The poet has a new thought; he has a whole new experience to unfold; he will tell us how it was with him, and all men will be richer in his fortune. For the experience of each new age requires a new confession, and the world seems always waiting for its poet.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Poet"
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Childhood Lake Country Remembrance

I remember the wildness
and the silent sunrises.
The lake or the mist
swallowed the forest sounds.
Or maybe the earth
was holding her breath,
waiting for that fiery beginning.

I held my breath,
standing on the dock,
amazed at the silence,
amazed
that the forest and the sky
and the lake and I were all watercolor blended.
No sharp edges,
we were all one.

Fishsplash,
and the world began to breathe.
Birdsound,
Woodpeckers rapping, Jays screeching,
the only Blue Heron I've ever seen.
And I began to breathe
the lake and the mist.
Trying to hold my moment
as the sun rose to drink in the lake's breath.

--Diana Martin
Do Not Turn On

Do Not Turn On Red
Crimson maybe
but definitely not on red.
Do Not Walk
You can twirl or trip or skip
but absolutely do not walk.

Do Not reach for heaven
The top shelf of the bookcase maybe,
but heaven is too far
so definitely do not reach for heaven.
Do Not surrender your heart
You can share, care and cry
but absolutely do not surrender your heart.

Do Not Turn Your Heart Red
Do Not Walk to Heaven
Do Not Surrender
Do Not Reach

Do NOT
Do NOT
Do.

--Karen Johnson

One Foot Out the Door

I am the product of public schools.
I never had the joy
Of describing the rap
Of Sister's wooden ruler across my knuckles,
Never wore plaid uniforms with gym shoes,
Never got out of classes
For saints' feast days
Or for mass each morning.
I didn't have twelve or thirteen siblings running around
And no relatives who were priests
(Although I did have some distant cousin
Who was a nun, about 60 years old;
My mother told me
She used to ask the mother superior
For beer each year on her birthday).
I don't know what's considered a mortal sin
And what's considered just a feel-really-guilty sin
But I know a lot of people who are ready to tell me.
I haven't had the benefits,
Or the background,
To be really any good at what I profess each Sunday
But I have an idea about right and wrong;
I know what hurts people
Even without doctrine telling me so.

--Karen Sasveld
We all sat around a dull white kitchen table with fading gold specks trapped under a glossy coating. In the middle of the table was a hexagonal juice glass, just tall enough that you had to have a good bounce on your quarter to make that clinking sound on the clear bottom when you shot.

We loved playing quarters, my brother's friends and I. I liked how they didn't care that they were all twenty and I was only fifteen. We sat in Boo-Boo's kitchen in the hot desert summers of Arizona with jugs of wine that we drank in juice glasses like the one in the middle.

Boo-Boo was my brother's best friend. They were both waiters at the Whaling Station restaurant with their other friend Ranger Smith. That's where they all met. Everyone was always teasing them about the similarity of their names, (Jim, Jack, and John) so that night while we were playing quarters, we came up with nicknames for them. My brother Jim was donned "Yogey" (actually inspired by a love for frozen yogurt rather than the bear) and the nicknames "Boo-Boo" for Jack and "Ranger Smith" for John sort of fell in line.

My best memories of summer were those in that Jellystone world in the heart of Scottsdale, only dried out Saguaraos lined our forest instead of towering pines, a river-bottom rock yard replaced the carpets of green grass, and the dry heat of the sun replaced the cartoon blue skies, but I didn't mind.

I was one of the "snowbirds" from the north who came to the desert, like the seasonal migration of birds, to escape the humidity and mosquitoes. Every summer I flew out to Arizona to spend some time with my mother and Yogey. When my parents divorced, they split custody of my brother and I so half of my childhood life was spent flying across the country and back. It wasn't seeing my mother though that I looked forward to the most—it was hanging out with Yogey and his friends.

Boo-Boo's kitchen was always cool in the summer, with the windows closed tight to keep the air-conditioning in, and the heavy beige curtains in front of the sliding patio doors were always drawn tight to keep out the sun. That is why we always met at Boo-Boo's house; and because his parents would always let us crash over there—everyone on the floor of the living room, lulled to sleep by the hum of the TV that no one watched.

In the morning we would sit around the white table with our bare feet dangling on the cool yellowing linoleum, while Boo-Boo's sister Karrie cooked omelettes with Velvetta cheese oozing out the sides and flakes of pepper speckled on top. Sometimes Boo-Boo and I would pick up the trash scattered about the house while we waited, but mostly we just moved the cans and bottles to one side of the table so we could have a place for our plates.

My brother and his friends were really close. Sometimes during the day when my mom and stepfather were at work, they would all come over to our house and swim in the pool. Karrie in her leopard print bikini, and I, in my navy and white speedo, would lay in the orange and white nylon chaise lounges next to the pool and watch the guys do cannon balls off the diving board. I would watch my brother as he glided back and forth across the deep end, avoiding the waves of water his friends pushed at each other. My eyes trailed his body as he dodged the waves, cutting through the silvery water as he torpedoed for the drain. I always wondered how he could stay down on the bottom so long.

When it came to quarters, my brother was by far, the best shooter; even when he'd had a lot to drink. He placed the juice glass in front of him, several inches from his raised shooting hand. He lowered his head in a parallel line with the target. He brought his hand down and hit the table with the side of his fist, releasing the coin from his fingers so that the ribbed edge hit the table at the same time as his hand. The silver disk sparked upwards into an arch and rimmed the bottom of the glass. He raised his gaze, but not his head, looking for his victim. Catching one of the female's eyes, he smiled. Consume, he said.

Sometimes when my brother had to go to work and I had the house all to myself, I would slip into my speedo, grab my white beach towel and spend the whole day engraving white criss-cross marks on my back. The pool wasn't refreshing like you would think. It was hot, like swimming in a large bathtub. Sometimes the water would get up to 90 degrees, and it made my body feel heavy as I tried to prac-
tice my breaststroke. I usually gave up and resorted to floating on our fading red plastic raft. It is bad to fall asleep in the sun, but I couldn't help it. The sun was so warm; the waves rocking the raft until slowly there would be no movement around me but a quiet buzz of the black Chinese beetles crawling in the shade of our Oleanders.

One night when we played quarters at Boo-Boo's house, Boo-Boo and I stayed up after everyone had gone to bed. The TV flickered and the flash of colored lights made the dark cherry wood furniture pop in and out of view. I sat on the couch with a white afgan on my lap. The air-conditioning whisked and blew on my feet hanging over the edge of the coffee table. Boo-Boo sat next to me on the couch and we talked about the summer. His hand felt cool on my face. The lights cast shadowy blue on his face and highlighted his cheek bones and razor stubble. His eyes hid in caves-dark and sallow. His hand moved down my cheek and along the hollow of my neck, tracing the collar of my shirt. He didn't say anything. He ran his fingers through my sun-bleached hair and pulled my towards him. I leaned to kiss him, closing my eyes. His lips felt smooth and wet and tasted bittersweet from the wine. We stayed up for a little while longer messing around on the couch. The afgan had slipped to the floor. An empty beer can clattered across the table and fell onto the carpet.

Whenever Yogey and I had to stay home, we would sit in his room and read Mad magazines. We didn't like to watch TV because then we'd have to sit in the living room with our mother and stepfather. So we just sat in his room instead. Sometimes he would let me listen to my tapes on his stereo but Olivia Newton-John wasn't his style. Instead we'd listen to "Black Sabbath" or "Led Zeppelin." I guess his music was okay sometimes. We could barely hear the two out in the living room fighting over the loud rock music.

Boo-Boo didn't drink for his twenty-first birthday. During the fall while I'd been at my dad's, Boo-Boo had started dating a Mormon girl who didn't believe in drinking. We all met at his house for a celebratory game of quarters. We shared a fifth of whiskey and just passed the bottle around when it was someone's turn to drink. All except Boo-Boo and his girlfriend. She sat in his lap with her Clairol streaked hair tied-up in a pony-tail and squinted at everyone. The only time she smiled was when Boo-Boo announced their engagement. Karrie dropped the bottle of whisky on the floor. I just stared down at the brown liquid as it wound its way around the shattered glass and dribbled across the floor along the pattern in the linoleum.

I hated whenever my step-father came home before my mother. I was in the living room watching TV when I heard the kitchen door open. I looked around the room—it was a wreck. I quickly gathered up the laundry I was folding and started to carry it back to my bedroom. As I passed the entryway to the kitchen I saw my stepfather putting his usual case of beer in the refrigerator. I hurried to my room and shut the door. I sat down on my bed an listened as he yelled about the dishes in the sink, the lint on the living room carpet, and the towels left out by the pool. I looked at my clock—no one would be home for another hour. I laid down on my bed and stared at the mustard flower print wall-paper. The little flowers began to float before my eyes. I could hear the TV in the living room, he must have turned the volume really loud. I rolled on my side and put my pillow over my head. When I woke up it was after seven and my mom was home. I could hear my step—father yelling about dinner and the dishes. A door slammed. The TV was still blaring. Yogey knocked on my door and then walked into the room. He handed me a magazine.

Karrie threw a surprise party at their house for Boo-Boo's twenty-second birthday. Boo-Boo didn't date the Mormon anymore. We all sat around the white kitchen table and played quarters with two bottles of Jack Daniels to celebrate.

I woke up one morning about a quarter past 11. Everyone had left while I was asleep so the house was still, except for the whirr of the refrigerator in the kitchen and an occasional rumble from the ice-maker. The sun was shining bright through the dining room windows that looked out across the pool. I put on my speedo and headed back, watching the clouds melt into one another from the heat. I could hear children at play out in the street. The hollow clatter of tin on the pavement filled the silences between their laughter. I was almost asleep when I heard a car door open and close. Through the windows I saw my brother enter the kitchen. Yogey was still in his waiter's jacket, but the front of his soiled white shirt was half-unbuttoned and his tie was missing. I grabbed a towel and went inside to see why he was home so early. He told me he had been fired for stealing alcohol from the bar. The restaurant had called my stepfather. It wasn't long before he was home. Yogey hadn't even changed his clothes yet when
my stepfather walked into his bedroom. He and Yogey began to fight. I ran to my room and slammed my door. Suddenly I heard Yogey's door slam. I opened my door, but I didn't know what to do. I felt like screaming but nothing would come out—then my stepfather opened Yogey's door and went to watch t.v. in the living room. I ran into Yogey's room and found him lying down on the floor. His hand was covering a red swollen cheek. I sat down beside him and cradled his head in my lap; just rocking back and forth until we both fell asleep.

The summer of Boo-Boo's twenty-third birthday, his parents put in a pool. After a game of quarters, we would move the party outside and try to build human pyramids in the pool. I was a diver on my high school team so one night they asked me to do some dives. I decided to do an inward where you jump backwards then dive towards the board. Their board wasn't a spring board, though, and I scraped my back on the end of the board. My back stung from the chlorine in the water. I screamed. Blood was floating in the pool. Karrie screamed. Boo-Boo looked at my back as I was climbing out of the pool. It's only a scratch, he said. So we kept on swimming. I still have the scar.

It was about 8 o'clock in the evening and Yogey and I were in his room playing Dungeon and Dragons when the doorbell rang. Yogey's window faced the front door so he glanced through the shades to see who it was. His eyes looked funny as he looked at me. He jumped up and ran out of his room. I tried to see out the window to see who it was, but they must have stepped into the doorway. I could hear my mother and stepfather arguing with someone in the next room so I went out to see who it was. "Go to your room!" my stepfather shouted. Yogey was trying to get past my stepfather to see who was at the door. My stepfather kept saying to the person something about not belonging here and he asked them to leave. Yogey finally stopped fighting with my stepfather and grabbed my arm and dragged me out the back door. He began running to the gate that led to the front of the house. I was watching him wrestle with the iron latch. He began hitting it and cussing, but he couldn't get it open. I ran over to help him, but I could barely see the latch in the dark. Yogey began pounding at the fence. Tears began to streak his face. He stopped and rubbed his splintered fists and then started kicking the wooden boards of the gate. Finally, the gate broke away from the latch and he grabbed my hand and began running around to the front door. As we got to the driveway we saw a rental car pulling out onto the street. Yogey ran after the car, but the driver didn't see him. I stood in the driveway and watched as Yogey crumpled into a little ball on the curb and sobbed. I walked over to him and sat down. "It was dad—it was dad," he kept saying over and over. "Don't you get it, he'd come to see us." He had been on his way back from a trip to California and had come to surprise us, but my stepfather wouldn't let us go. I sat and listened to Yogey as he finally stopped crying. It was a clear night. A little breeze was blowing through the Oleanders and the crickets were calling to their mates. Somewhere a dog was barking to be let in for the night.

My dad didn't let me visit my mom after that summer. After a couple of years I didn't care anymore anyway. Karrie and her family had moved to Washington. Boo-Boo had gotten back together with the Mormon girl and was living with her in an apartment in the same complex as Yogey. Yogey lives with his girlfriend because she has lots of money and pays all of his bills. He only came to visit me once at my dad's. He told me his girlfriend had paid to send him to cocaine-rehab for six months. I didn't tell my family though. They never knew he did cocaine—they never really cared either.

I sat in the lounge of Hogan's grill with a couple of my college friends and nursed a Tom Collins. I wasn't really listening to what they were saying—something about a dance or a party probably. I was thinking about my past life and what this summer had in store for me. I had met a great guy and he wanted to marry me. He hadn't known me very long—but he didn't care. He doesn't know about me, but I've told myself I'm going to tell him as soon as I quit. I'm going to quit before we get married. I swear I really am. I handed the waitress my empty glasses and ordered another Tom Collins—one more won't hurt.
A Moment at Most

I love that time of day
that comes late and lasts
a moment at most
as the sun falls
and shadows grow
trees strain upward
to brush a sky falling fast
to darkness.
This moving portrait
fills the horizon
white clouds
billow into orange
and a hush
unfolds with the magic.

It comes quickly
and then the sun
disappears below the trees
Shadows darken
and grow together
weaving a coat of black
which swallows orange
like candy
and turns trees
into scaly-armed creatures
with faces that laugh
as you’re scraped
rushing through branches
deeper into darkness
until you stumble
are swallowed
by the ground
and in a moment
disappear.

--Jim Zeigler

Wide Awake

I slept a lot as a child;
I didn’t wake up until sixth grade
And then I wished I hadn’t.
They were wrong—
It was nice to sleep through life.
There were no nightmares
Until I woke up.

--Karen Sasveld

A Chat with the Rain

Softly, so very softly
Drip-drops the rain against my screen,
And blankets my hands in its misty spray.
What have you seen, my cool and wet friend,
As you rolled across the moon-lit heavens tonight?
Surely you passed by the window of my love,
And watched her ready for bed.
This evening I am jealous.
But what you have seen tonight,
I will touch tomorrow.

--Matthew Taylor
Time

I had a dream last night,
There was my silver spoon.
Mom was thinner; Grandma was taller;
My brother and I, we shared a room.
I swept the floor to Carol King,
And cried as I listened to her voice.
I kicked the can and ran and sweat,
I smelled the night of youth and choice.

I know now but didn't then,
And it stays that way until the end.
Then can't change and won't pretend,
We learn, we learn--again, again.

--Stacia Mellinger

Dreams

i dream of the moon
and i dream of the earth;
i dream of death
and i dream of birth
i dream of you
and i dream of me
i dream of things
that cannot be
i dream a lot
and maybe that's bad
but dreaming makes me happy
when i feel sad
to dream is to live
and to live is to be
so without my dreams
i wouldn't be me

--Tawnee Shallenberger
Alone at Night I Sense My Dead Wife

Mists from the rain which has fallen
Coats the night
In a film-like membrane, which I must
Pass through
A street light high above towers as a sentinel
Maybe it knows what I am thinking of
Thinking of doing
Desperately craving the power to do
It glares at me like a disappointed father
Or an offended priest
It is you I think of
As my feet splash upon the wet pavement
You walk so clearly with me
Our stride moving as one
Together we walk
As we once did
Under a different moon

It is dark
And a chill wind tugs at us
Pushing us forward, and somehow, dragging us back
Trees and objects in the distance
Blend into the dark clouds
Surrounding us
Like twigs
On a foggy night
Sticking upright in damp mud.
Gravel crunches
As I step onto the curb before my house
I do not need to look for a light
In the kitchen window
To know that
No one is home.

A tired man
In a tiring life
I fall asleep committing the unforgivable
I tug and pull at your memory
Like an enraged lion on a piece of warm, bloody meat

If I could I would take you from God

But instead I awake and leaving my chair,
I go into the bedroom.

--John Strott
Only the Night

Only the echo of the midnight wind,
Heard us that eve that I whispered with you,
The wonders of Time and all within.
Only the star a thousand years old,
Saw us that eve when your eyes made me weak,
And just for a moment, the wind was cold.
Only the dew on the cool morning grass,
Touched you that eve without sharing your warmth.
As I did that morning deep in my past.
Only the Night has seen you since then.

--Matthew Taylor

Black and White Eyes

Rings of watery crystal color
drown in pools of shining black.
Eyes full of love
open to take the lover in
dilate to say more clearly
with black of pupils
almond-shaped white
what rings of color only hint.

I can see myself in your eyes
when you look at me.
I can lose myself in their widening centers
when you love.
I feel colorful
more colorful than a crystal prism
looking at your black and white eyes
drowning in reflected love.

--Karen Feasel
Attending the Opera

I hear a piece by Wagner,
Or Strauss,
Or Verdi,

And I am 9 years old,
Riding in the back seat of the car
Into the city,
Mom and Dad in the front seat;
And we're dressed in our
Very best clothes,
The ones that hang in the closet all year
Waiting for a night like this
When little girls pretend
That they can grow up
and be princesses.
We're going
To the opera.

And because I am only 9,
I don’t care that we go in the side door,
And sneak in with Tom,
Our usher-friend,
Before the people who paid come in.

And I don’t notice
That we are the only people sitting on the stairs.
At intermission,
When Tom whispers to my father
And we troop down
Through the crowds of elegant dresses
And important conversations,
Down to the main floor,
To the empty seats that someone paid for,
But no one claimed,
I don’t realize that
We don’t belong there.
I don’t notice the turning heads
Or all the eyes looking,
Forming their opinions of us,
Whatever they may be.
I notice Wagner,
and Strauss,
and Verdi.
I know them better
Than I know these faces.

We drive home;
Now Tom is in front with Dad,
And I lean against Mom
And listen to grown-up conversations
With only half an ear,
Until the evening overtakes me
And I fall asleep against my mother
Dreaming
That I can grow up
And be a princess.

--Karen Sasveld
Dream On, Dream On,
Dream Before the Good Lord Takes You Away
by Leslie Filter

"Higher, Mommy, I want to go higher! Please, can we, Huh? Let's go higher!"
"We can't go right now! I don't have time to go higher, honey!" her mother exclaimed as they walked past the escalator farther into the deep reaches of the store. Rushing past the perfume counter, she was pulling her little girl along like a kite on a string that just won't fly. The soles of her white uniform shoes squished along the linoleum so quickly, it sounded like the steady rhythm of the sprinklers you see on a golf course. Finally, she had made her way to the hosiery department, only to find a line stretching from the register to the brick road that led the customers around the store.

God dammit, Barb thought, I'm going to be late for work. Mrs. Tumey hates it when I bring Elizabeth late.

"Mommy, I want to go up. Can't we go up now? Can't we go higher?" Elizabeth whined, interrupting her mother's heated reverie.

"No, Elizabeth! Mommy has got to go to the cafe to work, and you have to go to Mrs. Tumey's. Now, just be quiet!"

"You always go to work! Why can't we go up once? Pleeeeease!"

"Elizabeth!"

In the car, with Elizabeth still whining, Barb thought about a time when she and Chad had first started dating, and they came to this very mall to window shop for Christmas. The mannequins were all decked out in red and green velvet party dresses with the black satin bows, and they were standing on a stage, lightly covered with that styrofoam snow. She remembered watching shoppers hum, and whistle, and walk to the beat of those instrumental Christmas songs, and she remembered her and Chad laughing at them, holding hands.

Today was kind of like that day, she thought, stormy and cold.

"Can we come back, tomorrow," Elizabeth pleaded, "maybe to go up?"

"Well, we'll see," said Barb, noting a bit of doubt in her voice, a detail the child did not recognize.

On the way to Mrs. Tumey's, Barb was stopped by every red light, and the pauses seemed to last forever. Why do I still take my child to this old hag, Barb was thinking, but she knew the answer—Mrs. Tumey was the only sitter she could afford. Working alone she could hardly pay the low rent of their smaller apartment, across town. I should get a better job, she thought, but she also knew the answer to that—she couldn't afford to take time off work.

On the way, today, she found herself driving by the apartment building she had lived in with Chad, not too long ago. God, she loved that apartment. Stained glass windows, hard wood floors. Well, it really wasn't in very good shape, but she and Chad, and later, Elizabeth, lived there together—on the fourth floor. There were six floors in that building, and one day she and Chad had planned to live on that top floor, which was only one apartment instead of split up, like the others. They were on their way.

Finally, Barb had arrived at Mrs. Tumey's, and as expected she was late, and Mrs. Tumey was unhappy. Like a scolding, scary, old, elementary teacher, Mrs. Tumey pulled Elizabeth out of Barb's arms as if she were a cork in a bottle, and, with just a look of resentment toward Barb, she slammed the door in her face. Barb knew she had interrupted Mrs. Tumey's game show.

She was also late for work, which did not go over well, since her shift was to begin at noon—rush hour. She wasn't sure how late she was, but she knew she had spent about ten minutes in her car trying to put on her hose—a necessary item in her boss's eyes. She had been working this job for six months, but she still could not get used to the odd eccentricities of her boss. As she was struggling to put on her hose without attracting too much attention from the passers-by, she thought with some frustration how she never had to put up with this stuff when Chad was here. He made quite enough money to support them, and even though she had one day planned to work, she enjoyed her time with Elizabeth. Chad, who had been sent to college by his parents, had promised ever since they had been dating, to send Barb to school one day, so that she could do something she really wanted. He kept promising to send her once he got enough money. Promises, she thought.

As expected, she walked into Hal's Diner at the busiest moment of the day, and for a split second she thought that maybe Herman, her boss, wouldn't notice. He had named the cafe Hal's because he didn't like his own name, and thought that Hal's would create a better image.
She was just slipping back to the employees' closet when Herman, leaning over the grill, noticed her. Raising his voice to the loudest level, and attracting the attention of everyone, Herman waived his spatula and yelled, "Barb! You're late! I have customer's waitin' to be served! Do they need to make an appointment to get service? Now get to work!" Before Barb could say a word, Herman about-faced, and he and his grease-streaked apron were back at the grill.

Furious, Barb whipped open the tablecloth curtain of a door at the closet and she threw in her purse and raincoat. Just as the purse hit the floor, one of the last two seams holding it together ripped and out spilled used tissues, a bag of Elizabeth's candy, the department store bag and the wrappings of her hose, her billfold, a Hal's Diner nametag, coupons for pop-tarts and weenie-weenies, and a small mountain of change. She picked up the handbag, and as she was trying to stuff everything back in, she noticed another item. It was a crumpled old letter of Chad's.

As she knelt beside her things, she stared at the letter, holding it nervously, as if she did not know what lay beyond its folds. But she had read it before; she read all of his letters—over and over. She wasn't sure which one this was or how it got in her purse, but she had almost forgotten those letters he wrote. She had kept every one, and wrapped them together in a plastic baggie tied with an old shoestring of Chad's, and tucked them into a drawer at home.

She heard Herman's work boots scuff along the kitchen floor, and she hurriedly gathered the rest of her spilled life into a mound and put the letter into her waitress apron. She certainly was not ready for another confrontation with Herman, especially since she had seen the letter. Chad always had a way of weakening her defenses.

She got a tray of water glasses, chipped off some dried food that was on the edge of one, and was headed to her first table. She was glad to see it was a couple of regulars. These two ladies came in every day, always ordered the tuna salad on one slice of wheat bread, with a fruit salad on the side, or an occasional cottage cheese and, of course, coffee. They did not require the waitress to talk to them because they were too busy gossiping, but if you kept their coffee cups full you could expect a hearty tip.

Unfortunately, her day did not continue so easily. It seemed that everyone that came in was either a hood, or a bum, neither of which classified as a good tipper, or an easy customer. None of them ever seemed to receive the right order, or get enough fries, and, of course, they gave her no tip. She did luck-out a couple of times and waited on some businessmen, but they were few and far between, and the day proved to be a long one.

At five o'clock Barb got Tammy, another waitress, to take her tables as she took her lunch hour. Instead of taking her usual free meal at the diner, Barb decided to get away. She used her shopping bag as a purse, and went to the fruit stand two blocks down from the diner. She got a plastic bag of red apples, and at the TV-like newspaper vending machine she got a paper and took a five minute walk to one of the huge hotels nearby.

She loved just sitting in the lobbies of these hotels. They were so beautiful, and so ornately decorated. This one, although it was a skyscraper and was built not too many years ago, was made in Victorian styling, with burgundy velvet upholstery, and dark mahogany furniture that curved in smooth lines. It was all so perfect. She hadn't been in one for so long she almost forgot the clean linen smell of the hotels, and the quietness of it all. These hotels do not have families of screaming children check in, who drive up in station wagons, but rather all of the guests here are serene, and elegant.

Barb unfolded her newspaper, and looked through the first section for an interesting story, but finding none, she went on to the City/State section. On the front page of this part they had a picture of a local Homecoming Queen. She stood in her long, frilly prom dress, holding her bouquet of roses in one hand, and adjusting her crown with the other. Barb thought of Elizabeth at that moment, and she pictured her as a Queen one day. The little girl had her mother's dimples and green eyes, and surely she, if her mother couldn't, would be able to get Homecoming Queen. Barb had been up for it, but she didn't get it, and she knew why. At her school you had to run with the rich girls to get the crown, and although she was popular, Barb knew her "sometimes-employed" factory-worker dad wouldn't score her any points in the wealth category. Maybe things had changed for Elizabeth's sake.

Uninterested by the paper now, Barb set it down, and watched the elevator travel on its little track. It was one of those elevators that stuck out into the room, instead of being surrounded by four walls. It was made of the same mahogany and it had an iron fence partition to cover the opening. Many times it would travel without carrying anyone up or down, or it would just sit at a floor waiting for someone to push its buttons. It seemed alive sometimes as it moved so smoothly, and without mistake, and it seemed to be in control of itself. Barb had remembered seeing many elevators just like this one at other hotels, but this one was
certainly the most interesting.

Being at the hotel so long that day, made her remember how much she loved coming with Chad. She had stayed in a few of these hotels quite a bit when she was with Chad. They always checked-in, Barb pretending they were a married couple, with their one bag and they followed the bellhop to their room, arm-in-arm. They usually stayed just one night, and had the continental breakfast in bed, but once, when she went to visit Chad at school, he got a good deal on a suite through his dad's company, and they stayed the entire weekend. It was wonderful.

Sadly, she finished her apple, and realized with her life the way it is that she probably would never stay in another hotel like that. Not with Chad out of her life.

From six until eight o'clock, the end of her shift, she worked behind the counter and became more ready than ever to go home. She was tired of whisking from one end of the counter to the other, shuffling plates of scrambled eggs, and burgers and fries, that Herman, who worked all-day on the weekends, had slung together and lined up on the metal windowsill between the kitchen and the dining room. Her hands hurt from the burnt places where she had spilled hot coffee, and her hair had fallen completely out of the little bandana Herman made the girls wear, and now it hung in her face. The hose that she had struggled with earlier that day now had twenty runs, holes, and pulls in them, and she knew she would go through the same line tomorrow to buy them in the same rush as she had earlier that day. When the arms on the Pepsi clock above the counter finally marked eight o'clock, Barb was sick of the diner and she gathered her things and without a word to anyone, left. Another day, another $36.84 (including tips). she thought to herself.

Elizabeth was, to much astonishment and to a blaring TV set, asleep when Barb arrived. Barb paid Mrs. Tumey, and cradled her sleeping child out to the car. Elizabeth was so vulnerable in that position, but she also seemed so carefree. What it would be like, Barb thought, to be a child again, and to sleep whenever you wanted, and have your mother carry you to bed. Barb had forgotten what it was like to sleep.

That night, after Barb had undressed Elizabeth and put her to bed, she undressed herself, throwing her uniform on the ground, and put on her long nightgown. It was raining out now, and it would probably be a cold night. She turned on the TV, opened her bed up from the couch, and twisted open a cooler she had picked up from the local liquor store on the way home. When she was ready to get into bed she saw the letter she had found earlier peeking out of her apron pocket. Upon a few moments of indecision, she hurriedly grabbed the letter and held it to her breast. She crawled under the covers still holding the letter and couldn't decide if she wanted to read it. She didn't know if she really wanted to remember things that she had forgotten. There was so much to miss from that time she spent with Chad, and it hurt so much to miss it.

On the screen was a rerun from that old television show "Eddie's Father." It must have been the end (when the two always talk, but of nothing that has to do with the rest of the episode) because Eddie was asking his father twenty questions. Eddie asked, "Why do birds fly, Dad?" and in his infinite TV father wiisdom, Eddie's father replied, "Well, to go higher, of course." Eddie then asked, "Why do they fly in a group?" and was answered with "So they don't get lost. There aren't any road signs in the sky, you know!" And with that, Eddie was swung into his father's arms, and they were off into the sunset.

During the credits and the closing song, Barb then remembered her own daughter's unanswered question, "Why can't we go higher, Mommy?" Barb thought, Because I can't fly anymore. Not alone.

Without really thinking, she got up from bed and she put the letter in the baggie with the rest of Chad's letters, tied the shoestring, and shut the drawer tightly.

Leaving the TV on, Barb cried herself to sleep, and listened to the TV still sing the theme song, "Let me tell ya 'bout my best friend..."
A Cold Day at an Auction

His life was laid out
all over his soon to be liquidated
backyard.
He was into small engines,
radios and guitars.
The men in the stetson hats
were gonna sell it all.
The car at noon.
The house at one.
The homemade guitar,
Carved onyx dogs,
Paintings of God.
All the things that gave him joy,
peace, strength and laughter,
sacrificed to the Vulture pack.
"Dollar, dollar, dollar, dollar,
Two dollar, two dollar,
Sold
Two dollars."
I've got a dead man's rug on my floor.
The unknown remembered man
who gave me the adrenalin buzz
of the competing pack,
tearing and devouring
the skin and bone and meat
of a lifetime.

--Diana Martin

Loneliness

All I depended on is
Swept up by the emptiness
And tossed across my mind
Like a tumbleweed blown
Across the desert.
The sullen area of my existence
Is burnt into my mind,
Exposed to the heat
Of questions unanswered.
The cool night casts
Over passions lost
And the memories
Travel through my mind
Leaving their tracks
Like animals,
Only different because
The drifting sand of time
Won't cover them up.

--Jennifer Robbins
Heavy Equipment

The Cat creeps along,
Growling and clawing at the fresh earth,
My father its master.
I stand on the road,
Lean against the car,
Feel the smooth metal across my back
And the door frame over my shoulder blades.
My father and his machine
Cross the dry land
Beneath the late afternoon sun.
He churns up a dirt cloud
That fades across the field
To where I stand:
A message for me, to take in,
And take home.
Far across from me,
He's building things
He'll never have
In his own life.
I breathe in the dust
Feel it rattle in my lungs
While I revel in the scent
Of my childhood.
This is his contribution to my life.
His gift to me,
His only daughter,
Is the dust he brings home
Settled on his cap,
And the mud caked on his boots.

--Karen Sasveld

User Friendly

I am amazed
at how the terminal
blinks brightly
“funds not available”
to the wrinkled face
of a faded
old woman
standing hunched
against the wind
creased brown laceless shoes
soaking in the snow.

--Jim Zeigler
This Night Weighs Heavily

My sheets feel like last night’s dish towel,
And my clothes cling and clutch
A body so tired.
Ants parade from the window
To the wrapper of my last Hostess pie.
The crickets continue their monotone hum
Intermittently interrupted by a passing car.
--Digital clock marks another hour--
Extra pillow in my bed again.
I want to see my friends tonight.
Why must this isolation be such a burden, and
Why must this burden be mine?

--Michael Millington

Windows

I thought I’d go for a walk
That almost autumn’s eve, when the air was soft
And my mind was filled with her.
I looked in her window as I passed her home,
And wondered what it would be like to see through that window
From the other side.
   And I smiled.
As I strolled on, I noticed two figures in the distance,
   A man and....
I quickened my footsteps to answer my question.
I couldn’t have been closer without touching her,
But I may as well have been a thousand miles away.
They held hands and giggled, and once when they turned
Toward some far away laughter, I could swear
   They saw right through me,
And suddenly, the night air was very cold.
   She went into his house with him,
And I stared at his dark windows,
   And thought.

--Mathew Taylor
The Gestation of Art

The hungry ones
are clawing and biting
at the earth.
Looking for bedrock,
Searching passionately
for what's really here.
For the music.
For spirit truth.

The hungry ones
are fervently trying
to avoid mediocre.
Igniting fire
to burn away the fat
leaving the bones of existence.
And then see the bones
fresh.

The hungry ones
look for new tongues,
to speak new words.
Polished words,
Blasted by life wind
and emotion sand.
Core words, that see
the truth with heart eyes.

We are the hungry ones.
Breaking our bones,
Searching our centers.
To expose ourselves
naked and honest to the world
so that the world
might be reborn
naked and honest with itself.

--Diana Martin
The Choice

by Emily Puckett

The darkness loomed before me,
Beckoning, seductive.
I had been there before
And never wanted to return.
But there it stood;
Oddly, comforting.
I turned to get away
But it followed
Like a shimmering shroud.
Following me, calling me.
I used all my resources
To escape, to banish it.
This time no thing worked
And I was engulfed.

At first I welcomed it
For it was predictable,
comforting, familiar and
I hated myself for doing it.
Soon I spun out of control.
Lost all bearings, felt nothing
But fear.
Deeper and deeper into the darkness.
Fear and Guilt
Were all I knew,
Bereft of love, joy, God.

It seemed as if there
Was no place for one of no faith.
I longingly peered out
Of the darkness.
Looking, searching.
Returning my gaze were
Eyes of concern, eyes of confusion.
Only one was willing to
Enter the darkness with me
Yet I continued to fear.
The voices of darkness
Quietly whispered their secret:
Do not trust a heart of
Compassion and love
For it will fail you.
It can not withstand the
Confusion of your fear.
You are too frightening
And it will fail you.
And I listened, Goddamit.
I listened to the voices
And I believed.
I believed to the depth of my soul.
Darkness, despair, hopelessness.
My constant companions.
I cursed them daily
Yet held them tightly.
I prayed to God for freedom
But held them tightly.
I believed the darkness.
Goddamit it, I believed.

A phone call, a voice,
An off-hand comment.
A story shared, a nudge given.
God had spoken and I heard.
I picked up the word and
Locked it away for fear
The darkness would find it.
In moments of safety
I brought the word out.
I held it, touched it,
Yearned for it.
Each time, I held it longer.
It soon began to glow
And with it came warmth.
I continued to hide it away.
The voices of darkness still
Sang their song.
Not yet would I trust
The Word.

Flickering, sputtering, fragile.
It grew inside me.
The Word gained strength
and its glow deepened,
Calling me with its intensity.
Calling me out of the darkness
As Lazarus was called.
I stepped fully into the light
And quickly shrank back,
Shaking, shivering, shuddering.
Did I dare believe it?
This light, this Word.
The voices were quieted,
Waiting patiently their turn.
They trust me to return.
They knew I could not risk.
They knew the strength of fear.

It was here:
The Light, the Word,
The Dark, the Fear.
Which would I choose?
Rain and Mercy

In the ice you can see my hands—clinging to the briar.
Big and blue, unyielding—
Brushing every fire; dousing every pyre.

When the dawn comes will they softly move?
Will the sun help?
Will the newborn sky?
Will the cool blue in the eye?

If He brings the Rain,
And if Mercy is Her name.

In the desert you can see my heart—rolling in the sand.
Dry and cracked, dusty—
Denying every demand, ignoring every command.

When the night comes will it softly move?
Will the water help?
Will the tropical sky?
Will the cool blue of the eye?

If He brings the Rain,
And if Mercy is Her name.

In each cave you can see the soul—defined across the land.
Trapped and wrapped, forgotten—
Explaining when it can—to the heart and to the hand:

“When the day comes I will try again.”
Will the earth help?
Will the natural sky?
Will the cool blue in the eye?

If He brings the Rain,
And if Mercy is Her name.

--Stacia Mellinger
Another drought-dreary afternoon is smothering the Weaver farm. The still wind whispers across the parched Kansas plain, scattering scorched fronds of dying sorghum along the dusty footpath from the clapboard house and out to the faded red barn.

Katherine Weaver flits about her birchwood kitchen in a trance, heaving a heavy sigh. A lot of good it does, she thought, to be part Indian, if you can’t make the rain come. Katherine Littlefoot Weaver. One of the last folks in Kalvesta with any true Pawnee blood. Her grandfather, Clemson Weaver, was a medicine man.

She longed for the days spent growing up on the Oklahoma reservation, surrounded by the strength and spirit of her clan. Clemson Littlefoot was a small but mighty man, who carried with him the power and presence of the great spirit. If he were here now, he could make the rain come. She remembered how the village women brought him coins and shiny seed-filled gourds to coax the rains or some other request from the great sky. In exchange, he would don his cap of painted grouse and turkey feathers and his belt of shattered buffalo horn. Alone he would venture, to the edge of the plain, to confront the speechless sky, and would lie, near naked, for hours beneath the tireless burning sun, to steep in his own sweat. Delirious, he would stagger back to the reservation. The village women would be waiting to lead him to the center of the sacred circle, flanked by corn seeds, crimson root, and mystic symbols etched in the dust.

Exhausted, he would sit alone in the center, as the women placed a garland of beads and bear-claws around his shoulders, and rubbed icawas into his spine. Silently, everyone would gather round him, sitting on the hard hot dirt, to await the descent of grace from the Great Spirit.

Soon a gust and swirl of dust would surround him, whisking him up to his feet. Then all at once, Clemson Gentle Coyote Littlefoot, standing strong and erect, would shudder and begin to dance and shout. She could feel the low humming vibrations made by his stammering fees, as he danced and prayed for rain. Katherine would give anything to be sitting near his feet to absorb the sweet vibrations before the coming rain, to be caressed awake by softly pelleting droplets out of a hot hazy sky, surrounded by her kinswomen, and she’d give anything for a child.

She stared out intently at the not-yet-ready-to-give heavens, as this alone would cause the skies to open. “Now, Dear God,” she prayed, “if only a little rain...” Nervously she straightened the lace-edged muslin cafe curtains capping the window. How absurd. That she should think she could wish the rain to appear!

Her grandfather told her once, that Coyote medicine is good medicine, strong medicine, that could help her anytime she needed it. Where was it now? What did it matter that she was born on the autumn night of the coyote’s howl? Perhaps her mother, a hard-working farm girl of good Dutch stock, was right. All this Indian hullabaloo is just phoney-baloney. Tradition, sure. But power? That’s what you find in the Bible, in a church with stained glass windows and a pulpit. Or so her mother believed.

Going to church every Sunday, supporting the mission, wishing and praying—even visiting a supposed Osage shaman, didn’t bring her any closer to bearing a child.

She didn’t have much success by going to church. The minister said, “God’s will. Adopt.” What’s that supposed to mean? She had better luck at the clinic in Cimmaron, from the fertility specialist who told her tubes were blocked, but that it didn’t really matter, because Buck was sterile anyway.

She had difficulty accepting that a generally healthy strapping six-foot-two-inch, two-hundred-twenty-pound logger from upstate Washington could have this problem. Back trouble, maybe, from too many hours driving his rig cross-country, but not a sperm count of zero.

She considered adopting a baby, and had even discussed it with Buck. Buck loved kids, but couldn’t stand to upset his mother—especially now. They couldn’t adopt. Because to do so, would be to admit to the whole world Buck’s problem—or so his mother, Hattie Weaver, thought.

Hattie’s a kindly and feeble old soul, easily driven to tears and tantrums, and who rarely every makes any sense. She likes to telephone people in the middle of the night to ask about the strangest things—like chickens. Katherine and Buck took her to the Pennington Clinic in Wichita, only to learn that she’s senile. Organic Brain Syndrome they called it. Five thousand dollars
for a fancy way to say senile. And no money left over for a nursing home, or for a lawyer for that matter, to initiate adoption proceeding. As it was now, there wasn't even enough money left in the cracked mason jar hidden behind the Drano beneath the sink. She'd spent most of the change she'd saved from picking through Buck's pockets on love offerings to healers and readers.

So far everything she'd heard from the readers was the same, and the healers and the shaman, too. A child would come, once she righted her life, and learned how to "relax," and to be content to just walk in the comforting shadow of the Great Spirit. She knew how to pray, how to love her neighbors as her self, but not how to relax. How could she? Even thinking about relaxing made her tremble. What, with sewing, and canning, and all those other farm-wife duties, where was the time? These were only worth putting aside for a child. Only for a child.

The wind outside the kitchen window started to whip up a little, and the curtains flew toward Katherine, whisking and slapping at her scalp, waking her from her daydream. The skidding tumbleweeds and wind-cast flecks of dirt outside reminded her of the great swarming dust cloud that signaled the call of the Great Spirit, and the last time Clemson Littlefoot danced for rain. His bronzed, sweat-glazed chest became pasty with flying dust, as he coughed and hacked. He could not stand, but instead lie, alone in the sacred circle, gasping for breath, his beaded prayer cloth hanging limply from his loins, and dragging in the dirt. Yet still the rains came. Huge cool droplets streamed past his long silver-threaded ebony locks and over his wrinkled shut eyes, washing clean the sticky sweat-plastered mud from his chest. For the first time, the men entered the sacred circle, to remove his body. It rained for four days and four nights. One old woman swore she saw a coyote sleeping in front of his house.

The hot arid stench of burned sorghum stifled Katherine's senses. She bent forward over the sink, to shut the window, reaching over on tip-toes, her hard flat abdomen accepting the impression of the sink ledge.

She stepped back and rested full-flat on her heels, savoring the sensation in her belly. She sat down on the big carved oak chair across from the refrigerator, and rubbed her abdomen, caressing it, sliding her smooth palms around over the wrinkled gingham apron covering her faded heavy work denims. She continued caressing, in loving strokes, covering her belly and hips in wide concentric circles. As she felt the stiff ripples and rivets on the pockets of her Wranglers, she wondered what it might be like, if her belly was so big that the pockets would pooch out, and that she'd need to lay flat on the bed to zip them up, yet be unable to do so.

She wanted to drive to Dodge City to buy some of those jeans with the square elastic panels in front, and one of those frilly, three-sizes-too-big, long-in-front maternity blouses. Or at least be able to take the truck to Cimarron to buy a pattern to make some.

She loved Buck desperately, but even more desperately wanted to bear his child. However, the thought of another lonely supper with Buck talking about the hogs, and how he wished he'd go back to driving the rig would drive her mad. A child could change things. A child would make life exciting, worth living.

Katherine stared at the closed refrigerator door, at the magnets clattering the front, and at the long sleek freezer door handle. The silvery letters emblazoned in the steel handle seemed to reach out to her, glimmering in the shadows. Their silvery sheen seemed to be magnified by the reflected light, cast down from beneath the moving blades of the rickety ceiling fan. She watched as the unstable old thing quivered, sputtered and buzzed as it turned, chopping the stale and arid indoor air.

The fan sang in tandem with the low hum coming from beneath the refrigerator. This reminded her of the queer noise her grandfather made before he shrieked at the clouds causing them to pour.

The silver metal letters seemed to be moving in the light, back and forth, in and out, playing hide and seek with the light. KELVINATOR. She read the word displayed in shimmery block letters. KELVINATOR. She said it over in her mind a few times. She liked the sound of it. She wondered if there was a Kelvin who started the company. KELVIN, she thought. That would be a nice name for a boy. She was certain that she'd never name a child after Buck. Buck Junior? No. Bradson Jameson Weaver the fourth? Certainly not. A boy's name. A kid name. Something like Kelvin, or Kevin maybe. A fun, let's-go-romp-in-the-hay-and-turn-the-hoses-on-the-pigs-and-bring-frogs-into-the-house kind of name. An All-American boy name. The more she thought about it, the more "Kevin" seemed just right.

As she reached into the fridge for six ears of crisp white corn and a few fat parsnips, she thought about the possibility of a Kevin coming into her life. Maybe she could get money somehow to see a lawyer. To heck with Hattie. Anyway, when it comes to being Indian, women have control over adoptions, captives and just who can and cannot enter the clan. Dear God, she prayed,
if only the money for an adoption. And, Dear God, please, a little rain?

She could smell a half-open jar of mustard Buck left on the side-door. She wondered about family barbecues, and a red-headed freckled kid, who’d love hot dogs, and ice cream, and slopping the hogs with his daddy. She threw a package of bleeding steaks onto the formica counter with a thud, and slammed the fridge door shut with the side of her foot. She plopped the ears of corn and the parsnips into the dry sink, and wiped her bloodstained and sticky hands on the rear pockets of her jeans.

She could hear the rustling whistle of a narrow zephyr edging beneath the back door. Carefully she opened the screen door, and peered out. No sign of Buck. The wind was really howling now, and from the way it looked, there would be—THANK GOD—rain in about an hour, and coming from the east. Storm clouds were twirling in a grey and ebony pinwheel, about a mile behind the tumble-down barn, and above the pig pens. The pigs, slathered in mud, huddled tightly in one corner, as if to shield one another from the coming downpour. Buck was nowhere to be found. He was probably in the barn, fixing the rusting tractor, that was broken, AGAIN.

Katherine looked up at the groaning grey sky and shook her head. Now she had the corn to worry about. If this storm turns out to be the hum-dinger it’s hinting at, the corn will be in trouble, and surely there won’t be any money for a lawyer, a pattern, or even gas to put in the truck for a trip to Cimarron. The sputtering electric tinkle interrupted her quietude. It was the phone. Katherine slowly shut the door, and shuffled in her foam-soled wedgies, glanced across the hardwood floor toward the phone. It stopped ringing before she got there.

Rats! she thought. The blasted phone. Whoever it is will just have to call back. Dazed and disgusted, she decided to do the dishes which she had haphazardly stacked into a babelous pile at the edge of the sink. She dropped an armload of veggies from the dry sink onto the drainboard, and reached for the round black rubber drain plug at the back of the sink. Again she savored the chilling, painful, yet comforting sensation of the icy sink burrowing into her belly. She shoved the stopper into the drain, and lifted the tap, allowing warm water to fill the sink. Yes, a storm was really brewing. In fact, it had already started to sprinkle. The soggy smell of dead and damp sorghum came piercing from the window. She watched the rain as it matted down the buds and chaff on the sorghum, occasionally flying and spattering against the closed window, with an occasional gust of wind. She thought about how windswept raindrops would spatter against her grandfather’s cheeks as he chanted. She was never really sure if perhaps they were mixed with tears. THANK GOD she thought. It’s been one heck of a drought.

She stared intently at the waterfall of raindrops on the window, and wondered how in the world rain was supposed to relax people. The rain began to pound. She could hear the wind slamming and rattling the shutters on the outside. She was glad that Buck installed the lightning rod last week. She thought about the legend of Kitkehaki, the Moon Daughter, and Lightning Medicine. About the maiden who prayed for rain and a child, but when she left the tipi to rescue the abandoned coyote kit, she was struck by lightning. Her hours of gazing up and counting the stars, and talking to the Great Spirit, were rewarded by a wild shining bolt of light, and lifted by the wind, she was carried up, far away into the night heavens, to take residence in the moon. The Pawnee say that when a strong rain comes, you can see her smiling in the moon, and talking to her Coyote children below, who bay back at their glistening mother.

Katherine looked, but couldn’t see the moon. It was only dusk. But she could see the huge jagged bolt which cracked at the rod before her, darting back and forth behind the barn, tracing an electric sizzle into the damp sky. As she watched the rod quiver, she thought about the lightning, the rain, and Kitkehaki. She realized, that as it was now, here with her hands in warm soapy water, a storm raging outside, she had a much better chance of getting struck by lightning than she did of ever bearing Buck’s child. If only there really was a Kitkehaki, and if only she could grant a wish. If you can wish upon a star, why not a squaw in the moon? How absurd. Wishing on stars and the moon. But oh, how she did wish she could be swept up by the wind, carried to some far off place, to return with the budding seed of her spouse flowering inside her.

She washed away the last crusted crumbs of dried oatmeal and sorghum syrup from a favorite Pfaltzgraff bowl with a ragged dish sponge-mop. Just as she hung it over the plastic-laminated rung on the dish drainer, the phone rang. “Are the chickens in yet?” It was Hattie. Hattie and those dog-goned chickens. Whenever it rained, she thought chickens were out drowning somewhere. “Yeah, Hattie. Buck will bring the chickens in... I promise...Oh, just some dishes....” ZAP. She heard a quick sizzle and a crackle, and the phone line was dead. She looked out the window. Rain was sweeping in airborne currents and flailing against the back stoop. The lightning rod was...
vibrating. Hattie must be scared out of her wits, she thought. Oh well. Just have to wait till she tries to call back.

The freshly washed dishes were now resting contentedly on the drainboard, and dripping peacefully onto the rubber mat. Katherine's hands were in the cooling water, swishing shards of food and debris into the drain with her fingertips, sweeping in slow circles. The phone rang again. Must be Hattie, she thought. She shook her wet hands rapidly over the sink, like a dog after a dip, flinging droplets over the counter and sink.

She grabbed the receiver of the phone with her slick wet hand, and propped it up on her shoulder, and plunged her hands back into the emptying sink.

"Uh, hello ...

"Is Kevin there?"

"Kevin??"

Kevin. She was startled. Someone wanted a Kevin. Why, she couldn't name her child Kevin. There was someone else around here with that name.

"I said, is Kevin there??" The voice seemed to be coming from some dark lonesome hollow, almost as if some sacred earth mound had this modern convenience. The woman's voice sounded raspy and screeching, and like it was coming from a tube. It also sounded quite angry. Apparently at someone named Kevin. The hollow in the woman's voice seemed to expand and contract, accented by crackling and sizzling whenever the aged woman took a breath between words. A rotten connection.

"Kevin? Ma'am, there's no Kevin here. You have the wrong number."

"Hardly." The woman replied in a crazed and gruff angry tone.

"Huh?"

"I said, is Kevin there. Let us speak to him."

"Umm, are you one of Hattie's friends? Ma'am, there's no Kevin here, really."

"Hattie? Oh, no. Kevin's. He's ours. And we know he's there."

"Ma'am, I don't know what you're talking about."

"That's what they all say, right? And this is a wrong number. Wrong."

"Look, lady, for the last time, there's not a Kevin here, got it?" Katherine was getting agitated at this crazy old woman and thought she'd hang up, so she pulled her hands from the cold soapy water, and wiped them vigorously on the towel hanging from the under-sink cabinet door handle. She jerked the receiver from her right shoulder with her hand, and with an air of authority, switched ears, stood upright, as if ready to do battle in a face-to-face confrontation with the woman. The lady remained silent. Katherine knew if she tried to hang up now, the line would be jammed, so she could only hang up once the woman wanted to. In exasperation she blasted a yell into the receiver. "For the last time! There is no Kevin here, has not ever been and probably never will be! Okay??!!" The thought of this senseless verbal exchange, and her last remark, caused a sad twinge inside.

The woman said in a soft but sarcastic voice, "Okay. Have it your way. But this is Kalvesta, Kansas, right? This is the Weaver residence, right? Don't bother. Tell Kevin we know. And tell him we're on our way over."

Katherine slammed the receiver down hard on the wall jack, and as she did, a queer electric shock travelled all the way up her arm and into her shoulder, pinging a piercing pain into the side of her neck, down through the palm of her hand, at the same time. Her fingers went numb, tingly and cold.

She heard the low rumble of thunder along the plain and could smell the torrential sheets as they washed the wheat. She grabbed her left wrist, and rubbed around it, kneading, trying to force the blood into her hand, to get the feeling back. She felt nauseous. She looked at her hand, and noticed it had taken on a pallid, china-blue-casted white hue, not unlike the sink it was now resting upon. She continued to rub the hand.

The back door rattled, banging against the inner screen with great force. It wasn't the wind, but wild knocking.

"God-damn it, Kit! Open this God-damn door, why don't you???? I'm getting soaked out here!"

Still clasping her cadaverous hand, she walked zombie-like to the back door, and opened it slowly. There was Buck, shivering.

"Damn it, Kit! Are you okay?" She just looked at the swollen hand. "What's the matter with your hand?" She didn't answer, but looked over at the phone. She saw Buck dripping wet, like he had dropped into the pond, chasing after one of the pigs. His hair was plastered to the back of his neck, his bangs stuck to his eyebrows. His plaid shirt with cutaway pockets and pearlized grommet snaps conformed to every perfectly shaped muscle of his upper torso. His jeans were so wet they looked deep ebony. His heavy workboots were tracking oozy thick mud and matted hay into the house.

Her hand stopped throbbing. She looked up and realized just how wet Buck really was. "Oh, honey! Look at you. You're wrecking the floor. Please go get changed. You'll catch a chill."

"No, Honey. I—I came in for you. You gotta
come back with me—out to the barn. There—There's this kid—and well, found him crouched behind the rabbit feed, mumbling something about “don't find me.” He—He won't talk to me. Weather's too bad to take him to town, besides the phone lines are down. Can't call anybody. He won't leave the barn. Did get one thing out of him, though—says his name is Kevin.”

**Violated**

Pinned
Against a wall

Violated
by this stranger

A man
i don't know
who doesn't
know me

Caresses me
Touches me
Talks to me

Scream!

Help!

Slap!

No one hears
No one helps

So...

The stranger
pins me to the wall
Violates me

While others
unknowingly
continue their fun
on the other side
of the
doors

--Kimberly Gustin

Sunbathers

wet slabs of meat
laid out to dry
with bleached hair
carefully arranged
inside the pink bikini body bags
Don't you find it strange?
Greased like pork
worshipping the sun
like shrivelled bacon pagans.

--Kimberly Gustin

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--Tawnee Shallenberger
Promotion Day

First day of first grade:
Smaller than everyone else,
Quieter.
She knew no one;
They had already established themselves
And she was an intruder.
She sat at her desk, a silent mouse,
And did what she was told.

I wonder how their teacher told them;
How she explained the extra desk,
Moved in just the day before,
Waiting for the girl to come
From Mrs. Prato's room,
The kindergarten room,
Across the hallway.
How did she spare
All the delicate egos
And six-year-old pride,
Take in the extra one
And smooth it all out
To make it equal again?

Somewhere in that school building,
Children were still drinking chocolate milk,
And taking afternoon naps,
And learning their ABCs.
The girl walked across the hall alone
And opened the books
That she had learned to read.

--Karen Sasveld

The Dove

The dove finally free from the ark
finds no place to rest.
Through the day and night she flies
high and strong against fatigue
and the elements. She strains
delicate wings
beats a furious path
and breath burns in her chest
a pure white streak across
a blue sky as smooth
and immense
as the water-world below.
She is like a child's chalk dot
centered on a blue construction sheet.
If only the child
would fold the sheet in half
bending the dot's wings
leaving chalk
against the brown desk top
and letting the dove rest.

--Jim Zeigler
The Prey

The hunter pins down
its prey
Holds it so it can’t
break free
Gags it so it can’t
scream
The hunter’s object
penetrates his prey
works it around
within the prey
At first a little power
behind the motions
faster—quicker
More strength.
Finally, the hunter lets
the prey take a final
gasp of air
Scream
As the hunter’s final
dig penetrates with all
his might into the prey
The hunter lets up his grasp
He looks into its eyes
Steps back
Observes
As his prey lies still
Violated by this stranger.

--Tawnee Shallenberger

Imaginations of My Sister, Age Six

Blue hexagons mark child stepping stones
on the green worn water-carpet.
Rippling shadow-creatures bare imaginary
fangs and rough pointed scales.
Balanced precariously on a tiny shoeless sockless foot
poised on a hexagon island, arms wavering
outward, dancing a tightrope walk
is my sister, age six.
Peering fearfully, intently at the murky green
from beneath long unkept brown bangs.
Danger, she knows should a single toe splash
Off the blue into the stormy, infested waters.
She is centered in the room
halfway through her journey. Her pace quickens
stone-skipping from left to right.
The bathroom door is only two more steps
(She has to go)
She jumps—lands on her right
left flails in the air
she lunges for the threshold
knees smack tile and arms fling for tub wall
she strains and holds her toes
hanging over the sea
and safe.

--Jim Zeigler

FALL 1990
Thoughts Upon Visiting a War Memorial

Screaming blasts of light stab the mind
Of the young killer.
His elders tempted him with promises
Of Victory and Honor.
But now, he crawls through blood, searching
For pieces of this shattered promise.
He does not live to kill...
He kills to live.
Fragments of memories and corpses float about
Him with the stagnant smoke of Death.
"Why?" he asks.
He doesn't know what he is questioning--
He only knows that there is a mindless void
Between logic and porportion.
The shadow of dusk mists about the unknown soldier,
No moon, no stars, no light.
Even the Fires of Hell are black.
Seventy years later his brave spirt echoes within
The walls of a silent, somber chamber.

--Matthew Taylor

Dead

once red
six roses stand stiff with hanging heads
over the table top
as if blood had dried on their very petals
they are dark and brittle.

none of them look at the others anymore
they all turn away
leaning out over the vase
and if they could
they would fall from the table
to rest
once more
gently upon the ground.

--Matt Butzow
Afterthought
The sunlight
disappears
with the window pane shadows
on the floor,

and shallow water
strangles
the cold steel darkness
of an open drain.

One drop of blood
falls through the air,
falls onto the basin.
One drop of blood
begins to spread itself
along the inside,
begins to spread itself
on white porcelain,
becomes its own stream
absorbing beads of water,
separating with greater speed
into short hypertonic branches
led by gravity to the curve in the sink

where it gently feeds the pool.

--Matt Butzow

Marriage of Death

Place this ring upon your finger
In this marriage of death
We both know
We must be together
No one else will have us
We were just having fun
Not considering what we'd done
But now consequences come
We must pay
For our careless day
And now we're doomed together
So place this ring upon your finger
For we'll be going together
So this marriage of death
Is what we deserve now
And we've learned from our mistakes
Even though it's now too late
But we were just having fun
Not considering what we'd done
And this kiss of death came from another

--Tawnee Shallenberger
I Know I Blur

Looking down at the clouds through triple-plated reflection white on blue silhouettes bloat to distortion and become someone else. Faces passing overhead through the rectangle window transform from one end to the other become something new and then disappear past the border.

On the drive home I look out the window. I know I blur to street sitting people and I feel myself expand and billow in their eyes. My cloud grows fills the car presses against the windows swells around the wheel and under the dash until I brake sharply and throw my face through the clouds, to the sun striking windows, releasing smog to the winds.

Resting sideways on the cool blue steel of the hood my face shrinks and glass shards sparkle distinctly in my hair

Glancing upward from the corner of my eye giant white fists extend long blurred fingers accusingly that reflect in my eye and remain even after the stranger's small hand tries to grant me darkness.

--Jim Zeigler
If White Loses His Queen
by Christian Carl

Two years ago I lost her. I feel like the walking dead. I really don't walk though, I float. At night, I float through the streets, hiding my ugly face in dark corners. I scare lonely walkers as I float from shadow to shadow, avoiding the white light.

I live in an apartment downtown. My only window faces a large brick building on the other side of the alley. Painted on the black brick of the building across from me, a large white dove hangs like a picture in my window. Underneath the dove in white letters, I see the reminder of my loneliness. The caption reads, "The only solution is love." If this is true, then I have no solution.

I can't keep my eyes off of this dove. As the sun sets each day, the dove becomes whiter and whiter with its descension. When it becomes dark, its black dotted eyes interrogate me. They drive me from my room. I float down the fire escape. I hurry—avoiding the dove's stare, but I swear his eyes move. I know they follow me.

I move past the sleeping homeless lined up in the alley. It's almost like I'm trying to find my way out of a graveyard and I have to step over tombstones. I try not to wake the dead. A mass of clothes hold the shaking sleepers. They are wrapped in rags. Their hands are in their pants to keep them warm. One of them is mumbling—she's moaning a "Hail Mary" as I walk by, and I feel the stare of the bird intensify on the back of my neck. I pick up my pace, hurdling the sleepers until I escape the alley and the dove. I float down the street, looking back at the white light that shines from the alleyway.

I had been coming to the Inferno for the last two years. I had never noticed the sign before. Before I lost her, I slept at night. I didn't notice the dove until I spent my first night alone. I laid awake in my bed and stared back at the dove, but the white burned my eyes and his dotted black eyes became my pupils. With each night, the stare of the dove became more powerful. I tried shutting my blinds, but his outline burned through the black plastic.

I hated white. My walls were white. My refrigerator was white. My bed was white. I tried painting everything black, but the white dove covered my walls with whiteness. The nights became long and lonely. My eyes were burning red from the white light. It pained me to shut them. I knew I had to leave. I had to find someplace to go to escape the dove and its white, interrogating light.

The Inferno is my someplace. When I first entered the Inferno, I felt warm and comfortable. The bar was lit with a mysterious soft red light. The source of this light was hidden, but I didn't care where it came from, I was just happy that nothing was white. Absolutely nothing was white. I felt alive inside the Inferno. Every night for the last year and a half I made my journey from the white into the red comfort of the Inferno.

That night, like every night, I sat alone at the Inferno. Through the red light of the bar, I watched the people around me. Every night I saw the same people. I saw the same things. I watched the two lovers sit and talk at the table in front of me. The woman stirred her drink with her index finger as she listened to her lover's voice across the table. She watched his mouth. She watched his lips move and she swirled the ice with her finger and licked the liquid from her fleshy spoon. The ice had melted from her stirring, and through her glass, I saw the door of the Inferno.

I watched people walk in. I never saw anybody walk out. The same people walked in every night, but that night, I noticed some new visitors. I watched the loud guys walk in. They were regulars at the Inferno. The loud guys all looked alike. They all wore red rubbies and jeans and their hair was parted to the side. They're extremely loud. Over by the bar, I notice a tight-faced waitress preparing herself to wait on the loud guys. She walks over hesitantly, and one of the guys insults her. She ignores them and they roar with laughter.

begin to notice things. Maybe that's why I never really noticed the dove before. Before I lost her, I slept at night. I didn't notice the dove until I spent my first night alone. I laid awake in my bed and stared back at the dove, but the white burned my eyes and his dotted black eyes became my pupils. With each night, the stare of the dove became more powerful. I tried shutting my blinds, but his outline burned through the black plastic.

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As the waitress moves from table to table, I wait for the rest of the regulars to enter. The young woman should be next, I thought to myself, but instead, I saw a black-faced fat man walk in carrying a briefcase. He walked in, looked straight at me, and then headed for the stairs to his left. I had never noticed the stairs that descended down. Where did they come from? Where did he come from? Why did he look at me? He moved down the stairs and step by step, he slowly disappeared.

I called the waitress over and asked her about the black-faced fat man. She looked at me like I was crazy, and said that she had never seen any black-faced fat man carrying a briefcase. She also told me that the Inferno doesn't have a downstairs. "Are you gonna be okay," she said, and I asked her to bring me a Bloody Mary. I felt stupid. I've been coming here every night for a year and a half and I've never seen him before. I tried to pass it off as a dream—some type of hallucination as a result of bad liquor, but I couldn't shake the stare of the black-faced fat man and his black beady eyes. My thoughts were interrupted by the entry of the young woman. I had been expecting her. Her presence took my mind off of the dark stranger.

She walked in squinting at the brightness of the red light. She was dressed in a red leather outfit. Her lipstick matched the red light of the Inferno. Her eyes searched the room, looking for someone. I wanted that someone to be me, but every night she looked right through me, and tonight was no exception. She gave up her search and lit a cigarette. She desperately sucked on the cigarette, choking the filter with her lips as she moved toward the bar to order a drink.

As she moved to the bar, another regular entered the Inferno. He was a middle-aged man wearing blue pants, a white oxford, and a blue tie. His sleeves were rolled up and his hair was messed up from running his frustrated hands through it. I didn't know who he was, but he probably just finished crunching out some numbers in his tiny cubical on the 5th floor of some large downtown office building. I have a feeling that he's the last one to leave the office every night. He runs his hands through his hair. He finds a table and sits down. He rests his hands on his head, and he holds himself up with his elbows.

The door opened again. This time it was another stranger. His face was glowing white. He stood there in the doorway just looking at me. He wore a black three-piece polyester suit and cradled a thick black book in his left arm. He walked in, threw his arms up in the air, clutched the book in his left hand, mumbled something to the ceiling, and quickly moved toward the stairs.

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The stairs were back again, and as he descended, he signaled to me. He wanted me to follow him downstairs.

I looked around for help. No one had noticed these strangers. No one heard my cries for help. No one paid attention to me, and I felt alone again. I felt myself drawn to this stairway. I floated across the bar towards the stairs. I was carried by my curiosity down the stairs. I came to a tall wooden door and just as I started to knock, the door opened.

I entered the room and the door quickly shut behind me. The two strangers sat in the black-lighted basement. The glowing white face of the man with the black book and the black-faced fat man studied me as I stood in front of them.

The black-faced fat man sat at the table. Set up in front of him was a Chess board. On his Chess board sat an array of Chess pieces. He had set up both sides, white versus black, and he patiently watched the board, never again looking up at me. In his left hand he also held a book—HOW TO WIN AT CHESS—and he studied each page.

The pale, glowing face spoke to me. "This is the Chessman," he said, "and I am Mr. Night, his assistant. Don't mind him, he never speaks, he never smiles, and he never looks up from the table once the game has begun. Each morning he leaves the Inferno. He will return at sundown to continue the game until he has won...or he has lost. When his game is over he leaves. I don't see him for weeks, maybe months.. It depends on how soon I can have his next case ready. When I have found someone worthy of his challenge, then I call for him and he comes."

I heard Mr. Night's words, but I didn't understand. Who was he playing against? Why was he playing, and what did I have to do with it? As questions filled my mind, Mr. Night informed me that I was the Chessman's next challenge. Why me? What happens if he wins? Mr. Night said that it was up to me to figure that out, and that I had better figure it out soon.

Not knowing what to do, I ran from the room, up the stairs and back to my apartment. It was day time and the sun turned the white of my apartment into a golden yellow and I could ignore the dove. I had forgotten about the dove. The Chessman and Mr. Night had taken care of that. I laid on my bed thinking of what I could do. I tried to make sense out of what happened that night, but I couldn't. I dismissed it all as a bad dream.

As soon as the sun set, I returned to the Inferno. I crawled out of my back window and down the fire escape—never looking at the dove. I carefully stepped over the rows of homeless, and
then stumbled over a young woman. She looked up at me and smiled. Her smile was yellow and crooked. It wasn't white. I liked her smile. It reminded me of the yellow of the sun. I wasn't afraid of her. I apologized for stepping on her, and quickly made my way to the Inferno.

Afraid that maybe the Chessman wasn't a dream, I thought to myself...What if I have already lost? No. No. If I had lost, I would probably know by now. I hurried through the door of the Inferno and found my usual seat. I waited. The Chessman didn't walk through the door. I saw no sign of the stairwell. I waited. The regulars were making their way in and there was still no sign of the strangers.

Looking through the bottom of my glass as I finished my drink, I saw a large figure standing in the doorway. I set my drink down and the Chessman stood in front of me. His black, beady eyes stared at me as a black smile stretched across his face. I looked away in fear. When I looked back, he was gone. Just seconds after the Chessman had disappeared down the stairs, Mr. Night walked in. A look of disappointment covered his pale glowing face. Maybe I had lost? I didn't understand why he looked so disappointed. His face dropped, his arms dropped to their sides, he shook his head, and walked downstairs.

I quickly moved across the Inferno, through the red, down into the black of the basement. When I entered, I noticed that my Queen was gone, and some of the pawns, black and white, had been moved. The game had begun, and I had no idea how to play. I had no way of defending myself against the Chessman. If I couldn't be in charge of my own white pieces, how could I win? I asked Mr. Night how I could win if I couldn't even move my own damn pieces. He replied that I was in charge of my own pieces, and that with each day the game would progress. My actions determine my moves on the board. I was being played out on the Chess board—but my Queen was gone. I complained that I could never win without my Queen and that this game was unfair. Mr. Night told me that when I lost her, I lost my Queen. "So," he said, "I hope you understand that it is quite fair."

When I was in the basement of the Inferno, the pieces on the board never moved. I returned the next night to see the black smile on the Chessman's face, and the disappointing look of Mr. Night. Mr. Night was frustrated with me. He pulled me aside. He asked me what I was doing here. "Haven't you figured it out yet?", he said in disgust. "Do you want to lose? Do you want to just watch him suck the life from you? Do you want to become like me? Do you want to become the walking dead? I lost her too! Don't you understand? I lost her too! I've spent a year and a half studying you. You lay around all day. You never eat. You never sleep. This is all because you lost her. You are the next candidate. Don't you understand? I spent my life hiding! I wanted to be alone. I found myself in this same room 2 years ago, and I lost! I sat in the same chair upstairs that you've been sitting in for the last year and a half. You've shown no motivation for self-improvement. You are a waste of space. You are the walking dead. Don't you understand? I've served my term! I've served my term! If he wins, then you take my place and I...I'm...I'm gone. Every two years the Chessman must attempt to find another assistant. If you don't lose, I can keep living. I'd rather be the walking dead than nothing at all. You must try to win. You must learn how to win at Chess. You can save yourself and you can save me. Please! I beg you!!"

I fled from the black of the basement, through the red of the Inferno and into the white of my apartment. It was daytime and I sat in my apartment thinking of how I could win. I was helpless. I thought about Mr. Night. I wanted to save him and myself, but how? I remembered that he said that I must learn how to win at Chess. I remembered the book that the Chessman held and I went to the bookstore. I bought a book on how to win at Chess. I studied the book and found the answer. Chapter 7—WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU LOSE YOUR QUEEN. The passage read:

If White loses his queen during the early stages of the game, he is found to be at a severe disadvantage. His only escape from Checkmat in this situation is to regain his Queen through patience and perseverance. In order to regain the Queen, White must cross from the White zone through the Red zone (the center of the board) and into the Black zone. If White reaches the edge of the Black zone, he regains his queen and is back in the game. White must be unafraid to take risks, but he mustn't avoid the obvious. In this situation, the most difficult moves are the smartest ones to make.

I sat and thought about this passage. I realized that at night, I found myself in the White light, I escaped into the red, and I ended up in the black. I must be close to the solution to my dilemma. I just didn't know what to do. Like the book said, you must move from the white to the red and then into the black and you can regain your Queen. As I sat on my bed thinking, the sun had gone down,
and I found myself in the white light. I stayed there this time. I wanted to see if I was missing something. The book said that sometimes the most difficult moves are the best moves. I sat in the white light. I hated the white light, but I had to stay there. I had to face the light and wait for something to happen. I moved towards the blinds and twisted the handle. The white light burst through the glass in slits and burned my eyes. I kept them open and in front of me the solution to my problem shined on the black brick wall. "The only solution is love" in bright white letters filled my eyes. My eyes read the letters and I spotted something below in the alley. The young homeless woman, that I had stumbled over, sat there against the black brick. She was wrapped in white blankets. She wore a white hat that sat on her head like a crown, and I had realized that she was my Queen. I had found my Queen!

I ran down the fire escape, staring back at the dove. The white no longer burned my eyes. The black dotted eyes of the dove were empty. I woke up the young woman. She was scared at first, but then smiled. I walked her up the fire escape and into my room. I told her that she was my Queen. She said that she had watched me come down the fire escape every night. She had watched for my return every morning. She said that she had been worried because I didn't leave that night. She was afraid that something was wrong. I told her that everything was okay because I had found my Queen. We fell asleep that night, holding each other tightly with arms and legs. When I woke up, she was gone, and in the palm of my hand I held the White Queen. I ran to the window to look for her, but was struck by a burning white light. I looked up to face the dove, but it was gone. In its place a message was carved into the black brick with bright white letters:

Welcome back and thank you.
Sincerely,

Mr. Night

I smiled and set the Queen on the windowsill. I knew that I hadn't won yet, but at least I was back in the game.