



# Calliope

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*Michael S. Weaver*

**PROVIDENCE JOURNAL VI  
CELEBRATING THE PLAY**

for George H. Bass

At Cecilia's we had red beans and rice,  
waking the cook on the bar stool  
long after the kitchen had been closed,  
the food put away like lonely songs,  
only half consumed, and we started building  
a pile of memories on the table,  
laughing about how rehearsal succeeded  
and how it failed, and how something  
so alive depends on imaginations  
cooperating and synchronizing whenever  
summoned. When the food came we ate  
with good cheer and paper napkins.

I thought that we could return years later  
and stir the ashes of this vital magic  
that escapes names like a flying ghost,  
not accepting that we will all leave  
in our separate ways in unpredictable time,  
not believing memories and time  
were all we had before or after the play.

*Diane Swan*

## **EIGHTEEN**

When the army said he could take nothing  
with him, afraid and longing  
for what comes next,  
he struck his room like a stage set—  
rock posters, playbills,  
the fake headlines hollering his name—  
and packed the boy away in seven cartons  
shoved into the closet's dusty back,  
only once saying  
he didn't want to go, he'd changed  
his mind, then marking, in case of fire,  
which box to save first.

When I was young, expecting love,  
curled like a willow over my own reflection,  
I dreamed a man would come, a husband,  
some foggy prince to bear me castleward.  
There was no child in it.

And now the music is stopped upstairs  
and downstairs his black piano  
empty as a glove, and around me air  
has been vacuumed of his singing,  
his questions—*Did you ever want to die?*

God had better be at home in that  
St. Christopher, namesake,  
silver medal I had soldered to its chain  
that tonight in some dim barracks  
continues around his neck.  
While here I can do nothing for myself,  
having never imagined a son  
or life without him.  
And so I smooth his bed, as I have always

*Swan/Eighteen*

done, folding the white sheet back  
triangular, like a sail. Or a page  
I bend down to keep my place.



*Francine Witte*

## AND

The shops have strung themselves shut,  
"Sorry, we're closed" and "please try again."  
Everything near you lowers towards sleep.  
Whatever you need, you'll have to need less.

The moon tries again. Gives you what light  
it can. Thousands of miles below you,  
on the other side of the world,  
the sun is answering everything.

Only the night is this flawed,  
allowing for doubts that ignite  
like white stars occurring to the sky.

What gets you through is knowing  
that like a terrible monster  
un-housing a small town, the dark  
will move on searching for food

and knowing, that like the conjunctions  
and, but, maybe, the night is useless  
without something on either side.

*Heather L. Johanson*

## **BETWEEN SEASONS**

She comes with the first snow of the season. She knows intuitively where to find me and I hear her stomping her cowboy boots on the back porch before I look up to see her coming into the kitchen with the flurries and the cold air. She shakes the braid of her hair and the last flakes fall from her shoulders and disappear. I'll find them in puddles on the tiles where she stood after she's gone. Now, I reach for the kettle to heat water for tea.

She takes off her boots and pads over the tiles in her stocking feet to sit across the counter where I've been working at the typewriter. She has to hop slightly to lift her small frame onto the kitchen stool. The snow smells so good, she says. You can almost smell the places where the wind has been. She is breathless from the cold and something else that does not show in the high color of her cheeks and the excited gesturing of her hands as she takes off her gloves. This is her season. The crisp clarity of the white earth, the bite of the unseen air are elements of her. She shuns the popular migration south and prefers instead to wander the abandoned woods, her three great dogs bounding and scenting rabbits at her heels. They never catch one, she assures me, but I have been afraid of dogs and the sound of their baying between our houses sends a shiver down my spine.

Twenty-eight years old, she could be my twin, but looking at her across the counter is like watching my shadow, an indistinct, inverted reflection. There is a serpentine quality about her, the way the long brown braid dances over her shoulder when she tosses her head. She laughs like the boiling water steaming up the windows, keeping us by obscurity in a world of our own. She pours herself water and watches the color of the tea bleed into it. She waits for it to be dark and strong and then squeezes the last life from the teabag before throwing it away.



## *Johanson/Between Seasons*

She was here when Jacob and I first moved from the city. Like the wide oak stump at the side of the driveway that we spent that first summer trying to blast away and could not, it seemed she had always been. Even in death, that great tree would not let go its hold on the earth; its roots must have been wrapped about the very core itself. It's not going, Jacob said of his nemesis with awe: it's not going unless it takes us with it. So it stayed beside the driveway, a lurking hump in the back of the land, and where there had once been shade is now the first place to thaw in winter and the cats have a warm, dry place to sun themselves.

As a gift one Christmas she brought me tulips, bright red bobbing against the snow in a clay pot she had made herself. And every year since, she's brought me new ones, yellow and oranges, and once a deep exotic purple that seemed almost black. The flowers from two years before are a pleasant surprise bursting out of forgotten places in the ground. Our front yard is a riot of color in the spring, and I always have the one clay pot in the bay window of the kitchen in the middle of the winter. I don't know how she makes them bloom unseasonally and I do not want her to tell me.

This year, she brings a pot of white tulips that disappear against the snow.

I'm going away, she says. Just for the holiday and she asks if I will look after the dogs. Let them out twice a day, be sure they have food and water. They really don't need much attention, she says. They just like it. She gives me a key to the padlock on the front door and instructions for watering some of her plants. She'll be gone four days and I think, what could happen?

At the door again, I want to keep her, but the dogs come and cluster around her and I cannot get close. Her distracted hands brush the tops of their butting heads and they carry her away like a triumphant crowd. When she is gone, her footprints fill quickly with new snow, as if she had never been.

*Johanson*/Between Seasons

Her ground is firmer than mine: she stands on the solidness of ice and snow and the great rock ledges of New England. I am unsure of myself, like the formless soil that washes away with the first spring rains. I am pliable. My suburban doubts about moving to the country were swept away when we first came by Jacob's enthusiasm for planting a garden and building shelves and working with his hands and his rapture at the night's vast starlit sky. I don't tell him when he's on the road and I'm alone that I leave all the lights on at night. When he calls and asks "watchya doin'?" I tell him I am looking at the stars and we share that moment doing the same thing at the same time thousands of miles apart.

Two days before Christmas and Jacob is in the city. The thing he has always loved about this house is coming home, to the soft, lighted windows blinking through the trees. This is our shelter, he says, just like a home should be. I do not tell him that when I am alone, the empty rooms grow too big and hollow to protect me.

It's cold, with two feet of snow on the ground, but the sky is clear. It's snowing here now, I tell him. Out the back door, the wind is stirring white dust up in clouds, like a frozen desert. I wouldn't be able to see her light even if she were home, and it takes me some courage to make my way through the darkened woods.

The house where she lives is a long low building, not really a house at all, but a shelter squatting in the trees. Before the temperamental New England farmland was subdivided, it might have been a chicken coop or a stable. On the darkest nights, a warm light has glowed from the tall windows, spaced where stall doors might have been. Now in the winter twilight, with no one at home, the weathered dark wood shades the grey horizon between the stands of oak and pine.

The dogs rush at me from the darkened doorway and before I can find a light, they pass me in a jostling mass of

*Johanson/Between Seasons*

sniffing wet noses. I panic a moment as their cries grow distant: I have read about dogs wandering the countryside seeking vacationing masters, but as I watch they bound back again, the great shapes of them dark against the snow.

Inside, I am surprised somehow to find the tools of human life—furniture and pots and bowls. A couch and table and dresser, all sparse, but solid, just like her. Even the tall, free-standing mirror in a corner is framed in wide planks of oak, a heavy and permanent window into a private world. In it I look small; I do not look like I belong here, among her invincible things.

I turn away and fill bowls with food and water, then call the dogs in, knowing their names, but not knowing which is which. Only two return.

Where is he? I find myself questioning them, expecting them to answer, but not expecting to understand. She talks to them all the time, their tails and tongues bantering back like the Chinese grocer back home, ordering about his immigrant stockboy: I have never understood.

I have to think. I know that he is her oldest dog, a big grey hound she told me she raised from a pup. Danny, I remember; that is his name. Danny, I call. Where did he go, off by himself before supper?

In the midst of the great old trees of the woods, there is a place where the spring runoff meets with the high groundwater and creates a natural, mossy kind of pool. It is a popular spot for transient waterfowl to gather along their migration routes, a secret place that only they can see, flying overhead. I would never have discovered it myself, if she had not taken me there.

One year at the turn of the season, we stood at the edge of the wood and watched the ducks and geese gathering for their annual flight south. Their flapping raised streamers of water and sun-burnished leaves as they took to the air and we swayed to their circling patterns in the sky.

Do you think they know where they are going, she



*Johanson*/Between Seasons

wondered. Do they know they'll be back in the spring or is this a new place for them every year? We kept our voices low like the moaning of the trees against the wind, as if we had some secret that might break the natural spell.

I earnestly hope that Danny isn't headed there now. I don't know how deep the water can get, or how strong the ice is—and in the dark, I don't think I could ever get home.

Danny, I call. Danny. And I think I sound like one of the neighbors when I was growing up in the city, calling the kids in for supper. But here there are no laughing responses echoing from garages and vacant lots. I call and after a while listening to the silent woods call back to me, I move off into them. Danny, I call, but Danny does not come. And I wonder why she names her animals with people names and not more clever things the way others do. Danny. What kind of name is that, for a dog? Danny. I'm starting to panic now and my voice is growing shrill, but I can't tell anymore where my fear comes from. The coming of nightfall presses around me, along with the responsibility for this missing dog. What will I tell her? Dogs run in packs; why didn't Danny come home with his? I think of the racoon with only three legs that raids our garbage in the night, and even though she said the trap was old and no one used them anymore. . . I have to find Danny.

I stumble through the snow, calling: Danny, where are you? By now the snow is luminescent under a three-quarter moon, drifting in and out of clouds, casting shifting shadows in my path. They skirt among the tree trunks like furtive animals, but none of them is Danny.

When I find him, Danny is still, his great shadow more like a puddle, a void, a negative space in the radiant ground. I reach to touch him and am surprised by the sting of the metal buckle on his collar. Where the warm moistness of his breath used to come, it is dry, the foreign conversation of his tongue, his ears, his tail are gone. I do not understand. What happened, Danny? What kept you from coming home,

## *Johanson/Between Seasons*

leading you here to this desolate place in the woods? Danny, what happened? But Danny does not answer my whispered questions. Suddenly, everything is very cold, and I know that Danny is dead, but I think sitting here in the snow, that I must get him home, to the warm house, to the vet. He's a big dog, though, and I know I cannot carry him. I am helpless, wet, with my hands going numb, my eyes watering and the sharp wind, sharp strands of hair lashing at my face. I can't see the houselights from here. There is a frightening moaning sound and I look up, for its source, before I realize it is my own sobs. What am I going to tell her, Danny? How will this fit into our conversations over tea?

That's the way Jac finds me: sitting in the snow, holding the dog's head in my hands, my salty, warm tears falling into his fur. I've been calling you, he says: why didn't you answer? The dog is dead, I tell him: I know it's just a dog, but I can't handle this. He kneels beside me in the snow and gently raises the big grey form in his arms above my head, light as air. He didn't come home, I am babbling: I couldn't find him. I don't know what happened. He's an old dog, Jac says: animals have a instinct to go away alone to die. I think she'll understand.

When she didn't come back we buried Danny out front, near the stump, where the cats still have a safe refuge from the newcomers. Now the spot is bare among the first spring blooms, but next year there should be white tulips in the light young grass.

The younger dogs, Sam and Joey stay to the backyard, thwarting Jac in his efforts to keep them out of the garden. They run and tumble after rabbits, or the cats and dig under the fence, pressing their noses and bellies into the fresh, moist earth.

The days are longer now and sometimes, when the moon is out, the dogs linger by the garden gate and one of them may howl. The sound, if anything, is sad, and I understand



*Johanson*/**Between Seasons**

that, if not the words of the song. I call them in. They  
hesitate a moment at the edge of the wood and then they come,  
pressing at me with their cold wet noses and muddy feet,  
sweet live things.

*Jon Lavieri*

## NIGHT DRIVE THROUGH GARY

There is a foundry flaring up  
off the highway through Gary tonight  
as if a solitary bomb  
has fallen through the blizzard.  
The shoulder is flecked with anonymous breakdowns,  
where hands lost their grip on the wheel  
and wheels lost their grip on the road.  
We're doing thirty-five with a long way to go,  
our faces jutting forward  
as if that extra six inches  
will get us there any sooner.  
Two armless sleeves of tire tracks  
angle across the lane into the ditch  
where a truck is lying on a turtle's back.  
The highway patrol goes skidding in after,  
flashing its limpid blue.  
The closer we come toward Kalamazoo  
the further it backs away from us.  
In the passenger's seat,  
down at the end of my leg,  
my brake-foot keeps marching  
through the same empty space.

*Carol Frome*

## LIGHTNING

The truth of the matter ignites  
at night, when you're driving home,  
frightened, in a midwestern rain, lightning  
striking. Each electrified point  
becomes a new horizon, now in the West,  
now the East. The truth is:  
you can never know  
for sure where the edges are. You just keep driving,  
blind, except for the flashes  
of oncoming headlights and lightning: flashing

you'd like to draw to your open hand  
and wind onto a spool, to kindle and work,  
later on, into something useful—  
a poem, maybe, that you might be needing  
soon, when you'll be in the dark  
and needing a good light, or a house  
with lots of light where you could turn  
on the dark for a change, and to think,  
life spinning out from your palm,  
quick as lightning.

*Marcelle M. Soviero*

## ARMS

I come to you  
needier than a newborn.  
I want to be all body,  
to have my mind shoveled out  
and buried in the sand at Long Beach.

How free my arms could be then  
if my mind wasn't busy  
with the memory: My sister's body  
in the white bed, knives in jackets  
on the kitchen counter. I simply want  
to forget everything and concentrate  
on the embrace—your fingers  
at the base of my back.

As a child I imagined we came from hugs,  
born from two pairs of entwined arms.  
I wanted the warmth of a body  
around mine. I wanted each bone  
to be held in, always afraid I'd fall  
into darkness. Later I searched for anyone  
who could pack me tightly against them  
roll me in their arms like flour  
being kneaded into dough.

You have taken over  
where they all left off,  
so tall your belt presses just below  
my chest; *"This is why we have arms,"*  
you say, careful to look at me.  
It is all connected, I think,

*Soviero*/**Arms**

the arms hugging, the smile on the face,  
the knowing that even something  
this simple won't last—your fingers  
touching my spine, my hands placed at your neck,  
and your breath in my hair  
like someone never born.



*Shoshana T. Daniel*

## HAVDALAH

Cinnamon lingers. Another Shabbat  
shot. Spice incenses the senses, fingers  
the somber air. Darkness; our hands are not  
touching. I observe the sabbath longer  
than required, refuse the flame, the bright  
illuminant and heat. We sit for hours,  
far enough apart.

We part.

Tonight

the air is thick with every scent but yours,  
smoke and sweetness, candle-wax and wine.

I will not dash my wineglass to the floor,  
splash and shatter evening with a violent  
reminder of desire.

I breathe the fine

September air, then close and lock the door,  
restore the sabbath, singular and silent.

*Paul Grant*

## BLUE PLATE SPECIAL

Here you've got your country  
fried steak, which is  
none of the above,  
merely the burned  
memory of meat  
nailed to the crockery,  
and here you've got your french  
fries forgetting  
their names under brown gravy,  
and your cabbage  
boiled until the earth  
can't hold it up  
anymore,  
and here's your white bread  
that you won't touch,  
and to wash it all away  
you've got the acid  
they gave us to make  
the world over with:  
the acid that eats  
a road out through  
the moonlight  
that has to go on—  
for its own sake and ours—  
short-changing us  
for what was over  
the last hill  
so there'll be a next.

*Marcelle M. Soviero*

## THE ANGRY ONE

When he is here  
I make the angry woman  
swallow her words, each vowel  
a sword. I hold her head down  
so he can't see her eyes, like yolks,  
that run off her face. So he won't notice  
her purple cast beneath my skin,  
or the extra vein in my left arm  
where she sits sharpening the swords.  
All while he rubs his hands, like emery boards,  
down the length of my body  
she presses thorns into me.  
*Dirty girl*, she hisses, but I don't listen.  
I let him open me like an acorn, hurting me  
in the undoing, until I feel  
his fingers unscrew my spine.  
Some other part of me plays  
make-believe, counts the plastic rosary beads;  
*he loves me, he loves me not.*  
When he leaves she bites  
the lining of my stomach,  
right where he left off.  
She knows I am afraid to lose anyone,  
even him. She wants to speak for me,  
to this one with hard lips,  
whose body I am forced to kiss.  
And I want to break her from me  
like the stick of celery snapped in half,  
so I can comb her wax hair,  
bend her joints into shape  
like a Barbie doll's.  
I want to see her face to face,  
so we could work together, finally,  
to draw my breath back out from him.

*Francine Witte*

## COUNTING

Sometimes, very late  
when the street shines with rain,  
you can count the cars hissing past.  
They sound like stars  
that sizzled one by one  
out of the wet night.

Or you can count the powder rooms  
of music clubs where women are painting  
themselves into the mirror.  
Soon they will follow  
their reflections  
back to the dance floor.

Every day millions of syllables  
fly from mouth to mouth.  
You can count them as they pass  
the ear and wrinkle like smoke  
toward the sky.  
You can learn to sit  
and watch your outstretched hand  
flexing at whatever just got away,  
you can count your fingers counting.

*Lynne H. deCourcy*

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR A WRITER BETWEEN STORIES**

Sharpen new pencils; keep blank paper,  
Sweet, expectant squares,  
Tucked in every pocket.  
Be ready  
For what is not there.  
Leave your house: in the yard,  
Your dog may be dragging the end of a rabbit  
Through trillium, spread like birdsong  
On the ground. Watch it disappear into the  
Wilderness  
Of his jaws. Consider the shape  
Of an absence,  
The power of the unseen  
Growing larger as you endure it.  
Walk through town to a cafe,  
Listen! Eavesdrop shamelessly  
On the unsaid. Memorize  
The nuances of silence.  
Take a drive in the country.  
Last night on the road I saw  
Two gloves, two shoes, laid out  
As though on some invisible  
Ghost ready to rise up  
And shatter my windshield.  
Of course, if your windshield is shattered,  
Well, that is the story you must write  
This time, gleaming and ready-made  
On the surface. If not, so much  
The better: pull over.  
Get out and pick up the void  
Between the gloves and shoes,  
Discover its heart  
This way: cup it in one hand, and



*deCourcy*/**Suggestions...**

Cover it with the other.  
Wait.  
Uncover it with a flourish;  
Brandish the knife or the flower  
Or whatever you find there  
With words that equal  
Its cruel, perfect beauty.

*Shoshana T. Daniel*

## SESTINA: TALKING, TALKING

This is the winter of the lumpy fu-  
ton, a wet season of talking, talking,  
driving, walking, sprawling on the rose  
quilt under the wet sunset's dull mango.  
That sky would make you look, but no one  
does. I've been asking you, asking you, "What

do you want?" You keep saying, "No, what  
do *you* want?" but go on talking. The fu-  
ton slumps. It's been closed and folded one  
night too many. The clock's loud tock-tocking  
smacks the bare walls. If you were set to go,  
you'd be furious that when you rose,

I'd rise too. Or wouldn't. Your mouth narrows,  
closed against questions and their answers. ("What  
is this weird stuff?" you moaned a week ago,  
poking your dish of groundnut stew and fu-  
fu while the stereo blasted talking  
drums and no one—not the waitress, no one—

told you.) If this were a game, we'd know who'd won.  
You strategize with Xs and arrows,  
sing with your Walkman while I'm still talking.  
Lately I've been wondering just what  
moves would mate or match you: lunge, kung fu  
kick and shout, or the silence of a Go

master. I beg the luck of the bingo  
board, my fingers crossed for E-21.  
You hum *fa fa fas*, bland as boiled tofu.  
You've never brought me a single rose.  
I've never asked for one. I ask, "What  
album's that?" You lift your headphones. "*Talking*

*Daniel/Sestina. . .*

*Heads: 77. 'You're talking  
a lot, but you're not saying anything.'" Go  
figure. Someday I'll get lucky, know what's  
what. In the talking, talking, one  
more night on that futon under the rose  
sky, I'll realize, indeed, I have you:*

*you'll be talking, talking, you'll be asking, "What  
do you want?" but go on talking. I want what anyone  
wants: the sunset. A new futon. A fistful of roses.*

*Carrie Etter*

## **GENTLE HOUR**

I woke to the whirl of the turning  
wheel. Each morning at six,  
before the employment ads  
blackened his thick, callused fingers,  
before the anger had risen  
and twisted in him like a tornado,  
he would climb the rusted  
Sears Roebuck exercise bike,  
pedalling against money and time,  
the rushing like the sound of driving  
over rain-wet streets.

The house was guilt and anguish,  
unpaid bills and unemployment checks.  
There was an hour every morning  
just past dawn, before we cowered  
at the loud curse of his voice,  
when we would scurry past him  
like mice and he would call out to us  
pleasantly or look upon us grinning—  
Father, where did you go, where did you go  
on a bicycle with only one wheel  
and no wings?

*Lizz Grove*

## **MILES PER HOUR**

Audrey and I are in a bar and it's four in the morning. She's leaving soon, driving across the country to Los Angeles. And this is the first time we've seen each other in three months so we've been sitting in one booth for five hours trying to catch up on gossip but trying to be meaningful too as time is short. We talk about the semester I just finished, and the series of awful odd-jobs she's held to get money to go to L.A. We talk about boys and laugh about John and Henry, about Mario, who likes men now, and about Ian, who unfortunately doesn't. "That's one good thing about California," she says, spitting an ice-cube back into her drink," all the men are laid-back and gorgeous."

"When can I visit," I say, raising my glass.

The truth is I don't believe Audrey is going anywhere. I've known her for six years and I've seen her take acting lessons, singing lessons, and paint her bathroom black to make it a darkroom—only to hate taking pictures. I've seen her invest in a horse ranch in Nevada and spend money she didn't have on an electronic typewriter in order to compose poetry. Some of it was ok. It all looked good.

When we first met we were instantly best friends. The kind of friends where communication is mostly telepathic, which pisses off the second-string friends. The kind of friends that don't mind when the other one gets way too stoned. We remember details from each other's teenage trysts that lesser friends would let us forget.

When we became best friends we both had faith and absolute trust in anything that popped into our heads. One of the first times I was over at her house I told her I was going to marry Billy Idol. I had seen him a few times, out at clubs, and I really couldn't explain it, it was just something I felt. "Oh I know," Audrey said, "some things are just destined." We were serious. We were fourteen.

Somewhere along the line I stopped believing in the



## *Grove/Miles Per Hour*

things I told Audrey. Then I stopped believing the things Audrey told me. I thought we were doing it for fun, to pass the time, because that was the way our friendship was. I didn't think either of us were going to be famous, or brilliant, or desired by hordes of men. But sitting on her roof, in good weather, drinking Crystal Light spiked with vodka, I let her try to convince me that all this was possible.

I went to college and she went to work. We would get together during my vacations and fill each other in. And each time I saw more clearly that when Audrey talked about destiny, she meant it. This is the third vacation I've been hearing about Los Angeles. I sit in the bar, feeling like the worst sort of cheater as I say things like, "Oh, I know, some things are just beyond our control, but there's a reason that you have to go to L.A. We might never know why, but something will make sure you get there. Something will look out for you."

It's easy to know why Audrey would like to go to California. Her mother threw her out of the house around New Year's and she's been living with friends of the family ever since, a childhood girlfriend and her father. I can't get Audrey to say it, but I get the feeling they're not particularly nice to her. She can't afford to live on her own in Manhattan, and there's little chance her mother will let her move back in. Not that she would go anyway. Her mother and her sister, she says, are certifiable. I've heard all about them. How her sister used to beat her up with a broomstick and lock herself in the bathroom to consume whole jars of mayonnaise with a spoon. How her mother, when Audrey's father was dying, sent her to Pennsylvania and wouldn't let her see him. But I don't know anymore, they've always seemed like civil, average people to me. They pour me coffee and ask how school is going.

After that night in the bar summer begins. I sell medical supplies over the phone, flirtatiously chatting with doctors about the benefits of Zantax. Audrey makes plans. She's taking driving lessons, buying a car, getting

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insurance, all the essentials for going cross-country. She calls me at work, usually crying, telling me she doesn't know what she's doing but she just has to leave, to get a fresh start and confidence, she says. I continue to put doctors on hold for her, but I begin to think I need her to leave too.

Our friendship had always operated on talking about ourselves as if we were having a conversation—a sentence about me, a sentence about Audrey, a lot of empathetic nodding. This worked just fine until we started having experiences that weren't fourteen year old girl ones. Now I'm not sure if she's even heard me as I tell her things, or if she really understands the way I want her to. Now she says to me, "I can't listen to what David said to you today; I'm *moving*." If you were, I think, I would listen and listen and cheer you on. But I don't believe that Audrey is dealing in fact, and even if I don't have faith in them anymore, I have my own fantasies and I want my own turn.

I spend the summer working and waiting for each snag in the trip. I want her to give up the idea, before she smothers both of us with it. I write letters to friends scattered across the country until school restarts. When it's convenient for both of us Audrey and I meet at the bar. It's a dive, but it's equidistant from our houses.

I don't enjoy these evenings, nursing drinks with crushed ice and fruit pulp, forcing laughs, feigning interest in anecdotes that mean nothing to us. We're friends doing penance for our friendship. We reminisce, carefully going over details we've already committed to memory. We speak quickly as we speak of the future, already half there. When we talk about things that have happened in the absence of the other it's as though we're running forward, shouting back over our shoulders, "So you see, this is why I'm going where I'm going." And if the other doesn't understand, it's just a drag on our speed. Then we rein in, recite lyrics to songs we thought we'd forgotten.

One Saturday when Audrey has illegally driven her car downtown from a friend's garage (she never did get

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insurance) we get into an accident. She puts a ginger ale on the dashboard, forgetting about inertia. During a sharp turn onto Third Avenue it flies and we go into the back of a parked car. I sit on the curb, thinking, you really can't make it around the block. I watch Audrey charm the police. She's young and cute and sobbing so they don't give her a ticket but they do call a tow truck and give us a ride to the garage.

While the car is being patched up Audrey turns to me with a sad smile and says, "I don't know why these bad things keep happening to me."

"Like what," I say.

"Like the accident," she says, impatiently, as if I've forgotten. "Like the soda, and the moving, and my mother, and my last four jobs."

"The accident happened because you put the can there," I say, and suddenly I become very interested in the mechanic's welding.

A few minutes later Audrey comes up behind me and peers over my shoulder. "I have no idea how I'm gonna pay for this. I can't even pay my American Express bill."

"How did you get an American Express *card*?" I ask. The idea is astounding. I've always been afraid she might ask me for money and she's walking around with a credit card.

"When I worked for the interior design place they got me one."

"Oh. Listen Aud, I've gotta go. Dinner's probably ready at home."

"I'll call you soon," she says.

She doesn't call for about two weeks and I realize that I know no one at home anymore. I start reading, really reading, *TV Guide* after dinner, plotting my entertainment for the evening. All my other friends seem to be cavorting in the Catskills, in Boston, in London. My boyfriend is no longer my boyfriend. I'm working in midtown, where the air caught between the skyscrapers is quickly being used up,



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with no new air expected. Finally I call Audrey.

"Hi," she says. "I'm sorry I haven't called, it's just that I've been so depressed. I lost my job; I have no money. It just seems like no matter what I do something keeps pushing me back down. How are you?"

"Wow," I say. "Sorry. That's terrible. Why'd they fire you?"

"They didn't *fire* me, I got let go. Their busy season was over."

"Well maybe this is a really good omen about L.A. You're free now," I say. This kind of talk is easier.

So we meet for drinks and talk about fate. Audrey doesn't see that this is an omen, she says omens don't make you broke. So I switch tactics and explain about benevolent powers keeping her from unforeseen dangers. She says she should have gone to college.

"That's a rotten idea," I say.

"It's rotten not to have the option," she says, raising her eyebrows at me. I go put quarters in the jukebox. We listen to "Piano Man," humming along and getting maudlin.

We drift back a few years. "I would love to see Bill again, you know, just run into him on the street or something," I say.

"God. Remember when I was going out with Charlie and we walked in the park and he said 'Hey! Look at that beautiful fucking moon.'"

"Even when you look shitty you look good." We say this together. We laugh. We can't remember who said it, or to which one of us.

"Tom," Audrey says.

"No, he's not clever enough," I say.

"Oh what am I going to do," she says, chewing on her straw.

And I don't know what to tell her, but anything I could think of would take too long and she would probably never speak to me again. So I tell her about this party I went to the night before vacation started. How Danny got drunk and

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peed off of the ninth floor fire-escape. How funny it was, because if she knew Danny she would know that Danny would never do something like that.

Audrey listens and when I've finished she is quiet for a second. Then she tells me about Tania, the woman she's living with. Tania lifts weights and if I knew Tania I would know that she was only doing it because her mother had abandoned the family when Tania was thirteen. And if I knew some of the other things Tania had done, then I would think body-building was a relatively sane reaction. "What should I do," she says, "I'm so depressed."

"Audrey, I don't know," I say.

"Thanks a lot," she says, but she smiles, kind of. We make plans to meet again soon.

I'm counting the days until school starts again when Audrey calls, her voice higher and faster than I've ever heard it. "I'm going," she says, "in five days."

"How?" I ask. She had never gotten another job.

"Well, this friend of Tania's, Missy, has to get out there too. But she has to leave on Monday and I told her that I have no money or anything but she said that's ok because she has tons and as long as I have the car ready we can go."

"How does she have so much money?" I ask.

"Her father gambles for the Mafia or something," Audrey says.

"Wow. So you're really going," I say.

"Yes. I can't believe it. It just goes to show you. When you're really down something always comes along. Anyway, I'm giving myself a going away party on Saturday. Can you get here early to help, like at nine?"

"Audrey," I say, "I can't. My friend Kate is coming in from Long Island just for the night. You know Kate, I told you about her. She's the one. . ."

"Well God, I have to see you before I go. But I have so much to do."

"Listen Audrey, I have to go, but I'll call you back and we'll definitely get together before you leave," I say.



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All I can think is that this is going to fall through, and boy will she be upset. But when I see her on Sunday, the night before she leaves, she's almost packed. Frantic, she throws things towards boxes and I tape them shut.

"I hope I'm remembering everything," she says.

"Why don't you write on the box what's in it," I say.

"I don't have time," she says.

At one in the morning we take a break. We go buy beer and bring it up to Tania's roof. We lie under the humidity of summer and look at the sky, which is orange and purple, unnatural but familiar. We share a cigarette without speaking, not that we have nothing to say. I could tell her about the classes I'll be taking in a week. She could tell me about her party. But we don't. We don't talk about what we're thinking either. She's imagining something that's actually coming true, and maybe I'm all out of imagination because for me it never does. I don't tell her how I picture her trip. It would upset her—deer suddenly frozen in headlights, legions of Hell's Angels peering into car windows, wheels flying into ravines.

When we do speak, finally, it's about beer and humidity. I tell her I don't think I'll marry Billy Idol after all.

"Things change," she says.

Pretty soon we're back to normal. She tells me about how she had to throw Neil out of her party because he kept exposing himself as he sang, "California Here I Come."

"He thought it was hysterical," she says.

I tell her about school. And it's like nothing is happening, like the first summer we knew each other, fourteen years old and talking for hours because summers in the city could be so boring. Then the beer is gone and Audrey says, "I have to finish leaving."

We get up and we ignore the fact that we won't be doing this tomorrow or next week. "Why don't you walk me to a cab," I say. This was a tradition with us. She always did, after we had hung out on her roof.

"I really can't," she says. "I still have so much to do."

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"Ok," I say. I already have her new address, Missy's actually, so we hug and it's a long hug but it seems ridiculously short. I walk towards Seventh Avenue and get into a cab. It speeds me downtown, accelerating through rows of yellow lights. I roll down the window and I smell the end of summer in the hot wind.

Tomorrow I will start my own packing as Audrey heads west. By the end of tomorrow we will be five-hundred actual miles apart. Five-hundred miles and counting.

*Diane Swan*

## HERON

At the mouth of the narrow creek  
that links the salt marsh to the ocean,  
Andy stands motionless, fishing for  
green crabs. Taller than I remember,  
he takes a slow, careful step. Ripples  
ring from his long legs as he looks down  
through schools of small, black fish,  
like flocks of punctuation, to where  
crabs hide under ceilings of sand.

Ten years I've watched him study  
the moving water, fill the dented pail  
with the scrambling, coarse green chowder,  
then dump it back into the sea.  
I watch now, as he moves farther out,  
knowing he is not fooled by patterns  
of light and shadow. That his hand  
dips swift and clean, without a splash.

*Michael Lauchlan*

## WITH CLIO

Don't think we had a long conversation  
or that I was a good counsellor.

When I greet a stranger her memories  
pour out unbidden.  
The furrows from an old strap redden again.

And not just memories but the God-forsaken present!  
One son dead, another in jail,  
the daughter a scuffed-out butt.

I didn't even know it was Clio.  
I kept looking for the bus, then at my watch,  
just hoping she would stop.  
Had the bus not come  
I might have shaken her by the shoulders  
or fallen at her feet, begging,  
"Please, I'm just a stranger without a car.  
What can I do?"

When I saw it coming I finally turned to face her,  
knowing it would soon end.  
She was weeping, of course,  
her skin and clothes grey as burnt charcoal,  
as if she had survived a housefire  
and only just crawled out  
to catch this bus.

I followed her up its steps  
fighting the sudden urge to embrace her,  
trying not to touch her at all.

*Carol Dine*

## HURRICANE, MEGANSETT HARBOR

And I tell you  
we could smell it coming  
deep in our throats,  
wet and panting,  
its mouth wide open—  
all hunger and lust.  
Wanting us off the ocean  
it wants for itself.  
We tied ourselves to our bunks  
when the winds came  
into every hatch  
and porthole, ropes multiplying,  
thumping the deck.  
Our breath became wind,  
cups chattering in the sink,  
plotters and dividers on the map table,  
halyards chiming the mast  
on the Day of Judgement. We begged  
for sleep, for the tremendous rocking  
to take us below.



*Debra Kaufman*

## THE UNDERTAKER'S DAUGHTER

We had two houses,  
the brick one we lived in  
and the white-columned one  
where no one lived,  
only visited in their stiff  
clothes and whispers,  
looking dazed in the daylight  
as if they wished death  
didn't smell so sweet.

My father was respected,  
anyone will tell you;  
he always knew  
just how to act.  
Women admired his manicure;  
men, his firm grip.  
No one imagined  
his hand at breakfast  
spooning out  
his three-minute egg,  
or evenings unbraiding  
my mother's hair.

If anyone gave me a second  
thought, all they'd see  
was a girl with a fresh complexion,  
neat clothes, and a quick,  
rehearsed smile.  
No boy ever kissed me.

In my narrow  
upstairs room, I arranged things  
and painted still lifes.  
I liked how shapes

*Kaufman*/**The Undertaker's Daughter**

had a way of rising  
out of the blank  
canvas as if  
whatever I saw there  
had a life of its own.

*Joyce Odam*

## LAMENTS

the nostalgia  
of certain dreams  
of certain plans not followed . . .

the safe illusion  
of hindsight  
where everything is perfect . . .

the lament of wrong-doing  
of failed chances  
of foolish decisions . . .

the losing of forgivers  
who can never find you  
who are not looking for you . . .

the easy flow toward regret  
like birds off a black cliff  
above a blacker sea . . .

*Jon Lavieri*

## GLOSSARY

rhythm of city traffic, gospel choir  
down the street every Sunday, laughter  
through the neighbor's window, cadence  
of Hagler's hands, a room full of people  
cheering the home team, the languid pulse  
of a sleeper breathing, Miles and Coltrane  
locking horns, wheeze of the coffee machine,  
skreak of the earth's rusty axle, a board  
loose in the stairway, ice scraper on a  
windshield, snowplow on pavement, champagne  
glasses connecting, the librarian's shush,  
the evening news, rattle of bodies  
in collision, and silence,  
especially silence

*Shoshana T. Daniel*

## **ROUTE 9 RONDEAU**

for Wendy Cheek

Isn't it great to be alive?  
Monday, midnight; Route 9, Brookline;  
kill the headlights, floor it, drive—  
isn't it great to be alive?—  
taking the curves at 75,  
thinking about a dead friend of mine—  
isn't it great to be alive?  
Monday. Midnight. Route 9. Brookline.



Joyce Odam

## ONCE UPON A LONG ROAD

Once upon a long road  
into difficulty  
we took turns  
watching for signs.  
But our eyes were slow  
or looking at distractions.  
And we always went deeper.

Each blamed the other.  
We tore each other's maps  
in half  
and watched for Nature-signals:  
Streams of water.  
Crows.  
Whichever way life goes.

At last we understood.  
The roads went nowhere.  
All that effort—  
for this place  
that we named  
"County of Lost Love."

Others followed.  
Settled here  
with us.  
We raised our children.  
Sent them out  
with folded maps of prayers.  
They would make it—  
anywhere but here.

Marcelle M. Soviero

## THE WRONG OF IT

Your insistence on passion  
could break my spine. The way you  
love it different every time.  
I am like the wind-up toy you place  
on the floor and face in any direction.  
If I hit the wall, it's okay. This is what  
boys do to toys.  
And I accept it completely.  
I hold my fear in, like a locket  
stitched in just below my ribs.  
Because you've opened the bird cage,  
you've helped me jump in water.  
We are webbed and finned. You seem strange  
in this light.  
As in most—and in darkness too.  
Your body two times too big, and that much  
larger than mine. You light six candles,  
call me into the bathroom, wet my lips  
with the bathwater,  
and tell me to keep my mouth open.  
There is not enough force in me for you,  
not enough anger or rage. You tell me I am the wrong  
recipe that turned out right. I say "*I love you  
less than the sun or moon, but so much more  
than rain.*" There are things I drown in,  
and you are one of them.

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