
when three cars fly by, and I wish
I could outrun every last damn one.

I’m about to throw in the towel
when a cobalt blue Mercedes pulls
over. Two gorgeous women roll
down the window and ask where
I’m going. Anywhere but here,
I always reply and they always smile—
clichés are still the best way to a woman’s
heart. Swoop in and save them from twenty-
story falls or curbside stumbles, and all the Lois
Lanes of the world could be yours.

It’s when I get in the backseat,
cold air blasting from all sides,
that I miss the desert heat.
They race 95 down Route 54:

on their way to Lubbock, they say,
though they’re going the wrong way.
I’m thankful for the break, but wish I could

sit in front, see the road
as we face it head-on,
instead of catching the rust-
colored landscape gallop past.
The redhead turns and asks
with breath full of coffee and wet metal,
*Hey, don’t I know you from somewhere?*

Like everything,
it’s a perfect lie. We’ll never get
where we’re going. The desert
evening cools us into dream.
Christopher Kempf

The Bonneville Salt Flats

What Young saw was the glowing, God-struck promised land. Lake
    that was not a lake, of the salt & salvation

he had waited for since Palmyra.
& when he arrived, his men
    on the edge of mutiny, he knelt

to lick from the earth what their skin
had forgotten. The body,
    divining some saltier calling, will swallow

even itself in times of trauma, will shrivel
like an apple to save
    the asterisk of seeds at its center. I’m not

saying there’s a soul in this poem,
but Provo, except for the slow migration of plates
    beneath the surface, the Flats

might also have swallowed. Sodom
understood this. & Libya, riven
    by the Nazis who wanted,

in its own North African Flats, an unflankable
wasteland. Land
    of hunger & mud enough, just

beneath the silica, to lick
an entire brigade of tanks. That sinking feeling.
    That flood. What
Chinese laborers describe, laying rail
across the rock-salt in 1910, is the extent
of desiccation they were made
to endure, their desert
heads gone hollow
    without the fluid movement
demands of us. What
Lee Shao recalled was crust
    clouding his eyeballs. Silica
in the vitreous
humor. There is nothing
    funny. Or once,
all this was water, as we
too, for the most part, are pools
    of saline. Sacks
of alkali we seatbelt & burn
across the cracking flatland. We floor
    our hemis like men. Here. Haul
our longing across this sizzling
disc of salt at speed
    enough to leave it.
Reclamation

for Imo

Morning sprays gold on the water.
The wind dispenses its cool medicine.
Except for my brother, who always
shuns whites, my family sleeps.
This land is your land. When Woody sang
was he thinking of me, a Cheyenne-Comanche woman?

Oklahoma. A Choctaw word that means
red people. The old “Indian Territory.”
A dumping ground beneath the barrel’s
worm-soaked bottom, its rotten wood.
I’ve made my peace with it.
With Custer’s attack along the Washita River
and the interpretive clash—Battle? Massacre?—
that never ends. Raw liver ravaged by brigand birds.
With elders blotted out by thunderclouds
who’ve never scrubbed their tongues clean,
who lament a doomed inheritance:
men on swift ponies,
an ocean of grass with no shore.
In Hammon I can show you blinkless eyes
of marble, paint flaked from walls like flayed skin.

Old men, drunk before breakfast,
who trip over a broken hoop
on their way to change the channel.
But when I came home after years adrift,
first a foster child among whites,
then a lost angel cradling a bottle

within the corn rows, a plague of locusts
chewing the years into dry, wizened husks,
I fanned a flame with chokecherry,

knew to break the fever that had burned
for so long required purification:
lightning slanting my bones before it

blackened the prairie. My tongue exposed
to the cauterizing hiss of the powwow, this stream,
that day my people gave it their blood.
Rio Grande Gorge

If Coronado, dazzled beyond repair
by rumor, by legends tended
more fiercely than any mortal crop,

had taken the Low Road to Taos in October,
he would have found gold, all right,
gone blind from surfeit of it,

the cottonwoods on either side
extracting tribute from his eyes.
And once, driving through a storm

east of Albuquerque, I watched
a cloud transform from vapor
roiled at random to a buffalo,

then an Indian pointing north.
A rainbow spanned a horizon
so savage, so black I spun off

into cante jondo, Lorca’s deep song
steeped in blood and shattered glass.
Into a past composed of absence,

of adobe weathered and crumbling,
helmets rusted out beneath the yucca.
Conquistador, you should have known

that in a land of angel fire
alchemy has many practitioners.
Spittle and clay once made a man see.
Alexander Lumans

The Home of Wonder Bread

When I fall to pieces, I am going to fall to pieces here.
—Chief Wolf Necklace

A kickball sails into a green dumpster between streets named for the demi-patriots of the old West: Wynkoop, Larimer, Colfax. Today: microbrewery, Cheesecake Factory, bowling alley with two stories.

November 29, 1864. The slaughter began with slaughter—ended with distant laughter. Col. Chivington and seven hundred U.S. Raiders rode down into Sand Creek, toasted on tarantula juice and tangleroot. Chief Black Kettle raised a white flag, then thought better. He raised an American one. His thirty-five painted braves didn’t stand a chance.

In the loading bay for Hostess Cakes: women’s breasts were lopped off, genitalia carved out, unborn children exposed to desert air and dull saber. Raiders wore them as hats. Played catch with their hearts. Stretched them over saddle-bows and rode proudly home to Denver.

The skins of nine chiefs waved from the Apollo Theater’s flagpoles. One Eye, War Bonnet, Spotted Crow. Enough celebration guns were fired skyward that in Omaha Bear Robe, White Antelope, Yellow Wolf. it would rain bullets, sprinkling the land in shallow swathes Big Man, Bear Man, Left Hand. as if from a butter knife, all under suspect thunder.

A hundred and fifty years later, warbeads rattle in substations. The Purina Dog Food factory sends up smoke signals. Scalps hang from the two sets of monkey bars.
at Sand Creek El “where each child is treasured.”
One kickball still knocks around inside a dumpster
while the kicker—unseen until now—steps into the picture.
On the bus home, he passes that rooftop sign for The Home
of Wonder Bread. With only a fingergun, he takes aim.
Dawn Manning

Thriftscape with Buttons

Our houses shared the same floor plan, 
our mothers were alike: in their flat East Valley ranches stuccoed with secondhand salvage—
ready as Mormon pantries to weather monsoons

and personal end-of-days. My mother 
was a barricade of protocol: beaded moccasins, 
church bulletins, and half made-up memories; your mother just had stuff. So we dug

your mother out, and didn’t talk about mine. 
We carted out chicken crates, 
sleeper-sofas, sheet music, and baby clothes, 
then dragged the stained-glass Jesus

through the gravel by its hooks. 
We bartered it all for a song, crowded together 
in the last lawn chair adrift 
in the Sonora’s brined sand, downing shots

of Irish cream and caroling “We Three Kings” 
to the tight-packed sea-pinks, sick thrifts 
hobbling over beer cans, sinks, and dog shit, rooting 
through penny-pinched buttons

flooding from jelly jars, 
pickle jars, cookie jars—
a cascade of leaky life rafts 
sent to save the horde.
Forget What the Arsonist Took

Forget that time we lost ourselves
on purpose, aiming our high beams
past roads bleached by casino glare,
over cattle grates,

until gravel petered
into meadow—womb
of the White Mountains—soft belly
in a jagged-rimmed bowl.

Forget how we heard them first,
huffing mist, the hollow cupping
of hooves on grass, hides shuffling
husks; how we cut the engine,

wave-borne in the whinny and flicker
of moon-skimmed manes,
undulation of unbroken backs.
How a lone elk head

reared from the equine tide:
his antlers
a barren tree luminous
above the sway, his body

a silhouette
shifting black on black
through the herd—
a shadow rooted in light.
Yvonne Martinez

Chicken Fried Rice: An Excerpt from the Memoir Capirotada

It was before she and her confederates shut down Salt Lake City taverns and we were still living in Salt Lake when I first met my Grandma Mary. My big button, white collar, Little Orphan Annie coat covered me to my knees. I wore white lace trimmed anklets and black patent leather shoes. My feet hung just over the edge of the overstuffed sofa by the big window at my great-grandma Mercedes’ house, where I lived with her and great-grandpa Vidal. They were the only parents I knew. I was six years old waiting by the window for Mother, who at that time was as new to me as my Grandma Mary was.

Mother’s black drawstring purse bounced against the leather sides of her jacket when she walked up the steps. She lifted me up to her and I made a circle with my arms around her neck. My face in the sweet leather smell of her collar, my stomach curved around her breasts, she carried me downstairs to the idling Hudson. I sat in the front seat on white stitched leather between Mother and her husband. My brothers tumbled over each other in the backseat on our way to Grandma Mary’s. The green Hudson rolled over the snow like it was carpet under the State Street archway.

Grandma Mary lived on Second South in rooms on top of a row of storefronts where our family had owned a succession of Salt Lake City Mexican restaurants since the 1930s. We had places with names like “Los Cinco ‘R’s” and “El Abandonado.”

Mother carried me up the stairs to a six-panel door that had three locks on it and a hole where the doorknob used to be. In her arms, Mother made a swing for me. I rested myself against her and sat in her laced hands like the song she sang.

“Would you like to swing on a star?”

Mother’s face was cream-colored, like the cream in my great-grandpa’s coffee, just poured.

“Carry moonbeams home in a jar?”
Her lips were pink like the painted pink top of Mexican coconut candy; the kind behind glass in great-grandma's restaurant.

“Or would you rather be a mule?”

In 1950s Utah, the candy, pan dulce, Cantinflas puppets, and sequined rodeo dresses came in boxes big enough for me to climb into. The boxes came up by train from cities in Mexico unknown to me, but like everything else we needed to be Mexican in Utah, they came by rail up from Central Mexico to the Mexican side of Salt Lake City where we lived, and where we ran businesses other than the restaurant; businesses that the Mormons patronized but couldn’t own.

Mother’s red nails hit the door.

“A-tisket, A-tasket, I lost my yellow basket…”

Mother’s song.

The door opened to windows with sheets pulled back to show the brick wall of another building. In rooms that smelled of comino, roasted and sweated chile ancho, and the sticky grit of barbacoa and roasted calf heads, two women and two men sat around a coffee table that had burn holes all around it. Behind them, there was a scratched, painted brown, metal bed with sheets and blankets spilled down around it on the scarred plank floor. The unmatched, scratched, yellow, red, and blue wooden chairs teetered like my kindergarten chairs. Two couples sat in a circle around the cigarette-burned coffee table that held Grandma’s golden ashtray in the middle of it.

Grandma Mary’s lips were red, always red, and when she smiled her eyes flashed black against white except for when she drank and then her eyelids went flat and you could only see the red.

Pink against red, Mother’s lips met Grandma’s.

Grandma lifted a burning cigarette from her golden ashtray. She inhaled and printed the pattern of her lips on the cigarette, then exhaled. In her rooms, Grandma only wore satin.

Grandma smoothed the white satin skirt on her lap. Mother broke the curve of my body against hers. I could only see Mother’s chipped front tooth behind the opening and closing of her pink lips.

“I’ll come back to get you later.”

She bent over to hand me to Grandma. Purse at her back, me in her arms, Mother made a bent-kneed scoot closer to Grandma. She rested her elbow against Grandma’s blue, peg-legged chair. Mother tipped me into Grandma. I bunched up tighter around Mother’s neck, my backside on Grandma’s lap. Mother’s lips pressed together pink to pink.

“Like we talked about, remember?”
Grandma’s man, Mr. Sanchez, wore a thick black brush of a mustache and wavy, cut neat, salt-and-pepper hair. We only knew his last name. That was all we needed to know.

You can change a man like a man changes his shirt, Grandma was fond of saying, and sometimes his shirts will fit the new man.

The starched flannel sleeve of Mr. Sanchez’ shirt covered his arm to his wrist.

“Come on little girl,” he said in a Texan drawl.

He took a pack of cigarettes out of his creased shirt pocket. “I won’t bite.”

A crease line ran up and down the brown plaid patch of his shirt pocket. Grandma pulled the narrow strap of her satin slip up over her shoulder.

“That’s ’cause you ain’t got no teeth.”

The other man who sat around the table spat out his beer when he laughed. Grandma flicked her ashes into the golden ashtray and extended her cigarette to him.

“This is Chief.”

Chief had long black hair tied behind his head and wore a shirt with a collar that stood stiff like it had been ironed and the rest of the shirt hadn’t. Grandma pulled in to inhale and blew her smoke in the direction of—but turned her head away from—the woman next to him.

“And this is Chiefa, his wife.”

Chief tapped his near-empty beer can on the cigarette table burns and Chiefa got up to get him another beer. He took the last swig of his beer and folded his can with one hand. “What’s the matter? Don’t you want to stay and visit with your grandma?”

“Watch.” Mr. Sanchez took a drag of his cigarette. His cheeks opened and closed. His mustache even and flat against his lips, he leaned forward and blew out a white circle of smoke. The smoke hung in the air and then like a ghost, it changed shape.

Mother pulled my arms away from her neck and closed them on my lap. Under me, Grandma’s lap was warm, leg to lap, only her satin slip between us. A white circle floated by.

“Come on, sit with your grandma and I’ll make you another one,” Mr. Sanchez said.

A large smoke ring floated and landed like a halo around Grandma’s head. I reached for the smoke ring, touched it, and it disappeared.

There was gold in Grandma’s mouth when she laughed, gold from during the war, from when she was making good money. Where her
comadres had embedded diamonds in their teeth, Grandma preferred gold. When she was making good money she sent her kids their dinner home in a cab. Even as an adult, Mother associated Peking duck and chicken fried rice with Yellow Cabs.

Mother’s black Capri pants crisscrossed like scissors over to the brick-framed window. Her silhouette against the building across the street, she stood sideways to get a view of the street. She opened her purse and pulled out her lipstick and mirror, “Tony and the kids are waiting for me downstairs.”

Mother pulled her purse shut and slung it around her back, “Mom, I’ve gotta go.”

The side slits of her Capris opened over Mother’s calves when she bent over to kiss me, “You’re gonna stay with your grandma, okay?”

I reached for Mother’s neck and pulled myself around her to find that sweet leather smell.

Chief slid his beer to Grandma, “Don’t you wanna stay and visit some more?”

I felt the satin of Grandma’s slip between my legs and on the back of my thighs. I shook my head and looked back at Grandma’s gold against the red of her lips when she smiled. Her eyes were no longer clear and had started to dim red.

“I’ve gotta take her, Mom. She doesn’t want to stay.”

Grandma’s satin slip moved up her thigh when Mother lifted me off Grandma’s lap. Grandma smoothed down the satin over her lap and reached for her cigarette.
Sarah Fawn Montgomery

Lessons in Cartography

Lesson One: Cardinal Directions

A compass rose looks like a stained-glass sun, arrows pointing out possibilities in precision, intervals spaced by half, then half of half. Sometimes the rose consists of the four important points: north, south, east, west. Sometimes it has a midpoint between each one. Other times, it is these four directions and about a dozen others, each arrow carefully shaded half-black, half-white, as though direction were that easy.

I like my compass rose with just the four base parts, none of these intermediate directions, though the older I get, the more I seem to need something intermediary when things don’t go according to plan, or more importantly, when what I desire is not easily governed.

I left California, the place I’d always known, to move to Nebraska, a place I’d never been, watching the craggy coast shrink in my rearview mirror as I headed due east. I was most likely headed in some more intermediary position on the compass, but specificity didn’t concern me then.

What concerned me was the way I was leaving my position as insider to become an outsider, leaving the West to go backwards. If Manifest Destiny governs this country, prides itself on reaching the Pacific, why was the ocean a blurred line behind me? John Gast’s American Progress shows Columbia in her white robes, golden hair, book in hand, tiptoeing, no, floating really toward the ocean, bringing light with her, driving settlers toward their apparent destiny. Never mind the way the animals, a bear in one corner of the canvas, buffalo in the other, flee from her. No matter how Indians trudge before her, their figures overshadowed by her imposing foot, much larger in size, yet still delicately rendered.

I was leaving, defying cardinal direction. Soon I would travel just enough distance to move beyond the point of vision, the ocean sinking behind the curve of the earth. Like most people, I had to leave a place to realize I loved it. Though I had always smiled at the way driving through rolling hills eventually led to the shore, it wasn’t until driving away that I felt an ache for the land, wondered how to find home somewhere else.
Sarah Fawn Montgomery

Lesson Two: Scale

As I moved across space—pillows, boxes of books, a spatula rattling in the backseat—the landscape was different than my maps promised. A map represents a region of earth or heavens on a plane; it is a way of making the robust compact and easily foldable. But when I unfolded a map during meals or at a quick rest stop, shifted my eyes from the road to the paper stretched across my steering wheel, I found the mountain wrinkles and river squiggles didn’t match what surrounded me or what was ahead.

Maps utilize scale—a ratio of distance on parchment or digital screen to the distance across great sweeps of land. If the images depicted on the map are small enough to ignore the earth’s curvature, then the scale is constant. A constant scale is less deceptive. If, however, a map covers larger areas, say a large geographical landmark or perhaps the entire globe spinning on a metal axis on a desk somewhere, distortion occurs as the sphere must become the plane. It is impossible to create a map with a perfect scale.

On my map the Sierra Nevadas were a few jagged triangles, wrinkled like a woman’s hose, sprawling over two states. The states were precisely boxed, as though a child new to crayon might be instructed to color within the boundaries. The map provided elevation and a route but said nothing of the way my car would slow at the climb, the way I’d be compelled to stare up, up. My map said nothing of this.

On my map the Grand Canyon was just a thick line, a spatter of numbers. But when I parked and made my way according to the signs, I was breathless and fearful at the sight. The canyon stretched further down than anything I’d imagined or would be able to imagine after I left, colors shifting with the layers of sediment, watercoloring through time. I tried to peer down to the river at the bottom, but the depth made me dizzy and I wanted to swoon, crawl along my belly to the edge and stare a good long while at the rock ridges and clefts. I stayed several hours, walking from rim to rim and back, awed and a little stomach-sick by the permanence and force the gash suggested. My map promised nothing of this scale.

Lesson Three: Roadmaps

A roadmap looks like a series of veins under elderly skin—a lifetime of stories, deep grooves and wounds. Look at a roadmap
and you’ll see where the blood flows, where it is thickest and where it tributaries out to the limbs. Look at a roadmap and you’ll see where the veins of a country or a county, a state or a city, intersect and hub.

Roadmaps show major highways and roads. They show airports and railroad tracks. Cities and points of interest. Roadmaps are for planning where to go, usually when you don’t plan to stay.

My eyes couldn’t keep the roads straight and soon I thought the lines were moving rather than simply sitting stagnant. There was an interstate number when I drove through Utah, 70 perhaps, but the number didn’t matter—what mattered was that I was on a red vein, the blue vein of the Colorado River beside me. The map revealed a thinner road, too, an offshoot declared 191. This route, the map said, would lead to Moab, a point of interest.

What I knew of Moab was from photos, orange and red rocks that seemed as though they would leave a chalky residue on my hands if I were to run my palms across. What I knew of Moab was that there was a curve of rock called Delicate Arch, where the wind blew through so deliberately it left a rainbow of stone, an upside-down smile like the quizzical faces of tourists who tried to figure out how it was done.

The roadmaps did not tell me this. Nor did they tell me the way this place was covered by ocean during the Pennsylvanian period, was once ocean dunes and then floodplains. The roadmaps did not tell me that white-throated swifts nest on top of the arch during the summer, the downy white at their throats breaking up the slick black of their bodies. The way the wind felt like air from a dryer vent, the way the dirt made its way into the tread of my shoes, leaving my trail for days afterwards. The way my hands, cramped from clutching the wheel as I made my way to my new home in Nebraska, eased at the sight of the Colorado Plateau, a rock formation that has seen little faulting or folding within the last 600 million years. The way we tourists stared, mouths slightly open at this place we did not understand.

Lesson Four: Data

When looking at a map, discerning how to get from here to there and quickly, we say we are reading. On my trip I read books late at night in motels, pausing to peer out the windows at my tiny car burdened with my things. I spent my last night on the road before I started my new life on the plains in Denver, Colorado, peering first at my book, then at my maps, then out the window at the Mile High
City, which, like all my travels, seemed different than the maps had promised.

When I read my book, I was mindful of the syntax, of a specific word. I stopped and reread and thought, “Yes. That’s it exactly.” I stared at the ceiling and rolled sentences over in my mouth like marbles.

I didn’t do this with the maps. I opened them and refolded them. I sharpened the creases with my nail. I thought, “That’s not what it looks like” or “This is a lie.” I spilled tea, left a brown film over Montana.

We rarely stop to parse maps, to think of the way a map’s contexts can be extended, the way the map can be read through various lenses. We rarely stop to think “Yes. That’s exactly it,” or more correctly, “No. That’s all wrong.” Most refer to a map for numbers, raw data, the most convenient route across this pesky latitude or longitude.

The imposed grid system of latitudes for north and south directions, longitudes for east and west directions, measures distances over the earth’s surface. It has been used since first suggested in 300 B.C. by Hipparchus and was standardized by world mapmaking in 1884. The Prime Meridian, 0° longitude, took years and death and millions in reward to achieve. Most don’t know the story of the Prime Meridian, the way Britain appointed the first royal astronomer in 1675, built an observatory to improve sea navigation, to find a way to map the heavens so man could sail across the seas, every minute important in navigation, the data precious in that way. The way years later, no progress had been made—over two thousand men were killed in 1707 in a sea disaster. The way Parliament offered a Longitude Prize in 1714, including a reward of £20,000 (equivalent of about $3 million today), a prize unclaimed for nearly sixty years until John Harrison, an unknown carpenter, managed to invent the marine chronometer that would accurately measure longitude and change cartography.

Now MapQuest will tell you how far to drive without needing to know these things; satellite imaging will show you precisely what a motel or rest stop diner looks like. Google Earth makes the entire world accessible and now GPS navigation systems will tell you, quite literally, where to turn, so that looking at the map on the screen, highlighted for those who don’t know what road they are on, isn’t even necessary—a calm voice tells drivers, “Left turn ahead.”

This ease of mapping and movement means most don’t know how far a mile is or what direction a river flows or that the Prime Meridian, like most mapping tools and conventions, is arbitrary. That despite this arbitrariness, we give prime meridians to celestial bodies, try to
impose form and order on moons, ringed Saturn, reddened Mars, prove our power over place through mapping, impose data on things we know little about.

Maps, in theory, tell us how to know land, how to move across the sea when we cannot see the land at all, yet we don’t know the fundamentals of cartography. All we’ve got to tell us about place is data, but numbers are stoic and clinical, seemingly simplistic when fit into a system dating back to the Babylonians, Johannes Werner, Ptolemy, Newton. And while the data makes “sense,” while the system has certainly been synthesized, the numbers are meaningless—easily controlled, imposed by man, by the mapper, a mathematician, an artist who can render the world in any way, simply by presenting data.

Lesson Five: Political Maps

If we understand maps as a way to know or describe a place, as a way of imposing order on a landscape, as the history of Magellan, Cortez, Robert de La Salle, Daniel Boone, Kit Carson and others, of man vs. nature, of expansion and conquest, then aren’t all our maps political?

A political map does not show roads or physical features or topography. Instead it indicates state and national boundaries, major cities, capital cities like my new home in Lincoln, Nebraska, marked with a star circumscribed. A political map tells who is in control and how far this control reaches.

When Jefferson ordered Manifest Destiny, he wanted maps to establish a United States claim of discovery to the Pacific Northwest, an American presence before any other. The maps and journal accounts—scientific data on plants and animals, paces and numbers, climates and seasons—were documentation to prove knowledge of place and thus ownership. He sent the expedition across the continent like spreading water, their travels wetting everything in sight.

Certainly maps existed before Lewis and Clark—John Meares, James Cook, Alexander Dalrymple, Philippe Buache. Their maps stretch out on fanciful scrolls, more attention given, it seems, to the brightly-colored figures framing the maps than on the places themselves. The land seems secondary when surrounded by men on horses, burning villages, exotic women hareming in the right-hand corner. What of the bedrock, the river running aortic through a place, when compared to images of the natives being taught to read, a sea dragon, a phoenix, a star, a paragraph in cursive Latin?
Strangest, for me, about these old maps are the ways they offer alternate views of place and our place within it. My concept of the world spins and changes when I see these maps, some with land cut open and spread across a plane in a way that seems broken, some rendering places I’ve never seen with so much detail I feel disoriented, some with the world so small in comparison to the surrounding figures it seems secondary to the people and to artistic flourish. No matter the perspective, however, something remains the same—thick borders outline the land, holding in continental coasts, dancing along the edge of a territory, marking clearly what is ours and what is theirs.

Native American maps represent my new home on the Plains differently, land defined not in calculated precision—scale, numbers, a clinical removal—but in organic ways. Lean Wolf’s map showing the course he took on a horse raid from the Hidatsa village at Fort Berthold to the Sioux Valley at Fort Buford is lively, shapes and ideas easily understandable without an explanatory key. There is no scale, no scattering of numbers. There is just the land and the trail and the horse and a sense that this is the truth of experience.

White Bird’s pictograph of the Battle of Little Bighorn, too, is a map devoid of numbers or routes or data gleaned from a compass or marking paces. While some may argue the painting is not a map because it does not outline boundaries and borders, it will tell you much about the place. When I look at this map I see movement and landscape, the physical features of the Plains, the way place is shaped and sometimes scarred by human contribution and violence.

Lesson Six: Legend

A legend is the guide to the system. A legend uses words or phrases—colors to explain the way the world is depicted. Grassland is pale pink. Streams a steady blue line. Bare land is yellow. A legend creates the symbols one should heed.

One must read the map—the world in essence—through the cartographer’s eyes. Rarely can you understand the map without the legend, without the cartographer’s direction and control. The land changes with time—places grind along fault lines, the sea laps at shifting shore lines, we dam rivers or strip away mountains until what’s left looks like empty ribs—so maps are the stories that persist, the stories we seek out to see our roots, to know backward into how we arrived, why we are. What, then, can be done when the cartographer’s
legend does not satisfy? What happens when the stories might not be true?

As I left Denver and made my way to Nebraska, the mountains dipping low to the Plains, I found no map whose legend was truth. The maps I followed showed restrooms and picnic spots, gas stations and coffee stops, but none of the texture I experienced. A river on the map was just a line, the highway dwarfing it according to the map’s legend. But the river I saw stretched for miles, ran farther and faster than the highway, eclipsed even the water towers that reached toward the sky high above. Merely a line on the map, in reality the river defied legend, layers of trees growing alongside the water, bowing low to greet the water’s edge, bright chokecherries ripe with astringency, mosquitoes rhyming along with the water’s noise.

Follow early maps of the outbound route Lewis and Clark took and you’ll move along the river as well, from Camp Dubois up through the corner of Nebraska, up the Missouri through South Dakota and through states one by one to the Pacific. The Niobrara, Cheyenne, Knife, and Milk rivers branch off as though they are running away from the cartographers. The expedition arrived in Omaha, Nebraska, in late summer, just as I arrived years later, but like my modern maps, I couldn’t follow their legends. Legends on these maps are myth, the mythos of the West, of progress, of Columbia marching back toward the way I came. Legends are the way the men made sense of what they saw, mapped it along with a story for others to read. Read their journals, too, and you’ll find the daily accounts of men looking to write the world onto a foldable space.

Lesson Seven: Physical Maps

I’d thought driving into the Heartland would feel more decisive, like I’d suddenly realize what the place meant when I got there. Months of researching my new home, using satellite imaging to take me right onto the main streets and looking at tourist maps to pinpoint where to shop and eat had me feeling as though I’d arrive and simply reorient myself.

The drive left me uncertain, however, many of the maps negated by my experience. Physical maps promise a flatland, leave the page smooth and unblemished, but they leave out the Midwestern sky, which is as fierce and terrifying during a summer storm as it is gorgeous when calm, the way it domes across the expanse of space,
curves higher and further than it could anywhere else in the country. To be on the Plains is to be aware of the sky, to reorient your gaze upward, to imagine yourself smaller somehow.

To be on the Plains is also to be aware of a long history. Fossil records may place sandhill cranes in Nebraska for over nine million years, the birds returning each spring to watch the landscape change, for they’ve seen the creation of the Platte River 10,000 years ago, watched the bison give way to cattle, prairie grass give way to corn.

We’re changing place now, altering the physical landscapes through the stubborn nature of our will. Maps drawn up by the Lewis and Clark expedition have long since ceased to be true, if they ever were, the physical nature of place permanently altered or disrupted, contemporary maps outdated even quicker.

Now some physical maps include manmade elevations or points of interest, dams or bridges, fast food restaurants and Starbucks, elements that order a place, define experience for the traveler before they’ve even left the car. We deal with temporality rather than physicality; we know a place by the physical markers we’ve set up rather than the physical markers a place has established with history.

I wonder what our maps will look like long after the restaurants have been replaced, freeways rerouted, land smoothed or terraced or concreted. Our sense of place and permanence shifts so quickly I wonder if we’ll look back at our satellite images the way we look at old maps, bright flags and ships moving in the margins, drawing the eye away from the place and toward the mapmaker’s name calligraphied across the corner.

Lesson Eight: The Cartographer

The cartographer presumably knows place best, for whom else but the most intimate to map a place, whom else but the most intimate to tell the lifeblood of a landscape, the heartbeat of a region?

Like God, the cartographer gives us a world, maps our existence in and on it. The cartographer sets the map’s agenda, as though the map had an order of business or some underlying motive. A well-designed map, according to American geographer Alan MacEachren, “is convincing because it implies authority.” Readers of maps believe in the power and truth of the mapmaker more than the region.

The cartographer tells us how to know a place, chooses the traits to be mapped, chooses what is relevant. The cartographer reduces the
complexity of characteristics to be mapped, orchestrates elements to best convey a message to an audience. In a cartographer’s terms, this is called projection, generalization. This is called editing.

As with so many of our interests and contributions, there is a certain hubris in this editing, a sense of unearned arrogance and accomplishment. Look at maps from the 1600s, 1700s, the 1800s, and you’ll see the cartographer’s name declared. Look at the border, the frame around the map nearly as important as what is inside, a banner proclaiming the one who commissioned the map. Look at the craft, for that’s certainly what cartography is—a crafting of place. As with most things, those with power do the writing, pride spurning them on.

Competition is apparent, too, in cartography, mappers earning their place in cultural memory. Early mapmakers—Herman Moll, Nicolas de Fer—used to steal from one another, one map appearing innocuously in another, engravers taking credit for the expedition and artistry. In 1806, as Clark went east to establish legend, he collected Native maps to fill in the blanks where his own maps fell short.

An American cartographer, Arthur H. Robinson, says if a map is not properly designed it “will be a cartographic failure,” that out of everything cartographers must do, “map design is the most complex.” According to Robinson, a cartographer owes his audience a superior design and scope. A cartographer must teach. With cartography came the printing press and mass production, magnetic compass and telescope, lithograph and GPS. Now the cartographer has new ways of imaging and recording—satellites that show what a city looks like down to a fine blade of grass, three-dimensional topographies, resource maps that change with the stock market.

What, then, is superior design, superior scope? How do we frame a landscape, decide what stories to tell? How do we define or redefine it?

Final Lesson: Deep Maps

When I came to Nebraska, people told me roadmaps would be easy, that the city of Lincoln was designed as a grid, easy to follow and just as easy to commit to memory. But roadmaps didn’t tell me I’d have difficulty adjusting to the few lanes of traffic instead of six- and eight-lane freeways. When I came to Nebraska, the scale of the map promised Lincoln was a large city, but I found it sprawling compared to what I’d known before. When I came to Nebraska, I had another type of legend: Buffalo Bill and his Wild West show, visions of Little
House on the Prairie, and the fantasy of Dorothy leaving the Plains behind in black and white.

A final lesson, it seems, comes from looking at the way we’ve recorded land and its ownership, its physical attributes and resources and the manmade marks we’ve added, and noticing what we’ve left out or altered or erased altogether. Notice what we never knew. Traditional maps, for me at least, did nothing to usher me from outsider to insider, said nothing to me of the history or soul of the place. All they provided was the patina, no grain or root.

There is something to be said for travel along secondary roads, for avoiding large cities and tourist points of attraction, something to be said for getting to know place in ways beyond the map, devoid of the nostalgia that so often makes up our understanding of place, of country, of legend. There is something to be said for exploring place regardless of scale or conquest, to know place not horizontally across a plane, but vertically, using geographical and natural history, stories and folklore, archaeology and weather to travel through time.

Deep maps do not feign objectivity or claim authority like conventional cartography, nor do they imply who has the ability to describe a place. Everyone can be a cartographer. We can be of more than one place, can find a stake in a place we are new to or just visiting. Roaming makes coming home richer, for when we explore places beyond our understanding and experience, we see connections between places we never imagined—California and Nebraska—and the depth in each.

I have lived in Nebraska for several years and am still learning about this place. When I arrived in the Midwest I was lonely for California, lonely for the shore and the salt of an ocean breeze, lonely for vineyards dotting hillsides. I was so lonely I was willing to reach out to an unfamiliar space, as most travelers are. When we travel somewhere new we open ourselves up to what it will give us, we are receptive for something to offer excitement or beauty or comfort. What I found was that it isn’t hard to love the Midwest; it isn’t hard to love any space if you are mindful of it.

I’ve only begun to understand how glaciers moved over this space, smoothing it and depositing rich soil, how once megafauna—woolly mammoths with arced tusks, giant sloths and saber-toothed tigers—walked this place, and then the buffalo, moving seamlessly as the grasses grew and cured, Plains Indians following with the seasons. I’ve only started to learn about prairie grass, the way the roots stretch underground for a braided eternity, the way fire fuels their growth. I’ve
Sarah Fawn Montgomery

only started to appreciate the way a storm leaves the sky a coke-bottle green, the way you can feel a tornado in your bones, or the premonition of snow, only started to appreciate the way this place demands a love affair with the weather.

I’m making my map by figuring out the roads on my own, sometimes taking the longest route from here to there to see something unfamiliar. My map includes the small towns not on the maps—bee keeping on a hill, a prairie burn. I’m making my map by talking to people whose families have lived here for generations, learning about the sorrows of this place, the Easter Blizzard of 1873 and the Night of the Twisters, about the KKK presence in the 1920s and ’30s and the murder of Brandon Teena more recently. My map includes the rivers and the sky and seeing myself as smaller somehow, not a conqueror of a new place, but a small share in its history.

I make my map each afternoon, when, no matter the season, I walk three or four miles along a trail just behind my home. The trail stretches the length of the city and though walking was something I’d never done in California, I’ve found that my new position in this place asks quietly for it, asks for me to come and be in the space, a part of it rather than an observer.

My map is the way I must first cut through a neighborhood, dappled light through the branches, always two little girls riding bikes and whispering “hi.” The way the trail suddenly appears behind the neighborhood as though the city were vanished, fuschia flowers looking like stars, a slender gopher frozen just outside his hole, bright eyes pointed up with his nose to the sun, cardinals with sharp beaks and calls, a black squirrel running the same length of branch each afternoon, and glittering insects, some larger than an outstretched finger. The ways things smell as the seasons shift, the sight of rabbits brown against the stark snow, then hidden against the dirt when the melt comes. My map is the way this trail leads for miles on either side, as far from my home, as far into place as I want. My map is the way I ignore the mile markers to walk deeper.
Christina Misite

After the Rainy Season

I.

Huebner Creek has two inches of water that it’s losing fast, banks worn,
this year’s two weeks of usefulness over.

On the corner of Market and Alamo is a man hefting a shovel, digging dried mud out of an excavator’s tracks, shovel’s sharp edge in, a shift the satisfying crumble of earth falling away.

II.

During last week’s thunderstorm I sifted through pictures: so many of my old room, now wallpapered over and passed on to the next sister, now just points in mid-air.

III.

I remember so well the broad fingernails of your hand wrapped around a glass
Christina Misite

of water, but everything else is overexposed, negative, the blur of the wrong lens.

It’s not my touching you

that feels so distant, but that you lay on my bed, your eyes grazing my walls, that you once moved through spaces no longer there.
Kristi Moos

Rushmore

The single largest threat to Mount Rushmore isn’t terrorism, but water.
—South Dakota Department of Tourism

There are old symbols—
they fall to the ground with ease.

The cheerful ones gape and grin,
the cartoonish ones droop and sigh.

Sometimes they rise in us sleeping—
a face, a body, waiting for an earthquake

or a sinkhole in the earth, like a grave,
with its dead ends and profitable turns.

They dance a jig once their cracks
are sealed—remaining battered

yet joyful, reminiscent of pet dogs
for whom everything is official—

each night, they go to bed officially,
surrendering to the physics of resiliency.

They chat under side-light sunsets, the hue
of endless hope, as in a Bierstadt still life.

They lean back against a uranium mine,
repeat the mantra, all of our nature must be used.

They doze off over a dormant riverbed
certain that some truths overcome all inertia.
Kristi Moos

They wiggle deeper into granite robes, convinced that miracles will fend off water,
as for Moses, who parted the sea with his staff, or Odysseus, naked and wet under Ino’s veil.
Juan J. Morales

Gift

*  

Take the middle-aged man in an Albuquerque laundromat who once asked me about my ancestry and boasted of his 15th generation Spanish heritage held on tracts of land he had claim to in New Mexico or Spain. I don’t remember which.

When I tell him my parents never taught me Spanish, he instructs me with the condescending click of a tongue to learn.

His tone enough to redden my face like a slap he would have obliged when I already implicate myself enough in the form of awkward conjugations and the repeated phrase “¿Cómo se dice...?”

Thinking about it now, this man showed me how we can associate ourselves with one side and deny the conquered half. I wish I could ask him now if he knows how we can forgive and approach the culmination even in our struggle through words and idiomas.
I don’t know what is true anymore, so I keep scribbling, music cranked on my iPod. I want to know place for our family centuries before. Family trees are reconstruction methods to explore ourselves now. Seen in the weathered photos and bestowed with identical names, the forgotten are doppelgangers wearing similar expressions, high cheekbones, facial features of the denied indio.

I look into their eyes by staring in the mirror and witness the scars of younger days I regret collecting.

When I was fourteen and asked if we had Indian blood inside, my mother’s point-blank answer no. Even then, I didn’t believe.

She didn’t understand why it mattered to recognize two bloods swirled together while I didn’t consider how she had a protective life to conceal the indio when she grew up. To forget the indígena within, to smother origins in denial, are adopted habits from times before I knew how to track a pen into words. I think about my confusion burying me on either side of a line drawn in the sand, knowing it will be erased by the rising tide, and then I turn up my music again.

I write future and past pressed together as the skin we wish to crawl out of, but in the end learn to accept as a gift.
Melissa Mylchreest

July, Montana

Twenty-seven days
over 100 and on every one a fire,
the summer turned so hot the trees went to ash.
   No sky that month
but that close, still pall,
and when late some days the sun showed
like a dull blood orange in the west I stood
in the slow streets to stare. After dark, purple
lightning, green heat keeping to the hills.
   One midnight we wrestled
your mattress to the front room for the screen door,
for the air when it moved, waking early
into a precious cool hour
from dreams of smoke.
   Sweatstain, parched skin, the salt
stain on my tongue from your skin, a season of taste
and absence. No rain.
Before and after helicopters, silence. Before
and after love, silence. No stars. No telling
the time, no need beyond our three rooms on 3rd,
the market on Orange Street. Nothing on the walk back
but the road and the charged air
watching the progress of a pineapple,
a bag of limes, arancia sangue Italian ice
that would melt before home.
   We fed each other
ruby spoonfuls, a sharp, sour
supper to cut the haze, drank late
naked at the kitchen table, glasses
dripping the night’s only constellations
to burn and burn off our thighs.
They shutter the mill and still the mill
stink settles in this valley, and men
soured—thirty years of a sure thing
and now this shame—turn to their old friends
and then the bottle and for a few
there’s finally the certain comfort
of blued steel. Once the great trucks groaned
and downshifted up to the gates all day.
Amid steam and noise, a kind of coarse
brotherhood; lives gathering trucks, wives,
high school football and the Frenchtown bar.
So one morning at the hardware store,
what honor’s left in Tom, we’ve been friends
twenty years. Can you give me a job?
Tell me, what else can a man do,
that pulp smell dogging him like a ghost?
And one day the Missoulian runs
a three-inch mention and everyone knows
the newsprint is trucked from Canada
where trees still fall and a good man can die
in his traces if he chooses.
To become a ghost town requires continuous decay and ghosts. A wall collapses, then another; nails rusted, slowly corroding until they reluctantly release their grasp. Just a pile of debris that someday, too, will return to the ground. Scrub and grass finally claiming foundations. Eventually cement will crumble until all evidence of the town is erased. Out west, the landscape is rampant with ghosts, towns abandoned, windows blasted thin as parchment that shatter once frames sag, old mills that produce little more than tumbleweed and rodents. But this town found a way to avoid decay, a way to avoid the prick of the rusted nail, shards of glass, the figure that stares from an upstairs window every night since her death. This town refused that fate, the empty houses placed onto trucks then carried away. The old town declared defunct. Declared restored. Salvaged. Safe.
William Notter

Driving Nevada

One of the continent’s only places where dark is really that— nothing past the headlights’ reach but black, with a ragged edge separating land from lighter starlit sky. Perspective vanishes at nightfall here, without so much as farming country’s scattered lights to orient a driver.

Hours on, you crest a ridge and a town appears far off, Ely, say, or Tonopah, a spray of gold that would have dropped every Spaniard in an expedition with genuflecting, signing the cross, oaths of gratitude to God and pope and king. The sight of those providential lights would have justified the blistering march and every Indian dispatched.

Thirty minutes later, what seemed like the shimmering towers of Cibola on a velvet field reveals itself: a truckstop buffet, streetlights, casino marquees. PAYCHECKS CASHED IF YOU PLAY. LOOSEST SLOTS IN TOWN. Friars and conquistadors could never know but gold is here, microscopic bits percolated into sediments
deep under brown mountains, 
blasted from pits that would have taken 
generations of slaves to dig.

Low-grade ore gives up its gold 
in the alchemy of cyanide leach. 
The mines mean steady checks 
for engineers and dump truck drivers, 
but nothing like imperial fortune. 
Still, that old dream lingers in the lights, 
their promise over distance, 
a prize just waiting to be taken, 
the chance that lines you up with grace.
As I watch my son draw a map of the Columbia River for a social studies unit on Lewis and Clark, he uses a fistful of pens to capture its rolling power pressing west through the Cascade Mountains, carving out the gorge that defines the border between Oregon and Washington. But he doesn’t bother detailing Tongue Point, a nearly mile-long peninsula that bespeaks the river’s surrender to the sea. Along this outcrop of land the Columbia’s fresh water floats above the denser salt water before soaking into the tides. On the map, where Tongue Point should be, my son has drawn a single, shaky blue arrow that edges off the outline of the continent and points to the words “Pacific Ocean.” This uncelebrated marking of the end of the river’s 1,200-mile journey troubles me. It suggests that the river is finite, that it has no future. I shift my weight from side to side, lean over his work, and wonder if he can imagine that water travels from land to sea to air, and back. I am uncertain about articulating how, by degrees, one thing becomes another.

The trembling blue arrow reminds me of a fishing trip with my husband. We bobbed in a rented motorboat in Netarts Bay. I baited crab traps and watched the lapping waters gradually grow up into folding waves until, at some distance, they mixed with the pounding surf. I couldn’t fix the point where the marine horizon unequivocally shifted, where I could say, “This is exactly where the bay ends and the sea begins.” I was tempted to drop traps farther out to get a better idea of the border between the two, but a sensible fear of open ocean kept my curiosity in check. I didn’t want us to suddenly find ourselves caught in rough water in such a small craft, wondering how we got there. I didn’t think about it then, but now know, that in cycles of all kinds the transition points are often both elusive and critical. This is the lesson I want my son to learn, that I wish were evident in his drawing. But I can find no good way to suggest that he spend more time drawing Tongue Point other than to say that a shaky blue arrow makes the river’s merge with the sea seem inconsequential. I keep
quiet because he is working so hard to finish the assignment. Instead, I
watch how he goes over and over the line that plots the river’s path, the
part he knows for sure, and admire the determination of his strokes.
He has drawn a portion of the truth—the fact that sooner or later, all
rivers end, yielding their waters to collect as oceans and lakes. But the
appearance of finality masks a cycle of regeneration. Right before our
eyes, oceans and lakes evaporate and ultimately fall to earth as the
snow and rain that keep rivers in motion.

According to the wedding invitation, the ceremony will be
held on the banks of Lolo Creek, just outside of Missoula, Montana.
My American niece is marrying her Japanese fiancé, and I am told
the service will combine western and Asian traditions. I don’t know
exactly what that means, so I let my imagination pour over possibilities
while I rearrange the snacks cluttered around my feet in the front of
the car. We are on our way to the wedding via an extended camping
trip, winding from our home in Oregon through Idaho and Wyoming.
On this particular ten-hour leg of the journey, we press north through
the Teton Range and distract the children with false moose sightings,
pointing to hulking shapes along the creeks that feed the Snake River.
As I handle sticky juice boxes and dig for a trash bag, I take my eyes off
the landscape to imagine my niece in a silk kimono shuffling down the
aisle in open-toed wooden shoes, head bowed and deferential. I see her
in sepia tones, like a delicate artifact from the past. But I know from a
picture she sent that her gown is strapless with an empire waist. “Pray
for dry weather,” she wrote in an email, worried about mud making
her procession treacherous in satin heels. She said they have planned a
tea ceremony. I consider what that might involve.

The evergreen horizon rushes past as I try to envision the months
and years following the wedding, and the ways in which the confluence
of cultures will propel the newlyweds’ lives. I take a quick inventory
of how my German husband and I have influenced each other; how
my brother and his Italian wife have blended their ways. Where do
these changes begin? Is it the moment you say “I do,” or are they put in
motion, like a chain of reactions, starting from the first time you meet?
Some people think it’s unusual that my niece is marrying a foreigner,
but to me it ripples into the past, to the African-American, American,
Polish, and Ukrainian unions of my parents and grandparents. I look
over my shoulder and glimpse at my children, whose eyes scan the
creek banks for any sign of thick haunches and curved antlers. When
my daughter squeals, claiming to have spotted a moose, she sets our heads turning. It’s then I notice that the car is still paralleling the creek, moving up current, headed toward the source.

My last trip to Montana, over twenty years ago, was hasty. My boyfriend at the time and I had packed an overstuffed futon into our twenty-year-old Volkswagen Fastback and hurried across the country from San Francisco to New York City. Our only detour was Glacier National Park to drive the Going-to-the-Sun Road during the short seasonal window when the two-lane highway is cleared of snow. In a picture of me taken at the turnout on Logan Pass, the highest point on the road, I straddle the Continental Divide. I am full-face to the camera, mouth partway open as though in mid-sentence or mid-laugh. We had traded jokes about whether the car would have enough acceleration to power up the climb to 6,600 feet. At the summit we stopped to document the accomplishment. Somewhere behind me in the picture is a signpost that, at the time, I didn’t bother to read, but that I now know describes the geographic consequence of the location. The Continental Divide separates the watersheds of the Americas—to the west of it, all rivers drain to the Pacific Ocean; to the east of it, they run to the Atlantic Ocean. Geographers consider it the hydrological apex of North America. But I couldn’t tell. It looked like a lot of other places I’d been.

After snapping our photos and taking in the view, we piled back into the car with a new concern for the brakes on the winding descent. We dropped down into the valley and forged across Montana’s plains. The mountains appeared fully framed in the rearview mirror, like an improbable movie set, jutting precipitously out of a flat, treeless foreground. At first we raised our eyes every few minutes to watch the reflected image diminish a mile at a time. But finally, we anchored our attention on the road in front of us and plotted our progress on the map, drawing a finger over each town as we rolled east.

The wedding is small and personal—all of the thirty guests are either family or close friends. My niece has planned an elegant outdoor affair that requires the help of many hands to succeed on her limited budget. We gather the morning of to help decorate the tent, polish stemware, tie boutonnieres, wrap favors, set tables, transport chairs, and hang flying-insect traps. An hour before the ceremony, everyone scatters to shower and change. When we reunite it doesn’t
seem as though we just spent the day toiling together in the late summer heat; we admire our handiwork as though strangers had done it. During the processional, my niece walks between her parents and appears both weak with emotion and driven by anticipation. Curiously, it’s my brother I watch most closely. I can’t take my eyes off him and then realize that I am struck by how much he looks like my father. All weekend no one has talked about how proud my father would have been to witness his granddaughter’s wedding. Maybe no one wants to feel again the sadness of his death five years ago, or maybe no one wants to admit that we’ve learned to celebrate without him.

As my brother passes me in the aisle, I shift my gaze to my mother, who is perched almost off the edge of her seat in the row in front of me. She has tears in her eyes. I was twelve at my brother’s wedding, almost the age of my son, who is fidgeting in the row behind me. My brother’s wedding was far more modest, held in the living room of our small three-bedroom Manhattan apartment. I remember that we prepared a vegetarian buffet, that I wore my sixth-grade graduation dress, and that my mother cried. As my niece reaches the altar, I think that the tears my mother shed then are the same as the ones she sheds now, somehow reconstituted from the memories—good and bad—of other family milestones. Just before the officiant begins, a friend leans over and says, “It won’t be long until we see your little one in a long white dress.” She means my seven-year-old daughter, who is the flower girl. It’s strange to try to picture this boy-bodied pixie as a mature woman, and stranger still to imagine her the mother of a child of marrying age. I feel heady and adrift; I want to drop anchor, find a mooring. I childishly wish for this moment on Lolo Creek to remain forever present. The rush of the creek is an unbroken pulse in the background during the tea ceremony, the exchange of vows, the gifts of rings, and the recessional. Before long we are all headed back to the house to toast the newlyweds, moving slowly through the grass until we are out of earshot of the water that is always on its way and never arriving.

The day after the wedding, my husband and I are the first to leave Missoula, packing children and gear back into the car for the last stretch of our journey, eleven hours returning to Oregon. My mother and brother fly west; the rest of the family flies east. After having spent nearly a month on the road, I have lost interest in going anywhere except home. We pass the time in the car singing rounds, playing twenty questions, and periodically arguing. We press on uncomfortably
to our destination rather than stop too often. Heading south through Kennewick, Washington, we cross the Columbia River into Oregon. Back in familiar territory, we measure the distance in memories—the time we were in the gorge when it was filled with kite surfers, the time we couldn’t outrace the storm and drove all night to avoid pitching the tent in the rain. We sing whatever lines we can remember from the Woody Guthrie song “Roll On, Columbia”:

Green Douglas firs where the waters cut through.
Down her wild mountains and canyons she flew.
Canadian Northwest to the ocean so blue,
Roll on, Columbia, roll on!

Two hours from home we leave sight of the river and head south to the house. It’s late when we arrive and spill out of the car. It already seems so long ago that we sat beside Lolo Creek, which fills with water from the snowfall captured by the glacial range. That creek, not even a thin scribble on our map, seasonally roars through Lolo Creek Valley to join the Bitterroot River. Then it flows into the Clark Fork Basin until it cedes to the mighty Columbia and empties into the sea. Some of those same waters flow by the Alaska, California, and North Equatorial Currents to Japan, to sustain a cycle that is so immense it can scarcely be imagined.
Ricardo Pau-Llosa

Wadis

Flying north over Colorado

As the mountains finally move upon us,
the guts of sudden rivers spider
the tarnished gold of drought. What spills

this web of tribute with dark coinage
as it widens as it gathered
is now tumbleweed, blood black

colonies blown, daubings. Now ravine
in cleft hungers, whose ends brittle
into empty silks, these veins homaged

timelessness with the roar of snow
exchanged, captured hence understood.
The past essays in the world’s treasured howling.

Days later, in the Springs, I will sit
on a suburban porch and see a huge flag
flutter over model homes on the next block.

We know the rectangle the wind denies
in folds and flaps that harem bulges now,
then triangles and trapezoids, river fast,

shuffling off an endless coil of forms
ahead of naming’s calculus. A branch
of wind breezes up the grasses, sways

the flowering bush on the lawn,
and given desire would strain the trunk
which, sole among nature, presently
joins the roofs and walk lights and cars
in solid indifference. The flag nervously
mediates between the built and living worlds

which force commingles, telling its nascent shape
to those who know her dead inside their homes,
away from the flame day casts upon the stones.
Fernando Pérez

Open Field, Bicycle Graveyard

Most of the frames resemble
an animal’s carcass.
Bones, a back tire—all that’s left.

She’s been robbed before.
Missing pieces remind her.

She’s learned: keep things closer,
pay attention to detail.

Rust swiping its way across
handlebars, those colors
tasseled in hair strands.

She walks
as if buildings have flown,
leaving only hills
and wind between.

When she’s lost
in the valleys beneath Black Mesa,
easy to think she should stay
the sheep, keep
the San Francisco Peaks west.

Young shepherd
with only the shell of a lighter,
deer bones buried under feet of snow
remembers to breathe
slower, to leave everything to the fires
signaling from search camps,

elders wrapped in extra skin
holding her warmth around their backs.
Zara Raab

Storm over Santa Fe

Wind ruffles the striped agave
and the bright-colored sarapes of Hopi
selling their wares; roses cleave
the pale adobe and quick-rhyming
bees hip-hop in fury.

Rimmed around by high mountains,
this place of kiva is blessed,
red and yellow flowering of dress,
azure sky, scent of jasmine—
sleepy as childhood—seamless—

till the air starts to fray,
lightning brings rain, an umbra,
dark cloud above an estufa
pelting stout gringos on parade
as they strut sloshed round the plaza.

Sudden ducking of proud men,
smelling of liquor kava,
thick men with tempers like salsa,
like lightning, becoming children
beneath the storm’s fat piñata.
Natalie Scenters-Zapico

Your Mouth Is Full

of prickly-pear jam, goat cheese, and cracker. As you speak, your gums might be bleeding, I can never tell from the shadow. I laugh at how you call each card: Con los cantos de sirena,

no te vayas a marear, el farol de los enamorados, cuánto apache sin huarache. Each black bean dances across our uneven table, so neither one of us can tell who is winning. You pull el cotorro

from the deck and I confess, My wedding dress, I found it full of cocoons. I sent the dress back home with my mother. As you shuffle the deck, you say, Your mother’s verging cities must be hungry then,

since they couldn’t have you for a wedding, look how they took the dress instead. We laugh and dance each time another bean strikes four across the board. I’ve almost won

but am missing el cornudo. I tell you, My dress, my poor dress what will the verging cities do to it? Your mouth full and red, you say, They’ll cry for your white dress until one city wears it, and the other
can tear at it from behind. One sister, beautiful, the other, hysterical for the moon behind the sun. You call: El que te mata. I say: Lotería, el diablo o la muerte? You say: No, el alacrán.
Angels Fall from the Sky to El Paso, Texas

I wonder what he sees first: a building, perhaps a bank of windows cutting into the sky. Or a road, a freeway stitched with cars so small it looks like a fine embroidered curtain. And Angel, what do you think of? Do you think: This is me—dying in the sky? Do you scream to God? Do you tell him, you are not that kind of Angel? Do you say: I am merely a man named Angel— I have no wings to fly. And when he does not listen, do you scream or close your eyes and unwrap the gift of gravity? That pull, that tug of organs. And Angel, do you see me? Just before you hit the middle of five o’clock traffic?

Running on the sidewalk searching each body as they hit the ground, for any one of them that might be you? A city of fallen angels, each one a collection of human arms and legs, a torso, and bleeding mouth. I knew when immigration arrested you, when I had to pay a fine for ever having loved you, that they would
take our one bedroom, our washer and dryer—
anything of value. But, how was I to know
that even God would push your frail form
from the sky? So when I find

your body naked, your skull cracked
in shards across the tar, I take
my clothes off and cover you.
You whisper: I can’t die here, I wanted

to fall on the live side of the border.
And I know it isn’t your voice
I’m hearing but I take your severed hands
and carry them across to Juárez anyway.

I breathe bone as I cross—your blood running
to my elbows. I breathe. I breathe
to exchange your body for an explanation.
I breathe. No one says a word; I breathe.
As cranes descend, black ink seeping from twilight onto the Platte River’s sandbars, I can’t imagine defensive kicks, pecks; birds glide, spilling onto this parchment of sand.

Moving calligraphy, my husband: clad in black, brown belt doubled in back, he walks across sky-blue carpet—every muscle’s flex a flow as seamless as breath.

Where the river curves like the arch of his bare foot—like letters he writes in the air when he moves—a fossil: same six-foot wingspan, pointed beak. A sandhill crane.

Once, tangled together in crisp sheets, we slept. His arm looped, cursive script penned around my neck. Choke hold. He woke, amazed by my presence.

How do instincts, whether twenty million years of practice or two decades, train a body to such vigilance? Even in dreams we fight or fly or freeze.
On the mat, his right hand
a fist at his waist, foot turns,
knee bends. He lifts his left
arch to touch his inner thigh—
a character for grace.

Into night, water, each other,
cranes settle. Feather colors
match the hues of cornhusks
in nearby fields. Beaks scratch
survival in patches of snow.

*Thump, thump* ripples through
silence. Sinews and flock flash.
A pivot evades danger. These
signature moves may save us:
breath and lift of wings.
Showing Idaho to a Russian

The river is bloated today—a swollen brown Snake, swallowing stumps and bridges, forts and drug shacks. I point to it, Sayzana shrugs. Mostly we don’t speak. The creek by my house flooded once. Huge chunks of road floated away. Sayzana takes serious pictures of herself in front of our buildings. She notices the geese. I can’t remember the Russian word for goose. Last night I dreamed I strangled one but it wouldn’t die; it just stared, Cyrillic. I want to tell her this but can’t. The geese are getting thick now. It starts raining. Even geese sometimes choke on rivers. I stood on the Volga once, watching tiny ice-fishers like penguins. I remember how the ice cracked. I miss this loneliness, Sayzana says. I nod, muttering something about rivers, something about Idaho.
Titi Nguyen

Marian Days

We are twenty-eight minutes behind schedule when the bus doors finally swing shut. The television screens bolted above our heads flicker from black to bright blue. Before I can charge out of my seat in a sudden change of heart, the bus lurches away from St. Ambrose Church in Dorchester, Massachusetts, with a guttural gasp.

Although it’s too late now, I’d expected to quit at the last minute, to ditch the itinerary I’d signed up for and join my father waving goodbye on the sidewalk. I’m headed for Carthage, Missouri, nearly 1,500 miles away to spend the next seven days with my mother and her church group at the Marian Days celebration, an annual pilgrimage for Vietnamese Catholics. This year my mother successfully coaxed me into joining her in what would be her third pilgrimage.

“Come with me to Missouri,” she’d said several weeks before.

With her accent, it sounded like ‘misery.’ Seven hot, prayer-filled days in mosquito-infested campgrounds with my mother had never appealed to me before, but this year I agreed to come. She made the argument that I could spend some of the time writing, and for a while I’d had an unnerving fascination with what she sought on these trips. Two hundred and fifty dollars bought us each a round-trip bus ticket, about 27 hours each way. Flying to Vietnam would be faster.

Earlier I’d checked out my fellow passengers as they loaded suitcases and camping gear into the gaping side of the bus. About a third of them are female between the ages of 50 and 70, dressed in lightly-quilted vests, caps with obscure insurance company logos, and thick cotton socks with slippers. Seated now, they kick off their shoes and pass around canned sardines in tomato sauce and a bottle of Maggi seasoning. I’m sitting next to my mother, directly underneath the blaring speakers of a TV screen and behind a woman with a bag of fruit that attracts several fruit flies circling above us.

A man in front keeps the VCR fed with an unrelenting stream of Vietnamese entertainment: a variety show led by a troupe of singing and dancing priests; a comedy skit about a woman who can’t cook.
and her despairing husband; a feature highlighting the cuisine and lush landscape of Vietnam, looking supernaturally green against the dull brown of the American landscape passing by our windows; and official footage of the previous year’s pilgrimage.

Although my mother has agreed to withhold all lectures on how her religious beliefs should naturally also be mine, I can already tell it’s a promise that won’t be honored.

“You cannot lose your faith. Look at all those Catholics,” she says, nodding toward the screen. “What’s one hour to God every week?”

With nearly forty women on board, getting to the lines at the rest stops becomes something like competitive sport. Barring trampling, the older ladies, in particular, do not hesitate to jostle, push, or cut their way to the front. Some of them jump into opening stalls before the previous users fully emerge. My sleepiness allows me to observe in dazed amusement until the nips on the backs of my heels grow sharper and an opening stall door nearly slams against my forehead.

The states we’re traveling through blend into a green and yellow haze: by a certain point, nothing distinguishes New York from Pennsylvania, or Ohio from Indiana or Illinois. The further west we go, the longer the stares become. At a stop in Greenfield, Indiana, a scrawny man in leather mutters something about moon faces. I study a swastika-handled pocketknife for sale through a glass display case at a Springfield, Illinois, gas station. A framed poster mounted next to a vending machine at a rest stop in Shelby County illustrates invasive plants that threaten the state’s habitats and announces: THE INVASION OF NATURAL HABITATS BY NON-NATIVE OR EXOTIC PLANTS POSES A SERIOUS THREAT TO ILLINOIS NATURAL ECOSYSTEMS. BE ON THE LOOKOUT FOR THESE NEW INVADERS TO ILLINOIS AND REPORT ANY SUSPECTED FINDINGS. Below, photos of Brazilian Elodea, Japanese Knotweed, Oriental Bittersweet, Chinese Yam, and Japanese Hops. A smaller sign above the poster reads: STOP THE ASIAN LONGHORNED BEETLE.

Fields with stacked bales of yellowed grass and the occasional house—low boxes with dull, peeling paint—pass by my window. In Effingham, Illinois, a massive white steel cross on the side of Interstate 57 inspires gasps and camera clicks from the other passengers. Erected by The Cross Foundation, it measures 198 feet, second only to the Great Cross in St. Augustine, Florida, the tallest freestanding cross in the United States at over 200 feet.
In 1953, Father Dominic Trần Đình Thủ founded Dòng Đồng Công, a small religious order within the Roman Catholic Church of Vietnam. The priests fled to South Vietnam the following year from North Vietnamese communists. My understanding is that although Father Dominic was imprisoned by the Viet Cong, he arranged for his priests to leave the country with the hope that the order would continue elsewhere. After the fall of Saigon in 1975, about half of the order, one hundred and seventy priests, escaped to the United States and were split between Fort Chaffee in Arkansas and Camp Pendleton in California.

Since no American family could sponsor them all, the priests were to be further divided across the country. As Dòng Đồng Công prepared to disintegrate, the Bishop of Springfield-Cape Girardeau in Missouri invited the priests to his diocese in Carthage to start a central seminary of their own. They renamed themselves the Congregation of the Mother Co-Redemptrix, devoting their holy work to the Virgin Mary and establishing themselves as the first Vietnamese-run monastery in the United States.

I won’t learn all this until several days later. For now, the pilgrimage location still seems like a random choice. With my earplugs in place, the videos fade into a distant din. The occasional tree or silo slips past outside my window, but soon the shapes become impossible to make out against the darkening sky.

We arrive at the seminary campus at noon the next day. People have already began pitching camping tents around the border of the 28-acre grounds but even so, it’ll be a tight squeeze for the estimated 70,000 pilgrims who’ll arrive from all over the country between today and Thursday, when the religious ceremonies begin. In past years the Congregation’s religious neighbors have allowed visitors to camp on their lawns and even use their kitchens and bathrooms.

My mother has brokered some kind of deal for us: two beds in the volunteer building in exchange for some fruit selling. Although the details are still unknown, I immediately agree. Some light work to escape the ninety-degree weather sounds more than fair and without volunteering, my mother and I don’t have anywhere to sleep. Along with four other fruit volunteers from our group, we drag our luggage to a building across the grounds. Two flights of stairs and a classroom set up with low military-style camp cots later, my T-shirt is soaked with sweat.

After a cold shower I browse through titles like American Catholic,
The Holy Spirit: Growth of a Biblical Tradition, How To Talk to God When You're Not Feeling Religious, and Why Do Catholics… on the classroom’s particle-board bookshelves. My mother, on my left, snores lightly while I make friends with Thuy, a twenty-eight year old immigrant on the cot to my right, also from my mother’s St. Ambrose parish. Since we don’t have to report to the fruit stand for another hour, Thuy and I decide to explore the grounds.

As we head to the seminary gift shop, Thuy tells me she’s here to pray for her sister to pass government exams to study abroad in the United States. As we approach the door of the gift shop, I sense her watching me carefully. She asks me if I’ve lost my faith. I stare at her. I laugh.

“You have to believe. Tell him what you want. Pray and he’ll listen.”

I want to ask her what exactly it is I should believe and want. Would it be acceptable to ask God for a paid seaside vacation in Spain? A winning lottery ticket that will save me from my slew of waitressing jobs? Although I’m enjoying my time with Thuy, I begin to feel a small breach between us.

I’m not surprised by my mother’s betrayal, her sharing my ‘problem’ with Thuy. On the bus earlier that day, a woman lamented that not one of her five children had become priests or nuns. My mother had snorted, telling the lady that her expectations were too high. “All I ask is for my children to go to Mass.”

My mother traces the seed of my religious infidelities to living away at college. She’d say I became lazy and apathetic under the influence of new friends, that their American ideas tainted my pure spirit, spoiling an upbringing that included all the significant Catholic milestones: baptism, first communion, confirmation. I never met these dutiful commitments she forced me to keep with anything other than displeasure and skepticism. My decision to go away to school served my adolescent need to escape my parents’ control, but it also freed me temporarily from the grip of their faith, especially my mother’s.

She wasn’t always such a devout Catholic. Years ago, missing church was a minor offense. When my family did go, we went to St. Ambrose in Dorchester on Sundays. The Gothic stone building was difficult to heat in the winter and the cold made the church even more austere and uninviting. I could never see the priest through the throng of bodies, but his droning sermons bored me so thoroughly that I couldn’t bear to imagine what he looked like. Wedged between my brother and sister, I’d rifle through the hymnbooks on the little built-in shelves and carve letters into the waxy oak pew with my fingernail.
The sad organ music and the sweet smoke of burning frankincense always made me sleepy, and because I was young, it was okay for me to stretch out on the hard seat and nap.

My mother became more reliant on her faith after her mother’s death several years ago. In the weeks following my grandmother’s death, my mother often invited the church group over to pray. On these dreaded nights my siblings and I were put in charge of cleaning the house while our parents argued in the kitchen about what to serve. We hauled folding chairs up from the basement and set them in congregational rows in our living room. Prayers with the group dragged on for what seemed like hours, and just as someone seemed to have made the final sign of the cross, another woman would start the opening refrains of a hymn in a warbly voice. My brothers and sister and I had broken up with laughter the first time but were quickly subdued with our mother’s flashing eyes. After the singing finally ceased we prepared bowl after bowl of my father’s hot phở. The group members left quickly after they ate, leaving empty soda cans and bowls with wilted basil swimming in broth.

My mother joined the group soon after to take minutes at the organizational meetings. At first my father resisted her requests for him to come along—the stoop needed shoveling, the cans taken to the recycling center—and my siblings and I saw that we weren’t the only ones wary of my mother’s new fervor for all things God. But after my mother finally succeeded in taking him with her, he conceded that the group was pleasant enough. My siblings and I saw that it must have appealed to his own beliefs and that it had made him feel good to be in the company of these people. We knew that we’d lost an important ally.

Resin, marble, plaster, and cement statues of the Virgin Mary crowd the shelves and floor of the Regina Gift Shop. Names like ‘Heritage Collection’ and ‘Montefiori’ are embossed on these statues imported from Italy, China, and Peru. I peruse racks of T-shirts with silk-screened images of the Virgin Mary and ‘NTM-Ngay Thanh Mau’ (Days of Holy Blood) emblazoned on the fronts while Thuy sorts through baskets of beaded necklaces and bracelets with crucifixes and Patron Saint medals and rings. A massive selection of rosaries made from glass, wood, glow-in-the dark plastic, and Swarovski crystal cover the entire back counter, along with birthstone rosaries and children’s rosaries encased in colorful acrylic eggs. Near the register up front, I flip through prayer cards, laminated postcards from Milan, religious CDs, and vocational books. Then, while waiting for
Thuy to pay for her beaded prayer bracelet, I study plastic holy water bottles molded in the shape of the Virgin Mary, Virgin Mary snow globes with supplicating herdsmen at her feet, and 2010 calendars featuring photos of the various altars sited throughout the Congregation’s grounds. I’m relieved to step back outside into the sun away from the paraphernalia once Thuy has finished paying.

The opening ceremony of the 33rd Annual Marian Days Celebration is scheduled to begin in two days, followed by three days of lectures, workshops, and opportunities for confession, reconciliation, and prayer. Most people arrive early to the fair to raise money for their church groups. To get to the fair we walk past classrooms, dormitories, priests’ homes, the health office, the Immaculate Heart of Mary Shrine Church, the Vietnamese Martyrs Auditorium, and Assumption Hall, where we’re staying. Along with nuns and volunteers, pilgrims over sixty-five years old are granted a spot in Assumption Hall’s air-conditioned gymnasium.

The fairground is divided into rows of concession stands and makeshift restaurants. The information booths of religious orders and seminaries, as well as stalls selling more religious gear made by Vietnamese orphans form the last row.

“For you,” Thuy says, handing me a small brown paper bag. I look inside to find a white beaded rat, my lunar year animal, on a keychain ring.

Before reaching the fruit stand, we pass an empty tent with a banner printed with ASIA. Celebrity singers from Trung Tam Asia, a series of televised musical variety shows, will arrive in three days and give two charity shows on Friday and Saturday nights. By the crowd already gathering in the tent to scan the list of performers, I can tell it’s one of the more anticipated events of the week. Truc Ho, the creator of Asia, also owns Saigon Broadcasting Television Network, a national twenty-four-hour news and entertainment channel. As a devoted attendee of the celebrations, he has recruited singers for the past five years to perform pro bono.

The Vinhs, the Texan couple who own the fruit stand where we’ve volunteered, have a successful restaurant in Port Arthur. Their profits back home have helped build three churches, so they’re treated something like royalty at these celebrations. In the past few years the Vinhs have had the sole fruit concession at a prime location behind Assumption Hall. When Thuy and I arrive at the stand, my mother and other women from our group are already in the tent peeling mangos and pulling golden lobes of jackfruit from their leathery nests. Mrs. Vinh assigns us younger ladies to sell up front.
“You pretty girls have no business in back. Charm the customers,” she says. She hands us each a wad of small bills.

Thuy is a natural saleswoman. She leads old ladies by the arm to look at expensive magenta dragon fruit, furry rambutans, lycees, and longans while I stand guard by the ice cream freezer, selling popsicles for a dollar each like a kid at a lemonade stand.

“Come on, the pretty girl wants the măng cụt. Get her what she wants,” she teases a guy fingering the $3 package of sliced pineapple while his girlfriend eyes the $18 mesh bag of deep purple mangosteens imported from Thailand.

“Sweet as sugar,” Thuy says when a woman asks about the tamarinds. Like me, Thuy hasn’t sampled the merchandise. She has what we Vietnamese call a lanh face, cunning and pockmarked. She’s shorter than me but stands with her hands on her hips, teeth bared, winking at me while steering and coaxing customers.

My trouble with Vietnamese customer service is a linguistic matter. The use of personal pronouns in Vietnamese is determined by the age, marital status, gender, and social standing of the person you are speaking to, as well as your relationship to that person. Each time a customer approaches me I have to decide within several seconds whether to call him or her ‘younger sister,’ ‘older sister,’ ‘young unmarried aunt,’ ‘old married aunt,’ ‘really old lady,’ or ‘younger brother,’ ‘older brother,’ ‘young unmarried uncle,’ ‘old married uncle,’ or ‘really old man.’ After insulting several middle-aged ladies by slapping them with the dreadful ‘bà,’ I call to Thuy to break a bill for ‘ông này,’ (this guy) and Thuy winces, whispering that she’s pretty sure the man in front of me is a priest from the congregation, in which case I’m to respectfully call him ‘Cha.’

Asians, particularly Southeast Asians, love fruit. If you visit Chinatown in New York City during the summer, you’ll see hordes of Asians and Asian-Americans swarming the fruit stands that line Canal Street. Tropical produce from Thailand, Malaysia, and Vietnam are quickly consumed, no matter the price. In the fall, pomegranates, persimmons, kumquats, chestnuts, and boiling peanuts are most desired. The summer months bring rambutans, lychees, longans, mangosteens, tamarind, jackfruit, durian, guanabana, and papaya. These lush fruits are difficult, if not impossible to grow in the Western Hemisphere. It’s not unusual for Asians to cross borders in search of less expensive tropical fruit. My own family has driven long hours from Boston to Toronto on quests for inexpensive soursop and cherimoya.

Most of the restaurants and juice stands come from Houston
in eighteen-wheelers, and each year boys with sharp Adam’s apples and girls in sorbet-colored sandals volunteer as maître d’s, servers, and bussers. Hot noodle soups, combination rice dishes, curries, and desserts with coconut milk and black beans are served in outdoor dining rooms with bright fluorescent lights, huge industrial rotating fans, and blaring music evoking the feeling of eating in Saigon.

Although the restaurant owners are here to raise money for their own church groups back home, five percent of their proceeds go to the Congregation. Through the Vinhs’ charity especially, CMC makes a killing each year. The couple donates all profits to CMC, which is why their stand is always up front near the main pathway and priests from the order often stop by to help sell.

By the second day, the nuns bunking in the classroom next to ours have arrived. Although I’ve been here for only a little more than a day, it feels much longer. When signs are suddenly posted on the bathroom reading: ‘Nữ tu sĩ,’ (Nuns only), I, like the other volunteers already too spoiled to use the public outhouses, ignore them. One night I find myself next to a petite nun flossing at the sink. She smiles politely as I scrub the dried green patches of my Queen Helene mint julep mask off my face.

“Chào xo,” I say before running out. (Bye, sister.)

With three hours until fruit duty, I wander through the informational booths set up near Assumption Hall. At one table, two priests sit with pre-printed envelopes that pilgrims requesting papal prayers stuff with money. Nearby, another priest looks up names of deceased relatives on his laptop and sends visitors off with a letter and number combination to find their loved one’s memorial plaque in the Queen of Peace Garden. My understanding is that inscribed plaques start at a thousand dollars and can get more expensive depending on its size and location in the garden.

At the neighboring stall targeting teenage boys considering the priesthood, twenty-five-year-old Brother Pham Duy Quy from Port Arthur, Texas, tells me the order now has approximately one hundred priests and brothers. The Congregation of the Mother Co-Redemptrix’s annual ‘Come and See,’ two weeks of educating boys on the ascetic life, is the order’s main method of recruitment. As I sip freshly pressed sugarcane juice, he explains to me the journey to priesthood. Men must be at least eighteen to join. Novices take their vows of chastity and poverty in the first couple of years, and the final vow of obedience to God is taken in the sixth year. He describes in a somewhat envious tone
an older brother’s mien while taking his final vow: “I’d never seen him so happy.”

The arrival of an eager mother and her son interrupts my time with Brother Quy. He sends me off with a rosary of yellow and red plastic beads matching the Vietnamese flags flying through the grounds.

Back at the fruit stand, I restock the plastic mesh bags of fruit on the tables and arrange the popsicles in the freezer by flavor: red bean, durian, taro, pandan leaf. My shift runs from noon to four when Thuy will come and sell until eight p.m. My boredom ends with the emergence of an older woman from our group who’s tired of dissecting fruit. She’s pudgy with short fluffy hair and horn-rimmed glasses. She has a perpetual smile on her pink-frosted lips, and I secretly begin to call her Miss Piggy. The sides of her sweaty arms stick to mine in the cramped area behind the display table. When customers ask prices, Miss Piggy yells over my response while sticking up her short fingers: “Three dollars! Five! Five!” She opens plastic bags with licked fingers and readies them in front of customers as they examine the fruit.

When a woman asks Miss Piggy if the mangos are ripe, Piggy responds with an emphatic no; with certain fruit, the Vietnamese prefer the crisp sourness of the unripe. With a disapproving look, the woman says, “You’ve sinned. I can tell they’re soft just by looking.” Miss Piggy’s chest deflates, but soon after the offended woman moves away Miss Piggy is grinning again. She’s in such a good mood that I let her handle the money, but regret it as she starts to peek into customers’ bags, checking if I’ve charged them properly.

The first official day of the celebration opens with rain. What began during the night continues in a drizzle until noon. Hundreds of flooded tents force pilgrims into Assumption Hall, the two auditoriums, and the church. I begin to feel guilty about my dry bed as I watch exhausted parents toweling off their kids.

By noon, the basement of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Shrine Church is crammed with people lining up for confession while taking refuge from the rain. According to the ‘self-examination’ sheet a nun hands me, I’m long overdue for a confession. That I question God’s existence and doctrines of the Church, willfully miss Sunday masses and ‘holidays of obligation,’ use God’s name in vain, own a battered copy of The Only Astrology Book You’ll Ever Need, have a suspicious nature, lied in order to avoid jury duty, greedily take larger portions of dinner for myself and reserve what’s left for my boyfriend, corralled my
co-workers into starting a weekly lottery pool, feel envious of people entering beautiful townhouses in the West Village and worse still, have taken drugs, watched carnal videos, and fornicated out of wedlock—all this ensures that I will be kneeling in one of those little rooms for a very long time and delaying other confessors from divulging their own transgressions. I decide instead to explore the building next to the church that serves as the Congregation’s administrative offices.

Photographs of CMC’s priests, past and present, are displayed in the lobby inside a large glass vitrine. An enlarged, framed black-and-white print hanging in the common area shows the one hundred and seventy founding Vietnamese priests lined up like schoolboys, faces gaunt and solemn. Another more updated color photo shows the new batch of priests lined up in the same way, with a statue of the Virgin Mary nestled in front with the first row of men. The irony, I think while scanning the rest of the photos in the vitrine, of a matriarch with no voice represented by one hundred and seventy men. I don’t see a photo of a single nun or woman, either.

At the information center down the hall I get an idea of how expensive it is to run a seminary. Security costs $20,000 a week. Trash carting services alone cost $3,500 a week. From behind the info desk a Father Kim assures me that the Congregation has enough support to cover these expenses. Many of its benefactors donate time and money to keep things running. For instance, one of the wealthiest benefactors, a family from Texas who prefers not to rough it at the annual celebration, sends CMC a $300,000 check instead.

The first Marian Days celebration in 1977 was small, Father Kim explained, intended for Vietnamese families in the surrounding cities of Kansas City, Springfield, Joplin, and Oklahoma City. About four hundred people showed up the first and second years. It grew each year after, and the most attended celebration was in 2000 with over 100,000 pilgrims. Perhaps surviving the feared arrival of the new millennium had something to do with those high numbers that year.

While I’m in the center with Father Kim, he answers calls and directs other priests on his walkie-talkie. At one point he takes a call on speakerphone from a woman who has arrived at one of the many nearby airports and wants to know if a driver from CMC can pick her up. Father Kim says, “Of course one of the brothers can pick you up, but which airport are you at?” She has no idea. “I don’t know, Father. The one with all the airplanes. And all the people.”

“That doesn’t tell me anything. Spell a word that you see there, maybe on a sign?”

Titi Nguyen

Here Father Kim’s face reddens, so I raise my hand in thanks and close the door quietly behind me.

On the third day I push through bigger crowds: women battling the sun with umbrellas, couples walking arm-in-arm, teenagers checking each other out. For the teenagers, the pilgrimage is a social event, an opportunity to hang out with their youth groups. With their modest uniforms, youth group members are easy to spot: the boys wear black pants, the girls navy knee-length cotton skirts, and they all have white short-sleeved button-ups and bright yellow kerchiefs with embroidered red crosses around their necks. During the day they hang out on the main lawn around a volleyball net. The boys volley while the girls practice chanting drills. The chants involve calling out the states from which they came—Minnesota, Texas, Kansas, Massachusetts, Indiana, Michigan, North Carolina, Virginia—and cheering.

The teens who come to the celebration on their own from the surrounding Missouri towns look completely different—worldlier, more seasoned. Girls with chemically streaked hair in short shorts and thin camisoles and boys in plain muscle tanks or loud Ed Hardy T-shirts sport wispy mustaches and baby faux-hawks. These kids keep the fair buzzing when masses are in session.

Midwestern Vietnamese fashion isn’t so distant from its coastal counterparts. Hair lightening among Asians is just as popular and predictably unpredictable here as in the Northeast: on black hair, home dyes promising shimmering blonde or auburn usually result in a brassy orange-brown. I spot the occasional nose job, usually on middle-aged women. These nose jobs are no different from the ones Vietnamese Californians or Bostonians get—all made in Vietnam. There’s little art or subtlety in their reconstructions—the women usually end up with too-pointy tips and articulated nostrils. But so long as popular procedures to look more Western, like nose jobs and eyelid cutting, stay cheaper in Vietnam, Viet Khieu, or overseas Vietnamese, will continue to return there for their plastic surgery.

Each day a visiting bishop and dozens of priests conduct an outdoor Mass on the main lawn, which is where I’m sitting along with about 70,000 others in lawn chairs. High-powered lamps shine fluorescent, attracting black clouds of insects. Cicadas whirr. Hand fans bat against the thick ninety-degree night air. This Pontifical Mass lasts three hours, ending in a Eucharistic procession that creates
looping lines of people waiting to receive communion. With the thought of treating myself to a pandan leaf popsicle I skip the last hour.

The next morning, on my mother’s recommendation, I stop by Father Vu Toan’s Marriage Enrichment seminar, the first in the series of lectures and workshops. This is his eighth year speaking at the Marian Days Celebration. He’s obviously a popular guy—the red plastic seats around me in the Vietnamese Martyrs Auditorium fill pretty quickly. Father Toan is in his late fifties, but he has a full head of black hair and a smooth, genial face. He’s known for his sense of humor as much as for his sermons, and he begins his lecture that day with a small joke: “Now I know what you’re thinking: how can a man who’s never had a family come up and teach me about marriage?”

Pretty soon, the audience is roaring and settling into their seats for a good talk. I feel shut out. I’m missing punch lines, innuendoes, playful puns that imbue the Vietnamese language. Father Toan moves gracefully between jesting and preaching, and the people around me are leaning forward to listen intently. The woman in front of me pinches her young son’s ear when he begins shifting in his seat.

Vietnamese can be broken down into at least three dialects and six different tones. The complexity of the language goes even further with the unofficial division of what I’ll call ‘highbrow’ and ‘lowbrow’ Vietnamese. Highbrow Vietnamese, poetic and formal, is used in the media, literature, church, public ceremonies, etc. One usually hears lowbrow Vietnamese at home, with family and friends, or in popular comedy skits with actors playing unrefined peasants. Of course there are varying levels of each, but I grew up speaking a version somewhere between the two. Father Toan seems to be mixing the frills of highbrow with some tame, cursed invectives of the low, but I’m stuck trying to understand through my standard, respectable Vietnamese. As the faces around me brighten with appreciation I begin to wonder if I’m missing out on something truly transcendent. But the longer I sit, the more I start to understand that my wistfulness is related more to the inaccessibility of language and my inability to enjoy the pleasures of my native Vietnamese rather than my failure to understand the messages Father Toan is imparting.

Back at our fruit stand Mrs. Vinh catches Miss Piggy dropping prices for customers and has to pull her aside to restate the rule against
bargains and reprimand her for essentially taking money from the CMC priests. Again we share the afternoon shift, and Miss Piggy continues to talk over me in her zeal, her eraser-pink lips still smiling. After the third hour, I gather my things from the back, squeeze my mother goodbye, and leave out the side of the tent. The Missouri sun is high, and although I hide under a wide-brimmed straw hat with sunscreen slathered on my face and arms, I can still feel my skin roasting.

On my way to the Queen of Peace Garden, I bump into a man who earlier at the fruit stand had slipped me his phone number and e-mail address along with three dollars for his bag of sliced mango. Now he leaps up from his towel on the grass and runs to give me a plastic beaded bracelet and a keychain with four dangling metal lips each etched with the words, ‘Kiss Me.’ I thank him again, but with a small scowl this time.

“My phone number,” he calls after me.

The sign at the entrance of the Queen of Peace Prayer Garden reads: Please NO Bikes, Skateboarding, Rollerblading, Breakdancing, or Loud Talking. The inclusion of breakdancing is curious. Has this, like dyed hair and tattoos, evolved into a mark of rebellion in Vietnamese communities? Rows of bronze plaques screwed onto low granite walls line the garden walls. Three years ago my mother had a plaque inscribed for my grandparents, and I locate it now in row F191: Maria Nguyen Thi Ta, Batolemeo Doan Thuc, Phero Nguyen Van Dai, and Anna To Thi Ngut. The plaques around my grandparents’ are carved with names like Giuse, Teresa, Vicente, Lucia, Anna, Lorenzo, and Cecilia. Vietnamese Catholics are all baptized with Anglo-Christian names; I was baptized ‘Annette’ after my godmother.

After this break I return to the fruit stand. A customer asks the price of a box of tamarinds.

“They’re five dollars each, but I’ll give you three for thirteen,” Miss Piggy says quickly under her breath.

I stare at her. Part of me wants to rat her out to the Vinhs but my spotty attendance keeps me from actually doing anything. At least Miss Piggy actually shows up to her job.

At the end of the shift my mother and I wander over to the Asia tent where she recognizes a singer my niece likes, a baby-faced guy with hair gelled into a cock’s comb. He reminds me of Justin Bieber. As we ask him for a photo more people push their way into the tent to ogle.

Of a beautifully made-up woman we watch devouring a bánh mi, my mother says, “She was discovered by a man she made a porn video
with in Vietnam. Everyone there thinks she’s trash but she’s popular here. Your uncle loves her.”

The singers teeter around on four-inch heels and gossip with one another while fanning themselves. They seem like a whole other species, unable to withstand the heat and dust like the rest of us. To stave off what appears to be boredom they pull out a microphone and start warming up for the night’s big performance. Justin Bieber shows off some complicated foot tricks and pelvic thrusts. The former porn star joins him on the table while the other singers cheer. They lean and shimmy into each other. It’s like watching a bunch of college friends rock out at a karaoke bar. All around us, fans whistle and shout. My mother rocks on her tiptoes, peering over peoples’ heads and clapping her hands.

My mother and I, doused in mosquito repellent with lawn chairs in tow, manage to find a space for the concert on the main lawn not too far from the stage. The day’s mega mass has just ended; most of the audience has been here for several hours already. The crowd seems ready to relax after the week of praying. People balance trays of food on their laps and stretch their legs across the grass.

The two SBTN newscasters emceeing the show thank the priests and audience for having the Asia network at the celebration. A priest comes onstage to remind us that we’re not allowed to give the singers flowers or gifts, or ask for autographs. It seems an unnecessary precaution; everyone here seems to know that worshipping false idols won’t be tolerated, especially at this festival devoted to the Virgin Mary.

The ex-porn star is up first. Dressed in tight black satin pants and a gauzy blouse over a very visible rhinestone-encrusted bra, she struts back and forth across the empty stage as she sings. She undulates her toned arms, floats her elongated fingers to frame all the right places—face, chest, pelvis. When she leaves the stage to huge applause, one of the emcees cracks, “I don’t know if you audience members can see, but Nguyen Hong Nhung seems to have forgotten to button up her shirt.” Then quickly, with bowed head, “I’m sorry, Father.”

The crowd laughs nervously. My mother explains that a singer showed up at last year’s celebration in sexy outfits that prominently displayed her new set of breasts, ultimately forcing the priests to ask her to leave the celebration. Because of this scandalous incident, the emcees and most of the female performers tonight wear áo dài, the traditional Vietnamese dress with throat-high collars.

The songs in the show are about a soldier’s death, lovers parting, and
the beauty of Saigon—good traditional Vietnamese music that arouses in the audience nostalgia for their youth and for the old country. I don’t hear any of the usual English and Vietnamese medley pop numbers I find so corny. My mother sings along and I snap her photo.

The next day—the last full day of the celebration—I come across several crudely-built freestanding walls set about fifteen yards apart on the main lawn. Each makeshift confessional structure has a wooden kneeling board nailed perpendicularly to a vertical board that’s as wide as a door, separating the confessor from the priest, who sits on a folding chair on the other side. To protect anonymity, purple parchment paper is taped over drilled holes in the vertical board to allow only hearing and speaking. It’s a strange scene: eight or nine priests sit under the blue sky on one side of the barrier while confessors kneel on the other. They can’t see each other, but everyone else on the lawn—some waiting for their own turns to purge—can see each movement and expression of the players in this intimate act. Just fifty feet away on the main stage, backup dancers rehearse for the final entertainment show that night.

A man waiting his turn tells me CMC has erected these extra confessionals so that those who haven’t yet confessed can do so in time for the big celebration of the Virgin Mary that afternoon. My attention settles on a woman kneeling about twenty yards away. She speaks rapidly into the board, her bowed head moving closer and closer to it. Soon I can’t see her face at all. It makes me wonder if meaningful relationships between congregants and their priests really exist. And if they do, how far can a person get with this kind of relationship? People must seek out their priests in trying times, but I wonder if priests are willing to offer practical guidance along with spiritual counsel. Can priests be social workers as well as envoys for Christ? What does this relationship provide and how far can it go? Of course, context plays a big part in the confessing; I can’t imagine that these drive-through confessions on the lawn will be very serious. Rather, it seems like another obligatory act, a belief that one must purge him or herself before receiving communion, or in this case, before the big celebration.

Maybe it’s because my last confessions never amounted to anything worse than fighting with my siblings, occasionally stealing from my neighbor’s fabulous sticker collection, and being bratty to my parents for my priest to absolve but I’ve always suspected that my listener wasn’t very interested. What kind of trouble did you have to get into
to command special attention? Now that I have some things that may command special attention, that old curiosity has waned.

I think of how the only way I’d passed Vietnamese religious classes and gotten confirmed was by stealing the answers off my cousin’s tests. Not only did I not understand the lessons or know how to read the booklets we were sent home with each week, I was a wholly uninterested student. I remember how I’d sit in that narrow velvet-upholstered confessional booth at St. Ambrose, heart thrumming as I racked my brain for bad acts to report to the disembodied voice, and how I pretended to pray when the voice asked me to recite along with it. My mind seemed able to commit just one prayer to memory, and that was the ‘Our Father’ in English. I strung nonsensical syllables together and murmured incoherently along, my identity protected in the darkness of that quiet booth. Praying that I could fake my way through it again.

The ladies return from the fruit stand to the classroom early to shower and prepare for the deliverance of the Virgin Mary, the main event of the pilgrimage. I join them in the walk to the main lawn to secure seats for the final concert, which will take place after the big procession and final mass. The late afternoon sun is still fiery, making my decision against joining the procession through the residential streets of Carthage easy.

Thousands of people have gathered to watch but I’m able to squeeze in with our chairs. As my mother leaves for the procession with the sea of people, I can’t stop looking at her. She looks radiant in her white silk chiffon áo dài. A silver amulet embossed with the Virgin Mary’s visage on a pretty blue silk ribbon hangs around her neck. At this moment, I can see how much this—all of this—fulfills her, how completely relaxed and happy she looks. My love for my mother is enormous but despairingly, I think about how her faith will always stand in between us, separate us. What my mother feels is crucial for the health of my soul and can bring us together is the very thing that I feel divides us.

The procession, shepherded by a small statue of Mary riding up front on a decorated float, snakes down the paths leading off the seminary campus to the residential streets. I imagine the people of Carthage sitting on their porches marveling at the throng of Vietnamese singing and praying, proud to show their devotion and to animate their Virgin Mother as they pass through the neighborhood. Those who remain on the lawn with me wait patiently for the marchers to return.
Since I’ve heard the whole thing can take a good half an hour, I take out the *US Weekly* magazine I found on the bus several days ago and plop down in my chair. The woman standing beside me frowns so hard that I tuck the magazine back into my purse but stay seated.

A tape of praying plays over the loudspeakers, but the voices, young and grotesquely cheerful, lack the nasal somberness of suffering that I hear in the praying of my mother’s group. What I’m hearing now reminds me of in-flight instructional videos. Parked to my right is a white van belonging to Little Saigon Television from Orange County; the footage from tonight’s Mass will be broadcast to hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese around the world. Away from the stage, on the path parallel to the west side of the lawn, I see a blond man in a wheelchair studying the scene, a content smile on his tanned face.

Youth members holding bunches of fat helium-filled balloons begin to link arms to create a wide path for the returning procession. Two large columns of blue and white balloons float above the sides of the main stage, tied to Congregation of the Mother Co-Redemptrix flags. For some reason I worry that those non-biodegradable objects are going to be released at some point during the ceremony.

The procession returns with men in bamboo rice hats and yellow silk áo dài carrying golden scepters with the image of the Virgin Mary at their peaks. Behind them, women in blue dresses grasp bouquets. And finally, what 70,000 people have been waiting for, the culmination of the week: the float displaying the Virgin Mary statue appears. Surrounded by thick bouquets of flowers, the plaster Virgin measures around three feet and except for some scratches and a wearing down of the glossy paint, looks like it could’ve come from the shelves of the Regina Gift Shop. The float glides past us, followed by two long lines of nuns and priests. People cheer and wave blue and white CMC flags. Firecrackers explode from the main stage. The woman who gave me a dirty look earlier has tears in her eyes. The youth members release their balloons and the balloon columns onstage are finally unanchored. They float away into the late afternoon sky, flags trailing.

After a bathroom break, my mother and I are refused re-entry onto the main lawn by two security guards from the Jasper County sheriff’s office.

“We already have chairs set up,” I say to one of them.

“I can’t let you in,” he shakes his large head without looking at me. These boys with their pale skin and big, shiny loafers seem new
to the force, vigilant of every order given to them. We give up and endure the Mass standing. The cops continue to turn people away. They block an old lady trying to get past. While the guards explain to a youth member that she can’t rejoin her friends, the old lady darts past them onto the path between the lawns. Two more old ladies rush in after her. The guards turn and stare mildly at the escapees, and five more people stroll past them.

At the end of Mass a herd of priests disperse throughout the lawns to give communion. Each priest is escorted by a youth member carrying a light-up saber-sword with tiers of green, white, hot pink, and neon light that serve as a guiding point for the crowd. My mother motions for me to get into line, not wanting me to miss out on receiving the Eucharist at this festival. Joining the line of parishioners gravely crossing themselves is, for me, a ritual devoid of meaning. It’s been so long since I’ve taken bread that when the priest places the wafer into my cupped hands, I instinctively say, “Thank you.” He looks at me with confusion as I step away. The wafer is as dry and tasteless as I remember.

The same singers from the previous night perform again—song-for-song, same costumes, same routines. The audience doesn’t seem to mind. This time, however, the show is continually interrupted by the Charity Sweepstakes, a lottery sponsored and financed by CMC. Lottery tickets were sold all week to pilgrims for different prize drawings. Next to me, my mother pulls out of her pocket the five crumpled tickets she bought earlier in the week and hands three to me.

At intermission, the emcee selects six volunteers from the audience, mostly kids, to spin the six wheels that several brothers roll out onstage. After two rounds of practice spins and the audience’s annoyed murmurs toward a local white boy at the third wheel (his powerful whips keep the wheel spinning a full two minutes after the other wheels have slowed), the lottery begins. As the first two series of numbers are called out, we in the audience scan our tickets hopefully. No winners for $50 or $100. Much to everyone’s disappointment, $200, $500, and $1000 also pass unclaimed. Someone yells ‘kin’ or bingo from the audience at $2,000 but it’s a false alarm. The tension rises at $5,000, and at $10,000 another ‘kin’ rings out, but this time it’s a joke. No one laughs. I grip my three tickets tightly in my hand and peer across at my mother’s cards as the final round of numbers is called for twenty grand. We check our numbers once, twice, three times. The silence in the audience is followed by embarrassed laughs, a couple of boos from the youth group members. The anticlimactic end is too much for the little kids to bear,
and some start to cry. “Why didn’t anyone win, Bà?” a little girl with braided pigtails sitting in front of me whines to her father.

Not a single dollar is given away, and the Congregation keeps all profits from ticket sales.

After packing my bags on the final morning, I stop by the fair to pick up food for the ride back to Boston. It’s a chaotic scene—people jostle each other for containers of rice and bean puddings, and food vendors are restocking Styrofoam cartons of rice and noodles with grilled pork along with paper-wrapped baguettes, plastic cartons of dried pork and salt fish as quickly as they disappear. I escape with four rice combos, three puddings, and a bag of beef jerky, the deliciously garlicky, spicy kind found only in Vietnam or California.

Before we can get on the bus, there’s the closing ceremony to attend, where other bleary-eyed parishioners are assembled on the sparsely populated main lawn. Many others are cutting through with their luggage on the way to their vans and RVs, anxious to get on the road.

After Mass, my mother and I carry our things to the bus, where we’re reunited with the rest of our St. Ambrose group. We sit in our original seats but it takes another half hour to leave. Miss Piggy is nowhere to be found. After several calls to her mobile phone go unanswered and everyone begins to shift impatiently in their seats, a woman from our group finally finds her sitting on the steps of the church some hundred yards away with her luggage at her feet. Somehow Piggy had gotten the idea that the bus would pick her up there.

As we start the long trip back east, the group initiates fifty rounds of prayerful thanks for a successful pilgrimage. Thuy comes to visit us in our seats and my mother takes our photo. At a rest stop in Scranton, Pennsylvania, I sort through the items I’ve amassed during my time at the 2010 Marian Days Celebration: a silver rosary tattoo, a neon-pink bumper sticker with the Virgin Mary’s profile under the CMC logo, the yellow and red rosary from Brother Quy, a free T-shirt with red rose stems intertwined through the word REDEMPTION, the plastic beaded bracelet and lips keychain my admirer forced upon me, and a yellow Mead legal pad full of notes. My mother climbs back into her seat and looks at my collection in my lap. She smiles the smile of someone who has found her final truth.
Virgil Suárez

Dusk in Las Vegas, A Parable of Light and Shadow

My father called it “la boca del lobo.” The wolf’s mouth. The palm trees lean closer to the earth, as if for warmth, or maybe one last sharing of secrets. Sparrows roost in neon signs, transform into pornographic litter, words strangled between the line, hung out to dry. Blackbirds flock in to land, perch on the wires, roofs, taller places where water can’t climb, a fake sense of security—in the night they chatter of plentiful food, idea nests.… In a hut by the tourist deadend, an old man sits, his legs crossed, with a finger he traces this arching of light, ascending into the horizon. The red he sees is like his hands, his skin, whatever the dusk takes, it doesn’t return. Black, his soul rises skyward when he closes his eyes. When stars glitter-dust the night sky, he can hear the voices of the dead, rasped in wind. If you strain to hear them, they will speak of other dusks, other nights, inside the gambling halls, the money machines chatter endlessly about impossible dreams, when the wolf opens its mouth, swallows your life, a moment at a time—dissolving.

Behind you rises the bark for placing your next bet.
Matt Sumpter

Smokejumper Elegy, 1949

After the Mann Gulch Fire

We gather what they dropped: the crosscut saws, Pulaski heads, a flask dripping warm gin. We almost hear the grass, waist-high, ignite—and Foreman Dodge, the way he screamed for them to throw their tools into the brush and run like hell. Stooped beneath backpacks of rocks, we climb the slope they climbed—Navon, Diettert, Reba, Harrison—past black-veined stones, the roots of junipers clothed in ash, where their curling forms uncurled, and only grasses matted flat beneath their backs survived. It’s late. Our flashlights probe the dark like insect legs. We had found some living—euphoric, laughing like old drunks, too burned to feel—their voices like a happily let-go balloon, just bobbing off. It’s here we drop our packs—there is no monument—and build a cairn. We had laughed with them, had seen the red interior flesh of their eyes. But as we build, we wonder if the dead can be replaced—by stones, by us—or if they smolder like a tree’s still-glaring coals. An ax-head lies half-buried in the ash, still hot to touch, its handle burned away. We wonder how our suffering can end.
Mountain Bachelorhood

Your mind becomes a sinkhole thick with the mud of names, of necks brushing your forehead like cotton drapes, of sweat you remember between the ridges of her vertebrae. And there isn’t just one ‘her,’ understand. You are the one throwing love into cattle troughs, seeing what floats, how much is displaced, pressing your wrists to theirs like a falling body before it hits the water. You’ll remember all their names and every night without them: the kettle shrieking catcalls, the new moon’s absent light, the window showing nothing but your face. Maybe, you’ll think, I am the only bird riding thermals above a cold, un-rippled lake. Maybe I am the lake.
On-Call for Wildfire

We sharpen chainsaw teeth, and steel dust rains from our hands. The tree line stiffens, waiting for wind.

East two miles, lightning impales a field. West, a boy falls from a switchback but doesn’t die, and his crew chief radios, Help us. No one here can lift him.

Our Nomex clothes reek of ash, but we don’t belong to the earth. One man spirals his knife around an orange, holding up the uncoiled skin.

We scour rust from our tools or rip their starter cords: our only hymn. The voice keeps scratching on frequencies we can’t respond to,

until static, like embers, fills our ears.
Revenant

Gates of the Mountains Wilderness

Below the tree line and boulder field, above
the meadow where mosquitoes stirred the air
like highway heat, my chest opened to the sun,
and no one saw as I stepped outside myself:
translucent, barely cold, feet colored red
from the creek’s wet clay, my outline filling
with Douglas fir, an aspen’s yellow shivering,
bear tracks stuttering down to water. Turning,
I wondered at my body: the acne scars and crow’s feet,
the too-thin waist, the remnants of a half-spent life.
Meanwhile, the earth expected nothing. A sugar pine
grew fat with birds as trilliums dropped their petals.
Thought eased from me like breath. I’m not the first
to want an untamed life, as imprecise and certain
as a pinecone loosening its seeds. I could not
have been the first to step back inside a tired,
sweating body and splash its face with dirt.
Advertisement: Butte, MT Bluegrass Festival

Drive up from the lowlands, singing and beleaguered.  
Come see the store clerk cradling a banjo  
like a child, the man like a pot-bellied Zeus striking bolts  
from a fiddle’s neck. Take stock  
of narrow bars and carnival tents, police aiming  
down the bores of their billiard cues.  
Count the windows filled with scrap wood, and call this  
Nowheresville: what with the brothels (dead) and copper mines  
sucked dry), the old folks glued to Keno machines.  
But in a town that’s nothing but itself,  
you’re Mr. Anyone: a swiveler-of-hips, a drunkard  
coalescing with the grass.  

Come whistle down the moon, and see the moon run  
like an animal that leaves no tracks.  
In the silences drawn long between the notes  
of your life, swing by.
Ginny Wiehardt

Running Father Moczygemba Out of Town

Panna Maria, Texas, 1857

Having believed rumors they had heard in Silesia about a land of milk and honey in America, they were disheartened when they found instead a land filled with scrub brush, waist-high grass, and rattlesnakes.
—T. Lindsay Baker, The First Polish Americans

It seemed hours.
Florentina could hear them shouting under the tree Whose branches held the sky, Keeping her awake. Torch light cutting across her bed.

Some plotted hanging.
Others, drowning in the creek That yearly sent a crop of snakes Rattling through the fields.

She climbed through the window, Ran out to the twins’ grave At the edge of their land, Where the orchard was meant to be. The seedlings like withered crosses.

She pressed her face against the tilled earth. Hard clumps of dirt, The ones boys threw against the sides of trees To see the dirt explode like grief. She feared beetles Carried their screams away.
From there, she saw Father’s figure
Devoured by the hills,
Hurrying toward the German towns,
To the tongue they had come to crave.

But even there streams run to nothing,
Leaving yellow streaks along the bed,
As though death, drunk and stumbling,
Had pissed his carelessness into the clay.
Straw Maid

_Panna Maria, Texas, 1857_

They put wheat under cloth,
salt on the step.
They drown the straw maid.
Still the soil cracks and their cattle wander.

What waste.
While rain runs through Silesia,
this sky gives only vastness and light.
Hoof prints baked into clay.

Beads turn up on riverbed,
stars caught in dust.
What haven’t they thrown at this land?

Maid tendered to the river, to the corn.
The mockingbird goes silent.
The panther growls irritation in the wood.

They make the _pisanki_ for Easter.
They sprinkle salt outside the door.
They pour wax into the coldest spring,
yet the lightning still strikes dry.
Bread, Salt, Wine

Panna Maria, Texas, 1867

Her white cotton dress,
her face of straw.
Each year they beaded, they tatted,
they made her beautiful

for a good harvest.
The first time Florentina
saw the doll drowned in the creek,
she screamed.

But Jacob is a good man,
and it’s always been this way.
He waits outside,
good suit brushed,
fingernails clean.

Three times around the fire they lead her.
They wash her feet
and anoint her lips with honey.
They leave her waiting for the groom

and his courage. He removes his boots,
one and then the other.
He clears his throat.
He rises and turns to the door.
Voice as a Scattering of Sunlight on Water

Heaven gave his feet to you. The water comes early this time, just before dinner. Wherever we step it squelches from grass under foot. The wide lawn, clear over to the olive trees, fills slowly. No other evening begins like this one, the sigh of irrigation water rising on the small windows of the house. I in red shorts and cowboy boots, my grandfather on the grass brim steps over, and there, like two birds, we stand in a fray of dusk-orange light, unmoving, and listen to the water’s whispering edge. Gnats rise in spirals. Heaven gave his feet to you, a calm voice about that hour, without despair.

On our way down the long gravel drive, he lets my hand go and stoops to clear twiggy debris out of the mouth of a pipe. Water never ceases to pour over his wrists. It is cool and smells like desert. Each morning begins like all the others, in the remains of water, under countless signs of its impermanence. Those too seep away. The dirt will be dark umber a short time. Sage wicks from the air.

There is no burden I must carry, everywhere an arid heaven, only a light which returns, traced by sparrows sweeping down, and which in its sheen on the water we seem to be part of,
Lawrence Wray

and which, the effacing light, renders
and carries us into this time we have lived.
We walk ankle-deep on the vanishing
green. The trees along the ditch,
once enormous, are likewise green
and one day also will vanish
with him. Stay close, he says to me.
The enduring image I will always have of the pumpjack is how it takes life. My first encounter was a coyote, its body still reaching for whatever rabbit it chased into the counterweights, the head swiftly separated from the pursuit. My father was checking the well, maintaining the pumpjack, and he came across the carcass when he shut the counterweights down at the engine. I was in grade school, asked to remain in the truck until the machine was at a standstill. That’s when my father called me to have a look.

In western Kansas the pumpjack looks like a parishioner in full genuflection amongst the grasses. To what does it pledge its respect? It points its head low to the well and rises and repeats this gesture for its entire life cycle. It is rare that there is a congregation, but at times one pumpjack can see another in the distance, perhaps part of the same injection field. Their heads are like ball-peen hammers. Corn and wheat grow around the pumpjack, and in the late summer in an irrigated cornfield the pumpjack is the center of its own labyrinth.

I imagined the pumpjack as a living thing when I was young. My father took me to check wells with him, and in the winter I felt sorry for the pumpjack as I might an animal with no shelter. They were often in cattle-guard cages. My father implied that certain ones were curmudgeonly, excitable, slow. I didn’t name the gesticulating metal, but I wasn’t far from it. To me, they were alive.

The drive to the location was a fine one. We left the highway just outside Montezuma, Kansas, to a sandy dirt road maintained by the county. The roads humped in the middle and the truck felt like it might be slipping toward the ditches, unmowed and wild and seemingly bottomless, so we drove the center until we came to a passing truck. There were grader ruts at times where the wash of a short but powerful thunderstorm might sift too much sandy gravel from the road and the grader that carefully combs the sand back in place struck the hardpan below, giving it the same consistency of rumble strips near construction sites. The wind was low, the temperature was dropping, and it was evening.
From the county roads, the lease roads were nothing more than worn lines connected by a culvert. We entered cornfields, wheat fields, and sorghum, the path no wider than our truck, the husks brushing the sides like fingertips. The roads grew increasingly bumpy in the cultivated fields, smoother in the fallow sections.

Below the surface there are rods and pipes and casing that help to bring forth oil, gas, and water. It is imperfect and so in need of constant maintenance, which brings roustabouts and pumpers. Much of the pumpjack’s life is in its roots, where it has fluid and the cool depth of the earth. It lives to produce. The cottonwoods and the crops continue on, little rain and hardpan of the loam surround it. As with much of what happens in this part of the world, more is going on beneath the ground than above. That which we cannot see we deduce from the personality of the pumpjack. Its color can tell an oilman what company placed it there. Its age tells them about the field’s productivity and funding. Its speed tells them about the depth and quality of the crude.

The first lesson in working the oilfield: Beware the machinery. A pulling unit can take a life with swift gruesome abandon. A drilling unit and its derrick need only be seen up close to know the power it can employ to mangle the body. But because the pumpjack looks so little like a machine but rather like an animal in the distance it lures the living in. It looks so much like a supplicant. So predictable. The cattle guards are not there for show. The number of coyotes and small game the pumpjack kills is surprising. The counterweights in the rear drive the crank like the menacing fists of gods. They are meaty guillotines making passes into shallow grave wells.

Beneath the pumpjacks in Kansas, Texas, Oklahoma, and the surrounding states is the Mid-Continent Oil Field, the largest crude field in North America, first drilled in 1892 in Neodesha, Kansas. But after the initial boom, with the need to extract the oil in other than natural ways, the pumpjack became a fixture in the fields in the 1920s. They bore little resemblance to the modern “nodding donkeys” that dot the landscape now, with hand-hewn logs for beams and the look of a teeter-totter with a great wooden wheel at one end. They’re all but gone now, long since relegated to the bone yards or eaten through. It wouldn’t be until the 1950s when the pumpjacks became the metal horses we know now.

I stared at the coyote for some time. The sun was nearly down, a handful of pencil-thin clouds masking its exit in the west. This was a grazing field, and I could hear the cattle lowing in the distance, the tall prairie grasses that had been allowed to flourish were chattering like an
off-air station in the background. My father went about the business of checking the pumpjack and well, greasing the massive machine. It was close to time to go home. We’d been in the truck for the better part of a day and though this time with my dad was precious, I was ready to go home.

But I wasn’t ready to leave the coyote. The surprise with the coyote was the lack of blood. The body could have been sleeping, burying its head in the dust. The coat was grey and brown, coarse and short. An accomplished hunter, the coyote was not stricken with mange, not gaunt. He was a long animal, a formidable predator. Clean sharp claws adorned its tattered paws. The tail hair waved in the breeze, so clean. I stepped closer. Little patches of black in the pelt. Some of the hair was lighter at the tips, darker at the base. One could not have seen him in the prairie grasses were he to retreat to safety. The counterweight rested in the ground, its flat end against the neck, and the absurdity of a circus tombstone came to my mind.

My father’s words: *This is what happens when you get too close.*

There is an ecosystem there, in the base of the pumpjack, where the I-beams rest like rails on a sled. Small lizards in southwest Kansas, near Ulysses, lie prone and flat on the hot metal. Field mice make their way along the insides of the beams like an interstate system. Rabbits burrow into the sheeting of pebbles where the loose gravel is easy digging.

Crabgrass lines the edges of the I-beams on the ground. Nightshade, mustard weed, fireweed (and the resultant tumbleweed), wild carrot. Anything that can survive the chemicals in constant circulation.

Snakes were always a step away, coiled or burrowed in the cool gravel. Mainly bull snakes, little garters, but occasionally a rattler might make its home there.

Robins and swallows nested in the horse head, especially in gas pump-jacks that run only a portion of the day. If the engine was housed in an open-sided port or a small shed, beware the birds’ anger at disturbing their babies in spring. Spiders in the corners. Hawks on the walking beam searching for prey. The cattle rub against the fencing with each visit.

From the gearbox I’ve cleaned whole nests of rats. They enter through conduit holes in the bottom of battery boxes and rectifiers. They enter through the open seams of metal, the rusted corners and bent lids. There is a whole history mice exploit in order to make their nests. The smell is fetid and dizzying. It is rare to have to evict a rat, but the babies are often dumped from the box unceremoniously.

The first nest I cleared, I picked it up with gloved hands and set it in
a ditch for the parents to find. The ditch was shallow, the grass brown and low, the nest easy to spot. The nest had the shape of the gearbox at its base—wide but shallow—and had been woven together in such a way that it held that shape in my hands. I could feel it move with the babies inside, but I could barely see them under the protective top layer of grasses.

I returned to seal up the holes with silicone to keep rats from reentering. At the end of the day, as we drove the lease road to the highway, I looked over at the nest in the sun, the babies still nestled in the scraps of paper and foliage, and thought how little I could do for them.

When I was old enough, during my return trips from college, my father took me on as an oilfield hand for his very small company. He installs electrical systems to underground pipe and keeps the pipe from corroding by diverting the negative charges that occur naturally underground to a series of sacrificial anodes buried alongside the well. My job was installing the ground wire, which ran from the wellhead where the horse head was, through the base of the pumpjack, and to the rectifier at the back of the pumpjack. The first time I made that trek through the pumpjack, I felt like I was doing something illegal. I’d been warned so many times, even with the machine off, not to go through the pumpjack, but there I was spooling the heavy-gauge wire beneath the metal to pin it in place.

Some pumpjacks run on diesel engines so loud it is difficult to talk on location. It offers some comfort that the noise is an indication of its lethal grind. They have a long lever on the outside of the housing as a brake, and the engine can be powered down after the brake has been set.

I checked a gas well once that wasn’t running, took the meter readings on the rectifier at a box a safe distance from the pumpjack’s moving parts and recorded them in the book. I pulled on the wires to see that the connections were still solid. The day was windy and the loudest sound was a thrum of highway traffic half a mile from location. One can start imagining, after some time alone, sounds coming from corn and wheat fields, the rustling of which hits just the right tone. The wind through barbed wire whistles. At any time these might also have been in the background as I recorded my readings.

Late summer days in southwest Kansas have their own glory. The day is hottest at four, but by six the wind and the increasing shade cools a sweaty back. Boots don’t feel so obtrusive, and with supper approaching each checked well was one step closer to home. The cottonwoods and elms blink their leaves in the distance in small untamed groves.
surrounding creek beds and terrain too mottled to farm. There is often a smell of fresh-turned earth.

I turned around to close the rectifier box on that day and found the pumpjack running, silent, behind me. I remembered an old joke that applied to pumpjacks: What is always running, but can never leave? I’d never known it had kicked on as per its programmed schedule, and the counterweights fluttered behind me like a butterfly.

As kids we waded through the boneyards of the oilfield companies at night, looking for whatever we could find. Rich and I combed one machine shop yard specifically to steal the silver bulldog from the hood of a Mac truck. We didn’t have any cutters, so Rich stood on the bumper, his powerful body rocking the hood ornament back and forth, forward and back with violent jerks, working the mounting loose. He looked like he might be pulling in a shark in an off-shore fishing expedition, the way he worked for a few pulls, rested, renewed the tugging contest until the piece finally parted with its mount, releasing Rich as well to the ground where he held up the dog like a receiver verifying a catch.

Parts of the pumpjack lay in those machine shops around the towns I lived in as a child. They were all oilfield towns: Hays, Ness City, Hoisington. In the yards of the machine shops, the welding sheds, the petroleum companies, the service and supply companies, there were the familiar horse heads, the walking beam, the cranks. They were often in poor form, rusting or in various stages of reconstruction. They looked like beaten mules, draft horses gone lame. Valves and casing, pipes and pumps, the heavy metal discard of the oilfield. We’d been a generation seeing these pieces in machine shop yards, seeing the missing pieces of our fathers likewise upon return home. Men with fingers numbering less than ten, men with no toes on one foot. I had a neighbor who had lost his left arm, and I watched as his beautiful (to me as a child) blond wife put on coats, opened beers for him as they sat under the safety of an opened garage in summer evenings together. I was lucky, I remember thinking even then. My father was still whole.

My childhood was full of the pumpjack. Little League sponsors, free hats and coffee mugs from the companies with whom my father did business. A man in town had a miniature pumpjack in his yard, and though I can’t remember for sure, I think it was pumping a water well. Nearly every oilfield company uses the pumpjack as its symbol. If they do not, then it is the oil derrick. It is backlit by the setting sun, the horse head held high like a hammer poised to strike a railroad tie.
The pumpjack is a symbol because it most easily sticks out along the prairie. In the fields it rises above the rest of the foliage except for the rare grove of cottonwoods or locust trees eyebrowning a creek. It is a symbol because it keeps its head down and works, because we all want that kind of dedication. In the pumpjack, we all find our desire for focus.

And indeed some of the men in town looked like pumpjacks. They had the willowy tensil strength of cables running through their backs and arms. They were always hunched over. Faces like shovels, arms coated in sun and oil and grease they haven’t the time or inclination to take off before they gather themselves from their work trucks to have a beer at The Shack. Their pants are spotted black and blue, the drill hands and the pulling unit hands, the men that have to put the pipe in the ground and drag it out when there is a problem. They even move like the pumpjack: slow even pace around the pool table, down the street, but one nearly feels inclined to believe that for all their movement they are in the same place. They guarded their beer at the bar with their arms. They didn’t look backlit by the sun. They didn’t look romantic.

That night I climbed the dead pumpjack in the yard, mounting it like a bull rider. The boneyard was just off the highway leading into town. It was fenced off with welded metal pipe three feet high. They stood more like declarations of property than warnings to keep out, and I looked out from atop the pumpjack, the first one I’d ever climbed, and saw the oilfield town at night. The pulling unit crews, despite the darkness, were coming in one at a time, their trucks and rigs coated in rotary mud and crude. They unloaded from the trucks and staggered wearily into the shop before heading home. The cement trucks, finished filling the drilled holes, were parked like sleeping elephants across the highway in an abandoned field. The houses didn’t start for another half mile to the south. All around us were metal-shed shops, open gravel lots with heavy machinery, the detritus of subterranean exploration. Below me, the warm memory of the sun radiated from the black paint of the tired pumpjack, and the boys called for me to come along. And I did.

Years later, in the summer of 1995, Rich lost his father in the oilfield. Dan was a machinist and welder as well as a garbage man in the mornings. I worked for him for a time in high school just a few years before, picking up garbage in the surrounding small towns. He was doing repair work on a pumpjack when the weights of the head came loose, crushing him.

Days after the funeral—which I missed while working in Nebraska as
a crop scout—Rich and I retreated to the blade platform of a windmill just outside of town to drink a case of beer and hope we didn’t plummet to our own demises. The windmill is its own kind of pumpjack, a vacuum machine, the spine-numbing water tumbling from the exit valve with the metallic mineral taste I remember from garden hoses and the water my grandparents drank. The pump and rotary were long-since broken, wood eaten through in the tower, metal blades missing like pulled teeth. The sound of the pipes rattling when another breath of air propelled the fan face and the water drew up sounded like wind chimes located on the porch of Hades, so we employed the brake for the evening. The cows, for which the stock tank was supplied by the mill, would have to make do the following day.

From the platform we could see the grid layout of the country roads. Pumpjacks bowed in the distance. I don’t remember what I said. What could I say? He did a dangerous job, worked with weight and motion. His job was to tie them together, and sometimes the problems are too great to fix. Old parts, mismatched pairings. Few were rewarded for trusting what rested above them.

The evening went on and we got drunker. The power of that weight occurred to me during the dusk. He must have never known it was coming, and probably, it was my hope, didn’t suffer much. Rich told me he had already started heading out to location because he felt like something might be amiss. More a feeling his dad would need another pair of hands to do the job. Nothing so much as he encountered.

Rich never cried. He’d had enough. We talked about the times he and I worked for his father, riding on the back of the trash truck, kicking “fruit field goals” into the back when we should have been working. We talked about his career as a welder now, and how he does the same sort of work his father did. I don’t want to remember the exact conversation. I don’t want to approximate it. I’d do a poor job if I tried, and it wouldn’t matter much. What mattered is that we saw the sun come up even though we were both exhausted, we finished the beer, made it down without hurting ourselves, and wandered back to town to take our places.

Years earlier, after my encounter with the coyote, my father sometime during those days took me along to check wells, gave me my first taste of beer. Coors, from the can. He only had a few, and at the time nobody really thought twice about drinking a few beers as they drove home from work. I jabbed at the opening, a small sip when it was passed
to me. It tasted bitter and metallic. Cool but not cold. It tasted like a bolt might taste had I put it in my mouth. That’s what it felt like, too, like I was finally taking in what it meant to work with the dangerous metal, the moving arms and fists of pumpjacks. Out the window, pumpjacks bowed and rose in the distance. It was dark by then; we were on the sandy dirt road home. A rooster tail of dust rose up in our wake. It was only a sip, but a sip was enough.
Wendy Rawlings

Utah’s Bright Dark Heart

He has to live in the midst of the incomprehensible, which is detestable. And it has a fascination, too, which goes to work upon him.

—Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness

Called “Utah’s Brightest Star” on the city’s website for reasons I can’t begin to imagine, Tooele is a straight shot an hour west on I-80 from Salt Lake City, at the base of the Oquirrh Mountains. I taught at Utah State University’s satellite campus in Tooele in the late ’90s, when the Tooele Chemical Agent Disposal Facility, the city’s largest employer, began destruction of the 13,616 tons of chemical weapons stockpiled there. By 2011, 99% of the VX, Sarin, and mustard gas at the facility would be destroyed. These nerve agents have been classified as weapons of mass destruction by the United Nations. I’d learned about the disposal facility in Tooele at the same time I’d been informed of the job opening, and I found I had to fight with myself to quell fears I would have called irrational if I’d heard anyone else voice them. I brought my own water and didn’t drink from the fountains on the Tooele campus. Once I was embarrassed to find myself holding my breath as I walked the short distance from my car to the building where I taught, as if this could prevent contamination.

Teaching in Tooele brought into high relief my cultural and environmental anxieties about living in Utah. As an atheist from New York, I had struggled to adjust to living in Salt Lake City. I was used to Manhattan’s compact island geography, contained by bodies of water. The urban sprawl of Salt Lake City, sitting in a bowl between two mountain ranges, made no sense to me. On high pollution days, I could see a clear line marking where smog trapped in the city met cleaner air above. The streets were wider than any I’d ever seen and had been built that way, I learned, to allow oxcarts to turn around in the days when pioneers were the city’s occupants. Each street was named according to its distance from the Salt Lake Mormon Temple. I lived eleven blocks east of the temple and nine blocks south. Every
errand mapped my proximity from a church organized around a set of values that made no sense to me. I no more believed in eternal marriage or spirit babies than I did in the existence of the devil in hell. Driving eighty miles west each week to Tooele, I felt myself to be traveling into the dark heart of Utah, where the Mormons would be more devout and fundamentalists perhaps more likely to practice polygamy. Friends had shown me houses built for what some called “plural marriage,” with several sleeping quarters built as spokes off a main house. The chemical weapons disposal facility stood for me as a kind of environmental equivalent of the Mormon Church, something else I feared and couldn’t comprehend.

I drove to Tooele every Wednesday night. Many of my students were Mormon, but no one could have called them homogeneous. In my composition class there was Neva, in her sixties, with white hair and a big growth on her nose, like a cartoon witch. She was partial to sweatpants and a T-shirt depicting Jesus holding a cross that looked to me like rebar. Then Samantha, one of those young women who look as if they’ve been through the wringer, in a bright red cocktail dress and black high-heeled sandals. Lisa, tiny in tight jeans, mother of five sons and recently married to a Mexican man; she had just changed her last name from Hogan to Martinez. Two Debbys, both spelled with a “y,” both with frosted hair, though only the Debby who worked as a teacher’s aide and wanted to be a teacher could write like an adult.

Other students struggled to express themselves on paper. They had never heard of peer reviewing and were mortified by the idea when I brought it up. So everyone else can see how stupid I am and how many mistakes I make? No, I explained. The notion that everyone’s rough draft was flawed didn’t go down well. When they turned in their final drafts, I asked for the rough drafts with their classmates’ comments and perused them at home in bed. You are such a better writer than I am, one student wrote in painstaking script. Another: This is a perfect essay.

The median lethal dose for human beings from exposure to the VX nerve agent is ten milligrams. Early symptoms of exposure such as runny nose and shortness of breath don’t seem like cause for alarm, but that’s just the beginning of a short and painful trip whose destination is death. In 1994, a member of the Japanese cult Aum Shinrikiyo attacked a man suspected of being a spy on a street in Osaka and sprinkled the nerve agent on his neck. The victim chased his attackers
for a hundred yards before collapsing and then going into a coma from which he never emerged. Members of the Tooele community (some of whom were married to or offspring of my students) earned their paychecks from the unenviable task of disposing of these nerve agents. They had to destroy 1,356 tons of VX alone, in the forms of rockets, projectiles, warheads, and land mines.

In the midst of all this chemical-weapon-destroying, Tooele was burgeoning. The Falls at Overlake, Canyon Rim Estates, Shetland Meadows, Bee Hive Homes: new developments built around artificial lakes and golf courses seemed to spring up over the course of a single semester. And could city leaders be envisioning the unlikely avenue of tourism for Tooele’s future? When I drove into town for the last time before I left Utah for good in 2000, I passed the Sit-N-Bull Trading Post, Thompson’s Smokehouse (“Fresh Beef Jerky Here”), and Fantasy Pewter.

Fantasy Pewter? There were a lot of words I could imagine next to the word “fantasy,” but I doubted I’d ever come up with pewter. The shop sold pewter figurines of dragons, sorceresses, unicorns, warrior Vikings, the grim reaper holding a sickle, and so on. There was a forced cheerfulness about the face of civic life in Tooele that I read as an attempt to mask the horror of the chemical weapons stockpiled in their midst. A banner strung above a main intersection read Pioneer Sesquicentennial! In big letters below an advertisement for a high school dance were the words GUYS ASK NOW.

Unlike my more secular students at the University of Utah, the students in my Tooele classes couldn’t talk about the reading without treating literary characters as if they were real people. In discussions, students voiced opinions and often judgment about how The Great Gatsby’s Nick Carraway and Jordan Baker were conducting themselves. When I began a discussion about a short story by Alice Munro, a female student read from her written response, “I did not like this story at all. She is just a person without any morals.” Students conflated author and character, condemning the author for the character’s poor decisions. “The man or woman is unfaithful and they are never happy,” a student lamented. But I couldn’t help but be infected by their many enthusiasms, their vociferousness. Peter, a big-bellied, middle-aged man in a Shamu the Whale Sea World T-shirt, got up in front of class to read his essay about Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy and warned us that he might start to cry. When he got to the part of the piece that gave an account of a man who molested his second wife’s children, Peter choked up and
handed the essay to Jonathan, who finished the job for him. I had been teaching for eight years and couldn’t remember another instance of a student crying in class. Later in the semester, another student, Synethia, wept openly while listening to Nick read his essay about guide dogs. In response to a short answer quiz question about the meaning of the title of Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*, one student wrote, “The character is saying I AM HERE! I AM ALIVE!”

**Incineration is the standard method for destroying chemical weapons.** Workers receive the nerve agent in protective containers (I’m picturing a sort of metal Houdini milk can wrapped in chains secured with padlocks) and place them on trays sent to an automatic processing area called the Explosion Containment Room. A rotating kiln removes the explosive components, after which the liquid agent is sucked out and placed in holding tanks. After the liquid is incinerated, it’s sent through “Pollution Abatement Systems” (the terminology, I suppose, is meant to comfort or at least placate) and then shipped to “out-of-state underground disposal facilities,” which probably means somewhere in Nevada. At one point, Tooele stored 44% of the nation’s stockpile of chemical weapons.

**After class, lit up on adrenaline, I drove the hour back to Salt Lake City with a friend who taught at the same time as I did.** I waited until we had pints of the locally brewed Hefeweizen in front of us to tell her about an incident that had occurred in my research writing class. Introducing the cause-effect essay assignment, I’d offered the example of writing an essay about the effects of living in a town that harbored the largest stockpile of chemical weapons in the U.S. Wasn’t it true, I asked, that an abnormally high number of people in Tooele had developed disorders of the central nervous system? This was before the Internet; I was operating on things I’d heard. No way, the students said. A woman with white-blond hair and a high, virginal voice said, “We don’t think about that.” A few students insisted that the level of risk was low. Then the group refused, with an air of decisiveness that felt almost planned, to discuss the topic any further.

What had I expected? I asked my friend over artichoke dip and more beer. To use my vast and superior knowledge to educate my students about the dangers that lurked in their own backyards? So that, what? They’d quit their jobs and move to San Francisco, where the water was pure and soil unsullied?
During the time I was teaching in Tooele, a fifteen-year-old in Springfield, Oregon, named Kipland Kinkel, murdered his parents and two other people. If you look him up on Wikipedia, his entry begins with the sentence, “Kipland Philip ‘Kip’ Kinkel is an American spree killer.” I mention this because the way in which my life in 1998 unfolded had begun to feel increasingly random. It probably marks me utterly and indelibly as an American that I identify spree killers as the signature figures for the idea of randomness. Had I known that Kip Kinkel’s full name was “Kipland Philip ‘Kip’ Kinkel” back then, I probably would have gone around singing his name under my breath like a poetic little ditty. I was attracted at that time to instances of forced goodness arbitrarily juxtaposed with instances of deliberate and yet seemingly unavoidable evil. That year I’d read Anne Tyler’s novel, The Accidental Tourist, which begins with a couple’s son being “murdered in a Burger Bonanza his second night at camp.” Tyler’s narrator goes on, thinking in tandem with me, to say that “It was one of those deaths that make no sense—the kind where the holdup man has collected his money and is free to go but decides, instead, first to shoot each and every person through the back of the skull.”

I’d been accepted to a graduate program in Salt Lake City after having an affair in New York with a married Irish illegal immigrant who had a young daughter. He had since divorced, and we’d stayed in touch, talking on the phone about the possibility of him moving to Salt Lake. On my birthday that year, friends had taken me for dinner at Ruby Tuesday, where a waiter presented me with a bottle of champagne. The hands holding the bottle belonged to Brendan, the Irishman I loved. He had arrived for good, with two suitcases. The first months after his arrival were euphoric, but money and job worries had gotten the best of us. Now we were splitting up, though we couldn’t afford separate apartments. We still shared one bed, but I had gotten involved with my Spanish tutor and Brendan had met a much younger woman. One night he came home drunk, sat down on the edge of my side of the bed, and told me his new girlfriend was pregnant. I counseled him to help her get an abortion and we fell asleep curled up next to each other.

One Saturday, lonely, I wandered into Deseret Book, the world’s largest Latter Day Saints’ bookstore, and ended up spending the afternoon there. I was fascinated by a timeline that placed world events and church history side by side. A sign encouraged shoppers to “See the Big Picture.” Beneath the timeline were display tables and shelves on
which stood porcelain statues depicting images of devotion. You could buy “Praying Hands” ($58), “Called to Serve” ($188; eager-beaver-looking missionary), and “Eternally Yours” ($146; man and woman looking into each other’s eyes). In another aisle stood models of Mormon temples all over the United States. The Los Angeles temple had a swimming pool. As a non-believer with a sense of the world as an almost entirely arbitrary and capricious place, I felt perversely drawn to the contrast between the Mormon religion, the majestic Utah landscape, and the kookily frightening fact of Tooele as the nation’s primary site of chemical weapons destruction.

Natalie wrote an essay about the benefits and hazards of smoking, a masterfully comic restatement of things we already knew. She made the class laugh when she said she would love nothing more than to smoke and watch game shows all day. Nick’s essay began, “I am the drummer in a band called Pivot.” The sentence evokes the student: tall, skinny, pimpled, and unsure of himself. An older man named Jerry, who I had pegged for a blue-collar Republican with a wife and three kids, came to class one day in a T-shirt that said, “Let’s Get One Thing Straight: I’m Not.”

On the last night of class, Ray asked me to sign his research-writing textbook, as if I were its author. “As a memento,” he explained. I sat with pairs of students and helped them proofread their work. One had written “specific” as “pacific.” Another used “prays” when she meant “praise.” I envied my Tooele students their ingenuousness in the face of menace, their absolute disbelief in the universe’s arbitrariness.

“There is religion in the groundwater here, the love of the land nuclear and latter day,” I later wrote self-consciously in my journal. But in a sense I was right: the Mormon Church’s Emergency Planning Guide provides detailed instructions on everything from how to identify likely disasters to a list of long-term basic food supply items. Marriage is forever, and after death, the kingdom of glory awaits. In the meantime, a statement on the Church’s web site conveys the LDS philosophy in its characteristically pragmatic and upbeat fashion: “Preparation, both spiritual and temporal, can dispel fear.”
Contributors’ Notes

Jeffrey Alfier has work forthcoming in Louisville Review and Windsor Review. He is the author of The Wolf Yearling (Silver Birch Press, 2013) and publisher of San Pedro River Review.

T. Duncan Anderson has stories published in A Gathering of the Tribes, ZYZZYVA, FICTION, Santa Monica Review, and forthcoming in Eclipse and The Rattling Wall. He studied creative writing at the Iowa Writers’ Workshop following four years in the Navy. He currently lives in Los Angeles, California, and is expecting his first child.

Tacey M. Atsitty, Diné, is Tséñahabilnii (Sleep Rock People) and born for Ta’neeszhahnii (Tangle People). Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in Kenyon Review Online, Prairie Schooner, Crazyhorse, As/Us, Florida Review, New Orleans Review, New Poets of the American West, and other publications. Her chapbook is Amenorrhea (Counting Coup Press, 2009).

Oliver Bendorf was born and raised in Iowa City, Iowa, and is studying to be a librarian at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he recently earned his MFA in poetry. His poems have been published in Best New Poets, Indiana Review, Mid-American Review, Ninth Letter, Redivider, and elsewhere.

Daniel Berkner’s poems have appeared in The Los Angeles Review, Hot Metal Bridge, The Dos Passos Review, High Desert Journal, The Lyric, and The Meadow. His manuscript was a semi-finalist for the 2011 Saturnalia Books Poetry Prize. He holds an MFA from the University of Idaho in Moscow, where he currently lives, works, and is thankful for the rain.

Annie Binder received her MFA in Creative Writing and Environment from Iowa State University and currently lives in Des Moines, Iowa. Her poetry has appeared in Slice.

Mark Jay Brewin, Jr.’s poems have appeared in or are forthcoming in Beloit Poetry Journal, Southern Humanities Review, The Hollins

**Lauren Camp** is the author of *This Business of Wisdom* (West End Press) and editor of the poetry blog, *Which Silk Shirt*. She has been a co-winner of the Anna Davidson Rosenberg Poetry Awards. Her poems have recently appeared in *Sweet, About Place Journal, The Perch*, and *The Quotable*. Her website is www.laurencamp.com.

**Cara Chamberlain**'s work has most recently appeared in *Canary, Tar River Poetry*, and *Chaffin Journal*. She is the author of the poetry collection *Hidden Things* (FootHills Publishing).

**Mario Chard** is a winner of the 2012 “Discovery”*/Boston Review* Poetry Contest and a Wallace Stegner Fellow in Poetry at Stanford University. He is the former poetry editor of *Sycamore Review* and a graduate of the MFA Program in Creative Writing at Purdue University. He lives in San Jose, California, with his wife and two sons.

**Karlyn Coleman** is the winner of the *Crab Orchard Review* Special Feature Award in Fiction. She is also a winner of the 2009–2010 Loft Mentor Series in fiction. Her work has been published in *Revolver, Paper Darts, McSweeney's Internet Tendency, Writer's Block*, and *Canvas*. When she’s not writing or teaching, she’s watching her sons play hockey in one of the many cold ice arenas that are scattered across Minnesota.

**Heidi Czerwiec** is an associate professor of Literature and Creative Writing at the University of North Dakota, where she is Co-Director of the annual UND Writers Conference. She is the author of the chapbook *Hiking the Maze* (Finishing Line Press), and has poems and translations recently published or forthcoming in “A Poetry Congeries” at *Connotation Press: An Online Artifact, South Dakota Review*, and *Absinthe: New European Writing*.

**Carol V. Davis** is the author of *Between Storms* (Truman State University Press). She won the 2007 T.S. Eliot Prize for *Into the Arms*...
of Pushkin: Poems of St. Petersburg. Her poetry has been read on NPR, Radio Russia, and at the Library of Congress. She teaches at Santa Monica College, California.

**Stacey Donovan** has published poems in *Sonora Review, The Grove Review*, and *Southern Poetry Review*. She lives in Kansas City, Kansas.

**Andy Eaton** is an American poet who lives with his wife in Belfast, Northern Ireland. His poems have recently appeared in or are forthcoming from *Magma, Narrative*, and *Ruminate*.

**Matthew Gavin Frank** is the author of the nonfiction books *Pot Farm*, *Barolo*, and *Preparing the Ghost: An Essay Concerning the Giant Squid and the Man Who First Photographed It* (forthcoming from W.W. Norton: Liveright); the poetry books *The Morrow Plots, Warranty in Zulu*, and *Sagittarius Agitprop*, and the chapbooks *Four Hours to Mpumalanga* and *Aardvark*. His work appears in *The New Republic, FIELD, EPOCH, AGNI, The Iowa Review, Crazyhorse, Black Warrior Review, Best Food Writing, The Best Travel Writing, Creative Nonfiction*, and others. Born and raised in Illinois, he currently teaches creative writing in the MFA Program at Northern Michigan University, where he is the Nonfiction Editor of *Passages North*. This winter, he prepared his first batch of fried trout ice cream.

**Jenny George**’s poems have recently appeared in *FIELD, Indiana Review, The Collagist, Inch*, and *North American Review*. In 2012, she received a Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Prize in Poetry for her work.

**Katherine Gordon** teaches English and Creative Writing in St. Louis, Missouri. She has a PhD in Scottish Literature from the University of Glasgow and an MFA in Poetry from the University of Missouri–St. Louis. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *River Styx, Mochila Review, Études Écossaises*, and *ScotLit*.

**Jennifer Hancock**’s poems have appeared in (among other journals) *Third Coast, Spoon River Poetry Review, Ecotone*, and her poem “Foray” is forthcoming in *Fungi Magazine*. She grew up on the Texas Gulf Coast and currently lives in western Colorado, where she is Assistant Professor of English at Colorado Mesa University.
Jocelyn Heath is a first-year PhD student in English with a poetry concentration at Georgia State University. She received her MFA in poetry from the University of Maryland, College Park. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in Poet Lore, Sinister Wisdom, West Trade Review, Foothill, and Soundings. She reviews poetry collections for Lambda Literary, and works as an assistant editor for Smartish Pace.

Lisa Higgs has published work in Water~Stone Review, Midwest Gothic, and PMSpoemmemoirstory. She has published a chapbook of sonnets, Lodestar, and her manuscript What Space you Inhabit recently was a semi-finalist for Persea Books’ Lexi Rudnitsky First Book Prize.

Adam Houle holds a PhD from Texas Tech University and teaches English at the South Carolina Governor’s School for Science and Mathematics. His poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in AGNI, Zone 3, Cave Wall, and elsewhere.

Bethany Schultz Hurst’s poems have appeared in journals such as River Styx, Cimarron Review, Rattle, Smartish Pace, and The Gettysburg Review. She lives in Pocatello, Idaho, where she teaches at Idaho State University.

Gary Jackson was born and raised in Topeka, Kansas. He is the author of the poetry collection Missing You, Metropolis, which received the 2009 Cave Canem Poetry Prize. His poems have appeared in Callaloo, Tin House, The Laurel Review, The Normal School, Tuesday; An Art Project, and elsewhere. He’s also published in Shattered: The Asian-American Comics Anthology, and is the recipient of both Cave Canem and Bread Loaf Fellowships. Jackson is an Assistant Professor at the College of Charleston in Charleston, South Carolina, and at the low-residency MFA program at Murray State University in Murray, Kentucky. He has been a fierce lover of comics for over twenty years.

Christopher Kempf is a Wallace Stegner Fellow in Poetry at Stanford University. His work has appeared recently in Gulf Coast, Ninth Letter, and Prairie Schooner, among other places. He lives in Oakland, California.

Peter Ludwin’s most recent book, Rumors of Fallible Gods, is a two-time finalist for the Gival Press Poetry Award and was published by
Contributors’ Notes


Alexander Lumans has published poems in Sycamore Review, Poet Lore, Southern Humanities Review, South Carolina Review, The Collagist, Strange Horizons, Redheaded Stepchild, Off Channel, and the anthologies Poets on the Object and Say It Loud! He won third place in the 2010 Wabash Prize for Poetry from Sycamore Review. He has been awarded fellowships to the MacDowell Colony and scholarships to the Bread Loaf, RopeWalk, and the Sewanee Writers’ Conferences. He lives and teaches in Denver, Colorado.

Dawn Manning is a writer, photographer, and rogue anthropologist living in the Greater Philadelphia area. Her work has appeared in Fairy Tale Review, Silk Road, and other literary journals, and was recently awarded the San Miguel Writer’s Contest award for poetry. She can be found herding cats for Animal Friends of Lansdowne, or through her website at dawnmanning.com.

Yvonne Martinez is a third-generation Utahn, now living in Berkeley, California. “Chicken Fried Rice” is part of her larger memoir-in-progress, Capirotada.

Christina Misite is an English instructor and new mother. Her work appears in The Comstock Review, Borderlands, 42opus, and Concho River Review. She lives in San Antonio, Texas, with her husband and son.

Sarah Fawn Montgomery holds an MFA in creative nonfiction from California State University-Fresno, and is currently a PhD candidate in creative writing at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, where she has served as Prairie Schooner’s Senior Nonfiction Reader for several years. Her work has been listed as notable in Best American Essays and her poetry and prose have appeared or are forthcoming in various magazines including Confrontation, DIAGRAM, Fugue, Georgetown Review, The Los Angeles Review, North Dakota Quarterly, The Pinch, Puerto del Sol, and others.

Kristi Moos is the editor of Poecology. Her work has appeared in ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment, Prairie
Schooner, Denver Quarterly, New American Writing, Terrain.org, and elsewhere. She lives in Palo Alto, California.

Juan J. Morales is the author of Friday and the Year that Followed (Bedbug Press). His poems have appeared in Copper Nickel, PALABRA, Poet Lore, Zone 3, and other journals. He is the Editor of Pilgrimage Magazine, a CantoMundo Fellow, and the Director of Creative Writing at Colorado State University-Pueblo.

Dionisia Morales earned her MFA in creative writing from Oregon State University. Her essays have appeared or are forthcoming in Cream City Review, Hunger Mountain, CALYX, Oregon Humanities Magazine, Brevity, and other journals.

Melissa Mylchreest writes poetry and nonfiction in western Montana. Her work has appeared in many journals, magazines and on public radio. She is the winner of the 2012 Merriam-Frontier Award for her chapbook Reckon, the 2011 and 2012 Obsidian Prizes for Poetry, and a 2008 Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Prize in Poetry.

E.A. Neeves has an MFA in creative writing from Emerson College. Her fiction has been published in Salamander and Midwest Literary Magazine. She lives in Boston, Massachusetts, where she is working on a collection of linked short stories.

Titi Nguyen is the winner of the Crab Orchard Review Special Feature Award in Literary Nonfiction. She was born in Saigon, Vietnam, and raised in Quincy, Massachusetts. Her essays have appeared in The Threepenny Review, The New York Times, Ninth Letter, and Witness. She lives in New York, New York.

Greg Nicholl lives in Baltimore, Maryland, and is an assistant editor at the Johns Hopkins University Press. His poetry has recently appeared in Boulevard, Cold Mountain Review, Ecotone, Gay & Lesbian Review, Mid-American Review, Post Road, Smartish Pace, and elsewhere.

William Notter’s collection Holding Everything Down (Southern Illinois University Press) won the High Plains Book Award for Poetry and was a finalist for the Colorado Book Award. His poems have been published in Alaska Quarterly Review, Atlanta Review, High Desert...
Journal, and The Midwest Quarterly, and in the anthologies Manifest West: Contemporary Cowboy (Western Press Books) and Good Poems, American Places (Viking Penguin). He has been awarded grants from the Nevada Arts Council and the National Endowment for the Arts.

**Dustin Parsons** is Assistant Professor of English at SUNY Fredonia. His stories have appeared in American Literary Review and Keeping the Wolves At Bay: Stories by Emerging American Writers (Autumn House). His essays are forthcoming in Seneca Review and Fourth River. He is a recipient of a New York Foundation for the Arts nonfiction grant and an Ohio Arts Council Individual Artist Grant in nonfiction. He lives in western New York with his wife, poet Aimee Nezhukumatathil.

**Ricardo Pau-Llosa**’s seventh book of poems, Man, is from Carnegie Mellon University Press, as were his previous four titles. He has new work in APR, Poetry, December, RHINO, Christianity & Literature, The Fiddlehead, Stand, EPOCH, Edinburgh Review, Rock & Sling, among other journals. His website is www.pau-llosa.com.

**Fernando Pérez** is from Los Angeles, California, but moved to Phoenix, Arizona, to pursue an MFA in poetry at Arizona State University. His work has appeared in Painted Bride Quarterly, Furnace Review, Naugatuck River Review, Crab Creek Review, and Faultline. He currently resides in Tempe, Arizona, and teaches writing both at Arizona State University and Mesa Community College.

**Zara Raab**’s poems evoking the rainy darkness of the remote northern California coast are collected into two books: The Book of Gretel and Swimming the Eel. A third book, finalist for the Dana Award, is based on the tale of Rumpelstiltskin. It will appear later this year, along with Fracas and Asylum in early 2014. Her poems, reviews, and essays appear in Evansville Review, River Styx, Crab Orchard Review, The Dark Horse, and Poet Lore. A contributing editor for Redwood Coast Review and Poetry Flash, she lives in California, near the San Francisco Bay.

**Wendy Rawlings** is the author of a novel, The Agnostics, and a collection of short stories, Come Back Irish. Her fiction and nonfiction have recently appeared or are forthcoming in AGNI, Cincinnati Review,
Contributors’ Notes

Passages North, and Florida Review. She teaches creative writing at the University of Alabama.

Natalie Scenters-Zapico is from the sister cities of El Paso, Texas, and Ciudad Juárez, México. Her poetry is forthcoming or has appeared in The Believer, Prairie Schooner, West Branch, PALABRA, among others.


Crystal Stuvland’s work has appeared in Untitled Country Review, Silent Things, Smashed Cat Magazine, and The Expeditioner. She’s currently teaching English at Universidad de Las Américas in Quito, Ecuador.

Virgil Suárez was born in Havana, Cuba, in 1962. Since 1972, he has lived in the United States, growing up in East Los Angeles, California. He is a translator, editor of several best-selling anthologies, and fiction writer; and as a poet, he is the author of eight books, most recently 90 Miles: Selected and New Poems, published by the University of Pittsburgh Press. He lives and works in Florida. When he is not writing, he is out riding his motorcycle up and down the Blue Highways of the southeastern United States.

Matt Sumpter is the winner of the Crab Orchard Review Special Feature Award in Poetry. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in The New Republic, Cincinnati Review, 32 Poems, Guernica, and elsewhere. He is a Creative Writing PhD student at Binghamton University.

Doua Thao is from Wisconsin, and currently lives in Greensboro, North Carolina, where he is a MFA candidate at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Ginny Wiehardt’s work has appeared in journals such as the Notre Dame Review, PN Review, Shenandoah, Spoon River Poetry Review,
and *Willow Springs*. She has an MFA in poetry from the Michener Center for Writers and has held residencies at Hedgebrook and Jentel. She lives in Brooklyn, New York.

**Lawrence Wray**’s poems have been published in *Innisfree Poetry Journal, Dark Horse Review, Weave Magazine, Blood Lotus, Cider Press Review, Prime Number Magazine, Sentence*, and *Naugatuck River Review*, among others. The father of two daughters, he is involved in the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, home-schooling community and teaches writing classes in an independent learning cooperative.
“Cynthia Huntington’s Heavenly Bodies is the most searing and frightening book of poetry I have read in years. The poems arise from pain and illness, from the body’s rebellions and betrayals, and yet they are also curiously exhilarating, even redemptive: perhaps because they are utterly free of self-pity, and find the means—through the sustained ferocity and invention of their language—to transform suffering into a vision so bold it must be called prophetic. Heavenly Bodies is a remarkable collection, on every level.”
   —David Wojahn, author of World Tree

2012 National Book Award Finalist!

Heavenly Bodies
88 pages, $15.95
978-0-8093-3063-8

Copublished with Crab Orchard Review

Available at major retailers and independent bookstores, or from

SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY PRESS

Orders & Inquiries • TEL 800-621-2736 • FAX 800-621-8476
www.siupress.com
A Murmuration of Starlings

Poems by Jake Adam York

“Through a ceremony of language and song, A Murmuration of Starlings consecrates and memorializes the souls, blood, and bones of those black men and women slaughtered on the altar of hate and violence during the Civil Rights era. With a lucid, shrewd intelligence and a commanding vision of healing and atonement, Jake Adam York makes an offering of images and music that seems the foundation of a new understanding and remembrance.”—Major Jackson, author of Leaving Saturn and Hoops

“A Murmuration of Starlings is a fierce, beautiful, necessary book. Fearless in their reckoning, these poems resurrect contested histories and show us that the past—with its troubled beauty, its erasures, and its violence—weighs upon us all… a murmuration so that we don’t forget, so that no one disappears into history.”—Natasha Trethewey, author of Native Guard

Copublished with Crab Orchard Review

96 pages, $14.95 paper
978-0-8093-2837-6

Available at major retailers and independent bookstores, or from

SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY PRESS

Orders & Inquiries • TEL 800-621-2736 • FAX 800-621-8476
www.siupress.com
Persons Unknown
Poems by Jake Adam York

“Elegiac and epic, these poems broaden the limits of the American imagination on the subject of Jim Crow, an era as worthy of mythologizing as the War of Independence or World War II. I am grateful that York is applying his prodigious talent to this history and I am profoundly shaken by the result.” —Anthony Grooms, author of Bombingham

“Jake Adam York’s beautiful poetry reclaims the voices of America’s disappeared. This elegant victory of memory offers us a map to justice and hope if we but heed the call.” —Susan M. Glisson, author of The Human Tradition in the Civil Rights Movement

“These poems are corrosive, blunt, historical as photographs we know from front-page news, but they have also the depth and tang of sweet dawn before anything has happened, before the lynchings, the blood…. Persons Unknown is bravely done work and Jake Adam York is, now, a necessary poet among us.”—Dave Smith, author of Little Boats, UnsALvaged: Poems, 1992–2004

Persons Unknown
112 pages, $14.95
paper, ISBN 0-8093-2998-0
978-0-8093-2998-4

Copublished with Crab Orchard Review

Available at major retailers and independent bookstores, or from

SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY PRESS
Orders & Inquiries • TEL 800-621-2736 • FAX 800-621-8476
www.siupress.com
Crab Orchard Series
In Poetry
2013 Open Competition Awards Announcement

_Crab Orchard Review_ and Southern Illinois University Press are pleased to announce the 2013 Crab Orchard Series in Poetry Open Competition selections.

Our final judge, Rodney Jones, selected _Millennial Teeth_ by Dan Albergotti and _Zion_ by T.J. Jarrett as the winners. Both winners are awarded a $2000 prize and will receive $1500 as an honorarium for a reading at Southern Illinois University Carbondale as part of the 2014 Devil’s Kitchen Fall Literary Festival. Both readings will follow the publication of the poets’ collections by Southern Illinois University Press in September 2014.

We want to thank all of the poets who entered manuscripts in our Crab Orchard Series in Poetry Open Competition. _Crab Orchard Review’s_ website has updated information on subscriptions, calls for submissions, contest information (including online submission information) and results, and past, current, and future issues. Visit us at:

CrabOrchardReview.siu.edu
Southern Illinois University Press

2014 Crab Orchard Series in Poetry
Open Competition Awards

Two winners – $3500 and publication each

All unpublished, original collections of poems written in English by United States citizens and permanent residents are eligible* (individual poems may have been previously published). (*Current or former students, colleagues, and close friends of the final judge, and current and former students and employees of Southern Illinois University and authors published by Southern Illinois University Press are not eligible for the Open Competition.) Two volumes of poems will be selected from an open competition of manuscripts postmarked October 1 through November 16, 2013. The winners will each receive a publication contract with Southern Illinois University Press. In addition, both winners will be awarded a $2000 prize and $1500 as an honorarium for a reading at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. Both readings will follow the publication of the poets’ collections by Southern Illinois University Press.

All postal submissions must be accompanied by a $25 entry fee (online: $28). For complete guidelines, visit CrabOrchardSeriesInPoetry.submittable.com or send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to:

Jon Tribble, Series Editor
Crab Orchard Open Competition Awards
Department of English
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
1000 Faner Drive
Carbondale, Illinois 62901
**Glaciology**

*Poems by Jeffrey Skinner*

“In *Glaciology*, Skinner’s perceptions often seem to balance on the very edge of unbeing. What is broken beckons to us, alive in the lens of his attention, constantly undone and remade in shifting, dazzling patterns. Funny, surprising, verbally sharp, and ruefully aware of danger at every turn, these poems shine with a fierce love of the world.”—Cynthia Huntington, author of *Heavenly Bodies*

“Few contemporary poets capture the severe lonelinesses of American manhood with such clarity and cold, honest wit as Jeffrey Skinner. ‘I have been hired by divine gangsters—’ he says, ‘Reason my work is invisible.’ I have admired his taut, strange work in book after book. He’s a pilgrim.”—Tony Hoagland

Copublished with *Crab Orchard Review*

80 pages, $15.95 paper  
ISBN 0-8093-3273-6  
978-0-8093-3273-1

Available at major retailers and independent bookstores, or from

**SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY PRESS**

Orders & Inquiries • TEL 800-621-2736 • FAX 800-621-8476  
www.siupress.com
THE LAUGHTER OF ADAM AND EVE

Poems by
Jason Sommer

“The Chinese have a word for it: hsin, heart/mind—and Jason Sommer has it in abundance—a probing intelligence that feels for what it sees, the insight the more acute for its connectedness. Here is a beautifully modulated existential anguish, knowledge from the stunted tree that bears the fruit of exile, an unerrning ear for the music of thought, ruefulness, the full monty of candor, an ironic awareness, and most movingly, the avowal of what is beyond irony.”

—Eleanor Wilner

“Plainspoken, ferociously and tenderly energetic, enmeshed in history even while it yearns for the miraculous, this is a fabulous book by a fabulous poet who deserves what he has surely earned: a wide and enthusiastic audience.”—Alan Shapiro, author of Night of the Republic

Copublished with
Crab Orchard Review

96 pages, $15.95 paper
ISBN 0-8093-3278-7
978-0-8093-3278-6

Available at major retailers and independent bookstores, or from

SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY PRESS
Orders & Inquiries • TEL 800-621-2736 • FAX 800-621-8476
www.siupress.com
In the Absence of Clocks
Poems by
Jacob Shores-Arguello

“...This is a twenty-first-century poetics, one world seen through another: Ukraine through the poet’s other ancestral wellspring in the isthmus of the Americas. It is a journey at once forward and back, and throughout we are guided by a ‘map of a ghost country.’ It is a language that dares to ‘cross the impossible river.’ Life seems what it always was, timeless and eternal. But then the present detonates and we realize where we are and why nothing will be the same. An amazing and heretofore most unexpected book!”—Carolyn Forché

“This is the sort of book that investigates deeper into the lives of others, to find poetry there, to find meaning, to find strangeness that is all our own. So what do we find here? I found how ‘betrayed by quiet, we do not pray to darkness. We demand.’”—Ilya Kaminsky

Copublished with
Crab Orchard Review

72 pages, $15.95 paper
978-0-8093-3103-1

Available at major retailers and independent bookstores, or from

SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY PRESS
Orders & Inquiries • TEL 800-621-2736 • FAX 800-621-8476
www.siupress.com
“Love, nature, angels, age—these poems illuminate the important but very subtle issues that give life just the right modest weight it requires. I read them as teaching poems, teaching how to notice signals of meaning before they slip past. I will give these poems to friends who are always looking for a true insight and a worthy observation.”—Thomas Moore, author of Care of the Soul

“Complete with walking stick, a sharp eye for birds and botany, and a yearning for passion, Wally Swist makes his way through the world and takes the lucky reader with him.”—Billy Collins, former U.S. Poet Laureate
2010 Open Competition Award

Series Editor, Jon Tribble

**THE BLACK OCEAN**

*Poems by*

Brian Barker

“Barker creates a harrowing world threatened by the inescapability of its own complex, often dark history, a world on the brink of chaos and collapse. Though these poems are frequently dizzying and threatening, they are also distinguished by technical dexterity, sonic complexity, and a truly visionary sensibility. *The Black Ocean* confirms my belief that Brian Barker is one of the most ambitious and talented young poets at work in America today.”—Kevin Prufer

“‘Death is the mother of beauty,’ Wallace Stevens contended, and Brian Barker’s lovely, heart-wrenching poems glow with the vision, the poignant vanishing light, of last things. They scroll down the page with a lyric grace, a sacred rage, a spooky, apocalyptic power, and a visionary gleam.”—Edward Hirsch, author of *The Living Fire: New and Selected Poems*

Copublished with *Crab Orchard Review*

80 pages, $15.95 paper
ISBN 0-8093-3028-8
978-0-8093-3028-7

Available at major retailers and independent bookstores, or from

**SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY PRESS**

Orders & Inquiries • TEL 800-621-2736 • FAX 800-621-8476
www.siupress.com
**SMITH BLUE**

Poems by Camille T. Dungy

“Loss inhabits these poems—palpable, less spiritual than common though no less devastating, spoken by one not afraid ‘to hear what quiet really sounds like.’ And what has been lost?—lovers, landscapes, poets, none replaceable with the easy distractions of iPods or NPR. What remains? Words. Lyrical yet coolly self-conscious, these poems engage loss to ‘recall / how we smelled before this end was begun.’”—Michael Waters, author of *Darling Vulgarity*, finalist for the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize

“Exquisite moments of intimacy caught in the meshes of history, of human depredation registered in language as plainspoken as it is rich in implication, *Smith Blue* by Camille Dungy is a gorgeous and powerful book, one of the best I’ve read in recent years.”—Alan Shapiro, author of *Old War* and *Happy Hour*

Copublished with *Crab Orchard Review*

88 pages, $15.95 paper
ISBN 0-8093-3031-8
978-0-8093-3031-7

Available at major retailers and independent bookstores, or from

**SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY PRESS**

Orders & Inquiries • TEL 800-621-2736 • FAX 800-621-8476
www.siupress.com
2009 Open Competition Award

Series Editor, Jon Tribble

STRANGE LAND

Poems by
Todd Hearon

“Todd Hearon’s engaging, inventive language penetrates to what he calls ‘the dark of your memory,’ a region where dreamlife and language overlap, where occulted feelings find the chords and discords of speech....This is a first book of rare mastery.” —Robert Pinsky, former U.S. Poet Laureate

“These are beautiful uncompromising poems.” —David Ferry, author of Of No Country I Know: New and Selected Poems and Translations

“At once inventive and elegant, hungering and assured, immediate and literary, visceral and visionary, the poems of Strange Land range broadly across the idiomatic and the oracular with a lyric economy that is as deftly accomplished as it is exhilarating. Strange Land is an exceptional first book, ambitious and necessary.” —Daniel Tobin, author of Second Things

Copublished with Crab Orchard Review

88 pages, $14.95 paper
978-0-8093-2966-3

Available at major retailers and independent bookstores, or from

SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY PRESS

Orders & Inquiries • TEL 800-621-2736 • FAX 800-621-8476

www.siupress.com
 Threshold
Poems by
Jennifer Richter

“Threshold weaves domestic details —children, neighbors, ordinary moments—into an extraordinary account of pain and survival. But what appears to be, at first, a fractured narrative of turmoil, heals in the craft of these poems, into an account of a mind growing in and through language.”—Eavan Boland, author of Domestic Violence: Poems

“Throughout this lovely book, the music of survival and transcendence undergirds a song of the body in its changes.”—Natasha Trethewey, author of Native Guard

“Threshold sparkles with a shaped brilliance. Each poem is intensely believable because there isn’t a decorous flare of language here. To cross the threshold is to (pro)claim the metaphysical that resides in the everyday.”—Yusef Komunyakaa, author of Warhorses: Poems

Copublished with Crab Orchard Review

88 pages, $14.95 paper
ISBN 0-8093-2965-4
978-0-8093-2965-6

Available at major retailers and independent bookstores, or from

SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY PRESS

Orders & Inquiries • TEL 800-621-2736 • FAX 800-621-8476
www.siupress.com
Poems by
Claire McQuerry

“The poems of Lacemakers have much in common with the experience of gliding she describes so vividly in one poem—all lightness and delicacy and daring….Lifted on the page by an impeccable ear and her careful, unflinching eye for the arresting metaphor, these graceful lyrics manifest a twenty-first-century pilgrim’s desire to dwell in the space between the gravities of place and the lure of the placeless, between bodily desire and the clarity of the bodiless, between the ties of Earth and those of an elusive Heaven.”

—Daniel Tobin, author of Belated Heavens

88 pages, $15.95 paper
978-0-8093-3061-4

Copublished with Crab Orchard Review

2010 Winner

Available at major retailers and independent bookstores, or from

SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY PRESS
Orders & Inquiries • TEL 800-621-2736 • FAX 800-621-8476
www.siupress.com
Poems by

Tyler Mills

“Tongue Lyre is part tapestry, part song—utterably powerful in its fierce reclamation of music and broken beauty out of flames, collapse, shattering, violence, disaster. Moving with an assured, tumbling associational momentum and flecked with scalpel-chiseled images, virtuoso passagework, these poems will thread their way through your head like a piercing silvered needlework where they will linger. And sing.”

—Lee Ann Roripaugh, author of Year of the Snake and On the Cusp of a Dangerous Year

80 pages, $15.95 paper
ISBN 0-8093-3222-1
978-0-8093-3222-9

2011 Winner

Copublished with Crab Orchard Review

Available at major retailers and independent bookstores, or from

SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY PRESS

Orders & Inquiries • TEL 800-621-2736 • FAX 800-621-8476
www.siupress.com
BEAUTIFUL TROUBLE

Poems by Amy Fleury

“The minute I finished Beautiful Trouble, I wished I had copies to give to all my friends: To the poets, of course, who will admire it for its art, but also to those who don’t read poetry. Fleury proves that a book of poems need not be baffling or condescending or self-absorbed. With ordinary words placed with perfect precision, this book throws open dozens of windows onto fresh new ways of seeing, and loving, the world.” —Ted Kooser, former U.S. Poet Laureate

“These are troubles beautiful as plain days distilled to the wonder seed.”
—Kim Stafford, author of The Muses Among Us: Eloquent Listening and Other Pleasures of the Writer’s Craft

64 pages, $14.95 paper
978-0-8093-2598-6

2003 Winner

Copublished with Crab Orchard Review

Available at major retailers and independent bookstores, or from

SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY PRESS
Orders & Inquiries • TEL 800-621-2736 • FAX 800-621-8476
www.siupress.com
“There is no shelter from the blows of fate in Amy Fleury’s American heartland. Yet the inhabitants of her poems respond to suffering with quiet dignity and an abiding faith in the interconnectedness of all living things. It has been a long time since a book moved me as deeply as this one. These are not just beautifully wrought poems; this is one of those rare works that can renew the weary human soul.”

—Julie Kane, Louisiana Poet Laureate and author of Jazz Funeral and Rhythm & Booze

Sympathetic Magic
80 pages, $15.95
978-0-8093-3224-3

Copublished with Crab Orchard Review

Available at major retailers and independent bookstores, or from

SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY PRESS
Orders & Inquiries • TEL 800-621-2736 • FAX 800-621-8476
www.siupress.com
A Call for Submissions

Special Issue: The West Coast & Beyond

Crab Orchard Review is seeking work for our Summer/Fall 2014 issue focusing on writing exploring the people, places, history, and changes shaping these U.S. States, Commonwealths, and Territories: California, Oregon, Washington, Alaska, Hawai'i, Puerto Rico, American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, the United States Virgin Islands, and other areas which have been a part of the United States beyond the Lower 48 States (excepting those States listed here).

All submissions should be original, unpublished poetry, fiction, or literary nonfiction in English. Please query before submitting translations. Writers whose work is selected will receive $25 (US) per magazine page ($50 minimum for poetry; $100 minimum for prose) and two copies of the issue. All editorial decisions for the issue will be made by the end of February 2014.

The submission period by postal mail for this issue is August 15 through October 1, 2013. (There will be later dates for online submissions to our Special Issue Feature Awards.) Mail submissions to:

Crab Orchard Review
West Coast and Beyond issue
Faner 2380, Mail Code 4503
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
1000 Faner Drive
Carbondale, IL  62901
USA

Address correspondence to:

Allison Joseph, Editor and Poetry Editor
Carolyn Alessio, Prose Editor
Jon Tribble, Managing Editor

For general guidelines, check our website at:

CrabOrchardReview.siu.edu/guid2.html
Special Issue Feature Awards in Poetry, Fiction, & Literary Nonfiction

$1500.00 in each genre

All Entries must be submitted through SUBMITTABLE

http://craborchardreview.submittable.com/submit

October 1, 2013 – November 15, 2013

Entry Fee: $22.50 per entry

All entrants receive a year’s subscription ($20.00)

Entries should fit the topic of the Summer/Fall 2014 special issue, “The West Coast and Beyond,” focusing on writing exploring the people, places, history, and changes shaping these U.S. States, Commonwealths, and Territories: California, Oregon, Washington, Alaska, Hawai’i, Puerto Rico, American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, the United States Virgin Islands, and other areas which have been a part of the United States beyond the Lower 48 States (excepting those States listed here).

Poetry entries should consist of one poem up to five pages in length. Prose entry length: up to 6000 words for fiction and up to 6500 words for literary nonfiction. One poetry entry, one story entry in fiction, or one essay entry in literary nonfiction per $22.50 online entry fee; a writer may send up to three entries in one genre or a total of three entries if entering all competitions. One winner in each genre category—Poetry, Fiction, and Literary Nonfiction—will be selected by the editors of Crab Orchard Review to be published in the issue and receive a $1500.00 award. The editors are looking for the work in each genre that best embodies the topic of the special issue.

All entries will also be considered for publication in the Summer/Fall 2014 special issue, “The West Coast and Beyond.” Regular Crab Orchard Review contributor’s payment rates ($25 (US) per magazine page. $50 minimum for poetry; $100 minimum for prose) apply to any accepted work that is not a genre winner. All editorial decisions for the issue will be made by the end of February 2014.
“A magazine writers admire and readers enjoy.”

Crab Orchard Review, the national literary magazine from Southern Illinois University Carbondale, has received awards from the Council of Literary Magazines and Presses and the Illinois Arts Council. A subscription to Crab Orchard Review is $20 ($24 online) for two issues. Subscribe now for some of today’s best new writing.

Crab Orchard Review is supported, in part, by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency, in partnership with the National Endowment for the Arts.

Subscription to Crab Orchard Review

___ 1 year ($20/$24 online) ___ Supporting Subscriber ($35/yr)
___ 2 years ($30) ___ Donor ($70/2 yrs)
___ 3 years ($40) ___ Patron ($100/3 yrs)
___ Single copy ($12) ___ Benefactor ($300/Lifetime)
___ Single copy International ($22) ___ 1 year Subscription Intl. ($35)

Name ____________________________________________

Address __________________________________________

City/State/Zip ______________________________________

Please begin my subscription with Volume _____ Number _____

Send payment to: Crab Orchard Review, Jon Tribble, Managing Editor, Dept. of English, Mail Code 4503, Southern Illinois University, 1000 Faner Drive, Carbondale, IL 62901.

Phone: (618) 453-6833 Fax: (618) 453-8224
In this volume:

Jeffrey Alfier
T. Duncan Anderson
Tacey M. Atsitty
Oliver Bendorf
Daniel Berkner
Annie Binder
Mark Jay Brewin, Jr.
Lauren Camp
Cara Chamberlain
Mario Chard
Karyn Coleman
Heidi Czerwiec
Carol V. Davis
Stacey Donovan
Andy Eaton
Matthew Gavin Frank

Jenny George
Katherine Gordon
Jennifer Hancock
Jocelyn Heath
Lisa Higgs
Adam Houle
Bethany Schultz Hurst
Gary Jackson
Christopher Kempf
Peter Ludwin
Alexander Lumans
Dawn Manning
Yvonne Martinez
Christina Misite
Sarah Fawn Montgomery
Kristi Moos
Juan J. Morales
Dionisia Morales
Melissa Mylchreest
E.A. Neeves
Titi Nguyen
Greg Nicholl
William Notter
Dustin Parsons
Ricardo Pau-Llosa
Fernando Pérez
Zara Raab
Wendy Rawlings
Natalie Scenters-Zapico
Christine Stewart-Nuñez
Crystal Stuvland
Virgil Suárez
Matt Sumpter
Doua Thao
Ginny Wiehardt
Lawrence Wray

Crab Orchard Review
Volume 18, Number 2  Summer/Fall 2013

Cover Images:
Excerpts from photographs taken in various locations by Lisa Percy, Loren Elise Foster, Allison Joseph, & Jon Tribble © 2013

Published by the Department of English
Southern Illinois University
Carbondale

ISSN 1083-5571
$12.00us Vol. 18 No. 2

Prairies
Mountains
Deserts

in print since 1995