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RALEIGH REVIEW FOUNDED AS RIG POETRY
Robert Ian Greene
February 21, 2010
EDITOR’S NOTE

Five years ago Raleigh Review started off during a metaphorical storm. I’d just completed my first semester (and ultimately my best semester grade-wise) as a graduate student, and then, like the great Bob Dylan line, “I took too much for granted, got my signals crossed.” The crossing of one’s signals usually leads to embarrassment and awful drama. This situation was no different, though what was different was the outcome—this magazine, now on its fifth volume.

Now, no matter how difficult the times, I am constantly reassured by the growing interest in Raleigh Review. For one of our stories to win an award and three of our poems to land as finalists out of the gate was reassuring. Receiving grant after grant has been reassuring. To have writers travel thousands of miles to attend our workshops taught by award-winning faculty is reassuring. To have a staff and a board comprised of award winners themselves is reassuring.

At the same time, for our people to be as giving as they are with their time in order to promote others is surprising to many, though not to me. I know most artists are giving beings, and it is an honor to work with such great talent.

This issue marks our fifth anniversary, and I dedicate it to the staff and board at Raleigh Review who work to make us even better.

Onward and upward!

—Rob Greene, editor
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After a night of mortar fire,  
in the first light, her father drags  
a hose across his yard, to water  
the plum saplings he planted

last month. Half a world away,  
crepe myrtles outside her home  
blaze, impotent red blooms.  
When she phones, he will talk

only about the plums, how  
sweet they will taste, sliced  
and salted, on his favorite plate.
Insomnia

The driver cannot sleep
until the child finishes her nightly
traverse of the sky, hopping from star to star,
pausing to dip her hand in the black river.

He wrote home of the man and woman
wailing and clawing their chests and faces,

gesturing toward the car they’d stumbled from
with both hands after his tank crushed the trunk

and back seat, but he never mentioned
the flashlight he held,

the crushed glass of the rear window,
the still child’s hand,

how he lies on his cot watching the girl carefully
leap empty space between steppingstones,

brush hair from her face,
on her way toward dawn.
POEM | Mark Madigan

Kate
—My niece, age 9

Among those things
listed on a scroll
of birthday wishes

was Grappling hook.
What vision, I thought,
in one so young

to be looking out now
for gifts that could only
lift her up.
POEM | E. Kristin Anderson

“Fresh-faced and dirty”

A hot gust of air is learning,
a new havoc to know. Electricity.
Think of it as cumulative, more rural—
trendy, actually, hanging north
of a landscape.

Yes, you wash the depth of days,
naturally to damage this cascade
of morning. Your barrier is skin,
a night with medicine, that sonic
fragrance. Crazy, pink, that lost
ability may be pollution—
invite it in.

This is an erasure poem. Source material: “Clearing the Air” by the Editors. Marie Claire, September 2014, pages 326-328.
POEM | *Mike Smith*

**Branson, Missouri**

The mountains weren’t enough, so here’s to the high season and the red corps of engineers. Here’s to the neon godliness of enterprising souls who guessed you might willingly cede your privation to the indigenous few who’d cash your checks in full costume and swipe your cards.

What changes hands is gold they never found here in this state of being nowhere near a spot you’d care to be.

They made it worth your while. They dammed the river and gave you Freon luxury in an authentic shack. Old jokes, old jokes hop and sing out on seventeen scuffed stages where B-Listers with blisters look for no place like home.

Check your map: The line starts here.
Anchorage

I am Bud Whitney blushing with my bride. I am Jack Brown, builder of boats and ferryman across the Knik Arm. This is big water, Cook Inlet, and I am snow-stupid, of a stock built for burrowing, wearing my hat far back on my head.

Easy friends, I’ve got only time to kill, talking to a blur.

You’ve heard of the dangers of mud flats, of the kindly Dena’ inu. You’ve heard of gold beyond. Truly, it’s there, out far from where I will never send you this. Why else would we have so many words for how it glitters in your eyes?
LAURENCE HOLDEN | *Garden of the Golden Sections #311 (River Gihon)*, 1990
38 x 50 inches | Acrylic, paper, gold leaf, wood
Collection of the artist
Pinhole Vision

Pin-hole, n. A small hole or perforation made by or as by a pin.

Vi-sion, n. The act, power, or faculty of seeing; sight; the ability to imagine and prepare for the future, as in: He had a vision of things to come.

“...once a hole opens in how you’ve been looking at the world, everything else pushes through.”
—Ursula Heigi, Children and Fire

Laura’s father carefully unscrewed the blue glass finial from the top of their biggest living room lamp and slipped off the shade. The light from the bulb flooded the room. He put the lamp on the coffee table, pushed the kitchen stool in front of the table, and closed the thick damask drapes so no other light could come in.

“Sit here,” he told her mother, pointing to the kitchen stool, “and look there, toward the wall, so I can see the outline of your face.”

Laura’s mother sat on the stool, careful to sit straight so her head was about even with the bare light bulb. She pulled back her hair so he could see her forehead, nose, and chin in profile against the bright light.

“Let your hair go,” he said, “so I can see how long it is now. You haven’t cut it have you?”

“No,” she answered.

Her mother let her hands drop and tilted her chin up so her hair would fall softly against her neck.

Laura thought her mother looked like one of those beautiful Breck girls in the magazines. She wondered if her father knew about Breck Shampoo. She also wondered how much he saw when he looked at them against the bright light of the exposed bulb.
Her father turned his head toward the bright light and frowned. He rubbed his eyes with the heels of his hands and walked toward the lamp.

“Sorry,” he said to Laura as he turned off the light.

Laura’s mother looked to her as if to say she was sorry too and took the stool back to the kitchen.

Laura was disappointed. It had been almost a year since the last time her father had seen her silhouette against the glare of the exposed bulb. She was seven then, but now she was eight, and her hair was even longer than her mother’s, and she wore it in a ponytail. She was anxious for him to see how grown-up she’d become.

She stood silently by as her father put the lamp back together again. She didn’t offer to help, hoping he’d change his mind. Laura secretly worried her father would never have the chance to see her because he never knew when it was going to happen, how long it would last, or if it would ever happen again once it left him.

Pinhole vision is what he called it: a kind of stark explosion of images through one tiny receptor at the back of his sightless eyes that would, without warning, work for a moment, giving him the pleasure of sight. It was a pleasure, however, that often left him with a sick headache. It was a headache, Laura knew without asking, that meant no one could come to the house today to play.

Laura stepped aside so her father could go to his room to put on his dark glasses and rest.

§

“He was blind?” Andrew asked. The two of them were sitting in Laura’s kitchen. Andrew had just asked her to marry him, and he wanted her to tell him everything.

“Since birth. But you wouldn’t have known it.”

§

They had moved into the house on Gloria Street the summer before she started third grade. The house was new. The neighborhood was also new. Sprung from life, her mother used to joke, out of WWII, as though it had
been commissioned by the army and plunked down in the middle of a field of dreams.

Laura didn’t know anything about the army or the war, but it seemed to her that everyone who lived in her neighborhood had come from it, except for her father and their family.

“Shhhh,” she cautioned Brenda, her new neighbor, her soon-to-be new best friend, who had come to the door that morning to see if she could play, “my father’s resting.”

Laura slipped her thin body between the screen and front door, careful to hold in the tongue of the lock on the door so it wouldn’t make a sound when she pulled it shut. She didn’t want to wake her father.

“My mother says your father is blind,” Brenda said.
“He is.”
“Got shot in the face in Germany or somewhere over there?”
“Born that way.”
“How do you get born blind?”
“You just do.”
“But he can see, can’t he?”
“Nope.”
“I don’t believe you.”

§

Laura took a moment before she tried to explain everything to Andrew.
“You would have had to have known him to understand,” Laura said, pouring another glass of wine for herself.
“I want to understand,” Andrew told her, gently rubbing the rim of his wine glass, round and round, until it made a slight humming noise. “I want to know everything about him and about you.”

§

There were so many things to say. So many things she’d never talked about to anyone before.
Laura had loved growing up in their house. She loved that she could stand on their new cement front stoop, look down the block and see her school. It was big with blue doors and was named after a president, like all the other schools in this new city. Unfortunately, by the time they had built her school, the school board had already used all the more honorable presidential names like Jefferson and Roosevelt. Her school was named Taft, an easy name to remember and to spell, which pleased Laura but not her father. When her father took her to register for third grade, he told the school secretary it was a damn shame to name an elementary school after a lazy, shiftless Republican like Taft.

The secretary didn’t bother to look at her father in his dark glasses; instead, she looked straight at Laura and announced that Taft wasn’t lazy, just fat, and it didn’t matter what they called the school as long as they taught the children how to read and write.

§

“My mother says we have to be careful when we play at your house,” Brenda said.
“About what?”
“Leaving toys on the floor or not pushing our chairs in when we leave the table. She says your dad could trip over them and hurt himself.”
“That’s not true.”
“That’s what she says.”
“She doesn’t know.”

§

“There was this girl,” Laura said, holding the wineglass by its delicate stem in order to bring it up to the light so she could look through the dark wine to see the face of the man who wanted to marry her, who insisted he wanted to know everything about her.
“Brenda was her name, and she was my best friend until she got saved in tenth grade and told me I was a heathen, and she couldn’t talk to me anymore.
“She had a younger brother named Jake. One day they were over at our house playing. It must have been right after Christmas or my birthday because the floor was littered with books and toys. We heard my father coming up the stairs from the basement. Brenda and Jake got real quiet and quit playing. I didn’t know what was happening, so I quit playing too. When my father walked through the room, he stopped for a moment and said hello to both of them, called them by name the way anyone would. After he spoke, he continued on through the living room to his bedroom without stepping on anything.

“As soon as he was gone, Brenda stood up and told Jake to get up too. She grabbed Jake’s hand and announced they were going home because they weren’t allowed to play with liars.

“Do you understand? They thought he could see because he knew who they were.”

“Could he?”
“What?”
“See?”
“He was blind.”
“Then how did he know who they were?”
“He just did.”

§

The Weekly Readers came every Tuesday after the last recess. Mrs. Moore, her third grade teacher, would put them on their desks. When they came in from recess, they were expected to sit down and begin reading the first story silently to themselves.

Laura was the last to come in one day because it was her job to hang the jump ropes on the coat hook by the door. When she slid into her seat, everyone stopped reading and looked at her.

“When everyone is done reading,” Mrs. Moore intoned, “we’ll discuss the story.”
The students went back to reading, their heads bent down over their desks. Laura picked up her Reader and started in on the story. It was about being handicapped.

“There are all kinds of handicaps,” Mrs. Moore began a few minutes later, holding the Weekly Reader out in her hand as though she too were reading it. “Can anyone name a handicap?”

“Deafness,” Thomas Winters called out.
“Being crippled,” added Brenda.
“What about being blind?” Mrs. Moore asked, looking straight at Laura.
“That’s not a handicap,” Laura said.
“But of course it is, Laura. In fact, it’s probably the worst kind,” Mrs. Moore said, straightening her back and looking down at Laura over the edge of the Weekly Reader she held out in front of her.
“It is NOT,” Laura screamed. “It is NOT at all like being deaf or crippled.”
Then she did something she often dreamed of doing but never thought she would have the courage to do: she stood up from her seat, walked to the door, and once she could see her house, she began running. She ran until she reached the cool, safe surface of the cement stoop and she sat down and cried.

§

“What was your father like?”
“My mother used to say he was the kind of man who should have been born rich.”
“Why rich?”
“Because he liked things.”
“Like what?”
“Dark gray pinstriped suits with starched white shirts. Navy blue wool gabardine sports jackets.”
“He liked colors?”
“And textures. Smooth felt hats. Tan cashmere coats. He always said there was something special about the feel of red silk.”
“And your mother?”
“She didn’t care that much about red silk, but she would wear it for him and whenever she did he would say she looked beautiful.”

§

Laura’s father was the only father in the neighborhood who wore a white shirt to work. Dressed in a suit and tie, he would walk to his insurance office in town every morning after he walked her to school. Her mother would pick her up from school. Her father would come home every night precisely at six, just in time to wash his hands and sit down to dinner.

All the other fathers in the neighborhood worked in the automobile factories. Those who pulled the day shift left before their kids got up and came home from work when their children got home from school. If they worked afternoons, they left when school was over and came back when their kids were in bed. Brenda’s father worked the night shift, so Laura could never play at her house because her father was always sleeping.

Brenda’s father wore blue pants and blue work shirts to the factory, and his hands were big and rough. On his days off he fixed things in their garage. Laura’s father’s hands were smooth. He didn’t fix things. He sat in the living room and listened to the news on the radio or put on his earphones and listened to Talking Books.

Sometimes, her father would go outside after dinner to mow their lawn, pulling their small gas mower behind him, kicking his feet as he walked in order to know he was pulling the mower across uncut grass.

Once, when Brenda’s father was out in the backyard and her father was mowing the lawn, Laura saw Brenda’s father look over at her father then look away as though there were something shameful about a man who had to drag a mower behind him rather than push it in front of him like someone who could see.

§
“Sometimes Mom would go out to dinner with her friends. She was very different from Dad. She liked to be in the middle of things. She liked to gossip, to be with people, to dance at parties.

“It was funny. Everyone called my mom by her first name. Even the kids in the neighborhood called her Linda. But they didn’t call my father by his first name; it was as though he didn’t have a first name. Everyone called him Mr. Beckman. My mom would call him Mr. Beckman when she was annoyed at something he’d done or said and she didn’t want to fight, just wanted to warn him she was getting agitated.

“When she’d go out with her friends, Dad and I would walk into town and have dinner at this little restaurant not far from his office.

“One night, a new waitress seated us and gave both of us menus. When she came back to take the order she looked at my father. When she saw he was wearing dark glasses, she looked away from him and turned to me to ask what he wanted.

“I told her she should ask him. My father pretended nothing had happened and gave her his order. After both of us had placed our orders, Dad asked for a cup of coffee. Again, the waitress turned to me and asked whether he wanted cream and sugar. I exploded. He’s blind, I told her, not deaf and dumb.

“We never talked about him being blind at home, and I knew what I had said was ugly. It felt ugly in my mouth the way things that you shouldn’t say do. I thought my father was going to be angry with me. Instead, he laughed this great big laugh. His laughter filled the restaurant. Everyone quit talking and stared at us. The waitress was so embarrassed, she took off her apron and left.”

“What happened next?”

“The owner brought us our food and apologized. He said the waitress was new and didn’t know. My father just waved his hand as if to say it was nothing to worry about.
“After dinner, when we were walking back home, my father told me that people who couldn’t talk weren’t dumb. They were mute, and that he didn’t want me to ever use the word dumb again.”

§

When Laura was in high school, she’d go to her father’s office on Saturdays in order to help him write letters or file. When her father talked to people on the phone about their insurance policies, he took notes in Braille. Afterwards, he’d call his secretary into his office, and he’d read his notes to her, and she would fill out the policies or make any changes he had noted. He kept his Braille notes on all his customers in his desk, and the secretary kept her written ones in the files in the front office.

The work seemed simple enough, and it made Laura mad that people were always so amazed a blind person could sell insurance, as if it was some kind of miracle a blind person could do anything but eat and sleep.

§

Jimmy Davis was the first boy who ever asked Laura out, and from the minute he picked her up, he couldn’t quit asking questions about her father. He wanted to know why he was blind and what he did all day. He said he couldn’t imagine what it would be like to be blind and not be able to do anything.

They had gone to a school dance, but neither one of them was comfortable dancing, so they had come home early and were sitting in Jimmy’s dad’s car in front of Laura’s house talking.

The windows were beginning to get steamed up, and Laura was wondering just how long they could sit in the car before her dad would come out to ask what was going on. She wished Jimmy would just shut up about her father.

“Does he work?” Jimmy asked.

“He has an insurance company,” she told him.
“I don’t believe he sells insurance.” Jimmy said, sure that he had caught her in a lie.
“You’re right,” she told him. “He doesn’t. He robs banks.”
“But he’s blind.”
“Who says?” Laura taunted.
“Everyone. He wears dark glasses.”
“Part of his disguise. That and the insurance company. Do you really think the police are going to arrest a blind man for robbing a bank?”
“Maybe not.”
“That’s how he gets away with it. No one can believe it’s true.”

§

“He loved the movies. Westerns, murder mysteries, espionage, James Bond, anything but stupid things where they took fairy tales and messed them up. He didn’t care too much for romantic comedies either, except those wonderful Spencer Tracy and Katharine Hepburn ones. Those were the best. My mom had no patience with the movies. She said she couldn’t sit still long enough to watch a movie. She liked to do things and go places, anything but sit still.

“My dad and I would go to the weekend matinees when the place was full of kids. We’d sit in the back row. All the kids would be piled up in the front, and they’d be laughing and talking, and my father could get the feel of what was going on from their reactions.

“Sometimes, there’d be this long silence in the movies, especially in the westerns, where two guys were facing off getting ready to draw. The audience would be holding its breath. My dad would touch my arm, and I’d tell him what was going on.

“It was the only time I was his eyes, and the two of us needed each other.”
Laura didn't know what to tell people when her parents divorced. Her best friend Brenda was shocked and said she couldn't imagine how a blind man could leave his wife and live on his own. Laura said blindness had nothing to do with it.

But she had lied. For a long time before the divorce, her father didn’t do anything when he was home but sit in his chair with his earphones on while her mother went on about her business as though no one was in the house but her. Laura wasn’t sure what was wrong, but she knew the air was electrified the way it often is when a storm is coming, and you can feel it on your skin long before you see it come washing across the horizon.

“Are you like your dad?” Andrew asked.
“I’m like my mother in that I can see, but more like my father in how I feel about things.”

Laura didn't like her father's earphones any more than her mother did, but they were a necessary evil of his desire to read by listening to Talking Books. The earphones, however, shut the two of them out of his world. If he didn’t wear them when he wanted to read, they had to listen to his books too, which was like having someone read aloud while you tried to vacuum, take a shower, read your own book or newspaper, or talk on the phone.

Laura knew the earphones were only part of it. The real problem was that her mother had wanted a job and her father didn’t want her to have one. Whenever the subject came up, he refused to talk about it, saying he made plenty of money and he didn't see why she needed to make more.

She said she wanted to get out of the house. She said she felt like a prisoner. She said she wanted her own life.

Laura could hear them after she went to bed each night. They would usually start talking in one room, then

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move to another. It was as if they were searching for a place where they could feel comfortable talking to each other. Eventually the talk would turn into a fight, and her mother would slam their bedroom door, and her father would go into the living room and put on his earphones and sit in his chair. The next morning, Laura would find her father asleep in his chair and her mother in the kitchen making coffee as though nothing had happened.

It all ended abruptly the afternoon her mother came home with a department store name badge in her purse.

“You can’t do this to me,” her father had said, refusing to sit at the dinner table.

“Do what to you?”

“Embarrass me like this. Make people think I can’t provide for you and Laura.”

“Who cares what people think?” her mother argued.

“I’m blind.”

“And, I’m not.”

It was over before their dinner got cold. He was gone, and her mother cleared the dishes and went to her room and shut the door.

§

“I would go to my father’s office on my way home from school every day. On Friday afternoon, he’d give me my allowance. We’d talk. Sometimes I’d answer the phone for him.

“He had an apartment near the movie theatre. We’d go to the movies together on weekends just like we always had. When I was in college, I’d come home for the holidays, and we’d go to the movies every day. We had this deal where we’d save up movies to see together. I’d call him and say save this one for me. He’d agree and ask me to save some other one for him. We’d have a list, and we’d see them all: musicals, mysteries, comedies, and even those horrible things Disney made. Fantasia was the worst for my father. Nice music, but nothing about Fantasia made any sense to him.
“I used to think that if my mother would have gone to the movies with us she would have stayed with him.”

Andrew leaned his arms on the table and looked at her straight on as though she might bolt and run.

“You’re not your mother, and I’m not your father,” he said.

Laura reached behind her and turned off the light.

“And then what happened?” he asked.

“And then he died. Just like that. One minute he was walking down the street talking with a friend, and the next minute he was dead. A heart attack. My mother was the one who called to tell me.

“I didn’t know what to say to her. I was still angry she’d left him. I felt so empty and strange, like he’d never even been in my life.”

“Was he handsome?”

“Like a god.”

Slowly, Laura began to talk in the dark. She told him about her parents fighting during the night and how she couldn’t go to sleep until it was over and she heard her father walk to the living room to sit in his chair and her mother slam the bedroom door. She told him about the time she told Jimmy Davis her father was a bank robber. And about Mrs. Moore and that stupid third-grade *Weekly Reader* and how she ran home and cried on the front porch wishing her father would be the one to find her and take her back to school so she could show Mrs. Moore he wasn’t handicapped. But, instead, it was her mother who came home and found her, washed her face, and took her back to school.

When Andrew reached across the table and took her hand, Laura was surprised at how cool his fingers felt against her skin. All at once, she remembered how it was to sit next to her father in the movies and to tell him about the things he couldn’t see. Then, she told Andrew the truth about her father.

“Sometimes he could see. Not for long, and not very well, but he could see. He called it pinhole vision. Whenever it happened, he would take the lampshade off
the big table lamp in the living room and put my mother on a chair in front of it. And, if she sat very still, he could see her, an image of her, against the bright light for just a moment. Then the vision would be gone, and he would be blind again.”
LAURENCE HOLDEN | *Figure Standing*, 2006
11 x 8.5 inches | Sumi ink, charcoal, watercolor on paper
Collection of the artist
POEM | *Kate Henry*

**Each Day**

Concern with correctness made the parting 
Amicable. We shook hands, no other  
Parts touched—we made sure. There were no 
Water spills, no plate-clatter, no smarting

Of the hand’s hot print ghosted on my back.  
Each day the kitchen grew murkier. Fruit  
Flies bloomed upward in séance, unrooted  
From rot when I came near. I put lilac

Soap in vinegar, bleached the countertops, 
Did the ritual, if for no other reason  
But to clarify the body’s sense  
Of flesh. The resilient burn cropped

Up and faded. Each day cold and related  
Closely to the last. I kept watch. I waited.
Unsent Valentine to Porcupine, South Dakota

Moth-shaped leaves bang
again & again against
the basement window.
Snow winds screech
outside my rented house
like a hundred Lloronas.
I’m plump, nude, & waiting
for the washing machine
to finish its mad dance.
I live alone & haunt
myself with lies about
forgotten flesh while
dormant desires feast on
my increasing forgetfulness.
If the true God manifested
in this Minnesota basement,
I’d mince about & wink,
but if Satan popped up
I’d offer my tight ass
without blinking for
just a few more years.
Just a few more years
with you in Porcupine.
POEM | C. Wade Bentley

Gone Off

Your dog took to me like a favorite tree. Your mom made her whiskey-sauce meatloaf, and was feeling no pain. Your grandpa beamed at the way I phrased my Jeopardy answers in the form of questions during my run through Potent Potables. When I played a diamond to dummy's ace to end our bridge game and take two overtricks, there were smiles all around. And when they left us alone, at last, it was as if they had already undone the top three buttons of your blouse.

We may have failed to account sufficiently for you, however, how you would say you could smell it on me, something like optimism long spent, like potato salad or Clams Casino left sitting out.
The Winter from Which None Will Emerge Unscathed

Well, right off, Uncle Cleo will die, but we can't really blame the winter so much as deep frying. Two disks in Irwin's spine will bulge when he tries unsuccessfully to push the neighbor's daughter's Fiat up the driveway, but he does get asked in for coffee—just coffee—so there's that. Arwen will hold her face against the kitchen window, soaking in the last of the sun's warmth at 4:45 p.m., and later, mid-January, carve day lilies into both of her thighs with a lobster fork. Six-year-old Stefan learns the hard news about Santa. A seven-hundred year-old foxtail pine in a Sierra Nevada ice storm splits down the middle. Thirty-seven residents of Butte, Montana, question the existence of God, though twenty-two will recant before Easter. One night in early February, Cyril will see a side of himself so dark and loathsome that he will refuse to allow the coming reproach, the slow indictment of light.
I Still Don’t Know What They Were Fighting For

It must’ve been the giddiness of that contract Mr. Ward sold so he could throw the block party—steaks, lobsters, bar, a steel band—or maybe the informal quality of what Mr. Green proposed—just a rope tied around a square formed by lawn chairs—that led Mr. Ward to say yes to Mr. Green, to the bout.

§

That night, my father sat in a chair with his martini, watching my mom dance with Mr. Ward near the weeds on the edge of the property. I’d found, a few weeks before, a contract both my parents had signed—An Open Marriage—stuffed in a pocket of my dad’s uniform along with other stuff: pot, pills, some Korean money.

“I know something,” I had told my father “about Mr. Ward.”

At the party, my father didn’t take his eyes off them. I had told him what Annie Ward had revealed to me, that her father killed a guy, his best friend. A blow to the nose sent a bone through the guy’s brain and ended Mr. Ward’s fighting career because that kid haunted him still.

“What do you want me to do about it?” my father had asked, and I’d told him, but he didn’t say anything in reply.

§

Fight time and Mom stood in Mr. Ward’s corner. Mr. Green swayed, drunk on Wild Turkey. His wife yelled that it wouldn’t recover anything, beating Mr. Ward, and Mr. Green yelled back if she didn’t see why it would, maybe she should shut the fuck up. The rest of the neighborhood
surrounded the ring, the whole lot of them sadly mismatched.

Annie rang the bell, the squat muscled Mr. Green moving like a wrestler and the skinny, mean Mr. Ward not moving at all.

My father wasn’t around. I hoped he had changed into his uniform as I had told him to and that he’d step into the ring as that kid. I thought Mr. Ward probably fucked Annie. I don’t know why I thought it, and maybe that was just my own sickness having grown up around all of them. He looked at her creepily, like now, stalking Mr. Green like a ninja.

“One shot,” Mr. Ward kept saying. “That’s all it’s gonna take.”

I was looking past the weeds for my father, so I missed it. When I turned around, Mr. Green was squirming on the ground holding his face. Mr. Ward ignored him, went to my mom in the corner, gave her a big long kiss in front of everyone.

§

Later that night, I found my dad in the car in the garage, uniform on, not dead or anything, the car inside full of smoke from that old pot. I told him what had happened and he said, “Figures.” I asked him what had happened to the plan. He didn’t answer, just laughed a lot, and repeated “what had happened to the plan” over and over, like something broken.
Light at the Seam

This is the afterlife,
threshold of oblivion:
a blacktop crest
on Pine Mountain,
Bell County, Kentucky,
US Route 119 burning
north through the heart
of coal until it plays out,
frozen, in DuBois, PA.
Out of gauzy lavender fog,
the wakened sun
swoons in white robes:
Jesus, flanked by Moses
and Elijah, transfigured,
*up into a high mountain
apart*. Deep within,
miners suspire, shake
light at the seam.
The Windows of Heaven

...in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month,
the same day were all the fountains of the great deep
broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened.
—Genesis 6:11

Down from Coal River Mountain,
where gorges slurry atop Eagle seam,

water leaks from invisible understories:
one drop, then one drop more until

revealing itself, quickened,
in the gap malformed, flashing

on its back the chromium
light that augurs flood,

departing its branch, swaggering
the hairpin, jewel weed

slickened to its banks, yellow
buds drowned, flickering

the whiptail. Phoebes
chant. Crows set up

black on wires. Spotted
cows slosh muck to the knoll.

Then it’s hurtling drunk the swale,
airborne, creek no more, but cock-strong
river, gouting spit, wronged
in some Shakespearian mien:

sizzling rain, simmered
in the troposphere—

three, four inches, too little time,
too sparse a vessel—gravity

smearing it through the valley.
Upon the land gathers a Biblical

quietus before it explodes
the culvert at the hollow crosshairs

where roads conflux and houses,
that once believed they’d be a town,
cower at the surge.
The wind spells its knots.

The sky shakes. Folks
huddle on the rise beyond

Rainey’s swamped trailer
and watch it come on.
Old Man Winter

February’s frozen rain
drapes the backyard
 in its glistening spell,
traps
the mind in cold decades deep: Home again.

I felt like dying,
something not said:
words to scatter crows over the fields.

Might as well come late
and bare-chested to the dinner table,
might as well burp or chew with your mouth open,

transgressions

that got you slapped at six-thirty in the evening
over the breaded veal cutlet and potato.

Pop,
you never said
you hated winter, you admitted
little. But now I feel it,

as if the early fog reached
through the window to hold us together,
 as we so seldom were,

staring out
at the hollies in their stricken glory.
LAURENCE HOLDEN | Seedlight: Wintering Seeds, 2014
12 x 9 inches | Oil on canvas
Collection of the artist
POEM | Marie Pavlicek-Wehrli

At the Kitchen Table

I fall forward into the black funnel that was his mouth. Falling past row upon row of spent black craters, troughs that held each tooth’s root and shout each marred and stunted thought. Black teeth. Black fingers. Black bread—the tablecloth lay between us like something dead with its shadowed folds of faded chintz that bent the way his oiled handprints crawled across a faded rose-patterned field—Nothing waits so long as this, to count, tap by tap, the time between a tired head’s loll and nod, until the spoon, dipped again into the soup’s bowl, lifts to enter his open mouth.
POEM | *Chera Hammons*

Mineral Rights

After about two hours of driving south on Highway 287, fields of pumpjacks, cow-pastures full of them, sway their slim hips slightly off-beat of each other, pulling oil out of the well, tedious in their dumb horsey faces. Long-snouted horseflies suck sticky dark wet from the shallowest cow places they can get to, bend of shoulder or hock. Their stomachs are chalices where the animals marry. The prairie drones with peace and insects, and no one stops to look at it. The joints start to orange so the machines creak steadily with rust for decades together, steady and heavy. A jackrabbit rests in the shadow of the neck of one, cool and still, lucky in the shade and used to its noise.
LAURENCE HOLDEN | *This Mountain Opens to Speak Its Name*, 2011
82 x 78 inches | Acrylic, gold leaf on polyester fabric
Collection of the artist
What does a tiger do in the suburbs?

The question must begin with Alice, lonely Alice, sprawled across her paisley bed. She’s opened her window because it’s summertime in California, and out there, the whole world has thrown their windows open, too. They have forgotten that someone—she—might hear their beating hearts: the tinkle of forks on plates, heavy footsteps down a dim hallway, a television audience laughing. It is dark out, not quite black but purple, and in this dim, the crickets chirrup. In the distance unseen by Alice, palm trees sway hello, goodbye, but mostly they sway goodbye because lying face-up on her bed, Alice feels in her bones the impossibility of the distance beyond the rows of houses that are the neighborhood where she lives. She has trouble envisioning this beyond as a specific place because the house-rows go on forever. She imagines herself as a boat in the middle of an ocean. She closes her eyes and sees her little wind-whipped sail. Beyond is the thin place where the water falls into the sky.

She opens her eyes. A moth flies through her window and flings itself into her buttercup lights, din, din, din.

The swaying palms conduct this great orchestra of goodbye because she is only twelve years old, but Alice knows already that she and everyone else is grasping outwards and beyond themselves. Building houses and paving roads, but what does it matter? She is sure they’ll never get there. Because this place, she feels, is as transient as hope, unpin-down-able and unspeakable, the electric current whizzing through the power lines swinging over them all, there one minute and gone the next—like the crickets—goodbye, goodbye, goodbye.

Of course, twelve-year-old Alice never meant to know these strange desires, but Precocious snuck into her
house one night and tiptoed around, hunchbacked and with fingernails down to his knees. He snuck into her father’s lungs and lit them black and yellow. She felt him back there, behind the bandage on her father’s chest. He held her hand over the fluffy gauze. *I’m sick, you see,* and Alice asked if he was dying. Her mother sniffled on the opposite end of the couch. *Of course not,* he said, but his voice wavered, and Alice knew the black thing inside his chest had spoken. The truth zapped her then. It ran from the top of her head down to her toes. She shivered. The truth zapped the floor beneath her feet, and she looked down and saw the earth split open. Inside was this awful, red-stinking gunk.

“They’ll make medicine to save you,” she said. Her father half-agreed.

Now she closes her bedroom door because her father’s face is big as a soccer ball. The stent in his chest makes a strange outline in his T-shirts—a small box or a cupboard, Alice thinks. She closes her door and listens to the orchestra reaching beyond itself.

“Goodnight, princess,” her father says from behind her door.

His oxygen tank rumbles, and the wheels of its case squeal down the hallway. Through the wall behind her bed, in her parents’ bedroom, it rumbles still. Alice closes her eyes and puts her hands over her ears, but now the rumbling is the blood rushing round her head, *behind* her ears. She wills this wind away. The lightness of open window glass, the pot of gold at the craggy end of the world, the golden horse she imagines standing on the other side of the sky—she wishes for this to stay, if not materialize, please stay, because this light feeling in her chest—the crickets, the palms, the fork tines tinkling on plates—is flying away...away...there, it has flown.

“I’m doing what I can!” she hears, and she runs to her window because next door the yelling has begun.

It happens every night in Jakey’s house. Jakey, who lives so close to Alice that she might reach beyond her window and touch the white stucco of his house if only
her arms were longer, and if only there wasn't the fence between them. She peers through the fence slats to catch something more than the yellow light shining through Jakey’s bedroom window. She knows Jakey is behind that window. They were playing outside together once, throwing lawn darts at a bush, and she asked Jakey where he went when his parents fought. In my closet, he told her, or beneath my covers. But mostly my closet, he said, which he described as a little house—a four-walled cupboard, Alice corrected him, because a closet is small like a cupboard—and in my house, he said, I keep my pillow and my astronaut.

Alice imagined a house within a house, felt keenly her and Jakey’s private lives hidden deep within the private lives around them, the furthermost shelves in broken-hearted cupboards.

“Stop telling me I'm—” and then the windows rattle shut, one after another. The yelling rattles the windows. Alice can’t hear the words but understands their meaning, Ow, ow, ow, like the cry of some wounded animal, and Jakey’s dad is the wounded animal that cries out at night. In the daytime, he crawls out of his cave and performs strange acts. From the front-room windows, Alice watches him skip to the mailbox in black socks pulled to his knees. He overwaters the violets in the front yard, stands in puddles of muddy water singing strange songs: Hey-ho, hey-ho, the Asians are on the radio, Alice once heard, that gravelly voice coming like it was stuck in the bottom of its cave. Once came laughter loud as screaming. Alice ran out back, and there was Jakey's dad, burning a pile of furniture in his backyard.

“Don’t worry, Jakey,” Alice says. “Be brave.”

She says this, even though her words mean nothing behind wood and stucco and glass. But Alice is twelve years old and Jakey is six, which means that Alice has grown up enough to know that believing you aren’t alone is almost as good as being understood by something or someone. Yes, Alice feels this in her bones.
She crawls into bed and sends feeling-waves from her head to Jakey’s. Waves that say, I’m here, I hear.
And then Alice falls asleep.
To sleep...
A low song comes to her while she’s in bed: *Lions and lambs, lions and lambs, peanut butter, lions and lambs.* Cigarette-smell awakens her. She moves around beneath her sheets, to face the window. Her brass headboard tinkles. Out there, smoke curls to meet the moon. She hears the song coming like from the other side of the sky: *Lions and lambs, lions and lambs, peanut butter, lions and lambs.*

She shakes the sleep from her head. A window rattles open, rattles shut. *Shhh...* A voice says, *Come on, hurry up,* and Alice runs to her window. Through the fence slats a dark figure—darker than the dark of night—moves in front of Jakey’s window. And then Jakey’s voice rises over the fence.

*Where are we going?* he says, and the dark figure says, *Shhh,* and Jakey’s head appears over the fence, swaying like a camel’s toward the front yard.

“Jakey!” Alice whispers, but he is too far away to hear.
She runs to the living room. She bursts through the front door and stands on her front lawn, barefoot and in her nightgown. Jakey is sitting on his dad’s shoulders. His dad is bent over and opening his car door with one hand; a briefcase hangs from the other. He squats down and tips forward. Jakey falls into the car. He giggles. Then Jakey’s dad throws the briefcase in after Jakey and taps the car door shut. He runs to the other side of the car and gets in. The car rolls slowly down the driveway.

It’s so quiet out, Alice can hear the blood inside her head. It happens slowly, impossibly. They could be moving underwater. The car disappears down the hill. Alice runs to stand in the middle of the street. From there, she looks down: the car’s taillights disappear around a corner, two red eyes blinking, *where-where.*

Alice runs after them because he has his foot on the clutch, and his boy in the front seat, and they’re coasting
down the hill—thank god they live on a hill, even if the hill is a little broke. He sees that now in his crazed clarity, but when they bought that house all those years ago, it had seemed like a dream to live on top of a California hill. Because going down a hill in stick-shift, he can be in stealth-mode, with his foot on the clutch and the engine off, and it’s like him and his boy, Jakey, are finally freeing themselves of the past; because where he’s from in Queens, New York, it snows black ice, and once upon a time, living on a hill in California meant snowless skies, clean sidewalks—to him, an unpatented kind of happiness. It meant he’d made it because he’d built something beautiful of his own with a good wife and a good boy, but isn’t it true? Beautiful dreams disintegrate, whatever the hell beautiful dreams are. They coast down the hill, and he watches the speedometer: five, ten, fifteen—and the little track homes go by faster and faster in the dark. They pass the same houses again and again: the one with the withering crabapple tree beside the driveway and the sad violets beneath the window; the one with the circle window near the roof looking out onto the wide skies and sidewalks that unfurl into more of the patented same. So much of the same that they could be standing still, and in the back of his throat, he begins to feel that itchy sense of being stuck, resigned. He swallows the feeling away because he’s made the choice to move past it, and the needle hits twenty, he lets go of the clutch, the car pops—kaplow!—to a start.

“Me and you, Jakey!” he cries. He says: “Out there, Jakey—out there is something for me and you.”

“There’s Alice,” Jakey says. He’s standing on the seat, facing the rear window, this pile of kids’ bones in saggy pajamas. “She was on the grass,” he laughs. “She’s running after us in her pajamas.”

He grabs the bottom of Jakey’s pants and pulls him down. He looks in the rearview mirror but sees only a vague fog in the distance.

“Sit down, Jakey,” he says. “Alice isn’t out there.”
He pulls up Jakey’s pants because the green planets of the boy’s underwear are showing. He tries to light a cigarette, but his hands are shaking. He has to try a couple times before he hits the tip with the car lighter’s fiery coils. He convinces himself he’s shaking because he’s gotten away with the first part—dressing in all-black like a cartoon robber and taking his boy into the cartoon night—not because he’s scared he won’t get away with what comes next: he has this grand plan to surprise Jakey (and the plan’s amazing possibilities explode brightly in his mind), and he taps his fingers on the briefcase and chuckles. He catches himself and realizes he’s acting like a Russian or a Jihadist. Pick your era, take your pick, Yippee-kai-yaymotherfuckers! He’s about to show his boy that he’s a hero.

“Why are you laughing?” Jakey asks.

He looks at his boy and winks. “Sometimes things get to be so good they’re funny,” he says.

“We’re going fast,” says Jakey.

He checks the speedometer: the needle lights up eighty. He presses down on the gas pedal because he wants to be the hero.

“We’re speeding ahead like comets, huh?” he says. “Kabloom, kablah! Right, Jakey? But hey, you just slide way down in your seat there, and we’ll get to go even faster.”

Jakey slides down. From the corner of his eye, he watches his boy shake his head into the seats, no-no.

“Where-are-we-going?” Jakey asks, in time to each turn of his head.

He wishes he could explain why it has to be strange and in the middle of the night, but how does he explain to his boy they’re chasing a feeling? One that runs from you when you call it, is lost when you need it. You’ve got to take charge and go after it. He takes a drag, and the tip of his cigarette glows for a moment, goes black. The smoke rising from his cigarette is that feeling, he decides, because unless you make it a point to try and snatch it,
you’ll spend your life watching it float away. He reaches out and grabs the smoke.

“Trust your dad,” he says.

They come to a red light. He looks both ways before he guns it through the intersection, keeping his hands at ten and two and the cigarette dangling from his mouth. He looks out every window because he worries the fog will turn red and blue. Or worse, materialize into Renee cops, crazy Renee cops who are both real cops and wife-cops, all of them trying to put a general damper on life. He hears Renee in his head: You’ve lost your goddamn mind.

But he hasn’t lost anything. Instead, he’s come to some realizations: that he’s spent his life reaching in the wrong directions. The silhouette of a diving board against the sky takes him to the way-back, ghostly beyond. To memory: how they’ve accumulated and made what he is now, and he feels sorry about this. He’s sorry he thought California was a beautiful beach because, of course, he ended up in the Central Valley, land of cows and sour-smelling pools. He’s sorry he voted for Reagan; sorry he sells Amway and isn’t very good at it. He’s sorry he didn’t realize he was sorry fifteen years ago—or that he was going to be feeling sorry fifteen years in the future. He’s sorry about the whole damn thing because none of it’s true. He’s this lie. If he’d been braver and more honest he’d be living way up in a tree, surviving on chocolate-flavored insects. He’d have come up with ways to save the world: potable water, electricity-less light bulbs, a machine that takes fear and regret away, buzz-buzz, beep-beep.

He looks at Jakey down there in his seat and staring ahead. Once upon a time he was Jakey, scared and confused because the whole world was spinning out of control, on the verge of a wipe out. Watching television all day in the neighbor’s house but really listening to his parents fighting on the other side of the wall. He escaped that and found this, but what is this? This is the puddle of
shimmering heat before the oasis. He sees the palms in his head, the ocean crashing over them.

with the circumstances of their lives than anything else: car wheels spinning round and round on asphalt driving everything back from the ineffable to the factual because there is his boy looking at him from thirty years in the past, and there he sits thirty years in the future. He feels himself starting to cry.

“I’m sorry,” he says. He rubs his face with his jacket sleeve and turns onto the freeway.

“Why?” says Jakey.

He thinks about it. He’s got to tell this story:

“You know your grandpa?” he says.

“No,” says Jakey.

“Grandpa was an inventor. My dad. You know what an inventor does?”

“What?”

“They make stuff no one’s thought of before. Think about it, Jakey. Someone invented this car we’re driving in. They thought it up, they had this dream, and poof. Here it is.” He takes his hands off the steering wheel to make the poof.

“What did Grandpa invent?”

“Well, he had a couple things cookin’, you know. He had this thing for Velcro watch straps.” He smokes his cigarette. “You see those things everywhere now.”

He doesn’t want to finish the story because his father was a kook, a deranged old man in plaid pants and a beak nose (he looks in the mirror to see if he has that beak nose), a man with dreams that materialized into a Lower East Side boarding house, canned food, and the hope that a chair could fold out into a toilet and a bed.

“Where’s grandpa?” Jakey asks.

“He got old,” he says. “And that’s about it, kiddo. Sorry, it’s not a good story. ’Cuz then your grandpa went to live somewhere and I never saw him much. I came out here. Hey,” he says, pointing at Jakey’s doll. “Your grandpa wanted to be an astronaut his whole life. Except he never got there. You know what I mean?”

He turns onto the freeway. In the dark, with the radio crackling about a wormhole in the sky, they speed past
yellow signs. And on those signs, shadow families run together, holding hands. A tall woman pulls two kids, her hair blowing behind her. They lean forward into the yellow and then past the yellow. They run into the dark night beginning to lighten now as they—all of them—tilt toward the sun. Toward something like hope, way up in the chest, like of being more than what you are or are doomed to be, to become what you want to be: a hero.

He veers into the rumble strip. Jakey falls into the door and begins to cry.

“I want to go home,” he says.

“But we’re about to see something amazing, Jakey,” he says. “Do you believe me? Do you promise to believe me?” he says while his boy watches from down on the floor. All these lights going by—the street ones, the traffic ones, the gas station ones—land on his dad’s face in shapes. There’s a triangle on dad’s chin and a bar on his nose, and they’re rolling across him like they’re coming out some little rolling machine, buzz buzz, beep beep. He’s scared ’cuz his dad doesn’t feel the buzz buzz beep beep. ’Cuz he’s looking straight ahead, real still, the little ball in his throat going up and down, wee-oohh, wee-oohh, Jakey sings along to it and makes a song. What’s out there in the straight-ahead? He stretches his neck till his throat hurts. Out the window, there’s nothing, just the sky looking dirty and the spider-arm streetlights. He crawls onto the seat to look out the front window. Straight ahead it’s real dark, and they’re driving—kabloom! his dad says—into dark and dark. He feels all-of-a-sudden not sure. His heart gets stuck in his throat, and he feels kind of like throwing up ’cuz his dad is taking them into the black and looking serious about it, like the black is the thing, and the black is forever.

His dad says to trust him, but he can’t trust anything about the black. He tries to touch the briefcase on the seat.

“Remember how fast we’ll go if you stay down there?” his dad says. “Remember?”
He slides to the floor. He guesses there’s Amway inside the briefcase, like vitamins and toilet paper—their whole house is vitamins and toilet paper—but he’s got this feeling there’s something else. He’s feeling too scared to ask. Down on the floor, he finds some tiny rocks rolling around, and he presses them into his palms. The rocks make bright, red shapes that hurt. The hurt takes the fear away. When it hurts too much, he puts his astronaut against his knees and stares at it for a long time. He wants to bring the astronaut to life, to find some feeling in its face because if the astronaut is scared like him, then he’s not alone. It would be easier to be brave, he decides, if the astronaut let him know that the two of them, together, could be brave. Nothing happens. His dad says his grandpa wanted to be an astronaut, and he hides the doll under the seats because he thinks he sees his grandpa in the astronaut, looking at him with old dead-person eyes from a hundred years away.

His dad asks him why he did it.

“I hate dolls,” he says. He means it.

Now he’s alone but okay. That astronaut was scary. He kicks his feet against the car and remembers Alice running after them in her nightgown. It’s cold, and he’s sure Alice is cold. But then he’s sure Alice doesn’t care about cold ’cuz Alice is like a knight. She could walk through ice and fire if she wanted. She won’t even get lost ’cuz Alice can’t get lost. He wishes he was Alice or that Alice would come get him on a giant white-spotted horse and take him home, clop-clop, because he’s cold, and the radio is talking about people coming down from other planets. He sees monster teeth and old green hunchbacks shooting lasers out their eyes, buzz-buzz, beep beep. He says beep and scares himself.

_I’m a knight, I’m a knight, I’m a knight_, he thinks, but he knows he’s not, that he’ll never be. He looks up and out the window again because maybe something in the glass will come and say, _Okay_. He wants for a blue angel to come and take off her wings, and then it’ll be his mom. That’s even better than Alice; it’s better than his dad.
Something appears that's darker than the sky, these fuzzy-topped trees waving hello, goodbye. He closes his eyes, and the palms stick in his mind before they go by, go bye.

He curls up on the floor and tries to sleep. The hot air feels good on his head. His dad changes the radio, and the radio sings, Don’t do me like that. The car slows down. The tires pop, and the rocky goes bump bump beneath him. He tries to sleep, but he can’t ’cuz he’s scared something’s gonna happen. He holds his breath and squeezes himself together. He makes himself stiff until he’s sure nothing will get inside to hurt him, but then his whole body aches, and he has to let go. The fear comes again: like the world is gonna end, and his heart starts beating fast—not from volcanoes or explosions or earthquakes or the sky falling down in big pieces that’ll send grass and parts of their arms in the air. It’s more like the explosions are gonna happen inside them. He’s sure. His heart goes thump-thump-thump.

“Almost there, kiddo,” his dad says. Jakey sits up and holds himself tight against the car door.

Then everything gets quiet in his head because everything gets quiet in the car. But he doesn’t know this yet—that it’s quiet in the car—because he’s too busy squeezing himself together. He hears a click and feels the cold creep up his pajamas. His dad’s hands are on his arms.

“Come on, Jakey,” he says.

He opens his eyes. Smoke comes out his dad’s nostrils, and his head hangs above him. His dad looks like a dragon. The sky is purple-blue behind. Then those arms reach down and lift him up into the sky. The cold zaps his bones. His teeth chatter. His dad sets him down, and the rocks in the road hurt his feet.

“I’m cold,” he says. He lets go of himself and starts to cry.

“It’ll warm up real fast, Jakey,” his dad says. He rubs him all over. “Don’t cry, kiddo,” he says, and he takes off his big jacket and sets it on Jakey’s shoulders.

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His knees buckle because the jacket is heavy. He shakes out of it and turns away. Across the big empty parking lot, there are the trees he knows as the crying trees and behind them the duck pond, and next to the duck pond the big gates that open up to Story Land. The zoo’s on the other side. It’s like every second he sees all this clearer because the sky is getting light, getting lighter. He wants to go over there, but he’s scared because if he does, it’ll be the end, kaplow.

“Put on the jacket, Jakey,” his dad says, lifting the coat off the ground. He reaches in the car for the briefcase.

Jakey shakes his head. He doesn’t need his dad’s coat to be brave. His teeth chatter.

His dad takes his hand and pulls him across the parking lot. The rocks bite the bottom of Jakey’s feet. The hurt makes it hard to cry, to even feel scared. The closer he gets to the gates, the more he hears the caws and woots coming down from the other side of the sky.

They get to the sidewalk, where it doesn’t hurt to walk. He lets go of his dad’s hand and runs to the big front gate because he sees what he knows: The Simple Pieman’s pie rising over the bushes. He lifts himself on his toes because he wants to see the three pigs in their house.

“We’re going in?” he cries. He says it again. His dad is knocking on the little ticket booth, knock-knock-knock. The blinds are over the window like no one’s home.

“No one’s home?” Jakey asks.

“Just checking to make sure no one’s home,” his dad says, and he walks away like he’s going to the car except he turns toward the crying trees and the ducks. He walks way over there. Jakey runs after. The soft grass feels good, and now he’s feeling good and brave because how can anything bad happen in this place he knows and understands? Nothing bad has happened yet. He picks a stick up off the ground and bangs it against the fence. Not by the hair of my chinny-chin-chin!!!

The ground is a little wet, and the wet numbs his toes, but the numb feels okay, like a non-feeling, maybe, not
too bad and not too good. His toes are bright red. He's wriggling them like worms when he runs into the back of his dads' legs, bam.

His dad's looking at the fence, laughing, with his hands on his hips. Because the fence has shrunk to rusty metal bars with spiked wire wrapped around. They've come to some end with wire like sharp teeth. His dad puts his foot on the wires and holds them down.

“All right,” he says. “Go on under, Jakey.”

He gets that bad feeling again, of the world about to end inside them. Except now it’s worse 'cuz his dad’s turned them upside down and around. He looks at Jakey like what happens next is up to him—little, sad, not-brave Jakey.

“Go on, Jakey,” his dad says.

He shakes his head. He looks behind him, to back there, to where?

He turns around. His dad is on his stomach sliding beneath the fence. He stands up on the other side and wipes the dirty wet off his pants. “See that?” he says. “Magic.”

He squeezes himself together. He closes his eyes and slides under, toward his dad. He stands up muddy on the other side and keeps his eyes closed. When he understands his hands and head are still connected to himself and not sitting on the grass, he opens them. He's standing on top of a little wet hill. Down below is the zoo. The animals cry woot-caw-woot. The sky's getting lighter. This place isn't scary shapes but actual things: a squirrel running to hide way up in a tree; his dad walking down the hill with his briefcase, to stand in front of a rose-colored wall. The grass is almost as tall as Jakey, and he runs all around in it. He kicks at a coke can; he tries to catch a flower in a tree. He hears the long sound of his dad calling to him, heeyyooooo. He's waving. Jakey runs down the hill like something's pushing behind him, like if he doesn't get down there quick, the burning, good feeling will go away forever.

His dad lifts him up and sits him on the wall.
“You see that down there, son?” he says.
Jakey turns his head to look. Down there is walking a beautiful tiger, back and forth between two trees.
“Yeah,” Jakey says.
His dad puts his briefcase on the wall. He pops it open. Inside is a jar of peanut butter, a jar of jelly, a loaf of bread. This shiny little knife.
Jakey breathes through his mouth at the strangeness of it all.
“You hungry?” his dad asks.
He shakes his head.
“What about him?”
Jakey looks at the tiger down there, walking. He wonders what it’s thinking. What it wants? There’s that turnaround thing again, and because he doesn’t want to do the wrong thing, he says, “Maybe.” He thinks about it—he squeezes himself together—and says, “Yes.”
His dad clicks shut the briefcase. He’s holding a sandwich. Jakey looks at his dad—stopping for a second at the wee-oohh of his Adam’s apple, not so much going wee-oohh now as whoa, whoa, whoa—and his dad looks at him, too, like he’s trying to figure something out.
What? Jakey wishes he understood, he wants to understand. His dad winks.
And then he leans way down over the wall and dangles the peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwich from his shaky hand. “Tiiiiiiger,” he calls. “Tiiiiiger.”
The tiger’s not looking. He’s walking up and down like he doesn’t hear them, like he doesn’t care.
“What if he’s not hungry?” Jakey asks.
His dad keeps calling Tiiiger, tiiiiiger. Jakey turns away for a second ’cuz there’s this cluster of white clouds way up in the sky. Like the sun is hiding back there. He looks up there until his eyes hurt and then looks down at himself. He’s forgotten that he’s wearing his pajamas, and this seems kind of funny. His dad is calling tiiiger and telling Jakey to say it, too, like tiiiger is more than a word. His dad is up on his tiptoes, hanging way over the wall, crying tiiiger all by himself. Jakey decides he doesn’t want
his dad to be crying all alone. He squeezes himself, lets himself go. He turns and calls over the wall, *Tiiiger, tiiiger*, too.

And would you believe what happens next: the tiger looks at them with his head to one side, kind of funny-like. Like he’s saying, in a silly accent, *May I help you? Is there something that you need?* “*Tiiiger, tiiiger,*” he calls while his dad dangles the sandwich. The tiger walks away like he’s forgotten something behind one of the trees. And then he turns around, real fast, and runs at Jakey and his dad. His dad drops the sandwich and pulls them both behind the wall.

Up there, the big orange ball of the sun rips through the sky. The tiger comes leaping over.

His dad is holding him so tight that Jakey can feel the heart through both their shirts, beating *badoom-badoom* to his own *thump-thump*. The tiger lands in front of them. He licks his two front paws. Then, he turns around to face them both. Jakey laughs. He’s sure the tiger’s saying, *Good morning, no problem!* He’s sure the tiger’s telling them something—*Hey, okay!*—*he must have told them something* ’cause never in the history of tigers has a tiger been posed the question: What does a tiger do in the suburbs? The question is more literal than existential. Where does a tiger go?

He has lived ten years behind that rose-colored wall, pacing back and forth, and doesn’t it feel good to stretch his limbs into the unusual? The unknown. He passes the monkeys who are screaming something he can’t understand. The ducks in the pond are squawking at each other. He walks up into a weedy hill and pokes around there for a while. He tries to eat an old coke can, but it must not taste very good because he paws it away. Up there in the weeds, he might be thinking about the old jungle country he came from—the stink of a crabapple tree in bloom might remind him of a Flame Tree—but he walks around the weeds like none of this matters. He is carefree and cool. He yawns. He is tiger-in-the-moment, tiger in the dew.
So it doesn't occur to him that the barbed-wire fence might be serendipitous. What does he care about serendipity? About fence? He's not escaping. He's walking, if tigers may be said to walk as opposed to saunter, pad, explore. He leaps over the fence to walk around the parking lot. He sniffs the air. He squints his eyes against the morning sun. He feels the sun against his back, and he walks around to find a shady place where he might lie until the sun goes down. He comes across a car—a strange metal-box-contraption, if tigers might be said to think in terms of metal and box and contraption, but the car casts no shadow, and he's too large to slip beneath. He sniffs the car tires before he pees on one of them.

He walks across the parking lot, down the road that becomes the freeway. Behind him, in the zoo, the animals are still crying. Some cry higher-pitched than others. The further he walks, the more distant the cries become until the sound of cars speeding along the freeway drowns the cries. And at this point, he might be thinking of something else from his past, and it might come to him like a song because the sound of car tires whizzing across asphalt could be the ocean touching the shore before it slides away. It is a fact that where he's from lies beside an ocean, but what does this memory mean? Assuming tigers remember. But whatever memories he might have fall away the moment he walks up the freeway ramp and onto the freeway because here he emerges in another country. This country wipes out the others. Ahead of him, another ocean spreads, this one a vast and blue smog. The smog drapes itself over the house-rows, enveloping them in velvety waves. A million drops of houses turned into one vast ocean, the tiger probably thinks because he stops at the end of the ramp and looks out for a long moment before he walks on.

He follows the freeway. He appears nonchalant, which gives him a kind of swagger. The situation is, he must realize, peculiar—or strange, weird, unnerving, unique—and maybe he is scared. Because now he’s in the
middle of it. Cars speed dangerously past, their horns blaring. Cars stop mid-lane, their drivers gawking. He walks past them and sees their drivers’ shocked faces in the window glass. In one window, he sees his own reflection, if this is even what he sees, if he understands that in the glass he sees him and on the other side of the glass he sees her, and yet they are superimposed on each other, and she is shocked and crying. Can he understand the shocked and crying, the hysterical shaking of the head?

The tiger cries out, too. The woman crawls into the depths of her car.

He walks on, but now he must notice that the world has gotten louder. Now the whizzing ocean-sound of the cars is replaced by mechanical screaming in the sky. He looks up. Two strange birds hover above—helicopters—and if he doesn’t know their names he must feel what they are, that they have something to do with him, these strange and fearful things. And what can he do but walk? Up ahead, two cars collide in glass and steel. Glass flies in the air and lands at his feet. He steps on a shard. Immediately, he feels the pain of it in his paw. Because of course a tiger feels pain. He limps around the smoking cars ahead. Around him, people are saying, My god, my god, and he either hears this, or, wa-wa, wa-wa, but does it matter? Because they are both, to him—somehow—the same.

He limps off the freeway, near where Alice is trying to reach the distant place. She’s run so far she’s breathless. The bottoms of her feet sting, and they hurt so bad she cries. She’s run far enough that she’s confused about where she is, but she understands enough of her surroundings to feel like she’s gone nowhere, like she’s been running in a circle: everywhere are more houses like hers with wooden fences around their small backyards and clipped lawns, violets. She hopes her fast running will get her to the distant place she imagines Jakey and his dad to be. She’s not sure where this is, but she needs to get there, too.
She turns a corner. She stops and gasps because the street is lit up red and blue. There are police cars all around, policemen hanging from the trees like monkeys. One of them is crying into a bullhorn, but Alice only hears an urgent, \textit{wana-wana, wana-wana}. And in the middle of the street walks this giant tiger. The tiger is walking toward her. Alice can’t move. She feels the baby hairs rising on her scalp. Her toes and teeth tingle. The tiger looks her in the eyes, and that look zaps through Alice, from foot to head, before it settles in her chest. This look that says, \textit{Hey, little girl—I know what you mean}. And there the look knots itself around the part of her that knows it all already. It knots gold braids all around that part, makes it heavier but beautiful, this crazy-beautiful tinsel-gaudy-stupid rope that could wrap itself round and round the whole world.

“Step away from the road,” comes a voice like God from the sky. “Young lady, you’re in danger. Step away from the road.” The helicopters chop the air above.

And there comes this pop and a hiss, and the tiger, still heading toward Alice, stops. In one gesture, the tiger’s eyes widen and narrow, and he lifts himself on his back feet. He swipes the air above Alice’s head; he makes this beautiful pirouette before he falls to the ground. Not dead, just asleep—\textit{Snooze, snooze}, he says. And during this—for one brief moment—Alice reaches out her hand.
LAURENCE HOLDEN | *Seedlight: Summering Seeds*, 2014
20 x 16 inches | Oil on canvas
Private collection, Atlanta, Georgia.
POEM | *Tina Mozelle Braziel*

**To Season**

Now let me praise parsley, the pause of leaf,  
on the 99 cent Stuckey’s breakfast plate,

my first encounter with the emerald furl  
beside grits and fried egg. Praise it

as a harbinger of this flat leaf parsley palming  
my white-wine and buttered penne. Let me praise

rosemary, watch it curve into laurels above ears  
of corn now roiling in the pot. Praise

the fragrant fronds I had known only as a weed  
in Mozelle’s story of how she tucked rosemary

into the neck of her flour-sack dresses as a girl.  
Let me praise its perfume allure that sated her

longing for glamour when she lacked lacquers  
to redden her nails and gloss her lips.

Now praise us, salt (you mineral), sing  
of grit, hum as you rise from our pores.

Praise us as we sharpen our knives, cure  
these iron skillets. Let praise distinguish us,

place us here but coming from there;  
let praise now us, bring us into this season.
POEM | Lynn Otto

Still with My Mother

A doe gave birth in the yard below.
So still with my mother at the window,

I spoke low of what we both could see—look, look.
From holding myself motionless, an ache
came up my legs and back. Was it so long?
The mother nudged and nursed the just-born fawn

and then ignored it, turned away and strained
until a second tumbled to the ground—

she licked it clean. Then both came to her sides,
and when she walked, they followed her to nearby
woods.

How thin, how fine, the fawns and their mother.
They all knew what to do, and have I ever?
POEM | Ellen Bass

Hello Morning

Little maple  
taking shape against my window,  
night's dark gauze falling from your limbs.

Hello bird whose name I don’t know.  
Wing feathers louvering open, first light  
shining through as they lift.

And curled tea leaves  
sleeping in your tin.

There you are, my dead mother  
in your red lacquer frame.  
You once carried the sea home in a jar  
and held out a spoonful to me each day.

And you baby chicks, peeping  
when I pull back the towel from your cage,  
pecking corn mash, sipping water,  
raising your beaks  
so the water slides down your throats.

The Times folded in the driveway,  
The Dow breaking 16,000.  
Minimum wage at $7.25.

In China, minks and foxes are skinned alive.  
An artist has sculpted them in clay—  
sticking in a needle for each hair.
In Toronto, an anesthesiologist is found guilty of putting his penis in the mouths of twenty-one women behind the blue drape of the operating table.

There are the ten thousand beautiful things and the ten thousand terrible things the Buddha said we must open our hearts to.

Dear breasts. Half a century ago I wrapped you in black lace and a boy laughed, astonished this was all for him.

Welcome cracked spines of paperbacks, pearls with a broken clasp.

My neighbor is down on his knees, scissoring the grass around the daffodils.

Hushed children of the world, your green bones broken, yellow bruises blooming.

Hello to the shovel leaning on the fence and to the excellent grave my son dug for the dog—so deep I had to stretch flat, to lower her body.

I’m listening, Mozart. You make a world in which loss is bearable.

Good morning, my mother-in-law. You still know my voice. I love you forever, we say, over and over. Speech burned down to these embers.
My daughter is just now
boarding a plane for an ice-slicked coast,
looking for a doctor to save her.

Rose petals have fallen into the grooves
of our beat-up truck bed, verses
of pink blossoms against the rusted paint.

There are only a hundred elements.
The same chord shivering
through everything.

I should have been kinder
to the man who sat beside me
at the D league basketball game.
He was so lonely he wouldn't stop talking.
I never even took a good look at him.
Only the cat hair silvering his dark pants.

Hello my jacket. Maybe happiness
is nothing more than how much pleasure
I can take from the act
of zipping your little metal teeth together.
Deliquescence

Spring. I’d almost forgotten
how the earth tilts her face,
unsnaps her valise, and all
the rooted greenery spills out,
silks and chiffons flung everywhere.
Even our old apricot, diseased
and hacked, is not going gently.
Janet calls me to see it
studded with tight green balls—
charms pinned to the ruins
of a dying woman’s hair.
His first summer, our son crawled here,
plowing bare-kneed through the fallen fruit.
Such a yield that August—lushious
gold, a ferment of succulence.
He bit whatever fleshy globe he chanced on,
then tossed it over his shoulder.
Yesterday Janet’s mother went down
to the lobby of The Oaks in her bathing suit,
two towels folded in the basket of her walker,
looking for the swimming pool in her mind.
Whatever decays, whatever sweetness
is pecked from my stone brain,
may I hold onto this
one memory, broad and immaculate:
the apricots swelling and dropping,
splitting with their ripened weight.
LAURENCE HOLDEN | *Tulip & Bird of Paradise*, 1986
16 ½ x 23 inches | Monoprint, oil on paper
Collection of the artist
Novels are large landscapes, with multiple images and figures. Short stories are more often still lifes—the angle of light on a peach, a bowl, a knife—illuminating small moments in a way that helps us to see things we would not normally see. In The Seven Stages of Anger, Wendy Fox helps us see those moments.

The first two stories, about children of hill people in eastern Washington State, set the tone of the collection. Raised in a tough, individualistic, yet tightly knit community, the children begin to see themselves in perspective when a fire drives them into town:

...we heard two of the town men...talking about what kind of people lived there, on our mountain, how we were just hill people anyway, how we couldn’t have much worth saving. We had barely, some of us, started our years of education then, and we knew some people bought most of their food at the store and wore clothes other than hand-me-downs... I think we had known for a long time that we were different, we just didn’t know how much it mattered.

As these children grow up and move to Seattle, they find themselves adrift in the much more comfortable, but somehow less coherent, less meaningful, urban, middle-class life.

A sense of drifting pervades the stories in this book. Women, particularly, drift into sexual liaisons, into marriage and motherhood without really wanting to. The
narrator of “House” is psychologically housebound; Constance in “There And Back” allows herself to be drawn into a minor crime spree. They are passive women, capable at their jobs but unable to be proactive in their personal lives.

One feels here the ennui of a class, a generation divorced from roots, from any sense of the polis, of community. (By contrast, in the last story, “The Eggshells of Everything,” set in 1950, the strong sense of family and community is palpable.) Characters are not so much searching for meaning as being beyond the point where meaning makes a difference, muddling along. Yet there are flickers of redemption. Brian, for instance, in “The Car,” has drifted into marriage and suburbia, living with his wife, his alcoholic mother-in-law, his newborn daughter. He buys a new car and has the dealer follow him home in the old one:

He liked his life, he decided. He liked the women: Lucy, Jenny, Stella. He kept his radio silent and he repeated their names as he drove. The car was smooth against the pavement, and the wheel responded to even the slightest touch. Brian thought they were a little like the pioneers then, the three men and his two cars, caravanning across an unfamiliar landscape, headed toward a new idea of home.

Press 53 has earned a reputation as a publisher of collections of finely crafted short stories. The Seven Steps of Anger is a worthy addition to the publisher’s list, and is well worth reading.
Much has been written about the five stages of grief, clearly defined to make loss more manageable—to the observer of those in mourning, if not those surviving loss. But in Betty Adcock’s recent *Widow Poems*, a slim collection totaling ten poems, the poet explores grief, loss, and identity with far more depth, from the perspective of a woman fiercely engaged with the act of living after her longtime husband’s death.

In this book, there are, of course, memories of a husband’s last moments: “I remember / how you lay curled in pain, your spine / collapsing like a column of smoke,” the language intimating the impermanence of life made apparent. In this poem, “Vulpine,” and throughout the book, Adcock opens up space through her images for the lonely and, as she writes, “holy” beauty the world offers us. “Only the fox came / on the night you died, strange / angel the color of gold fire…” This holy, ghostly fox appears in more than one poem, an image of (solitary) constancy to temper that other, last, constant inhabiting this collection.

In other poems, melancholy is resisted for celebration, admiration, reflection. At these times an abundance of description fills the page in long lines. “Circle” transforms into a prose poem after a kind of poetic prologue, jumping into a breathless jazz pacing, no line breaks in sight:

1943, the guys in the Navy jazz band you were lucky enough to get into at seventeen, all shipped out six months later to battles where the guns’
percussion accompanied no tune you'd ever heard, and the only solos played were Kamikaze, I see you in the belly of the battleship Indiana, waiting, waiting, bored and scared in Damage Control the third deck down...

Elsewhere, in “The Widow Finds the Annuals,” Adcock applies a different form to her long lines, writing in rhyming quatrains. Like Sexton and St. Vincent Millay, she conjures a certain wry humor within these constraints: “It’s the oldest boring story / the young despise until it is their history / that’s gone to seed in no season.”

Adcock, author of six previous collections, conveys a self-awareness of how her poet's identity shapes the widow speaking to us in these poems—although she is neither cloying nor insistent. Take, for example, her italicized aside in “Lunar: A History,” the direct language as sharp a contrast as its slanting font to the vivid similes and metaphors threaded through the rest of the poem:

—just here the words fall, fail, can't stay
as you couldn't stay for this poem's still
unfinished end.
You died instead.

And in “The Widow Reverses Wordsworth,” her rejoinder to poetry’s longtime celebration of youth, Adcock not only questions the reverence given to inexperience, but celebrates how, later in life, rejuvenation seems possible because of a greater awareness of the world:

But is this not heaven too, now to be alive?
even in solitary, in the absence here
on the winter porch open to birds
cutting the morning to gold ribbons,
breaking day into music, this day
chill and light and mine?
CONTRIBUTORS

E. Kristin Anderson grew up in Westbrook, Maine, and is a graduate of Connecticut College. She is the co-editor of Dear Teen Me, an anthology based on the popular website. Her poetry has been published worldwide in many magazines and anthologies and she is the author of two chapbooks, A Jab of Deep Urgency and A Guide for the Practical Abductee. She is an online editor at Hunger Mountain and a contributing editor at Found Poetry Review. Once upon a time she worked at The New Yorker. She now lives in Austin, Texas, where she is currently working on a full-length collection of erasure poems from women’s and teen magazines.


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