

The background of the cover is a watercolor illustration. It depicts a landscape with a winding path or road that curves from the bottom left towards the center. On the right side, a large, dark tree stands prominently. In the middle ground, a row of smaller trees is visible against a light, hazy sky. The overall style is soft and painterly, with muted colors and visible brushstrokes.

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Cynthia Andrews

SLEEPING IN HEAT

In Gainesville, where I find myself,
I go to bed clutching a small, white bear
and I do not put the fan on high
or turn the fan completely off—
I leave it low, whispering over
my arms and face, conjuring up
the silken friction of skin on skin
from some other era of sleep.

The bed creaks; I've come to like the sound
in the absence of your body. The marvelous
brass rails call notice to the slightest
readjustment of my pillow.
I dream relentlessly, of tortured reenactments
dangling in my just conscious,
those old rotten tomatoes of the day.

Rarely do I make it to sunrise
without the pinprick of waking, justifying
a well-lit trek for juice and a passage through
The Snow Leopard, where chill horizons
exhaust the spirit, daring every eye that opens
to swallow the brutality of light.

Jill Barrie

NEAR THE DEPOT

I live in a city blighted by light.
My room is small, the maps on my walls are
large, trimmed by ocean and ribboned with names.
Often I listen to radio. I compose broadcasts
of my own: *A Bomb Has Brought Down The Vatican,*
Castro Has Gone Underground, In France
A Purge Is Afoot, The Guillotine
Reinstated. Outside,

trains groan. Semaphores
blink to keep from crying.
I have nowhere to go.
Asia hangs from my spine
where the tail has worn off.
Europe is my shirt of horsehair and silk.
And I lie with my lover on the edge
of the Americas. The world
is small when you make it your home.

Martha Carlson-Bradley

HAUNTED WOMAN

I suppose it's too much to expect
he'd grow kinder after death,
but these tantrums, for three years now—
the coal-bucket upset on the carpet,
the unlit kettle burning dry.
What is it? I wonder
as though that question ever did any good.
Didn't he slam doors, scowl, curse,
insist that nothing was wrong,
I must be crazy to keep asking,
can't a man live in his own house?
And then he'd leave the wood in the pile
for someone else—for me to fetch,
and worse, he'd turn away at the last moment,
knowing I would never insist,
too stung, too humiliated,
the nightgown bunched around my waist.
Now I'm the one ignoring him.
I tell my gentle, second husband
the dog knocked over the coal, the cup
slipped out of the baby's hand.
Nothing's wrong, I say, and kiss his cheek.

Robert Cooperman

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY, ON THE DEATH OF HIS SON WILLIAM IN ROME

I could join Mary in her wish
to be underground, numb
to the laughter of Lear's gods.
A boy of four, squirming terrier pup—
taken with the snap of fingers.

I seem a plague to all who love me:
first Harriet, playing Ophelia,
but hardly needing a nudge
to float, a lily down the Serpentine;
then our flower Clara, choked by dysentery;
finally, William, Wilmouse
burned by typhus like a butterfly
vicious boys toss into their campfire.

New life grows in Mary;
if I knew its death-date
I could bear the loss-to-be.
But fate delights in lending a bauble,
watches our joy, waits for us
to think all will continue
placid as lemon-April.
Only then it sends storms
to smash us against continents—
a tap with its mallet fatal enough.

Mary and I trudge north
to quiet summer mountains;
we'll stare at diminishing tree-lines
and try not to remember
our little Wilmouse, laughing
to be tickled and told stories
of ogres and princes.

Cooperman/Percy Bysshe Shelley, ...

**Even in sleep he galloped,
sheets tossed like manes of ponies
loving runs over hard ground.**

Michael Daugherty

THE CAGE

Driving my father's Cadillac, I come over a rise in the long straight road and the lights of surrounding towns appear around me, spread out like so many boats in a vast, dark harbor. To the south, Kansas City rises from the plains, an island of vertical light. For that one moment at the apex of the rise, I am my own island, another flash of light breaking above the plains for an instant. Then I'm going down, coasting off the hill, the digital speedometer mounting higher, but I don't look at it, only at the road. At the bottom I can feel the weight in my face and my stomach, catching up.

Sadie is in the passenger seat, her dark fur shining in the dashboard glow. She looks at me and smiles, her big teeth glistening. She's my favorite dog. She showed up at our back door when we lived in Illinois. She was a small black puppy, shivering either from cold or fear when she came to us, became one of us. Now, she watches the lights appear as we hit another rise. She looks at me. I'm going fast enough that I can't look away from the road, but I know she's looking at me. Her tags jingle slightly. The Cadillac hums.

In town I stop at the hardware store, where I buy hinges, chickenwire and varnish. I put it on my father's charge account, exchanging smalltalk with the man who owns the store. My father is better at the smalltalk than I am. I think it has to do with his job. He works for an insurance company, but I think a lot of what he does comes down to selling people in subtle ways, making them like him. My Dad always has something to say, some little joke or comment that makes people smile as he waves and leaves. The man at the hardware store seems to expect something like this from me. He smiles, says something about a football game that I know nothing about. I nod my head and chuckle knowingly, looking at the invoice I'm signing. He points at the roll of chickenwire. "What's this for," he says. "Keeping chickens now?"

Daugherty/The Cage

"No" I say, picking up the roll. "It's just for a cage. A room really for the dogs."

"Oh," he says, nodding. "I see." I can tell he's thinking *how can this be Bill's son?* I try to think of something to say as I'm pushing through the door, but all I can manage is "bye." The hardware man smiles a neutral smile and waves. He thinks I'm weird. My hair is long.

This is how most of my around town excursions go: hardware, post office, video store; little jaunts into florescent holes of smalltalk. The best thing is the car; when I get back into it and Sadie is waiting there for me. The car responds, a faithful vehicle taking me wherever I want, away from town, out onto the empty landscape where there is nothing or no one to make me feel like a stranger.

This is not my town anyway. I live in a little condo in Kansas City, close to the mall where I work and the community college where I take a few classes. I spend a lot of time up here though, at my parents'. I put the supplies in the backseat of the Cadillac. The dog is anxious, glad I'm back, ready to be moving again, but we make one more stop in town, at the video store.

I pick out an old western, thinking maybe my parents might want to watch it too. If not, I like it late at night, all alone. I will eat popcorn in a blue haze of television light, sitting in my father's La-Z-Boy, in front of the big screen. I've gone for drives in the late hours and I've seen those blue television islands all around. They erupt from dark houses at two a.m. You can see it through the curtains, on the ceilings. They are numerous, scattered over the countryside. When I see them, I feel an odd camaraderie with those anonymous shapes behind the tinted curtains.

I can't remember if I've seen the western that I choose, but I suppose it doesn't really matter. Old westerns have a way of all blending together in my memory so, even if I've seen it before, I would get the plot mixed up with another one. The girl behind the counter who gets it for me is young and pretty, blond like so many of the girls here. I watch her and

Daugherty/The Cage

she hands me the videotape with what seems a forced indifference. A large gold class ring with a red stone swings from a chain around her neck. She's wearing too much make-up and her hair sits in a stiff perm. I try to imagine her in daylight, without the make-up, without the class ring, riding alongside me in a car, going somewhere, anywhere, but I can't. She gets me a bag of popcorn that comes free with the movie and I leave.

Sadie is waiting when I slide in on the seat next to her. Behind the plate glass windows of the video store, someone else is talking to the girl and she smiles, laughs while giving him a friendly push; pretty people with their lives happening to them like the plots of so many movies, with blind inevitability. I feel a turning in my stomach, a longing, but I try to ignore it. I pat Sadie on the head, gently. We take the backroads home, driving slowly, sharing the popcorn.

*

When I get to my parents' house, I go down to the basement, where I have several projects going. For awhile, I've been working on an assortment of small boxes. I don't really know why I make them or what I will do with them when I'm done. I just make them. I like working alone down there, the smell of fresh sawdust permeating my nostrils until I sneeze. Sadie keeps me company, lying on the concrete floor, occasionally looking up at me to see what I'm doing.

On one corner of the big workbench I have stacked the finished boxes. None of them are perfect. They would look all right to most people, but when I look at them I see where the corners don't fit as snug as they could, or where the lid doesn't fit exactly square over the box, or a place where the glue ran and I varnished over it anyway. I'm getting better. Over the months my fingers have slowed down. When my patience for it runs thin, I go for a drive or a walk with the

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dogs.

Sometimes I have capitalistic fantasies about the boxes. I imagine myself turning out hundreds, even thousands of them, distributing them to shops that will sell them, quitting my job at the mall. Then I realize how long it takes just to make one box, one imperfect little box.

My other, more recent project is the cage I'm building for the pets. It's really more of a room, a wall dividing off a section of the workshop. I'm building it for the dogs and cats because they need a place of their own to stay when it gets too cold for them outside. They can't stay in the house. My parents have ruled that out. This is the second house my parents have lived in since they moved to Missouri. The first house was smaller and in a town closer to the city. I didn't see the house before they sold it, but apparently the animals messed things up there quite a bit. Before my parents sold that house, they had to fix all of the damage that the animals had done. They had to replace carpets, doors, and even a wall that had been scratched out. Now it's beginning to happen here.

My parents have four dogs and a bunch of cats. My Mom has a weakness for strays. She can't turn anyone away. Animals must spread the word among themselves, telling each other that you can go sit at that back door and the people there will feed you and take you in. They'll show up at the back door and wait expectantly. Then they'll hang out and multiply. My Dad will complain about them sometimes, but it is partially his own doing. My Mom used to have so many plants growing in their house that you could hardly see out the windows through them. My Dad said "plants belong outside, why don't you get a regular hobby, like cats and dogs?" So she did.

Even though he complains, I know that Dad likes them. He takes the dogs out for long walks on the prairie. They run around and flush birds out of the high grass and deer from the woods. I think it makes him think of when he was younger and he would take his dogs with him to hunt for

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food. That was also in Missouri, a long time ago.

My Dad once told me about some dogs that he had when he was ten years old; beagles that he used for hunting. They went roaming once and ended up killing some chickens. The farmer shot them and hung them over a barbed wire fence by the road where my Dad found them. "It's just the way people were," he told me. "I shouldn't have let them get away like that." Still, that image sticks in my mind and I think of our dogs, of Sadie, and whenever the question of keeping the dogs in comes up, a picture of them hung limp over a barbed wire fence forms itself in my mind. I can't imagine someone hurting Sadie, and I'm not sure I wouldn't shoot anyone who did. There's not many people I like as much as Sadie.

Sadie is the only dog who is well enough behaved to say in the house. The others are a little wild and they tend to mess things up. The cats are another thing. They were normal before the last move, I guess. When my parents moved into the new house a year ago, my Mom didn't want to let them out right away since they didn't know the place and they might get lost. Also because of the coyotes. The last people who lived here had a cat, but a coyote ate it, right on the back porch in front of the sliding glass door.

So the cats were left downstairs in the workshop a lot when my parents first moved here. Unfortunately, they quit using the litter pan. They found all kinds of really creative places to go in the workshop. When I showed up, I spent a lot of time trying to get the workshop together, unpacking things, helping my Dad hang stuff on the walls, cleaning up cat piles, rinsing off tools rusted with urine. Some of the tools hadn't been unpacked since the move from Illinois, five years ago. When my Dad saw what the cats had done, he didn't take it very calmly and he didn't blame it on the cats.

It's the same with the dogs. They get left in the garage. They tear up the drywall, make numerous piles, and chew up anything they can reach. They don't care how expensive a pair of boots is, they just like the way it feels to rip them

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apart with their teeth. My Dad doesn't take any of this very calmly either. After he found his good boots torn up, he stormed into the kitchen where Mom was and bellowed an accusation. I heard my mom reply "Well, where else can I put the dogs then?" I overheard my Dad saying something about getting rid of them or just taking them out and shooting them. So I am building a cage.

When I am done for the evening in the workshop, I go upstairs to see if anyone wants to watch the western with me. I had tinkered with the boxes for awhile and put the chickenwire on the cage before an overwhelming laziness caught up with me. My Dad has gone out to an AA meeting though, and Mom goes to bed early. I turn the lights down low and put the movie in the VCR. Sadie rests near my feet, but she doesn't watch the movie.

*

Later in the evening, driving back to my condo in my old Subaru, the plains dissolve into housing developments and rows of condominiums. I've lived here for more than six months already and I'm still not really sure how or why I do. During the last five years I've lived in places of obvious beauty; ski towns from Vermont to Colorado, the California coast, places where the geography never lets you forget where you are.

My wandering began when my Dad was transferred from his job in Chicago to Kansas City. I was enrolled in a small college near Chicago and lived with my parents, but when they moved, I got on my motorcycle and headed west. When I should have been taking finals, I was lying on a beach in California. That was just the beginning.

Now though, in a Subaru entering the anonymous suburban landscape where I live, I am somewhat surprised at how easily I have become a part of this place. There's not much about my neighborhood that I really notice, but I don't find myself thinking much about or missing those other

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places where I've lived.

I arrive at the condo complex where I live. The Subaru whips around the curves, dodging the islands where small evergreens grow from beds of wood chips, protected by cement curbs. I coast into my spot and cut the engine. Blue light shines from behind the blinds of my unit. My roommate will be up watching MTV, stoned.

My Dad used to live here, in this condo complex, for a few months last year before they moved to the new house. He and my Mom were split up. I was in California at the time, so I don't know exactly why it all happened, but it came as no surprise to me. They had been apart for awhile when I found out. It made sense to me, but when I found out they were getting back together and buying a new house, further out in the country, that made sense too. I wanted them to be together. It's only natural for a kid to want his parents to be together. But I also wanted them to be happy, and after thirty-odd years of a marriage that culminated in what theirs became, it seemed like a generally unhappy thing.

It wasn't so bad when we were in Illinois, although as things led up to their move to Kansas City, my parents seemed to have more fights over small things and my Dad seemed to be away on more business trips than usual. He had been promoted and he had started making more and more money, but it took a lot out of him. Both of my parents seemed to age very quickly then.

I don't know exactly what happened when they moved to that Kansas City suburb, but everything seemed to fall apart there. When I would talk to either of them on the phone, they would subtly complain about each other. When I would tell them something, I would have to tell each of them individually because messages were seldom conveyed and when messages weren't conveyed, there would be anger and bitterness with me in the middle of it.

I was glad when they split up. I felt relieved. It was easier to deal with them as two separate people, two separate phone numbers. That didn't last long either. When my Dad

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was on a business trip in San Francisco he gave me a call and said he'd buy me supper. So I met him at his hotel and we went out to a restaurant where we had a few drinks without saying much of anything and ate an expensive meal that we didn't say much about. We walked back to his hotel room where there was a small refrigerator stocked with liquor and snacks.

I told him that it looked like the life, living in places like this all the time, flying in planes, eating the best food . . . all on the company credit card. As soon as I'd said it though, I sensed that I'd said something wrong. He was sitting in a plush chair, looking out the window over the lights of the city. He was about to pour us a drink from a little bottle when he stopped, put the bottle down on the table and pushed it away. He was looking away from me, but I could see him breathe in heavily. He started to speak but his voice faltered. "I just want my family to be together," he said.

I lock the Subaru and go inside. My roommate is sitting on the couch with a girl I've never seen. Their feet are propped up on the coffee table amidst empty beer bottles and ashes. MTV is on the television. They say hello in their own, obscure way, without actually looking away from the screen and I go to my room.

I can hear my roommate through the wall, stoned, laughing at the television. We don't know each other at all, but in some ways I envy his simple life, the way he has sex with girls he doesn't know and how he doesn't seem to care about it. As I lie in my bed I look at the shapes in my room, dimly lit by a streetlight shining through the blinds, and nothing looks familiar, none of the furniture is even mine. It's as if I have come home to a hotel room.

*

It's Friday night and the cage is almost finished. I built it out of two by fours, particle board and chickenwire. It has taken me a few days to build, working on it several hours at

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a time, here and there. I have been meticulous.

Everything has been cut to fit perfectly. If I made even a small mistake I started again with a new piece of lumber. I sanded in places I didn't need to sand and I made every head of all the big spike nails lay flat into the soft wood. When I've worked on it I have been only vaguely aware of anything else.

What the cage really amounts to is a wall across a section of the workshop. It has a door at one end so you can let the cats and dogs in and out of the workshop if you want to. There is also already a door so you can let them outside. I have nailed particle board over the drywall so the dogs can't tear it up.

It seems fairly foolproof. There is no way the dogs or cats could get out. It's not an uncomfortable place for them either and it's not an eyesore for my father. On the contrary, it looks better than the wall he had to look at before. He will no longer have the cats and dogs to complain about. For my mother, it will be a safe place to keep the animals. The coyotes won't be able to get to the cats. The dogs won't get out to the highway or into the neighbor's livestock. There is no reason the cage shouldn't work.

When I'm done, I keep working. It's early in the evening and the tools are put away. Still, I find myself trimming the sharp edges of the chicken wire. A door slams upstairs; my father returning from work. It's just a doorslam, but I know it's him. It is a sound I've known as long as I can remember. Something about its brisk finality becomes the punctuation for my Dad's day at work. The floor shakes a little with the slam, and with it, my cage. I try the door, swinging it back and forth. The door slides perfectly into place. I slide the latch across and it holds firm. The way the doorslam shook everything though, makes me suddenly doubt my own work.

I start upstairs, thinking I might casually mention that they might want to take a look down here. When I get to the top of the stairs though, I hear them. Their voices are tense,

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like instruments strung tight enough to break. My Dad is louder, Mom responding in a different voice than anything she used on me, almost like she's acting, trying to make her words sound mean and cold-blooded. "Fine, Bill," she says. "That's just fine. You go ahead and write any checks you want and I'll just mystically intuit how much so I can balance the checkbook and pay the bills without bouncing any checks." "Don't go trying to shift the blame to me," he says. "I've been dealing with stuff like this all day and the last thing I want to do is come home and do more. And what's that dog doing in this house?"

"Well all I know is the last time I knew how much I had in my checking account was when you were on your own. Who paid your bills then, your secretary? And you leave the dogs out of this."

Something in their voices sounds so much like myself, like arguments I have had with the women I've tried to get along with. Quietly, I go back downstairs. I feel suddenly very tired. The cage looks ridiculous.

For awhile, I sit at my stool in front of the workbench. The florescent light is annoying and feels like it has been on forever. I try to work on one of my stupid imperfect little boxes, but it's no good. My fingers are impatient, frustrated. Sadie looks up at me from where she has been sleeping amid the sawdust on the floor. I get up, pulling on my coat and head out the back door, Sadie following.

We walk out onto the plain. It gets pretty cold out here in the winter. There's not always a lot of snow, and there's not much green either. When the wind blows it gets as cold as any place. There's something about it that I like, though. I can get a little of that feeling I sometimes go to the mountains for; the feeling of space, the feeling of something bigger and more powerful than myself. It's something that makes me feel small and all the stupid little things that make my life imperfect even smaller. I could get lost in that feeling. I'm feeling that tonight as I walk until I'm far away from the house and all I can hear is the wind and

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trucks on the distant interstate.

Sadie is out in the grass somewhere, sniffing around, enjoying herself.

I lay down on my back. The stars are bright. The highway noise is a faraway drone that I can almost feel through the ground. The wind blows around me. I am low, streamlined. Here, the wind can pass over me. I can get lost under the wind. I don't have to go back.

I can feel the plains spreading out away from me. They could swallow me up or I could spread myself over the surface, emanating from one point like a star. In the distance, dogs are barking.

A silhouette is moving up a rise, half of it in grass, the other half a dim shadow against the stars. It's my Dad. He has the other dogs with him. Sadie runs to greet them. I hear my father calling my name.

I don't say anything. The stars and the night are so large. I close my eyes, disappearing from my spot on the plains.

My Dad calls my name again. There's an uneasiness in his voice, something I've never heard. He calls a couple more times and I don't say anything. He stops. I can see him standing still, not fifty feet from me.

How I would like to stay flat in the tall grass, listening only to the wind. Slowly though, I get to my feet and in a moment, I know he can see me walking to him from the darkness.

"There you are," he says. "I was wondering where you'd got to. It's cold out here."

"Yeah," I say.

He seems to be looking at me, perhaps trying to gauge my expression, but it's too dark. "It's a pretty night though," he says, "but your mother's got a good supper waiting on the table."

"Great," I say. I put my hands in the big pockets of my coat and we walk back towards the only light we can see.

Lynne H. deCourcy

AUGUST

The summer already lies
broken-backed, bent
toward September; it is easier
now to give up on the weeds, bolted
higher than the marigold heads,
choking even the sturdy
beans that bulge tough and inedible
in the sour heat.

Let the frost pick them
and the caved-in tomatoes
gone to bugs and falling
from early May's organized cages.

When did it happen,
whatever perfect flourishing
we waited the long months for,
that sleeping in the torpor
our dreams have slipped
like souls from spoiled flesh
toward something clear
and bare as winter?

Lynne H. deCourcy

ACROSS THE TABLE

Across the table, sidelit
through the window
by noon glaring off water,
your face
its network of creases almost invisible
on the shadowed half, like a dream
remembered
only until I convinced myself.
But where the unfeeling light opens
steadily on it, an unblinking eye,
the netted lines are exposed as anything
unprotectable.
Newspaper ink has rubbed off
on your fingers; when did they change
from sturdy to frail?
And when have you studied me
in full window light, showing you
what I do not see myself,
and kept silence with what you saw
as I do now?
You look up, not catching me, only
to say you see by this article
there is an overdue effort
to save the terns, nesting now. I nod
and glance away:
outside, the beach erodes
and erodes.
The dune fence has pulled loose again;
it will sway like grief when another weather blows in.

Dave Etter

SUDDENLY

The evening news
sticking halfway out
of his coat pocket,
a gray-felt hat
pushed back on his head,
rye whiskey on his breath,
someone's grandpa,
a poolhall regular,
one-time first baseman
in the Yankee chain,
a lover of rare books
and prairie sunsets,
someone's old daddy
heading toward home
for a hot supper,
waits for one freight
on the main line east,
but steps into the path
of another train,
highballing out west,
and so suddenly
in the late fall twilight
becomes an item in
the morning news.

Gary Fincke

AUNT HELEN'S BOOKS

My father brought romance with meals on wheels.
He carried my dead aunt's books to invalids,
And those women in housecoats picked at meatloaf,
Pushed the pudding aside, the tray straddling
Their thighs while Hilary learned which man to love.

One morning the woman on North Street was dead.
My father made the phone call. He carried
The salisbury steak downstairs and returned
For sixty-eight weeks of paperbacks. Thanks,
The paramedics said, we'll take it from here.

My father said he waited in his car. He said
He opened a book and read a chapter and those men
Had her out of there before Heather was hired
By a lawyer who wanted her to work late. He said
The woman was older than Aunt Helen; he said
She'd want those novels passed on; he said
Her lips were parted like a mouth breather's
Or somebody who forms each word she reads.

Nadell Fishman

GARDEN

In rich brown soil under
the tall pine that stood
in front of my parent's red
brick house, my mother planted:
spatulas, butter knives, soup ladles,
all the luckless utensils of her orthodoxy.

Not the happy spoon of the rhyme,
who ran away with the dish,
her patterned stainless fell
folly to our forgetfulness. We knew
meat and milk don't mix,
but between the knowing
and the doing an innocent spoon
was banished to dirt.
Burdened by a role
in religious life, two separate
armies of kitchenware lined
the shelves and drawers on opposite
sides of the sink.

Why is it,
my friends would ask, your mother
plants her silver? This question
sat long among the odd behaviors
that bloomed like cutlery in our garden:
the Sabbath darkness we groped in
rather than affront God with electric
light, the bacon
we shunned—the stuffed derma
we savored, the menorah in the window
at Christmas.

Fishman/Garden

Venerable roots ground such faith
in this plant that does not bend.
The heavens and I as witness, my mother
upside-down interred those shafts:
serrated pronged and bowled,
exhausted her shame of us, in earth.

Howard Gardner

THE FACE MY FATHER CAME FROM

Bebop
days are teal blue
cool—
like grass glistening after the sprinkler
his bowl cut
the sun
reflects off greased hair
like a spring lawn
he jumped out the GE factory
tipped to the bus stop
the dixieland way still stuck on his shoes
shuffling to the back seats
wanting to get off on Park Street and look,
that Chevrolet's grill smiling back at him for weeks
smooth his hands across polished sides
then go to Danielson's
the suit in the window points to the front door,
no time to try it on while the sun fell
that wouldn't be right
that couldn't be
what would he say after
dark
he would have to tell the police to check with Miss Loren
she lived in a big house on Upper Mountain Road
she knew Harry's father-in-law
Harry had even worked a big party for her once
last New Years
1956.

Ricia Gordon

IN OUR FLESH

When my mother came home from touring China,
my father dead less than a year,
I praised her spirit and courage
as we looked through her photos
of buildings oppressive and whimsical,
the troops of clay soldiers
exhumed in Xi'an. I wanted to believe
her life had begun again,
the years of nursing a dying man,
a lifetime of denial and rancor
thrown off like a bad habit.
But she said it wasn't enough, her new life,
without someone to share it with,
China a way to fill time.

I had forgotten
how only a few years before,
lonely, between lovers, I walked my road in late summer
to a field overlooking a pond—
a generous bowl circled by acres of grass.
One frail cloud hung its shadow
over the darkening water
and I longed to speak of it,
as if such moments have words,
if only "look there," or "did you see that,"
and the man whom I spoke to
could smile, touch my hand,
the world in our flesh
whole and urgent.

Jeff Hardin

THE SLOW HILL OUT

Driving out of the holler
took time. The wheels on Pop's
bus, *Silver Bullet* painted
along the side, inched forward,
slapping for a foothold,
rocks slipping and rolling
back down that steep hill.

What we climb out of always
takes time. We must grab hold
deftly, anticipating the give,
the slip that forces us back
into our own weight.

Pop was patient. He knew it
took time. Clutching it,
pushing the gear shift to first,
the climb was steady, few
relapses, his mind on the balance
at his feet, his eyes up ahead.

The balance was the key. "It will
take time," he said, "But
you will know when it's right."
I could feel us moving forward
even as he said it. Balance
will move you forward, I kept
saying, over and over, believing
I held something, something
firm and worth holding to.

Jeff Hardin

A HOUSE SET WELL BACK

*How would it be if you took yourself off
to a house set well back from a dirt road. . .*

—Henry Taylor

Chickens are there
pecking near the well
in the slender dry weeds.

Where overalls hang wet
is where the clothesline droops
nearest the ground.

Inside that house,
just inside the
window above the tiller

a woman's hand pushes a rag
around the perfect circle
of a plate. She is looking

through that window at that
dirt road, the clear air
hanging still. The clothesline

rises a little in the afternoon.
Her eyes fall. The chickens
move among shifting shadows.

Pamela Harrison

TOP HILL

Mrs. McGowan's neighbor has some lilies to divide.
I'm to drive my truck and get them. Word
gets around. Good gardeners are hard to find.
Her drive's so steep—they bought it for the view—

I wonder if my brakes will hold. Mrs. Pollard
stands alone in her yard, a storm-struck tree,
gripping the leash of a great lunging dog.
It makes an awkward meeting for us both.

When she puts the dog inside, I get a tour
of the grounds, hear the story of the friends
who hoped to help her when her husband died,
so unexpectedly this June. How she arrived home,

found them weeding his perennials from the bed.
All the coreopsis gone, all the daisies and the mums.
Her face is twisted and bewildered still.
"You know," she says, confiding helplessly,

"he bought me a surprise last spring before—
They just arrived—two hundred bulbs. . . ."
I look away, past the large, too-empty house,
across the weed-infested beds. "It's too much

for one," she says, her words fading in the air
like the pale contrail of a passing plane. I nod,
bending to pull some burdock with my fork,
knowing what I'm in for, what she asks.

Pamela Harrison

WASHING DISHES

She stood at the kitchen sink, leaning
her belly against the wooden counter,
sturdy and braced, dreaming into the water.

It surprised her she liked washing dishes.
People left her alone, her family withdrew,
half-guiltily, to nether reaches of the house.

She worked there, tethered to the chore,
erasing the day's regrets, cleansing a residue
of poorly-chewed words, the hard, discarded

crusts of habit and convention. She wiped
round and round the white plates and lifted them,
dripping, in the rack to dry, immaculate as eggs.

Tap water splashed off pots in liquid umbrellas—
beautiful, ephemeral geometry unfurled
in the familiar repetitions of dailiness,

a ritual suffused with the sound of water
trickling like a fountain in a cloister.
The moon raised its face in the darkening pane,

twinning her own pale reflection in the glass,
and she would dream, or the dream would
dream her, and words and music rose,

whole thoughts into her head.

Rustin Larson

TRYING TO SAVE BROTHERS

I. May 1986, Washington, D.C.

So I'm on my way home on a hot May afternoon,
the proverbial 102 in the shade,
my car's air conditioner isn't working,
so it seems like all my thoughts are coming back
from their orbit around the city and baking

into my flushed head: the morbidity of teaching
freshman English, the unlikeliness of keeping my job
at the community college north of town, thoughts of me
noticing the traffic slowing down, thickening, thoughts of me
starting to feel trapped and edgy. It must have happened

just minutes before now, no cops around, no ambulance,
just him with his face crushed to the pavement,
blood raying out in all directions like a Japanese
battle insignia, his motorcylce laying twisted near him,
the car he smacked broadside stradling the curb,

a group of pedestrians gathering around, one even feeling
the corpse's wrist and returning to the sidewalk
head shaking no, no. The dead man's long blond hair
shifts when a breeze puffs by, the fingertips
of his stiff hands press the pavement as if he were

about to push himself up and out of the accident,
wipe his face on someone's shirt
and be alive again.

The driver in front of me grabs her mouth
when she sees it. And I, with all my shitheel thoughts

leveled to dust, steer forward, not thinking for a while,
feeling the cry well in my chest,

Larson/Trying to Save Brothers

not because I knew him, but because
whomever was angry last night when he came in late,
drunk and full of insults, whomever is washing

his stained sheets this very moment, doesn't even have
the slightest idea.

II. May 1982, Iowa

I saw him, the day before it happened, lounging
in the library as I shelved books. What did he say
to me? Something in Japanese and English.

I shelving haiku, Konrad saying something to me
I'll never translate, something untranslatable

like drunkenness, like Pat drunkenly firing into the dorm
late that night, "Who's going to die next? You?

You? Will it be you?" and I lying in my bed
listening, staring at the blackened lamp, Pat breaking
a bottle on the doorstep and sitting down and crying.

I remember Konrad's girlfriend of a week (I once told him
"she's so cute, all she needs now are antlers"
whatever the hell that was supposed to mean)
and him dying before she could figure out if she
loved him or not, wandering the old campus of my memory

now, past the lantern erected in brick and iron and memory
for a drowning victim in 1925, a young man
with a Greek name, Paupaulakos or something,
drowned while he was trying to save brothers.

"No greater love does man know than this." says the bronze plaque.

Near the spot the huge oaks stop rustling, and someone
is practicing cello in the conservatory, a third part
for Brahms's German Requiem—
all harmony, but recognizable as rain clouds

Larson/Trying to Save Brothers

stir overhead making me choose between the student union
where "It's a Wonderful Life" is playing for the sixth time
this weekend, or the art studios where Pat is
painting now—several weeks after Konrad's funeral—
a portrait of a woman's torso, no face, but a cascade
of black hair over smooth boulders to a shining reservoir.

"I call her the mother of everyone" he says and invites me
to sit down and sip beer he smuggled into the building
in his "art" bag. It begins raining in earnest
now and the air becomes darker. I see our fluorescent
reflections in the streaming windows. It is late May.

In a few days we will be packing to go home,
but we don't talk much now. I watch him paint,
navel, contour of legs. This is life,
this is what I need tonight,
her turbulent hair.

III. May 1986, Washington, D.C.

I am waiting for Caroline to come home, waiting alone
in our room, in the airconditioned gush of silence
accompanying my thoughts. Was he nameless
or am I feeling the loss of a brother, wanting him
back and living, even though he would grow to hate me,

call me a dipshit on a chance meeting in the Supermarket
as I fondle my way through a pile of canteloupes.

I want him back, even if this is a mercenary thought,
saying if he can escape it, so can I, so can Caroline,
the way we escaped the city once, driving to a place in Maryland,

a hamlet with stone houses from the Revolution. . .
we pulled onto the shoulder, watched the sun go down,
a broad field with a pond, some horses grazing

Larson/Trying to Save Brothers

far off. . . we were a little jealous we didn't own anything
so marvelous as these creatures silhouetted in dayend red,
wanted nothing but air between us and them,
thinking "this is what it means. . ." and "maybe this
moment is the reason. . ." pulling her close to me
and watching the sun and horses darken through a spray
of her hair.

Jon Lavieri

The Empty Six-Gun

Caked with prairie dust
I return to a ghost town,
handcuffed to the rib
of a set of horse bones
clattering between my legs.

I take the sagging town
in the cradle of my palm,
blow a twister up through
the buildings.

When your curtains fly up
mine is the giant head
in the sky,
tumbleweed moons
spinning me halos.

Jon Lavieri

CRACK

This fist of ice
trying
to punch its way
out
from somewhere
down
inside
your heart.

stop
shudder

hold your breath forever

sit up
your spine
is a cactus
petrified

Charlotte Mandel

TRANSPLANT: SIX O'CLOCK NEWS

i

News of the day, he smiles
to the backstepping cameras—
a four year old on stick legs,
melon-cheeked on wonder drug,
cabbage patch doll in his arms,
spindle-ribs shielding

the gift sewn-in
of a rhythmic
bagpipe-drum—
heart of a child who passed through
the ribs of a fire escape
four stories high

whose parents signed yes
before the brain signaled *die*.

ii

Here, the surgeons simply
overstitch

Like a shell the coffin closes
storing an echo

of air over iron balcony, a
spidery acrobat sprung
one story two three four

of a breath
caught on the keel
of an open boy's chest
loose arteries
eager to play

Mandel/Transplant:Six O'Clock News

iii

Play soft, play fair,
yawning nursemaid ghosts,
when you rise at midnight.
Do not taunt the child with no heart.
Comb his hair

with your smallest hand bones.
Let your spines slant in the comic
dances of puppets
and high-kicking letters of alphabet.
Bring fireflies

to mimic the sparks in the dusk
of a living child's brain as he runs
with red balloon wings over surf.
Honor the ritual
learned under spotlights.

So young, help him to bear this weight
of the bruised gasping heart
he caught as he fell.
Say to him, *Do not try to rise,*
Child, fall deep.

Lynn Martin

THE ADIRONDACKS

We have left New Hampshire behind us like a tame bear
eating the shaken leaves, waiting at the border
to swallow us back. But for now we play pioneer
and search for the holy grail. All the elements are here:
water disappearing around corners blown fast
against oars; a boat whose nose sniffs
and retreats from waves arching their backs
in the shimmering light; an overland hike
whose roots kiss your boots in toestopping rapture;
the upper lake to cross before you are there.

Above our heads the mountains sit, hands folded
in a contemplation so severe the ear jiggles itself,
stupefied by a world so wide and silent.
Under those eyes we wrestle to keep
our direction true, try not to get lost
in the deliberate beat of blue heron's flight.

Somewhere an owl hoots the time. Nothing has begun,
nothing ended. We dip our paddles into the past,
chant an ancient litany: Haystack, Basin, Saddleback,
Gothics, Sawtooth; rediscover prayer.
Chickadees chatter a story of smallness
we can retell any way we please.
Everything listens and gives it back again.
Ravens drag the day reluctantly from one shore to the other.
Tonight it will snow. Tomorrow it will melt
every track, erased before we even open our eyes.

Cynthia Moore

SOMETHING FOR MYSELF

If not the thick rush of wind
through these black caverns,
then the heel clicks sharp and quick
at the heart's peeled rim.

Some things I'll save
from talk's hardened hand,
from the dull tap of words
upon your risen chest.

It is enough for you
to strip each wall to primary white,
each floor to first wood.

But the cupboards
with their woolens squeezed tight
inside vinyl bags, far from damp,
from moths, your seasoned touch—
These remain mine.

I have shown you
the roundish leaves that shimmer
in thin mountain air.
Already, you have named the tree.

And while you defy a secret
to wedge its way through the space
between us, I fashion the disguise:

A patch of naked ground
beside some distant pond,
a rock marked by morning shadow,

Moore/Something for Myself

the final pew in a forgotten church,
where a woman lays down
the words to songs
a man will never hear.

Cynthia Moore

THIS IS WHAT I FEAR

It's a matter of shutting doors,
of drawing shades tight over windows.

It's about sponging up footprints
and knotting the belt of this bathrobe.

It's not that I can't bear
the guttural ruckus of thunder
or the sun's white glare at noontide.

It's not the rats themselves
nosing the sticky tracks,
nibbling the flesh scent
that make me nervous.

The rain on my chest
does not scare me.

It's not a matter of keeping
flies out, but of saving
the spiders in dark corners
where they can spin their passions
without interference.

Yet the wind I let in is not satisfied
to sweep the undersides of tables.

The wind solving the riddle of webs,
leaving me only threads
of quiet music—
This is what I fear.

Matthew Murrey

LONG INTO THE NIGHT

**This house I love best
with its lights still on at five am
and voices in the living room,
a man and a woman talking.**

**They have talked past the radio
stopping into static,
past the tired neighbors
latching their doors,
past the last dog barking.**

**I don't care whether they're
brother and sister,
old friends, or lovers.
Their voices please me
like the light from their windows
while I watch from here,
brindled in streetlight and tree shadow,
with my shoulder sack of newspapers
and two dozen silent houses still to go.**

Liza Nelson

CARCASSES

Best of all I loved the story of Orlando
you told as we drove to your folks
that first time. How on hot afternoons,
soon as school let out,
you boys from the Base trailer park
stole into the nearest orchard.
How you gathered bagfuls. Oranges, lemons,
even grapefruit you pitched in battle
while the sun, a giant orange overhead,
glowered and sank.

All your stories new then
billowing memory of glass nosed bombers
who roared overhead,
their bomb bays loaded with tin foil,
shreds of silver that floated in the eye
for days. Juice ran down legs,
stained necks but never wounded.
Young boys' violence
sticky and fragrant
as the mothers' voices calling
their names through the dusk.

North of Orange Blossom Trail
some twenty miles, we rolled down
all the windows. I drank thirstily
from your rippled drawl, inhaled the trees
deep green and full of golden fruit
too perfect. As if to magnify
that ripeness, a small pond gleamed
with a cottage on shore, and a rowboat.
We could live there, I thought,
and be happy forever.

Nelson/Carcasses

This morning I wake to quick murmurs,
the radio hissing the sear of missiles
when they hit. What started as love
on the page thins and widens.
The family has gone. Passing
through Orlando all I see for miles,
row after untended row,
are carcasses. And sometimes a shack,
its roof caved in, where a foreman
might have slept. The frost line
has moved south of these empty branches
reaching like the arms of chained men.

Joyce Odam

I DANCE WITH THE GHOST OF MY SISTER

I dance with the ghost of my sister
she is me
I am one

it is summer
and childhood again

we play catch
we play hide and hide
in seeking twilights

we laugh together at secrets
we sleep together in dreams

when I am angry at her
she disappears
I cannot punish her

only I am punished
by my envy
by my only-childedness
by our tearful mother
who lives only for me

I twirl in the fates of my sister
who is featureless
and has no existence
except what I give her

I pull her after me
in homesick years
in worlds where I am a stranger
and she has outgrown me

Kathleen Peirce

GOODBYE, EVERYONE

for Hascall Peirce

Of course what I remember most
is what we used to call the Park
Edition. That is where we had our cottage
which was purchased years before by my great
grandmother, Helen Hascall Woodward.
Down on the riverbank, in front of the cottage,
was a huge oak tree with a bench built all
the way around it. Then of course
there was the old chain ferry, operated by Jay Meyers
and his helpers. The ferry consisted of two
chain barges being pulled across the river
by a large cog wheel running on the chain
turned by hand cranks. Then too
there were two scows that held
six passengers plus the oarsman. There was a bell
on each bank to signal the ferryman in case
he happened to be in the ferry shanty
on the other side. Then down the river
was the ferry store, run by a wonderful
lady, May Heath, who was really Mrs. Doc Heath, Mrs.
Marshmallow because her beautiful
snow white hair was always fluffed so high up on her head.
I would like to leave you with a picture
of that tree. You can see my whole family
sitting on the bench. That is me there
on my grandmother's lap. I am only two weeks old, 1914.

Susan Pope

SIMPLE TASK

Between two rotting poles
ropes,
here and there worn to threads,
tremble slightly.

Feet eased into garden clogs
blue kerchief knotted round her skull,
basket of linens in her arms,
Mrs. Barrows makes her way
to the lines:

pegs the first sheet,
pegs the second.
Brown fingers against wooden pin,
she pauses.
Face lifted,
she watches.
In the air
the faint burnish of pollen.

Cold and still
in the back hall
stands a daughter's gift,
a gas dryer
delivered by a fine gentleman from Sears
one birthday,
75th or 6th.

Nevertheless
in winter: hands frozen,
sheets stiff
in summer: back moist with sweat,
Mrs. Barrows lifts and bends,
drawn not by habit

Pope/Simple Task

**nor by thrift
but by some kind of love
for the flap of cotton in the wind,
for the burn of sun,
for the way, in the freshening morning,
moisture rises
 scatters
 dissolves.**

Susan Pope

INTRUDERS

"The world don't care for old people," she said, to the emaciated tom sleeping at the shop. He eased down the steps to greet her as she walked up the driveway. "Been here seven decades too long, Fatty."

IVY'S TRADING POST the rotting sign above the door read. Viola Winters had taken over the name with full ownership of the business when Skip Ivy died twenty years before.

"Come on, puss." As she reached for her keys she spotted a dark mound at the far end of the entryhall. "Get out of here, you," she said. The mound moved. "This is no bowery." She'd never seen a bowery, never traveled far from this town where she'd been born, but she knew bowery meant bums, tramps, vagrants.

The mound spoke. "It's me, Mrs. Ivy." Everyone called her Mrs. Ivy now. She'd never protested as the "Mrs." made her feel safe and secure.

"What?" She squinted and leaned her bulky body forward. Her keys jangled. The shape rose and became a boy. "Can't see," she said.

"It's Harry."

Harry helped her in the shop. Why was he here she wondered, but she'd learned years ago not to question or criticize young folks. Did no good, maybe harm. Probably what the old man she read about in the morning paper did; talked back. Three teenagers ransacked his house, pushed him down the cellar stairs. Wasn't missed for five days. Alive when they found him, with a broken leg. He'd eaten vegetables out of jars he'd put by—lost his voice shouting, help, help.

She wanted to shout right now. Why aren't you home with your mother? Why aren't you eating a warm breakfast?

"Didn't think you'd mind if I slept here," the boy said.

Pope/Intruders

As she opened the shop door Mrs. Ivy herd a scuttling, saw the glint of a dark rump scurrying through a stack of paintings. "Rat," she muttered. The boy followed her as far as the coal stove. "Build up the fire, Harry. Be useful."

She flicked on the lamp. Look at him: two earrings in one ear, none in the other. Hair lopped off in uneven lengths. Greyish-green army jacket filched from her Vintage collection. The boy smiled and stomped off into the windowless room where she kept a hot plate, powdered milk and crackers.

She shoveled coal onto the embers in the stove and opened the vents. Navigation in the cramped room was difficult. Disorder allowed customers to imagine they were getting a bigger bargain.

"Got any cereal?" the boy called. Cabinet doors banged.

Would he hang around all day? She settled in the chair beside the stove and fingered the spines of the old books on the shelf beside her. Fatty handled mice, but rats were another thing. Ah, *The Compendium*. Recipes for every occasion. She pulled out the book and put it on her lap.

Harry crossed the room holding a thick ceramic bowl of Wheaties. He slurped and he smelled and the knees of his pants were black with dirt. He needed a mother's touch. Needed some love. She chose an orange from the basket beside her and tried to push her thumbnail through the skin.

"Hold on," the boy said. He set down the bowl and pulled a knife out of the sheath at his waist. "Give me that."

She tossed him the orange and he jabbed it with the knife, peeled the skin. As he handed her the fruit he popped a chunk in his mouth.

"Haven't you got somewhere to be?"

"Soon as my buddy Jed gets here with his van, we're taking off to live in the city."

Fatty slinked from behind piles of magazines, rubbed an ear against Mrs. Ivy's foot, then lapped the milk from the cereal bowl. Sweet puss, but no rat catcher. "Find something to do," she said to Harry at last.

Pope/Intruders

She opened *The Compendium* and turned the brown, flaky pages. There, page forty, "To Kill Rats In Barn And Rick."

"Excuse me, are you Mrs. Ivy?" A young man hurried into the room and dropped a large cardboard box on the floor.

"Bob Whitman," he said, thrusting his hand beneath her nose. How'd he expect her to shake his hand in that position.

"Can you use any of this?"

She quickly assessed: blender ten, lamp five, plastic bowls two, the whole might bring thirty, thirty five. "Not much of a show."

"I cleaned out the basement." He smiled anxiously.

"Five in trade."

"Okay," Bob Whitman said, nodding so vigorously that his glasses slipped to the end of his nose.

Fool. Didn't even bargain. Mrs. Ivy jammed *The Compendium* back on the shelf. Could've gotten five more if he'd argued a bit. No one dickered anymore. A lost talent. Took the fun out. Arguing kept a soul alive; words flung back and forth, clattering like bowls, bodies heating up over pennies and the worth of Grandma's teakettle. Still, the less dickered the more money in her pocket.

"Any rats down to your place?" she asked the man, who examined a marble topped Victorian dresser.

"Been overrun here. Ivy kept the place clean and neat but I haven't the energy."

Mrs. Ivy told Bob Whitman how her feet ached, how young folks had no respect and how she missed Frank, the Chihuahua that had been with her for almost twenty years.

"I killed him," she said. "They call it 'put away' but death's what it amounts to." Blind, the dog had nipped her when she'd startled him, had torn the skin on her fingers. He was incontinent and shook. She carried him to the vets wrapped in a soft towel. As they entered, Frank's nostrils quivered, he bared his teeth and bit her hand again. The receptionist reached for the bundled dog, the towel fell open and Frank leaped from Mrs. Ivy's arms. Midair his

Pope/Intruders

body arched in a last reach for escape; he landed with a thump on the tile floor.

The smell of the place, a combination of septic and antiseptic, had made Mrs. Ivy sick as she walked down the row of caged dogs sold at the hospital. The vet encouraged her to replace Frank with another, but what did he know? The animals yelped, barked and scraped their nails against the wires. She turned around and walked out, thinking of Frank, arched and leaping.

Bob Whitman moved close and put his hand on her shoulder.

"Sounds like you were really attached to Frank."

"In one door and out the other. No animal or person we can't do without, I suppose." She wouldn't cry, not in front of this stranger.

Bob Whitman turned away and ran his hand over the smooth oak top of a kitchen table. "How much?"

"For you, a hundred." He flinched. "Be two hundred in the antique store."

The man drifted around the shop for a time. "How about ninety for the table," he said.

"Can't. It's on consignment."

"A hundred and fifty for the table and the dresser."

"No can do." Now they were cracking. She'd been mistaken about him.

"One seventy-five."

"One ninety."

"One eighty-five." He pulled out a wad of cash and at the sight of it Mrs. Ivy wavered.

Just then, Harry appeared in the doorway dressed in a velvet coat and woman's feathered hat. A sword in one hand and a bologna grinder in the other, he pranced about the room waving the silver blade in the air.

"One eighty-five," she agreed, and Bob Whitman laughed and counted out the bills.

"Minus five, of course," he said, over the swish, swish sound of Harry's voice. He arranged to return later with a

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truck.

"Take that coat and hat off before you ruin them," Mrs. Ivy said. That boy needed some guidance. That boy needed some caring.

"Me and Jed are going into business for ourselves," Harry revealed as he struggled out of the tight fitting coat.

"That's the way. Never work for nobody but yourself. Key to happiness."

Key to happiness. Skip Ivy's very words to her the first time he leaned toward her in the backroom. "You're the woman for me," he whispered. "Rubenesque. Pale," he said louder, rolling the "R". They'd been drinking, celebrating a big sale to some "New Yawker," as Skip Ivy said. His sweet words heated her, as she heated water for the coffee. He ran his hand up and down her back, smoothed her dress over her thighs. She protested. He dickered. A wily salesman he persuaded her and once they'd started, once it became a weekly ritual, she changed her mind, she came around to enjoyment, she neared pleasure. He talked to her nice, Ivy did and the loving satisfied her on the one hand and left her hungry on the other.

"Get me that metal bucket from the other room, Harry," she said, shaking herself from her reverie. When he returned with the bucket they filled it with water and poured in a sack of bran she'd taken in trade. Supposedly the rodents drowned in the process of getting the bran. Several dozen at a time, the book said.

"Talk with me, Harry," Mrs. Ivy requested, after they dragged the bucket to the far corner of the room. "Sit beside me. I've been thinking, if this deal with your friend don't work out, maybe you could rent a room from me. I'd feed you in exchange for yard work, shoveling snow. Might even adopt you." Confiscate those earrings, first thing. Hide them or chuck them all together. "I'll dress you decent," she added. The son she'd never had. She sighed. Money in her pocket and here she was feeling sad, like she'd lost something and longed to have it again, the way she sometimes

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longed to be young once more and awaken on a summer day and feel infinite time stretch before her. Now time had constricted, had folded its wings like a pigeon on a ledge. Days held nothing larger than the catching of rats, the selling of furniture.

"Maybe even change your name to Winters," she continued, but Harry was no longer beside her. She turned and saw him in the doorway whispering to a thin boy in a red school jacket.

"This here is Jed," Harry announced. The Jed person grinned and nodded. Two of his front teeth were missing and his cheekbones stood out in his lean face like smooth potatoes.

"I hear you trade for cash," Jed said.

She moved close to see this Jed clear. "You heard wrong."

"Harry my man, you said she'd trade for cash, didn't you?" Jed questioned Harry, but looked at her, his grey eyes glistening sharp as a blade.

"Go fetch them items from the van," he commanded.

Harry returned with two cardboard boxes of old postcards, sheet music, daguerreotypes. He held the boxes while Mrs. Ivy rifled through, then set them on the floor.

"Daguerreotypes will go for a good bit." A joke. They were dented and unframed, the images faded, but she wanted to help the boys out, or Harry anyway. "Thirty for the two boxes, but don't let it get out. Everybody'll be wanting cash." She removed the money from her pocket and counted six fives.

Jed shoved Harry aside and stood before her with his palm open, wiggling his fingers. "You can sell them for more than that, Mrs." His voice was harsh.

She looked at Jed, then Harry.

"Come on," Jed said, impatiently. "Come on, let's get going."

Come ons never ceased, even in old age. Come on Frank, a little trip to the vets, back home in no time. Come

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on, Mrs. Ivy, hand over all that cash. Were those last words in her head or had one of the boys spoken?

She thought she saw Harry's hand graze his knife in the leather sheath. She trusted Harry once, he was a good boy, but good boys can get in with the wrong kind. For a moment she saw herself lifting an andiron, cracking skulls. Fool. She had no strength to fight or leap. She'd thud, she'd roll down cellar stairs.

"Let me check again," she said. She got down on her knees as if to examine the pictures more closely this time.

"My eyes are old, I might have missed something." She felt the boys above her, waiting.

"Help me up, lads," she said, but Jed turned aside and Harry didn't seem to hear. She thought suddenly of the day not long ago when she'd gotten into a nice hot bath, soaked until the water cooled. When it was time to get out she hadn't the strength to raise her body. She'd called for help, called and called and finally the papergirl heard her, came and lifted her out.

Now, she braced her hand on the chair and pulled herself erect. "Trash," she said, "but tell you what I'll do." She held out all the money. "Here's a bit extra to help you start your business."

Jed grabbed the bills. "Customer's always right, Mrs." He tucked the money in his pocket. "Much obliged. Ever grateful." In his haste to leave, he knocked books off the counter. "Don't you worry a bit," he added. "Mum's the word."

"Good knowing you, Mrs. Ivy," Harry said, before he disappeared.

Doors slammed, an engine roared, tires crunched on gravel. Wearily, Mrs. Ivy picked up the fallen books. Mrs. Ivy. Mrs. Coward, that's who she was. Lost the most cash she'd had in months. All her life she'd lacked courage. It stays with you, a lack does, if you don't attend to it. A hand on her arm startled her. The boys, after her again. Never a moment's rest, but it was only that Bob Whitman.

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"Will your grandson help me load?"

"Grandson?" She shook her head and laughed. Good she found out the truth of that boy's heart now, before she left the shop to him or some such foolishness.

Bob Whitman looked at her oddly, then bent under the table to unscrew the top from the pedestal. "Nothing one person can't manage, I guess," he said, and he carried it through the door.

She pulled out dresser drawers, stacking one on top of the other with a slam. As she was about to carry out the smaller drawers, he returned.

"Let me, Mrs. Ivy," he said, taking them from her.

"I'm no Mrs. I never married," she said, in a bitter voice. Couldn't catch a man, couldn't catch a rat, couldn't catch a thief.

"Ahead of your time. They all live together now."

"Never lived with Ivy, neither. It wasn't like that."

"What was it like?"

"A bit of dickering, a bit of loving, who's to care?"

"Tell me."

"Bah, you've no time for that."

He set the drawers down and sat in her rocker.

"The ramblings of Viola Winters aren't worth a thing," she protested.

"Worth a cup of coffee, anyway," he said.

Unbudgeable fool, she thought. She watched him lean over and throw coal on the dying fire. Ah well, the customer is always right. First rule of business, as she learned today. Ivy'd cringe in his casket at those words. Ah well, let him.

"Sugar?" she asked, and she headed for the back room.

Later that night, after Bob Whitman departed, Mrs. Ivy sat in the rocker. The dim light of the fire burned clear in the darkening room as she rocked back and forth beating a soothing rhythm. Soon the rocking ceased and she slept, and

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as she slept there was a scuffling and the click, click of nails against the floor. The rat waddled in, well-fed, slow moving and steady, by his grey whiskers an old rat, he ambled toward the bucket of bran, paused and sniffed, his black, shiny nostrils quivered as did Frank's that last day. But he was not old for naught; for years none had encroached on his kingdom. He sniffed and sniffed, hesitated where youth might have plunged. His belly, gorged with Wheaties, felt no urgency for bran and thus he moved his fat rump on among the wares, past the old woman and sleeping cat, through the entryhall, beneath the rotting Trading Post sign and out into the night.

Steven Sater

ARTICULATION OF A LONGING

It can be heard even here: this hush
just beyond the sound that is left by the wind,
as if the earth itself were listening,
and we who sit with regret
were unable to hear. . .

What you might have wanted I have not given.
Only the litter of so many syllables uttered from a
mouth of tears. . .

And here, here are only more words;
not even names for what I'd give you:
the unspoken rocks in the cooling river,
the trees extending their twigs without gesture,
the frets of the rain in the transparent distance
as the dusk confounds the solitary witness. . .

Marcelle M. Soviero

DRINKS

There is nothing sadder than you
when you drink, when you let
the mustangs run in your head
and wish you were dead,
wish you were dead.
You tell me this, me, your daughter
who grew up on parades and lollipops.
Sometimes I want to yell stop.
Just stop. But last night when you drank
I gave you the excuse you needed.
If I were a drinker I would have drunk too.
And because I did this, you laughed
and did not say you wanted to die,
you even told the story about the ladybug
and the manbug,
just the way you did when I was young,
when the summer sky over our house
had hints of purple in it, the color of plums,
the color of bruises mending,
ready to fade back into the skin.

Marcelle M. Soviero

PAPER DOLL

Sometimes I forget
that I have a mother, a father,
as if I were created
by accident with a child's scissor
cutting out a paper doll.

Brought into the world
by a small hand who cut me out
as neatly as possible,
left me with the same number of ribs
as any man. I am happy to be paper.
It is less complicated.

I have no sisters or brothers,
the child stopped snipping
after she made me,
so I am alone, flat out on the little table
before her. I have two arms, two legs.

Then she colors me—
puts me in a pink dress
that can not come off.
She gives me blonde hair
and blue eyes. The girl-child
has laid her sex on me.
I am the perfect doll,
made of paper, not glass.
I do not break. I bend.

Dan Stryk

DEMON-MOTHER

(or The Moment)

—based on a Japanese folk tale

. . . the rain beats down
all day. I vaguely sense
the book slip from
my lap—my head,
dull as a stone,
follow its course—
my neck, a heavy rope,
hauling the darkened
grey & green of day,
like a giant dimlit
scroll, into this very
moment. My head
drops. What if
there's no other time
than the one I'm
caught in now, lethargic,
lost? I hear her
voice, so far away,
a brittle screech. . . But
closer now, a softening
into a whisper drawing
all into the soggy
earth—rain pouring
all day long—as
my head sinks deep
in her dark womb, beneath
my rising lawn. . .

Dan Stryk

DECAYING WASP

Day to day on the window screen
we'd watch it turn
to gradual forms, to gradual

shades at the winter's
heart (endured those static
enclosed days

of our own clotted
lifelessness) and finally
the brittle corpse

loosen itself—a sweet
release we almost
felt—into greyish

yellow dust, or in the dusk-
light, antique gold,
the greasy swatter

winter-stilled & hanging
by the locked door
on its hook.

Rynn Williams

THE FAMINE

There were years when I ate nothing. In my decade
of stringency I'd cut an apple in twenty pieces
and feed on the sound of thin metal breaking
skin. The resistance of the grainy flesh.
I lived on the smells of kitchens, grease
left in the air. I lived on table scraps
and the smoke from others' fires. I
wanted to streamline, to pare down,
to stroke my ribcage, my narrow
bones and thrill with their
sharpness. When the famine
within grew so great
it flared up
in a blue flame
and died,
I lived
on air.

Rynn Williams

THE VOICES

There are voices
in the blurred undersides of wings,
in the quick dot of the rabbit's tail
retreating in bittersweet,
in the low chortle of the marsh.
There's the laugh of the high vine,
the forsythia and the dandelion.
There's the sigh of the long grass.

And if I were of this kingdom
I would be silent
and rooted, surrounded
by the chorus of stones.
Lumpy, my blunt ends
would poke through the soil,
my skin would be dusty and thick.
I would grow in the shape
of the below-ground.

I would be the solid,
heavy comfort of starch,
a tuber: rooted, rutting,
jutting through the richness,
the earth clinging in purple clots.
And I would hear the voices.

Francine Witte

FOR BARBARA

Just when it looks like the sun
will always roll out its long yellow
carpet, the wind shifts,
rubs clouds against the sky
till they shred and break

with news from a friend down South.
She writes of her strip of Carolina
beach, a margin between her and the sea

where she can be found most mornings walking
off her mother's recent death. It still makes
no sense, the ships falling off the horizon,
the swimmer, one mile out, taking breath

for granted. But it's sand that puzzles her
most, particles so small, she wouldn't miss
a single one, yet now it's all she's got to stand on.

So I have to wonder, she closes, how solid anything is
when the wind can take it at whim, the waves repeating
the story that sounds different every time, the swimmer,
pulled further, not feeling the water's slow advance,
how he doesn't suspect a thing.

Joyce Odam

THE HAPPY ENDINGS

You know the way to the happy endings.
Some ways are blessed with peril.
Go in a long dress, wearing jeweled shoes.
Sing a song of travel.

Some ways are blessed with peril.
Be grateful for all survival.
Sing a song of travel.
Use your true voice.

Be grateful for all survival.
Small birds will follow you.
Use your true voice.
When it gets dark do not light the candle.

Small birds will follow you.
Sleep will cover you with its wings.
When it gets dark do not light the candle.
Morning may not unravel.

Sleep will cover you with its wings.
You will dream the same dreams.
Morning may not unravel.
You are on your way to the dark country.

You will dream the same dreams
your mother did.
You are on your way to the dark country.
You will marry kings.

Your mother did.
She has told you how many times she cried.
You will marry kings.
Kings have many wives.

Odum/The Happy Endings

**She has told you how many times she cried.
Go in a long dress, wearing jeweled shoes.
Kings have many wives.
You know the way to happy endings.**

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Cynthia Andrews' poetry has appeared in *The Allegheny Review*, *Calliope*, *Plainswoman* and elsewhere. She lives in Orlando, FL, where she is a freelance writer and a news anchor for WBZS radio. She earned her BA from Roger Williams College with a double major in creative writing and career writing. **Jill Barrie** received her MFA degree in writing from Vermont College in 1982. She lives outside Boston with her husband and son. **Martha Carlson-Bradley** received her MFA from Warren Wilson College. Some of her work appears this fall in the *Carolina Quarterly*. She lives in Hillsborough, NH. **Robert Cooperman's** work has appeared in *The Literary Review*, *The Mickle Street Review*, *Pennsylvania Review* and elsewhere. **Michael Daugherty** lives in Plainfield, VT. He has taught at Goddard College and UVM's Church Street Center. He has fiction forthcoming in *The Beloit Fiction Journal* and is included in the recent anthology *How the Weather Was* (Ampersand). **Lynne H. deCourcy's** poems have recently appeared in *Prairie Schooner*, *Three Rivers Poetry Journal* and *Nimrod*. An Ohio Arts Council grant recipient, her book, *The Time Change*, will be published by Ampersand Press in 1991. **Dave Etter** has published twenty-one volumes of poetry, the most recent being *Carnival* (Spoon River Poetry Press, 1990). He lives in Elburn, IL. **Gary Fincke's** work appears in *Poetry Northwest*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *The Gettysburg Review* and elsewhere. **Nadell Fishman** writes, parents and lives in central Vermont. For the past three years she has been a senior staff member with the Governor's administration. **Howard Gardner** was recently a featured poet in the Los Angeles Poetry Festival. His work has appeared in *The Moment* and is forthcoming in the *Earthwise Literary Calender*. **Ricia Gordon** was a semifinalist in the 1990 The Nation/ "Discovery" competition and a 1990 recipient of a Vermont Council on the Arts fellowship grant. She teaches at Keene State College and is a freelance book editor. **Jeff Hardin** is presently working toward his MFA in writing at the University of Alabama. His poems also appear in *The Panhandler*, *Z Miscellaneous*, and *New Collage*. **Pamela Harrison** lives in Norwich, VT, teaches literature and writing courses for the University System of NH, and is poetry critic for *Behind the Times*. **Rustin Larson** lives in Fairfield, Iowa. He has poetry forthcoming in *Passages North*, *Cimmaron Review*, and *The MacGuffin*. **Jon Lavieri** received a BFA in Creative Writing from Roger Williams College and is now living in Kalamazoo, MI, where he is pursuing his MFA at Western Michigan University. **Charlotte Mandel** has published four books of poetry, most recently *Keeping Him Alive* and

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