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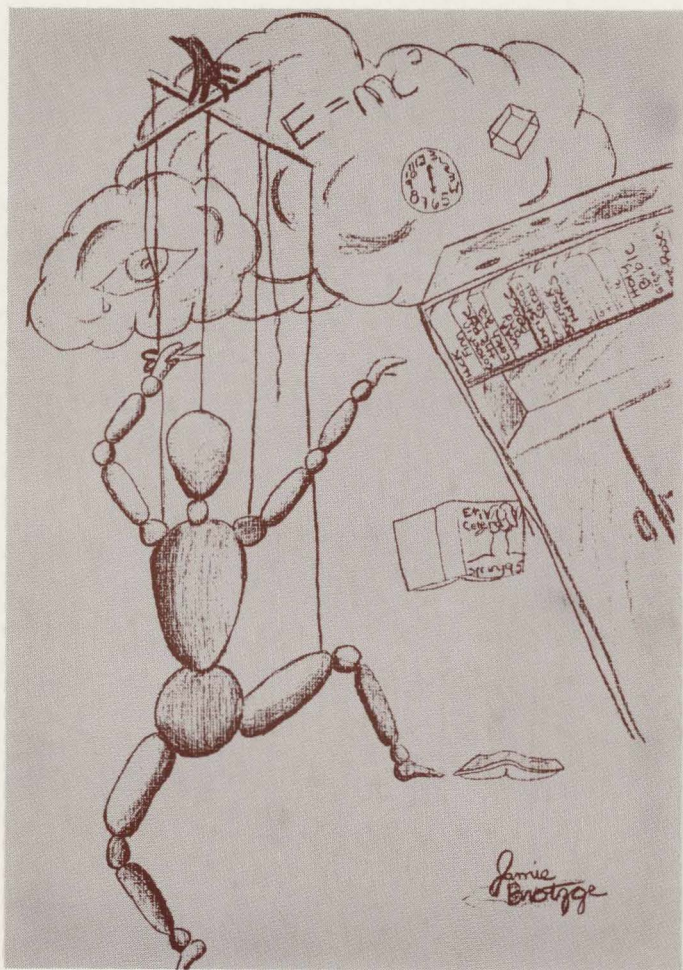
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The Literary Magazine of Marshall University



Spring 1997

SPRING 1997

THE MARSHALL UNIVERSITY LITERARY MAGAZINE

ET CETERA

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THE MARSHALL UNIVERSITY LIBRARY MAGAZINE

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Fiction

- 1st** **The Shim Incident**
 --Grace C. Gosselin
- 2nd** **Dog Will Hunt**
 --Robert L. Jones
- 3rd** **Time Gone By**
 --Deborah Dunlap

Poetry

- 1st** **Staring at a Painted Raven**
 --Robert L. Jones
- 2nd** **Dead Dog Epiphany**
 --Todd Young
- 3rd** **Trembling Parallelism**
 --Sheenagh K. Fraley

CONTENTS

Fiction

Dog Will Hunt--Robert L. Jones	5
The Performer--Deborah Dunlap	19
Guys To Look Out For--Shawn Ayers	24
The Shim Incident--Grace C. Gosselin	28
Time Gone By--Deborah Dunlap	39

Poetry

angels --Robert L. Jones	45
Remembering The Beats --Nathaniel Chambers	46
Independence Day --Kelly Broce	47
An Essay by Bly --Nick Salyer	48
Bleed For Me --Robert L. Jones	49
Staring at a Painted Raven --Robert L. Jones	50
Witness --Melissa Cuppett	51
Magician --Kelly Broce	52
Childhood --Nick Salyer	53
Queen Maude's Black Room --Michael Cornelius	54
Cut --Luke Styer	57
Water's Edge --Holly Shanholtzer	58
The Fishing Hole --Greg Rickard	59
Standing --Tyler A. Parris	60
Dead Dog Epiphany --Todd Young	61
Trembling Parallelism --Sheenagh K. Fraley	63

Dog Will Hunt

by Robert L. Jones

"Get that goddamned dog outta my patch for I kick the shit outta you and hit too," Gerald said, pointing a dirty finger toward the hound that was sniffing around in his garden patch.

"You got that to do, you little prick," Ned replied as he walked over to the hound and kicked him lightly in the side. The brown and white basset yelped and then ran out of the patch and onto the dusty road. Ned followed.

"Dog is the best huntin dog round here, you got no right ta talk bout him like that. Show some 'spect. Sides, your tomatoes ain't worth a shit anyhow."

Ned stood in the middle of the road a few seconds more, then turned and walked back toward his own house, just a little ways down the road.

It was almost three o'clock. Leona would be getting off the bus in Rockingham right about now, he thought. She should be there by 6 PM. Ned rubbed his bearded chin, it would be good to see her again. She had been the first girl he had ever kissed, seen nude, made love to. He and Leona shared many firsts. Everyone was so proud of Leona. She was the only one in the family to make it. She was the bright one in the family and she had a formal education. After graduating from Beauty School in Hamlet she made it big in Charlotte working for a beauty salon. Now she was a celebrity in Hamlet hollow because she worked in the big city.

The sun was just going down. Ned sat down on his front porch and waited for his cousin. He reached into a cooler sitting beside him, took out a can of beer, and leaned back in his favorite chair. Once a man from the city had broken down near there and just left his car, a nice one, an '80 Cadillac. Ned had taken the front seat out and set it on the porch. It made for many comfortable evenings of just sitting and drinking beer.

Even before Dog started barking, Ned heard Gerald coming up the road. He knew it was him by the way his feet shuffled in the dirt. He knew why he was coming too. "That shit," Ned mumbled.

Ned thought about getting the twenty-two from behind the door, but his pellet rifle was closer. He sat very quiet, waiting, waiting for just the right moment.

Taking careful aim Ned fired a pellet that stung Gerald's left leg.

"Ahhh, goddamn," Gerald yelled as he grabbed his leg and sat down in the middle of the road. "What the fuck ya doin that fore?"

The next pellet hit him in his left ear lobe and he jumped up scrambling for cover.

It was a nice tree, the one Gerald picked for cover, nice thick trunk, and it hid most all of him.

"Get the hell outta here," Ned called out. "Leona don't want to see yer ugly face."

"Hell, Ned," Gerald replied, peering around the tree. "I don't care nothin bout that. I jest want that picture a mine you got."

"Well that makes it different then, you kin come up an have a beer, but what picture ya talkin bout?"

"You know the one, that picture I got in Mt. Airy, at the

flea market," Gerald said, sighing the last few words and moving closer to the porch.

"I don't know nothin bout that. I ain't seen no picture."

"Yes ya have Ned, you know ya have, damnit. I stuck it in the trunk of that ol car a yours that last night we's all together, afore Leona went off to that school."

"Nope, I ain't seen it, don't know nothin of it." Ned smiled wide, his teeth were black from the snuff he had been dipping.

Ned adjusted himself in the Cadillac seat. "You kin come up here and have a beer with me jest the same."

Gerald carefully climbed up on the porch and took a beer out of the cooler, then sat down beside his cousin.

"You outta remember that picture Ned," he said lifting the can to his lips, "a velvet picture of the King."

"Richard Petty?" Ned asked, in mocked interest.

"No, damnit, the king, the king, Elvis. Best damn one I ever seen too. Ya know the eyes on that thing will follow ya around, watch ya, kinda like Elvis is in there somewhere. It was painted jest afore he kicked the bucket."

"Must be a real big picture then," Ned said laughing and slapping his knee.

No, damnit, it's regular size. It's black velvet and has him in that red jump suit thing, and the color is jest right in it, it looks almost real."

"Damn, Gerald, you's a strange one. Seems like I would remember somthin like that, but I don't"

I put it in the trunk of your old Ford that night we's all runnin round. There was you and Leona and me and No Teeth."

No Teeth was Hattie Martin, a waitress at the only truck stop between Hamlet and Gastonia. She got the name after

having all her bad teeth taken out. Nattie had never been able to save up enough money to buy dentures, but that was just as well for Ned and Gerald, the only two guys who would be seen with her.

Other than that, and her hawk-billed nose, she was not bad to look at. Ned had always said she had a great personality.

"Sorry, " he said spitting out into the air, "I don't remember none of that."

"I'll jest ask Leona when she gets here." Gerald said, giving in.

"Leona ain't gonna want to see that ugly face a yours first thing, hell that'd be the last thing she'd want ta see." Ned turned the beer up to his lips and drank long. "She probably wants to get used to the place; it most likely takes some gettin used to ifin ya been gone a spell."

"That might be so," Gerald said, swallowing the last of his beer, "still, do me one favor and let me jest check in the trunk a your car."

"Fuck you, you little shit," Ned said angrily. "I ain't about to have you searching through my stuff, god knows what ya might steal." He shook his head back and forth.

"Then I'll jest bust the trunk open, take a little look see," Gerald said standing up.

"Ya do that an me and you's gonna fight and I mean fight hard." Ned stood up and stuck his face in Gerald's. "Now get the hell off my land."

Gerald stepped down off the porch. "Alright you prick, have it yer way."

Leona was wearing a yellow sun-dress with white sandals; her long blond hair swung across her shoulders as she climbed from Tommy Ferrit's old Chevy. He called it a

cab, hardly anyone else did though. Leona smiled when she saw Ned.

She was about twenty, and attractive for that part of Richmond county. She had a slight build, and she was tall. Many of her friends had told her she should go to New York and be a model, but she didn't know how to begin and left it at that.

Her piercing grey eyes fixed onto Ned's. "How ya doin honey?"

"Not bad, can't complain none." Ned said through dip stained teeth.

Ned took her suitcase from the trunk of the Chevy. "You jest come fer a visit, or what? I thought you'd never come back here."

"I'm jest gonna visit a spell, Ned, hell I missed ya, and that Gerald too." She looked around. "Where is he anyway?"

"I reckon he couldn't make it," Ned said

"That'll be three-fifty Leona," Tommy said holding out a hand stained from the past months berry picking.

Leona opened her small black purse and pressed a five into his hand. "Hang on ta the change, you kin buy me a brew tonight maybe." She smiled and turned toward Ned.

"I'll sure nuff do that Leona, I'll be lookin for ya tonight," Tommy said as he back-stepped into his Chevy.

"What did you do that fer?" Ned asked, as they walked into the house.

"Do what?"

"Why ya wanna get his hopes up like that?"

"Gotta give him somthin to keep him interested in me, shit, I learned that a long time ago." Leona plopped down on the sofa.

"God damn," she said, holding her nose.

Ned smacked Leona's knee through the screen door.

"Well, where did ya see it?" Gerald asked.

"Well, I don't recollect now, but ifin I see it again I'll tell ya." She smiled at Ned.

"Hey Gerald? Tell Leona all that stuff bout that picture. Tell her bout how it's the only one ever made and all that other shit."

"Well, you remember when I bought it? I got it off that guy at the flea market, paid five bucks fer it. He said that it was the only one ever made. Seems like Elvis had it painted right fore he died, kinda like the president guy Washington did that time, you know, never got finished, 'ceptin this one got done fore Elvis dropped dead on the shitter that mornin. So ya can see what I got, well, when I find it. I got me a, what was that you said Ned?"

"Priceless paintin," Ned answered, shaking his head.

"Yeah, I got one of them priceless paintin's like hangs in them towns. Thought I might sell it, get me a car or somthin. Hell I might even take us all out on the town fer a night. Who knows? Guess it depends just how priceless it is." Gerald looked out at the mountains. "I might jest use it to get me outta this here hollow."

Ned was touched by this. He made up his mind to get the picture and somehow give it back to Gerald.

Leona came out and sat down on the Cadillac seat with her two cousins. "It sure enough is pretty out here. I had almost forgot jest how pretty. I remember all those nights we spend out here, runnin and playin. But that was happier times, back when we was kids," she looked at Ned, "Remember them times Ned?"

Ned looked down into the can of beer. "Yeah, I reckon I member em."

But Ned didn't like remembering. He was alone now

most of the time. His mother had run off years before, but his father had only recently died.

Well," Leona began, "You damn well better remember em!" She stood, spun around and ran inside. The screen door slammed hard and part of the rotten wood fell onto the porch. Ned, looked over at Gerald, their eyes met, briefly questioning.

"Kin I use a water hose on this here paintin'?"

Leona walked across the yard where Ned was wiping on Gerald's painting. "I don't know, I think you ought better use some dish liquid, maybe, or somethin like that."

"I ain't got nothin like that. How bout jest some soap?" Ned said looking down at the dog crap that covered the painting.

"Hell Ned, you ain't worth a shit, " Leona said pushing him out of the way, "Let me clean the damn thing afore you ruin it."

"Shit, some of this cheap ass paint's comin off", Leona said as she scrubbed on the velvet surface.

"Ha! Yeah, it looks funny, but Gerald won't notice, he's a dumbass."

"Ned!" Leona stood up, "Why can't you jest stop pickin on Gerald? Why do you have to fight with him so much, call him names, make him feel low? He's kin!"

"Jest cause he's kin that don't make him smart," Ned replied throwing his .22 rifle over his shoulder, "Come on Dog! Get yer lazy ass up, we's goin huntin."

The hound lazily came and stood by Ned's side.

"Leona?"

"Yeah?"

"You do me a favor and take that over to Gerald fer me,

I kinda am a little shy bout that. I let the joke go too long, it ain't funny to me no more."

"Sure, I'll take it down to him," she stood back and looked at the spot she had been cleaning, "Now, jest let it sit here in the sun a bit and it'll dry real nice."

"Then you'll take it over ta Gerald? Ned asked.

"Yeah, Ned, you know I will," she frowned.

Ned walked over to where Dog was now lying. He took the tip of his boot and nudged his side. "Come one Dog, get up here boy, Damn if you ain't the sleepinest dog I ever had."

The trip to Gerald's house was pleasant for Leona, she had been gone for five months, it was spring now, her favorite season. Things just seem to be better in the spring, she thought, kicking up dirt as she made her way along the road. She remembered that road well. She, Ned and Gerald had traveled it many times, drunk and sober. She smiled, and skipped along the road.

Walking in the woods early morning often reminded Ned of the times he and Gerald had spent hunting together before the accident. The morning dew make made the tips of his brown boots wet and he could feel his toes getting a little cool. Suddenly, Dog took off after something moving in the brush ahead, but Ned didn't see. He was thinking, thinking back to the last time he had been in that very spot.

It was almost a year to the day. He and Gerald were hunting rabbit and squirrel, as they had done since they were kids. It had been raining and the red clay, mixed in with the mud, made the trail slippery. Ned was leading, Gerald was having trouble on the hill, his boots were no help. Ned had heard the rifle go off even before he felt the

burning and tearing in his right leg. He couldn't remember what happened next. He knew it had to have been Gerald who carried him off the hill. It had to have been Gerald that got him to Hamlet, and the hospital.

The doctor that removed the bullet told Ned he would have a permanent limp. A reminder, Ned thought.

Ned looked around, almost expecting to see Gerald just behind. "It's been too long," he said, "Things jest happen."

Gerald heard Leona's footsteps on the road; her sandals slapping in time, and went out to greet her.

"Hey Gerald!" she called, as she approached the shack, "Hey Gerald, I got yer picture. We found it."

Gerald stepped out onto his porch. "Yaaaa hoo!" he screamed, running down the steps and out in to the road. "Where'd ya find it? I bet that damn Ned had it all along."

"No, well, it was at his house, but he didn't know nothin bout it. I found it put up," she lied.

Gerald took the picture from her, "Come on in the house a spell, we hain't had a chance to talk since ya got in. That damn Ned all the time keepin ya for hisself." He gently carried the picture into his house and set it down against the wall. "I'm gonna sell this, get me some bucks."

"Wait a minute," Gerald said, looking close at the painting. "That picture looks different," he turned the painting toward Leona, "Don't that look funny ta you?"

"Heck, I don't know, I can't remember what it looked like before, we's all drunk that night you was haulin it around in Ned's car."

"Well, my Elvis picture had both the eyes, this one has an eye missin."

"Maybe the paint rubbed off, it'll be fine, jest make it

worth more that's all," she said smiling.

"I guess yer right, Leona," he said, as it leaned it back against the wall.

"Well, I hope ya get a lot out of it, but, well, jest don't get ya hopes up," Leona said looking at the painting.

"Sit down here, Leona, I'll get ya a beer."

"Well, how bout some coffee, I kinda stop drinkin beer, least for the time bein."

"What!" Gerald said, shocked, "My god, Leona, you always liked ta drink, hell, you always out drank me and Ned."

"I know that, but things is different now," she looked over at Gerald, looked hard into his yes, and then at the floor, "Sometimes things jest happen, changes things."

"Whatca mean by that?"

"Nothin, don't you worry bout it, I don't even know what I'm sayin myself sometimes." Tears began to form in Leona's eyes.

"Hey now, what's this?" Gerald said, as softly as he could.

"Oh, Gerald, it's nothin."

"Well hell then, lets jest change the subject. When ya have to go back to Raleigh?"

"Never."

"Never?"

"I ain't never going back. I'm gonna stay here. Maybe have me a kid or somethin," she sighed.

"A kid?" What ya mean by that?"

"Kin you keep a secret Gerald, it's a important secret?"

"Sure I kin, fer you I kin."

"I'm gonna have a baby."

"Well, I'll be damned. You went off and got yourself pregnant by one of them city boys?" Ned said shaking his

head.

"No, not by a city boy. I's pregnant when I left here, Gerald."

"Jesus, hell's fire, then it's mine?"

"It ain't yours," she sobbed.

"That's worse then. The only guy I ever knowed you ta date was that Wilson guy, my god he ain't worth a shit."

Leona took a deep breath. "Ain't his, it's Ned's" she began to cry.

"Ned's?" Gerald looked down. "But he's yer first cousin, ain't they some law about that."

"Law? What the hell's law got to do with it. You think a law gonna keep people from gettin together? Ain't never stopped em before."

"Well, shit. I don't know what ta say. Jesus, what kinda relation will he be ta me? I'm gonna have to figger on this one, Leona."

"We's cousins too Gerald and we did it, never bothered you then," Leona said, frowning.

"Well I loved ya, that's different."

"Loved?" she asked, "Loved, like did, but don't no more?"

He looked long at her, "I don't know, I jest know I got to think on all this."

"Yeah, Gerald, me too," she said looking out the window, past the trash in Gerald's yard, past the pine trees, past the mountains that surrounded them, out into the open sky. Things do get messed up at times, she thought.

"Come on, Leona, " Ned shouted, "Get in the damn car if yer goin."

"Don't you yell at me like that Ned Barley, I'll slap the shit outta you and you know it," she said as climbed into

the Ford beside Ned.

Friday mornings Ned and Gerald always drove to nearby Gastonia. Ned made this run once a week to get beer, cigarettes and car parts. Gerald brought the Velvet Elvis along, setting it neatly beside him in the back of Ned's Ford.

"Wonder how much I'll get outa this?" Gerald asked, leaning forward.

"Well, I don't know, but ifin it is a one of a kind, hell, you ought to get some good money outa it," Ned answered.

"Hey, ya ever tell Ned the news?" Gerald whispered into Leona's ear.

"What news?" Ned asked. "Tell me what news?"

"Damn you, Gerald," she shot him a piercing glare and kicked the back of his seat.

"Well, jest might as well come out with it," she said, taking a deep breath. "I'm gonna have a baby, Ned, your baby."

"Jesus Christ!" Ned shouted as the Ford caught the soft shoulder of the highway and spun. As Ned fought the wheel the ford careened across the highway, spun around once, then suddenly came to rest against the side of a hill.

"Shit! That was a close one," Ned said as he took a deep breath.

"Sure was," Gerald said as he looked out his side window. Something had caught his eye, something familiar, something very like what he had in the seat beside him. He squinted to make it out. "Hey Ned? Is that what it looks like?" he said pointing at a row of velvet Elvis paintings beside a red truck.

Ned didn't answer, there was nothing to say.

etc

The Performer

by Deborah Dunlap

“Excuse me. The line is moving.”

Jamie was startled from her thoughts by the effeminate voice behind her. She glanced back, mumbling an apology to the odd looking red-haired man, and made her way to the end of the line at the Pizza Shak, her favorite fast-food joint in the mall. The taste reminded her of home.

As she chewed the slice of veggie pizza, she thought about her old home in New York. She had moved to West Lane a little over six years ago, a big change from her previous life in Manhattan. She missed her family so much and couldn't wait for them to visit this Christmas. She knew things would still be the same, she would have to defend her little brother, Scott, from the family's good, but misplaced intentions. Everyone knew the perfect woman for Scott. Just yesterday on the phone Mom had said, “Scott just hasn't found the right woman yet.” Yeah, Jamie thought, and he never will unless she has a set of cajones hidden in her pantyhose.

Jamie had always considered herself open and accepting of people, a unique quality in the bigoted little town where she now found herself. She wondered what the girls at work would think if they knew she had a gay brother? Even better, she wondered what they would think if they knew she had helped him and his friends get ready for drag shows.

She checked her watch, emptied her tray, and headed

back to the store. She dreaded going back to the counter. Missy, the new makeup consultant at Jamie's counter, was still wearing her training badge after six months. Jamie had to give her extensive training sessions and she still wasn't coming close to picking up the ins and outs of cosmetic sales. Everyone knew she only got the job because her uncle is the assistant store manager. Missy was just too shy and naïve to make it at their fast-paced million dollar door. Jamie specialized in cutting edge style. Missy specialized in big-haired, country hospitality.

Jamie walked back to the time clock, swiping her card three times before she heard the familiar beep of the laser scanner. Popping a Certs into her mouth, she prepared herself to deal with Missy's country way.

As she neared the counter, Jamie saw Missy talking to the red-haired man from the food court. From a distance, the man reminded her of the Weebies she had played with as a kid. His hair, balding in the front, stood out in three distinct puffs of pumpkin orange from the top and both sides of his head. Missy's face was the familiar shade of crimson it always became when she was nervous, so Jamie could only imagine what the man was asking her.

Missy was visibly relieved to see her and the man smiled as she approached the counter.

"Jamie, do we have a totally white foundation? He's looking for something to make his face really white, and I couldn't seem to find anything like that."

A group of girls approached the counter from the other side, and Jamie told Missy to help them and she would finish the sale with the gentleman.

Jamie turned, extending her hand to the man in introduction, and said, "Hi. My name's Jamie. How can I help you today?"

Instead of shaking her hand, the man placed a Tootsie Roll in her palm, and they both laughed. "I love candy. Don't you?", the man asked.

"I guess you love pizza, too. I was the one holding up the line at the Pizza Shak."

"I thought I recognized you. Actually it was your uniform that made me realize I needed some new makeup. I travel a lot and I realized this morning that I forgot my cosmetic bag at home. I'm looking for a white foundation, a white powder, a black eyeshadow, and a dark blusher. Can you help me? Your colleague didn't seem to be able to."

Jamie considered herself adept at reading people, although it didn't take a genius to figure out that this man and Scott had a lot in common. Here in West Lane, people are cut from the same boring mold. But in New York, everyone was an individual. Jamie knew there was a gay bar somewhere outside town, and she suspected her customer was heading to some kind of show there.

Focusing back on her customer, Jamie confidently assured him that she had everything he was looking for. She quickly gathered her tester units and returned to him.

"We don't have a totally white foundation, but we do have a rather light ivory shade that will suit you. Is your skin oily, dry, or combination?"

"I would say it is more dry, but I like a matte finish. I don't want to look shiny on stage. I'm a performer."

"How interesting. What do you do?"

"I'm a singer," he lisped. "How light is the ivory foundation?"

Jamie swabbed a little from the small round bottle with a Q-tip and handed it to him. He examined it and rubbed it on his hand, smoothing it until only a trace of the color was

left.

“If that one isn’t white enough, you can apply Transparency 1 powder, which is our lightest shade, and it should lighten it more. The powder will also set your makeup, providing for a longer wear.”

“Oh. I use aerosol hairspray to set my makeup.”

“What do you mean?” Jamie asked, curious to know more about this unusual man.

“Well, before I go on stage, I spray 3 or 4 coats of hairspray across my face and let it dry. It keeps my makeup looking great all night. I could probably wear it for a couple of days and it would still look freshly applied.” He threw back his head and let out a loud, girlish giggle and said, “Don’t look so shocked, Sweetie. I’ve been crazy my whole life.”

Jamie swallowed, almost choking on saliva, as everyone in the department turned to look at the commotion at her counter. Missy was eyeing her from the other side of the counter where she was practicing makeup artistry on a younger girl.

Jamie went on with her explanation of the products he requested, trying to remain professional with this jolly, insane man. She wanted to laugh and have fun with him, maybe even sit him down for a consultation, but the disturbing looks she was getting from everyone in the department, including her manager, forced her to remain completely serious and professional. She wished the people in West Lane could put aside their prejudice, a wish that would never come true. Prejudice was inbred in towns like this one.

“Well, sir, it sounds like you need a good cleansing regimen to accompany your makeup practices. Let me demonstrate how our cleansing cream, toner, and

moisturizer work.”

She demonstrated the products on his hand while he constantly giggled, claiming to be ticklish. Much to Jamie’s surprise, he told her to put everything on his charge card.

While Jamie scanned his products and totaled his purchase, the man walked around the department handing out Tootsie Rolls to the other beauty advisors. Jamie glanced at the name on the VISA card. Horace Jones; did that name ever fit.

Jamie motioned Horace back to the counter, where he signed the receipt in large flowery cursive. “Thank you, Mr. Jones. We hope you will visit us again when you are town.”

He winked at Jamie and left the store through the North exit, whistling an old Madonna song and swinging his bag of makeup.

“You don’t see many guys like him around here, do you?” Jamie directed at Missy, who was cleaning up after her consultation.

“Jamie, “ Missy drawled, “Do you think that man was a clown? I heard him tell you that he was a performer and he had lots of candy and he wanted white makeup. He had that funny orange hair, too.” Missy smiled, believing her observations to be keen.

Jamie inwardly groaned and replied, “No, Missy. I don’t think that man was a clown.”

Etc

Guys To Look Out For

by Shawn Ayers

There are four types of guys that you have to look out for. Four types. My dad explained this to me when I was real young. He told me who to look out for, and who not to worry about. The first type, he said, was the guy who didn't blink. Be careful of him, daddy said, cause he's always watching. He's watching every move you make. He notices the little details that most don't, like if you been out, say, with another woman, cheating on your wife, up to no-good mischief, you know, that sort of thing; this guy, he's gonna notice. If she wore makeup and you haven't washed, he'll see it on you. Not just lipstick, anybody can see lipstick, but that orange stuff women put all over their face so that their skin don't looked bleached out, you know? That guy will notice that. And perfume, he'll smell that on you. Sometimes, this guy, he watches so good, you know, that you can be all cleaned up, took a shower or whatever, and he'll still know. Yeah, can you believe that? He knows because you're acting funny. He's watched you, you see, and he knows how you act when you act normal, so he knows after you done something like that because you ain't acting normal no more. Dad said you have to watch out for this guy because he has to know you pretty good, you know, to hurt you. You might work with him. That's why daddy warned me. This kind of guy is usually a coworker, and what makes him dangerous is he likes to tell what he notices. Look out for this guy on the job.

The second type of guy dad warned me about was the

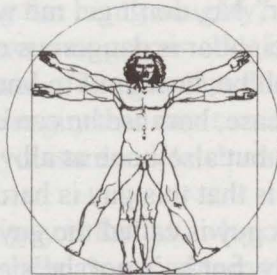
guy who never smiles. This guy don't ever smile, or laugh, or tell a joke, or nothing like that. That just ain't normal, dad said. That guy has a lot of anger, a lot of rage. He feels like he's been cheated out of something that life hasn't given him all he deserves, or something like that. Dad said this guy couldn't see the "fundamental ironies of life," whatever that is. He couldn't understand that when life turns hard, and you don't get the breaks you think you ought, that it isn't because you don't deserve them. God doesn't try to cheat you out of a good life, things just sometimes don't work out right, that's all. So this guy, because things aren't like he wants them to be, he gets this big chip on his shoulder, you know, and it squeezes all the joy out of his soul. What makes that so bad for other people is that he wants to squeeze all the joy out of other people's souls too. You remember that kid back in elementary school that, no matter what, he had to snitch when you was having fun being naughty? This is that guy! Even back then he was sour grapes. But it don't end there. This guy can be violent. The guy that don't blink is seldom violent, but the guy that don't smile will sometimes hit you just because you smile. Watch out for him, daddy warned me, and I do.

The third type of guy is the guy who can't be still. This guy is full of energy, he's always running around and got himself shifted into overdrive. This guy has more energy than sense, daddy said, and it could lead to trouble. Whatever you feel like doing that's crazy, like say you're into rock climbing, and this guy, he's with you and he's into rock climbing too, this guy is going to do it in the most dangerous, stupidest way. He's gonna try to out climb you, even if he's never done it. These guys, daddy said, aren't really crazy, they just don't know their own mortality. That

means, they don't think they're gonna die. Dad told me, "this is a good guy to have with you if you're ever in a war, because he'll charge a machine gun nest or a bunker and you won't have to. But he's a bad one to be with in a bar, if there's a fight, because he'll drag you into it." Yeah. These guys, they're not really dangerous. I mean, yeah, they're dangerous and you have to look out for them, but they're not usually violent towards a friend. But friends usually land in the middle of the trouble they make. If the guy isn't your friend, don't make him mad. They seldom get a joke, and since they aren't afraid of their own mortality, they're liable to pop you one. They make good fanatics, too. I think this type of guy is what makes a good terrorist, because after a few drinks and a cause he can groove to, this guy will strap a bomb to his belly and walk into a toy store.

Now, the fourth and final type of guy to look out for is the guy-next-door. No, don't get me wrong, I don't mean your next door neighbor is dangerous or something (though he might very well be, how am I to know?) The guy-next-door is a special case, because he can exhibit traits from any of the others, but also none at all. Do you follow? What I'm saying is that this guy is hard to tell, almost until it's too late. This guy is called the guy-next-door because he can be anybody, but he's not; he's a guy you look out for. When daddy told me this, I was immediately frightened. I mean, if anybody can be a guy-next-door, how do you know? Daddy said that, to really tell a guy-next-door, you got to watch him close. Don't blink, because you never know when you might miss something that will reveal him to be a guy-next-door. And don't make friends, no, don't even smile, because this guy can get at you through a friendship way, make you think he likes you

then backstab you. So don't smile at him, or hang out with him. Pretend in your head that he stole something from you, or cheated you out of something, and that will help you keep from smiling at him by mistake. And the first time he tells a joke, and you think it's about you, go out swinging. You have to let him know that you won't take that sort of thing, and that you're not afraid of him, even if you think he might kill you. That's the only way to protect yourself from a guy-next-door.



The Shim Incident

by Grace C. Gosselin

Jeanine cradled three-day-old Sean in her arms and checked her seatbelt as Dick pulled the Plymouth away from a New Orleans hospital. While the yellow car wound it's way through the mid-morning traffic, Jeanie marveled at the wide streets lined with palm trees, oleander shrubs, and ante-bellum buildings decorated with lacy ironwork. Streetcars clanged. Ships moored at wharfs unloaded cargoes such as bananas and coffee. For several miles wonder danced in her hazel eyes, but it faded when the Fury groaned and climbed Huey P. Long Bridge.

Cautiously Dick steered the car on the span which arched over the Mississippi, sandwiching a railroad track between its narrow lanes. At the foot of the bridge, he headed west on Highway 80 toward a river parish—toward home.

Jeanie watched the changing landscape. At first industrial buildings lay haphazardly beside the road, but they soon gave way to desolate marshland. In a short while canals paralleling both sides of the highway loomed into view. Laden with swamp lilies touched with September sun, they seemed to stretch endlessly into the horizon.

She sighed, comparing the flat land to her hometown surrounded by hills in Tennessee. The low land did not provide the protection and inspiration found on lush hillsides. In the nearby area where she lived, the land rose five feet above sea level. The highest points were the railroad track and the levee.

Jeanine glanced at Sean. His skin, white as vanilla yogurt, resembled his father's. She bit her lower lip, hard. She was an only child, inexperienced with children and, at times, had little energy. She knew her family, now in Virginia, and Dick's, in Vermont, were too far away to lend support. "I feel inadequate, Dick, and weak. I'm... I'm just not sure I can handle everything today."

Dick blinked his crystalline blue eyes behind his safety glasses. "Tell you what, I'll stay home till nap time. I was planning to go back to the plant right after I dropped you and Sean off at the house. Bill said to take as much time as I needed to get my family settled."

She smiled broadly and patted Dick on the arm. "Oh, thank you, honey. I appreciate that."

Dick soon spotted a railroad crossing and stoplight near their home. He turned right and the Plymouth rumbled over the crossing like a beagle sniffing the ground while running up and down a hill.

Jeanine spied a serpentine wall announcing their subdivision of chemical plant professionals. Spacious homes were built in assorted styles without basements. "Well, here we are at Mimosa Manor, home of the country club, cool as a cumber crowd."

Dick wrinkled his eyebrows and smiled faintly. "And home, too, of Dick and Jeanine Laurent... and others..home of concert-goers, hikers, Saints and Red Sox fans."

"You got me there, Dick."

Then Jeanine saw her ranch style home dwarfed by trees in the back yard. It's brick front displayed a stained front door carved with a floral motif and a lantern scrolled with black wrought iron. A brick wall in the center camouflaged the storage room that connected to the roof and house, forming a breezeway.

As Dick pulled into the breezeway, a forlorn expression washed over Jeanine's face. Her obligations to nurture her family and maintain her home felt as if they were cold, heavy shackles binding her slender wrists and ankles. Additional trips to New Orleans for shopping and medical appointments, increasing child care duties, housework, low stamina, and a husband too busy to help, all tugged at her. And all left her with little time and energy to pursue writing and oil painting, interests she had as an individual.

When Dick opened the side door of their home, Jeanine hesitated before entering. Then two-year-old Pete noticed her. Wearing a milk mustache, he squealed as he bounded toward her. With sticky hands he clutched her thigh, as Mrs. Bergeron, an elderly baby-sitter from Old Marci, ambled toward them. Pete looked up at Jeanine. "Mommy, I missed you."

Jeanine exhaled slowly. Carefully she balanced Sean in her left arm, then tousled Pete's brown hair with her right hand. "Mommy missed you too, Pete."

Dick left at nap time and Mrs. Bergeron, due to Jeanine's pleading, stayed three hours beyond that.

At 3:00 a.m. Sean fidgeted in his crib while Jeanine, dejected, sat in a ladderback rocker in his bedroom. He nursed a little at midnight, then developed a fitful sleep pattern. He cried, slept about twenty minutes, then repeated the process hour after hour. Desiring to feel competent as a mother, Jeanine tried to get Sean to sleep for long periods. She never forgot that Pete had kept her sleepless his first night away from the hospital. Since her endeavors had been fruitless, she tasted the bitterness of failure. Anxiety nipped at her too, for she realized her lack of rest could sap the energy she needed for meeting her responsibilities. Quietly, Jeanine wept. She dared not

wake Dick or Pete. Their questions concerning the cause of her tears would humiliate her.

Strands of pale light woke Jeanine at daybreak. Sean, for an unknown reason, had fallen into a sound sleep after her crying. This had allowed her to snatch three hours for herself, but those three hours did not prevent her from being edgy.

After breakfast as she whisked a gurgling olive oil bottle from Pete's mouth, piercing car horn blasts triggered wails from Sean. She charged outside to the mailbox and peered into the postal carrier's Ford. A muscular-looking woman, about twenty years old, was inside, not the Cajun mailman whose face was as wrinkled as a bloodhound's. Over the years the mailman had carried heavy packages to her door, Jeanine appreciated that.

"Where's Oliver?"

"He died." The carrier abruptly handed her the package and gunned the car forward..

After a week, several neighbors complained about Martha, the new mail carrier. Al and Mary, next door, had mentioned that Martha was in love with her roommate and attending a clinic.

Jeanine was not interested in rumors. She had endured six days of horn blasts heralding baby-gifts-blasts that required pick-ups which tightened her shackles. Jeanine considered telling Martha that the horn blasts disturbed her family, but the mean-looking mail carrier intimidated her. She itched to tell Dick about the matter too. But, nearly all of his time at home was eroded by his unit's second start-up at the plant.

Finally one night she fumed, "Dick, I can't take anymore. That mail lady is waking up Sean every day with her horn, expecting me to run to her every beck and call."

“That’s not fair. Does she know we’ve got babies in the house?”

“I don’t know if she does or not. And she probably doesn’t care.”

Dick was irritated after a grueling work day. “I’m going to write that carrier and tell her a few things.” A few moments later he raised his six-foot frame from the desk, stood outside, and plunked the swiftly written message into the mailbox.

Four days later, Jeanine received notices to pick up parcels at the post office because she had not responded to the mail carrier’s toots. She shook her head of auburn curls. She dreaded driving the winding River Road and packing her sons in the car for unnecessary trips.

The next day while Martha’s green automobile was stopped at the mailbox, Jeanine walked slowly toward it and addressed the carrier. “Uh, Martha, uh... I haven’t picked up my packages at the mailbox because I’m having trouble hearing you.”

Martha chomped on a cigar, her voice deepened. “your husband said my honks could wake the dead.”

“Well, they were waking my newborn.”

Martha’s eyes riveted on Jeanine. “Lady, you’re not my sweetie pie, so I don’t have to kow-tow to you like your husband. I’m not changing the way I do my job just for you. I don’t push my responsibilities off on everyone else. Can you say that about yourself?”

Jeanine’s lips quivered. She looked at the ground. “Uh, well, uh... I’ve got to go.”

She hurriedly went inside, braced her back against an enameled door, and closed her eyes. Jeanine was too stunned to cry. She realized she needed to be alone to reflect on Martha’s words.

Saturday soon came, and Jeanine drove to the levee. Since Dick didn't work that day, he gladly complied with her request to baby-sit their little ones.

She trod on oyster shells at the levee. The grassy slopes resembled her beloved hills somewhat and relaxed her. But the river traffic intrigued her, pulling her out of herself and into a new world. Grain elevators poured their contents into tankers flying flags of various countries. Barges, some loaded with chemicals or other products, and some empty, skimmed through water. They headed north to the Ohio or west to Texas via the Intercoastal Waterway.

Watching the barges, she recalled her reason for living in Louisiana. Chemical companies had located plants on the Mississippi because they found it cheaper to ship products and materials by water than rail. Unica Corporation, Dick's employer, had built a sprawling complex beside the river three years earlier, and transferred Dick to it only a month after their marriage.

Viewing the river traffic, a sign of productive activity, she became wistful. She had once been productive as a copywriter before her marriage. Openings for such positions were not available in her parish. Her writing background made her feel uneasy conversing with most of her neighbors. They worked as technology experts for oil or chemical companies. Jeanine turned her gaze to the land side of the levee and took a glimpse of Old Marci. Perhaps she could find opportunities for meeting more congenial people in that neighborhood. She had heard that people living there were natives of her parish or adjoining parishes.

Then Martha's words raced into her mind and stabbed her with pain. Jeanine supposed her timidity and lack of

confidence caused her to slouch her responsibilities on others. Would she ever know her ability until she made earnest attempts several times, alone? She decided to find the answer. Jeanine stopped strolling. "Come hell or high water, I'm going to get those packages. And I'm going to bend and bang some of those chains 'till they come apart."

After her decision, she decided to return to the car. She strode down the slope with a determined air, as a gentle breeze caressed her ruddy cheeks.

On Monday, while Martha's car was stopped at the Laurent mailbox, Jeanine walked rapidly to the vehicle. She fastened an unfaltering gaze on the mail carrier. "Martha, I plan to pick up all my packages at this mailbox. And about your question last week; others have done things for me in the past, but from now on I'll assume all my responsibilities."

Martha raised her eyebrows. "That's fine, Mrs. Laurent."

The following week Jeanine retrieved all of her parcels. Martha had handed them to her with a sprouting mustache and flat chest. This piqued Jeanine's curiosity. She wondered what stage of development Martha was in. Was she a she, a him, or a shim?

With each passing week fewer parcels arrived. By early October Jeanine had no packages to retrieve.

Strong breezes in late October warned that a hurricane hovered over the Gulf Coast. On the day the hurricane was to hit, Dick, on a business trip, phoned Jeanine from the Atlanta Airport. He could not return home, all flights to New Orleans had been canceled.

According to the latest WWL advisory, the hurricane would make landfall about 9:00 p.m. in

Louisiana, then march through several parishes. Though Jeanine was disappointed that Dick could not help her with hurricane preparation, she knew the parish they lived in was not in the predicted path of the storm. For their parish. Torrential rains, flooding, and moderate winds were expected.

Jeanine checked her store of supplies and food recommended for hurricane preparation. She tied down the swing set. Then, to her surprise, a neighbor came over and raised some of her furniture. When she placed X's of masking tape on her windows, she noticed Martha-Shim delivering mail with bulging biceps and a goatee.

At bedtime moaning winds encircled the subdivision. Aware that hurricanes spawn tornadoes, Jeanine placed Sean in a car bed in the largest bathroom. Next, she called Pete in and helped him slip his chubby body into a sleeping bag. After reading a few of Pete's favorite stories, she turned off the light. In the darkness, she heard the rain pelt the windows and sighed. The latest advisory had announced there would be less flooding than originally predicted.

An hour later she heard a ripping sound, a thud, and shattering glass. Sean's room! She left the bathroom and flipped the switch in his room. Nothing. Then she grabbed a flashlight and shone it inside. A tree branch had slammed through the window, part of it hanging over the crib. She moved the crib to the other side of the room.

Jeanine lit candles near the doors and other strategic spots. She rushed to the back yard with the flashlight, placed it on the patio, and angled it at the branch. Breathing heavily and trembling, she yanked the branch twice before it yielded. Then she dropped it on the grass.

Picking up the flashlight, she went inside the storage room and found a piece of paneling. Carefully she carried it to Sean's room. Then she heard Pete and hurried to the bathroom.

"Mommy, why did you leave me?"

"A mean ole wind caused a tree branch to poke a hole in Sean's window. Mommy was outside getting a board to cover the windows, cause we don't want the rain to get in."

He sat up and sniffled as Sean continued dozing. "Mommy, I'm scared. Will the wind blow our house down, like the big bad wolf?"

Love flashed through her like lightening. She knelt down and hugged him. "No, honey. Remember at bedtime, I read a story about the apostles and how they got scared when the wind rocked their boat?"

"Yes."

"And remember Jesus calmed the storm and the boat quit rocking?"

"Uh-huh."

"Well, he'll calm this storm too. He's the boss of the wind and will make it obey him."

Pete touched his bottom lip with his forefinger, then lay down. He soon fell asleep. Then Jeanine positioned the 8x3 panel against the window.

By 4:00 a.m. the storm had passed, and Jeanine moved the boys to her room.

A little after dawn, while the children slept, Jeanine stepped onto the breezeway. Water in the street receded. Spanish moss lay on the driveway and lawn. Suddenly, she stared at an eighteen-inch snake slithering near her front door. Having copper and black markings, it tried to slid through the slit under the door. Her heart thumped. She

knew neighbors had found copperheads and water moccasins in their yards and homes. Jeanine grabbed a hoe from the storage room and stood behind the wriggling reptile as it continues to face the door. She struck it behind its head, hearing the clank of metal against concrete. Then she saw the severed body. Turning, she left behind the snake's remains and her childish reactions. She entered the house.

Inside she sipped a cup of coffee, savoring its flavor. But she savored even more her newly discovered ability to keep her children and home safe. After she finished her coffee, she cupped her right palm under her chin. Perhaps she was becoming a full-fledged woman, the kind she had always hoped to be.

Later that day Jeanine related to Dick all that had happened during his absence. He had arrived in the afternoon, shortly after the reopening of the New Orleans Airport.

No other hurricanes threatened the area that autumn. Jeanine was pleased that she no longer had to deal with storms and engaged in other activities.

In November, she employed a lady for weekly housecleaning. Fewer housecleaning chores gave Jeanine more time and opportunities for other activities. She chatted more often with Dick in the evenings, and joined the League of Women Voters. In December, she and Dick began attending lectures on parenting. At discussions following the meetings, they eagerly met new couples; some were Cajuns, others were newcomers.

It was not until Christmas packages arrived that Jeanine noticed other changes in Martha-Shim; broader shoulders and a scraggly beard.

January brought another change. A new carrier began delivering mail in the neighborhood, apparently a permanent replacement for Martha-Shim. And though Jeanine delighted in writing a booklet for the League of Women Voters that month, she occasionally puzzled over Martha-Shim's disappearance.

Jeanine bounded over the bumpy River Road with her sons a month later. She parked at the post office and entered the drab building. Holding Valentine gifts she planned to mail to her parents, she stood behind a slim-hipped mailman discussing his route with Mr. Haydel, the Postmaster. She heard Mr. Haydel call him Mark. As the handsome carrier turned to leave, Jeanine's jaw dropped. Mark was the former Mathra-Shim.

After mailing her packages, Jeanine hurried outside to the parking lot. She saw Mark standing beside his Ford reading a form. She went up to him. "Excuse me, sir."

Mark looked up. "Hello, Mrs. Laurent."

"Hello, Mark. I was wondering if you had been assigned a new route?"

"Well, yes and no. My other route became so big they cut it in half. The new carrier, I know you've seen him, has your area. But I've kept the Highway 80-Bayou Allemand section.

"I hope you like it"

"I do. I'm under less time pressure because I've fewer deliveries." He coughed slightly. "And I have more time to be personable."

"Sounds great." She glanced at her car. "Good luck to you, Mark."

"You too Mrs. Laurent."

Jeanine returned to the Plymouth and maneuvered it back onto the River Road. Passing the Dufresne

Plantation, she entered Old Marci. At the home of her new friend, Mae Caire, she dropped the boys off for baby-sitting. Heading toward Nouveau Place, Jeanine grinned. She was on her way to an oil painting class.

etc



Time Gone By

by Deborah Dunlap

Diana sat in the wheelchair, patiently waiting for her husband Jonathon to complete the necessary paperwork for her admittance to Williams Memorial Hospital. She wrinkled her nose at the all too familiar antiseptic smell and silently prayed to wake up from this nightmare that was now her life.

Only three weeks earlier, her life was fairly happy. Her days consisted of freelance technical writing for a local firm and carpooling a few of the neighborhood kids, along with her own, to school and back. She and Jonathon had recently celebrated their tenth wedding anniversary, when he had grandly presented her with her dream home, a two-story brick colonial on the corner of 4th and Elm. He always gave great presents after she had overlooked his latest indiscretion. This time it was the blond who lived down the street. He was never very good at hiding things. She was always willing to overlook things for the kids' sakes, but now a new twist had entered her life and she knew they were all going to need him. She hoped he would be there.

During her annual physical examination, Dr. Lewis had found an unusual hard mass that Diana had not detected in her monthly self-exams. Dr. Lewis told her not to worry, but ordered a mammogram for the next week. The mammogram verified the mass and she was then sent to Williams for an ultrasound of her left breast to give a more detailed picture.

Diana remembered the look on Dr. Lewis' face when he gave her the results of the ultrasound three days later. He said, "Diana, things don't look very good right now. You have a mass in your left breast that could possibly be cancerous. I want to try to examine it in my office under a local anesthetic before suggesting surgery, in the event it is only a fluid-filled cyst. We want to cover every possible route before putting you through that."

The examination had not been successful. The needle came away with no fluid, so here she was now in the hospital awaiting a biopsy.

Jonathon called her name, then called it again. Diana worked to clear her head before answering him. "Yes?"

"Diana, all of the paperwork is taken care of except one form you have to read and sign yourself. Here," he said, as he handed her a document containing four or five carbon copies.

Diana began to cry as she read the form. The form wanted her consent to the partial or complete removal of her breast in the case cancer was found. They would do it all while she was asleep, without first allowing her to come to terms with the diagnosis. She looked at Jonathon through red-rimmed eyes and said, "I don't know if I can do this."

Jonathon knelt down beside her, allowing her to cry on his shoulder for a brief moment, something he hadn't done for a long time. "Diana, the kids need you and so do I. Please let the doctors do what they have to do to save your life and sign the form."

Diana searched the eyes she knew so well, looking for any trace of love or affection, and coming away empty. She knew she had to be strong for her kids, so, with a

shaking hand, she looked down at the form in her lap and signed on the black line.

An orderly in a bright blue uniform arrived to wheel her to her room, and Jonathon trailed along behind with her favorite old suitcase. Room 509 was filled with bright sunlight, illuminating every surface. She arranged her few items in a drawer beside her bed, put on her flannel gown, and slid under the sheets. Jonathon sat down in the brown leather chair beside the bed, looking out the window.

After an hour of broken conversation, Dr. Lewis appeared, shaking Jonathon's hand when he entered. "Diana, the surgery will be first thing in the morning. I had you check in for some preliminary bloodwork. There are several things you need to know. First, I expect things to go very well. Dr. Carver, your surgeon, is one of the best. Second, try to get a good night's rest. You will be prepped for surgery around 6:30 in the morning. Do you have any questions for me?"

Diana looked at him through worried eyes and asked, "How will I know if I still have my breast when I wake up? Will I be able to feel it or will I have on bandages? I need to know what to expect."

"Due to the location of your mass, Diana, a good deal of cutting will be necessary, with a minimum of scarring due to Dr. Carver's exceptional skill. This means your breast will be securely wrapped after surgery, so you will not be able to tell just by touching your breast, if it is still there. There will be a period during surgery where you will be kept under anesthesia, while the lab examines the mass Dr. Carver will remove. If there is no cancer, you will be taken to recovery. If there is cancer, the doctor will continue to operate to remove the cancer. I estimate you will be taken into surgery at 8:00. When you wake up, look

at the clock hanging in your room. If it is 4:00, a portion or all of your breast has been removed. Diana, I know how hard this is for you. I will be here when you wake up and we will go from there. Okay?"

"Okay," she whispered.

At 5:00, after her dinner, she told Jonathon to go home to be with the kids. They needed to understand why mommy wasn't going to be home for a few days.

"Will you be all right here? If you need anything, call."

"I'll be fine. As a matter of fact, I need a little time alone."

Jonathon brushed her cheek with his lips and slipped quietly out the door.

By herself for the first time that day, Diana cried. She cried for herself, and for her children, and for unknown things. She cried because her husband needed her but loved someone else. She cried until her eyes hurt, and no more tears would come.

In the glow of the twilight, she thought about the joy she had felt in this same hospital the first time she saw and held her precious babies. She remembered breastfeeding them for the first time and hearing their tiny voices. Now, at eight years old, they were the only thing she lived for.

She could hardly remember when she and Jonathon had truly loved each other and reveled in the touch of the other. She had hoped for several years that he would fall back in love with her, but it was always someone else. If they removed her breast, she knew he would be lost forever. Why would any man want a deformed woman? Diana began to cry again and continued until she fell asleep.

Diana awakened to find a nurse pushing a small silver cart toward her bed. "Good morning, Mrs. Danvers. I'm Judy, the morning shift. I'm going to help get you ready for your surgery."

Diana allowed the young nurse to stick her hand twice before getting the I.V. going. An orderly arrived a short time later, helping her slide from the hospital bed to a gurney, then rolling her down the hall.

Jonathon came up alongside her cart and took her hand. "How are you doing this morning?"

She wanted to scream, "How the hell do you think I'm doing?", but all she could do was smile at him through her drug-induced haze.

Diana's mind was filled with dark and unusual dreams. She thought she heard someone calling her name, but she was deep inside a dark, fuzzy tunnel and couldn't answer.

The darkness slowly began to subside and Diana opened her eyes. Her vision was a little blurry, but she could see the outlines of several people standing around her. As her eyes came into focus, she saw Jonathon, Dr. Lewis and a nurse she didn't recognize. Her eyes fixed on the wall behind them and she began to moan. It was 5:45. Her breast was gone. They were all here because her breast was gone!

"Diana! Diana, listen to me," Dr. Lewis said, "please don't get upset, Everything is fine. You still have your breast intact."

"What do you mean?" she asked, through choking sobs. "It is after 4:00."

"Normally, that's how long things take. You had a severe reaction to the anesthesia and went into cardiac arrest. You almost died, Diana."

Jonathon walked over and took her hand. "The surgery was successful. Dr. Carver removed your lump and there's no cancer. Diana, I was so worried." He began to cry, unable to hold back any longer. "Dr. Lewis, can I have a moment alone with my wife?"

"Certainly. Diana, I'll be back in to check on you later."

The nurse and Dr. Lewis left the room, leaving only Diana and Jonathon. "Last night," Jonathon began, "I had a lot of time to think about you and the kids and times gone by. I haven't been a good husband to you and I know I don't deserve another chance, but I want to try to make up for all the pain I've caused you. Diana, I love you."

Diana looked at Jonathon and said, "We'll see." She was weary from the anesthesia and it hurt to breathe, but she felt stronger than ever.

etc

POETRY

angels

Folding back wings
sliding cold hard
into perfect pews
they pray....
Fingers of blood
eyes burning
smoke vaulted cathedral
the edge
chasmic-black paradise.
Call out
strained hope
slipping sins
in a collection box
dark wood.
Naked
in brown rooms
kneading flesh
Hail Mary's
oily beds.
Convulsing
ungodly love
waiting for angels
to appear
forgiving sin.

R. L. Jones

Remembering The Beats

There were four of them sitting in a circle;
I recognized them immediately.
By God there was ole neal Cassady,
reciting Proust and a
Remembrance of Things Past.
A cigarette hung from his lips, and he was chanting,
"Yas, Yas, Yas," slowly and not as surely as he had in the
old days.
There was William S. Burroughs with an apple on his head,
cutting and pasting;
He was eating his Lunch, and it was not Naked.
Next to him was Allen Ginsberg, Howling that
HE HAD SEEN GOD, but had not talked to Him yet.
Rising up—towering over all was Faustian-like Jack
Kerouac,
surrounded by empty benny tubes and melted t-shirts.
He spat at his typewriter, cursed it,
all in the name of sensation and "beatific" visions;
Visions of pearls and empty pockets; visions he said,
of the lamb and lion walking down the street hand in hand.

Nathaniel Chambers

Independence day

tonight we watched the beginning
and saw heaven choke
on golden things

harmless little fire
so delights the eye
as long as it can't touch us

and when it all falls down
we will be the ones to
watch the ants scurry
or will we be the ants
under the microscope

the insects on parade
doing our dances
singing our songs
for the weary white coats

and they wish to be us
while we wish to be them
we watched the beginning
as we watched the end

Kelly Broce

An Essay by Bly

Li Po and Pindar
rode on dragons

a bumpy ride
feathers grew

from their foreheads
hanging tightly

leaping into
the sea

Nietzche went
insane

the true poem rises
blowing dragon smoke

Nick Salyer

Bleed For Me

I am a razor
against your skin
feel my cool sharpness
my sweet steel.

Bleed for me my love
let your crimson tear-like
droplets caress my skin.

I need this,
your life spilling out
swallowing mine
in rich redness.

R. L. Jones

Melissa Cuppet

I feel the pain
reaching into my mouth
touching my tongue

Slipping down my throat
and I am filled with painted tears
and I walk away
more at ease

R. L. Jones

Staring At A Painted Raven

something in those molten amber eyes
transforms me
flesh to canvas.

I feel erupting on my skin
shapes
like winged shards of glass.

Images span my hands
clutch at my chest
unfurl feathers against my face.

Black embraces me
pulling me down
covering me.

I feel the painting
reaching into my mouth
touching my tongue.

Slipping down my throat
until I am filled with painted raven
and I walk away
more art than life.

R. L. Jones

Witness

I will dry up soon,
today, maybe,
I will disappear, and
the people walking past this spot
will not know I
was ever here.
unless I call out to them,
unless I drink in the rain with an open mouth,
I will dry up and die,
so I will drink
until the rain stops,
until the rain stops,
until the sun comes up for me
and I finally rise up,
knowing that I have
given well.

Melissa Cuppett

Magician

lord of illusion lord of your world then I am trapped there
 I'm your little girl oh and please won't you tell me if any of
 it was real the pain that you made for me the dreams that
 you killed remember the illusionist he was nailed to a tree
 I'll grant you the same if you insist on fucking with me
 very well wrapped package you never could deal with
 jagged edges plastic can be molded so easily pretty in pink
 and a Barbie doll's life was never the one for me mail-
 order rubber doll make her your wife and I know you know
 who the shoe will fit the girl with blonde hair and double d
 tits the perfect white smile she says I wanna be fucked she
 microwaves your dinner and you tip her fifty bucks then
 she whispers your secrets to the agents outside you whip
 her and rip her to find nothing inside now who will clean
 up your mess sweep the pieces under the wedding chest
 illusions no uses without your audience

Kelly Broce

Childhood

Walking up the stairs
in my mind
my grandmother
while living

waited on the porch
in fading dress
always old

a gray bun
until night
released the mane
down her back

a long gray
brushing
I staring

remembering nothing
only
the look of her
in the mirror

Nick Salyer

Queen Maude's Black Room

A king died here, in this room, in this chateau, in
Chenonceaux.
I can still see him if I close my eyes and journey back in
my mind.
He lies on the bed, overcome, his courtesans fleeing from
his sight,
to mourn, to escape their own selfish grief, to not bear
witness to his
death.

Nothing in this village emits death except the room where
he slept.
Wavy farmland hugs the castle, a river kisses and brushes
the south wall.
His chamber is sullen dark, walls and ceiling and floor
shaded with lacquer.
White bones and white feathers are etched lovingly into the
ebony timbers
of the walls. The writing table and bedding are black, the
mahogany chest
stained black, the curtains, armoire, and nightstand all
black. It was quite
breathtaking.

I imagine she held his hand, his queen, Maude, matron and
rubesque
in her lacy bedclothes. She held his hand and whispered
she loved him,
told him to let go of his pain. I am sure his death was
painful. They

usually are. She held his hand, and he died, and she never let go. She lived in this room, done over by her, never to leave it, alone and steadfast. It was whispered amongst the less loyal servants she was mad, with grief, to dwell in darkness, never emerging to watch the sun or moon or river, living by murky candlelight. Her black dresses, satin, must have looked beautiful on her. Only white etching ever broke the black horizon, the bones and feathers and spades bordered into the walls and ceilings and floor and furniture. She must have been quite mad to live amongst all this black harmony and peaceful lack of light and color. Life could not cross her door; time, her sole and walled up companion. She must have loved her king, more than riches, or light, or death. Though I am awed by the beauty of her surroundings, her sacrifice I could never make, a lonely prisoner of my own accord for twenty-six years in a solitary black room with only prayer and bewrayed love for nourishment. I cannot imagine how much she loved him, for her to live like that, and cannot imagine ever feeling such love myself. I doubt any could; and I leave Queen Maude's black room, turning back once to see Maude at her scribe's table, head

down, not writing,
 not thinking, just waiting, disconsolate but patient. I turn
 and go; I want to
 bear witness no more to the story of this room, so I leave:
 Maude alone, me

jealous

Michael Cornelius

Cut

Chasm

opens as the ground rips.

River

flows up, fills the gap
 runs red as it contacts the air,
 absorbs the precious oxygen.

He tastes iron as he licks his wound,
 winces with the pain of contact.

Stillness

waiting for the blood to clot.

Luke Styer

Water's Edge

The edges of my waves
tickles the toes
of people walking
as I sink their soles
beneath my skin.

From them I feel
emotions forgotten to me
except for envy
which is revealed as crashing waves
that calm
into a rushing white cloud.

I consume
the feelings of joy and freedom
from the feet
of the people who stand and stare
at my edge.

They jump with outstretched arms
and blind remembrance into
my womb
then rest in a familiar comfort
as I rock them back and forth.

I surround them
with power they have lost
and I taste
the life
I was not meant to lead.

Holly Shanholtzer

The Fishing Hole

The fisherman laughed,
Sounding like volcanic ash
Dying on a cool, lazy ripple
In a shallow pond.
“Slim pickin’s today, boy,”
He barked. “Ain’t nothin’ to do
But head upstream—
‘N hope.” He laughed again.
I winced
And sucked on my bleeding thumb.
I remember each wheezing laugh
From my father’s great chest
And his death stare as I set
The catfish free—
And how the worms screamed,
Impaled on the silver hooks.

Greg Rickard

Standing

We stand on carefully tressed dock wood
that floats on the waterway, the backside of the island,
salt-soaked from recent neap and recession.

(We don't hold hands like we used to)

Humidity tickles my skin like glaze on my lips,
the fresh baked Krispy Kremes we ate
before trudging through sand along the beach.

The water laps forth and back
as crabs and scuttlebutt float helplessly
in the tide's pull.

(It's a cold wind tonight)

You know, docks warp and wither
like trees in the just-past winter inland;
time will collapse them.

I realize we are trying to walk on water
no faith in love strong enough
to stand above the tide.

Tyler A. Parris

Dead Dog Epiphany

Things get heavier when they die.

I believe that. I really do.

It's kinda like by dying you're actually gaining something.

Like when the breath of life leaves you, gravity increases,
holding tight to that used-up. Left-behind husk.

(if the moon wasn't so bright, I wouldn't have to think
these things.

if the dog at my feet was only playing dead, I could
smile.

if the wind would just change direction, I
could stop breathing death.)

silence is the language of the dead—listen for it...

I hear the mute tongues of the dead, screaming in silent
agony.

The lone wailing of a single life becomes a symphony of
despair,

the death of every living creature woven into a web
of weeping.

(if the dirt would just fall faster, the visions would stop.

if I could throw down this shovel and walk away, I
could cry.

if this icy pain cuts any deeper, my heart
may freeze.)

cold is the touch of the dead—warm your heart...

Love, fresh and unused, washes over me,
 (the last shovel of dirt fills the grave)
All the love they never gave, never knew they had,
 (I walk away, sweat and gravedirt on my
 face)
They warm me with their final bittersweet kiss.
 (and I taste death in my lungs.)

love is the parting gift of the dead—remember them...

Todd Young

Trembling Parallelism

Standing there
you look Cold and
 Alone
a grey victim Breaking,
 Growing
in desolate fields of discontent.

Wings flutter there,
 capturing a burgundy
 they cannot hold
i sink my arms into your ground
exquisite Misery surrounds.

But
you are Breathless and
 Fallen
your dusty eyes
 two strangers
glancing in different directions

as even We
 are torn.

Sheenagh K. Fraley

UA-119