

Fox Chase Review



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A. Igoni Barrett

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I Am Joy

She is drunk, he isn't. Her weight on his arm is what causes him to stumble every few steps, to walk lopsided, like his broken wing is dragging in the dust. Her heels clatter on the asphalt: *clak-a-clak-a-clak*. When he stumbles she teeters, her hands fly out and claw his arm, his shoulder, his neck. Her mouth jerks open, ejects noises that turn to laughter. His anger has become a raw taste in the back of his throat—each time her fingers rake his skin, each time her beer-breath washes over his face, he feels the sourness eat deeper into his oesophageal lining. He endures. With each wave of anger he overcomes he feels himself become a stronger man, a better person.

Drunk or not, he will fuck her this morning.

She halts. He has moved two steps ahead before he misses her presence. He whirls around.

'What is it?'

She is standing stiff and straight, staring at her feet. She is clad in a red tank top and white bum shorts. A white handbag dangles from her left shoulder. He admires the braless boldness of her breasts; his gaze sweeps over her bare arms and legs. Her shoes are red patent leather, the heel a contoured block of wood.

When she drops to her haunches he starts forward, but draws up when she begins to undo the straps of her shoes. The movement of her fingers is slow, languorous. She rises to step out of the shoes, then bends to scoop them up. She rises again, unclasps her handbag and drops the shoes inside.

'My feet are paining me,' she says, and strides toward him, barefooted.

The sky is tinged with the watercolours of dawn but the moon is still a big fat pearl in the roof of the world. The air is heavy with dew and the scent of wet grass. The nightclub is far behind them; the bass of its music speakers thump the air. She has taken his arm, their progress is faster, the road stretches before them, it is deserted—then it is not. She says 'Ah, there,' and pulls him after her, towards the shapes lurking in an arboreal cluster of shadows. Everything happens in a blur; it is too sudden, too soon; he has no time to resist this force that sweeps him towards a disaster he did not foresee. When they are close enough to inhale the burnt-weed smell of the two men, she releases him.

She moves forward, alone. Her gait is disjointed—from the waist up she cringes, but her feet are dancing.

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The men know what she wants. 'How much?' one of them asks, and when she whispers a reply his hands reach down and make zipping noises. 'Your friend wants anything?' he says as he extends a balled fist.

Her arm darts forward, her fingers cupped. She turns her head to look at him. She drops her fist. He can see the outline of her face, the rigour of her features, but not her expression.

He nods.

'Bring two hundred,' she says. She turns to the dealer. 'Bring another one.'

#

The neighbourhood cocks are crowing at the sun when they arrive at her house. There is a half-naked old woman perched on a stool in the corridor and for a moment he thinks that this is her grandmother. But she unlocks the first door in the house without glancing in the woman's direction, without greeting her, and when she enters the room he dashes in after her.

The room is cool as a tomb. Cigarette butts, bottle corks, dirty clothes, litter the floor. The cobwebs that hang in the corners of the ceiling are sagging with dust. A mattress dominates one side of the room. On the floor beside the wall socket sits a TV, a CD player, an electric cooker, a table fan. CD plates lay scattered about, like spilled coins.

There is no chair in the room so he sits on the bed. She drops to the floor beside the CD player and draws in her legs. She leans forward and riffles through the CD plates, squinting at the names printed on them. She hums as she finds one that she likes. She turns on the player and inserts the plate. She has unwrapped one of the brown parcels, has shredded the leaves and removed the seeds, is folding the crumbled fibre in cigarette paper, when the music starts.

'I am not a prostitute,' she says. Her gaze is fixed on her fingers, which are pinching and twisting, tapping and stroking.

He waits for her to make her point. She has nothing to add, so he says, 'I know.'

'Listen to this song,' she says, and dips her head to tear the cigarette paper with her teeth.

He listens: he is sure: he has never heard it before. He wonders how to tell her. He is ready to pay her, despite her denial. He is sure she is—he met her at the club less than two hours ago and here he is, lying on her bed, watching her roll a joint—a prostitute. He will wait, the time is not right. After she has had her smoke.

He is distracted by the spark of the lighter. She has lit a mosquito coil.

'Mosquitoes?' he asks.

She jabs the joint between her lips and rasps the lighter—one time, two times, a few more times. When it catches, she throws him a glance over the flame. 'The smell—I have neighbours.'

From the way her lips pucker when she sucks on the joint he can tell she is not smoking for pleasure. She turns her head toward the ceiling and exhales—he feels a prickling of respect settle on him like a cloud of flies. A haze that is the colour of old aquarium water swirls about the room. Through it, her eyes gleam like beacons.

She leans back until her elbows rest on the floor. She stretches her legs, crosses her ankles, and twiddles her toes. The undersides of her feet have a carapace of dead skin.

'Do you like the music?' she asks, and raises her foot, the right one, to point at him. Her toenails are gnarled and broken. Her tone, unlike the language of her body, is composed.

He nods.

‘Have you heard it before?’

He shakes his head.

‘What do you mean—do you listen to radio at all? They play it all the time!’

The irritation in her voice startles him. He hastens to reassure her:

‘I don’t listen to radio that much. Who is he?’

‘Skinny C. He is the brother, the younger brother, of the owner of the club, you know, where we met.’

‘Oh,’ he says.

‘He is my boyfriend,’ she says.

A single second, big as a thundercloud, floats by. She blows smoke at him and wags her tongue, so he says, ‘Ok.’ She is crazy, this girl, he has begun to suspect.

‘Take,’ she says. She pushes herself up with her elbows and leans forward with the joint outstretched. ‘I want to go and piss.’ As his hand reaches for the joint, as his fingers brush hers, he feels a stirring in his groin.

The song is on repeat. He holds the joint over the edge of the bed and taps it to dislodge the ash. He listens to the song lyrics; he catches a few words through the kitchen-clatter beat. *No talent, no voice*, he thinks, and feels an urge to laugh, but the joint is burning out, so he takes a puff, to rekindle it.

#

It is the sixth or seventh time he has stoked the joint. He is blowing smoke rings and watching them disintegrate in the air, when he hears a sound outside the door. He looks up and sees a face peeking at him through the gap between door and jamb. *Her grandmother—I knew it*, he thinks. He leaps up and flings the joint to the ground and stamps it out. He controls the urge to bolt: he knows they will be expecting that. It was planned, it is a trap. They have done this before, grandmother and child.

When she enters he is bobbing and weaving, flailing his arms, jerking his head, to the music. She stops in the doorway and stares. She says, ‘Great song, eh?’ She looks at his hands, at his face, at his hands again. ‘Where is my dope?’ she asks. Her eyes drop to the floor. She stiffens. ‘But why?’ she snaps at him.

He makes an effort to bring the movement of his limbs to a stop. He is wet with sweat: he can feel it streaming into the crevices of his being. He is short of breath, and panting, as he barks at her: ‘Where is your grandmother?’

‘What?’

‘Don’t even lie...I saw her just now peeping at me through the door!’

Her eyes are like moonstones. She stares at him, her gaze mesmeric.

‘My grandmother...*both* my grandmothers...are dead.’

Her words have shattered his conviction and scattered the fragments. He grasps at the explanations that dangle before him like ropes, but his mind is a heavy object, it weighs him down. He gapes at her,

transfixed. She drops to the bed and digs into her pocket, then brings out the parcel and unwraps it, her fingers working deftly. She glances up. Her face relaxes and laughter gurgles in her throat. 'You're high,' she says, patting the bed, 'come and lie down.'

The mattress sags as he settles in. His knee brushes her thigh. 'Careful!' she hisses, and presses her hands against her belly, to keep them steady.

She lights up and sucks down. When she exhales it sounds as if her soul is leaking from her orifices. Her eyes are like polished pebbles, bright and round.

'Where is your boyfriend now?' he asks.

'Who?'

'Skinny C.'

'Who told you he's my boyfriend?'

'You.'

'I did not.'

'You did.'

'When?'

'Just now, not long ago, before you went to piss.'

She takes a drag: her cheeks deflate and the spliff crackles. 'Ok,' she says, 'if you say so.' The frown she turns on him is connected by nerve strings to some rancid spot in her memory.

'What did he do?' he asks.

'That one? What has he not done? He's fucked my friends...he's stolen my money. But the one that pained me most was this last time he went back to Yankee—'

'He's based in the US?'

'I didn't tell you that before?'

'No.'

'He lives there—in Illinois. *Mattoon*.'

She says the name of the town with a boast in her voice. She repeats it, 'Mattoon'—a smile brushes her lips. She is lying on her back, and he on his side. He has been waiting for the right moment, for the chink in her armour. *This is it*, he thinks, and places his hand on her knee. She doesn't react, so he begins to stroke her leg, slowly at first, and then faster and faster, his fingers inching higher, heading north.

She is telling him about her boyfriend. He comprehends her monologue in snatches: *he promised to take me...he lied...he broke my heart*. He is not interested. His thoughts are focused elsewhere.

'What are you doing?'

His left hand is fondling her breast and the right is stroking between her thighs. 'Nothing,' he says, and continues doing nothing.

'Stop it.' She takes a drag from the joint and quenches it by pinching the tip. She places the stub under the pillow. When he looks up from licking the rim of her navel, she exhales in his face.

'I like your t-shirt,' she says.

He winks his thank you, and lowers his head, again.

'*Stop,*' she says, and places a hand on the back of his neck, 'I told you—I am not a prostitute.'

'Then what are you?'

'Enh?'

He is not listening. He is far-gone on his journey. From where he lies the road ahead is smooth as skin, and every bend, every diversion, leads only in one direction.

He repeats it. 'What are you?'

For a split second, before she gives him the shove that tumbles him off the bed, he believes he has brought her to a climax. From the floor, he watches as she sits up, arranges her top, and zips up her shorts. When his discombobulated gaze latches unto her face, his stomach jumps into his chest, flops about a few times, and then begins to sink a long distance, turning over and over.

'Get out,' she says.

'Please...I'm sorry.'

'Why are you sorry?'

He senses a ruse, a leading fist, but he is desperate, so he says:

'I'm sorry about what I said. I didn't mean it that way.'

'Wrong answer,' she says. 'Get out.'

He can feel his craving turning to anger. He rises to his feet and glares down at her. She holds his gaze.

He bats his eyelids to keep back the tears of rage.

'What did I do?' he asks.

'If you don't know, you will never know.'

He is tired of this game. She *is* a prostitute, after all.

'I want to fuck you,' he says. 'How much do you want?'

Annoyance flashes across her face like lightning across the night sky. When she speaks, her voice is invested with a grandeur he cannot understand.

'You're a fool,' she says, 'I can hear everything that that you're thinking, you just make it worse by saying it. But don't worry, you will get what you want, one day you will fuck me. Just not today.'

'Then when?' he asks.

'Get out now, before I get angry,' she says.

'Not before you tell me *when*.'

On the CD player, Skinny C starts up again, stuck on repeat. He will say the same words, express the same emotions, make the same mistakes in pitch and grammar, as long as she wants.

'You will fuck me on a Saturday, at night, at your place. Around 10 o'clock on the 6th of March. You will come two times, the second time without a condom. In the morning you will give me five thousand naira plus this t-shirt you're wearing.'

He laughs. 'Are you serious? *Three* weeks from now?'

Her silence is a stone wall: his words splat against it. He presses, he cajoles, he pleads, and then he falls silent, too. He shambles to the door, halts in the doorway and turns around. He says, 'One last thing...can I have your number?'

She is plumping up the pillows.

'What about your name?'

She is smoothing down the sheets.

'At least tell me your name, *please*?'

The bed is now ready, so she lies down on her belly, turns her face to the wall, tucks her hands between her knees and crosses her ankles, and—as he stands there, stuck in the goo of frustration—she announces, in a voice ravaged by sleep, 'I am Joy.'

A. Igoni Barrett is the author of *From Caves of Rotten Teeth*. His work has appeared in *Agni*, *Guernica* and *New Madrid*. He lives in Nigeria.



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Aaron Belz

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Flies

A swallow flies—almost floats, I am told.
A fly swallows, steels itself, and lays
her eggs on meat that has grown old.

A man eating such meat swallows flies,
or fly babies, which are worm-like.
His droppings will contain foreign stuff,

but this is really nothing to worry about.
He can still go out and watch swallows
floating, dropping down behind a boat's

silhouette, still conjecture on the shape
of the night as docked yachts emit murky
clanks and the bay sparkles with light.

Aaron Belz's second collection of poems, *Lovely, Raspberry*, was published in April by Persea Books. He lives in the Los Angeles area. You may learn more about Aaron Belz at his [website](#).

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Alligator Ashtrays

My grandmother
had alligator ashtrays
(made of baby alligators,
I'm pretty sure,
circling a sea shell)
that I let my little men
wrestle with
sort of like Tarzan
and the crocodiles.
Sometimes the gator won,
sometimes my little men.
Gram smoked her cigarettes
and watched
the METS on TV
through thick
Coke bottle glasses.

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Anthony Buccino's poetry has appeared in literary magazines and anthologies. For more information, other writings and hours of web page reading, visit [Anthony's World](#).



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It dropped from the sky
and lay on stone,
all cartilage and baggy skin,
writhing in slow motion.
A few rows of pinfeathers
nudged through its naked wings.
Its eyes bulged shut. One splintery leg
bent oddly; the other clawed air.
A neon yellow target at its beak
gaped in reflex or request. The bird rescue lady
in her blue smock, her ranch house
full of broken fledglings, took one pursed-lip look:
You've got yourself a house swallow,
and when that meant nothing:
they peck the native birds to death.
My hands held out the shoebox, its cargo
of hollow bone and faltering heart.

Home,

I saw them everywhere. Slender forked tails,
ashen wings prowling the lawn,
launching from low branches,
and once, a couple mating on a fencepost.
She plumped down, soft as a dustball
while he lighted on her rump, fluttered up
to circles her, then touched down for more
while through a windowpane a foot away,
I watched. I thought of banging glass
or shooing them with a broom.
I thought of a rock to crush their skulls,
but no: I was flattered
to be that close, an accomplice
in their bid to inherit the earth.

April Lindner is the author of *Jane*, a novel forthcoming from Little, Brown's Poppy imprint in October 2010. Her poetry collection, *Skin*, received the 2002 Walt McDonald first book poetry prize from Texas Tech University Press. With R. S. Gwynn, she co-edited *Contemporary American Poetry*, an anthology in Longman's Penguin Academics series. She is an Associate Professor at Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia.

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B.E. Kahn

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The Stay and Still Life

He was in the room
before I was awake.
"Shhhh....."
He shredded my childhood
with hands wet like a mouth.
It was my room, his room,
until I reclaimed it
decades later
after I'd killed memory,
then recalled, and forgave him
and the torn fabric of myself.
He died and with him
the stay of execution
I'd have had to pray for
to save my life
after taking his.
The canvas still reeks of him.
Words inscribed in the night
loudly speak of him—
only now I choose
will continue to choose
the color of this stay.

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B.E. Kahn, a native Philadelphian, now lives in Wynnewood, Pennsylvania. She is a recipient of Pennsylvania Council of the Arts and Pew Grants. She was awarded First Prize for Poetry at the Philadelphia Writers Conference and some of her other awards include The Lotus Bloom Journal and The Missouri State Poetry Prize.

Her poems have appeared in Harrisburg Review, Philadelphia Poets, CQ, California Quarterly, Bridges A Jewish Feminist Journal, Jewish Spectator, Earth's Daughters, Half Tones to Jubilee, The Lucid Stone, Laurel Leaves, The Laughing Dog, In the Small Courtyard of the Convent, Mad Poets Review,



Schuylkill Valley Journal, New Verse News and the Tupelo Press Online Poetry Project among other publications.

A retired speech therapist, she teaches poetry to intergenerational, interfaith, community based groups, some under the auspices of the Arts and Spirituality Center.

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Blanche Remembers the Long Ride

*Dreams, / Dreams go on,
Out of the dead on their backs,
Broken and no use any more:
Dreams of the way and the end go on.*

"Among the Red Guns," Carl Sandburg

I used to believe in love the way believers play their faith,
close to the chest, fanning it out when they need it most.
I could have used some back there when my mother sold me
for a song, a hard-handed man he broke me surely,
no more hopes for children or a tender word at best.
My daddy was a kind man but so poor he could not cope
with anything but slow tilling of the barren soil
sun-up, sun-down, wind that brought the farm indoors,
the only thing that saved him was his deathlike sleep, yet
dreams, dreams go on.

Never expected what love was really like,
how it pulled me to him like a chigger to the hairline,
his warm brown eyes, his hands that mastered anything
he put his mind to, we had such plans for living, he and I,
among the woodland bright safe places far away from all
we'd known before, we would be fine and free, we said so
all the nights in tourist camps where we would lie awake
and listen to the passing cars, the storm of bullets and
the blood that burst in streams upon the floor
out of the dead on their backs.

Who would have known how bad it would become,
the nights I'd sit up on the car and watch the stars,
the taste of terror in my throat and gore on my thin hands,
some nights I could not see the moon for all the horror in the way.
Or maybe it was hunger or the endless sleepless days
when all we had was fame and not the kind I ever wanted:

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outlaw woman, they didn't even know my real name.
I would have gone most anywhere with Buck but
they would not let me be there at the end, we were both
broken and no use any more.

When we first met upon the road in sad West Dallas
he was the most beautiful man I'd ever seen, he loved me so.
Even my daddy liked him: he was good all the way to bone.
Went to serve out his whole term because I asked.
I wish he'd stayed there now, or maybe gone to school
or left his kin behind, it was all on goddamn Clyde
what happened, we were doomed, I knew it from the start.
There was so much to hope for in those dusty early days,
his arms around me, all the future still to come.
Dreams of the way and the end go on.

Bonnie, Awake in Dexfield Park

I swear I heard the lions calling
though I know for sure the zoo's been gone for years

it was as clear as daylight with the highstrung moon,
the stars so still I tried to stir the waters of the sky
with just my finger-tip

to lean down over Buck and see inside his brain
it was a fever. all else were asleep,
it was my job to watch. I did not mind it.

hours passed as easy as a dream.
the only thing I'd ever tell was this:
the hoot owl sailing by?
I thought it was his spirit running free

Henry Barrow

1.

Ever see a horse run?
Teeth just grinding air, shine
coming off it like a blazing afternoon.
I wanted one of them.

First day I went to school
I fainted straight upon the ground,
never went back, never learned to read.

What good would it have been to me?
To see my boys' dark history there,
the blood upon their heads and hands
and all the weeping in the world

fell down around my head
and in my house.

The only time we found some happiness
we had just wed, and then we had but five good years
til it was done.

2.

I could never buy a horse,
but went to church and did the proper thing.
I married Cumie, she was 16 and under five feet tall.
She was a rock to me for all her days.

I started with a rented field
and babies, we had seven:
Jack and Artie, Buck and Nell,
Clyde, LC and Marie, all of them lived
to talk of it: hunger, constant moving,
no time for dreaming.
Jesus watched us every day.

3.

They call me quiet. It was true.
I laboured til I dropped.
Cumie made our children go to church
and school, she made those children mind.
My daddy never hit me
the way her daddy done,
a whipping sets them straight I guess
though it never fell to me.
I was too busy on the journey to provide.

We never had the time to play or watch them grow,
there was no room for grace
nor kindness
nor hope

4.

They grew up, got away to town,
I worked until my hands were bloody bones
and still I tilled the soil
til the cotton root rot came
and weevils ate the rotted crop right off.

We moved to Dallas, to the Bog
and started there again,
through illness and the dusty storms
my children did provide for me just fine:
I was a scrap dealer and
a station owner
and sometimes I sold hooch.
I drank some too, some days.

5.

Our boys would drive their flashy cars
and dress real well,
they told me it would work just fine:
there would be land, a pasture with deep shade,
the things I'd wanted in a life
but I saw them in the ground before their time

We bought one stone for Buck and Clyde
I did not shed a tear
sat still with Cumie while she mourned
my head held low
as fits a man without one stroke of luck

Carolyn Smart's fifth collection of poems, *Hooked - Seven Poems* was published in 2009 by Brick Books. An excerpt from her memoir *At the End of the Day* won first prize in the 1993 CBC Literary Contest. She is the founder of the RBC Bronwen Wallace Award for Emerging writers, and since 1989 she has taught Creative Writing at Queen's University.



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Live Oak Forest

Every morning of our lives I squeezed
your hand and you squeezed back.
Because I stole you I had to check
that you were there.

When we explored the magic forest
I feared for angry tribes.
They would sever my hand.
That's what they do to thieves.

Once you lived in that desiccated
forest of the oak
moth. We brought the leaves to luster,
the butterflies to monarchy.

That night when I hydroplaned to the hospital
I was afraid to squeeze your hand.
You might squeeze back. I might steal you
and condemn us to eternal flight.

But you were still beneath the muslin sheet.
When they pulled it from your face I adored
your warm freckled shoulders
as I always did, your oaken scent.

Clouds of Cambodia

Clouds dwell like lovers over the Mekong River
We walk bare foot through the jungle, splash
through the streets.

I have no lover.

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The humidity drowns me into a new life.
I bathe in water from the Mekong and shear
my long hair. The air fills with water
and the river changes course.

It is my time to be reborn, to take refuge as a crone,
to sweep the Buddhist temple with a broom
made of twigs.

In a cascade of rain we study the carving
of creation, how the two armies pull
at Naga, the snake, until the sea churns in

Glenna Luschei is the founder and publisher of the poetry journals *Solo Press* and is the author of many chapbooks, special editions and trade books, the latest being *Salt Lick* by West End Press of Albuquerque and *Witch Dance*, published by Presa Press in 2010. She was named Poet Laureate of San Luis Obispo City and County for the year 2000. Luschei has also published an artist book of her translation of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's *Enigmas*, Solo Press, 2006. She has received the D.H. Lawrence and the National Endowment for the Arts fellowships. She is also an Admiral in the Nebraska Navy.



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Fountain Pen

A faded blue box full of dusty bones,
or so I presumed until I eased the lid off
to find gleaming tools, colored gemstones.
My Grandfather's fountain pens—cast-offs
from a legendary man I know little about.
I hold each slim piece, gently draw off the cap—
the arrow shaped nib, black ink spout,
eighteen-karat gold, the point enwrapped.
The distinct sound his pen makes on paper—
like a dog's toenails scratching hardwood.
This slim tip—perhaps was his biographer,
ink sucked to the automatic cartridge like blood.
I dream of knowing the secrets within his pen,
what I'd learn if his thoughts were actually written.

For the Pretty Woman on the UCSF Shuttle

She gets on the quiet hospital shuttle bus,
flashes a smile, a slender dark-eyed beauty.
Her ringing phone echoes, sounds ridiculous,
she answers, *"What do you want from me?"*
Her face twists from normalcy to despair—
she begins to shriek and cry, launches into
another language, signaling the end of an affair.
Tears stream down her face as she argues—
red-faced, stammering, says something so true
"I cannot do this anymore." I've been there before.
Her life is splintering in public. I hope she pulls through,
fights like a bull against the thin-lipped matador.
I want to stroke her long brown hair, pull her to my chest,
utter words he's left unsaid, let her get some rest.

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Cherry Trees, Expanded

I want to do with you what the spring does to cherry trees...

-Poem XIV, Pablo Neruda

I want to do with you what taste buds do to dark chocolate
what coffee does to mornings

what Zuni café does to chicken

what lemonade does to thirst

what white wine does to shrimp and garlic

what a BBQ does to summer nights

what flames do to wood

what the wind does to sails

what the sun does to red poppies

what candlelight does to romance

what clean sheets do to my bed

what a hot bath does to skin

I want to do with you what your kisses do to my thighs

what painted red toes do to a foot fetish

what pantyhose does to your eyes

what dreams do to reality

what poets do to words

what the imagination does when unharnessed

what jay walkers do to red lights

what the NY Times does to lazy Sundays

what poetry does to sadness

what laughter does to worry

what the library does to literacy

what a seat on the train does to writing a morning poem

what Diane DiPrima does to revolutions

I want to do with you what Neruda did to cherry trees

Ingrid Keir is a poet and artist. She is the founder and co-host of the WordParty poetry and jazz events in NY and SF. Her poetry has been published in *The Haight Ashbury Literary Journal*, *Cantaraville Literary Quarterly*, *16th & Mission Review* and was selected to be in *The 1st Visual Poetry & Performance Exhibition* at Mission Cultural Center in San Francisco. Her poetry was also selected to be in a collaborative project with artist Kyle Knobel at the Marjorie Wood gallery (September 2009). She has written several books of poetry: *The Secrets of Like* (2004), *Toward the Light* (2007) and is currently working on a new collection of poetry.



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Jacob Russell

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In a House that is not There (2008)

Unhinged the door swings as though on air
But there is no sign of the house

A bird with white wings
has carried it away

One goes in and out
but never arrives

A bell at the pavilion
rings the guests to dinner

Everyone is dressed in white

The doors were always open
For those in need

Often there was singing
As they emerged from the trees
A white heron flew over the lake

It is better not to applaud
It is better to keep the silence

Like the rings on the surface of the lake
Circling back to where you began

Like a white bird
In a house that is not there

Seven Principles of My Spirit Stick

... that there are as many gods as there are people who imagine them

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... that all imagined gods are real.

... that those who keep their god in chains become prisoners of their own lives, walking through the world untouched and untouching

... that if you give your god its freedom it will grow in power and (some not all) of its power will be yours

... that the gods care nothing about good and evil

... that they only know what you teach them

... that imagined gods cannot save you from death, but if you ask, they may give you the power to save them from death.

Jacob Russell lives in South Philly with his Spirt Staff where he grows tomatoes and herbs in the little strip of a garden in front of his apartment. His work has been performed by InterAct Theatre and appeared in *Criiphoria 2*, *Conversational Magazine* (when it was *Poetry Quarterly!*), *BlazeVox*, *Scythe*, *Salmagundi*, *dcomp Mag*, *Pindeldeyboz*, *Battered Suitcase*, *Clockwise Cat* and other literary venues. He is currently working to complete a second novel and seeking a publisher for a manuscript of poetry. He manages the literary blog: [Jacob Russell's Barking Dog](#).



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Judy Kronenfeld

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All Comfortless

My doddery father yells
Mother! when they tie
him down in the hospital,
and then, lip quivering, sobs
*I've always been a good person, why,
why are you doing this to me?
Mother, help me!*

He is pummeling down a tunnel
of dark blurred namelessness, looking for
a clearing bright as day
on the other side of time,
a meadow hedged in
by the protection of pines
where she waits astride a courser,
with her stanchion
and flag, bearing his face.
She will hoist him
into her arms. He will lie down
in her smell; he will drink
the wind in her sleeves. His honor will be
restored.

I want to take a knife
and slash his shackles,
but his bald head is crested
with a swollen bump, his rump—
as if made of something other
than flesh—looks as solidly purple
as a velvet caparison.
Here they protect him
from falls, but do not protect
him. His dignity a stolen
and hidden treasure, and no-one
sets out on the quest.

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Outside, near the hospital steps,
there is a dog who sits
in the filthy lap of a homeless man
with a few black teeth muttering
on the filthy sidewalk, and growls low
in her throat if someone
she doesn't like passes
too close, and sleeps there in his lap,
curled up, utterly
happy.

This is for the Husband

who sits outside the dressing
room, a purse on his lap,

who brings her the 14,
and suppresses the murmur
numbers don't matter

who holds a violet sweater
against her face

This is for the husband
who attempts to wield the curling iron
for her curly hair, when her right wrist
breaks in a fall

who schedules their walk
in the mall, out of the dangerous
sun, and thunks his metal-clawed
cane, as she wobbles her walker
forward—his clothes matching
her desert colors: rock white, sand beige,
bleached skull grey

This is for the husband wearing
a tonsure of white straw
as he says the rosary
of pink and white pills into the napkin
beside her bowl of Cheerios:
*Colace, Avandia, Aricept;
Amlodipine, Lipitor, Lasix*

This is for the lucky husband

Judy Kronenfeld is the author of two books and two chapbooks of poetry, the most recent being *Light Lowering in Diminished Sevenths*, winner of the 2007 Litchfield Review Poetry Book Prize (Litchfield Review Press, 2008). Her poems, as well as the occasional short story and personal essay have appeared in numerous print and online journals including *Calyx*, *Cimarron Review*, *The American Poetry Journal*, *The Innisfree Poetry Journal*, *Natural Bridge*, *The Hiram Poetry Review*, *Poetry International*, *The*

Women's Review of Books and *The Pedestal*, as well as in a dozen anthologies or text books, including *Bear Flag Republic: Prose Poems and Poetics from California*, edited by Christopher Buckley and Gary Young (Greenhouse Review Press/Alcatraz Editions, 2008), *Beyond Forgetting: Poetry and Prose about Alzheimer's Disease*, edited by Holly Hughes (Kent State University Press, 2009), and *Love over 60: An Anthology of Women's Poems* (Mayapple Press, 2010). She is also the author of a critical study: *KING LEAR and the Naked Truth* (Duke U.P., 1998). Ms. Kronenfeld is a Lecturer Emerita in the Department of Creative Writing, at the University of California, Riverside.



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K.M. Dersley

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Love Manoeuvres

Kelvin and 'his' women—
the women
he had SEEN somewhere.

in Cambridge there were many
of them, beautiful
and rich, some foreign and
racy-looking but, he claimed,
lesbians every last man of 'em.

with him it was a battle
he was waging, he never
ran away from a girl a little
in the divine game.

Cupid's a whimsical fellow
but with Kelvin it was all so
deadly serious it's no wonder
they found him a turn-off.
he was mad at them—
they didn't get their panties
down quick enough and
he didn't exactly ladle on
the old 'politesse'.
rapier wit and waspishness
might get a laugh out of a girl
but it's no way (I fancy)
to get a girl out of her clouts.

he was always ready
to take a break from the battle to
talk it over with me or Wes
in a pub but the folksy girls
we were all looking for then
never materialised.

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as far as I know
Kelvin's still in a
blessed state
of celibacy

or, as Wes used to term it,
'sea bass'.

The Date

they said they'd
found me this chick
and all I had to do
was show up for
a coffee but
when I did she only
looked about
60 years 'young'.

turned out she
knew me way back
and offered next time
to make herself
more presentable
as in the heyday.

when we met again
and went on
the town, guess what,
she did look more like
40 years 'young'.

she really seemed
to have fire in
the boiler and honey
in the hips.
she drew admiring glances
as did I
for squiring her.

yes, the chick could
have been 30 years
'young'.

the promise was
fulfilled

and brothers,
I can reliably report
that a little later
there was had
a whale

of a time.

K.M. Dersley runs the *Ragged Edge* website, which has published writers such as Gerald Locklin, Jim Burns, A.D. Winans, Adrian Manning, Karl Koweski and Doug Draime.

He frequently presents his own work on stage and on YouTube, sometimes with music. Four of his poetry chapbooks have been published by Kendra Steiner Editions of San Antonio, Texas, including a collaboration with Adrian Manning: *Next Exit: Six. Many Septembers* was the latest Derz work published by Kendra Steiner.

In February 2009 KMD presented his songs and poems on the program *Headstand* hosted by Patrick Widdess on 209radio from Cambridge, England. Also last year he read at the Book Club Boutique session in the Green Fingernail, beneath Dick's Bar in Soho, London. (Film available from the BCB on YouTube.)



Coming soon is a chapbook of poems from *Alternating Current* called *Management Gold Not Me*.

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Lynne Thompson

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Patina

The wife doesn't sleep with him anymore
because he wavers, like candlelight—his

chest a rattling fer-de-lance as he calls *Dora*
Dora Dora—74 years old and still dreaming

about his mother all the long night long.
The wife's content on a sofa more restful

than any bed she's ever shared. She loves
the cool of its *let's pretend they're queen-sized*

sheets; the way moonglow slants its patina
at 1:42 am; loves how, *finally*, she is alone.

Their Shih Tzu barks his dreams of bones
because he is used to their arrangement.

Their spinster daughter, who has returned
home, again, understands less than a little.

Comes the dawn and the wife attends
to modest duties: the husband's breathing

apparatus in need of its regular *click*—
the dog scratching to be let outdoors, sniffing

after an old bloodhound who will never sniff
after him (both dogs piddle on a neighbor's

shrub of rosemary)—their daughter sent off
to a futile profession not nearly as hard as this.

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This girl with my blood in her veins has a different design for her life than the one I once drew for her. A Tutankhamen tattoo is inked into her upper arm. On her toes, sporty hydrangea blue. A bee stings her tongue with a golden stud and when she prays, I sing *spiritu sancto* in a dead language. My maple'd violin she doesn't love. She doesn't love my turkey pot pies. She loves any street locked with a universal key. She takes her tokes. She doesn't exhale. It's all within her and all I've got is a short road. She's got a flood and the ways she knows to ride it.

Time & Want

You don't want to think it was you. You want to think you were kind when you had to be; that you were more supple in bed than a serpent when he was your shiny apple. You want to say he mumbled when spoken to but waxed eloquent making vulgar jokes about your mother. You need your gals-pals to loathe him twice as much as you do. You would love to *sweet baby love some* heart-stopping hunk o' hunk as soon as possible but you fear

that idea is the most improbable of all. You want to two-step in a shower of fireflies so everyone thinks you are lovely and always will be. You never want to get out of your bed. Just there, you stare at ants on the march on your window sill. Each one who isn't queen has her task to complete, time and again, and when she fails, she's cast from the settlement.

Lynne Thompson's *Beg No Pardon* won the 2007 Perugia Press First Book Award and 2008 Great Lakes Colleges New Writers Award. Her poetry has appeared in the *Indiana Review*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Southeast Review*, *Poetry International*, and *Margie* among others, and new work is forthcoming in *Sou'Wester*, *Ploughshares* and *Spillway*. A three-time Pushcart Prize nominee, Thompson was recently commissioned by Emory University to write poems in collaboration with choreographer Anna Leo and by Scripps College in collaboration with sculptress Alison Saar.



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Charley Plays a Tune

Crippled, in Chicago,
with arthritis
and Alzheimer's,
in a dark rented room,
Charley plays
melancholic melodies
on a dust filled
harmonica he
found abandoned
on a playground of sand
years ago by a handful of children
playing on monkey bars.
He hears bedlam when he buys fish at the local market
and the skeleton bones of the fish show through.
He lies on his back riddled with pain,
pine cones fill his pillows and mattress;
praying to Jesus and rubbing his rosary beads
Charley blows tunes out his
celestial instrument
notes float through the open window
touch the nose of summer clouds.
Charley overtakes himself with grief
and is ecstatically alone.
Charley plays a solo tune.

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Rod-Stroked Survival, With a Deadly Hammer

Rebecca fantasized that life was a lottery ticket or a pull of a lever,
that one of the bunch in her pocket was a winner or the slots were a redeemer;
but life itself was not real that was strictly for the mentally insane at the Elgin
Mental Institution.
She gambled her savings away on a riverboat

stuck in mud on a riverbank, the Grand Victoria, in Elgin, Illinois.
Her bare feet were always propped up on wooden chair;
a cigarette drooped from her lips like morning fog.
She always dreamed of traveling, not nightmares.
But she couldn't overcome, overcome,
the terrorist ordeal of the German siege of Leningrad.
She was a foreigner now; she is a foreigner for good.
Her first husband died after spending a lifetime in prison
with stinging nettles in his toes and feet; the second
husband died of hunger when there were no more rats
to feed on, after many fights in prison for the last remains.
What does a poet know of suffering?
Rebecca has rod stroked survival with a deadly mallet.
She gambles nickels, dimes, quarters, tokens tossed away,
living a penniless life for grandchildren who hardly know her name.
Rebecca fantasized that life was a lottery ticket or the pull of a lever.

Michael Lee Johnson is a poet and freelance writer from Itasca, Illinois. He is heavy influenced by: Carl Sandburg, Robert Frost, William Carlos Williams, Irving Layton, Leonard Cohen, and Allen Ginsberg.



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Michelle Brown

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Russian Baths

The second most beautiful girl is the boldest.
She can duckfoot around the benches, untie the ribbons
of her hips. She is bold; she is silver; she cannot shame us.
The thistle under our arms. The dermal ruts, sulfur between our legs.
Our talk is bright, sparrowish. Kindergarten, that last trip to Mexico.
I've never seen sand so white. We face away from her,
salute the lockers.. Grey steel, wheel of numbers. Not a mirror.
She unhooks her bra. She has all the time in the world.
There are many of us. The air is moist.
When we exit, we will beat each other, flank to shank,
with birch bound neat. We will breathe eucalyptus,
get a little high on chlorine. Yes, that is nice. You have a body;
it is my body. Acupuncturists say we shore our envy
in the spleen. We fit as tight as matryoshkas. We slit
our collective eyes like votives strung on the porch
of a late-summer party. We bathe her in distilled & terrible light.
Not an interrogation room. Not a flirt with red curtains.
There are women who come when called, who tell you what you need
without duress or torture. We all have something to sell
the high bidder. Our secrets, our Tupperware, our nasty lingerie.
At summer parties, our sweat is delicate and sweet
under our lace. We have dresses for dancing, for the egret chirps
of love, for cake. Fold chocolate into butter, frost twenty layers
and feed her. How much time we've wasted in another's life!

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We hold her hair back, lovingly.
Lovingly, we clean the plate.

Michelle Chan Brown's work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Sycamore Review*, *Prism Review*, *The Missouri Review*, *Tampa Review*, *KNOCK*, *Gertrude*, *Broken Bridge Review*, *The Concher*, *Yemassee*, and *textsound*. She earned her MFA at the University of Michigan, where she received the Michael R. Gutterman prize. She lives in Pomfret, Connecticut, where she is the Writer-in-Residence at Pomfret School and serves as assistant poetry editor to *Drunken Boat*.



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Trapped

When anyone asked Ranger where he worked, he liked to say that he “plied his trade” at home, in the cellar. “Ply his trade,” said his wife’s sister. “Now there’s something!”

In the kitchen, his wife, Angel stomped on the trap door, cut into the dining room floor, leading down to the cellar. Each day, when his meal was ready, Angel would stomp as many times as she needed, to get Ranger’s attention. He’d mumble, “Not hungry!”

Angel asked her sister to go downstairs and tell him that she’d prepared something special. She agreed. It was the least she could do. She negotiated her girth on the narrow, irregularly spaced plywood steps. The air smelled of beer, cigarette smoke, steel and sawdust.

He could never hear her coming. She stood looking at his tall frame. She liked the way he leaned his whole body into his work, his shoulder leading the way, into the back and forth motion of sharpening a saw with a long file, deliberately, one tooth at a time. She placed her hand against the damp wall of the cellar, squinted in the fluorescent light. “Hey,” she said. He looked up, then down again. “Hey,” she repeated, impatient. “She’s got something special tonight,” she said, flicking her chin over her shoulder. “C’mon.” He stared for a few seconds, trying to read her face. They take him for a fool. A fly buzzed, hit itself against one damp wall and then another. He marked the saw tooth he was filing with blue chalk. He laid the file down on the tool bench. He hesitated.

Upstairs, Angel waited in the kitchen. It was really too hot to eat.

Ranger looked at the food. Warmed up leftovers. He was too tired to argue about it. Angel exhaled, slapped at a fly on the table with a dishtowel. Her sister pushed her own plate away, and lit a cigarette instead. She exhaled. “Who are you working for these days, anyway?” she asked him, narrowing her eyes. She was bold enough to ask.

He laid his fork down, and chewed deliberately. He looked up at her and said, softly, “I’m freelancing,” he said, with reverence, like it was a word he just learned yesterday. At that moment his smile was almost beautiful.

The sisters looked at one another. Angel held her belly and her sister held her hand over her mouth.

“Freelance, huh.” Angel said, wiping the tears from her eyes. She said it like a statement, not a question.

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"Now imagine that," her sister said, with genuine curiosity. She forked a mouthful from his plate and twirled it in the air above her.

A fly buzzed around the plate of food, sluggish in the heat, no different from the rest of them.

Angel loved an easy target. She angled the dishtowel, eyes narrowed, drew back. Her sister grabbed her arm, inexplicably shook head 'no'.

The trapdoor creaked. It sounded like a moan.

The sisters looked up at the State Farm clock on the wall.

The fly buzzed, useless. They decided to let it live, if it could, just a little bit longer.

Michelle Reale is an academic librarian on faculty at Arcadia University in the suburbs of Philadelphia. Her fiction has been published in a variety of publications including *Smokelong Quarterly*, *elima*, *Word Riot*, *The Los Angeles Review*, *Monkeybicycle* and many others. Her fiction chapbook, *Natural Habitat* has just been released by Burning River. She has been twice nominated for a Pushcart Prize.



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Rebecca Schumejda

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The Viewing

I place my hand on my car's hood
as if it were the lid of my father's casket.
163,000 miles or 59 years—
the timing belt like his heart
stopped, unexpected and premature,
despite efforts of other functional parts
that we'll strip then sell.

When I stood over my father
for the last time, I wore
mismatched dress shoes
one navy, the other black,
the same style. I will never know
who noticed, I was already busy
trying to remember what he looked like.

This is the last time I will see the car
I talked to as if it were my father—
my four-horse-powered confessional,
where I admitted to sins,
while doing ninety on 87
each morning on my way to work,
hoping for my father's pardon.

We came here to take what is usable,
see my car one last time, say goodbye.
As my husband removes the tires,
I rifle through the interior,
as if invading the dead's closet.
I come across a claw hammer,
I forgot my father placed under
the passenger seat for my protection
the day he helped me pick out this car,
then I walk around the front so I
can write R.I.P on the dirty windshield.

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Forgiveness

We wait for our daughter
to fall asleep,
so we can finish arguing.
The rain hits the roof first.
She rolls over, reaches out
in search of one of us,
lightening, silence.

I count:
One—lawnmower, you left outside.
Two—lid, I left off the sandbox.
Three—car windows, you left down.

Then crack,
you tell me you can't anymore
like rain, rain, rain,
like forgiveness
I place her wandering hand
in between ours,
so she stops stirring.
We close our eyes
and listen to each other's fingers
billow like repenting storm clouds.

Rebecca Schumejda is the author of *Falling Forward*, a full-length collection of poems (sunnyoutside, 2009); *The Map of Our Garden* (verve bath, 2009); *Dream Big Work Harder* (sunnyoutside press 2006); *The Tear Duct of the Storm* (Green Bean Press, 2001); and the poem "Logic" on a postcard (sunnyoutside). She received her MA in Poetics and Creative Writing from San Francisco State University and her BA in English and Creative Writing from SUNY New Paltz. She lives with her husband and daughter in New York 's Hudson Valley.



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