

POESÍA

A esta mujer Cyané Quijano

A esta mujer se le escapa el tiempo en el desorden;
No bastan sus dedos para contar las horas
Son insuficientes las que se le dan.

Le pesa la ansiedad
Permanece alerta a toda hora
Al llegar la noche
El insomnio y las palabras reverberan en su sangre.

Le duelen las uñas a esta mujer;
Sus dientes buscan algo más que labios
Un final.

Se le conoce una risa desesperada;
Aún no controla su dedo índice
No conoce la tarde
Solamente el ruido del lápiz.



FICTION

Acting My Life

Yesul Myung

Being the new student is never easy, especially on the first day. I edged from class to class, trying not to be noticed, while I waited impatiently for the last bell to ring. When I was walking towards my drama class I saw two boys disputing over something. As I got closer to them, I could see that their argument arose from their differences. Their discussion could be seen as the perfect bully situation that every school was trying to fight against. One had the image of a “geek” and the other, if he could be classified, would probably be the “wannabe popular.” The wannabe popular was a scrawny and fair boy with spiked up hair and baggy jeans. He was cussing and shoving the geek who looked like he could cry at any moment. He then turned abruptly and ran away to the bathroom.

Guys with basketball sweatshirts clustered around the wannabe to congratulate him. According to them, the wannabe had given the geek what he needed. The geek was inferior to everybody so somebody needed to remind him of it once in a while.

I hurriedly passed by them, trying to avoid the possibility of the wannabe channeling his anger through me. Besides, I didn't want to be late for my last class of the day.

This was the first time I had ever been in drama practice. Drama wasn't a very appealing class to me but my mother had forced me to take it. According to her, the class would help me socialize better with other people.

I entered the room but there was nobody there. I was glad. This way I would be able to look at the people coming in instead of being the one looked at. The room was covered with pictures of previous presentations and advertisements. There were thirty chairs facing a small seven-by-eight stage and next to it was a small wooden desk. I sat in the cushioned blue chair in the farthest row. I made myself comfortable and waited patiently for the other classmates. Slowly, twenty-four sophomores, juniors and seniors started to walk in.

Everybody started to settle down as Mr. Glass walked in the room; he looked very intimidating. He was bald, about 5'10", broad shouldered and had penetrating eyes. Before he started his class he introduced everyone. Unfortunately, he took longer with me because I was the new kid. He made me stand up and briefly describe myself. My face was blushing while I introduced myself, but I went through it, and nobody laughed.

I was surprised when I heard Mr. Glass tell us we would start acting that day. I had expected the acting to take place a few weeks later when my face was more familiar to my classmates.

Everybody was to act a crying scene and the one who evoked the feelings of the audience the best would get a giant Milky Way candy bar.

One by one my classmates started performing their scenes. Some cried with such passion that it was hard for me to believe they were faking it. They banged their fists on the floor of the small stage

and their wails were echoed throughout every hallway in the school. But others approached it in a more subtle but pathetic way. They would pull the corners of their mouths down and form their hands into fists. Then, they would bring those fists upon their face and start sobbing. I thought I could do better than that.

I started tightening up as my turn was coming closer. My heart started pumping blood faster carrying with it a chilling and insecure sensation that made my fingers and toes itch.

“Erika, your turn!” snapped Mr. Glass.

I walked slowly to the small stage feeling the eyes of everyone upon me. Every step of mine was followed by a screech from the movement of the metal chair, a noisy tap from a pencil or yawns, coughs and sighs from my classmates.

As soon as I went up on the stage, I froze. I didn’t know how to start my scene. I had never acted in my life before, how was I supposed to feel? I didn’t know if I should perform the passionate cry or the faint and pathetic one. What if people started laughing at me? Students started to shift uncomfortably in their chairs as I decided on my act. I would try the soft and dismal cry.

I tried to make my hands go into fists but my body was so paralyzed at that moment that I couldn’t move my arm. I tried to pull the corners of my mouth down but my teeth were clenched; I couldn’t move them. What was I to do! That is when I decided to start sobbing; I figured the tears would come after, obviously.

I tried to sob but it wouldn’t come out in a natural way. I started to choke off my breath like I did when I really cried. Then, I moved my shoulders up and down following the rhythm of my

breathing. Of course, I did all of this with my eyes facing the floor.

By this point my arms started to relax a little so I was able to turn them into fists and move them towards my face. But as I did so my eyes made the mistake of wandering into the faces of the audience. It was horrible. Their faces were shocked as they looked at me. Their eyes were wide open and their mouths were hanging. I stopped in mid-act and realized how bad I was humiliating myself. From their point of view they saw a red-faced-girl moving her shoulders up and down. They probably thought I was laughing silently or exercising my shoulders.

As I was realizing this, my audience started to burst into howls and giggles. I was petrified. It was my first day in school and I was already being laughed at. Now I would never make any friends and I would be treated as the outcast of my high school. I would be bullied like the geek I saw before. It was when I realized this that the tears came flowing out naturally. I cried unable to stop myself, but the reaction I got from the crowd was unexpected. As they saw my crying “scene,” they stood transfixed, awed by what they thought as my “innate talent.”

I stood crying for about five minutes until Mr. Glass came up to me.

“That’s enough Erika; it was great. I love your talent. You get the Milky Way,” he said handing me the chocolate.

I left the stage with my candy bar in one hand and a tissue on the other. As I walked to my chair many classmates congratulated me on my acting. They said they had enjoyed the small warm-up exercise for my shoulders I had done previous to my acting. If they only knew...

After class I went up to Mr. Glass to explain to him how my scene came to be that way.

“Mr. Glass,” I whispered. “I cried because everyone was laughing at me, I’m not a good actress. I have never acted in my life before.”

“Well whatever it takes to make others believe what you want them to. You made them believe you were a great actress; make them continue believing that way,” he said patting my back.

What Mr. Glass said to me that day was very true. It was a lie that I

hadn’t acted before; I always acted when I was with my parents or strangers. I could never be the real me, so I would always make them believe I was someone else. It was like the “wannabe” I saw that morning. He was only bothering the geek to fit into the group. For both of us, our whole lives were about acting. We took situations, people’s point of views, our era *corriente* and we followed it.

I always act, to make people feel better, to disguise my feelings, to protect myself while the real me stands somewhere off-stage watching silently.

POESÍA

Aficionado

Abraham Lázaro

¿Qué se siente?
¿Qué se siente allá abajo?
Entrar en trance,
Citar al toro por delante.
¿Qué se siente?
Compartir alientos con el toro
Y rozarse... apretarse
Piel con piel, para que la muerte
Más ancha y fácil,
Pueda entre los dos caber.
¿Qué se siente?
¿Qué se Siente allá abajo?
Hablarle al burel
Y susurrarle altivo;
“¡Mátame!
¡Mátame si puedes!
Que aquí en el ruedo
Solo somos tú y yo.”
¿Qué se siente?
Alargarle la muleta escarlata
Y citarlo de largo...
Mientras pasa ante ti
Y tú le dices;
“Anda... pasa,
Pasa que tú, si quieres,
La vida me arrancas.
Pero no... yo te reto, te respeto,
Tú, mi amigo
Tú, mi hermano,
Que es usted, su majestad el toro;
Y que es su vida, el arte mía.”
¿Qué se siente?
¿Qué se siente allá abajo?

POESÍA

Ausencia

María del Lourdes Govea Mendoza

Tu imagen se difumina...
Pero quedan aún tus manos
Y queda tu voz,
La sonrisa soñolienta
Y la hiriente duda en tu mirada.

Tu imagen se difumina...
Pero el aire huele a ti,
El eco de tu voz irrumpe en mi silencio
Y luego te extingues lentamente:
Como flama, como humo, como aroma...

Tu imagen se difumina
Porque ya eres solo recuerdo,
Memoria,
Dolor...
El dolor se dispersa y habito en la oquedad:
Bruma de memoria,
De añoranza,
De ausencia...
Luego, el silencio.



FICCIÓN

Ayer

Marissa Haro

Nunca pensé que terminaría así. Tomaste tus dos valijas y saliste de la habitación sin importarte lo que dejabas atrás. No era mucho. Mi presencia en estos últimos días no parecía importarte en lo más mínimo, es por eso que supongo que dejarme atrás no te causa inquietud o remordimiento. En cambio, yo siento como si una daga estuviese surcada en mi alma, no puedo respirar. Un suspiro y otro, pero no logro alcanzar un estado de paz; un estado de indiferencia por tu deserción. Por más que mi orgullo se intercale, debo admitir que te necesito. Y que cada movimiento me recuerda de tu ausencia. Has dejado fragmentos de tu esencia a todo mi alrededor. En los diarios *El Despertar* debajo del sofá, en las cenizas de tus cigarrillos en los ceniceros, en las tazas de café colombiano en el fregadero, en mi piel y en mis labios.

Ayer estuve vaciando los cajones de tu buró, tenía curiosidad de saber qué habías dejado adentro. No encontré nada más que alguno que otro clip, tu viejo reloj de bolsillo, una caja de *Marlboro* y fotos mías. No estoy segura de lo que esperaba encontrar dentro, tal vez alguna pista. No sé qué. Algo que me diera la esperanza de que algún día regresarías a mí. Pero al contrario, tan solo me quedaba más claro que ya no habría un futuro. Mis deseos se han ido impacientando con el transcurrir de los días, sin embargo, no hago nada para tratar de olvidarte. ¿Por qué habría de intentar tal cosa?

Mi madre ha llamado preguntándome cómo me trata la vida;

¿es irónico no lo crees? Aquí me encuentro lamentando algo que nunca pudo ser, pero simulo no darle importancia a la situación. Soy infeliz, pero no le digo. No necesito hacerlo, su instinto de madre le dice que algo no anda bien. Tiene miedo de no saber aliviarme si alguien me ha dejado cicatriz. Temo que solo tú puedes serenar mi dolor.

Vago ciegamente alrededor de nuestra habitación, un aire melancólico consigue entrar por las ranuras de las persianas. Me imagino dónde podría encontrarte, en algún motel barato en la carretera camino a *Las Vegas*. Dudo que seas feliz, tal vez mi orgullo no me permite aceptar el hecho de que te encuentras bien sin mí. Te escribo cartas que no pienso mandar, llamo a tu móvil y justo cuando sé que vas a contestar, cuelgo. Me pregunto cuándo terminará todo esto. Toda esta avidez, esta necesidad de esperarte, de tenerte a mi lado. No lo sé. Me es difícil creer que alguna vez llegué a reconocer que una vida sin ti, ya no es vivir. Pero lo tengo presente en cada uno de mis pensamientos.

Es increíble cómo la vida puede cambiar a una persona de forma tan radical en un plazo de tiempo tan corto. Solía caminar a la playa bajo la sombra de tu mirada, el tan solo saber que me mirabas desde la palapa creaba un tipo de defensa contra mis temores. Me sentía protegida. Ahora siento que camino desnuda y hasta el más pequeño susurro de los pelícanos hace que se me erice la piel. Te has ido. Ya no me ves y me siento vulnerable. Tal vez es por eso que

mi corazón rehúsa dejarte ir, porque me has hecho creer que sin ti todo se seguirá cayendo. Es tan solo cuestión de esperar a que este sentimiento muera, no del todo,

pero necesito que poco a poco se desvanezca. No puedo seguir así, tengo que salir de aquí.

POESÍA

Boca de viento

Carlos Ochoa

Te besan los labios con boca de viento,
sin haberla tú antes escrito, pensado,
llorado y mucho menos amado.
Ignorar en gerundio su habla
y entre líneas la lengua,
porque hacer caso omiso
sin punto y con coma es
perderse en el tiempo.
Buscar la mentira ocurrida
con la boca del viento
es encontrar la verdad de la risa
en la no muerte que siento.
No emborraches al niño,
que cegado viene en camino,
te pido viento y destino.

NON-FICTION

Ceilings

Carlos Ochoa

The ceiling is so neglected. Everyone's feet are on the floor— at least most of the time— but few ever bother to touch the ceiling, few try. Its presence is overlooked and never appreciated. Everyone says, “Be thankful you even have a roof over your head,” but no one ever mentions ceilings.

No one ever looks at the ceiling. One's eyes stare slightly down, as if searching for coins on the floor when on a walk.

Only on a stroll at the park do the eyes wander up to the sky guided by the slow taper of the trees, usually pines in Guadalajara.

It is a beautiful ceiling, the sky. Never still, the cumulus clouds glide northwest; cirrus stay high, wispy and almost invisible. Nevertheless it is a tasteless ceiling, especially the clouds (no vanilla, or lemon or strawberry or chocolate), and amorphous, infinite. Anything without an end is dangerous, too prone to entice dreams.

Tangible ceilings, however, pose limits; they are limits themselves to these dreams of infinity. These neglected ceilings only reach so far as the walls will allow them. Ironically, it is under these ceilings that most dreaming is done.

Ceilings tell stories; they aren't mute, or even silent. A ceiling can speak with physical evidence: water stains, cracks, flaking paint. It is easy to learn the use of a room with a glance at the ceiling.

Ceilings are so neglected; no one ever listens to the ceiling. When the rain

hits it, it is the rain people hear, not the ceiling.

The ceiling over my bed is at a slope, useless and ornate. Like the rest of the house the ceiling is white, with valleys and crevices where mosquitoes hide at night. It is devoid of anything else, no light bulbs even.

It is absent and cold. Present only physically, the ceiling over my bed is only the ceiling over my bed, and nothing more.

In its position it is witness of fantasies, of journeys and fears, of ideal situations and of restlessness. Darkness.

It has always been there: while I walk through the forest at night (lying still in bed), or as I fly with no wings over the city.

I have dreamed of being alone in a vast room, the walls farther beyond the horizon. It was dark, but I could see ahead of me, almost everything but the walls. I ran, never getting tired, never seeing the walls, only the one at my right. It was covered in tiles of colors, bright red, yellow, green, blue and white.

Suddenly the wall was at my left, and a huge boulder was chasing me. An endless game of tag, my worst nightmare.

The ceiling has seen me wake up from nightmares; it has seen me keep on sleeping through them restless. It is a sluggish death, my twisting and how it slowly diminishes, so unhurriedly, until the nightmare is over, until the nightmare has killed me.

I don't want to die in my sleep. I want to know I am dead, that it is over. But so many people would rather die in

the middle of a dream. It is like waking up in the middle of a dream, too. One doesn't have the chance to finish it, to hold the resolution in one's hands and manipulate it until it brings satisfaction. It is abruptly interrupted, so rudely.

So often I dream and it is 6:45 a.m., a few minutes before I have to wake up, and the alarm clock goes off, or the rooster next door crows loud enough to

be heard in my room. These dreams never end, or they do, *in medias res*.

But ceilings don't know what I dream. Or they shouldn't know. It would be so wrong for them to know, a violation of privacy. All a ceiling can do is listen, or watch, or make the sleeper believe that in his sleep someone is watching.



PROSA

Conflicto de uñas

Gizeh Becerra

Cierto día, mientras estábamos comiendo, mi mamá notó que mis uñas rebasaban el límite que ella consideraba apropiado para una dama de mi calibre. Ella simplemente me dijo: “Gizeh, córtate las uñas”. Yo, como cualquier otra hija, le contesté con un muy sofisticado: “Ajá”. Por la tarde, mientras veíamos televisión mi mamá volvió a comentar sobre el exceso de longitud de mis uñas. Me dijo: “Córtate las uñas que se te ven muy feas”. Esta vez sí estaba atenta a lo que me decía ya que no encuentro las noticias muy entretenidas. Pensé: “¿Por qué tanto interés en mis uñas? ¿Por qué no las puedo traer como a mí me gustan?” Estar aburrida y ser regañada al mismo tiempo no es una buena combinación, así que mi reacción fue alegar. Discutimos un rato sobre por qué las uñas largas, según el criterio de mi mamá, son vulgares. Hasta que empezó con el ejemplo de las modelos del catálogo de Burda. Las modelos de un catálogo alemán de ropa siempre se le han hecho a mi mamá las mujeres más bonitas y sofisticadas del mundo. La razón, aún desconocida. En el momento cuando mi mamá abordó este famoso tema perdí toda intención de seguir discutiendo y fui por el cortauñas. Después de un tiempo, el conflicto volvió a surgir cuando mi mamá vio a mi hermana con las uñas largas y pintadas de un tono rojo sangre. De nuevo, comentó que las uñas se veían vulgares y agregó que se veían aun peor de ese color. La reacción de mi hermana, ya acostumbrada a nuestras críticas poco constructivas, no la tomó muy en serio, pero mi mamá insistió: “Si te fijas en los catálogos

Burda, todas las modelos traen las uñas recortaditas”. Yo pensé un poco confundida: ¿Cuál era el interés de mi mamá en nuestro arreglo personal? Finalmente, llegué a la conclusión de que ella quisiera que sus hijas se arreglaran a su modo, porque es el que le parece apropiado. En mi opinión cada quien debería ser libre de arreglarse como quiera. Hice una nota mental de esto para que si mi mamá volvía a mencionar esto, comentarle mi punto de vista. Bueno, no tuve que esperar mucho tiempo. Un domingo al mediodía mientras estaba tranquilamente viendo MTV, después de haber estudiado, me dice mi mamá: “¿Esto es todo lo que has hecho?”. Refiriéndose a ver televisión. A lo cual contesté bastante indignada: “No, ya estudié para matemáticas”. Mi mamá insistió: “Sí, pero aparte de eso no has hecho nada”. Y la conversación siguió así: “Bueno... no”. “¿Y no piensas hacer nada?” “Sí, al rato”. “¿Porque no haces ejercicio?” “Porque no quiero”. Entonces fue cuando le llegaron las irresistibles ganas de darme un sermón. Fue uno de esos en donde básicamente me dijo que tenía que estudiar y hacer ejercicio más seguido. Fue uno de aquellos no muy largos y terminó con: “¡Ah! Y córtate las uñas que se te ven muy feas”. Ella se marchó al poco rato ya que se dio cuenta que hacían falta manzanas, pero yo me quedé enojada. Hice uno de mis muy frecuentes berrinches mentales. De esos que hago cuando me dejan sola y sin nadie con quien desahogarme después de haberme regañado. Según me acuerdo fue algo

así: ¿Quién se cree? No es que nunca vaya a hacer algo productivo, solo que estaba descansando. ¿O qué? ¿Ya ni siquiera puedo descansar? Aparte, mis uñas están perfectamente bien. Apuesto a que las modelos también traen las uñas largas”. Entonces fue cuando descubrí un brillante plan. Así le iba probar a mi mamá que no tenía la razón sobre mis uñas. Iba a hojear sus catálogos a ver si de veras las modelos tenían las manos perfectas. Yo iba muy entusiasmada con mi astuto plan. Abrí el primer catálogo.

Noté que aunque la ropa estuviera pasada de moda, las modelos eran muy bonitas, como dijo mi mamá. Pensé: “Bueno, aunque tuviera la razón en esto, no quiere decir que la tenga en lo demás, ¿verdad!” Seguí hojeando el catálogo. Todas las modelos tenían las manos arregladas y las uñas pintadas de color perla o beige, pero mi más grande desilusión fue que: ¡Ninguna tenía las uñas largas! ¡Ni siquiera poquito! Entonces, con la cabeza baja y el ánimo aún más bajo fui por el cortauñas.



NON-FICTION

Dear Mom Julie Capetillo

Dear Mom,

I have decided to write you this letter because it has become impossible to have real conversations anymore. I know I am seventeen and it is normal for a mother and daughter to feel tension these years, but it's hard to ignore the fact that the tension between us has created a wall. We smile and say hello and feel proud when we manage to get through a day without yelling at each other. I have convinced myself that I am fine with the way we handle our relationship and have suppressed the memories of the time before we danced this destructive tango.

It's been a long time since I've thought about the way we used to be. I didn't really even care to remember. Why live in the past? But today when I was in the bathroom trying to fix my hair and you came in to tell me I was running late, I felt a glimpse of that past. I had been trying to braid my hair and was having no luck. It's so hard for me to do anything while looking in the mirror; when I do it, everything comes out backwards. I had a fleeting thought of the way you would always tell me how beautiful my hair was when I was little, and how you would fix it for me in the morning before school. As you



weaved the brown and reddish locks together you would tell me how when you were young you had hair just like mine. My whole life I have always been so proud of my hair because it looked like the beautiful rich brown hair I saw you with in pictures. Even in the Sixties when all the girls had worn their hair long and straight yours always had been the most gorgeous. I had always been so

proud that I had had the luck to inherit your genes, but most of all I was proud that *you* thought my hair was beautiful. The way you handled it and told me it even

felt like your own, the way you kissed the top of my head when you were done fixing it.

You were still standing behind me in the bathroom doorway and when you saw my frustration with my hair you walked over and took my thick hair and braided it. As you twisted the sections of hair you said to me, the way you used to, how much you loved my hair. It was funny, even after all this time I still felt the twinge of pride as you said it.

I tried to think back to the time when things started to go wrong. Even though I hardly ever think about it much

any more, now I remembered when I would cling to you as if to life itself when you would drop me off at nursery school. I would physically have to be peeled off of you every single morning for weeks, until I understood that you would always come back for me when it was time to go home for lunch. Leaving your side had been terrifying for me then. When we visited my grandmother's house for the summer, we slept in the same room and I would spend the night getting out of my own bed to crawl into yours. I had wanted to be near you so badly. Now it seems I do anything to get out of the house.

I looked through some old pictures you took of me when I was little. One Halloween, you dressed me up as a princess. You had a shimmering white puffy gown made for me. You bought me a crown with a heart and rhinestones on it. You even let me wear your earrings to complete the outfit. I had been your little princess. You took me along to get manicures with you and helped me throw birthday parties for my baby dolls. I had been the only girl in the family and you were my sister as well as my mom. Now, most times we act like we don't even know each other when we pass one another in the living room. We are cold and it feels awkward to hug. And it seems as if silence has taken the place of words in our life together.

I think about the fight we had last week, something stupid. I can't even remember the way it started. You screamed, I cried. You called me a little bitch. The word stung more than a slap across the face. All I could think about was what I could say to hurt you more. I kept my mouth shut because I had heard Dad's car come into the driveway and knew I would just get myself into more trouble. I looked at you as you walked out of the doorway and hated you. I hated you for making me feel so bad. I

hated myself for allowing you to. I wiped my tears and splashed water on my face. I sat down at my desk and continued doing the homework I had been doing before the fight. Not even ten minutes had passed before I heard Dad knock on the door to my room, two quick yet clear raps. This is how he always knocked on my door. I knew what was coming: more yelling, punishment for having gotten in yet another fight with you and a dramatic culmination of the fight, with me throwing something across the room, crying, and burying my face in a pillow and wailing until he left the room. That's exactly what happened this time, too, except when I looked up from my tear-soaked pillow you had come in the room. I said nothing, you said nothing, but we seem to have learned a new language over the past years. A language composed of brutal thoughts and battering stares. One in which words are not even needed to hurt one another. In the way you looked at me I could see the snappy rude remarks I dish out everyday. It's as if in your eyes I could see the hurt those spiteful words cause you. I can feel the pain I inflict. The silence was almost deafening; there was so much I wanted to say. I wanted to tell you I'm sorry; I wanted to tell you I need you. I wanted to tell you I miss the way you used to smile at me. I want the old you back. I want the old me back. But I said nothing. I was too proud. I was too afraid it was too late. I was terrified you wouldn't want me anymore; you have seen the real me and hate it. So I let you walk out of the room.

I feel alone and I fill my life with other people and other things and tell myself it's ok. I assure myself that I can fill the void your absence leaves but I know I never will. I try not to think about the fights we have, the way I roll my eyes at you, the way I always tell you I'm too busy to talk. I try to not think about you,

but how can I not? I am you. I see you in the mirror when I wash my face. I see your hands as I type this letter. I hear your voice calming me down when I am nervous for a test.

The other day, after we fought, I was too much of a coward to apologize to you. I wanted to desperately but I didn't

know how to excuse the way I am. I still don't. But there is one thing that I do know for sure. I love you. I thought I had forgotten how to say this to you, but I haven't. I'm sorry I couldn't make myself say it before.

“Any life worth living is an act of constant revision.”
--John Irving

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You were still standing behind me in the bathroom doorway and when you saw my frustration with my hair you walked over and took my thick hair and braided it. As you twisted the sections of hair you said to me, the way you used to, how much you loved my hair. It was funny, even after all this time I still felt the twinge of pride as you said it.

I tried to think back to the time when things started to go wrong. Even though I hardly ever think about it much

any more, now I remembered when I would cling to you as if to life itself when you would drop me off at nursery school. I would physically have to be peeled off of you every single morning for weeks, until I understood that you would always come back for me when it was time to go home for lunch. Leaving your side had been terrifying for me then. When we visited my grandmother's house for the summer, we slept in the same room and I would spend the night getting out of my own bed to crawl into yours. I had wanted to be near you so badly. Now it seems I do anything to get out of the house.

I looked through some old pictures you took of me when I was little. One Halloween, you dressed me up as a princess. You had a shimmering white puffy gown made for me. You bought me a crown with a heart and rhinestones on it. You even let me wear your earrings to complete the outfit. I had been your little princess. You took me along to get manicures with you and helped me throw birthday parties for my baby dolls. I had been the only girl in the family and you were my sister as well as my mom. Now, most times we act like we don't even know each other when we pass one another in the living room. We are cold and it feels awkward to hug. And it seems as if silence has taken the place of words in our life together.

I think about the fight we had last week, something stupid. I can't even remember the way it started. You screamed, I cried. You called me a little bitch. The word stung more than a slap across the face. All I could think about was what I could say to hurt you more. I kept my mouth shut because I had heard Dad's car come into the driveway and knew I would just get myself into more trouble. I looked at you as you walked out of the doorway and hated you. I hated you for making me feel so bad. I

hated myself for allowing you to. I wiped my tears and splashed water on my face. I sat down at my desk and continued doing the homework I had been doing before the fight. Not even ten minutes had passed before I heard Dad knock on the door to my room, two quick yet clear raps. This is how he always knocked on my door. I knew what was coming: more yelling, punishment for having gotten in yet another fight with you and a dramatic culmination of the fight, with me throwing something across the room, crying, and burying my face in a pillow and wailing until he left the room. That's exactly what happened this time, too, except when I looked up from my tear-soaked pillow you had come in the room. I said nothing, you said nothing, but we seem to have learned a new language over the past years. A language composed of brutal thoughts and battering stares. One in which words are not even needed to hurt one another. In the way you looked at me I could see the snappy rude remarks I dish out everyday. It's as if in your eyes I could see the hurt those spiteful words cause you. I can feel the pain I inflict. The silence was almost deafening; there was so much I wanted to say. I wanted to tell you I'm sorry; I wanted to tell you I need you. I wanted to tell you I miss the way you used to smile at me. I want the old you back. I want the old me back. But I said nothing. I was too proud. I was too afraid it was too late. I was terrified you wouldn't want me anymore; you have seen the real me and hate it. So I let you walk out of the room.

I feel alone and I fill my life with other people and other things and tell myself it's ok. I assure myself that I can fill the void your absence leaves but I know I never will. I try not to think about the fights we have, the way I roll my eyes at you, the way I always tell you I'm too busy to talk. I try to not think about you,

but how can I not? I am you. I see you in the mirror when I wash my face. I see your hands as I type this letter. I hear your voice calming me down when I am nervous for a test.

The other day, after we fought, I was too much of a coward to apologize to you. I wanted to desperately but I didn't

know how to excuse the way I am. I still don't. But there is one thing that I do know for sure. I love you. I thought I had forgotten how to say this to you, but I haven't. I'm sorry I couldn't make myself say it before.

“Any life worth living is an act of constant revision.”
--John Irving

NON-FICTION

My Deepest Regret

Marisa Chavarria

All human beings are capable of being cruel at some point in their life. I don't mean cruelty such as not sharing your cookies, but cruelty as in intentionally damaging another person's mental or physical state. It is a part of human nature to sometimes be malicious towards others and, although I do not agree with it, I too have been guilty of such behavior. There have been shameful moments in my life when I have lashed out at people and blasted them with harsh words. What's worse is that the people I abuse the most are also the people I care about the most. And regrettably my sister has been my number one target.

I haven't always been harsh towards my sister. Actually, we

used to get along very well. When we lived in Bolivia, we were practically inseparable. We used to play in our backyard on our swing set for hours, taking turns pushing each other. Then we would scurry down to the basement where we would either perform some spectacular acrobatics show for our stuffed animals or gossip about neighbors and friends at a tea party. I loved to play with my sister, and she loved to play with me. We protected each other from our parents' reprimanding and our older brother's pranks. Of course, as the older sister, I would manipulate her into obeying some of my practical commands. I could con her into giving me her last

half of a Pop-tart, or into cleaning up the mess I made with my Barbie dolls. One time I even got her to sit still while I painted her arms and legs with a black permanent marker. In fact, she didn't even get upset with me afterwards when my mother spent two hours scrubbing it off. For the four years that my family lived in La Paz, Bolivia, my sister was my best friend. When we moved to San Diego however, things gradually changed. I changed.

At first, everything was the same as it had been before. I went to school in the mornings with my brother and came

home to an evening filled with fun and games with my sister. After a while my sister started to

make friends with the other young children her own age that lived on our street. It didn't bother me so much, only that I didn't have anybody my age to play with. For the first time in my life, I began to feel like the middle child. Both my older brother and my sister had children their own age to play with wherever we went. While they had cousins and friends who lived on the same block, I had no one. And as time went on, building forts and playing Barbies with my five-year-old sister and her friends was no longer appealing to me.

When we moved to a different part of the city, the three-year gap between our ages was more apparent to

**“The past is not dead. The past
is not even the past.”
--William Faulkner**

me. None of the children in my class were as close to their younger siblings as I was. My peers were too mature to play hide and seek with six year olds, and because I was trying to fit in, I began to feel the same way. I stepped into a whole new world, where only my friends and social life mattered. I became so involved in caring about my reputation that I failed to notice the separation I had begun from my sister. I no longer wanted her to accompany me on the short walks home from school, and whenever she followed me while I was with my classmates, I would yell at her in front of everybody. But she persisted in tagging along with me wherever I went, which irritated me even more. As the year went on, I was no longer feeling annoyed with my sister, but rather upset. Finally, as we were walking home one day from school, I lost it. My patience had run out, and I was angry for all of the times she would not leave me alone, allow me to grow up.

We were walking up the hill that leads to the cul-de-sac where we lived and both of us were exhausted from the day's heat. My entire day had gone wrong: I received a low grade on my spelling test, and I missed the last goal in the soccer game. The last thing I wanted was a nosey little sister asking me why I was upset. By the time we reached the end of the street I was exasperated. She asked me one last time to tell her what went wrong, and I pushed her. I didn't just push her, I shoved her straight onto the pavement. She looked up at me and I could see the blood trickling from her cheekbone down her face and onto her shirt. She began to scream. She screamed so loud that my mother heard her from down the street. Before I could even make sense of what I had done, my mother was lifting my sister up off the ground. I couldn't bring myself to apologize for pushing her down. I was too

ashamed. And to this day she wears a tiny scar just above her cheekbone, the scar I placed on her when I removed myself from her heart.

That day I realized that my relationship with my sister would never be the same. I drove her away because of jealousy, because I didn't want her to be the one to drive me away first. My cruelty eventually came back to me, and it was only fair that I played the hand I had first dealt. When we moved to Costa Rica, my sister wanted absolutely nothing to do with me. I lost her trust and respect, and to her, I was just a mean stranger living in the room across the hall. Some days I would knock on her door and ask if she wanted to go out to the movies or something. But I always got the same reply, "I'm busy." I tried to get her to trust me by asking about her social life and offering advice. She never asked for my advice though, and I learned to deal with it. It was my turn to feel the pain of indifference.

Now I have finally reached a level of maturity in which I can confront my weaknesses. I regret every act of unkindness I have shown my sister, but I know that I have allowed it to carry on too long and cannot take it back. I wish I could take back every time I slapped her in the face for smarting me off, every time I called her a fucking bitch to her face rather than walk away and ignore her. I wish I could take back every time I told her that I hated her because I was angry. She will never understand why I did those things, just as she will never believe me when I tell her how much I care about her. Maybe someday she will forgive me, when we're much older. And maybe then I will be able to forgive myself for my weaknesses.

I can admit my weaknesses now because I know that it is in our human nature to possess flaws such as jealousy,

and cruelty. But because of these natural flaws I have lost someone who I truly

love. And that is my deepest regret of all.



POESÍA

Diseño enseño

Cyané Quijano

Corre...
sobre puntitas hacia
la oscuridad. Como inquilino
baila un tango con los matices de luz y sombra.
Suenan las copas de sus traviesos deditos. Arriesga la
noche por una tentadora migaja de vida. Esconde su somnoliento
cuerpecito de las fieras en el polvo. Cruza pasillos, d e s v a n e c e;
calla su agudo en su mundo propio hasta llegar su otra noche, y v u e l v e.

NON-FICTION

Dragonflies

Carlos Ochoa

Nineteen dragonflies dart through the air on the fourth floor, a light cloud of beating wings constantly expanding and contracting. I walk down the stairs to the third floor and once more they are there, unpredictably changing direction, undecided as to where they are headed.

I continue my odyssey down the stairs; I am not used to the descent or ascent of so many floors by foot. As I gaze out from every floor to look at the ground beneath I see the dragonflies again. The swarm floats down with me, dispersing to hide in the shadows between the leaves of the trees every time I look at them, and then coming back together when I set foot on the next step. I know they are there, following me as I descend. I know they will be there when I reach the bottom floor.

Nineteen dragonflies, like one of the plagues of Egypt described in *Exodus*; they fly over me, apparently watching me. But they aren't.

The life of a dragonfly is short, no more than six months, often less. They hatch, grow to maturity in less than a month, reproduce and die.

The time dedicated to floating over my head, like my guardian angel is a significant amount of time. A major portion of their adult life has been wasted.

It is such a horrible feeling, to feel that way. Every year, the amount of time in a day, a week, a month becomes proportionally smaller to the amount of time one will live.

For a dragonfly, a month is one sixth of its life. For a person one month

usually is nothing but a small fraction of life.

It would be frustrating to get to a point in life when you feel that everything you have done has been a waste. I would never want to realize that. As the feeling that one's time in college is coming to an end realizing that the years one has invested and spent in study for a better future have not been satisfactory to the soul must be dreadful.

A fresh start is nearly impossible, and nothing one would really want either. To spend another batch of four years, maybe in vain would be nerve-wracking.

And yet, here they are, nineteen dragonflies darting from place to place, never still. Half an hour is a great amount of time to them, time that could be spent trying to find food, or a suitable mate that will spawn future generations.

These dragonflies are like a cloud that rains on me only, except that a cloud of rain is even shorter-lived, only a few minutes. The rain will fall on me for five minutes, then dying off, only barely allowing me to dry before another drop falls. But it is not rain, but dragonflies, which last longer, and are more consistent.

A dragonfly's mating ritual is a beautiful one. They mate in the air, joined by the tail, almost in a dance as they fly back to back. Four pairs of wings beat in unison, between the two, the dragonflies can see everything: Front, back, sides and up and down of them and of the world that rushes by them.

Today, none were mating, the season is over. It comes with the rains

that bring the levels of humidity up that were needed for a proper incubation of the eggs. It rains seldom in September, and by now the eggs must have hatched.

It is my paranoia probably, if I think that they are following me. The dragonflies have left the security of their

eggs, their fragile wings have just finished drying and only now are they acquiring their rigidity. They have just left the nest, and are flying for the first time, never following me, but dropping at the same pace as I did.



TRANSLATION

En Paz by Amado Nervo

Translation from Spanish by Julie Capetillo

In Peace

So near to my decline, I bless you, life
because you never gave me false hope
or work unjust or punishment undeserved;

because I see at the end of my harsh path
that I was the architect of my own destiny;
that if I extracted bitterness or sweetness of things,
it was because, in them, I placed a bitter or sweet taste;
when I planted rosebushes I always harvested roses.

It's true though, after my blooming there will be winter
but you never told me May was so eternal!

I found nights of worry long,
but you never promised otherwise,
yet I had some that were sacredly serene...

I loved, I was loved, the sun fondled my face.
Life, you owe me nothing! Life, we are at peace!

POESÍA

Esperanza de noche

Carlos Ochoa

Ya casi es mañana
y el sol no ha salido, no reaparece
en el horizonte violando a la noche
y yo sigo atado a la silla
con las manos libres
esperando—
te
espero.

Llegas con el sol
en la mano y una hora más tarde
me desato para saludarte.
Pero es tarde ya y debes irte
tan temprano que es tarde
y ya debes irte.

No he dormido y me arden los ojos
con esperanza en exceso
y luego tristeza
la amargura de café sigue en mi garganta.

“Soledad, ¿por quién preguntas sin
compañía y a estas horas?”

--Federico García Lorca

NON-FICTION

Frontier

Gina Annette Rodriguez

I was raised like any other “typical” American child. I had a huge house whose attic I was afraid of; I had pink curtains, was best friends with all my neighbors, went to school in a big yellow bus, and celebrated the fourth of July. The only thing that separated me from the rest of my fellow kindergarteners was my pitch-black hair and my dark-colored skin.

In class we were taught about Columbus’s discovery of America and the landing of the Mayflower on Plymouth Rock. The teacher led me to believe that all my ancestors arrived to this continent on that boat departing from Europe, and became the best of friends with all the Native Americans. That day I went home with a sense of pride and understanding where I came from. When I tried to share the news with my parents, they informed me that my ancestors were a mixture of Europeans and Indians, but they were not the ones that I learned about in class. Puzzled by their explanation, they told me that one day they would show me and that I would understand.

I had overheard stories about Mexico when Spanish-speaking relatives came to visit (although I rarely understood them) and seen images of it from various movies. But from what I understood and saw, I envisioned in my head a dusty, brown desert with sparse cacti distributed evenly throughout a flat plane with mountains and plateaus in the background. But when I turned around in my mind, the sand from the desert connected with the shore. The beach

would be covered by beautiful brunette women and a couple of fat guys wearing sombreros accompanied by donkeys. To sum up my mental picture of Mexico, it was brown, completely brown. Everything I pictured was brown and I am not quite sure why.

When the day that I would understand where I came from arrived, it never really did hit me. To me, it just seemed like we were going to take another road trip and be back by next weekend. I was six years old and I did not realize what the concept of moving to another country meant; I did not even bother to say goodbye to my friends. One day I was playing in Chad and Taylor’s house after school and the next thing I knew, my parents and my sister came to pick me up in the car, something that never had happened before since we lived three houses down.

I did not notice when we crossed the border between the United States and Mexico. One minute we were speeding down the highway, the next we were stuck in what seemed to be a traffic jam, and then we were once again speeding down the highway. It was not until we finally arrived at our destination that I noticed people speaking the same language I had heard my parents speak occasionally. Though I had heard it before, I had never been encouraged to learn it until that moment. My older sister, Yvette, and I were forced to learn a completely different language, which might as well have come from the thirteenth star of the galaxy Ungachaca because it seemed so different and

awkward for us to pronounce, just to ask for a glass of water. Since frustration always got the best of us, we resorted to just saying “*agua!*” in hopes that someone would understand us.

It was hard making friends for that particular reason. A lump in my throat would form every time I heard my new neighbors running up and down the street, playing, and having fun in a language I could not comprehend. Unlike my friends back home, they didn’t come up and ring my doorbell, asking if I could come out to play. It happened the other way around. First, I would sit on my doorstep, hoping they would have pity on me and ask me to join them. When that didn’t happen, I would move into my garage and bounce my sister’s basketball around hoping to grab their attention. When my plan continued to fail, I found myself walking up and down the sidewalk staring at them and quickly turning my head away when they looked in my direction. I ended up asking them in my broken Spanish if I could play with them.

The food itself was not hard to get used to since my mother would make us Mexican food on special occasions, but it was still different. Yvette and I would have a glass of Coke, having been accustomed to it by then, ready to chug down after eating a spoonful of some weird purple version of *pozole* or round sheets of what they claimed to be the same as tortillas, just made with different colored corn. The worst part was the milk. I hated drinking it since it did not go well with my stomach, and I was hesitant to do so when I knew there was no escaping it; when it came to having my morning bowl of cereal.

Poverty was something that I had not been exposed to before moving to Mexico. I had never witnessed a beggar walking down the street asking for money, nor someone my age throwing melons into the air while their face is painted like a clown, nor someone sleeping on the sidewalk covered in newspaper. I did not have the understanding from birth about the differences between the rich people, middle class people, poor people, and homeless people.

One night my family and I were heading home after going to a cousin’s birthday party and saw a little boy walking between cars at a red light asking

for money. He wore a dirty, ripped, white shirt, dark pants with holes in them, and wore no shoes as he

tapped on every car window. I made my dad give him the piece of cake I had received that night before we drove off. When I was about to continue to play with a puzzle I had with me in the car, I realized that the little boy probably did not have a toy of his own to play with. I broke down in hysterical tears feeling guilty for not giving the boy my puzzle since I had so many other toys and wouldn’t miss it. I begged my dad to turn around so I could give it to him, but my parents said he probably was not there anymore. A while after that I felt guilty every time I ate a meal, played with something, or was covered by a blanket. Not too long after I became immune to it, turned my head the other way, pretended not to see, and justified their situation by not having any ambition of moving forward.

I quickly, though unwillingly still, got used to dressing up all nice and neat

“It is only the first step that is difficult.”

--Marie De Vichy-Chaconne

just to go to the store. I have been accustomed to seeing people throwing their trash out the streets instead of finding a trashcan, causing a foul smell throughout some areas of the city; although after ten years, I still cannot believe that many people take no consideration towards a healthier environment, but I am not surprised when they don't. I can speak Spanish now, but it is still not my preferred means of communication.

I have finally learned the background of my heritage and have lived here long enough to understand it, but I still do not think of myself as a true, 100%, die-hard Mexican. I continue to speak English with my family and friends, refer to myself as American when asked about my nationality, feel more

comfortable in Texas than here but I prefer Pennsylvania over any place else, and I place my hand over my heart instead of holding my arm horizontally across my chest when either national anthem is played. Maybe they are all just habits I cannot get rid of, but I do not consider myself as a true American either. I see it as a curse. Coming to Mexico and not being Mexican enough, having to seek refuge in the United States only to find out that I am no longer American enough. My father sees it as a gift. He says we are lucky to be able to experience the best and worst of both cultures and having the opportunity to be apart of these two different worlds. Bicultural he calls it. In a sense, he is right.



FICTION

Going Back

Julie Capetillo

Last Wednesday during mentoring a man came to talk to the high school students about investing their time in others, and about helping the community around them, about making a difference in someone's life. I looked around the auditorium and was amazed by the students' concentration. Usually when a guest speaker, or any speaker for that matter comes in to talk, three-fourths of the students seem hardly aware that there is someone even speaking to them. Motivational speeches are usually a wonderful opportunity to catch up on the weekend's gossip with your friends sitting in the same row. However this time, the situation was radically different. It seemed as if every single person in the auditorium was listening intently to what the man had to say. It wasn't only the manner in which he delivered the speech. His arms in constant gesticulation and his mesmerizing voice seemed to have an entrancing effect on the audience, and there was power in the message his speech was conveying.

The school has tried for years to get students to do community service. The students have always seen it as a dreary task, just another annoying requisite one must fulfill in order to graduate. The man in front of them on Wednesday however had a different way of approaching the subject. He began talking about his own experiences helping people. He was a teacher and although the job was not the highest paying, he was intensely happy. He knew teaching was his vocation. He knew that teaching

and enriching other people's lives was the best way he could fulfill his own life.

He talked about having taken one of his students to an impoverished old woman's shack and having him fix her tin roof so that she would not get wet in the rain. Since she could not walk, she would have had to lie in bed, getting soaked, and probably would have died there had the man and the boy not come to help her. When the job was done and the boy was leaving, the old woman called him over to her cot. She asked him his name and he told her it was Carlos. She asked him to carve it into the little wooden box she had next to her as a bedside table. When he asked her why, and if she wouldn't rather he wrote it on a paper for her, she told him: "No, I want it carved there so I will never forget it and I can pray for you every night. You saved my life." When the boy left the shack he went to his car and cried. The work he had done in one afternoon had saved a woman's life. He had had such an impact on her future without even realizing he would.

The speaker also talked about having taken a group of his students to an orphanage. The kids at first had not wanted to go, but after having gone a couple of times they began to realize the impact their visits were having on the orphans. The fact that the orphans knew someone cared about them, that someone played with them, that someone gave them a hug, made a huge difference in their lives. At night the orphans, who had been forgotten by the world, knew that they mattered to someone and that knowledge gave them something to hold

onto. Knowing they mattered to someone gave them hope that they were not alone in this world.

The speaker did not preach about fulfilling service hours or giving back to the community, he simply talked about his own experiences in reaching out to others and the spiritual effect this could have on both parties. He asked us to think about *investing* our time rather than wasting it, to consider helping strangers and not turning our backs on their lives simply because what they were living day to day seems like too immense a job to tackle. He convinced us that, though we may not be able to solve others' problems, we have the power to at least make a difference and offer them support as they wage their daily battle.

I think what was most moving about the speech was that he made students realize that they had the power to change a person's life, to change a person's future.

When the speech was over, we all crowded out of the auditorium, and talk about spending time on community service was all that could be heard within the clusters of students.

I walked back to my Mexican literature class, picked up the books I had left out on my desk, and took out my agenda to make sure I had everything I needed to do my homework. To my surprise, I had all the homework for the next day completed. All I had been assigned had been a couple of math problems and I had done those in class. Apparently the rest of my friends had realized the same thing I had.

"Yes! There's no homework today! Hey Julie, you want to go out for lunch and then to the movies? I really want to see the new Austin Powers movie," Liz said to me as she stuffed her pencil box into her bag.

"Um, yeah, I'm free today except I'm supposed to go over to Clara McKenzie's house to work on a math project," I said hesitantly.

"Oh give me a break! You are going to ditch me for that nerd? She can handle the project on her own. Dude, she is so weird. Aren't you freaked out about going over to her house?" Liz said.

"Well it's not like she's my best friend, it's just a math project, and you know I can't afford not to do well on those. I really want to go with you but I need to have that project done," I said.

"Whatever, Dude. I'm pissed you're dissing me for a freak. Can't you just tell her to do the work by herself? It's not like she has anything better to do with her life. Have you seen the gross scabs on her wrists? And the way she just hacked off her hair last week in art class? She was just standing in front of the sink looking in the mirror and grabbed her hair like four inches from her head and chopped it off with big orange scissors. The girl has a death wish. She should just stop talking about that crap and get it over with if she's really serious about it," Liz said matter-of-factly.

Inside I was appalled at what had just come out of my best friend's mouth, but knowing the way Liz reacted any time I disagreed with her. I decided to keep my opinion to myself and just answer the way I knew she wanted and expected me to.

"I know! She is such a weirdo. If she is so depressed she should take some Prozac or quit whining. I'm just doing this project with her because I know she will get me a good gra—" I stopped in the middle of my sentence almost choking on my words. Clara had walked into the room and had been putting her books away in the back of the classroom.

"Clara, um hi, I um—" I mumbled in embarrassment.

“Julie don’t worry about the math project. I’ll finish it. It’s ok,” she said with her head in its usual downcast position.

“There we go! Problem solved, Julie now you can come to the movies with me. Thanks Clara you’re a doll,” Liz said cheerfully. She grabbed me by the wrist and led me out the door.

“This is great! Come on, you ready to go?” Liz asked.

But I was embarrassed and felt badly about what I said and what Clara had obviously overheard. I decided to tell Liz that I was not feeling up for the movies.

As I drove home I remembered my visit to Clara’s house the week before. We were sitting at her desk and I noticed her wrists. They had dark crimson scars cut into them. I thought back to not so long ago when my own arms bore the same scars. I thought back to the morning I had stood in front of my mirror and hated the face that stared back at me. I had taken my rich brown hair and cut it off, watching as the locks fell to the floor, hoping that some of myself was going with them. I had crawled to a corner in my room and I had prayed to not wake up. To leave the emptiness inside. To be able to escape from the hell I was trapped in.

For months I had been taking Prozac, along with an array of other drugs.

My mother had died five months before, and that was when they thought my problems had started. The drugs were supposed to keep me from feeling the pain. What they really kept me from feeling was life. It was true, I no longer cried when I went to sleep at night, but I could no longer laugh either. The drugs that my father forced me to take every night were no cure. They were a Novocain for life. That morning in my

room I was trapped inside my mind. I was so alone. I wanted to cry, I wanted to scream, I wanted to feel, but I couldn’t. That morning, as I sat on the carpet, hugging my knees, I decided that it was better to feel pain than to feel nothing at all. I was going to have to face the dark times in life if I wanted to be able to see the good. I stopped taking my medicine and with the guidance of God. I was able to overcome my depression.

When I looked in Clara’s eyes I knew what was going on behind them. I knew she was trapped. The cuts on her wrists, the suicide “attempts,” they were pleas. I knew that if she had really wanted to die she would have already killed herself; I also knew that Clara wanted desperately to live. She needed someone to help her out of the prison of her mind. She was begging for someone to reach out and help her return to the life she had once known.

As I stared at Clara’s wrists, I thought about saying something to her, about telling her what I had gone through, and assuring her that there was a way out of her hell. But instead I said nothing. I kept on working at the quadratic equations, and when we finished, I packed up my books and left. I pushed the thought of Clara out of my mind. I pushed what I knew all too well about her out of my mind, to a place where it could not bother me. I didn’t like being reminded that I too, had felt the way she did.

As I drove home I looked over to the passenger seat and saw the form that I was to fill out in order to pick a community service project. How ironic that I am so ready to extend my support and compassion to strangers while I deny the same thing to someone close to me.

But I didn’t want to go back to that place, not even if it was just to help her get out of it.

POETRY

Espero curarme de tí by Jaime Sabines

Translation from Spanish by Julie Capetillo

I Hope To Be Cured of You

I hope to be cured of you in a couple days. I must quit
Smoking you, drinking you, thinking you. It is possible.
By following the recommended procedure. I
prescribe time, abstinence, loneliness.

Does it sound all right if I love you for only a week?
It is not too much, its not too little, it is enough. In a week
all the words of love can be gathered,
that have been uttered over the earth, and they
can be set on fire. I will warm you with this
hearth of charred love. And also the silence.
For the best words of love are between two
people who say nothing to each other.

Also must be set ablaze that other language, elusory and
subversive, of he who loves . (You know how I tell you that
“I love you” when I say: “It is so hot,” “Give me some
water,” “Do you know how to drive?” “Its gotten dark”...In
a crowd, next to your people and mine, I have
told you “It is late,” and you knew I was saying “I love you.”)

One more week to gather all the love of
time. To give it to you. So that you do with it what
you please: save it, caress it, throw it away. It’s
worthless, that is true. I only want one week in order
to understand things. Because this is the same as
leaving an insane asylum, only to enter a
cemetery.

NON-FICTION

Child of the Korn

Marisol Perez

I was watching TV; it was January 18, 2002. I got home early because we had semester tests. I was watching this weird reality show called “The Love Cruise,” it made me laugh so much; everyone on the show took themselves too seriously. I was really getting into the show when my mum yelled: “*Sol, ven para acá!*” so I made a face. “GOD! What now?” But I managed to get myself into the kitchen.

“*¿Qué pasó?*” I asked annoyed.

“*Ya viste El MURAL?*” I was puzzled, I mean I always read the newspaper, but why would she ask?

“*¡Nel! ¿Por qué?*”

“*Porque creo que va venir KoRn*”. The news shocked me with amazement. I grabbed the newspaper and turned to the *GENTE* section to find an article about KoRn entitled “*Unos Freaks Estadounidenses*.” My eyes just wandered around the articles like pinballs, and they suddenly came to a dead stop.

“*KoRn ha confirmado su presencia en Guadalajara, cuando el 6 de marzo pise el Auditorio Benito Juárez...los boletos de KoRn empezarán a venderse el primero de febrero en las tiendas Mr. CD...*” I was speechless. I mean this type of thing never happens here. Guadalajara, although a big city, had not had international concerts in ten years! I was so happy! My favorite band (besides Nirvana, of course) was coming to my city! And the coolest thing, I would get to go see them.

I had to call my friends and report the good news. I called Pandra (Paulina), Ingris (Ingrid) and Hades (Adriana).

They all wanted to go. And Ingris’ brother, Toño, said that he was going no matter what. So I had a great idea. I asked Ingris if we could all go together.

“*Mira, Wey, tu le preguntas a tu brody si nos podemos ir con ustedes,*” I said.

“*Zas, Wey. ¿Pero quién más va ir?*” Ingris asked.

“*Todavía no se wey, pero yo de seguro si nos lleva tu hermano,*” I said.

“*Sale, Wey, yo le digo,*” said Ingris.

“*Orale, gracias. Bye.*” I replied

Well, Pandra asked her parents, but they told her that she was out of her mind, that there was absolutely no way that she was going. So she gave it up, unlike with Hades, whose parents agreed to let her go if she came with Ingris, Toño, his friends and me. I think the reason our parents let us come was because we had known each other since kindergarten and they knew Ingris’ parents. Actually both of our parents were pretty freaked out that their fifteen-year-old daughters were going to a “heavy” concert, with all the *marijuanos* (potheads) and “those crazy teens.” But sooner or later they would have to understand that it was us, we were already part of them.

I suggested buying tickets for the front so we could be in the mosh pit. But Ingris and Hades were scared to get crushed. A lot of people are involved so you tend to get touched everywhere, and I mean everywhere. It’s mostly men involved so, no thanks. We decided to buy tickets for the *gradas* (bleachers), which wasn’t that bad. This was about the greatest thing ever to happen in my life! STATIC X was opening for KoRn!

I was glad LINKIN PARK wasn't opening for KoRn in Guadalajara as it was in Mexico City. I think STATIC X is so much better than LINKIN PARK.

But then Monday of the same week I caught a terrible cold. I felt so bad; I had trouble seeing. The concert was on Wednesday. "This is just so my luck!" I told myself over and over. But I was going, I didn't give a damn! I couldn't let my parents see how sick I was. I feared that they wouldn't let me go to the concert, but I was going, even if I had cancer.

But conveniently or miraculously, however one chooses to see it, the day of the concert I was feeling much better. I came directly home from school to have lunch and then to go to Ingris' house. I went up to my room to brush my teeth and get ready. I put on a black shirt (not like I had a choice: black shirts are all I really have), my favorite baggie pants that were all raggedy and ripped, and I put on my black eye make-up and black lipstick. I was ready. But I was kind of upset because I wanted to take my spikes. But the organizers had specifically asked people not to take sharp objects. *Oh well!* I thought, taking the short spikes.

We got to Ingris' house and her brother Toño was already waiting for us. We got into his blue car and drove off listening to KoRn at full volume. I kept thinking how lucky I was. How much life made sense at that moment; these are the things I want to live for, I thought. I was so thankful I was alive.

"I can't see! I can't see! I'm going BLIND! I can't see! I can't see! I'm going BLIND! I'm BLIND!" the tape kept repeating. 'BLIND' was my favorite KoRn song. I began to tell Hades how explicitly awesome it would be if they opened the concert with BLIND. But I was also very excited and terribly happy about STATIC X! My hands started to

shake. This was seriously getting to me. Inside I felt like I was going to explode. It was a feeling I can't explain, like when you know you like someone, but better. This was the feeling of true love. The feeling you can't get from anything else but music.

As we were waiting in line I saw the kids there and thought about my Gramps. "*¡Lleno de puros muchachitos locos!*" Full of crazy punks, he would say. I sat there and thought for a minute about my grandpa. About that time that I was listening to the radio and they had this trivia contest. I won a T-shirt. I was supposed to go pick it up, but my parents couldn't take me. So I asked my grandfather to take me. This place was all the way down to the Centro, on Hidalgo Street.

"*Mira, Sol, esas son las tiendas de los muchachos locos,*" he said as he pointed to a skate shop full of possible *marijuanos* (pot heads).

"*Ahí es!*" I yelled. I thought it was really funny how he thought that me, his granddaughter, wasn't into those hangouts, but that was exactly where I headed.

So anyway, we were still in the line and I saw people getting behind me. I felt happier. I guess that always happens when you realize that you are not the last one anymore. Time went by slowly, eternally. But I guess you always feel time goes slower when you really want something to happen. When it was finally dark, we were allowed to enter.

The place was amazing, roaring with people. And the first thing I saw was the speakers. There were speakers everywhere, including the roof and at the top of each wall. I was stunned to see 10,000 people all united there, all waiting for the same thing I was. This was home, I told myself again. I belong here. Underneath us there was a mosh pit

yelling angry and rather explicit words at the other crowd. Sometimes little transparent bags were thrown all over the place, full of a very suspicious yellow liquid. Yes... piss, it was gross. I just hoped and prayed that I didn't get piss on myself. They kept throwing stuff, so we threw stuff back, everyone except for Ingris. She kept telling me nervously: "*Sol, no seas agresiva wey, no avientes nada ya.*" I didn't listen to her. Ironically a lighter came towards us, and it landed sharply on Ingris' stomach. You could tell that it hurt her. But it was kind of funny that she was probably the only one that wasn't throwing stuff and she got hit.

I stared nervously at the stage and at the drums and microphone holders giving out a faint glow under the purple and red lights. Suddenly I saw a bunch of people walking onto the stage. The lights went out and a roar of excitement was heard among the crowd of kids, hungry for music. I felt my heart leap.

"*Buenas noches, good evening, Guadalajara!*" was heard and then the light was turned to the voice. It was Wayne Static, lead vocal of STATIC X. With that they started playing violently a song called "Get to the Gone." "*Get to the gooooooneeeeeee!*" yelled Wayne Static furiously. My brain was paralyzed, and then we all started jumping and head banging, singing along with the song. I didn't think the crowd could get any crazier, until the bassist yelled at full voice to the crowd,

"*VIVA MEXICO, CABRONES! No se confundan! Yo soy Mexicano! Ay! Ay!*" the people roared with excitement and yelled back, putting their fists in the air.

I was banging my head so much and yelling, even with my cold. I was having the time of my life jumping all around. STATIC X played for about 45 to 50 minutes.

"*Gracias Mexico! VIVA MEXICO, CABRONES!*" I was feeling happier than I had ever been in my life. Then I thought that was just STATIC X. I'm probably going to die when KoRn comes on.

We waited about thirty minutes for KoRn to come out. I took time to look at the crowd. They all looked so normal to me. Spiked jewelry, concert T-shirts, colored hair and black all over. *I am home*, I told myself again.

Suddenly I felt it. The walls vibrated with sudden tension. Clouds of smoke emerged from all over the place. Roars of nervous and involuntary laughter made a deafening sound in my ears. An intense feeling invaded me. Bold faces stared up at the stage. Nobody was smiling, but I could tell they were all dying of happiness just as I was. Some kids, open-minded individuals, pounded punk rock signs and fists in the air. The kind of people who, like me, always get the weird looks. I felt my heart pounding furiously in my chest and into my throat. I tried to stay still but my legs were shaking and so was my brain. I looked around again, biting my lips, and a drop of blood tingled down my chin. I felt alive; I closed my eyes; they were also beating like they had a heart of their own. Sweat ran down my forehead, leaving a trail of itchiness behind. I felt alive, I felt home, and now I could explode.

One of the drums' cymbals started clashing. My breath caught dead in my throat.

"It's BLIND, aw f***! Its BLIND," I whispered to Hades and to Ingris, alluding to their hit.

"Oh my god!" cried Hades and I stared at her as a tear dropped from my eye. They all stepped out. First, the drummer, David, then the guitarist, Munky, then the other guitarist, Head, then the bassist,

Fieldy. And last the vocalist, Jon Davis
who shouted
“ARE YOU READY?!”

What kind of question was that? I
thought, I've been ready all my life.

NON-FICTION

Living in the Open

Michael Hogan

We have a small house in a quiet section of Guadalajara called Providencia. Less than two hundred yards away is a large eucalyptus park where a flock of parrots gather every evening as I walk my eight-year-old Doberman, Molly Malone, through its winding paths. In the walled garden back of our house is a large mango tree under which I sit most early evenings reading, writing in my journal, correcting student essays. The whitewashed walls are covered in bougainvillea of orange, violet, magenta and rose. Surrounding the back doors (one of which is the door to our bedroom) is an untrimmed tangle of jasmine vines with delicate white blossoms.

But none of this is remarkable. What is noteworthy is the fact that our back doors are always open when we are at home. Occasionally a hummingbird darts over our bed, or a sparrow deigns to enter the other room which has been converted to office space where it looks over at me answering my emails and then departs. Once, more annoyingly, a field mouse and its companion decided to make a temporary home in one of Lucinda's quilts in the closet. On the whole, though, the advantages to this lifestyle outweigh the drawbacks. We breathe the same air both inside and outside. And when we leave both front and back doors open, as we usually do in the summer evenings, the rose garden in the front and the jasmine in the back fill the rooms with a natural fragrance. There is no adjustment going in or out. In the winter we dress warmly both at home

and outside. In the summer we dress scantily, whether to read in the garden or lie down for the night.

We suffer fewer colds or flues than people in other places and I think this has less to do with presence or absence of bacteria or viruses, but rather with the absence of shocks upon the system. Let me relate a few common examples of the latter. Each June I go to Daytona Beach, Florida to correct exams for the College Board. We stay in an air-conditioned hotel which is very pleasant. We leave our rooms to go to the Ocean Center, the spacious air-conditioned civic complex where the Educational Testing Service has us read the Advanced Placement exams for eight hours a day. Each time we leave one building or enter another our bodies are forced to adjust to the 90 degree Fahrenheit and 70 percent humidity of the outside world, and then readjust to the 70 degree, 10 percent humidity of the inside world. The stress on the system is considerable and it is constant during the week of correcting. Moreover, since the doors and windows need to be tightly sealed to keep the heat out, one is constantly breathing recycled and artificially-filtered air inside both the hotel and civic center. One is cut off from the fresh ocean breezes, the odor of salt, from the cry of the seagulls, from the ozone smell of the lightning in the late afternoon as thunderclouds move over the coastal headlands.

When we visit relatives in New England in the winter, a similar adjustment takes place. But now outside the temperature is 20 degrees Fahrenheit.

So the house must be sealed up, to prevent the cold from getting in, and the expensive fuel oil heat from escaping. Houses in New England are always a bit warmer than is natural. This is because the displacement of heat is inefficient, there are gaps in the windowsills, at the base of the doorways; the ceilings are high and there is an attic and cellar. To keep the whole house warm it is necessary that some rooms are actually hot. The air one breathes in such house is not recirculated or filtered, and thus one is often drowsy in the evenings, or finds on wakening that one's lungs are clogged with a heavy fetidness which must be coughed up and spit out before one can wholesomely greet the day. One is invigorated only when one manages to stagger out into the crystalline morning and breathe in the cold damp ocean air. However, one's lungs have been so imbued with the warm dry air of the house, that the cold oxygen-rich atmosphere of the real world stresses the entire system. Moreover, the dryness of the air in the house has dehydrated one's body (just as airplane flights do) so the coffee one drinks to warm up after arriving at the office (coffee being a diuretic) weakens the system even further.

Moreover, in both these environments: the air-conditioned hotel in Florida and the centrally-heated home in New England, one is forced to breathe in unoxigenated air which is laden with the coughs, carbon dioxide emissions and effulgences of the others similarly situated, so that any virus or bacterium coughed or sneezed by one, soon is passed onto others. Compare this now with our open door policy in Mexico. The summer breezes blow through the front door and out the back, cooling the heat of the day. In the evenings the rains purify the air and modify the level of

moisture in all of the rooms. In winter, the heavy quilts (and sometimes an electric space heater) keep us warm in our bed, while the cool air circulates in the house. The dog goes in and out when she pleases. The mourning doves and crickets awaken us in the summer, and the raucous cawing of crows in the mango tree are the winter alarm clock. Sometimes the rain, whipped by the wind, comes slashing in but that's easily remedied with a mop and there is no damage because the floors are tile. We have no rugs to keep in mold, which would allow viruses and bacteria to gain footholds, or allergy-producing microbes to flourish.

I borrowed the title for this essay from a book by Marge Piercy. Neither the book, nor the title poem "Living In The Open" seemed connected in any way with what I want to talk about in the essay; the title merely seemed appropriate.

But now as I look at her book again and read about how she came to live in Wellfleet on Cape Cod, and how "it became a particular place to be healed," I realize with humility that most accidents of borrowing usually signify. I realize that I, too, have come from a closed-up place in my life to one which has slowly opened. That I have stepped out of a life which was stifling into one where I breathe clearly. I have stopped thinking about being and started to be. As Piercy wrote:

Only when we break the mirror
and climb into our vision
only when we are the wind together
streaming and singing,
only in the dream we become
with our bones for spears,
we are real at last and wake.

I think that living in the open has helped me to transcend my own notion of myself. Who you believe you are, is so much about doing, accomplishing, so much about the opinions and expectations of others, that the gradual accretion of all of these, (until you become a reflection of them) causes the true self to be lost in the process. The writer becomes what his reviewers have written, the teacher becomes his evaluations, the husband becomes the wife's defeated hopes, and the wife the husband's faded dreams.

Some people live in the same place all their lives but often the interior landscape changes, or they deepen with their attachment to the land and the land becomes eloquent in their bones. Wendell Berry is one of these, working his farm in Kentucky, writing his poems, and writing even about the larger economies of the world and how they function, and why they fail.

In this world
men are making plans,
wearing themselves out
spending their lives,
in order to kill each other.

To live in a place "however barren" and know it, is to be "secure against enemies and friends," Richard Shelton once wrote in his book *You Can't Have Everything*. This is true but like most lines of poetry only half a truth. There is another life, many other lives, and one can live as many as one chooses. I have lived in the cold winters of many-mansioned Newport and skated on cattailed ponds, caught poison ivy in the summer, and watched the leaves turn gold and red in autumn as young men hurled their padded bodies against each other on the frosted grass. I made my home in Charleston where the ships anchored in the tranquil bay,

where the Ashley and Cooper Rivers flowed to the sea, where the ante-bellum mansions were back-to back with shacks of the poor.

I have lived in Tucson and heard the spadefoot toads crying like lost children in the Sonoran Desert, recognized the crooked path of the sidewinder in the dust, saw the lightning kaleidoscope across the Catalinas.

I have awakened in the foggy mornings of San Francisco to the clanging of the trolley cars, fed the sea lions on Pier 32, and trudged the interminable hills in search of grace. And in each of these places I found love. In each of these places I knew loss. And each, in its time, called home.

Now, as the mosquitoes annoy us with their nocturnal buzzing, as the mice set up home in the kitchen, and the landlady becomes more avaricious, as Lucinda's brothers and sisters grow more distant and her heart more weary with absence, it may be time to move again. Back to the States. But this time it is not toward a landscape mandated by the necessities of a job. We need not move because the externalities of our life compel us. Now, we have the chance to explore an imaginary landscape which will mold itself to us even as we fold into its contours.

So, I go on-line and look at the hills of Arkansas, the wooded fields of West Virginia, the plains of Oklahoma; think of quiet and peaceful walks in the evening. The hoot owl in the tree at dusk, the red-tailed hawk floating lazily above the trees. Lucinda dreams wistfully of the beaches of Sag Harbor, the gulls wheeling above the deck of a fishing boat, the row houses of Hartford, the gentle hills of Connecticut. For her a return to the States should be a return to the familiar, to ocean smells and beaches, to the voices of children, to the

lap of the waves, and flat northern syllables.

For me there is no return. For me there is only a movement outward which is also a movement inward. To me the world is too much with us. I have heard the voices of children day after day, and that of mothers, too, in the teeming hundreds.

I have had enough of beaches and sand, styrofoam cups, loud music, bright sunshine, and other folks' offspring kicking up sand. I've had enough of traffic and cities, of keeping up with appearances, of being accessible. I want the insulation of trees which have taken a long time growing, a mountain that stands between me and the cities, and

a damp morning in which the mist, slowly, like the gravity of old bones, melts away in the sun. Where the sun itself, forever weary in its business of lighting half the world, turns slowly and with wonder to discover us there behind the mountain, behind the trees, coming out in the late morning air. I want to craft words the way a West Virginia carver whittles his block of heartwood, half in play and half in deadly seriousness, then grins with delight when after days there appears in his gnarled old hand: a bird, a rose, a flame.



NON-FICTION

A Man Without a Past

Carlos Ochoa

There is a man who has no past, a universal figure, sometimes in the form of a man, sometimes in the form of a woman. His presence is tangible only for a moment considered sacred by most, celebrated annually. He is a man who is present at birth only, retiring when the process comes to an end. It is a universal figure: all men are born in the absence of a past. It would be horrible too to be born with a past, especially when one would have no knowledge about it.

The fact that at birth one lacks a past implies a complete innocence of the mind, a blank piece of paper waiting or hoping even, to be written on. Although, innocence denotes mostly a lack of knowledge, for which one must be able to make use of memory —ability gained and exercised during the beginnings of childhood.

Before childhood most are unable to remember anything relevant. How traumatizing it would be if one was able to remember birth! The *other* light at the end of the tunnel, and then a sudden feeling of being out in the open, breathing air, and then just to make sure you are doing well the doctor slaps you hoping to hear you cry. The first thing anyone in the room looks at is your groin and then a cry of “It’s a boy!” or “It’s a girl!” and hugging and handshaking and congratulating while you hang from your feet that are in the doctor’s hands, everyone is joyous about you and yet you are forgotten for a moment.

For most, the first real memory — or the earliest one that can be retrieved— takes place at two or three years of age.

One is then able to talk and walk, at that age one is truly experiencing the world. The experience gained will serve as the base for the future. If not, how would one be able to run and talk to friends and write and play?

But at birth one cannot run or talk, nor does one have any friends to talk to. If not, surely you would run out the door as soon as you are out of the womb, or complain and ask the doctor to set you down and slap him back, the words “Nurse, fetch me a towel, please,” coming out of your mouth.

However, one is born a man, or woman, with no past and then becomes the owner of experience, the owner of one moment that can be called a past. One is most certainly (and hopefully) unable to speak and move around and will chose to be held in one’s mother’s arms rather than running out the door.

One would expect that innocence leaves the soul moments after birth. Not to worry, innocence stays with one through life at varying degrees. Complete innocence at birth, partial at death. The present is innocence from the future, and as everyone is at least physically in the present, this innocence accompanies one from birth to death.

It is like waking up to a room illuminated by a crack of light that breaks through a space no wider than a finger. The curtains didn’t close right last night. Yellow is more yellow, blue is bluer. The opaqueness of a room equipped with good curtains disappears to brightness. Even when it is still dark outside the crack in the curtains lets light become the

burglar of the night. The room can no longer serve its purpose correctly. Darkness has been violated and it is now a more difficult task to sleep.

Innocence is a relative darkness, whereas light represents knowledge. With light everything is clearer, sometimes for the best, but most often not. Life is represented occasionally as the day and death as the night. The levels of innocence are fairly represented by the room.

Death is the most determinate statement of life (the final one too), an action that occurs to every life form, disregarding life expectancy. Death involves an action, a state of mind and of the body.

Death is horizontal.

When it comes it does not bother to knock on the door. (It can surprise you in the bathroom even with a locked door.) Death becomes the most egotistical verb.

In the future I will die.

In the present I die.

In the past I died.

Of course it is nearly impossible to say any but the first statement while it is still true.

Dead people have nothing to worry about, or so they say. But do they not say as well that ghosts are restless souls who left life with worries? It is almost desirable to stay as a ghost now that one is alive. It would allow more time of relative life. It would be painful, though, to stay or to come back. It would be painful to see things go by without taking you into account. Leaving you behind, a thing of the past (there is a man without a past).

People die with peaceful looks on their faces but it is impossible to know the reality of their expressions. True, it should be a relief to quit suffering after a long painful disease (live ones suffer pain at higher scale than the dead), but what if

death hurts? Real death, that is, death that you don't come back from to tell that you saw the light at the end of the tunnel. Ignorance is best sometimes.

I used to think that the stork brought you to your parent's arms, but then came the question: would the stork take you away at death?

Then my grandfather died, and the stork would lose its beak for ever. I was not shocked by his death, my mother's tears were far more impressive on my six year-old mind. I didn't go to the funeral, so with little explanation from my parents it was all up to my imagination to decide what happened.

My grandfather died of cancer of the pancreas a few months after my uncle was killed in a car accident.

"What do people do at funerals?"

"They go see dead people"

I imagined how my parents viewed my uncle and grandfather at the funeral. They were sitting on a pair of stools behind a sheet of glass like items at a store's window, for everyone to see one last time. Their eyes closed softly, both chins resting on chests that had long ceased to breathe, shoulders slouching, the corpses leaning against each other for lateral support.

"Dead people? Are they dressed?"

"Yes, in a suit or a nice dress."

They would be dressed; my parents told me so, in suits.

When everyone had seen them, death would come and put them both inside a black hearse, laying them face down if death was not careful enough.

The bird's songs would stop, and a silent noise would burn the air. A frozen wind (mute) would hide in the trees, provoking a shower of blood-colored flowers, dry blood.

"What happens when everyone is done looking at them?"

"They are buried in the cemetery."

Gravediggers would make a deep hole in the earth (to earth, ashes to ashes...) six feet deep and place the two bodies —now in coffins— next to my dead grandmother. Curious children would be peeking into the pit.

“Do people cry?”

“Not the dead ones.”

Adults would walk away, crying as dirt fell on the coffins. Everyone dressed in black like a starless night, some with sun- glasses censoring red eyes.

“Can I go to the next funeral?”

“If you are old enough, yes.”

NON-FICTION

In the Midst of October

Emily Burnor

Hiking in the Blue Ridge Mountains in the midst of October was a favorite family pastime. Every Sunday afternoon, our family slipped out of our stiff church clothes and into our warm sweatsuits. All four of us piled into our maroon station wagon and slowly began swerving up the winding trail. We left our small town behind us and entered into a land of vegetation, with an occasional chimney-puffing log cabin. We passed miles and miles of golden dry crops, and their vigilant scarecrows protecting over them. Then we took the swerving serpent of a road that I could never bear as a child. We revved up and up the mountainside, until our ears popped. Finally, we arrived.

We came to a shaded parking lot that had a few large log cabins made of wood and stone. My mom would always whisper to me, “Do you need to go potty?” But by that point, I was too eager to get on a trail and hike. There was a sign in front of four or five different trails. My family would always stop, debate on which trail to take, and begin our hike.

Our hikes along the Sharp Top Mountain trail were what I remember most from those days. With my first step, I could smell the wild combination of the warm sun and the autumn vacuum drying out the few dewdrops September had left behind. There was not a cloud in the sky, and the wind cooled the heat of the sun, making it a perfect day for hiking.

The trees loomed over the path, canopying us as we trotted up the rocky trail. The giant oaks swept overhead.

The thin cottonwoods were dispersed throughout the woods. Poplar trees, young and old, joined the mix. Thousands of trees surrounded me, none of which were the same.

Each tree had its special bark, its own trunk, from which extended its branches. Its leaves sprouted out of each individual branch, like multi-colored fingers extending from a scraggly hand. Each finger was spotted a different color; the striking reds, carrot-colored, umbrella yellows, milk chocolates, deep violets all crowded the looming trees, overwhelming their skinny branches. The branches dropped a handful at a time, left to drift down onto the rough, bare rocks and be crunched on.

Crunch, crunch, crunch. The multi-colored mattress of leaves padded my L.A. Gear light-up sneakers. The rigged rocks underneath my feet were uneven, but I learned the beauty of balance. Wide step, baby step. If I hit a wobbly rock, I searched desperately for my mom’s hand.

The wind pushed me forward, slightly hitting the back of my perspiring neck. My sweatsuit always tended to over-insulate me about three-fourths of the way through the hike. Every time the crisp wind whistled, a cascade of leaves would trickle to the ground. Occasionally, a leaf would tickle my shoulder, teeter, and then reluctantly join the rest of the leaves on earth.

Suddenly—stop! A slight wisp of movement. The four of us stood perfectly still. Silence. Then, it revealed itself. A beautiful doe, with long, delicate legs

supporting a toned, round belly. Its shiny, brownish fur reflected the sunlight. Its eyes reflected insecurity, the profundity of its pupils too black, too untrusting. We stood before it in awe. It stared suspiciously at us. I lifted my foot. The eternal four seconds we had with the deer ended as my foot returned to earth in slow motion. Crunch! Its ears perked up, its eyes widened, and its hooves clattered off into the protection of the woods.

I had scared the deer off. We sat in silence for a few moments. I felt my family's disapproving looks. We continued anyway.

Crunch, crunch, crunch. Shuffle, shuffle. Shhhhhh, trickle, trickle, trickle. Heh, heh, heh. I always heard myself panting on the Sharp Top trail.

Suddenly, there was a well-kept wooden sign saying "SHARP TOP

PEAK→" in black, bold letters. We scurried up the set of rocky stairs until we reached the clear top. The canopy of the forest was cleared off, and a few benches made of rock were the only sign of civilization. There was no graffiti, no signs, nor a haze of pollution in the distance. Above us circled two peregrine falcons, floating on the thermal, while below us lay a nest of yellow, red, green, and orange. In the distance, there were brown fields where the farmers were lighting matches to vast piles of leaves. On the other side of the mountain, there was a wrinkly little lady sitting in her cabin, blending the sweet juices of the fresh Granny Smith apples with her warm cinnamony spices to sell in her husband's country store. Somewhere, back in the woods we left, was the deer, wandering cautiously, with his untrusting eyes.



FICCIÓN

Náufragos en la vida

Yesul Myung

Todos los que vivimos lo hacemos como náufragos. Siempre andamos naufragando en esta vida. Nos movemos de un lugar a otro, chocando con nuevas experiencias y encontrándonos con fuerzas más grandes que nosotros, como el destino, el mar. Estas fuerzas nos controlan y mientras más las confrontamos y desafiamos, más desagradable se hace nuestra vida.

Para poder aventurar en el mar, donde somos más vulnerables, los náufragos siempre dejamos atrás lugares y cosas que amamos. Empezamos con la inocencia, la casa, la familia y, al final, la vida. Siempre arriesgamos estas cosas para poder ir al mar donde nos desarrollamos para otra etapa de nuestra vida.

Algunas veces llegamos a lugares que queremos y otras veces no, pero la única cosa que se aplica en las dos ocasiones es que nunca estamos preparados para estos nuevos lugares.

Por más que pensemos que estamos preparados siempre hay sorpresas y tristezas para las

cuales no estamos listos. Así como el náufrago que cae en una tierra desconocida, nosotros nos encontramos con gente mala, trabajos que no pagan bien, las desgracias del destino y, al final, la muerte. Así es la vida.

Nos movemos de isla a isla desnudos de entendimiento y

experiencias. Pero esa es la manera en que empezamos una nueva parte de nuestras vidas, todos empiezan como náufragos.

Todos empezamos como parte de la tripulación del barco. Nos adaptamos al olor salado del agua, al tedioso movimiento del barco y a la falta de comida fresca. Y justo cuando creemos que tenemos todo bajo control llega una tormenta que nos destruye y nos deja sin nada.

Y otra vez, empezamos desde el principio.

La corriente del mar nos lleva encima de un pedazo de madera hacia nuevos continentes. De las cosas malas salen buenas. Y así empezamos otra vida en otra tierra que solo conocemos mediante lo que hemos escuchado y visto.

Hay algunos que empiezan como náufragos en estas tierras y así se quedan. Las desdichas del mar los lastiman tanto que se hacen vulnerables a otros

“Tenemos en nosotros dos fuerzas poderosas, que triunfan de los hombres y triunfan de las cosas: ¡la vida y el amor!”

--Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera

problemas que se encuentran. Aquellos son los que se lastiman a sí mismos porque solo

ven las cosas malas de la vida y las cosas buenas las ignoran. Está bien vivir como náufrago al principio, pero quedarse en este estado crea soledad, ignorancia y altera a la persona. Estas personas viven las fatalidades de su vida una y otra vez y nunca ven a su alrededor para ver las oportunidades que se les ofrece.

Pero hay otros que visitan nuevos lugares como náufragos: pobres, ignorantes y solos, ellos solo empiezan de esa manera. Ellos visitan lugares desconocidos y crean experiencias, porque, claro, no se nace con ellas. Toman sus conocimientos pasados para poder usarlas como herramientas para lo nuevo e inesperado. Ellos se olvidan de la tormenta que los destruyó y en vez de ver lo que perdieron están agradecidos de lo que no perdieron, incluyendo su vida y sus amigos. La verdad es que los amigos siempre nos acompañan, aunque seamos náufragos.

Estas personas son las que miran al mundo tal como es, ven las cosas malas y las buenas, porque no existe un mundo sin el otro, y los equilibran. Ellos son los

que se desarrollan como personas. Cuando llegan a las tierras desconocidas ellos tratan de adaptarse de cualquier manera. Ellos son los que dan el primer paso, van a la escuela, tienen novio, van al trabajo, tienen esposo e hijos y, al final, mueren. Ellos son los que viven.

Nosotros vamos de un lugar a otro, pero nos acostumbramos a estos nuevos mundos. Unimos estas etapas de vidas y las hacemos una que es lo que nos hace ser lo que somos. Mediante tormentas e infortunios nos forzamos a hacer cambios, es la manera más eficiente. Pero todos, todos los que viven, empiezan como náufragos en la aventura de esta corta vida.



FICTION

Non-disclosure

Michael Hogan

Even those close to Willie Lomax didn't know him very well. He led a quiet life in a small town in West Virginia called West Haven where he lived on a rented property in a small ranch house that he shared with his girlfriend Anita. Willie worked as a landscaper and sometimes played in a Blue Grass band. On those occasions when he had a gig, he would pack up his banjo and head out, usually on a Thursday night and return home Saturday.

Anita seldom went along. She had her own life, working as a hairdresser at the Three Mile shopping center and some of her best customers came in on Thursday to get their hair done or their nails manicured for the weekend.

Willie never seemed to have much money, either from his job or his avocation, but the couple did well enough. The house was rented but they had a late model car. Sometimes Anita flew to Memphis to visit her aging father; sometimes Willie drove over to Oklahoma to visit his Mom.

Willie was fifty-eight, thinly built but wiry and strong. His mother, in her eighties, was too much for Anita who stopped going along with him on those trips. When asked about it later, Anita would say, "Willie had his life and I had mine. We were together but there were probably as many things we didn't share as things we did."

Anita was ten years younger than Willie and, although she sometimes regretted being saddled with the relationship, most of the time it was comfortable enough and she saw no need

to change it. She had her friends at the hair salon and at the local Baptist church. Willie had his music and, she guessed, a friend or two on the road. The only thing that did annoy her was Willie's penchant for watching T.V. in the evenings. He would sit in front of the set in his underwear and watch baseball, sitcoms, and then the news.

She considered him a comfortable but rather dull person, but she had grown used to his company and it seemed more trouble to change him than just accept him.

It was December of last year when she began to suspect that maybe Willie's life was more interesting than she had guessed. She had been thinking about buying Willie a new banjo case for Christmas to replace the old battered number he had been carrying around for the past twelve years. She had gone into the closet to check on the brand name of the case so that she could order a replacement of the same quality. When she opened it there was money inside. More money than she had ever seen in her life. And the bills were banded together, hundred dollar bills with bank wrappers marked \$100,000 for each stack. She was so frightened she didn't even bother to count how many stacks there were. Hurriedly, she closed the banjo case and put it back on its shelf in the closet.

When Willie got home that evening she didn't say anything to him about the banjo case. How could she begin? It would look like she was snooping among his things if she

mentioned the money. So, she asked him instead if he had a Blue Grass gig this weekend.

"Yep, down in Mount Hope," picking at his salad.

"Mount Hope? Where is that exactly?" she asked.

"Well, it's about ten miles north of Beckley. You know Beckley, that's where your girlfriend Norma is from."

"Well, that's where her ex-husband is from," replied Anita. "Norma is from over in Crab Orchard, they just met up at the race track. Stupidest move she ever made."

Willie did not rise to the bait. He knew that defending any man against his wife's alliance with Norma would be foolish, although he had met the husband a time or two and considered him a decent enough man. Outside a horn tooted.

"That'd be Norma and Sandi," Anita said jumping up. "We're going to the movies tonight. Listen, the roast is on the sideboard and I've already sliced it. There's french beans in the pot on the stove."

The women went to see a movie which was about a couple of bank robbers whose modus operandi was to kidnap a bank manager the night before a robbery, and then accompany him to the bank where they got him to open the vault. Then, they cleaned it out and made their getaway. The movie was a comedy of sorts, one of the robbers was a hypochondriac, the other a boxer. Both were escapees from prison. As she watched the movie Anita thought about Willie. How much did she really know about him anyway? Was he really playing the banjo on all those weekends? How could he have made so much money? And if the money was legally earned, why didn't he put it into a bank account? She wondered briefly if he was

selling drugs. But surely she would have known that. There would have been suspicious calls to the house, rough-looking visitors. But nothing like that ever happened. Willie sat around in the evening watching T.V., getting a snack around nine, and then heading to bed after the 11 o'clock news.

She could not picture him as a bank robber. Fifty-eight years old, a slight paunch from too much sitting around in the evenings, his breath a bit wheezy from cigarettes. Mostly he was tired, worn out at night. She could not imagine him with either the energy or the guts to rob a bank. But where could the money have come from?

The following week, reading the evening paper, she suddenly came across a short item in the "Crime Beat" section which stirred a memory.

"Willie?" she called from the kitchen where she was sipping her coffee.

"Yeah, Hon," he replied, his attention glued in the T.V. set.

"What was the name of that town again, where you played last weekend?"

"Huh? Oh, um...Mount Hope," he replied.

She read the short notice in the newspaper. "Farmer's Cooperative Bank in Mount Hope was robbed Friday afternoon by an armed gunman. An undisclosed amount was taken and the FBI is investigating. This is the twelfth bank robbery in West Virginia this year." The next day she went to the local library and began reading up on bank heists.

She discovered that last year in the United States there were over 8,000. Most were quick in-and-out robberies with an average take of \$1,200. More than fifty percent of bank robbers, she learned, were captured at the scene, and twenty percent within days of the offense. But that left another thirty percent. Of those, twenty percent went on to commit

multiple robberies. Some were killed in shootouts, others captured only after exhaustive investigations lasting years, even decades. When they were caught finally, it was usually by the IRS, not the FBI, as a result of large cash purchases or transfers caught by audits or supplied by informers. Which left ten percent. Ten percent got away, and their take was much more than the \$1,200 average. It was often in the hundreds of thousands and occasionally in the millions. These cases were seldom publicized. The FBI had a policy of not putting such bank robbers on the Most Wanted list until they knew exactly where they were. Otherwise, the ten percent non-closure rate would generate embarrassment for the federal agency. Anita could not know it but Willie was, in fact, one of the ten percent.

He had been pulling bank robberies in West Virginia, Kentucky and Ohio for the past twelve years. He had made a little over two million dollars. He hoped to retire when he was sixty, two more years, and he would purchase a comfortable waterfront property where he could fish or putt around a harbor or lake in a small inboard. But he was cautious. He knew that the IRS tracked large cash transactions, so he made no deposits or transfers larger than \$3,000 at a time. Always, he had a gambling trip, a banjo-playing gig in an after-hours joint, or some other plausible explanation for the deposit. And he declared taxes on all such "income." Still, that left approximately \$1,600,000 that he had not put away in CDs or IRAs, mutual funds or savings. And as to that money...well, as we have seen, it was sitting in 16 neat bundles of \$100,000 each in a banjo case on the top shelf of the hall closet.

"Willie?" Anita said, after they had cleared off the dinner dishes and just

before Willie returned again to the television.

"Yes, Hon," he replied distractedly, his mind already on the Red Sox game and the excitement of the pennant race.

"What would you do if your Mom died and left us a bunch of money, and all of a sudden we were rich."

"Huh? Well, that's unlikely. I mean, not that she won't die. But she's living on social security and the only thing she's got left of Pa's money is the old house. It might bring in a hundred thousand. But, even if that happened, it wouldn't make us rich."

"But supposed she did? Supposed she left us a million dollars. Would you take me to Paris? Would we go on a world cruise?"

"Sure we would, Anita. Paris, cruises, the works," Willie replied, returning to the t.v. and the Red Sox. They were only one game down in the series and he wanted to see if they could pull it off.

Two years later, Willie would have occasion to remember that night. He had been looking at brochures for waterfront property in Daytona Beach. This was to be his last year working. He was making careful plans for his retirement now that there were enough funds cautiously transferred to safe investments. There was still a few hundred thousand in the banjo case but he didn't even bother to count it. It was money he no longer even thought about. Then, there was a knock on the door.

It was special agent Phil Anderson of the Criminal Investigation Division of the IRS. An unassuming, balding man in his late forties, Agent Anderson nevertheless stuck fear into Anita's heart as he showed her his badge and stepped across the threshold.

"I wonder if you could explain the source of income for your cash purchase last week of \$12,350 for a European cruise package," he asked quietly.

While Anita blushed and stumbled, Willie began edging toward the back door, but the mild-mannered detective pulled out a Sig Sauer and pointed at his heart.

"Please sit down and join us, sir. I'm sure this conversation would interest you as well."

So, Willie sat, and listened to the conversation that he had ignored two years ago, when the Red Sox were down by one game in the series, and he was in a hurry to return to the T.V. and catch the latest scores.

"A blank piece of paper is God's way of telling the
writer how hard it is to be God."

--Sydney Shelton

NON-FICTION

On Camping, Fishing and Bubblegum

Meaghan Hoffman

My dad and I went to Basha's to pick up some last minute groceries, like ice and ground beef, for our camping trip to the Apache Reservation in the White Mountains. Dad let me get two packs of Zebra Bubble Gum, the kind that tastes like eight different fruity flavors and have zebra stripes on them, all for myself. I immediately started to chew on all of the pieces that were between red and pink because they were always the flavors I liked. I was constantly chewing gum that summer when I was seven, because my Grandma Ana had just taught me how to blow a bubble.

When we got home, Aunt Maria was there. She was going to watch the house for us while we were gone. She asked me to blow a bubble for her with my gum, so I tried to blow the biggest one I could. It got so big that when I crossed my eyes and leaned forward a little I could see it getting bigger and bigger. I rocked back and forth a few times, but I tripped and my hair fell forward into my eyes and the bubble burst. There was chewed gum everywhere, in my hair, on my nose, and stuck all over my upper lip.

I sat down on the wooden rocking chair in the living room while Aunt Maria brought a hot washcloth and my dad rubbed my face with soap and water. Then my mom brought an ice cube to get all the gum out. I sat there letting them rub me and burn me and freeze me half-crazy while Philip, my brother, ran around in circles in front of me, screaming with laughter.

"Gun-gun look, look!" He would say and stick his tongue out with a chewed up wad of gum on it.

Finally we left the house, but only after my gum had been confiscated. That night, I stood in front of the fire, and I smelled something moist and cool, but musty, like when I visited my grandma in Houston and it smelled like wet dirt and lots of grass. I started to sway in front of the growing fire, waving my arms over it and chanting something that I thought was like the language that Indians spoke. The fire seemed huge, it's flickering flames seemed to reach for my tiny hands and the spars of cracking wood arched towards me like little red fireflies whose light faded when they drifted away from me. On that night it seemed that if I bent my head back fast enough that the stars would rush forward as if returning from some other place in the sky they had gone to when I wasn't looking. How strange that as a child everything was there for me to make my own at will. Now at the threshold of adulthood I realize that nothing is free, that I have to make things mine by way of work and achievement.

The next day I went fishing for the first time. I didn't know what I was doing but my dad said it was fun to fish because we got to eat what we caught afterwards.

"Will I catch a fish, Daddy?" I asked eagerly. I waited for him to answer as I watched him carefully attach the metal weights and the buoy-like bobber onto my line.

"Maybe, Cutes," he said using my nickname with a smile. "Let's hope so!"

After that I desperately wanted to catch a fish, even one of those retarded minnows that stayed under the rocks and in shallow parts of the creek. I didn't know you really weren't supposed to catch those and I really did believe they were mentally-disabled fish.

I learned to get used to the acrid, sticky stench of the power-bait my dad liked to use. I always chose the pink, salmon flavored kind instead of the neon yellow one because I thought it was bait for girls only. I made Philip cry because I laughed at him when he used it.

My dad had just helped me cast after *something*, probably a crawdad, had taken my stupid pink bait again. I was waiting for him to reel in my line till it was taut, when I looked up.

A herd of mustangs were crossing the creek to the immediate right of us. It was like a freak accident, like I was watching a live shooting of a John Wayne movie or something from *The Alamo*. The mustangs galloped down the steep side of the opposite bank. I could see their powerful chests and thin legs gleaming in the early morning sun. I thought that they were wet and that's why they gleamed like angels. I didn't believe they were real angels because they didn't have wings. Waves and droplets sprayed where their hooves had pounded across the creek in swift, rapid strides. Then...they were gone.

I started bawling. My mom rushed over to sooth me by saying I wasn't hurt and the horsies were gone now. Didn't I think they were pretty?

"Yes, but..." I sniffled pitifully with tears coursing down my red cheeks, "They scared away the fish!" It didn't matter, though. I was nine before I caught my first fish.

When we were getting ready to leave my dad made me take the water jug back to the cherry-colored truck we borrowed from my Uncle Rich. In the side pocket of the door I found my zebra bubble gum. I went over to a medium-sized boulder that had the least amount of that crusty green fungus on it and started to chew on the last two pieces of peach flavored gum. I saw Philip coming towards me and I quickly hid the wrappers in my pocket.

He sat down next to me on the boulder and I hid the gum under my tongue.

He looked at me and said in his lisp, "I'm sowwy you didn't catch a fish, Gungun." I smiled and tried to say something but the gum popped out of my mouth before I could. He looked at me with wide brown eyes with his bangs flopping nearly to his eyebrows.

"Don't tell Mom, please Philip!" I pleaded helplessly. It was too late. I saw his mouth already forming the word "Mom."

"GUN-GUN'S CHEWING
GUUUUUUM!"

PROSA

Señales

Laura Jileta

Te pasan cosas en esta vida y tú las pasas por alto. Simplemente lo tomas como cualquier otro acontecimiento del día. Pero estas cosas que te pasan son señales que debes tomar, porque si lo haces darán un cambio a tu vida. Hay días que puedes ver a alguien en una esquina encorvado y lo único que pasa por tu mente es cómo esquivarlo para no darle limosna. Cuando en sí quizá haberlo visto un poco más y no haberlo evadido te podría haber cambiado la perspectiva, la perspectiva que tenías hacia todo. Simplemente el señor te pudo haber dado una sonrisa y con eso te sentirías que todo hubiera cambiado; pensar que aunque se encuentre a lo mejor en sus últimos días se dignó darte una sonrisa, y, sin embargo, tú lo evades. No te das tiempo de analizar nada porque simplemente sabes que son cosas de la vida diaria y no hay por qué desperdiciar un poco de tu “valioso” tiempo.

Se muere alguien ante tus ojos y tú sólo piensas que es una casualidad y das un paso hacia delante sin pensar en lo sucedido. Te vas de ahí o al menos tratas. Piensas que es algo que debía de pasar; te escudas en pensar que a lo mejor la persona ya era demasiado vieja o simplemente la enfermedad era incurable. En pocas palabras, no le encuentras el sentido sentimental, sino el sentido real. Pero aun así, aun cuando tratas de escabullirte existe una duda muy dentro de ti. Y te preguntas sabiendo la respuesta: ¿Esto pasó porque así es el destino o no? Tu mente dice sí, pero tu

corazón dice no. ¿A quién creerle? Estás en un dilema: creer en tus sentimientos o en tu razonamiento. Pero desgraciadamente no existe una respuesta correcta, sino el balance perfecto que al volver a dar ese paso lo harás hacia adelante, pero sabrás que podría este ser tu último.

Volteas de nuevo hacia atrás al cadáver tendido en la cama blanca en un ambiente pálido. Te quedas inmóvil por unos instantes. Tus ojos tratan de cerrarse ante la encadilante “*blanquees*”, tus oídos se vuelven sordos eludiendo cualquier llanto, incluso el tuyo, tratas de no pasar saliva evadiendo así cualquier sabor de ese instante y por último tu nariz se niega a respirar, se niega a saber que en esos instantes el oxígeno ha aumentado. Tu olfato quiere pensar y quiere hacerte saber que el próximo paso que darás será uno común y corriente, uno en el cual nada ha cambiado ni el hecho de una muerte podrá afectarte. Tus manos se mantienen pegadas a los lados de tu cuerpo estáticas tratando de estar inmóviles. Tanto duras en esto que la ironía es que el muerto que se encuentra en esta habitación no es aquella señora con cara demacrada (que ya era su hora de morir) y ni siquiera ese enfermo con la enfermedad incurable, sino tú. Tú que te niegas a aceptar la realidad en la que vives, te niegas a aceptar el exceso de oxígeno, te niegas a aceptar que no eres inmune, te niegas a aceptar que el próximo paso que darás no tendrá sentido porque simplemente no lo vives.

NON-FICTION

Shadows

Rosie Garciamontes

I'm sixteen years old and I claim that I am old enough to live alone if I had to. I'm not saying that I want to, I just think I could. But the night always proves me wrong. I lay in bed unable to fall asleep and convincing myself that I hear footsteps, that there's someone outside my window or even in my room. It's nonsense because I have two dogs that could kill any intruder. But I still think I can hear it and I feel like a little kid; I can't move, I don't breathe, I just stare into the darkness trying to hear the footsteps. I wouldn't have this shadow haunting me if it wasn't for this spring break incident.

It was Monday, first week of spring break, 5 A.M. My neighbor, Danielle, was walking in Santa Anita, a safe and friendly neighborhood, which is a gated and a suburban community. She did this everyday for her exercise. But this morning was different. Most of the families were away at the beach or visiting relatives somewhere. As she was walking down the mountain watching her cold breath freeze, she heard footsteps behind her and didn't pay much attention to them. She kept on walking, thinking about what she had planned for that day and if her husband was awake yet. But after a while she realized that the footsteps she had heard a while ago were still there. She increased her pace to see if she could lose the shuffling step behind her, but she didn't. She looked over her shoulder, but could not see who it was. She started running but that didn't help either; he was determined to seize her.

He caught up with her, pulling her to a halt with a firm arm around her neck. His other arm held a gun to her back. Danielle was a strong woman and she had never feared guns, so as soon as she felt it, she tried to free herself from him. Twisting and turning, she hoped that his grip would weaken, but it didn't. He took out a knife and that's when her fear rose. She yelled at the top of her lungs and kept trying to get away from him. He then was fed up with her and started stabbing her with no mercy; she fell to the ground and he still would not stop. Some neighbors turned off their lights as if they weren't home and she wondered, what happened to friendliness and humanity? She couldn't believe they had done that when they were people she knew, people with whom she ate lunch every Thursday. But this was proof of how hypocritical people can be.

Her screams could be heard two blocks away. Only one family whom she didn't even know came out to help her, and this is when the assailant fled. Towels and towels were brought for Danielle. The towels were soaked in blood, dripping all over the place; they were barely enough to stop her life from spilling. An ambulance and the police were called and her husband was contacted at home.

When the Mexican police got there, they began asking questions such as: "What's your name? Where do you live? Do you fight with your husband? Maybe this is all his doing?" Instead of helping her into the ambulance, they continued asking such questions.

Danielle lost vast quantities of blood; she was stabbed in her genitals many times, the knife cut through her vagina. Re-constructive surgery was performed and the only reason she lived was because she was such a strong woman. As soon as she recovered, she called her lawyer, a detective, and the American and French embassies for help (she is French and her husband is American.) She also wanted everyone to know what had happened, especially the women, so we would be careful. She told us that the most frightening thing about the assailant was the way he looked at her. He was a tall, skinny man who looked harmless, but he was surprisingly strong. His eyes gave him away though, they were what got her more scared



because they showed insanity, rage and drug use. While she was fighting him, her husband came to mind, how he was peacefully eating breakfast while reading *El Mural*, a popular Mexican newspaper. If he only knew what was happening, if he only knew she was ready to die, ready to give up.

The people who helped her really saved her. But how can anybody live peacefully after being slashed by a nut? How can anybody ever be able to sleep again after such mishap?

Many people believe that the criminal was somebody who used to live in Santa Anita, somebody who, because of excessive drug use over a long period of time, was currently at a recovery home. This man was allowed to visit his aunt (who doesn't live in our guarded compound) during the holidays, but there are ways to escape any house. Also, there was easy access into Santa Anita through the mountain because it is the only place where the fence isn't very high.

We found out that Danielle was not the first to be attacked this way in Santa Anita; she was only the first who tried to do something about it. Sadly, money is very powerful in Mexico and this man's parents had a lot of it, so as soon as he was claimed a suspect, the investigation was dropped and there was nothing Danielle could do. The rest of us were never informed whether or not he was caught or

if he's even back at the recovery home.

So the secure neighborhood I arrived to almost six years ago is not the same anymore. I used to go to the park with my friends at midnight and play basketball, but our fear and our parents' fears prohibit us from doing so anymore. In the past we never locked our doors. Heck, they were sometimes left wide open, but it's not the same anymore. Now we know this felon could strike back at anytime; he could simply come over the mountain, get in, and stab the first person he sees.

Shadows keep haunting me night after night. I find myself with the light on at 4 o'clock in the morning, my trembling hands holding my rosary. How can anybody sleep knowing there's a deranged man out there ready to attack? It's been four months since it happened and I still lie awake, frightened, praying for him, praying that he doesn't hurt anybody else.

People should realize that even the unimaginable can happen in the safest

neighborhood. It's always a good idea to learn kickboxing or some other method of self-defense, at least carry pepper spray. I hope this incident doesn't haunt me forever, but the image of Danielle falling to the ground with a lunatic swinging a knife at her has not left my mind. "*Lo más impresionante era su mirada de loco,*" the most impressive thing was his look, his eyes, which revealed insanity. Her voice telling us this will never leave me.

"A human being can survive any "what" in
life as long as he has a "why" to live."
--Victor Frankl

POESÍA

Siete Lunas Diego Soberanes

Siete lunas y te irás
Con tus ojos futuros y lejanos
Y mis manos llorando su vacío

Quizás se me pierda tu memoria
Puede ser que tu ausencia no me atrape
Tu silueta, tal vez, se desdibuje

Y trataré de convencerme:
La primera soledad será difícil
Después... mejor no haber nacido

Soledades que ensordecen tu recuerdo
Maquinando la estrategia canallada
Y me clavan en la frente la derrota

Siete lunas y te irás
Con tus manos sin las mías
Y mis ojos sin futuro... y sin los tuyos

SIN FRONTERAS

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1997 Highest Award
1998 Award of Superior
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2001 Highest Award

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POESÍA

Sueño, fugaz viento

Jesús Ángel Sánchez Juárez

Del amor, tus ojos piden
caricias con gritos que soslayan
gotas en besos equívocos,
en pieles de manos que sudan
y entretejen temor de ceguera.

No has dejado salir de ahí
al pequeño monstruo blanco
que atrae el mar y trae los sueños a cuevas

Del primer contacto, la lágrima cae,
hunden en tu pecho mis manos de papel,
romper su espalda con afán bravío,
corrió el sudor, lascivo y tibio,
entresacando de su piel páginas.

Desde luego, huyes, con todas
las posibles ganas, deseas dejar
ajenos a ti misma los portazos,
los regresos fracasados, los espejos
y sus interiores humillantes.

Renace el hálito de esperanza
que insiste en escaparse
de entre mis manos,
mis manos hablan caricias de pétalos
aromados de océanos, aromados de ti.

¿No te puedo encerrar viento
entre mis manos?
para que no destruyas mi sueño.

The Sleepover

Emily Burnor

Brooke and Amanda were sprawled out across a large sleeping bag on Brooke's living room floor, all lights out except for the small candle lit on the glass coffee table. Brooke was lying on her back, staring at the ceiling, dazed, while Amanda shuffled through some old magic cards she found in a nearby magazine rack. It was their weekly sleepover, the traditional party of two they held every Friday night, a custom they shared since the third grade. Brooke, a pretty, black-haired thirteen-year-old with large breasts for her age, suddenly rolled over and looked at her best friend.

"Amanda," she said, "I have something really important to tell you."

Her best friend looked up with concern. Her green eyes reflected a glowing yellow tone in the glow of the candle. "What's going on, Brooke?"

Brooke looked into her friend's worried face. Amanda's mouth was pointing slightly downward, and her lips were drawn tight. Brooke paused for a moment. She stretched her arms forward, and slid back down onto the ground.

Amanda leaned forward. She poked her finger into Brooke's shoulder. "Tell me," she gently insisted.

Brooke kept her face to the carpet. In a muffled tone, she said, "You know how I had to stay after school yesterday afternoon?"

"Yeah, I remember," Amanda replied.

"Well, I was waiting outside of the school when Collin Larks came outside," Brooke said.

Amanda gasped excitedly. "He is so gorgeous!"

Brooke nodded. "And older," she added. "And he stopped to talk to me."

"Ok, details, right now!" Amanda demanded.

"Well," Brooke continued, "he came over and said, 'Hi, Brooke.' And then, he sat down, and asked me a few things like why I was still there after school, if I liked middle school, if I had Mr. Moseley for math...things like that. It was starting to get really late, so I told him that I should probably start walking towards my house. And so he walked with me. I don't know, we just kept talking...and about five minutes into the walk he just turned to me and asked me, 'What would you do if I kissed you right now?'"

Amanda slapped the floor. "Get out!"

"No," said Brooke plainly. "And I just didn't say anything. Instead, I closed my eyes. Two seconds later, he kind of grabbed me by my shoulders and pressed his lips against mine. Then, he started poking his tongue through my lips. I had no idea what to do, so I just started giggling. It was kind of slimy, and I...I don't know..."

Amanda inhaled deeply. "Brooke," she said matter-of-factly, "you were what they call 'French-kissed.'"

Brooke turned her head from the carpet and looked at her friend. "You think I don't know that?" she asked. "In fact, I kissed him *back*. His lips were very soft, and I could taste Doublemint gum."

Amanda shrugged. "So what? It's not a big deal. Most people have been kissed by now anyway."

Brooke sat up, offended. "Well, I don't think Miss I-Know-Everything-About-Guys has been, has she?"

Amanda glared at Brooke. "And, your point is? I am saving my first kiss for the right guy, not for some popular guy that's just going to forget about me anyway."

Brooke opened her mouth, as if she were going to fight back, but nothing came out. Her spine curved downward, and her head dropped disappointedly against her pillow. "I guess you're right," she admitted, keeping her gaze towards her bare feet.

Amanda extended her legs forward and plopped backward. She rolled over to her side, where she smiled to herself. Brooke peered up at her best friend, lying still, and slowly took the same position, her back towards Amanda's.

"Amanda?" Brooke said.

"Hm?"

"Are you asleep?" Brooke asked.

"Almost," said Amanda. "I'm tired, aren't you?"

"Yeah, pretty much," Brooke answered.

Brooke pushed herself up to the coffee table and blew the candle out. She retook her position on the sleeping bag, and sat staring into the darkness. She thought about how Collin had stopped in his tracks and asked her in his beautiful, maturing voice, "What would you do if I kissed you right now?" *What*

a question, Brooke thought sarcastically to herself. *What if I kicked you in your balls? Or yelled "RAPE!" at the top of my lungs? What would YOU have done?*

She thought about how entrancing he was. No one had ever looked at her like Collin did, that glazed, hungry look that only the starving people on World Help Organization commercials have. She wondered what *she* had looked like to him. A timid, black-haired girl with nice hips and big boobs? *Of course*, she thought. *Amanda's right...he liked my boobs. He'll just forget about me, won't talk to me ever again. Used, that's what I am. Used.*

A first kiss wasted on some fourteen-year-old jerk that just was looking for an easy target. *I'm so stupid*, she thought. *What would Amanda have done? Probably slapped him and told him he was an idiot. It shouldn't have mattered if I thought he was cute, or if he was sort of cool to talk to. Even if I liked it, it was incredibly wrong!*

Brooke's eyes filled with tears. She thought about how Collin seemed so sincere, but was really so false. She thought about Amanda saying to her how she would wait until she met someone that really cared about her, that she would not let herself be used. Her best friend, her true reliable source, told her she was used. And the worst part was, she liked it. She loved it! She loved the way her tongue felt in his mouth, the way he wrapped his fingers around her shoulders. Her neck hairs rose when he asked her those few words... but it was not real. It was just a set-up. *Why didn't I have Amanda just wait for me after school? I had to run into that guy, and get myself into all sorts of trouble. And now, he probably ran off to tell all his little skateboarding*

friends every detail of the episode and that I am easy. The seventh-grade slut.

Tears ran freely down Brooke's cheeks, and she stifled her sobs. She closed her eyes, but the vision played and replayed in her head. She tried thinking about the funny movie Amanda and she had watched earlier, but it just reminded her of how Amanda's green eyes shone the light from the television, just like they had shone when she was leaning forward anxiously. Brooke just lay there, preoccupied with the whole situation, wondering what her best friend was thinking.

Amanda, pretending not to hear Brooke's sobs, closed her eyes. A picture of Brooke first arriving at Tomahawk Elementary School came into her mind, how pretty she looked in her navy jumpsuit, how her hair was so perfectly curled. She remembered how Brooke was so timid and so scared, and how red her face turned when the teacher demonstrated her beautiful cursive writing to the class. She thought about the time Brooke had decided to hide in the laundry basket while playing hide-and-go-seek with her neighbors, and ended up peeing on a towel. She thought about roller-blading the bike trail for hours, telling all sorts of stories, both real and made-up and seeing which one was most believable. And all the times they went to Putt-Putt and drove go-carts with some friends, which was always followed by their private pizza and slumber party at Brooke's. Or entering middle school, and coordinating outfits the first day. It seemed that everything they had done since the third grade was *together*. Then, she began imagining Brooke walking with that boy on the path, French-kissing for the first time. *Idiot*, she thought. *How dare he try and do that to our friendship!* And she

closed her eyes, trying to sleep. But Brooke's body was pulsating with repressed sobs. Amanda just swallowed the huge lump in her throat, pretending to be asleep.

The next morning, it was time for Saturday morning donuts. As Brooke and Amanda sat eating the pastries and sipping on milk, Amanda said, "I forgot to ask you last night..."

She paused, focusing on the sugar-coated donut in her hands. Then, she quickly spurted, "Did you like it?"

Brooke reached for a fresh napkin, wiping the chocolate frosting off of her hands. She placed the napkin down, gulped down the rest of the cold milk, and began fidgeting with the blue cup.

"No," she said. "It was horrible. Just horrible."



POETRY

Portrait of the Tortured Artist

Tunde Akinade

A dark figure sits alone
On a small hard bed,
In a tiny, barren room.
With curtains drawn tight.
The unsympathetic glow of the computer screen
The only light, that casts shadows upon the walls and the mind.

A solitary man,
Strong, heavy hands pressed hard against his face;
That is etched with the deep lines
From the demons
Slashing at his soul,
Within.
So far past emotion, no tears can fall.
A sip of whiskey to ease the pain.

Reminiscent of so many who have passed before
Mind, heart, and soul devoted to create,
While he destroys himself.



NON-FICTION

Twisted Expectations

Lauren Nichols

I wiggled my inflamed toes sticking out of the bright blue cast. The light pink nail polish I had so painstakingly applied three days earlier was chipped and dirt had collected under the ingrown toenail. The teacher's voice seemed far off as though enveloped by a heavy mist as she tried to explain the difference between the tangent and the cotangent of a triangle to the class. I didn't understand how I was supposed to concentrate on math while my left leg felt as though spiders were crawling up and down, weaving an eternal web. I reached down to scratch my ankle and my fingertips hit the hard cast that now seemed to govern my life. It had taken me ten minutes to get up the flight of stairs, beads of sweat accumulating around my hair line, menacing to roll down my forehead, herds of eighth graders pushing and shoving their way down, whipping their textbook-laden backpacks against my shaky crutches. Breathing heavily, I had arrived at my seat in class five minutes late, only to discover to my despair that I had forgotten my notebook in my locker and now had a zero for that day's homework.

When I was in first grade I remember a boy came to school with a cast after falling off his bike. The teacher had given him an honorary seat in the front of the room and gave him an extra chair to prop his leg up. I had gazed at the white cast on his small leg with such amazement and jealousy. I wanted my own cast to have everyone in the class sign and draw pretty hearts on, for everyone to swarm around me at recess

and listen to me boast of my bravery and describe what the forbidden realm of the hospital and emergency room was like. I wanted my own pair of aluminum crutches so that others would buy me my lunch at recess while everybody else admired my sparkling white cast. I saw a broken leg as a token of bravery and the shiny crutches as an emblem of power. For my birthday my parents bought me a doctor kit so that I could smother my dolls in bandages, but it wasn't the same as having my own injuries to show off. Every time I fell and scraped my knee I would come up to my parents and show them my bruise, hopeful that the leg might be broken. I imagined them rushing me to the hospital where a nurse in a white uniform and a big smile would hand me a teddybear to hug, and a doctor with a stethoscope around his neck would wrap my leg carefully into the bandage and magically make it cast-hard. Usually my parents would simply hand me a wet washcloth and instruct me on the proper use of Band-Aids.

I was ignorant then of the fact that a fractured bone was as bad as a death sentence and crutches were slave masters. I had no idea that they wouldn't let me have a minute of peace, forcing me to haul myself around with screaming arm muscles while the ligaments and muscles in my useless leg slowly wilted. A crutch wasn't the only thing I had wished for that was not all it was cracked up to be. In second grade I had wanted more than anything to have my own pair of braces. Part of my desire was because my older sister had gotten them and I could not

stand letting her have all the excitement. When I went to the dentist I would strain my jaw, faking what I thought to be a good impression of an overbite. To my dismay the dentist would always pat me on the back and congratulate me on my perfectly straight teeth. I longed to have the metal pieces hug my teeth and have them shimmer in the sunlight everytime I smiled. Often I would open up a paperclip, easing out the folds and shape it into a half circle inserting it in my mouth and then admire my work in the mirror. I would contemplate the way the thin metal band illuminated my face, accenting the glint in my eyes.

When I turned thirteen the dentist suggested I get x-rays of my mouth and stated that I would need a retainer. I was thrilled. I was not expecting the nights when my mouth would feel like it was caving in on itself or the mornings when all I could manage to eat was a banana. When I went to bed I would jam it in my mouth to please my mom and then spit it out as soon as she turned out the lights. I would do the same before school; I couldn't concentrate when I felt the throbbing go all the way up into my temples. I began to loath the dentist appointment. I had to go to every two weeks, where the bands were tightened and forced into my mouth, after which I would get lectured on using it more consistently. The terror of the dentist's chair and the repulsion of the pink and silver-colored piece I was expected to keep in my mouth went on for two years.

I was lucky, though. After one of my visits to the torture room, the dentist came up to me and I braced myself for another sermon on how I wasn't using my retainer frequently enough. Instead I was greeted by a smile and he congratulated me on my vast improvement and told me I should use it for about a week more and I would be done. I was as happy as the day he had told me I would need that horrid apparatus.

Every part of growing up always seemed better when I was little. I wanted to have exciting things happen in my life, I wanted to have the freedom to go wherever I wanted. I wanted to grow taller so I could reach the chocolate chips on the top shelf in the pantry, and I wanted to learn how to write so that I could keep journals and write to my friends. I imagined growing up to be a doctor, learning how to drive and going to college. Now, only a few years older, I regret every chocolate chip I have ever eaten, every time I get dressed in too-snug Levi's. I do not have time to write for pleasure and have long ago shed the desire to become a doctor. I have not yet gotten a driver's license even though I could have two years ago. All I still look forward to is moving on to college and hoping it will be better than everything else has turned out to be. I probably will always wish for what I have not yet experienced, but for the time being, I must enjoy what I have already received, even if it is only a pair of crutches.

NON-FICTION

The Underworld

Cyané Quijano

No matter how many times I try it, every time feels like the first in my life. The last time I did it was at Rangiroa Lagoon, French Polynesia. My family and I got on the dingy with our snorkeling equipment; the tanks were already there, waiting for us. We were inside the lagoon, heading toward the open sea. The ride was better and more fun than any roller coaster I have ever ridden. Inside the lagoon, the water was turquoise and green and blue. The clouds were spectacular; they were white cotton candy floating in mid-air. The sky was clear and intense blue; the horizon could hardly be distinguished.

We had to hold on to a rope throughout the ride, so we wouldn't fly out. Our wet suits were down to our waist; splashes of water on our shoulders cooled down the hot sun. At the mouth of the lagoon the water looked like gelatin, it moved uniformly in waves. We could spot a pack of dolphins coming near the dingy to race with the pilot.

The open sea was very rough. The waves hitting the dingy and the violent wind made a lot of noise. We had to hold on tight while we put on all our gear. The pilot and the guide helped us with the tanks; they were heavy and hard to put on with such movement. When we were all ready, we got closer to the edge of the dingy. I was scared, and thrilled, and excited, as if it were my first time. I secured my mask and inflated my jacket. The guide began the countdown. One... (I questioned myself whether or not to throw myself off backwards from the dingy), two... (I grew more and more

scared), three... (I closed my eyes and held my mask)...

I breathed deeply, looked around to see if everyone was okay, and descended into a completely different world, where we, too, were both predators and prey. The reef was one hundred-twenty feet below us, although our view was blocked by a pack of about three hundred gray reef sharks. We were the intruders; about ten gray tip reef sharks circled around us violently. For a second I hesitated, trying to escape their cold eyes. What kept them from attacking us? They looked deep into our eyes for challenge, and then turned, and came back. We were now ninety feet deep, getting closer to the reef.

To the right was a profound blue; the reef kept stair casing into the depths of the ocean. It was not fear, not amazement, but something in between both that gave me shivers whenever I stared in that direction. We heard cries like a high-pitched siren. It was the dolphins who were playing on the waves a while ago. This was such a euphoric moment. It was delightful to watch the dolphins swim by closely playing with each other and laughing. They were protecting a little one; he was the most playful.

After every breath I felt more secure and calm; the sound of the compressed air being exhaled and inhaled reverberated throughout all that silence. My strokes were slow and wide. My body became more and more relaxed, almost shut down. I crossed my arms over my chest to keep warm.

We were flowing with the current, watching the sun filter through the water and hit the coral playfully. Some coral were phosphorescent, some purple, pink, red, orange, blue, white... They were made up of tiny snowflake-shaped crystals.

The fish were beautiful. Some were green, and had noses like Pinocchio's. Other fish were small, half-black and half-white. There were also tuna, and marlins. We even saw one barracuda. There was another fish—the Napoleon fish—which was huge and green, and very curious; he followed us all the way. There's more life in that spot than any other in the whole world. We were told that diving in Rangiroa was kind of cheating, because one saw more life in one day than most people in dozens, hundreds of other dives. We also saw two turtles; they were not rushing. They seemed very peaceful. And a manta ray flew toward us and then drifted away peacefully, leaving a shadow behind.

The current started to get stronger as we approached the mouth of the lagoon. We just let ourselves drift in with all the sharks and fish, and enjoy. The bed of the mouth was sandy and white. The walls of the mouth had caves packed

with fish; no doubt some white-tip reef sharks were resting inside.

Inside the lagoon there was no current. We began rising at that point. We had to do a safety stop of five minutes, fifteen feet below the surface. Otherwise, the nitrogen would collect in our veins and bones, leading to death. It is incredible how one can stay suspended in mid-ocean. We even danced a waltz before ascending.

The exact moment I popped my head out of the water I was disconnected from the wonderful world below. I was focusing on getting up on the dingy. First, I gave the conductor my weight belt, and then my flippers so I could come up. On the ride back, I thought of how it was so much more different down there, so peaceful and quiet and still. It felt as if I were in a dream, where I could breathe and float underwater. Every movement was so tranquil; every breath so calm. There was no hurry or rush, everything just flowed at its pace.

That dive, where the sharks were waiting for us to enter their territory, and where the dolphins greeted us, was the best, because it was the last. The last for that trip anyway—but one of many in my life to come.

POETRY

Valley of the Shades Tunde Akinade

I look down upon the valley of shadows,
As the warm light fills me
And the green grass lures me.
Fondly I gaze
While the pressure grows.

I touch the crystal blue water
Of the river,
That winds lazily through the shade
Of the trees that line its banks.
Longingly I watch
As the pressure builds.

My eyes fall upon the souls,
That sit, stand, or lie,
Silently on the soft grass
In the deep valley.
I look into their eyes as they stare into a distant space
Or to a place known long ago.
As the pressure explodes
Onto the wall, in abstract art
And slides to the floor.
The gun falls from my hand.



POESÍA

Vuelves

María del Lourdes Govea Mendoza

Regresas furtivo horadando mi sueño
No hablas, sonrías
No explicas, me abrazas...
Y corren en tu hombro
Recuerdos ardientes:
Añoranza y nostalgia:
Memoria imposible en el alba naciente

Aún siento tu cuerpo y tu aliento en mi cuello
Pero opaca la luz tu figura
Y se torna inasible tu otrora presencia

Y cierro los ojos ansiosa por verte
Mas tú ya no vuelves...
Das la espalda silente
Te vas como antes

Y siento en el agua tu abrazo de sueño
Y vivo este día en duermevela perenne
Y busco en tu risa, en tu mirada remota,
En tus brazos lejanos
Tu ausencia de siempre

“Las palabras van al corazón, cuando han salido
del corazón.”

--Solon

POETRY

Watching Movies

Michael Hogan

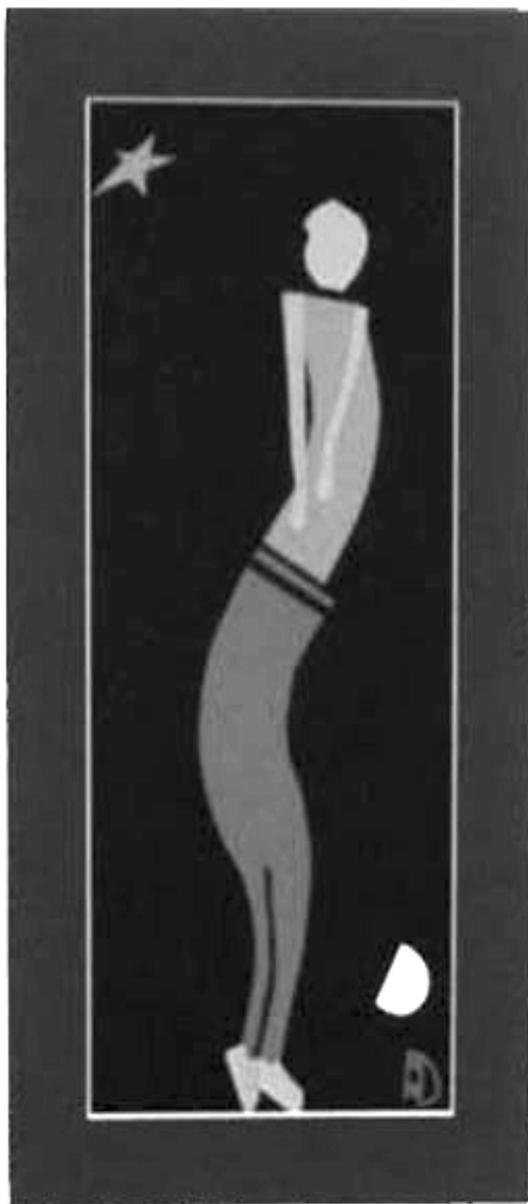
Listen, this is true. When the movie is good, you just go in and disappear. At the end when you walk out, just for a while you have an aura: you're taller, braver, more beautiful, living in another world.

Then your friends begin talking about the plot, the action scene, or where they parked the car. You blink, and ratchet back to normal, as if all these things are important. So, the world tilts back again: your imagination pruned like a bonsai. Your life revised, like the red pen of the substitute teacher crossing out the best lines.

Still, the moment just before, resonates in the acoustics of memory; distant, until you find it again in a moment alone, which makes ordinary life seem an act of suspension, putting the tape on hold.

See. What happens out there all around, like where the car is parked and who said what about whom, can't get you to what is real. Everything terrible and wonderful is where you once were and never knew it at the time. And the social whirl is but an echo, a shadow.

What light you possess, like the movie images which fade in the darkness of an underground garage, is in that part of you which can never be safe--which can never truly be--as long as others are watching, listening, talking like a swarm of bees, like a joke you don't understand, like that couple yelling at each other now, because they could not find where they parked the car.



NON-FICTION

Zucci Barry Krangle

I wasn't completely convinced. This was it, the last morning I would be able to scratch his head and nuzzle those silky ears, a routine old Zucci and I had shared for the past eighteen years. A routine predated marriage, kids, mortgage and all sorts of other serious decisions, especially the one I had to live up to this afternoon. It was time. He could hardly get up any more, barely able to walk... it was the right thing to do. I collapsed and buried myself in his mane. Zucci stretched and laboriously opened his cloudy hazel eyes. His mammoth head followed me to the door. I rode off to school wearing sunglasses.

I rode my bike as usual. Zucci was everywhere I looked. He used to ride to school in my pocket until he was old enough to trot right beside my bike, nipping and growling at my front tire so he wouldn't have to run too fast. I'd pretend to try and lose him. That was the game...

Today, I rode slowly.

Zucci was a five-dollar dog. He had been discovered at the bottom of the heap at the S.P.C.A. A girl in my grade

seven class showed up one day with five bucks in an envelope.

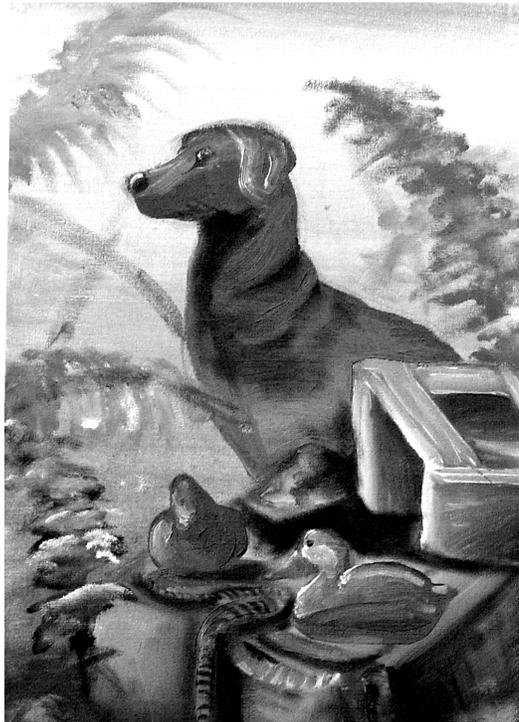
"Mr. Krangle, you need a dog," she said. "You can't live in the Creek without a dog. There's a puppy at the pound, I picked him out for you. The pound guy knows which one. Bring him to school tomorrow."

So I did, for fifteen years, until his hips started giving out.

Zucci rarely missed a day of school. We kept a book of matches on my desk because his farts were so stinky. We even had a Zucci monitor, to fetch water, walk him at lunch and hide him from the dogcatcher on garbage day. He played the cow in a Christmas Pageant one year. We glued spots on him and hung a rubber glove from his belly for an udder while a primary kid wearing a milking stool encouraged him to

graze.

Another year, Zucci was a Christmas present. Young William was hoping for a doll (not a dog), so he dressed up Zucci in baby clothes, booties and all, and wheeled him, all 120 pounds of animated malamute around the stage in a pram to chorus of "aahhhhs!"



I walked my bike across the school field, where Zucci had rescued a kid once. A toothy Shepherd, former police dog, had bolted out of the back of an idling pickup and pounced on a grade fiver. Zucci had flashed across the field like buckshot, ripping into the Shepherd and freeing the kid. Zucci was honored at an assembly and presented with a bone, a medal and a slick new collar with his name engraved on a shiny slice of brass.

I roped a dead chicken to that collar one time because Zucci developed a taste for fowl. My neighbor witnessed Zucci methodically creeping through the forest and snagging one of his chickens. With the torn chicken in one hand and a rifle in the other, the neighbor banged on my door claiming it was time to exercise the law of the land. I talked him out of shooting Zucci by promising to tie the chicken around his neck for one week, a cure I had read about in the Foxfire Book. On the seventh day, I freed Zucci from the festering, throbbing, maggot-ridden mass. Zucci continued to howl, flinch and shudder for days. I almost wished I had let the neighbor shoot him instead. He never stalked another chicken though.

I wheeled around to the playground and rested my bike against the fence. This was where we kicked off “Dogs,” the musical I had written and produced with the Drama Club to celebrate the beloved canines of Roberts Creek.

*Ra Ra Ra Roberts Creek
Ra Ra Ra Roberts Creek
All us hound dog buddies have
the run of the street
You can have your city living and
your high-heeled hype*

*I'd rather be a Creeker, I'm the
gumboot type*

Prior to the premiere we'd held a dog show. Every kid in the school who had a dog brought him/her to school. The dogless kids were encouraged to bring their stuffies so they too could join in. CBC caught wind of the festivities and sent a crew to document the spectacle. Zucci led the parade and joined me for the interview, right there, next to the fence where my bike waited, anxiously.

The bell rang. I cleared my class and reluctantly got on my bike.

I beat the school busses home that day. Zucci was stretched out on the beach in front of our house dreaming, trotting double-time in pursuit of an imaginary setter. He had a thing about setters. I laid down beside him. He snuffed and sneezed, sensing my presence, then shoveled his muzzle into my cheek. We shook paws, played the tugging game, and pretended to wrestle. Zucci gave my forearm a tender wolf-nip and me a throaty growl. The kids planted chunks of hamburger on Zucci's snout, remembering when he used to ‘snap em’ out of the air every time.

“Watch this, Dad!” Zucci froze, flicked his snout and snagged one, then he fell over, triumphant.

“Dad, Dad! Zucci! He's OK! He can catch again!”

The vet, Bob, was late.

“Maybe he had an emergency surgery, got stuck at the hospital. I'm sure we could set up another time when he isn't so busy.” I explained to my kids. I was relieved.

“Zucci is so much better tonight anyway. Look! He's really perked up, he's doing way better.”

I was convinced. “I’ll call Bob tomorrow,” I told my wife Holly.

She tilted her head, half-shut her eyes, and stared straight into my heart. Zucci rolled onto his back, grinned and gave the “scratch me” look.

Bob arrived with a black bag.

Zucci didn’t even stir as the vet eased the needle into his thigh.

He drifted away slowly in my arms. I tried to face my daughters, Chara and Elsa, to tell them he was gone, but my words got lost in the embrace. Chara, my eldest gently stroked my head.

“It’s time to go, Dad. It’s time to take Zucci out to sea.” My eight-year-old, suddenly so grown up.

I rowed furiously until my house shrunk to a postage stamp. My girls sat quiet and still at the bow. Bob sat behind me with his hand on my shoulder. Zucci was still warm at my feet. My toes were curled around his silky ear.

We said a prayer for Zucci. We thanked him for loving us so. I undid his collar, eased him over the gunnels and let him go.

Moonlight ripples guided us back to the beach. I carried Elsa, Bob carried Chara, and Chara clutched onto Zucci’s collar. We tucked the girls in their beds. From the bottom bunk Elsa whispered, “One more Zucci story, Dad, OK? Just one more, please!”