

A 3D rendered scene featuring a sunset over a rocky landscape. The sky transitions from a deep purple at the top to a bright yellow glow where the sun is setting behind a range of jagged, grey rock formations. In the foreground, the word "genesis" is written in large, three-dimensional, textured brown letters that appear to be floating on a dark blue body of water. The water's surface is rippled, and the letters and the sunset glow are reflected in it. The overall mood is serene and atmospheric.

genesis

FALL
1994

Invitation to Artists and Authors

Artwork is invited from all persons who have been students at IUPUI at any time during the last eighteen months prior to submission. Any type of artwork may be submitted. Artists are asked to submit no more than ten pieces for a given issue. If possible, please submit photographed artwork in either color or black and white. Arrangements for the return of artwork not photographed will be made following publication. Please identify each piece on the back with its title, your name, address, phone number and a short biography. Artists will be notified as to acceptance prior to publication. Submit work to *genesis*, care of Geneva Ballard in the English Department, Cavanaugh Hall.

Manuscripts are invited from all persons who have been students at IUPUI at any time during the last eighteen months prior to submission. Manuscripts of essays, one-act plays, fiction, non-fiction, or poetry, on any topic, may be submitted at any time to *genesis*, care of Geneva Ballard in the English Department, Cavanaugh Hall. All manuscripts are considered by a student editorial board. Authorship is not revealed to the board until a manuscript has been accepted.

Manuscripts must be typed; prose pieces should be double-spaced. Please classify prose pieces as either fiction or non-fiction. Poets are asked to submit no more than ten pieces for a given issue. All submissions must be accompanied by a separate title sheet containing the author's name, address, telephone number and a short biography. Names should be on the title sheet only, and not on the manuscript.

Authors whose material has been accepted will be notified prior to publication date. Manuscripts will not be returned. Any manuscripts submitted too late for the current deadline will be considered for the next issue.

genesis

art & literary magazine

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Evening Prayer

I have seen him
standing on a chair,
arms outstretched
in a papal bathrobe
the dog chewed the seat out of.
Crossing himself, my father
releases prayers
in the world's second greatest flood,
dousing the dinner plates
and anyone who will listen:
"Armageddon is coming!"

And I say,
hasn't it?

Oh, yes,
many times.
But none so good
as the time
he fell off the chair.

The Flood

When my father was five
and the rain fell like bricks
for the nineteenth day—
 he wished for stilts.

When the river had reached
the Buick's running boards
When the dogs at the railroad tracks
were left to chance graves
of police-fire or water—
 there was no room in the car for Brownie.

When the rapid current had turned
both pebbles and tombstones alike
and carried lifeless swans away
When feathers and withered petals
had drifted like paper dolls, drowning—
 my father returned.

When the prodigal sun came crawling
and my father's house groaned
in the gaudy dawn
When candy stripe rainbows of vanished dresses
smeared the pregnant walls
and arms and legs of tables and chairs
lay scattered in the mud
like pennies in a fountain—
 a lone teacup sat on a sill.

When my father was five
and the flaring brown skirts of the river
retreated

When my father stood on the porch
and knew he would never see the body
of his dog—
 he breathed.

When my father tells the story
and his voice is a dry as dead branches, cracking—
 the watermark on his memory
 glistens.

The Doll

It would be a good day for picking cotton. Kate was sure of that. There wasn't any light at three-thirty in the morning, but she had examined the dark sky on her way to the privy, and millions of stars twinkled back at her. Not a cloud to be seen, and the air was dry and cool. The day would get hot, but she was used to hot. You didn't live in Texas and not get used to hot weather. Yes, hot was fine. Just as long as it didn't rain. You couldn't pick wet cotton.

She had milked Sadie by lantern light, pouring the warm milk into a big, tight-sealing can which she lowered by a rope into the well, holding out just enough for Lilly's breakfast and for making biscuits. Now she sprinkled some flour on a cloth and kneaded her dough briskly, took out her rolling pin and sprinkled more flour on it. *Bringing in the sheaves, bringing in the sheaves*, she sang softly, as she rolled the dough with firm, fast strokes, cut out the biscuits and plopped them into the waiting greased pan. Grabbing the handle of the old cookstove's oven door with the end of her apron, she opened it and thrust the pan in quickly, taking care not to touch the sides of the oven. After closing it, she turned the bacon she had frying in an iron skillet on top of the stove. *We shall come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves . . .* It was time to wake up Lilly.

"Lilly?" She stepped into the small bedroom she shared with her eight year old daughter. "Lilly, it's time to be getting up so's you can eat before we go to Pritchard's." Lilly bounded up like she always did. Kate never could figure out how the child could be sleeping so soundly one minute and be wide awake the next, just as soon as she was called.

"Okay, Mama. I'm up." She rubbed her eyes with her small fists, then climbed off the big bed.

"I laid you out some clothes there on the rocking chair," Kate said, on her way back to see about the bacon. It was done, nice and crisp. She took it out and laid it on a piece of folded newspaper, then cracked two eggs into the skillet of

hot bacon fat. By the time Lilly was dressed and back from her trip to the privy, Kate had their breakfast on the table.

"Don't dawdle, Lilly," Kate said, as soon as the two of them were sitting down. "We need to start walking soon if we're going to get to Pritchard's by sun-up. I feel like I can pick me a hunnert today."

"Yes, ma'am," Lilly said, spreading some of Kate's peach preserves on one of the big, hot biscuits.

Kate wasted no time eating her own breakfast, then washed it down with a couple of gulps of her now cooled coffee. She took three of the biscuits that were left in the pan and placed them, along with what remained of the bacon, in an empty syrup can for their noon meal. She put the last of the biscuits in the stove's keeper. Lilly finished eating and went outside to feed the chickens.

Singing again, now loud and clear, Kate quickly tidied up the kitchen area, putting their plates and cups into her big wash basin. She took off her apron and hung it on a nail, then gathered up a bundle of burlap feedsacks she'd tied together the night before, her sunbonnet and Lilly's smaller one, the syrup can, and a big Mason jar she'd filled with water. She turned down the wick on the kerosene lantern and stepped out the back door to see if Lilly was ready. It was a long walk to Pritchard's, but she believed they'd make it by daylight.



"Mama, when's Daddy coming home?" Kate and Lilly were sitting on the grass, under Pritchard's old liveoak tree, eating their cold biscuits and bacon. The day was hot, all right. Pritchard told her his thermometer read 96 degrees at ten o'clock that morning. Resting in the shade here now, after picking cotton since about six, the last thing Kate wanted to think about was Cal, and when he might be coming home. He'd left on Wednesday, just after they got the last of their cotton in, just like he'd always done. He'd taken their cotton to the gin in town, been paid for it, and caught the bus for Fort Worth, probably. She really didn't know when he might be back. Not today, that was sure. Today was Saturday. Cal

wouldn't miss a Saturday night in Fort Worth with money in his pocket. By now he probably had him a bottle and a gal.

She smiled at her daughter. "I don't know for sure, Lilly. Your Daddy had some business to see to. It might be Monday before he gets back."

He'd be back. He always came back, although she sometimes wondered why. They hadn't been a man and wife in the real sense of what that meant since after Lilly was born. She wasn't taking the chance of getting in the family way again; it was all they could do to keep the three of them clothed and fed. Besides, she was forty-five, almost forty-six years old. She was too old now, she thought, for foolishness. Cal kept on letting her know how he felt about it, but she couldn't help it. Life was just too chancy. So he told her about this gal and that one, and how he knew how to "make 'em happy." That intrigued Kate. From her experience of him, he didn't know any too much, but she reckoned as long as he had a dollar in his pocket to spend on them, they let him think he was making them happy.

She looked over at her daughter, who had fallen asleep in the grass under the big tree. That was another of Lilly's mysteries. She fell soundly asleep as easily as she woke up. Kate reached down and tenderly smoothed several strands of the child's reddish-brown hair off her warm forehead. Just like his, that hair. But that's where the resemblance ended; all Lilly's other features belonged to Kate. Cal once told her she ought to be glad of Lilly's hair, otherwise . . . what had he said? Otherwise, he'd "swear somebody had been messing where they shouldn't." Kate had laughed to herself, not at his crude comment, but at the notion of herself with another man. What opportunity did he think she could possibly have had for that, out in the middle of nowhere? Their nearest neighbor was Pritchard, and his place was a good two hours' walk. She couldn't imagine when Cal thought she'd have had the time for such, even if she'd wanted to. When they first married, Cal was a widower with five children. Two of them had still needed raising, and she'd done that; cared for them and loved them like they was hers. The youngest boy, C.W.,

had just got out on his own the year before. Now he had himself a good job driving a bus on the Cleburne to Waco run.

Kate sighed. It's just as well if the child sleeps an hour or two, she thought, I can pick faster without her. She put back on her sunbonnet, picked up one of her feedsacks, and walked back out to the cotton field. She would make a hunnert today, she was sure, and when she took what Pritchard paid her and put it with her egg and cream money, and then added to that the money she hoped to make selling pecans, she would have more than enough to buy the doll for Lilly's Christmas they'd seen at Hogan's store in town. That was her plan. To buy that doll. She was the prettiest little thing, with blue eyes and gold hair that could be combed, all dressed up in a fancy blue organdy gown and black satin slippers. She even came with a little comb for that gold hair. Lilly had stared at the doll the entire time they were in the store, but said nothing. It was too much to hope for, let alone talk about. But Kate knew.

So far, all Lilly's Christmases had amounted to each year was new colorbooks and boxes of Crayolas. That was all Kate had ever been able to afford. What few dolls Lilly had were homemade. They were sweet, and Lilly loved them, but even Kate had to admit they weren't very pretty. There was only so much you could do with sack cloth, a little embroidery thread, and old buttons. She wanted Lilly to have a pretty doll just once before she got too old to play with them. So she asked Hogan, the last time she was in his store by herself, to hold the little gold-haired doll back for her. He knew she'd come back for it if she said she would.

As she crawled along the crusted earth on her knees, swatting at gnats with one hand and pulling bolls as carefully but quickly as she could with the other, Kate wondered why Cal couldn't see Lilly having the doll for Christmas. She had told him about it, describing the gold hair that could be combed, and of her plan to buy it. He'd snorted. It wasn't that he didn't love their daughter, because he did. In fact, he doted on her. It was most likely because of Lilly that he always came back, if the truth be known. And Lilly rewarded him with her adoration. But Cal wasn't going to pick any

neighbor's cotton so's she could have a nice Christmas. He couldn't see spending the money for the doll, but it didn't bother him to spend it on liquor. Or some gal. He just couldn't see how much pleasure it would give Lilly, she guessed. As a child, Kate never had a real store-bought doll herself, and never thought about wanting one, but that didn't mean she couldn't see the joy it would bring to Lilly.

She paused to wipe the sweat that dripped from her forehead into her eyes, arched her back to ease the dull ache that grew steadily there, then bent back down to her work. A hundred pounds of cotton by sundown meant a doll with gold hair.



By the time they got home that night, Sadie was standing by the house, bawling indignantly to be milked. Kate told Lilly to wait on the porch while she felt her way into the house to find her matches and light the lantern.

"Come on honey, we've got to get you washed off and fed, then you can go on to bed." They made their way to the backyard where the hand pump was, and Kate worked it until there was a steam steady enough to wash the chalky road dust from their bare feet and legs. Then she filled a water bucket while she still had the pump going. "You carry the lantern, Lilly, but mind your step and don't fall with it." Kate hoisted up the bucket and they went into the house.

"I think we'll just have them leftover biscuits with a little jam for our supper, Lilly," said Kate, pouring some of the water into the basin they used for washing themselves. "It'd take too long to get the stove going again." She lit a small candle from the lantern's wick and set it on a dish, which she handed to Lilly. "You finish washing up, then go ahead and change into your nightdress while I go out and milk Sadie. We'll have us some good fresh milk with our biscuits."

As she went through the familiar motions of milking Sadie, Kate, tired as she was, looked forward to the moment when Lilly was asleep and she could go down into the root cellar to add what she and Lilly made that day to her hidden coffee can. She loved her root cellar. Lined up in rows on its shelves were the fruits of her summer's labor. It sure had

been a good year. She'd canned peas, beans, squash, corn and tomatoes, and put up all manner of pickles and relishes, fruit preserves, jams and jellies. It gave her great pleasure just to look at all those rows of jars. They had a small fall garden planted, too; there would be more. And there would be enough money from their cotton and feed crops to buy a hog for slaughter come November. The small amount of bacon they'd eaten today was store-bought bacon, a gift from C.W. During hot weather, their meat consisted mostly of rabbit and squirrel, although sometimes she and Lilly would spend an afternoon fishing from the banks of the Brazos. All that was good, but she did look forward to hog-killing time when once again they would have bacon, ham, and pork chops.

Tired, but feeling satisfied, she finished up the milking and walked back to the house. In the kitchen she found Lilly, sitting with her head down on top of the table, sound asleep. The child had laid out plates, cups and knives for both of them. The little candle flickered nearby. Kate's heart ached for her small daughter who was evidently more tired than hungry. She set the milk bucket and the lantern on the table, then gathered Lilly in her strong arms and carried her into the bedroom where she laid her gently on the old iron bed. Lilly nestled down into the feather pillow. Kate smiled to herself. If ever a little girl deserved a pretty doll, it was this one.

She went back to the kitchen and dipped one of the cups into the bucket of milk. She took three of the biscuits out of the keeper and threw the ones that were left into a small scrap bucket she kept by the door for chicken feed.

After she had eaten, she cleared off the table and put her dishes in the basin with the others. Them dishes would just have to wait until morning. If she was too tired to fire up the stove for a meal, she was surely too tired to fire it up for heating water to wash dishes. She took the lantern and the milk bucket out to the well, hoisted up the big can, added the new milk, and lowered the can back down. She went to the hand pump and rinsed out the milk bucket, then turned it upside down on the back porch. She'd scald it tomorrow. Now she was ready to go down in the cellar.

She held the lantern up high as she eased down the familiar steps in to the cool dankness. Light from the lantern gleamed off the rows and rows of jars. Kate sighed. She counted twelve jars of tomatoes from the left end of one shelf, then reached behind the twelfth jar for her coffee can.

She knew right away something was wrong. The can was way too light. She held the lantern up high and peered into the can, giving it a good shake. A couple of pennies rattled around in the bottom. Kate sucked in her breath. She knew what had happened, but why? Wasn't there nothing of hers she could call her own? She sat down slowly on the floor of the cellar, setting the lantern beside her. She shook the can again. It was true; all her scrimping, saving, and planning, and it was gone. All she had left was the money Pritchard had paid her. For a moment, she thought she might cry. She wanted to cry. Not ten seconds ago, every muscle in her body had been taut as a bow; now she felt limp as a wet rag. But she didn't cry. Crying never helped nothing, never changed nothing, never made no difference.

She sat awhile, watching the lantern light flicker over the dirt floor of the cellar. She noticed an old brown centipede slither out of a dark corner in her direction, and for a minute or two she just sat there, watching it progress across the hard-packed dirt. She hated the things, and normally would have moved quickly to find something to smash it with, but now she just sat. Get up, fool, she told herself. Finally, she found her numbed legs and leaped out of the way, just as the centipede made its way across the spot where she'd been sitting and off into another corner. She picked up the lantern from the floor and set it on a shelf, removed Pritchard's coins from a handkerchief tied to the inside of her dress, and dropped them into the coffee can. She put it back in its place behind the jar of tomatoes. She'd have to remember to tell Hogan he could put the little doll back in his storefront window.



When she woke up Sunday morning with a fly tickling her nose, sun was already streaming into the open window. It was late. She was always up before the first rooster crow;

she realized suddenly she'd never even heard the rooster. Sadie bawled from the backyard. Poor Sadie. She must wonder what had happened to their usual routine. Kate sat up stiffly, her back and neck muscles protesting yesterday's work. She looked down at her reddened, sore fingers and rubbed them a minute or two, then slowly climbed out of bed. Lilly was already up. Kate could hear her out back, talking in soothing tones to Sadie. She pulled an old dress over her head and tied on a clean apron, then stepped out of the bedroom and through the kitchen to the back door.

"Mornin', Mama. Sadie's just havin' a fit out here to be milked. I was trying to keep her quiet so's you could sleep, but she won't listen to me. Ornery old cow."

"How long have you been up, Miss Ladybird?" said Kate, beginning to unravel and redo her two long braids.

"Not too long. Sadie's bawling woke me up."

Kate walked out on the porch and sat down to finish braiding her hair. She looked up at the sky, already a blistering blue. It'd be another hot, dry day. Sadie walked right up and nudged her knees with her big nose.

"Sorry, Sadie. You're just going to have to wait a little longer. Lilly, fetch me my water bucket and then see how much wood's left in the woodbox. I got to scald out that milk bucket."

By the time she got the stove going, the water boiling, the cow milked, and the dishes washed, it seemed to Kate like midday. But it was only eight-thirty. She was just used to having her early morning work done by sun-up. She mixed up her biscuit dough and was just beginning to knead it with a vigorous rhythm when she heard the rattle of harness and Cal's familiar "Whoaaa, mules, whoaaa, there now," out front. She heard Lilly come running from around back.

"Daddy! Daddy, you're home, you're home!"

Kate wiped her hands on her apron. He must've come back from Fort Worth yesterday evening and spent the night at Clifton to be getting out here this morning. Maybe he had him a gal at Clifton, too. It wouldn't surprise her none. He might've spent the night at the wagon-yard or over by the gin, but she doubted it. Cal did like hisself a bed for sleeping.

She wanted to run out the door and attack him with all her might, demanding to know why he'd taken her money. But she didn't. She'd learned not to pick a fight she couldn't win, and it seemed like she was always on the losing end of most of their fights. Cal was mean when he was drunk, and strong when he was sober.

She made her way slowly to the front door. Cal and Lilly were coming up the steps, Lilly fairly dancing around him.

"What is it, Daddy? What is it? What's in that big old package?"

Cal held something with both hands behind his back.

"You just be patient, Lil. 'Good things come to them that waits,' ain't you never heard that?" He sat the box on the porch, then tipped his hat grandly to Kate. "Good morning, Miss Kate. And how're you today?"

"I'm fine, Cal, just fine. How was Fort Worth?"

"Oh, mighty fine, mighty fine indeed. Step out here on the porch, I got something I want you to see."

Kate stepped hesitantly through the doorway. They had themselves a couple of old cane chairs on the porch, and Cal seated himself in one.

"All right, Lil. You can open that box now," he said.

Lilly's nimble little fingers set to work.

"Oh Daddy, oh Daddy, she's the most beautiful thing I ever did see," Lilly exclaimed. "Look, Mama, look!"

Kate was stunned. The box held a little red-haired doll in a splendid get-up of dark green velvet. On the doll's head was a matching velvet hat with a bright blue feather; on her feet were little leather shoes with a high, soft shine. And there was another, plainer dress and a pink nightdress with matching slippers in the box, too. She was fancier than the little gold-haired doll at Hogan's.

"She's got hair just like yours and mine, Lil," Cal said pointedly.

"Oh, yes! She does, Daddy, she does," said Lilly, leaping onto Cal's lap and throwing her small arms around his neck.

Cal looked at Kate over Lilly's shoulder, and the look in his eyes sent a shiver down Kate's spine. So that was it. Kate felt her legs go weak, and for a minute she thought they might

fold up on her. Slowly she turned and went back in the house. The heat inside the small room almost overtook her; its heaviness bore down on her. She wanted to run, all the way to the banks of the Brazos, and jump in. She wanted to feel its deep, cool waters surround her, would welcome its swift current sweeping her down, down, down. She reached for the edge of the table.

There was another feeling as strong as love, sometimes stronger. She'd seen that feeling just now in Cal's eyes. She'd known right then it was what made him come back, ever bit as much as the love he felt for Lilly. What had she done? What had she ever done to deserve that? She believed she would rather take a beating. But there wouldn't be a fight; Cal didn't need one.

She walked slowly around the table and sprinkled some flour on her rolling pin. A single tear slid down her face and landed, with a little pouf, in a small pile of flour. Kate stared at it as if disbelieving it had fallen from her eye. Then she wiped it away with the end of her apron, and with firm, exacting strokes, began to roll out her dough for the day's bread.

After

A cluttered room echoes guitar melodies.
 A slight, half-nude body lies on the mattress.
 Denim shorts, dull from many washings,
 Crouch, crumpled on the floor.
 Sweet smoke slowly weaves its way to the ceiling
 Like a cobra rising to his piper.
 Withered black and lavender gladiolus
 Rest broken upon the transparent vase
 On the quarter-beaten table.
 Someone forgot to turn the bathroom light off.
 The seat is down, and wet.
 A litter box juxtaposed between the shower and toilet
 Smells of cat piss.
 A crayon self-portrait hangs on the wall
 Opposite the porcelain commode.

Labored breath releases unclear thoughts
 Like an anointed preacher.
 Summer heat penetrates the clapboard exterior
 And suppresses the fan-driven air.
 Clenched fingers knead drooped, red eyes
 Back and forth, back and forth.
 A black nose twitches:
 The indifferent ghost pauses and sniffs,
 Then glides into the next room,
 Calculating each footfall.
 Each hears his own heartbeat,
 HeartBEAT, heartBEAT.
 A baby cries in the distance—
 Each remains in repose.
 Someone lifts the stereo remote
 Like Michelangelo's Adam reaching for God.
 The raised volume retards all other noise.
 White-rimmed, red noses are blown.

Jerry was buried today.
 Tomorrow is his birthday.

Indianapolis Museum of Art

Galleries of long and distant rage
I picture myself hanging in the stale corridors
Or hiding in a damask hung alcove of quiet light
Amongst softly shining busts and staring eyes
I am afraid of them
I am afraid of their rage
So queerly expressed in epigrammatic patterns
De pasmo whisper the creatures
Ringing like ancient echoes
Down the steel pan traps
Screams of anger and anguish
Every painting comes to life
Canvasses warp and washes run like blood
A small Winslow Homer hanging on the wall trembles in fear

Post Nuclear Orgasm

Atoms grew excited
Cosmic debris glowed
over wavering distances
(it's hot)
New windows, widened
After that, nothing happened for days

Inhaling bright fallout
Inebriating rain
Flashes of flesh
turn and return to the chorus
of an exploding song
(chorus)

I wear a fragment of your world
on my finger
If I squint, I can see you
buttoning your shirt
(like you're closing a wound)
If I squint, I can see you
blinking your eye
(not knowing I am the speck)

Are you: phantom
fatal water
shadow animal?

I am: survivor
hungry after gorging
membranes of darker ages

Tell me this castle is futile
and I will carve medieval graffiti
on the wall of your inner ear:
Abracadabra! In a pouf an acoustical cloud
can rearrange the map of a universe

Things die anyway in canons
of faceless obituaries
but I can always tell
where a house once stood

Counting petals in the ashes,
I exhale
You have exhumed
that part of me I quit

I do not know what this means
I do not think it matters

Spring

I remember the time
at La Margarita,
the restaurant overlooking
Bleeker and Thompson,
when we tipped salsa'd tortillas
and salty-sweet tequila
down our throats.
We groomed each other's hands
against cheeks and lips.

Out our corner window
we could see the cop's mount:
eyes gone squirrely,
a raging rut setting him swinging
like a billy club.

Grinning villagers
lingered on the walks.
Traffic stopped
but horns did not complain.
Waiters,
the cook,
came to the windows,
spinning off Spanish
and low laughter.

Pleasantly tanked,
I smiled into your eyes.

You called for the check.

Fish, Worm, and Hook

Your mouth
my mouth
across from one another
move around
 against
nibbles
of words
tiny
but even once linked
together the pain
involved
manages
to keep our distance
whole
if not solid.

excerpt from “The Trouble With Girls”

We met at a theater in Hollywood that shows old movies, which does not explain why the place is called New Beverly. Was there previously an Old Beverly? Did it show only new movies? It is this same line of questioning I am firing at the idiot who is taking my ticket—who looks like he’s twelve and apparently lacks the ability to form intelligent sentences—when this weird girl walks up and goes into this long story about how the theater got its name. I don’t remember what she said, and it doesn’t matter anyway since years later I read a story in the *LA Times* which gave me an entirely different explanation.

That’s one of the first things I learned about Audrey. She tells you stuff she made up, only she doesn’t tell you it’s made up. Some people call that lying. Since she usually makes up interesting answers to boring questions, I choose to be amused rather than offended. If I were to ask her if she was lying she would probably get mad and not speak to me for a couple of days. Pointless arguing, like underwear, is a waste of time. I have given them both up.

Anyway, we were both at the New Beverly to see an old movie called *Backstreets* starring John Gavin and Susan Hayward. He’s married, they fall in love, and she spends her entire life waiting on him to get that divorce he promised her. Only he never gets the divorce because his wife is a bitch, he is a wimp, and she is a fool.

I saw the ad in the paper and figured if I saw how pathetic Susan Hayward looked, I’d be inspired to forget about the married, “but I swear I’m getting a divorce,” loser I’d been waiting around on for more years than I care to admit. Of course that didn’t happen. I ended up bawling like a baby and thinking John Gavin really did love her and if he hadn’t died in that fucking car wreck they would have ended up together.

Luckily, Audrey was the only other person in the theater. She moved to the seat next to mine and shared her box of kleenex. When the movie ended we walked across the street to the diner where I spilled the story of my wretched love life and the saga of the married man.

Audrey listened sympathetically, and continued handing me tissues. At the end of my sad little story she said she was getting some very strong vibes. According to her psychic powers he and I had been married in a previous life, and if we could get him to remember this past life as well as I remembered mine, he would divorce his wife, marry me, and the universe would be in perfect harmony. Okay, maybe she didn't say that "perfect harmony" part. But I pretty much think that psychic stuff is a lot of crap and don't get me started about the previous life bullshit.

After sitting and talking in the diner for a few hours, we walked the six blocks to her apartment on Sycamore. From the outside the place looked perfectly normal, but inside it was as strange as Audrey herself. Every wall was covered with bookshelves, and the shelves were full of video tapes. She had every movie I had ever heard of and about a billion more. I'd never even seen that many movies in one place—not even at Blockbuster on Wednesday when the shelves are full.

She said I could borrow up to three tapes if I wanted, but I'd have to fill out the video sign out sheet by her front door. I noticed the sheet was blank and yellowing, so I grabbed a tape.

Just my luck, I grabbed an Elvis movie—causing Audrey to launch into this whole monologue about the "Is He Alive?" debate. I said I thought he was alive because I thought that's what she had said, not because I really gave a damn one way or the other. She said I read too many "rag mags." I swear to you, that's what she called them—"rag mags."

After the big Elvis conversation I decided it was time for me to get going. It was getting late and I still had to go home and wash something to wear to work the next day. My mother always tells me I should do all of my laundry at once and not just wash things as I need them. I tell my mother she should

get a hobby since she obviously has way too much time on her hands if she can actually concern herself with my laundry schedule.

Audrey wanted me to stay and offered to loan me some of her clothes. Since I'd only met her a few hours before, her offer sort of freaked me out—so I pretty much just said “see ya” and left her standing there in the middle of her living room slash tape library.

The phone was ringing when I got home and I nearly broke a limb trying to get the door open and leap to the phone before the machine picked it up, just in case it was Mr. Wonderful calling. Alas, my aerobatics were in vain. It wasn't Mr. Wonderful, it was Audrey calling to ask if I wanted to go to a poetry reading at *Insomnia* the next night. I said yes because I was too busy trying to figure out how she'd gotten my phone number to remember I hate poetry. Later in the shower I would remember writing it on her video sign out sheet.

Since it was the first time I had talked to her on the phone I thought it was strange that she didn't say “hi” or “goodbye.” When I answered she just started talking, and when she finished she just hung up. It seemed odd then but now I'm used to it and do the same thing when I call her. I even do it to my mother, which drives her nuts. “Why do you hang up on me like that? Why can't you say goodbye like a normal person?” I tell her I'm not normal, and it's high time she realized it. At which point, you guessed it, she hangs up on me and I start laughing.

If I told my therapist I laugh when my mother gets mad he would probably conclude that I hate my mother, or some other unresolved inner child bullshit kind of thing. Truth is I love my mom—even if she does own not one but two Michael Bolton cds. Besides, if she was really mad she wouldn't hang up, she'd start crying. She hangs up because she's infuriated. My mother says “infuriated” because saying pissed off is “street talk” and as she has reminded me every day since I was six, “Ladies don't use street talk.”

For my birthday last year Audrey gave me a velvet Elvis painting. I guess the fact that I once borrowed “Harum

Scarum" from her made her think I was some huge Elvis fan or something. The picture is really lame. It's one of those Elvis from Hawaii ones where he's all fat and has a lei around his neck. I hung it in my bathroom as a kind of shrine. Audrey thought that was cool. My mother thinks it is disgusting and now refuses to use my bathroom. Instead, she either reminds me that she went before coming over or she uses it as an excuse to leave. If only they made Elvis wallpaper.



The Kingfisher

Many years ago when I was a child my father told me that the Kingfisher found everything he needed by the river—his prey, his home. He didn't search from high in the skies, like the Hawk, for his food. He didn't rely on other animals, like the vulture, to provide his sustenance. My father assured me that although the Kingfisher is small, his royal beauty and self-sufficient mastery make him great. My father also said that if we used the abilities that lay within us we could provide ourselves with what we needed, too. So as the Kingfisher took from the stream, I decided to take from the world.

The air hung heavy with humidity like the belly of a pregnant sow. Even the trees appeared burdened with sweat. The sky was clear and blue with no clouds to shelter the earth from the sun's burning light. It boiled the earth, and the sweat and the humidity were the steam rising from the tormented land. My shirt clung to my heaving body as I ran up the ravine filled with thorn briars and wild grape vines. My arms swung back and forth, holding the twelve-gauge shotgun, with the rhythm of an old man pitching grave soil.

Claude stumbled behind me and cried out for help. He carried the money. I stopped, ran back, and lifted him up. At the time I believed he would be nothing more than like his father—poor, and living in a run-down log cabin in a forgotten hollow in the Appalachian mountains of Kentucky. I didn't know if I could be like my father. He was dead.

When we had walked into the General Merchandise I could smell fried chicken. It must have been Shackleton's lunch. Shackleton's belly stuck out like a boulder, but his face was skinny, like a kid's who lived in the hills. He sat on a three-legged stool beside the cash register sucking the tips of his fingers for the last clinging flavor of grease. Suddenly I was hungry, almost to the point of weakness. I grabbed an apple and bit into it. He had heard the doorbell, but continued

licking his fingers. As we neared the counter he peered up at us through his bespectacled eyes.

"That'll be a nickel for the apple."

I took another bite and dropped the apple on the floor. He hadn't even noticed the gun. Then I shoved it up near his face.

"Put the money in the sack." I said.

Claude held the burlap sack open like a child trick or treating. He smiled and said, "Right in here, Mr. Shackleton."

"What? Who the hell are you?" Shackleton said staring at me. "You're John McGuanes's son. He owes me money."

Then he wiped his fingers on his overalls and his face turned slightly red like a turnip—his cheeks pink, but his chin underneath white. His eyes widened behind his cloudy spectacles and he pointed at me.

"Put down that gun, and who are you?" he said to Claude

"Claude Mulligan, don't you remember me?"

"Can't expect me to remember all you potato farmers."

I stared at Shackleton. We weren't asking for credit. Sitting there frowning, he crossed his arms over his obstinate belly.

"Sheriff Lackey will get you."

"Put the goddamn money in the bag, or Claude's going to bust you in the jaw—isn't that right, Claude?"

"That's right." Claude said and pushed the burlap sack up closer to the register.

"The law won't forget. You can't escape it, you're too small. It'll beat you back down like the wind does the leaves in the fall. All you green ignorants got to be taught."

I wrenched the shell back.

"Put the money in the bag."

He opened the drawer, then put the money in the sack like someone putting down the potatoes they owed you—one at a time.

"You'll never be nothing," Shackleton said, "just like your father."

I leapt over the counter and smacked him on the side of his head with the butt of the shotgun. He fell. He grabbed his head and I started to kick him. He put his arms around his

ribs, but I kicked him so hard that I lifted him off the ground. My vision blurred. I felt like I was dreaming.

"Stop it, Harris," Claude screamed, "you'll kill him."

I stopped. Claude's voice sounded distant, quiet. My father's voice was quiet. He explained things to me in a quiet voice.

"We got to get out of here!" Claude yelled.

I looked down at Shackleton. He lay like a sleeping pregnant woman curled on her side—peaceful and with a life inside her round belly; but there was not life inside his belly, only the gluttony gained from someone else's table. Why should the law protect him? He took from my father; I took from him. His belly was full; mine was not.

The door bell rattled. I looked to see if I knew them. Two ladies returned a quizzical stare. Claude and I ran out of the store.

We drove the 1950 Plymouth up the dirt road to Claude's house. Shackleton didn't know where we lived. Facing the cabin stood a patch of woods so thick hunting squirrels was difficult. Behind lay open meadows of hills grown over with wild grasses and thickets of blueberry and huckleberry bushes. We slept out back on the ground, awakened by the early morning light and the dew on our blankets.

To me the cabin appeared as a dubious home—more like a shack to hide in from the weather. It was made of rough-hewn logs—probably built early in the last century—no windows, just one door. A thick air redolent of burnt wood interposed the green air of the outside in your nostrils when you walked in. It seemed unpleasant.

In the early morning on those rolling, green hills, the mist hovered in clusters, like the clouds kissing the earth as it does at Black Mountain near Hazzard. The hills emerged out of each other like fish eggs gently floating where their mother had birthed them, each one unconcerned about the other resting upon its sides—clinging to each other. I felt like I could see forever, the hills going on and on, never ending. Each year the fruits and berries were reborn, and the gardens and the fields were revived. My father used to

farm hills and valleys like those, and he fished the rivers and streams. He believed they would give you everything. I was seventeen, and I thought that I could find what I needed with money. With money you could buy what Shackleton had. With money you could go to the university.

I had told Claude that we would buy a new car with the money.

"Why do I need a car, my daddy owns one," he replied, "besides, where'd I go?"

"You'd go to Ashland," I said, "and maybe get a girl."

"Girls don't like me. I feel fine right here."

"You've seen those houses in Ashland . . . You come home and the house is so big it'll take you a week to visit each room properly; and those Caddies, parked in the driveway with those fins sticking up slicing the air like a knife saying get out of my way, I'm rich—that feels good."

"Some people ain't hungry for them things."

"But that's what we're supposed to want."

"But how can you get them things?"

"You take them."

We saw the cops raising a hell of a dust down the road so we jumped into the Plymouth and took off for No-Bear Cave. We called it that because I thought I had seen a black bear in it. When James, my brother, went in with his shotgun, the one I now had, and found nothing, he laughed and gave it that name.

"It's just like the Indian you claimed to see," James said.

"I did see him. He had feathers."

"These woods ain't meant to have Indians anymore."

We had planned to hide out in the cave until the police tired of looking for us, then we would go to Ashland, or Huntington, West Virginia. There were thousands of caves in this part of the country. We had made provisions earlier, stashing our fishing poles, blankets, cooking gear, and boxes of shotgun shells there. It was our clubhouse—there were only three members.

"Boy, they sure got us running like rabbits," Claude said as he shot dust out the back end of the Plymouth.

"I'm a prize rabbit."

"Rabbits ain't no prizes, they all the same."

"Yeah, I guess we're just like them now."

At Wood Creek bridge we parked the car and ran into the woods. After about a mile we heard muffled shouting. I knew those obese deputies were too unfit to catch up to us. We headed west and crossed several small creeks walking about a hundred yards down the center of each then climbing up the bank. Jogging was nearly impossible in those narrow valleys and sharp ridges shadowed by ash, hickory, maple, and pine. Their branches intertwined like a net trapping the heat. Then the heat became visible, and tumbled gently like the waves on a reticent sea. The sun glared down on the forest, punishing. And the wind withheld its breath. But we ran on.

"I got to cool down, Harris. Got to get naked in the water, and quench this burnin' heat."

"The east fork of the Little Sandy isn't more than half a mile . . . My daddy said these woods won't ever fail you."

"But when you make a mistake she'll let you know," Claude added.

We slid down an embankment and there was the river lined with hundreds of trees attempting to hide their secret. The east fork of the Little Sandy was clear like the Big Sandy. It wasn't as wide or deep, but you had to swim across in most places. Claude dropped the burlap sack and stripped off his clothes. He dove into the water without a sound, splitting the water like a Kingfisher diving for fish. He came up out of the water empty-handed.

While floating on top of the water he said, "There's enough fish in this water to feed a man for a lifetime. I wish I could live right here and never have to leave. Everything I want is here."

I slipped into the water.

"There's no TV here, no dancing, no music," I said.

"There's music. Can't you hear it?"

"Yeah, but sometimes these things don't seem like enough. I see those fancy people driving down our roads, sightseeing, like we were animals in a zoo, and our way of

living was about to become extinct, like it was primitive. Most of them have been to the university; maybe they know better.”

“Maybe.” He spit water out of his mouth. “I guess we got enough money to find out.” Then he splashed water in my face.

“Stop,” I said. “Look.”

I pointed to a tree limb hanging over the water up the river. A Kingfisher gripped the skinny limb which bobbed up and down like a gentle seasaw. His crested blue head dipped slightly down as he peered into the clear water with his solid, black eyes. My father told me that Kingfishers would sometimes spend long hours watching for small fish to swim near the surface, and then they would plunge in to seize their prize. But he didn't bother to look downstream.

We lived in the cave for three days, and each morning, as the sun came up. I rose, collected my fishing pole, and walked into the fresh dawn. I had hunted and fished in these hills all my life, and I knew that the only person who could find us was my brother James. After that one week I found James waiting for me at my spot on the Little Sandy.

He was older, and he was married. He wore the blue uniform that his boss made him wear at the factory. It was Sunday morning.

“What you fishing for?” James asked

“Bluegill,” I said.

“You and that Kingfisher done fished them out of this hole.”

“There's plenty left, always will be.”

He stared at the river while I dug the earth for a worm. I found two, put one in my shirt pocket, and baited my hook with the other. I set my bobber and dropped my line into the water. We both sat down on the bank.

“Why'd you do it?”

“I wanted to show those bastards that I could be rich, too.”

“Show them what, how to go to jail? Now who's gonna read a jailbird's poems?”

I felt a tug on my line and I looked at my bobber, watching it dip, quick, but gentle. I yanked the pole. The line and hook sailed out of the water, tangling in a branch—no fish caught, just a small piece of worm hanging from the hook.

“You ever get hungry, and no matter what you eat, you still feel hungry?”

“Sometimes.”

“What’d you do?”

“I turn on the radio.”

James started digging around in the earth.

“You can’t ever fix it,” he continued. “You got to make yourself forget.”

“You think daddy ever felt hungry like that?”

“Don’t matter if he did. You got no choice. Some people’ll always be hungry; some people won’t.”

“I don’t think daddy was hungry like that.”

“Cause that was what he was meant to do, like me working in the factory. I don’t like it, but that’s what I got to do.”

“We aren’t meant to do anything. Daddy chose to be a farmer, and he was proud of it. You chose to work in the factory. I’ll choose to do what I want.”

“Are you gonna choose to go to jail?”

“How about Shackleton,” I yelled. “Is he ever going to pay what he stole from daddy? You have to take.”

James threw a small clump of dirt into the clear river. The river absorbed it. I untangled my tackle. We sat, not speaking as I rebaited my hook and tossed the line into the stream.

“I brought the cops,” James said. “They’re at the cave.”

I jumped up, confused. I had believed that my plan would work. I thought it was natural.

“Where you gonna run to?” he said. “They’ll find you.”

He looked out into the river.

“They said they were gonna shoot you when they found you.”

He brushed his hair back with his hand, breathed heavily, and released it.

“You’ll only have to spend a year at the reformatory and then you can join the Army.”

I sat down.

"I don't want to join the Army."

"You'll get used to it."

"What's going to happen to Claude?"

"Oh, he'll do his time and then come back here."

My pole started tilting, so I picked it up. The fish tugged on the line and darted around in the water. I didn't jerk the line; I knew I had caught something. I pulled the line firmly out of the water. It was a Bluegill that must have weighed two pounds. I felt pleased.

"Nothing like catching a fish," I said.

"Yeah, then you don't have to care about what kind of car you got, or when you're gonna buy a TV."

"Daddy didn't care about those things, either."

"No, I reckon he didn't."

The fish's rainbow belly glittered like Irish gold in the sunlight. His body was small, but his taste was rich. This was good to eat. This was good to take. I gazed at my prize.

"Maybe I won't care anymore."

Three Pieces in the Shape of a Madwoman

I.

Where are the violins?
Where are the cellos?
This impersonation of a normal woman
has gone too far.
Something is rising in me
that refuses to do the dishes—
It's the madwoman!
Not the beauty with the flaming eyes
and the streaming hair
but the one my mother always warned me about.

See her there
at the window, bare breasted.
She waves a white shirt and will not surrender,
throws ashes and other prodigal whatnot
from the sill as if it were a cliff.

II.

Who am I kidding?
There are no coyotes here,
only the shrieks of police sirens
and bad brakes.

But Mama, she knows about the madwomen.
Grandmother burned her clothes in the yard,
that was Virginia Beach.
Grandmother stayed pregnant with the Second Christ
until she was 55.
(just like a man, he never showed up)

And Mama, she got slain in the Spirit.
Spoke in tongues.
Believed.

Now she interprets the flight paths of birds,
talks to the rain,
quilts the silhouettes of trees
in dark fabric.
Believes.

III.

A woman who can not trust herself
to be funny the next time—
is this what you mean, Mama?
Reacting to accidents before they happen?
Mama clicks her castanets and says,
“You are SO melodramatic.”

My sister sees things.
Mostly shadows, but sometimes the future.

I see things.
Mostly what is not there,
but some things I know:
the weather is bad.
Often I go for days convinced I am alive.

What is to be done with the eye
once it has been plucked out?
Make like a man, catch as catch can?

Mama raises her head.
I misunderstand,
thinking she means to answer.

Markle St.

The Maple is still here
standing like an old man with no cane
with bark black and wrinkled
the survivor of a nuclear blast.

The base wears a pan
of tan petrified clay
no grass
after so many shoes
so many circles
and so many falls.

I kick the ground
and dust rolls into a cloud
and I remember
two little kids
trying to hang themselves
one hot summer day.

Kenny Beachum
helped me tie a rope
to the lowest brown arm
and fashion a noose
just like they had in the movies.

And I stuck my head in
and spun around and around
In circles on the tan pan clay
looking up and watching the hemp
do spirals and braids and candy cane strips
as the rope cut into my neck
and the world turned red
then black.

And for just a second or two
as I groped around on the grass
one arm reaching for nothing
my mouth open and lips shaking
Kenny laughing down a pointed finger
and my neighbors staring across the yard
just for a second
I knew who I was.

In This Garden of Beauty

I won't take that concrete path.
I'm no pecan pecola peanut
shell to be crushed
meat mushed
'neath the force
of a wrongly bred love.

Drop me.
I'll FIND dirt
 sand
moss
to sprout from.

Won't promise to bloom
anytime soon. 'cause
ASSumed
internal rhythms
 groundhog shadows
 external schedules
 Burpees catalogs
ain't shit to me.

Faith:
now THAT'S the real shit.
Pile it on
'til I'm stanky with it.

Sometime then,
I will bloom
during My June,
in My hour,
beneath My moon.

Forecast Calls For Rain

Rain falls here;
I feel low rumblings
in the distance and
streaks of electrical
imagery dance across
a background of ink,
taunting me.

I regard these
skeletons of energy
from my shelter
of contemporary ignorance
and laugh, too convinced
of my own existence.

What insanity drove me
to this need for seclusion?
These four walls
suppress my every breath, and
I long to dance wildly
with the skeletons
in the sky and laugh at
those who can only
watch in vain.

My Sacred Place

And where do I fit in?
This industrial jungle of new this
Rebuilt that.
Wooden boards cover windows
Of broken dreams and cracked mortar
While steel fibers climb precociously
To a dawn of new horizons
Filled with techno-mutants
That still race against time.

The PTA luncheons,
Gym classes and ball games,
Headlines, deadlines and timelines,
Who has time?
To break for red lights
Which blink on and off and on and on.
Stop and stop and stop again.

And yet, I race up a hill
Of tall grass and dandelions,
Evading the awkward embrace of
Radon particles mixed with dew
Which cling perilously to my wiper blades.
There on this hill of dancing grass and
Waving dandelions, I raise my arms to the sky
And shout—my presence to be heard
By laughing birds and squirrels who race
Into the orange and red of the sunset.

The wind, it plays with my hair
Like a tender child;
And the sun, it burns my skin
Hot like a new lover.
I lie on the grass and it tickles
My every tiny crevice
With scratchy, probing fingers
Searching for the answers
Which are embedded in
The heavily drawn lines
Etched in the creases of my Self.

And where do I fit in?
A tiny speck that floats along
A greater universe of fallen stars.
If only the dust would settle
Long enough from the explosion
Of the Big Bang,
Then maybe I could see myself;
Sitting there in a corner
Hugging my knees to my chest
And staring out a window
From my sacred place.

Jesse B.

The dash is
as smooth and fine
and black
as his suit
and his skin
Jesse B.
is a slick
mack daddy mutha.
Some say the man
never worked a day
unless working is
being what he is
a shining vessel
of black an gold
everything so smooth
as the dash in
the black and gold
catillac that
rolls into the drive
and pops the lid
as Joey and I listen
to smooth oiled
clicks and cranks
coming from the trunk
of stolen guns.
Jesse B. is a smooth
bruthahustla
a pimp prophet
incandescent excalibur
gliding over the streets
prowling like a panther
ice cream truck
Jesse B. has always got
what everyone wants.

Like A Strange Butterfly

Señor Alvarez cautioned Yolanda about eating deviled ham.

"You can't trust what Americans put in tin cans."

Señor Alvarez wore a brown leather trench coat that helped keep out the late winter winds. It hid his narrow frame. It made him look like a well filled-out man; but he was a skinny, old man.

"You can't smell it to see if it's spoiled. And who knows what they put in there? No, Americans and tin cans are not reliable."

"Señor Alvarez, I have never eaten deviled ham, but my father says that it's good."

Yolanda held her hands together in her lap and kept her back straight when she talked to señor Alvarez.

"Julio Chavez likes anything American. When they take his land, he won't like it anymore."

"How can they take the land here in Chihuahua?"

"They took Texas, didn't they?"

"But he owns the land, señor Alvarez."

"Chica, you are but fourteen, how can you begin to understand?"

He switched his toothpick to the other side of his mouth.

"They'll buy it, like that gringo, señor Yeats."

"But he doesn't own the land; he leases. Surely God will not allow the Protestants to buy His country. Even the French oppressors were Catholic."

"But not Mexicanos. The American takes most of the grazing fields with his large herd, and he makes more pesos than any Mexicano around here, including myself. That's land and money that should be in brown hands."

He kicked his boots against the post to shake off the clinging brown soil. The dust of a distant rider swirled down the road. Señor Alvarez raised a hand over his eyes and asked Yolanda who the rider was.

"I can't see who it is either."

“It’s that gringo. I know how he rides—what a spectacle.”

When the rider was upon them, he saluted. It was señor Alvarez’s son, Claudio.

Yolanda walked home in the bright sunlight, but even the sun could not hide her white breath nor hinder the frigid wind. In her mind burned the warmth of her father’s opinion, and the cold of señor Alvarez’s judgment. She pushed her hands deeper into the pockets of her faded coat, concluding that she would find heat buried beneath the layers of cloth like a fire smoldering beneath the ashes. It was the same cold.

She passed by señor Yeats’ ranch as she always did on her way back from the village. The ranch was a few hundred meters from her house. She squinted her eyes to get a better look at the hacienda. It had been built by the Pizarros seventy years ago. They were the richest ranchers within a 150 kilometer radius. But the grandson of the Pizarro who built the house entered politics, sold his cattle, and moved his family to Mexico City. He rented the ranch to señor Yeats.

Yolanda imagined the hacienda to be four times the size of her adobe. The walls appeared as white as the first snow in the mountains. No wind seemed to penetrate below the concave tiles, keeping the house warm in the winter. In the summer the sun struck the red tile roof with desert intensity, but the house remained cool. Only tile blessed with blood could do that, she remembered being told. The hacienda surrounded a garden. In it they said he grew magic grain which made his cattle fatter. She had never seen the garden. Señor Yeats did not allow it.

Yolanda saw the outlines of men scurrying about, tending the cattle. Many vaqueros worked for señor Yeats. How is he so successful? No one raises a larger herd. Maybe Papá knows; but if he does, why do we have so little?

“*Ai chica, que bonita!*” a ranch hand shouted while the others laughed. Her face reddened, and she quickened her pace, glad that her home was near.

Her father worked the pump to fill the metal pails with which he watered the livestock. His muscles strained to build

pressure in the pump. He looked up and saw Yolanda. He wore small, round glasses that reminded Yolanda of her professor. He had moved to the fields of El Faro from the mines of Zacatecas. His eyes—hazel, like root beer—grew bright.

“My querida, we are eating at señor Yeats’ this evening.”

“Please Papá, not again, you know I don’t eat deviled ham.”

“It’s time you begin.”

“I’ll fix mole con pollo.”

“Not even my favorite meal will tempt me. Anyway I promised. Why don’t you want to go?”

Yolanda recalled how her father came in most nights. He would sit in the rocker and hang his arms off the chair. His fingers nearly touched the floor, and his veins still bulged. He ate whatever they fed him. Then he slept.

“I’m sorry, Papá. I’ll get ready.”

“You have always been sensible, my querida, but sometimes it takes time for you to understand.”

“Ai papá!”

Even in the dark Yolanda could see the chipping paint as she passed near the outer walls of señor Yeats’ home. Señor Yeats greeted them and directed them to the dining room. The long wooden table seated all of señor Yeats’ vaqueros. None ate with the guests; they dined at the cantina on Saturday nights. Julio Chavez smiled as señor Yeats opened the can of deviled ham. The can opener looked like a strange butterfly to Yolanda, and when señor Yeats lacerated the metal can with the steel insect, she covered her ears from the noise. Then he scooped out the potted meat and placed half on Julio’s plate and the other half on his. He walked to the end of the long, rickety table and brought back the pot of beans and served señora Chavez and the children. He sat down, and while Julio blessed the food, Yolanda peeked up at señor Yeats. His head was not bowed, nor his eyes closed.

“Amen,” echoed señora Chavez.

“Don’t you believe in God, señor Yeats?”

“Be quiet, hija. My daughter, the little nun.”

"I don't mind. Yes, I believe in God."

"Why don't you pray"

"I do. But not like you."

"How else can you pray?"

"I pray, privately, in my garden."

Julio offered a cracker.

"Try some deviled ham, hija."

"Please Papá. I don't want to."

"She doesn't have to try what she doesn't want," señora Chavez said.

"You're right, but how can she know that she doesn't want it without bringing it close to her face for examination; and how can she know its flavor without tasting it?"

"Maybe someday, Papá."

A quiet rap interrupted the dinner. The wood floor creaked as señor Yeats walked to the door. Yolanda noticed that his boots were caked with mud. Was he lazy, or did he not care about the mud?

"Hola."

"Hola. I am sorry to interrupt you; may I speak with you?"

"Yes. Would you like to go into my office?"

"No, here will be fine."

He must not see that we are here, thought Yolanda.

"I must sell my cattle. I don't have enough feed to last the rest of the winter. I thought I could make it . . . Well, will you buy them from me?"

"No. I can't take your cattle from you. You've been a rancher all your life." He pulled his hand down over his chin and put his fingers into his Levi's, hooking the belt loop with his thumbs. "What will you do?"

"I'll move to Chihuahua, or Juarez, who knows."

Señor Yeats pulled his hands free.

"My friend, I have much grain. I'll give you enough to last till spring."

"I cannot accept charity."

"I know. You can pay me back by breeding your great bull with a few of my heifers."

"Thank you, señor Yeats. It will be done."

He tipped his hat and left.

"Who was that man, Papá?"

"It was señor Fuentes. You need glasses, my querida."

"They make me ugly."

"The only thing ugly is the distortion that you perceive."



After last year's plentiful fall, when the corn had equaled the sun in hue, and the capricious earth had granted the dry plain an abundant harvest, the men of El Faro gathered at the ranch of Galen Yeats. With their bellies full of the tequila of triumph and certainty they made their demands. They assured themselves that their cattle would be gorged with grain, and that their children would be fat with beans. The children pursued the spectacle.

"The American is an invader," yelled señor Alvarez. "He is the maiden whore of the prostitution of El Faro!"

"Forget the authorities in Chihuahua; Julio has corrupted them."

"The gringo must leave!"

"Calm down, caballeros," shouted Julio. "What strange thoughts infest your minds. Señor Yeats is like any man among you. He wishes to work, and see fruit from his labors. Yes, he's an American, but who among you hasn't he helped? Has he profited from any of you?"

The harsh rumble reduced to a murmur.

"Let's rejoice in the harvest and allow señor Yeats to be glad also."

"But it is our land. We are Mexicanos."

"It is your land, but whose land was it before you? It's against our law for a foreigner to own any part of our land, so he rents. Why deny him what he's paid for?"

"Señor Chavez is right," the priest said. "Let the fiesta continue without the strife that the devil, alcohol, blinds us with."

"Yes, but he's no devil, he is an angel of riot!"

The men of El Faro indulged in their liquor, which made them forget their complaints and remember their swagger. But the children would not forget so quickly, thought Yolanda. They possess no wine to wash away the residue.

"My father says that the American has bought your father."

"Papá does not serve Mammon," replied Yolanda.

"Who is Mammon?"

"He is the fallen angel of riches who blinds men with their own lusts."

"If he does not serve Mammon, then why does he defend a rich man?"



Once again the skinny of winter yielded to the labor of spring. Julio Chavez plowed his field. As he sliced the refreshed earth, Yolanda watched him clutch his side as if it were his own flesh being turned with the steel blade. But that did not bother her: it was the exposed earth—whether it would yield good or bad. She could not yet discern if the soil was rich or poor. She covered her eyes from the blurred sight.

When she opened them, her father lay upon the exposed field. She screamed. The doctors thought he had appendicitis. When they operated, they found cancer. It had secretly flourished beneath his skin. Julio knew he was going to die.

"I know I am dying. I wish I had longer to help you, my querida. Just remember not to dig too deep—you might get stuck."

He died one week later before he finished planting his fields. Galen Yeats hired men to finish the planting. They cultivated and harvested it as well. Galen Yeats tended the cattle. But Yolanda stared at the unopened cans of deviled ham all summer; only when her mother sent her to the store did she go out.

"Hail Mary," she often prayed, and added, "I will not be deceived. The cancer will not infect me."

She lit candles for her father's release.

When the harvest came, señor Yeats gave señora Chavez enough pesos to buy a ranch.

"You shouldn't accept that money, Mamá."

"I can accept what I want."

"But you shouldn't want that."

"Why not?"

"I know Papá never accepted money, but he defended the gringo."

"If he died for doing what was right, then let me die the same way."

"But why would God punish a good man?"

"Why would God let my mother and my sister die of starvation while the Pizarros dined on lamb? My family were good Catholics. Why would they give me their food so I could live, but they die?"

"I don't know, Mamá."

"Nor do I."

Yolanda wept.

Señora Chavez brushed Yolanda's hair with her fingers.

"While your father lived, we did not have to accept this good man's money. But I will take it from him now, and we will live."

As the celebration of the harvest commenced, Yolanda stared outside her window. All night she could hear the faint sound of jubilation like the sound of a distant battle. As the moon became brighter in the night sky, the sound grew. The cadence beat a rhythm marked by illumination, like the explosion of gunpowder of an awkward firing squad. Were the gods of the night elevating the noise of their praise on the lips of the drunken? she wondered. But sounds cannot be seen. She ran outside to see the phantasm. At first she did not understand, but then she remembered that it was only the yearly ritual of ousting the American. She walked over wondering who would defend him this time.

"At last the authorities have agreed with me," said señor Alvarez. He wore the trench coat since a chill permeated the night. "You cannot use our grazing land. They will no longer lease it to you."

"Caballeros, haven't I helped you when I could? What did I take from you?"

"You took the grass that our cattle could have fed upon."

"We can't trust you, gringo."

"Julio trusted me."

"Julio was a fool."

"And a traitor."

To Yolanda the men's flickering lights grew dimmer. She thought she saw Galen Yeats entering the hacienda. The men's voices grew louder mixing until the sound was nothing more than a jumbled din. But she heard a familiar voice near her, distinctly. It said, "Salud."

The train sounded like it whistled its disapproval of the burden it had to carry. But then it chugged, chugged into motion as if resolving to bear the weight placed on it. Yolanda marveled at the strength of the black machine. Her mother nudged her. Galen waved from one of the windows on the train. He wore a brown leather trench coat made in Guanajuato. She waved back. He tipped his hat and yelled, "Try the deviled ham. I think you'll like it."

When Yolanda arrived home, she hung her coat up. She surveyed all the patches and decided that she would get a new jacket. She would keep the old one as a memory. She walked over to the shelf where she had sat all summer. There remained the remnant, eight cans of deviled ham. She had been afraid that the next one her father opened would be spoiled. I should eat Mexican food anyway. But what's the difference, as long as it feeds you? Papá never got sick from the gringo's deviled ham.

Yolanda found the can opener. I don't think you can fly, but you look as if you could. Maybe you would like to. So would I. She clamped the instrument down onto the can; it bit into the metal, and Yolanda raised her right hand to her ear, but only for a moment. Then she returned her hand to the task and opened the can. "The meat looks like chorizo before it's fried." She looked around. No one heard. She spread some on a cracker and held it in her hand. She smelled it. Then quickly she ate it and washed it down with a glass of water. She waited for her stomach to contract and expel the foreign matter. It didn't. Maybe I like deviled ham. She spread some more on a cracker and walked into her bedroom and looked out the window towards Galen's ranch. Men were herding cattle into the corral. One sat on a horse watching;

he wore a long coat. Has Galen come back? That can't be him.

"Mamá, I need glasses."

"I still have your father's. You should try them."

Yolanda ate the cracker and wiped the window with her hand.

"I will, Mamá. Then I will see clearly."

Artists and Authors

Mark A Curtis is a Senior majoring in English. I like to write from experience, but I also like to retell old family stories, fashioning them in my own vernacular and expressing the truths I see in them.

Deborah Evans is originally from Detroit, Michigan. She is a pre-law English and Philosophy major currently studying Japanese language.

Elizabeth Heichelbech is twenty six years on the planet. Born in Washington, D.C.; through a series of cosmic mishaps was raised Catholic in Kentucky along with six other people claiming to be siblings. Barely escaped the convent. Left University of Louisville in junior year to begin professional ballet career. Danced for various companies in the Midwest. Quit ballet to see what life was like outside of a tutu. Sold everything and traveled west, making it as far as Florida. Returned to Indianapolis for do-overs, self-published a chap book and attended the Midwest Writer's Conference on scholarship. Began classes at IUPUI in August; is studying English with emphasis in Creative Writing.

Laura McPhee is ian's mom & elvis devotee. Laura dreams of moving to Paris, losing 15 pounds, writing the great american novel & andy garcia (not necessarily in that order).

Sean Monkhouse is a senior majoring in English. Recently started a local publication in Indianapolis named "Crosssextions." I am currently working on an underground comic strip entitled "DA PEOPLE."

Tisha Rodriquez graduated from IUPUI's School of Education in May 1994 with a major in Spanish and a minor in English. She is currently the Spanish, Journalism and Speech teacher at Lutheran High School in Indianapolis.

Elizabeth Schmidt is a full-time student in English and a full-time mom. I live in Indianapolis with my daughter, boyfriend and cat. My hobbies are writing, fingerpainting, cooking and sleeping. If I could have one wish, it would be for more time in the day.

Becky Vasko is a part-time, "non traditional" student working on my undergraduate degree and majoring in English. I enjoy writing, and find the concept of combining fact into fiction particularly compelling. My story, "The Doll," is dedicated to the memory of "Lilly," November 6, 1931-July 22, 1994.

