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

When I saw how this issue was coming together, I got shivers. It smacked me in the face from the get-go and never stopped shaking me.

Editors Sierra Golden, Craig Lincoln, and Hao Nguyen and their respective staffs selected impressive pieces of writing. I was engrossed in every poem, every story.

Finding artwork to complement the writing was a delight. I am indebted to Heather Allen for introducing me to the work of artist Pete Sack. And Geri Digiorno returns with her fourth outstanding cover collage, expertly incorporated by cover designer Henry Kivett.

The only word that comes to mind for this issue is “breathtaking.”

It’s been a pleasure for me to work with such talented editors and contributors while our publisher, Rob Greene, has been on sabbatical to spend time with his preemie twins. It seems appropriate to dedicate this issue to them.

To Max and Ava—
Your father has his priorities straight

Readers, get ready for quite a ride.

—Karin Wiberg, managing editor
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Prey

It was the eviscerated porcupine,
its sacrificial posture over the downed
poplar limb, buck teeth tipped back

in what seemed like surrender, innards missing
from a belly split clean as a hickory nut. Then later
that month, the doe downed in the backyard,

neck snapped but otherwise left whole,
the three weanling calves just plain gone
from the neighbor’s pasture that made us think not

of recent rumors of mountain lion kills
in Medina, but of Uncle Winfred, long eaten
by colon cancer, his campfire tales

of the hrumphrumph that once prowled
these bluffs, hungry for hearts, especially those
of girls who ventured out at night.

And though he did not speak of height
or conformation, in our dreams we conjured
our own—mine lean, yarn brown, and loping.

Loose-hocked it paced through gorse shadow
when the pickup idled and we’d draw straws
to see who had to shimmy from the truck’s bed
to unlatch the gate, even the youngest unexempt from that long trek down the limestone aisle of road, taillights crimsoning our thighs.

At dinner the conversation turns to the neighbor's foreman, who last week cut the throat of a young goat and slung it from a cedar sapling, crouched all night with a Colt .45 by a bucket of blood, but nothing. Still, after the dishes are done, some of us slip out alone to walk the chalk-pale loop past the barn, under a caul of stars, our faces silvered by a reaper's moon.

To know again how our hearts are meat, what it would be to be husbanded by something marrow hungry, imagine again what beast skulks through darkness, lifts a muzzle to the perfume of our flesh. To have a name for it.
POEM | Noel Crook

Orion’s Belt

All those years he loved
the smallness of her hands—

how the fist fit neatly in his palm,
his fingers circling both her wrists

at once. In bed he admired
the winnowing of rib to waist,

the rise of hip; contemplated
her flank, her ankles, her feet.

Of course he worshiped
the obvious: breasts, belly,

the darkness there between her legs.
But even when she showed him

he did not see she kept Orion’s Belt
in a splay of freckles on her thigh.
POEM | *Noel Crook*

**House**

Swaybacked, molting, mildew-blackened
between fallow tobacco fields,
its sprung shutters sagging

like flagged wings, the house foundered
under the oaks when we came,
    fresh from the city and just married.

An exercise in history, we learned that slaves
    had built the place—at the courthouse ferreted out
Captain Archibald Capehart’s deeds

for fourteen unnamed field hands who’d loaded
    oak beams numbered at the mill
    and hauled them by wagon

down twenty miles of mud road,
    dug a cellar out of red clay.
    Now it sits, squat, white as an egg

at the end of the dirt drive, smug
    in the coat of paint we gave it
    last spring, and in the time it’s taken

to find the right green
    for the master bedroom and bury
    three good dogs out back, we’ve learned
the crooked landscapes of its un-plumb walls, their blunt odor of horsehair wadding on afternoons when damp slicks

the corrugated roof and mold grows on our shoes in the mud room; on winter mornings the frail constellations of spackle-dust sifted silent as strychnine from the cracked hall ceiling. The walls here are swollen with stories—blank-faced, serene, they keep secrets of whole families held restless and musty in the plaster:

the caught breaths of children playing hide and seek, slow crumbling of marriages, little treacheries of brothers, smell of another brought in unnoticed on a husband’s hands. In my daughter’s room the cry of the mother whose boy died in her arms, skull smashed when his Roadster missed the curve:

our own stories sidled up next to those of Captain Capehart, laid out and bathed on the dining-room table,
all the mirrors hung with sheets.
  Hot nights, when sleep swings
   out of reach, the windows thrown open,

I hear them confabulating behind the plaster
   —dry, querulous whispers threaded
     with the trilling of the crickets—

and half-dream how some day
  the house will fall, victim of a faulty wire
   or deserted in some end-of-world

disaster, the wind lifting its tin lid for rain,
  thin lathes loosening, all our stories
   sliding into mud—how maybe it will stand

for a while like this, a dark skeleton
  against the pines, marker only for those
    who moved silent over pitched joists,

matching and joining the beams,
  the ring of their hammers rising
    into blue, immaculate sky.
ARTWORK | Pete Sack

I Just Want to Fly
Moon

As a child, you longed to be an astronaut. The stars were every dime you ever threw into a well. Winters, you used to like to lie back in the snow, to look up, your powdery breath floating above you until the happy churn of wheels on pebbles meant your father was home.

“Aren’t you cold?” He asked one evening, shutting the door to his truck.

You were cold, but your warm house was lit up behind you, and you could go in anytime, and that made you less cold. So you said, “No.”

Your dad lay down beside you. You were glad he was beside you though he didn’t know how to hold still. He made a snow angel. You laughed at him. Then you made a snow angel. You remember the scuffing sound of your arms and your legs, and his arms and his legs, as you made snow angels together under the dark before-dinner sky.

You are on your way to the moon alone. You are being cannonballed up in a rocket. Earth makes it hard to leave. It pulls. Your narrow ship pushes. You feel the throttle in your teeth. When the push stops and you start floating, you look out the porthole. You feel acutely how thin the metal is between you and unbreathable space.

You feel as though you are falling. You were never afraid of falling, but now there are so many ways of falling, and what used to mark north doesn’t mark anything at all. North slid out from under you on your way up.

You land where you are supposed to land. You land and you slide down the chute. You are standing on the glowing surface of the moon, where you will live from now on. Here, the horizon curves under a sky that looks like glittering magnetite, and low enough to scrape.

Your friend’s voice is in your helmet. He is on Earth. He welcomes you to your new home. You notice that he sounds like your father. During the years you practiced walking in your spacesuit through deserts and flying still ships, you didn’t notice this. But now his voice is stretched and chipped by distance: it has become a thin voice that cracks. It has become your father’s.

You get to work. You check the checklist on your wrist. You take photographs of each mountain. You put rocks in bags with your thick fingers. You pick up pebbles that weigh nothing. You can’t feel them through your gloves. You have to look at your hand or you don’t know what you have in it. You think you might have nothing.

Rocks, rocks, rocks: you are up here with all these glowing things, spinning away from you. The planets hang, sanded spherical, moving like mobiles, each heaving into the silence a noise too large to hear. A noise that surely you could hear, if you had your ear the right distance from the whole planet.

You trot a slow low gravity trot, you glance your hand through the black, feeling for strings, the ones by which celestial bodies hang. Or to feel for the thickness that supports them, and turns them, and slows down their light. There must be something that slows the light, swaddles it, or all space would be aglow with the gold of suns upon suns, not just punctured with pinpricks of light.

There must be something holding you up: you feel like collapsing but you don’t collapse. How nice it would be to lie down right here, in the cradle of this dry sea.

The surface of the moon feels like snow under your boots. Its cringe under your feet is something you can feel bone-deep, like chalk on a blackboard, or rubbing certain kinds of cotton between your fingers.
You notice footprints. Bigger than yours. Footprints older than you. You watch your step. You step over metal junk, the suicidal machines that did their jobs and then crashed. You skirt the divots. You remember when you thought for every crater there had to be an asteroid somewhere; you remember when you didn’t know that the asteroid became the crater.

Night here: one big shadow. The voice in your helmet tells you enough rocks are in bags; it’s time for bed. Your father’s voice, and the way the darkened valleys sweep, as if smoothed into place by long arms—

You look back at your module. A disappointment. It looks like you made it by yourself out of foil. You did not go far. The map your footsteps make on top of the map of the moon goes loop-de-loop—it coils back on itself. You have stayed proportionately as close to the module as the moon is to the earth. You are suddenly aware of the insignificance of your steps.

You came here for nothing. Rocks.

You climb slowly into the shuttle. Inside, you feel the weight of all space. The galaxy spirals its long arms around you. Stars pulse their lighthouse rays, dying rhythmically, far away. Out your window, the bright scoop of earth is your night-light.

How could you have stayed on Earth? All your efforts, your whole life, had been directed upward. All the numbers you learned! All the time you spent flying still ships! All the time you spent alone so you would not be lonely on the moon!

But now, you realize, with despair, that you do not want to be an astronaut. You want only to be a child wanting to be an astronaut. You want to be a child in your own backyard, lying with your father on top of the earth, feeling the gentle press of your warm house behind you, full of light.
Her Knees, Shaking

*the shanty preacher’s sister*

She worked the next row,
amways quicker, better than I was.
That was all I thought of her ’til that day
I miscarried in the field.
She said, *That there will be the best row. Mark me,*
*nothing is ever lost.*

My hands never been smooth. A month later,
I put my cheek to her, brought her to the ground with me.
I watched the flush, the sweat between her thighs. Her only
softness, too, there and under each breast.
Nothing else to live off of, nothing to stave this hunger,
we walked to where land ended. The river did not deny us.
Walking the Buttermilk Trail

The stone I carry
to your grave
tastes of grit and fish.
On the trail
we still belong
to each other. I see
your body:
beech leaf lightly-
veined as your ankles
and a ghost of ivory
clinging beneath
the May apple crown.
These will vanish.
I’ll be yanked toward
emptiness, and what
can pry me open then?
Not even the wild
phlox, clinging
to the hollow.
POEM | John Blair

Shooting Dove

Watch your lead, he says,
catch it on the rise. Sweep on
past and take it when

the muzzle grazes
the beak. Watch for the climbers
over the trees, they’re

the ones, streaking-rare,
impossibly manifest, that sweep
the glistered sunlight

through the cedar elms
and strip the breath from your lungs
like something you can’t

afford to lose, and
as you raise the stock to your
face, weight on your back

foot, the bird palléd
by the muzzle’s sudden void,
a child will fall clean

from the half-held bowl
of sky, torn with yearning, through
your one open eye
into the wounded
and weeping core of you where
nothing ever heals

and all you crave drains
sodden from your heart onto
fields of scattered wings.
Displacement

Because the inlet has become too thin,
the dredge impales the bottom with its bones,
draws out in mouthfuls dusty clouds of sand
& sludge. I place my ear to iron pipes—
turned amber in the salt exhaust—the soft
wet ash of centuries eroded back
onto the beach. Its song the texture of
the throats of crows when sloped toward the sky,
its joints with lights like rivets. It must work
on through the night, & soon its graveled hum
becomes the moon that rolls along its track
& at the melody of sunrise, light
unwedged from the horizon. Purple sky
erodes & in its place a passage through.
POEM | Laurie Byro

The Fox Requiem

excerpted from “The Fox”

The girl went outside where suddenly she knew the fox was singing. A singing roamed the woods, in the fields and in the darkness. The fox grew from the earth, red as a candle flame. When she touched him, he bit her wrist. The fox whisked his brush across her face. It seared the girl’s mouth and she was stricken.

He continued to sing. She lay trembling, a burnt out wick, silenced by the fox.
POEM | *Mara Eve Robbins*

**Almost Raw**

She liked to pick up slabs
of bloody meat and tear off pieces
with her teeth. Smaller than you’d expect,
not quite 5’1” and oh,
that woman could eat. I learned
to sear steak on high heat. I learned
to forget knives. The beef, she liked—me,
she only tolerated. I was useful
in the way a spatula can be,
saving drippings for the dogs.

I was good enough to stay awake
till three AM and light her slender cigarettes
with the embered tip of my thick
Camels. Eventually she found Jesus,
sends emails now with too much God
for me to swallow. Sometimes

I pick up a ribeye, rare, hold it soaked
with fresh blood to my mouth,
teeth tearing sinew from the still-cool flesh
of the center, and I wish for a God

that would have blessed the fervent
carnivore, that would have taken
her folded hands and placed them
on the blistering handle
of my skillet.
ARTWORK | Pete Sack

Boylan Tower 1
When I Was New

When I was new
to New York, and broke,
I sold a pint of blood
for six dollars
and kept passing in and out
of consciousness
for the rest of the day.

I shouldn’t have done it
the doctor
(I guess he was a doctor, the one
who drew the blood)
kept saying,

your weight’s just borderline.

I was lying when I said
I’d eaten breakfast.
If I could afford breakfast,
why would I be selling blood
for six dollars?

I can’t let you leave, he said,
if you pass out on the street,
they’ll step right over you.
Go back to Louisiana, little girl,
he said,
though I wasn’t a little girl anymore.
I am looking at the clouds now thinking about what matters. When he finally let me go, after orange juice and saltines, I walked to the Nedicks in Grand Central and got a bowl of chicken noodle soup with more saltines and a glass of milk and savored that feast. *Forsythia bloom at the saddest times,* I remember thinking then because it was spring and they were.
Long Beach Littoral for Late March

There’s a hotel without a name near Miramar and Anaheim, where occupants drop what possessions they own on dusty mattresses. You didn’t dwell long on whatever loss brought you there, locked the door behind you, and hit the twilight streets under a weak moon rising in the soft impeachment of early evening. At Rudy’s Diner you waited for a warm meal dowsed in Tabasco, the heady acid jolting a cough, a bite of hash browns chased with bitter coffee. Bill paid, you passed a woman at the entryway phone begging someone in Spanish to please come home. Avoiding her eyes, you paced west on Anaheim, stopped at Rosita’s Flowers, blossoms locked behind a thrown bolt. Above, night birds fluttered from a window ledge into wind rising shoreward, smelling of iron and the sea. Reversing steps, you came to the railyard at Cerritos Channel and paused, wondered if there was more out there, knowing the answer was a search for nothing promised, all thought haloed under liquor store neon—an arrow aimed inward like a one-way sign, nightfall bringing all the sirens ever needed to sing your way home.
ARTWORK | Pete Sack

Brown Woman
Maid of the Mist

Running

One night many years ago, according to what I’ve been told, a Bent County sheriff’s deputy found me walking alone along a narrow two-lane road in the middle of nowhere. It was past midnight. It was summer. I was three years old. The story goes that I told the deputy I was looking for a new home. I have to invent some of the details now, create my own version of the truth, because there is no one to say exactly how it happened.

I’m going to say that it was a cool night, because that’s the kind of summer night people pray for on the harsh plains of eastern Colorado—cool, sweet nights to give relief from the hot, mean days. I’m going to say that there was a good moon for traveling, a moon that was enormous and red in early evening when it was low, close to the ground, like a giant, glowing coal, but small, bright and white later when it was up high in the sky. A moon to light my path and to show me, softly illuminated, the fields that stretched flat in every direction uninterrupted, for all I knew, until the ends of the earth. Occasionally there was a dark mass of trees against the sky, sheltering a farm house. Lightning from an electrical storm crackled on the horizon, and I heard the soft roll of thunder, like Indian drums, a sacred ceremony happening a long way off. I’m going to say that I wore only shorts and a little shirt, and rubber thongs on my bare feet. I rubbed my arms for warmth. I was hungry.

Well lookit here, I imagine the sheriff’s deputy saying when he found me walking along the side of the road.

Do I remember the bright headlights of the patrol car looming up out of the darkness, blinding me? I stopped and put my hands over my eyes to block out the glare.
Well lookit here, a little bitty girl.

He squatted down so he could look into my face, sitting on his haunches, his forearms resting on his knees, fingers entwined. Wearing an Indian ring of silver and turquoise.

Sweetheart, what are you doing out here in the middle of the night, huh?

He reached out to touch me but I pulled away.

Give me your hand, sweetheart. What’s your name, anyway?

Bee-trice, I said.

He tried to take my hand again and I jerked it back.

Ah-ha. Resisting arrest, huh?

Won’t go home, I said.

Your folks are probably worried sick wondering where you’re at.

No.

The deputy walked away, the heels of his boots crunching on the gravel. There was a pop as the trunk of the patrol car opened. He came back unfolding a brown army blanket.

Everything’s gonna be all right, sweetheart. He draped the blanket over my shoulders. Yes, honey, everything’s gonna be all right.

But everything would not be all right. Taking me back to Mama and Da would not be all right. Bellyache all the time would not be all right. Baby sister Rachel always hungry, crying, would not be all right. I screamed.

The deputy pulled back, his mouth open.

Sshh, sshh. You’re going to wake the dead, for God’s sake.

I screamed louder, looking straight into his eyes, my face a tight, crimson knot, my fists like little rocks. Then I struck out, hitting him on the head, knocking his Smokey Bear hat cockeyed, and with the other fist I hit him in the chest.

Holy shit!

He reached out and pulled the blanket from my shoulders. I started to run but he tossed the open blanket
over my head like a net and as I struggled to break free he pinned my arms to my sides, lifted me off the ground, and carried me to the car. I could only kick and one of my thongs flew into the weeds where it may still lie this many years later. In the back of the patrol car I burrowed my face into a corner of the seat and beat my fists against the cushions, against the doors and windows, against my own head. I kicked at the front seat where the deputy sat, giving him jolt after jolt, and he kept repeating, trying to calm me, It’s okay, honey, we’re going to get you back to your mom and dad quick as we can. His radio buzzed with static and another voice, a woman’s voice, tinny through the speaker, said, Bring her in.

That may be the way it happened, many years ago.

Pictures

I was returned to Mama and Da, although I do not remember it. And I do not remember later being taken from them with my baby sister, Rachel, and going to live in a new place with many children who were strangers.

And I do not remember with any detail the weekend my new parents came to pick me up at the foster home in Las Animas, although there are pictures to record the event. One picture shows my new mother and me in the swimming pool at the Bent’s Fort Inn. She is standing close behind me, her belly against my back, her arms wrapped tightly around me, her head tilted down so that her cheek is against the top of my slick wet hair. The aquamarine water sparkles around us. Another picture shows my new father pushing me on a swing in a park. It is a barren place, the grass dry and sparse. In one picture the three of us stand next to the carved wooden sign at the Kit Carson Home and Museum. In another we are at the entrance of Old Bent’s Fort. I cannot look at any of the pictures now without reading into them. In some pictures my new mother seems desperate, her smile forced and tense. In others she looks hopeful, cheerful. My new father appears distracted, glancing away or towards his
feet. I examine my own image looking for clues. Who is this girl? What can I learn from her face, from the eyes, my God, the eyes, coiled like western rattlers ready to strike? Certainly this child, this wild thing who stuffed food into her mouth with both hands, who slept on the floor, who could only grunt replies to questions, this could not have been the little girl of their dreams.

They’d brought a gift, a pink stuffed rabbit. I ripped off its arm and tore at its ear with my teeth.

Bea, no! my new mother said.

They also brought a picture album, carefully arranged to show me my new family. We sat together to look at it, the three of us, cross-legged on the motel room bed. I picked at a scab on my ankle.

Don’t do that, honey. It’s not ready to come off.

Here’s your new brother, sweetheart. Bradley. He’s six.

My eyes darted to the picture, then away.

He’s adopted, too. He’s a wonderful boy.

I pushed the album off my lap. My new father picked it up, held it open so I could see it.

Bradley’s staying with friends while we’re here.

Back in Denver. That’s where we live. Near Denver.

We call him Brad. He can’t wait to meet you. He’s always wanted a little sister.

This is our house. Your house.

Rachel. I said my sister’s name. Rachel.

Somebody else is adopting your sister, honey. A very nice family.

This is a picture of your room, sweetheart. Do you like the wallpaper? Rainbows.

Sure she does. Don’t you, Bea? Everybody loves rainbows.

I pawed at the plastic pages of the album, digging the pictures out of their sleeves, looking at them and throwing them to the floor.

Careful, honey. Don’t hurt the pictures.
This is your aunt and uncle in Florida. These are your cousins in Detroit. Your backyard. Your dog. Your very own Hot Wheels.

Be careful of the pictures, sweetheart.

I put my finger into the moist wound on my ankle where the scab had been.

We love you, darlin’.

Rachel, I said.

We can’t take Rachel, honey. They’re finding another family for your sister.

We’re going to give you a home.

A real family.

A family that loves you.

Love

This family is built on love, my mother would say.

Do you know how much your mom and I love you? my father would ask. More than you can ever imagine. You’re our best girl.

Bradley and I shared a bedroom for the first few weeks. He would speak softly to me after lights out.

You’ll like these people, he’d say. You’ll be safe here.

I responded with silence. He was not my brother. Later, I would go into his room when he was not there. I stole his baseball cards and threw them in the garbage or gave them to neighbor boys. I put holes in his stereo speakers and scratched his records and unraveled his tapes. I took his books to other places in the house, hid them and forgot them.

I hate you, he told me one night. He had come quietly into my dark room, had knelt down at the edge of my bed. I hate you, he whispered harshly next to my ear. You’re crazy. I hate you.

My mother and father often told me they loved me. Sometimes they said this as I raged, pinning me to my bed as I struggled and screamed, the effort taking all of their strength. My first therapist recommended this holding technique.
When I was eight we moved to Michigan where my mother and father had grown up. I met new aunts and uncles, new cousins, and two sets of grandparents, all who told me they loved me.

I hurt things, broke things. Radios, telephones, toys, watches were soon in pieces. My dolls lost their hair, their hands and feet, their heads. I held the neighbor’s pet bunny to my chest until it stopped breathing, loving it to death. You monster! the neighbor shouted. My fingernails were chewed to nubs. I sucked on pennies, scratched and picked at my skin, bit my lips until they bled. I was moved from school to school, from therapist to therapist, from drug to drug. My parents were determined to help me find a normal life.

Sometimes I asked my parents about my first family, about Mama and Da. They would tell me the story they were told, how I ran away when I was only three, how I was found on the road at night. My birth parents didn’t know how to take care of me or my sister Rachel, my father said. They mistreated us. There’s a scar on the back of my leg, a burn scar, they were told. I was a failure-to-thrive baby, but I was tough. I was trying to take care of my sister Rachel when I was only three and she was two. The judge took us away. I was almost four when I was adopted. I weighed less than thirty pounds, they told me.

I asked about the house I’d lived in but they didn’t know much about it. It was in the country, a pretty awful place, they heard. I asked them why Rachel didn’t come to live with us. They told me that the adoption people thought it would be better if Rachel had her own home. I think they were afraid that I would boss her or hurt her.

Why can’t I see my sister? I asked.

You have a new life now, they told me. You have a new family.

Then my father told me this story. Up in heaven, when God was getting ready to send me to my family here on earth, there was a mistake and I was accidentally sent to the wrong family. A cosmic screwup, my father
said. It took almost four years to get things straightened out, but now I was finally with the family God wanted me to be with. And Rachel was with the family God wanted her to be with.

My father told me this story more than once.

You’re a survivor, he would say. You’re little but you’re strong. You never gave up. You’re a very special person.

You’re a beautiful girl, my mother said. God gave you the gift of beauty.

Let your true colors shine through. You have a good heart. Let it show.

You’ve got to learn to control yourself.

Stop it! my father would shout at me when I began to rage, clenching and unclenching his fists, his face thrust forward into mine, his jaw working hard. Get yourself under control, now!

But I could not.

The Brink

The summer that I was ten we took a trip to Niagara Falls.

We’re going to do all of the things my parents wouldn’t do with us when we were kids, my father said.

We put on yellow plastic ponchos and went out on a platform next to the cataract. We reached out over the railing but we could not touch the water.

Can you feel the force of the falls? my mother shouted over the thunder. I can feel it, she said. I can feel the energy all through my body.

Then we went down a long tunnel behind the falls. Small chambers had been carved out of the rock, and holes dug all the way through to the outside where the curtain of water rushed by.

We went on the Maid of the Mist. The boat churned its way up the channel almost to the base of the falls, its engines rumbling and straining against the force of the
current. The terrible noise filled our heads, and the fine, cold spray blew across our faces.

Awesome, Bradley said.

That night we went to a special theatre to see a movie about the falls on a huge screen. It showed how the falls were formed, and about its history. The first person to go over in a barrel and survive was a woman.

See, a woman, my mother whispered, nudging my shoulder.

Then the movie told about a boy who had gone over the falls. It had happened years before. He and his father and mother were fishing in a little boat several miles upstream. But his father couldn’t start the motor, the kind that starts by pulling a rope wound around the top. The boat began drifting downstream faster and faster, and there was nothing they could do. They put on life jackets. People along the river bank could think of no way to save them. Eventually they entered the rapids, the boat capsized, and the father was killed. The mother was swept close to the shore of Goat Island and was pulled out just before she reached the edge. The boy went over. People on the Maid of the Mist saw something bobbing in the water. They pulled the boy out, safe.

That night I lay in my bed at the motel and tried to imagine what it would be like to go over the falls like the little boy. I imagined myself being swept through the rapids. I imagined myself screaming, flailing the air, clawing at boulders, clutching at the foam. But when I neared the brink, my fear turned off the picture, would not let me look at it, would not let me continue. I lay there for a while and then tried again to imagine it. I was in the rapids, choking and sputtering, but again the picture went dark. Finally, I willed myself to continue, not allowing my fear to turn off the picture, forcing myself to look towards the edge, it came so quickly, the incredibly smooth surface of the water curving downwards, and then I was there, at the brink. I felt a small hand in mine, Rachel’s hand. Looking down into the maelstrom I went
into freefall. I must have made a sound, because from the other bed Bradley said, What?

More Love

Sometimes we talked to Rachel and her parents on the phone. They lived on a farm in Colorado. I would be very excited to talk to her, but I was never sure that she knew who I was. I overheard my mother talking to her mother about therapists and school, about attachment problems and mental age. Rachel told me that she was in love with Prince Harry, Princess Di’s son, and that he was in love with her and that they were going get married some day.

I was fourteen when a man first told me he loved me in a romantic way. His name was Doug, he was twenty-three, and he lived next door with his parents.

He’s a re-tard, Bradley told me.

It was summer, early evening, and Doug and I were alone on the playground.

Are you a re-tard, Dougie? I asked.

He let out a burst of laughter, like a machine gun, uh, uh, uh, uh. Yeah, I’m a re-tard.

Dougie, do you like girls?

Yeah, I like girls. Uh, uh, uh.

Do you like me, Dougie?

Yeah. I like you, Bea.

He took my outstretched hand and I led him off the playground and up a grassy hill. At the top was a cluster of trees and bushes. I let go of his hand and ran for the hiding place, Dougie running behind me, and when we reached the safety of the trees we fell to the ground panting. I leaned back on my elbows. The grass was cool and scratchy against the backs of my legs. I pulled Dougie on top of me but he held back, so I put my mouth full against his and he slowly relaxed, lowering his body onto mine.

Tell me you love me, Dougie, I whispered. Say you love me.
Uh, uh, uh, uh.

He put his mouth over mine this time, and began a rhythmic movement of his hips against mine, and I responded with a grinding movement of my own. Oh, oh, Dougie, say you love me. I felt him against me, growing, getting hard. Say you love me, Dougie.

I love you, Bea. I love you, Bea. Then he jerked against me. When he got up there was a wet spot on his pants.

Back home I went to my room, closed the door and got into bed with my clothes on.

Honey, is everything ok? my mother asked through the door.

What’s up, babe?

I pulled the quilt over my head and closed my eyes and tried to remember Mama and Da. I imagined a house I’d seen in a movie about poor country people. A shack of unpainted wood. Maybe like my first home. I imagined myself as a baby, neglected, smeared with my own shit. I saw myself at three years old, finding something to eat for Rachel and me. A bag with bread in it. I tore off small pieces and put them into her mouth. I had left her there. I had run.

What’s wrong with her now? I heard Bradley ask.

That night I tore my bedroom apart, threw my TV to the floor, crushed my porcelain dolls against the wall, tore the sheets and blanket from my bed, ripped my clothes from their hangers, emptied the dresser drawers into a heap in the center of the room. When my parents tried to hold me, I scratched and bit, I tore my mother’s glasses from her face and broke them, and put the imprint of the sole of my shoe on the side of my father’s face where it remained for nearly a week, a red welt, a reminder of our struggle. Finally I was subdued, the act taking all of their strength and their will, holding me down on the bed as I continued to fight, to thrash and to spit, to butt with my head, hissing, I hate you, I hate you both. You’re not my parents.

I know they hated me at that moment, but they kept repeating again and again, between our heaving breaths
and our sobs, We love you. We love you, sweetheart. We love you, Bea. You're our best girl, our wonderful girl, and we love you.

Later, I heard my mother tell my father, I can't take it anymore.

But of course, they did take it, and they told me they loved me, and I told them I loved them, and it was all true.

Running Home

In high school I was always older than the other kids in my class because I'd been held back. For two years during school I worked part time as a bagger at the local supermarket. I learned to drive. I had sex with lots of boys. I got better at controlling my rages. I still had trouble reading and doing arithmetic, but they let me graduate.

In the quiet of early morning after my last day of school, while my mother and father still slept, I left home in the four-year-old Honda that had been my graduation present, heading west towards Colorado to find my sister Rachel. I had her phone number in my purse, along with about 500 dollars I'd saved. I took some clothes, a bag of apples and pears, a blanket and pillow, and my father's road atlas. The money would last if I was frugal, if I ate the apples and pears for most of my meals, and if I slept in the car.

I started out with my favorite station on the radio, oldies, and when it finally faded into static I switched to the strongest station I could find until it too faded away, and then I switched again. I heard country music, more oldies, a lot of rock, sometimes news, and occasionally a preacher. I stopped only for gas, and to go to the bathroom.

I spent the night in a parking lot behind a grain elevator in eastern Iowa. The sound of heavy trucks woke me in the morning and sent me on my way west. By the next evening I had crossed Iowa and Nebraska without
seeing much besides the road ahead. Just west of Ogallala I dipped down into Colorado on Interstate 76 and pulled off at Sterling. I stopped at a church advertising an all-you-can-eat fried chicken dinner and ate my fill. That night, in the quiet dark of the Honda, I tried to remember. Did I really call my first parents Mama and Da? No matter how hard I tried I could not imagine the sound of their voices. Is it possible that they never spoke to me? I could conjure up no sensation of touch, no memory of an exchange of feelings. Was it only my imagination, or did I actually remember seeing Mama sitting on a straight-backed wooden chair, her feet hanging limply, her toes barely touching the floor, her arms wrapped around herself, holding herself as she rocked her torso forward and back, forward and back, a tiny movement from the waist, endlessly, forward and back, forward and back, her lips moving without speaking, her eyes closed? Rocking forwards and back.

The next morning I filled the tank at a truck stop and washed up in the ladies bathroom that smelled of disinfectant, then headed west on Interstate 76. An hour later at Brush I headed south on Highway 71, a thin red line on the map. The closer I got the more notice I took of my surroundings, for miles and miles broad, flat land, the high, arid plains of eastern Colorado. Gigantic irrigation sprinklers on wheels inched their way across the ground. Millions of tiny green tufts sprouted in neat rows across the endless gray fields. Rocky Ford by dinner time, an apple from the bag, east on Highway 50, another thin red line. Dark as I drove through La Junta. A sign, Las Animas 21 Miles, sent a quiver rippling through my belly. An hour later I was checking into the Bent’s Fort Inn.

The next day I found the park where, years before, a picture was taken of my new father pushing me on a swing. There was another family using the swings now. The parents were just kids themselves, about my age, he with a thin mustache and long, limp hair, she with a washed-out complexion and tired shoulders. They took turns listlessly pushing their toddler boy, and for the few
minutes I watched not a single word passed between them. I smiled at the boy and he stared back.

Back at the Bent’s Fort Inn I put on a pair of shorts and a tank top and went out to the pool. Two girls, sisters, were taking turns doing cannonballs into the deep end. I eased into the cool water and waded to the spot where, sixteen years before, my new mother had held me in her arms. I closed my eyes, held my breath, and slipped beneath the surface, allowing the water to hold me, refresh me, envelop me, isolate me from the real world above. I let my body sway slowly with the currents, slowly swaying, weightless, wishing I could stay there forever. The play of the sisters at the other end of the pool reached me like distant thunder.

That night, from my motel room, I called Rachel’s mother. She told me that my parents had called, told her that I might be headed west. I told her I would call them. She gave me directions to their house, a farm in the country. She said she couldn’t wait to meet me.

Their house was a neat two story of white-painted cinder blocks, set in a square of emerald green, an oasis of smooth lawn and large trees surrounded by miles of flat, gray land. There was an old wooden barn and a newer metal barn, and fencing laced together to form what looked like pens for animals. At the entrance to the driveway was a sign in the shape of a pig. Dwyer’s Farm.

As if she had been watching for me, the woman who was Rachel’s mother came quickly out of the side door. She was rosy and smiling, her arms open wide for an embrace.

Bea, it’s so good to see you.

Yes, I said.

You’ll call me Liz. You don’t remember me, but I met you at the foster home. She put her hands on my shoulders. What a beautiful young lady, she said.

I smiled, but kept an eye on the side door, waiting for Rachel to come out.

My sister, I finally said.
Oh, God! Liz Dwyer said. What am I thinking? She's out back, sweetheart. Go on, go on! She made shooing motions.

As I was walking away, Liz called my name. I turned.

Your sister, she said.

Yes?

In the silence I heard the low, rough noise of a tractor in the distance.

Be patient with your sister, she finally said.

I will.

Behind the house there was a small cement patio with potted geraniums lined up along one edge and white plastic chairs pulled up to a round umbrella table. A few yards away was a garden patch about the same size as the patio, perfectly square, with plants of different heights and textures and colors, leaves of green and white and purple, with clean brown dirt raked smooth between the straight rows. Rachel sat in a lawn chair in the deep shade of a large tree at the back of the yard, gazing off in the direction of the fields, lost in herself, it seemed, not waiting or watching for anyone. I kept my breathing under control and went to her, numb, as if I was floating, out of contact with the earth.

Rachel?

She looked in my direction.

Hi, was all she said.

Even though she stayed in her chair I could tell she was larger than me, taller, heftier. Her smile seemed far away. Her eyes were slightly crossed behind thick glasses. She wore a pretty, loose-skirted cotton print dress and sandals. I knelt on the grass in front of her, put my hands on her knees and looked into her face.

Rachel, do you know who I am?

My sister, she replied through the smile. My sister, Beatrice.

I leaned forward and hugged her, resting my head on her bosom, and she held me as we rocked slowly back and forth.

Rachel, Rachel, I murmured, and then I began to cry.
She said nothing, but tugged gently at my arms, pulling me up until I was nearly in her lap, Rachel cradling me, and then she began stroking my hair, silently, gently. We stayed that way until I was all cried out.

She offered me the soft skirt of her dress to dry my face, then she used it to fan cool air onto my red eyes.

I love you, Rachel.

I love you, Beatrice, she said. Would you like to see my pigs? She clapped her hands together.

Absolutely. Let's see the pigs.

*My* pigs, she said. She came up quickly out of her chair and headed toward the pens by the barn, leaving me to follow.

We spent a few minutes looking at the pigs, watching them lie there, or roll over, or root with their noses into the dirt. Rachel giggled when a pig grunted, or stumbled over another pig, or rolled in a patch of mud.

What are their names? I asked her.

Never name anything you might have to eat, she said. That's the rule. Then she pointed out the few that had names. Big Daddy and Big Mama and Bertha and Andy and Pickles and Porky were like family. Permanent.

Bill Dwyer, who had been working in the fields, joined us for lunch. He and Liz asked about my life, and school, and my family, and I responded with good, positive answers. I asked Liz if she knew where Rachel and I had lived before we were taken to the foster home. Yes, she told me. No one lives there now.

Rachel was mostly silent, and before we were done she left the table and did not come back. Later, I found her in the chair behind the house. I sat on the grass next to her.

I'm so glad to see you after all these years. We're going to be close, real sisters, forever. She didn't answer.

I love you, Rachel.

Before I left, Liz gave me a big hug, then put a small square of folded paper into my hand. I looked at it in the car. It was a map.
I drove for about half an hour, following Liz’s directions. Then I was on a narrow gravel road. A cloud of dust followed me for several miles. Occasionally, there was a house, or a crossroad leading toward the horizon. Twice the car scattered gangs of crows picking at the meat of dead animals. It was midafternoon when I pulled up next to the abandoned house. The sun was a yellow blur in the sky. The house was a small one story made of wood, the paint faded, the roof sagging on one side. Most of the windows were shattered. A hot breeze ruffled the trees and insects buzzed up out of the tall weeds as I pushed through them. The back steps looked dangerously dilapidated. I climbed them carefully and put my hand against the door. It swung open into a little covered porch crammed with junk—a couple of wooden chairs, a crib, stacks of old magazines, cardboard boxes filled with empty cans and bottles. A ripped mattress leaned against the wall. A door led into the kitchen. Although the windows were broken out, no breeze stirred. I walked slowly through the empty rooms. Worn linoleum covered the floors. The walls were streaked with moisture stains. Colorless shreds of curtain hung limply at a few of the window frames. I heard the whispered scurrying of small animals.

A film of perspiration formed on my forehead. For a moment I felt chilled, faint. Mama. Da. Were you here? Did you walk through these rooms? Did you occupy this space? Inhale this air? Touch these surfaces? Did these walls hear your voices? Is there anything of you left? A vibration? An atom of your breath? Did you stand naked in this tin shower, the hard soles of your feet on this rusty floor, your face upturned to the spray of water, the sweat of your body, the oil of your skin, the spit of your mouth, loose hairs from your crotch running down this drain? Mama and Da, did the cries of my sister echo here? Is this the place where I was made? Have I seen these walls before? Does any trace of the little girl remain? Yes. I can feel her. If I stand very still, quiet my mind, close my eyes, I can feel her presence. Oh. Oh. Oh Mama. Oh Da.
I sank to my knees in the center of the small living room, my eyes closed, my arms wrapped around my body, and holding myself this way I began to rock, slightly, gently, rhythmically, endlessly, back and forth, back and forth, back and forth, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh...

I awoke to darkness, still on the living room floor. As my eyes adjusted I could see moonlight through the window and the outline of trees. It was cooler now. A faint breeze moved the shreds of curtain. I left the house, pushed through the weeds, walked past my car, and when I got to the gravel road I kept walking. The moon gave enough light for me to see where I was going. It was a bright moon, high and white in the sky. I walked until I came to a paved road, followed it, and then another. It was chilly. I rubbed my arms for warmth. Lightning crackled on the horizon, and occasionally I heard the faint boom of distant thunder. Ahead I saw headlights approaching. As they came closer I continued to stare into the brilliance, unblinking. This time I would not raise my hand to block out the glare. My eyes burned from the brightness but I would not close them. The ground shook and dust flew up as the car sped by. I turned around and walked back to the house.

The next day I returned to the Dwyer farm. Rachel was in her chair behind the house, staring out across the fields. I heard the low muttering of Bill’s tractor.

Where’s your mom? I asked.

To town getting groceries, she said.

I love you, Rachel.

I love you too, Sister.

I took her hand and she got out of the chair and I led her to my car. I opened the door and she got in without hesitating. I didn’t hesitate either. I got behind the wheel and we left together, onto the road and away.
ARTWORK | Pete Sack

Almost Home
POEM  |  Emari DiGiorgio

A Girl Writes a Letter to God

I’m sure you already know this. I guess we’re not really friends, but I’m writing on account of Bootsie. Bless her heart. That’s what mom said. At least she’s not suffering. On the day that she died, she wouldn’t drink my Cap’n Crunch Berry milk or eat the honey-smoked ham I snuck from the fridge. She lay in the stretch of sunlight by the screen door. She knew we were going to the vet. But when mom got the carrier from the mudroom she didn’t scramble behind the couch. I couldn’t hold her. Not because she hissed or tried to wipe my face off. I thought I would break her or her bones might tear through the skin. When the doctor gave her the needle, it was so fast. She was breathing and then she stopped. It felt like when she left she took the air with her. Mom says Bootsie’s in a better place, but I can’t imagine anything she’d want more than to be tucked into the hood of the sweatshirt at the foot of my bed. It’s not my favorite, but even if it was, I’d want her to have it. I’m writing to ask you to send an angel or a dove or whatever. I’m not going to wash it so it has the right scent. And if you’d prefer that I mail it, I’ll ask mom to take me to the post office. But it’d probably be better if you sent for it. If I don’t hear from you, I won’t assume that you don’t exist or that you don’t care about me or Bootsie. I know no place is safe. We do lockdown drills at school, and a man shot another man for texting at the movies. Mom says the world’s going to hell. It must break your heart, to see something you made fall apart.
POEM | *Emari DiGiorgio*

The White Horses of Wainui Beach

I've felt the dredging stride, a hoof
upon my chest or back. To slide along
their slick coats before they buck and rear—

a circus act. No trainer walks these steeds
round the circle of corral. The wet sand
sinks beneath the weight of the white water’s

muscled flanks. Only moon spooked, not gods
or demons, with calla-white manes. They run
themselves aground and vanish like ghosts

in the foam or splinter like trade ships
tethered to the plow of the sea. I too
am bound to this earth and wish to know
what it is to shatter and resurface whole.
Corpus Christi

Night lets go its moorings and slides out to sea. Your prayers drift down like a sheet pulled taut over the city, pour from lips like a tower tumbling away, falling always somewhere else. Thunder unrolls slow over the worn-out cottonlands and echoes between seawall and promenade, fumbling down brick lanes, trying to get out of town. So we’re enveloped, all of us, the sheet hauled, unfurled and billowing slowly down, catching us inside, pushing us into each other’s arms.
This Kind of Room

It’s that kind of soft, not too hot, summer day when all I want is to be young enough to run fast break full courts until night falls.
I don’t want to subway into the city, stop in book stores, thumb through bins of used vinyl for hours, stand in line at the Angelica for one of those movies where I don’t care if the main character lives or dies. I don’t want to be back in love with Erica, driving to some quaint upstate town, windows down, in complete control of the tape deck and we’re both singing along as loud and as off key as we please: Springsteen, Beach Boys, old live 1969 Poco. Don’t want to linger over brunch, wander into tiny shops filled with scented candles and antiques, not even if we stop at a roadside park, find a deserted shady spot, spread a blanket and end up making out like we first met.
I want to be the first, the only guy at the schoolyard, feel the grooves of the ball with my fingertips, hear it echo off the handball walls, the four floors of empty brick classrooms, as I take a few dribbles, make easy lay ups. I don’t want to be in Vermont, back in love with Helen at the Champlain Valley county fair watching Jesse stroke some bored cow, taking pictures as he rides the long rainbow slide fifty-five straight times, no matter how cute and ecstatic.
he looks every time. Don't care if he sleeps through the night and we cuddle through some video, walk to the bedroom for slow mind blowing sex and an early morning rewind. I want to stand at the foul line, hit a few shots, watch the ball softly fall through the not yet stolen net. No, not a little kid on a back in Brooklyn Sunday, my grandfather, my father, still alive, mom complaining there's nowhere to place the lasagna pan and my favorite uncle, Dom, with his crutches by his side, always saying just as long as there's this kind of room in heaven, we'll all be alright. I want to nod knowingly, maybe slap palms, flick bounce passes when the other guys start showing up, talking shit, late night west coast box scores. I definitely don't want to be sitting inside, at my desk, clicking through emails, reading about my old schoolyard friend Duden's kidney transplant and how it all went well, he's recovering nicely. Don't want to think about my own kidney condition especially since it's now official that the medication didn't work. I don't want to spend a moment making a list of who would contemplate donating a kidney for me, who would get sick of visiting me in the hospital first. Today, all I want to do is shoot for sides. Duden's my first pick. He grabs a rebound, hits me with an outlet pass. I glide down the sideline, cross over, take off and soar to the hoop. Even if my shot somehow rims, spills out, Dude will tip it back in, fill the basket.
ARTWORK | Pete Sack

Took a Shot at a Moving Target
Lament for the mango tree’s daughter

When a man can’t live on the land of his ancestors, he settles down in the land of his imagination.
—Kayimuinda Ndjo

Where are you little flower?
If you are in a stream
I will dive to join you
If you are in the stars
I will be a cloud for you
If you are in a graveyard
I will be the sap on your tomb
If your shroud is closed
Barambo will sing to open it.

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1 Dried up steam
2 Prince of minerals (Cabinda), first of the dead buried in the city of the wind

52 | Raleigh Review
POEM | *Landa wo*

**Complainte pour la fille du manguier**

*Quand un homme ne peut pas vivre sur la terre de ses ancêtres, il s’installe dans son imaginaire.*

—*Kayimuinda Ndjo*³

Ou es tu petite fleur?
Si tu es dans un ruisseau
Je plongerais te rejoindre
Si tu es dans les étoiles
Je serais un nuage pour toi
Si tu es dans un cimetière
Je serais la sève sur ta tombe
Si ton linceul est clos
Barambo⁴ chantera pour l’ouvrir.

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³ Ruisseau asséché
⁴ Prince des minéraux (Cabinda), premier mort enterré dans la cité du vent.
Running Late

Sometimes a body makes it hard to get ready for work. Take nipples, for instance. The way, when kissed by a cold draft after a shower, they rise up like a kid in the front row of class waving both hands. You see them—and you just have to stand there and gaze, amazed by the way blood rushes, plumps them to tight berries, how the tingle jingles through your body.

While you should be making coffee, packing lunch, you remember how, in a crowded room, they perk up near the one with promising lips and sure hips, twin pulse pulling you toward hello. This magic—the magic of our bodies’ beautiful machinery, if I were to show you what I know so far about the Holy, I’d begin with this.
ARTWORK | Pete Sack

This Requires My Full Attention
FICTION | James Braziel

Last Time Jake Played the Blues

He had four fingers. Tonight he has six. Now I know I’ve been drinking, hell we all have, and I know drinking is an epidemic in this country among us out-of-work jobbers, but six fingers. Damn, Jake. We’re losing money and ground to the Man and you’re gaining fingers. Let me say here, I can count as high as 657 in an alcoholic stupor, so I know how to count to six. And let me say, too, the blues have never sounded better. Amen.

The last time Jake jowled down—twisting his neck like a duck over the wavy part of his guitar, his eyes using red laser telepathy to tell his fingers what to do—he did not, I repeat, did not take a break from making his guitar twang-diddy-twang. He shifted up that fret board, latticing a ladder to the sky, making the clouds we couldn’t see dance dirty with the moon. We were down at Jack and Jill’s Topless Oysters Bar, amazed. Gulf Shores. And that was with four fingers. But with two more fingers, it’s like he’s taking us to one of those galaxies just getting started. Like he’s the usher.

Last time I heard Jake play the blues, I was still in love with Lucinda, one of those bad loves where your woman yells at you and you yell at her and the drinking is the only thing that makes it good enough to stay inside that squeak-squawky birdcage, go round and round. I had just been let go that afternoon from my two week stint at the chicken plant because I supposedly cut the chickens the wrong way. Boss said I didn’t know the difference between a thighbone and a backbone. Hell if I didn’t. I was cutting them more efficiently, fool. But calling him a fool did me in.

I went home glum blue, got Lucinda, and came out here. But did I get a single I’m-sorry-baby from her? No. Instead Lucinda told me she had fallen out of the love
orbit we spent four months making. All the while she listened to Jake with her hand over her crotch.

“Man’s got four fingers to strum with. That’s all, Tony.” She pointed to the stage. “Yet he’s got more soul and love in those fingers than you got in all your right hand.”

I explained to her that Jake was a left-handed picker.

“Don’t matter, know-it-all,” she yelled and slapped my head. “Damn, know-it-all, you see? It don’t matter. You won’t ever love me like he loves his guitar.” And Jake was going into some deep delta under the big muddy thing cause he’s from there, born out of that river before he moved here, and I felt like I couldn’t breathe the chords were so heavy he kept laying down. I closed my eyes and nodded cause it was true—I didn’t love her.

“So true,” I said to Lucinda.

She chucked her drink in my face, a fuzzy navel that made me taste all peachy. “Bastard idiot,” she said. “You’re not even willing to fight for our love.”

But I would not open my sticky eyelashes to any of her venom. I was down underneath that river at its deepest point in the cool calmness where Jake came from. My river of peach and bad feeling feeling so good, so lonely, but so good, I wasn’t ever going to leave if I could help it.

Her chair scraped across the floor like a fat chicken unable to fly.

“Wait Lucinda,” I said in a breath of regret, but all I had was the emptiness of where she had once been. Up on stage, Jake played the blues. He never even looked at the audience while he played, just stared at his fingers. So I looked at my fingers all rough and cut. I wondered for a split second what kind of pieces a chicken holding a knife might cut me into. Then I refocused and thought of Jake’s music and my fingers. Together. That was the first time I really communicated with him, on his level, when I really understood where the calmness in him came from.

Then I looked off, way off. Can’t tell you where exactly—into that mob getting rowdier, the colored lights
weeping above. I don’t know where it was I looked, but I connected with something larger than the world of Jack and Jill’s Topless Oysters. Every now and then, I yelled out, “I’m with you, brother,” and put a hand up to the sky, grabbing hold the ladder Jake had made.

Though he didn’t answer, he heard me.

After Lucinda’s declaration on his playing, you’d think she’d be here tonight to hear more. I was prepared for it, ready to ignore her sweet cutoff jeaned ass. But let the record show she is not here to witness the miracle of Jake’s additional two fingers bestowed upon him by some alien god I guess. He did not grow them on stage. Yet he’s using those fingers like he’s had them his whole life, taking all of us up to some far off galaxy we don’t want to come back to Gulf Shores for. Who wants to come back for taxes and nasty bosses and death and a dirty ocean full of blitzed tourists and irresolute women that don’t love you? Not me. I would only come back for true love, if some woman could give it, and give it to me the right way with an accepting heart and an understanding that even though I can’t play the blues like Jake, I know what he feels. If I wanted, I could grow fingers and do whatever it takes to love a true love back. Every chord he touches, I’ve those chords way deep down, ever so deep down in me.
POEM | James Crews

In a Blizzard

The night was alive with falling snow, white hiding the white of the Capitol until, from a distance, it looked like one of those cairns the Inuit used to stack at each pass, a heap of stones in the shape of a man they could stop and talk to, or reach out and touch with stiff hands when the mountain wind cut too close. As I rounded the frozen lake, I saw it on the fresh snow: a cigarette, not yet wet or ruined, and though I'd quit years ago, I picked it up, slipped it in my pocket and ducked into a diner where I begged matches and a cup of steaming coffee. Almost home, I held that hot Styrofoam up to the plow now grinding along my street, toasting the unseen man spreading rocksalt like alms among the rows of tucked-in houses his yellow lights kept caressing. I stepped onto my porch, struck a match and lit the cigarette, letting the smoke go into the bitter air where it bloomed and hovered as if it couldn't bear to leave me.
POEM | James Crews

Waiting for Love

You must save up for it and collect and gather honey.
—Rilke

You can collect as much of it as you like, keep it in trunks under the bed, in closets or store it in stone jars as the pharaohs did, placing gallon after gallon of priceless honey next to the alabaster heads of sarcophagi so when they woke wide-eyed and famished in the afterlife, they’d find something familiar and sweet to eat. But nothing hoarded stays hidden for long. Soon enough some looter will shimmy into that secret room in you and—ignoring the warnings—he will pry off the lid of every sighing jar and scoop out what is now crystallized, shining in his hands, and still delicious after all that time.
REVIEW | Tom Lisk

A Beguiling Experience: 

*Beauty Mark*


*Beauty Mark* is my first encounter with Suzanne Cleary’s work. It is, however, her third published poetry collection, and makes me want now to seek out the other two. *Beauty Mark* manifests considerable poetic skill in a limber and versatile style.

These are poems of sensibility, and of sense. Any reader can follow the syntax, understand the vocabulary and grasp the meanings of the sentences in *Beauty Mark*. The poems are meant to be understood, or rather to be felt as well as thought, which means experienced rather than compartmentalized by their “meanings.”

Irony, the default mode of anxious doubt, seems the only way a poet can respond to the gut stuff of lyricism, the tug of sentimentality, the pull of Emerson’s advice “Trust thyself.” As a gesture against anxiety about “meaning,” let’s say these lyrics, perhaps like all lyrics, work somewhere between self-pity and selfish joy, between MacLeish’s “a poem should not mean but be” and Frost’s “a poem is a momentary stay against confusion.”

Cleary takes on the big subjects—God, memory, time, fame—and manages steps toward post-irony, a large mind discovering and controlling the relationships between the inward and outward elements of her own experience. In “Silver Amulet of Ganesh the Elephant God,” she addresses the amulet not just as a symbol but as a god, “the size of my thumbnail,” and with only the lightest touch of irony “I can believe in you / ... for
neither does my god stop the bus from crashing”—polytheism synonymous with monotheism when it comes to divine helplessness, or at least inscrutability answering our common need to believe in a higher power in the face of disaster. In a later poem, “Holy Water,” “…the water changed God / into something close, and ordinary, and simple, and here.”

Her titles are marvelous, and the poems live up to them. “Televangelists” and “God Visits the Televangelists” pave the way for the lucid beauty of those lines from “Holy Water.” “Swimming with Miss Peggy Lee” and “Magnificent” inform each other. “Manual of Proper Correspondence” and “Exercises from a Manual of Proper Correspondence, 1889,” a found poem arranged from the actual manual, reveal a wry and generous sense of humor recognizing that the social niceties of one generation often seem silly and fussy to the next, but our ironies are just as likely to seem quaint.

If titles like “Lines for the Actress Who Performed Shakespeare-in-the-Park with a Stick in her Mouth” and “Cheese of the Month Club” don’t make you want to read the poems, I can’t help you.

Cleary’s poems are shapely, with beginnings, middles, and ends, but the confident ambivalence of the speaker’s voice leaves us with more to feel (and think about) and a desire to reread the poem for its relation to the whole collection. The poems don’t just offer summary lessons to bring “closure,” but an aesthetic wholeness that makes me want to experience the poem again. Suzanne Cleary’s poems function as beguiling experiences. In Beauty Mark delight becomes instruction.
Poems of Many Places: 
*The Widow from Lake Bled*


After reading the final chapter of Kirby Wright’s selected poems, I felt compelled to write a quick review of his book. Wright’s unpretentious word choice and deep knowledge of place lead me to believe that this is indeed a poet who has been to and experienced the locales he writes about. This is not a poet who sits in front of a television set and gets so outraged by the news reports that it leads to a book. Nor is this a poet who interviews factory workers with hopes of furthering his career by shedding some light on what it means to actually work for a living. Kirby Wright gets his hands dirty with lines like:

Voila the dead hour before the sun.  
Scent of plumeria, whiskey, and menthol.  
Coral moon teases the roosters to crow.  
Honolulu Harbor turns mercurial.  
(First stanza “At Waikiki At Four in the Morning”)

With lines like “Taboo dreams invade the hotels,” I feel like I am in the very rooms he describes:

Palms become silhouettes.  
Walls of my studio are sex bamboo.  
Taboo dreams invade the hotels.  
Umbrella tree shivers below me.  
(Third stanza “At Waikiki At Four in the Morning”)

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I've started this review with the end of *The Widow from Lake Bled* because the deeper you get into this collection the stronger it gets. But even the beginning sets a high standard. When entering Wright’s selected poems, get ready for couplets, tea, and perhaps a cigarette or two while sunning on the deck:

> The widow shakes her coat
> At the bedroom window.

> There was a Porsche in the garage
> Now long gone.

> She warms in black sweats
> On her maple deck.

> Sunlight sparks the lake below
> Chimneys blue the valley with smoke.

> She lives on cigarettes and tea.
> *(First 9 lines of “The Widow from Lake Bled”)*

After the opening poem, a tight and modern pantoum features a waitress who may ask your age after the fourth pint “At Billy Boozer’s” in Hong Kong.

> I slip into Billy Boozer’s for a drink.
> I am confident, hair dyed blond.
> You are the Carlsberg girl, a beer model.
> I like the green Danish frock.

> I am confident, hair dyed blond.
> You ask my age after the fourth pint.
> I like the green Danish frock.
> I know there are three decades between us.
> *(First two stanzas of “At Billy Boozer’s”)*
The poems in this book are real—in the most earnest sense—and range from traditional form and hybrid forms to prose poems and free verse. It does not matter whether you are in Kirby Wright’s chapter on Eastern Europe, Hong Kong, Martha’s Vineyard, or Waikiki, he conveys an actual and a factual legitimacy and a strong knowledge of these regions. From this single collection of selected poems, Kirby Wright strikes me as someone I can trust, and I am looking forward to experiencing other locales through his lens.
CONTRIBUTORS

Jeffrey Alfier is winner of the Kithara Book Prize for his poetry collection *Idyll for a Vanishing River* (Glass Lyre Press). He is also author of *The Wolf Yearling* (Silver Birch Press). His recent work has appeared in *Poetry Ireland Review, Arkansas Review,* and *New York Quarterly.*

John Blair’s short story collection *American Standard* was the 2002 winner of the Drue Heinz Literature prize and was published by the University of Pittsburgh Press. He has also published two books of poetry: *The Occasions of Paradise* (U. Tampa Press) and *The Green Girls* (LSU Press/Pleiades Press). A professor in the English Department at Texas State University, Blair directs the undergraduate creative writing program. Two of his novels have been published by Ballantine/Del Rey, and his poems and stories appear in *Poetry, The New York Quarterly, The Sewanee Review, The Antioch Review, New Letters,* and elsewhere.

James Braziel is the author of the novels *Birmingham, 35 Miles,* and *Snakeskin Road.* His work has appeared in journals and newspapers, including *The New York Times.* Currently, he lives in north Alabama with his wife, poet Tina Mozelle Braziel. They are building a house together.

Amber Burke is from North Dakota. She is a Yale graduate and former actress who completed The Writing Seminars MFA program at Johns Hopkins University in 2012 and is now writing and teaching yoga in Pennsylvania. Her work has appeared in *Five Chapters, The Michigan Quarterly Review, Apt, Essays & Fictions, Devilfish Review,* and *Escape Into Life.* She has finished her first novel and is at work on a second.

7th Quarry (from Wales). Her work draws on myth, fairytale, and her experiences of foreign places in the years she worked as a travel agent. Byro has been facilitating Circle of Voices, a poetry discussion in New Jersey, for over 15 years, currently at the West Milford Township Library where she is Poet-in-Residence.

Allen Chamberlain grew up in the woods of Mississippi and now lives in Richmond, Virginia, where she is Head Librarian at the Saunders Family Library and teaches in the English department at the Collegiate School. Like her grandfather and mother before her, she manages the family’s tree farm in Clarke County, Mississippi. She is a 2013 graduate of the MFA Program for Writers at Warren Wilson College. Her poems appeared in Sound & Sense: Virginia Poets and Their Students.

James Crews was born and raised in St. Louis, Missouri. His work has appeared most recently in Ploughshares and The New Republic and he is a regular contributor to The (London) Times Literary Supplement. He is the author of The Book of What Stays, winner of the 2010 Prairie Schooner Book Prize in Poetry. He lives and teaches in Lincoln, Nebraska.

Noel Crook’s first book, Salt Moon, winner of the 2013 Crab Orchard Review First Book Award, is forthcoming from Southern Illinois University Press in early 2015. Her poems have appeared in The Atlanta Review, Shenandoah, New Letters, Smartish Pace and other journals. Her chapbook Canyon was published by Red Dragonfly Press in 2010. She is a graduate of the MFA Program in Creative Writing at North Carolina State University.

Wendy DeGroat is a poet, librarian, and teacher with poems in About Place, TRIVIA: Voices of Feminism, and Sprout. As part of her poetry advocacy, DeGroat curates poetryriver.org, a site that connects visitors with diverse voices in contemporary American poetry and resources for exploring documentary poetry, including handouts from her documentary poetry workshop at Split this Rock 2014. She also teaches creative
writing workshops for LGBTQ elders and writes articles that encourage more frequent inclusion of contemporary poetry in classrooms and libraries, such as “Make Space for Poetry” published in the March/April 2014 issue of Knowledge Quest, a professional journal for school librarians.

**Emari DiGiorgio** makes a mean arugula quesadilla and has split-boarded the Tasman Glacier. She is Associate Professor of Writing at The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey and Poet-in-the-Schools through the New Jersey State Arts Council and the Dodge Poetry Foundation. Her poetry manuscript *The Things a Body Might Become* was a finalist for the 2013 Crab Orchard Series in Poetry First Book Award and Open Competition and the Black Lawrence Press St. Lawrence Book Award. Recent poems have appeared in *The Nassau Review, Poetry International,* and *Smartish Pace.*

**Geri Digiorno**, Sonoma Poet Laureate (2006-2007) and artist, is founder and director of the Petaluma Poetry Walk. She studied art at College of San Mateo, Solano College, Sonoma College, and Santa Rosa Junior College and has worked at the homeless shelter in Petaluma teaching poetry and collage.

**George Dila’s** short story collection *Nothing More to Tell* was published by Mayapple Press in 2011, and his short story chapbook *Working Stiffs* was published by One Wet Shoe Press in 2014. His stories and personal essays have appeared in numerous journals and earned several awards and prizes. A native Detroiter, he now lives and writes in Ludington, a small town on the Lake Michigan shore.

**Heather Dobbins’s** poems and poetry reviews have appeared in *Big Muddy, CutBank, The Southern Poetry Anthology (Tennessee), The Rumpus,* and *TriQuarterly Review,* among others. She was a featured poet for *Beloit Poetry Journal* last June. After ten years of earning degrees in California and Vermont, she returned to her hometown of Memphis. Her debut, *In the Low Houses,* was published in March by Kelsay Press.
Tony Gloeggler is a native and lifelong resident of New York City. His work has been recently featured in *Columbia Poetry Review, Paterson Literary Review, Nerve Cowboy, Exit 13, The Gathering Of The Tribes, Rattle,* and *The Ledge*. He has two full-length collections: *One Wish Left*, which went into a second edition and was published by Pavement Saw Press in 2000, and *The Last Lie*, which was published by NYQ books in 2010. His new collection, *Until the Last Light Leaves*, is forthcoming from NYQ Books.

Rob Greene is the editor and publisher of *Raleigh Review*. He teaches at Louisburg College in Louisburg, North Carolina.

Tom Lisk’s poetry, fiction and essays have appeared in many literary magazines, newspapers, websites and wastebaskets. Three collections of his poems are available through any bookstore: *Aroma Terrapin* (Mellen Poetry Press), *These Beautiful Limits* (Parlor Press), and *Transient Lodgings* (Jacques Wool Produblications).

T. J. McLemore holds his MFA in poetry from Boston University. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *The Worchester Review, Moth + Rust*, and others. He currently lives and teaches writing in the piney woods of east Texas.

Mara Eve Robbins lives and writes in Floyd County, Virginia. She stops to help turtles cross the road, enjoys drinking green tea out of blue Mason jars, and often wanders around with Sharpie markers asking people to write poetry on her pants. Her work has appeared in *New York Quarterly, Nantahala Review, Real Simple*, and Floyd County’s own *Museletter*, among other wonderful publications. She still enjoys her steak rare.

Anele Rubin’s poetry has been published in *Café Review, Paterson Literary Review, Midwest Quarterly, Rattle, Atlanta Review, Chattahoochee Review, Third Wednesday, U.S. 1 Worksheets, San Pedro River Review, Slant*, and many other places. Her poetry collection *Trying to Speak* was published by Kent State University Press. She divides her time between Brooklyn and New Kingston, New York.
**Pete Sack** started his art career at an early age, creating watercolor paintings of baseball players from photos out of magazines. He continued his artistic development at East Carolina University, where he graduated with a BFA in painting in 1998. While there, Sack was introduced to oil paint and has had a loving relationship with the medium ever since. Presently residing in Raleigh, North Carolina, Sack has combined his love of oil paint and watercolor by creating paintings with both mediums. He is currently represented by Mahler Fine Art in Raleigh and shows regularly in Raleigh and other venues around the area.

**P. J. Williams**, born and raised in North Carolina, is currently an MFA candidate at the University of Alabama. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Salamander, Crab Creek Review, Nashville Review, DIAGRAM, Four Way Review, Cloud Rodeo*, and others. He is co-founder and lead editor of *Utter*, an online journal of writing and art, and is co-editing an anthology of poetry inspired by hip-hop with poet Jason McCall.

**Landa wo** is an Angolan Cabindese poet who, having previously lived in Ireland, France, Gabon, Congo and England, currently lives in Germany. A poet of the diaspora, Landa wo writes mostly in English and French with the heart oriented to the unknown, dreamed, and surely idealized land of Angola and Cabinda. His work has won a number of awards including 1st place in the Metro Eireann Writing Competition 2007, Eist Poetry Competition 2006, and Feile Filiochta International Poetry Competition 2005. His poetry appears in literary journals in Ireland, UK, New Zealand, and USA (*Boyne Berries Literary Magazine, Nashville Review, Blackmail Press, Ropes, Weyfarers*) and in a number of anthologies.
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