



# Calliope

Published by DOCS@RWU, 2015

vol. 6 no. 1

# Calliope

Volume 6, Number 1  
December 1982

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CALLIOPE is published twice a year, in December and May. Single issues are \$1.00; a year's subscription, \$1.50.

Submissions of poetry and short fiction are welcomed from Aug. 1 through Mar. 31 and must be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Manuscripts are read and evaluated with the author's name masked so that beginning and established writers are read without prejudice.

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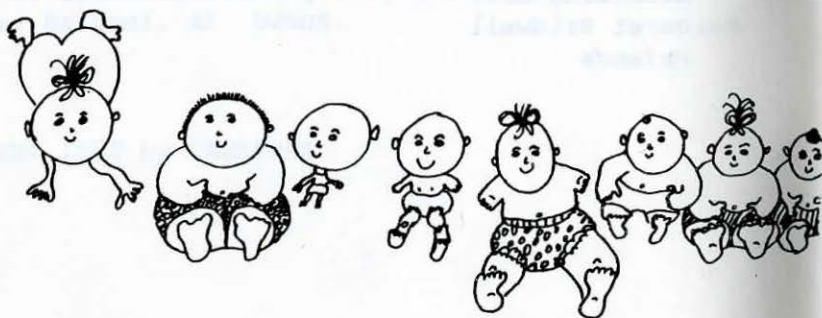
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Wendy Barker

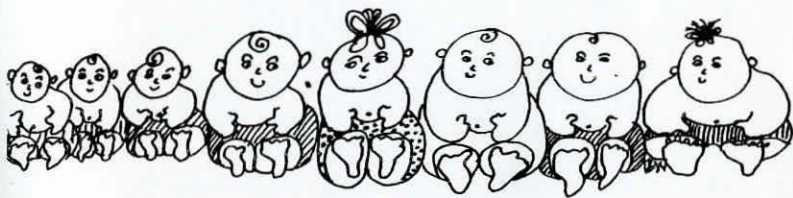
TO DAVID AFTER TWO YEARS

You are growing at the other end of the house,  
weighing it down  
with bouncing, jumping.  
I can't remember  
your vague canine infant's eyes

or your hands  
but I remember measuring them  
against my thumbnail,  
saying I would always remember  
your hands were no bigger than my thumbnail.

At first you were the clock, held  
the clock in your mouth,  
swallowed my sleep into your stomach.  
The world lived in someone else's dreams.  
This year my belly is flat,

you grow brown in slow summer,  
firm as green tomatoes.  
I am no longer green,  
the clock is back on the wall,  
and every night I can finish one dream.



*Sandra Case*

the shortest day

The day is only a crescent  
a thin slice of white moon  
pulling over the sharpness  
of black trees & soundless snow.  
She perceives each short day  
of her forty years,  
they remind her of things  
unsaid & undone  
letters written & stuffed  
into underwear drawers,  
lovers melting like candles  
& her own flesh dissolving  
around the infinity  
of bone.

Peggy Heinrich

MOON GODDESS

A hawk taught her archery.  
Drawing her bow in its beak  
it pointed the way.  
The slit of her eye diamonds  
to light like a cat's.  
She knows the secret of moss  
and mushrooms; calls  
each creature by name.  
She runs, kicking dust in the eyes  
of a turtle, scattering hares.

Rooted like beech trees  
women stare at the ground  
blunting the song of the wind.  
The one who raises her eyes to the moon  
discovers the seed of her self;  
her shoulders unwind like new fern;  
she runs an inch above ground  
braiding the wind with her song.



*Richard Holinger*

## A BATHROOM DRAWN IN THE CONTEMPORARY MODE

Around five or six, Leland Bonfield has discovered, there is not much traffic in the john, so he goes in to soak up atmosphere. He gets a feeling of what hues will prime a bathroom mood, what objects, details, must be included, added, omitted; what lines, lettering, space suggests for toilets, sinks, flip-lock doors and urinals. There is the question of how antiseptic, filthy, or in order it should be: the whiteness of the porcelain, the condition of the paint, the look of the hand dryer (which should convey whether or not a whoosh of warm air would dry wet hands should the viewer push the mirrored button the size of silver dollars before the Susan B. Anthony). All this and more Leland sizes up, how best to represent the Men's room on the third floor in the Arts Building at a large midwestern university an hour outside a large metropolitan eco-system in today's society.

No one had done it before. You had to be different, an original, today, to get any recognition at all in academia. If he pulled it off, it would mean tenure and a place to stay.

Leland moves. He washes, touches, looks, smells. He becomes a student again, and the bathroom is his because he has paid tuition for it. He becomes an elder faculty member, coming in after leaving a class on the Baroque Period, thinking already about work in progress in his studio. He becomes the art critic, here to evaluate Leland's masterpiece "A Bathroom Drawn in the Contemporary Mode" that will be in a museum if he has any say at all. They all enter the cinder-blocked arena, its floor tile pattern scuffed bare, mirrors spattered with soap and broken pimples, basins rimmed with dark hair, urinals stuffed with paper towels, stalls scratched with more information than bulletin boards.

To do his research, Leland goes into the farthest stall, lets the door close, but leaves the latch erect,

Holinger/A Bathroom Drawn in the Contemporary Mode

unlocked. Most did not fit easily in place; why paint himself in a corner? If it stuck, he would have to crawl out from under like a worm, or over the top like a thief. Inside, he inspects the graffiti: light, sensual, poetic, its theme secret disclosure. The sketches are not that good, not for an art department john; he might have expected to see these usual angles and ordinary poses in an English or science department john, but Leland hoped for influences from at least the most obvious masters they all had freshman year: Picasso's half-faces, Rubens' thighs, Leonardo's smiles, Manet's gatherings. Here even parody was missing.

From his tweed jacket pocket he takes a rainbow of magic markers, touches up what's there, and begins a live nude when he hears the outer bathroom door push open.

His pants are not down where they should be. He has been standing, drawing at coat-hook level on the stall door, still unlocked. The strongest desire he feels, after sliding the obese pens into his pocket, is to lock himself in. Or, rather, to lock everyone out. Lowering the steel bar into its holster would send his fright out like a bull horn, that he did not trust his fellow man, his fellow artists, to pick an open door over a closed one. Leland has more regard for his fellow colleagues and students, brothers and neighbors, than to jump to paranoid convulsions. He unbuckles his pants, lets them fall, and, with his shorts separating him from the cold, black, wooden seat, stares at his design, prepared to wait until alone again to finish his work.

At the same time the worn, brown wing-tips, curtained with baggy cuffs, appear under his door, Leland hears three light knocks.

What if I know him? is Leland's first concern. Should he disguise his voice, unroll a few sheets, grunt an apology that this one is filled? or be polite, play it formally, pretend to assume there has been a mistake made, that all this someone really



*Holinger/A Bathroom Drawn in the Contemporary Mode*

wants is to relieve himself and be gone? The safer, more aggressive approach would be to lay down his law and scruples at once, to intimidate first, then lower his tail as skunks do after the danger dissolves. But Leland is not a skunk, and has no such defense.

"Busy."

He waits, then tires of the silence. "Be through in a moment." He must sound like an operator asking a party to hold.

"I wrote the message. The one over the toilet paper."

The voice is old, distant, out of touch, It is not the *I* that is emphasized, but *message*. There is hesitancy, also, and a lack of belief in what is said. Leland thinks: What will this do for my painting? He looks for an epigram to link with the voice.

"What message?"

"Above the roller. 'Meet a friend. Tuesday, five-thirty.' Have I been cleaned off?"

Leland finds the black letters, different sizes, upper and lower case scrawled randomly, the words of the appeal misspelled. It all begins to take form. What this man is looking for Leland wanted to suggest in his painting: the contemporary rest room that alienates instead of relieves. It will be Edward Hopper's Nighthawks at the urinals.

"You're still written here."

"We should leave. I've got a place. It's close by and warm."

It would be better to study the man against the tile background and row of sinks. Why chase this lonely, inarticulate misspeller if Leland could not work him into art? He had to keep the fellow here, play with possibilities of angles, dimension, depth, see his figure bend over porcelain, squat on seats, push liquid soap, rub his hands under hot air like a magician looking for a trick. Whether he finally ended up in the painting did not matter. Perhaps the state of the art in bathrooms did not admit any human life, just the idea that once life was there, like

Holinger/A Bathroom Drawn in the Contemporary Mode

vacuous Chicago train stations. The viewer would not see him; he would instead feel his absence and mourn it.

Leland stands, pulls up his pants, protected now that his idea is clear. "I'm coming out."

"They shouldn't see us talking."

"The place is empty. Everyone's home having dinner with families or watching the news. No one comes back until night school."

Belt buckled, Leland opens the small door, and sees his father before him. It is not, of course; the cheeks are too thin, beard too crisp, eyes too tight. But when he first looks into the face, he thinks his father has returned to help him with his masterpiece, to lead Leland from sink to stool, water to excrement, showing him all that life and death had to offer, because no one else would be able to illustrate all the ups and downs as well. Even if it had been he, Leland would not have known him any better than one recognizes the presence of a dream; he had burned the old Polaroid his mother gave him of his father standing naked in the cold Ozark stream where they used to live, his hands raised above his head to catch Leland, a white blur against the gray trees, suspended like a solid halo set too high. The same year his father went south to where the country was still growing up. Leland's mother took the rest of the family to Chicago like an immigrant restlessly moving to the land of opportunity. Ever since he had stuck to the area as if it could do what his father had never done, spank him and show him the ropes.

"My name is Leland Bonfield," he confesses out loud to the stranger.

"Here's where I live." The man displays a wrinkled piece of paper soiled with pencil marks.

Leland holds out his hand, not to take the note. but to shake the man's hand. "I'm an art instructor here."

The paper disappears in a fist. The man retreats a few steps, his attentive face souring, then makes a



decisive turn and leaves Leland alone in front of his stall. Pursuit would not do. Perhaps Leland has imagined the man's importance too great in the first place, before seeing the rest of him, when all he knew about him was that he wore his pants too long and needed new shoes. Maybe the painting would evolve faster, more convincingly, without a live subject to represent all that Leland has in mind. Better to work with a feeling.

He washes his hands, but when the towel dispenser turns nothing out, and with the blower out of order, Leland leaves the bathroom shaking dry his hands as if they have been asleep, as if trying to get the feeling back, the numbness out.

Bernadette Miller

## REVOLVING DOOR

Ever since she was sixteen, Maggie Murphy had worked in the small Broadway bar--unable, somehow, to quit. One Christmas, preparing for work, she thoughtfully studied her reflection above the cluttered dresser. A towering, fat woman of forty, she admired her black-dyed curls and smooth, white complexion--like Liz, her pretty mother. How come, in spite of her good looks, the bar was all she had? She suddenly remembered Liz brushing her dark curls and pushing her away. "Kid, I ain't got time for kisses; I gotta land another husband!" Maggie felt a sharp pang. Repressing it, she painted her nails. She couldn't blame her mother for ignoring her; landing a husband was rough! She sighed, her glance skimming the rumpled bed. She was unhappy because she didn't have a man. Last year, there was Eddie, real handsome with red hair. She frowned. A moocher, spending all her money! Then two years ago there was Jack until he found someone else. Who was it before that? Buttoning her blouse, she shook her head impatiently. Why drag up the past? If she stopped depending on the bar for her social life and had a respectable job, she'd make friends and get married, instead of sleeping with bums. Yeah, it was time to smarten up. Tomorrow, she'd quit for sure.

Brightening, she donned coat and high-heels, pausing before the Scotch on the dusty foyer table. No more of that stuff! She clumped determinedly down the tenement stairs and past the wreath-decorated door. Outside, it was eerily dark, the heavy clouds threatening snow. Maggie headed along Columbus Avenue and turned the corner to Broadway. Shivering from the cold, she longed for the comfortable Scotch, but soon reached the cozy This 'N That with its orange lamp, cartoon

## Miller/Revolving Door

posters, and pool table--the room festive now with tinsel streamers.

Wee Willie, the janitor, was sweeping. He was a big, ugly ex-boxer wearing red turtleneck sweater. Beaming at Maggie's arrival, he dropped the broom and eagerly patted her behind. "Hey, Babe, when are we gonna make it?"

She glanced at his dented nose, whitish scar, and twisted mouth. "I still ain't interested," she said, shuddering. With a clean rag, she polished the wooden bar until it gleamed. Then, as usual, she folded her arms on the bar and awaited the regulars--as though welcoming familiar guests to her home.

The Odd Couple entered first: a tall mustached Negro nicknamed The Red Baron, and Tuck, his diminutive roommate with blond ponytail. Celebrating the holidays, Tuck had outdone himself in wine-colored velvet knickers, cape and boots.

"Hiya, Mistah Fashion Plate!" Maggie said, grinning. "Who's the big designer today?"

Tuck shyly pivoted, spreading his cape to reveal a matching vest. "Givenchy," he said softly.

She whistled her approval. "This Givchee deserves a treat. Tell 'em the fuck's on me! Ooh, what I said..." Coyly she pressed red-lacquered nails against scarlet mouth. "Like in television--bleep bleep." She poured drinks. "Two bleep bleep Bourbons comin' up!"

A cue stick clicked ominously in the corner "Get over here, Bubbala."

Smile fading, Tuck hurried to the pool table.

Maggie sighed and cleaned the sink. Poor Tuck was lonely; he could use a friend like her.

"Gee, gimme a break, huh?" Wee Willie said, tugging at her arm.



Impatiently she brushed him aside. "Quit pesterin' me!"

"Just cause I ain't much to look at, don't mean I ain't good in bed."

"Huh, just wants a lay--like all the others! I said I ain't interested. So get lost."

She quickly dried her hands on a towel and poured beer as Richard entered with George and Joe-the-Pro, an ex-actor. Richard, an ex-writer, was Maggie's favorite. Tall and blond and wearing a pea jacket, he was lots of fun, but never asked her out. If she wasn't a barmaid, she thought, a nice guy like that might marry her.

George, an ex-drummer who now drove a cab, studied his companions with solemn owlsh eyes. "No horsing around this time, or we'll be late for Wally's party."

Surprised at the opportunity to meet people outside the bar, Maggie stopped wiping the liquor shelf. She folded her arms on the bar and smiled coyly, fluttering her false eyelashes. "Say, I ain't been to a shindig since I don't know when. Think Wally would mind if I crashed it?"

The men glanced at each other and busily sipped their beer.

Annoyed at their pointed silence, she exploded: "Well, speak up! Cat got your balls?"

Richard frowned. He turned to George, who whispered, "Make her think it's dullsville, and then get her mind off it."

With a sly grin Richard reached for the heavy breast looming over his glass. "Sweetheart, don't get your bowels in an uproar over the party. You'd be bored to death."

"Ha, I'll bet!" Angered by his elusive answer, she removed his hand from her red-satin blouse and glared at him. "Screw you! How come



## Miller/Revolving Door

after Wally's been droppin' by here for years, he don't invite me? I got bad breath or somethin'?"

Joe-the-Pro extended his glass dramatically, trying to distract her with humor. "Darling, your teeth are like stars...they come out at night. And your eyes are pools...cesspools."

The men laughed but Maggie, who usually enjoyed their joking, pursed her lips, still unsoothed.

"C'mon, Maggie, you know we all love you," Joe-the-Pro said finally. He stretched upward to offer her a pacifying kiss. With a drink stirrer, Richard goosed the wiry fellow straddling the bar, and Joe-the Pro jumped, squealing, "For Chrissakes, cut that out!"

Maggie roared with laughter. Gee, they did care about her, she thought, pleased at Richard's apparent jealousy, and let him fondle her breast.

"Hey, you clowns, quit kidding around and let's shove off," George said impatiently. "Or there won't be any dames available at the party!"

"That's right!" Richard said, grinning at Maggie. "Okay, men, duty calls..." Playfully linking shoulders, they marched toward the door.

Maggie was having so much fun, she hated to see them leave. "Comin' back afterwards?"

"Natch!" Richard said, and raised his arm. When he lowered it, the trio burst into their usual song:

*Bloody Maggie is the barmaid we love.  
Now ain't that too damn bad!*

Standing by the window, Maggie wistfully watched the men cross the street, pass the A&P, and disappear from view. What the hell,

why not crash the lousy party? She had the guts. When her mother ran off with that gambler, didn't she quit school to work in the bar....She frowned. After Pa died in the war, it seemed like Liz had no time for her. Like when a boy made fun of her polka-dot dress, and she'd stayed up late, waiting for her mother to come home and give an opinion. Liz had just shrugged and said, "Yeah, yeah, it looks nice, okay? Now leave me alone; I wanna sleep." It seemed as if Liz never had time--like she didn't want to be bothered. Maggie shook her head, refusing to find fault with her mother. Well, no wonder Liz had no time; she was probably worn out. Being a dancehall hostess was no picnic!

Feeling uneasy, as though there were other things, too, she didn't want to remember, she stared at the snow drifting lightly past the A&P. But suppose people at the party figured she had nowhere else to go--like she was desperate. Desperate, ha! She tossed back her head defiantly. Everybody in the bar loved her. They thought she was pretty, and a barrel of laughs. Why, she'd be the life of any party!

When her shift ended at ten, Maggie rushed back to her uncleaned apartment and rummaged in the bedroom closet, tossing clothes on the bed until she dragged out her sexiest dress. The ankle-length sequined skirt unzipped to the crotch, and the plunging lace bodice emphasized her heavy bosom. She proudly inspected the gown. Boy, when they see her in this, won't they be impressed! There were grease spots near the hem. She rubbed at them with spit and stopped. Aw, forget it; nobody would notice. Sucking in her stomach, she struggled into the tight dress. The wide band pulled uncomfortably at her waist. Goddamn, she really was getting fat. Despite her girdle, she could barely squeeze into size twenty-two.

Shoving aside dresser jars, she carefully reapplied her make-up: heavily outlining her eyes,



coating the false lashes, and repainting her mouth a vivid, purplish red. She powdered her face until the white skin was smooth as alabaster, and with a red velvet ribbon, she gathered the ebony curls into a tidy ball atop her head. Finally, she splashed on perfume, and checked her appearance in the foyer's full-length mirror. So she was a little plump, she thought, shrugging. Any real man would appreciate a sexy broad like her. Unzipping the skirt, she fisted hands on hips, and twisted this way and that, admiring her butterfly-stockinged legs peeping through the slit. What the hell, she was a knockout! Quickly she finished and hurried outside.

Juggling an umbrella, Maggie stepped gingerly along the wet streets so she wouldn't ruin her glamorous beaded pumps. Wally's apartment was only four blocks, but despite her shivering, she wished it were farther, her stomach knotting with fear. How should she behave at the party? She wouldn't be a hostess, like in the bar, but a guest. She remembered her mother entertaining boyfriends in their Harlem apartment--like that gambler. They hadn't wanted her around. Aw, she was just a kid then, and shy. At the party she could tell jokes, make 'em laugh! Nervously she tried recalling a joke; her mind went blank. After loosening up, she'd remember some. But suppose it didn't matter what she said? Suppose, they, too, didn't want her around...

She'd reached the modest brownstone. Trembling with doubts, she hesitated, longing to return home. C'mon, she coaxed herself, this was her chance to prove she could be liked outside the bar. Act confident--as if she owned the joint! She'd be so fascinating, they'd have to like her! Reluctantly she climbed the stoop and paused in the wallpapered foyer.

From the end apartment she heard bursts of laughter and applause, followed by Joe-the-Pro shouting, "Hey, Wally, you should be on the stage. There's one leaving in five minutes!" Another burst

Miller/Revolving Door

of laughter. Then Joe-the-Pro shouted, "Okay, everybody, settle down, and good old George will lead us in Christmas carols!" There were enthusiastic replies of "Let's sing! Let's sing!" Their voices, accompanied by piano, drifted softly through the hallway:

*Silent night, holy night.*

*All is calm, all is bright.*

*'Round yon Virgin, mother and child...*

Impetuously Maggie pressed the mailbox buzzer. The singing faded as the guests quieted to greet the new arrival. Terrified by the sudden stillness, she waited for Wally. Her heart thumped so hard, she was sure of an attack, but seeing him emerge, she pulled herself together. Smiling and waving she shouted, "Hiya, Wally! Surprise! Surprise!"

An ex-comic, now a shoe salesman, he stood there staring: a chubby, round-faced little man wearing a floral sportshirt over dark trousers. Flustered, he opened the hall door. "Uh...nice to see you, Maggie." He finally composed himself. "Come on in."

Deeply relieved at his welcome, she stopped to kiss his cheek and exclaimed joyfully, "Wally, you old bastard, I busted your party!" With bright smile and swaying hips, she followed him into the studio apartment with its lighted tree at the bay window opposite a double bed. In the center of the large room, gathered around a long, makeshift dinner table, the guests stared at her. She hesitated, feeling awkward. Suppose, like Liz, they thought she was dumb and ignored her? Sparkle! Shine! Don't give 'em time to think about it!

As soon as Wally hung up her coat, she grabbed him with an affectionate squeeze. "C'mere you little sexpot. Aha, now I gotcha!" Playfully she dragged him down onto the bed, where they wrestled vigorously while he struggled to extricate himself.

George shook his head, groaning, "Oh boy, there goes our party. No more songs, no conversation..."



## Miller/Revolving Door

Satisfied she had everyone's attention, Maggie rose, grinning, eager to meet the guests staring at her open-mouthed. She tugged impatiently at her girdle riding up under her breasts. "Well, how's about introducin' me?"

Blushing deep red as he straightened his trousers, Wally stammered, "Uh...uh..."

What the hell, she'd do it herself, Maggie thought. She turned to a blue-suited man, intending to greet each guest in turn. Beaming, she stuck out a hand. "Hiya, I'm Maggie. What's your name?"

"Tom," he responded coolly, and sipped his drink.

In the silence her arm dropped heavily to her side. She waited; nobody said anything. Bewildered, she looked for Richard. They'd had such fun in the bar--he'd help her out of this fix. She spotted him beside a skinny blond wearing velvet jumpsuit. Relieved at a solution, Maggie sashayed to the sofa, and happily squeezed next to Richard. Smiling, she slid her hand between his thighs. "Hiya, gorgeous, havin' fun?"

"Until you came," he muttered, face flushing as he removed her hand.

"Whaddya mean?" she said, surprised and hurt.

"Forget it." He stared, embarrassed, into his coffee cup.

Stunned, she scanned the disapproving faced, and frantically searched for something funny to say--determined to smash the icy wall surrounding her. "Are you kiddin'? This party was like a goddamn funeral. It needed a live wire like me to wake it up. Wake the funeral--get it? Ha! Ha! Ain't that a scream?"

The faces, reddening, turned away.

"Who is she?" whispered the blond beside Richard.

"A raunchy barmaid," he muttered with a grimace.

A sharp pain knifed Maggie. She swallowed hard and shivered, suddenly feeling cold. She shouldn't, but maybe one little drink, just to warm her up...She clapped her hands. "Hey, Wally, how's about some

Miller/Revolving Door

Scotch?"

"One Scotch, comin' up!" Smiling awkwardly, her host exited into the kitchen. An uncomfortable quiet settled over the room. Maggie stared in anguish at the tree with its pool of gifts. Returning, Wally placed the bottle and glass on the table, and studied her with sympathy. "Maggie, I...well..." He finally patted the ball of curls. "Honey, we're real glad you could spend your Christmas with us."

She stared up at his friendly face. "Ge-gee, you don't mind my...my..."

"'Course not!" he lied cheerfully. "You drink up and have a good time."

She yearned to tell him what a sweet guy he was but found herself blinking back tears. Afraid she'd slobber all over him, she gulped her Scotch, savoring its hot sting in her throat. Finally, brightening, she shouted, "Hey, Tom, wanna hear a good dirty joke? I know some beauts!"

George shook his head. "Jesus!"

The blonde rose abruptly, a pained expression on her face. "I hate to be a party pooper, but it's late and I..."

Richard jumped up and fumbled with her coat. "Let me get you a cab."

The blonde smiled. "Okay."

Confused, Maggie watched Tom rise next, followed by George and Joe-the-Pro, and everybody else drifting toward the clothes closet. "It is getting late, Tom apologized to Wally, who looked disappointed as he distributed coats.

"Say, I hope the party ain't breakin' up on my account!" Maggie called anxiously from the empty couch. No one answered. Still fighting tears, she downed another drink, accidentally spilling liquor over her sexiest dress. Goddamn stiff, who cared about 'em anyway? She and Wally would have their own party!

She poured more Scotch, while her yawning host, waiting for her to leave, dozed off in an armchair. In the emptied room, Maggie stared into her glass,



*Miller/Revolving Door*

remembering that other night she'd been left alone, when her mother ran off with the gambler. She'd begged and begged, but Liz couldn't stay. "Kid, can't you see that this guy's gonna help me?" Liz had said, grabbing a dress off the door hook. "Soon as we make money in Las Vegas, I'll send for you." Maggie nodded. Liz would have, too, if she hadn't smashed up that gambler's car and gotten killed. But then...did she know for sure her mother would have sent for her? Maybe Liz was glad to be rid of her--like she'd been a noose around her mother's neck...Maggie poured more Scotch. If Liz said she'd send for her, that's what she would've done!

The bottle finally drained, she left Wally sleeping in the chair and lurched outside, her coat open, umbrella forgotten. Head spinning, she hesitated in the swirling snow. What the hell, why not get a nightcap at the This 'N That? Make her feel good, seeing the old place again...

Wobbly in the slippery snow, Maggie grabbed at street lamps for support, scolding herself as she floundered along. She shouldn't have gone somewhere she didn't belong! Look at the fun she'd had this afternoon--not like the crap she took at the party! At Broadway she slumped against the A&P to catch her breath, and felt her world tightening around her--as if something indefinable was trapping her in that bar, never letting her escape. She stared through the snow. If only her mother hadn't run off, maybe things would've been different...She shook her head sadly. Liz did the right thing by trying to get ahead. Besides it happened a long time ago. She had to forget it.

Make-up smeared and hair askew, she lurched across the street to the crowded This 'N That, and slammed open the door. Ignoring the customers, she headed straight toward Wee Willie, who jumped up from his stool. He stood poised under the flickering orange lamp, his arms outstretched.

Miller/Revolving Door

Yearning now for affection, Maggie sought his embrace, trying not to flinch at his ugliness while he fondled her breasts and behind.

He hugged her tightly beneath her wet coat. "Where yuh been, Babe? I missed yuh!"

"Be at my place in an hour," she muttered, hiccupping, and staggered out.

Around the corner, where the bar's occupants couldn't see her, she plopped on the slushy curb, and finally began to cry. She shook her head in bewilderment. Even that night in Harlem, when she got the telegram about her mother dying, she'd just stared at it, unable to feel anything. Yet here she was, Maggie thought, forty years old and bawling her heart out, like a kid, over a stupid party!

Emptied, she wiped her face with her coat sleeve. C'mon, the bar wasn't that bad, she reassured herself. She still had the customers who thought she was fun. Shivering, she buttoned her coat. Yeah, and there was Wee Willie. She'd feel a lot happier, having a man again...She forced a bright smile. Then patting her curls, she hurried home to freshen up for her new love affair.





Suzanne Paola

## WALKING THE SUICIDES

They wear blue bathrobes with empty plastic vials in the pockets. Their eyes are sealed shut, like kittens. They move with a kitten's graceless stumbling. Their arms hook around your neck. They are in love with the earth, with its hard pull, swooning for it.

And you, as you keep yours those few inches from the ground, as together you circle the carpet like Atlas walking his intolerable burden, as you breathe the lemony, plasticity scent of the shampoo in her hair and feel the thin jump of her pulse under your fingers, you imagine that there are hundreds of them, all falling, and there you are holding out nothing but a certain altitude and an occasional hard slap, and what, you wonder, must the penalty be for this awakening, this forced motion, the small flutter of the fingers that indicates something forbidden has been stirred to life, for this awful breathing.

Laurence J. Sasso, Jr.

## The Old Man Swims at Night

The old man edges  
into the cold pool  
unused to this modernity.

Born to rope swings,  
black tires and lily pads,  
blood suckers and still ponds,  
he is unsure here.

This chlorined pocket  
of tile and cement is without other life.  
He tangles in the nylon lane mark  
and falls suet heavy amid children's toys  
down under the icy night surface,  
smelling the foreign odor,  
captive water.

The lane marker unshackled  
wraps over his belly and trails  
behind; he turns slowly, goes deeper,  
the nylon line reaching back, connection  
to what is above.

He looks up from the bottom to see his cord,  
his slug stomach white as the inside of an eye,  
his flipper-like arms brown from the elbow  
down.

He shouts. A bubble of confusion rises slowly  
to open in the dark without a sound.

Through the burning water  
he stares upward at the night  
trying to know what root of moon,  
what seed of star,  
has grown this time,  
has made this sac of fluids  
where he has no choice but swim.



Margaret Bridwell

FRIENDS

Met a man name of Thomas Mottley. Yonder on Sullivan's Island it was--South Carolina. Man was fat with little bitty eyes. Wore a rag tied around his head and flip flops on his feet. His overalls, the biggest I have even seen, were sewn with a pie-like patch to accommodate his seat.

"Right nice to meet you," I said.

"Hey, Red," said he. And he swung his hand from behind his back and stuck out a fist full of yellow jasmine.

"Well, I'll be damned," I said. "Lot of years since I got any of these. Flowers that is. Thank you kindly."

Man grinned so wide his eyes disappeared.

I

There is a photo of the fat man and the rose-haired woman. It frames them on the beach, standing stiffly beside each other among glistening white gulls come to feed. A bouquet of yellow jasmine is held awkwardly in the hands of the woman. The man's hands are behind him, presumably clasped. Sea oats wave in the immediate background. In the far background, gray-green thicket of wax myrtle and swaying palms. And further on still, out of the colored picture and down a dusty Island road, a massive live oak draped with Spanish moss, awaits in the fat man's yard.

The rose-haired woman? Fifty years old perhaps. Or close. Pink polyester slacks with matching top. Rawboned. Porous skin, heavily madeup. Wrinkled. Tired. All of this can be seen clearly in the photo. All of this can be seen clearly to the naked eye. But not to Thomas Mottley. His eyesight, never good, at twenty-eight is nearly gone. There are thick glasses, of course, at home, on leave as usual when the owner is out-of-doors. They too await, on a lone pinewood desk stacked high with manuscripts and dreams--

*Bridwell/Friends*

a poetry of sorts. And so, for now, Thomas Mottley views the woman in a youthful haze of pink and rose.

"Drove down here from Virginia," I said. "Come for a rest. Name's Edna Macky."

"Well," said he, "Macky and Mottley. Now, what do you make of that? Fat Mottley. Redheaded Macky. Yessuh, Hon, this crew's gonna do alright." Man's belly began to bounce and he lost his eyes again. To tell you the truth, after what I'd been through, it was real nice to meet a friend.

*Macky*, she said. *Edna Macky*. And he felt his heart burst into bloom: all pink and rose and white--have mercy! He had first caught sight of the woman four days before. Out on one of his late morning treks to the beach, he had spied her from a distance up the road--a wild rose among the sea oats. That was what she appeared to him to be. Then he was surprised and excited as he stumbled his way along the beach access, when he actually heard her speak. Her voice was husky, coarse, with a grain that rubbed raw a need he'd neglected. And suddenly he was deaf to all other sounds. He had stopped short, to listen, as she spoke to a child. The child, small and stubby, a girl he supposed--it was so difficult to tell in the sun--was chasing tiny sand crabs in the tide.

"Hold still, Sugar," the woman said, "grab up one of them crabs and I'll snap yawl's picture before he bites off your thumb." Laughter--the woman's and the child's. He had been dreaming of the woman ever since. And finally, this morning, he had worked up the courage to snip the yellow jasmine from the vine.

II

There should have been several more photos on file. But there weren't. Somehow in the excitement of the days to follow the camera was left behind. Even though there were many colored scenes. Envision some of them now, in your mind's eye. And as you watch the fat man and the rose-haired woman, hear



**Bridwell/Friends**

them laughing, always laughing. Yes, there they are, busily baiting fishhooks with frozen shrimp, a cooler of beer between them. See the fat man grin and perspire as he leans forward to drop his line over the side of the Breach Inlet Bridge. Notice the fire of the woman's hair as it catches the brilliance of the noonday sun. And down there stands the stubby child, squealing and waving up from the shell-spangled beach below them. Pause, and imagine if you can, the dance of the sailboats as they dip and sway on the billowing ocean beyond. Close your eyes and experience, with the boats, the nudge of the sea breeze upon your skin. And if you like, drift with the breeze. But be careful. Ahead lies the mysterious marsh with its ozone odor and its thirsty mosquitoes. Go indoors. Indoors in the air-conditioned comfort with the fat man and the rose-haired woman as they browse the Edgar Allen Poe Library. A sanctuary that fills the fat man, the poet, with reverence. Watch him swell with the musty smell of the books that surround him. Books he will stroke and pet, for of course, without his glasses he cannot attempt to read. And how does the rose-haired woman react to this shrine of ravens and maidens? She is aware she has been brought here to share a treasure, so she nods at her young friend's pleasure and secretly yawns. Tonight there will be adventures more to her liking: a scheduled nightly stop at Bert's Bar and then a surprise. The fat man, the joker, the friend, has promised to serenade the Carolina moon with a five string banjo. Listen now. Hear his pudgy fingers fly. *Foggy Mountain Breakdown. Lonesome Road Blues.* Difficult songs, fast songs. But there is beer on ice and the warm moonlit beach to prod him. And, most of all, there is the rose-haired woman--applauding and urging him on.

Lord, I never expected to have such a time. Fat man sure was fun. "That good buddy is just what you needed, Momma," Tootie said. Bless her heart. She hadn't even met him yet. Tootie is my daughter. And she's real cute. Except she eats like a pig.



## *Bridwell/Friends*

She feeds little Dee Dee too much, too. But she's good to her momma. And that's more than I could say for some folks.

"Get on down here, Momma," she said on the phone. "Stay here with me until you're good and ready to go back. Hurts me to hear you cry." See what I mean? She's right nice to me. "You can play with little Dee Dee while I fix hair at the beauty shop," she said. "It'll keep your mind occupied."

So I did. Got myself down there, that is. But I swear, with what I knew was going on back home, I never expected to have such a time.

It was time. He planned to make his move tonight. He would kiss her right out here on the beach under the stars. And then he would ask her to marry him. He had been playing hands-off with the woman for over two weeks. And he knew he couldn't wait any longer. Just the scent of her caused him to rise--sweet Jesus! It was a constant embarrassment. Last Waltz, she'd said. Last Waltz Cologne. Well, he liked the smell of it. Even if it was a bit strong. He fit the banjo in its case and snapped it shut.

"Hey there, Babe," he said, "hand me over one of those cold beers."

The woman didn't even pause in her talking, just grabbed up a Bud from the cooler and stuck it out at him somewhere in the dark. Well, he liked that about her, too. She enjoyed laughing. And she enjoyed talking. Of course, now and then her words wore him down. Like they were doing tonight. But that was understandable. After all, before she came into his life he had spent all of his time with words--stacking them, pushing them around, reciting them out loud. And tonight he wanted to be with the woman alone. Besides how in the name of God was he supposed to kiss her with her mouth moving like that? Then again, if her mouth stopped making noise, would he be able to find her in the dark? He was afraid not.

*Bridwell/Friends*

". . .got to meet my daughter," the woman was saying, "she's real nice." How many daughters did she have? He'd already met the little stubby one. There must be one more. Probably away at a summer church camp, he guessed. He hoped there weren't any others. Two was the most he could support if he expected to carry on with his poetry. And he expected to. He'd have to ask the woman whether or not she received child support. Or maybe the father was dead? He would need to find out. Because he was certain he didn't want to teach school again. The one year--five years ago--that he had tried that, he had been obliged to fail his entire class of Wando High School students--flat. He still worried about running into one of them on the street. As things stood now, though, he figured if he and the woman were frugal, they could get by on his monthly trust. Well, here he was ahead of himself. First things first. Grunting with the effort, he scooped across the warm sand to sit close to the smell and the sound of the woman.

". . .never expected to be good buddys with a man. Know what I mean? Women most of the time can't be real buddys with men. "Course I reckon at my age. . ."

Okay, here he was. Now, how was he to go about it? He hadn't kissed many women before. Come to think of it, he hadn't kissed any women before, with the exception of his mother. And she was dead. Shot by his father when he caught her on the couch, in his own law office, with a Charleston aristocrat. Afterwards, his father, a huge cigar smoking solicitor who had lived in Columbia before he moved to Sullivan's Island, slipped the pistol back in his pocket long enough to carry his wife to the back seat of his car, stop at First Federal to set up a trust fund, and drive on home, first over the Pearlman Bridge, then the drawbridge, to hand twelve year old Thomas his banjo. A deputy found T. Toad Mottley a week later, asleep forever with his wife in the marsh--their kingdom by the sea. Unaccountably, the aristocrat had gone un-



harmed. That didn't surprise the people of Charleston. Everybody knew, they said, that you simply did not go around shooting the Charleston upper crust. Thinking back on it, Thomas realized he hadn't been seriously interested in kissing any woman since his mother. But now he was. He wanted to kiss this woman tonight. And he wanted her to kiss him back. He wanted to caress her. And he wanted her to caress him. He wanted her to spread her freckled arms and welcome him in. And failing that, he wanted her to shut up. The woman talked on. He decided to make his move.

Lord Jesus God Have Mercy. I never was so panicked in my life. There we sat, drinking cold beer and talking, like good buddies, as usual. When out of the dark, and all of a sudden, the fat man dove right square on top of me. Then he started to rubbing his mouth all over my face. Well, he'd knocked the breath out of me. So I couldn't scream, at first. And big as he was, I couldn't get him off me to run. Finally I got my breath back. Soon as I did, it hit me what a snake-in-the-sand he was. And I got cussing mad.

"You sneaky sonofabitch!" I screamed. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself. I'm old enough to be your mother. And look what the hell you've done!" With all that beer and whatnot, he'd caused me to wet my pants. Sand was caking all in between my legs.

"Wha?" he said. And that's when he stopped wrestling around. He just lay there, half on top of me and half off, and was real still. But I wasn't. I lit in hitting and kicking for all I was worth.

"You sneaky-jackass-sonofabitch!" I yelled again. "Soon as I phone my husband, he's gonna come down here and whip your butt." To tell you the truth, I wasn't about to phone my husband. And I sure as heck wasn't gonna tell him anything. But anyway, that's when the fat man rolled off of me and sat up.

"You sonofa--" I didn't get to finish that one. Because it was then that he started crying. Real hard.



"Well, for heaven sake," I said, "stop that." He just kept right on, sitting there all hunched over in the dark with his belly jumping the way it did when he laughed. Only this time he was crying. I couldn't help myself, I got to feeling sorry for him. I reckoned he'd gone crazy. Or else I'd kicked him somewhere too hard. Either way he needed a friend. So I reached over to pat him on the head. But the fat man pushed my hand away. And then he cried louder.

### III

Located approximately four blocks from the beach, Thomas Mottley's house sagged. That was to be forgiven. Like many of the once gracious homes on Sullivan's Island, it had seen only minimal repair in the last hundred years. And although not raised until eleven years after the South had fallen, a sense of antebellum prevailed. And, perhaps, if you had rocked quietly on that fog-moist dawn, alongside Thomas on the rotting gray verandah, ghostly echos of cannon fire from a tragic civil conflict might have filled your head. But most certainly, the present-day aroma of stale whiskey could not have escaped you. For five long days Thomas Mottley's closest friend has been Jack Daniels.

Picture the fat man now, for once wearing his thick glasses out-of-doors, a bottle in his hand. Take in the massive live oak hung with scraggly beards of Spanish moss, at which Thomas now stares. And at his feet, to the right of the wicker rocking chair, note the coil of heavy rope.

And the rose-haired woman? Sleeping fitfully on a fold-out bed only three streets away. This is the day, a Thursday, she is scheduled to leave the Island.

Lord knows, I hated the thought of leaving him like that. Over there in that old house all alone.

But no matter what I called to him through the door, he wasn't about to come out. After five days of that, I reckoned it was time to give up.

"I declare, Momma," Tootie said, "he just ain't your responsibility. You got you and Daddy to worry about." I knew she was right. Big Mack, my husband and Tootie's daddy, had done what I asked and gotten rid of that young partner of his. And then he called me up on the phone to come on home. Because, by now, he could see I meant every word I said. I didn't care how innocent he insisted it was, I wasn't about to put up with no woman partner on my husband's truck. You don't need to be born a genius to figure out what was likely to happen on a long haul. And I couldn't put up with that. Even if she was ugly as mud. Anyway, now I had to get on home. Still and all, I hated to leave the fat man without saying goodbye. He'd been a right nice friend to me. That is, before that night. And then I expect he just got confused, what with the big moon and all.

"Tootie, honey," I said, "dress little Dee Dee up in that pink sunsuit I bought her. And get you on some cleah jeans. Let's go over there and knock on that door one more time."

He had rocked there on the porch long enough --the fool and his bottle. It was already nine o'clock. He didn't want the woman to catch him outside. What was he worried about? He was safe. She was leaving first thing this morning for home. She'd said so through the door yesterday. No doubt she was well up the road toward Virginia by now. He didn't need to wait any longer. He would take one more good drink, and then he'd get on with it. Sweet Jesus!--why hadn't he paid attention to what the woman's mouth was saying? Or at least, why hadn't he worn his glasses? Vain is what Grandmaw used to call him. He wished Grandmaw weren't dead. He wished he had been a good boy and done what she



said. But the damn glasses were so thick they made his eyes appear beady. And he could see people staring at him whenever he wore them. He wished Grandmaw were alive and cooking sweet potato biscuits and sausage in the kitchen right now. Well, she wasn't. She died two years ago in her sleep of old age. And it didn't do any good to wish. Besides, if she hadn't died then, she would be sick and ashamed of what he'd done now. And she would probably die from that. How could he make such a fool of himself? A married woman and an older one at that. And what if Grandmaw knew he was a coward, too? She told him when he was twelve that it was the design of the Lord that he be strong. And then, yesterday morning, he hadn't even been able to step more than two feet into the marsh. He had meant to hike in deep. He had taken a blanket and his brand new thirty-eight. But then he felt that thick blue-black mud ooze up around his ankles and he'd screamed. Jesus!--dropped the gun and the blanket in the stinking marsh and ran. It was almost as bad as blubbering like a baby in front of the woman on the beach. He looked out across the yard at the massive arm of the oak tree. Well, he wasn't afraid of trees. He had swung on that one lots of times. And he was going to swing on it once more. He grabbed up the coil of rope at his feet.

Before God, I never thought I'd see such a sight. It made me right sick with fear. There stood the fat man, staring out of those thick glasses, a rope looped around his fat neck, and him balancing with only one toe on that wobbly rocking chair.

"Jesus Christ," said Tootie, "the man's gone nuts." And that's when she shoved little Dee Dee up behind me where she couldn't see. Then Tootie ordered me to stay put. So I reached around and pressed Dee Dee in close to the back of my legs. And then I started in praying, right out loud.

"Oh, shut up, Momma," Tootie said. It was pretty clear this whole business was making her mad. She had lost little Dee Dee's daddy this way. And Tootie had



seen enough. She yanked the bottom of her sweat shirt down over the top of her jeans, and then she marched her plump self right over to that tree.

"Get the hell down from there," she said.

"Huh?" said he.

"I ain't telling you twice," Tootie said. And about the time she said it, she hauled off and gave that big oak tree a kick. That's when the tone of her voice caused little Dee Dee to start in bawling. And it must have scared the fat man, too. Because that's when he flinched and almost lost his balance.

"Move!" said Tootie. And he did. He commenced to tug that rope off of his head, fast. Just as soon as he got the job done, he slid down and passed out. Right there in the wobbly rocking chair under that tree. And then is when I got the surprise of my life. After making sure the fat man wasn't dead, Tootie straightened up and patted her red hair.

"Now, Mamma," she said, "you go on home to Daddy. Me and Dee Dee will stick around here. Maybe fix something to eat for him when he wakes up. I can see right clear, this fat man needs a friend." And I'll be damned if she didn't put her hand on her hip and wink.

#### IV

Thomas Mottley's suicide attempt never made it in *The News and Courier*. But three months later, the announcement of his wedding did. There was a photo of the local poet and a red-haired woman. They were featured in the Regional Section, page 12-B. A bouquet of yellow jasmine was held proudly in the hands of the woman. And the fat man? Well, he grinned so wide his eyes disappeared.

Laurie Taylor

DOWNHILL INTO FOG

Here, the snow  
slips down and away, veiled to a depth  
the moon can't reach.

I've met other such places:  
an uncertain trail oozing  
over frogs sleeping in mud,  
where witch hazel prepared its thin flowers.  
And a brown opacity for swimming,  
thirty splashes wide,  
where trees stood about like mothers,  
anxious,  
trying not to interfere.

The boat my mother carved for me  
of her own heart  
decays among reeds. Tied to the oarlock,  
this narrow ribbon  
unspooling behind me, broken  
by falls, formed, reformed,  
speed measured in polepricks.

Poised at the brim of the hill  
I think I see  
cattails pressed against thwarts  
waiting below. Fog.  
Only fog. The least pulse of light  
lures me on; the skis mutter  
only to themselves.

Margot Treitel

WORK IN PROGRESS

I draw up the covers, listen to the fear of dark,  
read a chapter, lie down and fall asleep.

They grow away from us and into us in a single gesture

This is exactly how I remember it. The single light  
spread on a single chapter, the soft  
flowing into sleep, the meaningless dream.



Margot Treitel

AN ACT OF LOVE

The idea was to leave nothing to the imagination,  
film graphic acts going through the motions,

rich in the details we find lurid and compelling.  
So these are the possibilities, how it's done.

If I try to thin things down, set the camera  
on blur, I merely suggest a stick figure  
moving at right angles to a flat plane.

When I drag myself from bed to wash my teeth  
a whole scene flashes from the basin.

If I stretch my hand into the shower, it lies  
before me in a spool of steam.

When I settle down with coffee, trying  
to flesh this out, what rises to the surface is

a simple act, a noun, a verb, a light touch  
passing through the room I can't get hold of.

Barbara Ungar

THE RESURRECTION OF ROGER WILLIAMS

bury me by the appletree  
no coffin, please, or flimsy so  
the groping root  
can hug my skull tight as a stockingcap  
its tendrils thread my nostrils delicately as scent  
pierce my eyesockets like light  
my earholes like a song  
swallow my vertebrae like grapes, licking down  
hips & legs to my toes' last curl, crush  
my bones in its wooden grip  
and mix me with the rain  
distill me into sweetest sap, pump me  
up the gnarled trunk twigging to burst  
into white blossom  
reaching for a long lost blue  
globe me like slow blown glass  
my skin once more bared to the sun's kiss  
reddens, ready to be eaten again

Roger Williams (1599-1683), religious emancipator, was buried in his backyard. In 1860 his descendant, attempting to exhume his remains, found not a bone, but bits of rotten wood, a few rusty nails, and the root of an appletree in the corpse's place and form. This human-shaped root is on display at the Rhode Island Historical Society in Providence.

Joan Wolf

HUMMINGBIRD

The hummingbird flies  
like uneven breath.  
His throat is the rare hue  
of the cardinal flower.  
See how the asparagus rises  
before distributing  
its seed, and the scarred  
moon barely visible  
in the water, wreathed  
by reflections of trees.  
Let's swim into the cold  
where black loons dive,  
two by two, and later,  
in the high grass, where  
there can be no abstinence,  
speak to me the way  
a leaf does ascending  
in a gust. Say again  
how the hummingbird returns  
to the same wild grove,  
the same magnetic blossoms;



Joan Wolf

ON WALLS AND HAPPINESS

At a downtown bar, serious  
over scotch, you say:  
"I no longer expect to be  
happy." Gazing around  
the half-filled room, you  
note the way each object--  
this iced glass, this table,  
my notebook--contains  
at least one wall.

That night in my dream  
I fall toward you, my tongue  
in your cool mouth. A king-  
sized bed drops dependably  
as a stage prop from the strainless  
night sky. I whisper: "I want  
to/I'm going to make you happy."

Is this seduction or some sort  
of missionary passion - saving  
the hungry. A house descends  
to accompany the bed and as I  
unbutton you, the place begins  
to resound with a series of odd  
bass notes, the music a bee  
makes coming and going in  
the ear of a flower. I want  
to say *See how the walls*  
*are singing* but you are a clock  
set to alarm just before pleasure.  
"No! No!" you cry. "I can't  
bear it - even for an hour!"

You push me off and I jerk  
awake, wondering why the  
conversation between need  
and denial continues so feebly  
by daylight; we work, eat, talk  
while our more courageous dream  
bodies dialogue somewhere else.  
Yesterday I even heard myself  
say to a friend: "No one has  
a right to expect happiness."

Joan Wolf

AUTUMN DUSK

Night enters the lake  
with its black tongue  
as slender reeds  
rouse the wind.  
In outlying fields,  
the harvested earth  
folds itself in darkness  
and the gold lights  
of farmhouses  
turn on, one by one,  
like thoughts  
before sleep.  
Lie down beside me  
in the shore's  
deep shade  
where high leaves  
swirl and surrender  
to the grass.  
We will blend  
more quietly  
with autumn's weight.  
When we wake  
to frost under  
these chestnut branches  
geese will be passing  
in strict formation  
overhead, flying  
in pairs away from  
this common dream.





## CONTRIBUTORS

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Laurence J. Sasso, Jr. is the director of the News Bureau at Rhode Island College, and edits *The Greyledge Review*. He has previously been published in *Commonweal*, *California Quarterly* and *Yankee*.

Laurie Taylor has appeared in earlier issues of *Calliope* and many other magazines. Her collection of poems, *Changing the Past* (New Rivers, 1981) won a Minnesota Voices Project publication award last year. A first mystery novel is due out from Walker in April.

Margot Treitel's poems are part of a collection in progress. Other poems have been published recently in *New England Review*, *Poets On*, and *Jam To-Day*.

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