CutBank

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The University of Montana

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*The Lung and Haircut*

At a Halloween party, a lung went as a haircut, and a haircut went as a lung. They became inseparable. They got along famously. The haircut had a shit brown Silverado and he often let the lung drive it. The lung played the piano while eating pancakes, a feat unmatched by any other lung, and the haircut could make the best pancakes. Once, when the lung got sick and couldn't go to work, the haircut stayed home too and they watched a half dozen movies. They discussed their biggest fears one quiet night beneath a golden moon, black clouds shifting and giving chase, a plane landing carefully in the distance, one right after the other, in perfect intervals. The haircut's fear was to be eaten by a shark, but he was lying. The lung knew it. He remembered seeing death on the mirrored surface of the haircut's coffee one morning, then watched him pick it up and swirl it around in circles. The lung said timidly, *losing you*. They let the words float a while, heavy in the moonlight, and the lung went home to write a poem about it that goes:

> Death is falling gently onto all our collars
> and it is spreading out on the floor.
> It is one thing and then a million things.

*Mourning Brooch with Braided Hair*

It was like being approached by something fragile
from a long way off. Not the first match
that failed on the candle, the second
that brought it alive with a touch. Less
the rooster known from over the valley,
more the gap in the dawn after one's own dies,
the third breeze that has to bend the fire
down the wick, the value of a thought
of iridescent feathers banding the throat
and the head held back, a feather of hair
in one hand, scissors in another, not the heart
beating, but what might return over the heart.

*The Durations*

With the swinging of the lines of the crescent moon
upturned, under the foot the Virgin shows
below her wooden, floor-length, sky-length robe,
and with the sound of fluttering inferred
by the travel of the crown-tailed fish
inside its kingdom in another, nearby room,
flickering an insoluble softness all these days
in a glass that carries always
the countenance of a sound that could be made
by something one could strike,
with the memory of a music that entered us,
and the sinking in the silence afterward,
signal of the durations,
your silence and absence have form.

*Jaws of Life*

**Michael FitzGerald**

Last Saturday my husband and I found a homeless woman in our bed. It had been raining all day, and at around six I ran up to the Blockbuster on Market. When I came back, our swollen front door was wide open, not having shut behind me as it usually did. The rain spattering dark spots on the Sisal rug that lines our front hall.

When I walked into the living room, I asked David if he had stock in PG&E.

"I hope not."

"The front door's been open this whole time," I said.

"You shouldn't leave it open. It's raining out."

"How did you not notice?"

"Born wrong," he said.

I put the movie in and sat down. He packed the bong and handed it over. I took my time pulling down a few dainty hits and then gave it back. He fixed himself one while the trailers started. When the movie was over, I stood and said I was going to bed. My face felt rubbery and fat from exhaustion. He nodded and picked up the Harper's and put his feet on the couch where I had been sitting.

I felt along the cool surface of the bedroom wall until I found the light switch and clicked it on. I was still high, and wouldn't have noticed her if I hadn't made the bed that day. But there she was: Sandra, Poetess of the Streets. Sandra, Out of Work Paralegal. Sandra, a sopping wet human being in our bed. Her eyes squeezed tight, like a child faking sleep. Her thatchy Mohawk with a few days growth on the shaved parts. On the floor: a red sweat shirt, a large leather purse dark from rain, and two spanking-white -- like she had gone swimming with them on-- sneakers, cheap imitations of cheap imitations.

"Hello?" I said.

She didn't answer, and I flick the light a few times. "Excuse me. Hello. Hello." She finally sighed, then faked a yawn, and pulled the blankets tighter, rolling over so she was facing the wall. Her boney shoulder blade stuck up from the covers. She was brittle skinny. If she wasn't armed, I could take her.

"Who are you?" I asked.

No answer.

I yelled down the hall for David.

"What?"

"Come here. Now," I said. "Seriously."

"What?" he replied.

"There's a woman in here."

"A what?"

"Get off the couch and get in here. I'm serious."

She turned back to me. "He said I could sleep here."

"David?"

"He took me here and said go to bed." I promised myself right there, that if this was David's idea of a joke, we were over. I turned back toward the living room.

"Did you do this?" I screamed.

His feet hit the floor and finally he was at the end of the hall.

"There's a woman in our bed," I said. "Did you put her here?"

"You're kidding?"

"She says someone did."

"Dude, no. Seriously, no." He hurried the rest of the hall.

She turned and put her face into the pillow. The bed seemed wetter than it should from just a wet body. The comforter was translucent and you could make out the dark clumps of goose feathers. It was like someone had turned a hose on it. David, now in the doorway with me, looked at her: "Holy shit."

She looked back up. She blinked her eyes, Betty Boopsy-like, like she was just waking up and not sure where she was. *Oh my what a surprise?* There was a disturbance by her head where she had used our five-hundred-and-twenty thread count pillowcase as a napkin. Her mouth looked like she had tried to eat a stick of lipstick.

"What are you doing here?" David asked her.

"Sleeping."

"Who said you could?"

"We need permission to take a nap?"

"You're in our bed," I said.

David and I looked at each other, and it clicked. Who wouldn't try to get out of that weather? The freezing cold rain. An open door.

There are some mistakes you can't learn from. And then there are some that teach you something new everyday for the rest of your life. David has taught me how to cook, to not be nervous around Ivy League grads, and how to live

in disillusionment. We go forward by constantly changing, but never attaining, mediocre dreams. This month's dream is to move to Portugal. He's blockhead handsome—some think, too handsome to have gone to Harvard. He's got sandy hair, big shallow-set brown-green eyes, and a large face, which makes him picture well. Until a year into our marriage, he was muscular in that slightly unattractive gym-built way urban men can be. But he's lost the tone, and is now just big and warm. My smart friends say he's a catch and my dumb friends (mainly Joliet) would fuck him if unmonitored. But his handsomeness makes him insecure. And he's been telling me once a week how great our lives will be when his company brings the new and improved Jaws of Life to market. We'll retire. Move to Portugal, live by the water, and eat mussels and *tapas*. He'll pick up classical guitar making, learn *bossa nova*, and I'll do something other than buy media slots for the California Beef Council.

Who knows what I was thinking, but I said she could stay one night.

The next morning David and I were out on the living room couch, awake. We had given her our bedroom. I had my head on his chest, listening to the th-thunk th-thunk of his Ivy League heart, kind of wishing he had put her in there, thinking we smoke too much pot.

Sandra walked in with her shirt off. Her tiny breasts looked like fried eggs and the crinkly skin above them like avalanched snow. The tattoo on her right shoulder was either a sunset or a sea monster climbing out of the water.

"You people are very cool. That was a really nice thing," she said.

"It's ok," David answered, opening his eyes. "The rain must have been miserable."

"While I was sleeping I dreamt a poem about you. Both of you."

"A poem?" he said.

"I do this for the special ones. Do you want to hear it?"

Who wouldn't?

Poem for the People who Live In the Land of the Brightest Love.

> Your hearts are disease-free bathhouses.
> Your minds are the new gardens of Antarctica.
> Vishnu is the issue.
> But you are life-time BART passes if BART was life.

For a few seconds she looked like she was thinking of the next line, then dramatically claimed, "The End." She closed her eyes, dropped her chin, and crossed her arms over her naked chest.

The thing about homeless people is they often seem like normal people un-

til you start talking to them. Then they seem crazy. Sometimes they talk in big loops and say every single thing that pops into their head. Sometimes they get stuck in tight little loops and can't find a way off the most inconsequential inane topic. We took her out to breakfast and she couldn't *not* tell us her version of her life story. She had been a paralegal until her boss got the hots for her. She didn't like the shelter because the big women were jealous of her tattoos and kept raping her. She was trying to save up enough from panhandling to move to Santa Fe where her younger brother lived with his French wife and ran a ranch with horses that had tails the color of butter. She herself had had marriages but only one was serious.

Since David has gotten involved with the Jaws of Life project, the 'guitar room' has only been a place to lean his guitars. We had an REI blow-up mattress. We told her she could stay for a few days if she wanted.

The Jaws of Life headquarters is an office in the Embarcadero Building, but they have a warehouse in South San Francisco where they test prototypes. On the weekends we get stoned and go rip-apart junkyard Toyotas. We're like ants, cutting doors from cars like leaves from trees.

The big improvement is that it runs on batteries. The existing Jaws of Life are pneumatic. The Hurst Company of Lancaster, Pennsylvania invented the original and quickly cornered the market in 1972 after years of making jacks for race cars. But there is a big problem with pneumatic Jaws of Life: They are tethered to an air compressor that's connected to a combustible engine. The user can only venture as far as the air hose allows and wherever the Jaws of Life go, you also need to hump a 150-pound generator. This makes them useless for entering burning buildings to lift a fallen brace off a person or for climbing down into a ravine to dislodge someone from a crumpled minivan. With a battery-powered Jaws of Life, you can go anywhere to save people.

A GM engineer in Lake Forest came up with the design five or six years ago after an abandoned coalmine gave out while being explored by his little boy. The man and his neighborhood watched and listened helplessly for over two hours as a trestle squeezed the son lifeless. The engineer had worked with electric cars at GM and got a prototype together on the weekends in his basement. But he couldn't attract any seed money until 9/11 came and renewed interest in the emergency medical tools industry. For a few hundred thousand dollars, David's company bought the rights to his Jaws of Life. The GM engineer was quickly replaced and the headquarters moved out here where they could keep an eye on things.

A world bracing for disaster is ripe, and if they get it to market, David's company will sell the new and improved Jaws of Life at over $20,000 a piece to the

35,000 fire stations in the U.S.

We both had to work on Monday. Before going to bed that night, we flat-out asked her if she was going to steal from us while we were gone.

"I wouldn't steal from you unless someone had a gun to my head."

"You can't let anyone else in either."

"I wouldn't do that. People don't come where I go."

"Okay. We're going to give you a key, but if you screw us, you're screwing the People who Live In the Land of the Brightest Love. Those are the people you don't screw. You know?"

"That is one of the things I *know* know. I *know* that with all my heart."

In the morning as I walked to the BART stop on 24th, the fog still lingering above the rooftops of the Mission, I found myself weeping. I had always thought we lived in the Land of Yeast Infections and Small Luxuries Paid for by Constant Anxiety. The last time I had done anything 'good' was when I donated $50 to the Red Cross right after 9/11 and that turned to crap because they put me on their pledge list and spent my entire donation calling and junk-mailing me for more donations. I had paid $50 to kill trees and bug myself.

I was faint with hunger but also felt if I ate a single bite of anything my butt would literally pop. My tears were partially because of my blood-sugar level and partially because it seemed Sandra might be saving us. I like my job in advertising, and our friends are cool, still earnest and comfortable with their credit card debt, but since I turned thirty-three in September, I've felt a tiny distinct emptiness, like there's this small mouth inside my chest, open and closing for want, but I don't know of what. At our last cocktail party, I let one of David's co-workers talk to my breasts about mortgage rates for over an hour. I have found myself thinking about when we'll get the next William-Sonoma catalog. Our lives are clearly shrinking. We're becoming little people. The interesting things are being replaced with necessary. People call us, and we call them, less. The dinner parties are fewer and further between because we never have any new anecdotes. The longer we go without others, the more pressure we feel to have a good time when we're with them. You would think it would make us closer, but the distance between David and I seems to grow in direct proportion to the distance between us and the rest of the world. And this, saving this homeless woman, helping Sandra out, it seemed to me like something that could puff us back up. As I walked by *Que Pasa*, I pictured our life, our marriage, as that two-story-high balloon creature outside the car dealership on 14th and Valencia being inflated, and Sandra, at the creature's foot, blowing until her cheeks were rosy. We were going to have an incredible dinner party story.

Work that first day went very well. I stayed away from Sherri and Niall. I sat down at my desk, turned off my phone, ignored email, and made a list of the little projects I had been blowing off for months. Then I methodically worked through the list. One task at a time. No skipping around. Staying off the phone. No emails to people I hadn't talked to in four months. No Googling college roommates to make sure they hadn't yet made it. I focused and plowed through the list and at the end of the day it felt, for the first time in weeks, like I had earned my keep.

When I got home, the apartment was full of a warm steam. Every window was covered in condensation. In the kitchen, Sandra stood in front of the stove, a pot of water on each burner, watching them boil. She had shaved off her Mohawk.

"There's a mouse in your house," she whispered, "Shhhh," then motioned with her eyes toward the wall behind the oven. "Can't get to him with the broom."

"A mouse?"

"Shhh." She tiptoed to the side of the oven, waved me over, and pointed down. There was a wet mouse having difficulties on a glue strip. It was partially hidden by the gas pipes that came from the wall to the oven, but you could see it well enough to see it was shivering with fear. She lifted her eyebrows and put a finger to her lips. Then she took one of the pots of boiling water from the burner and dumped it on the mouse. Steaming grey water sloshed out from under the stove carrying a smooth wooden spoon and dark little islands of lint. After a moment of frantic twisting and shaking, the mouse stopped moving. Sandra got on her knees, reached back in there, and pulled the strip out.

That night after the lights in the guitar room had been off for over an hour, I shook David awake and told him that maybe this wasn't such a good idea.

"It was a mouse," he said. "I'd been meaning to set some traps for months."

"But you wouldn't have poured boiling water on one? That says something about her, doesn't it?"

"It says she's resourceful."

"Or sadistic."

"You want me to kick her out right now?"

"No, but she's got to go soon."

"Well yeah, of course, but let's just give her a few days. Everyone could use a few days off."

I rolled over facing him. He was a lump of comforter up to his chin, then he was a dark delicate silhouette with large heartbreaking lips. His eyes were closed, but I could make out the flickers of his long, almost womanly, eyelashes. He looked so calm and at peace with this. I wanted to curl around him and float on that peace. I wanted to trust everything and felt a slight pang because I didn't. I

wasn't being true to our good karma. I was being poison. If this went wrong, it'd be because of my doubt.

"Could we not smoke pot for a few weeks?" I asked.

I saw his lips smile. "In exchange for what?

I reached over and into his boxer shorts. "Anything." And gave it a little squeeze.

"Yeah, sure. Let's take a break." He turned to me and I saw the wet glimmer as he opened his eyes. He asked if something was wrong.

"No. No," I said. "This feels like an opportunity, and well, I guess, I just don't want to blow it."

"Sandra?"

"Yeah, this is kind of crazy isn't it? Like joining the Peace Corps or something, just some big thing that could change us."

"We shouldn't change," he said, and lightly ground into my thigh. I pulled myself on top of him, guided him inside, and wrapped around him for a position he calls 'Minimalists in Bed'.

On Tuesday night we took Sandra out for Vietnamese at the Sliding Door. While we were waiting for our drinks, I asked Sandra how her day went. Before we left that morning, she said she was going over to The Church of World Truth in the Tenderloin where she worked sometimes as a custodian.

"I've been thinking about it," she said, "and I think my problem is that I never know a good thing when I see it. I just let life overwhelm me. I always run from the good things. I don't ever have it easy and that can't be from just bad luck. It's got to be my fault. And I think you guys are a good thing and I'm a fool if I don't embrace it. I'm going to stay."

"Stay?" I said.

"Yeah. At first I didn't want to. I was just soaking wet. But I've thought about it and I'd like to stay, for a while. Maybe until I go back to school."

David saw me waiting. "Is our apartment that big? I'm not sure we'd all fit," he said.

"Your apartment? It's huge. It's beautiful. Have you ever lived in a car? A Pacer or one of those foreign jobbies? Or a refrigerator box? Your apartment is great."

"But we might need that room."

"What, more guitars?"

"No," he looked to me, "but," he paused, "we're thinking about a baby." He paused again. "That would be the baby's room. Maybe we can help you get government housing?"

"A baby? You two? You're going to be a mama!" Pointing at me. "That's so

great. When?"

I looked at David. This was his grave. "Well," he answered, "soon."

"When? How far along? God, do I miss my baby."

"Well she's not pregnant yet, but soon."

"I don't want to move in forever. I'm sure I can get back on my feet before the baby shows up. Plus, I know all about babies. I could give you a hand. There's so much to know. You're going to need someone to massage your butt."

"We'll think about it. We'll see," I said, but wondering if that last part was an underhand insult.

Sandra smiled at me, starring a few second too long. I looked away first. David and I needed to huddle before negotiating this one further. We successfully stayed off the topic of her moving in more permanently for the rest of the dinner.

In bed that night David said he'd have another talk with her and if it came to it we'd change the locks. As I waited for him to say something about the proposed baby, my eyes adjusted and the ceiling went from black to grey, and soon his breathing was rhythmic and shallow, and he was asleep.

After Harvard, David had spent a year in Manhattan working as someone's assistant at Merrill Lynch and, as he told me one night during an Ecstasy-fueled truth session, trying to *measure his worth by how much trouble he could drink himself into and how many non-Caucasian women he could have sex with*. One day after watching a documentary on Solzhenitsyn, he woke up and decided he was going to run a marathon and write a book. He read in a magazine that some incredibly high percentage of Americans say they want to do both. He decided he was going to do both in six months. He stopped going out every night. He broke up with June, who he describes as "one of those really clean, alert Asian gals." He got up at 5:30 and wrote five pages before work and in the evenings trained in Central Park. At the end of six months, he ran the NYC Marathon and had a three-hundred-and-fifty page novel finished. Through a Harvard friend of a Harvard friend he got the novel on the desk of an editor at Grove/Atlantic and miraculously they published *Confident They'll Be Mistaken for Gods*. I've read it. It's intertwined stories based around different people drowning in one of the Finger Lakes. It's not going to win any prizes, but still... *My Husband the Novelist*, and he's so smugly blasé about it, it sometimes gives him a Martian quality. Then he drove across the country. After spending a few months bartending in Whitefish, Montana, he ended up here in San Francisco. He had decided the only way he was going to be able to live the life he wanted was if he had money. Montana was nice, but it was nothing if it wasn't a retirement home for college kids. He said

that after the marathon and novel, he suddenly knew he could do anything, so *doing things* couldn't possibly be the point. He said the only reason humans get things done is because they know they're going to die. He didn't want to live like that. He wanted to live as if he wasn't going to die. He wanted to eat well, have lots of sex, and experience beautiful things. With the help of a family friend in New York, he joined Blackboard as an analyst. The Jaws of Life is the first project where his arguments were the main impetus for the deal.

Blackboard is full of Ivy Leaguers, but I can tell that my friends, especially my male friends from before our marriage, hold him with contempt for going to Harvard and his seemingly effortless snagging of a well-paying job while most of us temp-ed in one form or another for years when we first got to San Francisco. After a few drinks they defer to him on difficult questions, like How long does it take to drive to Fallon, Nevada?, and when he doesn't know, they gloat as if they won a personal victory.

On Wednesday, he beat me home, which is rare. He and Sandra were sitting at the kitchen table drinking a bottle of Zinfandel. There was a lemon-garlic chicken roasting in the oven. Sandra had the course catalog to San Francisco State out. She had called her brother in Santa Fe and if we would talk to him, she thought he would agree to front her the money, as long as he wrote the checks directly to the school. Her voice was crisper and had almost the hint of an English accent. She kept making up words and using big words incorrectly. She was going to *attribute* to our household and take over all the cleaning and cooking. She had a *permínition* that this time it'd all work out. She referred to us as Ms. Nancy and Mr. David.

"This is insane." I said that night in bed.

"That chicken was good. And those carrots? I usually hate carrots."

"Seriously."

"Dude, I don't know, but so far, I think she's fun. Problems are only problems if we can't adapt to them. But it's up to you. If you aren't cool with this, that's fine."

"Fun? The topless poetry?"

"No, just all of it. Watching her try to figure out her life. Listening to her talk. Her life had been so fucked up. It's inspiring. I think it was Paul to the Romans, *We who are strong ought to put up with the failings of the weak.*"

When he said this, he spoke with the same tickled tone that he did when we first met and he used to say, *That's so cool you're from Texas.*

By Thursday morning, her hair had grown in a little. Her skin still had this ashen quality but her thinness and large eyes made her look Eastern European

or a little like a sexy, battle-hardened Sigourney Weaver in Alien. When I was leaving, she asked me if we had a footstool; she wanted to remove the stains on the bathroom ceiling.

I finally told Sherri and Niall about her. They had all kinds of concerns, mainly that she'd kill us. They blamed David, like Sandra was an extension of his vanity. Sherri said, *Helping is tricky. It's a fine line, but there are some people you help and some people you run from.* I told them what David told me. We were embracing the Universal Spirit. We were putting in our two cents. Saying we think people are good. We like people. Except people, like most Republicans, who think people are bad. Those people probably are bad. You've only got yourself to go on. But Sandra clearly wasn't a Republican, and she would be on our good karma vibe and be cool and not steal anything or screw us over, because we were cool. We were the People who Live In the Land of the Brightest Love. By doing this nice thing, we were paving over the possible bad things a homeless crack-head might be capable of doing; we were unbalancing the scales of good and bad.

Later that day Niall sent me an email inviting us to his place for a sushi party on Saturday.

It was pouring on Thursday night. Like the night she arrived, strings of cold rain. We had finished a quiet dinner of home-made gnocchi with okra and caramelized onions that she and David had made. I was feeling a little rundown and didn't talk much during the meal. She was wearing a lime green blouse, which was definitely mine and something I planned on addressing after a little caffeine. As I was getting ready to clear our plates, she poured the dregs of the wine into her glass, stood up and said, "Nancy, we've got to tell you something."

I looked at David and raised my eyebrows. "We?" I asked. David rolled his eyes and shook his head.

"David and I," she said.

"Don't do whatever you're doing," David said.

"We like you a lot. And are glad we've been able to help you, but I think you're ready to get out on your own. We'll give you some money to get you going, but I think you need to try and make it without us," she said. "The little bird needs to spread her wings."

"You're funny, Sandra."

"You're funny too Nancy, but you're beginning to cramp our style."

"And you're beginning to need to find the door, you fucking fruitloop," I said.

"Sandra, what's going on?" David asked.

"No David, I'm too tired to deal with this. I want her out. Right now," I

said.

"It curves to the left. We've been doing it," she said to me.

"I'm not kidding around. This is over. You need to leave. This minute," I said.

She slammed her wine glass down on the table and waited like a toddler to see how I would react. She had become beautiful over the week. I could see that. Her skin, which initially looked porous and rubbery, had softened. She glowed, dewy and fresh. She had been delving into my $35 an ounce Clinique moisturizer. I was borderline bulimic with a huge ass. It had to have crossed his mind.

I turned to him. "Get her out. I need her out of here, David. You did this. You encouraged her."

"Everyone should just calm down. Sandra, what's going on?"

"I told you," she said. "I can't live with her anymore. I want to be alone with you. I need to be alone in order to concentrate on school. I need to study."

When you don't care anymore, everything is obvious. You would only get to a place like Portugal by losing what you have. That zero-sum game business. I got up and walked into the guitar room. I picked up her crappy leather purse, her growing pile of clothes and the S.F. State application and brochure. I kicked his '58 Fender until it fell off its stand and wedged against the wall. I continued until the neck crunched. I walked down the front hall and opened the door and tossed her crap into the wet street where it fell lamely three or four feet from our steps.

The biggest hurdle with getting the Jaws of Life to market is proving the product in real-life situations. Your average fireman isn't going to run into a burning building with a beta. Not many station chiefs are willing to tell someone's mother, *We were trying something new at your son's apartment.*

When I came back, Sandra was standing on our small kitchen table kicking at David. "You just want to fuck me," she kept saying. "I know you. I know all about you." He stood back with his hands up like he was holding a dog at bay.

"Sandra, this is over," he said. "It's okay. But you've got to get some help."

"Oh, you... *It's ooookaaay.*" she mimicked him, in a pansy voice. "*It's oooo-kaaay....* You, out-of-towners are all the same. You all smell alike. You out-of-towners."

She was only addressing David. She was biting her lower lip to hold back laughter. Her face looked like it was going to explode with mirth. Her kicks were getting higher, above her head, inches from the ceiling, like a Rockette or a Cossack. Her arms were slicing the air. It all seemed too big for our little kitchen.

"No kicking," he said.

"No," she yelled back. "More kicking. Much more kicking. Less bright ideas. Much more kicking." One foot leaving the table before the other could land.

David cross-armed me away from her, pulling us both to the wall, giving Sandra's dance berth. She was haloed by the ceiling light. And her skin dewy. I was mad and a little frightened, but I couldn't help but appreciate her beauty. As she slowed, a different, less crazy smile crossed her face, knowing she had us, or at least me. She pulled on the blouse with both hands, and the buttons popped off effortlessly and tinged against the stove and walls. Her small breasts had firmed. The tattoo was a sunrise.

"I can make you both feel good," she said. "We could do something interesting."

*Would that save us?* I thought. She wasn't really a person. Not like Joliet. It wouldn't be adultery.

As if she heard my thoughts: "I won't take your husband. I can serve you both equally."

There will be a minute at the sushi party tonight when David and I jockey over who will tell the story. They're my friends so I'm already better positioned. I won't admit to having considered it. I'll probably glibly end with something obvious: Don't invite schizophrenic homeless people into your apartment, or, Beware of fixes that work for both marital and social problems. Ha, ha, ha. But what will Mr. Ivy League's punch-line be? In convincing Blackboard to get behind the battery-powered Jaws of Life, he had to look at other angles. An obvious one was to lobby for a law that would require every large building be equipped with a Jaws of Life on each floor—like axes used to be—so that in the future when buildings are burning or collapsing, the people inside would have a way past impassable objects. I will look at him as he says, *We should have kept her. We all need something to make us feel alive, a pinprick each morning. If people like us, people with resources, don't, then who?* My friends know he wrote a novel and let him get away with crazy-talk, but I'll have to say something. Who cares that they're my co-workers. *I am your pinprick,* I'll say, grabbing his large hand, *but you need to be the calm for my furious heart. Let me be your impassable object. Let me be the thing you cannot do.*

*The Fall*

The raspberries are very sad
tomorrow in the field

about your body as if light
in chiaroscuro showed you things

in many ways, the light and dark
of it, in shadow or the nape of it,

each the other in among
the first and fallen make the last.

Like you staying bit
by bit or trying

on new weeds, oracular
in these. And said, we.

*[Woken with words, relevance placed bedside]*

Woken with words, relevance placed bedside

And drowning in rustic weather,

a wish for stones

to fly and for fish to exist without water.

Like Science divorced from imagination,
a thorny knot
in the museum of bridges.

In this museum, I crossed a bridge
only wide enough for one.

A village fool
does not need a village to sleep well at night.

On this bridge, a yawn can sway

And my sympathy for this bridge will thread the needle of night.

Never will a sentence ring with such sincerity.

I love accidents for the sliver
of confusion they bring when they appear.

*An Interview with Diana Abu-Jaber*

## Jay Stevens

*Diana Abu-Jaber is the author of Crescent, which was awarded the 2004 PEN Center USA Award for Literary Fiction and the Before Columbus Foundation's American Book Award and was named one of the twenty best novels of 2003 by The Christian Science Monitor, and Arabian Jazz, which won the 1994 Oregon Book Award and was nominated for the PEN/Faulkner Award. Her memoir, The Language of Baklava, was published in the spring of 2005. She teaches at Portland State University and divides her time between Portland and Miami.*

**Jay Stevens:** In your books, Arabian Jazz and Crescent, the parent characters of your main protagonists resemble your parents in real life. And it seems like the father character – or in the case of Crescent, the uncle character – is a wonderful story teller. Did your father and other relatives tell a lot of stories? And was that an influence on why you became a writer?

**Diana Abu-Jaber:** Yes, I think that was really important growing up around story tellers like my dad and my uncles. I think it instilled a love of the beauty of the spoken story. Also, my mother was a reading teacher. She brought home a lot of fables and fairy tales, which also have an oral tradition behind them. It was a combination of those things that brought me the desire to tell stories, as opposed to a love of the beauty of writing.

**JS:** But the style of the books are Western-novel-like, not fables or spoken stories with the exception, of course, of the fable that's spun by the uncle in Crescent. What books influenced you? As a child, did you read a lot? What were your favorite books as a child?

**DAJ:** Definitely all the classic fairy tales. The Brothers Grimm, Hans Christian Andersen, all the really dark, Germanic, bloody fairy tales. The ones that were violent and stuff (laughs), but very magical. And then as I got older I became interested in all kinds of weird books, I mean I read really weirdo things. I read all these Readers' Digest condensed books that my parents had lying around.

The Naked and the Dead and From Here to Eternity. These classics of – I don't even know – the seventies, I guess.

And then I got interested in Khalil Gibran. And that's because I liked the picture on the cover of the book. (laughs) You know, that mystical line drawing that he did of his face, a self-portrait, which is on the cover of The Prophet. I thought it was incredibly deep, I was really taken with it. But you know, I was eight (laughs). Actually, I started Gibran when I was probably about twelve, in middle school. And Kahlil Gibran was the first person I ever read who was Arab. That was really interesting, to find someone who was a reflection of my heritage. I had never encountered that before.

I was really interested in writing. I've always been. That's something that started from a very early age where I was thinking that's what I wanted to do. When I was in high school, I read everything that was put in front of me. I studied all the modernist writers of the time. All the people who were popular and who my teachers were reading. A lot of Phillip Roth, Saul Bellow, and classic Southern writers, Flannery O'Connor and Eudora Welty and Faulkner, of course. I remember trying to imitate what they did and thinking this is what literature is.

**JS:** And this was high school?

**DAJ:** Yes, high school. It continued into college. I had a traditional mainstream American education in literature, I would say. Especially reflective of the period. It wasn't until later in college and in graduate school that I started reading minority writers, people who were just coming at writing from different social and cultural perspectives. That was really important to me. That was when I started to figure out that I could write about my own experience. But it took me a long time.

**JS:** A lot of immigrant children do everything they can to become Americanized, to distance themselves from their heritage. But you seem to take the opposite tack. It's interesting that you have one American parent and one parent – your father – from Jordan. Why do you feel so connected to your father's past?

**DAJ:** When I was a kid, I didn't want to connect with my father's heritage. I was embarrassed about it. I did everything I could to be an American. I can remember being so snotty. (laughs) I used to go into this big grocery store in Syracuse with my father, where they had huge produce sections, and my dad would try to bargain about the price of the produce. (laughs) I'd think, this is

humiliating to me! I can remember being at the cash register and my father saying to the cashier "I'll give you a buck for three tomatoes, but not for each tomato." (laughs) And I pretended I didn't know him. (laughs) I pretended I didn't understand Arabic when he spoke to me in public places. Because when I was a younger child, Arabic was a secret code in the family – I think that's true for a lot of immigrant families. But then I didn't want to speak Arabic. I didn't want to be different from my friends at all. It wasn't until graduate school –

**JS:** Really?

**DAJ:** I think it's related to the fact that I didn't find literature that reflected other cultural perspectives. I didn't find that many images of other cultures coming up in my experience. And I was raised in this backwoods place outside Syracuse. So the notion of multi-culturalism wasn't something that I was aware of until college. Maybe it really wasn't part of the popular culture until I was in college. We're talking late seventies.

**JS:** Your parents are alive. In your books, your parents are missing, usually dead. What's the deal? How do your parents feel about that?

**DAJ:** I have theory about that actually. Again it's one of those things that I didn't plan to do. But I think that when you're the child of immigrants, if your parents are from a really traditional authoritarian culture – as my father is – you have to work so hard to kind of break through – I did – and find your voice and establish your identity, it's almost like you have to metaphorically kill them off. I have been writing about – I always seem to write about children who are from these kinds of backgrounds. Adults who have had to go through this struggle, the great struggle, to form an identity. So I always think when I'm writing, like I don't want to get into the whole parental thing because that's a whole other dimension. So I'll just kill them. (laughs) But it becomes an even bigger element of the book because of their death, and they're more present in their death than they are when they're alive. It's an ironic effect that I never intend.

**JS:** How do your parents feel about their killings?

**DAJ:** My mom said...one of my aunties called her up, 'Pat, Pat, they've killed you!' (laughs) Very discreet. I have the most discreet relatives in the world. My mom said, 'you know, I'm so glad!' (laughs) Because she feels she doesn't have to answer to anything, it removes her from the equation. And my dad, the great thing about dad, I think this is true for anyone who's the child of immigrants, if

you write in a language that your parent doesn't speak fluently or read fluently that you have all this freedom. (laughs) He reads my books, but he doesn't really get what's going on in them.

**JS:** Until they're translated into Arabic.

**DAJ:** Yeah, right! (laughs) Ooo. He has the pride of knowing that I publish books, but he doesn't have to deal with some of the more complicated personal questions in them.

**JS:** Was there an event or that pushed you into exploring your father's past?

**DAJ:** Yes. I had a teacher in grad school. He's a North Dakota writer. Larry Woiwode. He's a wonderful writer. He wrote a beautiful book, called Beyond the Bedroom Wall, which I wildly recommend, and a lot of beautiful books. And he was an important professor for me.

We met regularly, we had tutorial sessions. And I used to bring stories I wrote imitating John Cheever. I wrote about things that I didn't know anything about, things totally outside my experience that I thought were literary. One day Larry said, 'you know, you come in here and tell me really interesting stories about your family, this wild Arab-American community that you're from. And then you write these really boring stories (laughs), about cocktail parties on Long Island. What are you doing? Why don't you write about this interesting stuff in your life?'

That felt risky and strange, and I didn't want to do it. I resisted. But then I decided I'd take a chance. I guess part of the problem for me is that when I was growing up, my father was always so insistent that my identity and my siblings' identity was Arab. We moved back to Jordan several times when I was a kid, and it was almost scary to me, because I felt so pulled apart by my two cultures that I felt I had to claim one and insist on one – trying to be an American.

But I started writing about some of my relatives and my experiences. It was all fictionalized. I wrote a little about Islam and I wrote a little about gender roles in Arab families. And lo and behold it seemed to work. But it was a really specific moment where I was given permission to write about what I know. I think a lot of writers have talked about that moment of being given permission....

**JS:** That's interesting. On that note, a lot of interviews I've seen stereotype you as the 'Arab-American' writer. In your interview with NPR, for example, they asked you your opinions about political events in Iraq. How does that make

you feel, that you're solidly identified with the public as 'Arab American Writer.' Who are you really? What's your real identity?

**DAJ:** I want to be John Cheever. (laughs) I mean it's funny – isn't it? – how that happens. I think for all writers it's true that having some kind of a niche gives them a good starting place. That was useful for me with my first book. [Arabian Jazz]

When I first had the manuscript for the first book, I didn't know if anybody was going to be interested in it or how it was going to do. I didn't have any contacts, I had no connections, I didn't know anything about the publishing industry. I did have an agent, though, and the agent was sending the book around, but I got weird responses to it. One editor who looked at it said she liked the writing, but that Arabs were politically inappropriate. She just came right out and said that.

**JS:** This in nineteen – the early nineties...

**DAJ:** Ninety-three. Not that long ago.

**JS:** "Politically inappropriate." Did you ever find out what that meant?

**DAJ:** My agent was so appalled, he just said we're moving on. The book was optioned, which was (laughs) a way to make ten thousand dollars. (laughs)

**JS:** Every writer's dream.

**DAJ:** (laughs) They had me fly down and do 'lunch.' I sat at this meeting with a group of Hollywood people who said, "Great story! We love the idea of the family, but do they have to be Arab?" They said things like, "I heard Lithuanians are really hot these days. A story on Arabs, I don't know, it's unattractive, people won't want to go..." The title of the book is Arabian Jazz!

So it's always been a double-edged sword for me. It has not in any way guaranteed acceptance. I think it's probably made things challenging for me as often as it's given me a special foothold.

**JS:** So do you feel like you have different identities, like, the writer, and then the person?

**DAJ:** I do. As I've gotten older, I've made more of an identity as an adult away from my parents. But my father's culture, it's always going to be important

to me and central to me, but it's no longer the operating principle of my life. That makes me interested in moving into a larger arena.

**JS:** Arabian Jazz. One of the themes in that is the idea of racism in the United States. Did you encounter much racism as a child in Syracuse?

**DAJ:** Oh, yes!

**JS:** Was that a pretty accurate depiction of what it was like to grow up in Syracuse?

**DAJ:** That was a touch of it, definitely. We lived in a few places. Every time we would go to the Middle East we would come back to the States and live in a different place in the Northeast. Usually it was in or around Syracuse. In upstate New York it's very blue collar, it's kind of Appalachian. And we lived in the country for a lot of my growing up years, where the other kids were exposed to nothing. They barely had television sets, if they had any exposure to the outside world. And so the racism was always subtle and strange. People didn't even know they were being racist. Maybe that's how racism is always is, it takes itself for granted that this is how the world is, and I just am superior to you (laughs) because of how I look or where I'm from. I can remember we were targeted during the energy crisis in the seventies. People left notes about Arabs and the oil, 'give us back our oil.' (laughs) Like we had it in the back yard, you know? My dad encountered weird racism at work....

**JS:** What'd he do?

**DAJ:** He did a lot of different things, he was all over the place. He was a custodian for a long time, he sold carpets, he was a court bailiff, he sold cars, security guard...

**JS:** So the racism he encountered at work?

**DAJ:** Well, he started moving into more professional work. After a while he settled into an administrative job at a hospital. But what he always wanted to do was to own his own restaurant. And people – he cooked professionally for a long time, too, he worked at Hotel Syracuse – people would say things like "I don't know if I want an A-rab touching my food. You people are dirty." He'd hear comments like that. When he worked as an administrator, the union was always going on strike, and because he was in management, he got targeted. People would call

the house and make horrible racist threats on the phone. My sisters and I were little kids, we'd pick up the phone, and they'd say this stuff to us on the phone. It was amazing what people felt it was okay to do, or right to do. I didn't encounter it as much from the other children. I think Arab was too subtle of a racism for them yet. You had to get a little older before you learn some of the finer nuances of racism. (laughs) I would not have wanted to have been African American in that community, I tell you. So, on the one hand I was able to pass, because I was so light skinned, but not my dad and sisters, who were Arab-looking.

**JS:** Why did you stick around? Why did you keep going back to the Syracuse area? There were Arab communities elsewhere in the States, like Miami, where you would've fit in better. Where your dad could have started his own business.

**DAJ:** There was a feeling that racism was everywhere and that this was what America was, you know? My dad had family in Syracuse. For him, family is the most important thing. The idea of moving to a place in the United States where the immediate family was not, was almost unthinkable for him. My mom wanted to move to California...(laughs) I wish! She wanted to move to Santa Monica, back when they could've bought property, and made a killing years later. (laughs) My dad said that we had to stay where the family was.

**JS:** In Arabian Jazz, there's also a sense of – I wouldn't call it racism – in Jordan against Americans. I guess 'prejudice' is the word I'm looking for. Did you feel that when you would go to Jordan with your family?

**DAJ:** Well, it was always a sense of insider/outsider. And definitely there is race consciousness in the Middle East, for sure.

**JS:** Was it different than in the United States?

**DAJ:** It didn't feel as much like a value judgment to me as just a qualitative difference. The Arabs don't call themselves "white," they call themselves teem, which means "wheat." And they're more accepting of the variations in skin color, because there are so many variations in the Arab complexion. So, you can be a black Arab and you can be a white Arab and you're considered part of the same race. That's kind of liberating in a way.

But there are permutations within skin color of beauty, and if you are white, that's considered more beautiful. In my family that was very confusing. My aunties and strangers would make a big deal out of me being the "white one." And my sisters, who were darker, they called them "the Arabs." They'd say, "oh,

they're the Arabs, she's the American." And they used to tell me to stay out of the sun, and "oh, your skin is so fabulous (laughs), you're so lucky, blah blah." And of course that totally messes you up for the rest of your life.

**JS:** One of the interesting things about Crescent is that it's a book about an Arab community in the United States and it was published in 2003. Obviously much has changed in the Arab community since 9/11. There seemed to be some small nod to 9/11 in the book. Tell me where 9/11 occurred in the process of the book and how you decided to change the book because of it.

**DAJ:** Well, I actually finished it before 9/11. There's one scene where – and I can remember working on it – where there's a lecturer talking about that something bad is coming –

**JS:** Something bad is coming because of the United States' treatment of Iraq.

**DAJ:** Because of American foreign policy, right. Everything in that book is based on America's foreign policy towards Iraq since the first Persian Gulf War. And to me...9/11 was shocking, but it was not surprising. I feel like all you have to do is look at our foreign policy to see exactly what was coming.

**JS:** So you wrote that scene of the lecture before 9/11?

**DAJ:** I did!

**JS:** Because it reads like you wrote it afterward...

**DAJ:** Everybody says that! I know! (laughs)

**JS:** The gift of prophecy!

DAJ: Right! (laughs) I know!

**JS:** Like you're on a highway, and you prophesize a car's going to come along!

**DAJ:** Exactly! I've felt like that all along. And people have been saying that for years. I'm not the first person to make that observation. That's something that I encountered as I was researching the novel. I would read political analysts

who would say over and over and over again, it's only a matter of time before terrorism hits our shores, we've got to beef up security, we've got to beef up airport security. There were people who talked about Osama bin Laden, and who talked about the plots of al Qaeda against America to strike the airlines! I mean, that specific! But nobody was listening, nobody believed it. It came with the territory that I was researching for the book. It was all right there.

Then 9/11 happened, practically the day after I turned in the manuscript. I had been working and working and working, I finally got it done, I gave it to my agent, I got married (laughs)...my husband and I got married the day before 9/11. Then that happened.

**JS:** The day before? You got married on the tenth of September? 2001? (laughs) That's not funny! (laughs)

**DAJ:** I know! (laughs)

**JS:** It's ironic.

**DAJ:** It's very weird. It's very ironic and weird. So I called my agent, and I said, "should we burn the manuscript?" I thought, no one's going to want to read this. This is a national catastrophe, this is horrible, and the last thing anybody's going to want to read is a book about the Arab culture, the unfairness of American foreign policy, how we need to treat Arabs better, et cetera. I really was ready to just put the thing in the shredder. You know? And I had a kind of bad experience with another novel before that, about the Palestinians...

So my agent said, "no, you have to stick with it." She was prescient to say, "I think people are really going to be interested in this now. This is actually the time for this kind of story." It was really her call that we stayed with it.

It didn't get published right away. There was like another year of work – we edited it and talked about putting in 9/11 or changing the timeline, because it's really set right before 9/11. But I didn't want to do that. It felt too false....I still feel like it takes a while to write about something like that. You need to process it, you need to try to understand what happened. I did. Basically the edits were about the story. And we kept it as it was.

**JS:** I also read in the interview at the end of my copy of Crescent that there was a strong reaction to Arabian Jazz. And I was wondering if you'd talk about that. Who was wronged and what kind of reaction did you get?

**DAJ:** Well...eew!

**JS:** We can pretend this question never existed.

**DAJ:** (laughs) I don't mind talking about it. It's very...it's weird in a way because...it's so much about my feeling about the family...and...I was really taken aback. When I wrote Arabian Jazz, I meant it very affectionately, I meant it to be a humorous tribute.

**JS:** To the Arab-American community?

**DAJ:** Yes. I always took it for granted that it was my people, my community, my family. And to me, humor is an affectionate thing. I think humor can also have an edge to it, certainly, but I thought that was going to be okay. A lot of the Arab-American community – not all, a lot of them loved the book and were very excited – a number of them felt that the humor was mocking, glib. And that really surprised me. I wasn't prepared for that. I got a wide range of responses from people. The first review for the book was in the Washington Post written by an Arab man who was enraged with the book. It was a scalding review. It was so angry that my editor actually wrote a response to the newspaper. It had to the be the first review, too, it was really hard. We were both like, "uh oh..."

**JS:** Guaranteed sales! Sorry, just thinking positively....

**DAJ:** I learned from that experience the expression, "there's no such thing as bad publicity." I didn't know that expression before Arabian Jazz. (laughs) Occasionally a critic would read the book – an Arab critic –and be enraged by it. Also there's a female infanticide in the book, and one critic in particular was really upset about it because she said it misrepresented Islam, that Islam does not endorse infanticide.

**JS:** Where did you come up with the idea for that?

**DAJ:** That's the thing! It's true, Islam forbids infanticide, but there were rumors I heard in the community that my family was from of female infanticide. And just like any society, there are the laws of the culture and then there is what people in their day-to-day lives do. And that's what you want to write about, you want to write about what's weird and exceptional.

Part of the problem is that there are few representations of Arabs in this culture, and you can't assume that there's a counter-balance about what most Arabs are really like. So for me to write about my family or the individuals that

I knew in all their complexities and nuances and strangeness meant that I had to do it in a bit of a vacuum. And that people would read these books and not know that really most of the general Arab culture is not like this. Most Arabs are much more normal, they're much more ordinary, just like in America. That was a problem for me with Arabian Jazz. I learned a lot from that early experience, and I responded to it with a novel, the second one [Crescent]....

**JS:** This is probably a good time to talk to you about Crescent. I felt there was a huge leap in craft from Arabian Jazz to Crescent. Talk to me about that. What did you learn from writing Arabian Jazz and how did you apply that to writing Crescent? What did you work on, specifically, to make Crescent a damn good book?

**DAJ:** I think a lot of Arabian Jazz was written...I hate to put it this way, but to perfectly frank, I think a lot of it was written in a state of fearfulness. I didn't know if I was allowed to tell these stories. I didn't know if I was allowed to write in my own voice. I didn't know if this book was acceptable. I was worried about not offending anybody, not being a bad girl. And that's just poison to writing. Writers have to be audacious. They have to really take risks. Arabian Jazz is constantly moving back and forth between its voices. Sometimes it's humorous, sometimes it's serious, sometimes there's poetry, sometimes there's goofiness. I feel like that reflects my own process of second-guessing myself. I had this "oh fuck it" attitude (laughs) by the time I was writing Crescent....(laughs) I don't know if you can put that in the interview.

**JS:** I hope so!

**DAJ:** Ah, the "ol' fuck it attitude." (laughs) It's a literary term.

**JS:** I'll spell it differently, italicize it, pretend it's Arabic...

**DAJ:** As we say in the Middle East, oaphuket! (laughs) You know I've gone through the wars with Arabian Jazz, I wrote this other novel that has not been published that was an incredible painful process. By the time I was writing Crescent, I felt like I really didn't care what anybody thought. I just wanted to write the truest story I could. And I wanted to write out of my obsessions and I wanted to be audacious. So it was that freedom – and I was just older! I was in my late thirties then, it was just time to go for it. I think that was a huge, huge thing, getting older and feeling braver. The "oh fuck it" principle. (laughs)

**JS:** There were a number of things you did in Crescent that made it a solid book. For example, all the characters remained throughout in the book and each played an integral part to the story. The characters were treated more seriously. The big thing I noticed – I mean, writer-to-writer – the descriptions of people, the pauses between dialog, those things were vastly improved....

**DAJ:** Oh! That's interesting!

**JS:** What's the secret? What's the elixir? Did you know this stuff?

**DAJ:** No!

**JS:** Should I end the question here, so I don't ruin it for you?

**DAJ:** Oh, no, that's fine. That's really very interesting. I really learn a lot about my writing from talking to people who've read my work. I did a reading recently where a student raised her hand and she said, "I want you to please talk to us about the significance of the color blue in your work." And I said, "what do you mean?" And she said, "the color blue and all its variations, how it comes up over and over and how it's there –"

**JS:** [Referring to a passage from "Crescent"] Blue wards off the evil eye!

**DAJ:** Yes...I...wish I had thought of that. (laughs) I was completely unaware that blue was an operating symbol, and she had done this analysis of it. Somebody else wrote to me about the significance of the gaze and of eyes. I think a lot of writers write so much out of the unconscious that they're not always aware of their technique. For me, it's always a struggle to grasp the idea of craft. I have deliberately, in some way, isolated myself from the study of craft, not meaning to, but it's not the way I innately approach writing. It's very challenging for me to conceptualize my technique and writing process. I guess that is true for a lot of writers. When you teach writing or when you're learning about it, you go through this unnatural process of making what you do unconsciously, conscious. That's a long-winded way of saying –

**JS:** You don't know.

**DAJ:** I don't know.

**JS:** Let's talk about the missing book for a second. I had no idea that it ex-

isted. Do you want to talk about it? What was it about? Why was it painful? What happened to it?

**DAJ:** It's hard to tell. I can tell you the circumstances. It was a book about a Palestinian family. And I wrote it when Palestine and Israel were in the news a lot in the mid-nineties. When there was a lot of tension and fighting and some of the worst violence. It was a very heavy book. After the humor of Arabian Jazz I wanted to take on a more adult style. Grief. I wanted to get more serious. I felt emboldened after actually managing to publish a book. It made me feel more confident about trying on this more grown-up feeling. Authority. Sadness. So I wrote this book, a very brooding, very heavy book, and a lot of family experiences went into it.

Palestinians have always struggled with their representation in the news in the American media. I finished it, and a lot of complicated things went on with whether or not it was going to be published. And I can't go on the record and tell you these things. I don't know if the things that happened were more about the prose of the book or the politics. It was a really hard experience for me, and it meant that that book didn't get published. I worked on it for five years, I really put a lot into it. So, I've got this second book out there. People say, 'there's a huge gap between your two novels!' It was another book, actually.

**JS:** Would you like plug your new book coming out?

**DAJ:** Oh, yeah! I've got a new book coming out! (laughs) [The Language of Baklava] will be out this March. It was my editor's idea. We were talking a lot about cooking, and my dad's obsessions with food, and my family experiences. It was because I was working on all that when I was writing Crescent, and [the editor] said "you really should just go for it, tell your own family experiences." At the time, memoirs were still of interest. (Laughs.) Not like now.

**JS:** So, lots of recipes...

**DAJ:** Each chapter is based on a dish or an ingredient, and there's family stories around it, and then there are the recipes that use the ingredients.

**JS:** One of the things I noticed about Arabian Jazz and Crescent was that the protagonists from the books – Jemorah and Sirine – they're very similar characters. In fact in the progression of storyline is very similar as well. Where do you go from there?

**DAJ:** Oh, God!

**JS:** Are you working on a new novel? Do you want me to ask this question?

**DAJ:** I am, I am.

**JS:** I hope you're not working on another character like that...I'd be stabbing you in the back...

**DAJ:** It's scary, I kind of have the feeling that I must be doomed to be writing the same book over and over again. Maybe that's just what it is to be a writer. You try to re-do it. I do notice that I have very similar traits in my heroines. I'm trying to do something new with this new novel...I started a new novel....

**JS:** Do you want to talk about it, or are you superstitious?

**DAJ:** I'd be happy to. What's most interesting about it, is that I'm trying to write a book with no Arab-American. My husband for years now has been telling me to stop writing about my heritage. He's like, 'what have the Arabs done for you?' (laughs) I have to say, he has a point. Because it's like you cannot set yourself up for the spokesperson for your people. Nobody wants you to do that. I want to try and expand my platform. I would really like to have a larger voice from which to write. So this new one, it's set entirely in the United States, it's set in Syracuse. Heritage is...the idea of heritage or culture is done entirely through the metaphor of personal identity rather than race or culture. I think my obsessions in the way are the still the same. It's still...I keep going back to certain types of questions, like the question of parentage...all those things are back again, despite my best efforts. This new book has elements of genre elements. It's a little bit Gothic...

**JS:** Which genre elements?

**DAJ:** There's some detective – it's very much a literary book, it's really a literary book, not really a detective book. The main character is a fingerprint specialist. I'm working off the idea of a fingerprint as a kind of identity blueprint. It's still really, really rough. I'm excited to be trying something new...

*Southern : Narrative*

I

If cut, it comes back, the crabgrass across a slope, or under the screened porch, comes back, irregular as first letters, or the mower's first stammer. A narrative takes shape after small suburban lawns: first distance, then circumference: *in the language of Scottish law, the experimental apparatus is both 'art' and 'part' in bringing about that which appears to happen.* If cut, and appears to happen, the letters take shape.

II

In the courthouse square, the sculptor cuts a limestone slab beneath Tory oak where Otto Woods was hanged. This is history, circa 1944. This is monument, an arrangement of space, the development of a discourse. While the weather permits, the sculptor cuts a limestone slab beneath the Tory oak. Crabgrass extends from trunk to courthouse. Storm clouds gather, then quickly disperse. Potentially present while as aperture, rupture, passage, the discourse develops from cell to cell.

III

The girl with the bluegrass guitar sings of Otto Woods. "The southern Jesse James," they say, never had a chance, they say, so sings of difficult weather, sings of dying stars. The classical observables diverge at each glance: *the whole body capable of any form that the next daring spirit may brood upon.* Snow falls over palmettos. Crabgrass spills the courthouse walls. So sings, and sings, of stars.

IV

A train track rusts in its field of used cars where Otto once hid his crates of whiskey. Crabgrass fills the spaces between the tracks. This is the commonly held view. An alternative form concerns the uncertainty between energy and time: fermentation, calcification, decomposition. I should have already said "someone stole Otto's watch, and he vowed to steal it back." This is how the story began. I should have said *lightning has damaged the Tory oak*. The view was never better, has never been better.

V

Happened all at once, they said. Jerry yelled out "the son of a bitch got a knife." Should have seen it coming, they said – as if a fundamental constant – only a matter of time, they said – as for the speed of light or the force between two masses. Otto nearly cut his leg in half, they said. Happened all at once, they said.

VI

When in flight, Otto followed the Yadkin River from Wilkesboro to Winston-Salem, from valley to basin, in precise mathematical operation, or a range of chance formations, in the way, for instance, the weather demands migrations, or the way their lines of flight withstand the weather. Patterns emerge after the initial variables: pressure, fifty-seven cents, a list of debts. Primarily, he traveled from valley to basin.

VII

Whether the weather is over tarmac, chickenwire or salt marsh, each measurement forms a sign that must be interpreted: 4x8x10 cross poles kept Otto's camp intact during the September storms. From here, the positioning of the singular cloud resembles a limestone slab: begins again as cell membrane: the word following after is partial weather, partial committee, the sum of it said elsewhere, and from another view.

*Slander*

Of your rumor animal
I know: its coat of wool

and searing bloat-speak
of summer, when words

wear looser, talk more limber.
In winter, with haunches

stiffer–the noise cold
and sober–your animal

recites our names better:
*sister, lover, pupil, scour.*

Spoken thus, shaken from
sumac by the throat of your

beast, we fall, grabby
as starfish eager for extension,

for elaboration. We are your
animal's violent instinct

to speech, dusky titles
of season, the inherited habit

of slander. Our names
bristle its fur, open its mouth.

Your pet, sir, is speaking.

*Anticipatory Landscape*

In color your sleep is red. It is hunger that does this

to paper lungs

bright as a lantern and floating down a river, waving

to shore, those stung.

The hover of winter and your hip's thin grin of bone

fell forward

in labor, an unrequited night to sorrow, but to spring

it lashed back.

The animals left penned between this crimson dream

and strict season

are only shadows, white eyes of what you did

see first.

*Artist Statement*

## Eben Goff

In exploration of Butte, Montana, mining metropolis of bygone days, I have encountered a landscape of upheaval and burial. As a person from elsewhere, understanding this unique space is like learning a new language. When decoded, it renders the topography of heaps and excavations into a map of history.

Areas strewn with the mechanical remnants, chemical by-products, and earthen surplus from over one hundred years of mining are read as disintegrating stories. In the heyday of this city, the miners, like subterranean mountain climbers, named each copper, zinc, and silver vein that ran through the granite strata. Today, Superfund reclamation projects have begun to sanitize the defunct industrial sites. Dozens of mine shafts have been capped with anonymous concrete slabs. Mining has lost its central economic position in the community.

People no longer feel the need to remember locations or names of the increasingly invisible mine yards. The knowledge is passing out of practical purpose, and thus, out of intimacy or detail into the realm of local lore. Verbal maps of the terrain become vague. This memory loss works opposite the usual direction–the younger members of the community are less aware of the roles or names of empty lots and eroding tailings piles, while some of the older folks in the community continue to orient by these 'void spaces,' often referring to locations relative to where something used to be.

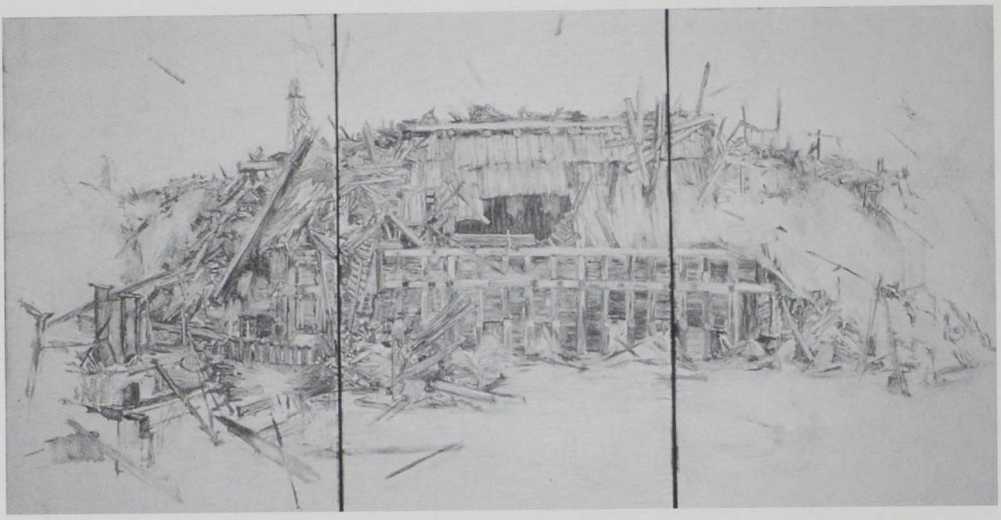
When I return again and again to unnamed places within the mine, names begin to suggest themselves. Returning and naming befriends that place; it creates intimate orientation and enables me to internalize their qualities. Accumulated experiences become a personal archive and the source for my large oil paintings. Multiple sites are threaded together to create more complete portraits of place.

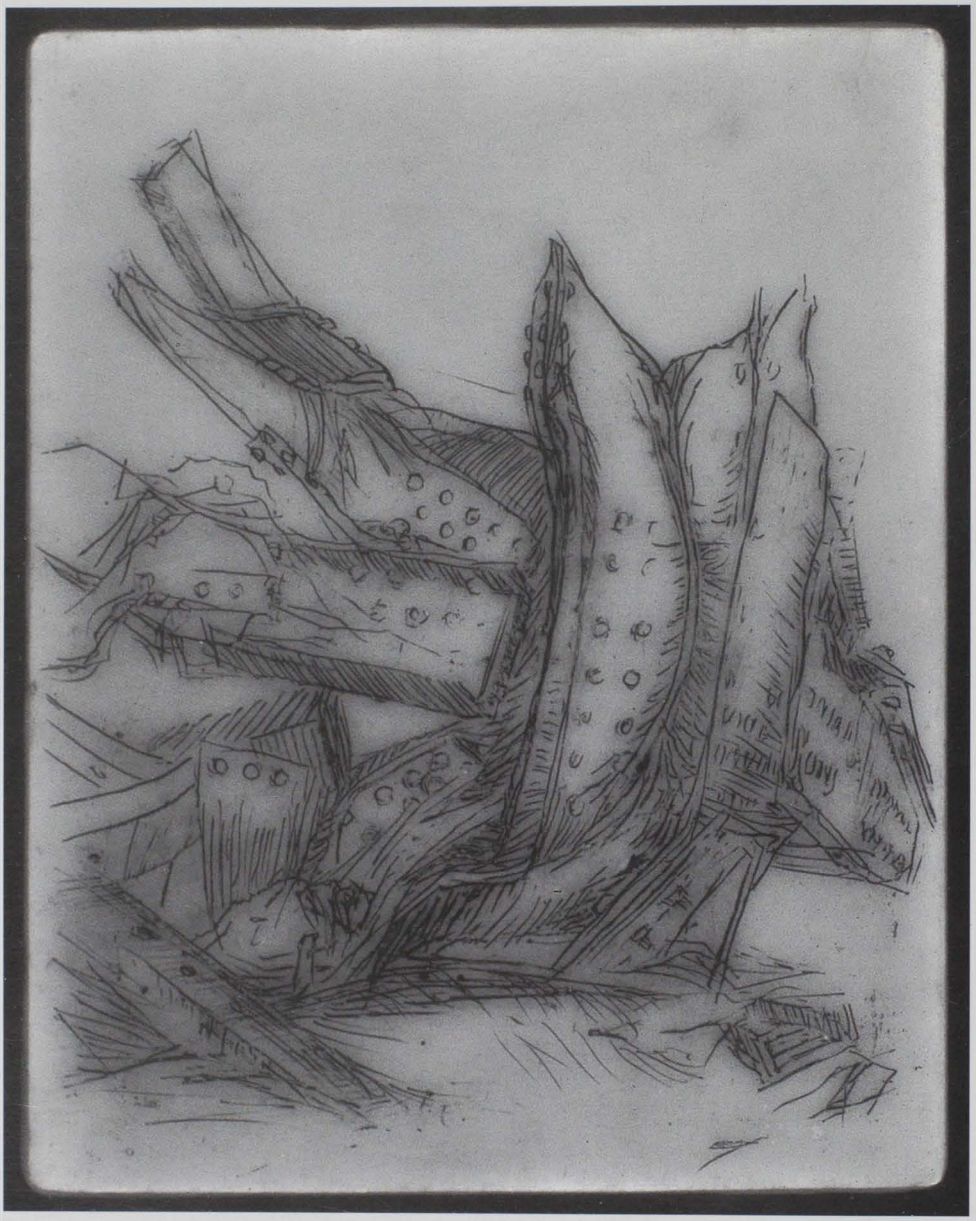
My mental archive is enriched by photographs and drawings made on site (lately, small, engraved beeswax panels). As a painter, I acknowledge that many of the basic materials of my craft, (i.e., cadmium red, cobalt blue, nickel yellow, etc.) are the little offspring of industrial chemical facilities and mining operations. Incorporated into this array, I am making my own paints using pigments collected from the mine sites.

Furthermore, the character of this land, a place where the forces of erosion now rule, has a certain synergy with the fluid tendencies of paint applied by brush. I deeply enjoy these holistic, reciprocal relationships between the nature of paint and what I use it to depict.

All of this composes a type of mapping where scale is fluctuating and images are not purely documentary. Rather than actual diagrams or instructions for navigating, these amalgams are the result of my own mapping process. The yield of my own navigations through a landscape extensively molded to the functions of rail beds, pipelines, and ore crushers, it is an uncontained factory. The ordering implicit in the act of mapping is equally present in our industrial incursions: A grid laid over a continent, or a mountainside detonated and carved into a series of thirty by fifty foot ledges.

The essence of what I see in Butte is nature reclaiming these imposed geometries. Through our abandon, the grace of decay is once again carrying everything towards the lowest possible point. I am here as witness to this movement and as an unusual agent in this process of remediation.





Don A. Anderson, the author's father

from *Rock Salt, A Memoir*

## Donald Anderson

Fifty years and the picture sticks: my father sweeping icicles from the eaves with a broom: something I see myself doing today—if I were to do it—with a two-iron. But it's 1959, and my father's plying with a broom. What's more, it's the night before Christmas in Butte, Montana, where the miners are on strike, and here's my long-legged father, knocking on ice. The broom's straw doesn't give because it's stiff. My father has jerked the broom from a snowbank beside the carport—the carport he'd built the summer before, with salvaged 4x4 posts and corrugated Fiberglas. When it rains, or if snow melts, water sluices from wherever a nail has been hammered overhead, from the spidered cracks. The Fiberglas is a mint green that tints sun.

My father is sweeping icicles because we are making ice cream. It's damned cold, which is not the way I would have put it then. When I was a kid in Butte, winter temperatures often fell to 30, 40, even 50 below. It's cold and my father and I are in our sheepskins and lined buckle-up overshoes. In places, the snow is at our knees. When the icicles snap, they drop with intent. My father has told me to Stand Back. Pay Attention. Stay Tuned.

I stood back all right, and checked the street. What if somebody saw? What would anyone think of us making ice cream after dark in the dead of winter? And if we were going to do that, why couldn't we drive to a gas station to buy block ice? We have ice, my father said. We'll knock icicles off the eaves. Perhaps it was best, for we'd have driven to the gas station in the 1949 two-tone—black-and-white—Hudson Hornet my father had cut with an axe and a hacksaw into what he thought passed as a half-ton pickup. After he'd removed the back seat to connect the space with the trunk, he folded the roof to contain the front seat. He got it started, then rammed it like a fullback or pulling guard. Help me, he said. Stop standing.

He hacked a hole for a Plexiglas rear window and metal-screwed everything as tight as he could. During winter, the heater had to hump to keep the cab heated. The finishing touch was quarter-inch sheet metal welded to the frame for the truck bed. There was no tailgate. My sunk vision of normalcy had been to pack Twinkies and Wonder Bread into my school lunch box and to not ride in

a half-assed truck. What I took in my lunchbox was homemade bread—home-cracked wheat—bulk carrots and apples my father bought then kept fresh by storing them in sand in the cellar. I'd seen pickups with tailgates that hinged flat to open and to extend the bed. I fancied my uncle's pickup, the word FORD embossed on the zinc-gray steel. The tailgate was unmarked, as if it had never been touched or opened. Uncle Ken had threaded the tailgate chains with lengths of garden hose to prevent them from rattling and from nicking the paint.

My job is to carry the downed ice, like shot-gunned grouse, to the porch where my father will stuff what I bring into a canvas bag, then crush it with the flat of an axe—the same dulled axe he'd made a truck with. I get an image of unfrozen grouse being flattened in the bag to feathers and mush. The bag is coarse canvas, an ore bag from the Lexington mine where he works. My father brought home ore bags the way office workers bring home new pens or doctors sample analgesics.

My father, Donald Arthur Anderson, won't let me swing the axe, though he tells me to bring him more ice. You're just standing, he says. If your hands weren't covered, they'd be in your pockets. He's working in the cold with cloth gloves. Monkey Grips, he calls them. They are a fuzzy-yellow felt with rubber fingers—or, more exactly, the fingers sport rubber dots. Sometimes my father will don the right-handed glove to open a jar that's resisting. I'm wearing his mittens. They are dark leather with real wool inside, like our coats. Where the ice has dropped, I have to dig in the snow. When I bring the ice, my father jams it into the canvas then bats it with the axe.

I add rock salt as my father turns the crank. When he's not looking, I stick a piece in my mouth. The crystals look like ice or soiled diamonds, but they taste like salt and mud. I get to turn the crank while my father adds ice. I can feel the mixture stiffen. The ice cream maker is constructed of hoary wood, a small barrel, the bound slats like a Cape Cod shed. The pail holds a metal cylinder for the goop and sterilized wooden paddles that are locked in by a lid and a locking crank. Two-thirds the way up the side of the pail is a drilled hole my father has enlarged for the salted ice to drain.

Before long, I can't turn the crank, even with two hands, and my father finishes up. In the house, he extracts the paddles, hands me a spoon, sets me up at the sink. When my sisters look cheated, he informs them that I have done the work and deserve it. Sullenly, my sisters dice up the canned peaches with elk-bone handled steak knives while I scrape and tongue the paddles. My father stirs the peaches into the ice cream then puts the concoction into the freezer. He wants us to go in to sit by the tree. I take a last lick at the paddles.

In the living room, my father publicizes that we are old enough to hear what a strike means. He looks tired, but it's important to him that we understand that

he is part of management and not labor, though he's the only one in the room who pursues the difference. That is, he says, he's a salaried man, and not a man who shows up—drunk or sober—in the rustling line to hope for a job for the day. The reason, he says, is because he has had two years of college. He next advances the point that I will get four years of college and a stamped diploma. He informs my sisters that he will, when the time arrives, spring for a year of college at a Mormon school, Ricks or Snow College, maybe BYU. One year, he repeats. Plenty of time to corral a husband. But you, he says to me, now pointing, it's the full four years. He tells me I may have to get a job to do it. I tell him I can get a job at the mine. That's fine, he says, you'll have to.

At the time, I'm 13, and my sisters are 14 and younger. My baby brother is six. In 40 years, he'll be dead, and it will be alcohol that will take him. My brother James Arthur II, named for my grandfather, will not attend college. He'll spend some time in the Army and in prison. He'll become a diesel mechanic and a master welder, his specialty custom horse trailers. He was a horseman, too, who supplemented his income by breaking broncos. He was 17 when I first saw him handle a rough mount. The performance made me think of words like id, bygone, Hun. The mare's flanks were roweled bloody and the specialized bit split flesh. It was all clotting blood and froth and lather.

Later, AWOL from the Army and jailed in Alberta for having beaten senseless a lawman—an off-duty RCMP—Jim, released from prison, rode a horse from Alberta to Sante Fe, where he sold the beast. He had named the horse "Junction" and would produce photos of the animal the way someone else might produce a photo of a boat or new patio, a picture window that has been installed. Jim will drink daily, and most of the day. In time, he'll bilk my father out of half of my father's life savings—that nest egg reported to me as $22,000 dollars, the set-aside amount my father had amassed during 40 years of strain. Jim will visit me in Colorado the year before he dies, but on Christmas Eve 1959, he is a six-year-old who has just started school.

My father gets back to the business of the mine strike, now five months in duration. He, a salaried man, is on half pay. The miners, by contrast, are unemployed. Nonetheless, he says, we—our family—have had to stretch, gesturing at what I think he means us to see as the roof of our house, the electric lights that burn, the heat rushing from the vents above the furnace. He does everything except rub his stomach. From time out of mind, he has told us stories of his father and the Great Depression. We were never hungry, he says. We had lousy clothes, but we ate. My father saw to it. So. My father points at us. We are blessed, he confirms. Ordering us to our knees, and using his chair as a prop, he prays his 1959 Christmas prayer about the wise men and the baby Jesus and all the angels and the animals around the smelly manger. We had a cow and a barn.

I knew what that was like. Around a barn, sterile straw is not easy to come by.

Mother passes out ornaments and tinsel, and we trim the tree. For a while I hang the tinsel a strand at a time. I even straighten out some of my sisters' work. Later, I just throw clumps at the branches above me. Before we go to bed, my mother serves home-baked cinnamon rolls and cocoa. The icing melts and slides off as if the buns are sun-fried fenders. Prior to dessert, my father reads the Christmas story as it appears in the Gospel According to Luke. He doesn't like the version in Matthew, says: Matthew was a legalistic Jew. My father contends that Luke writes more like a poet, which stumps me some because my father's poet is Robert Service, and his Service favorite, "The Cremation of Sam McGee." When he's done with Luke, we ask for Sam, and my father, who knows the poem by heart, delivers. His delivery is peppy, with the usual punch at the end:

> There are strange things done in the midnight sun
> By the men who moil for gold;
> The Arctic trails have their secret tales
> That would make your blood run cold;
> The Northern Lights have seen queer sights,
> But the queerest they ever did see
> Was the night on the marge of Lake Lebarge
> I cremated Sam McGee.

My mother plays "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear" on the piano. I like the song better than the Bible story, but I don't say it. To consider the piano as a piece of furniture is to know that the case is roughed up but that my mother kept the instrument more than passably tuned. She, herself, had perfect pitch and her voice was the sweetest alto. It has been 40 years since I have heard her sing. I have no idea where the bruised upright came from or where it went. When I returned home for my father's funeral, the piano was gone, replaced by some sort of contraption featuring selections with computerized percussion. I almost unplugged it.

On Christmas morning 1959, my sisters and baby brother and I each receive an orange and wrapped books. Some friends of our parents have donated their grown children's library. I get the entire Bomba the Jungle Boy set. Christmas night, for dessert, we eat the peach-laced ice cream.

The labor strike is to drag on. My father, a Mormon Bishop, turned to his church. From a special catalog, my mother orders clothes, sturdy shoes and canned meat. In a central room of our dug-out cellar there are plenty of canned beets and green beans and peaches. Rice, pinto beans, hard winter wheat, and a

grinder. There's an opened box of bullets, matches, bottles of aspirin, and Vitamin C.

We had a cow, too, an old Guernsey, kept in a bathroom-sized pen with a bathroom-sized shed in the backyard. The cow's name was Pet. When I milked Pet, she would swing her shit-dirtied tail. Pet's tail was a redhead's tresses that would encircle my neck and face, my ears and mouth. The idea I had was to shave the tail. Problem solved, I sat to milk. When Pet swung her tail, the rope of it nearly knocked me deaf. For a while, I wore earmuffs and goggles.

Pet didn't produce much milk, but what milk she produced was rich, and I sold cream to neighbors for 50 cents a pint. In the cellar next to the freezer, my father set up the hand-cranked separating machine. When I'd filtered and separated the milk and cream, I'd haul the equipment to the kitchen to clean it with soap and boiled water.

At the time my father purchased, in the late '40s, the house in which I was to be raised, he did so without consulting my mother. After my father's death in 1993, my mother confessed that when she first saw the place she'd wept. "I cried and cried," she said, "it was such a shack." Previously, we'd lived upstairs from my father's parents—his father a legendary, though savaged drunk, and his mother an abusive taxicab dispatcher. My mother, Zola Maxine Stevenson, and my father had wed on New Year's Eve, 1943. The wedding had been planned for New Year's Day, but my father, ever practical, married the day before, realizing the advantage of a full year's tax break.

My father's best friend Sidney had died at Pearl Harbor two years prior. My father had tried to join up, but had been denied enlistment because of a childhood mishap in his father's wood yard that had blinded one eye. My father had wanted to join the Navy before the attack on Pearl Harbor, explaining that if he and Sidney had been able to enlist together, they could have asked to be assigned to the same ship. Whatever would have happened to my father on board Sidney's ship would have happened more than four years before my birth.

When, in the '70s, I was commissioned as an Air Force officer, my father couldn't attend the ceremony, but he made sure to telephone long-distance. The commissioning seemed more important to him than to me. I had joined the Air Force to avoid the walking tour of Vietnam, as my draft lottery number in 1970 had surfaced as #1. I had considered hightailing it to Canada, but with a wife and a year-old daughter, I did not.

In 1941, my father had an official armed forces deferment. He went to work in Butte's copper mines. When he called about my Air Force commissioning, he had some information: Because of the war, the U.S. faced a copper shortage. To have copper for bullets, they minted Lincoln pennies out of steel. The war

required copper. So, he said. Then: So.

Following my father's death, one of my dreams was about those pennies. In 1943, the mints in Philadelphia, Denver, and San Francisco struck approximately a billion steel pennies, freeing up copper for munitions. When my father said So, I was supposed to acknowledge his contribution to the war effort. I did not do that. After the war, my father worked an additional 30 years in the Anaconda Company's—and then ARCO's—copper mines and lead smelters. Who will give him due?

My father was a believer. That he was a devout Mormon, and the son of a failed one, was the thread of his cloth, the color his wool was dyed. Early on, I thought of him as armored.

The chink I first recall was Sunday television. I was nine or ten when T.V. (and its three channels) arrived in Butte. The fat blond cabinet black-and-white seemed to pulse, even when switched off. Given a choice I would have watched something—anything—every night. But in our house, homework and storybooks reigned, and Sabbath viewing was forbidden. One way or another, though, my father heard about the new Western "Gunsmoke." As it turned out, my father's edict was subject to waiver. "Gunsmoke" became a long-running Sunday appointment, a sanctioned family event.

Though my father promoted James Arness and his unwincing manliness as Marshal Matt Dillon, it seemed to me, even at my unperturbed age, that my father, although drawn to Dillon's qualities, was in love over his head with Miss Kitty. My young father was a breast man, a preference only aggravated when my mother later lost hers to a double mastectomy. She had been what was called, in those days of industrial bras, a sweater girl. In a photograph I recall, the wool features a moose and pine trees.

If it was my sisters who named our old Guernsey Pet, it was my father who named our new cow: Marilyn. As in Monroe. He kept a pin-up calendar in his bureau's top drawer. The twelve months confirmed a penchant for chests and black-mesh nylons. Old Pet had been put down and my father bought a two-acre field across from our house. The Silver Bow creek ran through the field. Encircled by barbed wire, the two acres featured a tin-sided shed and a manger. It was Marilyn's kingdom. Marilyn was a Holstein whose milk volume quadrupled Pet's—her cream, however, not nearly as rich. To run Marilyn's milk through the separator was hardly worth it, and I wouldn't have done it were it not for my father's love of cream on his Corn Flakes and the possibility of a neighbor's 50 cents.

Sunday was church day. Early morning was the service for men only, followed by Sunday School for all. The later afternoon was tied up for a final ser-

vice, another combination gathering. After dinner we'd assemble for "Gunsmoke." We came to know Doc Adams, the gimp-legged Chester, Festus, and even Burt Reynolds as the half-breed Quint. A child and survivor of the Great Depression, a willing boxer, a miner and woodsman, a reliable citizen, an ungrumbling husband and father, my father admired dependable men. He admired Marshal Dillon, but he didn't seem to comprehend Dillon's on-screen discretion. He was certain Matt and Kitty were sleeping together. As a man who invited my mother for scheduled weekend naps behind a locked bedroom door, from which he emerged refreshed, often singing, I doubt my father wanted fact or testimony of any coupling, but he may have thought the Marshal should have whistled or hummed. Something.

Butte, Montana—"The Richest Hill on Earth"—was once the largest city between St. Louis and Seattle. In 1867, the peak of the placer boom had the city's population at 500. It halved over the next two years. Then, quartz deposits were discovered. Mining barons, flocking to Butte, became Montana's first millionaires based on silver, then copper. In the 1880s, Butte was the planet's largest copper producer. In 1884, there were over 300 operating mines, 4,000 posted mining claims, 9 quartz mills, and 4 smelters, all operating 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

In 1899, Marcus Daly merged with Rockefeller's Standard Oil Company to create the Amalgamated Copper Mining Company. By 1910, having bought up the smaller mining companies, Amalgamated changed its name to the Anaconda Copper Mining Company, the largest corporate power in Montana. ACM dominated local politics and all the business that mattered in the state. Through the 1950s, the Company owned every newspaper in Montana.

The Irish came in droves and soon became the city's largest ethnic group—they worked the mines, but also began to dominate local government and policing. Butte's Miners Union formed in 1878, sending the largest delegation to the International Workers of the World's founding convention in Chicago in 1906. Butte became known as the "Gibraltar of Unionism," but worker frustration at the Company's deaf ear to demands led to violence in 1914 and 1917—violence that involved guns, dynamite, Federal troops, and murder.

In 1917, the city's population at a peak of 100,000, 168 men were killed in a mine fire—a fire that remains the worst disaster in U.S. mining annals. A frayed electrical cable being lowered down the main shaft ignited its timber lining. With the Great War clamoring for copper, all of Butte's mines were working at capacity, and the Speculator had nearly half its 2,000 miners below ground when the fire struck, spreading flames down the shaft and into the drifts and crosscuts. That only 168 died was its own kind of miracle, as miners decamped,

more often than not in pitch black, into adjacent mines.

Two years before the Speculator calamity, 16 shift bosses and assistant foremen on the surface for their lunch hour stood around the main shaft of the Granite Mountain mine awaiting the 12:30 whistle to be lowered back underground. Also awaiting descent were twelve cases of 40 percent dynamite. For reasons never unearthed, just as the whistle blew, so did the powder. Fingers, identified by wedding rings, were found more than a mile from the scene. All to say that Butte, as a mining boomtown, was hardly a model of city planning. Streets zigged and streets zagged. Houses collapsed where mines honeycombed beneath, and a whole suburb gave way to the expanding Berkeley Pit.

There were no policies against livestock in Butte. I dreamed of the sheriff coming to our house to tell my father it was illegal to keep cows. I didn't hold out much hope because at school we studied Montana history and I knew there were more cows in my state than people, and my teacher had said that Montana statutes dictated death by hanging for cattle rustling, but not for human murder.

Miss Stephanie, my fifth-grade teacher, whom I loved like my father loved Miss Kitty, was from California. She said San Francisco housed more people than our whole huge state, but then admitted that San Francisco couldn't have penned all the cows. "Your cows" was the way she put it.

It was my job to walk Marilyn to the stockyards. We didn't own a trailer, so, when the cow was to be bred, I walked her there. "Okay. So. Good," my father would say, then drive our truck to the yards. Me? I'd herd the cow—a one-man, one-cow cattle drive.

You want your friends to see you walking a cow to the stockyards to be bred? Okay? You see? You're 16 years old. You live inside the city limits. In a fenced field across the street from your house is a cow your father wants humped. You're driving a cow with a stick in your hand. You're herding a cow with a stick to the stockyards.

Your father has already parked—you spy the truck in the lot (the old Hudson, spray-painted red, cab already peeling). For a moment you think you spy Miss Stephanie's car—the copper DeSoto.

You herd the cow into the corral. The bull is let in. Cowboys materialize and arrange themselves all along and on the corral's top rails. The bull, short-legged, has a hard time reaching. There are jokes. When the bull connects, everyone laughs, so you nod your head, squint. Your father pays someone. You find your stick and start the cow for home. The old girl seems bedazed and druggy. Once a year, Marilyn was bred, and once a year, my father slaughtered a yearling to fill our freezer.

My grandfather on my father's side, James Arthur Anderson, had been born in Utah, his being born there the consequence of his father's teen-aged conversion to Mormonism. At 16, great-grandfather Rasmas, following his baptism in Jutland's River Karup, had been disowned by his Danish clan and had emigrated from Copenhagen, alone, to America and on to Utah, the desert Brigham Young called Zion. At Ellis Island, my great-grandfather's family name was altered from Andersen to Anderson, because a customs official so willed it. Then the official assigned an initial for a non-existent middle name.

Rasmas X. Anderson hied himself to the lunar landscape of eastern Utah, where in time he spawned my grandfather, who in 1920 witnessed the birth of my father, Donald Arthur. My grandfather, James Arthur, who would defend Mormons if you brought it up, had lapsed early. By the time the Great Depression hit, he was making a living selling whiskey to failed "saints," as the Mormons called themselves. In my father's version of his father's whiskey success, he and his sister Ramona were the only children in Vernal, Utah with new shoes. "We wore our shoes," he said. "We had them."

Though he'd built his own still, my grandfather fought off competitors by stealing their hooch and selling it too. He would take my father, hand him a bag of sand. Together they'd sweep through suspected brush or high grasses, casting handfuls. Whenever sand struck glass, they would gather up and haul off the whiskey.

James Arthur liked to box and gamble and be drunk. He'd attended college, where he'd managed a degree in mining engineering from the Colorado School of Mines. During his school years, according to my father, James Arthur held the welterweight boxing championship in Colorado and three adjoining states. What was to put him into the whiskey business was that he'd lost the family ranch in a card game with a judge in Vernal. In my dreams, what my father and grandfather cast to locate jarred hooch is not coarse sand, but rock salt. Clink.

James Arthur was sailing smooth until he expanded deliveries to the Ute Indian reservation. A Mormon Bishop tipped him off that as a consequence of the Indian sales, Federal revenuers were hot on the hunt. James Arthur packed his wife, my father and his sister, into a Model T. My father was under the impression that his father was headed for Canada, but, as he put it: We ran out the last of our fuel in Butte. So.

It was a predictable slide from "Gunsmoke" to "The Ed Sullivan Show." Though both shows got their starts in 1955, and though both productions lasted years, Ed Sullivan changed America in ways "Gunsmoke" and the Marshal did not. In Butte, there may have been Irish and Finns and Swedes and Czechs. There may have been Poles, Mexicans, Germans, Filipinos, Chinese, Italians, In-

dians, and Welsh miners from West Virginia, but there were no blacks I knew of—none in my schools. What I learned about blacks, I learned from Ed Sullivan on Sundays, after church.

At first, the blacks on the show seemed damaged: Sammy Davis, Jr., who could dance but sported an immobile glass eye after he'd lost his mothered eye in a near-fatal car wreck. And: Ray Charles, who couldn't see at all, and who swayed when he sang in a way that looked uncurbed and alarmingly chancy. I pictured Ray crooning in his shower, then thwacking through glass.

The black women, though, seemed whole and larger than life: Mahalia Jackson, Pearl Bailey. Or sexy: the Supremes or Horne. Lena Horne. Lena Horne could sing, but unlike Pearl, Mahalia, even Diana, she could dance, and when she sang and danced, it was a flirt with the audience different from what I knew much about. This may have been true for my father too. Following a particular Sunday night set, he turned to note: Pretty good looking . . . for a Negro. What was wrong with what he'd said wasn't altogether clear to me at my age then, but what I heard in my father's voice was as much wonder as a cluttered admiration.

Later: You get in a fight with a Negro, watch your wrists. (From where was the Negro he'd fought?) A Negro's head is hard. Aim for the nose. That said, as far back as I recall, my father was an unbound fan of Joe Louis, the "Brown Bomber" from Detroit. But it was Archie Moore who my father admired most—that wiliness, that heart. My father took it personally when Marciano kayoed Moore. He couldn't even talk about the fight with Ali, then called Clay. He could about the battle with Yvon Durelle though. Floored three times in the first round in a ring in Montreal, and floored again in the fifth, Moore retained his title with a desolating blow in the 11th round. Archie was 45 at the time. The Canadian fisherman not yet 30.

My father advanced that Moore, with some 200 fights and the most knockouts ever (141!), was dodged for so long that when he first fought for the Light Heavyweight Championship of the World, he was 39 years old. With dread and esteem in his voice, my father said Moore then defended that title for next ten years, the longest period in the division's history. As a light heavyweight, Moore fought for the Heavyweight Championship twice. And though he was kayoed by Marciano in nine rounds, he dropped the Rock with a sacking right in the second. Moore had begun his boxing career in 1935. At the time he fought Clay in '62, Archie was 50.

My father told the story that when Sugar Ray Robinson tore apart Carl "Bobo" Olson for the middleweight crown, Moore wired: "Ray—you preached a good sermon, and I think he got the word." As was the case for any number of my father's tales, I thought: If this story isn't true, it should be.

I was 19 in 1965, on my way to France to serve a Mormon Church mission. I had no craving to preach Joseph Smith's invented gospel—didn't want to be a member of my father's church—but I wanted out of Butte, the city of my birth, and France was my ace.

During my time in France, I mostly lived in the Alsace-Lorain, usually in neighborhoods with expatriate Algerians where the rent was cheap. The first dead man I ever saw was an Algerian who'd been stabbed in a brawl and lay on the cobblestones, leaking. The Algerians, who stood about, ignored us—a couple of white kids in black suits, gaping. We were wearing our name tags: Missionaire Mormon.

Despite my church years in France, I, like James Arthur I & II, was to lapse. Not long after I returned to the U.S., I petitioned the church for excommunication. I wanted my name wiped from their lists. I wanted them to stop tracking me down. My father kept forwarding my addresses to Salt Lake.

During the '60s in Butte, the Chamber of Commerce sponsored a "Clean-up, Paint-up, Fix-up" campaign. "Butte is my town—and I like it!" was plastered on beggarly billboards all over the city. The town I was raised in, and invoked to like, produced more copper than any other collection of mines in the U.S. of A. The town produced Evel Knievel and the defunct Berkeley Pit, an expanse that Robert Craig Knievel, even in his greenest youth, would not have attempted to clear. The rising groundwater in this, the nation's deepest abandoned pit, is so poisonous with dissolved metal concentrations that ducks or geese, landing in its inviting mile-deep shining, die. Loudspeakers blare recorded shotgun blasts to discourage the fowl. Studying the pit, you will see the moored skiff used to net migratory carcasses, for the loudspeakers have not proven particularly convincing. According to my father, who'd worked his final years in the Berkeley Pit, the dead ducks and geese are burned on the spot.

Three Heavyweight Boxing Champions: John L. Sullivan, himself, as well as Jim Jeffries and Bob Fitzsimmons all fought bouts in Butte. Aside from recording the lowest winter temperature (-61° F) in the contiguous United States, Butte is the place where J. Edgar Hoover is reputed to have assigned FBI agents who nettled him.

The Berkeley Pit's heavy metal water is rising at a rate of 5,000 gallons per minute, 7.2 million gallons per day. Situated above much of Butte's population, the Berkeley Pit has a current water depth of some 5,200 feet, the same depth the shaft was sunk at the Mountain Con, where I had been employed as a miner. The critical level—that is, the depth at which general flooding will occur—is 5,410 feet. In 1987, with a focus on the Berkeley Pit (and its rising tide), the en-

tire Butte mining district was visited by the Environmental Protection Agency. As a consequence, the combination of "The Richest Hill on Earth" and the Silver Bow Creek flowing down the Clark Fork drainage was named the largest Superfund site in U.S. history, covering, as it does, some 100 miles in length. It is no longer the river Lewis and Clark committed to memory.

I didn't miss Butte when I lived in France. There were too many distractions, not the least of which was the French language itself that, for the longest time, sounded to me like static electricity. No, the first time I missed Butte was when the Air Force assigned me to Strategic Air Command Headquarters in Omaha, Nebraska. I'd lived the most of my life at the base of the Continental Divide along the knuckled spine of the Rockies, where the sun rose from behind and set upon peaks. In Nebraska, the sun didn't know where to be.

In 1978, my father called from Butte to tout that the Mormon Church would now permit black men to be ordained into the priesthood. Until now, blacks could be baptized and pay tithes, but their full participation was restricted. In the Mormon hierarchical patriarchy, blacks had heretofore held no positions of authority, nor had they been allowed into the "sacred" temples.

My father had called, certain that the Church's incorporation of blacks would sway my return to the fold.

"As of today, blacks are, of a sudden, acceptable?"

"No—as of June 1st," my father said.

"You mean God has caved in the face of the NAACP?"

"What do you mean?"

"You're telling me the prophet has had a revelation about blacks?" Then: "Like Brigham Young did about plural marriage?"

"It was Wilford Woodruff who put a halt to polygamy—and, yes, he received a revelation. He was the prophet at the time!"

"Okay," I said, "so it was Woodruff who had the revelation about the time Federal troops were due to arrive to start jailing high church officials. Polygamy was against the law, Dad. Why shouldn't we recognize a difference between divine decree and political expediency?"

"I thought you'd be happy about the Negroes," he said. "I am. Yes, I am."

"I am too," I said. "Now BYU can get some running backs." I was sorry the minute I said it.

For me, growing up, the Mormon doctrine, as I understood it, was that blacks were black as a consequence of the cursing of Cain. The poison notion was that, having murdered his brother Abel, Cain was struck with a blackened skin so that any who found him would know not to kill him (God meaning for

Cain to suffer a long and harried life). One of Noah's sons, Ham, then married a daughter of Cain. From that marriage sprang, in Joseph Smith's words, "a race which preserved the curse in the land."

In the Church's Book of Mormon, white skin is taught as the preferred hue. According to Smith and his book, "Lamanites" (or Native Americans) are said to be cursed with a darker skin because of sin and disobedience. Long before the arrival of Columbus, "righteous" whites warred with their darker-skinned brethren. Eventually the whites (called "Nephites") fell into their own sinful ways and were slaughtered by the Lamanites. Moroni (who these days adorns in golden form and trumpet to lips most Mormon temples worldwide) was, by his own account, 400 years after the coming and going of Christ, the last righteous white man standing in the Americas.

Spencer W. Kimball, the prophet on watch when blacks were admitted to the priesthood was, as well, a booster of the Indian Placement Program, wherein "Lamanites" from reservations were placed into white Mormon foster homes. He pronounced on the subject: "I saw a striking contrast in the progress of the Indian people today as against that of only fifteen years ago. Truly the scales of darkness are falling from their eyes, and they are fast becoming a white and delightsome people."

In a New World twist, Joseph Smith declared that The Book of Mormon, an abridged history of the people of the Americas covering a thousand years (B.C. 600-A.D. 400), had been engraved upon hammered gold sheets, rather than on the Old World's clay or papyrus. In Mormon lore, this alleged recorded history became known as the Golden Plates, and Joseph Smith as the latter-day prophet to whom they were delivered.

The earlier prophet Moroni guarded, then buried the Golden Plates, only to return in angel form in a heavenly visitation to Joseph Smith in upstate New York in 1823. Four years later—the same year Beethoven passed—the Angel Moroni released the Golden Plates to the entrepreneurial Smith. As you may have guessed, the Golden Plates, translated by young Joseph into The Book of Mormon, were, translation complete, returned to Moroni and the heavens.

Smith claimed to have employed two translucent stones or crystals to translate the ancient tongue. These stones, affixed to a breastplate so Smith could gaze through them at the Golden Plates were named Urim and Thummin, after their predecessors in the Old Testament. But as a kid, Urim and Thummin sounded to me like something out of Tolkien. My father read to us from The Hobbit, a book he'd encountered as a teenager. He liked stories about dwarves and goblins and wizards. And so did we. At the time, Golden Plates and seer-stones made perfect sense to me. As did otherworldly personages appearing in blinding light.

My father remained a Mormon and a miner. As copper prices fell and foreign competition broadened and the rich veins petered out, a concentration plant was built and virtually all shaft mining halted with operations moving to the low-grade ore production of the Berkeley Pit. Begun in the mid-'50s, the Berkeley Pit was to become the largest open pit mining site in America. During the first 20 years of its operation, over 700 million tons of dirt were removed. Workers were digging out almost 300,000 tons of earth a day with 46,000 tons being ore with an average ore grade of less than one percent. Eventually, 200-ton trucks were being loaded with four scoops of a 22-yard shovel basket. The tires on one of these trucks, as my father put it, were the height of a basketball hoop and the width of an outstretched Wilt Chamberlain. Wilt the Stilt they called him, he told me, as if I wouldn't know. For my four years of high school and for the next two as well, Wilt the Stilt led the NBA in scoring, including a career-high 50.4 points per game in 1962. That same year, in the greatest performance of offense ever, Wilt single-handedly scored 100 points against the New York Knicks in a game played in Hershey, Pennsylvania.

My grandfather James Arthur climbed into a ring in the Butte Civic Center during the Great Depression. He had challenged a professional in a winner-take-all affair. "Dixie" LaHood was a regional tough who'd beaten a world champ in a non-title fight. My grandfather, stripped to the waist and in his work pants, came back from a beating and knocked LaHood on his heels. Ass-over-teakettle was the way my father put it. A hat had been passed before the fight. James Arthur fisted the cash and walked home with my father, who'd beheld every punch of the ruckus.

When I was 11, my father was head sampler at the Lexington mine. His day crew brought ore samples to the surface to be assayed. Based on the findings, the mining superintendent would determine whether and where to continue to blast and to drill.

There was a mining engineer who would stomp through my father's office with his night crew. This engineer had taken to sitting in my father's chair and propping his cruddy boots on the desk. My father told him if he did this again he was going to knock him to the floor. I'd heard my father set forth the situation to my mother.

My father worked Saturdays at the mine, above ground, for half days. It was the day he did his paperwork. I often tagged along. Dad would pack us baloney and sweet pickle sandwiches on cracked wheat bread, smeared with butter. In my father's office, I'd fiddle with ore samples (I'd assembled a labeled collection in an egg carton for a Cub Scout badge), and sharpen pencils. Sometimes, my

father would let me wash up his respirators in a big sink and install clean filters. I'd draw with my father's drafting tools.

The Saturday I'm writing about, we entered the office to the engineer in my father's chair with his feet on the desk. When my father kicked the castored chair, the engineer and his elevated feet crashed to the floor. My father jutted his chin toward the slime on his desk, then handed the man a pair of red boxing gloves. He had removed two pair from his desk's bottom drawer. It took me a few years to understand that my father worked in a place where boxing gear was essential. Whatever the case, he educated the engineer that Saturday at the Lexington, conducting a clinic in fisticuffs. Right away he landed one on the nose—a quick flick with his shoulder behind it. And if the snapped nose hadn't diluted the big man's starch, what my father next did to his ribs did. Can you see the engineer inching his paws and elbows toward his bleeding face, exposing the gut? I saw it. The clinic was almost over before it started. Everything my sweet-tempered father did was exact and quick and vicious.

In 1962, I tried to quit high school to work in a car wash a pal of my father's owned. I'd wanted to work in the mines for the money to be made there, but hadn't yet aged the required 18 years. My father promised he'd help me get on at the Mountain Con where he was now the safety engineer after I graduated from Butte High. I'd wanted to go to work to buy a car. I had my eye on a 1947 Pontiac Silver Streak, the two-door. My father said I couldn't quit school. He said I could drive the Hudson.

In 1964, my father got me work at the Mountain Con. One of my first jobs was helping a contract miner (those who were paid for the volume of ore they moved) whose partner hadn't shown for work the day after payday. I'd stood that day in the rustling line and was hired for a pre-determined day's pay of 21 dollars. I went to work with the miner, mucking out a stope that had been drilled and blasted the shift before. In a shaft mine, what you might call a tunnel is called a drift. Stopes (pronounced with a long o, like stōve) slanted off vertically mined shafts called raises. Stopes followed the ore veins, because shaft mining is about the removal of high-grade ore.

Our mucking machine, like everyone's, powered by hydraulics, was a scoop—a steel bucket on cables and pulleys rock-bolted into the face of the stope. When the cable snapped, my partner and I dragged it, like road kill, to the tracks where we lay it on one of the ore car steel rails. Here, he meant to trim the frayed ends in order to re-splice them. My partner knelt by the rail and arranged the heavy snake. I handed him the axe.

I was asking questions and, in the process of answering me and trimming the cable, the man lopped off his left index finger. It was a powerful swing and

a clean cut, just shy of the knuckle, toward the wrist. The man removed his glove to stanch the bloody pump. He didn't shriek when the axe fell, and he didn't squawk when he removed the glove to observe the result. He wrapped the wound with shirt cloth he'd torn away with one swift move with his good right hand. When he'd finished, he looked up from where he kneeled. Shit, he murmured, then rose to stand in his half shirt. He could have been a statue, a bronze man in a helmet, a hero, an actor in a movie starring Victor Mature.

I stooped to retrieve the digit. It was still in its little glove case, like a gift jackknife. I headed for the station, where a massive box constructed of lagging (rough cut 2x8s) housed coils of pipe through which water flowed for drinking, for drilling, and for quelling dust. Each morning, on each level of the mine (we were on the 5200 level, a mile deep) block ice was shipped down and dumped into these boxes to chill water.

With the axe, I chopped on a block for enough ice to fill my upturned hardhat. I removed the finger from the glove, then covered it with ice. I caught myself scanning for rock salt.

At the station, we rang for the cage. My father, in his role as safety engineer, arrived with the shift boss. He transferred the finger and ice to his hat. My partner, my father, the shift boss, and the iced bone and flesh were hoisted to the surface. My father had congratulated me for thinking of ice. He called me Donnie in front of the men.

I reattached my lamp to my hardhat and headed back to the stope and its cable. There were ice chunks caught in the hardhat webbing. I stuck two pieces in my mouth as I worked my way up the drift. I ate lunch and waited for the shift to while by. Although the Mountain Con wasn't the hottest on the hill—the Stewart was—temperatures at 5200 feet were generally in the 90s. Despite just sitting, I was sweating when I saw light approaching. I first guessed it was my father coming to check on me, but it was my partner. His finger had been reattached. Without mentioning the stitching, he walked me through resplicing the cable, and we went back to work with me operating the mucking machine, adding to the ore we'd already removed. In the middle of it all, I shot him a look. Didn't want to miss the shift, he said. He held the ungloved hand in front, as if to know where it was. The bandage shone conclusively white in our lamplight.

My father retired from mining in the '80s, about the time the sump pumps were cut off in the shafts and the Berkeley Pit closed, the now unpumped, metal-laden water beginning to seep in. Though all with their starts in the '50s, the Berkeley Pit had a lengthier run than either "Gunsmoke" or Ed Sullivan. Had my father noticed? Was he aware that Miss Kitty had preceded him in death, that she'd died from complications from AIDs she may have contracted during

a trip to interior Africa? Amanda Blake, except for Arness and Milburn Stone, made the most appearances during "Gunsmoke's" 20-year run. As of this writing, James Arness, three years my father's junior, remains very much alive and will answer email sent to his personal website: JamesArness.com.

Donald Arthur Anderson is interred in Butte. On his gravestone, his John Henry (as he would have said) is shortened to Don A. Anderson, the way he signed his name. I returned to Colorado to a letter posted three days before the day my father died.

Dec 8, 1993

Merry Xmas. We will put our tree up tomorrow. Your mother is going with me today to buy one. It's been quite cold here, but it's warmed up some. I can still start all my cars without plugging them in. Yesterday, it's been 52 years since my pal Sidney's boat sunk. How could I still miss him? I do. We have a new carpet in our kitchen, bath, and back porch. Our upright freezer finally gave up—we had to get a new one. We have 2-refrigerators, 2-freezers, 2-microwaves, 4-TVs, 4-phones. I think we are pretty well equipped, don't you?

—All love.

P.S. I've got to do something about the carport.

I couldn't help but see the carport, its paled Fiberglas, except for the nail holes, so fiercely resisting weather, moths, rust, time, chronic time. This manufactured product had outlasted my old man. I'd thought his shelf life would have pressed on, like Fiberglas, or gold, or copper, Styrofoam, sealed Twinkies, MoonPies, the sproutable wheat found in the tombs of Pharaohs. The Fiberglas, even finding its way to Butte's landfill, would outlast me too. My father admired efficiency and made persistent use of the materials at hand. On the day he died, he brewed up four heart attacks in fourteen hours. He had a job to do, and he did it.

In 1976, Atlantic Richfield Company, then the 8th largest oil company in the country, bought out the long-standing ACM. In 1985, Montana Resources, a local state concern, bought 40,000 acres of Butte mining property from ARCO, who'd shut down operations as unprofitable. In Butte, mining has been "temporarily suspended" due to the cost of deregulated electricity and collapsed copper prices—these days, the nation able to get low-balled copper for its bullets elsewhere. When Montana Resources suspended operations, there were a few over

300 employees. A far cry from 1903, when Butte claimed the largest payroll on the planet: 12,000 men in the mines and mills pocketing $1,500,000 monthly.

I keep a photograph in my office at the United States Air Force Academy, where I teach. The photograph stands on a credenza beneath where my diploma from Cornell University hangs. When I went back to school at 42, my father said, "Are you? Why?" A boy from Butte in New York City was what he thought. In the photograph, my father wears his hardhat and lamp, bib overalls and a long-sleeved shirt, the right sleeve of which, for some reason, has been sheared at the elbow. His sampling hammer dangles from his belt. He's wearing safety glasses and his Timex. His steel-toed rubber boots and pant legs are slimed. His right arm rests shoulder high on part of a dismantled hydraulic drill. The scene is well lighted. There are five-gallon cans of Texaco lubricant. When I look at the photo, what I think is: There are boxing gloves in his desk, bottom drawer.

*"Neither is landlocked but still"*

Neither is landlocked but still: the sense of being placed. If something is monumental they say it has a foot on every bank and a part in every enclave. Enormous Delta: a confession of trials and tributaries. A historical or pastoral romance is a narration that caters to rivers and the persons in their beds. The way they were raised or grew up on or ran over or the way they embanked. An unspoken certainty is *forming between reeds*. The complicity of gradation being what it is, the settlement being its accessory.

*"Manufacturing as city of fairies"*

*Manufacturing as city* of fairies, claiming no loss, just kilowatts. Numbers turning. "Bifurcated geography" pits tongues against necks. *Seeing past yards* because towers are wider, and nobody steps on themselves. Lick themselves. For once a corner means something. "Proprietary about the areas" of shaved, little curl at the end, a sweet gasp toward seedheads. Imagine a whole country just for sleeping, another for waking, a third for lying. *Sitting in brackish water with* complete control. In the center of the pot, one quick shoot. *It, as follows,* we will grow together. Down where Ten Mile Creek comes in so rural it rots. We find each other's animal. One per bend the rules of the house. "Rules: only those" whose swim will come up for air. And that, a zone of water or of bricksand, a blend of extents. *And other patient places.*

*"Or is it riding in a phaeton"*

Or is it riding in a phaeton or is it on the heels of a photogenic summer people. True story: I used to be a girl who had no shoes but then I met a man who had no rural route. In the paper. I am featured prominently picking peppers. I am selling incendiaries by the shopping center. Struck. Smouldering black cats or effeminate sparklers to write my name across the air that makes your blossomed clavicle, your smitten small town, such an exposure. *Who for the fact that he was still alive* begot a storefront in that very spot for a penny an acre? Or the first-born child of *a fountain.*

*"If a leg is wrapped in strands"*

If a leg is wrapped in strands, does it grip more tightly. Coal is a food. Harrowing is for plants. *Silty clay* or *silt loam* or *loamy sand* or *clay* end up diagrammed, weighting each other. And what if a mouth. Fit an anchored lip. When "nailed to our faces" we remember someday we would break off stems, prehistorically. *Gradually we allow the hedges.* Our two feet are thorns, finding their pressure. Soils distorted by water. And what if a horse pinned a wasp. The photo's leafy frame creeps over the field. Litter brings a heavy color to a fire. Straps afire in the shaft.

*"It's the Ohio system of ending things"*

It's the Ohio system of ending things with a pause or hold for safety. I imagine all the places we could place a net. And if over the years I gathered (all the things that you sent downstream), how would it gross? Neglected series of pulleys. A hair that is systematically wild. When developing foci to account for the drain, we would not include the following: looking alive, gigging the bastards, attributing carnage to sties. It is not my system. Every good farm does not swell. When occasionally things go missing they are usually my face.

## *What Great Human Beings We'll be Someday*

### Matthew Scott Healy

I agreed to get along with Francisco during his ride to rehab. No insults, no sarcasm. Forget ethnic slurs. I couldn't call him a wop or a goombah or a guinea. My girlfriend Kendra made me promise all this, and I said fine, not being a guy who would screw things up when they're about to turn in my favor.

"This is a difficult decision for him," Kendra said. "Don't make it worse."

I was lying on the fold-out bed watching Kendra brushing her hair. She was standing in the doorway to the bathroom, head to one side as she pulled the brush through.

"What decision?" I said. "His P.O. told him to do it."

"He could have decided to run."

"He should have."

Kendra was topless, and I looked over at the window. The curtain rod on our living room window was dented in the middle, so the curtains hung funny, leaving enough space between them to see inside the apartment, even when we tried to close them. It was mostly dark out still, but Kendra had the bathroom light on, so anyone walking by would have a clean look at her, nothing stopping them. Our apartment complex only has one level, and all day the neighbors walk by, or sometimes it's no one we recognize–hoods, punks with shaved heads and wife-beaters, gang tats–looking into every open door and window as they go by, and I've explained to Kendra that we have to keep the curtains shut because they're looking for things to steal.

I said, "Why don't you clip those curtains together, for fuck's sake?"

"We don't own anything worth stealing."

"That's not what I'm worried about."

She tossed the hairbrush into the bathroom where I heard it rattle on the counter and into the sink. "Oh, Christ, Kevin. Why don't you just say what you're thinking instead of playing all this passive-aggressive bullshit?"

She put on the T-shirt she had worn yesterday with the words Role Model across the chest, and I felt relieved, felt it like someone had taken their foot off my neck.

"Better?" she asked, posing with her arms out, before stomping back into the

bathroom.

I won't describe what she looks like. I've tried to convince buddies who have never met her that she's hot in her own gutter-glam kind of way, but to do it takes a long time and I have to talk about the shape of her breasts once her bra is off, and her tiny shoulders–shoulders the size of oranges–and the tattoos she has on her calf and her wrist and the one she had put on the small of her back–Archetypal Slut–after she misheard some girl at a concert who called her a "typical slut." Besides, I get pissed at myself when the guy finally gets it and has this look on his face like *now* he can picture her. I will say that if you saw her–I don't care what your tastes are–you'd think she was hot.

"Let's not go," I said. "Forget Francisco. Let's stay inside. Let's not eat or drink or sleep. Let's just stay here and do things to each other that would make people sick."

"Get dressed, Kevin."

"I can't find a good reason to."

"I'm taking your car if you're not ready in five minutes."

I had the covers halfway off, an open invitation for Kendra, and I was trying not to pull them back up even though the air conditioning was freezing. I knew Kendra would never do it, but in my head she was climbing back in, wrapping herself and the covers around me, and the phone was ringing over and over without us picking up, laughing at the idea of Francisco at a pay phone, hanging up before the machine answers so he can reuse his only change. Then, as I thought this, the image of Francisco's finger in the coin return, I was getting out of bed.

"I thought Francisco already *was* in treatment," I said.

"He failed that. This is residential. He's got to live there because he couldn't stay clean."

I liked to consider myself well-informed when it came to drug programs–enough of my friends had gone to them–so I asked which one Frank was going to.

"Phoenix Prosperity. The one on 7th Ave," she said. "Six months, gates, sign-in boards, prayer group."

"A bunch of addicts sitting in a circle saying, 'What great human beings we'll be someday.'"

Kendra came across the room, dragging her socks across the carpet so she could give me a shock of static electricity. "That's it, Kevin. Get it all out of your system now." I let her touch my arm with her finger but nothing happened. She frowned. "Promise to be good today?"

Kendra was the reason for transporting this big bastard Francisco to treatment. This is how willing I was to do anything for her. Kendra and Frank had had a thing when he'd first come to Phoenix. He was from Milan. A big Italian

guy with a meth problem–although I always thought of him as German or Swiss because he was huge and had blonde hair and blue eyes. Hitler's progeny, I called him, just to fuck with him, and he flexed and posed like it was something to be proud of. Before Kendra and I hooked up, before she moved in with me and we had told each other that our love made it seem like we had never really been in love with anyone else, we used to get together with Francisco and shoot through a gallon or two of Popov vodka. Screwdrivers, Jackie Specials, Purple Motherfuckers, Bad Mojo. Kendra had a book of drink recipes and we made the drink if we hadn't heard of it. We partied, the three of us, wherever we could. Sometimes there were others, but mostly it was just us–me with no idea that Kendra and Frank were hooking up.

Back then I'd made the mistake of letting Francisco crash at my apartment for a few nights–oblivious that he was banging the girl who would one day become my girlfriend–and when he stayed with me he went around in nothing but tighty whities, parading around and singing Michael Jackson songs. Even in Italian I could recognize the beat of "The Man in the Mirror". Now I'm stuck with it, the mental picture of Francisco's body, built like he'd spent his whole life winning swimming team trophies.

Kendra assured me that they were never really together, not like a relationship or anything, and that it had lasted only a week. She said, "It was only sex and drugs." This she said as though it were a comforting thing. Not that anything she said could have helped when I imagined the two of them shooting up in a dingy motel room (Kendra was of a rare breed who could shoot heroin all night and then never want it again) and then fucking, Francisco with his big Italian hands satisfying Kendra in elaborate European ways, making her dream of getting laid by a foreign-guy come true. I know about Kendra's foreign-guy fantasy. She denied this too, of course. She actually said that before Francisco, she had never pictured herself sleeping with anyone who wasn't American. But I know why she really said this, and it was the same reason the stories about her and Francisco keep changing every time she told them, every version with less kissing, with less touching.

We agreed to pick Francisco up at a park where he was living. When he called that morning, Kendra said we would drive him to rehab because he was homeless and didn't have a job or a car. These past few weeks he'd been calling Kendra more regularly, filling her in on the chronicles of his life. The most recent developments were that he had been fired from two telemarketing jobs and had been questioned by police for assaulting a transvestite. These were some of his problems. Getting over Kendra was one of his problems. Not surprisingly, he blamed everything on the drugs, although sometimes he blamed his psychologi-

cal dysfunction. He once showed me a piece of paper that was in his wallet and it said, more or less, that he was crazy. The letter seemed authentic. I examined it as I would a fake dollar bill, holding it up to the light, looking at it from a higher angle. It was signed by a doctor and written on office stationery. I thought about craziness being responsible for his current condition and I felt sorry for the guy, thinking that his problems might be beyond his control and that he deserved sympathy. Then I would remember him as the guy who had had sex with my girlfriend right before she started dating me, that he wouldn't leave us alone because he was leeching off of Kendra's sympathy and understanding, and I'd remember why I hate him.

The sun was still low behind the buildings downtown. I followed Kendra through the parking lot. She walked by a little Mexican kid wearing diapers, who was working hard to get to his feet, but caught in a kind of push-up position. This kid was all alone. No parents in sight.

"Come here, little guy," Kendra said, and picked him up, taking him–just like that–out of danger. I loved this kind of stuff about her, even though I knew these were the same reasons Francisco was still around. Kendra carried him into the park where we found some woman sitting under a tree. "Is this your baby?"

"Yeah," the woman said, like she had some reason to be irritated.

"Maybe you should keep an eye on him," I said, as Kendra handed the kid over.

"Nothing would happen to him," the woman said. She was homeless, and as we walked away, I noticed the park was filled with them, wearing shorts and T-shirts because it was already so warm out–eighty-five degrees at eight in the morning and wide open spaces. A five-star resort for homeless people. Some of them were shuffling around a soccer ball in the middle of a field, no goal in sight, kicking it with full force like they were training for the World Cup.

"That's hilarious," I said, pointing them out to Kendra as we looked for Frank. I don't usually recognize irony, but this seemed like it.

Kendra looked insulted. "They're homeless."

"Like that's some kind of defense."

My idea of homeless people came from the guys lying on the street with their worldly possessions heaped around them. Frank wasn't that bad off. He wouldn't ever decline to the point where he'd be wheeling his stuff around in a shopping cart. He had some instinct of self-preservation that made it impossible for him to become like other homeless people. He was clean-shaven and alert. He managed to change clothes enough to make me think he had a closet somewhere, probably at the home of a middle-aged divorcee, some junkie who got off on a six-foot-five Italian coming over to shower and change and shoot up. Frank liked to wear polo-shirts and jeans, and at a distance he looked like anyone else, but

close up something wasn't right–the clothes were too snug or too loose. He had one yellow shirt he wore all the time, a Bill Gates shirt, but with a long line from a Magic Marker on the collar. I thought about this whenever he said that no one could ever tell he was homeless.

Kendra and I walked around for a while and found him sitting on a bench in front of the Park Ranger's office, hands buried in the pockets of an expensive-looking hooded jumper with the San Antonio Spurs logo across the front, and I wondered if he had stolen it. We almost drove right past him. He looked like a jogger taking a breather.

Frank grabbed a duffel bag and trotted up to the passenger window. He leaned his massive head in close to Kendra and smiled. "Got room for one more?" he said, and I wanted to hit the accelerator and watch him throw a fit in my rear view mirror.

"You sure you want to go through with this?" I said.

Kendra turned to me and narrowed her eyes. "Are you nervous, Francisco?" she said, turning back to him.

"Nervous? Check this out," he said, and held out his hands. I think he meant to show how steady he was, but from where I sat he looked like he had the shakes. He put his hands in the pockets of his jumper. "I'm getting off the streets," he said, as though he had convinced us. "How can I lose?"

"Well, get in," I said. "What are you waiting for?"

What happened next I keep replaying in my head whenever I think of this story. Kendra offered him the front seat. She said, "Here, Frank. You take the front seat." and then climbed over the stick shift to get into the back, and the way she moved opened her clothes up to show the small of her back and Frank, climbing in, stopped in his tracks, and said, "Wow," even though he must have known that tattoo was in a place not meant for him to see–"What's archetypal mean?" he said, butchering the pronunciation.

So I asked him what the hell did he think he was he looking at? "You want to fucking walk?" I said.

"What?" he said, and instantly, like he knew playing innocent wouldn't fly with me, said, "I'm very sorry. My mistake."

"Relax, boys." Kendra was in back, shimmying her shirt back into place. "It means I'm the original."

I took Francisco's duffel bag from him and handed it over the seat to Kendra. And don't think I didn't give it a good shake on the way back to hear if there was the tinkle of glass paraphernalia.

"There's nothing in there," Frank said. "Just socks and underwear and a check from my dad"–he turned in his seat to face Kendra to share this next bit–"he's paying for this treatment."

Frank's dad was a dentist in Italy. From what Frank probably told him, I wouldn't be surprised if he thought treatment was like summer camp, with canoe trips and character-building activities.

"You don't have anything in your pockets?" I said.

Kendra stretched her legs across the back seat. "He's going to treatment, Kevin. Give him a break."

"Yeah, I know where he's going, because I'm taking him there. It's my car. We'll get going when I turn on the ignition and put the car in gear. We'll get going when I know our passenger is not smuggling drugs in my car."

"You want to frisk me, too?" he said, turning the pockets of his sweatpants inside out. "You could have been a cop, Kevin."

I *did* want to frisk him, check his pants and see if he had anything stuck in the band of his underwear. You get to know plenty of addicts living in South Phoenix, you can't help it, just like you can't help but know their secrets because they're so eager to talk about it, like they're desperate for someone to hear them and know how clever they can be. Frank was this way too, when I first met him, talking about places he would hide his stash if he ever saw a cruiser enter the park. Kendra kicked the back of my seat.

"Let's go," she whined.

I took us north on Central Avenue, and then across Van Buren, through the part of Phoenix where people stand on sidewalks, not going anywhere, not waiting at bus stops. They watch passing traffic like at any second they think someone is going to stop and give them a ride. Men and women both, all of them looking like hookers. I look at them as I drive and they look back.

Frank was going off. "I'm going to get through treatment and I'm going to get off probation and I'm going to get a job and when I do I'm going to take both of you out for a big steak dinner to celebrate. You like steak dinners, don't you, cowboy?"

He had stopped calling me by my name when Kendra and I got together. Now I'm cowboy to him. Or dude. Or guy.

"I'll settle for cheeseburgers," Kendra said. "How about that, Frank? We'll all get cheeseburgers from Fuddruckers when you get out."

"I'm not going back to jail again," Frank said. "Jail is for suckers."

And I almost laughed because I never would have guessed he had ever been to jail from the way he talked. He used slogans everyone else knew were outdated, and maybe he thought he was cool enough to breathe new life into them.

"You don't have to get me anything," I said. "In fact, if you successfully go through treatment, I'll *buy* you the steak."

We all knew what I meant, but Kendra said, "How's that for incentive, Frank?"

Frank didn't say anything, and I thought we were done, but a minute later he started putting on a hell of a show, over there in the passenger seat, moving his head back and forth like he might be losing his mind, but doing it in such a way to make us think he was trying to keep it to himself. Ticks in his neck, that kind of thing, controlled and so quick you barely caught them. He can be a hell of a showman when he wants. I wanted to see how long he could keep it up, but Kendra put a stop to that. She leaned between our seats and–of course–said, "You okay, Francisco?"

"He's got the shakes," I said. "It's withdrawal."

Kendra said, "What time do they stop doing intakes at Phoenix Prosperity? You want to get something to eat before you go in?"

"They stop taking people at nine a.m.," Frank said, twitching a little more now that we had noticed him.

"They'll have food for him there," I said.

"The food in those places is terrible," Kendra said. "I'm hungry too. Let's find a place to stop. We'll have a quick meal together."

I pulled up at a place that had the sign out front: *Authentic Breakfast Burritos*. The restaurant must have been a bar once. Inside it had bar-type furniture–square, lacquered-wood tables attached to the floor with single black metal posts. The only light came from a propped-open door next to the kitchen. We ordered three breakfast burritos and coffee at the counter.

I took out my wallet to pay my share but Kendra said, "My treat."

"Fuck that," I said. "I don't want you paying for this guy's food. Either we all pay for ourselves or I pay for everyone."

"That doesn't make sense," Kendra said, irritated, turning away from the girl at the counter, who was waiting with one hand on the cash register. I asked Frank if he had any money to pitch in.

"I don't have anything," he said.

"You're broke," I said. "You have no money."

He held out his empty hands as some kind of proof. "If I had any money I'd pay for all of us."

"Okay then," I said, back to Kendra. "This is a point of pride. He doesn't get anything more from you. You've done enough for him already. Anything he needs in the next half hour I'll provide, because I don't expect anything in return. Here, Kendra. Take the money, Kendra."

I was the only one of us who could afford it. I've had the same job in the stereo components section at Best Buy for the last two years. I was holding out a ten dollar bill, but Kendra didn't take it until Frank said, "Just let him pay."

"What a humanitarian," Kendra said to me. "What a heart of gold."

She kept her eyes off me, on the counter. The woman behind the counter

looked nervously at the three of us as though we might pull her over the counter and maul her. She took our orders while still watching us, without looking at what she was writing.

We took our plates to a table. We were the only people in the restaurant. Traffic could be heard outside, but otherwise it was quiet and no one seemed interested in breaking it. If I hadn't been there, Kendra would be sitting closer to Francisco, probably filling him up with words of support and encouragement–I could see it now–and he would be figuring out a way to believe what she said, thinking of how it could help him. But we were all tight-lipped because I was there and that was fine with me. No one even mentioned how bad the burritos tasted, especially not Frank, who had only taken two bites and was pulling out strands of lettuce from one end. When it became clear that he wasn't going to eat another bite of the food I had bought for him, I said, "Something wrong with the food?"

"The food is great," he said, folding his arms and then unfolding them. "Exceptional. You're very generous."

"Not hungry then?"

His leg was bouncing in place. I had been watching it bounce for five minutes. It never slowed down. It was moving so fast that it seemed unnatural, and only the one leg, acting independently of his body. I had been trying to check his eyes, and when I finally got a good look I saw that the black parts were the size of pin-pricks. I tossed the rest of my burrito onto the plastic plate. "He's high," I said. "That's why he's not hungry. He's fucking high."

Frank straightened up in his chair. His expression didn't change. He didn't seem startled, but I figured that must have been the drugs. "I am not high," he said.

"What are you talking about?" Kendra said. "Are you high, Frank?"

"High as a kite," I said. "Look at his eyes."

Kendra looked, leaned in, tilted her head. "What am I looking for?"

"The pupils aren't dilated."

"What does that mean?" she said.

"It's dark in here. His pupils should be wide open. All black."

"You don't know what you're talking about," Frank said.

"I watch COPS."

Frank looked at Kendra. He said in a calm voice people use when they want to sound convincing, "I haven't done anything since Tuesday night. I swear it. I've been cleaning myself out."

Kendra didn't seem to hear him. She was evaluating him, making up her mind. I heard him, though. His denial registered first as a lie, then, played back in my head a few times, thinking about the way he said it and the way his face

looked, I wasn't so sure. As I said before, this guy could put on a show.

"Are they going to take him if he's high?" Kendra said.

"Kendra, look at me. I'm not high."

His leg had stopped, but when he moved closer to the table, leaning in to face Kendra in a desperate pose, I was positive he was lying. Good liars have more conviction than honest people do when telling the truth. They're too eager to be believed. I was hoping Kendra would be on my side right then, convinced, flat out. I hoped she would realize what kind of man we were dealing with. But I knew how easily she could be persuaded, because her natural instinct was to trust people. She had come from a trustworthy family and that made her want to believe what people told her.

So before she could make up her mind, I said, "I've got a question for you Frank. I've got an excellent question. We don't even care if you're high, just so long as you answer this one question truthfully. Are you ready?"

He looked suspicious. He was no fool.

I said, "If there were no laws against using drugs, if you didn't have people telling you all the time how drugs are going to ruin your life, if you didn't have a judge forcing you into treatment, if you never had to take another piss test again for as long as you lived, would you stop using drugs?"

He couldn't answer. He knew the answer, just like I did, but he didn't want to say it.

I said, "Well, Frank, you might want to think of something better to say if they ask you that question in treatment."

"We used to be friends, guy. All I want today is a ride."

He stood up, rising up, so tall you could see the process of his body parts working to get him up to a standing position, hips, rib cage, shoulders–he was a big son of a bitch–all of him rolling and sliding into place. "I'll be right back," he said, and he had changed his face to look like he was angry–no, scratch that. Not angry–hurt. Hurt we had doubted him. He lumbered down the hallway and into the restroom, the door marked for both men and women, the sign written in both English and Spanish.

I said to Kendra, "You know what he's doing right now, don't you?"

"You promised me."

"Yeah. That's true. But this guy is no good. Keeping this particular promise is less important than drawing attention to the fact that Frank is a fuck-up. More than a fuck-up."

"Baby, I love you, but you've got to help me here."

"This guy is a threat. Can't you see he can do real damage?"

She used her stir stick to probe the coffee and, not looking at me, this is what she said: "I'm not letting that get in the way of doing something good."

This didn't seem like a very good insult. I dismissed it, because we were building up towards an argument and it was her turn to say something she thought would hurt me. But a few days later I was still thinking about it, because I can be paranoid sometimes, and I wondered if what she said might be what she really thinks of me, that maybe she's got a certain picture of me built up in her head as a guy who is selfish instead of protective, that she didn't understand what I was trying to do. And naturally I wondered what else I was doing that made her think of me in ways that were inaccurate or untrue. So I've been second-guessing my instincts since Thursday, going around the apartment biting my tongue, my natural routine all fucked up because I keep thinking about all the ways Kendra might misunderstand what I'm saying or doing. This is how lethal Kendra can be with an insult, because she plants it and then it grows until it splits you open from the inside.

But at the restaurant, none of this occurred to me. I wasn't second-guessing myself yet, so when Frank came out of the restroom I looked at him and saw that his hooded jumper was in perfect condition, not a mark or stain on it, the Spurs logo shiny even in the dim lighting. It looked brand new, which, for some reason really pissed me off. Here I was paying for his breakfast, giving him a ride to treatment, and he had better clothes than I did. I couldn't even prove to Kendra what a low-life he was. "Think I'll use the pisser too," I said, "before we go. That all right with you guys? Do we have time?"

Kendra looked at her watch and I said, "It'll only take a second."

In the restroom I lifted the porcelain lid off the toilet and looked inside. I pried open the paper towel holder and shuffled through the stack of cardboard-brown paper towels. I overturned the trash and pushed it around the floor with the toe of my shoe. When I couldn't find anything, I looked around and saw the soap dispenser next to the sink. I unscrewed the cap and when I stirred the liquid soap with my finger, I found a pipe, a little glass tube, coated with pink, dripping soap. I ran some water over it and dried it with a paper towel. One end of the pipe was charred black. I put it in my shirt pocket, went back to the table, and they both looked, in my opinion, guilty.

"Okay," I said. "All set. Let's go."

Phoenix Prosperity was a long, cinderblock building in the middle of a residential neighborhood, painted white and striped with yellow and blue and red arrows on the outer walls so the new guys know where to find things like the kitchen and chapel. I looked at the building over Francisco's shoulder, and the first thing he noticed was the gates–his big blonde head going from left to right, following the perimeter of the fence, with its electric locks and posted signs of visiting hours.

I heard Frank say, "Six months" to himself without any real indication of how he felt, but clearly he was sweating it.

When Kendra offered to walk him up to the building I agreed that we should, absolutely, let's follow this thing through.

The lobby was empty and looked like it hadn't been cleaned in days. A particle-board table against the far wall had about a dozen Styrofoam cups with coffee rings on it. A fly made the rounds, landing on the lip of a cup, crawling around the edge and then down, inside, a few seconds later emerging and setting down on the next cup.

"I guess this is good-bye," Kendra said.

"Hold on a minute," I said. "We're here. Let's make sure this gets done right. That Frank is signed in. Not that I don't trust you." I gave Frank a look and he took a deep breath, not letting it out. His head went back and his posture got straight in a weird way, like he was about to start levitating.

I leaned over the receptionist's counter and yelled. It was almost nine. A guy came out from the back. The guy had sideburns that turned into a moustache, a big bushy deal that would have been ridiculous on anyone else, but this guy pulled it off. He looked like the kind of guy who already had a reason to hate you. He told us his name but I can't remember it.

"We need to talk to someone who handles intakes," I said.

The guy looked the three of us over and his eyes went back to Frank. He knew right off that of the three of us, Frank was the damaged goods. "I handle intakes."

"My P.O. called in yesterday," Frank said.

The guy went to a big dry erase board on the wall with names written on it. Frank's name was already there and there was a row of empty boxes next to it for people to check things off as they did them–sweeping the floor, completing a meeting–that kind of stuff. "What's your name?"

"Francisco Bivona," he said.

"Okay," the guy said. "I remember now. We've got a bed set up. Come on around the back."

Frank picked his duffel bag up and took a step towards the door.

"Just a minute," I said. "My name is Kevin and this is Kendra. We're the ones who brought him in here today."

The guy with the chops waited.

"Anyway, we have Francisco's best interests at heart, you know? We're friends of his. We want nothing more than for him to go through treatment. But you should know that before you take him that he's not coming in clean." I took the pipe out of my pocket and held it out. The intake guy looked at the pipe but didn't take it. "See? I just found this ten minutes ago in a restaurant where Fran-

cisco dumped it. My guess is he was planning to bring it in to Phoenix Prosperity and thought better of it."

Kendra said, "That could be anyone's."

"Jesus, Kendra. Don't be stupid."

The guy with the chops didn't do anything with this information. He had a stash of words he allowed himself every day and he wasn't going to waste any on me. We all stood there, in a kind of square formation, knowing the pipe was Francisco's.

"Francisco has a serious problem," Kendra said, apologizing to the guy whose name I can't remember. She was in it with me. The two of us. She was pissed at me, I could see it in the way she moved her arms, tight and jerky like she had forgotten how to operate them, but the only thing she could do was back me up. For Francisco's sake.

"I don't know about the other guys in treatment," I said, "but Francisco will be the first one to admit he's got hardcore emotional and psychological issues. He's got a letter from a psychiatrist that I'm sure he'll show you. Anyway, this is not his first time in treatment. It's not his second or his third. He stays for a few days, talking about how committed he is to recovery, and then he takes off for no reason and gets high. This is probably nothing new to you. But he's also been using this morning. He's high right now."

Frank didn't deny it this time. I was almost hoping he was going to come up with some act, but he was standing there without a show, waiting for the other guy to say something. Frank had his duffel bag in hand and looked like he would completely give in to whatever decision the rehab guy made. His body was still abnormally straight, and I saw now that he was taking quick, shallow breaths through his nose to maintain it.

I wondered if I should say anything more, if I had done enough, and then went on, "I'm just saying all this because I thought maybe you guys could keep an extra eye on Frank. You know, because he's going to try to get away."

"You guys are some real friends," said the guy with the chops. Kendra would later rehash the way he said this over and over, trying to figure out if the guy was being sarcastic or not. "We're going to help Frank understand that he's got to stay away from people that are going to hurt his recovery."

"That's a good policy," I agreed.

Kendra said, "Frank, do you want me to call your P.O. and let him know you're here?" I wished she hadn't said this. There was something so pathetic about the way she said it.

"We'll take care of that," the guy said. "You don't have to worry. I'm taking him back now."

As they went out, Kendra said, "Good luck" but Frank didn't look over. You'd

think that in a moment like this–where you believe you'll never see someone again, which is what I was believing–that you'll get something out of it that you can tell somebody about years down the line, about how he said *this* and then I said *this*. You hope that everyone will say something memorable enough to make a good story out of it. But it just happened that Frank and the guy whose name I can't remember simply opened a door and went through it. Not even a look back, which I guess is the best possible thing. And when they were gone, it was just me and Kendra, and we went back out to the car.

Let me just say now that Frank didn't make it. On Saturday the counselors at Phoenix Prosperity told him to go look for a job and be back in four hours. He didn't go back. I know this because Frank's probation officer called this morning and talked to Kendra, wanting to know where Frank was. He thought he might be staying with us. He said that Frank had skipped out on treatment and would have no choice but to write a warrant if he couldn't find him. Even after everything I had said on Thursday, Frank wrote down our phone number as the number to call in case of emergency. It's funny how he won't give up on some things. After Kendra hung up the phone, she told me what happened in about two sentences and then she went in the bathroom. The bathroom was the only place in the apartment where one of us could go for any privacy. I watched TV for a while and when she didn't come out I put the TV on mute and listened. Then I went to the bathroom door. I thought maybe she was crying, but I doubted it, because I couldn't hear anything like sobbing, and because Kendra isn't the type to cry. I've seen her cry maybe twice in the entire time we've been together, once when her parents told her they didn't want her to move in with me, and once a few weeks ago when she was wasted and arguing about how Francisco needed support and I told her to drop the Samaritan act. More likely, she was probably just stewing in the bathroom now, not wanting to face me, and here's why: because I had been right about Frank. I knew he wasn't going to make it and she was being pissy that I had made my points clear. I could have said something through the door, but I didn't, because I had already told Kendra everything I needed to say at Phoenix Prosperity.

That day, as we walked out, Kendra had said, "You're wrong about Frank."

I laughed. I really thought it was funny that she kept on with this. "This time will be no different. How much do you want to bet? I'll bet you a hundred dollars right now that it'll be no different."

"At the restaurant," she said, "when you were in the bathroom, Frank said that I was the reason he was going to make it through treatment."

"What's that supposed to mean? That's going to make a difference?"

We got in the car. I wondered if Frank was unpacking in his room and watch-

ing us through the window, waiting for us to drive off. I wanted Kendra to kiss me, and although I knew she was in no mood for it, that we were on the verge of an argument, I couldn't help myself. I reached over, rubbed her forearm and up to the bicep. And when she didn't respond one way or the other, I moved my hand up to her shoulder, to the back of her neck. I brought my other hand over.

"At least it's over," I said, almost whispering.

"Will you acknowledge that it's different this time?" she said, as though my hands weren't on her.

"Touch me back."

"Are you listening?"

"Yeah, but I wish you were talking about something else."

"Why don't you want him to get better? I can understand if you're jealous–"

"I'm not jealous," I said. "I'm disgusted. Anybody would be disgusted. To think that you did the same things with him that you do with me."

"Fine. Okay. You're not jealous. What I mean is, why don't you want him to get better, regardless of whatever you think about him? Can't you want a person to get better?"

"What's wrong with you?" I said. "That doesn't have anything to do with me. All I'm saying, all I've ever said from the start, is that he's not going to make it. That's just a fact. That's like saying that two plus two equals four or that the sky is blue. It's all the same thing as saying that he isn't going to make it."

"Can you not say that, please?" she said, and she wasn't arguing anymore, but pleading, the way she does when she's losing the fight, or thinks I'm missing the point. "Can you just allow room for the possibility?"

"I don't know why it's so important for me to think he's going to make it."

I looked at the windows of Phoenix Prosperity. They were covered with hand-written recovery slogans, *One Day at a Time... The Elevator is Broken, Take the Steps... Faith Without Works is Dead.* I started the car and put it in drive and kept my foot on the brake. I knew what she wanted me to say, but I couldn't do it.

"He's not going to make it," I said again, this time like I wasn't joking, or trying to hurt her–just stating a fact.

She folded her arms the way she does when she's done with me, her last defense, when it's clear to her that I'm such a moron I can't possibly see her side of it. But it was important she understand, regardless of what she believed, that he wasn't going to make it, not even with her apparently inexhaustible supply of hope and good intentions.

*First Winter Poem When the Dreams Shift*

I dreamt a bowl full of pearls.
A white boat dressed the horizon.
There once was a dressmaker
whose dreams filled with bolts of white
fabric so porous it took its wearer's shape
upon touch, temperature.
And the next night, a pearl sword.
Death felt like nothing.
Even the moon is battered
like a silver bowl when its ellipse
flies less than perfect.
*Have I not somewhere scrutinized*
*a dead white-feathered moth laying eggs?*
Did the eggs first bother me, or the death?
Were they not the pearl earrings
I dreamt I lost when I escaped the chalk
prison dripping water from its ceiling?
In another, I am the woman sealed in
by heat, a second skin of white fabric.
I am a cut out of another person,
white even on the soles of my feet.
I am guilty in my dreams, running
with white teeth from the bright contrasts
of bodies in snow. Dark coats and pocked
landscapes. The dressmaker stitches
the shutters. I am trying to equate
my mistakes with their consequences
and everything adds up to the pearls.
They pour out of my mouth in strings
when I try to explain.
I have stayed too long on my back
where the stand sticks to my tongue.
I dreamt the white-feathered moth
left white cutouts on the moon
which had turned into a bowl of water,
pearl bubbles expanding from the center
and white boats popping at the surface.
Everything is brighter from far away
and set against the snow. Close up,
dull as beach glass wintered with sand.

*Natural Disaster*

me twelve hours the mountain
shape shifting snow-ghost see
God's vowels lilt with wind
get this straight: no one died
nothing was said my mouth said
nothing thought avalanche

upon avalanche split vibration
cracks a snowfield my body deserves
this burying spine crumple
breakers snort the fall a whistle
helmetless head maytags
slopes the curve body apology

circumspect my mouth says nothing
breathes hardly even a wound
nothing diamonds barrel down
rain under say drowning
that pressure leash to board
to air open O day's salt temple

O circulate thrash a space
for mouth spit or open mouth
gravity rings liquid or air down
up degree depending what did you do
what can you do but open
the mouth lie dilate

pearl vertebrae circle
in a dish diamond nerves blind
my O body an O of steel breaks
each thud a gasp a vowel of nothing
eye to foot holy space for head my mouth
please please keep me quiet me

*An Interview with Emily Wilson*

## Devon Wootten

*Emily Wilson is the author of The Keep. She lives in Brooklyn, New York, and publishes the occasional chapbook under the imprint Spurwink Press.*

**Devon Wootten:** You are the proprietor of a small press. How does that activity interact with your poetry?

**Emily Wilson:** I'm not sure it does interact. The two activities are, for me, pretty discrete. In some ways, printing is a relief from writing poetry—the very technical, concrete nature of the work, of bringing a project through to completion. I've always enjoyed making things, and printing is a good outlet for one's perfectionist tendencies. Most printers I know are obsessive perfectionists. The poets I know are too, but I feel I'm always trying to manage my obsessiveness in poetry, to not let it get too much hold, because I want to have a kind of freedom too, a looseness that will come into tension with the tighter, more constrained parts of my nature. That is not to say that the creative activity of printing, of designing a book or a broadside doesn't require that same kind of balance. Now that I think about it, the two processes are probably not that different from each other. They just feel different to me. And I like the mechanical aspects of printing. The machines are very cool, and it's satifying to figure how to work them. I wish I had more time to print right now, but I'm moving around too much. I haven't been in the vicinity of my own press for quite a while and I miss it. Now, though, I will have to admit that I have noticed, lately, words and ideas from the realm of printing making their way into my poems. So there must be some subliminal cross-over going on.

**DW:** Can you talk more about this "tension" in your poetry? How do you see it working?

**EW:** The specific kind of tension I think I was referring to is the one I feel between the stringencies of the process—formal elements, syntactical efforts to "make sense," precision of image or diction, all the things that feel rigorous to

me—coming up against a desire to be in the flow and flux of imagining, of incipient meaning, of the poem's becoming something of its own, sort of despite me or despite whatever intention I might have started with. I've had plenty of experiences that I would identify as a kind of verbal strangulation, where the stringencies hold too much power and the poem can never quite become something interesting or alive to its own mechanisms. That sounds oxymoronic. But it is a kind of aliveness—that not-quite-pin-downable quality that poems have when they succeed—that sense of them having truly been discoveries—that is what I am always after. But it doesn't always happen, probably for one of two reasons: not enough rigor or not enough freedom. Or both. I'm probably more naturally bent toward the former so I feel I have to counter that part of myself a bit to stay open and loose in a poem, as it's going along. I have a narrowing-off tendency, a demonic editor, that I have to work against. It's a tension that extends into other parts of my life, of course. Poetic struggles seem to tend to do that.

**DW:** The idea of the poem "becoming something of its own" is such a slippery concept. It seems to beg the question of the role of the poet in creation. Where do you feel positioned in relation to your poetry?

**EW:** It is a slippery concept. I think what I'm getting at is the way in which the poem derives, in part, from processes or reservoirs that one may not necessarily be aware of—all the things that can happen in a poem that surprise the writer, or feel surprising because they are not prompted by conscious intentions or aims. And in fact, we often are not even aware of these things until someone else points them out to us. I guess I am always wanting that kind of subliminal activity to be going on, so the problem becomes one of admitting it into the process or at least not putting up too many barriers to it. It's a tricky area. The terrain between conscious control of the act of writing and unconscious entrapments and happenings that have a way of surfacing through the engagement with language. It's probably more of an effect of a state of being. I don't know. That's getting a little gauzy. I like Frost's concept of the "freedom of [his] material"—admittedly a difficult thing to talk about.

**DW:** I think the idea of the "state of being" of the poet in the act of creation is fascinating—but it raises so many questions for me. If the language of the poem comes out of an 'openness'—to the subliminal, to the possible, to a source—it would seem to me an intensely personal process; one that might result in a poem that is, for a reader, difficult to access in the way a traditional narrative might be said to be accessible. What then, in your mind, does poetry 'do'? Does it have at its origin the recreation of this 'genesic' state in the reader?

Or is it something else?

**EW:** I don't really know what it "does." What does any art form do? But it does do something. Something happens. Something changes for me, the reader. Whether it's a momentary shift in the material, in the surface of the "real" (I was just reading Nabokov's statement about "reality" being the only word that should never be used except in quotation marks!) or in my sense of what is real or fixed in the world, I'm not sure. It seems to come down to a feeling of gaps, displacements, or little tears and stretches in my perception of the appearances of things, accepted notions and deductions. It can be physical gaps or emotional gaps or psychological gaps or moral gaps or intellectual gaps. Probably all of these things together and overlapping with each other. "Genesic" is probably apt but so too, the decompositional, the destructive and constructive both. Language, when put to its full powers, seems so incredibly alive and flexible and plastic to me. Utterly fixative and utterly fugitive. As far as its effects being more or less accessible, I guess I always have some sort of faith that it will "read," generally or particularly. When I am reading, that feeling of things getting across, however partially and strangely, is always so marvelous to me, so thrilling, so hopeful. I realize I am describing a paradoxical thing: the idea of writing getting something across and at the same time eliciting a feeling of the gaps. I'm sorry to be so abstruse. I do not often think about the question of accessibility while I am writing. I am not sure I am thinking about much beyond what the words are accomplishing together in their little field, what effects they are having, what associations they are dragging in. What further abridgements they are making toward. I am concerned with having that experience, of getting across something difficult in myself.

**DW:** In many of your poems there is a 'you' addressed (I'm thinking specifically of "Ontogeny"). How do you see apostrophic address working in your poems?

**EW:** I think it's just another thing that makes itself available to me as I push into a piece of writing. In that series called "Ontogeny," the poems are addressing, in many cases, a particular "you" are an instance of trying to write about a particular intimate relationship. I think there is slippage, though, where the "you" becomes sort of frayed, or layered with other things, other levels of address or shades of address. It feels like a self-address at some points. So my instinct was to keep it somewhat open. I was interested in ways that relationships can be thought of as a kind of evolution, or a thing that evolves, or devolves as the case may be. That series is really, to me, a kind of reverse ontogeny, starting from the most "evolved" state and tracing back to a less formed, or fixed, state. The order

of the sequence goes back in time. The word "unstructuring" in the last poem is, I think, angling toward a sense of that process of devolution, or loss of form or structural integrity. That as much as things evolve and "structure" themselves as they go, they are also always in the process of being broken down. Maybe that is why the "you" (and the "we") disappears in that last poem. It's sort of existing before the fact. There's no "other" to face yet, or to understand oneself in relationship to—since it was the first poem I wrote, I'm sure I didn't yet know I was going to write a series that would be addressed to anyone. The poems are arranged in the reverse order in which I wrote them. So there must have been something I wanted to gain by reading them back to myself, backwards, a kind of mirror image of the process of writing them. I don't remember that I set out to write a poem of overt address, per se; that's just what it became as I went and as the "facts" kept pushing their way in. Other times, I think the formal address has arisen out of some need to speak to a general entity, to the species perhaps, or to our historical antecedants or collective consciousness, to adopt an overly psychological frame. I really think these things just happen as a poem moves forward. And even if there is not a formal address, the poem is speaking to some implied other person, or group of persons or something else.

But I wanted to get back to the question of accessibility because I was just reading something by the Russian filmmaker, Andrey Tarkovsky, that seemed relevant. Mainly I was struck by his description of the relationship between the film (as it represents the creative consciousness of the director, or "author") and the audience as one of essentially reciprocal activity. That the audience is not a passive receiver of the work, but rather a partner in formulating and realizing its potential. That it is a communal undertaking that requires creative effort on both sides. And I was thinking how reading really is the same, for me—it is an active effort, a striving for understanding, a striving to feel the residue of the work, its "unified field," to meet up with it and really feel it. It is an engagement that requires effort, and time, and the extension of myself. And I find this the most rewarding kind of reading—where I feel the thing is just out of my grasp, maybe three or four steps, or many more, ahead of me, and I feel that incredible gift of something truly fresh and genuinely challenging in its reaches. So I feel works of art are accessible, always, depending on my ability to go toward them, to engage with them and push myself to the point where I feel the strain, the possibility of more than I might ever be able to grasp. And that this is really a complementary feeling to being in the writing of a poem.

**DW:** I wanted to ask you about the role of nature in your poems. I'm thinking of your beautiful poem "Winter Journal". I get the sense that many poets feel uncomfortable with natural imagery—trees, fish, birds—almost as if it is embar-

rassing to utter these words. Do you find this to be the case? How do you feel nature to be working in your poems?

**EW:** "Nature" is almost always a part of my subject matter—it is the material at hand, an endlessly complicated subject. I may at times ask myself why I do not write poems with more people or manmade things in them. But this is, I think, a superficial question. I find the material facts of "nature" to be endlessly interesting, but really, the distinctions pretty quickly break down. Being outside, in the physical surroundings, was one of the things that prompted me to write poems from the start. I am much more inclined now to try to get at the finer grains of the term—ideas of subjectivity, of my own "nature," concepts of what is "natural" vs. what is not, all of these various complicating layers. I think the thing that always surfaces for me in writing (and I'm not even sure I ever really feel that I am writing "about nature"), or that I always feel myself coming up against, is a sense of its fundamental intractability. That whatever form my investigations take, "nature" remains somehow silent to me. Of course, nature is not inured, and we seem to be very good at bending it to our will. But just that it is such a slippery and in some ways, unknowable, thing, uncategorizable, ultimately elusive as a concept as much as a real entity—even as we pursue it with greater and greater technical understanding. I feel I have this experience often. Of being in a natural setting and finding it utterly mysterious, utterly confounding in its revealed detail. It defies explication. And as I keep going down that road, I am continually amazed at how rich it is a subject matter. A real "matter," in all the senses of that word. It is inexhaustible because it is so fundamental, and so fundamental to poetry, really. Because every poem that is ostensibly "about nature" is a construction, in its way, is an act of subjective choices and renderings, of high artifice. Even the most "natural" seeming things. And so I feel I am always in the thick of this. In a poem, there is the knowledge, always, that I am "reconstructing" a physical memory or experience of the natural world, and bending it to my will, "seeing" it in a way that is useful to me. And that process often becomes the real subject. And that seems both highly problematic and utterly crucial. I think at the heart of it must be a desire to remain aware and sensate. To be alive to the world, which I think is a part of every artist's quest. This seems very, very important to me. But then I am compelled to make something—to mess around with the given. And the pressure of that boundary is very critical to me.

**DW:** Though it seems impossible for anyone to say how one's poems are 'coming along', I'm curious as to what you're working on at the moment and how it seems to be revealing itself.

**EW:** I have been accumulating new poems for a few years now that, in some ways, feel like experiments in extending the work of those Winter Journal poems. Trying to open up the forms, to keep pressure and sustain. I had gotten myself into a little formal trap, in some ways, in my first book—though it was very useful up to a point—of short coupleted poems. The process there began to dictate a limit of length that I became impatient with. The Winter Journal was the key, the intermediate step—it really opened things up for me in a way that is still manifesting. So I'm just hoping to keep going in that. To build bigger, more complex, more interesting things.

## Sawako Nakayasu

from *Texture Notes*

Bicycle texture.

Take five radically different groups of people. The groups may radically differ in the usual categories (such as size, shape, color) or others (such as surface area, scent, hair texture, politics, emotional predicaments). Lead them by the hand, and then let go and give them a choice: field of flowers, field of gold, field of dreams, field of vision, field of applicants, field of corn, field of bicycles, field of bicycles.

Thickness of the anti-tropism.

Devil in my kitchen

Lets loose all the contents of my refrigerator and they scatter, all the food, condiments, ice cubes, and they plant themselves, on the table, atop the tv, at the base of a potted plant, and they grow roots, dig in before they rot in place all over the place all over the place.

Character sketch:

Fullness in its attempt to achieve itself.
Spread thin to the point of being everywhere.

I gather, and gather, and gather, but once the spilling sets in again I spill into the nearest ocean – in order to let the spilling be even, in order to be fair, to be fast, to be true – which is why I need to live near oceans.

A hierarchy where fast truth is better than its slow equivalent, and a commonality of the things which are not true no matter how hard you look or how hard I swim, in how near which ocean.

Is always at the approach, that danger called good enough.

I bring it all, everything that fits, all of it spilling over, I stumble forth with it all of it, if only to arrive at process.

*Hallway*

In the dream you meet the house
and whisper
melodies are like this
the leaves turn the shower
of green, your mirror is drawn
and the backsilver
tightens: bride you are, and
bride you will be
my fleeting fleeting
shoeshine of earth–
door to door to window
you go, the gentians each
with their hallway lights
mother of the house
is your next step, breath
on it like a
single wing that takes
a slug of the transparent
as you leave the house
for a bed heavy
as a bag of honey.

*This Morning*

He is feeding at the branch outside my window.
His brightness compels him.

Like the curious clod I set in
my maw and forgot.

Music of expulsion; ground-music
tallying bits of bark in which

an insect might make of its cowering a notion of
bliss.

I will spend this winter with you by the sea
beneath the glossy pilings by the sea.

There weather chases us
into its other weave, syllables–dried sap–

thermal garment taking us in
indifferent.

Today's rain, and yesterday's melted snow, weighted
the gutter with the usual

tangle of debris; debris came out of its hiding to
tangle the gutter.

*Rent*

Unfitness: two walled rooms
in a hut
in the exposed elements
with the riddling rims

room for one but two
would have to do compressing
one in the other's
scudding mass

owing to a lack of ownership
in feeling

gainsaid
in the larder

outnumbered

*Song*

Landed in its

nettles, its sunlit trench

in which a root was
notched by the tool's
dull edge, sorted, corded, tagged, dragged

off my an element, a wind,

turned to cinder, done

this way he will not grow back

Landed
on the path between former trees

traversing the foothills

in golden serrations

at his side despite ourselves, fingers

plying the air with small translucent kites

playthings fed to the birds

like decoys

this way he can proceed
without pause

hedge having been cleared
outbuildings pulled apart
barrels patched with tar

how could he lift himself straight up

how will we meet up or join

onetime ridge
high and lonely pheasant's nest
flecked with eggshell

*The Responsible Neighbor*

## Jacob M. Appel

All through that hysterical spring, while the terror level swung up and down like a dowsing rod and utility workers dabbled in surveillance, Eric Mitnock joked about turning in the neighbors. *Not only is it our patriotic duty,* the thirty year old toxicologist explained, *but it means shorter lines in the laundry room.* So on the afternoon the FBI arrested two Saudi dental students for videotaping the Kensico Dam, Eric proposed beating a confession from Mrs. Pappas, the widow in 1B who tended the marigolds and impatiens around the stoop. And after investigators charged a Romanian grocer under the Patriot Act with distilling ricin in his bathtub, Eric suggested the building ban castor beans, as it had previously prohibited pit-bulls. His wife tolerated this cynicism. Natalie had once fantasized of becoming an ACLU lawyer, and she assigned Kafka's *The Trial* to her twelfth graders, but a colleague's nephew had lost both hands in an Israeli nightclub bombing, so she'd grown sensitive to competing points-of-view. Fortunately, domestic espionage was the sort of non-negotiable yet remote topic upon which an otherwise happy couple might disagree, like reproductive cloning or Shakespeare's identity—or so Eric believed until that Saturday morning, around one o'clock, when they awoke to the hammering of an unknown fist at their door.

Eric feared the building had caught fire. He pulled his jeans over his boxer shorts, shoved his bare feet into his sneakers. "Where's the goddam cat?!"

"I'll get her," said Natalie. She flipped on the reading lamp.

Eric squeezed his wife's wrist. "I love you," he said. Then he bolted from the room, still struggling into his shirt. The pounding on the door continued—arrhythmic, like a diseased heart.

In the entryway, where he'd expected to encounter searing smoke and flames eating at the rafters, the air smelled of shellac, not melting plastic. Natalie had been varnishing antique furniture. While Eric dragged a mahogany teapoy away from the door—nearly tripping backwards over a UPS package he'd taken in for a neighbor—it struck him that there'd be no swirling inferno. Only police. A SWAT team. Or interrogators armed with brass knuckles.

"Coming!" he shouted.

Eric slid open the deadbolt and unhooked the lower latch. He'd hardly turned the knob when their midnight caller pushed the door in all the way.

"You have my parcel," charged the man.

The accuser was a short, paunchy middle-easterner in his forties. Thick stubble veiled his cheeks, and his nose veered sharply off-kilter. Blood tinted his sunken eyes. In one hand, he waved a narrow slip of paper.

"Your what?" demanded Eric. Natalie came up beside him, clutching the cat to her bathrobe.

"You've taken my parcel," the man insisted. He thrust forward his paper slip.

"Who the hell are you?"

"They left me a note. Here. It says 4D," said the man.

Eric felt Natalie's hand gripping his shoulder. "He's from across the hall," she said. "He teaches singing."

"It's three in the fucking morning," snapped Eric.

"I understand it is late, but my parcel is highly important," said the man—his voice agitated, his accent more British than Arab. "Ah! There it is!" The man stepped toward Eric and retrieved the UPS package, struggling under its weight. "I'll have to ask you not to pick up my parcels in the future."

"I was trying to be helpful. This is outrageous."

Natalie's fingers tightened around Eric's arm.

"They asked me to sign," he said, "so I signed."

"Please," warned the man. "Do not do this again."

Eric watched his neighbor disappear into apartment 4K. (That was where Allan and Judy Landau had lived: For ages, he'd meant to invite the Landaus to dinner, since Natalie and Judy had both gone to Vassar, but they'd split up before he'd had the chance.) "I should call the goddam police," Eric shouted into the empty corridor. Then he slammed the door.

"I *should* call the police," Eric said again—to Natalie. "Who the hell does this guy think he is?"

"What do you suppose was in that box?" she asked. "It looked awfully heavy."

"Beats the shit out of me. Whatever it was, it couldn't have been important enough to wake us up."

"*He* thought it was," said Natalie

She led them back to the bedroom. The cat hissed and jumped from her arms.

"He seemed so desperate," she said. "I hope he's not up to something illegal."

Eric shrugged. "Do you want me to go ask him?"

"You don't think it could have been explosives?"

"Nope," said Eric. "It was fifteen bricks of cocaine, two hundred indecent photographs of young children and a tusk from an endangered Sumatran rhinoceros. I could tell by the weight."

"You don't think he's a terrorist, do you?"

Eric grinned. "Okay," he said. "Very clever."

He turned to kiss his wife—but she was sitting rigid at the foot of the bed, and she wasn't smiling.

They slept in that morning. The *Sunday Times* had already sold out when Eric arrived at his corner bodega, and Mrs. Greenblatt's no longer had any whitefish chubs, but Eric didn't blame these inconveniences on the jerk in 4K. A college internship at the medical examiner's office had taught him where grudges led—arsenic, digitalis, cyanide. Besides, the day was flawless. Sunlight warmed the breeze. Crabapple blossoms coated the sidewalks with delicate white petals. In the playground on the corner, boys in yarmulkes tossed bread crusts to a pair of Canada geese. Eric didn't mind walking the extra three blocks for a newspaper. He whistled on the way: "Wonderful, Wonderful Copenhagen"; "Paris in the Springtime"; "I Left My Heart in San Francisco." When he arrived back home, armed with a half pound of Bay of Fundy nova, he'd shaken off the previous night's intrusion.

Their building was a six story walkup. It had through successive incarnations been German, Ukrainian-Finnish, Jewish-Italian, boarded-up, nearly razed for an expressway ramp and, because Irving Berlin had composed "Alexander's Ragtime Band" on the premises, preserved as a cultural landmark, but now it housed mostly young artists and couples who couldn't afford Manhattan. Eric had lived there eight years—the last seven married to Natalie. He'd never once experienced trouble with his neighbors. They led their lives. He led his. (Though during these six years he'd endorsed dozens of petitions and purchased countless Girl Scout cookies.) That made his run-in with the man in 4K all the more unsettling. Eric considered pausing on the stoop to ask Mrs. Pappas about the new tenant—if anybody might know the contents of his package, she would—but it didn't seem worth the bother. He merely waved and complimented the old woman on her begonias. In his own apartment, coffee perfumed the air. Natalie had brewed fresh espresso.

"I'm home!" Eric called.

"I know!" Natalie answered from the kitchen.

Eric kissed her on the knuckles. Then on the lips. While she poured the espresso, he separated the newspaper into piles. In his stack went the headlines, the metro, the business. She got the magazine and the week-in-review. Also the obituaries. They'd battle over the travel section—a struggle that usually ended

in tickling, and sex. (He'd once made the mistake of purchasing two papers, with two travel sections, which she'd taken as a personal rejection.) After they made love, she would remain in bed for the crossword puzzle.

"I've sworn off the marriage announcements," Natalie declared. "Jessie Podolnick lectured me on how they're classist. Jessie's that tenth grade cheerleader I told you about, the one who thinks she's a communist. She was pretty convincing."

"Classist?" Eric sipped his coffee. "Charging money for the paper is classist."

"That's different."

"They should print divorce notices instead," he said. "They'd sell more papers."

Eric watched his wife buttering her bagel. He found her tiny hands exquisite; they reminded him of a doll's gloves. "I adore the way you eat," he said.

"You mean you adore that I'm not filling out," scoffed Natalie—but he sensed her delight. "If I looked liked Raymond Burr, you'd sing a different tune."

Eric scanned the headlines. Afghanistan. Venezuela. Equatorial Guinea. How he missed the great Pax Clintonia!

"On the subject of singing," continued Natalie. "I've been thinking more about last night."

"Last night? What happened last night?"

"I'm serious, honey. Maybe we *should* call the police. To be safe."

Eric folded his paper. "And tell them what? That our neighbor is an asshole?"

"What harm could it do?"

"What harm could it do?" echoed Eric. "I can't believe you're even asking that. How do we know the man's story? Maybe he overstayed his student visa. Or he's wanted on some petty drug charge. You're not going to have the man deported—or tortured in Guantánamo, for all we know—just because he woke us up in the middle of the night."

Natalie bit her lip. "It has nothing to do with waking us up. I'm worried about what was in that box."

"Because he's an Arab?" demanded Eric.

Natalie glared at him while she chewed her bagel.

"I'm sorry," said Eric. "I didn't mean that."

He reached for his wife's hand, but she drew it back. She stood up—sending the cat lurching off her lap—and crossed to the window.

"Yes, okay," she said. "That's part of it...."

A knock at the door kept her from completing her thought. A gentle, orderly knock. They exchanged looks to decide who'd answer it.

"I hope you didn't sign for another package while I was gone," said Eric. He

polished off his espresso; the caffeine was already surging through his arteries. "Or it could be the cops," he said. "Maybe the jerk turned us in. To be safe."

Another polite knock. Too polite for cops. Eric navigated a necropolis of partially lacquered bookshelves and opened the door.

It was the man from 4K again—but made over: Clean-shaven. Hair gelled. Sporting a white summer jacket with a red poppy in his lapel like a British colonial on Remembrance Day. He cradled a bouquet of jonquils and purple irises.

"I have come to apologize," he said. "For yesterday evening."

"More like this morning," grumbled Eric.

"Yes. More like this morning. I am sorry."

The man held out the floral arrangement. Eric didn't take it. They stood at impasse until Natalie swept into the entryway and scooped up the flowers.

"You know you terrified us," she said.

"Again, I am sorry. In my homeland, you will please understand, neighbors are not always to be trusted."

"That must have been an important package," said Natalie.

The man removed a mauve handkerchief from his breast pocket and dabbed his forehead. "From my family in Syria." He shifted his weight back and forth between the balls of his feet and his heels. "Sheet music," he added. "I am a tutor of voice."

"I've seen you putting up flyers at the bus shelter," conceded Natalie.

"Yuhanna Lebaton." The man displayed a soiled card:

YUHANNA LEBATON
VOICE INSTRUCTION
OPERA — JAZZ — MUWASHSHAH — BROADWAY

"Well, Mr. Lebaton...." interjected Eric—his hand still on the doorknob.

"I am interrupting," said Lebaton. "I do not wish to intrude."

"I'm sure we'll run into you," answered Eric.

He pushed shut the door. Natalie tugged him into the kitchen by the arm.

"Now do you see what I mean?" she whispered.

"He's going to be a pain in the ass," said Eric.

"You can't believe there was sheet music in that box. He could hardly lift it. And I'm sure they don't have UPS in Syria."

"So?"

"So I'm worried. We have to do something."

Eric perched himself at the edge of a captain's chair, sharing the seat with a

pair of ornate mantel clocks. The furniture had belonged to his wife's late stepmother. They'd planned to auction most of it on eBay, but Natalie kept putting off the sale. Deoxidizing the bronze handles on the chiffonier. Resurfacing the rosewood scrutoires. She wouldn't even take the dead woman's clothes to Goodwill. "How's the varnishing coming along?" Eric asked.

Natalie ignored him. "I've got it," she announced. "No police. No Immigration Service. All you do is sign up for a couple of singing lessons."

"You are joking."

"C'mon, honey. What does it cost to take a look around his apartment? You've always wanted to go back to singing anyway."

"I'd also like to play professional basketball—but I'm not having myself stretched on a rack. Besides, you know where I stand on this. I'd rather get blown up than spy on people."

"I know. I know," said Natalie. *"Because they who would give up an essential liberty for temporary security, deserve neither."*

Ben Franklin had been right, of course. Eric's own grandfather, a chemist, had fallen victim to the witch hunts of the 1950s. Falsely accused by a former research assistant. Blacklisted as a onetime fellow traveler. The story of Erwin Mitnock's final ordeal—unemployment, shock therapy, suicide—cast its shadow over Natalie's proposal. But this went beyond principle: Their new neighbor struck Eric as a mushrooming threat to his own peace-of-mind.

"Today, solfeggio lessons," he said. "Tomorrow, the Gestapo rips out our toenails."

Natalie clasped both his hands in hers and gazed up at him. "I'm begging you, honey. One quick look around."

This was the same tone of voice she used when she pleaded with him not to eat fugu or not to drive in the passing lane on the interstate. He'd fallen in love with a woman who phoned her own answering machine to make certain her apartment hadn't burned to the ground—and the prospect of another breakdown terrified him.

"You do understand this is crazy?" asked Eric.

"If I admit it's crazy, will you do it for me?"

Eric nodded. "You know I will."

"Then it's totally insane," said Natalie.

She pulled him toward her and rested her head against his chest. She kissed the veins along the inside of his forearm and asked, "Where's the travel section?"

The following evening—after the Homeland Security Administration issued emergency warnings about chemical plants and sea-based attacks—Eric knocked on the voice instructor's door. The toxicologist was exhausted from a

surprise state inspection at the lab. His lower back ached. His feet throbbed. He wanted to produce only one type of music: The sound of his ass against the couch. On the bus ride home, Eric had hoped he'd find the voice instructor away—maybe hospitalized with the summer flu—yet he was secretly pleased when the Syrian answered the door in his bathrobe. Under his terrycloth robe the man wore pinstriped pajamas. A sleeping mask crowned his head like a pair of sunglasses.

"My neighbor," said Lebaton. "What a delight."

"I woke you up."

"Just a nap. Now we are even."

Eric let the remark pass. Nobody in his right mind would equate a six p.m. visit with a one a.m. home invasion, but Eric didn't exactly hold the moral high ground.

"I thought I might take a singing lesson," he said. His words rang false—utterly implausible.

The Syrian rubbed his palms together. "I am so glad. So very glad. Please do come inside and we will begin at once."

"What I meant was—"

"It will wait, whatever it is," said the singing instructor. "I think it's essential to start when one is at the peak of one's enthusiasm."

Lebaton led Eric into his poorly-ventilated apartment. It appeared far smaller without Judy Landau's carefully arranged mirrors and wardrobes. Only inches separated a threadbare recliner from a television mounted atop milk crates. Along the back wall ran a paisley loveseat, missing one antimacassar, and an unfinished wooden bookcase displaying a handful of books. All Arabic titles. Maps of Vermont and the New York City Subway System hung on the closet door. Eric scrutinized the room: the empty takeout tins, the soda cans doubling as ashtrays, the overabundance of granite figurines. What was he looking for? He had no clue how to identify explosives—unless they resembled the red dynamite sticks from the Road Runner cartoons, which he highly doubted. But he also doubted Al-Qaeda shipped bombs via UPS.

The Syrian seated himself at a cocktail piano whose higher keys had lost their enamel. He motioned for Eric to pull up a stool.

"What sort of singing are you interested in learning?" asked Lebaton. "I will confess, Mr. Mitnock, I did not take you for a music lover."

"I don't really know," said Eric.

"Of course, you don't," said Lebaton. He patted Eric on the knee. "This is your wife's idea, isn't it? You can be honest."

Eric didn't answer—what could he possibly say? His career in espionage hadn't lasted twenty minutes.

"I am no stranger to such matters, Mr. Mitnock," said Lebaton. He played scales while he spoke. "Many men come to me in the hope of pleasing their wives, particularly if they have reached a—what might we call it?—a stagnant period. It is far more common than you might think."

"That's not what—"

Lebaton held up his hand. "No explanations necessary. We will make a virtuoso out of you yet—whatever your motives. *When horses are unavailable,* as they say, *one must saddle dogs.*" The Syrian stretched his fingers, one at a time, and adjusted his shirt cuffs. "In Aleppo, I taught men in your circumstances traditional muwashshah melodies...but here, maybe, we will start with Cole Porter...."

Lebaton drew his bench closer to the piano. He struck up the opening notes of "Could It Be You"?

The music hardly registered with Eric. He was focused on the numerous granite figurines: statues of dolphins, elephant herds, a club-tailed beaver—deciding whether they might conceal TNT or hollow compartments for blueprints. They didn't, obviously, but he wanted to tell Natalie that he'd tried his best.

"Do you like Cole Porter?" asked Lebaton.

Eric continued scanning the room for contraband. "He's fine."

"I am a great admirer of men like Cole Porter," said Lebaton. "Lorenz Hart. Leonard Bernstein. Does that surprise you?"

"Should it?"

"I am also a Christian," said Lebaton. "A Maronite Christian. Descended from Samaritan traders. That comes as another surprise to many Americans."

"I'm sure it does," Eric said uneasily.

"They like to introduce me as a Christian. That makes me okay."

The Syrian played another few bars of Cole Porter.

"And what about you?" asked Lebaton. "I have heard you work with poisons?"

That caught Eric's attention. "Who told you that?"

"The lady who gardens. I forget her name."

"I just work in a lab," said Eric.

"Excuse me, Mr. Mitnock. You have labored hard all day. It is rude of me to ask about such matters. We will talk more on another occasion, I hope." He passed Eric a well worn libretto. "Now stand up. Let's test your range."

They didn't speak much after that. Eric worked his way through the Porter repertoire. "You'd Be So Nice To Come Home To". "I've Got You Under My Skin". "Paris Loves Lovers". He sensed that he'd drifted out of key several times. Lebaton listened. Occasionally, the instructor shook his head. One time, he winced as though he'd caught his finger in a mousetrap. Let's try something in

a lower octave, he suggested. Later: Something less intricate. Eventually, he asked if Eric knew any songs by memory—and they concluded with "Wonderful, Wonderful Copenhagen." The singing instructor looked as though he'd been ravaged by wolves.

"We may have our work cut out for us," said Lebaton.

"How much do I owe you?" asked Eric.

"For you," said the tutor. "Nothing."

"How does fifty dollars sound?"

"I won't have it," insisted Lebaton. "I must make amends for yesterday night. Besides, I do not know many people in New York. It is good to have a friend. Now when would you like your first lesson?"

"I'll get back to you."

"Nonsense. Students say that and never return. Please name your time. My schedule is entirely flexible. Would you like to say Wednesday at six?"

"I'll get back to you."

Eric retreated toward the door and "accidentally" knocked the granite beaver off the coffee table. The tail cracked lose from the body.

"Jesus. I'm sorry," said Eric. "I didn't mean...."

"It's all right, really," said Lebaton—but Eric could sense that it wasn't.

The toxicologist picked up both pieces. Solid stones.

He found Natalie reading the news on the internet. She'd swapped her teaching outfit for sweatpants and a tank-top, exposing her pale, emaciated arms. His wife's weight loss frightened Eric. Her wrists had thinned so much that he could wrap one hand around both of them simultaneously. At the same time, her fragility fed his affection. He snuck up behind her and kissed the back of her head.

"How was school?" he asked.

"There was a bomb scare in Manila," she said. "At a mall."

She spoke as though this has been part of her own day—as though Eric should plan his life accordingly.

"I won't shop there," he said.

Natalie swiveled around her chair. "So? Any progress?"

"The man couldn't blow up a balloon."

"You found the box?"

"Nope," admitted Eric. "But you've got the wrong guy. For starters, he's a Christian. And I think he tried to make a pass at me."

He related his encounter with the Syrian in painstaking detail. Natalie showed particular interest in the questions about Eric's work—but also found cause for concern where Eric hadn't: the map of the subway system, the effort

Lebaton made to reveal his religion.

"How do you know he's a Christian?" she demanded.

"He told me so himself."

"And you took his word for it? Did you see a Bible? Crosses on the walls?"

Eric stood beside the freestanding globe and spun it randomly. "Trust me on this one. He's just a lonely singing tutor. He's into Cole Porter for Christ's sake."

"But you didn't find the box?"

"If that box did contain bomb-making materials or grenades or whatever, and Lebaton is some sort of terrorist mastermind, do you really think he'd leave it lying around his apartment?"

"Who knows how these people think? Adolf Eichmann was listed under his own name in the Buenos Aires phonebook."

Eric draped his tie over the chair back. He placed shoetrees inside his loafers. If he said nothing, he hoped Natalie might drop the subject.

"I checked with Mrs. Pappas," Natalie continued. "She says Lebaton hasn't had any visitors in five weeks. Strange for a voice tutor, don't you think?"

Eric fought the desire to answer.

"According to Jorge, he pays his rent in cash."

Jorge was the super who flirted with the female tenants. Eric trusted him far less than he trusted the overweight music instructor.

"Say something, dammit," demanded Natalie.

"What do you want me to say?"

"I don't know." Natalie hid her face in her palms. "Why do I get like this? I just keep thinking of that poor kid with those plastic claws for hands...."

"It's okay," soothed Eric—though he wasn't so sure. "I promise."

He wrapped his arms around his wife's back, squeezing her toward him, savoring the warmth of her body. Even her sobs were delicate. Tiny rabbit-like breaths.

She was the one who broke their embrace. "When is your next lesson?"

"Please, let's put this behind us."

"How can we? Don't you read the news?"

Eric's laboratory at NYU was a news-free zone. His research—developing an antidote for methyliodide poisoning, a malady common among glassblowers—didn't require waiting for organic tissues to proliferate. Downtime was minimal. The few technicians who'd brought in radios after 9-11 had taken them back home. This sheltered Eric from any breaking story, short of nuclear winter. (What a contrast to Natalie, who checked the headlines between each class period.) On the day of his second visit to the Syrian, the national terror

warning had been reiterated—though trains, rather than ships, were now the target—but Eric didn't know the first thing about it. Nor did he care. His only goal was to wrap up his private investigation.

"So soon," Lebaton greeted him. "You could not stay away."

"I had some spare time," said Eric.

"I understand. Say no more."

Lebaton motioned Eric toward a line taped on the carpet. Instead of playing the piano, he circled his pupil as though admiring a statue—or a nude model. "We must begin with a yawn," he said. "Relax your throat. Let your larynx drop...." This was building a head voice, Lebaton explained. It consumed almost an hour. "Now continue your yawns and repeat the word 'dumb' while holding your fingers against your throat."

"Dumb, dumb, dumb," sang Eric.

"No, longer," objected Lebaton. "Duuuumb. Duuuumb."

"Duuuumb. Duuuumb," repeated Eric. He wondered if the Syrian were making fun of him, the sort of prank one saw on *Candid Camera*. (His vocal lessons in junior high school had consisted only of singing.) Lebaton drank three cans of Diet Pepsi while Eric "sang," but didn't once use the toilet. No opportunity arose to sneak into the man's bedroom or—another of Natalie's ideas—to photograph the Arabic titles of his books for future translation.

"That's enough singing for one day," said Lebaton.

Eric cleared his throat. "Do I pass?"

"It is not a matter of pass or of fail," replied the tutor. "But you are too much like water, taking the tint of all colors. Singing is about expressing your inner secrets."

"I'm not very secretive," said Eric.

"I believe otherwise," answered Lebaton. "Sometimes we have secrets we ourselves do not recognize. Singing releases them."

Eric retrieved his briefcase from the sofa. "Thank you for the lesson."

"Let me make you some tea," offered Lebaton.

"I really can't," said Eric. Then he considered the diuretic properties of tea. "All right, maybe one cup...."

So they sat in the living room and the Syrian shared his life story. Or at least what he presented as his life story. Lebaton claimed that his singing lessons had been highly sought after in Aleppo until his brother-in-law had run afoul of the authorities and been sent to Tadmor prison. Then nothing. Another brother-in-law, an optometrist, had brought him to Liverpool—but the work proved no better. Who wanted to study voice with an Arab where Italian graduate students were plentiful? The brother-in-law urged him to "do it the American way": change his last name to Tchaikovsky or Rachmaninoff; claim he'd been a leading

conductor in pre-siege Sarajevo (The optometrist called this "sticking your best foot forward." Yuhanna did not know what to call it). For a while Lebaton taught piano to middleclass Indian girls. Not glamorous work, but you had to stretch your legs according to your quilt. Then last autumn he'd befriended the sculptor who'd fashioned the granite animals.

"He is not from Syria either," said Lebaton. "He's a married man from Vermont."

The "either" left Eric on edge. He stood up to leave—defeated by the tutor's stainless steel bladder. "Thank you for the tea," he said.

"Allow me to use the toilet," said Lebaton. "Then I'll show you out."

Too good to be true, thought Eric—and it was. The Syrian didn't close the bathroom door while he urinated, preventing Eric from exploring the bedroom. The toxicologist did manage to photograph three book titles. When Lebaton returned, he placed his hand on Eric's shoulder. "Wesley will be coming to New York. I do not wish his visit to interfere with our lessons."

"Why would it?" asked Eric.

"I am glad to hear that."

Eric grinned—fingering the digital camera in his jacket pocket. He knew that what he'd done was wrong. Totally aberrant. But there was no denying the other reality: His thirty seconds of photo-snapping had been fun.

That night they dined on Lebanese food in Cobble Hill. Babaganouj. Meat-pie dumplings. Sautéed cauliflower topped with yoghurt and pine nuts. They'd been eating at Café Jeita every Thursday since the attacks of September 11th in a show of solidarity with the local Middle Eastern community. Rafiq, the owner, knew them well. (On quiet nights, Rafiq's wife took Natalie upstairs to see the twins while he invited Eric across the street to his social club for a round of darts.) How could Eric justify his snooping to the restaurateur? He couldn't. He didn't even want to show his face. But Natalie rejected his other suggestions—pad thai on 23rd Street, tapas in New Jersey. She was determined to have Rafiq translate the photographs.

The hostess, Rafiq's teenager daughter, steered them through the bustling main dining room to a cozy nook behind a silk curtain. Images of prewar Beirut decorated the cedar-paneled walls. They sat beneath a photo labeled: Martyr Square, 1971. It reminded Eric of Miami Beach. That was where Grandma Rose had retired after his grandfather's suicide. It would be so easy, Eric knew, to end this absurd investigation. All it required was one sentence. Telling Natalie that he'd found the box. That it contained bricks. Or music carved onto bricks. Who cared? Natalie would accept anything he told her. It was so easy. But also impossible. That meant lying to her—the sort of small falsehood that would

require ever larger cover-ups.

Rafiq greeted them with baklava and lady fingers on the house. "No darts tonight, I'm afraid," he said. When Natalie explained that they needed several photographs translated—part of a school project for "her niece"—Rafiq was delighted to help. He even chatted with Natalie at length about the fabricated child.

"This picture," said the restaurateur, "says, *Elements of Vocal Technique*....and this one says, *Advanced Riggs Method*." Rafiq smiled. "This third one is by an American. *Blades of Grass* by Walter Whiteman."

Natalie thanked Rafiq and sent her love to the twins.

"Whitman," said Eric. "I told you he was coming on to me. Are you satisfied he's not going to blow us up?"

"This doesn't prove anything," said Natalie. "If you were masterminding a terrorist attack, you wouldn't leave evidence lying around."

"I swear you're driving me nuts. What happened to Adolf Eichmann and the telephone book?"

"I wasn't thinking clearly," said Natalie. "We have to call the police. I just can't see any way around it."

Eric slammed his fist on the table. "You are not calling the police," he said

"I'm a grown adult," she answered sharply. "I can call whoever I want."

Rafiq's daughter entered the alcove to drop off the bill. Eric waited until the girl left. "Of course you can call whoever you want. But I'm asking you not to. Please, Natalie. Let me take care of this."

"Then take care of it, Eric. Or I will."

Eric left Café Jeita determined to resolve the matter immediately, even if that required pounding on the Syrian's door at one a.m.—but how? He could interrupt the man's sleep, but couldn't force his way into the man's bedroom. Nor was he certain what finding the box would accomplish. In order to absolve the voice instructor, he'd have to prove a negative. Never easy. Impossible when his wife construed all exonerating evidence as further indication of the man's cunning. How did they know Lebaton had a brother-in-law in prison? Or even that he was Syrian? According to Natalie, the tutor's story made too much sense. This upset her so much that on Wednesday—the same Wednesday a suspicious knapsack shut down Grand Central Station during rush hour—she stayed home from school. By Thursday, her diet consisted of seltzer and Xanax. She got out of bed only to inspect the Syrian's door through the peephole. Eric hinted at phoning a therapist. She responded by dialing "9-1" on the telephone, holding her finger above the final "1" until he apologized. (*It was the world that had gone insane. Not her.*) She also insisted he continue with his spying.

This wasn't the first time Natalie had snapped. When her father had died, she'd barricaded herself in the restroom at the kosher-style deli on 4th Street and refused to leave for nine hours; a five week stint in New York Psychiatric followed. That ordeal even made the *Daily News*. But this time—well, though he hated to admit it, Eric wasn't 100% sure she'd lost it. Or, rather, just because his wife was decompensating, didn't mean the Syrian wasn't up to no-good. Listening to Lebaton describe his dream of opening a dinner theater on the Cardo in Damascus, sashaying his torso while crooning snippets from *Oklahoma!* and *West Side Story*, Eric couldn't imagine the tutor as anything but a lonely middle-aged refugee. Yet the Syrian dropped numerous anti-Semitic remarks (about Ira Gershwin, Sammy Cahn), one time explaining: "I have nothing against Jews. Only Zionists." He resisted showing Eric his bedroom—despite frequent intimations. And he remained mysterious about the UPS package. When Eric asked point-blank what exactly the box had contained, Lebaton answered: "A gift from my friend." No word of family, Syria, sheet music. Never had Eric felt so torn.

By Friday—when the President elevated the terror level to red—Eric's eyes were bloodshot from sleep loss. He hadn't showered in two days. He'd run out of disposable razors and wore a twenty-four hour beard.

"What is troubling you, my friend?" asked Lebaton.

"I've had a lot on my mind."

The tutor sighed. "Me too. Wesley's coming. Tomorrow."

Eric noticed the absence of old pizza boxes. The carpet had been vacuumed. A draft blew through the curtainless windows.

"He's taking me to dinner at the Carousel Club," said Lebaton. "He wants to spent the entire day with me. What do you think I should do?"

Eric realized the man was asking him for advice—romantic advice. He rose abruptly. "I have to go home."

"I didn't mean—"

"I'm going now," said Eric. "Goodbye."

He picked up his briefcase and walked out the door.

Natalie greeted him at the threshold in a pink sundress. She'd painted her toenails burgundy and tucked one of Lebaton's jonquils above her ear. Eric still had his key in the door when she kissed him hard on the lips.

"What's going on?" he asked.

"I'm done with the furniture," she answered.

Eric was amazed to see the bookshelves varnished and neatly stacked on either side of the door to the pantry. Gone were the paint rollers, the carpet of

shellac-speckled newspaper. From the kitchen carried the rich aroma of simmering meat. Eric couldn't remember the last time Natalie had seemed so relaxed, so engaged with life—so much the woman he'd married. Certainly not in the past week. Maybe not since her parents had died. She'd even garnished the cat's collar with a scarlet ribbon. All through dinner—lamb chops, Moroccan style—she didn't say a word about their neighbor. Eric didn't dare.

For dessert, Natalie had baked her own key lime pie. It was more like key lime cake—chunks of lime embedded in flour—but Eric washed it down with wine.

"It's awful, isn't it?" asked Natalie.

"Experimental," answered Eric.

Natalie picked up the entire cake and dropped it in the trash pale. "I phoned Judy Landau today," she said.

Eric recognized his wife's tone: a combination of guilt and defiance. As though confessing to an a affair she did not intend to end. He kept silent.

"I figured she might have left a spare key with Jorge." Natalie held up a small steel latchkey dangling from a pink rubber band. She smiled. "I was right."

"Jesus-fucking-Christ."

"Jorge will never know I borrowed it. Besides, we're not going to steal anything."

All at once Eric understood that it was he, not his wife, who would use the key. That was the cost for keeping jonquils in Natalie's hair—a high price, but he would willingly pay higher. It was so inevitable, it wasn't worth disputing.

He held out his hand. Natalie folded his fingers around the key.

"Judy and Jorge...?" he asked.

"She said it wasn't serious," said Natalie. "I didn't want to upset you."

Syndicated television was the only frame of reference Eric had for slipping into his neighbor's apartment. *The Rockford Files. Cannon. Magnum P.I.* From these shows, he'd learned the basics: always wear black gloves; locate a hiding spot upon entering a room. But even as a teenager, Eric had preferred crime-solving to crime-stopping—that brand of armchair detective work practiced by Quincy and Perry Mason. The allure of intellectual sleuthing had led him into toxicology. Housebreaking, in contrast, felt criminal. Far more criminal in real life than it did on TV. Eric even feared the police might arrive while he was in Lebaton's apartment and conclude he was also part of the terrorist conspiracy. If there were a terrorist conspiracy. Which there wasn't.

The Syrian and his friend left the building around five o'clock. The friend, Wesley, appeared much older than Eric anticipated. Maybe sixty, sixty-five. He was also much darker than Eric expected—olive-skinned, broad-faced, possibly

Hispanic or Indonesian. Nothing about this was inherently suspicious, except that Eric had envisioned a lanky, fair-haired Wesley in his thirties. The toxicologist watched the pair's departure: first through his peephole, then from the kitchen window. The two men strolled slowly. When they finally reached the avenue and descended into the subway station, Eric darted across the corridor. He'd wanted Natalie to stand guard—but the pressure had proven too much for her. She'd taken a sedative. Luckily, their apartment and Lebaton's opened onto the same alcove. It was a small, dimly-lit recess that hooked behind the stairwell. The third apartment on the alcove stood empty. Under renovation. As long as the Syrian remained away, Eric wouldn't be disturbed.

During his initial moments in the tutor's apartment, Eric paused in the vestibule to gather his wherewithal. His pulse was racing. His hands quivered. How different the dark, still room looked without Lebaton pacing in circles! The man's entire life was now Eric's to explore—but the scope of his choices left him paralyzed. Should he check the closets? Inside the piano? Then some unknown gear clicked inside him and he walked decisively, as originally planned, into the Syrian's bedroom.

The bedroom was the larger of Lebaton's two rooms. Its central features were a sagging queen-size bed and a long, low-slung bureau. Atop the bureau sat two water-warped cartons and a French horn case. There was also a bag of laundry leaning against a halogen lamp. On the far side of the bed—out in the open—lay the UPS package:

FROM: WESLEY ALVARAO,
12 STATION PLACE
RUTLAND, VT 05701.

Eric opened the box with great care—fearful of what sudden contact might detonate—but there was no explosion. The package contained crumpled balls of writing paper, which, when unfolded, revealed markings in a language he didn't recognize. Indonesian? Some derivate of Arabic script? He spotted a bass clef and the word adagio. The scrawl was merely some form of musical shorthand.

He took a deep breath. He dug through the insulation and ran his fingers over a cold polished surface, then reached his entire hand inside and drew out another granite carving. This was larger than those in the outer room. The subjects were two idealized nude men, one sitting on the other's lap with his arm wrapped around his lover's neck. Lebaton and Wesley. That was all.

Eric was repackaging the statue as rapidly as possible when the murmur of voices rose in the hallway. Then he heard the bolt turn. The toxicologist suddenly realized he hadn't scouted out a hiding place. His television instincts kicked in

and he scooted under the bed, dragging the parcel with him. Only then did he sense his mistake: What if Lebaton and his friend made out on the bed?

"I'll pay you back the money, somehow," said Lebaton. "But I just can't do this."

"Do you know how hard I've been working to get you that visa?" demanded another voice—presumably Wesley's. "I don't want any money. What I want is an explanation."

The men's footsteps drew closer. One of them sat on the bed. It squeaked.

"You've met someone else, haven't you?" demanded Wesley. "You love someone else!"

A long silence. "Nothing's happened," Lebaton finally said. "He's just a neighbor....but his marriage is falling apart, so he's been coming over here each day.... and I don't know....I thought we agreed nothing was carved in stone...."

"So it's over. Just like that?" snapped Wesley.

The Syrian remained silent. A door closed, then another. After that Eric waited for hours while Lebaton sobbed himself to sleep.

Eric wandered the streets until the sky grew gray with light. He'd read somewhere that Brooklyn was the most diverse city in the nation—that an average resident of his own neighborhood encountered more people from different backgrounds in one week than the average inhabitant of Bangor, Maine, met in a lifetime. He noticed this more that morning. The shopkeepers rolling up security gratings wore turbans and kufis and taquiyahs. Deliverymen in guayaberas unloaded newspapers in tightly-bound dozens. Shirtless children sporting pavas, laughing, shrieking, hosed down the sidewalks and each other. All of these ordinary people went about their business, entirely unaware of Eric's grievous wrong. He'd have no choice but to apologize to Lebaton—to confess and let the chips fall where they may. Natalie would accept that. She'd have to. Not that confessing could undo the damage he'd caused—but it would be a start. And afterwards: Shame? Jail? Who knew?

Once he'd decided to confess, Eric actually felt good. Surprisingly so. He purchased four whitefish chubs at Mrs. Greenblatt's and a *Sunday New York Times* from a vendor in the park. What he wanted most was a quiet breakfast with Natalie, an opportunity to tell her how much he loved her. As he approached his building, Eric was seized with a deep, overpowering longing for his wife.

Then the sirens registered. The fire trucks. Police in SWAT uniforms.

Natalie came running toward him. "Eric! Thank God!"

She wrapped her arms around his waist.

He staggered back a step. "The police...."

"You didn't come home. I didn't know what to do."

"You called the police...."

An explosive anger took hold of Eric—as powerful as his longing had been. "Do you know what was in that box?" he demanded. "Sheet music! Sheet music weighed down by a goddam stone!"

Natalie pressed her body to his. "You're alive. That's all that matters."

Eric staggered backward again, letting the newspaper fall from his hands. He gazed beyond his wife's embrace toward the squad cars, the news vans, the swarming bystanders. He was alive—so what? Where did that leave him? He realized that the singer tutor was somewhere out in that maelstrom, already beyond rescue, another warning of the terror to come.

*Syrian Music Instructor Accused In Bomb Shipment.*

*Suspicious Package Leads To Evacuations In Brooklyn.*

"It matters less than you think it matters," Eric said.

He wasn't sure it mattered much at all.

*Drought in Havana, 1998*

*Mujer negra* from the sea bluffs of Baracoa,
Odalia dreads drought, freak of nature,
she says, ill-born like a two-headed calf, a mute horse,
a dwarf child abandoned among the jutías
and iguanas, but even if Odalia's cowries auger
torrents, or she proffers goat's blood to

*orishas*, El Niño brings drought every generation–
1998's the worst in sixty years when fields
of marrow desiccate to dust chaff, mud burr,
and little survives besides African *ñames*,
white-fleshed, Odalia grates for mealy flour,
unleavened bread that petrifies overnight.

Days the tanker trucks make their rounds,
whistled yells of *agua fresca* race through ruinous
streets, and Odalia teeters down ramshackle
stairs to join lines that crawl until sundown,
then plods home on shoes soled with cardboard
and hemp, cans hoisted on a shoulder pole,

a squat, jowly woman who pulled oxcarts of cane
at seventeen, carved a cow's carcass *con machete*–
her street one of many where tenements crumble
to sugar lumps, and black migrants from Oriente
crowd into plywood lofts to raise pigs in bathtubs,
distill from peels and rinds, *chispatrén*, train sparks.

Odalia drinks enough to survive, the rest saved
for gods that crave okra, cilantro, seedlings of *guaguasí*,
and the pygmy banana whose pungent fruit delights
Oshún, *orisha* of the river, all sweet waters, who sleeps
inside a clay jar she used to fill with rain and river
stones, Our Lady who dances to drums of *batá*.

Habana, still showerless into late August,
tankers idle for weeks, no fuel, no parts, neither scuds
nor cloudbursts to revive Oshún's *guineo* bush,
Odalia foraging mangoes that go rancid at the altar,
her last pesos spent on maduros to make amends,
the last gold squeezed from bitter oranges.

Under a kapok tree, Cementerio Colón, she divines
from knucklebones until Ifá commands her to hurl
Our Lady's statue into the sea, bury the votive candles,
burn the altar to cinders, remake Oshún from living
skin. Odalia and her neighbors pool the $30 for a goat
they slaughter at sunrise, the hide tanned in blood,

varnished with honey, sinew stitched, an iron nail
burning rainbeads around Oshún's neck, lightning bolts
her belly, then chorused prayers for *lluvia tropical,*
so profligate in sweltering days of *caña de azucar y tabaco,*
*aguaceros* that strafe zinc roofs, snap decrepit trees,
so relentless they soften limestone to cartilage.

*Mug Shot*

Face a distortion. Expression falling back into distance,
as a crowd recedes behind a fleeing man. Iris's brown
black back at the flash, and a hoard of curses perched
on the brink of lip. The mouth cruelly fixed and stained
with an outline of dark lipstick, and in her eyes a light
stirred with the throb of siren's pulse, its mix of glee
and negligence an affront to any decent citizen. A face
crumbling like an old shed that begs to be knocked down.

with a single kick. Eyes roaming the room as one might
survey land standing neck-deep in a pit, whisky-pitched
and ether-lit. This, as a whole, pulled into the second's
suck of lens: while mirth crawled the halls of countenance,
sorrows flowered behind the brow, and apathy took up
residence, a serious and true crime was being planned.

*Mushrooms*

Pale caps erect as chiseled stone make the mind
a sculpture garden. Staking their luminous flags
on the damp nap of lawn, they blazon a ghostly
vulnerability, are obvious as the pointed question
the face cannot master, its flush climbing the neck
and cloaking cheeks with admission. Nocturnal
and explicit as greed, their presence suggestive
as a door left ajar, their appearance is so sudden
my mouth makes an O. What moon tugs these
clean sheets straight up from soil? Their skin
bare there as skin is bare everywhere after clocks
hand us down hallways, and our mouths lock.

*Civil War*

They walk through a field sick with dead bodies.
They carry chairs. Think
*we leave with our chairs*. Think *theater*.
A nest within them holds suffering.
A nest within them understands
they feel wholly beautiful only for those moments
after they give. Think
*the loud killing*. Think *yolk in the skull*. The trees
endure their structure
like the bones of some magnificent animal.
Think *floating under the spine in the lost museum*.

*February 9, 2003*

There are two paintings
one on top of the other.
There is the life told to you
and the one you understand
know. There is memory
and you now now
now as always an exile
or emigrant within the borders
of your skin. Tell me again
how you fear people
only get so smart how the future
will be the same as the past
how the cage of the brain
was locked upon us.

Britta Ameel, originally from Salt Lake City, is currently an MFA student at the University of Michigan, where she won a Cowden Fellowship and Meader Prize. Her poems have appeared in Fugue, em, and The Manzanita Quarterly, and have been nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

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Michael A. FitzGerald lives in Idaho. His work can be found in The Massachusetts Review and Swink, among other publications. His novel, Orphans, needs a publisher.

Eben Goff came to Butte in 2003 through an artist residency fellowship from A.Dofe. Inc. Significant events leading up to this include his birth in 1977 and subsequent adventures in India, Japan, triumphs and mishaps throughout North and South America–many of which occurred in his home town of Seattle. He honed his focus on art making at Skidmore College (NY), graduating in 2000 with a clear interest in the issues and aesthetics of industrial

landscapes. In spring of 2005 he returned to his alma mater to exhibit new work along side six other outstanding alumni. Recent exhibitions of painting and sculpture in Montana include installations at Aunt Dofe's Hall of Recent Memory in Willow Creek and empty Butte store fronts in association with the Phantom Gallery Project. Eben currently teaches drawing classes at the Warm Springs State Psychiatric Hospital and teaches painting through the Butte Silver Bow Arts Foundation.

Matthew Scott Healy has worked as a cartoonist, puppeteer, and probation officer. He is a two-time limbo champion. He lives in Columbus, Ohio with his wife and gecko.

Erika Howsare is soon to receive an MFA in poetry from Brown University. Her poetry and non-fiction have appeared in Chain, Field, The New Orleans Review, Fourteen Hills, and Horse Less Review, and is forthcoming in Encyclopedia and The Indiana Review. In 2004, a grant from Brown enabled her to travel along the route of Lewis and Clark, and the poetic travelogue Bicentury (New Rows and Locks) was the result. In 2005, she will create a multimedia travel piece based on a walk across Rhode Island. Her chapbook, Elect June Grooms, was published by Horse Less Press in Fall 2004.

Quinn Latimer is a poet and art editor living in New York City. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in The Paris Review, La Petite Zine, Circumference, Guernica, and Unpleasant Event Schedule. She is an editor at Parnassus: Poetry in Review, American Letters & Commentary, and Columbia: A Journal of Literature & Art. She was recently chosen by Bin Ramke as a finalist for the University of Georgia Press First Book Prize.

Mark Levine's third book of poems, The Wilds, will be published by California in 2006. His previous books are Debt, and Enola Gay. He teaches poetry at the Iowa Writers' Workshop. Before that, he spent his contented youth teaching at the University of Montana.

Cate Marvin's first book of poems, World's Tallest Disaster (Sarabande, 2001) received the 2000 Kathryn A. Morton Prize and the Kate Tufts Discovery Award. Her poems have appeared in Poetry, Ploughshares, Paris Review, and are forthcoming in Boston Review and Verse. She is an assistant professor in creative writing at the College of Staten Island, City University of New York.

Orlando Ricardo Menes teaches in the Creative Writing Program at the University of Notre Dame. New poems have appeared in Prairie Schooner, Epoch, and River Styx. He is the author of the poetry collections Furia (Milkweed Editions, 2005) and Rumba atop the Stones (Peepal Tree, 2001), as well as the editor of the anthology Renaming Ecstasy: Latino Writings on the Sacred (Bilingual Press/Editorial Bilingüe, 2004).

Jonathan Minton lives with his wife Allison in Helena, Montana, where he teaches English at the University of Montana-Helena College of Technology. He is the author of Lost Languages (available at Amazon.com from Long Leaf Press). He has recently published his poetry and reviews in eratio, Castagraf, Columbia Poetry Review, and Free Verse. He is the editor of the online literary journal Word For/Word (www.wordforword.info), which has published post-Avant poetry, prose, visual art, essays, and reviews for the past four years. When not watching reruns of M.A.S.H., he is finishing a PhD dissertation for the State University of New York at Buffalo on the poetry and poetics of Post-World War Two Anglo-American exchange.

Sawako Nakayasu's publications include So we have been given time Or, (Verse, 2004) Nothing fictional but the accuracy or arrangement (she, (forthcoming from Quale Press, 2005), and Clutch (Tinfish chapbook, 2002), along with a number of poetry translations from Japanese. Sawako can be contacted at *sawako@gmail.com*.

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