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EDITORS

Jo Daniels
Michael Daugherty
Lori A. Galego
Adam T. Robbins
Christine Servais

Advisory Editor: Martha Christina

Cover drawing: Maria Llach

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Tarantulas on the Lifebuoy originally appeared in *Ploughshares* and is the title poem of Thomas Lux's most recent chapbook, published by Ampersand Press, Roger Williams College, Bristol, RI.

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Submissions of poetry and short fiction are welcomed from Aug. 15 through Mar. 31 and must be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Manuscripts are discussed with the author's name masked so that beginning and established writers are read without prejudice.

Address all correspondence to Martha Christina *Calliope*, Creative Writing Program, Roger Williams College, Bristol, RI 02809.

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John Aylesworth

WOLVES

for Margo, who has lupus

Looking for the shyest of animals
of the North American wilderness,
it wanders inside you, through stiff joints,
organs, gorging white cells.
In Alaska, behind the house,
stands a tree father planted.
When we were young, we played army
in the hole dug to hold it.
For two weeks, we had a foxhole.
Then the tree filled it.
Animals which have the confidence
can stand and defy wolves for hours.

Wolf pups are born blind, deaf, and darkly
furred, greedy for their mother's belly.
When I look for wolves, I find you starving,
with your stick-legs, fingers falling off,
the strawberry butterfly spread across your face.
The snap of a wolf's teeth sounds
like the slapping together of floor boards.

Our sister Julie
wandered a thousand miles in Alaska
with wolves that chase a deer
in deep snow, each leap synchronized
to carry a pursuer into the trail
broken by the kill,
the leader two feet behind taut hamstrings.
Two traits of wolves are most evident.
One is their need for emotional attachments,
the other their aversion to fighting.

John Aylesworth/Wolves

So go inside.
Slip past the clean snowscape and bones of woods.
When we were children, the sun
you loved was an animal you followed.
Now you must run from it and crawl
inside the house where we were born,
watch snow slide down the windows,
rest, and read what you can of wolves.
Then go looking.



Judith Anne Azrael

DEATH OF THREE

I found a few days ago an animal washed up on the beach just below my cabin. From a distance I could not tell what it was...perhaps a coyote or a dog. And I must confess that for a moment it seemed it might be a mythical creature there amidst the gleaming beach stones. The blue inland sea was strangely calm that day and in the distance those uncountable islands appearing and disappearing in the mist.

As I drew nearer I saw that it was a deer...a doe... her head flung back in surrender. Her large ear stiffly raised was etched in black and lined with soft white. The slender graceful legs ending in ebony dancer's hooves. I have heard that deer sometimes swim from island to island. And sometimes drown.

This death did not seem sad. Not here in this place where eagles soar. A few days earlier I had seen a young eagle doing astonishing flips in the air. I was alone on the beach and the eagle alone in the sky. And then it was gone. I stood there transfixed for a long time. No this death did not seem sad...the lovely unscarred deer stretched out beneath the sky. At sunset I brought down a sketchbook and drew its graceful curves. The tide was beginning to sweep in... cool water lapping at the body of the deer. That night I woke again and again...piled wood into the woodstove...stepped out for a few moments under the bright dome of stars. The tide was still high. I wondered if the deer would be washed out to sea.

Judith Anne Azrael/Death of Three

I arose at dawn. The tide had withdrawn leaving a wide stretch of stones. The deer looked stranded and matted and forlorn there on the dry rocky shore. No vultures or eagles or coyotes had found it . . . had taken it for their food. I avoided the beach that morning, having breakfast instead around the bend on the grassy cliffs. I could have stayed another day at the cabin, my solitary and peaceful retreat. But instead I took the ferry that weaved and swayed away over that bright blue water. I went back to town.

I drove back thinking of another death that happened when I lived by another sea . . . a lovely orange cat, a stray, who moved in with us trying the easy life --carpets and cat food and the like. But kept all her hunting habits. At dawn when sleepy and unsuspecting I let her in she would enter carrying a live mouse or an occasional mole. She would sit all day in the sunlight on a wooden deck where fuchsias grew abundantly and hummingbirds danced suspended in the bright air. She had a perch above the hummingbirds there on the deck and could leap down and catch them in a flash. And although I believe in the cycles of nature, I somehow couldn't bear to see those beings of pure color and motion and light trapped in the jaws of my cat. I would look out of the window and see feathers peeking out of the corners of her mouth. And run out, pry her mouth open and the bird would soar away miraculously unharmed. The cat didn't seem to mind. I never saw her eat one. Perhaps she thought it wasn't worth it--not much content to a hummingbird. I think it was their amazing quickness that fascinated her. . . that lured her to match it with her own.

Judith Anne Azrael/Death of Three

When she wasn't catching hummingbirds, she perched gracefully on some lofty perch. . . the roof of the high rafters of the house overlooking the sea. A photographer friend from Toronto asked if he could take her back home with him for his model. But I steadfastly refused.

Then one day I noticed she looked awful. . . weak and sick. And I realized she hadn't evidenced her fiercely independent spirit for some time. Realized I had known this and not known it for a while. I was concerned. So were my children. We took her to the vet.

Alas the town has changed also. No longer did Andre the hippie vet live out in the woods and charge whatever people could afford. Once he had sewn up a dog of ours and just for good measure attached a large safety pin. The dog recovered in leaps and bounds. But now we had an appointment in an air-conditioned office where a neatly dressed receptionist inquired about the name of the pet and its previous medical record and its age.

But it is death I am writing about. . . death and discovery and even joy. The vet declared that the cat had leukemia, had no red blood cells left and would die in a very few days. He gave me several choices: to have her "put to sleep", to give her some vitamin shots which had about one percent chance of helping her, or elaborate blood transfusions and hospitalization that would be prohibitively expensive and had little chance of saving her. The children and I talked sadly and all agreed. We took her home with vitamin shots and some sticky protein in a tube that I was supposed to squeeze in her mouth a few times a day.

Judith Anne Azrael/Death of Three

And then began a strange vigil that lasted about a week. The children went to school each day. And on a deck by the sea I tried squeezing the sticky stuff in my cat's mouth. She spit it out--all over her lovely fur. After that she learned to clamp her jaws so tightly I could not budge them. I fried her tiny pieces of liver in butter and served them up. Milk warmed. Bits of browned hamburger. She grew weaker and I would carry her to her bowl, carry her in the hopes that she would grow more alert with change of locale. But she would stand there wobbly and sticky furred, half sleeping half waking. She would just stand there. I held food up to her mouth. She wouldn't even lick. And after awhile I would carry her away.

I would carry her to the deck and there in the sunlight amidst her beloved hummingbirds and shining fuchsia I would hold her on my lap, press my face against her fur and catch the scent of meadow grass still lingering there. And I would plead with her not to die.

But mostly I was guardian of these her last days...taking her with me from room to room so I could keep watch over her. The vitamins began to produce her biochemical change. Occasionally she would lick at the food I kept placing before her. And once or twice I saw her weakly but steadfastly cleaning her fur. And one night my daughter called joyously from her room that the cat had begun to purr. But the shots wore off and the vet agreed there was no reason no hope in acquiring them for her once again. All progress stopped. And then the rapid downhill slide.

Judith Anne Azrael/Death of Three

I am getting closer to the point. One night I held the cat in my arms and we stared into each other's eyes. Hers looked merciless. I was shaken by their intensity. It was a long look ... one that went on and on . . . and I was the one to finally turn away.

What had I learned? It is difficult to put into words. I saw that I had been willing the cat to live . . . willing her by my vigilance, by the fierceness of my desire. I thought about her eyes, about those tightly clamped jaws from a creature with so little strength. That evening I gave up. I let the cat go.

I found the cat dead the next morning. When the children came home we buried her in the meadow. No grave markers except the bareness of that earth. And no words.

What happened next was that I felt released. I felt a peacefulness enter my being that was deep and complete. I walked the bluffs for days watching the sea spill and dance against the beach. I visited the rock wall where cormorants hid their sleek black bodies in the shadows of the rock. I wrote poetry... a long series of rapturous poems called "The Luminous Mountain." I did yoga by my large sea windows. The silence ... the solitude seem sacred. I stopped answering the telephone.

What had I learned. Perhaps something about responsibility... that mine was simpler and lighter in this universe than I had ever imagined. But I think it was more... I know it was more...deeper

Judith Anne Azrael/Death of Three

and more mysterious, my truth. Something of the shape of the curve of breath.

My grandmother died when I was 23. (Though oddly, my father sometimes asks me in a sad and puzzled tone, "Judith, do you remember your grandmother?" Yes, I remember my grandmother her beauty her dignity. . .yes father. . .how safe and loved I felt with her.) Because I was living a thousand miles away, because I had a baby and because of reasons I cannot fathom, no one informed me of her death until after the funeral. Otherwise I would have been there.

When the call came I cried. Sad surprised tears. Though it would be years until I learned to cry to truly sorrow to enter that dark wave that would rock me and pommel me and hold me and then spill me cleansed and wet and shining back into the light. Whenever I thought of my grandmother she seemed alive. I felt I had to be careful not to make a slip, not to ask for news of her. I dreamed of her often and in my dreams she was alive. Though I had some photographs of her I sometimes looked at, photographs taken some months before her death, and in them she looked pale and transparent as a ghost. And finally the dreams ceased and years flowed by. And then I dreamed of her again. . .dreamed she was cradling me in her arms and we were laughing we were weeping we were sobbing. We were saying goodbye.

There are times when each day seems a miracle of brightness and of joy. It was a time like that when I wrote a letter to my mother and father,

Judith Anne Azrael/Death of Three

a note sent on an impulse from my heart. And in it I thanked them for giving me my birth. On the beach below my cabin a few days ago there was a dead deer, lying stretched on the sand. . .with its lovely and graceful form. And there for a moment in the sunlight in the silence with the sea barely whispering against the shore, I gave thanks for being present at this death.



Tina Batt

GATES

I am a long horse jumping
gates that hang from upright posts.
My hind legs keep dragging
over the wooden railings, sending
them clattering to the ground
like broken toothpicks.

By the fourth gate, I've knocked
three down. Five more to go.
I circle back to them from the other
side. On my back, he whispered
you're fine, you're fine.

I cleared the next gate. I dropped
the next four and spent the night
alone in the barn without
a rubdown, smelling twilight. I dreamt
of a weedy pasture, familiar dust.
I was walking through a gate, slowly,
as if I knew it.

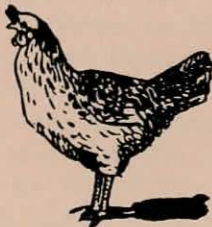
Tina Batt

THE MAN WHO LOVED BIRDS

From the chicken coop
the hill we watch the sky from
slopes down. A single rooster perched
in low eucalyptus crows
to twilight then sleeps, as other birds
put their heads beneath their wings
with the interchange of light.

His monument to birds, the new coop
is their sanctuary from the night.
Chained to the ground by small
intelligence, he has to show them
how to save their lives.

Deep in coyote brush his flashlight
finds them. Grabbing a mound
of flustered bird, wings outstretched
screaming, he holds it tight
against his chest, and with softly measured
coos, he takes each bird to roost
in the new coop.



Mara Bergman

SLUG

Each night it appears
on the floor by the sink
and stops its steady crawl
when the light flicks on.
When one of us prods it with cardboard
how it cringes
shrinking into itself.
It hardens like shell
and lets itself be rolled out the door into the night
it tried to escape.
Still clings the line of mucus,
shiny and silver
streak of progress.
One of us wipes it up with a cloth
and we talk about stopping the pipes.

Joseph Bruchac

RABBIT AND THE SUN

A Lakota Story

Long ago, Rabbit lived with his Grandmother in a lodge deep in the woods. No one else lived close to them and that was the way Rabbit liked it. Each morning he went hunting, though, and he saw something which bothered him. No matter how early he rose in the day someone with a long foot had been ahead of him and left a trail. Rabbit tried to find out who the hunter was who had been ahead of him, but was never able to come early enough. Always that trail was there before him.

Finally he went home to talk to his Grandmother.

"Grandmother," he said, "I am not happy. No matter how early I rise each morning someone has always been ahead of me and left a trail. He leaves the track of a long foot and he will frighten away all the game. I think I should go and make a snare and catch him."

His Grandmother looked up from her work. "Why would you do this?" she said. "Has this person hurt you in any way?"

"I shall catch him in my snare," Rabbit said. "No one else can be allowed to hunt along my trail."

Then Rabbit went out, taking with him a snare. He set it and waited in the bushes. At last he went to sleep. When he woke in the morning he checked his snare. Something had been through it, but the snare was not strong enough to hold. It was broken and the broken ends were blackened. Rabbit grew very angry. He went back to the lodge and made a snare twice as strong as the first. Again he returned and set his trap and again he slept. When the morning came and he woke he saw that, just as before, the snare was broken and the trail of the one with the long foot was there in the grass. Now Rabbit was

Joseph Bruchac/Rabbit and the Sun

furious. He went home and braided a snare so strong that even a great bear would not be able to break it. He whispered charms over it and took it back and set it in the path. Then he waited. He waited as it grew darker and darker and then, though he tried not to, he fell asleep.

When morning came, he jumped up to check his snare. But, just as before, the strong snare had been broken and the edges of the strong braided string were blackened as if by fire. Now Rabbit was more angry than he had ever been before. He went home to his Grandmother holding his broken snares. He took ashes from the fire and blackened his face and sat down before her.

"What is wrong, Grandson?" she said.

"I have decided to die, Grandmother," he said. "I cannot make a snare strong enough to catch my enemy and so I no longer wish to live."

"Grandson," the old woman said, "wait. You can make a snare from my hair. Nothing can break it, even though it is thin and white." Then she took a stone knife and cut off her hair and gave it to Rabbit.

Rabbit was very happy. He took his Grandmother's white hair and braided a snare. He went to the trail and set it and waited. Again he slept, but when he woke in the morning it was not as it had been before. There was something caught in his snare. But it was so bright he could hardly see it and it was very hot all around him. Not knowing what to do, he ran back to the lodge where his Grandmother waited.

"Grandmother," he said, "I have caught my enemy. But he is very large and very bright and it is so hot that I can hardly get close to him."

"Grandson," the old woman said, "it is as I feared. The one you have caught is the Sun, the one who brings light each day to the world. I tried to warn you, but you were too proud."

"What shall I do now, Grandmother?" Rabbit said.

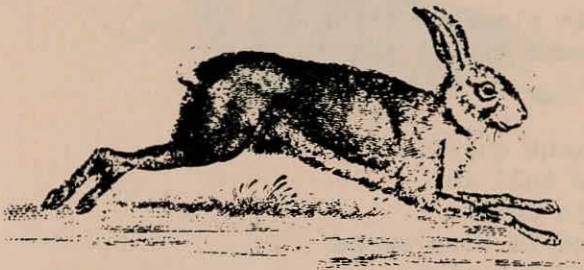
"You must release the Sun. Otherwise he will

Joseph Bruchac/Rabbit and the Sun

burn up the whole world."

So Rabbit ran back quickly. It was even hotter than before and he could see that the sun was very angry and straining against the snare made from the hair of Rabbit's Grandmother. But though the hair was white and thin, it would not break or burn. Rabbit wanted to run away, but there was nothin else to be done than try to release his captive. Ducking his head down low he ran in quickly and pulled the end of the snare so that it would come loose. As soon as he did so, the sun soared up into the sky like a great eagle being lifted by the wind.

Ever since then Rabbit has carried a patch of yellow hair on his back because he was scorched by the heat of the Sun as he ran in to set it free from his snare. And ever since then, though the Sun rises earlier in the day than any other thing, it has not walked again on the Earth but stayed high in the sky, away from Rabbit's snares.



Tom Buell

AFTER FIFTEEN YEARS HAVE TURNED

The throaty raven speaks
at first in dreams and when
he comes, speaking in tongues,
he will not translate.

We slide from sleep.
The frieze of sound begins
to render.

Ankle deep in moss and fog,
we do not pick the deadly amanita.
Risk red tide, but avoid its clammy
breath, fear its tingling lips.

Something good will happen
today, she says.

Much stays secret, between us.

Like the balance point
of cormorants, their bent necks
angling like forks.

Each logwood drift turns back
the years we first camped
along this curve of time.

Here's a quiet place to think
why insects make funnel patterns
in the dust.

We know how such questions
are a trap to fall in,
raveling up in words.
And why the seals clap awake
the heron-shrouded night.

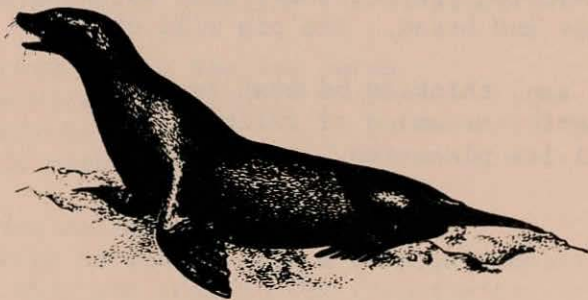
Tom Buell/After Fifteen Years Have Turned

More by far is secret.

Like the thrush's privacy.
Swainson's, shy of sharing,
too mute for ears and gone
if scrutinized so closely.

From such notes, if taken well,
the next step might be up
the scale to clearing.

Morning fog moving
off the distant straits.



Nicole Cooley

PENTITENCE

The pig is translating the Bible
because he likes the smell of bitter incense
along his prayerbook's pages.

Each week after the last service,
the pig collects roses and hatpins
fallen from ladies' hair beneath the pews.

The pig would like to wear a cassock,
to feel the smoothness of black cloth
on his skin and over his small ears.

Hiding under the chapel stairs, the pig
watches Sunday School girls, those ankles
wrapped in eyelet and lace he wants to grasp.

Often at night the pig cannot sleep.
He cries for his four short legs,
his clumsy hooves, the patches of brown on his back.

All week the pig dreams of Sunday.
After morning prayer, there will be baskets
of honey and bread. The pig will stretch

in the sun, thinking he must learn
more Latin, dreaming of religion
and all its pleasures.

SNAPSHOTS FOR MY DAUGHTER

You were five, I think, when we saw the cat
chase her backside under the bed
and let out a wail sharp as a bandsaw
as the first slick lump emerged.
The cord intact, she circled and circled,

and for seconds we felt the panic
that she didn't know what to do. Then
she licked away the sac, freed the paws
to reach with inborn instruction for warmth.
You said, it wants to go back.

Nine summers later I packed you for boarding school.
You practiced walkovers in the yard, demanding,
watch this, hey watch. . . .as if I could miss
the sleight of your body, breasts
rising like yeast bread, the chest

I could blanket with one hand
out-grown. That summer we recovered
two iron wheels left for rubbish
by the farmer before us. We hooped them home
through the hayfield greening for a second cut

and stood them on the sagging porch
wanting the wheels to signify
we were ready to let go.
I never felt more helpless

than when you called, homesick,
your sixteenth birthday, from a foreign country.
I gave you what you needed, but I couldn't
make it easy. That night I dreamed

I carried a baby so small
the birth was painless, but the deeper rip
where the blood-lace last connected us
ached a long while into morning.

Alison Deming

DREAMWORK WITH HORSES

Last night I dreamed again about the horse
and for once I knew that what I miss
is not the false arcadia of the family farm
where lambs are born with no blood on their faces
but something wild and vengeful inside
ignored, now demanding to be fed.

Weeks pass when I forget the chores
until at last I go to the pasture,
surprised again that the horse
survives negligence. Scruffy with burdock
and spring shedding, she ambles from the back
pasture

buzzing her lips in contentment, no thinner
than I left her. It's clear she doesn't need me,
though I'm sick for forgetting to feed out
the hay, oats and water stored in my shed.

*

The horse comes into my small suburban house.
It suddenly seems possible to keep her
no matter where I live. I lead her out
the kitchen door, notice I'm barefoot,
afraid she'll shatter my feet, I go back
for boots. The bridle is jury-rigged baling twine,
too weak to hitch her in the yard while I go.
I walk her in, then out, less afraid of injury
than of losing my connection, the possibility
of riding full-tilt across the hayfield.

*

Even in my wildest dreams the horse comes out on top.
In the one where they fought--the stallion knocked
out, then

men interceding--the horses were the most beautiful
roan, chestnut and bay shining as if
groomed and curried by their own aggression.

They beat the cowboy--the stubbled hard-denim man
hit the electrified fence, was thrown in the air
like a back-lit cloud. I spent months trying

to explain

this dream; the therapist said the horse was Poseidon,
the bringer of storm and calm, lent me

a copy of *Equus*, in which the boy
stabs out the eyes of his passion for the distortion
of civilized love. This is what waking
does to the dream.



Alison Deming

LADY GODIVA

for Joe David Bellamy

I'd sooner wait for the horse to cook my supper
than for my husband's heart to soften. The mothers
beg. "If we pay our children starve." But he has other
virtues in mind--to subsidize the monkish scribes who
know their place, how seldom truth appears, and when it
does how seldom recognized.

Last night asleep I saw the tinker's five cling
like dying weeds to a fault in the earth. My husband,
drawing on his sturdy coat, mocked the dream. "I'll
repeal the tax the day you ride naked through the marketplace."

The challenge hung like drought over Coventry. Only
the monks were comfortable, setting gems in wrought gold
bookcovers to dress the sacred message with more persuasion.

What works for them, reversed, could work for me--my body
plain, built more for labor and compassion than display,
wearing only my intention, I'd ride to Persia to see him
hold his word.

There's virtue enough in the body, I know it everytime
I brush withers and flanks and the horse leans into my stroke
like a child, educated by touch and a soothing voice. Men
are wrong to say a horse is broken when it wears a rider
quietly. What breaks is the fear that makes him bolt from
a wing-beat in the brush; fear that gathers power like an
over-tightened spring until it gives....

Today this white horse and I will shine, reflect the
morning, turn our heads together to see fat crows flush
from the wheatfield.

John Gilgun

BESTIARY

Coyote

Coyote, created out of some god's nightmare of emptiness--empty mouth, throat, belly, bowels--lopes across the desert beside his brothers. At the center of Coyote's consciousness--a diamond tooth, shining like the snow on Hunger Mountain. Sometimes, when he stops running, he thinks of the absurdity of his situation, driven forward all his life by an image of a tooth glowing in the center of his consciousness. Then he feels shame. But he always pulls himself together again and runs on toward the mountain, which retreats in front of him on the horizon. Coyote--always empty, never filled.

Snake

The mind of Snake descends like an arrow to the heat at the center of the earth, Snake being of the earth, earth being Snake's mother. Something is coiled like a question mark at the center of Snake's consciousness. Who put it there? No one knows. And why does the spirit of Snake never ascend upward toward the sun? Even the wisest shaman has never been able to answer this question.

Kangaroo Rat

At the center of Rat's consciousness--flashing lava, leaping steam from geysers, foam as it bounds over the rocks in the mountains of the mind of the rat god. Rat sees a seed, which expands and explodes. Then the god is there, holding out a bony finger, urging Rat to jump over it. Rat obliges and leaps

John Gilgun/Bestiary

over the moon, finding, in the other sky, a feast
as his reward.

Bear

A round, intensely red raspberry glows in the center of Bear's slumbering consciousness--succulent, moist, sweet, like the roots of trees soaking up a spring rain. Bear thinks "round," for Bear *is* round--round eye, head, belly, testicles. Bear dreams that he is a barrel of molasses rolling down a ramp at a steamboat landing in St. Louis. Bumpy-bump. In his sleep, Bear laughs, and around him in the darkness the pines applaud.

Horse

Horse is doomed. He hears the footsteps of a mysterious man as that man walks across the plains toward him. The sound reverberates in Horse's nervous system. He looks into the water which has collected in a wheel rut. His reflection disintegrates there in a series of shuddering ripples. Death is the absence of his image in the still water.

Eagle

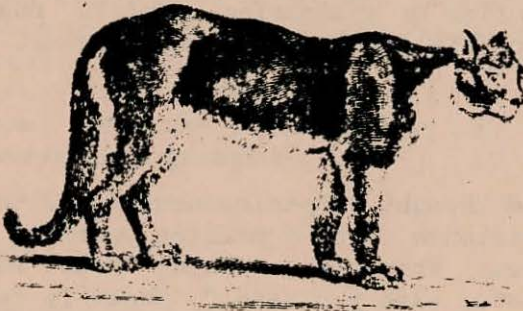
Some god thought "rapaciousness," and the beak came into existence. For a million years it floated alone in space. Then the god said, "Head, body, wings, talons, whatever else you need." Eagle is conscious of the fact that, as far as the gods are concerned, he will always be merely an afterthought.

John Gilgun/Bestiary

Cougar

The feline god thinks in images. "Leaves of aspens in August," he thought, and Cougar's coat came into existence. Cougar stalks like a poem through the hills, on paws lighter than the breath on your lower lip when you whistle. The whiskers of Cougar brush against the cavern walls of my consciousness as I drift toward sleep. They are the limbs of dwarf willows weighted down by the first snow of the season. Suddenly they rebound, carrying all of us--gods, snakes, bears, birds--into a new dimension. Cougar is there, smiling. Sleep!

*



Malcolm Glass

SNAKE

My skin follows me
everywhere, craving
an itch to polish
my colors.

And my bones follow
my skin like the music
of breathing.



Malcolm Glass

WEST, AGAIN

for Ken Saville

1. *Bear*

His hair and beard
burned in stuttering
flames, as he

stumbled around
the log cabin
raging with fever,

every curse a lean
poem from the teeth
of the sun.

2. *Fish*

Each scale
is a thumbprint,
a snowflake. Eyes
that never see

the well of sleep.
Ribs like the
delicately tuned
strings of a lute.

He eats the meat
that is not meat.
He breathes deeply and
air becomes water.

Malcolm Glass/West, Again

3. Hawk

One night he woke
to find his body
covered with feathers,
his toes curved like talons,
his arms hinged like

wings, his lips hard
as clam shells. And without
a thought of flying
he turned over and
went back to sleep.



Malcolm Glass

IN THE WINTER CABIN

The frost line crawls under the walls
and creeps toward the stove, like a
glacier closing in on
a city from all
sides.

A bear be-
gins his three-
legged
dance,
mourning
his brother.
He wants to go
inside, hold the man,
keep him warm in his arms,
like a thick cocoon of wool,
for life; but the bear knows better.



Michael Guzzi

STRAY

Charles Haller knew all about his dog, Lucy. He knew when she had to go out, when she was hungry or thirsty, or just wanted to play, and as he tracked uphill through the few inches of fresh snow, he knew she'd be waiting for him.

The wheezing bus from which he had emerged trailed away. It was dark; there were no street lights by design in the neighborhood, no street lights to clutter. Few of the homes had their outside lights on. The snow was fresh and wet and slippery. His legs were tired. He looked under the tall evergreen trees that hid some of the homes he passed; it was dark and seemed sinister in there. He grimly imagined what would happen should a vague spectre leap out at him. He would not have the strength to run or fight. But it was a safe neighborhood.

His driveway light was on as always and he could see his house clearly. He stopped for a moment. It was a neat, small, three bedroom cape cod built in 1940 of brick and stone, as all the homes in the plan were. The windows were steamy from the stove and its cooking. He could see the vague shape of the dog's head and shoulders behind the window glass.

He neared the door and the dog disappeared from the window, only to reappear before him when he gratefully stepped inside. The dog was excited and alternately danced and charged at him. She stood on her hind legs and pawed him with her forelegs.

"Go on girl," he said wearily and eased her down. He followed her into the kitchen, her nails ticking against the tile floor as she trotted to her dish and lapped water.

"Lucy says its cold, " he announced to his wife, Dee.

"It's supposed to go down to zero tonight," she said while examining something inside the oven. "I'm

Michael Guzzi/Stray

glad we're not going out tonight." She looked at him and smiled.

"Me too," he said.

He went upstairs to change. The dog bounded up ahead of him and was on the bed watching as he took off his tie first, then his coat, belt, shirt, shoes, pants and socks. He realized that the shades were not pulled. He lay down on the bed. The dog moved quickly to his side, circled, settled, then rose, circled again, and settled next to him with her hard rump nestled tight against his side. Her head was turned to him and her chin rested on his chest.

The dog slept right in the bed with him and Dee. At first, when the dog was a pup and untrained, he wouldn't have imagined it, but one night she somehow got out of the kitchen, made her way upstairs and jumped on the foot of the bed. Sometimes at night the dog would start to twitch and whine. The vet said it was dreams that made her do that. He couldn't imagine what a dog would dream about. It was probably the only thing about her that he didn't know.

The dog squirmed and turned on her back, her legs bent and spread. He rubbed the soft warmth under her arms and worked down her chest and belly. Then he moved and rested his head on the soft place where her back leg met her body, and listened to the low gurgling and crushing sounds that were like a factory.

He was stirred by this. The dog began to lick his chin. He eased her head away. She jumped from the bed and he heard a bone click against her teeth. He raised his head and watched as she trotted away with the bone. As he listened to the muffled beating of her feet on the carpeted stairs, he shielded his eyes from the ceiling light and rolled over on his stomach.

"Lucy, tell daddy to get up," he heard his wife call from the bottom of the stairs. He got up and

went over to the window and pulled the shades. Then he put on his old slacks, sport shirt and sweater. Slivers of short white hair from the dog radiated from the dark sweater, as they did from many of his clothes. He vigorously ran his hands up and down its front and they fell in a flurry of linear flakes.

When he came downstairs dinner was steaming on the kitchen table. He sat down with Dee. The dog circled the table, then sat at attention some distance away and watched them eat.

"I hope the car doesn't freeze up," Dee said. "I'll need it tomorrow."

"Look at her," he said and looked at the dog. "I was walking her yesterday and an old guy I never saw before stopped and admired her. He went to pat her but you know how she is. She wouldn't let him. Anyway, he has a retriever and he said they can be just like one of the family."

"They're just like family," Dee said. "They can be as big a pain in the ass as family, too."

"Was she good today?" he asked.

"She was chewing again."

"What?" he asked calmly.

"A letter from Mattie, before I had a chance to read it. There weren't enough pieces left to put it back together."

"Lucy says she doesn't like your sister," he said. "She thinks Mattie's dumb."

"You just don't give her a chance," Dee said.

"Don't look at me," he said and raised a hand in defense. "Dogs are excellent judges of character."

"Well, she didn't think much of your new shirt," Dee said.

"Oh, Lucy," he said in a slow, deep voice. The dog looked away and pinned back her ears. "You're a bad girl."

"Is it ruined?" he asked.

"Not exactly, but the buttons are all gone. I don't know if I can sew them all back on."

Michael Guzzi/Stray

"What do you want to do, design my clothes now?" he said to the dog.

After they finished the meal, he set his plate down for the dog to lick. "Boy, Lucy says this is one of the best meals she ever had," he said as he watched the dog find every trace of food that remained.

"I wish you wouldn't do that," Dee said. "I'd rather scrape it right in her dish. She gets that slime from her tongue on the plate and it's hard to wash off."

When the dog had finished he picked up the plate and brought it to the sink. "See," he said. "Clean. Doesn't even need to be washed." He opened a cabinet where the dishes were kept.

"Charlie, get out of there," Dee said and laughed. He laughed and fended off her arm and put the plate atop a stack of clean ones. She retrieved it quickly and dropped it into the hot soapy water. Then she took the clean plate it rested on and dropped it in too.

"What's the TV Guide say tonight, Lucy?" he said.

"It's Wednesday," Dee said. Her hands were in the sink. "Nothin is on Wednesdays. I'm going to watch the portable in the bedroom after I finish up here."

"I'm going downstairs to read the paper," he said. "I'll be up in a while." He picked up a ripe apple from a basket of fruit and went downstairs with the paper.

He sank down in his place at the end of the couch, next to the lamp. The dog had followed him down and settled on a chair across the room. She eyed the apple as it moved to his mouth. He paced himself so the apple lasted through the entire paper. When he had finished, he put the paper down and held the core in his lap. The dog clambered down from the chair and stood at his knees, her ears erect. After a while she began to stamp her forelegs with impatience. She let out a whimper, then a low growl.

Michael Guzzi/Stray

He held out the apple core to her. She opened her mouth and he dropped it in. The dog would eat anything.

As he sat there he realized that as it was Wednesday it was his and Dee's night upstairs. He'd go up and Dee would already be in bed. He'd be careful to close the door ahead of the dog. Then he'd turn out the light, and they'd make love in the brightening and dimming glow of the television to uncertain snatches of voice and song.

"Charlie," he heard Dee call from the kitchen. "Will you be coming up?"

He watched the dog finish the apple and followed the rhythmic sway of her narrow hips as she trotted upstairs in response to Dee's voice.

"Charlie," Dee called again.

"I'll be up in a while," he called back. "Let Lucy out. I think she has to go."

He sat there, feeling restless and uneasy. The news in the paper was nearly all bad, its pages loaded with death and greed, except for the story of a six-year-old girl who'd had a heart and liver transplant. It looked like she was going to make it; she was going home. The paper termed the recovery "remarkable." He wondered what the parents were going through. They were nearly 40, his and Dee's age. They must know the heart could fail at any time. What can you do? Can you ever prepare yourself for that moment? Or do you just go on, doing the best you can under the circumstances, even finding some joy in the fact that you've made it this far. It was like that with him and Dee. They weren't always happy, but their lives were comfortable, and nowadays that counted for something. And they had the dog. She was a character.

He heard Dee's footsteps at the top of the stairs.

"Charlie! Charlie! Come here!" she called down.

He jumped up and went to the bottom of the stairs.

Then she said: "Lucy took off. She ran after something."

Michael Guzzi/Stray

He bounded up the stairs and passed her with the dog's leash dangling limp in her hands. He ran outside without a coat, calling loudly into the air. He stopped and stood in the front yard, watching the black, starless sky as if searching for an answer. Then he called again. After several minutes of this, he came back inside, holding himself from the cold. He found his coat. Dee put hers on over her nightgown. They drove up the street, past the last house, to where he car's headlights warmed a stand of trees and brush on an undeveloped plot of land. Beneath the vacant landscape sat a clutch of other homes, less affluent, with gravel driveways, crumbling retaining walls, and webbed porch furniture from the summer left frozen in the snow.

"How did she run?" he said angrily. "Didn't you use the leash?"

"I didn't get a chance to get it on her good. She pushed her way out the door. Something was out there. I didn't see it until she was already after it. It looked like a squirrel."

"I don't think squirrels come out at night," he said. "It could have been a rabbit."

"I tried to call her," she said plainly and looked away.

"You should have had the leash on her," he said. "She doesn't listen to you like she does to me. That's why I don't need the leash."

He rolled down his window and called the dog's name.

"Well, for her sake I hope she doesn't wander into Laurel Gardens," Dee said. "Those children don't like her. She barks at them when they cut through our yard."

"She couldn't have gone much further," he reasoned. "Rabbits don't run that far. They hole up somewhere. She should have to come back."

He was quiet for a while. The idling engine began to miss from the cold, jostling the car. "God damn that dog!" he yelled. "God damn her! I'll kick her ass for her! I'll kick her ass good! She doesn't know what side her bread is buttered on."

Michael Guzzi/Stray

He hit the steering wheel, then seized it and pulled on it as if he would wrench it from the shaft. He cursed and swore in combinations of words that were absurd. Then he finally exhausted himself, and he was quiet.

"Charlie, let's go home," Dee said. "If it's meant for her to come back she will. She knows where she lives. It's cold, she could be on the doorstep already."

He drove around the block back to the house. He could see that the shade was still up on their bedroom window. "I'll call the animal shelter from work tomorrow," he said. "She's unusual enough, some one could have picked her up and turned her in. She has a collar and tag. Somebody should call. The thing is, she's not friendly enough with strangers though."

"We can ask the neighbors to look out," Dee offered. "We can call the police."

"If it comes to it, I can put an ad in the paper," he said. "I don't know, I never lost a dog before."

When they returned home he looked all around, poking in every shrub and bush. They went inside without a further word and left the outside lights on, and others within the house. Its windows began to glow in succession until light shone through nearly every window.

He followed his wife upstairs, watching the rolling of her wide hips that alternated with every step. He caught her midway up, and held her loosely from behind. She pressed against him desperately and ground into him.

"I'll find her," he said. "I'll go out in the morning and look. If I know her she'll be on the doorstep waiting to get it. She knows what side her bread is buttered on."

"I don't think they know," Dee said. "I don't think they know about things like a person does."

She took his hand and placed it against her neck, massaging it. Then she tapped it, went up the rest of the stairs and into the bedroom.

"I'll be right in," he said.

"I'll warm up the bed," Dee said.

"Good. Thanks."

He went into the bathroom and washed his face and hands. They still rung from the cold.

"The weatherman said it's going to be warm this weekend," she called out. "It could go up to thirty."

"Thirty?" he called back, amazed at how things can turn around like that. While he dried himself he imagined a vague scene in which a brilliant sun melted the snow away in minutes. Clouds of steam wafted into the sky. He could almost recall the smell of rich, moist earth.

"Lucy says..." he started to say. Then caught himself. He could hear the television in the bedroom. He wondered if Dee had heard. He wondered if she'd forgotten that the dog was still out there.

He went back downstairs and looked out the window. Then he found the flashlight in the cabinet under the kitchen sink. He put on a pair of boots and a coat.

"I'll be up in a little while," he called upstairs as he pulled the door open. "I'm going to poke around a little."

Without waiting for an answer he went outside and followed the dog's tracks in the front yard until they were lost in the road. He walked up the unlit street, shining the light and calling the dog's name. When he came to the field, he pushed his way through a narrow opening between a row of overgrown hedges. The light cast a weak halo on the snow, but he kept walking, his head down, concentrating on the light. His back began to ache. He kept going until he came to the place where the road turned back into his own neighborhood. The snow was broken there, again and again, by trails of staggered holes. He didn't know tracks, but they could have been made by dogs. He followed them through the field and stopped, breathing heavily, where they converged and continued down a hill, where the other homes were.

He knew these people must have kept dogs. Why would they let them roam on a night like this? All he knew about these people, from the shape that their

homes were in, was that they were careless with their property, and that they were probably as careless with their lives. The homes were probably full of injured marriages and broken appliances. Were they as careless with the lives of their animals as well? He'd read in the paper, months ago, that somewhere people poured gas on a dog and set it on fire. It was the most horrible thing he could imagine. Who would be capable of it? Surely it was beyond these people, as it was beyond him and Dee and everyone he knew. This was not a place where anything could happen. His dog was lost. Dee he'd forgive. He'd forgive Dee for that. He'd forgive the dog. There'd be forgiveness all around. All he had to do was bring her home, shivering. Shivering and grateful. He braced himself and sidestepped down the hill, after the tracks, toward these houses and their few small squares of light.

Tim Houghton

EAGLE'S GOD-TALK

My breath spread blue
against space,
I am the meaning here, the sun

my conspiracy. When my sleep
makes it set,
I dream that gold again

but take it into me,
through each vessel of my strength
and make it red. I'm ageless from this,

my love of kill. It has
perfected me. And when this mountain
hinges my wings,

I know I am faster than God
and will stay here
forever

and will hear the clockworks
beneath me. My will is the rhythm
dealing the waves, scorning

their panic. They too
will know the other season, the face
white from a thousand skulls.
I bring winter to the sea. Only I.

Steven W. Huss

HAWK

The wide green lungs of Miccosukee swamp
exhale squirrel bone and rotting cypress.
Mosquitos swarm in sweat of august nights
beyond rutted clay roads in twist of moon
through ancient stands of oak.
The spirit you hold in your pocket
like a rabbit's foot will not take you
past the knives of scrub palmetto
around the swamp, the owl screech bleeding
in the trees. To keep this earth from closing
on you like a fist you must place the spirit
beneath your breast bone, fill it with your breath,
let it fly before you like a great white hawk.

Maggie Jaffe

DOLPHIN

Not speech
but sea

speech
breaks
in soundings:
murmurings of shoreline

waterwall,

sinew of heart
and mind
and matter

*my dream is of dolphins
freely churning up
white water far from
the galleon shore.*

But drowning in nets
they are crushed
by weight of shadows,
their lungs collapse
like sails.

Now the slaughter begins.
Even the sun can't take it,
standing there all day
on burning legs.

Because they are large-

hearted
it takes them long to die.
Dying sane and mute,
trusting us still,
staining the already
darkening waters...

THE TREASURE OF BONE

we hunters swarm in a hive of nerves
and keep the feet a moving target
we've heard the tone of a bloodhound soar
when the diamondback pierced his foot
seen how he snapped off its head
assuming that victory has no poison
and limped into the tense undergrowth
ahead of the sickness on his heels

how many falls later
we lame and swollen
come upon him
and rearrange his bones
among the hollow stalks
and wonder at the miracle
of how flesh disappears
only to feed an earth
dressed in the jewelry of bone

Margo LaGattuta

RUMPUS

Waits there under every moon,
my old ruffled dog with her stick.
Calls me with green eyes
to come out and rhumba.

Mud-caked belly from the bush
down by Paint Creek's bank,
she pulls me dancing
in the wet black leaves.

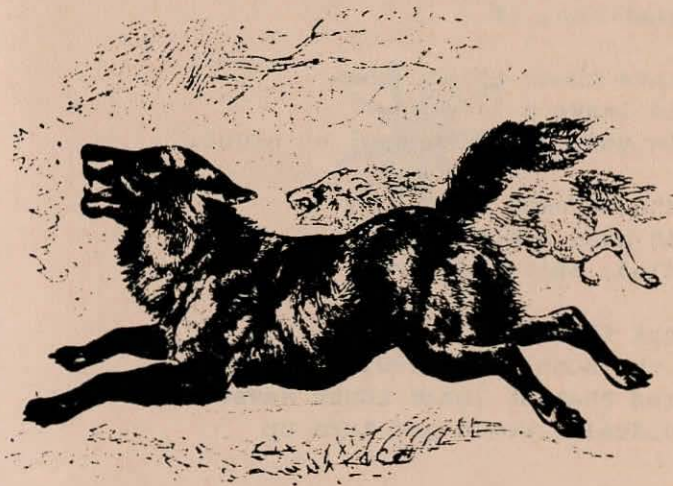
She imagines herself Carmen Miranda,
her wolf teeth flash
moon white in a howl
brought from belly deep night.

All the frightened neighbors close
their shades to our wild rumpus.
Don't want to see my old dog dance
or me with the earth all over my face.

Nancy Lagomarsino

OUT OF NOWHERE

Twilight so early, and cool enough for a sweater. Just a few hours ago my eyes watered, I was so weary I had to lie down, yet now in this dim light I take a few steps, I feel strong enough to do this, moving as carefully as a car down the driveway and out under streetlights blinking from their deep, uncomfortable sleep. I don't know what's in the hedge, but up ahead my small black dog is trying to find out for me, the white patch on his chest shining like a miner's lamp. Since last night a few stars have come closer--you can see them panting like dogs hurtling out of nowhere, the same dog from many different directions.



Thomas Lux

TARANTULAS ON THE LIFEBOUY

For some semi-tropical reason
when the rain falls
relentlessly they fall

into swimming pools, these otherwise
bright and scary
arachnids. They can swim
a little, but not for long

and they can't climb the ladder out.
They usually drown--but
if you want their favor,
if you believe there is a justice,
rewards for not loving

the death of ugly
and even dangerous (the eel, hogsnake,
rats) creatures, if

you believe these things then
you would leave a lifebuoy
or two in your swimming pool at night.

And in the morning
you would haul ashore
the huddled, hairy survivors

and escort them
back to the bush, and know,
be assured that at least these saved,
as individuals, would not turn up

again someday
in your hat, drawer,
or the tangled underworld

Thomas Lux/Tarantulas on the Lifebuoy

of your socks, and that even--
when your belief in justice
merges with your belief in dreams--
they may tell the others

in a sign language
four times as subtle
and complicated as man's

that you are good,
that you love them,
that you would save them again.



Tia Maytag

DOG STORIES

Something stirred through the house because Bruce and I wake at the same moment. We automatically head for the kitchen. He limps in his right rear quarter, and I've got arthritis in my left hip.

It's midnight. Bruce is eating so frantically that I'm afraid he might choke; he could inhale a kibble. I stand at the counter and rip chunks of cake out of the foil I'd wrapped it up in this evening. Maybe Bruce and I had the same dream and that's why we're eating like this, wanting the feel of substance.

It's more likely, though, that it was Claude's visit. He is concerned about the resale value of the house when all the carpets are urine-spotted because Bruce has lost control of his bladder. Claude is eager to have me move into something smaller so that he can add my house to his real estate holdings.

"Take Bruce to the pound," he says. And then he'll bend over and pat his head. Claude has no loyalty.

"How can you even suggest such a thing when this dog used to be your closest companion?" I ask him. It wasn't really this Bruce, but Bruce The First that Claude slept with when he was little. Claude doesn't answer anyway.

Claude is restless in this house. He moves around fingering his grandmother's tea cups on the shelves and imagines how much they would sell for in his wife's antique store. His wife Ginny, rarely visits me. She says the house smells like a zoo.

When Bruce is done eating, he throws himself down on the floor. At this age you can't just ease down. It takes too much muscle control.

I wait for tea water to boil.

Ginny is too fussy. It was smell that saved Ordelle Peterson when she fell down her steps and broke her hip. The postman suspected something because there was a horrible stench coming through the mail chute. When the police arrived and opened up the door, Ordelle's

Tia Maytag/Dog Stories

German Shepard, Petey, was guarding her. He had done all his business close to the mail chute. Ordelle claims Petey knew that would save her.

Even though Petey was heroic, that story horrifies me because it reminds me of the story about the movie star in Hollywood who died and then her dachshund grew hungry and ate little bits of her. That would be a point in favor of not raising dogs on meat products.

Bruce's kibbles are softened in milk because he's missing most of his teeth.

Claude visits us at least once a week, and he calls several times during the week, so he would find me without too much delay. He knows I don't go out past the porch unless I get a ride to the grocery store.

Bruce hears me shuffle to the sitting room with my tea and he gets up to follow. Sometimes the dog bothers me, following me around like this, watching me with those brown eyes as if I have promised him something. Most of the time, though, I don't really notice that Bruce is an animal. We move like shadows. He knows my routine.

Bruce waits for me to settle into the chair and then puts himself right next to me so that his belly is actually resting on my slipper. This way, when he falls asleep, he knows that I can't move without waking him. That touches me and I bend over to pat his short-haired back. I ruff up his fur and check for fleas. Since it's colder now they haven't been much of a problem. When Bruce and I went out to my sister's after my husband Edward died, we came back to a house full of fleas. They flipped up out of the carpet like dust when you walked across it. It just surprised me that they were there, proliferating, when in all these years I had never even thought about them.

Bruce is fifteen years old. They say dogs don't usually live that long--one year being equivalent to seven human years. That means Bruce is 105. He has outlived most of the dogs on this block, including the Waring's pedigreed Golden Retriever, Rudolph. But Rudolph's son is still alive. The Waring's have Golden

Tia Maytag/Dog Stories

Retrievers painted on their welcome mat, their cocktail glasses, and even on the side of their mailbox. Sally Waring's hair is the same color gold as the dogs' coats. They feed them meat.

Sally comes down to visit every so often with Rudolph's son and a new female. I can hear Sally coming with her "Sit, stay, heel." The dogs obediently sit on the porch and wait when she comes inside. We all, including Bruce, look out the window at them and talk about how much Rudolph's son resembles his father; I don't know how many times I have said he has a beautiful head and watched Sally smile with pride. It is a safer, less painful subject, than Bob Waring, Jr. who did not follow his father into the law practice.

They say that people grow to resemble their dogs. As Sally walks back up the street with her dogs, I watch how imperiously they all stride with their golden hair glowing in the sunlight.

This Bruce was really Edward's dog. I think there is something of Edward in him--not just the chunky build. I mean actually a part of Edward that has remained behind to keep me company.

Bruce has wet again. It just runs right out. But then, a lot of people I know don't have perfect control either.

I have to get a paper towel, but I hate to wake Bruce. He will follow me back and forth. As I hold the paper towel under the faucet, Bruce flops against the kitchen cupboards even though I tell him not to lie down. I go back to the chair and stoop as well as I can to dab up the spot. He stands, sensing that I am not going to settle in the chair again, and then he follows me back to the kitchen and watches as I throw the towel away.

"At least punish him," Claude would say. Every time, just before he leaves, he says, "I'll take Bruce with me now and drop him off at the pound. You won't even have to deal with it, Mother." He brings armfuls of things that are supposed to remove odor and stains from the rug. I don't use them. Usually it is just

Tia Maytag/Dog Stories

a dribble of urine--not enough to count. The rug is beige anyway.

"You can always replace the carpet," is what I mutter. Claude pretends he doesn't hear me. He's miserly about everything except his own clothes. I gave him Edward's good tweed jackets and he could have had them altered, but he said they were too heavy. He likes pale things--gray, nubbly jackets that look like they've got silk threads woven through them.

I settle back into the chair. Within a few minutes, Bruce is dreaming again. Twitching. I like to imagine what it is that Bruce dreams about. He was never very active, but his legs quiver from the paw to the shoulder as if he is running. The edges of his mouth curl and waver. Sometimes there are sucking noises from his mouth. In the depths of his dog brain, he remembers his mother.

Just as I might confuse the two Bruces that we've had, I sometimes wonder if there wasn't more than one Claude. The Claude I knew as a child was not the finicky, pretentious man who wanders through my house fingering everything of value.

I tap Bruce with my slipper to wake him. When he begins to shudder all over he doesn't breathe right. At his age, too much excitement isn't good--even if it is a dream.

Bruce The First died when Claude was fifteen. It was around that time that Claude began to change. I remember at first Edward and I thought it was the death of Bruce that made Claude angry at the world in general. We immediately bought Bruce The Second, this Bruce, thinking that it would help Claude to attach himself to a dog again. Instead, Claude was not really interested. In fact, I now think we bought Bruce The Second to help ourselves because we saw our son growing away from us.

When Bruce is sound asleep, like he is now, he rolls onto his back. His lips droop downward

Tia Maytag/Dog Stories

making him look gleeful. Bruce The First died in his sleep of old age.

Doris Fitch calls and wakes us up, wanting to know if I want to ride to the grocery store. I would rather not go with Doris, but I say yes.

Doris resembles her dog Bitsy. Bitsy is a Chihuahua; Chihuahuas are not dogs, but rodents. Doris cheats at bridge. She has had three husbands and a son in jail. Bitsy is the only dog that Bruce hates. Doris always brings Bitsy into the house and I have to lock Bruce up in the bathroom. Doris puts Bitsy on the floor and she runs right up into your lap--dressed, always, in a sweater. She stands up with her paws on your chest and her face next to yours. Doris will say, "No, no, Bitsy," but I think she is delighted by the exuberance of her dog.

Bruce, like me, is stiff. Most nights I fall asleep in the chair. I open the front door to let him out. He barely walks off the porch to do his big business; it's just too much effort.

He also forgets his age and will make the motion to charge after the newspaper boy on his bike, but then the pain and stiffness stop him and he watches instead. Edward didn't like newspaper boys either. They didn't get a tip unless they got the paper up on the porch.

It takes a long time to get ready for anything now. Bruce limps with with me from dresser to closet as I dress. I have toast in the kitchen; he has softened kibbles and the toast rind.

To spare Bruce, I wait for Doris on the porch. I know that Bruce is behind me with his eyes just over the sill of the window peering out. It would be more than I could bear to look at his face.

When I get in the car with Doris, Bitsy clambers all over me and then stands between us on the front seat with her tiny tongue flapping and her eyes bulging straight ahead. Doris puts her into her purse when we go into the store. I take

Tia Maytag/Dog Stories

my own cart--not needing one so much for the quantity of groceries as for the support--and pretend that I don't know them.

It's coming home to Bruce that is awful. He gets excited to see me. What other creature shows his love so unconditionally? Anyway, the arthritis in Bruce's hip hurts when he wags in greeting which means that even while he's happy, he whines in pain.

I have special treats for both of us from the grocery store: cookies for me, dog biscuits in bone shapes for Bruce.

"Where have you been?" Claude asks over the telephone. "I'm coming over." He isn't concerned that I didn't answer the phone earlier, just annoyed.

I wait at the window until his car pulls up then I sit down in my chair. He knocks and marches in. I always ask if he wants coffee or tea, like he's a normal visitor. "Only beans, you know that," is what he says, meaning he will only drink coffee made from freshly ground beans.

He pulls the footstool up in front of my chair. when he sits down he makes a little tug on his pants leg, like a curtsy. In his hands he has a brochure with inky black and white photos of dogs and cats. He bends forward with his elbows on his knees. Bruce is very alert by my side.

"Bruce is a dog," he says, giving Bruce a quick glance.

"He is?" I say to tease him. I pat Bruce's head.

"Seriously," says Claude, slapping the brochure in the palm of one hand. "Here is an animal piddling all over the house. The place reeks, you can't bend down to clean up after him...He really should be put out of his misery."

"He is not miserable," I say.

"Now, wait, Mom." He uses "mom" when he wants to soften me. He fingers the brochure and wants to read from it.

Tia Maytag/Dog Stories

"You can go," I say to him. I can feel my heart fall out of rhythm. That's not particularly good for someone my age. Bruce stands up and begins to prance in place.

"They use modern methods," Claude continues, as if he hasn't heard me. "Bruce won't know."

"He knows."

"They put them in decompression chambers. . ."

"Get out!" I shout. Bruce begins to bark.

"Suit yourself," Claude says, which is not what he means at all. He opens the front door and lifts his chin up and sniffs. "It smells like something dead in here." He closes the door. I can see him on the porch picking paint off one of the posts. I am sure he is calculating the cost of repainting.

Bruce is panting. My eyes are bleary with anger. I get up out of my chair and we limp together to the bedroom. There is a small wooden chair next to the dresser that I slide over to the bed. It is all I can do to get Bruce's front paws up on that, then I shove on his behind. Working together we get him up on the bed. I pull the covers around my neck and think about decompression--a chamber that would pull the air right from our noses and mouths and out of our bodies.

The bed shudders with Bruce's snores vibrating through the bedsprings.

Jack Myers

MY CAT "BOSS"

Little cat with your mind poised on a nail,
you think like light streaking from a diamond,
you meow in the rubbery voice of need.

I am the hard-boned rubber doll who can't
relax, who makes technicolor wrong decisions.
I have the patience that transforms substance
into dross. You have the quickness of an act of thought.

I've been studying you for a very long time:
the way your eyes close when I speak,
the way you trot indignantly from my reach,
and I have come to this conclusion:

I will probably outlive you
but I will do it very badly.



THE GREEK SHOULD HAVE CLIPPED ITS WINGS

The Greek's girl stands by an open window
 cursing the Greek in the draft
 street traffic slipping around her waist.
 In a shrug the parrot rises
 from the Greek's left shoulder.
 The girl shrieks, the bird so close
 in passing it brushes her mascara.

Now strangers gather.
 From Tony's Laundromat to Oriental Gardens
 they whisper a valuable bird is stuck
 it's getting darker these days
 a parrot could freeze overnight.
 I think I see him someone says
 pointing past the dying leaves.
 Everyone looks up,
 the Greek, the Greek's girl, the man
 who scales buildings, mountains,
 even trees for the right price,
 who kisses his wife's throat
 while he winds his rope.

The Greek's pantaloons billow.
 His girl who never shuts up
 when they make love
 is laughing and trying to light a cigarette
 at the same time. The tree the parrot's chosen
 dwarfs the three story house. The climber

throws a loop and shimmies upward.
 His red cap catches on a jutting limb,
 slips from his head. His boots
 thud against the trunk. Directions
 called from the crowd go unheard,
 man like bird intent upon uncommon gifts
 for lifting off the earth,

Liza Nelson/The Greek Should Have Clipped Its Wings

matters of estimating when to let go,
when to hold. At the moment
the man can finally see
yellow and green wing
no longer blended into autumn branches,
the parrot lets go
leaving the man a court fool
pulling air from his hat.

Those down below raise their arms in unison,
a string section about to pounce on High C,
the expectant whoosh of silence
before they run to the next yard.
Only the pregnant wife remains
to watch her man cling on.

Hurry hurry
the others call
the parrot's in the elm.

Its tail feathers shimmer
quicksilver fading into clouds.
The man swings his rope to dangle
like a noose, snatches his cap
which he twirls vivid red on one finger
as he slides in a swoop to the ground.

Liza Nelson

AFTER BROWSING AT RAY'S TROPIQUARIUM

Flat bellied as rejection,
expressionless,
I have taken the shape of a fish.
Mist rolls through the streets
over the cars skimming past
while encased within
their four glass walls
lone swimmers peer,
mouths pursed with pale hungers
blank O's. What texture
my back might offer
mottled bright and dull
cannot be touched through
tempered glass. As if facing
the emptied mother
who nightly dared my childhood
across the dinner plates, I anticipate
questions never asked. Secret light
trickles from my mouth,
streaks my tail phosphorescent
as bubbling water. Scales
sparkling flecks of ice,
I slip away from predators
by changing color.

Now I am swimming free.
Goodbye all heavy legged lovers
who said as I fluttered my arms
in the snow making angels
I would never be pretty
enough to last. I feed on
wingless insects at the surface,
sleep with round eyes open.

Paul Nelson

WROUGHT

Barned since birth, they stood in the seamy stalls
all winter beside the mountainous Jersey,
her loins ravined, bones like staves, udder
dragged and chewed. The father they will never know
lies in isolated pasture, well enough disposed,
seed in the freezer.

I towed the two of them out, bawling at the landscape.
At first they froze, then slowly made their way
all around inside the barbed steel. Down by the
sliding bank,
they looked quite brave, chased each other,
all akimbo, slipping in their own shit,
flat to knoll, gate to shed and back again,
panicked by their lungs, the involuntary lunging.

Now look at their heads in the tub
like heavy boots that love each other,
eyes warped open to the light. The stiff wind
wags their hides, black and white maps,
draped on the rail.

I gave them names by which to kill them.
During the war I gave my son as easily,
thoughtless as he was. I can't bring him back.

The fall chill drives the flies inside
to sleep by the billions. The two of them
nosed the proffered hand, palm of grain.
Even as I murdered them, their mother freshened.
As will the half-dark faith.
We must be men.

NOAH (i)

All afternoon you've been testing the boards,
Looking for leaks, stamping the flooring in place.
You've scared a quarter of the animals to riot,
Knocked a deer, cross-mated when we weren't
Keeping good enough watch, into early birth
And the mess is mine to clean, when, really,
There are other duties. You've shaken the railings
I think of every stall. I tell you,
Yes the waters seem to be going down,
If it will save you from another fit
Of convincing me, listing your proofs. How many
Birds you've sent off in just the last two weeks
The world will never know: your madness
I hope in better time you and I
Will hold to ourselves, I hope
That your sons have not seen. Somewhere
In the very bottom, underneath the stores,
There is a seepage and the must smell
Is terrifying the deeper you go
And we can't get to it. You try
All the hinges on the doors,
Swing open to ocean, waves higher than sight.
Yes, it's been long enough. Dry land is the desire
A man might have that his neighbor's grandsons
Have fertile wives. A few more days
And we'll be slaughtering the lesser beasts;
Neither I nor your children will forgive you
The times you chase after their wives.
I talk often of letting the lions loose
In the underdeck, of doing anything
That would quicken us, and it's not idle thought.

Ken Poyner/Noah (i)

Close the portal and come to bed.
You'll babble half the night of the physics
That will leave us stranded on rock
And believing is adequate for me: I'd like
To get to sleep. You check one more deck,
Drive a new nail. All night I feel us lowering,
The waters breaking on shores, the terrible arid
Smell, the desert everywhere, the bastard species
dying of thirst.



Mark Sanders

OPOSSUM

In back of the house,
a fenceline wound in weeds,
the opossum our dog
found hiding there
is a shivering stone
of wet, gray fur.
I went for my shotgun,
loaded it, but
feeling sorry for the animal,
my wife stopped me,
said the opossum was cute.
How anything so much
like an enormous rat
is cute is beyond my grasp,
though I won't argue.
Sleet pecks at the panes
of the windows
like chickens for grain,
the frost on the glass
making a fine mash.
Meanwhile, the opossum
plays dead for the weather,
the snow's feathers
closing about him
and the meatless bones
of the trees
rooting in the frozen earth
like stones.

Mark Sanders

ABOUT THE DARK

The heifer dies,
her stillborn calf,
stuck at its shoulders,
stiff as a stump
in an unbroken field.
All that is left
is feces and mucus,
a funeral
of waking flies.
Crows are laughing
in the trees,
their beating black wings
giving birth to the image
of much darker things.

About the dark,
where the sky
meets the end of field
and fence,
the larks fly off
like the day's last light,
like sparks on a fuse,
the earth's mad dash
toward death.

Mark Sanders

RACCOON

Minnows are kisses,
silver lips cooled with gloss

*

In banking water,
reeds and willows part like loins.

The mask slips through.

*

Cat-tails rush like blood,
a throbbing of blackbirds.

*

A shifting sand covers the past.
The evening contracts as mist hugs the heat.

*

Sighing, the river looses its muscles.

*

So hands fall like heavy stars,
and the taste on the tongue
is wet, round stones.

Gary Sange

BIG DANCER

Under the earthcrust
of his dung-smeared, dusty hide,
this bulk of ovals rolls
over to lift
onto his knees
until he's stuck
in prayer.

Then gathering up
such purpose
he stands swaying
to the beat of his rump
drumming on the iron door.

Eyemarks lost
in the massive wagging face
steadily disregard gawkers;
giant ferns rivered with veins
listen as they flap

to the rhythmic formal frenzy
of his gliding stomp

tossing off smooth
semi-circles
to abrupt
corners of the cage

probing between bars
a floppy rumpled trunk
lofted to a spiraling
pythom ballet

David Tedlock

A WALK IN THE SNOW

At the bus stop, where Kelley has been waiting with her for nearly 30 minutes, he finds himself hearing her say, "Even my legs are cold now. I'm wearing sweats and tights underneath everything, and I'm still getting cold."

Tights. She's telling him she's wearing tights. Underneath everything. Somehow he knows they're red. She would have muscular thighs and calves, firm feet.

A strand of blond hair strays across her forehead from underneath her knit cap. She has an angular, attractive face. But mostly it's her voice in all this snow. Her voice seems always to be lifting up. Even when a gust of wind lashes at them and he turns his back on it so that he fully faces her, she only turns momentarily away from him.

"My feet are gone," he says. "I don't feel them anymore."

She looks down at his wingtips, covered largely by black rubber overshoes. All the snow beneath his feet is hard packed now, almost ice.

"You should take better care of yourself." She says this as if she knows his wearing wingtips and two pairs of dress socks is only the latest example of his not taking care.

Kelley nods. He agrees with everything she says. It's twenty below with the windchill. The cold has brightened her cheeks, made her eyes bluer.

She says, "Some hot chocolate would sure taste good right now."

He agrees and says, "I should've known they'd never close the University." Then he worries about how old his cynicism makes him sound. He adjusts his backpack's shoulder strap, shifts his huge black portfolio from one hand to the other, and thinks, At least I'm not carrying a briefcase.

Last year, she tells him, when they closed the University for two days because of the blizzard, the

David Tedlock/A Walk in the Snow

guys in her dorm got crazy. They played football in two feet of snow, crashed into each other recklessly, scrambled wildly after fumbles. With the windchill, it was five below.

"They were just crazy," she says.

Crazy, Kelley thinks, is a way he hasn't been for years.

"But now I've got an apartment," she says. "The dorm was too much."

"Where?" Kelley says it before he can stop himself.

"Forty Second and Mitchell," she tells him.

"It's a one bedroom in a house right on the corner. I like the privacy."

"That's not so far from where I live," Kelley says. But that's all. He imagines buying her a cup of hot chocolate, or having a cup at her apartment. It's early in the afternoon yet. At home Tom and Jerry, utterly bored, are probably mangling pot holders or systematically clearing everything off Patti's bulletin board. When Kelley gets home he'll find the shopping list in the bathtub, the calendar on the couch, the 25%-off-on-Purina coupon, perforated a dozen times by feline incisors, lying slain on the floor of his study. And Moses and Zoie will be expecting their before-supper walk, especially because of the snow, some kind of aphrodisiac for the Labs--they crash through it, burrow into drifts, plunge their heads below its surface, throw themselves down and trash around wildly like spring colts in fresh clover.

Meanwhile she stands next to him in her corduroys and blue parka. Everything she says is lifted up by her voice.

She says, "You really ought to get some warmer shoes and socks. You're going to have to soak your feet or something to warm them up."

Kelley sighs. He's wearing the wingtips because he expected to drive to class today, but then Patti's car wouldn't start and she'd taken his, too late for him to change shoes and socks.

Into another gust of wind she says, "You don't

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usually ride the this bus, do you?"

When the bus finally comes, they're no longer alone--a crowd of shivering students has gathered. The bus surges up to them through the snow filled streets and Kelley wonders, What now? Then suddenly she runs away from him, over the snow bank and down to the street's edge where the bus's door opens for her. So he stands there hesitating--all the other riders are closer, really, so they'll get on next. But all of them hang back, assuming he's with her, and so he ends up getting on right behind her. He takes a deep breath of the warm, thick air in the aisle and follows her back, deliberately sits down next to her. She's chosen, he notices, the only seat with an empty one beside it.

She's already pulling off her cap. Her hair is much longer than he expected. Loose and full, it changes the geometry of her face, softens her features. She shakes her head and produces a brush from no where. It's as if he's arrived too early for their date and she's still getting ready to go out.

But in sitting down Kelley has taken off his mittens purely out of habit, and snapped them together onto his parka's zipper. He has bared his hands so that suddenly he can think of only wrong things to say. He cannot say, Can I buy you a cup of hot chocolate? He knows she is wearing red tights, underneath everything, but he cannot say anything right.

After dinner Kelley cleans up the kitchen and Patti disappears, then comes back wearing her pajamas, slippers and robe.

"I'm not going anywhere tonight," she says. She sits down on the couch with the latest issue of *Pediatrics* and puts her feet up on the hassock.

"Work, work, work," Kelley says from the kitchen. He's drying the skillet on the stove. But Patti doesn't respond.

He still has trouble imagining the work she does

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though he's seen her there in Kendleson's office, dozens of times. Her name's on the door: Patricia Adler, M.D., pediatrician. Inside are legions of children with runny noses, measles, and scarlatina.

"Did you feed the cats?" It's the second time he's asked, but the first time, when she was changing clothes, she didn't answer. Now she says, "No." But she doesn't get up and do it, one of her jobs. Cats need love too; that's his argument.

"Rob," she says. "They can wait. I've got to finish reading this article." Her tone says, Why didn't you ask me earlier? Her right hand, freed from holding the magazine, twists a strand of her blond hair, so short now it doesn't even touch her collar. He still remembers how her hair, so long then, spread over her open notebook in the soft light of a library study table as she reached to touch his idle hand.

Over dinner she told him so much about the tonsillectomy he feels as if he assisted in the operation. He's grateful she talks about her work, it makes his own work place--dusty and jumbled, the studio air thick with the smell of oils--seem strange even to himself. And she hasn't asked him about his day. Maybe it's just that she's used to his telling her without her having to ask. Maybe he's holding out on her. Either way, it's something he wants to tell but isn't able to.

Finally, the only question he could ask her was, "Does your body know when you don't have your tonsils anymore?" But her scientific answer didn't tell him what he wanted to know, so that now, as he puts the skillet away, he wonders again about lost tonsils.

Meanwhile, Tom and Jerry do double sentry duty at the edge of the kitchen floor. They eye Rob expectantly. Rob makes the mistake of looking at them, and Jerry lets off a calculated meow. Tom studies the distance between himself and the kitchen counter. They're both just plain house cats, what she wanted. "Your dogs, my cats," she said once.

"I gotta take the dogs out," he announces, but Patti says nothing. Moses and Zoie hear though. There's a

small explosion underneath the kitchen table; both of them scramble for the front door. Red alert: Rob is going for a walk.

"Yeow," Jerry says. He wants to eat. Now.

"Okay, okay," Rob says. He points at Moses and Zoie, panting at the front door. "You guys just wait a minute." Then he feeds the cats. Jerry eats steadily, but Tom just glances down at the food, chicken and tuna, his favorite, and walks away.

"Some people," Rob says, shaking his head. In the living room he puts on two pair of wool socks, his down vest, parka, hood, hat, mittens. He's ready for a walk in outer space.

"Space man," he says to Patti, but she says nothing.

The wool socks and boots make him think of *her* again--he doesn't even know her name. When she left the bus he kept trying to watch her walk away, to see if she would turn and wave, or look. But the bus windows were steamed over and there were too many people in the way.

At the front door Moses and Zoie prance around like a couple of rowdies. They crash into Rob's legs, into each other, the walls.

"Out you guys," Rob says. "Out." Moses races out the front door and disappears into the night, but Zoie simply waits on the porch. She always waits to see, exactly, where he is taking them. After all this time surely she knows the route they'll take--up the hill to the pocket park, then around it once or twice, and home. Surely she could make her own way--Moses does. But instead she waits for Rob to show her. Then she settles in alongside him, almost as if he's told her to heel.

Halfway up the hill a panting Moses pulls up in front of them like a freight train suddenly out of coal. Even in the dim light from the corner street lamp Moses and Zoie, utterly black, stand out starkly against the whiteness of the snow.

David Tedlock/A Walk in the Snow

When Rob returns with the dogs, he finds Patti asleep on the couch.

"Long day," he tells everybody. Jerry is sleeping on the centerfold of *Pediatrics*.

"Hey," Rob says to Patti. He touches her elbow, that's all. If he's not careful, he'll startle her awake; she'll think some ogre's got ahold of her.

"Hey," he says again. But only Jerry opens his eyes. It's a cross look. Hand off, buddy--that's what it says.

Patti's tonsillectomy was scheduled for 7 a.m., and she was up at 5, early because of the storm. Then her car wouldn't start and she stood in the living room, immobilized, in tears. Rob studies her face and shakes his head. It's hard to believe she's a doctor. In sleep she seems so young. It's as if he's just met her.

She claims she was ignored by the boys in high school, made fun of, even, but he doesn't believe her.

"I was," she insists. "I was flat chested, and nobody liked my pug nose."

"You were flat chested?" The way he points makes her cross her arms over her chest. She has the power to distract him from any task, just by walking by.

"Hey," she says when he comes after her, trash bag in hands or with his dishwashing gloves dripping water. The gloves make her wrinkle up her nose. She's a doctor but her nose actually makes her look squeamish for a moment.

"Your nose," he says, putting his arms around her but holding his gloved hands away from her back, "could launch a thousand ships." The touch of pug is still there, just.

"I love your nose," he says, kissing it, "in a bikini. Or in blue jeans. Or in sandals. Just sandals, that's all."

But he doesn't say any of this now. She's asleep and he's standing there thinking about the bus ride and how he couldn't catch one last image of her as she walked away.

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In the bedroom he turns down Patti's side of the bed and switches on her electric blanket. Back in the living room he sets Jerry, too sleepy to protest, on the couch cushions. Then he carries Patti off to bed. He's still strong enough to carry her.

By the time he's got her slippers off she's waking up enough to help with the robe. Without opening her eyes she says, "Thanks for taking out the cats."

"Dogs," he tells her. "Cats eat; dogs go out." He thinks of elaborating, but she has already slipped under the covers so far all that's left of her is her blond hair spread briefly over the pillow case.

"Go paint," her voice says from somewhere. Then she's gone again.

In the living room once more, Kelley catches himself operating on automatic pilot: the newspaper goes under the t.v., Patti's empty wine glass goes on the kitchen counter by the sink. But then he slumps down on the couch next to Jerry. The walls, all white, seem so empty.

He glares at the walls, then studies his stockinged feet. At the bus stop she knew about his shoes and socks, but when she rose to leave all he could say was, "Get warm." He doesn't even know if she heard.

In his study, he tries again to get something onto a fresh canvas. But the empty white spaces there makes him melt in his chair. His body slumps down until he is nearly a puddle on the floor.

He would stay fixed ther forever by the big white canvas except that he's discovered by Zoie, who licks his face and climbs all over him. Then Moses comes in and the two of them work him over, demand their last walk of the day.

On the couch he sits next to *Pediatrics* and begins putting on all his winter gear again. After the last time her work made her nearly disappear for a few days, he found a card on his desk. From Patti, her neat, rounded letters spelling out his name in blue on white. On an otherwise utterly blank surface she began, "I kept looking at so many cards, but none of them were

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right for you. Then I found this one. I love you." The card was roughly cut and folded once, its utterly blank surface almost precisely the texture of water color paper.

Outside there's a surprise: it's snowing again. Big heavy flakes wafting down without wind. Already two of three inches of fresh snow rest on parked cars and once-cleared sidewalks. The street light seems enshrouded in thick, shifting blankets of lace.

At the park Moses and Zoie plunge through the deep drifts while Kelley starts up the sidewalk on one side. His feet make new tracks in the fresh cover. He looks down to the end of the park and imagines walking all the way to her apartment. It isn't too late yet. He doesn't even know her name, but he's certain he would recognize it on her mailbox. When she opened the door, she wouldn't be surprised to see him, all covered with snow.

"I wore boots," he'd say.

Moses races to the end of the park and waits there as if he hopes or expects Kelley will go beyond it, but Zoie ranges close at hand. Patti agreed to Moses and Zoie readily enough, but they entitled her to cats. She would probably want children someday, too. She hasn't decided yet, but she says there is plenty of time left.

"Twins," Kelley says to Zoie, who has joined him on the sidewalk. "She'll probably have twins." He imagines himself hustling the twins into diapers while Tom and Jerry, Moses and Zoie all watch, amused or astounded, spectators at a raucus tag team wrestling match. Meanwhile, Patti would be off somewhere taking out some kid's tonsils.

But from her sleep she said, "Go paint."

When Kelley gets to the end of the park, he hesitates and suddenly he feels silly. He knows where he is going. He turns and walks down the sidewalk like the man on the moon. He takes big, mechanical steps, juts out his arms. He's a robot. Stomp, stomp, stomp. Then Frankenstein. But Moses and Zoie, way

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ahead of him, pay no attention.

All the snow makes the park seem so small now, every sharp edge turned to contour, every distinct shape reduced to anonymity. At the last corner Moses still wanders yards and yards away, but Zoie waits for him. Her waiting makes Kelley pull up short of a full circle around the park. He looks down the way he began and sees: already the snow is making his footsteps disappear, the closest ones, the oldest, gone now, the rest fading fast.

At the bus stop she was the one who started the conversation. He arrived thinking about lost tonsils, and she stood there by the sign and told him she was wearing tights. Red ones. Underneath everything.

Zoie waits just inside the park for him to decide about making another circuit.

"Always waiting," he says to her. Wagging her tail, she looks utterly patient. Then he does it. He leaps over the snow bank and tackles her, crashes her down into the snow.

She's shocked into momentary inaction, but then she struggles wildly. Her powerful legs thump his chest as he wrestles her around to pin her, to hog tie her, to bury her in the snow--he doesn't know what, exactly, but she keeps sliding away.

Then Moses comes charging up and Kelley frees an arm, knocks Moses down and applies a bear hug. He wants both Labs to succumb to a five-count.

They thrash crazily in the snow and his winter gear makes him awkward, but his surprise attack gives him the edge. He gets Zoie in a scissors hold, Moses in a head lock, and holds them both for the count.

Panting, they all head for home, where Kelley sits in his study with a sleepy tomcat in his lap and a cup of hot chocolate in his palm. He looks at his big white canvas and sees there all those footsteps of his, filling up with snow and disappearing so soon, so far away.

Barbara Ungar

PEAK FOLIAGE LAMENT

Now the yellow leaves shake down like rain.
Day after day you wake to a world more
brilliant - how can the sky deepen blue
the wind sweep the maples flame any
higher - until today, all subtly
faded, a falling off so familiar
to our generation whose home, The Greatest
Nation On Earth, has been always falling

in the shadow of that vast sadness of
the animals vanishing from the face
of the earth, two by two. They take a
bow on T. Y.: save the whales the wolves
the children send money save the world send
money money money as if money
ever saved any form from passing
into the ark of the invisible

Their tread wrenches our sleep as they step
off to join dinosaurs and dragons
among the constellations, leaving us
more widowed and barren, like the woods
with every spiraling leaf. The cry
of wild geese

the silence after

Ann Wagner

BULLHEAD

Dark, where their hooks hang
like stiff and deadly larvae,
the water grows thick,
the rotting gives off heat.
I feel with barbels
thin sheets of leaf,
hollow tubes of stem,
soft, black wood.
These barbels are good
as a blind man's hands.
They know buttons from snails
and the pattern of nails
on a fisherman's boot.
The bloated silk sides
of a sunken bluegill
dissolve at a touch.
My caresses finish
what has been started.
I glide over your cheek, your hair
your bluegill and eelgrass
here, where it is mine.

Michael West

HOG

"...a cybernetic meadow...all watched over by
machines of loving grace."

--Richard Brautigan

Supposedly plants do well
in the company of classical music--
I'm going to try it on my hogs.
A transistor radio
draws only a little juice--
what have I got to lose?
Three good sows, a bottle-fed red boar
and a full litter of suckling Chester Whites.
Concrete slabs curbed and chainlinked automatic
watering and feed, electric fly killer--
believe me it's a pleasure to witness
the results of scientific hog farming.
I can offer them this much:
Death and Transfiguration
pre-explicated by Karl Haas--
all anyone could ever ask for--
pork with good taste.

Susan L. Williams

THIS KITTEN WILL OUTLIVE ME

walking the length of my bath,
taking my measure with grave kitten symmetry waiting
for white islands cat-dangles
one paw, shakes it
as if
shaking off fire.

She wants to walk on water.

I slap water at her, all laid out, her
ears fold back, her eyes
half her face
twice reflected, something shining
under the water, crouches
as if she will interrupt
the mad-red spot
under the water, I grab for her foot, she cat-dances
high-backed turns on a drop licks
her foot. Her throat cat-rattles,
I riddle my fingers into my hair and wait, braided
under the plushy water, her paw
silks the loosening skin of my wrist. She
looks for a sign under the skin.

I should line up some land for her to light on.
Should do something Roman--I grab for her rabbit's
foot. She watches
my eyes, I raise
one luminous knee

(If thy breast offend thee
If death offend thee)

Susan L. Williams

This life
These lives
have come
through millions of deaths
I say to this kitten
baptized
into my bath.

Step lovely.



Jeffrey Wilson

AFTER FISHING IN HIRSCHKIND'S POND

As the crappie rose to the surface
of the galvanized bucket I hit them
with a ball peen hammer between the eyes.
I thought nothing of death back then
and its endless need for old relatives.
I followed a single prayer: to lay
the fish inert, eyes cooked white,
peppered on the ready fry pan.
They responded not by dying, but by slowly
sinking, then rising. Their simple
mouths opened as if rings of silver had
floated to the surface. And with this
gulp of air they disappeared
like the sound of a drum.

BIRD WATCHING ON HIGHWAY ONE

If I hadn't spent my younger years
nose to the wind, eyes straining for the upper
bough, ears attentive for the simple note,
I wouldn't have even recognized them
slicing the foreground of sunset
like two childless swings still whipping
after the last ride before bed. Black crescents
shot across the highway...owls in flight,
concerned only with each other, forgetting
their place. Their brains, warm, ripe
fruits from an ancient tree. On hushed wings
they glide, dodging harried cars in the twilight.
Their wild eyes focused
on each other and the wind.

Jeffrey Wilson

NEW HAMPSHIRE

There is always one who prefers
to wander outside the enclosed yard
to scratch and shuffle in the drive-
way, shuns the homogenized feed inside.
At first I trouble and chase, clip
her wings and hope she'll stay safe.
But after months of trapping I realize
the hook-bill hen is the healthiest.
She lays her egg in the dog house,
her feathers sheen in iridescence.
The world is more complicated
than I know, there is little
wisdom under lock and key.

Bill Wood

BY A LAKE

this guy listens for the moon
as it breaks on water, tries
to figure how it stays whole.
A ripple of minnows calls him in.
His kick makes small froth, and the fish
curling through the lake, the beaver
dropping a pine on a fallen pine,
the speckled toad squatting
near a hump on the bank
feel the way being afraid to love becomes dying.
Suddenly, they know what is human.

CONTRIBUTORS

John Aylesworth is a graduate of the MA program at Ohio University where he studied with Stanley Plumly and Paul Nelson.

Judith Anne Azrael has had stories in *Minnesota Review*, *Jeopardy* and *Confrontation* and has published four volumes of poetry.

Tina Batt lives in Martinez, CA and will graduate in August from the MFA Program at Vermont College.

Mara Bergman works as a children's book editor in London. She currently has poems in *The Bad Henry Review* and *Cincinnati Poetry Review*.

Joseph Bruchac edits *The Greenfield Review*. Other retellings of stories from Abenaki and Iroquois traditions have appeared in *Cricket* and two volumes of Iroquois folk tales are available from The Crossing Press.

Tom Buell teaches in the English Department at Portland State University.

Nicole Cooley has attended the New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts and Bennington College. This is her first publication.

Alison Deming has recent work in *Tendrill*, *Poetry NOW*, *Nimrod* and other magazines.

John Gilgun's *Everything That Has Been Shall Be Again*, a collection of animal-reincarnation fables is available from Bieler Press.

Malcolm Glass has published widely in little magazines. He also writes fiction and drama and his play, *Greetings* is to be produced this spring by Poverty Playhouse in Nashville.

Michael Guzzi lives and writes in Pittsburgh with his family and a dalmation named Lucy.

Tim Houghton's work has appeared in *Poet Lore*, *Denver Quarterly* and *Tar River Poetry*.

Steven W. Huss has poems forthcoming in *Cape Rock*, *Images*, and *Menomonie Review*.

Maggie Jaffe has published in *Another Chicago Magazine*, *Confrontation* and *Pacific Review*.

Robert S. King co-edits Ali Baba Press and *Lodestar*. His most recent chapbook is *Dream of the Electric Eel* (Wolfsong Publications).

Margo LaGattuta's chapbook, *Diversion Road*, was published by State Street Press. She teaches writing at the Paint Creek Center for the Arts in Rochester, MI and will graduate in August from the MFA Program at Vermont College.

Nancy Lagomarsino lives with her husband and two sons in Hanover, NH. She will graduate in August from the MFA Program at Vermont College.

Thomas Lux has published nine books and chapbooks, most recently *Tarantulas on the Lifebuoy* (Ampersand Press). He teaches at Warren Wilson College, Sarah Lawrence and at Emerson College in Boston where he lives with his wife, Jean Kilbourne.

Tia Maytag has published stories in earlier issues of *Calliope* and *Tendrill*. She lives in Hesperus, CO.

Jack Myers teaches at Southern Methodist University and the Vermont College MFA Program. His most recent volume of poetry is *I'm Amazed That You're Still Singing* (L'Epervier Press).

Liza Nelson recently received her MFA from Vermont College. She lives in Atlanta.

Paul Nelson's *Days Off* was a 1981 winner of the AWP Poetry Series Award. A new manuscript is ready, *The Hard Shapes of Paradise*.

Ken Poyner is a frequent contributor to *Calliope* and also has recent work in *Jam To-Day* and *Iowa Review*.

Mark Sanders is widely published in little magazines. His most recent book is *On Common Ground: The Poetry of William Kloefkorn, Ted Kooser, Greg Kuzma and Don Welch* (Sandhills Press), co-edited with J.V. Brummels.

Gary Sange's work has appeared in *Poetry NOW*, *Crazy Horse*, *Ohio Review* and many other magazines.

David Tedlock has published in *Kansas Quarterly*, *Southwest Review*, *Indiana Review* and elsewhere.

Barbara Ungar's poetry has appeared in *Sojourner*, *Waterways* and others. She also writes short stories and is working on a children's anti-war play.

Ann Wagner will graduate in May from the MFA Program at the University of Arizona.

Michael West is a newcomer to *Calliope*.

Susan L. Williams has poems coming out in *Labyris* and the *Inkling Anthology*. She lives in Minneapolis with her son Garret and their cats, Bob and Gisela, who is the kitten in her poem.

Jeffrey Wilson received his MFA from Vermont College. He has been published in many magazines, including *Karamu* and *Quarry West*, and lives in Martinez, CA.

Bill Wood lives in Locust Grove, VA where he installs and pumps out septic tanks. Other of his poems have been in *Tar River Poetry*, *Laurel Review*, and *Skyline*.

JUDITH ANNE AZRAEL

TINA BATT

MARA BERGMAN

JOSEPH BRUCHAC

TOM BUELL

NICOLE COOLEY

ALISON DEMING

JOHN GILGUN

MALCOLM GLASS

MICHAEL GUZZI

TIM HOUGHTON

STEVEN W. HUSS

MAGGIE JAFFE

ROBERT S. KING

MARGO LAGATTUTA

NANCY LAGOMARSINO

THOMAS LUX

TIA MAYTAG

JACK MYERS

LIZA NELSON

PAUL NELSON

KEN POYNER

MARK SANDERS

GARY SANGE

DAVID TEDLOCK

BARBARA UNGAR

ANN WAGNER

MICHAEL WEST

SUSAN L. WILLIAMS

JEFFREY WILSON

BILL WOOD

