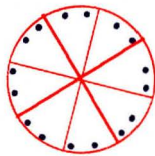
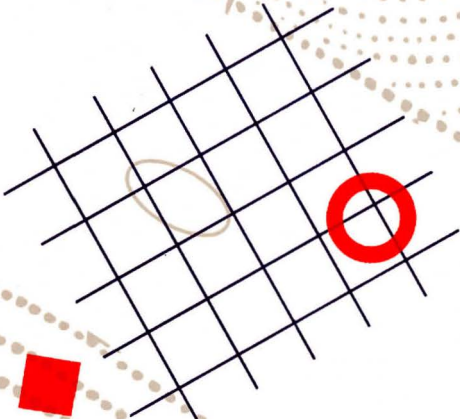
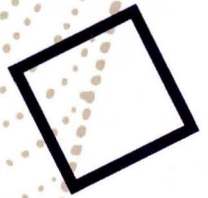
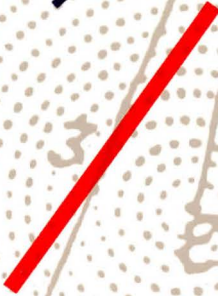


# Calliope



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# Calliope

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Submissions of poetry and short fiction are welcomed from  
August 15 - October 15 for the Fall/Winter issue and  
January 15 - March 15 for the Spring/Summer issue.  
Manuscripts received at other times are returned unopened.  
Manuscripts should be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped  
envelope. Simultaneous submissions accepted.

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

Address all correspondence, submissions and subscriptions to  
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Printed on recycled paper

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Joyce Odam

## THE SISTERHOOD

I am in a room of many women  
each alone from the other  
each a container of stories  
each a silence worth listening to. . .

our dresses touch when we pass each other  
in soft, aversive movements  
when we are waiting our turns,  
when we are measuring our restlessness. . .

shall we escape. . .  
shall we be here forever in our  
alien kinship, who are uniquely alike,  
who are divided by our difference. . .

Robin S. Chapman

## FITZ HUGH LANE

Marine painter, 1804-1864

If it was travel he wanted,  
It wasn't by boat. The weather  
Is always the same; some clouds,  
The light growing pink on glassy water,  
A curve of beach, a schooner. Still  
As the held breath. The glaze  
Thinned even more to capture  
The distant, luminous air—  
Something those revived from death  
Describe, serene and regretful  
As they return again to the distant body  
That paramedics work over.

Francine Witte

## DECISION

Halloween, and the last October sky darkens  
to mask the city. Streetlights appear  
sudden as fluorescent teeth in a small boy's mouth.  
In the neighborhoods, mothers are shuffling  
groups of children toward strange doors,  
safe candy. These are not the streets  
I knew as a child when I dressed as Snow White  
or whatever was big at Woolworth's that year.  
Back then, I wouldn't even *eat* an apple.  
I wanted what was wrapped so that later  
I could spill my loot on the bed  
and tear it open. So much has changed.  
I still *want* mystery. But now, candy  
is x-rayed, and I know where I'll be  
a month from now, no longer a child  
but more like those mothers hovering unseen,  
keeping things sure. Even the promise  
of sweetness no longer tempts me.  
Just last week a man asked me to live  
in his city, but I looked around  
to the neat arrangement of my books,  
and the thought of throwing out address labels  
made the streets seem sweeter here.  
So, instead I am studying the masks  
of the trick or treaters, guessing to myself  
what they might be. Some are obvious,  
snow queens or devils, and others,  
ghosts with sunglasses, were made up  
at the last minute out the door,  
patched together like the excuse  
I just made on a long distance call.  
Maybe saying my mother needs me here  
wasn't such a lie. She's hundreds of miles  
away, but she needs me in a life

**Francine White/ Decision**

we've both grown used to. She shouldn't worry  
about strangers putting razor blades  
in apples. She's old and she's tired  
of standing in doorways, holding  
her breath till I'm safe again,  
maybe that's what I should have said.

Marcelle M. Soviero

Francine White/Decision

## ANNIVERSARY

Back home for the first time in a long time,  
I rinse the lumps of cake off the plates,  
my mother's coral lip print from the glass.  
For their thirtieth anniversary  
my parents bought a new kitchen sink; *porcelain*,  
she tells me now, *you have to watch the glasses don't break*.  
For their eighth I made a knit bird's nest  
built around a balloon, and she hung it  
from the ceiling fan. That was the year  
they gave a name to my father's drinking,  
when her nervousness showed—  
street clothes underneath her nightgown  
just in case. How she tried to keep me busy—  
piano lessons, gymnastics, the Huntington Library Book Club,  
but nothing could keep me  
from coming down the stairs and finding him  
in this kitchen. I can hear him now, even,  
saying he wanted to die.  
*All the bills come at once, Martie*, he'd say.  
*Who can tell?*



**Michael Carrino**

## **WHAT THE WOMEN KNOW**

Women I know will tell you  
flirtation's my lifeblood,  
this ambivalent grimace  
means I want to commit  
sins, not crimes; want  
someone new to pass her shadow  
over my soft, pale chest.

Women I know will tell you  
dead relatives lean close, help me  
blow out the birthday candles,  
whisper "be careful" as the flames  
stagger, as I sneak out the door,  
follow a white moon into the dim town,  
meet a woman filing her sleek nails  
inside the neon blue diner, admire

her silver ring, her vanilla scent,  
because we are about to lie,  
lie down together without a clue  
what later the other might dream.

*Michael Carrino*

## REASSURANCE

Letter from my brother, David, 1982

I.

I'm dizzy and preoccupied with work.  
Naples is trashy, sad,  
melancholy and fun, a whole city  
overflowing with relatives, that same  
sweaty, proud vein pulses  
in their foreheads as they eat.

I read Robinson Crusoe,  
discovered twin sensations, hope and fear,  
stumbled through my blood  
as when Crusoe, expecting a deserted beach,  
discovered footprints he no longer recognized.

Yesterday, I visited Saint Lucia Port  
at sunset. Sipping Anisette  
in a dockside café with James  
under the neon Cinzano sign, I asked the waiter,  
as best I could, directions to Cesanlia

where Grandpa led small-time vandals  
on vineyard raids until his fearful mother  
sent him away. He "landed up,"  
as he would say, a New York tailor  
chalking pant cuffs at Rogers Peet.

II.

Cesanlia, I imagine, is dusty rubble,  
distant relatives who use a dialect  
my worn out dictionary can't quite translate.  
I bet they remember Grandpa  
only as an old man, who visiting  
two years before he died

**Michael Carrino/Reassurance**

turned his nose up at chickens  
in the yard and gave money  
for a cousin's education. James believes  
the trip is difficult. We'll see. Later,  
walking arm and arm,

down narrow sidestreets brimming with the famous  
music of Naples, we stole a postcard  
picturing the bay. I'll send it to you. As expected,  
the pace suits me. I met a tall blonde  
painter from Milan who finds the south

vulgar. James is angry,  
jealous. My flirting is shameful,  
delicious. Really you should travel,  
Michael. Don't worry about me.  
I'm no immigrant tailor

pricked by each stitch in New York  
until he met his suddenly familiar  
face in the fitting room mirror: expansive,  
filled with angry humor like America  
flaunting hope and fear like bright new clothes.

Linda Raymond

## KNICKKNACKS

Mama and I were in the kitchen doing my hair. I was anxious, wondering if the Easter Bunny was going to come the next morning. My hair always got done before Easter and at Christmastime, too. Otherwise, Mama just braided it up tight around my head, so tight that it pulled the corners of my eyes up, like Chinese eyes. But that night Mama put the hot comb on the burner and we waited for it to smoke. I never liked to get my hair straightened. She burned my scalp without meaning to and that's worse than if she did it on purpose. If it's an accident, you don't have to apologize.

"Hold still!" Mama said, yanking. My hair stood up in all directions and Mama was going to get it to lie down. I winced back tears. "You so tender-headed," she added, rubbing Vaseline onto a hank of my hair, slicking it up for the hot comb.

When she pressed the hot comb to my hair, the grease on it sizzled, smoke rose. I smelled burning hair. But it was what we had to do to get me ready for Easter, to look nice.

That morning we had gone downtown on the bus. Mama didn't know how to drive, besides, Daddy had the car at work so it wasn't as if the car was *available*. First we went to Kresge's, Mama said so we could look at the knickknacks. Down in the basement of Kresge's they had tables in the center aisles where there were knickknacks. My Aunt Willie in West Virginia used to have knickknacks. She kept them on a polished glass shelf. She had a piano, too, with polished ivory keys. I could play it as much as I wanted, though Mama said I was *banging*. I wanted to buy a knickknack so it would remind me of playing the piano. Mama and I dug through the heap on Kresge's tables. I found a dog with twinkly green glass eyes. Some sort of spaniel, I guess. They're supposed to be a loyal breed. I read that somewhere. Mama wanted to buy a little china bird with a pointed beak, but it looked too delicate to me, so I told her not to buy it, the beak would only break off as soon as she got it home. She gave me a look, then said she didn't have enough money for



**Linda Raymond/Knickknacks**

two knickknacks, anyway. I got my dog, then we went looking for my dress.

All the while we were in the little girl's department, I kept my hand on my dog wrapped in tissue. I had him in my pocket where he'd be safe. I already had a name for him—Rover. That's a great dog's name. I saw Mama over at a circular rack that had dresses jammed onto it by size. The metal hangers on the rack screamed when she pushed them back and forth, looking at the price tags. I went over.

"Look at this one," I said, pulling out a bunch of pink nylon ruffles. "It only cost twenty dollars." I knew it was a lot, but there were some white people at the next rack and I didn't want them to think we couldn't afford to be there.

"Only?" Mama said, too loud. "Only? You think I'm made out of money?" I knew better than to answer that. My hand went back to my pocket, to the dog. "Here," she said, holding out a prickly looking blue dress, "Go try this on."

I took the dress to the rear of the store where they had fitting rooms, but nobody ever went back there. I had the place to myself. The crinoline collar on the dress scratched my neck, but I didn't care, the belt made up for it. It was wide and silky—a sash, really—and even after I wrapped it around my waist twice, it still trailed past the hem. It was swank.

I looked at my knobby knees in the mirror. The dress didn't hide them. Didn't hide my ashy legs, either. Daddy said my legs were rusty. He'd say: "Go put some lotion on those rusty legs, gal." He also said you could tell when a colored woman was combing her hair—you could hear the electricity fly. I looked in the mirror and pulled on my braids, trying to straighten the kinks out.

"This sure is some nappy hair," Mama said, pressing the hot comb against my head. "Hold still!"

I wriggled my butt on the stool, trying to get away from the comb. I don't think Mama knew that when the grease got hot it let off burning steam. She was part Indian and her hair was



*Linda Raymond/Knickknacks*

naturally straight. Some of the best times I had was when she'd lie on the couch, her head on the rolled arm, her long black hair trailing over the side, and I'd kneel and comb her hair with long, lazy strokes. Sometimes I braided her hair, two long ropes on either side of her head like an Indian princess. But Mama was no princess—she was too fat. Even I knew that. Still, she was beautiful.

I stared up at the lightbulb on the ceiling and Mama jerked on my hair. "I'm about to burn you," she warned.

"Don't worry," I said. "You already did." She yanked again.

"What was that?"

"I said, 'Don't worry if you already did.'"

The smoke was starting to sting my throat. I remembered Rover in my coat pocket.

"Mama, my butt hurts," I said. "Let me go get my knickknack."

"Be still." She set the hot comb back on the burner. I watched the smoke curl up to the lightbulb.

"Mama, is the Easter Bunny coming this time?" I didn't really believe in the Easter Bunny, but I did believe in candy.

Mama said, "Humph."

"When is Daddy coming home?"

"Whenever he takes a mind to it." She took the comb out of the fire and wiped it on a greasy potholder. "Hold this."

I turned the potholder over in my hands. Burnt sprigs of my hair were stuck in the grease spots.

"My back hurts. I want to get my knickknack."

"Well then, go get it."

I jumped off the stool and ran to the hall closet. I liked it in there. Daddy hung his cashmere coat in that closet. Sometimes when he wasn't home I'd put his coat on, and his shoes, too, if I could find them. He had a pair of brown and white spats with tiny holes swirled into the leather. They curled up at the toes, holding the shape of his feet. I felt for my coat in the dark, my hands passing over his soft coat, releasing the odor of Noxema,

**Linda Raymond/Knickknacks**

his smell. I shoved my hand deep inside my coat pocket and closed my fingers around Rover's plastic body.

Once, I guess it was the summer before, my father had a good idea. We had just moved to our new white house and he was happy because there was a balcony on the second floor, off their bedroom. Not a nice balcony. The floor was covered with tar and it had a green plastic roof. You had to climb out the bedroom window to get to it, and it had a big rust stain down the side, like the Jolly Green Giant had peed on it. But it had potential. My father wanted to grow a lawn up there.

I didn't know that until I heard him hauling gravel up to the balcony, one washbucket at a time. First, he'd scrape the bucket into the hill of gravel he dumped by the kitchen door. Then he'd set the bucket upright, and run into the house, through the kitchen, down the hall, up the stairs, into the bedroom, out the window, and onto the balcony where he'd haul the bucket up the side of the house.

I stood by the kitchen door looking up, watching the bucket clang against the white bricks, watching paint chips break loose and float down. I really wanted to get back to my Saturday morning cartoons, but the sun was so sunny, the sky was so blue, and everything seemed so all right. So I called up to him, "Daddy, you want some help?"

The bucket disappeared over the lip of the balcony. I heard gravel being dumped. Then he stuck his face over the edge and looked down. The sun razzled gold through his hair.

"Yeah, I could use some help, Chickenfoot. Fill up the bucket." He lowered it to the ground.

We spent the morning working together. I'd fill the bucket with gravel, he'd haul it up and dump it. When we had all the gravel on the balcony, he raked it into a smooth bed. By then his undershirt had a big wet stain down the middle of the back. I tried to pick up a bucket of gravel, but I couldn't lift it.

In the afternoon he left to get a load of dirt. Then we spent the rest of the day hauling dirt up to the balcony to lay on top of the gravel.

"Tomorrow we can get the sod," he said.

*Linda Raymond/Knickknacks*

"What's that?"

He laughed. "Already made grass." He flicked a hand across his face. "Mosquitoes out. We better go in the house before we get bit." He crawled through the window, but I stayed out. I was waiting for it to get dark. When it's dark in the summer you can feel the air with your fingers. It's so soft it makes you want to cry. So I waited for it.

I closed the closet door on the smell of Noxema and my father's cashmere coat. Rover sat at attention in my hand. I wished I had a real dog, one that would do exactly what I told it to. If I said sit, then it would, or if I said heel, it would, or come, or stop. I looked at Rover and commanded him to *STOP!*

Once we went to Chicago. Daddy's sister lived there with some other people I was related to. One night we went to a carnival, but it had a bad smell. I wrinkled my nose.

"Pew, what's that?" I said to Mama. She was busy talking to my Aunt Flourine, a pale yellow, mean woman. She looked just like Daddy, but she wore lipstick. She answered me instead of Mama.

"Child, that's the stockyards," she said. "That's where your dinner meat comes from. They right over there." She pointed behind her. Past her big shoulders I could see a large dark area, a place with the lights turned out. A place for us to get our dinner meat.

The best part of the carnival was *The People Who Are Not Quite Human*. They each had something about them so wrong that people would pay money to see it. One woman was supposed to be a giant, the largest human alive. We paid a quarter apiece and saw a fat lady. There was a lady they said had the head of a woman and the body of a snake. She *was* skinny. But my favorite was the Spotted Lady. The poster outside her tent showed a beautiful white lady, spotted like a leopard. I begged my father for the quarter to see her. He said no.

"Please, Daddy, please. She has spots," I said.



**Linda Raymond Knickknacks**

"I don't care if she has spots *and* stripes," he said, turning away. He was pitching quarters to win a free ticket to the carnival for the following night. Three quarters had to land exactly in the middle of a circle the same size. So far, he had landed two just right.

"Please, Daddy?" I said. I started to cry, although I didn't really feel like it then. He grabbed me by my arm, and whispered into my ear, hard.

"Now you listen to me," he said, whisky breath pushing against the side of my face, "you better straighten up and fly right!"

I wasn't sure what he meant by that. Aunt Fluorine frowned at him. "Give the child a quarter. What's the matter with you?"

"It's my last quarter," he said. "She can't have it!" He turned, threw the quarter and missed.

Mama pulled a dollar out of her wallet and pushed it at me. "Bring back my change," she said.

I stood in a long line of people eager to see the Spotted Lady. I worried that I was not old enough to be let in. When the ticket man took my dollar he said, "Where's your mother?"

I pointed. "Down there." She was watching my father watch me.

Inside the tent I couldn't see anything until I was right in front of the Spotted Lady. They had her in a booth with a curtain drawn. They'd let three people stand in front of the booth, then they'd whisk the curtain aside. Husbands were cautioned to hold onto their wives, in case the ladies fainted. As the curtain flew open, I bit my lip.

An old colored woman sat on a chair eating a sandwich. Her skin was the same color as mine. She had white, irregular spots on her face, arms and legs as if the pigment had been burned out of her. I looked, then someone pushed me aside.

My father waited outside the tent flap.

"Well," he said in a tired voice, "did she look like a leopard from the jungle?"

I almost said yes.

*Linda Raymond/Knickknacks*

As I stood in the hall, I tightened my fingers around Rover. I knew he was just a lump of plastic and would never do what I wanted him to. I heard Mama calling from the kitchen.

"Where'd you go off to? Come in here—I'm not finished with you yet!"

The kitchen was blurry with smoke. Mama stood by the stove with her arms folded, looking big. She had on a striped housedress and the same pair of light blue terrycloth house shoes, run down at the sides, that she always wore. Her hair was twisted into a floppy knot on top of her head. I loved her so much it made me feel small, too little to hold it all.

"Is Daddy coming home?"

"What do you want to know for?"

"Mama," I said, "Do you think I'll be pretty when I grow up?"

"Don't you worry about whether you're pretty or not," she said. "I don't want you to get married. I want you to be a school teacher."

"Why can't I get married?" She made another sigh and shifted her weight.

"Because," she said, "Every week it's the same old six and seven."

I didn't say anything. I didn't know what six and seven she was talking about. I turned Rover over in my hand. His hard green twinkly eyes made me angry.

"No, don't get married," Mama said. "You can live with me."

I wanted her to stop. "Where will Daddy live?"

"Wherever he takes a mind to." She didn't say anything for awhile and in the silence between us, I heard Daddy's car pull up in front of the house. The front door slammed, then he was in the kitchen.

He wavered unsteadily in the middle of the room. "Got fired from my job," he said, shaking his head. "They caught me sleeping." I could hear the hurt in his voice and I imagined myself curled up under my blanket, hand to my face, sleeping deeply while being watched.



**Linda Raymond/Knickknacks**

He emerged from the smoke and swayed over my stool. I hated his breath. He peered down at me.

"What are you looking at?"

I quickly looked away, but Mama yanked my hair and told me to be still. She spoke to him, still straightening my hair.

"Seems like you can't keep a job."

"Seems like you can't keep your mouth shut," he said.

His spoiled smell stung my nose; I jumped off the stool.

"You stink!" I said.

I saw his hand coming from a long way off. He grabbed my shoulder, holding me fast, then smacked his other hand against the side of my face. Hot, wet pain crawled into my ear. I just stood squeezing Rover.

He turned and lurched toward the kitchen door. I drew back my hand and heaved Rover into the fuzzy patch of hair dead center on the back of Daddy's head.

I really thought he'd kill me for that. I thought the end had come. I prepared to run, out the kitchen door, down the sidewalk into the night, run as fast as I could. I knew he'd follow, but I'd run faster. The distance between us would increase and he would never catch me. He never would.

But he turned and gave me a bleary-eyed look instead. He said to Mama, "Why don't you *do* something with her?" And he went to bed.

Mama said, "Get back on the stool," and pressed the hot comb to my hair.

*Ed Weyhing*

## TURNAROUND TIME

The tinkling bell on the front door signaled the evening's first customers: an attractive, middle-aged woman and a heavysset greying man wearing a convention badge on his tweed jacket. As Eugene Chen, owner of Buffalo's oldest Chinese restaurant, looked up to smile at his guests, the man struggled with the door and bumped his wife's head. Eugene Chen extended his hand to help, but too late. They were already through the door. He should have propped open the heavy door, as he often did on summer evenings such as this.

Flustered by his awkward entrance, Harold Doebeler looked around for something familiar. The Chinese guy was standing right there with menus. Doebeler took his wife's elbow protectively, held up two fingers and managed a nervous smile. "Mama San's birthday," he told the owner.

"Oh, Madame's birthday!" Eugene Chen said. "A happy occasion! We give you a good table."

Anita Doebeler smiled at the attention, followed the owner to one of the center tables. "Harold, this is nice," she said over her shoulder.

Third in line on the way to the table, Doebeler sucked in his gut, noticed the Eastern Hardware Dealers Convention badge on his coat, slid it off and into his pocket.

As soon as Eugene Chen heard the word "birthday" he decided on table eleven. In the center of the restaurant, it was reserved for birthdays, anniversaries, graduations—every special occasion. When large groups arrived, Eugene Chen put them at table eleven. He pulled in surrounding tables to make enough seats. Waitresses rushed to rearrange place settings. But not just large groups: sometimes small parties, too. The radiance of lovers should not be hidden in a quiet dark corner. Eugene Chen placed them at table eleven, and lit a single white candle for them.

Often for the celebrations at table eleven there was a cake with lighted candles. The ceremonial cakes with white icing

## ***Ed Weyhing/Turnaround Time***

were the only Western item served in Eugene Chen's restaurant. Compliments of the house.

The custom started with Eugene Chen's own two daughters. Normally they ate at the little table in the corner of the steamy kitchen where the waitresses and the old Chinese cook pampered them. On birthdays they insisted on getting dressed up and having real birthday cakes. They also insisted on table eleven. Seeing the little daughters' parties in the restaurant, guests started asking ahead for the cakes. Now Eugene Chen regularly ordered an extra one every day. The ceremony was part of his repertoire.

He liked best serving the cake on his own initiative, hearing a birthday or anniversary mentioned. Always the youngest waitress brought the cake to the table. The guests were surprised and delighted.

Frequently people sang, often from other tables. Eugene Chen did not know the custom of public singing, but the first time it happened in his restaurant he saw the guests enjoyed it, so he stood by and smiled. His waitresses stood by and smiled, applauded gently when the song was complete. In turn, the guests of honor sometimes shared the cake with nearby tables, the waitresses passing plates of cake back and forth in a clatter of laughter and excitement. If Eugene Chen's wife was not busy in the kitchen, she stood at the back of the restaurant with her arms folded, smiled at the singing and the celebration.

This night, as soon as his two guests were seated at table eleven, Eugene Chen caught the eye of his oldest waitress. He made a small circle with his two hands. She understood the signal for a birthday cake to be iced and decorated for table eleven. Before the two guests opened their menus, preparation for the surprise party began.

Back in the reception area, Eugene Chen contemplated the couple at table eleven. The man had referred to his wife as "Mama San." Eugene Chen first heard this expression applied to his own mother, when he was four. He became separated from her in the carpet section of Midland Department Store. He sat down on a stack of throw rugs and cried. A security guard



## Ed Weyhing/Turnaround Time

scolded him. "You should have stayed with Mama San!" he said. Eugene Chen didn't know this expression, didn't know the man was talking about his mother.

"Honey, this is the real McCoy," Harold Doebeler told his wife. "This is a real Chinese place." He discovered this himself as he tried to find on the small menu a dish he recognized. Each item was printed in Chinese characters with a short English description. The stiff yellow parchment menu was a booklet of six pages and more than a hundred items. The last dessert on the list was number 132.

Once a salesman took Doebeler to a Chinese buffet in Wilkes-Barre: all the rice and chow mein and eggs fu young you could eat; all the tea you could drink; and all for less than two super cheeseburgers and a shake. Before that, in Korea, well, not *in* Korea, but when Doebeler's transport ship was ferrying troops between Japan and Korea and Okinawa. Talk about food: teriyake, sushi. Sweets, too: these little Chinese pastries—nuts and apricots, sold them right on the street. There wasn't a Chinese restaurant in Prospect Park, and Doebeler promised his wife a Chinese dinner when they came to Buffalo. This occasion was high on their priority list.

The trip was Anita Doebeler's birthday present. It was her wish. "Harold, to see you actually take some time off. Even if it's just for the convention. You've been saying for years we'll go. It would only be a week."

Each time they had this conversation Doebeler's stomach muscles tightened and his shoulders drew closer to the center of his body. Trouble was, Anita meant well, but she just didn't understand the importance of being at your store. Things didn't run by themselves. They ran because Doebeler personally checked everything, and they always ran right. But when his wife brought up the vacation issue a third and then a fourth time, he resigned himself to losing a week.

The young waitress filled their water glasses. The Chinese owner placed a single white candle in the center of the

## Ed Weyhing/Turnaround Time

table. A black man and a college girl were now at one of the tables along the wall. Three middle-aged couples arrived together. Doebeler noticed the men were not wearing ties, wondered if he should take his own tie off.

The candle cast a shadow of the water glass over his menu. Doebeler tried to figure out where appetizers left off and entrees began. There were seven types of shrimp, none fried. Where was Eggs Fu Young? Where was *Rice*, for Christ' sake? By the end of page four, Doebeler forgot the choices. Back to page one.

As the restaurant filled, Eugene Chen used looks and subtle gestures to set off flurries of activity like tiny firecrackers in various parts of the restaurant. Occasionally he moved here or there to light a candle, straighten a flower in its vase, pick up a dropped napkin, point to a recommended item on the menu.

Eugene Chen liked to weave a magnetic field around table eleven. He focused the entire restaurant's energy there. He was cordial to each new arrival, but his attention was on the couple at table eleven. They were the anointed ones. The woman's birthday was to be the evening's ceremonial theme. He sensed the precise moment when his guests needed help with the menu, smiled, stepped toward their table.

At home Doebeler watched "Nightly Business Report" on Satellite. He recalled a recent report on a chain of coffee shops in New York City and New Jersey. The small shops had only twelve to fifteen counter seats each. Their sales volume depended on customers coming and going in a hurry so new customers could take their places. The company hired monitors to travel throughout the chain measuring the average time a customer spent at the counter. Turnaround time, they called it. When Doebeler saw the Chinese owner approaching his table, he wondered about turnaround time at the "Szechuan Princess."

"Mama San needs a little more time to make up her mind," Doebeler said as Eugene Chen approached. "Wouldn't



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mind a little more of your tea, though." He jiggled the pot toward Eugene Chen.

Eugene Chen seldom had to make noise to get anything done in his restaurant. This night, every waitress and several of the guests heard him clap for tea at table eleven.

In the kitchen one of the older waitresses whispered to Eugene Chen's wife. She came to the small round window, looked out, then quietly stepped into the dining room.

By now Eugene Chen was back in the reception area, drying his hands on a red napkin. He smiled at her. Quietly she smiled back, but remained outside the kitchen door in the rear of the dining room, pretending to fuss over the waitresses going back and forth.

Doebeler finally settled on shrimp, shrimp something-or-other. Number twenty-eight. He read the English description to the young waitress. "And how about some rice on the side," he added.

The young girl started to smile, then touched her pencil to her lower lip. "The Szechuan shrimp is served on rice," she said.

"Well, that's what I meant," said Doebeler. "There's rice *with* it." It wasn't always easy dealing with these people, he thought. He only wanted what was coming to him. But he could see his wife was enjoying the evening. Hell, that's all that counted.

By the time dinner was being cleared away at table eleven, Eugene Chen was determined to make the evening's finale a success. The older waitress told him the cake was ready. He waited for the table to be cleared, then with a nod of his head signaled for the cake to be brought in. At the same time he heard the man ask the young waitress about dessert. A *Chinese* dessert, the man said.

Startled to hear the request at the very instant the surprise birthday celebration was to begin, the young waitress turned to Eugene Chen with a question in her eyes.

## Ed Weyhing/Turnaround Time

Christamighty, thought Doebeler. These people are funny! It looks like I actually need Papa-San's permission to order dessert for my wife on her own birthday.

Eugene Chen dispatched the young waitress to the kitchen with a single Chinese word. He approached the table smiling.

"There will be cake for Madame's birthday," he said. Doebeler interpreted this as a question. He chuckled, and wagged two fingers to decline. "We didn't come all the way from Prospect Park to Buffalo to have *cake* for Mama San's birthday," said Doebeler. "I was thinking about a little pastry I once had over there. Sort of a triangular shape," he put his thumbs and forefingers together to make a triangle the right size.

The Chinese owner was not paying attention. He smiled at something happening behind Doebeler. Doebeler swung around in his chair to see the young waitress approaching the table with a small birthday cake.

He meant well, thought Doebeler. Just a little communication problem. "Honey, what a nice cake," Doebeler said. "That's awful sweet. I told Papa San we weren't having cake. We're looking for a little Chinese pastry. . . ." What the hell did they call them? All he could think of was to make the triangle again.

Anita Doebeler put her hand on her husband's sleeve. "Harold, the cake will be fine. It's a lovely cake," she said softly.

"What's the name of the nuts? Macadamia nuts," said Doebeler. "It's a small triangular pastry with apricots and macadamia nuts. . . Honey, leave it to me. I'll buy you that cake, too. I just want you to try one of these pastries. If these people do it right, there's nothing better."

"What you are talking about is not Chinese," said Eugene Chen.

"Now wait a minute, I had it over *there*," Doebeler said. "Don't tell me my memory is going bad."

"Oh, you have been to China?" asked Eugene Chen.

Doebeler looked around. The young waitress stood holding the cake. The candles were starting to burn down. "Well,



## Ed Weyhing/Turnaround Time

I'm not a far-east expert, my friend. Japanese, Chinese, I won't swear to it. All I know is I was over there." And by God he *was* over there. Hauled a hundred thousand troops between Japan and Korea, Korea and Okinawa. They sold these little pastries from carts right on the street. "Right on the streets of Tokyo," Doebeler said. Again he found himself holding up the triangular frame of his thumbs and forefingers. He wondered if he perhaps tasted the pastry in Honolulu.

When Eugene Chen heard "macadamia nuts" he knew it was not a Chinese pastry. The macadamia nut was unknown in China. On the streets of Tokyo, he thought to himself. On the streets of Tokyo, it was said that Japanese vendors sold to the occupation forces delicacies made from cat meat.

This thought he was able to hold in his chest, and not speak. Still, he knew what happened at table eleven was a disgrace. The words he spoke to his guest were a disgrace. The tone he used was a disgrace. He wished his words were dead. He wished the feelings beneath the words were dead.

Eugene Chen left the dining area, walked through the front door to the sidewalk. The heat evaporated from his cheeks and forehead into the summer evening. He adjusted the canvas awning and picked up a chewing gum wrapper from the sidewalk.

Through the window, he saw his wife move from the rear of the dining room. She took the young waitress's hands, still holding the cake, and guided them to a place in front of the woman at table eleven. The first notes drifted through the front door as table fourteen—the table of three couples—started to sing.

Jesse Lee Kercheval

## ORBIT

August 1966

My mother was driving the fifty miles back to Cocoa when we saw it. We'd been to Orlando, the nearest big town, to take my older sister Kay to the allergist. The doctor had drawn blue lines across her arms with a ball point pen and injected her between the lines with fluid he drew from carefully labeled bottles. *Sand. Orange Blossoms. Mildew.* Basically, the allergist said, what was in the bottles was Florida. Kay sat in the front seat next to our mother, looking out the window, trying not to scratch.

We were taking a different route home. The land on either side of the highway was flat and brown, stretching away into a hazy distance broken only by an occasional umbrella shaped tree. "Hey," I said, to cheer Kay up, "the Dark Continent." She nodded. It did look like Africa. My mother looked too, taking her eyes off the road without slowing down.

"Julie," she said, shaking her head. She didn't see what I meant, but then she watched a lot less *Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom* than Kay and I did.

Then up ahead in the veldt, something truly strange appeared. "Look," I said, pointing. My mother braked. A road met the highway, and off it branched miles of paved roads lined by overgrown sidewalks. There were even poles for street lights, an intersection with a slightly faded stop sign. But no houses. A complete town laid out in the middle of nowhere with no houses. Then I saw there was one house in the distance, a Rainbird sprinkler spinning in its green yard. My mother pulled off the highway, but left the engine running, the air conditioner on high. In front of us, mounted on top of a metal pole was a large rusty planet with two lesser balls of corrosion orbiting it. The sign said, *Satellite City.*



*Jesse Lee Kercheval/Orbit*

"Well," Kay said as my mother pulled back onto the highway, "at least Dad didn't move us here." My mother accelerated, and I watched out the rear window as the ghost town receded.

"I do think that was a little shorter," my mother said when we turned into River Heights, the older subdivision next to ours.

"Next time," Kay said, peering at the odometer, "we should write the mileage down." We drove past rows of concrete block houses. Then our Plymouth bumped over the hump in the pavement that signaled the boundary between River Heights and our neighborhood, Sunset Heights, which was smaller and newer and better, where there were Rainbirds going in the yards and the houses tried hard to hide their concrete block. Our house looked like genuine used brick, like our old house in Washington, D.C., but here it was only one brick deep.

In the garage, my mother cut off the AC and the engine, and we went inside. The house was air conditioned too. "Jesus," my mother said, "it was hot out there."

"Why don't you lie down?" Kay asked.

So my mother went to take a nap, something she never used to do in D.C. My friend Marla who lived across the street had this theory, a pretty well developed theory, that the world was divided into inside people and outside people. Most kids were outside, most parents inside. In this theory, mothers were the worst. Fathers, at least, went to their offices to sit around. Mothers just sat in their houses. But in Washington, my mother had been different. She'd been a G.S. 9 at the Treasury Department and had gone to work every day just like my father. It wasn't until we moved to Florida that she started staying in the house. And Kay, kid or not, stayed with her, folding clothes and playing cards.

I started for the front door. Kay called to me from the dining room. "Mom doesn't want you going out while she's asleep," she said.

**Jesse Lee Kercheval/Orbit**

"I didn't hear her say that," I said. Kay was only two years older than me, not old enough to give me orders on her own.

"Well, she did," Kay said. "Come in here and play cards with me." Kay wanted to play cribbage, the game my mother had taught her, that they played together for hours now. The wooden cribbage board my mother had had since before we were born was out on the dining room table. But I didn't want to play. I always got confused and pegged backwards.

I opened the dining room curtains and looked out. Behind our house was an abandoned orange grove. I was hoping to see Marla or David Mize who lived next door. Or any of the kids in the neighborhood. I knew them all by now and their older brothers, their dogs. Kay didn't. She stayed inside when all the other kids were outside. She didn't know about Marla's theory. But now I didn't see anybody. Just orange trees, drowning in long grey Spanish moss.

"Oh, gross," Kay said, pointing. I looked up and saw that the telephone wires just outside the window were knit together by sticky spider webs. In the middle of each web was a big furry black and yellow spider. I counted to ten to prove that spiders didn't bother me, then shut the curtains.

"They looked like hairy bananas," Kay said. She was playing with the bowl of wax fruit in the middle of the table, shifting the red apple from hand to hand. We used to pretend the apple and the bunch of grapes were married, the colored marbles from our Chinese checker set their many children. Kay swished the purple grapes along the table like a Southern Belle in a long skirt. "Mom didn't have to come to Florida, you know," she said.

"What do you mean, not come?" I said. This was obviously stupid. "I mean, what were we supposed to do? Live without a mom?"

Kay shrugged.

This was too much. I heard my mother in her bedroom, coughing. She was still awake. "I'm going outside, Mom," I called down the hall. "Okay?"

*Jesse Lee Kercheval/Orbit*

"All right, Julie," she said. She sounded tired, dreamy. I was halfway out the door when Kay called after me. "Mom says don't go barefoot." I kept going. "And she means it."

Marla was on top of the sand hill, a big white dune that stood between Sunset Heights and the causeway to Cape Kennedy. So far the sand hill had been too steep and shifting for anyone to build a house on. Marla waved when she saw me struggling up the steep side, the hot sand filling my Keds, weighing me down. Just when I reached her she yelled, "Freefall, Captain," jumped in the air, and slid feet first down the dune. I kicked off my shoes and jumped too, sliding to a stop next to her in an avalanche of white sand. I lay on my back, my feet buried. The sand was cool underneath and damp, and I dug my hands into it like crabs. I could hear Marla beside me, digging too.

"Oh, no," I said, "a gravity wave," and began to roll like a log down the hill, faster and faster, sand flying from my hands and my hair.

This was Space, the game we'd been playing all week. We rolled off the sand hill and into the Heck's backyard, dodging meteors that fell like so much hail. In the Mize's backyard, where solar wind was so fierce you had to spin in circles, David came out and spun with us, across my backyard, into the orange grove, and finally across the River Road and down the steep bank, overgrown with elephant ears, to the Indian River. We lay face down on the old dock that stood leaning in the shadow of the causeway bridge and trailed our hands in the brown water. I told Marla about Satellite City.

"Oh, that," she said. "My dad said Kennedy was planning to build the Manned Space Center out there somewhere, but Johnson put it in Houston instead." Her dad was an engineer at the Cape, so I guessed she knew what she was talking about. She shook her head. "The developer went bust."



*Jesse Lee Kercheval/Orbit*

I thought about that one house surrounded by all those empty lots, enough backyards to run for miles without a single bad dog or fence. But alone? With out anyone in the neighborhood to play with? I shook my head. It would be worse than being an only child.

I raced home that night in front of the truck that fogged for mosquitoes. To either side of it, Marla and David and all the kids in the neighborhood were running. They ran barefoot through the sand spurs and stinger nettles without a pause, danced in front of the truck in bare feet on the asphalt still melting hot from the sun. I had put my sneakers back on, and my toes were sweating. A great white cloud of mosquito spray followed me across our yard, but I beat it to the door and ran inside.

My father was in the kitchen, and when he saw me he asked, "Do you know where your mother keeps the scissors?" I couldn't help staring at him. Of course I knew. How could *he* not know? It was like not knowing where the bathroom was. Don't you live here? I wanted to ask. But then I realized. He didn't really, not like we did. In his office he probably knew which drawer the scissors were in. Or maybe he didn't. Maybe he just asked his secretary Mrs. Cowen like he was asking me. "Did you hear me, Julie?" He sounded more hurt than angry, like there was a game going on and I'd left him out.

"They're in here, Dad," Kay said, pulling out the drawer closest to the phone. Lately, she hated for anyone to get upset. "What do you want to cut?" That was the question my mother always asked. The pair with the black handles were for paper and her silver sewing scissors weren't, though we used them for that every chance we got because they were sharper.

"A tag off a shirt," he said. Kay thought about it, then handed him the sewing scissors.



*Jesse Lee Kercheval/Orbit*

After dinner, I lay on the family room floor in front of our big black and white console TV while Kay twisted the rabbit ears this way and that. The nearest station was in Orlando and all she was getting was snow. Everyone in the neighborhood had giant silver aerials up on their roofs. My dad had ordered one from Sears, but he was still looking for someone to put it up. He'd graduated from West Point with a degree in engineering, but this wasn't the sort of thing they had trained him to do.

Kay was trying to get *I Dream of Jeannie* for me. It was set in Cocoa Beach, which was ten miles from where we lived, and so was my favorite. I think even Kay liked the idea of living someplace important enough to have its own TV show. "There, I think I've got it," she said, keeping one hand on the rabbit ears and holding the other out to act as an aerial. And she was right. Jeannie the Genie followed by several ghosts of herself went out to get the astronaut's morning paper in her belly dancer's costume. "The neighbor is going to see her," Kay said. And she was right. He did.

"And it's gonna get Tony in trouble," I said, getting into the plot, which was pretty much the same every week.

"Hey, look at that," Kay said, pointing with her free hand at the TV screen. "I never noticed that before." I looked. Above and beyond Jeannie's pony-tailed head, at the end of this suburban street in Cocoa Beach, I saw what she saw. Grey mountains.

"That's not Florida," she said. "There aren't any mountains in Florida." She was angry, really angry. She let go of the rabbit ears, and the picture disappeared. "Mountains." She shook her head. "How stupid do they think we are?"

Later that night, the moon woke me up. It was full and the light coming through the window was so bright I could see the purple flowers on the bedspread, the purple and white plastic flower arrangement on Kay's dresser. I was sleeping in Kay's room, in one of her twin beds. Recently I'd started being afraid to sleep alone in my own room because I thought all

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creatures, everything living except me, could move effortlessly through time and space and who knew what might end up under my bed. I sat up, pushing the covers away. Kay's bed was empty, the bedroom door open. I waited for the sound of the toilet flushing in the bathroom, but the house was quiet except for the hum of the air conditioning. I got out of bed.

"Kay?" I could see her standing, motionless halfway down the hall.

She turned, her fingers to her lips. "Shhh." There was a faint blue light flickering under the family room door. The TV. Our parents were still up.

I heard my mother's voice. "So basically, without saying as much, they said it was hopeless, that if something in civil service opens up, it will be filled from Washington. So, " there was a pause, "I've signed up to take the teacher's test."

"Good idea, Helen," my father said, sounding a little distracted, like he was the one watching the TV. "That way you'll at least be able to substitute."

Kay looked at me, shook her head. "But she *hates* to teach," she whispered. I knew my mother had taught before. She told stories sometimes about teaching for a year in a one room school in Kentucky where the kids got sewed into their underwear for the winter, but that was years before she'd met Dad or Kay and I were born. She'd taught again for a while when Kay was in nursery school and I was a baby, before she got her job with the Treasury. But I'd never heard her say she'd hated it. And it didn't sound as if she'd ever told my father she did. But she'd told Kay, told her a secret, like they were friends or something. The air conditioning cut on with its whoosh and the cold air gave me goose bumps.

I grabbed Kay's hand. "Come on," I said, pulling her toward the front door.

"What?" Kay said. She yanked her hand away. "Where?"

I opened the door. "Outside."

"In your PJs?" Kay stared, unbelieving. "Mom wouldn't..."

*Jesse Lee Kercheval/Orbit*

"Going, going, gone." I started down the front steps with Kay following. The white light of the moon was everywhere. Mom had left the Rainbirds on and they swung in wide arcs, watering more drive than grass. Now it was Kay who grabbed my hand. I tried to pull her with me, but she dug her heels in. I ran in a circle, orbiting her, trying to make her dizzy. Her the planet, me her satellite. Around and around and. . .

"Damn it, Jul," she said, letting go. I spun off across the lawn. "Stop."

"Catch me," I said and ran. I could hear Kay right behind me.

She chased me through the Mize's back yard, setting their collie Fritz barking, through the Heck's yard, their damp grass squeaking under our bare feet. I caught a glimpse of Mr. Heck standing at his bedroom window, his chest naked and hairy. She chased me through all the yards and onto the sand hill. The sand was still hot, warmed my toes as they grabbed hold. I went down on all fours, scrambling up the hill, sending waves of sand down behind me, into Kay's face

Then we were on top. I stood and Kay stood beside me, both of us too out of breath to speak. In the moonlight the sand was so white it looked like snow, like this was not Florida at all. The houses below seemed to have disappeared, leaving only black road, white sidewalks, like suddenly we did live in Satellite City. I grabbed Kay's hand, and this time she didn't pull away. Without a word we ran, waiting until the last second to push off as hard as we could. "Ge-ron-i-mo-oh," Kay said, yodeling the last syllable. Then we landed, sliding, our feet digging into the sand, sand slipping cool up our pajama legs, our backs.

But when we stood up and the sand poured out, something fell out of my pants leg and clinked on the road. "What was that?" she said.

I bent down and picked up a piece of a coke bottle, worn smooth by the sand. I held it out for her to touch.

"There was *glass* in that sand?" Like she couldn't believe it.



Jesse Lee Kercheval/Orbit

"It isn't going to hurt you," I said. "Look, the edges are all smooth."

But she wasn't listening. She kept shaking her head. "You ran *barefoot* over broken glass?" I shrugged. Kay sneezed.

So to me it seemed like Kay's fault two days later when I came sliding down the sand hill one last time before dinner and there *was* a piece of glass, freshly broken glass, brown glass, from a beer bottle maybe. I pulled it out.

I stood up, afraid to look. "Is there blood?" I asked Marla. I held up my shoeless right foot for her to see.

"There's blood," she said. I looked. She was right. There was red mixing with the white sand that clung to the bottom of my foot.

"Your mother is going to kill you," Marla said. She ran to get my sneakers from behind the bush where I had thrown them, brought them to me. They were almost new, still white. I'd had to beg for genuine Keds. I put my left shoe on, tied the laces. Then I threw the right one as far as I could. It turned heel-toe, heel-toe in the air, up over the fence that separated the sand hill from the causeway and bounced twice on the asphalt shoulder. Marla looked at me like I was crazy.

"The glass went right through my shoe," I said. Marla shook her head. She didn't think much of my chances.

"Your mother is still going to kill you," she said.

I limped home, leaving small moon shaped blood stains on the driveway. I could hear Kay in the garage, taking a load of clothes out of the dryer. I opened the front door as quietly as I could so she wouldn't hear me.

My mother was in the kitchen, having a drink before dinner. I leaned on the kitchen table, lifted up my foot. She took a sip of her bourbon. "Well," she said, "let's go to the bathroom and get a good look." I waited for her to ask me how I did it, but she just followed me, her drink in one hand. I limped extravagantly, hoping for sympathy. I heard Kay come in from the



*Jesse Lee Kercheval/Orbit*

garage, start down the hall behind us, but my mother shut the bathroom door closing Kay out.

I sat on the vanity beside the sink, while my mother ran water over my foot. I closed my eyes, afraid to look. "I think you'll live," she said. I opened my eyes. The cut was shaped like a half moon, was nearly an inch long. The glass had sliced clean through my new hard callouses, the ones I had earned by going barefoot every day for a month. It looked bad, but when I bent closer I could see that the soft skin underneath was only broken at the top of the moon, where I had landed on the glass with my full weight. Already, the cut had almost stopped bleeding. My mother opened the cabinet under the sink and got out the round blue container of Morton's salt she kept there for gargling away sore throats.

"Lift your foot up." She filled the sink with warm salt water. "Okay, put it back." I did as she said. The salt stung. She sat on the edge of the tub drinking her bourbon and water and watching me. She didn't say anything. I looked at myself in the mirror, slightly fogged with the steam from the sink. I certainly looked guilty.

"I was barefoot," I said. She nodded. "I wasn't wearing my shoes."

"Obviously not," she said. She didn't seem upset. I thought of my nearly new sneaker lying on the side of the highway. Maybe if Marla held the barbed wire apart, I could reach through the fence, retrieve it. I decided not to tell my mother about my shoe just yet. But then she smiled at me, and I felt a question coming.

"Do you know what milkweed is?" she asked. I shook my head, confused. "It's a plant with hollow stems like bamboo," she formed an O with her forefinger and thumb, "or a bunch of soda straws." She touched a hand to her right knee and I saw she had a scar there, an old one, a round white lump. "I fell once and a piece of milkweed went right in here," she said. "I didn't tell anybody and it got infected. My knee swelled up as big as a cow's. That was before antibiotics. I'm lucky I didn't get blood poisoning and die." My mother rubbed her finger across the

*Jesse Lee Kercheval/Orbit*

raised scar. "My father carried me everywhere for a month. He wouldn't let me walk, wouldn't let my feet so much as touch the floor."

I didn't say anything. I just sat there. I was waiting for the point, for this story to become a lesson—that there were dangerous plants, that parents knew best. But my mother just shrugged. There wasn't any point. It was just a story. She was talking to me like we were the same age, like she wasn't my mother at all. Maybe this was the way she talked to Kay when they played cards, why Kay knew the things she knew.

"I'm sorry," I said.

My mother took another sip of her bourbon and looked at me, puzzled. "For what?"

"For going barefoot when you told me not to." My mother still didn't seem to understand what I was talking about. She shook her head. Just then Kay sneezed. She was in the hall, right outside the bathroom door.

Then I understood. My mother hadn't said anything to Kay about my going barefoot. It was Kay. Kay who worried about me getting hurt, my mother being unhappy, my father feeling left out.

"You can take your foot out now," my mother said. "I think it's soaked long enough." I lifted my foot and looked at the cut, the edges now white and soft.

"Kay's going to kill me," I said. My mother nodded, as if now we both understood. She handed me a towel, and we sat there a minute more, like we were both kids, like we were both hiding out. Then she opened the bathroom door and let Kay in.

*Claudia Keelan*

## **REFINERY**

Let the words fall, please just let them.  
With all we've abandoned by now  
chances are we could piece the fallen  
city together by recall, assemble

The family members for a new portrait.  
We could put the terror in reverse: how  
the black chalk erases off the faces and the blood  
returns from the salt water, filling

The scattered limbs that are assembling now,  
back onto the bodies. How the boys, enamored,  
amnesiac, stare down at their boots until

They board the ships and sail back the way  
they came from, the sands left unstained,  
apologies forgotten in their throats.

Claudia Keelan

## ROMANTICISM

It is not the clay road  
on which a woman travels  
clutching a baby in one arm  
and holding an older boy's hand  
while he eats an apple.  
I think it must be  
in what the boy sees as he walks  
there, caught in the sweetness  
of apple, in the love it allows  
him as he bites suddenly  
his cheek, as he turns his face  
up to his mother, wanting to cry  
but stopping himself, *how tired*  
*she is* and he has only just begun  
to bleed. And it's how I want  
to let him keep looking away  
from her who has his hand,  
at wild flowers, the old town,  
anywhere but at his feet.



**Maura MacNeil**

## FALLING

I.

It was the summer of polio and tb. when I was told  
to stay away from strangers and the public beach.

It was the summer my grandfather gave me half dollars  
and I would put them in my mouth for the taste

and I was scolded for not knowing where they had been.  
The world was becoming larger then. And I liked that.

*Tonight I dream I am a whore because  
that is the only way you will come to me—  
but I do not know this yet.*

*I sleep in an attic room overlooking  
the bay.*

*At night I open the window so the fog  
will come in and turn the room dark  
and an odd blue.*

*My sister whispers "I am afraid," but I  
am laughing at her.*

*I can't imagine anything fearful.*

*I close my eyes, press my fists against  
them to imagine what she sees  
but I cannot.*

II.

I am thinking of the moment when I learned to be afraid.  
When I stopped sneaking to the beach where the boys pressed  
their tanned hands against my naked breast and I would sigh,  
slowly, but not from the feeling of nipple against palm  
but from the sight of skin against skin. At that moment  
I would not think of how my skin no longer fit—their hand  
made it  
fit and I saw myself as they saw me. I was perfect.

**Maura MacNeil/Falling**

That was the summer I grew too fast and was told it was  
the sudden growth that kept me awake at night when I listened  
to my bones grow, felt my skin stretch across  
thighs, as my sister slept soundly.  
I told her I began to watch for fear. I could recognize it  
for us both now.

*I dream I am a whore.*

*That is the only way.*

**III.**

That summer could have been the one where a girl washed  
up on the beach, missing both breasts, her hair tangled by  
waves.

It could have been the summer when I first began to fall—  
off high rocks, roofs I sat on in the evening to watch  
fireworks lit off the beach, or in my sleep during six nights of  
fever

when my mother bent over me, put coins on my eyes.  
They were wet on my lids—I smelled silver, tasted metal,  
and it stung.

*I am on a seawall. It is afternoon and the air  
is gray. High tide.*

*The water rocks the wall—  
but it does not.*

*I am balanced. Now I am falling  
onto the sharp rocks below.*

*I am tired for the first time. I think  
this is death.*

*I remain here. On my back. I am silent.*

*I do not cry. No one will know.*

**IV.**

Tonight I am learning to be afraid of all things  
because I am learning to be afraid of you.

**Maura MacNeil/Falling**

V.

I want to go back now and change all things.  
The infections that brought on fevers, the drowned girl  
that made us all afraid and the night air that now  
in memory is too heavy—  
the way my sister's voice told me I should be afraid  
when a boy touched my breast and promised he would never  
stop.

*This is the way we die, she said.  
Sometimes I lose my body. Sometimes I  
forget to breathe and faint just as he  
moves into me and I'll wake up alone.  
I won't know where I am but I'll think  
of a familiar sound. The ocean maybe.  
Or maybe wind and I'll try not to be  
afraid but sometimes I'm sure  
I am dead.*

*Your body is growing too fast, she said.*

VI.

Tonight I dream I am a whore and I wake up.  
I close the windows and as I pass the mirror  
I do not recognize the face.  
It is the face you see—  
I am covered with ornaments—  
there are bells around my neck, stones on my forehead  
and my eyelids are painted a deep blue.  
I have to remember this is not a dream.  
I have to stare hard to bring my own face back.

*I undress in the hallway as though I am  
being watched by you because if  
I am watched I won't begin to fall.  
But I am falling. I am on the floor  
holding myself—I am pushing my*



**Maura MacNeil/Falling**

*stomach against the rug and it hurts my  
sunburnt legs. There is a coin in my  
mouth. I roll it around with my tongue.  
I am without breast—  
my hair tangled by wave.*

Martha Carlson-Bradley

## WINGS

The strange noises she hears  
don't trouble her sleep.

It's morning when the wind roars for a second  
inside the house

or something sighs in the heating duct.

Today, the sound of enormous wings

makes her glance, startled, at the windows,

where she half-expects some mutant urban pigeon  
to bump the glass, insist on getting in.

But the venetian blinds hold nothing back,  
innocent, half-open.

The plane passing overhead

clears the signal tower;

the radio stops sputtering static.

Nothing flutters across the kitchen,

no angel bringing news,

the light slicing the table,

ordinary sunlight.

Martha Carlson-Bradley

## THE CARDINAL

He throws himself at dawn  
smack against our bedroom windows,  
challenges the dimmer self  
reflected there

and scares us into day, his beak  
like blood, eyes fixed, black—and every day  
the mission's more frenetic, wings  
struggling to hover, drab underdown  
ripped up against the red—

The body fails;  
the mind holds on—

*get through, get through—*  
blind to the leaves and the sun.



**Gary J. Whitehead**

## **IN THE GALLOWS CROWD**

The bare feet of the women on their knees  
before him are black with the dust and dirt  
of the long climb, soles hard like centuries.  
They hold their countenances like their hurt,

grim and half-hidden in the folds of their  
black threadbare robes and their opaque veils.  
Where in these dark inglorious clouds, where  
in this sky, waits the rain? They wait like hail-

stones for the sun to come and melt them. They  
have felt cold pain their bones, these numb women.  
Behind them here, I am shamed; I should go pray  
with them; I should lament with them, open

my lame arms to them; I should help them wash  
the mouths of his wounds; I should comfort them.  
Where then, is the rain? Will it come and hush  
their weeping, will it wash the blood from him?

If it fell now I would take their muddy  
feet and rinse them in the rain on my knees,  
and the deep bloody holes, the deep bloody  
holes in him, I'd close like his open eyes.

Gary J. Whitehead

CONTRIBUTORS

## METAMORPHOSIS AT A HILL'S EDGE

I never want to go back to that place  
where the chrysalis falls free,  
where addiction's silky robe unwinds  
with the slow ambivalence of summer.  
Another trip there and I might never leave.  
Were I to flit there again among the twisting

grounds I'd light on Screaming Rock  
and listen for the silence of my first self;  
and in the soft cocoon of what was lost  
I'd prod the darkness for what rested there  
and the truth it took to make it hatch.  
I'd imagine an opening, a supple chute

like a mouth filled with sour grapes, broken  
promises closing on the skin of the ripened  
fruit. I'd feel the seed of another life growing  
outside of me, hanging from a tree in a distant  
meadow, squeezing its way out, falling,  
flying in the face of the world it denied.

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Martha Carlson-Bradley** lives in Hillsborough, NH. Her work has appeared in *Carolina Quarterly*, *Poets On:* and *Soundings East*. **Michael Carrino** is an adjunct instructor in the English department at SUC at Plattsburgh, NY. He has recently published in *Poet & Critic*, *Green Mountains Review*, *The Hudson Review* and others. **Robin S. Chapman's** poems have appeared recently in *The Hudson Review*, *Beloit Poetry Journal* and *Nimrod*. She lives and works in Madison, WI. **Claudia Keelan** is currently an editor for *Denver Quarterly*. Her poems have appeared in, or are forthcoming from *Ironwood*, *Ploughshares*, *Indiana Review* and elsewhere. **Jesse Lee Kercheval's** collection, *The Dogeater*, was the winner of the AWP award in short fiction. She has work forthcoming in issues of *Stand*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *Fiction* and others. "Orbit" is part of a series of stories she is writing about growing up near Cape Kennedy in the sixties, a collection tentatively titled *Space*. **Maura MacNeil** teaches poetry and composition classes at New England College. Other work of hers appears in *Crazyhorse*, *Green Mountains Review* and *Poetry Miscellany*. **Joyce Odam** has recently published in *Yarrow*, *Paisley Moon* and *Bitterroot*. **Linda Raymond's** work has appeared in *Prism International*, *The MacGuffin* and elsewhere. She teaches fiction writing at the University of California. **Marcelle M. Soviero** lives and works in Manhattan where she is an editor for *Popular Science*. **Ed Weyhing's** work most recently appears in *The Crescent Review*, *Glimmer Train* and *Weber Studies*. **Gary J. Whitehead** edits *Defined Providence*. His work appears recently in *Gulf Coast*, *Oxalis* and *Without Halos*. **Francine Witte** lives in New York City. Her chapbook, *The Magic in the Streets*, is forthcoming from Owl Creek Press.



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POETRY &amp; FICTION BY

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