



Calliope

Calliope

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Submissions of poetry and short fiction are welcomed from August 15-October 15 for the December issue, and from January 15-March 15 for the May issue. Issues are thematic and the December 1985 issue will deal with *colors*. Manuscripts should be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. No simultaneous submissions, please.

Manuscripts are discussed with the writer's name masked so that beginning and established writers are read without prejudice.

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Elinor Benedict

A HYMN FOR THE POST OFFICE

Inside this place of regulation
where paper and cardboard shuffle
dry as spirits waiting in line
to squeeze out of purgatory

and letters slip-slide into heaps
of yours truly and sincerely yours and even
a few loves among the circulars with
special offers exclusively yours

now twinkles another sound--
a constant small music accompanying
sunlight pouring down Jacob's
ladders through shut panes.

Maybe it's a shower the tired young
postman is dreaming about at four o'clock
or a spray of stars he remembers
from last night's porch with his girl

or that carton of baby chicks mailed
to Maplevale--small yellow messages
singing about circles yet unbroken
waiting in boxes to be delivered.

Elinor Benedict

HABITATS

Two seasons now, a pair of orioles
have tied their nest above us
from the oak tree's highest branch.
Their eggs have long since flown
to Mexico; their empty purse
waves back and forth on meager
strings. Those breeders sewed
their pocket with a seeming
frailty, hasty lack of care.

Below, we built our geometric
wood and concrete house with months
of hammering. Last night's rainstorm
lanced our bedroom window panes
with twigs, drove water through
the mitered ledge. At dawn
we watched the oak limbs thrash
like broomsticks purging attic corners
clean. But when the blowing stopped,
the cold tree's drooping sac
still clung in tangled evidence
of summer's careful need
to grasp and hold
and breed.

Rebekah Bloyd

THE MAN WHO MAKES THE BIBLE PLAIN

Two glasses of water
on the pulpit
set in view
of the congregation.
"This," he said, "is your soul."

From his suit pocket
he took two potatoes.
Held one high and deadpanned:
"This is you."

Cut that potato
with a paring knife,
dropped half in
a glass on the left.
Potato juice clouded the water.
"Giving less than all," he said,
"confuses the soul."
Now the whole potato
into the second glass.
"While giving all of yourself
keeps the soul clean." Winked:
"Though both of these
could stand some attention--
a good baking
and a dollop of butter."

I nodded, laughing with
the sisters and brethren.
I was ten. Religion
was simple as watching
the water cloud or hearing
your stomach rumble
in church.

Rebekah Bloyd/The Man Who Makes The Bible Plain

White hair, shiny with Vitalis,
shiny metal rim
of his glasses. Pastor Jim,
in Oklahoma City twice a year.
Billed on revival posters:
"The Man Who Makes The Bible Plain."

Now I wonder how--
Ruth could say
 I will go
 I will lodge
 I will die

to Naomi.
Job could withstand
his house smote by wind
and fallen, his skin
clothed with worms
and loathsome.
Abraham, even binding
Isaac.

I have questions now
potatoes won't answer.
And I sleep with those
potatoes night after night--
the two halves never
mend, and the whole
will not give.

Carole A. Borges

RITA MORALES

The woman in the mirror braids her hair into a rope.
She rubs mineral oil
over her torso, shoulders, neck, nipples.
Her husband stabs his knife into the kitchen table
watching its point disappear into oak.
He chews the ends of a grey mustache.
Reading a comic in the kitchen
you listen to the clock ticking
the scampering sound of a mouse behind the wall.
No one speaks. No one moves fast.
The woman slides into her bed unclothed.
The man folds his knife and stretches.
You feel yourself moving down the hallway
hands caressing a faded wallpaper rose.
Past her door, past the rack of dead overcoats
you open your bedroom.
Coldness and your eyes
tight around moonlight.
You're not going anywhere, not ever.
Under the blankets you touch yourself
making sure the body's still there.
You watch bars of light, shadows, pass over
your covers,
a truck, a car, a Greyhound bus.

Tom Buell

WINTER ON THE COAST

The teenager at the Mobil station
tells us not much happens this time
of year. Loggers out of work.
A few farmers in for gas.
He gets out a snapshot of a huge
praying mantis: You have to have
a project, he tells us, like building
dune buggies. Roll bars. Rack and pinion
steering. Warning flags at the end of poles.

He sees we're from another planet.
Customized, he explains. Patiently.

We sell a lot of these flags.
Long as I can remember, lots of flags.
His father looks up from the dog-eared
Playboy he's been fingering:
You tell 'em all about it, Son.
Eighteen years. All eighteen years.

He winks at us.

On the causeway the current holds
the bait just under the surface.
The fisherman has his kids along.
I ask him what they're looking to get.
Nothing much. Just a quiet place.
What about you? Birds, I say, making
a pair of binoculars with my hands.

The seals watch us canoeing across
the inlet. We get close enough
to see their whiskers.

Tom Buell/Winter on the Coast

Out on the spit our dog flushes
a pintail out of the sharp beach grass.
One of its wings is broken. It thrashes
away and submarines. The dog plunges in,
treading water, swiveling her neck.

The seals riding out the tide
blink from sight. Rain freights in,
cancelling the horizon. Our dog barks
against the sudden darkness. Gulls whirl
in a burst of sunlight. Coved from the wind,
bufflehead and goldeneye hold the shore.
Higher on the cape, the fir nurses
on deadfall, the rot of centuries.
Their thighs bind the earth.

On the long beach, a single set of tracks.

Carol Dine

TO A LITHUANIAN EXILE

You have come from a country
that is no longer a country.
Who is responsible?
What nightmare keeps you
curled up next to the wall,
an unknown territory
where your mind has wedged;
where one black bird
flies back and forth.

You tell me about the curvature
of a land, a lost culture.
All I can imagine is
another woman's torso.
I am afraid of your past.
I would replace it
if only I knew what it was.
Hold me
and call the ghosts by name
like old lovers
made docile by time.

Carol Dine

AUTISM

And the egg you were living in
ripped, tossed you
like a tidal wave, upside down.
That's why you're like this--
flowers growing in the glass
behind your eyes.

You can't say help
or touch me,
feel as if your brain
were charcoal after the fire;
or you have a thought
but it dissolves
like a sugar cube under your tongue.

No one believes what you see:
you gnarl your hands
into a puzzle,
rock back and forth;
and you imagine a fish.
It glides toward you,
opening its bronze fins;
and with the tip of your thumb,
you draw the word.

Carol Dines

ARRIVAL

What I fear most
is seeing you
exactly the same,
your long trip over,
the waiting tapered
to this moment.
Unchanged, your tall body
shifting foot to foot,
always a wall or tree
behind you, an
old army rule.
We'll lay a blanket
in the backyard, blend
rum and strawberries
with ice, strong enough
to make us cool
in the hot sun.
At dusk, we'll sit
on the porch, buried
in the silent
edges of the city,
and you'll know
as you've always known
the momentum of doubt
that stains our dreams
a darker color.
We'll remain touching
long into the night,
your body wrapping mine
until I too
feel what remains
unchanged. You'll ask
the same questions
about my teaching,
writing, and wanting
a family--what holds

Carol Dines/Arrival

my life together.
And as I answer,
full of tension
from lack of sleep,
full of having you
there to listen,
my biggest fear
is that you'll find
sleep easy
inside my voice,
and the dense air that begins us
will drop from our lives
only me
holding on.

Carol Dines

FOUR O'CLOCK IN WINTER

Today I walk the edge of the frozen lake,
each breath a scrap of fur
rising to dusk. I want to hear
the air pocketed under ice,
the bottom gulping.
In the depth,
each fish swims towards
the last oxygen.
It is our lives
collected into thought, each act
hollowed into useful words
that move us, finally
towards the internal bruise
of weightlessness--
what can't be named.

This is the widening that falls
between our senses, and returns us
to the uncareful silence
with its posture of winter--
snow slurred into drifts,
branches snapping under
their own white weight,
between telephone poles,
each distance
measured and frozen.

Gary Fincke

MY FAMILY RUNS

Whenever we do, they talk
And I listen to my breath.
They chatter and point; it takes
Us miles to start returning.

The best runs are like moving.
We change houses nearly year
By year although they hate school
Since it is filled with strangers.

Both sons understand pace, how
The simple wind changes us,
And talk ends when we turn west,
Facing the weather, and though

They complain, neither of them
Slides off our route. What feels like
Fatigue is geometry,
The radius extended,

A dog we have never seen
Lunging from a lilac-stuffed
Yard which insists it is May,
The month of our repacking,

Because sometimes the houses
Collapse when questioned, guilty
Under the eyewitness glare
Of separation, and our

Neighbors, if they watch from their
Porches, must feel the trembling
Faint under their chairs and sense
The bulge in their foundations.

Gary Fincke

HARVEY WALKER

Some days the allergies
Wake me early, make me walk
Through the underwater dark
Until I find the shallow end
Of wheezing, that slippery rock
Footing Harvey Walker never
Mastered. How else to explain
His size and his absence
And his failure, in so far
Over his head he was
A fourth grade toy, one that coughed,
One that stayed home for months
While we forgot him?

That winter the whooping crane
Was extinct, almost, stalked
By a name as ridiculous
As Harvey's cough, and we
Watched slides of condors
And grizzlies and whatever
We were supposed to care for:
An animal lumbering where speed
Was essential, one splashing
Where sinkholes multiplied--

So I look for Harwey Walker,
The sun an hour away, because
Some people choose to retrace
Themselves, and as they walk,
Searching for the familiar landscape,
They see the arrangement of houses
And yards and debris exactly calling
Up childhood in that bitter way,

Gary Fincke/Harvey Walker

That dwarf shape of fear whose messages
Stay as simple as those folded
Inside mittens; because I can lie
On my back and draw a tide
Into my lungs, and remember
Harvey Walker, and sit up
Whenever I want to drain myself--

Which keeps me thinking, this morning,
Of our stupid way of seeing,
How Harvey Walker finally disappeared
And I refuse to medicate myself.

Markham Johnson

GETTING OVER

Through shallows they rise
 glistening in sun, wiggling
 in mud, sucking air, fifty
 carp and drum fanning
 their black dorsal fins. They fall
 to flap on one side. Three now six
 kids with nets and seines
 swarm the pool, more fish
 than water. On the pedestrian bridge
 looking over a young man leans
 on the rail, arms stretched, reaching
 down as if to collect
 and raise up these rough fish
 black as powderburns. The fish
 he caught as a child
 he could never clean, lift out
 guts, yellow egg stream.
 And when the hook settled
 far down, the tearing
 free was like some new found
 knowledge, sad and inevitable
 as sleep. When I leave
 he is still there, head down,
 sucking the same hot summer air
 as thrashing children,
 and dazed carp risen
 from water to the new world
 come out on land with no feet,
 just a fin to slap and slap
 like a broken wing.
 Even the white egrets won't eat
 this oily flesh. This is how it goes
 with no getting over.

Markham Johnson

FISHING THE CANEY

In softened clay where red pond water
laps the bank night crawlers rise

resurrected souls spitting mud, red
throated, fat as the dead by drowning.

Half risen we pick them, then scrabble back
over low stone walls scuffling knees,

as if anyone would care
us robbing worms from Craig County dead.

Five miles from Hog Shooter, where the Caney
black as roustabouts hands sidles up to Oglesby bridge

channel cat skulls litter the bank
the size they become in bait shop tales.

After an hour of only carp and drum
Andy pulls out the sack of hog pellets,

and we sling handfuls in the stunned silence
of the river to raise the great black channel cats.

Soon enough the first ones come up flopping,
some bellied up, white bellied, humped and thrashing

drunk on Cade's Best Hog Feed--blessed
souls on judgement day drunk on sweet Jesus.

Markham Johnson

WATCHING A METEOR SHOWER

Tonight they are tipping from perches
like mangoes, or jays drunk
on rotting fruit.

Their brothers are pushing
them from the nest. They do not fall

like teal or ptarmigan, unsuspecting,
but like cliff divers.

The long-tailed ones string
guts across the sky. We wait

for lost rivers
of pure light. They open
their ragged mouths when no one
is watching, then fill with night.

Norbert Krapf

THE PATOKA RIVER AND THE BLESSINGER BROTHERS

*Wolf, how deep is
the water, it meant
in the Miami tongue.*

Deep enough to swallow
the two Blessinger
brothers one Sunday.

Neighborhood play
broke apart that afternoon
when the phone call

to a relative brought
the news we could not
even begin to accept.

The sky drew as tight
as skin over pus
that's about to pop

as we waited for
an eyewitness account.
And finally the carload

of relatives and friends
and the hurried story
in hushed voices:

Jim, the tall quiet
softball player with
those deft hands,

dragged up from the river
bottom, flesh clammy white
carried away on a stretcher;

Norbert Krapf/The Patoka River and the Blessinger
Brothers

Charlie, "Chas," the short
peppery basketball player
with springy legs and hands

stained brown every fall
from dehusking walnuts,
dragged up from the river

bottom foam bubbling
from his nostrils.
For years I stared across

the classroom at their
silent brother Ron, thought
of my two brothers, never

knew what to say:
Too deep, Patoka,
too deep for words.

Lynn Martin

ROUTINE

She is the breath of 20 years ago
finally used up. Wearing black
would be too ostentatious; she settles
for dark blue that holds
the mind's absence tightly. Her heart

hasn't been in it for a long time.
The Utah in her mind is very far away,
but it's a place she can climb rock faces
with the most dexterity, and convince herself
that reaching the top of a mountain is possible.

She tests herself against the sharp
air that never ends, small cuts
heal quickly, her body grows lean
with the shadows of summer. She could be
anywhere, but is not here. She might

be listening to the ocean pound the night
into small bits of darkness, holding a parrot
whose rusty voice repeats the monotonous
note of broken things. Don't think this sleepwalker
can't function. Meals slide from her fingers

fully cooked, even the starched tablecloth
is perfectly smooth. Check her eyes,
they are empty, and the house is silent
even as her voice speaks softly of new curtains,
yesterday's sermon in church, a vacation in March.

Lynn Martin

LOOK MIRROR

this is not my face.
I won it from a magician
who had perfected his disappearing act
so well, he was gone even while here.

I, ignorant of magic,
took my face of clay
kneaded it to form an illusion
that lived within an illusion,
but you, mirror, show me
someone I don't even know.

My own face is made of pine needles,
spiked wing feathers,
next year's still to be born leaves.
Off the Verrazano bridge, fog
streams through my eyes, the sound
of a foghorn etches my cheek.

My own face waits for me on street corners.
At the funeral it says,
let's wear an English cap of leather
pulled low over one eye.

Therese Mattil

DRINKING UP THE GHOSTS

Memory is leaking through holes
in the afternoon. There are puddles
all over this day. Perhaps I should

clean up this mess, start again.
But even as I sweep, my father
is dripping into the twilight

and a great pool of lovers is gathering
in my bedroom. Don't think I haven't
tried to fill the holes. Skeins

of yarn, piano keys, a complete
leatherbound set of Harvard Classics.
Nothing works. One of these days,

I'll wring out my tired heart and pour
these ghosts into some ancient cistern.
Set it outside and let them evaporate

in the sun's thirst. One of these
days, I'll learn to line my nights
with sponges, keep my humor dry.

Therese Mattil

ONE OR THE OTHER

for Peter

I search through cast iron pans and clay bowls
for the oldest pot. Its dented metal has known

only salted water and the heat that causes
pasta to plump and soften. My grandmother

left me this battered legacy. Today, the boiling water
gives rise to spirits which hover over my kitchen

while you tell me it's permanence you fear. *Nothing*
is permanent, I mutter, the dulled pot

unable to reflect my serious face.

The mirror takes notes each morning and never
forgets what it has learned. The test

is years away. Before then, I will become lined,
turn salt and pepper. Dust will fill the crevices

of my skin. My belly will plump and soften,
pillowing our future children. That anger

which often dances in my eyes will increase
or subside, but neither of us will notice much.

We will have forgotten to light the dinner candles
by then.

You pour the wine and we drink to permanence.
I predict these candles will not last the evening

but of course you disagree. I ladle
last summer's tomatoes onto the swirls

Therese Mattil/One or the Other

of pasta in our bowls, and while you dream
of next summer's greens, I picture

the frosted stumps and rotted squash hidden
beneath this December snow. I raise my glass

again. *To change*, I whisper.

Liza Nelson

WIVES

Light homes through glass bricks
and the corrugated plastic roof
vibrating flat notes
of sticky air. While we sit
side by side on folded towels
our little boys paddle kick
ferocious yellow whales
churning foam against each.

Can it be ten years already?
Pleasantly dazed by chlorine vapor
my husband's first wife
trades me conversation
back and forth like jingle shells
small almost transparent
treasures we hold in our palms
savoring their delicate
imperfections. A teenage goddess,
the swim instructor knows
no favorites as she calls our sons
to push off one by one
toward her glistening arms.

Their shouts and laughter
ring like metal. The simple truth:
you want my friendship, I yours.
The man between us
made us enemies. His love
a fence too high to climb
we saw each other through barbed wire.
He saw caged sharks
circling his scratched hands,
racing toward any whiff of blood.
Our memory of that hunger
deep and binding,
what compromise time makes
with passion while our sons splash
together in the hot green water.

Liza Nelson

SHUT UP OUT THERE

Whenever I sit down you squawk
knowing I can't close
my window in this heat. Yes,
I saw the blue jay this morning,
flat on his spine, wing crushed,
head thrown against the pavement,
and I thought, nothing more,
dead bird; I was pressed for time.

I didn't kill the bird, even if
three years ago a dirty pigeon
trapped itself in a room
filled with windows. My husband
brought the hockey stick against
its skull. I had children sleeping;
pigeons spread disease. But listen,

last spring we found a baby
chipmunk and took turns
holding him tight for warmth.
I heated milk, dug a kind of burrow
in some towels, left a light
burning. He died by morning
anyhow. We buried him in soft
red clay. You have no right.
I'm turning on the typewriter
this instant. Hear
how the keys striking
block even the rustle of leaves.

Suzanne Oggenfuss

A MATTER OF RESPECT

It seemed like Bubba Jakes' whole life had led up to one final question. It was a question of respect and manhood, and in a backwood trailer park near Dade City, Bubba Jakes rose to the challenge.

Bubba felt he had become a doormat for anybody with dirty feet--his teammates, his first two wives, other women, strangers. But somewhere down deep inside something snapped when Arthur Cox started his funny business. Bubba Jakes finally decided he was not going to take it any more.

"There was a time when I had all the respect in the world," Bubba Jakes said. "I had me the hottest fast ball in the league, a curve that nobody could hit and thousands of people out there in the stands a standing up to cheer me when I walked out onto that mound to start my wind-up. I want to tell you, I was on top of the world. I had me money, good looking women, and best of all, I had me some respect. And then, one day my arm just went. Snap, click. Just like that. It weren't my fault but you'd a thought that I done it on purpose. Hell, nobody felt worse than me when I started losing my edge and giving up all those runs. And it sure weren't no reason to boo a man who'd done won plenty of games. But it seems people only like you when you're hot and my arm got as cold as a frog and the manager gave me my walking papers."

"Now my first old lady, she'd gotten used to the good life and when my arm went and I was sent down to the minors in South Georgia she hung around for awhile figuring I might just make it big again. But she ended up doing me like you wouldn't do a dog. After being married six years and having me two kids, she took to running around. She'd say she was going to a church meeting, and I were damn fool enough to be-

Suzanne Oggenfuss/A Matter of Respect

lieve it. I'll tell you, it's a hard thing to understand, a woman slipping off to see another fellow like that. When I found out about it, I packed up and left everything behind and came on back down here to Florida."

When Arthur Cox first bought the trailer nextdoor, Bubba thought he had finally found a friend. Old Coach growled every time Arthur came around, but Bubba just told the dog to be still.

"Now my second old lady," Bubba Jakes said, "when I met up with her she was separated and I paid for her god damn divorce. We had a son named Wesley, and she stayed home except for when she took a factory job in Tampa, but she quit because it weren't air conditioned enought for her. Then somewhere along the line she started slipping around on me. She started drinking hard too and I'd have to go down to the god damn jailhouse to bail her out, and I did it too. But the third time they called me down there, I said to hell with it, let her boyfriend pay her way out."

Arthur Cox admired Bubba Jakes' parakeets so much that he took him down to the pet shop where they sold them for only \$3.50 apiece. Bubba even let Arthur use one of his bird cages. Then, Arthur's wife Darleen wrecked her Chevy and Bubba got some parts and said he would fix the car at a bargain rate.

"Now there was this one old gal I was going out with some," Bubba Jakes said. "She'd come over here and drink beer and watch television with me some, and one day she was sitting over there on the couch and she said, 'Bubba, I'd like to go up to Brooksville

Suzanne Oggenfuss/A Matter of Respect

and get my daughter and bring her over here to meet you, but I don't have no gas for the car and I don't have no money with me to buy any.'"

"I looked in my wallet, and all I had was \$10.00 so I said, 'Honey, you take this and get you \$3.00 worth of gas and bring me the change when you bring your daughter back.'"

"Like the damn fool I always was, I sat there watching TV for a couple of hours waiting and I ain't seen hide nor hair of that woman since I gave her my \$10.00."

Bubba Jakes thought he and Arthur Cox were pretty good buddies until Arthur Cox's wife moved out and charged her husband with battery and then filed for divorce. After that, Arthur Cox refused to pay Bubba the money he owed him for the work on his estranged wife's car. Things began to go downhill fast after that.

"Now, I'm used to having buddies turn on me," Bubba said. "When I lost my fast ball all those years ago, my teammates wouldn't even let me buy them a beer after the game. Sometimes they'd just get up and leave the bar whenever I walked in. And when I was working construction in Tampa a few years back, I let these old boys stay over at my place for free. They didn't have no money and were pretty much down on their luck and they seemed like pretty good old boys so I took them into my home and I fed them and I let them feel like they was right at home till they could get enough money together to get a place of they own. Well, one day I came home and my valuables was all stolen, garbage had done been poured across my floors, and them old boys was long gone. I found my stuff in a pawn shop and had to buy it back. Yes siree, I'm use to having buddies turn on me."

Suzanne Oggenfuss/A Matter of Respect

Bubba Jakes was a downtrodden man when Arthur Cox began his funny business. And at first he took it like he had taken it before. When he tried to mow his lawn, he said Arthur Cox called him dirty names. He said Arthur Cox took to threatening him with a shotgun. He said Arthur Cox took to calling the police on him and making up lies about his dog, Coach, being a nuisance.

"He was all around mean and nasty," Bubba Jakes said. "But I was used to being treated that way."

When old Coach came yelping home with a hide full of birdshot, Bubba Jakes just picked out the pellets and said, "I guess we was meant for abuse, Coach. When you signed on with me you was asking for it."

Things went on like that until one day Bubba Jakes said, "enough is enough." It was the death of his prized parakeets that caused him to finally say "enough is enough."

At one time Bubba had owned fourteen of the prettiest talking and singing parakeets between Dade City and Zephyrhills. But suddenly they began to die. He'd get up in the morning and find one or two of the little birds dead on the floor of its cage and before he knew what was happening, only six birds were left. This was when Bubba Jakes had finally had enough.

Bubba parked his old rusted Ford pickup truck back down the grove road and then sneaked back home

Suzanne Oggenfuss/A Matter of Respect

and tied up old Coach near the trailer. He turned out all the lights in his trailer except for the little one next to the bird cages and he went back in the bedroom and waited. Along about three in the morning old Coach commenced to barking and Bubba Jakes was up like a flash and out the door of his trailer with his 18-inch flashlight blazing through the darkness.

"I saw what looked like old Arthur Cox, out there with a bug spray can in his hand," Bubba Jakes said. "He cussed me and ran back toward the weeds swinging the spray can around his head and laughing and cussing to beat the band. I knew it was Arthur Cox by his hunchback walk. You can spot him among a hundred people."

Bubba Jakes called the police and showed them his evidence. A dead parakeet and a bug spray can that he had found in the bushes. He had the proof, he told them, and nobody was going to push Bubba Jakes around anymore. It was the kind of case a prosecutor would rather not be bothered with, they told him, but Bubba was not even listening. He was a changed man, and he was not going to back down ever again.

Bubba Jakes did not back down, either, and pretty soon Arthur Cox found himself on trial for cruelty to animals and damaging another's property. Across the state of Florida came cries of outrage that taxpayers would have to foot the estimated \$3,000 bill for the jury trial of a man accused of bug spraying thirty-six parakeets to death. But there was much more at stake. Bubba Jakes was through with being pushed around, and he would not be swayed.

Suzanne Oggenfuss/A Matter of Respect

"See, it's not just the price of a parakeet and a few trampled down bushes," he told the court. "It's a matter of respect."

Arthur Cox, through his lawyer, told the jury that Bubba Jakes was lying about the parakeet, and even if he was not lying there was nothing cruel about spraying for bugs; it wasn't his fault the parakeet got in the way of the bug spray.

The jury sat in judgment for forty minutes, and returned to announce that Arthur Cox was guilty as charged. The judge ordered Arthur Cox to pay Bubba Jakes \$3.50 as restitution for the dead parakeet.

Bubba Jakes spent the \$3.50 on a six pack of RC Cola, two Snickers and a pack of unfiltered Camels, and sat under an orange tree with old Coach. While he sipped his cola, chewed his candy bar and smoked his unfiltered Camels, he talked about respect and how his life had changed.

"Old Arthur Cox, he couldn't take the shame, and he moved away to Arkansas where he belongs," Bubba Jakes said. "Now I don't let no one push Bubba Jakes around. I'm fifty-two years old and I deserve a little respect. Now people comes up to me and says, 'Bubba, you really stood up against that animal killer. You're a man.'"

"Word gets around. People don't mess with you. Radio Shack over in Tampa started sending me a flyer every time they have a sale."

Bea Opengart

THE BLUE MUG

empty
is sky broken through
with lightning, hairline
crack in the glaze,
and the lip of my blue mug
is chipped, the rim imperfect,
the mouth my fingers encircle, an o:
fill me, drain me, and I am
the same and the plums are fattening
pink in the tree, their color
repeated from memory.

Loose in the wind
the thin leaves quiver. Long, like fingers
beginning to curl. The fruit
fully ripened falls,
the foliage held by the window
moves in the current, shifting the air
and bulk of its body
over the fence away from me, I am
at peace when the plum tree
jostles its limbs, cool
when the tree stands still.

Ken Poyner

THE POLITICAL INDEPENDENTS

I think the father would have done best
To let nature alone. Everytime the boy
Reached out with the left hand the father
Growled, swatted it. The boy sat on his
Preferred hand at table, had to eat
With the right. No matter what fell on the floor,
Nor how long the boy took to feed himself,
The father waited, made sure the offending limb
Was kept down. Of late the family
Has taken to tying the arm back, to having the boy
For hours waddle about with the use
Of but one hand. He'll learn alright,
Be a gawky child, but put out the right.
His mother accedes because it is the father's wish.
Weekends I come up on the gatherings
Of the once left handed men, catch them
Comparing right arms, popping biceps
That could lift small horses free of the ground--
The spindley, withered other dangling
From shirt sleeves like a continuation of the cloth.
Half the night they'll be arm wrestling,
Single handedly pulling saplings up; and then
Some mostly drunk bastard will in absent-mindedness
Throw up the left, try to pull chest high a glass.
I watch from a safe distance the embarrassed men
go home.
Everytime that boy brings the left
Too quickly against an object that requires two hands
The father again beats hell out of him. I reach
For the lamp, extending my good left arm
And in straight line of sight from the bedroom
You wince. The father had once a fine left hand,
A powerful arm, put out that left appendage
As much as I, perhaps more.
And then he had a son.

Ken Poyner

THE MARRIAGE

You've kept him more years under the table
 Than I can remember; how often
 My knees have rubbed against his face
 As I've eaten half a cold breakfast
 I couldn't put to paper. We bought
 The huge red tablecloth, floor length
 On three sides and almost on the fourth,
 To hide him when I'm working at the sink
 Or busying about by the pantry door.
 Around the edge of the dining set
 I've crushed potato chips, cola bottle caps,
 His bread crumbs. When I've left for the day
 He's had you on the kitchen table, the sofa,
 In our bed, on the porch; I find
 Drippings from the previous night's meal
 Ground into my living room chair. How you've managed
 To keep the house reasonably clean, wash the clothes,
 Stop God-knows-whose child from straying
 Out of our yard, I can't figure.
 We sleep quietly, though twice a week
 I have my way on your side of the mattress
 And fare not too poorly. I can hear him then
 Rubbing life back into legs folded too long.
 How, in winter when we turn the heat
 Down at night, does he warm himself?
 Sallow skin and brittle bones, eyesight
 Gone to the lack of vitamins--I keep handing him
 Under the table half my vegetables. You cook me
 Double portions and still I lose weight.
 I think I can go on fooling you forever.

Martin Robbins

FLASHBACK/IOWA CITY, 1959

On April nights when the air,
heavy from manured farmland,
moved through curtains,
I charted searchlights
circling blue pulses.

Measuring the river's push
against old bridge pilings,
I heard the truck horns pulse--
twice--as cattle bellowed
those nights towards
Chicago's stockyards,
and from lamplit window shades,
the low echoes of fevers.

Jessica C. Weber

MAMA'S MAN

Oh, we made a pair, my mama and I, the night of the day my dad died. Between us, we downed a bucket of mai tais and danced with two dozen Shriners. Mama wore black--for drama, not mourning--and a wicked red-painted grin. I wore a plain gray suit, out of respect, and Mama's makeup because she said mine was too boring.

Between dances, Mama told us--me and the Shriners who followed us back to our booth--a string of stories. "Oh, there were a lot of them," she said. "Just one right after the other." Sure enough, three at least and one other who might or might not have been a distant aunt came to the funeral two days later. Ears laid back, they circled the relatives at graveside, eyeing each other and Mama and me.

"Do you remember when you were about six years old..." Mama said, and I did remember standing beside her in front of the open door of the coal furnace while she shoved in dresses and shoes and underwear that belonged to another woman. "He was moving her," she said. "Using our car to move his whore." I had grabbed a silky blue dress printed with white sprigs, thinking how pretty it was and how I'd like to wear it for dress-up and shoved it into the coals.

That furnace was my bogeyman. At night, I'd think about what might be crawling up its metal chutes, my eyes fixed on the grill over the register in my room, waiting for it to lift up. Finally, I'd nerve myself to scramble out of bed and run into Mama's room where I'd crawl in between her and Dad. Mama and I would lie there in the dark saying the scariest things we could think of while Dad pretended to be terrified and begged us to stop.

"I used to walk all the way out to the swimming

Jessica C. Weber/Mama's Man

pool, and it was always full of soldiers..." This was in the army town where I was born. Mama was at that pool on VE day. There's a picture of her in a draped and skirted swimsuit, round dark eyes and a V for victory over one bare shoulder, one of a group of family pictures that hung on the living room wall until I started seeing Brian and made her take them down.

The Shriners kept ordering mai tais and we kept pouring them on top of the brandy we'd drunk, sitting on the bed in Mama's room from the time we left the hospital in the early afternoon until it got dark and I had to call my husband the lawyer. Brian said he was sorry, but he begged off the funeral; a meeting with a client. "I don't care," I told Mama. "I don't especially want him to come."

"I liked Andy better," Mama said.

I liked Andy better, too, in spite of everything. We met in the registration line, both of us signing up for our first semester of classes, got married at Thanksgiving, and spent the next five years going to a crazy assortment of parties and classes and meetings, sharing the top floor of a big barn-shaped house with whoever happened to be around. After the first year, I planned to walk out about every other month, but before I got around to doing it, Andy was dead.

At Dad's funeral, all overweight aunts and uncles and other relations by blood and marriage, I remembered Andy's: besides Mama and Dad, there were about a hundred friends of Andy's and mine, shocked but not really surprised. Andy drank a lot and used drugs and drove fast and took so many chances he was bound to lose one. In a way, it was the same with Dad. Three packs of cigarettes a day and a lot of sudden loud comings and goings, all chased with bourbon straight up, day after day for over fifty years. When he had a stroke, and then another, it didn't surprise any-

Jessica C. Weber/Mama's Man

body, any more than it had eight years earlier when Andy landed in a ditch with the car wrapped around him.

Sometimes it seems like their lives added up to their deaths and serve them right. I still get mad at them both, for all the good it does.

I went back home to live for a while after Andy died. I had a job as a lab assistant in the university research institute, and I could have gone on doing it. But our friends weren't a crowd anymore; they had paired off and wandered away, and I couldn't face living in that noisy party town by myself.

I waited tables while I was home, at the same truck stop where Mama had worked when I was in high school. I had made excuses, then, to avoid meeting her downtown for a Coke during the half-hour between the end of school and the beginning of her shift, knowing she'd be wearing her crinkly black nylon uniform and tennis shoes.

When I'd get home, just past midnight, in my black nylon uniform and tennis shoes, she'd be waiting up for me. We'd have brandy and talk; mostly she'd talk, about how nice it would be if one of us had plenty of money so we could buy a lot of clothes and travel. Dad was off on one of his flings then, and I guess she was thinking about shopping around herself. But when I decided to marry Brian and his law practice, she was the one who cried for Andy who never made anywhere near two thousand dollars in one year in his life, and tried to talk me out of it. "You'll be bored," she said. I told her I was already bored, with being poor and living the way I did, and she got her feelings hurt.

"...we'd hitch out to Petey's and dance with everybody who asked us..." This was when I was about nine years old. "We" included Mama and her best friend Angie. Two or three nights a week, they'd take off wearing circle skirts and tight twin sets,

Jessica C. Weber/Mama's Man

pearls around their throats and little gold chains ringing their ankles. Giggling and doing last-minute things to each other's hair, they'd make me promise to be a good girl, go to bed at ten, not turn on the stove. When they were gone, I'd head for Mama's bedroom to try on high heels and blue eyeshadow. I'd look in the mirror and see Mama and Angie spinning off the arms of strangers, showing off the jitterbug and lindy steps they practiced in the living room. I don't know where Dad was then; he was still in the service, so maybe it was something to do with that, or maybe not.

I lived for the day my girlfriends and I would be old enough to help each other get dressed up to go out to bars and dance. But by the time I was old enough, we didn't dress up much and we didn't listen to music you could dance to, and I had forgotten all about it. I never got a chance to get dressed up to go out to a bar until that night after Dad died.

I couldn't believe it when Mama suddenly said, "Let's go out and get a drink."

"We can't do that," I said. "How would it look?"

"You sound just like Brian," Mama accused, and maybe that's what made me agree to go.

"Maybe Dad would have wanted us to," I said.

Mama snorted. "You always were good at kidding yourself," she said. "You can't wear that, let me lend you something." She started pulling skirts and sweaters out of her closet, and I remembered her and Angie dressed to the teeth and lit up with anticipation. But I shook my head. The idea of going out to a bar five hours after Dad died was bad enough; I couldn't bring myself to dress up for it. Mama wrinkled her nose. "At least let me put a little blusher on you," she said.

"Where are we going?" I asked her when she was finally satisfied with her own face and I wouldn't let

Jessica C. Weber/Mama's Man

her do anything else to mine.

She mentioned a little downtown bar that I thought would be okay. I didn't know it was where the Shriners always went to drink after their meetings, or that the bartender would know Mama's name. By the time I knew that, I wasn't surprised when Mama started dancing with Shriners. I sat by myself in the booth for a while, then decided it would be less trouble to dance than to fend them off. Most of them were still wearing their silly costumes, and I held them as far away as I could and still dance, so it didn't seem too bad. But by maybe the eighth dance, the brandy and the mai tais all hit and I had to let the Shriner help me back to the booth where Mama was wearing her latest partner's fez, the tassel hanging over her nose and making her eyes cross.

"Let's go home, I said, feeling really disgusted with her and myself both. I thought about adding "Mama" in a loud voice, but didn't. She twisted around to look for a clock. Both Shriners eyed her sweater.

"Why it's not even midnight," she said. "Let's go to the Ladies' and freshen up and maybe you'll feel better."

I followed her to the one-holer women's room, thinking I'd lay down the law in private. We took turns on the john then stood side by side in front of the mirror. I glared at her reflection; she smoothed an eyelid. "Loosen up," she said. "Have a good time."

"My Dad just died," I reminded her.

"So did my husband," she reminded back. "We've both lost a husband now," she said as if it had just occurred to her. "We've finally got something in common. Just one more drink and two more dances, okay?" Looking at my stubborn eyes in the mirror, she said, "I need it, bad." We turned over the rest-

Jessica C. Weber/Mama's Man

room to a woman with Masonic badges marching across her huge loose breasts. "I used to wear your father's medals," Mama said. "We weren't supposed to, but a lot of army wives did."

As we passed the bar on the way back to our booth, we were claimed by more Shriners, or maybe they were repeaters, for the first of our two dances. Sometime in the course of the long number, I got my second wind and nodded when my Shriner called for maitais. When the drinks came, he stuck the paper umbrella from his into my hair; it felt like a butterfly sitting on my ear. Mama reached across the table and adjusted it.

"Do you remember..." she said, and she filled in the details of a night I remembered as assorted shrieks and thuds.

It had been a slow night at the truck stop, she said, and she'd taken off work a couple of hours early, silently letting herself into the house and running up the stairs to surprise dad. I watched the face of Mama's partner so I wouldn't have to look at Mama.

"...and her hands were tied to the bedpost, and there was a belt on the floor and marks on her backside. He'd been hitting it with the belt, you could see, but when I walked in, he was kissing it."

"What did you do?" a Shriner asked.

"Why I picked up that belt and beat the bejesus out of him," Mama said. "And that was just for starters," she added with a private smile. She had one more dance coming, but she shook her head when the Shriner suggested it. "I guess I'm ready to go," she said, looking like the day and the booze and the dancing had all dumped on her at once.

She claimed the passenger seat, although I was pretty sure she wasn't as drunk as I was. I drove home slowly, wondering whether, if we were stopped,

Jessica C. Weber/Mama's Man

I'd be better off explaining or not explaining that the head of our family just died and that was why his wife and daughter were plastered with makeup and drunk as skunks. I wondered out loud whether Brian would defend us if we were arrested. "He'd pay them to lock us up," Mama said.

Finally I got us home and spent a good three minutes lining the car up with the curb. "Listen," I said, not wanting to say anything, but feeling like I had to. "I knew Dad ran around and all but I never knew it was that bad. I'm sorry."

Her eyes, rimmed with thick black circles from tiredness and mascara, were fighting back something. "Bad? No, it wasn't bad. It wasn't bad at all," she said.

"I mean, that last. About the woman tied to the bed..." I didn't want to look at her eyes again, so I looked in the direction of her mouth instead. It was twitching at the corners and I was afraid she'd cry. I knew it would probably be good for her, but I didn't want her to.

"Why, I don't know how you can say that," she said. "I won that one loud and clear." Then I did look at her eyes and saw it was a laugh she was holding back. It bubbled over, and I figured she had laughed then, too, when she threw down the belt and claimed her man under the eyes of the tied-up and bruised girlfriend. "The look on her face..." Mama giggled.

"Once I came home and Andy was in bed with a woman who always claimed to be a lesbian," I said. "I almost left him. There were a lot of times I almost left him."

"I wouldn't have let you," Mama said. We dragged ourselves upstairs hanging onto the bannister for dear life and laughing at each other. I stopped with Mama at the door of her room; she quit laughing when she looked at the double bed, so we slept in it

Jessica C. Weber/Mama's Man

together that night.

I lay there for a long time before I fell asleep, remembering things like how sometimes Dad would turn on the radio and he and Mama would dance in the living room. I'd sit on this broken-down couch we had, watching, and about the time I started to get bored, Dad would pick me up and whirl me into the dance, him and me for a number or two, then the three of us in a complicated pattern we'd keep up until somebody missed a turn.

Then we'd join hands in a circle and spin, faster and faster and faster. At just the right second, when we couldn't go any faster, Dad would get this goofy grin and yell, "one two three" and on three we'd all let go and fly off to separate corners of the room, trying to land on a chair or the couch, but risking a table or a lamp for the sake of the ride.

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